BLACK BESS;

OR

THE KNIGHT OF THE ROAD.

A Tale of the Good Old Times.

"Some of the Author's Friends cry'd—'Look'e, Gentlemen, the Man is a Villain; but it is Nature, for all that.' And all the young Critics of the age, the Clerks, Apprentices, &c., called it Low, and fell a Groaning."

Henry Fielding. ("Tom Jones," Bk. VII. Chap. I.)

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PREFACE.

THE Author of "BLACK BESS; OR, THE KNIGHT OF THE ROAD," has one request to make.

It is, that those who have, unread, condemned the present work, will take the trouble to peruse it. An entire change of opinion will be the result; because in no place will vice be found commended and virtue sneered at; nor will any pandering to sensuality, suggestions of impure thoughts, or direct encouragement to crime be discovered; neither are there details of seduction, bigamy, adultery, and domestic poisonings, such as are indispensable ingredients of our popular three-volume novels. On the contrary, the work will be found full of exciting personal adventures, such as can never be re-enacted until Railways are swept away, and Stage Coaches replaced on our High-roads—until, in fine, the present state of things is changed to what it was a century and a half ago. If anyone is weak-minded enough to be carried away by the idea that a highwayman's career as depicted in these pages can be played in reality at the present day, he must be imbecile indeed. Let not the "Life of Robin Hood" fall into the hands of such a one, or, sure as fate, Sherwood Forest would be his destination, with a bow and arrows for his stock-in-trade.

Seriously, however, such a state of mind, so produced, would of course work its cure in a little while, before much harm was done; and the victim, thoroughly cured, would laugh heartily at his past folly.

To the Public which has received the work with such unexampled favour the Author begs to express his best acknowledgments, coupled with the hope that his next effort will not be found unworthy of their support.

London.

BLACK BESS;

OR, THE

KNIGHT OF THE ROAD.

A ROMANCE.



[DICK TURPIN STOPS THE LORD MAYOR'S CARRIAGE.]

CHAPTER I.

DICK TURPIN WAYLAYS AND ROBS THE EX-LORD MAYOR OF LONDON ON WIMBLEDON COMMON.

THE rim of the rising moon was just peeping above the horizon, and a few faint, sickly beams of light shot up from it into the night sky, giving to all objects a dim, spectral-like appearance.

Standing in the middle of the high road which skirts Wimbledon Common on the north side was a horse and rider.

The moonlight shimmered upon both with a strange effect.

At first sight it seemed as though a lambent flickering flame was playing over them, from the horse's hoofs to the long feather in the rider's hat.

This was caused by the peculiar tint the vapours on the horizon gave to the moon's rays.

The horseman was leaning forward in his saddle in an attitude of intense listening.

There was something remarkably picturesque and

Nos. 1 and 2.
GRATIS with these Numbers, in New Coloured Wrapper, the SPLENDID COLOURED PICTURE: DICK TURPIN LEAPS BLACK BESS OVER

romantic about him as he sat so still upon his steed in the centre of the deserted highway.

He was tall and muscular, and sat in the saddle with an ease and grace as rare as it was admirable.

His attire was well calculated to set off his figure to the greatest advantage; it was that so much affected by military officers in the reign of the second George.

A three-cornered black felt hat, trimmed with broad gold lace, and with a long black feather trailing from it.

A cravat of spotlessly white muslin tied in a large bow, with the ends depending almost to the waist.

A crimson-coloured coat, very long in the waist and very stiff in the skirts trimmed and faced also with gold lace.

A waistcoat of the same materials and colour, coming low down on the hips.

Close-fitting pantaloons of white leather, and large black boots coming up high above the knee.

Such was the costume which he wore.

We have said nothing of the jewellery upon his person, and which glistened faintly in the moonlight. A refined taste would have considered there was a little too much of it.

Of the steed which he bestrode, and which was no other than the mare so celebrated in song and story—Black Bess—we feel it is perfectly unnecessary to say a word in the shape of description.

Her rider—whom we may as well at once call by name, Dick Turpin—had, at the moment we introduce him to our readers, one hand upon her neck.

We have said he was listening intently.

So Bess appeared to be, for her ears were projected forwards.

Upon the soft miry road—for it had been raining heavily a few hours before—was an indistinct grating sound.

None, however, but the most practised listener could have detected it, or, if they had, could have told what it really was.

To Dick the sound was perfectly intelligible.

A carriage was approaching, though as yet it was at a considerable distance.

Very rapidly, however, the sound grew louder and the trampling of horses' hoofs began to mingle with the grating, crushing noise.

Then the light of the carriage lamps flashed through the gloom and cast a dim halo around.

It was one of those capacious, comfortable vehicles, in which our great-grandfathers delighted to ride.

Two powerful horses drew it along at a rapid rate.

There were no armorial bearings upon the carriage, but the gaudy ornamentation about it was sufficient to show that it belonged to no member of the aristocracy.

The stout coachman though, who sat on the box and drove the horses in a dignified sort of way, had something of that appearance.

So also had the footman, who sat with his arms folded before him in the dickey.

The occupants of the carriage were two persons, upon whom the sun of glory had risen, shone, and set.

And all within the space of twelve months.

That period of time had comprehended their butterfly existence.

In a word, they were the ex-lord mayor and ex-lady mayoress of London.

It was the ninth of November, and he had yielded his title and office to another.

He had not, however, been wholly overlooked, as most are, when their term of office has expired; the civic authorities had somehow taken it into their sapient heads that he had fulfilled his onerous duties with more than common ability, so they had, the previous three months, been busily engaged in getting up a testimonial in the shape of a large gold cup, very elaborately chased and ornamented.

A fulsome inscription engraved upon it set forth at length the suppositious talents of Lord Mayor Funge.

Such was his euphonious appellation.

Ezekiel Funge.

Of course the presentation of this cup increased his pomposity and arrogance in no small degree.

He lolled back in the carriage with a most complacent smile upon his lips.

It had been there ever since he had received the golden cup. He could not trust it out of his sight, and when he set out for his residence at Mortlake he had put it into the carriage with him.

When we say he could not trust it out of his sight, we speak literally, for the cup was placed on the cushions on the opposite seat, so that as he stretched out his legs and leaned back, he could contemplate its beauties through his half-closed eyelids.

The quantity of fat upon his face prevented his opening them to any great width.

"Matilda!" he said to his wife, for the fiftieth time during their ride; "are you looking at the cup?"

"Of course not, you idiot," was the polite reply of his better half, who was in appearance the very opposite of himself, for she was thin and waspish, with a vinegar-looking countenance, and a particularly shrill, sour, disagreeable voice. "Of course not, idiot; do you think I'm like you, got eyes for nothing else?"

Ex-Mayor Funge gave a gasp, and agitated his fat hands like the fins of a turtle when he is suddenly thrown on his back.

"My dear, my dear," he said, "how often I have expressed my desire that you would not speak in that dreadful way; it is really—I may say—really"—

"Hold your tongue, do, stupid!" interrupted his wife, "and don't make such an ass of yourself, or if you have got anything to say, say it at once, and not circumbend about as if you were addressing a lot of tipsy aldermen!"

"You don't comprehend, Matilda—you don't comprehend; and you don't sufficiently, duly, and properly appreciate the honour and respect which have been paid me as a reward for the trustworthy fulfilment of the important duties which devolved upon me."

"Oh! stuff!"

"Matilda!"

"Rubbish!"

Ex-Mayor Funge gave a groan.

"It's a great trouble to me," he said; "I little thought when I went courting you at the fishmonger's, in Fore-street, how you would turn out. Ah! me, I wish some of the old folks could have lived to see this beautiful cup!"

He took it into his hands as he spoke, and held it up so that the light of the carriage lamp should fall upon it.

As he held it there, in the uncertain light, it looked very rich and handsome. The design was good, and the execution tasteful.

But its appearance, pretty and captivating as it would have been to ninety-nine women out of a hundred, made no impression on the ex-mayor's wife. She was one of those women who are always grumbling and discontented with everything and everybody.

Still ex-Mayor Funge carried his admiration for the cup to rather a ridiculous extent.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" he kept repeating, as he turned it over in his hands, and viewed it on every side. "Beautiful! it's—a—really—a—what's that?"

The ex-lord mayor gave a great start, and let go the cup, which fell with a dab on the floor of the carriage.

It was the sudden report of a pistol which gave him such a shock of alarm.

The explosion was followed by a voice which said, in clear, decisive tones—

"Pull up, coachman, or you are a dead man!"

Like a prudent man who values his skin above all things, the aristocratic-looking coachman at once brought the carriage to a stand-still.

"Oh! Matilda, Matilda!" said the ex-mayor. "It's a highwayman—a highwayman! I shall lose my beautiful cup."

At this moment Dick rode up to the window, and let it down with a crash. Ex-Mayor Funge's agony and alarm at the presumptive loss of his cup were very visibly impressed upon his countenance, which was really an amusing thing to look upon.

Dick laughed outright.

He just projected the barrel of a pistol a little way into the carriage as he said, blandly—

"A nice evening after the rain, your lordship."

"A nice fiddlestick, you vagabond!" said the ex-mayoress, imitating Dick's manner. "I suppose you will rob us first, and cut our throats afterwards."

"Oh! not by any means, your ladyship, not by any means. I should never forgive myself were I to deprive

society of two such ornaments to it as yourself and your worthy spouse."

Dick lifted his hat and made a most elaborate bow as he concluded his reply.

As for the ex-mayor himself, he could only give vent to some inarticulate groans.

"I am sorry to trouble you," said Dick, "but this is really a case of necessity. I must trouble you for your money, rings, watch, and the gold cup you have got with you in the carriage."

As these last words reached the ex-mayor's ears, he uttered such a dismal groan that Dick fairly drew back his head out of the carriage.

"Come, come," said Dick, recovering himself, "I am very much pressed for time, so I beg that you will comply with my request with all possible expedition."

"Oh! you wretch! you villain!" said the ex-mayoress. "You ill-bred, low brought-up son of a parish. If I was a man wouldn't I settle you pretty quick!"

Her husband sat still on the seat, quite incapable of speech or motion.

With a skill and dexterity that could only have been acquired by long practice, Dick rapidly transferred the contents of the mayor's pockets to his own.

Then he looked about for the cup, but could see it nowhere.

The ladies then, as in the present day, distended their dresses with hoops, so that large as the carriage was, the skirts of the ex-mayoress nearly filled it.

"I very much regret to say," said Dick, opening the carriage door, "that I shall have to trouble you both to alight."

Ezekiel was nearest the door, and with some little difficulty Dick dragged him out.

No sooner did his feet touch the ground than he sat down on the roadside, in a very doleful and undignified manner indeed.

"Now, my lady, I must trouble you, if you please."

"Don't 'my lady' me, you villainous-looking rascal! Don't 'my lady' me, I say. You know as well as I do that it ain't my title any longer, you do, you ugly wretch!"

Dick smiled in the politest manner, and putting his arm into the carriage, seized her hand, and drew her gently yet forcibly out of it.

The thing was done with extreme featness, and the ex-mayoress found herself standing beside her husband before she was thoroughly aware of what had taken place.

She did not, however, imitate his example and sit down in the road.

Dick glanced again into the carriage, and there, on the floor, near the opposite door, he saw some glittering object which he made sure was the golden cup.

It was quite out of his reach, so he sprang off his horse, and rather imprudently got into the carriage.

But the ex-mayoress had an eye to all that was going on, and springing forward, she banged the carriage-door, and fastened it in a moment.

"Joseph! Joseph!" she shrieked; "get down in a minute, and run to the other door. I've caught the plundering villain. Stand by the door, and don't let him get out. I'll scratch his face for him if he tries to get out on this side, and you, Thomas, run and get some assistance."

The ex-mayoress felt the courage of an army in her breast.

Now Joseph the footman, and Thomas the coachman, experienced no such sudden accession of valour.

Of the two, Joseph was the greater coward, though he was certainly the youngest and most active.

He was one of those slim, delicate-looking young men who are so often chosen as footmen.

When Dick fired the pistol and called to the coachman to halt, his heart gave such a leap that he almost fell backwards out of the rumble.

However, he did keep his seat, and, finding he was in no way injured, sat there shaking in every limb and quite unable to move.

He had a most wholesome dread of firearms, and, if the assertion be true that the more despicable and contemptible a man is, the more chary he is of risking his life, then Joseph must assuredly have been the most contemptible of human beings.

When his mistress addressed him in such a valiant *strain*, and with such fierceness of tone, he at once began to descend from the seat, but not with any particular degree of alacrity.

"Make haste, you cowards!" she shouted, dealing her husband a tremendous blow on the side of the head, which did not in any way tend to clear his faculties, for he sat looking more bewildered and stupid than before. "Make haste, you cowards! and mind he doesn't get out on the other side, I'll take care he don't this."

In the meantime, Thomas the coachman had descended from his box, and, in obedience to her hasty command, had started off in the somewhat hopeless task of looking for some kind of assistance.

Trembling all over like a jelly, Joseph took up his station at the carriage door in order to prevent the highwayman from making his escape.

All, however, was most suspiciously quiet inside the carriage.

Black Bess had strayed some little distance down the lane, and was cropping some of the short grass which grew on the roadside.

The ex-mayoress stood boldly and defiantly on guard.

Then Joseph, who, seeing all so still, had begun to gather some small amount of courage, felt it disappear in a moment when the window close to him was let down with a clattering sound.

A moment more and he would have taken to his heels; but, before he could do so, the coachman, breathless and exhausted, arrived upon the scene.

"Keep—him—a—min—minute longer," he gasped out, "it's—all—right; nabbed he is, my lady. Here's fifty hofficers a—coming."

A perfect shriek of pleasure burst from the lips of his mistress.

"Oh! the low-minded vagabond; he'll be caught and hung now, sure enough, and serve him right, the blackguard!"

The tramp of many horses' feet came now very plainly to their ears.

"Here—they—are—my lady; here—they—are!" said the coachman, who had not yet recovered his wind; "here—they—come; can't you hear them?"

"Yes, yes! here they are, sure enough. He's caught, and we'll all go and see him hung."

As she spoke, a troop of about ten or twelve mounted police officers swept round the corner of the road at a dashing rate.

CHAPTER II.

DICK OBTAINS POSSESSION OF THE LORD MAYOR'S CUP, AND IS HOTLY PURSUED BY THE OFFICERS.

When Dick sprang into the carriage, he made sure he saw the golden cup lying close down by the door.

He found, however, that his eyes had deceived him; so, without more ado, although he had, in a manner of speaking, been imprisoned in the carriage, he set about looking for the cup in a systematic manner.

He could not find it anywhere, and he began to fear that the vixenish mayoress had managed to take it out with her.

Still, as he felt no apprehension from the amount of resistance they would be able to offer, he did not hurry himself, but very leisurely recommenced his search.

He was exceedingly anxious to obtain possession of the cup, and was resolved to do so for a very particular reason.

About a week before, when in company with a few kindred spirits, he had made rather a heavy bet that he would rob the lord mayor of his cup, and present it to them as a trophy on that or the following evening.

At last, after turning over all the cushions, he, to his inexpressible satisfaction, found it jammed in a corner, underneath the seat.

He possessed himself of it, and then listened to what was going forward.

It was then he let down the window, and so frightened Joseph with the sound.

He heard the intelligence that so many mounted officers were at hand, and for the moment was unable to account for it.

"I have it," he said, and a flush of anger swept across his face; "I have it! Some one who was present when I made the bet has set the grabs on my track."

We may as well say here that he was perfectly right in

his conjecture, and at the moment the coachman saw the officers, they were in search of the highwayman.

However, he had the common before him.

He might, though, have some difficulty in regaining his seat on the back of Black Bess. Still, he was well aware that a peculiar whistle would bring her to his side in a moment.

Another circumstance was in his disfavour. The moon which a short time before had only in a dim fashion lighted up the landscape, was now shining brightly, and was only obscured for a minute or two as some small vapoury clouds swept over her disc.

He paused for a brief moment to arrange some plan of action in his mind, and it was then the troop of officers came in sight.

His resolve was quickly taken.

With an exercise of that surprising agility for which he was so famous, he sprang like an harlequin through the window of the carriage.

He chose the side upon which the mayoress stood for the execution of this feat, because Bess was on that side of the way, and he alighted on the unfortunate Ezekiel with so much suddenness and force, that he fell flat down upon the road at once.

The soft, fat body of the ex-mayor broke the violence of his fall, and without even sustaining so much injury as a bruise, Dick sprang in a moment to his feet, and gave the signal to his mare.

She reached his side with a bound at precisely the same moment of time as the officers reached the carriage.

Dick placed but one hand upon her neck, and then vaulted lightly into the saddle.

He was seated in the twinkling of an eye.

"Surrender! surrender!" said the chief of the officers. "There's five hundred pounds for your apprehension, dead or alive. Surrender, or I fire!"

The only reply Dick made to this invitation was to give Bess the reins, and dash off along the road in the direction of the common.

As soon as the chief of the officers saw the movement, he cried in a loud voice—

"Fire!"

The simultaneous discharge of about a dozen pistol-shots followed his command.

Dick, however, was at rather too great a distance for them to be very effective, and they whistled harmlessly about and around him.

Then Bess put forward that speed which could not fail to leave any other horses far in the rear.

After firing the volley, the police took no notice of ex-Mayor Funge and his wife, but plunged forward as rapidly as their steeds would carry them.

It was exceedingly unfortunate for Dick that the moon was shining with so much clearness, as it enabled his pursuers to keep him steadily in view.

They were one and all exceedingly well mounted, and plied whip and spur most vigorously.

After the lapse of a few moments, Dick turned his head and looked behind him.

He was gaining rapidly on his pursuers, and must eventually, unless some unforseen accident occurred, distance them completely.

He was quite sure of baffling them if he could but reach a small plantation, or rather wood, which was only a mile or two ahead.

He looked back again, and saw the officers were still farther in the rear, although they were goading their horses to the utmost in their endeavour to overtake him.

When he looked back again the next time, it was just as he was entering the wood.

They were then completely out of sight.

He trotted gently along a narrow glade.

A deep silence was everywhere around him,

He looked about him on all sides, in quest of some place of concealment in case the officers should, on finding he had disappeared, take it into their heads to hunt through the wood.

No such place met his gaze. However, he still pushed steadily onward.

At that time the wood was of a tolerable size, though a few poplars are all that remain now to show where it once stood.

Suddenly Dick paused, for a faint, peculiar sound reached his ears.

It came and ceased so suddenly that, acquainted as he was with slight noises of all kinds, he was unable to determine what it was.

It sounded more like the shutting of a door than anything else.

He hastened forward in the direction from whence the sound had proceeded, walking Bess gently, so that her hoofs should make as little noise as possible.

Her tread was almost noiseless upon the soft springy turf.

The trees now began to get thinner, and, after proceeding some distance farther, he emerged into a small clearing of about a quarter of an acre in extent.

At the side of this enclosure opposite to where he stood, an unusually dense group of tall poplar trees reared their summits to the sky.

In the black shadows which they cast was a rudely-built cottage, or rather hut.

It was only one storey high, but it covered a large piece of ground, and its interior was doubtless divided into several apartments.

Dick listened for a minute or two, and then, not hearing any sound, either in advance or behind, rode boldly forward to the door of the solitary habitation.

"Hilloa there! Hilloa! House! house!" he shouted, striking the door some heavy blows with the handle of his riding-whip.

He paused, and, as the summons was disregarded, repeated it.

He did so because he felt almost sure the place was tenanted, for a few rays of light shone through the chinks in the door.

He was on the point of applying his whip for the third time, when the door was abruptly flung open, and a man appeared upon the threshold.

A huge fire was burning within, and emitting a brilliant light, which brought the figure of this man into bold relief.

To all appearance, take him altogether, he was not exactly the individual to inspire a nervous person with confidence if he met him in a lonely place.

"Well," he said gruffly, as he saw Dick observing him, "what's your business?"

"Yes," said Dick.

This was rather an ambiguous reply, and the man favoured him with a long stare.

However, without paying any further attention to him, Dick dismounted from his mare, and holding her by the bridle, walked towards the door of the hut.

"Here—here—hold hard!" said the man, putting his hand against Dick's breast, and striving to keep him back, "I should like to know where you're a comin' to!"

"Inside, my friend, inside. I'm tired, so is my mare, and I want to rest awhile."

He pushed by him into the interior of the hut as he spoke.

The man appeared so astounded at his coolness that he could hardly make any opposition to him; and, seeing him once fairly in, he, with a growl of dissatisfaction, closed the door.

A clumsy three-legged stool was the only thing there was in the place which would serve for a seat.

This Dick monopolized unceremoniously.

"My worthy friend," he said, as the man came towards the fire, "I am very sorry if I have forced myself inconveniently upon you, but pray understand I will pay you liberally for my shelter and your trouble."

The man gave a grunt by way of response.

Observing this sign of concession, Dick took a guinea out of his pocket, and handed it to the man.

His eyes glistened with cupidity as he received it, and his whole bearing underwent a remarkable alteration.

"Your lordship's servant," he said. "What can I do for you."

"Give my mare a feed of corn and a little water—only a little, mind."

"Yes, your honour's worship."

"And if you have got anything good to drink in the place, bring me some."

The man replied by going to a chest at the other end of the room, and producing a bottle and glass.

"Brandy," he said, as he placed it on the table.

Dick poured out a glass.

"This is a queer place, rather," he said, after drinking it off, "a very queer place!"

The man looked at him suspiciously.

"Why, yes, it is," he replied, "but it does for a poor fellow like me who picks up his living in the wood."

"A woodman?"

"That's it. You see there's always a great quantity of dry sticks lying about."

"I suppose so," said Dick, with a smile, for his companion did not look much like a man given to such peaceful pursuits.

But then appearances are often deceptive.

The man noticed the smile.

"To be sure I sometimes pick up a stray hare or bird, but not very often, though."

"Drink," said Dick.

The man did not need a second invitation.

All remained profoundly still about the old hut.

"Making so bold," said the man, "I should like to know who you be?"

Dick laughed as he said—

"Well, I don't know that I need fear telling you who I am, for, unless I am mistaken, you are a member of the same honourable profession as myself, only in rather a different line."

"Indeed."

"Yes. I wonder when you saw me that you did not at once suspect who I was."

"How should I?"

"When you saw my mare."

"She is certainly a fine creature!" said the man, looking at her more attentively.

"You're right. She has not a white hair about her."

"Then she is——"

"Black Bess!" said Dick. "Fill up your glass, and drink good luck to her rider."

"Dick Turpin?"

"Himself!"

"And are you really him?" said the man, looking upon Dick with some degree of awe, and a great deal of respect.

"Most certainly."

"Then I'll drink your health with all the pleasure in life!"

"Fill up, then."

"And—if now——"

"Speak on. Don't be afraid!"

"If you wouldn't mind, now granting me a favour, I should take it very kind."

"What is it?"

"Let me——"

"Go on!"

"Shake hands with you."

"To be sure I will," said Dick, giving him a hearty grip.

The woodman uttered a sigh of satisfaction, and then said—

"Well, what lay has brought you down these parts? I have never heard of your being here before."

"Well, you see it was rather a special job."

"Oh!"

"About a week ago you must know I was at the 'Three Tuns,' in Seven Dials."

"Ay, ay."

"Well, while we were talking over business, one of the pals, said—

"'I s'pose you've all heard of the cup that's to be given to old Funge, the mayor?'

"Some had and some hadn't."

"Of course."

"So it turned out, when the story was told, that a subscription was afloat to purchase the lord mayor a large golden cup to be presented to him on his retirement from office."

"Yes."

"'We all know old Funge,' said one. 'He'll burst with pride if he gets this present!'

"'Oh! won't he rather!' added another.

"'Now,' said I, 'I'll bet anybody fifty pounds that I'll take his cup and bring it here within three nights after he receives it.'

"'Done!' said one.

"The bet was booked, and the case then looked rather difficult; for, of course, we did not know that old Funge would be fool enough to take the cup in the carriage with him."

"Then did he?"

"You shall hear. I kept a sharp look-out, and at last found his delight was so great that he could not suffer the cup to go out of his hands, but made just as much fuss with it as a child does with its rattle. However, to make a long story short, I found he had got it in the carriage, and was on his way home without any escort."

"You got it, then?"

"Oh! yes, with hardly any trouble. But just as I had secured it, a party of officers galloped up; but I managed to baffle them, and here I am, safe and sound."

"Then, you've got the cup?" said the man, manifesting a much greater degree of interest in the recital than he had previously displayed. "Have you got the cup with you?"

"Of course I have. Look! here it is."

"Dick, as he spoke, produced the valuable from one of the pockets of his capacious coat.

An eager covetous glance darted from the woodman's eyes as he saw it, and he made a step forward towards Dick.

"It is pretty, is it not?" said the latter, turning it about in his hands. "By this firelight it looks rich indeed."

"Very, very."

Then Dick, for the first time, noticed the avaricious look on the woodman's countenance.

He was on his guard immediately. His suspicions were aroused and he lost not a moment in restoring the precious cup to his pocket.

The woodman watched it disappear from his sight with about the same degree of satisfaction as a famished wolf would exhibit on seeing a lamb, upon which he had set his heart, safely escorted from his fangs.

Dick poured out another glass of brandy.

"Drink!" he said.

The man suddenly assumed a listening attitude.

"What is it?" asked the highwayman. "I hear nothing, and I am accustomed to catch the slightest sound."

"I may be mistaken," said the man, "but I fancy I heard the tramp of horses' feet. I have lived a many years in the silence of this wood, and my hearing has got sharpened."

"It would."

"Still, I will go to the door and listen. Maybe it was nothing."

The woodman rose from his seat, and, opening the door, stood for a moment listening, and then went out.

"I don't half like his ways," thought Dick. "I will keep a sharp look-out upon him."

He also left the fireside, and walked to the door of the hut.

As he reached it he saw the man returning slowly across the clearing.

"My ears must have deceived me," he said, as soon as he had perceived Dick. "I can hear no one."

"I thought you were mistaken."

There was a slight alteration in the tone of his voice which the man appeared to notice, for he added in an apologetic sort of way—

"At all events, it was a mistake on the right side. I should not like you to get into trouble under my roof."

"No, no!"

"And, for my part, I am very glad to think I did make a mistake."

"Then you think there is no one about?"

"The wood is as quiet as the grave."

"Well, if that is the case, as I have been knocking about a great deal the last night or two, I should be glad of half an hour's slumber."

This was simply a ruse on Dick's part, for he wished to assure himself of the good faith of the woodman, and determined, should it prove he was attempting to play him false, to deal out retribution, with no sparing hand; for, generous and free himself by nature, he detested avariciousness in others.

On the other hand, should the man be really inclined to serve him, it would be a very convenient thing to have such a place as this lonely wood hut to seek a shelter in in case the hue and cry after him should be unusually strong.

It was to this end, then, he proposed to feign sleep so as to test him.

The experiment, certainly, was rather a dangerous one, but Dick was a fearless man, and the thought of personal peril never had the least weight against any enterprise he had determined upon.

He interrupted the apologies the woodman began to make by saying—

"As you must know I am accustomed to get sleep how and where I can, and sometimes it is in very strange places, so if I put this stool up in yonder corner, and lean back against the wall, I shall sleep as comfortably as I could wish."

Without, then, waiting for any reply, he placed the stool as he had said, and, folding his arms, leaned back as if to compose himself to slumber.

"Do not let me remain more than an hour," he said, "as I wish to get back to London before dawn."

The man promised to rouse him, and, having done so, stretched himself out at full length in front of the fire.

CHAPTER III.

DICK TURPIN DISCOVERS SOME OF THE MYSTERIES CONNECTED WITH THE OLD HUT IN THE WOOD.

A DEEP silence now ensued. Dick with his head leaning on his breast, and his eyes to all appearance close shut, sat perfectly still, allowing nothing that was going on to escape him.

By Dick's orders Bess had been littered down at the further end of the huge apartment.

The wood logs on the hearth sputtered and crackled, and that was the only sound that could be heard.

At last, after the lapse of about a quarter of an hour, and just as the deep repose was drawing the highwayman into a doze, the man by the fire made a slight movement.

Dick was aroused immediately; but was careful not to start in the least degree, so as to make the man suspect he was not actually asleep.

The woodman had placed his hand upon the floor, and risen to a half-sitting posture.

He regarded Dick narrowly, and the latter, as he glanced at his face through his partially closed eyelids, was struck in a moment by the sinister expression which appeared upon it.

He remained for some time without changing his position.

Then he spoke in a strange hoarse whisper.

"He sleeps now," he said; "surely he sleeps, and then what I have to do will be done easily. Ha!"

He sank, suddenly, flat down upon the floor.

Dick had moved a little on his seat.

Then seeing that all remained perfectly still as before, the woodman slowly and carefully raised himself from the ground.

"Yes, yes," he said, in the same whispering tones, and as if he was endeavouring to inspire his craven heart with courage. "Yes, yes! he sleeps soundly—soundly; I must do it all alone, for there is no one down below, but—but——"

"Down below," thought Dick, struck with the strangeness of the remark. "What in the world can he mean?"

"Yes," continued the woodman, "I am here alone with him. He is asleep, and is it not best I should be alone? Surely I can vanquish a slumbering man? Then I will get rid of his body, and the cup will be mine, for if I do the deed by myself, I shall not have to share the worth of it with anyone. No one need know he has been here. I can turn the mare loose in the woods, where she will soon be picked up by someone, or why should I not keep and sell her? That will be an additional profit. I will do it."

"You precious rascal," said Dick to himself. "I would pounce upon you at once, only I should prefer catching you in the very act, and then you could frame no excuse. You little imagine what there is in store for you!"

Slowly, now, and carefully, so as not to make the least noise, the man got up off the floor of the hut.

From his belt he took a long and most formidable looking knife, and clutching it tightly in his hand, he stepped forward cautiously towards his, as he believed, unconscious guest.

Dick remained perfectly still. Not by the slightest sign did he give the man cause to think he was not sleeping.

But he was on the alert for whatever might happen next.

And now the woodman stood as close as he dared to Dick, and lifted his knife in the air.

Instead, however, of its plunging into the highwayman's heart, as he fully intended it should, he felt his wrist seized, as his arm descended, with a powerful grasp, while another as powerful clutched him by the throat.

"You cowardly, avaricious wretch," said Dick, sternly. "What reason can you give that I should not now at once put an end to your miserable life?"

It would be quite folly to attempt to describe the look of unutterable consternation which overspread the woodman's face at this unexpected termination to the adventure.

"Spare me! spare me!" he cried.

"Spare you, you miserable hound! How dare you make such a request to me? Drop your knife!"

But the woodman, who by this time had recovered from the first shock of his surprise, on finding that Dick was awake, feeling that his condition was so desperate that it could not be made much worse, commenced a violent struggle.

At heart, although he was a big, burly ruffian, he was a thorough-going coward, and like the wolf—which animal he in more than one respect resembled—would not show fight until forced at bay.

With Dick, however, whose muscles seemed of iron, he stood but a poor chance; and, after a fierce but brief struggle, the highwayman threw him with so much violence upon the hard earth, which formed the floor of the hut, that he lay stunned and incapable of motion.

Dick wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Whew!" he said; "that was hot work, but it strikes me I have settled him for a little while."

However, to put him out of reach of doing further damage, Dick, after a brief search in the hut, found a stout rope with which he securely bound him.

Then he lifted him up, and fairly threw him into one corner of the apartment.

It was not the gentlest of treatment, but then as Dick very justly said, he did not see how he could expect him to be particularly careful how he used him.

He gave no signs of life or consciousness.

Dick went to the door of the hut, and, opening it, took a long look around and about him.

Nothing, however, but the tall trees met his gaze.

The moon was now high in the heavens, and all objects were distinctly visible.

He listened, but all was still.

Then he turned back, and was about to lead Bess out of the hut and mount her and ride off, when he suddenly recollected the remark the woodman had made about no one being down below, and he immediately became curious to know the meaning of what he said.

"Yes," he said to himself, after deliberating the subject in his mind for a few moments; "yes, there is certainly something more in this hut than meets the first glance; and as I have yet some hours to spare, I will try if I cannot find out what it is."

Having come to this determination, he set about in a very business-like manner, making an examination of the building.

For this purpose he took one of the burning brands from the fire, and which would serve very well as a torch, to assist him in his investigations.

He commenced with the apartment in which he had been sitting. From the size and rambling manner in which the hut was built, he felt sure there must be several others.

The thatched roof formed the ceiling of the one in which he stood, and was about eight feet from the ground in the lowest part.

The two beams ran lengthwise across it, from which many articles were suspended.

The walls appeared to be nothing but mud and timber; the whole building seemed very roughly constructed.

There was no window whatever, so that in the daytime the only aperture through which light could enter was the door.

He made the tour of this room several times, carefully examining the walls and roof, as well as the rough flooring.

There was nothing, however, to raise the least suspicion. All seemed quite ordinary and commonplace.

Near the fire-place, however, was a door. He tried it, and found it yield to his touch.

A gush of cold air blew upon him as the door opened. All was profoundly dark beyond.

The piece of wood which had served him for a torch up to the present moment in a most satisfactory manner, now gave unequivocal symptoms of expiring.

It was, however, very little trouble to choose a fresh one from the many burning on the hearth, and, having done so, he proceeded to examine what there was on the other side of the door.

He did not anticipate making any particular discovery, because the room appeared to be on a level with the one he had just left, whereas the man had spoken of "down below," which, Dick considered, could only refer to some underground apartment.

He entered, therefore, without hesitation.

A strong current of air came from the other end of this room, and Dick had some trouble to keep his extemporized torch alight.

He got on much better, though, when he closed the door behind him, as he did away with the draught.

The room, or whatever it might be called, was very much larger than the one he had left, though precisely similar in appearance.

At the farther extremity was a door perforated with several large holes, and it was through these the wind came.

This door opened by means of a string latch. As it swung back upon its hinges, Dick saw it simply led into a rude kind of shed, which would serve as a resting-place for cattle.

The moon's rays fell into this place, and he saw the greatest portion of it with perfect plainness. It was quite empty.

Outside, the tall trees in the wood waved gently to and fro in the wind.

It was, then, apparently nothing more than a simple wood hut, and such as might have been used and built by a man who got a living in the woods.

He was somewhat disappointed; but feeling assured that there was nothing further to be seen by going forward, he retraced his steps.

He very particularly examined the flooring as he did so.

The first apartment, or the one in which was the fire, was gained without his having made any discovery whatever.

As he had done in returning through the other room, he held the torch low down on the floor, and went carefully over every square foot of it, in the hope of discovering some indications of a trap-door, but with no better success.

However, once as he came up to the edge of the hearth-stone, he fancied he saw a faint line of light running along it.

A closer observation showed him that when his eye was perpendicular to the stone, he could see this line of narrow light running completely round it.

Here, then, doubtless, was the aperture which he sought.

The fire having gone some time without replenishment, was now almost extinct, so Dick easily enough swept off the embers which remained, so as to get a good view of the hearthstone.

What was his surprise to find the fire had covered a stout iron ring, some three or four inches in diameter, which appeared to be very firmly fixed in the stone, and evidently intended as a means of raising it from its setting

Dick cooled and seized it with one hand, and found it required but a small exertion of strength to pull it upwards.

It opened after the fashion of most trap-doors; that is to say, it was hung upon two hinges.

When the stone was upright, Dick peeped over the edge of it, and discovered a rude flight of steps, which were lighted by an iron oil lamp.

It was the rays from this light which he had seen through the chink of the hearthstone, and had led to the discovery of the secret door.

"Ah!" he said, as he saw it, "it was most certainly a grand mistake to put a light there, however convenient it might be for those who had to ascend or descend the steps. If all had been in darkness I should never have discovered it, for few people, I fancy, would have thought of looking under the ashes of the fire for an entrance 'down below,' as my friend in the corner called it."

Propping up, then, the stone, as well as he was able, Dick, without hesitation, commenced the descent of the steps.

They were twenty in number.

The lamp was suspended from the arched roof of a passage, which ran along horizontally from the staircase.

It was a very difficult job, but Dick at length did succeed in detaching the lamp from its position.

This would be an invaluable aid to him in his researches. So, holding it up so as to diffuse its rays as much as possible, he proceeded cautiously along the passage.

In the other hand he held a small steel crowbar, which he had taken from a pocket in his coat, made expressly for it. Not more than an inch in diameter, nor more than fourteen or fifteen in length, it would prove a most dangerous and formidable weapon of defence for close quarters.

The passage along which he made his way was simply hollowed out of the earth, and supported at irregular distances by rough pieces of timber. The floor, roof, and walls had been hammered hard and flat by some heavy instrument. It was only a few feet in length, and at its further extremity was a massive-looking wooden door.

This Dick reached in half-a-dozen steps. He ran his eye over it, but no fastenings of any kind were visible, nor was there even a keyhole.

Of course, there were very few doors that would have presented an insurmountable barrier to Dick; still, before he proceeded to violence, he determined to see if he could not open it by fair means.

After a few futile efforts he abandoned the idea.

"It's no go!" he said, "and yet I am not half satisfied. There must be some ready means of opening this door, if I could only find them out. However, I'll get through somehow."

He placed the lamp upon the passage floor as he spoke, and in such a position as its beams fell clearly upon the door.

"Now," he said, reflectively, "I wonder if there really is no one on the other side of the door. From the way my treacherous friend spoke I fancy there must be somebody, but yet not anyone who would assist him. If he has any friends I certainly hope they will not return until I have made my explorations. Now, it strikes me the very wisest thing I can do will be to go back again and barricade the door as well as I am able, so that if they should come back they will have a little trouble in effecting an entrance.

There was so much sense in this reflection that he there and then picked up his lamp and prepared to put his resolve into execution.

A dismal, smothered kind of groan, at that very moment smote his ears.

He could not help giving a slight start as the unexpected sound echoed through the vaulted passage.

"Who's that?" he said.

All was still.

He turned round again and faced the door, for it was quite evident the groan must have come from the other side of it.

"There's some one in trouble, that's clear," said Dick after a pause of a few minutes. "Hilloa! there! Who are you? Hilloa!"

The massive door seemed to beat back his words.

They met with no response.

"Ah! well, I shall find all out soon, I hope, but I will go first and blockade the door."

He walked rapidly along the passage, and ascended the little flight of steps.

Had it not been for the lamp he carried the place would have been in pitch darkness, for the scattered embers of the fire were totally extinguished.

Bess was reposing very quietly in the corner where she had been littered down. He merely gave her a passing glance to make sure all was right, and then went to the door.

Once there, he could not resist opening it, and looking out, so as to discover whether there was any one within sight or hearing.

The silence was most intense.

As he expected, he had quite by taking a refuge in the wood, thrown the officers off the scent.

He re-entered the hut, and closed the door.

He found behind it a very thick oaken beam of wood, which was fastened to the door by a rivet in the centre, and fitted in a staple on each door-post.

"They won't open that very easily," he said, as he fixed the oak bar in its place.

Just then his eye fell upon the woodman, whom he had bound and thrown into the corner in so unceremonious a fashion. He was lying still and immovable in the position in which he had fallen, and he was to all appearances quite dead.

Then Dick bethought himself of the other door, opening into the shed, and he secured that as well as he was able.

Feeling then tolerably secure, he once more commenced the descent of the steps which the hearthstone had disclosed.

He hesitated a moment as to whether he should leave the hearthstone up as it was, or let it down into its place; but, after a minute's consideration, he resolved to leave it propped open.

In another minute now—for he had got familiar with the place—he was standing at the massive door through which the groans he had heard appeared to penetrate, though his voice had failed to do so.

He took the steel bar again into his hands and inserted the sharp point into the mortice of the door.

Then he pressed against the other end strongly and steadily, and, although the door started a little from the pressure, it did not give way. Still it gave him a better opportunity of inserting the crowbar; so much so indeed, that, at the second trial, he had the inexpressible satisfaction of seeing it swing open.

Then he picked up the lamp quickly, and held the crowbar in a defensive attitude.

Another deep groan from the cavern—or whatever it was before him—came with fearful distinctness to his ears.

A close, stifling atmosphere gushed out through the door, beyond which all was utter darkness.

Slowly and cautiously, and taking care to find a firm place to put his foot upon before he lifted the other from the ground, Dick crossed the mysterious threshold.

As he did so, the lamp emitted only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays, which in a very insufficient manner dispelled the darkness which seemed to Dick to be rolling about in huge clouds.

The air had a hot, clammy, disgreeable flavour, and was besides excessively oppressive, so much so, that the highwayman felt it pressing upon his heart and brain until he grew sick and faint.

Then he reeled out of the cavern into the passage, and was forced to lean against the wall for a considerable time before he could recover himself.

The fresh, cool air, however—for so by comparison it seemed to be—rushed down gratefully from the room above, and, mingling with the lethiferous vapour, deprived it of its noxious qualities.

Then once more came the deep, hollow, corpse-like groan, but now much louder and by far more unearthly in its tone; it seemed to fill all the atmosphere around him.

And yet, for the life of him, Dick could not tell from whence the sound appeared to come; it seemed to reach his ears from all sides.

The flame of the lamp was getting dimmer and dimmer.

Was, then, the air in that cavernous-like place so impure as not to be able to support the combustion of the wick?

Surely no; for if it were so, then no human being could possibly for many minutes live in it; and did not the groan point to the existence of someone there who was, doubtless, suffering much agony?

As this thought crossed his mind, the question arose unbidden to his lips:

"Was it from human lips so horrible a groan had come?"

CHAPTER IV.

DICK TURPIN MAKES A HORRIBLE DISCOVERY IN THE CELL BENEATH THE WOODMAN'S HUT.

AND now, as minute after minute passed, and the fresh air from the room above entered the passage, Dick felt his lungs beginning to resume their wonted healthy action.

He no longer gasped for breath, and the dull, heavy sensation which had come over him had left his brain and eyelids.

Stooping down, then, and taking the lamp again in his hands—for when he leaned half-fainting against the wall, he had placed it upon the ground—Dick tried if he could make it give a better light.

Then he found that the dimness of the flame proceeded chiefly from the fact that only a small quantity of oil, and that very thick and glutinous, remained in the reservoir of the lamp. However, by altering the wick, he did succeed in making it burn a little better.

It was, though, self-evident that if he wished to prosecute his researches in that strange, gloomy-looking place, by its aid he must do so without loss of time.

Once more, then, Dick, holding the lamp in his left and the steel crowbar in his right hand, passed through the ghostly-looking portal.

He experienced but little difficulty in breathing now; the air had a strange odour, but that was all.

"Upon my word," said Dick, as he paused after taking a few steps, "I have many a time heard of making darkness visible, but I must say I never in my life had a better exemplification of it than I have now!"

He might well think so, for the faint light the lamp gave was totally inadequate to disperse the "black darkness" with which the cavern seemed literally filled.

Naturally enough, too, he felt timid about his footing in that place, for he did not know how far the level floor extended, or how soon he might find himself upon the verge of some deep declivity too late to save himself from tumbling headlong down.

The silence which followed the utterance of the last groan was something terrible, and Dick found it growing more and more so each moment; so he was fain to speak his thoughts and speculations as to the place he was in aloud.

"I wonder, now, what this place can be? Some robber's haunt, I fancy; and yet it seems strange it should be filled with mephitic vapour, as it was. The place is full of mystery, and——confound it all, what's that?"

These last few words were spoken in a very different tone to the others. In walking forward his head had struck violently against something depending from the ceiling, but what it was he could form no idea.

With the help of the lamp, which threatened every minute to go out, he saw the object which had given him the blow upon the forehead.

It was another lamp, much larger in size than the one he held in his hand, attached by a thick iron chain to a kind of staple in the roof.

"Confound the thing!" said Dick, again; "what a crack it gave me, to be sure! Why on earth didn't they hang it out of reach of one's head? Stop, now, I wonder whether there's any oil in it?"

He felt the wick with his fingers, and found it sticky and wet, and on applying the flame of the smaller lamp it readily enough ignited.

It was a minute or two before it fairly burnt up, but when it did, it cast a tolerable light over the whole of the cavern.

There was only one or two distant corners into which its beams did not penetrate.

As nearly as he could estimate, the cave was about forty feet in length by thirty in width.

A large table and some benches were ranged round the walls.

Beyond that there was no furniture in the place.

Dick felt disappointed, when he, having given a good look round, found it such an ordinary place.

In shape it was exceedingly irregular, and full of corners. Like the hut above, it was very rudely fashioned.

"Ah!" said Dick, after he had taken in the general aspect of the cavern, "this is a snug little residence, and no mistake. I must have a closer look into it, and try if I cannot find out the individual who groaned in so uncom-



[THE SPECTRE HORSEMAN.]

fortable manner. I wonder if this lamp will come down like the other did?"

He tried, and found it would not, but he managed to disengage the portion holding the oil and the wick. To be sure, it was not very nice to lay hold of, but Dick never troubled about trifles.

In the corner which was in the deepest shadow, Dick found a curious-looking door.

It needed a sharp eye to distinguish it from the surrounding walls, for it was precisely the same colour, and it was more by accident than anything else that Dick's eye fell upon the chink that ran round it.

There was a circumstance connected with this door that filled Dick with astonishment.

A thin wreath of whitish-looking smoke made its way slowly through the crevice round it.

That, then, evidently was the source from whence the deadly vapour emanated.

An intense desire to know what was on the other side of this door occupied Dick's mind, to the exclusion of everything else.

He put the lamp down on the floor, at a little distance from him, and with the steel bar which had before aided him so materially, commenced an attack upon it.

It was some time before it yielded in the least degree to his efforts.

At last it gave way.

It was well Dick possessed sufficient presence of mind to throw himself instantly upon his face, for a perfect cloud of white vapour poured into the outer cavern.

The inner chamber must have been filled with it to the entire exclusion of the wholesome air, for it rushed out in incredible quantities.

By holding his face close to the earth, Dick managed to escape the greater part of it. He lay quite still, because he knew that it would soon disperse.

He cast an anxious glance towards his lamp, but, though its light was not so brilliant, he found it burning steadily.

The dense vapour rolled above and around him, and seemed as if it would never disperse. The time appeared doubly long to Dick, for he was in the highest degree impatient to know what it all meant.

After waiting a few moments longer, he ventured to rise to his feet.

The cavern was getting clearer.

He could see but a very short distance in advance of him.

As he approached the inner door he felt the air grow hotter and hotter.

His eyelids smarted and tingled as they do sometimes in a London fog.

Disregarding this, he boldly stepped into what in his mind he could not help calling the mysterious chamber.

He increased his caution.

The floor was hard and solid to the feet.

The inner cavern, or cell, was very limited in its dimensions. By stretching out his arms he could almost touch the wall on all sides, while the roof was hardly high enough for him to stand upright.

Suddenly he drew back the foot he was about to place upon the floor. He had trod upon something soft.

It sent a disagreeable thrill through his veins, for some instinctive feeling seemed to tell him what it was.

He held the lamp down on the floor, and looked at the object upon which he had put his foot.

It was a human hand.

It was in some inexplicable way puffed up to thrice its natural size, and the skin was stretched so tightly over it that the whole seemed like some huge blister.

Full of surprise and wonder, Dick looked still closer, and then he saw, lying stiff and rigid, the body of a man.

It was swollen in the same proportion as the hand.

There was not the slightest sign of vitality about it.

The body was that of a tall, powerful man. He was rudely clad in a garb which was a strange compound between that of a gamekeeper and farm labourer.

The face presented a frightful spectacle; so frightful, indeed, that after one brief glance, Dick turned away his head appalled.

There was upon the terribly bloated and disfigured features an expression in which a whole world of agony was depicted.

"This, then," said Dick, as he turned away his eyes, "this, then, is the poor, miserable wretch whose groans came upon my ears with so horrible a cadence. Who can he have been, and what can he have done to meet with such a fate as this? However, all speculation upon the subject can be of no avail. I would, though, give something to know the explanation of it, for it cannot fail to be of startling interest."

After one more glance round the cell, for it was nothing else, Dick turned round as if to leave.

As he reached the threshold, he paused reflectively.

"Ought I," he said, "to leave this place until I have assured myself that no spark of life yet clings to the pained, bloated carcass? No," he added, "I must return."

It was very unwillingly, however, that he again approached the body.

He knelt down by the side of it, and, removing some portion of the clothing, placed his hand, as nearly as he could judge, above the heart.

The skin was burning hot.

He felt a slight flutter beneath his fingers, but so slight as to be almost imperceptible.

"He lives! he lives!" he said; "perhaps even now I may hear the strange story of his sufferings from his own lips."

He nerved himself to look upon his face.

It was a loathsome colour.

The features were normally, no doubt, regular and bold. The eyebrows were jet black, and so, too, was his hair. But his countenance, swelled to the exaggerated size it was, had almost lost all traces of its configuration.

The eyes, which were staring blindly open, looked strangely small in comparison with the size of the face.

Overcoming his repugnance, Dick slowly raised the body to a sitting posture.

A strange half-sigh, half-groan, issued from the distorted lips.

"Come, Mr. What's-your-name, rouse up a bit, I daresay you are in a very bad way, but you might be worse you know. How do you feel now?"

All was still.

Dick listened in vain for a reply.

Then a slight shudder overspread the body of the man.

"Ah!" said Dick, as he felt it, "I am sadly afraid it's all over with him, poor fellow!"

He laid him on the floor of the cell as he spoke.

He replaced his hand upon his heart, but its pulsations had ceased to be perceptible.

"One thing is certain," said Dick, as he once more prepared to depart, "of all the strange adventures I have met with in my career, this is certainly the strangest of them all."

He closed the door of the cell, and once more glanced round the cave, so as to impress its appearance upon his memory. Then he walked slowly to the foot of the little flight of steps.

As he placed his foot upon the first one, a loud and impatient knocking at the outer door reached his ears.

CHAPTER V.

THE ROBBERS IN THE WOOD RETURN, AND MAKE AN ATTACK ON DICK TURPIN.

Now, when Dick heard the knocking at the door of the hut, he did what was an unusual thing for him indeed.

He stood still, undecided how to act.

The first question which crossed his mind was whether those who were clamouring so loudly for admission were police officers or some of those bold, reckless men who doubtless made the cave beneath the hut their hiding and abiding place.

He was inclined to think the latter as being the most probable.

He placed the lamp upon the floor, and stealthily ascended the steps on tiptoe.

His position was most unquestionably full of peril, for it was only natural to suppose that if these men were sufficiently inhuman to doom one of their comrades to so terrible a death, they would not scruple to put him out of the way of divulging any of their secrets.

"They're an uncommon bad lot, that's certain," said Dick; "and, as I cannot get any profit by encountering them, I think the very best thing I can do will be to get clear off, if possible, without letting them know anything about it."

Having come to this determination, he crept stealthily along the floor of the hut until he came to Black Bess.

He patted her encouragingly upon the neck, and slipped the bridle over his arm.

As he was close by the door, he stopped to listen.

The knocking had ceased, and the confused murmur of several voices alone came to his ears.

He could not distinguish a single word.

Without, therefore, pausing a moment longer, Dick led Bess across the room to the door which opened into the outer apartment.

The fresh, cool air that gushed in refreshed him exceedingly.

Just as he was about to close this door, he heard the sharp report of a pistol, and the bullet crashing through the panel.

The men outside, to the number of five or six, and who, as Dick had rightly enough conjectured, were members of the band of robbers who made that lonely hut their home, were evidently getting angry and impatient at this disregard of their summons.

"Fire away!" said Dick, "nobody cares!"

Before opening the little door which led into the shed, Dick thought it would only be prudent to listen for a while, and ascertain, if possible, whether any of the woodman's companions, finding it impossible to obtain an entrance from the front of the hut, would go round to the back of it.

He looked through the holes which were perforated in the door, but saw nothing.

Almost immediately afterwards, however, he heard a rustling among the trees.

Keeping both ears and eyes open, he waited patiently for what should happen next.

Three swarthy, ill-favoured, gipsy-like looking men emerged from the trees.

The moonlight, which was even brighter than when he had looked out a short time before, revealed their figures with great distinctness.

Looking straight before them, and without pausing for a moment, these men approached the door behind which Turpin stood.

From their confident step they evidently anticipated no difficulty in opening this door.

When they tried it they found it firm and immoveable.

Dick stood a little on one side, for he thought it not unlikely they would, in their disappointment, fire a bullet through that door as they had through the other.

The men, however, drew back to a short distance, and spoke in a low tone to each other.

"I wish I could hit on some plan of scaring these scoundrels. I'll warrant they are as arrant cowards as ever put shoes on their feet. What can I think of? Surely I ought to be able to think of something."

He rubbed his head in a perplexed, absent sort of way. It was no use, though, he could not rub an idea into it.

The act of keeping his eye upon what the men were about prevented his elaborating any plan of action.

He now saw two of the men withdraw, leaving the other as a kind of guard.

"They have gone round to their friends in front, I suppose. I wonder what they think of it?"

The robbers appeared to be alarmed about something. They seemed to dread taking any vigorous steps. No doubt they were puzzled how to account for the hut being barricaded against them.

From some reason or other they appeared to be aware that their hut had been taken possession of by some one, but, of course, whether by one person or twenty they could have no idea.

Then Dick saw the two men who had just left return, accompanied by three others.

All six then entered the shed.

"Shaw is right," said one.

"Well, it's quite certain, whether he's right or wrong, that if the bar is really up behind the other door, there will be little hope of forcing it, for it was made purposely to resist any attack that might be made upon it."

"Yes, yes."

"Some one must have entered this place, and, no doubt, discovered all. As the doors are all fastened, he must be inside."

"Comrades," said another, "it is some spy, and we are lost. Are you agreed that he shall die?"

"All—all!" they cried.

"Thank you," said Dick to himself. "But it strikes me you are counting your chickens before they are hatched."

Then the man who had so logically concluded that there must be some one inside the hut unfriendly to them, spoke again—

"This door before us, and the existence of which no one would suspect when standing in this shed, because it is made of the same materials as the walls, is by no means so strong, and if we all strive with a will we shall easily enough force it open, and then death—death to the intruder."

"Yes—death!" said the others.

"You make a mistake," said Dick, mentally, "if you think you can frighten me by any such threats——"

He was interrupted by the man who had taken so prominent a part in the council saying rapidly—

"The trunk—the trunk!"

To the intense surprise of Dick, no sooner were these words spoken, than they dashed rapidly into the wood.

This furnished him with matter for speculation.

"The trunk?" he repeated. "Whatever can they mean by saying, 'The trunk—the trunk!' and then running off like a parcel of madmen. I can't make them out at all. I think the very best thing I can do is to be off!"

He put his hand on the fastenings of the door.

"Stop, now," he said, as a second thought entered his head. "I may fall into a snare of some kind. Never mind, here goes."

He was too late.

He heard the sounds of men's footsteps approaching.

"Here they are back again. I wonder what they meant by 'trunk?'"

It was a great puzzle to Dick, and he was anxious in the extreme to know what it was.

They did not keep him long in suspense.

The six men made their appearance again in front of the shed, carrying the trunk of a small tree upon their shoulders.

"Oh, I see now," said Dick; "how ever was it I did not think of that before? It was the trunk of a tree that they meant. It looks as though it had been cut down some time, and laid on the ground in the wet. They are going to smash the door in with it."

The intention of the robbers was now only too apparent. With a ready thought, that had struck them all at once, as soon as the word "trunk" was uttered by their comrade, they one and all remembered the trunk of a tree which had lain for many a day in the clearing in the front of the hut.

Then all, actuated by one impulse, darted off to fetch it.

That was the moment Dick should have seized upon to make his escape; but while he was cudgelling his brains to think what they meant, the opportunity was lost.

The trunk which the men carried was quite denuded of its branches. No doubt they had, from time to time, been lopped off for firewood.

It was about ten feet in length by two in diameter.

The men, three on each side, made a pause, and settled it firmly upon their shoulders.

The thickest end was turned towards the door, and when the men carrying it rushed forward and used it as a battering-ram, there were very few doors that could have held upon their hinges.

Dick's position was getting critical, for at close quarters six to one is rather long odds.

"Forward! forward!" shouted the man nearest the large end of the tree.

Encircling it with their arms, the men ran forwards, and the rude battering-ram came with a terrific crash against the door.

Still, it did not give way completely. It was strongly made, and kept its place bravely; but another such a blow as that which it had just received must inevitably demolish it.

"Back! back! mates; back! One more blow, and the door is open."

The men gave a cheer as they drew back, and prepared for another charge.

They rushed forward with great impetuosity, with thrice as much as was required indeed, for the door gave way in a moment; and as they had prepared to meet with a much greater amount of resistance, they, as a natural result, went sprawling into the hut, with the tree on top of them.

They did not appear, though, to have sustained much damage, for, in an inconceivably short time they had risen to their feet.

All cast a rapid glance around them.

The bright moon lighted up the place in almost every part.

The hut was empty.

Dick had immediately after the first blow retired to the other apartment.

The door which connected the two rooms opened inwardly, so he stood a better chance of securing it than he would if it had opened outwards. His eye lighted upon the chest from which the man had produced the bottle of brandy. It was large and heavy, and Dick dragged it with difficulty along the floor and placed it against the door.

Of course it would not form any great obstacle, but still it would hinder their entrance for a moment or two.

He had just finished placing it in its position when he heard the men dash up against it.

"If now," he said, "I could only have a peep outside this door to see what is going on in front, but, as I can't I shall have to take my luck."

He unfastened the door, so that it would at any moment swing open.

Then he mounted his steed.

Crash—crash came the blows upon the inner door.

Feeling there was not a second to lose, Dick guided Bess to the front door of the hut.

By leaning forward in his saddle he could take hold of its edge.

He bent down his head to a level with Bess's ears, and held the reins firmly with his left hand.

Then he pulled the door quickly open and dashed out into the clearing.

A loud shout from several men in front mingled with that uttered by those who were within as he did so.

"The spy! the spy!" they cried. "That's him! Stop him! Stop him!"

Several men darted out from the shadow of the trees and endeavoured to seize Bess by the bridle.

They might as well have tried to arrest the flight of an eagle.

Several shots were fired by those in the rear, and a sudden shock, like a stroke with a stick, unaccompanied by pain, made Dick aware he had been hit in the shoulder.

It was his left one.

He pulled up and turned round upon his foes.

Their numbers had increased to near a score.

They stood huddled together in a dense throng.

They had all paused on seeing Dick suddenly wheel round.

He had a pistol in his right hand.

"Fall back into the hut," he cried in stentorian tones. "Fall back all, or I fire."

Instinctively the men retreated a few paces.

"Forward—forward! let not the spy escape. Are ye such cowards that ye shrink from one man? He has learned our secret and will betray us. Capture him, alive or dead!"

The man who pronounced these words appeared to hold the post of captain to the troop, for, though he gave such valorous orders, he himself very prudently kept in the background.

Dick laughed as he said—

"I hold here the life of one man. Which of you is willing to be that one?"

None stirred.

They were cowards as it was, but Dick's resolute bearing, and the conviction that one of them must receive the contents of the pistol, did not enhance their valour.

They drew back yet further towards the door of the hut.

"On! on! After him! after him!" again shouted their prudent captain. "Capture him, my gallant hearts!"

Dick could not help feeling amused at the idea of twenty men holding back from attacking him.

An open kind of glade was before him, so, firing his pistol at random in the midst of the banditti, Dick turned his mare's head and galloped away.

As soon as they saw his back the men hastened to pursue him, and Dick heard them give a loud shout, intended no doubt to buoy up their courage.

"What a ridiculous termination to so horrible an adventure. They are the rankest cowards I ever met with, and no mistake. I suppose their achievements consist for the most part in plundering a henroost. I am, however, far from being satisfied; I would give a great deal to hear the story of that poor fellow whom I found in the underground cell."

Full of these thoughts Dick reached the lane which bordered the wood.

He looked behind him, but no traces of his pursuers were visible.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MEETING WITH THE SPECTRE HORSEMAN IN THE LANE.

"WHAT a glorious night!" said Dick, as he looked up and down the quiet shady lane.

The moon was at the full, and had just passed the meridian.

Far and wide, over hill and dale, tree and meadow, hill and stream, fell the flood of silvery lustre which she poured forth.

It lighted up, too, with a rare brilliancy and beauty, the numerous objects in the fertile landscape.

Dick stood upon a piece of slightly rising ground which commanded a splendid view of the surrounding scenery.

Reposing on the northern horizon, like some giant cloud, was the mass of buildings of which the city of London is composed.

Above them all towered the mighty dome of St. Paul's Cathedral.

The gilding on the summit of the monument glistened faintly in the mellowed light.

But not for long did the highwayman remain gazing at the beauty of the scene. He was anxious to reach London, and turning Bess's head in that direction, he gave her the rein freely.

And now, as both horse and rider are for the present in comparative safety, we will rest for a few moments from the recital of the varied incidents which occurred on this most eventful night.

We wish, if possible, to combat in the space of a few lines the objections which have been raised to making a highwayman the hero of romance.

We feel sure some of our readers will be willing to listen to our arguments.

First, then, it has been urged, and with some apparent reason, that the narration of such romantic incidents as pertain to a highwayman's career would tend to make the thoughtless endeavour to imitate them.

Before we consider this question, it ought to be clearly borne in mind that no small amount of the interest which such a tale excites is due to the fact that the Knight of the Road is essentially a thing of the past.

It is well known how the influence of time softens the asperities of all things, and it has not omitted to throw a gloss over the highwayman's exploits.

Now we ourselves cannot for a moment think it possible that anyone, let him be ever so unreflective, could be ridiculous enough, in these days, to attempt to imitate their deeds.

In fact, the bold highwayman who cried "Stand and deliver!" upon the road, has got to be considered in the light of a species of knight-errant, whose chief business was to redress such social wrongs as came under his immediate notice in the course of the many adventures among high and low, which must necessarily fall to his lot, and this is why we follow him with pleasure. Were scenes of violence alone depicted, the only feeling that would be called into existence would be disgust at his atrocities.

"Such, then, being the case, it must be self-evident that it is not his obnoxiousness to the laws of the land nor the crimes of which he may have been guilty, that gives the attention of the reader, but his courage, address, single-mindedness, and opposition of all kinds of oppression.

When we carry the fancy back a hundred years, we picture society as something very different to what it is in the present day. Law and justice were not so impartially administered them as they are now, and it must be conceded that there is yet ample room for improvement.

But nothing causes so great a change in manners and customs as increase in the speed of locomotion.

The lumbering stage-coach, with its bluff coachman and thick-headed guard, has given place to the railway train, so his occupation having gone, the day of the highwayman has passed away never to return.

Besides, the person who was weak-minded enough to think he could achieve the feats ascribed to heroes such as ours, would be just as likely, after reading some romance of chivalry, to don a suit of armour, and set out in quest of adventures, like Don Quixote.

Now no one thinks of stigmatizing as improper the romances in which mailed warriors and crusaders take a part, and yet it appears to us, the objection raised applies to them with equal force.

The truth is, that those persons whose ordinary life is monotonous and void of incident devour with avidity all tales of wild and wonderful adventure, for the simple reason that they present so vivid and remarkable a contrast to the routine of their own existence.

To all of these we promise in our pages a rich mine of entertainment; but we wish them to remember the work is a romance—nothing more.

Meanwhile Dick has trotted swiftly down the lane in the direction of London.

The high road is gained and crossed, and down another narrow lane, which will abbreviate the distance to be travelled, he takes his way.

Soaking slowly through his coat and trickling down on to Bess's flanks, came the blood from the wound in his left shoulder.

It was scarcely more than a mere scratch. The bullet, which had been fired by the robbers in the wood, had

ploughed up the flesh on his shoulder, but had not touched the bone in its passage.

It bled freely, and to this circumstance may be attributed the total absence of pain. He heeded it not in the least, and had even forgotten he had been wounded.

But slowly and constantly welled forth the current of life, and fell with a faint, almost inaudible, drip upon the ground in the country lane.

Not for long, however, can he remain insensible to the fearful loss of blood.

Still he galloped onward.

All was beautifully calm. No sound, save the beat of Bess's hoofs, and the rustling of the foliage on each side of him, broke the delicious silence.

Before him, and high up in the heavens, was the bright, full moon, travelling apparently at the same rate as himself and ever keeping the same distance in advance.

Occasionally a light fleecy cloud would sweep over her disc, obscuring her brilliancy for a moment, and then sail away across the sky, but that was all.

It was a night which could not fail to make a deep impression upon any reasoning being. The deep silence and repose around seemed to steal into the mind and create a corresponding influence upon the soul. It seemed to chasten and soften down the thoughts as the moonlight chastened material objects.

Then the aspect of the lane changed.

The low hedgerows gave place to high ones, while here and there a thick group of elms and poplars cast a deep black shadow on the roadway.

Dick still pressed on. Once or twice he felt a strange sensation of weakness, and a kind of mist floated before his eyes.

A slight smarting from the wound in his shoulder now attracted his attention, and he placed his right hand upon it.

To his surprise, he found his coat sopping wet.

He withdrew his hand with a puzzled air.

Oh! I remember now," he said; "one of those rascals scratched me with a bullet, and I suppose it has been bleeding ever since."

He moved his arm about to ascertain whether the joint had been injured in any way, but he felt nothing more than a little stiffness.

"Oh! it's all right," he said. "I must manage to bind it up in some way; I wish I had discovered it earlier."

While speaking he untied his voluminous cravat, and, though it was rather an awkward job, succeeded in bandaging the wound and staunching the blood.

"That's better! I shall get on now, I fancy."

But he had lost more blood than he imagined, and he felt his head swim, and he reeled in his saddle.

"Woa! gently! hold up!" he said, clutching Bess's mane. "Woa now!"

He recovered himself by an effort, and pricking his mare gently with a spur, continued on his way.

A dull red mist seemed to obscure his vision, but by degrees it cleared away.

Then, as he looked in advance of him, he fancied he could see in the far distance something in motion, but he could not determine what it was, for it was so confounded with the shadows at the end of the lane that it was hardly distinguishable.

Presently, however, it began to assume the form of a horse and rider.

It looked, though, strangely dim and undefined.

It approached with a peculiar gliding, undulating movement.

What puzzled him most was, that though he bent forward in the saddle and listened, and though all around was so profoundly silent, no sound of the horse's feet striking against the road came to his ears.

And still onward, nearer, nearer, with the same gliding, stealthy motion, came the mysterious steed.

Dick felt a vague feeling of alarm—it could scarcely be called terror—creeping over him.

This was in a great measure, no doubt, produced by the great quantity of blood which he had lost.

He made a strong effort to shake it off.

It was in vain.

Then he became conscious that Bess was trembling violently.

His hands wandered to the holsters.

And now the spectral-looking horseman reached a spot where no shadows fell upon the lane, and was plainly revealed by the pale moonbeams.

The misty, shadowy look had disappeared.

Both horse and rider were defined with extraordinary clearness.

Involuntarily, as his eye rested upon them, a cry of astonishment issued from his lips.

And well there might.

He fancied he must be dreaming.

The mysterious rider was a perfect reflex of himself.

The steed of his own mare, Black Bess.

He saw the whole as plainly as if he had stood before a gigantic looking-glass.

He closed his eyes, fancying for a moment that what he saw was but the creation of his own brain; and when he opened them again it was with the firm conviction that when he did so the apparition would have vanished.

But no; there it stood, and apparently ten times more palpable than before.

He ran his eye over the costume.

There was the same rakish-looking hat, with its long trailing feather, the same gold-faced scarlet coat, the same high boots—all was most exact.

In a moment, all that he had ever heard respecting the appearance of such an object being a foretoken of death flashed through his mind; and, although it could not absolutely be said that he placed credence in such stories, yet, when he saw approaching, and at no great distance from him, a form which he was convinced was no illusion, a cold chill crept over him, and the blood seemed to gush back suddenly to his heart.

His breath came short and thick.

"What can it mean?" he said, faintly.

As he spoke, the mysterious horseman suddenly leaped the hedge, and sped over the meadows until he reached a little knoll, where he stood still and immovable.

As for Bess, she seemed as if changed to stone. Her neck was outstretched towards the spectre steed, and her eyes seemed bursting from their sockets. Her mane was erect and her sides wet with perspiration.

How long Dick gazed he knew not, but suddenly a cloud passed over the moon's face, and cast a temporary darkness around.

When she peeped forth again the spectre horseman had disappeared.

Dick gave a sigh of relief.

"This is very, very strange," he said. "What can be the meaning of this assumption of my own form and features? I feel sick and faint. My brain is heavy and my arms paralyzed. Can it be possible that I have bled to death?"

His heart pulsated at twice its usual speed as this question crossed his mind, and he leaned forward heavily upon the neck of his steed.

In a few moments, however, the deathlike faintness which had come over him passed away, and as he settled himself properly in the saddle, he passed his hand two or three times over his brow, and looked in a bewildered sort of fashion about him.

All was still and silent. No other living, moving object could be anywhere distinguished.

He urged Bess forwards.

Filled with strange thoughts and sensations to which he had hitherto been a stranger, Dick proceeded on his way to London, nor did he draw rein again until he stood upon the old bridge at Blackfriars.

A cool, refreshing breeze came from the surface of the water, and Dick paused for a few moments in order to enjoy it, for it came very gratefully upon his fevered brain.

There were a few vessels even at that hour moving lazily on the river.

He watched them for some moments.

It was wonderful what a difference the cool breeze made to Dick; he felt himself revive rapidly.

Then he spoke—

"I am better now—much better. I feel, though, very, very weary, and am glad I have reached London. I will make my way at once to where I can have an hour or two's repose."

He proceeded at a gentle pace up Bridge-street, and so on across Fleet-street into Farringdon-street, and past the gloomy old Fleet Prison.

Then he plunged into the mass of narrow streets and courts which lie between Fleet-street and Holborn-hill.

To-day it is by no means an enviable locality, but a hundred years ago we may reasonably conclude it was at the very least a hundred times worse than it is now.

He threaded his way into Chancery-lane without meeting with a soul.

He made his way to the corner of Carey-street.

Here a watchman had his station, who was supposed to watch over the neighbourhood and protect the houses from the burglar!

Suppose, indeed!

The box was there, but it was empty. Doubtless, the guardian of the night was solacing himself somewhere near at hand.

At almost any other time Dick would have played him some trick, but now he was so thoroughly exhausted he could think of nothing but reaching some place of rest.

Soon, then, he emerged into Drury-lane by way of Princes-street, and, turning to the left, pulled up at the White Horse.

No traces of this ancient inn are left now. It was pulled down many years ago, and the present gin-palace erected on its site in the south corner of a passage called White Horse-yard.

It was famed all over London as being the resort of all the criminals in town. The landlord was always too well paid by his customers for any reward, however great, to be an inducement for him to betray them, and any of the "family" was sure of finding a safe refuge in his house.

Although it was at an hour when everybody would be supposed to be in bed, yet, when Dick drew up before the old inn, a light was burning in the tap-room.

He alighted, and, instead of entering by the door, led Bess by the bridle down a narrow alley until he reached a small door.

Here he paused, and pressing his thumb against the lintel, waited patiently.

The door swung silently open, and a stout, red-faced man appeared upon the threshold.

He held a lantern in his hand.

"Hullo!" he said, gruffly; then, as he recognized his visitor, he said, in a cordial voice, "Why, Dick lad, is it you? I have not seen you for an age. How mortal pale you are, to be sure! What's the matter?"

Dick smiled languidly as he replied—

"I am wounded, Matthew."

"Eh! wounded?"

"Oh, only slightly, only slightly. A mere scratch; in fact, nothing to speak of."

"Come in, come in, and let me attend to it. Bring your mare with you. I'll see to stabling her all right. Come in, come in."

Dick led Bess over the doorstep as desired, and Matthew, the landlord, carefully closed the door.

It was rather a strange place in which Dick stood, and it well deserves a line or two of description.

In appearance it more resembled the bottom of a well than anything else, only it was square instead of round.

The only roof it had was the sky.

It was about eight feet square. That side of it in which the door was placed was a plain brick wall of the same height as the house itself.

The other three sides were simply the external walls of the inn, in which were several windows.

But the strangest thing of all was that a number of pieces of iron, about twelve inches long by one in diameter, were stuck at regular intervals from the floor to the roof, so that a person might by their aid ascend to the housetops.

These bars were besides arranged so that they passed near every window which looked into this square place.

Their use was obvious.

A person could leave any of these rooms without difficulty through the windows, and either go up or down as circumstances might require.

There was a small low door opposite to the one by which Dick had entered, leading into the inn, and another on the left hand leading by a circuitous route to the stables.

It was through this last-mentioned door that the landlord passed, followed by Dick and his mare.

Tired and faint as he was, Dick would not forego his invariable custom of seeing his mare safely lodged and fed.

This done, he accompanied old Matthew through a maze of wooden corridors, and up a flight of rickety stairs into a small chamber.

"There," said the landlord, putting his lantern on the broad window-sill, and carefully closing the shutters, "you may make yourself perfectly comfortable for twelve hours at least. Here is the bed."

Dick threw himself upon the bed with an air of intense satisfaction.

"Shall I leave the light?"

"No; I shall not want it."

"All right; good night."

"Good night, landlord," replied Dick; "mind you look after my mare."

"Don't trouble about that, my boy. Won't you have something to eat and drink?"

"No, no, thank you," replied Turpin, drowsily. "Stay till I wake up. That'll do."

"Good night, Dick," said the landlord again.

He waited in vain for a reply.

Dick was fast asleep.

"Ah, well," said old Matthew, as he approached the bed, and cast the light of the lantern upon his face. "He's helpless enough now, and no mistake. However, he shall come to no harm under this roof so long as I am alive. So rest in peace, brave heart, rest in peace."

The landlord slowly left the bedside, and closed the door carefully behind him.

The dawn of the coming day struggled through the triangular-shaped holes in the window shutters, and a faint, leaden-coloured beam of light fell upon the exhausted, slumbering highwayman.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE POLICE OFFICER ON THE ROOF OF THE OLD INN IN DRURY LANE.

"ROUSE up, Dick! rouse up, lad! Wake up! wake up, come! Here's a couple of redbreasts dropped in. Wake up!"

It was old Matthew Gale, the landlord, who spoke.

It seemed to Dick as though he had only just closed his eyes when these words sounded in his ears.

He started up in bed.

"What is it, Matthew, eh? Is the house on fire?"

"No, no; only I saw a couple of officers come in. I didn't stop to see what they wanted, but thought I would wake you up, so that you might be prepared for action if necessary."

"Thanks! thanks! And Bess?"

"Right as a trivet. She's got all her traps on, and you can have her at a moment's notice."

"That is well. Why, dear me, it is getting quite daylight."

"Daylight? Ha! ha! He! he! he! Ha! ha!"

The landlord fairly held his sides.

"Hilloa! what's up? Why do you laugh?"

"Ha! ha! Why, at you, to be sure. The idea of fancying it was getting daylight. Night is closing in quick!"

"Nonsense!"

"It's a fact."

"Then do you mean to say I have been sleeping twelve hours?"

"Well, that's somewhere about the figure, I guess."

"I can scarcely credit it. I thought I had only just closed my eyes when you called me."

"That was because you slept sound. How is your wound?"

"Oh, I fancy it's all right. I feel nothing of it."

"I wouldn't move the bandage yet if I were you," said Matthew, after examining it. "Let it alone, and it will soon get right. Try a glass or two of this; it is the finest old port in my cellar. It will put new blood into you."

"You are thoughtful, my friend. I do feel just the least bit faint."

"I shouldn't wonder. Now, if I were you, I would try a good meal."

"I feel very hungry, I can tell you; but how about the officers you were mentioning?"

"Oh! dear me, what a head I've got! I have been rattling on like this, and quite forgot all about them."

"I can scarcely think they are after me. How could they tell I was anywhere in the neighbourhood?"

"Oh! I didn't say they were after you, only I thought you ought not to be asleep while the Philistines were abroad."

"They can't be after me. If they had seen me last night we should have had a visit long before this."

"No doubt, no doubt."

"Just run down, will you, then, and find out their object; and, as soon as you can, come back and let me know."

"I will. Don't be afraid, Dick, lad; you are safer here than you could be anywhere. I'll promise you if the grabs are in search of you I can baffle them without any trouble. So rest in security where you are. You have nothing whatever to fear."

"Well, then, Matthew, I should like you to run down again, and find out, if you can, what it is these officers want."

"All right; but on no account leave the room until I return."

Dick opened the door himself, and allowed the landlord to go out, and, leaning over the balusters, watched him as far down the stairs as he could, and then stood still and listened.

He heard the landlord's footsteps for some moments, and then a door closed, after which all was still.

Then a long pause ensued, when, hearing the door open again, Dick withdrew into his chamber.

In a moment or two afterwards the landlord returned.

"Well?" said Dick, inquiringly.

"It's you they're after. They've got some suspicion you are here, but of course I denied the fact, and told them to search the old place from top to bottom. It will take them some time," he added, complacently.

"No doubt of that."

"The 'White Horse' is fuller of odd nooks and corners than they fancy."

"Have they begun their search?"

"Yes; and as they no doubt think in a very cunning manner. You must not suppose that this staircase is the principal one. It is quite a secondary one, and they may not discover its existence. However, they have all gone straight up to the top of the house, intending to commence their search on the roof and end in the cellar."

"All, do you say?"

"Why, not all, of course. They have left one or two downstairs as a kind of guard; and, no doubt, several more are looking out in the lane and the court, and they would of course raise an alarm if they saw you attempting to leave the premises."

A great hubbub from somewhere above now reached their ear.

"God bless me!" said the landlord, "what's that?"

"They had made some discovery or other, I should fancy. What can it be?"

Old Matthew changed colour a little as he replied—

"I have no idea. However, it appears they have been up to the roof, and come down again. I must leave you now, to go and see what they are after."

"Very good; but how shall I manage if they take it into their heads to come here while you are away?"

"I'll show you. Bess is safe enough, and where they will never find her, so don't let that trouble you."

"Well—well!" said Dick, uneasily.

"Don't put yourself about. Beleaguered as the house is, it would be impossible for you to leave it with your mare. I know you don't like to be off her back, but it can't be helped."

"What do you propose, then?"

"Just this. When I go out, shut the door and lock it after me. If the officers don't come, well and good. If they do, look here!"

The landlord went to the window as he spoke.

"Now," he said, "there is something very peculiar indeed about this window. You see, to all appearance, it is nailed up."

"Yes—yes."

"Well, it is only in appearance. Those nail-heads, which stick out so ostentatiously all round the sash, are like a good deal of ostentation in this world—all sham. They are just intended to mislead any one, and nothing more. The window opens with a hidden spring, in this way."

He pressed on the head of one of the many nails round the sash, and the window rose silently in the groove made for it, and continued to rise so long as the head of the nail was pressed upon.

"Now, of course, you will say," continued the landlord, "that it is just possible, as the spring which opens the window is not concealed, that it may be discovered. But there is not the slightest ground for such a thought. On the contrary, it is more likely to prevent its being found out. You must bear in mind that there are at least fifty nail-heads here altogether, which diminishes the chances of discovery fifty times. Then, if the nails were tampered with, no one would think of driving them in further, as you saw me do, but, on the contrary, would try to pull them out."

There was so much logic in this reasoning that Dick was convinced at once.

"But you haven't seen all of this yet," said old Matthew, with a certain degree of pride, "though the other part is simple enough. Look outside."

Dick put his head through the window, and saw that he was looking into the square, well-like place which he had entered about twelve hours before.

"Those bars," said Matthew, "are mortared very firmly into the wall, and you need not fear their giving way. As soon, then, as you hear the officers at the door, press on the nail; it is the eleventh from the sill, and the window will open as I showed you. Then climb out, and take hold of the bar nearest to you with your right hand, and putting your foot on another one, close the window with your left; you will find it shut down with ease. It will then be immovable, and present to the officers the appearance of having been nailed up for a length of time. An active man like you will, of course, be able to reach the roof without difficulty, and when you have, I must leave you to your own devices."

"And fear not for me, then," said Dick, pressing the landlord's hand; "I shall be right enough, never fear."

"I will leave you, then, for I am full of anxiety to know what the redbreasts are doing, and my longer absence might be productive of suspicion."

"Do so—do so."

"I hope," said Dick, "you will be able to lead them off the scent, for I can feel I am dreadfully weak. I must have lost an immense quantity of blood."

"Keep yourself quiet, and don't get excited. I would advise you to lie down on the bed again. You can, if necessary, easily make it appear as though it had never been slept on."

"To be sure. I wish"——

"What?"

"You will smile, but if you will believe me, I am never contented unless Bess is close to me."

"Oh! now don't, I beg, trouble about that. I, as I said just now, may take the officers quite off their scent; and if I do, as it is only a little after nine, you can, as soon as they are gone, make your way down the court into Clare-market, and so gain the open country."

"I shall be glad to do so, and I fancy when once London is behind me, I shall be some time before I return."

"Oh! your wound makes you down-hearted. You will soon be all right."

"Well, leave me now, leave me now. Try and spare me the task of climbing over the roofs, for I feel quite unequal to it."

"Trust to me, I'll do the best I can," said the landlord, leaving the room.

With a wearied air, Dick threw himself upon the bed, and pressed his hands over his temples. There was a throbbing sensation in his head which was distracting and painful in the extreme. His system had been almost drained of blood.

Time passed, and nearly half an hour elapsed after old Matthew left the room before Turpin heard anything to indicate the coming of his foes.

Then, as he lay in a half unconscious state he heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs.

A minute more, and the hum of many voices mingled with them.

He rose to a sitting posture on the bed.

The different objects in the room seemed chasing each other round and round him.

He was in a strange, dreamy state.

Suddenly, the familiar tones of old Matthew's voice struck upon his ears.

He was speaking loudly.

"Of course, of course. Go where you like; I don't care. I only hope you'll find him, that's all."

"Your conduct is very suspicious, Mr. Gale; very suspicious indeed," said a gruff voice.

"As how, I should like to know?" rejoined the landlord. "As how, I say? Have I interfered with you in the least, or said a word to you about turning my house upside down, and ruining my trade? Just answer me that."

"Why, I think your trade would take a good deal of ruining, Mr. Gale. It's no good you putting on an air of injured innocence, for your house is celebrated all over the kingdom as being the resort of the worst of characters."

"Be careful what you're saying, be careful what you're saying. Recollect you're in my house, Mr. Officer."

"I know that," was the reply, given in an irascible voice. "But you just let me catch you out in harbouring or abetting any one, and see if I don't make you smart for it. I shall be sure to do so, sooner or later."

"Oh! indeed, Mr. Clever; oh! indeed. Perhaps you'd like to find me out to-day?"

"I shall, too, or it's very odd to me, so I wouldn't advise you to crow so loud. What room does this door open into, eh?"

They had reached the threshold of the one in which Dick stood.

While this little conversation was going on, and which, from its rather artificial character, was doubtless got up by old Matthew with the intention of putting Dick on his guard, the latter had, in a great measure, succeeded in shaking off the feeling of faintness which had so weighed upon him.

He smoothed over the bed, and unlocked the door silently, so that the suspicions of the officers should not be aroused by finding it fastened on the inside; and then, rushing to the window, he pressed the spring, and passed quickly out of it.

Taking hold, then, firmly of the bar, as the landlord had directed, he closed the window with his left hand.

As he hung thus suspended, he felt himself seized with a sudden giddiness, and it was by little short of a miracle he saved himself from falling into the yard below.

He looked up, and saw the edge of the roof about ten feet above him.

He sighed as he saw it.

"I can never do it," he said; "I never in my life felt so deadly faint. I must make the effort, though, or they may see me from the window."

He climbed up three or four steps, and paused; he felt that for the moment he was out of danger.

The cool night air blew refreshingly upon him, and every second seemed to bring with it a fresh accession of strength.

No sound reached him from the room below.

How they were getting on of course he could form no sort of idea.

"It will be best for me to ascend the rest of the distance. I shall be able to rest much better on the roof, and I shall no doubt be perfectly secure; for, having searched it once, they will not be likely to look for me again; and, unless I am mistaken, they will leave a man on every staircase as they go on with their search to prevent the possibility of any one making their escape by ascending.

He proceeded to the execution of his design. The remaining bars were ascended with but little difficulty, for he felt he had regained much of his wonted strength, and he found himself in another moment at the edge of the parapet.

To climb over this would be the most dangerous part of the business. He would have to relinquish his hold of the iron bars, and, grasping the stonework, draw himself over. But the stone had been there exposed to wind and rain for many a long year, and was much decayed; and as he, with his left hand, strove to take a hold, he as often found a fragment come away in his fingers.

They fell with a slight sound into the yard beneath. Dick shuddered at the time they took to reach it.

However, making a vigorous effort, he scaled the parapet, and rolled over into the gutter, which surrounded it on the inner side.

It was not a very pleasant place to fall into, for it was filled with black slimy mud, which had from time to time accumulated there, and Dick rose up very much the worse for the contact.

He did not, however, rise immediately to his feet, but lay still for a few moments, and then, raising his head, looked carefully around him.

An angular roof of dark red tiles was on his left hand, and up this he began to climb.

The ascent was rather steep, and he slipped once or twice before he reached the top, along which he crept a few feet, until his farther progress was stayed by a huge stack of chimneys.

"I must get round this," he said, "and on to the roof of the next house, in case any of the officers should make their appearance, then I shall be all right."

Very carefully now, for the attempt was full of peril, Dick crawled round to the other side of the chimneys.

"Now I've caught you, Mr. Dick; now I've caught you," said an exulting voice at this moment; and, before he was aware of it, Dick felt himself clutched tightly round the throat by some one.

It was a Bow-street runner, who had been left there by his superiors to watch if the highwayman made his appearance, and with instructions, in case he should do so, to give an immediate alarm.

But this man did not want for courage, and he resolved, should Dick get out on to the roof, to try his best to capture him single-handed, which would entitle him to the very large reward offered for his apprehension.

He was sitting very composedly on the roof, but yet keeping a sharp look-out around him, when his attention was arrested by hearing a slight sound.

It was the crumbling of the coping as Dick sought to obtain a firm hold of it.

He withdrew instantly, and hid himself behind the chimneys, for he was well aware how great an advantage you have over your enemy if you can pounce upon him unawares.

The officer, too, was also aware how difficult it was to keep a foothold on the tiles, especially during a struggle, so he very cunningly had got over the ridge of the roof on to the opposite side, where he held himself in readiness to catch Dick by the throat.

He knew, while he kept his hold upon the highwayman, he could not by any means fall down.

But Dick was accustomed to sudden surprises, and he very quickly recovered from this one.

He was in a moment alive to the fact that unless he speedily overcame this officer, and that before he gave any alarm, his comrades from below would come to his assistance, and then, in such a place, opposed to such odds, escape would be hopeless.

All this flashed through his mind with the rapidity of lightning.

Feeling, then, the necessity for instantaneous action, he summoned to his aid all the strength which he possessed, and taking a firm grip of his opponent's throat, he endeavoured, by main force, to drag him over the ridge of the roof on to the side on which he was.

Now this officer, full of the hope of being able to capture the redoubtable highwayman single-handed, disdained to call for help, as he might have done, and attacked him in a courageous manner.

It was a singular combat.

If there had been a spectator of it, though, he would have noticed that Dick was by slow degrees drawing the officer over in spite of the strenuous efforts which he made to prevent it.

The wound in Dick's arm, which, now that his blood was hot, he thought not of, was, nevertheless, a disadvantage; but this was more than compensated by his superior weight, for the officer, though muscular, was slightly made.

Slowly and surely he felt he was being drawn upwards and over.

Neither spoke.

Their heavy breathing was the only sound which issued from them.

With might and main did the officer strive to maintain

5 NEW SPLENDID COLOURED PICTURES GRATIS with Nos. 1 & 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6
8 OTHER SPLENDID COLOURED PICTURES GRATIS with Nos. 7 to 15.



TURPIN'S STRUGGLE WITH THE OFFICER ON THE ROOF-TOP.

his position on the slope; but in vain. He made frantic attempts to insert the toes of his boots in the crevices of the tiles and the brickwork of the chimneys; but in vain likewise.

Feeling, then, that it was imperatively necessary to change his tactics, he ceased suddenly to oppose any resistance to being dragged over, and gave himself an impetus forward.

This had the natural effect of causing Dick to lose his balance, and both, without relaxing their hold, rolled over and over down the slanting roof.

Had it not been for the old stone parapet, which was about eighteen inches high, and which had given Dick so much trouble to surmount, they must inevitably have been precipitated into the yard below.

It stopped their further progress, though with more force and suddenness than was pleasant.

A broad gutter, filled with the accumulated mud of many years, surrounded the parapet, and it was into this delightful bed they fell.

Dick was undermost.

The police-officer placed his knee on Dick's breast, and paused a moment to regain his breath; then, in a moment after, the struggle recommenced on both sides with redoubled fury.

They rose to their feet.

There was just room for them to stand in that narrow gutter, but that was all.

Dick was an experienced wrestler, and a cold chill crept over the officer as he felt himself in the grasp of one who was evidently a practised hand.

"Surrender!" said Dick, between his teeth—"Surrender, and I will spare you."

The only reply the officer made was to cling yet tighter to his foe.

"Take your fate, then!" shouted Dick, and he threw him violently down.

The unfortunate officer fell with a dull, sickening sound upon the top of the parapet.

His body was half over, but he still kept his hold. He felt in that was his only chance of preservation.

With a sudden wrench Dick freed himself from it, out at the expense of some portion of his apparel.

With a hideous rush the body of the officer fell back again, and plunged headlong down the abyss ere Dick could put out his hand to save him.

He placed his hands to his ears so that he should shut out the sickening crash of his body falling on the stones below.

He heard it though plainly enough in his imagination, and he withdrew his hands with a horrified expression upon his countenance.

He stooped down and peered over—all was dark below and profoundly still.

"Poor fellow!" said Dick, as he rose; "it's all over with him. I'm sorry, for he was a brave man, but it was his life or mine! Where shall I make my way now?"

He looked all round as he spoke. It was dusk, and the gloom was momentarily increasing.

An apparently solid mass of roofs and chimneys of every imaginable shape and description environed him.

From one or two of the queer-shaped attic-windows came a faint gleam of light.

The moon had not yet risen, or if she had was not sufficiently above the horison to shed her light upon the roof-tops.

He crawled along the gutters until he came to that part overlooking Drury-lane.

An ever-moving throng filled the pavements, and then in another moment Dick's eye fell upon the form of an officer who was standing in a doorway on the opposite side of the street and regarding the front of the inn attentively.

Dick slunk down still lower in the gutter, though when he peeped over he had not exposed enough of his body to be visible in the darkness.

Along the gutter on to the next house, and then on to the next, until he reached the corner of a street, he slowly crept.

He halted.

"I must make my way down by one of these attic windows," he said, "and through the house into the street below."

He made his attempt upon the one nearest to him. It was securely fastened.

Just at that moment his eye fell upon a trap-door in the roof which was slightly displaced from its position.

"That will do it," he said. "All is easy now."

He advanced to the trap as he spoke and lifted it off in a moment. It seemed to cover a square patch of darkness.

Before he trusted himself to descend, he took a coin from his pocket and let it fall through. For aught he knew the trap might be immediately over a steep staircase, or so great a distance from the floor as to prevent his dropping down with safety.

Besides, were anyone about the sound would inevitably attract their attention, but had he shown a light, it would have called notice to him.

The coin fell on a floor a foot or two below him, with a ringing sound.

He listened to see if any notice was taken of it, but all was silent as before.

Then he lowered himself carefully through the trap, holding firmly by his hands. He stretched out his feet and found they just grazed the floor, so he reached it without making the least noise.

CHAPTER VIII.

DICK, BY HIS TIMELY PRESENCE, INTERRUPTS THE PERPETRATION OF A DEED OF CRUELTY.—THE YOUNG GIRL'S GRATITUDE.

For a minute or two Dick stood perfectly still, in order that his eyes might become accustomed to the gloom. He dared not exhibit a light, and besides if he did it would only have the effect of making the darkness seem greater by the contrast, for, of course, he could not keep it burning.

Very gradually the light from the aperture in the ceiling above appeared to increase in brightness, and as it did, the objects surrounding him began to be dimly visible.

It was on a small wooden landing which he stood, and from which one door opened. It was well he had the precaution to stand still, for the top staircase was only a few inches from him.

He extended his hand and rested it upon the baluster. It was large and massive, and such as may be found in London in old houses, at the present time.

With slow and careful steps, and walking close to the wall so as to make the least possible noise, Dick descended the flight of stairs, and found himself upon another landing.

He could see with tolerable ease about him, for it was lighted with a long window.

Hearing no sound, and seeing nothing indicative of the presence of a living creature, Dick did not pause, but commenced the descent of the second flight.

His foot was on the sixth step from the top, and he was feeling his way round the turn in the staircase, when his ears were saluted with a succession of short shrieks of so shrill a nature that he almost lost his balance.

It was evidently from a female that they proceeded.

"Good heavens!" said Dick, "whatever can have happened. I never heard such frightful screams before. Some poor girl is in trouble, I take it!"

As he uttered these words, he sprang hastily down the remainder of the stairs, nor did he pause until he found himself in the passage close to the front door.

The horrible shrieks still sounded in his ears, but they came from some depth lower down.

Guided by the cries, he found his way to the head of the stairs leading to the kitchen, and up these they came in full force.

Without a moment's delay or hesitation, Dick ran down them, and seeing a bright light issuing from a partially closed door, he pushed it open, and with the hanger, which he wore by his side, in his grasp, burst into the apartment.

A horrifying sight met his gaze.

Cowering on the floor, and divested of almost every article of attire, was a young girl of about seventeen years of age. She was dark, and had long glossy hair hanging disorderedly about her. Her hands were clasped together tightly, and her face, under happier auspices, was doubtless beautiful, but now it was convulsed with agony. Her lips were apart and bloodless, and tears were streaming from her eyes.

Standing over her, and flourishing a broad, heavy belt or strap, was a being in the shape of a woman. She was old and gaunt, presenting indeed more the appearance of an animated skeleton than aught else. Her eyes were bright and reptile-looking, and a ghastly expression of delight and fiend-like malice lighted up her countenance as she struck the girl brutally with the strap.

Close by was a short, thin, insignificant-looking man, but there was a world of pity and commiseration in his looks. He held up his hands in a deprecating manner, as though he would fain, if he had the power, interpose and shield the young girl from the violent attack the woman made upon her.

Dick saw all this at a glance.

"Help! help! Save me! save me!" shrieked the young girl, as her eyes fell upon the new-comer. "Oh! sir, whoever you may be, save and help me!"

She sprang up on her feet, and reaching Dick's side with a bound, flung her arms round him and clung with the intensity of one who feels she has found a saviour.

Unmitigated surprise at the sudden appearance of a man in so hostile an attitude, deprived the old hag for an instant of both speech and motion, and she glared upon Dick as she held the strap in the air, as though she had been suddenly confronted with a spectre.

Dick passed his arm round the slight form of the young girl and drew her towards him, endeavouring by this means to reassure her and calm her terrible agitation.

"Oh! save me, sir! save me!" she sobbed, "take me away from here! Pray do, for Mrs. Brettle beats me nearly to death every day. Oh! do take me away! Will you, sir?"

She clung to him still more closely, as she asked this question, and looked up into his face with so much appealing earnestness, that Dick felt the tears spring uncontrollably into his eyes.

"Save you, my poor girl!" he said, in his deep, manly tones, which thrilled through every nerve of the girl's body with a feeling of exquisite delight which she had

never before experienced; "of course I will, and take you where you please, but not till I have punished this hag for her cruelty towards you."

A happy smile lighted up her face like a sunbeam when she heard his promise, but it was suddenly clouded over, and a look of deep dejection usurped its place.

"Why do you look so sad all at once?" asked Dick.

"I'll let you know, Mr. What's-your-name!" burst in the shrill tones of the old woman's voice at this moment, and before the girl could frame a reply. "I'll let you know, Mr. What's-your-name, whether you can come rumpaging into a lone woman's house in this way, and interfering between her and her apprentice as belongs to her, leastways as she took out of the workhouse at St. Giles's six weeks ago come Easter Monday. I'll let you know."

"Apprentice?" said Dick.

"Yes; apprentice!" repeated the old woman. "I should like to know whether there's a law in the land, or whether there isn't; and if a lone woman is to have her house broken into because she chooses to give her parish apprentice a lesson. That's what I want to know."

As for the miserable-looking man, he said never a word, but stood looking from one to another aghast.

Disdaining to say anything further to this woman, who, now that she had recovered the use of her tongue, would doubtless be terribly abusive, Dick bent down his head, and looking into the girl's face with an air of perfect ease and confidence, said—

"Is it true, my dear, what this—woman, I suppose, I must call her—says? Are you her apprentice?"

"Alas! sir; yes."

"What is she? I mean, what trade were you apprenticed to learn?"

"Cap-making, sir."

"And—forgive me if what I ask hurts your feelings—from what has been said I gather you are alone in the world?"

"Quite—quite alone, sir!" said the girl, sobbing and weeping afresh. "I have no father, no mother, nor have I friend in the world."

"Oh! yes, you have," replied Dick, cheerfully. "Providence has sent me here just in time to be a friend in need to you, and I will take care you are no longer subjected to *her* brutality."

He pointed with his finger towards the woman whom the girl had called Mrs. Brettel.

"Oh! indeed; oh! indeed, Mr. What-d'ye-call. How much longer are you going on with your highty-tighty nonsense? I know what's law if you don't. That's my apprentice, and if you don't give her up at once, and leave my house, I will send for a constable, and pretty soon make you. Things have come to a pretty pass, indeed, when you can't do as you like in your own house without some bully or ——"

"Silence, hag!" shouted Dick. "Were it not for your sex I would bestow such a summary chastisement upon you as should serve for a lesson for the rest of your life. There are too many like you, who fancy when you take a poor orphan apprentice into your clutches you can commit what outrage you choose upon her. Why does she beat you?" asked Dick, in kinder tones, as he turned again to the young girl.

A vivid flush of crimson in a moment overspread her face.

"Do not ask me that, sir; do not ask me that," she replied, bending her eyes downwards. "Indeed I cannot tell you. It is something very wrong."

Dick's eyes blazed ominously as he heard this answer, and when the old woman again saw his countenance, it wore so terrible an expression that she involuntarily fell upon her knees and yelled for mercy.

The girl sobbed as though her heart would break.

"Cheer up!" said Dick, "cheer up. You have nothing to be ashamed of, and I will take care you are no longer coerced by her in any way. But who is that man?" he added, indicating the man who was present.

"That, sir, is Mr. Brettel."

"Her husband?"

"Yes."

"And does he sanction such cruelty?"

"Oh! no sir. He is kindness and gentleness itself. He would not hurt a fly, but his wife treats him almost as badly as she does me, and he is quite powerless to help me, and if he even said a word of remonstrance she would beat him almost to death with the strap!"

Dick regarded Mr. Brettel with a look in which surprise, curiosity, and pity were strangely blended.

"Is it possible?" he said.

"It is true, sir; and I have to thank him for many little kindnesses which he has done me."

"You have, have you?" screamed the wife, rising suddenly from her abject position. "So that's how you set me at defiance in my own house, you tyrant, is it?" she continued, addressing her husband. "Take that and that!"

As these last words issued from her lips she rushed upon him like some wild animal, and struck him over the head and face with the strap.

"She's a delightful female, certainly," said Dick, as he released himself from the hold of the young girl; "but I must put a stop to this."

Suiting the action to the word, he seized the furious woman by the neck, and, brandishing his hanger in her face, compelled her to desist.

Mr. Brettel rose with difficulty to his feet, and wiped the blood from his neck and face.

"Now, sir," said Dick, as his eye fell upon a clothesline that was stretched across the room, "I will render you a service. Pull that rope down, and give it to me."

Mr. Brettel tremblingly obeyed.

"On second thoughts," said Turpin, as he handed it back to him, "you shall bind her yourself."

"I—I!" said the husband, with genuine terror in his tones.

"Yes, you," said Dick, laughing. "You needn't look so frightened about it. You will have no danger. If she makes the least resistance, I will have her head off at a single blow."

He flourished his weapon in a formidable manner.

Mr. Brettel's hands shook so much that no one would have fancied for a moment that he would be able to do such an act; but after awhile his wife's apathy endowed him with courage, and he bound her strongly.

Dick sheathed his hanger.

"That's over; and now, Mr. Brettel, if you'll take a piece of friendly advice, you will keep her just as she is until she's half dead with hunger. She will be submissive enough then. Never heed her threats. So long as you do not unloose her she can do nothing. It will be your own fault if she ever ill-treats you again."

Mrs. Brettel ground her teeth with rage.

Her husband ventured to smile, and rubbed his hands over one another with feeble satisfaction.

"I will do it!" he said; "I will do it!"

"Well done!" said Dick, patting him encouragingly on the back. "Well done! I shouldn't advise you—— Hullo!"

"What's the matter?"

"Why, where's the young girl gone?"

"Who, Ellen?"

"If that is her name."

"I am here!" said a gentle voice, and the apprentice entered the room, but so altered that Dick scarcely recognised her.

She had taken the opportunity to slip out while they were so busily engaged in binding her mistress, and had put on a bonnet and a shawl.

She walked quickly towards Dick, and placed her hand in his.

"Take me with you, sir!" she said, pleadingly. "Do take me away from here! I don't care where I go, so that I leave this hateful place! You are brave and gentle, and I feel that I can trust you. I have no one else that I can ask to assist me. Will you take me?"

Dick hesitated.

He was in a rather dangerous situation, and might have some difficulty in getting his mare and leaving London were he by himself, but encumbered by this girl his hopes of escape were diminished tenfold.

Then, besides, he asked himself if he did escape with her, what was he to do with her eventually.

The girl noticed his hesitation.

She withdrew her hand, and her eyes thronged with tears.

"Don't think wrongly of me for asking you," she said. "I did not mean to offend you; only I thought you would be able to——"

Tears and sobs checked her utterance.

"My dear girl," said he, drawing her towards him, "I wish I could take you away from here, and I will, too. But I shall only involve you in fresh perils, and perhaps worse ones than those from which I have rescued you."

"No, no; that cannot be!"

"The curse of Cain is on me! my hand is against every man's, and every man's is against mine!"

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, anxiously.

"I am amenable to the laws—I am a felon! Even at this moment the officers are no doubt on my track. You are innocent, but I am guilty!"

"I will not believe it," said Ellen, dashing the tears from her eyes. "You are all that is good, all that is noble!"

There was evident admiration in her gaze.

"My dear girl," said Dick, again drawing her towards him, for he felt that this young girl's trusting confidence had kindled a warm feeling in his heart. "I would take you with me, you do not know how gladly, only I know so well I shall but involve you in fresh difficulties and dangers."

"I shall not fear them if you are by, because I have seen that you are bold and strong enough to overcome them all. Do let me share your perils. I would dare everything to be taken away from here!"

"But if you go I can fetch you back again. Thank goodness! there is law for that!" screamed Mrs. Brettel, who had all this time been tugging at her bonds in a vain effort to free herself. "I tell you, you are mine—mine, and the law will bring you back!"

The accents of her voice, although she was powerless to do her harm, filled the apprentice with renewed terror, and she again clung to Dick's arm.

"Don't be frightened, my dear," said he. "I see I shall never be able to leave you here exposed to her tender mercies. I will take you where you will be in safety, and where she will never find you, or perish in the attempt," he added, mentally.

Ellen gave quite a scream of pleasure as these words fell upon her ear.

"Come, come, you must learn not to be so excitable as you are. There, put your arm in mine, and we will be off."

How gladly the poor apprentice complied with his words!

She looked up in his face with the same trusting smile which he had twice before seen upon her countenance, and which became her so well.

As he gazed upon her, the bold highwayman forgot all about his present dangerous position, and pressing her hand to his side, left the kitchen.

A volley of abuse from Mrs. Brettel followed him.

"I say, Mr. B.," said Dick, returning, and popping his head in at the door. "Do not you forget my advice. Treat her like they do a wild animal! Tame her with hunger. It will be all your own fault if ever she ill-treats you again. Good-bye, old fellow!"

He shut the door as he spoke.

"Now, my dear," said Dick to the young girl who had been so strangely thrown upon his protection, "as the place is so confoundedly dark, perhaps you wouldn't mind showing me the way to the upper regions?"

Ellen laughed lightly as she held his hand, and led him up the staircase into the passage above. The poor orphan was happier than she had been for many a year. Her past sufferings were already forgotten.

"Here we are," she said, pausing at the front door.

There was a fanlight over the top, and through this an oil lamp shed a feeble light. It fell upon Ellen's face, and tinged it with a rare beauty. Dick sighed, and thought he had never seen anything so lovely.

CHAPTER IX.

DICK FINDS A PLACE OF REFUGE FOR THE POOR ORPHAN APPRENTICE.

"STOP!" said Dick, as the young girl put her hand on the lock of the front door preparatory to opening it.

"What for?"

"Why, although you said you did not believe it, it is nevertheless true that I have seriously transgressed the laws, and it was to elude the pursuit of the officers, who were after me, that I dropped through the door in your roof, intending to make my way out at the front door. But I heard your screams, and I forgot all about myself in remembering that a female was in trouble."

"And so," said Ellen, in a grave voice, "you have perhaps, by saving me, given your enemies an opportunity of ascertaining your whereabouts, and time to take fresh measures for your capture."

"I hope not; but I fear so."

"Oh! I understand now why you said you could not take me with you. I should be an encumbrance to you, and you would have to look after me when you ought to be looking after yourself. I did not know of this, indeed I did not, or I would never have been so selfish as to ask you to take me away with you. Farewell! I will remain, and leave you at least the prospect of making your escape."

She held out her hand, and repeated the word "Farewell!"

"How you run on to be sure. Of course I am all that you say, and a great deal more, perhaps. But I am quite resolved now to take you with me and chance the danger. It is probable enough the officers are thrown quite off the scent, and have relinquished pursuit of me. If so, we shall get off without any trouble."

Ellen shook her head.

"No—no," she said, "I cannot be so ungenerous. Fly, fly at once, and leave me to make my own escape."

"And where are you going to, my poor girl? Do not think of that, but render me a service."

"Render you a service? Oh! what can I do? Tell me, tell me."

"Well, you understand, of course, that these enemies of mine are police-officers?"

"Yes—yes."

"Do you know one when you see him?"

"To be sure; because of their large red waistcoats."

"Just so. It is very possible some of them may be waiting outside the door here to pounce upon me as soon as I get into the street."

"What can I do?"

"Why, I want you to open the front door, and go out as if upon some ordinary business, leaving me here in the passage."

"Yes—yes."

"Well, when you are out, go a little way up Drury-lane, looking carefully all about you, yet not seeming to do so, and come back and tell me whether you see any lurking about."

"Yes. I shall not be long."

"Be cautious, Ellen. If you see no one, then I can regain my mare, which is close by, and take you to a place of safety."

The young girl took his hand again, and, pressing it affectionately, opened the door and went out.

Dick stood quite still in the passage, patiently awaiting her return.

He took a couple of pistols from his coat-pocket and examined the priming, so that they might be in readiness for immediate use.

A hum of voices came up from the kitchen where he had left Mr. and Mrs. Brettel. The couple were, no doubt, in high disputation.

Several minutes passed, but Ellen did not return

Dick began to be uneasy.

He took a watch from his pocket, and, holding it close to the fanlight, looked at the time. It was close upon twelve.

His impatience rose to an unbearable extent. He did not for a moment think the girl had played him false, but dreaded she had fallen into some fresh trouble.

He was just about to open the door, and sally out for confirmation or dispersion of his fears, when some one tapped lightly at it.

He flung the door open in a moment.

It was Ellen.

"Did you not think me a long time?" she asked. "I thought you would, but I have been all round and cannot see an officer anywhere."

"That is well. Then we may get off in perfect safety. We will not delay another moment."

Dick, as he spoke, passed out of the house with his companion, and closed the door after him.

All was still in the street, or rather court, into which he emerged.

A dozen or so steps brought them into Drury-lane Most of the shops were shut, but here and there an open one cast a beam of light on the pavement.

The miserable oil lamps that were stuck here and there flickered feebly, and scarcely dispelled the darkness for a foot around them.

"I think," said Dick, "you had better go in at the front door of the 'White Horse,' while I go round into the court by the stables. Walk straight up to the bar, and ask for Matthew Gale, the landlord, and then tell him I am round the corner waiting for the mare."

With the alacrity of genuine gratitude, the young girl did his bidding.

The old inn was full of rude, noisy people, and she shrank back a little. For herself, she would never have dared to enter, but, for her preserver, she felt she could do anything, so she walked up to the bar and asked for Matthew Gale.

"That's me, miss," said the person she addressed, leaning over the window-sill, "what do you want?"

A man was standing at the bar window drinking a glass of gin, and the hasty glance which Ellen flung upon him did not prepossess her in his favour.

"I want to speak to you, sir, if you please. I have a message to deliver."

The man with the gin assumed an indifferent air, and raised his glass to his lips; but his sense of hearing the while was stretched to its fullest extent.

"Come in; come in here," said Matthew Gale, in those jovial tones which were really a pleasure to hear, and opening the half-glass door that led into the bar. "Come in here, and tell me what you have to say."

"It is a secret," she said, in a whisper. "A friend of yours who has his mare here is waiting for it in the court, and wants you to bring it out to him."

Old Matthew looked at her distrustfully for a moment, but her ingenuous countenance bore upon it no traces of treachery or deceit.

"Very well," he said, in a whisper. "Go back and tell him his mare will be ready in a moment."

"Thank you, sir."

She rose from her seat and left the bar, and as she passed the man at the window, she saw him empty his glass, and after saying a word or two to the landlord, follow her to the front door.

Her position was rather embarrassing.

The man might be, and probably was, a police officer whose suspicions were aroused and who had determined to follow her.

She knew not how to act. If she hesitated she would convert the man's suspicions into certainties.

A confectioner's shop was just on the opposite side of the way, and the idea for a moment crossed her brain that she would go in there and make some trifling purchase, when she recollected with a pang that she had no money.

What was to be done?

She availed herself of the only resource that was open to her, and she turned back and went again to the bar-window.

Old Matthew had vanished.

She looked up the passage. The man had evidently gone into the street, but whether he had turned to the left or the right of course she could form no sort of conjecture.

Time was speeding on. The mare was doubtless ready, and her preserver anxiously waiting for her to make her appearance; and every minute he stayed she knew to be full of danger to him.

Without saying a word to a soul, she made her way again to the door.

A tipsy woman on the other side of the way, and who was endeavouring to keep on her feet by clutching the window-shutters, was the only person in sight.

She darted round the corner of the court in a moment.

"Ellen! Ellen!" she heard a voice say, in suppressed tones, "Ellen! Ellen!"

"I am here," she said, hastening forward.

At the corner of Stanhope-street was a man on horseback.

She recognised her preserver instantly.

"You must mount and ride before me," said Dick, as she reached his side. "I have no other means of conveying you."

She held out her hands to him, and he swung her into the saddle before him.

Just at that moment a shrill whistle sounded through the court, and the man whom Ellen had seen drinking at the bar sprang out of the shadow of a gateway and grasped Bess by the bridle.

It was no time for compunctious hesitation, for Dick knew that the signal he had given would quickly bring others to the spot; so, seizing one of the holster-pistols by the barrel, he struck the man a terrible blow on the head.

Down he went like a shot.

"Off and away!" said Dick, giving his mare the rein, "on Bess, on!"

With a loud shout, a desultory throng of persons came rushing down the court from the direction of Drury-lane.

"Stop him! stop him!" they cried, "A thousand pounds reward! Stop him! stop him! Dick Turpin the highwayman! A thousand pounds reward!"

A cry of terror came from Ellen's lips as she heard the sounds, and she clung yet tighter to him.

"All right, my girl," said Dick, "they are on foot. We shall soon be safe. Don't be frightened."

Bess went round the corner of Duke-street, and into Lincoln's Inn-fields with a rush, and then the loud report of several pistols rose upon the air.

"Are you hurt, Ellen?" said Dick.

"No, no; I am quite safe and unhurt. And you?"

"Without a scratch."

The young girl gave a sigh of relief.

"The danger is over now," said Dick, as he trotted quietly across Holborn, and saw no signs of his pursuers. "Your troubles will be over now, I hope. I have just recollected an old friend of mine who keeps an inn near Hornsey-wood, and who will, I know, only be too happy to find a shelter for a friend of mine."

"Oh! thanks, thanks," said the girl. "How shall I be able to repay you for all that you have done to-night on my behalf?"

"Why, forget all about it, and never mention the subject. You will be wise if you banish all thoughts of Mrs. Brettel and her cruelties from your recollection."

The poor girl shuddered.

"I will try to do so," she said, "but I feel I shall never be able to be sufficiently grateful to you."

"Pho! pho! nonsense! say no more on that subject, I beg you; let us talk about something else. Look there is a nice level piece of road before us. I will show you what speed bonny Black Bess can make!"

CHAPTER X.

THE ARRIVAL AT THE "HAND AND KEYS," NEAR HORNSEY WOOD.—THE MURDER.

"AND are you really," said the orphan apprentice, as Dick, after a hard gallop, slackened speed a little, while traversing a narrow lane, "are you really that brave, true heart whose name is in every one's mouth, and to whom such generous actions are ascribed?"

"Well, I don't know about that," replied Dick, with a smile; "but I am Dick Turpin, the highwayman, whose delight is to cry, 'Stand and deliver!' to a passenger on the road; and this is Black Bess, without whom he would be nothing, if that's what you mean."

"You underrate yourself, as generous natures always do. I have heard so much of you, and so longed to see you, but I never thought I should meet with you. I am so happy."

Turpin whistled.

"I wish you would change the subject," he said. "I never feel comfortable when anyone praises me, because I know very well I don't deserve it."

"You do; you do indeed."

"I am afraid you are prepossessed in my favour. If you will believe me, it would require a vast amount of good to counterbalance the evil which I do. I wish you would talk about something else, or, if you like, we will take another gallop."

"I am willing."

Once more, after this brief dialogue, the trees and hedges seemed to fly past them, as Bess put forth her marvellous speed, and very soon the old inn known as the "Hand and Keys" was in sight.

"That," said Turpin, as he pointed it out to his companion, "is the place I intend you to take shelter in, until some further arrangements can be made for your future course of life."

It was a very large, old-fashioned building. The walls were of wood, and the immense roof, though tiled in places, was, for the most part, thatched. It stood some few yards back from the road, having a spacious yard in front, which was used in summer as a bowling-green.

Somewhat to Turpin's surprise—for it was past one o'clock, and the inn was noted for closing early—lights were shining from almost all the latticed casements, and when he halted close to the horse-trough he could plainly hear the strains of some musical instruments, and the sound of jollity and merry-making within.

"Whatever can be the occasion of this?" he asked himself. "I am quite sure it must be something extraordinary to keep Tom Davis and his wife up so late. Hi! Jabes, Jabes!"

It was the ostler he called, and who rejoiced in the name of Jabes, but, contrary to an hitherto unvarying custom, no Jabes made his appearance.

After waiting a moment Dick sprang off his mare, and assisted Ellen to alight.

"I suppose he is too busy indoors to pay any attention to us to-night; so come, I am sure you must be tired, and we will make our way in at once. We may think ourselves very lucky in having found them up. I should think such a thing never happened before."

They reached the front door of the inn, which was closed, and Turpin tapped at it in a peculiar manner.

It was opened in a moment by the stoutest man that Ellen had ever in her life beheld.

"Well, Tom, my boy, how are you? What, in the name of goodness, is in the wind, that you are all up at this hour?"

"Bless my stars!" ejaculated the landlord, "if it ain't Dick. Here, walk in—walk in. I didn't think I should have the pleasure of seeing you to-night. I am more pleased than if anybody had given me a hundred pounds."

"Whatever for, Davis?"

"Why, you see, it's just a hundred years ago this very night since the old place was built. A century, mind you. So I have invited everybody that I could think of, intending to make a glorious night of it. Now, I would sooner have you than anyone else, provided," he added, in a more serious tone, "you have not been up to your tricks in the neighbourhood, because, if you have, I should advise you to be off."

"Oh! that's all right enough. Don't let that trouble you a bit! I haven't been near here for months. But, I say, first of all, how about my mare? Where's Jabes?"

"Oh! he's indoors, and half-drunk by this time, I'll warrant. Never mind. I'll stable the mare myself."

"All right. I'll go too."

"Yes—yes. You always do that. But, I say Dick?"

"What?"

"Who's that you've got standing behind you? It's a petticoat. Oh! Dick, you're as bad as a soldier!"

The landlord chuckled gleefully at what he was pleased to consider his own wit.

"Hold your row, fatsides, and let's stable the mare. I do not want to stand on the doorstep talking all night. Make haste. I have something particular I want to say to you."

"All right—all right. Here, come along. You know the way. You had better lead Bess yourself."

The little party crossed the yard, and made their way round to the back of the inn, where Bess was carefully fed and lodged.

"Now, Dick," said Tom Davis, the landlord, as they stood in the stable, "if you've got anything private you want to say to me, why you can't find a better place or a better opportunity than the present."

"No, I was about to say the same thing."

"Well, then, let's hear it; because the sooner I get back into the room again along with the company the better!"

"Just so, and I will out what I have to say as short as possible. I met with a very singular series of adventures last night, and was wounded in the shoulder. I sought refuge at Matthew Gale's crib in White Horse-yard, Drury Lane. You know old Matthew?"

"Of course I do! Who doesn't? Cut along!"

"He found me and my mare snug quarters, and I had a comfortable nap for about twelve hours, when old Matthew woke me up and told me the grabs were down-stairs. I had stolen the golden cup from the ex-lord mayor, as he was on his way home, and he made, I suppose, a grand fuss about it, so the officers were searching everywhere for me."

"But what in the world made you take such a thing as that? Why, it's no good to you, and would, of course, bring you into trouble!"

"Well, I should never have done it for the sake of the cup itself, only I ought to have told you I made a bet of fifty pounds that I would take it, and produce it within three nights, which will be to-morrow night, so I must get back again to London."

"And have you the cup with you?"

"Yes!"

"I should uncommonly like to see it. Here, hold it up while I hold the lantern."

"All serene," said Turpin, complying with his request.

"Very pretty; very pretty, indeed. I should think the old bloke is savage."

"No doubt he is."

"Did you have much trouble to get it?"

"Scarcely any; but just before I got away up came a body of officers. Some one must have split on the job, and set them on the watch. However, I got off all right."

"I should not like to be the cove that did it!"

"You may depend if I find him out I will make him suffer for it."

"Serve him right!"

"However, I'm not telling you what I intended. It's this. The Redbreasts, as I said just now, were after me; so, by old Matthew's advice, I got out of the window of the room I was in, and on to the roof."

"And then got off, I suppose?"

"No, not altogether. They had stationed one of their men on the roof to see that I did not escape that way, and he pounced upon me. We had a desperate struggle, in which he fell over the parapet, and into the yard fifty feet below!"

"God bless me!"

"I felt sorry for him. He was a brave fellow!"

"Well, what happened next?"

"I crawled over the roofs till I came to the corner of Clare-court, and then I got into one of the houses through a trap-door in the tiles."

"Go on—go on!"

"I was halfway down the second flight when I heard such a sudden succession of shrill screams that I was almost stunned. I rushed down stairs like a shot."

"I suppose you forgot all about the officers?"

"Quite. When I got to the kitchen-door, I did not hesitate; but still hearing the terrible screams, dashed the door open, and sprang into the room!"

"What next?"

"There, on the floor, I saw this poor girl, who is an apprentice, and her barbarous mistress was standing over her, and flogging her with a strap!"

"A strap! Now, d——"

"Now, don't be rash, Tom, and hear me out to the end," interrupted Turpin, seizing the landlord's hand, which he had clenched as if about to inflict condign chastisement on some one. "Don't be rash!"

"Very well. Go on, then; but if that wouldn't make a man's blood boil, I don't know what would!"

"Nor I."

"And you saved her, Dick?"

"I did. She was a poor orphan, without a single friend to fly to for protection."

"Then God bless you for such a good deed!"

"And this," said Dick, as he took Ellen by the hand, and led her a step or two forward, "this is the beautiful girl who was the victim of so much cruelty."

"No!"

"She is, though; and now, Tom Davis, this is what I want to say to you. No one knows my way of life better than you do, and how impossible it would be for me to take charge of this poor girl. Now you, Tom, have neither chick nor child, as the saying is; so I want you to find a home for her for a little while, until arrangements can be made for getting her employment and deciding what her future shall be."

"That wants no deciding," said the warm-hearted landlord, with a tear in his eye, "leastways, if she's willing to accept what I propose. Now, my dear," he said, turning to Ellen, "do you think you could make yourself happy and contented at the old 'Hand and Keys' along with me? If you do, why all I can say is, there's a home for you as long as you like to have it, and I'll be your father. Do you consent? If you do, I shall be happy indeed, for your sweet face, and the troubles you have gone through, have quite won my heart."

The tears thronged so thickly into Ellen's eyes as the landlord made this generous offer with so much tenderness and kindness that she could not say a word in reply, but, leaving Turpin's side, where she had stood during the brief dialogue, placed her arms around his neck, and kissed his cheek.

"There, there, don t take on like that, don't take on like that," said Tom Davis, his own voice husky with emotion. "The idea of anyone, now——Turpin, I tell you plain, I can't believe it."

"Can't believe what?"

"Why, that there ever could be anyone barbarous enough to harm a poor, loving, beautiful child like this is. It's altogether impossible, and quite against human natur'!"

"One would think so," said Turpin; "but I am sorry, for the sake of that same human natur', to say there are plenty of people who are more cruel than wild beasts."

"So it seems, so it seems."

"But, Davis, when I had saved this yonng girl, I was fairly puzzled to know what to do with her."

"You were?"

"Yes, until, all at once, I thought of you, and then I felt sure that I had found this poor girl a refuge."

"And so you had. Now, my dear," said Davis, "are you willing to stay with me? because, if you are, we will get back to the house at once."

"Oh! sir, how can you ask me such a thing? You must not think me foolish, but I have for so long heard nothing but unkind words that your kind ones make me weep in spite of myself."

She laid her hand again upon his shoulder. She already felt for him the affection a daughter feels for a father.

"Now may ——" began Davis, again, and no doubt, in the height of his indignation, he was going to pronounce some terrible anathema, but Turpin stayed him.

"Come," he said, "I think we understand each other now, so the best thing we can do is to get under the roof-tree of the old inn. Poor Ellen, here, after all she has gone through, must, I am sure, be wearied to death. As for myself, I feel I require no rest at present, I had such a long, sound sleep at Matthew's; so, while you find her a bed-chamber, I will, if you are willing, join the company in the kitchen. There is no one there who knows me, is there, Tom?"

"No one that I am aware of. Bess is all safe until you want her, so we will go in at once. They will wonder what has become of us. Take hold of my arm, my dear, and I hope now I have got charge of you, you have seen all your troubles."

So saying, the trio made their way back to the inn, and entered it by the back door. The landlord's wife was called, and Ellen's story related to her. Her disposition was as open-hearted as her husband's, and, as they were childless, she received the orphan with delight.

After a few minutes' more conversation Ellen, bidding her preserver and protector an affectionate good night, left the room in company with buxom Mrs. Davis.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EXTRAORDINARY SEQUEL TO THE MURDER AT THE ROAD-SIDE INN

"I SAY, Davis!" said Turpin, as he looked down at his attire, which was most certainly none the better for the many incidents he had gone through; "I say, Davis, my boy, it is quite impossible for me to go into company in this plight. Suspicion would be immediately excited. What shall I do?"

"Why, change your dress, to be sure. Here, come up stairs along with me, and I can show you a well-stocked wardrobe, from which you can select at pleasure."

'That's the ticket. I sha'n't be long, for I am anxious to join the fun that's going on."

And Turpin was as good as his word, for in a few moments he came down again, presenting a very different appearance indeed to what he did before.

There were two large rooms on the ground-floor of the "Hand and Keys;" both of these were filled with company. In the one, young folks for the most part assembled, who amused themselves with the dance; while in the other a good number of guests were seated round the enormous fire, which reached half up the chimney, telling tales, jokes, and remarkable adventures.

It was into this latter room that Turpin went. He was hardly in a humour for dancing.

His appearance attracted immediate attention; for his manners, carriage, and attire were those of a most refined gentleman.

He bowed low to the assembled company as he entered, and old Davis, the landlord, as soon as he saw him, sprang from his seat with a degree of alacrity very unusual for him to exhibit, and, seizing his hand, said—

"Friends and neighbours all, I have the pleasure to introduce you to a very old and particular friend of mine, Mr. —a—a——"

"Richards," said Turpin, seeing the landlord was rather at a loss what name to call him by. "I am very happy to see you all, gentlemen, and hope we shall very soon be better acquainted!"

He took a seat in the chimney-corner, which was offered him by the landlord, as he spoke.

"Fill up another bumper!" cried Davis. "Don't spare, but drink to the prosperity of the 'Hand and Keys,' which is a hundred years old to-night!"

All rose, and the toast was, for about the twentieth time, drank with loud applause.

"I say, Davis!" cried a tall, thin man, as he resumed his chair in the front of the fire, "I have only just this moment remembered that to-night is also the anniversary of another event connected with the old inn. It is the eighth, I think!"

"God bless me, so it is!" said Davis, with a slight shudder. "I did not think of it before; but just eight years ago to-night a most horrible murder was committed upstairs!"

"In this house?"

"Yes, in No. 3, on the first-floor."

"I never heard anything about it before, landlord," said Turpin, as he poked the fire, and made the bright flame shoot up four feet at least. "How did it happen?"

"It was a very sad affair, neighbour Groves, wasn't it?" said Davis.

"It were; it were, indeed!"

"Let us hear it, Davis; let us hear it!" cried several voices, animated by that love of the horrible which seems an almost natural instinct. "Let's hear it!"

They drew nearer the fire as they spoke.

"Well, gentlemen," said Davis, settling himself in his chair, and pulling three or four tremendous whiffs from his pipe, "I shall be most happy to oblige you, of course, though I can't help thinking it is rather out of place to-night, when we met to be jolly."

"No—no!" cried a number of voices. "Go on!"

"All right. I dare say most of you here know something of the occurrence"

"Very little."

"Then, perhaps," said Davis, inquiringly, "it will be best for me to begin at the beginning, and tell the tale all through?"

"Of course—of course. Now don't keep us in suspense any longer."

"I won't. You must know, then, it is just eight years ago to-night, and as one or two were sitting round the fire here, as we might be now, telling tales and talking about the old house which had defied the wind and weather for so long—it was almost as late as it is now—when we were every one startled——"

"Yes—yes; make haste!" they cried, impatiently.

"Now, gentlemen, if you interrupt or bother me, I sha'n't be able to get on at all, and it won't take very long. As I was saying, it was almost as late as it is now, when we were all startled by hearing a tremendous knock at the door.

"I didn't know how it was, but just then we all happened to have left off speaking when this very loud sud-

succession of knocks were given at the front door. There was something very peculiar about them, and I never could make out what they were done with. I have never heard any knocks like them either before or since; and——bless my heart alive! what's that?"

A rapid succession of blows upon the door, of a very peculiar nature indeed, reverberated through the old building, and caused the landlord to utter his involuntary exclamation.

"It's some one knocking!" said the thin man in front of the fire, "and knocking, too, just like——"

A repetition of the summons at the door drowned the rest of his speech.

Turpin rose to his feet.

"You really don't mean to say you are all so alarmed at such a simple circumstance? Run, some one, and open the door

Nobody stirred.

Then, for the third time, came the terrific knocking at the door.

Now the prominent idea in Dick's mind was that this noisy summons was given by some body of police, who, likely enough, had tracked him to his present shelter, so, of course, he naturally hesitated to open the door himself.

Then he remembered the change he had made in his dress, and thought that the likeliest means of averting suspicion from himself was to go in person to the door, and see who was there.

No sooner had he made this resolve than he opened the door of the kitchen, and passed out into the passage beyond.

Before, however, he could reach the front door, it was flung open, and a tall man wearing a roquelaure cloak strode in.

The occupants of both rooms in the inn had rushed in a body to the doors, and stood still, gazing at the stranger.

"Well! what now? what now?" said the new comer, with a strange mixture of assurance and nervous agitation; "what kind of place do you call this? Are you all mad, or did you never have a visitor before?"

"I am very sorry, sir," said Tom Davis, forcing his way into the passage, and making a bow to the traveller, "I am very sorry we kept you waiting, but you happened to arrive at a very curious time."

"I don't see that. It is not as though you were all a-bed. However, it ain't worth making a bother about."

"Thank you, sir; thank you. Be kind enough to step into the kitchen, and we will make you as comfortable as we can. You see the old inn has been built just a hundred years to-day, and we are celebrating the event."

"Oh! indeed, landlord!" said the stranger, seating himself in the chair which had been placed for him, and looking around at the time-blackened walls with an uninterested air; "I suppose you were all too much occupied to hear me, and yet I thought I knocked loud enough too."

"It wasn't that," said Davis. "We heard you plain enough; but, as I said before, you happened to arrive at a very curious time."

"How? What time?"

"Why, just before you arrived, neighbour Groves happened to remember that it was exactly eight years ago to-night that a shocking murder was committed in No. 3 bedroom upstairs!"

The stranger gave a sudden start, and paled slightly.

"What place is this, then?"

"Why, the old 'Hand and Keys,' to be sure!"

"The 'Hand and Keys!'" repeated the stranger, in a trembling voice. "It is very cold," he added, drawing his cloak still closer round him, and almost burying his face in its folds, "I quite shiver with it!"

"You don't say so, sir! Here, Jabes! Jabes!"

"Here you are! what do you want?" said a surly voice; and the ostler, whom the knocking and the recent arrival had aroused from his slumber, got slowly off his seat.

"Some more wood on the fire, Jabes. Quick now, the gentleman is cold!"

"Oh! never mind, never mind. Don't trouble, don't trouble," said the traveller, who had a strange way of repeating his words. "I shall do, I shall do!"

Nevertheless, Jabes took his departure, and quickly returned with three or four chumps, which he threw on the fire.

By this time the guests, who had been scared by the knocking, following so close on to Farmer Groves's narrative, had sat down in their respective places, one and all bestowing the whole of their attention on the man who had just arrived.

A rather embarrassing silence followed, which the landlord broke by saying—

"Have you travelled far, sir?"

"Yes—yes; a long way—a long way," replied the stranger. "I suppose I can have a bed here?"

"Oh! yes."

"Then get it ready at once!"

"Should you like a fire lighted, sir?"

"By all means."

"Very good, sir."

"And while you are doing that, just bring me a glass of brandy—a tumbler, you understand; and let it be strong—strong!"

Old Davis executed his orders; and when the large quantity of raw spirit was placed before the stranger, he drank half of it off at one gulp.

Then again followed a pause, which every moment seemed to grow more and more intolerable. It was remarkable that those who had been talking so freely just before should now be at a loss what to say. There was something about this stranger which attracted the whole of their attention.

Turpin had taken care to seat himself in the shadow on one side of the grate, and he leaned back against the wall almost shrouded from observation. A continuity of perilous adventures made him suspicious of the slightest circumstance that had anything unusual in it

The dead silence continued.

Tom Davis looked from one to another and coughed vigorously.

It was no use, he could not break the stillness which had fallen on the company like a spell.

Then he seized the poker and stirred the fire recklessly. If the truth must be told, he felt quite as disconcerted as the others did. At last, in sheer desperation, he said:

"Now, Farmer Groves, why don't you go on with your story?"

Farmer Groves looked askance at the stranger and he said:

"If the gentleman has no objection?"

"Oh! no; none in the least—none in the least. Go on—go on!"

The words were jerked out rather than uttered, and appeared to have a discomposing effect upon Farmer Groves, from which he only recovered by swallowing a huge draught of ale.

"Then the best way will be to begin again, for I almost forget where I left off."

"Very well—very well!" they all cried, glad of an opportunity of opening their mouths. "We are all listening!"

"Eight years ago this very night, as I and a few others were sitting with Tom Davis, the landlord here, as I might be with you now, chatting and laughing and the like, when all at once there came a most terrific knocking at the front door."

"You understand sir," interrupted Tom Davis, addressing the stranger, "that friend Groves had got just this far into his tale, and the words about the knocking were scarcely out of his mouth, before we heard some one begin hammering away, so we were all of us rather skeared like."

The stranger made no reply, but looked steadily at the fire.

Tom Davis turned away with an offended air, while Groves continued his narrative.

"As it was nearly one o'clock in the morning and a most unusual time for any one to come, seeing that on any other night the inn was closed at ten to a moment,—as it was so late, I say, we wondered who it could be, and hesitated before we went to the door."

"Just as we did to-night," said the landlord.

"When we unbarred it, to our surprise, who should we see on the threshold but Reuben Simms, the steward to Sir Herbert Burrows, of the old Manor House.

"He was a very disagreeable man, and very hard to



[DICK TURPIN CRIES "STAND AND DELIVER!" TO THE TRAVELLER ON THE HEATH.]

deal with, as many of Sir Herbert's tenants found. It was a sad pity things were left so much under his control; however, he's dead and gone now, though when he lived I question whether any one could have been found who would have said 'I like him!'

"'Didn't expect to see me here to-night, did you?' he said, in his sharp voice. 'Shouldn't have come, only Sir Herbert kept me so long, and I did not like to go so far by myself at night for fear I should be set on and robbed. I s'pose you can let me have a bed?'

"'Oh! yes, of course; you will walk in and join us?'

"'No, let me have a light,' he said, 'I want to go to bed and not sit up sotting with you.'

"This was quite an uncalled-for remark for him to make in reply to our civility,—at least we thought so; but none said a word, because the old man was of a most revengeful disposition, and because we knew he had the power to spite any of us; so he took a light and went upstairs, down which he never came again alive."

"And if you will give me a candle, landlord," exclaimed the stranger, rising to his feet, and apparently much agitated,—"if you will give me a light, I will go upstairs, for I hate blood and murder stories, and I can guess what's coming."

"Certainly, sir, certainly, sir; you can have a light in a moment. If we had known you had any objection, why, of course, we would have deferred the tale-telling to another time."

"Oh! never mind, never mind. Are you ready?"

"Quite; be good enough to step this way."

Tom Davis showed the traveller into his room, and rejoined the company in the kitchen.

All this time Turpin sat in perfect silence, judging it was more prudent so to do.

"Now, Groves," said the landlord, "let's have the rest of the tale."

"There's not much of it to tell now, except that we all went home about daybreak, and the next morning, about twelve o'clock, thinking it strange Simms, the steward, did not come down, his bedroom was broken open, and there he was found weltering in his blood, and the apartment in the greatest disorder."

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"And was his murderer never discovered?" asked several.

"Never! Numberless people were had up on suspicion, but it could not be brought home to any of them, and from that day to this it has remained an inexplicable mystery. Sir Herbert offered a very large reward for the apprehension of the murderer or murderess. It was five hundred pounds, I think, but no one was found out."

"How strange!" said one.

"Yes; in most cases the murderer leaves some traces behind him; but in this they had been too cautious."

"And did anyone know the motive for the murder?"

"Not exactly; old Simms had many enemies, but on that particular night he had received a large sum of money from Sir Herbert, for some purpose which we never learned; but it was all stolen from him."

"It's my belief it was theft, not malice, that was the motive," said Davis.

"And mine," said Groves. "Sir Herbert had him buried, for the old man had no kindred. It was rumoured however that he had a son who had been guilty of some crime, and who was always a no'er-do-well sort of chap, who had gone abroad, but that was a many years ago, and no one knew for certain."

"Has the son ever turned up since?"

"Never, but——"

The remainder of the farmer's sentence was drowned in the loud explosion of a pistol which seemingly had been discharged just over their heads.

It was succeeded by one terrific, piercing shriek, after which all was deathly still.

"God bless my life!" said Davis, turning very pale, and staggering to his feet. "Surely another murder has not been committed."

Turpin also rose much agitated, for he had recognised the voice of the young girl whom he had befriended.

The remainder sat as if rooted to their seats.

"Follow me all!" said Dick, hastening to the door; and then, without waiting to see if he was obeyed, sprang lightly and rapidly up the staircase.

No sound of any description reached his ear as he paused for a moment on the landing and listened.

He was joined immediately by the landlord and about half-a-dozen of the most courageous of the company.

"Quick—quick, Davis!" cried Turpin. "Show me the room in which the young girl was placed."

The landlord pointed with his finger to a door nearly opposite, and without ceremony or hesitation, Dick flung it open, though his heart beat as he did so at a painful rate.

A night-light was burning in the room, and by its aid Dick saw a huddled-up mass of white upon the floor.

Instinctively he knew what it was; and while the others stood in a dense throng upon the threshold, he stepped forward and raised the form of the poor apprentice in his arms and placed her upon the bed.

She was either insensible or dead.

A glass of water stood upon a table close at hand, and he lost not an instant in sprinkling some of its contents upon her face.

Her eyes opened, and she looked around her with alarm and dread.

"What is it, Ellen? What has happened?" asked Dick, tenderly.

A smile played upon her lips as she heard his words, and then her eyes slowly closed again.

"Ellen—Ellen!" cried Turpin, "what has happened? Why did you scream?"

"I cannot tell," she replied, now perfectly aroused. "Yet stay! I remember now; I woke with the sound of a pistol-shot in my ears."

"I thought as much!" said Dick. "I must leave you now. There is no danger, and nothing to apprehend. Repose in peace.

"The traveller's room!" cried Dick, hurrying out again into the passage. "Let us go there at once!"

Davis led the way, and then they all paused in a body in front of a door opening from the opposite side of the passage.

Their numbers had been greatly increased while Dick was speaking to the young girl, and several of those who had come last carried lights in their hands.

All noticed that a figure of 8 was painted on the door.

"Why," said one, in rather a shaky voice "that is the very room old Simms was murdered in, isn't it?"

"Yes."

A disposition to draw back manifested itself instantly. Dick placed his hand upon the lock. The door was fast.

"Have you a key?" he asked.

"No. The door fastens on the inside with a bolt."

"I think we are justified in bursting the door open?"

"Certainly—certainly."

"I think," suggested Groves, "it would only be right to knock first."

"So it would."

Some heavy blows were struck upon the panel. There was no response.

"We are wasting time when every moment may be of the utmost value," said Dick.

"Right," replied the landlord; "force the door."

A simultaneous rush was made, and the door flew open in a moment.

"Lights—lights!"

Those who had hastily snatched up candles made their way into the room. The rest, who were somewhat timid, remained outside.

It took a moment for the candles to dispel the darkness in the room, and then they saw partly lying across the bed the man who had at so late an hour sought shelter.

Blood was gushing from his breast at a fearful rate, and it fell with a sickening sound upon the floor, where it collected into a huge pool.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the landlord, while those who were with him yet stood aghast with surprise. "Good heavens! what a frightful sight! The idea of it occurring at my house at all, let alone upon this particular night!"

"Does he live still?" asked one.

"I should scarcely think so," said Turpin, taking a candle from a man who was standing near him, and approaching the bed as he spoke. "I should scarcely think so; he appears to have shot himself through the heart!"

A faint sound, half-moan, half-sigh, came from the traveller's lips, and gave the lie to Turpin's supposition.

"By heaven!" they cried. "He is not dead yet! Raise him up a little!"

As Turpin had all through taken the initiative in the matter, he put the light down beside him, and, passing his arm under the body of the stranger, slowly raised him to a sitting posture.

The flow of blood was checked a little by this process, but a look of intense and unutterable suffering overspread his features.

Then he opened his eyes and glared around him as he muttered in a half-audible voice—

"Horror—horror! Why did they put me in this chamber above all others! Justice! justice! the old man is avenged at last! Off! off! You are blood! blood—nothing but blood! Father, father, I did not know you! How should I! how should I have done so! Do not look at me so awfully! Keep away—keep away! I was impelled by want to do the deed! Father, father, pity me, forgive me! Your form has haunted me sleeping and waking ever since that frightful night, eight years ago, when, in this room, I found on whom I had used my knife. What guided me here? What horrid fascination dragged me to this spot? Fate, for—I"——

A gasping kind of sob issued from the stranger's lips, and suddenly doubling together, his body, face downwards, reached the floor before Turpin could save him.

Horror—intense horror—was depicted upon the faces of the guests as they looked at each other, deprived by the fearful nature of the revelation of the stranger of the faculty of speech.

It was Turpin who broke the silence:

"Friends all," he said, in grave tones, "this is in itself a terrible spectacle, and enough to overcome the most callous heart. Let us leave this room, for we can do no good by staying in it, or we shall never be able to drive the appearance of this sight from our brains."

"Yes," added Tom Davis, with blanched cheek and lip, but yet in an authoritative voice. "Let us go away at once, for I feel sick to death!"

"And I—and I," responded many voices, in hushed accents, as they left the scene of blood, and resumed their places in the lower apartment.

The landlord went himself to the bar, and drew an

each of the company a small glass of neat brandy, which was gratefully accepted by all.

There seemed to be a general disinclination to commence a conversation, and each seemed busy with his own thoughts.

"I say, neighbours," said Groves, at last, shifting about in his chair, "it appears to me that you ought to send off to Sir William at once, and let him know what has taken place."

"True," said Davis, who seemed unnerved by what had happened. "I am in such a state that I am only half conscious of what is going on."

"It is truly awful."

"It would be if it had been a simple suicide, but how horrible to think the murderer of Ralph the steward should be thus discovered!"

"And that it should turn out to be his own son, for such I take it was what the man meant."

"Frightful in the extreme. I remember him when he was a boy, and then it was prophesied by all that he would come to a bad end!"

"And so he has. I can imagine his terror and dismay when he found himself in the chamber in which he had murdered his own father!"

"Yes, and how the thought would drive him to suicide and madness!"

"Ay, indeed! It would be most strange if it did not. What must he not have suffered during the past eight years!"

"From what he has said though, I gather he had no idea when he committed the murder, doubtless for the sake of the money he had about him, that it was his own father!"

"Clearly not, or, at any rate, let us hope so."

"But," persisted Groves, "had not one or two of us better start at once for the hall. It is close upon daybreak, and surely Sir Herbert will pardon us for arousing him at so unreasonable an hour when he learns our errand."

"By all means!" exclaimed several, rising. "Do you go, and we will accompany you!"

"Agreed," said Groves, and in a few minutes afterwards a little party of about a dozen persons was on its way to the hall.

Turpin remained behind. He had many urgent reasons for doing so, but he went to the front door of the inn along with Davis to see them off, and there they stood watching them until they were out of sight.

"Tom," said Turpin, in a whisper, as they both lingered on the steps, "of course you know very well I don't wish to be mixed up with the proceedings at the inquest which will have to be held, because of the danger which would result from calling me so publicly forward; but still it would be equally dangerous for me to set out for London at sunrise. The officers just now are more than usually on the alert after me."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Just this. My evidence, as there are so many witnesses who can depose to the same facts as I can, will be of little or no service, so I need not be mentioned in the matter at all. Find me some snug little place where I can remain until nightfall, when I must be off to London."

"As you like, Dick, my boy. I see no obstacles whatever; I will find you a comfortable berth, and as you say there is no need—although you did take rather a prominent part in the affair—for you to run the risk of giving evidence. There can only be one verdict returned."

CHAPTER XII.

DICK BIDS FAREWELL TO ELLEN, AND SETS OUT FOR LONDON TO SHOW THE LORD MAYOR'S CUP TO THE "FAMILY" AT THE "THREE TUNS."

THE shades of evening were just beginning to dusk all objects, when three persons stood at an old-fashioned bow-window on the ground floor of the "Hand and Keys."

These three persons were Dick, Ellen, and the landlord.

Dick was speaking.

"Ellen," he said, "you will then stay here along with my friend Davis so long as you may choose to do so. I am certain you will find him as kind and affectionate to you as though you were his daughter."

The poor girl could not trust herself to speak, for so much kindness touched her to the heart. Her eyes filled with tears, and she took a hand of each, and pressed them in token of her thanks.

"There, there—it is all right—it is all right," said Tom Davis. "Don't take on so much. I can only say, so long as the old roof is above my head you are very welcome to share it with me."

"And now," said Turpin, "it will soon be time for me to set out for London."

"London?" repeated Ellen. "Oh! no; do not go. Why run into so much danger?"

"Danger!" replied Turpin, with a laugh. "I never think of it. I must visit London to-night, in order to receive the money I have won by taking the mayor's cup."

"How much is it?" asked Davis.

"Fifty pounds!"

"Then it is hardly worth the risk."

"Not for the amount of money certainly. But having half won the bet it would be foolish to lose it by not complying with the other part of it."

Davis shook his head.

"I know you are sure to go," he said; "but it strikes me you have the most difficult part to perform."

"Why?"

"Why? Did not you tell me some one had split upon it, and set the officers on the watch?"

"Well, yes. That was my supposition from finding them so close at hand."

"And you were right; so rely upon it, now that attempt failed, knowing you intended to carry the cup in person to the 'Three Tuns,' they will so surround you with enemies that it will be impossible for you to make your escape with your life."

"Oh! how can you think of blindly rushing into so much peril! You cannot be in earnest."

Fain would the young girl have persuaded herself so, for she could not help feeling a deep interest in her protector; but the next words that came from Turpin's lips dispersed her hopes.

"I will do it," he said, "and defy the danger! The more of it there is, the greater will the achievement be."

"I see you are bent upon it, Dick," said the landlord, "and I know before to-day that when you take a thing into your head there is no turning you, so I sha'n't say more."

"I am bent upon it," replied Turpin, "and I must say I feel none of the apprehensions which you do."

"I suppose not."

"But I do," replied Ellen. "And now that I have found a friend and protector, do not let me lose him so soon. Don't go, for my sake."

"I see you are even more timid than Davis is."

"I am always timid when there is much danger."

"And I am bold, and on this occasion I feel an assurance that I shall come off all right."

"I hope you may," said Davis. "When do you want your mare?"

"Now," said Turpin, looking through the window, and observing the aspect of the night. "It is full early yet, but a fog seems to be rising rapidly. I hope it will be a dense one, for if it is I shall stand a much better chance of success."

"Then," said Davis, "I will go round to the stables, saddle Black Bess, and bring her to the door myself."

"Do so, do so."

The landlord departed on his errand.

"And now, my dear," said Turpin, drawing Ellen towards him, "pray dismiss from your mind all foolish feeling of alarm for my safety. I have returned unhurt from many a more dangerous expedition. Be happy. Davis and his wife will try their best to make you so, and do not let them fancy you ungrateful by showing them they have not succeeded."

"I will try to be happy and content."

"And," added Turpin, if I should not return, do not be alarmed. "It is impossible for me to say at any time where I may be in three hours afterwards. Let me desire it ever so much, I may be weeks before I pay another visit here."

"Weeks?"

"Yes; and in the meantime you will find time pass pleasantly enough here."

Ellen shook her head.

"Not in your absence," she said.

"Mare's waiting at the door," said Davis, as he re-entered the room; "so I should advise you to be off as soon as possible, for you are well aware Bess never stands anywhere long together without attracting observation."

"And who can wonder at it?" asked Dick, proudly. "Her equal has never yet been found, and never will be I fancy!"

"Be off then! No one suspects your presence in this neighbourhood now, but they soon would if they saw her at the door."

"I am off. Good-bye, Ellen! Don't be alarmed about me. I shall be safe enough, don't fear. Expect me when you see me! Good-bye, good-bye!"

He hurried out of the room as he spoke.

A moment sufficed to take him to the huge front door of the "Hand and Keys," and there, just a few paces off, he could distinguish Black Bess.

The fog however was getting denser each moment.

"You will have an ugly journey, Dick," said Davis, as the highwayman mounted his mare. "I fancy it will soon be too thick for you to find your way."

"Not a bit. I could almost do it blindfold."

"I shouldn't wonder. You have been times enough."

"Rather; and I trust more to my mare than I do to myself," said Turpin, patting Bess's neck as he spoke.

"I am not surprised you are so fond of her."

"I should think not. And now, Davis, as it may be some time before I see you again, I should like to have a serious parting word with you."

"Speak out, my boy!"

"I allude to the young girl, Ellen."

"I guessed as much."

"And"——

"Now, don't let that trouble your mind at all. I will take care of her, and mind, as well, that she comes to no harm through you."

"Ah! ah!"

"You needn't laugh. I can see through a ladder before the rounds are knocked out"

"I don't doubt it."

"She has taken a fancy to you—more's the pity."

"Pho! pho!"

"There's no disguising the fact."

"Then, to put an end to all jesting," said Turpin, gathering the reins in his hand, "I will promise you she shall never be wronged by me."

"I am glad of it, Dick, very glad; for I already feel as though she was my own daughter."

"Good-bye, then, Davis, old fellow, treat her as a daughter, and I am sure you will find her all that you desire."

As Turpin spoke these words he waved his hand, and, gently pricking Bess upon the flank, was in a moment out of sight in the thick fog.

"It's a sad pity," soliloquized the landlord, while he stood for a moment on the door-step, "a sad pity, that a man like him should have taken to the road. He is a brave heart, and I don't believe he would do an ungenerous action for the world. If he had only had the opportunity many have, what a great man he would have become. Now what is he? Perhaps going to is death. It is a sad pity."

"It is indeed," said a gentle voice at his elbow, and, turning round, Tom Davis saw the young girl whom he had so soon learned to love standing by his side.

CHAPTER XIII.

TURPIN ROBS SIR THEODORE HOUGHTON ON HIS WAY TO LONDON.

"GENTLY, Bess; gently, mare;" said TURPIN, to his steed. "There is no hurry, lass. We have a good four hours before us."

Bess subsided into a gentle trot.

"Well," thought our hero, as he carried his hand to his pocket to make sure the cup was all right, "a few things have happened, certainly, since I took this cup out of the fat mayor's carriage; but the strangest thing of all, and the one I cannot banish from my imagination, is the spectral shadowy form which I feel convinced I saw in the lane. What could it be? What can it portend?

"I was a fool not to have ridden forward," he muttered, after a few moments' thought. "I will not believe it was anything supernatural. I was wounded. My brain was confused and giddy, and I had not that ready command over my actions that I generally have. Let me catch sight of it again, and I will chase the figure until I discover what it is."

His ruminations and resolves were quickly put to flight, for, indistinctly and muffled by the opaque atmosphere, came the tramp of a horse's hoofs upon his ears.

He paused to listen.

He had reached a small open space, but across which he could not see. He only knew that he was not in the roadway by feeling that Bess was treading upon turf.

The sound of the approaching footsteps came from the rear.

"It is a single traveller," said Dick, "and he comes most opportunely. My pockets are almost empty. It is to be hoped he carries a good booty."

The traveller was approaching slowly and cautiously, as though he was by no means sure of his footing.

Turpin wheeled round

Then he quietly waited until the unsuspecting rider should be close to him.

At length, when he judged from the loudness of the sound that the solitary horseman was at about fifty paces distant, he gave Bess the reins, and swept swiftly down the lane.

"Stand and deliver!" he cried in loud tones, and at the same time holding a pistol to the astonished rider's breast. "Your money or your life!"

"Neither, you villain!" said a voice; and, before Dick anticipated any such event, the rider fired a pistol point plank at his face.

Turpin shook in his saddle.

The bullet had been well aimed.

It struck his hat from his head, and ploughed up his scalp in its passage.

Before, however, the traveller could follow up the advantage he had so undoubtedly gained, Dick recovered himself, and, rapidly bringing his weapon to a level, pulled the trigger.

There was a flash and a report!

The shot was seemingly effective, for the traveller uttered a loud cry of pain.

He did not, though, fall from his seat, but preserved an upright position.

"Quick!" said Dick, "your money, watch, and trinkets! You have only yourself to thank for what you have got!"

No reply.

"Come, come," added Dick, "hand them over, or I shall be forced to take them, and, generally speaking, I am not over gentle when I do!"

"You have shattered my right arm," replied the traveller, "and I am powerless! Were it not for that, and the excruciating pain it occasions me, I would struggle with you to the last! You can please yourself how much you maltreat a wounded man who cannot struggle with you!"

"Use your left hand!" said Turpin, leaning forward towards him.

"I will, and do!" cried the traveller, in an excited voice.

At the same moment Turpin heard the click of another pistol. It simply flashed in the pan.

"You are a treacherous rascal!" shouted Turpin. "Take that."

He doubled up his fist, and struck the traveller a terrific blow in the face.

He swayed from one side of his horse to the other, and then losing his balance, fell on the ground.

"I hope that's a settler!" said Turpin. "I do hate treachery above all things. I wonder if he has got much in his pockets?"

As he asked himself this question, he dismounted and stooped over his prostrate foe, who lay very still indeed.

Turpin shook him rather roughly, as he said:

"Come, now, it's no good your shamming in that way. I have had enough of it."

An inarticulate sound, either a curse or a groan, Dick could not tell which, was all that he got by way of response, so he added:

"It's no good losing time. It's a troublesome affair, very. I only hope he has got enough about him to make

it worth my while! Let's see! here's a nice watch—repeater, I think—with chain and seals. Not so bad. A pocket-book. Not very fat. A purse! Ah! heavy too. Bravo! Breast-pin. Gold of course. Two rings! Diamonds, doubtless. Anything else? No."

While uttering these disjointed sentences, Turpin made a perquisition of his enemy, and having examined the different articles which he took, transferred them to his own pocket.

"I should very much like to know," said Turpin, as he rose to his feet, "whether I did shatter his right arm as he said I did? It's so confounded dark. I can't see. Stop a bit. Yes I can."

He produced a small bull's-eye lantern from his pocket, and as his antagonist gave no signs of motion, very leisurely proceeded to light it.

In a moment or two, as the wick fairly caught light, he was able to throw a tolerably broad ray of light around him.

"Your face is damaged considerably, my friend," he said, as he turned the light full upon the traveller's features, which were covered with blood. "I never gave such a fair blow in my life! Never!"

Then he proceeded to make a more minute observation.

"What a deceitful fellow he must be, to be sure. He's not wounded in the arm. He thought of having me, I dare say, but he has found his match. That reminds me to look after the wound I fancy he gave me in my head. Oh! it's nothing—absolutely nothing! Why, I don't believe it has bled a dozen drops! I shall be none the worse for that, though it was a very narrow escape!

"What shall I do with this fellow now? Leave him where he is, in the middle of the road? It would serve him right! Ah! did you speak?"

The traveller certainly did not speak, but he raised himself up off the ground a little, looking rueful and woebegone in the extreme.

"Villain!" he said, as his eyes fell upon Turpin, "you have conquered and robbed me. I made sure I should put an end to your career!"

"How kind of you, to be sure!"

"And I should have done so if my infernal pistol had not missed fire!" he continued, for he was recovering rapidly.

"Well, why don't you wipe your face? Can't you feel it's all over blood?"

"You shall pay dearly for this, my spark," said the traveller, as he wiped his face with his handkerchief.

"You won't carry this game on always. I'm a magistrate, I'd let you know."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and vagrants like yourself tremble when they hear my name!"

"What is it?"

"Sir Theodore Houghton, sir!"

Turpin shook his head.

"Never heard it before."

The magistrate opened his mouth to an unnatural width in token of his astonishment.

"Never heard it?"

"Never."

"Oh! impossible. My name is well known everywhere!"

"Among the 'family,' I suppose."

"The family?"

"Yes, the light-fingered profession. Easy-come-easy-go sort. You understand?"

"I do, and I can tell you it is woe to those who are brought up before me."

"Oh!"

By this time the magistrate had risen to his feet, and was evidently getting better every moment.

"I am unarmed now," he added, "or I would try what I could do."

"I suppose you called it fair play to fire upon me as you did?"

"Most assuredly! Everything is fair to a felon like you?"

"That's your opinion!"

"And everybody else's that's got any sense."

"Of course."

"Well, now, your worship," said Dick, with a mocking air, "it appears by what you have said, you have endeavoured to make your name a terror to those who might be brought up before you; and, to do so, you have, no doubt, unjustly punished many!"

"And what if I have?" asked Sir Theodore, preparing to remount his steed.

"Why, we will just have a little bit of retributive or poetical justice upon you. Remember, you are wholly in my power."

The worthy magistrate glared around in some dismay.

No living thing was either within sight or hearing, and he rather anxiously waited to hear what Turpin said next.

He was not long kept in suspense, for Dick said—

"I am going to a large meeting of the family to-night, and I am determined you shall go with me. I shall have great pleasure in presenting you to their notice, and still greater in handing you over to them to be dealt with according as they think proper. Of course, letting them know the cowardly and treacherous attempt you made upon my life!"

"Help—help! Murder!" shouted Sir Theodore, as Turpin announced this resolution. "Why, they would tear me limb from limb if they once got me in their clutches. You cannot mean that. Help—mercy!"

"I do mean it," said Turpin, "and consider I am doing no more than right, and acting in a merciful way towards you. As you have been so fond of administering punishment to others, you shall try how you like to have it administered to yourself."

During this short conversation Turpin had not once let go the grasp he had fastened upon him.

"And look here," added our hero; "do you see this?"

It was a long, bright-barrelled pistol which he asked him if he saw.

"I do."

"That's all right. Now listen to what I am going to say, and take warning. Are you listening?"

"Ye—es."

"This pistol is one by which I set great store, and I never produce or use it except upon extraordinary occasions. It is made with the utmost nicety; carries a ball to its mark as true as a hair, and *never misses fire!* I wish you to impress that strongly on your memory. It never misses fire! Now, if you wish to preserve your life a little longer, obey my directions, or, if you do not, why"——

He cocked and levelled the pistol in a manner by far more significant than pleasant.

The magistrate's teeth chattered when he heard the sound, and saw the weapon brought to bear upon his person.

"Now, mount," said Turpin.

Sir Theodore obeyed.

"Now take off your cravat, and tie one end firmly round your right wrist."

The pistol still covered him, so he perforce obeyed.

Turpin snatched up his lantern and caught hold of the other extremity of the cravat, having first assured himself that it was properly secured to his companion's arm, and then mounted on the back of Black Bess.

"Quick march," he cried; "and bear in mind that at the very first attempt you make to get free, I fire!"

CHAPTER XIV.

SIR THEODORE HOUGHTON TURNS OUT A VERY BAD CHARACTER INDEED.

It was in this strange fashion, then, Turpin and his companion made their way to London. Sir Theodore quietly resigned himself to his fate, and therein showed his wisdom. He was fully impressed with the idea that certain and immediate death would be the penalty for trying to get away, while he thought, by peacefully surrendering to his foe, he would be in a position to take advantage of any unlocked-for circumstance that might occur.

As, however, time passed, and they rapidly neared London without meeting a soul, he began to quake with fear, for he knew pretty well what he had to expect at the hands of the "family."

The fog which had settled down soon after sunset got no thinner as they neared the metropolis.

"And now there's one more thing, Sir Magistrate," said Turpin, breaking the silence: "if you cry out for

assistance in any way, it's a case with you. As sure as you do, I fire."

"Oh! let me go, pray let me go at once! I promise to forego all idea of punishing you in any way and taking my revenge for what I have suffered to-night. Come, you are only doing this to frighten me. Let me go!"

"Shouldn't you like it? No, no! When I let you go, it will be into the hands of the 'family.'"

Sir Theodore relapsed into silence.

They reached at last the corner of Broad-street, St. Giles's. Turpin made his way down a dark-looking archway, taking his companion with him.

Several narrow turnings branched off from the bottom of this gateway, and, after proceeding a short distance down one, Turpin paused.

Then he blew a whistle which had a very peculiar sound.

"Dismount!" said Turpin, at the same time alighting from his steed, but taking care the magistrate should not give him the slip.

He blew the whistle a second time.

A man bearing a lantern came rapidly towards them.

Turpin addressed some words to this man, but what they meant Sir Theodore had no idea. It was in an unknown language to him.

The man with the lantern, however, understood him, evidently, for he said something in reply, and then, taking the two steeds by the bridle, he led them away.

"Forward!" said Turpin, seizing his companion's hand, and dragging him quickly down another alley, at the bottom of which he paused before a low door in the wall.

This door swung silently open, without any person making themselves visible.

A long, narrow passage, dimly lighted, appeared beyond.

Turpin led Sir Theodore down it.

At its extremity was a flight of steps, and then another door, opening into a huge apartment, which deserves a line of description.

It was not very wide, but of prodigious length. A table, formed of one long plank, stretched almost from one end to the other, and on both sides of this were seated probably a hundred persons, variously engaged smoking, drinking, talking, singing, swearing, all at once.

The noise was perfectly deafening.

The magistrate shrunk back in alarm.

At the further end of the table a man was seated in a chair much higher than the others.

As soon as he saw the new comers appear upon the threshold this man hammered violently upon the table with the pewter pot from which he had been drinking.

"Silence! si—lence!" he cried.

By slow degrees the tumult subsided into a low hum of voices.

Turpin stepped boldly up to the table.

"Hurrah! bravo! bravo! It's Turpin the bold! Three cheers, friends, he's brought the lord mayor's cup."

"Order!" yelled the chairman, at the top of his voice, and banging the pewter pot more violently upon the table than before—"order, pals! Who's the strange fly he's brought with him?"

Immediate attention was directed to Sir Theodore Houghton, who endeavoured to avoid the scrutiny as much as possible.

"Who is he? who is he? Name—name!" they shouted.

Turpin held up his hand for permission to address them.

"This, my friends," he said, "is a gentleman I have great pleasure in introducing to your notice. His name is Sir Theodore Houghton, and he is a county magistrate."

As he spoke, Turpin pushed his companion forward.

A deep roar of execration came from the throats of those assembled as they heard the name pronounced, and the greater part rose from their seats, while those who were nearest clutched the unfortunate magistrate tightly wherever they could obtain a hold.

He shook with fear.

"Death! death! Down with the unjust judge! Kill him—kill him!"

"Silence! si—lence!" again shouted the chairman, and making his voice heard above all the din. "On to the table with him! We'll try him. I'll be judge You shall be jury!"

"Hear, hear!" cried the thieves. "Bravo! Up with him!"

And, despite the resistance which he made, he was lifted by twenty hands at least on to the table.

He was compelled by blows to assume an erect position.

"Mercy, gentlemen, mercy!" he said, in trembling tones, and with shaking limbs. "Mercy, mercy!"

"All right! We know what you mean by mercy, and you shall have plenty of it!"

"Order!" again exclaimed the chairman. "Take your seats, mates. He shall be tried! Let us manage the affair in a decent manner."

It was a rule with that disorderly assembly that a chairman should be appointed every night by the general voice, and that he should, while he held that position, have the others under his command.

Slowly, therefore, and muttering threats against the unhappy wretch who had fallen into their power, they obeyed, and seated themselves in their respective places.

"Prisoner, advance!" said the chairman.

"Forrards!" exclaimed those who were nearest to him, compelling him to walk to the middle of the long table.

"Who accuses the prisoner?"

"I do!" said Turpin, stepping forward.

"Of what?"

"A treacherous attempt upon my life!"

"Now, prisoner, do you plead Guilty or Not Guilty?"

Sir Theodore Houghton looked about him in a bewildered manner; he could hardly believe in the reality of the scene that was enacting before him.

The chairman repeated his question.

"Not Guilty!" replied the magistrate, nervously.

"State your charge!"

"I will, your lordship," said Turpin.

There was a laugh at this.

"Silence in the court!" shouted another voice.

The laugh grew louder still. There was something so uncommonly comic about this assumption of judicial form.

"I was on the way from Hornsey to London," continued Turpin, "when all at once I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs beating against the road. Thinking I might be able to do a little business, I pulled up and waited for the horseman to make his appearance."

"Quite right!"

"Presently, when he was only a few yards off, I rode forward, and requested him to pay the toll!"

"Well?"

"Then, your lordship, without saying a word, and before I was at all prepared for such an event, he fired a pistol full in my face. It knocked off my hat, and grazed my scalp, but did me no more damage."

"That's lucky!"

"It was, your lordship! Of course, I wasn't long recovering myself, and then I fired at him in return."

"Quite right!"

"He gave a cry, and called out that he was hit, and said he could not hand over himself. Not suspecting anything, I leaned forward to clear his pockets myself, when he put another pistol to my breast, and pulled the trigger!"

"The miscreant!"

"Si—lence!" said the crier again, or rather one man who had taken that office upon himself.

"Very fortunately for me, your lordship," Turpin continued, "the pistol only flashed in the pan, so I was unhurt. I did not stop to take out another pistol, but doubled up my fist, and hit him such a fair smack in the face, that down he went off his horse into the road at once!"

"Now, prisoner," said the *pseudo* judge, "what have you to say in your defence?"

"I defended my property," replied the baronet, who had an idea that he might get on better if he put a bold face on the matter.

"How came you to bring him here?"

"He told me he was a magistrate, and boasted how he served those who were unluckly enough to be brought up before him."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, your lordship; so I thought as I was coming

here, I would bring him with me, and put him upon his trial, and see how he liked it!"

"A very proper idea."

"I thought so, and here he is!"

"Now," said the judge, "is there any gentleman present who has suffered any injustice at his hands?"

"Yes, yes! Me! me! me!"

Twenty voices at least replied to his words.

"I can't hear you all, gentlemen! Let the one who has the strongest case against him step forward. If we find him guilty, sentence shall be pronounced!"

"Agreed! Who stands forward?"

"I do!" said a voice.

A tall, respectable-looking man got up off his seat.

"Order for Gentleman George!" shouted the chairman.

Sir Theodore turned ghastly pale as soon as his eyes fell upon this man, and he trembled so excessively that he could scarcely keep his feet.

The man who had been called Gentleman George began to speak, and there was an immediate silence.

"My case is a very hard one," he said, "but I will relate it in as few words as possible."

"Silence!" said the crier again, who, though there was no noise, thought, as the speaker paused, he ought to say something.

"It is nearly ten years ago now since I entered the prisoner's service. He was a justice then, and I was employed as his clerk. I lived in the same house with him."

Sir Theodore's agitation rapidly increased, and he glared wildly at the faces by which he was surrounded, upon every one of which he saw an inimical expression.

He evidently dreaded what was coming next.

"I shall not go minutely into my story," continued Gentleman George, "because it would take up too much time, I will only say that Sir Theodore had a daughter."

His voice wavered slightly, but, recovering himself with an effort, he went on:—

"We were thrown much together, and, as she was about my own age, there was nothing wonderful in our falling in love with each other. It was folly and wickedness on my part, but who can control his destiny?

"We kept our attachment secret for some time, but eventually it was discovered. With the exercise of that treachery and duplicity which seem native to him, he called me into his library, remonstrated with me, yet kindly and gently. I could say nothing, for I felt I was in the wrong.

"'After what has occurred,' he said, for I can recollect his words as well as I could if I had just heard them—'after what has occurred, you must feel the impossibility of remaining any longer in my service. I do not wish to deal harshly with you so long as you leave this place. If you absent yourself, there is a probability of my daughter forgetting her unfortunate passion, so I beg of you as a favour I think you ought to grant, that you will place as great a distance as you can between this house and yourself.'

"What could I do but consent? Fool that I was, I ought to have distrusted his kindness, and feared it more than his anger.

"'I have no fault to find with you,' he said, 'in the way you have executed your duties. There is half a year's salary due to you; I will write you a cheque for that amount, and two hundred pounds in addition, upon the sole condition that you never return here. It will serve to pay your travelling expenses, and to support you until you find some fresh employment. Do not hesitate to accept it. It is a sum of money I can well spare.'

"He wrote out a cheque for two hundred and fifty pounds, placed it in an envelope, and gave it to me.

"This was acting magnanimously to all appearance, and, like a fool I believed he was sincere. I ought to have known from his behaviour on other occasions that I ought to expect the worse.

"I took the cheque and bade him good-bye. I went to my room, packed up all my things, and took them down to the coach office, and secured a place for myself in the mail, as I intended to go to Liverpool, where many of my friends resided.

"The bank was at a town four miles distant from Sir Theodore's house, and I got there just as the bank was closing. However, as they knew me, the man at the counter just glanced at the cheque, and handed me over the money.

"In an hour afterwards I was in the coach and on my way to Liverpool.

"And now," said Gentleman George, as he looked around, "the black part of my story is yet to come. It is so foul and monstrous, that you will never believe it possible any man could act in so diabolical a manner."

He paused for a moment, and wiped his face, while the rest of his story was waited for with a stillness that was positively painful.

"I reached Liverpool on the fourth night. I will pass over my own feelings and reflections, but you can guess they were far from pleasant; still, the sense of no impending evil weighed upon me.

"I at first intended to see my friends, but I afterwards altered my mind, and determined to leave England for ever and go to America.

"A vessel of several hundred tons burden, was just upon the point of sailing for New York, and I engaged a berth on board.

"The following morning, just as they were about to weigh anchor, a boat filled with many persons shot out from the quay, and was rowed rapidly towards us.

"They made signals for the captain to pause.

"As the boat neared the ship's side, we all noticed it was filled with police-officers.

"'They are after some one who has absconded,' I thought, and I looked round at those passengers who were standing in a throng round me wondering which it could be.

"Five minutes afterwards, the officers came on board, and spoke to the captain. Then they came towards us.

"I looked on with some curiosity, but who can imagine my surprise when the chief stepped up to me and put his hand on my shoulder?

"'You were almost off,' he said; 'but we've caught you. Come along, and don't detain the vessel any longer.'

"I was thunderstruck.

"'Am I to understand you have a charge against me?'

"Ha, ha! That's good—werry good!' said the officer. 'Come along, and don't make a rumpus!'

"'I don't understand you,' I said. 'I have done nothing to make me answerable to the laws.'

"'Oh, no! I don't suppose you have. However, here is a warrant for forging a cheque for two hundred and fifty pounds upon Sir Theodore Houghton, and making off with it.'

"'It is false,' I cried. 'Sir Theodore wrote the cheque himself?'

"That may be. I don't say it isn't, but you must come along with me. It looks very strange, though, for you to receive this money, leave without saying a word to anyone, and then embark for New York.'

"It flashed upon my mind in a moment how bad a construction could be placed upon my actions. I was overwhelmed, but I was not conscious of the full extent of my misfortune."

Gentleman George paused a moment for breath.

All still remained silent. They seemed spellbound.

A cold sweat burst out at every pore of the magistrate's body, and he sank upon his knees on the table.

He strove to speak, but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

"I have only a word or two more to say," resumed Gentleman George, sadly, "I shall not detain you much longer. I was brought back to Sir Theodore's, manacled like a felon. I was had up, the charge made, and committed to the assizes.

"A weary time to me elapsed, and then I was placed upon my trial. My friends had heard of me, and had engaged an eminent counsel for my defence. His eloquence, however, was of no avail. Sir Theodore here entered the witness-box, and perjured himself by swearing that he had never had any such conversation with me, as I said he had, and appealed to those who knew him, and asked if they thought he would be likely to have acted in such a manner? My whole statement, he said, was most preposterous and absurd, for was it probable he would give a large sum of money to one who had done him such an injury? The natural course for anyone to take would be to turn me ignominiously from the house. He dwelt, also, upon my baseness in bringing his

daughter's name before the court as a screen for my bad conduct. The trial lasted many hours, and everything he said damaged me.

"In his examination, he distinctly swore that he knew nothing of my leaving him until the morning following my departure, when the cashier from the bank came over to ask him about a cheque which they had cashed just as the bank was closing on the previous day. He declared it to be a forgery, and asked by whom it had been presented.

"He was told, of course, by me.

"I was sent for, but no one knew better than himself that I was far away, and was not to be found. It was, all said, a clear case of forgery and absconding; so a warrant was obtained for my apprehension, and I was arrested in the way I told you.

"My counsel could not shake the prosecutor's evidence in any way. There was no flaw in it. The judge summed up, the jury returned a verdict of Guilty, and I was sentenced to be executed!

"And so, you see, by his diabolical ingenuity, was I, an innocent man in thought and deed, convicted of a capital offence!

"But his vengeance was not sated as I have no doubt he hoped it would be. By the assistance of my friends I was enabled to escape, and so I eluded the dread penalty of the law. But since then I have never dared to show my face. I have been forced to become an outcast and a thief!

"As for the wretch who brought all this upon me and blighted my future hopes, I have never seen him since he stood in the witness-box until he was brought in to-night, and then I recognised him instantly. If you have any doubt of my statement, look at him now, and tell me whether he looks like an innocent man!"

The man who had related this fearful tale of prospects blighted, and who was known only to his associates under the name of Gentleman George, raised his hand as he finished speaking and pointed to the shrinking, cowardly wretch upon the table.

"Guilty—guilty!" they all cried, fiercely, as they rose tumultuously to their feet, and stretched out their hands towards him.

The chairman banged the table.

"Order! gentlemen of the jury, order! Do you forget that you are in a court of justice? Be seated, and let us hear what the prisoner has to say in his defence!"

They obeyed.

"Prisoner on the table," said the judge, as soon as silence was restored, "what have you to urge in your behalf?"

White as ashes, his teeth chattering in his head, Sir Theodore Houghton rose trembling to his feet.

He licked his parched lips.

"It's all false!" he said, in a hoarse, hollow whisper. "False from first to last. He is guilty, and was rightly sentenced!"

Then he sank again, half fainting, upon the table.

The chairman, in his capacity of judge, then very formally summed up.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, and his tones got graver and more solemn as he proceeded, "you have heard the evidence which has been given against the prisoner, and it remains for you to deliberately weigh it in your minds. Do you consider the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

As if with one voice those who were assembled cried, the moment the words left his lips—

"Guilty!"

Then there was a dead silence.

"Prisoner on the table," said the chairman, "you have heard the verdict which has been recorded against you. Have you anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon you?"

"It's all a mockery!" shrieked Sir Theodore, springing to his feet as if galvanized. "A hideous mockery! I refuse to be tried, or submit to this farce any longer!"

"You cannot help yourself; the general voice has pronounced you guilty, and the court now proceeds to pass sentence upon you. The sentence is the same that you so unjustly caused to be passed upon Gentleman George, namely, that you be hanged by the neck until you be dead!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE OFFICERS CAPTURE DICK TURPIN AT THE "THREE TUNS."

No one spoke for some seconds after the sentence was thus pronounced.

Sir Theodore strove hard to make some articulate sound, but in vain.

Horror had possession of his soul.

He knew his guilt, and he felt that the hour of retribution had at last arrived.

He clasped his hands together in an agony of mute supplication.

It was the chairman who broke the silence.

"Who will be his executioner?" he said.

A man rose instantly.

"That will I," he said, "for I have suffered much injury from this most unjust judge. I will carry the sentence into effect, and so give a warning to others. Who has a rope?"

Several pieces five or six feet in length were handed to him.

He tied them all securely together.

Half-a-dozen iron hooks were fixed in the roof, and to the largest of these the man made fast one end of the rope.

The other end he made into a noose.

The next operation was to pinion the miserable prisoner, and, in spite of his desperate resistance and frantic shrieks for mercy, this was quickly done.

A chair was placed immediately beneath the hook, and Sir Theodore forced to stand in it.

Then the rope was adjusted round his neck.

The expression on his face was awful to see.

The "family" sat looking on in grim silence.

"Help! help! Murder! murder!" screamed Sir Theodore, in a cracked voice—for the so-close presence of death restored him his voice. "Help! help! Mercy! mercy!"

"Confess, then, while yet you have time."

"I do! I do! The charge was wholly false, and I got it up to avenge the wrong he had done me. What he told you was true. Release me! Release me!"

"No, now you have confessed to the perpetration of so horrible a crime, you shall die!" said the chairman. "We can feel no doubt as to your guilt, and shall carry out the sentence without compunction!"

"No—no! Save me! Sa"——

The chair was suddenly knocked from under him, and the sentence checked upon his lips. He gave a desperate plunge, and struggled slightly—then all was over.

Sir Theodore Houghton had met with the reward he merited.

"I have him! I have him! Surrender! surrender!" cried several loud voices at this moment, as a large party of police-officers dashed headlong into the room, while half-a-dozen at least clung to Dick; and, before he was conscious of what had occurred, he found himself overpowered and a prisoner.

The attention of every one present had been so riveted upon the fearful termination of Sir Theodore Houghton's life, and so absorbed by the terrible narrative of Gentleman George, that the whole of them were, in a manner of speaking, quite deaf and blind to any extraneous circumstances; and so the police-officers, whose measures had been very carefully taken, were actually in full possession of the entire premises before the lawless company had any idea that they were menaced by danger in the least.

Even Turpin, watchful as he usually was, had been unable to resist the powerful interest which the exciting tragedy produced in every breast; indeed, so intense was it, that his breath came short and thick. In fact, he, as well as all the rest, was spell-bound.

The sudden irruption of the officers, however, and the loud shouts of their leader, in a moment aroused their slumbering activity.

Instantly all were upon their feet, and a desperate struggle immediately commenced, and several of the "family," seeing our hero so surrounded, sprang forward to attempt his rescue.

Sir Theodore Houghton was, of course, well known to all the officers, for his severe sentences had made



[THE OFFICERS CHASE TURPIN THROUGH SOHO.]

everywhere notorious, and, as soon as they recognized him, half a dozen rushed forward to cut him down.

They were too late though to save his life.

The fall was very sudden, and the magistrate no inconsiderable weight, the effect of which two circumstances was that his neck was dislocated.

The officers were not long in discovering this, for when they set him up so that he should have a chance of reviving a little, his head lolled about in every direction.

So soon, then, as they ascertained that life was really extinct, they left him, and turned towards those who had sprung upon Turpin.

They had every need of their aid, for they found it a most difficult task to keep their hold upon their prisoner, and defend themselves at the same time from the violent assault that was made upon them.

Already had Turpin got one of his arms free, and was dealing heavy blows, which made his captors shrink, when the other body of officers reached the excited, struggling mass.

The numbers were about equal.

The yelling, shouting, and swearing were tremendous.

"Give him up! Give him up!" shrieked an officer, mounting on to the table. "Give him up and you shall all go free! It's only him we want, and we're bound to have him, so give him up at once!"

No notice whatever was taken of this speech.

Then this officer, who was doubtless one of those in command, grew furious when he found himself disregarded, and ran towards the end of the table near which the struggle was now taking place.

We have before had occasion to remark that this table in the thieves' kitchen was composed simply of one plank. This was supported on three tressels.

When the officer rushed forward so suddenly to its extremity his weight tilted it up, so down he went on the floor in a moment, and was buried nearly under an avalanche of pewter pots.

Blood was trickling from his head and face when he again rose to his feet, but, heedless of the hurts he had sustained, he dashed like a maniac into the thickest of the fight.

Turpin, too, was injured in many places, but struggled desperately, for he resolved not to be taken alive without an effort.

He got his other arm free.

Upon seeing this, the officers redoubled their endeavours.

Turpin was an immense favourite with all the "family," and there was scarcely one of them who would not willingly have laid down his life to render him a service.

Therefore they fought most gallantly in his behalf. They knew the motive which had brought him there.

Feeling that the issue of the conflict was very uncertain, Turpin commenced slowly to retreat backwards to the door, intending, if once he could get into the passage, to make a bold rush for escape.

The "family" divined his intention immediately, and so, too, did the police officers; but the former made such a sudden attack upon the latter, that they had much ado to defend themselves.

Two men only interposed between Turpin and the door he was so anxious to reach. Turning round sharply upon his heel, he, by a well-directed blow, laid one prostrate, and sprang past the other, who, however, grasped him tightly by the skirts of his coat.

Dick placed his hands behind him, and plunged forward. Many rapid footsteps followed him.

"The door is guarded!" exclaimed Dick, involuntarily, as his eye fell upon four men standing near it.

"Surrender, or we fire!" they cried, upon seeing him approach.

"Never!" said Dick; and as he spoke he ran up a narrow flight of stairs which were close at his left hand.

The next instant several of the officers who had disengaged themselves from the fray which was still going on in the kitchen, came along the passage, and sprung up the stairs after Dick, who, however, had made good use of the brief start which he had obtained.

He was already at the top.

He saw then several doors, all of which were closed.

Without pausing to choose, he placed his hand upon the fastenings of one just opposite to him, and opened it.

All was profound darkness within.

Very dimly, though, and as if a curtain had been drawn across it, Turpin saw the outline of a window.

He hastily secured the door.

He heard the officers stamping up the staircase.

Rejoiced at having successfully eluded them so far, he crept forward on his hands and knees towards the window, for he judged that to be the likeliest means of avoiding a collision with whatever furniture there might be in the room, which, for aught he knew to the contrary, might be a bed-chamber, and occupied by some one.

The room was limited in its dimensions, and he very quickly reached the window, and drew the curtain from before it.

"Bang! bang! bang! bang!" came four heavy blows upon the panel of the door.

Dick flung open the window.

It was one of those diamond-paned casements opening like a door, and permitting easy egress.

Just below him Dick saw the roofs of some outbuildings, and he dropped down upon them.

"I fancy," he said, "I shall be able to make my way into some of the courts, and then very likely I shall get free!"

While speaking he slid down the tiles, and, as he expected, found himself only about ten or twelve feet from the ground.

Grasping the gutter with his hands, he quickly, but yet carefully, lowered himself, and then dropped to the earth.

No sooner did he reach it than the window through which he had just passed was dashed open, and several persons scrambled out of it on to the roof.

Turpin found himself standing in a narrow alley, but, hearing his pursuers so close behind him, did not pause for breath, but hastily wiped the perspiration from his face and set off at full speed.

A half-shout—half-yell—from the rear told him he was already seen.

He quickened his speed.

The alley he was traversing he knew would take him into Dudley-street, and he was in hopes, could he gain it, that he would, by the intimate knowledge of the locality he possessed, succeed in baffling his pursuers.

Oh! how he wished for his bonny steed when he did reach it, and looked up and down to assure himself that no enemy was in sight. How easy, then, would have been escape! But now there was every prospect of his being hunted through the streets on foot.

"Stop him! Stop him!" he heard his pursuers cry. "Stop him! A highwayman! A thousand pounds reward!"

The sounds came upon his ears with great distinctness.

He ran across the street and down another turning into Soho, but the shouts of the officers had aroused the neighbourhood, and there was quickly a crowd at his heels which increased in numbers every moment.

In as direct a line as he could, Turpin made his way towards the Oxford-road, as Oxford-street was then called, the vague idea of reaching the country filling his mind.

He had trusted by doubling the corners of the streets suddenly to get out of sight of his pursuers, and then seek shelter and concealment in a house.

But they were too close upon his track for this hope to hold possession of him long, and the whole of his energies were bent on running at a swifter pace than they.

A considerable distance had been already passed over, and Turpin began to show signs of exhaustion. His breathing was painful, and he staggered more than once. He felt quite sure that he could not much longer maintain his present speed, and unless succour of some kind presented itself, and that quickly, he must abandon all idea of getting free from those who were hunting him.

He passed by many a turning on his route down which he was afraid to turn lest it should be a yard and have no outlet. If he once went down one of these he would be caught like a rat in a trap.

Presently he saw a street which he recognised with a throb of delight. It was a very short one, and he plunged down it, and round the corner to the right and then to the left.

His pursuers were out of sight.

He redoubled his efforts.

Half-a-dozen turnings more, and he was in Oxford-road.

It is a very difficult matter to imagine one of the principal and most crowded thoroughfares in London a quiet country road, bounded by trees and meadows, and yet such was Oxford-street at the time of which we write.

Dick could hear the voices and footsteps of the crowd, but he could not see their forms.

On the other side of the way, and near a gate in a garden wall, was a servant in livery, leading a horse by the bridle, and apparently waiting for some one.

"A godsend!" said Dick. "I shall be free now!"

He rushed across the road as he spoke, and before the servant knew at all what was going to happen, he found himself sprawling on the ground.

Turpin was seated in the saddle in an instant.

He doubled up the reins, and struck the horse sharply across the shoulders.

It was a thoroughbred animal, unused to blows, and it reared and plunged voilently for several moments, then set off at a tremendous gallop.

The foremost of his hunters, though, were fairly in the Oxford-road before the horse started.

They set up a loud shout of anger and disappointment.

To their surprise, as well as Turpin's, who happened just then to turn his head, ten or twelve officers who had been chasing him on foot swept round the corner well mounted.

They had passed some livery stables on their way, and from thence obtained the cattle. Their stoppage was what had caused Turpin to gain upon them as he did.

They were in full sight of their prey.

Very fortunate, indeed, was it for Turpin that he had been lucky enough to obtain possession of a horse. The odds now were, if anything, in his favour.

The officers came along at a good rate.

It was a beautiful steed upon which Turpin was mounted, though of course very inferior to his own noble and was, no doubt, highly prized by its owner.

He made his way due west.

At length, after a gallop of about four miles, Turpin

reined up his steed upon the brow of a hill, and looked behind him.

The mounted police were just at its base, and good as was the speed he had made, he had not apparently gained a dozen yards upon them.

"The fellows must have got hold of some first-rate cattle; this one seems already to show signs of distress. Oh! for my own mare, Black Bess! Were she beneath me, I would laugh at all their efforts."

While speaking he had urged his horse to fresh exertion.

CHAPTER XVI.

DICK IS A WITNESS TO A VERY SINGULAR SCENE IN THE OLD COUNTRY CHURCH

THICK black clouds had hitherto wholly hidden the moon's face, but now through a large straggling rift she looked down upon the earth.

"Confound it!" said Turpin, as the bright rays fell upon his countenance. "I could have done very well without any more light. Now they will be able to see me a mile off."

The road was very straight; indeed, it must have been remarked by many, what a great distance it goes without making a bend either to the right or the left, so there was little or no exaggeration in Turpin's words, when he said the officers would be able to see him a mile off.

"I must get out of this, that's certain," he added. "Let me see; a little further on I shall come to what I call the Dark-lane, for want of a better name, and down that I will take my way. Ah! here it is!"

Even while he spoke, Turpin found he had arrived opposite the entrance of the lane, and he turned down it like a shot, disappearing from the gaze of the officers with a suddenness that must have appeared to them almost magical.

Turpin had very appropriately designated this lane by the adjective dark, for the trees on both sides grew to such a great height, and so very thickly together, that scarcely a ray of light of any description penetrated through them, and it seemed more like riding into a cave than aught else.

Turpin dashed onwards without suffering his horse to relax its speed in the least.

A few minutes when a horse is at full gallop will carry a rider over a great deal of ground, so in a very short time Turpin emerged from this lane into the high road again.

He could not see them, but he could hear the clatter of his pursuers' footsteps.

"Now for it," said Turpin. "I can't get clear by riding, so I will give them the slip. Ah! now that will do first-rate! Capital!"

He flung himself off his horse as he spoke.

He took the reins and tucked them tightly under the front of the saddle, then with the palm of his hand struck the horse a smart blow on the flank, which caused the high-mettled creature to gallop swiftly along the road.

Turpin passed over to the other side, and crawled through a gap in the hedge.

He found himself in a meadow, on the west side of which, over another hedge, was an old country church.

A loud shout, and apparently of gratification, let him know that the officers had reached the road.

"What can they be so pleased about, I wonder?" asked Turpin. "I will take a peep, through the hedge."

He did so, and was so astonished at what he saw that he almost betrayed his place of concealment by an exclamation!

The officers were standing in a throng near the end of the lane, looking attentively at something.

Turpin followed the direction of their eyes, and saw, for the second time, that spectral resemblance of himself.

The officers saw it, too; so it was clear there was no delusion about the matter; or rather, if there was, they were subject to it as well as himself.

The figure was standing in the middle of the highway, at about half a mile distant, looking back over his shoulder at the officers, and seemingly in such an attitude as to be able to start so soon as any symptom of motion showed itself upon their part.

Turpin was bewildered, and he looked first from the officers and then to his second self.

"What, oh! what can it be?" he asked. "What am I to think of this strange assumption of my own form! It would be perfect madness, or I would, as I resolved, rush forward and solve this mystery. Now I am compelled to inanition!"

By mutual consent, both parties seemed to have come to a halt for the purpose of resting their steeds, and so long as that distance was preserved between them neither could obtain the advantage of the other.

Turpin was full of curiosity and wonder to know what would happen next.

Suddenly the chief of the police uttered a few words to his companions, and then the whole of the troop, clapping spurs to their horses' sides sped quickly down the lane.

The spectre horseman, and whom they no doubt believed was Turpin himself, was not apparently at all disconcerted at this proceeding on the part of the officers, for he, too, gave the reins to his horse, and set off at full speed.

The officers gave a loud shout, as they commenced an immediate pursuit.

"This grows stranger, and more and more incomprehensible," said Turpin, as he rose from his recumbent position in the meadow. "Who can this mysterious being be who so closely simulates my form and dress, for that it is anything supernatural I resolutely disbelieve, and will do, yet the whole affair is most perplexing and mysterious. It is quite evident, though, that the officers are labouring under the impression that it is me. So far it is very good, since I have an opportunity of escape which I should not have had under other circumstances. Until, however, I find it out, I am quite certain I shall know no peace. I feel exceedingly desirous to know how the chase is getting on, and whether they have caught my double. Is there a tree anywhere I can climb? No!"

He looked all round as he spoke, but no tree of any magnitude, or from which anything like a view could be obtained, was in sight.

"Stop now," he added, as his eye fell upon the old church to which we have alluded. "Stop, now. That church seems to have a tolerably high spire. Now if I could only get up that I should see for miles round, first-rate."

No sooner did this thought enter his mind, than he hastened across the meadow to put it into execution. He soon reached the hedge, which he surmounted, and then rolled down a grassy bank into a very narrow, but picturesque-looking lane.

He was on his feet in a moment.

"Who'd have thought, now," he said, "that I was going to miss my footing in that manner? Never mind, it's all right. I suppose this narrow path leads to the church?"

Turpin was right enough in this supposition, and in a few minutes he reached the entrance to the graveyard.

As is often the case in country places, there was a right of road through the churchyard, so Turpin had no other trouble in entering than that of pushing through a turnstile.

He hurried up the broad, smooth, gravel path, and ascending a short flight of stone steps, stood beneath the porch.

A door was facing him, which he naturally enough supposed led into the church, and there was another on his right, which was, beyond a doubt, the one he wanted, namely, that leading to the belfry.

The almost full moon lent him sufficient light to make an examination of the door. It was fastened, but that was a circumstance of no importance, for it creaked open in a moment under the application of Turpin's fingers.

The blackness and silence of the tomb were before him.

Dimly though he could see by the faint light that straggled into the place a circular flight of steps.

He pulled the door after him, and, as it dragged a little on its hinges, it remained close shut, and to have looked at it from the other side no one would have dreamed it had been forcibly broken open.

There were loopholes in the stonework of the staircase at regular intervals, and through these the moon's rays shone with an exceedingly beautiful effect

Dick peeped through one or two of these on his way up the stairs, but the view through so narrow an aperture was too circumscribed for his purpose.

In less time than would have been believed, considering the strangeness and darkness of the place, Turpin reached the top of the steps, and withdrawing a large rusty bolt

pushed open a trap-door just over his head, after passing through which he found himself standing on the square, leaden roof of the church tower.

The beautiful prospect of many a mile of moon-lit country would have been quite sufficient to recompense anyone for the trouble of the ascent, and Dick looked around him with deep pleasure.

The perfect silence and repose that everywhere prevailed lent, too, a great charm to the scene.

Dick scanned the whole of the horizon with his keen eyes, but no traces either of pursuer or pursued were visible.

The broad, nigh road could be defined with great distinctness as it wound about as sinuously as a river, and as the earth in it was of a whitish colour, it looked like a band of silver winding among the bright green trees.

Turpin made a lengthened examination of all the landscape, but still being unable to see what he sought, prepared to descend again.

Yet he lingered upon the roof-tower of the old church; he knew not why he did so, unless it was the extreme beauty of the scene, to which no words of ours could do adequate justice.

Presently there came upon his ears a faint muffled sound, and placing one hand upon the stone battlement, he leaned forward in order to hear the sound better.

It gradually increased in loudness.

"Horsemen!" said Turpin, "that's certain, and going at a tremendous pace, too. It must be the officers. Surely they will be in sight directly."

The faint, muffled sound grew plainer and plainer, until the clatttering of horses' hoofs could be heard.

Just over the tall edgerows, but at a considerable distance, Dick could see a number of riders' hats gliding rapidly along.

"There they are—there they are!" exclaimed Dick, greatly excited; "why, they are coming back! Have they caught him, I wonder, and made him a prisoner?"

The horsemen had now, within a short distance, reached a bend in the road, after turning which they would be in full sight of Dick.

"It won't do to stand up like this," he said, "for some officious personage is sure to see me. I must be quite a conspicuous object up here!"

There was in reality no ground for apprehension, for Dick, when he spoke, quite forgot the height to which he had ascended. Still, he crouched low down on the roof, and peeped over the stonework anxiously.

He found his view was not in the least impeded, and he had the gratification of seeing a horseman sweep round the corner and come at a rapid pace along the road.

Although he was quite prepared, Dick could not help feeling a little agitated when this horseman came in sight.

His resemblance to himself was perfect.

He came along the road at a rapid pace.

In another moment the officers came round the bend, and catching sight of the flying horseman, with many gesticulations urged forward by whip and spur their almost exhausted cattle.

The interest with which Dick regarded them was most intense.

"I can't understand," he muttered, "how they have turned back and preserved the same positions, unless my personator has ridden bodily through them, and I should hardly think he would be foolhardy enough to do that. It is a thing I should think about twice before I did!"

He lost sight of them all at this juncture, as the road took another sudden turn, but he knew in a moment or two they must reach that part of it which passed by the church, and which for a distance of half a mile or more each way was in nearly a straight line, while from his elevated position he would be able to see over the hedgerows on each side of the lane.

Dick's double, for so in his mind he called him, very quickly made his appearance.

"He is gaining on them!" said Turpin, a tone of satisfaction in spite of himself tinging his voice. "He will soon distance them completely."

The officers now came in view.

Their horses seemed all but knocked up.

It was a most exciting race to Turpin, and he watched it with as much interest as folks do the Derby when they have some very heavy bets depending on the issue of it.

He forgot all about the caution which had induced him to crouch down behind the coping, but rose to his feet and waved his arms, almost uttering a shout in his excitement.

He became conscious of the risk he had run by seeing one of the officers in the road below turn round and point to the tower.

Turpin dropped down like a shot.

Still he ventured to look over. The man was evidently from his manner saying something very earnestly to his companions.

"Confound the fellow," said Turpin, as he looked at him. "I wonder now whether he saw me. What a fool I must have been to have stood up in that absurd fashion!"

It would appear that what the officer said was simply relative to the edifice itself, for the whole of them turned round in their saddles and gazed at it, but they did not slacken speed while doing so.

Five minutes more and they were out of sight.

Turpin turned away.

"I can't make it out," he said, as he felt his way down the steps; "can't make it out at all. Who can this man be who bears so remarkable a resemblance to myself, and dresses so much the same. I must wait patiently, I suppose. The mystery will be cleared up some day. It must unquestionably have been he I saw when mounted in the lane, only my excited fancy just then magnified him into a spectre!"

This was a very probable supposition, but whether it was a correct one time only can determine.

Turpin groped is way down the belfry stairs, and reached the bottom in what seemed to him to be an incredibly short time. However, there, by the faint light of the moon through a loophole above, he could see the door plain enough.

He pushed it open.

Instead, however, of passing into the porch as he expected, he found this door opened into the gallery of the church.

The interior, in contrast with the dark belfry staircase, was quite bathed in light, and a vague undefined feeling of curiosity caused Turpin to pass through this door, and after walking to the edge of the gallery he sat down upon one of the front seats and looked below him.

He happened to be facing the large stained glass window over the altar, and through this the moon's rays streamed with full force, lighting up all the body of the church, and leaving the remainder in deep shadow.

Scarcely even in the many scenes which he, in the course of a long career, had met with, had he found one so imposing as this. A rapt repose, such as can exist only in a sacred edifice, everywhere prevailed; and unconsciously and despite himself strange and solemn feelings filled his breast—feelings of whose existence he had hitherto been in ignorance.

It might be that he sat five minutes, or even ten, leaning his head upon his hands, and his elbow on the railing of the gallery, with his eyes fixed upon the beautiful stained window, and his mind abstracted from all things present, when a slight rattling sound made itself heard, and immediately recalled his energies.

He started like one suddenly awakened.

The rattling noise continued, and he listened in a vain endeavour to make out what it was.

In that old silent church it came upon the hearing clearly, though probably elsewhere it would have been unnoticed.

Although somewhat startled by the circumstance, Dick retained sufficient presence of mind to remain perfectly still.

In another instant he heard a sharp click, which was followed by a grating noise.

Then he heard a voice.

"Confound the old door!" said some one. "What a trouble I had to open it, to be sure! I must have that keyhole seen to to-morrow; it kept jumping about in a very improper manner! It must be bewitched! However, I knew it would have to yield to me in the end; me, Solomon Goggs, as has been beadle and sexton here a matter of forty years! That's why I had patience—I—I knew very well, when it kept bobbing about so, that if I took a careful aim the key would sure to go in, and so it did. Hold up!"

The speaker blundered against something in his path.

The words, however, which he had uttered, made things quite intelligible to Turpin.

It was the rattling of the key in the lock that had disturbed the highwayman's ruminations, and the thick tones in which the old man had spoken, and who had named himself Solomon Goggs, proclaimed pretty loudly that he was some distance gone in intoxication.

What was his motive for paying a visit to the church at so unusual an hour he had yet to learn, so Turpin remained quite quiet, and listened for him to speak again.

As he fully anticipated, he had not long to wait, for Mr. Solomon Goggs, beadle and sexton, had reached that point in his potations at which extreme loquaciousness began.

"Oh! I see now: It's one of the benches belonging to the free seats. Confound the free seats! There had no business to be such things in the church, leastwise of all, down stairs. To be sure, they're close to the door! I should like to know who it was pulled the bench out. Some of the low-minded mobocracy sort of people. It's just like their imperance, making me break my shins agen it! Come up, will you!"

The last words, apparently, were addressed to the bench against which he had stumbled, and which might be supposed to have been somewhat refractory, for the words were followed by a rumbling, creaking sound, which echoed and re-echoed through the building.

"That's right at last! What a night of adventures, to be sure! It's infernally disagreeable to have to come here—infernally disagreeable. I am well paid though, so I ought not to grumble! Still I am always aggravated when I have to leave pleasant company at the 'Well of Content!' The sooner this job's over the better, and then I shall stand a chance of getting back again before they have all gone!"

Thus speaking, the old man, in a devious, uncertain kind of way, made his way along the aisle of the church.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE SPECTRE HORSEMAN UNRAVELLED TO DICK'S UNQUALIFIED SATISFACTION.

A FEELING of mingled curiosity and interest to know what errand it was that at that unusual hour brought Mr. Solomon Goggs to the church took possession of Turpin's mind, and he waited very patiently to find out what it was.

Judging, however, that if he occupied his present position in front of the organ he would run a great risk of being discovered, he took the opportunity, while Mr. Goggs was busily moving the bench, and talking to himself, to step round to the right-hand side of the gallery, which happened to be shrouded in deep shadow, for the moon was not shining quite straight into the church, but rather obliquely; consequently, one side of the gallery was quite light, while the other was in darkness that seemed all the greater by the contrast it presented to the other. Here Turpin felt he was secure from discovery by any chance observation.

"How uncommonly bright the moon shines," continued Mr. Goggs, who was now not far from the chancel; "uncommonly bright it shines. Ha! ha! that's a good line—a musical line—ha! ha! Uncommonly bright, uncommonly bright, uncommonly bright it shines!"

Mr. Goggs, the beadle, chaunted the words to the tune of some pothouse ditty with which he was doubtless familiar. He ended with quite a loud "shines," which, in the stillness of the church, he considered came with a capital effect.

"Bravo! now, there's a stave! I wonder where anyone else is to be found, of my time of life, who could come that sort of thing. Uncom—uncom—uncommonly bright it shines! I am decidedly in voice to-night, and that makes the shame all the greater that I should have to leave my friends."

"He seems a nice sort of article," said Turpin, to himself. "I must certainly wait until I know what he is going to do. I have a presentiment that it will be something worth hearing. Hark!"

Mr. Solomon Goggs was speaking again.

"What's the good, too, I should like to know, of sending me here on such a bright night as this to light up the church? No good at all. No one would be able to see them, the moon shines so. I suppose, as it's no sort of concern of mine, I may as well light them."

With a tremulous hand, Mr. Goggs began to light, with a lamp which he carried with him, a number of tall wax candles on the altar. As he said, it did seem useless to light them, for the rays of the moon quenched them utterly.

It took Mr. Goggs some time to accomplish his task, and he kept muttering and grumbling all the while.

"I have no patience with such humbug, not I; why the deuce could not they come at a respectable hour, and not when the church ought to be left entirely to—ahem! those individuals who live underneath it!"

"Hang it! why don't he say what it is that has brought him here?" said Turpin, impatiently, "and not keep gabbling like that. I suppose if I want to gratify my curiosity I must wait."

"There, now," said Mr. Goggs, with an air of satisfaction, as the last candle took light,—"there now, that's all right, and I suppose they will be here directly, and I shall just have the place ready when they come."

Mr. Goggs now proceeded to dust and arrange some cushions, and this job seemed to require all his breath, for he did not utter a word while he was doing it.

"Ah!" he sighed, as he rose up and straightened his back, "that's done. It kill's me a'most to knock them cushions about. I'll take a walk down to the door and see if they are on their way."

"The deuce take it!" said Turpin, as the beadle tottered down the aisle, "why don't he say who's coming? I almost fancy, from his preparations, it's only going to be a marriage, and yet who can it be at this hour in this out-of-the way place? There's something mysterious in it, that's certain, and I will stay to see it out."

At this moment, Mr. Goggs opened the church-door to have a look out, and, as soon as he did so, the grating of carriage-wheels reached Turpin's ears.

He leaned over the balcony of the gallery and tried to see who was coming. He was unable to account for the intense curiosity he felt.

The grating of the wheels ceased.

Then there was a murmur of voices, and a party of five immediately entered the church.

The first who made his way up the aisle was attired in clerical robes, and, by the pure light which streamed in, Turpin could perceive he possessed a remarkable, oily-looking countenance, and a portly body to correspond.

Next came two persons, and these, in a moment, riveted the whole of his attention.

They were male and female.

The former was a fair-haired, good-enough-looking young man, though many would have been displeased with several traits in his physiognomy if they had been considered apart; but in their entirety they would, by any but a very keen observer, have been passed over unnoticed.

He was bareheaded, so Dick had a good opportunity of studying his features; not, however, that he did so particularly, for he had recognised him at the first glance.

It was the afterwards Earl of Bristol, though at that time the chances of his succeeding to the title were very remote, and he was known only as the Honourable Mr. Hervey.

With an increasing interest, Turpin turned his gaze upon the fair companion at his side, but she was shrouded from head to foot in a rich white lace veil, so he was unable to see her countenance.

From her form and carriage there could not be the slightest doubt that she was both young and beautiful.

Behind them, again, were two females, one of whom walked a step or two in advance of the other, as if to show, even in God's temple, where all should surely be alike, that she who followed was an inferior.

Neither of these where known to Turpin.

The rear was brought up by Mr. Solomon Goggs, the beadle, who seemed to have shaken off a great deal of his intoxication, for he walked along in a very pompous manner indeed.

The minister opened the little gate in the iron railings in front of the communion-table, and stepped into the enclosure.

The Hon. Mr. Hervey and his companion knelt down on the cushions, which had nearly broken the back of Mr. Goggs to dust and ashes.

The two females stood a little on one side, and spoke together in a whisper.

Mr. Goggs, from some safe corner where he had placed it, took a long black staff, with a formidable gilt affair on the top, with the sight whereof on a Sunday morning he was wont to strike terror to the souls of the charity children in the back seats in the gallery.

"It's going to be a marriage," thought Turpin, "that's evident enough. But what in the world can be Mr. Hervey's motive for coming here in the dead of night to be married? There's something wrong going on, I know! I wish I could see the bride's face!"

Never did a wish meet with a speedier gratification than this did; for no sooner were the words out of his mouth than the prospective bride raised her hands, and threw the large white veil off her face.

A very beautiful countenance was then revealed. Full of gaiety and sparkling vivacity it doubtless, from its configuration, generally was, but now the cheeks were wet with tears.

But if Turpin's surprise was great upon seeing Mr. Hervey, it was a thousand times increased when the bright moonbeams fell upon this fair face. He recognised it instantly, for he had seen it many times, and it had never failed to call forth his greatest admiration.

Her name sprang involuntarily to his lips.

"Elizabeth Chudleigh!"

This extraordinary woman, who was afterwards so notorious as the Duchess of Kingston, was at this time occupying the position of maid of honour to the Princess of Wales—the mother of George III.—and had already, by her levity and intrigues, created an unenviable reputation.

But that she should be thus about to pledge herself to the gentleman by her side filled Turpin with astonishment, for popular rumour said she was betrothed to the Duke of Devonshire, who was then travelling on the continent.

His speculations were interrupted by the minister commencing the ceremony.

As it proceeded the maid of honour became violently agitated, and she who stood behind her with the domestic stepped forward, and, placing her hand upon her shoulder, whispered a few words in her ear.

She shuddered, and became calm.

In thick, unctuous tones, the minister went on reading the service.

At length he came to that portion where the bridegroom has to place the wedding-ring upon the finger of the bride. She refused to hold out her hand.

A look of the greatest conceivable vexation crossed Mr. Hervey's face, and, seizing her by the wrist, he forced the ring upon her finger.

The clergyman pretended to take no notice of the circumstance.

Again a few words were spoken to the bride by the female, who possessed apparently much power over her, but this time in a louder tone.

Dick strained his sense of hearing to the utmost, but he could not catch their import.

They appeared, however, to have their due effect, for the maid of honour—now in name only—ceased her struggles, and resigned herself to her fate.

The ceremony was completed, and the bride and bridegroom rose to their feet.

The former was very pale.

"What secret agency," asked Dick of himself, "can be at work? What power is it that woman possesses to cause this girl to do that which I am certain her heart does not approve? She loathes this man! I can see it in her countenance! However, I cannot interfere, and, even if I could, it is now too late!"

Mr. Hervey took the hand of his young bride, and, having kissed it, placed it beneath his arm.

The whole party then proceeded, headed by the beadle and his staff, to the vestry of the church, the door of which, as soon as they had passed through it, closed after them with a bang.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DICK SETS OUT FOR LONDON IN SEARCH OF BLACK BESS, AND HAS A NARROW ESCAPE OF HIS LIFE.

"Now this," said Dick, as he rose from his seat and gave himself a good shake; "now this is a little affair which, although there does not seem to be an opportunity at the present, I shall try my best to unravel. It has in it every element of the mysterious; besides which, I feel a very warm interest in this young wife, and it will go hard if we do not become better acquainted than we are at present. Who knows my unsuspected presence at this secret marriage? and my being a witness of it may be a circumstance that will, perhaps, some day turn out to my advantage?"

By the time Turpin had finished these reflections the vestry door was opened, and the little party again made their way into the church.

They did not pause, however, but went straight to the entrance and departed.

The clergyman and the beadle remained upon the threshold.

Turpin heard the grating of the wheels of the vehicles along the gravelled avenue.

"They're gone," said Mr. Goggs.

"Sir?" said the parson, "did my hearing deceive me, or were those words addressed to me?"

"I humbly begs your honour's worship's pardon, sir," replied Mr. Goggs, in a cringing tone. "Very humbly begs it."

The parson put on an air of importance.

"You should bear in mind, Mr. Goggs," he said, pomposely, "that there is a certain amount of proper deference due from you to me."

"I humbly is aware of that, your worship. I merely ventured to remark, or rather to make the observation, that our late honoured and respected bridal party had gone."

"It was a piece of unwarrantable presumption upon your part, Mr. Goggs."

"Oh! your worship!"

"A man, Mr. Goggs, who has filled under me the posts or duties of beadle and sexton for so many years as you have ought to know better than make such a disrespectful assertion!"

"Yes, your worship."

"You should never assert anything to me as a fact, Mr. Goggs, if you are ever so assured of it; but you may venture, in a proper sort of way, to mildly suggest anything to me, but nothing more!"

"Very good, your worship."

"Now put out the candles, Mr. Goggs, and then lock up the church."

"I will, your honour's most respectful worship. Good-night, your worship!"

"Good-night, Goggs! good-night!"

"Him be hanged!" growled the beadle, as he turned and came up the aisle. "'Good-night, Goggs!' forsooth! Why don't he set me the example of being so d——d respectful?"

"That's just what I should like to know, old fellow!" said Turpin, as he leaned over the gallery, and looked with a quizzical expression into the face of Mr. Goggs.

We really wish we could convey a proper idea of the look of blank astonishment that overspread the beadle's face as the unexpected sound of a human voice fell upon his ear. He glared all round with wide open mouth and eyes.

"Don't be afraid: it's all right!" said Turpin.

As he spoke he got upon the edge of the gallery, and jumped into the pulpit, which was but a foot or two below him.

"The devil! the devil!" screamed Mr. Goggs, in an agony of fear. "Help! help! Murder! murder!"

In some inexplicable way he seemed to roll down the aisle, and out of the front door of the church in a moment.

Turpin roared with laughter as he descended the pulpit stairs.

When he reached the door the beadle was quite out of sight.

"I fancy I have disturbed his nervous system a little, and given him a fright that he won't get over yet a bit. I shouldn't wonder, though, if he don't arouse some one and come back, so I had better make myself scarce."

Turpin sauntered down the gravel path towards the turnstile.

He paused for a moment with his hand upon one of its crossbars.

"How am I to get Bess?" he asked himself.

could not help it, and yet I wish I had not left her behind. I suppose the only thing I can do is to make my way back to London with the least possible delay, and in the best way I can."

No living moving thing was in sight as he directed his steps down the green leafy lane into the high road.

"It surely must be near day break," said Turpin, as he looked up at the sky, "and yet I see no light in the east. I suppose it is because the moon shines so brilliantly."

He walked rapidly along the highway in the direction of London, and after proceeding rather more than a mile saw something which filled him with pleasure.

It was a waggon, drawn by a team of horses, creeping slowly up a hill.

"That's the ticket," said Turpin, as he changed his walk to a run. "I will try if I cannot ride the rest of the way to town."

Turpin gained very rapidly upon the waggon, and overtook it just as the driver came to a halt about half way up the hill.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE OFFICERS SURROUND THE MARKET WAGGON, AND MAKE TURPIN A PRISONER.

"Hoy!" shouted Turpin.

"Well, what now?" asked the driver, who seemed only partially awake.

"You're on your way to London, ain't you?"

"What if I be?"

"Don't be surly—I know you are. I want you to give me a lift."

The man roused up a little on hearing this, and from his very high seat looked down curiously upon Turpin.

"I don't mind if I do give you a lift," he said, after a few minutes' observation.

"All right."

"That is," he added, "if you don't mind riding a-top of the carrots and turnips, and standing some beer as soon as we reach the 'Red Cow' at Acton."

"With all my heart. How far is it?"

"Well, maybe it's a matter of four miles."

"No more?"

"No. Climb up, I mon't wait."

With a little difficulty Turpin climbed up on to the top of the waggon. It was one of those huge, clumsy conveyances, drawn by five powerful horses, which, by an early riser, are still to be seen crawling every morning into Covent-garden market.

Turpin found himself on a not very soft place to sit down upon, and about fourteen feet from the ground.

As soon as he had settled himself a little the driver addressed some words to his horses in a language which was quite unintelligible to Turpin, but apparently not so to the horses, for they shook their heads, causing the bells on their harness to tinkle, and began to descend the hill.

Turpin soon found his most comfortable position was a recumbent one, so he adopted it, resting his head on his elbow.

"You are out uncommonly early," he said to the countryman, for Turpin was one who could never remain in anybody's company long without beginning a conversation of some sort. "have you come far?"

"Just t'other side Uxbridge; that's all."

"Going to market, I suppose?"

"I be."

"What time is it?"

"Not much arter three. Kim up!"

"Three! Is it possible you get to market so early? You must start overnight."

"I be very late this morning. I shall be one o' the last in. Some'll have been there four hours before me."

"Indeed!"

"Them as comes fust gets rid o' their load fust, and gets the best price for it."

"Oh! that's it, is it?"

"Yes, it be."

"So you all try how soon you can get there?"

"We does."

"Then how is it you are so late this morning?"

"Why you see, it was through a accident. There's a very narrow gate leading from our farm into the road, as is barely wide enough to let this waggon through."

Turpin could hardly help laughing at the idea of calling it a narrow gate that would allow such a monstrous four-wheeled affair to pass through; but the man was right enough: he spoke comparatively, and all things are big or little, wide or narrow, by comparison.

"Well, what then?" he asked.

"Why there was a brick's end or summat lying in the way, and I was just guiding the team through the gate, when the darned thing turned the fore-wheel a bit aside, and bump against the post it went, and off came the hind one."

"That was a misfortune."

"But that ain't the worst part of it."

"No?"

"No. In consekence of the wheel coming off the waggon upset, and out came all the carrots and turnips. Warn't old Gripps just savagerous."

"Who?"

"Old Gripps; that's my gaffer, and him as owns the farm."

"Oh, I see!"

"He came down like a roaring bull, and didn't he set on to I? But 'twarn't my fault, I couldn't help it."

"Put you put matters all right?"

"Oh! yes; we put on a new wheel, and loaded the waggon again; but it took above five hours altogether."

"And you will lose the sale for a great deal of your stuff?"

"Oh! I don't know for that, but I sha'n't get such a good price as I ought."

In such rude talk as this Dick whiled away the time which otherwise would have passed very slowly, and he was quite surprised when the driver said:

"We're at Acton now, and yonder by the roadside you can see the truss of straw hanging outside the 'Red Cow.'"

"Oh! is that it? There seems a good many horses and men about."

"Yes, sure to be. Some'll be going to market, but more coming back, and we always stop for a little while both going and coming, so on market days they do a little trade."

"They must do."

As they approached the old inn, the bustle became greater and greater, and the road was quite choked up with vehicles.

The driver who had given Dick a lift was obliged to draw up fifty yards or so from the inn door.

"Now, my friend," said Turpin, as the man prepared to alight, "I don't want to come down and enter the inn with you, but here is half-a-crown, and you can get what you like for yourself."

"Thank your honour," he said, holding out his hand.

Turpin placed the coin within it.

The driver looked very closely and earnestly into Turpin's face as he did so, and then by the exercise of great gymnastic skill got down off his seat.

Dick laid still closer down upon the vegetables, for he by no means wished to court observation.

No thought of the danger which menanced him entered his mind, and as he laid down and looked up at the sky, he fell into a deep reverie.

We will return to the driver.

As soon as he found his feet touch the earth, he cast one anxious glance up at the top of his waggon, and then made his way as quickly as he could towards the "Red Cow."

His purpose he no doubt considered a vitally important one.

He had recognised Turpin, for he had once before had a good look at him as the highwayman stood at an inn door.

The first glance which he gave when Turpin asked for a lift, was sufficient to assure him of his identity, for the man possessed the by no means uncommon faculty of immediately recognising anyone he had once seen.

When, however, Turpin placed the money in his hand, their faces were close together, and he had an opportunity of scrutinizing Dick's closely, which confirmed him in his recognition. He was quite sure he was not mistaken.

There was a great number of people standing round the front door of the "Red Cow," drinking and making an early breakfast, and he was rather at a loss how to proceed.

He knew what a large amount was offered for Turpin a

apprehension—a fortune for a man of his position; and, of course, he naturally enough wished to obtain as large a share of it himself as he possibly could.

It was in this way the large rewards offered for the simple apprehension of a criminal in those days defeated their own object, for it made people think just as the driver of the market-waggon did.

At length, after some moments' cogitation, finding himself just as undecided as he was before, he resolved to take the landlord of the "Red Cow" into his confidence, and be guided by him as to what he ought to do.

He was impelled to this course by the conviction that he had no time to lose, for if he was absent many moments the highwayman's suspicions would be aroused, and then the large sum of money would slip through his fingers.

Like most of those persons who are slow to come to a decision, the driver was in a violent hurry to act upon it as soon as it was made, and he hastened down the passage towards the bar with the dread at his heart that he should be too late.

His spirits sank to zero when he saw the landlord wholly intent upon serving his customers, whom, however, he could not supply fast enough, for many were clamouring loudly for refreshment.

It did not require a second glance to show him the hopelessness of being able to ask the landlord's advice, so he was again thrown upon his own resources.

He was beginning to despair, when he noticed for the first time that among those who were standing at the bar were four or five London police-officers.

He considered their presence as something providential.

With the manner of a perfect maniac, he made a rush at the police-officer who was nearest to him, and, seizing him by the collar, began to drag him along the passage of the inn.

The driver was a tall, robust fellow, strong enough to pick up an ox and carry it in his arms; so he had the police-officer, who happened to be the smallest of the lot, out into the yard in front of the inn in a twinkling.

The others set down their glasses, and followed them with wonder in their looks.

The driver was a little out of breath—not with exertion, but excitement; and when he had got the officer outside, he could not speak, but kept opening and shutting his mouth in a most extraordinary manner.

The officer felt convinced he was in the clutches of a madman, and he shouted for help.

The others sprang forward to his rescue.

"Reward!" gasped the driver.

The officers pricked up their ears, and thought they had, perhaps, got hold of a good thing.

The one in command, and who was a purple-faced, apoplectic-looking man, with a temper as short as his neck, no sooner heard the driver pronounce the word "reward," than he seized him by the neck, and, in the strength which passion for a moment gave him, shook him to and fro.

"Speak out, you dolt!" he cried. "Make haste! What have you got to say?"

It was a fatal course to pursue, if he wished to elicit any information.

"Reward!" was all the countryman could utter, but he pointed in the direction of the waggon. As, however, there were at least a dozen standing about, the officers were not much wiser.

"Reward for what?" they cried, while the purple-faced man looked as though he meditated a second attack.

"Thousand pounds!" said the driver.

"Dick Turpin it is!" they exclaimed. "He has caught him, and wants the reward!"

The driver nodded his head rapidly.

He did not see the sly wink the officers gave their companions, or he would have sunk to the ground in dismay. It was so dreadfully expressive.

"Where is he? Show him to us, and you shall have the reward!"

"He's lying down on the top of my waggon o' turnips. Come along; I'll show him to you."

They obeyed with alacrity, and the officer with the purple face, as he passed the front door of the inn, shouted, as loud as he could—

"Let those who wish to earn five pounds in the next five minutes follow me!"

It was ludicrous to see with what haste those who were drinking put down their glasses and made a rush out of the door of the inn.

The bar was vacant in an instant.

Then, seeing the officers a few yards off running with all their might, they hurried after them as fast as their legs would carry them over the ground.

CHAPTER XX.

DICK TURPIN HAS A VERY UNCOMFORTABLE JOURNEY TO LONDON IN COMPANY WITH THE POLICE.

In the meantime, Turpin lay placidly enough on his rather hard bed of vegetables.

Strange to say, he felt perfectly secure, and no thought of danger entered his head for a moment.

His mind was filled with the image of the fair Elizabeth Chudleigh, whose marriage he had seen solemnized under such peculiar circumstances, and so much did the subject engross his attention, that the hubbub which had taken place in the inn-yard had failed to rouse him, and it was not until the officers actually reached the waggon that he was aware of the peril in which he was placed.

He recovered, though, in a moment the use of his thoughts and limbs, and he sprang to his feet instantly.

He saw at a glance he was taken, and that, unless something most miraculous occurred, there was not the slightest possibility of his making his escape.

"Give in, give in at once, Dick!" shouted the officer with the purple face. "It's all up with you! You're done as brown as a hammer! We mean to take you; alive, if we can—if not, why dead, of course!"

He very coolly cocked a pistol as he spoke, and presented it full at Turpin.

The highwayman's position could scarcely, by any possibility, have been worse than it was. Perched up fourteen feet from the ground, and on top of objects that would impede his descent, and surrounded on every side by foes—for those who had left their drink at the bar in obedience to the police-officer's summons had placed themselves all round in a circle—all retreat was absolutely cut off; for, though these men were not armed, yet, as soon as he began to descend by the waggon, their numbers were so great, that they would have closed round him and overpowered him immediately.

Situated, too, as he was, he had no means of making an effective attack upon his foes.

"Come down, Turpin!" said the purple-faced officer again. "Come down, my boy, and give in handsomely! It's no good you getting up a row! You have led me a nice dance to-night, and how you came to be on top of this waggon I can't conceive, for I chased you as far as this in the direction of London."

Turpin smiled. It was, doubtless, his double to whom he alluded.

Still he showed no signs of complying with the officer's very polite request, who began, therefore, to grow more purple than usual in the face as his impatience increased.

"Up with you!" he shouted to his men. "Climb up on the waggon and make him your prisoner, since he's fool enough not to come down!"

With a readiness and courage which certainly did them credit, the officers sprang forward at the word, and began to climb up the ropes by which the vegetables were secured to the waggon, in a very reckless manner.

Turpin's position was getting critical.

He looked about among the turnips in the hope of finding a pitchfork, which, of course, in the hands of a desperate man, would be a most dangerous weapon, but there was not one.

In fact, there was nothing whatever on the top, with the exception of two beams of wood, the use of which he could not conjecture, but these were too heavy for him to wield.

The heads of the officers just appeared above the bunches of turnips.

"This will never do," said Dick. "Ah! why didn't I think of that before?"

The waggon was a trifle nearer one side of the road than the other, and over the hedgerow Dick could see an extensive meadow.

If it had been soil, it would have been risking life and limb to have jumped it, but he noticed that just on the other side of the hedge a quantity of loose rubbish had



[TURPIN SWEARS FRIENDSHIP WITH TOM KING.]

been heaped up, doubtless for the purpose of burning, and when he saw this the idea occurred to him of jumping from the top of the waggon upon it and then trusting to his luck.

Just as the first officer crawled on to the top of the waggon, Dick gave a spring, and in an instant alighted on the heap of rubbish.

The shock was very great, and Turpin felt as if all the breath had been suddenly knocked ont of his body, and he was a moment or so before he could rise.

That brief interval of time was fatal to him.

The officer was, of course, much surprised to see Turpin make such a flying leap, but with praiseworthy bravery he followed his example.

Turpin was just getting up, when he was prostrated again with great violence by this officer falling upon him.

The concussion almost deprived him of consciousness, but he still retained sufficient of his senses to feel himself clutched round the throat by no gentle hand.

Then a desperate struggle ensued.

The odds were fearfully against Turpin, but he fought bravely.

In a moment or two, and before he could free himself from his foe, the other officers and the market-waggoners had run a little way down the road, and climbed over a gate, and were making towards him at full speed.

They cast themselves bodily upon the combatants.

The officer with the remarkable purple visage was overjoyed, and he danced about in a most extraordinary manner in token of his satisfaction.

"Hurrah! Bravo! Nabbed at last! I knew I should have him! A thousand pounds, too! What a glorious sum! Pity it's got to be shared amongst so many!"

A cloud obscured the sunshine of his joy as this reflection crossed him, and he ceased his triumphal dance abruptly.

He began to rack his brain to devise some scheme for appropriating to himself the greatest part of the money.

Bleeding, bruised, and exhausted, Turpin was raised to a standing posture.

A dozen hands grasped each of his arms, and a pair of handcuffs were locked upon his wrists.

The redoubtable highwayman was a prisoner.

He was judged, however, to be not sufficiently secure, so a piece of strong cord was passed through his elbows, and then drawn tight behind him.

The position of his arms thus pinioned gave him intolerable pain, but he scorned either by word or gesture to make his captors aware of the fact.

The probability is, if he had, that any remonstrance from him on such a subject would meet with nothing but derision.

He was deprived of all means of effectual resistance, so, instead of further exhausting himself, and furnishing his foes with a pretext for additional ill-usage, he to all appearance quietly resigned himself to his fate.

We have said to all appearance, for though he was outwardly calm, his heart was burning against the waggoner who had so treacherously betrayed him.

Those who had succeeded in capturing him stood round in a dense crowd.

"Bring him along!" said the chief officer. "Bring him along! He shall be found in lodgings for a few days!"

As he spoke he led the way across the field, through the gate along the road, and to the "Red Cow" inn.

He was followed by his well-escorted prisoner.

All halted when they reached the inn yard.

"Fetch out the horses, Perkins," cried the chief officer. "They are already saddled and bridled, so look sharp!"

"All right, sir," said Perkins, as he disappeared into the stables.

The treacherous waggoner kept close to Dick. In his eyes he was the representative of so many guineas, and he was unwilling to trust him out of his sight.

One of the officers drew near to his chief, and spoke to him in a whisper.

"Mr. Wriggles," he said. "Mr. Wriggles."

"Well, Instone, what is it? Speak low."

This was said in quite a condescending way, so the officer who had been named Instone felt emboldened in what he was going to say.

"I hope you'll excuse me, Mr. Wriggles, but I don't like the idea of having to share the reward with all these country bumpkins"——

"Especially after the trouble we had in the kitchen at St. Giles's, and riding for hours all over the country."

"The idea is outrageous in the extreme, in my humble opinion, Mr. Wriggles."

"And mine, too, Instone."

"Well, sir, I wanted to ask you if we couldn't get out of it in some way?"

"I should like, but I don't see how it's to be done."

"Nor I! And yet"——

"Can't you suggest anything?"

"Well, no, without we fobbed them off with a promise, and then crept out of performing it in the best way we could."

"If nothing better can be thought of, we must do that. The greater part of them, if not all, have been up to London, and are on their way home, so we shall not have very much trouble with them; but, as for this waggoner who put us down on the job, why he appears to be going to London with his load, and if so we shall have a bother to do him."

"So I think, Mr. Wriggles. Just look how he watches Dick. Talk of a cat watching a mouse, why it's nothing to it."

"Nothing, as you say. Oh! here comes Perkins."

As he spoke Perkins and the ostler came out of the stable with five horses ready equipped for the road.

The poor animals, though, looked dreadfully fatigued, and it was quite evident the officers' journey to London would not be a very rapid one.

"Now, Perkins!" shouted Mr. Wriggles. "Make haste, you've been a long while fetching them."

"I know that, but I couldn't help it. The poor 'osses is so tired, I could not persuade them to get up nohow."

"Never mind! Mount! You, Instone, take the prisoner behind you. Your horse must carry double for a bit, and then we will change, and take it in turns all the way."

"Very good, sir."

Dick Turpin was raised and seated in the saddle.

Already had a plan of escape matured itself in his mind, and any resistance just then would only have had the effect of destroying it, so he suffered them to do with him as they pleased.

The men, however, were evidently prepared for a desperate struggle, and were somewhat surprised at the tameness with which he submitted to his fate.

Mr. Wriggles was well pleased to observe it, for he had rather an exaggerated idea of Dick's powers of mischief, but he did not attribute the highwayman's quiet behaviour to its real cause.

"My friends," he said to the people in the inn-yard, as he got on the back of his own steed and took his place at the head of the little cavalcade, "I promised those who assisted me five pounds a-piece for doing so."

"You did—you did!" they cried, crowding eagerly around him.

"Well, I spoke on behalf of the Secretary of State. Of course, I have not the hundred pounds or so that would be required to satisfy you in my possession now, but if you will call on the Secretary of State any morning at ten o'clock the money will be paid."

There was a look of blank disappointment upon the faces of those who, for purely mercenary motives, were so ready to lend their aid to capture Turpin. None of them seemed to like the idea of waiting upon the Secretary of State.

Murmurs of dissatisfaction arose.

"It's no good grumbling at me, my friends," said Mr. Wriggles. "You were in duty bound, without the offer of money, to lend your assistance towards making this man a prisoner, and all I have got to say is, that those who do not like to go to the Secretary of State for their five pounds must go without having them."

Turpin had scarcely anticipated this, and it, to some extent, disturbed the plans he had already made; but of course he could not let so favourable an opportunity go by without making an effort to turn it to his advantage.

He turned towards the people, and spoke rapidly:

"It's all humbug what he has been telling you. Don't believe it. He has no authority to make such a statement respecting the Secretary of State, and you would only get laughed at by the officials if you went there on such an errand. The officers here want to do you out of your share of the reward and pocket it all themselves. Set upon them; they deserve it for their duplicity. Free me from them, and I will give you every one not five pounds each, but ten, and that upon the spot. Now then, what do you say? Dick Turpin was never yet known to break his word. Set me free!"

Absolute passion prevented Mr. Wriggles from interrupting Dick in making this speech. He tried to give some orders to his men, but his mouth only opened, while his countenance changed from red to purple, and then from purple to black.

He was in imminent danger of strangulation when Dick finished, but then he recovered his voice.

"Gag him! knock him down! kill him!" he shrieked. "Don't let him utter another word!"

Dick just had time to say—

"Set me free, friends all, and I will keep my word," when a twisted handkerchief was thrown across his mouth and tied tightly at the back of his head.

"Hear, hear!" shouted several of the throng. "Set him free! set him free! We can trust to his word, but we can't to the officers'. They have deceived us already. Down with them!"

The whole of the crowd seemed to be unanimous upon this point, for, while these words were yet upon their lips, they made a rush upon the officers, who were scarcely prepared to resist them.

The numbers of their opponents were four to one, and, though they were armed and mounted, they stood but a poor chance.

Dick felt himself seized and dragged off his horse in a moment, and the gag removed from his mouth.

"Cut the cord behind me!" he cried, as he found his feet touch the ground, "and then I will assist you."

It was done instantly.

Then there were the handcuffs, which he had forgotten; but by this time the whole of the officers had been pulled off their horses, and were held firmly upon the ground.

The victory was complete.

It was an easy-enough matter to take a key out of one of their pockets and unlock the handcuffs.

Dick was once more a free man.

"Thanks for your service, my friends!" he shouted; "I will keep my word; you shall have the money I have promised, and as much over as I have got; but first let us punish these cowardly redbreasts."

"Bravo! bravo! We will! we will!"

"Then fetch as much rope as you can."

Two or three set off, and returned with a quantity of thick rope, which they had got out of their waggons.

"Now," said Turpin, naturally assuming the command, "tie them in twos, back to back."

This manœuvre was quickly executed, and then they found, of course, they had one officer over, for there were five in all.

"Tie him to the waggoner who betrayed me," said Turpin.

In spite of his protestations and desperate resistance, this was done.

They were all quite harmless and helpless.

"Now, I further propose," said Dick, "that we lift them up just as they are, and put them on their horses' backs, and start them off to London."

This was a proposition which rather tickled the fancy of the countrymen; so laughing heartily, they proceeded to put it into execution.

The officers cursed, swore, and threatened.

No heed was paid to them whatever, and they were tied on their horses' backs.

"Good-bye, Mr. Wriggles," said Dick, as he struck the horse upon which that functionary was placed a sharp blow on the flank, causing the jaded creature to set off at a trot; "good-bye—a pleasant journey to you."

The men sent the others off also, and away they went along the high road towards London, screaming out oaths and volleys of abuse the while.

CHAPTER XXI.

TURPIN FINDS HIS PURSE EXHAUSTED, AND RESOLVES TO REPLENISH IT BY STOPPING THE WESTERN COACH, IN WHICH ENTERPRISE TOM KING RENDERS HIM ESSENTIAL ASSISTANCE

THE countrymen and Dick watched the officers until they were out of sight, and then the latter turned round to address them.

They gave a cheer as he did so, but he held up his hands for silence.

"I cannot," he said, "say enough to you in token of my thanks for the great service you have rendered me. Believe me, I am most grateful. You have acted wisely, so far as your own interests are concerned, by freeing me, for the officers never intended to give you anything for your trouble, but merely use you as tools for their own ends. However, I will keep my word."

As he spoke, Dick put his hand into his pocket, and produced the purse he had taken from Sir Theodore Houghton.

"I offered you ten pounds a-piece," he said, "and I did not say fifteen for the sole reason that I did not know exactly how much money I had about me, and I did not like to promise more than I could perform."

"Hurrah!"

"However, here is my purse, and I intend to share it equally among you. I know there will be nothing under ten pounds a-piece. How many of you are there?"

There was a rapid counting of heads, and then a voice said:

"Twenty-two."

"Twenty-two; that will be two hundred and twenty pounds altogether. Stand forward one at a time."

The men readily came forward, for such a sum seemed a wonderful amount to them, for their week's earnings probably did not amount to as many shillings.

Turpin counted out ten guineas into the hand of every one, and then he found he had a considerable sum left.

"Stand forward again," he said; "I am never liberal by halves, and I will share my purse with you to the last guinea."

He gave them each five guineas, and then found a few remaining.

These he took in his hand, and flung them up in the air to be scrambled for when they came down.

"That will do to drink my health with," he said.

"We mun look sharp," said one, "for we shall be mun late this morning."

"Never mind that for one," said Turpin, catching one of the officer's horses by the bridle, and vaulting into the saddle. "I shall insist on your all drinking my good health for the sake of the landlord here. Farewell!"

Without then uttering another word himself, or giving those to whom he had behaved so liberally an opportunity of so doing, he clapped his spurs to the horse's flanks, which made him set forward as quickly as his tired limbs would allow.

Day was beginning to dawn, and he looked warily around him.

No one, however, was in sight, but ere he had proceeded a couple of miles, the faint sound of a horn came upon his ears.

He reined up at once.

"That is the western coach, or I am very much mistaken," he said, "and it comes most opportunely. I have cleared out my pockets, and I must fill them again somehow. I don't think my freedom very dear at the price I have paid for it, and congratulate myself for having got out of so awkward a scrape so well. Black Bess now is all I want."

A shade of anxiety came over his face as he reflected upon the great difficulty there must inevitably be in regaining possession of her, yet without her he felt he could do nothing.

He almost forgot the coach that was approaching, until another blast of the horn warned him that it would soon reach the spot on which he was standing.

"Oh! the coach. Now I'll warrant it's well loaded, and carries a good booty. It is rather daring to stop so many people at day-dawn, but Dick Turpin is just the man to do it!"

"This, though," he added, "is not at all a suitable place for the job. I am on too high ground. Now, there is a hollow a little further on, with tall trees growing thickly on both sides of the way, and which is always in shadow, even in broad daylight, so that will be the place. I will make the best of my way there."

The winding notes of the horn reached his ears for the third time as he urged his horse forward to the spot he had mentioned, and which was known on the countryside by the name of Deadman's Hollow.

At the rate Dick went he very soon reached this place.

As he had fully anticipated, he found it quite dark, and it became more and more so as he advanced.

Near the centre Deadman's Hollow was intersected by a narrow cross-country lane, and Dick considered if he backed his horse a little way into the entrance of it, he should be able to dart out and take the guard and driver by surprise.

With this intent, then, he increased his speed, and, on reaching the corner, was about to turn round, when, to his unutterable surprise, a mounted man suddenly darted out from it, and placed a pistol to his breast.

"Stand!" he cried, in just such sharp, sudden tones as Turpin himself made use of. "Your money or your life!"

For the space of about half a minute these two men looked at each other in silence.

The eyes of both had become accustomed to the deep gloom in the place, and they could see each other with perfect distinctness.

Dick saw before him his double, the spectre horseman.

There was, however, nothing spectre-like about him now. There he stood palpable enough, and the pistol that was pressed against Dick's breast had a most material feel.

Still he was not in the least alarmed, but only curious to know what should happen next, and who this person really was who resembled him so closely.

All this happened with great rapidity, and before the half-minute had expired Dick had drawn from his holsters a short-barrelled pistol, and with a speed and dexterity acquired only by long practice, clapped it to his opponent's breast, at the same time that he shouted:

"Stand yourself! Hand over all you possess, and that quickly, or you are a dead man!"

It was now the other's turn to be surprised, but he quickly recovered himself as he replied

"This is a poor jest, as you will find to your cost, Hand over!"

"Ha! ha! ha!

Dick laughed loudly—it seemed to him so excessively droll to be stopped on the highway by another.

The other made a gesture of impatience.

"I am a temperate man, and never shed blood if I can by any means avoid it, so to prevent my spilling yours, as I might have done over and over again, I say once more, hand over what valuables you may have about you!"

"I shall do no such thing," replied Dick. "Tell me, first, who you are."

"When I mention my name," said the other, "you will know better than trifle with me. It is Tom King."

"What?"

"Tom King! Deliver—deliver at once, for I cannot stay parleying like this; even now I can hear the coach entering the hollow. Hand me your purse, I say, before I am compelled to take it by force."

"I will give you my hand."

"You are a maniac, I think. I have borne with you so far, but I should advise you not to tempt your fate further!"

Dick replaced his pistol in the holster, and held out his hand.

"Tip us your mawley and let's have a grip. I can prophecy we shall be great friends."

The highwayman seemed rather surprised at Dick's coolness, and looked at him in a bewildered sort of way. He evidently knew not what to think.

But now Dick could hear that the coach was not many hundred yards distant, and as he by no means intended it should pass without paying toll, he said quickly to the highwayman:

"Give me your hand, Tommy, and don't be a fool. You know as well as I do there's no time to lose, for the coach will be here directly. I am known to you by name, I'll warrant, as you were to me, although we have never met before. I am he who is called Dick Turpin."

"I fancied as much," said Tom King, grasping Dick's hand, and pressing it warmly. "But I scarcely dared hope it to be true. This is what I have wished for many and many a time!"

"And so have I. Something seems to tell me we shall be great friends now we have met, and I hope we shall go through many an adventure with each other."

"So do I, with all my heart. We shall, at all events, have one, for here comes the coach."

"Tell me, Tom," said Dick, "did you really take up a position here to stop the coach?"

"I did; but when I heard you coming, of course I thought I would do a little business with you first."

"It is rather a remarkable circumstance, but I made my way hither for the very same purpose as yourself, and I was just about to take up a position, when you pounced out upon me."

"It is strange, indeed, but we must talk further upon the subject after the coach has passed, for here it is!"

"Agreed."

"You, then," said Tom King, "had better place yourself on the other side of the road, while I remain where I am, and we can then both ride forward and attack the coach on both sides at once."

"Bravo! that is a capital scheme. Take care of yourself."

"All right. Don't fear for me; we have stopped coaches before now single-handed, and I am sure we can do the thing well together."

"We ought to do. Hush! they are here!"

Dick, as he gave this caution to his new friend, backed his horse a little way down the lane, on the other side.

He had scarcely time to look to the priming of his pistols before the heads of the first horses appeared.

Then he darted out swiftly from his place of concealment, and catching the one nearest to him by the bridle, turned him completely round.

The other horses, of course, turned with him, so the cumbrous vehicle was brought to a standstill instantly.

At the same moment Tom King rode out from his side of the road, and cried, in a loud voice—

"Halt!"

"Then, before anyone had time to recover from their surprise, he discharged a pistol in the air.

The natural effect of these summary proceedings on the part of the two highwaymen was that all the passengers were filled with dread, and expected their last hour had come.

"If you attempt to drive on before the toll is paid you will have a bullet through your head for your trouble; but if you remain still you will come to no harm."

"In the meanwhile, Dick left the off leader's head, and repeated the same warning to the guard as Tom King had given to the driver.

The rapidity of their manœuvres, and the sternness of their tones, made all conscious that they had fallen into the hands of men who would not be trifled with; so the guard very prudently replaced his blunderbuss in the case from which he had taken it.

There then remained only the passengers to grapple with, and from none of these was any resistance worth mentioning to be anticipated.

Tom King let down the coach window at his side while he shouted to Dick—

"Keep a sharp look-out, and if anyone makes the least movement, fire! I will attend to the insides!"

When he looked in he found the coach tolerably full of passengers.

"Quick, ladies and gentlemen!" he said; "hand me your money, watches, rings, and trinkets, and don't be foolish enough to resist, for it can only have the effect of making things much worse for you in the end."

He played with a very elegantly-finished pistol while he spoke in such a careless manner that a nervous old lady in the coach gave a scream, and then went off into a fit at once.

"I would advise you to make haste, my friends, for this pistol has a strange knack of going off and shooting anyone who dallies, so I give you warning in time."

A young, and so far as Tom King could tell by the faint, uncertain light in the interior of the coach, an extremely pretty girl was seated next to the door; and when he had finished speaking, she put into his hand a very slender purse and a small locket.

"Take those, Mr. Highwayman, for I suppose you must have them," she said, in a trembling, agitated voice. "Heaven knows how ill I can afford them! Take them. I have nothing more!"

"If I do, may I be——! Never mind, my dear, keep them. I would not take anything from you but a kind word and glance for all the world. But you, sir," he added, turning to a portly man, who was seated opposite to her, "but you, sir, I can see can afford to lose a little without much inconvenience. So shell out!"

The man thus adjured, and who looked like a country gentleman, took a handful of guineas and put them into Tom's hand, as he said—

"There, take those, you vagabond, and be off, and think yourself lucky. It is not worth while, as you are armed and I am not, for me to throw away my life for the sake of a little money."

"You are a very sensible man, but I must trouble you to hand over a little more before I have done with you."

"No, let me be able to pay you the same compliment as you did me, and be satisified with what you have got from me, and levy your contributions on some of the others."

"You are a jolly good-humoured fellow," said King, "and I will follow your advice Come, sir," he added, addressing a thin, sharp-featured man, "let me trouble you next, if you please. I daresay you all know my name. It's Tom King. I never yet made a practice of ill-using those I have eased of their superfluous cash, but have simply taken what was offered me, provided it was any way reasonable."

With a groan, this man placed a guinea in Tom's hand, who turned it over and over with so comical an air that the other passengers laughed outright.

"That is all I can spare," said the thin-faced man. "Take it. I hope some day to have the pleasure of hearing you are hung!"

"Thank you."

Tom still turned the guinea over and over in his hand.

"I am getting rather impatient, so make haste!"

"I have given you all I can afford, indeed I have. I am a poor man, and money is of great value to me."

"Now that man is a humbug," said the stout gentleman, who had behaved so liberally. "I happen to know

him very well. He is a maker of Brummagem buttons, and is better c with respect to money than anyone in the coach."

"Oh! indeed," said Tom King, "then I shall have to deal rather harshly with him for his deception. Now, Mr. Brummagem Buttons, I shall count three slowly, and if by that time you do not hand over every farthing you have about you, the pistol is sure to go off."

"No, no! mercy, Mr. Highwayman! Don't believe him—don't believe him! I am a poor man—a very poor man, indeed. However, I will give you a guinea more."

"One!" said Tom.

"Yes, yes! here it is. I said one, good sir—here it is."

"Two!"

"Don't go on, Mr. Rob—Highwayman, or I am a ruined man."

"Three!" said Tom; "now give me all you have, or I fire."

"Here it is; take it—take all I have and beggar me; I would rather part with my money than my life."

"You are wise to do so;" said Tom, pocketing a bag containing at least a hundred guineas; "the one you do stand a chance of replacing, but not so the other. Now, ladies and gentlemen, I have nearly enough, but it would be wrong to show any favour, so the remainder will please put their contributions in here."

He took off his hat as he spoke, and held it crown downwards in the coach.

It grew heavy in a very few moments, for all the travellers in the carriage could not but be conscious that Tom was, under the circumstances, acting in what he doubtless considered was a handsome manner.

As for Turpin, he had made good use of the time that his companion took to attend to the insides, for he had managed to collect, without much difficulty, a very respectable sum from those who rode on the top of the coach.

By the time he had finished, Tom had emptied the contents of his hat into his pocket, and, making a very graceful bow to the travellers, withdrew.

"Now, coachy," he said, "hold your hat; you have behaved very decently indeed, so here is something to drink my health with; and now drive on."

So saying, he tossed a guinea into the coachman's hat.

"Thankee, your honour," he said. "Good night. Don't forget Charley. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander!"

He turned round, and saw the guard holding his hat in a most eloquent manner.

"Oh! you're Charley, are you. All right. You're a trump, so here's a guinea for you."

The coachman gathered up his reins, and, turning his horses' heads in the proper direction, drove off towards London.

CHAPTER XXII.

DICK TURPIN FINDS IT MORE DIFFICULT TO REGAIN POSSESSION OF BLACK BESS THAN HE ANTICIPATED.

"Well, Tom," said Dick Turpin, to his new companion, as he watched the coach disappear, "I consider we have had a very easy job."

"And so do I," replied Tom King. "Uncommon easy, and very profitable. The insides shelled out like bricks."

"Well, I didn't do amiss with the outsiders, but I vote we divide the swag when we have a better opportunity."

"We will. You see, in a very short time now it will be broad daylight, so I think it imperative we should look for some kind of shelter."

"It is imperative, Let us get on as fast as possible."

They both spurred their horses, and Deadman's Hollow was soon left behind.

"Where do you propose to go, Dick?" asked Tom King. "I know of no shelter hereabouts."

"I suppose not, for this is scarcely your locality. You are most heard of on the north road, I think."

"Yes, but I got down here a day or two ago, and something has been happening ever since to prevent my getting back."

"I have had a more than ordinary share of adventures during the last four days; but you will laugh when I tell you the circumstance."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"Well, you must first answer me a question."

"Very good; I have no objection."

"Were you anywhere near Wimbledon Common four nights ago?"

"Yes."

"Were you in a lane that goes by a cross-country cut to London?"

"I was; and while there a singular thing happened to me."

"So there did to me; but now I fancy it will not be strange much longer."

"You are making me very curious. Do not keep me any longer in suspense, I beg."

"It would tire you to tell you what happened during that eventful night; let it suffice to say I was wounded in the shoulder."

"Yes, yes."

"It was little more than a scratch, and I received it during great excitement; so I forgot all about it."

"I suppose it bled a great deal, and so prevented you feeling any pain."

"That was just it. I went riding on and on, never thinking; but all this while the blood was escaping from my shoulder at a prodigious rate; presently I began to get very weak, and shook in my saddle, while once or twice the clear, moonlit atmosphere, seemed changed to blood!"

"You must have lost a great deal of vital fluid for that symptom to show itself."

"Well, be that as it may, I felt something was the matter with my shoulder, and I put my hand to it, and found my coat was sopping wet. Upon this I took off my cravat, and bandaged up the wound, stanching the blood as well as I was able; but when I had finished I almost fell off my horse."

"It was a fortunate thing for you the officers did not show themselves just then, or it would have been all up with you."

"It would, that's certain. However, this is the strange occurrence of which I spoke."

"You have made plenty of prefatory remarks about it, so I should like to know what it was without further circumlocution."

"You shall; but I have said no more than was necessary for the comprehension of the incident; indeed, hardly enough."

"I will dispense with the remainder."

"Very well. As I lifted up my head from binding my shoulder my brain swam round and round, and I had the greatest difficulty conceivable in keeping my seat at all."

"You said that before."

"Oh! did I? I had forgotten; you shouldn't interrupt me—you put me out."

"Go on, then, your own way; but it seems to me as though you never meant to tell me what the incident really was."

"Oh! you be hanged. Don't be so impatient, we shall have plenty of time to talk."

"Will you tell me what the incident was?" asked Tom King, quite out of patience, "for I want to know where we are going to shelter."

"Don't trouble about that, but just leave it to me. I will find you a place where you will be as right as ninepence. Just listen to this mysterious incident."

"I've been doing that for the last quarter of an hour."

"Well, I didn't fall out of the saddle, but when I looked along the road, although my eyes were dim and my head spinning like a top, I saw something misty and shadowy approaching."

"You fancy it looked misty, but I fancy the mist was nowhere but in your own eyes."

"Very likely; but I tell you I saw something shadowy-like, and in a moment or so it took the form of a horse and rider."

"Yes; what was there wonderful in that?"

"I'll tell you. The moon was shining with unusual brightness, and when I looked closer I saw this rider was attired and mounted exactly like myself. The features, too, were just the same."

"Nonsense!"

"I fancied so, at any rate, and I believe they were. It was not a delusion. I am confident!"

"What became of it, then?"

"Why, it jumped over a hedge in a manner none but Black Bess could have done, and then both horse and rider galloped over the meadows and disappeared!"

There was a smile on Tom King's face, as he listened to his friend's narration

"It's very strange—very strange indeed! And you thought it something supernatural?"

"I confess I did until to-night, when something occurred to change my opinion."

"What was that, pray?"

"I was very closely pursued by the officers, but I had a chance of putting into execution a rather old ruse, but yet a generally successful one—that of dismounting and hiding behind the hedgerow, while I gave the horse a sharp cut, that made him fly along the road at a slashing pace."

"It's a very good dodge, and I have found it succeed more than once. However, go on."

"Well, then I got through a gap in the hedge, and then laid close down on the grass, while I peeped through to see what the officers would be after."

"Yes."

"They were quickly down the lane, and then they all halted, and appeared to be looking very intently at something. I followed the direction of their eyes, and there I saw the same figure as I had seen in the lane at Wimbledon three nights before."

"Didn't you think you saw your fetch?" asked King, with the same smile playing about his lips.

"I thought I saw my double, but the closer and better look I was able to have showed me it was only someone generally resembling me in appearance."

"Yes; as I might."

"Just so. I have hardly a doubt about the matter; but, quite for my own satisfaction, tell me whether you were in the lane I described, and whether you took a flying leap over the hedge into the meadows?"

"I was, my boy, and I did; and it was also me that you saw standing in the high road. Confound it! it appears I have you to thank for the chase the officers gave me, and the narrow escape I had, since they doubtless fell into the same mistake as you did, and took me to be you. It's a nice thing, upon my word! However, it don't matter, as they did not nab me."

"Well, Tom, my friend, whether you believe me or not, I can assure you it has taken a great weight off my mind. It is so much better to have a matter of that sort cleared up. It appears, however, that no slight thanks are due to you for the assistance you so unknowingly rendered me in making my escape."

"Don't mention that, I beg. Odd things do drop out, and one of the odd ones is that we have never met each other before to-night."

"It is rather singular, but we have always kept separate beats. As, though, we got on so well to-night together, I propose we enter into an alliance offensive and defensive. What do you say?"

"Why, you have just anticipated the proposition I was going to make to you myself in almost the very words you have used!"

"That's rather singular, and so it is that I should be stopped on the highway by anyone, and be told to fork over."

"Very singular, as you say."

"However," said Turpin, "I hope that a friendship so strangely began may long continue."

"And so do I, but I hope it won't end as it began."

"How do you mean?"

"At the point of a pistol!"

"No fear. What a strange idea that was! Dear me, everything seems to be strange to-night!"

"It does."

"Give me your hand again, my friend, and let us pledge ourselves to an eternal friendship."

"Agreed!" said Tom King, holding his out to his companion.

Dick shook it warmly, and holding his hand up to the sky, which was just beginning to be tinged by the rays of the rising sun, said—

"I swear, Tom, that through thick and thin I will stand by you, and prove myself your staunch friend!"

"And I also swear the same thing towards you!" said Tom King, returning the friendly pressure.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TOM DAVIS VOLUNTEERS TO GO TO LONDON FOR DICK TO TRY TO GET BLACK BESS BACK AGAIN.

A BRIEF silence followed these words, during which the two friends pressed their horses forward.

It was Tom King who spoke first.

"I am trusting altogether to you, Dick, to find a place of shelter, for, comparatively speaking, I am a stranger hereabouts."

"We shall be right enough."

"I only hope it isn't far off. Just look how fast the sun is mounting in the sky. We shall have everybody abroad directly."

"I should fancy five minutes will take us to it."

"Where is it, then, that you intend to go?"

"To the 'Hand and Keys,' close to Hornsey Wood. Do you know it?"

"I can't say that I do,"

"Nor Tom Davis, the landlord?"

"No."

"Oh! he is a first-rate fellow, and will be overjoyed at seeing you."

"Is he safe?"

"Yes; I have trusted him with my life a hundred times, and would do a hundred times more. We have been firm friends for years. Look," he added, "can you see that large, rambling, old-fashioned building yonder, standing a good way back from the road, and with a signpost on the footpath?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is the 'Hand and Keys,' so we have not far to go to get housed."

"I am glad of it. Our exploit to-night will sure to cause a great deal of commotion, and the search after us will be a warm one."

"I don't doubt that. I must say it was a most impudent thing for two men to stop a coach full of people by daylight."

"Rather!" said Tom, as he trotted, with Turpin, into the yard in front of the inn.

No one appeared to be about. The blinds were all down, and the inmates apparently one and all in deep repose.

"Get off your horse, Tom," said Dick. "I'll show you where the stable is. We'll give the cattle a feed ourselves, and by that time I daresay some of them will be up, and then we shall be able to get something to eat, for this keen morning air has made me as hungry as a hunter."

"And me. That reminds me I have been going to ask you ever so many times what has become of your famous mare, Black Bess. Is she laid up lame somewhere, that you are riding another?"

"No; but I was set on in London, and obliged to run through the streets on foot. I could not get at Black Bess, who, I hope, is safe in a stable somewhere. This is the second horse I have had to-night, or rather last night, and they are neither worth a rush. I must occupy myself to-day in devising some means of getting her back again."

By this time they reached the stable-door, but they found it fast.

"That's no consequence," said Dick. "I didn't expect to find it unlocked. Jabez sleeps up in the loft, and we shall soon wake him up."

Turpin kicked against the stable-door with the heel of his heavy jack boot.

He made a prodigious clatter.

"Cuss you all!" said a surly voice, "what do you want?"

The owner of the voice projected his head through a narrow window.

"Make haste down, Jabez!" said Turpin, as he caught sight of him.

"Make haste be hanged!" replied the ostler, and he shut the window with a bang.

Almost directly afterwards Jabez opened the door, and the two highwaymen led their horses into the stable.

"Who'd a'thought of seeing you here agin so soon, squire?" said Jabez to Turpin.

"No one, I fancy, for I didn't myself till an hour ago. I am sorry to fetch you up, but it's past sunrise."

Then, observing that Jabez looked rather curiously at Tom, Turpin hastened to add—

"This, Jabez, is a particular friend of mine, and a gentleman you will be proud to make the acquaintance of. He's a regular out-and-outer, and his name is Tom King."

"You don't say so?" replied Jabez. "I've heard of him many's the time lately. Why, they do say, squire, he's only second to you!"

"Well, Jabez," said Tom King, "you and Dick here seem to be very good friends, and I don't see why we shouldn't be, eh?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Well, I'm particularly careful about my nag here, so pray use her well. Here's a guinea to drink my health with."

"Your honour's a perfect gentleman," said Jabez, as he consigned the coin to his breeches pocket, "and I only hopes as how we shall often have the pleasure of seeing you at the 'Hand and Keys.'"

"I have no objection to your having such a wish. However, first of all let me see how well you can fettle my nag. As for that one the squire's got, it's good for nothing, and is one he took off a police-officer."

"He! he! Off a hofficer! What a good joke! He! he! he!"

Jabez chuckled enormously as he went about his work.

"No one knows," said Turpin, "how overjoyed I shall be when I get Black Bess. I am certain no lover was ever so fond of his mistress as I am of my bonny mare. She is, beyond all question, the finest piece of horseflesh that ever existed. She is, to use a common expression, worth her weight in gold!"

"I can readily believe you are anxious to get possession of her again; I should think it went very much against the grain to leave her behind you."

"You are quite right, it did. But I could not help myself. It was an utter impossibility for me to reach her. The officers were too close after me for that."

"Well, let us hope you will soon have her back."

"I shall not be fit to undertake another adventure until I do."

"Then, if that's the case, I shall almost feel tempted to make a journey to London myself and fetch her."

"I am afraid you would stand but little chance of success, and besides which, you would be running your neck into unnecessary danger."

"Well, there would be some little risk, of course."

"My friend, do not think of it for a moment. I would never permit it, so say no more upon the subject."

"I will not, but, in the event of your getting her soon, will you allow me to give you a little advice?"

"Certainly; I hope you will never hesitate to speak to me with perfect frankness and candour."

"It is this, then. London and its vicinity is by far too hot to hold us, so I propose that we take a trip into some of the south-western counties, as being a portion of England we have neither of us visited professionally."

"The advice is good, and I will follow it the moment I have the opportunity. I am beginning to long for a change, and I fancy such a trip as you mention would be just the very thing. Why, we should have lots of first-rate adventures on the road there, and also during our stay!"

"We should, and they would have all the charm of novelty. I am glad you approve of the scheme."

"I do, most entirely. If I had my mare I would be off to-night. But come, Jabez has groomed and fed your horse, so we will try if we cannot get into the inn and have something to eat."

"I am awfully hungry," said Tom.

Arm in arm the two friends made their way to the back door of the inn.

It opened to their touch, and they found when they entered that Tom Davis was up and dressed and busy taking down the shutters.

"Good morning, Tom!" shouted Dick, as the landlord appeared with a couple of shutters on his shoulders. "How are you?"

"God bless me!" he said, almost letting fall the shutters in his surprise, "if it is not the squire back again. Come into the kitchen. I have got a good fire; you know you are always welcome."

"I know I am, and that's why I sought shelter here this morning."

The landlord hastily put down the shutters, and bustled into the kitchen.

"Now, Tom," said Dick, "before we go any farther, just allow me to introduce you to a new but very particular friend of mind, Tom King."

"Tom King!" exclaimed Davis, "is it possible? Here, give us your hand, my boy, I am heartily glad to see you!"

King bowed, and held out his hand in reply to this very cordial welcome.

"We are both tired and faint," said Dick, "for we have worked very hard, and have had nothing to eat, so we shall be glad of a little breakfast as soon as you can get it."

"It's as good as done, for I'll set about it myself at once. No, I won't, though, for here comes my wife, and, gadzooks! Ellen, too!"

"Ellen!" exclaimed Dick, in a tone of pleasure. "I had forgotten her for the moment. I shall be glad to look into her face again."

"It's a main pretty one, and no mistake, and the best thing is, too, that her goodness equals her beauty. I would not have her go away on any account, short as is the time she has been with us. I love her as much as I should if she was my own daughter. Ay, even more, for aught I know, for I question whether a daughter of mine would ever be so good as she is."

The words had scarcely left the landlord's lips, when Mrs. Davis and Ellen entered the room.

There was a wonderful difference already visible in the countenance of the young girl. Her cheeks had filled out, and her face had lost its ordinary paleness.

The greeting between her and Dick was warm indeed, and Tom King observed, with an expressive shrug—

"Oh! that's how the wind blows, is it? Well, all I can say is, I admire his taste."

His surprise was very much augmented when Dick introduced her to him, and afterwards, in a few whispered words told him what he knew of her history.

The huge table in the kitchen was quickly covered with a profusion of generous fare, and while this was in progress, Davis finished taking down the shutters.

Ten minutes more saw them all doing justice to the really excellent and tempting breakfast laid before them, to which their keen hunger imparted a pleasant relish.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CURIOSITY INDUCES TURPIN AND TOM KING TO WITNESS A CEREMONY WHICH, ALTHOUGH OBSOLETE AT THE PRESENT DAY, IS YET COUNTENANCED BY THE LAW.

"I NEVER dreamt," said Dick, as he helped himself to a huge slice of fried ham and a couple of eggs, "I never dreamt for a moment, Davis, when I parted with you on the door-step the night before last, that I should be back again so quickly. By-the-bye, how did you get on at the inquest?"

"Why, not at all."

"Not at all?"

"How should we? Why, it doesn't take place till to-day!"

"The deuce it don't! That's very awkward. I've half a mind to be off again!"

"Oh! nonsense, don't talk such rubbish. No one need know you are here unless you wish it."

"Then, that makes all the difference. I don't want to be dragged forward, I can assure you!"

"You must keep out of sight, then, or they are bound to call upon you if they have any idea you are in the neighbourhood."

"What inquest is it, Dick?" asked Tom King.

"On the body of a man who committed suicide in the bedroom upstairs."

"Good gracious! What an unpleasant thing to have happen in a house!"

"You're right enough there," said the landlord; "but it's one of those casualties you can't possibly avoid. I shall be very glad now when it's all over."

"Yes. Was there anything at all peculiar in the case?"

"There was; very peculiar indeed. In fact, it was about as tragic as anything well could be."

Dick then briefly gave an account of the circum-

stances attending the suicide of Simme, the steward's son, with which the reader is already familiar,

Tom king listened to the end with rapt attention.

"Wonderful!" he said. "The ends of justice are sometimes strangely worked out! I suppose there is very little doubt as to what verdict will be returned by the jury?"

"None at all, I fancy. As clear a case of *felo-de-se* as ever I heard of."

"Yes," added Davis; "the cross roads will be his grave, sure enough."

"Do you think they will carry out the law to the letter?" asked Tom King.

"I am certain. The matter, of course, has been well talked over in the kitchen here."

"I don't doubt that," said Dick. "The whole affair must have been a godsend in the way of gossip and speculation to the people in the village."

"I can assure you," said Tom King, "I cannot resist feeling deeply interested in it, and, for my own part, should like to be present while the inquest takes place."

"Well, there's nothing to prevent that," said the landlord. "I hardly think you are well known enough about here for you to fear recognition."

"I think not, and even if I was I would run a little risk to gratify my curiosity."

"Now the worst of it is," said Dick, "with respect to myself, that some of them would be sure to recognise me as Mr. Richards, and I should be called upon to give evidence—a thing I particularly wish to avoid, for, in coming so prominently forward, I should be sure to be detected."

"Perhaps not," said Tom King, "However, don't let me draw you into it. You make yourself snug here somewhere all day, but I shall watch the proceedings. Where is the inquest to be held, landlord?"

"In the clubroom upstairs. It has all been put ready, and I expect the coroner and jury here at eleven o'clock."

"Well, now it is only just six," said Tom King, as he glanced at the face of the old family clock which stood in a recess near the door, "so, if you like, I'll just take a few hours' rest, and if I shouldn't wake up in time for the performance, just give me a call."

All rose from the table as King uttered these words, and Turpin, taking Ellen by the hand, led her to the window, where they could converse together without being overheard.

"Well, my dear girl," said Dick, tenderly, "I know it is hardly necessary to ask you, but are you quite happy in your new home?"

"Oh! quite—quite happy; happier than I have ever in my life been before. Indeed, until I came here, I did not properly understand the meaning of the word. Davis and his wife overwhelm me with kindness."

"Then, believe me, Ellen," said Dick, "it causes me great happiness to hear you say you are so comfortable. I feel that my rescue of you from a fate worse than death itself is a good action in my life that will outweigh many of the bad ones I have done."

"Now, Dick," said Tom King, "are you coming to have an hour or two's rest, as well as myself?"

"Yes, my friend, I am weary. But I want to say a word or two to Davis here."

"All right! you can tell me as we go upstairs."

"Very good," said Dick. "It was concerning Black Bess I wished to speak."

"Black Bess! has anything happened to her?"

"Well, no hurt, I hope; but last night the officers surrounded the 'Three Tuns,' and made an attack upon it, trying very hard to make me a prisoner."

"I told you they would before you started."

"They did. However, there was a bit of a tussel, and I managed to make my escape through a window into a court, but the grabs were close behind and I had to run for my life

"Then, of course, under such circumstances, you could not get Bess out of the stable in the alley?"

"No, I could not, and there I have no doubt she is now, at least such is my hope. Now I want to get her back again, for without her I can do nothing."

"I fancy now," said Davis, "you have applied to just the right person in the scrape you have fallen into. If it wasn't for that confounded inquest, I'd start off now and fetch her; but, as it is, we must both be content to wait till it's over."

"I knew you would help me out of this difficulty," said Dick; "for of course you must know it would be utter madness for me to go and fetch her myself. The place is sure to be well watched by the officers."

'You may take your 'davy of that! But don't let the matter trouble you a moment longer. Rely upon it, I'll bring her here safe and sound!"

"Thanks! and now which is our bedroom?"

"Why, this attic. It has two beds in it, and is a tolerable size. You may make yourself safe here as long as you like."

"I can believe you, Tom Davis, for you have never deceived me yet."

"And never will," said the landlord, closing the door.

"Good morning, friends!"

"Good morning, Davis," replied the two highwaymen, throwing themselves wearily on each of the beds.

In less than five minutes they were both sound asleep, for they had undergone no slight amount of exertion during the preceding night, and were proportionably fatigued.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BURIAL OF THE SUICIDE IN THE CROSS ROADS AT HORNSEY.

It wanted only a few minutes of eleven when Tom King opened his eyes again.

Dick was still sleeping heavily, so King rose and made a few alterations in his toilette in silence.

This was an operation that did not take him many moments to perform, and he was soon making his way downstairs.

He met the landlord upon the landing.

"I was just coming up to call you," he said.

"Oh! were you? Then you are a day after the fair."

"So it seems. The jury have begun to arrive."

"Have they?"

"Yes. Soon, is it not?"

"Very soon."

"The fact is, they are as impatiently curious as you are."

"The inquest, then, will begin punctually at eleven?"

"I'll warrant you, not a minute later."

"So much the better. I shan't get tired of waiting."

The speakers rapidly descended the stairs, and then Davis, pushing open a door, ushered Tom into the clubroom.

It was quite full of people, and at least ten of the jury were seated at the table, so Tom King's entrance caused no particular notice.

Scarcely, however, had he time to note the general aspect of the room, when the coroner and the remaining jurymen arrived.

Then followed the swearing-in ceremony, after which they all adjourned to view the body.

But, however full of interest the proceedings might be to Tom King, we think it hardly worth while to describe them in detail, especially when the purpose can be answered in a few words.

The coroner and the jury, then, were about as obstinate and thickheaded—the beadle as pompous—the medical officer as elaborate as they generally are under such circumstances.

On returning to their seats, the inquiry was commenced; but there was so little evidence, and that so much to the point, that when it was given, the jury required, or at all events took very few minutes to decide, and a verdict of *Felo-de-se* was returned, which was just what everyone had made up their minds to all along.

The poor wretch, who certainly might have been consigned to the tomb without such an indignity being wreaked upon his mangled remains, was, in pursuance of a barbarous law, which is still in force, though rarely if ever put into execution at the present time, sentenced to be buried in the centre where four roads meet, and a stake to be driven through his breast.

Even at that time the sentence began to excite abhorrence, but as it was not often a case occurred, the feeling most generally elicited was that morbid curiosity for the horrible which is to a certain extent inherent in every breast.



[THE YOUNG PRETENDER HAS A SWORD COMBAT WITH TOM KING.]

The inquest was over shortly after midday, and the burial was ordered to take place at midnight.

It was a good day for Davis, so far as the consumption of eatables and drinkables was concerned.

Tom found he was as busy as possible in the bar; so, without showing himself, he went upstairs to his attic.

"I wonder how long Turpin is going to sleep," he said. "One would think, to look at and hear him, that he had not been to bed for a month!"

Dick was, indeed, sleeping soundly; but that was a circumstance little to be wondered at, considering all that he had gone through.

"Well," continued King, as he threw himself again upon the other bed, "I suppose it is best, for he will wake up fresh and vigorous, and ready for anything."

Three hours afterwards the landlord entered the room, and finding both his guests asleep, awoke them.

"I am off now," he said to Turpin; "but I thought I would speak to you first. You say you left Bess in the stable belonging to the 'Three Tuns?'"

"Yes, the one in the alley."

"I know."

"The place will sure, I fancy, be well guarded by the police. Have you any plan for getting possession of the mare?"

"Well, I can't say I have at present, but on my way there I daresay I shall think of something!"

"I only hope you will, and that your effort will be successful. Without Black Bess, I am like a ship without a rudder."

"I'll tell you what it is, Turpin," interrupted Tom King; "as soon as there is an opportunity, you must tell me how it was you came to possess such a magnificent creature as your mare is; and there are many other passages in your history to which, in the short time I have been with you, you have alluded, and which I feel a deep curiosity to hear."

"You shall be satisfied, Tom. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do."

"What?"

"One of these very next days, when we have the time to spare, and I feel in the humour, I will relate to you succinctly the whole story of my life, from the commencement of my career until I met you in the lane, but upon one sole condition."

"And what is that?"

"That your reciprocate the favour, and in return for my history give me yours, which I am full of anxiety to hear."

"Agreed; and now finish your arrangements with Davis here, for I can see he is impatient to be off."

"Well, Davis, my friend, I don't know there is any more I can say. You, of course, will be known as coming from me, and Johnson will deliver her to you. I shall leave you to devise a means of baulking the officers, if any should happen to interfere with you, and remember, when you are once on the back of Black Bess you are safe, for the horse that can run swifter than she has yet to be foaled."

"I know you have a great idea of her speed, Dick; and justly, too, I should imagine, considering the number of times that her fleetness must have been so vital to you."

"Just so. Let us see. It is close upon four now," said Turpin, looking at his watch, "and it will take you rather better than half-an-hour to get to Seven Dials. I wouldn't hurry there, though. I think it will be better if it is dusk when you arrive."

"I shall certainly stand a better chance of getting off if it is, so I will delay my departure half-an-hour."

"Do so, my friend; and, if you are not aware of it already, let me tell you it is the worst of all policy to ruin anything by precipitation."

"I am well aware of it, and fully believe in its truth. I may be back with comparative quickness, and I may not return till morning. It is all according as circumstances turn out."

"I can trust you, I am well aware, so I leave you to do your best. By-the-bye, was the verdict you anticipated returned?"

"Yes, *Felo-de-se!* and they will bury him at the cross roads, with a stake through his heart, at midnight."

"Oh! indeed. Then the probability is, Davis, you will be absent from that interesting ceremony."

"And glad I shall be, for, what with one thing and another, I have had rather more of old Simms's son than I care about, though if I happened to be at home it would be a bit of satisfaction to know he was thoroughly disposed of."

"I daresay it would," said Tom King; "but it strikes me you feel just as much interest and curiosity in the matter as I do. I always make it a point of seeing all I can, and I have never had a chance of seeing one of these midnight funerals before, so intend to see this one."

"Well, I have not the least objection," said Tom Davis; "I daresay you will find it a dismal spectacle."

"What do you say, Turpin?" asked King. "I am going; will you bear me company?"

"Willingly. Not that I have much relish for such scenes; for my taste lies in quite a different direction. I shall, however, if Davis does not come back before the ceremony takes place, be very glad to accompany you, for, being anxious, the time will hang heavily upon my hands, if I have nothing to occupy my thoughts."

"That's right!" said Tom; "I didn't half like the idea of going by myself."

"And I," said the landlord, as he moved towards the door, "will go downstairs and get a cup of tea, after which I will be off. As for you, gentlemen, I shouldn't advise you to show yourselves at all till night; so I think the best thing you can do is to lie down and rest while you have the chance."

"All right, my boy," said Dick, "and I hope with the darkness I shall see you return with Black Bess."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BOW-STREET RUNNERS ARE VERY WRATH AGAINST DICK, AND RESOLVE TO CAPTURE HIM AT ALL HAZARDS, WHICH MAKES HIS PROJECTED JOURNEY INTO THE SOUTH-WESTERN COUNTIES ALL THE MORE IMPERATIVE.

NIGHT came.

Dark, drear, and wintry, with a blustering wind blowing up from the north-east, bringing occasionally with it a dash of heavy rain-drops, which came against all objects with as much force and suddenness as sea-spray.

From the horizon to the zenith the heavens were covered with one huge black cloud, which was in no place lighter or thinner than in others—it was like one vast funeral pall.

It was a night on which few people would move from their firesides, unless some very powerful motive called them abroad; it was, in fine, a night which fitly harmonized with the ghastly ceremony about to be performed.

It would, indeed, have seemed a profanation—a hideous mockery—if the moon had shed her fair, pure light upon so horrible a scene.

Three-quarters past eleven was just pealing out from Hornsey church when the front door of the "Hand and Keys" inn was flung open, and the burial train appeared upon its threshold.

Slowly, and with solemn steps, the little party, to the number of five-and-twenty, made their way across the inn yard into the high-road.

Six persons bore the coffin containing the suicide's remains, and which was to be rudely cast into a hole dug in the stony road, without the performance of those sacred rites the Christian church ordains.

And as if this were in all conscience not enough, the inanimate clay was to be legally mutilated.

Truly was it a deed more suited to the sensibilities of savages at some early period of the world's history than civilized men, and that, too, in the middle of the last century, when science, art, and good breeding were supposed to have reached the highest point of perfection.

It seems incredible that such could be the opinion of those living at the time when so sickening a custom was not only tolerated but enforced.

Yet, stranger still to say, this barbaric and inhuman law has never been repealed; and it is to avoid its consummation that juries, now-a-days, almost invariably return in a case of suicide a verdict of temporary insanity.

By this means only can they ensure the burial of the corpse in consecrated ground.

But would it not, we ask, be better for this most disgraceful law to be erased from the statute book of England, than for juries to be forced to give in a false verdict?

There can be but one reply to such a question.

The nearest cross roads to the "Hand and Keys"—or four lanes end, as they expressively termed it—was where the narrow country lane, in which Tom King had taken up his position to rob the western coach, crossed the highway.

At some remote period it had doubtless been the scene of a similar occurrence, from which its unpleasant designation of Deadman's Hollow was derived.

Those persons who had been selected to accompany the coffin and to relieve those who bore it from its weight, carried in their hands huge pinewood torches, which, baffled and blown about by the wind, cast but a flickering and uncertain light upon surrounding objects.

Davis, the landlord, had not returned from his dangerous mission when the procession started, so, as they had agreed, the two highwaymen descended from the attic and followed slowly after them.

They hung back, though, considerably in the rear, taking care not to expose themselves too much to the gaze of the curious villagers.

Their caution was scarcely necessary, for the coffin of the suicide absorbed all their faculties. They had eyes and ears for nothing else.

Both Turpin and King were silent. The solemnity of the scene had its due effect upon them. They felt, without knowing why, that speech would be out of place.

At their slow pace twenty minutes brought them to the cross roads in Deadman's Hollow.

Here they found a large concourse of people assembled, who were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the *cortège*.

The grave was already dug. The stones and yellow sticky clay, that had been turned up from it, were piled in a large mound upon the margin of the grave.

Across this mound was laid a newly-cut hedge-stake, some seven or eight feet in length, one end of which was sharpened to a point.

A few moments' bustle and confusion ensued upon the

arrival of the body, but it subsided almost as suddenly as it arose.

"This is a very solemn scene, Dick," said Tom King, drawing his cloak closer round him to protect himself from the bleak wind. "What with the weather, and what with this strange funeral, I am chilled to the very bone!"

"And I, too!" said Dick. "I think, however, we may safely venture to draw closer. As we are here, we may as well see all, for it is not probable we shall have another opportunity."

"I hope and trust not," said Tom King. "I could hardly credit such things were done, and that is why I felt so curious. It is to be hoped so loathsome a spectacle will, in the course of a few years, be wholly unknown except by name."

The bearers of the coffin paused for a moment on the brink of the grave, and then, letting go the handles, dropped it in.

It reached the bottom with a strange, dull, rattling sound.

"Stand aside, there, you folks," said a man at this moment, pushing his way into the centre of the ring the bystanders had formed around the grave; "stand back, there, will you!"

This man, who was rather short and very fat, and having apparently much of the animal in his composition, drew himself up as he uttered these words with what he thought was a dignified air.

"I suppose that's the parish beadle," said Dick to a man who was standing near him.

"Yes; and parish constable too. But who are you," asked the man, curiously, "as doesn't know him? Why, everybody knows Tobias Primp!"

"We are travellers from London," said Dick, readily, "and I daresay the same motive that brought you here brought us too."

"What is that?"

"Curiosity, to be sure!"

The man turned away, and was silent.

In the meantime, Mr. Tobias Primp had taken up the hedge-stake and held it in a vertical position.

"Now, then, one or two of you lend a hand here," he said, with as much authority as if he had been *lord* of the manor. "Lend a hand here, and assist me in the execution of the law!"

Several persons sprang with alacrity into the ring.

"No! no!" shrieked a voice, which, from the tone, was evidently a female one. "No! no! You cannot—shall not do the deed! Fall back, and fill up the grave, but do not mangle his poor remains! You will not read the prayers for the dead over him, I know; but surely his mother's prayers will prove equally as efficacious!"

A strange and universal impulse prompted those who were thronging round to draw back, and as they did so, a woman dashed with wild gestures into the circle.

Then she fell upon her knees by the grave.

The light of the torches which the bearers carried burned much better now they were not in motion, and their light revealed with great distinctness this woman's face and figure.

She was very old. Her skin was wrinkled, and looked yellower than it really was in the dull red glare of the torches. A quantity of thin gray hairs streamed behind her in the wind, and she clasped her wasted, bony hands together with an agonising earnestness.

"Get up, low woman," said Tobias Primp, recovering from his surprise, and advancing towards her. "Get up, and don't interfere with the majesty of the law, or I'll have you locked up, I will."

"No! no! you could not keep a mother from witnessing the interment of her son! I tell you he was my son!" she shrieked. "My son! my own flesh and blood, you understand."

"This is horror upon horror," said Dick; "let us draw back and leave them."

"Never, never," said Tom King. "I will stand by to the last. I cannot prevent them from carrying the sentence of the law into effect, but if they offer that poor creature any ill-usage, they shall rue it."

"You are right, Tom. I forgot the poor mother when I spoke. I will stay."

King pressed his hand in silence.

"Stand back, I say!" again cried Mr. Primp. "Can't you hear what I said, or did the wind blow, as it were, eh?"

"My boy—my son—my only one!" screamed the old woman, springing suddenly to her feet. "Have mercy! spare him—spare him! Friends, neighbours! help me! help! Do not let them do so frightful a deed! Save my poor boy from that, at least! Save him! Oh! save him!"

No one stirred, though, probably enough, many felt an inclination to do so; but the dread of the consequences of interfering with the carrying out of a judicial sentence kept them back.

"You do not move to help me!" she cried, in anguished, despairing tones, "Must a mother pray to you in vain to save her son's remains from a ruthless law! Oh! you who are fathers and have sons of your own, listen to my prayer, save and help him——Ah!"

This last ejaculation was forced from her lips in consequence of finding herself in the grasp of two men who had been directed to seize her.

With as much gentleness as possible these two men led her away from her son's grave.

But her voice, as she shouted for her son to be saved from his terrible doom, for a long time echoed and re-echoed along the highway, but it grew each moment fainter and fainter, until it could be heard no longer.

Then the ponderous hedge-stake was raised in several hands, and swung up and down twice or thrice, so that it should descend with greater force.

It went through the thin elm coffin with a terrible, sickening crash.

At that very moment there descended from the sky a perfect deluge of rain.

It seemed as though an enormous cloud had been suddenly reft open, and its contents allowed to fall bodily upon the earth.

The torches were extinguished instantly.

Then a general movement among those assembled took place.

Those who had been engaged to fill up the grave performed their task with great rapidity.

"Stop a minute, Dick!" said Tom King, as he observed his companion about to withdraw. "Stop a minute! We are drenched to the skin now, and cannot get any wetter, so let us stay and see it all out!"

Turpin uttered a growl of impatience and dissatisfaction, but remained.

In the meantime the grave had been filled up, and the men were now busily engaged in heaping a quantity of pebbly stones round the hedge-stake, which projected some three feet above the level of the road.

"Now I hope you are content!" said Turpin, as he saw the last stone put in its place.

"Yes, I'm ready now," said Tom; "only I made up my mind to see it all out, as being one of the most singular customs in existence."

"Come along, then!" said Dick, setting off at a trot. "Why, I believe the rain gets heavier every moment. It's positively coming down in one sheet."

"Oh! never mind. I daresay you have had your skin wetted before to-day, and when you were not so close to a place of shelter as you are at the present moment."

"That's very true. I wonder how Davis is getting on. I thought he would have got back before this. I am very uneasy and impatient, I can assure you."

"I have no doubt of that, for if you should be unfortunate enough to lose your mare, you will be a long time before you find one to match her."

"I should never find one. It would be an impossibility. When Turpin loses his mare it will be all over with him."

"Well, we shall soon know the result of the landlord's errand, for the inn is not a hundred yards off now. Look, you can see the lights at the front window quite plainly."

"Yes. I am, though, under the impression Davis has not returned, or we should have seen something of him. My heart misgives me very much about it."

"So I suppose, for you speak in quite a desponding way. You may depend it will be all right sooner or later."

"I hope so, indeed!" said Dick, as he pushed open the front door of the "Hand and Keys," and entered, closely followed by his comrade.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN DEPART FOR LONDON ON THEIR PERILOUS ERRAND.

FROM the noise which greeted the ears of the two highwaymen as they made their way along the passage, it was pretty clear that the old inn was tolerably full of customers. Avoiding, however, the kitchen in which the guests were, both ascended the broad oaken staircase.

Turpin was first, and he halted as soon as he reached the landing.

"Tom," he said, "I needn't tell you how anxious I am about Davis. I wish you would go down again and ascertain whether he has returned. Not that I think he has for a moment, only it would be more satisfactory to be sure he had not."

"I'll go," replied Tom. "None will know me. Stand here till I come back."

"Who shall you ask?"

"Your flame!"

"My flame?"

"Yes, Ellen!"

"Oh!

"I think she will be the best to make my inquiries of."

"Or Mrs. Davis. It doesn't matter which."

Tom King descended the stairs and went into the bar. It was empty at first, but Mrs. Davis and Ellen entered immediately after him, each carrying several jugs.

The young girl smiled when she saw King.

"You seem busy," he said. "It's an ill wind blows nobody good. Has Davis returned?"

"He has not," said Mrs. Davis, as she wiped her face with her apron. "I wish he was safe back! Did you ever know such a wet night? When he comes he will be drenched to the skin!"

"I was in hopes he had arrived. My friend is very uneasy about him and his mare, so he sent me to inquire while he waited for me on the stairs. Let us know as soon as he returns."

"Very well, good night!"

"Good night!"

"Not come?" interrogated Turpin, as soon as he saw King.

"No! They will send us word the moment he does."

Dick sighed.

"I don't like this," he said. "There is danger abroad, or Davis would have been back before this. If he does not come quickly I shall risk all and start myself. Fool that I was to leave Bess behind me. I'll warrant I never do the same thing again."

"You couldn't help yourself, could you? However, I don't wonder at your impatience and anxiety."

"I confess they increase fearfully every moment. There is, however, one thing certain, Bess must be got back somehow or other."

"I suppose so. And the best thing we can do is to go up to our attic and wait a while, and occupy ourselves in devising some scheme to be carried out by ourselves in case Davis should fail."

"You are right, my friend. I wish we had a light though, for this staircase is most confoundedly dark. I can't see where I am going."

"Never mind, feel your way. We shall be right enough when you reach the attic."

"So we shall. Let me lead the way, my friend."

"It will be a case of the blind leading the blind, I fancy, though, of course, you have been oftener up the stairs than I have."

"Rather!"

The highwaymen felt their way slowly up the staircase, and after a little blundering reached the attic.

Both went to the window.

"Throw it open, Dick," said King. "We shall be able to tell, then, what the weather is like, and whether there is anyone on the road."

Turpin obeyed.

A sudden gust of wind, bearing with it a quantity of rain, entered the chamber.

"The weather doesn't seem to have improved, Tom. The sky is as black as ink."

"It is. I fancy, though, the rain has abated a great deal."

"Oh! it has; there is no question about that. It couldn't come down at that rate long. I never knew anything like it, and I have seen a few showers. Can you see or hear anyone on the road?"

"No; both are out of the question. It is so dark you can't see your hand before you, and just hark how the wind howls!"

A terrific gust swept round the old inn as he spoke, and moaned and whistled as it careered round the corners that obstructed its onward passage.

"Shut the window," said Dick, "and let us come away."

"No: stop! silence!"

"What do you hear?"

"I fancied just then that I heard the tramp of horses' hoofs on the roadway."

Both strained their sense of hearing to the utmost.

"I hear nothing," said Turpin, after a brief pause.

"Nor I, now. And yet I fancied I heard a horse approaching. It must have been fancy merely."

They remained listening a little longer, but as they could hear no repetition of the sound, closed the window.

"I am in a terrible fidget," said Dick, "and I get worse and worse every moment."

"I can scarcely wonder at it, for you see Davis has been gone seven or eight hours now."

"Yes; that is the circumstance that fills me with alarm. I fear Davis has been seized by the police."

"Or," said King, "he may not have left London when the rain began, and is waiting there until the weather is better."

Dick shook his head at the supposition of his friend.

"It is just possible that may be the reason, but I doubt it."

"Well, then, let us suppose Davis has failed. What steps shall you take to get Bess into your possession?"

"I have no idea; but doubtless some mode of action will suggest itself to me at the proper time."

"Well, it's always my system to mature a plan before I start, and then you set about what you have to do with greater ease and confidence."

"That is only true to a certain extent, my friend. So many things occur to alter the aspect of events, that your plan requires perpetual modification, and by the time you have to put it into execution it is quite different to what it originally was."

"I have known such to be the case."

"You must have done. Now I always think it best to set out having only your ultimate purpose in view, and then let circumstances form and suggest your plan of operation."

"Perhaps it is best. But I asked you what you intended to do, simply because I look upon the attempt as an impossibility."

"Do you?"

"I do."

"It is difficult and dangerous, I know, but it does not follow from that it is impossible."

"Well, so far as my own convictions go, I feel quite assured Davis has failed in his errand, and has likely enough been made prisoner as an accomplice. Now if he, a stranger, could not succeed, I don't see what chance you yourself have of doing so."

"I admit all that, but I don't see that it is impossible, nevertheless."

"Well, then, I suppose by that, you have resolved to make the attempt yourself?"

"I have."

"Then I have a request to make of you which you must promise beforehand."

"I can guess what it is before you speak."

"I daresay you can. It is that you will let me accompany you, and share the dangers and difficulties of the enterprise."

"I cannot say no to your request, Tom, because I would rather you went with me. As for the danger, I know you value that no more than I do."

"You are not far off the mark there; but if such is the decision you have made, just allow me to give you a piece of advice."

"What is it?"

"To lose no time in carrying out your project."

"I have no intention."

"Then let us start at once. If we do not, we shall have it daylight before we know where we are."

"We shall. Come with me. It will take but a few minutes to get the horses ready for the road."

As he spoke, Turpin left the attic, closely followed by Tom King.

On reaching the bar they paused for a moment, and again inquired whether Davis had returned, and again received a negative reply. Briefly announcing, then, their intention to go in quest of him, they hurried out of the inn, across the yard, and into the stables.

Five minutes afterwards the two highwaymen were mounted and on their way to London.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TOM KING FIGHTS A SINGLE COMBAT WITH CHARLES STUART, CALLED IN HISTORY THE YOUNG PRETENDER.

THAT this was about the most dangerous expedition Turpin had ever ventured upon there can be little doubt, and though this fact was quite patent to him, it did not cause him to hesitate in the least.

There was some little improvement in the state of the weather perceptible. The rain had almost ceased, and the wind had lost much of its violence.

The roads, though, were in a fearful state, and were very heavy to the horses, for their hoofs sank deeply into the soft clayey soil at every step they took.

The two friends did not speak for some minutes after leaving the yard of the "Hand and Keys." They were too much occupied in picking their way to have leisure to do so.

The night was profoundly dark, so they did not venture to put their horses to a gallop, but they went over the ground at a trot that soon decreased the distance they had to travel.

At length they reached a firmer piece of road, and then Turpin, turning to his companion, said—

"This cool air clears one's faculties. While we have been plodding along, I have been thinking over Tom Davis' non-appearance, and trying to form some hypothesis to account for it."

"Indeed?"

"Yes!"

"Have you succeeded?"

"I fancy so. I seem as though I could tell just what had taken place."

"How do you account for that?"

"I cannot tell, but I have made it out bit by bit, and feel confident I have arrived at the correct solution of the affair."

"It will be a good thing if you have, for, of course, it would lend us most material aid in forming a plan of attack, and determine to a great extent whether we should use stratagem or force."

"I think we shall want a little of both."

"Very good. Let us hear your account of what has happened!"

"Well, you must know first that just before I met you I was betrayed by a waggoner and taken prisoner by some officers."

"Oh! I have heard nothing of this before."

"Dear me, no more you have. Then I shall be obliged to go back to that incident in order to make you understand."

"Well, tell it in as few words as you can, for I am rather impatient by nature, and can't bear to have to wait when I want to hear anything."

"I can assure you it is quite as disagreeable to me as to you. The fact is, as I said before, we must, as soon as we get a chance, relate our histories to each other, and then we shall be able to talk in comfort."

"We shall. You say you were made a prisoner. Never mind the particulars. What next!"

"They were the same officers that pursued you so hotly. There were five of them, and they got about twenty farm labourers to help them, so I did not stand much of a chance with so many."

"I should think not."

"However, when they had bound me, and put me on horseback behind one of the officers, the thought occurred to them how dreadful a thing it would be to have to divide the reward amongst so many."

"Yes, that is only human nature. That over-grasping feeling on the part of the officers has assisted many a one to escape."

"It has; but we will not go into that subject now. The officers then tried to diddle these men, without whom they would never have captured me; so I took advantage of the circumstances to turn the tables upon them."

"How did you do that?"

"In the simplest manner possible. I offered those men who had captured me ten pounds a-piece to set me free; so they paid into the officers, and did it at once."

"Ha! ha! Capital! That's the best joke I have heard for some time! And how about the officers?"

"I did not let them off scot-free, you may depend, but had them tied back to back, and mounted on their horses."

"Ha! ha! ha! Bravo! Better and better! I shall burst, I know I shall! Ha! ha! How droll they must have looked, one with his face to his horse's head, and the other with his face to his tail! Ha! ha!"

"It would have pleased you most to have heard how they swore when we touched up the cattle, and made them gallop along the road!"

"I should have died, I know I should."

"I did, and so we did all! I kept my word with the men, and gave them not ten pounds but fifteen."

"Then they were in ecstacies with you?"

"They were. I have made a friend of every one of them. But what I was going to say is this: the officer in command was Wriggles. Do you know him? An apoplectic-looking man!"

"I have seen him."

"Well, he is very sweet on catching me; but he wants to do it with as few persons as possible, so as to get the larger share of the reward. Now, in spite of his defeat, I feel convinced it will not be a lesson to him, but he will still try to capture me with his four men. It was he who was put up to my being at the 'Three Tuns,' and, of course, knows Black Bess is stabled somewhere close at hand. Now, his plan of operations will be this. He will look upon that stable as a kind of mousetrap."

"A mousetrap?"

"Yes. He and his officers will take up their stations in the stable, and very patiently lay in wait, and make a prisoner of everyone who enters."

"Dick, my boy, you've hit the right nail on the head this time. You may depend they have caught Davis, and are keeping him there, most likely trusting that those who have sent him will shortly make their appearance."

"That's the conclusion I told you I came to, and you think that is the real state of affairs?"

"I feel certain of it. Somehow it seems to carry conviction with it."

"I am glad you think so. Of course, I could not tell what effect it would have upon your mind. Now, don't you think I was right when I said we should require to use stratagem and force?"

"Quite right. Though, under the circumstances, I should prefer using rather more of the latter than the former."

"It would be best, perhaps. Now, what course should you propose?"

"Well, I hardly know. If it is just as you have supposed, I should be for dashing into the stable, and bringing the mare off by main force."

"So should I, Tom. I like a bold plan of operations. I think we should be a match for Wriggles and his four men."

"Oh! yes. We ought first, if possible, to ascertain whether they are there, and then bounce in suddenly upon them!"

"That will be it; and, being taken by surprise, the battle will be half won!"

"Let us push on a little faster, then, for the sooner we get there the better."

"Yes; but hark!"

"Hark? At what?"

"Can't you hear someone approaching?"

Tom King bent forward in his saddle and listened.

"Halt, Dick!" he said. "A horseman is coming from the direction of London!"

As he spoke the sound of the horse's footsteps splashing into the mud and little pools on the roadway came quite plainly to their ears.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN PROVE MORE THAN A MATCH FOR MR. WRIGGLES.

"I SAY, Tom!"

"Yes, Dick."

"This is a traveller."

"Or Tom Davis!"

"Oh! ah! or Tom Davis."

"What were you going to say?"

"Why—a-hem! The business we are on requires despatch."

"Unquestionably."

"But if this should be a traveller, my friend"——

"Yes."

"Do you think we ought to lose the opportunity of doing a little business?"

"Just as you like. Abstractedly I should say no."

"He might carry a rich booty."

"He might."

"And it would be a shame to let it slip through our fingers, wouldn't it?"

"Especially when it wouldn't delay us much one way or the other."

"I think we must stop him, Tom."

"Very well. Look after your priming. Remember it has been raining, and the chances are ten to one the charges have got wet."

King examined his own pistols as he spoke, and Turpin followed his example.

The horseman, be he whom he might, was not now many yards distant. His horse's footsteps could be plainly enough heard, but neither the form of horse nor rider could be distinguished owing to the unusual darkness of the night.

The two highwaymen had halted just in the middle of the road.

Both now were silent, for they did not wish their voices to reach the horseman, and be a means of putting him on his guard.

In another moment he was face to face with King and Turpin.

"Stand!" said the latter, "and deliver what valuables you carry with you peaceably. If you resist, your death be on your own head."

The only reply the traveller made was to draw a sword with lightning rapidity from its scabbard.

It gleamed through the air like a flash of light as it descended, for this traveller aimed a desperate blow at Dick's head with the weapon.

By something little short of a miracle, Dick drew back quick enough to escape the stroke; but the sword, in its descent, sliced a small piece of skin off the neck of his horse.

The pain, doubtless, was excessive, for the animal reared and pranced, and became perfectly unmanageable.

Dick maintained his position in his saddle, though anyone less accustomed to horse-riding than himself would, no doubt, have found it impossible to do so, and he strove to soothe the creature in the best way he could.

The man who had been attacked did not fail to perceive the advantage he had gained, and spurring forward, would doubtless have made short work of Dick had not Tom at that moment interposed his person.

He had drawn the hanger which he habitually carried by his side, and stood still and quietly on guard.

His opponent, he fancied, was in some way connected with the army, both on account of the promptitude with which he made his attack upon Dick, and because occasionally King could see something glittering about his apparel, as though he was attired in an officer's uniform.

On finding himself confronted by King, the traveller did not appear to abate his martial and valorous bearing a jot, but instantly commenced a furious attack upon Tom, who, though an expert swordsman, found himself fully occupied in warding off the heavy blows which were aimed at him.

The conflict continued for many minutes without either party gaining advantage.

The idea that he was fighting with a soldier was strengthened in King's mind by observing what perfect mastery he had over his steed, and, indeed, the manner in which he made it wheel about was well calculated to call forth surprise and admiration.

And now Turpin, who had succeeded in calming his horse, also drew his hanger, and rode forward to the assistance of his friend.

"Stand back, Dick!" shouted King, making his voice heard above the din of the clashing steel. "Stand back, and let us have fair play! It would be cowardly for both of us to attack a really brave man who is defending what he carries about him."

Without a word, Turpin drew back as requested.

"A rest! a rest!" cried the soldier, if soldier he were, for the first time breaking the silence. "Hold a moment!"

King lowered his weapon.

"You are a brave-hearted man," continued the stranger, restoring his sword to its sheath, and holding out his right hand, "and true courage and bravery are the things I admire most on earth. I know not who you are, except that you are a highwayman, yet, strange as it may seem to you, I should be proud and glad to reckon you my friend. Shake hands!"

Nothing loath, King grasped the hand so friendly held out to him; and said, while Dick looked on in wondering amazement—

"You have behaved yourself most gallantly, and I accept your cordial invitation with the utmost pleasure. Still, you will excuse me if I say that I fancy you have overrated me. Fair play is always my maxim."

"And mine too. And I must say on this occasion you have acted up to it. Here is my purse!"

"No, no," said Tom King. "Keep it! I would not take it from you for worlds!"

"I insist upon it," said the stranger, endeavouring to force a well-filled purse into his hands. "You might, if you liked, have set upon me with your companion, and deprived me of my life; for if your friend is as accomplished a swordsman as yourself, I should not have stood the ghost of a chance with you. I had much ado to defend myself as it was."

"You are very frank, sir," said King, still avoiding the proffered gift, "and I admire you for it. I must, however, refuse to accept anything from you."

"Well, then, if you will not, probably your comrade will. Here, you Sir Highwayman No. 2, here is a purse of guineas which I wish you to accept as a present for the forbearance you have exercised. Take, and be welcome!"

Turpin made a deprecating gesture.

"The case is entirely in the hands of my friend," he said, "and I must decline to interfere with it. So you must excuse me if I refuse."

The stranger returned the purse to his pocket with rather an offended air.

"Then, gentlemen—for by your manners and bearing such you are—since you will not allow me to do anything to show my gratitude for your forbearance, perhaps you will allow me to proceed on my journey."

He gathered the reins in his hands as he spoke, and touched his steed with his spur.

"One moment!" said King, placing himself directly in his way.

"What is your wish?"

"We have already passed sufficient compliments, I think," replied King; "yet, still for my own part, I have said no more than your gallant behaviour prompted me to say. I would scorn to take anything from you but your name, and that, I confess, I have the greatest desire to know. Will you give it me?"

The stranger hesitated a few moments before he spoke.

"My name," he said, "is a secret. I am hunted and proscribed, and many are thirsting for my life! I do not like to refuse you anything, and yet"——

"It appears to me," said Tom King, "that your position in that respect is very much like our own."

"It is; but most unjustly," replied the stranger, a tone of sadness tinging his words. "My position should be among the highest in the land."

A deep sigh came from his lips as he finished speaking.

Both Turpin and King were perfectly absorbed in their strange adventure.

The latter broke the silence.

"We will not press you," he said; "but still I think you may safely trust us with your name."

"Perhaps so, and if I do, a day may come when I shall be glad to avail myself of your assistance. The

simple fact of your being fugitives like I am, emboldens me to confide in you. You will be surprised when I declare myself! But before I do, tell me your names."

"Mine," said Tom, "is tolerably well known. It is Tom King!"

"Tom King, the highwayman?"

"Even so."

"You surprise me, for I expected to find the person who bore that name an unmitigated ruffian, capable of every atrocity."

"Thank you!" said Tom, drily.

"Excuse me," remarked the gentleman. "I only said what sort of character had been represented to me under your name."

"Oh! no offence—no offence!"

"And your companion," continued the stranger.

"He must answer for himself."

Dick drew a little closer to the speakers.

"My name," he said, as he raised his hat and made a most elaborate bow, "is Richard—commonly called Dick—Turpin!"

"Indeed! I little expected I was in the company of two such celebrated characters, and, after receiving your confidence, I cannot withhold mine; besides, I am quite sure now I shall have nothing to fear from you."

"We will give you our assurance," said Turpin and King, both speaking at once. "We will give you our assurance that your name shall never be revealed by us unless with your consent."

"Agreed, then. Listen! I have two names by which I am equally well known. One is Charles Stuart, and the other is"——

"THE YOUNG PRETENDER!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE YOUNG PRETENDER FINDS TWO STAUNCH ADHERENTS.

THE two highwaymen drew back a few paces when this name fell upon their ears, and though, generally speaking, they were disposed to show but scant reverence for royalty, yet, when this announcement was made, they involuntarily backed their horses a few yards, and raised their hats respectfully.

The name of the unfortunate young man was, of course, well known to both, and they were also familiar with the many reverses he had suffered. It is, therefore, to be presumed that his chivalry and gallantry, and the fact of his being hunted by almost all the world, conspired chiefly to cause a feeling of friendship for him to arise in their breasts which they would not otherwise have felt.

"My friends," said the Young Pretender in his calm, rich voice; "do not draw back, I beg. Think in how many ways you resemble he who is rightfully your king, but who is now no more than you in station. Like you, I am compelled to travel in disguise and when the sun has withdrawn his face. I am surrounded on every side by enemies who are thirsting for my life. I am compelled to be ever watchful—ever in dread of treachery. In all these respects must I—a king by birth and right—resemble you!"

These words were uttered in a tone of deep, inexpressible pathos, tinged with a soul-absorbing sadness; and as he gave utterance to his reflections, he became conquered by his emotion, and his head drooped upon his breast.

His words, manner, bearing, all combined to raise a feeling of sympathy in his behalf on the part of our two friends.

They were silent for a moment or so, and then Tom King broke the silence.

"Your highness," he said, "among all those who most profess themselves your adherents, there is not one so true, so faithful, so devoted, as myself. I consider your right to the throne of England as most indisputable, and only too gladly will I do all I can to advance your cause. You will allow, sire, that the position in which I am placed will prevent my doing much."

'Pardon me," said Stuart. "You have addressed me by a title which, at present, is not my own: though I hope some day it will be. Still, there is an old Scottish superstition which says, 'It is unlucky to give anyone a title before it actually belongs to him.'"

"I am sorry, my prince," replied King, "that I have been led into an indiscretion. Let me hope that you will receive my promise of allegiance to you."

"I do! I do! And yet to-night"——

He paused abruptly.

Neither King nor Turpin liked to speak, and a silence ensued, which they could see much embarrassed the young prince.

He got out of his difficulty by finishing the sentence he had checked himself in uttering.

"To-night," he said, "secretly and in disguise, I made a visit to the metropolis. I was induced thereto by those who had professed by oaths and protestations that they were devoted solely to my cause. Base hearts! It was a deeply-laid scheme for my capture and destruction, but by great good fortune I succeeded in eluding them, and have so far escaped in safety."

"I trust, my prince," said King, gravely, "that you will never do me the injustice to think of me in the same breath with them. You must see that it is no interest of mine, that I have no motive for siding with you save the true one, and that is, I consider, if monarchy must be a national institution, you, as the descendant of the Stuarts, possess a far better right to the throne than any German family."

"That's just exactly it," said Turpin, speaking for the first time, for hitherto he felt that respect for young Charles Stuart prevented the interruption of the conversation he was holding with Tom King. "Excuse me, my prince, but King, my comrade here, expressed so well my own convictions, that I could not forbear saying so."

"There is nothing to excuse," said the Pretender, gently. "Heaven knows every friend now is a friend indeed, and you must accept such thanks as I can offer. Believe me, I am most grateful to you both."

This was said with so much sweetness of tone, and such charming grace, that it was impossible for anyone not to be charmed with it.

"We will endeavour to merit your thanks," said Turpin, "and hope that the day is not far distant when we shall have the satisfaction of hailing you King of England!"

The eyes of the Young Pretender brightened.

"When I am," he said, "I will take care you quit a mode of life which is not worthy of you; you shall both have a position in my establishment."

"We are well enough content with our lot," said Dick, "and having once commenced warring with society, as we have, the struggle must be continued until one of us is vanquished!"

"You reject my offer. But I forget. I am not yet in a position to make it to you! I have been betrayed into a weakness. Farewel.!"

As he spoke, Charles Stuart again took the reins in his hand, and rode forward.

The two highwaymen drew aside to enable him to pass.

"I am going now to Scotland," he said, "where I hope soon to raise my standard. Will you join me when I do?"

"With all the pleasure in life. We would accompany you now to preserve you from danger, but business of the most urgent nature, and which will admit of no delay, calls us to London."

"Farewell, then," said Charles Stuart. "We part with the understanding that, as soon as you hear I am raising an army, you will place yourselves under my banner?"

"That is it," said Tom; "and rest assured we will render you all the service in our power."

"Since, then, you will not accept the purse, and which now I am sorry I ever offered you, permit me to place upon each of your right hands a ring, which will enable me to recognise you upon a future occasion."

"Willingly, my prince."

The highwaymen held out their hands, and the young Pretender placed upon each a ring of considerable value.

"I shall recognise you now," he said, "and, for the third time, let me say farewell! Day-dawn is now close at hand, and I must hasten my journey, or I may even yet be overtaken by my foes. Farewell!"

"Farewell, my prince, and may the time soon come when we can hail you King of England!"

Charles Stuart lifted his hat, and striking his spurs into his horse's sides, galloped swiftly along the road.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE FIGHT IN THE STABLE BETWEEN THE OFFICERS AND THE HIGHWAYMEN.

THE two friends for some moments pursued in silence their interrupted journey.

The adventure they had just had was provocative of thought.

But Dick, as we know, was a person who could never go far in anyone's company without indulging in conversation.

"How silent you are, Tom! Has this young enthusiast made so deep an impression on your mind?"

"He has, I must confess. I was thinking what a singular thing it was that we should have met each other as we did."

"A strange chance. I like him much, for we have had proof to-night that, if he is gentle in his manners, he can be, when he wishes, as brave as a lion."

"Yes; I do not think that I ever had so much difficulty to defend myself from anyone before. You know I pride myself very much upon my skill with the sword."

"He was almost a match for you. But come, Tom, my friend, quicken your speed. Have you forgotten our errand?"

"For the moment I had. There is no time to lose, for look, already in the east is a faint line of light."

"There is. I can see it plainly, so daybreak must be close at hand; but, let the peril be what it will, I am determined not to pass another day separated from my bonny mare."

"One thing, we are not far from our destination. A quarter of an hour, I fancy, will be enough to carry us there."

"If we make good speed, it will. But is it not singular we should have both met, and joined the Pretender's side?"

"Yes. I am rather surprised at you, Dick, for I always thought you were a staunch opposer of sovereignty and such like."

"So I am, Tom, so I am. I only sided with him because it always comes natural for me to side with the weak against the strong."

"Oh! that was it, was it?"

"It was; but still, as you yourself said, so far as title to the throne goes, I do consider he has a much better right to it than any German by any possibility can have."

"You are right there. That's just what I think; and if I can do anything towards making him king, I shall do it."

"And I will help you," said Turpin, "for the short time I was with him sufficed for him to win my heart."

"I am rather puzzled, though, at his behaviour. One would hardly have thought he would have made friends with us as he did. You may depend he has met with some great grief to-night that has chastened and subdued his heart."

"Without a doubt. Did he not say as much to you in the course of the conversation he had with you?"

"He did. He said those who had professed themselves sworn friends to his cause and party had lured him into a snare for his destruction. But come, here we are in London at last."

"I think, Tom it will only be prudent to slacken speed a little as we go through the streets, or we shall create suspicion."

"You are right And now, have you matured your plan?"

"No: that I have not. Too many things have occurred. Stop, and let me have five minutes' thought, and do you try if you can arrange some plan of operations."

Both relapsed into silence.

They were now threading their way through the densely-populated district lying north of Holborn. Although it was so early in the morning, many people were walking through the streets.

At length, without uttering another word, the two highwaymen drew up close by Montagne House, which has been transformed into that handsome building, the British Museum.

"Well, Tom, what is it?"

"I was just considering which would be best: to leave the cattle somewhere about here, or ride up to the 'Three Tuns.'"

"The latter, I think, and I'll tell you why. If I had not separated from Bess, I should not have had to run through the streets for my life as I did."

"That's true. Then you say ride forward?"

"Yes."

The horses were once more put in motion, and when they again halted it was opposite the mouth of the alley in Seven Dials leading to the stable in which Black Bess had been placed.

A poor shivering, ragged urchin was shuffling along the street, and Dick beckoned him to come towards him.

"Do you think you could take care of these two horses for a few minutes if I gave you a shilling for doing so?"

"A shilling. Oh! could I not rather. Why, holding 'osses is how I gets my living. I only wishes I could get a shilling off everybody!"

"Well, you shall off me if you mind the horses well, and so you will off my friend here, I know."

"Two shillings!" said the boy, as he made a dart at the bridles. "Oh! won't I have a breakfast, neither!"

The two friends alighted from their horses.

"Walk them gently up and down," said Dick to the boy; "but don't lead them far away. When we come back, we shall want them in a hurry very likely."

"All right, your honour," said the boy, touching his cap.

"Now, Dick," said Tom King, "as you know the ins and outs of this place, and I don't, perhaps you will take the lead."

"I will. Follow me. I have made up my mind to a bold course of action."

"That's right. I like a bold plan best; it always has a better chance of succeeding!"

"Well, my plan is very simple. I assume, in the first place, that Bess is in this stable, and that the officers are there waiting for anyone who may come to fetch her."

"Well?"

"I intend, with your co-operation, to make a bold rush into the stable, overcome all resistance, lead out Black Bess, mount her, and be off, laughing at all pursuit."

"The plan is, I must say, bold enough in all conscience. Still, I like it, and there is every chance of its being successful."

"I am glad you think so. Now, halt a minute! Just round the corner to the right is the stable."

"Oh!"

"Now, quietly! Hark!"

"What's that?"

"A footstep. Cannot you hear it."

"Yes, now quite plainly. Who can it be, I wonder?"

"I have no idea. Draw back a little, and we will see. If it is an officer we must pounce upon him, and make him a prisoner at once."

The two friends got as close to the wall of the alley as they could, and waited.

The footstep approached.

It was a lounging, careless one, as though the walker was in no particular hurry, but merely idling about to pass away the time.

In another moment, now, a strange compound between a man and a boy came round the corner from the direction of the stable.

"Oh! it's all right," said Dick. "It's only Alf!"

"Alf? Who's Alf?"

"Why, the man who looks after the horses. How fortunate we have met him."

"Why?"

"We can get all the information we require that is necessary to make our plan perfect."

"Is he faithful?"

"As a dog. I would trust him to any extent."

"Then, if that is the case, it is indeed fortunate we have met him."

"Hi! Alf! Here!" said Dick, in a suppressed voice, and putting half-a-crown into his eye as our fops now-a-days fix their eye-glasses. "Hi! Alf! Come this way."

The ostler looked up as he heard these words, and his face lighted up with pleasure when he saw Turpin.

He threw off his lounging, shuffling gait, and advanced quickly towards him.



[TURPIN AND KING ATTACK THE OFFICERS IN THE STABLE.]

"Good morning, Alf," said Turpin, dropping the half-crown into his hand. "I want a little imformation from you this morning."

"All right, your honour. I can guess what it is."

"Oh, you can?"

"Yes. It's about your mare that you left here the night before last."

"It is. Quick! tell me. Is she safe and unharmed in the stable where I left her?"

"She be as right as a trivet; but——"

"Thank fate, so far. But what?"

"Well, I'm glad I found you, for, do you know, I have been thinking about you all night, and just as I was deepest in thought about you, I heard you call me."

"Yes, that's right enough. But what were you going to say?"

"Why, Bess is in the stable safe enough. There's old Wriggles and four officers with him taking care that no one fetches her away."

"Just as I told you, Tom."

"Eh?" said Alf.

"Oh! nothing. I merely remarked to my friend here, that things had fallen out just as I supposed they would. By-the-bye, how and when did Mr Wriggles and his men arrive?"

"Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!" laughed the ostler heartily, and yet in so subdued a way that at a few yards' distance it would have been unheard. "Ha! ha! ha! The werry best joke as ever I heard on. Oh! Squire, you is a rum 'un, you is."

"How did they come?"

"You know how they come. Ha! ha!"

"I know how I started them."

"They come here on horseback, tied back to back."

"Oh! they did?"

"Yes, and when I seed them they looked so outragious comical that I laid down and rolled in the yard, and fairly cried."

"With laughter?"

"Yes. Oh! you should have just seen what a rage Mr. Wriggles was in. His face was black——"

"Good heavens!"

"As a nigger's."

"Was there a countryman with them?"

"A market waggoner?"

"Yes."

"There was."

"And what about him?"

"Oh! poor fellow, he was in a dreadful way. I really felt quite sorry for him."

"Why?"

"Oh! he said you had ruined him. He should lose his place, his vegetables would spoil, and he should get looked up for the damage done. If you had not got off, he said, it would not have mattered, because he would have had the reward."

"Really, I am quite sorry I didnot give in at once, for his sake."

"I dessay you is."

"Is he in the stable with Wriggles?"

"Bless you, no sir! Old Wriggles is a hartful card. If he was in a towering passion, he did not lose his wits. The waggoner knew nothing about Black Bess being in the stable here, though Mr. Wriggles did, so he went off to look after his waggon and team."

"I should think he will stick to it infut ure. It will be a les son to him. Fool that he was, he might have had a handsome sum for giving me a ride to London. I should not have begrudged it him."

"I knows as how you wouldn't, squire. You never begrudges nothink."

"Well, then, this waggoner has gone?"

"Oh! yes. Like the boy's eye."

"And you have not seen him since?"

"No, squire. We haven't seen nothink ofehim."

"That's all right, then. He would hav been an awkward customer at close quarters. And tnow, Alf, we may as well know all about it. Wha did Mr. Wriggles do after the waggoner had gone?"

"Swore above six, and then drank four glasses of brandy!"

"What then?"

"Why, he said as how the stable would prove a first-rate trap, and that he should nab you as sure as eggs ain't bacon, for you would be certain to come after Black Bess!"

"Just how I told you he would reason," said Dick, turning to Tom King.

"Exactly. Go on, Alf!"

"Well, all five of them went into the stable along with the mare, and there they have been ever since."

"How do they employ their time?"

"Oh! they're all right. What with eating, drinking, and telling tales, the time passes pleasantly enough."

"And now, one thing more. Did anyone come here after Black Bess?"

"Yes, a fat man!"

"How did he get on?"

"Why, they nabbed him."

"Have they got him in the stable now?"

"Yes, tied hand and foot!"

"Poor Tom!"

"I was not about when he came, or else I should have given him the office; but he walked into the stable half soaked, and so nabbed he was!"

"How very odd, Tom. It turns out precisely as I said it would."

"It does!"

"Now, Alf, look here!"

"I is looking."

"This gentleman and myself are going to fetch the mare out of the stable, and give the officers a thrashing."

"That's the ticket! And you want me to help," said Alf, turning up his sleeves, and squaring with his fists.

"No, not exactly. That would only get you into trouble. I have got a boy outside with two other horses. Now, you would render me a service, and a great one, if you would keep an eye upon him, for it may, perhaps, be important that they should be close at hand."

"I'll see to it, squire; so that's one trouble less on your mind."

"I am glad to hear you say so, for you are a faithful fellow, and will, I know, keep your word."

"You are right there, squire; but shouldn't I like to help you slip into the officers. Oh! stockings!"

Dick and Tom could not help laughing at Alf as he jumped about the alley, as though engaged with some formidable antagonist.

"Mind the horses Alf, my boy, and you shall have a guinea for your trouble."

"Right! Stand here a minute, and I'll just have a peep."

Alf ran to the mouth of the alley, and then returned.

"Right he is! That boy'll mind 'em all right. I knows him. Now, squire, look here, I can put you up to a dodge!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

TURPIN AGAIN MOUNTS HIS BONNY MARE.—HURRAH FOR A LIFE ON THE ROAD!

"WELL, Alf," asked Dick, as the ostler approached him with a mysterious yet triumphant air, "what is it?"

"A scheme!"

"To get the mare out?"

"Yes."

"And Tom Davis?"

"Who?"

"The fat man they made prisoner."

"Oh! ah! yes! Him as well."

"That's the style, Alf. Let us hear what it is:"

"No, never mind telling you. Just follow me, and I'll show you what it is."

Alf made his way along the alley, and round the corner leading to the stables.

He was closely followed by the two highwaymen.

"Hush!" he said, and he held up his finger for silence.

They trod on tip-toe.

The sound of a voice singing a song in stentorian tones came upon their ears.

"They're making themselves jolly, ain't they?" whispered Alf.

"It seems like it."

"Now, squire, look here. Do you see that round hole there?"

"In the wall, over the stable?"

"Yes."

"I can just see it; but it's so dark."

"All the better. Well that round hole looks out of the hay-loft over Bess's stables."

"I know it does."

"Werry good! Now, do you see this ladder?"

"I understand," said Dick. "You want me to put the ladder up to the hole, and make my way into the stable that road?"

"Egzactly, squire. When you gets up in the hay-loft, creep along carefully to the left, and then you'll come to the stairs leading to the stable. Down' em you go like a shot. The officers is taken by surprise, and in consekence licked—you mount Black Bess, and off you go like a bird!"

"It ain't half a bad scheme, Alf, and I shall put it into execution."

Alf looked pleased.

"As, however," continued Dick, "absolute silence is indispensable, and you are used to moving ladders and I ain't, I will just get you to put that one up to the hole in the loft, and then we will manage the rest. What do you think of the scheme, Tom?"

"Why, I think it is a very good one. They won't dream of our making an entrance through the loft, and so the whole of their attention will be given to the door. What a voice that fellow has, to be sure."

Just as he spoke, the end of a verse had been reached, and then the whole joined in chorus, apparently with great gusto.

Alf took this opportunity to place the ladder against the wall, and the highwaymen mounted it, and were standing in the hay-loft before the chorus was concluded.

According to arrangement, Alf went to the street, so as to look after the boy with the horses.

Comparative silence prevailed after the song was finished, so Turpin and King stood profoundly still. It was no part of their plan to let the officers know they were there before they actually stood before them.

A great quantity of straw was scattered about the floor

of the loft, so they were afraid to make the least movement lest the rustling should betray their presence.

"Now, Instone," they heard a voice say, in thick, guttural accents, "it's your turn now, so tip us a good one!"

"Yes, Mr. Wriggles," they heard a voice respond, which they reasonably enough supposed belonged to Instone. "I'll try my best, sir, if you please."

"Order for Instone! Silence, gentlemen, silence."

Mr. Instone now began to troll forth a song, which, however first-rate it may have appeared to his companions, does not, in our eyes, merit reproduction here.

The highwaymen waited again for the chorus, and at last their patience was rewarded.

Quick as thought, for the dawn of the new day was stealing into the sky, and their eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, Dick and Tom made their way to the staircase Alf the ostler had described.

It did not deserve the name of staircase, for it was simply a rude kind of ladder, nailed against the wall.

"Now, Dick," whispered Tom, "look to your pistols!"

"All right!"

"Mine are in good order and fit for instant service. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Come on then, at once."

As he spoke these words he descended the ladder with the agility of a monkey.

He reached the ground a second or so before Turpin, but that was all.

They did not pause a moment, but yet they had time to see they were in a long stable divided into several boxes, and that the officers were seated in one opposite the front door.

Uttering a loud shout, which, coming so unexpectedly as it did, struck a panic into the hearts of the officers, Turpin and King crossed the stable.

A table had, by the order of Mr. Wriggles, been carried into it, and around this the officers were seated.

They rose in confusion.

The two highwaymen were among them in a moment.

Then commenced the most desperate struggle that can be well conceived.

The officers had, in point of numbers, the advantage; but our friends, by their determination and energy, soon made the chances equal.

"Give it them, Tom, my boy! On to them! Make them remember this to the last day of their lives. That's it! Down you go!"

The deep potations in which the officers had been indulging diminished the resistance they would have made, though the heavy, straightforward blows which King administered appeared to have a sobering effect.

Mr. Wriggles fought, screamed, yelled, and danced like a madman.

"Take them!" he said. "Capture them! The one is Dick Turpin and the other is Tom King! Take them both, and then what a glorious reward will fall into our hands! Now, Instone, quick to the door! Don't let them escape!"

Instone made a rush to the door, which Turpin was trying to unfasten and fling open, but a terrific blow in the face from Dick's fist laid him prostrate on the ground.

The next minute the door was open.

A gentle light was now diffused through the stable, which enabled Dick to see the state of affairs much better.

Tom Davis he saw was bound hand and foot, but looking upon the highwaymen's proceedings with considerable satisfaction.

While Tom was busily combating those officers who could stand upon their feet, Dick made his way towards Davis, and, taking a clasp-knife from his pocket, cut the bonds by which he was secured.

The landlord's limbs were terribly cramped from being so long in one position, and he was some minutes before he properly regained the use of them.

"Get hold of Bess, Davis, my boy, and lead her out into the yard," whispered Dick, "while I give these fellows here a little more physic. I can see Tom will be glad of my assistance."

So saying, Turpin plunged into the thickest of the fight, leaving Davis to execute his orders.

The officers certainly tried very hard to conquer their assailants, but in vain. No doubt the desperate resistance they made was owing to the exasperation they felt at being so often defeated.

But they were doomed to be defeated once more, for, just as Turpin heard Davis lead his mare out into the yard, he found there were only two officers in a state to show fight.

Dick took one and King the other.

They made short work of them, and they were quickly lying by the side of their companions.

The victory was complete; and, though knives had been drawn and pistols fired, yet none of the combatants had received any injury save that derived from their fists. They found them the most convenient weapons at close quarters.

Turpin and King had, of course, made themselves proficient in every means of defence; so, as they were both excellent boxers and wrestlers, as well as being sober and determined, they could scarcely fail to gain the victory they did, although their foes were so superior to them in numbers.

All five of the officers, Mr. Wriggles included, lay upon the floor of the stable more or less in a state of insensibility.

"Whew, Tom!" cried Turpin, as he wiped the perspiration from his face and went into the yard. "It was warm work, but we have succeeded in our object. Are you hurt?"

"Bruised and battered a little, that's all; but I am unwounded, if that's what you mean."

"I say, though, we ought not to leave them like this. Let's lock them in the stable."

"Good! It shall be done."

King turned the key in the lock.

"I suppose Davis has led Bess into the street along with the other horses. Come on at once; I shall feel another man when I am once more upon her back."

"The change will soon take place," said King, as both hurried along the yard, and round the corner of the alley; "for look, there is Davis just under the archway!"

"And holding Black Bess by the bridle," exclaimed Turpin. "Hurrah! I am a man once more!"

So saying, he ran down the alley, and flinging his arm round his mare's neck, stroked her head and face with his hand.

The noble creature evidently recognized him again, for she uttered a short, low neigh of satisfaction, and returned her master's caress by rubbing her nose into his hand, and on to the sleeve of his coat.

"Now I hope you're happy, Dick," said Tom Davis, after watching the greeting between the highwayman and his steed. "Is your heart at rest?"

"It is, Davis. I don't care a straw now for anything or anybody! One! two! three!"

As he uttered the word "three," Turpin placed his hands on the back of Black Bess, and vaulted lightly into the saddle.

The magnificent animal, so soon as she felt her rider on her back, pranced and reared in the narrow street. She had been so long cooped up that she longed for a gallop into the country.

"Gently, mare, gently!" said Dick. "I will give you the rein presently, and then off you shall go as fast and as far as you like! I shall be better able to appreciate your value now, Bess!"

In the meantime King had taken his seat on the back of his own steed.

"Here, Davis," cried Turpin, "I should advise you to get back to Hornsey as soon as you can. You can take the horse that brought me hither. It is one belonging to Mr. Wriggles's troop, so mount it, and be off!"

"I will, lad, for I can't walk back again. Woa! easy now!"

"With a great deal of exertion, Mr. Davis managed to get into the saddle.

"I think it will be best for us to separate, Davis; so take my thanks with you for the service you have done me."

"Oh, don't mention it. I have done nothing."

"Remember me to Ellen and your missus. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye."

Mr. Davis trotted off down St. Andrew's-street.

"Now, Alf, look alive, my boy, for I want to be going. Here's a guinea for your trouble and assistance."

"Thanks, your honour." said Alf, touching the peak of his cap.

"And give this half-crown to the boy for minding the horses."

"I will. Here, David, here's half-a-crown for you!"

The boy, who had probably never before had so large a sum in his possession at one time, looked at the coin with quite an incredulous air.

"It's a good one," said Dick, "try it."

The boy put it between his teeth, and then, apparently satisfied that it was not counterfeit, vanished round the corner of the street.

Turpin and King laughed heartily.

"Off with you, squire, at once," cried Alf, who was standing just in the alley; "off with you. I'm blest if old Wriggles hasn't broke down the door of the stable. Here he comes."

With a perfect rush, Mr. Wriggles, followed by one of his men, shot out of the alley into the roadway.

He had recovered to some extent from the effects of the injuries he had sustained in the encounter, but his face was considerably damaged.

Two or three streaks of very dark-coloured blood crossed his empurpled visage, which detracted greatly from his personal appearance.

"Help! help!" he cried, in gasping, gurgling tones. "Dick Turpin and Tom King, the highwaymen! Two thousand pounds reward!"

The two friends easily got out of his way, but halted a few yards off.

"Two thousand pounds!" said Mr. Wriggles, "two thousand pounds. Perkins, you fool, why don't you run and catch hold of their bridles?"

Mr. Perkins shook his head ruefully, and with the air of a man who has had quite enough of hard knocks and to spare.

"We had better be off, Dick," said Tom King, "or we shall have all the neighbourhood about our ears."

"It will be quite as prudent."

He gathered the reins in his hand, but before he started he turned round and said, in a loud voice——

"Good-bye, Wriggles, my friend. Good-bye! You may as well give up, for you will never nab me. Take a lesson from experience, and don't be a fool any more. Good-bye!"

Seeing how his prey was slipping through his fingers restored to Mr. Wriggles the power of his voice.

"Seize him! Seize him! A highwayman! Two thousand pounds reward!"

"My eye!" said Alf, the ostler, as he saw the highwayman gallop off towards Charing Cross. "Ain't you coming it strong?"

Muttering a volley of oaths of the most frightful description, and tearing the hair from his head by handfuls, Mr. Wriggles made his way back to the stable of the "Three Tuns."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN MEET WITH AN ADVENTURE ON THEIR WAY TO THE NEW FOREST.

It was broad daylight, and the sun's rays were tinting the eastern sky when the two highwaymen trotted down Cranbourne-street into Piccadilly.

They deemed it advisable, as there were no signs of pursuit, not to go at a greater speed.

The chances were, if they did, that they would immediately attract attention, and this was a thing they never wished to do.

"Well, now, Dick, we have taken the right road. Have you determined upon setting out on our country excursion at once?"

"I think it will be quite as well, eh! Tom?"

"Most assuredly."

"Oh! I know you are very anxious about it. I expect you have some particular motive, as you are so eager."

"I have not, indeed, except that I am quite tired of London, and feel as though I should like an entire change—go somewhere, in fact, where I had never been before."

"It will be pleasant enough, no doubt. And, another thing, I have had quite enough of Mr. Wriggles to last me for some time; and as, in his vexation, he will doubtless do something desperate, I think, for peace and safety sake, we ought to go."

"So do I, too. You may depend it will be first-rate, and perhaps I shall get a chance of hearing your history?"

"Oh! yes. I promised to relate my early career. I will, too. It's rather a sad story, so I tell you beforehand."

"So is mine."

"Dear me, Tom, was that you?"

"What me?"

"That spoke in that dreadful tone."

"It was. I was unconscious of the change in my voice, but I suppose it was caused by the thoughts that were passing through my mind at the moment."

"They were not very pleasant ones, then, I should think."

"You are right there; they were not, indeed. However, it is quite certain we cannot tell our stories on horseback."

"Not exactly. I shall be glad when we get free of the houses, and then we will have a gallop."

"Which will put an end to all conversation."

"It certainly will. Tom, my friend, I feel lighter-hearted than I have done for many and many a day. I have got my priceless Bess back again, and you may rest assured it will be a long time before I part with her. I am longing for the moment to come when I can let the reins fall upon her neck, and allow her to go at what speed she pleases."

"Is it not a lovely morning?" said King, as the sun rose above the houses, and cast his warm beams upon the roadway. Think how bright and green the fields and hedgerows will look."

"They will. To me there is something very beautiful about the appearance of the country at early morn, when there has been some rain the night before."

"Well, we are close to Knightsbridge now. What do you say to sweeping along a little?"

"With all my heart. Off and away!"

The speed the two highwaymen made during the next few minutes was something prodigious, and they got over the ground at a great rate.

But King's horse, although a most magnificent animal, could not keep pace with Black Bess, who, taking immensely long leaps, sped along with astonishing swiftness.

"Pull in a bit, Dick—pull in!" Tom said. "I can't possibly keep pace with you, and in a minute or two more I shall be half a mile behind."

Upon hearing these words from his friend, Dick reined Bess in, and allowed King to come up with him.

"It's no good your going at that rate," cried Tom. "I should never have believed, though famous for speed as your mare is, that she could have outstripped my horse in such a short distance as this."

"I am convinced, Tom, that there is not a steed in England that could match her either in a long or a short gallop. You have not yet seen what speed she can really go at."

"I can form a tolerable idea. But, come, what course do you propose to take?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't know. You mentioned a rather wide district, and I am making my way towards it."

"Just so! Suppose, now, we were to take the Southampton road!"

"I have no objection to make. I should fancy it would be a very profitable place."

"And so should I. Nothing would delight me more than to ease some fire-eating old admiral of his cash."

"Then we are almost sure to meet with one. You have decided upon Southampton?"

"Yes. I don't know any town that would suit so well. What is the state of the exchequer?"

"Oh! tolerable. There's all the booty, except a few guineas, that we took out of the western coach."

"We are not in immediate want, then?"

"By no means; but still we ought not to let anything go by us in the shape of business."

"Oh! no. I am getting very hollow though, so I propose we stop at some house of entertainment hereabouts. Do you know of any?"

Turpin reflected for a minute.

"About five miles further on there is a house I have called at once or twice?"

"What is the sign?"

"The 'Samson and Lion.'"

"Do you know the landlord?"

"Slightly. He is a very superior kind of person to country innkeepers generally, and has evidently at some previous time occupied a very different position to what he does now. I have never trusted him with my name. He knows me only as a chance traveller."

"So much the better. There is the greater chance of our being unmolested."

"There is. Shall you make a stay there?"

"I think not! Why should we?"

"Oh! I see no reason why, only I did not know what your intentions were."

"Why, to push along as fast as possible. We have not seen any signs of pursuit, and really it is such an unusual thing for us to travel by daylight, that I quite enjoy the luxury."

"So do I, and we will indulge in it for some time to come. How long do you think it will take us to reach our destination?"

"It all depends how much we are delayed. I should think some time to-morrow."

"That will suit; and there, just look, a little in advance on the right-hand side of the road there is the 'Samson and Lion.'"

"That large thatched building so surrounded by trees?"

"Yes."

"What a beautiful place! Do you know, Dick, I could make myself very comfortable as landlord of a place like that. Could you?"

"Well, I can't say I could, for it would be too inactive a life to suit me."

"It would have that against it. I suppose you will be better pleased when we place ourselves under the pretender's standard."

"Are you really in earnest about that?"

"I was never more so in my life. Have I not promised? and I never break my word."

"Then, if you go, I am quite willing to accompany you."

"It will be a stirring life for a time, and a good thing for us if he ascends the throne."

"No doubt of that, but the chances of his doing so are, I am afraid, rather slight."

"We must do our best," said King, as they both alighted from their horses, and gave the reins into the hands of a man who was lounging about, and, from his general appearance, connected with the stables.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DICK'S DESCRIPTION OF THE CHARACTER OF THE LANDLORD OF THE "SAMSON AND LION" TURNS OUT TO BE VERY ERRONEOUS.

"Now, ostler," said Dick, "we are going to stay here a little time, and want these cattle taken care of the while."

The ostler turned the piece of straw he held between his lips over and over several times, during which operation he closely scrutinized our two friends and their steeds.

"Look sharp!" said Tom, impatiently. "We don't want to wait an hour."

"Who wants you?" said the ostler, gruffly. "I never axed you to wait! There's the front door, and if you want anything you'll find Mr. Waghorn in the bar."

"You'd best not be impudent, Mr. Ostler," said Turpin. "I'm waiting to see these horses taken into the stable and properly fed."

"Oh! you is, is you? Don't you wish you may get it! We never allows no strangers in our stables."

Turpin was about to make some angry rejoinder, when King stayed him.

"My friend, you don't seem over civil, but just listen to me!"

The ostler turned the straw in his mouth, but said nothing.

"You'll find it to your advantage, I fancy," said King. "We are a couple of gentlemen who think very highly of our cattle, and, therefore, make it a practice of seeing they are properly attended to, which is never anything out of the ostler's way."

King drew a crown-piece from his pocket as he spoke, and placed it in the ostler's hand.

The touch of the silver upon his palm produced a magical effect upon his behaviour, for he said, with great deference—

"I see, now, you is gentlemen, though at first sight you don't look it, either of you!"

Turpin and King both regarded each other, and then noticed the disordered state of their apparel, after which they ceased to wonder at the ostler's suspicions.

"The fact is, my friend," said King, "we got into a little bit of a scrape, last night. That's a thing, you know, which often happens to gentlemen."

The surly ostler deigned to smile.

"Follow me, gentlemen," he said. "You shall see your horses fed, and I'll warrant I do it to your satisfaction."

"You will, if you comply with our directions. We have our own idea about feeding them, and I dare say it differs from yours."

"All right, sir. Come along!"

Turpin and Tom followed the ostler round a corner of the building, and then at the further end of a large yard they saw the stables, which appeared, for the size of the inn itself, to be unusually large and commodious.

It was always a practice with our two friends to ascertain precisely where their horses could be found, in case anything should occur to make such a knowledge all-important to them.

They were also very careful to learn exactly in what manner the stable door was fastened.

"Put them here, just opposite the door," said King, as they entered. "Don't take the bridles off, but give them a small quantity of corn."

The ostler, who was sagacious enough to know that he would earn most by doing their bidding, obeyed.

"And now," said Turpin, taking some money out of his pocket, and giving it to the ostler, "go up to the bar and fetch half-a-pint of rum."

"Half-a-pint of rum?"

"Yes. What is there extraordinary in that?"

"Oh! nothing—nothing," said the ostler, leaving the stable.

He returned in about five minutes with the measure of spirits in his hand.

Turpin took it from him, as he said—

"And now I want a pail about half full of clean water; take particular care that it is clean."

The ostler obeyed these orders with considerable curiosity as to what Turpin was going to do.

His surprise was very great when he saw Turpin empty half the quantity of the rum into the bucket, and give it to Bess, who drank it eagerly.

"There's a wrinkle for you," said Dick, to the ostler, observing his look of astonishment. "That mare's like a Christian, and now she has drank that will travel fifty—nay, I would not be afraid to say a hundred miles without pausing for breath or refreshment."

"Gammon!" said the ostler.

"It is a fact, and I would back her to do it for a hundred pounds!"

"Be cautious, Dick," whispered Tom, "or you will raise the man's suspicions."

"True," returned Dick, in the same tone, "I forgot myself, but I am always carried away when I begin to praise her."

"There's only one horse that could do such a thing," said the ostler, "and that is Turpin's famous mare, Black Bess!"

"Pho! pho! my man; I would back my mare against the highwayman's any day!"

"Ah! it's very strange, but yours seems quite black!"

"It is, but there is nothing extraordinary in that, I imagine. But come, never mind, get another bucket of water for my friend's horse, and make haste, for I am badly in want of my breakfast, and the business, too, which I am upon is very urgent, and will admit of no delay."

The water was brought, the remainder of the rum emptied into it, and then given to King's horse, who seemed to like it quite as well as Black Bess

"Be good enough, now,' said Turpin, as he set down the pail, "to show us the way to the house."

"This way, if you please. You can see the door just opposite."

"Come along with us, and you shall have something to drink at the bar."

"Thanks, sir—much obliged," replied the ostler, leading the way.

Turpin whispered to his friend.

"He has not looked the door," he said, "but merely pulled it to, so if there is occasion we can easily get at the stable."

"I almost fear he suspects who we are. It was rather foolish of you to say what you did."

"Very foolish, indeed. I am now fully sensible of my folly. However, it cannot be helped, so we must make the best we can of a bad bargain."

"There's nothing else left for us to do. But, hush! here we are."

They entered the inn as they spoke.

It was a curious building, only one storey high, and seemed to have been converted into, and not built for, its present purpose. The door, through which they passed, opened into a kitchen of very great extent, in which were two or three people only, and they apparently belonging to the house.

The landlord, who was a very gentlemanly-looking man, came forward as soon as he perceived his guests, and bade them welcome.

"We shall not stay long!" said Tom King, "because our business is important and will admit of no delay."

"Still," said the landlord, with a smile, "you cannot travel without taking something substantial now and then in the shape of refreshment."

"That's true enough," said Turpin. "So bring us something that will suit us for breakfast. What have you got cooked in the house, for I can't stay while you prepare anything?"

"I have a nice round of beef, cold, that was boiled yesterday, if that will suit?"

"The very thing. Bring it at once, with a good nagon of your October ale to wash it down."

"Very good, gentlemen," said the landlord.

"A-hem! Dick!"

"What is it, Tom?"

"Didn't you tell me you knew the landlord here?"

"Well, only as seeing him occasionally. It is some time since I was here last, and he appears to have forgotten me."

"What do you think of him? I mean, what is your opinion of his character?"

"Oh! I hardly know. I have not noticed much, except that he seems a superior man to what people of his class generally are."

"Ah! yes. Have you looked no further?"

"No. What in the world are you driving at? Why don't you speak out? Do you see anything to cause suspicion?"

"Well, yes."

"What is it, my friend? Tell me at once. Do not keep me a longer in suspense!"

"Hush! come a little closer to me, and do not speak so loud. I am a bit of a physiognomist, and I invariably make a study of the countenance of every one I come in contact with. Now, I have studied the landlord's countenance here, and though at the first glance it seems open and candid enough, yet a little closer observation showed me that he was not all he professed to be."

"Very likely," said Dick. "Few are!"

"You misunderstand me. That man, Dick, mark my words, is a rascal, and we have everything to fear from him in case he should suspect who we are! Beneath the superficial aspect of his countenance is written plainly treachery and deceit! Do you notice what a long while it has taken him to execute our order?"

"You are strangely suspicious, Tom."

"It is because I scent danger in the air in which it is most to be feared—treachery!"

"We can but be on our guard, then, and prepared for anything that may happen. He is certainly a long time gone, but still that may, perhaps, arise from some very natural causes. I will look closer at him when he returns."

"You can do that now," said Tom, "for here he comes."

As he spoke, Mr. Waghorn entered, carrying a tray, on which was placed a large piece of cold beef and a tankard of ale.

"I am afraid," he said, as he put the comestibles on the table—"I am afraid, gentlemen, you will consider I have been a long time gone; but as I can see you are gentlemen, and expressed a wish to have some of my old October, I took the trouble to go down in the cellar and tap a fresh barrel on purpose for you."

"We are obliged by your attention," said Turpin, fixing his keen eyes upon the landlord's face. "Here's a health to all!"

Turpin drank some of the ale.

"Upon my word, that's good," he said. "Capital! And yet," he added, wetting his lips with his tongue, "it has left a strange taste behind it."

King started.

"A strange taste?" repeated the landlord, "impossible. You must have had something in your mouth. Why, that is the very best ale in my cellar. You taste it, sir."

These last words were addressed by Mr. Waghorn to Tom King, who raised the drink in his hands, and swallowed a small quantity.

"What do you think of it, sir?"

"It certainly has a peculiar smatch with it which I cannot say I like. You had better bring us some more."

Mr. Waghorn, with a look of deep vexation on his face, which might arise from two causes, left the room.

"Dick, my friend," said Tom, as soon as the landlord was out of earshot, "I was right. He is a rascal, and we have fallen into the lion's den. That ale was drugged. I recognised the peculiar flavour instantly."

"Drugged!" said Turpin, springing to his feet.

"Sit down, Dick, we will see it all right. I have not the smallest doubt left on my mind but that he suspects who we are. Either he has come to the conclusion himself, or the ostler has communicated it to him. If the latter, you have only yourself to blame, and perhaps it will be a lesson not to talk so incautiously as you did to the ostler in the stable about your mare Black Bess. The landlord here, knowing we should be likely to make a desperate resistance, conceived the plan of drugging the ale, which would render us helpless. In the meantime, he has sent off for some assistance."

This was spoken in a suppressed, emphatic whisper.

"If this is so," said Turpin, "he shall rue the day. I"——

"Sit down, my friend, and be silent. Let us assure ourselves that we are right before we proceed to action. Don't look so excited, for, hark! here comes Mr. Waghorn."

Dick assumed as great an appearance of calmness as he could, and then said—

"But this second lot of ale, Tom?"

"I shall drink it without scruple. He knows now we are on the watch, and should notice any little peculiarity in the flavour. You may rely upon it there will be no danger in drinking this. I will taste it first.'

"Do so! do so!"

Mr. Waghorn reached the table at which our friends were sitting, and placing down another tankard of ale, said—

"There, gentlemen, I have tried that myself, and think you will find it all right. I cannot for the life of me conceive what was the matter with the other. I assure you it was drawn from the very choicest cask in my cellar."

"Oh! this is better," said Tom, as he handed the ale to his friend. "Try it."

Turpin had a wholesome dread of the effect of drugs, so having had so narrow an escape, he this time scarcely swallowed a mouthful.

"Yes; that's an improvement on the other. I can't get the taste of it out of my mouth. Come, Tom, make haste with what you are eating. It is quite time we were off.

"You are making a short stay at the 'Samson and Lion.' Are you going far, gentlemen?"

"Yes, landlord, we are on rather a long journey, and have no time to spare. For myself, I have done, and am ready now, as soon as my friend has finished.

"Pray make yourselves comfortable, gentlemen. I will

in hopes we should have had you here as guests a little longer."

Mr. Waghorn more left the room and closed the door after him. Then the two highwaymen noticed something that had before escaped their observation, namely, that those persons who were in the apartment when they entered had now one and all left it. It was in itself a simple enough circumstance, but after what had occurred, Turpin was disposed to eye it with suspicion.

"I have started you off," said King, "and you are just as suspicious now as you were blindly confiding a little while ago. I suppose you would say, 'Let us go at once?'"

"Certainly!"

"Then I don't. You may depend we can't much increase the danger by remaining a little longer, so make a good meal in peace, as I intend to do. We have, perhaps, been alarming ourselves with a shadow."

"Not so, my friend—not so; I feel quite convinced of that. I can feel something at my heart which tells me I am in greater peril than ever I have been in before."

"Fancy, Dick, fancy! though generally speaking I am not disposed to disregard those inward monitors. I believe that our more subtle nature is able to apprehend danger before the grosser part, but with you it arises from having drank some liquid which you believe to have been drugged."

Turpin rose to his feet, and walked impatiently about the room.

"You take it very coolly, Tom," said Dick. "Take my advice, and let us leave this place at once. It is impossible to tell what extra peril we incur each moment we remain! Look, Tom, there is that surly-looking ostler, with a most villanous expression on his face, just prowling across the yard. Tom, I tell you, I will stay here no longer!"

Turpin was in a greater state of alarm and agitation than ever his companion had seen him in.

"Why, Dick, positively I don't know you. You who, in the hour of danger, are generally so calm and self-possessed, to show so much—terror shall I call it—as this? Really, I cannot understand it!"

Dick was annoyed.

"I do not feel inclined to risk my liberty by staying here any longer. The danger, Tom, is, I am confident, much greater than you imagine, so let me persuade you to leave at once!"

"I will, Dick," replied Tom King, "leave at once. It is not worth while for us to disagree about such a trifle. Come on, I am ready!"

"I am glad of that," said Turpin; "and now let us get to our cattle as quickly as possible. But it strikes me most forcibly we shall be prevented in some way!"

"You magnify the danger. I can't make you out. You seemed quite unnerved. Surely, the small quantity of drugged ale that you drank has not had that effect upon you!"

"I cannot tell, Tom, I am sure; but I do feel very strangely. Ha! We are caught! Done for!"

"What do you mean? What is it?"

"Turn round, Tom," was the reply, "and look!"

King had his back to the window, and in obedience to his companion's words, he turned round and looked through it.

"Good heavens, Dick!" he said, "there is danger indeed. The yard is full of officers!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

MR. WAGHORN COMES OUT IN RATHER STRONG COLOURS, AND SO DOES JACK THE OSTLER.

THIS was a sight which would not fail to fill the breasts of the two highwaymen with consternation, but before we relate what they did upon making such a discovery, it is necessary we should inform the reader how it was the officers in such force came to be in the yard of the "Samson and Lion."

The incautious words which Turpin had uttered in praise of his mare Black Bess raised a suspicion in the mind of the ostler which every moment increased.

It will be remembered that Dick tried as well as he could to allay the man's suspicions, and had taken him with him to the bar, where he had told the landlord to give him what he liked to have to drink, and then leaving them made his way with his companion into the kitchen.

The ostler chose three-pennyworth of gin neat, and when Mr. Waghorn came back to the bar to execute the orders given to him by his guests, the ostler said—

"Mr. Waghorn! Mr. Waghorn!"

"Yes, you villain."

"No hard words, now. Did you look at the coves in the kitchen?"

"Confound your impudence, what's that to you? Be off."

"Mr. W., don't be a fool. This will be a good day for us."

"Oh! bother."

"It will. Those men represent a sum of somewhere about fifteen hundred pounds!"

"Fif—fifteen"—

"Hundred pounds!" iterated the ostler.

The landlord stared aghast.

"What do you mean?" he said; "speak out, you fool, do."

"Oh! go and be hanged," said the ostler, who did not seem to be over particular as to how he addressed his master.

Mr. Waghorn shook his fist.

"Listen!" said the ostler, catching him by the arm, and dragging him towards him, and whispering in his ear—

"Dick Turpin!"

"The devil?"

"Tom King!"

"Why don't you say what you have to say at once," said Mr. Waghorn. "Do you mean to tell me that our guests are those two notorious highwaymen — Dick Turpin and Tom King?"

"I does, governor. There's not no sort of mistake about it."

"And what do you say the reward is?"

"Fifteen hundred pounds!"

"What a sum, Jack!"

"It is, that's certain. Why, it's more nor we could make if we worked hard for a year."

"Silence! Have I not told you a thousand times never to allude to what we do?"

"All right, guv'ner. No harm done. I didn't say nothink, only a guilty conscience needs no accuser. I 'spose you intend to nab these highflyers?"

"Oh! yes, I should like; but how are we to do it? They are desperate fellows, and won't give in without a hard struggle, you may depend."

"Lor, guv'ner, do you mean to say you don't know how to make them 'ere as harmless as two blessed babbies?"

"No!"

"What have they ordered?"

"Some cold beef and ale. I must make haste, or my long absence will perhaps rouse their suspicion."

"Cut along, then, and just put some of this in the ale!"

The ostler, as he spoke, handed the landlord a small packet containing a white powder.

"What is this, Jack?"

"Oh! a soother, that's all. Just put it in the ale and stir it up, and if they drink it they will be all right in half-an-hour."

"But suppose they should not drink it; what then, Jack, eh?"

"Don't you think they will?"

"Oh! I don't know, they are very suspicious fellows, and they might fancy they tasted something."

"So they might."

Jack, the ostler, scratched his head.

"That's no obstacle," he said, after a pause. "I'll tell you how to manage it. Get them to drink the ale if you can, and I will mount a horse and ride to Guildford and fetch some officers. I can be back in half-an-hour."

"But the reward, Jack?"

"That'll be right. Can't you see that is the only way to make sure of it?"

"Not at all. The officers will want to share it, and then it won't be worth our while."

"You don't see the thing right yet. Get them to drink the ale if you can. Should they do so, they will in ten minutes afterwards be dead drunk, and incapable of

moving in the least. When this happens, all you will have to do will be to get some ropes and bind them securely. Do you understand?"

The landlord nodded.

"When the officers come, then, supposing the highwaymen to drink the ale, they will not have to capture them, for they will be already captured, and, therefore, will not be able to claim any part of the reward."

"You're a sharner chap, Jack, than I gave you credit for being."

"Oh! I knows a thing or two. And now, look at the case in another light. Suppose as they don't drink the ale and get suspicions like. What must you do?"

"I look to you, Jack, to know."

"Why, you must smooth things off as well as possible, and when you go out lock the door after you. Before they can escape, I shall be back with the officers, and then they can nab them, we going shares in the reward. So, you see, guv'ner, we makes sure of summut, let things turn out as they will."

"Unless, after all, they should make their escape. I tell you, Jack, they are daring fellows."

"May be—may be. But they won't be daring enough to get off this time. I wager. Now, guv'ner, take in the grub, and I'll be off for the officers. I shall be back in half-an-h ur."

"Very good, Jack."

We have seen how the landlord took in the drugged ale, and how, in consequence of their putting too large a dose in it, the highwaymen had found it out, and were upon their guard, ready to defend their liberties with their lives, and how they looked through the window and saw the yard full of officers.

The ostler's plan was a very good one, and he certainly deserves credit for his ingenuity in devising it; but we have yet to explain how it was he got back with the officers so much before the time he had mentioned.

The fact was that, as he was on his road to Guildford, he saw a largeish body of men approaching him, and when he got nearer he found they were police-officers conveying a prisoner from Guildford to London.

A few words sufficed to make them aware of the posture of affairs, and they pushed forward as rapidly as they could.

They reached the "Samson and Lion" in less than ten minutes, and eight of them alighted from their horses, leaving the remainder to keep guard over the prisoner.

By the ostler's directions they came round to the back and into the inn-yard, and they were advancing in a body to the door when Turpin called Tom's attention to them.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TURPIN AND KING MEET WITH NOTHING BUT DANGER ON EVERY SIDE, AND BEGIN TO LOSE ALL HOPE.

THE position of our two friends was certainly very critical, and really we do not see how they possibly can make their escape this time from the toils that have been spread around them by the cunning ostler and the landlord of the "Samson and Lion," of whom Turpin had had such a good opinion.

But he was destined before long to make one or two very startling and unexpected discoveries in connexion with Mr. Waghorn and his mode of life.

We must not anticipate.

On perceiving the officers in such numbers, the two highwaymen stood for a moment irresolute. They knew not how to act.

Tom King made a dash at the door.

"Fast!" he said, as he found he was unable to move it in the least.

We must beg our readers to remember that in the good old times, as some eccentric people call them, things were made in a very much more substantial manner than they are at present. Now-a-days a thing is not thought good unless it is light and fragile, but our forefathers thought nothing was good unless it was cumbersome and heavy.

So with this door at the "Samson and Lion." Had it been such a one as we see in our modern dwellings, it would scarcely have opposed Tom in the least; but, as it was, he was unable to shake it even, for it was made of stout oak, and weighty and strong enough to have served for the door of a prison.

"What is to be done, Dick?" asked King. "I am sorry I disregarded your foreboding as I did. It was foolish of me, and if you get into any trouble on my account through my obstinacy, I shall never forgive myself. Silence!"

A subdued murmuring sound came from the other side of the kitchen door.

It was the officers in consultation as to what they should do.

The two highwaymen listened intently, but all they could hear was now and then a word spoken in a louder tone than the others, but, of course, from this they could glean no sort of information.

"What course shall we pursue, Dick?" asked King. "What plan will be the best to adopt?"

"That is very hard to determine," replied Turpin, as he glanced round the room.

"It is. You are right enough there, and I look to you to devise some mode of operations."

"You must assist."

"We must be quick, too, or we shan't have a chance," said Tom, as he heard three heavy knocks given on the panel of the kitchen door.

"What is to be done? I am quite at a loss to think. We may as well, though, come away from the door, for it is quite evident we cannot make our escape that way."

"Not exactly; though, if nothing better turns up, I—— What's that?"

A key rattled in the lock.

"I forgot, Dick," said King. "Of course the door is locked on the outside, and they can come in when they think proper."

"No, they cannot," replied Turpin.

As he spoke, he sprang suddenly to the door, and, before the person who held the key could turn it in the lock, he slipped a couple of strong iron bolts into their sockets.

"They'll have to undo them before they get in," he said, after executing this feat.

The man, whoever it was, turned the key in the lock and shot back the bolt.

Then he paused.

He evidently hesitated to lift the latch and enter, for he by repute well knew the dangerous characters he had to deal with.

At last he summoned courage, and lifted the latch, expecting, of course, that the door would swing open to his hand.

To his surprise it was fast.

"They have bolted it on the inside," shouted a voice, in loud enough tones to penetrate through the thick oak, for the two friends heard them distinctly.

Then there was a murmuring sound.

"Batter it down! batter it down! Take them alive or dead!"

"Alive, if you please," said another voice; "and then we gets our blood money!"

The next moment a violent assault was made upon the door.

But while this was taking place, Turpin and King had not been idle. They had together made a very careful examination of the room, but the result of it was by no means to their advantage.

The thought of escape by the window of course occurred to them, but they found it was one that did not open, such being the fashion of making them at a time when the necessity of ventilation and fresh pure air was not so well understood as at present.

The window was, besides, protected with a number of iron bars, which effectually put an end to all hope of their making their exit that way.

The wily ostler had, doubtless, taken care to make the officers acquainted with that fact, or they would have endeavoured to make their way through it into the room.

The two highwaymen looked around them in despair.

Nowhere could they see the slightest probability of making their escape.

"I am afraid it is all up with us, Tom," said Dick, "and that we shall be nabbed at last. The only thing that remains for us to do is to fight it out when the grabs enter. But what possible chance can we stand against so many?"

"None at all!"

"You should have taken my advice. I knew we were



[TURPIN AND KING ESCAPE FROM THE "SAMSON AND LION."]

in great danger, that's why I was so anxious and agitated."

"Don't say a word about that, Dick. I know it's all my fault, and that if anything happens to you I shall have to answer for it. How they are banging at the door! They will have it down in a few minutes."

The din was something terrific.

The officers had evidently been supplied with some heavy battering instrument, for the blows came upon the door with great force, and the thick panels were beginning to crack in many places.

Then it started a little from its hinges.

The officers gave loud shouts as they perceived this symptom of yielding, and increased their efforts.

"Well, Dick," said Tom, "it's no good our standing here like this. It appears to me that, since we can't get out, the best thing we can do is to delay as long as we can the officers making an entrance."

"To be sure, that will be it. Help me move this table. There, now! push the end close up to the door, and then we must get something to wedge between it and the wall."

"That will be the ticket. We shall stop them for a little while, that's certain; and now let us resolve what we are to do."

The police must have had some idea that a barrier had been put before the door, for some one cried in a loud, authoritative voice—

"Resistance is worse than useless, so give in at once. We are bound to take you, for you cannot possibly escape. Yield, therefore, with a good grace, to superior numbers, and prevent the needless spilling of blood."

The officer waited a minute or two for a reply, but none was made.

"Surrender!" he cried again; "it will be the best policy. We will give you three minutes to open the door. If you do not do so at the expiration of that time, the consequences be on your own heads."

No. 9.
GRATIS with this Number, the SPLENDID COLOURED PICTURE: CLAUDE DUVAL DANCING A CORANTO WITH THE LADY ON THE HEATH.

The three minutes elapsed, but no sound of any kind came from the kitchen.

"Curse you both, then!" yelled the officer, in a great rage. "I will not be played with any longer. Draw your pistols! Make ready! Present them to the door! Fire!"

There was a stunning report arising from the discharge of about six or seven pistols.

The bullets crashed through the door and lodged in the wall opposite.

The officers waited until the smoke had cleared away, and then as all was still silent as before, they began again to hammer at the door.

Neither Turpin nor King were in the way of the shots that came into the kitchen, for they had resorted to the only outlet there was to the room, and that was the door at the top of the cellar steps.

It was simply the instinct of wishing to get as far as possible away from their foes, and placing an additional barrier between them, that made Turpin and King take refuge behind this door.

To be sure, doing so did not better their condition in the least; but still, as Tom remarked, while securing the cellar door on the inner side, it could not possibly make it any worse.

A crashing sound, now mingled with the blows upon the kitchen door, which plainly enough told our friends that it was giving way before the vigorous assault that was made upon it.

They were surrounded by utter darkness.

Unfortunately the door at the top of the cellar steps, behind which were the two highwaymen, was rather a slight one, and there was certainly no hope that it would withstand for any length of time a resolute attack upon it.

"Come away from the door, Tom," said Dick to his friend. "You are in danger of receiving a chance shot."

"I am almost afraid to move in this strange place. I can hear your voice plain enough, and tell to a trifle whereabouts you are standing, but as for seeing you it is quite out of the question.

"Will it be safe, think you, to show a light?"

"Oh! yes; I should think so. But have you the means about you for procuring one?"

"Certainly. I am never without. Stop a moment; we will soon see what kind of a place we are in."

Turpin took from his pocket a small lanteru, which, considering the state of the manufacturing arts at the period, was certainly a wonderful object. It carried a small wax taper, which Dick ignited by means of a phosphorous match, then, and for many years afterwards, called thieves' matches, because when they were first invented they were almost exclusively used by members of that fraternity, who found them exceedingly useful.

The flame from the taper which Dick lighted was only a tiny one, and by itself would scarcely have dispersed the gloom for a foot around it, but placed in the lantern, which was fitted with a reflector of highly polished silver, and a lens of peculiar construction, Dick was enabled by its means to cast a broad, bright beam of light in any direction he thought proper.

Holding it by the handle, the highwayman moved the lantern rapidly about, and flashed the light upon all the objects by which he was surrounded.

In this way, then, the two friends were enabled to form a tolerably correct idea of the kind of place they were in.

They found they were standing at the head of a flight of steep brick steps, leading down apparently into the cellars of the "Samson and Lion."

It must be remembered that though it has taken us some time to relate what occurred after the two highwaymen passed through this door, yet a few moments elapsed in reality until Dick lighted his lantern.

A terrific crash at this moment announced that the officers had succeeded in entirely demolishing the door.

Then arose a loud shout of triumph and gratification, which was quickly changed into one of surprise and disappointment at finding the room empty and their prey nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TURPIN AND KING DISCOVER THE SECRET OF MR. WAGHORN'S OCCUPATION.

"TREAD carefully, Tom," said Dick to his companion, not, however, raising his voice above a whisper. "The stairs are wet and slippery, and if you lose your footing you will bring the officers upon us at once. Follow me; we may perhaps succeed in placing another door between ourselves and our foes!"

Dick commenced the descent of the steps.

"Hold!" said King, in a whisper. "Listen!"

Some kind of altercation seemed to be going on in the kitchen, and both listened intently, for they might hear something that would be of service to them.

Suddenly they heard a rapid rush of footsteps across the kitchen, and something plump against the door.

"I tell you, you shan't! Not one of you! You should have broken down the door sooner before they escaped! You must not—shall not pass through this door unless it is over my dead body!"

The friends recognised the voice.

It was Mr. Waghorn, the landlord's.

They looked at each other, as well as they could, in that dim place, with astonishment depicted upon their features.

Before, however, they could communicate with each other by words, they heard a harsh voice reply to Mr. Waghorn, and all their faculties were bent to hear what this voice said.

"Stand away from the door, Mr. Waghorn! Your conduct is singularly suspicious, and almost sufficient to warrant my taking you into custody; besides which, you are interrupting officers in the discharge of their duty. Let us pass at once, for every minute that we delay only gives them a better chance of ultimate escape! If you do not stand aside at once, my men shall force you away, and you will besides have to account for your extraordinary behaviour!"

"What can be the meaning of this?" asked King, still speaking below his breath. "I am fairly puzzled! What do you think, Dick?"

"Simply this. There is something here which Mr. Waghorn does not wish found out."

"It must be that. I wonder what it can be?"

"Ah! that I cannot tell. However, one thing I think is certain; and that is, that it will turn out to our advantage if we immediately act upon what we have heard."

"I think it very likely. Lead on, my friend! How fast they are talking, to be sure! How is this adventure to terminate?"

Very carefully the highwaymen descended the greasy steps, holding by the dank walls as they went.

They reached in a moment or two the bottom of the steps, and found themselves in a vault or cellar of considerable extent.

There was no light in this place, with the exception of that which proceeded from Turpin's lantern; this, however, was amply sufficient to light up, one after another, every nook and corner in the vault.

From the landlord's manner, both Turpin and King had expected to find something of a very extraordinary nature in this place, and no words can possibly express how much surprised they felt when they found it was absolutely empty.

Scarcely crediting that their eyes had not deceived them, they made again a rapid examination of the cellar.

But no; nothing was there. Not so much even as a barrel or a jar.

"Well, this beats all," said Dick. "Why, the landlord must be a perfect maniac. What earthly reason could he have had for wishing to prevent the officers coming here? This is a mystery, indeed!"

"You are right there, mystery is the word! Recollect we have only made a most cursory examination of the place. Lend me the light, and I will examine it more closely. I only hope Mr. Waghorn will keep the officers long enough at bay to enable me to have a good look about me. They seem to be going it now!"

The subdued murmuring sound of many voices reached their ears in one indeterminate hum.

Tom King took the little lantern from Turpin's hand, and, casting its light downwards, made a careful exploration of the floor.

There was nothing to recompense him for his trouble.

the flooring was uniformly composed of very-much abraded bricks, but there was nothing in any part of it that indicated a secret outlet, which was what King was looking for, and what he fully expected to find.

He rose from his stooping posture with a feeling of annoyance.

"I can find nothing, Dick. Surely it must be a secret entrance into some other place that Mr. Waghorn is afraid the officers will discover."

"Very likely that is it," said Turpin, turning away from the foot of the stairs where he had been standing while King made his search; "very likely. Look round the walls, and see if you can find anything."

"That is our last hope," said Tom, as he bit by bit examined the walls of the vault with the lantern.

"Mr. Waghorn is still speaking," said Dick. "I feel curious beyond measure to know what he can possibly have said to delay the officers so long as he has. I"——

A sudden exclamation from his comrade's lips arrested the remainder of his speech.

"This way, Dick," cried Tom; "I have discovered it at last."

Turpin hastened towards his friend, and found him standing in a little recess, almost cupboard-like in shape, from the right-hand side of which opened a small door.

Dick's astonishment was very great.

"How could we possibly have missed seeing this door? Why I, when we first examined the place, cast the light of the lantern into it."

"I know you did; but are you not aware the light fell only upon the wall opposite to you, leaving the sides of the recess in deep shadow? Now, as you see, it is from the side of the recess that the small door opens."

"I see."

"There does not appear to be the least attempt at concealment, and that, very likely, is one reason why we did not see it."

Dick laughed.

"We must not stay now to go into that subject," he said. "Quick, pass through the door, for, hark! the sounds of contention up above grow louder every moment."

"Come on, then," said Tom, as he passed through the mysterious portal; "I am ready."

Dick pressed through close behind him, and secured the door as well as he could.

Just as he did so, he heard the officers descend the steps with a rush.

He turned to his friend, who was a foot or two in advance of him, for the door they had so providentially found was at the commencement of an arched passage.

"The officers are in the cellar," he said, in a low voice, for he did not know how plainly sounds from the place he was in could be heard in the outer cellar. "Mr. Waghorn has not succeeded in his attempt to prevent them doing so, as I most devoutly wish he had."

King made no reply to this speech, but, looking carefully around on all sides of him, made his way as quickly as he could along the passage.

It was quite impossible to see its extremity, so they were forced to the conclusion that it was of considerable length.

There was nothing remarkable in its appearance. The walls and roof were composed of old red bricks, but the floor of nothing but hard earth.

At last, after proceeding about twenty yards, they came to another door, which was the termination of the passage.

Rough bands of iron crossed this door in many directions, and were fastened at short distances by large nails, the heads of which projected at least three-quarters of an inch from the woodwork.

The two friends both looked at this door, and mentally calculated its strength. They raised their eyes at the same moment.

"This is a barrier!" said King. "It strikes me we have done for ourselves at last, for here we are like rats in a trap—and hark! the officers have discovered the door through which we have just passed."

Some heavy blows, and the shaking of the door in its frame, reverberated with unpleasant plainness along the passage.

"We mustn't give up, Tom, for all that. It's a ticklish situation to be in, to be sure, but we must make the best of it."

Bang! bang! bang! bang! came the blows on the door.

"We must get through, and that quickly," added King, "if we wish to preserve ourselves skin-whole. If they were to take it into their heads to fire through that door, as they did through the other, we should stand but a poor chance of escaping the bullets."

"We should, indeed," said Turpin, feeling in a moment the full danger of their situation. "This door must be forced."

"But how are we to do it? It's all very well to say the door must be forced, but such a job as that would require both tools and time, neither of which we have just at present."

"That's true enough. Have you tricd the door, though? If you recollect, the one at the top was not fastened, and perhaps this is not."

"Perhaps not," said King, seizing upon the supposition with a feeling of hope springing up in his breast. "It's no go," he added, almost immediately; "the door is as firm as a rock."

A silence of a minute or two followed this announcement, and then both the highwaymen felt how very tightly they had laid hold of this faint hope.

A look of desperation quickly succeeded upon their faces the one of disappointment they had worn, and both began to examine their weapons.

The altercation between the landlord and the officers seemed to be by no means over. The blows had ceased, and therefore the voices could be heard plainly enough, though not the words that were uttered.

This cessation of attack on the part of the officers the friends felt boded no good to them; and in that strange place, into which they had so imprudently ventured, they waited with great anxiety to know what would happen next.

The peculiar accents of Mr. Waghorn's voice rose above all the others.

Dick had placed the lantern on the floor, and with its lens turned towards the door they were so anxious to penetrate, so that the greater part of it was lighted up with great distinctness.

As, however, Turpin raised his eyes from the priming of his pistols, and looked towards this iron-bound door, he uttered a slight exclamation.

Tom King was standing with his back to him, and he turned round instantly.

"What is it?" he said.

Dick placed his hand upon the door.

"We are a couple of fools," he replied. "We have been troubling ourselves all this while to break open this door, and the key in the lock all the time."

"Impossible."

"One would think so. But look, here it is; my eye lighted upon it by the greatest wonder in the world."

"Your sight must be very keen, my friend. Of course, now I can see it; but it is a very small key for so large and so heavy a door."

"It is. I am quite surprised. And yet key it must be; still I can see no signs of a lock."

"Nor I. Turn it, my friend, quickly, and try. The officers have renewed their attack upon the door."

"And as if they meant to break it down, too. Whatever can they be striking it with?"

"Axes, I should say, by the peculiar sound. If it is so, they will soon have it down. Does the door yield?"

"Yes."

"Hurrah!"

It was in quite a faint way that King said "Hurrah!" but he gave a sigh of relief as he did so. Then, catching up the lantern, he followed his friend, and closed the door quickly after him.

Dick had taken the key out of the lock, and so it was soon inserted in the keyhole, and the door locked on the other side.

Both then became sensible that they were in a much warmer atmosphere than they had been previously.

There was, too, a strange, sickly smell pervading it.

But although they felt this, neither alluded to it by speech at present, but turned their attention to making the door as capable of resisting an attack as their means would permit.

They were in hopes of finding some bolts on the inner side, but they saw none. Apparently the only fastening the door ordinarily had was the lock.

"I remember once, Tom, being in a place underneath a woodman's hut, and I thought that about the strangest subterraneous place there well could be, but this beats it alt ogether!"

"It is a strange place," said King, as he glanced around him; "but before we examine it at all let us try if we cannot find some means of barricading the door."

"There ought to be two bars somewhere; for look, Tom, here are the staples on each post."

"And here is one of the bars," said King, raising a large piece of iron from the ground.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DICK AND TOM RATHER PREMATURELY CONGRATULATE THEMSELVES UPON HAVING MADE THEIR ESCAPE.

It was with a sensation of much greater security and satisfaction than he had hitherto felt, that Turpin took the iron bar from the hands of his friend, and placed it in the staples.

It crossed the door in a slanting direction.

"Now, if we can only find the other," he said, "and get that fixed in, the officers will be some little time forcing an entrance, I fancy."

"So should I. The other bar, I should think, is sure not to be far from where we found that one."

"I should think not. Just show a light. Ah! here it is!"

Turpin picked up the other bar, and having fixed it, turned his attention to the place they had entered.

The blows on the door at the other end of the passage could still be heard, though but faintly, in consequence of the second one fitting so closely in its frame.

For a moment or two, as Tom King turned the light of the lamp in different directions, the two highwaymen looked around them in silence.

They were at one side of an almost circular-shaped vault, which they roughly estimated could not be more than eight feet high, nor more than thirty in diameter.

"Whatever place is this?" asked Turpin. "Dear me! who would have thought, to have looked at Mr. Waghorn, that he was such a mysterious character!"

"Not many, perhaps; and yet, as you know, I noticed something peculiar about him the moment we met for the first time."

"You did. But do you feel how tremendously hot this place is? It is quite like an oven!"

"It is, and what kind of business the landlord carries on down here I am quite at a loss to conceive!"

"But we shall quickly find out," said Turpin, stepping forward. "I only hope we shall be fortunate enough to find some other mode of egress from the place than the door by which we have just entered."

"And so do I, for I shall be glad enough to exchange this close, stifling atmosphere for the fresh air and daylight above. What part of the inn are we under now, I wonder?"

"I can't imagine. Yet stop! Yes, I can! We were at the back of the house, weren't we?"

"Yes."

"Then we went down the cellar steps, and the passage we found runs at right angles to them."

"That is right."

"We must, then, I take it, be somewhere under the yard."

"I think so, now I come to call to mind the bearings of the different places."

"Then," said Dick, looking up at the black roof, "we may console ourselves with the idea that the blue sky is over our heads!"

In a more earnest manner they commenced looking for some means of leaving this circular vault, but they could not help pausing with deep curiosity to examine several things in the centre of this place, which in a moment explained Mr. Waghorn's motive for not wishing the police to descend into the cellar.

In the first place they found a strangely-constructed furnace, in which a few embers still smouldered.

It was from this source that the sickly and oppressive heat proceeded.

Close by was a number of odd-looking instruments, and Turpin took one in his hand in order to look at it more closely.

King pressed forward with the light, and as soon as he perceived the object his friend had taken up, he exclaimed—

"I see it all now. Everything becomes comprehensible in a moment! Do you know what you are holding in your hand?"

"Yes, a mould, though I have never seen one just this shape before."

"I have. A chap showed me one just like it once. He said that it would make better counterfeit money than could be made by other means."

"I should think it very likely," said Turpin, who had been turning the mould over and over in his hands, and carefully examining it. "This one appears to be for half-a-crown."

"And here is one of the casts from it," said Tom, taking up a bright-looking coin, from a heap of others that were partially covered with sand.

"It is really very good, and though this one is, I suppose, scarcely finished, yet it has a very genuine appearance. And so it turns out mine host of the 'Samson and Lion' is a coiner on a very extensive scale."

"And you may depend he has made the subject his study. Now, one would scarcely have thought he would have ventured to have called in the officers, as he appears to have done."

"The thought that his secret would be discovered did not, perhaps, occur to him. I dare say from the look of the place he has been carrying on this trade for a good many years, and so, having escaped so long unsuspected, has become reckless."

"That is just it. Now, I'll tell you what I think we are really compelled to do."

"What is that?"

"Why, find some means of getting out of here as quickly as possible, and when we find we can leave instantly, we will unbar and unlock the door we have carefully fastened, and let the officers come in without their having to force an entrance. I think that is the best way we can be revenged on Mr. Waghorn."

"And I! It shall be done, too, if possible. I expect, though, to hear the officers make an attack on this door every second."

"Come on, then, at once. I feel certain somehow that there is another means of exit."

"Well, I only hope there is. Do you carry the lantern, my friend, and I will go a little in advance of you."

Tom King took up the lantern, and Turpin crossed over to the other side of the vault.

But though they subjected all sides of it to the most rigid scrutiny, no signs of an opening could be seen.

They were soon convinced there was no door except the one by which they had entered, and they once more advanced to the furnace.

"It strikes me very forcibly," said Dick, "that we shall be found along with Mr. Waghorn's coining apparatus. Ha! did you hear that?"

"Well, rather, I should think. That officer must have some muscle to give a door a whack like that."

"No, no, Tom. I did not mean the blow on the door, though the sound followed close upon my exclamation. I think we're saved, my friend, for I heard as plainly as ever I heard it in my life, the peculiar neigh Bess often gives when she is anxious to be off."

"You did?"

"Yes. The sound came from just over my head. We thought we were under the yard, but it seems, instead, we are under the stable."

"If such should really prove to be the case, I shall have strong hopes indeed of our making our escape. You are sure your ears did not deceive you?"

"Quite sure."

"Then if the stable is just over our heads we will quickly make our way into it. The roof, fortunately, is not a high one. What can we get to stand upon?"

"This mound of turf, I should think, if we move it where it will be of service."

"That will do capital. Make haste, for if our friends have any idea we are making our escape they will fire at once, and it is not worth while to risk being put out of the world, or even injured, by a shot of that sort."

"It is not"

Both now set about removing to the centre of the vault the turf, of which there was a tolerable quantity close to the furnace, where it had doubtless been placed to serve as fuel.

They piled it up as high as they could, and when they carried the last, had the satisfaction of finding that it was just high enough for the purpose.

Dick mounted upon it instantly, and, taking the lantern again into his own hands, made an examination of the ceiling. He knew not as yet how much difficulty there might be in making a way through it.

But, to his unbounded joy, his eyes fell upon a small trap-door.

"We're saved, Tom! we're saved!" he cried, yet not loudly. "Were saved! There is a trap-door in the ceiling here, which opens into the stables. Hurrah! old fellow, we shall do Mr. Waghorn yet. When once we get to our cattle and mount, I will give them leave to catch us."

The discovery of this trap-door was so unexpected that Tom could hardly believe it was real. He feared the news was too good to be true.

He mounted therefore in a moment upon the mound of turf, and, as Dick turned the bright ray of light from the lantern upward, there he saw the trap-door plain enough.

It was small in size, yet large enough for a slim man to pass through easily. It did not appear, though, to have been used for many a day, for the two bolts that fastened it were completely rusted in their sockets.

The woodwork of it, too, was covered with that fine, disagreeable-looking moss which grows so plentifully in dark, damp places.

Dick made several efforts to draw back these bolts, but it was some time before he succeeded.

The second bolt was even more obstinate than the first, but it went back at last with a kind of shrieking creak.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN REGAIN THEIR STEEDS, MOUNT, AND MAKE ANOTHER ESCAPE.

WHILE our friends were thus occupied, the blows were still rained upon the door.

There was a little circumstance connected with them which they entirely overlooked.

This was, that, though the door was struck, still so violent an attack as might have been expected was not made upon it.

Had our friends noticed this, they probably enough would have set it down to its real cause.

But they did not notice it. They were too busy with the trap-door.

Still, we feel that it is with the highwaymen, and not with the officers, that we have to do; so we will not, by any allusion, anticipate events.

When the second bolt was withdrawn, it became rather a serious question whether they should boldly open the door and emerge into the stable—supposing Dick was right in coming to the conclusion that it was the stable—or should they first endeavour to ascertain what was on the other side.

The latter was the most prudent course, so they resolved to adopt it.

Dick accordingly raised his arm to push open the trap-door a little way and then peep through.

It was as firm as a rock.

Upon making this discovery, he could not restrain a groan of disappointment.

"It's no good," he said. "We must remain. The door is either fastened on the other side, or else there is something so heavy upon it that it cannot be raised."

"Or," said Tom King, taking up the poker from the furnace, "it has been closed for so long that it has stuck in its frame as the bolts had. Stand aside! let's have a try!"

"Hold a moment!" said Turpin. "Make no reckless noise. We may give the alarm to some one in the stable, if it should happen to be tenanted."

"You take the poker, then, and try if you cannot force the door open."

Dick did so, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the door give most unequivocal symptoms of yielding.

"There! I told you so!" said King, as it was loosened all round, and Dick gave the tool back into his hands. "I thought the wood had only swelled and stuck."

"And you thought right! Silence though! I am going to lift the trap a little way."

Very carefully, then, Turpin raised the trap about a couple of inches.

His first supposition was confirmed at once. The door opened into the stable.

It did not take long for his nose to make him cognizant of that.

He listened, but he heard nothing save the restless movements of the horses in the stalls.

He spoke in a whisper to his companion.

"Come on," he said. "All's right! But pray be quiet!"

As he uttered these words he took hold of the frame of the door, and, by the muscles in his arms, drew himself slowly and carefully upwards.

All was still, and in another instant he was standing in the stable.

He caught hold of Tom's hands and assisted him up.

Then they closed the trap-door, and crept stealthily to the end of the stall they were in, and looked round to see if any one was in sight.

No, the coast, apparently, was quite clear; so they ventured to walk towards the door, which was just pushed to, but not latched.

Black Bess and Tom's steed were in the same boxes they had been placed, and all ready for immediate service.

But just as they mounted—which they lost no time in doing—they heard a loud shout in the yard.

At the same moment, too, there came up through the trap-door, which Dick had been unable to fasten, some of the officers who had been battering at the door.

To have hesitated would have been to be lost; so, uttering a hasty hurrah, Turpin and King, stooping low down in their saddles, dashed at full speed into the inn-yard.

The officers, who had been standing in a dense throng near the threshold, were rather disconcerted at this sally, which was as sudden as it was unexpected, and they gave way on all sides.

As no violence had as yet been done to them, both highwaymen disdained to draw their hangers, as they might have done, but simply swung their riding-whips around them.

These were loaded at the handle with lead, and, in a vigorous grasp, were very dangerous weapons.

The officers did not take long to recover from their panic, and they rushed forward to seize the horses in a body, but they might as well have attempted to stay a whirlwind.

Without suffering the least injury whatever, Turpin and King were fortunate enough to reach the highroad.

They did not pause in the least, but dashed along in the direction they intended to travel, but the hasty glance they gave at the front of the inn showed them that both Mr. Waghorn and Jack the ostler were there as prisoners.

The reader will remember that a man had been left in charge of the horses and prisoner, and the officers, before the highwaymen could reach a bend in the road, had mounted them, and were in full pursuit.

"Forward! forward!" shouted Dick, as he turned back and saw his foes behind him. "We shall have some sport now, Tom. The chase gets interesting."

"Rein in a little, then," said King, who was already falling in the rear, for the words of her master, spoken, as they were, in exhilarating tones, caused Black Bess to almost double her speed. "Pull in!"

"You must urge your nag forward, Tom. The officers appear well mounted and their horses fresh."

"They do," said Tom, and he struck his spurs into the flanks of his horse

The officers, who, in their anxiety to take Turpin alive, had acted so considerately towards him, now that they saw he was in a fair way of making his escape, fired volley after volley from their pistols.

But too great a distance had been placed between the fugitives and the police for these shots to have any effect beyond that of startling every living creature that made the lane and the adjoining meadows its home.

Still they fired as fast as they could load, and by means

of goading their cattle to the utmost, contrived to keep Turpin and King in view.

It was only by a long gallop that our friends could hope to escape, for the country was flat, and there was no cover visible for many a mile around.

They were careful, though, not to distress their horses, and so only put them to just sufficient speed to maintain a safe distance between them and the officers. They trusted by this means to tire out their pursuers, and when this was the case, by putting their steeds upon their mettle, to get quite clear of them.

The officers, however, pushed on in a most determined manner, so that, although Bess easily enough performed the feat, Tom's horse had occasionally a little difficulty in keeping pace.

At last, after a two hours' ride, the highwaymen felt it to be imperatively necessary to breathe their horses for a few moments.

They had just crossed a common of considerable extent, and they could see uninterruptedly behind them for a great distance.

But though they gazed long and anxiously in the direction they had come, and shaded their eyes with their hands, they could not see the smallest signs of the officers.

"We have escaped them for a time, Dick, I really think," said Tom King. "They have held out well, I consider."

"They have, indeed; but I am in hopes, now they have relinquished the chase, they must have felt the utter hopelessness of capturing us."

"Yes. We have, nevertheless, had a narrow escape, as narrow as ever either had, I fancy. Very fortunate, indeed, was it for us that Mr. Waghorn was a coiner, and carried on his business underground!"

"Yes, or I scarcely fancy we should have been here now. However, who knows?"

"It is some consolation to think the officers have made the rascally landlord and his ostler prisoners. They will have some difficulty in getting off at the assizes."

"Oh! none at all! The judge will very soon dispose of them. They may safely consider they have seen the 'Samson and Lion' for the last time."

"No doubt, no doubt!"

We must beg our readers to call to mind that at the time of which we are now writing, and, indeed, for long afterwards, many offences which are now visited with a comparatively slight penalty, were then capital ones, and persons who were convicted of making bad money were hanged without mercy. It was an offence which neither the first, second, nor third George forgave.

Therefore it was that Turpin spoke so positively about their fate.

Tom and Dick now gathered the reins once more in their hands, but before they started, they turned round, and again looked keenly and scrutinizingly in their rear.

The police-officers were not in sight.

"They have turned back, depend upon it," said Turpin, "and we can now pursue our journey in peace, and more at leisure. Your horse, Tom, seems quite blown."

"He does; and, although Bess shows no signs of distress, you must bear in mind we have come a long distance and at a great speed before we halted."

"So we did. However, it has carried us a long way on our journey, for I took care to shape my course as well as I could. I don't suppose we have gone far out."

"Oh! no; I have taken notice how the land lies."

"Well, then, can you form any idea of whereabouts we are?"

"I should think about twenty miles from the New Forest."

"Then," said Dick, "we will try if we cannot perform the rest of our journey at a moderate rate. I shall want a good rest after this."

"Still, I think we have got out of Mr. Wriggles's way. It will now be a feeling of revenge against us that will actuate him, and he will spare nothing to have us captured."

"I fancy not."

"But if we stay here a time, and I daresay it will be even more profitable to us than in London, we shall give his anger time to cool."

"Oh! I don't care a fig for him nor his anger either. Push along."

CHAPTER XL.

THE TWO FRIENDS FOLLOW THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT THROUGH THE NEW FOREST, AND MAKE A PROFITABLE DISCOVERY.

WHEN Dick Turpin and Tom King, three hours afterwards, reached the borders of the New Forest, it was quite dark.

They were holding a rather animated conversation as to whether they should proceed still further.

"What's the good?" said Turpin. "We may as well have a rest somewhere as not. Remember, we have been a long time upon the road, and a merciful man is merciful to his beast."

"That's right enough; but I don't see where we are to put up, and I don't much relish the idea of spending the night in a tree."

"Nor I."

"Very well, then, let us proceed. As it is, I see no signs of human habitation, but we must do so if we keep on."

"I don't know that. We are in a very sparsely-populated district, and, instead of going in the direction of dwellings, we may only be plunging deeper and deeper in the wood."

"I admit there is the fear of doing that, yet I think if we take care to keep where the trees are thin, we shall soon find a place—a cottage, or something of that sort—where we can rest."

"Forward, then! I don't see what else is to be done."

They started their horses afresh, and though Black Bess presented no very palpable signs of flagging, she must have been suffering from fatigue.

In this way they went on, at scarcely more than a walking pace.

The darkness increased every moment.

In spite, too, of their efforts to keep amongst the trees at the margin of the forest, they found they were gradually getting farther and farther in.

At last, Turpin pulled up.

"It is folly going farther like this. We shall be benighted here, that's clear enough; so let us stop at once. We may find a less comfortable place."

"I should not give in yet," said King. "It's confoundedly dark, but it appears to me if we bear a little more to the left we shall get clearer of the trees."

"They don't grow so closely together there, I really think. Come on, we may as well make the attempt."

"Of course we may. And look, I am right, there is a light among the trees there."

"Where?"

"It has gone now. Stop; there it is again!"

"Oh! I see it. Is it a cottage, think you?"

"I hope so."

"It can't be that," said Dick, a moment or two afterwards; "the light is not stationary."

"Halt a moment and let us see; I fancied the light shifted, but we may have been deceived by our own motion."

"No, that cannot be, for look! it is almost out now, and"—

"Now it has gone altogether."

"No; there it is, a little farther along. Do you see it?"

"Yes, plainly enough. It is either the will-o'-the-wisp or else some one carrying a lantern."

"If it is the former, the less attention we pay to it the better, for you know well enough a will-o'-the-wisp will only flicker before us, and lead us into some morass."

"We shall soon know whether it is that, my friend, if we follow it a little while."

"So we shall. Come along, then."

"Be careful where you tread; the ground may be treacherous."

"I am not afraid. Bess is sure-footed, and I can safely trust myself to her. You can follow close to me."

The mysterious light still flitted before them, but in a tolerably direct line.

What in the world can it be, Dick?" asked Tom, after regarding it for some moments attentively. "I fancy if it is a man with a light; we ought to see some indications of his form."

"Well, I don't know. I should say seeing is quite out

of the question. I never knew it so dark before as it now is."

"I can hear nothing," said Tom. "I think it something rather singular."

"Then we will soon find out what it is. Push your horse on a bit faster."

King did so, yet they could not perceive that they approached the light in the least.

And now every moment saw them still deeper involved amongst the trees; but the intense curiosity they felt to know the meaning of the strange light made them quite heedless of this circumstance.

That it was not what they first fancied it—namely, a will-o'-the-wisp—they were quite certain. Its course was too direct, and the flame too constant, for it to be that strange emanation from the earth.

In fact, they found now that it was only invisible for a moment, as though a person in carrying it had passed behind some opaque object.

But in a short time the trees grew so thickly together, and the underwood got so dense, that it became almost an impossibility to proceed, and so Dick and Tom drew up.

There was the provoking light, flitting before them in just the same fashion.

"I feel very tired," said Turpin, "but I am determined to prosecute this adventure to the end. I should never feel satisfied if I left without finding it out."

"Nor I," said Tom.

"Alight then, my friend; we can fasten the horses to the trunk of this tree, and creep forward on foot."

"That will be it."

"You must lose no time, though. Look how fast the light travels."

"It does, indeed. We must make them secure. We shall soon overtake the light, I make no doubt; but there is another thing to be taken into consideration.

"What is it?"

"Why, if we go wandering into the forest, how are we to find our way back to the horses? Recollect, it is pitch dark."

"You need not remind me of that. Confound it, I have just stepped into a hole full of mud."

"We must both be careful; but, seriously speaking, if we tether the horses here, how are we to find our way back to them?"

"Oh! I can get out of that difficulty with very little trouble. Take hold of this."

"Take hold of what?"

"This ball of fine twine. It is of considerable length. Tie one end of it to the tree and unwind the ball as you proceed, letting the string fall on the ground; you will easily enough find your way back then."

"So we shall, unless the string should not happen to be long enough."

"There is no fear of that. I have two more just such balls in my pocket."

"Oh! then, of course we shall be right. Now then, are you ready?"

"Quite."

"Come along, then, it is high time, for the light is almost out of sight."

"It is. I can see it though. Ha! it stops."

"Does it?"

"Yes, I am sure. Hurry on, we shall find all out now."

Taking care to pay out the string as they went, which, in the event of their return, would most certainly prove an excellent clue, the two highwaymen struggled through the furze and gorse bushes in the direction of the light, which now seemed to be quite stationary.

As they drew still nearer to it they advanced with more caution.

But just when they were within, as they fancied, a dozen yards or so of it, it danced away again.

Turpin and King stopped at once.

"This is a regular wild-goose chase," said Dick; "you may depend it is nothing more than some marsh light, and it will lead us about all night."

"It cannot be that," replied Tom. "Listen. I can plainly distinguish a crashing among the bushes, as though some one was passing through them!"

Turpin bent his ear towards the ground.

"Your hearing has not deceived you," he said. "The sound is very faint, but I can certainly distinguish just such a noise as would be produced by some one forcing their way through thick vegetation."

"Then it can't be a will-o'-the-wisp, that's certain. At least, I have never heard that it makes such a sound in its progress."

"Oh! it is not that. Be as careful as you can, and make no more noise than you can help, for I do not want our presence to be suspected."

"Certainly not, but I don't see how you are to help a dry twig snapping under your feet."

"Oh! no; and such a sound would pass unnoticed. Be quick! Why, hang it all, it's gone!"

"Gone? So it has. Dear me, how sudden!"

"Hush! don't speak loud. Voices travel a long way in these silent places. I dare say we shall see it reappear directly."

They were mistaken.

One, two, three—five minutes elapsed, but no signs of the light could be seen.

"This is very odd," said Tom King. "However, don't let us hang back. I can see just where the light vanished from. I have had my eyes fixed on the spot and have never moved them once."

"Lead on, then, as straight as you can!"

Tom King, taking hold of his companion's coat, walked on carefully. Their progress was not rapid, for the ground rose rather suddenly.

Without speaking another word, for fear their voices should travel before them, they breasted this little hill and looked around.

They did not see the light at first, but a more careful observation brought to view a very faint light far down beneath them.

It was quite stationary.

Turpin and King both saw it simultaneously, and with greater caution than ever made their way towards it.

Rather more than a dozen steps brought them to the brink of a dingle.

As well as they could make out it was about fourteen feet in depth, and the sides were literally covered with rank vegetation, such as is common to such spots.

The light seemed to be just at the very bottom.

And now, as they listened at the top of this dell, there came up to their ears a sound which they immediately recognised.

Some one was digging.

The sound of a foot striking upon a spade, and of earth being thrown up, could be plainly enough heard.

There was something mysterious and provocative of curiosity in the fact of any one penetrating so far into the forest at so late an hour, and then, in that lonesome spot, making an excavation, that the highwaymen both found their interest in what was going on increase tenfold, and they bent over the ridge anxiously.

Presently King felt his companion's hand upon his shoulder.

"What now?" he asked, in a scarcely audible whisper.

"The sides of this dingle," replied Turpin, "are so thickly wooded that it would be impossible for us to descend without causing sufficient noise to attract observation towards us."

"I am aware of that."

"But I have found what seems to be a narrow, beaten path, leading circuitously to the bottom. Now, I think if we exercise proper caution, we can make our way down without our footsteps being heard."

"Yes, yes! Where is the path?"

"Here it is, Tom. Let me go first, and then you will see!"

"Agreed! Go on!"

Treading on his toes, and taking long, silent strides, Turpin preceded King down a path not more than eight inches wide, that seemed to run corkscrew-like to the bottom.

The shrubs with which the sides of the dingle were lined rose up almost to their waists on each side of them, but still, as none grew on the path itself, they were able to descend without making sufficient noise to be the means of attracting notice to them.

As they went lower and lower, the sound of the man digging—for that was what they concluded it to be—got louder and louder.

If any one had asked our friends what they expected to find on reaching the bottom of the dingle, they would

have unhesitatingly replied, some ruffian who, in that deserted spot, was endeavouring to hide the evidences of his crime.

In fact, that some one was digging a grave.

How great, therefore, was their surprise, when they saw through the bushes the form of an old gaunt man, the very reverse of what they had expected to see.

But it was he evidently who had so puzzled Turpin and King with the light, for on a mound of the earth he had turned up was a common stable lantern.

Under most circumstances it was, no doubt, considered to give forth a very insufficient amount of illuminating power, but in that intensely dark dell it seemed enough to reveal everything.

Its rays fell with full force upon the face and form of the old man who was digging, and our friends examined him attentively.

From his thin, white locks, sunken eyes, and attenuated frame, one would have judged his age to be something remarkable, and yet there was none of that stiffness in his limbs which is apparent in men who are far down in the vale of life.

On the contrary, his arms, which were bare to the shoulders—for he appeared to have taken off his coat and rolled up his shirt-sleeves in order to better execute his task—although little more than skin and bone, were yet sinewy and strong, and he seemed to stand firmly and erectly upon his legs.

But upon his shrunken and emaciated countenance was written plainly the word AVARICE.

Mingled with that expression now, though, was one of apprehensive terror.

His spade was clutched tightly in his hands.

His head bent forward as if to listen.

Then in a strange, piping voice, he spoke—

"I thought I heard some one," he said; "but all is still now, quite still. I can hear the rustling of the branches, but that is all. I fancied, too, on my way here I heard strange sounds behind me, but I did not look back, I did not look back!"

He shook his head tremulously to and fro as he repeated the words.

"They say there are strange sounds to be heard, and horrible sights to be seen, in the forest after dark, but I don't fear them. I don't—ha! ha!—believe in such nonsense. There is only one thing I believe in, and that is gold, bright gold—ha! ha!—and I only fear those who are strong enough to deprive me of it. I thought I heard some one creeping after me, but I suppose that was only my fancy. It is very hard to think a man cannot get a few pounds together without having everybody after him. It's very hard, too, to think that I should be obliged to bring my money to this place at night to hide it. If I had it at home, I should not be able to sleep in my bed; but it is safe here, quite safe."

The wretched old miser—for such he was—recommenced his toil.

So close as the two highwaymen were to him, neither could have spoken a syllable without running the risk of being overheard, and they did not want just then to make themselves apparent.

But it strikes us that if the thought that two such notorious characters as Dick Turpin and Tom King knew of the exact locality of his hidden treasure he would, to use his own expression, have never been able to sleep in bed.

Presently the old man found it necessary to rest again from his labour.

"It is terrible tiring work," he said, half-aloud and half to himself,—"terrible tiring work. I should think now I cannot be many inches off the iron casket which contains my riches. It is not much, but there are plenty who would not scruple to rob a poor man of his hard-earned gains."

"I shall be rich some day," he added, after a moment's silence, "and I shan't want to save up then as I do now. Very soon I shall have enough to live on, and then these hard, fatiguing night-excursions to the recesses of the forest will be at an end. I shall be glad of that, very glad. Five minutes more, and I shall reach the box, and then, when I have added what I have brought with me to-night, I can feast my eyes with its contents. Oh! it is a brave sight—a brave sight!"

The poor wretch—for, though he possessed doubtless a larger sum of money than many a rich man, he was a poor wretch—the poor wretch, we say, once more bent his back to his task.

Shovelful after shovelful were thrown out on to the mound.

Suddenly the miser stopped, and pressed both his hands to the side of his head.

An idea—so horrible that it almost destroyed his reason—flashed upon his brain.

The agony he endured was something awful, and surely a foretaste of that punishment to which he was so justly decreed.

But it was only for a brief instant that he stood thus. Uttering a wild, yelling shriek, which echoed and echoed through the trees, startling many a bird from its perch, the miser snatched up the spade and threw up the earth at a furious rate, until he had made another mound of the same height as the former one.

And all this while he never gave vent to a sound.

The whole of the faculties he possessed seemed to be centred in turning up the earth.

The rate he worked at would have been surprising in a young man, but what was it in a feeble, emaciated frame like his?

Simply astounding.

"My gold!" he shrieked, with terrible agony in his tones. "My gold—my treasure—the fruits of a long life of penury and grasping! Who has been here? Am I mad, or dreaming, or what am I? No—no, I am here, in the dingle where I hid my gold, but it has been stolen from me! It is gone—gone. Some one has dogged my feet and deprived me of my all—of all that I cared to live for. No—no, it cannot be true! It would be too, too horrible! I must have missed the spot, and yet I marked it well. No—no, I did not miss the spot, but, he! he! how funny! I have not dug deep enough! Ha! ha! not dug deep enough. What an old fool I must have been to make such a mistake and frighten myself so much!—he! he! I should never have believed I could have done such a foolish thing! I must dig deeper and I shall find it then, of course!"

There was something so horribly dissonant and unnatural about the miser's laugh that Turpin and King shuddered involuntarily.

It was wonderful to see with what breathless rapidity the old man threw out the soil.

At last he stopped.

The delusion with which he had endeavoured to cheat his mind could now no longer be maintained. He knew he had dug many feet below the spot where he had concealed his treasure. He knew that he had made no mistake in its whereabouts; he knew, too, worst of all, that some one had been there before him—that his precious gold was gone.

For a moment or two he stood incapable of speech or motion, but his thoughts were busy, and his brain dizzy and whirling.

Then he found his voice.

It was choked with sobs.

His anguish, no doubt, was great indeed—greater than many can perhaps imagine.

Large tears of agony started from his eyes, and streamed down his sunken cheeks.

"My gold! my gold!" he said; "who is it that has stolen what I prized more than life itself? May my withering curse cling to him through all eternity! May he be bereft of all he holds dear in this world, even as he has bereaved me! Oh! I am old now; old, old! My strength is gone, and I cannot live long enough to save any money now. I shall die as I knew I should—as I always said I should—a pauper, a pauper!"

He sat down upon the edge of the excavation he had made, and looked down into it.

"The long, long years of toil it cost me! The privations I endured in order to add to its amount, if it was ever so little, for I knew those little sums would tell up some day, and now it is gone, all gone; gone at once. I have only now left to me that little I have about me. Oh! what shall I do? What will become of me?"

Then his voice became suffocated in his sobs.

Presently, however, he recovered himself, and sprang suddenly to his feet.

The soft night breeze blew his long hair from his face, and made it stream in a strange fashion behind him.

5 NEW SPLENDID COLOURED PICTURES GRATIS with Nos. 1 & 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6



[TOM KING AND DICK WATCH THE MISER DIG FOR HIS TREASURE.]

His hands were clenched tightly.

The fire of insanity was in his eyes.

"I know what I will do now!" he yelled, in startling tones. "I know what I will do! I will seek him who has robbed me of my treasure, seek him by day and by night unceasingly! I shall find him, for my wrongs will urge me on. I shall find him, and then let him beware! I am a poor, weak old man, but yet I have power left to rob him of a treasure which he can never regain, and which, perhaps, he values almost as much as I did my darling gold! I will find him, and then I will take his life! Not all at once, as he deprived me of my treasure, but bit by bit, drop by drop! I will find him! I—ah!—help!"

The loud report of a pistol rung on the night air,

The miser pressed his hands upon his breast.

His body swayed to and fro.

He made frantic efforts to stand.

He tried to shriek, but his lunge were filling rapidly with blood.

A sickening, gurgling sound alone came from his lips.

Then he turned slowly round upon his heels, staggered, and, uttering a strange, gasping sob, fell headlong backwards into the hole he had dug with so much toil.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE HIGHWAYMEN DEAL RETRIBUTION TO THE MURDERER OF THE OLD MISER.

OUR two friends were so much absorbed by the strange scene in the dell, that, had their lives depended upon it, they could not have stirred a step.

When, however, the report of the pistol came so unexpectedly upon their ears, both gave a sudden start and almost lost their footing.

By an impulse which he could not control, Dick sprang forward, but Tom King held him back as he whispered impressively—

"Silence! Do not stir! We shall see the man who fired that cowardly shot, or I am mistaken."

Dick obeyed.

At the same moment a great rustling among the trees took place, but, of course, in the profound darkness they could see nothing.

Then they heard a heavy footstep, crunching on the gravelly soil.

With their eyes wide open and their heads stretched forward, the highwaymen waited with indescribable impatience for this individual to make his appearance.

They were not long kept in suspense.

The lantern which the miser had placed upon the little mound of earth still shed its faint glimmering light upon the scene.

But it was on the bleeding corpse of the old man that its rays fell with the most force and intensity.

To the excited fancy of the highwaymen it seemed as though the light had concentrated itself there specially.

But this was only fancy, for something, at first dim and undefined, came within the sphere of the lantern's beams, and at a considerable distance from the body.

Presently this something came more fully into the influence of the light.

And then they saw a man.

He was advancing in a strange, creeping, stooping fashion.

But as he came from the opposite side of the dingle to that upon which our friends were standing, they of course saw his face with great distinctness.

It seemed terribly repulsive—most likely more so than it really was. It was seen under peculiar circumstances, and such as were by no means to his advantage.

When within about six paces of the old miser's body this man paused.

He put up his hand to shade the beams of the lantern from his eyes while he took a long look at his victim.

Then he spoke in a deep, hoarse whisper.

"Is—is he dead?" he asked. "Is he quite dead? He seems still enough! He—he must be dead! I have used a pistol too often to miss a mark like that! He must be dead—dead! Hn! Mercy—mercy! Help! help!"

He uttered loud screams and flung himself upon his knees.

And yet there was, to all appearance, nothing to cause this sudden outbreak of terror and alarm.

Our friends could not fail to be much startled by it, and they looked round with something like dismay, wondering what was going to happen next.

But all remained just as it was before.

Quite bewildered, the highwaymen kept their eyes upon the man who, after making several unsuccessful efforts, at last rose to his feet.

With an intensity and anxiety which cannot be described, our friends listened for this man to speak.

It was from his lips alone that they could hope to learn the reason of his mysterious fear.

He soon spoke.

"What a fool I must be!" he said, nervously, "to frighten myself in that way. It was n—nothing after all. Nothing! I thought I felt some one clutch me by the throat! Could it have been all fancy! No—no! It was—it was something! I felt something touch me, surely! What was it? What was it?"

He looked upon the ground near his feet, as well as his trembling limbs would allow him.

"Of course; why this must be it, and so I have alarmed myself with nothing! This little branch it was that fell from one of the trees above, and struck me on the back, I suppose. Curse it!"

He threw the branch upon the ground as he spoke.

The cause of the poor wretch's terror was now sufficiently explained.

By some means, a little branch from one of the trees had become disengaged from its hold upon the parent stem, and falling down, had struck the murderer upon the back, filling his very soul with a mortal terror, such as he had never before felt.

How true it is a guilty conscience needs no accuser.

Considerably relieved, our friends continued to watch him attentively.

It would seem as though he had gathered courage from the discovery he had just made, for he walked now quite up to his victim.

"He is dead, sure enough, and I—I am a murderer! I have shot many a bird and many an animal before to-day, but never a human being! But why did he tempt his fate? My life would have been one continual dread if he had lived after he swore to haunt me! It was his own fault—his own fault! Surely, what I did was but acting in my own defence!"

In this way, as he stooped over the stark and prostrate corpse, did the murderer endeavour to deceive his conscience.

"I will bury him here—here, where he buried his treasure! He cannot grumble at that, surely. Then I will flee far, far from this spot, which to me will be always full of horrors! With his riches I shall be able to live like the great ones of the land. Ha! that were indeed worth something! I shall soon forget, in the pleasure of possessing it, the manner in which I obtained the wealth—very soon. And then all will be well."

"No, villain!" cried Dick, in his loud, clear voice, which struck terror to the soul of the guilty man; "no, all will not be well. Murder will out! With the death of a human body there arises an invisible avenger which pursues the murderer until the ends of justice are appeased!"

"Ha!" yelled the man, as he turned to fly; "discovered! A thousand curses! All is lost now!"

But he was not suffered to escape. King sprang forward, and grasped him tightly by the throat.

And then this man, who in more than one respect resembled one of those ferocious animals which will fight only when placed at bay, faced about and commenced a desperate struggle with his captor.

He was a tall, powerful man, and now despair seemed to have redoubled his strength; and King felt that if he wished to secure him he would have to call his friend to his assistance.

Turpin sprang forward.

Between them the murderer stood not the ghost of a chance, and he was overpowered almost immediately.

King placed his foot upon his breast, and, drawing his hanger, held it at his throat.

Its sharp point just penetrated the skin.

"Move hand or foot," said King, "and you are a dead man. Now answer me, and truly: who is it you have so treacherously murdered?"

The man remained doggedly silent.

"Answer," said King, again: "who is it you have shot in so cowardly a manner?"

Still no reply.

Tom pressed slightly upon the hilt of his hanger, and, as the murderer felt it entering the flesh, he cried—

"Curse you both! would you murder me by inches? It was my master."

"Your master! Then the crime is doubly enormous! What was his name? Who was he?"

"Olinthus Furze, the miser."

"It was you, then, that came here and dug up the old man's treasure-box. To what place have you removed it?"

"I will not tell you," said the man, fiercely. "You shall kill me first!"

"Now, look here, Tom," said Dick, who had been very busily engaged about something during the past few minutes. "Look here, Tom, I will show you how to deal out retribution to this fellow."

King turned round, and saw his comrade holding a piece of rope with a large noose at the end of it towards him!

"Are you going to hang him?"

"Yes, but not by the neck, though. You keep him in his place, and I will slip it over him!"

And, although he experienced considerable difficulty, Turpin slipped the noose over the man's head, and drew it tight under the armpits.

The other end of the rope had been cast over the stout limb of a tree a few feet overhead.

Dick began to haul him up.

The man shrieked, and kicked, and struggled, but all in vain!

Up he went.

They drew him up until his feet were about four feet from the ground.

Then the highwaymen secured the rope to the trunk of the tree.

The murderer swung round and round, and swayed to and fro.

The expression of his face was so awful that when they saw it the highwaymen shudderingly withdrew their gaze.

The rays of the lantern sun played upon the form of the old miser, and upon this object the eyes of the murderer were fixed as if with some terrible fascination.

"Here you will remain," said Dick, "in the company of he whom you have deprived of life until some one shall find you here, and convey you to the nearest prison."

"Curses on you!" howled the man; "curses on you both! What was it I did to you? Why did you interfere with me? Curses on you!"

"You can cry out as loudly as you please," said Tom King, "some one will doubtless hear your shouts. May the terrible spectacle before you prove some slight punishment for the deed you have done."

As he spoke, Tom and Turpin picked up the ball of string, and began to thread their way back to the place where they had left their horses.

It was well they took the precaution, for, without some such guide, it would have been impossible on that dark night to have found their way through the mazes of the forest.

The loud shouts and frantic screams of the murderer of the old miser echoed and re-echoed along the glades, rousing from their night's repose many a wild denizen of the forest.

At last they ceased with a suddenness and abruptness that was startling in the extreme.

CHAPTER XLII.

OUR FRIENDS ARE OVERWHELMED WITH ADVENTURES OF THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY DESCRIPTION.

"What is the meaning of that?" asked Tom, of his companion.

"I hardly know, but I was thinking just as you spoke about the miser's casket of gold!"

"Well?"

"Oh! nothing, only I cannot help thinking that it is not far from where we stood."

"What makes you think that?"

"I'll tell you. But while I do so let us retrace our steps to the dingle and ascertain the meaning of the cessation of the man's shouts."

"Is it worth while, think you?"

"I do. I am sure of it. Listen!"

"I am all attention."

"In the first place, then, let us set about to account for the presence of the murderer at the spot where the robbery was committed, and at so late an hour."

"That, I presume," said Tom, "can be accounted for in two ways. Either he had only just removed the casket and had not time to get away before his master came, or I think, most likely, he had, after taking it from his hiding-place, merely secreted it somewhere in the bushes, and had visited the place to-night to carry it off completely."

"Exactly. Now, under either of these circumstances, the casket of gold must be somewhere close to the dingle."

"Of course."

"Very well, then, don't you consider it would be very wrong on our parts to leave such a treasure to the chance finding of anyone?"

"H—m! perhaps it would! But what could we do with it, and, to tell you the truth, Dick, I don't like the idea of having anything more to do with it. The miser's curse will cling to it, and it will I fancy prove anything but a blessing to its possessor."

"Pho—pho! Tom. Shake off such foolish notions as those I beg. Really now, I did not think you were so superstitious."

"Don't laugh at it my friend. You will find it turn out a serious matter."

"Oh stuff! Now look here, I'll tell you what I'll do." They reached the brim of the dingle as he spoke, and they paused there to continue the conversation.

"Well?"

"Let us look about the dell in every part until we find the casket. We will then bury it in some place that we shall easily recognise at a future time. Of course, I needn't tell you anything about the precarious nature of our profession, and who knows, if we bury this treasure, that we may not some day be very glad of it, and find it of the utmost service."

"Why, indeed?"

"You consent, then?"

"That we shall look about in the endeavour to find the casket? Yes."

"And if we do find it, to bury it?"

"Yes."

"Come on, then! Be careful of your footing! What can have caused the man to be silent so suddenly, I wonder?"

"We shall soon know that. I can just see him now. How very still he hangs! Is he dead?"

"I should think it would be scarcely probable. And yet I don't know, either. He might be!"

"He might!"

"I hope not, however, for I am greatly in hopes of being able to extort from him some particulars respecting the whereabouts of the casket."

While speaking, they had reached the bottom of the dingle.

The lantern still burned clearly, and Tom King went towards it and took it up.

Then, carefully avoiding the bleeding body of the miser, he made a detour, and reached the tree to which he had suspended the servant.

He cast the light upwards.

"Your hopes of learning anything are at an end, Dick. See, he is quite dead! He must have shouted until he broke a blood-vessel; for see, it has streamed all down his clothing, and is even now bubbling from his mouth!"

"Turn the light away, Tom, I cannot bear to look upon him. Well, he has met with no more than his deserts!"

"True, and yet when these signs of the tragedy are discovered, as they are sure to be sooner or later, how inexplicable it will all appear!"

"I think myself they will have some difficulty in arriving at a correct solution of the affair."

"If they are left to draw their own conclusions from what they see they certainly will; but I think we shall be only doing our duty by leaving them some clue."

"What do you propose?"

"Oh! it can be done simply enough. Get your lead pencil, and write a few words upon the leaf of a pocket-book, and place it somewhere about his person."

"A good thought; it shall be done. I have, though, one little amendment to propose."

"What is that?"

"Why that you write the document."

"Oh, very well; just as you like."

"Why the fact is, where I went to school we did not pay much attention to writing and such like. Now I know you are a good scholar."

"Middling, as to that. Still I can manage a job of that sort."

"Very good, then; suppose you begin at once, because the sooner we get back to the horses the better."

"Just so," said Tom, as he took out an elaborate pocket-book, and prepared to write; "what shall I say?"

"I shall leave that to you."

Tom sucked the end of the pencil very deliberately, in order to collect his thoughts.

Then he wrote, bearing very hard upon the paper, so that the writing should be as black as possible, the following words:

"We, Richard Turpin and Thomas King, do hereby certify that, having witnessed this man, whose name we do not know, commit a deliberate murder upon the person of one whom we believe to be known as Olinthus Furze, the miser, did pass a rope under his arm pits and suspend him to this tree in order that he might be discovered and punished for his crime, which we cordially detest.

"And we hereby further certify that, hearing his shouts and screams suddenly cease, we did retrace our steps to learn the cause, and found him dead and bleeding from the mouth, having apparently broken a blood-vessel in his frantic screams.

"(Signed) "Richard Turpin.
"Thomas King."

"That will do capitas," said Dick, as Tom finished reading it to him,—"capital! And now put it into one of his pockets."

This was done.

"Thank goodness!" said King, "he's done with. And now about this treasure. If you'll take my advice, my friend, you will not meddle with it."

"Pho! pho! I am ashamed of you. Come along."

Rather unwillingly, King again took up the lantern and followed Dick, who commenced a very systematic examination of the dingle.

At last, and just as he was beginning to despair, he struck against something which was partly on the brink of the dell.

He made an examination of the object instantly.

It was a large oak box, crossed and recrossed in every direction with stout bands of iron.

"Here you are, Tom," he cried, in an exulting voice. Bravo! it's close to the top, so we shan't have the job of pulling it up, and there are handles on each side, I declare. Why, if you take hold of one handle and I take hold of the other, we shall carry it off first rate."

"Ah! yes, I dare say. We shall want the spade though, and as you are so anxious about the job you had better go down and fetch it, and take hold of the string at the same time! You had forgotten that, had'nt you?"

"I had, for the moment! but, however, if you have any objection to going, stay here for a moment, and I will quickly fetch the spade."

Without waiting for a reply, Dick plunged quickly into the dell, and in a few moments returned with the articles of which he went in quest.

Then, together, the two highwaymen carried the box for some distance into the recesses of the forest.

It was very hard work, for the box was a great weight.

About fifty yards from the dell was a tree, with a monstrous hollow trunk, from the summit of which there grew out a young tree.

This could not fail to be an unusual object, and therefore was well qualified, on that account, to point out where the treasure was hidden.

"You could'nt find a better place if you searched the whole forest over," said Dick, as he reached it, "and so here goes!"

There was a piece of level ground near the trunk of the tree, and Dick with the spade very carefully cut away the turf in long strips, about a foot in width, which he placed on one side, so that when the hole was filled up, the turf could be replaced, and so the ground show no symptoms of having been disturbed.

Dick set to work with a will, and soon had a tolerable sized hole dug.

Tom King sat down upon the edge of the miser's box.

It was not necessary to dig to any great depth, so the pit was not long before it was in readiness to receive its precious contents.

As they lowered it into the hole, Dick felt a very strong inclination to open the box, but the fastenings were of so complicated a character, that, after making one abortive effort, he gave up the attempt in despair.

"You must bury your riches unseen, my friend," said Tom King, "and if you will be guided by me, you will let them always remain where they are."

"How absurd! Do you think any luck, good or bad, attaches itself to the treasure? Nonsense! Now, I contend it will be vastly pleasant, when we are distressed for money, to know just where to put our hands upon a large sum."

"Perhaps so, perhaps so! Come, do not linger over your work! I think it's quite time we got back to look after our cattle."

"It is, Tom," said Dick, as he patted the turf down in its place. "I don't like the idea of leaving them at all; but I have done now. I will just take one more look round at the place, and then we will be off."

They did so, and Turpin caught hold of the string which they had provided as a clue, and once more threaded the intricacies of the old forest.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE GIPSIES AFFORD SHELTER TO THE HIGHWAYMEN.

WITHOUT any accident, save that of stumbling occasionally over some projecting root, our friends reached the place where they had left their steeds.

Both animals were stretched upon the grass. They could not be other than much fatigued.

Upon, however, hearing their owners approach, both started to their feet.

"And now, Tom," said Turpin, as he settled himself in his saddle, "what are we to do next?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, but one thing is certain: we must stop somewhere, not so much on account of ourselves as our horses."

"True. And yet they ought, I think, to hold out, if we travel gently, until daybreak."

"They will have to do so if we cannot find a halting-place. And now, which way do we go—to the right, or the left, or straight on?"

"To the right, I fancy. We will keep as much as possible upon the edge of the trees."

They did so, and for hours and hours they continued on their route without meeting with a single person or seeing a sign of a human habitation.

Horses and riders were completely tired down by the time the first flush of dawn appeared in the eastern sky.

They were glad when they saw this token of the coming day. It seemed to promise repose for a short time, and also served to indicate their course.

They found they were but little out of their way, and soon after leaped over a low hedge into the highroad.

"Surely, now," cried King, "we cannot go far without meeting with some place where we can shelter for a little time."

"One would think not. It is a high dawn this morning, Tom; we shall have a glorious day."

"I think so, myself. Ah! already I can see the edge of the sun's disc; and look! is not that a wreath of smoke curling up yonder?"

"It is. From some farmhouse or cottage, probably. Let us hasten."

King urged his horse to make a little better speed, and a word from her rider caused Bess to make a sudden dash forwards.

The smoke which the highwayman's keen glance had detected was some distance ahead of them, and considerably west of the highroad they were travelling.

They found it necessary, therefore, in a short space of time, to forsake the highway and strike across the fields.

The soft turf was peculiarly grateful to the tired horses' hoofs.

After crossing several meadows, they reached the brow of a hill—if hill it could be called, for in reality it was little more than a piece of rising ground—and, looking down, saw at their feet a gipsies' camp.

There were two or three of their houses upon wheels grouped round, and an equal number of canvas tents.

In the centre of the circle which these objects formed, was a fire, made chiefly of green twigs, and which sent up the dark blue vapour which had arrested King's attention.

About a dozen persons—men, women, and children—were crouching around this fire, and watching anxiously a large iron pot, which was suspended in the usual fashion over the flames.

"This will be the very thing for us," said Dick. "I have more than once had occasion to seek shelter from these strange, wandering people, and always found them faithful. Come on, Tom, we shall be almost sure of meeting with a welcome."

King needed no pressing to do this, and, alighting from his steed, he made his way down the hill on foot.

Dick followed his example.

At the sound of their tread upon the grass, the gipsies turned round, and then rose one and all to their feet.

A man who might perhaps be considered handsome, were it not for his beetling brows, stood forward from the rest.

"What want you, strangers, with the Zingari? Speak, let us know your will."

"We are travellers, and, as you say, strangers—that is, to this part of the country. Our horses have been for many hours upon the road, and we seek food and shelter for them, and for ourselves who need it scarcely less than they do."

"You are welcome to the tents of the Zingari," said the man. "Fear nothing! Truth is stamped upon both your countenances. Hi! Sebo! Sebo!"

A lad of about sixteen came forward, to whom he addressed some words in the gipsy tongue.

Of course, neither of our friends knew what had been said, but they had no difficulty in guessing the import of the words, for the boy advanced to their steeds, taking each by the bridle.

Turpin made a step forward as if to follow him, but King detained him, as he whispered—

"These are strange people, and you must be careful in your behaviour. Just watch whereabouts he bestows the cattle, but do no more. They will be safe beyond a doubt. Let us hasten to eat with them, for when we have, no temptation on earth would be powerful enough to make them betray us; nay, if we are attacked, they will even defend us with their —— Hush! say nothing! If we whisper thus, we shall perhaps make them suspicious of us!"

This reasoning was so cogent that Dick said not another word, but turned towards the man who had greeted them. He was looking at them attentively.

"The fare of the poor Zingari is hard," he said, "but the weary stranger is welcome to a share. We cannot long afford them shelter, for we are about to depart."

"The deuce you are," muttered Dick, and then he added—

"It is not so much food as rest that we require, though we are sadly in want of both. If you will allow us to join you in the consumption of the meal you are preparing, and then let us rest somewhere, we shall not only thank you, but leave some substantial token of our gratitude behind."

"You are welcome," said the gipsy, who seemed by no means displeased at this promise of payment for services rendered. "Sebel will tend your steeds! Advance, and we will break bread with you."

Five minutes more saw Turpin and King seated with the gipsies round the fire, and apparently quite at home. They jested, laughed, and talked to each other as though they had been acquaintances of many years standing.

As the gipsy had said, the fare was by no means sumptuous. It consisted of a stew, which both our friends pronounced as being most delicious, and only needed the accompaniment of something stronger than water to make it a first-rate meal.

The production of a couple of guineas proved sufficient to induce the wanderers to postpone their intended journey, so a tent was provided for the two highwaymen, into which they soon afterwards passed, and, as they felt in no way apprehensive of danger, either from attack or treachery, they stretched themselves upon the rude pallets prepared for them, and in a few minutes were sound asleep.

The sun had passed the meridian when they awoke and looked out of the tent.

All was calm around them. The sky was without a cloud, and birds were chirping merrily from every bough.

The gipsy who seemed to be in some sort of command over the others, upon seeing the friends at the opening of their tent, walked rapidly towards them.

"The strangers have slept long and soundly in the gipsy's tent," he said. "The sun has already begun his downward course, and the people are impatient to begin their march."

"And we are quite ready to go," said Dick, as he stepped outside. "Fetch us our horses, and we will be off!"

"It shall be done," said the gipsy, moving rapidly away.

"I feel now," said King, "as though I should like a good swill. That would be a refresher."

"You can have it then," said Dick, "I am certain, for I can hear a stream bubbling somewhere close at hand."

"And so can I now. It seems to be just beyond those shrubs there."

"It does," replied King, as he hurried forward in the direction indicated.

On the other side of the shrubs Dick had mentioned was a scene of rare picturesque beauty.

Before them was a little hollow, down one side of which flowed a pleasant little brook, which, as it danced over the mimic obstructions in its course, created the pleasant gurgling sound which had been the means of directing Dick's attention to it.

The water was clear and cold, and the highwaymen dashed it plentifully over their faces.

Considerably refreshed by this primitive ablution, they rose to their feet and made their way back.

They saw the gipsy and the boy Sebel standing near the tent with the horses, which had been carefully groomed down, so that they looked quite fresh and vigorous.

Turpin's eye brightened as his glance lighted on his mare.

As he sprung upon her back, she uttered a low neigh of pleasure.

King also mounted.

Then, giving the gipsies a liberal gratuity, and especially the boy for the care he had taken of the horses, the two highwaymen, at a gentle trot, regained the highroad, and continued their journey.

CHAPTER XLIV.

TURPIN AND KING ACHIEVE A RATHER LUDICROUS ADVENTURE WITH CAPTAIN SALEM NIDGET OF H.M. SHIP "PLOVER."

"It is a lovely morning, Dick, is it not? I do enjoy it! Let us go at a more easy rate; there is no occasion now for hurry."

"It is Bess. When she has had a good rest, there is no such thing as holding her in."

"So it appears. And now, do you know, I fancy we have come quite far enough to commence operations."

"I was thinking so a few moments ago, and was going to ask you how much longer you intended to keep on like this, when you spoke."

"Then, my opinion is, the sooner we begin business the better. It will be, I take it, a very profitable place; still, we must be careful not to decrease our distance from London, but approach rather to the sea-shore."

"Very good. I advise, then, that we look to our pistols, so that, should anything occur, we may be prepared."

They drew up for a moment, while they re-primed and loaded their weapons, and then proceeded on their way.

Those who have visited this portion of the country will not need to be told of its exceeding beauty; and our friends, who had a keen appreciation of the beauties of nature, but not much for those of art, enjoyed the prospect amazingly.

At four o'clock they had only passed a few houses, and had not met with anything of importance on the road.

This was rather surprising and quite at variance with their anticipations.

But presently, at the very extremity of a long line of road, they saw a faint cloud of dust arise.

"Here is something at last!" cried Dick, "really I had begun to despair of meeting with an adventure before night."

"So had I."

They walked on very gently.

The cloud of dust, as it came nearer and nearer, increased rapidly in size.

Now our readers will doubtless think to themselves, Dick Turpin and Tom King were daring men, but surely the writer does not wish to make us believe that he contemplated stopping a carriage on the highroad at daylight. But we do, and a few moments' reflection will show that there is nothing so very improbable or impossible about it.

A reference to the newspapers of the period will show that it was by no means a rarity for people to be stopped on the highroad in the daytime, and even within sight of their own dwellings.

In a little while the highwaymen were able to distinguish through the dust the outline of a carriage.

It was a very showy affair apparently, and was drawn by four horses, attended by two postilions.

"This is a wedding set out, you may depend," said Dick; "I can see very plain we are going to have some fun."

"I have no objection," said King, "provided a little profit attaches to it."

"Get out! you are always looking after the loaves and fishes. Now I should be content if there was only a little pleasure to be derived from this adventure."

"We shall see. However, Tom, you take one side of the road and manage the postilions, while I go on the other and peep at those inside."

"As you like," said Tom; "they will be here directly."

"Yes; now then. Trot forward, not fast enough, however, to excite suspicion."

"All right."

The carriage was now only about fifty yards from them, and the distance was, of course, diminishing every moment.

That their first conjecture that it was a wedding carriage was a correct one there could be little doubt.

The postilions seemed to take no particular notice of the two advancing horsemen, and their astonishment was most unbounded when Tom King rode close to them and shouted—

"Pull up, or I fire!"

The rays of the declining sun glistened dazzlingly upon the long barrel of the pistol which Tom King held out at arm's length.

The postilions, as the reflection flashed into their eyes, stopped the carriage at once.

Before, though, Dick could reach the carriage door, the window was let down violently, and a head projected out of it.

Is was a remarkable looking head.

The face was very full, and of a deep crimson hue, to which a very white powdered wig formed a peculiar contrast.

His first words betokened his profession, even if his attire did not.

"Avast, there, you swabs!" he shouted. "Avast! What do you mean by overhauling us? If it wasn't that I have just got married, and don't want to frighten my wife, I would pretty soon settle you, you piratical rascals!"

"Easy does it!" said Dick, who saw at a glance the speaker was unharmed. "Easy does it! We want your purse and watch, and so forth."

"And you call that easy, you loblolly, do you? You want a good rope's-ending at the grating, and if I'd got you aboard my little ship *Pluvver* you'd very soon have it."

"Oh! indeed! Then I presume you are the captain of the *Plover*, or *Pluvver* as you call it; eh?"

"Yes, you son of a gun! I——"

"Then just hand over a good booty."

"Never!" said the captain, in a towering passion, as he sank back into his seat.

Then Turpin caught sight of a female with a very graceful figure, and pleasing countenance.

Dick took off his hat and made a very deep bow.

The lady returned the salute.

The captain uttered a suppressed growl, but as he had no weapons he did not relish attacking our hero, who held a pistol negligently in his hand.

"Surely, madam," said Dick, with his head still uncovered, "surely you will not object to myself and friend drinking your very good health and happiness in the married state?"

The bride made no reply.

"Then I shall consider silence gives consent. Come, captain, hand over your purse like a sensible man, for heaven knows I wish there to be no bloodshed or violence. Let me request you to advise him to do as I require," added Turpin, turning again to the bride.

"Now, Salem, give him your purse, there's a good man, and let us go on our way in comfort!"

"Never!" said the captain. "I have never struck to the enemy, yet, and, damme! I never will. I can't defend myself, you land pirate, and you'll have to take all you get."

"Very good," said Dick, "if you prefer it, I don't mind."

So saying, he very skilfully took the captain's watch out of his fob.

It was a chronometer set in a gold case, and attached to a massive gold chain, at the other extremity of which dangled some very large seals.

The captain of the *Plover* could not restrain a groan when he saw it disappear in the profundities of the highwayman's pocket.

"And now your purse," said Dick. "Remember, discretion is the better part of valour."

"For heaven's sake take it and be off," said the captain.

"All right! And now, madam," said Turpin, in his most insinuating tones, "let me exact a tribute from you. I will not take anything from you in the shape of jewels or trinkets, but simply a kiss from your ruby lips."

"By God!" said the captain, springing to his feet, "this is too much. Damme! I have given in quietly, and now you want to kiss my wife before I have kissed her myself! No, I'm d——d if you shall!"

But the lady blushed, and looked anything but displeased or reluctant to comply with the bold highwayman's demand.

In fact, Dick was a very good-looking fellow, and of a style and colour that is always pleasing to the ladies.

Dick shook his hair back from his face and smiled.

The lady bent forward.

But the captain interposed.

"Draw back your smirking figure-head, you piratical swab, or I'll spoil the colour of it, damme! And you, madam, draw back. You are my wife, recollect, and I'll make you suffer for your conduct!"

But Turpin was not so easily to be baulked out of his kiss, when he saw that the lady was evidently not disinclined, so he held his pistol at the captain's head significantly.

"Seat yourself," he said. "Remember, I have your life in my hands, and I can deprive you of it in an instant. If you value it, sit down."

Now, Captain Nidget—for such was his name—was a bold enough man in his way, but just then he did not feel desirous of leaving the world and a widow.

So he sank back in his seat, and glared at his wife and the highwayman like some wild animal.

Not heeding him, however, Dick put his arm in the carriage, and taking the lady round the waist, drew her towards him.

She made a show of resistance, but when her face was close to the highwayman's, she suddenly ceased her struggles, and Dick pressed not one, but a dozen kisses on her lips.

They were not only received, but returned.

The husband was furious.

But Dick was aroused from his blissful occupation, by hearing Tom King shout in a loud voice:

"Look out, Dick, look out! Be off at once! Here come the officers again! They are straining every nerve!"

The words were followed by the report of a pistol and the trampling of horses' feet.

CHAPTER XLV.

TURPIN AND KING TAKE REFUGE IN THE OLD MANSION AT DURLEY CHINE, AND MEET WITH A SERIES OF UNPARALLELED ADVENTURES DURING THEIR STAY THERE.

OUR friends make a slight mistake when they came to the conclusion that the Guildford police-officers had abandoned the chase.

The fact was, they found their horses completely knocked up, so were obliged to come to a standstill, but they sent off one of their band, mounted on the best horse in the troop, to fetch fresh cattle and also a reinforcement. This necessarily delayed them for some time, but they calculated upon the highwaymen relaxing their speed, and perhaps even halting when they found they were no longer pursued, and, therefore, had great hopes that if they could follow they would soon overtake them.

By dint of numerous inquiries on their route, they succeeded in tracing Turpin and King to the gipsies' camp, which they reached only a few hours after they had left it. They spurred on their horses, and saw at last, to their great satisfaction, the persons whom they sought actually robbing a carriage by daylight.

They increased their speed, and it was not until the postilion waved his arm that King knew of their approach. It was then he gave the alarm to Dick in the manner recorded at the end of the last chapter.

At the same time, he himself turned his horse's head round, and set off at full speed, leaving Dick to follow his example as quickly as he could.

Turpin pressed one more kiss upon the bride's lips, and then giving Bess the rein, sped off like the wind.

He overtook Tom King in a few moments.

In the meantime, Captain Nidget learned with great satisfaction that a body of police were close at hand.

He opened the door of the carriage, and stepped out into the roadway a second or so before the officers reached him.

He pulled off his white-powdered wig, and waved it aloft in the air.

"After the pirate!" he cried. "Board them and string 'em up to the yard-arm! They have keel-hauled me, damme, and kissed my wife!"

The officers could not contain their laughter.

They did not nevertheless, relax their speed, but plied whip and spur most vigorously.

The horses they had beneath them were of capital quality, and were, besides, quite fresh; so that the highwaymen had everything to fear, and the officers everything to hope, from the pursuit.

King and Turpin, however, had an excellent start, and they took care that the distance between them and the officers should not diminished.

The road, too, beneath their feet was smooth and even.

Now, had Turpin been by himself, there is no question he would have been easily enough able to distance his foes in a very short space of time. But then King was not so well mounted as he was, so he had to keep Bess back.

As the officers pressed very hardly upon them, Tom King noticed this fact, and he said, as well as he could, for galloping at such a rate as they were made conversation difficult—

"Leave me to shift for myself, Dick, my boy. I won't consent to allow you to lose your own chance of escaping because my steed is not so good as your own. Shoot ahead as fast as you can, and leave me to my own luck!"

"Nonsense! I shall do nothing of the kind; you know that well enough. Keep your horse as well up as you can. I will stick by you to the last! Remember what they say at sea—'A stern chase is a long chase.'"

As he spoke these words, he leaned forward in the saddle and grasped Tom's horse by the bridle.

In this way, he compelled him to gallop faster.

Fortunately they were out of range of the pistols, so they had nothing to fear on that account, so long as they kept up the distance.

They found, by the increasing number of vehicles in the distance, that they were approaching a town, so they turned off to the right across the country.

In some places the cross lanes were very miry, and the horses with difficulty struggled onward.

When dusk came, the relative positions of pursuer and pursued were unchanged.

The officers had determined to hunt them down.

It was something to be wondered at that King's horse had kept up so long and so well as he had, but now he gave evident signs of utter exhaustion.

"I cannot keep up many minutes longer, Dick. Let me advise you, while you have the chance, to clear off and leave me; it is no good for one to destroy the other."

"It seems evident we cannot outrun them, so we must have resource to a little stratagem. Look, yonder is a dense clump of trees. Now if that should turn out to be a wood of any extent, and we can make our way into its intricacies, I think we may set them at defiance."

Tom King looked in the direction to which his friend pointed, and saw, as he said, something that looked like a wood of considerable size. It doubtless was a portion of the New Forest which had been cut off from the remainder.

"It is our only chance, he said, "and but a faint one, if you make the best of it. Still, there we should be able to hold ourselves at bay."

"It will be a difficult matter to fight so many with any hope of proving victorious."

"How many are there?"

"Eight or nine; I can't tell which."

"That is long odds. We must make the best of it."

And now a new difficulty presented itself.

The wood they were now, of course, anxious to reach as speedily as possible, was on the other side of a hedge, which, though not so high as to be insurmountable under ordinary circumstances, was yet too high for the tired horses now to venture.

The only resource that was left to them was to ride on as swiftly as possible until they came to a gate.

About a quarter of a mile lower down they found one.

Dick dismounted and tried to open it, but found it fast.

It was secured by a huge padlock and chain.

A large, round pebble of several pounds' weight was lying in the lane, and Dick took it up in both hands and dashed it against the lock.

It gave way at once.

He held it open while Tom and Bess passed through. He then closed it and remounted.

But although this had been done quickly, it consumed time, and the officers consequently gained upon them considerably.

The field was a ploughed one.

"Everything seems against us," said Dick. "Here, this field, for instance. We shall have to make our way round the edge of it, along the beaten path. To attempt to cross such heavy ground would be utter madness."

"It would, so we must do the best we can."

At little more than a walking pace they crept along the narrow path, with a deep fetid ditch on one side of them, and the soft ploughed land on the other.

Meanwhile, the officers came galloping down the lane.

They passed the gate though.

Then, evidently, they had not seen our friends pass through it.

A little farther on, however, as they heard nothing of their prey in front, they drew up, and, having listened, consulted with each other as to what they had better do.

They little thought it; but at that very moment all that separated them from the highwaymen was the hedgerow.

Our friends had taken the precaution to draw up so that no sound should reach the ears of their foes; but their care was of no avail, for King's horse suddenly lowered his head, and gave vent to that strange, gasping cough, so often uttered by horses when much distressed.

A curse came from the lips of Tom King, and a shout of gratification from the officers.

They prepared to leap the hedge.

"No, no," they heard a voice say. "Go through the gate!"

"What gate?"

"The one we passed a minute or two ago. Come on!"

The officers retraced their steps.

There was nothing left for our friends but to make as much speed as they possibly could.

The ploughed field led into a meadow.

Across this and another, and then another, with the officers close upon their track they went.

And now the officers found themselves near enough to make use of their firearms, and the report of a pistol suddenly arose.

It was simply a trial shot.

The spent ball struck Dick upon the back.

"That was well aimed," he said, "and if the distance had only been a little less, I should have been done for! Whip your horse! Spur him to the utmost! Do not spare him!"

The officers appeared to be well satisfied with the shot, for it was followed by an irregular volley, which did no harm, save inflicting a few trifling wounds upon the fugitives.

Tom King's horse, although at the last gasp, kept up bravely.

"Now, Tom," exclaimed Dick, as they crossed the last hedge that intervened between them and the wood they were so anxious to reach. "Now, Tom, one more effort, and then all will be well."

Tom King made one more desperate effort.

He plunged still deeper his spurs into his horse's sides.

The exhausted creature staggered onwards.

Loud voices, mingled with the discharge of many pistols, called upon them to surrender.

But the highwaymen pay no heed to them. Every nerve is strained to gain the confines of the wood.

It is but a few hundred yards distant from them.

They increase their efforts.

It would seem as though the horses the officers bestrode were almost as much knocked up as the highwaymen's were, for despite the cruelty with which their riders goaded them on, they could scarcely gain upon their prey.

The officers well enough knew that their chances of capturing our friends, should they succeed in reaching the wood, would be materially diminished, but still their tired cattle could not be made to proceed faster.

They reloaded their pistols and fired another volley.

Then Dick heard Tom King utter a sudden exclamation.

"What is it, Tom?" he asked. "Are you hit?"

"It is nothing. A bullet has struck me on the left arm."

"It is not a serious hurt, then?"

"Oh! no. I cannot tell exactly what it is, but it appears to have furrowed the skin from my shoulder to my elbow."

"If that is all, it will not prove serious. Strive again to make your horse keep pace with Bess; a minute or two more will take us into the wood."

In obedience to the application of both whip and spur, the poor animal seemed to concentrate in its limbs the whole of its remaining strength.

The speed it made for the next few seconds was something wonderful, it even shot ahead of Bess herself.

But when the borders of the wood were just reached, it reared suddenly, staggered, and then fell heavily to the ground.

Tom had anticipated this catastrophe, and had therefore prepared himself for it.

When his horse fell, his feet were already freed from the stirrups, and he stood upright, when the horse with a dull heavy thud, reached the ground.

There was no time for regrets, or even for speech.

The officers shouted with gratification when they saw the horse fall. Surely, they thought, we shall have one of them in our power.

But Tom, without pausing a moment, had set off on foot at full speed.

He was an excellent runner.

It was not long before he had the pleasure of finding himself beneath the shadow of the trees.

Then Dick dismounted.

Bess, now, would be an encumbrance, but still they were obliged to put up with that as best they could.

Dick caught her by the bridle, and led her into the mazes of the forest.

The trees in it were very old, and in size, gigantic. They grew closely together, too, and they found many places where it was impossible to force a passage between their trunks.

The soil was covered with gorse and brake in great profusion.

Ere, however, they had advanced many yards, they could hear the officers crushing through the trees.

Fortunately for our friends, the undergrowth and trees, as well as the darkness, prevented the police from keeping them in view.

The gloom in the forest increased at every step they took.

And now it would have been an easy enough matter to have eluded their pursuers if they had not been so close upon their track as they were, but, as it was, the noise they made in their progress sufficed to enable them to keep accurately upon their track.

Still they were in hopes, by pushing vigorously forward, of increasing the distance between them.

In this they appeared to partially succeed, for the sounds of the pursuing footsteps came by no means so distinctly upon their ears as they did.

Then Tom King broke the silence which had been preserved between them since they entered the wood.

He spoke in a low voice.

It might have been that he was faint, or that he did not wish his voice to reach the officers.

"Dick," he said, "Dick."

"What is it, my friend?"

"I am sorry to say it, my friend, but we must come to a halt at once."

"Come to a halt?"

"Yes. I bore up as long as I could, and as well as I could, but I am done up now."

"Good heavens, Tom!" exclaimed Turpin, "what is the matter?"

"My wound is, I fear, more serious than either you or I at first imagined."

"Stop a moment, then, and let me examine it. Is it painful?"

"Not in the least."

"Why did you not speak before? You must have been losing blood at a great rate. However, it is only loss of blood you are suffering from, and I will soon remedy that."

So saying, Dick tore off his scarf hastily, and bound it tightly round Tom's arm.

"That will be better," he said, as he completed his task. "I am sorry you did not mention it earlier. However, take a draught of this."

Dick produced a good-sized flask as he spoke, and handed it to his friend, who took a good draught at it.

"That's real genuine brandy as imported," said Turpin, as he placed the flask to his own lips.

But, short as was the time they had consumed, yet it sufficed for the officers to gain upon them surprisingly.

When the highwaymen looked behind them, they saw, to their great astonishment, a number of lights flashing through the trees.

It was therefore evident that the officers had in some way possessed themselves of either torches or lanterns, which would greatly aid them in their search.

Their having kept so well upon our friends' track can be easily accounted for.

The wound which King had received in his shoulder bled plentifully, and all the way he came he left behind him such a track of blood, that they followed it with the greatest ease.

But now, as the effusion of blood had been stopped, the officers would no longer have this guide.

Tom felt much better after the draught of brandy; he followed Dick through a dense thicket.

The officers must have caught some glimpse of his retreating form, for several pistols were discharged in that direction.

By great good luck, though, neither of them were sufficiently well-aimed to have effect.

The highwaymen struggled on, now sinking ankle deep in some slough, and then forcing a passage through the dense vegetation.

The officers were close behind them. Indeed, they seemed to be making much better speed than our friends were.

They were inspired to do this because the only guide they had for their track now was the sound of their footsteps, and they knew when once they lost the sound the highwaymen would easily escape, and so all the trouble they had had would result in nothing.

Hence, they pressed onwards with incredible eagerness.

More than once they fancied they could distinguish the dark forms of those they sought creeping in advance of them, and then pistols would be immediately levelled and discharged.

But although this manœuvre had been several times repeated, it had not yet produced any results.

Dick felt that Tom drew his breath slowly and laboriously.

His heart grew heavy with anxiety.

"Tom, my boy," he said, "hold up! Don't give in yet, if you can possibly help it. Cheer up, old fellow, we shall do them yet. Take another pull at the brandy!"

"Thanks!"

Tom's voice was very faint.

Without pausing in their speed, Dick again took out his flask, and passed it to his comrade, who took a deep draught in silence.

The spirit had the effect of infusing a fictitious vigour into the muscles of the highwayman, and he strode forward twice as rapidly as he had done before.

But now they made a discovery which much disconcerted them.

The undergrowth was getting more scanty.

The trees grew at a greater distance from each other.

A faint, soft light stole over the scene.

In fine, there was every appearance of their having reached the other side of the wood.

"We are done for, after all, I am afraid," said Turpin, as he one by one noticed these things. "We must bear to the right, Tom; perhaps we shall do better there."

"Impossible! Look! The officers have spread out on each side of us. We should have to fight our way through them."

It was as Tom had said. The officers had separated themselves, and formed into a line, the extent of which the flashing of the lanterns which they carried plainly indicated.

At the ends this line now began to curve slightly.

"We are being surrounded," said Turpin, as he observed this change in the position of the lights. "They will



[TURPIN AND KING ENTERING THE MANSION AT DURLEY CHINE.]

form round by ,in a circle. There is no help for it. We must push forward!"

In a few minutes after this they emerged into a small open space.

It was not the extremity of the wood which they had reached, as they at first fancied, but one of those small open spaces covered with soft turf which are not unfrequent in forests of considerable extent.

"We must fight it out, Tom," said Dick. "I wish we had known, we would have begun before. Still, never mind! Cheer up!"

"I feel very weak and cold, my friend," said Tom, "though I think I am not quite so bad as I was a little while ago. Let me have another drink at the brandy. It is the real stuff."

"With all the pleasure in life. Finish it off. It's no good disguising the fact, we have hot and dangerous work before us."

"Look," said Tom, as he returned the flask, "there is a tree which has been cut down. Let us place ourselves behind its branches. We shall be better prepared for resistance then."

"We shall. Quick! or we shall be intercepted!"

The two highwaymen made a sudden dash across the open space to where a large tree had been felled, and ensconced themselves among its branches.

It had not evidently been long in its present position, for the leaves were plentiful upon it, and green and fresh.

They took up this position only just in time, for seven or eight officers, uttering loud shouts to each other and cries to our friends to surrender, rushed into the enclosure.

If they had sought for hours in the forest, they could scarcely have found a better place for defending themselves from attack than the one they now occupied. The stout, straggling branches of the tree would be very puzzling obstacles to overcome, and very difficult ones when two desperate men were behind them, who had firmly resolved to die rather than yield.

Turpin and King drew their hangers, and placed themselves on guard.

CHAPTER XLVI.

TURPIN AND KING DISCOVER THE MYSTERY OF DURLEY CHINE.

BLACK BESS had followed with noiseless step and rare sagacity in the footsteps of her master and his comrade.

Her fine perceptions seemed to make her conscious that silence was absolutely required, and she trod as stealthily as cat after its prey.

The posture of affairs in that little open space in the forest was rather singular in itself and most perilous for our friends.

At some not very distant period it would seem that one of those gigantic oaks, for the growth of which England is so famous, had—

"Reared its tall branches to the sky"

from the centre of this clearing, but now it had been felled preparatory to removal.

Its branches were many, wide spreading, and stout, and covered a large piece of ground as it thus lay upon one side, which, of course, had the natural effect of causing them to spread out laterally to a great distance, while in many places they rose vertically to a considerable height.

In all the forest it is questionable whether there could have been found a place more suitable for intrenchment, or a position where two men could better defend themselves against a host.

The capacity of this place was, of course, immediately perceived by Turpin, and he at once turned it to its greatest possible advantage.

The branches interlaced each other in a very puzzling manner, but the two friends penetrated them for some distance, leading Black Bess by the bridle.

Then, having reached a part sufficiently free from obstructions to allow of such a feat, they forced Bess to lie down upon her side.

But our friends were fully alive to the vital importance of celerity of action, and all this was done with great rapidity, and before the officers could reach the tree.

In a moment afterwards, however, and before Turpin and King could look to the priming of their pistols, they were upon them.

"Stand firm!" said Dick to his comrade. "Stand firm! Remember this will be no child's play! We are fighting for our liberty and life against four times our force—men who have determined to deprive us of one of them! Now, Tom! Here they are! Upon them!"

As he spoke, Turpin advanced a few paces.

He waited, though, for the police to commence the attack, who had completely surrounded the fallen tree and were crying in loud tones for the highwaymen to surrender.

But, finding not the slightest notice taken of their words, they fired an irregular volley into the tree.

This was done, of course, at random, for they had no idea whereabouts among the foliage their prey had concealed themselves, but they trusted one of the shots would find them out.

Not the faintest sound, however, came from the branches of the tree, so they fired again.

This volley was succeeded by a shot from the tree, and one of the officers placed his hands upon his breast and fell backwards.

There was one foe less for our friends to contend against.

The others, however, marked the spot from whence the flash and the smoke of the discharged pistol proceeded, and half-a-dozen shots were fired in that direction.

Our friends, though, had taken the precaution to crouch as low down on the ground as they could, so the bullets passed harmlessly a foot or two above their heads.

Another and another shot was fired by the highwaymen, both of which took effect upon the police, whose numbers were thus rapidly and unexpectedly reduced one-third.

"This will never do:" King and Turpin then heard a voice say. "We shall be picked off like sparrows on a fence. Charge at once, and rout them from their cover."

But the officers were but men, and had a wholesome dread of death, besides which, the fate of their companions was not without its effect upon them, and they hung back a little from executing the orders of their chief.

They huddled together in a denser throng.

They were quickly made aware of the imprudence of this, for two more shots were fired from the tree.

"Charge! my men! charge!" again cried the officer in command. "The danger in doing so will be less than it is now. Upon them, then! Charge!"

As he spoke—for he was a brave man—he drew his own cutlass from its sheath and sprang forward.

The others could not do otherwise than follow his example.

In their progress, though, they were greeted with two other shots, with equally good effect as the preceding ones.

But they did not draw back a moment, or hesitate in the least.

The number of officers was now reduced to four, and all this while neither of the highwaymen had received any injury worth speaking of.

There is a little mystery in connexion with the pistol-shots which we have yet to reveal.

Crouching down low upon the ground, Tom King loaded the pistols, and handed them to Turpin; who, resting the barrels upon a limb of the old oak, was thus enabled to take a most careful and deadly aim.

The lanterns which the officers carried assisted him greatly in doing this.

He had reduced the number of his opponents to less than one-half.

It was very repugnant to Dick to pick the men off in this way, but he felt that unless he chose to allow himself and his companion to be taken prisoners, there was no help for it.

But the officers now, as we have said, charged boldly at the highwaymen.

It would have been much wiser on their parts if they had adopted this plan at first, but the peculiar place in which our friends had taken shelter baffled them.

But Dick and Tom felt from the vigour with which the officers now pressed forwards to attack them, that they would yet have to struggle desperately for their lives and liberty.

Therefore, after one more discharge, they both took up their hangers.

Dick felt a desire to whisper to King, and tell him to try his best, but he was afraid his voice would reach the ears of the police-officers, and make them aware of their exact hiding-place.

Instead of speaking, he simply pressed his comrade's arm.

And then the officers were upon them.

But our friends had securely intrenched themselves behind some of the interlacing boughs of the tree, which formed a kind of barrier almost breast-high.

The officers had drawn their cutlasses.

They did not wait now to load and fire their pistols, but each wielded his weapon with an impetuosity which he hoped would quickly overcome the resistance offered to to them.

But they were mistaken.

Turpin and King were both excellent swordsmen—it had been imperatively necessary that they should become proficients in every means of defence—and in a few moments two of the foremost officers fell beneath their strokes, while they themselves had received no further injury.

There was another circumstance, too, which we forgot to mention, and which gave the two friends no inconsiderable advantage.

It was this.

The ground upon which the tree had fallen, rose into a little hillock, and it was upon the summit of this elevation that Dick and Tom stood.

They were, consequently, at least two feet higher than the police, which enabled them to reach over the barrier of branches.

But the two remaining officers—one of whom was the chief—were very bold, determined men, and they resolved by their own efforts either to capture the highwaymen or die in the attempt.

They were worked up to a perfect pitch of frenzy.

Dick and Tom received their onslaught with coolness,

and calmly defended themselves while watching their opportunity to deal them a slashing cut.

Turpin was the first to disable his antagonist, whom he wounded so severely in the shoulder that he was fain to sink upon the ground, and proclaim himself vanquished.

Then he turned towards Tom King, whom he knew, from the wounds he had received, must be nearly, if not quite, exhausted.

Dick found him engaged with the chief of the police, who had already forced his way through the umbrageous barricade, and was pressing hardly upon him.

In fact, it was well for Tom that Turpin turned his attention to him when he did, for his foot slipped, and he fell heavily upon the ground.

He was so faint he could not rise, for he had, since the wound he received just before entering the forest, lost an enormous quantity of blood.

Before, however, the chief officer could follow up the advantage he had gained, he found himself suddenly confronted by Dick Turpin, who at once attacked him.

The chances between the two combatants were nearly equal—if anything, the chief of the police was the taller and more powerful man of the two.

Dick could not but admire the bravery of this officer, who, although he knew all hope of victory and capture was at an end, yet did not in the least abate the strength of his blows, or indicate the least idea of surrender.

On the contrary, he fought, if possible, with greater fury than before, and for once Turpin found some one who was fairly entitled to be called his match.

Still our hero did not like the idea of slaying this man, foe though he was, and he, therefore, sought to disarm him.

In this he was for a long time unsuccessful, for the officer, with loud cries for him to yield, attacked him with great resolution.

There was very little light, too, for them to fight by. The lanterns had become one by one extinct, and it was only because their eyes had got thoroughly accustomed to the darkness that they could see each other at all.

At length Dick, who was fairly weary of the fray, dealt one terrific sweeping blow with his hanger, which, striking through all guard, reached the head of the brave officer, who fell to the ground suddenly and heavily as though he had been knocked down with a pole-axe.

The highwaymen were masters of the field.

CHAPTER XLVII.

OUR TWO FRIENDS ENTER UPON QUITE A NEW LINE OF BUSINESS.

At the moment the officer fell to the ground, Tom King raised himself a little upon one hand and looked confusedly about him.

In fact, during Dick's contest with the chief of the police, he had lain in something that closely resembled a swoon.

For a minute or two he remained rather in doubt as to what had happened, and he passed his other hand over his eyes repeatedly.

But just as memory was flooding back upon him, the familiar tones of Dick's voice reached his ears.

"Tom—Tom," he heard him say, "the day is ours. Get up! get up at once! All is over now! I mean there is no danger! Our foes are all slain or wounded, and I myself am unhurt. Come, get up—get up!"

"All right," replied King, in what he intended to be a cheerful voice, but he found to his surprise that the words were almost inaudible.

He made a stronger effort.

"I am afraid I am badly hurt," he said, and he raised himself still further from the ground. "Help me up, Dick. I fancy when once I reach my feet I shall be able to stand all right enough."

But even as he uttered this assurance, so sudden was the accession of weakness came over him, that he sank back upon the sward.

"Hilloa!" said Turpin, in some surprise, for until then he had no idea of the condition of his friend. "Hilloa, Tom! are you so bad as that? Eh?"

But no sound responded to his words, save a strange half sigh, half groan.

Seriously alarmed, Dick knelt down hastily by the side of his friend, and placed his hand upon his heart.

It was beating regularly but very feebly.

"Oh! it is not so bad, after all, as I thought it was," he said, while he gave vent to a sigh of relief. "Not so bad as I thought it, but if something is not done, and that quickly, it soon will be worse. Let me get my lantern out of his pocket, and then I shall be able to see what I am doing!"

The reader will recollect the lantern of which Dick now spoke. It was that one which had rendered them such signal service while escaping from the "Samson and Lion."

Turpin was not long finding and lighting it.

He first cast the broad, bright beam of light upon his friend's countenance.

It was very pale, and streaked with blood in many places.

Tom's eyes were closed, and he looked for all the world as though Death had written Finis to his career.

But such was not the case, nor was it to be until he had seen stranger and more perilous adventures than any with which he had yet met.

King opened his eyes.

It is most likely the bright rays of the lantern falling upon his eyelids aroused him.

But he could not see his friend, who held the lamp before him, and whose form was consequently shrouded in darkness.

He heard his voice, though, for Dick, as soon as he saw Tom's eyes open, spoke to him cheeringly.

Then the administration of some more brandy from the flask greatly aided his recovery; in fact, in a few moments he was able to sit up.

With all imaginable tenderness Turpin made an examination of the wounds which Tom King had received.

He was overjoyed to find them all of a superficial character—the first one he had received looked the worst, but that was owing in a great measure to the coagulated blood about it, which had forced itself through the bandage he had so hastily tied on.

"You will be right enough in a very short time," he said, as King looked inquiringly at him. "Absolute rest for a time will be indispensable, and then you will be as sound as ever you were."

"I am glad of that assurance, my friend, for I do assure you I feel about as bad as I well could just at present."

"No doubt—no doubt! Congratulate yourself that you have got off so well as you have."

"I do—and you?"

"I am, as I may say, perfectly unhurt, though I expect to find a scratch here and there. However, stay where you are for a moment. I would lie down if I were you—it will rest you more, and you will recover your strength better. In the meantime I will try if I cannot find some water that will do to wash your hurts with. You will find a plentiful application of cold water will make a wonderful difference to you."

"I should be glad of some water, indeed!" replied King, "for the wounds smart and burn unbearably."

"That is inflamation—a thing to be especially eschewed—and you may make up your mind that if the hurts are not well cooled with water, they will take a dangerous turn. I shall not be long gone to fetch some, so be patient. I will just put Bess upon her legs again."

So saying, Turpin made a few steps further among the branches and helped his mare to her feet, for he had at the commencement of the contest commanded her to lie down, and so she had remained.

It was one of the things he had been most careful in teaching her, for he was well aware of the value it would be to him. In the present instance she had by lying down been entirely out of the range of the pistol shots.

When she reached her feet she rubbed her nose affectionately against Dick's breast, who in return patted her upon the neck.

Then, after a word more to King, Turpin left the tree which had been of such essential service to him, and crossed the little open space.

Bess followed him with the docility of a dog.

He listened for a long time for the sound of flowing water without result, but presently there came to his ear—

"——the bubbling music of some little stream
Dancing over rocks."

He quickened his steps, and soon found himself upon the margin of one of those little brooks, which sometimes divide estates and counties from each other. He noted the spot carefully, and then retraced his steps.

King he found was already wonderfully better.

With his assistance Tom rose to his feet.

"Lay hold of my arm," said Dick. "Don't be afraid of leaning on me. I can bear your weight well enough Or would your prefer mounting Bess?"

"I would rather walk," replied Tom. "I find I am gaining strength momentarily, and we have not far to go, have we?"

"Not a hundred and fifty yards."

"I can manage that then, especially if we walk slowly."

"To be sure you can. Come along, Bess!"

It took them some minutes to reach the little brook, and, when they did, Tom was fain to sit down upon the bank, which happened to be rather precipitous. The exertion of walking even that short distance completely exhausted him.

When he had rested a little, he, by Turpin's directions, got still closer to the water's edge, and put his arm so that the water actually flowed over it.

Dick then, by filling his hat with the pure fluid, poured a considerable quantity upon the upper part of his arm, near the shoulder.

The beneficial results of this treatment were soon apparent, and when the clotted blood was completely washed away from the wound, it did not look half so ghastly and formidable as it did before.

When this operation was completed, and the arm had been thoroughly drenched with the cold water—which, of course, had the very natural effect of staunching the blood to some degree—Turpin formed a portion of his clothing into a long bandage, which he first soaked thoroughly in the stream, and then bound tightly around Tom's arm.

"I think the worst part of the job is over," he said, as he rose from the crouching posture he had assumed. "How do you feel now?"

"Quite well!"

"I suppose you mean quite well to what you did a little while ago?"

"That's it! And I fancy now if you will only bathe my head and neck in the same way, I shall be as right as right can be."

"Very good! Hold your head over carefully."

Tom did so, and the copious stream which Dick poured upon it allayed instantly the smarting of one or two slight wounds which were in themselves nothing.

After the application of the cold water had been continued for about five minutes, Tom King felt himself well and strong enough to rise and walk without assistance.

Turpin observed this with pleasure, but he said:

"You must not tax your newly-gained strength too much, or you will suffer in the long run. I consider it imperatively necessary that we should seek a shelter somewhere. I mean a place where we can, if we choose, remain for a day or two without molestation."

"I do not know where such a place is to be found," said King, "though I should be glad enough were it discovered. If I could rest for a day or so, it would be a good thing for me, for in that time I should quite get over the effects of this night's work."

"We must try, though of course just now it will be more difficult than usual, for our fight with the officers will rouse all the county."

"It will, indeed! I did not think of that when I spoke. Why, the difficulty is ten times increased."

"It is! We left London because we made it too hot to hold us, but I fancy what we have done will make this place hotter still."

"You may depend upon it it will! It is unlucky for me—very. Still we can only make the best of it. Is it, though, really possible that we have overcome so large and well-armed a body of officers? I can scarcely credit it."

"Unfortunately for us, and for them also, it is too true! However, I did but defend myself."

"And your wounded comrade."

"I think you did a fair share towards defending yourself. More than most men would have been able to do with such hurts as you had received."

"But now," said Tom, as they both reached the little clearing again, "let us go back to our original consideration. What is to be done?"

"I have no idea further than that we push on as fast as possible."

"Yes, I am quite sure the greater distance we put between ourselves and this place the safer it will be for us. Have you any idea of the time?"

"The night must be young yet. However, we will consult the captain's watch."

"Oh! he was a captain, was he? Did you get anything like a booty?"

"Pretty fair," said Turpin.

He smiled as he took the lantern from his capacious pocket, and directed its light upon the face of the chronometer. It was just half-past ten.

"There is plenty of time for a great deal to be done before daybreak," remarked King.

"True!" said Turpin, returning the articles to his pocket; "and now the next thing you will have to do will be to mount."

"On Black Bess?"

"Yes."

"And what shall you do?"

"Walk, of course! Both of us cannot be on her back at once very well, and surely you would not have me ride, while you, wounded, walk on foot? Come, get up without any nonsense! You will find you will not be able to go on at any great rate for two or three reasons, so I shall be easily enough able to keep up with you."

"But——"

"I tell you, Tom, I will have no buts in the case, so mount at once. You must be aware that every moment may be of the utmost importance to us."

Finding it utterly useless to remonstrate, King suffered Dick to assist him on to Bess's back, who, in her way, seemed rather at a loss to account for the change which was made.

Tom seated himself in the saddle. He was beginning to find he was not so strong as he fancied he was.

"There is one thing more to be considered before we start," he said, as Dick took hold of Bess's bridle to lead her away.

"What is that?"

"Simply this. If you have not lost all count of our course, I have, and I should just like to know which is north, east, south, and west. We ought to be going south."

"I confess," said Turpin, "I had lost my reckoning, and was about to lead you off without considering the way. However, I am very glad you mentioned it, because we shall easily settle the point."

"How?"

"With the captain's watch."

"The captain's watch?"

"Yes; I have noticed that many watches made for seafaring people have a compass fitted in the back, and I daresay this one has."

"It will be capital if it has."

"We shall soon know," said Dick, as he once more produced his invaluable lantern, and looked at the watch by means of its rays. "Here you are, just as I expected."

The highwayman then placed the watch in a horizontal position, and found that the south was just before them, so that Dick had by chance hit upon the right direction.

But now, feeling themselves quite sure upon the point, Turpin took hold of Bess's bridle again, and pushed onwards at a good speed.

Just then the clouds parted a little, and allowed the moon to take a peep at their proceedings.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A SUCCESSION OF STRANGE EVENTS—DICK TURPIN RELATES HIS EARLY HISTORY TO HIS FRIEND, TOM KING.

DOWN many a glade—through many a thicket—over many a stream and treacherous morass—sometimes lighted by the straggling moonbeams, and sometimes in the profoundest darkness—our two friends made their way. Dick Turpin had hold of his mare's bridle, professing to lead her, but although he did shape her course, he trusted entirely to her finer instinct to keep out of any dangerous place.

As for Tom, he sat very quietly upon the back of Black

Dear, he was more prostrated from the effect of his wounds than he cared to acknowledge, even to himself.

From time to time, as they proceeded on their way, Dick had recourse to the compass in the captain's watch, in order to make sure they were not travelling in the wrong direction.

It was obviously their best policy to get as far from London—or, in fact, any town—as possible, and then lie concealed for a little time until the noise their last exploits would be sure to make should, in some measure, have died away.

Both were well aware that if they persevered in the course they were taking, they must reach the sea coast at some point between Southampton and Portsmouth.

They continued, therefore, to follow a passage in this direction, for they argued that if it should become imperative, they would no doubt be able to slip over to France for a time.

It was not until they had gone many a mile, apparently where no man had gone for a hundred years at least, that Tom spoke.

"Dick—Dick," he said.

His voice was low but firm.

"What is it, my friend? Are you better?"

"Much! But when you again look at the compass to make certain of our route, turn the watch over on the other side and tell me what the time is."

"I will do that now, for I was about to look when you spoke. It wants a little more than half an hour of midnight."

"Indeed, so late! Surely, now, in half an hour we shall emerge from this place, of which I am most heartily tired, and we shall be able to tell whereabouts we are."

"I suppose the necessity of rest grows upon you."

"No, I cannot say that is altogether it; but I feel impatient, and long to place myself where I shall be more secure than I am now, for I can assure you I could now do very little in the fighting way."

"I should think not; so, for your sake, I hope we shall meet with no interruption."

It was verging closely upon midnight when the two friends emerged from the forest.

A scene of surpassing beauty met their gaze.

Before them, glistening in the moonbeams like polished silver, was the English Channel. It stretched to the right, to the left, and straight on before them, as far as the eye could reach.

The landscape, too, was very rich, and very thickly wooded.

There was but one habitation in sight, and that was a very fine old Gothic hall, or mansion, which was built upon the summit of a rock, and overlooking the sea.

It was surrounded by a park of vast extent, which had rather a sombre appearance, attributable, however, to the great number of chestnut-trees that grew in it.

The moon was barely half way between the horizon and the zenith, but she had risen above the thick bank of clouds, and her bright rays fell upon the roofs and chimneys and one side of this mansion with an exceedingly beautiful effect.

For some time the two highwaymen remained quite motionless, gazing upon the magnificent panorama spread out before them, in which, at that still hour, the longer they gazed the more beauties they found.

Dick was the first to break the silence.

"This is splendid!" he said; "I never saw anything one half so lovely. Did you, Tom?"

"I must confess I never have," said King, "and yet this place is most deceitful."

"Deceitful, Tom? Why, what do you mean? Do you mean to tell me it will fade away—vanish—like that, what-do-you-call-it the travellers say they see in the desert?"

"The mirage? No, that is not what I meant. Do you see the mansion up there?"

"Yes."

"I have heard of it many times, and recognise it from the descriptions I have at various times had of it, and sketches I have seen. You, doubtless, when I mention it, will know its name, or, at all events, have heard it before."

"What is it, then? You fill me with curiosity."

He drew closer to King as he spoke.

"It is known," said Tom, "by the rather singular name of Durley Chine."

"Durley Chine?"

"Yes. Is it possible you have not hitherto heard the name?"

"I have no remembrance of it."

"You surprise me! A few years ago there was a great talk about it. However it turns out an excellent thing for us."

"You talk rather enigmatically, Tom, and you jump from one thing to another strangely. What is it you mean? You spoke at first about this beautiful prospect being deceitful. Now, I should like to know first what you meant by that."

"I will tell you."

Dick looked with increasing earnestness into his companion's face.

He anticipated some remarkable and interesting revelation.

"When I spoke of its being deceitful," continued King, "I alluded chiefly to the air of peaceful serenity there is about this place, and thought of the strange occurrences that happened some twelve or fourteen years ago, when I was a boy."

"Indeed! What were they?"

"It will be scarcely worth while to tell you now," said Tom, "nor would it be wise. We shall soon have a more fitting opportunity. I intend we shall take up our abode in that mansion for a time! No one will think of looking for us there."

"And how about the residents?"

"The place is uninhabited, and has been for the period of time I mentioned."

"Fourteen or fifteen years?"

"Yes."

"How extraordinary! Whatever can be the reason that such a magnificent property as this is deserted?"

"That forms the sequel to the account I have to give you of the things that happened there. It was one of those domestic tragedies, the remembrance of which endures for a generation, and is then forgotten."

"You have filled me with curiosity and interest."

"I do not doubt that; but come, do not stay here like this; let us push forward. In a very short time now we shall be secure from all search; and I shall, besides, be able to have that rest which I feel is so vitally important to me."

"I am glad to hear that. But the place of concealment had need to be a good one, if we are to escape discovery. There will be a hot search made."

"You are right there, but I am not much afraid now. Take the bridle again, and keep on in as straight a line as you can."

Once more then the little party set themselves in motion.

The road they took, which was nothing more than a footpath through some fields, was somewhat declivous, so that in a little while they lost sight of the sea, but the gabled roofs of Durley Chine, owing to their elevation above the surrounding scenery, were still visible.

A little more than a quarter of an hour's walk brought them to a broad cross-country lane.

Turpin unfastened the gate, and passed out of the field into it.

The opposite side of the lane was formed of wooden palings, some six feet in height.

They were nailed close together—one strip of wood overlapping the other.

A green, mossy parasite had overgrown this palisade, and imparted to it a neglected appearance, while here and there some trailing plant had twined itself fantastically about it.

Above this paling, and effectually preventing any one from surmounting it or even seeing what was on the other side, grew a large quickset hedge, which was in the full glory of unrestricted growth.

Above that could be seen the tops of numerous large chestnut-trees.

"This, I take it," said King, after Turpin had refastened the gate, "is the boundary paling of Durley Park. How gloomy it looks."

"And how impregnable. How are you going to effect an entrance?"

"Why, not by climbing over that hedge, you may be sure. If we follow the palisade we must arrive at the entrance gates."

"Yes; but do you think of getting through them?"

"Why not?"

"Oh! I see no reason why not."

"Of course, if we find a gap in the palings we may as well pass through it. But I do not suppose we shall."

"Not see a gap in the palings, and the place been so long deserted? I should think we shall be sure to do so."

"You will know more presently."

"You are very mysterious about it."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure."

"Well, I will tell you how it is. I said just now I was acquainted with some particulars of certain events that happened here and led to its being closed up. I want to give you those particulars in the form of a narrative, unspoilt by my telling you anything you might construe into a solution of the mystery!"

"Then I only hope it will prove interesting enough to compensate me for my patience in waiting for it."

"I can promise that it will beforehand; and look, do you see the top of some white object just in advance?"

"Quite plainly. I was just going to ask you if you knew what it was. It looks like some monument or other, but it cannot be that, surely?"

"I have never seen it, but only heard that it is here to be seen by anyone who takes the trouble to look."

"What is there to be seen?"

Tom laughed as he replied—

"You must wait and see."

The lane curved round a good deal to the left, so that, although the moon's rays, which became every moment more brilliant, showed the top of some monument, the lower part was not to be seen.

That part which was visible resembled the apex of an obelisk.

Dick's curiosity, which was now raised to the highest pitch of endurance, was soon gratified, for in a few moments they went round the bend in the lane, which then for a mile at least stretched out in a straight line before them.

Near the middle of this straight piece of roadway—that is to say, rather less than half a mile distant was that which the highwayman had seen the top of over the trees.

It was clearly a monument of some kind, though it seemed a very strange place for such a thing to be erected.

In a very few minutes Turpin and King reached it, and by mutual consent both stopped to examine it attentively.

The strange and startling events that are about to be related in connection with the old mansion at Durley Chine, make it imperative that we should be a little more precise than usual in describing it.

Its height from the ground to the point at the top was not much under twenty feet, so that, placed as it was in the centre of the lane, it formed a very conspicuous object.

It was built entirely of white marble, very highly polished, and the moonbeams fell upon it with rare beauty and effect.

The base of this monument consisted of a square pedestal about five feet in height by three across.

Upon the top of this pedestal (one at each corner and the other in the centre) were placed five stone balls, resembling cannon balls in every respect save colour.

These formed a support for the upper part of the monument, which was composed of a pyramidally-shaped block of marble, at least ten feet in height.

Such was the peculiar object before which the two friends paused.

The singularity of its shape was sufficient in itself to attract, under any circumstances, something more than a passing observation, but its strange situation made it still more remarkable.

The highwaymen looked upon it for some moments in silence.

Tom King was determined not to be the first to speak. He had not to wait long, for Turpin asked—

"Has any one been buried here? or what is it?"

"Look a little closer at the pedestal, my friend, you will see that there is upon it an inscription."

"No, there isn't; it is a coat of arms, or something of that sort."

"And is there nothing more—no lines under it?"

"No."

"You must be making a mistake, or else I have been informed wrongly."

"Oh! I see," said Dick, who had made a re-examination of the pillar, "I see how it is! There is a coat of arms on two sides of the pedestal, and an inscription on the others."

"I thought so. I had always been told there was. Can you read what it is?"

"On this side I can, for the letters are large and deeply cut."

"That will do, then. The inscription on the other side is merely a duplicate of this one."

"Listen."

Dick then read as follows.

We give the inscription just as it appeared upon the stone.

In obedience to the instructions
Contained in the last Will and Testament of
SIR ERNEST DANE, Kt.,
This Marble Monument has been in this place erected
by his Executors,
In order to make known to all persons that the Will of the deceased Baronet strictly injoins
that,
Dating from the time of his funeral,
The 25th JULY, MDCCXVII.,
No foot be placed
Either within the mansion of Durley Chine
or the park surrounding it
For the period of One Hundred Years;
But all things left
Untouched as they were at his death.
And
Should any one be found sufficiently abandoned to
disregard the last injunctions of the dead
(which should always be held sacred),
They will in the eyes of the law be guilty of a trespass,
for which
They will be prosecuted with the utmost rigour,
Sir Ernest having caused to be set aside
A sum of money
For that especial purpose.

"What do you think of that, Dick?" asked Tom King, when his companion had finished reading the above inscription.

"What do I think of it? Why, that altogether it is the most extraordinary thing I have ever met with."

"I don't doubt that."

"What in the world could be his motive for abandoning such a beautiful residence to decay?"

"You may depend it was an all-powerful one."

"Do you know what it was?"

"Rumour has given several reasons," replied Tom, evasively. "When this monument was first put up it called forth a great deal of remark."

"It would be sure to do that. And these armorial bearings on the other side are, I presume, those belonging to the family of the baronet?"

"Yes."

"How strange, to be sure! And I see now, as you pass down the lane either way, the inscription is before you."

"Just so. That was in order every one should see it."

"I wonder if his wishes have been scrupulously observed."

"I cannot tell, my friend. I can only say this, if they have hitherto they won't be much longer!"

"Then, do you think of taking refuge in the mansion?"

"I do. I resolved upon it the moment I saw the building."

"Now, I should have thought," said Dick, half seriously, "that from what you said about the miser's box, you would have had too great a reverence for the wishes of the dead to disobey them."

"So I should, if they had been at all reasonable. But when they are ridiculously absurd, like these, I consider I am quite justified."

"And so do I. For I tell you plainly it is not because this place will afford us such complete concealment that I am anxious to enter it, but I have made up my mind to see if I cannot find out the reason why Sir Ernest made so peculiar a will."

"With all my heart, do it," said Tom.

"I think I never had my curiosity so much excited about anything as it has been about this."

"It looks like it. However, I have heard an account of the mystery of Durley Chine, but how far it is truth, and how far fiction, I cannot tell until we have actually seen the inside of the place."

"Come along, then, at once! But you speak a great deal better than you did."

"Oh! yes, I am much stronger now than I was. Yours was very judicious treatment, Dick."

"It was simple, and it appears to have been effective."

"It has. I shall soon be all right again, thanks to you. And now we ought not to lose any more time than we have already. Let us see about making an entrance into Durley Chine."

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE SECRET OF DURLEY CHINE.

OUR friends now, having given one more glance at the obelisk, turned round.

Then, and not till then, did they notice that they had reached the termination of the park paling, and that there was in its place the entrance gates to the park.

They were flanked by very large solid stone buttresses.

The hinges of the gates, which were of wrought-iron, were secured in two high stone pillars, which had upon their tops the crest of the family sculptured in stone.

This was a lion seated, with one of his fore-paws resting upon a vertical shield.

"I don't think we shall have much difficulty over this job," said Turpin, who carefully examined the lock. "It is large and formidable-looking, but it will be all the easier picked for that!"

"It will; but are there no other fastenings?"

"None that I can see, with the exception of two bolts."

"Oh! they are nothing. But, Dick."

"What?"

"You must be careful how you open the gate. You must do it so as to be able to fasten it again, and leave it without the appearance of its having been tampered with. If you do not, you will destroy our safe hiding-place at once."

"I'll take care of that. You watch for anyone coming."

"All right! There is not much to fear, though, I fancy, in the way of an interruption. Still it is best to be prepared."

In the meantime, Turpin had produced a pick-lock from his pocket, with which he immediately commenced operations.

The gate lock baffled him for some time.

At last, however, its bolt shot back with a sharp click.

It was then an easy matter to withdraw the bolts, and swinging one half of the gate open, Turpin entered, closely followed by Tom King, who was mounted on Black Bess.

As soon as they had passed through, Dick shut the gate, bolted it, and then, by the aid of the little instrument which had already been so useful, relocked it.

They were now standing in the main avenue of Durley Chine, or rather in what once was the main avenue.

Now it presented no claim for such a designation, for the fine gravel was completely overgrown by a mass of luxuriant undergrowth, through which they had some trouble in forcing a way.

It grew darker and darker at every step they took.

The huge horse-chestnut trees with which the park was literally filled, stretched out their massive branches, loaded with dark leaves, in every possible direction, and making too dense a canopy overhead for the moon's rays to penetrate.

A row of these sombre-looking trees had been planted at each side of the avenue, and doubtless, when properly trimmed, looked handsome enough; but now, for more than fifteen years, they had been allowed to grow unrestrainedly, so that they had put forth branches here and there, until the whole were inextricably interwoven with each other.

Our friends' progress was necessarily slow, for they felt it incumbent upon them to proceed with caution.

It was one comfort, though, to find the ground beneath their feet firm and even.

The avenue was serpentine in shape, so that they could not obtain a glimpse even of its termination, nor of the mansion they were so anxious to reach.

Dick's thoughts were running upon the mysterious monument.

"Did this Sir Ernest Dane," he said, after a few minutes silence, "have no heirs?"

"None very closely allied to him, but several distant relatives."

"And did they not contest this will?"

"I believe they did all that could be done to set it aside, but their attempts failed utterly. The baronet was one too many for them."

"How very strange! But stop! What is to become of the place at the end of the hundred years?"

"It is to go into the possession of his nearest heir then living. You must understand that this estate is, or was, but a portion of his property. The remainder he divided pretty equally among his descendants."

"Then they ought to have been satisfied, and have left him to the quiet indulgence of his whim."

"I don't know that. It was argued that no man had a right to do as he had done, and I think it was argued very justly."

"Perhaps so, for a multitude of evils might spring from such a state of things."

"You are right enough there, but you see here the place remains as he ordered it, though whether it will remain until 1817 is more than I can tell."

"Or care to know. Thank goodness!" exclaimed Turpin; "we have reached the end of this avenue at last."

It was as Turpin had said; they had reached the end of the avenue, but before they gained the mansion they would have to cross a lawn of unusual size, on which the grass had grown to a height of three or four feet.

Before them, however, was the picturesque residence called Durley Chine.

They were facing, of course, the front of the house.

It was in deep shadow, for the moon was hidden behind; still her rays served to outline it with great distinctness.

Our friends made a strange, rustling sound, as they crossed this neglected lawn.

"What a very pretty place this is, Tom," said Turpin. "Really, the more one sees of it the greater seems the shame that it should be left to rot away."

"And yet, Dick, you ought to recollect that our recent adventures will be the means of bringing us into great peril; so you see Sir Ernest's whim has done some service to us, at least, for you may depend, if we only act with moderate caution, we shall be able to stay here unmolested as long as we think proper."

"Perhaps so."

"There is no perhaps in the matter; for, unless they had conclusive evidence that we were hiding here, I am certain neither officers nor anyone else would be permitted to search here. I very much question even if they would be allowed were they quite certain."

"This, then, we may say, is a sanctuary?"

"Exactly."

"And that all they could do, if they found we were here, would be to starve us out."

"They could do that, certainly."

"But come, never mind that now. Here we are."

"Yes, my friend; but, before we try to make an entrance, had we not better house Bess somewhere?"

"I don't know; I fancy it will be the best to take her round either to the side or the rear, and tether her to a tree, so that she can feed upon the grass, for we have no other food to offer her."

"Be it so, then. But you must take care not to place her where she can be seen by any one overlooking the place."

"Oh! yes, that will be managed easily enough."

Bess, accordingly, was led round to the back of the mansion; and our friends having found a kind of shrubbery, they tied her by the reins to one of the trees near it, leaving her sufficient length to crop the rather rank herbage about her feet.

Dick was also careful not to actually secure her to the tree, for he knew his mare was sagacious enough to understand she was not to stray from where she had been placed; at the same time, should anything occur to make

such a thing necessary, she could release herself from her bondage.

This having been done, King and Turpin once more made their way round to the front of the mansion.

The hall-door was reached by two flights of stone steps, each of which had a massive balustrade.

Two lions, chiselled in stone, similar to those upon the park-gates, but much smaller in size, were upon the end of the balustrades.

Decay, however, had already begun to exert its influence upon both balustrade and steps; for the former were crumbling at the edges, and moss-grown, while the latter were broken in many places.

Day by day, year by year, had dust accumulated in the crevices of the stonework, and then the seeds of many curious wild plants had drifted there, and grown up, but, from want of space to take proper root, dwarfed in their proportions.

In fact, when the two highwaymen ascended the flight of steps, and stood upon the huge slab in front of the hall-door, the traces of desolation and neglect became more and more apparent.

The massive doorway itself was a perfect marvel in the shape of grotesque carving, but the finer portions of it had long since crumbled into powder.

The door was large, and of solid oak. Its colour now, however, was difficult to determine.

It was gracefully ornamented, and, at the same time, strengthened by a quantity of filagree ironwork running over it.

There were shutters to all the windows, but they were closed. They were of a kind very rarely to be met with now. In shape they more than anything else resembled the modern venetian blind, except that they were large and strong, and were hung on the outside with perpendicular hinges.

It was quite clear that to whomsoever the eccentric baronet had delegated the carrying out of his instructions had done their duty, for the place was strongly barricaded.

Turpin took hold of the large knob upon the door, and tried to shake it.

He might as well have tried to shake the great door of Newgate itself.

It was as firm as a rock.

"It strikes me, Tom," he said, "that this place may be, after all, just a little bit too secure."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, that we shall not be able to get in."

"Do you think not?"

"I fancy we shall have considerable trouble. Just put your shoulder against this door, and try to shake it!"

"Not I! It is quite immovable, no doubt."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"We must seek some weak part of the defences to make an entrance."

"And where do you imagine you will find it? It appears to me the place has been fastened up with the greatest possible care."

"It has, unquestionably, but they have left one point unguarded."

"Where?"

"These little windows!"

Tom King, as he spoke, pointed to two small latticed casements.

They were placed upon each side of the door, and probably for the purpose of illuminating the hall

They were tall, and comparatively narrow.

They were filled with a great number of minute stained glass, diamond-shaped panes.

But they were unprovided with shutters.

The little side windows had, evidently, either been entirely overlooked, or else, finding there was no means of fastening them, they had been left to take their chance.

When Tom King called Turpin's attention to them, both became aware that a soft light had stolen over the scene, and that they could see now with much greater distinctness what they were about than they could before.

They turned round to see from whence this sudden accession of light had come, and found that the moon had just made her way round to the front of the mansion, and was shining softly upon them.

Dick took from the pocket in his coat, which he had made expressly for it, a small steel crowbar.

"This will facilitate operations, I rather think. It is a beautiful little weapon, is it not?"

He held it out to Tom as he spoke.

King took it in his hands, and, just glancing at it for a moment, said—

"It will be of most essential service. But we have wasted sadly too much time already. So, here goes!"

He made a step forward to the little window.

"Nay, nay," said Dick, "you are wounded, my friend, although you must be getting much better, or you would not have needed me to remind you of it. Still, I fancy I can do it better than you."

"I had forgotten it for the moment, I confess. But take the jemmy, and start at once!"

"All right!" said Dick. "It will be easy enough to get in now."

But he found much more difficulty in effecting an entrance than he at all expected.

CHAPTER L.

RELATES THE STRANGE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS WHICH THE HIGHWAYMEN SAW AND HEARD IN THE DESERTED MANSION AT DURLEY CHINE.

HOLDING the little crowbar firmly in his hand, and mounting upon a portion of the stonework, Dick Turpin made an examination of the fastenings of the tall, narrow windows.

He quickly found they were very simple, so he broke one of the little panes and introduced his hand.

Simply turning round a button handle undid the casement, and he flung it open at once.

Then he, for the first time, became cognizant of the fact that the hall window was protected on the inner side by some ornamental iron-work.

He communicated his discovery to Tom King, who remarked—

"That is very awkward, but we ought to have foreseen it. You must break it down, but be careful to do so, if possible, in such a manner as not to excite notice—I mean, in the event of any one coming here to look for us."

"I shall have some trouble in doing that. However, I will do my best."

A grating, crackling sound now ensued, which showed that Turpin had already done some execution.

"Does is yield easily?" asked Tom.

"Oh! yes. I suppose the damp has got to it in some way, for it hardly holds a bit in the setting. That's the last one! There it goes!"

The iron screen which Turpin had displaced bodily fell with a loud clang upon the flooring of the hall, raising a thousand and a thousand echoes in the dismal building.

All within was as dark as the very tomb.

Turpin leaped down again on to the stone slab.

"Now, Tom, my friend," he said, "enter! The way is clear before you! I will follow!"

So saying, he caught hold of his comrade and assisted him on to the piece of stone coping from whence he could without difficulty make his way through the window into the hall.

Tom King got quite through the window, but did not jump down.

He seated himself upon the inner sill, and, turning round, said—

"Light that lantern of yours, Dick, and hand it up here. It is positively so dark that I could not see anything within an inch of my nose. And before I shift from where I am I should like to see where I am going to."

"You are wise. Stop a moment."

Once again, on that memorable night, did Dick produce his lantern, which had been of such good service to them, and, having ignited it, gave it to his friend who stretched out his hand to receive it.

Tom King then cast the broad ray of light full into the interior of the hall.

Its vastness, both in respect to length, height, and width, was something wonderful. A carriage and pair could have been turned round in it with ease.

But Tom King did not attempt to make any particular examination of the hall while in his present position; he merely noticed the distance to the floor, and, finding it insignificant, dropped it at once.



[DICK TURPIN RELATING HIS EARLY HISTORY TO TOM KING.]

In another moment Turpin had scrambled through the window and was standing at his side.

King stooped down and picked up the iron screen from the floor of the hall.

"Take this, Dick," he said, "and before we do anything further, or look at anything, let us restore the window to the same state as it was when we first saw it."

"It is a good advice, and I will follow it. First, however, I will close and refasten the window."

"Good; but you must see to do it by the aid of such light as comes to you from without."

"Why not turn the lantern this way?"

"It would be most unwise to do so. We do not know but even at this moment some person may have his eyes fixed upon this building, and whose suspicions would be immediately excited if he saw a light flash from one of the windows.'

"You are quite right, Tom, and I admire your caution," said Turpin, as he forced the fastening of the window into its place. "Hand me the piece of iron, and I will fix it up again."

This was the most troublesome job of all; but at length, after repeated efforts, Turpin succeeded in replacing it.

To be sure, the least touch would have knocked it down again, but they did not expect any one would be there to touch it, so they considered they had done pretty well.

The pane of glass which Dick had broken would, of course, have to remain as it was; but, even in the event of any one coming to that door, such a little thing as that might elude their observation.

When Dick stood on the hall-floor again, he took the lantern from Tom's hand, and looked all about him by its aid.

From the very first he had felt a deep curiousity about this so strangely deserted mansion.

He turned the beam of light first upon one walls

For about half-way they were composed of black oaken panelling, very richly and grotesquely carved.

The figures upon them seemed to be in some way connected with each other, as though the whole formed an allegorical or emblematical device which Dick fancied

pertained to the chase, but he did not pause to examine it with sufficient attention to say whether it was or not.

Between the top of the panelling and the ceiling were some large paintings—at least, such, from the frames, they imagined them to be; but they were so thickly incrusted with dust it was quite impossible to make anything out respecting them.

Several large doors opened from this entrance-hall in both sides of the wall, and in its centre almost was a spacious staircase, with a balustrade harmonizing with the panels.

On the first landing of the staircase they could dimly see a handsome window of stained glass.

From the roof of the hall depended a chandelier, in which were many pieces of wax candle.

Pieces of sculpture of various kinds were placed in the hall, as well as a huge ornamental flower or tree-pot, in which a withered, ghostly-looking stem still remained to show what had once been there.

But upon every object lay dust in surprising quantities. The floor of the hall was so thickly covered with it that the highwaymen's feet sunk into it like snow.

Such was the general appearance of the place into which our two friends intruded.

Can we wonder that, finding some fresh wonder at every turn, they stood for some time motionless and speechless.

At last when they had, bit by bit, seen the whole of the hall, Dick spoke.

He could not tell how it was, but somehow he involuntarily spoke in a subdued voice to his companion.

"What do you think of all this, Tom, my friend?" he said. "Is it not strangely and wonderfully solemn? What a pity, too, to see a place, like this must have been at one time, in such a state. It is shameful!"

"You are right there! But we have not, I fancy, seen one half of the wonders of Durley Chine, and, doubtless, the remainder will well pay us for our trouble."

"If it is at all like this it will. But come, where shall we go first?"

"I should advise," said Tom, "that we make our way into some one of the apartments, and there make ourselves as comfortable as circumstances will allow."

"But the peep at the rest of the building, which I am so anxious to have?"

"It will, I fancy, be wisest to postpone that until to-morrow when we have daylight to aid us."

"Oh! we can do without daylight," said Dick. "This lantern will answer the purpose. Come along!"

"I can make every allowance for your curiosity and impatience, but I must really remind you of two things."

"What are they?"

"Why, firstly, that though I have held up very well considering, yet it has cost me an effort, for my wound is still painful, and I am yet weak."

"Pardon me, my friend, but I had forgotten that. We will find some place where we can rest at once."

"And not only that," continued King. "You must not forget that we shall only be safe here so long as we raise no suspicions of the place being inhabited. Now, it appears to me an impossibility for you to walk about the house with a light without its being seen at some of the windows, and then, of course, we should be done for at once."

"You are thoughtful and prudent," said Turpin. "It would be almost, if not quite, impossible not to show some light at the windows."

"Very well! Then I propose, as I said, that we make ourselves as comfortable as we can in one of the rooms. What do you say to this one?"

While he was speaking, Tom stepped across the hall, and put his hand upon the handle of one of the doors we have mentioned as opening out of it.

"Oh! let it be that one by all means," said Dick; "does it open?"

Tom turned the knob, and tried the door.

It was fast.

"If we get in here," he said, "we shall have to undo the lock. Can you manage that, Dick?"

"I dare say I can," said Turpin; "just hold the light for a minute or two, while I try."

Tom King took the light, as he was requested, while Turpin produced a small bunch of skeleton keys.

After trying several, he found one that would unlock the door.

It was very hard to turn, but it all at once shot back with a sudden snap that in that deathly, silent place, was positively startling.

Dick threw open the door, and paused for a moment on the threshold, so that whatever foul air that had accumulated there should be displaced.

Then both entered.

"Shield the lantern a little, Dick," said Tom, who had returned it to Turpin while they paused at the door. "Darken it for a moment, while I see whether there are shutters to this window, and whether they are closed."

The slide of the lantern was turned, so that only a fine pencil of light was allowed to pass through the lens.

The room was pitchy dark.

In a little while, though, they could distinguish from the rest of the gloom a few faint lines of light.

"We were right to take the precaution of dousing the light, Tom. Do you see? The night light is just visible there."

"It is. Do you recollect the peculiar shutters?"

"Yes."

"Well, it is through them that the light comes."

"That's it."

"We must stop them somehow from the inside, for, of course, if we can see the light from without, it is only fair to infer that our light will be seen from within."

"Of course. But how shall you stop up the window?"

"That remains to be seen. Throw the light just before our feet, so that we can see where we are going."

The room was of tolerable dimensions, for they were some time in reaching the window.

The floor of it was, if anything, more thickly covered with dust than the hall was, at seemed to be different and of a lighter character, for clouds of it arose at every step they took.

"Now," said King, as they paused before the window, "If there are only some inside shutters we shall be able to shut out the light without difficulty. Are there any?"

"No, none," said Turpin, after a minute's examination; "but there are apparently some very thick curtains, and I should think, if we draw them closely and carefully, they would answer the purpose quite as well."

"Almost; but not quite. However, draw them, and let us see."

But when Dick caught hold of the curtain and gave it a jerk, there fell down such a quantity of dust that he was fain to retreat.

He waited until it subsided a little, and then made a second attempt—this time with greater care.

But, nevertheless, the dust continued to fall, though not in such large quantities.

It was very fine, pungent, disagreeable dust, too, and made our friends' eyes smart intolerably, while they kept on sneezing, as if for a wager.

At length, after frequently relinquishing the task, they succeeded in drawing both curtains completely across the window.

They then turned away.

To their great vexation, however, they saw there was another window in the room.

However, there was no help for it, so they were forced to go through their disagreeable task once more.

"I think tha' will do," said Turpin, as he carefully lapped one curtain over the other. "I think that will do."

"No doubt, and now let us have the full benefit of the light from your lantern."

"With pleasure," said Dick, as he withdrew the slide and allowed the full light to stream into the room.

The first thing they did was to turn it in every direction, so as to see what kind of place it was in which they stood.

From its dimensions, and the appearance of the furniture, which, although antique, was very beautiful, despite the coating of dust upon it, they concluded it was the

dining-room of the mansion into which they had made their way.

Everything they saw was full of interest to them, and our friends spent a good ten minutes in looking at the different objects.

A large, substantial-looking table ran down the centre of this room, with a dozen or so chairs placed around it.

But what was most singular was, that upon this table were a number of small articles, which a closer examination showed our friends were the remains of a repast.

They were astonished beyond measure.

"It seems to me," said Dick, "that the old baronet's will was carried out to the very letter."

"Most singular," said King. "But Dick, my friend, I am very cold!"

"So am I. This place strikes as cold and damp as a charnel-house."

"It is very natural it should when we consider how long it has been shut up. We must remedy it."

"By lighting a fire, I suppose you mean? Do you think it would be safe to do so?"

"Oh! yes! Look, there is the fire-place."

"I see it, but I don't perceive any fuel."

"That won't be a difficulty. Just lend me that little jemmy of yours, and I'll soon have some fuel."

Dick gave King the crowbar which he carried with him.

As soon as he had it, Tom commenced a very ferocious attack upon one of the chairs, and soon had it lying in fragments on the floor.

Another shared its fate.

Then he carefully placed a portion of the wood upon the hearthstone.

It was one of those old fashioned grates, provided with dogs, as they were called, which were pieces of iron for wood to rest upon horizontally.

Tom King laid the remains of the chairs in the shape of a pyramid, and then set light to them.

It was some time before he could get them to ignite properly, but when they fairly burst into a flame they burned away first-rate.

In a short time, now, quite a brilliant light filled the apartment, and revealed its most hidden recesses.

Very picturesque it looked in the ruddy and incontinent firelight, which made strange, oddly-shaped shadows flicker on the wall.

"We must look out for seats of some kind now," said Tom King, "and then we shall be quite cosy and comfortable."

"We cannot have anything better than a couple of these old arm chairs."

"But the dust!"

"Oh! we can easily get rid of that."

So saying, Tom King set about freeing his chair from the heaps of dust upon it.

Turpin took another, and followed his example.

And now, as the dust was removed, the richness and beauty of the chairs became at once apparent.

In particular the one which Turpin had taken for his own use.

It was the one that stood always at the top of the table.

The back was very high, and cushioned with crimson velvet, upon which the coat of arms belonging to the Durley family had been embroidered in gold.

The velvet had faded slightly in places, but the device itself was as bright as new.

The arms and legs of this chair were also very beautifully carved, while the upper part of the back had been wrought into the shape of a coronet.

Dick was pleased with the grandeur of this piece of furniture, and he was very careful to cleanse it from every particle of dirt.

Then he looked at it with admiration, and called his comrade's attention to it.

The firelight fell fully upon it, and imparted to it an appearance of great magnificence.

"Beautiful!" was Tom's involuntary exclamation when he gazed upon it.

He had been busily engaged in dusting his own chair, and had not paid any attention to Dick, so the beauty of this chair burst upon him all at once.

The one which King had was a very handsome one, but it would not bear comparison with Turpin's.

"I suppose," said the latter, when they had both looked at it sufficiently, and as he seated himself in it, "I suppose this is the chair in which Sir Ernest and his forefathers were went to sit."

"There can be no doubt of that," said Tom King, as he also seated himself. "I wonder if he ever thought it would be occupied by Dick Turpin, the highwayman?"

CHAPTER LI.

DETAILS HOW IT WAS DICK TURPIN TOOK TO THE ROAD. AND HOW HE OBTAINED POSSESSION OF BLACK BESS.

"Not exactly, you may depend," replied Dick, as he settled himself more comfortably in the family chair, and stretched out his legs towards the glowing embers. "Heap on a little more wood, and then, while we are taking our ease, just tell us what you know about Durley Chine."

"Certainly," said Tom, casting the remainder of the chairs upon the hearth.

This had the effect of dulling the light for a few minutes, while the smoke arose in quite a thick mass.

"Tom," said Dick, suddenly. "You've done it!"

"What?"

"You know how careful you were about not showing a light, and drawing the curtains over the windows?"

"Well, well?"

"Well! You have just put on all that wood, and where do you think the smoke's going to?"

"Out of the top of the chimney, of course! It was an oversight on my part, certainly. Still, as it is night, and the chimneys are very high, I don't suppose it can possibly be seen, for it will be little more than vapour by the time it reaches the top."

"I suppose not. However, if it comes out in a cloud, it cannot be helped now."

"No, but I shall certainly be more careful the next time I put any on."

"Do so. Ah! that's better!"

A broad flame shot up the chimney as Dick spoke, and so put an end to the smoke by consuming it."

"We are very snug here," said Tom, taking off his hat, and hanging it on one of the projections of the carving on his chair back, and throwing his pistols carelessly on the floor; "quite snug and cosy."

"We are that; and after knocking about as we have been lately this is quite a grateful change."

"I only hope we shall be left undisturbed for a day or two, and then I shall be able to get my strength up."

"And I."

"In the morning, though, and when we can have day-light to aid us, we will make a thorough exploration of the place, and, if we can, visit every nook and corner in it."

"Agreed! I should like that vastly. But come, in the meantime, just be kind enough to put me in possession of the facts you know concerning the assertion of Durley Chine."

"The facts?"

"Yes."

"Those simply?"

"Of course."

"Oh! I meant to have thrown all that I have heard, without reference to being facts or not, into the form of a narrative."

"H-m! ah! perhaps it will be as well."

"It will not take very many words, or a very long time. The story is, in itself, simple, yet most terrible."

Tom paused a moment or so.

Dick kicked the fire together with his foot.

"You must understand, first of all," resumed Tom King, "that when Sir Ernest Dane died, that is to say in 1717, he was verging closely upon sixty years of age.

"In all the accounts that I have ever heard of him he has been represented as a dark-souled, evil man, whose youth was spent in riotous living and debauch, and his old age in sorrow and in shame."

"I am afraid, Tom," interrupted Dick, "that the description would apply to very many baronets; and not only baronets, but those who rank among the highest in the land."

"Yes; but thank heaven: if there be many like him, yet there are some who show us what human nature ought to

be when the accident of birth raises it above the majority of mankind."

"I don't deny that; but never mind, get on with your story."

"Yes; but, bear in mind, I cannot vouch for the truth of any of these assertions, for not only was I never in this part of the country before, but I have never seen Sir Ernest Dane."

"Then you speak by hearsay?"

"Quite. I have been told, that at the age of fifty, he was remarkable for his shrivelled diminutive person, and his vindictive malice, which peeped out on the most trivial occasions."

"What a delightful old man!"

"Despite his numberless extravagancies, which would have been sufficient to ruin most men, he, at the time of which I am speaking, namely, ten years before his decease, was possessed of considerable riches, as well as many estates, which were all, however, strictly entailed."

"That accounts for it, perhaps."

"Very likely. Now this old, hoary-headed sinner, had not at all improved since the days of his youth. To be sure, his body failed him, for excesses such as he had indulged in always leave their traces behind them. Yet the salaciousness of his disposition was in full vigour, and the old lecher professed to fall in love with the daughter of a Mr. Enderby, a gentleman of means, who resided not far from Durley Chine."

When King reached this part of his narrative, Turpin removed his eyes from the fire upon which they had been resting, and fixed them upon his comrade's countenance. He already anticipated the catastrophe, and he listened with intense interest for the continuation of the story.

"It was said that if you had searched the counties of Dorset, Devon, and Hants, you would never have found a maiden who could compare with Kate Enderby, either for personal beauty or those manifold attractions which are most endearing in woman.

"Such, then, was the being whom Sir Ernest Dane polluted with his thoughts. She—fresh, rosy, and seventeen—he jejuned, decrepit, and fifty, with one foot already in the grave.

"But Sidney Enderby, the father of Kate, was a man in whom no generous emotions could be found. His disposition was more sordid than it is easily possible to conceive any one's to be.

"He and Sir Ernest Dane formed a pair well suited to each other."

"You have drawn a nice portrait of them at all events. Upon my word, Tom, I should never have believed you were so graphic."

"Now, stop that, Dick, or not another word do you get out of me."

"Oh! never mind! I only said what I thought! Get along!"

"No sooner, then, did Sir Ernest apply to Mr. Enderby for his daughter's hand, than the latter, with many extravagant protestations of delight, assured him that his dearest wish was to see Kate united to his friend and neighbour.

"And so, without having a whisper, let alone a voice, in the matter, Kate Enderby was disposed of to Sir Ernest Dane.

"It was in vain she prayed and wept not to be forced into so hateful an alliance—in vain she urged that she had plighted her troth to another who was then upon the bright, blue waters—her father was deaf to all—and, terrified by his violence, and more dead than alive, the beautiful young Kate Enderby, who, one would have thought, certainly deserved a happier and more congenial fate, was wedded by that outrage upon humanity, the owner and resident of this mansion."

Dick looked around him, by the aid of the bright firelight, with a strange feeling in his breast. He could almost fancy—although Tom had given him no description of her personal appearance—that he could see the unhappy bride, pale and sad, seated in one of the gloomy, funereal-looking chairs.

Indeed, so strong did the delusion grow upon him, that he was obliged to rise and walk across the room to where he fancied he could see her, before he felt quite certain that it was a trick of his imagination.

His comrade watched him with some surprise, but he said nothing.

Then Turpin re-seated himself, and King went on.

"For two years all went quietly, and, to all appearance, well. Poor Kate's face, whenever it was seen, had always the traces of a heart's sorrow upon it; but, for all that, she looked beautiful, as she flitted like a spectre about the ghostly mansion.

"As for Sir Ernest, he grew more hateful and more hideous every day.

"At length, a change came over Kate.

"She no longer looked sorrowful, as she did, though her face wore anything but a cheerful expression. The colour began to return to her cheeks, and her wasted form to fill out to its proper proportions.

'How was this?' asked those who saw her, 'Has she at length resigned herself to her lot, and resolved to be as happy as circumstances would allow.' Alas, no! It was neither of these causes that induced the change in Kate's appearance.

"No one marvelled at it more than her husband.

"He revolved the matter continually in his mind, but he was unable to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion.

"The surprise which he first felt very quickly merged into undefined alarm.

"Among the servants belonging to the mansion of course this matter was freely canvassed, and they soon felt sure they had penetrated to the core of the mystery.

"More than one while out at a late hour during the night, or while gazing from their chamber windows, had observed a shadow form flitting from tree to tree.

"They immediately—rightly or wrongly—connected this circumstance with the alteration in their mistress, and many sly hints were dropped about it.

"Shortly afterwards, however, Sir Ernest's wife was observed to lapse into her old tristful state.

"For nearly four years, then, did this state of things continue; but at the expiration of that time, one of the keepers in the park, while out late one winter's night, saw the mysterious shadowy figure.

"Naturally enough they looked towards their mistress for some visible manifestation of this, for they still persisted in the connection they had formed between her and the figure; but they were disappointed. Lynx-eyed though they were, they failed to perceive any difference in her countenance. It still wore the same air of deep dejection that it had during the last four years."

Tom paused for a moment to regain his breath, but Turpin, who was breathlessly interested in the story, waved his hand impatiently for him to go on. He was too inwrapt to speak.

"I have not much more to tell you now. All at once a report was circulated that filled the mansion and the country surrounding it with blank astonishment.

"It was some time before it was believed, but every day some new fact turned up to stamp the rumour with the indelible impress of truth.

"Sir Ernest Dane's young wife had eloped!

"But with whom?

"That was the question.

"Then the story of the shadowy figure which had been seen, got talked about and known.

"Sir Ernest had the country scoured in search of his lost bride, but all in vain. Not the slightest trace of her was found.

"In prosecuting their search, it also became known that Ralph Anderdon the young sailor, to whom Kate was betrothed, had returned in safety in his ship to Plymouth, that he had left her on leave of absence, and then never re-appeared.

"This seemed to point strongly to the supposition that it was with Ralph that Sir Ernest's wife had eloped.

"Of this, however, there was no proof; but young Anderdon never rejoined his ship, and Kate was never found!"

CHAPTER LII.

THE HIGHWAYMEN DISCOVER THE SAD FATE THAT BEFEL RALPH ANDERDON AND KATE.

DICK TURPIN waited in silence for Tom King to continue his mysterious narrative.

To his surprise he remained silent.

"Surely," Dick said, at length, and it was in a tone of disappointment and vexation that he spoke, "surely, you do not mean to say that this is all you can tell me about the desertion of Durley Chine?"

"Almost it is!"

"Then it is most unsatisfactory."

"How deep an interest you have taken in it. But what more did you expect to hear?"

"All the particulars about shutting up the place in this fashion, and the motive for Sir Ernest making the strange will he did."

"Then, my friend, you want to know more than any living person knows, I fancy."

"But, surely, some account was given of it."

"Oh! very many; but whether true or not, who can tell?"

"And what happened here after the elopement? Can you tell me that?"

"I can give you some particulars of it."

"Do so, then, I beg, by all means."

"For some months after the event Sir Ernest roamed about the old mansion like an unsettled ghost. He grew excessively frightened, and would not venture anywhere alone! His eyes got bloodshot and deeply sunken in their orbits. He refused to eat, and became the living personification of a conscience-stricken man.

"There were some who went so far as to say that guilt of the deepest blackness could alone wreak such an effect upon anyone; while others, who were more charitably disposed towards him, assigned it to the remorse he must have felt for having blighted the fair future of the girl who had been forced into a union with him, and whose life he had made a miserable burden.

"I ought to have told you that immediately after the elopement of his wife, Sir Ernest caused the room which she habitually occupied to be shut up, and forbade any of his dependents to ever enter it."

"That is a very strange circumstance," said Turpin, "is it not?"

"Well, I don't know. It is only natural, I think, that he should wish her to be forgotten, and, if possible, to forget her himself."

"Then he took the step that was, above all others, calculated to cause her to be kept in remembrance, that's all I can say."

"Like enough—like enough!"

"But go on, my friend. Just let us hear of the closing up of the place."

"In a little while, then, Sir Ernest took to his bed, and he never rose from it again.

"About three hours before his decease he had his will made, which, after having stated in what manner his property was to be distributed, stipulated that immediately after his funeral the mansion of Durley Chine should be vacated; that all things which it contained should be left in the precise positions they then occupied; that every door was to be locked; every window fastened; the park palings to be thoroughly repaired in every part; that the entrance gates should be firmly locked; and then the whole left unvisited by a human being for the space of one hundred years, dating from the day of his demise."

"What a singular will! Surely, such a one was never known before."

"Scarcely, I should think, and yet some strange things have been done in that way, and doubtless will be. To finish—he bequeathed a sum of money for building the monument in the lane, about which he gave the most minute instructions, and also sunk a farther sum which was to defray the expense of keeping the palings and the monument in repair; and also to prosecute any one who was found trespassing either in the house or on the adjoining lands."

Tom paused, and then, observing Dick was silent, he added—

"Surely you do not wish me to tell you that the baronet's instructions were carried out to the very letter. I should think you have already seen sufficient to tell you that."

Dick raised his head.

"I was not thinking of that exactly."

"What then?"

"I was running the whole story over in my mind, and endeavouring to come to some conclusion."

"And have you succeeded?"

"To a certain extent I have."

"To what conclusion, then, have you come?"

Dick placed his hand upon the corner of the old-fashioned dining-table, and, looking King full in the face, replied, in a tone of deep and earnest conviction—

"The conclusion to which I have come I make no doubt will surprise you beyond measure, unless your thoughts have happened to take the same turn as my own."

It was now King's turn to feel anxiously interested, and he asked—

"Tell me what it is."

"*I am firmly of belief*," said Dick, "*that Sir Ernest's wife never eloped at all!*"

The deliberate manner in which Turpin enunciated this opinion quite staggered Tom King.

"Really, Dick," he said, "that is an extraordinary idea; but, now you have started it, I begin to be quite of your way of thinking."

"And is it possible, Tom, that it has never occurred to you before? Why, a thousand things indicate such a thing."

"I must confess," said Tom, "I never thought of it. I somehow or other quite took it for granted that Sir Ernest's wife eloped."

"And many more did beside, and so thought no more about the matter; but, take my word for it, Tom, there is something more in this than the world, perhaps, will ever know."

"Very like—very like. Now you have given me the start, or clue, as I may call it, things innumerable come thronging into my mind."

"Let us wait until the morning, Tom. We will then together spend the whole of the day in searching over the place, and it will be odd to me indeed if what I suspect is not in some way or other confirmed. I wish I knew which was the room Sir Ernest's wife occupied."

"I cannot guide you in that, for I have no more idea than yourself. Still, I should think, in going over the house, we shall find it."

"No doubt of that. The difficulty will be to know when we do find it."

"That's it, but don't let us vex our brains by thinking any more about it to-night. We cannot elicit anything more. Consent to let the subject drop until the morning, when I hope we shall be able to renew it, and arrive at some satisfactory result."

"With all my heart. I say drop the subject, if you have grown tired of it. But what shall we talk about or do instead, for I can assure you I do not feel sleepy in the least."

"Nor do I. I feel that it would be quite out of the question."

"Well, then, I ask what are we to do. Start another subject, Tom, or else let us go back to Sir Ernest Dane."

"No—no, don't let us do that. I have, believe me, heard quite enough about him for one night."

"Very well. What shall be the new subject?"

"What should you like?"

"Oh! anything, I am not in the least particular."

"Very well. Do you recollect that you made me a promise, and repeated it more than once? Now we are as quiet and comfortable, I am sure, as anyone could wish to be, and I am sure you will never have a better opportunity, and it will be some hours to daybreak, and"—

"There, stop—stop! that will do!"

"You guess, then, what I am about to say?"

"Of course I do!"

"Well."

"You want me to relate some of my back history to you?"

"That's it."

"Before I made your acquaintance?"

"Exactly; before I had the honour of your acquaintance."

"Well, then, if you are inclined to listen, I will tell you all, from my birth upwards."

"You need not go quite so far back as that."

"Very well. But there is a condition. Can you guess it?"

"I can."

"If we are here, then, to-morrow night, as we are to-night, that you will relate your life, for I am very anxious to hear it. I know it must be full of interest."

A slight shade overspread Tom's countenance, as Dick

spoke, but it disappeared almost immediately, as he replied:

"I do not know what your opinion will be as to its interest, but I can tell you beforehand that it will be rather a sad affair."

"Oh, never mind that. Mine is not altogether cheerful, but you must promise to return the compliment before I begin."

"I will; and now start at once."

"Don't be too impatient! I must have time to think it over a little. But don't you see how low the fire is?"

"I do now, but I didn't when you spoke."

"It must be replenished. Why, I do believe if we had left it a quarter of an hour longer it would have gone out altogether."

"Yes; a fire soon dies out when it once takes the turn. Stop a minute, and I'll soon have some more fuel."

"But it seems a great shame to destroy such handsome furniture."

"It does, I quite agree with you; but it cannot be helped. Can it?"

"I don't see how it can."

"Lend me the jemmy, then, and I'll soon have this one to pieces."

So saying, Tom dragged one of the chairs towards the fire, and, having received the crowbar from Dick, he very quickly broke it up into fragments.

He placed a good half upon the fire.

"Now, Dick," he said, as he reseated himself, and leaned back in his chair, "I'm all attention, so just make a start."

"Very good," said Turpin, who, after a premonitory ahem! commenced the story of his life without further preface or hesitation.

CHAPTER LIII.

DESCRIBES HOW TURPIN COMMITTED HIS FIRST BOBBERY ON THE HIGHWAY.

"You must know, Tom," said Dick, "that I cannot boast of anything grand with respect to my parentage. My father was a butcher——"

"And so was Wolsey's," interrupted Tom.

"He was generally considered a well-to-do man by his neighbours; but, in the course of time, one or two things dropped out that had rather a damaging effect upon his character.

"It was always their intention to bring me up to the same trade, but somehow I did not like it. In fact, I was ambitious to be a gentleman.

"However, not far from where I was born, namely, at Thaxted, in Essex, there was a very large estate and a park that was quite overstocked with deer, belonging to a magistrate named Sir Thomas Deane.

"Well, in spite of the strictness with which he endeavoured to keep up the the game laws, and the heavy punishments he visited upon offenders, somehow or other, the keepers were always reporting the loss of his deer.

"There was about a dozen harum scarum fellows like myself, always hanging about, and having apparently nothing to do, and we were everyone of us looked upon with the greatest suspicion by Sir Thomas Deane and his keepers, though, for a long time, nothing could be brought against us.

"One fine night, though, as the whole party of us were standing over a fine buck that had just been brought down, we heard a loud shout, and before we could as much as look round, we found ourselves hemmed in by keepers and various other people belonging to the estate.

"Resistance was almost useless, but we showed fight, and one or two managed to get off, but the remainder, myself included, were captured, handcuffed, and lodged in the village cage, round which guard was kept until the morning, when we were marshalled into the presence of the magistrate, Sir Thomas Deane.

"He scowled upon us when we entered, and took his seat upon the bench. You may depend he treated the case in a very summary manner. He found us all guilty, and committed us to the assizes.

"As it so happened, we had not long to wait, for on the Monday morning the assizes commenced, and our case came on for hearing on Wednesday.

"The evidence against us was very conclusive, so the jury brought us in guilty, and the judge sentenced them all very heavily, with the exception of myself, who he let off lightly, so he said, because I was the youngest of them all, and the only evidence against me was that I was standing with the others. I ought to have told you that my father got a counsel to defend, and the line he adopted was that I was passing through the park at the time and stopped to see what was going on, and so came to be apprehended. I therefore got off with six months' imprisonment in the county jail with hard labour. But I found it terribly irksome and disagreeable, and before I had been in prison a fortnight I made up my mind to escape.

"An opportunity soon afterwards occurred, and I availed myself of it, and, after some trouble, did get free.

"Thaxted was very quickly left behind me, and I shaped my way directly for London. Of course, I had no money in my pocket, the jailors took good care of that. I was, besides, clothed in the prison dress, and this it was imperative I should get rid of, or I should be detected and apprehended immediately.

"I was walking along the London road, turning these things over in my mind, when I heard some one coming towards me at a sharp trot. It was just getting daybreak.

"'Now, what shall I do?' I thought to myself. 'Here is come one coming who doubtless possesses the very articles so necessary for me to have. Shall I strain a point for once, and take them from him?'

"The traveller I could hear coming nearer and nearer.

"'It must be so,' I said. 'Such a chance will perhaps never happen again, and, now I have gone so far, I am determined not to be caught and taken back to jail.'

"So, having come to this resolution, I drew aside into the shadow of the hedgerow, and waited for the traveller to pass me.

"In a minute or two I saw his horse's head on a level with me, and shouting, 'Stand!' in as loud and as gruff a voice as I could assume, I darted out from my place of concealment, and caught the horse by the bridle.

"'Stand!' I said again. 'I am a desperate man! Your money or your life!'

"'You shall have neither, you villain!' said a voice which I recognised instantly. 'Take that!'

"It was the voice of Sir Thomas Deane.

"Chance, then, had thus strangely brought about a meeting between us.

"I was rather startled, you may guess, and almost frightened, for this was the first affair of the kind in which I had ever been engaged.

"When Sir Thomas said, 'Take that!' I saw a faint flash, and heard a click.

"He had aimed a pistol at me, but it had missed fire.

"He uttered a curse as he found this was the case, but before it was well out of his mouth I had sprung upon him, wrested the pistol from his grasp, and dealt him a heavy blow on the head with the butt end of it.

"He fell off his horse at once.

"I was rather scared, I can tell you, when I saw the effects of my blow, but I felt I had gone too far to retreat, so I stooped down and began to rifle his pockets.

"I found in them a considerable sum of money, for he had been up to London to draw some money out of the bank. I also took a handsome gold watch, of which I knew he was excessively proud, and several other articles of less value.

"I had done all this without finding him give the least signs of life, but he now began to be aroused.

"Thinking it best to be prepared, I went up to his horse, which was standing still enough in the middle of the road, and took the other pistol from the holster.

"When I got back to Sir Thomas, he was sitting up in the road and rubbing his head in a very lugubrious fashion.

"I had not done with him yet.

"'Come, Sir Thomas, arouse yourself. Strip off your clothes immediately; or if you don't like to do that, I will put a bullet through your skull, and take them off after you are dead, which will save you the trouble.'

"I could see Sir Thomas shook a little at this, and like a prudent man he began to divest himself of his clothes.

"He pulled off his coat.

"Then his vest.

"He would have stopped, but a menace caused him to proceed.

"He took off his cravat and ruffles, and then his shirt.

"He paused again.

"'Be quick,' said I; 'off with your breeches and boots!'

"He looked at me in amazement; but finding I was terribly in earnest, complied."

"He took it very quietly, I think," said Tom; "didn't he?"

"He did! The fact is, he was only half conscious of what he was about. A good crack with a pistol is apt to have a confusing effect."

"I believe you. However, go on. What did you do when he had stripped himself?"

"Why, I stripped off my own clothes in a twinkling, and attired myself in his.

"'There,' said I, when I had done. 'You needn't look so down. You can put on the clothes I have just taken off.'

"He glared at me for a moment, and then began scrambling them on.

"'If you hadn't been so particular after your deer, one or two of which you could very well afford to spare, this would not have happened. Do you recollect me?' I said; 'I am Jack Palmer, whom you sentenced a little while back at the assizes.'"

"Jack who?" said Tom King.

"Jack Palmer. I forgot to tell you that is my right name."

"Oh! indeed!"

"Yes, I assumed the name of Richard Turpin some time afterwards."

"The deuce you did! However, go on with your story."

"He recollected my name, of course.

"'Curse you, you villain!' he said. 'Curse you, I wish you had been hanged!'

"I daresay you do! Good morning, Sir Thomas! a pleasant journey! This seems to be a nice little bit of horseflesh, I'll borrow that, too.'

"So saying, I jumped on the horse's back, and turned his head towards London.

"To my surprise, as I rode off, I actually heard Sir Thomas give vent to a chuckling laugh, which sounded more like a gander in the last agonies of strangulation than anything else.

"A sharp canter, though, soon left him far behind."

CHAPTER LIV.

RELATES HOW TURPIN STOLE HIS CELEBRATED MARE BLACK BESS.

"And so that was your first little adventure on the road, was it, Dick?"

"It was."

"Well, all I can say, you did things in a very bold and creditable manner."

"Rather! but you have not heard the best of the joke."

"What is it, then?"

"This. I was just entering London when I found what it was Sir Thomas was so spasmodically laughing about."

"Oh! what was it?"

"When I took off my prison clothes, and gave them to him to put on, I forgot to——"

"Ha! ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha!" roared Tom King, heartily. "I see! You forgot to transfer the booty out of the pockets."

"Just so."

"Ha! ha! ha! Really now. No wonder the magistrate laughed!"

"None, indeed! But you must make some allowance for me, Tom."

"Oh! certainly, certainly."

"I was rather flustered, you know. It was quite strange to me."

"Oh! don't make any excuses, I beg. I can quite understand it. I think it served the old magistrate jolly well right!"

"So do I, for he was a selfish, hard-hearted rascal. However, I can tell you one thing, and that is, I never made such a mistake again."

"No, I should hardly think you would. But come! What did you do when you found you had no money?"

"Oh! I was not altogether penniless. I found some loose silver in the pockets, which I had disdained to take before."

"But which you were glad enough of now. Proceed!"

"Well, I rode into London, and put up at the 'Saracen's Head,' in Skinner-street, Snow-hill."

"I know it well."

"I had a very good breakfast, but I noticed that the landlord eyed me rather suspiciously. My clothes did not altogether look as though they had been made for me.

"Still he did not venture to make any remark, so I paid him his bill, and went to look after my horse.

"It was brought out to me very nicely fettled, and, take it altogether, it was a very creditable looking piece of horseflesh.

"Indeed, the ostler made a remark to me to that effect, and added, that if I wished to part with it, he knew someone who would be very glad to become a purchaser.

"Here was an excellent chance of getting a little money, so I at once told the ostler that though I had not thought of selling, yet I was open to receive a reasonable offer, adding, as well, that I should stand something worth his while if his customer behaved handsomely.

"I waited in the stable a little while, while the ostler went into the house to fetch the would-be purchaser, who, I found, was staying there.

"After a little badgering, he agreed to give, and I agreed to take, fifty guineas for Sir Thomas's nag.

"The money was paid, so I slipped a guinea into the ostler's palm and made myself scarce, for I was sharp enough to know the sooner I was off the better.

"Indeed, just as I passed out of the archway, I saw a body of police coming from the direction of St. Martin's-le-Grand, so I hastened down Snow-hill, and soon found myself at the back of Field-lane.

"I had often heard of this place, though I had never seen it.

"As I perceived no signs of a pursuit, I did not go down it, but found my way into Hatton Garden, and thence to Holborn, where I entered a coetumier's and purchased some clothing that suited me better than those I had taken from Sir Thomas Deane."

"And what did you do next?" asked Tom.

"You will hardly expect it, but I set out, and for days and days tried to obtain some kind of honourable employment."

"You succeeded, of course?" said Tom, with a tinge of irony in his words.

"I did not. My efforts were entirely useless. Everyone to whom I applied wanted some account of my past life, which, of course, I could not give them; though towards the last, the philanthropic appearance of many of the persons to whom I made application, induced me to tell them of my misfortunes, but I was met with such looks of indignant horror for having entertained the idea of asking them for employment, after having been in jail, that I very quickly gave that up."

"It is always the way, my friend," said Tom King. "I have found it so to my cost. When once a man is down, his fellow-men turn upon him like wild beasts, and keep him down. Woe to the unhappy wretch who first loses caste, for let him try afterwards, as he will, he will never be able to regain his position."

"That is unfortunately too true, my friend. Heaven knows it was from no wish or predilection on my part that I became a highwayman. I was forced into that career in spite of myself."

"Well, well; do not begin to reflect upon it in that way. It is a subject that will not bear much reflection. It is a short life and a merry one, checkered by many a strange episode, that does not fall to the lot of common humanity."

"It is. And so, of course, Tom, it is nothing surprising that when my money was all spent I went upon the highway seeking more."

"Not at all—not at all. You had your choice of two evils—to starve or go upon the road—and you chose the less."

"Many and many a strange adventure have I had, Tom, during my career, but still such as we may meet with again."

"Just so. I will, however, give you credit for having made yourself notorious in a very short space of time."

"Pretty well. Not more so than yourself."

"You have created for yourself such a reputation as no highwayman since the days of Robin Hood has, and such as no highwayman ever will again. Your name is one that will never be forgotten."

"Pho! pho! stop that. I have only one more point upon which to satisfy your curiosity, and I am done."

"And that is"—

"To tell you how bonny Black Bess came into my hands."

"Ah! yes. I want to hear that above all things."

"Very well, then. It was some little time after I took the road that I stopped the Dover coach."

"Indeed, I remember that little circumstance very distinctly, my friend. It caused quite a consternation."

"A little. You doubtless remember the rewards offered for me?"

"I do. They represented a large amount. The government gave so much—two hundred pounds, I think—and the travellers in the coach made up a like sum."

"They did, and the chase was very hot and close after me. I had many narrow escapes, but the narrowest of all was one fine summer's afternoon, while riding on the high road between Kilburn and Edgware.

"I was going at a very easy pace, for I did not anticipate pursuit, when all of a sudden I was startled by something whistling past my face, and then there was the immediate report of a pistol.

"I confess to being startled greatly, but I had sufficient presence of mind to clap spurs to my steed and then gave a hasty glance behind me.

"Five well-mounted officers were coming along after me at full speed, and as soon as they saw I perceived them they set up a loud shout, which they doubtless intended should have an intimidating effect upon me.

"I was not without a certain misgiving as to the result of the chase, for the horse I was on, though well competent to run a short distance at an amazing speed, yet had not enough bottom in him to keep up for any great length of time. Now, a horse to be really serviceable should combine fleetness with endurance."

"He should," said Tom. "But such horses are very rarely to be met with, even let alone purchased."

"Well, to go on with my story. I had, in a very short time, the satisfaction of seeing that the distance between myself and my pursuers were considerably increased.

"As soon as I observed this, I determined to take all the advantage of it that I could, for I knew my horse would soon slacken speed so much as to allow the officers to overtake me if I kept him upon the highroad.

"I, therefore, sought about on both sides of me for one of those narrow sinuous lanes which are so plentiful in that part of the country, and sure enough before I had gone a hundred yards further, I saw one, and turned down it like a shot.

"From the loud cry to which I heard the officers give mouth, I could tell this manœuvre had been seen.

"I gathered the reins in my hands, and struck the horse several sharp blows with them about the neck, and at the same time burying my spurs in his sides.

"And now another misfortune happened.

"By some perversity or other, this lane, which was at first rather too serpentine, suddenly straightened, and continued so for as far as I could see.

"I had not bettered my position in the least. The officers would be round the bend in a few moments, and then they would be able to keep me in view.

"Just then, on looking in advance, I saw, nearly a mile off, a man on horseback, attended by a groom.

"Here was a new source of vexation, for, of course, the gentleman, as I took him to be, seeing me flying from the police, would try to impede my progress—perhaps even attempt my capture; and, although he might not succeed, yet a collision between us would infallibly give the officers time to pounce upon me.

"All these circumstances and their results passed with full force upon me, and I goaded still more my almost knocked-up steed.

"He had some of the true blood in him, for, when he felt the sharp points of the spurs, he uttered a loud snort, and set forward at a rate that absolutely amazed me.

"The gentleman in advance came at a trot, looking curiously upon me.

"His groom had fallen back considerably in the rear.

"In another moment we met.

"I had noticed, as I neared him, that the animal which he rode was of the most faultless shape, and exquisite symmetry.

"But when his horse's head was on a level with mine, he pulled up abruptly, and, by a dexterous movement, caught hold of mine by the bridle.

"The officers were thundering along the lane.

"'Hands off,' I cried, 'or it will be the worse for you! I am a desperate man, and flying for my life!,

"'Oh! you are, are you?' he said; "then I will see if I cannot put a stop to your gallop! Hi! James. James!'

"James, I made no doubt, was the footman I had seen."

"I just glanced before me, and saw him coming along at a good speed.

Matters were growing desperate.

"'Let go my horse!' I cried again, and the loud cries of the officers, and the din of their horses' hoofs almost drowned my voice. 'Let go my horse, I say, or take the consequences.'

"I could tell he tightened his hold.

"Then there darted into my mind a wild idea of escape.

"I did not wait to calculate its probabilities of success. If I had, the chances were that I should have abandoned the scheme as absurd, but I did not pause, but instantly put it into execution.

"Before the gentleman on horseback had the least notion of what I was going to do, I clenched my left fist tightly, and struck him a terrific blow on the head.

"The blow alighted somewhere near his ear.

"He fell off his horse as though he had been shot.

"This was what I hoped, and I had prepared myself for what I was next about to do.

"That was to spring upon the back of the gentleman's matchless steed.

"I accomplished the feat, difficult in the extreme as it was, but I was saluted with a volley from the pistols of the officers, who had now got into alarmingly close quarters.

"By good fortune one only wounded me, and that was only slightly.

"I turned the horse's head that I had become so strangely and unexpectedly in possession of, and just touched her side with the spur.

"The bound forward that she gave was so terrific that I was almost thrown.

"I, however, succeeded in keeping my seat.

"Away we went, like the very wind itself.

"James made one abortive effort to stop us, but he got rolled in the dust for his pains.

"Yells and screams of disappointed rage came from the throats of the officers.

"But away went the gallant steed, with a rapidity which more and more astonished me, and in a short time the officers were left far behind.

"That bonny mare I have never parted with since, or trusted out of my sight for many hours together. She saved my life then, but it is by no means the only time. I named her Bess in remembrance of some one whom I knew, and black, because that was her colour."

"And it was by such a chance circumstance as this, then, that you became possessed of the finest piece of horseflesh in the kingdom?"

"It was, my friend. Such was the way in which Dick Turpin became the owner of Black Bess."

CHAPTER LV.

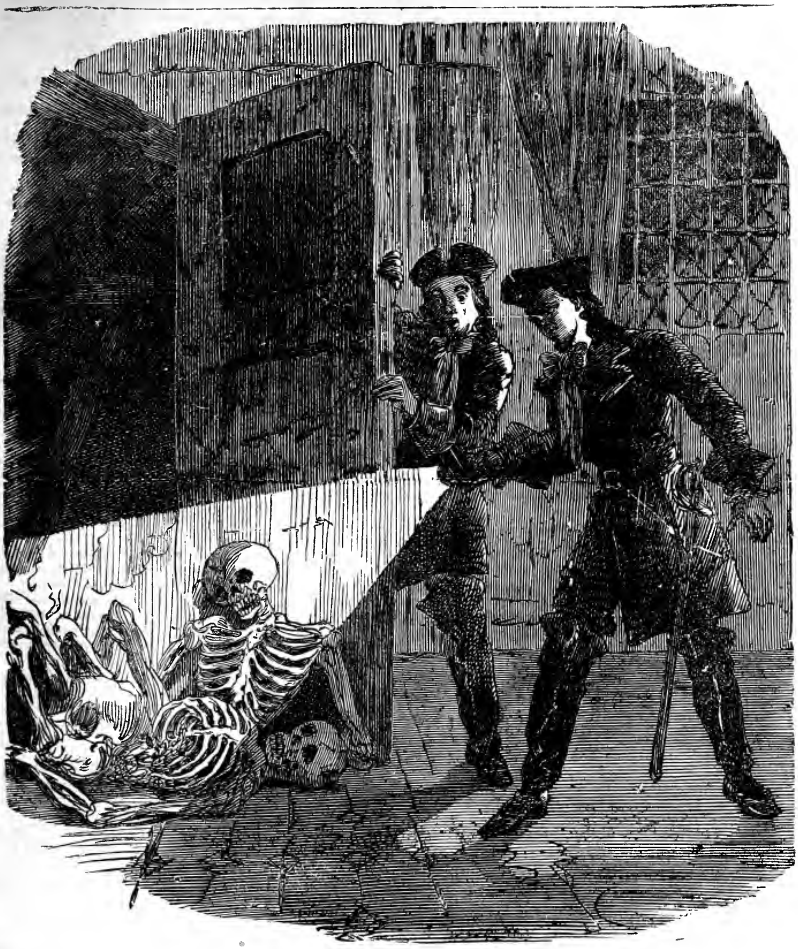
THE SEARCH THROUGH THE OLD MANSION AND ITS RESULTS.

As Turpin uttered these words, he rose from his seat, and walking up to the windows, drew back the thick heavy curtains.

The pale golden beams of the rising sun found their way into the apartment through the many chinks in the curiously-fashioned shutters.

"By Jove!" said Tom King, in accents of surprise, "it is morning! I had no idea of it!"

"Time soon slips away in conversation, and now let us at once commence the exploration of this building."



[TURPIN AND KING DISCOVER THE LOVERS' REMAINS AT DURLEY CHINE.]

"You are very eager about it, Dick."

"I am, and cannot help feeling so. Of this I feel certain, that we shall find something that will amply compensate us for our trouble."

"I wish I could feel as certain that we should find something that would amply compensate us for a breakfast, but I'm afraid we shan't."

"So am I. But come along, who knows what we may not find? You had better shut the door after you, Tom!"

They stood now in the spacious hall belonging to the mansion. The sunshine entered freely through the windows on each side of the door, or at least as freely as the thick coating of dirt with which they were encrusted would allow.

The numerous objects around them looked strangely spectral and ghostlike in the morning light.

The dust, which had looked black, now seemed of a whitish colour, and it lay upon the floor of the hall like snow.

Our friends' footsteps were perfectly noiseless.

Turpin led the way up the staircase, and Tom followed him in silence.

On the first landing they paused.

Doors they could see in abundance, but where they led to they could not tell. They tried the handles of several, but, as they had been led to expect, found them fast.

"Not here, I fancy," said Tom, "shall we find the wife's shamber, but on the floor above. Good heavens! Dick, what's that?"

Turpin turned round with an expression of alarm upon his face.

A strange noise, like the shrieking of ten thousand fiends, seemed to fill the air around them.

But only for a moment.

It died away then, not with the same suddenness as it arose, but in a faint, hoarse, hollow murmur.

Then all became as silent as the grave.

So abruptly had this sound come upon them that our friends were quite unnerved.

By an effort, Dick Turpin found his voice.

"The mysteries of Durley Chine are beginning to develop themselves," he said.

"It would seem so," replied Tom, uneasily. "But what was it? From whence did it proceed?"

"I can form no idea," said Dick. "It seemed to come from all sides, and whether from above or below I can form no manner of conjecture."

"Nor I. Let us hope that we may never hear such a sound again!"

"Nay! On the contrary, let us hope to do so, and let us be upon our guard, and not be taken by surprise when we do."

Scarcely had those words left his lips, and before Tom King could utter a reply, than there arose, with twice its former intensity, the same fearful sound.

Our friends fastened their eyes upon each other to note the effect this would have.

Both were pale.

Both felt the same question surge up in their minds.

Was what they had so often heard about the supernatural, and what their minds had never hitherto given credence to, real and true?

In that foot-deserted place, so long closed against human beings, it is no wonder such a question and many another of a kindred nature should be engendered.

Despite the control which he habitually had over himself, Dick felt his limbs tremble under him.

Tom King spoke.

His voice was quavering and unsteady.

"This is horrible, Dick," he said, "most horrible."

"It is," said Turpin, "most horrible. I am convinced no living human being could have given utterance to those unearthly sounds."

"Do you know what you imply?"

"I do! And, though as free from superstitious influences as a man can safely assert himself to be, yet I cannot close my eyes to the fact that what we have just heard, and which we are certain can be no delusion of the senses, is sufficient and has indeed sufficed to make me waver in my belief."

"It is enough to do so, and I must confess to the same thing myself, though I am very loath to do it, for I have ever, until now, scouted such things in scorn."

Again arose the awful shrieking cry.

But Dick had been waiting for it—expecting it—and was prepared.

"That came from somewhere above, Tom," he said, "I am certain of it! Follow me!"

He turned and would have sprang up the next flight of stairs, but King caught him by the arm.

"What would you do?" he asked.

"Do?" repeated Turpin. "Why this! Feeling confident that the horrible sound came from the upper portion of the mansion, I will ascend and not pause until I have pried into every nook and corner! Why do you hold me back?"

"I know not," said King, confusedly, for he was ashamed of the weakness he had shown. "Come on."

"That's right, my friend! Let us use our best endeavours to discover the source of those dreadful cries! Think how great a satisfaction it will be if we can succeed in discovering from whence they proceed, and trace them to some natural causes!"

"It will—it will!"

"Quick, then, Tom! Hark, there it is again!"

The unearthly cry once more sounded in their ears.

"How much more this would have scared us in the night time!" said King. "Darkness would have endowed it with threefold terror."

"It would. That is only natural. But what surprises me is, that it is so continuous."

By this time our friends had reached, as they thought, the topmost story in the house, but they found there was yet another flight of stairs to be ascended.

Ere, however, they could cross the landing to them, they were again startled by the mysterious cry.

It was pretty certain that it came from above, for the sound reached their ears much more intensely than it did, and they could distinguish in it a strange howling note which they had not previously noticed.

Without the loss of a moment, and before the echoes had entirely died away, Dick sprang up the flight of steps, which were narrower and steeper than the preceding ones.

Tom King followed closely.

At the top of the stairs they emerged into a large room or attic.

There were in it two windows, but as they had not been provided with shutters, were boarded over.

The planks, however, did not fit closely enough together to exclude the light, which entered freely in long pencils through the joins.

It is probable enough that when first put up these boards were joined to a nicety, but in the lapse of years they had shrunk, as wood is apt to do.

Our friends could see around them without difficulty.

The attic appeared to have been used merely as a lumber room, for many odds and ends were scattered about the floor.

They looked over every part of it with the utmost attention, but he saw nothing that in any way tended to explain the cry.

"We must give it up, I am afraid," said Tom King. "I can see nothing here to cause it."

"And no human being can have been in the place, for look, except where we have ourselves trod, the dust is undisturbed; and no one ascended the stairs before us, for I was careful to look upon them for the imprint of a foot, which would have been as plainly visible as in snow."

"Right!" said Tom. "We must then consider this to be one of the mysteries of Durley Chine which we cannot solve."

"For the present," said Dick, "only for the present. Although we have failed in our first attempt, we may be more fortunate in a second!"

"Perhaps so; but I am afraid not. There is only one thing. Did the sound actually come to us from above when we stood at the foot of the last flight of stairs?"

"So far as my sense of hearing serves me, it did. But I may have been mistaken, for it is always a matter of extreme difficulty to trace such noises to their true source, unless you have something more to guide you than your ears."

"Just so. But is it worth while to stay here any longer? We have seen all there is to see, I fancy."

"I would rather we did not go until we heard the cry again. I have noticed that it has occurred at something like regular intervals."

"So have I."

"Do you then, my friend, stand with your back to mine, so that your eyes command the opposite half of the room to what mine do. Let nothing escape your observation, but have all your senses on the alert!"

"I understand," said Tom King, as he placed himself in the required position. "You think, then, that if we both do this, we shall not only be able to tell beyond a doubt whether the sound actually proceeds from this place, but if it does, be also able to tell from what precise portion of it!"

"Exactly! That, I fancy, is the only means by which we can do it. I'm only impatient now for the cry to come. Fail not to have every sense awake, but do not keep yourself too much on the stretch, or you will defeat yourself that way!"

"I am aware of it. Let us be silent now in order that our speech even may not be the means of confusing us."

With an anxiety, greater than our readers can conceive, the two highwaymen stood back to back in the attic of the deserted mansion, and waited for the repetition of the strange cry, which had naturally so scared them when they first heard it.

Turpin certainly deserves great credit for the manner in which he managed this affair, for surely no better mode of determining from whence the noise came could be devised.

The windows we have mentioned as being in this attic were placed at each extremity.

The ceiling was low, and sloped from the centre.

It would appear that this attic ran from the front to the back of the mansion, for the windows were both in gables of the building.

As our friends thus stood, of course each had a window before him.

In waiting for the strange sound to again make itself

heard, Tom King, whose eyes had rested with the keenest scrutiny upon every object within their sphere, noticed that in the boarding of the window opposite to him there was a small round hole.

Three fingers held close together would have about filled it up.

It was a very trifling thing to notice, but Tom's eyes were just then required to notice trifles.

"There's been a knot there, I suppose," he thought, "and as the wood has shrunk away from it, it has tumbled out. That must be it!"

At any rate it was a probable enough supposition.

At length, and just as their patience was getting exhausted, the terrible cry again resounded in their ears.

That it came from the place in which they stood there could not be a doubt.

Tom King echoed it with a shout of gratification.

"Hurrah!" he said, "I see it all now! We have been frightening ourselves about nothing!"

"What is it?—what is it?" asked Turpin, anxiously. "Tell me at once!"

King led him to the window.

"There is the secret," he said. "Do you see that round hole in the board?"

"I do."

"Look a little closer, and you will see that the pane beyond is broken!"

"So it is, Tom!" said Turpin, after a momentary observation. "But do you mean to say that the noise came from there, and that the wind blowing through caused it?"

"Most certainly I do! I noticed the hole in the board and fixed my eye upon it, and presently the noise came, and I was confident, through that hole. I take it that when a gust of wind comes in one particular direction, it rushes through that little hole with extraordinary violence, and makes the horrible sound which so alarmed us!"

CHAPTER LVI.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN MAKE A FORCIBLE ENTRY INTO SIR ERNEST'S CHAMBER, AND DISCOVER THE TRACES OF A FRIGHTFUL DOMESTIC TRAGEDY.

THAT this was the real solution of the mysterious cries there could be little or no doubt.

Just the least tinge of vexation was apparent in Dick's voice and countenance when he spoke.

"What fools we both were to allow ourselves to be terrified by a sound that admits of so easy explanation!"

"Do not chafe, Dick!" said Tom King. "I regard it as being extremely fortunate!"

"How so?"

"Thus. In our exploration of the mansion, which we cannot say we have fairly commenced, if we hear any sound for which we may not be able to account, the simple means by which this horrible howling is produced will teach us not to be alarmed at it in the least, and induce the belief that it is produced by natural causes only!"

"Looking at it in that light it certainly is fortunate," replied Turpin; "but what annoys me is that I should have allowed it to unman me as it did. I ought to have known that an old deserted place like this would be full of strange noises."

"I can find every excuse for you, Dick. The cry was certainly a most fearful and unearthly one, and sufficient, coming unexpectedly as it did upon us, to strike terror into the bravest heart. Hark! there it is again!"

With a prolonged, wailing howl, the wind again rushed through the circular hole in the board.

"Come away, Tom! Come away!" said Turpin. "It is useless to stay here any longer. Let us try to find out something more about Ralph Anderdon and Sir Ernest's wife!"

"Agreed! But is it possible, think you, to put a stop to this noise? Although we know what it is, it is none the less unpleasant!"

"A good thought, Tom. It shall be done. A large piece of paper screwed up and pushed tightly in, will stop it up as well as anything."

"It will."

Dick rummaged his pockets, and at last found a piece of a newspaper.

This he folded and rolled up tightly in the form of a plug, and stuffed into the hole.

"That will do it, I think," he said. "Now, Tom, come along!"

The highwaymen then, without further delay, left the attic.

They paused upon the landing beneath, from which two long corridors ran right and left, having doors opening from them.

"What do you think of doing with these rooms, Dick? Surely you do not intend to open them every one? If you do it will take us some time, for they are sure to be all locked. I should imagine these were the servants' dormitories."

"Very likely! I think, however, just to satisfy ourselves, we will open one of the doors. Should your supposition turn out correct, we will leave the others as they are."

To this Tom at once agreed; and Turpin, producing a bunch of skeleton keys, very soon had the door open.

They entered with great curiosity.

It was plainly furnished, and evidently, from its appearance generally, a servant's bedroom.

Our friends merely glanced round this apartment and then retired. There was nothing there at all extraordinary.

Dick was careful to lock the door again after him, so that at a future time no suspicion might be aroused that they had entered there.

"I think we may safely jump to the conclusion that all these numerous doors open only into such chambers as the one we have just seen the interior of.

"Very well; we will try the floor below."

Accordingly another flight of stairs was descended, and they found themselves standing upon a landing precisely similar to the one they had just left.

Here the doors were wider and higher and not so close together.

Turpin again had recourse to his skeleton keys, and one after another opened these doors.

They were all bed-chambers.

At last, after having well nigh lost all patience, and hope of finding Sir Ernest's bed-chamber, our friends came to a door where some substance had been placed over the keyhole.

Dick wiped away the dust which lay very thickly upon it, and found it was sealing-wax, or some similar substance which had been placed over it.

A closer examination showed him that Sir Ernest's coat of arms was impressed upon this seal.

He called Tom's attention to it.

"If we had known," he said, "that the lock had been sealed, we should have been spared a great deal of trouble, for I make no doubt that as we have found none of the other doors with a seal upon them, that this is the one opening into Sir Ernest's own room."

"Nor I, either. Break the seal, Dick, and open it at once."

With his knife, Dick chipped away the sealing-wax which had become almost as hard as iron.

To his mortification, however, he found, when he had taken the trouble to do this, that the keyhole itself was filled up with some hard substance, which clung so tightly that he gave up all hope of getting it out, after making several efforts, and breaking the point of his knife in the attempt.

"What is to be done?" he said. "Confound him for fastening up the door in this fashion!"

"So say I. There is but one course left, my friend, and that is to cut out one of the panels with our hangers, and enter the room in that fashion."

"I do not see in what other way we are to accomplish our object, and yet I am reluctant to destroy the door. However, it cannot be helped, for I have set my mind upon finding out something more about the ultimate fate of poor Kate."

"Here goes, then," said King, who had drawn his hanger; "leave this job to me."

"Not so, my friend. You forget your wound. It is evidently getting better, but take my advice, do not use it any more than you can help just at present."

"Very well," said King, drawing back. "do you do it, then."

In a very business-like manner did Turpin set about cutting out the panel.

His weapon was strong and keen-pointed.

Taking a careful aim, he gave a sudden thrust.

The sword went quite through the panel at that part where it was mortised into the door, and consequently thinnest.

Then by working it about, and pressing heavily upon the back, he cut completely down one side of it.

He repeated the same process with the other side.

There then remained the most difficult part to do, namely, to cut the top and bottom of the panel, which would be, of course, against the grain of the wood.

A little perseverance, however, will do wonders, and our friends soon had the inexpressible satisfaction of seeing a hole in the door large enough for the man to pass through one at a time.

This room was in the front of the mansion, and the sun, which was shining upon it, found its way in through the bars of the shutters, the peculiar shape of which we have already described.

Turpin's impatience to enter this room was so great, that scarcely had the panel fallen bodily inward, than he crept through the hole he had made, leaving Tom to follow his example as best he could.

King was soon in also, and the highwaymen looked about them with the greatest curiosity and interest.

The subdued light which filled the room seemed more congenial than if the broad daylight had revealed its every nook and angle.

The apartment was a spacious and a lofty one.

The furniture was massive and gorgeous.

In one recess was a huge funereal-looking tent bedstead, of that kind in which our ancestors used particularly to delight.

The curtains were drawn closely around it.

They looked heavy and sombre.

The four posts of the bedstead were surmounted with a large plume of feathers, resembling those which are seen on hearses at the present day.

It was full five minutes before either of the highwaymen spoke.

The whole of their faculties were bent upon an attentive and minute examination of the chamber they had entered, and which they were firmly of opinion was the one that used to be tenanted by Sir Ernest and his wife.

Tom King was the one who spoke first.

The intense stillness of that gloomy room oppressed him.

"I think we have entered the right place, Dick, don't you? An apartment like this would surely be the one set aside for the occupation of the owner of the mansion."

"Yes—yes. In this room, Tom, beyond a doubt, the baronet's fair wife, in whose mysterious fate I feel so deep an interest, pined away her young life, like a wild bird in a cage."

"You seem strangely moved, Dick."

"I am. I feel the profoundest pity for the unhappy girl, and there is also some prescient feeling within me which makes me conscious that this long shut-up room has been the scene of a terrible tragedy."

"How strange!" said Tom, and his voice grew hushed and solemn. "The words you have just uttered seem to have given consistency and method to the vague and undefined ideas which were floating about in my mind."

"The simple circumstance of being in a deserted chamber, and being surrounded by a silence so intense as we are, is sufficient of itself to people the brain with thick-coming fancies, but, apart from them, I feel that we stand upon the threshold of a discovery that will cause the current of our blood to stagnate in our veins."

"How seriously and earnestly you speak, Dick, said Tom King, who remained for a moment or two quite motionless and silent after his companion spoke. "You infect me with your own gloomy forebodings!"

Turpin made no reply.

His eyes were roaming over every portion of the apartment.

To him all things in it were distinctly visible, though if any one had suddenly come in out of the sunlight they would not have been able to see at all.

But Dick's eyes had become perfectly accustomed to the dim light.

He crossed to the side of the room opposite to where he had been standing, and appeared to scrutinise something very closely.

Then he turned towards King, who had not moved from his position, and said—

"Look here, Tom! Unless I am quite out in my calculations, it is here we must look to find the solution of the mysterious disappearance of Ralph Anderdon and Sir Ernest's fair young bride—the secret of Durley Chine!"

CHAPTER LVII.

DICK TURPIN SETS OUT UPON A RATHER PERILOUS EXPEDITION.

THERE was something so very solemn and impressive in Dick's manner that Tom King was completely overawed, and it was with a strange beating at his heart that he made his way towards the spot where his friend stood.

"What have you found, Dick?" he said. "What is it?"

"This," replied Turpin, placing his hand upon a door in the wall. "This door is of iron, and can only lead to one place, and that is a small strong room wherein jewels and such like things are kept."

"I am aware," said Tom, in a tone of disappointment, "I am aware there are usually such places in the chambers of the great. But what has that to do with the secret of Durley Chine?"

"Everything!" said Dick, who in this instance seemed to be gifted with a strange kind of foresight. "The secret of Durley Chine will I fancy turn out no secret to me! I seem somehow to have divined it from the first, and as soon as I saw that door I was convinced that I was right!"

"I confess I am fairly puzzled to understand you. However, if that door is all that hides the secret from our view, I say open it at once!"

"I intend to do so, my friend. It will, though, I think take some time."

As he spoke, Turpin produced from his pocket several small implements, with which he at once made an attack upon the lock.

Not rudely, but gently. He knew well it was a door built for strength, and that it would be hopeless to think of forcing it, and that if it was to be got open it would be by coaxing.

His patience was put to a severe trial.

Originally no doubt the lock was made as unpickable as possible, but now, having been left to itself so long, it had got thoroughly rusted into its setting, so that, even if he had had the proper key, it would have been a matter of some difficulty to turn it in the wards.

But this opposition to his wishes only served to make him more determined.

He had to pause more than once.

At last the bolt of the lock was bit by bit forced back

But the door did not open.

It seemed to be fastened into its frame.

There was, however, near the centre of it, a large octagon-shaped knob, and this Dick caught hold of and pulled with all his might.

The door shook slightly.

He tried again.

Tom King lent his aid by clasping him round the waist.

Slowly, with a harsh grating sound, the door opened.

But only while they pulled with their utmost strength.

When it was open about eighteen inches, something, which must have been leaning against the door, fell fluttering and rattling into the apartment.

It lay on the floor in an unshapely huddled-up mass.

The dust rose up in clouds.

Instinctively, the two highwaymen sprang back and retreated until they were brought to a stop by the huge bedstead.

Tom King was startled, and so was Turpin, but not to anything like the same extent as his companion.

Neither, however, moved or spoke until the dust had to some extent subsided.

"What—what is it?" gasped Tom. "What is it?"

We must approach to know that, though I more than suspect what it is. Stay, the light in the room seems to be fading. Can it be possible that the day has gone?"

"It would seem so; but do not dally! Quick! Light your lantern, we shall then be able to see better."

"I was thinking of doing so," said Turpin, producing it from his pocket, and igniting the small wick within it by means of a phosphorous match.

In another moment now a clear beam of light streamed through the crystalline lens.

Our friends then made their way towards the strong iron door, directing the ray of light upon the object which had fallen forth.

A cry of horror came from Tom King's lips.

What had fallen were the mouldering, festering remnants of a human body.

The bones, which could be seen here and there, were bleached and bare, and the clothing that lay about and around them seemed to be of no greater consistency than tinder.

But their first natural shock of terror and disgust at meeting with such an object over, the curiosity of the two highwaymen resumed its sway.

By Dick's advice the strong door was pulled as far open as it would come.

They then stood on one side, so that the charnel-like odour which filled the closet might mingle with the purer atmosphere in the large apartment.

Then, with slow steps, they walked to the spot where the human remains were lying.

"See," said Dick, "here is that which explains all."

"It does; but look, do you perceive, my friend, there is more than one body here."

"I am aware of it; I felt sure there was!"

"I can distinguish several portions of a woman's dress, and here and there the bright brass buttons belonging to a naval uniform."

"It is even so. You see how I was right when I said Sir Ernest's wife never eloped. Here is the proof, for that this is all that remains of the unhappy Kate there can scarcely exist a doubt."

"And of her old lover, Ralph Anderdon."

"And of her old lover, Ralph Anderdon, as you say. The vengeance of Sir Ernest was complete. Here is the key to the desertion of the mansion. He calculated that in a hundred years all traces of his crime would have disappeared, and so the name would remain untarnished. I somehow saw through it all at a glance. I can tell what occurred almost as well as if I had been here to witness it."

"It is not difficult to do so now."

"No, nor was it to me from the first. You may depend Sir Ernest Dane surprised his wife and Ralph Anderdon here together. He then, by some means, contrived to put an end to their existence, probably by poison, and then locked them in this strong room."

"That, I think, with all due deference to you, can hardly have been the actual state of affairs."

"Why not?"

"You seem to overlook the circumstance that they were both leaning against the door; they could not else have fallen out as they did."

"True."

"That, then, I take it, clearly indicates that they were put in there alive, and that they died leaning against the door, perhaps in the hope of releasing themselves from their place of confinement."

"Yes, you must be right in that respect, but it makes Sir Ernest's crime ten times more horrible. They must have starved to death!"

"Or, which is more likely, perished for want of air."

"Or the two causes combined. Sir Ernest, however, displayed some ingenuity. There was no bungling in his work."

"None. At least, to all appearance."

"So probable a story that his wife had eloped with her former lover would, of course, be easily believed by those who were acquainted with the history of her life and young affections."

"It was believed implicitly, and I think you are the very first that ever expressed a doubt upon the subject; at least, that I have ever heard of."

"Some intuitive feeling caused me to do so."

"The circumstances altogether are most strange."

"Most strange, indeed!"

"It is a sad sight. Beautiful as I have heard Kate was, there are no traces of her beauty now."

"But can you wonder that Sir Ernest should wander spectre-like about the house, and that he should dread always to be alone? In this gloomy place, and with the weight of his fearful crime pressing upon him, it is no wonder he became the living personification of conscience-stricken man!"

"My very words!"

Dick smiled.

"Never," he said, "to the longest day of my existence, will be obliterated from my mind all that I have seen and heard respecting Durley Chine!"

"I can readily believe that."

"Poor girl!" said Turpin, looking down at the grisly bones lying at his feet. "She is greatly to be pitied—far more to be pitied than blamed—though that she was guilty I think there is conclusive evidence."

"Her punishment was great."

"You are right there. No one, unless those who have actually experienced it can tell how horrible it is to die from want of food."

"And this young sailor. His career was a short one, and its termination inglorious. He is more guilty than Kate, but it is very, very easy to forgive him!"

"He had a consolation, and he may perhaps have considered it a great one, that of dying with her he loved, for it is probable that one did not long survive the other."

The more our friends pondered upon the lovers' unhappy fate, the more deeply they felt moved.

Both were for some minutes silent.

All that had happened in that old mansion was perfectly apparent, and the thoughts of each were busy in running over the several details.

"Come, Dick," said Tom King, first breaking the silence. "We shall do no good now by staying longer in this place. Come!"

With an effort, Turpin roused himself from the reverie into which he had fallen.

A deep, long-drawn sigh came from his lips.

"Yes, Tom, my friend, we will go, but I fancy that what we have just seen will furnish us with the material for many an hour's conversation."

"Yes, unquestionably it will; but, come, do not let us stay here any longer!"

"I will but take one more glance around me," said Turpin. "Here is the place behind the door which we have barely looked at."

Turpin accordingly raised his lantern and cast its beams into the strong room.

Walls, roof, and floor presented one uniform smooth level surface, and were apparently of iron.

It was perfectly empty, and not more than four feet square.

"That is all," said Turpin. "But what are we to do? Leave the place just as it is?"

"There is no help for it. Come along! I am already sick and faint beyond endurance! Come!"

Slowly and reluctantly Dick left the apartment, but some strange fascination made him gaze about him until the last moment.

CHAPTER LVIII.

IT TURNS OUT THAT OUR FRIENDS ARE NOT THE SOLE INHABITANTS OF DURLEY CHINE.

THE air in the corridor seemed by comparison a thousand times purer and sweeter than it was, and Tom drew several long breaths, so as to expel all the miasma his lungs had absorbed while gazing on the frightful spectacle in Sir Ernest's room.

It was quite dark now, and the lantern which Turpin had was of great service.

"What is to be done next, Dick? I can scarcely believe that time has slipped away so fast, but positively night seems to be closing in."

"It does," said Turpin, consulting the chronometer, which he had taken from Captain Nidget, "and it is, too! Why, would you credit it? it is close upon seven?"

"Well, what are we to do, Dick? There is little more, I fancy, to be seen worth seeing in the mansion."

"No, perhaps not. I think, however, that considering all things, it will be much more to our safety if we remain hidden here for twenty-four hours longer."

"I don't dispute that in the least, but in the meanwhile just let me ask you what we are to do for food during that time?"

"It is some time since we had any last!"

"I am painfully aware of that. I have before now more than once had to fast for a lengthened period, but I never went so long before, and never felt so hungry as I do now!"

"Nor I; and it is quite certain, Tom, that if we are to stay here we must have something to live on; but how to get it is the question!"

"I think, considering the length of time the place has been shut up, there is very little likelihood of our finding anything in it at all comestible."

"None at all, I should say. The only thing is, if we chose to go groping about in the cellars, we might find a bottle or two of choice wine."

"We must have something to eat first. However, let us go first to the room where we passed the night."

"Agreed!" said Tom, and they both descended the stairs, and in a minute or two more were standing at the door of the room.

It will be recollected they fastened it when they quitted it in the morning.

Dick unlocked it, and they entered.

"Look here, Tom, I'll tell you what I will do. Just clear my clothes from dust as well as you can, so that my appearance will not excite suspicion, and I will, as it is now quite dark, go out and see if I cannot get something at the nearest village."

"But with me, of course?"

"No, I think it will be better if you stay here. Alone I shall not be so likely to excite suspicion. Do not let us waste time by parleying about the matter. I want to go at once."

"Then I hope, since you have made up your mind to that effect, that you will not be any longer gone than you can possibly help."

"You may rest quite easy on that score. I shan't. While I am gone, however, do you light a fire, and so forth, so that there may be no time lost when I arrive with the provisions."

"Trust to me for that. But shall you not disguise yourself at all?"

"How can I?" Besides, I think it hardly necessary. It is not likely there is any one here who knows me, or, at all events, who would be able to recognise me, in the dark; so that I run little or no risk."

"Still, be most careful."

"I will."

"Above all, take the greatest care that no one sees you leave the grounds, for if they do so the country will be roused immediately."

"Don't let that trouble you. Now, shall I do?"

While they had been speaking, Tom had been busily engaged in cleansing the dust and cobwebs from his friend's apparel.

"Yes. Be off with you, and don't be long, and above all, do not excite suspicion by either word or action!"

"All right. Mind you have the fire alight when I come back. Good bye!"

"Good bye, Dick," said Tom, as he assisted him through the small hall window.

Turpin sprang upon the doorstep, and then ran lightly down the crumbling perron on to the lawn.

Tom King followed him with his eyes as long as he could, but Dick was soon lost in the gloom of the evening.

"I only hope he will come safe back," said Tom, as he returned to their room and prepared to make a fire. "I wish now I had insisted upon going with him, and yet, perhaps, it is best as it is. I will try to think so, at all events!"

That was very good philosophy upon Tom's part, and leaving him to follow it, we will turn our attention to Dick Turpin.

No sooner had he plunged among the trees on the lawn, than he heard a faint whinnying sound, and the rush of horse's footsteps.

"That is Bess," he said, and in another minute the sagacious creature was rubbing her head against his shoulder.

Dick caressed her gently.

He knew that was the best way to soothe her.

Then taking the bridle in his hand, he again led her to the shrubbery, and tethered her to a tree.

This done, he hurried rapidly away.

His mare cast after him that melancholy gaze so often to be observed in a horse or a dog who is more than usually devoted to his master.

Making as little noise as possible, Dick recrossed the lawn, and made his way down the carriage-drive to the entrance gate.

Here he paused, and listened with intentness that soon became painful.

But all was still.

No approaching or receding footstep disturbed the solitude of that place.

Dim, ghastly, gaunt, and half-confused with the dark shadows of the trees, stood Sir Ernest's monument.

Dick waited full five minutes before he ventured to stir.

Then feeling confident there was no one at hand, he picked the lock in the gate and passed through, taking care to lock it again after him.

He crouched down in the shadow of the buttresses, and again waited.

His caution was scarcely necessary.

So evil a name had Durley Chine got among the inhabitants of that district, that not one of them would have ventured anywhere in its vicinity after dark, even if they were offered untold wealth for doing so.

Feeling certain that he was the only living human being near that spot, Dick stepped out boldly into the road or lane, whichever it might be called.

Then a very interesting question arose in his mind.

To reach some place where he could purchase the things he required, should he turn to the right or the left?

He paused and considered, and then, remembering that he had come with his companion some distance along the road to the right, and that they had not seen anything like a human habitation, he made up his mind to turn to the left.

It was a lucky thing that he chose the way he did. In less than a quarter of an hour he reached a small hamlet.

What was the name of it he had not the remotest idea.

The inhabitants seemed all to be indoors.

Dick passed as quietly and stealthily as he could along the little straggling village street.

Presently he came to an alehouse.

He hesitated a moment, and thought of attempting to get there what he required, but, fearful of raising suspicion, he turned away.

He was looking for one of those miscellaneous shops which are to be found in most villages, where every description of goods can be purchased.

"Surely," he thought, "this village will not be an exception to all others, and be without one?"

He began to think so, for he had passed completely through it when he saw a light shining from a window a little in advance.

Hoping it would prove to be the place he wanted, he quickened his steps.

He reached it in two minutes.

Yes; there was the small latticed window crammed with goods of every description, chalky-looking sweetmeats in blue bottles preponderating, which invariably distinguish the village hucksters.

Dick drew close to the window and tried to peep in, but the things were stacked so closely together that he found it impossible to obtain a glimpse even of the interior.

Then a fresh difficulty arose in his mind.

Would it not seem strange for a person of Dick's appearance to walk into a shop and purchase bread and such like necessaries?

Of course it would.

Curiosity would be at once aroused.

Dick hesitated.

He pulled the ends of his moustachios.

"It's lucky," he muttered, "that I happened to think of it before I went in. If I hadn't I should have made a mess of it! Something must be done! Let me see! Oh! ah! that will do!"

Dick had hit upon a scheme.

He lifted the latch of the shop door.

As he opened it a bell rang furiously.

In obedience to the summons, a tall, thin, shrivelled old woman entered the shop.

"What is it?" she asked, in an unceremonious voice.

Dick put on an air of immense importance, and spoke in a pompous sort of way.

The woman became obsequious instantly. She thought Dick was a lord at the very least.

"My good lady!" he said, "I want you to assist me. I was walking homewards when I heard cries of distress, and in a little shed that had only three sides to keep out the cold, I found a poor family actually starving."

"Yes, sir—my lord, I mean!" said the woman, confusedly.

"Address me by the first title, if you please," said Dick, in a manner that made the woman more and more convinced the second was the one belonging to him. "I found this family, ten of them in all, actually dying of hunger—dying of hunger!"

"Lor' a mussey, sir! You don't say so!"

"It is true! For the shame of England, it is true. They were all so far gone that not one was strong enough to come here and get some food, so I determined to come myself, and take it myself. I never do good actions by halves. So just put what articles you think proper into a basket so that I may carry them conveniently, and I will pay you liberally for the whole!"

CHAPTER LIX.

TOM KING IS MUCH ALARMED BY HEARING A MYSTERIOUS VOICE IN THE OLD MANSION.

"Yes, sir, I am sure your lordship is very good. It is not many that would do as you've done! I s'pose, though, you are a stranger in these parts. Excuse, me, my lord, for venturing to say so much."

The woman bustled about and procured a wicker basket as she spoke, into which she stowed some bread, butter, tea, eggs, and such like.

"Yes, I am a visitor here."

"I thought so, sir. At Lord Wingfield's, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Dick, who no more knew who Lord Wingfield was, than the man in the moon, but conjectured he was some nobleman who had a residential estate in the neighbourhood. "I have come down to my cousin's for a short visit."

"Oh! indeed, my lord. I didn't know Lord Wingfield had a cousin, but of course now he must have"——

"How much will they all come to, my good woman? *I* am anxious to get back. They will wonder what has become of me, for I only went out for a stroll after dinner!"

"Well, sir, your lordship, I mean," said the old woman, who was rather at a loss how to appraise her goode, but thought she ought to avail herself of this opportunity to get profit. "Altogether, basket and all, they comes to seven—yes, eight-and-sixpence."

She would have sold the same articles to one of her ordinary customers for half-a-crown.

"Very good," said Dick, "here's half-a-guinea. You need not trouble about the change."

If the old woman had had any doubts about Dick being a lord, they were completely dissipated after that one politic speech.

"Your lordship's very good—very good," she said, regretting that she had not asked more. "I am sorry, but I am a lone woman, and there is no one I can send to carry the basket for you."

"And a deuced good job, too," muttered Dick to himself, "for such a thing would have been very embarrassing."

"There's my neighbour's little boy, Josiah, would have been glad to carry the basket for your lordship. It seems ridiculous for you to have to do it."

"Not at all, not at all," said Dick, placing the handle of the basket. "There's no false pride about me, and I am never ashamed of being seen doing a good action."

"Ah! my lord, them's the sentiments I should like all lords to have. Old England would be very different to what it is."

"It would—it would!"

"Allow me to open the door for your lordship," said the woman, rushing hastily round the counter, and bringing down an avalanche of bottles in her course. "Allow me."

Dick stood aside, and permitted the old woman to open the door.

"Good night, my good woman, good night."

"Good night, your lordship!" repeated the woman, curtseying to the g—— "Who'd ha' thought I should have lived to see the day that I should have waited on a real lord, and Lord Wingfield's cousin, too, and then to see him carry the things away on his own noble arm! Oh! it clean bangs all, that it do!"

Dick Turpin hurried off along the village street, and was so fortunate as not to meet a soul.

His ruse tickled his fancy mightily.

But it had taken more time to obtain the provisions than he had calculated upon, and he knew that Tom would be losing all patience, if not getting positively uneasy about his safety.

So when Dick reached the lane leading to the gates of Durley Chine, he set off at a trot, which, though apparently not calling forth any particular exertion enabled him to get over a good deal of ground in a short time.

Very soon he had the satisfaction of seeing the iron gates before him.

He unlocked them and entered, carefully relocking them behind him.

Then, noticing that the long grass had the appearance of having been trampled upon, he spent a few moments in restoring it to a perpendicular position.

In this he succeeded very well.

Running along the carriage drive he soon emerged upon the lawn, which he crossed without relaxing his speed, and then bounded up the steps.

Tom he found was standing at the window watching for him.

"Success!" said Dick, handing him the basket; "there's enough there to keep us nearly a week."

But Tom took the basket in perfect silence, and then, holding up his hand, he said impressively—

"Hush!"

Dick was astonished.

"What is the matter?"

"Hush!" said Tom, more earnestly than before.

"Oh! I see how it is," said Dick to himself. "He has gone too long without food, and his wound has made him slightly delirious!"

This was a natural enough supposition, and certainly Tom's behaviour was sufficient to induce it, for what earthly motive could he have for saying, "Hush!" in so mysterious a manner?

Dick put his foot on the balustrade, and crawled through the window.

As soon as he stood in the hall, he felt Tom clutch him tightly by the arm, and whisper—

"Hush!"

Dick began to feel alarmed.

"Hang it all, Tom, what the deuce is the matter?" he said. "Speak out, what is it?"

Tom did not reply, but drew him into the room which they had occupied on the previous night, and closed the door cautiously behind him.

In obedience to his promise, Tom had made a fire.

It was burning brightly, and diffused a pleasant light.

Dick looked anxiously at his companion's countenance.

Tom was pale.

There was, too, something like a scared look about his eyes.

Dick was more and more bewildered.

"For heaven's sake, Tom, my friend," he said, "speak! put me out of my suspense by telling me what has happened to cause this great change in your behaviour!"

Tom came forward.

"Keep your distance!" said his companion, retreating as he advanced. "You look just a little mad!"

"I do feel strangely!" said Tom; "but, Dick, so sure as you and I are present here in this apartment, so surely are there other inhabitants of Durley Chine beside ourselves!"

"Pho—pho!" said Dick, drawing a long breath, "and is that all? Here help me with the supper, and let's have something to eat!"

"Do not disregard or disbelieve what I tell you. I am convinced that what I say is true!"

"Very well. I don't say it isn't," said Dick, who thought it would be best to humour him. "But before I listen to what you have to say further, I must have something to eat!"

Accordingly Dick commenced transferring the contents of the basket to the table.

The craving of hunger was strong in Tom's breast, and the sight of the plai yet tempting viands made him forget all else.

For the next ten minutes both were perfectly silent.

By the end of that time, however, their appetite having been appeased, Dick spoke—

"It was quite time you did have something eatable, Tom," he said, "for I do believe if you had gone much longer without, you would have clean lost your senses. I am sure you were a little mad when you stood at the window and said 'Hush!' in the fashion you did!"

"Perhaps so—perhaps so! My wound—fasting for so long—and the day of excitement we have had, may have caused my senses to play me false."

"I should think such a result was very probable."

"And yet," said Tom, "surely I cannot have made so great a mistake. Listen!"

"He got up as he spoke and opened the door a little.

Then he assumed an attitude of intense listening.

"I can hear nothing," said Dick, "except the sighing and murmuring of the wind in the deserted corridors. Do you?"

"Not now," said Tom. "But let the door remain as it is, just a little way ajar."

"Very well. You are on the side to feel the draught, not I!"

"I do not care for it," said Tom, resuming his seat; "and now I will try to tell you what I heard after you left me."

"Do so."

"I stood at the hall window watching you until I could see you no longer. Then I returned to this room, broke up a couple more chairs, and lighted the fire."

"Yes, what then?"

"This, of course, took up some little time, but still I thought it almost time you were back. I felt dreadfully sick and faint for want of food. My wound smarted horribly, and I continually saw bright moving figures, sometimes like stars and sometimes like faces, flitting before my eyes."

"Those symptoms are easily accounted for."

"I am aware of it! Well, I sat here in the chair for what seemed to me to be an endless time, and then I got up and staggered to the little window in the hall. I say staggered, because I found my legs had scarcely strength enough to support the weight of my body!"

"Well—well, go on! What next?" said Dick; "for goodness sake don't be so prolix!"

"So what?"

"Oh! hang it all, don't beat about the bush so much. Come to the point."

"I was at it, and should have told you by now if you hadn't interrupted me. Don't be so impatient!"

"Go on! Go on!"

"You may laugh at what I say as much as you like, but I'm confident it's true for all that, and that if I was exhausted from want of food, that my senses played me no trick. While I was standing at the hall window waiting and watching for you to make your appearance, I distinctly heard a voice."

"A voice?"

"Yes, a voice."

"What words did it utter?"

"I could not distinguish the words. It was a voice alone I heard."

"Nonsense, Tom, you must have been mistaken. Who is there here besides ourselves possessing the faculty of speech?"

"That I cannot say," said Tom, "but I am as confident as I am of my own existence at the present moment, that while I was at the window in the hall I heard the sound of a voice, if not voices, and that is why I said 'Hush!' as soon as you appeared, for I thought it only natural that, if I heard someone speak, that someone would hear us speak also!"

CHAPTER LX.

THE TWO FRIENDS PROBE YET DEEPER INTO THE MYSTERIES OF DUDLEY CRYPT, AND GET TAKEN PRISONERS FOR THEIR PAINS.

Dick Turpin looked narrowly into Tom King's face as he spoke, and saw at once that his comrade was fully convinced of the truth of what he had uttered.

That there was anything supernatural about it, Dick would not for one moment believe.

He could not yet divest himself of the idea that it was Tom's fancy.

Yet it might not be, and it most certainly behoved him for his own safety's sake to act with as much precaution as possible.

"You do not credit me," said Tom, "but it is true for all that! Now what voice could it have been?"

"How should I be able to tell any more than yourself? Now pray, Tom, recollect how startled—I might say frightened—we both were this morning at hearing that awful shrieking sound, and yet how simple was the cause that produced it!"

"I know it was," said Tom King; "but I could credit the wind making such a sound as that, but not imitating a human voice. There is something about that, I take it, that makes it impossible for anything to imitate it."

"True!" said Dick, uneasily. "True! We ought not to dismiss such a thing as this without further consideration, even if we could."

"And that I very much doubt," said Tom. "But come, my friend, I am refreshed. My brain is clear. What are we to do?"

"That is very hard indeed to say!"

"It is."

"If we could only hear the sound again, we should have something like a foundation to go upon!"

"I am aware of that, and that is why I put the door open just now, in order that we might hear what was taking place outside with greater plainness."

"Exactly! We will listen! And now, Tom, assuming that your hearing did not deceive you—and setting aside all thoughts of supernatural agency—from whose lips, think you, was it likely the sound came?"

"There you puzzle me, I cannot form the least idea. The place has been so long closed up, and when we came we found no traces of any one having made an entrance before us."

"That we certainly did not!"

"And I think we may say, with greater safety still, that no one has entered during the time we have been here."

"We have not heard any one, and surely no one could have got in without our doing so."

"Certainly not."

"Who can it be then?"

"Not a friend!"

"No—more likely an enemy! Yet stay, Tom. Do you think there is a probability of our being tracked hither by the police, and that they have found some means of entering the place so distant from this as for us not to hear it?"

"I am bewildered, and know not what to think!" said Tom, springing from his seat, and pacing up and down the room.

"So am I; but it will never do to remain so. We must make up our minds to a certain course of action, and that at once."

"What do you advise?"

"I must think what will be best. You know, in nearly all cases, I am in favour of a bold course of action!"

"It is generally best."

"Shall we adopt it in the present case? Say the word. I consent!"

"I think it will be best," said Turpin. "Come along, Tom! Look to your weapons carefully, and we will soon see from whence this mysterious voice came!"

As he spoke, Dick, with an air of great resolution, now that he had made up his mind what he was going to do, rose from his seat, re primed his pistols, took up his lantern and crow-bar, and closely followed by Tom King, left the room, and entered the hall.

Turpin had taken the precaution to turn the dark slide of his lantern, so that not the faintest ray of light proceeded from it.

Tom King gently closed the door.

They stood then surrounded by a darkness and a silence that were positively dreadful.

Without making the least sound our friends crept along the hall.

As soon as they reached the extremity both paused and listened.

When Tom heard the voice he was too much su



[DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING ARE BROUGHT BEFORE THE SMUGGLER CHIEF.]

to take particular heed of the exact direction from whence it came. It was somewhere in the mansion, he felt confident.

Therefore, unless they should hear it again, they would have nothing to guide them.

Not half a yard from where they stood was a flight of steps leading to the lower portion of the building.

Dick touched Tom lightly on the arm and whispered:

"Shall we go down here and see if there is anything to rouse suspicion?"

"Yes, by all means; I feel it would be impossible to rest until this affair is thoroughly sifted."

"I should not exactly be at ease. I fancy there is little likelihood of anyone being above, considering we explored that part of the place!"

"You may depend the voice ascended these steps," said Tom, "for although everything has been so silent ever since, I am still firmly convinced that I did hear a voice!"

"Very well, my friend, follow me, and we shall soon know whether you were right or not."

So saying, Turpin fearlessly descended the stairs.

Still he did not go rashly, for he knew not how sure his footing might be; but the bright rays of the lamp showed him that all was well.

On reaching the bottom of the stairs they saw before and on each side of them several doors. These were tried one after another, and found fast locked.

Dick turned round to his companion with a smile upon his lips.

"There is nothing here, you see, or, at all events, everything has the appearance of not having been disturbed. I am sure it was your fancy, Tom! Do you feel inclined to prosecute your search any further?"

"I do," said Tom, who was vexed to think Dick should be so sure he was mistaken. "Here are some more steps. Let us go down them!"

"With all pleasure imaginable. These lead to the cellars, I should think. Perhaps we may be lucky enough to fall across some wine, which would be very acceptable just now!"

The stairs certainly did have the appearance of leading to the cellars.

They were of rough bricks, and so were the walls.

Both were covered with humid exhalations.

It became now absolutely necessary for our friends to tread with the utmost caution, and feel one foot secure before they moved the other, for the slime on the steps was treacherous in the extreme, and there was nothing on either side that permitted a hand hold.

At length, to their great satisfaction, the bottom of the steps was reached.

The descent had occupied many minutes, for the steps were numerous. They were now on a level with the foundations of the building.

The atmosphere that entered their lungs was most impure and chill, and they breathed with difficulty.

The lantern seemed to have diminished the brilliancy of its light, or else the air itself was of a greater density than that above.

They could not see to any great distance around them, but they appeared to be standing in vaults of great extent.

The flooring was quite wet.

Our friends kept on in as direct a line as they could, expecting in a short time to come to some obstacle that would prevent their further progress.

In this anticipation they walked on for a hundred yards or more.

Still there was no appearance of a termination.

Black empty space was on all sides of them.

There was another circumstance that had made itself manifest for some little time.

The ground gradually sloped lower and lower.

Dick came to a halt and flashed the lantern about him.

"I'll be hanged if I half like this place," he said. "I am cold to the bone, and we seem on the highroad to the infernal regions. What's the good of going any further? I think it is pretty clear now you made a mistake!"

"I don't see it," said Tom, obstinately. "Let us go on further. This place must have an end somewhere."

"One would think so; but I can see neither beginning nor end. However, if you are resolved, come on!"

They, therefore, once more resumed their course.

The descent became more rapid at every step.

But there were no signs either of roof, sides, or end; the only thing they could see was the ground, which was running with moisture everywhere.

Their footsteps echoed hollowly in that gloomy and sepulchral-looking place.

"I am puzzled beyond measure to think what kind of place this is."

"Are you? Well, I cannot say that I am!"

"Indeed?"

"Yes; the mansion above us is built upon a rock which overhangs the sea, and I fancy these are natural cavities in this rock which were used for cellars; and very good ones they would make!"

"Ah! just so! I don't doubt it. They are extensive enough, goodness knows!"

"They are! How far, think you, are we from the end of this place?"

"That's just what I should like to know. It seems pretty clear there is no one here but ourselves!"

"Have you anything small and heavy in your pocket—a stone, or something of that sort?"

"No, I haven't. What do you want it for?"

"Why, if one of us took a stone, or something of the kind, and threw it straight before us, we should have some idea of how far we have to go, for I have quite made up my mind not to turn back until I have seen where this leads to!"

"The deuce you have! However, I haven't a stone, but here is a bullet. I daresay that will answer the purpose just as well!"

CHAPTER LXI.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN HAVE SOME SINGULAR ADVENTURES IN THE VAULTS, AND ARE RATHER TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

"It will be the very thing!" replied Tom King. "Hand it here!"

Dick accordingly gave to his comrade a bullet of rather large size.

"Stand aside," said Tom, preparing to throw it. "One—two—three!"

As he uttered the word three Tom threw the bullet straight before him in the darkness with all the power he had in his arm.

They waited anxiously to hear it strike.

In the intense stillness that was around them they expected the slight sound it would make would reach their ears, even supposing the bullet fell at a considerable distance.

But they waited in vain.

Not the faintest sound arose.

"This is incomprehensible!" said Dick.

"It appears to be; but let us push forward. We must find out something very soon!"

They now resumed their course.

In a few minutes the nature of the ground changed.

Up to now it had been wet, but tolerably hard. Now it was very soft and their feet sank deeply in.

By the reflection of the lantern too they could see that here and there the water had accumulated into small pools.

Foul and noisome insects, such as damp and darkness combined never fail to generate, crawled lazily from before their feet, or plunged with a dull plash into the pools.

"This solves the mystery of our not hearing the fall of the bullet at once," said Tom King. "It would sink into this soft ooze without a sound!"

"It would. But hark! Cannot you hear faintly a strange rumbling noise! What can it be?"

"There is only one thing that can cause such a sound!"

"What is it?"

"The washing of the sea against a rocky coast."

"You are right—that is it! Come, it is possible we may find some mode of exit from Durley Chine which is either unknown or forgotten!"

And despite the disagreeable nature of the ground they pushed forward with fresh spirit.

As they advanced, the rumbling sound became plainer and plainer, until at length they could distinguish the dashing of the very waves themselves.

The path descended very rapidly.

"Hilloa!" said Dick suddenly, as looking before him he saw the beams of the lantern rested on something. "Hilloa, Tom! what have we here? This is a discovery, indeed!"

"That it certainly is! Why, they are casks without number piled up!"

"They are!"

"Shift the light a little! There, that will do! Why, they stretch out on both sides as far as we can see! Well, I never! Are they full, I wonder?"

Full of surprise at coming so unexpectedly upon a larger number of casks than they had ever seen at one time in their lives before, the two friends hurried forward to obtain a nearer view.

Yes, there was no mistake, there the casks were. They were small ones, and of the kind generally called kegs.

Dick knocked several with his knuckles.

From the dullness of the sound it was quite certain they were full of liquid of some kind or other.

"I say, Dick," said King, rather triumphantly. "Do you think I was wrong when I said I heard a voice?"

"It would be premature to say yet! There seems some degree of probability about it now!"

"Rather! Just look at the ground!"

Dick did so, and was astonished to find the impression of numberless footsteps on the soft floor of the vault.

This was confirmation indeed.

Our friends got anxious and excited.

They could feel their hearts knocking against their ribs, and their breathing became short and laboured, as is often the case when people are under more than usual circumstances of excitation.

"Some one has been here, that's very certain!"

"No one can dispute the evidence before us, I should think," said Tom King. "If my stomach was empty I was certain I heard a voice!"

"Well, it seems as if you did. Still they must have been nearer the stairs than we are now or you could never have heard them!"

"I don't doubt that for a moment!"

"I wish we had thought of looking for the traces of

footsteps before, but the truth is, I placed no credence in your story!"

"I know you did not, and therefore said nothing; but if you were not looking out I was, and I saw the foot-prints quite close to the bottom of the steps!"

"Then why didn't you speak?"

"Why didn't I speak?"

"Yes"

"Because I thought I would serve you out if I could, though of course if you had stoutly refused to go any further I should have told you!"

"Well—well! It appears to me we have by no means come to the end of the remarkable sights at Durley Chine!"

"No! On the contrary. I think we shall find we are on the threshold of some new discoveries!"

"No doubt of it! But I should uncommonly like to know what there is in those casks! Have you anything you can tap one with?"

"I have not."

"Nothing that would answer the purpose?"

"No. I left an auger which I had with me on the table in the room above."

"That's a pity! However it is not worth while to go and fetch it. Let us see what more there is to be seen."

"It will be best to follow these foot-marks. They will surely lead us somewhere."

"Yes, it seems almost like a path. Come along!"

They made better progress now, for they had firmer ground to walk upon.

About two minutes brought them to a place where the path led right through the casks, which were piled up on either side like a wall.

The murmuring of the sea grew plainer and plainer.

But now another sound begun to mingle with it.

The hum of many human voices.

"Look to your pistols, Tom," said Dick, as soon as his ear detected the new sound. "Look to the priming. There must be many people here, and they are more likely to be enemies than friends!"

"Unfortunately, yes!"

"Still I fancy as we are, should any one take the aggressive, we should be a pretty good match for more than half-a-dozen!"

But scarcely had this assertion left his lips than the highwaymen emerged from the path between the casks into an open space, and before either knew what had happened the lantern was dashed violently from Dick's hand on to the ground, and both our friends felt themselves seized upon from behind by numberless hands.

They were strong hands too, and each one gripped as though he never meant to loose his hold.

Resistance was impossible.

They were completely overpowered.

At least half-a-dozen hands held them firmly by the arms.

Dick Turpin and Tom King were prisoners.

CHAPTER LXII.

FURTHER PERILOUS ADVENTURES IN THE CAVERNS.

So utterly unexpected was this attack, and so suddenly ended, that it was a minute or so before either of our friends had any clear idea of what had taken place.

They were soon aroused to the fact that they were captives.

But who were their captors?

That they would have given no inconsiderable trifle to know.

But all was darkness the most intense and profound.

Both could hear the heavy breathing of those who held them prisoners, and could tell to a little whereabouts they stood in consequence, but not the least bit could they see.

It was Dick who spoke first.

"Who are you that have dared to lay your hands upon us? Speak. Speak at once!"

"Ha! ha!"

That was the only reply he got to his speech.

But almost immediately a gruff voice said—

"Bring them along! Quick! I will await them in the lower cave."

"Oh, indeed!" thought Dick, "now I wonder who you are? Not a police officer certainly, so there's some consolation in that!"

There might be, but it was no great one, one would think.

Obeying the orders they had received the men who held our friends set forward.

Tom began, in spite of the wound in his shoulder, to struggle most desperately.

"Easy does it, Tom!" cried Turpin as he heard the scuffling behind him. "Give in quietly. It will soon be all right provided you don't say who we are."

The men took no notice of this. At all events they made no remark about it.

Tom ceased his efforts, and allowed himself to be hurried along in the intense darkness without the least resistance.

Their captors must have been very familiar with the place, for seeing was quite out of the question. Yet they did not make one false step.

Those who held Dick walked first.

About half-a-dozen steps behind them came the others.

Presently a voice said hoarsely in Dick's ear—

"Descend the steps! They are thirteen in number and steep!"

The same caution was given to Tom King.

The whole then passed down the steps.

Still in deep darkness.

They were hurried along another passage, at the extremity of which they could see a faint ray of light.

So faint that in any less darkness it would have been imperceptible.

Dick hailed it with pleasure.

In a few moments now would his curiosity be gratified, and he would surely know by whom he had been taken prisoner.

The ray of light increased in brightness.

The muttering of voices reached their ears.

The passage seemed a most interminable length.

But, as the longest lane must have a turning, so must the longest passage have an end, and in a few minutes, to Dick's great satisfaction, a kind of curtain was drawn aside, and he was hurried forward into what he supposed was the lower cavern.

One hasty glance around was sufficient to enable him to have a clear idea of what kind of place he was in.

But it will take us some few minutes to describe it.

Contrary to the place they had just left, this one was well lighted—at least, the contrast made it appear to be.

It was a very lofty cavern, with long graceful-looking stalactites depending from the roof.

In shape it was irregular, but very spacious.

The floor was hard and calcareous.

At irregular intervals round the walls, long pinewood torches were stuck in the crevices, and these diffused a ruddy light over the place, as well as marked out its extent.

Near the centre a group of about a dozen men were congregated.

Several of these held torches above their heads.

Our friends saw at once into whose hands they had fallen.

Smugglers.

There could be no question of it.

No doubt there was some little unknown creek which led from the sea into that cavern.

The vaults under Durley Chine were made the receptacle of the smuggled goods, where they were housed for whatever time they thought proper.

Many things lying about showed that they had only just completed a large and valuable run.

The casks which our friends had seen had not been there above twenty-four hours.

The semi-nautical garb which the men wore, and the circumstances by which they were surrounded, betrayed at once their occupation.

These things were noted by our friends as they were led across the cavern to where the group we have been speaking of were standing.

Among these was one whose gigantic athletic form and authoritative air pointed him out as the chief of the lawless gang.

As our friends approached, the little group dispersed to the right and left, so that they stood face to face with the captain.

By his command the torches were so held as to cast their full light upon the prisoners, who were still held tightly by the arms by those who had secured them.

The smuggler chief—or king, as he delighted to be called—surveyed the highwaymen with undisguised surprise.

"Capsize me in a squall!" he ejaculated. "What strange fish have we here? They don't belong to the coast-guard, I'll be sworn!"

We have before had occasion to state that the dress worn by Dick Turpin and Tom King was a kind of undress military uniform, and such as was worn by cavalry officers when off duty.

But this attire was by no means confined to persons in the army. Many of the young lords and beaus about town clothed themselves in a similar manner.

A hundred years ago or so, the difference of rank, station, and occupation was more easily distinguished by the dress than they are at the present day.

Now it is difficult, with respect to dress merely, to tell a peer of the realm from a clerk in a lawyer's office

Then it was quite different.

The smuggler chief therefore saw immediately that the persons he had taken prisoners were not revenue officers, as he had no doubt fancied they were, but perhaps gentlemen of birth, fortune, and position.

His bearing and manners, therefore, were comparatively civil.

While this scrutiny was going on, both the highwaymen were occupied with the same thought.

Should they make themselves known?

Dick looked at his comrade.

He saw at once that he was considering the same thought as himself.

Dick shook his head slightly, with a motion that no one would have noticed.

But Tom saw and understood it.

They were to keep their identity a secret.

This took place just as the smuggler chief finished speaking.

Dick considered it a favourable moment for him to make some remark.

He therefore fixed his eyes boldly upon the smuggler's countenance, and said, with an air of most perfect calmness and hauteur—

"My friend and myself are waiting for some explanation, which I suppose must come from you, as you appear to be in command. Why are we made prisoners, thus?"

Dick's tone and bearing produced upon the smugglers just the effect he desired and intended it should.

Tom King sustained the character of an injured gentleman to perfection!

"Yes," he said, as soon as the words were out of Turpin's mouth. "I wish to have an explanation of your conduct in dragging me here like this."

The smuggler chief felt convinced they were of the blood royal itself.

"We are sorry you should have been found spying about our warehouse. You know our secret. Our secret is our lives. Therefore you must die!"

"Nonsense," said Dick. "Not till our time comes! Let us be released, we wish to speak a word or two to you in private."

The smuggler reflected a minute, but then feeling sure he had his prisoners quite safe beyond all hope of escape, he made a sign with his hand to the men who released the highwaymen at once.

"Follow me," said the chief.

With an assumption of great dignity, our friends marched behind him.

The remaining smugglers, who had every confidence in their chief, troubled themselves no more about the strangers.

At the far side of the cavern the chief paused, and drawing aside a curtain, motioned the two friends to enter.

They, seeing that they stood upon the threshold of an apartment luxuriously furnished with articles of foreign manufacture, did not hesitate to obey.

This room was lighted with three large lamps, and a bright fire was burning on the hearth.

The chief entered, and, with the manner of one who feels he is at home, sauntered across the room, and flung himself upon a large silken ottoman.

One would have thought, by their manner, they had lived there all their lives, and so far from being strangers and prisoners, intimate friends of the chief, for both Turpin and King swaggered up to two chairs, which they very coolly carried to the vicinity of the fire, and where they could see what expression the smuggler's face wore.

Then they seated themselves.

Turpin crossed one leg over the other, and leaned back in the chair in a negligent posture, while he twirled the ends of his fine mustaches with a grace that was quite perfect.

As for Tom King, he was determined not to be behindhand with his comrade.

Observing an iron bar upon the hearth, he took it up and arranged the fire with it to his satisfaction.

Then he took hold of his chair and sat down in it, with his legs astride the seat, and his hands leaning upon the back.

On these he rested his chin.

The smuggler king neither moved nor spoke, but sat gazing at the highwaymen with the most unbounded surprise.

The coolness of their behaviour, when so environed with peril as they were, quite staggered him.

But he was a brave man, and, like almost any one who is truly brave, admired and appreciated bravery in others.

He admired their slim and well-knit figures, and made a mental estimate of the amount of strength possessed by each.

And now, to his surprise, the smuggler king felt himself embarrassed.

The time had come for him to speak, and he knew not what to say.

Dick and Tom waited quietly.

The smuggler settled himself in an attitude upon the ottoman.

"A-hem!" he said.

Our friends took no notice.

They enjoyed the scene mightily.

They were amused to think what a difference their putting on the calm resolute bearing they did made.

But the smuggler felt his embarrassment, so far from diminishing, increased.

The longer he waited the worse he was.

He resolved to make a bold plunge.

"Gentlemen!"

He spoke in quite a deferential and subdued tone of voice.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I can see, without looking twice, that you are persons of high birth; I can also see, which gratifies me much more, that you are a couple of singularly brave men. Your behaviour here sufficiently proves that."

The chief paused.

Our friends waved their hands deprecatingly as he uttered his compliments on their prowess, and at the same time in a manner which meant "Go on."

"But," said the smuggler, seriously, "you were found under very suspicious circumstances—excuse me for saying as much. Never mind; I saw you were gentlemen, and I treated you as such!"

It was pretty clear the chief expected that this speech would call forth some sort of reply.

He was disappointed.

His guests contented themselves with simply bowing carelessly, as if in assent to his proposition.

"I say, gentlemen, you were both found under very suspicious circumstances. You were prying about our storehouse. You discovered our secret, and that the vaults below the deserted mansion of Durley Chine were made the receptacle of smuggled goods. I say you have found out all this. Now a code of laws has been framed by which we all act, and from which we never deviate. In that code of rules it is expressly stated that, should any person discover the secret, they should have the choice of two alternatives—it being at my option whether the alternatives are given—to submit to be put to death, or else become members of the band."

The smuggler chief, as he finished this very long speech, wiped the perspiration from his face with a French silk pocket-handkerchief, and waited with great eagerness and anxiety for our friends to make some reply.

CHAPTER LXIII.

PERILS AND DANGERS THICKEN ABOUT OUR FRIENDS.

To the surprise, then, no less of the smuggler chief than Tom King, Dick Turpin put on an appearance of great candour as he spoke to the following effect.

"I have nothing to complain of in the way of treatment, and I am sure I can answer for my friend; but if you will listen I will give you some explanation of our presence among your goods."

"I shall only be too glad to pay the greatest attention to what you have to say, gentlemen. But first help yourself to a glass or two of wine."

The highwaymen accepted his invitation.

"You must know, in the first place," said Dick, reseating himself, while Tom looked wonderingly at him to know what he was going to say, "you must know, in the first place, although we do not want it mentioned, we are of very high rank, indeed. That is to say, our fathers are, which is much the same thing."

"Exactly!" said the smuggler, with a gratified smile at his own perspicacity. "I could see at once that you were gentlemen—real gentlemen!"

Both highwaymen perpetrated two very deep bows.

Dick resumed.

"At present I cannot inform you of our precise rank and station, for obvious reasons!"

"Ahem!" coughed Tom, but Dick went on without taking the least notice of the interruption.

"But you, as a man of discernment, must be well aware that not one young man in a thousand manages to live in London upon the allowance which is made him."

"That's very true," said the smuggler, sententiously. "Dice, wine, and women is the very devil!"

"Well, a day or two back—mind I am telling you this in confidence!"

"Yes—yes!"

"Well, a day or two back we found ourselves literally penniless, and what to do we knew not. We had exhausted every resource, and were driven to our wits' end. At length my companion mentioned Durley Chine to me."

"Ah!"

"Yes. He told me the strange story about it being shut up and so forth, which I daresay you know very well!"

"I do!"

"Well, he suggested that we should make our way down here secretly, enter the mansion by stealth, and then see if we could not find some valuables to take away with us. My friend here said there was every reason to believe there was a large sum in gold, jewels, plate, and such like scattered about the mansion."

"Ha! ha!"

"You laugh?"

"Excuse me, I beg! Go on, sir, if you please."

"Well, I thought the suggestion good, and down we came. We got in unperceived, and began our search for the valuables."

"Ha! ha! ha! What did you find?"

Dick stroked his moustache.

"Why," he said, "we had a great deal of trouble, but found nothing!"

"I thought not!"

"You—you thought not?"

"Yes!"

"May I ask why?"

"Oh! certainly. I paid the place a visit myself about—let me see—twelve years ago, and carried off everything that was of value!"

"Ha! I see! That's why you laughed?"

"It is."

"But, since you yourself thought well of it, you must give us credit for having hit upon a good idea!"

A complacent smile stole over the smuggler's face. His vanity was tickled.

"Yes," he said. "But finish, pray, though it is scarcely necessary."

"It is not! However, after searching every room, we came to the stairs leading to the vaults, and the idea then very naturally occurred to us of descending and searching them also as a kind of forlorn hope!"

"Just so! And while you were thus occupied my men, thinking you spies, made you prisoners."

"That's it! So now you are in possession of all the facts, what do you intend to do?"

The smuggler reflected.

Dick's story was so natural and circumstantial, that he never for one moment thought it fictitious in the least particular.

Tom King was exceedingly pleased with his companion's inventive genius, which so far had helped them out of what at first appeared an insuperable difficulty.

But, although they did not suffer the ghost of such a thing to appear upon their countenances, we, as faithful historians, must inform the reader that they waited with great anxiety for the smuggler chief to speak.

"Well, gentlemen!" he said, at last, "it appears to me now that your being taken prisoners by my crew will turn out a very lucky thing for you!"

"I shall be very glad if it does," said Dick.

"It is quite clear your expedition to Durley Chine would have been a futile one, for I give you my word that there is nothing in the vaults that was worth your carrying away. But, as you seem to have the right spirit in you—brave, and all that sort of thing—in want of money, and not over particular how you get it, why the very best thing you can do is to join our band for a time! What do you say?"

This was what Dick had hoped for.

But he pretended the proposition came quite unexpectedly upon him, and he asked for a few minutes to consider upon it.

"Oh, certainly!" replied the smuggler, rising from his seat. "Take as long as you like. Talk it over between yourselves, for it is necessary I should run down to the beach for half-an-hour. I will leave you here as you are, if you will give me your words of honour not to attempt to escape!"

"Willingly," said both our friends in one breath, as they, too, rose. "We give you our words that we will make no attempt at escape."

"Very well, gentlemen! That is all I require," said the chief. "You may depend the best thing you can do will be to accept my offer!"

So saying, the chief pushed aside the curtain, and passing into the outer cavern, left our friends alone.

Neither, however, uttered a syllable for some moments. They were on their guard.

Dick drew Tom into the centre of the room, and spoke to him in a whisper so faint that it was almost inaudible.

"We are safest from eaves-droppers here," said Dick. "No one can be very close to us. It is my belief that the smuggler has only made a feint of going away, and that he has made his way to some place where he can both see and overhear what happens!"

"Like enough," said Tom. "Like enough!"

"I may be wrong, but it can be no harm to be on the safe side. What did you think of my narrative? Was it plausible?"

"First-rate; and as for the chief, I look upon him as a jolly old file."

"What I want to say is this. By no means let slip a hint which will serve to make him aware who we really are."

"I will take care of that!"

"So will I! And now most unquestionably the best thing we can do is to join his band!"

"Very well, my friend. If you are willing I am!"

"One of my principal motives for wishing to join is that we shall be quite lost sight of, and shall be able to return to the road with spirit!"

"Ah! the road!" said Tom King. "Hurrah for the road—hur—"

Dick put his hand over his month.

"You have forgotten your caution."

"I did for the minute."

"Be careful, or you will spoil all. Now for my own part, to return to the subject, I see no great harm in smuggling!"

"Certainly not!"

"Very well, then. The conscientious part of the business is settled!"

Tom laughed.

"I daresay we shall like the change very well for a time, and when we are tired of it we will give them the slip. We shall be sure to have plenty of chances!"

"Oh, yes, that will be no trouble! But how about Bess?"

"Ah!"

"You had forgotten her!"

"I had."

"What shall you do?"

"What can I? The only thing will be to let her remain where she is and take care of herself. I'll warrant she does not stray far. Perhaps she is safer there than in any place we could find."

"If she is not seen."

"That is the only thing. But come, have you made up your about joining?"

"Quite."

"Very well, be circumspect and don't forget the parts we have assumed."

"Do not fear! We will take our seats now, and wait for the arrival of the chief."

In ten minutes afterwards he entered.

From the appearance of his clothes, which were muddy and wet, they considered he was quite in earnest when he said he was going down to the beach.

Our friends were pleased.

"It will be a rough night and no mistake!" he said. "I never saw the ocean such a colour but once before, and that was a matter of twenty years ago, when a hurricane swept over all England, and destroyed nearly all the shipping off the coast! That was an awful night indeed!"

"And you say the sea looks the same colour to-night!"

"It does! Thank goodness, our cargo is safe on shore. But come," he added, "have you made up your minds? Do you accept my offer?"

"We have talked the matter over."

"Yes."

"And, under the circumstances, have come to the conclusion, we had better join."

"Bravo!" said the chief, his eye sparkling with gratification. "I shall be proud of having two such brave hearts under my command."

To conceal a smile, as much as anything else, the two highwaymen bowed deeply.

"Are you ready to join now."

"Yes," said Dick and Tom, in one voice, "at once!"

"And your names?"

"Those we shall be obliged to keep secret, as well as our rank, as we said before.

CHAPTER LXIV.

DOINGS IN THE SMUGGLERS' CAVE.—OUR FRIENDS BEGIN TO HAVE SOME MISGIVINGS.

"VERY good," said the smuggler chief, "you can keep that a secret as long as you like, but you will have to choose two names by which you may be known."

"Just so," said Turpin. "You can call me Richard."

"And me, Thomas," said Tom King.

"Let us go, then, into the outer cavern. It will be necessary for you to take the oath of fidelity in the presence of all the crew."

To this proposition our friends were obliged to consent.

It seemed strange, having been so long accustomed to command themselves, to be under the orders of another.

And yet the thing pleased them, from its perfect strangeness.

On reaching the large cave, they found assembled there a goodly number of men.

On a future occasion Dick counted them, and found they were twenty-three in number. Including the chief and themselves, twenty-six, in all.

Rather a formidable gang.

It would seem from their manner that they already were aware that two more members were about to be added to the band.

As soon as the two made their appearance, the whole of the smugglers formed themselves into a circle round them.

The oath was then administered.

Tom King and Dick Turpin were thenceforward sworn smugglers, and in duty bound to obey the chief, or, as he was styled, king.

In a very short time our friends contrived to make themselves at home.

They became immediately immense favourites with the crew.

It was at a late hour when they separated.

Three days passed thus, during which time Turpin and King took their turns with the rest in keeping guard.

One of the smugglers, who was well skilled in wounds, had attended to Tom's shoulder, which was now quite well.

But however grateful this rest at first was, our friends quickly wearied of it, and longed for the excitement of action.

The smuggler king still maintained his friendly demeanour towards them. He was delighted beyond measure that chance had thrown two such people in his way.

But on the evening of the third day, they observed an unusual amount of bustle and activity.

Of this, however, they feigned to take no notice, but waited for some explanation to be given them. They would not seek it.

Their curiosity was soon gratified, for the smuggler king approached them and said—

"To-night, you will have an opportunity of showing the crew what you are made of."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; we hope to land safely a very valuable cargo of French silks, in doing which, we shall want you to lend us a hand."

"We shall only be too glad to do that," said Dick, "for we were both growing tired of our inactivity. When shall you want our services?"

"In two hours," said the chief, "and during that time I should advise you to lay aside the clothes you have on, and attire yourselves like the rest. You will find them more suitable."

To this both consented, and when they, at the expiration of the time specified, made their appearance, the smuggler king scarcely knew them.

"Come on," he said. "Do nothing but follow me, and obey the instructions which I give."

We should have stated that during the three days neither of our friends had been permitted to approach the outlet of the caverns.

Now they were going to do so they looked about them observantly.

The large cave communicated, by means of a long winding passage, with a large natural hollow in the rocks.

At short and regular distances along this passage sentinels were always posted.

At the end of the passage nearest the beach was a door so artfully formed of stone that, when closed, it could not be distinguished from the remainder of the rocks, even by the keenest eye.

The door was thrown wide open, to allow the crew to pass out.

The cold night air, for it was long past sunset, came most refreshingly upon our friends.

They were the last to pass through the door and then it was closed quickly behind them.

Both looked back at the sound, but no trace of the outlet through which they had passed could they see.

The black shiny rocks rose up on all sides of them in huge gloomy masses.

The hollow in which they stood was almost in the shape of a horseshoe.

At low tide, which it then was, the sea left it firm and dry.

At high tide the water rose to a level with the little door in the rocks itself.

The waves beat with a sullen dash upon the sand.

At a word from the smuggler king the men divided themselves into two companies, and each one going to a particular crevice among the rocks, drew forth a cutter.

Slight judges of nautical matters as our two highwaymen were, they could not help noticing the beautiful make of these vessels, which were about the size of those with which men of war are provided.

The two boats were pushed into the water.

The smuggler chief took his seat in the larger one of the two and motioned our friends to sit near him.

They obeyed, and were followed by eight other men, who seated themselves at the oars.

All were fully armed.

The other boat was manned by ten more of the crew. Their directions were to follow the first cutter.

The boats were shoved off.

Very glad were Dick and Tom that they had not been separated.

The men at the oars bent to their task with right good will, and they made great speed through the water.

As soon, however, as they got far enough out at sea to feel the breeze, which was quite fresh, the smugglers laid aside their oars and hoisted a sail.

Those in the second boat did likewise.

Their speed was now much increased, and despite the shrewdness of the wind, our friends could not conceal a feeling of exultation as they went bounding over the waves.

Their pleasurable emotions were also still further increased from the fact that they were quite in the dark as to what they were about to do, or where they were about to go. The extent of their knowledge lay in the few words the smuggler king had spoken to them in the cavern.

As they looked back they could see the gable roofs of the deserted mansion at Durley Chine clearly defined against the lighter colour of the sky.

But their attention was quickly distracted from this object by the captain's motions.

A packet of some kind which he had taken from the pocket of his overall, lay upon the prow of the cutter.

It was conical in shape, and about six inches high.

The top was a sharp point.

To the surprise, then, of our friends, the smuggler king produced a match, with which he lighted the point of the conical package.

It flamed up suddenly for a moment, and then burst into a beautiful green flame.

For a space of time during which a person might, with moderate speed, have counted a hundred, the bright light continued.

The dark surging billows which rushed past the boat, had their crests tinged with a rare beauty as the light fell upon them, but its effect upon the faces of the crew was to make them look ghastly in the extreme.

At the expiration of the time mentioned, the bright and beautiful light faded away, leaving so black a darkness behind it that the nearest objects became for a few moments invisible.

That this was a signal was pretty evident, and our friends looked for its result with very great interest.

The smuggler king, who, in accordance with his invariable practice, had never spoken a word during the expedition, except when giving brief directions to his men, scanned the horizon with a keen and searching glance.

He was clearly expecting some reply.

But none came.

Dick, who was seated nearest to him, noticed that he sat down with a vexed and disappointed air.

In the meantime, the little vessels scudded at a prodigious rate through the water.

Our friends looked round.

The darkness had rapidly increased.

The moon would not rise for nearly five hours, and the heavens were besides covered with a huge slate-coloured cloud.

It required an effort for them to see the second cutter, which still kept precisely in their wake.

After a little time, however, the smuggler king produced another conical package which he placed upon the same spot as he did the former one.

Ere he lighted it, however, he placed a powerful night-glass to his eye, and carefully examined the whole of the horizon with it.

When he was looking in a direction in a line with the course the cutters were taking, Dick fancied he heard him give vent to an ejaculation, but of its signification he had no idea.

The smuggler king put down his glass.

He applied a light to the second package.

This time the light was yellow, or amber-coloured.

As soon as it had become quite extinct, Dick saw another light of precisely the same tint, but apparently at a great distance.

It looked like a torch, for the flame was not any larger, and, unless it had been looked for, would scarce have been perceived.

The smuggler chief, as he resumed his seat laid his hand upon Dick's shoulder, and said—

"All's well!"

CHAPTER LXV.

HIS MAJESTY'S REVENUE CUTTER "OSPREY" MAKES SAD HAVOC AMONG THE CREW OF THE SMUGGLER KING.

It was something quite unprecedented for the smuggler king to make the remark he did, for one of the laws he was most stringent about having observed was, that no one composing the crew should utter a syllable while out upon one of their excursions, and himself to do no more than give orders which were absolutely necessary.

But he made an exception in favour of our friends.

Never was a man more confident upon anything than he was that the new members of his band were really part and parcel of the aristocracy of England.

It is a misfortune that it should be an element in the mental composition of most people to have too lofty an idea of the excellence of birth, and too poor a one of genuine merit when displayed in any of its numerous forms.

But it is probable enough the smuggler would not have been so much in favour of our friends had it not been for the calm contempt of danger which they both displayed.

Bravery in a man was a sure and ready passport to the smuggler's rugged heart; but still we cannot help thinking that on this occasion its passage was facilitated by the belief that those who had displayed the quality he most admired in such a remarkable manner were gentlemen of rank.

When the captain said "All's well!" Dick naturally enough turned his eyes in the direction whence he had seen the responsive light proceed.

The smuggler king observed it, and continued—

"You will understand all soon," he said. "That light which you saw just now over yonder in answer to mine came from the prow of the *Snake*, the name of the vessel which brings the articles half way across the channel!"

"I guessed as much!"

"They will make all sail now, for seeing the light was yellow they will know it is the second signal we have given."

"But look," said Dick, whose eyes were still directed towards the approaching sail. "Look, they are making signals to you now, are they not?"

The smuggler sprung to his feet, and again applied the telescope to his eye.

"They appear to me to have hung three lanterns in the shape of a triangle," said Dick, who also rose and stood at the smuggler's side. "Is is not so?"

"It is," said the chief, shutting up his glass with a sudden snap.

"I presume," said Turpin, "they mean that all is not well?"

"You are right! That is exactly what they do mean!"

"Danger?"

"Yes."

"Do they point out the precise form the danger is to take?"

"Yes!"

"Then it does not much matter, for, knowing that, you can take your steps accordingly!"

The smuggler king turned round and regarded Dick with a look of admiration.

"You are a brave man, apparently," he said, "and seem not to value peril in the least! We shall see presently whether you are really what you seem!"

Dick smiled.

"You have not told me the meaning of those signals."

"No, but I will do so! Three lights in that position signify that the coast-guard have some inkling that a run is about to be attempted to-night, and are on the look out for us!"

"Is that all?"

"All?" repeated the smuggler, and encore too, as you will find!"

"H—m! Perhaps so," said Dick, carelessly. "I am free to confess that I know very little about fighting on the sea!"

"It is by no means certain," said the smuggler king, "that we shall actually come in contact with them!"

"Oh!"

"I shall not court an encounter, for they are always in a position to do us much damage with their heavy guns!"

"I suppose so."

"But stay! I will take a sweep round again with my glass, and see if any other craft is in sight."

As he spoke, the smuggler chief took up his telescope and examined the whole of the horizon attentively.

"I can see nothing suspicious," he said. "It may turn out to be a false alarm. A man on the look-out is posted on the *Snake*, and should a vessel hove in sight a red lantern will be shown."

"Your arrangements seem very good."

"They are as perfect as we can make them."

Nothing further was now said, for the interval between the two cutters and the *Snake* lessened rapidly.

The smuggler king now had his mind fully occupied in giving directions to his men.

In ten minutes more the *Snake* reached them

Things were ordered with great skill.

Everything and everybody was in readiness.

One cutter was on one side of the *Snake*, and the other on the other.

A number of rather small packages were rapidly transferred from one to the other, and stowed away.

Our friends performed their part by receiving the packages from the deck of the *Snake*, and handing them to the crew of the cutter.

The amount of work got through in a short space of time was astounding.

The packages being made so small, enabled them to be handled with the greatest dexterity.

As for the smuggler king, so soon as his cutter came in contact with the *Snake*, he climbed with great agility on board, doubtless for the purpose of settling matters with the captain.

The *Snake* was a small vessel not much larger than a yacht, and in that dim light our friends could see that her sailing capabilities must be something extraordinary.

But suddenly there arose a report that was absolutely deafening.

A blinding sheet of flame shot before their eyes.

Groans—shrieks—ejaculations of rage arose from the smuggler's vessels, and mingled with the crashing of timber and the din of falling masts.

So utterly unexpected was this event, that our friends were completely overcome, and for a moment knew not whether they were alive or dead.

A dark bulky form dropped from the *Snake* into the cutter.

"Confusion!" he cried. "The revenue ship *Osprey* has stolen upon us, unawares! Quick! quick! To your oars like men! Row—row for your lives! Haste! haste! We shall escape them yet! Bend your backs, and strain your arms if ever you want to see dry land again! The goods are all landed! and, if we try, all may yet be well! Row, my men! Row! Row for your lives, or the coast-guard will overtake us!"

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE "OSPREY" KEEPS UP THE CHASE, AND DESTROYS THE CUTTER.

AGAIN at this moment did another broadside burst from the portholes of the revenue ship, and the bright glaring light revealed for a fleeting instant her dark hull, her decks, her cordage, all thronged with well-armed men.

That brief flash sufficed also to show the *Snake*, fearfully crippled about her spars and rigging, endeavouring, like some wounded animal, to crawl away.

It showed, also, the cutter in which our friends were, and revealed the form of the smuggler king as he stood up in the bows quivering with excitement.

The other cutter, too, was seen in the rear, endeavouring to reach its companion.

Then all became lost to sight.

A darkness that seemed ten times greater than it really was, seemed to enshroud all things.

The speed with which the foremost cutter dashed through the water was something fearful.

But the greater danger always submerges the lesser one, and so this was not heeded.

The anxiety of the smuggler king was extreme.

He shouted out his orders until his voice grew harsh and inarticulate.

Then again did the portholes of the *Osprey* open and vomit forth flame and death.

Once more was the scene momentarily illuminated.

But this time the guns appeared to have been specially aimed at the two retreating boats, for a perfect shower of missiles whistled through the darkness over the crew's heads.

The sail which they had put up suffered severely.

Indeed, it was thought they would have to cut it down.

But, so long as it preserved its perpendicularity, this they determined not to do.

The oarsmen worked nobly, and urged the little vessel through the waves with greater swiftness than it had ever gone before.

Three spare oars had been taken from the bottom of the boat.

One was handed to Turpin, with injunctions to make use of it.

One to Tom King.

The other the smuggler chief himself took.

The addition of the three oars made a perceptible difference in the rate of their progression.

They had, too, the tide in their favour, which was a very great matter indeed.

Our friends looked around.

No single object met their view.

Even the waves that were displaced by the boat were scarcely visible.

But it was towards the land that Dick and Tom looked.

They had no clear idea of how far they might be from it.

How they would have rejoiced could they have seen the roof tops of Durley Chine.

The second cutter was also hid from sight.

Their assailant, too, was not to be seen, nor would she be until another of those dreadful discharges took place.

But to some extent this darkness favoured our friends, for, of course, it prevented the crew of the *Osprey* taking such careful and deliberate aim at them as they would otherwise have done.

All was very silent now. Since the smuggler chief had taken an oar he had ceased to shout to his men, for he thought that perhaps was a means of directing the attention of the enemy towards them.

And now as the brief moments slipped away, and no token of aggression came from their foe, they began to indulge in the hope that she had lost them.

Fain would the crew of the first cutter, in which our friends were, have shouted out to their companions in the second to know whether they were all safe, but they felt they dared not.

It was too hazardous.

The friendly cry might reach the ears of their enemy, and so draw her down upon them.

Therefore they were silent, and bent all their energies to the task of propelling their vessel through the water.

But when those who had been less sanguine than the others about having eluded their antagonist, began indeed to think that such was the case, another volley came to show them the erroneousness of their supposition.

Nearer and deadlier—much deadlier—was this broadside than the preceding ones.

The report of the guns seemed to shake earth and ocean.

The sheet of flame that issued from the vessel's side revealed everything plainly.

The *Osprey*, with her crowded decks of well-armed men, and who, as yet, had not received a single shot in return, was rather less than a mile to the leeward.

They saw, for a period of time so short, that we have no word that expresses it, the outlines of the second cutter, which was quite half-a-mile in their wake.

They had not made such good speed as their comrades.

Then it was gone.

Utterly.

They saw it no more.

That broadside had caught the second cutter fairly between wind and water, and swamped her in a moment.

Never was there annihilation so sudden—so complete.

A deep and bitter curse came from the lips of the smuggler chief.

Then all again was darkness.

Of all the perilous and critical positions in which our friends had ever been placed, this was surely the most perilous and most critical.

What chance was there of escape?



[THE CONFLICT BETWEEN DICK TURPIN AND THE SMUGGLER KING.]

None, unless they should be fortunate enough to reach the shore within the space of a few minutes.

With an ever-increasing anxiety our friends looked behind them, but so dark was it that they could scarce see a dozen yards.

Both were uneasy because they could not correctly estimate their true position; if they had been able to do so they would have had no trepidation whatever.

The smuggler king, however, they could not but regard with admiration. As each new danger and difficulty arose he showed himself superior to it.

Without ceasing to use the oar, he gave, in a suppressed voice, orders to his crew, who obeyed them instantly, for they had implicit confidence in his ability to save them.

At a word from the smuggler king, Dick took up the ship's telescope, and applying it to his eye scanned closely the whole of the horizon.

For some time he could see nothing. Presently, however, some dark object made itself apparent.

It was small.

It was in motion.

"I can see the ship!" he said; "but it appears to be at some considerable distance."

"Is she keeping in our course, think you?"

"I cannot tell that," replied Turpin. "I am not yet used to it. I would advise you to take the glass yourself. I can point in the right direction."

"I will do so," said the smuggler king, throwing down his oar. "Ha!" he added, as he saw the chase. "She has lost us, I believe. She is tacking about, first here, then there. Hurrah! No, she sees us, by Jove, and is coming dead in our wake!"

"Never mind that," he continued, addressing his men. "We are close to the land now, and they are in the rear considerably. Pull again, as you have pulled before. It will be high tide then, and we shall escape them without difficulty.

Upon hearing the assurance that the distance to the

shore was insignificant, the men plied their oars with right good will.

Then came another discharge from the revenue ship.

Assuredly this was for no other purpose than to show them the position of the vessel of which they were in chase.

But it served much better to show the smugglers the exact position of their enemy.

She was fearfully close.

The smugglers still rowed on. It would have been the height of impolicy for them to have made any demonstration in reply to this discharge, which certainly harmed them not in the least.

Five minutes of the most intense anxiety elapsed.

Then the smuggler chief spoke to his men in a tone of relief.

"Down with the sail, lads! We are ashore. Row slowly. Take care, helmsman, keep her clear."

Then the highwaymen became conscious that the little vessel drifted into a cavern.

Its sides grated against the rocks.

Then a shrill whistle came from the captain's lips, and the door in the rocks which we have before mentioned swung open.

When the smugglers took their departure it was low tide.

Then the door was dry, and they had to walk some little distance along the sand before they reached the sea.

Now it was high tide, and the water had risen until it was on a level with this curiously-contrived door.

To Dick and Tom's great surprise, the water was in the passage beyond also, and the boat shot through the opening of the rocks into it.

Then the door was closed.

Of course the darkness was most profound.

The voice of the smuggler king arose.

"Lights! lights here!" he said. "Be quick some of you. A torch here!"

In a minute or so half-a-dozen torches were lighted, and as they fairly burst into a flame, revealed all objects in the rocky passage.

The scene was picturesque in the extreme.

Our friends observed that the floor of the passage rose rapidly, so that the water did not reach more than twelve or fifteen feet into the passage.

The depth of the water in the last two or three feet was consequently insignificant, and the men at once leaped out of the boat.

Our friends did so likewise.

The water only rose just above their ankles, and in two or three steps they reached dry ground.

They would not have been human if they had not felt rejoiced at this miraculous escape, for if the smuggler's haunt had been less cleverly contrived than it was, they would, beyond a doubt, have been destroyed by the coast-guard.

As it was, they were quite safe.

To the crew on board the revenue ship their disappearance must have borne the appearance of magic.

As they all stood in the passage in a dense throng they heard distinctly the boom—boom of the guns, while, at frequent intervals, a loud report reached their ears.

But the smugglers were quite out of their reach now.

Slowly and silently—the smuggler king himself taking the lead, the little party made their way along the passage into the large cavern.

Here a huge fire was blazing.

It was most welcome, for the men were, one and all, cold, hungry, tired, and wet.

They hastened their steps.

Then reaching the fire, which was burning in the centre of the cavern, they threw themselves wearily upon the ground around it, their chief setting the example.

Turpin and King were glad enough to do the same. They felt what they had gone through much more severely than their companions, because they were so unused to it.

In fact they, as well as every one there present, were dreadfully fatigued.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE HISTORY OF TOM KING, THE HIGHWAYMAN.

No one spoke.

A deep gloom seemed to overshadow the hearts and countenances of all present.

On the face of the smuggler chief this feeling was plainly perceptible, but there was mingled with it one of rage.

More than one-half of the men who had looked up to him as their master were now at the bottom of the sea.

One of his beautiful fast-sailing cutters, too, was destroyed.

Truly had that been a bad night's work for him. Never before in all their career had they met with such a terrible reverse, but yet they ought to have anticipated such a thing occurring.

In the morning that portion of the silk which was in the boat in the rocky passage was unloaded and stored away in a place designed for its reception until such time as it could be safely disposed of.

Turpin and King took their share of this work along with the crew.

When it was over they both repaired to a small chamber in the cavern side which had been fitted up for their use.

The apartment, if it could be dignified by such a name—was not much more than eight feet square.

It was, however, made very comfortable.

The rugged walls were covered with cloth, and on the floor was a thick matting.

Two large lamps illumined it.

In one corner was a rude bed.

Our friends threw themselves wearily upon it.

For a moment or so there was a silence, but then Tom King spoke.

His voice showed that he was in anything but an amiable frame of mind.

His face as well bore testimony to the same thing.

"I tell you what it is, Dick. This sort of thing may be all very well, but hang me if I like it."

"Why, what's the matter, Tom?"

"Matter—enoughs the matter, I rather think. Who would fancy the idea of living here in this style without seeing daylight? I can tell you I don't."

"Well, you needn't be so ill-tempered about it."

"But I am."

"So I see. Now, what is it you have got on your mind? Out with it, my friend!"

"Oh! nothing but what I say. I don't like the idea of being shut up here in this manner, and only going out at night in a boat to stand a chance of having your boat sunk without being able to do anything in your own defence."

"Nor I," said Dick; "but I have made no remark about it, because I didn't exactly see how it was to be helped."

"Surely, my friend, you don't think of staying here for ever," said Tom King, starting up.

"Lie down again, do, and don't excite yourself. I only intend to stay here until I see a chance of getting away."

"I am glad you have had enough of the smuggling business."

"I have, I can assure you. There is nothing daring about it."

"Daring, indeed, I should think not. It's quite contemptible!"

"And yet you must, I think, admit that the chief displayed both skill and courage in the managment of affairs last night. Our escape is entirely owing to him."

"It is, I admit, but still for all that I don't like the notion of being here or under the command of any one."

"Ha! ha! Tom. You've let the cat out of the bag! That's where the shoe pinches, is it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, that the chief reason you don't like being here is because you do not believe in having any other master than yourself."

"That has a great deal to do with it, I confess. I like my liberty, and be free to go where I like and do what I like."

"So does every one. But seriously speaking, Tom, I do assure you that if you had not broached this affair I should have done so."

"Should you?"

"Yes, and I have arranged at the first opportunity we could find to give our friends the smugglers the slip."

"You know I am willing now, then. But how is it to be done?"

"Ah! that's what puzzles me. To get back through the vaults into Durley Chine is out of the question, for I know part of the band are always there on the watch."

"I know that, but then the same thing applies to the other outlet—I mean the passage leading to the seashore; men are always stationed there on guard."

"That's true enough; but now you must recollect the smugglers have lost half their number, so they will not be able to post so many sentinels as they did."

"To be sure not."

"It remains then for us to find which is the weakest guarded, the passage or the vaults."

"Exactly."

"I have thought the matter over, and I came to the conclusion that it was only in one way we could hope with any reason to achieve our object."

"And how is that?"

"Wait until the smugglers set out on another expedition, and manage so as to be left behind. We will then contrive to overcome what sentries there are, and be off!"

"Just so," said Tom King, somewhat appeased; "just so; or it might happen that we were left sentries ourselves!"

"It might, but I think it scarcely likely. However, I think, having said what we have, we have said all we can, and nothing now remains for us to do but wait for the course of events."

"Evidently that will be the best, and the sooner we can get off the better I shall be pleased."

"And so shall I. What a delightful thing a gallop along a nice country lane would be, would it not?"

"Oh! hold your noise. Don't talk about such things without you want to drive a fellow wild."

"But after all, Tom, I am sure there can be no life to equal a life on the road."

"No, none. Hurrah for the road! a fine night, a good nag, and plenty of money!"

"Yes. Now, look here; while we are in this cavern it is quite evident we cannot enjoy the pleasure of being on the road; but I'll tell you what will be a good substitute."

"What?"

"Why, just tell me your adventures. Recollect, you are under a promise to do so, and we shan't have a much better chance than we have now."

"No, perhaps not."

"Begin then; I am all attention, I assure you.

"I have given my word," said Tom King, and his voice grew bitter and melancholy as he spoke, as though the past called up anything but pleasing thoughts in his mind; "I have given my word, but I do assure you I shrink from fulfilling it."

"No, no! Hang it all, you must not do that. Now, Tom, don't be so downhearted as you seem, but lead off in good spirits."

"That would be a sheer impossibility, Dick; I could not do it. The events of the past are too sad for me ever to be in good spirits when I think of or relate them."

"You interest me, Tom, very much. There is a tone of pathos in your words which moves me exceedingly. I am ten times more anxious to hear your story than before, so really you must not disappoint me. There is another thing that makes me very curious also."

"What is that?"

"Why, you are not, like me, a rough sort of chap. Your hands and feet and ears are small—sure signs, either in men or horses, of high breeding. Your skin, too, is soft and delicate. There is the air of a gentleman about you, though I give you credit for, in a general way, disguising it pretty well. but it is so, nevertheless."

"Oh! stop, stop."

But, heeding the interruption, Dick went on—

"You, besides, are a capital scholar. You can read and write, and you often have, when you speak, a mode of expressing yourself which can only have been acquired by long intercourse with people of highly-cultivated intellect and careful study of the works of our best writers."

Tom smiled when his comrade ceased, but it was in a sickly fashion.

"Really, Dick," he said, "you will make me out presently, I shouldn't wonder, to be what our friend the smuggler king thinks I am—namely, a nobleman in disguise. Ha! ha!"

"Now, it's no good your trying to get up a laugh with such a face as that on, so give up the attempt at once."

"But it is most amusing. I did not think, though, that you had studied me so closely as you appear to have done."

"Nor have I studied you, but it would be scarcely possible for anyone with powers of observation to be with you so constantly as I have without perceiving just what I have perceived."

"Indeed!" said Tom, "then I must have been very clumsy."

"Clumsy? What do you mean?"

"Well, Dick, my friend, I have promised to tell you the story of my life, and I will not go back from my word. Therefore, I may as well confess that I have acted a part, so your surmises are correct; but I have acted my part clumsily, or else you would not have seen what you have."

There was some chagrin in the tones in which Tom King pronounced these words, as though he was scarcely pleased to find his companion had observed so much.

Turpin noticed it, but made no remark.

He was too anxious to hear what might fall from Tom's lips, in the shape of a narrative, to jeopardize its relation by anything he might say or do.

Therefore he remained silent, and waited for his comrade to commence.

But King seemed to have fallen into a deep reverie.

The past, with all its joys, disappointed hopes, dark sorrows and regrets, was flooding back upon his soul.

His face grew pale and then assumed an expression of such pain and mournfulness, that Turpin, as he perceived it, half repented that he had touched a chord which had produced so powerful an effect upon his friend.

He said as much to him, and then added—

"But, Tom, do you not think that the mere narration of your troubles to me will ease your mind."

"It might do so. I cannot tell."

"You will be sure of meeting with true sympathy."

"I am aware of that, and therefore, if you will listen, I will commence, and when I have done I will ask you whether I have not been 'more sinned against than sinning?'"

Turpin changed his position to one that commanded a view of his friend's countenance.

Then, after a few moments' silent reflection, as though he were considering which was the best point at which to begin, Tom King began in a voice that was unsteady with emotion, to relate that which he had never before breathed to a human being—the story of his life.

As he proceeded, the tristful expression of his face communicated itself to his friend's, and Turpin listened to one of the most extraordinary narratives that he had ever heard.

It was full of interest.

In the succeeding chapter it is given in Tom King's own words.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

OUR FRIENDS ARE FAR FROM SATISFIED WITH THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SMUGGLERS—THE STORM.

"You will in a moment understand the reluctance which I feel to begin this history, when I tell you that it will involve the exposure of my own deep, great, and everlasting shame.

"The story shall be told in as few words as possible.

"Over many and many an acre of fertile English soil stretch the domains of the Marquis of Belgard. Large tracts in the counties of York, Durham, Cumberland, and Somerset are owned by him.

"It is not, however, of the present marquis that I am about to speak, but his father and mother.

"The latter was a woman who was loved by all who saw her. All those qualities which are precious in the female sex were hers in excess. Gentleness, devotion

unselfishness, virtue and beauty are the names of a few of them.

"Her husband, the marquis, I do not remember save in a dreamy way, which is perhaps more owing to talking and thinking much about him than actual recollection.

"However, from my earliest years I can remember the marchioness. She was my mother!"

The voice of the highwaymen failed him. He tried to go on, but could not.

Turpin's astonishment was intense.

"The marchioness your mother?" he exclaimed. "Good heavens, is it possible? By what strange mutation of fortune did you become a highwayman? You, the son of a nobleman of one of the highest ranks?"

"You may well ask those questions," said Tom King, subduing his emotion. "It seems impossible, does it not? but it is true, and in the tale I have to tell you the whole will be explained.

"I was barely two years old when my father, the Marquis of Belgard, died. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that I retain only an indistinct and confused impression of what he was like. But my mother—my dear mother—whom I loved a thousand times more than mothers usually are loved, I can recollect always. It is not three years since she died. Sorrow and shame broke her gentle heart."

King again found it necessary to clear his throat.

"From my infancy until I reached my eighteenth year, I lived with her a most retired life at a mansion on the marquis's estates in Cumberland. We saw scarcely any visitors; the only ones, in fact, were the family of the Earl of Standon, who had some estates adjoining ours.

"But one thing occurred that at all disturbed the monotony of my life.

"I loved.

"It seems strange, no doubt, to you, Dick, to hear me say that I loved, as a young and ardent spirit deprived of all society can love, earnestly, fondly, truly.

"The object of this adoration was the eldest daughter of the Earl of Standon. Her name was Charlotte.

"You will not have patience to hear me describe her; nor have I the mind to do it. To a lover, his mistress is perfection. Such was Charlotte in my eyes.

"The love I had for her was returned. It was sanctioned, too, by our parents, who looked forward to our union with undissembled pleasure.

"She was little more than one year my junior—that is to say, eighteen—the age when the personal attractions of a woman are at their full.

"We had many and many times repeated those lines of Shakspere, to the effect that the 'course of true love never did run smooth;' and never did so without referring to our own case, which seemed to prove the falsity of the assertion.

"But soon a time came for us to feel its truth.

"And now I have to tell you that about my father which will brand him with infamy.

"My mother was not his wife.

"Do not misunderstand me. She was no leman. The ceremonies of the church united them; but he had another wife alive.

"She was far, far below him in station. A poor girl, in fact, with whom, when a young man, he had fallen desperately in love, and whom he secretly married.

"A son was born.

"His eldest son.

"You are beginning to see now what is coming.

"However, to return. In a little time my father tired of this first wife. He had seen my mother. She was lovely—she was rich. He loved her.

"Of his marriage with the village girl no one knew a syllable. He had kept it a profound secret.

"Now he thought he would put an end to it altogether.

"It would seem he laid a plot for her destruction, and actually lured her into the snare, but she with her child managed to escape.

"She disappeared.

"No one heard anything of her; no trace could be discovered.

"Then the marquis married my mother.

"I am the fruit of that union.

"At length, just as I was about to attain my twentieth year, the news came to us that my father had been married before, and that he had a son, the issue of that marriage, who was the heir to the whole of the estates.

"This tale at first my mother resolutely disbelieved, but it came out in evidence—for, of course the matter went to trial—that a woman who had for years lived among all the poverty and crime of London, had sworn upon her dying bed that she was Marchioness of Belgard.

"This story was at first not listened to, but she produced a marriage register, the authenticity of which was beyond dispute.

"In her last moments she swore that the love she had for her unworthy husband was the sole reason that she had not divulged the secret before, and that now she felt compelled to do it in justice to her son.

"Her son was found.

"He, so far as could be learned, was a most disreputable character, but that mattered nothing—he was the heir.

"Of course I need not tell you that the verdict was pronounced in his favour.

"The shock broke my mother's heart. She died as soon as the intelligence was brought to her.

"Thus suddenly—unexpectedly—I became an orphan and an outcast!

"Naturally enough I sped to pour out my troubles upon the breast of her I loved, and who had by the most solemn vows swore an undying love for me. I sought her; I found her.

"Fool! insensate fool I was! But I was young then, and believed woman what she seemed. I ought to have known that now she would find her affection for me suddenly cooled down, but I did not for a moment entertain the thought that she would prove false. I should have as soon believed the sun's rays were cold!

"It is not needful for me to relate the particulars of the interview I had with her. Let it suffice to say she found she loved me no longer; her friends would never consent to her union with me, she said.

"False, hollow-hearted woman! true type of her deceitful sex. It was the position I should have given her that she loved and longed to have—not me.

"I was foolish enough to upbraid her; I knew no better then.

"Already was I guilty of the greatest crime of which the titled and the rich are cognizant—*I was poor*!

"Completely crushed at thus beholding my dearest hopes foredone, I fled, fled I knew not, cared not whither. All I sought was oblivion from thought.

"Vain search—I found it not.

"But, as time elapsed, the violence of my anguish became less, and I was able to think a little of my position.

"I hated—hated with a fierce, bitter, burning hatred—all mankind!

"I ought to mention that the true heir to the estates offered to me a sum of money and a small estate, but my pride would not suffer me to come forward and be known. I fled—disappeared.

"The place to which I directed my steps was London.

"Day after day, in that mighty wilderness, did I wander about, having no aim, no object.

"By great good luck, I had a considerable sum in my possession, as well as valuables in the shape of jewelry, which represented as much more.

"On this I lived.

"It was in a dark, old-fashioned inn in Coldbath Fields that I took up my temporary abode. I lighted upon the place by accident.

"One wintry afternoon, as I was sitting in the dreary taproom, there came in two persons.

"Having nothing else to occupy me, I lifted up my eyes as they entered, and there was something so peculiar, or, more properly speaking, remarkable about them that I regarded them with the greatest interest.

"The one who entered first was in height, shape, feature, everything a man could be. He united, without incongruity, the grace and beauty of Apollo with the strength and frame of Hercules.

"His costume well befitted him. It had a dash about it that harmonized well with his bearing.

"His companion was very different.

"The style, too, in which they were dressed was similar, but there all likeness ceased between them.

"This second man was rather short and very slightly made.

"Both sat down.

"The first comer drew a chair up to the fire, and threw himself into it with a grace both rare and admirable.

"The other, in a quiet way, sat down upon the screen.

"The landlord seemed to know both well. They chatted and laughed together for some moments.

"Suddenly, however, I heard the rapid trampling of horses' feet in the street.

"The next moment at least a dozen men rushed into the room.

"'Hurrah!' they shouted. 'Here they are! On them, my men!'

"A most deadly struggle now ensued.

"The new comers, I saw, were police officers.

"But it was not possible for such an unequal contest to continue long.

"The first comer had drawn a sword, which he used with terrible effect.

"But, knowing victory was out of the question, he turned to fly, and called to his comrade to follow his example.

"Then was performed the most daring feat I ever saw or heard of.

"This man, hemmed in, surrounded as he was by foes, took one terrific leap, and, to my unutterable amazement, went clear through the window into the street.

"There was a struggle outside for a second, and then all was still.

"He had escaped.

"But his companion was not so fortunate.

"He was caught and securely handcuffed, and then led off.

"Those two men were Claude Duval and Sixteen-stringed Jack!

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE STORM—THE NIGHT EXCURSION—THE MINUTE GUN—THE WRECK OF THE MERCHANTMAN.

"CLAUDE DUVAL and Sixteen-stringed Jack?" repeated Dick Turpin, in the utmost surprise. "Can it be really possible? And egad! Yes, it must be, for jumping through the window in that fashion was just like Claude. Jack, you say, was captured?"

"He was."

"Now look here, Tom, I have let you tell your history so far without attempting to interrupt you. One surprise, in fact, follows so close upon another, that you fairly take away my breath; but when you mentioned two such celebrated individuals, I could not help breaking in."

King smiled.

"I did not notice it at the time, but now I do remember, you did not utter a word either in the way of question or comment."

"That I certainly did'nt, but it has all got to come."

"Do not let us recur to it! You know enough to make you aware that it cannot be a pleasant topic for me to discuss. I have been led away by my feelings to say, perhaps, more than I ought to have said, and my narrative is doubtless somewhat incoherent. Still, for all that, my friend, I think I have been sufficiently explicit to make you understand it, and, such being the case, say no more, for when I speak of it it always unmans me."

"Tom, my friend, I have a greater respect for you since I have heard your story than ever I had before. You have been hardly used by fate, and it is a thousand pities for a generous, noble nature like yours to be turned to gall!"

"When I reflect upon the past and think of what I might have been—what there appeared to be every human probability of my becoming, one of the proudest of England's peers, and then think what I am—a highwayman, a breaker of the public peace, and destined for an ignominious end—I feel as though I was going mad, and for that reason I strive, as much as possible, to banish thought and the remembrance of past, present, and future."

"And only natural that you should do so. I have not heard the sequel to your story, but I can easily enough imagine it. You found no other course open to you, so you took to the road, as many another gallant heart has done before you."

"Well, well, let us say no more about that."

"And there is one question I would fain ask on the score of curiosity."

"What is it?"

"May I ask it?"

"Certainly."

"It is, what became of Lady Charlotte?"

"Lady Charlotte?"

"Yes."

"Did I not tell you?"

"No."

"Ha! ha! I thought I did! I said it was the name and title that she loved, and, ha! ha! ha! she won them, too!"

"Now, pray, Tom, for the sake of my nerves, don't laugh in that horrible, discordant fashion again. You have positively set all my teeth on edge. Don't disguise your mind from me now you have told me so much. Be yourself, I beg; you were never born with the capabilities of acting that which you do not feel."

"I have long felt that, Dick. But, however, to answer your question. Lady Charlotte, who professed so much affection for me, cast me off, as I said, and married the true heir."

"Then, Tom, the thought that you have escaped from the clutches of such a heartless being ought to make you rejoice; for, depend upon it, she is one of those girls who will never make any man happy."

"I have struggled with all my might against my passion for her, and, unworthy as she has proved, believe me, Dick, so firm a hold has she taken of my affections, that I love her even now."

"It is infatuation."

"You may call it what you choose, the fact remains unaltered. I love her still."

"Then yours must, indeed, be strong affection."

"And yet I feel I hate her—hate her, and the whole of her accursed sex."

"Ah, then, there you are wrong. I will never consent to believe that all women have dispositions like her, and would act as she has done. Rather would I cling to the conviction that she is all that is pure, all that is good in human nature."

"Then is human nature most impure and bad if it is so? There is not one who knows of love and virtue, save by name, and who would not barter everything they possess for lucre."

"I see very plain," said Dick, "it is quite folly for us to speak upon that subject, so I say by all means let it drop. I have faith in woman's goodness, you have not. Time will show which of us is in the right."

"It will. But Dick, mark my words, and I speak in all solemn seriousness, so sure as ever you are fond enough of a woman to trust her, she will betray you. Mark me if she does not."

"Pho, pho, Tom. You are in a gloomy humour. I can see it will be best not to touch upon that portion of your history. How did you know who the two persons were who came into the public-house at Coldbath-fields?"

"The landlord."

"Oh!"

"And he it was who, after gathering some inkling of my history, persuaded me to try my fortune on the road."

"And the best thing for you, since it is the only thing you could have done and continued a gentleman."

"Well Dick, to go on, Claude Duval, as I told you, escaped; and not only that, he contrived to rescue his pal Jack before the officers were halfway to Newgate."

"Bravo, Claude! Well, go on, I like to hear about him. The ladies' highwayman, as they always called him."

"Well, to my great surprise, in less than half-an-hour both highwaymen came into the public-house again, looking just as though nothing at all had happened."

'Capital! Of course the officers would not think of coming straight back to where they started."

"They didn't. The landlord introduced me, and the result of it was that I joined them in their very next expedition."

"Did you though, by Jove! Ah! Tom, I would give something if I could only call Claude and Jack pals, but there's no chance of that now, is there?"

"Very little."

"What surprises me is that you should have known them and not me."

"It is rather singular, but I was only with them a short time. So many were on the look-out for them that they were compelled to run over on to the continent to avoid being taken, and since then I have not heard of them."

"Nor I."

"I lent them all the assistance in my power, and saw them safely aboard the vessel. They wanted me to go too, but somehow I have a most insurmountable dislike of leaving England, so I remained."

"And so have I," said Dick; "I was born in it, and I hope I shall die in it."

"Oh, don't talk about dying, I beg."

"I won't if it don't please you; but go on and finish my life."

"Ah! do."

"When I saw them safely off I was entirely thrown upon my own resources, but they had let me into the secrets of the profession, so I made no doubt about getting on all right. I was most prosperous, and had not long been acting for myself when I met you."

"Nor had I, as you know. I think we must have begun somewhere about the same time. If anything, you were first."

"Very likely."

"But in one respect I do envy you exceedingly."

"And what is that?"

"Why, having been a companion of Claude Duval's. I have the highest opinion of his gallantry and courage, and I only hope that I shall some day meet with him."

"It is likely enough you will have your wish. I should never be surprised to hear he had come back to England, for it is not in his nature, any more than it is in mine, to lead an inactive life, and one devoid of excitement."

"I only hope I may see them both, and, what is more, that all four of us may have many a startling and wild adventure between us."

"Well now, Dick, I do think you ought to confess yourself satisfied. You know my former history; you can account for what little peculiarities you may have observed. You see, too, to what I am reduced by a father's villainy."

"I do; but it is an unfortunate thing that in this world the innocent party in an affair of that sort gets the greatest share of the misfortunes and disagreeables to put up with, and in that case yours is only a case of many."

"You are right enough there."

"Then it ought to be some consolation for you to be aware that you are not singled out to be different to your fellows. The consolation is a poor one, I daresay."

"It is; and no one but those who have indulged in such hopes for future happiness with the one they love can form any idea how hard it is to be bereft of all."

"Yes, I can, Tom. I can easily imagine it."

"But, even if you do, imagination must fall far short of reality. But come, let us, before we separate, make up our minds what we are to do."

"You mean with respect to the smugglers?"

"Exactly."

"Then I do not think we can do better than to make the attempt to get left behind, under some pretext or other, when the rest go out on an excursion, and then do our best towards making an escape."

"I think that would be the best. As for this life, I am thoroughly sick of it, and the sooner a change occurs the better I shall be pleased."

"It will not do, however, to be too precipitate. They are much stronger in point of numbers than we are, and it would be the height of folly for us to throw away our lives unnecessarily."

"Of course it would, and I should not counsel such a thing for a moment: but what I mean to say, do not let a chance slip by."

"Oh, there is no fear of my doing that, for I can tell you I am most anxious to rejoin my mare Black Bess."

"Ah, yes, she is in the grounds above."

"She is, and, while there, is perfectly safe, for she will be able to find plenty in the shape of green-meat to live upon; but what I am afraid of is, that she may stray away, be seen, and captured."

"That would be a loss indeed."

"It would—a most irreparable loss; but still, I do not much fear this, only it might occur, and when I think of it I always get uneasy."

"Just so. I am glad there is something to tempt you to get away."

"You think I shall find an opportunity all the sooner?"

"I do. The first one will, I hope, be seized upon and made use of by you."

"Never fear but it will. No long time can elapse without our accomplishing our aim."

"Yes, after all, as Claude Duval used to say, 'there's no life like a life on the road.'"

"And he was quite right. How glad I should be if at this moment I could take him by the hand, as I do you, and call him friend."

"I should wonder if you don't one of these days. Many unlikelier things have happened."

CHAPTER LXX.

DICK TURPIN DEFEATS THE DESIGNS OF THE SMUGGLERS, AND TOM KING SAVES A LIFE.

A WEEK elapsed.

Seven entire days; and during that time nothing had occurred to at all disturb the monotony of our friends' existence, nor had a chance offered itself of putting their design into execution.

Tom King was vexed and impatient.

But it was no good for him to chafe. There he was, and there he was obliged to be.

And in this interval scarce one of the smugglers had left the cave, and no other run of goods had been attempted.

The *Snake*, the smuggler chief, by some inexplicable means, had learned, had with much difficulty managed to get back to port.

The week had been chiefly spent by our friends in taking their share of the work.

In groping about the cavern, Tom King had come across several articles which greatly called forth his surprise; so he pocketed them, and showed them to Dick, who was as much surprised as he.

From these articles but one inference could be drawn, and that was, the smuggler king was not a smuggler only, but something worse.

Our friends became much more circumspect.

And so a whole week glided away.

Towards midnight on the eighth day, a fearful storm arose which increased in fury and violence every moment.

The howling of the wind, the rumbling of the thunder, the hoarse dash of the waves against the coast, could be heard with great distinctness in the cavern.

Nearly all, Turpin and King included, were seated round the fire, chatting and laughing with each other.

While thus engaged, there came upon their ears a prolonged wailing cry.

All started to their feet.

The highwaymen, because they wondered what such a sound meant.

The smugglers, because they recognised it as a signal.

The chief drew one or two of his crew aside, and spoke to them in a whisper.

Their eyes turned towards our friends.

Evidently, then, they were the subject of that mysterious whispered conversation.

The remainder of the smugglers, however, moved quickly about the cavern, and began encasing themselves in the tarpaulins.

Tom King was overjoyed when he perceived this, and catching Turpin by the arm, he whispered:

"Hurrah! They are going out on an excursion to-night, and we shall have a chance of bidding them good-bye!"

"They are preparing to go certainly," replied Turpin; "but whether we shall have a chance of getting off is more than I can tell. Look, the chief has got a couple of men with him, and they are talking about us I am confident, for their eyes every moment turn this way."

"Is it likely, I wonder, that he suspects us of our design?"

"I cannot tell! If he does we shall have to look after ourselves."

"Can you hear the storm, Dick? It is most fearful! Does not their leaving the cavern on such a night as this seem confirmatory of our suspicions?"

"It does—it does, indeed; and yet I hope we are mistaken. I have always admired the chief as a brave man, but if what you hint at is true, I shall be unable to think so any longer."

"You would. It is the most abhorrent of all crimes."

At this moment the smuggler king called for our two friends to approach him.

They did so.

"We are going out on an excursion to-night in which none but old salts will be of service. We shall, therefore, be compelled to leave you here in charge of the caverns."

At this unexpected slice of good luck, our friends had to conceal their exultation.

Turpin spoke.

"That is just as you think fit," he said. "Of course you know in what way we shall be of the greatest service to you, and we will obey your instructions."

"Good," said the smuggler king. "We leave you in trust of the place, and you will be responsible for it and all that it contains."

"You won't have to complain of us," said Dick; "but shall we be left the sole guard of the place?"

"Yes, with the exception of Willis, who is in the cavern above with the casks, and Peters, who keeps guard at the door in the rock."

"Very good, then. What time do you leave?"

"Immediately. My men are nearly all ready. As soon as they are we are off."

The smuggler chief left our friends as he spoke.

Tom King with difficulty restrained himself from making some extravagant manifestations of delight.

Had they had the arranging of things themselves they could scarcely have made them better.

The smugglers, who were now reduced to eight men, exclusive of the two on guard and our friends, placed themselves in rank and followed their chief across the cavern.

Tramp, tramp, they could hear their feet along the rocky passage.

At last all was still.

The two highwaymen were alone.

"I think," said Tom King, "that the first thing we do shall be to take off these clothes we have on and don our own. What say you?"

"Oh, do so, by all means. If we are to go on the road again it won't do to have such things as these on."

"Certainly not. Come, then, I know where they are. Everything is ready—pistols and all."

"Bravo, Tom; I don't wonder at your anxiety to be off. Really this being shut up in the dark is quite dreadful."

"It is to me. But let us change our dresses without any more delay."

In a few minutes afterwards our friends returned to the outer cavern, and looking like themselves.

Still they paused and hesitated as to what they should do. They were, besides, desirous of not losing any chance they might have by precipitation.

They waited, therefore, for a considerable time, so that the smugglers would have time to get fairly off.

From his vest pocket Dick produced Captain Nidget's gold chronometer, and, looking at the dial, found the fingers pointed to twenty minutes to two.

"I think we may venture now, Tom," said Turpin; "but I have for the last few moments been thinking over the manner in which we are to leave this place, whether by the passage or the vaults above."

"Well——"

"I think, taking all things into consideration, it will be best for us to make our way out by the passage."

"Why?"

"Not only is it nearest, but I confess I am most curious to know whether those suspicions we have against the smuggler chief are well grounded."

"I should like to know, too, so we will go by the passage. At any rate, we shall be able to see what he is after. It is nothing very good, or he would not have left us here."

Something, doubtless, of which he guessed we should not approve. Now, my friend, are you ready?"

"Quite ready, and more than willing."

"Follow me then!"

So saying, Dick strode across the cave in the direction of the entrance to the passage, and, drawing aside the thick curtain which was hung over the opening, both entered it.

"Tread cautiously, Dick," whispered Tom King; "recollect there is the man Peters on guard at the door, and he might be able to raise an alarm."

"Fear nothing! Let your hand slide over the wall as you go on; we shall be all right then."

The passage was in the profoundest darkness, at least that portion of it in which they now were. The guard would, of course, be likely to have a light, but the place was so serpentine that they could see nothing of it.

With the greatest of care the highwaymen crept forward, but, in spite of all their efforts, they could not avoid making an occasional slight noise.

Presently Turpin stopped, and, turning round to Tom King, said—

"This man on guard! What shall we do with him?"

"Knock him on the head!"

"I hardly like doing that. I should prefer, if possible, taking him prisoner and not doing him any further injury, unless he should make so desperate a resistance as to make it unavoidable."

"Well—well, as you like. Only take care he don't give an alarm."

"I'll look out for that. Peters is a very decent fellow, and I daresay when he knows we are resolved, he will submit to being bound without making any resistance."

"Then, if such is the case, I say walk boldly forward and tell him so."

"We will, but I should like to make my appearance as suddenly as possible, so as not to give him time either for action or reflection."

"Then you must be silent, for I fancy we must be close to him. Cannot you hear his voice?"

"Yes, he is singing a song, poor fellow, I daresay he finds it very lonely sitting there by himself!"

Tom King made no reply, and both, with the utmost caution and silence, crept forward.

The horrible din of the tempest could be heard much plainer in the passage than in the cavern, and at every step they took the sound became more audible.

But hark! another sound mingles with the tempest's roar. It is one which causes the two highwaymen to suddenly come to a halt.

Boom! boom! boom!

That was the sound.

Dull—muffled.

Coming at short but regular intervals.

Boom! boom! boom!

"It's the minute gun!" said Dick; "some vessel in distress is off the coast."

"Yes; hark! there it comes again."

In the intervals of the storm they again heard the sullen report of the signal gun.

"God help them," said Turpin, "if the wind has blown them on the rocks! When we were out that night I thought, as I looked around, what a fearfully dangerous place it must be for vessels, and how little chance of escape they would have if a storm should overtake them in that spot."

"Quick, my friend, forward! Let us dispose of Peters, and make our way on to the beach. Who knows what service we may be to the crew and passengers?"

"Who, indeed? Certainly we shall be able to render them some assistance."

After taking about a dozen more steps, they paused again.

It was where the passage took an abrupt turn to the right.

Turpin being first, leaned forward, and peeped round the corner.

By the light of a torch which was stuck in the wall, he saw Peters, sitting upon a fragment of rock, and chaunting some snatches of an old sea ditty.

He had evidently not heard their approach.

Uttering a loud and fearful yell, which sounded with great effect in the vaulted passage, Dick Turpin sprang forward, and grasping Peters by the throat, bore him to the earth, and made him a prisoner before he could recover from his surprise at the sudden attack made upon him.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE HIGHWAYMEN ENCOUNTER GREAT DANGER IN THEIR PHILANTHROPIC AND RETRIBUTIVE EXPEDITION.

"Don't struggle, Peters," said Turpin. "You have nothing to fear, only we are determined not to stay here any longer; so off we go, and to do that we must overpower you, my friend. If you don't resist, you will come to no harm. If you do, you will get a crack on the head."

There is sufficient prudence in Peters's disposition to make him see the force of this reasoning, so he gave in at once, and suffered Tom King to bind him securely with a rope.

"There can be no blame laid to you, because all will know two men are a match for one, especially when taken at unawares. Your comrades will release you when they come back."

Not waiting to listen to what Peters had to say, our friends hastened to the door in the rocks, and removing the iron bar that was across it, pulled it open.

When they did so, they were for a moment or two perfectly blinded and deafened by the tremendous violence of the storm, which now burst upon them in full fury.

They stepped from the door on to the beach, which was quite dry, it then being only just about half tide.

Fain, however, were they to shelter themselves behind the rocks. They could not stand against the wind.

In this way they crept along for a considerable distance.

By screening themselves thus, and shading their eyes, our friends were able to look around them.

In front the sea was hissing, boiling, dashing, against the rocks.

Above the sky was covered with a dense black cloud

Behind was the mass of rocks, which rose up irregularly to a height of more than two hundred feet.

But as they happened to look back, both were astonished to see a bright light burning on the summit of the highest piece of rock.

It looked like the lantern of a lighthouse.

A broad beam of light streamed forth, and which must have been visible at an enormous distance.

Boom! boom!

The vessel in the offing still continued her signals of distress.

Dick placed his mouth close to Tom's ear, and spoke—

"Our suspicions are certainties. Look at that light! It is a false beacon, placed there by fiends in human shape to lure an unsuspecting vessel on the treacherous rocks. The smugglers are wreckers also, and this is their accursed work."

There was a terrible energy in the way these words were uttered.

Turpin's excitement knew no bounds.

Open, daring, bold, doing what he did do in the face of all, he detested treachery as such a nature only can detest it, and the proceedings of the wreckers, of whom he had often heard, filled him with abhorrence.

As we have hinted at, some days before Tom King had found in the cavern numerous little objects which had evidently come from a wreck.

This raised the suspicion in their minds that the band which they had joined were not smugglers merely, but wreckers also.

Some words which had been incautiously dropped by the crew strengthened them in the idea.

When Dick, therefore, saw from the upper crags a bright light streaming forth, he knew in a moment that it was a false beacon, put there to entice ships to their destruction.

He had heard enough about the proceedings of the wreckers to know that such a thing formed a chief part of their plan.

In a storm, those on board a vessel, seeing a light burning steadily ahead, would, of course, come to the conclusion that it had been placed there in order to guide them to a safe anchorage, or else mistake it for some other beacon which was well known to be in the vicinity.

By this means, then, the labouring vessel, struggling manfully against the storm, is urged on by the crew to her own ruin.

Then, too late, it is found that, so far from reaching a harbour of refuge, they have got entangled among the sharp granite rocks that guard the shores of England

It seems scarcely credible that human beings ever could act so base a part; but that it is so unfortunately there exists abundant proof.

The vessel, thus drawn close to the beach, strikes.

Then goes to pieces.

Her crew and cargo are at the mercy of the wreckers.

Boom! boom! boom!

Horribly distinct, horribly mournful, came to our friends' ears the dull roar of the minute gun.

Alas! for that brave ship, help there was none.

She had dashed in between two rocks, about half a mile from the shore, that were shaped like the protuberances upon a camel's back, and there struck.

To move her in the least was impossible.

Crash! crash! With a terrible grating sound the sides of the vessel at each rise and fall of the sea chafed against the rugged sides of the two rocks, whose jagged points ground her woodwork to powder.

Thrice had the hapless crew endeavoured to launch a boat, but each time failed.

Then they resigned themselves to their fate.

Weary and wet they thronged upon the forcastle of the ship, which happened to be highest out of the water, and there, clinging together, as though that would protect them, they waited for their doom.

In the meantime our friends crawled slowly onward, compelled in their course to clutch tightly the slippery rocks.

Both rejoiced in their hearts, though neither spoke, that they had made their escape as they had, and resolved to do their utmost to save any of the crew of the unfortunate vessel.

But ignorant of the ground as they were, and on a night so pitchy dark, they ran the gauntlet of a thousand dangers.

On no side, however, could they see or hear aught of the wreckers.

Further, further along the line of rock, which seemed to stretch right out in the channel, went the highwaymen.

Presently, however, they found they could not go any further without actually walking into the sea, and that, of course, was out of the question.

As far as they could see, the rock stretched seaward apparently for miles.

But where they stood there was a part much lower than the rest, not ten feet high in fact, and where it was not quite so precipitous.

It was quite evident that, if they wished to be of any assistance to the crew of the sinking vessel, they must in some way or other surmount the barrier, for it was from the other side of it that the signals came.

So close as they now were to the tumbling ocean speech was almost out of the question, so it was by signs that Dick made Tom aware he was about to make the attempt, full of peril as it was, to scale the wall.

The place though, they found upon a closer examination, favoured them exceedingly.

Several fragments were so disposed as to be almost like steps.

But they were wet with spray, and more slippery than ice.

Undismayed, however, by the seemingly insuperable obstacles which presented themselves, they resolutely struggled to obtain a footing upon the first of these fragments. After many and many a fall and futile effort they succeeded.

To get from this on to the next was a much easier task, and so on to the next, until at length they drew themselves up on to the wall of rocks.

But at the very moment they did so there came such a furious blast of wind from seaward that nothing could withstand, and Turpin and King suddenly felt themselves dashed from their feet and hold.

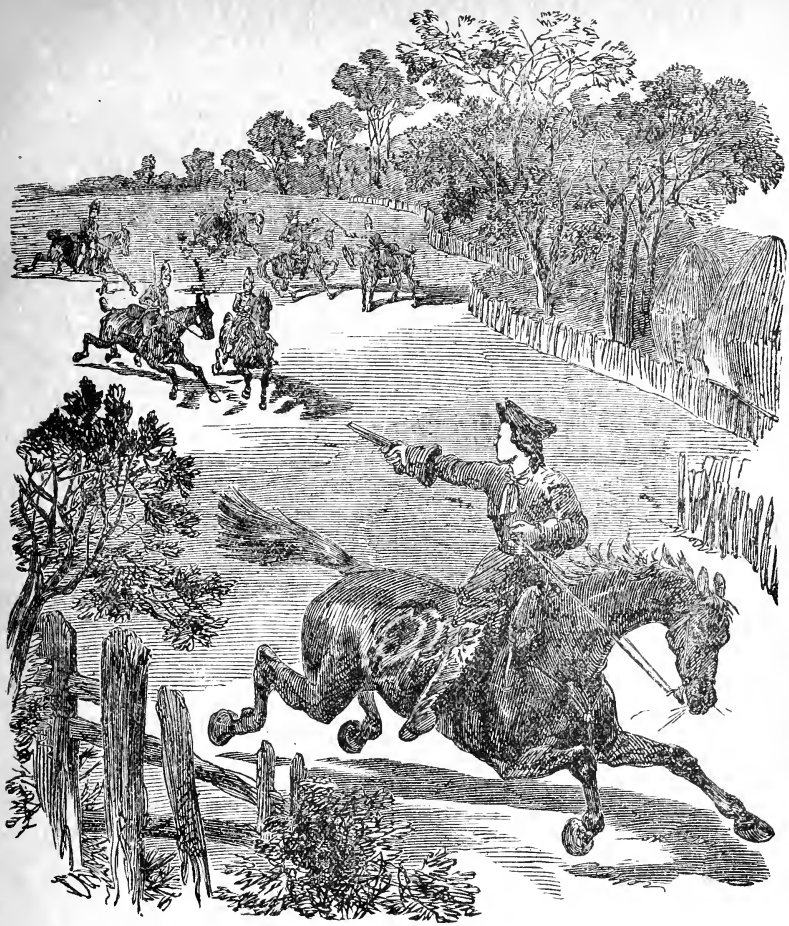
They gave themselves up for lost.

Fortunately, however, for them they were close to a ledge of rock, and it was against this they were thrown, instead of being swept off on to the beach.

But such was the force and suddenness of the shock that they were for some few minutes in a state of utter insensibility.

The sea spray very soon recovered them, though.

Their heads had gone with a dreadful thump against the rock, so their ideas were at first somewhat confused



[TOM KING IS CAPTURED BY THE DRAGOONS.]

Boom! boom! boom!

Those were the sounds that next came to their ears, and restored them to perfect consciousness.

Taking each other by the hand they crept forward on their hands and knees to the other side of the rocks, and having reached it, lay flat down upon their stomachs and peered over.

CHAPTER LXXII.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING FIND THAT MOST EFFECTIVE MEASURES HAVE BEEN TAKEN FOR THEIR CAPTURE.

A LOUD and fearfully startling cry of mortal agony greeted the ears of our two friends at this moment.

Above all the din of the contending elements it rose clearly, distinctly, and there was mingled with it a crashing sound of some strong body being torn asunder.

The vessel had gone to pieces on the rocks.

It was her parting timbers that made the sickening, crashing sound.

The highwaymen drew their breath short and thick.

Then they endeavoured to pierce the gloom before and below them.

Faintly—very faintly, they could see the sand.

But they were astonished to find that, though on the side upon which they had ascended the part of the rocky wall was not more than ten feet high, the other side where they so much wanted to be was as inaccessible to them as ever.

A sheer descent, not much under thirty feet in depth, was between them.

How they were to get down they knew not.

Suddenly, however, a bright light illumines the strand, and by its aid they can see things distinctly.

But fearing to be themselves seen, they crouch still closer to the rocks.

They saw the wreckers gliding about like spectres.

Compelled as they now were to remain simply spectators of what was about to take place, Turpin and King looked down with all-absorbing interest.

High and dry, beyond reach of the waves, was piled a heap of miscellaneous articles, which had been washed ashore already from the wreck.

Every time the waves broke upon the sands they brought with them some object, which was immediately seized and placed with the rest.

But to their unutterable horror they saw the smuggler chief himself with his drawn sword in his hand deliberately lying in wait for such of the crew as were washed ashore, and then dispatching them with his weapon.

Thus those who succeeded in escaping from the deep did so only to perish by the murderers' steel.

Then the body was dragged ashore.

Rifled of everything of the slightest value.

Afterwards consigned again to the deep.

It was a horrid sight, and the two highwaymen felt themselves grow fairly sick at heart and the blood stagnate in their veins.

The butchery continued.

Women, too, were served in the same ruthless manner.

But it was only while the first stunning sensation of horror was upon them that our friends could remain inactive while such deeds were perpetrated before their faces.

They raised themselves a little.

There was now a slight lull in the storm, which foretokened either a total cessation of its violence or a renewal of it.

Dick took the opportunity to speak.

"Tom—Tom!" he said, "I cannot stand this. Would you ever have believed the men with whom we have consorted were such fiends? Look, there is the chief. His sword is dripping with blood. By heavens, look again; there is a beautiful girl; see, he has struck her once, and the waves carry her away. Now they bring her back, and he strikes her a second blow. He drags her ashore. Monster, he shall rue this night and its unholy work."

"He shall, if we can but reach him," replied Tom King; "but I do not see how we are to do it. To jump down would be madness."

"It would; but if no other mode of reaching presents itself I shall risk it. I am determined to put an end to this butchery, and take such a vengeance on the actors in it as will be remembered long after we have both ceased to be."

"I think," said Tom, "now that the wind has gone down so much, we may manage to crawl along this wall, and find a place nearly inland, where we can drop with greater safety."

"Let us make the attempt, my friend; anything is preferable to remaining here. Would that I had been able to save the ship."

"It would have been a glorious deed, but it is no good thinking of what has taken place; let us see what good it now lies in our power to do!"

As he uttered this practical remark, Tom, who was nearest to the shore, began to creep slowly along the rocks.

It was an attempt full of danger.

Every part was wet with the sea-spray, and made it almost an impossibility to take a hold either by the hands or feet.

But, in a case of this sort, caution and perseverance will do wonders; and so, by slow degrees, our friends got further and further along the rock, without meeting with any other accident than bruising their flesh against the more rugged portions of it.

Ten minutes only served to carry them what, under ordinary circumstances, would be considered an insignificant distance.

To their joy, however, they reached a place where they thought they could with safety reach the beach.

Holding tight with their hands, they gradually lowered their bodies into the abyss, and then, letting go, dropped upon a flat place a few feet below them.

They repeated this process again, and reached a lower portion still.

From thence their descent to the sands was easy, and they made it in safety.

The storm had evidently reached its height, and was now rapidly subsiding. The wind came only in wayward gusts, and the waves became more tranquil. The clouds, too, dispersed, and a gentle, subdued light spread itself over the scene.

Drawing their swords, Turpin and King rushed forward.

The wreckers were still engaged in their frightful work.

But some portion, our friends found, had gone—most probably, they thought, back to the cavern, for they could see, besides the smuggler king himself, two of his men—that is, three in all.

The highwaymen, as our readers know, had fought against longer odds than these.

So, not attempting the least concealment, they called out to them to desist.

The smuggler recognized the voice, and he turned round with great suddenness.

Dick, who was thoroughly disgusted at his brutality, made a rush at him.

"Dastardly villain!" he cried, "I have discovered the full extent of your iniquity. Defend yourself, or, so sure as there is a heaven above us, I will cut you down!"

The smuggler king uttered a cry of rage, and his sword clashed against Dick Turpin's.

Tom, in the meantime, had attacked with great resolution the two men.

A most perfect master of the art of fence was Tom King. In happier times, when his position in life was far different to what it was now, he had made it a favourite study, and many a time since had he found it serve him in the hour of need.

On this occasion he was able to perform that most difficult of all feats with the sword—that is, to parry the cuts and thrusts of two antagonists, as well as deal them slashing cuts in return.

But still this was most dangerous, and he had great difficulty to prevent one getting behind him.

The feet of the fierce combatants sank deeply in the sand.

Backward and forward, round and round, now with their feet actually in the water, and anon far up the shore, they went, until at last, a favourable opportunity occurring, Tom caught one of his assailants such a blow upon the head that he fell down at once like a log of wood.

The other, furious at the fall of his comrade, fought with increased desperation, all the time crying loudly for his chief to come and aid.

But Turpin found that individual quite enough to do to defend himself without helping other people.

Single-handed, the other smuggler stood but a poor chance with Tom, who, in less than five minutes, stretched him on the ground, bleeding profusely from at least twenty wounds, every one of which looked sufficient to cause death.

Having done this, he turned his attention to his friend, who was still desperately combating with the chief. Neither appeared to have gained any advantage over the other, or to have received a wound.

In fact, in point of skill they were well matched, though not in other respects, for the chief was taller, heavier, and stronger than Dick Turpin.

Tom King hastened to assist him, but Dick, perceiving his intention, cried—

"No—no, Tom! Hold off! It is a fair fight, and shall continue so! Sheathe your sword, my friend, and leave us to it."

Thus commanded, Tom withdrew and watched the progress of the fight.

That Turpin would eventually prove the victor he felt certain, for he noticed that there was upon his face an expression of stern determination, which he had never observed there before.

Then day dawned.

The cold, gray light stole softly over the scene, and almost seemed to have the effect of calming the roughness of the water.

As Tom gazed towards the ocean, his eye lighted on some object which was left by a retiring wave upon the sand.

Ere, however, he could reach it, another wave carried it away again.

But he perceived that it was the form of a child, apparently not more than ten or twelve years of age.

The waves once more carried it towards the beach, and Tom, stooping dow" lifted it out of the water, and laid it on the sand.

It was either insensible or dead.

It was a beautiful and lovely girl, and lying there in that motionless attitude, with her golden hair streaming disorderly about her, and with fragments of sea-weed hanging to it, she looked perhaps more beauteous than under other circumstances she would appear.

Tom was charmed.

But hearing the clashing of the steel which had hitherto made the air ring again suddenly cease, he turned to see the issue of the conflict.

The smuggler chief was down, and Turpin was in the act of returning his sword to its scabbard.

Upon seeing Tom bending over something not far from the water's edge, Dick hastened towards him.

"The smuggler king," he said, anticipating his friend's question, "has gone to his last account. He had some courage in him, after all, and he would not yield until death positively compelled him. It is a sad pity he was such a villain. But what is that, Tom?"

"Cannot you see? A little girl which I picked out of the water while you were engaged in combat. Has she not a lovely face?"

"She has indeed, and it would have been a thousand pities if one so fair and angel-like had been swallowed up by waters. Is she dead?"

"I fear so!" said Tom. "She is as cold as ice, and I cannot detect the least flutter in her pulse."

"Well, well, poor thing—your assistance came, after all, too late! But is this the only creature we can find belonging to the unfortunate vessel's complement?"

"I fear so," was the reply, as Tom looked searchingly along the beach; "we have come too late to save any one."

It was as he had said. A few splinters from the wreck were floating idly about, and several human forms, which had been gashed by the smuggler chief's murderous blade! but that was all.

A silence, which was most impressive remained for a few moments between the two friends, broken only by the plash, plash of the waves.

Then the sun rose.

The first beams from

"The god of day,"

gilded with a marvellous beauty the crests of the still spumous waves, and shot up in long beams of ruddy light among the clouds.

One ray, that seemed almost brighter than the rest, fell upon the child Tom had taken from the water.

It is needless to say that it added fresh beauty to her lovely features.

Tom stooped down suddenly.

"By heavens! Dick," he said, "she is alive! I saw her eyelids move slightly as the brighter light fell upon them. She lives, and we have not had our labour in vain. I will take her in my arms and carry her, and do you, my friend, lead me to the nearest habitation."

Suiting the action to the word, he picked the child up in his arms.

An exclamation came from Dick's lips.

It was echoed by a shout of anger, and Tom King, looking up, saw the remainder of the smuggler crew, armed with weapons of every description, hurrying towards them, yelling and gesticulating with rage.

"We shall have another fight, I can see," he said, as he laid the child down on the sands, and drew his sword.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

A TREACHEROUS CALM—THE DAWNING OF DESPAIR.

THERE was every reason to suppose that these men, who now ran so eagerly forward to attack our friends, had been sent back to the cavern for some purpose, and having from the distance seen what was going on, had made as much haste as possible, but arrived too late to save their rascally leader from the fate he so richly deserved.

"Come on, you cowardly villains!" shouted Dick. "Come on! we are ready to serve you as we served the rest. Come on, I say!"

As he spoke he brandished his weapon, and, without waiting for them to come, he sped forward to meet them.

Tom King followed his example.

It was five or six men that they thus defied.

The dauntless bearing of our friends was not without its due effects.

The men slackened their speed, halted, and then, without waiting for a blow to be struck, turned and fled.

But Turpin and King were not disposed to let them off thus easily, and they pursued them as fast as the nature of the ground would allow.

The smugglers, though, knew the road much better than the highwaymen, and running among the rocks, disappeared.

Turpin came to a halt.

"What do you say, Tom? It is pretty clear those vermin have sought refuge in one of the many caves hereabout; shall we follow them?"

"I should like to make them feel the weight of my arm, I confess, but still I do not think it would be prudent to chase them any further. They might lure us into some place where we could not escape with life."

"That is very true. I think we may content ourselves with what we have done."

"So do I. You may depend we have put a stop to any more wrecking business being carried on in this quarter just yet a bit.

"The smuggler's band, large as it was, is now, you see, virtually destroyed, since those cowardly wretches are all that remain."

"Yes, the revenue vessel and us together have been the means of putting a few rascals out of the world."

"I cannot feel the slightest commisseration for their fate."

"Nor I. If anyone deserved to be punished with death, they did. To entice a vessel freighted with their fellow-countrymen to destruction by means of a false beacon, is diabolical in the extreme."

"No fate could expiate such an enormous crime, but I am afraid such things as we have witnessed to-night are not so uncommon as is supposed. I had frequently heard of such things, but until they were avouched by my own eyes, I never gave them credence.

"There is a point we ought to consider of at once, and that is, what we are to do in the next place. There is the little girl that I took out of the water, and who lies yonder on the beach. I cannot find it in my heart to leave her, especially as I am sure she is alive."

"You can only do as you said you should, namely, take her to some homestead close at hand, and give her in charge of the inmates."

"That must be it. A few sovereigns, which we can easily spare, will soon banish any scruples that may be felt about taking her in."

"Oh! rely upon that. Make haste across the beach, my friend, and fetch her. I will wait here for you in case any of the smugglers should show their noses."

"I think there is little fear of that," said Tom, as he set off at a run.

It did not take him long to reach the spot where he had deposited the young girl, and as he took her up in his arms he was overjoyed to find that she was growing warm, as well as evincing other signs of returning animation.

Such a light weight as she was was nothing to Tom King, so he made his way with great swiftness to where he had left Turpin.

"Is all well?" the latter asked, as he got within speaking distance.

"Yes, she lives, and I do not doubt, if we can only succeed in reaching a place of shelter, that she will quite recover herself."

"I am glad to hear that—very! It appears to me we shall be likeliest to attain our object by keeping along the coast, since it is hardly possible for us to proceed far without finding a fisherman's hut."

"Very well, then. Come on at once, though I must say I had thought of finding her a more comfortable abiding place—a farmhouse, for instance."

"That would undoubtedly be better, but the nearest one may be several miles from here, and I think it most imperatively necessary that you should take her to the first place we find."

"It is—it is. These wet clothes ought to be removed with as little delay as possible."

With such talk as this, which seemed to cheat the distance, our friends walked rapidly along the sands in the hope of finding a place for the child—the only

living thing that remained to tell what ship it was that was wrecked, and to what port she was bound.

It was quite half-an-hour, though, before they came in sight of a habitation.

And then it could scarcely be called such, though it indicated the proximity of a dwelling.

It was a windmill, and at least a mile distant.

"That will be the place," said Turpin; "give me the child, and you can rest your arms a bit. That's it. Now on we go."

The little girl was handed into Dick's arms, and then the highwaymen, leaving the course they were taking for one at right angles on the left of it, continued their way with unabated speed.

Every moment they knew might be precious to the young thing's life.

The road was toilsome, for it rose very rapidly; in fact the windmill was upon the ridge of a hill.

By changing their burden frequently, however, they managed to get on pretty well.

As they fully expected, they found as they drew nearer that there was a neat little cottage adjoining the mill. It was surrounded by a large and well-cultivated garden.

From the exterior appearance of the place generally, the two highwaymen formed a favourable opinion of the inhabitants.

Numberless flowers, of every imaginable hue, were blooming everywhere.

Order and neatness were observable in all things.

Such signs as these would enable anyone to come to a pretty correct conclusion that the occupants were what the outside of the house showed they were.

It was a relief when they reached the pretty green palisade with which the garden was environed.

Tom King was carrying the child.

Dick pushed open the little gate.

It made a slight sound as it turned upon its hinges, upon hearing which, some one, who was within, came to the doorstep.

The door itself was wide open, and Dick, as he strode along the neatly kept gravel path, caught a glimpse of one of the cleanest and prettiest little rooms that ever he remembered meeting with.

It was a woman who came to the door.

The morning sun was now shining brightly, and she had to shade her eyes with her hands before she could precisely tell who was coming.

She was young and graceful-looking, with a countenance pleasing in the extreme.

Upon, however, perceiving our friends, she gave a shriek of alarm, and retreated hastily into the house.

Their appearance terrified her.

And well it might, for the proceedings of the night had made them look rather ferocious individuals.

Her cry, however, brought another person on the scene.

This was the miller, who emerged suddenly from a little door in the mill itself.

He, too, was young, with a frank-looking, good-tempered countenance.

Evidently he was the husband of the woman who had made such a brief appearance at the cottage door.

"Hilloa, there! Dang it all, who be ye, what do ye want, frightening my Fanny in that way, eh? Who be ye, I say? What dost thee want?"

"Your assistance," said Turpin, in a gentle voice. "Your assistance, to restore this little girl to life. We picked her up insensible on the beach."

"Eh? what?" said the miller, hastening towards them. "God bless my life! What a pretty little thing! How nation pale and death-like too she be! Here Fanny—Fanny, come hither! thee be'est wanted."

Reassured by her husband's voice, the woman again appeared.

Our friends were standing just inside the porch.

"Look here, Fanny, lass, these gemmen here were on the coast during the storm last night—and an awful storm it were—and they a' picked up this little girl here. They do say she's alive, but she looks more like death than life, a sight!"

"Nevertheless," said Tom King, "she is alive, or, at all events, was a little while back, and if you will only take off her wet clothes, and put her in a warm bath, I daresay she will come round. Will you do this? I will pay you well for your trouble."

The womanly sympathies of the honest miller's wife were immediately enlisted in favour of the little girl, but when Tom spoke of paying her for what she did, she drew back with an offended air.

"We don't want to be paid for acting like Christians; but if it is in our power, we will do what we can towards reviving the dear little thing."

"I am very glad to hear you make such a remark," said Tom, handing his burden to her, "very glad. It confirms me in the good opinion I had formed of you."

A pleased look came over the good woman's face as she heard these words, and so there did over her husband's too.

But, having once taken the child, she did not linger, but hurried into the house with her.

"Dang it!" said the miller, grasping Tom and Dick alternately by the hand, "you're the right sort. Come in, come in, and try a bit of breakfast."

Our friends determined to accept this offer, and entered and soon had a most substantial and appetising fare set before them.

When the meal was over, the miller's wife entered the room in which they were sitting, and gave them the glad intelligence that the little girl had come back to life, and was then in bed fast asleep.

Upon hearing this, our friends gave the miller and his wife some further particulars about the storm and the wreck, and then begged the favour of a bed, so that they could rest themselves for an hour or two, which request was readily granted to them.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

TURPIN AND KING ONCE MORE UPON THE ROAD—THE SEARCH FOR BLACK BESS.

THE sun was but a few degrees above the horizon when Turpin and King descended to the kitchen of the mill cottage.

Very weary and very much exhausted were they when they threw themselves upon the bed, in the room to which they had been shown, and the delicious silence, as well as, perhaps, some somniferous quality of the air, made them sleep long and heavily.

But they got up feeling wonderfully refreshed.

After plentifully swilling themselves in cold water they, as we have said, shortly before sunset made their way downstairs into the back room on the ground floor of the cottage.

They found upon the table a light and frugal repast, for the miller and his wife were just then about to partake of supper.

In tones of unfeigned welcome did the miller greet our friends, and request them to seat themselves at the table.

This they were nothing loth to do, besides which they did not want to leave until they had learned some additional particulars respecting the child King had saved, and this would give them an opportunity of doing so.

They were saved the trouble of asking the question, for the miller said—

"Dang it! but she be all right, tho' she did look so corpus like! Miseus ha' spoken to her. Tell the gemmen what she said, Fanny."

"It were not much, sirs," said the miller's wife, "except she told me her name was Susan, and cried very much for her uncle and her brother."

"Did you ask her the name of the ship?"

"I did, sir."

"And what did she say it was?"

"A very curious name, but she took the trouble to spell it to I."

"What was it?"

"I recollect quite well. She said R-a-n-e-d-e-e-r, *Ranedeer*."

"The *Ranedeer*," said Tom, "then we shall be able to find out all about her; for, though it is not an uncommon name for a ship, yet the mode of spelling it is peculiar, though I believe, correct. However, it will, I doubt not, enable us to identify the vessel."

"And did she say no more?"

"No; I would not let her, for even that little exertion quite knocked her over; so I told her to go to sleep, which she did, and is sleeping now."

"Thanks," said Tom, rising from the table. "It is necessary that myself and friend should leave here now at

ence, as important business calls us away; but rest assured no long time will elapse before you see us here again. In the meantime do not be offended with me for offering you this purse of sovereigns. To me they are no object. I can spare them easily, and without being sensible of their loss."

The miller opened his mouth to remonstrate, but King waved his hand and went on.

"It will be impossible for you to have this little girl here without incurring numberless expenses, which, I am sure, I can better afford than you. Do not look upon it as being paid for your charitable conduct, but rather consider it is I who wish to have this chance of being charitable."

Nine sentences out of every ten the miller uttered commenced with two words, and the one in reply to Tom King's observations was no exception to the habit he had fallen into.

"Dang it!"

Those were the two words.

"Dang it!" he said. "What you say sounds fair enough, and may be if I was in your place I should want to do the same; so we'll say no more about it. The little thing shall want for nothing while she is under my roof, bless her pretty face and beautiful golden hair. I'll take good care of that. We've got no children of our own, though many's the time we've grieved over it. However, here we are with one, and, so long as she chooses, here she will find a home."

"You are a downright honest, good-hearted fellow," said Tom King, warmly pressing the miller's huge rough hand with undisguised admiration. "I wish there were more such in the world. However, no matter. It strikes me you will have a chance of keeping your word; for, to the best of my belief, every one else on board the ill-fated vessel perished."

Tom could not repress a shudder as he thought upon the means.

And, now," said Turpin, breaking the rather awkward pause which ensued, "we must be going. Look, the sun has quite set now, and soon darkness will close around us."

"It is even so," said Tom King. "Farewell for the present, my faithful friends. Rely upon it we shall not be long ere we return, for I am anxious to speak to the child I have saved, and look again at her beautiful face. While I am gone I shall make every inquiry about the vessel, the name of which I am not likely to forget. Farewell."

He wrung the hands of the miller and his wife as he spoke, and passed out of the door into the garden.

"Farewell," said Turpin, shaking hands with them likewise, "and accept our thanks for all you have this night done for us."

So saying, he rejoined his friend.

They passed together out of the little wooden gate, and turned towards Durley Chine, which was still distinctly visible.

Several times did they look back, and each time saw the miller and his wife wave their hands after them.

"There," said King, as they came to a bend in the road which hid the mill-cottage from their sight; "under that roof are two of the best natures that ever drew the breath of life."

"I firmly believe it, and we ought to think ourselves fortunate in the extreme in finding such an asylum for the girl, in whom I feel as warm an interest as you do yourself."

"I am not afraid to leave her in their care; and now, knowing she's safe what shall be our next plan of operations?"

"Before we can think of that, we must re-enter the deserted grounds surrounding Durley Chine, and find the mare Black Bess! You, too, will require a steed. You must look about for one."

"I must, and I only hope that I shall chance upon a good one."

At this moment they reached the summit of a little hill, and, ere they descended it, they paused a moment to regain their breath and look around them.

The twilight was only deep enough to render indistinct the more distant objects in the landscape, for many a mile all things were plainly visible.

Their gaze lingered longest on the cottage adjoining the mill.

The worthy couple were still outside the porch, and it seemed as they could still our friends were looking in that direction, for they again waved their hands.

"Forward!" said Turpin, "do not let us waste any more time. I am most anxious to reach Durley Chine before night closes in."

"We shall easily be able to do that, for twenty minutes walking will take us there. But, above all, let us be cautious that no one sees us enter."

"I do not think we need fear that. Really, the place seems almost uninhabited. With the exception of the miller and his wife, we have not met a creature."

"I am aware of it, but we have not come far. As for our not seeing anyone on our way to the mill, I think nothing of it. It was an hour when but few people are abroad. Even London would be deserted."

"But look, we are destined to see somebody, at all events. What a cloud of dust there is at the end of the road yonder to be sure. Whatever can it be coming?"

"I have no idea!"

"Nor I; what puzzles me though, is that the ground should have dried so soon after the storm!"

"Then there is nothing at all wonderful in that, if you take into consideration the nature of the soil; you see it is of a calcareous or chalky nature, like the caverns, and wet is greedily absorbed by it, so that when the rain has ceased the surface soon gets dry."

"Oh! that is it, Well, I always look to you for explanations of things of that sort. I am not such a scholar as you."

Tom laughed at this remark, and said—

"My pretensions to the title of scholar are very slight indeed. I am, though, puzzled beyond measure to know what can be approaching to raise such a cloud of dust."

The elevated position in which our friends were, enabled them to see for a long distance ahead.

Considerably more than a mile off was a dense cloud of dust, and what caused it they would have given no trifle to know.

That it approached them was evident.

Some minutes were spent in fruitless speculation, and then Turpin, struck with a sudden idea, flung himself down on the roadway, placing his ear to the earth.

It was a wonder he had not thought of this before.

He did not remain in this position a moment, but sprang again to his feet.

"What do you make of it now?" asked Tom King.

"I am almost as much puzzled as I was before," was the reply. "A large number of horses are approaching."

"I daresay, now," said Tom, with a laugh, "it is a drove of horses going to market."

"That's it! Yet no! Stop! It isn't!"

"Why not?"

"It's the wrong time in the day; people wouldn't be taking their horses to market at this hour in the evening."

"No more they would. That is a little circumstance which did not occur to me when I spoke."

Turpin again placed his ear to the ground.

"You are altogether wrong," he said, when he rose. "They are horsemen, and coming along at a sharp trot."

"Horsemen! I am more puzzled than before. What can they be doing?"

"Goodness knows! But anyhow I think the most prudent course for us to pursue would be to leave the road, and take to the meadows. We shall then be able to see without being seen."

"So we shall; and here, as if it was made on purpose, is a gap in the hedge, which will answer our purpose most admirably.

The two friends immediately crossed the ditch which interposed between them and the bank of sloping earth upon which the hedge was planted, and then got through the gap into a field beyond.

The grass in this field had been suffered to grow a prodigious height, and as they found they made a loud rustling noise in their progress, they stopped, and lying down full length, peeped through the interstices of the hedge row.

Nearer, nearer—plainer, plainer—tramp, tramp—came the sound of horses' hoofs.

Who can they be that are coming?

At last, and just as our friends found their patien

exhausted, the foremost of the band of horsemen came in sight.

He was quickly followed by the remainder, who dashed past our friends at a sharp trot.

"Why, bless my heart alive!" ejaculated Turpin, when the last horseman had passed them, "I be hanged if it is not a troop of dragoons! What on earth can they want here, and trotting along at such a rate as that? Something's up somewhere beyond a doubt."

CHAPTER LXXV.

TURPIN AND KING ELUDE THE GUARD, AND ENTER DURLEY PARK.

SITUATED as our friends were, that is to say, at war with everybody, it became a necessity to take cognizance of everything that occurred, and it had grown into a habit with them to consider that when anything of an unusual character happened, it had a special reference to them.

So, on this occasion, the circumstance of a troop of dragoons passing along the highway filled them with speculation.

But not for one moment did they dream of the imminent danger in which they were.

Little did they think what a fortunate thing it was that they had been prompted by caution to hide behind the hedge while the cavalcade passed.

The fact of the matter was, that the body of soldiers which they had seen, was but one of several other companies who had been sent out with strict injunctions to scour the country in all directions for the notorious and audacious highwaymen, Richard Turpin and Thomas King.

Great, indeed, was their peril, but they knew it not.

Could it but have been whispered to them what alarming and effective measures had been taken for their apprehension, how they would have hastened to the sea-shore, from which they were at so short a distance, and, hiring a vessel of some kind, have crossed over to France.

But alas! there was nothing to warn them but their own perceptions.

The reader will remember what a series of daring deeds they had committed before taking refuge at Durley Chine, which certainly had the effect of baffling their foes, though not throwing them off the hunt.

Firstly, there was the robbery of the lord mayor's coup.

Secondly, the execution of Sir Theodore Houghton.

Thirdly, stopping the western coach.

Fourthly, the robbery of Captain Nidget, and

Finally, the defeat of the officers in the New Forest.

This was a deed which, as Dick had rightly conjectured, would make the country too hot to hold them.

But when he made this reflection, he little thought such vigorous steps would be taken to bring him and his comrade to justice.

The rewards were doubled.

Police-officers without number made inquiries in every possible direction.

They had been traced to the borders of the New Forest, but beyond that place there was nothing to serve them for a guide.

But what was looked upon as being quite certain to entail their capture was, that from sunset to sunrise, all the highroads were patrolled by companies of cavalry soldiers, whose orders were to keep a sharp look-out, and if they saw the highwaymen to make them prisoners—alive if possible, in order that they might suffer judicially for the crimes of which they had been guilty. But rather than allow them to escape on these grounds, they were to take their lives without hesitation.

For a full week had these measures been actively in operation, but without achieving the desired effect, for, as the reader knows full well, they were, during that period, either in the mansion at Durley Chine or the caverns beneath it, where it would have been well if they had remained.

But it was the opinion of both that they had secluded themselves quite long enough to allow the noise their exploits would occasion to blow over.

But in this they made a grand mistake

A very particular account of them had been given to all the men, who were told not to scruple to take any one prisoner who at all answered the description.

This was a glorious thing for the police, since it enabled them to have the appearance of doing a great deal.

But it was appearance only; for though on the average about fifty persons were had up daily on suspicion, yet it was in all cases satisfactorily proved that they had yet to get hold of the right men.

Still, for all that, it looked as though the police were in earnest, so, as usual, the people were pleased with, and deceived by, them.

From the fact of their having been traced to the vicinity of the deserted mansion, it naturally occurred to many that it must be there where they had taken refuge, and they asserted as much to the executors of Sir Ernest Dane, who were, however, inflexible, and would not permit any intrusion to be made, and the will of the deceased baronet disobeyed.

A close watch, however, was kept round the premises, and with this the executors could not interfere, nor indeed did they wish to do so.

This guard consisted of police-officers, all well armed, who were posted at short intervals all round the park palings.

But this, of course, produced no effect, or, at all events, had not done so as yet.

Still they did not suffer their vigilance to relax.

Thus, our friends were, in a manner of speaking, hemmed in in every direction, and let them turn whichever way they would, capture stared them in the face.

Of all this the highwaymen were completely ignorant. The only thing that called forth remark was the presence of the dragoons.

The thought was uppermost in the minds of all that it was just possible that troop had been sent out to apprehend them, and each waited for the other to make the supposition, neither liking to be the first to broach the subject, so the consequence was it was not spoken at all.

Besides, were such the case, they had passed them, and the distance was every moment increasing.

What is easier than for them to continue their course along the road?

Nothing apparently.

They were not, however, aware of the extent to which the officers had carried their machinations.

If the thought did occur to them that this one troop was in search of them, they certainly did not for a moment dream that it was one of many who had all the same object in view.

There is something terrible in the idea of two persons being environed with such deeply-laid schemes for their destruction.

But so it was.

Then, as the reader is well aware, that when he knew the full extent of his danger, Turpin's mind rose equal to it; but here, in the present case, he was utterly unconscious that he was in any peril at all—certainly no more than he was every day accustomed to.

What is his errand now?

To enter Durley Park, and lead out Black Bess.

Such a thing would be utter madness did he know that people were on the watch, and adopted cautious and strategic measures accordingly; but set out with such an object, not dreaming that it was necessary to take any particular precaution, would be nothing short of sheer suicide.

It is very strange, but it nevertheless often happens, when we are most happy then are we nearest to sorrow, and when most confident of being safe to be in the greatest danger.

Such was the case with both our friends.

They left the meadow, and returned to the high-road.

Not a soul, or even a living creature of any kind, was in sight.

The dragoons were completely out of sight and hearing.

The pace they were going at was one that, without appearing so to do, got over a great deal of ground in a short time.

Then the sun sank suddenly behind the black mass of clouds that was piled up on the horizon.

A sudden obscurity overspread the scene.

A cool wind arose, and whistled mournfully amongst the foliage.

But, unheeding this, our friends walked rapidly along the road in the direction of Durley Chine.

It was Tom King who spoke, after a rather long interval of silence, during which both had been occupying their thoughts with trying to account for the presence of the dragoons.

But although this subject was topmost in his thoughts, yet Tom did not allude to it in any way.

"I very much regret," he said, "that we did not serve the remainder of the smugglers, or rather wreckers, as we did the chief and the other two. Such wretches ought not to be allowed to exist."

"I think we may rest satisfied with what we have done. They will be some time, I think, before they renew their frightful business; if, indeed, they ever do."

"Pho! pho! We have not dealt them a severe enough blow for that. I, for my part, feel pretty sure that before many days are over, they will begin again."

"Well, well, perhaps so. I shall, however, most certainly in a day or two revisit the mill cottage. Not only shall I be glad to see again its worthy inmates, but I am anxiously impatient to speak to the little girl. What did they say her name was?"

"Susan."

"Ay, Susan. She will be able, I hope, to give me some particulars about the vessel that was wrecked. Poor thing! she is the only one saved. What is to become of her? What will be her future fate?"

"You won't know that if you puzzle your brains for an hour. The best thing that can happen to her will be for the miller to adopt her as his own daughter."

"It will, if he will adopt her."

"You may depend he will be only too glad. Both have loving hearts. It seems strange that such people should be denied children of their own, as they appear to be."

By this time the glorious twilight had deepened into night, which was at once dark and moonless.

The greatest part of the distance to Durley Chine had now been passed over. The mansion was certainly not a quarter of a mile off.

More picturesque than ever did it look in the darkness, for it was outlined with great distinctness upon the lighter coloured sky behind it.

But all between the two highwaymen and the house itself was very dark indeed. No object at a distance of more than a few yards could be discerned.

Suddenly Turpin caught Tom King by the arm, arresting his footsteps.

At the same instant he pointed with his arm down the lane.

"Lights!" exclaimed Tom King, as he saw the object to which his companion directed his attention. "Moving lights. What can they mean?"

"That is it!"

"I can count five of them. They are moving along in a straight line towards the coast."

"They are. I cannot tell what the meaning of it is," said Dick to his companion, "but I can tell what it is."

"I think I can, too."

"It appears to me quite clear that some half-dozen men carrying lanterns are making their way either along the hedgerow or else along the palings of the park at Durley Chine."

CHAPTER LXXIV.

TURPIN AND KING ARE CHASED BY THE TROOP OF DRAGOONS.

"ALONG the park palings," iterated Tom King; "that's where they are, that's clear. Who can they be, eh?"

"I am as much at a loss to know that as I am to know their object."

"For my own part, I cannot help connecting those lights with the troop of dragoons we saw gallop past us a little while ago."

"The deuce, you can't; but look, they have stopped, and now there is as many again of them."

It was with increasing interest that our friends now strained forward to watch what was taking place.

The light of at least a dozen lanterns could now be seen flashing through the darkness; but the lights no longer moved; they were stationary.

Presently, however, they formed out into a straight line, and then divided in the centre, half going one way and half the other.

Then they observed, further, that as they went on one light was left behind; so that in a few minutes the line extended in an irregular line for a considerable distance, each light being an equal distance from the other—that distance being thirty or forty yards.

No sooner was this done than, as if by magic, every light became extinct.

Not the faintest gleam remained to show where they had been.

It is needless to say that all this filled our two friends with the most intense surprise.

Turpin drew a long breath.

"This is something very extraordinary," he said; "I can't make it out at all; can you, Tom?"

"No further than this, that I think it pretty evident those men who carry the lanterns have been placed as sentinels somewhere, and, from what I can see, apparently along the park palings."

"That is it, of course. I have it now, sure enough. You may depend, Tom, that in some way or other we have been tracked to Durley Chine, and that those men have been placed there to nab us as we leave it."

"Of course," said Tom King; "however was it that it did not occur to us before! Now I can see all plainly enough?"

"All what?"

"Why, those dragoons we saw trot down this lane are on the look out for us, in case we should not be in the mansion; and the others are either soldiers or police-officers, who have surrounded the park, for the executors of Sir Ernest would not, I am certain, listen either to their entering the grounds or search the house."

"Just so! Those lights, then, we may safely conclude, were carried by the relief guard, as I may call it."

"There can be little doubt of it; and now, such being the case—the roads watched by dragoons and the park surrounded by men—I think it pretty clear you must give up all idea of getting Black Bess in safety out of the grounds."

Turpin was silent for a few moments.

"The risk will be great, Tom," he said; "very great indeed, and yet"——

"Yet you would say you do not like the idea of leaving your mare where she is."

"I do not. Without her I can do nothing. But, my friend, I do not want to draw you into this extra trouble on my account, so let me beg of you to secrete yourself somewhere close at hand."

"While you make the attempt alone? Never! I am your friend, and it is not in my disposition to desert you because there happens to be a little danger."

"But, Tom, listen. You could do no good by accompanying me. Two persons would not be required for the job, so let me again ask you as a favour to let me carry out this little affair single-handed."

"I shall allow you to do nothing of the sort. I know I can be of use to you. Two heads are always better than one. I shall be deeply offended with you if you do not let me have my own way in this."

"You are a true friend, Tom," said Dick Turpin, pressing his hand. "Believe me, I shall indeed be most glad to have you with me. I did not wish to appear selfish in the matter, and that was why I pressed you to let me go alone; but, if you mean what you say"——

"I always say what I mean."

"I know you do, and therefore it is settled that you accompany me."

"It is."

"Very well, then, I would ask your advice."

"Upon how we are to proceed?"

"Yes."

"Well, there you puzzle me, for, to tell the truth, I hardly know what to advise. I think the first and best thing we can do is to creep forward with all possible caution, and then, I doubt not, circumstances will arise which will materially assist us."

"Come on, then."

"Does the plan meet with your approbation?"

"Perfectly."

"Then let us make our way towards the palings as stealthily as we can."

Nothing further was now said, but both the highwaymen proceeded to put their determination into execution.

After going about a couple of hundred yards they deemed it advisable to leave the highway, and take to the fields. So happening to see a gate they clambered over it.

They then found themselves in a meadow of very large size. In fact, in the darkness, they could see no bounds to it.

Still keeping in sight the angular roofs and picturesque-looking chimney-tops of the mansion, they struck across the grass, upon which, of course, their tread was all but noiseless.

Yet, so intensely silent was the whole of the place, that even here they were obliged to tread carefully, lest the creaking of their boots, or the jingling of their spurs, should attract attention towards them.

They at length came to a hedge which was so dense and high, that it formed an effectual barrier against their proceeding further; so, after assuring themselves that this was the fact, they were compelled to go along it until they found either a gap or a gate.

At the further extremity of the field they came to a stile, which they got over at once.

"I think it will be the wisest plan not to stray far from the path in future. We shall lose less ground by doing so, I'll warrant."

"Very likely. But come, one more field I take it, and then we shall reach the palisades; so I think the less we say now the better."

There was so much wisdom in this, that Turpin at once acquiesced in it.

In a few more minutes they could see the boundary of the park.

We have in a former chapter described it.

It was in a stooping posture that our friends advanced.

The least sound would be fatal to them.

Dimly, very dimly, they could see the figure of a man.

He was standing quite motionless, and, as they fancied, in an attitude of listening.

What was to be done?

Both wished to speak, but dared not.

Turpin caught hold of his companion by the coat, and motioned to him to lie flat upon the earth.

As it was out of his power to remonstrate or ask a question even as to his motive, Tom King complied.

Then Dick slowly and cautiously drew his sword from its sheath.

Its bright blade glistened slightly, but in drawing it Dick made no sound.

He placed the blade in his mouth, and held it firmly with his teeth.

Sinking then upon the earth, he, in a tortuous, snake-like manner, crept forward.

Tom King begun to follow him, but Turpin made such an imperative gesture for him to remain, that he, perforce, obeyed.

Repugnant as it was to his mind, Dick had resolved upon the assassination of this man who stood so still at his post.

Unless he did he felt sure he must abandon all hope of regaining possession of his mare.

He considered that the end justified the means.

And yet, let us do him the justice to observe that, could he have hit upon any mode of accomplishing his purpose without taking this man's life, he would with the greatest alacrity have adopted it.

But there was none.

Therefore he, with all the subtlety of an Indian, crawled forward.

The officer was doomed.

But, as he stood there on guard, no thought of his imminent danger crossed his mind. Little did he dream that he was so near the end of his career—that the sands of his life were all but run out.

Then Dick adopted an expedient which completely answered his purpose.

He wished to distract the attention of the sentry from himself.

But, at the same time, he did not wish to arouse the attention of another.

Dick took a small pebble in his hand.

Taking a careful aim, he threw it so as to fall about a dozen yards from the officer.

The slight noise it made as it reached the earth caught the man

Had he not been listening intently he would never have heard it, but the fact was he already fancied he could hear something.

He turned immediately in the direction where the stone fell, and carried his rifle to his shoulder.

In another moment he would have cried in a loud voice, "Who goes there?" but ere the words could reach his lips, Turpin had glided forward as swiftly and noiselessly as a spectre.

He drew himself up to his full height behind the sentinel.

Then, with a strange sickening sensation about his heart, he plunged his sword into the body of the officer.

He fell without a groan.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE DRAGOONS CAPTURE TOM KING, AND CONVEY HIM TO NEWGATE.

So far, then, our friends' perilous undertaking was crowned with success.

It was an anxious moment, while they waited, to learn whether the fall of the officer was heard by the next sentry.

But it did not appear that such was the case.

All was still.

Using the greatest caution, Tom King crept up to and rejoined his comrade.

Turpin held up his hand for him not to speak.

Then, turning round, he proceeded to examine the fence.

He was agreeably surprised to find that a huge chestnut tree, growing just inside the inclosure, projected a massive branch right over their heads.

It was some distance from the ground, it is true, but still not so high as to make it a sheer impossibility for them to reach it.

In fact, by the assistance of his comrade, Dick was enabled to grasp it with both hands.

After that the remainder was easy.

He drew himself up.

He found then that his weight so far bent the branch as to make it within reach of Tom's grasp.

In another moment he was beside him.

All this had been done with great celerity, and without the least alarm being given to the other sentries.

The highwaymen passed along the branch of the tree, and then dropped into the park.

They looked about them curiously.

Bess was nowhere in sight.

A peculiar whistle from Dick's lips would, however, be sufficient to bring her to his side; but this he did not dare give because of the dread of its reaching the officers' ears also.

They threaded their way through the park in silence, until at last they reached the shrubbery, where, it will be remembered, Dick tethered his mare.

When he did so he had taken pains to minutely observe the places, so he made his way to the particular tree without hesitation.

Bess was gone!

But as he was about to make some observation to his friend respecting her disappearance, there was a slight rustling among the trees.

He turned round suddenly, placing his hand upon his sword.

There was, however, no ground for alarm.

It was his mare, Black Bess.

She recognized Dick instantly, and exhibited her intense delight by caressing him much in the manner that a cat will do.

It would have been difficult to tell which was the most delighted of the two.

"Hilloa," said Tom King at this moment, but in a low tone of voice, "Hilloa, why, here is another!"

"Another what?"

"Another horse. Whose can it be? It is also saddled and bridled."

"I am astonished. However came it here?"

"I don't know at all," replied Tom, who had been attentively looking at the strange horse's trappings, "but it evidently belongs to a police-officer. I can tell that by the harness."

"This, then, is a suspicious circumstance."



[THE DRAGOONS ESCORTING TOM KING INTO NEWGATE].

"It is, for it certainly seems to point to the fact that officers are actually, in defiance of Sir Ernest's will, prowling about the grounds."

Tom looked anxiously around him as he spoke.

But no living thing was in sight.

"I can scarcely think, from all I know of the circumstances," said Turpin, after a few minutes' anxious thought, "that it could be as you suppose. A dead man's wishes would not be suffered to be thus disregarded. I should rather incline to the belief that it is a horse belonging to one of the officers whom we overcome in the forest."

"By Jove! Dick, you have hit it this time," said Tom King, with great animation. "Horses have strange instincts, and I would wager my life this one has followed Bess hither."

This was a most probable supposition, and both agreed that it must be a correct one.

I shall chance it, and appropriate him to my own use," said Tom, springing on to the strange horse's back, while Turpin mounted his mare, "and there is another little circumstance in connection with it, and that is, supposing our conjecture about this horse to be right, there must be, somewhere in the palings, a place which a horse can leap."

"Egad! yes, I was thinking how we were to overcome that difficulty, and it has disappeared. Let us ride forward, and try if we cannot find this place."

So saying, they made their way to the palisades, and continued along them, taking care not to make a sound.

Presently they came upon a spot where the vegetation was more scanty, and where it was possible for a horse to leap.

Dick placed himself in a line with this place.

He seated himself firmly in the saddle, and gathered the reins in his hand.

"Now, Bess," he said, as he patted her gently and encouragingly upon the neck. "Over, mare—over."

With a sudden rush, Black Bess dashed onwards, and cleared the palings at a bound.

PRICE ONE HALFPENNY.

No. 18 will be Published next Thursday.

Tom King followed closely after him.

His horse, which was really an excellent one, inspired, doubtless, by the example of its companion, leaped over the fence in first-rate style.

But no sooner had they alighted than both highwaymen heard a loud shout, which was immediately succeeded by the discharge of a musket.

They had been seen and heard by one of the many sentinels posted round the park, who lost no time in giving the alarm to his comrades.

The gun was fired without any particular aim being taken, so neither of our friends were injured by it in the least.

Finding that they had alighted safely in the lane which skirted the park, they turned their horses' heads, and by every means in their power urged the animals onward.

The speed they made was prodigious.

But, nevertheless, they could tell by the flashing of lights here and there, and the sounds of many voices, that the alarm was spreading.

It was a lucky thing for Tom King, not only that he should have found a horse so opportunely, but that it should have turned out of so good a quality.

In fact, he succeeded in keeping up with Dick without having to use much exertion, and without the latter having to check the speed of his own mare.

And now, as they swept on at that fearful pace, the sentinels dashed forward to attempt to stay them, but they were only hurled to the earth for their pains.

We have said that one side of the lane was bordered by the park palisades. The other side was bounded by a hedge of holly-trees of most luxuriant growth.

A little further on the lane wound round to the right.

In a few moments both highwaymen reached this bend.

They galloped round it without slackening their pace, and then drew up with great abruptness.

Completely blocking up the lane and forming a most effectual barrier to their progress was the troop of dragoons they had seen about an hour before.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE DRAGOONS HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF TROUBLE WITH THEIR PRISONER.

So very suddenly and unexpectedly did this sight come upon them that, beyond having presence of mind sufficient to pull up their horses, they lost all self-possession.

They were, however, quickly restored to their senses by hearing a loud voice say—

"Here they are. Upon them! Charge! Take them prisoners—alive if possible, if not, dead."

These words were immediately followed by the trampling of horses' hoofs and the clashing of weapons and accoutrements, as the dragoons prepared to obey their officer's commands.

Dick Turpin was the first to recover himself, and, turning his mare round, he shouted—

"Fly, Tom," he said, "we must run for it. To attempt for a moment to make a stand against a troop of soldiers would be the extreme of madness. Spur your steed, my friend, your life depends upon his fleetness."

As he uttered these words, Turpin just grazed the flank of Black Bess with his spur, and she sped along with a swiftness which no other horse could hope to equal.

"Make ready! Present!" cried the officer in command of the dragoons, as he saw his prey turn round and set off at such a headlong speed. "Present! Fire!"

The rattling discharge of about twenty muskets succeeded his command.

But our friends, luckily, had just turned the bend in the lane, so the bullets expended themselves fruitlessly among the trees.

Had it not been for this circumstance the highwaymen must have been swept from the face of the earth.

As it was they were not injured in the least.

Perceiving that this volley had been without result, the officer gave the order to follow in pursuit.

The regular beat of their hoofs reached the ears of Dick Turpin and Tom King with greater plainness than was either pleasant or desirable.

Despite the efforts which Tom's steed made to keep up with Black Bess, he every moment fell further and further into the rear. As yet, however, the distance between the two was inconsiderable.

They did not look behind them, but they could tell by a wild disorderly sort of shout, that the dragoons had them once more in view.

So prompt had been their pursuit, and so great the rate at which they came, that Turpin and King were scarcely out of the range of their guns.

Again they heard the word given to fire.

Upon the impulse of the moment Dick plunged both his spurs into the sides of his mare.

Unused altogether to such treatment, she gave a snort of mingled rage and pain, and then set forward at a speed so tremendous, that Turpin had the greatest possible difficulty in keeping his seat.

Then came the loud report of the fire-arms.

So soon as he heard the sound, Dick felt sure he was unhurt, and he turned round to look to the safety of his comrade.

Then for the first time he noticed that he was not near him.

Unheeding the result he slackened speed, and, turning round in his saddle, took a brief but searching glance behind him.

A pang shot through his heart as he saw what had taken place.

Tom King's horse had been wounded by the last discharge, and had become maddened and ungovernable with pain.

Like some tortured insect he spun round for a moment or two, and then galloped forward in the opposite direction, so that a minute or two must inevitably bring Tom into collision with his foes.

He saw his frightful danger, and sought to avoid it, but in vain.

The dragoons were for a moment thrown into confusion at thus seeing one of the men they were chasing turn round and gallop recklessly towards them.

But it was only for a second.

They halted and formed in a line three deep across the lane.

On came Tom's horse, blind to all before it.

King set his teeth and drew his sword, determined not to surrender without making an effort for his liberty.

But it was quite useless.

His horse was suddenly brought to a stand still, and he himself, surrounded by the troop, was, by numerous hands, dragged from his saddle, and, with great rapidity and dexterity, securely bound.

Tom King was a prisoner.

Beyond all hope or prospect of escape or rescue.

This was what sent a pang through Dick's heart when he turned and looked behind him.

Naturally enough, his first impulse was to ride to the rescue of his friend.

But before he could put his resolve into execution, he saw in a moment the utter uselessness of such an attempt.

How could he hope, single-handed, to cope successfully with so large a body of well-armed men?

The idea was absurd.

Clearly, all that remained for him to do was to seek his own safety by instantaneous flight.

This course, however, he was most loath to adopt, for would it not look like deserting his friend?

But then again there shot across his mind the thought that, were he free, he could do much towards aiding his comrade to escape; but if he, too, out of a false feeling of generosity, was to suffer himself to be captured, what hope was their for either?

None.

With the rapidity of lightning did these thoughts pass through Turpin's mind, and without apparently having had time to reflect and decide upon the course he ought to take, he again urged Bess forward at the top of her speed.

Encumbered with their prisoner, Dick reasonably enough indulged in the hope that he should before long distance them.

He was startled at this moment by another discharge from the carbines of the dragoons, and he heard several bullets whistle by in most unpleasant proximity to his head.

Then a numb sensation in his left arm told him that one of the shots had taken effect.

"You shall have one in return for that," he said, drawing a pistol from his belt.

Without drawing rein he again looked behind him, and holding out the pistol at arm's length, took as good an aim as under the circumstances he possibly could, and fired.

Whether the shot was or was not effective he did not stay to see, but changing the reins from his left to his right hand, occupied himself entirely in seeking his escape.

On, on, like the very wind he went, but still the dragoons kept most perseveringly in the rear.

And now, to Dick's chagrin, he saw, as he looked before him, that night was going, and day about to dawn, for a faint, slate-coloured light began to fall upon the various objects around him, imparting in many instances a ghostly look to the tall trees.

This, however, was a thing over which he could have no possible control.

Most devoutly though did he wish that darkness would have continued an hour or so longer, it would have been of such material aid to him.

Very soon was the park of Durley Chine left behind him, and now, on both sides of the lane, were nothing but hedgerows, so high and so thick that he could see neither over or through them.

In this way another mile was passed over.

On—on, as far as he could see, the lane had precisely the same appearance.

Just within sight and hearing was the troop of dragoons.

"Confound them and the place, too," said Dick, in a tone of great vexation. "They are most excellently mounted, and come along at a surprising rate, and this road is like a tunnel, there is no means of leaving it."

Regrets could avail nothing.

To add to the inconvenience of the place, he found the ground rose rapidly, causing a great diminution in the speed, which, up to this moment, his mare had been making.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

SQUIRE EDELTON AND HIS DAUGHTER ANNIE MAKE A SLIGHT MISTAKE.

From the look of the sky, Dick could tell that he was proceeding in as nearly as possible an easterly direction.

His ignorance of the topography of the place destroyed his confidence, for he knew not how soon he might reach some large town.

But if the ascent he was now making did hinder him, it had the effect of hindering his pursuers in an equal degree, so that after all matters remained much about the same.

A little more than five minutes brought Dick in view of the top of the hill.

From the clearness with which it was defined, he came to the conclusion that on the other side the descent must be very abrupt indeed, much more so than the side he was upon.

But what is amiss?

Dick suddenly brings Black Bess to a stand.

He looks eagerly about him.

Can it be possible that the dragoons have relinquished the chase?

Or is it that he has distanced them?

In neither case would he have pulled up with so much abruptness.

Lower down the hill, too, can be seen the troop of dragoons pushing along with unabated speed.

What on earth, then, could be Dick's motive for behaving as though it was his desire to be taken prisoner?

It was this.

As he had looked before him at the top of the hill he saw suddenly arise as though from the ground another troop of dragoons, similar in appearance to those by whom he was chased, but in greater force.

They saw him, evidently, for they had been travelling only at a walking pace; but now they came on at a full gallop.

And so when he saw this Dick did the only thing he could do, and that was to come to a standstill.

To have kept in motion would only bring his enemies closer upon him.

Turpin gave himself up to anxious thought.

For the first time he became cognizant of the fact that there had been more than one troop sent out to capture him.

He glanced around him despairingly.

Escape there seemed to be none.

A troop of soldiers before him.

A troop of soldiers behind him.

On either side the tallest hedgerows he ever remembered to have seen.

He might just as well have been in a tube.

There was little or no time for deliberation, however. The officers neared him with great rapidity, and in a minute or so would be within musket range.

Truly was Turpin's position most desperate.

"I shall be taken now, that's quite certain," he said; "and then farewell to all hopes of rescuing Tom. We shall swing together next Monday, without a doubt. The only way there is of leaving the lane is by jumping the hedge, and that I am sure is too high, even for Bess.

The jangling of the weapons and ornaments which the soldiers carried, now mingled with the horses' measured tread.

"I won't give up unresistingly," said Dick. "I will try the hedge. If I miss it, I can't possibly be any worse off than I am now, while there is every chance of my being better."

As he uttered these words Dick backed his mare as far as he could to one side of the lane, and faced the hedge on the other.

It was apparent in a moment that the sagacious creature comprehended fully what was required of her, but she seemed by her way to show that she considered the hedge too high, even for her to leap.

But Turpin was rendered desperate at so immediate a prospect of capture and death, and, unheeding the remonstrance, as one might call it, of his mare, he took a firm hold, and then patting her encouragingly upon the back, made her essay the, to every appearance, impossible leap.

For the first time since he had had her in his possession did Black Bess refuse to obey him.

She went half way across the lane, and then swerved.

Dick forced her back to her former position. Every second thus lost was of the most inestimable importance to him.

Finding her master determined, Black Bess once more turned towards the edge.

Then, with a rush and a bound, she was over.

But not clearly.

Her hind legs caught in the hedge, and both horse and rider rolled over and over into a field.

For a minute or so, Turpin was entirely deprived of consciousness, so that he did not hear the cry that the dragoons set up.

It was one compounded of rage, mortification, disappointment, and admiration.

Happily for the safety of Dick's bones, the meadow into which he alighted was composed of soft and stoneless earth.

He recovered the use of his faculties very quickly, and sprang to his feet.

Bess was standing close behind him.

He sprang without delay into the saddle, and shaping his course across the field at right angles to the lane, was soon beyond the danger of immediate capture.

The dragoons, who had made up their minds that the capture of Turpin was inevitable, were enraged beyond measure at his unanticipated escape.

The hedge over which Black Bess had just managed to leap was of so extraordinary a height, and there was so little room for a run before leaping it, that not one of them made the smallest attempt at following him.

The other dragoons who had been pursuing Dick now made their appearance on the scene, looking tired and anxious.

From the bottom of his heart did Tom King rejoice that his old comrade had been so lucky as to get off, though he himself had not been similarly fortunate.

Some very earnest conversation now took place between the officers in command of the two troops.

At length it was determined that the one which had Tom King prisoner, was, without further delay, to make its way to London.

The others would retrace their steps to the top of the hill, at which place they thought they should be able to get into the meadows.

But before they could do this Dick had got such a start that it was quite futile to think of overtaking him.

His progress, however, across the fields was not quite so swift as he could have wished, for the ground was soppy from the recent rain.

Bess, too, could not but be exhausted after the efforts she had made, and the heaviness of the ground affected her more than it ordinarily would have done.

After crossing a couple of meadows he came to a large plot of ploughed land.

His first thought was to cross this, but on further consideration he concluded it would be better to take to the firm beaten path which skirted it.

It would, besides, be less fatiguing to his mare, and he knew that upon her depended his chance of safety.

It is very probable, too, that this, although much further, would not take near so long.

At the other side of the field Dick found a gate which led into one of the most charming and beautiful lanes he had ever, in the course of his varied experience, seen.

Perhaps, too, the fresh pure air of the early morning made it appear more beautiful than at other times.

The sky was cloudless, and the sun had got sufficiently high up in the heavens to shed upon all things a mellow, yet rosy light.

Numberless birds were singing sweetly in the tall trees on either side of the lane, while a lark that had just risen was mounting rapidly upwards, his clear and musical notes making themselves audible above all others.

Not the least charm about this place was the air of entire repose which pervaded it. To have been there one would have thought that no such things as war and strife could have existence.

So much charmed was Dick with the appearance of this lane, the melody of the birds, and the delicious silence, that he sat still on his mare for a minute or two, lost in admiration, without making the least attempt to open the gate.

CHAPTER LXXX.

DICK TURPIN FOR A TIME GETS INTO VERY COMFORTABLE QUARTERS.

Dick dismounted.

No sooner, however, did his feet touch the earth than such a sudden feeling of faintness came over him that he reeled, staggered, and would have fallen had it not been for the fact that he clutched tight hold of the top bar of the gate.

He was at a loss for a little while to account for this, when, on moving his arm, he recollected the wound he had received, but which in the whirl of exciting events which had since succeeded he had forgotten.

By a great effort he shook off the weakness he felt, and then bandaged his arm.

This now, however, was scarcely requisite, for the hemorrhage had ceased in consequence of the blood having coagulated over the orifice of the wound. Still it could do it no harm.

Before leaving the smuggler's cave he had taken the precaution to stow into the pocket of his coat a small bottle of brandy.

Recollecting having done this he produced it, and pulling out the cork with his teeth took a long draught.

The fiery, unadulterated spirit seemed to fill him with new life so soon as the first uncomfortable sensation of having drank so much at one time had passed away.

Then he bethought himself of the object for which he had dismounted, which was to try if he could open the gate.

He was well pleased to find it was only secured by a piece of wood being stuck through the staple instead of a lock, so withdrawing this the gate swung open at once.

Taking Bess by the bridle he led her through it, and fastened it in the way he had found it, for he did not wish so glaring an index as an open gate to show the route he had taken.

He listened then very intently for nearly two minutes, but he could hear nothing whatever of his pursuers the dragoons.

Nor was he likely to do so, for they would have to make a considerable circuit to reach the very pretty verdant lane in which he now stood.

But of this fact Turpin was ignorant.

Apparently the lane was one but little travelled, for there were not ruts in it, and except in the very middle it was completely overgrown with short crisp grass.

Dick looked both up and down this lane, but it was so sinuous that he could see only a little way.

"I must mount and be off," he said, "though this place is charming enough to make anyone linger in it. My foes are too close at hand for it to be at all safe. In fact, how it is I hear nothing of them I can't very well make out."

As he pronounced these words, Dick, with a good deal of trouble mounted his mare, for his left arm being quite useless, rendered such a thing rather difficult.

At length he succeeded.

Again he paused to listen, but still he could hear no sounds indicative of the proximity of his foes.

It then became rather a nice question with him as to which direction he should take.

"I must find shelter somewhere," he said. "I cannot tell how much my arm may be injured, and neglect may make what would otherwise be but a trifling wound a dangerous one. Bess, too, I can tell will be the better for a rest.

"And yet," he added, "I hardly know whether, under the circumstances, it will be safe. However, I will try this way, let it be how it may."

So saying he turned to the right.

At a gentle trot, Bess made her way along this lane, her footsteps being all but inaudible upon the short grass in the road.

He turned the corner of the lane, and as he did so he happened to get into such a position that the sun's rays fell upon him.

They were warm and refreshing, and he felt grateful for them.

Nevertheless, he did not halt, but turned round another bend in the lane, which then for more than half-a-mile stretched out before him in a straight line.

Then he noticed that over the palings on the left hand side of the lane were some very tastefully and beautifully laid out grounds evidently belonging to a gentleman's mansion.

Then some little distance further on he saw what he took to be the entrance gates, and just over the tree-tops peeped the roofs and chimneys of a lodge.

The mansion itself however was not visible.

Dick rode on rather leisurely, for where he now stood he could see for a long way in the direction from whence his pursuers would have to come

None of them were in sight.

Just then Dick, having nearly reached the lodge gates, turned his gaze from the meadows on his right to the road before him.

Then he noticed that which he had certainly not seen before.

This was a young and beautiful girl.

Her age could not certainly have been more than eighteen, yet her form had arrived at full maturity. She was very fair, with eyes of a grayish blue, transparent, rosy cheeks, full lips, and a profusion of bright golden hair, which hung in tiny rippling curls over her shoulders.

She wore no covering upon her head, and had only a thin shawl to shield her from the keen morning air.

For full half a minute did Dick continue, like one spell-bound, gazing upon this vision of beauty.

Unconsciously he checked the speed of his mare, who now proceeded at a walking pace only.

The young girl was standing with her head bent towards him, and there was upon her pretty countenance such a lovely expression of mingled hope and fear, that Dick was completely charmed.

No one would have needed a second glance at her amiable countenance, and thoughtful, earnest-looking eyes to have been assured that none but the kindest sentiments had a home in her bosom.

It was evident she was looking narrowly at Dick, though why he should be the special object of her attention he could form no idea.

He determined, however, so prepossessed was he by her appearance, to implore her to grant him a few hours' shelter, in order that his wound should be attended to

"She is not the one to refuse me, I am sure," he muttered, "and so here goes to try."

So saying he dismounted from his mare, and taking her by the bridle, led her over the few yards that intervened between him and the fair young girl.

But, to his intense astonishment, before he had well made one step towards her she uttered a faint cry, which admitted of but one interpretation.

Joy.

Then, with this cry upon her lips, she sprang forward, and, extending her arms, clasped Dick round the neck; then kissing him lightly on the cheek, laid her head upon his shoulder.

To say Dick was astounded would be to convey to the mind of the reader a very faint and imperfect idea of his feelings just at that moment.

It was most mysterious.

Most incomprehensible.

But in the event of such an occurrence as the one we have just described, it would not have been in human nature not to in some way respond to such a welcome.

It certainly was not in Dick's.

In the most natural manner imaginable he encircled the form of the young girl with one arm, and, bending down his head, kissed the sweet, ripe lips which were turned quite lovingly towards him.

And as he did this, Turpin noticed what perfect happiness overspread her countenance.

Decidedly there was a mystery here.

But the first words the girl uttered dissipated it.

Gently disengaging herself from Dick's embrace, she looked up with a smile of ineffable sweetness into his face.

"Oh! Percy, dear," she said, "I am so glad you have come. We received your letter to say that you should reach home last night, and when night came without bringing you with it we grew so anxious and alarmed. Father has not been to bed all night, nor has mother, nor have I. It was some strange feeling or other which prompted me to run down to the lodge gates, and then to my joy I saw you in the distance. Oh! Percy, I am so—so happy."

The young girl again let her hand fall upon Dick's breast, but this time she burst into a flood of tears.

"Oh! the deuce!" thought Turpin, as he at once divined the mystery of the whole affair. "The deuce! She takes me for somebody else, that's quite clear. How in the world am I to get out of this scrape, I should like to know?"

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE TROOP OF DRAGOONS BY NO MEANS RELAX IN THEIR ENDEAVOURS TO CAPTURE DICK TURPIN.

THE tears which the young girl now so freely shed were clearly tears of joy, so Dick suffered them to flow on unchecked, while he took the opportunity to make up his mind to some particular plan of action.

Although what the girl had said was rather vague as concerned details, yet Dick saw plainly enough that he had been mistaken for some one, but whether that some one was a lover or a brother he could not for the life of him determine.

That it was one or the other there was not much room to doubt.

Then the young girl brushed away her tears, and said, with a laugh—

"How foolish of me to cry, to be sure! But don't be angry with me and chide me, as you used to before you went to India! But what makes you so strange, Percy? You don't seem at all glad to see me. I judged you by myself, and thought you would be overjoyed."

Dick was sorely puzzled what to say or do.

Should he at once dispel the girl's illusion, or should he endeavour to continue it.

He had scarcely any time to decide, for the girl was looking closely at him and wondering at his silence.

Dick felt somehow that it would be most conducive to his own safety to encourage the girl in her mistake.

But then he thought again what many difficulties he would have to contend with when he reached the mansion, and might there not be some one there with keen enough eyes to discover the cheat, and then would not his position be a dangerous one?

But his thoughts and speculations were instantly put to flight by the next words which came from his companion's lips.

"How very much you have altered, Percy. Not only in your manners and voice, but in your very features. Why if I did not know it was you I should hardly recognize you."

"That's not very remarkable," said Dick, who felt it imperative to make a remark of some kind. "In fact it's not remarkable at all."

In this remark Dick was quite right, as he said to himself—

"It would have been very remarkable if she had."

"I suppose not," said the young girl; "a seven years' absence makes a great difference in any one, doesn't it, Percy? and especially when that seven years has been spent in the army in India."

"Why yes, as you say," said Dick, who, as the reader will perceive, had made up his mind to keep up the delusion as long and as well as he could, "why yes, there is a great change in yourself even from what there was when I went away. You were quite a child then, and now you are a woman."

"Ah! yes, so I am. But you, Percy, have grown so much older."

"All I want to know," thought Dick, to himself, "is what relation I stand in to her, or supposed to stand in, rather. I can't be her brother, she is a great deal too affectionate for that. I can't be her lover, I think, or else she would be more reserved. How puzzling, to be sure. No! I have it; I ought to have thought of that before—I must be her cousin!"

The moment this thought found a place in Dick's mind, everything that had passed tended to confirm it, and he felt quite sure that he was right. All could be explained by supposing that the person whose arrival was so anxiously expected was her cousin.

In fact, Dick felt so certain that he ventured to assert as much.

He would have been glad to have learned her name, but that there was at present no means of knowing.

"And have you thought much about your cousin?" he inquired.

"What made you ask that question?" she said, in great surprise.

"I felt anxious to know," said Dick.

"My cousin! Who do you mean? Walter?"

"Walter, no!" said Dick, with the feeling that he had committed some blunder strong upon him. "Walter, no! I mean me!"

"You?" said the girl, with a bewildered look. "You?"

"Yes, me! Your cousin Percy, you know!"

The young girl's astonishment visibly increased, and she stared at Dick with the greatest possible amazement.

"Oh! lor," said Dick, mentally, "I'll be hanged if I havn't made a mistake and spoilt the whole affair. How uncommonly awkward! What in the world shall I do?"

While these thoughts swept through his mind, the young girl recovered herself.

She clapped her hands together, and she burst into a merry laugh.

Dick's perplexity increased, but in spite of himself a smile stole over his face.

The girl hit him playfully upon the cheek.

"Oh! Percy," she said, "that is like you, indeed. You were always fond of playing jokes, and I see you have not altered in the least. If anything, you have got worse. The idea, now, of your thinking of trying to persuade me you were my cousin! Whatever's put such an idea into your head?"

"I am sure I don't know," said Dick, who, with great presence of mind availed himself of this loophole of escape. "Strange things do come into your head sometimes."

"So they do, Percy."

But although Dick had so narrowly escaped discovery this time, yet he was more at a loss than before to know what he was taken to be. Another mistake on the subject would be fatal.

He hastened to turn the conversation.

'You don't ask me how it is I am so much behind my time."

"Nor more I did! How neglectful of you! Oh! all the night before last during the storm we were in such

fright, and when we found you didn't come to time we were dreadfully alarmed. If you had not come as you have, father would have sent Thompson this morning to Southampton to know whether the *Ranedeer* had arrived."

When he heard this speech, Dick was in such a state of mental distress that, without exaggeration, he might literally have been knocked down with a feather, as the saying is.

It conveyed so much intelligence, and that of such a very startling character.

In the first place, it was clear the young girl had taken him for her brother, who had been in India during the past seven years.

That she should fall into such a mistake was nothing but natural.

Dick's costume was, as we have more than once stated, a half-military one, in addition to which he had all the comportment of a soldier in his attitude and bearing.

Some resemblance, too, might exist between the highwayman and the anxiously-expected brother.

The fact of his coming along the lane had not a little to do with it, for it was rarely travelled by any save visitors to the mansion.

Dick's heart smote him for the deception he had practised as soon as he knew it was her brother who was expected by the *Ranedeer*. Too well he knew the cause of his delay. The ship he had seen go to pieces, and the wreckers had dispatched the gallant soldier without a doubt.

The strong feeling of indignation that arose in his mind was, however, somewhat appeased by the reflection that their misdeeds had not gone altogether unpunished.

"Come, Percy," said the young girl again, "how dreadfully gloomy you are! What has happened? Is anything amiss?"

"No, no—nothing. But I have been set upon by robbers, who have wounded but not plundered me."

Dick pointed to his left arm as he spoke.

The girl gave a little scream of terror, as she said—

"How thoughtless of me, to be sure! No wonder you are different if you are in pain. And I actually to keep you standing here in the lane! Come in, come in at once."

So saying, she took hold of Dick's arm, and led him towards the lodge-gates.

Dick had now gone so far that he did not know how to retract; but the thought of the grief of the girl and her parents when they learned the cheat he had played upon them fairly made them tremble.

"You are badly hurt, I am sure. I can feel you trembling like a leaf. Oh! do make haste—do make haste."

For the last minute or two, Dick had felt his arm burn and ache dreadfully, and unquestionably if it did not receive immediate care it would turn out an ugly affair for him.

This, and the wish to elude the dragoons, made Dick hesitate to speak those words which he felt sure would fill her with affliction, and he determined to postpone doing so as long as possible.

According to her wont, Bess followed her master with the greatest docility to the lodge-gate, one half of which was open.

At the door of the lodge itself Dick saw an old man. His bald pate glistened in the sunlight as, with a pleased smile upon his face, he bent low in respectful obeisance.

"He has fallen into the same mistake as the girl has," muttered Dick. "Never mind; so much the better."

"I be very glad to see you Master Percy," said the old man at the lodge. "Very glad indeed. We got sadly frightened about you."

"I daresay you did," said Turpin, with as careless an air as he could assume. "But never mind all that now. Here I am, you see, safe and sound with the exception of a scratch I got from some rascals who attacked me."

"Oh, master Percy," said the old domestic, in tones of genuine alarm, "are you indeed hurt?"

"Only a little. It will be nothing if it is attended to."

"I will run off at once for Doctor Congreve. Make haste up to the hall with him, Miss Annie. I shan't be long gone."

So saying, the old man donned his hat and set off with greater alacrity than could have been expected from one of his years.

"Thanks," muttered Turpin. "Not only for the haste with which you have set off to fetch the surgeon, but for telling me the name of my companion here."

"Come, Percy," said Annie, as we may as well at once call her, since such was her name, "we have already wasted too much time. Think how anxious father and mother are, for of course as yet they know nothing of your arrival."

"Of course not, Annie, as you say," said Turpin. "Take hold of my arm again, and we will soon set their hearts at rest."

"Oh yes. But do you know, Percy, I don't feel half so glad as I did a little while ago. You will laugh at me, I am sure, but I feel a presentiment of coming misfortune, though what shape it is going to take I know not. My heart is so heavy, Percy."

A gasping kind of sob came from her lips, and she leaned with increasing heaviness upon her supposititious brother's arm.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

TOM KING MAKES A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO GET FREE FROM THE DRAGOONS.

THE certainty that the worst forebodings of the fair Annie would be confirmed pressed heavily upon Turpin's heart when he reflected that it was almost certain every one on board the ill-fated ship *Ranedeer*, with the exception of the child, had perished.

In silence then the strangely-assorted couple made their way along the well-kept carriage-drive. Neither had sufficient command over their emotions to speak a word.

But, nevertheless, Turpin could not help looking about him with the greatest delight. Never before had he seen a place one-half so beautiful, and when he emerged on to a spacious lawn and saw, about a hundred yards off, a fine stone mansion his pleasure almost vented itself in words of admiration, but he had sufficient self-control not to betray the fact that it was the first time he had seen the house.

Long before they could reach the front door it was thrown open, and a venerable couple descended the stone steps leading from it to the lawn.

They then, as well as their aged limbs would permit them, hurried across it towards Annie and Dick.

"Surely, thought the latter, there must be some strong likeness existing between myself and this lost son of theirs, or they would not all fall into the same mistake."

But the fact of his identity did not for a moment enter their minds.

The welcome he received at the hands of the old couple was of the warmest description, and they both were guilty of some very extraordinary manifestations of delight.

But they were interrupted by the gentle voice of Annie.

"Father—mother!" she said, "you do not notice poor Percy is wounded."

"Wounded?" they iterated, with a sudden sensation of dread.

"Oh! believe me," said Dick, "it is nothing. Besides—besides—"

Turpin wanted to say the old man at the gate had gone for a surgeon, but he could not think of his name.

Suddenly, however, he remembered that something had been said about Thompson going to Southampton to see if the *Ranedeer* had arrived, and he jumped to the conclusion that it was that individual he saw at the gate; so he added, hastily—

"Besides, Thompson has gone to fetch Doctor Congreve."

"Thompson!" exclaimed Annie, in a manner that made Dick instantly cognizant he had made another blunder. "Thompson! why that was not Thompson we saw at the gate."

"Oh, wasn't it?" said Dick, scarcely able to conceal his confusion. "I thought it was; but when you come to lose much blood it generally has a bewildering effect."

"To be sure it does, my boy," said the old man, kindly. "Let me assist you to the house. I hope, as you say, the wound is not a dangerous one; but I know you often speak lightly of a serious wound."

The old man took hold of Dick by the arm, while Annie held the other; so between them he got on pretty well.

And, to tell the truth, the wound was more painful, and

he was more feeble than he cared to admit even to himself, which made their assistance very acceptable.

And thus, after a series of extraordinary events, did Dick Turpin, the highwayman, find himself the recipient of more genuine kindness than he had ever received before.

If Dick's heart was rough it was a very tender one, and the attention he was so unworthily having at their hands almost overcame him.

He could not help making with some bitterness the reflection that, under his true character, there was not one person who would succour him, and those very people by whom he was surrounded would have turned from him in loathing and contempt could they but have been made aware of who he was, and the cruel imposition he had practised upon them.

As for Dick's behaviour on this occasion, we cannot sufficiently condemn its disingenuousness, though, to be sure, there was every allowance to be made for him.

In the first place there was his wound.

This not only disabled him, but clouded his perceptions of what was exactly right and wrong.

Then there was the immediate danger in which he stood of being captured by the dragoons.

So, after all, some excuse is to be made for his conduct.

But that he would be long able to maintain the deception he had so successfully commenced, was a matter that admitted of the gravest doubt.

That the real brother would turn up there was, unfortunately, but little prospect. We say unfortunately, because we allude to the worthy family at the Hall, and not to Turpin.

To him such an occurrence would be fortunate.

With many cautions as to his footing, Dick was assisted up to the stone steps in front of the mansion.

Black Bess, who had followed him so far, much after the fashion of a dog, gave now the most unequivocal symptoms of mounting the steps after him.

"Why, God bless my life," said the squire, for such was the title by which the father of the fair Annie was designated, "what an extraordinary horse you have got. Why he is actually following you up the steps."

Dick smiled faintly as he said—

"I am much attached to the creature, and I believe she is to me. Let some one take her to the stables and look after her."

"It shall be done. It is a splendid animal, surely. Here, William—William, look after Percy's horse."

In answer to this call a neatly-dressed groom made his appearance from that portion of the hall devoted to the use of the servants, and taking Black Bess by the bridle led her off towards the stables.

On entering the hall Dick was ushered into a well but plainly-furnished room.

Between them the highwayman was gently forced into a seat.

The beautiful repose that pervaded this room had a languid effect upon Dick, and as he leaned back in the arm chair his eyes half closed.

At this moment there came the sound of wheels grating upon the fine gravel of which the carriage-drive was composed.

It was Doctor Congreve.

Entering hastily, and with the privileged freedom of a medical man, he walked straight up to Dick, and took him warmly by the hand.

"Glad to see you, Percy, my boy, after so long an absence, very glad. Sorry you have met with a hurt. Soon put that all right, though."

As he spoke he quickly but skilfully removed the bandage which Dick had tied on, and then, with a pair of small-sized scissors, completely cut away the sleeve of his coat.

With a few thoughts which elicited from the old doctor the warmest encomiums, Annie had left the room, and now returned, carrying a basin of warm water, with a piece of sponge in it, and two or three linen cloths.

Of these the doctor made immediate use.

Before the congealed blood was washed away, Dick's wound certainly did have a ghastly and terrifying appearance, but the performance of that operation made a world of difference.

"Thank goodness," said the doctor, examining the wound, "there are no bones broken or veins severed; I will bind it up for you, and then all that you will require will be a day or two's rest. I think I can safely say that at present there are no alarming symptoms."

To no one there present was this assurance more welcome than it was to Dick himself.

"Scarcely, however, had the doctor finished tying his bandage than the old man who had stood at the gate came running, breathless with excitement, into the room.

"Squire Edelton—sir!" he gasped, "there's a troop of mounted dragoons at the gate!"

This intelligence caused Dick to bound to his feet.

"Dragoons?" said the squire, "what do they want here?"

"They have a warrant to search all places they think proper."

"Yes—yes!"

"For Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

FOLLOWS THE FORTUNES OF TOM KING.

We feel it to be a duty incumbent upon us to relate to the reader, without further delay, how Tom King fared at the hands of the dragoons.

It will be remembered that when we saw him last, he, as well as the soldiers with him, had just witnessed Bess take the terrific leap over the hedge.

His heart, which before was heavily oppressed, now grew light, for his companion had every chance of ultimate escape, and he felt assured that he would leave no stone unturned to effect his rescue.

Such being his convictions, he very complacently suffered himself to be led along by his captors.

Still, the anticipation of being rescued by his friend did not prevent him from keeping a sharp look out to be ready to seize upon any chance accident which might be favourable to his freeing himself.

There was, as the reader has not failed to perceive, a certain independency of disposition about Tom King, which would make him much prefer owing his freedom to his own individual exertions than to those of another person, how great soever a friend he might be.

But surrounded by so many armed men as he was, the hopes of his being able to effect his own release were few indeed.

His hands were tightly tied in front of him.

The troopers on his left hand had hold of his horse's bridle.

And just as the little cavalcade put itself in motion, the officer in command cried out in a loud voice—

"Guard your prisoner well, my boys. If he makes the least attempt to escape bring him down with your guns, without waiting for me to give you the word to fire. We will lodge him in Newgate in less than twenty-four hours, alive or dead!"

There was something so vindictive and cold-blooded about this speech that Tom fairly shuddered as he heard it.

The horses were to some extent knocked up by the long chase they had had after Dick, so that their rate of progression for the next few miles was rather slow.

As they were so close to Southampton they determined to push on there and get a fresh supply of horses, when they would be able to reach London easily enough.

The warrant for the apprehension of the two highwaymen, a true copy of which had been given to the commanding officer of each troop of dragoons, although giving them ample authority to lodge Turpin and King in any of his majesty's prisons, yet expressly stipulated they should be taken as soon as possible to Newgate.

In pursuance of this Tom King, when Southampton was reached, which was a few minutes before eight, was put in the prison there, while the dragoons proceeded to the town authorities to give a report of their proceedings and also to receive a fresh relay of horses.

Altogether not an hour was spent in the town, which then was far from being the important place it is now, and during that hour Tom was so closely and constantly watched that he had not the smallest opportunity afforded him of achieving his desires.

The intelligence of the captivation of the notorious highwayman, whose deeds had produced throughout England what is now termed a "sensation," spread with great

rapidity through the town, and when Tom King was led out of prison and mounted, a dense crowd had collected.

Tom's pale and thoughtful face, as well as his youthfulness and aristocratic bearing, elicited a feeling of commiseration from the mob, who, while looking at him forgot the deeds of violence of which he had been guilty.

Indeed, so far did this feeling extend that the dragoons began to entertain serious fear that a rescue would be attempted.

And, indeed, had there been some one to direct them, or had anything occurred to turn their thoughts in that direction, there would have been serious grounds for entertaining such a fear.

As it was, however, the crowd contented themselves with the exhibition simply of their good feeling towards the prisoner.

Tom King was too acute an observer of human nature not to be well aware that a mob is about the least dependable thing in the world.

Therefore, he did not seek to incite them to do aught on his account.

As the little troop, with their prisoner, passed at a trot through the bar they shouted and huzzaed with that vehemency characteristic of English mobs.

It was by no means a pleasant journey which Tom King had in prospective, yet he would not suffer his spirit to be cast down, though he did not affect an exuberancy of feeling which he did not possess.

On the contrary, he occupied his mind with but one thought, and that was, how should he escape?

He could find no satisfactory answer to the question.

Midday came before they came to another halt, and then it was more in consideration of the cattle than the soldiers or their prisoner.

It was at a very retired road-side public-house at which they stopped.

The clatter of the horses' feet upon the road-way had the effect of bringing the landlord and all his domestics to the front door, and they looked at the approaching troop with the greatest curiosity and interest.

Probably such a sight had not greeted their eyes for many a year.

In a gruff voice, the officer called out to the landlord to prepare a meal for his men without delay, and also groom and feed their horses.

The landlord, who had never before had so many visitors at once at the "Crown and Cushion," was in so great a flustration that he hardly knew which way to turn.

Then, for the first time, he noticed that they had a prisoner amongst them.

The military appearance of Tom's costume made him think it was a deserter they had captured.

At any rate, it was easy to see that Tom had the sympathy of the landlord and the landlady as well.

So closely hemmed in as he was by foes, and with so many keen eyes fixed upon him, made their sympathy of not the least avail.

But Tom King did not despair. Although a considerable portion of the distance which intervened between London and Southampton had been passed over without his having done anything, yet he had the sanguine hope that something would happen to his advantage before he actually reached the metropolis.

In this, however, he was doomed to be most bitterly disappointed. The meal at the "Crown and Cushion" was finished, the horses were led out, they again mounted, and Tom was further from his object than ever.

The night set in dismal and dark, but this circumstance, far from favouring Tom, only caused the soldiers to take additional precautions. A long rope was provided with a noose at one end of it, which was passed over Tom's head and shoulders, and then drawn tight, while one of the soldiers held the end of it in his hand, and to make still more secure, he twisted it many times round his arm.

The soldiers had evidently determined to keep him safely until they reached a prison, when the onus of keeping him in security would devolve upon some one else.

King ground his teeth with rage, but seeing how impossible it was to hold any longer to the hope of making his escape, he resigned himself sullenly to his fate.

He felt now that his life and liberty depended solely upon the exertions of his comrade, Dick Turpin, and might not he find it as impossible to aid him as it had been for him to attempt his own escape?

Surely yes, and even then he was by no means certain that he had escaped his foes. There was an extreme probability that he was at that very moment in a predicament closely resembling his.

They halted not all night, and just as a faint light in the east showed that another day was coming, they trotted up Whitehall to the Horse-guards, where they dismounted.

The remainder of the distance to Newgate they passed on foot.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE DRAGOONS GIVE TOM KING INTO THE CUSTODY OF THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE.

JUST as the sun had risen to a sufficient height to gild with his first beams the cross upon the summit of the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, a procession, which arrested the immediate attention of all who were abroad at that early hour, came down Fleet-street, and, crossing Fleet-market, ascended Ludgate-hill.

This procession consisted of the twenty dragoons who had taken Tom King prisoner, which individual walked in their midst, looking by no means cheerful under the circumstances.

As at the present time, so at the period of our tale, it was an impossibility for anything at all out of the common way to pass along the street without its attracting a large number of people.

On the present occasion they thronged before, they thronged behind, they thronged all round—pushing, shouting, swearing, laughing.

Every moment, too, added to their number, so that by the time the procession reached the corner of the Old Bailey, the street was almost blocked up with people, and the dragoons were put to some trouble to force a passage.

In a very short time, however, the gate leading into one of the lobbies where prisoners were received, was reached.

The soldiers ranked themselves on either side of it, after the fashion of a guard of honour.

Then the officer himself seized the ponderous knocker, and banged away at the door at a furious rate, which would, he judged, have the effect of informing the authorities within that a prisoner of unusual distinction was brought to the gates.

It would seem, by the way the man who opened the little wicket in the door rubbed his eyes and yawned, that he had only just been aroused from a comfortable sleep.

This man, too, was evidently about to make some passionate remark, but when he saw the stern countenance of the commanding officer, he, with great suddenness, altered his mind.

"Open the door, and send for the governor at once, fellow, and don't stand there like that, or I'll have you dismissed for neglect of duty!"

"Cuss you!" said the turnkey, for such he was.

"Eh?"

"I said, noble sir," replied the man, in a fawning tone, "I hoped you would not be too hard upon a poor fellow. You see, what with one thing and what with another"——

"There, there. Never mind all that, but open the door."

"Yes, sir. The door is open, if you please. Walk in!"

This man, who was one of the most ruffianly bullies in all Newgate, was submission himself to this officer who had bullied him first.

It may be safely taken as a rule that all bullies are cowards, and the easiest way to manage them is to put on and maintain a more blustering air than they themselves assume.

It cowes them at once.

This janitor then flung open the door to its full extent to allow the troop to enter.

Now it so happened that the governor and ordinary of the prison had been very early that morning engaged in a little private business on their own account, and as the soldiers entered the yard at one door, these worthies entered it at another.

"Mr. Tapner! Mr. Tapner!" said the man who had charge of the gate, "here is a prisoner, escorted by a troop of dragoons!"



[DICK TURPIN DISGUISED AS A FARMER VISITS TOM KING IN HIS CELL.]

"What prisoner, stupid!" growled Mr. Tapner, who was not possessed of the mildest of natures.

"I don't know, Mr. Tapner; leastways for certain it's either Dick Turpin or Tom King."

"Ha!" said Tapner, the governor, looking interested. Then, stepping forward, he said, to the officer:

"Which of these notorious depredators have you brought me, sir?"

"Tom King, I believe. Take charge of him at once, and let me have your receipt. I don't want him any longer on my hands."

"No, sir, of course not," said Mr. Tapner, rubbing one hand over the other in a disagreeable fashion peculiar to him, while a hideous grin distorted his countenance.

"Yea," said the ordinary, whose name was Colley, "he is an ungodly fleshpot, and the devil strong within him."

Having uttered this speech, Mr. Colley—we beg his pardon, we should have said the *Reverend* Mr. Colley—uttered a groan, drew down the corners of his mouth, and turned the whites of his eyes piously upward.

While this was going forward Tom had been brought safely into the yard, and the great gate closed behind him. As he heard it shut with a clanging sound a shudder crept over him, despite the effort which he made to subdue it, and at the same moment he involuntarily found himself wondering whether he should ever again pass out in freedom.

His face had a very dejected look, for his mind was filled with a presentiment of coming evil.

But the black and frowning walls of Newgate are sufficient to appal the stoutest breast.

The governor left the yard for a moment or two, and when he returned he carried in his hand a slip of paper, which he handed to the officer.

It was a receipt for the body of the highwayman, and for whose safe keeping he was thenceforth responsible.

"Thank the fates, that job's over," said the officer, in tones that admitted no doubts of their sincerity. "It goes against the grain, I can tell you, to have to do the work of police-officers."

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Mr. Tapner grinned and rubbed his hands, but otherwise made no reply to this speech.

The intelligence that Tom King had been captured very quickly spread among the prison officials, and there was soon a goodly collection of turnkeys and other people employed in Newgate.

No sooner did the omcer receive the paper from the governor than he hastily consigned it to his pocket, and then, seeing that two turnkeys had taken Tom in hand, he gave his men the order to form into rank, and as soon as this was done the gates were opened to allow them egress, and off they went.

The governor and ordinary watched the soldiers march down the street.

Then turning back, the former walked up to where King was standing, and said in his coarsest tones—

"Well, villain!"

He evidently had indulged in the hope that Tom would utter some angry remonstrance, but he was disappointed. The prisoner said nothing—in fact, he took not the slightest notice whatever.

Now this aggravated Mr. Tapner exceedingly. He wanted to have some opportunity of venting his natural spite upon him, but of course while Tom choose to be indifferent, he could not.

But he made one more attempt.

"What do you mean, you unhung villain?" he asked, thrusting his face close to Tom's. "Where's your manners?"

"There," said Tom, who was greatly incensed; "there, and I hope you like it!"

As he spoke, Tom lifted up his feet, and, with the very heavy riding boots which he wore, gave the malignant governor two or three such terrific kicks upon the shins that he (the governor) fairly danced about with pain, while he bellowed like a bull.

The turnkeys who had hold of Tom drew back a little at this exhibition of spirit which, from the previous demeanour of the prisoner, they did not expect.

They had, too, to screw up their faces dreadfully, in order to control the impulse which they felt to indulge in a hearty laugh.

"In a general way," said Tom, "I'm not much given to kicking, but when a chap's hands are tied and his feet ain't, what else is he to do?"

"Curse you!" said Mr. Tapner, recovering so far as to be able to stoop and rub his shins. "You shall pay dearly for this. I'll make you repent it!"

"It's your own doings," replied Tom. "If you had been content with simply doing your duty, you would have escaped it."

"Young man," said the chaplain, with a hypocritical whine, "young man, the evil one is strong within thee, and yet the Lord willing I will cast him out."

"Am I to understand," said Tom, "that you uphold him in insulting defenceless prisoners? and he has insulted me."

"Oh! young man—young man. Banish, I beseech you, the evil spirit from your heart, and repentant enter the paths of grace."

"Dixon!" roared the governor. "Dixon!"

"Yes, Mr. Tapner, I am here, sir, at your commands."

A brutal and repulsive-looking man pushed his way forward.

"Get ready the heaviest irons in the jail, and rivet them on that scoundrel yonder. Clarke!" he added, turning to one of the men who held King by the collar. "Off with him to No. 26!"

"No. 26?"

"Yes; do you want to palter with me? I said No. 26."

"But"——

"I will have no buts nor barrels in the case!"

Now this, it should be said, was one of the governor's standing jokes; so all his subordinates laughed, as some one has it, "consumedly."

But only for a moment did the rascal, governor give way to his mirth. The pain in his shins was rather too acute.

"Come along," said the man who had been called Clarke. "Take my advice and don't make a rumpus. It will be all the better for you."

"Away with him," said Mr. Tapner. "And mind you make all secure. I shall visit the cell in an hour to see if my instructions are properly carried out."

With this the turnkeys hurried Tom King down a passage, who, however, resisted not in the least. In fact, the feeling of apathy from which the governor's insolence had roused him was quickly returning

"You should not be quite so violent, my dear friend," said the chaplain to the governor, to which piece of advice Mr. Tapner responded by telling the reverend gentleman to betake himself to a place which in these refined days is never mentioned to ears polite. Certainly it was not to heaven that he consigned him.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

TOM KING FINDS NEWGATE A MOST UNCOMFORTABLE ABIDING-PLACE.

THE cell in Newgate which was known as No. 26 was, without exception, the dirtiest, dampest, darkest, and worst-ventilated one in all the building, and very rarely indeed was it made use of for any but refractory prisoners.

To well-balanced minds it seems an impossibility for anyone to behave towards a helpless prisoner in the way that Mr. Tapner did, but, for the discredit of humanity, there are many men who would have acted as badly, or even worse.

We do not mean to imply that the governors of all prisons are ruffians, because—and especially at the present day—such is not the case, but we do say that Mr. Tapner was a ruffian, and that he was governor of a prison.

The reader will have the pleasure or the pain—whichever of the two it may happen to be—of hearing a great deal more about the governor and his friend the Rev. Mr. Colley, but it will be nothing to their credit.

In fact, we are not afraid to go the length of saying that scarcely ever have existed two such infernal villains as they were, and as succeeding events will prove them to be.

Tom King grew fairly weary before he reached the door of the cell in which he was to be placed, so many passages did they have to traverse and flights of steps to descend.

At last one of the turnkeys, who walked in advance carrying a light, came to a stand and said—

"Here you are!"

Then followed the grating of rusty bolts, as they were withdrawn from their rusty sockets, and the rattle of a key in the lock.

Then the door swung open.

The man with the light entered first.

Then Clarke and Tom King followed.

Dixon, who was the smith, and whose duty it was to rivet and unrivet the prisoners' fetters, brought up the rear.

A minute or two's delay then took place in consequence of the non-arrival of the man with the fetters.

Tom King, with an air of utter weariness, seated himself upon the stone settle, which was all there was to serve him for bed, chair, and table.

He roused himself a little upon hearing a heavy footstep in the passage outside, and then a man, carrying a mass of iron upon his back, entered.

With professional dexterity the smith secured the fetters to Tom King.

"Now then, you'll do!" he said. "You wont get out of that, I take it."

"Oh! he's sulky, Dixon," said one of the others, observing that Tom King made no reply. "Come away, and let him alone, he will be glad enough to have some one say a word to him when he's been here a little while. Come on. It's time we were off."

"All right. Good bye, old boy. We shall find you here when we want you."

And with a laugh at, as he conceived his own wit, the smith took up his bag of tools, and, along with the turnkeys, left the dungeon.

The hideous noise which was made in fastening the door jarred sadly upon Tom's nerves.

He was in darkness.

At least he thought so for some minutes, and then he became aware that a very faint kind of twilight was diffused around him.

By its aid, as he grew accustomed to it, he could see the dimensions of his dungeon.

It was between six and eight feet square.

The walls were smooth, and all but black.

The door appeared to be cased with iron.

It was listlessness and mere want of occupation that made Tom notice these things. In fact, he was scarcely conscious that he had done so.

When the door had been fastened, and the echo of the men's footsteps had died away, Tom found himself in the deepest silence.

He threw himself at full length upon the seat and gave himself up to thought.

It was, we fancy, want of proper food and rest that had reduced Tom to such a state of prostration, although chagrin at the precautions taken by the officers, and which had prevented his making even an attempt to escape, had undoubtedly a great deal to do with it.

As he laid there and thought, he naturally reverted to his comrade, and wondered whether he had been successful in escaping, and if he had, what chances he had of assisting him.

Of course Tom had not the advantage which the reader has, since he knew nothing of Dick's very ticklish position at the residence of Squire Edelton.

The last he saw of him was when Bess leaped over the hedgerow into the meadow.

Tom's ruminations ended by his falling into an uneasy slumber. How long he slept he knew not, but he was suddenly awakened by feeling a heavy hand on his arm, and when he opened his eyes he was obliged to close them again because of the light which filled the place.

The disagreeable tones of the governor's voice were the first sounds that fell upon Tom's ear.

But he no longer spoke in the way he did.

"Yes, Mr. Blandy, as you say, sir, it is a gloomy sort of place; but it's safe, sir, and so I thought I had better put him in, so as to make sure, you see, sir. I have accommodated him with a little jewelry as well."

Tom opened his eyes again, while Mr. Tapner was making this very facetious speech, and he saw him, with a smile upon his lips, rub his greasy hands one over the other.

At first our old friend was rather surprised to account for this visit, and at a loss to know who Mr. Blandy was, but in another minute he remembered he was one of the sheriffs.

Now this gentleman was about as different to the Governor of Newgate as any two human beings well could be, so of course they did not agree at all.

Mr. Blandy had a tolerably correct idea of what Mr. Governor really was, and so, being a retired city tradesman and having nothing to do, he occupied his time in paying frequent visits to the prison, and correcting any of Mr. Tapner's abuses.

This was a very laudable plan of his, though it made the governor and the ordinary bitter enemies. But Mr. Blandy did not care for that, and took no pains to conceal his contempt for his malignity.

Of course the governor was polite enough not to come to any open rupture with the sheriff, but hugged the hope that when his year of office had expired he would be troubled with him no longer.

Hence it was that he spoke in the deferential, gnathonical way he did.

To tell the truth, although he did not show it, he was very ill at ease about this visit, and if there had been time he most unquestionably would have had Tom removed to some other cell, for he exceeded his duty in putting him in the horrible place he did.

But Mr. Blandy had heard that Tom King had been lodged in Newgate; so he made all speed there, and insisted upon being taken to his cell at once.

The governor felt that to hesitate in any way would be to imply that he was aware he had acted wrongly, so he determined to put a good face on the matter.

The sheriff had expressed his surprise at his having consigned Tom to No. 26 before he had been even taken before a magistrate, and hence the words which Tom King had heard uttered when the governor and the sheriff entered his cell.

It did not need a second glance to show that Mr. Blandy had that rare possession—a feeling heart, and Tom felt sure he had found a friend, and one who not only had the will but also the power to be of service to him and a check upon the ill usage of the governor.

On the other hand, Tom's youth, personal appearance, and inoffensive, gentlemanly demeanour made a deep impression upon the sheriff, who became prepossessed in his favour instantly.

Poor Tom. His was no enviable lot, doomed to be the bone of contention between two of the civic authorities. He was like the man in the fable who had two wives, one old like himself and one young. The former liked to see his gray hairs and pulled out the black ones; the latter was of a contrary opinion, so ere long the poor man found himself without a hair at all.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

DICK TURPIN HAS A NARROW ESCAPE FROM THE DRAGOONS, BUT IS SAVED BY THE SQUIRE'S DAUGHTER, FAIR ANNIE.

MR. BLANDY turned round, and looked the governor sternly in the face.

"Mr. Tapner," he said, "I am sorry to have to say it in the presence of the prisoner and your subordinates, but nevertheless I shan't shrink from it on that account. The manner in which you have treated your prisoner is perfectly unjustifiable. Have him removed at once to another cell."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom King, rising and bowing as well as his heavy fetters would allow him. "I shall always be beholden to you, for no one is so susceptible of kindness as myself; I suppose, because I receive so little of it."

The sheriff was fairly taken aback when he heard this speech from the lips of a highwayman, and still more was he surprised at the gentlemanly air with which Tom spoke.

"You amaze me," he said. "Who are you?"

"What you see!" replied Tom, gloomily, for at that moment he reflected what he was.

"He—he!" laughed the governor. "Well done! Very well done, indeed."

"What do you mean?" said Mr. Blandy. "Give me your reason for treating this man, who in the eyes of the law is innocent, since he has not been convicted. I ask what is your reason for treating him with such rigour?"

"I—I told you, sir," stammered the governor. "He was violent, sir—very violent, so I had him put here for safety."

"He doesn't look much like a violent man. What did he do?"

"Assaulted me."

"Assaulted you! and he a prisoner. Impossible!"

"It is true for all that—he"——

"But what was his motive—what provoked him?"

"N-nothing!" stammered the governor, who discovered too late that it would have been best policy to have kept silent, and have said nothing in his extenuation.

"Will you excuse me?" said Tom King, interrupting the governor. "I should like you to be made acquainted with the facts of the case."

"Oh! certainly. Speak freely, my young friend."

"I have nothing to say," responded Tom King, "than that I was brought here strongly bound, and while incapable of lifting up my hand in my own defence, was grossly insulted by the governor here in the presence of his men.

"Indeed," said the sheriff, "is this so?"

"It is indeed, and can you wonder that I resented the insult in the only way that was left for me?"

"Certainly not. Mr. Tapner, I shall report this to the Secretary of State. It is not the first of these kind of offences that I have been made cognizant of. Call your man, and have these fetters taken off. He must then proceed at once to Bow Street, in order that the magistrate may duly commit him for trial."

"Very well, Mr. Blandy," said the governor, in a humble tone, "I am sorry I have displeased you, but all I sought was to make the prisoner quite secure. If you think I have overstepped my duty I cannot help it. Everybody, however, will do me the justice to say it was a mistake on the right side."

"That depends upon what you call the right side."

"Of his behaviour to me," said the governor, assuming a magnanimous air, "I shall say nothing."

"Very well, very well," said Mr. Blandy; "come along. It strikes me, after all, it is a case of six of one and half-a-dozen of the other."

Dixon, the smith, then came forward, and very soon freed Tom from the irons.

Short as was the time he had worn them, yet it was sufficiently long for them to cramp his limbs, and he stretched himself with a sensation of great relief.

A pair of handcuffs were placed upon his wrists, and then, escorted by the turnkeys, the governor, and Mr. Blandy, he was led out into the lobby of Newgate.

The man at the door opened it to allow them to pass out.

A hackney-coach, which happened to be passing, was called, and the sheriff, Tom King, and two officers, entered.

The governor they left standing on the threshold of the prison muttering inaudible curses on the head of Mr. Blandy.

It took the crazy vehicle a good quarter-of-an-hour to reach Bow-street, and when they drew up at the door of the court the day's business had already commenced.

Had Tom been an ordinary offender he would have had to have waited until the last, but as he was an extraordinary one, he was allowed the precedence.

The examination before the magistrates was more a matter of form than anything else, still it had to be gone through.

The justice on the occasion was one whose name was well known then, and is even at the present day.

It was Justice Fielding.

The daring depredations in which Tom had been mixed up had reached his ears, and after hearing a short statement of the capture from the officer of dragoons who was in attendance, he made out a warrant committing him to the sessions.

These would come off in exactly ten days from that time, so that Tom had at least an opportunity of doing something in his own behalf.

On the subject of the fetters and the dark cell at No. 26, not a word was said until the sheriff spoke to the officers as they were about to drive back to Newgate.

"Tell Mr. Tapner," he said, "that I shall look in again in the course of the day."

"Very well, Mr. Blandy. All right, sir."

The coach was driven off again to Newgate.

"And werry much obliged Mr. Tapner will be to you for your trouble," added the officer, as soon as they were out of the sheriff's hearing,—"werry much obliged to you indeed."

As the hackney-coach turned the corner of Bow-street into Long-acre a hope of escape sprang up in Tom's mind.

He was in a coach, and had two men only to contend against.

Yet, in that circumscribed space one man, let his courage and resolution be what they might, would be scarcely a match for two, and so after a minute or two's consideration, Tom thought himself, especially when he reflected, that a cry from one of his foes would bring scores of people to their assistance.

It was evident if anything was done in the way of escape it would be by stratagem, not force.

These thoughts quickly passed through Tom's mind, and before the coach got half-a-dozen yards further he had made up his mind what he was going to do.

The officers were sitting on the back seat with Tom between them.

King noticed that the one on his left hand had a rather more prepossessing physiognomy than the other, and therefore to him Tom addressed himself.

"I say, my friend," he said, "just listen to me."

"Well, what's the row now?"

"I suppose it's pretty certain what my fate will be at the Old Bailey next week?"

"Rather, I should say. Should you, Jacks?"

The officer who had been called Jacks gave a grunt by way of assent.

"Now, look here, my friends, you will excuse my calling you such?"

"Oh! stow your gammon.

"If you only feel inclined, I can make it well worth your while to look out at one side of the carriage while I get out at the other."

Both the officers shook their heads.

"No, no," they said. "It won't do. Oh! no, not at all."

"But I tell you it will. You won't get the reward if you do take me back, but on the contrary, if you let me go, you shall have a hundred pounds a piece."

The offer of this sum of money staggered the officers a little, and they hesitated.

Tom saw his advantage and hastened to follow it up.

"Take my advice and my offer. You must not hesitate much longer, or we shall get to Newgate, and then it will be too late."

"Well, then," said the officer named Jacks, "just hand us over the blunt."

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

TOM GETS UP AN ELABORATE PLAN OF ESCAPE, AND MEETS WITH A MISHAP.

"Ahem!"

"Eh?"

"Well, you see, dear Mr. Jacks——"

"Oh, stow that. Hand over the blunt."

"I would with all the pleasure in life, only you see there's a little obstacle in the way."

"Ha, ha!" said Jacks.

"He, he!" echoed his companion.

"Knowed how the case stood, didn't you?"

"In course."

Whereupon the two officers indulged in some more laughter.

"You're a bit too fast," said Tom. "Why don't you wait and hear what the obstacle is, when you know how precious time is."

"Oh! we knowed what the obstacle was afore you spoke."

"Oh! did you? Come now, what was it?"

"You ain't got the money."

"Not about me, I haven't."

"Well, what did I tell you?"

"But——"

"Oh! hold your row."

"Very well. It will be as good a thing for you as for me. I haven't got the money, as you say, but if you like you can order the man to drive where it is."

"Do you mean what you say?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, then, where is the money?"

"I'll tell you as soon as I have your consent. Do you agree?"

"Yes, provided it ain't far off."

"It isn't. You can understand, I daresay, without much trouble, that one way or another a good bit of money must come into my hands."

"Yes, I knows that."

"Well, I don't spend it all, and in various places I have hidden, in small portions, a very large sum of money. Now, not very far from here, I can take you to a place where you will find exactly the amount named."

"Two hundred pounds?"

"Just so."

"Go on then."

"But you must take your oath beforehand to keep your word with me."

"Oh! we takes the oath, that's understood."

"Then tell the man to drive to Theobald's-road, the end nearest Red Lion-square."

"Theobald's-road?"

"Yes, the end nearest Red Lion-square."

"You ain't up to no gammon?"

"Certainly not."

"We'll try you then. And I tell you for your own good, you had best not play us false."

"Nor you me," said Tom.

Mr. Jacks, who happened to be behind Tom, winked his eye at his comrade, who at once understood what was meant.

This was simply to take the money from Tom and then, so far from letting him free, keep him a prisoner.

But in this instance they were destined to overreach themselves in their cunning treachery, for Tom had no intention of giving them money at all, nor had, as the reader is aware, any money hidden anywhere.

The truth was, Tom was in such a desperate position that he could not by any means make things worse than they were, while there was just the bare prospect of making them better.

But it was a bare prospect.

The coachman, however, agreeable to the instructions of the officers, directed his vehicle to Theobald's-road.

Now Tom had fixed upon this place as being about the nearest solitary spot there was; for at the period of our story there were but few buildings in that direction.

The officers tried to get out of Tom whereabouts the treasure was, but he turned a deaf ear to the subject.

In a little while, however, the coach stopped.

Mr. Jacks alighted first.

Then he assisted out his prisoner, who was closely followed by the other officer.

"Tell the man to drive round the corner," said King. "I don't want him to know where it is."

There was nothing unreasonable in this, so the order was given at once.

"Now, Tom, no humbug," said Mr. Jacks, "Where is it?"

Tom assumed an air of great secresy and mystery.

His wrists were still confined by the handcuffs, but he did not think it would be over-wise to ask to have them taken off just at present.

On reaching a grating that was over a drain he stooped and tried to lift it from its position.

The officers looked at him with surprise, but Tom seemed so in earnest that their suspicions were allayed.

The iron grating or trap resisted, however, Tom's utmost efforts to lift it, so he was obliged to give up the attempt.

"You don't mean to tell us you have hidden your treasure in the sewer, do you?"

"I do."

"Nonsense!"

"It is all sense. A capital hiding-place, is it not?"

"I should never have thought of looking there."

"Nor any one else, that's the best of it. You must know that in the wall there is a brick out, and in the space is a little packet. That packet contains two hundred and fifty sovereigns."

"The deuce it does! but you said two hundred just now."

"Oh! did I? Then that was a mistake."

"And so you mean to say if we lift the trap, that we shall find the money in a hole in the side of the wall?"

"Exactly."

"Very well. Now, Jacks."

"But stop," said Tom, "take off my handcuffs, and then I will get it up for you. I have tried, but I can't with them on."

Mr. Jacks put his finger by the side of his nose.

"Oh! wouldn't you like it?" he said. "No, no, we'll lift the trap, and not trouble you about it."

"Oh! thank you for nothing; but it strikes me you have all the advantage on your side. I have trusted you, and you ought to trust me."

"Ha! ha! Now then, up with it."

By their joint exertions, the two officers strove to raise the grating.

They had, of course, to bend down to their task.

This was the opportunity for which Tom was watching, only he hoped that when it occurred his hands would be at liberty.

This was not the case, but he did the best he could under the circumstances.

That was, with great rapidity to push the two officers over into the roadway, and then dart off at full speed.

The position the officers were compelled to assume in order to lift up the grating favoured the execution of this feat to an enormous extent, and there is no question that if Tom's hands had been unfettered he would have got away entirely, but as it was it made ultimate escape a very doubtful affair.

Nevertheless the officers measured their full length in the road.

But they were rather used to surprises, so they were upon their feet again, and yelling at the tops of their voices, before Tom was fairly round the corner.

"Stop him!" they cried. "An escape! Stop him! A highwayman! A highwayman!"

But our friend, now that he knew speed was all that was required of him, got over the ground with extraordinary fleetness.

His foes, though, were very close upon his track, and being as it was middle day he was almost certain to meet a great many people, though then it was a neighbourhood little frequented.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

DICK TURPIN PAYS A VISIT TO THE COSTUMIER'S IN BOW-STREET, COVENT-GARDEN.

The cries of the officers in a very few minutes attracted those who were at a distance.

No one can have walked much in London and not been surprised at the rapidity with which a dense crowd collects. A few minutes is all that is required.

The wonder is where they all come from so quickly.

On this occasion, therefore, the officers were not long in getting a crowd about them, which increased every moment.

Tom King had taken that direction of the open country, and had every hope, could he but reach the green lanes and meadows which then lay north of King's-cross, that he should be able to baffle them completely.

The rage of Mr. Jacks and his brother officer can very easily be imagined. They had made sure of securing the money and retaining their prisoner all the same.

As it turned out, however, they got neither.

Tom certainly deserves a good deal of credit for evading them as he did. It is no easy thing to get up a plan on the spur of the moment.

Certainly the fiction about the money under the sewer grating was a good one.

He ran on unheeding his pursuers.

Ran as a man only can run when he is running for his life.

He made in his progress many a desperate tug at his handcuffs, but all to no purpose. He bruised his hands and rubbed the skin off, but he accomplished nothing more.

A very few attempts showed him the futility of trying to get free by such means, and so he turned the whole of his attention to running as quickly as his legs would carry him.

His pursuers kept up a terrible noise.

Tom turned his head over his shoulder and looked back.

He had certainly gained very little upon them.

But some yards in advance of all the rest he could see the two officers.

They were almost frantic.

In the first place they were wrong to have listened to the offer that was made to them, and then consenting to turn out of the way was a serious dereliction of duty, and for which they would be liable to a heavy and severe punishment.

Their exertions were something terrific, and they incited on the crowd who followed them by the most extravagant offers of reward.

Still they could do no more than keep the highwayman in sight, and they had considerable difficulty in doing that.

On went Tom with the speed of a hunted hare.

But, alas! his efforts to escape were destined to be of no avail.

At a sharp trot round a bend in the lane he is pursuing comes a troop of dragoons.

Tom could not control a cry of despair.

Those in the rear uttered a triumphant shout.

Of course Tom pulled up. Every step he took now would only have the effect of bringing him nearer to his foes.

We stated in a former number that all the roads about London were patrolled by different bodies of dragoon guards.

This was one of them.

From the elevated position they occupied on the backs of their horses, they were able to see at a glance the true state of affairs.

Tom was at bay.

He glared panting and breathless about him.

There was no escape.

With the instinct of despair, he made a dash at the hedge, and strove to scramble through, but the effort was a vain one.

He found it too closely planted for a cat even to have squeezed through.

Then in another moment his foes were upon him: those who were in advance—those who were in the rear.

Resistance was impossible. He was borne to the ground, and overpowered instantly.

Many ropes were cast about him, and he was pinioned most securely.

By some strange fatality, the troop of soldiers who had intercepted him were the self-same ones that had before captured him and brought him to Newgate.

The surprise of the commanding officer was excessive, but from neither of the two officers could he get the least information as to the manner in which Tom had got at liberty.

Poor Tom! surely his evil star is in the ascendant, and the good fortune which has hitherto so unvaryingly been his deserted him.

This time he was tied safely behind one of the dragoons, and so marshalled to Newgate.

At the prison the long absence of the highwayman and the officers had produced the utmost consternation, which, when the sheriff came to make some inquiries about him, rose to its full height.

Immediate search was made, but no trace could be found.

At last they encountered the troop having him a prisoner.

And so once again on that eventful day, was Tom King escorted by the soldiers into the vestibule of Newgate.

The joy that the governor felt at his having been captured was somewhat kept in check by Mr. Blandy.

To this gentleman Tom King was indebted for compelling the governor to put him in a clean and wholesome cell.

He did not, however, say a word against his being fettered. Perhaps he thought that only a measure of common prudence, considering the desperate and almost successful attempt at escape he had made

The cell door was closed, and Tom was left to his own reflections.

And gloomy enough they were, goodness knows.

There was, however, one comfort: he was not deprived of daylight. There was a barred window near the roof of the cell, and this admitted a tolerable quantity of light.

Tom was very much exhausted by the efforts he had made, and by all the varied incidents which had happened on that eventful day, and this seemed to have a corresponding depressing influence on his mind.

Such is very often the case.

The hours seemed to pass away very, very slowly. He was visited twice by a turnkey, who came for the double purpose of seeing that all was right, and bringing food to the prisoner.

Of the latter, though very coarse, Tom partook plentifully. He knew the importance of properly sustaining himself in case there should be a necessity for his making use of his bodily powers.

No further incident occurred during the remainder of the day; and when night and darkness came, Tom threw himself upon the miserable bed, and fell into a slumber, disturbed by extraordinary visions of dragoons, police-officers, and governors.

As for Jacks and his companion they were called upon to give an account of what had taken place after they left Bow-street, but this was done in such a rambling, contradictory, impossible way, that Mr. Tapner had them confined at once, in order to be taken before a magistrate to answer the charge of aiding and abetting the escape of a notorious criminal.

In vain they protested that such was not the case—that they had acted for the public good. Mr. Tapner was furious, and would listen to nothing, so Jacks and his friend were locked up in a cell until morning.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

DICK TURPIN ASSUMES QUITE A NEW CHARACTER, AND SUSTAINS HIS PART TO ADMIRATION.

Squire Edelton, the fair Annie, and Doctor Congreve looked at Dick with the utmost surprise. His consternation was apparent to everyone.

"But," said the squire to the lodge-keeper, "why did you refuse them admittance?"

"I—I didn't exactly refuse them, sir; but I didn't like to let them in without getting your sanction."

"Very well, then, let them in at once. They are quite welcome to search my house for the rascal. I only hope they'll catch him, that's all. But, Percy, my dear boy, what in the world is it that alarms you so?"

In good truth Turpin was in a state of terrible agitation.

He tried to move, but he was so weak, he found it to be an impossibility, and he sank back into his chair with a groan.

"Come—come," said the doctor, "it will never do for you to excite yourself in this way. You will make your wound positively dangerous."

The lodge-keeper was so anxious about his young master that he did not move to obey the orders which had been given him.

Dick raised his hand, and beckoning for the squire to approach him, with a great effort spoke.

The arm of fair Annie was thrown supportingly round his neck.

"My dear, kind sir," he said, "and you, my beautiful girl, I have that to say which will fill you with pain and sorrow, and turn your kindness into detestation."

Both looked as bewildered as they felt when they heard this speech, and anxiously waited to hear what more was to follow.

"Let me be alone with you both," continued Dick, "and I will explain all. I dare not hope that you will forgive me."

The squire made a sign for the doctor to retire, and perceiving that the lodge-keeper still stood upon the threshold of the door, he said:

"Admit the dragoons! Quick, why do you keep them at the gate?"

"Stay," cried Turpin, excitedly. "Do not, I pray you, send to them until you have heard what I have got to say. I will promise not to detain you many minutes."

"As you wish, my dear boy; but I do hope you will explain this extraordinary behaviour of yours."

"I will."

The greatest curiosity was now depicted upon the countenances of the squire and his daughter, and they bent eagerly forward to hear the next words which should fall from his lips.

It will be seen that they both still clung to the idea that Turpin was really what they had at first taken him to be.

But the first words Dick uttered dispelled the illusion.

"I am now," he said, in a solemn voice, "going to place my life in your hands. I have come here under false pretences. I am not your son, though I have passed myself off as such. I am Dick Turpin, the highwayman, of whom the soldiers at your gates are in chase."

At this revelation the squire fairly staggered back, while Annie withdrew her arm and clasped her hands together.

But Dick not giving them time to sufficiently recover from their surprise to speak, went on rapidly, though the effort was almost beyond him.

"Do not blame me too much for my impositions. I have been hunted and wounded by my foes for many hours. I eluded them, and, coming along the lane, was greeted by your daughter, who accosted me as her brother, whose arrival she had been all night expecting."

"Good heavens! Then my son——"

"One moment, sir, if you please," said Dick. "At first I was amazed, but, quickly recovering myself, can you wonder that under the circumstances I was prompted to do all in my power to favour the deception, since I knew that it was the best chance I should have of escaping from my foes. The rest you know already. The officers are at your gates thirsting for my blood. It rests with you whether you choose to surrender me wounded and helpless into their hands, or save me."

"No—no!" said Annie, "no—no! We cannot do that! It would be base indeed."

A faint smile came to Dick's lips as he heard the assurance of his safety.

"I knew you would save me! I was sure of it."

"But," said the squire, nervously, "I don't see!"

"You have nothing more to do," said Dick, "than to assure the dragoons, when they search the place, that I am your son. There is time to remove me to a bedchamber, and then suspicion will not be excited."

It is hard to say in what way the squire would have acted had he been left to himself. But his daughter spoke, and with him her will was law.

"Oh, yes, father! We must save him, indeed we must! Quick—quick! Run down to the gate and tell

the dragoons they are free to search the place; and you, sir," she added, addressing Dick, "come with me!"

She took him by the arm as she spoke, and raised him to his feet.

Then, by her aid, he managed to stagger across the room.

The brain of the squire himself was in a perfect whirl. He was a simple-minded man, unused to excitement of any kind, and the startling character of the events which had just occurred was sufficient to utterly bewilder him.

"Heaven bless you!" said Dick, as with great difficulty he ascended the staircase. "Your disposition must be a gentle one indeed, or you would have resented the cruel cheat which I put upon you. But the love of life and liberty is a dominant feeling in the breasts of all, and to preserve those treasures a man will do what he would not think of doing under ordinary circumstances."

"I can understand that," said Annie, quietly. "But it grieves me to the soul to think that one so capable of better things, as I am sure you are, should have adopted such a course of life."

"Don't reproach me now," said Turpin. "Wait until you know all. When I am better, and this present danger has passed away, I will tell you everything, and I have, I fear, some intelligence to give you respecting Percy."

"My brother. Oh! speak—speak!"

"Not now—not now. And, hark! I can hear even now my pursuers are close at hand."

"In here—in here," said Annie, opening a door. "This is Percy's own room. I must leave you to shift for yourself."

"A thousand, thousand thanks for your kindness to me," said Dick, kissing the hand that had supported him. "Never shall I forget this day, or cease to feel grateful for the service you have done me."

Dick's words were uttered in such a plaintive and grateful tone of voice that the tears rose up into the eyes of the beautiful and generous girl who we see could feel pity for an outcast like Dick was.

Ashamed of her emotion she turned away, and Dick closed the door of the room in which he had been ushered.

It is wonderful what a power the mind has over the body. Although so weak that he could scarcely crawl, yet Dick was able, by an exertion of his will, to call up enough strength to undress himself, secrete his clothes under the mattress of the bed, and then get into bed himself.

When he laid down, such a sensation of deadly sickness came over him, that it seemed as though the world was slipping away from him.

The truth was he was upon the point of swooning, and so soon as this thought occurred to him, he was able to recall his scattered energies, and successfully repel the feeling.

He knew that should they enter and find him insensible, they would imagine him to be dead, and under that impression do or say something that would lead to his apprehension.

And so, although only semi-conscious, he lay there straining his sense of hearing to the utmost to know what was going on.

CHAPTER XC.

DICK TURPIN DISGUISES HIMSELF AS A FARMER, AND VISITS TOM KING IN HIS CELL AT NEWGATE.

As may naturally be supposed, the suspicions of the dragoons were excited by the long absence of the lodge-keeper, who had simply requested them to wait there, and not enter until he had informed his master.

But when they saw the old gentleman himself walking down to meet them with a face of sorrow, those suspicions were almost dissipated.

At his approach the officer dismounted from his steed, and, bowing respectfully to the squire, said—

"I regret the errand we have come upon, but the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin, has been traced to the immediate vicinity of your mansion, and there the traces end. We are empowered by law to search whatever places we may think proper, and it will be our duty to search your house and grounds."

"You are perfectly at liberty to do so," said the squire, "and I am sure from your behaviour hitherto that you will act with all possible consideration, especially when I tell you that my only son, just returned after a military service in India, is lying dangerously ill in the house, and any bustle or excitement might be productive of fatal results."

"You shall have nothing to fear on that head. We will take your word that the highwayman is not secreted in your house, and merely search through the grounds."

"Do so; I shall be obliged. And you, sir, can accompany me to the house yourself, while your men do the duty. It will be, I suppose, more satisfactory for you to go all over the house?"

"It would certainly, since then I should be able to speak with confidence; but, however, I cannot under the circumstances think of doing so."

"But you must, as a particular favour to myself, come with me, I beg. The pair of us can walk over the whole of the building without creating the least disturbance."

"I cannot refuse you," said the officer, and then turning to his men, he gave them instructions relative to searching the grounds.

The squire then put his hand on the officer's arm.

"You will excuse me," he said, "but my son's profession is the same as yours, and so you see I look upon you as a friend."

"You are very good," said the officer. "I can quite understand the feeling."

In this way, as though they had been friends from boyhood, they made their way along the avenue, across the lawn, and up the steps in front of the mansion.

On the threshold they met the squire's daughter, Annie.

It was evident that her great beauty made a deep impression upon the heart of the officer.

On her side, Annie could not fail to be struck with the handsome appearance of the soldier.

As may be expected, the officer did not walk over the house. He could not think of disturbing them so much, he said, and so he sat down in the drawing-room to drink a glass of wine.

He remained contentedly enough until one of his men presented himself with the report that, though they had searched the whole of the grounds, they could find no traces of the man they sought.

Upon receipt of this intelligence, the officer was obliged to take his leave, which he did with manifest reluctance.

And so the danger which had so menaced our hero passed away.

As the day advanced he got much better, and just at nightfall, to the surprise of the squire and his family, their strange guest came downstairs.

It was in vain they remonstrated with him, and entreated him to return to his bed. Dick would listen to nothing of the sort.

In fact, as he suffered only from loss of blood, his vigorous constitution quickly recovered, and though still weak, yet he was able to walk with firmness.

He insisted, then, upon the squire and his wife and daughter accompanying him into the drawing-room, and while there, he made the worthy family acquainted with those facts of which the reader is already cognizant.

The intelligence which Turpin gave them concerning the wreck of the *Ranedeer* filled their breasts with grief.

"And now," said Dick, "while heartily thanking you for the inestimable service you have conferred upon me, I am not without a hope, as you are in possession of the facts of the case, that you will forgive me for the imposition I have practised."

"We do," said Annie; "but oh! make now a promise to cease to be obnoxious to the laws."

"I cannot," said Dick. "Do not think me ungrateful. Through me my old comrade has been made a prisoner, and I conceive it to be my duty, as I caused his arrest, to set him free again, and I will do it."

There was so much firmness in the way Dick pronounced these words that they forebore to urge him further.

"To-night," he continued, "I set out for London. If you will direct me to the stable, I will saddle my mare and depart. May you forget there is in existence such a one as I am."

The warm sympathies of Annie's nature were all on the side of the highwayman, in whom she felt the greatest interest, and, therefore, she said—

"We shall never do that, but always be on the look-out to hear that you have done better."

"Farewell," said Dick, as he walked towards the door of the room, "farewell. Beneath this roof I have met with more kindness than I have done in the whole of my previous career."

Then hastily leaving the apartment, and not allowing the squire or his daughter to make any further remark, he directed his steps towards the servant's offices.

In a few minutes afterwards the squire heard the clatter of horse's hoofs, and he knew the famous highwayman had gone.

Then, being left alone, all three gave way to their grief for the untimely fate of the much-loved Percy.

CHAPTER XCI.

DICK TURPIN MAKES EVERY EFFORT TO RESCUE HIS FRIEND TOM KING.

TWENTY-FOUR hours after the event we have just related a man, whose clothes were dragged with mud, walked with a slow and unsteady footstep along that part of Russell-street, Covent-garden, which leads from Drury-lane to Bow-street.

Upon reaching Crown-court he turned up it, and then passing into Martlett's-court emerged into Bow-street, just opposite where the Floral-hall now stands.

He leaned for a moment against the corner of the court and looked up and down the street.

At that hour few people were abroad, and the street itself was almost in utter darkness.

A little lower down on the left of where he stood was the Bow-street police-station.

It could be recognized by the lamp which was burning over the door.

This man, who thus stood at the corner, was our old friend Turpin.

He had accomplished in safety the journey between Squire Edelton's and London.

He had taken up his quarters with Matthew Gale, the landlord of the "White Horse," in Drury-lane,

His present errand was to a costumier's at the corner of Hart-street, from whom he wished to purchase a disguise, and he had chosen that silent hour of the night to steal out of White Horse-yard and reach it unobserved.

Feeling satisfied that no enemies were lurking about, Dick crossed the road, and in another instant was standing at the door of the shop he sought.

It was closed, but of that circumstance Turpin took no notice. Old Matthew had given him full instructions, and he rang a bell, the handle of which was placed almost out of sight in the carving of the door-post.

After a minute or so's delay the door was opened, and a little decrepit old man appeared upon the threshold.

He carried in his hand a candle, which he shielded from the draught with his hand.

A few words sufficed to let him know what Dick wanted and with many obeisances he ushered him into his shop.

"I can suit you exactly, sir," he said, "and I am very glad to have the opportunity of doing a favour for my friend, Mr. Gale. Anyone that he sends here must be welcome."

"I want," said Dick, "a first-rate disguise. Do not trouble about payment, I can assure you that it will be enough to satisfy you."

"Just so, sir. What kind of costume would you like, sir?"

"That is a matter I have scarcely considered. I shall leave it to you to make me look as different as you can. That is the chief object."

"You mean, sir, I take it, disguise you so effectually that your most intimate friend would fail to recognize you?"

"Just so. Do that and you shall have such a reward as you have never hoped for."

"Come into my room, if you please, sir. You see I am a lonely man, with neither kith nor kin, so the place is not so tidy as it might be."

The room into which the old costumier ushered Dick certainly was not so tidy as it might be, as the old man had it. In fact, it was littered with articles of every description.

The costume which this singular being chose for Dick, was one such as was worn by north-country farmers at the period.

When Dick simply put on the clothes it made a wonderful difference to him, but the costumier did not stop there. He cut Dick's hair close to his head, and fitted on a wig of long silvery-looking hair.

"I have done a great deal in this way, sir. When I was younger I used to dress the characters before they went on the stage, and there was no one could make up like me. Just hold up your face to the light, sir, if you please."

Dick did so, and then the old man proceeded to cover it with a very thin solution of some kind which in a minute gave his skin the appearance of extreme old age.

Next he very skilfully with a fine brush drew some lines and then shaded them, and with so much art that no one would have thought they were other than actual wrinkles unless by means of his touch he had satisfied himself upon the point.

The old man seemed to take the greatest possible delight in his work, and he paused every now and then to admire his own skill.

Nearly three hours were consumed before he pronounced Dick ready.

He then led him into the shop, and made him stand before a large mirror that was there.

When Turpin saw his reflected image he uttered a cry of disbelief, so utterly changed was he.

It was a strange feeling that, but there was nothing about him to assure him of his identity.

When, however, after rummaging in a corner the costumier found an old cross-handled walking-stick and Dick by his instructions bent his back and leaned totteringly upon it, the disguise was indeed perfect.

"I shall fear nothing now," he muttered. "I shall run not the slightest risk! Thanks, old man!" he added aloud, "this will be a good night's work for you."

As he spoke, he pressed into his skinny hands twenty guineas.

"I am glad you are satisfied, munificent sir," said the costumier. "I shall be glad always, for the sake my old friend, to do what I can for you."

"Say no more! What time is it?"

"Close upon four, sir."

"No later?"

"No earlier, sir," said the old man, with a smile. It will be daylight soon. All you will have to do will be to recollect you are an aged man, and walk accordingly."

"Fear nothing! and now, if you will allow me, I will go! Good night!"

"Good morning! noble sir!" said the old man, as he held open the door of the shop. "Good morning!"

Taking care, as the old man had directed him, to keep up the appearance of the character he had assumed, Dick walked slowly in the direction of the "White Horse."

"It will be a good test of the efficacy of this disguise if old Matthew is unable to penetrate it," he muttered. "I will try."

The "White Horse" was one of those public-houses where the greatest business is done during the night, so that when Dick arrived, he found it much the same as he had left it.

He tottered up to the bar, and said, in a capitally assumed voice—

"Can you let me have a bed to-night, guv'ner?"

"Matthew was as usual standing at the counter, and though he looked curiously at Dick, yet he did not recognize him.

"No," he said, "we don't let beds."

"Oh! gammon!" said Turpin, in his natural voice, "open the door and let me in!"

"Good gracious!" gasped Matthew. "It's actually the Squire. Well, I will say this, my old friend hasn't forgotten his art, that's quite clear!"

"Be cautious," said Turpin, looking warily about him.

"Oh! it's all right. Come in."

Matthew held open the little half-glass door leading into the bar and Dick entered.

The worthy landlord's admiration at the excellence of Dick's disguise knew no bounds.

"Oh! it's first-rate," he said. "You run hardly any risk if you'll only be careful."

"Risk or no risk," said Turpin, "I mean to pay Tom King a visit, and if I don't get him out of the prison it's very odd to me. It's my duty, and I'll do it."



SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL ARE ATTACKED BY THE BOAT'S CREW.

"Then, if that's the case, he's safe enough,"

"I hope so."

"Dick, my boy, I like you more than ever. It is no often we find anyone as will stand by a friend at a pinch."

"Perhaps not, but there are few, I think, who can boast of having such a friend as Tom King."

"Oh! he's one of the right sort, I know," said old Matthew, "though I haven't seen much of him myself."

"That pleasure has yet to come."

"But, now, tell me this. I haven't mentioned it before, but what is the plan of operations you have sketched out?"

"To tell you the truth I don't know. I was going to consult with you upon the subject."

"Very good. I think it will be in my power to be of more assistance to you than you think for."

"I am glad to hear it. And now tell me what you should advise?"

The worthy landlord reflected for a moment.

"Just come in this back-room a little while in case anyone should happen to come in."

"It will only be prudent."

"That's true enough, and I never know when a robin might pop in. But as for this little room, it's quite private, and we can talk there without fear of being interrupted or overheard."

While speaking, old Matthew ushered Dick into a small parlour, which was consecrated to the use of himself and his very special friends.

"Charlotte! Charlotte!" he said, "look to the bar."

Then he closed the door of communication, and going to the sideboard, took from it two decanters of wine and some glasses, which he placed on the table near his friend.

This done, he took a seat nearly opposite to him.

"Pour out a glass, Dick, lad," he said. "It ain't possible to talk business with a dry mouth."

Turpin poured out a glass for himself, and one also for the landlord, and then he said—

"Now, Matthew, my friend, there is no time to lose. Let us begin."

"With all my heart. The first thing I want to ascertain is your motive for going to Newgate?"

"My motive?"

"Yes, is it simply a visit of condolence, or do you intend to give him some assistance towards making his escape?"

"Why the latter, most certainly."

"Very well, then. Now do you suppose you will be able to walk off with him under your arm?"

Dick laughed.

"Not exactly; but I know very well what you mean."

"Of course you do. It is no good your running such a frightful risk as venturing into Newgate without you accomplish some good by it."

"True. Now, Matthew, pray speak out. I know, from your way, as well as if you told me, that you have some capital plan in your head."

"No. I can't exactly say I have; but I think, if we put our heads together, we shall easily enough be able to concert one."

"That's sense."

"Now, the first thing is the going into Newgate. Have you justly calculated the amount of danger you will be likely to encounter?"

"Not I," said Dick, carelessly. "It is time enough to think about danger when danger comes."

Old Matthew shook his head.

"You are too reckless by half."

"And all the better," replied Dick, for I do believe if I had stopped to be cautious, and such like, I should have been nabbed long ago."

"Perhaps you are right. However, let us confine ourselves to the subject we have in hand. In the first place, are you known by any of the officials at Newgate?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"That is a point in your favour, then. You may rest assured that every visitor Tom King has will be very closely scrutinized indeed, and you must take care that they do not penetrate your disguise."

"Trust me for that."

"You will observe, Dick, that all along I have avoided saying anything to dissuade you from going on your perilous errand, because I believe it to be useless. Your mind seemed to be quite made up."

"And not only that," said Turpin, "I consider it a point of honour to visit him, and run every risk in the endeavour to accomplish his escape. It was through me he got into the hands of the grabs, and it shall be through me that he gets out of them."

"That's a proper enough feeling, I do not pretend to deny," said the landlord, "but it's carrying it to an excess, I rather think."

"Pho! pho!"

"Ah! you may pho! pho! as much as you like; but look here."

"Well."

"You said just now I had some plan in my head."

"I know I did."

"Well, I hadn't, but, what was pretty much the same thing, I had something to propose."

"What was it? Quick! tell me!"

"Oh! don't be impatient. All I wanted to do was to suggest a little improvement in your plan."

"I shall be thankful to you for it."

"Shall you. That's all right then. Now look here, I am an older man than you."

"I don't dispute that for a moment."

"I could play the part of Tom's father first-rate, better than you could, I conceit myself."

"No, no, Matthew, that won't do."

"What won't?"

"Why, you want to persuade me into letting you go instead of me, but it won't do, I tell you."

"But I tell you it will. They won't suspect me for a moment, for I should go in my natural character."

"You won't go at all. I am quite resolved upon this point, Matthew, so let us waste no more words about it. My determination is, despite the peril, to see Tom King myself, and to tell him that I will free him if I have to pull Newgate down, stone by stone, to do it."

"I suppose you will have your own way," said Matthew, as he coolly poured out another glass of wine.

"You are right. I have every confidence in my disguise, and in my own capabilities to sustain the action of the part I have assumed. You now know my irrevocable determination. There is yet some time before the prison gates will be open, and let us occupy that interval in reducing to shape and method some plan for Tom's escape."

CHAPTER XCII.

OLD MATTHEW, THE LANDLORD, DISPLAYS INVENTIVE POWERS OF NO MEAN ORDER.

"NOTHING will please me better," replied Matthew Gale. "Let us try to think of something good."

"My rude idea was," said Turpin, "to convey to Tom some tools that would enable him to free himself from his fetters, for that they will iron him heavily I have not the smallest doubt."

"You may depend they will."

"A file or two would at any rate be useful to him; but I must confess I was rather puzzled to know how to convey them to him. I suppose when I enter the lobby I shall be searched."

"You will, and not only that, a turnkey will be present during your interview with him, whose special duty it will be to see that nothing passes from you to the prisoner."

"Ah! that makes it awkward, does it not?"

"It does."

"Now, I'll tell you how I thought of managing to overcome the difficulty. Let me hear whether you think it feasible."

"I am all attention."

"I thought of secreting a couple of spring files in the lining of my hat. You see it is stiffened with wire, and so they would be most likely passed over unnoticed. What do you think?"

"I think so, too, but there is a chance they might be discovered. They are sharp chaps there, and down to every move."

"I suppose so."

"And then, supposing you got in with the files all right, how should you manage to convey them to Tom?"

"Well that would entirely depend upon circumstances. I should contrive to let him know what I had brought, and where they were, and drop my hat carelessly somewhere: then he might either abstract them while I was talking or pick my hat up and give it me, and take them out at the same time, as opportunity offered."

"It's a very good scheme, but"—

"Ah! is there a but in it?"

"There is."

"What is it?"

"I think a better could be found."

"Do you? then that's as good as saying you have thought of one. What is it?"

"You have divined the fact, Dick, I confess; I have thought of a plan, but whether you will think the same about it as I do is more than I can tell you. However, you shall hear it."

"I'd wager my head it's something uncommonly good."

"Don't be too sanguine about it, for fear it should fall short of your expectations."

"Pray tell it me, and do not keep me in suspense any longer."

"You know the Old Bailey, of course?"

"You mean the street?"

"Yes."

"I know it very well."

"Then did you ever notice on the side opposite to the prison a shop where they sell meat pies?"

"I can't say I did."

"Well never mind, that don't matter. There is a meat pie shop there, and it is kept by a man named Elisha Coles."

"But I don't see"—

"What that has got to do with it, you were going to say."

"I was."

"Stop a moment, and you shall hear. Mr. Coles is a very old and very particular friend of mine."

"Oh!"

"His shop is very much frequented by the prison officials. In fact, his principal customers."

"So I suppose."

"And not only do a great many come in there and eat a small pie while they stand at the counter, but those who are on duty are in the habit of sending over for one of the large pies that he makes, and which is enough for dinner for three men."

"But what on earth"—

"Hold your noise, and don't interrupt. Now, Mr. Coles, as I said before, is a very great friend of mine."

"Hang it, I know you did; make haste."

"And what is more, I am a great friend of Mr. Coles."

The landlord was amusing himself a little at the expense of Dick's impatience.

"Now what are you trying to say?"

"Simply this; when you go to visit Tom, stay some time, and then send over for one of my friend Coles's pies."

"And how on earth would that benefit me?"

"Can't you see?"

"No, I'll be shot if I can."

"Then you're not so discerning as I took you to be, that's all. I shall take advantage of my friend Coles's friendship."

"In what manner?"

"I'll tell you. I'll go to him, and get him to bide a couple of files in the crust of one of his pies."

"Ha! I see now."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of the scheme?"

"Oh! it's capital; but"—

"Is there a but in my plan as well as in yours?"

"There is, and a good-sized but, too."

"Tell me what it is."

"Why, supposing your friend put the saws in the pie-crust, how is he to know which one to give?"

"Oh! you leave that to him; he'll manage that without any trouble at all. You have only got to send out for a pie, and when it comes, you may rely upon there being a couple of the best steel saws in London in the crust of it."

"Then, of course," said Turpin, as the excellence of the stratagem became more and more patent to him, "it will be easy to sit down to eat this pie, but how shall I know in what part of the crust the saws are?"

"You will easily be able to tell that; I will get him to put some little ornament on it—you know what I mean—and just above where the saws are there shall be two of these dough ornaments stuck together."

"Very good, Matthew," said Turpin, in a tone of exultation, "it is really wonderful how you get over the difficulties. I don't know whether it's an original idea, but whether it is or not it is the best I ever heard of. Why there will be no trouble in the affair at all now, if you can only insure the right pie being sent to the right persons."

"You let Coles alone for that."

"I will."

"Then you think it better than taking them in the hat?"

"A thousand times better, Matthew, a hundred thousand times! It is the cleverest thing I ever heard of."

Old Matthew's eyes sparkled, for he was no exception to human nature generally, and it is always sweet to be commended.

"And yet it is so simple."

"That, in my opinion, is the best part of it. And now, to make your mind quite easy upon the whole affair, I will tell you how Coles will arrange about the pie."

"Ah! do tell me that. As you say, it will be an additional satisfaction."

"Besides which I have thought of a means by which you can assist him."

"Let us hear, then, by all means."

"You must remember the part you are to personate is that of a north country farmer. Now they have a peculiar way of speaking which I daresay you can imitate pretty well."

"Pretty well."

"As you must be aware, too, they have peculiar ways of expressing themselves."

"I know they have."

"Very well then you order the pie, tell the man to [illegible] baked."

"Slack baked?"

"Yes. Don't forget. It means one that is only slightly or partially baked. Not browned, you understand?"

"Oh! I see."

The expression is not altogether uncommon in London here, owing to the many country people that are constantly visiting it. Now, when the turnkey asks for a pie slack baked, Coles will at once comprehend it is for you."

"Just so."

"You won't forget, or make any mistake?"

"Oh! no, it is a common enough expression where I come from."

"Where is that?"

"Essex."

"Oh! indeed. Then so much the better. Then to make quite certain, Coles will make some remark to the turnkey as to who wants a slack baked pie, and then ten to one if the man don't tell him it is for Tom King's father, who has come to visit him."

"And then, of course, Coles will have no hesitation in handing him the pie that has the saws concealed in the crust."

"None, as you say."

"Matthew, I should never have given you credit for managing an affair with so much skill. It's really first-rate, and does you infinite credit."

"Oh! don't say any more about it. Fill up your glass, and let us drink success to the scheme."

"With all the pleasure in life. And now, having arranged all this so very satisfactorily, what had we better do?"

"Lie down and get an hour or two's rest. It is only a little after six now, and they won't admit you to the prison until ten."

"Be it so, then. My mind now is quite at rest, and I shall be none the worse for three hours' sleep, and I know I can take it in safety under your roof."

"You can. Depend upon it, I will give you timely notice of the approach of any danger."

"I do not anticipate any," said Turpin.

"No, nor I; but still it is best to be prepared."

"It is, for when it does come it comes most unexpectedly."

"You will be able to find your way to your old chamber, I suppose?"

"You mean the one I slept in last night."

"Yes, and that night when you came here half scared and badly wounded."

"Oh! I can find my way there easily enough. Good morning, and many thanks."

"Don't mention it, I beg."

"I can trust to you to see about the pie."

"You can. Depend upon me."

"I know I can with safety do so. Good morning."

Turpin made his way upstairs, and entering the room which had been set aside for his own use, he threw himself upon the bed, dressed as he was, and in five minutes was sound asleep.

CHAPTER XCIII.

INFORMS THE READER TO WHAT EXTENT OLD MATTHEW'S SCHEME WAS SUCCESSFUL.

Few are there, we imagine, who have not noticed how great an influence the mind has over sleep. To go to bed with a resolution to rise at a certain hour is sufficient to cause one to wake about that time. How this is it is impossible to say, but it is a fact nevertheless.

Such was the case with Dick in the present instance. When he laid down on the bed the last thing about which he thought was that he must wake up at nine in order to pay his promised visit to Newgate.

Exactly to the minute he opened his eyes, but he could tell he had not had a sufficient quantity of sleep to thoroughly refresh him. Nevertheless, his intention was uppermost in his mind, and he sprang to his feet.

It took him but a few minutes to adjust his attire, and then, having every appearance of a venerable country farmer, he descended the stairs, and entered the bar.

As he fully expected, he found Matthew had already gone out. His errand would, of course, be to his friend the pie-maker in the Old Bailey.

Dick Turpin's heart was light when he turned away from the "White Horse."

Already he saw in his mind's eye Tom King once more in freedom, for that he would manage to make an escape he did not entertain the smallest doubt.

But, notwithstanding his elation of spirits, he was not oblivious of the fact that he was to personate a feeble old man, and he walked along with a slow and staggering gait accordingly, supporting himself upon the strong cross-handled stick with which the costumier in Covent-garden had supplied him.

More than one person turned a curious and inquisitive glance upon him, which made Dick apprehensive to a degree.

And yet his fears were groundless.

It was not any inconsistency or imperfection of his disguise that caused the people to look. It was his old-fashioned attire.

But these gazers had the natural effect of making Dick less reliant upon his disguise than he was, which was a pity, as his over-caution might be provocative of suspicion.

Just as he passed under Temple Bar a thought struck him, and he immediately proceeded to act upon it.

At the very next public-house he came to, which was at the corner of Chancery-lane, he stopped.

He walked slowly up to the bar, and called for gin.

As he was served with it he put down the money, and at the same time inquired whether they would put half-a-pint in a bottle for him.

He said this in such a mysterious way that a smile came over the face of the young woman at the bar, besides which, she was tickled at the idea of anyone asking such a question, and she set him down for a rokel at once.

The half-pint bottle of spirit was produced, and Dick paid for it, and left the house.

"Ha! ha! This will throw those stupid Newgate fellows off the scent, I rather think."

What Dick meant will be quickly enough seen.

He walked gently down Fleet-street, and up Ludgate-hill.

Then round the corner into the Old Bailey.

As he reached the door at which prisoners were admitted, he glanced at St. Sepulchre's clock, and saw that it was nearly twenty minutes past ten.

He tapped timorously at the wicket.

Little did Dick ever think that he should voluntarily seek an entrance into Newgate; and if anyone had told him the day would come when he would walk up to the very portal, and knock at it with the broad light of day looking at him he would have ridiculed the idea as most improbably absurd.

And yet there he was.

Strange things do come to pass.

The surly door-keeper dashed aside the little sliding panel that covered a small aperture in the door defended by twisted iron bars.

"What's the row now, eh?" he growled.

Dick set up a capital imitation of an old man's voice.

"Alas! alas!"

He shook his head tremulously, and forced some moisture into his eyes."

Bang went the little panel.

Turpin repeated the summons.

It was disregarded.

He knocked again, but somewhat louder.

The janitor appeared again.

"Be off with you," he said, "or I will give you in charge. There's no vagrants allowed about this place."

"Kind, good sir," said Dick, submissively. "Thomas, Thomas! my son Thomas!"

"Eh?"

"My son Thomas—my poor weak, misguided son, good sir."

"Oh! you want to see some one, eh? Why didn't you say so at first. I thought you came begging."

"That was a little mistake, noble sir."

"Bah! Who do you want?"

"Thomas!"

"Go to the deuce. Who's Thomas?"

"My poor son."

"Thomas who, idiot?" roared the jailer.

"King, good sir. Thomas King."

"Eh, what? Do you mean to say Tom King the high toby-man is your son?"

"Alas! yes," replied Dick, in a still more lachrymose voice.

"And you want to see him?"

"Even so. That is with your permission, kind sir."

"Oh! bother. Come in."

The ponderous door was opened to the extent of a few inches, and Dick, with many sighs and groans and shakes of the head, made his way into the lobby.

"Here, Winch," cried the jailer to one of his companions, who was sitting on a bench at a few yards' distance. "Here's this old fogy come to see Tom King."

The man who had been named Winch, and who, for a wonder, possessed what few Newgate officials did, an unforbidding countenance, gave a grunt and rose to his feet.

"This way," he said. "But stop a minute, what have you got about you?"

"About me?"

"Yes. Have you got anything hidden in your clothes? I must search you."

"No—no—good sir—very good sir—no—no—don't, I beg."

"Ah! you're frightened, are you? That shows you've got something hidden about you."

"No—indeed, no."

Dick acted being in a state of nervous trepidation to perfection.

Winch, however, with a look of great sagacity on his face, walked up to the suppositious old man, and in a very experienced way felt all over his clothing.

At last he came to a pocket that was in the breast of the coat, and where Dick had placed the bottle of gin.

The feel at once told him what it was.

"Ha! ha!" he said, as he drew it forth despite the feeble resistance Dick made to his doing so. "Gin, eh? We never allows no spirits to be taken in."

"Oh! think of my poor son, good sir, in his cold cell, and let his wretched father take him a little comfort. Do, good, kind sir—do!"

"No, its against the rules. I'll put it here, and you can have it when you go away."

"Thanks, good sir. But is it against the rules for you to have it?"

"Well, I don't know as it is," said Winch.

"Then," replied Dick, "if my poor boy can't have it do you. I could not bear the idea of no one having it. Its the very best old Hollands."

"Schiedam?"

"That's it. I always drink it myself, and I know my poor boy likes it. Alack! alack! that ever I should live to see this day. Alack! alack!"

"Come, come, old chap, don't take on so," said Winch, who was considerably mollified by the present of the half-pint of gin. "He may get off all right. This way, sir. You can take hold of my arm, if you like."

"Many thanks, sir, many thanks; I am getting old now, very old."

"You'll outlive many of the young ones yet," said Winch, with a peculiar smile, as he, with Dick leaning on his arm, entered those gloomy corridors leading to Tom's dungeon.

CHAPTER XCIV.

DICK FINDS THE VERY ATMOSPHERE OF NEWGATE IS FULL OF PERIL TO HIM.

Could but some unseen power have whispered to Winch, the turnkey, that it was no other than the famous highwayman, Dick Turpin, who was leaning on his arm, how utterly astounded he would have been, and what an entire change would have taken place in his demeanour.

But it so happened that not the faintest breath of suspicion dimmed his mind, which may be attributed not only to the excellency of the disguise, but to the admirable manner in which Dick had played his part.

His imitation of a timid, humble decrepit old man was really wonderful.

A few minutes brought them to the door of the cell in which Tom King was confined, and Winch undid the complicated fastenings, and pushed it open.

One keen glance was sufficient to enable Dick to take in a distinct idea of the position of the locks and bolts.

Then he stepped into the cell.

Winch followed close at his heels, but still stood only on the threshold.

He amused himself by swinging his monster bunch of keys to and fro.

The cell, of which Tom was so unwilling an occupant, though not what could with propriety be called comfortable, yet was so when compared with some of the others in the prison.

The floor, which was composed of large flag stones, was dry and clean and so, too, were the walls, while a grated window near the roof permitted entrance to a moderate amount of light.

But although Dick noted all these things, the principal portion of his attention was riveted upon his comrade.

Tom was sitting in a dejected-looking attitude upon his bed. His head was bent, and his eyes rested on the floor beneath his feet.

Heavy irons hampered his limbs, and made motion of any kind a matter of great difficulty.

And now Dick ran the principal danger.

It was in the highest degree probable that Tom, from his intimate acquaintance with Turpin, would penetrate his disguise, and, under the impulse of the moment, either say or do something that would rouse the suspicions of the turnkey.

The risk had to be run.

So immersed was Tom King in his meditations, that he did not appear cognizant of the fact that any one had entered his dungeon, nor did he lift his head until Winch said, in loud tones—

"A visitor!"

Tom looked up.

He gave a sudden start as his glance fell upon Turpin.

He knew him instantly.

His very lips turned pale.

But ere he could any further commit himself, Dick spoke—

"Tom! Tom! Alas! alas! my poor son—that ever I should have lived to see you like this. My poor, poor boy."

Brief as was the time it took for Turpin to utter these words, yet it was long enough to allow Tom to recover from the first shock of his surprise, and make him aware under what title it was that Turpin had paid him this visit.

He did not trust himself to rise and speak though, but merely assumed his former cast-down attitude.

Dick seated himself by his side on the rude pallet, and, taking his hand in his own, he said, in the same well-assumed tones—

"Ah! Thomas, Thomas! I knowed this would be the end; I was sure of it. I shall die a miserable old man and it will be all your fault. But I won't reproach thee, lad. I see you're down-hearted now, so I won't say another word. I won't, Thomas, I won't."

Winch was pretty well used to this kind of thing in reality, and yet he did not perceive in this instance that it was spurious.

He lingered a minute just inside the door of the cell, and then went out into the passage, where he solaced himself with an instalment of the bottle of gin.

The strict letter of his duty was to remain present during the interviews between prisoners and their visitors. But this was merely to see that nothing was handed to them in the shape of tools or spirits.

Winch in this instance felt sure he had nothing to fear on either of these grounds, his search had been so very systematic; and as he was quite tired of hearing reproaches and sorrowful replies, he gladly enough betook himself to the corridor.

No sooner had he gone than Tom opened his mouth to speak, but Turpin, by an expressive gesture, stopped him.

"I know what you are going to say," he whispered, "but never mind it. Listen to me, there is no time to lose."

"The risk" ——

"I know all that. Silence! I have come here in order that you may effect your escape."

"How—how!"

"Be patient. What could you do if you had two steel spring saws?"

"Two steel spring saws? Anything. With a crowbar get out of Newgate."

"Speak lower, the turnkey may be listening. As yet he has no suspicions."

"Your disguise is certainly an excellent one."

"But it did not deceive you."

"Oh! no."

"You knew me at the first glance."

"I did."

"But that is nothing. Listen to my plan."

"I am all attention."

"I shall send out for a pie."

"A pie?"

"Yes, a meat pie. In the crust of which will be hidden the two saws of which I spoke."

"I see."

"I will cut the pie, and manage to give you the right portion. I must leave it to your own legerity to take them out, and secrete them somewhere."

"You may safely do so. Oh! Dick, my friend, I was beginning to despair, but now you have filled me with new hope."

"That is well."

"With two such tools much I am certain can be done, and it will go hard if I do not work my way to freedom."

"That is the way to speak. Resolve upon accomplishing your aim, and you have more than half succeeded."

"I know it."

"And now for the pie."

"Be careful, Dick."

"You can trust me."

"Yes, but recollect for the last few minutes you have been speaking to me with your own voice—in a whisper, it is true, but still with your own voice. I merely asked you to be careful lest you should forget yourself."

"Thanks, my friend; your caution is welcome. Now I am on my guard."

"That is well."

Dick rose from his sea .

He made his way towards the door.

The turnkey was leaning with his back against the wall of the corridor at a few paces from the door of the cell.

He was taking another sip at the bottle of gin.

Dick Turpin walked close up to him, and then said in the humble clinging tones he had at first adopted—

"My kind, good sir——"

Winch was so intent upon what he was about that he did not notice Dick's approach, and when he heard a voice at his elbow he gave a great start, and, as a natural consequence, spilt ever so much of the gin.

"Confound you," he said, in a great rage. "What do you want now?"

"A thousand pardons, good, kind sir, a thousand pardons. I made sure you heard my footstep. Oh! how sorry I am to see such good liquor wasted!"

"Not half so sorry as I am."

"But sir—good sir. My poor son is hungry."

"Oh! he be d—d!"

"If you please, good sir. But when he said he was hungry, he put two or three things in my head."

"Yes, curse it, and one of them was to come out in the passage, and speak to me and make me lose half the bottle of gin."

"Believe me, kind sir, I am very sorry. But there are worse losses in the world than that, because it is one that can be repaired."

"Well, yes, I suppose it can," said Winch. "But will you repair it, that's the point?"

CHAPTER XCV.

IN WHICH TWO NEW AND VERY IMPORTANT CHARACTERS ARE INTRODUCED TO THE READER OF THIS HISTORY.

"Kind sir."

"Oh! don't be so infernally polite, but say at once."

"I will."

"You will?"

"I certainly will."

"Replace the bottle of gin."

"With pleasure, good sir."

"No, not with pleasure, but with another bottle."

"That's what I mean."

"Then it don't so much signify, does it?"

"It does not, as you say, kind sir. But to go back to the remark I was about to make."

"Yes, yes."

"When you interrupted me."

"Confound it, yes!"

"My poor son Tom said he was hungry."

"You said that before."

"I know I did; but what a dreadful thing it is to be hungry and have nothing to eat!"

"I don't doubt it, but he can have plenty of bread and water at dinner-time, so that isn't his case."

"True, kind sir, but that is as good as nothing. Besides, it is a long time to wait."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I am telling you, my very good sir."

"Then why don't you make haste?"

"I am, good sir, but I am getting old, you see, and infirm, and if"——

"I tell you what it is, old cock, if you don't say what you want at once, I'm"——

"When he said—that is, my poor unhappy, deluded son Tom—said he was hungry, it brought to mind that, as I passed down the street on the opposite side of the way, I saw there a shop where they sold the most luscious-looking pies."

"Coles'?"

"That may be his name, kind sir. I don't say it isn't."

"Then you know the shop I mean?"

"In course I do; everybody in the prison knows it. Why, we have a matter of thirty or forty pies from there every day."

"Indeed. How singular. Why you must be first-rate customers of his."

"I rather believe it, we are; but have you gone all this long way round to say you wanted one of his pies?"

"That is what I wanted to say, kind sir; but I wished to make so bold as to make a suggestion or two."

"Out with them, then."

"Why, I thought, that though my poor boy was hungry, yet you might not be, and still——"

"Still what?"

"That if I send for a large pie you would not mind helping us eat it."

"I should have no objection in the world; and if so be you want a pie fetched, why just fork over the chink, and you shall have one in five minutes."

"The chink? What do you mean by chink, good sir?"

"Why, how jolly green you must be. Chink means money, and money means chink."

"Oh I see," said Dick, with that vacant kind of smile, which one often notices upon the faces of the aged.

As he spoke he took from his pocket a small leather bag.

He undid the string with which it was fastened, and pulled out half-a-guinea.

"Take this, kind sir, and buy a pie. A large one, and you can buy yourself another drop of gin with the change, if you will be good enough to do so, kind sir."

"Oh, won't I, that's all."

"You will?"

"Rather. Do you know I looks upon you as one of the right John Bull sort."

"I am glad," said Dick, in his humblest tones, "that I have found favour with you, good sir."

"All right. Here, Hilton! Hilton!"

"Who's Hilton, excellent sir?"

"A man that runs of errands. Oh, here he comes."

An old, white-haired man, in a threadbare suit of rusty black, came at a shuffling trot along the passages.

"Here, Hilton," said Winch, as he approached. "Go over to Coles, and fetch a large meat pie. Would you like mutton or pork?" he added, turning to Dick.

This was an unlooked for chance of saying what he wished, so Dick availed himself of it instantly.

"I should, if it is agreeable to you, like to have a mutton pie, and slack baked."

"Slack what?"

"Oh! I know what he means," said Hilton.

"What?"

"Not baked too brown."

"That's just it."

"Very well, then, you shall have just what you like, old file. A large mutton pie and slack baked from Coles, and a pint of the best Old Tom from Allen's, at the corner."

"All right," said Hilton. "I'll be back in a jiffy."

Rejoiced beyond measure at the success of his stratagem, and not doubting for a moment that Coles would send the pie with the saws in it, Dick entered his old friend's cell.

By the expression on Tom's face, he could tell he had overheard every word of the dialogue between himself and Winch, as he contented himself with simply smiling and nodding his head.

As before, he took his seat at Tom's side.

In a few moments Winch came into the cell, carrying a monstrous pie, sufficient for half-a-dozen people to dine off.

The turnkey little thought how anxious a glance the seeming old farmer bestowed upon the pie, nor the delight which tumulted in his breast when he saw the top was quite pale, and that two of the little spiral ornaments on the top were placed so as to touch each other.

Winch deposited the gigantic pie upon the bed, since that was the only thing in the place that would at all serve for a table.

Then he ran back to the door and returned with three plates, knives and forks, and the pint bottle of gin.

"How very good of you, sir," said Dick "to have so much consideration for my misguided son. Surely you will have some recompense for your generous action."

As he spoke, Dick took up his knife and fork.

"Will you allow me to cut the pie, or will you, my dear sir?"

"Please yourself."

"Then I think I will," said Dick with the same silly smile. "They always expect me to do so at home."

"I daresay."

Dick cut a large piece out of the pie and placed it on the turnkey's plate.

His hand shook a little when he made the next cut, and handed Tom the piece of crust on which was the two ornaments.

Then he placed some on his own plate, and all three fell to eating as though they had fasted for a month.

Winch managed to get through his lot first, and while he was holding up for a second supply, he noticed Tom upset his plate.

Winch just noticed the circumstance, but all he did was to laugh.

He did not notice that Tom had left a tidy-size piece of crust on the bed, and that he immediately covered it up with the skirt of his coat.

Their aim was at last safely and successfully accomplished.

The hearty meal they made was washed down with gin, and all three were on the best of terms with themselves and each other.

At last Dick rose to go.

"Good-bye, my poor boy," he said. "I hope if you are spared you will see the error of your ways."

"And so do I," said Winch, "for you are both jolly good sorts."

Dick shook hands warmly with Tom King, and then followed Winch out of the dungeon.

The ponderous door was closed and locked.

Then, talking together like old friends, Turpin still preserving his deferential manner, they reached the lobby.

Here a rather unexpected sight met Dick's gaze.

There were four persons present.

One was the man "on the lock."

Mr. Tapner, the governor.

The Reverend Mr. Colley, the ordinary.

The fourth was a shrewd, sharp featured man, who was a perfect stranger to Dick, though rather a celebrated character.

Somehow, as Dick's glance fell upon these persons, a conviction sprang up in his mind that something was wrong—that the assemblage boded no good to him.

The eager, earnest gaze which all four fixed upon him served to confirm him in this idea.

He had much ado to maintain his composure.

But he did so with a great effort.

Assuming as unconcerned an air as he possibly could, Dick, still continuing his conversation with Winch, made his way towards the gate.

But when he was about in the centre of the lobby the man with the shrewd face stepped forward.

"One moment, sir, if you please; I have a word to say to you."

Dick had no resource but to come to a stand, which he did with a knowledge that he was discovered.

"Sorry to trouble you," said Tapner, the governor, advancing a step or two, "but as we heard it rumoured that it was very probable that Dick Turpin would seek to obtain an interview with his accomplice, I sent for Mr. Townshend, the Bow-street runner, to examine anyone who visited the prisoner, with a view to ascertaining whether they were really what they seemed.

There was so much meaning in the way this speech was uttered that Turpin felt sure his identity was more than half suspected.

The name of the celebrated police-officer was well-known to Turpin, though his person was not, and he was confident that anything like an observatio" would show that he was disguised.

As for Winch, he positively stared aghast.

"Come, sir," said Townshend, as he put his hand upon Dick's shoulder, "you have heard what Mr. Tapner has said, and of course you cannot make any objection to our ascertaining that you are really the father of the notorious highwayman, Tom King!"

CHAPTER XCVI.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL HAVE A COWARDLY ATTACK MADE UPON THEM BY THE BOAT'S CREW.

MOST reluctantly indeed do we leave Dick Turpin in a situation of so much peril, but it becomes absolutely necessary to the proper development of our story that we should do so, and introduce to the reader two fresh characters, in whom we hope they will feel as great an interest as they do in those with whom they are already acquainted.

The names of these two characters are well known, and familiar to the eyes and ears of all.

Jack Rann, otherwise known as Sixteen-String Jack.

Claude Duval.

These are the two characters.

The Claude Duval of whom we are about to speak was not the one who came to an ignominious end in the reign of the second Charles, but his nephew.

The two have often been ignorantly confounded.

It will be recollected that when Tom King related his history he, towards the latter portion of it, imformed Dick Turpin of the very singular way in which he made the acquaintance of Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, and how, after committing several depredations in their society, he had assisted them both to leave England.

They had managed to carry off with them a rather large amount of money, so that when they got over to Paris they were able to live in the first of style.

For a considerable period the total change in their mode of life had a pleasant and delightful effect, but after the lapse of a few months they began to long to revisit England.

This feeling, when it once took root in their breasts, grew rapidly, and the desire increased until they could go no longer without gratifying it.

Accordingly, on the evening of the very day on which Tom King was taken to Newgate, the two ex-highwaymen, having converted everything valuable which they possessed into money, set out from Paris to Boulogne-sur-Mer.

This place they reached in safety, and without the occurrence of any incident worthy of recordation.

It was, however, close upon sunset when they arrived, for in those days the rapid mode of transit we now enjoy did not exist.

Had it not been for their treasure, which amounted to several thousands of pounds in gold, and which they had bestowed in a shabby-looking leather portmanteau, they would have performed the journey on horseback. As it was it necessitated the hiring of some kind of wheeled conveyance.

They selected a post-chaise.

In a vehicle of this description, for all the world knows what post-stages were in France a hundred and fifty years ago, they traversed the terribly dull, barren, and uninteresting piece of ground between Paris and Boulogne.

"Thank goodness," said Jack, as he opened the door and stepped out, "that that's over, and I sincerely hope that I may never have to sit inside another infernal machine like this."

"And so say I," said Claude. "Here, take hold of the portmantle."

As he spoke, he handed the article named to Sixteen-String Jack, and then alighed.

"I suppose," said Jack, "that the best thing we can do will be to stop here a little while, and make a good meal."

"Oh! by all means."

"We shall then be ready to cross over about dark, as we had arranged."

"Just so. The only thing is shall we be able to hire a boat?"

"That is just the question."

"I should think we ought."

"Oh! decidedly."

"It would never do for us to go by the ordinary packet."

"It would not be over safe, for while on board we might be recognised by somebody or other, which would be exceedingly disagreeable."

"You're right, it would. No, it won't do to go by the packet, Jack."

"That's my opinion. Now I think for money we shall be easily enough able to hire a boat that will take us over in double quick time."

By this time the waiters from the hotel before which they had drawn up, came swarming round them, and made desperate efforts to carry off, not only the portmantle, but themselves as well.

"Hands off! Hands off!" said Claude and Jack together. "Hands off! We will carry it ourselves."

"Non—non—non," they replied.

"Lead the way, and we will follow," cried Jack, and he saluted one of the waiters with his foot in the hinder portion of his anatomy.

This had the desired effect, and in a minute or two more our friends were seated at table with the portmantle between them.

A wretched repast, to their English notions, was set before them, and then Claude took an opportunity to speak to the waiter who placed it on the table relative to the possibility of their obtaining a vessel that evening that would take them across the Channel to Dover."

"Impossible, messieurs," replied the waiter. "You have here the very best of accommodation."

"I know that," said Jack, "but go we must; and if you can find a boat you shall have five francs for your pains."

"Five francs! Oh, milord, I am your very humble servitor."

"Then it is no longer impossible?"

"Non, milord. This is the grand nation where everything is possible."

"If you pay for it."

"Precisely, milord. I go away to make the enquiries, messieurs."

"That's the style," said Claude. "I'll warrant he finds a boat for five francs. I'll be hanged, though, if I care about this fare. Thank goodness, this is the last time we shall have to put up with it."

"And the wine," said Sixteen-String Jack, as he put down the glass which he had just carried to his lips, and making a wry face as he did so, "is most damnable."

"Then I won't try it," said Claude, laughing.

In a few moments more the waiter returned.

"Have you found a boat?" queried Sixteen-String Jack, eagerly.

"I have, milord."

"That will take us across?"

'Oh! yes."

"What sort of a craft is it?" asked Claude Duval, dubiously.

"Oh! magnifique. When you are ready, milords, we will go down to the beach."

"We are quite ready and waiting," exclaimed the two friends in one voice. "Lead on."

"The bill, milord."

"Oh! yes; I had forgotten. How much is it?"

"Ten francs, milord."

"The devil it is, never mind! here is a Louis, you can keep the change for finding a boat."

"A million thanks, milord. This is the way. Shall I carry your portmanteau?"

"No, thank you," said Claude, who lifted it on to his shoulders without difficulty. "We prefer carrying it ourselves."

"As you will, messieurs. Follow me."

This they were not long in doing.

As they expected, it was quite dark.

The distance between the hotel and the sea beach was inconsiderable, so it was soon passed over.

Short as it was, however, it enabled the two friends to get accustomed to the obscurity, and when they reached the shore they saw in the distance a fair-sized lugger, while just at their feet was a boat to carry them on board.

"This is the captain of the ship," said the waiter, as a man stepped out of the boat and came towards them.

"Servant, sir," he said. "You want to cross the channel, I believe?"

"We do," said Jack, "what shall you charge to take us across?"

"It is a rough night, messieurs, and will be rougher."

CHAPTER XCVII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF DIFFICULTY IN GETTING TO ENGLAND.

At this intimation from the captain of the lugger the two friends instantly gave a keen look about them.

A large number of small dark clouds dotted the sky.

A fresh breeze came every now and then in short and fitful gusts, which caused the clouds to send across the heavens at a prodigious rate.

"I am afraid so," said Sixteen-String Jack, as he observed these signs of squally weather, "but nevertheless we must cross over to-night."

"I am ready, messieurs. My boat is strong, and the men good sailors."

"Then there is not much to fear. What shall you charge?"

"I cannot do it for less than one hundred francs (£4), messieurs."

"I suppose not," said Jack; "take us over safely, and you shall have a hundred and fifty."

"It shall be done, messieurs. Will it please you to step on board?"

"Yes, for we want as little delay as possible."

As they spoke the two highwaymen walked quite down to the water's edge, and stepped into the boat.

Jack entered first, and then held out his hands to Claude for the portmantle.

"Allow me, messieurs," said the captain, quickly.

"Don't trouble, thank you," replied Claude, drawing back, "I will give it him."

The captain looked rather surprised, and well he might, but he came to a tolerably correct conclusion on the subject.

And that was, that the old leather concern carried some very valuable article indeed; something too valuable to be trusted out of the owners' hands.

However, he made no remark, but entered the boat after them, and then gave the word for the men to push off.

The order was obeyed with true nautical alacrity, and the little skiff—for it was nothing more—was soon along side the lugger.

The two friends observed the same caution with their precious burden, and reached the deck of the vessel with it in perfect safety.

For a few moments a scene of great bustle and apparent confusion ensued, consequent upon getting the vessel under weigh, but when this was done all appearance of disorder vanished.

The highwaymen declined to go below, but, observing a pile of cordage and canvas on the deck, sat down upon it with the portmantle behind them.

Some ship's lanterns, which were hung to different portions of the rigging, shed a dim and crepuscular kind of light upon the deck.

By their aid Jack and Claude saw for the first time the countenance of the captain, and it did not prepossess them in his favour.

Both were, in consequence of their wide experience, capital physiognomists, and in all probability, had they seen the captain's face before they came on board, they would have declined his services, so sinister and treacherous was it.

A family likeness could be traced in the features of the rest of the crew.

It was in rather an anxious tone of voice that Sixteen-String Jack addressed his comrade Claude Duval.

"Claude," he said, in a whisper, for he was fearful of being overheard, "Claude."

"Yes, Jack."

"Speak low. Did you notice the captain's face?"

"I did."

"And what do you think of him?"

"Well, I may be mistaken, but I think he looks more like a wolf than a lamb."

"You may depend he is no good."

"Was that your idea when you looked at him?"

"It was."

"So it was mine."

"That is rather strange, but still it only serves to confirm me in the idea that I am right."

"What do you suspect?"

"Oh! not anything in particular. But have you noticed the rest of the crew?"

"No, they appear like shadows in this faint light."

"Well, don't seem to do so, but just take a good look at that chap there standing near the bulwarks."

"I see him."

"And what do you think?"

"Why, that he looks one of the greatest villains unhung."

"And you may depend he is, too. Such a man as that would be capable of any atrocity."

"Look, Jack, there is another of them about half a-dozen steps further aft. The lantern is shining on his face. I'll be hanged if he don't look a more diabolical character than the other."

"He does. You may make up your mind we have got into nice company."

"That's pretty clear."

"And the sooner we get out of it the better."

"So say I, but unfortunately it can't be done until we reach our journey's end."

"Unfortunately, yes."

"All we can do is to keep a sharp look out about us."

"That's it. But I say, Claude."

"What, Jack."

"It strikes me very forcibly that if they had any idea of what we carry in that portmantle behind us, they would try their best to get possession of it."

"Oh! don't suggest such a thing. We should be in a nice fix if they were."

"We just should."

"Why, how many of them are there?"

"I can hardly tell. I have seen half-a-dozen at least."

"Have you, by Jove."

"I have indeed, and the probability is that there are half-a-dozen more in different parts of the ship that we have not seen."

"Likely enough."

"So that twelve to two would be rather long odds."

"A little too long, I should think, but let us hope that our suspicions are groundless."

"I sincerely trust they are. Confound the sea, and all in it, I say. Give me the road."

"And me. Do you remember that young chap that was with us, and helped us off?"

"What, Tom King?"

"Yes."

"What made you think of him?"

"I can hardly tell. Happening to speak about the road, I suppose."

"What about him?"



[TURPIN TELLING ELLEN AND DAVIS THAT TOM KING IS A PRISONER IN NEWGATE.]

"Oh! I was just wondering whether he was still at the business, and how he got on, and such like."

"We shall know pretty soon, I hope. He was a brave chap."

"You are right enough there. It will be a sad pity if ever he comes to grief."

"It will indeed."

"Perhaps we shall meet him when we land."

"Likely enough."

Poor Tom! The speakers little thought that at that very hour he was an inmate of the prison of Newgate.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN ACHIEVE A BARREN VICTORY.

THE state of affairs on board the little vessel was rather peculiar, and especially dangerous to our friends.

As the last words passed their lips, a dark, lithesome figure crawled away from the bulk of cordage on which they were sitting, and in a strange, gliding, ophidious sort of fashion, made its way to where the captain was standing.

This dark and half-defined figure now rose to its full height, and showed that it was a boy of about fifteen years of age.

An aspect of low, ferocious cunning was on his face.

"Well, Jacob," said the captain, in a low voice, as soon as he approached, "have you heard anything?"

"Lots, but not much of any importance."

"Ha! they are cautious."

"They are, and something more."

"What?"

"Suspicious.'"

"Indeed. We must be cautious."

"You must indeed, for, from what I have heard, they are not men to be easily overcome or taken by surprise."

"But the portmantle?"

"It is behind them as they sit, and so placed that it would be impossible to remove it without their knowledge."

"Confound them! But the contents, Jacob—the contents!"

"They are of great value. But whether gold or jewels is more than I can tell."

The captain's eyes glistened with cupidity.

"Gold or jewels?"

"Yes, I am almost sure it contains either one or the other."

"Very good, then they shall be ours. Jacob!"

"Yes, sir."

"Go round to every one of the crew, and tell them to be armed in readiness for the signal."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"And when it is given, to pounce on the two men and either slay them or make them prisoners according as things turn out."

The boy Jacob, in the same snake-like fashion which had formerly characterised him, glided away, and one after another made the crew acquainted with the captain's orders.

It was well for our friends that they were so far prepared as they were.

They still continued their conversation, which turned chiefly upon old exploits.

They were somewhere about mid-channel.

As the reader suspects, the crew of this vessel were pirates: not bold, hardy men who contested bravely and fearlessly for what they got, but mean, sneaking hounds, who were ever ready to take an advantage of those who happened to fall into their hands.

Little did Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack think that they owed their lives so far to the position which they had taken up.

But so it was.

As they sat it was a matter of impossibility for any one to get behind them.

Had not such been the case, the assassin's dagger would long before have drank their hearts' blood.

But presently something came under Jack's notice that made him stop short in what he was saying.

"Be on your guard," he said, in a low tone. "Look before you."

In obedience to his friend's hurried command, Claude carried his hands to the butts of his pistols, so that they could be brought into immediate requisition, and looked before him.

Just separable from the rigging and the shadows which it cast he could see several dark forms.

They were the crew of the boat crawling stealthily to attack them.

Claude in a moment comprehended the danger, and cried, in startling tones—

"Up, and defend yourself, Jack, or you are a dead man!"

As he spoke, he himself sprung to his feet, and holding a pistol in his left hand, drew his heavy sword from its scabbard, and waved it with great swiftness around him.

"Confusion!" cried a voice, which the highwaymen immediately recognized as the captain's. "Confusion! We are discovered. Upon them, my brave hearts!"

A gutteral kind of yell burst from the throats of the men, and they precipitated themselves upon Jack and Claude.

But they quickly found they had got no children to contend with, and after the first onslaught they drew back from the terrific sweeps Claude made with his sword with something like panic and dismay stamped upon their faces.

Two of their number already lay bleeding on the deck, while several were severely wounded.

In repelling the attack, Claude and Jack placed themselves in a position best suited to the purpose.

Back to back.

That was the position.

Only for a space of time of a second's duration did the ship's crew retreat; then, animated by the words of the captain, they rushed forward with redoubled fury.

It was almost more than our friends could do to keep off so many foes, but what they managed with infinite skill to do so.

The sharp reports of the pistols, the clashing of swords, the cries of the combatants, and the groans of the wounded and dying, made up a chorus of sounds that would have befitted Pandemonium.

It was with a feeling of the greatest rage that both the highwaymen fought, but yet they were careful not to let it blind their caution.

From the first they had gained a slight advantage, and both knew to the full the importance of maintaining it, and that, if once lost, it could never be regained.

A combat, such as the one we describe, must of necessity endure but a few moments.

More than one-half of the crew lay helpless or dead upon the deck, and then the remainder cast away their weapons, fell upon their knees, and sued for quarter.

This was granted them on the condition that they moved not an inch from where they then were, until it was decided what should be done with them.

This they, with one voice, promised to do, but our friends nevertheless kept a sharp eye upon them.

Jack and Claude had both received several severe wounds during the contest, and to these they gave their first and immediate attention.

"It was a close touch for both of us," said the former, as he tied a bandage round his comrade's arm, "but we have got out of it pretty well."

"Yes, but what are we to do with these prisoners?"

"There, I confess, you puzzle me."

"Are they to be trusted, think you?"

"Not so far as you can see them."

"That is decisive, then."

"What are you going to do?"

"I propose that we make them all get into the boat that brought us on board, and then cut it adrift."

"Agreed; it shall be done."

"Then, raising his voice, Sixteen-String Jack said—

"Your lives are spared on condition that you at once betake yourselves to the boat, and cast off."

"Mercy, mercy! good sirs, we shall be lost."

"And a good loss, too. Which will you do; you can take your choice. Get into the boat, or stay here and be shot?"

"The boat—the boat," they cried.

"Be still. Rise one of you at a time and do so."

Muttering inaudible maledictions, the fellows rose and did their bidding.

They were rank cowards, or they would have made another attempt to conquer their foes.

It was, perhaps, as well that they got into the boat as quietly as they did.

As soon as the last had entered the frail bark, Claude cut the rope, and they drifted away in the darkness in a moment.

The sea, our friends found, and very much to their consternation, was in a state of great agitation, as though a storm was at hand.

The crests of the billows were quite white, and a thick foam floated on the surface of the water.

They strained their eyes after the boat, but it was invisible.

"We have done a foolish thing," said Jack.

"That was precisely my thought when we spoke.

"We are going to have a storm, and we should have kept some of those men on board to manage the boat. As for myself I am, as I may say, quite a novice in nautical matters."

"Never mind, we must do the best we can, and trust to providence for the result."

"Ha! ha!" said a voice.

The laugh was screeching and unearthly.

The suddenness with which it came, and the abruptness with which it ceased, made the blood rush with a sickening sensation round their hearts.

"Ha! ha!" said the voice again.

Quick as lightning Jack turned in the direction whence the hideous sound proceeded, and there saw, standing on the bulwarks, the figure of a man.

"Ha! ha!" said the man, on perceiving he was observed. "Ha! ha!"

"Who can it be?" asked Duval, anxiously.

"The captain."

CHAPTER XCIX.

THE CAPTAIN COMES TO A BAD END. AND SO DOES HIS BOAT.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK'S assertion was perfectly correct.

It was the captain who stood upon the bulwarks.

It was the captain who had articulated that discordant laugh.

But what was his object for behaving thus they could not conceive.

Almost at the commencement of the encounter Jack had given him a frightful wound with his sword, which he fully believed was a mortal one.

But in this, it would seem, he had made a mistake.

"Come down," said Jack, "and on condition of your steering the vessel safely, we will not only spare your life, but give you a reward as well."

"Ha! ha!"

"What in the world does he find to laugh at."

"That's just what I should like to know," replied Claude. "Perhaps this will aid us a little."

As he spoke, he stooped and picked off the deck one of the ship's lanterns, which during the affray had been disengaged from its position.

It was, however, uninjured, and the light within burning steadily, so that when Claude held it above his head he was able to diffuse a tolerable amount of illumination about him.

The figure of the captain became more plainly revealed.

"Ha! ha!" he said.

"Look, look!" cried Claude, "what is it he holds in his arms?"

Jack strained his vision to the utmost.

"It is the treasure," he said. "He has got the treasure."

"Ha! ha!" screamed the captain, in a yet louder tone of voice, "I am even with you now, and shall die revenged."

As he uttered the word revenged he, in spite of its great weight, swung the portmanteau in the air.

It was evident he had so far recovered from the blow he had received as to be able to make his way to where the portmanteau containing the whole worldly wealth of the two friends was deposited, and then feeling that his hours, nay, minutes, were numbered, had determined to die revenged.

"Drop that," said Jack, sharply, and running forward.

But he only precipitated matters.

Uttering a loud and fearful yell, which sounded dismally above the moaning of the wind, the captain clutched the portmanteau to his breast, and sprang over the ship's side into the sea.

Claude and Jack rushed to the bulwark and peered over, but though the former waved the lantern in every direction, not a trace of the captain could be seen, and of necessity of their treasure also.

They looked rather blankly at each other.

"Gone," said Jack, at length.

"Clean," added his comrade.

Then they looked once more over the ship's side.

"Curse the captain and ship, crew and all! That rascally waiter to put us into such hands. But I'll be even with him, if I have to make a journey to France on purpose."

"What's done can't be helped," said Claude, who was of a more philosophic turn of mind. "Altogether I think we have made a nice mess of it. Just look at the waves and the ship—what do you call it—yaws about everywhere. It's very odd to me if we don't rejoin our treasure now."

These words recalled Jack to a contemplation of the state of things around him, and of a surety what he saw was anything but assuring.

"We're in for it this time, that's certain. There'll be a terrific storm, and—good heavens! what's that?"

A tremendous report like the discharge of a cannon saluted their ears, and forced this ejaculation from his lips, and then the next moment a mass of something fell bodily upon the deck and partly into the water, causing the vessel to lean frightfully on one side, so much that one part of the deck was quite under water.

By a great effort the two friends managed to keep their feet.

"The topmast," cried Claude. "The topmast has gone. We must cut the ship clear, or she will sink at once."

He sprang forward as he spoke, and with his sword commenced cutting through the complicated mass of sails and ropes.

It was a tedious job, but Jack assisted him, and, as their weapons were keen, they soon managed to cut it through, and then with a great splash the whole fell into the sea.

The ship, as a natural result, quickly righted herself, but by this time the threatening tempest fairly commenced.

The wind howled and shrieked, and every now and then the waves would splash on to the deck.

The darkness rapidly increased, so that in a few minutes our friends were unable to see each other, and as for hearing that was quite out of the question, unless he happened to have his mouth in his ear.

Their position was about as perilous a one as could well be imagined.

Totally ignorant of nautical matters.

Totally ignorant of their whereabouts.

What hope of surviving the fury of the elements could they have?

Very little, if any at all.

It so happened that the vessel belonging to the rascally captain was well and strongly built, and no doubt, under proper management, would have come out of such a storm unscathed, but left entirely to the mercy of the winds and waves, it seemed little short of an impossibility that she would escape.

On the contrary, there was every reason to think that she would drift upon some rock and then go to pieces.

A sudden lull came.

It is by no means an unusual thing for such to be the case, but when it does it is a sure prognostic that it is only the tempest collecting its scattered energies for a stronger and more furious effort.

But it gave Jack an opportunity to speak.

"Claude, Claude!" he said. "Are you safe?"

"Quite. And you?"

"All right at present. Surely this is our last escape. The tempest will burst forth again with ten-fold fury, and then, I fear, down we shall go."

"How far are we from land?"

"I have not the remotest idea. But, Claude!"

"Yes, Jack."

"Find a piece of rope and lash yourself tightly to a spar now you have a chance."

"I will. You, of course, will do the same?"

"Assuredly."

"Have you a rope, my friend?"

"Yes."

"So have I."

"Make haste, then, and lash yourself, or you will be too late. I expect the return every instant."

"Leave me to myself. There, all is right now."

"You are sure you are secure?"

"Yes."

"Then we have done all that is in our power to do to save our lives. The rest we must leave in the hands of Providence."

"I fear there is no help for it?"

"There is not."

"Confound the captain, then, and all the whole lot."

"I cry amen, with all my heart."

"It certainly is not just the death I should have chosen, but I suppose we must put up with it. Ha! here it comes again. Good bye, old fellow."

"Oh, don't despair. I shan't say good bye. We—"

A gust of wind, of most tremendous force, came at this moment, and cut him short in what he was about to say.

Well was it they had taken the precaution they had, or without a doubt they would have been swept into the boiling sea, the froth upon the surface of which, glistened faintly through the darkness.

And then to add to their discomfiture a gigantic wave broke over the vessel, drenching them in a moment from head to foot.

CHAPTER C.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN REACH THE LAND IN SAFETY.

The rudderless ship plunged madly onwards.

Sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other, scudding swiftly along, sometimes in a straight line sometimes to the east, sometimes to the west.

But so pitch dark was it that the two highwaymen were not aware of these vagaries in her course.

An anxious hour passed.

Sixty minutes, every one of which they fully expected to be their last in life.

And all this time the storm continued with unabating violence.

The two friends had secured themselves to a large balk of wood, which they knew, in the event of the vessel going down under their feet, would float easily.

About six feet apart, one being at one end and one at the other, so that they should not, come what would, be separated.

They felt a consciousness that they had done all in their power for their own preservation, and calmly awaited the result.

Although the space between them was so inconsiderable, yet they were unable, even by shouting at the top of their voices, to make themselves heard.

But when that hour had passed the hurricane began to diminish.

A faint gray light appeared in the sky to the right of them.

It was the dawn of the coming day.

Right glad were they to see this sign, not only because it foretold the cessation of the storm, but because it enabled them to form some idea of their precise position.

The spume upon the seething waves gradually disappeared.

They no longer tossed and tumbled as they did.

In fact, it seemed that as the light in the eastern sky increased in brightness so did the storm decrease.

At last land came in sight.

Dim, shadowy, and indistinct it looked, but still land it was.

It was dead ahead.

"Can you swim, Claude?" asked Sixteen-String Jack, at length, when he found his voice could be heard.

"A little."

"I can swim well, though I have not practised lately. I think the best thing we can do now there is no fear of our being washed overboard will be to cut ourselves loose again, and so be prepared for any emergency that may arise."

"I think so too, and I shall be very glad to do as you suggest, for my limbs are so cramped with the cold and wet, and being so long in the same position, that I have scarcely any use left."

"That you will soon get the better of my friend," said Jack, as with his sword he severed his bonds; "you will only have to move about a little."

Claude quickly followed his example, and though at first he kept his feet with difficulty, yet in a little while he found himself all right.

Their first and most natural impulse was to go forward, and endeavour to make out their position.

"Have you any idea whereabouts we are?" asked Claude of Jack, who had taken a long and careful look around him.

"Not the least, and yet"—

"Yet what?"

"It seems impossible that we can have come so far; but still that place yonder looks like the North Foreland."

"It does," said Claude, looking in the direction Jack indicated. "And it is the North Foreland too," he added, after a few minutes observation.

"If it is, then all will be well."

"It is very fortunate the storm abated when it did, or otherwise we should have been dashed to pieces upon those rocks,"

"It was what I expected every moment. Still, I do not think we are in any great danger now. Plenty of fishermen live upon the beach, and as soon as they see a vessel so dismantled as this is, and going entirely at the discretion of the winds and waves, they will put off in their boats and take us ashore."

"Let us hope so."

"I think we may reasonably indulge in such a hope, and then a day's rest, and we are ready for the road."

"Not quite," said Claude.

"Why not?"

"Don't you forget that the confounded captair carried off our wealth. How are we to buy horses and new clothes too, for when these have been dried which we have on they will not be good for much."

"That's true," said Jack, as he stroked his chin, "uncommonly true."

"We can't go upon the road without equipments."

"No."

"What shall we do then?"

"I'll tell you."

"What?"

"Pad it!"

"No. That won't do. I don't like the idea."

"How vexatious it is, though probably we ourselves are most to blame."

"How so?"

"By being over-solicitious about the portmantle. You may depend it was that circumstance alone that raised the captain's suspicions."

"Like enough. But then it is only natural one should be careful in such a case."

"True! But, however, its no good grumbling about what's done and can't be helped. I only hope we shall soon see some of the fishermen's boats you spoke of."

"Then you have your wish, for look, I can see no less than three putting off."

"So they are. Wave your hat or your handkerchief, or something of that sort, to let them know we are in distress."

The fishermen quickly perceived these signals of our friends, and rowed forward with still greater speed.

The distance to the shore seemed insignificant, but it took the boats a long time to reach them.

At last, however, they came alongside.

A few words served to make them aware of the state of affairs, and they resolved to tow the lugger into the harbour.

In pursuance of this determination, a rope was attached and the vessel drawn as far towards the land as it would come.

By the time this was done it was broad daylight, and the sun shed his warm beams upon the now placid sea, which gave not the slightest token of the storm.

The whole of the crew of the boat who had been left upon the deck had been washed overboard, except one, who only escaped his companions' fate by having been jammed into a corner.

He was quite dead, of course.

Still this was sufficient confirmation of the truth of their story.

The fishermen all offered to find the two highwaymen with a shelter, and they gladly enough accepted the offer of one of them.

Our friends were not entirely penniless, in fact, between them they had somewhere about twelve pounds, and with some of this money they were able to get a tolerable meal.

After this they resolved to seek that repose of which they stood so much in need.

The bed upon which they were to rest was a hard one, but, despite of that, it was inviting enough to them, and it was not long after they threw themselves upon it before they were sound and fast asleep.

It was not possible for human beings to undergo what they had undergone without being thoroughly exhausted; indeed, it is questionable whether many could have been found who would have held out so long as they did.

But they were rather exceptional beings. The peculiar kind of life they had for so long led hardened their constitutions, and made them almost insensible of fatigue.

CHAPTER CI.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL HAVE A RATHER EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE ON THE HIGHWAY.

THE day was almost gone when Sixteen-String Jack, after several uneasy movements, awoke.

He started up at once, and hastening to the little window in the apartment, looked out.

Remote objects—for the window looked landward—were indistinct, and those, at even a short distance only, imperfectly defined.

Night was coming rapidly. In half an-hour it would be quite dark.

Claude was still sleeping soundly, but Jack, thinking

that the time for action had arrived, placed his hand upon him, and awoke him.

"Up, Claude," he said. "Up, and be stirring. It will soon be night."

"What shall we do?"

"That, when you are thoroughly aroused, is a question we must carefully discuss."

"Begin at once," said Claude, springing up, thoroughly awake, "begin at once."

"About these fishermen."

"Well, what about them?"

"You see, people are so cursedly officious. Now this boat too, you'll see, they won't let rest as they might, but make no end of inquiries and bother about it."

"They will, you may rest assured of that."

"Very well, I don't want any more than you do to be mixed up in anything of that sort directly we set our feet on the shore. It wouldn't be at all pleasant."

"And certainly not at all safe. I tell you what it is, we must give them the slip."

"So I think."

"This window is not far from the ground; now I think we might easily be able to drop it."

"Oh! of course; and then off we go, and they can settle their affairs in the best way they can."

"Exactly."

"Let us set about it at once, for who knows how soon they may be coming upstairs after us?"

"It is plenty dark enough, I think, to make our departure unobserved."

"Plenty; and besides, they are likely enough busy about their daily avocations, and would not notice us."

"They would not expect we were going to elope, and they will be rather astonished when they find the place empty."

"Ha! ha! They will. Now, how are we to get down?"

As he spoke, Jack unfastened the little latticed casement, and opened it.

"The place is little better than a hut," replied Claude. We ought only to require our hands and arms to aid us in our descent."

"You are right, that is all we shall require," said Sixteen-String Jack, who had estimated the depth to the ground with his eye.

"Come on, then. Let me drop first."

But Jack had already lowered himself from the window.

He hung for a moment by his hands, in order to steady himself, and then let go.

He alighted upon the little patch of garden at the back of the cottage, so that he made no sound that would be sufficient to give an alarm.

He was very quickly joined by Claude, who said—

"Now, Jack, I think the best thing we can do is to push on towards London, as we at first arranged."

"Hang it, yes. We thought of having cash enough to lead a merry life there for some time to come, but that confounded captain baulked us out of that intention."

"Ah! well! it is never worth while to grieve over spilt milk. We must set to work and get some more."

"I suppose we must; but come, climb over these palings, and let us betake ourselves to the high road, or we shall be discovered."

"Right!" was the reply, and then they scrambled hastily over the palisades that bounded the little garden, and, after crossing a field or two, they came to the high road.

To all appearance nothing was in sight or hearing, so they opened a gate, and passed through it without hesitation.

"Now, Claude," said Sixteen-String Jack. "There is clearly no resource but to begin business afresh."

"So I think; but we are very ill provided with the necessaries."

"We are; but we must do the best we can. Our safest course just at present will be to place as great a distance as we can between the place we have just left and ourselves."

"Indubitably."

"Forward, then."

For some time nothing further was said, but both set forward at a walk that was almost a trot.

It was a pace, however, which they could not keep up for any length of time without resting in order to recover breath.

They were a good two miles on their road, though, before they did come to a halt.

"Hark," said Jack, suddenly, as a faint sound reached his ears. "Hark!"

"Horses," said Claude.

"Yes, I can hear two. They are coming along at an easy rate, are they not?"

"They are."

"Shall we"—

"Try our hands?"

"Yes."

"With all my heart; it's a long time since we had any practice."

"It is. But what have you in the shape of weapons?"

"My sword."

"No pistols?"

"No."

"I have two, but they are discnaged and I have no means of reloading them."

"We must get the horses," said Jack; "those are what we stand in the greatest need of."

"I am afraid we shall have some trouble if they are determined men."

"Pho—pho! the more danger the better! Stand on one side here in the shadow of the hedge along with me, and when they come up let us jump suddenly upon them."

"Agreed."

The two highwaymen now took up their position, and waited with some impatience the coming of their prey.

The two approaching horsemen came along with great deliberation.

They were evidently in no great hurry.

As they drew nearer the sound of voices rose upon the air.

In the silence there was round about that place any little noise could be heard at a great distance.

"Don't mention such a thing, brother Zebedee," they heard a voice say, in oleaginous accents, "pray don't mention such a thing; you put me quite in a shiver."

"I am in a shiver myself," said a voice in reply, "and have been ever since I mounted."

"You are not accustomed to horseback riding, brother, I know, but then the steed only proceeds at a walk."

"Yes, but he don't walk steady, and he goes from side to side as though he was drunk. I never knew such a stupid beast."

"We haven't much much further to go, brother."

"Thank goodness for that, then, for I was afraid to ask the question."

"Not three miles, certainly."

"But when I think of the chapel-money we carry with us, and remember that there are ungodly men called highwaymen roaming about at night, seeking whom they may devour—I mean plunder, my blood flows chill in my veins, for we, the chosen of the people, are men of peace; and besides, we are not able to defend ourselves."

"Don't talk of such things, brother Zebedee, I say. The Lord be praised I heard to-day that one of the men of Belial, of whom you spoke, has even been captured and lodged in jail."

"Then let us rejoice. Is it that roaming lion, Turpin, they have taken in the toils?"

"No; but it is comrade, as he calls himself, Tom King, by name."

"Stand!" said Jack, at this moment, in authoritative tones, and catching the speaker's horse by the bridle, as he spoke. "Stand! Your money or your life."

CHAPTER CII.

WHICH TURNS TO MR. TOWNSHEND AND DICK TURPIN IN THE LOBBY OF NEWGATE.

"OH, Lord!" groaned Brother Zebedee, as Claude followed the actions of Sixteen-String Jack, "we are undone."

"Quick," cried Jack. "Hand over everything valuable you possess, and your lives are spared. Refuse, and I take your head off at a single blow."

"Mercy!"

"There is no occasion to be merciful. The money, you pious rogues."

The threat or taking away them never became the reluctance they felt to disgorging the money, and a tolerable-sized bag was placed in Jack's hands.

It was very weighty.

The two clergymen—for such they were, dissenting clergymen, evidently—expected that having given up the money they would be suffered to depart in peace, but in this expectation they were lamentably deceived.

"Alight!" cried Claude and Jack at the same moment. "Dismount at once."

"But"——

"Do you hesitate? We shall be obliged to send you to fill your destined place with the blessed."

"No, no!" they both cried, as they rolled off their horses with the greatest precipitation.

"Why?" said Claude, with a laugh, "you ought, according to what you preach, to be most anxious to quit this wicked world."

"That's never the case with a parson, though," said Jack, as he sprang upon the back of one of the horses.

"But what are we to do?" said Zebedee, ruefully, "what are we to do?"

"Go to the devil," said Claude, who had also mounted.

Then digging their spurs into the horses' sides, they sped away with great swiftness in the direction of London, leaving the two men—the chosen of the people—disconsolate in the middle of the road.

"These are capital horses," cried Claude, a few minutes afterwards, as they slackened speed to ascend a rather steep hill, "capital horses."

"I think, altogether, the adventure was most opportune; certainly one never gave us less trouble to carry out."

"But there was a bag," said Claude; "what does it contain?"

"Money, of course."

"I suppose it does from what we overheard them say. But what kind of money is it? How much is there?"

"It's a deuce of a weight," replied Jack, as he took it from his pocket.

"So much the better."

"They must be half-crowns, I think."

"I wish they were sovereigns."

"Never mind, we ought to be content."

"But suppose you just open the bag to see what kind of coin it really does contain."

"With all the pleasure in life."

The mouth of the bag was very securely fastened with a thin slip of leather, and Jack was sometime before he could undo it.

By the time he had done so they had reached the summit of the hill.

The country before them was visible for many miles, and just a few degrees above the horizon was the rising moon.

The light it shed was small, yet still it was a light and served to illuminate objects.

Claude looked rather anxiously towards his friend as he dived his hand into the mouth of the bag.

"What are they?" he asked.

"Half-crowns, I think."

"Guineas, I hope."

"Coppers, by jingo!" exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, as he pulled out his hand, and looked at the coins he had brought forth.

"Never! That would be too bad."

"It's fact, Claude, those smooth-tongued rascals have sold us—sold us dead as hammers."

Both looked rather blank.

A faint ray of hope sprang up in Jack's mind.

"Perhaps," he said, and he threw the handful of coppers into the road as he spoke, "perhaps they are mixed silver and copper together."

There was just a possibility that this might be the case, so he set about verifying it at once.

But no, "the chosen" had been me too many for them.

The bag contained nothing but coppers.

"Confound them!" said Jack, as soon as he had assured himself beyond all possibility of doubt that this was the case. "They have bilked us. What shall we do?"

"Ride back, of course. They can't have gone far, and you may depend they have two other bags somewhere in their possession."

"What makes you think that?"

"Why, it is evidently the proceeds of a subscription, or something of that sort."

"Yes—yes."

The gold would be sorted into one bag, the silver into another, the copper into another."

"Of course it would," said Jack, turning his horse's head round. "Come on, I'll serve them out for cheating me in that way. I thought they gave up monstrous quiet."

"So did I, but I attributed that to their cowardice."

"Especially from what they had said just before."

"Yes."

"But you may depend, Jack, the reason they gave in as they did was to get off, and so make sure of the large sum which I feel convinced they carry about with them."

"I give them credit for their cunning. It was hearing them talk that misled me."

"How so?"

"Why, when they spoke of the chapel money, I made sure when he put that heavy bag in my hand that I had got it, and so did not think it worth while to search further."

"I fell into just the same mistake."

"We ought not to grumble altogether. We have got hold of two first-rate horses."

"That's true enough. But come, after them! They are only on foot, so we shall be sure to overtake them."

"The quicker we are after them the better, then; but just reflect, we are going back to the very place we were so anxious to leave."

"Reflection be hanged! Come on. I should never know what it was to rest again if I was bilked by two parsons in this way. Come on."

The highwaymen put spurs to their steeds, and descending the hill with great rapidity, reached the spot in a few moments where they had left "the chosen."

But now not a trace of them was to be seen anywhere about the spot.

On this side the hill all was darkness, so that they could see only imperfectly about them.

Yet they were quite certain they were not where they had been left.

"Go on gently, Claude. Perhaps they have walked along the road. If so, we shall very soon overtake them."

At a more moderate speed they now continued their course, but nothing of the reverend gentlemen could they see.

This circumstance had the natural effect of whetting their desire to find them out.

"They are more cunning than I could have believed," said Jack. "Doubtless, expecting we should discover we have been put off with coppers, and that we should ride back after them they have taken the opportunity of hiding themselves somewhere."

"I wish I could find them," he replied; "but I am afraid we shall be compelled to give up the attempt. We have no idea where to look."

"No, that's the worst of it. Likely enough, they are hiding close at hand, and listening to every word we say."

"I am very loath to confess myself beaten, but this time I am afraid I must. Hark! what is that?"

The highwaymen bent forward in their saddles in an attitude of intense listening.

A strange sound came to their ears.

CHAPTER CIII.

DICK HAS A NARROW ESCAPE FROM A MAD BULL IN SMITHFIELD.

THE expression upon the face of Mr. Townshend when he put his hand upon Dick's shoulder, and spoke in the manner we have recorded, was really something to see.

The governor was scarcely, if any, less pleased, and he rubbed his huge hands together with the briskness of satisfaction.

The ordinary looked on with elevated hands.

Dick Turpin well enough knew that the moment Mr. Townshend, the experienced Bow-street runner began to examine him, his disguise would be detected, and feeling this was inevitable, he adopted a bold course of action.

He was able to take in at a glance all the features of his position.

Mr. Townshend would be his most formidable opponent.

Him therefore disposed of he might stand a chance.

He acted upon this idea instantaneously.

Doubling his fist, he struck the officer full in the face with it, who certainly was quite unprepared for such an assault.

He measured his full length upon the stones in the lobby.

No one could have withstood such a crushing blow as that was.

Dick did not wait for the surprise which this sudden attack had elicited to dissipate, but, plunging his hands into the skirts of his coat, drew out a pair of pistols

He pointed one at the governor and the chaplain.

The other to the man on the lock, who stood looking on in something like bewilderment, for he had not been told of the suspicions which his superiors entertained.

"Move, and you are dead men!" said Turpin. "I cover you both with this pistol. It is loaded with two bullets. Stand where you are, and be silent if you wish to preserve your lives."

This was said in a tone that admitted of no doubt as to its earnestness.

Then pointing the other pistol at the man on the lock, he cried—

"Open the door, or as surely as I am a living man I will blow out your brains, and open it myself,"

When the man on the lock heard these words he did not hesitate a moment, but began with a haste that defeated itself to undo the fastenings of the gate.

"Quick!" roared Dick, who did not know how soon some more officials of the prison might arrive upon the scene, and render his escape impossible, "quick, I say!"

When he spoke there was only a chain to unhook from the staple, but the man was in such a state of fright that he could not do it.

Dick saw this was the case, and he sprung forward, and flung the door open himself.

Then, without taking any particular aim, or even looking behind him, he fired his pistol and dashed into the street.

It was then just one o'clock in the day, and the Old Bailey was unusually full of people—workers, for the most part, who were hastening to their mid-day meal.

When those who were nearest the prison saw a man rush out so suddenly they at once concluded it must be an escape, and uttering a loud shout they ran forward and attempted to hold him.

But one sweep of the arm that held the discharged pistol sent the foremost sprawling to the ground.

The governor appeared at the doorway, and was immediately joined by Townshend, who had sufficiently recovered from his blow to rise, though his face presented a terribly crushed and bruised appearance.

"Dick Turpin!" they yelled. "Stop him! stop him! A hundred pounds reward! Stop him! An escape! An escape! The man there in the farmer's dress! A hundred pounds reward! Dick Turpin! Stop him! stop him!"

Such cries as these of course quickly brought a crowd about Dick's heels, who started off at a run that none were able to keep up with.

Along the Old Bailey and up into Newgate-street he sped, the mob of people yelling behind him, and gaining every instant a fresh accession to their numbers.

Dick looked up Newgate-street and down Snow-hill, but both thoroughfares were so crowded with vehicles and pedestrians that he saw it would be madness to take either of those routes.

Giltspur-street was before him.

It was pretty clear from obstructions.

Without having slackened his pace a moment he dashed along it.

He was not long in reaching Smithfield Market.

Then he found it was market-day, and the place crowded to suffocation.

Had he only had a few minutes' start of his pursuers, this circumstance would have advantaged him exceedingly, but they were too close behind him to make it possible to mingle with the crowd, and so elude their observation.

Besides, the drovers and buyers who were there heard the shouts of the people who were chasing Turpin, and they turned round and saw the flying man running towards them.

They immediately formed into line, and the drovers took up their goads just as they would have stood to stop some run-away animal.

Dick's heart sunk when he perceived himself thus hemmed in by his foes.

He decreased his speed, uncertain how to act.

By chance, on his right hand, he saw a narrow winding turning.

He rushed down it at once.

Where it led or whether it had any outlet he knew not, but it was the only hope of escape there was for him, and that was faint enough, goodness knows.

Should it prove, like many narrow London streets, to have an entrance but no outlet, he would be caught like a rat in a trap.

He heard the people in chase give a roar as he vanished down the opening.

But they were after him instantly.

The street down which he was now running wound round about in a most tortuous and perplexing manner.

At occasional intervals in his headlong course he saw other narrow turnings leading from it.

But into neither of these would he venture.

And now a greater peril than any that had yet menaced him presented itself.

He was besides getting exhausted and winded by the violent exertion he had been compelled to make.

The street took a turn to the right, and then after that for some two or three hundred yards went quite straight, until it terminated in the market again.

Yes, there were the old stalls, the cattle, and the throngs of people.

The lane or street, whichever it was called, for Dick had no time to look and see, led from old Smithfield Market, and after all its turnings brought you out on the opposite side.

But it was not this circumstance particularly that filled Dick's breast with dismay and despair.

Coming along the street at headlong speed was a mad bull.

Such a thing as chasing one of these infuriated animals through London streets was at that time far from an unusual occurrence, to the great danger of those passengers who might be abroad at the time.

On came this bull, which was of extraordinary size.

His head was held down close to the earth.

Fire flashed from his eyes.

Clouds of vapour from his nostrils.

He uttered a low, fierce bellowing sound, and lashed his sides furiously with his tail.

On he came at a frightful rate.

Well might Dick's heart stand still when he found himself face to face with so ferocious an animal, behind whom came just such a rabble as there did after him.

What to do Dick knew not.

But he had no time for deliberation.

The frantic animal came thundering on.

He had evidently seen Dick, and blinded by fury, looked upon him as one of his enemies.

The bellowing sound increased in loudness.

Dick's pursuers came round the corner, but when they saw the state of affairs stood still.

The street had two openings.

Both of these were now filled up by an excited crowd.

Near the centre were the two creatures chased.

One a bull.

The other a man.

Dick looked despairingly at both sides of him, but no friendly turning presented itself.

How was he to escape.

To turn and flee would but take him into the arms of his pursuers.

Was he fated to be gored to death by the mad bull?

CHAPTER CIV.

DICK FINDS A TEMPORARY REFUGE FROM HIS ASSAILANTS.

THE reader must bear in mind that from the time Dick came in sight of the bull scarce thirty seconds had elapsed, and the different things that had happened occurred simultaneously.

It is wonderful how many things can take place in a few seconds, but it requires time to relate them.

The reflections that passed through Dick's mind, though seemingly many and complex, were presented to his mind almost at the same time.

Sudden peril seems to have the effect of endowing the mind with greater powers, enabling it to trace the operations of many events at the same instant, and quite independently of each other.

There was but one way in which Dick could escape, and that presented so faint a prospect that it was scarcely deserving of the name.

The houses in this street were old-fashioned ones, with deep projecting doorways and overhanging stories.

By springing into one of these doorways, and pressing himself closely against the door itself, there was just a faint hope that he would escape the bull.

But if he succeeded in this, he would be captured by the men.

However, with the instinct of preservation from immediate danger, Dick made a dash at the nearest of these doorways, and squeezed himself in in the manner we have described.

He turned aside only just in time.

The maddened bull was bearing full down upon him.

The rapid movement which Dick made was an event for which the creature did not look, and it continued to run some yards past where he stood before it could recover the impetus it had given to itself, and came to a stand.

This it did about half-a-dozen houses off, and then, giving vent to a terrible roar of rage, he turned back again.

Upon this, the people who had been chasing Turpin advanced.

Those at the other end of the street who had been chasing the bull retreated.

Some kind of instinct seemed to tell the creature whereabouts Dick was, by whom its whole attention appeared to be occupied.

He galloped direct to the doorway.

But Dick Turpin had taken advantage of the brief space of time which it took the bull to stop himself and turn round.

He observed on the old door a massive knocker.

He used it vigorously.

The door was almost immediately opened, and panting and exhausted Dick stepped in and closed the door behind him.

It was the maid-of-all-work, apparently, who had answered the knock, and she was not a little astonished at Dick's behaviour.

But her astonishment merged into terror when she saw him, with great rapidity, turn the key in the lock, and shoot the bolts at the top and bottom of the door into their sockets.

So quickly was this done, that she had not time to cry out, run away, or give any alarm, before Dick caught her by the arm.

"Make but the least sound, raise but the least alarm, and you are a corpse!"

There was a fanlight over the door which served to light up the passage, and by its aid Turpin saw the girl open and shut her mouth, very much in the way some great fish might be supposed to do on being suddenly transported from its native element into the air.

"Silence," whispered Dick, in resolute tones. "Strive not to recover your voice, or"——

A dull thump at this moment came against the door.

"The bull!" said Turpin.

The thump was followed by the trampling of many footsteps, and then a hoarse cry arose.

Something of an unusual character was going on in the street.

"Wha-at's tha at?" gasped the servant, faintly.

"Satan and his imps after a sinning soul."

"Oh! heaven have mercy on me," said the servant, faintly.

"Show me the way to the top of the house," cried Turpin, as he heard a furious hammering at the door. Quick—quick for your life!"

But the events which had just occurred were too startling for the servant's mind to bear, and she fell backwards in a fainting fit.

"Confound her!" said Turpin, rushing along the passage.

A flight of stairs, leading to the upper part of the house, was before him.

He heard a voice crying out from the lower regions.

It was a feminine one.

"Sally! Sally! What is it? Shut the door, and come down stairs. Sally! Sally! I say!"

But Sally was deaf to all such calls.

Dick sprang up the staircase.

It was a very dark one, and he more than once in his headlong ascent missed his footing.

"What's the matter?" cried another voice, which proceeded from the front room on the second floor.

The door of this room was opened a little way, and a head projected from it.

It was a man's head.

"Who is it, I say? Is it thieves, or fire, or murder? Who is it, I say?"

"The devil!" said Turpin, and darting forward he caught hold of the knob of the door before the man could withdraw his head, and pulled it towards him.

The man made two or three inarticulate sounds.

Then Turpin let go of the handle of the door.

Down fell the man like a log of wood.

"I've done for him, that's pretty clear," said Dick, as he hurried up a third flight of stairs.

This storey appeared to be untenanted.

He opened one of the doors, of which there were two before him.

It led into a garret.

A glance told him no one was there, and he shut the door behind him at once, just as he heard a tremendous disturbance in the lower part of the house.

"They have found their way in," he gasped, as he fastened the frail door behind him. "What shall I do now?"

In fact, Turpin had ascended the stairs without a thought as to what he was to do when he reached the top. He had merely acted upon the impulse which prompted him to place as great a distance as he could between himself and his foes.

He looked round the attic in which he stood.

It was scantily furnished.

Two chairs.

A table.

In one corner a stump bedstead.

Against the wall a lilliputian looking-glass.

These were all the room contained.

The fastening upon the door, which was very old and frail, were merely a couple of bolts.

This, he felt, would be no obstacle to his foes, whom he could now hear rushing up the staircase.

He cast his eyes upon the bed.

He might, perhaps, he thought, by dragging that from its present position, and placing it against the door, hinder for a little while their entrance.

This he determined to do, and caught hold of the foot of the bed for that purpose.

But, alas! for the insecurity of things in this world. No sooner did he attempt to drag it forward than the lower part came away in his hands, and the whole reached the floor in one grand smash.

This was vexatious in the extreme.

Not only had he wasted moments when every moment was of inestimable value, but he had raised such a sound as could not fail to indicate his exact position.

He ran to the window, and flung it open.

It looked on to the roof, in which, indeed, it was made.

About six feet off was a gutter filled with black, oozy mud, and on the other side of that gutter a crumbling stone parapet, some eighteen inches in height.

'I must make my way over the roofs, I suppose," said Dick, "and trust to fate for the result."

As he spoke he clambered through the window and lowered himself into the gutter.



[SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL LISTEN TO THE MYSTERIOUS SOUNDS.]

He did not stay to close it after him; he was well aware his foes already knew his exact location, and that when they entered and found the room empty they would, of course, run to the window.

Dick scratched his hands and broke his nails in his progress down the slanting roof, but otherwise he sustained no injury.

His feet sank deeply into the mud in the gutter.

It was not without some misgiving that he stood where he did. He could not tell how secure it was, or how soon he might be precipitated into the street below.

CHAPTER CV.

DICK TURPIN'S POSITION DOES NOT GET ANY BETTER; IN FACT PERILS INCREASE.

Every moment now, however, only served to give him confidence, and with the feeling pressing upon him that there was no time for delay, he crawled as quickly as he could along the gutter.

After proceeding about a dozen yards, however, he came to a house that was some three feet higher than its neighbours.

Hitherto he had been careful not to let his head be seen over the top of the parapet by those who were doubtless watching for him below, but now he would be obliged to run the risk of being seen unless he chose to remain where he was, and that would be to ensure his capture.

He hesitated a little.

The accomplishment merely of the feat of climbing from one roof to the other was full of peril.

But if he was to escape it must be tried, and although he was almost powerless from the fatigue he had hitherto experienced, he summoned all his fortitude to his aid, and resolved to make the attempt.

He stood up in the gutter, and placed his hands on the roof of the adjoining house, in order to draw himself up.

The moment he did so a loud shout arose.

H uld not resist turning hi head and looking in the direction whence it proceeded.

This was from the street below.

Dick looked down.

It was crowded with an excited mass of persons.

Upon observing that h face was turned towards them they set up another shout.

Dick only gave one glance, and then he turned his whole attention to the task he had set himself.

Slowly and carefully he drew himself up.

And all the time he was in full sight of the people.

A woman who was amongst them, and who carried on her head a basket of suspicious-looking fish, exclaimed in shrill, shrewish tones,—

"Fetch him down—fetch him down, or he will escape. Hurl a stone at him, and fetch him down."

There was something so enchanting to the minds of the persons composing the crowd in fetching a man off the roof of a house with throwing stones, that, uttering a cry of delight, they at once set about putting her suggestion into execution.

A shower of missiles of all descriptions were aimed at Turpin.

But, luckily for him, when the first were thrown he had just succeeded in reaching the roof of the house, and he crouched down close to the parapet, which on that one happened to be a good two feet in height.

By this means he escaped the greater part of them.

Then Dick heard a loud hurrah in his rear, and he turned round, although he knew well enough from whence it proceeded.

Those who had violently broken into the house had reached the attic window.

"Surrender, Dick Turpin," cried a voice, "surrender, or you are a dead man!"

The only notice Dick took of this speech was to crawl still further, and with increased speed, along the parapet.

It is wonderful what danger people will run for money. Under ordinary circumstances there was not one of the men who were chasing Turpin that would have attempted that which they now performed.

They scrambled recklessly out of the window, and rolled down the roof until their further progress was stayed by the parapet, which vibrated before the shocks that were given to it.

But regaining their feet in an incredibly short space of time, they crept along the gutter in the direction of their prey.

As soon as Dick Turpin saw this movement on the part of his foes, he felt more than ever the necessity there was for him to use all his endeavours to escape them.

His position was a most perplexing one.

So far from having bettered his condition, he, as he glanced about him, felt pretty well convinced that he had made it worse.

He had crawled for some distance along the housetops, when a very serious obstacle presented itself.

He had reached a point where a narrow street diverged from the main one.

"Too wide," muttered Dick, as he peered over cautiously, and saw that, narrow as the street was, the space between the houses was too great to make a jump practicable. "Too wide. Which way shall I turn?"

That, however, was most essentially a moment for action—not hesitation.

There was but one resource, and that was to crawl along the roofs of the houses abutting upon the narrow street even as he had done the others.

Dick was agile, and he got along at a much swifter rate than his pursuers, besides which he had a good start, and the distance between them, instead of diminishing, increased.

The mob who choked up the front street, as we may call it, did not observe the highwayman turn the corner. The stone coping effectually shrouded him from their observation.

Their whole attention was absorbed in watching the progress of the officers who were full in view, for not having the motive for concealing themselves that Dick had, they made their way in an erect posture, which they found was easiest for them.

Of course Dick was now, owing to having turned the corner, out of sight of his pursuers

This was an event which might not occur again, and, after having with some difficulty got round a stack of chimneys, which in themselves would serve in no small degree to shield him, Dick began to look about him for a hiding place.

To have continued along the housetops would have been madness, for the officers would have nothing to do but take up such positions as would make his interception certain.

His only chance, and that was a faint one indeed was this.

To enter unperceived one of the houses in the street and find some place of concealment there until such time as he could emerge with safety.

But the difficulty of doing this was, one would think, insuperable or nearly so.

The whole neighbourhood appeared to be aroused.

The inhabitants of the houses would not fail to be on the alert.

Besides, if he did enter, although the officers might not know the exact spot, yet they would be able to tell where he had disappeared to a trifle, and then all they would have to do would be to post sentinels, and make a perquisition of the suspected houses.

Imminency of danger has the effect of enhancing the power of the mind, and all these deliberations presented themselves simultaneously to Turpin.

To remain where he was, however, was but to entail inevitable capture, so, as he knew he could not make his position much worse than it was, he resolved to make an entrance into one of the houses, and chance it.

One which seemed likely to answer his purpose was about half-a-dozen yards off, and he made his way towards it at full speed.

"Thank heaven!" he said, as he reached a small attic window in the tiles, one-half of which swung invitingly open. "Thank heaven, they have not seen me yet. Let me hope there is no one in the place to interfere with me."

As he spoke Dick raised his head, so that his eyes were just above the level of the window-sill.

"Empty!" he said, with a gush of grateful feeling at his heart. "Empty! There is hope yet—all may be well."

With the greatest eagerness, now, he drew himself up, and, taking care not to raise his body any higher than he could help, crawled head-foremost into the room.

Scarcely, however, had his feet touched the floor, than he heard a shout, and a mighty rush of many footsteps.

He closed the window with great rapidity. It was less likely to excite suspicion than if he had allowed it to remain open.

"They have turned the corner," he said. "Heaven help me! This street is now choked up with people making escape a matter of impossibility."

A loud hurrah from the mob reached his ears at this juncture, but what it signified he could form no notion.

"They think it fine fun," I daresay, he said, "to hunt a fellow-creature, like some wild animal, to death. But they have not caught me yet."

Having fastened the window, he turned round to examine the room.

But nowhere in it could he see an at all practicable hiding-place.

The door was just opposite the window, and he hastened towards it.

He placed his hand upon the latch, and lifted it stealthily then, holding the door open about a quarter of an inch, he listened.

All was still.

Having in this way assured himself that there was no one on the other side, he opened the door and stepped out upon the landing.

This place was profoundly dark; indeed, the only illumination it ever had was what reached it when the attic door was open.

Now it was close shut.

The fastenings of this attic door were all on the inner side, or Dick would have secured the door in some way.

He had, however, noticed the position of the stairs, and, placing his hand upon the balustrade, he began to descend them cautiously.

As he proceeded he found he was able to see a little about him, which showed some rays of light found their way there, though he could not perceive their source

At length he reached the landing on the floor beneath him.

He paused.

There was no sound in his rear indicative that the officers had traced him, but how long that would be the case was more than he could tell.

"What kind of house is this, I wonder?" he asked himself. "If I knew, it would be of material aid to me, since then I should know better what to do; now I am all abroad. Ha! what is that?"

A lumbering noise, which clearly came from the attic above, reached his ears.

At the same moment a door, within a few inches of which he had been standing, was flung open.

A flood of light, for such, by the contrast, it seemed to be, lighted up the landing.

"What is it?" said a voice, in accents of alarm. "What is it?"

CHAPTER CVI.

THE CUPBOARD PROVES A DANGEROUS HIDING-PLACE FOR DICK.

Dick saw that it was a young woman, carrying a child in her arms, who had asked the question.

Before she had time to give any alarm or notice that he was there even, Turpin rushed into the room, and closing the door, put his back against it.

"Silence!" he said, in a low, but fierce whisper. "Silence! If you so much as raise your voice above a whisper, even to pronounce one word, that moment is your last."

"Oh, heaven have mercy upon me, and save me," said the woman, sinking upon her knees in an agony of fright. "Spare me and my little one."

"Rise," said Dick. "I intend no harm against you or your child either, so long as you do not, by making an outcry, provoke me to it. Will you be silent?"

"Oh, yes. Have mercy, good sir. I will be very silent indeed. What is it you want?"

Dick looked earnestly into the woman's face in order to judge, by its expression, how far he might trust her.

The day was fading fast, and evening creeping on, but still there came into that room sufficient light to serve his purpose.

She was young—not twenty at the most, but already had care and want and grief marred the beauty of her countenance. Her eyes and cheeks were sunken and hollow, her lips thin and bloodless, and her whole body as much emaciated as one in the last stage of marasmus.

But despite of this, Dick saw at a glance that in her girlhood she must have been very beautiful. Her hair was dark and fine in texture, and there was about her that nameless something, which, under all circumstances, clings to those who are gently born and delicately nurtured.

The child which she held in her arms, and clasped to her bosom with maternal tenderness, was a diminutive, puny thing, devoid, apparently, of all animation save that which existed in its preternaturally large eyes.

Famine and misery had already set their stamp upon the poor little creature, and Dick felt a strange feeling at his heart as he gazed upon it.

All around, too, could be seen traces of poverty the most abject. The bare walls—the bare floor—the fireless grate—the miserable heap of rags in one corner which served as a bed—the broken window—the absence of all the necessaries of life, bespoke the fact that gaunt and hungry want there held dominion.

All this Dick saw at one brief glance.

There was something in this woman's countenance, notwithstanding the havoc which misery and sorrow had made upon it, that told Dick she possessed a kindly heart. He did not therefore hesitate to inform her who and what he was.

"Again," he said, "again I tell you, you have nought to fear! All I ask is that you will conceal me somewhere, and should my enemies, who are now thirsting for my blood, inquire whether you have seen me, that you will tell them no, and by that means save my life."

"I cannot—I cannot."

"You cannot?"

"No. There is no place here where you could hide. And I am so terrified and nervous that they would be sure to suspect your presence here from my manner."

"Madam," said Dick, "let me not appeal to you in vain. My life is wholly in your hands. You can save me or you can destroy me. Surely you would not willingly be the means of bringing anyone to death, even though he was your enemy, which heaven knows I am not."

"No—no! Oh! what is that? what is that?"

"My enemies!" said Dick. "I am unarmed, and cannot defend myself. Will you deliver me into their hands, or will you hide me from them?"

The poor woman, who was almost distraught with fear, began to weep.

Turpin got desperate.

"Hark!" he said, "they are on the stairs; can you hear them? Others are trampling overhead. In another moment they will be here. Hide me somewhere, and I will reward you well."

"Look round," said the woman. "Where can you secrete yourself?"

"Here," said Dick, as with a bound he reached a cupboard door. "In here."

"But they will find you there."

"Not if you tell them you have not seen me."

"Be it so, then. I will try."

The cupboard towards which Dick had hastened was in a kind of recess.

It was divided into two portions.

He chose the lower, because there was but one shelf in it.

With great speed he crawled in, and then he said—

"Bring some of those bed-things and stuff them in. Then, if they should be suspicious enough to look in, they will not see me."

With trembling limbs the poor woman did his bidding, and scarcely had she crammed the last article in, and turned the little button which served as a fastening to the cupboard, than a loud authoritative knock was given to the door.

Truly was Dick Turpin in an unenviable predicament. He was a prisoner, without the least power to release himself, and not only had he to trust to the woman keeping good faith with him, but to her having sufficient command over her words and actions not to generate suspicion in the minds of the officers that he was there.

There was only this one circumstance in Dick's favour, and that was that he had left no clue by which the officers could trace him to the house in which he was, which made a vast difference indeed; for, of course, they could not tell precisely in which one he had taken refuge.

The poor woman, who all this time had never put the child out of her arms, opened the door in answer to the summons.

Her surprise at seeing there several police-officers was real, for Dick had merely told her that his enemies were seeking him, and the idea that he was a criminal never once entered her imagination.

The officers rushed at once into the room and glared about them.

"What is it you want, gentlemen? What is it you want? We have done nothing wrong, I can assure you."

"We don't say as how you have, but we're after some one we suspects has got into this 'ere house. How long have you been here?"

"Six months, next quarter-day, sir!"

"Pho pho! I don't mean that. How long have you been in this room to-day? When were you out last?"

"At dinner-time, sir."

"Oh! very good! That will do. Now, while you have been here have you seen a stranger in the house? A man dressed like a farmer?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure he has not been here?"

"Quite sure, sir; for how could he come in without my knowing?"

"True; but have you heard no one?"

"Oh! yes. This house, you see, is let out to poor folks, and some one or other is continually going up and down stairs."

"Oh! and it is so often the case that, if you heard anyone on the stairs, you would not open the door to see who it was?"

"Not unless I thought it was my husband, sir."

"Ah! you have a husband, have you? And where is he, pray?"

"Here!" said a voice; and a young man, pale, thin, and wretched-looking as his wife, sprang into the room.

"Seize him," roared the officer in command. "Seize him!"

"No, no. Have mercy: Why do you seek him?"

"Let him go," said the officer. "That is not him."

"What is all this, Mary?" said the young man, with a bewildered air. "What does it mean?"

"We are officers," said the one who had ordered him to be seized, taking a constable's staff of authority from his pocket; "we are officers in search of a notorious criminal, who we suspects is hid somewheres in this house."

"But why did you seize me?"

"Just to make sure you wasn't him, to be sure."

"But he is not here, Mary, is he? Why don't you tell them so?"

It was the first time Mary had ever deceived her husband, and she hesitated a moment before she replied:

"I have told them," she said, "but they don't seem to believe me."

"Why, sir, you see," said the officer, who had previously spoken, "he is so full of all sorts of tricks, that a fox is quite a fool to him, and not no mistake, and so you see we is a kind of doubtful like."

"Just so. But who is he?"

"Well, we don't mind telling you, because you don't seem very well off."

"God help us! No. We—we are starving!"

"Just so, and that makes us think you will be glad of a chance of earning a part of the reward which is offered for the apprehension of Dick Turpin, the highwayman."

"Dick Turpin?"

"Yes."

"And do you mean to say he is in this house?"

"Why, not exactly that, but we have traced him to somewhere close at hand. Help us, and if we catch him you shall have ten pounds for your share."

"Ten pounds!" said the young man, who made a rapid mental calculation of how much food such a sum would buy for his wife and children. "Ten pounds?"

"Yes, and now perhaps you wouldn't mind us making a search here?"

"By no means," said the young man. "It can't take you long."

The wife sank down in an agony of tears.

"There seems to be but one place in the room where he could hide," continued the officer, "and that is the cupboard yonder. If he's there we'll soon have him out."

The poor woman gave a shriek as she saw the officer draw his cutlass, and walk up to the cupboard door.

CHAPTER CVII.

OLD MATTHEW IS RATHER UNEASY IN HIS MIND ABOUT TOM KING.

"DON'T be afraid, mum," he said, on hearing the cry, and attributing it to a widely different cause to that which in reality called it into existence; "don't be afraid, mum, we won't hurt you. We would not search at all, only it will be a sort of satisfaction; you see he is so uncommon cunning."

Poor Dick!

We have seen him in many perilous situations in the course of this eventful narrative, but never in so perilous a one as the present.

Discovery, one would think, upon the officer opening the door, would immediately ensue.

The woman who had befriended him made sure that all was over, and hid her face in her hands.

The top portion of the cupboard was first thrown open.

There were five shelves, but every one of them was quite bare.

"He isn't there, at all events," said the officer; "I say, my friend, you haven't much of a larder."

The others laughed.

"I have already told you," said the young man, "that we are starving."

"Come on, then, and I only hope we capture him, and you will have enough to live on for I don't know how long. Now what shall we find here?"

While thus speaking he turned the button, and opened the door of the lower cupboard.

"Hallo!" he said, "why here's a lot of rags here."

The husband looked rather surprised to see the bedclothes bundled up into the cupboard in that fashion.

"Oh! he ain't there, that's very clear! However, just to make certain."

And he plunged his cutlass three times into the mass of rags.

It is very certain Dick Turpin owed his life, or at all events his escape, on that occasion, to the merest chance circumstance in the world.

On entering the cupboard he had laid himself down as flat as he could; but when he did so it was without having any motive for so doing.

The consequence of this apparently simple action was, that he escaped contact with the cutlass when the officer made the three fierce and random stabs at it.

"No! he isn't there," said the officer, "and now for the rest of the house. I've got some one at the door below, and on the roof above, and so they have over all the other houses on this side of the street, so he can't escape."

With this sentence, the officer and the men he had with him, hastened from the room.

The poor woman's husband accompanied them,

As soon as she was sure she was quite alone, for Mary—we may as well call her by that name, since her husband did—Mary, we say, went to the room-door, and watched them descend the flight of stairs.

To accompany them in what the reader knows was such a perfectly useless search, would be anything but interesting. It is with Turpin and the wife that we have now to do.

Having watched them enter the room on the floor below, she very carefully closed her own door, and going up to the cupboard, she said,—

"Oh, sir—speak—speak. Speak at once, and relieve my heart by telling me you are not much hurt. Speak. Oh, speak at once."

She waited a moment, and then finding no reply came, she said,—

"Oh, he is dead—dead. What shall I do now? Oh, what shall I do?"

Tears streamed from her eyes.

Of a truth was Turpin right when he divined she had a tender heart.

To her, guilty though he was, there seemed something terrible and unnatural in thus seeking to drag a fellow-creature to death.

But Dick was very far indeed from dead, and he hesitated to reply solely because he was in doubt whether it would be safe for him to do so.

Her evident distress made him resolve to run the risk of being heard by his foes.

"Fear nothing, Mary," he said. "I'm safe and unhurt. I will, however, stay here until I am assured that my pursuers have left the place. As for your husband, you must let him know I am here. They have promised him ten pounds to aid in my capture or my death. I will give him thrice ten if he will aid me to escape."

"Oh! sir, do not think us so mercenary as that, or suspect my husband of such a fault. We are starving, sir, or he would not have done as he has."

"Say no more about that. Be silent, I pray. Your words may be overheard. Suffer me to remain here where I am until the officers have left the house."

"I will, sir—I will. But are you sure you are unhurt?"

"Quite, quite."

Mary withdrew, and seated herself near the empty grate.

She shivered, but it was more from fright than cold.

Night was coming on now with rapid strides.

The gloom in that miserable chamber deepened.

But the poor woman made no attempt to dissipate it.

Their last candle had been burned, and she had not a fraction wherewith to buy another.

The preceding day the pawnbroker in the next street had taken the last article they had that was of the slightest value, and with the few pence thus provided they purchased a loaf of bread.

It grew darker and darker.

And as the obscurity increased, so did the multitudinous noises which are ever heard in a great city subside.

Cramped up in that narrow cupboard, breathing with difficulty, and not able to stir hand or foot, Turpin listened with an intensity which can only be conceived for some sounds which would indicate the position of his foes.

But none came.

At length, when positive silence had prevailed for a long period, and when he felt almost certain that the officers had left the house, he tapped gently with his fingers against the panel of the cupboard.

Mary rose instantly and went towards it.

"What is it?" she asked. "Oh! what is it?"

"Find out, if you can do so without exciting suspicion, whether the officers have left the house. I trust to you not to betray me."

"Oh! sir. Do not think of that. I would not be guilty of such a thing for worlds! Besides, you ought to trust me. If I had wished to do so, what would have prevented me disclosing your hiding-place when the officers were here in the room?"

"Nothing," said Turpin. "I can trust you, I am sure. But above all things, excite no suspicion."

Without another word the poor woman made her way across the dark room, and down the still darker stairs.

It was an anxious time for Dick while she was absent, not that he had any doubts of her good faith, but what he feared most was that, if the officers should still be lurking about, they would suspect her.

But this dread had no foundation. In a very few minutes he heard her footsteps on the stairs.

"All is well!" she said.

"The officers have left the house?"

"Yes, some time ago."

"Very good!" said Turpin. "Then just open the door, and I'll come out."

The little button which fastened the cupboard was turned, and Dick scrambled out.

He was glad enough to stretch his legs.

"How confoundedly dark the place is!" he said.

"Yes; but you are not afraid of the darkness surely; and besides, it will be much safer for you to be in the dark."

"You are right!"

"I am sorry I have no better accommodation to offer you, but you see here all that we have."

"Thank goodness!" said Dick, "I am in a position to recompense you amply for having saved my life, and I will take care to do so."

"But I should be very much hurt indeed, sir, although we are so bad off, if you thought that I have only acted as I have in the hopes of getting money."

"I would not do you that injustice for a moment, and there is no reason why I should not display my gratitude for the service you have rendered me in the best way I can."

"Alas! sir. You cannot think how such a life as we are leading now grieves me. It is so different to the future I pictured for myself on my wedding-day! I am almost heart-broken."

"Do not weep," said Turpin, as the poor woman burst into a flood of tears. "Do not weep! Hope for better times!"

"I have hoped on many a weary month. Hoped against hope! and every succeeding day only served to show our position to be worse than it was on the preceding one."

"It is so."

"Those who have not experienced it cannot know what it is. What we are to do, I know not."

"We must talk about that. When do you expect your husband back?"

"Every moment. Hark! I can hear him now coming up the stairs."

"Indeed! Are you sure?"

"Yes!"

"Then I shall leave you to tell him who I am."

CHAPTER CVIII.

DICK TURPIN, NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE, DOES A GOOD ACTION.

"STAND back into the darkness yonder near the cupboard," said the woman; "he will not see you there. I am going to open the door."

Dick felt his way as cautiously and silently across the room as he could, until he reached the cupboard, where he paused.

Mary opened the door of the room, and stepped out upon the landing.

"Robert," she said, "Robert, is that you?"

"Yes, Mary, I am here."

The voice was one saddened with disappointment.

"I am so glad you have come back, Robert."

"Glad! You ought instead to curse the hour when first you saw me, for it is I alone that have brought all this want and misery upon you."

"No, do not say that, Robert," said Mary; and Dick, whose eyes were accustomed to the darkness of the room, could see that she had laid her head upon her husband's shoulder. "Don't say that, Robert, because it is not true. You could not avoid misfortune."

"No, dearest. Heaven knows if I could have avoided all the evils that have come upon us I would have done so gladly! But it has been through no fault of mine."

"I know that, Robert, and therefore you were wrong to blame yourself as you did. I could not bear to hear that."

"Heaven bless you!" said Robert, in a husky voice. "You are an angel, Mary. How wretched I should have been without you!"

There was a silence of some few minutes' duration.

Dick, whose heart was full of kindly sympathies, was deeply affected at this scene, and he rejoiced at the chance which had put him in the way of affording them at any rate a temporary respite from their misery.

Still he held back. He felt how impolitic it would have been to have disclosed his presence before Mary had warned her husband of it.

Mary was sobbing.

"Cheer up, Mary, darling!" said Robert, with an effort. "Cheer up, dear one! Surely we have now known the worst that can befall us, and such being the case, things must take a turn for the better."

"I hope so, Robert. But you went out with those officers. Did they capture the man they sought?"

"No, Mary, or I should have let you know it before this. We searched everywhere, but we could find no trace of him."

"But, Robert, suppose you had found him, and that you had received the money, do you think it would ever have done us any good? No, Robert, I am sure it would not, because it would have been the price of blood."

"Well, well, it is not worth while to talk about that now. He has escaped, and so I did not get the money."

"You speak angrily—regretfully."

"Do I? Then forgive me for it."

"I know you have had enough to try your temper and make you repine. Let us still hope that better times are coming."

"I begin to fear that is a hope which will never be realized, and I am sure to-night it seems further off than ever."

"No."

"No, do you say, Mary? What has happened, then? Tell me, oh! tell me."

"You promise you will not act rashly, but wait until you have heard all?"

"All what?"

"You shall know in good time. Do you promise, Robert?"

"I do, I do."

"I take you at your word. Now, sir, come forward and speak for yourself!"

The room was too dark for the expression of wonderment upon Robert's face to be seen, but he gave a great start when he heard some one walk across the room towards him.

"Who—what is this, Mary? Speak, tell me!"

"Make no alarm," said Dick, in those peculiar quiet tones which are more effective in arresting anyone's attention than loud ones, "make no alarm all will be explained."

"But who is this, Mary? what does he here?"

"That you shall learn in good time. I am here because I sought shelter from my enemies, and because your wife, whom heaven bless for being a true and noble-hearted woman, succoured and shielded me from them."

"Then, then"——

"What, my friend?"

You are the man of whom they came in search?"

"I am. I fear not to disclose myself to you. I am Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

Robert was so overcome by this revelation that he was full a minute before he could recover himself sufficiently to speak:

"Do not blame me, Robert, for what I have done," said his wife; "I could not have borne the thought of handing him over to his foes."

"But he is a criminal?"

"I have no proof of that. He has done me no harm; nor you either, to my knowledge."

"I am here," said Dick again. "You can betray me if you choose!"

"No, no. That would be base."

"I am glad to hear you say as much. As you must know, you have no special feeling against me, for to the best of my belief we have never met until this moment."

"I cannot see your face, Mr.—a—a—"

"Turpin."

"I cannot see your face, but there is nothing in your voice familiar to me. Its tones, too, are those of one who would not deceive."

"I am glad you have so good an opinion of me. Had it not been for your wife, of whom, indeed, you should be proud, for she has an angel's spirit"——

"God bless her! Yes," interrupted the husband, as he kissed her on the cheek.

"Had it not been for her, I say, I should have been in the hands of my enemies and a prisoner, but I appealed to her to save me, and she did so."

"I know she would. But where did you hide? I myself searched this place thoroughly."

"The cupboard."

"But you were not there?"

"I was, in the lower half of it."

"Then you are wounded?"

"No."

"By what means, then, did you escape the officer's sword? He plunged it three times through the clothes."

"Fortunately I lay in such a position that they did not reach me. He would have hit in a moment if he had, and then I should have been dragged forth."

"Good gracious!" said Robert, drawing a long breath, "what a narrow escape!"

"Narrow indeed! But do not let us talk about that. I escaped, and am free."

Dick paused a moment. He hardly knew in what way to mould his speech.

"Do not be offended with me if I make a remark, but you are poor?"

The husband and the wife were silent.

"The evidences of it are too palpable to be overlooked. But from the words and manner of both of you I can tell it is not your natural state. I can tell you have occupied a very different position. Do not think, however, that I wish to pry into your past life. You have been unfortunate."

"We have, indeed," said Robert, in a broken voice, "most unfortunate. But we could not help it. The circumstances were entirely beyond our own control."

"I can readily enough believe that."

"I have borne up against them as well as could—tried every means to keep the wolf from the door, but in vain—always in vain. I have walked London from end to end in search of employment, but found none, except, indeed, when I have had some casual job."

"Labour is abundant in London, and ever will be. To the end there will always be more hands than there is work for them to do."

"I knew all that, sir, but still I came, hoping to do better. It is that which grieves me to the soul."

Mary crept yet closer to him.

"Were it not for my wife here, I know not what I should have done. But she has proved an angel. The home from which I took her was, if not a luxurious, yet a comfortable one—and now—now look at this."

Turpin was deeply moved at this scene; and he rejoiced within himself to think he had the power to alleviating some portion of their distress.

"But Mary, heaven bless her," continued Robert, speaking from his heart, "has never uttered one word of complaint, but borne all in silence. I speak to you thus, although I cannot see your face, but yet your voice tells me you are one that can sympathize with us, and understand how dear such conduct must make her to me. She has been a true wife indeed."

Closer—yet closer Mary clung to her husband. Every word of eulogy he uttered was a reward to her, for she loved him as few women have the power of loving.

It seems hard that two fond hearts should ever know so much suffering, and yet it is only too frequently the case. Still, when they have weathered through the storm, they are happier for the contrast; but in London how many there are who perish for every one that is saved.

The silence that ensued was an embarrassing one for Dick. He could tell both Mary and Robert were much moved, and with a natural delicacy, he shrunk from intruding any remark upon them.

"Oh! Robert," whispered Mary, "I am so very—very happy."

And then Dick could tell a gush of tears had come to her relief.

CHAPTER CIX.

DICK TURPIN PAYS A FLYING VISIT TO THE "WHITE HORSE" INN IN DRURY-LANE.

"Pardon me, my friends," said Dick, after allowing time for the pent-up feelings of the wife to have full vent. "Pardon me, but"——

"Nay, sir," replied Robert, with an effort to speak cheerfully. "It is we who ought to ask pardon of you for having been so selfish as to forget you, and the danger you are in."

"Will you listen to me, and promise not be offended at what I say?"

"I think I can safely do that, for, unless I am indeed very much mistaken, you are not one who would say anything unpleasant."

"I am glad you think so! And, in the first place, you—or your wife rather, has rendered me the greatest service which you possibly could—you saved my life! Now, I am not one who expresses his gratitude by words alone, and therefore I desire that you will accept at my hands some more substantial token of it. Let no false pride be suffered to intervene between us. It so happens that I am in a situation to render you a service, though not commensurate with the one you rendered me; and, believe me, I shall be more hurt than words can express, if you refuse to allow me this opportunity of testifying my gratitude."

"Say on, sir—say on!"

"Then what I wish to offer you is a sum of money sufficiently large to give you a fresh start in life."

"Oh! sir, you are too good! Ought we, Mary, to accept of this?"

"Let me answer for her," said Dick. "Just now you were willing, for the sake of the reward, to assist those who came to capture me! In the event, I presume, of their having done so, you would not have scrupled to accept the money! If this is so, surely it ought to be more satisfactory to receive it for having saved a life!"

"I have listened to you," said Robert, "and have not been offended at what you have said. Now it is my turn to ask the same of you."

"I cannot do otherwise than assent, but"——

"Nay, hear me! You know our position, or at all events sufficient to comprehend it. We are starving—yes, starving is the word—but, for all that, we are happy. Every article of the slightest value which we possessed, with the exception of what you see, has been made away with. I knew the end must come at last, and so it has. We have reached it to-day. Now, sir, you will understand what I am about to say. For the service I have rendered you I feel that I cannot and ought not to receive money as compensation, badly as I need it."

But this is carrying it too far," interrupted Dick.

"Nay, do not speak, sir, until you have heard me out. With a small sum of money my wife and myself could take some business. We are willing, we should work—we should succeed; I feel convinced of that."

"And so do I," said Dick; "you are a worthy fellow, and if you don't succeed no one ought to; therefore I beg you will ac"——

"I have not yet finished, sir, but I shall in a few moments. It would be against and contrary to my nature to accept such a sum from any one—as a gift."

"But it is not a gift," replied Turpin; "it is payment merely for service rendered or work done."

"I cannot look upon it in that light, but I feel that if I refused all help at your hands I should not only be unjust to my wife and children, but ungrateful to you. Therefore if you will lend me for the space of twelve months the sum of twenty pounds you will be rendering a service the extent of which we can neither of us estimate."

"And is that all?" said Dick, "then you shall have your wish. Not twenty, however, but forty, and I shall tie you to no time for repayment."

"Forty pounds!" said Robert; "that is a large sum to anyone, and I have no security to offer you."

"No security? you have the best—an honest invention to repay me."

"If that is security, I have it."

"Here, Mary," said Dick, as he slipped some money in her hand; go and buy a light, and we will settle this little business."

Mary was gone but a moment. In fact, the basement of the house was a huckster's shop where such things as candles were sold.

The light which it gave when it was placed upon the chimney-piece, for there was no table in the room, was but ghastly and feeble, but yet sufficed to light up three happy faces.

Never in his life probably had Dick had such a sensation of satisfaction at his heart. He was conscious of having done a good action.

The forty pounds were counted out, which was, in truth, nearly all the money Dick possessed, and Robert would insist upon writing out a proper acknowledgment of the debt.

"And now that is settled," said Dick, "let us turn to other subjects."

"Excuse me a moment."

"Willingly, my friend."

"But where shall we find you a twelvemonth hence?"

"Do you think you will be able to repay me then?"

"I hope the whole of it, but at all events a portion of it."

Dick mused for a moment, and then he said—

"It is very hard indeed to say where I may be a twelvemonth hence, but if you will take it to the "White Horse" public-house in Drury-lane, and give it to the landlord, Old Matthew, as he is called, it will be all right."

"I shall not forget, sir, and in twelve months' time from this very day I will be there."

"I will endeavour to be there, too, for I shall be anxious to know how far you have been successful. It is likely enough we may meet before that time."

"And now, sir, you were going to say something else."

"I was, and that is, I wish to leave here as quickly now as possible. It is getting late. The officers doubtless have given up all hopes of my capture; still I do not wish to risk anything by being foolishly incautious."

"Of course not."

"I wish you, then, as a favour, to go to some second-hand clothes shop in the neighbourhood and buy a large horseman's cloak, with which I can disguise myself, as my dress, doubtless, has been accurately described."

"I will do it, sir."

"Here is the money. Be as quick as you can, yet above all things do not excite suspicion. You will also be able to tell whether there are any officers lurking about."

Robert was only too glad to be of assistance to his benefactor, and he started off at once.

At this moment there was a faint, wailing cry.

The child, which during the preceding scene had been sleeping in its little apology for a bed, awoke.

The mother's tones were very different now from what they had been. Her heart was light. At the last hour, when fate seemed most unpropitious, fortune had smiled upon her.

She held the child up to the light, which the little creature contemplated with evident delight.

"And now, Mary," said Dick, "for I hope you will look upon me quite as an old friend, and allow me to call you by that title, you will not refuse me permission, I am certain, to make your child some little present in remembrance of me."

"You are too good, sir."

"Nay."

"You have already done enough—and more than enough."

"Here is a guinea. Take it, and understand it is for the child. Use it to no other purpose. It will enable you to buy it warm and comfortable apparel."

Poor Mary. She had borne up through all the time of trouble, but now that good fortune had come upon her she was weak and wept like a child.

"Your heart is a good one, sir, I am sure," she said.

"I can appreciate a kindness," said Dick, deprecatingly, "but that probably is because it is a thing I so rarely meet with, and I feel a pleasure in conferring happiness when I can. There is so little of it in the world, that no one, if he has it in his power, ought to hesitate to bestow it to the full extent of his ability."

At this moment Robert returned.

"Here is, I fancy, just the thing you want, sir," he said, holding open a horseman's cloak of thick blue cloth, and exaggerated size. It will cover you up completely."

"And was the coast clear?"

"Quite."

"Farewell, then, my kind friends, and accept of my best wishes. May you prosper in the world as you deserve to do; and when you hear anything in disfavour of Dick Turpin, the highwayman, put the good action he has done this night in the opposite scale, and weigh it against it."

"You will be always remembered by us as a saviour, said Mary, taking Dick's hand between both hers. "Had it not been for your chance presence here what would have become of us?"

"Good-bye, Mary, do not think of that. You have only your own kind heart to thank. Had you not extended a helping hand to me, I should not have had this opportunity of saving you."

"Good-bye, sir," said Mary, tearfully. "I—I—"

She would have said, she hoped to hear he had ceased to become amenable to the laws, but as she thought it would sound like a reproach, she checked herself, and said instead,—

"I wish I could find words to thank you."

"And now, sir, will you permit me to go a little way with you. I am known, and it would, perhaps, be the means of warding off suspicion from you."

CHAPTER CX.

DICK TURPIN STOPS A BAGMAN ON HIGHGATE-RISE.

"THANKS, my friend, I accept your offer gladly. I have no very clear idea of my locality, except that I am near Smithfield Market."

"Come then, sir, let us start at once."

And after one more farewell to Mary, who stood at the top of the stairs with the candle in her hand, Dick followed his new friend into the street.

Turpin cast an anxious glance about him.

The street was dark, narrow, and winding, but so far as he could see there was no one in view.

"I really think they have left the spot," said Robert.

"Hush! do not speak. We may be overheard."

"In which direction did you wish to go, sir?"

"To Drury-lane."

"Shall you walk?"

"No; not only would it be tiring, but hazardous. I will take a hackney-coach."

"Very good, sir, then come this way; the second turning to the right will take us out on to Snow-hill, and on the other side of Holborn-bridge you will be almost sure to get one."

The distance to this place was short.

They halted for a minute at the corner, and then they heard one come lumbering along Fleet Market.

Robert hailed it, and the driver drew up to the curb-stone.

"Where to, your honour," said the jarvey, for the cloak Dick had on gave him quite an aristocratic look.

"To the corner of Princes-street in Drury-lane."

The driver touched up his cattle, and Dick shook hands with Robert for the last time.

"Well," said Dick to himself, as he settled himself in the carriage, "this has been a day of adventures, and no mistake. However, this is one I shall never have to care

back to with regret. I should like to know whether it was really all genuine. I shall know, though, if they return the money at the twelve months' end; but I'll not take it, not I."

He was silent for a minute, for the thought of where he was likely to be at the end of the time specified intruded itself rather unpleasantly upon his mind.

Naturally enough, this brought him to think of the condition of his friend.

"Poor Tom!" he said, "I wonder now how he is getting on? working away at his fetters, I know. But Mr. Townshend, despite your cleverness, I will free him yet! I have said it, and I will do it!"

At this moment the vehicle stopped, and looking out, he saw he had reached his destination.

He alighted, and having given the man a little more than double his fare, that worthy thought fit to say "thank you in a dissatisfied tone of voice.

Dick stood by the post, and watched him drive along Russell-street.

Then turning to the left, he directed his steps to the "White Horse."

Dick did not enter by the front door, because if he had he would have been obliged to run the gauntlet of many prying eyes, so he turned down White Horse-yard, and stopped before the same side-door as he did when he reached the old inn, wounded and faint, on the night he stopped the Lord Mayor's carriage.

As upon that occasion, he pressed his thumb upon the doorpost, and waited.

The door was opened almost immediately by old Matthew.

His delight at seeing Dick back safe and sound was very visibly depicted upon his countenance.

"Come in, Dick, and let me shut the door," he said. "I am right down glad to see thee back, and no mistake. I saw you chased up the Old Bailey into Smithfield, for I was in Coles's shop at the time, and I have been in a terrible fidget ever since."

"Well, here I am, you see, safe and sound. Let me come and sit down a minute, and then I'm off."

Old Matthew introduced Dick into the secret room, and then he related all those particulars with which the reader has already been made familiar.

But above all was old Matthew interested in the episode of Robert and his wife Mary.

"And now, Matthew, my friend, it is time I was off. I have business I want to do to-night, but if Tom is brought to trial I shall want to provide a counsel for him."

"Oh! I'll see to all that."

"No, you won't, and no disrespect to you either. I told you before I was going to get Tom King out of Newgate myself, and I'll do it!"

"Oh! very well, very well, have your own way."

"Don't be offended, Matthew."

"Are you off, then?"

"At once."

"Ain't you going to change your clothes?"

"Oh! hang it, yes. I forgot I was dressed in this style."

"Take this candle, then. You know the way. Your clothes are just on the foot of the bed. I sent over to the costumier's for them."

"All right; and while I am gone, do you saddle Black Bess, and have her ready for me.

Dick sprang up the stairs, and into what may be called his room.

It did not take him very long to resume his ordinary appearance, and then he went down again, and left the little private parlour by a door that led into the yard.

He found Bess there waiting for him.

"Are there any suspicious characters about, Matthew?" he asked, as he sprang into the saddle.

"I haven't seen none, Dick; but I should advise you to be careful; and let me tell you, besides that all the roads leading out of London are guarded by a troop of dragoons."

"That, for the troop of dragoons," said Dick, as he snapped his fingers contemptuously.

"Ah, it's all very fine to carry things off with a high hand like that, Dick, old boy, but if you'll take a piece of friendly advice you'll be careful."

"Don't be afraid of me. I shall be back again safe and sound."

"I hope so.

"And what is more, the next time I come he shall come to bring Tom with me."

As he thus spoke, Dick trotted Bess out into the court near its junction with Stanhope-street.

When he reached this place his thoughts involuntarily turned to the last time he stood there, and when he carried off the young girl Ellen.

"Ah, that reminds me," he said, as he changed Bess's trot into a canter, "I have not seen either her or Tom Davis for a long time, but I will try if I cannot do so to-night. Now I come to think of it, he would be just the very person I want to assist me."

Having these thoughts in his mind, he, as soon as he got clear of the houses, gave Bess the rein.

She had had a long rest, and was therefore quite fresh, and the speed with which she shot past the different objects in her route was really prodigious.

There are few things more invigorating than a few miles' gallop on horseback, and Dick became particularly conscious of it on this occasion.

He, however, reined her in to a walk upon reaching the rather steep ascent known as Highgate-rise.

The night had up to this moment been rather dark, in consequence of the heavy masses of clouds which filled the sky, but now, through a long straggling rift about half-way between the horizon and the zenith, an almost full moon peeped forth.

Her brilliancy was, however, dimmed by the vapours which floated before her disk, and the light which she sent forth was misty and uncertain.

Dick paused altogether on the top of the hill and listened.

Now, that identical spot is pretty well surrounded by buildings, and indeed forms a portion of London, but then it was quite a rustic place, with only a cottage here and there.

An intense stillness prevailed about this place at that hour, which was most delicious to the senses, but Dick, ere he had occupied this place two minutes, heard faintly the grinding of carriage wheels.

"Come!" he said; "it is a long time since I cried 'Stand, and deliver!' on the highway, and if I go much longer, I shall quite get out of practice! This, too, is a chance I cannot let go by."

So saying, he carefully examined the pistols in his holsters, which he found in excellent order.

"Who comes along the road so late, I wonder?" he said. "I shall be disappointed if it does not turn out a good booty, and one well worth the trouble. Whoever it is though, he is a long way off."

This was true, for none but the most attentive ear could have distinguished the slight noise which the revolving wheels produced.

Dick took Bess at a brisk walk down the hill, and having reached its base, where the trees grew thickly and cast a deep shadow on the roadway, he drew up as close to the hedgerow as he could, and waited.

The sound now rapidly increased.

"It is some light two-wheeled vehicle drawn by one horse," said Dick, and, just as he uttered the words, he saw two little star-like lights approaching him.

"They have the lanterns lighted! Well, never mind."

Dick suffered the gig, for such it was, to get just on a level with him, and then he darted out with the suddenness of an apparition.

A man, who was driving, was the sole occupant of the gig, and Turpin putting one of his pistols just before his face, cried—

"Pull up! Your money, or your life!"

CHAPTER CXI.

TOM DAVIS AND ELLEN GIVE TURPIN A HEARTY WELCOME AT THE "HAND AND KEYS."

NINE out of every ten persons would have done under the circumstances just what the man in the gig did, and that was to pull up at once.

"A—a highwayman!" he gasped.

"Yes," cried Turpin: "hand over whatever you may have of any value about you."

"What if I refuse?"

Dick held the pistol significantly.

"You would shoot me?"



[DICK TURPIN, SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, AND CLAUDE DUVAL PLANNING TOM KING'S ESCAPE.]

"Precisely. Be quick."

"Then take that."

Bang went a pistol, and Dick felt something inflict a stinging sensation on his cheek.

For a moment, so sudden was the attack, he was overcome with surprise, but quickly recovering himself, he said—

"Ha! you have had your fire, so now you can't rumble if I have mine."

"No, no! Mercy, mercy! have mercy! Spare my life, and take all I have got. Mercy, mercy!"

The man in the gig was in an agony of fright, for he fully expected nothing but death as the result of his rash action.

"Your carcass is quite safe," said Dick, "provided you hand over all that you have about you in the shape of cash. Quick! and don't abuse my clemency, for if you make another attempt, I will certainly blow out your brains!"

"In a minute, sir, in a minute. It's in a valise under the seat along with my samples. "You see I'm a bagman, sir."

"A what? Make haste."

"A bagman."

"And what on earth is a bagman?"

"A commercial traveller, sir. I represent the highly-respectable firm of Slink and Friar, No. 42, Abchurch-lane, in the City, sir."

"Oh! confound you. If you don't make haste I'll take valise and all."

"No—no, sir. Here is the bag, sir. It's not my money—not one penny of it!"

"Then you ought not to grieve so much about losing it."

"But I do. I shall lose my place."

"Oh! nonsense," said Dick, as he pocketed a largish leather bag, which the "bagman," as he called himself, handed to him. "You must tell your employers you were robbed of it by Dick Turpin."

"Dick Turpin?"

"Yes. Now for once I will take your word, only I caution you beforehand against deceiving me."

"What is it this bag contains?"

"Money."

"I can tell that, but to how much does it amount?"

"Seventy-three pounds odd," was the reply. "I shall lose my place, I know I shall."

"Pho—pho! I know better. Good night."

Dick rode off.

The commercial traveller evidently thought it was his best policy to succumb to the force of circumstances, and he let Dick go without any aggressive act, which was more than the highwayman expected.

"Not so bad," he said, as he took his way down a narrow lane that would bring him out somewhere near his destination. "It will do to fee the counsel with in case Tom is brought to trial; but it is very odd to me if I don't get him out before the sessions come on."

Whether he did so or not remains to be seen.

The sessions came on on the Wednesday following, so at any rate he had not much time to lose.

He reached the "Cross Keys" without having encountered a soul.

Jabez, as usual, came to the front of the inn on hearing a horse's footsteps.

His joy when he saw who it was may be imagined.

Dick followed him into the stable before he attempted to enter the house.

"How are they all?" he asked; "quite well, I suppose, Jabez, eh?"

"Quite well, squire."

"I will go in and see them directly."

"You will have to look sharp, for he always closes the old crib at ten o'clock, and it's close upon that now, I'm thinking."

"It is. I can trust you to see that my mare is safe?"

"Never fear, squire; I'll fettle her as well as though you stood by and watched me."

"It won't be anything out of your way, Jabez," said Dick, as he walked towards the door of the inn.

He lifted the latch and entered.

The first person he met was Ellen.

She knew him instantly, and uttered a faint cry of recognition.

"Hullo!" said a voice, which evidently belonged to Tom Davis. "Hullo there! who is it?"

"Won't you know me, Tom? It's a long while since I was here, but I hope you have not forgotten me."

"Forgotten you! The idea of such a thing. Come in, come in, do. Why, whatever brings you here to-night?"

"I will tell you presently," replied Turpin, as, taking Ellen by the hand, he followed the landlord into the kitchen.

There was a flush of pleasure upon the young girl's face—indeed, she did not attempt to conceal her gratification.

"The house is quite empty, Dick," said Tom Davis, picking up his pipe off the table where he had deposited it, "so you needn't fear being overheard."

"Where's the missus?"

"Well, she's summut poorly, thankye, and has gone up to bed. It ain't nothing serious, you know."

"That's all right then. And now, Tom, what have you got to drink?"

"Anything you like."

"Then I'll take some brandy."

"Very good. So will I. Ellen, my dear, just go to the bar."

"Yes, rather."

"Father!" repeated Dick, with some surprise. "How long has she given you that title?"

"Why, you see, Dick, it wasn't her doings at all, but mine, bless her heart!"

"Oh! indeed."

"Ah! she's a good girl, she is, and having no children of our own, and she being an orphan, and"——

"There, I don't want so many reasons. You found it more convenient, eh?"

"And a great deal more pleasant. Ah! Dick, you don't know what a treasure she is."

"And she appreciates your kindness?"

"She does. How anybody could be other than kind to her beats me. Here she comes."

Ellen at this moment entered.

Dick looked at her with more attention, and he felt no surprise that Tom Davis, with his huge heart overflowing with love as it was, should be fond of her. She was indeed a lovely creature.

Tom Davis bestowed upon her a look of prideful admiration as she approached, and looked up into his face with a glad smile.

"Upon my word," said Dick, "I am glad to see you looking so well and happy! I wonder at it, too."

"Why?" she asked, wonderingly,

"Why?" repeated Dick. "because I know what a domestic tyrant he is."

"Me?" said Davis, aghast. "Me a domestic tyrant? Well, that is good."

"You are joking," said Ellen. "There is nothing of the tyrant about him, I am sure."

"Not a bit of it! But come, Dick, what brings you here? This is something more than a chance call, I know."

"It is," said Dick. "I had a motive in coming here, I confess."

"What is it?"

"You shall hear. My comrade Tom King is a prisoner."

"God bless me! You don't say so?"

"Is it possible you have not heard of it?"

"This is the first news I have had."

"You remember him, don't you?"

"Oh! yes!" replied Ellen and Tom Davis, in a breath.

"Well, it was chiefly my fault that he got taken prisoner," said Dick, who thereupon related all that had taken place from the time Tom was captured by the dragoons, to his own narrow escape of capture in the vestibule of the old city prison.

"And is he still there?" asked Ellen.

Both listened with the utmost eagerness to the startling narrative which Dick related in simple yet forcible words.

"He is," said Dick, "but he won't be for long. I have sworn to set him free, and I will keep my oath in spite of every obstacle!"

There was a silence for a moment, for Dick had spoken in rather an emphatic tone of voice.

Tom Davis, who was standing with his back leaning against the mantelpiece smoking his pipe, poured out another glass.

"Well," he said, as he held it to his lips, "I've heard you say you'd do a good many things that I should have thought impossible, but nevertheless you've done 'em, which makes me think you'll do this."

"I shall!"

"It won't be an easy job."

"I know that," said Dick, "and I know as well that I cannot do it unaided, so I have ridden over here to-night to know whether you will give me your assistance?"

CHAPTER CXII.

DICK TURPIN IS ALARMED BY THE ARRIVAL OF THE HORSEMEN AT THE INN.

"WILL I?" asked Tom Davis, with a sudden animation in his voice. "You know I will! Only just say the word, and it's done!"

"Thanks, Tommy, my friend! I knew I could rely upon you."

"And now what is it you want me to do? We may as well talk it over before we go to bed."

"Certainly. I will not keep you long. Do you wish to stay, Ellen?"

"May I?" she asked, timidly.

"Nay, that is not it. Which would you rather do?"

"Stay here, unless you have an objection."

"No, I have none. You may be able to assist us, and I know you are to be trusted."

"Trusted?" said Tom Davis. "Of course she is to be trusted, and I should like to hear anyone say that she wasn't!"

"Really," said Dick, "if you go on in that way you'll spoil her altogether."

"Not a bit of it! She's too good to spoil, she is."

Dick could not help smiling at the enthusiasm the worthy old landlord displayed.

"Well, let us to business. You will see at once that after the very narrow escape I had, it would be something

akin to madness for me to attempt to have another interview with Tom."

"It would."

"But there is a great necessity that we should be in communication with each other, so that I should be able to assist him."

"Just so."

"In fact, without it, I don't see how it is to be done."

"Nor I. But I suppose the upshot of the affair is just this, you want me to go and see him."

"Exactly, my friend, exactly. Mind you, I don't want to compromise you in any way by asking you to attempt to smuggle tools into him; that has been done already. All I want you to do is to visit him occasionally, and carry messages between us."

"Then, if that's all, Dick, I'll do it with all the pleasure in life."

"Hurrah!"

"You are pleased."

"I believe you! I am glad indeed I have got your consent. More glad than I could easily express!"

"Well, all I can say is, you are heartily welcome."

"I knew there would be no harm in asking you such a thing."

"Not a bit!"

"There are so many advantages."

"As how?"

"I will explain."

"I am all attention. Fill up your glass, Dick! You don't drink!"

"No, I am too much interested in the matter that is going forward."

"I daresay."

"However, old Matthew—you know old Matthew?"

"Rather, I should think, seeing he is some kin to my wife!"

"Oh! indeed, I was not aware."

"Yes; but go on. What were you going to say about old Matthew?"

"Why, that he would only have been too glad of the chance to go, only, you see, he is so well known to the prison authorities."

"I suppose he is."

"Some or other of them are sure to be at his house. They suspect a great deal, but they can't fix nothing on him."

"Nor never will, I think! Old Matthew is one too many for them."

"He has been hitherto."

"Why, the old place, which they say was once a gentleman's mansion, is full of odd nooks and corners that no one knows anything about, except the landlord himself."

"So I have heard. Well, as I say, he would go gladly enough to see Tom, but"——

"But you'd rather someone else."

"I would, and that's the truth."

"And so you asked me?"

"As being the only person I could rely upon. You are known to few, if any, of the Newgate officials, and for that reason you would be able to go in your own proper character. You need not disguise yourself, I mean."

"Just so."

"That will be the great thing. After what has happened, I have no doubt someone will always be stationed in the lobby to examine everyone that comes to see him, but if you go as you are their search can result in nothing."

"That's uncommonly true."

"And you still have no objection?"

"None at all, Dick, if delivering messages is all you want me to do, though I am free to confess that if you had asked me to take him anything I should not have been quite so willing, though I don't know that I should have refused.

Still, you would rather things be as they are.

"Most certainly! Now what do you want me to do?"

"I will tell you."

"And when do you want me to go?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Very good, go on."

"You know I told you I managed, or rather old Matthew did, to convey Tom a couple of spring files."

"Yes."

"These, then, I hope he has been able to make good use of ere this. It is, however, a point I wish to be ascertained."

"Very good."

"Then I want you to learn what hopes he has of making his escape, and when he will be likely to accomplish it."

"Yes."

"As I knew that, I would take care to be in waiting close at hand, with a good horse for him to mount."

"I see."

"If, however, things should go adversely, and his escape cannot be effected before the sessions, tell him that I will take care to engage first-rate counsel in his defence. If he is acquitted, which is rather doubtful."—

"Very doubtful, I should say."

"Well, very doubtful be it. Nevertheless, we will not omit that chance in our calculations. A clever man before now has got a prisoner acquitted when the case looked very black against him indeed."

"That's true enough."

"And I see no reason why such a thing should not be done again."

"No—no."

"If he is acquitted, then, of course, all trouble will be at an end."

"And if they release him?"

"That would follow, as a matter of course."

"Oh! dear, no. They might have several counts in the indictment, and they would be almost sure to get him convicted on one of them."

"I did not think of that."

"Or, if they don't, the judge may refuse to set him at liberty."

"Surely he would not have the power to do that?"

"I don't know. He might give orders for him to be detained until another case could be brought against him."

"Oh! no; surely, no."

"You had best take it into your calculations, I can tell you."

"I will."

"Or they might manage things in another way."

"How?"

"Set him at liberty, and then take him prisoner again. But you may make up your mind that the judge and jury will bring him in guilty."

"Then he must be set free, that's all."

"Which is much easier said than done."

"Granted. But an unflinching determination can accomplish a great deal."

"I don't dispute it. I have seen too many instances of it."

"I have never failed yet. And now I think I have told you pretty nearly everything. Do you understand?"

"I think so. In the first place, you want me to set out for Newgate to-morrow morning, and get an interview with Tom?"

"Yes."

"Learn from him what hopes he has of making his escape with the tools you have given him?"

"Quite right. Go on."

"And if he does not get free before the trial, that you will take care and employ a good counsel in his behalf?"

"Exactly. Be sure you tell him of the narrow escape I had, and what madness it would be on my part to attempt to see him."

"He won't be so unreasonable as to expect you, I should think."

"Tell him not to be down-hearted, but that all will go well."

"I hope it will."

"So do I."

"You have grown much attached to him."

"I have. He is a brave, noble-hearted fellow, and such a one as you very rarely meet."

"Well, Dick, let me tell you this. You carry things off very well, and make light of danger, and all that sort of thing; but, nevertheless, there is no disguising the fact that he is in a very ticklish position, indeed. The authorities have been rather energetic lately, and you may depend they will do all in their power to hang him."

"They shall be balked, Tom; they shall be balked, that is, if I can help it."

There was a sudden trampling of horses' hoofs outside the door, and then an imperious summons for admission was given at the door.

"Danger!" said Tom Davis.

Dick coolly reloaded and primed his pistols.

CHAPTER CXII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL HAVE AN UNPARALLELED ADVENTURE.

It is sorely against our inclination to interrupt the course of events, but, as the old proverb, says, "Necessity knows no law."

We then repair to that pleasant leafy lane where we left Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval.

Their search for the persons who had played such a trick upon them had been arrested.

A strange sound came to their ears.

What it was, neither of them could divine.

Naturally enough they connected it with the two persons of whom they were in quest.

Whether they were right in doing this can only be discovered by succeeding events.

"That is a very peculiar sound, Jack," said Claude. "What can it be, think you?"

"That is beyond my comprehension. Hark! there it comes again!"

The horses, too, evidently heard it, and moved uneasily.

"This is very extraordinary. What sound can it be? I can liken it to nothing."

"It is nothing human, I am confident," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but let it be what it may, I will not leave this place without making the attempt at least to find out what it is."

"That is a bold resolution after such an assertion as the one you have just made."

"Do you think so?"

"You say it is not human."

"That is my belief."

"Then do you insinuate that it is something supernatural?"

"By no means, Claude—by no means. Good heavens! how horrible!"

It was the sudden repetition of the mysterious sound which had caused this ejaculation.

This time it came to their ears with greater loudness and distinctness.

"That is a cry of some one in some mortal agony or grief," said Claude, "though what lips could give utterance to it, I am at a loss to conceive."

"There is but one way to resolve our doubts, and that is to direct our steps in the direction whence it comes."

"But can you tell where that is?"

"Not precisely, but it comes from somewhere on our right."

"So I fancy, and it is scarcely likely we should be both mistaken in its locality."

"What is it over the hedge?"

"A wood or copse or something of that sort, I take it. The trees grow very thickly together."

"Stop, then. This makes it likely that we are right. Now, Claude, my friend, just turn all your attention to listening, and I will do the same. Being in expectation of the sound we shall not be surprised when we hear it, which will better enable us to fix on the precise spot from whence it comes."

"What would you do then?"

"Having ascertained it, go as straight in that direction as we can."

"Agreed. I am quite silent. Let us listen."

They did so.

But for a long time without result.

Still, from the periodic manner in which the cry had hitherto reached them, they felt almost certain if they waited long enough they would hear it repeated.

In this expectation they were not deceived.

Moanfully—wailingly—it rose again on the night air.

"That is conclusive," said Jack, as it completely died away. "Come! I think I can take you direct to the spot."

"I think I could do the same," said Duval; "so between us I hope we shall be successful in our search."

"Over the palings then we must get in the first place."

"I know it, but it will be awkward. There seems no safe place for a horse to alight, and, not only that, we do not yet know what capabilities they may have for taking such a leap."

"You think the best course, then, will be to follow the palisade until we reach either a gate or some place where it would be easier to effect an entrance?"

"Exactly."

"The only misfortune is, that we shall not be so well able to go where we desire."

"Oh! I don't know. Perhaps, too, we shall hear the sound once more."

"That is extremely likely," said Sixteen-String Jack, as he trotted gently forward. "Come along."

"We ought not to waste time, that is certain."

The boundary of the little wood was very closely scrutinized by our friends, and, at a little more than a hundred yards further down the lane, they found a gap which was quite practicable.

They dismounted and led their horses over the obstruction.

On the other side they found such a thick undergrowth of brake and gorse, and the trees themselves with so little space between them, that they were compelled to continue this mode of progression, for to have mounted would have been to incur a thousand perils which on foot they would escape.

The darkness was most intense, for the branches of the trees shut out almost every ray of light.

They, however, continued for a considerable distance to force their way.

At length they stopped.

"I don't like this place at all," said Claude Duval. "It might serve very well to elude one's foes, but"——

He was silent, for the strange cry again arose.

This time it was evidently in their vicinity.

"That is what I wanted to hear," said Jack. "Now I can shape my course to a certainty."

He plunged through the dense vegetation as he spoke.

"How very mournful it was," replied Claude. "I am more than ever at a loss to think what it can be? Can you hazard any conjecture?"

"None! Never in all my experience of the cries produced by different animals have I heard anything at all approaching that."

"Do you think it comes from a living thing at all?"

"Well—yes. I can hardly conceive it emanating from a thing devoid of life."

"I am completely puzzled."

"There is one thing, and that is, I think, before we are many minutes older we shall learn what it is."

In silence now they continued their route.

The further they advanced the more impervious the wood became.

Presently they came to a dead stop.

A barrier of some prickly kind of shrubs was before them.

In height it was nothing under six feet and how far it extended laterally they had no means of judging.

But just at this moment, and as Jack was about to make some remark to Claude, the sound which had before so much alarmed them again arose, and this time it appeared to be within a few paces of where they stood.

Upon the impulse of the moment, they both drew back.

Overcoming, however, almost instantaneously this very natural action, Jack said—

"Fasten your horse to the branch of a tree, and let us break through these bushes. I am certain it was from just on the other side of them that the sound came."

As he spoke, he securely fastened his own horse by the bridle to the trunk of a young sapling.

"I am ready," said Claude. "Here goes!"

They then made a sudden dash at the compact mass of vegetation, but in vain. They could not force their way through.

"Why, it's as bad as a brick wall.

"It is a great deal worse, my friend. A brick wall we should have very little difficulty in surmounting, but this, I take it, will be a bar to our further progress."

"No," said Jack, who had withdrawn himself from the hedge. "I think we shall be able to manage it yet."

"How?"

"You see this tree here?"

"Yes, yes."

"Its branches are wide spreading, and I think if we climb up into it, we shall be able to let ourselves down on the other side."

"Oh! yes, of course we can."

The two highwaymen then set about in good earnest to ascend the tree.

One of the horses was placed so as to stand just beneath its branches, close to the trunk.

Jack took the lead, and getting first in the stirrup, then stood upright on the saddle.

By this means he attained sufficient elevation to enable him to put his head among the foliage.

To seize one of the huge arms above him, and draw himself fairly up into the tree, was the work of a moment and a matter of the greatest ease.

Claude, of course, lost no time in following him; and, having crawled along one of the branches which stretched out laterally for many feet in the direction wished for, was about to drop to the ground, when Jack put his hand upon his shoulder, and spoke in a whisper.

CHAPTER CXIV.

THE PROSECUTION OF THE ADVENTURE IN THE WOOD BRINGS DANGER TO THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN.

"Stop!" he said.

"Why?"

"Before you descend it will only be prudent to reconnoitre. If there be danger, you will fall headlong into it."

"Good," said Claude, in the same tone in which his comrade had spoken, and which could not possibly have been heard half-a-dozen feet off.

There was, however, to all appearance, nothing to call for caution.

All seemed as still as the grave.

Nevertheless, they both leaned down close to the branch, and strove to pierce the gloom beneath them.

The short time that they had been in the wood had sufficed to make them familiar with the aspect of the various objects, and though when they first entered it had seemed perfectly dark, yet now a faint sort of twilight was diffused around.

At least such there was apparently, but it arose simply from the fact that their eyes had dilated.

They were, therefore, able to see that the hedge through which they had vainly attempted to force a passage was the kind of natural boundary to a large open space, the full extent of which they could not see.

Beyond this, however, nothing met their gaze. Beneath them was some turf of a very smooth character, and unbroken by the presence of a shrub.

"All seems very quiet," said Claude, at length, "and I can see nothing unusual. Shall we drop it?"

"Yes, I think we may do so safely."

Carefully lowering themselves until they hung quite straight down from the tree, having hold of the branch with their hands only, they waited a second to steady themselves, and then let go.

The space between their feet and the ground was only about eighteen inches, so they alighted upon the soft turf without making scarcely a sound.

But they were greeted with another repetition of the sound which had excited their curiosity if not alarm.

Although in a measure prepared for such an event, the cry this time was so horrible, so unearthly, and apparently so close to them, that they could not prevent a slight ejaculation escaping them.

"Forward," said Jack, who was the first to recover himself. "Forward. Claude, and let us see what this really is."

"It is hideous."

"Speculations are of no avail. On—on."

"Be cautious—oh! be cautious."

"I will."

"You know not what hidden danger to us may lurk beneath all this."

"That is true, and caution is by no means derogatory to courage."

"On the contrary, it is an attribute of it."

While uttering these words they had both crept forward in a stooping posture.

Of course, the nearer to the centre of this singular open space in the wood they got, the lighter it became, and in a few minutes they had the inexpressible pleasure of seeing the moon just rise above the tree-tops.

The few white, fleecy clouds that speckled the heavens, in no appreciable degree diminished the brilliancy of her light.

But it was only in a subdued fashion that her beams reached that spot in the recesses of the wood, for it was almost covered with the huge shadows of the trees.

Suddenly, however, Claude, who happened to look to his left, clutched his companion by the arm with nervous eagerness.

He did not speak; but when Jack turned round, simply pointed with his finger.

Lying upon a piece of ground, that rose almost into a hillock, was a strange-shaped, misty form.

Its proportions appeared gigantic.

There was not, however, a sufficient amount of light for them to trace its configuration with anything like accuracy.

That there was something, was a point beyond dispute.

Coupling this with the precise location from which the startling cry had come, they assumed that what they then only partially saw, was what had produced it.

Even while they gazed, a slight movement was visible about the shapeless bulk, and then they once more heard that sound which was so hideous and mournful, that it caused a strange, cold sensation about their hearts.

"Wh-at—wh-at—is it?" gasped Claude, whose eyes, as well as those of his companion, were riveted upon the object before them.

"I am no better able to form an idea than you are," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but I'll very soon find out."

"Nay, pause! Don't rush into unknown danger!"

But Jack, who was bold even to recklessness, did not allow himself to be detained, but at once moved in the direction of the object, whatever it might be, which had already produced so much alarm.

As a precaution against sudden attack, Jack drew his sword, and, grasping it firmly by the hilt, held it in an attitude of defence.

Claude Duval was, as a rule, very cautious—in that respect the very opposite to Jack, but this constitutional difference fitted them all the more for being the associates of each other.

Between them they preserved a balance which was highly conducive to their safety.

Any hidden unknown danger was always looked upon by Claude with distrust, but not so Jack, and in the present instance he did what few men would have found nerve enough to do, and that was to walk straight up to the little hillock.

It was not more than fifty feet from where he stood, so he was quickly close to it.

Claude no longer hesitated or drew back, but accompanied him.

When, however, within about half-a-dozen paces the dim shadowy-looking object began to take a distinct and palpable outline.

With eyes strained to the utmost, and neck stretched forward, the two highwaymen endeavoured to trace its configuration in order to form some idea of what it was.

But in this they were in a great measure baffled.

They could tell it was an animal of some kind, but that was all.

Its size was gigantic.

Its colour one uniform dusky tint.

But the head of this extraordinary creature, the like of which they had never before seen or heard, owing to its being raised higher than the rest of the body, was what they saw with most distinctness.

It was enough, and more than enough, to appal them.

Vulpine in shape, with large bright eyes, and glistening white teeth, or rather tusks, the head was terrible in the extreme.

The mouth was half open.

Flakes of white foam speckled the shaggy hair upon its breast and paws.

The tongue lolled forth.

Its glowing eyes were fixed upon our two friends, whose position was now, beyond a doubt, one of the greatest peril.

Then, lifting up its head in the fashion a huge dog does when he is about to bark, this strange animal again gave vent to the hideous moaning cry, half-animal and half-human, which had first reached the ears of Jack and Claude.

But then they were at a distance.

Now, however, when the throat of the creature was almost within reach of their hands, had they felt inclined to stretch them out, its horror was a thousand times increased.

For nearly a minute was the extraordinary sound prolonged, and then it died away in a faint whine.

CHAPTER CXV.

JACK AND CLAUDE ARE ALARMED AT THE APPEARANCE OF THE WILD ANIMAL.

"BACK, Jack, back!" exclaimed Claude Duval. "Back, for the love of heaven! You cannot tell what powers of mischief such a creature may have. Back. Oh! back."

As he spoke he clutched his comrade by the arm, and forcibly dragged him a few paces away.

But then Jack recovered himself.

"No," he said. "Let us stand and face the danger, whatever it may be; besides, to retreat might only be to hasten our own destruction, for I have ever heard that few wild animals will venture to attack a man if he stands and faces them.

"But this is England," said Claude, "where no ferocious creatures exist."

"All the better reason, then, for standing our ground. Let us remain where we are a few minutes. Look to your right. In a few minutes the moon will be high enough in the heavens to shed her beams upon the bit of rising ground, and then we shall be better able to see what is there."

It was as Jack had said.

They waited where they stood with great anxiety.

"Look," continued Jack; "it is, I think, pretty evident the creature, be it what it may, means us no harm, for it has not moved in the least."

"It is very strange."

"Of that there cannot be a doubt; and then, besides, the cry it has just uttered was certainly not one of rage, or anger, but rather one of pain or grief."

"You make me feel ashamed of myself," said Claude, who was instantly struck by the truth of his friend's remarks.

"I should be sorry to do that. The case is an exceptional one, that is certain."

The animal remained profoundly still, but yet they could see its glittering eyes were turned full towards them.

"I am at a loss to think what it can be," said Claude, after a brief pause.

"Another minute and the moon's rays will fall upon it. We shall be able then to form a more correct estimate."

An anxious minute passed, which seemed to those who were waiting a good half-hour, and then the chastened light crept over the little hillock.

Gradually all was revealed.

An exclamation of what he saw came from the lips of Sixteen-String Jack.

It was echoed by another of a similar character from his companion.

And truly well they might.

They had supposed that the wild animal was the only thing there was upon the knoll.

But in this they were deceived.

We will relate what they did see, and we feel sure that then the reader will to the full participate in their astonishment.

Motionless, and extended on its back, was a human form.

By the dress it would seem to be a man.

The upturned face was ghastly white.

One arm was stretched out upon the grass.

Clenched tightly in the hand was a sword, upon the lower part of which the moonbeams glimmered, but the upper part was of a dark colour, and reflected none of her rays.

Crouching down over the form, with its paws placed upon its breast, was the strange creature whose cries had first led them to the spot.

They were now able to see this animal plainly.

In shape it resembled a wolf; it had the same shaggy hair—the same long fangs—the same strong, wiry legs.

But that it was not a wolf was quite apparent, as if it was, it was of a size and colour such as they had never before heard of.

Well might such an extraordinary spectacle as this enchain the faculties of both our friends, and is it to be wondered at that they stood gazing for some moments, uncertain whether what they saw was real?

Then, and very naturally, the idea rushed into their minds, that the man who lay so still upon the grass had been worsted in an encounter with the ferocious brute.

But only for a second did this hold a place in their minds. There was nothing blood-thirsty or aggressive in the animal's appearance. On the contrary, it was mournful, and it gazed upon our friends without making the least movement either of fear or anger.

The attitude of the beast was such as might have been assumed by some faithful dog who had found his master grievously wounded or dead.

Another howl came from its lips, and both the highwaymen noted with astonishment, the melancholy tone it bore.

It served to arouse them from their distraction.

Jack turned round towards Claude.

"What are we to make of this?" he said. "I confess I am fairly puzzled. Of all the extraordinary adventures I have had there has never been one in the remotest degree resembling this."

"I, too, am bewildered beyond all expression. What conclusion to come to I know not."

"The demeanour of the animal seems peaceable enough."

"It does. What can it be?"

"I have no idea."

"The resemblance to a dog is very strong."

"Yes; and yet it is most unlike. Most of all, however, do I wonder who it is that lies so stark beneath its paws."

"What shall we do? Would it be prudent, think you, to approach such a creature?"

"Certainly not prudent; for if it should take it into its head to attack us, we should stand no more chance than we should with a tiger."

"A tiger—a tiger!"

"Why do you repeat the words?"

"Because," said Claude, "of the resemblance it has to a tiger. Until you said the word, I did not think of it."

"Ha!" said Jack, "there is a wondrous likeness. Look at the coat—the suppleness of the body—and the tail!"

"Those are the points in which it resembles it, but beyond that all likeness ceases. The head and legs, if I saw them separately, I should declare to be those of a wolf."

"It is no good to speculate upon it. We shall never know what it is if we stay at once. My advice is to go close up to it. It seems harmless and peaceful enough."

"Just now, but, like the tiger, it may be treacherous."

"We must be on our guard to resist it. Surely if we are wary we can between us conquer it, if it comes to a contest, and somehow I don't much think it will."

"Let us go then. My curiosity urges me forward. I could never leave the place until I knew something further."

"Whether the man beneath its paws, and whom it seems more inclined to defend than attack, is alive or not, is the point I am most anxious to ascertain."

With slow but firm steps the two highwaymen now advanced.

They could not but be fully sensible of the immense risk they ran.

There was a probability that one, or perhaps both, of them was marching to death.

Further than fixing his gaze steadfastly upon the two approaching forms, the animal took no notice of them.

Then, when they got nearer, they found that, though its fore-paws were resting on the breast of the man, yet they were placed in such a manner as to produce no inconvenience from their weight.

This circumstance pointed pretty clearly to the fact that it was friendly, and not inimical.

At this moment the man gave a faint groan.

"He is not dead," said Jack, "but how we are to serve him I cannot exactly see."

But the creature, with a sagacity that was quite canine in its character, raised itself up, and, removing its fore-feet, from their position, came submissively to where our friends stood.

It wagged its tail slowly, and looked with a beseeching glance into their features, and then, as if to still further enlist their sympthies, uttered a faint whining cry, very different in its character to the previous one.

It was impossible for anyone to be actually alarmed at the creature, despite its looks. Its manner and attitude were inoffensive and humble in the extreme.

Then, having done this, it turned away again, and walked with a stealthy, cat-like motion towards the prostrate figure.

What it meant was clearly deducible from its actions.

At least the interpretation Jack and Claude put upon them was that it required them to follow it, and if possible render assistance to the man.

"There is some deep mystery here, Claude," said Jack. "And I should be very loath, indeed, to go away until I had unravelled it."

So saying, he, having reached the wounded man, stooped down in order to ascertain the nature of the hurts he had received.

CHAPTER CXVI.

ANOTHER AND YET MORE HORRIBLE DISCOVERY IS MADE IN THE WOOD BY CLAUDE DUVAL.

So much odd intelligence was observable in the manner in which the creature regarded Jack's motions, that all idea of danger from it was completely dispersed.

It sat itself down upon its hind legs, after the fashion of a dog, and watched everything with the closest attention.

"Speak," said Jack, for he observed the wounded man give some signs of life. "Speak, if you have strength enough to do so, and tell us who you are."

There was a convulsive twitching about the lips in response to this, but nothing more. Although partially conscious, he was too far gone to use his voice.

"Water, Claude. I must have some water. He has been wounded with a sword, or some such instrument."

"I have no idea where to find such a thing as water here, but, however, I will try."

"Do so, do so. It will be absolutely necessary to bathe the coagulated blood away, and also, by sprinkling it upon his face, restore him to consciousness."

"You are sure he is alive."

"Oh! quite."

"Then, if there is any water to be had, I will bring some, and I do not expect I shall have to go far without finding what I seek."

Claude crossed the open space, and disappeared among the trees.

Then to the surprise of both, the animal, after casting a wistful glance at Jack, followed him.

"Look out, Claude! He may mean mischief."

But nothing in the creature's manner warranted such a supposition as this. It was as docile as ever.

Claude Duval, however, took the precaution of standing on one side until it passed him.

"Who knows?" he said, as he followed it among the trees. "It may be possessed of some instinct that will enable it to go to where the nearest water is to be found."

This idea was probable enough.

But scarcely had it gone ten yards, than it paused and uttered an angry snarl.

There could be no mistaking the signification of the sound.

Claude drew back a step or two.

Then, on looking closely on the ground, he saw some object upon which the animal had pounced.

He heard the gnashing of teeth and the laceration of flesh.

The shock he gave had the effect of very quickly bringing Jack to his side.

"What is amiss?" he said, in great alarm. "Oh! you are safe?"

"Quite! But look at this wild animal here. It has got something making a meal of."

But it had stopped that operation on the approach of Jack.

"Can you see what it is?"

"No! Do not go too close."

"I don't think, my friend, that it means us any harm. If it did, it would have demonstrated itself before this."

"Well, I must say, throughout it has behaved more like a dog than a wild animal."

"Good heavens!" said Jack, who had, while Claude spoke, stooped down to see what it was. "This is"——

"What?—oh! what?"

"Another man."

"Impossible."

"It is true, nevertheless. Look, Duval. He is shockingly mangled, and, of course, quite dead."

In obedience to these words Claude looked down, and there he saw what was clearly a man's body, but so frightfully disfigured, that it presented little more than the appearance of a mass of flesh.

"How horrible!" he said.

"The mystery thickens," remarked Jack. "What we have seen to-night is the result of some strange events of more than common interest."

"I would give the world to know them."

"I confess myself full of curiosity about it. You may, however, rely upon one thing."

"What is it?"

"That the strange creature we have seen is the preserver of one, and the destroyer of the other."

"What I cannot understand is its behaviour towards us."

"It evidently is possessed of sufficient intelligence to be aware that we are friends—not enemies."

"It looks like it."

"Rely upon it, that is the correct solution of one part of the affair. But come, we can do no good here. Let us return to the other."

"But the water."

"Oh, yes. I had forgotten. Listen. Can you hear the sound of a water-course? I fancy I did just then."

They listened intently, and then there came faintly to their ears, that rushing sound produced by running water.

They had little difficulty in determining its locality, and they made direct towards it.

The wolfish-looking animal growled, and then turning away, retraced its steps towards the open space.

"He has gone back to his master, for I suppose such he is. Indeed, the only reasonable conclusion I can come to is, that it is some foreign animal which has been partially tamed."

On reaching the water, which was but a little stream, the two highwaymen filled their hats with the pure fluid, and then returned.

The dismal cry which they had first heard in the lane again saluted their ears.

"That is his way of asking for assistance, I suppose, Jack."

"No doubt; and it has proved effectual."

"So it has—so it has."

Two minutes afterwards they reached the open space. The moon now fully lighted it up, and they were able to see its extent, which probably was little more than a couple of acres.

Simultaneously they directed their gaze to the little hillock, and there, occupying precisely the same position as he had at first, was the animal for which our friends had been unable to find a name.

On their approach it came towards them with every manifestation of pleasure of which it seemed capable.

"He's uncommonly sensible, Jack, to be sure."

"He is. Now for his master."

Sixteen-String Jack dipped his hand into one of the hats, and sprinkled a few drops of water upon the man's face.

A gasping sob was the result.

A repetition of this treatment caused him to open his eyes and start convulsively, while a faint groan came from his lips.

The animal did not seem to approve of this, and he looked threateningly at Jack, who, however, was too much occupied to notice it.

"Speak" he said. "What has happened? I am a friend."

"Friend—friend?"

"Give him a little more water," said Duval.

The hat now was nearly empty, so Jack threw what there was in it into his face.

The effect was rather unlooked for.

Uttering a dreadful shriek, that echoed and re-echoed among the trees, the wounded man sprang to a sitting posture.

It was followed by a howl from the creature, but, as it saw Jack evidently had no sinister designs, he made no further display of his dissatisfaction.

But it made Jack alive to his danger.

Then the resuscitated man, after passing his hand over his face, spoke.

It was only one word, twice repeated.

"Koolah! Koolah!"

His voice was faint, but the words reached the animal's ears, and it crouched down near him and licked his hand.

From this it would appear, "Koolah" was the name of the strange creature.

"Who are you?" asked Jack again. "I tell you we are friends, who have found you here desperately wounded."

"Ah!" said the owner of Koolah, as his memory suddenly came back to him. "I recollect all now."

He still retained his sword in his grasp, and using it as a support, strove to raise himself to his feet.

Jack perceiving this, assisted him.

When he thus assumed an upright position, the two highwaymen were better able to observe his general appearance.

He was a tall and well-proportioned man, with dark brown curly hair.

His costume was that of a naval officer, and the epaulettes upon his shoulders shone faintly in the moonlight.

He had received a wound from some sharp instrument in his back, and in consequence of the change of position hæmorrhage recommenced.

He leaned heavily upon his sword.

"I have had an atrocious attempt made upon my life," he said, "but the villain who stabbed me did not escape without a slight punishment at my hands."

He lifted his sword as though to examine its blade, but as soon as he deprived himself of this support he staggered, and would have fallen, had not Jack and Claude seized him by his arms.

CHAPTER CXVII.

THE LIEUTENANT GIVES SOME EXPLANATION OF WHAT HAS TAKEN PLACE TO THOSE WHO HAVE SUCCOURED HIM.

"THANKS—thanks!" he gasped faintly. "It was a close touch. I must have bled a great deal, which I suppose has caused this unaccustomed weakness. Let me sit a little while."

"If you will allow me," said Sixteen-String Jack, "I have a knowledge of surgery so far as it relates to wounds, and I can dress and bind up your wounds, which will make you feel much better."

"You will be doing me a real service," he said, patting Koolah's neck, "perhaps saving my life."

There still remained sufficient water in Claude's hat to enable him to wash the blood from the wound, which was a ghastly one; and then he extemporized some bandages, and bound it up.

"I can feel you have done that skilfully," said the stranger. "You must have had long practice."

"I have had some experience, it is true; but to return to yourself."

"What would you say?"

"I am glad you speak so much better."

"I already feel the benefit of your treatment, and am, no doubt, rapidly recovering. All that ailed me was the loss of blood, I think, and now that is stopped, I shall soon be better."

"Just so. You must know that myself and my friend, while passing along a lane, at some little distance from here, heard a most unearthly sound, which so excited our curiosity, that, in spite of all obstacles, we made our way hither."

"Then it is to Koolah that I owe your presence, and, consequently, my life?"

"Yes, if that is the name of the strange creature you have with you. You may judge of our astonishment when we saw so formidable a looking animal crouching over an insensible human form. Pray what is it? We are quite at a loss upon the point."

"As you see by my dress, I am a lieutenant in the navy, and, during a stay which I made in the Persian Gulf, I bought this creature, then a newly-born cub, from one of the natives, who assured me it was the offspring of one he had had for some time in his possession, and that it would, when it grew up, resemble, in most respects, a dog of unusual size. In its wild state the animal is a most ferocious brute, and as much dreaded as the tiger."

"Indeed, but what is it? It resembles the tiger in some respects, and in others the dog or wolf."

"You are right. That is just what it is. I forget the hideous name the Persians have for them, but I know the corresponding words in English are tiger-wolf."

"Indeed. How singular."

"The name no doubt is derived from the circumstance of its partaking of the nature of both those animals. I call him Koolah, because that is the name of the man of whom I bought him."

At the pronunciation of the word, the tiger-wolf again caressed his master.

"You see he is quite tamed."

"I am astonished," said Jack.

"And I too," added Claude Duval.

"He is, indeed, an invaluable defender."

"How comes it, then, that you were wounded? And it seems strange for you to be in this place at all, so far removed as it is from all human habitations."

A troubled look crossed the features of the lieutenant.

"You are discomposed," said Jack; "but I naturally feel curious to know this strange affair, more especially as"——

Jack was going to speak of the frightful sight he had seen among the trees, but he checked himself.

"It is only natural that you should. I am strangely perplexed. Help me to rise, sir, if you will; I fancy I shall be better when erect."

Sixteen-String Jack assisted him to his feet.

"It is only fitting that I should give you an account of these peculiar circumstances; besides which, you will perhaps assist me in coming to a correct conclusion upon the points which baffle me."

"We shall be glad," replied Jack "if we are able to achieve such a result."

"I will then tell you briefly that I landed at Portsmouth three days ago, and made my way here. I arrived a little before sunset. You must also know that this is a trysting place, where I had an assignation to meet one who—who—no matter—no matter!"

Jack bowed.

The young seaman was much agitated, but, recovering himself, he resumed—

"You will understand it was a lady I came to meet. Anticipating no evil, and fearing to terrify her by the appearance of my companion, I tied him to a tree close by, and then repaired to the hillock. I stood there waiting for her to make her appearance, when I suddenly became conscious that there was some one behind me. It was not that I heard or saw anything, but a strange, shuddering sensation made me aware of the fact.

"Before, however, I had time to turn, I felt a cold substance penetrate my back. I knew I had been stabbed—assassinated—and I turned with the quickness of lightning. I saw a man, and with my last strength I wounded him with my sword, and had the satisfaction of seeing him fall beside me. After that I remember nothing until you restored me to life."

It was with the most breathless interest that our friends listened to this narrative.

"But there was no one beside you when we came except Koolah."

"He must have broken from the cord with which I bound him to the tree, and my assassinator, who, perhaps, after all, was only slightly wounded, has crawled away."

"Not far, though!"

"What do you mean? Have you found him?"

"That is more than I can precisely take upon my



[SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, CLAUDE, AND THE LIEUTENANT VIEWING THE BODY OF STEPHEN MURRAY.]

say; but guided by Koolah, as you call him, we found among the trees the horribly mutilated body of a man."

"It is he, then; and I am avenged! Lead me to where he lies, in order that I may look at him, and, if possible, recognise my assailant!"

"Do you not know him, then?"

"Alas! no. What am I to think of all this? Why—oh! why does she not come?"

These words were spoken to himself more than to our friends, but they nevertheless heard them.

"If you are strong enough," said Jack, "follow me, and I will take you to where we found the horrible sight."

"Lead on, I will follow! My wound, although at first I feared it was a fatal one, cannot be so. I get stronger and better every instant."

Koolah, when he saw they were about to move, rose from his crouching posture, and with a slow, cat-like walk, preceded them.

They had only to follow him to find the object which they sought.

As before, he sprang upon the body with a growl of anger, and commenced tearing it afresh.

But a word from his master was sufficient to withdraw him from the object of his hatred; and then the young sailor looked closely at it in order to recognise, if possible, his dastard foe.

From the exclamation he uttered he seemed to do so.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "it is Katherine's guardian! What am I to think of this? My brain is in a whirl!"

"And well it may be, sir. But you have not told us all."

"But I will do so, and that at once. Perhaps you will be able to assist me to arrive at some conclusion, for I feel as if I was going mad!"

"You must curb your agitation as much as possible, or in the state you are now in, it may be productive of the worst results."

"You are right! I will strive to do so."

"I confess I feel no ordinary amount of curiosity in this matter, and therefore naturally look for it being gratified;

but independently of myself, I think a calm recital of all the circumstances will do much to soothe your min.

"It may be. I do not know you to whom I am going to make this confidence; but you have saved my life: that is sufficient. Besides which, I consider you entitled to an explanation—in which, though I say it, there is nothing of which I have cause to be ashamed."

"You would not be the true sailor I take you to be if such proved the case."

"You flatter! However, I am a lieutenant on board His Majesty's ship *Endeavour* man-of-war, which vessel now lies at anchor in Plymouth Sound. My name is Rupert Thrustans."

"On leaving the ship, I made my way direct to this place. I ought to have told you that this wood, or hurst, as they always call it, forms a part of the possessions of a young girl—an orphan—to whom, in fine, as you surmise, I am betrothed. As she was a mere child when her father died, he appointed an intimate and dear friend of his as guardian. His name was Stephen Murray."

CHAPTER CXVIII.

LIEUTENANT THRUSTANS RELATES A STARTLING NARRATIVE TO OUR FRIENDS.

DECIDEDLY the interest attaching itself to the narrative of the young sailor, Lieutenant Thrustans, was on the increase, and when he spoke of the guardian, they both involuntarily turned their gaze upon the mangled corpse at their feet.

"Yes," continued the lieutenant, as he observed the action, "he is there; that is what puzzles me! I will continue.

"From boyhood had the friendship between Stephen Murray and the father of my betrothed subsisted, and the feeling appeared to intensify itself as years passed by; so when he died there was nothing surprising in the fact that he should constitute him guardian of his daughter and her estates."

"But," interrupted Jack, "have you and this guardian been enemies?"

"No; on the contrary, friends."

"Then why did he make so cowardly an attempt upon your life?"

"Heaven only knows! I am unable to find a motive. It is surely he, and yet I can scarcely credit the avouch of my own eyes."

"Can he have mistaken you for some one else?"

"Hardly, I should think, for the hurst is but little frequented, and avoided after dark. But stay! How could he know I should be here, and why has Katharine not come?"

"You are now asking questions to which we are unable to reply."

"Pardon me, my friends, I am confused, dizzy, and the more I think over this night's occurrences the more does my bewilderment increase."

"I can easily understand that. But will you excuse me if I ask you a question?"

"Certainly! speak freely, and without reserve."

"Perhaps I shall be able to assist you in unravelling the affair. Believe me, it is from no objectless curiosity that I ask."

"I believe it. Pray speak."

"The question I was going to ask was this—What means did you adopt to make Katharine—if such is her name—aware of your intention to meet her to-night at this place?"

The young lieutenant was silent.

"If," said Jack, "the question I have just asked involves something which you would rather keep in your own breast, think no more of it, or, rather that it had never been asked."

"No—no! I have told you all so far, and I will tell you the rest. The hesitation which I displayed you will find to be a natural enough feeling."

Jack merely bowed assent.

"The easiest plan," said Lieutenant Thrustans, "if not the shortest, will be to begin with the beginning. I am inclined to do so, because I think it probable you will be able to show me out of my present horrible perplexity, and for you to have a fair chance of doing this I should assuredly tell you all."

"You are yet weak," said Jack; "before you begin this narration, suppose we return to the little hillock where we found you; there you will be able to find a seat and rest yourself."

"I will. Come, Koolah."

He turned as he spoke, accompanied by our two friends, who were positively burning with curiosity to get at the termination of this strange adventure.

The fierce animal to which he undoubtedly on the present occasion was indebted for his life, after giving an angry glance at the bleeding body of Stephen Murray, followed in his footsteps.

Upon reaching the little grassy knoll, all three sat down. In the pale moonlight they looked picturesque in the extreme.

Lieutenant Thrustans was seated with our friends one on either side of him.

He began his story rather abruptly.

"When her father died, Katharine had only just passed her sixteenth birthday. I was then nineteen.

"An attachment sprung up between us,—a fervent and unchanging one on my part.

"Although not her equal in point of wealth, for her father was the richest man in the county, yet I was so in birth and position. The property we had once possessed had dwindled down, and I, an only son, found it necessary to seek some avocation.

"In doing this I followed the bent of my own inclination. I was always passionately fond of the sea, and the desire to visit other countries was one of the earliest I can remember having.

"My father possessed sufficient interest to purchase me a commission on board one of the best ships in the service.

"It was just as these arrangements were completed that Mr. Hayward died.

"I ought to tell you that he knew nothing of the attachment existing between his daughter and myself, nor did he in any way show that he had the least suspicion of it.

"As I said, Stephen Murray, Mr. Hayward's stanchest and oldest friend, who has to-night met with so terrible a fate, was appointed Katharine's guardian, who, by her father's death, became the greatest heiress in the county, though of course she would not come into actual possession of her wealth until the attainment of her majority.

"Grief for her father's death, which was sudden and unexpected, drove for some time all other considerations from her mind.

"Luckily there was yet a month before the *Endeavour* sailed, or it is probable we should have separated without having the explanation I intended.

"I deferred it until the night before my departure.

"We met here upon this very hillock, in the hurst upon which we are now sitting. The interview was a long and painful one for both.

"She had become to a great extent reconciled to her loss, and so was able to speak with some degree of calmness and dispassion.

"What I urged upon her was this.

"She was young—very young. There was a brilliant future in prospective for her.

"My own was most uncertain, though, of course, I looked forward with every confidence to promotion.

"That she loved me then passionately, truly, with all the fervour of a first devotion, I had no doubt; but then, as I have said, she was young. Circumstances might arise which would induce a change in her affections.

"I did not say that such would prove the case; and although she might not then believe that a change in her sentiments could take place, yet there was a probability of it, judging from what had happened before to others.

"The avowal of a reciprocation of the love I bore for her filled me with happiness; and however much I might have desired it in my heart, I would not suffer her to bind herself to me by any vows, though that circumstance did not prevent my pledging my love to her.

"I don't know whether I have succeeded in making you comprehend me, but I did with her. I wished to leave her free, unfettered, and at liberty to use her own discretion, but to believe that I should ever be faithful to her through all mutations of chance and change, and if, when I returned from my first cruise, which would be at the very least two years, she then found her love for

altered, I would consent to the formation of an engagement between us.

"In brief, it was with the following understanding that we parted. On my return I was to forward a letter to her, naming the day I should be here, and that at moonrise on that night or evening I should be here and wait. If she was true, she would come and meet me; if she had altered, I should understand her absence. Is all this quite clear to you?"

"Perfectly," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and I can only say that your conduct in the affair cannot be sufficiently commended."

The young lieutenant bowed.

"I merely acted in the manner my conscience dictated and approved."

"Say, rather, in a manner which the high sense of honour prompted. Is not that your opinion, Claude?"

"It is," said Duval; "few, I think, would have been noble-minded enough to have carried out such a resolve, and I rejoice at the strange and unparalleled succession of events which has placed me in a position to render so true a gentleman a service."

The lieutenant bowed again, and though his heart told him that these encomiums were merited, yet with that sensitiveness which is ever the accompaniment of a disposition such as his was, he shrank from hearing them.

"Enough! enough!" he said; "though I should be guilty of a rudeness were I not to express my pleasure at finding you entertain so good an opinion of me. And now to conclude my story, for I have little more to tell. My presence here is sufficient proof of my sincerity. Never during the three years I have been absent from England have I ceased to think of her—to cherish her image in my heart. The hope that I should find her constant, and the portrayal of a happy future, has served to cheat many a long watch on the lonely ocean of its tediousness. I was full of impatience from the moment we commenced our return voyage, and though we were favoured to an unprecedented extent with fair weather, and consequently making great speed, yet to me our progress seemed snail-like in the extreme.

"As soon as I landed, my first act was to write, and then, with as little loss of time as possible, repair hither. The rest you know. I came hither at the appointed time and waited. While so doing, I was dastardly stabbed by some one who stole behind me unawares. That it was Katharine's guardian, Stephen Murray, who has been overtaken by a retribution, which I think just, who thus acted the bravo's part, there cannot be a reasonable doubt. The only thing that puzzles me is to find his motive. There I am quite at a loss."

Lieutenant Thrustans, as he thus concluded his strange story, let his head fall between his hands, and appeared to give himself up, either to thought or to grief, but which of the two it was, Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval were unable to determine.

CHAPTER CXIX.

THE BLOOD-STAINED LETTER BEARS WITNESS TO THE VILLAINY OF KATHARINE'S GUARDIAN.

RESPECT for the young and noble-minded seaman kept the two highwaymen silent, and, during the pause which now ensued, they occupied themselves with the reflections which such a narrative could not fail to call forth.

There was room enough for conjecture and surmise in all that they had heard.

The silence continued for full ten minutes, and, probably, would have continued much longer, had not Koolah, by uttering a faint whine, and licking his hands, aroused Lieutenant Thrustans from his abstraction.

He had become quite unconscious of the presence of our two friends.

"Pardon me," he said. "I—I— was thinking, you see—or striving to think—and so"——

"No apologies are needed, sir," replied Jack. "I can understand your silence. There is much to perplex, and much matter for speculation in what you have told us."

"There is—there is. Surely she cannot have so changed as to—but no—I will not do her that injustice. Such a thought ought never to have entered my mind. It was unworthy of me."

"To me the affair seems very simple," said Claude Duval, who had listened to the whole with the utmost attention.

"How so, sir?" said the lieutenant. "If you have anything plausible, in the shape of an explanation, I pray you let me hear it."

"I do not for a moment pretend I am right; but I have my own idea of the matter."

"Speak then, sir. If you can pilot me out of all the doubts that harass me, I shall be for ever grateful to you."

"Then tell me, did I understand you to say, that you had every reason to believe that Mr. Hayward was ignorant of the love existing between you and his daughter?"

"Yes. Such is my belief."

"Was Mr. Murray, the guardian, also ignorant of it?"

"That is more than I can answer. I can only say that I never breathed a word to him upon the subject, nor do I think he ever saw anything to cause him to suspect it."

"Indeed. Then, sir, you are inclined to the opinion that he knew nothing of it previous to or at the time of your departure?"

"I am."

"You may depend, then, this is the state of the case. By some means or other he has become acquainted with the fact. It may be, that the lady herself has avowed it to him."

"It is quite possible. But then, why should he have acted as he has?"

"That is quite another matter. One thing I think is very evident, and that is, you have been very much mistaken in the character of Mr. Murray. Could you have ever deemed him base enough to stoop to assassination?"

"Never."

"But there is every proof that he did."

"There is, and yet I can scarce believe it. No one bore a better name than he did. All who knew him looked up to and respected him."

"It is strange, but it is not the first time that a person has succeeded in blinding others as to his real character."

"True, true."

"However, I think we may feel sure that if you are only willing we can set at rest all doubts whether it really was Mr. Murray who made the attack upon your life."

"I have already identified the mangled corpse among the trees yonder as being his."

"I know you have, but that is not it. You said that you were in time to turn round and wound your assailant? Now, if the assailant was Mr. Murray, we shall, despite the rough treatment he has received from Koolah, find the marks of a wound upon him?"

"We shall."

"This point, then, once set at rest," said Claude, "I think the rest of the affair as plain as daylight."

"Let us go," said the lieutenant, rising to his feet. "Let us go. We can soon ascertain if it is so."

"We can, we can."

All three then again repaired to the spot where the corpse lay. Koolah, as before, closely following in his master's footsteps.

As before, too, he uttered the ominous growl, and was about to spring upon his victim; but a word from the gallant sailor was sufficient to restrain him, and he shrank submissively to the earth.

Claude Duval, as he had proposed the measure, now thought it his duty to carry it out. So, overcoming a natural repugnance, he stooped down to examine the body.

The altitude which the moon had by this time attained permitted her beams to dissipate the darkness that hung about that umbrageous spot.

Claude was able to see what he was about.

The sight was a sickening and revolting one.

The man's apparel was torn in many places, and soaked in blood.

As well as he could he removed it, or rather such portions of it as were rendered necessary by his purpose.

But even that was not enough, as Jack saw, so simply saying he would be back in a moment, he ran to the little stream and filled his hat with water.

By the time he returned, Claude had finished his disagreeable task of baring the body of the dead.

"Thanks," he said, as his comrade handed him the water; "the very thing of which I stood in need, for until the clots of blood are washed away from the wounds, it

will be impossible to tell which have been inflicted by the teeth of Koolah."

Lieutenant Thrustans looked on with the greatest interest and curiosity.

By the aid of the water, Claude soon removed the blood.

"Sir," he said, "there is no doubt now. Mr. Murray who lies here was your would-be assassinator. Look, here is the mark where the sword entered his right side."

Jack and the lieutenant stooped down to satisfy themselves of the truth of what Claude said, and there they saw what was palpably a sword, and not a tooth-wound, just under the short ribs.

"It is enough," said the young officer. "I am satisfied. All lingerings of doubt are now dispelled."

"They are unquestionably, I think," said Claude Duval. "We need not have taken so much trouble, though, if we had only given it a thought. He could not have reached the place without leaving a trail of blood, and if we had followed that from the hillock it would have been conclusive."

"It would, but yet after all not so satisfactory. Doubt is now impossible. It would, however, have saved you a disagreeable job."

"That does not signify at all. The main thing was to be perfectly satisfied, and I may say we are now."

"Yes, yes. Let us leave this place."

"I am willing," said Claude, "but I have not yet done. You say you wrote a letter to Miss Hayward?"

"I did."

"Is this it?"

Claude held up a crumpled, blood-stained sheet of paper.

"Oh, heavens!" said the lieutenant, as he snatched the paper, and looked at it. The moon's light was sufficiently powerful for him to assure himself that it was the letter he had sent. "What can be the meaning of this? Where did you find it?"

"I took it from the breast-pocket of the guardian. This is more positive proof."

"I see it all now," said the officer; "I see it all."

"Yes. Your letter, you may depend, never reached the hands for which it was intended. I know not what his motives may have been, but that Mr. Murray intercepted it is certain. Why he should not wish you to meet his ward, or why he should make the attempt he did upon your life, we have yet to learn; but, having ascertained this much, it will be easy to arrive at the remainder."

"There is a little circumstance," said Sixteen-String Jack, "deserving, I think, of consideration."

"What is it?"

"Supposing that Miss Hayward had not kept her appointment with you, what should you have done?"

"I cannot say—I know not."

"You would have gone?"

"Assuredly."

"Then, such being the case, why did Mr. Murray attempt your life? All he could want, one would think, would be to ensure your absence. It appears to me this could have been done without staining his hands with blood, and running the risk of being ultimately charged with the murder."

There was a silence.

This little circumstance had the effect of destroying Claude's hypothesis.

But it was only for a moment.

"No, stop," he said, "that all depends upon the amount of information contained in the letter. Did you say anything of the terms upon which you had agreed to meet."

"No. I would read you the letter, but it is not light enough. However, I will tell you its contents. I merely asked her, if her love was unchanged, to meet me to-night at moonrise, according to agreement, upon Gnome-hillock, in the hurst."

"And that was all?"

"All."

"Then he could have known nothing of your intention to depart. Rely upon it, circumstances have so fallen out as to tempt him to commit the crime he so nearly succeeded in. The spot is a lone one, little frequented?"

"Yes; superstition has cast her shadow upon the place, and it is scarcely if ever visited."

"Precisely: and so he thought you might remain there undiscovered, until decay had made such progress as to have obliterated not only your features, but the crime."

"It is awful. I can scarcely bring myself to credit the existence of so much guilt."

"I confess it is hard to do so, but there is no length to which a man will not go when under the domination of a powerful passion. But from all these dreadful circumstances I think it will be easy for you to derive hope and joy. I mean that she whom you love with so rare a devotion is true to you, or her guardian would never have attempted to put you out of the way."

CHAPTER CXX.

OLD STEVENS, THE STEWARD, MAKES A TERRIBLE REVELATION TO LIEUTENANT THRUSTANS.

THERE was so much truth in this remark, that Lieutenant Thrustans became at once impressed with the belief that that was indeed the true solution of the events which had taken place.

"Katharine," he said. "I will go to her at once. It is from her that I shall learn more of this mysterious and terrible affair."

"I should have proposed that as the next step for you to take," said Claude Duval. "We may reasonably presume that the letter now in your hands was never seen by her, and, therefore, she could know nothing of the appointment."

"Certainly not. Gentlemen, you are perfect strangers to me, as I am to you, but you have acted as friends only could. My brain was confused. I could not separate events. You having clearer minds have enabled me to come to a correct conclusion. You have rekindled hope. For all this I can never be sufficiently grateful. I feel that I cannot further trespass upon your kindness."

"If there is anything further that we can do to serve you," replied Sixteen-String Jack, "I can assure you it will be done with the greatest readiness. We are honoured by your acquaintance—should be proud to be considered your friends. Our time is our own, we have no particular engagement; and, therefore, I hope you will not be afraid to speak freely to us."

"I was then," said the young lieutenant, "about to ask you if you would finish what you have begun by accompanying me to 'The Home,' for that is the name of the house in which Miss Hayward dwells. It is but a short distance from here."

"We shall only be too glad. You will excuse me for saying, that all you have said, and all that has taken place, has filled us with interest and curiosity. I should, above all things, like to learn the sequel."

"Come with me, then. Your presence is the thing I most desire. Your intellects are more logical than my own. I confess I am about the worst in the world to find my way out a difficulty. Your friend, there, seems particularly gifted in that way."

He pointed to Claude as he spoke, who made a very low bow in reply.

"I ought before this to have told you our names," said Jack, with a glance at Claude, which he fully understood, "but the fact is, the things that have happened drove all ceremony out of my head. However, it is not too late to repair the omission. My friend's name is Engleheart—my own, Campbell. We have just returned from France, and are on our way to London."

The lieutenant bowed courteously in acknowledgment, and then he said,—

"They are two names which will be always remembered by me with the greatest pleasure; and now, gentlemen, are you ready to accompany me?"

"Quite. Yet stay. We have left our horses in the thicket yonder, for we could not force a passage through it. Doubtless you, by your knowledge of the spot, will be able to show us a path by which we can lead them hither."

"Certainly I can, if you will show me where they are."

Both our friends had been very careful to note the exact place where they had left the horses, and they pointed it out to their companion, who, turning to the left, led the way by a rather circuitous route to the tree to which they had been tethered.

With their bridles over their arms, for they would not mount while the officer was on foot, they followed

along a narrow pathway, until at last they emerged from the park on the side opposite to that on which our friends entered it.

At some distance, and upon the top of a slight eminence, was one of those picturesque old Elizabethan mansions, which always lend so much beauty to an English landscape.

It was surrounded by spacious grounds, in the highest state of cultivation, which were by the pale moonlight seen to the greatest perfection.

"That, my friends," said Rupert Thrustans, "is 'The Home,' the residence of her whose life and happiness I value far more than my own."

It was in tones of deep and heartfelt emotion that the young sailor spoke.

He led the way through the garden, and across a well trimmed lawn, with a slow footstep—at times an unsteady one. The highwaymen attributed it to the blood he had lost, and this, perhaps, was what made him feel so heavy-hearted, and so oppressed with the shadow of coming evil.

Not a single light beamed forth from any one window of the mansion. It seemed as though its inmates had one and all given themselves up to slumber.

Lieutenant Thrustans noticed the circumstance; as he did so, the reflection crossed his mind that it was a most unreasonable hour at which to pay a visit.

But Claude and Jack overruled his scruples, and urged upon him the importance of seeing the young girl as soon as possible.

A hint that she might even then be in danger, and in need of his succour, was enough to fix his determination.

He ascended the stone steps in front of the hall door, at which he knocked loudly.

No notice was taken of the summons.

He knocked again, but without result. All within the house was as still as though it was uninhabited.

A cold sensation was about the young sailor's heart. It was a presage that there was ill in store.

But he endeavoured to shake off the feeling.

"They sleep soundly," he said; "but never mind. Come with me to the servants' offices. I know where to find the steward."

Our friends, whatever may have been their thoughts, gave them no utterance, but silently followed the lieutenant round to the back of the premises.

The whole of the place was perfectly familiar to Rupert Thrustans, and he was able to go without hesitation to that portion of the building in which the steward's sleeping chamber was situate.

"That is his window," he said. "I shall be easily able to wake him by throwing some of the gravel against it."

So saying, he stooped and picked up a handful of the fine gravel of which the pathway was composed, and flung it against the window, not, however, with sufficient force to break the glass.

The means succeeded; for, after the lapse of a moment, the one-half of the latticed casement was thrown open, and a night-capped head appeared.

"Who's there? What do you want? Speak—"

"Stevens," said Lieutenant Thrustans, stepping forward, so that the moon's rays fell full upon him. "Stevens, dress yourself and come down, I want to speak to you."

"The lord be good to us," said the voice which had before spoken, and which belonged to Stevens, the steward. "It's Master Rupert come back at last. Wait a moment, I will soon slip my clothes on. I am glad you have come back. I have watched for you for many a weary month past, and now you have come, I have sad news to tell you—sad news."

"Good heavens!" cried Thrustans, in a voice of anguish. "A dull foreboding has sat heavy at my heart ever since I came in sight of the house. I felt sure something was amiss. Tell me, oh! tell me. Katharine"——

"Wait till I come down, Master Rupert, wait till I come down. I will tell you all then."

"Calm yourself," said Sixteen-String Jack. "believe me when things go wrong there is every necessity for it. Remember, you may have much to do. Your wound may, in consequence of undue excitement, turn to inflammation, and then you would be powerless. Be guided by me, sir, and be calm."

"I will, I will. That is, I will try to be; but when the heart is racked with contending emotions, when one anticipates the worst, it is not possible to subdue the throbbings of the heart."

"But you can make the attempt to subdue them. Listen to what the old man has to say. Look, here he comes."

It was even so. In his anxiety, the steward had hurried on his clothing with greater celerity than he had thought of for many a year.

He was rather surprised when he saw our two friends, for, having stood in the shadow, he had not noticed them when he looked out of window.

"These are friends of mine, Stevens," said Thrustans, hastily. "They know all, so do not hesitate to speak before them. Do not either keep me in suspense."

"What a strange, ugly dog you have got with you, Master Rupert," said the old man, doubtfully.

"Do not be afraid, Stevens. He will not harm you."

"That is well, then. Ah! sir, while you have been gone, and since poor dear master died, there's been sad doings at 'The Home'—very sad indeed, sir. Miss Katharine"——

"What of her. Tell me—tell me. Is—is— She is not dead, surely?"

"No—no," replied the old man, hurriedly. "She's not dead, poor thing, though I don't know but what it would be better if she was. Alas! alas!"

"Explain yourself. Do not torture me any longer."

"I will not. But you must compose yourself, Master Rupert, and prepare to hear bad news. Alas! that ever I should have to tell it."

"Old man," said Thrustans, in a trembling voice, "do you not see that this suspense only increases my agitation? Speak—speak at once—tell me all."

"Yes," said Jack. "Tell him all that has befallen her."

The old man was quite overcome with grief. He had been all his life in the service of the Haywards, and he was attached to them with a rare devotion, so that he felt most keenly any sorrow that fell upon them.

Tears streamed down his cheeks.

His voice was choked and inarticulate with sobs.

"Miss Katharine," he said, "my dear young mistress, the richest heiress and the most beautiful girl in the whole county, is—is"——

"Oh! heavens! what?"

"Calm yourself, I pray. She is mad, and the inmate of an asylum!"

For some minutes after hearing this terrible announcement, Lieutenant Thrustans was completely prostrated. He was bereft both of speech and motion. He had conjectured many terrible things in connexion with his betrothed—had, as he thought, schooled himself to hear the worst, but the thought of madness had never once entered his brain—it was too, too horrible.

The sobbing of the old steward was the only sound that broke the silence.

At last the sailor found his voice.

"Mad!" he shrieked. "No, no! not mad! not mad! Tell me that she is anything but mad, and I will bless you. Speak, I say! Stevens—Stevens! Tell me that she"——

"God help us!" ejaculated the old steward, as Lieutenant Thrustans, having worked himself up to a pitch of frenzy, suddenly staggered and fell like one dead upon the earth, ere a hand could be outstretched to save him.

CHAPTER CXXI.

LIEUTENANT THRUSTANS SEES THE GLIMMER OF COMING HOPE.

Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval were so utterly—to use a colloquial expression—taken aback by the startling intelligence respecting the betrothed of Lieutenant Thrustans, that they lost, for some few moments, their habitual self-command, or they would certainly have saved the gallant sailor from the heavy fall he had upon the gravelled path.

Koolah again uttered that horrible cry which had before

"Startled the dull ear of night,"

and Stevens, the steward, was so alarmed at it, that he drew back with the utmost precipitation.

Our friends, however, who knew somewhat of the

animal to be aware that there was nothing to be dreaded from it in the shape of violence, stooped down, and raised him to his feet.

The cry of the faithful creature seemed to have had a revivifying power upon him, for his eyes opened, and a groan came from his lips.

"Kate—Kate!" he cried. "Speak to me, dear one. Tell me that this is all some horrible freak of my imagination. Kate, darling, where are you?"

"Rouse yourself, sir—rouse yourself," said Claude. "There is a necessity for immediate action. Kate is not here; but we, your friends, are."

Lieutenant Thrustans passed his hand ... a bewildered manner across his eyes, as though he could, by that process, dispel the mists that hung about his brain, and then replied—

"Stevens!"

"Yes, Master Rupert, I am here," said the steward, venturing to approach.

"What were you telling me about a madhouse, Stevens?"

"Oh! my dear young sir, pray be calm—pray be calm."

"I am quite calm," he said, as he freed himself from the support of Claude's arm. "Quite calm. Quite collected. Repeat what you said."

The steward trembled. There was something more terrible about the assumption of unnatural calmness than there was in the fiercest expressions of despair."

"I said," he replied nervously, "that poor Miss Katharine had gone mad."

"Who said so?"

"Mr. Murray, who was the gentleman who was appointed to be her guardian, you know, sir."

"My friend," said Jack, "for such I hope you will permit me to call myself, "endeavour, if you can, to regain something like a natural composure, and allow me to question the steward. Considering the difference there is in our state of mind, I do not think I should be going too far in saying that I could do so much better than yourself."

Again Rupert Thrustans passed his hand across his eyes.

"I believe I am going mad. I will try to be calm. Ask him. I will listen."

"You hear," said Jack, turning to Stevens. "Now tell me. You say her guardian reported her mad? Had you ever seen anything in your mistress's conduct to make you think her insane?"

"No, sir, I never did; but it was after she went to live in London that the fit came upon her. I did not see her, you understand, because I was here."

"Enough. Mr. Hayward had, then, a town residence?"

"He had, sir, in Woburn-square."

"And during her stay there she went mad?"

"Such, sir, was the report."

"And to what asylum was she conveyed?"

"I know not."

"Can you form no conjecture? Have you never heard anything to assist your doing so?"

"Never; and yet"——

"Yet what?"

"Now I remember, some eight months ago a man came here of a suspicious appearance, and demanded an interview with Mr. Murray. I refused to allow him to enter, upon which he took from his pocket-book a card, and told me to give it to my master, who would then see him."

"And did he?"

"Yes, and very much excited he seemed."

"But what was there in the fact of his coming that should make you recollect it?"

"For one thing, because he was the only stranger that ever came, and his manner, coupled with Mr. Murray's excitement, made an impression upon me."

Jack was silent for a moment.

He was baffled, and yet he seemed upon the verge of making the discovery.

Claude, who as usual had said nothing, but listened eagerly, now put a question.

"Did you look at the card you received?"

"Well, yes, I did, sir, for my curiosity was roused."

"And can you recollect what it said upon it?"

"Oh! yes, I have never forgotten; I seem as though I could see the card now."

"Good; that is important. Now tell us what were the words upon it?"

"Dr. Stoffel, Lowne House, Stamford-hill."

"Are you sure that was it."

"Quite. The name of Stoffel, in the first place, is a peculiar one. Then the man himself looked as little like a doctor as he well could."

"Indeed. What sort of looking man was he?"

"A short, coarse, vulgar-looking man."

"We are on the right track, Jack," said Claude. "It is astonishing how one event seems to rise up out of another."

While this conversation was taking place the young officer gradually recovered the command of his faculties, and now quite calmly, but very differently to the way he had before spoken, he said—

"What do you make of this, my friends? You seem as though you comprehended it."

"I should not like to say that," said Claude, for Jack kept silent, "but I think I could, with every assurance, say that the young lady is not mad."

"Oh! sir, is that indeed your belief, or do you say it in the hope of affording me some consolation. If the latter, believe me it is a cruel mistake."

"It is not. I consider there is every reason to think she is as sane as either of us are at the present moment."

"Not mad!" repeated Stevens. "How can that be? She is in the asylum."

"She may be, and yet not be mad for all that. You have seen but little of the world, my friend. Do you believe all you hear?"

"Why, no, in a manner of speaking, I can't say I do?"

"Of course not, you have acquired that much experience of men and the world. Answer me another question. What cause was assigned for Miss Kate's madness, for there was one, surely?"

"Oh! yes. They said she had gone mad about a young man, a sailor, whom she loved, and who had been lost at sea."

"Ha!"

Lieutenant Thrustans pressed his hands to his temples.

"You see," said Claude, "the villainy is becoming more apparent now."

"I am horrified."

"And well you may be."

"What course should you advise?"

"A bold one."

"What would it be? I have the most implicit faith in your judgment."

"I should propose, then, subject to your approval, that we make all the speed we can to Stamford-hill, the residence of this Doctor Stoffel, and, no doubt, keeper of a private lunatic asylum, and carry off the young girl by main force. Does the plan meet with your approval, Jack?"

"It does, unquestionably. There cannot be a doubt, I think, about the correctness of all our premises, and if she is to be saved from what must be a thousand times worse than death itself, it must be done by force and stratagem, and not by any appeal to the legal powers."

Claude was pleased that Jack so fell in with his views; and as for the lieutenant, not only had he made up his mind to submit to their guidance, but the plan proposed was quite in accordance with the sailor-like notions he had imbibed.

The steward scarcely knew what to make of the proceedings of the night, and he looked first at one and then at another with an air of such perfect bewilderment that it was quite ludicrous to see him.

"And now," continued Jack, who naturally assumed the leadership of the affair, "I know the place where this doctor lives. It is a long way from here, but the night is young yet. Let us start at once. Stevens, have you a horse in the stable?"

"Yes, sir."

"Saddle, it then, and bring it out for Mr. Thrustans. We are going away now; when we return we shall bring your young mistress with us."

The old man hurried off to the stables.

Claude followed him. He knew he was much more competent to saddle the horse than the steward was.

In a few minutes he appeared with what Stevens assured him was the best horse in the stable.

By the way in which the lieutenant sprang into the

saddle and handled the reins, Claude saw he was an accomplished horseman.

Jack and Duval both vaulted into their own saddles, and all three were quite ready for a start.

Stevens only half understood what was taking place, and a rather anxious consultation took place as to whether he should be told of the fate that had overtaken Mr. Murray, but it was decided in the end that it would be best not to do so."

"No," said Claude Duval, "let us go at once. We have no time to lose. We must be there before the news of Mr. Murray's death can reach the ears of the rascal who keeps that most iniquitous of all places—a private madhouse."

CHAPTER CXXII.

RUPERT THRUSTANS AND OUR FRIENDS STILL CLING TO THE IDEA THAT IT IS AT LOWNE HOUSE THEY WILL FIND KATHARINE HAYWARD.

To trace step by step the progress of our friends from "The Home" to Stamford-hill would only have the effect of wearying the reader. Let it suffice to say that the distance as far as the then thinly-inhabited village of Stoke Newington was passed over without the occurrence of any incident worthy of special record.

The reader will not fail to have noticed that all three jumped, in a manner of speaking, to the conclusion that Lowne House, the residence of Dr. Stoffel, was the private lunatic asylum in which Katharine was confined, without having anything like positive evidence that such was the case.

But somehow or other the idea took a firm hold of their imagination, as things sometimes will, and they felt a degree of certainty upon the point amounting almost to conviction.

Whether they were right we shall quickly see. At present we think it quite possible that they have permitted their feelings to mislead them.

However, as we have said, they reached the little village of Stoke Newington.

Lieutenant Thrustans being amply provided with funds, they found no difficulty in getting fresh horses, so that the distance, although great, was passed over in what would be deemed an unprecedentedly short space of time.

But being now in the immediate neighbourhood of the place they sought, they resolved to proceed at a slower rate and talk over the plan of action to be pursued.

Jack was speaking in reply to a question put to him by the young officer, who had now recovered his ordinary state of mind, which showed that the wound he had received was quite a superficial one.

"We both know this part of the country uncommonly well," Jack was saying, "but still, for all that, our knowledge is not sufficiently extensive to enable us to say precisely where Lowne House is. I think I told you we had been some time absent from England."

"You did, sir."

"Notwithstanding that, I still think I can find the place, and that with little trouble; but before we reach it, we must settle something like a definite course of action. To wait and do this on our arrival at our destination will only be to lose time, so I propose that we go the rest of the way quietly, and that will not only give ourselves and our horses a rest, but afford us plenty of time for deliberation."

"Whatever you may think is for the best I'm quite ready to agree to," replied Thrustans.

"I am afraid you place too much confidence in us. I would much rather explain things as we go on."

"Such a course cannot but be satisfactory."

"In the first place, then," said Claude, "we must assume we are so far correct in our suppositions as this. Mr. Murray having been left guardian, has been tempted to try to get the whole of the estates and property into his own hands. During the persecution which Katharine must have endured at his hands, after his resolving to carry this project into execution, she probably told him of her betrothment to you. What other means he may have tried to effect his purpose does not matter. It is enough that one of them was to shut her up in a lunatic asylum, and propagate the report that she was mad. The story of her attachment to a sailor, and her grief at hearing of his loss, would form a plausible reason for so sad an occurrence."

The lieutenant was filled with admiration at the very skilful manner in which Claude had reduced the many and complicated events to a substance that carried on the face of it a strong impression of its actuality.

"Then," said Jack, "such being the state of affairs, his motive for acting as he did towards you, sir, follows as a matter of course. Your letter, which you forwarded to 'The Home,' addressed to Miss Katharine, would fall into his hands. He would read it and become aware of the appointment, but not of the peculiar terms under which it was to take place. In you he would see an enemy from whose untiring energy he would have everything to fear. To a man who had already perpetrated so much villainy, the assassination of a man—a stranger, too—upon a deserted, never-visited spot, would appear but an ordinary affair, and one, too, that was absolutely necessary to his retention of the property. He failed in his object, and the retribution which overtook him is as just as it is terrible."

It was now the officer's turn to look at Jack with surprise, after hearing from him this lucid account of the motives which led to the commitment of the frightful deed.

"I see," he said, "your minds are far more acute and logical than mine. More skilful, too, in untangling cause from effect, and drawing deductions from them."

"You flatter us."

"No. I merely compliment you upon the possession of an admirable power."

"Let us waive it, then. Does what we have together said bear to you the appearance of reality?"

"It does. Alas! that it should be so, it seems to carry conviction with it. Oh! my friends, what may the poor girl not have suffered?"

Our friends were silent.

Perhaps they were even better able to form an idea upon the subject than he was.

"It is terrible to think of," continued the lieutenant. "Let us hasten to set her free, for it would amount to positive cruelty upon my part were I to allow her sufferings to continue now I have been made cognizant of them."

"That brings me," resumed Claude, "to the point I wished to reach. We have advised a forcible removal from the asylum, when we have law on our side. But it is a very ticklish thing to have anything to do with; and, even if you are successful, some time must necessarily elapse before she can be released. But you ought to know that a person cannot be confined in a madhouse without the signatures of two diplomated physicians. There are men who will for a consideration sign a certificate that a person is mad whether or not such is really the case."

"Good heavens!" said the lieutenant. "I knew nothing of this before. Why, no one is actually safe."

"No one, when he has an unscrupulous enemy to deal with. And now, you will say, why not find out these physicians who have signed the certificate for Katharine's imprisonment—for that she is mad I do not for a moment believe—and punish them? But, believe me, such an attempt would be quite futile. Feeling how much was at stake, and as the keeper of the asylum would be as much implicated in the affair as themselves, they would manage, by the administration of drugs, or other means, to render her mad, at least at the time the examination takes place, and then she would be lost to you for ever."

"Oh! let us fly—fly at once," said the officer, who was horror-stricken at the recital of so much villainy. "Your plan is indeed the best."

"I am glad you think so. It is true Mr. Murray is dead, and that they would have no interest in keeping her—I mean so far as money goes; yet, you see, having committed themselves, they dare not release her."

"Come on—come on."

Lieutenant Thrustans would then and there have set off at a gallop, but Claude stayed him.

"Gently," he said; "we must act with all caution. Craft can only properly be met by craft. We are now at Stamford-hill. Our first act must be to ascertain the whereabouts of Lowne House."

"And then," added Jack, "we had better enter it, and

by threatening his life, compel the asylum-keeper to give Katharine into our hands."

"Agreed."

The commodious residences which now cluster so thickly about this neighbourhood have all been built long subsequent to the times of which we write. Then it was broad, open country, but thinly dotted with habitations.

As the lieutenant uttered the word agreed, there came to the ears of all three a faint rumbling sound, accompanied by the tinkling of a bell, and, looking in the direction from which it proceeded, they saw in the distance a covered waggon, creeping slowly along the road.

"Capital," cried Jack. "I daresay from him we shall be able to gather the information we require, but, as he will be a long time reaching this spot at the rate he is progressing, I will, with your permission, gallop up to him and make the inquiry. It will be hardly worth while for all to go, and besides, seeing us in such force, might have the effect of alarming him."

"Yes," said Claude, "it will be best for you to go alone. We will wait here for you."

Of course, the lieutenant made no objection.

Claude, however, had divined Jack's motive for wishing to go alone, and what that motive was, will very quickly be apparent.

The waggon was somewhere about half-a-mile down the road, and was going in the direction of London.

It took Jack only a few minutes to overtake it.

From their position on the hill, Claude and Thrustans were able to watch his progress down the road, and see the cumbersome vehicle brought to a standstill.

Then something followed, which they could not very well make out, for the distance was too great for them to see Jack's figure very distinctly, but that something of a very unusual character was going on they were quite certain.

What it was Claude more than half suspected, though the seaman did not. However, we will just follow Jack down the road, and make the reader acquainted with exactly what was going on.

CHAPTER CLXIII.

AN AGENT IN THE NEFARIOUS SCHEME AGAINST KATHARINE FALLS RATHER UNEXPECTEDLY INTO THE HANDS OF JACK RANN.

"HALT!" cried Sixteen-String Jack, as he whirled his horse round suddenly to face the driver. "Halt. I wish to speak to you."

More upon the impulse of the moment than reflection, the waggoner, hearing a voice call to him to stop, tightened the reins, and the horses with the utmost willingness came to a stand-still.

"Anan, sir?" asked the driver, who was only partially awake, driving with their eyes shut being a feat such individuals are very fond of practising. "Anan, sir?"

"I want to go to Lowne House, Stamford-hill. Do you know it?"

The waggoner shook his head to give increased emphasis to his negative, and said—

"Noa, sir. I doant."

"Not know it? Why, it is where Doctor Stoffel lives!"

"Anan?"

"Curse your anan! It's where Doctor Stoffel lives."

"Doan't know him, sir. The only doctor as I knows of about these parts is Doctor Green, and it bain't him; leastways he's in the waggin."

"Villain!" roared a voice, which proceeded from beneath the canvas covering of the waggon. "Villain! how dare you say I was here?"

"Lauk, sir, I didn't think it wor no harm, sir."

"Drive on at once, and leave this man, who may be a highwayman for ought I know, to make his inquiries somewhere else. Drive on, I say."

"Oh!" thought Jack. Then he said, rapidly, in a loud, fierce tone, "If you venture to go on before I give you leave to do so, I will blow your brains out!"

"Mercy! mercy! It's a highwayman, as I'm a sinner. Spare my life! spare my life!"

"Sit still, then, and you are safe; but so sure as you attempt to drive on, you are a dead man!"

The waggoner dropped the reins, and huddled himself up on his seat.

Jack now rapidly made his way to the back of the waggon, and drew aside the canvas which covered it.

When he did so the moon shone full into the vehicle, and he was able to see the interior with tolerable distinctness.

To his surprise he found it contained several people.

He knew well enough that it was no unusual thing for people to ride in the cross-country waggons when coming to London, but such journeys were usually made by day, and not by night.

It was not those who could not afford to hire a better conveyance who were the sole travellers in so cumbrous an affair. Many did it for the purpose of eluding observation, for all the roads about London were then particularly dangerous to those who had anything to lose.

Added to this there did not exist that facility of communication between places which now exists, and to which we have become so familiar. There were many out-of-the-way places near which the stage-coaches never came, and from which the only way of reaching the metropolis was by means of some such vehicle as this was.

Several women were in the waggon, and upon seeing Jack they all set up a succession of screams, which made it quite out of the question for anything else to be heard above the din.

There was no resource but to wait until it subsided, and this soon happened, for they could not help seeing there was something aggressive in Jack's manner.

"Doctor Green," cried Jack, "I am sorry to trouble you, but I have very important business with Dr. Stoffel, whose address I am told is Lowne House, Stamford-hill. Can you direct me to it?"

"What do you want?"

"That, sir, lies between us alone. Can you tell me whereabouts it is?"

"Ye—no—no, I can't."

"Why you began to say yes. What do you mean? Now I have asked you quietly enough, but I don't put up with nonsense from anybody, so mind what you are at."

"Oh! you need not think to bully me sir!" said Doctor Green, screwing himself as far into the corner as he could; "I'm not to be bullied."

"Did you address those remarks to me?"

"Yes; and I repeat, sir, I won't be bullied!"

"Come out," said Jack, "come out like a man, and don't hide behind the ladies. Come out, I say."

"Don't you wish you may get it? Drive on, I say, drive on."

The driver knows better; and if you don't choose to come out I'll pull you out."

"Me, sir. I'd advise you to try it on."

There was something very offensive to Jack in the manner of this Doctor Green, and he could not help somehow connecting him in his mind with the keeper of the private asylum.

Now the doctor spoke as he did because he thought he was tolerably safe, for he occupied the top part of the waggon—that is to say, the part furthest from the end—so that all the other passengers were between him and Jack.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said our friend, "I am really sorry to trouble and delay you, but I cannot help myself. I want to know the position of a certain house, and, from his manner, it appears Mr. Green knows where that house is, but will not tell me. Can any of you give me the information?"

"No," replied a chorus of voices. "We are strangers, and were never in this part before."

"That is enough. I must trouble you to alight, and then when I drag the doctor out, I shan't hurt anybody."

Upon hearing these words there was a general movement on the part of the occupants of the waggon.

"No—no. Don't get out," cried the doctor, "he only wants to rob you, or murder you, perhaps."

But they were deaf to his cries, and they got out as quickly as they could.

"I'll tell you. I'll tell you. Stop! stop! It won't matter, though, for he don't live there now."

"That won't do for me. I must have you out. You and I won't part company just yet."

While he spoke Jack assisted the last person to leave the waggon.

There was now no one in it but the doctor.



[THE SMITH KNOCKS OFF TOM KING'S FETTERS.]

He screwed himself up into a yet smaller compass.

Jack drew forth a pistol.

"Now," he said, "I can see you from here quite plainly. I will count three, and if you are not out by that time, I fire. It will be an impossibility for me to miss you. One—two—"

Doctor Green rolled out with the greatest celerity.

But just as he was about to disappear over the tail-board, Jack clutched him firmly by the collar.

"Oh! no!" he said, "you won't get away from me very easily, you'll find. Oh! no!"

He touched his horse as he spoke, and dragged the doctor fairly out of the cart, but he still retained his hold.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," said Jack, "I hope you will accept my apologies, but what else could I do? The bird that can sing, and won't sing, must be made to sing. Good night. I hope you won't be interrupted during the rest of your journey."

As he spoke these words, without waiting to see what the people said or did, he turned his horse's head towards the spot where he had left his companions, and set off at a gallop.

If he had turned his head, which he did not, he would have seen that the people saw with no small consternation the very unceremonious manner in which the doctor was abducted.

Before he started, Jack had assured himself that his hold was a good one, and, relying upon his strength, he fairly dragged Mr. Green along.

To be sure it was not very comfortable for that gentleman himself, but that was a thing that troubled Jack slightly, for he considered he had no one to blame but himself.

Claude and the lieutenant heard him coming, and rode forward to meet him.

They were astonished to see a man clinging, as they thought, to his saddle.

"It's all right," cried Jack; "lay hold of him, Claude, for my arm is tired. Don't loose him. I think we shall

find he knows a great deal that we are so anxious to know."

Claude laid hold of the doctor in a moment, but he dismounted first.

Then Jack had a good look at his captive.

He was a miserable little decrepit old man, and this accounted for the ease with which Jack had been able to hold him with one hand.

His demeanour was now abject in the extreme.

He was thoroughly terrified, and fully believed that his last hour had come.

"Mercy!" he shrieked. "Help! help! Murder!"

"Silence," said Jack, "or murder it will be. Silence him, Claude."

Claude Duval rather roughly put his hand over the old man's mouth.

"We must settle this," said Jack, as he dismounted. "I will soon make him secure."

He took off the curb-rein as he spoke, and tightly pinioned the old man with it.

Then going to Claude's horse, he possessed himself of his curb-rein also, and forming one end of it into a noose, he slipped it over his head, and drew it rather tightly round his neck, but not so as to impede his breathing.

"You can let him go now," he said. "I think he is pretty safe."

CHAPTER CXXIV.

OUR FRIENDS ARE SUCCESSFUL IN FINDING LOWNE HOUSE, AND MAKE A TOOL OF DOCTOR GREEN.

"SPARE me! spare me! Spare my miserable life!" said Doctor Green, and he sank upon his knees in the road as he spoke. "Spare my wretched life, and I will tell you all!"

It was clear he did not at all relish the noose that fitted him so closely, and his fear that this proceeding was but a preliminary towards hanging him was only natural.

"Upon those sole conditions," said Jack, "may you presume to call your life your own."

"I will tell you all, good sir. All—all."

"Silence! and do not venture to speak unless leave is given you to do so."

"I—I am silent."

The doctor was in a perfect agony of fright.

Claude looked at Jack for some kind of explanation.

As for the lieutenant, no words could possibly express the look of intense astonishment which was depicted upon his face.

He was like one in a dream.

And, in fact, when we come to consider upon the extraordinary nature of the events which had occurred during the last few hours, we shall scarcely feel surprised at the confusion of his intellects.

"I found this man in the waggon going apparently towards London, but whether he really was, or what was his motive for being there at all, is more than I can say. Certain it is, when I asked after Doctor Stoffel, his manner was so suspicious that I felt he must be in some way connected with that individual."

"No—n—!" began Doctor Green, but he was silenced by Jack.

"I can't make anything out of it," replied Duval. "But all I can say is this, that if all our suppositions prove to be correct, and this man is mixed up in the affair, I should say there was something out of the common way in such a coincidence of events."

"I hope you will get hold of no superstitious notions about it. However, now for the doctor."

Jack, as he spoke, turned to the trembling captive, and said—

"Show us the way to Lowne House, and that by the most direct route. Do you hear?"

"Yes—yes. Up the hill, good sir. Spare my life, up the hill, and then the first turning to the left."

"Your life is spared," replied Jack, "but if you attempt to deceive us, woe be to you."

Claude and Jack remounted.

They had now only the snaffle reins with which to guide their horses, but as they were tired there was little trouble in maintaining command of them.

It was Jack who kept firm hold of the one end of the rein, of which the other formed the noose about the doctor's head.

This left that gentleman two modes of action.

One was to stand still and be strangled

The other was to follow submissively.

The latter, as may be supposed, was the alternative chosen.

He was not, however, put to any very great inconvenience, for the three friends, as they might fairly be called, proceeded at a walk up the hill.

They were now silent, for it was by no means part of their plan to let the doctor know much about them—at any rate more than was unavoidable.

In a little more than ten minutes they reached the top of the hill, and then Jack said—

"How far on is the lane you spoke of?"

"Only a few yards now. Do you see that group of trees?"

"Yes—yes!"

"They are at the entrance of it."

"Oh! indeed. Come on."

Their pace was now accelerated a little, which was a most inconvenient circumstance for Mr. Green, for he was old and rather shaky about the legs.

Nothing but the most settled conviction that he was in some way mixed up with the iniquities of Lowne House would have induced Jack to behave as he did to him.

For our own part we think he might just as well have waited until he was assured of that fact.

But the strange life he had led enabled him to arrive very quickly at conclusions, and very rarely indeed was it that he proved wrong.

The lane which they were informed led to Dr. Stoffel's was a very dark one. On both sides of it grew some unusually large horse-chestnut trees, and so closely did the branches interlace one another that it was only here and there the moon could find her way through them.

Upon entering this place, the two highwaymen looked with additional keenness after their prisoner, for they thought it not unlikely he would take advantage of the darkness and endeavour to escape.

Like most other country lanes, this one was narrow and winding. In fact, in no part of it had they been able to see twenty yards before them.

Nor could they find the least evidences to show that there were human habitations at all contiguous to it.

Jack grew impatient.

"I say, Dr. Green," he cried, "how much farther along the lane is it?"

"Only a little way now. Oh, dear!"

"I should advise you to take care, if you value that miserable life of yours."

"You will find it right, good sir."

"Confound it! the house is Lowne, and no mistake," continued Jack, "the trees get thicker every moment."

It may not be amiss to explain what Jack meant.

"Lowne" was a word much more in use then than it is at the present day, though in many of the provinces it is constantly employed.

Its meaning, as many of our readers doubtless are aware, is "sheltered and screened from the wind," and the term is generally restricted to that kind of shelter or shade which is afforded by trees.

Hence, Lowne House signified "a house sheltered from the wind by trees."

Now, it was the name which at first struck Jack. It was just such a one as would be applied to a place of the description that they supposed Doctor Stoffel to keep.

"There!" cried Doctor Green. "Look! you see I am quite right. That brick wall surrounds the house."

All three upon hearing these words looked, and there they saw, on the right-hand side of the lane, the corner of an unusually high wall.

"Surround the house," said Claude. "Did I understand you this wall surrounded the house?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Then what is his motive for having such a high wall all round his house? Why, it must quite shut out all the view!"

"He! he! he!"

"Did you laugh?"

"No, good sir. No—no! I didn't laugh! Indeed, I didn't! Only the thought of shutting out the view."

"Ha! you have betrayed yourself! Now, answer me truly. Is, or is not, Lowne House a private lunatic asylum?"

"Oh! dear; I suppose you must know. Yes, it is."

By the time this little conversation was terminated, they had passed along that portion of the brick wall which abutted upon the lane, until they came to some large entrance-gates.

They were of wood, painted some dark colour.

Here they paused.

"And this is the entrance to Lowne House?"

"It is, gentlemen, it is."

"Enough; say no more than you are obliged. You are, of course, well acquainted with the premises."

"Really I—a—really"——

"Any hesitation will be your death."

"I am."

It was wonderful what a love the doctor had got for his life, but then it is a commodity that we all prize rather highly.

"Then," said Jack, in tones that left behind no doubt of his earnestness, "we are going to force our way in."

"Stop!" said Claude, "I have a thought."

He whispered something rapidly in Jack's ear, who thereupon said—

"To be sure, to be sure—much the best. Now, Doctor Green, listen to me."

Jack dismounted as he spoke, and his example was immediately followed by his companions.

Then a fresh consideration presented itself to their notice—what were they to do with their horses?

They could not enter with them very well, and yet it was important that they should be somewhere close at hand when wanted.

There was only one way to manage this, and that was to tie the horses to some of the lower branches of the trees.

This done, Doctor Green, much to his gratification and surprise, found himself freed from the thongs which had held him in bondage.

But Jack took care to keep a tight hold of him, and then Claude walked close behind him, and said—

"Do you feel that, doctor?"

"Yes, yes. Murder! You're running it into me. Murder!"

"Be quiet. It is my sword. All you have got to do is to obey. The moment you don't I shall run you through. It will be the easiest thing in the world."

"Murder!"

"Of course it will be murder if you force me to it, but I hope you will have too much good sense."

"Oh! dear."

"Now," said Jack, "you will answer questions just as I tell you; but, in the first place, how do you let the doctor know when he has any visitors?"

Poor Doctor Green thought the best thing he could do was to make a virtue of necessity, and he said, with an appearance of great candour—

"You will find the handle of a bell hanging against the wall. Pull it, and they will come."

It was the lieutenant who now spoke.

He began to see what was going on.

"All right," he said. "Here's the bell-handle. Shall I pull it?"

"By all means."

A tremendous clanging followed, which attested not only to the size of the bell itself, but the vigour with which the wire had been pulled.

"And harkye, Doctor Brown," said Jack, "we have made up our minds to get in here, but not by force as we first intended. You shall take us in and say we are friends of yours."

"I can't—I can't! Indeed I can't."

"Oh! very well then, you may as well die at once. We are bound to get in, but the best way will be for you to comply with our wishes."

The doctor groaned, but consideration for his own life triumphed over every other feeling.

"Hullo!" said Lieutenant Thrustans. "Here's somebody coming. "Down, Koolah, down!"

The tiger-wolf crouched submissively at his feet.

CHAPTER CXXV.

KOOLAH INDUCES DOCTOR STOFFEL TO COMPLY WITH HIS VISITOR'S WISHES.

THE sound produced by some one walking with a heavy tread upon a soft gravelled path could now be heard.

"Who's there?" asked a voice, gruffly, and a faint flash of light came through the interstices of the woodwork of which the gates were composed. "Who's there?"

"Say Doctor Green, who wants to see Doctor Stoffel immediately, upon important business," whispered Jack to his captive.

Claude seconded this command by a prick with his sword, and so he said, with a faint groan—

"Doctor Green. It's Doctor Green. I want to see Doctor Stoffel immediately upon important business."

"All right, sir," said the voice. "I'll open the gate in a moment."

The withdrawal of heavy bolts, and the clangour of a falling chain followed, and then a small door, constructed in the large gates themselves, was flung open.

A very rough-looking man stood upon the threshold.

"Come in, Mr. Green, it's all right. Come in."

Jack had got the doctor's arm very tight beneath his own, and they entered together, Claude and Lieutenant Thrustans following closely in the rear.

The man who had opened the gate was quite surprised to see four persons enter, when he thought the doctor only was outside.

He, however, did not make any remark, but after very carefully refastening the door, preceded them up a kind of carriage drive.

In a few minutes they came in sight of a large, dark, square building, from two windows in which issued a faint light.

The remainder was in complete darkness.

Claude and Jack concentrated the whole of their attention upon the unfortunate doctor, in order to see that he did not attempt to carry out any treachery against them.

Their fears, however, were quite groundless. He was completely terrified into submission, and henceforth he was but a puppet in their hands.

Two steps led up to the front door of Lowne House.

These were ascended.

The door itself was ajar, from which it might be inferred that the man who had let them in had emerged from it, and so left it.

He carried in his hand a rude stable-lantern, the sides of which were formed of horn, of so opaque a quality, that the rays of the candle within had the utmost difficulty in struggling through it.

The man pushed open the door, and then turning round upon the threshold, held it open to allow the visitors to enter.

He then very carefully shut and fastened it.

Our intruders stood close to each other in the passage, waiting for the keeper—for such they took him to be—to guide them.

"Go on, doctor," he said; "go on into the little parlour. Mr. Stoffel will be with you directly."

"Remember," whispered Jack in his companion's ear, "remember, your life is in your own hands."

Doctor Green evidently understood what was meant, for he walked across the hall towards a massive-looking old-fashioned door.

Jack opened it, and all entered with the exception of the keeper, who, of course, went to inform his employer of the late arrival.

A lamp on the table was burning brightly, and diffused a cheerful light through the apartment. Just, in fact, sufficient to disperse the darkness in the more distant corners of it.

Claude was compelled to sheathe his sword. It would have looked strange to have continued to hold it drawn in his grasp. A premature alarm would have spoilt everything.

Jack, though, still held his pistol, and took the opportunity of impressing again upon Green the policy of obeying them in everything.

"The least attempt at treachery, and you die! It will be impossible to elude my aim. Agree to everything we say; that is the only means by which you may hope to escape a violent death."

With many protestations, Dr. Green promised to do as he was bid.

The three friends then held a hurried whispered conference, in which they finally agreed upon the parts they were each to play.

To relate this, however, is needless. What they

agreed to do will be best seen by the manner in which they acted

Doctor Green was forced to seat himself in a chair opposite to the door.

Jack sat next to him with the pistol in his left hand in such a position that the doctor's body was quite covered by it.

Claude sat down near the door.

Lieutenant Thrustans, who, despite all the efforts which he made to control himself, could scarcely control his agitation.

Koolah was near his feet.

With a rare sagacity, such as is displayed by no animal but the dog, it had followed him submissively and unobtrusively into the parlour, so that the keeper beyond, noticing that something in the shape of a dog accompanied the party, thought nothing of it.

These dispositions having been made, they waited impatiently the arrival of the private madhouse keeper.

In reality, these arrangements were made very briefly indeed, and there was scarcely time for Doctor Stoffel to arrive.

About two minutes afterwards a shuffling footstep in the hall reached the attentive ears of our friends.

"Beware, Doctor Green," said Jack, in an impressive whisper.

A half-articulate groan was the reply.

Then the parlour-door opened.

A man, whose appearance tallied exactly with the description Stevens the steward gave of it, entered.

He rubbed his hands together, and made a general kind of bow to his visitors.

He said nothing, however, but waited for them to explain their presence.

Of this Jack immediately availed himself.

"Doctor Stoffel, I presume?" he said.

"Yes," was the reply, accompanied with a bow.

"I have called—or perhaps I ought more properly to say we have called, and in the 'we' I include our mutual friend here, Doctor Green."

Upon thus hearing his name mentioned the unfortunate wretch could not forbear a groan.

"Dear me, Green," said Jack, "what's the matter?"

"Oh! noth—nothing—nothing."

"But you groaned."

"A slight pain."

"Oh! I see; boot pinched you, perhaps?"

"Ye-es."

"Then, if that is all, my mind is at rest. I feared it might be something serious. Pardon me, Doctor Stoffel, but, being a particular friend of your colleague's here, I feel a little anxious about him."

Doctor Stoffel was all abroad, as the saying is. A vague suspicion that all this meant something unpleasant crossed his mind.

Jack, however, went on rapidly.

"I was about to say we have been commissioned by Mr. Stephen Murray to see and have an interview with his ward. That is correct, Green, is it not?"

"Quite correct," said Green.

"But—but"——

"Believe me, my dear sir, time is of the greatest possible importance to us, so I hope you will attend to our wishes at once."

"Who are you?"

"A particular friend of Mr. Murray's, or he would not have entrusted me with this affair. To convince you, however, that all is quite right, we have brought your friend Doctor Green with us."

"Ahem!"

"Sir?"

"You will excuse me, I am sure, but my astonishment at what you have just said is so great that I was unable to say at once that I am quite at a loss to comprehend this affair. I can assure you I know nothing of what you have just spoken about."

A look of great pleasure immediately appeared upon the face of Doctor Green.

"Oh! indeed," said Jack; "well, this is just what we expected, only we thought we would try fair means first. Claude! guard the door!"

Upon hearing these words, Mr. Stoffel turned round on his heels with great suddenness, and made a rush to get out of the room, but he only ran into Claude's arms.

"Help! murder!" he cried. "Jarvis! Jarvis! I say."

Claude Duval caught him by the throat.

The amount of compression which he used was quite sufficient to put a stop to further outcries.

Lieutenant Thrustans then, as agreed upon, in case events should take the turn they had, caught Doctor Stoffel from behind, and pulled him over on to the floor on his back.

Then, upon a word from him, Koolah sprang upon the prostrate form.

But he did him no injury.

That is to say, no bodily injury.

The fearful aspect of this creature filled the rascally madhouse-keeper's soul with such a terror as he had never hitherto known.

"Speak above a whisper, or seek to make the least alarm," said Claude, "and you are left to the mercies of the tiger-wolf, above you."

Doctor Stoffel lay perfectly still.

The frightful aspect of the animal, whose jaws were but a few inches from his throat, subdued him.

"I will do all you wish," he said, "so that you save me from this terrible creature. What are your demands?"

"You are getting reasonable now," said Jack; "but do not think to deceive us. We want Katharine Hayward. We know she is here. To deny it would be useless."

"Take away this monster, and I will obey you in all things, I swear"——

"I would not take your oath. You shall, however, be released; but the creature looks upon you as its lawful prey, and it only needs a word or a sign from its master, and it would tear you to pieces."

CHAPTER CXXVI.

KATHARINE HAYWARD IS SAVED FROM LIVING DEATH.

Doctor Stoffel shuddered visibly.

The young lieutenant spoke to the tiger-wolf.

In obedience to his words, the terrible looking animal removed its feet from the doctor's breast, but most reluctantly.

"You can rise," said Jack; "but remember, this creature has its eye upon you. If he sees you move towards the door, that movement will be the signal for him to spring upon you. Think twice, therefore, before you attempt any treachery."

"What do you want, gentlemen? What do you want? Tell me, and I will do it?"

"We require Miss Katherine Hayward, whom you hold here unlawfully under the pretext of being mad."

"I will go and bring her to you."

"I would advise you not to do so. No, Mr. Stoffel, we don't like you well enough, and we don't know you well enough to trust you so far. Call in one of your men, and in our presence tell him to bring the young lady to this apartment. Do you hesitate?"

"No—no. Oh! I am ruined—ruined!"

"Call your man."

"I will. If you ring that bell he will come to see what is wanted."

"Very good," said Jack, as he rung it. "Mind what you tell him, or you will find the flesh torn from your body!"

The door was opened in another moment.

Doctor Stoffel again hesitated, and then he managed to stammer out his orders to the man, who was the same who had permitted our friends ingress.

"Jarvis," said Doctor Stoffel, "go to No. 14, and bring her here."

Jarvis looked rather surprised at this command, but saying nothing he withdrew.

The pause that now took place was full of interest and excitement.

Rupert Thrustans drew his breath with difficulty. His whole body trembled. His heart palpitated.

He was upon the verge now of seeing her he loved with so much constancy and devotion.

Doctor Green leaned back in the chair in which he had been seated. He resigned himself to the current of events.

A quarter of an hour, which seemed to our three friends like a quarter of a day, elapsed before they heard any sound indicative of the return of the man Jarvis.

At length his heavy tread was heard: the door was

opened, and he re-entered, accompanied by what the lieutenant's heart told him was his betrothed.

We say his heart, for most surely by his eyes alone never would he have recognised her.

Claude, so soon as they were fairly in the room, shut the door again, and stood with his back against it, thus preventing the possibility of escape.

The situation of the different characters in the room deserves a few minutes description.

First, then, there was Claude against the door with his drawn sword in his hand.

Then there was Jack, armed with a pistol, standing near the chair in which the doctor sat, a huddled-up mass.

The keeper of the asylum clutching nervously at the edge of the table, unable to remove his gaze from the bright eyes of the tiger-wolf, who suffered not the slightest movement to escape him.

Jarvis, too, stood just within the room, looking from one to the other in bewilderment and alarm.

Shrinking behind him—her hair in disorder—her attire scanty and torn—her face pinched—her cheeks hollow—her arms wasted—that baleful-looking light in her beautiful, but now unnaturally bright eyes, which is ever the accompaniment of insanity, stood the heiress, the victim of the villainy of the treacherous guardian and false friend, Stephen Murray.

A cry, in which was concentrated a whole world of agony, came from the lips of the young lieutenant, as his eyes rested upon the fearful spectacle.

He sprang forward though as he uttered it, and clasped the poor maniac in his arms.

"Kate! Kate!" he cried. "Can this indeed be you? Speak to me, dear one! speak! Your voice cannot have changed! Let me hear it! Speak, speak, Kate! It is Rupert who speaks to you! Your own true love, Rupert! Kate—Kate!"

It was not the words themselves, but the impassioned tone in which they were uttered, that awakened the slumbering intellect of the poor girl.

A gush of tears came to her eyes, and her head sank upon his breast.

"Saved—saved!" she said. "I am saved! Oh! Rupert, they tell me I am mad, but I am not, indeed I am not."

Doctor Stoffel clutched the table edge with a yet tighter grasp. Had he not done so, his trembling limbs would have allowed his body to reach the floor, and he had everything to dread from such a movement.

Of a truth was he suffering some portion of the torment he deserved.

The lieutenant's heart was too full to allow him to speak. He could only kiss the tears from the face of her he loved.

It was some moments before either of the spectators of the affecting interview ventured to speak, and then it was Jack, who said—

"Pardon me, lieutenant; but, if you will take my advice, you will leave this place with as little delay as possible. You see the effect which residence here has already had upon her, besides which, we may be incurring danger."

What her madness might have found a resting-place in Katharine's brain, seemed to have flown away with her tears, for now in quite a calm voice she spoke—

"Yes—yes, Rupert! Take me away—take me away! Oh! I have dreamed of this—looked forward to it! I knew you would save me from the horrors of this place."

"And I will, Kate! I will!"

"I am glad," said Jack, to the young seaman, "that matters are no worse."

"Mercy—mercy!" cried Doctor Stoffel, as, finding it impossible to hold up any longer, he sank down upon the floor.

Koolah sprang upon him with an angry growl.

Fairly, indeed, might the lieutenant have been excused if he had suffered the tiger-wolf to destroy him, but that was a thing he could not think of for a moment, and so he stayed him.

Jarvis was a strong, determined-looking man, but the odds were too much against him for resistance to be thought of, so he stood exactly in the position he had before occupied.

"Jack," cried Claude, "make haste. "But before you go, what are we to do with these three rascals here? One, I fancy, is quite as bad as the other."

"I have been thinking about that," was the reply. "I think this will do it."

As he spoke, Jack stretched out his hand, and by a sudden jerk pulled down the bell-rope.

Claude knew what he meant instantly, and hastened to assist him. First of all, however, turning the key in the lock of the door, and putting it into his pocket.

It would not then be possible for any one to leave the room in a hurry.

Duval then pulled down the other bell-rope.

By this means they found themselves in possession of about twelve feet of strong cord.

In a great measure, now, Lieutenant Thrustans had succeeded in calming the young girl. He seated her gently in a chair, and then turned to those whose assistance had been so valuable to him.

By their wishes, Koolah was withdrawn from Dr. Stoffel, and put on guard over the man Jarvis.

In fact, the two doctors were past being able to lift a hand in their own defence.

They were tied back to back.

So tightly, too, were the bonds drawn, in order to make it more impossible to get free, that they fairly howled from the pain.

But no one could pity them for enduring that much anguish.

"We must find some means of stopping their noise," said Claude. "Stop a bit; perhaps I shall be able to find a couple of wine corks."

"They will do capitally. Try the sideboard yonder."

Claude did so, and in it he found several bottles of what appeared to be wine.

From two of those he extracted the corks.

Despite their opposition they were forced lengthwise into the two doctors' mouths.

They were about as effective gags as could well be imagined.

Their noise was stopped at once.

The question now arose as to what was to be done with Jarvis.

Jack found, however, some cord, which served to loop up the heavy curtains which hung before the windows.

There was not much of it, but still sufficient to bind the man's hands and ancles together.

Another cork was found, and thrust into his mouth.

Having so far disposed of the three villains, our friends between them lifted them up on to the table.

There, if they attempted to move about much, they would be sure to have a fall.

This was all done with inconceivable rapidity.

Poor Kate remained just where she had been placed, but the extraordinary nature of the events taking place around did not tend to decrease her agitation.

When, however, her lover came to her again, and, supporting her with his arm, led her out into the open air, a great change took place.

She was as rational as either of them, but a deathly weakness came over her, and it was only by lifting her in his arms that he prevented her from falling.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING TAKES PLACE.

So light a burden as Katharine now was was nothing to the lieutenant, and he hasteued down the gravel path, leading towards the gates, along which Jack and Claude had hurriedly preceded him, in order to afford him an opportunity of saying a few words to his mistress.

"Help! help!" he cried. "Help! She is dying. Help! help!"

Our friends turned round the moment these cries reached their ears, and then they saw the lieutenant running towards them with Katharine in his arms.

"It is only the effect of the night air after having been confined so long. It will be nothing. Follow us through the gates, and we will make our way towards some place where she can receive proper attention. Believe me when I say that all will yet be well."

These words, uttered as they were in a tone expressive of conviction, had their full effect upon the lieutenant, and, kissing again and again the face of his recovered

treasure, he stepped through the little door in the gates into the lane.

Probably five minutes elapsed before Claude and Jack could get the horses ready for service.

Then they mounted.

Lieutenant Thrustans seated his almost inanimate burden upon the saddle before him, holding her tightly to his breast, by means of his right arm.

At a gentle canter they went along the umbrageous lane, they deeming that to be the pace which would be easiest for Katharine.

The young seaman spoke.

His voice was husky with an emotion which did honour to his heart.

"My friends," he said, "for though our acquaintance has been so short, and was so singularly brought about, yet such you have proved yourselves to be, no words or acts could possibly express the extent of my obligation to you. I am indebted to you for my life, and that, without which, I should not care to live. Had it not been for the assistance you have rendered me—the almost preterhuman power you have displayed in unravelling the thread of this most intricate affair, I should never have succeeded as we have."

There was a sensation of pleasure in the hearts of the two highwaymen as these words fell upon their ears. They had the innate consciousness that they were deserved, on this occasion, at least.

"You speak too highly of us," said Claude, "though I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that we have been the means of doing you a service. It has been done with the utmost willingness, has entailed upon us no inconvenience, and if you will believe us, we are rejoiced at the chance we have had of doing good."

"But I must yet further trouble you—still further increase the amount of obligation which I owe you. I am quite in ignorance of this part of the country, so I must get you to direct me to the nearest place where I can find shelter for her."

"It was our intention," replied Jack, "if you would have allowed it, to have taken you to an inn kept by a friend of mine in times gone by. You can trust him. It is, too, not far from here."

"I would not, could not have ventured to ask you to do this, but now you have proposed it it is equally impossible for me to refuse. Lead me there, I beg, and make me still more your debtor."

"I do not wish you to look upon it in that light," said Jack, "and you only embarrass me by doing so. I would rather you took it as a matter of course."

"But I cannot do that. It would be both unfair and unjust."

"Let us, then, say no more about it. Do not, however, think us churlish or ungrateful."

"I can never do that."

"Come on, then. The inn I speak of is not very far from here, and we shall not be long reaching it."

"I am glad of that. Kate—Kate, dearest. Look up. You are saved!"

Poor Katharine Hayward made no reply in words, but by the way in which she clung to him, Rupert knew that she fully comprehended what he said to her.

They emerged in a few more seconds into the high-road.

As they did so, Jack and Claude heard the faint beat of a horse's hoofs.

The former spoke in a whisper to his comrade.

"Claude," he said, "some one comes."

"I hear him."

"I cannot tell any more than you can what emergencies may arise. We have no money."

"Only those coppers."

"Curse the coppers!"

"So say I."

"We have no money. That is a state of things which I can never tolerate. Make some excuse to the lieutenant here for my absence, and I will gallop down the road, and see what traveller it is."

"Agreed."

"There is but one man, so the risk will not be very great."

"Oh! no."

"Very well. The sound seems to grow fainter and fainter. He must be going towards town. Perhaps if I stay longer I shall not be able to overtake him."

"Be off at once, I will make an excuse to the lieutenant."

"All right. Slacken your speed a little, and I will soon be up with you again."

While this brief dialogue took place, our friends had dropped slightly in the rear.

Relying upon Claude's promise to invent an excuse to the young officer, Jack turned his horse's head, and proceeded at a terrific gallop along the road in the direction of London.

The faint tramp of the horse's hoofs had become quite inaudible when he started, but he soon heard it again.

Presently he came in sight of the horseman, and he reined his horse in to a trot.

All around was made distinctly visible by the moon's rays, and, about a quarter of a mile ahead, he saw a mounted man.

Had such a thing been probable, Jack would have said that the horse he saw was in the last stage of intoxication, for he reeled about in the road in a most extraordinary manner.

Jack became more cautious, but, as he drew yet nearer, he saw that the man on the horse performed in his way quite as curious evolutions.

Our friend hardly knew what to make of so strange a sight. If he wished to learn more, though, the only means by which he could do so would be to ride forward and see.

From what the reader knows of Sixteen-String Jack, he may easily suppose this was just what he did do.

A dozen bounds and he was alongside.

Before he had time to speak, the man on the horse jerked out rather than said—

"In the king's name! Help! I say, I call upon you in the king's name for help! But the reward is mine, recollect. I've found him! I, Aaron Coxhead! Me! I've found him, the reward is mine."

"Found who?" asked Jack, stretching forth his hand and catching the strange horse by the bridle. "Found who?"

The man on horseback held up his hand.

"Do you see that, sir?" he asked. "It's a constable's staff. I call upon you for assistance in the king's name. I am Aaron Coxhead, constable of the parish of Hornsey. I have found Dick Turpin, the highwayman. A thousand pounds reward! He is at the 'Hand and Keys.'"

Jack comprehended all instantly.

The name of Dick Turpin was familiar enough to him.

He was in danger. This fellow evidently, by some means, had learned of his presence in the house of Tom Davis, and had, although quite ignorant of the art of equitation, ventured upon horseback to ride to London for assistance.

Jack shifted his hold from the horse's bridle to the constable's collar.

"Harkye!" he said, "it's all over with you. I am a friend of Dick Turpin's, and sworn foe to all constables and police-officers.

"Mercy! mercy!"

"Not a bit of it. I have no mercy for such as you. There you go!"

Jack fairly dragged him from his horse.

The animal, glad to get rid of so troublesome a rider, galloped back towards Hornsey at full speed.

Now Jack had noticed he had passed over a bridge beneath which flowed a sluggish stream.

Still holding the constable by the collar, much in the same manner as he did Doctor Green, he made his way to this place, and then dropped him over the parapet.

The water was only a few feet off, and he reached it with a tremendous splash.

"That's done," said Jack, "but there's no money. Never mind, I have done Dick a service. At the 'Hand and Keys,' is he?"

He made all speed to regain his companions.

"No luck," he said to Claude, and that was all, for just at that moment they came in sight of a house, from which gleamed a light.

"There is the place," said Jack. How lucky to find them up. Come on."

They rode towards the inn door as he spoke.

CHAPTER CXXVIII.

RETURNS TO OUR OLD FRIENDS DICK TURPIN AND TOM DAVIS.

THE many complex and extraordinary incidents which ensued after the hearing of the mysterious sounds in the lane by Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, have followed so thickly and closely upon one another, that no opportunity for breaking off the narration has occurred, and therefore we have been unwillingly compelled to lose sight of the doings of the two chief characters in our story.

We mean, of course, Dick Turpin and Tom King.

The former, it will be recollected, was last seen carefully loading his pistols after the imperious summons for admission to the inn.

That it could be visitors at that late hour was considered quite out of the question, and therefore they reasonably enough came to the conclusion that they were Turpin's foes.

Tom Davis did not know what to do. Dick instructed him.

"Open the door," he said.

"Open the door? but suppose they are police?"

"I do suppose it, and consider it the best mode of action."

Tom Davis shook his head, and Ellen, seizing Turpin by the arm, cried—

"No, no, not that; it would be too—too dangerous."

Again came the knocking at the door.

"Open it, Tom," said Dick again, "if they are officers you may depend they have surrounded the house, and made it impossible for me to leave it. Open it, open it."

Thus commanded, and having better faith in Dick's judgment than his own, he went to the front door, and opened it.

"Hullo," said a voice, "is that you, Tom Davis? What an infernal while you have been. Are you grown deaf?"

These words at once let Dick know he had nothing to fear. The tones were certainly not those of a police officer.

Tom Davis opened his mouth and shut it again with an effort.

"God bless me!" he said; "I knows that voice, though I haven't heard it lately. Is it really you, Jack?"

"It is Tom."

"Dick," said Davis, "Dick?"

"What is it?"

"Why, there's actually Sixteen-String Jack outside the door."

A cry of astonishment came from Turpin's lips, which was echoed by some one from outside.

It will be seen from this that the inn Jack had spoken was the "Hand and Keys."

The cry of astonishment which echoed Turpin's came from the lips of Lieutenant Thrustans, who was thus suddenly and unexpectedly made aware of the true character of the man to whom he was so deeply indebted.

They had all alighted ere the door was opened. Sixteen-String Jack, and the lieutenant and his burden, entered.

Claude stayed behind to follow Jabez to the stable with the horses, for that worthy had also been aroused by the furious knocking.

Tom Davis hurried them into the room he had just left.

"Your surprise will keep," said Jack, in a low voice to Thrustans. "Katharine now requires all your care. When she is safe, I will explain."

A few moments served to put Ellen and Davis in possession of the principal facts.

Their sympathies were enlisted at once.

Rupert carried Kate upstairs, and laid her gently upon a bed. This done, he left her to Ellen's care.

On re-entering the parlour, he found that he who had been introduced to him as Mr. Engleheart had come in, and that all were talking rapidly and earnestly together.

The meeting between the three highwaymen had been a cordial one. Tom Davis, too, was quite as much pleased as any of them.

Jack had just finished relating the story of the constable when Thrustans entered.

Then, of course, the conversation dropped.

Claude and Jack took the young seaman on one side.

"Accident," said the latter, "has made you aware of who we really are. If you will think a moment, you will pardon and understand our motives for not giving you our real names."

Thrustans bowed.

"You have expressed yourself pleased with what you already know of us?"

"Could I be otherwise?"

"That knowledge then proceeds from actual observation; be good enough to remember that you can only have known the rest from hearsay."

The frank-hearted sailor felt this gentle rebuke, and he took the highwaymen's hands in his, as he said—

"I have been unjust. As you say, I ought to have judged you by your actions."

"That is sufficient, and now henceforth we shall be strangers. Do not say a word against it. You will excuse me for speaking plainly, and saying that your friendship, or, at any rate, an outward demonstration of it, can never do us any good, while, on the other hand, it cannot fail to do you harm."

"Never mind," said Thrustans, "I bitterly regret that I should have behaved as I did; but, hang it! I detest sailing under false colours. But you have proved yourselves true friends to me, and, sink me, if I desert you."

The two highwaymen could not fail to be pleased with the manly behaviour of the young sailor, but they were firm in their wish that he should forget them.

He was not, however, to be persuaded.

Ellen had sent Jabez off for a surgeon.

Two things induced Thrustans to quit the apartments.

One was his anxiety respecting Katharine's condition.

The other, the very evident fact that the three highwaymen wished to speak upon matters of their own.

Under the pretence, therefore, of retiring for the night, he withdrew, accompanied by the landlord.

Dick Turpin, Sixteen-String Jack, and Claude Duval were quickly at home with each other.

Davis had taken care to put before them plenty in the shape of refreshment.

As might be anticipated, the conversation turned upon Tom King's imprisonment. It will be remembered Claude and Jack were already acquainted with the fact, having overheard the parsons in the lane speaking about it.

"I will free him," said Dick. "I have sworn it, and I will do it. I care not for obstacles. If I have to pull old Newgate down, stone by stone, he shall be free."

"Well spoken," said Jack, "and if we can aid you in any way command us. Tom was a good comrade of ours, and has done us many a service. It is now our time to do him one in return, and I am glad of it."

"What is your plan?" asked Claude, in his usual quiet way.

"I have none arranged. To tell the truth, that was the very topic that occupied mine and Tom Davis's attention at the moment you arrived."

"It is high time something was agreed upon. Let us see, to-day is Saturday."

"Nearer Sunday," replied Turpin; "it is past twelve."

"And when do the sessions commence?"

"On Wednesday."

"You have not much time for action, then."

"No! That is true."

"However, there is time enough to accomplish a great deal."

Dick then proceeded to relate to his two new friends all those multifarious adventures which followed the capture of Tom King by the dragoons, up to the conversation he had just had with Davis, and with which the reader has already been made acquainted.

To all did they listen with the most profound attention. Not a single circumstance, however minute, was allowed to pass without being fully canvassed.

"And you have seen nothing of him since he had the files?"

"No, nor have I heard anything," replied Dick. "Davis was to go to-morrow."

"[illegible] let him do so. Until we receive his report we can do nothing definite. Our best plan will be to wait."

"I think so too."

"Who knows?" said Jack. "Tom King is a brave fellow."

"He is. Few braver."

"Very well. He has tools. Who knows, I say, whether he is or is not at this present moment in the act of achieving his escape?"

"It is possible."

"It is more than possible, it is probable. Others before his time have broken out of the old stone-ing without half such tools, and why should not he?"

CHAPTER CXXIX.

TAKES A PEEP AT TOM KING IN NEWGATE.

We think we may safely say that there is not one of our readers who does not feel equally anxious with Jack and Claude and Dick, to know whether Tom King really had been able to avail himself of the tools which had been brought to him in so ingenious a manner, under the belief that they would be instrumental in achieving his release.

It is so long since we saw anything of him that it will be necessary to recollect under what circumstances it was that we really did see him.

It was on the occasion of Dick's temerarious visit in the disguise of a farmer.

As soon, then, as the door closed, Tom sprang to his feet, and sought eagerly in the piece of pie-crust, which he had slipped on to the bed so slyly, for the files which Turpin told him were secreted there.

His heart gave quite a sudden bound when he felt in his fingers the thin pieces of spring steel of which the saws were composed.

He did not just then venture to particularly examine them, for fear some one should open the door suddenly, and surprise him.

He looked about him for some place where he might conceal them.

Now Tom was a firm believer in that philosophy which says, "if you want to hide anything securely put it into some conspicuous place," and so he proceeded to act in accordance with it.

His eye rested in a moment upon the grated aperture which admitted the light into the cell, and there he made up his mind to hide them.

"The very thing," he said. "I will just lay them on the stonework, and if they search all the dungeon over, ten to one if they think of looking there."

By standing upon the bed he could not reach the window with the tips of his fingers. However, that was sufficient, and he slipped them on.

Scarcely, however, had he done this, than he heard the sound of voices and footsteps in the corridor without.

He jumped quickly yet silently, off the bed, and flung himself at full length upon it.

Then the door was opened.

Four persons, looking very hot, and very much excited, rushed tumultuously into the cell.

The first was the governor.

The second the chaplain.

The third Winch.

The fourth one of Townshend's men.

Mr. Tapner evidently expected to find something extraordinary, and upon seeing Tom lying down on the bed as if nothing at all was the matter, a look of deep disappointment and vexation appeared upon his face.

King raised himself upon his elbow, and then stood up on his feet.

His surprise was in part real, in part affected.

The dread was at his heart that his comrade had paid dearly for his rashness.

At any rate he could see something had occurred to rouse their suspicions and disturb their equanimity.

He did not trust himself to speak, but waited for his visitors to commence the conversation.

It will be recollected that Mr. Tapner had a bit of a grudge against him, and this animus was shared in by the chaplain.

"Villain!" roared the governor, "infamous villain, what is the meaning of this?"

"It strikes me," replied Tom, "that I ought to ask you that question."

"You ask me? What do you mean? But I'll be even with you. I'll let you know you don't make an enemy of the governor for nothing. You shall suffer for it."

"Suffer for what?" asked a voice; and then, to the great confusion of Mr. Tapner, and equal delight of Tom King, who should walk in but Mr. Sheriff Blandy.

The curses that rose from the heart of the governor to his lips were of the most frightful nature imaginable, but he had sufficient prudence to control the impulse to utter them.

"Suffer for what, Mr. Tapner?" asked the sheriff again, as he walked with a mincing step into the cell. "Suffer for what, did you say?"

We should not be overshooting the mark, we feel sure, if we said that the greatest pleasure of Mr. Blandy's life consisted in teasing the governor. He enjoyed it amazingly.

"Suffer for his crimes, of course," replied Mr. Tapner, recovering a little from his confusion. "And that's what he deserves."

"Oh! indeed. I see. You all seem rather violent."

"Matter! there's enough the matter. Dick Turpin has been here, in this very cell, and had an interview with the prisoner yonder."

Mr. Blandy looked at the speaker incredulous.

"Nonsense!" he said.

"Do you call me a liar, Mr. Blandy?"

"Certainly I do not do so, and yet I might without departing from the truth so much as you do."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Only this. If you have suffered Dick Turpin to come into Newgate, and then allowed him to go out again, all I can say is you cannot have much pretensions to being the governor of a prison."

"But how did I know it?"

"My dear sir."

"Oh! d——n your dear sir. I said, how did I know it?"

"You told me."

"I told you? What do you mean? I said how did I know Dick Turpin had come into Newgate."

"You told me he had done so, and that is all I know about it."

The governor fairly danced with rage.

"You must calm yourself, Mr. Tapner."

"Allow me, if you please," said the chaplain, stepping forward; "but first I must say that Mr. Tapner has had quite enough to aggravate one of the holy saints."

"H—m! I should not wonder."

"A person dressed as a farmer, and representing himself to be the father of this unrepentant young man, who is, I grieve to say, deeply hardened in iniquity, sought entrance to the prison, and had an interview. Oh! the hypocrisy and guilt of which some people will be guilty. That farmer, Mr. Blandy, was the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin!"

This was the first account the sheriff had had of the affair, and he was naturally amazed.

"We had our suspicions, but in the most daring manner this man of wickedness escaped."

"And what was his object?" asked Mr. Tapner, who thought, perhaps, asking questions was as satisfactory as answering them; "I ask again, what was his motive for coming here?"

"To see his friend, of course," said Tom.

"And give him tools," cried Mr. Tapner; "that's it, search the place, Winch, and you, What's-your-name.

The two officers set about ransacking the place from top to bottom. It was not very large, nor were there many articles in it, so that the search did not occupy a very great deal of time.

Tom was of course overjoyed to hear that Dick had escaped, and he resigned himself with tolerable patience to the result.

The bed and bedstead—although they scarcely deserved the name—were pulled to pieces and thoroughly examined, but of course nothing was found.

Then, having in fine searched every portion of the cell itself, with the exception of the place in which they were hidden, they commenced to search Tom's person.

They would have done this at first if they had had any



[DICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS STOP THE TRAVELLER ON THE NORTH ROAD.]

...e the files were concealed about him, but now they resorted to it as a kind of forlorn hope.

Tom submitted to the search willingly enough.

They could not, of course, be positive that Tom had received any tools, and Winch, for his own credit's sake, swore stoutly that the thing was impossible, for not only had he searched the seeming farmer before he entered the cell, but was present during the whole of the interview, and they could not have been passed from one to another without his knowledge.

This of course was not true, but Winch was not afraid to say it was. The only person who was in a position to contradict it was Tom King, and it was not very likely he would do so.

"Well, we're baffled, it seems," said the governor, when the men had thoroughly satisfied themselves that Tom had the files nowhere concealed about him. "We're baffled, but we will make sure—of course with your permission, Mr. Sheriff Blandy." Here Mr. Tapner made a low bow of much respect, and turning to Tom, addressed himself to him: "We know you have no tools about you, but we are not quite so sure that there are not some cunningly hidden in the cell; and as a measure of precaution—ha! ha!—we'll remove you to another cell."

"I protest against this!" cried Tom King; "I protest against it. Mr. Sheriff, I appeal to you. It is to your interference that I owe my present comfort, and now he seizes upon this pretext to deprive me of it. Oh! it is monstrous, and I hope, Mr. Blandy, that you will not allow him to set your authority at naught."

"He! he!" gasped the governor, in an hysterical tone of voice; "That touches him. I declare my conviction that the prisoner has tools secreted somewhere in this cell, and I declare it my duty to remove him to some other place, as a precautionary measure. He! he! Oppose me at your peril, Mr. Blandy!"

"I do not for a moment dream of doing any such thing, Mr. Tapner, and you know it. Having such an impression on your mind, you are unquestionably right in ordering the prisoner to be removed; and it will be my duty to see

you, should circumstances make it necessary for me to do so."

Mr. Tapner was terribly disappointed when he heard this speech. He cherished the hope that the pragmatic sheriff would oppose him, and then he would have something like ground to stand upon against him.

He was at a loss what to say, and Mr. Blandy, who, in his way, was a very good sort of fellow, and unquestionably the means of preventing a great deal of ill usage from being visited upon the prisoners, continued—

"Give your orders, Mr. Tapner. You have my full sanction, sir; but I shall make it my business to see that when you change his cell you put him into one which is fit for a fellow-creature to remain in."

"Oh! very good. Of course, Mr. Sheriff, you are the governor of the prison, and I am a fool!"

"You are right there, if you are not in the first part of your sentence."

"Sir?"

"Oh! don't fume. You called yourself a fool—I didn't; bear that in mind."

Mr. Tapner saw he had got the worst of it, so, turning his back contemptuously upon his tormentor, he said—

"Winch, bring the rascal this way! Bring him along, and keep a sharp eye upon him. He may think to escape, but he won't, no matter how much *certain persons* may connive at such a thing!"

CHAPTER CXXX.

THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE TAKES MOST EFFECTIVE STEPS TO PREVENT TOM KING'S ESCAPE.

MR. TAPNER placed a most withering emphasis upon the words *certain persons*, and turned upon the sheriff a glance which he intended should speak volumes.

But that gentleman, conscious how baseless the insinuation was, disdained to take the slightest notice of it, which mortified Mr. Tapner more than words could have done.

Despite his rather ticklish situation, Tom King could not fail to be diverted with the little scene that was enacted before him.

His vexation that he should thus be deprived of the means of escape was great in the extreme, but he could not help himself, nor was he clever enough to invent some plan by which he could defeat the intentions of the governor.

Yet it is more than probable that he would have hit upon some scheme if he had been able to concentrate his ideas, but the interest and enjoyment he felt in what was going forward prevented his doing so.

There was nothing for him to do but submit to being placed in some other dungeon. Resistance he knew would only have furnished an excuse to the governor for his ill-treatment, without his obtaining the least advantage as compensation for it.

Winch took hold of him by one arm, and Townshend's man by another, and led him into the passage.

Mr. Blandy preceded them, and Mr. Tapner and the chaplain brought up the rear.

"Where shall I put him, sir?" asked Winch.

But for the presence of the sheriff, the governor would have replied, "the darkest and dampest dungeon in all Newgate." As it was, he gave orders for him to be placed in a similar cell to the one he had occupied, which was situated on the opposite side of the passage.

The door was flung open by Winch, and the whole party entered.

Tom looked keenly about him, in order to find, if he could, some ground for complaint; but he could not. It was quite as comfortable as the one he had left.

Mr. Blandy, too, looked round the place; observing which, the governor sneeringly inquired whether he was satisfied with the accommodation.

That was the only bit of revenge he could treat himself with, and, paltry as it was, Mr. Tapner chuckled over it.

But Tom stepped forward, and what he said rather turned the tables.

"Mr. Blandy," said Tom, addressing that gentleman, "until I became an inmate of this prison we were perfect strangers. To my knowledge, we had never seen each other before, and yet you, at the expense of a great deal of personal abuse, have been kind enough to take my part, and as I firmly believe, save me from a great deal of ill treatment. For all this I can only tender you my very best and most sincere thanks; and as I can offer you nothing further, I beg you will accept them, prompted as they are by the feeling of deep gratitude which I experience for what you have been pleased to consider it your duty to do in my behalf."

This was a speech for which no one there present was exactly prepared, and certainly none less so than the sheriff himself, who, in the confusion of the moment, managed to stammer out some words of acknowledgment to Tom.

Then Tom bowed, and retired to the most distant corner of the cell.

"Really," said the Sheriff, "there must be some mistake; the fellow is a perfect gentleman!"

"Oh! its very fine—very fine indeed!" said Mr. Tapner, shrugging his shoulders. "Its quite affecting to hear you. However, I'm going. Perhaps you would like to stay with the prisoner, Mr. B.?"

"No," said the Sheriff; "I shall at once proceed to the Secretary of State, and lay before him a full account of what I have witnessed here at various times, and ask him candidly whether he considers you to be a proper person to be left in charge of a prison."

"Ha! ha!" said Mr. Tapner. "Ha! ha! come along Winch."

But though he strove to laugh it off, he did not at all succeed in doing so, and it required very little discernment to perceive that it made him very ill at ease.

As for Tom, to tell the truth he was not a little pleased when they all departed and left him to the solitude of his dungeon.

He listened to the dull echo of their footsteps along the corridor until he heard a door closed.

Then all was silent—so silent, that one would scarcely credit Newgate was in the heart of the huge, bustling City of London.

Evening was coming on.

The light that straggled through the grated, unglazed window of the cell grew duller and duller every moment.

Folding his arms across his breast, Tom paced up and down his cell.

At every step he took his fetters clanked dismally against each other.

They had, too, the effect of making walking a difficult and tiring exercise, but Tom King's mind was too restless to allow him to sit still.

In that silent place the sound even of his own voice was cheerful to him, and so he spoke his thoughts aloud.

"Confusion light on the officious governor," he said, "but for him, I should now be making use of those tools my friend ran such a fearful risk to convey to me. Thank heaven, though, he has not paid the penalty due to his rashness. He has escaped, or I should long ere this have heard of his recapture."

There was some consolation in this thought, and Tom grew calmer.

"Its no good grieving over shed milk," he said. "I must bid good-bye to the files, and be on the alert to take advantage of any little circumstance that may arise. I shall not despair yet."

As he uttered these words, the last ray of light faded from the dungeon, leaving him in profound darkness.

He made his way to the rude pallet which was to serve for his bed, and stretched himself at full length upon it.

"To-day," he said, after a brief interval of silence, "or rather to-night, is Saturday. To-morrow will be Sunday. The sessions I suppose will begin on Wednesday, as usual. I wonder whether I shall be put upon my trial, or whether Dick will, between now and then, put me in the way of making my escape. But why should I not make the attempt, and rely entirely upon my own exertions? I will do it!"

But scarcely had he come to this conclusion, and before he had time to rise from his recumbent position, than he heard the door at the end of the corridor unlocked.

It might be the turnkeys about to visit some of the other prisoners.

He waited, and listened.

But such did not prove to be the case. The footsteps paused upon the threshold of his own dungeon.

"Confound it," he cried. "Can it be that rascally governor come to torment me? If so"——

The opening of the door put a stop to his speech.

There was the governor, sure enough, and Winch as well.

Behind them were two other men.

"Oh! there you are, prisoner," said Mr. Tapner, as the light of the lantern Winch carried showed him Tom King lying calmly on the bed, "there you are, and there I'll take care you stop. You've got the idea into your head that you will be able to make your escape. But, ha! ha! I'll try if I can't be one too many for you, my fine fellow. Ha! ha!"

"If it affords you pleasure to annoy me," said Tom King, raising himself upon one arm, "I have no resource but to submit. Let me warn you, however, to be careful, for I shall make Mr. Blandy acquainted with your proceedings."

"D——n Mr. Blandy, and you and all!" cried the governor, his rage getting the better of him, "D——n Mr. Blandy, and all the world!"

Tom laughed at Mr. Tapner's impotent passion.

"Very good," he said, "Curse who you like, I don't suppose it will make much difference."

By a great effort the governor controlled his temper.

"Harkye!" he said, "you have yet to find what are the consequences of making the governor of Newgate your enemy."

"I don't value you a rush, nor your enmity either."

"Well, we shall see. You think of making your escape, but you won't find it a very easy matter, I can tell you. I'm not going to put you in a stronger cell, nor put more jewellery on your person, but I shall just leave you where you are."

"Thank you for nothing," said Tom. "I suppose that's because you can't put me anywhere else."

The governor's choler began to rise again, but he managed in a strange fashion to turn it into a laugh.

But such a laugh!

"You stay where you are, but not alone. Ha! ha! do you hear? Not alone! ha! ha! Wilson and Biggs will share the cell with you. What do you think of that? Ha! ha!"

CHAPTER CXXXI.

TOM KING MAKES RATHER A STARTLING PROPOSITION TO MR. WILSON AND MR. BIGGS.

SETTING aside the offensive manner in which this announcement was made, it was about as disagreeable a thing as could well come to Tom's ears.

All hope of making even the slightest attempt to escape vanished in a moment.

It is not a part of our plan to withhold from any one that which is their due, and therefore we cannot refrain from complimenting Mr. Tapner for hitting upon this means of making sure his prisoner should not slip through his fingers.

The two men, who had been named respectively Biggs and Wilson, upon being called by the governor, at once entered the cell.

They each carried with them a small three-legged stool to sit upon.

Satisfaction beamed from the countenance of Mr. Tapner as he rubbed his hands briskly together.

"That's a stopper for you, I know. Ha! ha! You carried on pretty well, but you see I don't intend for you to have all your own way. Oh! dear no! quite the reverse."

"If you think to aggravate me into assaulting you you are very much mistaken. I am not going to commit myself in any such way. As for your petty malice, I treat it with that contempt it so well deserves."

"Assault me! Look to your weapons, my men. He's a desperate character, and there is no knowing what he may not attempt to do. All you have got to do, however, is to see that he does not escape, and defend yourselves if necessary."

"All right, sir, said Biggs; "leave him to us; we'll take care on him!"

"Do so, and you'll find it won't be the worst night's work you ever did. I would sooner have my right hand chopped off than he should escape!"

"Don't you be afeard of that, sir. When you're gone I'll put my stool agin the door, and lean my back against it. Then Jim, he'll look arter the cove as well."

"That will do. Ha! ha! Let Mr. Blandy say anything against that, if he can! I only hope he will Ha! ha! How do you like it, you villain?"

Tom King resolutely closed his lips, and turned over on his bed, so that his face was towards the wall. No provocation, he determined, should make him assault Mr. Tapner, which was evidently what that individual wished him to do.

Mr. Tapner waited a moment or two, and then finding Tom still preserved silence, he waved his hand to Winch, and stalked from the cell.

According to his expressed intention, Mr. Biggs, so soon as the door was closed, put his stool against it and sat down.

Wilson took up his position near the foot of the prisoner's bed.

Both then drew from their coat pockets a brace of double-barrelled pistols, and carefully assured themselves that the charges were in proper order, and the weapons ready for immediate service.

They had also provided themselves with a piece of lighted candle, which they stuck against a projection of the wall.

It shed a dubious twilight over the cell.

Some minutes passed in silence, Tom still maintaining the same position.

Messrs. Biggs and Wilson had lighted their pipes, and were smoking away at a great rate.

It was not possible, however, for them to long continue silent. They had nothing whatever to occupy their minds.

"I say, Biggs," said Wilson.

"Yes, mate."

"I takes it as being very hard lines we should be put upon such duty as this 'ere without bein' allowed summut to drink."

"So do I; but its just like 'em! I wonder they don't deprive us of our blessed bakker!"

"I couldn't nohow stand that. Its right awful to think on! I often wonders what a poor fellow would do without his pipe."

A pause ensued, during which it might be inferred that the two worthies were speculating upon the knotty point mentioned.

Tom moved.

The men were on the alert instantly.

"My friends," said Tom, who raised himself slowly up and sat on the edge of the bed, "it seems we are going to pass the night together?"

"I rather s'poses we is!"

"Then there's no reason why we shouldn't come to an understanding and pass the time pleasantly, is there?" said Tom.

"Not as I knows on," said Wilson; "what do you say, Biggs?"

"Not if the gentleman's agreeable."

"Very well, then," said Tom, "that's settled, for if I had not been agreeable, I should not have asked you. But do you really mean to say they don't allow you anything to drink?"

"Not a blessed drop!" said Biggs.

"Not a blessed drop!" repeated Wilson, with additional emphasis.

"Then I don't envy you your job," said King.

"I dare say not; but then you see *juty* is *juty*."

"But not pleasure."

"You're right enough there!"

"Well, now, look here," said Tom, "just listen to me a moment; I've got something particular I want to say to you."

"Go on then, we is all attention; ain't we, Jim?"

"We is."

"Then come a little nearer."

"Why? No one can't overhear us."

"I don't know that; but I want to make sure. Come close here, and then I shall not have to speak so loud as you."

"No tricks?"

"No!"

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!" said Tom, emphatically.

"Very well, then, what have you got to say?"

As they asked this question, the two men, rather dubiously be it said, neared the bed.

"Sit down," said Tom. "You can sit on one side, and you on the other. You will be able to keep me as safe then as now."

The two jailers were full of curiosity to know what Tom had to say, so they sat down; besides which they thought it would be their best policy to humour their prisoner as much as possible, and so make matters as pleasant as they could.

To tell the truth, too, they felt rather flattered at Tom's condescension; for in those days a high tobyman, as highwaymen were called, were something more than ordinary mortals.

But from what the reader knows of Tom King, he feels sure that he is doing all this with some ultimate object in view.

What it was will be very quickly seen.

"As I said," he began, "yours is a very disagreable job, now what do you get for it?"

"Eh?"

"I mean how much are you paid?"

"Do you mean extra?"

"Yes."

"Not a blessed mag!"

"What? is it possible that this night duty goes in along with your ordinary work?"

"There's not no mistake about it."

"And they won't let you have anything to drink?"

"Not a spot."

"Then all I can say is, its scandalous. The idea of putting you on dangerous duty like this, and giving you nothing extra for it, is out of the bounds of all reason."

"Old Tapner ain't a giving sort," said Biggs.

"But," said Wilson, "you didn't ask us to come and sit close to you to ask us such a question as that."

"No, I didn't."

"What was it then?

"You shall hear, only I was obliged to introduce my subject, you know."

"Oh, in course."

"Very well then. Now, I hope you will pay the most particular attention to what I am going to say."

"Oh, go on," said Wilson, "don't keep us in suspense."

"I loses all patience," said Biggs.

"But the question I am going to ask you is a very important one."

"Let's hear it then."

"If you get nothing for keeping me a prisoner here, beyond your regulars, how much should you say would make it worth your while to let me free, or put me in the way of making my escape? Don't be afraid to speak, I can afford a good price."

CHAPTER CXXXII.

THE TWO MEN ON GUARD ARE DAZZLED BY THE OFFERS OF THE PRISONER.

Biggs looked at Wilson.

Wilson looked at Biggs.

"Don't decide hastily," said Tom. "Take your time to consider. I'm in no hurry. What do you say?"

Biggs slowly shook his head.

So did Wilson.

"Surely," cried Tom, with affected astonishment, "you don't mean to say you decline."

"We does," said the two jailers, with a sigh.

"Oh! stuff. Name your price."

"It won't do," said Biggs.

"Not but what its hard to see the chance of money go by you, but it won't do."

"Not by no means. You've tried that dodge on afore, Mr. King."

"Eh?"

"I say you've tried that dodge on afore. Do you recollect Jacks and Bishop?"

Tom did recollect them.

They were the men he had tempted to release him, by promising them a hundred pounds apiece for their trouble.

"In course he recollects them. We knows all about that, and how you told 'em a lot of lies about two hundred and fifty pounds being hidden in the sewer. But we old birds ain't caught with chaff."

"But look here," said Tom.

"Save your breath. Jacks and Bishop looked like a couple of fools, as they was, and what is the result?"

"Why, they are lagged," said Wilson, replying to his companion's question, "and will be put on their trial this very sessions."

Tom was rather nonplussed, but he recovered himself and returned to the charge in a moment.

Although there was little prospect of success, yet it was the only thing he had that looked at all like a chance, and so he was bound to try his best with it.

Curbing his impatience, he went on—

"You have not heard the rights of the story," he said.

"That is what they told you. If they had not been treacherous they would have received the money all fair and square. What they wanted to do, however, was to get hold of the two hundred and fifty pounds and take me back just the same."

"Is that a fact?"

"Of course it is!"

"Well, then, all I can say, it serves them right. Don't you, Biggs?"

"I does."

"Treachery never fails to meet with its due reward. Now, my friends, if you will listen to me, I will tell you the truth, without any lies, and if you like to say yes to my proposal, why, well and good."

"Shall we hear it, Biggs?" asked Wilson, as usual, of his companion.

"I think so."

"It can't do no harm, can it? 'Cos you see we isn't bound to accept it."

"Certingly not, Jim."

"Then, Mr. Tom King, we'll just listen to what you've got to say, if you'll only act on the square."

"You must do so too."

"We shall be sure to do that, provided you don't try on no tricks."

"And I shan't be foolish enough to tamper with my safety for the sake of doing so, I can tell you!"

"Well, what are you going to say?"

"I'll tell you without any bother."

The two men got closer to Tom, being full of impatience to know what he was going to say, for they could tell from his manner that it was something serious, and important at the same time.

"I am going to tell you something that I intended to keep always locked in my own breast. In the first place, you must know, then, that I was going through a wood some distance from London. It was night, and very dark."

"And who was your companion?" asked Wilson.

"Well, it won't matter if I tell you, the fact is, it was Dick Turpin."

"I thought so!"

"But that doesn't matter to my story. I say we were going through a wood at night, when, all of a sudden, we saw a light appear before us in the darkness."

"A light?"

"Yes; strange as it may seem, we saw a light, but that was not all, this light kept moving about in a most extraordinary manner. Sometimes we saw it, and sometimes we didn't, till at last it disappeared among the trees."

"My eye!" said Biggs, "weren't you skeared."

"What?"

"Frightened like?"

"Oh! no, not at all, only curious."

"Ah! well, I should have been skeared. I never was in a wood but once in my life, and, if I knows it, it is the last time I ever shall be; but never mind that, go on."

Tom was well pleased to see that the story he began telling, and with the exact particulars of which the reader is acquainted, awoke so much interest in their breasts, so that they seemed to lose sight of his object in telling them the adventure.

"Yes, go on," said Wilson. "I does above all things like to hear a downright good tale, 'specially if its true."

"Well, then, this is true, every word of it, and so, to go on with what I was saying, when the mysterious light disappeared we consulted together for a moment, and then resolved to find out what it was."

"Did you really?"

"We did, and went on and on among the trees, which grew closer and closer together at every step we took. We thought at first that it must be a will o' the wisp."

"A will o' the wisp?" said Wilson. "What's that, Biggs?"

"Don't know!"

"I will tell you, then," said Tom. "It is a curious kind of light, which sometimes rises out of the earth in damp places, and goes flitting about here, there, and everywhere."

"Why, he means a Jack a lantern!" cried Biggs. "I knows what that is!"

"So do I"

"It is only another name for the same thing," replied Tom.

"Well, you thought it was a Jack a lantern. What next?"

"We found it wasn't that, for when we put our ears on the ground to listen, we distinctly heard a footstep, and the sound of some one forcing a way through the gorse bushes."

"It was a man with a lantern, then."

"Just so. But no sooner had we made this discovery than the light disappeared altogether."

"Did it, though?"

"We waited a good while for it to reappear, but without result, so we crept forward again, and at last we reached a kind of dell, and down at the bottom of this dell there we saw the light again."

"What was it?"

"A lantern! We crept as close as we could to the edge of the dell, and then we heard some one digging. The sound of a spade turning up earth came to us as plain as could be."

"And couldn't you see nothing?"

"No; but I found a sort of narrow winding path leading down into the dell, so as carefully and silently as we were able, we made our way down it."

The two men got still closer to Tom, in their intense eagerness to hear what was coming next. They were so absorbed with the peculiar narrative that they could think of nothing else.

"When we got to the bottom," continued Tom, assuming an awe-struck tone of voice. "When we got to the bottom, we were able to see, by the light of the lantern, a man, who appeared to be digging a grave!"

"A grave?" gasped Biggs.

"That was what we thought it was."

"And what sort of a man was he?"

"Oh! a very old man, with only some tattered rags clinging about his person, to serve as clothes, and he was so thin and so bent, that you would never have believed he had strength enough to walk, let alone dig a hole in the ground. He went on with his work for some time, and then stopped and spoke. From what he said, we gathered that he had concealed a large box of gold, but now he came to dig for it he could not find it. He fancied he had not dug deep enough, and went to work ten times harder than before. His curses were awful when he found that his treasure had gone. He got out of the pit and stood on the margin of it, and called down the vengeance of heaven upon the head of the robber, and while the words were upon his lips, Dick and myself were startled by hearing the loud report of a gun, and then we saw the old miser, for such he was, fall headlong and bleeding into the hole!"

CHAPTER CXXIII.

MR. TAPNER MAKES A VERY SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE UPON THE SCENE OF ACTION.

"WELL, I'm blest!" ejaculated Biggs. "It clean bangs all I ever heard on!"

"That it do!" said Wilson, "its the best of all! Let us hear what happened next."

"I will."

The two men again assumed their eager listening attitude.

Tom could not help smiling slightly.

But in reality it was not at all to be wondered at that the men felt the interest they did. Its startling character was well qualified to elicit it.

"Our astonishment," continued Tom, "when we heard the shot, and saw the old man fall into the pit was, as you may think, very great indeed, and it was the greatest wonder in the world we did not do or say something to betray our presence in that lonely spot, but we happened to possess sufficient self command to keep perfectly still, and we soon had cause to congratulate ourselves for having done so, for in a moment or two we heard the ground crush beneath the tread of a heavy footstep."

"Lor!"

"We watched and waited, and presently we saw a rough-looking man, with a hideous countenance, come close up to the pit. He looked closely into it, in order to find out, as I take it, whether the old man was really dead, and then we heard him say something about the miser's treasure, which made us think he had stolen it."

"Oh! do go on."

"We pounced upon him, and tied him up to the tree; and now," said Tom, turning to the two men, and speaking in a most impressive tone of voice, "now comes the most interesting part of my story."

"What?—what?—oh! what?"

"Let me get my breath! When we had done that we looked all round about the dell, to see if we could find the miser's box of gold."

"Ye-es—yes!"

"For a long time we were unsuccessful, but at last, just on the very brink of the dell, there we found a box carefully bound round with iron. It was about four feet long by three in width and depth."

"And—and"——

"That was the box containing the miser's treasure."

"You don't say so. Oh! Jim, how many guineas would a box of that size hold?"

"Oh! heaps upon heaps upon heaps!"

"And it would sure to be all gold—no notes, you know."

"Not a bit of it. Trust a miser for that."

"When we found it," said Tom.

"Yes, when you found it?"

"We carried it to some distance, and then dug a hole at the foot of a tree, and buried it."

"You did?"

"Most certainly we did."

"And you never opened it to look inside?"

"No, we could not, for the officers were after us, and we had something to do to make our escape."

"And is the box there now?"

"Yes, I could put my hand upon it; and that brings me to what I was going to propose. There is enough gold in that box to make an immense fortune for both of you. Now if you like to let me out, or help me to get out, I will give you my most solemn word of honour, and take any oath you may think fit to impose, that I will lead you direct to the spot where the treasure is hidden, and you shall have it all. Come, what do you say? Is it a bargain?"

This was an offer of so brilliant a description that the two men were quite dazzled with it.

Scarcely was it to be expected that they would for long hold out from embracing so tempting a proposal.

And, to speak the truth, Tom King was fully in earnest in what he said, and so the men felt sure he was, from his very manner.

Nevertheless, they spent some few moments in close consultation.

"Come!" cried Tom, impatiently, "if you are going to say yes, say it. You won't have such another chance for making your fortunes if you live a thousand years."

"Well, we say agreed," cried Wilson; "don't we Biggs?"

"We does!"

"Then!" exclaimed Tom exultingly, as he sprang to his feet, "then I shall be once more free! free to see"——

"A change in your guard," said a voice, and Mr. Tapner, the governor, put his head into the cell.

The surprise which this sudden appearance caused, made the three inmates of the cell for a moment quite speechless.

Messrs. Biggs and Wilson at length found breath enough to utter a dismal yell, and then they sank to the floor in an agony of apprehension.

Mr. Tapner, his whole face beaming with the most intense delight, came quite into the cell, closely followed by Winch and two other men.

"Ha! ha!" he cried, "I told you I should be a match for you. Thought, by telling a lot of stuff about buried treasures, to get free, did you? Ha! ha! Didn't think I might be listening through the keyhole to all you said! You omitted that in your calculations. Dear me! how funny that the governor of Newgate should be clever enough to outwit Tom King, the notorious highwayman. Sounds quite ridiculous. Ha! ha!"

Winch and the two men loudly echoed the governor's disagreeable laugh.

As for Tom King, his vexation knew no bounds, but he would not suffer it to become visible, and so afford the governor that additional satisfaction.

But the two men rose to their feet, and fawningly approached Mr. Tapner.

"Take those men prisoners!" he cried.

"Lor' bless you, Mr. Tapner, I hope as how you won't do no such thing, sir," said Wilson. "Don't you hope so, Biggs?"

"In course I does!"

"Why, you see, sir, we only pertended to listen to his artfulness; and the moment we seed you, sir, we should have told you all about it. We should, sir. Shouldn't we, Biggs?"

"I knows I should."

"Its all very well, but that lame tale won't do," said the governor. "Oh! dear no! Why you actually consented. Don't deny it, because I heard it with my own ears."

"We don't intend to deny it, Mr. Tapner."

"Then you consented?"

"No, no! we only pertended to consent. I'll take my solemn oath we only pertended to consent. Won't you, Biggs?"

"To be sure! So help my Davy, and no gammon! we only pertended to consent, in order to find out more about it."

"You hear Biggs, Mr. Tapner?"

"I do hear him."

"And you believe us, sir?"

"I believe you to be a couple of infamous scoundrels, and I'll have you locked up on the charge of assisting the prisoner to escape."

"No, no, Mr. Tapner; indeed we only pertended."

But the governor turned a deaf ear to their protestations, and turning to Winch, said—

"Go to the lobby, and bring a couple of men to take them prisoners and lock them up."

Then when Winch returned, which he did in a few minutes, for the distance he had to go was short, he had Messrs. Biggs and Wilson walked off, and he left two other men in the dungeon in their places.

"Don't listen to the rubbish he will try to pour into your ears. Its moonshine, every bit of it! But I'll have you so closely watched that it will be impossible for you to escape!"

"Trust to us, Mr. Tapner. We won't listen."

"That's best. What do you think now, Mr. Tom King? I would tell the sheriff if I was you. Ha! ha!"

But Tom turned away, disdaining to reply to the taunts levelled at him either by word or gesture.

Finding this to be the case, the governor, after a few of what, as he afterwards called them when speaking to the chaplain about them, cutting remarks, he left the cell, and the door was closed after him.

Tom King had no heart to say anything to his new guards, so he threw himself upon the hard bed and strove to sleep.

So passed the night.

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

TOM DAVIS AND ELLEN FIND OUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISREGARDING THE ADVICE CONTAINED IN AN OLD PROVERB.

About ten o'clock on the following—that is to say, Sunday morning—two persons well known to the readers of this history turned out of Skinner-street into the Old Bailey.

One was a man of jovial appearance and extraordinary proportions.

The other was a being so dissimilar to him in every respect that people, when they saw them together, would hardly be able to believe they belonged to the same race.

She was a young girl—small, and very shortly made, with hands and feet that might be a child's.

Her hand rested on the arm of this big man, and as they were so close together it made the difference in their relative sizes the more apparent.

Of course our readers recognise them.

One was Tom Davis, the worthy landlord of the "Hand and Keys."

The other Ellen, once the poor orphan apprentice, now his adopted daughter.

His errand was to visit Tom King, and deliver the message he had been charged with for him.

As for Ellen, her presence may be easily accounted for.

She had asked to come, and Tom never thought of doing otherwise than granting her slightest wish.

And so on this Sunday morning, just as the clock in the belfry of St. Sepulchre's church was striking ten, they came in sight of the gloomy old prison of Newgate.

They crossed over the Old Bailey, and Tom, ascending the little flight of steps, rapped rather imperiously upon the wicket.

The consequence was it was opened at once.

But the man on the lock, when he saw they were only visitors, had half a mind to bang the door shut in their faces, and likely enough would have had a whole mind, had not Davis taken care to make an entrance as soon as it was open.

"Well, I'm blest! what is things a coming to next, I wonder?"

"Let me have none of your insolence," said Davis, "or you will find yourself in trouble. Where's the governor? I want to see him, immediately."

"Jinks," growled the man on the lock, "go and tell Mr. Tapner he's wanted."

Now, to the reader it may seem rather strange that Davis should ask to see the governor, instead of asking to see Tom King; but the fact was, he knew that without he adopted some very clever stratagem, he would not, after what had occurred, be able to see the prisoner at all.

He had a scheme already, and the reader will see what it is as things go on.

In a short time the governor came into the lobby, through a door that led to his own private apartments in the prison.

He was curious to know who it was that wanted him.

He looked rather surprised upon seeing Davis and Ellen, both of whom were strangers to him, but the former hastened to say, in the politest manner he was master of—

"The governor of the prison, I presume?

"Yes," said Mr. Tapner; "and as I am rather busy, perhaps you will be good enough to let me know what it is you want with me in as few words as possible."

"Certainly, certainly, oh! certainly. The fact is I have made a rather long journey up from the country solely upon the business I have with you."

"Indeed."

"Yes. About two months ago, I ought to tell you, I was driving along the Southampton-road with my daughter here, when we were stopped and robbed by a highwayman, who I have reason to believe was Tom King."

"Dear me, yes; and you have come up to London, I suppose, to bring forward your case against him. Just so. Be good enough to walk this way."

So saying, he conducted Davis and Ellen to a comfortably-furnished parlour, the window of which looked into the Old Bailey.

In the strong feeling he had against Tom he was rejoiced to find some real *bonâ fide* evidence against him, such as this appeared to be. It saved him a great deal of trouble, for it had been his intention to go to the length of getting up a case against him.

"Getting up a case," in the way the governor used the words, meant suborning evidence.

He was saved the trouble—and, what was more, the risk—but he was so exasperated with Tom, that he made up his mind to leave no means untried to procure his conviction.

Mr. Tapner placed seats for Ellen and Davis, and then sat down himself at a desk covered with papers, and

taking up a pen, prepared to take notes of the statement about to be made to him.

"Now, sir," he said.

"You must understand," said Davis, "that one of my chief objects in coming up and bringing my daughter with me was to see the prisoner, for on the occasion we both had a good look in the face of the man who robbed us, and we should be able to tell directly whether Tom King was really that man."

"Oh! of course, of course. You shall see him at once."

"Perhaps," suggested Davis, "I had better, to save all trouble, see the prisoner before I make the statement, for if he should not turn out to be the man, why, of course, the matter will rest there."

"Just as you like, sir—just as you like. I am glad to find some one else besides myself anxious to further the ends of justice. I have no doubt the prisoner is the man who robbed you—no doubt in the world."

"One glance will be sufficient to assure us of that, will it not, Ellen?"

"Yes, father."

"Come with me, then," said the governor. "As you wish it, you shall see the prisoner first, and if you recognise him, make the statement afterwards."

"Just so."

The two now rose, and the governor, having called Winch, they proceeded in a body to Tom's cell.

Davis, while the turnkey was unlocking and opening the door, put his hand into his coat-pocket, where he had a letter folded up into a very small compass.

He had another difficult task to perform, and that was to place the letter in Tom King's hands unseen.

He took his hand out of his pocket, and held it between his fingers. So small was it that it could not be seen.

Then, as soon as the door was opened, he saw Tom, and managed, by the expression of his countenance, that he did not wish to be recognised.

King took the hint, and assumed a surprise at the visit.

"Now," said Mr. Tapner, "take a good look, and tell me whether you think that is him."

Davis walked into the cell, and looked at Tom. Then he shook his head.

"Look again," said Mr. Tapner.

"In the most natural manner, Davis put up his hand and touched Tom King on the shoulder, as though to turn his face more fully to the light.

Then, with the quickness of thought, he slipped the tiny piece of paper down Tom's neck, and said, suddenly, in a whisper—

"A letter."

"Is this the man?" asked the governor.

"No," said Davis, "I shouldn't like to swear it was, but my daughter will look, if you please."

"Oh! ah! Look at him, my dear. Is that the man who robbed you on the Southampton road?"

"No, I am quite sure it isn't."

"It isn't."

"No, the man that robbed us had large sandy whiskers, and his eyes were different, and he was taller and stouter. Oh! I am sure it isn't the same."

At this moment one of the men who had been watching in the cell touched Mr. Tapner on his arm and whispered something in his ear which made the governor's face assumed quite a blue tinge.

"Is it possible?" he cried, "Arrest those people, and confine them in separate dungeons at once. Away with them. I charge them with being accomplices of the prisoner."

CHAPTER CXXXV.

THE MAGISTRATE AT BOW-STREET GIVES TOM DAVIS A CAUTION.

Davis had seen the man whisper, and guessed in a moment that he was known.

Still he resolved to put a bold front on the matter.

"What do you mean, sir," he said, "by accusing my daughter and myself with being the accomplices of highwaymen? Take care what you are doing, sir, and mind what you say, for you shall prove your words."

"I am quite ready, Mr. Thomas Davis, quite ready. You see I know your name. Powell, here, is ready to swear you are the landlord of a public-house well known as the resort of desperate characters."

"You are dreaming, sir; I am no public-house keeper, but a farmer, and I live at Lymington."

The confident tone in which this assertion was uttered staggered the governor a great deal so he turned to Powell and said—

"Will you swear that man is Davis, the landlord of the 'Hand and Keys?'"

"Will I? Of course I will. You might just as well ask me to swear whether I was ever in Newgate?"

"You are quite certain, then?"

"Quite."

"That is sufficient, then. It is my duty to take both into custody."

"This is monstrous."

"You will have every opportunity afforded you of proving your identity before the magistrate to-morrow morning at Bow-street. Off with them."

It was useless to resist, so Davis suffered them to lead him to a cell.

Poor Ellen was terribly frightened, but her adopted father soon reassured her, and told her she had nothing whatever to fear.

"Search your prisoner," cried Mr. Tapner, as soon as they had left the cell. "Although I had my eye upon them all the while, yet it is possible something may have been given to him. Search the prisoner at once."

The two men sprang forward, and in a very rapid and dexterous manner searched him from head to foot.

But they found nothing.

How was it, then, that the letter escaped their practised observation?

We will explain.

As soon as Tom heard the governor proclaim who Davis really was, he judged that a search would be the result.

Therefore, while the attention of the governor and the men was chiefly centred in the landlord and Ellen, Tom managed slyly, and without attracting notice, to put his hand up to his neck and take out the letter.

It rested just between the neckband of his shirt and his skin.

Having it now in his grasp, the next thing was to find some safe place in which to secrete it.

He was at a loss for a moment, and then feeling how small it was, for he did not venture to look, he slipped it into his mouth.

The letter had been written on a long slip of paper about an inch and a half wide, and was rolled up tightly, and secured at the edge with some adhesive substance.

Consequently it was only about a quarter of an inch in diameter, and all know a much larger article than that could be easily concealed in the mouth.

Very fortunately it happened that neither of these manœuvres were observed, and when he was searched they never dreamed of looking into his mouth.

The case would have been rather different had they known actually as a fact that something had been given, but they had only a strong suspicion of it.

However, nothing was found.

Mr. Tapner was far from being satisfied, and yet he was immensely pleased to think he had secured one if not two of the highwayman's accomplices.

The day passed slowly away. Tom had removed the paper from his mouth, for he was fearful that the moisture would injure it.

There is no knowing what he might not have been tempted to give for the chance of reading this letter from his friend, for that it was from Dick! felt assured.

At last the men who were on guard over him were replaced by two more, and shortly after that Tom found an opportunity of perusing the epistle.

It ran thus:—

"DEAR TOM,—I have some news to tell you that will astonish you not a little. Your old friends C. D. and 16 S. J. have come back to England. They are with me now while I write this. We have learned that your cell has been changed, so I suppose you have lost the files. Never mind, perhaps it is all for the best. We have decided to let you go to trial. We will engage a first-rate counsel, who will, I daresay, be able to get you off. If so, you will

find us all there at the door of the court. If you lose the day, don't despair; we shall get you out of the old jug, so make your mind quite easy. We should try it on before you took your trial, but there is not time. Besides, C. and J. think it best to give you the chance of getting off acquitted, because, if so, we shall be spared the risk and danger of getting you out; not that we mind it, only C. says it is courage sometimes to avoid danger. Between the three of us we are sure to carry the affair out successfully. I don't know whether you will be able to send us any message back. If not, we understand that you quite agree with what we are doing for you. Your sincere friend,

"DICK."

Tom read this letter over two or three times, and then gave himself up to reflection.

He was indeed surprised to learn that his two old friends had returned, and still more that they had fallen in with Dick.

However, the circumstance of all three having determined to get him off, made him much more at ease in his mind; so, after having perused the letter for the last time, he tore it up into small fragments, and dropped them upon the floor of the cell.

Of course, he made no attempt to escape, so Mr. Tapner expended all his wonderful cleverness unnecessarily.

Tom came to the conclusion that it would be best to take his trial. His chance of acquittal was, however, small. Still his position could not be made worse than it just then was.

He knew, too, the fearful peril his friends would incur in doing anything to forward his escape, and he was not selfish enough to wish them to run into danger on his account unnecessarily.

On the following morning Tom Davis and Ellen were placed at the bar in Bow-street, and charged with being accomplices of Tom King, then a prisoner in Newgate.

Mr. Tapner stated the case against them, and dwelt upon it in every conceivable way.

Then the men were called who swore to his identity.

But there was not sufficient evidence to support the charge; in fact it rested upon suspicion merely.

The magistrate, however, when he dismissed the case, thought fit to administer a rather severe caution, coupled with a threat of what he should do if he was again brought before him under similar circumstances.

To the mortification of Mr. Tapner, Mr. Davis and Ellen left the dock in triumph.

Their first act was to make all speed towards the "Hand and Keys," at which place they arrived in the early part of the afternoon.

Right glad was Mrs. Davis and the three highwaymen to see them return in safety. They had been in a state of great alarm.

Tom Davis at once gave an account of all that had taken place.

As soon as he finished, the three highwaymen called for their steeds, and were for riding off to London, but Davis advised them to remain till after dark.

To this prudent advice they were wise enough to listen, and at a little after eight they mounted and rode off to London.

"Don't let me see you again," said Davis, "until you bring Tom back; and it strikes me, after what has happened to-day, this will be anything but a safe place for you."

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

DICK TURPIN POINTS OUT TO CLAUDE AND JACK JONATHAN WILD'S GIBBET ON CLAPTON COMMON.

THIS was right enough; indeed it is greatly to be wondered at that officers were not immediately sent off to search the place to see whether any of Tom's friends were hiding there.

But they considered it so improbable a thing that they should run the risk of sheltering themselves in so dangerous a place, that they deemed it unworthy of their trouble.

Before, however, we follow the three highwaymen on their journey to London, we will take a glance at two subsidiary characters in our narrative, in whose fate it may be presumed the reader feels a certain degree of interest.

We allude, of course, to that gallant and frank-hearted young sailor, Lieutenant Thrustans, and his betrothed, who had been so cruelly persecuted by her treacherous guardian.

We wish to take the present opportunity of following their fortunes and disposing of them finally, in order that we may not have to interrupt the succession of the strange events which so immediately followed, events which, in the intensity of their interest, will be found superior to any of those which have preceded them.

But it is not our wish to keep the reader back from the perusal of the strange adventures which occurred immediately after the three friends left the public-house, so we will put into as few words as possible that which we have to say.

In brief, then, to the great joy of Rupert, after careful medical attendance, Katharine recovered her health, and what was of even more importance still, her reason.

The two rascally doctors were taken into custody, and Lowne House establishment broken up. They were anxious to confess, in the hope that by so doing they would receive more lenient punishment, and what they said was quite sufficient to make the villainy of Stephen Murray apparent.

The lieutenant then made his deposition upon oath of all that had taken place between himself and the guardian, omitting, by their particular request, all mention of the two highwaymen who had befriended him.

Among the papers belonging to Stephen Murray was found a document purporting to be a deed of gift of the whole of the estates from Katharine to him.

But this was declared a forgery, and the young heiress put into possession of her rights.

It will require no great amount of prescience to see that one of the first things she did was to bestow her hand upon Rupert Thrustans, whom she had loved so well before, but whose conduct had thoroughly endeared him to her heart.

At her request he gave up the nautical profession, although he was on the high road to advancement, and settled down to the quiet, happy life of an English gentleman.

In after years, when he had assembled about him a few warm-hearted friends, it was his delight to relate his strange adventures with the notorious highwaymen, Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval.

As for Koolah, the tiger-wolf, he became more domesticated every day he lived, and suffered himself to be made the playmate of his master's children.

Having, then, brought things in connection with the young couple to so satisfactory a termination, we will follow our three friends.

They proceeded at a very easy pace.

"Sometime ago," said Claude, "a very clever lawyer lived at No. 8, in the Old-square, Lincoln's-inn. I don't know whether you have heard of him, but in my opinion, the best thing we can do is to put the case entirely into his hands."

"What is his name?" asked Dick.

"Well, that," Claude replied, with a laugh, "is more than I can tell you, but he calls himself Mr. Theophilus Lazenby."

"I have never heard of him," said Jack.

"Nor I," said Turpin.

"So much the better. He keeps his things very snug, I can tell you; but he is a clever rascal."

"And you think he will suit us?"

"Oh! yes. He will carry the affair through from beginning to end. I mean he will find the counsel, witnesses, and all that, but you must understand he never appears in the affair himself."

"How is that?"

"He can carry on his trade with all the more safety; but there is one thing I expect he will require—rather a heavy fee."

"The deuce! How much?"

"I can't say exactly."

"But what should you estimate?"

"Five hundred pounds!"

"Five hundred pounds?"

"Yes; and you may think yourself lucky if you get it for that."

"Then we must get some money from somewhere."

"I suppose so. How much have you got?"

"Something less than seventy pounds, which I took the other night."



[TOM KING IS BROUGHT TO TRIAL.]

"Then we shall want something like ten times that amount altogether."

"That's a great deal, and very little time to get it in."

"There is not much time, but we must set about it at once. There are three of us, and surely we ought to manage something extraordinary."

"It is so uncertain," said Turpin.

"You're right, it is; now, if you'll believe me, both Jack and myself have had several adventures since we landed, and not one has brought us any money."

"Except coppers," said Jack.

"Oh! d—n the coppers," cried Claude, who, whenever the adventure with the parsons was mentioned, always got into a rage, "d—n the coppers."

Jack laughed as he said—

"With all my heart; but not only have we had nothing but bad luck ever since we landed, but the rascally captain jumped overboard with our portmantle. which contained more than the sum we require."

"How vexatious."

"It is to be hoped, though, that we shall have a run of better luck."

"The best plan will be," said Turpin, "to stop everybody we meet, and not leave off until we have got the sum we want."

"That will be our best plan. We have got the best part of the night before us, and it will do if we see the lawyer in the morning."

"Poor Tom," said Claude, "he must be miserable enough where he is, but anyhow it won't be for long."

"If," said Jack, "we can only get him acquitted, all will be well. We will form ourselves into a band of four, and do something to make ourselves remembered."

"Just so—but steady, there is the turnpike yonder."

"All right."

"I propose," said Turpin, "that we take the turn to the left as soon as we get through the pike; that will take us out on to the Great North-road, by Clapton Common."

"It will be best, you think?"

"I do. On the high-road, we cannot fail to meet with a good booty. Trot gently through the pike."

The toll-man, hearing the travellers approach, hastened to open the gate and Dick threw him half-a-crown for his pains.

They were not long traversing the bit of cross-country road, especially as they gave their horses the rein, and they soon emerged upon the spot Turpin had mentioned—at that time rather a wild bit of country, and quite away from London.

Clapton Common, of which a vestige still remains, was then on both sides of the road—the high-road, in fact, intersecting it.

The moon now broke forth.

"Look," said Dick, as he raised his right arm and pointed out some object in the distance, "on yonder gibbet hang the remains of Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker, who was put there just fourteen years ago."

"I know it well," cried Claude Duval; "but I should think there is not much left of him now."

"Very little indeed," said Dick Turpin; "only the thing is pointed out as a curiosity, that's all."

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN EASE THE TAX-GATHERER OF HIS BURDEN.

By common consent all three pulled up before the gibbet and its ghastly burden.

There was sufficient moonlight for them to distinguish its outlines.

Thirteen years and a few months had elapsed since the gibbet was erected on that lonsome piece of ground.

During that time, the stout oak timber of which it was composed had bravely withstood the attacks of both wind and weather, though it was decidedly all the worse for its struggles against the power of time.

It had sunk some two feet into the soil, and had lost that perpendicular position it once had.

From the cross-beam of the gibbet hung the dark mass said to be the mortal remains of Jonathan Wild, though at the present time, without some such assertion, they would never have been taken as such.

How it was the body held together as it did seemed a mystery, until, upon a close examination, it was seen that the suspending irons formed a kind of cage in which it was contained.

As it swung gently to and fro in the night air, the rusty fastenings made a horrible creaking noise.

"And so that is all that remains of Jonathan Wild," said Sixteen-String Jack, after he and his companions had contemplated it some moments in silence. "It is an awful fate!"

He shuddered as he spoke.

"But surely," said Claude Duval, "if ever any one merited such a doom he did. He was a villain—a deeply-dyed villain, delighting in cruelty for cruelty's sake; a sworn foe to right and innocence; the willing accomplice in all kinds of villainy and guilt; a man dead to all generous emotions; ruthless, vindictive, and a very demon in his revenge!"*

"He little thought," replied Turpin, "when bringing so many to the scaffold as he did, that such would be his own fate; but there is retribution, even in this world."

"Come on," said Claude Duval. "I have seen enough of him. For my part I can only say, he deserves all he has got for his conduct to Jack Sheppard and Blueskin alone."

"I never heard the particulars of that affair. You see, I was but a child when it happened."

"I suppose not. Some day I will tell you, but there is no time now, for I can hear the sound of wheels along the road. Hark!"

"Yes," said Turpin. "Some one is coming, sure enough, though they are at a good distance yet."

"Yonder are some trees," cried Sixteen-String Jack. "Let us back our horses into the shadow of them."

This was done instantly, and then, silent and motionless as statues, they awaited the coming of their prey.

Every moment now brought the sounds more plainly to their ears.

"It is a light vehicle," said Jack, "and drawn by one horse—a dog-trap, I take it."

"It is coming from London!"

"Oh! yes, and will be in sight directly; are you all ready?"

"Quite."

"Then as soon as he gets opposite here we will all three dart out upon him."

"Good! I only hope he carries a good booty to make it worth our trouble."

"Silence, now, all of you! voices travel a long way on the night air. It is never policy to put one on his guard! Silence!"

Not another word was spoken.

The peculiar grating noise of the wheels upon the road grew louder and louder.

Whoever it was, he was coming along at a pretty good speed.

The road was quite straight for some distance, so the three highwaymen, as they looked down it in the direction of London caught sight of the approaching vehicle.

Five minutes afterwards it was on a level with them.

"Surrender!" cried all three of the highwaymen, with one voice, springing out upon the unfortunate and startled traveller. "Pull up, or we fire, and it is scarcely possible for all three of us to miss you."

"Mercy—gentlemen—mercy!" said the traveller, who they saw was a fat man, with a rather bulldog-looking countenance. "Spare my money, gentlemen; but, oh! take my life! No—no, I didn't mean that. Take my life, and—no—I mean"——

"Silence!" said Dick. "Another word, and it is your last! I always keep my word. I am Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

"And I am Claude Duval!"

The traveller turned a horrified glance at the speaker, as he heard him pronounce the well-known and much-dreaded name.

"And I am Jack Rann, otherwise known as Sixteen-String Jack!"

The fat man slipped down off the seat of the gig in an agony of fear, and made a ludicrous attempt to hide himself under the thick woollen mat at the bottom of it.

"Your money!" cried Dick. "Your money, and be quick about it. Hand it over, and your miserable life will be spared."

As Turpin spoke, he made a snatch at the mat, and threw it into the road.

Some dismal groans now came from the traveller's lips. He did not dare to speak after the threats that had been held out to him.

It was quite evident they would have got what they wanted, for he was quite incapable of giving it to them.

Claude performed that part of the business, but though he searched him thoroughly from head to foot, yet all he could find was about a pound in silver, and a monster pinchbeck watch.

He was about to turn away disappointed, when happening to touch one of the cushions on the seat, it moved, and disclosed beneath it a large leather bag, carefully tied round with a thong of the same material.

To snatch at it, and feel its contents, was the work of a moment.

"Money," he cried, "by all that's good!"

The traveller looked up, and when he saw the bag in Claude's hands, the groan he was about to utter changed into a shriek

"No, no," he cried, "mercy, mercy. If you take it I am ruined. Surely you will not ruin me good sir. The money in that bag does not belong to me, but I am responsible for it. Mercy, mercy! Do not take it. Oh! do not."

Dick put the muzzle of a pistol to his ear.

"Be silent," he said, "before you are compelled by a bullet."

"But it is the king's money. Five hundred pounds in gold! All taxes that I have collected. Me, my, more

* In thus speaking of Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker, Claude Duval was no more than just; but for a full and faithful account of the life of this unparalleled miscreant, the reader is referred to a work entitled "Blueskin," now publishing in penny numbers, uniform with "Black Bess," and by the same author. The details there given are from authentic sources, and may be relied upon as correct. Nos. 1 and 2, in a wrapper, price one penny.

You understand now that I shall be a ruined man if you take that."

"What!" shouted Claude, "are you a tax-gatherer?"

"Ye-es, good sir, I—I am, if you please," was the stammered reply, for Duval's manner was rather alarming.

"Then you will get small mercy from us," he said, as he slipped the bag, which he had been told contained so large an amount, into his pocket. "To almost any one else we would have listened, but not to you. Shoot him through the head, Dick, if he says another word; and you, Jack, bear a hand here. We'll tie the *varmint* to a tree. Come on."

Somehow or other our friends shared in that general dislike which is felt for tax-collectors. Very few, indeed, like them. We knew one once who actually set up in business, but of course it turned out a bad speculation.

More dead than alive, this fat man (who looked as though he throve on the blood of others) was lifted out of his gig, and by means of the reins lashed firmly to one of the trees on the wayside.

Had the unfortunate wretch ever so wished it, he could not have found breath enough to cry for help, but he could not control his groans.

A sharp cut with the whip was now given to the horse, and away it started at a most alarming rate.

As for our three friends, they put spurs to their steeds, and did not venture to draw rein until they were some distance from the spot where they had committed this most daring robbery.

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK PROPOSES A STRANGE CURE FOR JEALOUSY.

"I THINK," said Dick, some few minutes afterwards, changing his mare's speed from a gallop to an easy canter, "I think, Claude, if the tax-gatherer told us the truth concerning the contents of the bag, we shall have money enough for our purpose."

"Pretty nearly," said Claude. "I will just take the liberty though of convincing myself that all is well, not, however, that I am much in doubt about the matter."

Duval cut the pieces of leather that was used to tie up the mouth of the bag, and looked into it.

"All right," he said, as he drew forth several guineas. "He has not deceived us. His fright was too genuine for that, and from the size and weight of the bag I am inclined to think he has told us the truth about the amount also."

"Hurrah!" cried Dick; "this, then, is luck indeed. Surely, with what I already have, we possess sufficient for our purpose."

"It may be, and yet none too much," said Jack; "let us stick to our original intent."

"Agreed."

"It will never do for us to run short of funds, and jeopardize the affair in that way."

"So I think," said Claude; "this is certainly an extraordinary slice of luck, but still it's time we had one, I rather think, and"——

Duval broke off suddenly, for a fearful shriek came from somewhere close to the spot upon which they now stood.

"Good heavens!" cried Turpin, "what a fearful scream—there it is again, and again! Come on, there is a female somewhere in distress."

A succession of shrieks, that were really awful from their intensity, continued uninterruptedly.

"This way," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack; "this is the way! Over the fence to that house yonder! Quick! quick!"

Before he had well finished speaking they had all three leapt over a low fence that was on the right hand side of the road.

It surrounded a small garden in which was a pretty little cottage.

It was evidently from this habitation that the screams issued.

Dismounting from their steeds, and leaving them loose, the three friends dashed open the door of the cottage and rushed in.

The scene that met their gaze was one of the utmost disorder.

The various articles of furniture the room contained were strewed about in the greatest confusion.

Those that were at all breakable lay in fragments.

Near the fire-place, shrinking down to the floor as close as she could, and endeavouring to crawl along it, was a woman.

Over her stood a man with rather a formidable blackthorn stick in his hand, with which he belaboured her incessantly, notwithstanding her shrieks and frantic cries for mercy.

So intent, too, was he upon what he was about that he did not notice the intrusion of the three highwaymen, until Dick Turpin sprang forward and caught him from behind, round the middle, taking away the use of his arms entirely.

Sixteen-String Jack wrenched the stick from his grasp.

Claude Duval assisted the victim of his brutality to rise, and would have placed her in a chair had there been a whole one in the place.

As it was, he was very glad to find her able to keep her feet, because it showed the injuries she had received were not so severe as he expected.

This done, they looked about them for an explanation.

The man who had been using the stick so dastardly struggled and fought to free himself from Turpin's grasp, but he might just as well have tried to have got out of the hug of a grizzly bear.

Jack pulled out a pistol, and cocking it, held it in his face, at the same moment admonishing him in a significant tone of voice to be quiet.

As might be expected, the man was an arrant coward—for no one but a coward would think of striking a woman—ceased his struggles instantly, and when his own life was in danger became submission itself.

"Speak!" said Claude to the woman, assuming as kind and as assuring a tone of voice as he could. "Speak! tell us the meaning of all this."

"Do not harm him, gentlemen. Pray do not."

"Can it be possible you ask for mercy for him who has treated you so unmanly?"

"Yes—yes! Oh! yes! He is my husband!"

"Then is his conduct the more inexcusable. What is his motive for thus ill-using you?"

The woman was silent, but Claude was by no means displeased with her for that.

He turned threateningly towards her husband.

"What is your motive for thus abusing your wife. Tell me, or so sure as I am a living man, I'll make you."

The man was silent.

Claude made a couple of paces towards him, but the woman, springing forward, held him back.

"Spare him, sir. Spare him!"

"Tell me his motive, then?"

"He—he—is"——

"What?"

"Jealous!"

"Yes," exclaimed the man, now the secret was out, "and cause enough she gives me. I should like to know who wouldn't be jealous."

"That is no excuse for ill-using her," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Not a bit," said Claude. Then, turning to the wife, he asked,—

"Have you ever given him just grounds for jealousy?"

"Never, sir, as I hope I have a soul to be saved."

"That is sufficient."

"Its false!" cried the man. "I saw her talking and laughing with the milkman this afternoon."

"And what of that?"

"What of that? Do you think I want to see a couple of horns growing out of my head?"

"No, but you deserve them. And let me tell you you are going the right way to get them. As for your suspicions, I believe them to be groundless, especially if they have no better grounds than the instance you brought forward. And now, is it for that you were base-hearted enough to strike her?"

"What's that to you, I should like to know?" asked the man, plucking up a spirit. "If it was, what is it to you? She's my wife, isn't she? and can't a man do as he likes with his own?"

"You will quickly find out what it is to do with us. You are a miserable hound, unworthy of the name of man.

and it is a thousand pities that any woman should be cursed with such a brute for a husband. Down on your knees this instant, and ask her pardon, and promise to be no longer jealous, if you wish to preserve your wretched life."

"Never!"

"Kneel!" thundered Jack, and he thrust the muzzle of the pistol into his ear. "Kneel, or you are a dead man!"

The wife would have rushed forward and interposed, had not Claude held her back.

The man fell upon his knees.

"Dare not to move! and now I will try if you cannot be made sensible of what retribution is. Dick," he added, turning to his comrade, "shoot him through the head if he attempts to move."

"Spare him, gentlemen, do spare him!" entreated the woman. "He is my husband, and I love him, although he does ill-treat me! Spare him! spare him!"

"Do you hear that, you wretch?" cried Claude. "If you have got any shame in you that ought to bring it out."

"Here," cried Jack Rann, addressing the wife, as stooping down he picked up the stick; "take hold of that, and if you value your husband's life do as I bid you."

Thus adjured, the poor woman took hold of the stick.

"Now," he continued, "stand there, and if he does not instantly beg your pardon, and promise better behaviour for the future, lay it about him, even as he did about you."

"No—no—no," cried the woman, full of terror at the very idea.

"If you wish to save his life you will. Stand there! It is his own fault if he suffers you to strike him, though he richly deserves it. Still, he has a chance if he chooses to beg your pardon."

"Oh! William," sobbed the poor woman, "you hear what they say. Do as they wish you, pray do, and do not force me to obey them."

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN MAKE ANOTHER PRIZE ON THEIR WAY TO TOWN.

Now this man, who, by the way, most certainly deserved the soundest thrashing that could be given him—this man we say, if he had been possessed of only a small quantity of that very valuable commodity, common-sense, would assuredly have then and there ended the matter by asking pardon of his wife, and promising amendment for the future.

But no, there was too much pig-headed obstinacy in his disposition to permit him to do this.

So he made no answer to his wife's appeal, but fixed his eyes doggedly upon the ground.

"He will have it," said Jack. "Now, ma'am, don't be afraid to hit him. Come down with the whole strength of your arm. Don't be afraid. If he ventures to move, I will blow his brains out. Now then, begin."

Now this woman, who was so unlucky as to have a jealous husband and a brute besides, by her own confession, loved him; so, of course, at first she had shrunk from the idea of inflicting pain upon him, although he had not scrupled to use her so badly.

But when she saw that he would not avoid the punishment, as he easily might have done, she began to see the justice of what she was about to do.

Still she resolved to give him one more trial: but alas! he remained as sullen as before.

"Since you are determined to have it, then, you shall," she cried, and as she spoke she brought the stick down upon her recreant husband's back with such lusty and rapid strokes, that he howled fearfully with the pain.

"Bravo!" cried Jack, "keep it up till he asks your pardon. I'll take care he don't move, or do you a mischief. Pay into him."

Thus encouraged, the woman, whose fury was now thoroughly aroused, continued her beating with right good will, though her arm ached so badly she could hardly lift it up.

Thwack! thwack! thwack! went the blows, till the husband could bear it no longer, and he dropped flat upon the floor, and implored her forgiveness in the most abject terms.

Then, by every asseveration he could call to mind, he promised never again to be absurdly jealous or to ill-treat his wife.

He was assisted to his feet thoroughly cowed; he was quite conquered.

"Forgive me, William," cried the wife, whose passion was now over, and bursting into tears, she flung herself into his arms. "Forgive me; but what else could I do?"

"That's right," cried Turpin. "You ought both of you to be grateful to us to the longest day of your lives. I hope the lesson, as it was a sharp one, will last you your lives. The best thing you can do now is to forgive each other—forget the past—and make a new beginning.

So saying, Dick left the cottage, followed by his comrades, partly assured that the pair were on better terms with each other than they had been for some time past.

They quickly mounted their horses, and, leaping the fence, were once again on the high road.

"There was not much profit in that adventure, at any rate," said Claude; "though I by no means regret the time it has consumed. It is to be hoped that he will behave better in future."

"I don't know whether it will be a permanent cure."

"That will depend chiefly upon the wife," returned Claude; "but I daresay that she, finding her husband was jealous, did all she could to teaze him. Its a very common, but very silly practice, and provocative of no end of marriage-life mischief."

"Stop your sermonizing," exclaimed Dick. "Look there!"

In obedience to his words, Claude and Jack looked down the road, and saw a man on horseback.

"What, more game?"

"It looks like it. Let us ride on as though we were ordinary travellers. If upon getting nearer we think he looks likely, we will stop him."

"Agreed."

On drawing nearer they found the man on the horse was a sturdy-looking fellow, wearing a quaker-shaped hat on his head.

The horse he was mounted upon was by no means a handsome one to look at, though he might nevertheless be a good one to go.

"We must try it on with him," said Turpin. "Keep in a line across the road. I shall be nearest, so I will stop him."

They were now silent, for they were close enough for the traveller to overhear what was said.

"Halt!" cried Dick, as soon as he was on a level with him, and levelling a pistol with the rapidity of thought. "Halt, I say!"

"Oh! Lord," groaned the man; "they're highwaymen."

"We are. Three to one is rather long odds, you know, so just hand over what you have got without any bother. If you do so at once, no violence will be offered you."

"Alack—alack!" replied the man: "this will be but a sorry journey for me. But still I count my life of more value than the money I happen to have about me."

"Spoken like a sensible man," cried Duval. "Just hand it over to me."

In compliance with this request the man, with many sighs, put a heavy purse in Duval's hands.

"That's all, gentlemen, upon my soul it is, except a few shillings to pay my expenses on the road."

"Be off, then; you are welcome to that, and thank your lucky stars that you have got off so easily as you have."

The man did not need to be told this twice, but, striking his heels against his horse's flanks, he set off at a pace that soon took him both out of sight and hearing."

"Capital," said Claude. "We really are in luck's way to-night. Why this purse must contain a hundred and fifty or two hundred guineas at least."

"Bravo! then we shall have enough

"We won't neglect business, though. o-night's work shall be talked about, and no mistake."

"We are going the right way, but we must be more cautious now; we shall reach the city very shortly."

So many important events call upon us for immediate notice, that we feel we cannot spare the time to relate in detail the other adventures they had that night, especially as none of them were of very peculiar or novel in their character. More travellers were stopped, but from none

of them was taken sufficient booty to recompense them for their time and trouble.

It was rather late and very dark when they turned the corner of the Bank of England into the Poultry, and the streets were quite deserted

"There will be a devil of a row," remarked Claude, "about the money we have taken from the tax-gatherer, so I think the best thing we can do now is to see the lawyer to-night. He used to sleep in his chambers in Lincoln's-Inn when I knew him, and I daresay he does now."

"I have no objection to such a course," replied Turpin. "We shall have the matter off our minds, and, besides, we can easily make our way to old Matthew's, in Drury-lane, whose crib is, I take it, about the safest refuge we can find in all London."

"You know best about that, Dick."

"Then, if you will be guided by me, that is where you will take up your quarters. If there is any danger old Matthew is sure to get us out of it."

"Take it easy, then, and we shall not rouse suspicion."

CHAPTER CXL.

MR. THEOPHILUS LAZENBY HOLDS OUT BUT FAINT HOPES OF PROCURING TOM KING'S ACQUITTAL.

Our readers must all be of opinion that it was a very bold thing for our three friends to think of journeying through some of the widest and most populous thoroughfares in the metropolis, but they did it; and likely enough avoided that suspicion which they would have been almost sure to have raised had they taken for their route some of the bye streets.

As it was, no notice was taken of them whatever.

Down Cheapside, across St Martin's-le-Grand, along Newgate-street, past the dark, frowning walls of the old prison, down Skinner-street and Snow-hill, and up Holborn they shaped their way.

At the corner of Chancery-lane they paused to allow a hackney-coach to emerge, and then they trotted down it to the gateway of Lincoln's-Inn.

It was arranged that Claude Duval and Dick Turpin alone should enter, and that Sixteen-String Jack should stay outside to look after the horses.

The intricacies of the old inn were quite familiar to Duval, and he led his companion by the most direct route to No. 8, Old Square.

Late as it was, lights streamed from many of the casements. For one thing the sessions were near at hand, and a good many clerks were employed to rather late hours, in making out briefs for the counsel.

The door of No. 8 was standing open, so the pair entered, and commenced the ascent of the stairs without let or hindrance.

"Its on the fourth floor," said Claude. "Come along."

Several oil lamps were hung at intervals upon the staircase, so they were tolerably well able to see where they were going.

The topmost story was at length gained, and then on a door facing them they saw painted the words,—

MR. THEOPHILUS LAZENBY.

Claude Duval tapped sharply upon the panel, and waited silently.

Then the door was opened by a man who looked for all the world like some musty old parchment deed.

He looked keenly and suspiciously at his visitors.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"It's all right, The." replied Claude.

The old man recognised the voice, though he did not the person of his visitant. If his eyes failed him, his memory and hearing did not.

"Come in, come in," he said. "Why, it's years and years since I saw you! Come in, come in."

The old lawyer led them into an inner room, which was fitted up with tolerable comfort as an office or reception room.

The two highwaymen unfolded their business to him.

"Ah!" he replied, after having heard them to the end without uttering a sylable, "ah!"

"What do you say, Mr. Lazenby?"

"Awkward job!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes. I have heard something of it from private channels, and"——

"What?"

"Without actually being aware of the specific charge against him, yet I can say from pretty good authority that the case is as clear against him as a case could be, and that conviction is inevitable."

"What would you advise us to do? We are willing to pay well so long as we see a prospect of attaining our desires."

"Let me think, let me think."

A few moments' silence now ensued.

"I suppose there would be no chance of disputing his identity?"

"I fear none; his countenance is well known to many; as well known even as my own."

"That's bad! If it hadn't happened so, we might have got some one to swear he was the wrong man; but now that's all up."

"An *alibi?*" suggested Turpin.

"My dear sir, the thing is not to be thought of for a moment. The dodge is too stale and old, and in this case would be seen through directly. The only thing I can advise is the employment of some sharp counsel to watch the case, and attempt to overthrow the evidence."

"Let that be done, then. We leave you to choose the man best suited for the purpose."

"There is not much to be hoped for even then, if what I have been told about the case is correct. It is so simple, and yet so complete, that it will be impossible to find a flaw in it."

"Still it must be tried," cried Dick Turpin. "Look! here is a bag containing five hundred guineas, all in gold. Take it, and employ it to the best advantage."

Mr. Lazenby's eyes sparkled with avarice when he saw this large sum.

"All shall be done that can be done," he said, as he clutched it eagerly; "you may depend upon that. The sharpest man in practice shall be there to watch the evidence for the prosecution. But let me tell you further that robberies round about and in the metropolis have increased to such an extent that the legislature have determined to make an example of someone, and that someone is Tom King."

"They shall be cheated," said Turpin, "or I will myself perish in the attempt. My two staunch friends here have promised to aid me to the utmost of their power, and we are certain to succeed."

"I hope you may," said Mr. Lazenby, as he rose, to intimate the conference was over. "On my part, you may depend nothing will be left undone."

With this assurance the two highwaymen took their leave.

They found Jack Rann rather impatient at having been kept so long.

The result of the interview was communicated to him.

By the time they had finished the narration, they reached White Horse-yard.

Jack gave the peculiar signal, and the little side door was, as usual, opened by old Matthew himself.

He was rather alarmed when he saw three persons, but Dick Turpin soon let him know who they were.

The horses were placed safely in the stable, and then all four adjourned to the little private room behind the bar.

"I'm rather surprised at your venturing here, captain, when the officers are so keen on the scent; but its just like you—just like you. And now about Tom King."

"Very bad," he said, when Dick finished telling him. "Very bad! One thing, however. they didn't find the files; but they changed Tom's dungeon, as I suppose you know."

"Yes!"

"It's a sad pity; he might have worked his way to freedom by this time; but there he is, you see, and it appears to me worse off than ever."

"Not worse, that I see," said Duval; "I have faith in the old lawyer. He never buoys anyone up with false hopes, but he is generally successful for all that."

"Well," said Jack, "from what I can hear of the affair, my opinion is that he don't stand the least ghost of a chance of being acquitted, and I am sorry to say that when the authorities once make up their minds to hang a man they nearly always succeed."

"That may be, but I still cling to the belief that I shall baulk them."

"You know I should only be too glad for you to succeed, for I would myself go through no small amount of danger to do him a service."

"Well, you had better rest now," said old Matthew, "while you have the chance. I suppose you will be present at the trial?"

"Certainly, all three of us."

"Then the service of my old friend, the costumier, at the corner of Hart-street will be called into requisition, and I'll wager my life he disguises you so well that you may defy detection."

"I believe that," said Turpin, "from what I have already seen of his capabilities in that way. But come, if we are to roost, show us the way at once."

Half-an-hour afterwards all three, notwithstanding their anxiety and danger, were sound asleep, but old Matthew was awake and keeping guard.

CHAPTER CXLI.

TOM KING IS FREED FROM HIS FETTERS, AND DULY PUT ON HIS TRIAL AT THE OLD BAILEY.

VERY, very wearily did the time pass for Tom King in his gloomy dungeon, but at length Wednesday morning came.

He had learned that Tom Davis and Ellen had been discharged by the magistrate, but that was all the news of the outer world that reached him.

What his friends were exactly doing for him of course he knew not, but still he felt convinced they were doing the best and all that lay in them, and the intelligence that his two old comrades, Claude and Jack, had returned, and were exerting themselves to the utmost in his behalf, was a source of great additional hope and satisfaction.

He passed rather a bad night on Tuesday, and awoke tired and unrefreshed. He, however, rose, and having plentifully sluiced his face with cold water, felt wonderfully better.

He had yet some hours to wait, for the court did not open till ten, and he knew his, although the most important, was not the first case on the list.

He breakfasted, and that served to pass away some of the time.

At eleven o'clock he heard a great bustle outside the cell, and then the door was thrown open.

He sprang to his feet, and saw several persons whose faces he was familiar with.

There was the chaplain and the governor, and Winch, the turnkey, and behind them all was the smith who had riveted his irons on.

"Ha! ha! Tom," cried Mr. Tapner, in what he intended to be a highly facetious manner. "Ha! ha! Tom, not got away yet, you see. Managed to keep you safely so far. Ha! ha!"

"Has my time come," asked Tom; "because if it has, I am ready."

"Yours is the next case, my friend. The one that is on now won't take long. Its only a case of assault. Yours wont take long, I fancy, either. Dear me, its as clear as the sun at noon-day."

"You don't say so!"

"Oh! you'll find it out soon enough, never fear. Judge Sykes will try the case. What do you think of that? Judge Sykes. Do you remember him, eh? You robbed him of his gold repeater and diamond snuff-box on Ealing-common about twelve months ago. If you've forgotten him, he recollects you. Ha! ha! I can fancy how pleased he will be with the evidence against you, and how impartially he will sum up and leave the case in the hands of the jury. Ha! ha!"

By no outward sign did Tom show that he was in the least moved by what Mr. Tapner said to him, but he did recollect Justice Sykes and the robbery spoken of, and he saw his hopes of an acquittal vanish into thin air.

"We are going to remove those ornaments," continued the governor, alluding to the prisoner's fetters, "and by that time you will be wanted in the court."

At a word from Mr. Tapner, the smith came forward and knocked the rivets out of the fetters, which fell with a clang into the floor of the cell, and then Tom King was free.

Comparatively free.

To be sure he was as much a prisoner as ever, but still he was free from the irons which had so long galled his limbs, and he felt a sensation of relief and freedom immediately.

Scarcely, however, had he time to stretch his limbs than the tinkle of a bell reached his ears.

"Come on!" cried the governor, "its your turn! Guard the prisoner, and don't keep the people waiting."

Two men preceded Tom along the corridor, and two followed, while two more walked on either side of him, having a firm hold of his hands, and the collar of his coat.

In this way the court was reached, and Tom King suddenly found himself in the presence of what seemed to him at the first glance an innumerable multitude—a boundless sea of human heads and faces.

It was only natural for him to shrink a little when he found so many eager eyes fastened upon him, but this was a feeling that he soon subdued, and he looked about him calmly.

The hum of many voices filled the court, which was crowded with persons all eager to obtain a sight of the celebrated highwayman.

At first Tom had been able to distinguish nothing; all had seemed one perfect mass, but now he was able to note distinctly the different objects around him.

Firstly, and most conspicuously, was the judge, whose countenance he immediately recognised.

That was Judge Sykes.

By his side sat one of his brethren.

His eyes next rested upon the clerk of the arraigns, in his seat immediately below the judges, and from him to the barristers who were seated at the table.

To the right were the boxes appropriated to reporters, witnesses, and privileged spectators.

To his left the jury-box and jurors, and further on the witness-box.

Above and behind him was the gallery, as usual crowded to suffocation.

All these different things he noticed in the space of about three seconds, as he glanced around him, and while the clerk of the arraigns was fumbling with the papers before him.

At length that individual rose with some rather formidable-looking parchments in his hands, attached near the upper left-hand corner with a piece of narrow coloured silk ribbon, and gave a prefatory cough.

"Si—lence!" cried the usher of the court, carefully dividing the syllables of the word by making a long pause between them, and laying particular stress upon the i. "Silence."

All become suddenly profoundly still.

The clerk of the arraigns, then, in a rapid, jangling tone of voice, for which such functionaries are noted, commenced reading the indictment against Tom King.

The document itself, with all its needless and ridiculous circumlocution, was sufficiently difficult to comprehend, but it seemed to be his particular object to make so desirable a thing as understanding it quite out of the question.

He gabbled away until at last he paused quite out of breath.

Very little attention appeared to be paid to it.

The jury conversed in whispers.

The barristers at the table either looked over their briefs, or busied themselves in mending the quill pens.

The judges leaned back in their seats with their eyes closed.

But if all these were indifferent to the reading of the indictment, Tom King was not. He leaned forward over the dock, and listened with the greatest eagerness.

But, alas! the mass of legal jargon in which the simple facts were contained was far above his comprehension, and beyond a sort of conciousness that he was charged with robbing some one of something, he could make out nothing, and that was a piece of information he was already in possession of.

From this it appeared pretty clear that he must wait for the opening speech of the prosecution before he could form any precise idea upon the subject.

The clerk of the arraigns wiped his face and regained his breath.

"Prisoner at the bar, you have heard the indictment against you read, do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

A dead silence followed this question, and then Tom King, in a clear, musical voice, which was heard with distinctness in the remotest corner of the court, said—

"Not guilty!"

The faint buzz, which generally succeeds these words, now rose.

Tom looked eagerly at the different countenances of the spectators.

He had a dim sort of consciousness in his mind that his friends were somewhere present in the crowded court, and a natural instinct made him wish to ascertain their whereabouts.

But he was disappointed.

They were there, however, and his eye had actually rested upon them, but he knew them not, so carefully were they disguised; and though they noticed his inquiring, wandering glance, they felt how very unwise it would be to acknowledge it in any way, since such an act would have had the inevitable result of attracting attention to them, the thing of all things which they had most need to fear.

CHAPTER CXLII.

THE COUNSEL FOR THE PROSECUTION STATES THE CASE AGAINST TOM KING, AND THE EVIDENCE OF MR. JOSEPH POWIS IS OF A VERY CONCLUSIVE CHARACTER INDEED.

"SI—LENCE!" said the crier again.

Then the counsel for the prosecution rose, and, glancing around him, adjusted his robes about him.

Everybody was instantly on the alert.

But no one listened with an interest equal to Tom King, if we may except his friends, who were then in court.

Amid, then, a most profound silence, the counsel began his address.

He assumed his favourite attitude—that is, he hooked his left thumb in the armhole of his waistcoat, while in his right hand he held his brief.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury:—

"The prisoner at the bar, I am sorry to say, is already only too well known by you, for although he is young, and his career of villainy as yet has necessarily been but short, yet he has managed to create for himself a most unenviable notoriety throughout the length and breadth of the land.

"As is well known, he has by various artifices, managed for a considerable time to elude the grasp of justice; but a day came—as he well knew it must come—when a termination was put to his depredations, and now he stands before you at the bar to answer the charges which will be brought against him.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, I feel it is hardly necessary to state that the penalty which the law of the land awards for such offences as those he has been guilty of is death at the hands of the common executioner; but a repetition of that fact by me at the present moment can only have the effect of heightening the solemnity of these proceedings, as well as reminding you of the painful duty which you will have to perform.

"The prisoner, then, stands at the bar of this court to answer with his life the charges made against him; and although I hope you will not, while so much is at stake, draw a too hasty conclusion, yet, on the other hand, I hope, should he be proved by evidence to be guilty, that you will not shrink, through any false feeling of humanity or sentiment, from performing that duty which you owe to society at large for the protection of lives and property, however painful you may find it to be."

The counsel paused, it is presumed, to give additional importance, to what he said, and then resumed:—

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, it now becomes my province to state as briefly and clearly as possible the facts that will be brought before you in evidence.

"Firstly, then, it appears that on the twelfth of November last past Mr. Joseph Powis, a respectable tradesman, carrying on business as a maker of hardware goods, and residing at Birmingham, having business in London, did set out from that place in a coach, duly licensed for the conveyance of passengers.

'On reaching the neighbourhood of London, at which place the coach is due at six o'clock in the morning, and being still quite dark, the inmates of the coach were alarmed by the trampling of horses' feet, which was immediately followed by a voice calling to the coachman to halt, and the report of a pistol.

"The driver of the coach, gentlemen of the jury, finding his life in danger, brought the vehicle to a standstill, and was then compelled, under pain of death, to sit motionless upon the box.

"The driver, who will appear before you, and the guard also, will swear that the coach was attacked by two highwaymen, both well armed and mounted on steeds of a superior description, and that while one of the villains plundered those passengers on the roof of the coach, the other, letting down the window, plundered those within it.

"Mr. Joseph Powis, the chief witness in the case, was one of the inside passengers, and is prepared to swear that the prisoner at the bar, presenting a loaded pistol at his head, compelled him to hand over a considerable sum of money, at the same time declaring himself to be Tom King, the highwayman, and apparently glorying in his villainy.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, it will be further shown that, having robbed the passengers of all their valuables, the scoundrels decamped. Upon information of the robbery being given, warrants were made out for their apprehension, and officers of police despatched in pursuit. For a long time they were unsuccessful, and many more deeds of violence were committed, so that at length it was deemed expedient to call in the aid of the military, and eventually the prisoner at the bar was captured by a troop of dragoons at a place not far from Southampton, but his accomplice as yet remains at large, a terror to all those who are necessitated to travel with articles of value about their person.

"From all this, gentlemen of the jury, it will be seen that the case against the prisoner at the bar is fearfully clear, distinct, and complete; and having stated the different events, it will now become my duty to call before you certain witnesses who will depose to the truth of the facts I have laid before you."

The counsel threw his brief upon the table, and sat down.

Tom understood all now.

He saw how impossible it was to say anything in defence of what was alleged against him.

The statement which had been made by the counsel for the prosecution was a perfectly true narration of what had taken place on the occasion of Turpin and King robbing the Warwick mail, as described in the twenty-first chapter of this history.

The two judges whispered to each other.

The "gentlemen of the jury" tried to look sagely at each other, and then shook their heads.

The counsel for the prosecution having arranged his papers, cried—

"The first witness called is Mr. Joseph Powis!"

"Mr. Joseph Powis!" repeated the usher.

In obedience to the summons, the sharp-featured man, who had been rather strangely denominated as a maker of Brummagem buttons, made his way to the witness-box, and was duly sworn.

"Now, Mr. Powis, be good enough to state what took place on the twelfth of last November."

"I received a letter from a house I do business with in London, which made it necessary for me to set out on a journey to that place."

"You were then in Birmingham?"

"I was."

"Well, what next?"

"I took an inside seat in the Warwick mail, and all went well till we reached a village on the outskirts of London."

"When was that?"

"About half-past four on the morning of the fifteenth, or rather the sixteenth of November."

"What took place then?"

"We got to a very dark and lonely bit of road, and then I heard the trampling of horses' feet, and a loud voice crying to the coachman to pull up, on pain of death, and then I heard the report of a pistol."

"What next?"

"Before I had time to recover my surprise the coach

window was let down, and a man appeared at it, and demanded our money, watches, rings, and whatever else of value we possessed. The man was armed with pistols, and declared his intention to shoot those who offered the least resistance."

"Go on."

"To save themselves from personal violence, the other passengers gave him what they had, and I offered him a guinea, but he swore he would count three, and if then I did not hand over all the money I possessed, he would shoot me dead. So, to save my life, I gave him a bag containing a hundred guineas, and then he rode away."

"Very good," said the counsel; "you have given your evidence in a very satisfactory manner indeed."

"I have forgotten one thing."

"Let us hear it."

"The man who robbed us said, 'I daresay you know my name—its Tom King,' or words to that effect."

"Exactly—and I presume you had a good look at the highwayman's face?"

"I did, sir."

"Then look round the court, and tell me whether you can see the man."

"That's him, sir, standing at the dock. I should know him from a thousand, and I'm ready to swear to him at any minute."

CHAPTER CXLIII.

JUDGE SYKES PASSES SENTENCE OF DEATH ON TOM KING.

THE evidence which had just been given by Mr. Joseph Powis, and, above all, his unhesitating willingness to swear to the identity of the prisoner was so conclusive that all in court looked upon the case as settled.

The tale he told was too straightforward and circumstantial to allow of a flaw being found in it, and the counsel that Lawyer Lazenby had employed, who was an uncommonly sharp fellow, threw down his pen, and leaned back in his chair without a word to say on behalf of the prisoner.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury," said the counsel for the prosecution, "will it now be necessary to call the other witnesses I have spoken of, or do you feel yourself satisfied with the testimony given by Mr. Joseph Powis?"

"Who appears on behalf of the prisoner?" asked the judge.

"I do, my lord."

It was the sharp practitioner who spoke.

Tom looked at him and shook his head, as much as to say it was no good his saying anything.

"Then," said the judge, "have you any questions to ask of this last witness?"

"I have, my lord."

"Very well," replied the judge, and he leaned back in his chair in a manner which showed how little interest he felt in what was going to be said, or how much importance he attached to it.

"Now, Mr. Powis, the night, or rather the morning, in question was rather a dark one, was it not?"

"It was."

"I thought so. I understood you to say such was the case, and, further, that the coach at the time it was stopped had just reached a very dark part of the road."

"That is quite correct, sir."

"Then let me advise you to be careful. If it was a dark night, and the coach was in a dark part of the road, how in the world could you see the face of the man who robbed you well enough to swear to his identity?"

Mr. Powis was silent.

"Mind, you're on your oath," said Tom's counsel; "think before you speak. Are you quite sure that it was the prisoner at the bar who committed the robbery upon you?"

"Yes, I am."

"You saw his face, then?"

"Yes, sir, I did, quite plainly."

"But how?"

"The lamp that was burning in the roof enabled me to do so."

"The lamp?"

"Yes; and not only that: he said his name was Tom King, and that is the name of the man at the bar."

"Yes, yes, that is all very fine, but it is not evidence. Are you still prepared to swear to the identity of the prisoner at the bar?"

"I am, sir; I saw him quite plain, and I heard him speak, and I am prepared to swear to his voice as well."

"Really," said the judge, opening his eyes and leaning forward, "really, it appears to me our learned friend is merely trifling with the time of the court. The evidence of this man Powis is, in my opinion, quite clear, complete, and unshaken."

"Then, of course, my lord," said Tom's counsel, sitting down, "it is no use for me to speak any further, and I bow to your decision."

"Have you any witnesses for the defence?"

"None, my lord."

"Then I opine the case is ended. There can be no need to call further witnesses for the prosecution, and I shall at once proceed to sum up, and leave the case in the hands of the jury."

There was a momentary pause, during which the judge pretended to read over his notes.

"Silence!" cried the ushers.

Then the judge, in a mumbling tone of voice, commenced summing up.

"Gentlemen of the jury,—

"The case now about to be laid before you for your consideration is so clear and perfect, that it will be no trouble for you to come to a decision.

"The prisoner at the bar, who appears to be allowed on all sides to be Thomas King, the highwayman, has, upon the evidence of a highly respectable tradesman, been shown to have committed a daring robbery.

"In the most positive manner he swears he was in the Warwick coach, that Tom King, the highwayman, rode up the coach-door, robbed the passengers, and took from him a bag containing a large sum in gold.

"To corroborate this, there are the coachman and the guard of the coach.

"I leave the case, gentlemen, in your hands. So straightforward a one has never before been brought before me, and it is impossible for you to come to any other conclusion than that the prisoner at the bar is guilty of the offence with which he is charged, as also of many more of a similar character."

The judge concluded his brief summing up with these words.

It must be confessed he put the case rather strong before the jury, but then, think of the circumstances of the case.

Besides which, a hundred years ago justice was much more loosely administered than it is now.

Of course the jury went through the form of consulting together upon the verdict, and then the foreman turned round, and they took their seats.

An intense silence now prevailed in the crowded court.

The clerk of the arraigns rose and said—

"Gentlemen of the jury, do you find the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty of the charge brought against him?"

The foreman replied, in a clear voice—

"Guilty!"

A murmur arose from the crowd. The result was just what they expected.

Tom King assumed as much firmness of demeanour as he could under the circumstances, and looked the judge firmly in the face.

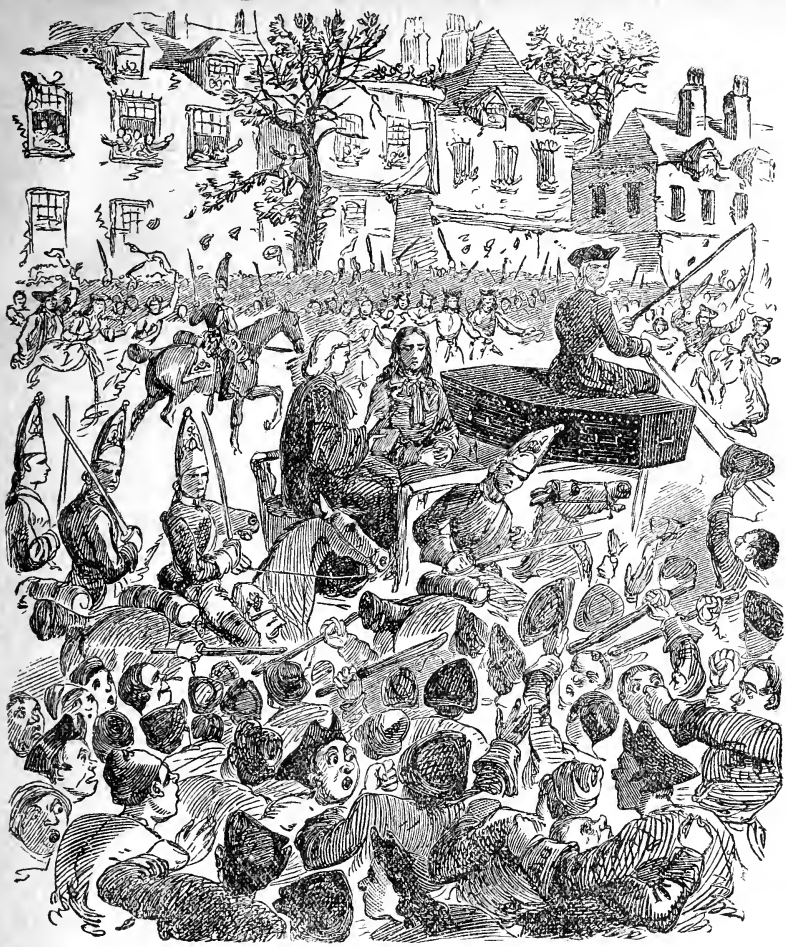
The clerk of the arraigns spoke—

"Prisoner at the bar, have you anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon you?"

The judge stooped and produced the black cap, which he carefully adjusted upon his head, and then, addressing Tom King, he spoke in the following manner:—

"Prisoner at the bar, you have this day been found guilty by a jury of your countrymen for an offence which you undoubtedly committed. It is to be deplored that there are others like yourself engaged in making war upon society, but I trust they will take warning by your fate, or they will assuredly meet with the same termination to their careers.

"The crime of robbery in the highways has lately increased to an alarming and insufferable extent, insomuch that it is now unsafe and dangerous for any one to go abroad alone.



[TOM KING ON HIS WAY TO TYBURN.]

"Now, this is a state of things which cannot be permitted to continue. The most effective steps will be taken therefore to suppress it, and in all cases where the charge is fully proved, and the prisoner found guilty, the full penalty of the law will be rigorously enforced.

"Prisoner at the bar, you, in common with every other person now present in this court, must be aware that the penalty due to such crimes as you have committed is death.

"You cannot have the plea that you were in ignorance of the consequences which would ensue upon your capture. What you did you must have done with the certainty of at one time suffering an ignominious death staring you in the face.

"But, in defiance of this, you still persevered in the evil course you had commenced. It may indeed be said that you, as an individual, made war against society as a body. There could be but one termination of such a struggle, and that would result in your defeat.'

The judge paused a second or so, and then continued—

"However much sympathy and commiseration may be felt by those who are now present for your unhappy position and awful impending death, yet there is another whose feelings must be almost, if not quite, as painful as your own.

"I allude, of course, to myself. Sitting here as I do in the capacity of judge and representative of the laws of the land, it is my duty to pass sentence of death upon you. In some cases this dreadful duty is somewhat lightened by the thought that some reprieve or pardon might be obtained, but in the present instance I have no such consolation. Your deeds of violence have been too many and too great for there to be a probability that any mitigation of your sentence will take place.

"Therefore I must adjure you to cast as much as possible all thoughts of this world from your mind, and prepare for the one you are about so soon to enter. I shall summon what courage I can to pass the dread sentence of death upon you; do you in like manner strive your utmost to receive it with composure, for it is my duty to assure

you that there is not the slightest room for you to hope for any mercy.

"Prisoner at the bar, the sentence of this court, then, upon you is, that you be taken from hence to the place from whence you came, and from thence to the place of public execution, which is appointed to be Tyburn; that you be there hanged until you be dead, and your body afterwards taken down and hung in chains as a terror to all evildoers and a warning to those who may think of embracing your mode of life. Let me most earnestly and solemnly entreat you to spend the short space of time which is allotted you to live in listening to prayers and religious conversations of the ordinary appointed to the prison, that you may look for that mercy from your Creator which you cannot hope to receive from your fellow-men; therefore, may the Lord have mercy on your soul!"

CHAPTER CXLIV.

MR. SHERIFF BLANDY AND THE GOVERNOR SETTLE OFF OLD SCORES.

PERFECT silence prevailed for at least a minute after the judge had finished uttering those awful words, which doomed an erring fellow-creature like himself to death.

All eyes were bent upon the prisoner.

Notwithstanding the hopes he had of escape, and the confidence he felt in the power and will of his companions to save him, yet it was not possible for him to be otherwise than deeply moved at his present situation.

Only a portion of the judge's words reached his understanding. The remainder was one uncertain hum, though he was all the time conscious of its import.

And during this period there rushed upon his mind all the more important occurrences of his past life. Above all, stood out the faithlessness of the girl he had loved so well, and to whom his present situation might be fairly enough attributed, for had she remained constant to him he would have been an ornament to society, for which he possessed every necessary qualification.

The last words of the judge's speech, and which to him seemed naught but a hideous mockery, aroused him from the state of abstraction into which he had fallen.

Then, when the last syllable was fairly articulated, he looked anxiously into the faces of the different spectators, in a vain attempt to find whether his friends were actually there present, and to judge by the expression of their countenances what effect the termination of the trial had upon them.

But as on the former occasion, although his gaze more than once rested upon them, yet he knew them not, owing to the care with which they had been disguised.

A jailer now tapped him upon the shoulder, and, turning round at the touch, he saw they were waiting to remove him from the bar.

Seeing this, he looked no more at the countenances of the spectators, looked no longer upon the stern features of the judge, but at once turned round and accompanied them.

Despite his efforts to compose himself, he was much dejected. It was indeed scarcely possible for a human being to pass through such an ordeal as he had, without feeling some emotion.

Indeed, had he have appeared callous, we should have ceased to retain the good opinion we have of him, for, although he sinned and set himself up in opposition to the laws, yet it was only under great provocation.

The short passage which led from the dock was very quickly traversed, and then Tom found himself in a small apartment, face to face with his old enemy, the governor, whose animal-looking face beamed with a diabolical satisfaction.

"Ha! ha. You'll alter your tune now, I'll be bound. I told you how it would be. We've made up our minds to hang you, and we'll do it. Try as you will, you cannot avert your doom. It won't be long, too, before your villainous companion shares your fate, and then the gallows will have had its due."

"You reckon upon cheating it, then, do you?" said Tom, quietly.

"Don't insult me, you scoundrel," cried the governor, mad with passion, for, just as Tom finished his dry remark, he heard it followed by a laugh, and, turning in the direction whence it came, he saw Mr. Blandy sidle into the room.

"What do you mean, sir?" roared the governor.

"What do you mean?"

"Mean by what?" asked the sheriff, with a coolness that provoked the governor to the last degree.

"Your conduct, sir!"

"My conduct?"

"Yes. I should like to know what you mean by encouraging the prisoners to set my authority at defiance, and insult me to my face. I ask you again, what do you mean by it?"

"My dear sir, pray don't be so violent, but just answer me a question. Why did you speak so unbecomingly to a man in the situation of the prisoner here? Did it look as if you had one spark of manliness in you? None but a craven-hearted man would have behaved thus to a defenceless man. It shows a mean, malicious spirit, and you richly deserve what you have got, and a great deal more beside!"

"Quit this room, sir!" shrieked the governor, whose rage now got completely master of him. "Quit this room, or I'll have you turned out of it! Quit the room, I say!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said the sheriff; "and if you will condescend to take a word of advice from me, you will be very cautious as to what you are about!"

"You be d—d, and your caution too!" replied the governor, clenching his fists, and walking in a bullying manner up to him. "Will you leave the room?"

"Most certainly not!" said the sheriff, thrusting the governor from him, for he had thrust his face into his. "I have an equal right here with yourself!"

"What do you mean by striking me, sir?" said the governor. "Perhaps you think you have a right to do that, but I'm d—d if I don't convince you to the contrary! Take that!—and that!"

As he spoke these words, the governor gave the sheriff a couple of heavy blows in the face, which made that gentleman stagger back a few paces.

Nevertheless, he maintained his composure, and said, calmly—

"I call upon all here to witness that I was struck first, and now, Mr. Tapner, we'll settle off our old scores!"

At these words, then, he made a rush at the governor, and laid about him with right good will.

Tom King, in spite of his dejection, enjoyed this scene mightily, and he was delighted beyond measure to find that the good-natured sheriff was considerably more than a match for the rascally governor.

As for the turnkeys who were present, their gratification was unbounded, though they concealed it as much as they could.

Nor could they very well interfere, for their duty was to keep firm hold of their prisoner.

The sheriff danced round and round in a manner that not only exhibited uncommon agility, but also quite baffled Mr. Tapner, who, blinded by rage and the blows he had received, knew not where to expect his adversary's attack, and as for returning his blows, that was quite out of the question.

The contest was not of very long duration, and just as Mr. Blandy gave the governor the blow which decided the battle, the door was opened, and the Lord Mayor, followed by several of the other city dignitaries (?) entered.

They looked at each other, speechless and aghast, at the extraordinary scene before them.

Mr. Blandy wiped his face with his handkerchief.

He had sustained but little injury from his opponent, who was stretched at full length upon the floor.

"What's the meaning of this?" asked the Lord Mayor.

All were silent.

"Will no one answer me?" asked the mayor.

"Will you permit me to speak, sir?" said Tom King quietly.

"Who are you?"

"Never mind. A prisoner, if you like, but a witness as what has just taken place."

"And can you explain it?"

"I can."

"Do so, then."

Mr. Tapner, the governor, insulted Mr. Blandy in such a degree that it was impossible not to resent it. He did, however, control himself, and then the governor

without further provocation, struck him two heavy blows in the face. Staggering back, but still maintaining his composure, Mr. Blandy called upon us to bear witness that he had been struck first, and then gave Mr Tapner a sound thrashing, as he deserved."

"It's a lot of d—d lies!" yelled the governor, struggling to a sitting posture; "it's a lot of d—d lies, I tell you!"

"Mr. Governor," said the Lord Mayor, sternly, "be careful, or I shall have to fine you five shillings for swearing."

"D—n you all!" replied Mr. Tapner. "You can fine me what the devil you like!"

CHAPTER CXLV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL PROPOSE A SCHEME OF FIGURE OPERATIONS, AND ELECT DICK TURPIN CAPTAIN.

WHATEVER amount of prudence the governor may have possessed, it was pretty clear by this last defiant speech of his that the whole of it had departed.

The Lord Mayor looked all the surprise he felt.

"Mr. Tapner," he said, "I shall report this to the Secretary of State, and insist upon an investigation of your conduct being made."

"Do that, sir," said Tom; "and the result will be that he will lose his office, and it is a disgrace to the city so long as he retains it."

"Villain!" yelled the governor, whose rage burst forth again upon hearing the tones of Tom King's voice. "Villain! you are the cause of all this, but you shall suffer for it."

So saying, he made a wild kind of rush at Tom.

Now, the reader must bear in mind that King was not fettered in any way, although two men had hold of him by the shoulder.

Accordingly, when the governor came towards him, he, in the most natural manner possible, lifted his left hand and gave him such a crack between the eyes, that the governor fell flat down on the floor, as though he had been shot.

"Take that as a receipt in full of the little account between us," said Tom. "I hope you saw, gentlemen, that if I had not defended myself, he would have done me a mischief."

"Upon my word this transcends all I ever saw or heard of," exclaimed the Lord Mayor. "Officers, remove the prisoner to his cell at once, and in the meantime we will have the affair between Mr. Tapner and Mr. Blandy gone into."

Tom suffered himself to be led away unresistingly, but he felt much better now that he had really paid back to the governor some of the harsh usage he had received at his hands.

"I'm blest," said one of the turnkeys, as they led their prisoner to the condemned cell. "I'm blest if this isn't the rummest start that ever I heard on. I knew old Tapner would drop into it some day, he is so werry violent."

"Serves him right," said the other. "Tom, that was a first-rate blow you gave him. Right in between his eyes."

Tom King made no reply to these remarks from his janitors, and they put him in the condemned cell.

It was the duty of these men not upon any account to lose sight of their prisoner, so they sat down with him much in the manner Biggs and Wilson had done.

Tom was still without his irons, nor would they, without orders from the governor, be put upon him; but for all that he was quite without a hope of making his escape.

After all that had occurred on that, to him, eventful day, he felt it no little relief to lie down upon his rude couch, and try to think.

As he did so, and weighed over all the circumstances carefully in his mind, he was ready to give himself up to despair.

There was no way that he could see in which his friends could rescue him. The authorities had, as Mr. Tapner said, one and all made up their minds that he should hang, and having come to such a determination, and knowing the character of the prisoner and his friends, they would not be likely to omit anything in the shape of precaution.

We may as well say here that Mr. Tapner was suspended, and a deputy appointed in his stead, who was to act as governor until the charges brought against his predecessor were disposed of.

This deputy was a man who had long been on the look out for the situation of governor of Newgate, and as he had influence, had been promised it so soon as it should become vacant.

It was pretty clear that Mr. Tapner would be discharged, so this deputy determined upon using the utmost vigilance, so that he might be appointed to the vacant place.

Knowing, then, the fears that were entertained that the prisoner, Thomas King, would make an escape, and that his accomplices might be expected to take some energetic, daring steps to set him free, he resolved to try if he could not keep him secure.

The determination to hang the notorious highwayman was well known to him, so immediately upon being invested with authority he had Tom heavily ironed, and, moreover, secured to the wall, while four men, instead of two, were placed in the cell to guard him.

They were regularly relieved at intervals of two hours.

When Tom saw this he indeed gave himself up to despair, and trembled with the dread that his friends might make a fruitless effort to save him, which would result in their capture.

And so the day wearily passed away.

It was at that time the custom for a condemned man to receive as many visitors as often as he liked in his cell, and to be indulged with whatever things he thought proper.

On the day after the trial old Matthew came to see Tom.

The interview took place in the presence of the four men, so that little could be said.

Tom managed, however, to convey in a whisper the hope that Dick and his comrades would not risk their lives by attempting to take him out of Newgate, for sentinels were posted at every available spot, and an alarm could be instantly communicated.

To this old Matthew bid him to be of good cheer, that the highwaymen had sworn to save him from death, and they would do it, let what obstacles would arise.

But all this was conveyed with great difficulty, owing to the presence of the four men.

When Matthew had departed, however, Tom felt himself much easier in his mind than he had before his visit; he had reliance upon the power of his friends to save him.

But Tom's life, during the four days that preceded the one fixed for his execution, was monotonous enough, and too devoid of interest for it to be entertaining to our readers to describe it in detail.

Let it suffice to say that during the time Mr. Colley, the ordinary, was very attentive to him. Indeed, since the downfall of his coadjutor, he had very much altered his behaviour.

At length Sunday came.

The execution was to take place at Tyburn at twelve o'clock on Monday.

Tom maintained his composure.

In the afternoon Matthew paid him another visit, during which he managed to let Tom know that active exertions were being made to save him, and that he was to hope up to the last moment, and by no means to let his courage fail him.

This he promised to do.

And now we feel that we can leave him, and devote our attention exclusively to the proceedings of his friends.

It will be remembered that the last time they were brought particularly under the notice of the reader was when, having arrived at the "White Horse," they had, by the advice of old Matthew, made their way up stairs to a sleeping apartment, in order to obtain a few hours' rest and sleep.

Scarcely had the sun rose, then, on the following morning, than the three highwaymen awoke, and hastily attiring themselves, went down stairs to the little parlour behind the bar, where they found old Matthew waiting for them.

A substantial breakfast was placed upon the table, to which they did ample justice.

"And now," said old Matthew, as he looked up at the dingy-faced eight-day clock in the corner, "it is just a quarter to seven. The judges will take their seats at ten, so we must be at the Old Bailey at least an hour before that time."

"Well," said Claude, "what of that?"

"It will never do for you to walk up to the Sessions House dressed as you now are. You would be suspected, if not recognised at once. Dick knows the way to an old costumier's at the corner of Hart-street, Covent-garden, who disguised him once."

"And well he did it," replied Turpin. "I shall never forget my astonishment when he led me to a looking-glass and showed me, not myself, but an old, wrinkled, bowed-down farmer."

"He is second to none in his skill in disguising people. He first learned the art by dressing actors for the stage, and he has made it a kind of study. I dare venture to say that when you go to him he will disguise you so well that you shall neither of you know each other."

"If he does that," said Sixteen-String Jack, "he is a clever artificer indeed, but you will excuse me for saying that I doubt it."

"I can easily understand your doing that," rejoined the landlord, "but you will nevertheless find that I am no more than right. If you will take my advice, you will start off and see him at once, before many people get in the streets. It would be dangerous if you were to be seen to go in by some prying, meddling fellow, and then not to come out again."

"Leave that to me," said Turpin; "I know the way, and I know the old man. He won't be sorry to have me again for a customer, for I paid him liberally the last time for his trouble. Come, my friends, are you ready?"

"Quite," said Claude and Jack. "Lead on, captain."

"I shall object to you applying that title to me."

"And wherefore?"

"Because I do not deserve it any more than you do."

"Pho! pho! Dick, listen to me," said Claude Duval. "Jack and myself have talked the matter over between us. We have agreed to rescue Tom, have we not?"

"We have," replied Dick, "and we will do it."

"Of course. We need not be uneasy about that, and when we have done it we agreed to form ourselves into a band of four, and perform such exploits as should make our names remembered for ever, even as Robin Hood's is to this day."

"We did—we did!"

"Very well, then. Four men cannot act in concert without a leader. That is true, is it not?"

"Perfectly true," replied Dick Turpin. "No army could gain a victory without a general."

"That is just the remark Claude made when I spoke to him upon the subject," said Sixteen-String Jack; "and, such being the case, we must look upon ourselves as an army, and choose a general. We have resolved that it shall be you."

"Of course I feel flattered at your preference," said Dick; "but we need Tom's consent first."

"Not so; the majority of votes will decide the question, though I know well enough he will agree to it at once."

"Well, if you will have it so," said Turpin, "it is not for me to say not."

"Of course not," said Claude.

"We have determined, as I said, to form ourselves into a band of four," continued Sixteen-String Jack. "You shall be our leader. We will then act only under your commands."

"Well—well," said Turpin, "let us talk further about that when Tom King is amongst us."

"Certainly; but do you not see the advantages that would ensue from such an arrangement? We should be able to defy all efforts at capture, for, together, we should be a match for more than twice our number, and what traveller would be in a position to resist us?"

"No one!" laughed Dick; "that would be a merry time."

"We will take only from those who can afford to lose," said Sixteen-String Jack; "and, whenever we have an opportunity, hold out a helping hand to those in distress. In fine, we will, if you like it, constitute ourselves the champions of innocence against wrong, as the knight errants did of old, and our chief business shall be to redress grievances and succour the unfortunate."

"It is a grand and noble purpose," said Turpin; "and I shall feel proud to be at the head of such a confederation. I am firmly of opinion that we shall be the means of foiling the machinations of many evil ones against the good; and let us hope that the performance of every one of these deeds will weigh in our favour against those crimes we have from time to time committed."

CHAPTER CXLVI.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN FIND THE COSTUMIER'S HOUSE FULL OF DANGER.

"It's all very fine for you three to stand chattering there, laying your plans for the future," said old Matthew Gale, in a good-tempered voice, as soon as Dick Turpin had finished speaking. "I say, it's all very fine, but in my humble opinion it would look far better if you would proceed to action."

"You are right," they cried, "it is quite time for action now, or we shall not be in time to get in."

"Follow Dick," said Matthew, "he knows the way to the old crib; he has been there before."

"Yes—yes!" said Turpin. "I will go out first, and you two can follow me at a little distance. We shall not be so likely to excite suspicion then!"

"Do you think there is any danger?" asked Claude.

"No more than usual. It is best to be cautious, and at this hour the streets begin to fill with people."

"They do—they do! and so the sooner you start the better."

"Look after Black Bess, Matthew," said Turpin, to the landlord, as he left the little parlour.

"Don't be afraid of that, she will be all right!"

"I knew I can trust her to your care."

"You can, Dick, with every safety. I would not have anything happen to her while she was under my charge for all the world. When you leave Hart-street, you had better make your way direct to the Old Bailey. I shall be there among the other spectators, and it will be the best plan, if you should happen to see me, not to recognise me."

"Of course! I'm off! Now, my friends, follow me! I shall cross Drury-lane and go down Russell-street, by the side of the theatre."

"Right!"

Turpin, assuming the air of a casual visitor to the inn, sauntered quietly along the passage, and stood calmly for a minute at the door.

He looked up and down the street.

To have seen him, one would have set him down as an idler, who had nowhere particular to go, and was debating which direction he should take.

It was a finished piece of acting.

It was done with an important motive in view.

Listlessly as his eyes appeared to wander about, yet in reality his glance was never more keen.

His object was to ascertain that there was no foe of his in sight.

The coast appeared quite clear. A good many people, of course, were in the street, considering the time in the morning, but that they were all ordinary pedestrians intent upon their own business, he was pretty certain.

Having assured himself of this, still keeping up the character of an idler, which he had assumed, he stepped off the doorstep and strolled up Drury-lane.

He went nearly as far as the corner of Princes-street, and then he crossed over to the corner of the theatre.

As he did so, he cast a hasty glance in the direction whence he had come, and saw, to his great satisfaction, his two friends walking along arm in arm.

They crossed over a little lower down.

Now that he knew they must have him in sight, Dick did not venture to look behind him again, but once more crossing over near the stage door of the theatre, he turned down Crown-court, which place is well known to many of our readers because it is there that the celebrated Dr. Cumming's Chapel is situated.

It is scarcely necessary to observe that it has been built since Dick Turpin's time, and that the court itself

was not then the smooth, clean, well-paved, respectable thoroughfare that it is now.

On the contrary, it was rather notorious as the residence of several desperate characters, whose occupation was, for the most part, nocturnal.

Along this court, then, to its junction with Martlett's court, Dick Turpin went at a steady pace.

Turning round to his left, about fifty more steps took him into Bow-street, a few yards only above where the well-known police-office is situated.

Before he emerged into this last-named thoroughfare, he thought his most prudent plan would be to reconnoitre.

Accordingly placing his hand against the wall, he leaned forward, so that he could take a good look down the street.

While thus engaged, Claude and Jack came up with him.

"Is it all right?" asked the latter.

"I think so," replied Dick. "I see nothing suspicious.

"Then we will venture."

"In a minute, I will show you the house first."

"Do so—do so!"

"You see that large building, there, nearly opposite?"

"You mean Covent Garden Theatre?"

"I do."

"Of course!"

"Then perhaps you also know that that very narrow street running down by the side of it furthest from here is Hart-street."

"No I did not know that."

"Well, it is, and that shop at the corner, where the shutters are all up, is the residence of the costumier."

"Oh!"

"I will go over first," continued Dick, "and do you wait here. I know the secret of asking for admission. As soon as you see me enter, cross over, but not before. I will leave the door ajar, so that you can push it open and enter without delay."

"Agreed; that will be the best plan to adopt, and the safest as well, I should think. Before you start, though, I should recommend you to take another look down the street."

To those who are familiar with the place, the following description will be unnecessary, but it will be interesting to those who are not.

Martlett's-court, then, is a narrow court on the east side of Bow-street, and nearly opposite the glass building attached to the Royal Italian Opera House, known as the Floral Hall.

The Bow-street police-station is about half a dozen houses lower down on the same side of the road, and nearly opposite which is the court, where the magistrate sits every morning.

In this narrow passage, which is more like the entrance to a house than anything else, our three friends could stand very well concealed.

Dick was able, therefore, by peeping round the corner, and only permitting just the top of his head to be visible, to see right down the street, past the police-station, for the street in that part curves round a little.

As upon the former occasion all seemed quite well. Even the one police officer, who was nearly always to be seen standing at the door of the station, was just at that time absent from his post.

Dick Turpin, perceiving all was well, made a sign with his hands to his friends to remain where they were, and crossed over.

Claude and Jack Rann watched him with the greatest attention go up the two steps before the door of the costumier's abode, and then almost disappear in the depths of the old-fashioned doorway.

It was now more than ever necessary for them to be upon the alert to watch for the door opening.

It was full five minutes though before it did, and their patience was by that time well nigh exhausted.

They then crossed over.

The door was ajar, as Dick had told them it would be, and they were inside in a trice.

The old costumier, looking older, dirtier, and untidier than before, stood just inside the shop with an unnaturally thin candle in his trembling grasp.

And now, if either of the three highwaymen could have seen into the street, they would have perceived something which would have convinced them that their situation in the old costumier's shop was one of extreme danger.

From the shadow of a doorway adjoining Martlett's-court there emerged a bulky figure.

As he came fully out into the faint morning light his costume could be seen to be that of a police-officer.

He put his finger to the side of his nose, while a look of intense cunning overspread his face.

"Werry suspicious circumstance, indeed," he said; "and werry suspicious-looking characters, too. If I didn't know he was out of the country, I should say one of the two that crossed over last was Claude Duval! Who knows, he may have come back, and, if it should turn out to be him, what a capital thing it will be for me! I will just cross over after them and put my ear to the keyhole of the door. Likely enough I shall hear something that will repay me for my trouble.'

In pursuance of this determination, the "active and enterprising officer," as the newspaper reporter would call him, crossed the street and put his ear against the panel of the door.

But, although he strained his sense of hearing to the utmost, he could hear nothing but the murmuring of voices, without being able to distinguish what was said.

Finding this to be the case, he gave up the hope of learning anything by that means, and he bethought himself of another.

He put his eye to the keyhole.

And here arose one advantage from the feeble light the old man carried. The officer could just see into the shop, but none of the objects were distinctly defined.

The circumstance of his not being able to hear what was said can only be attributed to the fact that our friends were very careful to speak only just above a whisper, and, as for the old man himself, his voice was weak and tremulous from age and weakness.

These little obstacles had the very natural effect of inflaming the officer's curiosity, but he could see no way in which he could satisfy it.

After trying to peep through the chinks in the window-shutters, and finding it impossible, he gave up the attempt in despair.

"Now what will be the best thing I can do?" he said to himself, reflectively. "Oh! there goes Tom Price; I'll ask him."

Hereupon the officer beckoned to one of his brethren, who was coming slowly from the direction of Long-acre.

"Tom," he whispered, making a kind of tube with his hand to convey the sound. "Tom!"

"Wot's the row, now?"

"Hush! Come here."

The officer, who had been named by his companion Tom Price, was so impressed with the mysterious manner of his friend, that he surmised something very particular was up, and he approached him with stealthy steps.

"Tom Price," said the first officer, as he caught the person he addressed by the collar, and pulled him towards him. "Tom Price!"

"What is it? Speak, and don't be a fool!"

"I've seen three suspicious-looking individuals come out of Martlett's-court."

"Did you? When?"

"Just a minute or two ago, and they went into this shop in a very mysterious way, and they haven't come out yet."

The two officers endeavoured to look profoundly wise.

CHAPTER CXLVII.

MR. WRIGGLES IS DETERMINED NOT TO BE THIS TIME BAULKED OF HIS PREY.

"WHAT sort of looking coves was they, Gibbs?" asked Price, after a pause.

"Ah! there's the most important thing. Unless I make a great mistake, they are all three high tobymen, for that's just what they look like!"

"The devil!"

"You may well say that!"

"But didn't you recognise them?"

"Well, I can't say I did; but if it had not been that he's out of the country"——

"Who?"

"Why, Claude Duval! If I didn't know he was out of England, I should say one was Claude Duval!"

"He may have come back."

"That's what I think. Suppose it should be him."

"What's the reward?"

"I don't know. Something handsome, you may depend."

"And they all three went into that shop, you say?"

"They did. "I seed 'em with my own eyes."

"Why, its the old theatrical property-shop."

"I knows that."

"Then I shouldn't wonder if they haven't gone in to disguise themselves."

This was so probable a supposition that they both jumped to the conclusion that it must be correct.

"Its a lucky thing for us, Tom. Let's go to the station, and lay the information."

"Very good."

"Yet, stop! There's no occasion for us both to go. You stay here, and keep watch while I run across myself."

"Agreed; but don't be no longer nor you can help."

"Trust me for that," said Gibbs, as he ran off. "You mind and keep a sharp eye on the premises."

At the rate the officer went at, it did not take him above half-a-minute to reach the police-station.

"Where's Mr. Wriggles?" he cried. "Where's Mr. Wriggles?"

"He's out."

At this moment there was a clatter of horses' hoofs, and a party of mounted officers rode up to the door.

There was a few minutes' confusion, and then the whole troop alighted.

Foremost amongst them was our old acquaintance, Wriggles, the chief police officer, and who we have lost sight of for such a long time.

Gibbs stepped forward.

"Mr. Wriggles," he said, "Mr. Wriggles."

"Well, what is it?"

"If you please, sir, as I was on my beat I saw somebody's head peeping out of Martlett's-court!"

"Make haste with your story."

"Yes, Mr. Wriggles, I won't detain you above a minute. "Thinks I, 'That's suspicious,' so I hid in a doorway close by, and presently I saw a man come out of the court, and cross the street. Where do you think he went, sir?"

"How the devil should I know! Go on with your story."

"He went into the old theatrical property-shop at the corner of Hart-street."

"Well!"

"He looked a very suspicious character, and I said to myself, 'That's a highwayman!'"

"A highwayman?"

"Just so, Mr. Wriggles, and then, having heard some talking going on in the court, though I could not hear what was said, I waited where I was expecting to see more; and sure enough I was repaid for my trouble, for in about five minutes two suspicious characters came out of the court, crossed over the street, and went into the property-shop."

"Two, do you say?"

"Yes, and they looked as much like highwaymen as we do like police officers."

"I'm jigger'd!" ejaculated Mr. Wriggles, "if it ain't them, sure enough."

"Who, sir?"

"Never mind—go on."

Gibbs now perceived there was something peculiar in the manner of the officers who had just returned with Mr. Wriggles, and he wondered what it meant.

"Go on," said Mr. Wriggles; "did you recognise either of them."

"No, sir, I didn't; but, as I said before, if I didn't know he was out of the country" ——

"Yes, yes."

"I should say one on 'em was Claude Duval, for I never saw such a remarkable likeness in my life."

No sooner did he hear these words, than Mr. Wriggles behaved in the most extraordinary manner.

Gibbs thought he had clean gone mad.

And well he might.

He seized hold of him (Gibbs) by the hand, and almost wrung it off.

Then, uttering a cry which sounded more like a wild Indian's war whoop than anything else, he took off his hat and threw it up in the air.

Gibbs stood perfectly aghast.

The other officers, too, evidently shared in their chief's gratification, though they were not quite so demonstrative.

"Nabbed," cried Mr. Wriggles, "nabbed! I've nabbed them at last. Hurrah!"

"Who, sir, who?" asked Gibbs, timidly.

"Who? Why, Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack! They have all three been upon the north road, and have robbed one of his majesty's tax collectors of a bag containing upwards of five hundred guineas."

This was a piece of information that completely took Gibbs' breath away.

"Then Claude has returned?" he gasped.

"He has, and he is in company with Turpin and Sixteen-String Jack."

"Then I claim the reward," cried Gibbs, "for they are all there in the costumier's shop at this blessed minute, and Tom Price is on the watch so that they don't leave it."

"Capital. Come on, my men. This will be the best morning's work we have done for a long time. Come on."

In a desultory throng the officers, to the number of seven or eight, followed Mr. Wriggles and Gibbs to the costumier's shop.

There they found Tom Price on the watch, who quickly assured them that no living creature had left the place.

"Then they are still inside a disguising of themselves, you may depend," said Gibbs.

"They are as good as nabbed then," said Mr. Wriggles, who, as the reader will know by the words he had uttered, had found the tax gatherer the three friends had plundered.

It now became necessary to dispose of his force to the best advantage, and with as much rapidity as possible, and in this Mr. Wriggles showed himself an able general.

A man was taking down the shutters of the shop in Bow-street, next door to the costumier's, and so he entered without difficulty, and quickly made the inmates aware of what was going on, at the same time calling upon them in the king's name to aid and assist him to the utmost of their power.

All the aid and assistance he then happened to want was merely for them to allow his men to go up to the top of the house.

He selected six for this duty, and instructed them to make an entrance into the next house as quietly as they could, and descend until they found those of whom they were in search.

This the six men set about readily enough. To reach the roof of the costumier's house was to them a matter of very small difficulty indeed, and there they found, as is usual in London houses, a trap-door in the roof, to enable the inmates to escape in case of fire.

This trap-door they found was secured on the inner side, but the fastenings were old and rusty, and gave way beneath the pressure they applied.

Having done so much, they left one of their number on guard at the trap, while the remainder slunk quietly down stairs.

In order that the highwaymen should be completely taken by surprise, Mr. Wriggles sent across to the station for a reinforcement, while he disposed the four other men, including Gibbs and Price, in such positions as to make it utterly impossible for them to leave the premises without being seen by one or other of them.

By the time he had done this, some dozen more men arrived, and placing himself at the head of the largest half of these, the others being employed as sentinels, he advanced to the front door of the shop, and knocked loudly at it, commanding them to open in the king's name.

Of course no notice was taken of this, so it was repeated three times, after which it would be lawful for them to break down the door.

By this it will be seen that Mr. Wriggles' calculations were by no means badly made. He reckoned by the time he had broken down the door the men whom he had sent to make the surreptitious entry would be ready to surprise them in the rear.

Of course these energetic proceedings, accompanied, as they were, with a great deal of noise, had the effect of attracting a large body of people, and the crowd kept increasing every moment.

From all possible directions they came, choking completely all the contiguous thoroughfares.

This, so far as the officers were concerned, was a fortunate enough circumstance, since it made it quite a matter of impossibility for either of the fugitives to leave the house they had so incautiously entered.

Success seemed to wait this time upon Mr. Wriggles, and he was in a state of the greatest gratification imaginable. Not only would a good share of the joint reward, which was offered for the apprehension of the three criminals, fall to his share, but he had as well a feeling of personal revenge against one of them at least.

It might therefore be expected that he would not be behindhand in doing his utmost to capture and lodge them in Newgate.

For the third time the command to open the door in the king's name was given by Mr. Wriggles himself, in his loudest tones, and then, as soon as the words were out of his mouth, he gave his men the signal to make their attack upon the door.

This they immediately did, and being provided with the tools necessary for the purpose, they, in a few moments, beat the door down from its hinges.

Calling, then, upon the highwaymen to surrender, they all made a terrific rush into the shop, followed by the foremost of the crowd.

But before we relate what next took place, and how the men fared who had made their way in by the roof, we will turn back to that point in our narrative when we left our three friends face to face with the old costumier, and relate what ensued thereupon.

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

THE CAPTURE OF THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN SEEMS INEVITABLE, BUT THE OLD COSTUMIER PROVES A FRIEND IN NEED.

"I REMEMBER you now, munificent sir," said the old man, as he held up the light in such a way that its beams fell upon Dick's countenance. "I have before had the pleasure of being of service to you."

"You are right," replied Turpin, "you have; and I require your aid again. These are friends of mine, and we have all been sent here by Matthew Gale."

"That is enough, gentlemen—quite enough. I require no other reference or recommendation. I am ready to do your bidding. Let me know your commands."

"We all three want a tolerably good disguise apiece, for which we are willing to pay liberally."

"I have before had a sample of your bounty, good sir."

"You shall be equally well treated if you do the job this time as well, and with expedition."

"It is a work of time, gentlemen."

"I am aware of that. Still, these disguises need not be so elaborate as the former one was. If you will select three suitable suits of clothes, we will soon have them on, and you can finish us off."

"Just so, gentlemen. Look here! You can take choice of these; they are all of the proper size."

Neither of the highwaymen spent much time in making their selection.

They chose three suits of a plain description, such as any commonplace person might wear.

This done, they proceeded to put the clothes on, which they did over those they were then wearing.

While they were thus occupied, the old man looked about among some wigs and hats.

These he handed to our friends, and then they one by one came in for a share of his attention.

Dick and Claude had already passed his hands and were in readiness, and Jack was all but done, when they all heard the unusual bustle in the street consequent upon the arrival of the police.

"Hark!" said Dick. "There is danger! I am sure of it. Someone has tracked us here, and made the officers aware of it."

"Nonsense."

"Silence, if you please," interrupted the old man. "If you will allow me I will go away and return with an account of what is going on outside."

"Do so," said Turpin. "I know I can trust you, or Gale would not have sent us here. Bring back the information we require, and you shall be rewarded sufficiently to satisfy you."

"I make no doubt of that," said the old man, with an avaricious grin. "I will not be long, good sirs. I will take the candle with me; you won't mind being in the dark. It will be safer, too, as well. There are curious old places in the house which no one knows of except myself, and I can easily get the information you desire."

So saying, the old man took up the miserable candle and left the shop.

He was not away above three minutes, but to our three friends they seemed like three hours.

"Well?" they asked, eagerly, as soon as he reappeared.

He placed his fingers on his lips for them to be silent, and then drawing close to them, he spoke in a whisper.

"The house is surrounded by police officers. Some are at this moment in the upper portion of this house, and which they will have some trouble in leaving, I rather think. At the front door of the shop is a body of men, who are armed with hammers and bars which looks as though they intended to force an entrance."

"This is startling and alarming news, indeed," said Dick Turpin. "What is to be done?"

At this moment it was that they heard Mr. Wriggles for the first time call out and command them to open in the king's name.

"Cannot you help us?" continued Turpin, turning to the trembling old man. "You tell us there are curious places in the house which are known to you alone. Is there one which will be of service to us in the present emergency, because if there is, name your own price, and you shall have it."

"It is in my power," said the costumier, "to take you to a place of perfect safety."

"And you will do it?"

"I will."

"That is well, but there is no time to lose, for, hark! there is the second command to open."

"All right. They must repeat the words a third time before they dare venture to break in, and before then you will be in a place of safety."

This was a most welcome piece of intelligence to our friends, who at first had felt something very like despair creep over them.

And now they heard quite plainly a hammering noise from somewhere overhead.

"That is the other party of officers. They will have a door or two to break down before they can reach us. This way, gentlemen—this way."

The costumier led the three highwaymen from the shop into the little parlour behind it as he spoke.

He carefully closed the door after him and secured it.

By the time this was done Mr. Wriggles had, for the third time, repeated the command, and then he shouted in loud enough tone for them to hear—

"I call upon you all to surrender! We are here in full force, and to hope to escape is sheer folly! We are bound to take you, dead or alive, so give yourselves up at once, and do not force us to use unnecessary violence! Surrender, I say, or the door will be broken down."

Mr. Wriggles waited a minute or so, to see whether any heed would be paid to it, and then he gave the signal to his men to attack and break open the door as we have already described.

"Now, gentlemen," said the costumier, "place faith in me, and act according to my instructions, and all will be well. Do you promise this?"

"Willingly, because it is the only chance we see of being able to effect our escape."

"Look here, then."

With some surprise, mixed with curiosity, they followed the old man to a cupboard on one side of the fire-place, on the other side of which was one precisely similar in appearance.

The door of the one to which he led them, the old man opened.

They saw that it reached nearly from the floor to the ceiling.

It was not fitted inside with shelves as they expected, but round the three sides of it a great many pegs had been placed, upon which hung clothing in both plenty and variety, and, in fact, it seemed quite full.

But though bulky, the things were yielding, and they easily pushed them aside.

"Walk in there, gentlemen, if you please."

Turpin and Claude Duval did so, but Jack held back.

"You don't mean to say this is the hiding-place you spoke of. If it is, I would rather be out of it than in it. You must be mad the officers will find us there immediately."

"You promised to place yourself under my directions."

"I did," said Jack, "and I will do so."

As he spoke, he stepped into the cupboard, closely followed by the old man, who shut the door carefully behind him.

They were not a moment too soon, for a grand crash reached their ears, which showed that the front door had been broken down.

"Stand still and upright all of you," said the old man, in a faint whisper. "You had better take hold of each other. I am going to touch a spring, which will let the bottom of the cupboard down."

The place was profoundly dark, but they obeyed the old man's words.

They could not see what he was about, but they heard a faint clicking noise, like the cocking of a pistol, and then they felt the floor of the cupboard slowly and silently descend with them.

The descent lasted nearly two minutes, although the distance was not above ten feet, but, as we have said, the floor of the cupboard sank with slowness.

A slight shock made them aware they had reached the bottom, but all was as dark as before, so they could not form an idea of what kind of place they were in.

"Step forward without fear. I shall have a light in a moment."

"It will be safe?"

"Quite."

The old man produced some phosphorous matches, by the aid of which he lighted a piece of candle, and when it fairly burnt up, our friends were able to see dimly about them.

They were standing at the extremity of a vaulted passage.

"This way, gentlemen, if you please," said the costumier, who stepped into it. "This way."

Our friends followed.

"And now I will show you the excellence of this contrivance, and, at the same time, convince you that you are perfectly safe. Watch me. My actions will be sufficient to explain to you, without words."

Hearing this, the three highwaymen looked keenly at what the old man was about to do.

The reader must please bear in mind, too, that though it has taken some time for us to describe all the particulars, yet, in reality, all took place in an incredible short space of time.

As our friends stood just within the vaulted passage, they could see the grooves into which the floor of the cupboard fitted.

The old man touched a spring, and then the square piece of wood, which formed the bottom of the cupboard, began to rise again.

They watched it go up and up until it was lost to sight, and presently they heard a snap.

"There," said the old man, "all's safe now. They will open the cupboard, no doubt, but they will find nothing suspicious in it, and the floor will be as solid as that of any cupboard, and unless they know the secret of the spring, I defy them to reach it."

"Whereabouts are we now?" asked Turpin.

"Underneath the pavement of Hart-street," was the reply. "Follow me. We have nothing to fear now from the officers, and you will see something which will surprise you not a little."

"But we have no time to spare," said the highwaymen. "Every moment is of importance to us."

"That I do not for a moment doubt, but, for all that, you will have to remain quiet somewhere until the mob disperse. Look here!"

The old man opened a door at the extremity of the passage as he spoke, and what they saw beyond it did indeed fill our friends with surprise.

CHAPTER CXLIX.

MR. WRIGGLES IS AGAIN DISAPPOINTED, AND THE HIGHWAYMEN PAY A VISIT TO THE FAMILY AT THE "SABLE TUNE."

No words of ours, however apt or well chosen they might be, could convey to the reader a true idea of the intense disappointment experienced by Mr. Wriggles and his officers when, upon rushing into the shop, they found it perfectly vacant, and exhibiting no signs whatever of disorder or recent occupation.

The hammering above, which was caused by his first detatchment of men trying to break down a strong door which barred their further progress, still continued.

There was a miscellaneous enough assortment of goods in the shop, and it was pretty full, still it did not take them two minutes to assure themselves that there was no one in it.

The little door leading out of it into the parlour next attracted their notice. It was fastened, but they soon had it open.

By the order of Mr. Wriggles—who began to have a disagreeable conviction creep over him that he had expended all his wonderful ingenuity and taken all his trouble for nothing—by his orders, we say, some of the men were sent up stairs to see whether they could not unfasten the door the others were endeavouring to batter down.

The little back parlour underwent a most rigid examination. There was not a single article in it which was not turned over and examined. The cupboard was opened and ransacked, all its contents one by one taken out, until it was quite empty, but all in vain.

Still Mr. Wriggles had an idea that there might be some secret connected with the cupboard, and he sounded the sides and the back with the stock of a pistol, but the dull sound produced was pretty good evidence that all was solid behind.

Then, as for the floor, the suspicion of its being moveable never once entered his mind. Besides, had he not stood on it and found it secure.

The conviction that his prey had escaped him impressed itself still more strongly and strongly upon him.

Some curses of a very awful and diabolical description came from his lips, which it is by no means our intention to repeat.

Every moment, now, that elapsed saw his hopes grow fainter and fainter.

There was not a corner in the house that was left unsearched.

But, of course, there was no result.

The officers, one and all, looked very blankly at each other, and especially Gibbs and Price—they were actually aghast.

But leaving the officers to get over their surprise and rage in the best manner they are able, and leaving them to their vain search in the costumier's abode, we will return to the vaulted passage in which we left Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack, and the curious old man.

The place into which they had emerged was underneath the stage of Covent-garden Theatre.

One glance was sufficient to show them that.

"You scarcely expected this, did you? But the fact is, I told you I was once connected with this place, and the passage you have seen was contrived for the convenience of a certain manager."

"Oh! indeed!"

"And then when I took to that house, and used to prepare the actors for the stage, I often used to avail myself of this mode of getting here."

"I suppose so."

"I had an idea, somehow or other, that one of these odd days it would prove useful, and so it has."

"Without something of the kind," said Turpin, "we should certainly by this time have been in the hands of the Philistines."

"Lead on," said Jack, "cannot you show us a way out of this place?"

"I dare say I can, but you must be careful that no one sees you emerge."

"To be sure."

"Up these steps, then."

The trio followed the old man up a flight of narrow steps, and then stood upon the stage itself.

The interior of the theatre looked like some vast cavern in the intense darkness, for what windows there were in the building, had been carefully blocked up.

It was quite evident the old man was well acquainted with the labyrinthine intricacies of the theatre, for he threaded his way through a forest of ropes and scenery with the greatest ease.



[TURPIN, DUVAL, AND RANN RESCUING TOM KING.]

At length he stopped near a small door in the wall.

"There!" he said, "is the place at which the actors enter and emerge. It opens into Covent-garden Market. As I said, all you have got to do is to take care that no one observes you leave, for if they do, the circumstance will be sure to give birth to suspicion, for this happens to be an hour when the theatre is never visited."

"I understand."

"Have you the means of opening the door?" asked Jack Rann.

"I have."

"Then open it just the least bit in the world, so that we can take a peep and see whether there is anyone outside or not."

"I am at your commands, noble sir," said the old man, as he proceeded to unfasten the door.

Having done so, he just opened it about half an inch, and closed it again with great rapidity.

"What is it?" asked the highwaymen.

"Nothing much," was the reply. "There is a police-officer standing there, and apparently with his attention wholly fixed upon this door."

"The deuce there is!"

"There is, indeed!"

"But it will never do to be kept prisoners here by one officer," said Dick Turpin; "we must take some decisive steps at once."

"What shall we do?"

"I hardly know; and yet I think the best thing to do will be to take another peep; and if he is still there, endeavour to decoy him in here by some means."

"Let that be it, then," said Claude. "I can't think of anything better, can you, Jack?"

"No."

"Let us set about it at once."

"You will do it, Dick?"

"Yes, as I proposed the scheme. You three stand aside a little, and I will open the door again, and peep out."

Agreeably to these instructions, the old costumier drew back, and Claude and Jack took up their positions close to the door.

Dick Turpin next proceeded, with all the caution possible, to draw the door the least bit open. He wanted to get it wide enough to be able to see outside without the officer being aware of it.

Fortunately the inside of the theatre was not only dark, but the doorway itself, owing to its position in the large building, was in deep shadow.

Sure enough, there was a police officer, with, apparently, his eyes fixed upon the little door.

Whether this really was so, or whether it was the result of accident, Dick could not tell.

And now how to proceed, so as to effectually prevent the man from giving the alarm, was rather a difficult question.

Dick looked out, but there appeared to be no other living creature, besides the police-officer, anywhere in sight.

Dick opened the door a little wider.

"Hist!" he said, at the same time beckoning to the officer to advance. "Hist!"

The officer saw the door open, and an ordinary-looking man appear at it, and heard him cry, "Hist!"

Now it will be as well here to state that this man was quite in ignorance of Mr. Wriggles's movements. He was, in fact, merely upon night duty, and happened to be standing where he was by the merest chance in the world.

Surmising that something unusual was going on, and not for a moment anticipating that he should run into any particular danger, he unsuspectingly advanced towards the door.

This was precisely the result which Turpin hoped for and expected, so opening the door a little farther, taking care to stand as much as possible behind it, he again mysteriously beckoned the officer to approach.

On he came.

"Now!" whispered Dick to Claude, who happened to be nearest to him. "While I keep his attention wholly occupied, you spring out and drag him in."

By the time he had concluded this hurried speech the officer reached the door.

"What is it?" he said. What do"——

What more he was going to say is unknown, for Claude just at that moment sprang forward, and putting one arm round his middle, and the other hand over his mouth, dragged him inside.

He was too much astonished to resist, until it was too late.

Dick shut the door instantly.

Claude shifted his grasp to the man's throat.

He struggled desperately, but it was of no avail.

"A rope!" cried Sixteen-String Jack; "find us a rope, and then all will be secure."

"Yes, noble sir," said the old costumier; "bring him this way, and I will show you plenty of the article you require."

"Lead on, then."

Between our three powerful friends, the officer had not the smallest chance.

The old costumier still held the light, and they followed him to a good-sized room, which was piled with miscellaneous lumber of all kinds, and especially old scenes, with the necessary rope tackle for moving it.

With some of this they very quickly tied the unfortunate officer hand and foot.

Then they closed the door, and repaired once more to the entrance.

"I believe," said the old costumier, "that you are now free to leave this place. You are disguised, but still I should recommend you to be cautious in your movements."

"Do not fear," said Dick. "Before we go, however, take this purse. I do not know how much it contains, but it is a heavy one. We are grateful for the service you have rendered us to-night, for had it not been for you we should, by this time, have been in the hands of the officers. You will see us again before long! Good morning!"

"Good morning, noble sirs!" said the old costumier, with a low bow, as the three highwaymen, one after the other, cautiously emerged into Covent-garden Market, and were quickly lost to sight.

CHAPTER CL.

OLD MATTHEW SUGGESTS TO DICK TURPIN A MEANS OF GETTING OUT OF HIS DIFFICULTY.

THE moment they felt sure they were secure from observation, the three highwaymen came to a halt.

"It is quite time we were at the Old Bailey," said Dick Turpin. "I am afraid, now, we shall have some trouble in gaining admittance."

"So do I," said Jack.

"And after what has just occurred, it will be trebly perilous for us to go there."

"I have no doubt of that," said Dick, "but I, for one, have no intention of staying away. Listen, this will be our best plan."

"What?"

"You shall hear. Disguised as we are now, we shall be almost certain to pass unsuspected, but to add to our safety, let us separate. I will go first, then you, Jack, can follow at some distance, and Claude bring up the rear. All we shall have to do will be to take care that we do not lose sight of each other."

"That will be best."

"I am glad you think so!"

"I will cross over to the opposite side of the street," said Jack, "and Claude can follow you; we shall then still further remove suspicion."

"Just so! And, as we are agreed, let us start at once."

After these words, the three highwaymen disposed themselves in the manner they had arranged, and avoiding the more populous thoroughfares, took their course in as direct a line as possible to the Old Bailey.

St. Sepulchre's clock chimed half-past nine as they reached their destination.

As usual, there was a crowd of persons about the entrance to the Sessions-house, and this was a circumstance very much in the favour of the highwaymen, for it diverted attention from them.

They were particularly careful to keep Dick in sight.

And now Turpin, for one whose person was so well-known to the police as he was, performed a very daring action, and one that made his two companions fairly hold their breath.

Walking straight up to one of the police-officers, who was standing at the foot of the staircase, he said in a feigned voice—

"We have heard there is to be a remarkable trial to-day. It is so, is it not?"

"Well, yes," said the officer, completely deceived by the appearance of the person who addressed him. "Tom King is going to be tried to day."

"Ah!"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you think," asked Dick, sinking his voice to a whisper, "that you could find us a place for a guinea, where we could see what takes place?"

"This way, please," said the police-officer. "This way, if you please."

The offer of a guinea was too much for him to withstand.

And so our three friends were comfortably installed in a front seat in the gallery, from whence a capital view of the court could be obtained.

The result of the trial has been already made known to the reader.

With an interest, which can be scarcely understood, they listened to all the proceedings.

As the counsel for the prosecution stated the case, Dick knew it was true in every particular.

Then when he heard it whispered that some months ago Tom King had robbed the judge himself of a very valuable snuff-box, he looked upon his condemnation as certain.

But, above all, he was incensed against the counsel employed by Mr. Lazenby, and for which he had paid so high a price.

This, however, was unjust. The evidence was too complete, and the conviction too determined upon, for him to stand the slightest chance.

The jurymen themselves had individually felt the inconvenience and danger of travelling with money or valuables of any kind in their possession, and they looked upon it as a duty to themselves to bring this man in guilty.

And so Dick and his friends waited there until the case was over and the prisoner removed.

Then they left the court.

There seemed to be no suspicion as to who they really were.

By preconcerted arrangement they all three separated and made their way to old Matthew's crib in Drury-lane by different and circuitous routes.

Sixteen-String Jack was the first to arrive.

A word from old Matthew let him know that, at present all was well, and that there was no new danger to apprehend.

He seated himself in the little private parlour behind the bar, already so well-known to our readers.

"I can see the result of the trial," said old Matthew, "without asking you any questions. However, it is no more than I expected."

"Nor I," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Still, we won't give up."

"Not at all. I think we have as good a chance now as ever."

"Better."

"Well, I don't know exactly for that. But here's Dick."

Turpin entered the parlour as he spoke.

"Where's Claude?" he asked.

"Not arrived yet."

"He ought to have been here first. I have come the longest way. I hope nothing has happened to him."

"Oh! you can safely let him alone for getting out of a scrape. Ah! here he is."

Claude Duval, looking rather flushed and excited, walked into the parlour, and closed the door.

"What is the matter?" asked Dick. "How is it you are so late?"

"Confound it!" was the reply. "Just as I got to the corner of Drury-lane I met an officer who declared he knew me."

"Indeed."

"I think he mistook me for some one else."

"Not that he thought you Claude Duval?"

"No. He would have raised a greater outcry than he did. However, I was obliged to dispose of him."

"How was that?"

"Why, just where we stood I saw a cellar under a shop, where a cobbler was sitting at work, and very attentively observing us, so I caught hold of the officer by the back of the neck and the seat of his breeches, and threw him right in."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Matthew Gale. "Capital. Ha! ha!"

"He went in with a tremendous crash, I can tell you; but I did not wait to see the result, but made my way here as fast as possible, and I believe without being observed."

"That's all right, then, and even if they do come peeping and prying, I can stow you where they will never find you."

"Thanks, Matthew. You are a real friend to us. And now about Tom. What are we to do?"

"That is a serious matter, Dick," said Claude, "and we must reflect before we decide how we are to act."

"Exactly."

"What is your advice, Jack? Do you think we could do any good by breaking into Newgate?"

"I am afraid not. Rely upon it, every possible precaution will be taken to prevent his escape. They have made up their minds to hang him, and without we are very careful they will do it."

"They shall not," said Dick, "while I live. The difficulties which I have already met with, and those which I can see, so far from daunting me or turning me from my purpose, only confirm me in it. The time, now, is drawing very short, but it is yet long enough to do wonders."

"That is true enough," said Claude Duval, "but it appears to be the most difficult and dangerous affair we have ever been engaged in. I was going to say hopeless. But we are resolved to stick to you, Dick, and help you, and we'll do it."

"We will," repeated Sixteen-String Jack.

"Thanks," said Dick Turpin, as he took a hand of each in his own. "Do not think the enterprise a hopeless one. I have a presentiment that we shall carry it out successfully."

"But how shall we act?"

"There I am at present at a loss, but if we all set our minds to work we shall soon think of something I have no doubt."

"Will you allow me to make a suggestion?"

It was old Matthew who asked the question.

Of course we will. What is it? You have been of good service to us in this way before, my friend, and we shall listen to what you have got to say with the greatest attention. What is it?"

"Really," said old Matthew, as a satisfied smile irradiated his rubicund countenance, "really, what I have to propose is so simple, that I am almost ashamed to say it after the way you have spoken, for I can tell you expect it to be something extra."

"We do! we do!"

"Then you will be disappointed, for it isn't."

"Let us hear it, and then we can judge."

"Very well, gentlemen; then what I was going to propose was, that you all three go to-night to the meeting of the family at the 'Three Tuns,' and lay the particulars of the case before them, and rely upon it they will hit upon some means of getting him free."

"Capital!" exclaimed the three friends.

Matthew looked pleased.

"That is as good a suggestion as could well be made," said Dick Turpin. "I have not ventured there since the night when Sir Theodore Houghton met with the reward he so richly deserved. That is a long time ago now, so I should think there would not be much danger in going there again."

"None at all, I should say, for no one could possibly expect you. It falls on a lucky night, too."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, this is Wednesday, and on Wednesday evening, as you know, there is always a full gathering."

"There is, but I had forgotten it. We will lay by for a few hours, and then we will go. I will put the case plainly before them."

And in pursuance of this determination, Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack, set out from the "White Horse" in Drury-lane, to visit the thieves' ken in Seven Dials.

CHAPTER CLI.

DICK TURPIN RECEIVES AN OVATION FROM THE "FAMILY" AT THE "THREE TUNS."

A LONG, low, smoke-begrimed, underground apartment, dimly lighted by tallow lips stuck in sconces, and placed at irregular distances along the walls.

In the centre a table, many feet in length, but disproportionately narrow.

Seated round it upon clumsy benches, inverted casks, and such like articles, were some forty or fifty desperate-looking men.

They were composed of one branch of the persons who in London get their living in defiance of the laws, or, as they called themselves, in their own vernacular, "the family."

The reader will remember that in the earlier portion of this story he was introduced to this apartment—if the term may be applied to such a place—as well as to some of the company in it.

It was, as we then stated, situated beneath the ground-floor of the "Three Tuns" public-house.

On this particular night—it being one upon which the whole of the "family" who possibly could do so assembled—the noise was prodigious.

The chairman, who, in accordance with custom, was installed in a wooden arm-chair, placed upon the end of the table, made vain and ineffectual attempts to restore order.

Every moment witnessed the arrival of some other member.

It was not until all assembled that the ordinary proceedings of the evening commenced.

Then the appeals of the chairman would be listened to, and tolerable silence obtained.

It was during all this wild uproar that our three friends entered.

They were far from wishing to attract attention just then, so they sat down unobserved upon the seat nearest to the door by which they entered.

It was the first time Claude Duval and Jack Rann

had seen the place, and they looked about them inquiringly.

But in its general features the scene presented to them nothing new.

It was not long, however, before the room got completely full, and then the chairman succeeded, after many efforts, in procuring a temporary and partial silence.

"Silence, pals," he cried. "Silence. A very important piece of information has been given to me, and if you will all hold your rows a minute I will tell you what it is."

Cries for order now arose on all sides, and when they had subsided the place became tolerably quiet.

"Gentlemen," said the chairman, "I have the pleasure to announce to you the fact that there is to-night amongst us one who is a member of our glorious profession, and the most glorious member of it, too. Gentlemen, I propose that he takes the chair on this here occasion."

"Name—name!" cried the rude assemblage. "Name—name! Who is it? Who is it?"

"Order, pals, and you shall hear. The member alluded to as being present is Dick Turpin, the hightobyman!"

The uproar that followed this announcement is far beyond all description.

"Hurrah! hurrah! Bravo for Dick Turpin! Where is he? Let him come this way! Put him in the chair! Let's drink his health! Hurrah, pals! We'll have a jolly night of it! Bravo! bravo!"

Such were a few of the more vociferous cries which could be distinguished above the Babel of other sounds.

In obedience to this call, the unanimity of which was so evident, Dick Turpin rose from where he had been sitting, and forced his way through the throng towards the chairman.

He was quickly perceived, and then seized by a dozen arms, and lifted bodily on to the table.

In this position he was a very prominent object.

His appearance was saluted with an applause that was, without exaggeration, absolutely deafening.

He bowed low and gracefully in acknowledgment.

"Take the chair! Take the chair!" was the universal cry.

The man who ordinarily fulfilled the duty of president over the rude throng had risen from his chair, and stood by the side of it, holding one of the arms.

Dick seated himself in an attitude that was at once imposing and theatrical, and fresh bursts of welcome and applause succeeded it.

The ex-chairman raised his hand, and as the eyes of all the company were turned in that direction the gesture was seen, and imagining he had something important to say, they prepared to listen to it.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "listen to me for one moment."

"Hear! hear! Silence!"

"I feel a great deal of pleasure on the present occasion in making room for one who is far worthier to sit here as chairman than I am."

"Hear! hear! That'll do! that'll do!"

But the chairman, unheeding, went on.

"I have to propose, gentlemen, that you every one fill up your glasses, and drink to the health of our honoured chairman, the celebrated Dick Turpin, the hightobyman!"

"Hurrah! Bravo!"

Dick rose.

Instantly all, as soon as they saw the movement, were silent.

He took a tolerable-sized purse from his pocket.

He held it aloft in the air, as high as the ceiling would allow him, and then let it fall upon the table.

The coins jingled musically as they descended.

"There," said Dick, "that will pay for something all round. Call the landlord, and let every one order just what they like."

The noise which had formerly prevailed was silence in comparison with the uproar that succeeded this speech and action.

Dick's popularity was in the ascendant.

It was some time before all were served.

From the elevated situation he occupied, Dick had an excellent view of the room and its inmates.

So soon, then, as he perceived that every one had his glass filled before him, he rose.

The signal was obeyed by all present, and rising to their feet, they raised the brimming glasses in the air, while the health of Dick Turpin was drank with every possible manifestation of delight.

Then the tumult having somewhat subsided, he proceeded to respond; and, amid a perfect silence, during which the eyes and attention of all were fixed upon him, he spoke as follows—

"Gentlemen," he said, bowing, "of course you can understand how proud and pleased I am to find I stand so well as I do in your estimation, and how grateful I feel for the manner in which you have drank my health. But, gentlemen, I came here to-night with a particular object in view, and the way in which I have been received encourages me to make known to you what it is without further preface or delay."

Hear! hear!" interrupted a chorus of voices.

"Silence all! Let's hear what he has to say! Hurrah for Dick Turpin! Speak! speak!"

As soon as he saw a chance of making himself heard, Dick spoke, but as soon as he began there was an immediate silence.

"It must be well known to all of you," he said, "that my comrade, Tom King, has been captured, lodged in Newgate, brought to trial, and condemned to die at Tyburn on Monday morning. Gentlemen, Tom King is my friend, and, as a brave man, I honour him. It was through me that he was taken prisoner, and I have sworn to set him free. But hitherto all my endeavours have been foiled. The authorities have determined to bring him to death, and they have taken precautions such as never were taken before to prevent all possibility of escape and rescue. I engaged a clever lawyer to try to bring him off, but he failed. He still languishes in his cell, where four men keep guard over him, and watch his every movement. Gentlemen, I appeal to you, and call upon you to assist me to keep the oath I made, that I would set him free if I had to pull Newgate down stone by stone to do it."

"We will! we will! Hurrah for brave Dick Turpin and his friend, Tom King! Three cheers, mate! We will get him out! Hurrah! down with the old prison! Let's set light to it, and burn it down! That'll be the plan! Bravo!"

Turpin began to speak, and once more all were still.

"I cannot express my joy at finding you so unanimous in your wish to aid me. Gentlemen, I beg you will think over the whole of the case, and decide in what way his escape is to be achieved. There is plenty of time for deliberation, but before we go any further I have some intelligence to communicate to you which will, I hope, afford you the greatest satisfaction. I ought to have mentioned it before, but it is not too late to repair the omission. Gentlemen, I have the pleasure to inform you that there are two other friends of mine to-night here present. They are well known to you by name, and I hope you will give them a hearty welcome. One is the celebrated world-famed Claude Duval! the other"—

But Dick's voice was drowned by the confusion which this announcement caused, and the other name could not be heard.

Claude Duval rose, and was instantly recognised by the majority of "the family," who crowded around him with every manifestation of delight.

He was lifted on to the table as Dick had been.

And then, after the ceremony of drinking his health was gone through, and he had briefly responded to it, Dick spoke.

"The other friend who is here present is Jack Rann, better known as Sixteen-String Jack!"

It was now Jack's turn to be placed upon the table, and he stood there in a confused, shrinking manner, habitual to him under such circumstances.

The delight of "the family" at having among them at one time three such very notorious characters was unbounded, and for a moment Tom King was forgotten.

But Dick took care to remind them of it.

He had anticipated a hearty welcome, but scarcely the ovation he had received.

Two chairs, in addition to the one upon which he sat, were placed upon the table, and Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack seated in them.

Then all gave themselves up to an attentive consideration of the best means to be employed to effect Tom King's release.

Many means were proposed · in fact, every one had a scheme of his own.

The meeting was prolonged until a late, or rather, an early hour, and then they separated, having agreed upon the course to be pursued.

What it was it is unnecessary here to say. It will develop itself.

The three friends reached the White House again in safety, and there we will leave them while we devote some space to an account of what took place in the meanwhile at Newgate.

CHAPTER CLII.

THE HANGMAN DRIVES TOM KING TO TYBURN, AND MEETS WITH A SLIGHT SURPRISE.

THE time passed wretchedly and wearily enough to Tom King while in the condemned cell.

On the morning following the occurrences just related, old Matthew Gale paid him a visit, and communicated to him the results of the meeting with "the family" at the "Three Tuns."

This intelligence was sufficient to rekindle hope in his bosom, for, if the truth must be told, he had begun to despair.

A remarkable change took place in his manner after the interview with the worthy landlord, which the men on guard over him did not fail to notice, and were extra vigilant accordingly.

But nothing took place to reward them for their trouble.

And so the days crept on until Sunday morning came.

This was the time that Tom most dreaded, and he would have given anything to escape the ordeal of appearing in the condemned pew in the chapel, and hearing the ordinary preach the condemned sermon over him, while he would be the cynosure of a thousand unfeeling eyes."

It was a needless aggravation of the last few hours he had to spend on earth.

But, finding it inevitable, he nerved himself to bear it as well as he was able.

The gallery devoted to the reception of those whose curiosity brought them to the chapel was crowded with fashionably-dressed people, for it was only those who had the means of paying handsomely who were privileged to see the show.

Tom tried his best not to do so, but he could not help shrinking a little when he was marshalled into the chapel, and led to the seat appropriated to those in his position.

It was rather singular that during the past week he was the only one who received sentence of death. At that time, when so many crimes were visited with the extreme penalty of the law, it was very rarely that such a thing as this occurred. The criminal annals of the period show that on most hanging mornings five to seven or ten perished.

How different it is now!

Only a week or two back the writer saw in the public prints the account of the trial of a man for highway robbery. The case was fully proved, and the prisoner found guilty. In the time of which we are writing the sentence would have been death upon the scaffold; as it was, the Common Serjeant committed him for two months with hard labour.

This, we think, is going to the opposite extreme.

The punishment is manifestly inadequate.

But to return.

Tom King was, as we have said, the sole inmate of the condemned pew.

The eyes of all were therefore directed entirely upon him. There was no one near him to distract any portion of their attention.

The position he occupied was about as uncomfortable and unenviable a one as could well be imagined, so it will not be thought wonderful that his embarrassment was so great as to make him only partially conscious of what was taking place. He seemed to see all things through a dense mist; and as for the words of Mr. Colley, the ordinary, if they reached his ears, they most certainly did not penetrate to his understanding.

It is questionable whether he ever experienced so great a feeling of relief as he did when he found, by the universal movement made by all, that the service was at an end.

Assuredly, never did his cell appear so pleasant a place as it did when he was led back to it.

The remainder of the day passed like the preceding ones.

In the afternoon, however, old Matthew paid him another visit, when he again assured him that all would go well, and despite whatever precautions might be taken by the authorities, they would be of no avail, and in no way prevent his rescue, which might be looked upon as a certainty.

And then, after old Matthew had departed, the last rays of daylight faded from the dungeon, and night rapidly came on—that night which it was determined should be the last he should pass on earth.

He threw himself upon his rude, hard couch.

But he slept not.

That was out of the question.

Each hour seemed an age.

The men who were on guard over him smoked their pipes in silence, for it was only occasionally that they spoke to each other, and then only when necessary.

And so the night wore away, and morning came.

There was an unusual stir in Newgate at a very early hour.

Outside, although many hours would elapse before the procession started, a dense crowd had collected.

From the corner of the Old Bailey nearest Fleet-street, it reached to Giltspur-street, and then far away down Skinner-street and Snowhill.

Its bulk continually increased, and there was every indication that it would before long form one unbroken line to Tyburn, at which place another and as large a crowd had collected.

The news that the celebrated highwayman, whose deeds had caused so great a commotion in the land, was about to pay the full penalty of his crimes, had been diffused over the whole metropolis, then by no means the gigantic place which it is now.

The greatest excitement prevailed.

As for Tom himself, although he had every confidence in his friends, yet he could not help feeling the full peril of his situation.

As, however, the day came, he grew much calmer, and was able to, in a great measure, shake off the nervous apprehensiveness which had possession of him during the darkness; but that was only natural.

The plan, too, which had been agreed upon by his friends for his rescue, was so good a one that, provided no unforeseen accident occurred, it had every chance of success.

Under the influence of these feelings, he was able to partake heartily of the rich breakfast placed before him; for, as we have had already occasion to remark, prisoners were at that time allowed to be indulged with whatever they liked in the shape of eating and drinking, and it is a disgraceful, but well-known, fact, that many malefactors were taken to the place of execution in a state of bestial intoxication.

Tom, however, drank only sparingly of some excellent wine, for Matthew had furnished him with ample funds.

When the breakfast was over, several persons came into his cell.

One was the new deputy-governor, who had taken the utmost pains to perform all his duties with scrupulous exactness, and he used every artifice he could think of to let the civic authorities perceive it.

He was followed by the ordinary, whose behaviour was now about as unlike what it had been as it was possible for it to be.

Then came two of the sheriffs, who had the disagreeable duty to perform of accompanying the prisoner to Tyburn.

One was unknown to Tom, but the other was Mr. Blandy, whose usually smiling countenance was now grave and sombre.

Some turnkeys closed the procession.

"Now, prisoner," said Mr. Cawthorn, for such was the name of the deputy-governor, "your time has come, and I hope, for all our sakes, that you will make no unnecessary bother, but submit to your fate with a good grace. Unlock the chain."

Three of the turnkeys now came forward.

Two of them took up their positions on either side of Tom and placed their hands on his collar, while the other

took a bunch of keys from his pocket, with which he undid the massive padlock which secured him by a chain to a staple firmly imbedded in the solid masonry.

Tom was perfectly well aware that he would gain nothing by any attempt at violence, so he remained quite still and tractable.

Mr. Cawthorn was vastly pleased, for, of course, he attributed this peaceful demeanour to the circumstance of the prisoner having been deeply impressed with the words he had uttered by way of caution and advice.

It was easy to be seen that the good-hearted Mr. Blandy was deeply affected by Tom's position. His behaviour on several occasions had greatly pleased him; he could see that there was about him that unmistakable impress of a gentleman which can never be assumed, and very rarely disguised, and he much regretted that one so gifted and well-educated as he appeared to be, should suffer so ignominious a doom.

Having been freed from the chain which confined him to the wall, Tom was led by his jailers into the yard of the prison, in which stood the horse and cart which was to convey him to Tyburn.

Here the smith was in waiting to knock the rivets out of his fetters, for prisoners were never taken to the scaffold in chains.

This ceremony was quickly performed. Long practice had conferred a great degree of dexterity upon him.

It would seem that the authorities had some idea a rescue would be attempted, for a large body of mounted, well-armed police-officers were in attendance, as well as a whole detachment of dragoons, who were to form a complete circle round the cart.

Tom's heart sank a little when, from a gloomy gateway, he saw these make their way into the yard.

They completely filled it.

Well he knew it would be no easy task to overcome men so well trained to the use of warlike weapons as they were.

They had, too, been evidently selected as large, powerful men, and such as would be best able to repel an assault.

A great deal of bustle and confusion took place, for many of the horses were very restive.

A coffin was placed across the front of the cart.

It was a frightfully common affair, the wood of which it was composed was deal, painted black, while it was roughly fastened together with white-headed nails, which gave it a ghastly and horrible look.

CHAPTER CLIII.

PARTICULARLY RELATES THE MANNER IN WHICH TOM KING WAS TAKEN TO TYBURN.

A PLAINLY perceptible shudder swept over Tom King from head to foot as this ominous object met his gaze.

But that was only natural.

It was a horrible idea to make a man sit down beside the coffin which was to contain in a short time his own remains.

One of the officials now tapped Tom on the shoulder, and bade him take his seat in the cart.

He obeyed.

Resistance would have been futile, and, worse than that, would have provoked ill-usage.

He was followed by the ordinary, who, on this occasion, was attired in full canonicals.

The hangman now crawled forward, and, taking the reins in his hand, sat down on the front of the cart.

And so the whole procession was formed before it began to defile through the low arched door into the Old Bailey.

By the usual time the whole of the preparations were complete.

It was no slight consolation to Tom to think that he was spared the indignities and exultation which Mr. Tenner would have displayed on the occasion.

A troop of mounted police, well armed with cutlasses, headed the procession.

Then, when they were in perfect readiness to start, the gates were thrown open.

As this was done, Tom caught a transient glimpse of a countless mass of human beings, swaying to and fro like waves upon the ocean.

The duty of these police-officers was, by forming themselves into a compact body, to force a passage through the crowd

They walked six abreast, and there was probably fifty or sixty of them.

Immediately after them came the cumbrous carriages in which the sheriffs were conveyed.

After them came another body of police-officers, but they were on foot. There was, certainly, not less than a hundred of them.

In the centre, and completely hemmed in by them, was the cart containing the hangman, the coffin, the condemned prisoner, and the ordinary.

Then an outer circle was formed by the detachment of dragoons, whose heavy horses caused the people to retreat to a respectful distance.

Tom looked upon the mass of well-armed men by which he was surrounded with something like dismay.

How could his friends hope to break through such a force, and rescue him.

The idea seemed absurd.

Truly were those in power determined that on this occasion, at least, their victim should not escape.

And thus, amid the shouts, screams, yells, groans, and hisses of the excited populace, the dismal procession started.

Tom looked eagerly around him, as soon as they turned the corner of the Old Bailey into Skinner-street.

But no faces which he could recognise met his eye.

It was, however, easy to see that the majority of the people, of whom the crowd was composed, sympathized with and were in favour of Tom King.

This was a circumstance that quickly forced itself upon the officers, though they had been previously led to anticipate that such would prove to be the case.

The appearance of Tom King alone was well calculated to enlist the good feeling of the people, and in addition to this, they had no great dislike for what he had done. They had none of them suffered any individual loss, for it was a rather notorious fact that neither he nor his comrade Turpin ever robbed those who could not afford to lose.

As it happened, none of those who had turned out to witness his execution were in that enviable predicament, nor was it likely that they ever would be.

Therefore, to them a highwayman was something more than an ordinary felon.

It is ever the case that, with the uneducated, courage is the attribute to be admired above all others, and is the one held in most esteem. We suppose it will always be so.

It was plain enough to be seen that, in the event of a rescue being attempted, they would befriend the prisoner and oppose the authorities.

This is a weakness common to all mobs.

The dense mass parted right and left before the advance of the solid body of mounted officers, who headed the procession.

As the cart reached the top of Snowhill, Tom turned a little and looked before.

Stretched up Holborn, as far as ever his eye could reach, was still the same mass of closely-packed human beings.

The shops were one and all closed, but the upper windows were crowded with eager and excited spectators, while in many places the very roof-tops were thronged.

Those persons who happened to be in Fleet-street or the Strand upon the day when the Princess Alexandra entered London, and saw the crowd that was there assembled, will be able to form a very good idea of what Holborn and the Oxford-road were like upon this eventful morning.

On reaching the foot of Holborn-hill, which then was a far more difficult ascent than it is at the present time, the cavalcade came to a halt.

The bell of St. Andrew's church was tolling dismally.

"Now," thought Tom, "will be the opportunity seized upon by my friends to achieve my rescue."

But as the three minutes, during which they stayed, passed away without the slightest manifestations being made, his heart turned cold, and a deadly sensation of sickness came over him.

The word was given, and once more the cavalcade was set in motion.

On—on they went without meeting with anything in the shape of opposition worthy of the name.

The crowd, which grew denser at every step, still shouted, groaned, and fought, as the humour took them.

Of course that wide and noble street which now connects Oxford-street with Holborn was not then in existence. It is, in fact, quite a modern improvement, having been executed within the remembrance of the majority of our readers.

Its site was then occupied by a thickly-populated district, a rookery, in fact, where crime and violence of every kind found a lurking-place.

The route to the Oxford-road then lay through the heart of St. Giles's. Indeed, that route can be taken even now.

There was a public-house in the High-street where hanging processions always halted, and where from time immemorial a bowl of wine was handed to the prisoner, who was supposed to drink the health of all the crowd.

But Tom was in no humour to comply with this custom, but still he deemed it advisable to do so, lest he should give offence to the assembled concourse.

The officers, too, and soldiers were given some refreshment, it being, in fact, a kind of half-way house.

The landlord himself came out with the huge bowl of punch in his hands, and gave it to Tom, who received it with a bow.

A loud hurrah arose from the crowd.

The guard were instantly on the alert, but there was nothing to apprehend.

Tom stood up in the cart, and, turning to the spectators, made another and a lower bow, and then drank some of the punch.

While he did so, he took the opportunity to cast an anxious glance over the crowd.

But no signs of his friends could he see.

Tom's hopes sank lower still, and when he sat down again and the procession moved on, he began in good earnest to prepare himself for death.

And yet, he asked himself, could it be possible that his friends would allow him to be taken to death without making at least an effort to save him? He thought not. They had doubtless some good reason for not making their appearance.

And thus, alternately flushed by hope and chilled with the cold breath of despair, he continued on his unwilling journey.

The broad country road, now called Oxford-street, was slowly traversed.

As they drew yet nearer and nearer to the fatal tree, so did their progress become slower and slower.

The body of police found their duty of forcing a passage increase in difficulty every moment.

But it was from no positive unwillingness on the part of those who were nearest to them that this arose.

It was because the people were already so closely packed that it was next to an impossibility to compress them into a smaller compass.

Very gradually, however, they gave way.

Then the triple-tree appeared in sight.

Tom knew it, not because he himself saw the ill-omened object, but because of the hoarse cry which arose from the people.

And still, as Tom's eyes roamed over the sea of faces, not one familiar countenance could he see.

But let it be said, that he did not perceive one that bore an expression altogether inimical to him.

But where was Dick, and Claude, and Jack? What had occurred to prevent them from carrying out their intentions as to a rescue?

Were the authorities to prevail? Was he to be a hangman's prey?

One would have thought so from a contemplation of the state of affairs.

But yet, let the chance be ever so small, his three companions were not the sort of men to give up without at least making an effort to save him.

It was in vain that Mr. Colley, the ordinary, endeavoured to arrest his attention. All that he said was wholly unheeded, for Tom understood him not.

The cart now reached the fatal spot, and here a brief pause was made while some necessary forms were subscribed to.

CHAPTER CLIV.

TOM KING IS RESCUED AT A CRITICAL MOMENT BY HIS FRIENDS.

It will be neither out of place nor uninteresting for us to take advantage of this interval in the proceedings of this terrible drama, and make the reader exactly aware of the manner in which persons were executed at Tyburn, inasmuch as the mode now adopted differs widely from it, which makes an explanation necessary for the due comprehension of the unlooked-events which so closely followed.

The method now practised must be pretty well known.

A firm wooden stage is erected, having at its opposite sides two upright beams of wood.

Resting upon the tops of these is a horizontal beam, from the centre of which the rope is suspended.

In the middle of the platform is a trap-door, secured on the under-side by a strong steel bolt.

Upon this trap-door the prisoner stands, the cord is scientifically adjusted about his neck, the white cap drawn over his face to conceal the convulsion of the countenance. All being so far accomplished, the ceremony is terminated by the hangman making his way beneath the scaffold and withdrawing the bolt.

The instant this is done, the trap-door swings back upon its well-oiled hinges, and the body, falling with great swiftness, is stopped by a sudden jerk, which in most cases is sufficient to extinguish animation.

But in the good old times they were by no means so humane; the simple fact of the procession to Tyburn being enough to bear out that assertion. That is all done away with now. The execution takes place in front of the prison, and the needless exposure to a gaping crowd avoided.

That, however, is not all. The contrivance of a scaffold with a trap-door in it was unthought of.

The gallows at Tyburn was composed of three large beams of timber, driven equidistantly into the earth in such a manner as to form a triangle.

Across these three horizontal beams were fixed, and it was from these the rope was hung.

But there was nothing resembling a scaffold. The earth about the place was smooth and grass grown.

This is how the execution was performed.

The cart containing the condemned was driven under the beams.

Then the prisoner was made to stand up in the cart while the rope was placed about his neck.

This done, the ordinary would finish his exhortations, the white cap put on, the ordinary and hangman would leave the cart, and the latter, seizing the horse by the bridle, would strike him with a whip, and draw the cart from under the fatal beam, leaving the body swinging in the air.

This was a mode at once barbarous and inhuman.

The fall was gradual, not sudden, consequently there was no dislocation of the vertebræ, and the poor wretch died slowly, in all the convulsive agonies of strangulation.

And now, after this long description, which was, however, unavoidable, we will resume the thread of our narrative.

The cart, then, containing Tom King, was drawn under the gallows in such a manner that one of the beams was directly over it.

As the horse stopped, the crowd became profoundly silent.

Close to the gallows were the carriages in which the sheriffs had been conveyed.

In a circle round these objects, that is to say, Tyburn Tree and the carriages, were first the officers on foot.

Then those on horseback.

The outermost ring was composed of the detatchment of dragoon guards, who anything but liked their duty.

Mr. Colley touched Tom on the arm, and asked him to stand up.

He obeyed.

Once more, and as he almost thought for the last time, he looked up at the sky, and then at the crowd before him.

In such a dense, enormous mass, and from his position, it was next to an impossibility for him to particularize individual objects.

He could see nothing of his friends.

But if he had, he asked himself, and they had been waiting till the present moment to make their desperate attempt, what chance would they have in breaking through the triple line around him?

None, he thought.

"Is it your wish, misguided young man," said the ordinary, "is it your wish to address those who have to-day assembled in order to see you die?"

"No," replied Tom.

"Do you confess, young man? Oh! let me beseech you so to do, and ask pardon of your offended Deity for your heinous guilt."

"Peace," said Tom. "What I do I do, but never for one moment will I believe that your interposition can be of the slightest benefit to me. So you need say no more."

The ordinary made a sign to the hangman that he had finished, and he immediately proceeded to pinion Tom, as a preliminary to placing the noose around his neck.

And now it would seem that the whole of the persons there present as spectators of the fearful scene had fixed their eyes upon the chief actors in it, and allowed the whole of their attention to be absorbed.

The officers and soldiers on guard were no exceptions.

They had ceased to believe that a rescue would be attempted.

This, as will be seen, was exactly what our three friends calculated upon.

While the authorities were on their guard and on the look-out for an attack, they stood but a poor chance of achieving their design.

When, however, they were lulled into a false feeling of security, and unprepared, would be the time, since they would be taken completely by surprise.

Seizing, then, upon the moment when universal attention seemed to be riveted in one direction, the signal was given to attack the soldiers and police.

It was shortly after dusk on the preceding evening that nearly the whole of the "family" repaired to Tyburn, and took up their positions around it.

They were divided into three bodies.

One was headed by Dick Turpin.

The other two by Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval.

For the reasons we have before given, it was at length decided that Tyburn should be the place where the rescue should be attempted, they believing that the chances there were much more in their favour.

So careful, too, were they to maintain a peaceable demeanour, that not the least suspicion was excited by their presence. At first sight they seemed mere ordinary people brought there by curiosity alone.

But their eyes were all the time fixed upon their leaders, and the moment the signal was given they were in readiness to obey it.

They drew their weapons, and made a vigorous and tremendous attack upon the guard.

It was irresistible, not only on account of their numbers, but because each man felt his heart was in his work, and the object for which they fought concerned him nearly.

Simultaneously they made their attack upon the guard.

At the same moment they cried, in stentorian tones—

"Hurrah for Tom King! Down with the sheriffs! Set him free! Set him free! A rescue! a rescue! On to them, boys! Don't flinch, and we are sure to win the day!"

But if the soldiers were for a moment taken by surprise, they quickly recovered themselves, and repelled their assailants.

And now the remainder of the mob, who were not actually of the "family," but yet who were prepossessed in favour of Tom, no sooner saw this energetic movement to overthrow the authorities, than they at once lent their aid.

In fact, it is probable they would have done this earlier, but they wanted a leader to give them the word of command.

In comparison with the number of the people, the soldiers and police were but a handful, and though well-disciplined and fully armed, they gave way before the pressure.

Foremost in the throng, and inciting the people on to the utmost, were the three friends.

With desperate energy they strove to fight their way to the triple tree.

But upon the first intimation of the attack, the sheriffs had acted with the greatest presence of mind.

Even if the crowd proved the victors they determined the victory should be a bootless one.

There was yet time to hang the criminal.

They might do with his dead body what they thought fit.

But Turpin saw this, and so did Claude and Jack, and they determined, at all hazards, to defeat it.

Tom King was unable to help himself in the least.

He was standing up in the cart.

The fatal noose was about his neck.

The white cap drawn down over his countenance.

His arms and legs were pinioned.

He was, therefore, not in a position to so much as struggle to avert his doom.

The soldiers and police closed round the gallows, as the crowd pressed onwards: closer and closer to it they drew.

The "family" fought like demons, and with a fury that nothing could withstand.

The hangman stepped out of the cart. But as he did so, his foot slipped, and he fell to the ground.

Quickly scrambling to his feet, and uttering some most awful curses, he ran to his horse's head, and catching him by the bridle, made him start.

The cart moved.

CHAPTER CLV.

THE AUTHORITIES ARE EXASPERATED AT THE DEFEAT OF THEIR SCHEME, BUT TAKE MOST EFFECTUAL STEPS TO CAPTURE THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN.—DICK TURPIN IS DULY MADE CAPTAIN OF THE BAND.

Tom King heard the wheels revolve, and felt the cart going from under his feet.

Another moment and he would be suspended.

But that moment was not destined to arrive, for just as the hangman set the cart in motion, and before it had moved more than a few inches, Claude Duval broke through the ranks, and, with one well-directed blow, laid the hangman prostrate, and stopped the cart.

Then, with an agility which no one would have given him credit for possessing, he climbed into it.

It was just at this moment that Dick Turpin reached the other side of the cart, and, leaning forward in his saddle, he took Tom in his arms.

"Quick, Claude!" he cried. "Quick, for your life! Get on to the coffin, and cut him down! I have him safe!"

How grateful those words were to Tom King.

He had heard all the confusion that had taken place, but seen nothing.

Claude Duval lost not a second in obeying Dick's instructions, and, taking a large sharp knife from his pocket, he mounted upon the coffin, and severed the rope at a stroke.

Dick caught Tom as he fell, and, exerting his utmost strength, placed him on the saddle before him.

Then he took a hasty glance at what might, with every propriety, be called the field of battle.

The conflict continued, but its violence was much abated.

The scene was one of inextricable confusion.

By the dead weight he held he could tell that Tom had fainted.

He undid the rope that had become drawn rather tightly about his neck, and tore the cap from off his face, so that his breathing should not be obstructed.

"Get clear, if you can," shouted a voice from somewhere above, "and do so as quickly as possible. There is a reinforcement coming."

Dick Turpin raised his eyes the moment these words reached his ears, and then he saw, very much to his surprise, one of the men he had brought with him, on the horizontal beams of the gallows.

From his elevated position he was of course able to command a very extensive view.

"Get clear, Dick!" he said again, "I can see the glitter of soldiers on the Oxford-road, and there is a tremendous cloud of dust! It will take them some few minutes to get here, but you must be off before they come, or it will be all over with you."

"We must fight our way through the soldiers



[DICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS BEARING OFF TOM KING.]

police," said Claude Duval, as he jumped off the coffin. "Once among the crowd all will be well. They will open a way for us, and cover our escape. Where is Jack?"

"Here," said a voice, and Sixteen-String Jack, looking very much the worse for the encounter, presented himself before them.

"Are you hurt?" asked Turpin, anxiously.

"Not to speak of. We have gained our purpose; the battle is won. Is Tom all right?"

"He has fainted," said Dick, "but that was from the sudden revulsion of feeling, no doubt."

"Be off with you," said the man on the top of the gallows; "be off, or you will all be captured. There is a large body of soldier coming. In a few minutes they will be upon the spot."

"Soldiers?" repeated Jack, in accents of surprise, for he had not heard the man's former communication. "How could they have sent for and obtained a reinforcement in so short a time?"

"We must not stop to inquire," said Claude Duval. "The coast is clear now. I will get my horse."

As he spoke, Duval took from his pocket a large steel whistle, and blew upon it a blast of exceeding shrillness.

This signal was thrice repeated.

The clear, shrill sounds rose high above all the surrounding din.

Ere the last notes had become extinct, two men, mounted upon magnificent horses, rode into the little clear space that was immediately around old Tyburn-tree, for the express instructions the family had received were to keep as clear a space round it as they could, and to use their efforts to drive the soldiers and police steadily in one direction away from it.

These instructions were most admirably carried out by the family.

Claude and Jack sprang into their saddles as soon as the two men who had brought the horses had vacated them.

"We are ready," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Captain, your orders."

"Forward, then," said Dick, "since you will have it so. You, Claude, lead the way, and Jack keep at my side."

"Right!" was the immediate reply, and Claude Duval rode a few steps in advance.

He was closely followed by Turpin and Jack Rann.

Black Bess had enjoyed a long interval of rest, and was therefore strong and able to bear, without inconvenience, a double burden.

Tom King was placed in front of Dick, and was retained in his position on the saddle by Dick's arm.

With his other hand he held the reins, so that it was necessary for some one to be at his side to defend him.

No signs of returning animation showed themselves in either Tom's face or form.

As soon as they saw the three highwaymen bearing off his body, they uttered a stentorian cheer, and, as Claude had predicted, opened a lane to allow them to pass through.

"Thanks, my friends," cried Turpin. "Many thanks for the assistance you have rendered me to-day. I shan't forget it, you may depend."

And so, with similar speeches, he greeted the people as he passed onwards.

But the lane which had been made closed up after, even as the water closes around the rudder of a ship, leaving no trace whatever of its progress.

Our friends had reached somewhere about the centre of the crowd, when a loud blast upon a bugle reached their ears.

Jack turned, and looked back.

The cavalry, of whose approach they had been fortunately apprised, had reached the outskirts of the crowd, where a scene of the utmost confusion was taking place.

The bugle blast which Jack had heard was a signal for the soldiers to charge.

This was about as ill-advised a step as they could well have taken, for it brought them into immediate collision with the populace.

Their best policy would have been to conciliate them.

But the officer in command was one of those obstinate, pig-headed fellows, who always attempt to do everything by force, and so he gave the order to charge.

He had experienced a great deal of difficulty in getting so far.

Some explanation of their presence on this occasion is due, and we may as well give it here at once.

It must, then, be understood that on that very morning a communication was forwarded to the Secretary of State, whose contents were of rather a startling character.

The sum and substance of it was, that the writer had good grounds for believing that a desperate and well-organized attempt would be made to rescue Tom King upon the arrival of the procession at Tyburn, and that the attack would be headed by three daring and notorious highwaymen, to wit: Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack.

Now, as a general rule, the Secretary of State, as all sensible persons would, took no heed of anonymous letters, and, therefore, having perused this one, he threw it into the fire.

In spite of himself, however, its contents would obtrude upon his mind, and he felt very uncomfortable indeed.

He did not like to break through his rule, and notice an anonymous letter.

Nor did he like the idea of allowing the opportunity of capturing the three highwaymen to pass by.

So, after wasting a great deal of time in fruitless debate, he resolved to send a troop of Light Dragoons to Tyburn.

As, we have seen, this was done.

But the Secretary was so long making up his mind, that the opportunity was lost, for, instead of arriving at the time they did, they ought to have accompanied the procession.

A properly drawn-up and legal document was given to the commanding officer, empowering him to capture the three highwaymen, and lodge them in any one of his majesty's jails. All good men and true loyal subjects were called upon to render the soldiers all the assistance in their power, to enable them to accomplish the end desired.

Thus armed, the officer set out.

He was in a very bad temper at the duty which had been assigned to him, and so, too, were all his men, for the military never like performing the duty of police officers.

What little patience the hot-headed officer possessed was quite exhausted with the time and trouble he had to force his passage through the mob to Tyburn.

On arriving, he saw at once that the rescue had already taken place.

Then he ordered the bugle to be blown, and gave the signal for a charge.

Thus attacked, the mob at once turned round and defended themselves, and a regular riot was the consequence.

The forms of the three highwaymen, being on horseback, were plainly visible to the officers and his men, and they endeavoured to cut a passage direct to them, through the living mass.

And however well the crowd of unarmed men stood the charge, they were compelled to give way before the sabres of the soldiers, who used them without mercy.

And so they struggled through the mob.

Yet, in spite of all their exertions, they could not gain upon their prey. In fact, the distance between them did, if anything, increase; for our friends, having reached the outskirts of the mob, were able to make better progress.

Still, their perils were very far indeed from being over.

CHAPTER CLVI.

THE TROOP OF LIGHT DRAGOONS CHASE THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN ALONG THE EDGWARE-ROAD, BUT LOSE SIGHT OF THEM AT BROCKLEY HILL.

Too late the commanding officer perceived that he had made a false move, and that it would have been better not to charge the mob at all, but waited on the outside of it, and then made the attempt to capture the highwaymen.

But although he felt the full force of this conviction, he would not allow it to appear in any way whatever.

The people, however, seeing the desperate manner in which they had acted, rather shrunk from them. Still, they were only able to go at a walking pace.

In the meantime our friends had got clear of those who had been of such important assistance to them, and reached the Edgware-road.

Then the people, as soon as they saw them break into a gallop, conceived they had done enough, and no longer offered even the semblance of resistance, but opened to allow the soldiers to pass through them, even as the highwaymen had done.

But these were neither members of the family, nor were they those who had suffered from the charge of the dragoons.

Away went Claude and Jack, urging the beautiful horses which they bestrode to the utmost, but, despite of her double burden, bonnie Black Bess kept ahead with ease.

Ere long, however, the numerous band of dragoons came thundering along the road after them.

The troop was one that had been long distinguished for the beauty and fleetness of its horses, and that was the reason it was selected, in case they should have to chase the highwaymen.

The road was broad and level. It was, moreover, firm beneath the horses' feet, and the speed they made really was amazing.

Neither of the highwaymen spoke, for conversation would have been next to an impossibility.

The whole of their attention, too, was necessary in looking to the safety of their horses, for a false step or a slip would have been fatal.

Tom showed no signs of recovery, and this was a circumstance that filled Dick Turpin with uneasiness. He began to fear that the rope had already pressed with sufficient tightness round his neck to strangle him.

Or he knew that it not unfrequently happened that a sudden and unexpected deliverance from any great peril resulted in death.

An instance of this was given to the writer some three years back. The narrator was an eye-witness. At the time spoken of he was a resident in Dublin, and business took him frequently to the barracks there. On one occasion a soldier was sentenced to be shot, though the offence of which he was found guilty would be deemed by most a trivial one. Some hopes that the sentence would be mitigated were entertained, but the morning for the execution arrived without bringing with it anything official. The man was led out to die.

An order was made that all civilians should be excluded from the barracks, but the narrator contrived to evade this order, and was present in the courtyard. A small body of soldiers, destined to perform the disagreeable duty of executioners, were marshalled forward, and the guns loaded. The condemned man, who was calm and composed, was led out and blindfolded. A handkerchief was placed in his hand, the letting fall of which was to signify that he was ready. An intense silence prevailed, but it was presently broken by the loud tones of an officer, who cried, "Make ready!" The rattling of muskets immediately followed. "Present!" cried the officer again. The guns were pointed at the doomed man, who at that moment let fall the handkerchief. Then followed a moment's awful stillness. The soldiers, with their fingers on the triggers of their guns, awaited the command of their officer to fire. But the word never came. The feelings of all present were wrought up to the highest pitch. None could imagine the cause of the delay, until it was announced that the condemned man was repricved. The poor fellow rose to his feet as soon as the words reached his ears, but he almost immediately fell backwards. It was thought that he had swooned from excess of emotion, but, upon examination, it was found that he was quite dead. Joy and the sudden delivery from death had killed him.

Such is the substance of the narrative related to the writer. Some of the minor details may not be quite correct, but still the story is told as near as he remembers it. For the truth of it he cannot, of course, vouch, though, as before stated, the gentleman who related the incident stated that he was present, and well acquainted with the whole of the particulars.

Of the humanity of the military authorities nothing need be said.

Let us resume.

Turpin, then, finding the insensibility of his friend continue, was afraid that joy had killed him.

He had no opportunity, however, of ascertaining whether this was actually the case, for their pursuers were hard upon their track.

They would have, too, a very difficult job to escape, even if they were so fortunate as not to be captured, which was, of the two, by far the most probable event.

But when men feel that life and liberty depend upon their exertions, it is wonderful what deeds they can perform—such as under less dominant influences they would not dream of attempting.

The soldiers, too, were indefatigable, and tore along in pursuit of the highwaymen at a tremendous speed. They, however, were not actuated by such a powerful one, but almost. They felt they had a disagreeable duty to perform, and, therefore, the sooner they performed it the better.

Besides, the little fracas with the mob had warmed their blood, and they began to have a personal feeling in the matter, which increased every moment.

Then, again, there are few to whom hunting is not a most delightful sport, and they were huntsmen in every sense of the term, only theirs was of the most exciting character, for the game they hunted was human beings

They spared neither whip nor spur.

Still, in spite of all their exertions, they could not get on so well as they wished. Do what they would, the highwaymen maintained the same distance between them, and that distance was just out of gunshot.

They came on, too, in a straggling throng, for those who rode the fleetest horses were foremost. Had they have kept in rank, and all moved at one regular pace, they would have stood no chance whatever of capturing their prey.

When making their arrangements for Tom's rescue, our friends had not calculated upon such an energetic pursuit, nor did they anticipate that Tom would be incapable of helping himself. In fact, a horse had been provided for him to mount upon, but which, under the circumstances, they deemed it best not to encumber themselves with.

All our readers may not be aware that the Edgware-road is a broad turnpike-road, running in a north-westerly direction from London. For exactly ten miles its course is a straight line, deviating not in the slightest perceptible degree, having not an appreciable curve during the whole of that long distance.

Many people have, no doubt, been filled with admiration when they saw it, and remarked what a beautiful road it was, but our three friends were quite of a contrary opinion, at all events, just then.

It gave them no opportunity of evading those in pursuit, for they were all the time in sight.

Had there been a bend in the road, the case would have been different. Once free from the observation of their foes, they might have a chance of finding some place of refuge.

There was no help, therefore, but to keep straight on.

The road was familiar to all three of them, and they knew that a bend in the road would not occur until they reached Brockley Hill, at which place it curves round rather suddenly to the right.

In a little more than a mile, however, it resumes its former direction, and continues in a straight line to St. Alban's.

This bend in the road, then, was the only chance they had of being out of sight of the dragoons, and it was there that they calculated upon being able to strike across the country.

Such being the case, it was obviously their best policy to strain every nerve to place as great a distance as they could between them.

At the rate they were going at, the ten miles was very soon accomplished, and the bend in the road reached.

As they swept round it—which they did with great swiftness—Sixteen-String Jack turned in his saddle, and looked back.

The foremost of the soldiers was rather more than three quarters of a mile distant.

The large or principal body about a mile off.

The cloud of dust which their horses threw up made their position apparent.

Our friends kept on for half a mile further, and then came to a halt.

Their pursuers were neither within sight or hearing.

An anxious consultation now took place as to what was best to be done; but scarcely had they commenced, than Turpin perceived Tom King evince some signs of returning consciousness.

This was an event which filled him with joy.

"You must not heed him now," said Sixteen-String Jack; "in something less than five minutes the dragoons will reach this spot. That, then, is all the time we can hope to have to reach some place of concealment, for to continue the race would be nothing but folly! What are we to do?"

"I know not what will be best," said Turpin.

"We must do something, without you intend to fall into their hands."

"This will serve us in place of nothing better," exclaimed Claude Duval. "Look here."

He pointed to a board, which was fixed on the top of some wooden palisadings, on the left hand side of the road.

"What is it?"

"Draw nearer, and you will see."

"'This house and grounds to let——'" said Jack, reading the words upon the board. "Capital! That will do it. We shall find safe refuge there for a little while, beyond all doubt. Do you not think so, Dick?"

"Yes—yes."

"Then leap over the palings without loss of time, or the dragoons will be upon us."

Indeed, at this moment the beat of the horses' hoofs upon the hard road came quite plainly to their ears, and impressed upon them the imperative necessity there was for them to be expeditious in their movements, if they intended to elude capture.

CHAPTER CLVII.

DICK TURPIN DECIDES UPON TAKING SHELTER FOR A TIME IN MINERVA VILLA, BUT SOON FINDS IT TOO HOT TO HOLD HIM.

"KEEP still, for heaven's sake!" said Dick Turpin to Tom King, as he backed Bess to the opposite side of the road. "Keep still until we are over. It will be taxing the mare's powers to the utmost to put her to such a leap as that."

This was unquestionably true.

Very few horses could be found who would have faced such an obstacle as that palisading.

It was between four and five feet in height, and on the other side grew a quick-set hedge, which made it at least a foot higher in the lowest part, and, of course, considerably wider.

No slight achievement would it be for a horse to leap such an obstruction, and for any one to do so that carried a double burden seemed quite beyond the bounds of possibility.

But Black Bess was a creature of no ordinary stamp, as the extraordinary deeds which she performed will testify.

But, as Dick said, he was now taxing her to the utmost.

He patted her neck encouragingly, taking the reins in his teeth while he did so, and then gave her the impulse forward.

She obeyed it with the utmost willingness, and, making a tremendous rush, cleared the palings gallantly, alighting on her feet on the soft turf on the other side with a barely perceptible shock.

All who have had anything to do with horses must have noticed how great an influence example exerts upon them.

So it was with the two horses upon which Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were seated.

Without the example of Black Bess before them, the probability is they would never have accomplished the leap; as it was, they performed it with apparent ease.

Claude's horse, however, missed his footing upon reaching the earth, and fell on to his knees.

He struggled to his feet again.

Then all three highwaymen dismounted.

The trampling of the dragoons sounded nearer.

The place into which they had so unceremoniously leaped appeared to be a park or shrubbery, but, whichever it might be, it was in a very neglected condition.

The ground was covered to a depth of several inches with decayed leaves, and this explained at once how it was Black Bess had descended so lightly.

Dick Turpin laid his comrade Tom upon the bed of leaves, and gave him the strictest injunctions to neither move or speak.

Then he took Bess by the bridle, and led her close to the palings.

Claude and Jack immediately followed his example.

All now awaited with extreme impatience and anxiety the approach of the dragoons.

In the positions they then occupied, it was quite impossible for anyone passing along the road to see the least vestige of them.

Nor would the hard impacted roadway receive any impressions of the horses' hoofs, to show at what part the leap was made.

The only risk they ran was that, at a critical moment, the horses might, by some slight sound or movement, betray their whereabouts.

This, however, they considered a remote contingency.

Another circumstance in their favour was that, at the time they halted, they were out of hearing of the soldiers; consequently, the officers would be out of hearing of them.

There would be no sudden cessation of the horses' footsteps to generate the suspicion that they had sought a hiding-place on the roadside.

For all that, their position was a ticklish one. There was a chance of their being discovered, in the event of which, all resistance would be futile: captivity or death inevitable.

The clanking of the soldiers' accoutrements could now be heard, mingled with the rapid hoof-beats.

Another moment and they would reach the spot where our friends were concealed.

Placing their arms round their horses' necks, and keeping a firm hold upon their bridles with the other hand, the three highwaymen sought, by gentle caresses, to keep the creatures quiet.

Of Black Bess Dick had little fear, but the other two were strange horses, and the worst was to be looked for.

Then the soldiers swept by with undiminished speed.

It was evident they had no suspicions as yet.

The noise they made, and the cloud of dust which enveloped them, were something prodigious.

But the highwaymen did not venture to make the least movement until the last of the throng was almost out of hearing.

Then, animated by one impulse, all three directed their steps to where Tom King had been laid.

Upon their approach, however, he rose.

A glance told them that he had not only quite recovered, but that he fully comprehended their situation.

"Waste no more time with me!" he said; "You have for my sake already run too many risks. Let us proceed to action!"

"Spoken like yourself!" said Claude and Jack, both grasping him by the hands. "We have met under strange circumstances, but let us hope it will be a long period before we separate."

"Thanks!" said Tom King; "but we must defer such speeches to a better opportunity. Those who are in pursuit of us, and who, I take it, from the clatter they made, to be soldiers"——

"They are. A troop of light dragoons."

"I thought as much. They have passed us; but you cannot tell how soon they may meet some one on the road who will tell them no one answering to our description has gone by."

"We cannot," said Turpin, who was beyond measure pleased to find his comrade's mind so clear; "and in the event of such a thing, they will immediately guess we have sought shelter somewhere, and will turn back, and make a vigorous search."

"There can be no doubt of that," said Claude Duval; "so the sooner we see about making our position more secure, the better. You lead the way, Dick."

Turpin led Bess forward, taking pains to keep as much in the shelter of the trees as possible.

"What place is this?" asked Tom.

"I do not know the name of it," replied Turpin; "but while we were in the road deliberating as to what course we should pursue, Claude saw a board stuck up with words painted upon it to the effect that there was a house and grounds to let. These are the grounds, and there, look, is the house."

Dick Turpin, as he spoke, raised his arm, and pointed to a gap in the trees, through which a view of a large and substantial-looking stone mansion could be obtained.

Claude and Jack, who were in the rear, pushed forward when Turpin pointed, to see what it was.

It was the front of the house which they saw.

Before it was a very spacious lawn, skirted by a broad carriage drive.

This, however, was in many places scarcely distinguishable from the lawn. Both were completely overrun with weeds.

The house, too, had an appearance of neglect about it, or, more properly speaking, it was in that state of dilapidation into which houses so soon fall when they are left unoccupied.

With buildings the natural order of things is reversed. They wear out quickest when they are not used.

"It looks a cheerless place, does it not?" said Turpin.

"It does, indeed."

"Would it be safe, think you, to venture upon the lawn?"

"In my opinion it would be wisest not to do so. You stand a chance of being seen."

"I know that, but I was wondering which would be the best plan to adopt, to push forward and get out into some of the cross-country lanes, of which there are so many hereabouts, or to take shelter for a time within the house itself."

"That will, I expect, be rather a difficult point to settle," said Claude. "My first idea was that the place would afford us capital means of concealment."

"But yet," said Jack, "it looks to me more reasonable to endeavour to place a great as distance as we can between ourselves and the dragoons."

"So it does," said Tom, "I quite agree with Jack there."

"Then perhaps you will agree with me in this as well, that the safest road for us to take to escape the dragoons would be the road back to London, provided, of course, that we can do so without their knowledge, for if they chased us back to London we should be irrevocably lost."

"It is a bold idea," said Tom, "to think of running into the jaws of danger in that manner, and yet I should not be surprised if the daring nature of the act did not carry safety along with it."

"That is just the view I take of the case," said Jack.

"But," exclaimed Duval, "it will never do for us to remain consulting here. If we do, all the chances will be lost."

"There are three courses open," said Turpin. "One is to take refuge in the house—another to seek an entrance into some of the cross country lanes—and the other to ride back towards London. Now, which shall it be? You must decide at once!"

"We will leave it to you, Dick," was the unanimous reply. "What you think the best to do shall be done. Speak."

"I will," replied Turpin, "because I think by so doing that valuable time may be saved. The soldiers seem to have gone on, and in my opinion the safest thing we can do will be to lie snug in yonder house until a bit of the bother is blown over, and the vigilance of the authorities relaxes."

"Agreed," cried the three highwaymen. "Lead the way, Dick. We will follow."

Having thus decided, they proceeded, without further loss of time, to seek an entrance.

In order to do this, Dick, after a rapid survey of the exterior of the mansion, did not go upon the lawn, but continued to force a passage through the trees round to the back part of the house.

This they found very secluded. Indeed, there was no dread of their being overlooked from any quarter.

But the neglect which they noticed in the front, was much more apparent in the back part of the premises.

Crossing a garden, which alone was the very personification of desolation, our friends came to one of those French windows, as they are called, which reach from the ceiling to the floor, and open in the manner of folding-doors.

This they instantly fixed upon as the place where an entrance would be most easily effected, and this proved quite right, for they got the window open without a very great deal of difficulty.

"The best plan," said Turpin, "will be to bring all the horses into the house with us. They can easily come through the window, and then we know they will be quite safe."

CHAPTER CLVIII.

THE SOLDIERS, DIRECTED BY MR. GROVES, APPROACH THE EMPTY VILLA AND SURROUND IT, WHICH FILLS OUR HIGHWAYMEN WITH CONSTERNATION.

WHETHER or not the empty house would prove a safe place of refuge depended entirely upon one condition.

That condition was an obvious one.

It was that the officers should not learn in any way that they had taken shelter there. If they did, their predicament would be an awkward one indeed, for to be besieged in a place of that sort by so many well-armed men would be no joke.

But what Turpin thought was, there was no mode that he could think of by which the soldiers could be made aware that they had taken shelter there at all, and consequently that being a never-visited place they would be safer there than they could possibly be elsewhere.

Passing through the room into which they had come by means of the French window, they emerged into a hall of very tolerable dimensions.

This was the lightest place in the house, for in the rooms the shutters had been closed, so that, except where a few rays of daylight made their way through the chinks, they were in utter darkness.

But in the hall there was a very good supply of light. It came in through a fan-light over the door, and also through a large and beautiful stained-glass landing, which could be seen just at the bend in the stairs.

They had no trouble in tying the horses to the balusters, and then they felt themselves quite free to go where they chose.

"Let us ascend," said Dick; "not only shall we be in lighter rooms, but also from our elevation able to command a view of the surrounding country, which may prove an advantage to us."

"Most decidedly," said Sixteen-String Jack. "I only hope they don't come here to look for us, for as sure as they do we shall be in a fix."

"I do not anticipate such a thing, myself, even for a moment, though there is no harm in being prepared."

"None at all, and now that brings me round to the subject I spoke of once before. Tom, my boy, I want you to give me your attention for half a minute."

"What is it, Claude?"

"I will tell you in a very few words. The other day, while we were all three talking about your escape, Jack and myself came to the determination to form ourselves into a band of four, as soon as you were free, and place ourselves under the command of Dick, who should be our leader, or captain, or whatever you like to call him. All we want is for you to consent to the proposal."

"Then you have it, and, if you will believe me, I never said yes to anything more willingly in my life. It is the best plan of action that could possibly be adopted."

"Hurrah!" said Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, in the same breath. "Hurrah! I thought you would agree to it."

"I do. Together, I believe we may do much, and be safe, but separated we could do nothing, and should, in a short time, take a ride to Tyburn, as I did to-day. Indeed my own case is about as good an instance of what I say as could very well be found. Had I been alone I should have perished, but through having you for my allies, I have been saved, and, to the end of my life, I shall always feel grateful to all three of you for what you have in done in my behalf."

"Come on," said Dick, "we have only done by you what you would have done by us; I am impatient to see the upper part of the house."

"Lead the way, then, and we will quickly follow you," answered Sixteen-String Jack; "I am quite as impatient as you are."

Turpin sprang up the stairs, with his comrades at his heels.

Upon reaching the landing they saw before them a number of doors.

Dick choose one which he imagined, from its position, would have its window situated in front of the house.

"Hold back," he said, "we must not show ourselves, for, as you know, this is a safe place for us only so long as no one suspects us to be in it."

It was well indeed for all that Turpin had the presence of mind to check, on the part of his companions, the very natural impulse which they felt to go direct to the casement and look out.

All four crossed the room cautiously, and then crawling to the window, peeped out of it,

It was next to an impossibility for them to have been seen by any one outside, for they only raised the upper part of their heads above the sill.

The first thing that attracted their notice was the entrance gate leading into the grounds surrounding the house.

It was some distance from it, and opened into the Edgware-road.

Before they had time to see anything more, Jack uttered an exclamation.

"Done!" he said. "We have brought our pigs to a nice market. Look, here come the dragoons back again."

The other three saw them before Jack finished speaking, for they followed the direction of his eyes.

About a quarter of a mile off down the road, and coming at a walk, was the troop of soldiers who had been so specially sent out by the Secretary of State to capture them.

They were looking about from side to side with great eagerness, as though each moment they expected to catch sight of something for which they were on the look out.

Turpin drew a long breath.

"It's all right," he said. "I expected they would come back, seeing and hearing nothing of us in advance. They must have been right on to St. Alban's."

"They needn't know we are here," said Claude; "and I don't think there is anything that would serve to put them on the scent. I wish night would come."

"Your wish will soon be gratified, then. The sun must be about setting, by the colour of his beams."

"Under cover of the night we should be able to steal away from here first-rate, and betake ourselves to a place of greater safety."

"Good heavens," exclaimed Jack Rann, whose eyes had never been off the soldiers for a moment. "Good heavens, they have already discovered us! They are pointing to the house!"

A glance confirmed this startling intelligence. At the short distance from the house which the dragoons were, it was easy enough to see that they were all attentively regarding the empty house.

But whether this had any connexion with our friends was more than they could say.

It would, however, be quickly seen.

Our readers can one and all imagine with what intense eagerness the highwaymen watched the progress of the soldiers along the road.

All depended whether they made a halt before the entrance-gates. If they did, all would be over with them.

Nearer and nearer they came, and at the same gentle speed.

Had they given up the hope of capturing them?

It looked like it.

And now, when the foremost in the troop were within about a dozen yards of the gates, the eager anxiety of our friends increased to an intolerable extent.

Their doubts and fears were quickly set at rest.

The troop stopped before the gates.

And now the interest they felt in what was going to happen next absorbed the whole of their faculties. They could neither move nor speak.

That the empty house was their destination was evident enough, for gradually the whole troop formed in a dense cluster round the entrance-gates, which were at length, after a good deal of trouble, thrown open.

Then they filed in, making in a direct line for the front door of the house, without paying the least regard to the path.

To reach the lawn took them but a few moments.

Then, as they came more fully to view, they noticed something which had until then escaped their observation.

And that was that the soldiers were accompanied with a stout bulldog-looking man, who was attired as a country farmer.

This man evidently was on rather friendly terms with the officer, for he walked near the neck of his horse in an important and imposing way.

It so happened that several of the panes of glass in the window out of which the highwaymen were looking had been broken out—indeed, demolished is the more appropriate word.

This happened luckily, for it enabled our friends to hear with tolerable ease what was being said outside.

They listened, stretching their ears to the utmost. A few words would decide them how to act.

The commanding officer was speaking.

"And so, Mr. Groves, this is Minerva Villa, is it?"

"It is, sir."

"And you think most likely the gentlemen we seek have taken shelter there?"

"I do."

"Then, if I speak the truth, I must say I don't."

"You're wrong."

"Not so! You do not know our men. They have cleverly enough managed to give us the double, and, by this time, are many a mile off. You may make your mind easy about that; though, of course, I shall search the villa just for the sake of feeling satisfied."

"Do so! and you will be rewarded."

"What makes you so positive, Mr. Groves?"

"Well, I don't mind telling you. Some fifteen years ago, Jonathan Wild was pursued by the police along this road, when all of a sudden he disappeared: and where do you think he went to?"

"That is more than I can tell—without this house was empty then, as it is now, and that he took shelter in it."

"Such is precisely the state of the case! The house was empty, and he did take refuge in it."

'The devil he did?"

"Yes; and what is more, he was caught: and now you know what makes me think they are hidden there, because they appear to have disappeared about the same spot; and they are quite as likely to think it a likely place of concealment as Jonathan Wild."

"To be sure! I am much obliged to you, Mr. Groves, and we will soon set the matter at rest."

By the time this little dialogue was at an end—every word of which had reached the highwaymen's ears—the whole of the soldiers had reached the lawn, for several of the horses having fallen lame, they came in stragglers.

Turning round, and seeing all there, he, in quick military tones, gave them the order to dismount, and form themselves into a circle round the building.

This manœuvre was quickly executed.

Some of the men proceeded to picket the horses.

The commanding officer and Mr. Groves walked about together.

As soon as the men had formed themselves into a circle round the villa, he turned to his companion, as he said—

"There; if they are in the house I shall very soon have them. I hope and trust they are there, and then this disagreeable duty, which I feel it a disgrace to be set to perform, will be over."

CHAPTER CLIX.

RELATES THE MANNER IN WHICH MINERVA VILLA WAS ATTACKED BY THE DRAGOONS, AND THEN BURNED TO THE GROUND.

To say that the four highwaymen viewed these energetic proceedings with something akin to dismay, would be to tell no more than the truth.

What hope could they have to cope with so many, with the least chance of success?

None at all.

They looked upon their capture or death as certain, and so resigned themselves to either the one or the other.

The place itself was in the worst possible conceivable state for them to stand a siege.

They had found no difficulty in making an entrance, nor was it likely the soldiers would.

They were at their wits end.

Dick Turpin was vexed, and took all the blame upon himself for what had occurred, though, of course, he had acted, as he thought, for the best. Too late he saw that the plan proposed by Sixteen-String Jack would have been the best one to follow.

Such regrets as these were now worse than useless; still he could not help cursing the officious Mr. Groves from the bottom of his heart, for it was clear enough, had it not been for him, they would not have been molested.

Dick resolved to pay him out, if ever he was blessed with an opportunity.

What is the best thing to be done? was the question uppermost in the minds of all of them.

But they could think of nothing.

Their reflections were disturbed by three terrific bangs upon the knocker of the front door.

Then a voice called upon those within to open in the king's name, and to fail not at their peril.

Of course, no notice whatever was taken of this appeal.

It was thrice repeated.

They were now permitted by the law to break into the house.

"I can see but one plan that offers us the least chance of success, and that chance is so very remote, that we might almost as well stay where we are and be captured!"

Let us hear it, nevertheless," cried Claude.

"It is this. Let us mount our horses, and then taking advantage of a time when the attention of all is occupied, let us make a sudden dash out—cut our way through the soldiers—and then fly for our lives!"

Claude shook his head.

"It is a desperate plan," he replied, "and, from the very boldness of it, deserves success. One thing would be greatly in our favour."

"The soldiers are not mounted, and if we succeeded in getting through their ranks we should have the start of

them, for it would take them some little time to get into their saddles."

"So it would—so it would. I did not think of that."

"Moreover, night is coming on apace."

"Another very favourable occurrence. I am beginning to get a better heart."

"I have an amendment to propose," said Tom King, "and one to which I have no doubt you will agree."

"Quick, then. Speak it!"

"Let us barricade the place below as well as we are able, so as to keep them for a short time at bay."

"Well, what then?"

"In the meantime let us set fire to the house in as many places as we can."

"Set fire to the house?"

"Yes, why not?"

"What is the good?"

"Cannot you see?"

"No, that I am sure we cannot."

"I am surprised. When the house is fairly alight we will mount, as Dick said, and wait as long as we possibly can."

"Yes—yes!"

"And then, when the flames are at their height, and when they are least in anticipation of such a thing, we will fling the door open, and make a rush for our lives in the way Dick proposed."

"That is an amendment, with a vengeance!" said Sixteen-String Jack, "but yet I like the plan. If you can manage to carry it out, you will have a much better chance of making your escape."

"You think so?"

"I do."

"And you, Claude?"

"Yes, if the barricading can be done, and the soldiers kept out long enough."

"That I own is the worst part of it. But still, are you willing to make the attempt?"

"Perfectly, since it cannot, by any possibility, make our condition worse than it is, while there is just a faint hope of making it better."

"Exactly; and you, Dick?"

"I consent, of course, and let us carry it out at once. Who has the means of setting light to the place?"

"I have," said Jack.

"Then do you perform that part of the business, while we three will do our best at barricading the doors and windows. You had better begin to set light to the top of the house."

"All right. You perform your part of the business, and I will perform mine."

As he spoke, Sixteen-String Jack darted up the stairs, and, with great rapidity, made his way to the top of the house.

The top floor consisted of two large attics, which had clearly been, at some former time, used as lumber rooms, for a considerable quantity of rubbish yet remained on the floor.

This was just what he wanted, so, taking a piece of paper from his pocket, he disposed it to the best advantage; then took out his phosphorous bottle and matches.

By the aid of these the paper was soon set fire to, and he had the satisfaction of seeing it blaze up bravely.

Then he turned to the front room, and went through a similar performance.

This done, he returned to the other room, and found there was quite a fierce fire burning, so he scattered the fragments about in such places where they would most readily take hold of the woodwork.

Only those who have seen a fire break out, can form a correct estimate of the speed with which the flames spread. When seen it almost seems incredible.

With such pains as Jack took, the upper part of the house was quickly in flames.

Then he descended to the next floor.

Here the materials were not so plentiful, but the walls were all lined with wood, so he tore down one or two of the panels and lighted them, placing them afterwards in such a manner as to easily catch the remnant.

And so on he performed his task, and without being long about it, too, and when he descended into the hall, were the others were, the upper part of the mansion was roaring like a furnace.

And now we must go back and relate what happened to the other three.

As Sixteen-String Jack dashed up the stairs, they ran down them into the hall.

Just when they reached it, the soldiers commenced a violent attack upon the front door.

They were not used to their work, or they would have looked for a place where a breach could have been more easily effected.

They did not, however, calculate that the door would prove much of an obstacle, nor would it have done so, had not our friends fitted a couple of stout bars into their staples, and then piled against the wood-work all the heavy articles they could find.

Then they took a hasty survey of the proceedings of the besiegers outside, but they did not seem to be making an attack at any other point.

In fact, what the officer intended to do was to keep his men well surrounding the building, and then to batter down the door, and enter with a good body, and take the inmates prisoners; or, if they attempted to fly, they would only fall into the hands of those stationed outside.

So far all was good, but the plan which the highwaymen had hit upon was just calculated to upset it.

Finding the barricading done, Dick Turpin produced a tinder-box, and so did Claude, and the pair, in a few moments, set fire to the ground floor in more than fifty places.

The fire caught surprisingly, but the house was old, and full of dry wood-work.

It blazed bonnily.

When they perceived the fire from the outside, it had obtained a firm hold of every part of the house.

The violence of their blows redoubled.

When Jack, therefore, descended the stairs, he found the lower part enveloped in flames.

The horses got frightened and restive.

As a last stroke, they set fire to the barricade, which they had erected against the front door.

The heavy, cumbrous articles, of which it was composed, were as dry as tinder.

The soldiers continued their attack with increased fury, and presently a crackling sound announced that the door was giving way.

When they saw this was the case, the highwaymen led the horses into the room which they had entered.

This one they had been careful not to set fire to.

Nevertheless, the woodwork was burning in many places, and the apartment was filled with pungent, suffocating smoke.

This being the case, Jack ran no risk by going to the window and opening the shutters.

It became evident, then, immediately, that the flames and the smoke were driven from the front to the back of the house.

Outside the window, when the shutter was thrown back, our friends could see nothing but a dense mass of black smoke.

But how far it extended, or whether it merely hung there as a curtain, was more than they could tell.

They trusted, however, to its being the former.

They mounted.

But the moment they seated themselves in the saddles, a terrific crash announced the demolition of the front door.

But when they beat it down, such a furious body of flame and smoke rushed forth, that they were, one and all, compelled to retreat.

From every window, too, and from the roof as well, the flames and smoke came pouring forth, and it was clear that in a few minutes very little would be left of Minerva Villa but a heap of blazing ruins.

The officer in command hardly knew what to make of the affair.

All he could do, however, was to order his men to be extra vigilant, and fire upon any one they saw attempt to make their escape under the cover of the smoke.

A minute elapsed, during which the smoke grew thicker and thicker.

Then the loud report of a volley of fire-arms was heard, and at the same moment the roof of the old villa fell in with a tremendous crash, burying all beneath it.

CHAPTER CLX.

OUR FRIENDS GET CLEAR FROM THE BURNING VILLA, BUT BY NO MEANS OUT OF DANGER.

A COLUMN of white dust shot up high into the night sky as the roof fell.

In its downward course it caused the walls to collapse, and all fell together to the ground in one immense smoking, smouldering heap, which was all that remained of Minerva Villa.

We now return to the proceedings of the highwaymen, whom we left as they seated themselves in their saddles.

The smoke, hanging as it did in a dense mass in front of the window, favoured them greatly in what they had to do.

If this had not been the case, they could not have made the charge in a body as they intended, and therefore they would have stood a much fainter chance of achieving their purpose.

Tom King, the reader will remember, had no horse, so Dick insisted upon his mounting behind him.

The horses now began to show signs of distress, so they guided them as silently as they could through the window.

The sagacious creatures seemed to recollect having entered it, and also to be aware that silence was desirable, and they put their feet to the ground with the greatest stealthiness.

The smoke completely hid them when they emerged.

All three of the horses were now made to stand close to each other.

Ere they made the charge, they listened in the hope that, by so doing, they might make themselves acquainted with the position of their foes.

They also strove to recollect what they should have to encounter in the shape of obstacles.

But in both instances the effort was a vain one; they could neither form any definite idea of the position which the soldiers occupied, nor could they distinctly call to mind, having only once seen it, the general aspect of the garden.

Their charge, therefore, would be obliged to be made headlong, and at random.

Providence must be trusted for the result.

And now, to look at the general aspect of affairs, there really did seem to be a probability that the highwaymen would escape unscathed from one of the most perilous straits in which it had ever been their lot to be placed.

There is no doubt, however, but that for Tom's lucky thought about setting fire to the house, they would at that moment have been in a far less enviable position.

Yet they were far—very far from being safe. The rank of the dragoons would have to be broken through. They would have to run the risk of the shots that would be fired at them.

The smoke which had so far been such a friend to them was now a foe.

It was just at this minute, and when they had determined upon the charge, that the roof of the villa fell in, as related at the end of the last chapter.

The crashing sound frightened the horses, and made them increase their speed.

Then, dimly and faintly through the smoke, they saw a flash of fire, and heard the loud report of the guns.

The soldiers who discharged them had not, of course, caught sight of the fugitives, for that was simply impossible, but they had heard the tramp of the horses' hoofs, and they aimed their pieces in the direction of the sound.

Instantly all were on the alert, and prepared to withstand a charge.

But the highwaymen were upon them before they were aware of it.

So impetuous was the charge, that the soldiers, who were only a single line on foot, gave way.

"The prisoners have escaped!" they cried, as loud as they could bawl. "This way! this way! An escape! Bring the horses round! Mount, and ride in pursuit! Quick! or you will be too late! Fly! There they go! Over the fence! They're off, by Jove!"

These were a few of the ejaculations that came from the lips of those who had witnessed the highwaymen's daring charge and flight.

One half-second after the encounter with the dragoons, and they were clear of the bewildering smoke.

And just in time it was, too, or a most serious accident would have occurred, which would have possibly resulted in their capture.

Just before them was a rather high wooden fence.

They saw it, and the horses saw it only just in time.

The obstacle in itself was nothing, and they went over it without the least trouble.

Beyond this was a paddock, and then a meadow; afterwards a hedgerow, and then they emerged into a narrow, winding country lane.

They turned their horses heads towards London.

Black Bess carried her double burden bravely, though nothing but the most urgent necessity would have tempted Dick to place her powers to so severe a test.

The sounds of pursuit reached them.

The dragoons themselves began to feel quite a personal interest in the affair, and they all acted as though it was of the utmost importance to themselves to succeed with the design they had in hand.

Therefore they ran to the lawn where the horses had been picketed, and scrambling into their saddles, set off at a helter skelter pace, without thinking of, or waiting for, the word of command.

But in spite of all they could do, the highwaymen had got a good start, and in a long chase a start is everything.

The road they had now chosen was very unlike the Edgware-road. Not only was it tortuous, but miry, and very heavy and tiring for the horses.

They resolved to leave it at the first opportunity.

The pursuing dragoons used whip and spur unmercifully, and goaded on their poor and jaded animals at a furious rate.

This persistence in keeping upon their track made all four of the highwaymen uneasy. It showed how determined was the effort made to hunt them down.

And when we take a careful and comprehensive view of the whole matter, we shall not fail to see that they had ample room for apprehensive dread, and that they might dread the worst.

If they survived this attempt at annihilation, they thought they could bid defiance to all others which might afterwards be attempted.

This was such a systematic and well-organized pursuit, that its termination appeared to point to running the highwaymen to earth.

Tom King, having no horse, was quickly felt to be a very serious inconvenience, inasmuch as it prevented Black Bess making full use of her powers, and, besides, fatigued her in no ordinary degree.

She had now been on the road for a long time, and had received neither rest nor refreshment, except such as she received for the few minutes she was in the hall of the empty mansion.

But there was one thing that was very much in their favour, and that was darkness.

This increased every moment as night deepened, and as the clouds piled themselves up in the sky, shutting out all glimpses of the blue vault.

A blustering wind, too, came every now and then in violent gusts from the south-west, and there was every indication of coming rain.

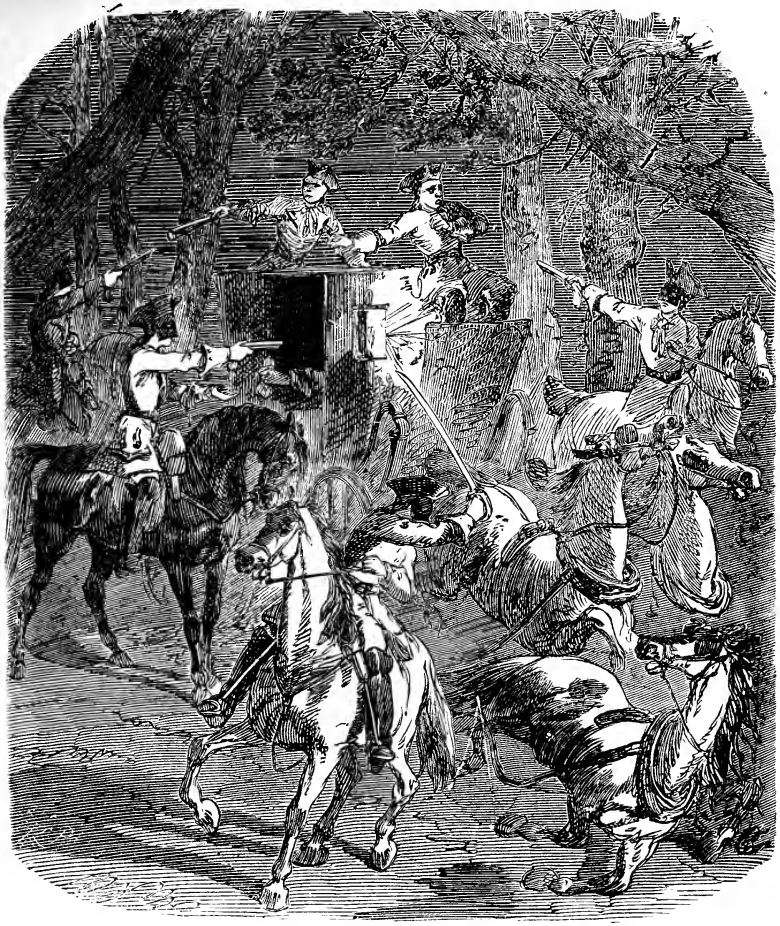
This the highwaymen did not care for, so that the roads were not made too heavy by it.

In spite, however, of their utmost efforts, they were a long time before they could get out of earshot of their pursuers, who came thundering on with untiring perseverance, but at last they began to grow fainter and fainter.

The imperative necessity of adopting some strategic measure now pressed itself upon the minds of all four of the highwaymen. To continue their flight under existing circumstances would be nothing short of utter madness.

Presently they came to a place where the river Brent crossed the lane. It was spanned by a huge wooden structure, for it so happened that just there the mimic river was of more than its ordinary width.

The horses hoofs raised many a strange echo as they clattered over the bridge, but scarcely had they reached the opposite side than Claude Duval cried out, in a loud voice, "Halt!" at the same time arresting the progress of his own steed.



[DICK TURPIN, TOM KING, DUVAL, AND JACK ROBBING THE OXFORD COACH.]

The command was immediately obeyed by his two comrades, who were filled with surprise, in which alarm was also mingled, for they dreaded that some accident had befallen him.

The next words, though, that he uttered dispelled their fears, and infused a momentary gleam of hope that they would yet succeed in baffling their enemies.

"Halt!" Claude cried; "I have an idea which I think can be successfully carried out. The river here appears to be both broad and deep. What is to prevent us from walking our horses into it, and then swimming down the stream."

"Nothing," said Dick Turpin. "It is a good thought, but it must be acted upon at once, or we shall be either seen or heard by our foes. Into the stream at once."

"We cannot make our position worse, be it how it may," said Sixteen-String Jack, as he followed Claude down the rather precipitous bank of the river, and then fairly walked his horse into the stream.

"It will be a rest for our steeds. Slip off the saddles and hold on by the bridles. If they are not encumbered with a rider's weight, the cold water will fill them with new life."

Before Dick Turpin had finished this speech, all had taken to the water and were ready for a start; nor were they any too soon, for the approach of the Light Dragoons was now plainly distinguishable.

To their unspeakable relief, they found the river, near the centre, was quite deep enough to allow the horses to swim down it with ease, and not only that, there was a strong current tending in a southerly direction.

Certainly it was rather a strange mode of progression, but though it was slow it was silent, and they built their hopes on the supposition that the route they had taken would be unsuspected, and their pursuers accordingly thrown completely off the scent—for a time, at any rate.

In accordance with Dick's commands, as soon as the horses found themselves out of their depths, all four slipped from their saddles, and committed themselves to the water.

having a firm grasp upon the reins, they found a small amount of exertion sufficient to keep them afloat.

The horses seemed to be much refreshed by their immersion, and they struck out more vigorously every moment.

But though their course seemed slow, it was not so actually. Progress in water is always deceptive, and, as they had the current in their favour, they drifted onwards almost without being aware of it.

CHAPTER CLXI.

FOR A SHORT TIME OUR FRIENDS SUCCEED IN ELUDING THE DRAGOONS.

From time to time they cast anxious glances behind them, in anticipation of seeing something of the troop of dragoons.

But the outlines of the bridge became confused, and at last faded altogether from their sight.

This happened before they heard the dragoons arrive.

Still they thought it not exactly prudent to leave the river yet, for fear they should not be far enough off to prevent the sound of their horses' hoofs being heard.

The river wound about very much, and they were not able in the darkness to take notice sufficient for them to tell how much they had doubled on their course.

There was the danger that it might wind them round again to the high road which they had left, but upon Turpin being applied to for information upon the subject, he replied that there was no danger of any such thing.

"I know the course of the little river well," he said. "If we continue to follow it we shall come out upon the Uxbridge Road at a point called Stonebridge, about half-way between Wilsdon and Twyford. Do you know the place?"

"Quite well," replied his comrades.

"That is enough, then. When we get there it will be time enough for us to consider which will be the next thing we had better do."

"You are right," said Tom King, "and one of the first things necessary will be to provide me with a horse. Black Bess won't be able to carry your weight and mine.'

"That is true, and it is a shame to tax the poor animal so. Nothing but dire necessity would have induced me. But never mind, she has not sustained much damage yet."

The river, after a little while, grew shallow again, which caused them to make another change.

They resolved, however, not to leave the course of the river, but walk their horses along the banks.

This time Claude Duval would insist upon Tom King riding behind him.

Without meeting with any adventure worthy of narration, they reached the stone bridge which spanned the river, and were glad to get up upon the broad highway.

From having been so long in the water, their clothing had got completely soaked through, and it now hung about them in a most disagreeable and uncomfortable manner.

To a spectator, at any rate, they would have appeared but very sorry objects.

The chill night air struck through to their very bones, and made their teeth chatter like castanets.

They clustered together, and a rather anxious consultation took place as to what step was to be taken next.

No sounds indicative of the vicinity of their pursuers reached their ears. They felt pretty certain, in fact, that they had completely succeeded in throwing them off their track.

Such being the case, the comforts which would accrue from a pleasant fire and a glass of something hot and strong, came vividly across their imaginations.

But their appearance, all dragged with mud and water as they were, was quite sufficient to rouse suspicion.

"Our position won't be improved by waiting," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and so the sooner we make up our minds what we are going to do the better."

"So say I," said Claude; "I am about as uncomfortable as a human being well could be."

"I only know of one thing that we can do," said Turpin, "and that is running rather more risk than I think advisable."

"Let us hear it."

"Am I am your captain, you say?"

Exactly."

"Then you are under my commands?"

"I suppose we ought to consider ourselves so.

"Then I will tell you what I had thought of, and what to me seems about the only course left open to us,"

"Well?"

"You can decline if you like. About a mile further on from here is a public-house known as the 'Fox and Grapes,' kept by a man named Pilbeam."

"I just know the house," said Tom King, "and that is about all."

"I know the landlord, and the landlord knows me," continued Turpin; "I have stayed at his house when I have been hard pressed by the runners."

"And he never betrayed you?"

"No; and yet there is something about the man's face and manner which makes me mistrust him."

"Perhaps that is your fancy."

"It may be."

"Why did he not betray you before?"

"It may not have been worth while to do so, and, more than that, at the time I speak of, I had not done anything particularly notorious."

"I see."

"But now you may depend there will be a great outcry made against us. The fact of a troop of dragoons having been despatched purposely to effect our capture will bear out that assertion. A large reward will be offered for the four of us; enough, in fact, to tempt any man."

"You are right; it will be running a great risk."

"Precisely; and yet, after all, he may be well disposed towards us, and have no thoughts of acting treacherously."

"You are willing, then, that we should try our luck?"

"I am; good fortune has always hitherto invariably attended us, and I do not see why she should desert us now. The thing is, the house is not far from London, and they may have heard of what has taken place at Tyburn to-day."

"Most likely, I should say."

"Still, if you are willing, I think we cannot do better than take shelter there for an hour or two at least—not solely on account of ourselves, but our cattle."

"And it must not be forgotten," said Claude Duval, "that we are now four strong, and that it would be no ordinary foe that we should have to dread."

"True; when we look more closely at it, the danger is not so great, only it would be awkward if the dragoons chased us here."

"It would, and no mistake; but I do not think we need be afraid."

"But, come, are you ready, all?"

"All!"

"Forward, then!" exclaimed Dick Turpin; "it is the first house you will come to on the left-hand side of the way."

Once more putting their steeds to rapid motion, they sped along the road.

The "Fox and Grapes" was very quickly in sight.

As soon as it was they drew rein a little.

To have made too much clatter would not have served their purpose at all.

Lights were beaming from nearly all the windows on the ground floor of the inn, thus showing that its inhabitants had not yet thought of retiring to rest.

There was an opening at the side of the public-house leading to the stables, and down this they turned.

The hoofs of the horses made a slight sound, and it appeared to be heard by the individual who performed the duties of ostler, for there came from the further end of the yard a flash of light, as though some one was carrying a lantern.

Our four friends dismounted, and then, taking the horses by the bridle, advanced to meet the man carrying the light.

Upon approaching him they found him to be a youth of about twenty years of age, with dark, curling hair, and a good-humoured expression of countenance.

"Well, Joe," said Turpin, with the air of an old acquaintance; "well, Joe, do you recollect me?"

Joe turned the lantern so that its principal beams should fall upon Dick's countenance.

"I thought it was your voice," he said. "Why, you are the noble gent that gave me a guinea the last time you were here, for grooming that black mare of yours."

"Just so. These are friends of mine, and they as well as myself, want their steeds well taken care of."

"I'll do it, sir. I'll do it."

"I knew you would: and now, Joe, do you know who I am?"

"I think I do."

"How did you come to know?"

"The guard of the coach told me."

"Ah!"

"Yes, but don't be afraid of trusting me. I'll never betray you as long as the world stands!"

"I will trust you, Joe, and if you will believe me, so far as your own money interest goes, you will get more by befriending me than ever you will by giving me up to justice."

"I wouldn't do no such thing! No, not was it ever so!" said Joe, with great emphasis. "Let me have the cattle, and I'll take care they are all right. You say those with you are friends of yourn?"

"Yes."

"May be some of them that helped you at Tyburn this morning?"

"Ah! How did you learn anything about that?"

"Why, Lor bless you, I was there myself, and didn't I pay into the officers downright well."

"I am much obliged to you, and here's some one who will feel even more so than I do."

"Then that's Tom King?"

"It is; but you ought to know it is not at all prudent for you to mention his name in that sort of way. You don't know who might be listening."

"Mum's the word with me in future."

"Will it be safe for us to enter the house?"

"Well, I don't know. You see it might be and it might not."

"I suppose so," said Dick, with a slight smile.

"Has any one belonging to the place seen you come in?"

"No one but yourself, I think."

"Very good; then if you will be content to come up into the loft with me, and make yourselves as comfortable a bed as you can amongst the hay, I think it will be the best thing for you."

"Can you conceal us, there?"

"Without any trouble, if no one has seen or heard you arrive besides myself."

"I am much obliged to you for your offer," said Turpin. "You won't lose anything by it. I will consult with my friends a moment."

"All right. You'd better come inside the stable, and then you won't be so likely to be seen. Come up."

Joe, the ostler, led the horses into the stable, and was followed by the four highwaymen.

Then pulling the door shut, Joe hung the lantern on a hook in such a way that its light was pretty equally diffused over the stable, and our friends drawing close together, considered over the proposal the ostler had made to them.

In the end, after arguing the matter pro and con for some time, they determined to accept his offer, and followed him up into a spacious hayloft, which extended over the whole range of stabling.

CHAPTER CLXII.

THE TROOP OF DRAGOONS STILL FOLLOW IN THE TRACK OF THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN.

THE fresh hay with which the loft was literally crammed sent out an odour peculiarly grateful and pleasing to the senses.

At least, it was so to our friends.

They were really surprised to find what a comfortable bed the ostler managed to make for them.

Then, when they laid down, he covered them carefully with it.

Fain would they have taken off their wet clothes and dried them, but that was not to be thought of, and they found the dry hay quickly absorbed the moisture from them.

All four were dreadfully fatigued, and very badly in want of rest.

"Are you all right, gentlemen?" asked Joe.

"Yes; and could sleep, if you would only keep guard over us, and warn us of the approach of any danger."

"Sleep, then, for rest assured I will do so."

"Many thanks."

"Do not think," said Claude Duval, "that we shall allow this great service to go unrewarded."

"Well, I won't say I shall be angry with you if you offer me something for my trouble."

"That's right. We shall look upon it as work done, and pay for it accordingly."

"Good night, then, gentlemen. Sleep in security, for upon the least sign of anything going amiss, you may depend I shall wake you."

"We can depend upon that?"

"You can."

Joe, the ostler, descended from the hayloft into the stable, where he proceeded to give his every attention to the horses, for the state they were in required it.

But he was well master of his business, and in a very short space of time indeed he had thoroughly cleansed and fed them.

Continually looking danger in the face as they did, made the highwaymen indifferent to it in a very great degree, and though they were on this occasion surrounded, as one might say, by an atmosphere of danger, and with their liberty depending solely upon the fidelity of a man they scarcely knew, but who had professed good faith towards them, they allowed themselves to sink into a profound slumber.

It was placing a great temptation in the ostler's way. The aggregate rewards that were offered for the apprehension of the four would amount to a considerable sum, and be enough almost to tempt any one when they found it all but within their grasp.

We should not be doing that strict justice which it is always our wish to do if we said that some thoughts of the wealth he would obtain by acting treacherously did not flit across Joe's mind: and when the operation of grooming the steeds was over, he sat down upon the lid of the corn-bin, and putting his head between his hands, gave himself up to thought.

A severe struggle took place in his breast.

By giving up the highwaymen to justice, he would be merely doing his duty to society, and at the same time he would be placing in his hands what to him would be competency for the remainder of his life.

More than once he started to his feet, walked to the stable door, having all but determined to deliver them to their foes.

But as often he returned, and resumed his seat.

And so the night wore on.

Little did the slumbering highwaymen think that they were in such peril as they were. Peacefully, quietly, and deeply they slept.

But Sixteen-String Jack, who was lying nearest to the circular window in the loft, suddenly grew restless.

He rolled over and over, and tossed his arms up and down.

The rustling sound which the hay made as he displaced it tended still further to disturb him.

Presently he awoke.

Accustomed as he was to waking up and finding himself in strange places, for he very rarely was twice at the same place—accustomed as he was, we say, this time he felt baffled and confused.

But the feeling lasted only for a moment.

Quickly shaking it off, he rose to a sitting posture, and endeavoured to pierce the darkness which surrounded him.

In this attempt he was unsuccessful, but he could tell by the deep and regular breathing that his companions slept.

The circular window, of which we spoke, was close to him. The wooden shutter, with which it was provided to exclude the wet when necessary, was drawn over it; but as it only fitted rudely, he could see the night sky through many a chink and crevice in and round about it.

In contrast with the interior it looked quite light.

Before he laid down again and composed himself to sleep, Jack thought it would be no harm to draw aside this shutter, and have a look at the appearance of things outside.

Accordingly, he crept towards it as quietly as he could, for he by no means wished to disturb the repose of his companions.

The woodwork was swelled or damp, for the shutter stuck firmly in its frame.

A little patience, however, enabled him to push it on one side silently, so that a space was left large enough for him to put his head through and look out.

Before him was the inn.

The sky was cloudy, the wind blowing occasionally with great violence, and then subsiding almost to a calm.

Through the rifts in the clouds, which were continually opening and closing up, came a faint, grayish-white light, by the aid of which he could see for a considerable distance around him.

The stable was built at the rear of the "Fox and Grapes," but the stable window was so situated as to command a view of the high road in the direction of London.

Along this he gazed, until it could no longer be distinguished from the surrounding meadows.

A solemn stillness was everywhere about. Not even the hooting of an owl, or the whirring sound of the bats, as they winged their nocturnal flight, could be heard.

But suddenly a faint sound smote upon Jack's ear.

He listened, but this time in vain.

He could not hear it.

A sudden furious gust of wind swept by, which made noise enough to drown all other sounds.

When it subsided again, however, he listened even more intently and eagerly than before.

"Horsemen!" he muttered, after a few moments' pause; "they are well mounted, too, and coming at great speed. Who are they, I wonder? The dragoons, perhaps, who may have got upon our track. Now I hear them. Why, there must be a score of horses, at least, to raise a sound like that."

He projected his head yet further out of the circular window, and bent all his faculties to listening.

This time there could be no possible mistake. The clatter of the horses' hoofs could be plainly enough distinguished. They were, however, at a great distance. Only the stillness that prevailed could have enabled him to hear them at all.

"I will wake them up," he said, alluding to his comrades; "it may bode no special harm to us, and we may not be in any special danger; still it is best to be prepared."

Acting upon this conviction, he drew in his head.

The breathing was quite sufficient to guide him to the exact spots where his companions lay.

He was well aware that the soundest sleep may generally be broken by a touch. He came to Dick Turpin first, for he happened to be nearest to him.

He placed his hand upon his face, and said:

"Hist! Wake up, Dick, and be prepared for action. There may be danger!"

Turpin was awake instantly.

"Crawl to the window yonder," said Jack, "while I wake the others. You will not need me to tell you what is the matter."

Dreading the worst, Turpin crawled to the window.

While he did so, Jack hastily roused up Claude Duval and Tom King.

There are some who, for the first few minutes after they are awakened, are scarcely conscious of what is going forward, but our friends were not of these.

Danger was a word sufficient at once to put them into full possession of all their mental faculties.

Eagerly and excitedly they all crawled to the window.

"What is it? What is amiss?" asked Claude and Tom King, anxiously.

"Hark!" replied Sixteen-String Jack. "Cannot you hear the tramp of horses' hoofs?"

"Yes."

"And what is more," added Turpin, "I can see them! I should think twenty, at least!"

"They are coming from London?"

"Apparently."

"Then they are our foes?"

"There is little doubt of that."

"Look, Dick, again. Can you make out what they are?"

"No; they are at too great a distance. All I can see is a dark moving mass."

"How shall we act?"

"That is hard to say."

"There is but one course open to us," said Claude.

"And what is that?"

"To stay here where we are, and conceal ourselves as best we can. We stand no chance of leaving here unperceived."

"But little, I am afraid," said Turpin.

"It cannot be done."

"We may, after all, be alarming ourselves without a cause," said Jack. "They surely cannot have any special knowledge of our whereabouts. Perhaps they have only a suspicion that we are on this road, and if so, they will be almost sure to ride past."

"We shall have our doubts set at end soon," said Tom King. "They must be very close now. Can you make them out yet?"

"Yes; I think I can."

"And are they the dragoons?"

"That I cannot say for certain, but they are mounted soldiers of some sort, and well armed, for I can see the glitter of their weapons."

"It is them, then, safe enough."

"How far should you take them to be off?"

"About half a mile."

"Draw in your head, then, for fear you should be seen. It is never worth while to run unnecessary risks."

"You are right," said Dick Turpin, drawing in his head, for during the foregoing conversation he alone had been looking out, while the others crouched down close behind him.

CHAPTER CLXIII.

RELATES WHAT TOOK PLACE UPON THE ARRIVAL OF DRAGOONS AT THE "FOX AND GRAPES."

THE approaching soldiers came on at a gallop, which seemed to shake the very earth.

It was Tom King who drew back the shutter to its full extent as he said:

"That will be much better. If we lie down all of us we shall be able to see, without running much risk of being seen."

This was so obvious that all followed his suggestion, and then looked with straining eyes and slightly quickened pulses at the approaching cloud, for such it seemed.

Suddenly, however, the clouds opened overhead, and a brighter light was shed upon the scene. The forms of the approaching horsemen were now plainly visible.

They were either the same troop of light dragoons, which had previously chased them, or another detachment from the same regiment, for their accoutrements were just the same.

The closer they came, and the more plainly they saw them, the further our friends drew back.

It should be distinctly understood that the window we have so often mentioned was situated in the gable end of the stable, and a view straight up the road could be obtained from it.

On came the soldiers, showing no signs of diminishing their speed.

Our friends' hearts beat high with the hopes that they would sweep by, and leave them unmolested.

Neither ventured to speak. All their attention was absorbed in watching and listening.

The voices of the riders, and the ringing sound occasionally produced as their weapons clashed against each other, could now be distinctly heard.

Two more minutes would carry them past the front of the inn.

The question was, would they go past, or would they draw up?

They could only ascertain by mastering their impatience for yet a little longer.

Little did they think of the danger they were actually in.

The state of the ostler's mind was quite unknown to them.

They did not entertain the slightest doubts as to his good faith.

If they had they would not have taken things so quietly as they did.

"Are the soldiers going to stop?" was the question that occupied their minds to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

They almost held their breaths as they came still nearer.

And now Dick's eyes caught sight of a human figure standing at the gateway leading to the highway from the stable-yard.

A second glance showed him it was the ostler.

He did not speak, but raised his arm and pointed.

The other three turned their eyes in that direction.

A suspicion that all was not well crossed their minds, and then deepened into conviction.

Before, however, they had time to adopt any particular mode of action, the troop of dragoons, with a sudden dash, pulled up in front of the inn.

They gave themselves up for lost.

While the trampling was subsiding they heard a loud voice say—

"Hullo! there; who are you?"

The question lifted a load off their minds.

It showed them that the suspicions they had entertained were baseless.

The ostler was not in collusion with the dragoons.

He had not connived to bring them there.

Chance alone had done it.

But why his presence at the gates at that late hour, when one would have thought all persons were asleep?

That looked suspicious.

These thoughts flashed simultaneously through their minds in the brief interval which elapsed between the officer asking the question and the ostler replying to it.

"I'm the ostler," he replied; "Who are you?"

"Don't be insolent, fellow."

"I ain't insolent."

"I tell you you are."

"I tell you I ain't."

The officer seemed upon the point of breaking out into a rage, but by a great effort he controlled himself.

Probably he thought he would be demeaning himself too far to fall into a passion with an ostler.

Choking with rage, he cried—

"Let me advise you to be careful."

"Thank you all the same, I am. How are you?"

"In the king's name!" cried the officer, who was the same hot-headed individual who had ordered the charge to be made upon the mob, and who was now more than ever disgusted with his task of hunting highwaymen, "In the king's name I call upon you to answer my questions truthfully and without prevarication!"

"Fire away," said Joe, "I'm a-listening; what do you want to know?"

"We are armed with a warrant for the apprehension of three notorious villains, known respectively by the names of Richard Turpin, Claude Duval, and Jack Rann, alias Sixteen-String Jack. They have with them one Thomas King, who is under sentence of death. I call upon you in the king's name to say whether you have seen them."

"I don't know as ever I seed 'em," said Joe.

"How long have you been standing here?"

"That's my business."

"Be careful, or it will be my duty to arrest you on suspicion."

"Suspicion of what?"

"Being an accomplice."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. Do not dally with us any longer. Have you been standing here long?"

"What do you want to know for?"

"Have you seen four men go by, mounted on three horses, during the last two or three hours?"

"No, I haven't," said Joe.

This was perfectly true.

He had not seen them go by.

"You haven't?"

"Certainly not, though I haven't been standing here all the while, but I should have heard them."

"But your conduct is suspicious."

"Is it?"

"Yes. You seem to be waiting for something."

"So I am."

"What is it?"

"I don't see as I ought to tell you. You've got a dress, and look very grand, but you're an awful trou some fellow. However, if it will do you any good, I will tell you what I am waiting for."

"What is it?"

"The Uxbridge coach."

"The Uxbridge coach?"

"Yes. I have been expecting it ever so long, and here it comes at last."

At this moment, in confirmation of Joe the ostler's words, the loud blast of a horn rung shrilly on the night air.

"There she is. The Dreadnought; but she's behind her time."

"Curse the Dreadnought!"

"Oh! as you please."

"And you haven't heard any one pass?"

"No."

"Nor seen them either?"

"No."

The officer turned round, and spoke in a low tone to those who were nearest to him.

The reader can conceive what pleasure the highwaymen felt when they found the ostler so determined to stand their friend, and throw the soldiers off the scent.

In breathless eagerness they waited for what was going to happen next.

The guard on the coach blew his horn again, and the rumbling of the wheels began to be heard as the unwieldy vehicle came bowling along the highway.

The officer of dragoons could make nothing of Joe.

Nor was there any suspicion attaching to his conduct, for, for all that he knew, it might be part of his duties to await the arrival of the coach.

But, if he was not suspicious, he was not satisfied.

"How long have you been here? Tell me," he said.

"About ten minutes."

"No longer?"

"Well, I won't swear it hasn't been a quarter of an hour, for the coach is late to-night."

"We have the most positive information that the persons of whom we are in search are somewhere on this road."

"Well, I don't say they ain't, because it's likely enough they are, but I haven't heard them. Lor bless yer! they'd be cunning enough not to make much noise in passing a house."

"There's something in that."

"If you'll take my advice, you'll wait till the coach comes, and then ask if they have met any suspicious looking characters on the road."

"A good thought! I will."

"Here it comes, then! You won't be kept long a-waiting."

From where the highwaymen were concealed, it was not possible to obtain a view of the road leading to Uxbridge, but they could tell by the grinding of the wheels that the coach was not very far off.

The troop of dragoons placed themselves in a straggling sort of line across the road.

In a few minutes afterwards the coach pulled up.

"In the king's name," cried the officer, "I call upon you in the king's name. Have you passed any horsemen on the road?"

"No, ne'er a one," replied the driver.

"You are quite sure!"

"In coorse I am!"

"Let me tell you there are four highwaymen on the road to-night."

A chorus of screams from the passengers followed upon this announcement.

"Four highwaymen?"

"Yes; and four as desperate villains as ever breathed. I am charged with a special warrant from the Secretary of State to apprehend them and lodge them in jail, and empowered to call upon any one to assist me in so doing."

"I only hopes you'll catch them, that's all! But you may take your oath they are nowhere between here and Uxbridge, or else I should have seed 'em!"

"That is enough!"

The soldiers drew on one side, and allowed the coach to pass.

The coachman cracked his whip, and off the horses started on their way to London at a capital pace.

The officer of dragoons looked half a mind to follow them, when he asked suddenly—

"How long does the coach take to reach here from Uxbridge?"

"About half an hour, I should think."

"Then it's likely enough they passed before the coach started. Forward, my men, they are somewhere on this road, I am confident, and to find them I am determined. Forward!"

CHAPTER CLXIV.

JOE, THE OSTLER, MAKES ALL THE REPARATION FOR HIS FAULT THAT HE IS ABLE, AND THEN ADVISES THE HIGHWAYMEN AS TO THE BEST COURSE FOR THEM TO TAKE.

In obedience to the command given to them by their superior officer, the troop set itself in motion and were soon at a considerable distance from the "Fox and Grapes."

And so the great danger which had threatened our friends, thanks to Joe, the ostler, had passed away, leaving them unhurt.

They could scarcely believe in the reality of their narrow escape.

Joe watched the retreating horsemen down the road to see that none of them lingered behind, and then turned towards the stable.

Dick looked out.

"Joe," he said; "Joe, come here."

Now Joe had no idea the highwaymen were awake. He thought, somehow, that they were asleep all this time, and he felt confused.

That was because his conscience smote him for what he had meditated doing.

'Come up here, Joe, I want to speak to you."

"All right, Captain, I'll be with you in a moment."

And he was as good as his word, for in less than the time mentioned he stood beside them.

"Joe!" they all four cried, "you have saved our lives! What can we do to show our gratitude?"

"Don't say a word about that, I don't deserve it."

"Not deserve it?"

"No, I do not, and I may as well be candid with you as not."

"But you deceived the soldiers."

"I know I did."

"You put them off the scent when they had us in their power."

"I know that, too."

"Has not that course saved our lives? To be sure it has, and how can we be otherwise than grateful?"

"I tell you I don't deserve that you should think so well of me."

"Why not?"

"What do you think is the reason I was up and dressed and standing at the gate when the soldiers arrived?"

"We have no idea. You told them you were waiting for the coach."

"Just so."

"And wasn't that the reason?"

"No; I wish it was."

"Can you tell it us? We are curious."

"I will tell you, though it will cause me to lose your good opinion, but better do that than hold it wrongfully."

"Speak on. You need not fear."

"But you do not know what I have to say."

"Nor do I want to know, if you would rather not tell it."

Poor Joe was silent. His emotions mastered him.

He was full of remorse for the deed he had contemplated.

But yet, with a candour which cannot be sufficiently admired, he made up his mind to tell them.

He little thought it, but by resolving upon such a course, his fault was more than half atoned for.

The highwaymen noticed his agitation, and were very much surprised at it. They knew not what to think.

"Have patience a minute," said Joe, "and I will tell you."

"You need not, if it is something so painful to you."

"But I will. I went to the gateway because I had made up my mind to go to London."

"To London?"

"Yes."

"For what?"

"*To betray you.*"

It is impossible to describe the tone in which these three words were uttered. Equally vain would it be to paint the astonishment of our four friends.

They were incredulous.

"Betray us?"

Joe did not reply.

"You cannot be in earnest, Joe," said Dick Turpin, kindly, for he felt deeply touched by the manner in which the lad had behaved. "You cannot be in earnest?"

"I was," said Joe, in a choking voice; "and you never ought to trust me any more."

"But," asked Claude Duval, "if you had made up your mind to betray us, why did you behave in the manner you did to the dragoons?"

"I repented then, though when I first saw them coming, I made up my mind to tell them you were here. It was the reward that did it."

"The reward?"

"Yes. How much do you think the rewards that are offered for all four of you would amount to if they were added up together?"

"A very large amount, and enough to tempt anyone."

"Do you think so?"

"Assuredly."

"Bear with me, then, and think no worse of me than you can possibly help. When I left you, and had groomed the horses, the thought came into my head to add up the rewards."

"And how much did they come to?"

"Two thousand pounds!"

"Why, that's five hundred a-piece!" said Turpin.

"There is more offered for you than any of the others."

"And when you added it up, you thought how desirable it would be for you to possess such a sum."

"I did; but I didn't think of getting all of it; now do you know the reason why I so wished to obtain a portion?"

"What is it? You have told us all so far pretty freely, and if, as I suspect, this is something in your favour, by all means let us hear it."

"I don't know for it being in my favour, but, you must know, I have a mother."

"Alive?"

"Yes, and very poorly off. She depends wholly upon me for all she has, but, as this is not much of a place, it is but little I am able to take her."

"I begin to understand."

"That is not all," said Joe. "There is—there is——"

"What?"

"Some one I am fond of."

"Oh!"

"But she will not have me until I have saved money enough to take a public-house myself."

"And very prudent of her."

"Do you think so?"

"Certainly."

"Well, you see now what I thought."

"Pretty clearly, I think," said Turpin. "You have a mother and a sweetheart, of both of whom you are fond. The one you would like to see much better off, the other you want to see your wife. Is that it?"

"It is."

"And with the reward you would have been able to do all this, and which, without some such slice of luck, you would have to wait a long time for."

"That is just what I thought."

"Then I do not for a moment wonder that you contemplated giving us up to justice. Do you, my friends?"

"Not at all!"

"In fact, I wonder you held back. You have not told us what caused you to alter your mind when the dragoons came up. Did you think there would be too many to share the reward with to make your portion worth having?"

"No; that was not it!"

"What then?"

"I hardly know, but I think it was more the manner in which the officer spoke to me than anything else."

"Now, Joe," said Turpin, "listen to me."

"Can it be possible that you wish to be friends with me after this?"

"Certainly; I think very highly indeed of you!"

"And you are willing to forgive me for my baseness?"

"Every excuse possible can be made for you. Will you listen to me?"

"You know I shall."

"Now do not be offended at what I am going to say, nor refuse what I am going to offer. Will you meet me at Stonebridge, about half a mile from here, at twelve o'clock to-morrow night?"

"For what?"

"I will then reward you for what you have done."

"I deserve no reward."

"Do not say that, because I think otherwise. Will you meet me?"

"If you wish it."

"I do wish it."

"And may I ask the reward you intend to offer me?"

"Yes; I have no reason for concealing it from you. I will give you the means of accomplishing your desires."

"You will?"

"I certainly will."

"After the manner in which I have behaved?"

"It is just that which determines me to act as I have said. What do you say, my friends? Do you approve?"

"Most certainly, and we will do all we can to assist you."

"Thanks. I knew such would be the case. Now, Joe, we have wasted rather more time perhaps in talking than we ought to have done, but never mind, so that we understand each other. The dragoons are far enough off by this time."

"They are; and, if you will take my advice, you will have your horses saddled without delay, and set off in an opposite direction."

"We will; but now, Tom, that reminds me of your difficulty. How are you to manage for a horse?"

"I know not," replied Tom King, "without Joe here can provide us with one. Can you?"

"I can, if you will pay me for it."

"Very well; Claude, I fancy, can manage to do that. Let us have them at once."

"Come down, then. They only want the saddles clapped on their backs, and you can assist and save time."

The highwaymen followed Joe down the ladder, and the saddles were quickly put on.

The horse that was brought out for Tom to buy, was one that had been left with the ostler to sell.

The price was forty guineas. Claude had enough, so the horse was bought, and Tom mounted it.

"Now, Joe," said Dick Turpin, as they quietly walked their horses out of the stable-yard, "don't forget to be at Stonebridge at twelve o'clock to-morrow night, and I will place in your hands a sufficient sum of money to enable you to gratify your wishes."

"I don't deserve it," blubbered Joe, as the highwaymen rode away.

CHAPTER CLXV.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN LEAVE THE "FOX AND GRAPES," AND LAY IN WAIT FOR THE OXFORD COACH.

"I FAIRLY tremble," said Sixteen-String Jack, "when I think what a frightfully narrow escape we have had, though no one could blame the lad for acting in the manner he did."

"I cannot, for one. Little did the officer think that his hot temper was the means of losing us."

"Which way shall we take?" inquired Claude Duval.

"You are our captain, Dick, and we are under your commands."

"Then let us push on to the Oxford-road. If we keep on for about half a mile, and take the first turning to the left, it will bring us out at Harlington-corner. Do you know it?"

"Quite well."

"Forward, then, because the sooner we are off the Uxbridge-road the better."

Brief as was the rest the horses had had, yet it was long enough to enable them to recruit their strength, and not only that, they had been well-fed and groomed.

They, therefore, willingly responded to the impulse forward which their riders gave them, and swept at a swinging gallop along the turnpike road.

Tom King was pleased to find that the horse he had purchased bore every indication of being a good one, and of a kind well suited to his requirements.

Upon turning into the lane, however, they were compelled to go at a slower pace, for it was very narrow, and had two deep ruts on either side, where the cart-wheels had been.

Dick took advantage of this opportunity to speak to his friends, and unfold his views.

Accordingly, when they were all close enough together for conversation to be easy, he spoke.

"We have succeeded so far," he said, "in eluding our foes, and making their plans of no avail. That they have tried what they could do is tolerably certain, and now, just for a change, I propose that we try what we can do in return."

"Agreed, captain—agreed!" cried the three others.

"What is it you propose?"

"A bold and daring deed at any time, but now unusually so."

"What is it?"

"Cannot you guess?"

"No—no. Tell us, do not keep us in suspense."

"I will not. I propose, my friends, that when we get into the Oxford-road, which we shall do in about half an hour——"

"Yes—yes."

"When we get there, I propose we look for some dark and sheltered piece of roadway, and there lay in wait."

"But for what?"

"The Oxford Mail Coach!"

"Are you in earnest, Dick?" asked Claude.

"Never more so in my life."

"It is a daring deed, then."

"So much the better. I like to achieve exploits that will bear talking about."

"But it will sure to be crowded with passengers, and the guard and the driver, it is well known, have been chosen as being brave men, and well able to make use of the weapons with which they are provided."

"I know all that," said Dick, "but I do not see anything in it to cause me to alter my determination."

"Let us do it," said Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack; "the bolder the deed the better it pleases me. As for Claude——"

"I shall give way to the majority," said Duval; "but while I do so I think we are running into much unnecessary peril."

"We have been in greater many a time. Come, Claude, shake off your fears."

"I have none."

"Here we are, then," cried Dick Turpin, as they emerged into the Oxford-road, "let us try our luck."

He proceeded to make an examination of the priming of his pistols as he spoke, in doing which he was immediately imitated by his companions.

All being made secure, they trotted on at a gentle pace, expecting every moment to hear some sound indicative of the coming of the coach.

The place, however, where they now found themselves was scarcely so well suited to their purpose as they could have wished.

The country for miles around was open, and the hedgerows more than ordinarily low.

It was getting much lighter, too, every moment, and in the east a faint misty radiance foretold that before long it would be daybreak.

Of course, had the mail-coach come along while they were in this part, Dick would not have changed his determination of stopping it, but, as it was, he deemed it good policy to move on and meet it.

A gallop of about ten minutes, though, brought him to a place which seemed expressly made for his design.

The ground rose up to a slight elevation.

Instead, however, of the road passing over it, as is generally the case, a path had been cut through it, thus doing away with the steep ascent that there would have been on one side.

But doing this had its disadvantages as well as its advantages, though probably the latter more than balanced

the former, as it made the road for a few yards very dismal and dark indeed.

In the highest part, the embankment on either side was about fifteen feet in height.

The sides were as perpendicular as a wall almost, and were profusely overgrown with rank vegetation.

The top of the embankment was fringed by a quick-set hedge.

From the foregoing description, it will be seen that, although the road was of a good width, yet the sides were more than sufficient to cast a dark shadow over it.

In the day time even, except when the sun was at his greatest elevation, it was a dark-looking place, and at night it was all but impossible to see your hand before you.

Well suited therefore was it in all respects for the successful accomplishment of the daring adventure upon which the highwaymen were bent.

The only thing now necessary was for the coach to come.

All their preparations being made, our friends did not speak, but sat like statues on their horses in various picturesque, listening attitudes.

Dick Turpin and Tom King had taken up their stations close to each other on the south side of the road.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, in a similar manner on the opposite side, only lower down towards London.

They were to attack the fore-part of the coach.

The others the rear.

Minute after minute passed by, but still they could hear nothing like the grinding of wheels.

They began to be fearful that they were too late—that the coach had passed.

So dark as it was, seeing the time was quite out of the question.

Nor had they any clear idea of what the time was, only from the appearance of the sky they judged that dawn could not be far off.

In fact, they could find it growing lighter and lighter each instant.

If the coach did not come soon, they would have it daylight, and that would have by no means suited them.

At last, however, and just as their impatience had increased to an unbearable extent, the long-wished for sound arrived.

Very faint it was at first, like the rustling of the wind among the trees, and such by an unexperienced listener it would be taken to be, but long practice had enabled our friends to discriminate between the two.

The state of expectation in which they had been kept had put them in a proper mood to execute their daring feat.

The road was straight, and presently, as they looked along it, the bright carriage-lamps on either side became visible.

On—on they came, with a motion that appeared perpetually incressive.

The rumbling of the wheels sounded like the muttering of far-off thunder.

With their bridles tightly in their grasp, a loaded pistol in each of their left hands, our friends held themselves in readiness to attack the coach.

The guard blew a loud blast upon his horn as they entered the hollow, in order to warn anyone who might be there to get out of the way of the horses, for in the darkness that there prevailed it would be impossible for them to be seen.

The driver of the coach had just confessed to the passenger, who sat on his off-side, that he never felt very comfortable when driving through this dark bit of road-way, when a bright red flash appeared, followed almost instantaneously by the lond ringing report of a pistol.

A voice cried out, "Halt!" exe the reverberations had fairly died away.

The horses were terrified.

Claude Duval, who was nearest to them, by a sudden and dexterous movement of his hand, succeeded in throwing the leaders down.

Those behind could not avoid falling likewise.

They kicked and plunged fearfully.

But keeping out of the reach of their hoofs, Claude drew his sword, and watching his opportunity, in two strokes severed the traces.

While he was doing this his companions had not been idle.

We must describe their actions separately and in detail, though of course, they all happened simultaneously.

According to the arrangements made, Sixteen-String Jack spurred his steed as close as he could to the coachman's box, and holding a pistol pointed at his head, commanded him not to move at his peril.

But the coachman, who was not a man to give in lightly or easily, immediately drew a double-barrelled pistol from a little pocket in the seat, made purposely for its reception, and taking a hasty aim at the dusky figure, he pulled both triggers in rapid succession.

Jack managed to move aside in time to avoid the first bullet, but he was not equally fortunate with the second, for he felt something inflict a stinging sensation upon his cheek, as though he had been struck by a thin switch. He knew by this that the bullet had ploughed up the skin.

"Shot for shot!" he cried, as he pulled the trigger of his pistol and fired.

CHAPTER CLXVI.

THE TIDE OF FORTUNE, WHICH HAS BEEN FOR SO LONG IN FAVOUR OF THE HIGHWAYMEN, NOW TURNS AGAINST THEM.

A LOUD yell of a most awful and startling character followed the discharge of Sixteen-String Jack's pistol, and the coachman, after swaying to one side, fell headlong off the box.

The cry was echoed by the passengers on the roof, who were now in a state of the greatest possible alarm, and almost dead with fright.

"Move not, at your peril!" cried Sixteen-String Jack, drawing another pistol and pointing it at them, for his blood was now thoroughly heated, and he did not much care what he did.

The passengers on the roof could tell he was a desperate character, and so obeyed his imperions demand, being fearful that their lives would not stand in his way, if they angered him.

And in this they were perfectly right, for the pain of the wound he had received in his cheek grew worse and worse every moment.

And now for Tom King.

He, as we said, was on the other side of the road.

When the coach was level with him, he sprang out, and held his pistol to the guard, and cried out to him not to move upon peril of his life.

But the guard had his hand upon the stock of the blunderbuss, which hung at the back of his seat.

Slowly and imperceptibly he raised it in his hand, until at length he got it so that its broad, bell-shaped mouth was pointing to Tom King.

His finger was on the trigger when Jack fired his pistol.

The flash dispelled the darkness, and Tom saw the bright barrel of the blunderbuss, with its muzzle turned towards him.

Comprehending what had taken place, in a moment he struck his horse sharply with the spur, which caused the animal to utter a snort of pain, and bound forward.

That saved his life.

The guard had his finger on the trigger, and he pulled it.

The blunderbuss exploded with a sound like that of some mimic cannon.

A perfect storm of bullets flew forth, but they did no execution.

They sank into the earth of which the embankment was composed, but that was all.

Turning his horse back, Tom held his pistol to the guard.

But fully believing that his last hour had come, he shrank down in his seat, and hid himself from sight.

The other passengers, with Jack at one end and Tom at the other, were cowed into perfect submission.

And now for the last, we proceed to describe the actions of Dick Turpin

At the same moment that his companions sprang forward to do as we have described, Dick Turpin, by a particular touch upon her flank, which the gallant creature



[THE FARMER GIVES THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN A HOSPITABLE RECEPTION.]

fully understood, made Black Bess take one leap, and then alight just at the door of the coach.

There she stood, as though carved in stone, except she tossed her head proudly, as if in satisfaction at what she had done.

Long practice had taught Dick Turpin the knack of letting down a coach window rapidly and dexterously from the outside.

It made a terrible clattering noise.

"Your money or your life!" said Turpin, assuming as ferocious a tone and manner as he possibly could. "Do not dally with me. The coach is surrounded by my men, so that resistance will be futile. Hand over your valuables at once—to those who refuse their death will be on their own head."

As he spoke these words, he projected the barrel of the pistol which he carried into the coach.

By stooping slightly in the saddle, he was able to observe the actions of those within.

The inside was quite full of passengers, and by the flutter of dresses, as well as several screams which followed his appearance, he could tell some of them were females.

His principal attention, however, was directed to an individual who sat with his back to the horses, next to the door.

He was tall and well-built.

His attire was of sober black, and the coat he had on was one of unusually large dimensions.

Round his neck was an enormous frilled neckcloth, in which, whenever he bent his head, his chin was completely buried.

He had taken his hat off.

Upon his head he wore a large white wig, every hair and curl of which was scrupulously arranged so as to be in perfect order.

His face was large, full, and florid, having, in fact, a bloated appearance so conspicuous in the countenances of those who are too much addicted to the good things of this life.

His mouth was large and sensuous, his eyes small, deeply set and sleepy-looking.

All this Dick Turpin was able to take in at a glance.

But it was not that there was anything very peculiar in this person's appearance or costume that made him regard him with so much attention. It was because he felt a vague consciousness steal over him that he had seen that face before.

It was not a friend's, he was confident, nor was it under favorable circumstances that he had seen it.

All of a sudden, like a flash of light, Dick recollected not only where and when he had seen him, but also who he was.

It was the counsel who had prosecuted Tom King at the Old Bailey.

Consequently, Dick looked upon him as a foe, though of course the man had done nothing more than his duty.

It did not take an instant for all these thoughts to pass through Turpin's mind.

No attack, however, was attempted to be made upon him by any of those who occupied the interior of the coach.

Probably the reason of this was none of them carried arms.

In fact, the Oxford mail coach was looked upon as being about the safest conveyance that could possibly be imagined, and the idea of any highwaymen having the audacity to stop it and rob it was not dreamt of.

To those who were spectators of the scene, no interval was appreciable between the time Dick reached the coach-door and took off his hat.

The light in the inside fell with full force upon his countenance.

It was far, very far indeed from being an unpleasing one. There was upon it an expression of dauntless courage, which no one would fail to admire.

He had dropped the reins upon the neck of Black Bess, for he knew that he could safely trust her not to move, and this allowed him to have both hands at liberty.

In one, then, he held his hat, and in the other a pistol.

He repeated his demand.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I must trouble you for all you have of any value. If you are wise, you will give it up at once. You cannot possibly escape, for the coach is well surrounded by the men who acknowledge me as their captain. If I cannot obtain what I want by gentle means, I shall be compelled to have you dragged out, one by one and searched. But this I shall not do if you will satisfy my wants. Come, my hat is before you."

This was said with an air of the greatest apparent ease, but all the time Dick took good care to keep a sharp eye upon every one, and was quite prepared for any sudden movement that boded danger to him.

But the passengers, finding the hopeless predicament they were in, like sensible people, preferred to lose their money rather than risk their lives, so they began slowly one after another, to drop different articles into the hat.

Watches, brooches, seals, bracelets, purses, and loose cash all made their appearance.

But there was nothing like so much in the hat as Turpin considered there ought to be.

Another demand produced a trifle more.

"Really," said Dick, at length, "if you go on in this way I shall lose what small amount of patience I am blessed with, and then when I do I will not be answerable for the consequences. Come be generous. I have been temperate where many would have been violent. I should be sorry to subject any one of you to the least ill-usage, and you ought to give me full credit for my consideration, when you find you are so entirely in my power."

The obviousness of this at once struck home to the hearts of all, and they gave up their things freely, being satisfied that, under the circumstances, it was the best course they could possibly pursue.

They had two disagreeable alternatives.

One was, to give up what they had.

The other, to have it taken from them.

The result of both was just the same, and so the first was clearly the lesser evil of the two.

In a few minutes it was heavy enough to satisfy him, and so drawing back his arm and replacing the pistol in the holster, he quickly transferred the booty to the capacious pocket of his coat.

While he did so, his ears caught the sound of some one weeping, while every now and then utterance was given to a deep and heart-breaking sob.

One of the inmates of the coach was in trouble about something.

What that something was, Dick determined at all risks to find out.

Of course it was no other than a female who thus manifested her grief.

And was it not his duty, as he emulated the doings of the knights-errant of old, to succour, protect, and comfort all females in distress?

CHAPTER CLXVII.

A VISION OF GENTLENESS, BEAUTY, AND GRIEF APPEARS TO DICK, WHICH AROUSES THE DORMANT FEELINGS OF HIS BETTER NATURE.

LEANING forward, then, in his saddle, Dick put his head inside the window of the coach.

Its inmates observed it with surprise, and began to fear that the highwayman was not satisfied with what he had extorted from them already.

But this alarm was soon dissipated.

In a kindly tone of voice, and which he could always assume without an effort, Dick spoke:

"I can hear some one weeping," he said, "which is sufficient to show me that one of you is in trouble. Whoever it may be, I conjure them to speak, and if it lies in my power to do anything to assuage their grief, believe me I shall only be too glad to do it."

A profound silence followed these words.

No one replied to him in any way, but he still heard the sobs, as though a violent effort was being made to stifle them.

"Speak," said Dick again, after a brief pause, and in a more earnest tone of voice than before. "Fear nothing. Who is in sorrow?"

"You speak kindly," said a woman's voice, "and so I do not mind telling you that it is this young girl who is sitting next to me who is crying so, but whether you can do her any good is more than I can tell."

As she spoke, the woman drew on one side and allowed Turpin to catch a glimpse of a young girl who was sitting next to her, and leaning as far back as she could, as if in the endeavour to escape observation.

She was dressed entirely in black.

Her face he could not see, for she had concealed it in a white cambric handkerchief, which she held up to her eyes.

What her age might be he could not, therefore, guess, except from a contemplation of her form, and as its contours were only partially developed, he came to the conclusion that she must be young—fifteen or sixteen at most.

The hand that held the handkerchief before her face was as tiny as a child's. But the fingers were long and wasted, looking as though her grief had been great and incessant, and as if she had suffered much.

The moment Dick's eyes rested upon this young creature, he felt an immediate and deep interest in her.

He longed to see her face.

That it was a very beautiful one he did not doubt.

With a still greater depth of pathos than had tinged his words before, he addressed her.

"Fair girl," he said, "answer me, as a great and inestimable favour, the question I am about to ask you. You are in deep—very deep grief. I am a rude, violent man, but I am willing, nay, anxious to stand your friend. Tell me then, without fear, whether it lies in my power to alleviate your sorrow."

The counsel who had prosecuted Tom King, and who resolutely disbelieved that there was anything like disinterested kindness in human nature, moved impatiently round in his seat, and uttered an indignant "Pish!"

Dick just glanced at him, but took no further notice just then.

As for the other passengers, they were one and all deeply moved at the manner in which the highwayman was acting.

There was something about his whole air and manner that was sufficient to convince them that he was playing a part, but that he was quite in earnest in what he said, and unquestionably would, if the opportunity was

offered him, try his utmost and do his best to ease that young heart of its anguish.

The woman who had before spoken, and moved to allow Dick Turpin to see the girl, now bent over her, and by her manner it was evident that she was endeavouring to persuade the young girl to speak, and, if she did no more, at least to thank the highwayman for the interest he had manifested in her welfare.

Her arguments had their effect, for the young girl removed the handkerchief from her face.

The light fell upon it.

In all his experience, and, as the reader may imagine, it had been tolerably extensive—never, Dick thought, had he seen a human face so nearly like what an angel's might be supposed to be as that one was.

Not even the painter's art, wondrous though it be, could do justice to its singular and rare beauty.

How insufficient, then, must words be to convey an impression of it.

We shall not attempt the task, but simply say that it was a reflex of the holiest and best feelings in human nature.

But the whole was chastened, overspread, and softened by the traces of grief—deep, permanent, inconsolable.

There was a strange feeling about Dick's heart—a feeling which he had never until that moment felt—as he gazed upon this heavenly face, and felt her dark eyes fixed in earnest gaze upon him.

How great the contrast!

The one the personification of gentleness, purity, and holiness.

The other of plunder, violence, and sin.

And yet Dick Turpin, as many of his actions have testified, was far from being all that is bad in humanity. There were many who, in his day, were looked up to with respect, and whose names even now are held in reverence, who were far worse than he.

But, nevertheless, he felt a strange aching in his breast, and a choking sensation in his throat, as he thought how great a gulf there was between them.

Even as her eyes met his for a brief instant in that mournful gaze, they filled with tears, and she again carried the handkerchief to her face.

But feeling that gratefulness alone ought to compel her to command her feelings sufficiently to express her thanks, she made a strong and successful effort to subdue her grief.

And then, when she would fain have spoken a few words, utterance was denied her, and the words passed away in an inaudible murmur.

In the deep and absorbing interest which Dick felt in this little episode, all other things faded from his mind. He no longer thought of the perils and difficulties of his situation, nor remembered that his life at that moment hung upon a thread,

"Speak," he said, still more gently. "Let me have the satisfaction of hearing you say that it is in my power to relieve you of at least some portion of your distress. Speak to me frankly."

"I will try," replied the young girl, who found her voice at last. "You speak kindly to me, and so—so—you see you spoke so kindly that—that—I could not bear it."

The tones in which she spoke, though very, very sad, were low, sweet, and silvery.

Dick was still more entranced.

Those other passengers, too, who had up to then looked on this scene with indifference and coldness, began, in spite of themselves, to feel an interest in it.

So modest and retiring had this young girl been during the whole of their long journey, that they were scarcely sensible of her presence and existence.

Now they began to wonder how it was they had not noticed her.

All but the prosecuting counsel had an expression on their faces significant of sympathy, but he looked on contemptuously.

"I have nothing to tell you, sir," continued the young girl, whose voice grew firmer as she proceeded, "at least nothing that will interest you. Believe me, I am very, very grateful to you for your kind expressions of good feeling towards me, and I shall always pray that you may quit this kind of life, for which you are so unsuited."

A shade passed over Dick Turpin's face.

It was one of vexation.

But he chased it away quickly; but when he spoke again there was a perceptible alteration in his voice.

The young girl sank back again into her old position, and replaced the handkerchief over her face.

"Is that all you have to say to me?" asked Turpin.

There was no reply.

He was almost choked, but he continued.

"Can I do nothing to assist you? If I can, pray let me know it. It will enable me to in part atone for that which I have done to-night."

The girl again looked up.

"There is only one thing," she said, "and that I ought not to ask."

"Why not?"

"I ought not."

"Will you let me hear it, and allow me to judge whether you ought to ask it?"

Again silence.

"Speak! Let me hear it! Cannot you grant me that favour?"

A flush mounted to her face, and spread over her neck and forehead, as she replied—

"I am an orphan, and the clothes I wear will show that my bereavement has been recent. It has been sudden, too. Both my parents died within a week of each other, and not ten days ago! I am on my way to London, where my relatives reside, and where I trust I shall soon find employment. I am poor, and now destitute, for when you held your hat inside the coach, and commanded us with threats to put into it what valuables we each possessed—threatening us if we refused—I placed in it a small, beaded purse, which contains every farthing I possess in the world; I have not even enough to pay the expenses of my journey, and what I shall do I know not. Your last behaviour has been so different to the former, that I have overcome the repugnance I felt in speaking to you; but now that I have done as you wished, I trust you will withdraw, and allow us to proceed without offering further violence."

It would be hard to say what were Dick's sensations while the girl addressed this long speech to him. The grieffful manner in which she spoke, and the utter desolation of her position, cut him to the heart.

How much additional sorrow, too, had he caused her?

His hand stole to the pocket of his coat, and he sought among its miscellaneous contents for something that felt like a beaded purse.

He drew it forth.

"You would have asked me to restore it to you?" he said. "I do it gladly. If this is it, take it freely. It will ever be a reproach to me when I think of to-night's doings."

So saying, Dick held the purse towards her.

It was of blue silk, elaborately worked with steel beads. It was of a kind now grown obsolete, with sliding rings, and a receptacle for money at both ends.

But as he thus held it in his hand he could not help noticing how slender and how light it was, and what a little money it contained.

"That is it," said the girl, beginning to weep again "my mother worked that purse, and gave it to me on my last birthday."

"Take it back, then," said Turpin, as he placed it in her hand, "and with it my best wishes, though I suppose they will not do you any good. I take shame to myself, however, that I——"

"Off with you, Dick! off with you!" cried a voice; "fly at once! The Philistines are upon us!"

CHAPTER CLXVIII.

THE OFFICERS THINK THAT THEY HAVE AT LAST GOT THE HIGHWAYMEN SECURE IN THEIR GRASP.

DICK TURPIN gave a great start at this sudden interruption to his apologetic speech.

He recognized the voice.

It was Claude Duval's.

If we were to say that he had completely, for the time being, forgotten the existence of his companions, we should scarcely be going beyond the truth.

In a moment, however, he recollected all, and he was once more calm and self-possessed, as he always was in the hour of extreme danger.

Bowing deeply, therefore, to the inmates of the carriage

generally, and the young orphan particularly, he, with great deliberation, left the coach door.

He could hear the sounds of many voices, and the clattering of horses' hoofs.

"Halt, all of you," he cried. "Halt!"

He wheeled his horse round as he spoke.

But before we proceed to relate what happened next, it will be necessary for us to describe the events which had transpired during the time Dick had been at the coach door.

Tom King, then, still remained in the position he had occupied, that is to say, he was at the back part of the coach, keeping the guard and the passengers near him in subjection.

Sixteen-String Jack was near the box. Not one of the passengers, after the summary manner in which he had dealt with the coachman, ventured to stir or make the least resistance.

Claude Duval, who had had the difficult duty of stopping the horses by throwing the leaders down, had been chosen for the execution of this duty because he was the tallest and by far the strongest of the four.

This, as we have seen, he had successfully performed. The leaders had been dexterously thrown down, and as they fell, brought the others to the ground with them.

By a few strokes of his sword, then, he severed the traces, and entirely freed the animals from all contact with the vehicle.

They plunged about madly for some moments, making it extremely dangerous for anyone to be near them.

Then they one after another struggled to their feet, and with a snort and a bound set off at a furious and frantic gallop along the road.

Their first fright over, they proceeded to their destination more steadily, being

——right glad to miss
The lumbering of the wheels.

All fear of the coach moving being now at an end, Claude rode up to the side and very coolly made those who sat outside hand him everything they had about them of the slightest value.

Menaced in the front and the rear, they could do nothing but submit.

Claude's pockets soon grew heavy.

His character had already been pourtrayed.

Cautious ever in running into danger, and willing to avoid running the slightest risk, yet, once in, no one could be more recklessly brave and daring.

He began to think, however, that to stop the Oxford mail was by no means so difficult and dangerous as it seemed.

But just as he had finished taking from the last person on the roof, he happened to look across the fields in the direction of London.

The dawn had sufficiently advanced to make objects even at a considerable distance dimly visible.

Coming along at a rapid pace, and with their arms extended towards him, was a large troop of mounted police-officers.

That they were aware of what was taking place, and making direct towards the coach, was quite certain; and it was when he had this conviction that he called out to Dick in the startling manner he did, as related at the end of the last chapter.

Not even the awe in which they were held by the pistols of Jack and Tom King could prevent those on the roof from giving utterance to a shout of gratification at the sight of this unexpected succour.

Although our highwaymen were not aware of the means by which the officers had learned what they were about—being, in fact, quite in the dark upon the subject—that is no reason, we opine, why we should not put the reader in possession of the facts of the case, for in this narrative it has been our special aim, even at the expense of interest, to avoid all inexplicable appearances.

We may briefly state, then, that this party of officers was one of many who had been despatched by the authorities upon the sole mission of watching the roads round the metropolis, and endeavouring to capture the highwaymen.

In fact, never before had such energetic steps been taken for the apprehension of any criminals, and no expense and no pains were spared to achieve their object.

Already have we seen how near they have more than once been in capturing our friends, but chance, fortune, or whatever it may be, had every time been in their favour.

But now they were menaced with a danger of no common kind.

The officers who now came over the fields were, without exception, experienced, well-tried men, and well up in the duties of their profession.

They had been set to patrol the Oxford-road, and be on the look-out for any event that might be of a suspicious character.

They were, moreover, not the only ones who had been sent out with similar instructions. Every road, indeed, leading from the metropolis was thus guarded, and the more important ones were furnished with as many as three or four detachments.

This, of course, necessitated the employment of a vast number of new hands, but none of these were sent upon this dangerous errand, but set to do the work which the others in an ordinary way performed.

The one body that had patrolled one portion of the Oxford-road during the whole of the night without the occurrence of anything unusual, and, as day was coming fast, they began to think that for that night at least they had had their trouble for nothing.

Chilly and miserable—for remaining on horseback the whole of a winter's night is no joke—they were thinking of turning in somewhere, when the sound of several steeds coming along the road at a headlong, break-neck gallop, reached their ears.

Fully impressed that something was going to happen at last, they became instantly on the alert.

There was about a score of them, so they formed in a double line across the road, determined to oppose the further progress of whoever might be coming.

Naturally enough, the idea they had had upon the subject was that those who were coming along at such a furious rate were the very individuals of whom they were in search, and the reason of their rapid speed, that the other detachment that was stationed nearer Oxford was chasing them.

Having formed this hypothesis, they began, as one may say, to count their chickens before they were hatched.

An old proverb particularly impresses the utter folly of doing this, and on the present occasion the wisdom of the advice was made powerfully apparent.

For, behold, instead of seeing the four redoubtable highwaymen approach, they beheld nothing but four riderless horses.

Their disappointment may be imagined, and it was more from the influence of this feeling than any other that they stopped where they then were.

The horses, which were those who had been cut loose from the coach, seeing the obstruction in their path, came to a dead stop.

They were close enough, however, to enable the officers to perceive, by the assistance of the early morning light, that they had been cut away from some conveyance or other.

Then one of their number expressed his conviction that the horses were none other than those of the Oxford mail coach.

The number—four—served to confirm this assertion, and to bring his companions to the same belief.

"Then you may depend," said one, "that the villains have actually had the audacity to stop the mail, and that under our very noses."

"Pho, pho," said another, "I can hardly think it. They are daring, I admit, yet scarcely foolhardy enough to do such a trick as that!"

"Well, we don't know. Anyhow, we must go and see, and if it turns out as I expect, we must not let them escape, or if we do, we shall be laughed at all the rest of our lives."

"Be off at once, then," cried one, who was in command of the rest. "We shall lose our opportunity while we stand chattering here."

There was a sudden movement forward after the utterance of these words, and then the officer who had first spoken, said:

"Let us take to the fields, and by keeping under the shelter of the hedgerows, we shall be able to steal upon them unawares."

"A good idea that of yours, Nutkins," said the commanding officer, "and it shall be acted upon. Ride along, my men, gently and quietly, until we come either to a gap in the hedge that we can conveniently leap, or else a gate which we can open and pass through."

They did not have to go far along the road before they found a gate leading into the fields on the left-hand side of the road, and one of them dismounted to open it.

It was locked, but that proved a circumstance of little moment, for the officer took from his pocket a bunch of picklocks, and had it open in a trice.

In those days the line of distinction between officers and criminals was less clearly defined than it is now, and there were positively times when all traces of it were lost, and the one merged completely into the other.

Here was an instance.

The gate was held open while the rest passed through, and then secured again.

Their road was then plain before them.

Meadows stretched around in all directions.

Over these they were able to pass at a good speed, without making any noticeable noise.

They took care to keep as close to the highway as possible. But presently the appearance of the place altered. Instead of smooth, firm meadows, they came to a succession of ploughed fields.

Rapid progress over these was quite impossible, so they preferred to make a detour, believing that to be the quickest in the end.

It was after this, that turning round to get nearer the high-road, they saw the coach standing still, and surrounded by mounted men.

CHAPTER CLXIX.

A WOOD UPON THE OXFORD-ROAD AFFORDS A TEMPORARY PLACE OF SHELTER FOR THE HIGHWAYMEN.

THIS was a sight for which, despite their anticipations, the officers were scarce prepared.

But there was no doubt whatever as to what was going on.

They had arrived in time to see the highwaymen in the very act of plundering the coach.

Confident in the power which, in point of numbers, they had over them, and stimulated by the reward and credit they would gain if they secured them, they, with a boldness most remarkable, dashed their spurs into their horses' flanks, and urged them forward at the top of their speed.

It was a lucky thing for our friends that Claude was fortunate enough to see them as soon as he did, or the consequences might have been even more disastrous than they were.

The manner in which he called out we have already described.

Dick Turpin comprehended in an instant the full extent of his peril.

To have all four galloped off at random, and possibly in different directions, would, he felt sure, be fatal, and so he gave the loud command to halt.

His comrades obeyed instinctively. Already they began in good earnest to look up to him as their leader.

It was at this moment that the officers reached the hedgerow just before the cutting or hollow commenced.

Excited by the prospect of capturing the highwaymen, they leaped over into the roadway, and came on at a prodigious rate, and making a terrible clatter.

"Form together!" cried Turpin, as he saw them coming; "all together! Are you ready?"

"Quite," cried his three followers, as they ranged themselves close to him.

"Forward, then!" he exclaimed; "it is a case of the devil take the hindmost."

He himself set the example of retreating at full speed, for he spoke in a peculiar manner to his mare, and allowed her to feel the reins fall slackly on her neck.

She gave one terrific bound, and then flew over the ground with a long sweeping gallop.

Indeed, so great was the speed she attained, that Dick was compelled to rein her in, in order not to leave his companions.

Do what they would they could not make their cattle go even for a short distance at a speed that would match Black Bess.

And yet they were all animals of first-rate quality.

The officers, as soon as they perceived this sudden movement on the part of our friends, uttered a loud shout, and, as they dashed into the hollow, presented their pistols, and fired an irregular volley after their retreating forms.

The passengers in the coach implored the police to stay and render them some assistance, but they were quite deaf to their cries.

Their object was to catch the highwaymen, and, either dead or alive, lodge them in Newgate.

The horses upon which they were mounted could not be said to be exactly fresh, for they had been out all night with them patrolling the road, but they were not tired, as the progress they made testified.

Our friends, however, had got the start of them, though it was so slight as to be scarcely worth mentioning.

Away—away they went, the hoofs of their horses striking sparks of fire from the flint stones of the road.

It was towards Oxford, and away from London, that they went.

The officers kept well behind them.

They made sure they had their prey safe, if they could only manage for a little longer to keep them in sight, for they knew if they did so while the chase continued, they must eventually come up with the other troop, who were patrolling another portion of the same road.

Then, hemmed in before and behind by forty well-armed men, what hope could there be that our friends would escape.

They would be literally surrounded.

The odds ten to one.

But there was one condition upon which this depended, and that was that they should continue to fly along the highway.

If they left it the case would be quite altered.

Most eagerly did the officers look out ahead for some indications of the coming of the other troop.

The morning was a beautiful one.

The dense and heavy clouds which had during the night overspread the entire firmament seemed to be driven back by the first flush of dawn, as the pale gray light struggled into the sky.

But when the sun's beams rose above the horizon, they completed their dispersion.

And so, by the time the whole of his bright, rosy disc was fairly visible, there was not a cloud or speck of vapour to be seen.

His rays had in them but little warmth, still, for all that, they were not deficient in illuminative power, and where the ground rose up to a slight elevation, a very extensive prospect could be obtained.

It was after breasting the highest of these hills that they had yet come to that Dick Turpin pulled up his mare, and called out to his comrades to halt.

Then, turning round in his saddle, he took a long and careful look behind him.

His pursuers were hard upon their track, though the distance which intervened between them had perceptibly increased.

Having satisfied himself upon this point, Dick examined the road before him.

He could see for many miles, but nowhere anything suspicious in the shape of an obstruction.

Then he went down the hill at a walking pace, but descended only so far as to be in such a position as not to be within the range of their pursuers' vision.

He stopped.

"It will not do to keep up this sort of thing," he said, "or we shall assuredly be run to earth. Besides, I question whether your horses would maintain it."

"Mine would not," said Tom King; "I have noticed that during the last mile she has given palpable signs of flagging, and I believe she would have given up ere this had it not been that the example of the others encouraged her to make greater exertion. Look! now we have stopped, her distress becomes more apparent."

And, indeed, the appearance of Tom's steed was such as to fill our friends with the utmost concern.

That it would be able much longer to keep its legs was clearly impossible.

"What is the best thing to be done, captain?" asked Claude Duval. "It will not do for us to wait. Every second bring our pursuers nearer to us."

"True," said Turpin. "I stopped because I felt it would be madness to continue the chase any longer."

"But you do not dream, surely, of making a stand against so many?" said Sixteen-String Jack.

"We must either do that, or manage so as to get out of their way. What is to be done?"

"That is for you to decide."

"Well then," said Dick Turpin, as he cast a rapid look around him, taking in at a glance all the varied features of the landscape. "If you will take my advice"——

"We are bound to do that," cried his comrades. "You are our captain. It is for you to command, and for us to obey."

"Since you will have it so," said Dick, with a slight laugh, "agreed."

"What are your orders?"

"Follow me to yonder wood," said Turpin, pointing to a dense mass of trees on their left, a little further on. "If we can plunge into its intricacies unperceived, I think we may manage to elude them."

"It is the only chance we have," said Tom King, "and a poor one at best. We have no time to lose. Let us set off at once."

"Stay," said Dick, "we will borrow a hint from our pursuers. Over the hedge with you. Not only shall we be less likely to be heard, but we shall be able to gain the wood with less chance of detection."

There was common-sense in this, so watching for a spot where the hedge was a little lower than it was elsewhere, Dick put Black Bess to the leap.

The gallant animal cleared the obstruction, apparently without an effort, and alighted in a meadow.

Example is a great thing with many animals, but especially with horses, and the present proved a remarkable instance of it. Singly, neither of the other three horses would have cleared the hedge at the first attempt; as it was, they went over beautifully.

The meadow into which they leaped, although of great extent, was quickly crossed.

Beyond it was a ploughed field.

They were separated by a low wooden fence, which could scarcely be called an impediment to their progress.

"Keep to the path," cried Dick, taking the lead, and alluding to a well-beaten foot-road which ran along by the side of the hedge.

Along this they could only proceed in Indian file, and at a comparatively slow pace.

By bending their heads down to a level with the horses' necks, they found the hedge was both high and thick enough to screen them from the observation of any one who might be on the high-road.

This ploughed field was succeeded by another and another.

Then the wood was gained.

As soon as they found themselves fairly among the trees, they felt they were for a moment comparatively safe.

Without pausing, they pushed on in an oblique direction, for now that they were so silent they could hear the officers coming along the road at a furious rate.

Whether they had actually made their way into the wood unseen was, of course, more than they could take upon themselves to say, but they believed, or at any rate hoped, such was the case.

Brave, bold, and daring, as we know the four to be, those qualities would not be enough to enable them to cope with a force so much in point of members superior to theirs.

A fair fight between them might be protracted for a great length of time, but it would inevitably result in their defeat or death.

Even now they stood upon very dangerous ground, and we confess we feel no slight amount of anxiety in looking forward to the events which must now immediately ensue.

CHAPTER CLXX.

DICK TURPIN IS MINDFUL OF THE PROMISE HE MADE TO JOE, THE OSTLER, AND DETERMINES TO PERFORM IT.

The reader should bear in mind that our friends had been upon the road for very many hours without resting, for their brief sojourn in the stable at the "Fox and Grapes" was scarcely worthy of the name, since the whole of their stay there was something less than two hours.

No men could bear so much fatigue without feeling its effects, and highwaymen, in that respect at least, were in no way different to ordinary mortals.

It is no wonder, then, that they and their horses should exhibit very perceptible signs of exhaustion.

As they penetrated still deeper and deeper into the wood, the sounds of pursuit came still more faintly to their ears.

At length they altogether died away, and then they began in good earnest to entertain the hope that they had succeeded in throwing the officers off the scent.

Had it been night instead of day their chances of ultimate escape would have been much greater, but many hours would have to elapse before darkness again covered the earth.

Presently they reached a large open space, perhaps rather more than an acre in extent, and, when near the centre, Dick suddenly wheeled round.

The others drew in immediately.

"Let us halt here a moment," he said, "and listen. It may be that the officers have, like ourselves, taken to the wood."

"All four listened eagerly, but, save the rustling of the trees and the chirping of the birds, they could hear nothing.

Not satisfied with this, however, Sixteen-String Jack slipped off his horse, and, without letting go of the reins, laid himself down at full length upon the turf.

In this way, with his ear pressing upon the ground, distant sounds would become more audible.

For full two minutes did he continue in this position, his companions during the whole of the time remaining profoundly still.

Then he rose to his feet.

"I can hear nothing," he said. "If they are in the wood at all, they must be a long way from here."

"That is a great relief, then," replied Turpin. "It would be out of the question for us to go much further."

"I am almost ready to fall from the saddle," said Tom King, "and no one who knew what I have gone through during the last forty-eight hours would wonder at it."

"You are quite right there. It is to me a matter of wonder that you have kept up so well as you have," said Claude Duval. "It is what few men could have done, and to look at you no one would give you credit for so much power of endurance."

And an inspection of Tom's personal appearance would have fully borne out what his companion said.

His frame was slight, his skin soft and fair, his features delicate, yet not feminine in their character.

"A rest is imperative," cried Turpin; "our cattle require it quite as much, or even more, than ourselves. Our best course, I take it, will be to push straight on. In doing so we must inevitably emerge upon the opposite side of the wood, and, judging from the extent of it, we are not likely to run much risk in being seen by our enemies."

"It is to be hoped," said Jack, "that when we do reach the other side we shall not be long in finding some place where we can rest for a few hours."

"Forward, then," exclaimed Turpin. "Keep on in the same direction as we have done hitherto. But let me tell you it will be necessary for us to exercise the utmost care in seeking out a roof to shelter us. The deeds we have recently performed, added to the preceding ones, will create no slight commotion in the land. All will be made aware of them, and such a reward offered as will tempt people to go to any length to capture or betray us."

"Very true," said Claude Duval, "but we must have a rest somewhere. I can hold out as long as most, and I must confess I am all but overcome."

Nothing further was now said.

At an easy, gentle rate, agreeable to their horses and themselves, for now they had little fear of being pursued, they pushed through the trees.

But the wood was even greater in extent than they had at first imagined it to be, and if they had not known they had paid the greatest attention to the route they took, they would have feared that they were only wandering round and round.

In a short time, however, to their no small gratification, they began to perceive things which indicated that the confines of the wood were close at hand.

The dense undergrowth of fern and brake began to dis-

appear, and the trees were thinner in the stem, and at a greater distance from each other.

Before they quite left the protection of the wood they were very careful to reconnoitre.

But no traces of their enemies were anywhere to be seen.

It was with a feeling of great relief that they assured themselves such was really the fact.

Cautiously, then, they emerged on to a common of considerable size.

Gorse bushes were growing upon it in abundance, as well as many other dwarfish shrubs indigenous to such places.

But none of these grew high enough from the ground to in any way obstruct their view, which was unusually extensive.

What common it was they had no idea, for, to the best of their knowledge, they had never been in that part of the country before.

They skirted it for some distance, in the hope of finding some beaten path that would take them across it, nor were they disappointed in their search.

Before long they arrived at a broad track, which stretched before them in a straight line as far as ever they could see.

With little or no hesitation they took this path.

The morning was now beginning to get advanced, for their passage through the wood had taken some time.

When they entered it, it will be remembered, the sun was only a few degrees above the horizon.

Now he had attained a considerable altitude, and, for the time of year, his beams were unusually warm.

Nowhere in the sky was the thinnest cloud or mass of white vapour perceptible. All was one pure, beautiful, azure blue.

In their progress across the common the highwaymen, from time to time, took care to cast around them anxious glances to see that their foes were not approaching them.

It was but at a walk that they went, for every step they took only served to show how much exhausted they were, and how badly prepared they would have been to defend their liberties and their lives.

They were right glad when the other side of the common was reached, for their situation, while they were upon it, was by far too much exposed to please them, or make them feel exactly comfortable.

They found the path they had been pursuing made a junction with a high-road which ran through a little village, the thatched roofs and red tiles of which could be distinguished through the trees, as well as the slender spire of the church and the time-stained sails of the windmill.

It was decided not to pass through the village, as their appearance could not fail to excite a great deal of comment. It would be better, they thought, to find some isolated dwelling—a road-side public-house for instance—where they could remain for a little while.

Acting upon this belief, they left the village to their right, taking their way down a narrow, shady lane.

Where it led to they knew not, but, from its direction, they imagined it would lead them clear of the village. They entered it.

The walking pace was still continued.

Before they had proceeded many yards they heard a clattering sound by far too familiar to their ears for them to mistake it. A horseman at rather a fast trot was approaching them.

"Who is it, I wonder?" asked Dick.

"A traveller."

"Shall we stop him?"

"By no means."

"Are you in earnest?"

"Certainly. We appear to be unknown here; let us endeavour to remain so. If we were to plunder this man there would be an end of our resting anywhere about here."

"So there would, Dick, so there would. We'll just walk on quietly as we are, and allow him to pass us."

So said, so done.

The space of little more than two minutes brought the approaching horseman in sight.

He was evidently going in the same direction as themselves.

As his pace was something considerably more than double that of our friends, he soon reached them.

"Good morning!" he cried, in that cheerful, good-tempered way so noticeable in the country. "Good morning!"

"Good morning!" cried our friends.

"It's a lovely morning for the time of year!" cried the traveller, slackening his pace, "is it not?"

"Very, indeed!"

He was a sturdy, healthy-looking, middle-aged man, and would have done well to have sat for the portrait of that familiar character, John Bull.

By the way in which he accommodated his speed to theirs, and attempted to enter into a conversation, it was plain he was of a talkative, sociable disposition, and delighted in making himself friendly with all he happened to meet.

Thinking it would best serve their purpose to humour him, our friends did so.

Englishmen, a hundred and thirty years ago, had then, as now, a favourite subject for conversation, and that is the weather.

As soon as the topic was exhausted, the burly man, who, by his dress and manner, appeared to be a farmer, said:

"You will excuse me, gentlemen, for saying so, but I be main curious to know where you are going, and I'll tell you why, because this here lane ain't no public road, but a private way as goes direct to my farm, and nowhere's else, as I knows on."

He turned an inquiring glance upon our friends as he spoke.

Turpin took upon himself to reply, as the others continued silent.

"You are asking what we don't know ourselves, for, to speak the plain truth, we came out this morning for a ride, and have lost our way."

"Oh, that's it, be it?" said the farmer. "Danged if I could make it out! Now, look here, you seem tired and hungry, and civil sort of gents, would you like to come to my house and have an hour's rest?"

CHAPTER CLXXI.

AFTER A BRIEF REST DICK TURPIN SETS OUT ON HIS PERILOUS EXPEDITION TO STONEBRIDGE.

"You make no mistake," replied Dick Turpin, "in saying we are hungry and tired, for we are both, and I trust you will accept our thanks for your kind offer, which we shall have very great pleasure to embrace."

Dick took off his hat as he thus spoke, and made a very low bow, in doing which he was immediately imitated by his companions.

The farmer, thinking not to be out of the fashion, took off his broad-brimmed beaver, and bowed as well.

"I'm much obliged," he said. "You see we are but plain, simple, country folks, like, and not used to Lunnun ways, and all you'll find to eat and drink is simple country fare, and——"

"There's nothing we so much admire as country fare, is there, Fitz-John?" said Turpin, addressing Sixteen-String Jack, who happened to be nearest to him.

"Nothing in the world, Clarence, nothing in the world," replied Jack.

The worthy farmer, when he heard the highwaymen address each other by such aristocratic names, at once became impressed with the idea that those whom he had so casually encountered must be persons of distinction. To be sure their appearance was not exactly the sort of thing to strengthen him in such an opinion, but he knew young bloods delighted in getting themselves into scrapes, and showing the contempt they had for the rich clothes they wore.

His desire for them to visit his house amounted to absolute frenzy, for this farmer in no way differed from most of the English agricultural classes in the reverential feeling they had for the nobility.

"This is my farm, gentlemen," he said, as they reached the end of the lane, "and, though I say it myself, a pretty one it is, and if you will only be good enough to condescend to sit down and take a meal with me, I shall feel much honoured."

"But," said Turpin, not wishing to make it appear how anxious he was to avail himself of the invitation, "we

are none of us, owing to some rather rough sport, in a condition to go anywhere."

"Oh! yes, yes," said the farmer; "don't let that stand in your way on no account."

"We are much obliged, for if we are to tell you the truth, we are sadly in want of food and rest. I don't know how it is you are willing to allow such suspicious-looking characters as we must be to enter your house, without it is owing to your superior discernment, which has enabled you to see what we actually are!"

"Gentlemen," said the farmer, who was no more insensible to skilful flattery than the rest of mankind. "Gentlemen, I hope you'll excuse me saying so much for myself, and making so bold as I do. But I flatter myself that if I can do nothing else, I can tell a real gentleman from a false one. Now, it doesn't need for me to give a second glance in order for me to see that you are real gentlemen, every one of you, and that is the reason I ventured to ask you to step in."

The farmer took out a spotted blue pocket-handkerchief as he finished this speech, and wiped his face with it; then pushing open a gate, he led the way into his own farmyard.

Our friends merely bowed in reply to his speech, and followed him.

The glance which they gave at their surroundings fully justified what the farmer had said. Neatness, order, and fruitfulness were everywhere apparent.

The bright golden autumn sun, which shed his beams upon the scene, contributed not a little to its appearance.

Half buried by an orchard, the trees in which our friends could see were literally loaded with fruit, was the farmer's homestead.

It appeared to be a long straggling building, one story high, looking very much as though some six or eight thatched cottages had been built, and then all knocked into one.

Upon a closer approach this became all the more observable, though the probability is that such was not the course adopted in building it.

The farmer observed the look of gratification which was upon the faces of his guests, and his heart warmed still more towards them.

Subduing his propensity to talk, lest by so doing he should distract their attention from some of the beauties of the place, he walked on in perfect silence.

His farm was his hobby, and he did not begrudge either time or money in improving it, and the result of his labours must have been highly satisfactory and pleasing to him.

The door of the farmhouse was soon reached.

There was a pretty old-fashioned porch over the door, and in this, although the season was so far advanced, three persons were seated, two of whom, upon hearing the farmer approach, rose and ran out to meet him.

They were two pretty, fresh-coloured country girls, and looked to be sixteen and eighteen respectively.

Upon perceiving the four strangers they drew back in confusion.

"My daughters," said the farmer, proudly, alighting from his horse as he spoke.

Our friends again bowed, and with such a courtly grace, that the hearts of the two maidens were quite won by the action.

They then proceeded to follow the farmer's example, and dismount.

The steeds were all given into the charge of a clownish-looking lad, who led them off to the stables.

Fain would our friends have accompanied him, and seen where their cattle were bestowed, but they felt they could not well do so without exciting suspicion—a thing they by no means wished to do.

So they allowed them to go, but it was with the mutual mental resolution that they would, before long, find some pretence for looking at them, and seeing exactly where they were placed.

The third person who had been sitting in the porch was the farmer's wife—a buxom dame, well worthy to be the mistress of such a spot.

The highwaymen followed the farmer into the large kitchen, where, with that cordial heartiness which is now so rarely seen, they were invited to sit down and make themselves at home.

The conversation which passed between those assembled is scarcely interesting enough for us to give it in full, but we should be tempted to do so, however, if merely for the sake of character, but so many exciting and thrilling incidents press upon us for speedy recital, that we shall refrain from doing so.

Let it suffice to say, that the welcome and hospitality our friends received was of the warmest kind, and when, after the dinner had been served, the whole party sat down to the table to enjoy themselves, the happiness of the whole party was complete.

Never before had the old roof echoed to such shouts of hearty laughter as it did that day. Giving no thought of their imminent danger, and the immediate vicinity of the officers, our four friends entered fully into the spirit of the scene.

Spying his first opportunity, Dick rose from the table, and went outside.

His comrades knew his object.

Dick found the stables only a few yards distant from the house.

Well pleased was he to find that all the horses had been well fed and rubbed down.

Caressing Black Bess, as one would a favourite dog, he left the place again, for he was fearful of calling notice upon himself by remaining too long.

The stable door he found, upon examination, to have no other fastening than a latch.

Then, before entering the house again, he looked about him carefully, so as to impress the position of the different objects upon his mind, for he calculated that in all probability he would want to find his way there in the dark.

He had not forgotten the promise he had made to Joe, the ostler.

The reader must know, in fact, that Dick Turpin was not the man to make a promise and hold back from it on account of the extra danger he might, by so doing, bring upon himself.

On re-entering the kitchen, he found things looking much about the same as they did when he left.

Another tankard of the famous old October ale was brought in, and while they quaffed it they amused themselves with relating many an incident well calculated to excite both interest and laughter.

And so hours passed.

Not the slightest suspicion that they were the famous highwaymen, about whom the farmer had a great deal to say, was entertained.

At length, pleading their fatigue, they were allowed to retire.

It was then just about sunset.

As good luck would have it, the rooms in the farmhouse were so arranged that our friends were obliged to take a double-bedded room.

Nothing could have suited them better.

When they were all four within the chamber, they threw off the heavier part of their apparel, and flung themselves upon the beds, heartily grateful for the chance which had procured them such a luxury.

Their fatigue was great indeed, and in less than ten minutes they were all sound asleep, so sound that it would require no ordinary noise to awaken them.

Truly are they in a dangerous and helpless situation now.

Those officers who had pursued them would not be very long before they found they had in some way missed them.

Then they would return, and perseveringly search for the spot where they would most likely disappear.

Suppose they should get upon their track and find them—slumbering, helpless?

Then indeed would the officers have an easy prey.

Let us hope, however, that the extraordinary run of good fortune which they have at present had, may continue for yet a little longer, in order that we may follow them in their soul-stirring exploits.

Nothing, perhaps, which they have ever done, will serve so well to show the bravery of their dispositions than the readiness and ease with which they laid down and surrendered themselves to sleep at a time when they knew they were, in the strictest sense of the word, environed by danger.

May no unfriendly hand disturb them.

So far there is no indication of coming danger. Without the house all is strangely calm and still.



[DICK TURPIN AND CLAUDE DUVAL BINDING THE BILL STICKER TO THE GATE.]

Is it that deceptive lull which so often precedes a storm? We must wait and see.

The night wears on.

The darkness gradually increases, and the stars, one by one, peep out of the blue sky.

CHAPTER CLXXII.

TOM KING VAINLY ENDEAVOURS TO PERSUADE DICK TURPIN TO ABANDON HIS PERILOUS PROJECT.

BETWEEN four and five hours after the highwaymen had entered the bed-chamber, Dick Turpin awoke.

Hastily rising from the bed, he proceeded to attire himself with those portions of his apparel of which he had divested himself.

He took the greatest care not to make any more noise than he could possibly help.

His three companions still slumbered.

When he had laid down to sleep, it was with the resolution to rise at least two hours before midnight fixed firmly in his mind.

And he had awoke.

He did not know the time exactly, but he felt pretty sure he had not overslept himself.

Watches he had in plenty, but there was no light, and no means of getting one to enable him to see the hour by any one of them.

The operation of dressing occupied but a few moments.

When he was quite ready he paused and listened.

All was still.

He was rather in doubt whether he should wake either of his comrades. As the reader suspects, it was his wish to go alone.

If he awoke them, he feared they would try to persuade him out of his resolution.

But, then, if he left them without their knowledge, and they should awake before he returned, the most disastrous consequences might ensue.

He resolved to wake Tom King.

This he did by shaking him slightly.

"Hist! Tom," he said. "Be silent."

"Is it danger?" asked Tom, in a voice almost below a whisper.

"No; calm yourself. There is no danger at present that I am aware of."

"Then why are you up and dressed?" asked King, sitting up on the bed.

"Be quiet, and I will tell you. I do not want to wake Claude and Jack."

"Why not? What is the matter?"

"You shall hear."

"I am all impatience."

"Do you recollect last night that I made a promise to Joe, the ostler?"

"Yes, now I do."

"Had you forgotten it?"

"For the moment."

"Do you remember what the promise exactly was?"

"Yes; that you would meet him at midnight at Stonebridge, and place in his hands a sufficient sum of money to enable him to set up in business."

"Just so."

"But, Dick, my friend, surely, under all the circumstances you do not think of attempting to fulfil your promise?"

"No, I do not."

"I am glad of that; I was afraid you were."

"You misunderstand me, I think."

"How?"

"You said I did not think of attempting to fulfil the promise."

"I did."

"And I do not mean to *attempt*, but to *do* it!"

"But the danger?"

"It has never yet made me turn aside from my purpose, and never will."

"It is madness to think of such a project."

"Nay, I am inclined to think it less difficult than you appear to do."

"And did you think of going alone?"

"I did."

"Worse and worse."

"Why?"

"It is utter madness—I might say, suicide!"

"Pho—pho! I am sure you magnify the peril. Listen to me, Tom."

"I cannot."

"But you must."

"Am I to understand that you have fully resolved upon going?"

"I have."

"Then I give in, for I know when once you make up your mind to do a thing, no arguments in the world will turn you."

"It is so, and more especially upon the present occasion."

"Then, Dick, such being the case, you will at least grant me one favour."

"No."

"But you will."

"No. Before you speak I know well enough what the favour is. You wish to accompany me."

"That is it."

"I knew it. Tom, my friend, for the sake of my own safety, no less than your own, I must refuse."

"Why?"

"For many reasons. In the first place, the officers will be looking for us in twos or fours. By going alone I run less risk of detection."

"There is something in that."

"There is a great deal in it. Believe me, I have not decided upon this course of action without due and sufficient thought, and I am firmly convinced that it will be best in every respect to go alone."

Tom was silent.

"Do not be displeased, my friend. I awoke you in order that my disappearance should create no alarm, since you would be able to account for it."

"But how long shall you be away?"

"That is a question I cannot well answer. I hope no longer than it will take Bess to gallop from here to Stonebridge and back."

"But we are a long way from that place, are we not?"

"We are, and yet perhaps not so far as you would imagine. I have taken accurate notice of our route, and I feel confident of being able to push across the country to my destination in a tolerably straight line."

"I am very uneasy about it, Dick," said Tom, after a brief pause. "Take my advice for once, and do not go."

"I am very sorry I cannot, but my mind is made up. Nothing ever yet held me back from keeping my word, and nothing shall."

"That is all very well on principle"——

"Now, Tom, don't say any more. It is quite needless, and I cannot stay to hear you. I shall try my utmost to go and come back without the people here knowing anything of it. Bess is tired, it is true, but yet I fear not she will do it."

"I shall see you go very unwillingly."

"That may be, but, Tom, as you value my friendship, do not let anything tempt you to follow me. Promise that you will not."

"I cannot refuse you, Dick, because"——

"There, never mind. You promise, do you not?"

"I do."

But Tom spoke the words very reluctantly.

"That is enough. Now let me go. I shall return all safe, do not fear. If Claude and Jack wake up before I come back, tell them where I have gone."

"I will. I know what they will say, however."

"So do I, and you need not tell me. I have been to the stable, as you know. The house, being all upon the ground floor, will be left easily, and I can make my way to the stable without any difficulty. Then I shall saddle Bess, and be off."

"It sounds very fine, Dick, but you do not think enough about the awful risk you run."

"And you think too much about it."

"Not so."

"It resolves itself into a matter of opinion, and I cannot stay to argue the matter with you. Lie down, and, if possible, sleep until I come back, for I am sure you are more in want of sleep than either of us."

"I am very weary."

"Of course you are. How could you be otherwise? As for myself, the sleep I have had has quite refreshed me, and I am ready for anything. Good-bye! I shall soon be back."

Dick cautiously and quietly opened the window as he spoke.

It was one of those old-fashioned latticed casements opening like a door, and composed of a number of tiny diamond-shaped panes of glass.

The opening made was just large enough for Dick to pass through, and no more.

The ground was about three feet below him, and he alighted without a sound.

Tom stood at the open casement.

"Shut the window, Tom," whispered Dick, "and go and lie down again, and leave me to myself. I shall come back safe, I know."

Tom did not reply, but he shook his head silently and significantly.

He did not close the window.

Dick did not stay to argue with him, but directed his steps to the stable.

The night was clear and fine, and Tom, as he stood at the window, was able to see to a considerable distance.

All presented the calmest imaginable aspect, and as he gazed out into the stillness, and saw the stars twinkling faintly overhead, he could not help asking himself whether all that had happened was not a dream, and whether there really were such persons as police-officers.

It was a strange semi-somnolent state into which he had fallen.

How long it continued he knew not, but he was aroused by hearing a slight noise.

He looked up.

In a moment he recollected all.

Then immediately after he heard a faint sound, which was to him perfectly intelligible.

A horse was trying to walk noiselessly.

"That is Bess," he said. "I trust neither she nor her rider will come to harm to-night."

Even as he uttered this aspiration, those he had seen appeared in sight.

Slowly and carefully Black Bess was picking her way through the farm-yard.

There was no moon, but yet such was the stillness and transparency of the atmosphere, that he could watch him to a great distance.

At last his form, and that of his steed, became so ill-defined that it was only by a great effort that he was able to keep his eye upon it.

He felt assured that if he once removed his glance he should never be able to fix his gaze again upon it.

Fainter and fainter they grew.

He strained his eyeballs vainly.

They disappeared.

With a heavy heart Tom closed the window, and again laid down upon the bed.

But this time, do what he could, sleep fled from him. His mind was too busily occupied in thinking of his friend, and the perils he would probably encounter.

"May he achieve his errand, which is a good one," he said, "and return in safety, but I doubt very much whether my wish will meet with a fulfilment."

CHAPTER CLXXIII.

RELATES THE MANNER IN WHICH DICK TURPIN MET JOE, THE OSTLER, AT STONEBRIDGE.

WHETHER the forebodings which haunted Tom King's mind are doomed to be realised we shall quickly see, for leaving him to his uneasy slumbers, we will follow Dick upon what it is only just to term—his temerarious expedition.

The bearings he had taken enabled him to go direct to the stable.

He pushed open the door, and a word spoken to the sagacious creature was enough to make her at once come forth.

The saddles and bridles were hanging near the door. His own he knew by the touch, for the stirrups were of a peculiar pattern.

Hastily placing it upon her back, and making all secure, he leaped into the saddle.

Then, as Tom had seen, he had walked her as gently and quietly as he could across the farm.

But no sooner was he beyond its precincts, than, uttering a cheering shout, he patted his mare upon the neck, and letting the reins fall loosely, allowed her to proceed at her own speed.

Thoroughly refreshed by her four hours' rest, Black Bess put forth that astonishing speed for which she has always been famed.

Endeavouring as much possible to go in a straight line to his destination, he paid no heed to the beaten roads. Like some wild huntsman, he scoured over the fields, leaping hedges and brooks, and not turning aside for any object.

It was a long time since Dick had enjoyed such a gallop as he then had upon the back of his bonny mare, and its exhilarating influence soon exerted itself upon him.

In the whole of his wild ride he met not a single living creature. Without any stretch of the imagination, he might have fancied himself upon an uninhabited island.

But he soon discovered that the distance from the farm-house to Stonebridge was greater than he thought it was, and he began to grow apprehensive that he would not be in time to keep his appointment.

Although her speed was even then greater than any other horse would have made, yet he did not scruple to urge her to still greater exertion, for he knew that the full extent of her powers had not yet been reached.

On, on, over hill and dale, hedge and stream, they flew, crossing lanes and high-roads, and plunging into and swimming across those brooks which were too wide to leap.

In the darkness the two rapidly-moving figures could scarcely be distinguished; or had any one caught a transient glimpse, they would have looked like some spectral horse and rider.

And now, at last, the broad, smooth Uxbridge-road, a little above Stonebridge, was reached.

Dick paused in a field that was on one side of the road, and, ere he leaped into it, listened to assure himself that there was no chance passenger or enemy of his within hearing.

No signs of either reached him, and feeling secure from immediate danger, he touched Bess lightly on the flank.

It was all she needed to make her give one bound, and then alight upon the hard roadway.

Lightly and gracefully she did it, and then stood firm as a rock, in readiness to turn in any direction.

Dick turned her, of course, towards the place appointed.

"I don't know," he said, "whether I am over my time, but for all that I shall trot the remainder of the distance. Joe would not expect me to be punctual to a minute, I have no doubt. Gently, Bess, gently."

At a trot which, though it seemed an easy one, yet got over the ground in a surprising manner, the remainder of the journey was performed.

As soon as Dick saw the dim shadow of the bridge before him, he slackened his pace still more, and kept a sharp look out on both sides of him.

For a moment he turned sick at heart when he thought of the horrible position he would be in should Joe, the ostler, have after all proved treacherous, and caused an ambuscade to be laid for him somewhere about that place, but he combated this feeling as much as possible, for he thought he was doing the young man an injustice by harbouring such a thought against him.

The bridge was reached.

On arriving in the centre of it, he pulled up and waited.

As he thus stood, he was even in the darkness a conspicuous object.

"If I pass this danger," he said, "I shall consider myself safe."

It was a hazardous mode of obtaining the satisfaction.

But all remained still as before.

"I am here either too soon or too late," said Dick. "I will draw aside a little while and watch."

He was rather at a loss where to conceal himself, so as to be able to see any one approach without being seen himself; but at last the thought occurred to him that if he descended by the side of the bridge to the margin of the river, he might stand there in the shadow without his presence being suspected.

No sooner did the thought occur to him, than he resolved if possible to carry it out, and accordingly he walked Bess to the end of the wall of the bridge, and made her go down the slope.

At the bottom he found a place where she could stand comfortably.

As the level of the river was only a few feet below that of the road, the archway was a very low one, and as Dick sat upon his mare, he was able to look just over the parapet.

He took care to place himself as close to the stonework as possible; then he waited.

A few minutes passed.

"No one is here," he muttered, "am I behind my time? I have a watch or two, I will try if I cannot find out what the hour is."

As he spoke, he drew from his pocket a very massive silver watch, the face of which certainly was not more than four inches in diameter.

This he held so that the greatest possible amount of light should fall upon it, but even that was not enough for his purpose.

Finding he could not see, he determined not to be baulked if he could help it, so he opened the glass, and felt the position of the fingers.

In this way he was able to tell to a trifle, but not accurately; he made out the time to be something less than a quarter to twelve.

"Hurrah!" he said, as he made this discovery, "then I am here first, after all. That's just what I like! Bravo, Bess, lass! There's no other steed in England, or in the world either for that matter, who could have performed the distance you have in the same space of time.

It would seem by the way in which Black Bess pawed the ground, tossed her head, and uttered a low, whinnying, neighing sound, that she was fully aware her master was speaking in her praise.

Deeming it best, however, to subside into silence, lest the tokens of his presence should reach unfriendly ears, Dick spoke to her to be silent and still.

He was immediately obeyed.

Then, assuming his former attitude, he peered over the low stone parapet of the bridge.

It was somewhere about ten minutes after this that Dick heard some one approaching at a rapid walk, and looking in the direction of the "Fox and Grapes," he almost immediately saw the outlines of a human form.

There was every probability that this was Joe, the ostler, but as a means of precaution, Dick determined not to discover himself till he had quite satisfied himself upon the point.

And now whoever it was that was coming, began to whistle in a very loud tone one of the popular melodies of the day.

Presently the figure reached the bridge.

Even as Dick had done, it walked to the centre, and there stopped.

Still Turpin did not move.

Then the figure spoke.

"I am afraid he won't come," he said, "and I don't wonder at it. He's far enough off by this time, I'll warrant. How glad I am I did not tell mother and Susan what I expected. They won't be disappointed now, as they would have been if they had known all about it, and then him not keep his word. However, it's only just twelve, and I ought not to expect him to be punctual. I'll wait an hour before I give him up."

Thus resigned, the ostler walked to the side of the bridge and sat down, determined to keep his disappointment down.

"Joe!" said Turpin.

The ostler heard the voice, and glared around him in alarm.

"Joe!" said Dick again, and this time a little louder.

"Who is it?" asked Joe, recovering himself a little; "is it the captain?"

"Yes; silence! I will be with you directly."

Joe could tell by the sound whereabouts the highwayman was, and he crossed over to that side of the bridge.

Turpin, in the meantime, turned Bess round, and regained the high-road.

"It really is the captain!" said Joe; "ah! I never thought you would come."

"But here I am, you see."

"Yes, you are here, but do you know your danger?"

"Never mind that, Joe; I made you a promise."

"I know you did."

"And I am here to perform it."

"It's a great deal more than I deserve."

"Not a bit of it! Now, Joe, how much do you want?"

"I don't know."

"But surely you have fixed upon some sum that would be just about enough for your purpose."

"Yes I have."

"And how much is it? Come, tell me."

"Two hundred pounds."

"Is that all?"

"All! I think it is a very great deal, though it may not seem much to you."

"But, Joe, don't be afraid to speak. Do you really think the sum you mention would be sufficient?"

"I do."

"Very well, I don't; and so to make sure, you shall have just double."

"Double?"

"Yes, double."

"Four"——

"Hundred pounds!"

Joe gasped for breath. The bare idea of possessing so much money was more than he could bear with anything like composure.

In the meantime, Dick very coolly began to take the money out of his pocket and count it.

CHAPTER CLXXIV.

DICK IS ALARMED BY THE APPROACH OF THE PATROL, BUT JOE, THE OSTLER, SUGGESTS A CAPITAL RIDING-PLACE.

"Hold your cap, Joe," he said, "and I will put the money in it."

Joe doffed his hat in a moment.

Then Turpin, as fast as he had ten guineas counted, dropped them in.

The hat soon grew heavy.

Many and many a purse contributed the money, but Dick took care to give nothing but guineas, for he by no means desired to give the poor fellow notes, which might be recognised as having been stolen.

Upwards of three hundred and fifty guineas had he thus counted, and transferred from his pocket to Joe's hat, when a faint, muffled sound arose.

Both stopped and listened.

Louder, louder, and louder it grew.

"It is the patrol," said Joe.

"The patrol?"

"Yes, they are out to-night in double strength, so I am told, upon all the roads leading from the metropolis."

"That is awkward."

"Very."

"I am glad you told me this."

"Why?"

"Because I shall know how to act."

"I thought you were in ignorance of it."

"And why?"

"If you had known, I thought you would never have run the risk of coming here."

"I should. It is a part of my principle always to keep a promise. What I say I mean."

"But hark!" said Joe, "they are coming at a good rate. Can you hear the horses?"

"Quite plainly. Are they dragoons?"

"I do not know. I have seen three or four different parties upon the road to-night. Some were dragoons—some police-officers."

It seems as though they had made up their minds to capture us."

"They have, and unless you are very, very careful, they will do it."

"Pho, pho!"

Although the advance of the patrol could be plainly heard, owing to the silence of the night, yet they were at a great distance, and completely out of sight.

"You must be careful," said Joe, earnestly. "Until you are all captured the authorities have resolved that every road leading from London shall be thoroughly well watched, so that for you to commit a robbery will be impossible."

"But we stopped the Oxford mail last night," said Dick, with a smile.

"And a foolish thing it was, too," said Joe, "though I hope you will excuse me for making so bold as to say so."

"Why? We had a capital booty!"

"Likely enough. I have heard that every passenger was stripped of all he possessed. But you were in quite difficulty enough, I think, without making matters worse."

"Never mind that now," said Dick. "All's well that ends well. Will the patrol pass over the bridge?"

"Assuredly."

"How shall I get out of their way then?"

"I hardly know. They won't pass you without stopping and questioning you, and then, ten to one, you will be recognised."

"Perhaps not."

"There is the risk."

"Yes, of course, there is the risk."

"Then do not run it."

"But have you any idea which will be the best for me to do?"

"If you attempt to fly, you will, ten to one, be heard and pursued."

"That I should not mind in a general way, only Bess has had her powers very much taxed lately, and I do not wish to strain her by putting her to a gallop, though if I did so I should get out of the way easily enough."

"She is a wonderful animal."

"She is. Now, Joe, can you think of anything? I don't want the patrol to see me, and I do not want to put Bess to a long and fatiguing gallop. What shall I do?"

Joe scratched his head.

"That's a hard question to answer," he said.

"There is not much time to spare."

"I can only think of one thing."

"What is it?"

"I hardly like to tell you."

"Why not?"

"Because it is so hazardous."

"Do not hold back for that reason. Generally speaking, the greater the hazard the more I like it."

"Do you indeed?"

"I do."

"You are a strange fellow, I can hardly make you out."

"Never mind. Quick! What is your scheme?"

"You see this bridge?"

"Of course."

"Well, I think it just possible that if you were to go down by the bank, and then walk your mare under it"——

"I understand. You think, then, the patrol would pass over our heads without knowing anything of us being so near?"

"It is just likely."

"It is very likely."

"Do not be too sanguine."

"Joe, my lad, it is the best idea I have heard for some time."

"Do you really think so?"

"I do! And how it is I have never thought of it before I can't conceive. It is so simple, and yet so certain to succeed."

"You will try it, then?"

"Most certainly."

"Then come at once, or if we stay longer where we are we shall stand a chance of being seen."

"You are right; and as you must know the way about here better than myself, just be my guide for once."

"I will."

"Take hold of Bess's bridle, and lead her where she is to go."

With a gratified feeling swelling at his heart, when he thought the bold highwayman so approved of his plan, Joe took the mare by the bridle, and led her to a place where they could descend to the brink of the river without difficulty.

"How deep is the water?" asked Turpin.

"Under the arch only a little more than a foot, except in rainy weather, and the bottom is all beautiful little pebbles.

"The very thing. Bess will be able to stand there without any trouble."

"She will; but if you sit on her back you will have to stoop a great deal, for, as you see, the arch is very low."

"It is; but we can manage nicely, I think. Now, Joe, the best thing you can do is to jump up behind me. Quick! don't stop, for we have no time to lose now."

"I don't like," said Joe.

"But it won't do for you to stand in the water yourself, and if you are here alone you will rouse suspicion. Jump up."

Feeling it would be vain to remonstrate, Joe jumped up behind Dick, and then the latter, walking Bess into the water, guided her along the centre of the stream.

A faint plash as she lifted her feet out of the water alone betokened her progress, and the patrols were not yet near enough for them to hear such a sound as that.

Half-a-dozen steps, and she was fairly underneath the arch.

As Joe had said, it was necessary for them to stoop very much, but such a trifling inconvenience as that they were quite ready to put up with.

When exactly half way under, Dick stopped his mare.

The noble animal seemed fully to understand all that was going forward, and to comprehend the necessity there was for silence, for no sculptured horse could have stood more immovably than she did.

The cold water round her hoofs was doubtless agreeable and pleasant to her.

Neither of the strangely-assorted pair who sat huddled upon her back ventured to speak, for the vibration of the earth told them that the patrols were very close at hand indeed.

On, on, with a dull sound, tramp, they came.

Under the arch the sound reached their ears, like the muttering of far off thunder.

Dick felt pretty well at ease, and did not much anticipate an attack; but still he thought it best to be on the safe side, so he drew forth his pistols, and, as well as he could, examined the priming, and put them in a condition fit for instant service.

This done, he felt more secure, and awaited the coming of his foes with great composure.

Only one thing gave him anxiety. Would the patrol ride on without stopping at the bridge?

If they did stop his position would be awkward in the extreme.

Another minute now would set his doubts and fears at rest.

He bent all his faculties to listening.

The horses came, he fancied, at a gentler pace as they neared the bridge.

But this he thought must be his fancy.

Some words that were spoken, however, showed him it was not.

No sooner had the foremost of the patrol set foot upon the bridge, than a loud and commanding voice cried out, "Halt!"

Joe clutched Dick tightly.

"Halt!" said the voice again, and then, when the trampling of the horses had ceased, all was still.

"Kemp!"

"Yes, sir."

"Come forward."

The two beneath the bridge heard some one on horseback advance out of the ranks.

"You will stay here, Kemp."

"Yes, sir."

"You understand your duty. Ride quietly up and down until you meet the other sentries. As soon as you hear anything at all suspicious, do not wait to see whether it really is so or not, but at once fire your carbine, which will be enough to bring the remainder of the force to this spot."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you understand?"

"Quite, sir."

"Forward then!" said the officer in command. "If the villains are on the road to-night, it will go hard with me if I do not capture them."

CHAPTER CLXXV.

THE SENTINEL ON THE BRIDGE PROVES A SERIOUS OBSTACLE TO DICK TURPIN AND JOE.

As these words were spoken, the patrol put themselves in motion, and left the spot at a sharp trot.

Dick listened for a long time to their retreating footsteps.

He found himself in a most unenviable predicament.

There was a soldier posted as a sentinel just above his head, with the strictest injunctions to raise an alarm if he heard the least suspicious sound.

He was in the water under the bridge.

That he would be able to walk Bess out without attracting the sentinel's attention was scarcely to be hoped for.

What was he to do?

He was in a serious dilemma.

Joe wished to speak, but did not dare to do so. He sat mute and still behind the highwayman.

The sentinel, whose name appeared to be Kemp, remained for some time just where he was, looking after the receding forms of his companions.

Then Dick heard him say something to himself, which showed that he was not in the very best of tempers.

"Hang this sort of work!" he said; "it's a scampering shame, that it is, to set soldiers to do police duty! Curse the highwaymen! I only hope I come across them, and see if I don't settle them pretty quick. A nice treat on a cold winter's night to patrol up and down a lonely road like this. However, I s'pose it's no good grumbling: I must begin and abide by it."

Having come to this philosophical conclusion, Kemp slowly walked his horse up towards the "Four Grapes."

It now became rather an interesting point for Dick to ascertain how far his beat extended, and whether, when he reached its utmost limit, it would afford him an opportunity of slipping out unperceived.

The pace at which this patrol went along the road was a very leisurely one, and it was some time before he got far enough off for Dick to be able to speak in safety.

As soon, however, as he had done so, he said—

"Well, Joe, what's to be done now?"

"You may well ask that," said Joe; "we are in an awful fix; you see what comes of taking my advice!"

"Your advice was good enough, if these confounded patrols were not so vigilant. Who would have thought, now, they would have taken the trouble to post sentinels in that manner?"

"Who, indeed?"

"Hark! Can you hear him.?"

"Not now."

"Nor I. How far do you think he will go before he turns back?"

"Not very far, I should think."

"Well, Joe, I'll tell you what I wish you to do."

"I'll do it."

"I know you will. As we cannot hear the patrol, he will not be able to hear you if you slip off the mare's back, and go under the arch as quietly as you can, and creep up the bank."

"But what do you want me to do?"

"Find out how far he goes, if you can, and whether it would be safe for me to come out."

"I wished to propose the same thing to you."

"Did you?"

"Yes, only I was afraid you would misunderstand me."

"Well, no matter about that. Slip off, and knowing the place as well as you do, you will easily be able to gain the high-road. Then note how far he goes."

"All right," said Joe; "I'm off."

As he spoke he dismounted.

The water reached half-way up to his knees, but he did not care for that.

Feeling the sides of the arch with his hands, he crept along stealthily, and was soon at the top of the bank.

Here he crouched down, and took a long look up and down the road.

The sentinel was quite out of sight, and it was only indistinctly that he could hear the beat of his horse's hoofs.

Whether he was approaching or receding he could scarcely tell, for the sound did not seem to grow louder or fainter.

But this was owing to the distance, and the slow rate at which the patrol went.

The sound began to increase in loudness.

"He's coming back," said Joe, as he crouched still closer to the earth.

And now he was rather puzzled.

The officer, he felt sure, had gone towards the "Fox and Grapes."

And yet, as the sound got plainer and plainer, he felt confident it came from the opposite direction.

He waited, watching and listening.

The horseman who was coming must be either a traveller or another patrol.

By the speed he judged it to be the latter.

Nor was he wrong; for presently, through the darkness, he could distinguish a military-looking form on horseback.

It rode right up to the bridge, waited a moment, then turned round and retraced his steps.

"Ah!" said Joe, as he slid down the bank towards the stream, "I see it all now."

"What have you learned?" asked Turpin, anxiously, as soon as he was within hearing.

"Hush," said Joe.

"Will it be safe for me to emerge?"

"Listen, and I will tell you what I have seen."

"Go on, then, I am impatient to leave this place."

"I don't doubt that," said Joe. "It's nice and cool in the summer, I should think."

"How far does the sentry go?"

"It doesn't matter."

"Not matter?"

"No, there are two of them, and their beats are so arranged, that when one is furthest from the bridge the other is upon it, and the reverse."

"Confound their caution!"

"So say I."

"Then, don't you think they go far enough for me to be able to get out unheard?"

"I should think you would stand a bit of a chance if you were to wait until they were both halfway."

"I see, both about the same distance from the bridge."

"Just so."

"Then, with care, you think I might do it?"

"It is your only chance."

"It shall be tried, then, and it won't be my fault, nor Bess's either, if it does not succeed.

"Now's your time, then. I'll walk out with you, and I only hope you'll get off all right, as you deserve to do."

"Stop that, Joe. If you want to offend me, just begin praising me. Lead the way out of this place."

"Quietly, quietly, or you will spoil all."

Joe again took Black Bess by the bridle, and led her along.

They quickly emerged, and then Dick stopped to listen.

He could hear one of the sentinels approaching at a brisk walk.

"Good-bye, Joe," he said. "Take care of yourself. I shall get across the country as quickly as I can, and I am glad I came to-night, for I have acquired some information very important to me, and which I could not otherwise have got. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Joe, "and to the longest day I live I shall feel grateful to you."

At this moment they saw a bright flash as of lightning, and then heard the loud report of a carbine.

"We are seen," said Dick. "Fly, Joe, and I will do the same. They will find it no small task to catch me, I'm thinking."

So saying, he struck Bess upon the flanks with his heels, which caused her to give one terrific bound, and then dart forward with incredible speed.

The shot which had been fired was speedily answered by another, and then the trampling of horses at full gallop followed.

"Hurrah!" said Dick, as Bess leaped a hedge that most horses would have turned away from, "hurrah! Let them follow us; we will lead them a rare dance to-night."

That he had been perceived by one of the sentinels seemed tolerably certain, for he now heard most unequivocal signs of pursuit.

But he felt he could well afford to laugh such efforts to scorn now that he had got so good a start.

One bold effort he determined should free him from them, and so, urging Bess to the utmost exertion, he flew along with the swiftness of the wind.

Very soon all sounds of his pursuers died away.

Then he drew rein, and went at a pace less fatiguing to himself and to his noble mare. Impatient as he was to reach the farm, where his friends were doubtless as impatiently awaiting him, he would not satisfy that feeling at her expense.

But the long, sweeping, easy gallop which she went at, and which she could perform with the greatest ease, carried him over the ground at a very swift pace indeed.

As near as possible, he took the same route back as that by which he came.

How late it was he had no idea, but there were no signs of daybreak visible in the sky, and he yet entertained the hope of being able to reach his destination before the farmer or any of his family were astir.

At last the comfortable-looking place came in sight.

Here he pulled up, and returned with the same caution as he had left.

As he crossed the yard near the stable he looked towards the window of the room in which his companions were.

It was open.

Within he could see a face, while a hand was waved towards him.

"That's Tom King," he said; "he is a true friend, and deeply grateful for the service I have rendered him. It will cut me to the heart to ever part with him, and so it will to part with you, my lass," he added, patting Black Bess upon the neck.

Then, having arrived at the stable door, he alighted, took off the saddle and bridle, replaced them on the nail from which he had taken them, and sent the mare to find her own way to her stall, which he felt sure she would be better able to do than himself.

Then closing the stable-door, he made his way to his chamber.

"Thank God," said Tom King, "you have returned safely. A thousand times, as the night wore on and you did not return, have I been tempted to set out in pursuit of you, and nothing but the promise I made you would have been sufficient to keep me back."

"It is as well you made it," said Turpin. "All has passed off right enough. I must give you the particulars another time. Has neither Claude nor Jack awoke?"

"No."

"Let us lie down, then," said Turpin, "and while we have the chance get all the sleep we can."

CHAPTER CLXXVI.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS HAVE THEIR SERENITY DISTURBED BY THE APPARITION OF A BILL-STICKER.

THE sun was high up in the sky before our friends awoke.

The inmates of the farm would not have them disturbed on any account.

As for the farmer himself, he was delighted, and nothing would have pleased him better than for his strange guests to have stayed with him for a month.

That they were gentlemen he was confident.

Tom King, too, had succeeded in making a favourable impression upon both his daughters, and the reader will scarcely feel surprised at this.

Upon awaking, they took all the pains with their toilette which they possibly could, and by the aid of clean water and a brush they much improved their personal appearance.

The wound which Sixteen-String Jack had received from the coachman was so slight as to be scarcely worth talking about. There was a long ugly scratch along his cheek and ear, but it did not look like what it really was, but as though he had been torn by a brier.

Of his night adventure Dick did not say a word, for he resolved to defer the narration of what had taken place to a better opportunity.

All four felt pretty sure the officers must have lost the clue to their whereabouts, or they would have heard something of them before now.

On leaving the chamber where they had passed the night, they repaired to the kitchen where so many happy hours had been spent the day before.

There they found assembled, and apparently waiting for them, the honest old farmer himself, his wife, and his two daughters.

The favourable impression which our adventurers had made was deepened considerably by the improvement visible. They did, indeed, look like gentlemen, and Tom King more especially, who, as the reader already knows, was one both by birth and education.

A substantial meal was spread upon the table, and, take the apartment for all in all, it would have been difficult to find a place that had so many evidences of comfort about it.

The air, unlike that of the previous day, was raw and chilly, so a large fire had been heaped up in the spacious fire-place.

The flames were high and bright, and cast a cheerful glow upon the faces of those who sat around, as well as on the walls and rafters.

Dick thought, as he looked around, he had never before seen such a picture of content, and he could not help contrasting the placid life of the inmates of the farm, undiversified as it was with any remarkable incident, and his own wild, turbulent career, full of wild and soul-stirring excitement. The one was like the unruffled waters of a lake, the other like the mountain torrent.

During the meal, which was as happy and as jovial a one as that on the preceding day, no one, to have looked at the four highwaymen, and noticed the careless, happy expression of their countenances, would have thought that so heavy a price was set upon their heads, and that the officers of justice were straining every nerve to effect their capture.

Of the jests, the merry tales, the jokes, the laughter, we shall say but little. The episode of their stay at the farm-house is too dull and devoid of interest for us to linger over its details.

But as our aim is to give the real lives of these notorious characters, we could not pass it over without making mention of it.

There was no wish that the highwaymen should leave the farmer's roof; in fact, they were pressed to stay, and our friends would doubtless have accepted the invitation, from the fact of its affording them a secure and unsuspected hiding-place, had it not been for an untoward incident.

Scarcely had they finished the hearty breakfast laid before them, and in which the farmer and his wife joined, out of compliment to their visitors, when a strange step was heard outside.

Our friends judged it was a strange step, for the dog, which had been lying in front of the fire, arose and uttered a low, fierce growl.

"Down, Rover! down" cried the farmer, then turning to his daughters, he added, "go to the door, Alice, and see who it is."

In obedience to this request, the elder of the two sisters went to the door and opened it.

"Good morning, miss!" said a voice. "I'll just trouble you to take that, and, if you'll allow me, I'll stick one or two about the farm."

"What is it?"

"It's a bill, miss, offering a reward of two thousand five hundred pounds for the apprehension and conviction of those four desperate highwaymen, Dick Turpin, Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack, who are supposed to be hiding somewhere in this neighbourhood."

It would be impossible to describe in any reasonable space the effect which this speech had upon our friends.

But the emotion they showed was not for a moment attributed to its real cause. It was thought to be merely the surprise which the sudden intelligence had elicited.

The farmer got up off his chair and went to the door.

"Good morning!" said the man, who, by the implements he carried, was evidently a bill-sticker. "Good morning!"

"Good morning!" replied the farmer. "What's that you say about highwaymen?"

"Here's a bill offering a reward of two thousand five hundred pounds for their apprehension, and containing a full and accurate description of their appearance."

"Oh! indeed!"

"They are thought to be in hiding somewhere in this part of the country, so I want you to give me permission to stick a few of the bills round the farm."

"Oh! certainly—certainly! stick up as many as you like! I only hope they'll be caught, for, rat 'em, they robbed me once of my money as I was coming home from market!"

"Did they, though!"

"Yes, they did."

"Then you needn't fear they'll do it again, for such steps are taken as will make their capture certain; they cannot escape, and every road is guarded."

"Glad to hear it!" said the farmer. "Glad to hear it! Where's the bill you spoke about? Oh! there it is! Alice has got it! But come, you seem a civil sort of chap, will you walk in and warm you, and have a jug of ale?"

"Thank you! if you will?" said the bill-sticker, putting down his can. "It's an awfully cold morning, and I am chilled to the bone!"

"I daresay you are. Come in—come in!"

The bill-sticker entered.

The highwaymen felt very uncomfortable indeed, but what were they do?

Move they could not, without exciting suspicion, and so they were obliged to remain where they were and stand their chance of being unrecognised.

The bill-sticker was a thin, sharp, active-looking, little man, with a very inquisitive cast of countenance, and ferret-like eyes, which glanced over everything in the place in a moment.

A chair was placed for him near the fire, and a large mug of ale poured out.

"Drink that," said the farmer, heartily, as he handed it to him, and if that don't warm you, nothing will."

"Many thanks, and good health to you all," said the bill-sticker, as he took the proffered mug and drank off its contents; but all the time he did so, he fixed his eyes upon our friends with the greatest attention.

Of course they noticed it, and knew what was the reason.

But their entertainers thought it was only rude curiosity on the man's part, for so impressed were they with the idea that their guests were gentlemen, that the fact of there being four of them did not rouse their suspicions.

The farmer had taken up the bill, and was looking earnestly at it, but to read the document was beyond his power.

He saw the figures on the top, £2,500, and, by dint of spelling every letter, he made out the word "Reward."

"I say," he cried. "Just let us hear what the bill says. Now, Mr. Bill-sticker, read it out to the company."

"Oh! certainly. Just hand it to me."

"Excuse us," said Dick, bending forward and speaking in a low tone to the farmer, "but while you listen to this we should like to run out and look at our cattle; they are valuable creatures, and we always make a point of looking at them the first thing every morning."

"No—no, never mind now. Stop and hear the description read."

"It is not worth while—we shall not be long away, and I thought if we went while you were listening to that, we should not be missed so much."

"Oh! very well—very well," said the farmer. "But don't be long gone. I shall be main sorry to part with you."

Dick upon this rose, and made a sign to his companions to do likewise.

The bill sticker looked after them suspiciously, but he did not like to speak, for fear of falling into some ridiculous mistake.

All four of our friends could not help giving a sigh of relief upon finding themselves in the open air.

"Game's up," said Turpin. "That man suspects who we are. I saw it in his eyes. Quick to the stable with you, and then we will mount and be off."

"That's the plan," said the others, as they followed him. "Confound the fellow for coming and turning us out of such comfortable quarters."

"So say I," replied Dick. "Only let me catch him, and see whether I don't pay him out."

They laughed.

Dick pushed open the stable door, and then, entering, each one set about the task of getting the horses ready for the road.

They were saddled in an incredibly short space of time, and then led out.

"Mount," said Dick, "and let us be off—unseen, if we can, or that bill-sticking rascal will raise such an outcry as will alarm the whole country-side."

Scarcely had the words left his lips, and before they had fixed themselves in their saddles, than, with a sudden rush, the bill-sticker and the farmer ran out of the house.

"Murder," they cried. "Stop them! Highwaymen! Stop them! Two thousand five hundred pounds reward! Stop them! Stop them! Oh! murder! Fire!"

CHAPTER CLXXVII.

DICK TURPIN AND CLAUDE DUVAL FIND ANOTHER BILL-STICKER IN THE LANE, AND TAKE THEIR REVENGE UPON HIM.

DICK TURPIN thrust his right foot into the stirrup, and then, gathering the reins in his left hand, he raised his hat and made an ironical kind of bow.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said. "You see we are off, and rather suddenly. But it can't be helped. I'm sorry to leave you. Good bye."

As he thus spoke he touched Black Bess lightly on the flanks, and she darted off at once.

The others followed.

The vociferations of the farmer and the bill-sticker soon died away. To be sure they ran as fast as their legs would carry them, shouting as they went at the top of their voices, but they were no match for the highwaymen's horses.

"I should like to smother that fellow in paste," said Claude Duval, as they walked their horses up a bit of a hill. "Confound him for coming and turning us out of such comfortable quarters. I don't know when I was so happy before."

"Oh! never heed that," said Jack. "I for one had quite enough of it, though I must say I shall always look up to the old farmer as one of the right sort."

"It's that infernal bill-sticker," said Turpin "I only hope we fall across him, and I'll make him remember us for one while."

"What do you intend to do next, Dick?"

"We ought to reflect a little before we act, I think."

"I am sure we ought."

"We have pretty good evidence that all the roads round London are pretty well watched, and I will give you an idea how it is done."

Dick then proceeded to relate to his friends the adventures he had had during the night. Their astonishment may be imagined, for Claude and Jack never knew that he had been absent from the chamber.

But, despite their recklessness, they could not help feeling rather uneasy at the extreme vigilance of their foes. They could no longer conceal from themselves that they were in real earnest.

"I think," said Tom King, "that the very best thing we can do is to leave London for a while, and bend our steps inland. We have never visited the midland counties yet. What do you say to doing so?"

"Say!" cried the others; "that no better plan of action can be proposed."

"Since we are so unanimous, then," said Turpin, "we had better start at once. That we are more than suspected to be in this part of the country we have abundant evidence, and for that reason it strikes me we shall have a great deal of difficulty in leaving it undetected."

"We must expect that; but we have got out of worse difficulties before now, and I trust we shall again."

"And now where are we?"

"I have no idea."

"Which direction, then, ought we to take to go where you propose?"

"There is only one way. It is about noon now, I should think."

"Just ten minues' past," said Dick, consulting a watch.

"Very good, then; the sun is somewhere about due south, so the simplest plan will be to go straight on and keep our backs to it."

"We shall do, then; but mind, above all, you keep a sharp look round."

"What's that, then?" cried Claude. "Do you see?"

"Where?"

"Further on down the lane."

"I see nothing," said Dick.

"Look at that large tree yonder. Can't you see something close to it moving about?"

"Yes I can," cried Tom King. "It is a piece of stick moving about."

"I see it now," said Turpin. "Halt a moment, and let us try if we cannot make out what it is."

"It looks to me," said Claude, "as though somebody was standing in the lane, and poking the trunk of the tree with a walking-stick?"

"But what on earth can they be doing that for?"

"I don't know."

"There doesn't look anything dangerous in it."

"There does not, and yet there might be. We must now look with an eye of distrust upon everything we cannot understand."

"Let us walk on gently and see what it is, and be prepared, if necessary, to defend ourselves."

The lane down which our friends were now travelling was a very winding one, with good high hedges on both sides of it.

It was round the first bend in it that this strange sight was seen.

At a walking pace, and looking very keenly about them, they went on.

As soon as they passed the curve, the mystery explained itself.

A man, armed with sticks and brushes, was pasting bills upon the trunks of such trees as were wide enough for the purpose.

"Another bill-sticker, by Jove!" said Turpin; "curse all the tribe. Why, if they go on at this rate, we shall be made known everywhere! Let us alight, Claude; we'll serve this one out, at all events."

So saying, Dick dismounted, and his example was immediately followed by his three companions.

"But what shall we do with the horses?"

"I will hold them, if you like. They will be safest if I do, and you three are surely a match for that fellow!"

"Oh! yes."

Sixteen-String Jack immediately took charge of the horses.

This care off their minds, the others walked steadily down the lane.



[DICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS DISCOVER THE DESERTER EXHAUSTED ON THE WAYSIDE.]

The man was so intent upon what he was about that he did not perceive their approach.

He had just got a refractory bill to stick against the bark of the tree, and he was patting it down at the sides and corners, in order to make it secure.

Dick would not speak to disturb him, but made a sign with his hand to Claude.

The two then crept forward on tip-toe, until they were close to the man, who little suspected who were behind him.

Then they gave a sudden dart forward, and caught him by the arms.

The bill-poster uttered a cry of fright upon feeling himself seized thus unexpectedly, and he twisted his head round in order to see who his assailants were.

Familiar as he had made himself with the description given on the bills, he recognised our two friends at a glance.

"Murder!" he cried. "Help! Save me! Oh! Lor'! Two thousand five hundred pounds! Oh! murder! Fire!"

"Stop that!" said Dick, and as he spoke, he snatched up the paste-brush, and sent it with a dab into the man's face.

Of course, it became an impossibility for him to continue his outcries any longer, for the brush was well charged with paste, and it filled up his mouth completely.

He managed, however, to make a terrible spluttering.

"Villain!" said Claude Duval; "what do you mean? Answer us this moment, what do you mean?"

The bill-sticker made an effort to speak, but, as he did not seem to relish swallowing his own paste, it was an ineffectual one.

"Oh! you won't speak," said Claude; "then we will have our revenge upon you. We have sworn not to leave a single bill-sticker alive, and you have fallen into our hands."

An expression of the most absolute fright came over the

face of the unfortunate man, and his hair fairly bristled up and stood on end.

In a spasmodic sort of way he managed to gasp for mercy.

"It's no use," said Dick, who at the same time made an expressive motion to his friend, which he perfectly understood.

There was a five-barred gate close by, opening into a field, and Claude immediately divined Dick wished him to be tied to it; for though they strove to frighten the man by threats, they had never for a moment entertained the idea of doing him any serious or wanton injury.

The bill-sticker himself, however, was not aware of this, and when he felt himself being forced backwards to the gate, he did not know what he had to dread.

"Here, Tom," cried Dick, "while we hold him, just feel in this fellow's pockets, and find whether he has anything about him in the shape of rope that will do to hang him with."

"All right!" said Tom King, interrupting himself in his occupation of reading the bill which had been stuck upon the tree. "I'll do it."

In a very scientific manner, Tom proceeded to rifle the man's pockets, and he very soon had the whole of their miscellaneous contents strewed upon the ground.

Among the rest were several pieces of very strong twine.

"These will do," said Turpin. "Now, Claude!"

Both set to work to tie the man to the gate, and this they did in a very little while. The cord they had was not quite enough, nor was it so thick as they would have liked for their purpose; but they made the best shift with it that they could.

There was a piece of leather strap that was fastened to the paste-can, and made so as to slip over the shoulder.

This they took, and formed one excellent band with it.

In brief, between them, by dint of a great deal of rummaging, they found a sufficient quantity for their purpose; and at length they had the hapless bill-sticker tied firmly to the gate, and quite powerless to help himself.

"Now, villain!" cried Dick, "you will remain where you are until such time as some one comes along this lane and releases you; and as it appears to me to be rather an unfrequented one, you will, I expect, have to wait for some time."

The bill-sticker had got rid of the brush out of his mouth, and he set up a dismal howl.

"Silence! Oh! you won't! Then take that!"

Dab went the brush into his mouth again, almost choking him with paste.

As it was stuck quite firmly between his jaws, and, as he had no use in his hands, he would have some difficulty in getting rid of it.

Quite satisfied with what they had done so far, their next proceeding was to take possession of the packet of bills the man carried with him, and also to pull down the one that was stuck against the tree.

They then formed the whole into a loose pile, and Dick, taking some phosphorous matches from his pocket, set light to it in several places.

Then a bright flame shot up, and in a little while all of them were consumed.

CHAPTER CLXXVIII.

OUR FRIENDS ARE NOT DESTINED TO GO FAR ON THEIR INTENDED JOURNEY WITHOUT MEETING WITH AN INTERRUPTION.

The poor bill-sticker looked with a rueful eye upon these proceedings on the part of the highwaymen.

To think that he should be able to see two thousand five hundred pounds—for in that light he looked upon our friends—right before his nose, and yet not be able to take it, almost drove him to distraction.

"So far very good," said Turpin, as he poked about the ashes of the bills, to see that none was left unburnt.

"Put his cap on," cried Sixteen-String Jack, who had been an amused spectator of the scene. "Poor fellow! he'll catch cold. Put his cap on."

"All right," said Claude, who divined the meaning that lurked beneath his comrade's words.

Stooping down, he picked up the can in which the paste was carried.

A good portion of its contents was spilt upon the road way, but yet there remained the more glutinous part of it, which clung tightly to the sides and bottom.

All saw now what Jack meant.

A shout of laughter came from their lips when Claude, holding it up as high as he could, reversed it and brought it down upon the man's head.

It was large enough to go right over it, and the rim rested upon his shoulders.

He looked about the most ludicrous object imaginable.

The tin can looked like some remarkable helmet.

"Now let us be off," said Dick. "We have done quite enough to make him remember us to the longest day of his life, and the sooner we move away the better. It won't do for us to stay too long in one place."

"Come on, then; we have certainly put a stop to his exertions—for a little while, at least."

"I wish he represented all his tribe."

"No doubt."

The four highwaymen remounted their steeds, and, after casting one last look at their enemy, resumed their way.

But they went at an easy pace, for it was obviously their best policy to husband their horses' strength as much as possible, whenever they had an opportunity, in order that when a time arrived which rendered it necessary for them to make great exertion, they might be equal to doing it.

"I cannot see any signs or sounds of pursuit," said Dick. "Can you?"

"None whatever."

"It is too much to hope that we have altogether eluded our pursuers. They are off our track now, but there is no knowing how soon they may be on it again."

"There is not."

"Both ourselves and our cattle have had a long, good rest, and, if we do not suddenly fatigue them, they will be able to take us a considerable distance without requiring another halt, and you know whenever we make one some fresh danger is pretty sure to arise."

"True."

"I suppose we still keep to our intention of seeking the midland counties, and trying if we cannot make ourselves snug there for some time?"

"Oh! yes—yes."

"We are all agreed upon that, then, which is sufficient for the present."

The lane, after a few more capricious convolutions, terminated in a broad high-road.

They did not know for certain, but, from its position, they judged it to be the one leading direct to Warwick.

If this should turn out so, their future progress would be easy.

And so, without any incident worthy of recording, they travelled this road until close upon sunset.

They had passed and met many vehicles and people, and from the latter they had received a great deal of scrutiny, but they did not offer to interfere with our friends, and our friends did not offer to interfere with them.

It was, then, just as the sun was about to set, that they noticed on the road before them a tremendous cloud of dust.

"That is a stage coach, I'll be bound," said Turpin, after looking for a few moments.

"It looks like it."

"It does."

"But, Dick," said Claude.

"What?"

"You do not think of stopping it?"

"No, I cannot say that I do."

"I am glad of that."

"Why?"

"Because it appears to me our presence on this road is at present unsuspected, and such being the case"——

"You think it would be injudicious to do anything that would serve to put the grab upon our track."

"I do."

"And so do I. Nevertheless, I hope it will prove to be a stage coach."

"Why?"

"We shall then know whether we really are upon the road to Warwick. I have not much doubt upon the subject, but still I should like to feel quite sure."

"I can say nothing against that."

"Oh! no. We will ride by quietly, and then we shall create neither suspicion nor alarm."

"Good."

In accordance with this, our friends trotted quietly along.

They did not go all four in a body, but in twos.

Turpin and King first.

Claude Duval and Jack Rann a little in the rear.

The stage coach came bowling along in capital style, and in a very short time they were able to distinguish the driver and the passengers on the top.

The sun was then just setting behind a large black cloud upon the very verge of the western horizon, and his last bright red beams fell with full force upon the approaching vehicle.

It was a beautiful sight, and one that might well call forth the admiration of any one.

But, ardent and enthusiastic as our friends were over horses, it gave them especial delight.

In fact, so charmed were they, that they forgot all else, and reined in their steeds to look, shading the sun from their eyes with their hands as they did so.

The driver, seeing this, and having heard of the stoppage of the Oxford coach, felt just in the least degree apprehensive when he saw our travellers, and he drew a long breath when he found he was allowed to pass unmolested.

It was more than he anticipated.

"All right," said Dick. "That was the Warwick mail. We shall have now no further trouble about our route; all we shall have to do will be to keep straight on."

As he spoke, the sun sunk completely behind the cloud.

A sudden darkness seemed to overspread the face of nature, and a chill blast of wind made the denuded branches of the trees clash lightly against each other.

Evening deepened into night, and when the moon arose, which she did with an almost full face, our friends were a considerable distance from London.

From having met with no molestation, they began to indulge in the hope that they had got beyond the range of the dragoons.

Such being the case, it was clearly their best policy to push on as quietly as they could, taking care to do nothing calculated to call attention to their whereabouts.

While they adhered to this, their progress through the country can afford but little matter for incident.

It was, however, something past ten o'clock when, in spite of themselves, they had about the strangest adventure they had ever met with, and which, in its results, had a material effect upon their future course of action.

What that adventure was we shall now proceed to relate.

The horses having been so long upon the road without once stopping to rest, began to evince signs of weariness, and the highwaymen themselves were somewhat cramped and stiff, by remaining so long in one position.

It was, therefore, thought advisable to come to a halt for a little time.

There were no dwellings anywhere near. Nothing but wide open country.

Nor could they see in the distance anything that looked as if they were approaching a village or town.

But on either side of them were some very verdant meadows, screened from the high-road by a hedge many feet in height.

In one of these they determined to stay awhile, and perceiving a gate at their left hand, they opened it and passed through.

The meadow was one of great extent.

Getting as close to the hedge as they could, our four friends dismounted, and, holding the reins in their hands, laid down to rest awhile.

But though the hedge was high, they were fearful that their horses would be seen if they stood up as they were.

But how were they to get them to lie down?

That was a question.

In past times Dick had taught his mare, Black Bess, to lie down, and he had little fear that she would obey him now.

He resolved to try, for then, they thought, and reasonably enough, that they might induce the other three to follow her example.

Accordingly Dick rose, and patting her on the neck bade her lie down.

At the same time that he uttered this command, he pressed against her shoulder.

The gentle creature understood him, and, bending her knees, lay down upon her side.

As they expected, this being done before the other horses, they were able to make them lie down also.

While they remained in this position it was a matter of impossibility for them to be seen from the high-road by any one.

In order to keep their horses thus, they were obliged to keep hold of the reins, and lie down close beside them.

But the creatures were too tired to be restless, and they lay there cropping the short sweet grass in silence.

As the bright moon shone down upon them they looked exceedingly picturesque.

The rest did them all good. Those only who have sat for as many hours in the saddle as our friends had without alighting, can tell how fatiguing it is, and how welcome a change, no matter of what sort, always is.

Half-an-hour, perhaps, passed, and during the whole of that time they had not been disturbed by the passing of a single thing along the high-road, but now a faint sound reaches their ears, which showed them that they on that night were not alone upon the road, as they thought they were.

CHAPTER CLXXIX.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN ARE UNSUSPECTED WITNESSES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY INCIDENT.

"THEY are horsemen," said Claude Duval, as he raised himself upon his elbow, in order to hear more plainly.

"They are horsemen, and well mounted."

"You are right, and, not only that, they appear to be in force. I should think there must be six of them, at least."

"Listen!"

There was a silence of some minutes' duration, during which all four of the highwaymen listened eagerly and earnestly.

The sound, which had at first been so faint as scarcely to be distinguished, and so equivocal that none but the most practised ear could have told what it really was, now grew more and more distinct, until, in a short time, the peculiar clattering noise which horses' hoofs make when striking upon the hard road, was plainly heard.

"Are they our foes?" asked Tom.

"Very likely, I think," replied Turpin.

"They have got upon our track in some way or other, you may depend."

"If so, then, it is obviously our best course of action to remain where we are."

"Certainly."

"They will pass us, to be sure," said Turpin; "but then, you must recollect, we shall have the disadvantage of their being on the road before us."

"Yes, that's true enough."

"Still, better that, I think, than have them at our heels; but we are by no means certain that they are officers. It may be, they have nothing at all to do with us."

"Yes, it may be so; but it is not very likely, I think. However, we must be unanimous in one thing."

"What is that?"

"Why, that under all circumstances, the best thing we can do is to remain quite still while they pass, let them be who they may."

"Oh! yes."

"So far well, then. The horses seem quiet, and I should think we might venture to leave them, while we crawl yet closer to the hedge. The moon is shining, and we shall be able to see everything on the road as plainly as if by daylight."

"So we shall, and, by so doing, we shall have the satisfaction of knowing who they are, and whether they are in pursuit of us or not."

"Just so."

"Come on, then, and lie down. The hedge does not grow too close together for us not to be able to see through it, and, though a slight sound would not reach their ears, still it will be safest to take up our positions at once, so that, when they do reach this spot, we shall have no necessity to move in the slightest."

"There spoke Claude Duval," said Dick Turpin. "Ever

cautious, never running into danger if he could possibly avoid it.

"Never mind that now, Dick. Take up your position so that you can see plainly all that passes, and we will all do the like. Quick, they will be here directly."

And, in truth, it seemed as though the little troop of horsemen was very close at hand indeed, but at present they were further off than our friends exactly imagined. The intense silence was so deceptive.

Tramp—tramp—tramp they came.

Our friends' excitement and impatience rose to its highest pitch, and they crept forward as far as they were able.

The moon was high up in the sky, and lighted up the road with great brightness.

From where they were, however, they were bound to have a capital view of whatever went by.

On they came, at the same regular, steady trot.

At last they came in sight.

They were not police-officers.

One glance was enough to assure our friends of that.

Nor were they their more dreaded foes, the light dragoons, who had kept hitherto so pertinaciously upon their track.

But, to the unbounded astonishment of the highwaymen, these men, who were well armed and mounted, pulled up exactly before the spot where they lay concealed.

It looked, indeed, just as though they knew the precise spot where they were.

But this was only fancy, and the idea was disappointed almost as soon as it had formed itself in their brains.

And now our friends, with a feeling of the greatest possible curiosity, lay profoundly still, just as they were, for, having halted, the least sound would be heard by the horsemen in the road.

For themselves they had no fear, but they could not for long be answerable for their horses.

Why the troop had halted just where they did they could not conceive, and the peculiar situation in which they were placed, made them fear that it boded no good to them.

"This place will do as well as any, I fancy," said an authoritative voice, "if you are sure he will pass here."

"We are quite sure of that."

"Then get behind the hedge and wait."

Our friends considered discovery certain, but they had sufficient discretion not to make the slightest movement.

It was very strange that these persons, whoever they might be, should think of concealing themselves where the highwaymen had.

It was one of those extraordinary coincidences that will sometimes occur.

It was a fortunate thing our friends did not move and betray their hiding-place, for it so happened that they chose the opposite side of the road, where there was a gap in the hedge.

Through this they, one after another, made their way, and, so far as the highwaymen could tell, dismounted from their steeds, and disposed themselves much in the same manner as they had done.

That they were waiting for some one, their action, and the few words they had let fall, pretty clearly evidenced; and who it was they waited for, and why they waited for him, they were full of curiosity to know.

They were each full of thought, and would have longed to have conversed, but they deemed it would be imprudent.

Those in the hedge, or, rather, behind it, no doubt were fully of opinion that they had the place all to themselves, and the chance circumstance of any one else lying in wait at the same place, never once struck them.

The result of this strange combination of incidents will be quickly apparent, for, as the highwaymen listen, they begin to hear the sounds of an approaching horseman.

On—on he came, and that at a most rattling pace. His horse, indeed, was going at full gallop.

The manner in which the hoofs struck upon the ground told them this.

It was only fair to suppose that the six men behind the opposite hedge heard the same sounds that our friends did, but there was no movement of theirs made to indicate it.

On came the horseman, and, the nearer he came, the greater grew the highwaymen's suspense.

There was a vague feeling in their minds that something terrible was going to happen, but, beyond that feeling, they had no idea that they could reduce to anything like consistency and form.

Whether the ambush boded any danger to the coming traveller they had no means of knowing, nor the special shape which the danger might assume, and, even if they had, they would not have been able to have apprized him of it.

At length he came in sight, at all events to Claude Duval, who chanced to be in such a position that he could see some distance further down the road than the others could.

By some fatality the horseman slackened his pace, and came on at a trot.

He glanced, too, uneasily from side to side, as though he had a presentiment of coming evil.

His horse was reeking with perspiration, and his mouth and chest were covered with thick white foam.

The rider was a man dressed in a semi-military costume.

All this Claude took in at a glance.

Suddenly, and just as the horseman was in front of the spot where the six men had concealed themselves, a loud voice cried out, in startling tones—

"Halt!"

Ninety-nine people in a hundred would have done as the rider did.

He stopped his steed in a moment.

But this action was all the more natural on his part, since from his occupation he was in the habit of receiving abrupt commands, and instantly obeying them.

Scarcely, however, had the echoes of the voice which had pronounced the word "Halt!" died away, and before the soldier had fairly stayed the progress of his horse, than there arose a loud and sharp explosion.

Mingled with this was a cry.

It came from the lips of the rider.

The men behind the hedge had taken up that position, then, to assassinate him, for the explosion was such as would be caused by a volley of small firearms.

A cloud of smoke hid all things from view for a moment, but, when it cleared away, the pale moonbeams discovered the rider and his steed lying in a strange confused and bleeding mass upon the road.

Our friends were horrified.

That such a cold-blooded and atrocious assassination could be planned and put into execution by Englishmen was almost more than they could believe.

But that such was so, there could now be no dispute.

Simultaneously and unanimously they sprung to their feet, and, drawing their swords, they rushed to the gate that led out into the lane.

The hedge was too thickly planted for them to force a way through it.

What might be deemed an infinitesimal portion of time sufficed for them to reach the gate.

When they entered the meadow, they had not fastened it, but merely let it swing to, which, from the way the hinges were hung, it had a tendency to do.

Dashing it open, they all four, in a compact body, rushed into the lane, and sped along it to where the unfortunate rider lay.

But they saw, ere they reached the spot, that the six assassins had crawled through the gap in the hedge, and were making for the same point.

CHAPTER CLXXX.

IN WHICH IS GIVEN SOME EXPLANATION OF THE ASSASSINATION IN THE LANE.

"FORWARD—forward, my friends!" shouted Turpin, as he perceived this circumstance. "Do not let them reach the poor fellow before we do, and thus allow them an opportunity of finishing their barbarous work."

With a rush, then, and a shout, they reached the place where the slaughtered soldier lay.

But the assassins, seeing persons approaching, did not fly, but came on as though it was fully their intention to contest what they had done.

Both parties arrived at the same moment.

Both had their swords drawn.

The assassins had the advantage in point of numbers, since there were six of them, while our friends were four.

But they had come off victorious at greater odds than those, and they felt no misgiving in attacking them, though, when they were close to them, they noticed in their foes a certain military appearance which they had not at first observed.

"Villains!" said Dick, "what is the meaning of this deed? Are we in England, that such things are suffered? Concealed behind the hedge, we have been spectators of all. Explain yourselves."

"We do not recognise your right to desire such a thing," said the man who had given the others instructions to get into ambush, and who, though there was no difference in them, might be supposed the one having the command. "We do not recognise your right. Begone, or you may get yourself into trouble."

"I say, explain yourself," said Dick, again, "or we will compel you to do so at the sword's point."

"That man is a traitor."

The one in command pointed to the ghastly, bleeding mass at his feet.

"Then, if so, why did he not receive a traitor's death?"

"He has."

"Not so. For the traitor there is the headsman's axe, and a public execution. Why was he shot down like a dog?"

"For State reasons."

"State reasons?"

"Yes; and now, knowing so much, and which I have exceeded my duty in telling you, depart."

"Never! The reasons you have given are not sufficient for us; and, look you, I stand now before his corpse, and none of you shall approach to extinguish the last spark of life that may cling to the wounded wretch, except over the dead bodies of myself and my companions."

"Treason—treason!" cried the man, "treason! These are doubtless traitors and rebels, too. Upon them! Take them prisoners! Slay them if they resist!"

With this, the six men precipitated themselves upon our friends, who met the onslaught bravely.

It would seem that these men were armed only with a sword and a short carbine. The latter had been discharged, so it would be a hand to hand contest.

A spectator would soon have seen how superior the highwaymen were in the use of the sword. They flashed their weapons round them with a rapidity which completely confused their adversaries.

Soon they had around them a circle of the dead and dying, while they, by the dexterity they parried all blows aimed at them, were unhurt.

Seeing the advantage they had gained, they pressed with still greater determination upon the assassins, over whom they felt they would obtain a speedy victory.

At length, all but two were beaten to the ground, and they, seeing the futility of longer opposing themselves to the highwaymen, threw down their swords, sank upon their knees, and sued for quarter.

This, of course, was granted to them upon the condition that they did not move in the least from where they then were.

The highwaymen were glad enough to sheathe their swords, and rest a moment to regain their breath—for the conflict, though short, had been a desperate one.

While doing so, however, they looked around them at what might, with great propriety, be called the field of battle.

Four of the assassins were stretched upon the ground, weltering in blood.

One was dead: his head had been literally split open.

Three others were so badly wounded that it was very problematical whether they would recover.

One of these was the commander.

Then turning round, they saw a still more terrible spectacle.

Mingled in one inextricable mass; bleeding—palpitating—from those places where the six bullets had entered.

The faint groans that arose, however, showed that the unhappy man who had been so treacherously slaughtered, was not dead.

The scene was a singular one.

"I say, Dick," exclaimed Claude, "this is a very singular affair, don't you think?"

"I do."

"What do you make of it?"

"Nothing."

"That is conclusive, at any rate! Can none of you make anything of it?"

The other two shook their heads,

"Can you make anything of it, Claude?" asked Dick.

"I confess I cannot. Altogether it seems quite inexplicable. Had it occurred in Italy—Rome, for instance, I could have understood it."

"Ay, so could I; but here, in England, it is a mystery."

"Let us go to the two who have asked for quarter. Surely from them we shall be able to get some information."

"You question them, Dick; and don't let us be long about it, for if any one was to come along the road, we should be in a very awkward predicament indeed."

"We should. I will question them quickly."

Followed by his three comrades, Dick Turpin drew closer to the two men, who still remained upon their knees as they had been bidden.

"Now," said Dick, sternly, "we have spared your lives when we might have taken them. For this you are compelled to do something to show your gratitude. Now tell us the meaning of all this."

"Ask us, and we will reply," said one.

"Yes, we will," said the other.

"Good, then. Tell me why you so treacherously shot down that poor soldier yonder."

"He was no soldier."

"That does not matter."

"He was a rebel!"

"A rebel?"

"Yes."

"How so? In what way was he a rebel? Against whom and what did he rebel? Where is the rebellion?"

"In Scotland, sir!"

"In Scotland?"

"Yes; the Pretender's son, assisted by the French, has landed on the northern shores of Caledonia, where it is his intention, so we hear, to raise an army, and invade England."

This was startling news to our friends.

"How long have you learned this?"

"Only to-day, when a spy brought word that a messenger from the rebel camp to some Jacobites in London, was on the road, and would pass this way."

"And so you were ordered to shoot him down in the way you did!"

"We were, and did no more than obey the orders we received."

"This is monstrous!" cried Dick; "were he ten times a rebel, he deserved better treatment than that. What end did you hope to gain by his assassination?"

"There you ask more than I can tell for certain, but I fancy they expected to find upon his person papers which would enable them to arrest the chief Jacobites in London!"

"It is a poor cause for such means to be taken, and they will never better it."

"We have nothing to do with that. A soldier's duty is merely to obey."

"Are you soldiers, then?"

"We are."

"But you wear no uniform."

"I am aware of it. We were ordered to attire ourselves as you now see us. I imagine because we should be less likely to attract attention."

"It is as foul a deed as well could be. But you have told us enough! Rise! begone! and consider yourselves well off that you have escaped with your lives!"

The two disguised soldiers did not need to be told twice that they might go. They scrambled in a moment to their feet, and set off at full speed.

"This is a most extraordinary affair altogether, but we will say no more about it until we have looked to the messenger, and as soon as we have done that we will be off!"

So saying, Dick strode to where the person in question lay.

His three friends followed him.

A little examination showed them there was no hope that they would be able to restore him to life. He still lived, it is true, but it was but the last flickering of the lamp.

Dick bent down over him.

The horse was quite dead.

He had fallen in such a manner upon his rider, that to separate them would be an impossibility without causing the poor wretch much unnecessary suffering.

"Speak!" said Dick. "If there is yet life enough in you to do so, speak! We are friends. Rest assured of that. Friends to you and to your cause!"

"Prince Charlie!" cried the dying man, in a feeble tone of voice. "Prince Charlie for ever! The papers! the papers!"

"Where are they?"

"They contain full details of the course our army is going to take, and there is a list of all persons in London who are favourable to our cause."

"But where—where are these papers?" said Dick. "Tell me where they are, and I will answer with my life that they do not fall into the hands of the Hanoverians!"

"Hurrah! for Prince Charlie!" cried the dying man, again. "He will yet be the king, and the Stuarts will be restored to their rights! That will be a bonnie time, but I shall never see it! The air grows dark—dark! Hurrah! for Prince Charlie! *Tandem triumphans.** At length triumphant! I am cold! My lungs fill—fill—with blood! I—I"——

There was a gasping groan, and the spirit of the rebel fled for ever.

CHAPTER CLXXXI.

TOM KING RECALLS AN ADVENTURE TO DICK TURPIN'S MIND WHICH HE HAD FORGOTTEN.

"DEAD!" said Turpin.

"Yes, poor fellow!" replied Tom King. "He's dead enough now, and of all the shameful and disgraceful things I have ever heard of, this is the worst."

"The very worst!" said Claude Duval. "But let us be moving. I look upon it as something like a miracle that we should have had the road to ourselves so long as we have without an interruption, but we shan't much longer, for hark! I can hear a vehicle of some sort or other coming now."

The others paused at this, and after listening a moment a slight sound reached their ears, which verified what Claude had said.

"But do not let us go," said Tom King. "Whatever it may be that is coming, it is a long way off at present."

"But why should we stay?"

"Do you remember what the poor fellow said about the papers? It will not take us a moment, let us possess ourselves of them."

"Agreed!" said Turpin.

No cloud dulled the brightness of the moon, and so they were well able to see what they were about.

But the task they had set themselves was by no means an agreeable one.

When they moved the mangled remains, they perceived a kind of wallet that the messenger had carried suspended from his neck by a strap.

In this, doubtless, would be found the papers of which he had spoken.

By cutting the strap in two places they were able to get possession of this wallet.

It was of leather, and secured by a lock, which they did not attempt to try to unfasten, but Dick with his sword cut away the leather around it.

The wallet opened at once.

Their suspicions as to its contents were quite correct. It was filled with papers.

They were tied up neatly in packets.

Tom King transferred them to his coat-pocket.

"There," he said, "we can do no more good here, that that is certain, so we will be off at once."

"Quick!" said Turpin, "or you will be too late."

They all four now ran down the lane to the gate.

Opening it, they all passed through, caught their horses, and mounted in an incredibly short space of time.

They did not reach the high-road, however, one moment too soon, for the vehicle they had heard approaching was now close at hand.

Short as the rest had been, it was enough to reinvigorate the horses, and they dashed along the road at a rate that soon left all sights and sounds behind.

About five miles further on they came to a rather steep hill, so they checked their cattle while they ascended it.

* The motto upon the Pretender's Standard.

Tom King took this opportunity to speak to Turpin; he had been anxious to do so for some time.

"Dick!"

"Yes, my friend."

"What we have just heard and witnessed has very forcibly brought back to my mind an incident which had entirely slipped my memory."

"What is it?"

"Is it possible it has not reminded you of it?"

"No, I remember nothing."

"I will tell you. Do you remember our first meeting?"

"Of course I do."

"Very well. It was not far from the 'Hand and Keys,' at Hornsey, was it?"

"Tom Davis's?"

"Yes."

"No, it was not very far from there. What of it?"

"Do you recollect how your mare was in London, and how Davis went to fetch it?"

"Perfectly."

"And how we went afterwards together?"

"Yes. What then?"

"As we were going on to London, we heard a horseman approaching; we stopped him, and he drew his sword and attacked me."

"By Jove! yes. The Young Pretender."

"The what?" asked Claude and Jack, who had listened with some curiosity to the little dialogue that had taken place between Turpin and King.

They, of course, were quite in ignorance of the incident, though the reader will doubtless remember it.

Should he not, it will be necessary for him to refer to the twenty-ninth and thirtieth chapters of this history, where it is given in detail.

The adventure was related to Claude and Jack.

"So," said the latter, "you really mean to say that you chanced to meet with young Charles Edward Stuart?"

"We did."

"And you did not find him a coward?"

"Quite the reverse, as the adventure proves."

"I asked, because he has always been represented to me as a coward."

"That is his enemies. He is no more a coward than I am."

"You must know," said Dick, "that Tom is quite on the side of the Stuarts."

"I am, and though they may have had their faults and failings, yet they are, nevertheless, the rightful heirs to the throne of England."

"Ah!" said Sixteen-String Jack, "that's a matter that interests me very little. What say you, Claude?"

"The same."

"Though, of course, just looking at it, I should be more on the Young Pretender's side than I should be on a foreigner's."

"Hear! hear!" said Tom. "Spoken like an Englishman. If they had been content to elect an Englishman to the throne, all would have been well, and there would have been but little disaffection; but, for my own part, I feel it an insult to the nation to set a lot of beer-swilling, muddle-headed Germans on the throne."

"You are getting excited, Tom."

"Never mind. It is a subject upon which one may be excused for exhibiting a little feeling."

"So it is."

"I spent my youth in the north of England, almost on the border, and so it is only natural that I should have imbibed some Scotch notions."

"That immediately accounts for your predilection in favour of the Stuarts."

"In a measure it does; but now, Dick, do you remember a little circumstance in connexion with our meeting with Charles Stuart, and which we have not yet mentioned?"

"I think I do."

"You must do."

"What is it?" asked Claude Duval.

"Why, this! Dick and myself both swore that as soon as he raised his standard, or rather as soon as the news of his having done so reached us, we would hasten to place ourselves under his banner!"

"You did?"

"Certainly. Didn't we, Dick?"

"Oh! we did, there's no denying that."

"And now we have the news that he has just raised his standard."

"But," said Claude and Jack, "do you think of going?"

"Why not? You would not have us break our words."

"Well, not exactly; but a soldier's life is none so pleasant."

"Pho, pho!"

"You will find it out."

"We shall be favoured."

"Put not your trust in princes."

"Ha! ha!"

"You may laugh."

"But, seriously speaking; and I will propose it more particularly to the captain here. Under all circumstances, don't you think the best thing we can do would be to push forward to the north, and take refuge in the ranks. We shall be quite safe there."

"I, for one, should approve of such a course, not only because I have sworn to do so, but because of the safety we should obtain."

"Then, captain," said Jack and Claude, "if that is your opinion, of course we subscribe to it!"

"Not if it is at all against your inclinations, my friends. You yourselves elected me to be your captain, but it is far from my desire to control all your actions. If you would rather not accompany us upon this expeditiou, you have only to say so, and we will either separate or abandon the idea altogether."

"It appears to me, now I come to think of it," replied Sixteen-String Jack, "about as good a thing as we could do."

"Then I give in to the majority," said Claude Duval. "I should be very sorry for us to separate."

"So should we all!"

"Am I to understand, then," asked Turpin, "that in this matter we are quite of one mind?"

"Yes."

"And our plan of operations will be to make what speed we can to Scotland."

"Just so."

As these words were uttered they reached the top of the hill, and as the ascent had been a long and steep one, they paused for a little while to breathe their horses.

Before and behind them all was perfectly still.

"That must be a strange sight for any one coming upon it unawares!" said Tom.

"What?"

"The scene where the battle took place!"

"It must, indeed."

"For one thing, there is nothing to identify us with it, or such an outcry would be raised that we should never be able to evade capture, because all the fault would be sure to be laid to us."

"Undoubtedly."

"Whatever person in authority can have sanctioned the perpetration of such an act, I am at a loss to think."

"It seems incredible. Why were they not content with taking the poor man prisoner, and not shooting him down like some wild, noxious animal?"

"We shall learn nothing by thinking of it," said Sixteen-String Jack; "and when we say it is a foul and dastard deed, we say all we can."

"I am pleased," said Tom King, "that I have been able to prevent these papers, containing his future plans, from falling into the hands of his foes. Had they become possessed of them, his cause would have been overwhelmed in ruin."

CHAPTER CLXXXII.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN RESOLVE TO JOIN THE ARMY OF THE YOUNG PRETENDER.

"Do you really think, Tom," asked Claude Duval, "that the young prince stands any chance of regaining the crown of his ancestors?

"I do! The best of all chances! Unless I very much mistake, as soon as the intelligence is spread that he has been proclaimed, and at the head of an army, hundreds of thousands will flock to his standard; and every day will serve to bring him fresh adherents."

"You are enthusiastic."

"Perhaps I am; but, rely upon it, I shall do all I individually can to aid him."

"We do not doubt it," said the others, laughing.

"It was the way he behaved upon the occasion of the fight I had with him that won my heart."

"He acted most gallantly, by your accounts."

"We have not exaggerated, have we, Dick?"

"Certainly not."

"Then he is one of the right sort, and I should think it would be a happy day for England when he is proclaimed her king!"

"There is this to be said," remarked Claude Duval, "we cannot well make our position worse, even if we do join the rebel ranks, as they will be called, for we have forfeited our lives already."

"Oh! drop that part of the subject."

"I was going to observe, if the young prince is defeated, we shall not lose anything; but if he gains"——

"Ay, there it is," cried Tom King, exultingly. "If he gains, we shall stand high in his esteem. He will grant us free pardons for what we have done, and place us in a position that will enable us to be gentlemen for the remainder of our lives."

"You must not forget that he will have a great many claimants upon his bounty."

"I do not; but we stand upon rather peculiar ground. He promised"——

"People in his position are always prolific in promises, and his race more particularly; but they have never been good at performing."

"Well—well, we shall see. The road is clear again, forward."

As he spoke, Tom King urged his horse to make better speed, and, the others following his example, they swept along the road at a gallop of about fifteen miles an hour.

This rate of travelling got over the ground quickly.

At last, morning broke.

The first early leaden-coloured beams of light showed them to be at the outskirts of a small town, though what it was they, of course, had no idea, for neither of them had been in that part of the country before.

Lest they should, at that early hour, attract unusual notice, they slackened speed as they passed through the High-street.

None of the places were open.

The town, which was of tolerable size, was quickly left behind, and the open country again reached.

It was now a great many hours since either of our friends had tasted food, and they began to feel the cravings of hunger.

But nowhere could they see a place where they could be satisfied.

The keen morning air served in no small degree to whet their appetites.

Therefore, they kept a sharp look-out for a roadside public-house where they could get the refreshment they needed.

The sun, however, rose, and attained a considerable elevation before they found one.

This they perceived at a great distance, for in accordance with a by no means unusual fashion, a stout post was planted in the footpath near the road, and a swinging sign suspended from it.

When they came near enough, they saw the letters on this sign were, "The Bald-Faced Stag, by James Marsh."

"This will be the place for us," cried Dick Turpin, exultingly, as he walked Black Bess to the large horse-trough attached to the sign-post.

As soon as he reached it, a man came rather leisurely from the inn-door.

"Going to bait here, gentlemen?"

"We shall stay for a little while. Have you good accommodation for man and horse?"

"Look there. Don't you see that truss of straw hanging up?"

"Yes."

"What does that mean, then?"

"Oh! I suppose it is all right. Where are the stables?"

"I'll take care of the horses, gentlemen."

"Yes, I know, but we would rather see them housed, fed, and groomed ourselves. Do you understand?"

Dick slipped a five-shilling piece in the ostler's hand, as he asked the question.

"Oh! yes, gentlemen, I quite understand. Be good enough to come this way. Just under that arch, sir,

takes you to the stable yard. Mind you stoop your heads, gentlemen; you see the arch is rather low."

So saying, the ostler, who now was all obsequiousness, led the way to the stables.

According to their usual custom, then, our friends paid particular attention to the disposal of their steeds. They had too often experienced the benefit of doing so ever to neglect this precaution, although on the present occasion they might fairly have been excused if they had omitted it.

They were absolutely famishing.

And they felt pretty well certain that they were near none of their foes.

The delay, however, was but trifling, and they eat their meal in all the greater ease in consequence.

Had they been suddenly surprised, and they in ignorance of the situation of the stables, they would have been in a very awkward fix indeed.

There is nothing connected with their stoppage at this inn at all worthy of record.

Having quite satisfied their hunger, they paid their reckoning, mounted their steeds, and departed.

That they were nearly, if not quite, unknown in that part of the country was pretty clear; but for all that, they took care not to do anything calculated to draw suspicion upon them.

It is questionable whether, in the whole length and breadth of England, four blither hearts could be found than those of the highwaymen.

As they cantered along the road, no one would have thought from their manner that they were in such great peril, or that so heavy a reward was hanging over their heads.

But then a danger that would have appalled most men, would have been looked upon by them with a careless smile.

And now, while they are travelling so quietly along the road, we feel that we cannot do better than give a few words of explanation before we enter upon what is certainly the most interesting and exciting episode in the lives of these celebrated highwaymen.

Many of the readers will not require to be told who and what the Young Pretender was, but yet there may be an equal number who do not, or, at all events, have at best but a confused idea upon the subject.

To these we shall more particularly address ourselves. The others may skip the few following lines.

King James II., then, as all who are in any way conversant with English history are aware, was dethroned, or, perhaps, more correctly, was compelled to abdicate the throne, upon which Prince William of Orange, afterwards King William III., was placed in his stead.

Now, the adherents to the family of Stuart, which, perhaps, included the whole of the Scottish population, would not admit that this forcible abdication barred the right of their family to the crown, and, on the accession of King George I., this question was agitated with much warmth.

Now James Stuart, or King James II., had a son, and it was contended by the Stuart faction that this son was the true heir to the crown, while the opposite party espoused the cause of King George I.

This son of the dethroned monarch, like him, bore the Christian name of James.

By the upholders of the Stuarts he was styled King James III.

By the upholders of the Hanoverian dynasty he was styled the Pretender, and this is the name by which he is most generally known—particularly at the present day.

Now, when George I. ascended the throne, an invitation was sent to the Pretender—who had taken refuge in France—to come to Scotland, where the friends to his cause were enlisting men for his service.

This invitation he accepted. He landed in Scotland, and very soon found himself at the head of a large army, whose numbers were continually augmenting.

The consequence was the outbreak, or civil war, between the two opposing parties, known to the reader of English history as the Rebellion of 1715.

The result of this is known. After a protracted struggle the Pretender was overthrown. Many noblemen who had taken part with him were executed, and their possessions confiscated, while the unfortunate James Stuart, accompanied by the Earl of Mar, managed, under the cover of the darkness, to get on board a vessel lying off Montrose, and afterwards land in France

But, though his defeat was so complete, all hope of seeing him upon the throne was not abandoned by the Jacobites, as those persons where styled who adhered to the side of the Stuarts.

But no very active steps were taken for nearly thirty years after this event, when the son of this James Stuart, the Pretender, by name Charles Edward Stuart, was invited over to Scotland, as his father had been before him.

At this time George II. swayed the English sceptre.

And now the whole affair divided itself into two portions, or pretty nearly so. One the Catholics, the other the Protestants.

Charles Edward Stuart, like his ancestors, was of the Catholic faith.

King George II., of the Protestant persuasion.

This brief, and necessarily imperfect summary, will, we think, be sufficient to enable the reader to have a clear idea of who the Young Pretender was, and also what his pretensions were.

It will be seen they rested chiefly upon hereditary transmission.

Charles Edward Stuart, then, came over to Scotland upon the representations of those noblemen who were affected with him, and what was the ultimate result of this step, we shall, from the circumstance of the highwaymen attaching themselves to his fortunes, quickly know.

CHAPTER CLXXXIII.

DICK TURPIN PERFORMS AN ACT OF CHARITY, AND THEN ONE OF RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE.

RETURNING from this digression, which succeeding events will show to be highly necessary to the proper understanding of the narrative, we will follow the fortunes of the four daring highwaymen upon the road.

They were a long way from Scotland and the Pretender's army, and they were destined to meet with some remarkable adventures before they reached either.

Mid-day saw them still upon their route, and a considerable distance from the inn where they had stopped to breakfast.

Despite the rapid approach of winter, the sun's rays, while he was passing the meridian, were very powerful, and, for the sake of their steeds, our friends were fain to go at a slower pace.

The district through which they passed was very sparsely populated, and conveyances were only now and then met with.

None of these did our friends venture to molest. They were under no pressing necessity, for the money they had in hand would serve to last them for a long time yet, and they by no means desired to be hunted through the country until they were forced into the Pretender's ranks.

For their own sakes it would look better if they came voluntarily.

It was somewhere about an hour past noon when Turpin, who was riding first, descried some object in the roadway.

In the distance he could not discern what it was.

Its appearance was something unusual, and, therefore, he slackened his pace a little, in order to enable his comrades to come up with him.

"What is it, Dick?"

"That is just what I want to know. Look yonder."

"Where?"

"On the right hand side, at some distance further on. Can you see it?"

"A mass of something?"

"Yes, that is it."

"I see it very plainly."

"And I—and I!"

"What do you make it out to be?"

"I should say a human form, only it looks too large."

"That was my first thought," said Turpin. "We cannot be too careful."

"Certainly not!" said Claude Duval.

"It may not bode any danger to us, but I have made up my mind during our journey to be on the safe side, and distrust everything which I cannot exactly make out!"

"That is the plan!" chimed in Claude Duval. "Keep to that, and we shall be right, never fear!"

"I knew such a course would meet with your full



[DICK TURPIN IS SHOT BY LIEUTENANT BECKWITH.]

approbation, if it did no one else's. But come! Go quietly! We shall soon see what it is."

At a brisk walk, our friends now went along the road, their eyes all the time fixed upon the confused mass before them.

By degrees, as they grew nearer and nearer, its outlines began to grow distinguishable.

Half-sitting, half-lying upon the roadway, his back supported by the green embankment, upon the top of which the hedge was planted, was a man in the garb of a soldier.

But his uniform was torn in many places; in fact, it was nothing but mere rags and tatters.

Bending over him, and supporting his neck with her arm, was a woman.

So intent was she upon what she was about, that she did not hear the sound of the horses' hoofs, or if she did, she paid no sort of attention to it.

Upon perceiving what it was, the others would have ridden on, but Turpin, touched with the deep distress apparent in both, and curious to learn some particulars of them, came to a halt.

Being then very close, he saw that the soldier was little more than a mere youth.

His cheeks were thin and haggard.

His countenance pale, even to ghastliness.

He was in a state of utter prostration, from what cause, of course, Dick knew not.

The woman, who seemed bowed down with suffering and privation, was long past the prime of life.

Deep furrows crossed and recrossed themselves over her face, and her hair was streaked with silver.

Her apparel, too, was ragged and travel-strained; the boots, too, which, in some mysterious manner, clung to her feet, indicated that they had done much service.

A groan came occasionally from the young man's lips.

It was echoed by a sigh and a gush of tears from her who, by her age and similarity of features, was doubtless his mother.

Her whole attention was centred upon the exhausted youth.

It did not take long for Dick, with his keen eyes, to note all this.

That their suffering was genuine he had no doubts.

Open-hearted and generous, and always ready to assist the necessitous whenever he had the power, it is not to be wondered at that he addressed the poor grief-stricken woman.

He drew yet nearer to her, and then resting his hand upon his mare's croup, he turned half round in the saddle, and spoke—

"Look up, my good woman," he said. "Look up. You are in trouble! I am a friend! Can I do anything to help you, or lighten your load of misery?"

The poor woman turned round with a sob of anguish, as these words of sympathy and kindness fell upon her ears.

They were the first she had heard for a long, long weary time.

Dashing the tear-drops from her eyes, she strove to look upon the face of he who had addressed her, and, at the same time, she endeavoured to control her voice.

But a faint "God bless you, sir!" was all that she could utter.

"Calm yourself," said Dick. "My time is precious. Tell me, if I can do anything to help you; tell me whether I can relieve any part of your unhappiness. Calm yourself, and speak."

Dick Turpin spoke these words in a kind, gentle, reassuring manner.

They had their due effect, for the poor woman removed her arm from around the youth's neck, and rose to her feet. It required a great effort for her to do so.

"God bless you, sir," she said, "and thank you, for I cannot. You see that poor young man there—he is my son."

This was an announcement for which Dick was fully prepared; but, nevertheless, observing that she paused, he endeavoured to put her still more at her ease.

"He is a soldier; is he not?"

"Yes, sir, he is—or rather was."

"Is he not a soldier now?"

"No, sir."

"How is that?"

"Ah, sir, you may well ask that question. It is a black tale, but my poor boy will surely be set right at last—though I fear he will never be alive to see it. I can tell you his history in a few words, and then you will be able to tell whether you can assist me."

"I will listen with pleasure," replied Turpin, "that is, providing that you do not keep me here too long, and I trust that it will be in my power to do you a permanent benefit."

"You are very kind, sir—very kind. There are few I find who can feel for the distresses of another as you do. Would there were more like you."

"Pho, pho! don't mention that; let me hear your story."

"You shall, sir; are those friends of yours?"

She indicated the other three, who were a few yards off.

"Yes," replied Dick, "they are intimate and dear friends of mine."

"That is enough. And now, sir, I will begin, though I fear I have tired your patience already."

"No—no."

"Twelve months ago then, my poor son there took the King's shilling and enlisted. It has proved a sad thing for him."

"It seems so."

"Perhaps I ought to mention, sir, that at one time we occupied a decent position in life. But the same thing dragged me down into the depths of poverty that has dragged down others. My husband took to drinking and to gambling."

"Alas! I see the end."

"I will tell you, sir. My husband gambled till he was ruined, till there was not a fraction we could call our own, and then—then—he drank—drank himself to death!"

It was in a choking and broken voice that the wife confessed the husband's degradation.

"I struggled on as well as I was able, and managed to earn a scanty living. My son, who had never been brought up to any trade, took what he considered the only honourable course open to him—he entered the army. That, as I told you, was twelve months ago."

The poor woman paused, and wiped her eyes with her apron.

Dick found he was listening eagerly and impatiently for the continuation of her melancholy history.

"I ought to mention that from the time he was a mere child, an affection has subsisted between him and one who was the daughter of a neighbour in the time of our prosperity.

"This feeling endured through all the vicissitudes of fortune which we have known—unchanged, unabated.

"But her parents—and, as I may say, only reasonably and justly—forbade her to hold any communication with my son; but she loved him too well to obey this mandate.

"In brief, after his enlistment, and things were going on a little smoothly, she forsook her fathers's roof, and they were secretly married; a step, which, however well-advised it may sometimes seem, is invariably a forerunner of unhappiness and misfortune.

"My son, of course, enlisted as a private.

"One of the lieutenants in the regiment to which my son belonged, whose name is Beckwith, and who has risen in the world, as we have sunk down in it, for some cause or other, I know not what, took a dislike to my son.

"I could never hear the cause of this dislike, but I can more than suspect it."

"I will tell you!" said a hollow voice, and the exhausted youth endeavoured to assume an erect posture.

CHAPTER CLXXXIV.

DICK TURPIN MEETS WITH A SERIOUS MISHAP THROUGH THE TREACHERY OF LIEUTENANT BECKWITH.

"I HAVE heard all that you have said," continued the exhausted youth. "Many thanks, sirs, for your kindness. I would have said as much before had I been strong enough. But now I can tell you how—how——"

Vainly did he try to rally his energies; he sank back again into his old position against the bank.

His mother was in a moment down again upon her knees, her arms encircling his neck.

He had swooned, and her agony for a minute or two was really dreadful to witness, for she thought him dead.

Slowly, however, he unclosed his eyes.

"Do not try to speak," said Dick, perceiving he was about to address him. "The effort is too much for you. I am much interested in your story. Your mother shall tell me the rest."

"Do, mother."

"I think I told you, sir, that Lieutenant Beckwith conceived an animosity against my son?"

"You did."

"Ah! sir, I don't suppose there is much need for me to tell you that when a superior officer has a grudge against one of the men under him, that that man is marked out for disgrace and punishment. It was so with my poor son."

"Curse him!" said the son, feebly, who had sufficient possession of his senses to understand the import of what was said.

"Hush, my boy! hush! Curse him not. Curse no one. Look you, sirs, in a little while, for some trifling offence, my son was sentenced to receive fifty lashes. It was not the pain he cared for, it was the degradation. Again, in a few weeks after he was well, the same thing occurred. The last time he deserted, and here you see him. It is the lacerated state of his back which makes him so powerless and unable to bear fatigue. You would not have patience to listen to all the privations we have suffered. When he came to me, and told me what he had done, I broke up my little home at once and fled with him, carrying away all that was valuable.

"What we have gone through since then no tongue can tell. The little supply of money that we had was very soon exhausted, and since then we have wandered about, subsisting upon the charity of others. Hitherto we have managed to elude those who have been sent out to apprehend him and drag him back to barracks, though how we have managed to do it is a mystery. Lieutenant Beckwith is upon his track, and I fancy will never rest until he has recaptured him."

"I am truly sorry for you," said Dick, "and I wish I was in a position to afford you permanent assistance, but that I cannot, for many reasons. However, here are a few

guineas. Take them and use them to the best advantage. They will enable you to buy him new apparel; and have his hurts properly seen to. Here; take them!"

As he spoke, Dick drew from his pocket a handful of guineas, and dropped them into the poor woman's apron.

Then, not wishing to receive the united thanks of the mother and the son, he made a sign to his companions and rode away.

During the brief conference which had taken place, his three comrades had stood around him in a circle a little distance off, yet not far enough to be out of earshot.

"What do you think of that little episode of military life, my friends?" asked Dick; for they were not going fast enough to make conversation difficult.

"Unfortunately," said Claude Duval, "it is only too commonly the case. That poor fellow is the type of thousands. In the army, if a superior officer takes a dislike to one beneath him, and if a revengeful disposition, it is a case. The best thing the fellow can do will be to blow his brains out at once."

"You seem to know a little of military matters, Claude," said Turpin. "I have never heard your history, except in a fragmental fashion; but I should uncommonly like to do so."

"I am yours to command, captain, and when we have an opportunity of sitting down quietly together, I shall have great pleasure in relating it."

"Agreed; I shall call upon you to fulfil your promise; but you did not reply to my question."

"As to being in the army?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have, though it is a good many years ago now. When you hear my history you will know all about it. Ah! look! here! who's coming?"

Upon this the others looked along the road, and there they saw approaching them a man on horseback.

He was magnificently mounted.

As the sun shone upon his attire, it showed by glittering here and there, that he wore some kind of uniform.

He was coming at a gentle trot, and looking carefully around him, as though in quest of something.

On getting closer our friends perceived by his dress that he was a lieutenant in the army.

It is astonishing how ideas, or notions rather, will spring up into the mind, and remain there with the full force of conviction.

No sooner did Dick perceive this traveller than he immediately connected him with the story he had heard.

In fine, he made up his mind he was the evil genius who had haunted the poor soldier's life, and driven him to desertion—Lieutenant Beckwith.

"Hold back, my friends," he said, "and allow me to ride forward and meet this man, myself."

"But why?"

"Oh! never mind. I wish to see whether a suspicion I have formed will be confirmed."

As he spoke, Dick gave Bess the rein, and soon shot ahead of his companions.

The lieutenant, upon hearing the rapid beat of horses' hoofs approaching him, looked up and perceived Turpin.

Somewhat to the surprise of the latter, the lieutenant quickened the speed of his horse, and hastened towards him.

"Good day!" he said. "May I trouble you a moment?"

Dick, of course, came to a halt.

"Have you come far along this road?"

"Yes; a considerable distance."

"Indeed, then perhaps you will tell me whether you have met with an old woman and her son. The latter in the uniform of the regiment, from which he has deserted. I received intelligence, less than an hour ago, that they were somewhere upon the road. Have you seen them? If so, let me know when, for, I need scarcely tell you, I am empowered to arrest him. Have you seen any one answering this description?"

"Yes, I have." replied Turpin, quietly.

"Where? Let me know where, or the villain may again escape."

"You are the villain."

"Sir?"

"I say, you are the villain."

"You shall retract that word."

"Never! That is, if you are the individual I take you to be."

"My name is Beckwith. Lieutenant Beckwith."

"I thought as much, and, being so, I say you are a villain. I have seen the poor fellow of whom you are in pursuit, and from his mother's lips have heard his history."

The lieutenant's face became livid with rage.

"I will let you know, sir, that a soldier is not to be insulted with impunity. But I know you not. Who are you?"

"That can matter little; I know you."

"But you may be a robber, and under such belief I act as I now do."

During the time he was speaking, the lieutenant had held his hand in the pocket of his coat.

Dick had his eye upon him.

As soon as he uttered these last words, he drew, with inconceivable rapidity, a pistol, and, aiming hastily, fired.

Prepared as he, to some extent, was for this treacherous assault, Dick was not able to draw back quick enough to wholly escape the shot.

He felt that he was hit, and no sooner did he have this consciousness than he staggered and fell off his mare.

Well it was for him that he rode so docile an animal, or his life would assuredly have been forfeit.

As it was, however, Black Bess stood perfectly still, and he sustained no further injury than in coming in contact with the ground.

But the report of the pistol rang out loudly and distinctly, and reached the ears of his three friends, who at once galloped forward to his assistance.

Lieutenant Beckwith, who, by this act, showed that he was dead to all feelings of honour and fair play, would have subjected Dick to still further ill-usage, had it not been for his three comrades.

When he saw them rushing towards him with swords drawn, and cries of menace on their lips, a new phase in the lieutenant's mental composition showed itself.

That was cowardice.

But the reader will hardly feel surprised to hear that such a man was a coward; it would have been strange had he not been.

He immediately turned and fled.

"After him, Claude! After him, Jack!" cried Tom King. "Do not lose sight of him. Capture and punish him. I will stay here and look to Dick, whose condition, I hope, is not so bad as it appears."

There was no time to hesitate, so Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack spurred their horses forward, and gave chase, while Tom King, throwing himself off his horse, rather than alighting from it, hastened to ascertain the extent of his friend's injuries.

And, in sooth, they seemed to be great indeed, for Dick lay at full length, without the least signs of life or motion, while blood flowed in great quantities from a ghastly-looking wound in his head.

Black Bess was standing near him, her head bent down towards his face. She could tell something was amiss, and knew not what.

She trembled all over with intense terror.

CHAPTER CLXXXV.

DICK TURPIN RECOVERS SLIGHTLY FROM HIS WOUND, AND TREATS HIS ENEMY MUCH BETTER THAN HE DESERVES.

"WOA, Bess, lass," said Tom King, for he feared she might be startled and run away. "Woa, Bess, lass. Gently, gently! All's well, I daresay. There now, mare—quiet, quiet."

He patted her, at first gently, then firmly, upon the neck as he spoke.

This soothed her.

But, in order to prevent accidents, he kept a firm hold of her bridle while he bent down over his friend.

"Dick—Dick, old boy! Are you too bad to speak? Dick! Dick!"

But the highwayman paid no heed to his words. He might as well have addressed himself to a block of inanimate matter.

Tom now began to grow seriously alarmed. The wound,

he feared, was a more serious one than he had at first imagined.

He was in great perplexity what to do.

He wanted water, but there was none at hand, and he did not like the idea of leaving him in his defenceless condition upon the roadway while he sought for some.

Taking a handkerchief from his pocket, he proceeded to wipe away the blood, in order to ascertain, if possible, the extent of the injury he had received.

The result was rather reassuring.

The bullet had struck his head a little behind his left temple, but it had not broken the bone.

It left a very ugly furrow, though, along the side of his skull, leaving, in a place or two, the bone completely bare.

From this the blood came at an alarming rate, so fast, indeed, that Tom began to grow apprehensive that he would bleed to death.

He listened in vain for the sounds that would indicate the return of his companions.

All around was still—still as the bleeding form by the side of which he knelt.

It was not, perhaps, until that moment that Tom King really felt how much attached he had grown to Turpin, but the prospect of for ever parting with him served to show how dear a place he occupied in his heart.

He would have given anything to restore him to life and health and strength, even as he had been only a few minutes before his meeting with the treacherous officer.

The time seemed very long to Tom. Each second was prolonged into a minute, each minute into an hour.

At last, however, the welcome tramp—tramp of horses' hoofs—reached his ears.

Now, he trusted, all would be well.

He rose to his feet, and, standing in the middle of the road, looked down it, anxious to catch the very first glimpse of them he could.

On they came at a rapid rate, for they were very uneasy about the condition of their captain.

Tom saw three horsemen coming, and he knew then that they had been successful in their chase.

They had Lieutenant Beckwith prisoner.

A few minutes brought them to where Tom stood.

The officers hands were bound tightly behind him. Claude Duval had his rein; Sixteen-String Jack held him by the collar.

"*How* is Dick?" was the question that came simultaneously from their lips. "He is not much hurt, I hope!"

"I fear he is."

"Woe be to the villain, then, who injured him!"

"He is quite insensible! I cannot rally him! And he bleeds profusely!"

"You want some water. Ride back, Jack, and fetch a hatful from the brook that crosses the road a little lower down."

"All right, but mind you keep hold of our prisoner!"

"Trust me for that!"

Sixteen-String Jack released his grasp, and galloped back, until he came to a brook or mimic river that flowed completely across the road.

Here he filled his hat, and, as it was steeple-crowned in shape, it held a tolerable quantity of the pure fluid.

Hastening back as quickly as he could, he found Claude in the meantime had adopted rather ingenious means of securing their captive.

His arms having already been tied behind him, he had made him alight from the horse. Then unbuckling the stirrup leather, he passed it between his arms and his back, and then buckled it again, thus binding him to the saddle.

The reins Claude had tied to the stout projecting arm of a tree

This having been done, he was able to make a closer personal inspection of Turpin's hurt.

He was thus engaged when Jack returned.

The first thing done with the water was to sprinkle a little of it on Dick's countenance, and endeavour to bring him back to life.

This it succeeding in doing. He gave a shuddering sort of sigh, and then opened his eyes.

He looked about him with a bewildered air, being at first quite unable to comprehend what had happened.

But seeing the familiar faces of his three friends bending over him what little amount of uneasiness he may have at first felt was dissipated.

"Lie still a minute or two, Dick," said Claude, seeing that Turpin was about to rise. "Lie still a moment; you have been hit, wounded. Let us dress your wound first, and wash away the blood that has clotted round it."

To this Dick offered no opposition, so with the handkerchief that he had previously used, steeped in the cold water, he proceeded to bathe it.

When the blood was completely washed away, the wound looked nothing like so serious as it had done before.

In those days it was the fashion to wear neck-clothes of white cambric, of a very voluminous description. They were folded several times, passed twice round the throat, and had ends hanging down almost to the waist

Tom took off his own, and thoroughly soaked it in water.

Then he placed it round Dick's head, tying it as tightly as he was able behind.

"Better!" said Turpin, as soon as this was done. "Much better! Until you tied that knot, I felt as though my head was falling to pieces; but it is all right now—quite right!"

"Do you think you could keep your feet, if we assisted you to rise?"

"Oh! yes; with all the ease in the world."

Upon this assurance, they lifted him up as carefully and tenderly as they could.

But when he was in an erect position, Dick felt the full extent of his weakness, and, had they not held him firmly up, he would have fallen to the ground.

By an effort, not to allow himself to be overcome, he recovered himself.

"Where is Bess?" he cried.

"Here!"

"Help me to mount her! Once in the saddle, and bestriding her back, I shall feel that I am safe. Where is the villain who fired so treacherously upon me?"

"Close at hand; but do not trouble yourself about him. Leave us to deal with him."

"No—no!" said Turpin. "Oh! for a draught of water—I parch."

"One moment," said Jack, "and I will fetch you some, though I have nothing better than my hat to bring it in."

"That will make an awkward drinking cup! I think the best way will be for Dick to mount, and ride to the place—it is not far off."

"Yes—yes! Believe me, I get stronger and better each moment, and some water will put me quite right."

"I will go with you, then," said Sixteen-String Jack, "as I know the place, and the others can keep guard over the prisoner."

This was assented to.

The brook was soon reached, and here Jack assisted Turpin to dismount.

Then the latter, lying at full length upon the road, put his lips to the surface of the water and drank heartily.

When he had quite assuaged his thirst, Jack persuaded him to remain where he was for a little time, while he poured water over him.

This he did by filling his hat, and then holding it above Dick's head emptied it.

The fresh, cool water was very refreshing and grateful to Dick's wound. It allayed the irritation.

Ten minutes of this treatment made a wonderful difference to Dick's feelings.

He rose to his feet a new man.

No longer did he require assistance to mount. He seated himself in the saddle without difficulty.

Then turning her head, he directed Black Bess towards where the others stood.

Well pleased, indeed, were they to see him looking so much better.

But there was an expression of stern ferocity upon his face which none of them had ever seen before, and which boded no good to Lieutenant Beckwith.

A clear recollection of all that had taken place came back to them.

And certainly, if anything more than another was calculated to raise a feeling of exasperation in the breast of any one, the treacherous attack which had been made was well qualified to produce that effect.

Dick Turpin was a good-tempered enough sort of fellow,

but he could not put up with such a thing as that, nor allow it to go unresented.

"Well, Dick?" they said.

"Yes, I am well," he replied. "But where is the traitorous wretch who attempted my life?"

"Calm yourself, he is here. Take my advice, do not get excited, or the consequences may be more serious than you imagine."

"I shall keep cool, never fear."

As he spoke, Dick guided Black Bess past Tom and Claude, who had purposely interposed themselves between him and the lieutenant.

But they saw how determined Dick was, and they judged it would be more harmful to thwart him than it would be to let him have his own way.

"Dastard! villain!" he said. "You fully deserve instant death at my hands; but I will be more magnanimous than you could ever think of being. You have had your shot at me; it is now my turn to have my shot against you. But I will not take your life, like an executioner. I will give you a chance, and put you on a better footing than I am sure you can deserve."

CHAPTER CLXXXVI.

THE END OF LIEUTENANT BECKWITH.—THE ARRIVAL AT THE "OLD WHITE LION INN."

"MERCY! have mercy!" cried Lieutenant Beckwith, as he heard Dick speak, and saw the stern look upon his features. "Spare me, and I will promise not to molest"——

"Silence!" said Dick; "do not make me think more contemptuously of you than I do already."

"What do you intend to do, Dick?" asked Tom, hastening to his side. "You are exciting yourself. Pray be calm, and tell us what you intend to do."

"I will; I intend to give him back shot for shot. Release him, but take care that he does not escape. Give him a loaded pistol, and I will take one too. You can serve as umpires to see fair play between us. Come, make haste, we have no time to lose."

"No," said the lieutenant, in a different tone of voice to that in which he had previously spoken, "no, we have no time to lose. I will consent to what he asks, although I know him not."

This sudden alteration in his manner may seem strange, but it can be easily accounted for.

Licutenant Beckwith was an accomplished duellist.

He had conceived a sudden and rancorous animosity against Dick.

To have slain him or put him to great torture would have given him the utmost pleasure.

So when he found by the words he had spoken to his companions, that he was going to allow a duel to take place, he felt bold and elated, for so great was his skill in the use of a pistol, that he was confident of obtaining a victory over his opponent.

Dick's comrades saw, by the fixed and determined ez-expression of his countenance, that it would be mere folly to attempt to dissuade him from fighting the duel, though they saw how perilous it was.

They could only hope for the best.

The officer was released from his bonds.

Jack was on the look out to see that he did not escape; but their late prisoner did not make the attempt.

He was going to face the matter out, and that with as much valour as he could muster.

But his face was deathly pale, and his eyes looked fixed and stony.

Turpin dismounted.

He took from the holster of his saddle a pistol.

That it was well and carefully loaded he knew, and he threw up the pan in order to see that the priming was all right.

It had caked slightly, so he handed it to Tom, who primed it afresh.

Then a pistol was placed in the hands of the lieutenant, and the two combatants got ready for fight.

They stood facing each other at about eighty feet distance.

The agreed upon signal was the pronounciation by Claude of the words one, two, and three.

He was to hold a handkerchief in his hand, and as he said three, he was to let it fall, the adversaries keeping their eye upon it.

Claude began.

"One!"

"Two!"

But before the three fairly came from his lips there was the report of a pistol.

The officer had fired.

Fired before his time, hoping by so doing to slay his opponent.

But the word was on Claude's lips, and he uttered it, letting fall the handkerchief as arranged.

Apparently, with the utmost calmness, and yet with the utmost rapidity, Dick raised his arm, pulled the trigger, and fired.

The echoes of the sharp report mingled strangely with a horible death-cry, and then all was still.

Lieutenant Beckwith fell to the ground.

Our three friends rushed forward to Turpin.

He was erect, and apparently unhurt.

"All is well, I fancy," he said; "the traitor did not succeed. It was a close touch, though, as you may guess. Look!"

Dick moved the collar of his coat, and showed that it was perforated by a bullet, which had left a track of its progress on the skin upon the side of his neck.

"Close enough!"

"Is the rascal dead?"

"I think so; but, Dick, you look very—very pale. I fear this matter, take it altogether, will be too much for you."

It was Tom King who spoke.

"No—no!" he said; "let us ascertain what sort of a condition he is in, and then we will push forward upon our road."

Dick went towards his foe as he spoke, and the others noticed with alarm how unsteadily he walked.

The lieutenant lay quite still.

He had fallen forward upon his face.

It was Jack who, stooping down, turned him over on his back, and said—

"He is dead!"

"Are you sure?"

"Quite! Your bullet has passed completely through his brain!"

"And so may all treacherous villains, as he was, meet with their reward!" cried Dick. "Draw him to the side of the road, and then let us be off. The sooner we remove ourselves now from this part of the country the better."

It cost Dick a great effort to carry things off with a high hand in the way he did.

The wound in his head was one beneath which most persons would have succumbed.

The other three highwaymen could say nothing against leaving that spot with all speed. It was evidently the best thing they could do.

Accordingly they set off at a gentle gallop.

In aftes times, Dick often wondered how that gallop was performed, and by what mysterious means he retained his seat in the saddle.

But little was said.

Dick was silent, because he felt he had scarcely strength enough to speak.

His comrades were silent, because they did not want to tempt him to join in the conversation.

They saw what a bad state he was in.

Each of them, full of apprehension for his ultimate safety, and cursing in their hearts the unfortunate meeting with the deserter, looked carefully after him, and were in readiness to afford him assistance, the very moment that he needed it.

In this way they proceeded for a long, long time.

It was their intention to put up for the night at the first roadside public-house they came to, and chance the consequences.

The day now began to draw rapidly to a close; but as yet they had not been successful in meeting with what they desired.

Swaying about in the saddle, and keeping up with very great difficulty, Dick Turpin endeavoured to hide, as much as possible, the dreadful pain that he had endured.

The wound in his head was but a flesh one, though of a very disagreeable and dangerous character; but it had

bled freely, and to this circumstance he unquestionably, upon that occasion, owed his life.

Then the manner in which his head had been dressed, though simple in the extreme, yet was the one best calculated to drive away all inflammation and irritation.

But it was the after-part that the three friends dreaded: not only would Dick be in danger, but it would delay them upon their route, and allow their descriptions to get before them.

If this should happen, the remainder of their journey would be performed with great peril.

This risk, however, they would have to run, for that Dick could be expected to hold out much longer, was out of all question.

Deeper and deeper grew the shades of evening.

Nothing occurred to vary the dull monotony of their route.

At length, and when it had grown quite dark, they perceived in the distance a faint star-like, stationary light.

This seemed to indicate that at last they were close at hand to what they had for so long been on the look out for.

They were impatient to ascertain this, and one and all urged his horse to quicker motion in order to ascertain.

Yes! they had reached a house of entertainment at last. The light which they had seen was a candle, placed behind a small window in the gable end of the roof.

The clatter of the horses' hoofs as they stopped in front of the inn, reached the ears of those within, and two persons hastened to the door-step.

These beings were the landlord and the ostler, respectively.

Tom King took upon himself to be spokesman; so riding forward a pace or two in advance of the rest, he said—

"Can you give us and our horses accommodation here for the night, landlord? One of us has been slightly wounded in an attack made upon us by some robbers a few miles from here, and he stands very much in need of rest and refreshment."

"Of course—of course, gentlemen. Walk in—walk in! Simeon, take the gentlemen's horses, and assist them to alight. This way, if you please, this way."

The landlord, who was an active, dapper little man, led the way into the interior of the inn.

All followed him, with the exception of Claude, who went to see where the horses were placed.

The "Old White Lion"—for such was the name of the inn—was a quiet public-house in a very lonely, sparsely populated place, and doing but little business; so it is not to be wondered at that four guests coming all at one time, and wanting accommodation for the night for themselves and horses, should create some slight commotion, and induce the utmost willingness to attend to all their wants.

The ghastly pallor of Dick's face, which, by the ruddy firelight, was all the more perceptible, called forth a great deal of remark, for the landlord was rather inclined to be loquacious.

Not to linger too long over trivial details, when we have so much pressing upon us of the utmost and stirring importance to relate, let it suffice to say that, after a tolerable meal, of which, however, Dick partook sparingly, our friends were shown to a large room at the top of the house, where all four could sleep.

Here the bandage that enveloped Dick's head was resoaked with water, which was about all that could be done.

By mutual consent they postponed all conversation as to what should be their next proceedings, until tomorrow, by which time they hoped Dick would be tolerably well.

He either would be in a fair state of recovery, or else in a high fever, so the morning was looked forward to with much anxiety.

CHAPTER CLXXXVII.

THE LANDLORD OF THE "OLD WHITE LION" MAKES A DESPERATE ATTACK UPON OUR FRIENDS.

MANY hours had not passed away when the slumber of our friends was broken by the shrill blast of a horn.

It was profoundly dark, and they rose at first without knowing what it was that had awoke them.

Before, however, they could ask themselves, they heard the sound again.

"What's that?"

Such was the question that rose simultaneously to the lips of the highwaymen.

And now, as their eyes got familiar with the darkness, they were able to see the windows in the room, of which there were two, and situated opposite to each other.

After asking the question, their next impulse was to crawl to the window, and look out.

They could not see very distinctly through the little panes of green bottle-glass, so they quietly opened one-half of the latticed casement.

The moment they did this, a rush of cold air filled filled the chamber, chilling them to the bone.

But they heard something which made them pass over this circumstance unheeded.

It was the low, rumbling sound of some vehicle upon the road.

"The coach," said Claude, with a disappointed air.

"What coach?" asked Turpin, whose brains were not in the clearest state.

"The Warwick coach, I fancy."

"Stand and deliver! Tom"——

"Hush, Dick! listen."

The rumbling, grating, and grinding of the wheels now grew much plainer, and again the horn sounded, with a shrillness sufficient to have awakened the soundest sleeper.

Some undefined feeling of curiosity made the four highwaymen linger near the window, and listen to what took place upon the arrival of the coach—for such they took it to be, and, considering the experience they had had in distinguishing the sounds of different vehicles, they were pretty certain to be right.

They were in this instance, for, in a few minutes, the coach stopped before the inn door.

Having the window open, they were able to see down into the front of the inn, where a scene of great animation took place.

The "Old White Lion," it seemed, was a place where the horses were changed.

There was a great deal of bustle and talking, and the busiest in making both was the landlord.

Our friends looked down with considerable interest.

The operation of changing was soon over, but just before it was, the guard drew the landlord aside.

"Here's a parcel of bills for you," he said. "I had a lot given me when I started from London, with instructions to leave a packet at every place I stopped."

"What bills are they?"

"You must read and see. They offer two thousand five hundred pounds reward for the apprehension and conviction of those four notorious highwaymen, Richard Turpin, Thomas King, Claude Duval, and John Rann, otherwise known as Sixteen-String Jack!"

"Lor!"

"They are known to be somewhere on this road. They have been traced to it, so I would advise you to keep your weather eye open. Such a sum as that isn't seen every day, and, when it is, isn't to be sneezed at."

"By no means! I'm much obliged to you."

"Read the bills attentively, old fellow, and pay particular attention to the descriptions. They are cunning foxes, and just beware whenever you see four chaps together on horseback."

"Four chaps"——

"On horseback. I say, look sharp, for, ten to one, they are the individuals."

"Oh! ah! I shouldn't wonder"—who, on the surprise of the moment was about to let out that he had four gentlemen in his house at that moment.

But the dread of having to share the reward, when, he considered, if he only managed properly, he could have it all to himself, and the credit of the capture besides, he became silent, and stopped himself in the middle of his speech.

The guard did not notice it, but, just at that moment, the coach began to move, so he was obliged to run and scramble up into his seat as well as he was able.

The coach, which was on the way from London to Warwick, disappeared in the darkness of the night.

They heard the landlord enter the inn and shut the door.

"What do you think of that, my friends," asked Dick, in his natural tones. The new peril with which they were menaced, seemed to have the effect of dispersing the mists of delirium that hung about his brain.

"I think it is high time we were off," said Tom King. "This is certainly no longer any place for us, but I am rejoiced to find that you have so far recovered from the effects of your wound."

"Thanks. Yes, I feel all right now. When I say all right, I mean excepting the disagreeable pain there is all along one side of my head."

"I am glad it is no worse. I was sadly afraid," said Claude. "It was a close touch."

"Rather too close to be pleasant; but do not let us stop to speak about that now; we have other matters of greater moment to take into immediate consideration.

"We have, indeed; and the first one, I consider, will be to see in what way we can best leave this house, so that our departure may be neither seen nor heard."

"There is no doubt about that."

"It will not do to attempt to get out by descending the stairs. The inmates are astir. Perhaps, by this time, they have read the bills and recognise us."

"I think that's extremely likely."

"How are we to leave, then?"

"The window?"

"Too high. We have no rope, and there are no buildings to break the descent."

"But here is another window opposite, and consequently, as I take it, at the back of the house. We have not looked at that yet. Perhaps we may be able to get out through it."

"This was probable enough; and, feeling that the sooner they got out of the "Old White Lion" the better it would be for them, they hastened to the back window.

Exclamations of gratification rose to their lips when they saw that immediately below it was a slanting roof, down which they could proceed without much difficulty, and thence drop to the ground.

"Capital," said Dick. "Let us be off at once. Claude, you know where to find the horses."

"Yes, but you must not think of going first. As I consider I know the way best, and as you are not so well as you might be, you ought to give way in a moment."

"And so I do," said Dick, as he drew back.

With a little trouble, Claude managed to squeeze his bulky frame through the window.

He reached the tiles in safety.

"Come on," he said.

"No," replied Turpin, in a whisper. "You go first, we will follow. Ten to one if the roof will bear our united weights, whereas it might do singly. Make your way to the stable and get the horses ready."

Claude was well-pleased to find Dick again assuming the command, and he would not have thwarted him upon any account.

So he slipped down the tiles and disappeared in a moment.

Tom King went next, then Turpin followed, and at last Sixteen-String Jack brought up the rear.

They all dropped to the ground in perfect safety, and so far as they could tell at present, without creating the least alarm.

The night was a very dark one, and they were fearful to move at first, lest they should stray to some place, and be discovered.

"Hist! Claude!" they cried, but to no effect. Claude appeared to be out of earshot.

Impatiently, then anxiously, they waited there, for him to make his appearance.

But as no signs of his doing so manifested themselves, Sixteen-String Jack ventured to go alone to seek him, bidding the other two on no account to move from where they then stood, or he might not be able to find them in a hurry, when every second would be of the utmost importance.

And now we will proceed to relate how it was that Claude was so long away.

On going to the stables with the ostler, he had given particular instructions where the saddles was to be placed, and saw it hung up in one part of the stable, where hooks were driven into the wall for the purpose.

But, to his consternation, when he came now to find them the wall was bare, the hooks empty.

A cold perspiration broke out over him at the thought that it was suspected who they were, and that the saddles had been removed on purpose to prevent their departure.

To quite satisfy himself upon that point, he took out a phosphorous match and a small piece of wax-taper, which he ignited.

These means of procuring a light he always took care to have about him.

It is a pity he did not adopt this course earlier. If he had, it would have saved him much time, and still more uneasiness.

By the aid of the tiny flame, he found he had made a mistake, and gone to the wrong side of the wall.

With an exclamation at his own folly, he stuck the end of the wax-taper upon one of the stalls, and going to the saddles, placed them as rapidly as he could upon the horses.

He had nearly finished, when he heard a footstep, and some one call him by his name in a suppressed tone of voice.

It was Sixteen-String Jack, who, entering, assisted him to complete his task.

Then each of them taking a horse by the bridle, they led them as quietly as they could across the yard to where Turpin and King were standing.

But, let them go as quietly as they could, they could not avoid their making a slight noise.

This noise, too, was heard by the landlord and others, who were in the house, for a door was thrown open violently.

A beam of light from the passage came into the yard.

It showed the landlord the forms of his suspicious guests, with their four horses.

"Murder!" he cried. "They're off! Stop them! Fire! Where's my blunderbuss? Quick—quick! that's it! I see them! Just mounting! Take that, you wretches, and I hope it will do you good!"

As he uttered these words, the landlord pulled the trigger of large blunderbuss that had been handed to him.

There was a blinding flash of light, a loud report, and a cloud of missiles hurled above and around the highwaymen and their steeds.

CHAPTER CLXXXVIII.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN FIND THE JOURNEY TO THE NORTH A VERY DANGEROUS ONE.

The recoil of the cumbersome weapon was so great that the landlord fell backwards into the passage after firing it, and his head went such a bang against the stone flags, that it was quite awful to hear it.

By great good luck, however, neither of our friends were in the least injured by the discharge.

Mounting their steeds, and led by Claude, who had taken care to familiarize himself with the locality, they dashed into the high-road, and once more were quickly on their way to the north.

In the eastern sky there was just the least flush of light that served to show darkness and night were about to be superseded by day and light.

"Take it all through," said Claude, "during the last twelve hours, I think circumstances have turned out as vexatious as they well could."

"They have, it is true, but we must not always expect to be as fortunate as we have generally been."

"No, no; but it's all through that confounded Lieutenant Beckwith."

"Ah! he's dead now. Let him rest."

"It strikes me we have by no means heard the last of that affair. It has brought us into trouble enough already, but it will bring us into more."

"Well, it is very certain if it had not been for him we should have been on the road in advance of the stage-coach, and then it would not have mattered how much disturbance was made."

"It will make matters awkward now."

"Very awkward."

"We shall be obliged to avoid all large towns, I expect. We must look out, too, very carefully, that we are not known. I hoped the remainder of our journey would be pleasant, but there looks to me to be a strong probability of our being hunted into the Pretender's ranks."

"Hold!" said Tom King. "I must take exception to

that word. It savours of Jacobinism. He is no pretender, but a Stuart, and consequently lawful heir to the English throne."

"Well, Tom, well be careful not to offend in future."

"Let us turn to another subject, Dick."

"Yes, my friend."

"Do not misrepresent the case, but tell us truly. What do you imagine to be the state of your wound."

"It is very bad."

"I feared as much."

"And yet, perhaps, not so bad as you might think. It is very painful."

"You must expect that."

"It was a providential circumstance that I escaped so well as I did. Have you ever heard of a more treacherous action?"

"Never."

"While I was speaking, though, I noticed his hand in his coat pocket, and was on my guard, but he whipped out the pistol and fired it in a smaller space of time than I could have believed possible, and I only had time to make just the movement I did."

"And which most unquestionably saved your life."

"I acted fairly by him."

"You did, Dick, a great deal too fair, and I should never have suffered you to stand up against him, only I was fearful that by thwarting you I should cause too great a flow of blood to your head, which might have brought on a brain fever."

"All is well."

"Not altogether. Just think what a commotion the deeds we have done during our journey will cause. We shall never hear the last of them."

"I think every day serves to show us the absolute importance of taking our way to Prince Charles's camp, and as his followers we may yet win distinction and renown."

Claude shook his Lead.

"I have thought the matter very carefully over," he said, "and the result of my deliberations is this: I think he stands a very poor chance indeed of being King of England."

"Do you?"

"I do, indeed; and I think if you will only perpend the matter, you will come to the same conclusion."

"It is a matter hardly worth the discussing now, we have so many things on hand," said Turpin. "There is the Warwick coach."

"Well?"

"It cannot surely, in this short time, have so much got the start of us that we shall be unable to overtake it."

"No, no."

"Let us do so, then."

"But for what purpose?"

"Merely to pass it, because if we can do so we shall be out of all the trouble we shall be sure to get into if it is before us."

"So we shall."

"Black Bess is pretty fresh, considering the number of miles she has travelled. How do you find your cattle?"

"Equal to a good gallop of two or three miles."

"Forward, then. But hark, what is that behind us?"

A confused noise from their rear, as though a number of persons were not far off, reached their ears.

They turned instantly to see what it was.

To their surprise, a multitude of persons, armed with every imaginable weapon at all practicable for defence, some mounted on horses, others on foot, were, with fierce gesticulations, hurrying towards them.

"We may thank the landlord for that," said Turpin; "but we can afford to laugh at such a pursuit. Forward! forward!"

In obedience to these words from their leader, our three friends gave their horses a sudden impulse forward.

A loud shout—it appeared to them one of derision—came from their pursuers.

What it could mean they knew not.

It seemed silly.

And yet Dick felt a vague uneasiness creep over him.

He feared something was wrong.

Oh! could he but have seen what took place in the stable a little before Claude reached it, his heart would indeed have sunk within him, and he would have been ready to give up everything as lost.

But if he was in ignorance, the reader must not remain so, and, therefore, we return to the scene which took place upon the arrival of the Warwick mail.

There was one other person besides the landlord who heard what the guard said about the highwaymen, and the colossal reward offered for their apprehension.

There was one who was struck with the coincidence of four persons arriving there, who tallied in general description with the highwaymen.

Now, it so happened that a slight disagreement had taken place between the landlord and this ostler the day before, about a rise in his wages, which he wanted, and which his master refused to give.

Since then they had not been on such good terms as they had been formerly, or the landlord would have been the first person he would have applied to in the matter.

As it was, he determined to take the case more into his own hands, and he set off to alarm some of the villagers.

But it occurred to him that the highwaymen might take the alarm while he was absent, and be flown by the time he returned, so he thought, to prevent all accidents, he would prevent them from going far.

With this end in view, then, he ran into the stables, and, with a piece of iron used to clear obstructions out of the foot, contrived to loosen one hind shoe on the hoof of each horse, leaving it apparently secure, but yet held only, and that frailly, by two nails.

This done, he darted off, and he had scarcely got clear of the premises, than Claude entered the stable.

Not suspecting for a moment that the horses had been tampered with, we have seen how Claude led them out—how his comrades and himself mounted them, and how they reached the high-road in safety.

While they went a tolerably steady pace, the shoes kept on, but directly they set them to a gallop, off they came, one after another.

That was why those in pursuit set up the cry of derision, which had made Dick uneasy, he did not know wherefore nor at what.

They were not long, however, before they discovered what was the matter.

The discovery came upon them like a clap of thunder.

What to do, or how to act, they knew not.

To turn and fight with their pursuers, although they might in the end prove victorious, yet perhaps it would be at the sacrifice of the lives of one or more of them.

To go on would only be to lame their horses, and render them incapable of doing them service.

Truly, were they on the horns of a dilemma.

Moreover, despite the akwardness of their position, they had but little time for reflection. Whatever course of action they might resolve to adopt, must, to be of any good at all, be adopted speedily.

And now, as if to add to their perplexities, they heard several horsemen on the road, approaching them.

They would be hemmed in between the two, for, of course, the new comers would see that something out of the usual way was taking place, and would lend their assistance to intercept them.

"We are in a dreadful fix!" said Turpin, hurriedly. And for the life of me, I cannot see my way out of it."

CHAPTER CLXXXIX.

THE HIGHWAYMEN FIND THEIR PERILS AND PERPLEXITIES ON THE INCREASE, AND THERE SEEMS TO BE BUT A SMALL DEGREE OF PROBABILITY THAT THEY WILL BE ABLE TO SUCCESSFULLY CARRY OUT THEIR UNDERTAKING.

"THERE is only one thing we can do," said Tom, "and, therefore, we must do it or give in."

"What is it?"

"Take to the meadows."

"Good! On the soft turf our cattle will not so much feel the inconvenience of being without a shoe. It is a good idea; but if it is to be of any good to us at all, we must do it at once."

"Of course."

"How?"

"Look for a gap."

"The hedge is lower here," said Claude. "Lead the way, Dick, for the love of heaven. It is the only thing we have at all resembling a chance."



[DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES SWEAR FEALTY TO CHARLES STUART.]

"It is," replied Turpin; "so follow me at once! There is no time to lose. The lane is full narrow for a leap, but we must do the best we can."

While he spoke these words, which he did in a very rapid tone of voice, he got as far from the hedge he was about to leap as the opposite bank would let him.

His three companions ranged themselves near him.

Then, settling himself more firmly in the saddle, Dick grasped the reins, at the same time pressing his heels against his mare's flanks to urge her onward.

With a sudden dash and a bound she was over.

The others followed in quick succession.

All alighted in perfect safety in the meadow.

But from their pursuers, who were too close behind them to be pleasant, there arose a furious cry. It seemed as though the highwaymen would triumph over the obstacle they had placed in their way, and get off altogether.

No reward, however, that was offered for their capture was too great and tempting for them to give up the pursuit very easily, and so, with incredible speed and utter disregard of pain, they scrambled up the bank and through the thickly-planted hedge.

But quick as they were in doing this, those of whom they were in chase had had time to cross the very large meadow in which they found themselves, and were in the act of leaping into another, whose extent was more than they could discern.

On—on they went, unheeding the danger and difficulties of their route, filled—animated with the idea that, ere long, the robbers' steeds would be too lame to proceed further.

When this happened, and they hugged the belief that it could not be very long before it did, they were in sufficient force to overcome four men.

At least they thought so.

Had they known the character of our friends as well as the reader knows it, it is probable they would have been of a different opinion.

Leaving them, however, to continue their pursuit, we

will turn our attention more particularly to describing the actions of the four highwaymen, whose positions, in consequence of the ostler's trickery, was a most perilous one.

"Take it easy now," said Dick Turpin, after they had leaped into the second meadow, "only go just fast enough to keep these fellows at the distance they are."

"We shall soon tire them out."

"I think so, Claude. We will lead them a pretty dance, and were it not for the loss of the shoes, we would quickly show them a clean pair of heels."

"Curse the ostler!" said Sixteen-String Jack. "It is the most awkward thing for us that possibly could be."

"Yes, we ought to have got ahead of that coach. Now, as we go on, we shall find the whole country alarmed, and on the look-out for us."

"Confound it, yes. But we must make the best of it we can. Take care of your horses, my friends; for if they are knocked up I do not know how we are to get others, and one heavy tread on a stone will do the business."

"They are gaining on us, Dick," said Tom King, a minute or two afterwards. "I have been looking back continually, and I am sure they are a great deal nearer than they were."

At this moment there was a loud report, as though several muskets had been discharged; and this was the case.

But it was quite useless. They had much better have reserved their fire, for they were not within range of their mark by many yards.

It served, however, to show the highwaymen the necessity of maintaining a greater distance between themselves and their pursuers, who they considered must ere long give in.

But for some time they evinced no signs of anything of the kind, and the perseverance with which they kept up the chase was remarkable.

"This sort of thing won't do," said Turpin. "I fancy Bess goes slightly lame already."

"You don't mean that?"

"I am afraid it is so."

"But what are we to do?"

"Ah! that is where I am puzzled."

"So are we."

"Who were they, should you think, whom we heard coming along the road?"

"I was wondering," replied Tom King, "and that is what has made me look back so continually. I have been expecting every moment to see them make their appearance behind us."

"But you have seen nothing of them?"

"No."

"Nor I, so let us hope they went by unnoticed, or perhaps we were mistaken in the sound. But we have no leisure to speculate upon that point now, we must turn round and make a stand."

"Turn round and make a stand?"

"Yes, and ten to one if by doing so we shall not frighten our foes out of pursuing us."

"It is a hazardous plan," said Claude Duval.

"That I do not dispute; but if we continue in this way we shall knock all the hoofs off our horses, and then we shall be done for to a certainty."

"So we shall."

"Turn, then."

"We obey, captain."

"Ten to one if it does not put our enemies out more than anything else we could do would."

As he spoke all wheeled round, and then stood perfectly still.

The result was just as Dick had predicted.

The run at which the men had been coming slackened to a trot, and then a walk.

Finally they stopped altogether.

The sudden and unexpected change in tactics was more than they could exactly understand.

They were too frightened to advance.

"Charge!" cried Turpin. "Now is our chance. Charge, and they will fly before us! What a pity we did not think of it before! Charge!"

His order, extraordinary as it appeared, was obeyed.

The pursued and the pursuers now changed places, for the moment they perceived this movement, those who had kept so perseveringly upon their track, turned and fled in the utmost panic and confusion.

"Hurrah!" shouted Dick. "On to them! on to them! Forward! forward! Death to them all! Do not let one of them escape with life!"

This was said in loud enough tones to reach the disorderly flying throng, and with the intention of intimidating them.

As Dick had said, it was a pity they had not thought of this bold plan of operations sooner, and yet, perhaps, it was all for the best. At an earlier moment it might not have produced the effect it then did.

A short time, considering the distance, served to take them to the high-road again.

Over the hedge they went headlong, each one intent only upon getting clear.

But our friends followed them no further—that is to say, they did not cross the hedge which divided the meadows from the road, since they could only have done so at the risk of seriously injuring their horses.

They, nevertheless, kept up a succession of shouts.

Down the road, in the direction of the "Old White Lion," scampered their discomfited foes, all thoroughly tired and sick of acting as amateur police-officers.

The highwaymen did not change their positions until they had watched the whole of the disorderly throng as far as the "Old White Lion."

Then, having done so, they looked at each other rather anxiously for a second or two in silence.

Their position was getting more and more complicated, and at the same time more full of peril.

Hitherto they had met with many risks and hairbreadth escapes during their journey, and when they passed through the country they were unknown; but now, wherever they went, it would be only reasonable for them to expect to find people anxiously on the look out for them, and prepared in more ways than one to insure their capture.

These words will give a summary of the thoughts that filled their minds during the brief period they looked into each other's countenances.

"What are we to do next, captain?" they asked. "Which will be the best course to take?"

"I scarcely feel competent to say," replied Turpin. "I do not know whether you have all forgotten the wound in my head: but if you have I have not."

"It was forgotten for a moment, Dick, and yet not altogether; but you carried things off so well that we fancied you felt nothing of it, and so thought it best policy not to recall it to your remembrance."

"I see!"

"That is exactly it. Is the pain very great?"

"Not so bad, perhaps, as it has been, nor yet so bad as might have been expected. My head feels very heavy; and every now and then there comes such a cloud over my eyes that I can hardly see; but that I shall soon get the better of, no doubt."

"You alarm me, Dick!" said Tom King, "not only by your words, but by your looks. You are as white as a ghost!"

CHAPTER CXC.

CONTINUES TO DETAIL THE ADVENTURES WHICH BEFEL THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN ON THEIR JOURNEY TO THE NORTH.

And in good truth, any one gazing upon the countenance of the celebrated highwayman, who felt an interest in his welfare, would to the full have shared in Tom King's anxiety.

It was pale even to ghastliness, while his eyes bore a stony appearance, really dreadful to behold.

"I must shake off the feeling as well as I can, Tom," he said. "We have more important things to think about just now,"

"We have," replied Claude; "and I think I can give you some little consolation. In the course of my life I have given and received a great many wounds, and the symptoms you describe are not so unfavourable as one would think at a first glance."

"Indeed."

"No, while you feel as you do you have nothing to fear, since the effect is principally produced by loss of blood, and you will soon make up for that again."

"That's all right, then; and now, my friends, let us

leave the discussion of that point, and attend to others of far greater importance."

"With all my heart," said Claude. "But, under all circumstances, it will be most prudent for you to keep yourself as quiet as you can for a short time."

"What are we to do, then?"

"Leave here at once."

"Easily said."

"It will not do to stay where we are. Let us dismount. The horses, then, will get on much better."

"But what are we to do, then?"

"Find some place where we can get them shoed. There is no other course."

"So be it, then. We will dismount. Let us hope we have frightened those fellows too much for them to come after us just yet!"

"Stay," said Tom King; "I will assist you down. You are not strong enough to dismount unaided. Stop, now!"

As he spoke he hastened to the side of Black Bess, and helped his friend Turpin from the saddle.

Nor were his services unwelcome. The short rest they had had at the "Old White Lion" was not enough to properly recuperate his exhausted energies; and though, in the moment of danger, excitement had enabled him to triumph over his weakness, yet, when all was over, he was more terribly prostrated than before.

He staggered slightly on reaching the ground; but, by an effort, he recovered himself.

"I must do the best I can," he said, in reply to his friends' expressed fears for his safety. "To stay where we are will be madness. The panic that has seized upon them will quickly dissipate, and then they will be upon us with fresh force."

"Even so!"

"Come on, then! Take your oridles in your hands, and creep cautiously underneath the hedge. The ground is soft, and will not hurt the horses now, having only their own weight to carry."

"And we shall not wander far out of our way," added Claude Duval, "if we take care to keep along the hedge skirting the high-road."

"I take it," replied Sixteen-String Jack, "that our greatest difficulty has yet to come."

"You mean with respect to shoeing the horses."

"I do."

"There I am of your opinion. Still, the danger and difficulty, great or little, must be faced. There must and cannot be any shrinking."

"True!"

During the whole of this brief conversation, our friends had not stood still, but pushed on as rapidly as circumstances would permit them.

Without dwelling upon their hopes and fears as expressed in their conversation, the reader will not fail to comprehend and form a due estimate of the gigantic nature of the peril with which they were threatened.

In the first place there was the dread that their late pursuers would summon up courage enough to re-attack them, and would, perhaps, bring with them an overwhelming reinforcement.

They were perfectly aware of the helpless state in which the highwaymen were, and that they could not possibly go any distance without rendering their horses quite useless.

Then there was the difficulty of finding a shoeing forge in the vicinity, and the danger they would incur during their stay there.

But, above all, there was the desperate condition of their leader; and this it was that gave the others the greatest amount of uneasiness.

Under this adverse combination of events, we shall see how far fortune favoured them.

Dick bore up bravely.

The pain he suffered was almost beyond endurance, but he made as little of it as he could.

His limbs were like lead.

But the imperative necessity of removing from their present position was foremost in his imagination, and he made all other sensations subservient to it.

No sounds to indicate that their late foes had resumed the chase reached their ears, and as minute after minute passed away, each one increasing the distance between them, they began to indulge in the hope that they had abandoned it altogether.

Ere long, however, they saw in the distance a man crossing the meadows in a diagonal direction, which would enable him to come up with them.

By the way this man fixed his gaze upon their persons, it became perfectly clear that he intended to intercept them.

One man, however, the highwaymen did not dread, though all four looked rather curiously and anxiously towards him.

Upon a nearer approach, they perceived he was a short, stout, apoplectic-looking man, dressed in the costume of a farmer, and having on his face an expression of agricultural obstinacy and stupidity.

He carried in his hand a long double-barrelled gun, and as soon as he was certain our friends saw him, he waved it over his head in a threatening manner.

By his side walked two dogs of a very ugly and ferocious breed.

Disregarding all three of them, our friends still continued striking across the meadows.

Fortunately, however, they watched what he was about.

The farmer began to shout.

At first they could not distinguish the words one from another; but presently, as the distance between them decreased, they found them to be something like the following—

"Hi! there! Stop! stop! Do you hear? Stop! It'll be the worse for you if you don't! Trespass, I say! Hi! Stop, will you? You can't go on!"

"I daresay this is the old bloke's ground," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and we are trespassing on it. Keep on. Don't take any notice. He will catch us just now."

And so he did; for observing that no heed was paid either to his words or his actions, the farmer left off shaking his gun and shouting, but changed his pace from a walk to a run instead.

In a few minutes, panting, breathless, and exhausted, he stood before them.

"Out of the way," said Dick. "Don't interfere with us. Out of the way!"

"But I tell you there's no road this way, and you can't go any further."

"Nonsense! Can't you see that we are in the majority, and that if we chose we could toss you over the hedge! For once in your life be a sensible man, and allow us to pass unmolested, or the consequences will be anything but pleasant."

"Stop, I tell you," cried the farmer, who was quite as pig-headed as he looked. "Stop, or I fire!"

As he spoke, he planted himself before them, and raised his double-barrelled gun to his shoulder.

His two dogs were one on either side of him, and they showed their teeth and growled, and looked as defiant as their master.

Of course the highwaymen were obliged to come to a halt.

"Now then," cried the farmer, having accomplished his first intention, "turn back and be off. I don't allow no trespassers on my ground. Turn back, or I fire!"

"Turn back be hanged!" said Claude Duval; and to the great astonishment of all, he made a sudden bound forward, knocked the barrel of the gun up in the air, and then wrested the weapon out of the farmer's hands.

But he had like to have paid dearly for this feat, for the two dogs we have mentioned, the moment they saw him attack their master, with a natural instinct sprang upon him.

Claude, however, could be nimble when he chose, and jumping backwards with great suddenness, he grasped the gun tightly by the barrel, and swung it round him with tremendous velocity, so that the butt-end described a circle about a foot above the ground.

In its progress it caught both dogs, as the terrific yell they uttered testified.

But although hurt—crippled, in fact—they were not disabled, and the pain they felt made them fly upon Claude with greater fury than before.

But this time he was not left to combat them single-handed. His friends Jack and Tom came to his assistance.

They shot both the ferocious animals.

The farmer turned black in the face with rage, and

danced about as though in convulsions, or the agonies of strangulation.

Still, with praiseworthy courage, he would not give in until Tom, having seen Claude in safety, rushed forward, and grasping him by the collar, thrust the muzzle of a pistol into his ear.

"Silence," he said, "or it will be the worse for you! As you have seen, we are not men who will stand trifling with."

CHAPTER CXCI.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN PUT AN END TO THE INTERFERENCE OF THE FARMER.

THE farmer glared around him with some dismay, but all that he saw fully bore out the truth of what Tom King had said.

A remarkable change took place in the colour of his countenance.

From a dusky black it subsided into a nondescript whitey-brown tint.

"Mercy! mercy!" he said. "Spare my life! spare my life! I am a sinner—a miserable sinner! Spare my life!"

"Keep quiet, then," said King, "and your request will be listened to; otherwise, there will shortly be a vacancy in the agricultural districts."

At this moment Claude approached.

"What do you mean?" he asked, threateningly. "What do you mean by treating gentlemen in the manner you have treated us! What do you mean by telling gentlemen to stop, and that they cannot go through your fields? What do you mean by it?"

"Trespass!" cried the farmer, recovering himself a little. "Trespass! that's what it is! This is my ground, I'd have you know."

"Be quiet!" said Tom King, as he pressed the muzzle of the pistol yet harder against the farmer's ear. "Claude," he added, "I want a word with you."

Duval approached, and Tom whispered something in his ear.

A nod and a pleased expression of countenance was the reply, and then Claude spoke to Dick and Sixteen-String Jack.

"Tom has hit upon a capital idea," he said.

"What is it?"

"He proposes, by dint of threats, to compel the farmer to take us to some place where we can have our horses shoed."

"Capital!"

"And make him give out that we are particular friends of his."

"Good!" said Turpin; "and so, inopportune as his presence seemed, we shall be able to turn it over to our own advantage."

"I hope so."

In the meantime, Tom had explained his purpose to the farmer.

"Do you wish to live?" he asked, "or are you quite weary of life? If the latter, I will put you out of the world at once. If the former, I will tell you how to remain a little longer in it."

"Spare me! Spare my life!" cried the farmer, in the utmost alarm. "I will do anything if you will only spare my life."

"Spoken like a reasonable man. Your life shall be spared."

"But what am I to do?"

"Obey me in all things for the next hour, and then you shall be free to do whatever you think proper. Otherwise"——

Tom had no occasion to complete the sentence.

"I will obey—I will obey. But tell me what I have to do."

"In one moment. Here, Dick!"

His three comrades advanced.

"He is quite reasonable, and has promised to obey me in all things."

"Then," said Turpin, sternly, "see that he does so."

"I will—I will, indeed, gentlemen," said the farmer, who, ever since the loss of his gun and the death of his dogs, had been in a perfect fright; "only tell me what I have to do."

"We will. Do you know a place where I can get a shoe put on my horse?"

"A blacksmith's forge?"

"Yes."

"Oh! gentlemen, if that is all you require, I can tell you where to find one."

"Then I should advise you to."

"I will—I will. There is one on my own farm—this very farm."

"Have you really?"

"Yes."

"Lead us to it, then, and understand this, and believe us perfectly in earnest."

"Yes, gentlemen. Oh! yes."

"Lead us to this smithy. I am rather weak, and will take hold of your arm. So. My friends will walk just behind us with pistols ready in their grasp, and the least thing they see that looks like treachery on your part, or hesitation to do as you are bidden, will be the signal for them to fire, and, as you have witnessed, they know how to use a pistol."

While speaking, Dick slipped his hand under the farmer's arm, and held it tightly.

The other three took up their positions a little in the rear, with their right hands in their coat pockets, grasping a pistol.

"Forward!" cried Dick. "We are going to let you off lightly, and you ought to be grateful accordingly. If you will have some shoes put on our horses, we will let you go free and unharmed, and pay you a reasonable sum for your trouble and the damage we have done."

The moment Dick spoke of payment, the farmer's manner entirely changed.

They did not know it then, but he was avaricious in the extreme.

"Come this way, gentlemen," he said; "you need not trouble about your pistols, I am your very obedient servant to command. This way, if you please. I see now you are gentlemen, and I am sorry any disagreement arose between us, but really such a many common people come"——

"That will do—that will do," cried Turpin; "lead on in silence, and bear what we have said in mind. Treachery will only provoke your death. It will not be possible for you to escape."

The farmer was silent, and led the highwaymen across several fields, until, in the distance, some thatched roofs were discernible.

These he soon after reached.

From the one to which they first came issued a bright light, and the clanking of hammers and anvils.

They found, too, that they approached this shed from the back, and that the front of it looked out upon a broad high-road, though not the one our friends had so long been travelling.

"Jackson!" cried the farmer, as they reached the large door of the smithy. "Jackson!"

In obedience to this call, a burly smith came forward.

Our friends kept a keen look out upon both, having fully determined to punish the farmer severely should he prove treacherous.

But all seemed well.

"Good morning, Mr. Bates," said Jackson, with that servile respect so noticeable in farming districts. "What can I do for you?"

Mr. Bates, somewhat to the highwaymen's surprise, spoke quite freely.

"These gentlemen want their horses' shoes seen to at once."

"All right, sir."

"Make haste," said Turpin; "we are pressed for time."

"Do you hear, Jackson," said Mr. Bates; "the gentleman says he is pressed for time."

Dick looked upon the farmer in wonder. He could scarcely believe it possible that so great a change could have taken place in a person in so short a time.

But he did not know how dominant a passion love of money was in the farmer's soul, and that he would hardly have scrupled at any means, however base, to obtain it.

Claude Duval was suspicious, and watched his every movement with the greatest attention.

"Do they all four want attending to?" asked Jackson.

"Yes," replied Dick. "I want the old shoes taken off and new ones placed on them all."

"Very good, sir. I'll take yours first."

"Do so," said Turpin. "Be gently with her, for she has a rare spirit, or temper rather, if you are in the least rough."

The blacksmith led Turpin's mare into the shed, and secured her head.

Then began his work.

"You have lost a shoe," he said.

"Yes, put a new one on carefully. Her hoof will be tender."

"So it will, sir."

"It will take a good while, gentlemen," said Mr. Bates, "to put sixteen shoes on. Don't stand here, I beg, but come up to the house."

"No, thank you," replied our hero, promptly. "I am much obliged to you all the same, but I would rather stand by and see the shoeing done."

"Just as you like, gentlemen; and while we are waiting we may as well settle about the little recompense you spoke of."

"Very good," said Turpin. "What harm have we done?"

"There's my two dogs."

"Yes."

"And my gun."

"Go on."

"And the trespass, and the time"——

"Never mind," said Dick, "going on any further. I'll tell you what, when your man has shoed the horses properly, you shall have five guineas from each of us."

"Five guineas? Yes, gentlemen—your lordships, I mean. Five and five is ten, and five is fifteen, and five is t. Did you mean twenty guineas altogether, my lord?"

"Exactly," replied Dick.

The farmer rubbed his hands together.

Covetousness sparkled in his eyes.

"You're welcome, your lordships," he said, "to come on my grounds whenever you think proper. Of course, I did not know you, or I should not have acted as I did. I'm very sorry. Why, my dogs, Towler and Snap, might have bit one of your lordships!"

"Very probably."

In such like conversation as this was the time passed away while Black Bess was shoed.

It was not that she exactly required a new set, but Dick thought, and wisely too, that he would take the present opportunity and have them all done—for it might be a very long time indeed before another such chance befel him.

CHAPTER CXCII.

A CART IS DRIVEN UP TO THE OLD SMITHY; WHICH EVENT HAS THE EFFECT OF OPENING THE EYES OF MR. BATES.

"WHY, I'm blest!" said Jackson, suddenly, who, having finished Bess, had begun upon Claude's horse, "why this one has cast a shoe too."

"We are aware."

"Their lordships are aware, Jackson," roared the farmer, in a rage with his dependant for making the remark: "go on with your work."

Thus rebuked, Jackson went on.

Presently Claude's horse was done.

Our friends' hearts grew lighter. They were glad to give twenty pounds for such an important service as that was. Just at that moment the value of it was incalculable.

Jackson took Tom King's horse in exchange for Claude's.

The circumstance of the off-hand shoes of two horses being off at the same time filled him with astonishment, and he looked upon the highwaymen and Mr. Bates inquiringly.

But from the looks of neither could he gather anything.

It was really amusing to see the way in which he examined the feet of Tom's horse.

He began with the fore ones.

Then took the near hind leg.

All three shoes were worn, but quite perfect, and fit to do a great deal more service.

Slowly he picked up the other foot.

He let it down with a dab.

The shoe was gone.

This seemed to Jackson mysterious and incomprehensible, and the manner in which he looked at the horses and their riders was ludicrous in the extreme.

However, he did not dare make any remark, but went on with his work.

In time, Tom's horse was finished.

Then there remained only Sixteen-String Jack's to do.

As before, Jackson looked at the feet, and just in the same order.

He lifted up the last one, thinking surely all four shoes would not be short.

But they were.

Letting go the hoof, and braving the anger of his master he stood up.

His astonishment was too great for him to contain his words.

"This caps all!" he cried, "clean caps all! There's four horses brought to the forge at the same time, and, as I'm alive, they have all four cast the same shoe!"

This circumstance seemed to strike Mr. Bates as being a most peculiar one, and he looked up at our friends with undisguised curiosity.

"It's all right," said Dick, for he thought no harm could be done by trying to account for the matter. "You see it's been done for a wager."

"It's been done for a wager, Jackson," cried Mr. Bates, who seized upon this idea with the greatest avidity. "Get on with your work, do. Their lordships know all about it. It's been done for a wager."

Half satisfied, Jackson resumed his work.

The time altogether that it took to put on the shoes was something considerable, and the day was far advanced before they were all finished.

At last, however, the horses were led out into the road in front of the shed, rubbed down, and given a mouthful of hay and water.

Mr. Bates, too, finding our friends would not, on any account, be persuaded to leave their horses, had had some refreshments brought out to them.

It was just at this moment that there came round the corner of the high-road a horse and cart.

Two men were seated in it, and driving at a very rapid rate.

But they drew up exactly in front of the smithy.

It was by no means part of the highwaymen's plan to draw attention to themselves, and therefore they remained just as they were, thinking that the best means of eluding observation.

A man was rubbing down their steeds, and they were standing close by, with Mr. Bates, watching him at his work.

Upon the stoppage of the cart, all looked up to see what kind of people it contained.

One was a man, and the other a youth of about eighteen or nineteen.

"Hullo!" said the former, as he scrambled rather awkwardly out of his vehicle. "Who belongs to this place?"

"I do," said Mr. Bates, stepping forward, and desirous of showing his authority to his visitors. "What do you want?"

"Perhaps you'll be kind enough to look at that, and, with your permission, I'll make use of one or two."

The man thrust a printed paper into the hands of Mr. Bates as he spoke.

Then, without waiting to hear what he said, he ran back to the cart, and produced a paste-pot.

Mr. Bates unfolded the bill.

"The devil!" cried Dick Turpin, as he saw all this. "Mount, my friends! It's another of those infernal bill-stickers!"

It was in a suppressed voice that he spoke, but still it was loud enough for those to whom he addressed himself to hear it.

A glance showed them that what their leader had said was perfectly right; so with that ease and dexterity which long and continual practice had given them, they sprang into their saddles.

Nor were they a moment too soon.

Mr. Bates, who had unfolded the bill, and begun the attempt to decipher it, looked up with amazement upon this sudden movement upon the part of our four friends.

Ere he could speak, however, something else occurred which changed the whole posture of affairs.

The boy in the cart—for he was little more—had of course made himself acquainted with the description given of the four highwaymen.

His eyes had rested upon the horsemen close at hand.

Of course he recognised them instantly; and whatever doubts he had were dispelled when he saw the celebrated mare Black Bess.

Therefore, as soon as the man came to the cart for the purpose of reaching out some bills, he communicated his suspicions to him.

A glance served to show the bill-sticker that his assistant was right; so, standing up on the shaft of his cart, he shouted—

"Stop thief! Two thousand pounds reward! Two thousand five hundred pounds for those four men on horseback! Dick Turpin, Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack. Stop them!"

From the insight the reader has already been given of the character of Mr. Bates, the electrical effect which the mention of this enormous sum had upon him can be readily enough imagined.

But he was too dumbfoundered to speak.

As for the highwaymen, they were quite at their ease.

To be sure, they were in such peril as would alarm most men, but all things are comparative; and in comparison with the difficulties they had been in such a short time previously, the present was a mere nothing.

At least they thought so, if one might judge by the easy way in which they took it.

At a sign from Dick they rode forward with great suddenness.

Mr. Bates, who made a wild and maniacal attempt to stop them, was thrown down.

And Sixteen-String Jack, as they passed the cart, gave the bill-sticker, who was still standing rather precariously upon the shafts, a vigorous push, which had the effect of sending him backwards over his horse at once.

This done, they increased the speed of their horses, and swept along the road, leaving Mr. Bates and the discomfited bill-sticker to console themselves as best they might.

In less than ten minutes afterwards, during which time they had torn along at their utmost speed, they drew up.

So rapidly and strangely had the last few events fallen out, that they could hardly bring themselves to believe in their reality.

But the necessity for proceeding with the utmost circumspection pressed itself upon them.

Altogether, they had been delayed something like eighteen hours, which would enable the news to get well spread abroad respecting them, and as for hoping to overtake the Warwick mail, that was quite out of the question.

But in other respects their position was materially improved.

Their horses were well shod and thoroughly rested.

They had no foes to dread upon their track.

By mutual agreement they proceeded at a good sharp pace, keeping a keen look-out for any indications of their enemy.

But none such came in sight.

The rest at the smithy, too, had another good effect, and that was Turpin's wound.

This ugly gash, as it appeared, was in reality nothing—that is, it would have been nothing, had he kept still, and received proper attention; but, as the reader knows, he had neither one nor the other.

They quickly found, however, by his manner, that he was much better, and Claude Duval presaged that, ere long, he would feel nothing of it.

And so, in company, they pressed on together, avoiding the main roads, and all towns and villages, sleeping in the open air, and managing in the best way they could.

Indeed, had they not adopted such means as these, their discovery would have been certain, so well and skilfully were plans laid for their capture.

Then, with respect to the expedition they had taken in hand, it was most unquestionably the best thing they could do, for while the same supervision was continued to be exercised upon the different roads, they would be quite debarred from pursuing their avocation.

Besides this, it had that to recommend it which is needed in all things, and that is variety.

CHAPTER CXCIII.

OUR FRIENDS REACH SCOTLAND IN SAFETY, AND MAKE A HALT AT PERTH, AT THE "MORAY ARMS," WHERE DICK TURPIN HAS A STARTLING ADVENTURE.

FIVE days after the occurrence of the events we have just related, four horsemen, whose apparel was torn and travel-soiled in many places, and whose steeds evinced by their gait a fatigue of no common order, drew rein before a small roadside public-house in the vicinity of Perth.

It is scarcely necessary to tell the reader who those four horsemen were. He knows already they are those in whose varying fortunes and exciting adventures we feel so deep an interest.

During those five days their journey had been undiversified by any incidents worthy of special mention. They had been careful to go by the most unfrequented roads, and had succeeded in escaping observation.

But the time will show that they had not dallied much upon their journey. In fact, with the exception of such brief halts as nature imperatively demanded, they had not stayed once during the whole journey.

But now, having come so far in safety, they felt in tolerable security, and resolved, let the result be what it would, that they would remain for the rest of the day, and during the night, at a public-house, about two miles from Perth, and on the high-road leading from it.

It is at this moment that we again present them to the reader.

The countenances of all are haggard, and show the immense fatigue which they have undergone.

The wound in Turpin's head, thanks to the close attention Claude paid to it, and despite all adverse circumstances, was quite well.

But he was far from looking the man he had done a short time before, though a good rest would soon put all that right.

It was in the latter part of a winter afternoon that they halted before the door of the public-house here alluded to, and which was known by the sign of the "Moray Arms."

They met with rather a cold reception from the occupiers of the house, who, from the fact of their all wearing the highland costume, they conjectured were high Scotch, who, at that time, were much prejudiced against the English, or Southrons, as they called them.

Of course, the dress which our friends wore showed them to belong to this latter nation, and to that they ascribed the cold reception they received.

They called for a private room, and a dinner of the best they could procure, and while they were getting it in readiness the highwaymen, as usual, paid a visit to the stables, conciliated the ostler, and saw their steeds properly groomed and fed.

No account of their exploits seemed to have reached so far north, and upon this they congratulated themselves, for they not only required rest, but desired to enter the Pretender's ranks as though they had come there of their own accord, and not selected it as a place of refuge from their foes.

On their return they were shown to a small and comfortable apartment—at least, it seemed such to our friends, who had been deprived of such a luxury for some time.

Here they dispatched a very hearty meal.

Abundance of wine had been placed upon the table, and, at the conclusion of the repast, Tom King filled a bumper, and, standing up, said—

"Now, my friends, fill up your glasses, and drink to the health of Prince Charlie and his father, King James!"

Some portion of Tom's enthusiasm had infused itself into the breasts of his three comrades; so, standing up, they responded to the toast with great warmth.

The conversation, of course, turned upon their mode of future procedure.

So far, they had come in a straight line, without any idea as to the exact locality of the Pretender and his army, and although they had made numberless direct or indirect inquiries, they were unable to gather a notion of his whereabouts.

But it is not to be wondered at that they were unsuccessful in this respect, for those of whom they made inquiries doubted their sincerity, and feared they were no other than English spies, nor would all their asseverations tend in the least to dispel this erroneous idea.

The only thing they had to guide them was that an engagement had taken place between the rebels and the king's troops under the command of Captain Scott, at a place called Loch Lochy, not far from Invergary, and in which encounter the Young Pretender's army proved triumphantly victorious

Towards this place, then, they had directed their steps.

The papers, which it will be remembered Tom King had taken from the wallet of the messenger, no doubt contained the information they were in search of, but, as all were carefully sealed and tied up, Tom would not listen to any proposition to making themselves acquainted with their contents.

On the present occasion the point was rather warmly contested by Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, who both maintained they should be doing no more than right by opening the papers.

But they had not the respectful feeling for the young prince that Tom had, for he looked up to him as his lawful sovereign, and considered that to do such a thing would be to commit an unpardonable offence.

As for Turpin, he remained neuter, leaving them to settle the affair between them.

But Tom was firm.

At length, however, as night was drawing in, and the necessity for rest made itself more and more apparent, they desired to be shown to their chambers.

The landlord—an old highlander he seemed—replied to their summons, and reluctantly proceeded to obey their bidding.

But, perhaps, thinking from the appearance of the highwaymen that it would be best to keep on friendly terms with them, he subdued this feeling as much as possible, and led the way up stairs.

The inn was a substantial building and of tolerable size.

The first floor was passed, and the second flight of stairs ascended.

Then our friends were shown into two bed-chambers adjoining each other.

Here they divided in their usual fashion—that is to say, Dick Turpin and Tom King—Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval.

Those only who can obtain proper rest at long and uncertain intervals can form a just idea of the pleasure with which the highwaymen laid down.

In five minutes all slumbered soundly, but not knowing what might occur, they had only partially divested themselves of their apparel.

Their chamber doors they had carefully secured.

These precautions taken, they surrendered themselves to sleep.

About four hours afterwards, Dick Turpin, after a few restless movements, awoke.

He lay profoundly still, for he was at a loss rather to think where he was.

Darkness of the blackest character environed him, but, after a little while, he became conscious that some few rays of light must find their way in from somewhere, as he began dimly to see surrounding objects.

As he lay there in perfect stillness, his ears were assailed by a strange murmuring sound.

It arose suddenly and as suddenly ceased.

Then it broke forth again, and continued uninterruptedly.

He could not have been properly awake and in full possession of his senses, or he would have recognised the sound much sooner than he did.

At last, however, he aroused himself thoroughly, and, sitting up in the bed, listened.

"Voices," he muttered. "What can that mean? There are a great many, too. What time is it, I wonder? Late. Long past midnight, I should think. It is danger. And yet, perhaps, it is not. However, I will not awake my comrades until I have ascertained."

With this Turpin slipped quietly off the bed, and standing upon the floor, listened.

He quickly discovered that the sound of the voices came from below.

As soon as he had assured himself such was the case, he, with the greatest care and secrecy, laid himself down at full length, and placed his ear to the floor.

The murmuring of voices became much more distinct, but he could not so much as catch a single word of what was said.

But the more he thought, and the longer he listened, the more uneasy he became.

What could be the nature of the conference taking place at that dead hour of the night?

It was only natural that he should connect it with himself.

He rose to his feet, and, as he did so, formed a hasty resolution.

He would not wake his companions, but alone go forth and learn whether there really was or was not danger.

Accordingly, he, with great speed, put on the remainder of his clothes, and looked carefully to his weapons.

But it was more to his sense of feeling that he trusted than his sight when he tried the priming of his pistol.

Then, with his sword drawn in his hand, in readiness for any attack, he crept on tiptoe across the room, in the direction of the door, which, being of old oak, stood out clearly defined from the white-washed wall around it.

He had himself secured the door, and, therefore, was able to set about unfastening it noiselessly.

This he succeeded in doing, and as, when he ascended, he had taken very particular notice of his route, he was able to find his way to the head of the stairs in the dark, without coming into collision with anything.

On the landing the voices could be heard with much greater plainness than they could in the room.

Not pausing, however, Dick Turpin stealthily commenced the descent of the stairs.

It took him a long time, considering the distance, but at last he reached the first floor.

As he got lower and lower, the more distinctly could he hear the mysterious voices.

And now he noticed that, from underneath one of the room doors on the right-hand side of where he stood, there came a broad beam of light.

That, doubtless, then, was the room in which the conference was taking place.

Cautiously he approached the door.

Then, stooping down, he put his ear close to the key-hole.

But scarcely had he done so, than the door was suddenly thrown open, and a loud ejaculation came from a man's lips.

CHAPTER CXCI

THE HIGHLAND CHIEFS ASSUME A MENACING ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE HIGHWAYMEN.

THE opening of the door was so unexpected by Dick Turpin, that he was a minute before he could recover himself, and he half fell over the threshold of the room.

But, ere he could quite reach the floor, the owner of the voice which had uttered the exclamation stooped down and clutched him by the collar.

There was a hurried movement of many feet, and a hubbub of voices.

When Dick drew himself up to his full height and looked around him, he found he was surrounded by a number of stalwart, well-armed men, who, by their attire, were evidently above the common breed.

The person who held Dick in his grasp was a noble-looking Scotchman, dressed in the costume of the chiefs of one of the highland clans.

Several others he noted wore similar apparel.

"Close the door," said a voice, in loud, commanding tones, "and we will see what curious knave has dared to pry into our counsels."

"I am no knave," cried Dick, who by this time realized his position. "Stand back, gentlemen, or it will be the worse for you. I am well armed."

As he spoke Dick waved his ponderous sword around his head.

Instinctively those who were nearest to him drew back

But it was only for a moment.

Uttering a shrill fierce cry, they drew their claymore from their sheaths and rushed upon him.

Before they quite hemmed him in, however, Dick drew a pistol with his left hand and fired—taking care to point the weapons above the heads of those surrounding him.

He know it would have the effect of arousing his comrades, and quickly bringing them to his rescue.

"A southern spy!" cried the highlanders, fiercely. "A southern spy! Down with him! Slay him! or his assistants will be upon us! Death to the spy! Death—death!"

Dick met the onslaught that was made upon him with the greatest coolness and skill.

With a truly marvellous dexterity, he parried the numberless blows made at him from all sides.

"Hold, gentlemen!" he cried. "Hold—hold! Hear me speak. I am no spy! Hear me, hear me! and then slay me afterwards."

"Yes, hold!" said a voice, full of rich music, gentleness, and strength. "Hold, my friends; we will hear what the southerner has to say, but keep an eye upon him!"

The command was instantaneously obeyed.

Dick turned towards the speaker, for he judged he must be one high in command over the others.

But, ere he could address him, there was the hasty trampling of footsteps; and, a moment afterwards, the door of the apartment was burst open, and Tom King, followed closely by Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, rushed in.

"Ha! betrayed!" cried the highlanders, as they perceived this. "Down with the dogs! down with the southerners! They are spies upon us, and our lives are no longer safe."

"Hold!" said the voice which had before spoken; "hold!"

It is impossible to convey an idea of the tone in which this word was uttered; but it had its effect upon all, even upon the three highwaymen.

They, like the rest, obeyed.

"Guard the door!" said the voice again, "and then we will question these intruders."

The men drew back, leaving the four friends in the centre of the apartment.

They stood closely to each other.

The scene was one of rare picturesque beauty.

The room in which they stood was spacious, and the ceiling lofty.

Round the walls, placed in tin sconces, were a number of wax candles, and these diffused a brilliant light, dispersing the darkness in the most distant corners.

In the centre, as we have already said, stood our four friends.

Grouped round them were about twenty distinguished-looking highland soldiers, each one the chief of a clan.

There was sufficient difference between them for any one to have told that.

But apart from the rest, and facing our friends, was the tall noble-looking chieftain, whose commands had been so scrupulously obeyed.

Who he was, neither of our friends had the least idea.

"Speak!" he said, "and be careful how you reply. Who are you, and why are you here?"

"Will you allow me to reply?" asked Tom King, making a step forward as he spoke.

"Yes; if you will be truthful."

"Do not doubt that, my lord. If I mistake not, you are of those who would rather see a Stuart on the throne of Great Britain than a Hanoverian."

"Proceed! That matters not."

"My lord, it does. All depends upon it."

"How so?"

"Whether we are friends or enemies."

"Friends or enemies?"

"Even so."

"Answer our question first," said the chieftain. "We have a right to demand it. Who are you?"

"Friends to Prince Charlie and his father, King James."

"Spies—spies!" interrupted several voices. "Spies—spies! They are southerners. Down with them."

The chieftain raised his hand.

The action, simple as it was, yet seemed so majestic, that the rude and violent men there present immediately obeyed it.

"Hold!" he said. "We will ask them for some proof of what they say."

Then turning towards Tom King, he continued—

"Your answer does not satisfy us. You wear the garb of those hostile to the cause you profess adherence to. But explain first, how it was one of your number was listening at the door during our secret councils?"

A murmur of assent followed this question, which, as the reader must be aware, was one to which Tom King was unable to reply.

But Dick was ready.

"I alone can explain that!" he said; "and I beg you will listen to me in patience. Last afternoon we arrived, and put up here. We have journeyed from England, and have been pursued as far as the borders by those who would gladly have taken our lives. But we eluded them, and were fortunate enough to reach here in safety, and, so far as we could tell, unperceived. The remainder is simple. The chamber in which I slept is immediately over this. I was awoke by the murmuring of voices. Fearful that it might be our enemies who had discovered us, I listened more intently, but still could hear no more than I had at first. The sounds came from below, and I resolved to ascertain whether our enemies were at hand or not. Accordingly I dressed myself hastily, and, taking my sword in my hand, crept down the stairs, and just reached yonder door as some one opened it. The rest you know. The pistol I fired was the signal to bring my friends to my assistance."

Dick spoke so calmly, and the whole bore such an impress of truth upon it, that the Scottish chieftains were all but convinced.

But still, with that pertinacity for which they are celebrated, they clung to the idea they had at first formed—namely, that they were English spies, and they were not willing to be disabused of it.

"Your speech is plausible," said the tall chieftain, who was evidently the head of the assembly. "But beyond doing so very vaguely, you have not told us who you are, nor by whom, nor for what you were pursued."

"Nor can we do so;" replied Turpin, "that is a piece of knowledge we have determined, at all hazards, to keep to ourselves."

There was another threatening movement after this speech, but the chief stayed it.

Turpin continued,—

"But from your dress, and the fact of your having chosen this lonely and unlikely spot for a secret council, I gather that you are partizans of King James, and, under that belief, I do not hesitate to say that we are of the same faction. Moreover, too, that our journey here was for the purpose of joining his army."

"Gentlemen," said the chieftain, "if what you say is true, then no one will be so pleased to take you by the hand. If you prove false, and traitors, mine shall be the first claymore drawn to slay you."

"We have no fear. We have but little proof of the sincerity of our words, but I may state that two of us are personally acquainted with the young prince, and it was upon the occasion of our parting that we promised, so soon as the intelligence should reach us that he had planted his standard upon Scottish soil, we would hasten to place ourselves beneath his standard, and do battle for him as best we might."

"It should be stated also," said Tom King, "that we were fortunate enough to render him a service, and in token of it he gave each of us a ring, and which was to be the means by which he would recognise us at a future date."

So saying, Tom King drew off the ring which Prince Charles had given him, and, with a graceful bow, presented it to the chieftain, who examined it with the closest attention, while the dense throng of Highland warriors looked on with curiosity and eagerness.

"I know this ring," said the chieftain; "and so far what they say is carried out by proof. Whether all is true is more than I could take upon myself to decide."

"We will give you our words," said Turpin; "and, among gentlemen, that ought to be sufficient."

"These are troublous times," said an aged man, solemnly, "and times when all should be distrusted. Our lives, our fortunes are in the balance, and it behoves us to be extremely cautious, when so much is at stake. If what these gentlemen now say is true, they cannot object to what I now propose, which is, that they shall remain with us under guard, and accompany us to the meeting place agreed upon, where, if what they say is true, all will be well; if false, they shall meet with the death that such black liars and base traitors best deserve. Are you agreed?"

A unanimous "We are!" came from the lips of all present.



[THE BODY OF CLAUDE DUVAL IS DISCOVERED ON THE BATTLE FIELD.]

"We are willing to abide by your decision," said Turpin; "for all we desire is to reach with all speed possible the young prince's ranks."

"We go at once, then," said the tall, noble chieftain, who, by his mildness and gentlemanly bearing, presented a strong contrast to the wild spirits by whom he was surrounded.

CHAPTER CXCV.

CAMERON OF LOCHIEL AND HIS TROOPS ESCORT OUR FRIENDS TO THE VALE OF GLENFINNAN, THE RENDEZVOUS OF THE CLANS.

The bare outline we have given of this chieftain's manner and appearance, will enable those who are conversant with Scottish history to immediately recognise him.

It was the gallant Cameron of Lochiel.

His name and fame have descended to us in many a romance, drama, and ballad; and his unfortunate fate is deplored by all.

From his unvarying kind behaviour he had gained the title of the "Gentle Lochiel," and yet he was perhaps the most powerful chieftain in the highlands.

It was unquestionably to the temperateness of his disposition, and the respect in which he was held by those who had assembled at the secret council, that our four friends owed their lives. Had he not interposed, the highlanders would have annihilated them in the blind fury of their rage.

It would seem that the little public-house at which our friends had halted had been selected as the meeting-place for the heads of the various clans, in order to take council as to their proceedings.

It was not, however, until some time afterwards that our friends learned this.

The meeting was just over as Dick descended the stairs, and the one who opened the door was about to depart, in order to ascertain, as a precautionary measure, that there were no spies lurking about.

Our hero was certainly found in a very suspicious

situation, and one, under the circumstances, that would have justified those present in taking some very summary proceedings.

As it was, they were desired to deliver up their weapons, while a band escorted them to see that no treachery was attempted.

To all this Tom King cheerfully enough assented, but not so the others. Grumbling, however, would have done not the slightest good, and so they were compelled to submit.

They were, however, permitted to mount their own steeds, and the whole party then set out.

The journey was a long, and, in consequence of the nature of the ground, a most fatiguing one.

On their way, they were joined continually by large bodies of men, each one composing the clan of one of the chiefs who had assembled at the "Moray Arms."

Lochiel led the van, closely followed by the other Camerons.

Ere two days had elapsed, our friends had succeeded in quite gaining the confidence of their guards, so that their arms were restored to them; but, notwithstanding, they continued to keep close to them, and had the highwaymen wished to escape, they would have found it very difficult, if not impossible.

They learned, however, that the place to which they were repairing was the Vale of Glenfinnan, which had been appointed as a general rendezvous for those who favoured King James.

It was here that they were going to meet the young prince.

A bright sun was shining in a perfectly clear blue sky, upon the morning when the party reached their destination.

Their numbers had continually increased, and they now counted upwards of eight hundred men, all highlanders—or nearly so—inured to every imaginable privation, strong, well armed, and ready for any deed, however desperate.

It was a grand and imposing spectacle, for those who were there to see it, when the highland troops, in tartan array, commenced the descent into the valley.

The sun had dispersed the mists which at that time of year hung generally over and around that spot; and, as they slowly wound down that narrow path, our friends gazed with undisguised admiration upon the scene before them.

Glenfinnan is a narrow vale, in which the river Finnan runs between lofty and craggy mountains. At its extremity is Loch Ghiel, a lake upwards of fourteen miles in length; and it is this beautiful sheet of diaphanic water, in which the rugged mountain peaks and the blue sky are duplicated, which gives the valley the grand and magnificent appearance which it wears.

But the centre of the peaceful glen was now occupied by soldiers, who, from where they stood, perceived the approach of their friends, and hailed them with loud cries of joyous welcome.

The total change of scene which this presented to the highwaymen was, of course, not without its charm, and they were prepared to enter with full spirit into the new mode of life open to them.

And if the reader will reflect upon past events he will not feel surprised that they should begin to tire of their latter mode of life, which had but few agreeables and a myriad perils.

Above all, was this the case with Tom King. His history, which we have given in a former chapter, will serve to show that he had been, by a strange series of events, forced to seek a living upon the highway; it was not, as with many, from pure choice.

And now he was tired of the life he had been leading. When he looked back to the fearfully narrow escape of his life he had had at Tyburn, and remembered the horrors of that morning, it was always with a deep and unsubduable shudder.

No wonder.

By birth, education, and breeding, Tom King was a gentleman, and up to his majority always looked forward to being one for the remainder of his days.

The sudden appearance of his father's unrecognized son, and the result of the trial, had dispersed all these hopes.

And yet Tom did not like the idea of continuing to sink lower and lower down in life. Fain would he have abandoned his exciting career, despite the pleasure attaching to it; and in the present insurrection he had been that in the event of the Stuarts proving victorious, he should stand a chance of regaining the estates which had been wrested from him.

There were many who flocked to the Pretender's standard from the same reason.

At any rate, as he had before repeatedly said, they could not worse their position, let things turn out as they would.

But in his own mind he took a far more sanguine glance at the prospect in the future. He was, in fine, enthusiastic in the cause he had espoused, and already saw the Hanoverian swept from English soil, and either the Pretender or his son seated on the British throne.

Then, for himself and his friends, the prospect was, if possible, more cheering still. Already he saw all four high in the estimation of their sovereign—filling honourable situations—their past offences against the laws forgotten and condoned.

Whether things eventuated in the manner he anticipated can only be seen in time, by tracing the course of the different incidents as they arose.

At any rate, they were about to enter upon quite a new phase of existence—quite new to all of them, except Claude Duval, who, it was believed, had fought under the French flag.

At length the bottom of the mountain pass was reached; and here, by the orders of their commander, the gentle Lochiel, they halted, and formed into two lines, each line being three men deep.

Between the two lines, without their arms, walked those prisoners whom they had captured in the various skirmishes they had had with the regular troops upon their route.

And now, looking in advance, our friends perceived Prince Charles, in a semi-highland dress, standing upon a slight eminence in the centre, surrounded by his most trusted adherents, who waved their caps as the soldiers approached.

The scene was one of the greatest possible animation, nor was the additional enlivenment of martial music wanting, for the bagpipes made the air vocal with their spirit-stirring notes.

In a short time the detachments of troops were arranged in a circle round the eminence upon which the young prince stood, with his head uncovered, returning the salutations of the chieftains, and responding to the hearty "Deochs laint an Reogh" of the men, which was very good Erse for "God Save the King."

Seeing himself at last surrounded by what had the outward appearance of an army, the heart of the young prince grew light within his breast. From the time he had left the shores of France he had met with nothing but disappointments, and though this is hardly the place, yet we cannot refrain from enumerating a few of them.

For motives best known to themselves, the French promised to afford the Young Pretender all the assistance, both in the shape of troops and pecuniary supplies, that lay in their power.

Upon the faith of this, and backed by the repeated invitations of the Earl of Mar, Lord Lovat, and other powerful Scottish noblemen, the Young Pretender embarked on board a ship of war of 18 guns, which was joined off Belleisle by the *Elizabeth* and other ships.

On their way to Scotland, however, they were unlucky enough to fall in with a British man-of-war, the *Lion*, commanded by Captain Brett, who immediately bore down upon the *Elizabeth*, the crew of which defended themselves with the greatest valour and resolution; and although, in the end, they obtained a victory over the English ship, it was at the destruction of nearly all their own ships, and the *Elizabeth* was totally disabled; but she managed, after incredible difficulty, to get back to Brest.

This was a serious blow to the Pretender's enterprise. Not only did it render those he had with him dissatisfied, but the loss was very great, as the *Elizabeth* carried, besides arms and ammunition for several thousand men, nearly four hundred thousand pounds sterling.

But, undismayed by this disaster, the gallant young prince continued on his way to Scotland, where he landed on the Isle of Skye.

And now he met with a fresh disappointment. The

French suddenly backed out of the affair—or virtually so—leaving him resourceless on a hostile shore.

The consequence of this disaffection of the French was, that many of the powerful noblemen, upon whose representations and fidelity he had relied, fell off also.

But, undaunted where many would have been cast down, the young prince persevered against the adverse tide which fortune poured upon him, and in the end gained the partizanship of the Camerons, from which moment things had looked better; and therefore, in consideration of all these circumstances, it is no wonder that he should experience a glow of joy when he positively saw the nucleus of an army gathering around him.

CHAPTER CXCVI.

PRINCE CHARLES RAISES HIS STANDARD, AND RECEIVES A STARTLING COMMUNICATION FROM TOM KING.

AGAIN and again he bowed to the assembled multitude, and, amid the acclamations of all present, the young prince gave the order for his standard to be raised and his colours unfurled.

This was done by brave old Tullibardine.

The flag was made of silk, and double the size of any that had been formerly used—the colours white, blue, and red silk.

A soldier assisted the old highland warrior to support the long, heavy staff, the sharp point of which could not be made to enter the hard, rocky soil.

The spot where the flag was raised is still pointed out. It may be seen to this day by the curious reader who may take the trouble to make a pilgrimage to Glenfinnan; for, in order that the event should never be forgotten, Macdonald of Glennaladel erected a small stone tower upon the spot, with an inscription on the base in Gaelic Latin and English commemorative of the occurrence.

Then, while the beautiful flag streamed out in the pure mountain air, Prince Charles, amid a profound silence, read a manifesto from his father James Stuart, and the commission of regency.

This over, he made a short but energetic speech to the men, which was received with loud shouts of joy, while, in the words of an eye-witness, "such loud huzzas and skimming of bonnets up into the air, appearing like a cloud, was not heard of a long time."

The hearts of all beat high with hope.

And now our four highwaymen, thinking it quite time they declared themselves, pushed forward as well as they were able, and reached at last the base of the little eminence upon which the Pretender was standing.

At the moment they thus appeared, Cameron of Lochiel, who was standing with his hand clasped by that of his prince, perceived them, and said something in a low tone to Charles Stuart, who turned round abruptly.

It was evident that at the first glance he did not recognise the highwaymen, but that was scarcely more than they had expected, for the night when their singular encounter took place was a very dark one, and he must necessarily have obtained only an imperfect view of their countenances.

Moreover, if Dick had forgotten the adventure altogether, how very likely it was that the young prince would do so.

"Excuse us, your royal highness," said Tom King, "but I have fulfilled a promise I made to you some time back. Do you remember giving me this ring?"

As he spoke, Tom held out between his finger-tips the bauble of which he spoke.

Lochiel took it from him, and placed it in the hands of the prince.

"Ha!" he said, as the well-remembered jewel met his gaze. "You are the two men who attacked me while disguised. I was on my way from London."

"You were, my prince, and then, if you recollect, we made a promise, which you were pleased to sanction, to the effect that, as soon as we heard you had raised your standard, we would hasten to enrol ourselves beneath it."

"You did so," said Charles Stuart, "and you are here. Believe me, you are most welcome. The incident, from its very peculiar nature, has frequently been present in my mind; but there seems to be four of you! How is that?"

"We will pardon us, my prince, for bringing with us two of our dearest friends, who will espouse your cause with equal warmth as ourselves."

"That needs no pardon. The more who join us, the easier will it be for me to regain possession of my own, and the more bloodless will be the struggle."

"I thank your royal highness," said Tom King. "There is another matter, of the gravest importance, about which I wish to speak, but would fain find some more fitting opportunity."

"Indeed!"

"The matter is important—yet not urgent."

"I will then dismiss the clans shortly, and, when that is done, do you repair to yonder cottage, where I am at present lodged, and there you shall have your say to me."

As he uttered these words, the prince gracefully held out his hand in true royal fashion.

Respectfully Tom took it in his, and, bending down over it, with his hat in his left hand, just touched it with his lips.

In this he was followed by his companions, and then all four withdrew.

The business with the soldiers lasted for some time longer yet, but at last they were all dispersed.

Ere Tom could gain his promised audience with the prince, the day was almost spent, for the sun had withdrawn his rays from the water of the lake and was sinking fast behind the mountains.

As the reader is aware, Tom's business with Charles Stuart was the restoration of the papers which had been taken from the wallet of the unfortunate messenger.

He went alone, though his comrades were close at hand.

Upon receiving permission to enter, Tom found himself in a small, scantily-furnished room in a cottage.

Besides the young prince himself, there were present several chieftains of note.

All looked with great curiosity at Tom King, but especially was he regarded by Lochiel.

"Your royal highness," he said, "I must request you to keep secret who and what I am, or, rather, in what character you found me."

"Willingly."

"Then, if you will have patience to hear what I have to say, I will put it into as few words as possible."

"Is it so important?" asked one of the chiefs present, and who, by his appearance, he surmised to be the Earl of Mar.

"I think it so. If you will permit me to commence, I will tell you, and then leave you to judge."

There was no reply to this speech, so Tom began—

"The intelligence, my prince, that you had landed in Scotland fell into my hands in a strange manner. A little more than a week ago, while in the midland counties of England, I was travelling the high-road to Warwick, in company with my three friends, whom you have this day seen. We had been in the saddle many hours, and our steeds were tired, so we led them into a meadow on the road-side, in order that they might have a rest.

"We, too, were tired, and glad enough to lie down on the turf beside our steeds.

"Not for long, however, had we been in this position, when, in the distance, we heard the faint sound produced by the coming of a troop of horsemen.

"Having no idea who they were, we did not attempt to move, but resolved to lie still, and allow them to pass us.

"To our surprise, however, the horsemen—there were six of them—drew up in the lane exactly before the hedge behind which we lay concealed."

"A strange coincidence," said the Young Pretender, who felt a deep and immediate interest in the narrative, which is scarcely to be wondered at, for it was well calculated to excite it, and the feeling was shared in by all the grim highland chiefs around him.

"What to make of it we knew not," continued Tom King, "and, as we were fugitives, the idea very naturally took possession of our minds that they had some special reference to us, and that they had halted where they did because they knew it to be our hiding-place.

"But we soon found this, our first surmise, to be an incorrect one, for one of the mounted men spoke—

"'This place will do as well as any,' fancy,' he said, 'if you are quite sure he will pass here.'

"Then another one replied—

"'We are quite sure of that.'

"'Then get behind the hedge and wait,' said the one

who had first spoken, and who, for certain, was the commander of the others.

"And now I ought not to forget to mention that, filled with curiosity, we crept silently close to the hedge, and peered through it, in order to see what kind of men they were.

"Although it was night, we were well able to do this, for the moon was shining with unusual brightness, and brought to view the smallest objects.

"We saw, then, in the first place, that the strange and mysterious new-comers were in number six, and that they were each mounted on a steed of more than average quality.

"All six, we found, were dressed precisely alike, in dark-coloured vestments, and there was no distinction, in dress at least, between them. The one who had the command bore about him no distinguishing token by which he could be recognised from the others.

"When the order was given to conceal themselves behind the hedge, we looked upon our discovery as certain, but, strangely enough, they chose the one on the opposite side of the way.

"They leaped over into the meadow, and then lay perfectly still.

"What to make of all this we knew not; and while we were only ruminating upon the subject, the silence was disturbed by the faint clatter of horses' feet.

"We did not require to listen twice to know that it was a single rider who was approaching, nor that his steed was coming at a gallop.

"Clearly, you will think the men behind the hedge were lying in ambush for the one we heard coming, but we had no grounds sufficient for us to act, nor did we see how we were to interfere.

"On the horseman came, and at length he came in sight.

"For some reason or other, he reined in his steed as he reached the ambuscade.

"At last he came opposite to it.

"Just as he did so, a loud voice cried, in startling tones—

"'Halt!'"

"The horseman who had just arrived, we saw wore a kind of military costume, and it was only natural that he should obey the order with the promptitude he did.

"He checked his steed.

"But before he could look around, and ascertain from whence or from whom the order had come, we heard a loud report, as of the discharge of several muskets, and then the horseman, uttering a loud scream of agony, fell headlong, with his steed, into the roadway.

"A cloud of thin blue vapour for a moment hid all things from our sight, but a puff of wind carried it completely away."

CHAPTER CXCVII.

OUR FRIENDS ARE APPOINTED AS BODY-GUARD TO THE YOUNG PRINCE.

When Tom King reached this point in his narrative, he paused for breath, for he had spoken rapidly, and without stopping.

To his surprise, he found himself surrounded, hemmed in by a crowd of eager faces, for, as he had gone on, his auditors had, in the intensity of their interest, lessened little by little the space which intervened between them until they could positively come no closer.

However, when he paused, they drew back again, but they were still intent and listening eagerly for the next word he should utter.

Not only was there the interest the narrative itself excited, but in addition the fact pressed sternly upon them that all that they had hitherto heard was but the prelude of something that closely touched themselves.

"Proceed!" said the young prince; "let us hear the revel of this most mysterious and horrible affair."

"It will, your royal highness. As you may easily surmise, we were at first completely overwhelmed with horror, and were unable to move; but soon another phase in the drama developed itself, which had the effect of immediately restoring to us the use of our lost faculties.

"There was a movement on the opposite side of the hedge where the assassins had concealed themselves.

"Doubtless they were about to consummate their hellish purpose.

"But the sound, slight as it was, was enough to release us from the enchainment of our minds, and as if dominated by the same impulse, we all four sprang to our feet and dashed into the lane.

"Before, however, we could reach the spot where the murdered man lay, the six men had crawled through the hedge on their side.

"We met over the dead body—for both parties directed their steps to that one point, and reached it at the same moment.

"We had our swords drawn, and the hilts tightly in our grasp.

"So had they.

"Moreover, they out-numbered us; for, as I have said, they were six, we were four.

"We did not make an attack upon them, however, without first demanding an explanation of the causes that led to the commission of the foul deed we had witnessed; but, beyond saying that he was a traitor and a rebel, we could learn nothing.

"The man they had shot down was not dead; though, of course, had it not been for our intervention, they would quickly have extinguished the last spark of life remaining in his body.

"In brief, we fought the villains—for they are deserving of no better name—and worsted them.

"All but two were beaten to the ground, and these, in the most abject manner, sued for quarter, which we did not hesitate to grant to them, on condition of their throwing down their arms, and telling us all they knew of the affair.

"It was from the lips of these men that I first learned, my prince, that you had landed on the northern shores of Scotland, and were about to raise an army and invade England.

"In addition to this they told us that information had been given by a spy, that a messenger from you to the chief Jacobites in London would pass that way, and that he would carry with him papers of vast importance.

"To our inquiries whether that was the reason why they had been sent out upon such a brutal errand, they answered in the affirmative. And the sole reason they could give for the sanguinary deed was, that it was expected to find upon his person a list of names which would enable them to arrest the principal adherents to the house of Stuart then residing in London or its vicinity."

A loud, angry, guttural shout came from the throats of the highland chieftains and Prince Charles as they were made the recipients of this news, and their pale, stern faces, showed how deeply they felt the danger in which their cause and lives had been.

But the deep desire they felt to hear the remnant—for they could tell Tom King's narrative was now rapidly approaching a termination—made them curb as much as possible all outward manifestation of their feelings.

Amid a partial silence he continued—

"These two men, whom we found afterwards were soldiers, we suffered to escape; and then, having done so, we turned our attention to the wounded messenger.

"The moon still shone brightly, and showed us his figure very distinctly.

"The horse was quite dead.

"But his rider lived.

"Assuring him that we were friends, he with his latest breath confirmed what the men had told us, and, having given a cheer for Prince Charlie, he expired."

The eyes of the bold highlanders glistened, and the angry expression of their faces was softened somewhat when they thought of the loyalty of their countryman.

"And now," said Tom, "I shall be obliged to speak of myself. Believe me, my prince, that I am sincerely devoted to your cause; and so I resolved that, come what might, papers of so dangerous a character to you as I supposed those were carried by the messenger, should never fall into your enemies' hands; and so, loathsome as the task was, I stooped down to search the pockets of the murdered man.

"The result of that search, my prince, is here. I tender you the papers in the same condition as I found them in the wallet of the messenger. They have been in

my possession ever since, and during that time they have been touched and read by no one."

With these words, Tom King took from his pocket the packets of papers, and bending upon one knee, presented them to his prince.

Blood was upon them in many places.

And now the highlanders, but for the respect they felt for young Charles Stuart, would have crowded around our friend with every manifestation of friendship; but as it was, they held back.

The prince rose from the rude chair in the cottage, upon which he had been sitting, at the same time extending his hand to Tom King, and assisting him to rise likewise.

Then he placed his right hand upon the shoulder of the highwayman and spoke.

The tones of his voice were deep and fervent.

"For the great service you have rendered me," he said, I shall never be able to show myself sufficiently grateful. I am poor in thanks, and never had the gift of eloquently expressing myself in words. But, if I cannot speak, I can act, and you will find that I shall do so on the present occasion in a manner that will please and satisfy all; for, had these papers been taken possession of by our foes, we should have been irredeemably ruined."

Tom bowed.

There was a pleased feeling at his heart.

He had done a service, and it had been appreciated.

Still he did not wish the young chivalric prince to bestow the meed of honour upon him only, and, therefore, he took the earliest opportunity to state that his three friends had been animated by precisely the same feelings as he had, and desired that they might meet with a reward equal to his own.

This speech still further increased the admiration which the highlanders felt for our friend, for, let them have been as rude and unpolished as they may, they yet were able to properly appreciate magnanimity and courage — two qualities that must of necessity ever go together.

"Call them hither," said the prince.

This was done.

Our three friends, who had been outside during the whole of this scene, received the summons to enter with some surprise.

"It fills my heart with joy," said Prince Charles, as he gazed upon the forms of the four highwaymen, "and I am sure it must all those friends who are here present, to gaze upon such staunch friends to our cause, and such brave men. But," he added, turning to Tom King, "it is to you that I feel myself most specially indebted, and so I say to you, name your own reward for what you have done."

"I am more than repaid," replied Tom, "by possessing the kind opinion of your royal highness."

This speech pleased and flattered the Pretender.

It seemed as though he already held the sceptre in his grasp.

"But," he added, "there must be something you can wish for. Let me know what it is you wish to please me. If in my power, your request shall be granted."

"We have no other wish than to serve your royal highness," replied Tom King. "Will you permit us to join your ranks?"

"We have already done so," replied Charles, "but I will name something. I admire you. You are all four truly brave men, and I should like you to form a species of body-guard about my person. Will you do this?"

"Willingly, my prince! I am glad you made the proposal, for it is one I should never have presumed to ask myself. You will indeed confer a high honour upon us, and reward our services more richly than they deserve."

"Not so—not so!" replied the prince. "What is your opinion, my friends?" he continued, turning to the chiefs, who were around him. "Can I place too high a value upon the service which these men have collectively and individually rendered us?"

"No—no!" they cried, with one accord. "No—no! Hurrah! for the brave Southrons!"

As soon as the tumult had a little subsided, Lochiel stepped forward.

He looked upon our friends.

"Do you accept," he asked, "the post which your prince offers you? Are you content with that as a reward for all that you have done?"

"We are more than satisfied! We will defend him to the last gasp, and he need fear nothing from his enemies while we are round him."

Little by little the story of the assassinated messenger was diffused among the troops; and so, ere long, the four highwaymen found themselves treated wherever they went with the greatest consideration and respect.

Better days we hope are in store for them than any they have yet seen, but at present we have only the hope to rely upon.

We must, with what patience we can, continue to watch the progress of events as we have hitherto done.

CHAPTER CXCVIII.

THE YOUNG PRETENDER SUFFERS HIMSELF TO BE DELUDED BY HIS TRANSIENT TRIUMPHS.

EVERY hour which now elapsed only served to show fresh men flocking to the standard of the Pretender, whose troops now began to assume the appearance of a regular army.

But all these proceedings had not taken place without attracting a great deal of notice to them, and the result was that Sir John Cope, the commander-in-chief of the forces in the south of Scotland, received instructions to raise what force he could, and march against the rebels.

Intelligence of this soon reached the Pretender's camp, who, under the advice of his chiefs, set his troops in motion, and began his march southward, their avowed object being to take possession of the palace of St. James's, in London.

By the intimate knowledge of the mountain passes which some of the highlanders possessed, they were able, without much trouble, to elude the force under Sir John Cope.

The two armies passed each other in Argyleshire, and the young prince proceeded to Perth.

Of this place they took possession, without the least resistance being offered them; in fact, they were much strengthened, for they were joined by the Duke of Perth, Lord Murray, Lord Nairn, and many others of less note, yet all powerful men.

Flushed with their success, and auguring from it the most favourable conclusions, the rebel army left Perth behind them, and pushed forward rapidly, the point to which they were directing their steps being the city of Edinburgh.

This they reached in three days.

They found the ancient city in a very defenceless state, and, as their numbers were now very formidable, they took possession of it with very little trouble.

Here they supplied themselves with arms and ammunition, and on the following day marched out to attack the royal army under the command of General Cope.

The two opposing forces came in sight of each other at a place which will be ever memorable in English history.

This was Preston Pans.

Early in the morning the Pretender's troops made a furious attack upon their foes, and threw them into unspeakable confusion.

The conflict was a desperate one, but at length the Young Pretender gained a complete victory over his foes, and compelled them to fly before him like chaff before the wind.

Still more elated, they marched back to Edinburgh, and the next morning attacked the castle, which had been put in the best possible posture for defence by the governor.

But it would seem that the rebels were destined to carry all before them.

They were now, at least, twelve thousand strong.

Leaving Edinburgh, and indulging in the wildest hopes of ultimate success, they determined to penetrate into England.

In accordance with this determination, they proceeded to Carlisle, and, much to the surprise of the inhabitants of that city, they were discovered one morning as the fog cleared off surrounding the walls.

This unexpected sight filled them with a panic from which they never recovered. The most exaggerated accounts had reached them of the power of the rebels, and they felt that their last hour was come.

But, when the attack was made upon this city, great difficulty was experienced in carrying it, for a desperate

resistance was made at the eleventh hour. It, however, availed nothing. The young prince was again a victor.

It can easily be understood how rapidly people would flock to his standard under such circumstances as these; and, indeed, the manner in which their numbers increased was really astounding.

The French, too, now that they saw some prospect of the Pretender carrying out his original intention, hastened to send arms, ammunition, and money to his assistance, all of which were very thankfully received.

But during this time the English Government was not idle, and the king thought fit to send his son, the Duke of Cumberland, at the head of eight battalions, and nine squadrons just returned from service abroad, to march against them.

But, in the meanwhile, the young prince, by the counsel of his officers, lost no time in following up the advantages he had gained, and he continued his course for some time longer into the very heart of England.

It will be noticed that we have not entered into the details of this episode in the lives of the highwaymen. There is so little always to vary the monotony of a soldier's life, almost constantly on duty, that particulars would but be destructive to interest.

In consequence of the favour with which they were looked on by the prince and the whole body of the soldiery, they fared much better than many of the others did. From this circumstance, however, it must not be inferred that they had no privations to endure, but then they were tolerably inured to hardships of all kinds.

As, however, the rebel army got farther into England, so did their dangers and difficulties increase. They no longer met with the easy victories which they had done hitherto. Every point had to be contended with the sword's point.

And now, to add to the young chief's troubles, disaffection arose among the troops. The highland chiefs, as they got nearer to the object, got more and more frightened at its magnitude, and would willingly have withdrawn.

England was to them a *terra incognita*, and they advanced with much the same feelings as the ancients when first prosecuting their discoveries.

It was in vain the prince exhorted them not to leave him and abandon his enterprise when so close upon achievement. They grew more obstinate, and at last refused to proceed altogether.

This was a dilemma which the prince was very far from anticipating.

There was, of course, much danger in advancing, but, perhaps, not any more than there would be in retreating. Either way they would have to cut their way through an army, for they were menaced both in front and rear.

To remain undecided, moving neither one way or the other, would be utter ruin, for it would give time for the two armies to coalesce, and then, hemmed in completely, what could they hope to do?

At last they began that disastrous retreat, so well remembered by the student of English history, and which, while it crushed the present rising, effectually put an end to all hopes of the Stuarts regaining possession of the throne.

It was with heavy and reluctant hearts that our friends turned their backs upon their undertaking. Such a course was entirely foreign to their nature. Rather than have retreated, they would have walked boldly and fearlessly to certain death.

But, under existing circumstances, what could they do? The more they saw of the young prince, the more they liked him, and the more deeply they sympathised with his unfortunate situation. With that chivalric feeling, which formed so important an element in their dispositions, they resolved to stand by him to the last.

The post of body-guard, to which they had been appointed, they maintained throughout the whole of the campaign.

Between the young Pretender and Tom King there arose a warm feeling of friendship. At his earnest solicitations, the highwayman had acquainted him with the melancholy details of his history.

Their ages, too, were similar; and so this friendship, strange as it may at first sight seem, was not much to be wondered at.

Nearly did all four feel for the distress of the Pretender when his army, of which he had had such great expectations, fairly turned their backs upon London, and began their retreat.

Sanguine and enthusiastic as he was, he had continued to hope on, and had never allowed himself to be cast down by any adverse circumstance. Now, however, it was impossible for him to hope any longer; the bright vision which he had had before him from the earliest moment of his existence faded away.

From town to town, from city to city, they went, enduring greater hardships than could be conceived, and those of the populace who had been favourable to them, when there was a chance of their gaining their ends, now turned against them with the utmost fury.

The consequence of this was, that all order was lost. The troops no longer marched in companies, but diffused themselves in every direction, committing excesses of all kinds.

It may be imagined with what different feelings the young prince re-entered the towns of which he had taken possession during his advance. Then his heart was elate with joy. He saw in the distance the great project of his life achieved. Now all was at an end.

No matter what may be the prejudices or new sympathies of any one, it is impossible not to feel a deep interest and pity for the fate of this young man.

Like his father before him, he had only been made the tool of others, who desired to gain their own ends, not his.

At length the borders of Scotland were reached, and the soldiers, now that they found their feet upon their native soil, felt ashamed of their fears, and expressed a return of that bravery and courage for which they have always been celebrated.

They resolved even yet not to abandon the Pretender's cause, but make a bold and vigorous stand.

But it was too late.

Awful words!

They seem like a death knell.

Too late!

The resolution was one that should have been made long ago.

The government had had time to take such measures as would effectually crush the insurrection, even though it was thrice as great and thrice as powerful as it then was.

The king's troops, under the command of the Duke of Cumberland, were hard upon their track.

Sanguine to the last, the Pretender hoped that this most desperate chance would enable him to retrieve his shattered fortunes.

CHAPTER CXCIX.

WHICH RELATES HOW THE REBEL ARMY AND THE KING'S TROOPS FOUGHT A PITCHED BATTLE UPON CULLODEN MOOR.

Not to weary the reader too much with historic details, we will pass over all the minor incidents which occurred, and present to him a scene full of grandeur, magnificence, and horror.

It is the night before the battle of Culloden—that struggle upon which depended everything.

The two armies had halted at some distance from each other; but both, having decided on a pitched battle, determined to abide the issue of the day.

In the rebel camp—for such we must perforce denominate it—all is bustle and excitement, despite the fatigue from which all suffered.

The young prince was much agitated, nor could all the assurances of his friends tend in any way to calm him.

He felt with full intensity the importance of the coming struggle.

But there was a little tent pitched not far from the one appropriated to the use of the Pretender, and, from among all the others dotted over the plain, we select that one for our especial consideration.

The weather was bitter cold, but in this tent there blazed, in a kind of iron-basket in the centre, a good fire, round which were seated four familiar faces.

Does the reader require to be told who they are?

The fatigue and harassment of the campaign had left its traces upon them.

They were pale and thin, with their features sharp and sunken.

All but Tom King looked sombre.

He all through had felt, and still continued to feel, as deep an interest in the whole struggle as though he had been the prince himself, and though he felt ill at ease about the morrow yet his enthusiasm would not allow him to show it.

He was elate.

"Do not look so moody, my friends," he said. "From to-morrow all will be changed, for I have still the greatest confidence in the highland broadswords. There is not a man who is not fully conscious that all will depend upon this day's issue."

"That may be," said Claude Duval; "and I sincerely trust that so it may turn out, but I fear it will not."

"And I," said Sixteen-String Jack; "in fact, I look upon the Pretender's cause as perfectly hopeless."

"But you will not desert it on that account?" asked Tom, eagerly.

"Certainly not. Having gone so far, I will see the end."

"And you, Dick?"

"Of course, I shall remain with you. I hope we shall all cling together! To-morrow will be a sharp contest. Hitherto, you must remember, we have been fortunate enough to escape without a wound. Whether we shall do so or not to-morrow is another matter."

"Do not anticipate evil, Dick," said King. "You seem very gloomy to-night; to be sure, there is cause for gloominess."

"It may be, Tom, that this is destined to be the last time we shall all four sit together. I do feel very heavy at my heart, but that is a thing no one can help."

"For one," said Duval, "I always cling to the belief that there sometimes comes such things as presentiments of danger."

"Talk upon some other subject," said Tom King. "The more you dwell upon such imaginary evils, the more terrible they become."

"True—true! But let me ask you to speak candidly, and say what chance you think there is of any good coming of this rash undertaking."

"Things do not look very promising just now, to be sure," replied King; "but yet I do not despair."

"Nor I, exactly; but from one of the spies I learned the British army is much superior to ours in point of numbers and weapons; and not only that, the men are all thoroughly rested."

"Which cannot be said of ours," chimed in Sixteen-String Jack. "Such a miserable lot of half-starved wretches I never remember to have seen."

"But they have true courage and are strong, and so the king's troops will find them to-morrow."

"You will, perhaps, think it foolish," said Dick Turpin, "but I cannot divest myself of the idea that fate has all along been unpropitious to this enterprise. There has been nothing gained as yet, and I do not believe there ever will. Too much valuable time was wasted at the first—time which they should have employed in active operations against the enemy. Time lost can never be regained. It afforded the government the opportunity of concerting the most summary proceedings against us. Tom, my friend, rely upon it, we have lost the day. The young prince, Charles Edward Stuart, will retire into that obscurity from which he has emerged, and never be heard of more."

Tom King shook his head.

"I am of that opinion," said Duval.

"And so am I," coincided Jack.

"You are all against me, then?" said Tom; and as he asked the question, there was just the least tinge of vexation perceptible in the tone of his voice.

"We are."

"I am sorry to hear you say as much," he replied, "very sorry."

"But in a few hours we shall know the worst."

"Or the best."

"Yes, or the best; but I should say the former would be most likely as regards ourselves."

"I cannot help your being of such an opinion; but, my friends, for the sake of all of us, and for the sake of the young prince, who has acted so well to us, do not go out to-morrow to the conflict with such thoughts as those upon your minds."

"How can it be helped?"

"That I leave to yourselves; but you cannot do otherwise than agree with me in saying that were such a feeling general throughout the army, defeat would be inevitable."

"So it would."

"Confidence in a cause or undertaking goes a long way towards insuring its success."

"I know that," said Turpin, "and will try my best to look on the bright side of things. You ought to know that I am not one given to despondence."

"That is true, I admit."

"Look here, Tom, I will promise you this, and I should not be afraid to say that Claude and Jack will promise you the same thing."

"What is it?"

"Why, that to-morrow—or, rather, to-day, for it is now long past midnight—in the struggle we will, as much for your sake as anything, cast our own feelings and prejudices on one side, and use our best individual exertions in the coming fray. Do you promise, Jack?"

"Willingly."

"And you, Claude?"

"Most certainly."

"I am glad to hear as much," said Tom King; "do not forget, I pray, how much depends upon the issue of to-morrow's conflict. It will either make or ruin us."

"No, no," said Turpin, "I will not say that."

"Why not?"

"Because it would not be true."

"But I maintain it would."

"How can that be?"

"Explain yourself."

"With all my heart. I grant, in the first place, that if the Young Pretender"——

"He is no pretender."

"Well, then, the young prince. I say I am willing to grant that if he gains the day our position may be much bettered; but I do not see that it follows we should be any worse off if he loses than we were before we joined ourselves to his fortunes."

"I don't say we should; but what I meant was, there would be no hope of quitting our late mode of life upon the road."

"Nor, to tell the truth," said Dick Turpin, "do I particularly wish to do so. Next to it, the life of a soldier must be most adventurous and exciting, but I am sure I shall never prefer it."

"And shall you never tire of the highway?"

"Who knows? I fear there is not much chance of our doing anything else. Our lives are now doubly forfeit, and to hope for pardon or mercy would be mere folly. As we have been so must we be."

"Let us defer the consideration of that until after the battle. But there is one point in connexion with it which we have not hitherto touched upon, but yet which I should like you to attentively consider."

"What is it, Tom? Speak out."

"I will. Let us suppose the battle over, the king's troops victorious, and the young prince defeated."

"That is a very rational and probable supposition, indeed," broke in Claude Duval.

"It may be."

"But go on."

"Will you listen to me?"

"Certainly we will."

"Well, then," resumed Tom, who was not altogether pleased with his companions' manner, "supposing that things should eventuate in the manner I have spoken of, the young prince's position, assuming that he should escape death or capture, will be a most dangerous one, will it not?"

"It will, indeed."

"But what should you do under the circumstances?"

"In what way?"

"I mean should you depart in the best way you are able, or should you consider it your duty to stick by Prince Charlie to the last?"

"I don't know for the last"——

"I mean until we have seen him disposed in some place of safety. Whether you do or not, I consider that you are in duty bound to do so. He appointed us, as a token

of his esteem, to be his body guard, and that, too, at a time when thing looked promising; and no amount of reasoning will make me think it less than an act of baseness to desert him in the hour of difficulty and danger."

"You are chivalric, Tom, to a degree."

"No matter, I feel that I am right."

"And so do we. Until you mentioned it, we never gave the matter the least thought; but rest assured, let the fortune of war be what it will, we, like you, will hold by him until we see him in safety—seated either on the British throne, or landed on some shore where he will be out of the reach of his foes."

"We are, then, it seems, quite agreed upon this point. I am glad of it. But morning cannot be far distant; let us, ere it comes, obtain what sleep and rest we can, for who knows how long it may be before we have another opportunity?"

CHAPTER CC.

DICK TURPIN SAVES THE LIFE OF CHARLES STUART, THE YOUNG PRETENDER, AT THE BATTLE OF CULLODEN.

MISTILY, gloomily, coldly, and cheerlessly dawned the morning which preceded the dread battle of Culloden.

So dark was it that neither army was astir until a much later hour than they had intended.

The heavens were covered with one huge black cloud, which, like a funeral pall, hid the face of the god of day, whose beams should otherwise, for an hour before, have revivified the earth.

Prince Charles, when he perceived the aspect of the weather, and noted the absence of the sun, drew an unfavourable augury from both events, and allowed his spirits to become proportionably depressed.

Unlike the savage and ruthless Duke or Gloster, he was not endued with that philosophic force which Shakspeare has, in common with many of his other characters, assigned to him; and so the young prince could not chase away the ominous effect it had upon him by thinking, as he did, upon a similar occurrence in the well-remembered scene before the battle of Bosworth Field, where he asks who has seen the sun, and is replied to, that he has not yet broken forth:—

> Then he disdains to shine—for by the clock,
> He should have braved the east an hour ago:
> Not shine to-day! Why, what is that to me,
> More than to Richmond? for the self-same heaven
> That frowns on me, looks lowering upon him!

But, as we have said, the young prince could not draw consolation from such a source; and though those around him endeavoured to rally him, the attempt was unsuccessful.

It was nearly eleven o'clock in the forenoon before the opposing forces fairly came in contact with each other; but, from that moment, a struggle commenced of so sanguinary a character as had never before been known.

The highlanders, although some discontent had arisen respecting the position the several clans occupied, behaved with great valour and intrepidity.

To add to their difficulties, a fine, sharp, sleety rain, of that kind so common in Scotland, began to fall. It was carried by a high wind into their faces, which, accustomed as they were to inclement weather, baffled and confused them.

As for the royalists, they felt comparatively little or no inconvenience from it, for they had the wind and rain to their backs instead of to their faces.

It has been general on the part of those antagonistic to the Stuart cause to describe the young scion, Charles Edward, as a young man destitute of personal courage, and especially is the statesman Horace Walpole noticeable for this, but there are two sides to all questions, and it is hardly likely that we should be correctly portrayed by our enemies.

The fact was, since Charles had found it necessary and advisable to adopt the costume of his own men in order that he might not be recognizable from the mass except by those who knew him. As must be well known to all, the government had offered a reward of £30,000 to any one who should take him prisoner either dead or alive, and we shall see presently how this circumstance actually turned out favourable to the prince, instead of adverse, as any one would think.

The four highwaymen, with him in their centre, could be seen in the very thickest of the fray, urging the men to make still greater efforts, and using every possible argument they could to induce them to do so.

Very soon, however, was the disagreeable conviction forced upon those best qualified to form an opinion that the hope of the Stuarts gaining a victory was but slight indeed. The highlanders, bold as they were, could not make any impression on the English bayonet—the most formidable of all weapons in the hands of a determined infantry.

Onwards—imperceptibly at first, but yet there was a movement—came the British troops, and, as a matter of course, as they pressed forward, so did the highlanders retreat.

But the advantage gained by the king's troops was only temporary. The moor in many places was little better than a treacherous bog or morass, and, fearful lest the soft, oozy mud should ingulf them, they held back.

This moment was seized upon by the prince's troops to make a furious charge upon their foes, nor was the opportunity ill-chosen.

Prince Charles himself, mounted upon a powerful war-horse, and surrounded by his body-guard, the four highwaymen, led the way; and this was an act which excited the utmost enthusiasm of his men, and made them second his efforts with unparalleled intrepidity.

The royalist troops wavered.

One of the first to note this was the prince.

Joy, and triumph, and hope beamed in his eye; and, holding his claymore aloft, he cried aloud to his followers in their native tongue.

They dashed impetuously onwards.

But the royalists had received a reinforcement, and came to a stand.

The infantry sank down, and presented a triple row of bristling steel bayonets, which looked as solid as a wall.

And here, it should be stated, that the Duke of Cumberland, brother to King George the Second, and commander of the troops, found a new mode of using the bayonet, which was put into execution with terrible effect.

It may be briefly described in a few words.

The usual plan was for the bayonet-man to attack the swordsman facing him; but, instead of this, the left-hand bayonet-man attacked the swordsman fronting his right-hand man. From this it will be seen that he was covered by his adversary's target, where he was open on his left, and his adversary's right was open to him.

This change produced an inconceivable difference.

Puzzled at this fresh mode of fighting, the highlanders staggered.

Following up their advantage the bayonet-men pressed more closely upon them, until they forced them to retreat.

It was in vain that the young prince and the gallant hearts he had around him strove to once more rally their almost defeated troops. They were deaf to all commands, all entreaties, and all threats; and, at last, fairly turned and fled.

Prince Charles made a bold stand to the last, resolved that no effort of his own should be wanting to insure the victory; but, while in the very act of beating back an enemy, his claymore, which had hitherto served him so well, snapped off suddenly, about six inches from the hilt, leaving him, for a moment, utterly defenceless.

His foes pressed closely upon him, and one would assuredly have taken his life had not Dick Turpin, with the greatest promptitude, sprung forward, aimed a pistol, hastily drew the trigger, and fired.

The reader knows already that it was very rarely indeed Dick missed his mark; and this time he assuredly did not, for the soldier, with an awful death-shriek, fell backwards on the battle-field.

"Alight, my prince!" cried Turpin, hurriedly. "Down! down! it is our only chance! They are upon us!"

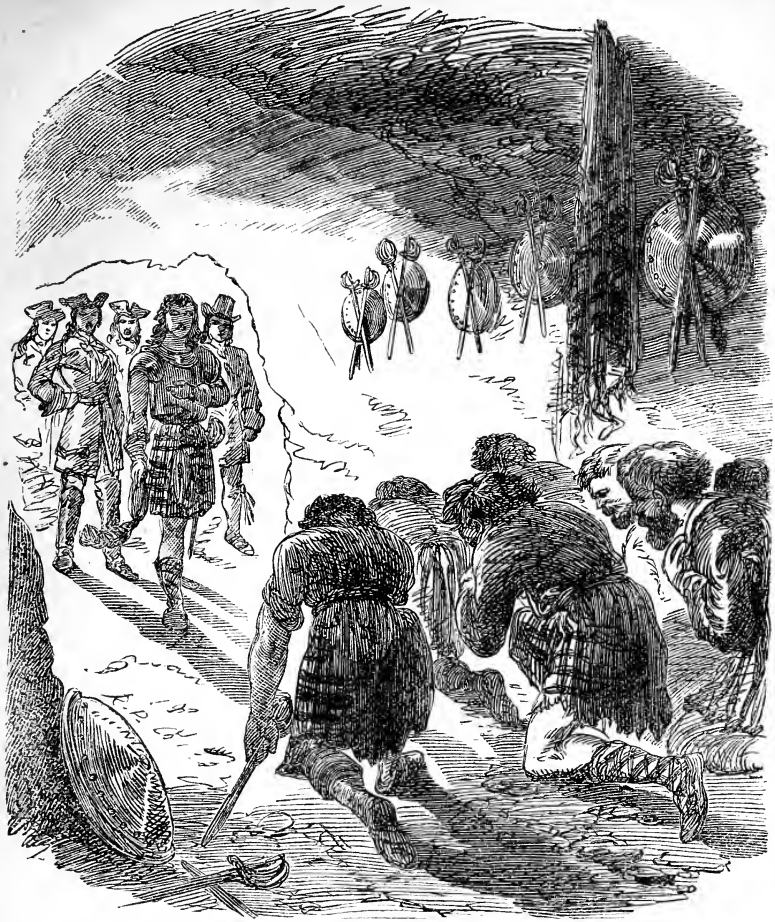
Seizing the Young Pretender by the arm, he half-dragged, half-assisted him from his horse.

Then followed a volley of musketry, which, if he had been in the saddle, would assuredly have riddled the prince with bullets.

As it was, he was safe, or comparatively so, but the king's troops at that moment made a sudden charge.

Both turned to fly.

The prince had hold of the highwayman by one arm



[THE BANDITTI IN THE CAVERN AFFORD THE FUGITIVE PRINCE PROTECTION.]

But one or both of them, in their blind haste, caught their feet against some obstacle, and were thrown heavily to the ground.

Ere they could regain their feet, something fell with terrific force upon them.

The next moment the right wing of the royal army rushed over them at full speed.

Tom King, Sixteen-String Jack, and Claude Duval had, in the rapid encounter, got in some way separated from them.

They were on foot, and armed to the teeth, and well, indeed, was it for their safety that they were, for the tide of battle that drifted them from the side of the prince carried them into the very thickest of the fight, where they had to use every exertion to defend themselves.

As it was, Claude Duval was struck down by a bullet, and as his companions feared, killed, and though they would fain have ascertained the extent of his injuries, and, if possible, have got him on his feet, yet they were unable to do so without running the risk of being thrown down and trampled to death, so impetuous was this last and decisive charge of the king's troops.

Like the rest, therefore, they scattered before it, and finding that there was no hope of gaining the day, and that their lives depended upon their speedy flight, they managed to escape with only one or two trifling hurts.

But when, after for an hour or so fleeing from their foes, they sunk exhausted on the ground, they began to entertain the most serious misgivings for their companion's fate, and for the young prince's also.

But the only chance they had of safety was to remain where they were for some time, at least.

So soon, however, as it was prudent for them to do so, they determined to rise and seek them.

The hearts of both were heavy, and, not only that, they were filled with disappointment; Tom King especially so, for he had, up to the last, hugged the belief that the Pretender's army would prove the victors.

Now, however, he saw that hope entirely lost. The downfall of the Stuarts was complete, and from such a

defeat as that which they met at the fatal battle on Culloden Moor, he felt certain they would never recover.

But we shall see what next took place in this crisis in our friends' affairs.

CHAPTER CCI.

TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SEARCH THE BATTLE-FIELD BY TORCHLIGHT FOR THEIR MISSING COMRADES.

It is the night after the battle of Culloden.

The strife of battle is over.

Heaps of dead and dying strew the plain.

From the latter there comes incessantly a terrible groaning sound. At times it is louder than others, as some chill blast of air sweeps over the bleak moor, augmenting the sufferings of those who lie there helpless to move.

The aggregation of sound which rose from the hundreds of parched and burning throats was truly horrible. It was the representative of a world of agony.

An almost full moon showed her face now and then as gaps in the clouds occurred, revealing upon such occasions with greater distinctness the melancholy spectacle.

Different portions of the plain are also brought into vivid relief by pine-wood torches, borne by those who have come to search for some friend or relative among the ghastly mass.

Other figures, too, could have been seen creeping stealthily about. They were the plunderers of the slain.

How much additional pain these wretched carrion caused, no tongue can tell.

Very few upon the battle field who wore the Highland dress were left alive. They had not fallen until they had not breath and strength enough left to stand.

The Duke of Cumberland, with the natural ferocity of his disposition, had given his men the order, in a significant tone, "to take no prisoners."

All knew what was meant, and the savage order was ruthlessly carried out.

Among those who bore torches and searched among the dying and the dead, seeking for a familiar face, were two old friends of the readers.

Each carried a blazing torch in his left hand, and a sword in his right.

The features of both, as they were occasionally seen with more than usual plainness, bore upon them the impress of fatigue and disappointment.

"This is weary work, Tom," said one, after they had one by one displaced a large heap of slain. "Very weary work."

"It is, indeed, Jack," replied the other; "but I hope it will not be fruitless."

"And so do I, indeed. We have met with no success as yet, and we have travelled over no inconsiderable portion of the field."

"We have. None but those who have experienced it can tell what it is to search a place like this. I had no idea how vast it was."

"Nor I, Jack. But do not let us despair."

"No—no."

"I knew you would not."

"I will not."

"It is very strange that we should lose both of them—or, as I might say, all three."

"You think, then, the young prince is on the field."

"I do. I feel almost sure of it, indeed, and for that reason I have done my best to spread a report that he had retreated to Inverness."

"And so, by sending his foes upon a wrong track, give him a better chance of escape."

"Just so, but I tremble for him if he is here wounded anywhere. There are many who know him who would not scruple to deprive him of his life, for, as you know, the reward of £30,000 will be paid to any one who will carry his head to London."

"The Hanoverians are bloodthirsty butchers."

"Right. They do not want him a prisoner. They are by far too merciless. They want him dead, for, while he lives, they just exist in terror."

"Let us hope he will escape from the power of his foes. Poor young man, his lot is a sad one."

"I cannot help pitying him myself, Tom."

"Nor can any one with the least spark of ruth within their bosoms. He has his faults and failings, but then he has had enough to try his temper."

"So he has."

"Just help me, Jack, a moment," said Tom King. "There seems to be some one lying under this great horse. I don't know whether we shall manage it, but let us try to move him. It may be one of those we seek lies underneath him."

"I hope not, for if there is I would not give much for his life! It would be stifled out of them."

"I am afraid it would, but Jack, my friend, you must not, because we have escaped without scarcely a scratch, expect that the others have been equally fortunate. If we find them at all, we shall find them badly wounded, perhaps dead."

"I hope not," said Sixteen-String Jack. "I shall be good for nothing if Claude should be no more."

"It is strange where he could have gone. He was by our side when we were overtaken by that rush and cast down, and I thought he was cast down with us."

"But it seems he was not."

"It does; but you must not forget that, though we made a search for him around the spot where we ourselves rose, it was necessarily an imperfect one, and since that time we have not been able to say with certainty this is the place."

"All that is very true, and I don't dispute a word of it. The plain bears always the same appearance by this light, let you go where you will."

"I am of opinion that we have not reached the spot again where we fell, though, of course, I could not speak positively."

"It may be, Tom," said Sixteen-String Jack, "that Claude has been made a prisoner."

"Very likely he has, and yet I don't know, the order given to the soldiery by the butcher, Cumberland, was to make no prisoners."

"And that is equivalent to no quarter."

"The same thing in other words; but come, my friend, help me to move this horse. We shall be doing some one a good service, for I can hear there is some person beneath who is alive."

"All right; but it will take our whole united strength to move the animal."

"I know it will."

"And we have only got one hand at liberty. What are we to do with the torches?"

"I don't know, hardly."

"Nor I."

"The ground is soft."

"A good thought. We shall, I daresay, be able to stick them upright in the damp soil. Try."

"I will."

After several unsuccessful efforts, the two highwaymen succeeded in sticking their torches perpendicularly in the ground, where they burned almost as well as they did while they held them in their hands.

This done, they turned the whole of their attention to moving the horse to which they had alluded, and which seemed to be lying upon two or three people.

He was unusually large and powerful.

To various portions of his body there clung pieces of harness, the character of which seemed to show that this horse had been used to drag a cannon about the field.

He was quite dead, and his whole body was rigid as marble.

How he came there of course they knew not, but from what they could see, it would appear that he had broken from the gun-carriage, and had either been shot down where he then was, or had fallen there exhausted.

But whichever of these it might be, assuredly did not much matter.

With right goodwill they set about the removal of the gigantic beast, and in doing so they were careful not to inflict any additional injury upon those beneath it.

The task was one almost beyond their strength to accomplish, but at length they succeeded.

The moment afterwards a voice, well known to both, said—

"Many thanks, you have saved my life. I know you, or I am mistaken."

"The prince!" cried Tom King.

"Yes, help me to my feet."

"But are you wounded?"

"I think not. I am bruised by that horse falling upon me, but that is all, and I fancy nothing more ails your companion."

"Companion, my prince! Which one?"

"Turpin."

"Ha!"

"He was with me in the strife, and by great promptitude shot a soldier through the heart, who would otherwise most certainly have slain me."

"And he saved you?"

"He did," said the prince, who, having risen, was able to stand by supporting himself with his sword. "He dragged me from my horse, and bade me fly. He clutched me tightly by the arm, and pulled me so I was forced to obey him; but the enemy charged, and in our hasty flight we stumbled, and something fell upon us seemingly a ton weight, and after that I remember nothing until this moment."

"I rejoice, my prince, that you are no worse hurt. I have sent your foes upon a false track, by spreading a report that you had fled to Inverness, which will make it all the easier for you to quit the field."

"I shall never know the extent of my obligation to you," said Charles Stuart; "but before we talk upon such subjects as those, we ought to see to the state of your companion."

"Dick Turpin!"

"Yes; you will find him on the ground, somewhere close to the spot where I myself laid."

"Is he killed, my prince?"

"No, I think not. I do no expect to find him any worse hurt than I am."

"That is good news," said Jack. "We were almost beginning to despair of finding him, for we have searched the field very many hours."

"Another of our companions is also missing, my prince," said Tom King, "and that is Claude Duval. During the last impetuous charge made by the king's troops we got in some manner separated, nor have we been able since to find anything of him."

"Indeed, you have been unfortunate, and yet things might have been much worse; but why do you not attend your comrade, who, I say, fell down with me?"

"Pardon us, prince. With your permission we will do so now."

"And I will sit down upon the carcase of the horse the while, for standing tires me."

As he spoke, the young Prince Charles, who was in a sadly exhausted condition, sat down upon the haunches of the war-horse, while the two highwaymen again taking their torches in their hands, commenced an examination of the dead bodies that had been buried under the noble animal.

CHAPTER CCII.

OUR FRIENDS, AFTER MUCH DIFFICULTY, FIND THE BODY OF CLAUDE DUVAL UPON THE BATTLE-FIELD.

SUDDENLY a cry broke from Tom King's lips, which was immediately echoed by one from those of Sixteen-String Jack.

They had recognised Turpin.

He was lying quite motionless, in a strange huddled-up attitude.

Instantly replacing their torches in the earth, they stooped down and straightened his limbs.

Dick groaned slightly as this was done, but he did not in any other way manifest his consciousness.

Still the sound was a welcome one to his two comrades, for it was enough to show them that life still held possession.

His body was very cold, but that was scarcely to be wondered at, considering the inclemency of the season, and the length of time he had been lying upon the ground.

Before departing upon their melancholy expedition, Tom King had taken care to provide himself with a bottle containing some kind of pungent essence, so taking the little glass stopper out of the neck, he held it to his friend's nostrils.

One inhalation was enough.

Uttering a long-drawn sigh, Turpin opened his eyes.

He looked for a minute or two confusedly about him, and then he remembered what had taken place.

He raised himself to a sitting posture, and then, by the aid of Jack's arm, gained his feet.

But he had almost taxed his strength too far.

Every object which he saw appeared to be spinning round him in mad gyrations.

By closing his eyes, however, he put an end to that.

"How are you, Dick?" asked his companions, anxiously.

"Better!"

"That is well."

"My brain swims, but I am getting the better of that now."

"It will soon cease," said Jack.

"Are you wounded?" asked Tom King. "I have looked, but did not discover any traces of one."

"No, I am not wounded—at least, I think not. It was that confounded horse that did it. He threw us down, and then fell with his whole weight on the top of us. I lay a long while perfectly aware of what was going on, but after a time I lost all consciousness."

"I think it was fortunate we found you when we did. You were doubled up in a very awkward way, and it is quite a mystery to me how you managed to draw your breath."

"It was that that finished me, my friend. You see I got into that position by my own exertions, in trying to get free from the mass above me, but I could not manage it."

"Well, well; let us be thankful you are no worse."

"Where is the prince?" cried Dick. "Have you found him? He fell down, and lay beside me, for he was buried by the horse."

"I am here," said the Young Pretender, as he stepped forward a few paces, for he had been standing on one side in order to allow the friends to speak to each other without restraint.

"And unhurt?" said Turpin.

"Quite, with the exception of some such bruises as you yourself may have received, but they are nothing."

"That is good news. Tom, my friend?"

"Yes, Dick."

"I feel rather faint."

"I suppose you do."

"Have you got such a thing about you as a drop of brandy?"

"To be sure, why didn't I think of it before. Forgive me, my friend."

"Oh! don't mention it."

"At least, it is not brandy, but it is something quite as good. I could not get brandy for love or money."

"What is it, then?" asked Dick, as he took from his comrade's hand a tolerable-sized bottle, and carried it to his lips.

"Rum."

"Better still," replied Turpin. Then, before he tasted the spirit, he turned and handed it to the prince.

"Drink," he said; "I am sure you must require some stimulant. Drink deeply, for we shall have great fatigue, doubtless, to undergo."

Thus adjured, the Young Pretender took the bottle, and drank a portion of its contents.

He then returned it to Turpin, who let it trickle down his throat at an alarming rate.

"Stop! stop!" said Tom and Jack. "Stop! stop! Don't drink it all, Dick. We shall want some left for Claude Duval."

"Claude Duval. Where is he? Not here?"

It was the first time Dick had noticed that one familiar face and form was absent.

"No," replied Tom King, "Claude is not here."

"Is he dead?"

"No. At least I hope not. We were all three thrown down and trampled upon by a sudden charge made by the enemy's troops."

"Like the prince and myself."

"Just so; but when we rose, although we searched in every direction for Claude, we could not find him."

"Has he been taken prisoner?"

"I trust not; but that is more than I can tell. I fancy we shall find him somewhere on the plain, even as we found you."

"Have you searched long?"

"Nearly four hours."

"What time is it, then?"

"I know not, but I should fancy it wants about two hours of daybreak."

"No more?"

"I fancy not."

"We must be speedy, then," said Turpin, who every moment recovered himself more and more, for the hurts he had received were really most insignificant. "We must find some safe hiding-place between now and daylight. It will never do for either the prince or ourselves to remain here."

"Very true, Dick; and so, if you are strong enough, we will resume our search for Claude at once."

"Oh, yes, I am strong enough; and you, my prince, what will you do?"

"With your permission, accompany you."

"You are most welcome so to do, but let me ask you the question that was asked of me, 'Are you strong enough?'"

"I think so. At any rate I will make the attempt, if you will lead the way."

"Agreed, my prince. I think, under all circumstances, you will be safest in our company, and should you feel the exertion beyond your powers, we can each take it in turns to support you."

"You are brave fellows," said Prince Charles. "Would that I had had a few more in my army like you, and the result would have been very different."

To this speech neither of our friends made any reply. It was a delicate point to talk upon.

Instead of speaking, then, they stooped down and took up their torches, and set forward again on their dreary task of turning over and peering into the countenance of every dead and wounded body to which they came.

The time that this consumed was really prodigious, but they toiled manfully at it.

Whatever amount of feebleness Dick Turpin might have felt, he allowed none whatever to be seen, and no one would have credited that he was so near death so short a time before.

As Dick would insist upon carrying a torch, the chief part of the pulling about fell to the share of Sixteen-String Jack, who was the only one who had his two hands at liberty, for the young prince walked by the aid of a sword which he had picked up, and which he used as a walking-stick.

On, on they went, with the same unsuccess. Hundreds of bodies had passed under their notice, but not the one they sought.

For some little time now the moon had been completely hidden by clouds, and the only light they had was such as the torches afforded them.

But now the moon broke forth again.

She was low down on the horizon, and her splendour was dimmed by the vapours that were floating in the atmosphere, and the rays which she cast upon the battle-field were dull and sickly.

But, by contrast with the darkness that had previously prevailed, they seemed comparatively bright.

Our friends were certainly enabled to see to a greater distance around them than they were before.

Sixteen-String Jack happened to stand up just as the moon thus broke forth, having been for the past few moments busily engaged in disentangling a body of men.

As he looked round, he said—

"Tom—Tom!"

"Yes."

"Glance about you. Don't this place look familiar to you."

"It does, rather. We have been here before."

"We have, that's very true, but when?"

"We have not been going over the same ground again in our search, have we?" asked Dick Turpin.

"No, no, I don't mean that; but it was just about this spot that we were when the enemy charged upon us."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I can tell it by that little mound of earth there, which is just where we fell."

"I know it now," said Tom King, "though I did not at first."

"And Claude was with you, you say?" said Turpin, interrogating.

"He was."

"And thrown down with you?"

"To the best of our belief."

"Then it appears to me this is the most likely spot to find him."

"But we have already searched it."

"And you found him not?"

"No."

"But did you look closely?"

"Pretty well; and yet not so closely as we have done in other places."

"How was that?"

"It was before we had a torch."

"Then I have hopes yet. We shall find him here or nowhere."

"That was what we ourselves thought, but since we have had the torches we have not been able to find the place, and, so far as my knowledge goes, this is the first time we have reached it since."

"Come on, then. My prince, you are fatigued."

"I am, in truth."

"Then seat yourself upon this mound. It will provide you with a tolerably good resting-place. There seems to be no one in this part of the field but ourselves, so you will be in no danger. We are only going to search round about this place."

The young prince was only too glad to do as Dick Turpin suggested.

He seated himself and watched them.

After a few minutes the three friends came to a place where some twelve or fourteen bodies had all been displaced, and turned face upwards by some one whose errand was doubtless the same as theirs—namely, to discover a missing friend among the slain.

One of these arrested their attention immediately.

The moon shone with great clearness upon it.

Extended upon his back at full length—his legs straight and placed close together—his arms outstretched—his head thrown back, and his eyes closed—presenting, in fine, all the appearance of a dead body, was he whom they had for so long vainly sought.

Claude Duval!

CHAPTER CCIII.

THE YOUNG PRINCE AND HIS ADHERENTS HAVE A NARROW ESCAPE FROM THEIR ENEMIES.

DICK TURPIN held his torch still closer over the prostrate form

His apparel was besmeared with blood.

Blood, too, was on his hair, his face, his hands, and all around him.

Sixteen-String Jack stood motionless for a moment.

Although it was in some such plight as this which he had all along anticipated he should find his friend, yet he had at the same time cheated himself with the hope that he should find him in a much better condition than that in which he had found him.

But it was only for a moment that he allowed this feeling to retain possession of him.

Dropping his sword, he sank upon his knees, and placed his hand eagerly over his old comrade's heart.

The two others looked on in anxious suspense to know the result.

"Does he live, Jack?" they asked.

A minute elapsed, and then he replied—

"I cannot tell. I am too excited. Do you, my friend, kneel down and try. I fancy every now and then that I can feel a slight pulsation, but that may, perhaps, be in my own hand."

He drew back as he spoke, and Turpin, kneeling down, placed his hand under Claude's apparel, and immediately above the region of the heart.

"He is not dead yet," he said. "There is a pulsation, but it is so slight as almost to elude detection. We must be prompt, and we may yet restore him to life."

"I see no wound of any magnitude," said Tom King; "at all events, not one that looks as though it was sufficient to cause death. Can you?"

"No, but there is a very ugly gash in his left arm. Give me the bottle with the rum in it, and I will pour some gently down his throat."

"If there is any life in him," said Tom, as he gave Dick the article he asked for, "that will bring it back."

And the result exactly justified the words, for Dick's foot happening to slip as he was in the act of gently pouring a small quantity of spirit into his companion's mouth,

about twice as much had run from the bottle than he had intended.

The effect of this upon Claude was for a minute rather alarming.

From being ashy pale, his face turned first red, then purple, and finally almost black.

A convulsive, choking movement shook his body from head to foot.

Dick dropped the bottle, and placed his arm under his head.

Then he raised him to a sitting posture.

No sooner was this done than a violent fit of coughing attacked Claude.

But our friends were by no means displeased to see this symptom of returning life.

"Give him a little more rum, Tom," said Turpin. "That will put him right. I dropped the bottle, but I don't think it is all spilled."

"No, there is a little left," said Tom. "Here, Claude, drink this."

Claude Duval swallowed about a tablespoonful of it, and then made an effort to rise.

But this his friends would not suffer him to do just at present.

They forced him to lie down.

Sixteen-String Jack addressed him.

"Speak, Claude!" he said. "Tell us, are you bodily hurt? Speak!"

"What has happened?" asked Duval, in whose brain the rum had produced a temporary confusion. "What is all this?"

"It means," replied Jack, "that the battle is over, and that we have found you among the wounded."

Claude was silent.

He was trying to recall his recollection.

"I remember now," he said, at length. "We were thrown down, and, ere I could recover myself, several fell upon me. I made several efforts to rise, but had not strength enough to do so. Nevertheless, I struggled to some distance, and then something struck me on the head. I think it was a bullet. I had been previously wounded in the left arm, and I lost a great deal of blood."

"Come—come," said Turpin. "Thank the fates, you will soon be all right; it is not half so bad as I expected; and as for the wound in your head, it can't be much, or you would not be able to speak as you do. Do you think you could rise and walk with Jack's assistance?"

"I think so. I do not feel so strong as I did a little while ago, but yet I think I could manage that."

"So do I; and besides, the sooner we are away the better. Dawn cannot be far distant. The young prince, too, is here, and waiting for us."

"He has escaped, then?"

"Without a scratch."

"Help me up, then; that's it. And you, Dick, and Tom, and Jack, I see you all around me. Have you all got off unhurt?"

"I might almost say so. We are knocked about a little, but that is all."

"Hurrah, then! That news makes me a better man directly. And now, where are we going?"

"I will speak to the prince."

"Do so."

"We will follow, then. Tom and Jack can support me between them."

"Good."

Dick Turpin, who had quite recovered from the effects of the slight hurts he had received, made his way at a run to the mound upon which the young prince was sitting.

It was distant about a hundred yards from where they had found Claude.

Upon a nearer approach he saw Prince Charles was seated in an attitude of deep dejected thought.

His elbows were resting on his knees, and his face was completely buried in his hands.

What his meditations were, who can tell?

So deeply did they absorb him that he had forgotten everything, even the place where he then was, and the danger by which he was surrounded.

He had forgotten that any one had been with him, and though they were so close at hand, he had not noticed the discovery of Claude.

So absorbed was he, that he did not hear the bold highwayman's approach.

Dick was embarrassed.

Time was precious, and yet he scarcely felt inclined to invade the privacy of the young prince's grief—for grief he could tell it was.

He knew how bitterly he must feel his defeat—that defeat which he had met in an hour when he confidently expected victory.

That his cause was now completely, hopelessly lost, he could not but be aware, nor could he blind his eyes to the fact that there would never be a hope again of raising an army in favour of his rights.

The rest of his life would be a weary blank, and when he died it must be with the conviction that he had left a great purpose unachieved.

Turpin coughed in the hope that that would arouse the prince. But no, his abstraction was too deep for that.

At last, feeling that it would never do to longer hesitate, he ventured to draw yet nearer, and touch him on the shoulder.

Charles Stuart started up instantly.

There was alarm visible in his countenance, but the moment his eye fell upon our friend, and he recognised him, the expression changed at once.

"Ha!" he said. "What is it now?"

"Pardon me, my prince," said Turpin, making a low obeisance as he spoke, "pardon me. I should not have ventured to disturb you only it was so urgent."

"Do not apologise, I beg."

"We have found our companion, and he is, I am pleased to say, but very slightly hurt."

"I am glad of that."

"I knew you would be, for he is one of the most devoted of your adherents, my prince."

"But why did you come to me?"

"It is now time to leave the battle-field. Every moment now that we stay is fraught with danger. Dawn is very close at hand. Tell us, my prince, in which direction shall we escort you."

"It does not matter now. Anywhere. To me one place is the same as another, and the grave the most acceptable of all."

"You are full of gloomy thoughts, my prince. Discard them. I am one who has known many a reverse of fortune, but I never allow myself to be cast down. I have that within me which makes me fight to the last."

"But, then, you had something to fight for."

"And so have you."

"What?"

"Your life!"

"The thing with which I would most gladly part."

"It may be now, my prince, that you feel weary of it, but there are others who would not be willing for you to quit this world. Live, if you can, and never yield your life until you are compelled, for it is a possession which once lost can never be regained."

The prince smiled faintly.

"Besides," continued Dick, "if you live you know not what time may yet bring forth. While there is life there is hope. Cling to it to the last."

"I will," said Charles. "You have made me lighter-hearted already."

"I am glad; and now let us depart. Which way shall we take? Yonder are our friends; they have halted there because they saw we were engaged in conversation."

"Call them, then. For myself, I know not which way to turn to escape my enemies, but doubtless they will be able to give us some information."

Dick Turpin beckoned with his hand for the three others to approach, for, as he had said, observing he was in deep and earnest conversation with the young prince, they had halted when they were out of earshot.

But upon perceiving Dick's signal, they instantly came to where he stood.

All three saluted the prince, and stood in silence.

Charles Stuart spoke—

"I cannot tell you which way to take," he said; "I must leave that to you."

"Then," said Tom King, "if you would permit me to advise"——

"Say on."

"A remnant of the army, which still hang together, is not very far from here. Would you like us to join them?"

"What do you advise? I have every confidence in your judgment."

"Union is strength," replied Tom. "I think we cannot do harm by joining them. We shall then see better how things stand, and form a more precise opinion of the general complexion of affairs."

"Your words are wise. It shall be done. Who can lead the way in the required direction?"

"I can."

"Do so then."

"The path lies in a direct line across the battle-field, my prince. Would you please follow in my steps."

CHAPTER CCIV.

OUR FRIENDS ESCAPE BY A HAIR'S-BREADTH A GREAT DANGER ON THE BATTLE-FIELD.

Just as the little party set themselves in motion, a faint white light appeared in the eastern horizon, which gradually diffused itself over all things.

The dawn had at last come.

It made the dismal scene by which they were surrounded look very chill, and very, very ghastly.

The upturned faces of the dead bodies that strewed their path seemed of a preternatural whiteness.

The morning came on with alarming rapidity; at least, it seemed so to our friends, the peril of whose situation grew greater as it advanced.

The distance they had to go across the open plain to reach the spot of which Tom spoke was very considerable, and they could not make such speed as they wished for several reasons, not the least of which was the numerous bodies and pools of blood through which they had to pick their way.

Those who followed kept continually glancing around them, in order that no foe should approach them at unawares; but, so far as they could tell at present, they seemed to have the place quite to themselves.

The many little parties of searchers had one by one disappeared, and now not one remained in sight.

When near the outskirts, however, Tom King perceived before him in the distance two mounted soldiers approaching.

They were too far removed for him to be able to say whether they were friends or foes.

In this state of things, he deemed it best to halt at once.

"What are you stopping for, Tom?" asked Dick, in some surprise.

"Two mounted soldiers are coming at a gallop from the very place, apparently, to which we are going. Whether they are or are not our enemies, I cannot from this distance make out. They are as likely to be one as the other."

"I see them," cried his auditors, "and I can see more behind. They are our enemies."

"Down, then," cried Tom King, who did not stop to see whether his comrades were right; "down with you, every one, or we shall be perceived, and then it will be too late!"

"I understand," said Turpin. "You mean us to feign death."

"Exactly. If they are our friends who are now coming we can easily make ourselves known to them, and if they are our enemies they will pass us by."

"I trust they may. I can hear their hoofs now I am upon the ground. They are in good force, be they whom they may."

"Crawl along out of the way," cried Tom, "we seem now to be in their direct line, and it will be no treat to be ridden over by a detachment of cavalry."

This was a fact that did not need impressing upon any of them, and they crawled away as fast as they were able in the direction of the other dead bodies on the plain.

When fairly amongst these, they threw themselves down into various attitudes, and remained profoundly still.

Tramp—tramp—tramp, the hollow beat of the horses' hoofs, coming at one steady pace, reached their ears with greater plainness every moment.

Dick Turpin had managed to dispose himself so that he could obtain a view of the ground before him.

In a few minutes, the two soldiers who rode first, came near enough for him to distinguish their uniforms, and he said, in a low tone—

"Lie still, my friends, and simulate death as well as you can. They are our foes who are now approaching."

The words were, of course, enough to make them obey instantly.

That they would safely escape the scrutiny of the soldiers there seemed every probability, provided they properly carried out the character they had assumed.

Dick Turpin was lying with his body partially concealed behind that of one of the king's soldiers, and being thus screened, he was able to continue his watch without any fear of being noticed.

All he hoped was, the troop would continue in the same direction as they had begun, for if they did, it would then bring them past where our friends lay at a distance of several yards from them.

And now the two soldiers who were, he supposed, sent on as a kind of advance-guard to reconnoitre, he found were gradually slanting towards him.

Still he hoped they would pass, or, at all events, that they would not discover them, for, if they did, their case would be hopeless; for against such a superior force it would be madness to contend.

Apparently, however, they looked neither to the right nor the left, but kept straight on their course.

Dick ceased to look, and held his breath.

The two soldiers swept past.

But they were very near them, and he thought it very questionable whether the troop behind would pass without trampling over them.

"I fear we have not got far enough away," he said to his comrades, who were very anxious about their position, but yet dared not move. "But, if they do, you must bear it, and not betray your being in life if you can possibly help it, or we are lost indeed."

"All right, Dick."

"Silence, now. They are coming."

And, in fact, the jingling of their weapons and accoutrements could now be heard among the medley of other sounds, and this alone was enough to indicate their proximity, and the consequent necessity there was for them to keep silent.

Stiffening themselves in their different positions, they steeled themselves to bear the worst.

But fickle Fortune for once was on the side of the highwaymen and the persecuted young prince.

The body of troops, to the number of two hundred, passed by.

They were not seen.

They were not ridden over.

Nor was their ruse suspected even, let alone detected.

The troop rode in a compact body, and took its way across the battle-field in the direction where the king's army was encamped.

Dick waited for a long time before he would allow his companions to move, and before he ventured to move himself.

He feared there might be some stragglers, and to be seen by any one of them would have been fatal.

But at last they rose, all thankful for the narrow escape they had had, but yet wishing they had been able to pass on their way unhindered.

While they had laid there, however imperative the necessity might be, they had lost much valuable time.

Not only had day dawned, but the sun had risen, and all around them could be seen with the greatest distinctness.

While crossing the open space, they could not fail to be conspicuous objects.

There was no help for it, however; they must run the risk of being seen.

At the best speed of which they were capable, then, they crossed the remainder of the moor, but, fortunately for their chances of not being discovered, the distance they had to go was but short.

In going that distance, too, they were so lucky as not to perceive a single person.

All of them much wished, of course, that they were provided with steeds, but they did not waste any time in vain regrets.

Under the direction of Tom King, they took the way which he believed would bring them up with the remaining portion of the Pretender's army.

But, though they toiled on for many hours, they could neither see nor hear any indications of its presence.

The road wound in between inaccessible and lofty rocks.

It was hare and difficult to travel, but still, without uttering a word of complaint, they kept steadily on.

Several times during their journey they were forced to hide from their foes, either by ascending trees or crouching behind huge masses of rock.

But, so far, they had kept clear of all mischances.

In this way they continued until night began to fall.

Then they were all tired and hungry. They had during their march rested many times, and eaten such food as they carried with them, but, nevertheless, when darkness began to close around them, and they saw nothing in advance to make them think they were nearing the flying army, they felt the absolute necessity for a long rest and sleep.

Besides, without a guide it would be in the dark most dangerous to attempt to continue in the path they were travelling, for they had reached the wildest part of Invernesshire, and their path lay constantly amid the mountains.

At times there would be upon one side of them a precipitous wall of cliff, the top of which would tower high above their heads.

Then on the other there would be a deep abyss—sometimes the bed of a mountain stream, at other times a precipice forming the brink of a ravine.

A short council was held as to what they had better do, when they decided that they would push on as long as they had light to do so, in the hope that they might reach some place where they could pass the night in greater comfort than they could in the open air.

From their enemies, the king's troops, they did not consider they had much to fear. The region into which they had penetrated was one into which they would not care to venture, and as for any of the inhabitants that they might find in that inhospitable region, the young Prince fully counted upon their loyalty and devotion to him not to seek to do him injury.

Whether he was right in holding this good opinion, or whether he was not, we shall very shortly see.

When it grew quite dark, which was not long, for it is one of the peculiarities of mountain districts that night comes on with great rapidity, they found themselves apparently as far off their object as ever.

Their own safety at last compelled them to come to a halt.

What they should do next was a question that increased in difficulty every moment.

The prospect of having to sleep all night upon the hard rocks was anything but an agreeable one.

"Are there no shepherds' huts about this place?" asked Turpin.

"I know not," replied the prince.

"There is a narrow footpath here, which seems to lead off among the mountains. Perhaps that may conduct to one."

"But the passage of it may be dangerous."

"With your permission, I will go alone, and ascertain."

"No!" interrupted the young prince, "let us all keep together. The path seems smooth, though narrow. I think, by exercising common caution, we may ascertain to what place it leads, and I am sure, gentlemen, I think it will be worth the trouble to try to ascertain."

CHAPTER CCV.

THE HIGHLAND BANDITTI IN THE CAVERN FIND THE PRINCE AND HIS FRIENDS FOOD AND SHELTER.

"UNDOUBTEDLY so, my prince," replied Tom King; "but, as you see, the path is very narrow."

"Well?"

"Then, as I proposed it, I hope you will allow me the privilege of going first."

"With all my heart, but pray take care. It would be sad indeed for a brave, gallant heart like you are to quit life in so dismal a fashion as falling over some deep precipice."

Tom laughed, and commenced traversing the narrow mountain path which he had been the first to discover.

The others were compelled to follow him in Indian file, for in no place was it wide enough for two to walk abreast.

Tom King, as we have said, went first.

Dick Turpin followed.

Then came the young prince.

The rear was brought up by Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval.

The latter was much better than, under all the circumstances, he could be hoped to be; but Claude had not only an iron constitution but an iron will, which enabled him to triumph over the infirmities of the body.

But, for all that, his unsteady gait proclaimed the debility under which he was labouring.

The mountain path was long and tortuous.

To add to its difficulties, too, it had an upward tendency, and in places the incline was so steep that they had much ado to ascend it.

But the sides were all the time hemmed in with walls of rock, so the only danger they ran was that of losing their proper path, or of some of the pieces of rock above falling upon them.

But this last was such a remote contingency that it scarcely, if at all, entered into their calculations.

On they went steadily and perseveringly.

They were encouraged to proceed by the conviction that grew in force in the breasts of all of them that this well-kept path must lead somewhere or other.

And the end showed them to be perfectly correct.

The path terminated upon a kind of plateau, about halfway up the side of a tall mountain.

Three sides of this plateau were hemmed in by the mountain.

The fourth was the one by which our friends had gained it.

As soon as they stood upon this place they saw before them a fissure in the rock.

But in the darkness the fissure would never have been visible, save from one circumstance.

It was faintly lighted up.

Our friends almost hailed the sight with a shout of welcome, but prudence restrained the sound.

They did not know yet who or what they had to deal with.

This, however, from what the reader already knows of the highwaymen's characters, was a state of things that was not likely to be of any great duration.

Without speaking a word, but motioning to the rest to remain where they were and be silent, Tom King crept forward carefully to reconnoitre.

The fissure in the rock was soon reached.

He peered cautiously round the side of it.

The sight which met his gaze was at once well qualified to call forth his pleasure and admiration.

At the further extremity of a large cavern, hollowed by the hand of nature out of primeval rock, was a huge fire.

It seemed to be composed entirely of wood, and it burned with great briskness, and the glow it cast irradiated the whole place.

Before this fire, on a very rude spit indeed, hung what in the distance looked like either a pig or a sheep, but Tom could not tell which.

And this was not all he saw.

There were, as might be supposed, some human occupants of this place.

They were six highland soldiers.

Great brawny men they were, real types of their class, but their faces were pinched and hollow, and their uniform hung in tatters about them.

This unlooked for spectacle, full of picturesqueness as it was, made Tom King remain at the entrance of the cave immovable.

His friends, who could not any longer curb their impatience, crept towards him.

He heard them coming, but, ere he could turn or speak, they had reached the spot, and had seen the same as he had, and with equal astonishment.

For a moment they stood as he had.

But, as may be anticipated, they had made some slight noise in their approach, and the highlanders had heard it.

Not dreading anything in the shape of an attack, they had laid aside the heavier portions of their armour.

But, seizing their swords with martial quickness, they ran towards the outlet of the cave.

Had it not been for the presence of the young prince, the position of our friends would have been rather desperate.

He, however, in a moment recognised the features of the men before him.

He had noticed them in the battle, where they had made themselves conspicuous by their daring actions.

Without the least hesitation, he took off his plumed hat, and walked quietly a pace or two inside the cave.

The man who had hastened forward with such fierce gestures stopped abruptly.

They knew him.

Despite his haggard look, despite his ragged dress, for the day's scrambling over rocks, and the stains of battle had not improved it, they knew him.

With one accord, then, and as though each breast was simultaneously animated by the same impulse, they all sank down upon their knees, and bowed their heads in reverent submission.

It would be by no means an easy task to define the feeling which these lawless, uncivilzed men had for their prince. In it there was no slight trait of ancient feudalism, and this is scarcely to be wondered at, when we consider how long that system of government was retained in the highlands by the more powerful chiefs.

These six men, as their plaid indicated, were members of the clan of Macdonald, who, to the last, remained steadfast to the Pretender's cause, and, unlike others, boldly and defiantly proclaimed it.

These Macdonalds, then, in the cave, with their rude and uncultivated intellects, looked upon a Stuart as a being second only to the Deity himself, and they paid respect to this last representative of the ancient and once powerful race.

And here let us remark that this incident is no fiction. These men actually had existence, and were found in the cavern by the prince, and received him in the manner we have described; and no better proof of their loyalty can be given that not even the large reward of £30,000 offered for the prince's head would tempt them to betray him.

Divided between them, it must be borne in mind that this large sum would be sufficient to provide them with an ample income for the remainder of their lives; and many a man has been tempted into committing the most atrocious crimes for less than half such an inducement.

But the prince trusted these men. In fact, he felt quite safe with them, and assured that nothing whatever would tempt them to betray him.

He bowed deeply in return to their salutation, and in a pleasant tone of voice bade them rise.

This they did, and stood with their arms still folded on their breasts, and their eyes bent upon the ground.

Prince Charles advanced, followed by the four highwaymen, who had witnessed this scene with the greatest astonishment.

Of course, they did not feel that amount of reliance upon the fidelity of these highlanders that the prince did. But, upon their parts, this was nothing more than natural. They did not know their loyal nature, and in their lives they had seen enough of human nature to make them more than ordinarily suspicious.

Everything was done by these men that lay in their power to make the young prince and his companions comfortable.

A couple of rude benches were placed at a convenient distance from the fire for them to sit upon, and they warmed themselves until the roast was finished.

It was a small sheep, which had by some means or other fallen into their hands—most likely it had been "lifted," as they called taking things when there was no one looking—but, whether this was so or not, the sheep was there.

As it was the least trouble, the sheep had just been trussed and hung before the fire, whole as it was.

It was suspended from the roof of the cavern by a stout rope.

The prince and his friends arrived just in time, for the sheep was almost cooked.

The mode in which they ate it was at once singular and picturesque.

The only implement they had to serve them for both knife and fork was their daggers.

But hungry men are always willing to put up with some trifling inconvenience when an enticing meal is before them.

The daggers were sharp, and so one by one, with great dexterity, they went up to the fire, and each one cut off a slice as the meat hung before the fire.

Of course the prince was allowed the precedence, and then our friends followed.

The slices they each cut off were really prodigious, but by the time the six gigantic highlanders had taken their portion, there was little more than a frame of bones left behind.

In fact, a glance into their gaunt countenances would have been enough to show that their fare had lately been of the hardest.

For about a quarter of an hour nothing was heard in the cave but the grinding of jaws.

After a time, however, their appetites were appeased, and then they felt a new want.

Like the want of food, it was imperious.

Sleep.

That was what they all required.

The prince set the example to the rest by flinging himself full length upon the rocky floor of the cavern before the fire.

One by one the others followed him, and lay down likewise.

All but one highlander, and he was posted at the entrance of the cave as a sentinel, in order to give the alarm to his slumbering companions in case any danger should present itself.

So passed the night.

The sentinel nodded, but there was no need in reality for keeping watch.

CHAPTER CCVI.

THE DUKE OF CUMBERLAND SURROUNDS THE MOUNTAIN CAVERN.—THE YOUNG HIGHLANDER'S STRATAGEM.

This cave, which had been so providentially discovered by the young prince and his four followers, afforded them a shelter for five weeks.

At frequent intervals during that period single spies had been sent forth to reconnoitre, but they all returned with the same intelligence.

The closest search was being made in every direction by the Duke of Cumberland for the young prince, and they were in imminent danger of being discovered in their hiding-place.

But they did not dare to leave it, as by so doing they would only have exposed themselves to fresh dangers.

By the advice, however, of Dick Turpin, the pathway, in its narrowest part between the rocks, had been choked up by a huge fragment of stone, which had been cast down from the crags above.

The only way by which the cave could be gained and left was by a route circuitous and difficult.

During these five weeks they had been several times driven to great straits for the procuration of sufficient food, and, indeed, the chief thing they had to subsist upon was the flesh of such wild goats as they were lucky enough to capture.

And here we pause a moment to supply an omission.

No doubt many of our readers have asked "What became of Black Bess all this time? Where did Turpin lodge her?"

Strictly speaking, we should have related in its proper place that, after joining the prince's army, Dick naturally felt unwilling to run the risk of taking his valuable mare with him during the campaign, and he had said as much to Prince Charles.

His half-implied request met with immediate attention, and one night during their stay at the house of a Scottish gentleman, Sir Kenneth Grant, the prince personally requested him to take care of his friend's mare until such time as he should come or send for her.

This Sir Kenneth readily promised to do, and so Black Bess had been in safety and security, while her owner had been so many times in such great peril.

The mass of incident pressing upon us for speedy recital drove this from our mind, and so it was not set down in the proper place, and with this explanation we will leave it, trusting that the time is not far distant when Dick Turpin, the highwayman, will mount his bonny



[THE YOUNG PRETENDER AND HIS FRIENDS ARE SHIPWRECKED ON THE COAST OF BARRA.]

mare, Black Bess, and resume his old daring and romantic career.

For a little while, however, we must continue to follow his fortunes with the Young Pretender.

It is, then, five weeks, or rather more, after the night when they found shelter in the cavern, that we again introduce them to the reader.

The youngest of the six highlanders had just returned from a spying expedition.

The intelligence he brought back was most alarming. Under the direction of the Duke of Cumberland, orders had been transmitted to all the towns and villages along the two arms of the sea, between Inverness and Edinburgh, to stop any person without a passport from the duke himself, or the magistrates of Edinburgh. The same instructions were also sent to all the seaports of Great Britain, prohibiting all masters of merchant vessels from receiving any person on board without a passport, or contributing in any manner to the escape of a rebel (for such, of course, was the term applied to all the young prince's adherents), under pain of high treason, and of being liable to the same punishment as those who had taken arms.

And this was not all, for the duke had also, at the same time, detached his cavalry into the low country at the foot of the mountains, to seize all those who might present themselves without passports to cross the first arm of the sea, with orders to send out continual patrols along the coast, and to search all the towns and villages in the neighbourhood of the sea.

The principal, and indeed the sole object whom the duke had in taking all these proceedings, was to secure the body of the Young Pretender; and it states in history that his instructions to his commanders were, not to take him a prisoner, but to put him to instant death.

It was in consequence of this cruel and savage order, as well as the other atrocities committed by his sanction, that he obtained the nickname by which he was ever afterwards known of "the Butcher."

This news naturally filled the prince and the few devoted adherents with him with alarm and almost despair.

Unable to leave their present shelter, they were like rats who had taken refuge in a trap, for they felt certain if the duke continued his search, as doubtless he would do, their hiding-place would be discovered, and the force of their enemies so overwhelming, that resistance would be quite out of the question.

In this state of affairs much anxious consultation took place.

The young prince himself laboured under a great depression of spirits, so that our friends had the direction of affairs almost in their own hands.

One of the things they deemed advisable was to send a man to the highest portion of the mountain, or the place from which the most extensive view of the surrounding scenery could be obtained, who was to keep a vigilant watch, and give them timely notice should any of the enemy approach.

This duty was taken in turns by the six highlanders, for our friends had not the same ability to scale the precipitous rocks that these hardy Scots had.

By this time, we ought to say, Claude Duval had quite recovered from his wounds.

The one in his arm, although it looked by far the worse of the two, got well first; the one in his head, which had been caused by a bullet, had given them a great deal of trouble.

But now it was quite well, and he was once more the same man as he had formerly been.

Their looks, however, had by no means improved during their stay, but such a triviality as that was not likely to concern them much.

As the five sat around the fire—that is to say, the prince and the four highwaymen—they looked about as lugubrious as they well could. Tom King especially, for he had two causes for vexation: his companions were discontented at their lot, and he felt that it was through his advocacy of the step that they had taken it, and they seemed to be a continual reproach; and in the second place, he was deeply concerned for the position of Prince Charles.

Moodily, therefore, they all sat around the fire.

The gloom which hung around the prince seemed also to envelop them.

What to do, or how they were to hope to make their escape, they knew not.

Could they but gain the sea-shore at Lochnanuagh, near which place the men in the cave informed them the Macdonalds and the Camerons would be found, they doubted not that these powerful chieftains would find some means of evading the embargo which the sanguinary duke had laid; but to reach this much-desired spot they would have to cross the line which the king's troops formed across the country.

To accomplish this feat seemed absolutely impossible, and, in fact, was so while their vigilance continued as active as it then was.

And so, with this uppermost in their minds, each one seeking to find some way out of the difficulty, but without success, all five sat gazing at the embers of the fire.

Apart from them, and quite out of earshot, were the five highlanders.

The sixth was outside on guard.

Like the others, they looked dejected and hopeless, occasionally speaking to each other in a low tone, in their own uncouth, guttural language.

And so the night passed.

How it was the duke had failed to discover their hiding-place they could not think; and yet, when we take the size of the country into consideration, it was not so remarkable as it looked.

Morning came.

Those in the cave did not observe the flush of dawn, but they were made aware of it by the signal of their comrade who was on guard outside, and who had been long anxiously looking for it.

Another of the men was sent on duty, and the one who had passed the night on the lonely peaks above came in.

He was the youngest of these highland banditti, and there was in his youthful countenance an expression of ingenuousness of which the others were altogether deficient.

The resemblance in complexion and general configuration of countenance to the Young Pretender had been frequently remarked by all present; and by any one who was not in the habit of seeing them together, this one might be mistaken for the other.

Of course, as is the case with most such likenesses, they ceased to be striking when the two were seen side by side, for then the little differences which existed showed themselves.

The frank behaviour of this young man made him a general favourite with all; and many a time, when all the rest had been desponding as they were now, he had infused hope into their breasts by his own sanguine enthusiasm.

But on the present occasion it was noticed, when he returned, his face was totally changed.

It was stern and determined, as though he had resolved upon some course of action which it would require all his nerve to carry out.

And his face was a true index of what was really the case. He had resolved upon a particular plan of action, and the result of it was to save his prince and free him from the perils that surrounded him.

What this plan of action was the next few lines will speedily develop.

It was, indeed, one that made it necessary for him to summon up all his self-command—all his stoicism—all his loyalty for the unfortunate prince he served.

The change in his looks and manner was noticed by all present, but no remark was made. No doubt it was thought that he, like them, had at last succumbed to that despair which weighed upon their own minds.

The young highlander, however, ate some food in silence. Then he called one of his comrades apart, and spoke.

What he said none knew; but those who had the curiosity to look on saw that a look of admiration overspread the features of the man addressed, which in a moment afterwards changed to the deepest and utmost dissuasion.

CHAPTER CCVII.

SUSPICION IS GENERATED IN DICK TURPIN'S BREAST BY THE MYSTERIOUS CONDUCT OF THE HIGHLANDERS.

One by one, however, the young highlander called his comrades aside, and addressed them.

From some he received encouragement; from others—and these were the ones who felt the deepest interest in his welfare—the reverse.

But by his way it could be seen that his mind was firmly made up—that what he heard made no difference to him—that he merely submitted his intention to them for the purpose of obtaining their opinion, and yet not for that opinion to bias him.

But the oldest highlander, who seemed to have some degree of command over the rest, addressed him earnestly; and in the end it would seem that they managed in some way to compromise the matter between themselves.

Dick Turpin had not failed to notice these whispered conferences between the men, and apprised his three friends of it.

In common with himself they looked upon it with apprehension.

For their own parts, they had no great faith in the devotion of these men like the young prince had, but then they had all four during their careers seen quite enough to make them distrustful.

They knew how great a temptation a reward of £30,000 would be to any one, but especially to these men, who were not only in want of the necessaries of life, but had also placed themselves in a position of great danger.

Of course, if they remained where they were and were discovered with the prince (and that they would be ere long discovered appeared a certainty), their lives, as well as his, would be taken; but if, on the other hand, they betrayed him, they would receive the reward, and not only that, but a free pardon also, for such was the condition attached to the proclamation of the reward.

These, it must be conceded, were powerful inducements to make these men act treacherously to their prince, and it was while having these considerations in view, that the highwaymen were suspicious of them.

Immediately after sunrise one of the men was sent out as a spy.

Our friends would fain have prevented his departure, but they were unable to do so.

The man left

Full of fresh uneasiness, our friends whispered to each other, and consulted as to what course they should pursue in this alarming crisis of their fortunes. They wished to communicate their suspicions to the prince, but he was so cast down that, for compassion's sake, they forbore to do so.

And so, with their minds in a state of indescribable anxiety and suspense, the time wore on.

And to the credit of the highwaymen be it said that, though they might have found safety in flight, they did not attempt to gain it. A desertion of the man who had so amazingly favoured them at such a time they felt to be an act of baseness such as they would never commit, let things eventuate how they might.

They waited, therefore, to see what would happen next. They had steeled themselves to hear the worst.

Above all, they kept a keen eye upon the young highlander whose conduct had first excited their suspicion, but in his countenance, stern and severe as it was, they saw nothing to indicate a traitor.

They were perplexed, too, by the behaviour of the others, for whenever they looked upon them their faces assumed an expression compounded strangely of compassion and admiration.

What this meant the highwaymen were unable to conclude.

But the day, contrary to their expectations, wore away without any new danger manifesting itself.

The man, however, who had been ostensibly sent out as a spy, did not return.

To be sure, on former occasions they had been absent for much longer periods, and their absence unnoticed or uncommented on, but now our friends counted every hour with feverish eagerness.

At last, to so great a pitch did their impatience and uneasiness rise, that they left the fire, and made their way to the entrance of the cave.

It was quite dark.

No moon lighted up the wild and magnificent scenery by which they were encompassed, and the pale, twinkling stars only partially defined the huge mountains in their immediate vicinity.

A dead silence was around them, unbroken even by the murmuring of the wind among those shrubs which found a scanty sustenance upon the rocky soil.

It was, too, intensely cold, and, as is generally the case under such circumstances, the air was very clear, and capable of carrying the faintest sound to a great distance.

It was while they stood upon the small plateau, which we have already mentioned as being outside the cave, that all four were startled by a slight noise.

It came suddenly, and ceased with equal abruptness, leaving those who heard it no opportunity of learning what it was.

They listened, however, with great eagerness for the repetition of the sound.

Nor was it long in coming.

A little while, and then they felt certain some one was approaching the spot upon which they stood.

But who?

It was too dark, and the comer was too distant for them to distinguish him.

It might be, and probably was, the spy who had been sent out in the morning returning.

It would be no harm, the highwaymen thought, to draw aside and see who it really was, without affording any indication of their presence.

To conceal themselves by standing in the shadow of the rocks was an easy enough matter, and they executed the manœuvre in perfect silence.

Plainer and plainer grew the sound which they had at first heard.

One person only was coming they felt certain, but the intense silence and sonorousness of the air had deceived them with regard to the distance he was from them, and they had to wait for his making his appearance much longer than they anticipated.

But at length he came.

Their vision had become accustomed to the darkness, and they saw a dark figure creeping stealthily up the steep pathway leading to the plateau.

When he drew himself up and stood before them, they found their conjectures correct.

It was the highlander who had been sent out to reconnoitre the position of the enemy, and bring back a report.

He did not hesitate or even glance around him, but walked straight to the entrance of the cave.

Our friends felt almost ashamed of themselves for the suspicions they had harboured, so unsinister was the behaviour of this man.

Nevertheless, they allowed him to enter the cave, and when the sound of his footsteps had quite died away, they listened again.

But this time all was still.

Feeling all but convinced that they had misinterpreted what they had seen, they returned to the cave.

When they entered, they saw in a moment that the spy who had come back had brought with him some intelligence of rather a startling kind.

All were crowding round him, and it could be easily seen that he shared to the full the excitement which every one experienced.

This made the highwaymen hasten forward to listen to what he was saying.

We will not tire the patience of the reader by repeating the speech in his own outlandish dialect, but reduce the substance of it to plain English.

"On all sides," he said, "the king's troops were surrounding them. The Duke of Cumberland was furious at the delay which had already taken place in not capturing the young prince, and had issued his orders in a more peremptory manner than before. To still further exert the men, he had determined upon taking the task of hunting him (the prince) to death in his own person, and that very day had set out, at the head of a large detachment of foot-soldiers. Some suspicion as to his whereabouts appeared to hold a place in the duke's breast, and he was conducting the search with the greatest circumspection and the utmost precision, never going over the same ground twice, and never leaving any place unvisited.

This news was indeed alarming, and seemed to point to their immediate and certain discovery, for in what way were they to prevent it?

The spy further stated that he had had the greatest difficulty in eluding detection, and that once he had to lie concealed among some rocks to avoid being seen by the enemy, or he would have been back much earlier to inform them of the great danger in which they all stood.

The highwaymen could not help regarding this man with admiration. Unquestionably he had had the opportunity of betraying the young prince, and also the opportunity of making his own escape, a thing that now seemed impossible.

The effect of this news upon Prince Charles himself was really heart-breaking to witness.

Up to the present moment, thanks to the representations of our friends, he had still clung to the hope that he should at least escape from Scotland and rejoin his parents, if he did no more.

Now that hope was entirely reft from him.

While his foes continued as energetic as they appeared to be, he knew well enough that he had not the slightest chance.

The stupor of despair settled upon him and upon all.

What could save them?

Nothing.

Nothing but the adoption of some clever scheme by which their enemies could be hoodwinked.

But what stratagem was this?

None at all any one would think who considers how destitute they were of resources.

And yet we shall see how something was proposed that was exactly calculated to achieve the required aim.

The young highlander to whom we have lately so repeatedly made allusion stood forward, and, despite the opposition which some of his companions made, addressed Prince Charles.

CHAPTER CCVIII.

THE YOUNG HIGHLANDER UNFOLDS HIS PLAN OF SELF-SACRIFICING DEVOTION TO PRINCE CHARLES.

THE Young Pretender had assumed what recently had been a favourite attitude.

He had seated himself upon the rude bench near the fire

placed his elbows upon his knees, and allowed his face to fall between his hands.

But when he heard the deep rough tones of the young highlander's voice, he raised his head and looked at him—not without surprise.

"My prince," he said, "you have heard, as I have, the report which our scout has to-day brought back to us; and, having done so, you must be well aware that to-morrow it will be no good to send out any one; by that time we shall have fallen into the hands of our enemies!"

"I am afraid it will be as you say. I have resigned myself to that, and so should you. When it comes to the last and the worst, we can only die like brave men, with our claymores in our grasp and our backs to the ground. For myself I will never surrender with life, but fight it out to the last!"

A murmur of admiration came from the lips of the highlanders as the prince gave utterance to this resolute and martial speech.

"I do not doubt your bravery, my prince," responded the young man; "but will you pardon me if I suggest a means by which you can throw your enemies off their guard, and so afford you an opportunity of making your escape?"

"If you can show me how to do that," said Charles Stuart, the fire of renewed hope kindling in his eyes, "I will not only pardon you, but you shall have my best thanks—and not only mine, but those of all here present."

"But, my prince," interposed the chief of the highlanders, "you know not the means of which he speaks, and when you are made acquainted with them, I am quite certain you will never consent to such a sacrifice."

"Heed him not, prince," said the young highlander. "Listen to me, I pray, and do not be offended with what I propose, nor deny my request out of any consideration for myself."

"That will depend," said the Pretender. "Speak, and let me hear. Speak freely, too, for there is nothing of which you need be afraid."

"You encourage me," was the reply, "and yet I don't know how to frame my speech or give utterance to my wishes. My prince, forgive me for my presumption, but have you noticed that in general outline there is some resemblance between you and me, sufficient to deceive any one who was not very intimately acquainted with you indeed?"

"I had not noticed the circumstance until you spoke, but now"—and Charles Stuart looked closely at him as he spoke—"I wonder how it is that anything so obvious and conspicuous can have escaped my notice."

"It has been seen and remarked by others. Look closely at me, prince, and tell me whether you consider the resemblance sufficiently great to deceive any one who had not seen you many times."

"In the face, most certainly," replied Charles. "But," he added, in accents of the greatest astonishment and incredulity, "surely you do not for a moment dream of securing my safety by giving yourself up to my enemies—by personating myself!"

"Pardon my presumption, prince, I beg!"

"But was that your idea? Is it possible that you ever seriously entertained the idea of"——

"Not only is it possible, but true."

"Never!"

"My prince, surely you do not doubt me!"

"No; forgive me; I would never do that; and yet, at first, I found myself almost unable to believe in the existence of loyal devotion of so chivalric a character."

"You flatter me."

"Not I; no one could ever accuse me of that. But, come, I shall not think of granting your request of allowing such a sacrifice to be made; but gratify my curiosity by telling me the plan you had formed."

"Your wishes are law, my prince; but when I tell you, it will be in the hope of gaining more than your curiosity, —your approval likewise."

Charles Stuart shook his head, and made a movement with his hand for the young man to commence.

He obeyed at once.

"You must know that last night, my prince, it fell to my lot to be placed outside upon the summit of the rock, to watch for the appearance of our enemies, and give timely notice of their approach.

"In my long, weary watch, with no one near me—no sound to break the awful stillness—no sight to see but the blue sky and stars, and the dusky outlines of the mountains—many strange and solemn thoughts occupied my mind.

"I thought, my prince, of you. I reviewed the whole of your present position, and saw how full of danger it was; and as I continued to gaze upon them, I became more and more impressed with the extreme difficulty you would have in avoiding them.

"Naturally enough, having reached this point, I pursued my thoughts still further, and having realized the full extent of the peril which impended over you, I began to cast about for some means by which it could be averted.

"For a long time, my prince, I endeavoured in vain to find a means that carried with it any appearance of feasibility of accomplishing so desirable an end. I was unable to see in what manner the vigilance of your enemies could be eluded.

"And then, not to weary you too much with a recital of my reflections, I thought that the only thing that could be done would be in some way to deceive your foes, and lull them into a feeling of false security.

"But, although conscious of the desirability of this, I could not concoct a scheme which would be calculated to effect it.

"At last, my prince, and I trust you will pardon me for the idea, the fact of the remarkable resemblance—in features, I mean—which exists between us pressed itself upon me.

"I had myself noticed it, and been surprised, and those who are with me have frequently spoken of it to me.

"Then I thought to myself, 'Suppose I was to make the proposition to the prince that I should personate him, and give myself up to the enemy.' Knowing you so slightly as they do, I feel sure that the deception would not be detected. When they had me prisoner under the impression that I was you, they would cease their rigorous search, and you would then have the best of all chances of reaching the sea-shore and making your way back again to France."

"I have heard you to the end without interrupting you," replied Charles Stuart; "not because I assented to what you said, but because I wished to hear all. Never did I dream that I should ever have so devoted a follower as your words prove you to be—never did I believe that such chivalrous devotion existed in these degenerate times."

The young highlander bowed deeply at these words of praise from the prince he was willing to serve so faithfully, and a flush of gratified colour mounted to his cheeks.

Charles Stuart, however, did not allow him to speak, but continued—

"You have not heard all, my friend—for such I should feel proud to call you—you have not heard all. Much as I may admire the loyal devotion which prompted the imagining of such a plan, and, however much I may desire the end which it is intended to achieve, I cannot for a moment think of accepting so great a sacrifice."

"Sacrifice, my prince!"

"Yes; do you not know the consequences of acting in the manner you proposed. If you gave yourself up to the Duke of Cumberland, and passed yourself off as being me, what do you think would be the result—whether or not detection should ensue."

"I know it, my prince."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes!"

"It is death!"

"I am aware of that, my prince," said the young highlander, firmly; "but I have devoted myself to your service, and I am quite willing to lay down my life in it."

The Young Pretender, in the present extremity of his fortunes, was much overcome by the behaviour of this follower.

In the hour of his prosperity, much as he might have thought of such an act, had it been related to him, still it would not have made the impression which it now did while he was destitute of friends and hope.

But let us do him the justice to say that he never once thought of accepting the sacrifice so pleadingly proffered, though he was pleased to learn the extent of this young man's devotion.

"You are silent, my prince," he continued. "I trust you are reflecting upon the proposition I have made, and that in the end you will accept it."

"No, it is not that," replied the Pretender. "Never could I dream of accepting such a sacrifice."

"Why a sacrifice?"

"Shall you not sacrifice your life?"

"My life, prince?"

"Yes."

"What is it that I should not win gladly if done in your service? That is no more than the duty of all who rank themselves under your banner, to consider for you if they can—if not, to die."

"Say on," exclaimed the prince, "the more you say the greater becomes my admiration."

"Alas!"

"Why do you say alas?"

"I regret that you should listen to me, my prince, from such a motive. But still I will try to persuade you to adopt my scheme. Believe me, my prince, when I say I have thought long and earnestly upon the subject, since it is an important one, not only to me, but to you, and all here present. You, as I do, must know full well that our ultimate capture and inevitable death is certain. It will, in all probability come upon us to-morrow, unless something is done to entirely change the current of events."

"I do not dispute that," replied Charles. "I expect to see them come. I have fully made up my mind to it. But we will meet them. We will each draw our swords, and fight to the last gasp, and if we fall, as doubtless we shall, it will not be until we have left our mark upon more than one of our foes. They shall slay us in fair fight if they can, but I will never gratify their malice by allowing myself to fall into their hands a prisoner, and all who are here, I feel certain, will defend me so long as a drop of blood remains in their veins."

CHAPTER CCIX.

THE YOUNG HIGHLANDER PERSISTS IN HIS DETERMINATION OF DYING TO SAVE HIS PRINCE.

THERE are certain times when a man can, by his voice and animated actions, command the involuntary admiration of his fellows, and rouse their enthusiasm to its utmost pitch.

So it was with the Young Pretender on the present occasion.

His auditors were, without exception, men who looked up to personal bravery as being the most estimable quality a man could possess.

Therefore, they listened with kindling eyes to the heroic sentiments he expressed, and when he finished they were all dominated by the same feelings as he was.

The young highlander, however, who had showed himself so much attached to the cause of the Stuarts, waited until this sudden outbreak of excitement had passed away.

Then he again spoke.

He commanded great and immediate attention.

"Prince," he said, "the words which you have spoken to me, and the manner in which you have listened to what I said, has had the effect of making me bold, and"——

"Do not apologize," said the Pretender; "you will please me best by speaking freely."

"And should I say that which will offend you, will you forgive me?"

"Freely."

"Then, prince, it is this. I do not wish for a moment to detract from your bravery, or those others present, but as you say, and truly, we shall all perish; now, let me ask you whether it would not be better for one to suffer in order that the others might escape?"

"And would you be that one?"

"I would, prince, with your permission."

"And in order that the others might be saved you are quite willing, young as you are, to quit life?"

"My life, as I have said, is devoted to your service, and to put you beyond the reach of your enemies I would sacrifice it with the utmost gladness."

"This surpasses all belief."

"Not so, prince; I have thought the matter deeply over, and I am sure that I could so arrange it that, though my life will pay the forfeit, yet your safety will be assured."

"How?" asked the Pretender; for it cannot be denied that he wished to save his life, but was reluctant to do so at the cost of another's. "How, my friend? tell me!"

"Thus!" said the young highlander; and as he spoke the word, he drew, with inconceivable rapidity, a poniard from its sheath.

It flashed for a moment in the air; and then, before any one could interpose, or even anticipate his design, he plunged it into his breast.

The prince started to his feet, and the ejaculation of horror which burst from his lips was echoed by the others, who, out of respect, had remained silent spectators of the scene.

"What have you done?" asked the prince. "What have you done?"

"My duty," replied the highlander; and as he spoke he drew the dagger from the wound, and threw it to a remote corner of the cavern.

The blood gushed in incredible quantities from the orifice.

Then he sank down upon one knee at the Pretender's feet.

"My dear prince!" he cried; "I die, in order that you may live, and my comrades escape. On the battle-field I was willing to risk my life for you, and shall I begrudge it now, when I know how great a gainer you will be by my decease? Forgive me! par—!"

His strength was ebbing from him fast, and he was unable to complete the sentence; but, with the last effort of expiring nature, he caught the hand of Charles Stuart between both his, and pressed a fervent kiss upon it.

Then he relaxed his grasp, and would have fallen backwards on to the hard flooring of the cavern, had it not been for the support Dick Turpin's arm afforded—for the highwayman sprang forward in time to save him.

"Let me lie down!" gasped the young man, feebly. "Let me lie down! I shall be better then. Let me lie down!"

Dick did not hesitate to comply with the request.

The wound, he felt certain, from the quantity of blood that had in so short a space of time effused from it, must be a mortal one.

Consequently it could matter little whether he remained in an upright or decumbent posture.

"The prince," said the young highlander, in a yet fainting tone of voice, "the prince!"

"I am here," replied Charles Stuart, and as he spoke he knelt down by the fast-dying youth, and took his hand.

"Forgive me, my dear prince," he said, "forgive me for my disobedience. Believe me, it is better that I alone should die than you should all perish. Do not shake your head. What I have done cannot now be undone, and do not let me die with the consciousness that I have so deeply offended you as to be unable to obtain your forgiveness."

"I forgive you freely," replied the Pretender, in a broken tone of voice, for naturally he was deeply touched by this great proof of devotion to his cause. "I forgive you freely."

"Then I shall die panglessly. Are you sure, my prince, that I have your full pardon."

"Quite; but yet do not think that I approve of your rash act, for to do that would be impossible."

The highlander sighed deeply.

"Well—well," he said, "I suppose I must remain content. But ere I die, listen to what I have to say. You will listen, will you not?"

"Certainly."

"Bend down closer, then, my prince, for to speak in so loud a tone as I have just done, exhausts me."

The Young Pretender, in obedience to the wish which his dependant expressed, bent his ear yet nearer to his lips.

"I have thought long and deeply upon what had best be done, my prince, and so I trust you will listen with what patience you can command, to what I am about to say. When the idea of personating your royal highness first found a place in my mind, I felt almost certain that you would never consent to it, but I determined, nevertheless, to carry out my intention."

"Rash youth."

The speaker did not heed this ejaculation, but continued—

"As we all know well, my prince, the ordere of the savage and unscrupulous Duke of Cumberland to all his soldiers are that when you are discovered by any of them, they are not to attempt to spare your life, but slay you without mercy. That very order, cruel as it seems, my prince, will turn out to your advantage, and to his defeat."

"How so?" asked the Pretender, for he could not help feeling a deep interest in what was said.

"I will tell you. Great as may be the resemblance between us, so far as our faces and complexion are concerned, yet that resemblance extends not to our bodies. I have known harder service than you, and my body is more muscular; it may be that I am altogether stouter built. At any rate, if they saw my body, the cheat we wish to put upon them would be almost certain to be discovered. Do you not think so, my prince?"

"I do."

"I am certain of it; but our enemies play into our hands, and that which would have been impossible becomes the easiest matter in the world."

"In what way? Explain yourself. I do not yet understand you."

"When I am dead—which will be in a few minutes now—I must request you to do something more, or I shall have died in vain. Surely that is not worth while! Promise me to accede to my request!"

"What is it?"

"Promise me!"

"I do. Speak!"

"It is this. As soon as I am dead, let some one draw his sword and sever my head from my body. Do not start and look so horrified! I shall not feel it. You have promised, and I rely upon you to keep your word. Do not delay me, for I feel that I am sinking fast, and I have yet much more to say."

"I am listening," said the prince, mournfully.

But the young highlander was almost exhausted.

By making a great effort, however, he rallied himself, and went on, though his voice now was little better than a hoarse whisper.

"Let some one sever my head from my shoulders. You understand me, do you not? That head, my poor head, will be worth thirty thousand pounds! My prince, that sum of money will be of the utmost service to you. Therefore, let some one upon whom you can depend carry my head to the Duke of Cumberland, declare it to be yours, and obtain the reward which is offered for it. I will defy them to detect the imposition, unless there should be someone there who is very intimately acquainted with you indeed.

The boldness of the plan which the young highlander thus unfolded, filled the prince and the highwaymen with admiration.

As for the highlanders, they stood looking on mournfully, for in the morning when, after his descent from the mountain, he had called them aside and one by one spoken to them, which circumstance it will be remembered had excited the suspicions of Dick Turpin, he had told them his scheme, and while some admired his bravery, all had endeavoured to dissuade him from it.

"Prince, prince," he cried, so feebly, that had not the cave and those within been profoundly silent, his voice would never have been heard; "do you comprehend my plan? Let my head be taken to the Duke of Cumberland, and passed off as yours! Let the reward be claimed. It is a large amount, and when it is obtained, let it be handed to you, to do with as you think fit. Thus will you be doubly revenged upon your enemies! You will be able to escape, and obtain the thirty thousand pounds as well. Can you hear what I say?"

"Quite plainly. But your voice shows me that your death is hastening on with rapid strides. Oh! for a priest to grant you absolution for the sin you have committed ere you die!"

"Do not think of that, my prince. To obtain a priest here is utterly impossible, but I shall die with the conviction on my mind that if ever any one was justified in committing self-destruction, I was, and that the motive will sanctify the deed. I am dying now, my prince. I feel myself growing cold, and things fade away from my view. Promise that I shall have my wishes carried out—promise that I shall not die in vain?"

"I promise!" said the prince.

"A smile lighted up the face of his devoted servitor, but either from a sudden pain, or from a remarkable fixity of purpose, he banished it, and assumed an expression of extreme anguish.

It might have been that, even in his last moments, he thought of still further imposing upon his foes, for, with the same look upon his features, he drew a gasping breath, a convulsive shudder overspread his body, and he expired.

CHAPTER CCX.

DICK TURPIN AND CLAUDE DUVAL CUT OFF THE HEAD OF THE YOUNG HIGHLANDER.

For several minutes after the young highlander thus drew his last breath, no one in the cavern either spoke or moved.

All were deeply impressed with the solemnity of what had just taken place, and that mysterious influence which the presence of a dead body never fails to produce, was shared in the full by all.

Prince Charles was the first to break the kind of spell by which their faculties were enchained.

He rose from the kneeling posture, which at the request of the now dead man, he had assumed.

The others, however, did not presume to move or speak, but waited with no inconsiderable degree of curiosity and interest to see what he would say or do next.

They were not long kept in suspense.

Drawing back a few paces from the corpse, round which the highlanders and our friends had rather closely congregated, the young prince spoke.

Without exception, his words were listened to by every one with the most profound attention.

"My friends," he said, "it seems that you all perfectly comprehend, as I do, the motives which led this poor young man to commit the crime of self-destruction; and, such being the case, it will be unnecessary for me to say anything about them. As he very truly said, our situation is a most desperate one—so desperate, indeed, that it is questionable whether by any adverse combination of circumstances it could be worse. If we leave the shelter of this cavern we shall assuredly, in a few hours, be captured; if, on the other hand, we remain where we are, our discovery will be certain. We have two courses open to us, the termination of both of which is precisely the same.

A murmur of assent responded to his words.

"The matter is one which concerns you all equally, intimately, and individually; and therefore I shall leave you to decide what had better be done. In the first place, do you consider the plan proposed a feasible one, and, if so, shall I be justified in adopting it?"

The prince paused, and looking at the group of anxious faces by which he was surrounded, awaited a reply.

The rude highlanders, however, would never have dreamed of advising their prince. To them a Stuart was a being little inferior to a god, and anything he chose to say they would have looked upon as law.

But, with our friends the highwaymen, it was altogether different.

Each of them was accustomed to perilous emergencies and to taking the responsibility of action upon themselves.

Yet they felt that for them all to have spoken at once would have shown a want of respect, so they nudged Turpin to speak for them.

He knew what they meant, and obeyed them promptly.

"It appears to me, prince," said Turpin, in his rough and ready way, at which no one could take offence, "that such important business demands some amount of deliberation; and as we have but very little time, the sooner we come to a decision the better."

"Let me hear your candid opinion!" said the prince. "In the hour of danger I have always found you a most trustworthy adviser, and in the present instance I shall be greatly guided by what you say."

"If you wish for my candid opinion, prince," replied Turpin, bowing in acknowledgment of the compliment which Charles Stuart had paid him, "I can give it to you in a very few words."

"Pray do so."

"Then I consider the plan a most excellent one. It

will require great boldness and address to put in execution, but I think all the better of it for that."

"And do you feel inclined to adopt it?"

"I do, most certainly; not, however, that I should ever have sanctioned or approved of the deed which this young man has committed; but as he is dead, and it is beyond the power of all of us to bring him back to life, I think we shall be greatly to blame if we scruple to make use of him to secure our own safety."

"And you think we should be justified in mutilating his remains?"

"It is not a very pleasant idea, I confess," replied Turpin, "but it strikes me that I would much rather mutilate his body than not, when I knew that by so doing I should not be injuring him in the least, but save my own life and the lives of my friends at the same time."

"That is enough. I own at first I felt some scruples whether I should keep the promise made him, but now you have quite removed them."

"The end to be gained will, I am sure, justify the means, and I for one should rejoice most heartily at the idea of your playing your foes such a trick as actually to receive the reward offered for your apprehension."

"Stop!" cried the prince; "that reminds me"——

"Of what?"

"Where is there any one to be found who will be willing, if we cut off this young man's head, to carry it to the Duke, and claim the reward?"

"I will—I will—I will!" cried every one, the highlanders included.

The prince smiled.

"Are you so ready to leave me?" he asked.

"Nay, it is not that," replied Turpin. "Had the service been to have remained by your side, and fight to the death, your appeal would have been as readily responded to."

"I believe it—I believe it!"

"But you see we are willing to do as you desire. It will remain with you to make election as to which one shall perform the mission."

"It will be one of extreme danger."

"Perhaps, prince; perhaps."

"If the fraud is discovered?"

"Why then I admit the bearer of the head would be in rather an unpleasant predicament! But, for my own part, I am sanguine of success if the one who goes performs his part well."

"Who shall I select?"

"That I shall leave entirely to you, my prince. I would speak, however, only I do not wish to shut myself out from the list of candidates."

"It shall go by the general voice," cried Charles. "That will be the fairest and most satisfactory."

"It will. How shall we proceed? for, my prince, I have always found it advisable, whenever a particular course of action has been decided upon, to set about it at once."

As you will. A show of hands shall decide it, and each candidate shall stand forward in succession."

"And you will decide who shall have the precedence?"

"I have no objection."

"It will be best."

"Then I decide upon you!"

"Me?"

"Even so. Stand forward."

Turpin, of course, complied.

"Now, my friends," continued the prince; "those who consider this the most proper person to depart upon the dangerous expedition, let them hold up their hands."

Scarcely had the words passed his lips than, as if by the exertion of one muscle, every hand was raised.

The decision was unanimous.

Dick Turpin looked round with a pleased smile upon his face.

He had all along coveted this task.

The inactive life which he had of late been leading made him long for such an enterprise as this no doubt would prove to be.

"Is this your decision?" cried the prince.

"It is."

"Enough, then. It will not be worth while for any other to stand forward, and if it will be any satisfaction to the electors and the elected, I can say that I heartily approve of the choice which has been made."

With an expression of countenance which one would think but ill accorded with what he was about to do, Dick Turpin drew his heavy sword from its sheath.

"It is a disagreeable task," he said, "but it is one that must be performed, and I am not the man to shrink from what is necessary."

He made a sign to Claude Duval, which was instantly understood.

He came to his side.

The others in the cave looked on with the greatest curiosity. There was not one who could have turned away.

The dead highlander lay out quite straght upon his back.

Dick stooped over him, and with his left hand took hold of him by the clothing about his neck.

Then, with some slight exertion, he raised him to a sitting posture.

Claude Duval sank down behind him upon his hands and knees.

Then Dick gently let the body fall backwards, as it had a tendency to do.

It balanced, of course, over Claude's back.

The head hung back, leaving the neck fully exposed.

It was a fair mark.

Dick lifted his sword.

He caught hold of the massive hilt with both hands, in order that he might bring it down with greater force.

The steel weapon rose a sickening, swishing noise as it descended.

But such was the vigour with which it was brought down, and so accurate was the aim which Turpin had taken, that the head was severed at a single blow. It rolled several paces along the floor of the cavern.

Very little blood followed the stroke. It had nearly all drained out of the wound which the young man had inflicted upon himself.

Dick assisted Claude to rise from his awkward position.

"That is done," he said; "but there is yet more to do."

"What, oh! what?" asked the prince; "this sickens me."

"No doubt—no doubt. When I leave here, let a spy accompany me. By hovering about at a distance he will be able to learn whether the ruse is a successful one, and whether the troops that guard the mountain passes are withdrawn. If this is done, let me implore you not to lose a moment in quitting this place, and making the best of your way to the sea-shore, at the point most convenient for you. There you must find some opportunity of embarking and getting safely over to France, where you will be sure to find an asylum."

"Unless," said the prince, mournfully—"unless indeed they, in the hour of my extremity, should turn against me."

CHAPTER CCXI.

DICK TURPIN SETS OUT UPON THE MOST PERILOUS ENTERPRISE HE HAS EVER UNDERTAKEN IN HIS LIFE.

"Do not anticipate misfortune, my prince," said Turpin, "it is bad enough without that."

"What?"

"Your position."

"I know that."

"If I succeed, you will have many difficulties to contend with in gaining the sea-shore. The fraud may not be suspected at first, and yet afterwards be detected, and a hot pursuit instituted after you."

"But have you reflected what you shall do in the event of discovery?"

"I have not—nor shall I. I shall wait till the time comes. Leave me to shift for myself, and I shall be all right. It must be close upon sunrise now, and so it is time for me to start, but let me, before I take my departure, advise you what to do, in order that my proceedings may be all the more effectual."

"What is it you wish?"

"My friends here," said Turpin, indicating by a movement of his hand, Tom King, Jack Rann, and Claude Duval, "will remain with you, and will do their best to aid you in making your escape. They will also be hostages for me."

"Hostages?"

"Yes, my prince, I look forward, with great confidence

to obtaining the thirty thousand pounds, and should I do so you will want some security for my handing it over to you. As I said, escape to France. I will take the earliest opportunity of rejoining you there. If you do not see or hear anything of me, you may conclude that my mission has failed, and that I am no more."

"But you will take every precaution to insure your own safety?"

"Do not fear that, prince. I am not so tired of my life that I am desirous of flinging it away. I shall meet you in safety, I feel assured."

"I trust you will, indeed.'

"And now listen, further. As quickly as possible, I shall take the head, and carry it direct to the Duke of Cumberland. I shall not adopt any particular disguise, for I do not believe I am known as one of your adherents. I shall invent on my journey a plausible tale to account for the head coming into my possession. On delivering it, however, the probability is that I shall be asked to lead them to the spot where the body is to be found."

"Ah! I did not think of that."

"But it is a thing likely to occur."

"Certain."

"I think so, too; therefore, some means must be taken to fix the deceit more deeply in their minds."

"But how?"

"My prince, I will tell you. These means will be rather disagreeable, but they cannot be avoided."

"What are they?"

"There are several things you carry about your person which will go a long way towards establishing your identity, such as your claymore, your dirk, your target, your sporran, and your curiously-worked belt. These you must transfer to the body of the man who died to save us."

The prince hesitated.

"It is inevitable, my prince, or I would not press it upon you. Your best course will be to exchange apparel, and, with your permission, I will proceed to strip these things off."

Turpin hardly waited long enough for the required assent to be given, but stooped down, and with great rapidity took off the different articles of clothing which the highlander had worn.

He carried them to the prince.

"They will furnish you," he said, "with that of which you so greatly stand in need."

"And what is that?"

"A disguise! Take the things as they are; retire to a corner of the cavern, and change them. We will then dress the corpse in those which you take off."

Dick, as he spoke, almost thrust the clothes into the prince's hands.

Repugnant as it was to him, no doubt he clearly saw the necessity of doing as he had been advised; and as the old proverb says, "necessity knows no law," so he overcame his dislike as well as he could, and exchanged apparel.

The operation was one that did not occupy much time.

In a few minutes he returned to where the highwaymen stood.

Of course, during his absence they had taken the opportunity of speaking to each other, and making a few arrangements as to their future proceedings.

The difference which the simple change of habiliments made to the prince was really astonishing, and the highwaymen were more than ever struck with the great resemblance which existed between him and the highlander.

Dick was well pleased to perceive it, since it gave him all the better chance of success.

Without loss of time, he and his three comrades dressed the dead body in the clothes which the prince had just taken off.

The job was a very awkward one, but they succeeded in accomplishing it.

Then the resemblance was perfect.

The clothes fitted tightly, for the young man was larger made about the body than the prince was.

"Now," said Turpin, "I think we may look upon success as almost certain. I shall bring the Duke and those who like to come here to see the body. But, stay! I must make it appear as though there had been an encounter!"

Struck with the thought, Dick drew the claymore from its sheath, and plentifully smeared it with blood, and laid it near the dead man's hand.

Not content, however, with this, and wishing to make the deception as complete as possible, he drew his own sword, and plunged it several times into the inanimate clay.

No blood, of course, to speak of, flowed from these places, but he took care that there should be plenty placed there; for, owing to the manner in which the dagger had entered, the young man had bled to death.

These preparations were ghastly and horrible, but they may be excused on the ground of the absolute necessity there was for them.

At length all was ready.

Dick took up the head.

He held it by the hair.

The others who were present involuntarily turned their eyes from contemplating it to the prince, in order to compare the two.

Of course some differences could be detected, but they were very slight, and intimate as he was with the prince's features, Dick felt that had the head he held been shown to him, he would, without hesitation, have declared it to be that of Charles Stuart.

It was Claude Duval, however, who proposed, as a precautionary measure, to inflict a wound upon the face in such a manner, that while it did not mar the face, would yet make it more difficult of identification.

Dick approved of this entirely, and so accordingly as he held it, Claude drew his sword and inflicted a slight gash upon the face, extending from the mouth to the temple.

"Now I think all is finished. Look! the sun has already broken forth."

All turned as he spoke.

The entrance to the cavern faced the east, and a few beams of the rising sun penetrated a foot or two inside the entrance.

"It is time I took my departure. Farewell, my prince. You understand, I think, how you are to act. Nothing will elapse, I hope, before I learn the welcome intelligence that you have escaped. Then, as soon as may be, I will meet you in France, bringing with me, I hope, the thirty thousand pounds, though I shall consider effecting your escape the primary object, and the other a secondary one."

"Right," said the Pretender. "I can feel now how much I shall regret to part with you; but that time will have to come. I am reconciled now, however, by the hope that, though the enterprise you have taken in hand is one of a most dangerous character, you will escape all peril, and join me in a little while. Farewell! and may success attend your efforts."

The prince retired to a distant portion of the cavern for a double motive.

To conceal his own emotion.

And to allow Dick to take a farewell of his comrades, without the restraint which his presence would of necessity impose.

Dick found that bidding good-bye for an indefinite period to those three gallant hearts with whom he had shared so many perils, and from whom he hoped never to be separated, was anything but a pleasant business.

It had to be gone through, however, and he—

Screwed his courage to the sticking place.

It was necessary that he should do so, for he could not blind himself to the fact that the peril he was about to incur was one of no ordinary character; but Dick Turpin was never the man to flinch from danger, as the present occasion fully proved.

"Good-bye, old friends!" he said, in as cheerful a voice as he could assume. "Good-bye! We shall meet again, I hope, ere long; and then we will once more cry, 'Hurrah for the road!' Do your best to procure the young prince's escape. Nothing on my part shall be wanting, rest assured of that; but I have every confidence in the success of the plan, which is one of the best I ever knew of."

"Take care of yourself, Dick!" said Tom King. "Do not run into any kind of needless danger!"

"I will not, Tom, rest assured of that. Farewell, friends! Let the spy be sent after me, and the moment he returns, evacuate this place, for I shall bring the duke here. That will be your best chance of escape. Farewell!"



[DICK TURPIN CLAIMS THE REWARD FOR THE PRETENDER'S HEAD.]

"Farewell," cried his comrades.

They shook hands all round.

But they were very loath to leave him, and followed him out on to the little plateau in front of the entrance to the cavern.

Holding the head in his hand in the same manner as he had first taken hold of it, he began the descent of the precipitous mountain path.

The highlander who was to watch his movements, and bring back a report of his proceedings, followed.

Then the prince came out on to the little plateau.

So, too, did the highlanders, whose numbers were now reduced to four.

The little party stood there and watched the receding form of the highwayman until the masses of rock at the base of the mountain hid him from their sight.

CHAPTER CCXII.

DICK TURPIN CARRIES THE YOUNG PRETENDER'S HEAD TO THE DUKE OF CUMBERLAND, AND CLAIMS THE THIRTY THOUSAND POUNDS REWARD.

MORE than once during his descent of the perilous mountain path, Dick Turpin turned back and waved his hand to his companions.

Those companions who it was questionable if he should ever see more.

But at length, when the bottom of the path was reached, and he turned round again, he found them no longer visible.

The immense masses of rock among which he had wound his way intercepted his view.

But the highlander who had followed him could still see at a distance.

And now, having gone so far, Dick began to very seriously consider as to which would be the best manner in which to act.

Accustomed as he was to trust to the chapter of accidents, and rely upon his own resources in the moment of danger, yet he felt that upon the present occasion, so pregnant with importance as it was, it would be better for him to depart from his ordinary method, and arrange beforehand some plan of action in his mind.

While thus deliberating, he found that the head, in the manner he carried it, was a serious inconvenience.

Besides which, should he meet any one, it would be the means of attracting more notice to himself than he wished.

And not only that, too, did it not represent a sum of thirty thousand pounds, and should he tell any one that it was the head of the Pretender he carried, would they not try to take it from him?

Assuredly so, and then not only would the chance he had of obtaining this large sum be lost, but also the escape of the young prince himself be jeopardized, if not made impossible.

These reflections showed him the necessity there was for him to conceal the nature of what he carried from every prying eye that might rest upon him, and he resolved to do so at once.

A fragment of rock—or rather what geologists would call a bowlder—projected conveniently from the hard ground a few paces before him, and so he seated himself upon it.

The head he placed beside him.

He wanted something like a cloth in which to tie it up.

This he soon found.

In the days of which we write it was customary to wear round the neck a cravat of very voluminous dimensions.

They were made generally of white cambric, folded into four thicknesses.

They were worn once round the neck, and tied in a large bow, the ends of which were of preposterous length, and trimmed with lace, according to the wealth and position of the wearer.

This, then, Dick felt was not only what he could spare, but what would best answer his purpose; so he pulled it off and carefully enveloped the ghastly-looking head in its folds.

This done, he rose and resumed his journey.

The highlander who followed him, on perceiving him stop, stopped also, so that the same distance was maintained between the two.

From the spy who had returned with such a budget of alarming news, Dick had learned which path he ought to take, in order to reach his destination.

The way, however, was long and toilsome.

At the expiration of three hours from the time of his starting, and just when he was ready to drop with fatigue, he saw before him, in the distance, a small troop of English soldiers.

This nerved him to proceed at a still quicker pace—for, at first, he was unable to tell whether they were approaching or receding from him.

He found the former to be the case; and that if they continued in the same line of march, they must pass over the very spot upon which he stood.

Under such circumstances there could be no necessity for him to continue on his way; and so he determined to wait till they came up with him.

The highlander, who had also perceived the soldiers, and comprehended Dick's motive, halted, and hid himself from observation by lying down at full length on the top of a distant rock, and allowing no portion of his body, save the upper part of his head, to be visible.

Strains of martial music now began to make themselves heard.

Dick scarcely dared to hope that this, the first troop he came in sight of, was the one of which the Duke of Cumberland had taken the command, but he resolved upon no account to surrender the head, unless to that individual himself.

From these, however, he reasonably calculated that he should be able to ascertain his whereabouts.

It took the soldiers about a quarter of an hour to reach the spot where Turpin sat waiting for them.

When pretty near, however, he rose, and advanced to meet them.

In number they did not much exceed thirty, but they were all exceedingly well armed.

They were on foot.

One, however, who rode, sometimes in the van, and sometimes in the rear, attracted Dick's immediate attention.

He had never seen the Duke, for during the past few years he had been commanding the army on the continent, and he had only been sent for home to crush this formidable rebellion.

But more than once he had been described to him by those who had had frequent opportunities of observing his appearance, and the figure who sat on horseback entirely coincided with the description he had had of him.

Seeing Turpin approach, it would seem as though orders had been given to take him prisoner, for several hastened towards him.

But, with the rapidity of thought, Dick stripped off the covering that concealed the ghastly burden which he carried, and again grasping it by the hair, he held it aloft, as high as his arm would allow him, and shouted—

"The reward—the reward! I claim the reward! Thirty thousand pounds reward! I claim it, I say! Here is the head of the Young Pretender! Charles Stuart's head! Where is the duke? Lead me to the duke! I claim the reward!"

These vociferations caused, as might be supposed, the utmost surprise and excitement among the soldiery, and something of their import seemed to reach the ears of the personage on horseback, whom Dick took to be the Duke of Cumberland, for he spurred his horse forward as he said—

"Vat is this? Vat you zay? Donder and blitzen! Zay zat one time more! Zirty zouzand pounds! Mein Gott! Did you zay it was ze Pretender's head?"

His Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland always spoke execrable English, but especially so if anything excited him.

"My lord duke," replied Turpin, as he stood near the duke's horse, and holding up the head in his right hand, and pointing to it with his left, "my lord duke, I said this was the head of Charles Edward Stuart, the Young Pretender, and so it is, and I claim the reward of thirty thousand pounds!"

"Donder and blitzen!" cried the duke, doubt, astonishment, and triumph alternately appearing upon his face. "Hold ze head up, and let me have von look at him."

He turned half-round in the saddle as he spoke, and Turpin held the head in such a manner that he could perceive the features.

The duke looked long and keenly.

"Mein Gott!" he cried, at length, "zat's him, for sure, though he looks fatter as when I zaw him last. Where did you find him?"

"With the permission of your royal highness," replied Turpin, "I will relate to you the whole of the particulars."

"Goot! Is zat his head?"

"Your royal highness, I know your character too well to be foolish enough to attempt to impose upon you in any way."

The duke smiled.

He was not insensible to flattery.

He liked to be thought sagacious and cunning.

But that may be easily accounted for.

It was because he was neither the one nor the other.

But then he, in common with most others, like to be flattered for that which they do not possess.

He looked with an eye of favour upon Dick already.

The highwayman saw his advantage, and, of course, did not fail to profit by it.

"It would be an insult to your royal highness to attempt to deceive you in any way, and, not only that, it would be sure to fail. Look, your royal highness. Look upon this face, and tell me whether there is any doubt about it."

"Certainly not. As you zay, zat is ze traitor's face."

Upon hearing this decided expression of opinion upon the part of their chief, the soldiers gave three cheers.

But the subordinate officers who attended the troop pressed forward to examine the head.

They looked, too, very curiously at Turpin, but he assumed an air of the most perfect self-possession, though, for all he knew, one or more of those who crowded round him were acquainted with his person.

The exultation of the duke was great—so great, indeed, that he would have overlooked all details had not the officers reminded him.

Not one, however, entertained the least doubt of it being the Young Pretender's head, and the idea of a man being

temerarious enough to pass some one else's off for it, never occurred to them at all.

They were exceedingly jealous, though, of Turpin.

Each one entertained the hope of being the lucky man, and now they were disappointed, though the probability is they would not have so much cared had the reward been claimed by one of their comrades.

But the duke now turned to the highwayman, and said—

"Vat you zay may be quite true, but you vill have to give us de proof."

Turpin bowed.

"I am ready, your royal highness."

"Donder and blitzen, then you shall make von begin."

CHAPTER CCXIII.

THE YOUNG PRINCE AND HIS FOLLOWERS COMMENCE THEIR HAZARDOUS JOURNEY TO LOCHNANUAGH.

From his lofty post of observation, the spy who had followed Dick saw all that had taken place.

It was rather premature, but he considered the whole affair now settled.

The troop they had so much reason to dread was there.

He could not tell, of course, how soon they would, under the direction of Dick Turpin, set out for the cavern.

He, therefore, considered himself justified in jumping to the conclusion that all was well, and so, with great care and stealth, he had crept down from the rock, and, by a circuitous route, made his way to the little mountain path leading up to the cavern.

Upon arriving at its commencement, he paused and looked back, in order to make sure that his foes were not close behind him.

To his great relief, there was no one at all in sight.

To say that this man did not feel the full peril of the situation in which he was placed, and that he was not anxious to get safely out of it in the best manner he possibly could, would not be true.

For his own part, however, he would never have dreamed of betraying his prince, although he might have gained so much if he had.

Nor would he have consented to the sacrifice of his companion's life if he could have in any way prevented it; but as the sacrifice had taken place, he thought it would be best to take all the advantage of it that he possibly could.

Satisfied that the coast was quite clear, he commenced the steep ascent of the mountain path.

By this time it was nearly noon, and the sun was at his greatest altitude.

The mists which usually hung about the mountain had been dispersed, and having passed the rocks at the bottom, he looked up to that place where the little plateau was situated.

An eye less keen than his, and less familiar with the spot, would fail to have detected anything upon it, but he could tell even at that distance that his friends were there watching and waiting for his return.

Up, up he went steadily and slowly, for he found climbing was a severe strain upon his already much-taxed strength.

But when he reached his destination, he was literally overwhelmed with questions respecting the manner in which Turpin had got on.

The reader is already in possession of more facts than the spy could give, and so it will be needless to repeat the imperfect imformation which he imparted.

They, however, like him, looked upon the affair as already settled—as though the result was already achieved. But how great was their mistake.

We will not, however, anticipate the course of events, but, leaving Dick Turpin for a little while in the enemy's camp, proceed to relate what steps were taken by his companions.

Hope had once more revived in the breast of the young prince. Not that he thought he should ever accomplish that which had been the dream of his own and his father's life, but he had the hope that he should escape from his enemies.

Moreover, he was stimulated by the hope which Turpin had held out of getting possession of the thirty thousand pounds.

This sum, large as it was, would not indemnify him for the loss of the crown of England, nor was it with that idea that he wished it.

It was chiefly because it would gratify a certain feeling of revenge which he very naturally felt.

Added to which, it would provide him with the means of recompensing those who had so bravely stood by him in his direst extremity.

He would, in fine, be able to give them as much as they would have obtained had they betrayed him and handed him over to his foes.

But should Turpin fail, they would have to rest satisfied with thanks, for he would have no more substantial payment to offer them, the unfortunate enterprise which he had undertaken having left him impecunious.

A great thing he felt, however, it would be to leave the shores of Scotland, taking the men with him, and thus saving their lives.

He listened, therefore, with the utmost intentness to every word which the spy uttered.

As soon as he had finished he spoke.

"My friends," he said, "you have all heard the news. All of you, too, heard the instructions which our absent friend gave us. They were that we should immediately evacuate the cave, for he would not be able to tell how soon he should return with the troops after he had fallen in with them."

"Exactly so," replied Tom King; "and, therefore, my prince, let us bid this place good bye, without delay. I have great faith in Dick's strategic abilities, and so would you have, were I to relate a few anecdotes about him. He will impose on them successfully, beyond doubt, and, relying upon our carrying out the instructions he was so careful to particularly give us, he will lead the soldiers to the cave."

"And so, the sooner we are out of it, the better," replied the prince.

"Unquestionably," said Tom King, "and so it only remains for you to decide what we shall do, and then we will make a start."

"I am anxious that we should all keep together," answered the prince," for in the present case I fully believe union to be strength. Lochnanuagh will be the nearest point where we can meet with our friends, and where we have a reasonable prospect of getting a boat. I propose, then, that we make that our destination. Do you agree with me there, my friends?"

A general murmur of assent came from the lips of those whom he addressed.

"That is sufficient. The next thing is, we shall require a guide, for I am not familiar enough with the country to find my way there. Let the one, therefore, who knows the road best stand forward, and we will make him our guide."

Neither of the three highwaymen were better qualified to take this post than the prince was himself, so it rested entirely with the five highlanders.

They spent some minutes in earnest conversation with each other.

There seemed to be some slight difference of opinion.

But as they spoke in their own outlandish guttural language, and in a low tone, the others could not tell its import.

The dispute, if any there was, was soon decided.

Perhaps this was in some measure due to the presence of the prince.

One highlander stood forward.

He was one to whom particular allusion has more than once been made.

He was the oldest, and the one that seemed to have some degree of command over the others.

He was a stalwart, sturdy Scot—a perfect type of his hardy race, and though his hair and his beard were of a grizzly gray, and his countenance interlaced with countless wrinkles, yet he was as strong and firm as many a one who had not attained to half his age.

The attitude in which he stood before the young prince was one of profound respect.

He did not speak, but waited for him to address him first.

"Speak freely," said the Pretender; "do you feel yourself qualified to guide us to the spot I mentioned?"

"My prince," replied the old highlander, "I am an old man now, and all my life I have lived about this spot,

and am as familiar with the road to the place you want to reach as I am with the pathway which you can see winding down to the base of the mountain."

"We will trust you, then," said Charles Stuart. "But if you know two roads, and one of those two is less frequented than the other, let us take that one."

"Enough, my prince! I can lead you the whole distance along a pathway inaccessible to horse, and where it is a thousand chances to one if we meet any one."

"Then let it be decided that we take that route; so now, my friends, forward, and I fervently hope not only that our brave comrade may bring his undertaking to a successful issue, but that we shall be so fortunate as to reach the shores of France, where I make little doubt we shall meet with a hospitable reception. At any rate, they will not treat us as our foes would."

"My prince," said the old highlander, respectfully, who had been intrusted with the duty of guide.

"Say on, old friend."

"If I might advise, I would have the order of march agreed upon before we start."

"You are right; it ought to be decided. Speak; let us hear how you think it should be done. I shall defer entirely to you, believing that you have the best idea of the difficulties we should meet with."

The highlander's face assumed an expression of the utmost gratification as the words fell upon his ears.

He drew himself up even more proudly than before.

"I think it will be best, my prince," he replied, "for one of my companions to go before us, in order to ascertain that the path is free from all dangers and obstructions."

"Certainly."

"And that another should bring up the rear, whose duty it will be to apprise us of the approach of the enemy."

"A better mode of procedure could not be devised," said the prince, "and let it be fully acted upon. The news that I am no more will quickly spread from place to place, and the vigilance of the troops who have been set to guard the various mountain paths will be abated."

"Let us trust so," said Claude Duval.

"Forward, then!" cried the prince; "it is high time now that we left this place."

"We shall have to cross the mountain," said the guide, "not descend it. The path will be rough and difficult, but each man must do his best."

He then gave some instructions to one of his companions, who set out first.

The others then followed.

The guide and the young prince.

The three highwaymen.

The highlanders.

And then one was left behind to bring up the rear in the manner they had arranged.

CHAPTER CCXIV.

FICKLE FORTUNE SEEMS AT LAST TO SMILE UPON THE FORLORN ENTERPRISE OF YOUNG CHARLES STUART.

In this way, then, they began their long and toilful journey.

The path was narrow, and in some places almost perpendicular.

Its course was upward and round the mountain.

They gained the highest portion, and then they were compelled by sheer fatigue to halt.

Naturally they looked back upon the route they had just come.

The prospect was full of grandeur.

As they gazed around, the breasts of the principal characters were animated with very different emotions.

The old highlander, as he stood up and looked at the magnificent scenery below him, felt a glow of the warmest admiration at his heart—he was proud of his native land.

But the young prince felt his heart swell almost to bursting, when, on looking round, he contemplated that which he considered by right belonged to him, and yet saw himself a disguised fugitive, with his life in the most imminent danger.

The three highwaymen, although impressed by the beauty and sublimity of what they saw, looked keenly upon the plain, in order to detect, if possible, some trace of their foes.

Claude shaded his eyes with his hands, and looked long and earnestly.

Suddenly an exclamation broke from his lips.

At the same moment he pointed with his finger in a particular direction.

"Look," he cried, "look there, all of you, and tell me whether those tiny specks are not soldiers."

In an instant every eye was turned upon the spot he indicated.

A cluster of specks, looking like a number of small red insects, could just be seen.

To distinguish them required a steadfast gaze and a clear eye.

Most particularly did the old highlander fix his looks upon them.

Our readers must have noticed how well aged people, when in possession of health and strength, can perceive distant objects.

In this respect they have the advantage of youth.

The reason is obvious.

As age increases, the pupil of the eye becomes flattened.

This produces a twofold effect.

One is, that objects near at hand, such as the letters in a book, cannot be seen unless held at a considerable distance from the eye.

The other is, that objects afar off, such as the figures upon the face of a distant church clock, or a balloon in the air, can be seen by them when invisible to younger persons.

And this was the case with the highlander.

Claude Duval was what is familiarly termed "long-sighted," and that is the reason he was the first to see the moving specks below.

But the guide, when he fixed his glance upon them, was able to make them out distinctly.

They were soldiers.

"I can see them," he said, "quite plainly. They are on foot, and are making their way towards the path leading to the cavern.

"Are you sure?" asked Charles Stuart.

"Quite, my prince," was the reply. "We must put ourselves again in motion. Fortunately, a few steps will take us round the side of the mountain. If we stay here we shall run the greatest risk of being seen."

"Lead on, then," cried the prince. "Do not delay a single moment. If they saw us, they would try all they could to capture us, although they might not suspect who we really were."

"Very true, my prince."

Once more, after their brief and insufficient halt, the little troop put themselves in motion.

But now their path trended downwards, which made a vast difference.

At first, they made all the speed they possibly could, but, as soon as they were quite out of sight of the soldiers, they slackened their pace, and proceeded at a more easy rate.

To measure in a straight line from where they were to the plain beneath was no great distance, but they could not, of course, reach it in this fashion.

The path wound round and round in the most tortuous manner conceivable, and, by the time they were near the base, it was quite dusk.

By the advice of the guide, they halted at a spot where stood an old ruined hut, doubtless erected by some poor shepherd.

It was now quite deserted.

The whole of the little party, save two, entered it, and these were left outside as sentinels.

Had they deemed it prudent they would have lighted a fire, not only for the sake of the agreeable warmth, but also for the light it would have afforded them, but they were obliged to forego this comfort.

Here they broke their fast with such rude food as they had each brought with them, and, throwing themselves at full length upon the floor, sought that rest which nature imperiously demanded.

Here they stayed for nearly four hours.

Night had then fully come.

The slender crescent of a new moon shed a faint and subdued light upon the surrounding country.

All was still—oppressively so, in fact.

That this was as good a time to recommence their march as they could possibly have was beyond doubt.

But before they fairly started, by the advice of Tom King and his comrades, one of the highlanders was sent out to reconnoitre.

He was absent nearly half-an-hour.

When he came back, he brought with him some rather alarming intelligence.

Some distance further down the path a party of soldiers were stationed.

As soon as the guide heard this, he said, at once—

"We must stay where we are. It is our only chance of safety. To pass them while they remain there will be impossible."

"Are you sure of this?" asked the young prince.

"Quite sure."

"Then we must trust to our scheme having the effect of removing them. When they hear of my fictitious death they will withdraw, for what other motive can they have for keeping watch?"

"None, my prince."

"Then we must stay, and wait till they remove."

At this moment the clear notes of a bugle rang out shrilly upon the night air.

The sound came from a distance.

It was immediately responded to by one close at hand.

Our friends did not dare to move or speak.

They bent all their faculties to that of listening.

Another note was blown, and then another, as though for the purpose of enabling the two parties to wait.

Had either of the three highwaymen been familiar with the nature of the ground, they would have crept forward to reconnoitre, but being in total ignorance of it, they considered it would be too hazardous.

The same idea seemed to strike the old highlander, although no word was spoken.

Motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he glided away like a spectre.

He was quickly out of sight in the darkness.

He was out of hearing sooner, for he had slipped off his shoes and stockings, and walked barefoot.

A very anxious time elapsed while he was absent.

All listened eagerly for his return.

The sounds of the bugles had ceased, leaving them as much in the dark as to their meaning as they were before.

Five minutes passed.

Still there was no sign of the old man.

Just, however, as their impatience had risen to such an unbearable extent that they were about to rise and seek him, he returned.

The young prince and his followers stood together in a dense throng at the door of the ruined hut.

"All is well!" said the highlander, in a deep voice, which was deeply tinctured with satisfaction; "All is well!"

"How so?"

"I will tell you, my prince. When I left your side I made my way with all possible silence down the path to where the troop of soldiers were picketed."

"And did you discover the meaning of the notes upon the bugles?"

"I did, as you shall hear. Taking advantage of those times when the clear, shrill notes made the ear deaf to all other sounds, I crept nearer and nearer, until at length I was able not only to distinguish their forms, but also to hear what was said."

"Go on."

"It seemed to me, my prince, that the bugle was blown by the soldiers below, in order to direct some one to the exact place where they were.

"Presently I heard a heavy footstep, a challenge, and a rejoinder.

"I listened with the utmost intentness.

"The new comer was a soldier, and he brought the others the intelligence that they might break up their watch, as the Young Pretender had been already captured.

"I lay quite still, and soon, to my great joy, the whole party of soldiers, who were twenty in number at the very least, retreated, leaving the pathway free."

"Is it possible?"

"Fortune at last favours you, my prince. Let us lose no time in taking advantage of this fortunate circumstance."

"The ruse seems to have succeeded, then?" said Charles Stuart.

"Yes; may he who has successfully carried it out fall into no great danger in consequence."

It was Tom King who uttered these words.

The deep and solemn tones of his voice left no doubt behind as to their earnestness

"Most fervently," said Prince Charles, "do I re-echo your wish; and let me also add that we may be fortunate enough to pursue the rest of our journey without molestation."

CHAPTER CCXV.

AN UNEXPECTED SPECTACLE PASSES BEFORE THE EYES OF THE FUGITIVES.

THE stirring episode in the lives of the four highwaymen, in which Charles Edward Stuart, the Young Pretender, played so prominent a part, is fast approaching a termination; and as in a little while we shall have to busy ourselves with relating the adventures of Dick Turpin in the English camp, we think it will be best, in order that there may be no future interruption, to follow the young prince and those he had with him in their dangerous journey to Lochnanuagh.

The withdrawal of the small band of troops, who had been set to guard the mountain pass at such a critical moment, seemed almost like a special interposition of Providence in their behalf.

At all events, the young prince thought so, and even if his followers did not, it seemed to re-animate them with fresh hopes, and they drew from the event the most favourable auguries.

The advice of the old highlander, who had brought this, the only welcome intelligence they had for so long received, was too good not to be immediately acted upon.

Accordingly, preserving the same order of march as heretofore, they recommenced their journey.

Morning was now, however, very close at hand, and so it became necessary for them to proceed with the utmost circumspection.

Indeed, so far as actual safety went, it would undoubtedly have been best for them to halt by day and travel by night; but they did not adopt this mode of progression, because they feared that the deception might ere long be detected, and so their escape from Scotland be for ever prevented.

Their main object was not to lose time, but to reach the coast as quickly as possible.

They relied much upon the knowledge of the country to be traversed which the old man possessed.

Every step they took served to confirm the words that he had uttered—namely, that every step of the road was perfectly familiar to him.

He still continued to express his belief that there was scarcely any probability of their encountering either friends or enemies, so little used, on account of its difficulty, was the path by which he proposed to take them.

On reaching the base of the mountain, a wild-looking glen or ravine was reached, on the other side of which they could just distinguish the outlines of another chain of mountains, whose summits were just a shade darker than the sky they seemed to pierce, save in those places where they were crowned with snow.

A terrible rushing, roaring noise, as of some turbulent mountain torrent assailed their ears, and as they still continued their progress across the ravine, the sound grew louder and louder, until at last the very ground beneath their feet trembled perceptibly, so impetuous was its course.

The din was terrific, and it is only those who have witnessed such a phenomenon who can form a just idea of what it is like.

All such will say that it is utterly out of the power of language to express it.

With great difficulty the old highlander made his voice heard.

"Take care all," he cried. "A narrow bridge, that will allow of the passage of but one man at a time, is the only means by which this mountain torrent can be crossed. Follow me, my prince. I will lead the way."

He walked forward as he spoke.

The others followed him anxiously.

A little more than a dozen paces brought them to the verge of the deep abyss, through some contracted channel in which the water forced its way.

The place in which they now stood was in the profoundest darkness, and had not their eyes grown thoroughly accustomed to it, they would never have been able to perceive the end of the bridge over which they had been told they would have to pass.

As it was, however, they could just distinguish the wooden railing intended for a support for the hand.

Boldly and fearlessly, however, the old highlander, after giving a word or two of advice to his beloved prince as to how he should proceed, advanced, and commenced the perilous passage.

The bridge, as he had called it, was nothing more than the trunk of a huge tree, which had been laid from one brink of the abyss to the other.

The upper surface, however, originally round, had been rudely chopped with an axe, until there was a flat place to walk upon, and a hand-rail had been formed by driving two posts in at each end of the tree, and fastening a long piece of wood of convenient thickness to them.

The young prince followed in the steps of his faithful and aged servitor.

More than once, as he thought of his perilous situation, and the awful depth of the abyss, his brain reeled, and it was only by clutching the railing with additional firmness, that he saved himself from falling.

But difficult and full of peril as the undertaking seemed, the torrent was safely crossed by all, without the occurrence of any accident whatever.

This done, they still continued their progress, relying wholly upon the old man who walked before them with the utmost confidence.

And now they again commenced the ascent of a mountain, but all were inspired to put up with the fatigue by the reflection that each step they took served to bring them that much nearer to safety.

Day dawned, and found them about half-way up a mountain, superior in every respect to that in which the cavern was situated.

Some alarm was generated in the breasts of all by the idea that they might be seen by some one from the plains below; but the old man promptly allayed them by the assurance that there was really nothing of the kind to fear.

The mountain path presented every appearance of being but little used. In fact, few had the courage to attempt to cross the mountains, and incur the risk of falling down some tremendous precipice.

They preferred rather making a detour by taking the broad and well-beaten road which wound round the base of the mountain.

But such a road as that would have been ill-suited to the fugitives, whose main object was to elude observation.

At present, so far as they could tell, they had not encountered a human being.

Fatigue compelled them at last to halt for awhile soon after sunrise.

Here they broke their fast with such rude food as they had been able to carry with them.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack both had an expression upon their faces which very plainly said they had had enough of it.

It will be remembered that all along they had felt rather unwilling, and it was only not to be separated from their comrades that they made a sacrifice and came.

Tom King was anxious for the fate of Turpin. The more he thought upon it the fuller of peril did the enterprise which he undertaken seem to be.

For the young prince, too, he felt the greatest possible solicitude.

But, with that constancy of purpose which formed so prominent a trait in his disposition, Tom determined to hold by him to the last—that is to say, until he had seen him in a place of perfect safety.

They stayed no longer than nature compelled them, and again set forward upon their journey.

The old highlander, however, gave them the welcome assurance that the distance they now had to go was comparatively short, and that, by pushing forward vigorously, they would probably reach it by nightfall.

This infused a little fresh energy into their exhausted frames.

Soon after this, too, the descent of the mountain was begun.

At the foot their guide told them they would have to exercise the greatest caution, because there they would have to cross the broad high-road, which during the day was much frequented by passengers of all kinds.

Owing to the very peculiar manner in which the path wound among the rocks, they were able, by stooping, to descend without exposing themselves to the gaze of any one upon it.

But now they reached a part where it would be no longer possible to do this.

They stopped.

It would be necessary to watch for an opportunity of crossing the road when it was free from travellers.

One of the men, after a little while, was sent forward to reconnoitre.

Scarcely, however, had he departed than the loud and spirit-stirring strains of martial musi burst upon their ears.

But it was not Scotch music.

It was the brass-band belonging to some English regiment that sent forth the cheerful sounds.

Not daring to move, they crouched still closer down behind the rock where they had concealed themselves.

The tramp—tramp of the soldiers could now be heard.

From this they could tell they were in large numbers, and marching steadily along a well-kept road.

At this moment the spy returned.

Alarm was in his looks.

"The Southrons," he said. "They come! Their numbers are countless! They are marching along the road!"

"Have they learned our whereabouts, think you?" asked Charles Stuart.

"That, my prince, I cannot tell, but they are coming in this direction."

"This is serious," said Tom King. "But with your permission, I will make a suggestion."

"Say on, my friend. I have every confidence in your judgment."

Tom bowed, as he replied

"It may be that this bodes no special harm to us. Let yonder fragment of stone be rolled against this, and I will stand upon it. By so doing I shall command a view of the road, and as only the upper part of my face will be exposed, there will be no fear of my being seen."

"As you will," said the prince; "but pray be careful not to betray our hiding-place."

"Fear nothing," said Tom. "My own safety would make me take measures not to do that, without counting yours and my companions.

As he spoke, Tom mounted upon the piece of stone which he had mentioned, and cautiously peered over the edge of the rock.

CHAPTER CCXVI.

THE PRINCE AND HIS FOLLOWERS REACH LOCHNANUAGH, AND ARE WRECKED UPON THE ROCKY COAST OF BARRA.

To his great satisfaction he found he could obtain an excellent view of the high-road.

It was many feet below him, and he considered the danger he was in of being seen by any one upon it was so slight as to amount to no danger at all.

In the distance he could perceive a large moving mass, the top of which was a forest of bayonets.

He watched its onward course with great attention.

It soon became obvious to him that they would have to pass just beneath him, or else mount the path, and discover them where they stood.

But when he came to consider, he felt that from the latter he had very little indeed to dread.

The circumstance of their passing along the road just at that time, amounted, he considered, to a coincidence, and nothing more.

Seeing that some time must of necessity elapse before the troops actually passed by, he descended, and requested the young prince to take his place and look.

The same was done by all of them, and then Tom resumed his old post of observation.

The foremost of the soldiers had now got a little beyond the rock behind which he stood, and up the road, as far as ever his eye could carry him, he saw them there in countless numbers.

What it meant he was rather at a loss to guess.

He turned round to the guide.

"You saw the soldiers," he said; "tell me, does the road they are taking lead them to England or to Scotland?"

"To England," was the reply.

"Good!"

Tom was looking out again.

He had intended at first to count the different companies, but he had found the effort beyond him.

His patience, and that of his companions grew exhausted.

Still there seemed to be no end of the troops.

There must have been several thousands of them at least.

They walked, too, as many abreast as the road would allow.

At last came some on horseback.

But these were comparatively few in number.

Then the officers.

The idea that had occurred to Tom when he asked the question of the guide, seemed confirmed.

The English troops, satisfied of the death of the person they had been sent to capture, were returning to the lowlands.

And now Tom could see the end.

With the greatest eagerness and impatience he looked forward, narrowly scanning the countenances of all who passed.

Presently he saw that for which he had been looking.

Surrounded by a guard, but without weapons of any kind—looking, indeed, very much like a prisoner of war—was Dick Turpin!

Yes, there could be no mistake, Tom could have told his familiar form from a thousand others.

He fancied Dick looked rather grave.

He noted one fact, however, with surprise.

Turpin was mounted on Black Bess!

It was as impossible for Tom to mistake the mare any more than her master.

After Dick and his guard came the Duke of Cumberland, surrounded by his staff, whose brilliant uniforms, despite the hard service they had seen, looked beautiful in the sunlight.

This was a sight that so absorbed Tom King, that he almost forgot his companions.

But at the last moment he did think of them.

They looked up again, as on the former occasion.

Sixteen-String Jack was the last, and when he came down again they had passed out of sight.

A vast crowd of people followed, as usual.

Not a word was said about Dick, for the old guide spoke.

"My prince," he said, "this is indeed a most fortunate circumstance for us. When the last stragglers have gone you may depend the road will be clear, for some little time at least. That is the opportunity we must take of crossing it. If we wait for ever we shall never have a better."

All present could not fail to be struck with the truth of this, and so not another moment was lost in speaking, but they crept cautiously down the path.

When they came fully into sight of the high-road, it was quite deserted.

Descending, then, the remainder of the path as quickly as they could, they, after looking both right and left, crossed it, and gained the shelter of a dense forest which was on the opposite side.

All drew a long breath of relief.

Then the prince spoke—

"Let us continue to push forward with what speed we may, for who can tell the meaning of this sudden movement of the troops, or estimate the danger it may bring upon us if we delay."

"My prince," replied Tom King, "I think you have now no cause for fear. The meaning of what we have seen is, I take it, clear enough. The whole troops under the command of the sanguinary duke have been withdrawn from the mountains, and, under the belief that you are no more, are repairing with your head to London."

"Do you really think so?"

"I feel almost certain of it, therefore, I say, push on with all speed. The chance of our meeting with our foes is now almost at an end."

"But," said Claude Duval, "what do you make of Dick being a prisoner?"

"Ah! there I am as much abroad as yourself. I can only account for it in one way,"

"And how is that?"

"That he is made a sort of honourable prisoner, in token of his good faith."

"Then, if that is the case, he is in a very ticklish position indeed."

"I fear he is, but if any one can get out of such a difficulty, Turpin can."

"I quite believe that, Tom."

"Most fervently," interrupted the prince, "do I hope that all will go well with him, and that he will lose neither life nor liberty through me."

"I know he has your good wishes, my prince," replied Tom King, "and he must even be content to abide by his own luck."

"I am puzzled," said Sixteen-String Jack, "to account for his having possession of his mare. You all of you know that it was left at Sir Kenneth Grant's, and that is a long way from here."

"We must wait," said Claude, "until we see him, and then he will have doubtless much to tell us, and many mysteries to elucidate."

In such-like talk and speculations respecting their absent comrade, they whiled away the time upon their long and weary march.

But as Tom had said, they met with no further molestations, though they did not upon that account abate the caution which they had all along observed.

Contrary to the opinion of the guide, it was nearer daybreak than nightfall when they reached Loohnanuagh—at which place they arrived thoroughly wearied out.

But the information respecting the Camerons and Macdonalds being found there was perfectly correct.

The interview between the young prince and Cameron of Lochiel, was a most affecting one. The gentle chief, in common with nearly every one, had heard of his death, and that the English were taking his head to London; for short as was the time, the startling nature of the intelligence had caused it to spread with extraordinary rapidity.

During the whole of the first day the prince and his followers were accommodated with rest and refreshment at a rude cabin, the temporary residence of Lochiel.

The latter started off without delay to find a vessel which would transport his prince to France; but for a long time his influence, great as it was, was powerless to obtain one.

He knew, however, the absolute necessity there was for instantaneous action, and that the deceit which had been put upon the duke might at any moment be discovered, and so he did not relax his efforts to obtain what he sought.

It was nearly dusk, and he was standing near the seashore with his object unachieved, when he saw a small boat come in sight.

He waited until its keel grated upon the strand, and then he spoke to the inmate.

From him he learned that a French sloop-of-war was anchored off the coast of South Uist—an island contiguous to the Isle of Skye.

The idea of reaching this sloop at once occurred to Lochiel; and after some trouble, he succeeded in engaging the man to row them to the spot where he had seen the vessel.

Midnight was the time decided upon for them to set out.

The night was dark and gloomy.

The highlanders who had been so faithful to the unfortunate young prince, could not be induced upon any consideration to leave their native land.

So the three highwaymen were all he had to accompany him, and they as steadfastly refused to leave him.

They found, however, when they took their seats that it would have been inconvenient to have loaded the boat more.

A last farewell was exchanged by the prince with Lochiel and the other chiefs, who, like their clansmen, would not suffer themselves to be pursuaded to leave Scotland.

The boat was pushed off.

At first the boatman took both oars, out, after a little time, the highwaymen alternately relieved him of one of them.

But, as they shot through the waters, darker and darker it grew, and the wind began to moan and sigh like a giant in great pain.

Fain would the boatman, as he glanced up at the threatening sky and heard the tokens of a coming storm, have turned back to the shore, but our friends would not listen to it: such a course would have been more dangerous to them than going on.

And now the waves began to swell, and on their tips appeared a thick white foam, which glistened around them wherever they turned their gaze.

Still on they went.

The storm rose to its full height.

The boat was tossed about like a feather.

All control of it was lost.

Suddenly, however, a tremendous crash made itself heard above the din of the tempest.

The boat had struck against a rock and gone to pieces.

CHAPTER CCXVII.

THE DUKE OF CUMBERLAND REACHES THE CAVE AND SATISFIES ALL HIS DOUBTS, AND THE HEADLESS BODY IS BURIED ON THE PLATEAU.

"DONDER and blitzen, den you shall make von begin."

Such was the elegant manner in which the Duke of Cumberland requested Dick Turpin to give him an account of how the head came into his possession.

Concealing the smile which rose to his lips as he heard these uncouth words by bowing deeply, Dick said—

"Your royal highness, it will take some time to relate the whole history to you, and, therefore, if you will permit me, I will defer it to another and more convenient opportunity."

"Nein! nein! Mine Gott! Nein! You shall make von begin at von now!"

"Your royal highness's wishes are my commands," replied Turpin. "I was fearful of tiring your patience."

"Nein! Go on!"

"My name," said Turpin, assuming a manner which he judged would make him thought well of by the soldiery, "is John Palmer, and by those who know me well I am called Jack Palmer, and nothing more. I come from Essex, and when I heard of the rebellion and the reward our good king offered for the prince of the Jacobites, for so I call him, I thought I would come to Scotland and try my luck. Well, a very hard time I have had of it since. I have been climbing over mountains and such like, but I met with no success. I was just thinking about coming back and giving it up, when, as I came down a road, I saw a narrow path leading up the side of the mountain. I don't know hardly what made me go up, only it was a sort of forlorn hope you see. Well, after a while, I found that this path brought me out on to a square piece of rock almost like a large table, and before me I saw what looked like the entrance to a cavern; and, fearing nothing, I entered.

"It was very dark inside, except just by the mouth, and I was going to turn away again, when I heard a groan.

"'Hullo!' I thought, 'what's that?' but I hadn't much time to wonder, for some one crawled out of the dark part of the cave into the light.

"I looked at him, and saw he was dressed in a Scotch dress, but I did not know who he was.

"But he spoke to me, and implored me to save his life; he said he was dying with cold and hunger, and that he had got separated from his companions and had been wandering about the mountains ever since, until he had laid down in the cavern to die.

"I asked him who he was, your royal highness, and then, after a great deal of hesitation, he confessed that he was Prince Charles Edward Stuart, for so he called himself, and begged of me not to betray him.

"There was my thirty thousand pounds, I thought; so I drew my sword and made a lunge at him.

"I wounded him slightly, but, faint and worn out as he was, he drew his own sword and attacked me with the desperation of a dying man.

"Of course you know the end now. I conquered him, cut off his head, and bore it in, and I claim my thirty thousand pounds reward."

"Good," said the duke, who had listened with pleasure to this barbarous tale. "Vera good indeed."

No sooner did he give utterance to this speech, than the soldiers set up a unanimous cheer.

When the sound had died away, one of the inferior officers addressed a few words in German to the duke, who gave a nod for a reply, and said—

"Vera good, mein friend. It is all vera good. But can you take us to the cave where his body may be found?"

"Certainly," replied Turpin, with the greatest readiness. "It is a long way from here, but I can lead you there direct."

"Good, then make von start."

The order to march was given, and then the whole party made their way to the mountain path.

While coming, Dick Turpin had taken the greatest possible notice of his route, so he was able to lead the duke without hesitation to it.

But he did not hurry, for fear his friends should not have had time to leave the place and get fairly out of sight.

For if even a glimpse were to be caught of them it would spoil all, and when in the distance he could perceive the mountain, he did not dare to turn his eyes up to it for fear he should see them, and that those accompanying him should follow the direction of his eyes and see them also.

And, in truth, had he looked up and his eyes been keen enough, he would have seen his comrades where they had taken the first halt, and from which place Claude Duval had detected the soldiers moving across the plain.

Fortunately, however, for all those in whose good fortune we feel an interest, the little plateau before the cavern was reached without a glimpse being caught of them.

The duke had been obliged to dismount at the foot of the mountain and ascend it on foot like the rest, for by nature dukes are no more respected than any other people.

No time was lost in crossing the little open space and penetrating the cavern, for all were filled with curiosity to see the remains of the young prince.

When there was no fire, the interior of the cavern was rather dark—too dark for any objects to be seen with proper plainness.

Turning round, Dick requested a light, but none of those present had the means of obtaining one.

It was then proposed that the body should be dragged outside into the daylight.

The outlines of the still, stark form could just be distinguished from the floor of the cave, and that was all.

But it was sufficient to enable two of the soldiers to catch hold of it by the feet.

In this ignominious manner, then, the body was dragged out on to the plateau.

Headless and besmeared with blood as it was, it presented a most ghastly and horrible appearance, such as would make any heart quail to look upon.

But it had the effect intended.

Whatever doubt might have lingered about the hearts of the duke, his officers, or his men, it was completely dissipated when they saw it.

There could be no mistaking the dress.

It was the same as he had been described as wearing.

Then there was the belt, with its curious workmanship, which was well known to belong to, and be highly prized by, the unfortunate prince, since he had received it at the hands of one very dear to him indeed.

His target, also, as the shield was called, and his sporran, or leather pouch, worn in front of the kilt, all went to place the question of his identity beyond dispute.

A close examination was made of the headless body, and Dick, who wished to quite satisfy them, again unwrapped the head, and placed it on the neck from which it had been taken.

All could see, then, that it had been cut from that, and no other.

The features, too, now that they had quite stiffened in death, and partially disfigured as they were, bore so remarkable a resemblance to those of Charles Stuart as to absolutely startle even Turpin himself.

His heart beat high with hope.

Hitherto the bold and daring scheme had succeeded in a manner that he never could have hoped for.

The duke and every one were perfectly satisfied.

And now Turpin had the other and more difficult portion of the plan to carry out, and that was to obtain the thirty thousand pounds.

This the Duke of Cumberland, in his uncouth manner, was pleased to express his opinion he had fully earned,



[DICK TURPIN RESUMES HIS OLD VOCATION AS KNIGHT OF THE ROAD.]

but, before he could actually receive it, he would have to accompany him to London without delay, and place the head before the king.

This Turpin would, of course, gladly enough have backed out of, but he could not see a means of doing so, and, besides, he thought for so great an end he could afford to incur a little danger.

Having been absent from the road for so long a time, he thought he might almost be forgotten.

At any rate, he should run the risk.

When all had quite satisfied themselves by looking upon the blood-stained corpse, Dick ventured to propose that he should be buried there and then upon the spot.

For some time the sanguinary duke refused to listen to any such suggestion.

His brutal nature would have been better satisfied had they mutilated, in some horrible way, the inanimate remains.

But, in the end, he was prevailed upon to pay this last tribute of respect.

None had spades or shovels wherewith to dig, but Turpin set the example by drawing his sword, and with it turning up the hard rocky earth.

A dozen were ordered to assist him, and, though the progress each individually made was small, yet together it quickly mounted up.

At the expiration of about a quarter of an hour, therefore, a tolerable sized hole had been scooped out of the rock.

It was rather shallow, however, and not very regular in shape.

But it was better than no grave at all.

With very little ceremony the body of the young highlander, who had so bravely died in order that the others might be saved, was thrown into the hole.

Then they began filling in the dirt.

This was an operation that was quickly performed, and the whole was packed in as hard as possible by the men stamping upon it with their feet.

At last the unhallowed funeral was finished, and Dick,

again carefully wrapping up the head, followed the duke and his troop from the melancholy spot.

CHAPTER CCXVIII.

THE EXTRAORDINARY MANNER IN WHICH DICK TURPIN REGAINED POSSESSION OF HIS MARE, BLACK BESS.

It was easy to gather from the manner of the duke that he considered his enterprise in the highlands was quite achieved.

He was the victor, and felt elated accordingly.

It will not be hard to believe that he cordially hated all members of the house of Stuart.

He rejoiced, therefore, at having, as he thought, seen the last of the race.

Gladly would he have had all of them exterminated, for he felt that while any of them lived, the members of his family held the English throne by a very uncertain tenure.

He gave orders, therefore, as soon as his troop was again in marching order, to withdraw all the soldiers who had been set to guard the different mountain passes, there being no longer a necessity for their being posted there.

The main body of the army was at Fort Augustus, a considerable distance further north, and it was to this place that, after some deliberation, he made his way.

He would then and there have set out for England, only he felt he could not justly and consistently do so.

Therefore, with an unwilling heart, he took the road to Fort Augustus.

He made all speed there, however, and immediately upon arriving, sent out messengers to the different troops commanding them to return.

Considering the manner in which they were scattered about the country, they reunited in a very short space of time.

It was early one fine morning that the army commenced its return march.

The hearts of all beat high with satisfaction and delight, but no one experienced such a joy as the duke himself did.

He was crafty enough, however, to keep a sharp eye upon Turpin.

Without actually saying as much, he contrived to make him a kind of military prisoner.

Dick Turpin, with the duke and his staff, stood together on the morning when the army began their march, in such a manner that the whole of the troops passed by them.

It was a pleasing and invigorating sight.

In the contemplation of it Dick almost forgot the peril of his situation.

There was something like pride visible in the glance which the commander-in-chief bent upon his soldiers, as, accompanied by bands of martial music, they all marched by.

The greater part was composed of foot-soldiers.

Then came the cavalry.

Suddenly, however, as these were passing by, Dick uttered an exclamation of the most unbounded surprise.

It was so loud as actually to amount to a shout.

The duke turned round.

An angry look was on his face, for he did not know from whose lips the cry had come.

But when he saw it was Turpin, that expression softened a little.

"Your royal highness," cried Dick, "hear me. Call to the men to halt. Do so, I beseech you, it is something of the utmost importance."

The duke muttered something in which the word "donder" could be distinguished, and gave the required command.

It was obeyed with that promptitude upon which generals so much pride themselves.

The progress of the whole was stayed.

Then the duke, in common with all the rest, turned an inquiring look upon Turpin, to know the reason of his sudden ejaculation, and the motive for making the extraordinary request he had.

Respectfully, he advanced towards the duke.

"Your royal highness will, I hope, pardon me when I tell you why I asked you to bring the troops to a halt, but as the cavalry were passing by I saw one man mounted on a black mare which I would swear belongs to me."

Such was the case.

Dick's quick eye had detected from among the horses which the soldiers rode, the familiar form of his own bonny mare, Black Bess.

At first he could hardly believe his own eyes.

He fully believed she was in perfect security in the charge of Sir Kenneth Grant.

And yet here she was before him.

There could be no possible doubt upon the subject. He knew the look of her too well, had seen her too often, to fall into any kind of mistake upon the subject.

And so he called out in the manner we have recorded.

"A horse!" cried the duke. "Donder and blitzen, do you stop the troop for a horse?"

"Excuse me," cried Turpin, and then he paused.

He hardly knew what to say about his mare, or where he had left her.

It would not do to relate just the facts of the case, that was quite clear.

Nor would it do to hesitate.

But Dick was used to doing things upon the spur of the moment, and concocting a tale upon an emergency, and though on this occasion, as we have said, he hesitated, yet it was so slightly as scarcely to be noticed.

"Excuse me, your royal highness, but I have no doubt of what I say. One of your men is riding upon a black mare which belongs to me, and by whom I set great store."

"Donder and blitzen" ——

"One moment more, your royal highness," said Turpin. "I would rather a thousand times surrender the large amount which you acknowledge that I have gained by slaying the Young Pretender than I would part with her."

"But, mein Gott! how did von soldier have von horse of yours?"

"That I cannot tell, your royal highness, but she is mine! She was stolen from me! I don't say that the man who rides her committed the crime, but she has been stolen from me, and I appeal to you as a just and upright man to demand her restoration to me!"

"It is von trifling thing vot for to stop de march! How can you prove your vords? Donder and blitzen, how can you prove dem?"

"Easily, your royal highness," replied Turpin, "if you will only allow me the opportunity."

"The troops is come to von stop! Be quick!"

"I will—I will prove it to you, because she will know me."

"Von horse know you?"

"Even so, your royal highness."

"Mein Gott, dat is good—vera good! Let us see von horse know his master."

"Command the whole regiment before us to dismount, your royal highness, and loose their bridles, and the thing is done."

Filled with surprise, and no small degree of curiosity either, the German duke gave the command to his men.

The regiment, of which Dick spoke, was a troop of horse soldiers.

In number they were about three hundred.

The one who rode Black Bess had, during the colloquy between the duke and the highwayman, got a considerable distance in advance.

A slight bustle and confusion of course ensued upon the obeyal of this command, but it soon subsided.

Every soldier and every horse stood immovable.

"Now, your royal highness," said Dick Turpin, and as he spoke his eyes sparkled with joy and pride, "if I call my mare, and she comes to my side out of all that number, shall you consider it a sufficient proof that she really belongs to me?"

"It will be von vera vonderful zing," said the duke.

"Shall you consider it a proof?"

"Donder and blitzen, yes! I should like to zee se horse or ze mare zat could do it!"

"Then you shall at once, your royal highness, for upon giving the signal, she will make her way to my side in a moment."

From where Turpin stood it was quite impossible for him to see Black Bess, so, of course, it follows that Black Bess could not see him.

But Dick was not afraid of the test he was going to

apply, long as was the time he had been separated from his gallant steed.

She had heard and obeyed the sound too often when he was engaged in some perilous highway exploit to forget it now.

Not only the duke, but all those who had heard what had taken place, looked forward to see what would be the result.

All were silent.

Then Dick Turpin turned his face towards the soldiers, so that the signal should be heard with proper plainness.

He looked not, however, particularly in the direction in which he knew Black Bess to be, but straight before him.

Then he gave utterance to a strange chirping sound, such as might be heard at night in a lonely wood, as one nocturnal bird gave a signal to another.

The sound was loud and shrill.

Before, however, its notes had fairly died away, a sudden commotion could be perceived in advance.

But whatever might be the cause, it was quickly over.

With a sudden dash, a horse leaped out into the open space before the soldiers.

It stood there a second, as though in doubt.

Turpin repeated the sound.

It was echoed by a joyful neigh, and the next instant his gallant mare, Black Bess, was at his side.

She rubbed her head gently against his shoulder.

The recognition was complete.

A feeling of the utmost joy filled Dick's breast.

His bonny steed was once more with him in perfect safety.

More than half the peril of his situation seemed to pass away now, and patting her encouragingly upon the neck, he took the bridle in his hand, and led her to where the Duke of Cumberland was standing.

CHAPTER CCXIX.

THE GOVERNOR OF EDINBURGH CASTLE SEEMS TO HAVE SOME DOUBTS ABOUT THE HEAD, AND PROPOSES A MEANS OF SETTING THEM AT REST.

"YOUR royal highness," said Dick, respectfully, raising his hat as he spoke, "are you satisfied that this horse belongs to me, and to no other?"

"Mein Gott! Yah! It is von vera vonderful circumstance. Donder and blitzen! it is more dan von can believe!"

And this last opinion was one that seemed to be shared in by most of those present—that is, if their looks of astonishment could be taken as any guide to their feelings.

When Dick had first taught Black Bess to obey a call from him, in the same manner that a dog would, he had done so under the conviction that it would be of the greatest utility,—but he never dreamed it would be so important as it had proved.

It established his right to her beyond all doubt, a thing which might have been otherwise exceedingly difficult to do.

It should be here stated that a considerable degree of jealousy towards Turpin existed among the officers forming the duke's staff, and they let slip no opportunity of suggesting things to the commander-in-chief which he would never have thought of.

On the present occasion one of them whispered something to the duke which was immediately responded to by a nod.

The officer, then, who was mounted on a beautiful horse, rose forward, and cried out—

"Where is the soldier who rode upon this black horse? Let him stand forward."

In obedience to this command, a soldier stepped out of the ranks, and was led by the officer in front of the duke, who, however, Turpin noticed was getting rather impatient at the delay.

The reader, like Dick, of course anticipates the question about to be asked.

It was how Black Bess had come to be in the soldier's possession.

A great deal would depend upon his answer.

At a sign from the duke, the officer propounded the queries.

"Is that the steed you have been riding upon?"

"It is, sir."

"How long have you had it?"

"It's a mare, sir."

"Never mind that, I ask how long have you had it?"

"Just before the battle of Culloden."

"How just before the battle, didn't you bring it from England?"

"No, sir."

"How was that?"

"The one I had first was shot under me at the beginning of the campaign."

"Well?"

"And this was one that was taken by forced levy."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite, sir."

"From what place was it taken?"

"From the house of Sir Kenneth Grant."

"Sir Kenneth Grant?"

"Yes, sir; if you will remember, some doubts were entertained of his loyalty, and so, to prove it, he allowed what was wanted to be taken."

"And you took this horse from his stables?"

"I did, sir."

"That is enough, then."

"May I venture to hope, your royal highness, that you are quite satisfied now that you find it is as I said. Sir Kenneth Grant is a friend of our family, and I left my horse in his stable."

"It is von enough," said the duke.

"Many thanks," replied Turpin; "and I hope you will accept my apologies for having delayed you so long."

"Mein Gott! yes. Forward!"

The order was given to resume the march.

Turpin, with as light a heart as any man in Scotland, despite the imminency of his danger, mounted once more his bonny mare, Black Bess.

He had been full of anxiety to know how he should gain possession of her, when, lo! she was, by a series of apparently adverse circumstances, placed in his hands.

The officers, however, took good care to keep close guard around him.

Many were suspicious.

And so, as the army was marching southward, it happened that Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack caught sight of Dick Turpin, escorted like a prisoner, and mounted on bonny Black Bess.

It will now be understood how it was that the prince and his followers reached Lochnanuagh without meeting with any difficulty.

The Duke of Cumberland was quite firmly impressed with the idea that he had seen the end of the Young Pretender, and who can wonder at his holding such a belief?

The consequence was that he no longer troubled himself to keep guard or to send out parties.

He was desirous of reaching London with as little delay as possible.

Already he fancied he felt upon his brows the laurel wreath which would be awarded to him for the prompt manner in which he had crushed this rebellion, which had at one time threatened to completely overthrow the existing government.

With little of interest to relate to the reader, the army reached the city of Edinburgh.

The whole distance had been performed by means of forced marches, and when they reached the ancient city, a rest became imperative for both man and beast.

They found that the account of what had taken place had already preceded them, and the streets were consequently thronged with the inhabitants when they arrived.

To gratify these, the duke caused the head to be set up on a tall pike, and carried in such a manner that it might be seen by all.

The greatest curiosity was manifested respecting it.

The principal portion of the army took up their quarters in the ancient castle, and it was to this place that Turpin was drafted.

The governor of the castle received the duke and his staff, and, as a token of respect, was allowed to inspect the head.

Some days having now elapsed since it was cut from the body a considerable alteration had taken place in its looks

The governor, however—who had seen the young prince himself upon the occasion of the rebel army taking possession of Edinburgh—when he looked at it, shook his head with a puzzled air.

Turpin, who was present, noticed the circumstance, misgivingly.

But let the governor's suspicions have been what they might, he did not give utterance to them.

Dick was rendered all the more uneasy by this occurrence.

He felt he was now treading upon very dangerous ground.

Yet his heart did not fail him in the least, and, having carried out the enterprise so far successfully, encouraged him to go on.

Besides, the least attempt to draw back would have the effect of bringing danger upon him.

He resolved to stand his ground.

A repast for the officers was laid in one of the largest apartments in the castle, at which Dick and the governor sat down.

As a matter of course, after the meal was over, the conversation turned upon the Young Pretender.

But Turpin noticed that the governor managed to bring up the subject.

What motive had he in doing this?

Dick knew not, but he maintained his composure.

The story of the manner in which the young prince's head had been brought before their notice was told over again.

"It has just occurred to me," said the governor of the castle, after listening attentively to all that had been said, and having come to the conclusion that he had heard the whole of the facts. "It has just occurred to me that there is an easy way to settle all doubts."

"Doubts!" said Turpin, rather fiercely, "who dares insinuate"——

"No one, my good sir," replied the governor with provoking calmness. "I do not wish to insinuate anything."

"Then, sir, just allow me to ask what you mean by doubts?"

"I can easily do so, if you will give me the opportunity."

Turpin bowed, as though he wished for the explanation to be given at once.

No one, to have looked in his face, could have read the feelings of his heart.

"When I said doubts," begun the governor, "perhaps I was not altogether right in using the word. In fact, I admit I was not. The fact is, although the story is rather extraordinary, it seems to be amply substantiated by facts. Now, you admit to solve doubts, you led the duke to the cavern where the body was to be found. Did you not?"

"I certainly did," replied Turpin, "and what they saw there fully bore out what I said."

"Just so."

"Well, then?"

"It was evidence proving the fact, was it not?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Now, in my opinion, any further evidence as to the identity of the head ought to be satisfactory to all parties, and especially so to you, for it would still further establish your right to the reward."

"I am well aware of that, and so far from objecting to have any confirmatory evidence brought forward, I shall only be too glad, for the very reasons you have named.

The governor looked at him keenly.

"But," continued Turpin, "when you spoke of doubts, I naturally took exception to the expression."

"Oh! just so. You see it is all right."

"You have quite satisfied me. For my own part, I must admit that the whole affair is singular enough."

"I think it remarkably so. Poor young man! I feel sorry for him. His wild ambitious dream is over now."

"And with it, I fear, all hopes of the Stuart family holding the sceptre of this country or England," said Turpin.

"Donder and blitzen! I say yah to zat. Vern good. But, mein Gott, governor, what was it you did say about de more of von proof? Let us hear vat zat might be at se vonce."

CHAPTER CCXX.

A PRISONER IS BROUGHT UP FROM THE DUNGEONS OF THE CASTLE TO IDENTIFY THE HEAD.

It was the Duke of Cumberland who spoke.

There was no mistaking the voice, and the utterance was now rendered more than ever unintelligible by the wine he had drunk.

He had been a silent, but not unobservant, listener to the conversation between Dick Turpin and the governor.

He at once took hold of the idea of gaining some additional testimony.

It was only natural that he should.

And when a notion once took root in his mind, the obstinacy of his disposition would for ever preclude all hopes of removing it.

An acute observer of human nature, Dick had been able to come to a correct conclusion as to the duke's character, and this speech of his added greatly to his uneasiness.

What kind of test was going to be applied to the spurious head he could not think.

Of course, he dreaded the inquiry, for reasons well known to the reader.

He was powerless to act.

He was like a rudderless ship, borne onwards by some irresistible current.

It might have been fancy, but Dick thought he could detect upon the governor's face a look of malicious satisfaction.

Could it be possible that he knew who he was?

Could it be possible that he, by some inexplicable means, divined the cheat which he had kept up so long?

He could not tell.

He shut his teeth to maintain his calmness, while the governor replied to the duke's question.

"Your royal highness, I am pleased to find that you think this so important a matter, and that you wish to know the means of placing the identity of the head beyond all doubt. It happens that I am in a position to do this."

"Mein Gott! Go on."

"You must know, then, your royal highness, that I have at this moment a prisoner in the dungeons beneath the castle, the personal attendant or valet of the Young Pretender."

"Valet?" thought Dick, and then in a moment he remembered who he was.

He had disappeared at the early portion of the rebellion, and was, as he thought, slain.

But, by the governor's words, it would seem that he lived.

"With the permission of your grace," continued the governor, "I will have this man removed from his place of confinement, and brought hither."

"Yah—yah."

"When, without knowing the reason for which he is sent, the head shall be placed before him, and, as the condition of his liberty, he shall swear whether it is the head of his late master, the Young Pretender, or not."

"Mein Gott! Yes, let it be done. Donder and blitzen! As you say, Meinheer Governor, we shall know zen for shure."

The governor bowed, and, summoning an attendant, gave orders for the valet to be removed from his dungeon, and brought there without delay.

But little was said after the man had left.

All were anxious and excited.

Dick found himself the cynosure of all eyes.

He had trouble enough to maintain his composure without this addition.

But, by a rare command of the facial muscles, he withstood the scrutiny, seeming in no way interested—as though he felt quite assured of the result.

Such, however, was very far indeed from being the state of his mind.

Upon the next few moments depended everything.

The prince and his friends, he hoped, were by this time completely out of danger, and yet circumstances might have arisen to make their quitting Scotland impossible.

He had no means of telling.

Should the man who was about to be presented declare

the head not to be his master's, Dick felt his position would be truly desperate.

Perhaps hopeless would be a better word.

Could he by any means communicate with this man, and let him know the secret, all would be well.

To save his prince he would swear the head was his.

But unforewarned—without the least idea of what had taken place—and offered so powerful an inducement for speaking the truth, what was to be expected?

The worst, unquestionably.

Intimately knowing the prince, as he would, from the fact of his being his personal attendant, and having filled the situation of valet, he would be able to pronounce with certainty that it was not the head of the young prince.

What was to be done?

Nothing.

Dick felt it was so, and, therefore, with the best grace he could, resigned himself to the current of events.

Luck had hitherto befriended him in many a perilous situation, and he could only hope that it would do so now.

He had one consolation under his difficulties, though it was so slight a one as to be scarcely deserving of the name.

Should the head pass this ordeal triumphantly, he might laugh at everything else, save positive proof that the Pretender was yet alive.

Only a few minutes actually elapsed from the time the attendant left the room until he returned, but it seemed an age.

He brought word that the prisoner would arrive in a moment.

The door through which he would come now became the centre of attraction, to which all eyes were turned.

No one spoke.

Presently, however, there was heard outside the door, in the stone corridor, the tramp of martial footsteps.

A voice cried, "halt."

Then the door was thrown open, and the prisoner marshalled into the apartment.

In obedience to a sign from the governor, the little truss which had escorted him separated, and allowed a view of the prisoner to be obtained.

He was an ordinary-looking man, with nothing special either in his face or figure to require description.

He had that unmistakable appearance about him, however, which always enables any one to distinguish a servant from a gentleman.

He looked around surprisedly, for he had not been informed for what reason he had been summoned.

Oh! how fervently Dick wished that he could communicate invisibly with him, but he feared to gaze at him even, lest the action should be taken notice of.

Events must take their course.

The bold highwayman felt his heart beat at an unusual rate.

"Your royal highness," said the governor, "shall I interrogate this man?"

"Yah! make von begin."

The governor turned to the prisoner.

"What is your name?" he asked.

The man hesitated a moment, and then replied—

"David Morrison."

"Good! And what was your last occupation?"

"That of valet."

"To whom?"

"To Prince Charles Stuart."

"There is no such prince! However, listen to me, and remember that your life depends upon the answers you give!"

No reply came from the prisoner's lips.

The governor continued—

"If you were valet to this young man, it follows that you must be intimately acquainted with his personal appearance. Is it so?"

"I—I know him," said the valet, stammeringly.

"Enough. Should you be able to recognise him?"

"Why—why do you ask?"

"Reply to my question," said the governor, sternly, "and never mind the reasons. Should you be able to recognise Charles Stuart?"

"From a thousand!"

"That is sufficient, then; you shall be put to the test. Speak truly, and you shall be immediately set at liberty. I promise this in the name of the commander-in-chief."

The man's eyes brightened at the prospect of quitting his prison with life.

"Where is the young prince?" he asked; "has he fallen a captive into your hands?"

This speech was quite conclusive.

He clearly had not heard the intelligence that the Young Pretender was supposed to be no more.

Dick's heart sank.

He felt certain that this man would immediately be able to detect the deception.

It was impossible for him to do otherwise.

In his joy he would be sure to declare it was not his master's head, and rejoice that he was yet alive.

He could never tell, Dick thought, that he would be rendering his prince an essential service by declaring that to be his head when he knew it was not.

Turpin's agitation increased.

By the order of the governor, the ghastly head had been sent for.

It was brought in wrapped up in cloths.

This was done in such a manner that no one could have guessed what it was.

The valet looked on curiously and inquiringly.

Not long, however, was his state of suspense allowed to continue.

One by one the cloths that enveloped it were removed.

Then the terrible-looking object was disclosed.

A shout of horror came from Morrison's lips.

He evidently recognised the head.

With no little satisfaction, Turpin noted this.

His hopes, too, revived when he perceived another circumstance.

From a variety of causes, such as its transit from place to place, in which it had received several contusions, and the partial progress of decay which had already began to make its loathsome presence apparent, it had lost that sharpness of outline which it had formerly had, and consequently, those finer features, which would have enabled one to identify it, were no longer visible.

CHAPTER CCXXI.

DICK FEARS THAT, AFTER ALL, THE SPURIOUS HEAD WILL BRING HIM MORE TROUBLE THAN PROFIT.

When Morrison uttered the cry, he would have sprung forward to make a closer examination of what, at the first glance, he had taken to be the head of young Charles Stuart, but the firm grasp of his captors held him back.

The governor spoke—

"Release him," he said, "and allow him to come forward. Now, examine the head, and tell us, on your life, whether it is the head of the Young Pretender."

This was said to Morrison, who, as soon as he was released, had sprung forward.

The head was on one corner of the table at which the duke and his officers were sitting.

As soon as he got near, the valet looked for a moment, fixedly, at the horrible countenance.

Then he sank down upon his knees before it, and covered his face with his hands.

Dick grew more hopeful still, but yet he dreaded a discovery being made.

Preserving the same unruffled demeanour, however, as he had hitherto done, he bent all his attention to the kneeling servant.

"Speak," said the governor, "and tell me whether this is the head of your young master."

The valet removed his hands.

His cheeks were wet with tears.

"It is he, poor young man," he said, in a broken voice. "Alas! that I should ever have lived to see this day. Alas! that such should have been his untimely fate. He was a good master to me. I shall never have such another."

He recovered his face, and rebowed his head.

The Duke of Cumberland uttered a sigh of relief, and his usual exclamation—

"Mein Gott!"

The valet surely was deceived.

But the governor, unwilling to believe that his suspicions were unfounded, was very loath to quit the subject.

"Rise," he said, "and be a man. Look again at the head, and repeat your assurance that it is your master's."

In obedience to this command, Morrison stood up.

He looked in the governor's face with surprise, and then turned to the duke and his companions.

He could not understand why they wished him to be so particular.

Their doubts communicated themselves to him.

Perhaps, after all, he thought, his beloved master was not dead.

Perhaps this was the head of some one resembling him.

His face became animated with the hope that his master might after all be alive.

Now was the danger.

Suddenly a thought seemed to strike him.

Tremblingly he approached the head, and put back the hair from the forehead near the right temple.

He started, and a half-suppressed cry came from his lips.

To Dick it was perfectly intelligible.

He closed his teeth, and drew in his breath.

The valet, doubtless, had suddenly recollected some mark by which he could tell for certain whether it was the prince's head.

Dick knew the mark for which he looked.

He had once seen it.

It was during their stay in the mountain cavern.

On the prince's right temple, and close to the hair, was a kind of mole, or fleshy excrescence of a very remarkable character, and any one having once seen it would certainly know it again.

Unquestionably it was this for which the valet looked.

He would not find it.

Turpin knew that well enough, and finally gave himself up for lost.

To conceal his agitation, he took up the glass before him, and raised it to his lips.

But his fingers refused to grasp it properly, and it fell with a loud crash to the floor.

This had the effect of turning all eyes towards him.

He laughed lightly, and muttered an excuse about his carelessness.

Among the rest the valet turned.

His eye fell upon Turpin's countenance.

He knew him instantly.

He nearly betrayed his recognition, but, by great presence of mind, he controlled himself.

Then a fresh current of ideas rushed through his mind.

He bent down once more over the head.

Dick Turpin he knew to be one of the prince's most devoted adherents.

What did he do, then, in the enemy's camp.

Why should he be here?

The mole, too, which he had seen a thousand times was absent from the head on the table before him.

Was it some deep laid plan to pass off a spurious head, and so allow the prince a chance of escape?

He thought so.

When once the idea took possession of his mind, it strengthened every moment.

Should he befriend his prince?

Unquestionably.

It was his duty.

But how was he to do it?

Was he to declare the fraud, and say the head before him was not that of his master?

Or was he to say it was?

The question was a difficult one.

How should he decide?

He determined to look at Turpin.

By the expression of his countenance, he judged he should be able to tell which he ought to do.

These thoughts had swept through his brain in an infinitesimal portion of time.

In fact, while he made, or affected to make, an examination of the prince's countenance.

Then he raised his head, taking care as he did so, to look at Turpin.

The latter had his eyes fixed upon the valet, and he gave a look of such deep meaning that it was quite impossible to mistake it.

Fortunately this was not observed.

The attention of all just then was centred upon the valet.

"Speak," said the governor, "and speak truly. Is that the head of the Young Pretender?"

"It is," said Morrison, firmly, "and I am quite ready now to swear to it at any moment after the examination I have made."

Turpin smiled triumphantly.

The danger was past.

The governor had a look of deep vexation on his visage.

It was clear he wished the decision to be otherwise.

"Stop!" he said. "How can you tell? How can you make so sure?"

"I knew him."

"I am aware of that, but why did you look at the right temple?"

As he spoke, the governor leant forward in his chair, and raised the hair in the same manner as the valet had done.

Here was a new difficulty.

But luckily the valet, while looking for the mole, had noticed a slight scar upon the temple, so he did not hesitate to say—

"I had often noticed on the prince's left temple a certain mark."

"And what was it?"

"A scar, almost imperceptible, but yet to be distinguished, on the left temple."

"It is here!"

"Your royal highness," said Turpin, who felt sure the danger had now passed away, "I really hope this testimony will be sufficient."

"Mein Gott, yes!"

"I am glad to hear you say as much. That I felt very anxious I cannot deny; but, then, if this man had declared it was not the prince's head, I should have been in a very awkward position, and not only that, have lost the reward as well!"

The duke nodded.

"But now, when it is impossible for there to exist a doubt, I do hope you will treat, or cause me to be treated, in a less suspicious manner than heretofore."

"How?"

"I will explain, your grace. Wherever I have moved I have found an armed party at my heels, which is exceedingly disagreeable, but not only that, I have been deprived of my weapons."

"It zall be altered. Give me your hand; I zall recommend you to ze king in London."

"Thanks, your grace!"

"As for zis man, ze prince's valet, he zall consider he has earned von freedom, but he must us accompany to ze king."

"I am willing," said the valet, who, with the natural perspicacity of a Scotchman, had divined pretty correctly the state of affairs, and was only too glad of an opportunity of serving this last scion of the house of Stuart.

The governor was thus completely discomfited.

It was not, however, out of any feeling to Dick Turpin that he had spoken as he did, but he was of an incredulous disposition, and would never believe anything until it was incontestibly proved to be right.

That Dick had found it very disagreeable and uncomfortable to be so closely watched and to be disarmed, and he received the assurance that it should be altered with the utmost pleasure.

And so this event, which looked at first so unfavourable to him, really turned out to his advantage in more ways than one

In life how often is this the case?

It was decided that the troops should remain in Edinburgh twenty-four hours, in order to thoroughly refresh themselves.

Now Dick, it must be understood, had latterly had another inconvenience to put up with.

And that was, he was short of that most essential requisite, money.

But this he had been careful to keep secret.

Now that a close watch was no longer to be kept upon him, he felt he might replenish his purse.

In the evening, therefore, he obtained a pass from the Duke of Cumberland to allow him egress from the castle, ostensibly to pay a visit to some friends of his.

In reality, to resume his old life as a Knight of the Road.

CHAPTER CCXXII.

DICK TURPIN ONCE MORE RESUMES HIS OLD VOCATION OF KNIGHT OF THE ROAD, AND MEETS WITH AN ADVENTURE.

With a very great amount of diffidence and reluctance the author of "Black Bess" ventures for the first time to address himself personally to his numerous readers.

But let it be clearly understood that it is necessity, not choice, which has dictated this step.

That the present romance has achieved a success totally without parallel in the annals of literature, is a fact which must be patent to all.

For this amount of patronage the author begs, in the first place, to tender his sincerest thanks.

But the extraordinary success of the present work, however gratifying it may be to the author, has had a contrary effect upon many others.

Envy, the most despicable and yet the most prevalent passion to which humanity is prone, has been plentifully engendered by it.

Other publishers, jealous of the approbation with which the present work has been universally received, have been instigated by this passion—not in a fair spirit of competition, or the desire of pleasing the public—to put forth other works of a similar character, in order that by so doing the sale of the present one should be injured.

But all these attempts, the author is proud and happy to say, have signally and deservedly failed, and he would not have alluded to the matter at all except for the following reason.

About a month or five weeks ago, a work was put forth of a character precisely similar to this, and, so far as the printing goes, as close an imitation as it is possible to make.

Not content, however, with trading in a disreputable manner upon this work, and introducing Dick Turpin as the hero, the unscrupulous and dishonourable proprietor has had the audacity to print in large letters upon the outside of the wrapper the words—a

"Companion to 'Black Bess; or, the Knight of the Road,'"

so as to deceive the public by inducing the belief that it was from the pen of the same writer.

Now, what the author of "Black Bess; or, the Knight of the Road," wishes to say to his readers distinctly and emphatically is, that he has no connection whatever with this work. It is got up solely with the view of doing him an injury, and such being the case, he hopes that his readers will not in any way individually give the least encouragement to this bare-faced imposition.

Unfortunately the law, stringent as it is in most things, is very lax in that of copyright, or protecting an author's prescriptive title to his work, or otherwise legal steps would have been taken to suppress its issue.

But the same effect will be produced if the readers of this work refuse to purchase it, for let them bear in mind the fact that every copy they purchase assists in the maintenance of a fraud, and inflicts a direct injury upon the author.

One by one the puny and disreputable attempts to supplant him in the favour of his subscribers has proved abortive. They have lingered out a painful existence, died away, and been forgotten.

But "Black Bess" has had a uniformly large and steady circulation from the first, and the author here promises that no effort shall be wanting on his part to retain it.

At the present moment there is only one work by his hand besides this in circulation, and this is entitled "Blueskin," the only work that can, with any justice, be styled a companion to "Black Bess."

This has been mentioned because, not content with what has been described, the proprietor of the disreputable work in question has endeavoured, by distorting the words, to make it appear to be written by the author of this romance.

Under all these circumstances, it was felt that for once the subscribers to this work should be appealed to, and urged to use their best exertions in putting an end to such unfair and disgraceful competition.

The author, however, would wish to say one word more before he parts company with his readers.

Letters have from time to time been forwarded to him, containing the query "is 'Black Bess' a true story?"

All of these the author would refer to the first portion of chapter the sixth.

But, in addition to what is there set down, it may be stated that the chief incidents are strictly true, and as the narrative proceeds, it will be found that the greatest pains will be taken to make the terminations of the careers of the four highwaymen correct.

With these words the author takes his leave, but not without again expressing his cordial thanks for the support and favour they have so steadily accorded to his efforts.

Armed with the pass which the Duke of Cumberland had given him, Dick Turpin ordered his mare, Black Bess, to be saddled, and, when the night had fully come, sallied out into the silent streets.

Soon, however, he left the city behind, and gained the open country.

Then, when he reined in his steed upon the highway, and listened for the approach of any travellers, a wild sort of glee filled his heart, so forcibly was the old time brought back to him.

When he reflected upon the strange life he had led during the past few months, he could scarcely believe that it was not a dream.

The absence and perilous position of his three companions soon made it seem reality.

A deep shudder involuntarily swept over him as he thought of the peril he had so safely passed through that afternoon.

His life then had hung upon a thread.

And now he is once more the Knight of the Road—bold, dashing, and chivalrous as he had been in former times.

He wondered what had taken place in London during his absence, and whether he had been forgotten.

But especially did the recollections of those who had proved themselves his friends in the hour when they were most needed occupy his mind, and he felt like one who had long been absent in some foreign country, and who was looking forward to a return to his native land.

But a peculiar movement on the part of Black Bess soon roused him from his reverie.

It was one that she was wont to give, and signified the approach of some vehicle along the road.

He listened, and found that the warning given by the faithful creature was a real one.

Some one was coming.

A better position than that which he had taken up could scarcely have been found.

The night was dark, but clear.

Right and left of him, to a considerable distance in both directions, was the broad high-road.

Behind him was a tall and closely-grown hedge, which served as a most excellent background.

In the distance the forms both of himself and his mare were invisible.

Grasping a large holster pistol firmly in his right hand, which he had previously ascertained to be ready for immediate use, he waited.

The sound of the approaching traveller could now be heard with very great distinctness.

Although he had been so long differently employed, Dick had not forgotten his old skill, and, as he listened, he could tell with certainty that it was a vehicle on two wheels, drawn by one horse that was coming.

The speed was enough to show that it was of some light character.

It was from the direction of the city that the sound came.

For this he was glad.

The probability is, that had it been going the reverse way, he would have allowed it to pass unmolested.

A recognition would have been awkward.

A minute more, and then he saw the faint flashing of two carriage lamps.

When he first caught sight of them they looked like two tiny stars behind a vapoury cloud, but they rapidly increased in size and brightness, until at length they shed a light all round them, illuminating the trees and hedges and mossy banks which skirted the highway.

The light, however, was perplexing to Dick's vision, and he was unable to see what was coming, or who was seated in it.

He had to judge by his ear alone.

At length, having waited till the vehicle was nearly opposite to him, he darted out from his place of partial concealment.

"Halt!" he cried, in loud, deep tones, such as would arrest the attention of any one. "Halt, I say, or I fire!"

A faint shriek followed his words, and upon looking closer, Dick could see that the vehicle he had stopped was a kind of tilbury, a conveyance at that time very much in use, and that two persons were seated in it.

One was a female, and it was unquestionably from her lips that the faint shriek had come.

The other was a man.

He held the reins in one hand and a whip in the other, but upon hearing Turpin's summons, he dropped the latter and drew a pistol, the trigger of which he pulled with great rapidity.

The aim he had taken was a good one, and the career of the gallant highwayman would then and there have been brought to a close but for one circumstance.

The hammer snapped upon the lock, and the powder in the pan flashed, but the pistol did not explode.

It ought to be understood that pistols in those days were made rather differently to what they are now.

The invention of the percussion cap, which makes missing fire a very rare circumstance indeed, was not then known.

In place of it there was a piece of flint, the spark from which set fire to the powder in the pan, and that was communicated to the pistol.

But if the powder was to shake out or get damp, or the small touch-hole get clogged up, a missfire would be the inevitable result.

CHAPTER CCXXIII

DICK TURPIN STOPS THE TRAVELLERS ON THE HIGH-ROAD, BUT HAS TO FLY FOR HIS LIFE.

With a bitter curse the traveller flung the useless weapon in the roadway.

Ere he could draw another from his pocket, or urge his horse forward, Dick Turpin grasped him by the throat.

He pressed the muzzle of a pistol against his temples.

The female who was with him uttered a succession of shrieks of so piercing a character, that were any one within half-a-mile of the spot, they would certainly hear her.

"Now," said Turpin, "you have tried to take my life, and there is no reason whatever why I should spare you. Silence!" he added, turning to the woman, "or you will not live five minutes longer!"

This threat, uttered in a cool, resolute tone, had its full effect upon the woman, for she ceased her cries at once.

Then Dick turned to the man.

"Hand over what valuables and money you carry with you, and no further violence will be offered. If you resist you cannot save yourself, and will only have your own folly to reproach for ill-usage."

The grasp Dick had of the man's throat was a very tight one, and he continued the pressure so long that he was scarcely able to move.

"Give up your money, John," said the woman, "and save your life. The one you can replace, but not the other."

"Spoken like a sensible woman," cried Dick, releasing the man's throat. "Take your wife's advice, for such she is, I fancy, and make certain of this, that if you attempt to move in the least, or try to injure me, the lives of both of you will pay the penalty. In general I am a temperate man, but when my temper is roused, I am a desperate one. Quick! Hand over!"

The traveller was about to comply with this forcible request, when there suddenly arose upon the night air shouts of many voices, and the trampling of many horses' feet.

A curse came from Dick's lips as he heard both the sounds, for it looked very much as though he was going to have all his trouble for nothing.

But the traveller seemed to draw hope from it.

Turpin, however, was determined not to let his prey slip through his fingers if he could help it, and though he felt he was running a great risk, he did not change his position in the slightest degree, but said—

"Quick! quick! On your life, quick! Hand over your money, I say! If you hesitate or palter with me, you are a dead man! Quick, I say!"

"Give it him, John! give it him!" said the woman again, in an imploring and terrified tone of voice. "Give it to him! It is not much for you to lose, and I am sure it will be best."

But the husband disregarded the wife's appeal.

Louder and louder grew the shouts, and the trampling of hoofs, and every second served to bring them frightfully near.

That they were some persons who had heard the wife's screams, and were hastening in the direction of the sounds, there could be little doubt.

They were in considerable force, let them be who they might.

Dick could tell that.

He knew that it would be madness for him to attempt to cope with such numbers.

They were not yet in sight, so he did not move.

He pressed the pistol against the man's head.

"Now," he cried, "you have one chance of your life! Hand me over your money!"

The wife was too much alarmed to speak.

But the husband, gathering courage from the nearness of the new comers, replied, resolutely—

"Never!"

At the same moment he tried to wrest the pistol from Dick's hands.

But the highwayman was too quick for him.

"I will count three," he said, with the most perfect coolness, "and if, when I pronounce the last, you have not handed me your purse, I will surely fire!"

The horsemen still came on.

"One!" cried Dick.

He held the pistol in such a manner that the muzzle completely covered the traveller's person.

"Two!" he cried. "I shall say three, and then if you are still obstinate, your death be upon your own head!"

The traveller, seeing the determined character of the man he had to deal with, and that he was a highwayman of no ordinary kind, at last saw the prudence of sacrificing what money he might carry with him rather than his life.

Accordingly, he produced from a breast-pocket a heavy and good-sized purse.

This Turpin took instantly.

He was only just in time.

About a hundred yards off was a body of horsemen.

There must have been from a dozen to a score of them.

That he was seen seemed pretty certain, for all uttered a loud shout.

But Turpin, having accomplished his ends in procuring a sum of money, was all right.

Placing the purse in his pocket, he turned Black Bess's head in the direction of the open country, and giving her the rein, darted off at a tremendous pace.

The angry tones of the man's voice, who had parted with his money so reluctantly, rose for a moment on the night air, and then he was out of earshot.

The horsemen, whoever they were, did not wait long to listen to his complaints and expostulations, but prepared to give chase to the highwayman.

But they knew not the matchless steed upon which he was mounted, or they would have saved themselves the trouble of their ride.

Dick would gladly have learned who and what they were, but he could not quite see how he was to do this.

He scarcely thought they were police-officers, but let them be whom they might, he determined to lead them a good dance across the country.

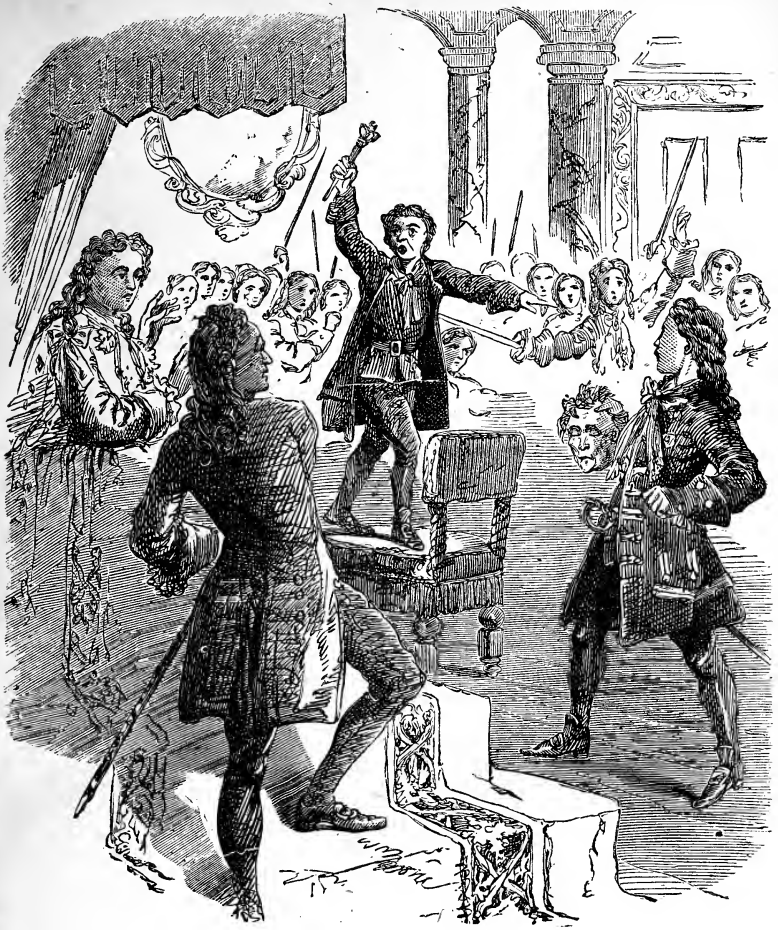
Accordingly, he tightened the rein a little, and reduced Black Bess's speed.

A clear level road was before him, though where it led, or how far it went, he had no idea.

The beat of horses' hoofs at full gallop soon reached his ear.

Still he slackened his pace, determined, if possible, to obtain a glimpse of his foes and, ascertain their character.

A shout from the rear made him aware of their proximity, so he turned round to look.



[DICK TURPIN IS DETECTED IN THE SALOON.]

All he could see was a dense body of men on horseback Beyond that he could form no idea of their appearance whatever.

Still lingering, he nearly paid the penalty of his life, for the sharp report of a pistol arose, and bullet whistled past his chee...

It was immediately followed by another, which showed him the nature of the men with whom he had to deal.

To tarry longer would be insanity, so he gave up the attempt of endeavouring to ascertain who they were, and dropped once more the reins upon his mare's neck.

She had been all the time anxious to proceed, and the moment she felt her head at freedom, she sped over the ground with a succession of long, sweeping leaps.

Each one was made apparently without the least exertion, so gently and gracefully was the action performed.

It was, however, a pace that got over the ground with wondrous celerity.

Before he could get out of pistol range, though, he was saluted with several more shots.

By none of them was he injured.

This is not to be wondered at.

Those who have tried to take aim with a fire-arm while riding at full gallop well know how extremely difficult it is to hit the object aimed at.

For this reason, then, Turpin was unhurt.

So soon as he was at a safe distance once more, he proceeded to carry out his original intention.

The reason that principally moved him was this.

He did not wish to exhaust his mare's strength any more than he could help.

A brief time only would have to elapse, and then the march would be resumed—a march more tedious and tiring than the preceding one.

By contriving to keep a little ahead of them, Dick fancied he should soon tire their patience out, and so be able to return to the city at a gentle pace.

Had he known who his pursuers were, he would have at once dismissed the idea as absurd.

But he was in ignorance of it, and was likely to remain so

Most perseveringly they kept upon his track, and by the sound alone could he tell that they were sparing neither whip nor spur to urge their horses onward.

In a short time he found it necessary to increase the speed of his own mare, in order to maintain the same distance between them.

This was not what he wished.

Still he kept on, wishing, if possible, to tire them out.

But of this there seemed no prospect.

On the contrary, it looked as though they would tire out him.

Reluctantly, then, Dick was forced to the conclusion that he would have to change his tactics.

His pursuers were not to be easily shaken off.

This gave him a little anxiety.

It seemed to show that they had some stronger motive for pursuing him than mere desire of assisting the man in the gig to recover his loss.

But if they were not officers, what special motive could they have?

Dick knew not, and finding it impossible to come to a satisfactory conclusion respecting it, ceased to perplex his brain, but turned the whole of his attention to getting away from them.

The only means by which this could be done would be the adoption of some stratagem that would send them on a wrong track.

He looked round right and left.

On either side of him were tall hedgerows and meadows beyond.

Should he take to these, and striking across them, find a circuitous way back to Edinburgh?

He thought so.

But he would have to get completely out of earshot, first, because if he did not they would know, by the cessation of the beat of the horse's hoofs that he had stopped.

Accordingly, he spoke a few encouraging words to his matchless steed.

As he did so he gradually slackened the reins.

Then, as an additional inducement for her to make greater speed, he pressed his heels gently against her flanks.

She responded by a slight neigh, and dashed forward at a pace that fairly made Dick shut his teeth together, and hold his breath.

CHAPTER CCXXIV.

DICK TURPIN, BY A STRANGE ACCIDENT, DISCOVERS WHO AND WHAT HIS PURSUERS ARE.

For not more than three minutes did Dick Turpin allow his mare to continue this tremendous pace.

At the expiration of that time, he began gradually to rein her in.

He continued doing so until she came to a dead stop.

Then he listened.

Faintly, very faintly, but increasing each moment in loudness and distinctness, he could hear the tramp, tramp, of his pursuers.

But he considered, from the gradual manner in which he had reined Bess in, that they would imagine rather that he had distanced them, rather than that he had stopped.

As for himself, he considered that the time he halted that he was out of hearing.

The sound of their approach still came to his ears, but then they were in large numbers, and the noise they would make would be proportionably greater than his.

But there was no time to lose.

Drawing back to the one side of the road, he prepared to take a leap over the hedgerow into the meadows.

But while he did so, his quick ear caught another sound.

It was very slight, and one that might well have escaped observation.

He listened.

But only for a second.

It was merely to assure himself that he was right.

A single horseman was approaching him.

He was coming, too, at a sharp pace.

This circumstance, slight as it was, filled Dick's breast with hope.

It afforded him the chance he wished for of knowing his pursuers.

Without longer hesitation, he patted Bess upon the neck, and put her to the leap.

There was a very short distance to run and give a spring, but it was enough.

She cleared the obstruction gallantly, and alighted upon the soft turf in the meadow with a scarcely perceptible shock.

At this moment the moon, which during the whole of the night had not once permitted her face to be seen, broke forth.

The landscape for miles around was lighted up as if by magic.

It would scarcely have been possible, at the present juncture of affairs, to have found a circumstance more unfavourable to the highwayman than this was.

To have struck across the meadows would have been ridiculous.

His pursuers would have seen him instantly.

There was only one resource.

That was, to lie down close under the hedge, and trusting to their passing the spot without noticing him.

It was running a great risk.

He resolved upon it, however, because he felt certain that it was the best thing to be done.

Short as was the time which had elapsed since he first halted, it was long enough to enable his pursuers to get close to where he was hidden.

A minute or two more and they would be in sight.

The horseman, too, that he had heard coming from the opposite direction, was now as nearly as he could guess at an equal distance from him.

If this was the case, the meeting would take place just in front of where he was.

Well tutored as Bess was, he had but little difficulty in forcing her to lie down.

In order to keep her still, he put his hand upon her head.

There was one thing which reconciled Turpin, in a great measure, to the risk he was going to run.

He should be able to see his pursuers.

By parting the hedge a little with one hand, he could see very plainly into the roadway, while the chance of any one seeing him was very small indeed.

There was little or no shadow cast by the hedges on the high-road, and the rays of the moon lighted it up with great distinctness.

The longer Dick listened to the trampling hoofs, the more he became convinced that his previous calculation was correct, and that a meeting would take place as nearly opposite to him as possible.

His patience was not much taxed.

By the time he had completed all his preparations, and taken up a convenient position, they were not more than a hundred yards distant.

He heard his pursuers give a loud shout when they saw the single horseman riding towards them.

Of course, owing to the moon's light, they could not see him a long way off.

The cry was one of astonishment, and Turpin interpreted it as signifying that they had fallen into the very natural mistake of supposing that the reason they heard the tramp of hoofs before them grow plainer and plainer was, because they fancied they were gaining upon the highwayman.

It might have been that the moon, happening to peep forth at the moment she did, was an unfortunate one for Dick, but it was, most assuredly, a fortunate one for the traveller.

Had they not seen him, his life would probably have been sacrificed.

On came the little troop, and then they pulled up with a jerk.

The traveller also reined in his steed.

They were face to face.

Dick had an excellent view of both.

The traveller was an elderly man, mounted upon a dappled-gray horse.

His hair was long and white, and a patriarchal-looking beard of the same hue descended upon his breast.

There was an air of great distinction about him, although he rode unattended.

He was, in fine, one of those men who involuntarily command the respect of all with whom they come in contact.

From this individual Dick's eyes turned to the troop of horsemen who had given him so much trouble.

They were all plainly-dressed, well-armed men, with the exception of one.

That one Dick knew instantly.

He wore a military costume.

He was one of the officers composing the staff of the commander-in-chief.

His name was Major Nicholson.

Dick took all this in at a glance, but before he could make any reflections upon what he saw, the major spoke.

If anything had been wanting to make Dick quite sure of his identity, his voice would have sufficed.

"I ask your pardon, sir," he said, politely, addressing the traveller, "but have you come far along this road?"

"By what right do you ask?"

"I will tell you," said the major; "because every moment is of the utmost importance."

"I suppose you mean to yourself?"

"Precisely."

"Then, sir, be good enough to understand that the same words apply to me in an equal respect as to yourself. Every moment is of importance."

"We are in chase of a highwayman," said the major, smothering the irritation of temper which he experienced at being treated in so off-hand a manner.

"Well, sir."

"We have kept hard upon his track for some miles, and when we heard your horse's hoofs, so far from thinking that it was any one approaching, we fancied we were gaining upon him."

"Then, sir, allow me to pass, and don't trouble me any longer. I know nothing about the highwayman."

"No, sir; but"——

"But what? You surely don't imagine that I am he, do you?"

"Certainly not; but, perhaps you have come some distance along the road, and, if so, you can tell us whether a man, mounted upon a beautiful black horse, has passed you?"

"I have come more than ten miles along this road," replied the elderly traveller, and I will give you my word that no one answering to the description you mention has passed me."

"Enough, sir. And I suppose you have not seen anything of him?"

"No, I have not.'

"Then, in some mysterious way he has eluded us, and yet he has never been fairly out of earshot. Pass on, sir, and accept our thanks."

"You are quite welcome," said the old man, raising his hat about a couple of inches above his head.

As he spoke, he struck his horse with his spurs and rode forward.

The troop of men parted in the centre, and allowed him to pass through.

After he had gone, the horsemen looked rather blankly at each other and inquiringly upon the major.

They wanted to know what had better be done next.

The major himself looked vexed and bewildered.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he asked.

The question elicited a general negatory shake of the head.

"It is no good riding any further, that I can see," he added. "Surely that gentleman would never have deceived us?"

"You may depend he has not," said one.

"Why so?"

"The highwayman has doubled upon us in some way, and, perhaps, by this time is a dozen miles off."

"But how?" said the major, "how? We have in a manner of speaking, lost sight of him. How can he have got off?"

"That is more than I can tell, sir, but, if he was a real highwayman, and one used to the trade, he would manage to avoid us without much trouble."

"I can't see it," said the major.

"Why, I remember a remarkable instance of their cleverness. Have you ever heard of Dick Turpin?"

"Dick Turpin?"

"Yes."

"No, I don't know that I have particularly."

"You have been absent for a long time in the wars, so I suppose that is the reason. Well, this Dick Turpin is a very famous highwayman, or was, I ought to say, for nothing has been heard of him lately."

"Well, what of him?"

"A party of officers once chased this Dick Turpin a long way into the country, and then back to London again, for, though he doubled upon them, they were soon after him. However, he distanced them completely, and the officers' horses being quite knocked up, they turned back and stopped awhile at the village of Acton, which they had passed through some time before. They had not stood drinking at the bar very long before a man came in and told them that the very man they had chased so much further on the London-road was at that moment on the top of his cart, and that his cart was in the inn yard!"

CHAPTER CCXXV.

MAJOR NICHOLSON TRIES VERY HARD TO DEFEAT DICK TURPIN.

"But how could that be?" roared the major.

"I don't know, sir; but when the officers got outside they found what the man said was true enough. There was Dick Turpin lying on the top of some turnips in the cart, as comfortable as he could be."

"But it's impossible," cried the major; "quite impossible."

"May be, sir, but they caught him. And so, after hearing that, if this should turn out to be a regular highwayman, we stand no chance of catching him."

"I shall be very loath to give it up."

"But you said you wanted us for some other business."

"I know that, but never mind, we are too late for it already, so you had better earn the money I have promised you by finding the highwayman, and taking him prisoner dead or alive, whichever you like."

"But how are we to do so, sir? We are all abroad, but, if you'll give your orders, they shall be carried out at once."

"How can I?" said the major. "I am as much abroad as yourself."

"Then, sir, I am afraid we must give it up. It is no good going further down the road. I should advise you to turn back, and examine the road all the way."

"A thought strikes me," said the major; "turn back and follow me."

With these words on his lips, and in the manner of one across whose brain some fresh idea has flashed, the major set off again in the direction he had come, with his troop of men at his heels.

Dick Turpin waited till the sounds of their retreat had quite died away, and then he rose to his feet.

Black Bess followed his example.

He did not mount, but stood with the bridle over his arm in an attitude of deep thought.

What was he to think of what he had just witnessed?

Major Nicholson was one of the officers who felt so jealous of him.

Why was he out that night, thus armed and thus attended?

What idea was it that had crossed his mind when he so suddenly determined to retrace his steps?

These were questions almost impossible of solution.

But Dick did not despair of coming to a reasonable conclusion.

He patted his mare abstractedly upon the neck, while he endeavoured, link by link, to form a chain of thought.

At last his face brightened, and though there was no one by to hear what he said, he spoke, as people often do when they arrive at the solution of any matter that has puzzled them.

"I have it," he said. "I see it all now, and I must be speedy. Yes, this Major Nicholson was one who showed himself jealous and suspicious of me from the first moment. He it was that caused me to be deprived of my arms, and treated almost like a prisoner. Perhaps he may suspect something, though by his manner when the man spoke of me, he did not appear to know my name; but that is nothing. It is my firm belief that, when he learned I had a pass from the duke, he set out to watch me, and hired those men from the city to accompany him. Thank goodness! I have avoided them. Steady lass! Steady!"

These last words were addressed to the mare, as he prepared to mount her.

It so happened that Dick exactly hit upon the truth in his surmises.

Major Nicholson, like many another officer in the army, had firmly resolved that the large reward offered for the head of Charles Stuart should fall into no other hands than his.

Therefore, when Turpin appeared and laid claim to it, he looked upon him as a deadly foe—as an interloper, who had stepped in between him and his rights.

His immediate impulse was to try all he could to place obstacles in the way of Dick obtaining his desires.

With a dog-in-the-manger sort of spirit, he determined that, if he could not have the reward, no one else should—that is, if he could in any way prevent it.

But the story which Dick told was too plausible and too circumstantial for him to be able to pick a flaw in it, and, besides which, it was unvaryingly adhered to.

Accordingly, he had managed to indirectly suggest to the commander-in-chief the expediency of depriving Turpin of his arms, and treating him as a prisoner-of-war, which, as we have seen, was done.

The suspicions which the governor of the castle had, infused a fresh current of thought into his mind.

He was present at the time when the Duke granted the order for Dick to leave the castle.

After a little deliberation, he made a similar request.

Of course, it was acceded to.

Going, then, into the city, he hired a dozen men, all mounted and armed, to accompany him upon an expedition.

What that expedition was, he kept locked in his own breast.

At the appointed hour the little troop was ready, and he rejoined them at the place agreed upon.

From where they stood, a view could be obtained of all persons leaving the castle.

They waited here for some moments, and then the sound of the heavy door being unfastened reached their ears.

In a moment or so afterwards, Dick made his appearance.

The major did not move, but watched him until he had proceeded for some distance.

Then he followed.

He had taken, previously, a very ingenious precaution to prevent Dick hearing that he was followed.

Over each horse's hoofs he had caused a thick worsted covering to be drawn.

By this means, the footsteps of the horses were rendered inaudible.

They followed like spectres.

They were very careful, too, not to draw too close, so as to be seen, but allowed the trampling of Bess's hoofs to be their sole guide.

But, suddenly, the horse which the major rode, from some cause or other—probably from the manner in which his feet were bandaged—grew restive, and, had not his rider been a most accomplished horseman, he would have been thrown.

The others were, of course, obliged to come to a halt, and everything was tried to soothe the terrified animal, but all in vain.

The major, in his agitation, probably increased the terror of the steed, for this delay was the most provoking thing that could possibly be.

Had such a feat been practicable, he would, rather than have wasted the time, have dismounted, and taken a steed from one of his followers; but such an attempt would be full of danger, and, besides, no one when riding likes to be mastered by a horse.

At length, after great loss of time, the animal suffered himself to be calmed down, and then it was found that the cord by which the worsted bandage had been bound to his leg had moved in some way, and got tightly drawn.

This, however, was seen to, and then the horse was quiet enough.

It was at this moment that there came to the ears of the whole party a succession of shrieks which must have been loud and shrill once, but, owing to the distance, had become faint.

A fresh start was just then about to be made, and the major, with a smile of triumph on his face, ordered his men to push on at full speed.

The shrieks continued.

In a little while, owing to the stony ground, the coverings over the hoofs were but now the major did not heed the sound.

When he arrived, however, he was just too late.

From the man and woman together, however, he learned they had been stopped and robbed by a highwayman.

Upon receipt of this intelligence he bade the men give chase, and endeavour to overtake him.

The result of this has been already seen.

Of course, the reader is in possession of a few more facts than Turpin was, but the bold highwayman was not very far off the mark.

Satisfied with himself so far, and feeling quite assured that he had baffled the major, he set about thinking what it was that had induced him to turn back so suddenly.

As in the former instance, this for a long time baffled him.

He considered it, though, as rather a secondary affair, and, while pursuing his thoughts, struck across the meadows in a direct line for the city.

At last he reached a broadish road—not the one he had previously travelled, but one that evidently trended to his destination.

A low hedge divided him from it, and this he did not attempt to leap, but walked on in the expectation of finding a gate through which he could pass, and thus gain it without difficulty.

Nor was he disappointed in this expectation.

After skirting the hedge for about a hundred yards, he came to one.

It was fastened, but not locked.

Dismounting, he quickly undid the chain, and flinging the gate open, allowed his mare to pass through.

Then, in order not to leave any palpable traces of the way he had come, he refastened it, which was done by passing the links of a chain through one another.

"There," he said, as he once again seated himself in the saddle, "that will do. I rather think the major has taken a vast deal of trouble to little or no purpose. However, we shall see. Come, lass!"

At a very gentle pace, for Dick had given Bess more work than he intended, he took his way along this road.

It seemed a very lonely and unfrequented one.

He did not meet a soul.

The moon had climbed higher and higher in the sky, and the clouds, which at the commencement of the night had covered the heavens, were now entirely gone.

It was really a beautiful night, and Dick, as he went, hummed a few staves of a popular drinking song, but his thoughts were chiefly occupied by Major Nicholson, and wondering what fresh scheme he had hatched against him.

In this way a couple of miles were passed over, and then, in the distance, Dick, by the aid of the moonbeams, perceived a building of some sort.

On a nearer approach, he found this to be a road-side inn.

Simultaneously with the making of this discovery, a fresh thought darted into his mind, and he resolved to carry it out at once.

"I wonder I never thought of that before," he muttered. "Never mind, it is none too late. Now, Mr. Major Nicholson, I think I shall be even with you! Ha! ha! you had need be sharp to outwit Dick Turpin!"

He laughed lightly as he spoke.

In one more minute he drew up opposite the inn door.

It was open, and from one of the windows on the ground floor streamed a faint light, thus showing that, late as the hour was, the inmates had not yet retired to rest.

CHAPTER CCXXVI.

DICK TURPIN GROOMS AND FEEDS BLACK BESS AFTER A FASHION OF HIS OWN, AND COMPLETELY BAFFLES MAJOR NICHOLSON.

"HALLO, there! hallo!" shouted Turpin, and as he spoke he took from his pocket one of his pistols, and, grasping it by the barrel, knocked with the butt end upon the doorpost.

His summons was quickly replied to by a tall, gaunt-looking woman, with a rather remarkable-looking widow's cap on her head.

"What do you want, sir?" said she respectfully, for Dick's important manner had its full effect upon her.

"I want my horse seen to," said Dick, "in the first place."

"Yes, sir, of course."

"Have you an ostler?"

"Oh! dear, yes, sir! I'll call him. Jim! Jim!"

In reply to this call a shock-headed urchin of about fourteen years of age made his appearance.

He understood at once what was meant, and Dick, having dismounted, led the way to the stables.

Here the highwayman, with his own hands, carefully groomed his steed.

Of course, in her progress that night, she had got in a sad plight.

Her usually sleek skin was rough and wet with perspiration, and foam was about the bridle, and on her lips and nostrils.

Her legs, too, showed that she had crossed more than one ploughed field.

All these indications of a hard gallop, Dick one after another carefully removed, until at last not a single trace was left.

To have looked at her and her trappings, no one would have believed that she had been out of the stable.

When this was over, Dick sent the boy for a quart measure of ale.

Then, going to the cornbin, he took out a small quantity of oats and chaff.

These he well mixed together, and, as soon as the boy brought the ale, he proceeded, very much to that individual's surprise, to moisten the whole with it.

This would be beneficial for two reasons.

In the state that Bess was then in it would have been very injudicious either to have allowed her to drink water or eat dry food.

But by moistening the corn and chaff in the manner we have described with a quart of ale, both evils would be remedied, and great additional vigour imparted to the animal.

Dick did not go into the inn himself, but stood by his mare while she ate, taking care all the time that she did not eat too quickly.

He sent the boy, however, for another quart of ale, the greater part of which he drank himself, and then handed it to him for his trouble.

Dick waited for some time after Bess had finished her meal, and every now and then he rubbed her down with a wisp of clean hay.

But she was quite cool now, or nearly so.

Feeling satisfied, at length, that all was right, and with the conviction on his mind that the major would be rather disappointed, Dick led Black Bess into the stable yard, and mounting her, rode off at a gentle trot.

Soon afterwards the portals of the grim old castle were reached.

He was challenged by the sentry, but the pass from the duke, which Dick handed to him, was quite sufficient, and he was immediately allowed ingress.

He directed his steps at once to the stables.

On his way he looked keenly about on either side of him, and was presently rewarded for his trouble.

Standing in the shadow of a projecting angle of masonry, his form scarcely distinguished from the dark background behind it, was the figure of a man.

Dick took no notice, but rode carelessly on to the entrance to the stables.

A man was there to receive his steed, and, after giving some audible instructions respecting how she was to be treated, he resigned her to his care, and sauntered away towards his own quarters.

But at the earliest opportunity he stopped.

Then, taking advantage of the darkness of the wall, crept noiselessly back.

He looked at the spot where he had seen the dark form standing.

It was gone.

Still creeping onwards, he reached the stable wall, and paused before one of the windows.

The shutter was down, and through the iron bars he could see distinctly.

The murmur of voices reached his ears.

Taking care not to place himself where he would be seen, Dick strained his sense of hearing to the utmost.

But all he could manage to do was to catch a word here and there.

He was, however, tolerably satisfied.

One of the voices was that of the man into whose charge he had given Black Bess.

The other belonged to Major Nicholson.

Disjointedly as the words reached him, Dick could form a pretty good idea of their import.

The major was asking the man whether the mare had or had not had a long and hard gallop.

The man expressed himself confident that she had not. That she had not been far, and not faster than a trot.

In support of what he said, he called the major's attention to several little points, all of which tended to confirm his assertion.

The major was always hard of belief.

But he could not get over the positive testimony of the stable-keeper and the evidence of his own senses.

He had fully expected to find Black Bess in some such trim as she was when Dick so carefully cleaned and fed her.

But instead of that, there she was, cool and fresh, and looking as though she had only been a short distance, and that at a very easy rate.

Those appearances, however, had a two-fold origin.

One was the excellent quality of the mare herself.

The other was the skill with which her master had groomed her.

The major was baffled.

But not defeated.

In a rage with himself and the world in general, he dashed out of the stable.

Dick drew hastily back out of sight, for he by no means wished that the major should know he suspected him, and that he played the spy upon his actions.

Looking, however, neither to the right nor to the left, he strode up the yard.

Dick followed him at a little distance, and entering the castle, laid himself down to take all the rest he could before the march to London was commenced.

In spite, however, of his wish to sleep, he could not do so, but tossed over and over continually.

His thoughts were active, and when that is the case, sleep is quite out of the question until the brain is tired.

His thoughts were much occupied in thinking of his three comrades, and wondering in what circumstances they were then placed.

The young prince, too, whose cause he had so zealously espoused and supported, where was he?

But it was mostly upon Tom King that his thoughts rested.

Somehow or other there seemed to be a closer band of union between him and himself than there did between either of the two others.

That this feeling was reciprocal there can be no doubt.

From a consideration of these, Dick's thoughts reverted to his own position, and the dangerous ground upon which he stood.

What he had seen already of Major Nicholson was quite enough to show him the necessity there was for his continuing to keep upon his guard.

In him he saw a foe to be dreaded, because he was suspicious and sly.

Then he thought of reaching London, and the audacious feat he was about to perform, of laying the spurious head before the king and claiming the large reward.

London!

When he repeated the word, it seemed to him almost like home.

He forgot his danger.

He looked forward with pleasure to reaching it.

The time that he had been absent seemed endless.

What a joy he felt it would be to make his way to the "White Horse," in Drury-lane, and take jovial old Matthew by the hand.

He could fancy how his face would expand into a smile when he saw him safe and sound.

Then there was Tom Davis, who had shown himself to be in the hour of necessity a staunch, true friend.

He could picture him, he thought, without difficulty, and the quaint old building in which he had resided for so long, and which had been in possession of his family for so many generations.

Dick felt that to once more meet this free and good-

hearted spirit would be a pure delight indeed, and he could tell with what interest he would listen to the story of the adventures he had met with during his long absence.

Then arose another recollection of a face that would smile, and a heart that would grow light in his presence.

This was Ellen.

The poor nameless, homeless, friendless, ill-used apprentice girl, whom he had rescued from the brutality of her rascally mistress.

His breast glowed with irrepressible joy at the remembrance of this one good deed in his career, which shone out from the rest like

Some bright particular star.

and which, he hoped, would go far to palliate many of the darker ones, against which this one shone out with all the more effulgency from the contrast.

He had changed her lot in life—had made it a happy one.

Tom Davis, with his huge, kindly heart, overflowing with sympathy and good nature as it always was, had soon felt her twine around his affections, and he had adopted her as his own child.

A sigh came from D ck's lips as he thought of the blissful calm of such an existence, and how widely different it was from his own wild and turbulent career.

Wearied out at length, he fell into a slumber, in which confused images of all his reflections were presented.

Alas! while thinking as he was, and picturing the condition of Tom Davis and Ellen, he little thought how far he was from reality.

He did not take into considera ion what great and magical changes a few months wil effect.

A person may arise from poverty to affluence, or sink from affluence to poverty, in such a space.

But we will not anticipate events.

CHAPTER CCXXVII.

A GLANCE IS GIVEN AT DICK TURPIN'S THREE COMRADES AND THE PRINCE.

Probably enough, it will be a long while before we can leave Dick in greater security than he is now, or in a situation of less danger, so we will take advantage while he is sleeping, to devote a few moments to his comrades and the unfortunate young prince.

It will be recollected that, with infinite trouble, they had procured a small boat, the owner of which had undertaken to row them to a spot where he had a few hours before seen a French vessel at anchor.

Accordingly, Charles Stuart, Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack had taken their places in the frail embarkation, and stood out to sea.

Ere long, however, indications of a coming storm made themselves apparent to the eyes of all.

The boatman wished to put back to the shore, and endeavour to make some safe harbour till the fury of the winds and waves were past, but our friends would listen to no such thing.

They preferred the danger of going on to that of turning back.

Moreover, they were in hopes that they would soon gain the large vessel, and then, doubtless, all would be well; for, however much such a tempest might endanger their little craft, a large one would scarcely bow before its influence.

Their hopes, however, were doomed to be disappointed.

The storm had increased in fury.

The waves swelled.

The wind blew in short and sudden gusts.

All command over the little boat was lost.

It drifted about at the mercy of the tempest.

Suddenly, however, and with a shivering shock, it struck against some jutting rock and went to pieces.

It parted first in the centre.

With the instinct of self-preservation, each one, as he felt the shock, clutched tightly at whatever portion of the boat happened to be within their reach.

To this instinct they owed their lives.

The broken boat floated.

They had, therefore, only to maintain their grasp.

That they would do this there was little fear.

The tenacity with which persons in danger of drowning will cling to anything which they have once seized is proverbial.

The wind howled mournfully.

The din of the storm increased.

As the four breathless beings held on for dear life to the boat, they felt themselves raised high in the air by the force of a gigantic wave.

Then they were propelled violently forward.

Blinded and half conscious, they felt themselves cast upon a rocky shore.

The wave receded.

They were once more on land.

But the wave which had carried them there would return, and wash them back into the deep.

That is, unless they either got out of its reach or shifted their grasp from the fragments of wood to some immovable object.

The latter was what they did.

From the shore upon which they had been so suddenly and violently cast jutted up numberless piece of rock conical in shape, and a few inches in height.

These were firmly imbedded in the sand, being, so to speak, the excrescences of the large rock which loomed up behind them like a giant.

They could not communicate with each other in any way.

The tempest drowned their voices in its roar.

They could not tell each other what to do.

But blinded, bruised, and semi-conscious as they were, each had the same idea at the same moment.

Letting go the boat, they clasped with might and main one of the little rocks.

And only just in time.

The wave came back.

Tons of water were poured upon them.

They felt themselves rising.

They felt the rock slipping from their fingers.

Then the wave receded.

Once more, then, were they allowed an opportunity of drawing breath and renewing their store of life.

But before they could thoroughly recover, the wave came back again.

This time they fancied with less force.

And so wave after wave, wave after wave broke over them.

Still they did not quit their hold, but pressed their bodies as tightly as they could against the sand.

But now, as a longer interval elapsed between each wave, so did they decrease in their intensity, until at last, though the ocean still heaved and tumbled, they did not reach them at all.

Then all lapsed into unconsciousness.

The wind lulled.

The sea no longer rolled in huge, mountainous billows, but, as if thoroughly exhausted, sunk into a dead calm.

The remainder of the night passed away, and then the sun rose.

His beams revealed no other tokens of the preceding night's devastation than those five still and deathlike looking forms clinging to the pointed rocks.

At last Claude Duval, who was the strongest of the party, and in whom the vital principle was most firmly implanted, aroused himself.

He was the one who had sustained the least injuries.

He gradually raised himself to a sitting posture.

Several groans came from his lips as he did so, for he felt as though every bone in his body was broken.

For a little while he was at a loss to remember what had occurred, and could scarcely believe that what he saw was reality.

Presently his eye rested upon the forms of his companions.

Then, like a flash of light, there swept across his brain a recollection of all that had occurred.

As he sat up and looked about him, he felt that he was every moment getting better, so at length he crawled to the person next to him.

He was lying on his face.

Whether he was alive or dead, he knew not.

He turned him over.

It was Tom King.

The faint moans which came from his lips, now that his position had been altered, took a great load off Claude's mind, for it showed that he still lived.

Situated as he then was, he felt he could do little towards assisting him to recover his senses, so he left Nature to take her course, and crawled onwards to the next form.

This was the boatman.

He, too, was living and revivifying under the beams of the rising sun, which poured down every moment an increase of heat.

Under these circumstances, Claude ventured to indulge in the hope that he should be fortunate enough to find all living.

Sixteen-String Jack was the next to him, and he was at some little distance off.

Beyond him, again, was one form of Charles Stuart.

While in the act of crawling towards the former, Claude saw him move his arms about and then rise upon one elbow.

"Jack!" he cried, in as loud a voice as he could command, "Jack!"

The highwayman turned upon hearing his friend's voice, and looked in his face with a puzzled air.

But he soon comprehended his situation.

By a great effort he, by his comrade's assistance, sat up and looked around him.

Claude glided off towards the young prince, whom he found in a perfectly senseless state, and looking so much like death that he gave utterance to an ejaculation, which caused Jack, feeble as he was, to approach him.

But, upon placing his hand upon his heart, he could feel a slight, fluttering pulsation.

But though Claude and Jack, who were presently joined by the boatman and Tom King, tried their utmost to restore him to consciousness, they were unsuccessful.

No doubt, had they been furnished with better means, the case would have been different, but then all were so weak that they could not so much as chafe his limbs, and so promote the circulation of the blood.

The pangs of hunger and thirst, too, began to make themselves felt by those who had recovered; but though they cast their eyes all around, them, they could not see so much as a blade of grass, nor a spot of fresh water.

In fact, they had been cast upon a mere projecting piece of rock, upon which nothing grew—upon which nothing found a resting-place, and where no water, except such as fell from the sky, was ever seen.

The part, too, in which it was went against them.

Mariners invariably avoided it, because of the dangers of the sunken rocks, which grew up from the ocean bed like teeth in a shark's jaw.

Were they then preserved from a more lenient death to perish of starvation upon that rugged and barren spot?

Surely, yes, unless assistance comes, and that promptly.

Higher and higher rose the sun, and when he was in his full power the young prince recovered.

The great heat of the sun, in their exposed situation, was now found to be a serious inconvenience to them all.

But there was no place where they could shelter themselves from his burning rays.

At last the sun declined—day faded—and night once more came upon the deep.

Cold, hungry, weary, thirsty, suffering great torment from their wounds and bruises, the unfortunate party lay upon the sand.

The intense coldness of the evening was now felt to be even a greater hardship than the sun's fervency, but they were helpless, and could not shield themselves from either the one or the other.

They waited for dawn.

It was near the close of this second day that Claude Duval, as he cast his eyes around, caught sight of a white object.

Almost dreading to give any room for hope, he did not speak to any of his companions, but looked again.

It was a sail!

No longer containing the joyful intelligence, he shouted aloud.

Wearied and worn out as they were, this infused fresh life into his companions' breasts.

Painfully they struggled to their feet, and then looking seaward, satisfied themselves that there was no mistake.

Of course the next thing now was to attract attention, and this Claude did by hastily stripping off his shirt, and holding it by the sleeves so that it fluttered out like a little flag.

By rare good fortune the signal was seen by those on board the vessel, and its course was altered towards them.

And then, for the first time, they thought of the unpleasant predicament they would be in if this ship, as most likely was the case, was an English one.

But prospective danger is preferable to present.

It so happened that the ship was really the French sloop of war of which the boatman had spoken.

He knew it again at once.

Animated now by hope, they waited the approach of the friendly bark, and, in less than an hour afterwards, were safe on board of it, where every attention was paid to them.

CHAPTER CCXXVII.

DICK TURPIN AND THE ARMY REACH LONDON, AND THE FORMER PAYS A VISIT TO OLD MATTHEW, THE LANDLORD OF THE "WHITE HORSE," IN DRURY-LANE.

It is not our intention to follow, step by step, the progress of the British army back to London.

Such a recapitulation of ordinary every-day occurrences would be wearisome both to the reader and the chronicler.

The lapse of time, therefore, which it took for the army to go by forced marches from one place to the other, must be passed over in a word or two.

Major Nicholson kept a very keen eye upon Turpin and all his movements, so the highwayman was cautious to a degree accordingly.

During the march, however, nothing further occurred.

No more doubts had been expressed about the genuineness of the head. Indeed, it seemed to be taken for granted, on all hands, that it was exactly what it was represented to be.

London was reached.

Banners waved, crowds gathered, guns were fired in honour of the arrival of the commander-in-chief.

The news of the victory had, of course, preceded them, and preparations for their reception had been made upon a grand scale.

Dick Turpin, however, was fearful that some curious eye should single him out from among the throng and recognise him.

He did not forget that a very large reward was offered for his apprehension.

Therefore, upon nearing the suburbs, he contrived, in spite of the opposition of Major Nicholson, to obtain permission from the duke to leave the ranks.

The conditions under which this leave of absence was granted were these—

The head was to be left in the duke's custody.

Turpin was to be at St. James's Palace without fail at nightfall, when the head would be presented to him.

To these conditions Dick at once agreed, and faithfully promised to comply with them.

He then separated himself from the troops, and at a hand-gallop made his way into London.

After carefully thinking the matter over, he considered that his best place of refuge, and where his priceless mare, Black Bess, would be safest, was the "White Horse" in Drury-lane.

Old Matthew, he knew, would be able to furnish him with the fullest information.

He had, moreover, many contrivances for baffling the officers, should they by any chance get scent of him.

It was not without some degree of trepidation, however, that he made his way in broad daylight into the heart of London.

He shaped his course to Bloomsbury-fields, at that time fields in reality.

Here, of course, few people were met with.

Passing Montague-house, on the site of which the British Museum now stands, he was able to go in a direct line to the top of Drury Lane.

Down that unsavoury thoroughfare, then, he passed, but when he reached the corner of Prince's Street he paused.

"It will hardly do," he muttered, "for me to be seen riding up to the door of the 'White Horse' in broad

daylight. I shall surely be seen, and my presence commented upon by some one. No, I will go the back way."

With these words on his lips, he turned the corner of Prince's-street, and, after going a little way, took again the first turning on his right, now called Stanhope-street.

It was at the back of, and parallel to, Drury-lane, and White Horse-yard—the name of the passage at the side of old Matthew's dwelling—connected the two.

The place is hardly wide enough to admit a man on horseback, but Dick had been before.

In a moment or two more, the strange little door in the wall—the secret of which was known only to a few—was reached.

Then he pressed upon the hidden spring and waited.

Before his summons was responded to, he had alighted and stood with his mare's bridle over his arm.

Silently the door swung open.

There stood old Matthew on the threshold.

At the first glance, he did not recognise Turpin, so greatly had his looks altered during the campaign.

But Turpin seized his hand, and, pressing it warmly, spoke.

The worthy landlord knew the voice.

That had not changed.

"Why, Dick?" he said, in the enthusiasm of the moment, almost crushing the highwayman's hand between his huge palms, "that is never you, surely. I had given up all thoughts of ever seeing you again."

"Yet here I am," replied Turpin, "safe and sound, and what is quite as much, if not more, here is Black Bess, safe and sound too."

"So she is; but don't stand there, Dick—come in, come in! I've such news to tell you. Where have you been all this long time? Come in, come!"

The worthy old landlord bustled about as quickly as his portly old form would let him.

The secret door was opened to its full extent.

"Be quick, Dick," he cried; "I don't want any unfriendly eye to see me."

"All right, Matthew, here we are."

Dick, as he spoke, led his mare into the little square yard which has already been described in the earlier portion of this history, and then the landlord rapidly shut and carefully fastened the door.

"Now Dick, lad, where have you been? Come, tell us, and I will tell you afterwards all that I know. And where's Tom King, and how is he, and what has become of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, and?"——

"Stop—stop!" cried Dick, with a laugh. "How do you think I am going to answer any of your questions, if you keep on at that rate?"

"I forgot, my lad; but you see there is so much I want to know."

"I don't doubt that, but, Matthew, my friend, let us first attend to bonny Black Bess, here. Lead the way to the stables, and when I have seen her safely disposed of, we will go indoors and have a glass together, while we talk over the past."

"Bravo! Dick, so I will. You're one of the right sort, you are, and know how to behave to a good horse when you've got one. It was always the same. The mare first and yourself afterwards."

"So it ought to be."

"As you say, so it ought to be. Now, Dick, follow me. I've got the door undone at last. Come along."

Old Matthew threw open a door as he spoke, and led the way along a passage, from which came the unmistakeable odour of stables.

At the extremity of this passage was another door, which led into the stables themselves.

It was not the first time that Dick had seen them, and even Black Bess seemed to recollect, for she walked direct to the stall which she usually occupied.

Old Matthew supplied her plentifully with corn, then littered down her stall with a quantity of fresh straw.

This done, he would insist upon the highwayman accompanying him without delay into the little bar-parlour, where none but privileged guests were admitted.

On the present occasion, in order not to be disturbed, he locked the door.

From a little cupboard he produced two or three bottles containing wines and spirits of a choicer quality than any were vended in London.

These they sat down by the fireside to discuss.

Matthew, however, firmly and flatly refused to answer any questions, or impart any information, until Dick had satisfied his curiosity by telling him all that had taken place since their last parting.

To do this, Dick had to go back to the execution of Tom King—or attempted execution, rather.

Beginning, then, with his rescue, he as briefly as he could, consistently with clearness, narrated to the landlord the principal events that had taken place, ending, of course, by his presence where he was at that moment.

To the whole of the extraordinary narration old Matthew listened, with his eyes wide open with astonishment.

But, above all, was he astounded at the bold and daring plan which had hitherto been carried out so successfully of passing off a spurious head for that of the young prince.

When he learned, however, that on that very night, Turpin was going to consummate it by presenting himself before the king, and demanding the reward, he grew alarmed and tried to dissuade him from it.

The risk was immense.

But Dick was deaf to all his persuasions.

"It is no good for you to say a word, Matthew—not a bit. I have resolved upon it, and you know when I once take a thing into my head there is no turning me! Now, will you listen to me a moment."

"What is it?"

"Will you listen?"

"To be sure I will."

"Very well, then. I have told you all that has taken place without hearing a word from you."

"I know you have."

"Then before anything more is said, you must tell me what has happened during my absence."

"Well?"

"Do you hear anything of the officers?"

Matthew smiled significantly.

"They drop in now and then."

"Still at the same game, eh?"

"Oh! yes. But if you want to know if they have been for you, they hav'nt. Wriggles—you know Wriggles?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, he gave me the most trouble."

"Did he?"

"Yes."

"How was that?"

"He got the idea into his head that you were concealed here somewhere, and he searched the old place from top to bottom."

"Did he?"

"Yes, and even then he was not convinced, but set men to watch, and made no end of fuss."

"All to no good?"

"All to no good!"

"Capital; and lately there have been no inquiries?"

"No. I began to grow afraid that you had departed this life, but I see here you are safe and sound."

"Yes; and now there is another point I want to be satisfied upon."

"What is it?"

"Am I much altered?"

"Very much."

"Then you think I am not in much danger of being recognised."

"I don't know. You are almost forgotten already, I do think! Such a long time has passed since you did any business. People now are not so afraid of taking a journey at night as they used to be."

"So much the better, then. I will soon let them know that Dick Turpin is alive! But come, Matthew, lend me your assistance. It is growing dusk, now, and I must be at the palace at dark."

Matthew shook his head.

"I should never run the risk, Dick, if I was you."

CHAPTER CCXXIX.

WHEN TOO LATE, DICK TURPIN FINDS IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER TO HAVE TAKEN OLD MATTHEW'S ADVICE, AND THAT THERE IS SUCH A THING AS CARRYING A JOKE TOO FAR.

It is night.

St. James's-street and Pall-mall are a scene of the greatest possible confusion.



[THE SENTINEL MAKES AN ABORTIVE EFFORT TO PREVENT DICK TURPIN'S ESCAPE.]

These two streets, and many other subordinate ones, are choked up with numberless vehicles of every description, while the footpaths are thronged with hundreds of pedestrian spectators.

The front of the substantial-looking old palace, which has of late fallen into comparative disuse, was brilliantly illuminated.

At least our ancestors thought so, but then they never dreamed even of the invention of so wonderful an agent as gas.

All over the city, too, and especially in the more aristocratic portions of it, the windows were lighted up from cellar to roof.

Not only was this done by the upholders of the house of Hanover, who were just then in the ascendant, but also by many of those who were attached to the fortunes of the exiled and vanquished Stuarts, who wished to avoid popular ill-usage.

The assembled crowd, of course, was densest just where the carriages stopped to deposit their contents, who had to make their way across the pavement to the entrance.

Occasionally a loud hurrah or a bitter groan would arise as some popular or unpopular personage alighted and crossed into the palace.

As may be supposed, the Duke of Cumberland was just at that present moment the popular idol.

Accordingly, when his carriage drew up with a jerk, a stentorian cheer which made the whole palace ring again issued from a thousand throats.

The commander-in-chief paused a moment to return these acknowledgments by bowing deeply, and then vanished into the recesses of the building.

Within, the palace was one scene of dazzling splendour.

The whole of the aristocracy of the kingdom were present, in order to receive the victorious duke in a manner which they deemed worthy of him.

Dick Turpin—who, it must be borne in mind, was known to the duke and his officers as Mr. John Palmer—was present.

He was dressed in a style befitting the occasion, but he strove, as much as possible, to elude observation.

In this he, to a very great extent, succeeded, for, observing a little ante-chamber, which was fitted up like a refreshment-room, he entered it at once.

A massive curtain of crimson damask, with bullion fringe and tassels, hung before the entrance of it in lieu of a door.

The room was quite vacant when he entered it, so, choosing the least conspicuous seat he could, he sat himself down upon it, and waited patiently.

The hum of voices from the large outer apartment now reached his ears very faintly indeed.

"What's to be the end of this desperate adventure?" he asked himself, musingly. "Am I to meet with the same success that I have done hitherto? As Old Matthew rightly enough says, it is a fearful risk; but never mind, Dick Turpin never was the man to relinquish what he had taken in hand on account of any perils or difficulties that might present themselves."

He was silent for a minute or two, for a louder noise than usual came from the saloon.

But, whatever might have been the cause of it, it was quickly over.

"I ought to arrange a retreat," he added, "in case I should be discovered. That will only be acting like a skilful general when leading his forces into the field. It will be my best course to set about that at once."

With this conviction on his mind, he rose, and, crossing the refreshment room, pushed aside the crimson curtain, and entered the saloon.

It was much fuller than it was when he had left it, and therefore he had all the better chance of doing what he wished to do unperceived.

Gradually, then, he paced round the room.

He came at length to the doors, through which fresh guests came streaming in.

A crowd of menials were about it.

He shook his head and passed on.

"No, no," he said; "if the worst comes to the worst, and I have to make a flying retreat from this gorgeous apartment, I shall stand no chance of getting free if I try to pass there."

The windows of this room were all upon one side of it.

They were small, like all the windows in the old palace, but they were many in number.

Without exception, they were all composed of little diamond-like panes, set in a framework of lead.

Some of these little panes were of stained glass, and so placed as to form curious devices.

Dick strove to look through several of these windows, in order to see what kind of place it was into which they looked, but he was each time unsuccessful.

Having, in a short time, made himself perfectly familiar with the different bearings of the room, he felt himself more at his ease.

Just at this moment, however, some one touched him lightly on the arm.

Dick turned like lightning, and then saw it was one of the duke's personal attendants.

This individual did not speak, but merely beckoned with his finger tips for Turpin to accompany him.

This the highwayman did not hesitate to do.

In a few seconds he reached the duke's side, who made a motion for him to remain where he was.

Then, before he had time to look around him, even to see by what persons he was encompassed, some large folding-doors at the further extremity of the saloon were thrown open, disclosing another apartment of similar appearance beyond it.

Towards this, then, all bent their course.

Upon a nearer approach, Dick saw that this was where the king intended to receive his guests.

He was seated in a massive high-backed arm-chair, which was placed upon a dais.

Upon his fat and vacant-looking face appeared a smile of complacent satisfaction.

It was the first time Dick had ever breathed the atmosphere of royalty, and so, as a matter of course, it oppressed him.

In what way to comport himself he knew not.

But yet he did not appear awkward.

He kept a watchful eye upon the behaviour of those nearest to him, and demeaned himself accordingly.

One by one the assemblage made their obeisance to their sovereign, and then the duke had several flattering compliments passed upon him for the manner in which he had conducted the campaign, and the promptitude with which he had crushed out this formidable rebellion.

It was then that the death of the Young Pretender was more particularly spoken of.

Now Turpin felt that his time was coming.

He could not control a slight beating at his heart.

The ghastly and terrible-looking head had been preserved from the ravages of decay by having been kept in spirits of wine during the march from Edinburgh to London.

Now, however, it had been carefully dried, in order that the king might gratify his curiosity by looking at it.

After that, it had been agreed it should be stuck upon a pike over Temple-bar.

The large, or rather immense reward which had been offered for this object, made every one present regard Turpin with the utmost interest and attention when he stood forward, by the duke's command, to assert his claim to it.

Now was the critical moment.

Was this audacious imposition to be successful?

Was the Young Pretender, after all, destined to have the laugh against his enemies?

We shall see.

Scarcely had Turpin taken the head in his hand, and standing before the king, commenced the recital of how he came to be in possession of it, than a strange hubbub arose.

The courtly guests looked about them with dismay.

An angry look came over the king's face.

But, despite of this, the hubbub increased, and came nearer and nearer.

Probably only one person there present could give a guess as to what it meant.

And that was Dick Turpin, whose eyes had suddenly encountered the gaze of Major Nicholson.

Upon the face of this individual was an expression of triumph.

Simultaneously with his observing this circumstance, a chair, which came from no one knew whither, was pushed forward.

Then a man, in a state of frantic excitement, which blinded him to all notions of etiquette, sprang into it.

This individual, upon whom the glance of all centred, was short and thin.

He was attired as a police-officer.

As if still further to show his authority, he held up at full length in his right hand a little staff with a gilt crown to it, such, indeed, as was carried by constables as an emblem of authority.

"Seize him!" he cried. "Murder! It's all a sham! The Pretender's alive, and has escaped! That is Dick Turpin, the highwayman! Seize him! Down with him! A thousand pounds reward! Murder!"

To paint the effect which these few words produced upon the guests in the saloon, is quite out of our power.

While he uttered the first few sentences, a dead silence ensued.

But that only lasted while they were dominated by surprise.

It was succeeded by a kind of roar, which quickly rose into a shout.

A rush was made in the direction where Turpin stood.

The chair upon which the officer stood was overturned

He was thrown to the ground before he could complete his ejaculatory denunciation.

But he was quickly up again.

CHAPTER CCXXX.

DICK TURPIN IS FORCED TO FLY THROUGH THE PALACE FOR HIS LIFE.

THE king started to his feet.

Swords were drawn.

Fierce cries uttered.

It may seem strange, but we are not afraid to say that the highwayman, who assuredly was in the greatest danger, was the calmest and most self-possessed of all.

It arose in a great measure from the fact that he anticipated the catastrophe.

But so suddenly had the officer sprang up upon the chair, and so rapidly had he spoken, that it was not until he was fairy overturned that Dick tried to fly.

His position was desperate.

He was surrounded.

Hemmed in on all sides.

His first impulse was to get rid of the head, which had now become merely an incumbrance to him.

Swinging it once round his head, he flung it into the face of his foes.

Then, with the quickness of thought, he drew his sword from its sheath.

It was not the trusty broadsword he was accustomed to use, but a rapier.

He glared about him.

To get to the windows was impossible.

The crowd of excited guests was between him and them, and to attempt to force a passage through so compact a body could only result in his own death or capture.

Some other outlet to the room must be found.

There were but two others.

One was the large folding doors leading into the outer saloon.

The other a small private door leading to the state apartments, through which the king had come.

To this Dick at once resolved to make his way.

He reached it at a bound.

A couple of yeomen of the guard stood on duty beside it, and, upon seeing him approach, they presented their long halberts at his breast.

But, with a blow from both arms, he dashed these aside.

Ere they could recover their cumbrous weapons, he gained the door.

He did not attempt to unfasten it, but flung himself with all his force against it.

There was a crash.

The door gave way.

A yell from the rear echoed the performance of this feat.

Dick stumbled when the door gave way, and almost fell.

Luckily, however, he preserved his footing.

A quarter of the force he used would have been sufficient.

Not stopping, however, he looked anxiously around to see what kind of place he was in.

It was a long and dimly-lighted corridor, from which opened a number of doors.

Willingly enough would he have tried to take shelter in one or other of the rooms into which they led, but his pursuers were too close upon his heels for such a manœuvre to be successful.

The confusion and excitement in the saloons were terrific.

The scene altogether had been too much for the royal nerves, so the king had sunk down in a swoon after springing to his feet.

Several rushed forward to his assistance, vociferating loudly

But by far the greater number hastened to pursue the audacious highwayman.

Foremost among these were Major Nicholson and the police-officer.

But Dick had got a start, though not much of a one, and did not allow himself to be frightened by the noise his pursuers made.

At the end of the corridor was another door.

It was ajar.

To dart through it was the work of a moment.

He noticed, too, that the fastenings were on the inner side.

He slammed the door to at once.

Then turned the key, which happened to be in the lock.

Then shot two brass bolts into their sockets.

Frail as the door was, and little strength as would be required to force it from its hinges, yet it answered one good purpose.

It enabled Dick to get out of sight of his pursuers.

Turning round, he found himself in a small ante-room, or vestibule.

Opposite was an open door, leading into a larger apartment.

Two steps brought him to it.

As he put his hand upon the knob to close this second door, his pursuers arrived at the first.

Some heavy blows were struck.

What followed next he did not stay to see, but closed this second door.

From afar off he could hear various sounds, which showed that the alarm was spreading, and would soon become general.

A bell was tolling furiously.

The kettledrums of the soldiers on duty at the palace sent forth their deafening notes.

"This is a serious affair," said Dick. "It strikes me, unless I find some way out of the palace, and that very quickly, I shall be captured."

He was now in a large and magnificently-furnished room.

It was illuminated by a chandelier, carrying some hundreds of wax candles.

Now, however, only two or three of these were lighted, so that the gloom was only partially dispelled.

Dick took this in at a glance, for, of course, he did not stay to make any examination.

It was vacant.

There was then a loud crash.

The first door had given way.

A moment.

And then his foes were at the second, and, by the vigorous manner in which they attacked it, Dick saw it would not hold up two minutes.

Running, therefore, the full length of this apartment he passed into another.

Beyond this was another.

In fact, he was in one of those long suites of rooms of which there are so many in St. James's Palace.

He had no resource but to keep on, for his pursuers pressed so closely after him.

Every door, however, through which he passed, he fastened as well as his haste would permit.

Having at length gained a little upon them, he stopped and drew aside one of the curtains before the windows.

This he found was an injudicious action.

He could just see very dimly what was beyond.

The window looked into an open paved court, which was thronged with people in a state of the greatest possible excitement.

From the loud cry which arose as soon as he drew back the curtain, he felt sure he must have been seen, and that he had given his enemies a clue to his whereabouts.

To have attempted escape from that window would have been madness.

Probably the time that he paused to draw aside the curtain and look out did not amount to a minute, but yet it enabled his pursuers to gain the door of the room in which he was.

They were expeditious.

There was a reason for this, but Turpin did not know it.

They had provided themselves with efficient instruments, by which they were able to demolish the doors almost as fast as Dick could fasten them.

He had no resource but to continue his flight through the suite of rooms.

These must come to an end some time, though they really seemed interminable.

Surely never before that night, and never since, had there been such a racket and confusion as there was then.

In a few moments, however—after, indeed, passing through two more rooms—the end was reached, and Dick emerged into another corridor, running at right angles to the course he had been taking.

The last door, however, he could not fasten, for the bolts and lock were upon the inner side.

Looking right and left down this corridor, for it stretched equally in both directions, he could see no one.

"I will turn to the left," he said. "Perhaps a little further on I shall come to a staircase, down which to force my way."

With these words in his mind, rather than upon his lips, Dick Turpin ran along the corridor, in the direction he had named.

Ere he had proceeded many yards, however, loud shouts, the clashing of weapons, and the hurried trampling of feet

behind him, gave notice that his pursuers once more had him in full view.

Still Turpin ran on.

He was afraid to stop and make the attempt to gain one of the many apartments which opened to the right and left of him, lest it should enable them to gain too much upon him.

It was a strange race.

With unabated speed, however, the highwayman kept on.

The long, low corridor was only dimly lighted by a few oil lamps, placed in the hands of statues at long intervals.

To a certain extent, this was an inconvenience, but it advantaged him in this way.

Those in pursuit could not see him so easily as they would otherwise have done.

And now, in the distance, Dick fancies he can discern the termination of the long passage.

Perhaps there was the much wished for staircase.

But, if so, he was destined never to reach it.

Fresh sounds suddenly greet his ears.

They come from before him.

Another moment, and he sees the flashing of lights, the murmur of voices, the rush of feet.

A cry of triumph comes from those in the rear, who press onward with greater eagerness.

It is echoed by a groan from the highwayman, as, thus placed between two parties, he comes to a halt.

To go on would only be to throw himself into their grasp.

What is to be done?

To stand still is to be captured.

There is no hope of being able to force a passage through either those in advance or those in the rear.

Their numbers are too great, and they are too well armed.

CHAPTER CCXXXI.

DICK TURPIN ESCAPES FROM THE PALACE, BUT IS MADE PRISONER BY A SENTINEL.

DESPAIRINGLY, Dick Turpin, the bold highwayman, turned his eyes around him.

He dashes the heavy drops of perspiration from his face, which, trickling down from his forehead, obscure his vision.

His drawn sword is in his hands, and, for a second, it looks as though he was going to turn at bay, and fight his numerous foes.

But that idea is too preposterous to hold place in his mind.

A door was near him.

He did not know it might, if he passed through it, so far from aiding his escape, ensure his capture.

But the risk must be run.

His foes are close upon him.

He hears their swords clash.

He hears them cry to him to surrender.

Unheeding them, however, he grasped the handle of the door, and tried to enter.

Alas!

The door was fast upon the inner side.

A firm, heavy door it seemed.

Could he force it?

He knew that if he stayed where he then was, before his heart could pulsate thirty times his foes would be upon him.

He drew back to the opposite side of the corridor.

As he did so, there was the sharp report of a pistol.

He staggered.

No doubt he would have been shot at earlier, but none of those in chase were provided with firearms with the exception of the police-officer.

He had only one, and he reserved that until he could almost make certain of his aim.

Dick was hit.

But only slightly.

Although he staggered, he did not pause.

He rushed across the corridor, and flung himself with might and main.

It cracked.

It gave way.

He could not stop himself, but fell heavily with it to the floor.

Before his mind, however, was so palpable an idea of his danger, that he was on his feet again instantly.

But his foes were on the threshold.

"Surrender!" they cried. "Surrender, and your life will be spared. Surrender! It is impossible for you to escape."

"Never!" shouted Dick, hoarsely. "Never!"

The room into which he had just made his way, was almost in total darkness.

From the surrounding obscurity, however, he could just distinguish the outlines of the window.

Many of his pursuers had provided themselves with lights, but those who carried them were in the rear.

They did not wait for these to come up with them, but dashed into the chamber, crying out for Dick to surrender.

But this was a thing Dick Turpin determined never to do with life.

There was the window.

He knew not how high it might be from the ground.

He knew not what sort of a place there might be beyond.

But he knew it was the open air, because he could just distinguish the night sky.

Therefore, with the one word of "Never!" upon his lips, he made a terrific spring forward.

He concentrated in it the whole of his remaining energies.

He mounted on the broad window-sill.

Then flung himself, head-foremost, through the casement.

There was a tremendous crash of broken glass.

A wild cry from the king's guests, who were amazed at the boldness of this desperate feat.

Just then, those with the lights arrived upon the threshold.

A general rush was made to the window, from which came a strong current of cold air, that threatened to extinguish the lights.

All that could be seen, however, was a large hole in the very centre of the casement.

Framework and glass had both disappeared.

For a moment all stood still with astonishment, but, recovering themselves, they ran out of the room.

"This way—this way!" some one had cried. "He has leaped into the garden, and cannot escape. This way will take you to it. We shall find him lying lamed upon the ground, for the fall is enough to kill him. This way, all! We have him safe enough now."

But in this they were disappointed.

The communication between the eye and the brain is instantaneous.

When Dick had jumped on to the window-sill, and sprang through the casement, he caught a glimpse of the tops of some trees waving near him.

This at once made him aware that he was a considerable distance from the ground.

And also that ground would be of a soft character.

Had it been otherwise, however, he could not have halted.

He plunged through the window.

The mere weight of his body would have been sufficient to have shattered it to atoms.

He held his breath as he fell.

Then, with a sudden shock, he reached the ground.

But, fortunately for him, he happened to alight upon a bed of soft mould.

He fell, too, on his hands and knees.

For full three moments, though, he was deprived of consciousness.

Although the alarm appeared to be so general, there was no one at all about this spot.

Had there been, his capture would have been certain, for he could not have raised a hand to defend himself.

His senses soon returned to him.

Before he ventured to stir, he listened.

Various sounds indicative of alarm, and such as he had previously heard, still reached his ears, but they did not seem to be particularly near that spot.

When he took the leap, it was only with the idea of escaping immediate capture, but now the hope of being able to get clear off began to fill his mind.

But clearly there was no time to lose.

He struggled to his feet.

He was bruised and shaken, but no bones had been broken.

He was in pain—great pain—and his left ankle-joint seemed out of place.

Ricked is the colloquial word for it.

This, he was aware, would soon pass off.

He glanced round him, in order to take in his position.

The garden into which he had fallen seemed to be of very great extent.

Behind him was the palace.

Before him, sharply defined against the night sky, was a wall.

What was on the other side of that wall?

He looked around him once more.

It must be St. James's Park.

Could he once get into that large inclosure, surely he should stand a chance of baffling those who were in chase of him.

In a moment, then, now that he had resolved upon a particular course of action, he hastened to the garden wall.

It was, he found upon nearing it, only a little more than six feet in height.

To scale it, therefore, would not be a matter of much difficulty.

He raised his arms, in order to pull himself up, but a sudden pain forced him to drop them again.

In his fall, he had almost forgotten the wound he had received from the pistol of the police-officer while in the corridor.

But now he was disagreeably made sensible of it.

The bullet had struck him in the top part of his shoulder, near its junction with the neck.

He rapidly put up his hand to ascertain the extent of the injury.

It was slight.

There was, though, what most would have considered a serious and ugly gash.

The pain he felt arose, more than anything, from a portion of his apparel having stuck in it, and now that bleeding began again, he felt scarcely anything of it.

Once more, then, he placed his hands upon the edge of the wall, and, by the muscular force contained in his arms, drew himself up until his breast was on a level with it.

To get his legs up was easy enough.

And now those who had left the chamber to make their way into the garden, arrived.

Their numbers had considerably augmented, and they had, moreover, provided themselves with torches, which threw a ruddy light around.

They perceived Dick almost instantly, before he could lower himself from the wall, and they made a rush in his direction.

But, ere they could accomplish more than half the distance, Dick had descended.

Only to fall into a fresh peril.

Directly his feet touched the ground, he felt something hard pressed against his body, and a voice cried—

"Stand, or you are a dead man! If you attempt to move, I fire!"

It was a soldier who spoke.

Dick could distinguish his form, for his eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness.

He was one of the sentinels who were deputed to keep watch round the royal residence.

The hard object which was pressed against Dick's breast, was the muzzle of his musket.

He had seen him on the wall, and, as he thought, had him secure.

But he little knew the man he had to deal with.

When any one feels that his life depends upon his actions, it is wonderful how much more can be done than under less pressing circumstances.

Had some trifling punishment only been the result which followed his capture, Dick would then and there have surrendered.

But he was well aware that, should he once be taken prisoner, his life would be the penalty

CHAPTER CCXXXII.

DICK TURPIN DISPOSES OF THE SENTINEL, AND BESIDES UPON A PLACE OF REFUGE.

One touch upon the trigger of that musket, and Dick Turpin would have been a dead man.

But that touch was not destined to be given.

It was a hazardous experiment, but, with the swiftness of thought, Dick seized the barrel of the gun and turned it aside.

He was only just in time.

The sentinel had seen the movement, and prepared to fire.

The highwayman was quickest.

Had a person stood there, however, and been a spectator of the affair, he would have declared that Dick seized the muzzle and the soldier drew the trigger at precisely the same moment.

In reality this was not so.

A space of time—certainly infinitesimal—intervened, and it was during this period that Dick turned it aside.

The bullet flattened itself against the wall within a foot of him.

The recoil of the weapon made it for a moment unsteady in the sentry's grasp.

Dick was prepared for this, and took advantage of it to wrest the musket from his grasp.

Then, still holding it by the barrel, but shifting one hand farther along it, he swung it with great swiftness round his head, aiming a terrific blow at his opponent as he did so.

But the man knew what was coming, and drew back to avoid the stroke.

He did not go far enough.

The butt of the gun, instead of reaching his head, as the highwayman intended, alighted on his shoulder.

But, such was the vigour of the blow, that, with a yell of pain, he sank to the ground.

Dick's blood was up, and well it might be, taking all circumstances into consideration, and he did what he would not in a moment of less excitement have thought of doing.

He struck the man again.

This time he fell like an inanimate body upon the ground.

The struggle was a very brief one, but when Dick looked round, he found his enemies were very close upon him.

A small door in the garden-wall, which he had not previously noticed, was thrown open, and the disorderly throng, worked up to a pitch of the greatest possible excitement, poured forth.

They were this time in greater numbers than ever.

He turned and fled.

The musket, which had once already rendered him such good service, he would not abandon.

It was unloaded, but, used like a club, it would be a very effective weapon at close quarters.

As he crossed that open space in the park, known ever since the reign of Charles II. as "the Mall," he heard the loud clear tones of a bugle rise on the night air.

What this meant, he knew not, but scarcely had the echoes died away, than its notes were taken up by another in the distance.

It seemed to be at the Horse Guards.

It was a signal of some sort or other, for it was taken up by another, this time in another direction.

For a brief space Dick was at a loss to think what this signified, and then he muttered—

"I have it. I know now. Confound it, my troubles are not half over. They have communicated with the soldiers at the different gates, who will now refuse to let any one pass out."

Dick hit exactly upon the real state of the case.

There were then, as now, several gates by which St. James's Park could be left or entered.

At each of these gates were posted soldiers as sentinels.

The bugle call was understood by them as a command to close the gates and allow no one to pass out.

Dick Turpin was in a cage—a large one, it is true, but, nevertheless, it was a cage, and one in which he stood a good chance of being caught, unless luck befriended him in some extraordinary and unlooked for manner.

The park was dark, and the many trees that grew in it threw deep shadows all around.

For him to keep out of the way of those who were pursuing him with lights was no difficult matter, because their exact position was always known to him.

But with them the case was quite altered.

The torches only made the darkness appear darker, and confused their eyes.

Unless just within the sphere of their rays, Dick could not be seen.

The only thing that could guide them was the sound of his footsteps.

All had paused, as if actuated by one impulse, when they came to the sentinel, who lay upon the ground with every appearance of death.

This gave Dick a slight advantage, and he availed himself of it.

After crossing the Mall, he came to the tall iron palings which surround the green inclosure in which the piece of ornamental water is situated.

He had some trouble in climbing over these, for he had no place upon which he could rest his feet.

But he overcame the obstacle.

The Mall was hard and dry, so that no trace of his footsteps could be seen.

But in the inclosure it was soft.

He went onwards, however, until he came to a gravel path, changing his course a dozen times as he found his foes were on his track.

One of these gravel paths brought him out at the very verge of the piece of water.

The clumsy iron suspension-bride which now connects the opposite shores of this pretty lake, and takes off all its beauty, is of modern construction.

At the time of which we are writing there was no such contrivance.

"What shall I do?" asked Dick of himself, as he stood breathless and exhausted at the brink of the still waters, and fixing his eyes upon his pursuers as he spoke. "What shall I do?"

A dreadful sensation of weakness came over him.

He felt as though he should fall to the ground.

But, by a strong mental effort, he recovered himself.

"It is my wound," he said; "and yet it seems to have bled scarcely any. How is it?"

He put his hand upon it, and found his clothes all round about sopping wet.

It had bled more profusely than he imagined, and the crimson fluid had been absorbed by his apparel.

"I must stop this," he muttered, "or, in a little while I shall fall helpless into their hands. I must be quick, too."

While speaking, he pulled off his cravat.

He tore it into halves.

One he soaked in the cold clear water at his feet, and then bound as tightly as he could over the wound.

The other he likewise soaked, and tied tightly around his ankle, which pained him excessively.

While doing this he was all the time careful to keep an eye upon the movements of those who were in pursuit of him.

They had wandered off into quite another direction to that in which he was.

Doubtless they had been misled by some accidental sound, which they took to be indicative of his presence.

This just afforded him breathing time.

Though, in comparison with some of the other parks, St. James's is not a very large place, yet it extends over a good-sized piece of ground, and it can easily be imagined how Turpin managed to elude them.

But that would only be at night.

They had only to keep the guard at the gates, and when the morning came, he would be seen and hunted down easily.

"What shall I do?" asked Dick again. "I think I will cross the water. I shall at least have an obstacle between them which they will not cross in a moment."

This was true.

To have skirted the lake, however, would have taken him some time.

He was an excellent swimmer.

Therefore, without hesitation, he committed himself to the water, taking the utmost care not to make a splash that would betray his whereabouts.

It did not require many long, vigorous strokes to carry him to the opposite bank.

The immersion, however, did him good.

It cooled his heated body, and allayed the smarting of his wound.

It seemed to clear his brain, too, for when he stood up again on the shore, and shook as well as he could the moisture from his clothing, he experienced, not only a fresh accession of energy, but a new idea darted into his mind.

"The haunted house," he said. "The haunted house. Why did I not recollect that before, and make my way for it at once? Never mind, it is not now too late. The haunted house in the Birdcage-walk will afford me a secure refuge, provided I can gain the shelter of its roof unobserved."

He ran forward as he spoke, and cleared the palings dividing the inclosure from the road he had named, and which extends from Bridge-street, Westminster, to Buckingham Palace.

Along one side of this road—for such it is, though called somewhat strangely Birdcage-walk—is a row of substantially-built palatial-looking residences.

A hundred and twenty years ago, however, it was a much more fashionable place of residence than it is now.

It was one of these dwellings to which Turpin alluded.

He could remember how for years back it had been shut up and allowed to go to ruin.

From time to time some adventurous person, tempted by the lowness of the rent, had taken up his residence there.

But their tenancy was never of long duration.

At last it came to be looked upon as unfit for human habitation.

It was this which first depreciated the value of the other houses contiguous to it, and they have never recovered their former status of respectability.

Strange stories had at one period been current about a horrible murder that had been committed there, but, in the lapse of time, the particulars had almost been forgotten, though the house stood there—a deserted ruin, as a perpetual memento of it.

CHAPTER CCXXXIII.

DICK TURPIN TAKES REFUGE IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE IN BIRDCAGE-WALK.

By this time the reader of this history ought to know Dick Turpin well enough to be aware that he was not the sort of man to have any dread of ghosts and spectres.

He feared no man living, and it was not likely he should fear one dead.

He set the whole story of the house being haunted to some ridiculous tale or other.

Whether he was right or not, we shall very quickly see.

He looked up and down the broad road, as well as the darkness would permit him.

No one was in sight.

Then he looked back in the direction he had just come.

Those who had so pertinaciously followed him, had penetrated the inclosure, and were standing on the bank of the lake, as nearly as possible at the spot where he had plunged into it.

Perhaps they had managed, in some way, to get upon his track.

He could see the reflection of their torches in the water.

This warned him to be speedy.

Crossing the road, he looked up at the houses, to find the one of which he was in search.

All of these dwellings had gardens between them and the park palings.

Dick turned a little to the left, or in the direction of Storey's-gate.

He soon found the house for which he looked.

He gave a sigh of relief as he did so, for within the last few seconds the disagreeable idea had occurred to him that, perhaps, during his long absence from London, the house had either been pulled down or tenanted.

But no, there it was, dimly revealed in the darkness, and presenting precisely the same appearance as it had done when he saw it last.

He paused before the little gate, which, like the palings, was composed of iron rods, with wood at the back to shut out the vulgar gaze.

Dick placed his left foot upon the rusty lock, and clambered over easily.

Then crept stealthily along a path, paved with flagstones, which led directly to the mansion.

For it to be a safe place of refuge for him, he must leave no indications of any one having entered it.

But how was this to be managed?

He commenced a patient examination, convinced that, for a minute or two, at least, he had nothing to fear from his pursuers.

This examination, however, was not very assuring.

Dilapidated as the place appeared, he found upon a close approach, that every part of it was firmly secured to prevent any one from gaining ingress.

In the lower windows the panes of glass were every one demolished, but they were defended on the inner side by strong iron bars, too closely placed together to allow anyone to squeeze between them.

Dick caught hold of one, and tried to wrench it from its socket, but the effort was a vain one, it was as immovable as a rock.

Time was passing.

There was a door leading into the lower part of the premises—the kitchen, most probably.

He had tried this before and found it fast, but he was now driven to it as a kind of forlorn hope.

He tried to shake it, and partially succeeded, but there was ample evidence to show that it was firmly fastened on the inner side.

He had the musket with him for he knew its value too well to relinquish it.

With it he could, no doubt, have battered down the door, but that was out of the question.

Not only would the sound betray him to his pursuers, but it would call the attention of the people in the neighbouring houses.

He looked upward, but he could see no chance there of accomplishing his object.

The windows were all provided with large shutters, made somewhat in the shape of Venetian blinds.

"No," he said, "the door is my only chance. Curses on this delay! It was what I never expected."

As he spoke, he felt the door all over with his hand.

In doing so, he discovered something which had escaped his previous observation.

Near the upper portion were two panes of glass; or rather, there had been, for now very little of the glass remained.

The holes were small, but Turpin immediately resolved to try to crawl through one of them.

His first proceeding was to knock away all the jagged pieces of glass as gently as possibly with the butt end of the musket.

Next, to climb through.

But this was almost an impossibility.

He put his hands through first, and then his head.

This was all well and good, but when it came to his shoulders there was the difficulty.

By wriggling about, however, and moving one side at a time, he managed, at the expense of his clothes and his skin, to crawl completely through the aperture.

No one would have believed it possible, and few, save a practised acrobat would have attempted such a feat.

Dick rose to his feet as quickly as he could, and then, going to the hole, removed those portions of his clothing that clung to the points of glass.

The kitchen—if kitchen it was—into which he had thus surreptitiously made his way, was in the profoundest darkness.

When he held up his hand before his eyes it was invisible.

"What will be my best plan now, I wonder?" he muttered, as he stood near the door. "Shall I try to get out of the front of the mansion at once, or shall I stand a better chance if I stay here, where I am, until the pursuit after me abates?"

This was rather a knotty point.

But, after a little reflection, and duly deliberating the matter, he came to the conclusion that it would be best to try and leave the premises at once.

Many a bold heart would have fluttered at finding themselves in such a place as Dick was, and surrounded by so much silence and darkness—two things which have so powerful an influence over the imagination.

Even he, however, brave as he was, did not feel altogether comfortable, and he kept every now and then uttering his thoughts aloud, so oppressive did the silence become.

Which way to turn, in order to find an outlet to the room, he had not the remotest idea.

However, he projected the musket before him, so as to avoid coming into contact with any obstacle, and moved his feet carefully across the floor, taking care not to move one until he had a safe resting-place for the other. He had started with his back to the door, and endeavoured to make his way in as straight a line as possible.

After taking about twenty steps, the barrel of the musket struck against some object, which, upon closer observation, he found to be the wall.

By continuing along this, and maintaining the same caution as heretofore, he judged that he should before long come to the outlet for which he sought.

Nor was he mistaken in his supposition.

He did come to a door. But it was fast.

Inside the house, he was not likely to stand upon so much ceremony as he did out, when he wanted to conceal his entrance.

He drew the rapier from its sheath, and inserted its fine point in the crevice.

He continued to work it in gently, until the strong part of the blade was reached.

Then he bore his weight upon the hilt, using it in the manner of a crowbar.

The door cracked.

He repeated the pressure, and then the door swung open.

But he lost his rapier, for the blade snapped off close to its junction with the handle.

He did not care so much for that, as he had another effective weapon in his hands, and as it had already performed its modicum of service.

The door creaked open.

The same pitchy darkness was beyond.

"There ought to be some stairs somewhere about here," said Turpin. "I wonder whether I shall be able to find them?"

This seemed highly problematical.

By dint of a good deal of searching about with the musket-barrel, he succeeded in finding them.

Then he cautiously commenced their ascent.

As he went higher and higher, he found it grew lighter, and on arriving at the top, he saw the source from whence the light proceeded.

He had reached the entrance hall of the mansion, the front door of which opened into a street running parallel with Bird Cage-walk.

Over this door, which was a very large one, was a fan-light, thickly coated with dirt.

But, nevertheless, a few faint rays of the night-light found their way through it.

At the sides of the door, too, were two long, narrow windows, and through these light also came.

Contrasted with the kitchen below, this place appeared quite light, though any one just coming into it would have thought the reverse.

Dick could see about him with tolerable ease, and a certain feeling of curiosity, which he found impossible to repress, made him gaze all around to take in as well as he could its general appearance.

The hall was broad, but the ceiling was low, and thus took off in a great measure the imposing appearance which it should have had.

On his left hand, and facing the door, was a spacious staircase conducting to the upper stories.

"It looks a remarkably fine place," said Dick. "What a shame for it to be abandoned in the way I have known it to be! I wish I had a light. I would make an examination of it from top to bottom."

Dick's curiosity was strongly roused, and it looked as though he was half inclined to undertake it without a light, for he added—

"If I go upstairs and look out of one of the back-room windows, I shall be able to see all over the park, and find what my foes are about, and by going to the front I shall know whether there is any one there on the look-out for me. I'll do it, and at the same time gratify the longing I feel to make an attempt at discovering the mysteries of this haunted house."

Having come to this determination, he went to the foot of the stairs, and commenced ascending them.

But, before he had reached the first landing, he heard a sound which made him immediately pause.

Then hastily ascend the few remaining stairs, and crouch down in the corner out of sight.

CHAPTER CCXXXIV.

THE PRESENCE OF DICK TURPIN IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE TURNS OUT TO BE A FORTUNATE CIRCUMSTANCE FOR THE YOUNG, INNOCENT, AND GOOD.

A KEY rattled in the lock of the front door.

That was the sound which had attracted Dick's attention.

What could it mean?

Who could it be, at that lonely and mysterious hour, that was about to seek an entrance to that ill-omened dwelling?

Of course, the question was one out of Dick's power to answer.

But, be it whom it might, it was no stranger.

The key, however, was obstinate, and would not turn at first.

Upon a second trial, the lock shot back with a snap which echoed and re-echoed through the lonely building in a startling manner.

The door was thrown open.

Dick ventured to stretch his head over the balusters, in order to see who was about to enter.

They were three men.

Dick could only just distinguish the outlines of their figures in the deep gloom.

One was tall and stout, and attired in a long riding-cloak, which reached from his neck to his knees, thus concealing all traces of his form.

On his head was a large felt hat, with a slouching brim.

Turpin had a better opportunity of observing him than he did the other two.

It was this individual who had unlocked the door, and been the first to enter.

He stood to hold the door open, and take the key out of the lock, and it was while he was thus engaged that Dick had an opportunity of studying his appearance and manner.

The other two men were dressed in a very ordinary costume.

By their behaviour he could tell they were lower in degree than the one in the cloak.

With increasing interest Dick looked down.

The door was closed.

At the same instant a voice said, in suppressed tones, the one word—

"Light!"

No reply was made to this command, verbally, at all events, but directly afterwards Turpin saw one of the men produce something from his pocket, which proved to be a dark lantern.

A broad bright beam of light came through the lens, and fell upon the wall.

It revealed as well the countenance of one of the men.

Villain was visibly impressed upon it.

The intense desire which Dick felt to know what could be the motive of their visit, predominated over everything else.

He forgot the curiosity which he had felt to explore the gloomy mansion.

He forgot the danger through which he had just passed, and that with which he was threatened.

His presence in that house could not fail to be one of great peril.

He could not tell at what moment his pursuers might learn where he had taken shelter, and they could surround it in such a manner as to make escape utterly impossible.

A house would be a very different place to a large open space like the park.

But, as we have said, he quite forgot all about that, and only remembered what was taking place in the hall down stairs.

When the man who carried the dark lantern uncloaked it, he held it in such a manner that the greatest part of the light fell upon the staircase.

Then the one in the long riding-cloak stepped forward, and began to ascend the stairs.

The two men followed him at a short but respectful distance.

As soon as he perceived this movement, Dick hastened to go still higher.

Some thick substance seemed to be upon the stairs, which had the effect of deadening the sound of his footsteps.

In this way he proceeded up two flights, and commenced a third, when he perceived the three men pause upon the landing below him.

He stopped, of course.

He did not turn, it must be understood, and fly precipitately, but ascended with due deliberation, so that just the same distance was preserved between himself and those who were following.

So far, he felt certain that his presence in that strange and mysterious house was unsuspected.

The three men evidently thought they had it all to themselves.

It did not take Dick long to arrive at the conclusion that they were there after no good. Every little circumstance pointed towards it.

They came there stealthily and secretly, concealing themselves under cover of the darkness.

The manner in which they ascended the stairs, pausing at every few steps to listen, showed their desire to be unheard—their presence in that lonesome place unsuspected.

On the landing at the top of the second flight of stairs, they paused.

Dick had reached a bend in the stairs just above them, and screwed himself into the smallest possible compass that he could.

It must not be forgotten that the whole place, except just where the beams from the dark lantern fell, was in the deepest darkness, so that this precaution on Dick's part was hardly necessary, and taken more from impulse than reflection.

As soon as the door was reached, the stranger in the cloak threw that garment on one side, and commenced feeling in his pocket, probably for the key.

The other two still stood in the same silent, respectful attitudes as they had before assumed, the one with the light holding it in such a manner that the principal portion of its beams fell upon the doorway near the keyhole.

At length the stranger, after a moment's search, produced the key.

When his cloak was partially displaced, it showed that the dress he wore beneath it was of the costliest description, both as regards the material used, and the manner in which it was embroidered.

Of his face Dick also obtained a transient glimpse, but only of the lower part.

The mouth, chin, and cheeks were buried in a profusion of dark hair, worn after some continental fashion then scarcely known in England.

This was the extent of his observations, for, having found the key, the cloaked stranger rather hastily and impatiently thrust it into the keyhole.

Dick heard plainly enough in the silence that was around, the creaking noise produced by the key turning in the wards of the lock.

Then the door was flung open.

Ere, however, either one of them could cross the threshold, there arose a strange wailing kind of cry.

So full of woe was it, so heart-rending, and so unexpected, that it was a thousand wonders Dick Turpin did not, by some hasty movement or ejaculation, betray his presence.

He did move slightly, but the faint sound which he made was absorbed by the cry that came from the room, or whatever it was, into which the door opened.

"Cease—cease!" said a feeble but screaming voice, "persecute me no longer. Away—away! I hear your footsteps, and the very air tells me of your loathed presence! Hence—hence! I will not listen to you. Your words are vain—quite vain! I have seen a vision in the night, and the recollection of it will make me deaf to all your urgings. Hence—hence, I say!"

"He is in one of his old fits again," remarked one of the men. "How excited he does seem. I am afraid it gives him too much to eat."

"Silence!" said the stranger, in a stern tone



[DICK TURPIN WITNESSES A MURDER IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE.]

"Silence, both of you, and enter. I will follow."

The two men obeyed this command immediately.

Shriek after shriek arose from the lips of the person within, and who, from the words just uttered, Dick imagined to be of the male sex.

But, had it not been for this, he would scarcely have surmised it.

The voice seemed rather that of a female, and the strange shrieks, too, which floated with so horrible a cadence through the air in that deserted mansion, served in a great measure to confirm the idea.

Suddenly, however, those shrieks ceased, and the highwayman heard a few words uttered in a low tone, but he was too far off to catch their import.

Fully impressed with the idea that they had that lonely house entirely to themselves, the stranger in the cloak, when he followed his two subordinates into the chamber, did not close the door, but swung it to after him, leaving it ajar.

It was open, in fact, to a space of about three inches.

Dick noticed this, for the stream of light made it very conspicuous.

With this little circumstance under his observation, as soon as he found himself unable to hear what was said, he, with all the caution he was master of, stole down the stairs.

The thick coating which lay upon them, and which had before deadened the sound of his footsteps, was nothing more nor less than dust.

The care he took was really quite unnecessary. His steps would have been quite inaudible.

It was rather a remarkable feature in Dick's disposition to feel immediately curious when anything strange or incomprehensible came under his observation.

So, on the present occasion, he lost all sense of the danger he was in, and the additional peril he was bringing on himself.

Something of a very mysterious character was taking place.

And, not only that, there were indications to show that it was of an iniquitous character likewise.

He paused for a moment on the second landing to listen, in order to make sure that he was unheard.

But, feeling tolerably assured, he crept forward to the partially-open door.

Leaning, then, upon the musket he had wrested from the sentinel, he listened with the utmost intentness.

The deep-toned voice was still speaking.

Dick could now for certain recognise it for the tall stranger in the cloak.

The words came clearly to his ears.

"Take care, old man—take care. Do not decide hastily. Reflect upon this last chance I offer you. Bear in mind, too, that your life—and not only your life, but the life of one which you hold at ten times more value—depends upon your reply. Speak, I say. Speak. You are in my power, and what has taken place up to the present moment ought to show you the futility of struggling against the inexorable decrees of fate. Cheat yourself no longer with false hopes. Reply—reply, I say, at once!"

The deep-toned voice ceased, and Dick listened with the utmost eagerness for the reply it was so anxious to elicit.

CHAPTER COXXXV.

IN WHICH IS GIVEN SOME DETAILS OF THE MYSTERIOUS DOINGS IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

"MERCY—mercy."

Those were the words that came plaintively and feebly from the lips of the person addressed.

"Answer me," cried the stranger. "Answer me at once."

"Have mercy."

"You palter with your fate, old man. Return me a direct reply. Will you comply with my conditions?"

"Conditions? What conditions?"

"You try my patience to the utmost. What have I just asked you?"

"You are my foe. I tell you I have seen a vision in the night to show me how deadly an enemy you are to me and mine."

"Pho—pho. You rave."

"No—no."

"I say you do. Dreams always go by contraries."

"But what I saw was true. I tell you, you are my enemy."

"A delusion—a delusion. So far from that, I am, could you but see it, your friend. Think of Blanche!"

"Blanche—Blanche!" shrieked the old man, with a sudden accession of vigour as soon as the name was pronounced. "Blanche—Blanche! Where is she? Tell me! Take me to her! Let me once again have the pure joy of looking into her blue eyes! Fiends, you mock me! Where is Blanche? Where is she?"

"I will tell you."

It was the tall stranger who spoke.

"You—you?"

"Even I."

"And know you where she may be found?"

"I do."

"Heaven have mercy on her, then, and shield her."

"Pho—pho. You rave. You see not clearly the aspect of affairs."

"How?"

"You ask heaven to do that which you can do yourself. Is it possible that you can have lived so many years without knowing that the machinery by which this world is set in motion, when once started, goes on and on, overcoming in its mighty revolutions all puny obstacles, and that heaven never interposes on behalf of any one who has the power of helping himself?"

"Scoffer!"

"You tire my patience. It is tried. This scene to-night is but a repetition of many that have preceded it. So many that you, as well as I, must have lost all count."

"I know it."

"But I tell you, old man, that, let the after consequences be what they may, this night shall be the last. Do you understand me? The last!"

"I am thankful."

"Now you are more reasonable, but do not misunderstand me. You have two alternatives."

"Two alternatives?"

"Yes, and you are free to choose between them. Make your own choice freely. The result will fall upon no other head than yours."

"And Blanche?"

"Ah! yes, and Blanche. Certainly on Blanche, if you are fool enough to persist in your refusal to accede to my conditions."

"Blanche! Blanche!" shrieked the old man again, for it seemed as though the pronunciation of the word drove him to a kind of frenzy. "Speak to me of her, I implore you. Oh! speak to me of her."

"If you accede to my conditions, not without."

"I tell you she is the only tie which serves to bind me to this life. Were it not for her, I should be content to die and leave this world, so full of care and trouble, to itself and those whose joy it is to live in its turmoil. But I cannot. Blanche binds my life to this poor wasted frame. I tell you, she is all that is left to remind me of the past. Save her, I stand here a wretched miserable man—the survivor of all his kindred."

"Peace—peace. We have heard all this before."

"One tie binds me!" cried the old man, with ever greater vehemence, for the interruption chafed him "One tie, but that one is so strong and so tightly woven in my heart-strings, that the one can never be wrenched from the other. In that one tie are condensed all those which almost broke my heart to part from. I love her with my whole love."

"You say so," replied the stranger, "but prove the contrary by your actions. But, come; calm yourself, and listen to me."

"What would you say?"

"That which you have heard many times before, but which, I believe, you have listened to unheeded."

"Blanche, I say!" shrieked the old man. "Release me, fiends, and let me fly to her! Release me, I say."

A slight struggle ensued, which ceased almost as soon as it had begun.

The old man was very weak, doubtless, and with his three antagonists stood no chance.

The tall stranger spoke again.

"You shall go to Blanche," he said; "and, if you wish it, remain with her for ever. But, unless you comply with my conditions, you may make your mind easy that you will never see her more."

"I defy you and your power!"

"Reflect well ere you decide."

"I have reflected."

"And is that your decision?"

"It is."

"I trust you will change. Do you know the consequences of your refusal to my conditions?"

"I defy you."

"Old man, you must be mad—utterly insane. You know not what you say."

"Are you really so anxious to save my life?"

"I am."

"And wherefore?"

"Because I would rather not have your blood upon my hands."

"Ha! ha!"

"But, if you drive me to extremities, I shall banish the idea, and then, when you find life is ebbing from you—that it is impossible for death to be averted—then, I say, you will repent, and wish you had acted otherwise."

"Never."

"But I say you will. The workings of the human heart are no secret to me. I say again, that when it is too late, you will repent."

"It is hard to die"——

"I am glad you know it," interrupted the stranger; "and, bear in mind, that there is another who will find it equally hard. There is Blanche. Surely you have not forgotten her. Is this the strong attachment you have always professed for her? Would you obstinately die when you might live to watch over and protect her, until such time as she was able to defend herself."

"Cease—cease."

"Why should I cease?"

"You tear my heart."

"And should it not be torn? You are blind to your own interests and the interests of one who you ought to consider far more than yourself."

"And do I not? Have I not? False villain! My intellect is not yet so stultified as to be unable to detect

your sophistry. You would gloze over your own villainy. You have not said a word about that."

"This is worse than all. I have had patience with you so far, but, let me warn you, it will not be of much longer continuance. The limit will soon be reached. Will you listen to me?"

"What would you say?"

"That which it would benefit you much to hear."

"Say on, then."

"You are an old man."

"I know it."

"But few years of your span of life remain."

"I know that, too, but they are much abbreviated through your plottings."

"Be calm!"

"I am calm."

"Seemingly. Let me entreat you to cast away all excitement. It cannot be productive of aught but harm."

"I am calm, I tell you!"

The fretful, peevish tone in which these words were uttered, but ill concealed the excitation beneath them—ready to break forth at the first opportunity.

"I will take you at your word! At first it was my intention to recapitulate the whole of the facts, but that would be most tedious and unnecessary. I am determined to have an answer at once! And upon that answer will depend whether you go from this house a free man, at liberty to do what you think fit. To once more have Blanche restored to you, or whether your life pays the forfeit, and hers also!"

"Monster!"

"Be calm!"

"Calm? Who could be calm while smarting under wrongs so flagrant as mine are?"

"Be calm, I say, and answer me. Do you know what the conditions are?"

"I do."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"Quite sure."

"That is well."

"At least, you have told them to me. You would have me assign my lands and inheritance to you, and in return, to have my daughter Blanche restored to me."

"To be sure. You are quite right. And why should you refuse?"

"Why should I refuse?"

"Yes."

"For my own sake, or rather, I should say, for my daughter's."

"A wicked and selfish plea."

"Wicked and selfish?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"How so! You know the history of the past as well as I do."

"Agreed; but that knowledge does not show me that I am either wicked or selfish."

"And I do. There is that little difference between us. Who was it first turned my father's heart against me, and caused me to be deprived of that which was lawfully my own?"

"Your own evil deeds, and more evil passions."

"False!"

"It is true," said the old man, in louder tones, "we are brothers, but, thank heaven, the same mother did not bear us. Mine died, and when our common father took another bride, he little dreamt that he was warming a serpent in his bosom, but so it was—so it was."

CHAPTER CCXXXVI.

THE PLOT BECOMES A LITTLE CLEARER, BUT DICK IS ANXIOUS TO HEAR STILL MORE.

FEVERISHLY interested, and deeply curious as Dick had been while listening to the foregoing dialogue, and accustomed as he was to penetrate an affair, yet it was not until the last words were uttered that he was able to form anything at all like a clear idea of the case.

But that furnished him with a clue, and one which it was very easy to pursue.

Hitherto he had stood without moving in the least from his position, but now he made a change.

The reason that influenced him was, he thought he should have a chance of seeing into the interior of the room, and not only listen to what was said, but observe the actions of those within, if he moved a little.

He made the trial carefully, choosing for his opportunity the time when their voices were raised loudest in talking.

As he expected, he found he could see into the room, but only partially

In a few words we will describe what it was he saw.

At one end of the apartment was seated, in a strange-looking high-backed chair, an old man.

His frame was much emaciated.

His features covered with a network of wrinkles, which crossed and recrossed each other in every imaginable direction.

His hair—what little there was of it—was snow-white.

His head was bald, and the hair encircled it like a trimming of white fur.

Many marks of great age were upon him, but still they had the appearance of being prematurely caused.

His arms were held on each side by the two men, the accomplices of the stranger in the cloak.

The grasp they kept was a tight one, and they forced him to remain seated in the chair, from which he every moment made an effort to spring.

Dick saw him very plainly, as well as the two men who had him in their grip, but he could not see the principal actor in this strange scene.

He was standing just so as to be out of sight from where Turpin stood.

The door hid him.

One table was in the room, which otherwise was barely furnished.

This table occupied a place near the arm-chair.

Upon it was the dark lantern.

The door containing the convex lens was open, so that the light was diffused over the apartment, instead of being condensed into one broad ray.

Anguish, despair, defiance, alternately distorted the face of the old man.

Such a conflict of the passions could not but be debilitating in the frame of so old and worn a man.

Many speculations concerning what he saw passed through Dick's mind, but he did not stay to elaborate any of them.

That which was taking place engaged the whole of his attention.

After the words the old man had last uttered, the cloaked stranger was unable to speak for a moment or so. He was actually convulsed with rage.

But at the end of that time, instead of giving vent to the burst of passionate invective which rose to his lips, he controlled himself by a mighty effort.

"Leave the past," he said. "To rake it up again can do no good. Attend to my conditions. Assign to me all right and title to the estates which you possess, and then your daughter shall be restored to you; refuse, and her fate will be such as to wring pity from the fiends."

"Cease—cease. Why torture me thus?"

"Why? Because I have determined that all shall be mine—mine, as they would have, had it not been for you. I would have slain you long ago, but I knew the conditions of the will, and the only way in which I can obtain what I covet is by a legal transfer of all from you to me."

"And think you I shall give it?"

"Why not? Surely of the two alternatives I offer, it is the more preferable. I do not reduce you or your daughter to absolute beggary. I will provide you with a competence. You shall both have sufficient to supply you with far more than the necessaries of life. You must be blind to your own interests to refuse."

The old man was silent.

The other made no offer to interrupt him, or to press him for a reply.

He hoped, by waiting patiently until he had well weighed it over in his mind, to receive one favourable to his desires.

"What guaranty have I?" asked the old man, at last.

"Guaranty of what?"

"That you will keep faith with me."

"In what?"

"In allowing an income to myself and my poor daughter."

"I swear it."

"I would sooner have your promise than your oath. I should depend on neither."

"In what way can I assure it?"

"I know not, nor do I wish to know it. Again do I defy you, and your utmost power. It may be that you hold me here a helpless prisoner—it may be that you hold my daughter in a similar condition—but, in spite of all that, I defy you—shall continue to defy you—for I have yet faith in heaven's willingness to throw a shield of protection between the helpless and their persecutors."

"Go on—go on! exhaust yourself. You will try my patience in so doing, but still go on. When you are calm—when you no longer rave—then I shall be able to talk with you."

Probably no means could have been found so eminently calculated to effect the end desired.

As if by magic, the old man became calm.

This request to beat out his fury, and the knowledge that it would be passed over without being heeded in the least, made him silent.

On the contrary, had he been opposed, he would have gone on and on, gathering new strength from the conflict.

Of a surety, when the cloaked stranger boasted that the workings of the human heart were well known to him, he said no more than the truth.

The present proved a remarkable example.

Observing that the old man was quiet and subdued, he spoke again.

This time, however, he approached the table.

Then Dick saw him.

But he could gather little more than he already knew.

The broad-brimmed felt hat still concealed his features, and the cloak his form.

But, as he bent down his head over the table, between Dick and the light, a portion of his profile became discernible.

When he saw it, the highwayman was at no loss to detect a likeness—faint, certainly—between the two half-brothers.

He had stooped to put something on the table before the old man, upon which he rested one finger.

It was a piece of parchment, and at one corner was a dark-coloured stamp.

He next produced a pen and ink.

The old man watched his every movement with the greatest eagerness.

But that was a token of the semi-imbecile state to which he had been reduced.

"Behold," said the stranger. "This is a document legally framed, and done so cunningly as to leave no loop-hole to creep out of. Sign it, and by that act you will make yourself free, and your daughter also. One would think, from your wild speeches, that you were an affectionate father, that you would endure anything rather than one so dear to you should suffer pain."

"Pain?"

"Yes, pain. You need not think that her captivity is anything pleasant, except in comparison with her future fate, if you still continue obstinate."

"Mercy! Have mercy upon me!"

"Have mercy on yourself. Sign that paper, and I will take you hence to the place where she now is. You shall both be free and unmolested from that moment. Do you hear me?"

"I do hear you."

"Then do you consent, or am I at once to close this scene, which would long ago have had an end, had I not felt the tie between us, and been unwilling to have your blood upon my hands?"

For the first time, the old man hesitated.

Dick feared he would consent.

The poet has said, "the woman who hesitates is lost," and the remark is applicable to either sex, under all circumstances.

But, imperfectly as we are at present acquainted with the history of these two men, of whose strange meeting Dick Turpin, the highwayman, so unexpectedly became a spectator and an auditor, yet enough can be gleaned to justify the thought that there were many things to secure the old man if he wavered.

Ere long, however, the whole will be unfolded to the reader, and it will be found to be the most remarkable episode which has yet been narrated.

Had there been an opportunity, Dick would have interposed, and cautioned the old man not to take his brother's specious promises as granted.

But he had no chance of doing this, and moreover, in the desire he experienced to be of service to him and his daughter, he felt that his best course would be to remain where he was, and not let his presence be suspected.

"Sign!" said the stranger again, "sign! You have had time enough for deliberation. Have you come to a decision?"

The old man was silent.

The pen was dipped in the ink, and thrust into his hand.

Then he looked up.

Tears were in his eyes.

"If," he said, "I thus abalienate my rights, to save my own and my dear daughter's life, will you keep your word with me?"

"I will."

"Enough, then."

With a heavy sigh, the old man put his pen to the paper.

Then, with the rapidity of desperation, and much in the same state as a man is when he commits suicide—when he dreads to think—he signed his name.

But the very instant he finished forming the last stroke his unnatural brother placed a pistol to his head, and drew the trigger with the rapidity of lightning!

CHAPTER CCXXXVII.

DICK TURPIN HAS YET A GREAT DEAL OF TROUBLE WITH HIS FOES, WHO ARE DETERMINED NOT TO GIVE UP THE PURSUIT.

THERE was a flash, and a puff of white coloured smoke, succeeded, without the elapsion of a second, by a loud report.

The old man was dead!

So suddenly was this horrid deed performed.

So rapidly had it been carried out, that Dick Turpin, prompt to move as he generally was, for a moment stood aghast.

He had never dreamed of so much perfidy.

He had had his doubts and suspicions of the stranger in the cloak, but he had not thought so badly of him as that.

Could anything more treacherous be conceived!

From the manner in which the deed was done, it must have been premeditated.

As soon as he had recovered somewhat from the sudden shock of astonishment he had received, Dick half started forward.

But ere he could achieve his intention of rushing into the room, and confronting the murderers and their victim, something else occurred which immediately had the effect of arresting his footsteps.

Bang—bang—bang.

Such was the sound which came with sudden and startling distinctness from the front door, which had been struck by some heavy instrument.

Bang—bang—bang.

The intention was to batter down the door.

But if the sound had the effect we have described upon Dick Turpin, who knew perfectly well to what cause to assign it, what effect could it have had upon the guilty wretches in the inner room?

They moved confusedly.

There was but one resource open to Dick.

That was, to ascend the stairs.

He did so before those in the room had recovered themselves.

A panic seemed to have been struck into their guilty breasts.

Bang—bang—bang.

Whatever little noise Dick Turpin might have made in moving, was effectually drowned by the reverberations of the heavy blows as they echoed and re-echoed through the deserted mansion.

Dick Turpin at once came to the conclusion that his pursuers, who had been forgotten, had ascertained in some way whereabouts he was concealed.

They had attacked the house.

Never could their presence have been more inopportune.

At least, Dick thought so.

He had, as we have seen, taken a deep interest in the actors in the scene we have depicted.

He would have liked to have seen the termination of it, and used his own endeavours to right the innocent.

Now, however, there seemed to be but little chance of his doing so.

But one thing remained for him, if he wished to remain uncaptured.

And that was to fly.

To leave the mysterious house, and this strange mystery within it, to elucidate themselves.

The discovery of what had taken place would no doubt create a diversion in his favour.

The reader does not require to be told which he considered to be the most important to himself.

It was to make his way with all speed from that ill-omened spot.

But how was he to do it?

The roof.

That was the thought that darted into his mind instantaneously.

But how was he to reach it?

He was unacquainted with the upper portion of the house.

He was in darkness.

Or nearly so.

The only exceptions were when he happened to be near a window, through which some glimmering of night light penetrated.

He had for a guide the nature of the stairs he had ascended, and he was well enough acquainted with the interior of houses to know that the upper flights do not differ materially from the lower.

Before, however, he had well reached the third landing, his ears were assailed by a terrific crash.

The front door was down.

His pursuers would now soon be close upon his heels.

He would fain have lingered, though, in order to learn what effect the discovery of the murder would have upon them, and whether the three men would escape or be apprehended.

But a consideration for his own safety precluded all idea of this, so he was forced to continue his ascent.

And as he went higher, he remembered, with an uncomfortable spirit, what great difficulty he had had in effecting an entrance.

Was it not only reasonable to argue from this that he would experience an equal amount of trouble in leaving it?

But, not allowing himself to be disheartened by this idea, he hurried on.

From the wound in his shoulder he felt but little pain, which was mainly to be attributed to the skilful manner in which he had bandaged it.

His ankle-joint, however, had swelled to more than double its usual size, and entirely filled his huge top boot, so that every time he moved it was at the expense of a great deal of anguish.

At length, he reached what he had no doubt was the topmost story in the house.

But the place upon which he stood was darker than any other part of the staircase, and he was consequently unable to perceive whether there were any indications of a trap-door in the roof above him.

Groping hastily round the walls, he came to a door, which he immediately opened.

While his hand was upon the knob, a terrible uproar came to his ears from the lower part of the house.

There was a confusion of voices, and the hasty trampling of feet.

Aware as he was that he had no time to lose, yet he could not control the impulse to run to the balusters and peep over.

The sounds still continued, and he had little doubt the body of the murdered man had been discovered.

Lights flashed upon the walls, and it was not long before he found those who carried them were ascending.

But he was yet in doubt whether those persons who had made so forcible an entrance were really his old pursuers from the palace.

Once more, then, crossing the little landing, he passed through the door which he had just before opened, and closed it after him.

The key he felt was on the outer side, so he pulled it out and rapidly locked himself in.

Turning, he saw he stood in a chamber of very limited dimensions.

Facing him was a window, and, from having been so long in the dark, the little light that came in was enough to enable him to distinguish the outlines of the walls.

It appeared destitute of furniture.

But it was merely by a glance which he cast round him that he noted these things. His attention was instantly riveted upon the window as the most likely means of escape.

Treading very softly, for he did not want to betray his whereabouts, he reached it.

The panes were of that kind then almost exclusively in use.

That is to say, small, diamond-like in shape and set in lead.

It opened, of course, in the usual old-fashioned manner, by swinging back upon two vertical hinges, and not by sliding up in a groove.

It was fastened, but it gave him no trouble to turn the little buttons at the top and bottom by which it was secured.

Then the casement swung silently open.

Dick looked out.

As he had quite anticipated, he found himself at the back of the house, and with St. James's Park before him.

His eye wandered over the huge green inclosure, but, so far as he could tell, there was nothing either suspicious or remarkable to be seen.

The pursuit of him had either been abandoned, or else his foes were at that moment in the house.

We may as well set all doubts at rest by saying here that those who had broken in were not the persons who had chased him through the park, but a body of ordinary police-officers.

Their presence can be easily accounted for.

The stranger and his two companions, before they ventured to approach the house, took a long look around and about them, in order to make sure that they were observed by no one.

Having satisfied themselves in this manner, they boldly crossed over, and stood concealed in the shadow of the doorway, which was of a curious and antique fashion.

Then they had entered, as we have recorded.

But it so happened, and it really was about as wonderful a thing as could well happen, they were seen by a Bow-street police-officer.

He had been out upon some special service, and was returning, when by chance he saw three dim shadowy figures cross the street, and disappear in the doorway of the haunted house.

This circumstance in itself looked a simple one enough, but not only was the behaviour of the men excitive of suspicion, but the officer well knew the house to be uninhabited and haunted.

He was, however, of rather a matter-of-fact turn of mind, and he came at once to the conclusion that he had discovered a very important thing indeed.

With great presence of mind, then, he had shrunk back into the shadow of the houses, and arrested his footsteps, in order that the mysterious individuals should not take the alarm.

When he had waited what he considered was a proper length of time, he left his place of concealment, and approached the door.

It was closed, and presented no signs of having been so recently opened.

The officer placed his ear against the panel.

All was still.

But, feeling certain that he had not been deceived in what he saw, although there were now no indications of it, he hastened off at full speed to procure assistance.

CHAPTER CCXXXVIII.

THE OFFICERS OF POLICE PURSUE THE MURDERERS, AND A RATHER LUDICROUS MISTAKE IS MADE BY DICK'S FOES FROM THE PALACE.

It was during his absence upon this errand that the strange interview between the half-brothers took place.

Had the officers arrived a little earlier than they did, an awful and cold-blooded murder would doubtless have been prevented.

But fate had decreed it otherwise.

Just as they reached the portal, the clear, ringing report of the pistol reached their ears.

This was enough to warrant them in taking rather more energetic proceedings than they would otherwise have done.

They battered down the door.

This done, they stood for a moment in listening attitudes, in order to learn in what portion of the house the disturbance was taking place.

Sounds came very clearly to their ears from above.

They bounded up the stairs, therefore, with all possible speed.

All were provided with lights, which they held in their left hands.

Guided by a hasty ejaculation, they proceeded to the room on the second floor, in which the murder had been committed.

They pushed open the door, which still stood ajar, and entered in a body.

The first thing they perceived was a door in front of them.

In the general rush forward which all made to reach it, one stumbled over the prostrate body of the old man, which had not been noticed, and fell heavily to the floor.

In a moment their lights were turned upon the spot, and then the hideous object was fully brought to view.

Their comrade was assisted to his feet.

"Never mind the body," he cried; "but look after the murderers, or else they will escape."

"Which way shall we go?"

"Some on the landing outside, to see that no one goes up or comes down the stairs, and the remainder through yonder door, which is the way I fancy they have taken."

As soon as these words were spoken, the officers divided themselves into two portions.

The officer who had given the instructions what to do, and assumed the office of chief, choose himself to go through the door.

They found upon passing through it, that it led into another chamber similar to the one they had just left.

Another door led out of it to a small staircase.

Down this they rushed with the utmost precipitation.

At the time that house was built the principle of making two staircases was much more generally adopted than it is at the present day.

The stairs leading from the hall was what was called the grand staircase.

The other, the secondary one, which was used by the domestics in the estsblishment.

It was down this latter one, then, that the officers precipitated themselves in search of the murderers.

The bottom was reached in an incredibly short space of time.

A gush of cool air came to their faces, which showed them that a means of exit must be somewhere close at hand.

And in fact a little door was found, which, when they passed through, they discovered led into a narrow passage.

Pursuing this, they came to the garden at the back of the mansion, looking into St. James's Park.

They had made good speed, for on looking before them, two men were seen effecting a hasty retreat over the palisades.

"Halt! or we fire," shouted the officers, hastening forward; "surrender, or you are dead men!"

But their words were quite unheeded.

Before, however, they could descend, the officers fired a volley of pistols at them.

Groans and shrieks mingled with the discharge.

But as soon as the smoke cleared away, nothing was to be seen of the men.

They had merely fallen upon the hard road on the other side, and were too severely hurt to be able to escape.

Here they were quickly captured.

They were the two accomplices—the principal had succeeded in making an escape.

But only temporarily.

The different exits to the park were, as we know, strictly guarded, and there was no chance of leaving the enclosure by the ordinary means of egress.

The two men had neither received a dangerous wound; they were, indeed, more frightened than hurt.

The blood, however, was stanched, and handcuffs placed upon their wrists.

Not knowing that the gates had been closed, and not being able to hear any sounds of footsteps, no attempt was made to search for the third person who entered the house, as they believed that such a search could only prove resultless.

Content with their prey, they returned to the house, in order to regain their companions on the landing.

Leaving, however, these and Dick for a little while, we will devote a word or two of very necessary explanation to the man in the cloak.

When he heard the heavy blows struck upon the door, he guessed in a moment that, by some unforeseen means or other, all had been discovered.

The suddenness, however, with which the intelligence had come upon him, deprived him for a minute or two of all power of action.

Then, recovering himself, he called to the men to follow him.

By his actions, it would appear that he was intimately acquainted with the interior of the house.

Without hesitation, he made his way to the door on the opposite side of the room.

It was fastened, but he quickly had it open.

He did not stay to see whether his followers closed it after them or not, but rushed down the stairs and out into the garden.

With an agility that no one would have thought he possessed, he leaped the palisades, and alighted on his feet in Birdcage-walk.

Nothing but instant flight, he considered, would save him.

Anticipating no difficulty in leaving the park, he ran at full speed in the direction of the Horse-guards.

He heard the report of the pistols, and guessed that his followers had been made prisoners.

A curse escaped his lips, for, next to preserving his own freedom, he wished to insure theirs.

It was in their power to reveal some very disagreeable secrets, which he preferred should be kept from the light of day.

He had no chance of rescuing them, he knew, and therefore did not make the attempt.

His original intention had been to make his way into Whitehall through the Horse-guards, but upon nearing this place, he caught sight of several officers on duty.

This induced him to alter his mind.

There was the narrow passage at Spring-gardens, which would answer his purpose quite as well, if not better.

Hurrying along in the darkness, he directly afterwards came in sight of the Mall, or broad-walk through the Park, leading from Charing-cross to Buckingham-palace.

To his dismay, he saw, at no very great distance, several figures moving rapidly.

He could distinguish them because they carried torches, which made them look like dim spectres.

By their manner, he could tell they were searching for some one or something.

Who could it be but himself?

He jumped to the conclusion no one.

A desperate effort must therefore be made to get free.

They did not see him where he stood—for he had come to a halt when he first caught sight of them—he felt pretty sure.

He must take care that they should not do so now.

A person less intimately acquainted with the position of the different objects in the park than he was would never have been able to direct their steps so unerringly to the point he wished to reach.

That point was the gate leading out into Spring-gardens.

Little did he dream how blindly he was rushing on to his own capture—what pains he was taking to effect it.

Skulking along in the shadow of the trees, in order that he should not be perceived, he came at length to a place where it was no longer possible to do this.

He reached the gate.

In the deep darkness he did not notice that the gate was closed, or if he did thought nothing of it, making sure that it would be opened at his command.

He was doomed to be woefully deceived.

He darted forward.

No sooner did he do so, than the sentinel on guard, who had heard his approach, and wisely continued silent, grasped him by the throat.

Then he raised such an outcry as would have reached the ears of the party from the palace, had they been at thrice the distance they really were.

On they came.

The stranger made a desperate effort to release himself. But it was in vain.

The sentinel at that time on duty happened to be the strongest man in the whole regiment.

Powerful as he was, the stranger was but a child in his grasp.

Then the others came up.

The police-officer, with a cry of wild exultation, clasped the struggling prisoner round the breast, thus pinioning his arms to his side.

"I've got him!" he cried. "Hurrah! Nabbed at last! Hurrah! Capital! Tie him up, somebody! Make haste!"

Some rope was produced, and with this the stranger was bound very tightly indeed.

"Bring him along," cried the officer. "Bring him along. I knowed I should have him! Somebody call a coach, and I'll have him taken to Newgate at once."

The iron gate was flung open, and the whole party passed through it.

It did not take them more than a minute to reach Charing-cross, and then they looked about them for a hackney-coach.

CHAPTER CCXXXIX.

THE STRANGER IS TAKEN TO NEWGATE, AND IS ALL BUT SET FREE, WHEN ANOTHER ARRIVAL AT THE PRISON TAKES PLACE.

Of course the reader has not failed to perceive the mistake into which the pursuers of Dick Turpin had fallen.

It seems at first sight rather remarkable that such should have been the case, but after a minute or two's consideration, it will look extremely probable.

In the first place, from the length of time the gates had been closed, they felt pretty sure that there could be no one in the park except the person of whom they were in search.

Then the manner in which the stranger had been caught, all looked as though it was their prey.

He had also favoured them in a great measure, and helped to fix the deceit in their minds, for when he began to run, feeling his cloak a very great incumbrance, he unfastened the little clasp at the throat, and allowed it to fall on the ground beside him.

A puff of wind soon afterwards blew off his large felt hat.

It rolled away into the darkness instantly, and he made no attempt to recover it.

The dress which his cloak concealed was, as Dick had seen, composed of the richest materials, and, as might be expected from that fact, was made in a fashionable manner.

In general appearance, therefore, as he was about the same height as the highwayman, he did not greatly differ from him.

His hat was off, and his hair partially hid his face.

The remarkable black-looking beard, too, had disappeared, which showed it was a false one.

Under all these circumstances, and bearing in mind that the only light they had was such as the torches afforded, the surprise which their blunder at first excites gradually passes away.

Not the faintest breath of suspicion rested on the minds of any of the party.

Indeed, the question of whether this was really the man they sought never entered the heads of one of them.

The elation of the officer at his having been so fortunate as to capture the celebrated Dick Turpin, was very great, and manifested itself in a very extraordinary manner.

At that busy spot they had not long to wait, late as the hour was, before a hackney coach made its appearance.

The driver was hailed, and the vehicle with some difficulty brought to a standstill near the kerb-stone.

The door was then opened, and the prisoner, who said not a word, was thrust inside in no very gentle manner.

Of course, he thought it strange that his foes should be so close upon his track, but a guilty conscience needs no scourge, and he, therefore, did not ask the motive of his captivity.

"Where to?" asked the driver, gruffly.

The officer hesitated a moment, and then answered—

"Newgate!"

The reason of his hesitation was this.

The great city prison was only used for the detention of such prisoners as had been duly committed by a magistrate to take their trial at the sessions.

This rule was, however, at times departed from, and the officer thought the present occasion sufficiently important to warrant his departing from it now.

Several warrants had, from time to time, been issued for the apprehension of the notorious highwayman, and one thing that influenced the officer was, that no prison could be so secure as that.

To be sure, not very many years back, the celebrated Jack Sheppard had made his escape from it, but then he was the only person on record who had performed so incredible a feat.

The driver, as soon as he received the order, whipped up his sleepy cattle, and drove straight to his destination.

Those acquainted with London, of course know that the distance between Charing-cross and the Old Bailey is not very great, but still it takes time to pass over the ground.

At a shuffling sort of trot, then, the horses made their way along the Strand and Fleet-street, and up Ludgate-hill.

There was no light in the inside of the coach, so the mistake was not likely to be discovered there.

The officer was seated by the side of the prisoner.

Major Nicholson sat opposite.

The others had climbed up on the roof, while not a few ran along by the side of the coach, which they were able to do without very greatly exhausting themselves.

At length the gloomy walls of Newgate were reached.

A thundering peal was delivered with the knocker upon the door through which prisoners were admitted.

Since the dismission of Mr. Tapner, and the appointment of Mr. Cawthorn in his place, several improvements in the prison regulations had been made.

All those men who had been found dereliction from their duty in any way, or exceeding it, had been summarily dismissed.

Consequently there was almost a new set of officials in the prison itself, though not many changes had taken place among the officers themselves.

That some alterations had been made could have been seen by any one who was acquainted with the management of things under the old code, for the door was opened immediately.

Without much trouble, the prisoner was got out of the coach, and escorted to the vestibule.

Morning was not very far distant, but still it was quite dark and night like.

The only illumination that there was in the vestibule proceeded from an oil lamp, the rays from which were of a very dim and sickly character indeed.

The result of this was that neither the officer nor Major Nicholson found out the mistake they had made.

"Where's the governor?" roared the former, in a voice of the utmost importance. "Where's the governor?"

"In his blessed bed, I hope, and fast asleep," replied the man on the lock.

"Go and wake him, then, and tell him to come here immediately, as I have a prisoner of the utmost importance to give into his charge."

"I'm on the lock, and it's more than my place is worth to leave it till my time's up."

"Where's some one who can go?"

"Why, there's Jinks somewhere about. Hi! Jinks. Where are you? You're wanted."

This man, who had been to some other part of the prison, hearing himself called, made his appearance.

"Wot's the row?"

"Mr. Cawthorne is wanted. Go and call him."

The man, who seemed of rather a surly nature, made no reply, but at once set off upon his errand.

About ten minutes elapsed, and then the governor made his appearance.

"Mr. Cawthorne," said the officer, "you won't grumble when you know what you have been called up for."

"What is it?"

"At last—I may say at last—I have succeeded in doing what so many others have tried and failed to do. Here is Dick Turpin, the highwayman, for the first time a prisoner within the walls of Newgate."

"Dick Turpin!" ejaculated the governor.

"Dick Turpin!" echoed the prisoner, in tones of the greatest surprise. "Dick Turpin! My fine fellows, you have made some mistake. I am no more Dick Turpin than you are."

"Ha! ha! ha! Very good! Ha! ha! ha!" laughed those assembled.

"That dodge won't do, Dick," said the officer. "Lor' bless you, we are not quite so green."

"Green or blue," said the stranger, "I tell you I am not Dick Turpin."

"Ah! well, it don't much matter."

"The devil it don't. How do you make that out."

"Why, you will have an opportunity of proving your identity, that's all."

"But I protest against this," cried the stranger. "Call who you like, I tell you I'm not Dick Turpin."

Something in the tones of his voice sounded rather unfamiliar to the ears of Major Nicholson, and, in spite of himself, he felt the disagreeable conviction creeping over him that he had made some dreadful mistake.

"More light," he cried. "More light. I will soon set this matter at rest."

"Lor', sir! you needn't take the trouble. There isn't no doubts to set at rest. However, here's my bull's-eye lantern."

With these words on his lips, the officer produced the article mentioned, and handed it to the major, who removed the slide with a nervous hand.

Then he allowed the broad, bright ray of light to fall full upon the prisoner's face, who bore the examination unflinchingly.

But the very first glance was sufficient to confirm the major's worst suspicions.

The man they had with so much trouble made prisoner was not the man they wanted.

The officer who had so congratulated himself upon his prize made the same discovery at the same moment.

He was too much astounded and overcome at first, but at length he broke out with—

"Oh! blow me tight, here's a go!"

"Come, come," said Mr. Cawthorn, who was not in the most amiable of tempers at having been called out of his warm bed on a cold night, "what's the meaning of this?"

The officer looked dreadfully chapfallen.

The major replied for him—

"We have made an unfortunate mistake. This is not Dick Turpin."

The stranger smiled triumphantly.

Then the officer spoke.

"That may or may not be; but there's something peculiar about the whole affair, and quite enough to warrant our detaining him on suspicion."

"Do so, at your peril," said the stranger. "Release me at once, or you shall pay dearly for this night's work."

There was something very authoritative in the manner in which he spoke.

"What shall I do, Mr. Cawthorn?"

"If you are sure he is not the person you name, you ought by all means to let him go free, after apologising for the treatment he has received."

"I will waive the latter part if you will let me free at once," said the stranger; "for the time I have lost is of the utmost importance to my own interests."

"In"—— began the governor; but what he was going to say is unknown, for he was interrupted by a violent banging at the prison door.

CHAPTER CCXL.

THE OFFICERS CHASE DICK TURPIN OVER THE HOUSE TOPS.

WHAT ensued upon the knocking at the door must be left to another chapter, for we feel it is quite time we returned to the adventures of the chief character in this history.

A portion of the officers had stationed themselves upon the landing on the second floor of the haunted mansion, in order to see that no one made his escape.

Casting their lights around them, they quickly discovered the trace of footsteps.

When Dick ascended the stairs, he had noticed he trod upon some soft, yielding substance.

But what that substance was he did not pause to inquire, though it would have been quite as well if he had done so.

The soft substance was dust.

Dust collected in such incredible quantities that it lay as thickly as snow.

Like snow, too, it retained the impression of every pressure.

The officers then discovered upon the upper flight of stairs such indications as left no doubt upon their minds that some one had ascended only a short time before them.

Having made this discovery, they deputed the office of guarding to one of their number, and hastened up the stairs in pursuit.

That they should fall into the mistake of supposing that the footsteps were those of one of the three men who had been seen to enter was natural enough.

Every stair bore the impress of the same boots, so it was the easiest matter imaginable to follow the track.

Up, up they went, until at length they reached the place where they terminated altogether—namely, at the door of the room which Dick had entered and secured after him.

Nothing was heard from the interior, and they immediately set about battering the door down in the same manner as they had the other one.

At the very first blow it gave symptoms of yielding, so it soon fell upon the floor.

Dick had opened the window when he found the men were really after him, with a view to making his escape by its means.

But this, he found, would be very difficult and dangerous.

Upon looking out, he saw that he was indeed at the top of the house, but the window, instead of looking out upon the tiles, as attic windows usually do, was flush with the building.

Casting his eyes upwards, he saw that the top part of the window was immediately beneath a stone parapet or coping, which seemed to run completely round the building.

It was just possible, he thought, by standing upon the window-sill, to reach the edge of this parapet.

Then, having done this, he felt pretty sure of his own power to draw himself up and over it fairly on to the roof of the mansion.

But the danger was immense.

Still his enemies would have all the greater difficulty in reaching him; and should he stay where he was, he must inevitably die or be captured.

Of the two alternatives he would have chosen the first, and he would rather have received his death by a fall from the top of the house to the bottom, than at their hands.

Accordingly he resolved to run the risk, being comforted with the assurance that death was all he could meet with.

This feeling inspired him with a kind of desperate daring, which not a little helped him to prosecute his perilous undertaking.

Mounting on to the window-sill, and holding tightly one half of the casement for support, he carefully and slowly got to an upright position.

Then shifting his grasp from the side to the top of the window, he steadied himself.

It was just when he had reached so far that the door showed unequivocal symptoms of giving way.

But he did not allow this circumstance to unnerve or flurry him for a moment.

When he was balanced he moved one hand, and supported himself with the other.

The one at liberty he raised above his head as high as he possibly could.

To his joy, he found that he could just take hold of the edge of the stonework.

Still his grasp was an insecure one.



[THE LADY IN THE COACH MAKES AN APPEAL TO DICK TURPIN.]

The least thing would destroy his equilibrium.

And should the coping-stone give way beneath his weight, which was no improbable event, nothing could save him from utter destruction.

This was sufficient to dismay even the boldest heart, but Dick Turpin was undaunted.

He clutched the edge of the stone as tightly as the muscles in his fingers would allow him.

He had then the most perilous part of his task to perform.

And that was to release his hold upon the window, trusting entirely to the one he had upon the parapet, and raise that arm to a level with the other.

But pressing himself against the wall as close as he could, he succeeded in doing this.

Then his course was comparatively easy.

Exerting all his strength, and giving a slight upward impulse to his body, he raised himself until his breast was on a level with the topmost edge of the parapet.

He then, with little difficulty, got one leg up, and finally rolled on to the roof in safety.

But he did not perform the feat quite quick enough to throw the officers off the scent.

They saw with wonder the route he had taken.

Every one placed too high a value upon his life to risk it, by attempting to follow the adventurous highwayman.

The idea, however, simultaneously occurred to all of them that there must be a trap-door somewhere at hand, by which access could be had with speed and safety.

Nor were they disappointed, for in the ceiling over the landing was the object for which they sought.

Had Turpin possessed a light as they did, he would have found it likewise, and used that mode of reaching the roof, but we know he was in the profoundest darkness.

Some little delay on the part of the officers took place.

owing to their inability to procure anything by which the trap-door could be reached.

But at last this obstacle was overcome, and, with all the speed they could possibly make, they scrambled out upon the tiles.

But they had now little to guide them.

Dick had got out five minutes before them, at the least.

However, they made a guess as to the direction he would most probably take, and set about searching for him with right good will.

Dick, however, had made the most of his time.

When he had accomplished his extraordinary and unparalleled feat, he laid still upon the tiles for a few seconds to recover himself.

Alive, however, to the necessity there was for immediate, action, he scrambled along the gutter in which he found himself until he could go no further.

Raising himself, he looked over the low stone wall, and found that he was divided from the next house by a chasm about four feet in width.

The distance was not very considerable, but a leap would be no trifling matter.

He looked down.

Or rather strove to do so, for the thick obscurity hid all things from his gaze at a depth of more than a few yards.

Dick cast one glance behind him.

His pursuers were not in sight.

Here, then, was an unexpected opportunity of getting free from them.

Without any more hesitation, he climbed up on to the parapet, and, standing on the top of the wall, made a spring upon the next house.

He performed the distance safely, but alighted with considerable force—so much so, indeed, that he feared the roof would give way beneath him.

But this apprehension proved groundless, and he crawled along much in the same fashion that he had done before.

To his joy, however, he found he had no more such gulfs to cross. The houses were built in one solid block.

Taking care to crouch down so as to be out of sight, he crept on and on.

He heard the sounds of his pursuers on his track, and this warned him to be still more careful not to make a noise, or do anything that would betray his position.

Presently he came to the end of the street.

He looked over, but could see nothing by which he could accomplish a descent.

His heart now misgave him, and the reader can judge what a relief it was when he found that the houses were continued at a right angle.

The further the distance he placed between himself and his enemies, before he made any attempt to leave the roofs, the better he knew it would be for him, so he pushed on with still greater speed than before.

But after a while, when he found that his enemies were out of hearing, he cast about him for some means by which he could descend from his elevated position.

A rope just then would have been of especial value to him, but as there was no probability of his obtaining one, it was no use for him to think about that.

He must find some other mode.

The most natural idea to occur to him was to seek an entrance through one of the numerous attic windows, but then he felt the great danger there was of raising an alarm if he should do this.

But he could not see how he was to avoid it, so he determined to run all risks, and trust to his luck, which certainly had befriended him already in a most surprising manner.

When he made this resolution he saw an attic window a few feet before him, and towards this he crept.

On reaching this, he ventured to peep through the window.

But he did so very cautiously, for as there was no light in the room, of course any one within it would immediately be able to distinguish his dark outline.

CHAPTER CCXLI.

AN ENTRANCE IS MADE THROUGH THE ATTIC WINDOW, AND A FRESH ADVENTURE BEFALS THE HIGHWAYMAN.

Dick Turpin strained his vision to the utmost, but he could see nothing.

He listened at the same time, but no sounds came to his ears.

To be sure this was no great proof that the chamber was unoccupied, but it sufficed for Dick.

Creeping still further, until he came quite in front of the window, he slid his hand up it, to see whether it was unfastened.

As he more than suspected, it was secure.

Such a fastening, however, as it possessed, he knew very well he could undo without making much noise.

Taking a pocket-knife from his pocket, he opened the largest blade, and, with the point of it, gently raised the lead round one of the panes nearest the fastening.

Having loosened it all round, he next proceeded to remove it from its setting.

This was done skilfully and silently.

Then, squeezing his hand through the contracted aperture, he undid the fastening.

The casement creaked open.

Nothing indicative of an alarm reached his ears.

But he paused before he ventured to enter.

After a short interval, however, finding the silence continue, he cautiously got through the window into the room.

To his delight, he found not only was it untenanted, but destitute of all furniture.

In order not to leave so palpable an index to the road he had taken as the open casement would do, he closed and refastened it.

Then sought about for the door of the room.

His intention was to try whether he could not descend the stairs without notice, and make his way out through the front door.

At that hour of the night, when most persons would be in a deep slumber, there seemed to be a strong degree of probability this plan of action would succeed.

The door of the room was composed of some kind of dark wood, and, as the walls were whitewashed, it showed out in strong relief.

The only fastening it had was a rude kind of drop latch, which Turpin raised cautiously, and then allowed the door to swing open.

Before him the darkness was most intense.

"I would give something," he muttered, "for the commonest rush candle that ever was made, but it is no good thinking about that; I have no light, and no means of getting one."

That the head of the stairs must be somewhere close at hand to where he stood he felt pretty certain, and he, after a moment's reflection, hit upon rather a clever expedient to ascertain their precise situation.

He went down upon his hands and knees, and crept cautiously forward.

It was well he took this precaution, for he found that he had been standing much nearer the top of the staircase than he had imagined, and a heavy fall down them would not only have severely injured himself, but raised an immediate alarm.

His great object was to get away from that house unobserved.

But fate had determined to place some obstacles in his path which would be by no means easy to overcome.

The first or top flight of stairs were, however, descended in silence and safety.

More than once, however, he stumbled against different things, but he did not make a loud enough noise to startle any one.

Creeping steadily onwards, he reached, at length, the hall leading to the front door.

A few steps now would lead him to freedom.

But at that moment there came to his ears a sound like the opening of a door, and then the flashing of a light appeared upon the stairs.

Some one was descending.

Voices, too, became audible.

Dick felt at once that it would be impossible for him to run to the door, and undo its fastenings unperceived.

He knew not whether any of his foes were lurking outside, but such a thing was extremely probable.

What was he to do?

He had no time to reflect or decide upon which was the best course to pursue.

A door was close to his right hand.

It was ajar.

It seemed to lead into a parlour of some kind.

The interior was in perfect darkness.

Likely enough he would find somewhere within it a secure hiding-place which would serve him for a little while.

He slipped in.

The door stood open just wide enough to allow him to do so.

The atmosphere within was of a genial warmth, and through the obscurity he saw the dull red embers of an expiring fire.

This seemed to indicate that its occupants had only recently quitted it.

Dick noticed these things, but, at the same time, paid particular attention to the persons he heard approaching.

Step by step they came down the staircase, with great deliberation. By the voices, Dick quickly found there were two of them.

That they were male and female.

That they were aged.

Upon reaching the foot of the stairs, they came straight up the passage.

A few rays from the light they carried penetrated the apartment in which Dick had taken refuge.

Could it be possible they were coming towards it?

That they intended to enter it?

If so, what an unfortunate and unlucky step it was for him to take to seek shelter there.

But there was no time for regret.

The best thing he could do was to hide himself at once, and trust to his luck.

They were coming towards that door, it is true, but then it was just as likely as not that they would pass it.

Dick made first for the window, in the hope of finding some curtains there, behind which he could conceal himself.

Nor was this hope doomed to defeat.

Some curtains were there, and, by the feel, long heavy curtains, too.

They were not drawn across the window, but hung in folds at the side of it.

Choosing the one nearest the door, Dick slipped behind it, and arranged the folds in such a manner as to effectually prevent any one suspecting a person was concealed there.

He was only just in time.

Scarcely had the curtains ceased to flutter than the door was pushed open, and the old couple entered, carrying a light.

The curtains, Dick now found, were of a semi-transparent quality, for he found, now the light was on the other side, he could see into the room with perfect plainness.

The person who first entered was a venerable-looking man, clothed in a fashion that even then was quite obsolete.

In his hand he carried a curiously-constructed lamp, which emitted a much greater amount of illumination than lamps at that time generally gave.

He was followed at a very short distance by a lady, as old, as venerable, and as strangely dressed as himself.

Both were attired with that scrupulous exactness which was so noticeable in elderly people a couple of generations back.

But what struck Dick most, and attracted the chief part of his attention, was that upon the countenances of both of them was an expression of the utmost grief.

That grief, however, was not of a violent or demonstrative kind. On the contrary, it was subdued and chastened, as though the sorrow under which they laboured was of long continuance.

That they were husband and wife, it did not require a second glance to see.

There was that indescribable but unmistakable resemblance between them.

At a rough guess, the age of the old man could not have been less than sixty years.

How much older he was, it would be hard to say, but there are some who assume a patriarchal look much earlier than others.

His wife was not much his junior.

They were speaking when they entered, and the first words Dick heard were these:

"It's no good, wife—no good at all. I can't help it. So don't say another word. I have tried to rest, but I cannot—I cannot."

"Calm yourself, John," said the wife, gently and soothingly. "Calm yourself, pray. Put the lamp down on the table, and I will stir the fire. Come, John, do."

The old man, with a trembling hand, placed the lamp upon the table, as he had been requested, while his wife stirred the embers together, and made them burst into quite a cheerful blaze. After depositing the lamp, the old man, with a faint sigh, sank back into an arm-chair and covered his face with his hands.

"You are not going to weep, John, surely?" said his wife, as she perceived the action, and drawing away the thin wasted hands as she spoke. "You are not going to weep. Cheer up."

The old man shook his head despondingly.

"I can't help it, Martha," he replied. "You know it is always the same, and as each succeeding year comes round, instead of my sorrow abating, it increases."

"But you should try to bear up under your affliction, John. It is wicked to repine, though, Heaven knows, our cross is heavy enough to bear—I——"

The kind-hearted wife's voice failed her at this juncture, and she sobbed aloud.

With a praiseworthy devotion she had striven to ease the drooping spirits of her husband, and sunk herself in the attempt.

It was now the husband's turn to console.

He drew a pretty carpeted stool close to his chair, and gently forced his wife to sit upon it.

Then he smoothed her thin, silvery hair upon her forehead, as he had been wont to smooth it years long, long ago, when that hair was thick and glossy, and black as jet itself, and when that now careworn and wrinkled brow vied with polished marble in its fair smoothness. He accompanied the action with a smile so wan, so sickly, and so sad, that it was more heart-breaking to look upon than his grief.

CHAPTER CCXLII.

DICK TURPIN DISCOVERS THE CAUSE OF THE OLD COUPLE'S GRIEF, AND HIS HEART IS DEEPLY TOUCHED BY THEIR DEVOTION.

THERE was something so peculiar about this old couple, and something so mysterious in their grief, that Dick became immediately interested in them.

Above all, their kind and affectionate demeanour towards each other made a deep impression on his heart.

It touched him acutely, and when he witnessed their vain attempts to console each other, he felt a disagreeable choking sensation rising up in his throat.

The scene had the effect of pressing his own isolated state upon his mind.

There he was, a foe to all men.

His hand was raised against his fellow-creatures, and their hands against him.

In the hour of tribulation there was no one to console him or make his load of affliction lighter.

But he banished these thoughts as much as he could, and fain would have escaped being any longer spectator of a scene that was so painful to his feelings.

But this was quite out of the question, and, besides, a certain kind of fascination, a strange contradictory feeling, made him long to be away and yet desirous of learning more.

"My dear wife," continued the old man, in a broken voice, "God bless you for your kindness to me, and the meek spirit which enables you to sustain your heavy load of grief with fortitude and resignation. We are poor weak creatures. In spite of myself, when this dreadful anniversary comes round, my spirits completely give way, and I cannot rest, sleeping or waking."

"I know that, John, and it shows how affectionate and good a heart yours is, or it would not be so. We ought

not to repine, though, quite so much as we do. Try, John, if for once you cannot overmaster it."

"I have tried, wife, and no one, not even you, knows how hard. But my heart bleeds whenever I think of it. It seems to me as though the wounds would never heal."

"It is a long time since they were inflicted, but mine seem as poignant as at first."

"So do mine—so do mine; and so you see, wife, how it is I cannot bear this dreadful night in the year to come round."

"It is almost over now, John. In an hour or two we shall see the sun, and a new day will begin. You—you will be more cheerful then, will you not?"

"I will strive to be. But, oh! wife, when I picture her—when I think how good—no, not how good—how beautiful she was—she was very beautiful, was she not, Martha?"

"Too beautiful, John," replied the wife, as she burst into a flood of tears. "She was too beautiful, too happy, and—and——"

"Good, you would say. Yes, that is the word which your lips hesitate to utter. She was too beautiful to be good; and yet, wife, do you know——"

"What, John?"

"Sometimes, when I reflect upon the past, I do not think her quite so much to blame—not quite so much to blame as I used to think she was in olden times."

"Bless you, John. I believe, even now, if she was to return—if she was to kneel at your feet and entreat your forgiveness——"

"Hold! hold!" cried the aged man, vehemently. "Do not speak of such a thing, do not speak of it. You make me feel quite strange."

"I know how you feel, John. You would like to see her once more before your eyes for ever closed in death. You would like to tell her that, deeply as she has sinned against us, you forgive her. Am I right, John?"

There was no reply, but Dick saw the old grief-stricken man bowed his head still lower and lower, till his cheek rested against his wife's forehead.

It was a touching scene, and hard indeed would that heart have been which could have witnessed it without emotion.

There was about them both all the fondness of early years. Their affection had been a lasting one, but, perhaps it was their deep and mutual grief which had served to knit them into closer bonds of union.

Singly they would never have borne up against it, but, united as they were, the one sustained the other in the hour when their affliction was the deepest, and thus the one alternately proved a support to the other.

"John! John!" said the wife again. "You do not answer me. Tell me whether I am right. Do you think you could quite forgive her? Do answer me."

"I should, Martha. I never thought that I should be able to forget the past, and overlook it, but now I feel that I can do so. As you say, it would be a consolation of no slight description, if I could see her once more on this earth. But why should we think of that? There—there is no hope for it!"

"I fear not," replied his wife, gently. "But yet I like to know that if she should come, you could pardon her! Tell me so again, John."

"Do you forgive her?"

"Do I? Oh! John, how can you ask me such a question? Where is the mother to be found who could not forget and willingly forgive the sins of her own daughter?"

"Not you, Martha! You have forgiven her long ago—I know that; but my heart was hardened against her."

"And enough to make it, John, enough to make it; but you are sure it is softened now?"

"Yes, at this moment, should she come before me, I feel I could grant her forgiveness, unasked."

"God bless you for those words, John! You have a kind, good heart. What years of anguish she has caused."

"Do not speak of that now. Let the past be forgiven. Oh! that I could see her once more—only once!"

"Your prayer, John, may be answered some day! You should recollect that we have never seen her since she fled—have had no explanation from her. Who then can tell what arts were used, what means employed to wean her from us?"

"As you say. Sometimes I think we have been heavily but justly punished."

"How so, John?"

"We thought too much of her. We exalted her by far too much—indeed, we almost worshipped her. She left us."

"Yes, that is it! I feel happier now. Do you, John?"

"I do."

"It is because you have forgiven her. You can bear to talk now about what has always driven you mad. Can you not?"

"Do you mean the past?"

"I do."

"I think I can."

"Do you know how long ago it is—since—since——"

"Since she left her home, to throw herself into a villain's arms?"

"Don't speak like that, dear John; you almost break my heart. But that is what I meant. Do you know how long ago it is?"

"Yes; this very night is the thirteenth anniversary of the event."

"Do you recollect that morning, John? Do not be excited, but let us talk gently over the past. I found the letter, John; you remember she wrote it before she left us?"

"Oh! God, yes—yes! Too well I recollect all that took place upon that awful day! It is written on my brain in characters of fire, which nothing will erase!"

"But forgiveness," pleaded his wife, "nothing but forgiveness. You told me you could forgive her."

"Forgive me, Martha. I am a weak-hearted and sinful old man."

"But do you remember that letter?"

"Why?"

"You read it?"

"I did, and was not blinded by the words; but almost—almost."

"You have never seen it since that morning, have you, John?"

"Never."

"Do you know what became of it?"

"No; why do you ask?"

"Should you not like to see it once more, if such a thing was possible? To once more hold in your hands that which she last touched before she left us!"

"Wife—wife!"

"What, John?"

"You have not got that letter!"

"I have indeed, John. I have never parted with it since that dreadful morning. I have carried it in my bosom till it is almost worn out, and it is stained in many places by tears; for whenever I could find an opportunity, I used to read it; and never without weeping."

"Martha! Can it be possible that you have kept this to yourself—that you have had this consolation, and refused to allow me to share it with you?"

"You are not angry, John?"

"No—no, not angry, but——"

"You know you never could bear to have that day alluded to, until to-night, and I am afraid that the sight of it would anger you."

I dare say it would—I dare say it would."

"And so, you see, I kept it a secret—the only secret, John, that I have ever had from you."

"Bless you, I believe you. But have you that letter now?"

"I have. I am never without it."

"Let—let——"

"Let what?"

"Let me see it."

"Should you like to do so?"

"I should indeed."

"Would it still further soften your heart?"

"I think so—I think so."

"Then I will read it to you."

"Do so, Martha."

"You can look upon the paper while I do so. Oh! you cannot think how I cling to it. It is the only thing I have in remembrance of her. You had all other things destroyed, and her bed-room door nailed up and covered, so that none should ever see or enter it."

"I did all that, Martha."

"But never mind now, John. Since that time we have never been able to see or hear anything of her. I wonder where she went."

"You will break my heart. Cease, oh! cease!"

"I think much upon the past, and should like you to do the same; we could talk then about that, as we do about other things."

"You are right, Martha; but where is the letter?"

"Here, John. You see it is very much worn, but it is quite perfect. I have taken such care of it, for I thought perhaps it would be all we should ever see of her."

As the old lady spoke, she drew from her bosom a little parcel.

Carefully taking off the cover, a folded letter was disclosed, and this, with trembling fingers, she spread out upon her husband's knee, while her tears fell thick and fast upon it.

CHAPTER CCXLIII.

WITH A LITTLE TROUBLE, DICK MANAGES TO GET OUT INTO THE OPEN AIR ONCE MORE.

"TAKE heart, Martha, take heart," said the old man. "You were going to show me how to be brave and firm. Come—come, read the letter!"

"With a great effort, the heart-broken mother subdued her emotion, and then began to read as follows:

"My dear, dear parents,—What will you think when you find I have gone, and when this letter falls into your hands? I tremble when I think of it, but your anger, if there is any, will, I am certain, pass away when you read this explanation.

"I have had a secret from you, my dear parents. I have guarded it jealously, and even your affectionate eyes have failed to notice it.

"Could I have had my own way, it would never have been kept a secret, but let me relate what has taken place, and then I shall leave you to form your own conclusions.

"Three weeks ago, my dear parents, while walking in the park, I was accosted by a young man—a gentleman—handsome—noble—wealthy.

"He paid me many compliments, and we at last grew quite friendly. Before we parted, however, he most earnestly entreated me to keep secret what had taken place. I refused at first, but afterwards he persuaded me.

"I kept the interview a secret. I saw him again, and then he told me that he was titled and wealthy—that he loved me. But he had friends, he said, who would oppose our union, but that in a twelvemonth he should be his own master, and independent of the world.

"He pressed me to wed him—wed him secretly, and keep the marriage a secret for twelvemonths only. At the end of that time he would own me as a wife.

"Then he told me his name and rank, but adjured me to reveal it to no one.

"In fine, my dear parents, I have consented to wed him in the manner he proposes. For twelvemonths I must bid you adieu. When that period expires, you will see me again, happy, and the wife of one of England's greatest nobles.

"You will wonder much at this, my dear parents, and you cannot imagine how it damps my joy that you cannot be at present the sharers of my good fortune, but the time I speak of will soon pass away, and, until it does, I shall remain in the most absolute seclusion. I have promised that I will do so.

"By the time you read this, my dear parents, I shall be a bride, and with no other cloud upon my pure and perfect happiness than that which I fear your displeasure will cast.

"But pray pardon me and wait, and, in the end, you will see that all will turn out for the best.

"From your ever-loving daughter,

"ISABEL."

A deep groan was the only comment which was made to this letter, and that was uttered by the bereaved father.

We have chosen to give the letter in its entirety, and have not related the various interruptions which took place while it was being read.

The poor mother carried the paper to her lips, and kissed it.

What can exceed the love a mother has for her child?

"She is a poor angel," she sobbed. "It was very—very wrong of her to keep such a secret, and allow herself to be guided by her own inexperience."

"She deceived us," said the old man, with a slight tinge of bitterness in his words. "She deceived us."

"But who knows, John, what arguments may have been used. You cannot tell. She is wrong. She has sinned. But who is always right, and who is sinless?"

"True—true."

"Many excuses can be made for her, John. She never dreamt of doing harm, and never for a moment suspected the villain who lured her from her home. That year has passed away, and twelve more years beside. We have never heard of her during all that long—long weary time. What must have been her feelings when she discovered how cruelly she had been deceived? What may she not have suffered since, for she would have been afraid to come to us!"

"Peace—peace, Martha! You make me like a child." Both wept.

"Where is she?" moaned the mother, again; "where has she been all this long time?"

"Heaven only knows."

"If her sin was great, her punishment has been adequate. But have you never thought, John, that we were much to blame?"

"No, I never thought that."

"But we were."

"How—how? I know your kind heart will make every excuse for her you can possibly think of."

"It is not that, John; but do you remember how we brought her up? We strove to keep her from all knowledge of evil."

"We did."

"And that was where we erred. Pure and stainless herself, she never dreamt there could be treachery in another, or, at all events, between a smooth and frank exterior."

"I see now—I see now."

"We ought to have taught her to distinguish evil from good, and shown her what a loathsome place the world was made through the influence of the bad passions of humanity."

"We ought, wife. I see the error now. We ought indeed."

"All the blame must not rest upon her, you know."

"You are right. I have done wrong, and added to my wrong doing. Would that I could recall the past. I would have had all England searched until I found her; but I was stubborn and obdurate."

"You could forgive her now if she came back?"

"Ah! yes, my dear wife; and, all through you, I see at last, when it is too late, that I alone am to blame."

"No—no."

"You would fain excuse me."

"None are perfect and——but hark!"

"What?"

"Did you hear nothing?"

"No."

"Hark again.'

"Did you hear something?"

"Yes."

"What, oh! what?"

"A moan as of some one in great pain."

"Heavens! wife! What can it mean? My heart beats strangely. Now I hear it."

A half-moaning cry from somewhere close at hand now came to their ears.

A presentiment was on the old man's mind that that sound had some connexion with their conversation.

There was the same impression upon the mind of Dick Turpin also.

"Wh—what is it—what is it, John?"

"I don't know, Martha. Hark!"

Again came the strange cry, but this time more wailingly than before.

"It comes from the street," said the mother, with bated breath; "it comes from the street."

"Let us go to the front door, Martha," added the old man, tremblingly; "let us go to the front door."

With these words on their lips, the aged couple slowly left the apartment hand in hand.

No sooner had they got fairly out of sight, than Turpin

looked out from the curtain, behind which he was concealed.

His face wore a serious look, such as had rarely before appeared upon it.

One could easily see how much he was affected by the simple and touching scene which he had witnessed.

But, interested as he was, the desire to get away rose paramount above it, and that is why, as soon as they had left the room, he looked out from the curtain.

He was, however, unable to see any means by which he could effect a retreat.

There was the sound of bolts being withdrawn and a lock shot back, for, of course, the door had been secured at night.

Then followed the creaking of hinges, which was echoed by a scream.

"What can it be?" asked Dick. "Ah, stop, I have an idea. How was it I did not think of that before?"

As he spoke, he slipped out of his place of concealment, and approached the table on tiptoe.

The lamp which the aged couple had carried was standing upon it, and burning brightly.

They had not carried it to the front door.

Familiar with the interior of their home as they were, there was no need for it.

The reader will, perhaps, guess what idea had entered Dick's mind.

It was to extinguish the lamp.

Under cover of the darkness, he would then stand a better chance of getting away unperceived.

He understood the mechanism of the lamp in an instant, and, by merely turning a screw, he put it out at once.

Then he stood profoundly still.

The darkness, contrasted with the previous light, seemed most intense—more so, indeed, than it was in reality.

"Bring her in, John," he heard a voice say. "Bring her in, poor dear thing. Who can she be? Perhaps it may be our own lost one come back to us, now that you have forgiven her."

"It is she!" cried the old man in a hysterical voice. "It is she! I know it! I know it!"

"Come this way, then. Why—why——"

"What?"

"The lamp is out."

"Out?"

"Yes."

"How extraordinary."

"Quick, wife, quick. Light it again, and let us look upon our poor lost one! She moans! She knows me! She put her arms around my neck, and presses her cold lips against mine! Mercy! Mercy! My child! Bless you, my child! Bless you!"

The old lady made her way back into the room, and, as she did so, Dick stole out into the passage.

A gush of cold air came upon his face.

Before him he could see the open door, and, upon a nearer approach, the dim and half-defined outlines of some person on the door-step.

Cautiously he made his way towards it.

The old man, with what little strength he had, strove to raise some heavy burden.

Dick's heart, more than his eyes, told him that it was a female form.

The flash of light from the lamp which the poor mother had succeeded in igniting, now shone upon the wall.

Now was the time for action.

He was close to the door.

With one bound he sprang into the street, and, without pausing, ran hastily forwards, until he turned the first corner on his left.

CHAPTER CCXLIV.

DICK TURPIN OBTAINS A DISGUISE BY A SUMMARY PROCESS, AND DIRECTS HIS STEPS TO THE "WHITE HORSE" IN DRURY-LANE.

"THIS has been a night of adventure!" muttered Dick, as he looked around to see what direction he ought to take, "but this last incident affects me most. What a good-hearted couple! I should not have feared to have thrown myself on their protection; but then, why should I bring care and trouble under their roof? They have borne enough already.

"What black-hearted wretch could it have been, I wonder, who, by his sophistic arguments, persuaded her to leave her happy home? The tale is a clear one to me, and not the least strange part about it is that, after a lapse of thirteen years of unforgiveness, as soon as her father pronounced her pardon, she had returned, as though the intelligence had been invisibly conveyed to her."

It will be seen by this speech that Dick jumped to the conclusion that the female form upon the doorstep was that of the erring and repentant daughter.

There were many things, certainly, to induce such a belief, but nothing amounting to a positive proof.

If she had returned just at that moment, the coincidence was a strange one.

And, although he had nothing to show it, Dick could not divest himself from the idea that the scene of which he had just been a spectator had some connection with the murder in the haunted house.

But whether this was so or not, time alone can evidence.

The morning was now close at hand, and a dull gray light seemed to fall upon all things and give them a cold and ghastly look.

By the aid, then, of this dim light, Dick looked about him.

To his relief, he could neither see nor hear anything of his foes.

But he was too close to the scene of his daring exploit to feel safe, and yet he hardly knew to what place to proceed.

Nor had he any distinct notion as to which would be the best direction for him to take.

He presented altogether a very suspicious appearance. His clothes were dirty and torn.

They were spotted with blood in many places, and over his shoulder was a crimson bandage.

He limped too, as he walked, for his ankle pained him exceedingly.

No doubt, by this time, a pretty accurate description of him had been posted all over London.

People would be on the look out.

He would feel safer at the "White Horse" than anywhere, but then how was he to reach that place unobserved, and morning fast coming on?

Old Matthew's roof would only afford him a safe asylum if he was not seen to enter it.

When he reached this point in his reflections, he heard a footstep approaching him.

Desirous to escape the observation of every one as much as possible, he shrunk back into the deep shadow of a projecting doorway.

It might be a mere chance passenger who was coming, and it might be a foe.

He looked in the direction from which the traveller came, and in a little while distinguished him.

He was walking at a rapid rate.

As he drew yet nearer, Dick saw there was a certain military air about him, both in respect to his walk and upright bearing.

A long black cloak which he wore tended materially to favour the idea.

It completely enveloped his form, and allowed only his boot-tops to be visible.

On his head was the almost universally-worn, three-cornered felt hat.

As he saw this person approaching, and noticed how completely the cloak covered his form, hiding everything he wore, the idea struck him of what a capital thing it would be for him if he could obtain a similar piece of apparel.

No sooner had this thought struck him, than he determined to possess himself of the very identical cloak which the comer wore.

He was upon the same side of the way as Dick was, and in a few minutes would pass the doorway in which he was concealed.

But to take anything from so warlike a person would, most likely, be no easy matter.

Dick, however, was not the man to trouble himself much about that.

He wanted the cloak, and he made up his mind he would have it, and that by boldness, too.

He felt rapidly for what weapons he had about him, but found the only thing he had got was a discharged pistol.

His sword had been broken.

But if the pistol was harmless, his enemy need not know it.

Grasping it firmly in his right hand, he waited.

The stranger, not dreaming of an ambuscade, walked on unconcernedly.

But, as soon as he was close enough, Dick sprang from his hiding-place, and, with unerring aim, caught him round the throat.

"Silence!" cried Dick, impressively, almost before the stranger knew he was attacked. "Silence! Utter a cry, or do anything to cause an alarm, and you are a dead man."

A gurgling sound followed these words, and Dick, fearful if he continued the pressure, his adversary would choke, relaxed his grasp a little.

At the same time, he pressed the muzzle of the pistol against the stranger's cheeks, and said:

"I want your cloak. Give it to me without resistance, or you die. Your life now hangs upon a thread. I am a desperate man, and shall not shrink to take it."

The stranger endeavoured to nod his head.

"If you mean you are willing to let me have what I require, be it so. But beware how you play me false. No violence will then be offered. The cloak is all I require. It is of little value to you, so give it up at once. If you are treacherous your death be on your own head."

As he spoke, Dick relaxed his hold.

But as he did so, he very dexterously unclasped the cloak, and, catching the garment from the stranger's shoulders, threw it over his own person.

"Now, sir," said Dick, "you are free. I am much obliged to you, and, if you wish to know to whom you have lent your cloak, it is to Richard—commonly called Dick—Turpin, the highwayman."

Then, ere the military-looking individual could recover his surprise, Dick hurried down the street, and was quickly out of sight.

He found the cloak was of first-rate material, and such as would be worn by any gentleman.

He adjusted it properly, and fastened it at the throat.

It was trimmed with fur, and made very full, so that he could completely wrap himself up in it.

Everything now that would have made him an object of suspicion was hidden from observation.

He walked along rapidly.

The streets were all but empty.

At the dawning hour few people are abroad.

Suddenly, upon emerging from a narrow street, he found himself close to Westminster Abbey.

"I will make my way to the river-side," he said, "and take a boat from thence to the Savoy-steps. That will suit me first-rate. I shall get to old Matthew's without any one being the wiser; and glad enough I shall be, for a little rest would be about as welcome a thing as I could think of."

With these words on his lips, Dick took the direction upon which he had determined.

The nearest point at which he could make sure of finding a boat was at the foot of Westminster-bridge; so it was towards that venerable and almost forgotten structure that he made his way.

A few minutes enabled him to reach it, and, descending a flight of stone steps on the east side of the bridge, made slippery by the recession of the tide, he saw before him several boats waiting to be hired.

He was quickly hailed by one of the watermen, who were always anxious, like cabmen are now, to have a well-dressed, distinguished-looking person for a fare.

With all possible speed, Dick stepped into one of the little vessels, and ordered him to row him to the Savoy-steps.

The usual "Ay, ay, sir," followed his command, and pushing off from the steps, the waterman, by his long, steady strokes, made the boat glide over the surface of the river at a rapid rate.

The tide, too, was running out, which made their progress all the easier and swifter.

But when the prow of the boat touched against the Savoy-steps and Dick leaped from the boat, it was broad daylight.

Taking care to draw the cloak closely around his form, and pulling his hat down over his face as much as possible, Dick took the shortest and most direct route to the "White Horse."

He saw no signs of pursuit, and nothing that looked suspicious, but for all that he did not relax his caution.

Upon second thoughts, however, he determined not to go to the front door, so he made a bit of a detour, and got into Stanhope-street.

Then, turning to the left, he entered the narrow passage which even now exists, and which is known as White Horse-yard.

Straight up to the secret door he went, and pressed upon the hidden spring, which sounded a bell in the interior. He had hardly to wait a moment before the door opened.

Old Matthew, in a state of the greatest uneasiness, had been on the watch for him, and his joy may be imagined when he found him standing there safe and sound.

"Come in," he cried. "Don't linger. Quick! There may be prying eyes about."

Dick stepped in at once.

The moment, however, that the door was closed, and before old Matthew had time to speak, he said—

"Black Bess! Where is she?"

"Safe, quite safe."

"Let me see her first, and I will tell you my adventures afterwards."

"As you will. This way. I never thought to see you back again!"

"Yet here I am."

"Yes, here you are, and more by good luck than anything else, I take it."

"I daresay that has a great deal to do with it, my friend."

CHAPTER CCXLV.

MR. WRIGGLES TAKES HIS MEASURES FOR CAPTURING DICK TURPIN, AND SEIZES HIM IN STANHOPE-STREET.

"AH! well," ejaculated the worthy landlord, as he threw open the cunningly-contrived stable door, "luck is a very fine thing, that's certain!"

"You are right."

"But, however, here's your mare. Woe, Bess!"

The landlord patted the noble creature affectionately on the neck.

Dick, too, approached, and a faint neigh proclaimed that he was recognised.

Of course, she was quite safe and properly attended to.

Old Matthew had seen to her himself.

But Dick always felt it to be a great satisfaction to know, from personal inspection, that such was the case.

The landlord was exceedingly impatient to hear Turpin's adventures, so he hurried him off at once into the bar-parlour, where a good fire was burning, and where the landlord had been sitting awaiting his return.

To satisfy him, then, Dick briefly gave him an outline of the incidents which have been already presented to the reader in detail.

As soon as he spoke of his hurts, however, the landlord insisted upon having them dressed, so he took Dick upstairs to a bedroom, and attended to them himself, for he had an excellent knowledge of all kinds of wounds, and knew how they should be treated.

When this was over, the highwayman was completely exhausted, and laid down upon the bed to enjoy a few hours' rest and sleep.

"Don't be afraid," old Matthew said. "If anything goes wrong you shall have the alarm soon enough. Trust me for that."

"Many thanks."

"Oh! don't mention it. A good sleep is the best thing you could possibly have, and when you wake up you will find something to eat beside you."

"All right."

"I shall go and have a turn in myself for a little while."

"I should think you want it."

"I do, though, if you will believe me, I don't take so much sleep as some do. I don't require it."

"Ah, well, my friend, I can go to sleep here in security, I know. Good morning."

The landlord left the room.

Dick turned over and over upon his bed.

Somehow, although he was so exhausted, he could not sleep.

His brain was busy.

It was occupied with many distracting things.

There was his night's adventures, his failure in what he had undertaken, Tom King and his absent comrades, all running one after another through his mind.

At length he fell off to sleep, nor did he wake until the short winter's day was drawing to a close.

As the landlord had said, he found beside him both eatables and drinkables.

To these he paid the first attention.

Then, having satisfied the cravings of hunger, he saw that his old friend had been thoughtful enough to provide him with a new suit of clothes, which were hanging on a chair-back at the bedside.

The highwayman then rose.

His wound was well bandaged, and the hemorrhage had entirely ceased.

He had nothing to do now but to let it take its course.

Having thoroughly washed himself, and gone through the various operations of the toilet, the change that he affected in himself was great indeed.

Indeed, he looked as he had looked of old, as he looked upon that November night when we first introduced him to the reader.

Before he had quite finished attiring himself, old Matthew made his appearance.

He was delighted with the change.

"Is all safe?" was Dick's first question.

"Quite, I think."

"You think?"

"Yes, there is a deuce of a hubbub about you!"

"About me?"

"Your name is in everybody's mouth."

"The devil!"

"You may well say that. If you want to save your neck, you'll have to keep yourself remarkably snug."

Dick smiled.

"What are you laughing at?"

"Do you see how carefully I have dressed myself?"

"Yes."

"And what pains I have taken with my toilet?"

"Yes, yes."

"And what do you think induced me to do so?"

"I don't know."

"You don't?"

"Had you any special reason?"

"I had."

"What was it?"

"This, my friend: Black Bess is all right."

"Eh! what?"

"Of course she is. Well, Matthew, my friend, I am going out for a ride into the country."

"No—no."

"But I say, yes—yes."

"You must be mad!"

"Why so?"

"You will be captured, to a certainty."

"I will take my risk of that. Now, Matthew, you have known me some time, and so you must have noticed one thing."

"What?"

"That when I take an idea into my head, or make up my mind to do anything, nothing in the world will turn me."

"I do know it, but pray for once listen to reason."

"Not if it means stop here."

"Why not?"

"I want a ride out in the free open air. I want to feel that I am once more a knight of the road. The adventures I had last night have whetted my appetite, and I am determined to see some more to-night."

"Well, well—a wilful man will always have his own way."

"Now, Matthew, don't be offended."

"I am not offended."

"Just consider. The authorities, knowing this to be an old haunt of mine, may take it into their heads to search the place thoroughly from top to bottom, and so, for your sake, as well as my own, it will be best to be out of it."

"Yes, but——"

"Now, Matthew, will you oblige me? I ask you as a friend."

The landlord groaned as he said it.

"I know what you want."

"That's all right, then."

"You want your mare saddled."

"I do, but not just yet. Say, in an hour's time. It will be quite dark by then."

"So it will, and, in the meantime, just think over what you are going to do."

"Oh! all right. Never fear. Go and get the saddle on at once, and then all will be ready in case of an alarm."

The landlord, finding further remonstrance would be useless, unwillingly withdrew to do our hero's bidding.

The hour he had mentioned soon passed away.

As he had said, it had during that space of time grown quite dark.

And now the use of the iron bars in the wall was displayed.

Had Dick gone down the staircase, he would surely have met some one.

But as it was, the square yard we have before described was never entered by any one but the landlord and those he could trust.

It was impossible for any persons in the neighbouring houses to see into it.

Dick threw open the window, and took hold of one of the horizontal bars.

Then, placing his feet on another, he closed the window and begun to descend.

This was the easiest matter imaginable, for the bars were arranged so as to be just like the rounds of a ladder, and could be ascended and descended with equal facility.

In a moment or two Dick reached the ground.

Then he bent his steps towards the stables.

There he found old Matthew examining the trappings of Black Bess, and seeing that all was perfectly secure.

He made one more attempt to induce Dick to derelict his enterprise, but he met with no better success than he had the first time.

When all was ready, Matthew furnished Dick with six pistols.

Two were for the holsters in the saddle.

Two he placed in his belt ready for immediate service.

The other two in his coat-pocket.

He loaded them with his own hands, and placed the remainder of the ammunition in his pocket also.

Old Matthew then opened a door which led into a narrow passage.

"Take the bridle in your hand," he said, "and walk to the bottom of the place, and you will find yourself in Stanhope-street. I trust I shall see you safe back again."

"Never fear for that," said Dick. "Good-bye."

As he spoke, he obeyed old Matthew's instructions, and passed the court—for such it was, though no other doors opened into it.

Twenty steps took him to the bottom of it.

He led Bess out into the middle of the street, and prepared to mount.

But, before he placed his foot in the stirrup, he felt himself seized from behind by some one.

Releasing his hold of his mare, he wrenched himself round.

But the person who had caught hold of him kept a firm grasp, while he shouted out:

"I have him! I have him, Mr. Wriggles! Mr. Wriggles, I've got him! Make haste! Here he is!"

A sudden trampling of footsteps followed these words.

Dick knew his danger at once. It was imminent.

His old foes had got scent of where he was, and had waited til he came out to pounce upon him.

CHAPTER CCXLVI.

RELATES HOW DICK TURPIN FARED AT THE HANDS OF MR. WRIGGLES, THE BOW-STREET OFFICER.

His only chance of escaping being overpowered by numbers, was by at once disabling the man who had seized him.

Summoning, therefore, all his strength, he wrenched his whole body round, and so got out of his grasp.



[MR. WRIGGLES AND HIS OFFICERS ATTACK DICK TURPIN.]

But only for a moment.

The man would not be shook off, and he clung to him again.

Turpin, however, struck him a heavy blow in the face, which made him stagger slightly, while his grasp slackened.

Dick struck him again, and this time more violently than before.

He fell to the ground stunned.

But by the time he had done this, the highwayman's foes were close upon him.

Mr. Wriggles, so soon as he heard that the famous Dick Turpin had again made his appearance in his old character, had not attempted to give chase to him in any way, having already learned the futility of doing so.

Without any precise information upon the point, he had an idea that he would most likely take up his quarters at the "White Horse," his old place of refuge in days past.

Old Matthew, the landlord, however, always managed, somehow or other, to get the better of the officers

That is to say, if they went in to search for any one, they always had their trouble for nothing.

No member of the family had ever been found there.

Mr. Wriggles had from time to time experienced all this, so he adopted quite a different plan of action.

At various convenient places he had stationed his men, so that a complete circle was formed by them round the ancient inn.

Here he resolved to wait and watch.

If Turpin came, he could not enter without being perceived, and if he was in already, it was impossible for him to leave also.

But he almost did so, too, for the door leading from the stables into the narrow passage was quite unknown to the officers as being a means of exit.

One of them, however, who happened to be posted at the bottom or east end of White Horse-yard, heard the trampling of Bess's feet, and saw her rider lead her into the road.

He then darted forward and clasped Dick round from

behind, while he called out to his superior for assistance in the manner we have related.

Upon hearing his voice, they had hurried forward at the top of their speed, and arrived just in time to see their comrade stretched at full length on the ground.

Turpin, however, the moment he had freed himself from his adversary, drew his sword from its sheath.

It was a long-bladed and beautiful weapon, which old Matthew had placed by the side of the apparel he then wore.

Its brightly-polished blade flashed like lightning as, the moment it was released from the scabbard, Dick whirled it round his head.

The officers, who had been advancing, halted, and drew back a step.

And during this scene Black Bess had not moved from her master's side.

She stood immovable as a rock, watching the progress of the affray.

The indecision of the officers was only momentary.

At a word from their leader, they made a rush forward.

But Turpin waved his sword again, describing a semi-circle with it.

None of his foes were within its circumference, or they would have been mown down.

Now was Turpin's time.

Taking advantage of the temporary supremacy he had gained over them, he turned with great swiftness towards his mare.

Then giving one spring, he leapt upon her back, at the same time uttering a cry which he knew would have the effect of making her bound forward at her utmost speed.

A yell came from the officers.

Up to the present, in obedience to the instructions they had received from their superior, they had not fired.

His design had been to capture the celebrated highwayman alive, and hand him over to the authorities, to be dealt with according to law.

But now he found he was slipping away from him, Mr. Wriggles gave the order to fire.

The officers, who had not been in time to cling to Dick after he had mounted, though several had rushed forward to do so, at once drew their pistols from their belts, and many shots were fired in quick succession.

But Turpin, having heard the command, did not waver.

He set his teeth hard, and struck Black Bess with his heels.

She flew along the narrow and deserted street at a terrific speed.

Its length was trifling, and he was round the corner into Lincoln's Inn-fields in the space of a few seconds.

His foes, however, raised a tremendous outcry, and followed him on foot as fast as they were able.

But the danger was now passed.

Or nearly so.

Dick had not expected to escape injury from the many shots that were fired at him.

To be sure all would, in the excitement of the moment, be discharged almost without aim, but even so, some chance bullet could scarcely fail to reach him.

Feeling no immediate effects from it, he did not stay his course, but made his way in a direct line to Bloomsbury-fields.

Here he drew rein, having ascertained that none of his enemies were within sight or hearing.

His first act was to move himself about in various ways, and exercise all his limbs, in order to learn whether he had been struck.

But the result was more than he could have hoped for.

He had not received a scratch.

Having assured himself of this, he patted his mare upon the neck in a cheerful manner, as he said:

"Well done, lass! well done! We are all right, and Wriggles is again defeated! Now, I once more feel myself a real Knight of the Road, and it is odd to me, if I do not do something to-night which shall serve to prove my right to the title. Bravo! bravo!"

Black Bess made a neighing sound as soon as these words were uttered, which almost seemed as though the gallant creature had made an effort to speak.

Turpin did not take it in that manner.

It was not the way in which she usually replied to him when he spoke encouragingly to her.

His face assumed a serious expression.

The sound to his ears sounded like one of pain.

Could it be possible?

Had the matchless animal been less fortunate than her rider when the pistols had been discharged?

Some stray bullet might have struck her.

Might even have reached some vital part.

With his heart much agitated by this thought, Dick alighted from the saddle.

"Art hurt, lass?" he asked, anxiously, stroking his hand over her glossy coat as he spoke. "Art hurt, lass—eh? What's this?"

Dick held up his hand, and in the dim night light he could see that it was smeared with blood.

He quickly found the place from which the blood had come.

There was a wound upon her croup.

Whether it was a very serious one or not he could not tell.

The blood flowed from it at rather a rapid rate, though, now she was standing still, it was fast beginning to congeal over it.

He did not try to stop this operation, because he knew when completed, that it would be a more effectual means of stanching it than any other.

The matter was a very serious one indeed, but it was most fortunate for both that the officers had not been well mounted, or the result would perhaps have been the capture or death of both horse and rider.

Dick was at a loss for a little while to know what to do.

Where could he take his mare to have her wound attended to, and what should he do in the meantime without her?

These were puzzling questions.

But it is surprising how much quicker we arrive at a decision when pressed by time, when we know there is no time for a lengthened argument pro and con.

Dick had to make up his mind quickly.

But just at that moment he heard a faint jingling of bells, accompanied by the rumbling of heavy wheels.

"A waggon," said Dick, as he heard the sound.

"Perhaps I shall learn something from the driver if I wait until it comes up."

Acting upon this idea, he took Black Bess by the bridle and led her to the side of the road, where he waited somewhat impatiently for the approach of the waggon.

It came crawling on at a snail's pace, as such vehicles usually do.

It was coming from the direction of London.

At length, when the highwayman's stock of patience was quite exhausted, it arrived.

He could just see that it was drawn by three horses; on the head of the foremost of which were some little bells, which jingled pleasantly as the horse tossed his head up and down.

"Hoy!" shouted Turpin, at the top of his lungs; "hoy! Stop!"

But the driver did not appear to take any notice.

Dick shouted again, but without further effect; so, lest the waggon should pass him after having waited for it so long as he had, he loosed the bridle, and springing forward, caught the foremost horse in the team, and made him come to a standstill.

The others, of course, stopped also, and the huge heavy wheels ceased to revolve.

A voice now cried out:

"Gee—woa—whoop! Dang it, who hist thee stopping my horse?"

The voice belonged to the driver, who had been sitting on his seat fast asleep, which accounted for his not hearing Dick when he called out to him.

Indeed, it was the cessation of motion which caused him to open his eyes.

Nothing else, hardly, would have had that effect.

"Stop," said Dick; "I want to speak to you."

"Speak, be dom'd," said the driver, in a rage, and making a slashing cut at Dick, as he uttered the words.

"Speak, be dom'd! What do ye mean by a stopping a my team?"

"Look here," said Dick, "do you see this?"

"See what?"

"A crown piece."

"Eh!" said the driver, forgetting his anger in the interest he took in what had been last said.

"A crown piece," said Turpin. "Listen a moment, and it is yours."

"All right, your honour, all right. What did you please to want?"

"Do you travel this road often?"

"Twice a week."

"Then you know it pretty well."

"Yes, I do. But what o' that?"

"My horse here has met with an accident. Now, where is the nearest place I can get a doctor?"

"What sort of a doctor do you want?"

"Why a horse-doctor, to be sure. There must be one not far off, I should think."

"Well, there is, certainly. Is your horse much hurt?"

"Well, yes; rather."

"Ah!"

"Why do you ask?"

"It's a matter of four miles further along the road."

"The devil it is! The way you are going?"

"Yes."

"Shall you pass anywhere near it?"

"Of course I shall."

"Very well, then, I'll make the crown piece half-a-guinea if you'll give me and my mare a lift as far as there."

"Will you, by gom?"

"I will. Is the waggon empty?"

"Yes, barring some straw at the bottom of it."

"That's the very thing."

"But, how can I give your mare a lift?"

"I'll show you. Stop a minute."

The man looked round with great curiosity, and Dick went to the back part of the waggon.

Jumping up on the board at the back, he drew back the tarpaulin which hung there.

Then he called to Black Bess by means of the peculiar whistle which he had so particularly taught her to obey.

She came towards him at once.

He patted her on the neck, and made her understand that he wished her to leap up.

This she did easily, for the distance from the ground to the bottom of the cart was nothing to speak of.

One bound, and she was fairly inside.

The waggoner was filled with astonishment.

He had lifted the canvas at the front of the cart, and so was able to see into the interior, which was lighted by a small oil lamp.

"Dom me," he said, "that licks all I ever seed in my life."

Dick patted Bess on the neck, and gently forced her to lie down, for he imagined she would travel easier in that manner.

Having accomplished this, he went to the front of the waggon, and said—

"Now drive as fast as you can, and the sooner you get to where I want to go, the more liberal I shall be."

"All right, your honour," replied the driver, smacking his whip, so that it sounded like the report of a pistol. "Come up, with you."

The horses put themselves in motion at once.

They went at first at a kind of trot, but that jolted the waggon in such a fearful manner that Dick could not stand it, so they subsided into a walk.

The cumbersome affair did not go more than four miles an hour, at about the end of which time the driver pulled up, and said—

"Here you are, sir. You'll find the door a little way down the lane there to the right."

"Very good," said the highwayman "Who shall I ask for?"

"Mr. Evans."

"Here's a guinea, then, for your trouble, and as soon as I get out, drive on, and the best thing you can do is to forget this night's work."

With this, Turpin scrambled out of the back of the waggon, and assisted Bess to follow him.

The waggoner, pleased enough with what he had so unexpectedly earned, and which was about equal to two weeks' wages, seemed to take Dick's advice, for he drove off at once.

Our hero watched him down the road until he was out of sight, and then he looked about him for the lane of which the man had spoken.

Sure enough, just on his right hand was a narrow turning.

Down this Dick Turpin did not hesitate to direct his steps.

He was glad to see that his priceless mare did not exhibit any outward signs of her hurt. She walked along steadily and firmly.

According as he had been told, he found, a few yards down the lane, some large double gates, which were surmounted by a circular piece of wood for a sign-board, upon which some words were written, but it was too dark for them to be deciphered.

Nor did Dick make the attempt. He merely gave a glance upward to see what kind of place it looked to be.

A little search showed him a handle by the side of the gate-post, and this he pulled downwards.

The loud clanging of a bell not far off from where he stood immediately ensued, followed by the barking of dogs.

Then he heard a heavy footstep, and a voice cried—

"Who is it? What do you want?"

Dick paid no attention to the first part of the question.

"I want to see Mr. Evans. I have hurt my horse. Open the door. Be quick."

The authoritative and off-hand manner in which he spoke, procured immediate obedience.

One half of the gate was thrown open, and a man appeared holding a stable-lantern as high above his head as he could, in order to see what the late customer was like.

CHAPTER CCXLVII.

DICK TURPIN HAS BLACK BESS'S WOUND PROPERLY ATTENDED TO.

DICK TURPIN, however, by no means wished to be closely scrutinized, be the man whom he might, so he walked forward, leading his mare by the bridle.

The man drew aside to allow him to pass, and closed the door after him.

No one was better aware of the policy of conciliating people wherever it was possible, by giving them money, than our hero. He always looked upon it as money well and profitably spent.

Accordingly, while the man was fastening the gate, he took the opportunity to draw half-a-crown from his pocket.

"I don't want to waste any more time than I can possibly help," he said, placing the coin in the man's hand. "Just ask Mr. Evans to make as much haste as he can."

"All right, sir!" said the man, touching his hat, and quite certain in his own mind that Dick was a gentleman, and consequently a customer well worth having. "He will be here in a minute, I know."

"The sooner the better. You can tell him from me that he will be well paid for his trouble."

The man hurried off to do his bidding.

Nor did he keep him long, for he soon returned, accompanied by a tall, gaunt old man, who had much of the appearance of having served in the army.

This idea was confirmed in Dick's mind by the kind of semi-military salute he made as he approached him.

Turpin spoke to him in an undertone.

"Are you a man content to do a service and be well paid for it, without troubling yourself unnecessarily about it, because, if such is the case, you can have such a job to do now."

Mr. Evans hesitated a moment, and then he replied—

"What is the nature of the service which you wish me to perform?"

"Nothing which you need shrink from doing."

"You must tell me what it is before I can give you a reply."

"It is simply this. You see my horse here?"

"Yes."

"Well, she has been hurt."

"Go on, sir."

"Are you willing to dress the wound she has received, without troubling about how she got it, and where and when?"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Evans. "That is a matter which don't concern me, and I always endeavour, as much

as possible, to act up to the principle of every man minding his own business, and letting other people's alone."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Turpin, "very glad indeed. You are just the man I want. Now you shall be well rewarded, especially if you do your business well and carefully, for, I can assure you, I set great store by the animal."

"Just so, sir," said Mr. Evans.

"Have you any objection?"

"None in the least."

"Then perhaps you will have a good look at her wound, and do the best you can for it."

"You may depend upon that, sir. Here, Ike, lend me the lantern."

The man had stood a little aside during the dialogue, but upon hearing his master speak, he approached.

Mr. Evans took the lantern from his hands, and, by the aid of its light, made a good examination of Black Bess.

Turpin looked himself, for, in the darkness in the road, he could not say for certain that the wound he had discovered was the only one which she had received.

But such proved to be the case.

The blood had coagulated on her croup in a large mass.

But it had ceased to flow.

Mr. Evans evidently looked upon it with surprise.

"Will you follow me under cover," he said, turning to Dick. "Perhaps you would like to lead your horse yourself."

"I should."

"Then, if you will keep beside me, I will take you to my room, where all my things are kept, and where she can be properly attended to."

Turpin did not scruple to follow Mr. Evans. He would not have hesitated if he had known for certain that he was incurring great danger by so doing.

Indeed, it is hard to say what risk he would not have run upon his mare's account. Certainly more than he would for any other living thing.

He had not far to go, for Mr. Evans merely led him across a small yard to a door leading into a shed.

This he opened and passed through, with Dick close at his heels.

"Ike!" he cried to his man, "run into the house, and fetch a bucket of hot water."

The man went off, and nothing could be done until he returned.

But he scarcely kept them a moment.

Mr. Evans took a sponge, and, dipping it in the hot water, washed away the blood which had caked over the wound.

He continued this bathing process for some time, and then Dick saw that a bullet had ploughed up the skin on her croup, making an oblique furrow about three inches in length.

Mr. Evans looked at the wound, but, in accordance with his agreement, made no remarks and asked no questions.

No doubt he knew what had caused it.

"This must be sown up," he said.

"Is it anything serious?"

"No, not at all. You see it is merely skin deep."

"I see."

"So that all that will be necessary will be to draw the skin together. It will heal all the quicker then."

"Let it be done if that is best," said Dick.

"Oh! I will do it at once."

"Shall you be long?"

"No, a few minutes only."

"I am glad to hear it."

"The bleeding, you perceive, has quite ceased. I will try to do something that will prevent it breaking out afresh."

"It is in a good place."

"Well, yes, so far as travelling goes, it is in a good place."

"There will not be any fear of its coming unstitched, will there?"

"I should recommend you to be careful."

"You may depend I shall be."

"There is no occasion for putting her aside for such a hurt, but it would do her no harm."

"It shall be done if possible. I value her very highly."

"She is a beautiful creature," said Mr. Evans, admiringly; "a very beautiful creature."

"She is indeed."

During this conversation Mr. Evans very carefully stitched the edges of the wound together, and when he had done, there was very little of the wound to be seen.

Dick then gave Mr. Evans five guineas for the service he had done, and the horse-doctor was not a little surprised at receiving so liberal a payment, although, from what Dick had said, he expected something handsome.

A second examination was made, in order to ascertain for certain that she had received no other injury, but the result was quite satisfactory.

Bess was then led to the front gate by which she had entered, and Dick Turpin, with a heart considerably lightened, trotted her gently out into the high-road.

What the speculations of Mr. Evans and his man were does not matter. He kept to his part of the bargain, and so did Dick to his.

But when Turpin had given him the five guineas, he found that was nearly all the money he possessed.

This was a state of things which could not be permitted to continue.

"Gently, Bess," he said, as his mare made an attempt to break into a gallop, "gently, Bess. You shall not go fast to-night, if I can help it; and certainly not without there is some urgent reason for it."

It was clear, however, from the manner in which she moved, that Bess felt very little, if any, effects of her wound, which fortunately had happened where it would not interfere with her motion.

Her rider would only allow her to proceed at a very gentle pace.

Money he had resolved to have, and an adventure, too, and he would not be baulked of either, if possible.

He so went on for several miles.

The night was dark and cold, and as he got further and further into the country so did the coldness appear to increase.

The moon was not shining—or, at any rate, was not visible, though there were some indications of her presence behind a cloud on the eastern horizon.

The road was quite deserted, and Dick was beginning to despair of meeting any one that night, when the sharp strokes of a horse's hoofs beating upon the hard road met his ears.

He drew aside and waited.

The traveller, which he could tell immediately was a man mounted on a steed of good quality, came on at a rapid pace, so only a few minutes elapsed before he was up with him.

As soon as he saw his horse's head was on a level with him, Turpin darted out of his place of concealment with a cocked pistol in his right hand.

He galloped for a few yards side by side with the horseman, while he cried—

"Pull up your horse, sir. Halt! I say, and that at once, or you are a dead man. My finger is already on the trigger, and the muzzle of the pistol not more than a foot from your head. Halt, I say!"

Thus forcibly persuaded, and dreading to lose his life, the traveller, with a bitter oath, reined in his steed.

At the same moment he plunged his hand into the breast of his coat.

Turpin saw the movement, and before he could withdraw it, he clapped his pistol to his forehead, and cried—

"Move that hand, and I fire. Do you understand me? The muzzle is against your face: can you feel it?"

He pressed more heavily as he spoke, until the pistol made quite a dent in the traveller's forehead.

"Now," he continued, "you have a weapon of some sort or other handy to your grasp. Fling it in the roadway this moment if you wish to preserve your life."

"You have the advantage of me," cried the traveller, "and I am forced to submit. Besides, I place too high a value on my life to throw it away upon the high-road."

"I am glad to hear it," said Turpin. "Down with your weapon! Remember, I shall keep a sharp eye upon you, and if I see anything that looks in the least suspicious, I fire—so I would advise you to be careful!"

The traveller could tell by the firm, cool, and decided way in which Turpin spoke that he was quite in earnest in what he said, so he, without further delay, drew a pistol from his breast, and immediately threw it in the road.

"Now the other!" cried Dick. "Quick! A couple

man like you would not think of travelling without a brace. Down with the other!"

The traveller gnashed his teeth, but he had no resource save to submit, so he threw down another pistol.

This showed Dick was quite right when he said a gentleman like him would not think of travelling with less than a brace.

"So far, sir, very good," said the highwayman. "Now, you will find it your best policy not to tamper with me. You are completely in my power, and if you do not wish to throw your life away, you will attempt no useless resistance, but hand me over whatever cash and valuables you have about you."

"You take this matter very coolly," said the traveller, with great difficulty controlling his anger.

"Very coolly," replied Dick, "and I trust you will be influenced by my example. It is so much better to carry out these little affairs quietly, and without making a disturbance."

"Curse your quietness. Here, take this, and be off."

The horseman held out at arm's length a good-sized purse, which Dick could see was tolerably well filled.

"I will take the purse," he said, "but as for being off, that is quite another thing. I shall want something more in remembrance of this pleasant interview before I go. Come, let me have your watch and chain and the appendages thereto. I am sure you carry one. Come, be quick!"

With another oath the traveller took off his watch and chain, and handed it to the highwayman, who then said—

"You may go now. Good evening, sir. I am much obliged to you, and I shall always look back to this meeting with gratification."

"Curse you, yes;" and as he uttered the words, the horseman stuck his spurs deeply into his steed's flanks, and galloped away.

With a gratified air, Dick Turpin felt his booty, and estimated its value by its weight.

"Not a bad commencement," he muttered; "but still not enough to be called a night's work. I must go on, there is plenty of time yet, and see what fate has in store for me."

Still he went slowly. There was no particular occasion for hurry.

Presently he saw before him some obstruction in the road, which a nearer approach and a closer observation showed him was a toll-gate.

It was closed.

He rode up to it gently, and the man came out of his wooden house and lazily swung open half the gate.

"Tuppence," he said, holding up a piece of white paper.

"Tuppence."

"Here you are."

"Why, this is half-a-crown."

"All right. Keep that on account of next time, for I may, perhaps, be in a hurry, and, if so, it won't do for me to have to wait while you fumble at the gate."

"Lor' bless you, your honour, no. I understands you. Long life to you. I'll take care you don't have to wait at my gate."

"All right," said Turpin. "Good night."

CHAPTER CCXLVIII.

A VERY REMARKABLE ADVENTURE BEFALS DICK TURPIN ON THE HIGH-ROAD.

It was always good policy for a highwayman to keep on good terms with the tollmen. They were in a position sometimes to render them a good deal of assistance.

This suffrage was in a general way easily obtained by behaving liberally to them.

Dick could mention more than one instance when he would have had much difficulty in eluding his pursuers, had it not been for a tollman hindering the officers two or three minutes while he undid the gate to allow them to pass through.

The speed of his mare was matchless beyond doubt, but then it had a limit, and, after awhile, her swiftness would abate materially.

Those behind might be indifferently mounted, but every now and then they would get more cattle, so it was only by stratagem that a highwayman had a chance of getting out of their clutches.

A delay of two or three minutes from any little circumstance, would be of immense importance.

After passing through the toll-gate, Dick still kept on towards the country and away from London, which was now about ten miles behind him.

The road was broad, level, and straight, and, when the moon broke forth, he was able to see a long way in advance.

In the far distance he could just see two tiny lights.

They were no larger than stars, or rather, looked like two glowworms.

Both were on a level with each other, and about equidistant.

Of course Turpin knew in a moment what those two lights signified.

A carriage was approaching.

If he had any doubt, the rumbling sound which soon followed would have convinced him, and, not only that, the lights, while preserving precisely the same position, continued to grow brighter and brighter.

Dick changed his mare's pace from a trot to a walk.

The carriage was coming at a very rapid rate, as though its inmates had some more than usual motive for travelling post haste.

But whatever their business might be, or however great a hurry they might be in, Dick resolved to stop them and exact a tribute.

And now the lamps shone very brightly, and showed him the forms of two steaming horses, who were harnessed to the carriage.

Dick had learned from experience that one of the most effectual methods of making the driver of a carriage stop his horses, was to fire a pistol in the air, and then cry out "Halt!"

This was the course he pursued on the present occasion.

"Bang!" went his pistol, with a report that echoed far and wide over the country, accompanied by a momentary flash of intense brilliancy, which revealed his form to the driver of the coach.

"Halt!" he cried. "Halt! or you are a dead man."

There is something remarkable about the word "halt!" Clearly enunciated, it seems to have a magical effect in arresting any one's progress.

In the present instance, its effect was heightened by the words which followed it.

The coachman stopped at once, and without any trouble brought his cattle to a standstill.

It almost seemed as though they understood the meaning of the abrupt tone of command.

The stoppage was immediately followed by a scream in a female voice, and before Turpin could reach the carriage, the door was thrown open, and a young lady alighted.

Dick could see at a glance that she was young, and, not only that, the moon's rays showed him that she was beautiful.

This was an action which astonished Dick not a little.

The young lady, the moment her feet touched the ground, ran towards him, and cried out, in the sweetest voice our hero had ever heard—

"Tell me—tell me! Who are you? What is your name? Tell me, I implore you! It is of the greatest importance to me. I guess it, but tell me your name."

She clasped her hands together as she spoke, and sank into a half-kneeling attitude.

Under the sudden impulse of the moment, Dick slipped off his mare, and tried to raise the young lady to her feet.

But she sank quite down into a kneeling posture, and said, anxiously—

"Tell me—tell me who you are! Do not delay, I pray you! Tell me your name!"

"I cannot refuse you," replied Turpin, "but I should first like to know your reasons for wishing to learn my name before I give it."

"No—no! that will take too long. No—no, tell me your name. Tell it me at once."

"Rise, then, to your feet. Let me assist you."

"Not until you have told me your name. I more than suspect who you are, but tell me—pray tell me for certain."

Dick hesitated.

In the first place, the whole transaction was of so extraordinary a nature, that he may be excused if he felt rather confused.

He was at a loss to understand what was meant.

When he had alighted and endeavoured to raise the young lady to her feet, he had released his hold of his mare's bridle, and she had, after straying a few paces onward, commenced cropping some of the short sweet grass which grew upon the roadside.

Dick had only given one glance at the carriage, the door of which had swung open.

That glance, however, had shown that it was occupied by some one, but whether male or female, he had not been able to determine.

All around was still.

The vague idea that this was some deep-laid scheme of his foes for his entrapment, glanced through his mind, but it was instantly dismissed.

He could see by the expression of the face of she who knelt before him, that she was in earnest, and that her position in life was such as to place her above joining in any scheme against him.

Besides, he could not believe that one so fair and candid-looking as she was, could be guilty of treachery towards him or any one else.

Something very urgent could alone have instigated her to do as she had done.

But what was it?

Dick was curious in the extreme.

It was useless to speculate.

The only means by which he could satisfy his curiosity would be by at once avowing who he was, and noting the effect the pronunciation of his name had upon her.

These thoughts passed with great rapidity through his mind, but during the time they occupied the young lady had renewed her entreaty.

The person in the coach had uttered some words, but what their import was, Dick neither knew nor cared.

His whole attention was absorbed by the singular behaviour of the beauteous being before him.

"My name," he said, "though I am quite at a loss to know why you wish to hear it, is John Palmer."

"John Palmer!" repeated the lady, in accents of the deepest disappointment. "Then all this time has been lost in vain—when time is so precious. But I made sure that you were the person I took you to be."

She accepted of Dick's aid to rise as she spoke.

"Surely, miss," said Dick, "after complying with your request, and telling you my name, you cannot, I should think, refuse to tell me for whom you took me."

"I took you for another."

"So I can readily judge; but what other? You have raised my curiosity excessively, and surely you will not refuse to gratify it?"

"I will tell you, sir, but pray let me return to my carriage, and resume my journey. Your surprise will doubtless be great—perhaps, even, you may be offended—but I took you for a celebrated character."

"Who, miss?"

"A highwayman."

"I do not scruple to avow that such is my profession."

"But the person I fancied you were is one who is justly entitled to be called the prince of highwaymen."

"And who may that be, with so enviable a title?"

"Richard Turpin."

Dick started, but he took off his hat, and made an elaborate bow, as he said:

"I am your humble servant."

"Ah! I was right, then. You deceived me before. Your name is not Palmer——"

"My name is Palmer, lady. I did not deceive you. I am known, however, not by that name, but the one by which you addressed me."

"All is well, then?"

"May I ask what is well?"

"You may. My behaviour seems incomprehensible and lunatic, no doubt, but it will all be explained."

Turpin bowed.

"I have heard that you have ever proved yourself a friend to the unfortunate. That you, although transgressing the laws, have atoned for many of those acts by deeds of mercy and goodness towards those who have been friendless and unprotected. Have I heard rightly?"

"It does not become any one to speak of himself," replied Turpin, "but I have certainly, as every man would, when I have seen the defenceless oppressed, interposed between them and the oppressor."

"I am right, then. I knew I was right. It was a fortunate chance that I should have met you. I was in hopes of doing so; something seemed to tell me that I should see you."

"But your journey?"

"There is no need of it."

"You have not explained yet."

"No, I have not; but I have a favour to ask of you, a great favour."

"Speak freely, and without fear."

"I am in distress, and require a strong hand to succour me—at least, not myself, but another."

"I am at your service," said Turpin. "In what way can I assist you?"

"Time is precious. I cannot tell you now. I had intended to go to London to find a friend there—a person with whom I am acquainted, but from whom I did not expect to gain what I wished. I was in hopes of finding you, and, having done so, I must beg of you to accompany me. Will you do so? At the first opportunity everything shall be explained."

Dick hesitated.

For the second time the thought had risen up in his mind that this was some deep-laid scheme for his apprehension; that the lady was only playing a part, and that he was about to follow her to his own destruction.

But, for the second time, one glance into her face was sufficient to dispel these half-formed suspicions.

He could not bring himself to believe that she could be guilty of such baseness.

She, with a woman's quickness, noticed his hesitation, and said:

"Do not fear to trust yourself with me. No harm shall come to you. Take my word for it."

"I will believe you."

"You may do so in safety. Assist me into the carriage where my attendant is waiting for me, and you can either enter or——"

"I will mount and ride by the side of the carriage," said Turpin. "But to what place are you going to take me?"

"Not far from here. You will accompany me, will you not?"

"I will, but yet, believe me, I should like to know the nature of the service which you require me to perform, and how far are you going to take me?"

"It will require too much time, and there is none to lose. All shall be made clear to you, and the distance is only trifling. I had done little more than commence my journey to London."

As she spoke, Turpin assisted her to enter the carriage, and closed the door.

Then, at her request, he bade the driver turn the horses round, and go back the way he had come.

A faint chirping whistle brought Black Bess to his side in a moment.

He vaulted into the saddle and had fixed himself in the seat before the coachman had obeyed the order which had been given him.

CHAPTER CCXLIX.

IN WHICH THE READER, AS WELL AS DICK TURPIN, BEGINS TO SEE THE LIGHT.

MUCH wondering what all this meant, and how the most singular adventure he had ever met with would terminate, Turpin trotted gently at the side of the carriage, accommodating the speed of his own mare to that of the horses who drew it.

That his curiosity was raised to the utmost pitch, the reader can doubtless readily believe, and he was anxious in the extreme to have his bewildering speculations set at rest.

There was something so mysterious about the manner of the young lady, and withal something so romantic, that he felt himself irresistibly attracted towards her.

In the positions they then occupied, conversation was difficult, and almost impossible, as the combined sound of the rumbling of wheels and clattering hoofs drowned all words not uttered in a very loud tone.

From time to time, however, the highwayman cast a glance into the interior of the vehicle at the lady who had made the strange supplicatory request to him.

He noticed opposite to her was a woman of about thirty

years of age, and who was the attendant who had been alluded to.

In this way upwards of half-an-hour elapsed, during which about four miles had been travelled.

At the end of that time they came in sight of a large white stone building—a kind of residence common enough in the present day, but not so then.

On the right-hand side of the road were some large iron gates, and, adjoining them, a kind of keeper's lodge.

At the request of the young lady, Dick rode forward a little, and pulled the handle of a bell.

The summons was replied to by a man, who, as soon as he saw the carriage through the bars, threw the gate open without delay.

They then entered, taking their way along a broad, smooth, gravelled path, which wound about in a serpentine fashion.

They did not, however, continue to keep to this path, but took one that branched off to the left, leading, Dick afterwards found, to the back part of the mansion.

The night was now, of course, very far advanced, and as he looked up to the house, both at the back and front, Dick could perceive no signs of any one inhabiting it.

From one window alone, and that was high up in the building, streamed forth a faint light.

The carriage stopped before a small door, which looked like a private entrance to the mansion.

Finding that they were to go no further, Dick Turpin dismounted, and, opening the door, assisted the lady and her attendant to alight.

The former spoke.

"Will you enter?" she said, "and then I will give you the explanation which I am sure you must be anxious to receive."

"Willingly," said Dick, "but"——

"But what?"

"My mare."

"She will be quite safe. Leave her, and James will take her, and see that she is put in the stable and made comfortable."

"Exactly. Still"——

"You hesitate. Speak freely, I beg."

"I cannot feel safe or comfortable unless I know that my mare is in perfect safety. I mean without I see her stabled with my own eyes."

"Ah! yes," said the lady, "I have heard as much, and also that you love Black Bess as you would love a mistress."

"You have heard correctly," said Turpin. "I do love her. I am grateful to her because she has saved my life upon more than one occasion."

"I should much like to hear the story of your life, but this is neither the place not time for you to tell, or for me to hear it. James will show you to the stables, and then bring you back to me."

Turpin bowed.

James was the name of the man who had driven the carriage.

He had descended from his seat, and when the young lady had finished speaking, he said—

"Will you take the bridle of your mare and follow me?"

The highwayman replied by at once leading his mare forward.

He had not, however, to go many yards.

The stables were close at hand.

James left the horses in the carriage, and opened the door to allow Dick to enter.

The stable was large and well fitted up.

It was divided into many stalls, in which were several horses, which a glance showed to be of first-rate quality.

Dick, as usual, saw his mare littered down and fed.

He also conciliated the coachman by making him a present of a crown piece, and requested him to finish properly attending to her.

He then followed him from the stable, full of impatience to learn the sequel of this adventure.

As he went out, however, he carefully noted all the different objects around him, and impressed their different bearings upon his memory, so that he might, should occasion require it, be able to find his way alone and unguided.

The door leading into the mansion before which the carriage had stopped, was ajar.

James pushed it wide open, and led Dick along a passage which was dark as the grave.

But its termination was soon reached, and then Dick was ushered into an apartment to which we must devote a line or two of description.

It was spacious, and furnished with massive oak.

The walls, too, from floor to ceiling, were composed of panelled oak.

Opposite the door by which he entered was the fireplace, in which several logs of wood were blazing.

This was the only illumination in the apartment, but it was quite sufficient. The wood was dry, and of a resinous quality, so that it emitted a brilliant and ruddy light.

It revealed every object within the apartment, and, had there been a lamp, it would have been of no service, for its rays would have been quite lost.

Seated by the fire, in an oak chair of an antique fashion, was the mysterious lady.

She rose, however, as soon as Turpin made his appearance, and, with well-bred ease, requested him to seat himself in a chair that had been placed upon the opposite side of the fireplace to that where she was sitting.

She had taken off her travelling apparel, and now appeared attired in a much more bewitching manner.

Her dress was composed entirely of black serge, cut low in the neck, with short sleeves, the arms being left bare.

They were of dazzling fairness, and so, too, were her neck and shoulders—they seemed, perhaps, even more so by the contrast which her sombre habiliments presented.

Yet that fairness, great as it was, had nothing unhealthful in it. It was a pure, clear white, relieved upon the cheeks by a faint rosy tinge, which quite took off all appearance of ghastliness or disease.

Dick had thought, when he had seen her in the open air, and in the partial darkness, that he had never seen a face so purely beautiful.

Her beauty, indeed, was of that kind which the old Grecian sculptors so much delighted to delineate.

But the living original possessed something which the other lacked.

It is true the marble accurately represented the lovely contours of the cheeks and chin and curving lips, and displayed the perfect form of the square forehead, but the eyes were absent.

The eyes, the most beautiful feature in her face.

No marble could imitate them, or convey an idea of what they were like.

They were intensely black—jet black—large, full, and languishing.

Her eyebrows, too, were black, and strongly pencilled—indeed, some critics would have considered them a blemish to that otherwise faultless face.

Dick looked at her entranced, and the longer he gazed, the more apparent did her bewitching loveliness become.

For a few seconds after he had seated himself, the silence was unbroken.

Each were engaged in perusing the lineaments and noting the appearance of the other.

Dick would have spoken earlier than he did, only he knew not what to say, and whether he should be doing right by taking upon himself to speak first.

A certain amount of embarrassment could have been detected by a close observer in the lady herself.

It was evident she wished to utter something, but knew not how to begin.

The fire blazed and cracked, while a large, old-fashioned clock, which stood in a recess by the side of the grate, sent forth a monotonous tick—tack, which made itself plainly heard in the silence.

The singularity of his position had a strange effect upon Dick.

He began to ask himself whether what was taking place around him was real, or whether it was simply a creation of his disordered fancy.

It seemed unreal.

There was something altogether out of the usual course of things from first to last in the whole affair.

He was about to break the silence, which had begun to oppress him terribly, when fortunately the lady, making a strong effort, spoke.

"Sir," she said, "you have been kind enough to accede to my request so far, and I sincerely thank you. A young lady, fair, rich, and beautiful, has, by a series of cruel in-

cidents, been placed in a position of the utmost distress. She is alone, and with but one friend in the whole world, and that friend, with all the will, has not the power to aid her. She requires a strong hand, a willing heart, and a powerful mind to free her from the meshes which threaten to involve her in destruction. These words, I doubt not, will furnish you with the clue you desired to have, but, before I enter into particulars, you must take a glass of wine. You must be cold and exhausted after your ride. It was remiss of me. I ought to have mentioned it before."

"Pray do not apologize or put yourself to any trouble upon my account."

"But you will take some wine," and, as she uttered the words, the lady rose to her feet and walked to the opposite side of the apartment, where stood an old oak buffet.

Opening one of the doors, she produced a couple of bottles and a glass, which she placed upon a salver and set down on the corner of the table where Dick was sitting, and within reach of his hand.

She, however, poured out a glass of wine, and pressed her strange guest to partake of it.

Of course, Dick complied.

It would have been churlish to refuse, and besides, he felt that a glass of generous liquor would be acceptable—for his hurts made him more susceptible of fatigue than usual.

The lady reseated herself, and Turpin turned round and leaned back in the chair with more ease and freedom than he had before done.

When she had spoken of the distressed lady, and said that she had but one friend, and that one not able to assist her in the manner in which she needed assistance, Dick was at no loss to come to the conclusion that the friend alluded to was no other than herself.

That he had determined to render all the aid that lay in his power, the reader can easily believe—since such a resolution accords so well with his character.

He waited, therefore, to be placed in possession of such facts as would enable him to act.

CHAPTER CCL.

DICK TURPIN FINDS A CONNEXION BETWEEN THE LADY'S STRANGE STORY AND THE MYSTERIOUS MURDER IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

"I HAVE so much to tell you," began the young lady, "and so many facts rise up in a moment in my mind, that I hardly know where to begin, or how to tell you what I wish to communicate."

"I hope you will believe, lady, that I am most desirous of rendering your friend all the assistance in my power."

"Many thanks. For my own part, I never doubted your willingness."

"Indeed!"

"I judged you by what I had heard recounted of you, and I find that I was right."

"Do not compliment me. I am the worst in the world to bear anything of the kind. I always feel uncomfortable."

"But they are merited."

"No matter, the effect is just the same; but, lady, you spoke just now of not knowing where to commence your history. Will you pardon me for making a suggestion?"

"What is it?"

"I think, for me to be thoroughly useful—to know how to act—I ought to know all. I think, then, that you had better begin at the beginning, and tell me all the particulars which you can recollect."

"Well, perhaps it will be best," said the lady, musingly; "and yet"——

"Yet what?"

"No matter, I will do as you desire, and then you will be better able to come to a conclusion."

"At last," thought Dick to himself, "I shall know the meaning of this most incomprehensible affair."

The lady was silent for a moment or so, during which period of time she seemed to be running over in her mind what she was going to say.

At length, in a clear voice, and with a distinct articulation, she began as follows—

"This house—or hall, as it is called—in which we are now sitting, is the property and residence of William Winberry, whose father was one of the richest merchants the whole city of London could boast.

"When a comparatively young man, he gave up business and retired here.

"He was then a widower, and it was the recent death of his wife, of whom he was very fond, that had the greatest share in inducing him to withdraw from the world.

"He had one child, a son—the same, indeed, who now owns the hall—the William Winberry of whom I spoke.

"He remained in a state of absolute retirement from the world for a space of three years, and he married again.

"What were the precise reasons which led him to take this step I know not, nor does it matter in the least to what I have to say."

Dick bowed assentingly, though he mentally took a note of the circumstance, for he thought it not unlikely, trivial as it seemed, that the event would turn out to be of importance in the end.

The lady continued.

"I perhaps ought to tell you that this second wife was above him in station, but not in wealth. She was, indeed, an earl's daughter, and the riches of the merchant widower doubtless swayed her choice.

"However, be that as it may, they were married.

"One child, a son, was the fruit of this union.

"It seems very strange for me to relate to you a private family history, but it is necessary that you should know all this. I can trust to your honour to divulge none of it."

"You can," said Turpin, "and it rejoices me to find that there is at least one person in the world who has not a bad opinion of me."

"There are many, I can assure you, who, while regretting that you have chosen the mode of life you have, yet cannot withhold their admiration of the many good deeds you have performed."

"Let us return to the subject under discussion," said Dick, who hated to hear anything in his own commendation.

"You have a noble heart, and that is why you wish your deeds of good to be unnoted. I have seen nothing of you until to-night, but you have at present fully borne out the opinion I have formed of you, and the more I speak to you, the more inclined do I feel to trust you, and the more persuaded am I that the step I have taken, though an extraordinary one, will be fully justified in the end."

"Proceed, lady," said Turpin.

"I will not delay you any longer than I can possibly help. Mr. Winberry, then, lived as unhappily with his second wife as he had done happily with his former one. They were quite unsuited to each other.

"His wife was haughty, proud, cruel, and vindictive to all save one, and that one was her son, who inherited much of her fierce patrician disposition.

"He was, as well, of a most overbearing temper, and passionate in the extreme, but his mother, so far from checking this vicious inclination, fostered it, and allowed his passions, whether for good or evil, to have full and unrestrained play. The latter predominated.

"The first-born son, William, was the very opposite. He resembled his mother, whom his father had so dearly loved, not only in his countenance, but also in his mental composition, though he united with it much that his father possessed.

"In proportion as the gulf of estrangement between the husband and his second wife widened, so did the bands of sympathy draw the father and his first-born together—they were inseparable.

"It would seem that the second wife noticed this, and took alarm at it, for her demeanour suddenly, and without any perceptible cause underwent a total change.

"Her son, too, whom she had named Adrian, curbed, to a great extent, the violence of his nature.

"His mother grew suddenly attentive to, and fond of her husband, but whether his own feelings changed is more than I am able to tell you.

"I ought not to omit to tell you that Adrian, the second son, was fearfully jealous of his elder brother, and hated him with the bitterest rancour.

"Things were in this state, when the second wife died of a contagious disorder, which was then decimating the the neighbourhood.



[DICK TURPIN FINDS ELLEN AND TOM DAVIS DESTITUTE AND IN DISTRESS.]

"To this scourge her husband himself fell a victim very soon after—so soon, indeed, that both were buried in one grave.

"A will was left.

"Mr. Winberry had had it drawn up with scrupulous care by a London attorney, and no one in the house was acquainted with the nature of its contents.

"There was in the chamber in which Mr. Winberry slept a cabinet of curious and antique manufacture, in which papers of value were deposited, such as mortgages, securities, and such like documents, for though he had retired from business, Mr. Winberry frequently lent money out on interest.

"The day came upon which the will was to be read.

"The keys were handed to the lawyer, who at once advanced to the cabinet I have spoken of, and in which he stated the will of the deceased had been deposited with his own hands.

"But upon looking, to the consternation of all present, no will was to be found.

"The circumstance of its having been stolen—for that was the conclusion unanimously come to—was puzzling. What motive could there have been for the deed? Surely the younger brother could have had no hand in its removal, for, of course, in the event of the father dying intestate, the whole of the property, landed or personal, would deseend to the eldest son.

"Who could have been interested in purloining it?

"The only person was the eldest son, William, to whose advantage it would be to destroy the will, if the property had been bequeathed to the younger born.

"But those who knew the deceased felt certain this was not the case. In the first place, William was known to be too highminded and honourable a young man, and too fond of his father to attempt such a deed, and, in the second, the deceased had not sufficient love for Adrian to deprive William of his rights.

"It was a very remarkable and perplexing occurrence was it not?"

"Very, indeed," replied Turpin, whose interest was

increasing every moment the beautiful being before him spoke

"However, it turned out to be of no importance. Indeed, the lawyer offered an opinion relative to its disappearance different to any that had been yet expressed.

"He stated that the deceased had caused to be prepared a will, which he had seen witnessed, and which he then held in his possession.

"An exact copy of this will had been given to the deceased, who had had it deposited in the cabinet where he had gone to look for it."

"That was the copy, then?"

"Precisely. The lawyer then took from his portfolio of papers the original document, which he proceeded to read to those present.

"By this will, the bulk of the property was left to William, the eldest son. To Adrian was bequeathed an annual income of eight hundred pounds, sufficient to keep him in affluence, but no more.

"There were other minor bequeathments, but those do not matter in the least.

"After reading the will, the brothers met and quarrelled. What passed between them no one knows; their interview had no auditor.

"However, Adrian left, and went no one knew whither.

"After a time, William married. I speak now of the present owner of the hall—the eldest son.

"In due course a child was born, but, in giving it birth, the mother, who was of a very delicate constitution, lost her own life.

"This child was a girl.

"Her father never married again, consequently the girl, who is now about my own age, is the sole heir to the wealth and the estates."

"I presume, then," said Dick, "that this is the friend of whom you spoke?"

"It is."

"And what is her name?"

The question seemed a strange one for Dick to ask, and one that was of little importance.

But it was not so.

He had a motive for asking the question, as will presently be apparent.

He even anticipated the reply which would be given him, and he evinced no astonishment when the lady replied—

"Blanche!"

CHAPTER CCLI.

DICK TURPIN IS ABLE TO IMPART SOME IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO THE MYSTERIOUS LADY.

From a very early stage in the story the lady was relating—from, indeed, the time when the two brothers had been mentioned—Dick had felt the conviction creep over him that there was some kind of connexion, near or remote, between what he then heard and what he had witnessed during his brief sojourn in the reputed haunted house in Birdcage-walk.

The circumstance of the double marriage—the unhappy wife—the two brothers—and, last of all, the name of the girl proving to be Blanche, all tended to fix that conviction in his mind.

But it was a most wonderful coincidence.

As yet, however, he stood but on the threshold of the knowledge that he was about to be put in possession of—all that he had heard was but the prologue to the drama—the heart of the mystery had yet to be laid bare.

Nothing that he had listened to had enabled him to come to a right understanding of the mysterious events which had so puzzled him.

The lady saw nothing particular in Dick's asking the name of the daughter. She evidently looked upon it as a mere commonplace casual question, for she expressed no surprise respecting it.

She continued.

"After the departure of Adrian, nothing was heard of him for a long—long time. William lived here the peaceable and contented life of a country gentleman, and spending all the time he possibly could with his daughter Blanche, upon whom he doted with a double love—that which he had borne for her mother and that which was her own.

"Had you searched the whole kingdom through, you would not have found a happier and more peaceful home than this.

"Its felicity was doomed to be interrupted.

"Three months ago—or it may be longer—the younger brother Adrian made his appearance at the hall.

"He had an interview with William in the library, which was his favourite apartment when indoors, and he came forth with compressed lips and flashing eyes.

"Quite by an accident, I sometime afterwards learned the substance of what had passed between them.

"Large as was the annual income settled upon him by his father, Adrian had squandered it, and was chin-deep in difficulties. Indeed, his annual revenue for several years to come had been forestalled, and he had nothing whereon to live.

"Under these circumstances he had applied to William—not like one who requires assistance and would be grateful for it, but with the endeavour to extort money from him—to wrest away that which belonged by law to him and to no other.

"William, although rich, was a careful man. I do not mean that he was niggardly, but he was not improvident; indeed, he not only hated that, but all who were guilty of reckless extravagance.

"He dismissed his brother, therefore, who departed, and the slight cloud which he cast upon the happiness of those at the hall passed away, and things resumed their usual course.

"But the effects of his visit were soon apparent.

"Like some dark cloud on the horizon of a pure blue sky, prognosticating that ere long the bright heavens were to be clouded as with a pall and a storm break forth, so did his appearance foretell disaster and misery to this happy home.

"About a month after his visit, and when that ill-omened event had almost been forgotten, Blanche disappeared."

Dick nodded his head.

It was just what he expected.

"In vain was the closest search everywhere made for her. Her father was like one frantic. All their efforts, however, proved abortive—not the slightest trace of her was to be found.

"It was then that I heard of the interview, and what had taken place between the half-brothers.

"In a moment I connected Adrian with the abduction, though what was his motive for it I was not able to hazard a guess.

"William Winberry, her father, instituted a most vigorous search in every direction, placing himself always at the head.

"One morning, and that is about six weeks ago, he went out at the head of one of the excursions. He was mounted on horseback, and somehow or other he got separated from his companions.

"He never returned.

"You may guess this double blow plunged the whole household into the deepest grief, for William and his daughter were universally beloved for their good qualities of head and heart.

"Rewards were offered and men sent out, and every day some intelligence was hoped for and expected, but, alas! those hopes and anticipations were doomed never to be realized. Each night only brought us the tidings of a day of disappointment.

"And so things have gone on up to the present moment. I think I have told you that Blanche is my cousin. Such is scarcely the case, but we are distantly related to each other, and we fixed upon that as being both convenient and friendly.

"Between Blanche and myself there has always existed a very warm attachment, and you may think how much all these terrible occurrences have disturbed me. There is no one in the mansion save myself who is able to undertake the conduction of affairs.

"Nor have I any person to consult with, for, with the exception of the two persons I have named, I have not a relative in the world.

"I have done all in my power, and failed.

"What to attempt next I knew not.

"Suddenly, I remembered having heard of you, and how, though you and the law were at war, you had done many a good action.

"I also heard how successful you were in what you undertook, and how the very boldness with which you usually set about things generally brought success with it.

"As soon as the idea seized me, I had the horses put in the carriage, and confided my scheme to the person who was with me, and who is the personal attendant of Blanche, and also to the steward, who, for once in his life, played the part of coachman.

"Upon both these you can rely.

"I thought of your perilous position.

"I ought to tell you now that I set out with a double intent.

"I went towards London in the hope of meeting with you, but had I not have done so, I should have applied to some of the officials of the state.

"I chose night for making the journey because that was the time when I knew I had the best chance of meeting with you.

"Fortunately I have met you, and now I think I have given you the clue to all."

"You have, lady," said Turpin.

"And do you quite understand?"

"I think so, and, more than that, that something more than chance conspired to bring about our meeting."

"What mean you?"

"In the first place, it was a remarkable thing that I should be upon the road to-night. Had I listened to the urgings of a friend, I certainly should not have been."

"Indeed! then I have cause to be doubly thankful."

"You count, then, upon my co-operation?"

"Pardon me if I say I do."

"And you are quite right, lady. I would run any risk—lay down my life, even—should it be necessary to render a service to yourself, or any one who was dear to you."

There was a solemn impressiveness in the manner this speech was uttered, which allowed no doubt of his sincerity.

"I believe you," said the lady, "and thank you at the same time. I had no one I could consult with, or probably they would have dissuaded me from the project I had formed, as savouring too much of the romantic. But it so happened that for once I was permitted to have my own way, and the result is your presence here."

"I can detect the finger of that mysterious thing called fate in all this," said Turpin, earnestly. "The coincidences are so extraordinary."

"You spoke of coincidences before, but you did not explain yourself; pray do so now."

"I will. I have some tidings to communicate to you."

"Let me hear them—pray let me hear them. Do not keep me any longer in suspense."

"You must prepare yourself for a shock."

"A shock?"

"Yes, and a severe one."

"Blanche"—

"Be calm. I have little, if anything, to tell you about her."

"It is William, then."

"Be calm, I beseech you. Promise me to be calm, and to hear with patience and fortitude that which I have to tell you."

"I will—I am."

"Excuse me, but the tones of your voice, and the manner in which you speak, belie your words."

"But I am calmer now, and if you do not wish my agitation to increase, keep me no longer in suspense, but let me know the worst at once."

"I will."

"Pray begin."

"Last night—or, I suppose more correctly, the night before last, for the present one is almost spent—I was pursued by my foes through St. James's-park.

"Anxious to find some hiding-place, I remembered that there was in Birdcage-walk a house which enjoyed the reputation of being haunted.

"With a good deal of difficulty, I made my way into it, but scarcely had I reached the hall than I heard a faint rattling sound, which in the silence that was everywhere around, was very audible.

"Not knowing for a moment what it was, and anxious to ascertain, I ascended the stairs a little way, and crouching down, watched and waited.

"I soon found that the rattling sound was produced by a key being thrust into the lock of the front door.

"Much wondering who it could be at that ghostlike hour who was endeavouring to obtain an entrance into a house of so ominous a reputation, I looked more eagerly than before.

"The bolt of the lock, which seemed rusted with disuse, was obstinate, and the wards refused to act, but at length the door opened, and three men entered.

"Two were ordinary-looking personages, such as one might find in the streets of London at any moment.

"But the third person was very different.

"He was tall and stoutly built, but his figure was concealed by a long ample cloak, which added greatly to his height, and his features were concealed by a large broad-brimmed hat, which was pulled on as low over the brows as possible.

"Only the lower part of the face was left visible, and that was covered with shining black hair, so that, in point of fact, his features were invisible.

"This person called for a light as soon as he had closed and locked the door behind him, and one of the two men, who were evidently his servants or attendants, unmasked a dark lantern, and the whole party made their way across the hall to the foot of the staircase, which they began to ascend."

CHAPTER CCLII.

DICK TURPIN RELATES WHAT HE SAW AND HEARD IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the younger lady, with a plainly perceptible shudder. "How terrible! You fairly frighten me! What must have been your feelings to have seen three men in such a dreadful place at night? I should have swooned at once. Were you not frightened?"

"Well, hardly!" said Turpin, with a smile. "I am used to such adventures as those, and they have long since ceased to make any impression upon me."

"Is it possible? But pray continue. You have worked my interest up to the highest pitch."

"Can such a story have such an effect upon you?"

"How? What do you mean?"

"Simply that, so far as the incidents yet related have occurred, I think it the simplest thing in the world."

"Then you have had other adventures more terrible?"

"Oh! by far."

"I would give much to have them recounted to me."

"Would you, lady?"

"I would, indeed. It is a part of my nature to delight in all stories of the wild and wonderful, and especially is my interest excited when I know the marvellous occurrences to which I listen are truths."

"I see—I see. But pardon me, lady; let us confine ourselves to the matter we have in hand. It is, I can assure you, and as you will find in the sequel, a very serious one."

"Go on, I pray you."

"Some time, perhaps, an idle hour may be found in which I can relate to you some of the adventures you wish to hear—but let us leave that now."

"With all my heart."

"Seeing, then, that it was the intention of the three men who had entered the haunted house, to ascend the stairs, I slowly and stealthily went up before them.

"There was a thick coating of dirt and dust upon the stairs which made my footsteps inaudible, or nearly so. At all events, what little sound I made was effectually drowned by the noise made by those following me, who did not attempt to keep silence, and the manner altogether in which they had acted, convinced me that this was by no means their first visit to the haunted house.

"I think I should have told you that the house in question has been deserted for many years."

"I know the place well."

"Indeed?"

"When in London, I have had it pointed out to me, and have never looked up at its gloomy walls and dirt-begrimed windows without a sensation of dread and undefined apprehension creeping over me."

"Such a feeling is only natural to sensitive organizations. But to resume. I preceded them up the stairs

in the manner I have described, until I reached the commencement of the third flight of stairs.

"The three men paused upon the landing below me. That is to say, upon the second floor of the house.

"Of course, I did not go any higher, but stopped at once—for I felt extremely curious to know what was their business there at such an hour, and surrounded with so much mystery as they evidently were.

"By the aid of the lantern, which one of the men carried, I could see that several doors led from this landing, either into apartments or corridors.

"Before one of these doors they paused, and the one in the cloak, after feeling in his pocket, produced a key.

"With this he unlocked the door and passed through it, followed by his two companions.

"They did not close the door after them, but left it ajar.

"And then arose a succession of shrieks, so shrill and ear-piercing, that I felt confident they came from a woman's lips, had not a few words dropped by the men let me know it was a man."

"A man!" ejaculated the lady, as a sudden suspicion glanced into her mind; "a man?"

Up to this point in Dick's wondrously interesting narration, she had not spoken a word. All her faculties were absorbed in that of listening. She had sat with wide-open eyes and parted lips devouring his words.

It was with an effort that she asked the question.

"Yes, a man," replied Dick, "but pray do not interrupt me. I would rather you listened patiently to all I said. When I had finished, you would then be better able to draw your own conclusions."

"I should—I should."

"As I told you, then, they left the door ajar, never dreaming for a moment that there was any other living being in the house beside themselves.

"I waited a moment, in order to make sure they had fairly entered; and, as I heard the sound of voices, I descended the stairs and approached the partially-opened door.

"At first I saw nothing, and the import of the words which now came distinctly enough to my ears, was, that there was an old man confined in the apartment—that the three persons I had seen enter were his enemies. Moreover, I learned their purpose. One, who by his deep voice I recognised as the stranger in the cloak, was endeavouring both by threats and persuasions, to induce him to sign a deed which would transfer the chief part of his property to him."

"Good heavens!"

"Calm yourself—pray calm yourself."

"I am. But pray go on."

"The chief argument used to persuade the prisoner to accede to the terms he wished was that his daughter, who was also held a prisoner, should be restored to him."

The lady clasped her hands together with awe as she heard these words, and then she cried—

"His daughter! Tell me her name. Did you hear it mentioned? If you did, tell it to me. Pray tell it to me at once."

"I must again ask you to calm yourself," said Turpin, drawing his chair closer towards her. "I must again ask you to be calm; and, as I before said, prepare yourself for the worst."

"The worst?"

"Even so. Doubtless you now comprehend the motive of my apparently objectless question of the name of Mr. Winberry's daughter?"

"I fear I do."

"The name was the same."

"Blanche?"

"Yes."

"My heart told me so! my heart told me so! But continue, pray continue."

"Willingly. I would rather you had listened calmly to the end."

"I will do so, I assure you I will do so, if you will only resume."

"I may as well tell you that when I had stood at the door a little while listening, I changed my position, so that I was able not only to hear, but also to see what was going forward.

"The first thing, then, that met my eyes was the figure of an old man. His face was wrinkled and careworn, and he had about him the appearance of extreme age, yet I could tell that it was permature.

"This old man was much emaciated.

"He was held down in a chair by the two men.

"The dark lantern I have mentioned had been placed upon the table, and the door opened. It was from the light from this which enabled me to see that which I describe.

"I did not at first catch a glimpse of the one who wore a cloak. The door hid him, but presently he stepped forward and came into full view.

"I could, however, see but little more of him than I had seen before. The large cloak still enveloped him, and he still kept the hat drawn down closely over his brows.

"The lower part of his face was quite hidden by the dense mass of hair which grew about it.

"I could, though, see a little more than I had seen before, for I was able to trace a faint resemblance between him and the old man sitting in the chair."

"Mer——"

"One moment," said Dick, interrupting the lady as she was about to speak. "The one in the cloak placed upon the table a properly drawn-up deed, and wanting only a signature to complete it, in which was assigned the whole of the property the old man possessed.

"In return for signing this document, he was to receive his freedom and be restored to his daughter Blanche, as well as have a certain sum settled upon him for life.

"Some conversation then ensued between them, the one in the cloak striving to bring the other to his desires.

"The old man, however, used some words which still ring in my ears. I will repeat them even as I heard them. They were these—

"'We are brothers, but, thank heaven, the same mother did not bear us. Mine died, and when our common father took another bride, he little dreamt that he was warming a serpent in his bosom, but so it was.'"

"He said those words?"

"He did; but listen, I beseech you. After a great deal of hesitation, the old man consented, for his daughter's sake, to sign the deed.

"Fain would I, had it been in my power, have interposed to save him to prevent this consummation. But how was I to do so? I feared some ill and treachery lurked beneath his words; but I ask again what could I do? In brief, the old man seized the pen which was temptingly offered him, and signed the deed."

"Never!"

"He did. But listen further. Scarcely had he finished the last stroke, than the man in the cloak drew, with the rapidity of lightning, a pistol from his breast, and placing it against the old man's head, fired."

The lady uttered a piercing shriek, but by a wonderful effort of strength she controlled herself, and requested Turpin to continue.

"The report from the pistol sounded with startling loudness through the silent mansion.

"But the deed was so unexpected upon my part, and so suddenly performed, that I was for the space of about ten seconds, positively deprived of motion.

"It is hard to say how long this would have continued, but I was doomed to receive another surprise.

"Some heavy blows were struck upon the front door.

"I have told you that I was pursued, that I had entered the haunted house in the hopes of escaping from my pursuers. I fancied I had been unperceived, but these sounds seemed to show that somehow or other they had got upon my track.

"I should have darted forward to the old man's assistance had not this occurred, but as it was, I saw that I could not aid him, and that my own safety depended upon instant flight.

"The manner in which the blows were struck upon the front door were sufficient to show me that it was intended to break it down."

CHAPTER CCLIII.

DICK TURPIN SETS OUT FOR LONDON TO GAIN ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RESPECTING THE MURDER.

"This is indeed a fearful tale!" said the young lady. "It approaches a termination. Pray allow me to conclude it."

"Go on, sir! I can see the hand of Providence. The guilty will be yet confounded!"

"I trust so! The heavy blows upon the door discomposed the men quite as much or more than they did me. I could tell that by their hurried movements. I was, however, compelled to seek my own safety by instant flight, so I sprang up the stairs. Had I been found where I was, I should, in all probability, have been implicated in the murder, and I should have had great difficulty in clearing myself of the charge.

"Besides, my liberty was already forfeit, and had I been captured my death would have been the inevitable result.

"The interruption was a most inopportune one. Had it not been for those heavy blows, I should have sprung into the room to the old man's assistance, though I fear I could have rendered him but little aid. The pistol was placed in contact with his ear, and the discharge which followed could not have been otherwise than fatal.

"It has been my lot to witness many a cold-blooded murder, but I can say I never saw one so awful as that. I never for one moment dreamt that a human being could have acted with so much perfidy."

"Oh, it is horrible—most horrible!" exclaimed the young lady, who, prepared as she had been by Dick's words, had sat stupefied with terror from the time the revelation had been made. "It is most horrible!"

"Listen! I sprang up the stairs and gained the roof. What took place afterwards I cannot tell, nor whether the murderers were arrested. I was fortunate enough to make my way over the house-tops and to enter a window, and thence I descended into a street, having escaped the great peril with which I was so imminently threatened.

"From that time until the present moment I have heard nothing more of the extraordinary affair of which I was a witness. You will not, I fancy, be at any loss to connect it with what you have related to me!"

"I can do so easily enough! You overcome me. I am bewildered at the strange combination of incidents, producing such wonderful coincidences. It seems beyond belief!"

"It does indeed!"

"Let me think—let me try to think!"

As she spoke, the lady let her head fall upon her hands, or rather, she clasped her hands over her head in the manner of one who wishes to shut out from contemplation all external objects, and whose desire it was to concentrate the whole power of thought.

Turpin was silent.

The fire had burned down and its ruddy light had faded away. Only occasionally came a fitful flash which illuminated the apartment with a transient brightness, leaving it in deeper darkness than before.

The wood logs had burned down to a red heat.

The wierdlike nature of the scene pressed heavily upon Dick. It was in vain he tried to shake off the impression.

He, too, tried to think, and to shut out his strange fantastical surroundings, likewise placed his hands over his eyes.

But soon the desire to know what the lady would say next rose paramount above every other consideration.

He did not move from his position, but shifted his fingers slightly so that he could see between them.

She had thrown herself back in the large chair in which she sat. Her sable robe could scarcely be distinguished from the dark oak of which it was composed, but her white and beautifully rounded arms shone out in all the greater contrast.

It was evident she was perplexed and overcome by the intelligence which Dick had just imparted to her.

At length, however, she roused herself.

Looking Turpin steadfastly in the face, and even in the gloom fixing her bright eyes upon him, she said—

"Tell me, if you can, what I had better do in all this. Your intellect is more calm and logical, your judgment is assisted by experience, and therefore, I look to you for advice. It was a girlish and romantic feat to set out in the hope of meeting with you, as I did, and how many would have laughed at me for it. Yet how strangely things are brought about. Apparently by the most unlikely means Providence brings about her ends. You, in all probability, are the only person who could supply me with the information for which I sought, and I meet with you and learn all!"

"I should think a parallel could scarce be found."

"And so should I. And now do not be offended if I make an appeal to you—if I entreat a favour."

"Fear not; speak freely and without hesitation."

"I am a poor, weak, inexperienced girl, left to the management of matters which might puzzle a wiser head than mine! I have confided in you. I have been impelled to do so by the good opinion I had formed of you. I shall have to place even more confidence in you than I have done hitherto. Let me appeal to your honour not to abuse it."

"Lady," said Turpin, proudly, "as you say, you do not know me. Had you done so, you would not have needed to make the prayer which has just passed your lips. Let this content you. Bad I may be in the opinion of many destitute of honour, but I can lay my hand upon my heart, and say that I never yet proved false to those who trusted me, or even abused the confidence of the defenceless. On the contrary, I have upon every occasion done all in my power, and run the greatest risks to defend them from their enemies."

"That is sufficient. After what you have just said, I shall feel no dread of placing the utmost confidence in you. I shall trust you utterly, and if you betray me, I am lost indeed."

"I shall say no more by way of protestation—prove me. Trust me freely, and do not fear for the result."

A smile of trusting innocence appeared upon the lady's lips.

"And now," continued Turpin, "let us consider that as settled, and proceed to a consideration of what had best be done."

"With all my heart. Pour out more wine, and I will stir the fire, or we shall be quite in darkness."

As she uttered the words, the young lady stirred the fire, and made it once more burst into a bright blaze.

Dick drank some more wine as he had been desired, for it was of such a quality as he had never before tasted.

"Now let me hear what you think had best be done. The sooner we decide and act upon our decision the better."

"True. In the first place, then, the newspapers cannot fail, I should think, to contain some details of the murder, which I feel certain was discovered."

"Well?"

"From them we shall, without doubt, be able to glean some additional information, which will, ten to one, point out a plan of action."

"So it would. I see that at once. How simple, and yet I never thought of that?"

"Nor did I until the moment before I spoke. I am glad you are of the same opinion. Have you a paper here?"

"No."

"That is awkward."

"Not very. Morning is now close at hand. Supposing I called up one of the domestics, and sent him off to London to glean all the news respecting the murder he could, and then to return with such papers as he might be able to obtain?"

"A good plan, but I have an amendment to propose."

"What is it?"

"This. Instead of sending one of the domestics, let me go. Pardon me for having the conceit to think that I could manage the business best."

"I do not doubt that, but think of the fearful risk of capture which you would incur. No, no. I shall not consent to that."

"Stay! stay! Take my word for it, it will be best. Then, as for risk and danger, that for both!"

Dick filliped his fingers as he spoke, to show the small amount of estimation in which he held them.

"You terrify me!"

"There is no cause for alarm."

"Do not say that. Were you situated differently to what you are, I should have proposed your going as by far the best, but, with a price upon your head, I cannot think of permitting it."

"I will promise you, not only for my own, but for yours and Blanche's sake, that I will use all possible caution, that I will run into no unnecessary danger, but that I will pry into the matter to the utmost, and return to you

without fail to-morrow night, bringing you full particulars."

The young lady's eyes glittered.

She admired true bravery and courage in a man above all other qualities, and her heart beat with a strange sensation of pleasure when she heard Dick talk so calmly and confidently, as he did, about his perilous enterprise.

The immediate consequences of his manner was that it begat a similar feeling of confidence in herself, and she no longer looked upon the excursion with the same amount of terror as she had at first beheld it with.

Dick was impatient to be gone. He explained to her the importance of his setting out at once, and if possible, of reaching London before daybreak.

He assured her that she might expect him at midnight, and, having done so, bade her farewell.

A quarter-of-an-hour afterwards he had mounted Black Bess, and was galloping rapidly along the high road in the direction of London.

But, coming to a rather steep hill, he drew rein and proceeded at an easier pace.

CHAPTER CCLIV.

DICK TURPIN FINDS ELLEN AND TOM DAVIS DESTITUTE AND IN DISTRESS.

"CAN all this be real!" said Dick, musingly, as Bess walked up the hill. "Can it all be real? Mine is a strange life; full of strange mutations and vicissitudes, but I have never yet met with any thing that will parallel this. The more I think upon it, the more wonderful does it seem! It is not so much the events themselves, but the manner in which they are connected together. How rare a chance was it that I should have overheard and witnessed what I did, and how much rarer was the chance which threw me in the way of the dear friend of the murdered man and Blanche—Blanche! I have long heard her name as yet, I wonder whether I shall ever see her! I trust so, for the interest I feel is no common one! But who is this mysterious and lovely lady, who has treated me as I have never before been treated? I have not heard her name as yet, but I shall soon! It cannot but be a pretty—but pshaw! let me leave that and turn to a consideration of the whole affair. I have not so clear a comprehension of it as I should like to have, but I shall soon resolve it, I make no doubt.

"In the first place there are two brothers, or rather half brothers, having the same father, but different mothers.

"The first of these, and by all accounts the better of the two, and the possessor of the estate and the principal portion of the wealth, marries, and has a daughter named Blanche. So much for him.

"Then there is the younger brother—the black sheep, and doubtless the cloaked stranger I saw in the haunted house, who wishes to obtain by force, or fraud, or both, that which is rightfully his brother's.

"He learns how the daughter, Blanche, is doated on, and that furnishes him with the key for action.

"She is mysteriously abducted.

"Then her distracted and almost maddened father is seized upon and confined in a solitary place, where the terms were made which I heard offered to him.

"It is truly a most delectable plot. For I feel sure I have arrived at the facts of the case. But how am I to frustrate it? I must defer that. Blanche—Blanche! What a pretty name! I must find out where her rascally relative has concealed her. Her father, alas, she will never see more, for that was her father I saw murdered in so cold-blooded a manner, I feel certain.

"For her sake I should like to bring him back to life, for if he loved her so devotedly as appears by all which I have heard, it is but reasonable to suppose that she loves her father in the same fashion. What, then, will be her grief when she learns he has fallen a victim to so horrible a fate! It will be great indeed.

"Adrian. That is the half-brother. I wonder whether I should recognize him again from what little I saw of his face? How did he get on, too, at the hands of the officers? That I know not. Perhaps both he and his two associates have been captured?"

The reader must not forget that Dick was quite in ignorance of what had happened after he crawled out on to the roof. He knew nothing of the manner in which the three villains endeavoured to elude the police, nor how the two subordinates were captured in the garden. He knew nothing of the flight of Adrian through the park, nor how he had thrown his bushy beard and moustache away, and lost his hat and cloak. With all this the reader had been made acquainted, being necessary to the due comprehension of the story; and not only that, how Adrian was mistaken for Turpin, and carried into the lodge at Newgate, where we last left him.

Had Dick been aware of all this, it would have saved him a vast deal of trouble, and made a material difference in his plans; but there was no ready means by which he could arrive at the information.

We must be content to follow him upon his hazardous journey to London, and trace, step by step, the various incidents which befell him.

As for the wound his mare had received, it was nothing more than skin deep, and would have got well if it had been left to itself, but under the judicious treatment which it had received it had got almost well.

From its position, too, it luckily did not interfere in any way with her motion.

On gaining the brow of the hill, therefore, she set off at a rapid rate, though Dick checked her speed to some extent, for he did not wish her to exert herself too much.

Soon in the distance he could perceive, like a huge black cloud, the city of London.

It was profoundly dark, being the hour before the dawn.

There was not much likelihood of his meeting with any one on his journey. Few people would be abroad. The late ones had retired, and the early ones had not yet risen.

By the time he reached the outskirts, however, a faint leaden tinge appeared in the eastern horizon, which each moment grew imperceptibly brighter.

The new day was coming.

Still full of meditation, the highwayman trotted on, and he did not allow his thoughts to pre-occupy him entirely, for ever and anon he cast rapid glances around, in order to make certain that no prying or unfriendly eyes were fixed upon him.

Brighter and brighter grew the long white streaks of light which shone in the east. Higher and higher it mounted in the sky, shedding upon all things a dim and cold gray light, and making the old fashioned houses, with their quaint roofs and overhanging stories, look spectral and ghostlike.

"Where will be my safest place, I wonder?" thought Dick. "The officers have now got a good scent of me, and the large reward which is offered for my apprehension, will preclude all hopes that they will relax their efforts. Where shall it be? I must put up somewhere. The proverb says, the nearer the church the further from heaven, and I believe it. Why, then, should not I be safest in the place of the greatest danger? They have turned me away from the White Horse, suppose I return there straight. I'll do it, let the risk be what it may. I shall feel safer there, and more at ease than I should anywhere else."

Having arrived by this train of reason at a decision, he at once turned in the requisite direction.

He slightly increased his speed, too, for he did not care to go to his place of refuge by daylight.

To get there as soon as possible he took several short cuts through narrow streets, where the poorest portion of the inhabitants of the city dwelt.

Suddenly he heard a faint, low cry.

It came from somewhere very close at hand, but ere he could think where, a thin wasted-looking figure bounded towards him, and clasping her hands together, pronounced his name.

He started with wonder, and under the impulse of the moment, reined in his steed.

The young girl who had spoken came still nearer.

At the first glance Turpin fancied he had seen her somewhere before, but where, he could not recollect.

Certainly, the circumstances under which the meeting took place, were widely different to the present.

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed the girl. "I have found you."

"Found me!"

"Can it be possible that you have forgotten me?"

The tone in which these words were spoken was touching, and heart-breaking in the extreme.

"Your voice and form seem familiar to me, but yet I am at a loss to recollect——"

"Alas! that it should be so. I had fancied—but no matter. I knew you in a moment."

"And I know you. Give me some clue to our former meeting."

"Do you remember the poor ill-used orphan apprentice whom you rescued and placed in a comfortable home?"

"Ellen?"

"That is my name."

"Impossible! This cannot be you in this condition; or if it is, by what chance do I find you destitute and in distress?"

"Alas—alas!"

"Speak. Tell me."

"It will take long. But are you still prepared to stand my friend?"

"Can you doubt it, my dear girl? I have often thought of you, and the recollection of the one good action I performed has solaced me in many a bitter hour."

Ellen sobbed, and tears ran down her cheeks.

"I am not alone in misfortune," she said. "Your old friend, Mr. Davis—my father, as I call him—is in the same abject condition."

"Tom Davis! Has evil come upon him?"

"Turn round. Look behind you. Do you see yonder doorstep?"

"I do."

"Do you see two figures, bowed down and helpless, with want and suffering, seated upon it?"

"I do—I do! But——"

"That, then, is the condition of your old friend and his worthy wife. Ought I to say that they owe all their troubles to you?"

Dick did not hear the latter part of this speech, or if he did, he affected not to do so.

He had sprang off his mare upon the first intimation that it was his old friend in such distress, and hastened towards him.

On one side of the street there was a strange looking archway, which had the appearance of leading into a large piece of ground, which was surrounded with a high stone wall.

Fitted in this archway was a ponderous door, thickly studded with large headed iron nails.

Two steps led up to this door, and seated upon them were two wretched beings.

They seemed to be absolutely perishing, either of hunger or starvation, perhaps from the two combined.

They were male and female, and both in a state of apathetic unconsciousness.

Faint as was the cold gray light which fell upon their faces, Dick Turpin was immediately able to recognise them as Mr. and Mrs. Davis, who had for so long kept the Hand and Keys at Hornsey Wood.

CHAPTER CCLV.

ELLEN FINDS SHE HAS NOT BEEN MISTAKEN IN HER EXPECTATIONS, AND DICK TURPIN, AFTER A LITTLE DELAY, REACHES WHITE HORSE YARD.

Dick Turpin was inexpressibly shocked when he beheld the condition to which his old and faithful friends had been reduced.

It was evident that they had been acquainted with gaunt poverty for some time.

The emaciation of their forms—the tattered state of their apparel, all showed that they had been, for months at least, exposed to the utmost degree of want and privation.

When Turpin last saw Davis few men could have been found to rival him in portliness of form, but now he was little more than a framework of bones, upon which the skin hung in large folds.

His hair had turned much whiter, and indeed, take him for all in all, he presented as true a picture of mendicancy as could well have been found.

Black Bess, as soon as her rider had alighted, followed him as a dog would, and when he stopped she stopped also a few paces behind him.

Ellen, too, approached.

"Tom," said Turpin, in a husky voice, "can it be possible that you are in such a state as this? Nay, do not hang your head, but look up and speak to me. I am your old friend Dick. Do you recollect me?"

Tom Davis had allowed his head to sink down upon his breast, and he made no effort to move it from that position.

He seemed as though he had totally succumbed beneath the weight of his misfortune, and nothing could rouse him.

When he uttered the words we have recorded, Dick accompanied them by placing his hand upon his old friend's shoulder. He shook him gently, too, and at length Tom looked up, with something like a look of recognition in his eyes and on his lips.

"Help us," said Ellen, whose youthful and vigorous constitution had enabled her to bear up against the privations they had suffered much better than her adopted parents. "Help us. We are perishing from cold and want of food. Help us. Pray help us."

"Help you?" ejaculated Turpin. "There is nothing on earth which I would do with greater willingness. I wish I knew how I could be of the most service to you. Let me think. Let me think."

"Only a copper, good sir—only a copper. Have pity upon us. We are hungry. Only a copper."

It was Mrs. Davis who spoke.

She had failed to recognise their preserver, and so made this appeal for alms in a whining voice.

The words cut Dick to the heart.

Between the old couple and himself there had for a long time existed a warm feeling; and those only who know what it is to be isolated can tell how much the highwayman thought of his friends, and how their manifest distress touched him.

"I must find you all a place of shelter, if I can," said Dick, addressing himself more to Ellen, who, however, listened eagerly to his words. "That is if it is in my power. I don't know where to turn to find what I require. Time, too, is precious. Chance must do it. I have trusted more than once before to its guidance, and I hope that it will once more befriend me."

"I knew you would help us," said Ellen, the tears streaming down her cheeks. "I have so longed that we might meet you, and I have my wish at last."

"You have," said Dick. "I wish that you had seen me sooner."

"I will tell you all that has happened since you saw us last at the first opportunity, but the condition of my father and mother demands attention first."

"You still call them by that title?"

"I do. My own parents I never knew—cannot in the least remember; but they have well supplied their place."

"I am glad to hear you say as much, and gladder still to find that you are grateful to them for it! But follow me. No, stay! I have a fresh idea! Here is a purse containing a large sum! Take it and make the best use of it. I should recommend you to take up your quarters at an inn for a little while, during which I will try if I cannot find you a place where you can permanently remain."

Ellen took the purse reluctantly.

Dick observed it.

"Believe me!" he said, "I have business of the greatest importance under hand, in which time is of especial importance! I have undertaken to perform something by a stated time! Do not, then, think me unkind if I do not set about it at once."

"But how shall we find you again?"

"I will tell you. Take a lodging at some quiet out of the way inn, and as soon as you have made the old folks comfortable, bend your steps to the 'White Horse,' in Drury Lane. You know the place?"

"Quite well."

"If you will recollect, I sent you there upon a former occasion. Find the same person you then spoke to, old Matthew, the landlord. Tell him where you are to be found, and I will come to you and take you to a place where the remainder of their days may be spent in peace."

"You are very—very kind!" sobbed Ellen.

"Pho—pho! Say no more, I beg! Do you quite understand the directions I have given you?"

"Quite."

"That is well, then, or rather all will be well, if you will carry them out. Now, farewell! It will not be long before you see me again! Farewell!"

"Farewell, Tom!" he added, making a last effort to rouse his old friend. "Farewell!"

But the attempt, like the preceding ones, was a failure.

With a deep sigh Dick turned round and mounted his mare, after once more bidding Ellen good-bye.

This little incident did not occupy much time, but still the dawn had now fully come, and distant objects could be tolerably well distinguished.

Another half hour and the largest portion of the inhabitants of the city would be astir.

It behoved Dick, therefore, to make what speed he could to his destination, or he would stand but a poor chance of reaching it unperceived.

The distance, however, was but short, and in something less than half an hour afterwards he trotted into Drury-lane.

That usually busy thoroughfare was now completely deserted. Not even a solitary watchman could be seen.

Upon this state of things Dick congratulated himself, and he increased his speed, for he could not tell how long it would continue.

The well-known corner was reached in safety, and as the highwayman believed, without anyone having seen him. The secret spring which rang the bell was pressed, and he waited patiently.

Some time elapsed, and as he was impatient to be admitted, he pressed the spring again.

Scarcely, however, had he done so, than the door was flung open by old Matthew, for no one else was allowed to answer that bell but himself.

His astonishment at seeing Turpin was so great, that it quite took away the faculty of speech, and he stared at him with wide open eyes and mouth.

Then the idea darted into his mind that Dick had been killed, and that it was the ghost of the celebrated highwayman and his steed that stood before him.

But that idea was dissipated almost as soon as it was engendered, for Dick cried—

"Now, Matthew! Let us come in, my friend! It's all right."

He clasped the landlord's hand as he spoke.

"Dick!" he said; "Dick! Is it really you?"

"Of course it is! Stand out of the way! Don't block the door up with that great paunch of yours, but let me come in."

But instead of responding to this in the way he generally did, Matthew held out his hand, and pushed Dick away.

"Be off!" he said. "Be off! You must be mad, clean—stark, staring mad! Be off, I tell you!"

"Won't you let me in?"

"Of course not. Do you think I want you nabbed and scragged?"

"Stuff! Let me in, I say."

"Shan't!"

"But you shall, or if you don't, I'll never come near you any more."

The implication of this threat was enough to make Matthew draw back, and Dick took advantage of the movement to walk in, and lead his mare after him.

He then closed the door behind him, and, turning to the landlord, said—

"Now, Matthew, what is the matter with you? Speak out at once. Come."

"Speak out. It don't want speaking out that I knows of."

"But it does."

"Well, then, ain't it enough you were nearly nabbed in Stanhope-street?"

"No. What of that?"

"What of it? Everything. The officers suspect my house. They will first surround, and then search it, when nabbed you will be to a certainty."

"Nonsense, Matthew, you have only just woke up from a sound sleep. That is it, I am sure. Come with me, and take Bess into the stable. I will then tell you what has befallen me since we parted, and give you my reasons for returning here."

"Oh! very well. Come on. It don't much matter. We are both done for, that's very clear."

"Stuff and nonsense. It's all right, I tell you."

Most reluctantly old Matthew fastened the door opening into White Horse-yard, and conducted the highwayman to the stable.

CHAPTER CCLVI.

DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN OBTAINING SOME ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RESPECTING BLANCHE AND ADRIAN WINBERRY.

Dick Turpin would have trusted old Matthew to do almost anything, but there was one exception.

He would not allow him, or any other living human being, to place Bess in the stable, and see her properly fed and littered down.

He always did this himself, and while he was so engaged, he managed in a few words to give an outline of what had taken place since they had last seen each other.

He concluded with these words—

"Now, Matthew, I want you to go over into Bow-street to your old friend the costumier's, and bring him here with you."

"I don't mind."

"Let him bring a disguise with him. Which should you think would be most suitable?"

Matthew considered a moment, and then he said—

"A lawyer's, I should think."

"So should I. That is a capital idea. Let it be a lawyer's. I should get on best with that."

"I suppose it's no good asking you not to run the risk?"

"Not a bit."

"I thought not. I am getting tired of it. I can tell you, I have never been successful as yet."

"And never will be, for when I once make up my mind to a thing, you may be sure there is no turning me."

"I think that is about the truth."

"You may rely upon it. Now, Matthew, will you do as I desire?"

"I will."

"That's settled. You had better start at once. You perfectly understand what I require?"

"Perfectly."

"Stop a moment, though! I would not let you interrupt me while I was speaking, but now I am very anxious to learn something about Tom Davis."

"Oh! ah! yes. I had forgotten that again! Well, you must know, very soon after Tom King's escape, when he was had up before the magistrate."

"Yes; I recollect that. I was at his house during the time."

"Very good, or I ought to say, very bad. Soon after that it came time for his licence to be renewed, and his application was not granted. They refused it on the ground of his having harboured dangerous characters, and that will be the way with me one of these days."

"Pho—pho!"

"It's all very well to say 'pho! pho!' Tom Davis would have done the same, I dare say, but you see the result! Well, after the licence was refused, he still lived in the old place, but the police made a regular crusade against him, and as misfortunes never come single, one night the house was burned down, and Tom Davis, with his wife and daughter, only escaped with their lives. Everything else was destroyed!"

"What became of them then?"

"No one knew, and I had never heard a word about them until you spoke to-night! Poor Tom! I am very, very sorry for him!"

"So am I!"

"Why did he not call here before, I wonder?"

"I don't know, without it was his independent spirit. I know he was one who would prefer to starve a thousand times, than ask charity once!"

"And you found him starving, Dick?"

"Yes, and reduced to such an extremity as to be quite unconscious of what was taking place around him?"

"But you gave them every assistance in your power?"

"To be sure I did."

"Then God bless you for it, Dick. It was a noble action, and I like you a thousand times better than before."

"I did no more than I ought."

"True; but yet how few would have done as you have? And you are not content, but must do more. Well, well! I hope you will succeed. It will not be your fault if Tom does not end his days in peace! I trust, too, you will succeed in the other enterprise you have undertaken."



[DICK TURPIN'S SECOND INTERVIEW WITH THE MYSTERIOUS LADY.]

"Thanks! Prove the sincerity of your words by going to the costumier's at once and bringing him back with the articles required."

Matthew started off without delay, and soon returned, bringing the old man with him, who made a most respectful bow as soon as he saw Dick.

About two hours afterwards a rather remarkable-looking individual stepped off the door-steps of the "White Horse," and walked down Drury-lane in the direction of the Strand.

He was of medium height, and a peculiar stoop in the shoulders made him look shorter than he actually was.

Upon his head he wore a carefully-brushed hat, which gave token of having seen better days.

Beneath this hat appeared a light flaxen peruke, such as was generally worn at the period.

But this had a faded and indifferent look like the hat.

The face was very smooth shaven.

The attire was that worn by attorneys, and to complete the costume, he carried a blue bag in his left hand, while he supported himself with a stick, for he seemed to have a little lameness in one foot.

Many people passed him, but few favoured him with a second glance.

Our readers can, of course, guess who this person was.

It was Dick Turpin.

So well disguised, and, to use the theatrical term, his "get up" so complete and excellent, that it would have absolutely defied detection.

Surely that was the garb under which none of his foes would look to see him.

No nervousness of step—no hasty glancing from side to side—as if in momentary dread of being seen by some one whose gaze he much wished to avoid, marred the effect of the whole disguise; on the contrary, he walked firmly and steadily, and as though he had nothing whatever to fear.

Dick made his way direct to the Strand, and reached it by passing down Drury-court, now much altered since the erection of the large printing-offices on its eastern side.

Close by St. Mary's Church were several hackney carriages waiting to be hired.

He hailed one of them by holding up his stick, and directed the jarvey to drive him to Birdcage-walk.

Off went the cumbersome and obsolete conveyance.

Dick leaned back in the seat and closed his eyes.

He did that to shut out external objects, which always disturb the train of thought, and buried himself in deep reflection.

The stopping of the carriage aroused him, and upon looking through the window he saw he had reached his destination.

"Which house do you want, your honour?" asked the driver.

"The one where the murder was committed!"

"The haunted house?"

"Yes, that is it."

"You will have to go round. It's the backs of these here houses what looks into the park."

"Drive round to the front, then, and be quick about it."

The order was obeyed; and in a few moments the carriage again stopped.

This time before the quaint and antique portal of the haunted house.

The driver got down off his box, and opened the door for Dick to alight.

He then gave the man a liberal fare and told him to drive off.

Turpin watched him down the street, and as soon as he had turned a corner and got out of sight, he (Turpin) ascended the steps and knocked at the massive door.

He had not learned it from any authority, but he came to the conclusion that the whole of the premises would be in the charge of police-officers until the inquest took place.

It was a bold and daring feat to make his way to this place, but Turpin was one who believed in the policy of going to head-quarters for information.

Certainly, here he would ascertain everything he wished to know, but by following his actions we shall learn how far his boldness carried him.

No notice was taken of his first summons for admittance, so he repeated it, and this time with much greater vigour than before.

Ere he released the knocker, the door was flung open, and a police-officer that Dick had seen many a time, and whom he knew instantly, appeared upon the threshold.

"Good morning," said Dick, in a plausible voice, and making a very deep bow as he spoke, "good morning."

At the same time he managed to cross the doorstep and stand in the hall, and with so much tact was it done that the officer gave way before him.

"What do you want, sir?" he asked, rather gruffly—it would have been very gruffly only he saw by the costume that his visitor was a member of the legal profession.

Dick made no reply—at least, no verbal reply, but introduced the thumb and forefinger of his right hand into his waistcoat pocket and drew forth a guinea.

This, with a sly dry cough, and holding up his blue bag with his left hand to conceal the action, he placed in the police-officer's palm.

The effect of the contact was wonderful and instantaneous.

His whole manner changed, and he made quite a low bow as he asked—

"What did you please to want, sir? Should you like to see the stiff 'un?"

CHAPTER CCLVII.

DICK TURPIN AT THE HAUNTED HOUSE LEARNS IMPORTANT INFORMATION.

"SHUT the door first!" said Dick Turpin, altering his voice as much as he could, so as to prevent any familiar tone reaching the officer's ears.

"Certainly, sir, with all the pleasure in life. One moment!"

The officer hastily closed the door and secured it.

Dick felt a great deal of confidence in his disguise, for this man evidently did not suspect him, and yet he was quite familiar with his ordinary appearance.

As soon as the door was shut Turpin spoke.

"My errand here is quite legitimate," he said, "please bear that in mind. My errand is perfectly legitimate."

"Of course it is, sir!" said the officer as he fingered the guinea about in his trousers' pocket. "I am quite aware of that."

"Very good. But in order that you may have no scruples at all, I will tell you at once what business brings me to this place."

"Just so, sir."

"A murder was committed here the night before last?"

"There was."

"Has the murdered man been identified?"

"No, he hasn't; leastways, not yet, though a good many have come to look at him."

"So I suppose. When does the inquest take place?"

"In about half-an-hour, sir."

"Where?"

"Here."

"In this house?"

"Yes."

"Oh! well, my friend, my business here is the same it seems as several more. I want to look at the body and identify it if I can."

"I thought so, sir. Please to come this way. The body is on the second floor. A good many persons have been to look, but you are the first gentleman."

Probably Dick was the first who had given him anything.

In a most amiable and obsequious mood, the officer preceded him up the stairs.

He was rather stout, was that officer, and the going up stairs took all his wind, so he said nothing during the ascent.

The landing where Dick had stood and seen the murder committed was reached in a few seconds.

The door leading into the room was closed.

The officer tapped at it, however, and it was opened from the inner side by one of his companions.

"Here's a gentleman come to 'dentify the body, Jim," he said, and then, turning to Turpin, he added, "my post is downstairs in the hall; but Jim here will show you every attention."

With that the first officer left the room and went downstairs again.

Dick glanced at the officer who had been called Jim.

His face was familiar to him likewise.

The success which he had achieved with the first guinea encouraged him to invest another in the same manner, so he went through exactly the same performance.

The munificence of the gift produced an immense amount of morigeration upon the part of the officer.

He touched his hat and muttered his thanks.

Dick's eye then fell upon an object in the middle of the floor.

The shutters had been thrown open, and some of the dust cleaned off the window panes, which allowed the light to penetrate, but otherwise not a single article in the apartment had been touched.

The table and the curious high-backed chair in which the old man had sat were just in their former position. The dark lantern was lying overturned upon the floor.

Between the table and the chair was a huddled-up mass of something covered over with a white sheet.

Although no portion of the object itself was visible, yet Turpin knew very well what it was.

The officer advanced, and turned down the sheet a little way, so that the head and shoulders of the dead body were exposed to view.

During his strange career, it had been the lot of Dick Turpin to look upon many horrible and ghastly spectacles, yet he thought this was more horrible than any he had ever seen, without it was that of the man he had found in the subterraneous appartment beneath the woodman's hut.

The face was shattered terribly, so much so indeed, as almost to destroy all the features.

The pistol had been discharged within half an inch of his ear, and one half of the face was literally blown away.

Dick turned away. His heart heaved at the awful sight.

The police-officer covered the white sheet over it again.

"Do you know him, sir?" asked Jim.

"It is hard to say from what I have just seen."

"Very true, sir. He's an awful object, that's certain!"

"Dreadful!"

"I could see it gave you a bit of a turn. But, lor' bless you, sir, you will soon get used to it!"

"Has the body been searched?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who searched it?"

"The surgeon."

"What did he find?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Nothing?"

"No."

"Not a card, or a scrap of paper, or anything of that sort?"

"No, his pockets were quite empty."

"That is strange. Then, beyond the face, there is nothing by which he can be identified?"

"Nothing at all, but leastways, I forgot, there is his clothes."

Oh! ah! to be sure, there's his clothes."

"Should you like to see them, sir?"

"No, no, never mind. Have you anything to sit down upon? I don't feel very well."

"Not in this room I haven't, sir," replied Jim. "I am keeping guard in the next. Would you like to step in there?"

"Yes, if you will allow me."

"Oh! certainly. Please to walk this way."

"There is a question or two I should like to ask you."

"All right, sir; I am sure it will give me very great pleasure to give you all the information I possess, for you are a real gentleman and no mistake."

With this complimentary speech upon his lips, Jim, the officer, ushered Dick Turpin into the adjoining room, through which, it will be recollected, the cloaked stranger and his two accomplices had effected their retreat.

A fire was burning in the grate, and the room had altogether quite an inhabited look.

There was a table and two or three chairs.

In one of the latter, which Jim placed close by the fire-side, Dick sat down.

On the table was a pipe and a stone jug, with which the officer had been regaling himself, and beguiling the tediousness of his employment.

He looked rather shyly at them for a moment, and Dick perceiving it, soon put him at his ease.

"Have you anything to drink there?" he asked. "If you have, I shall be glad, for I can't get that sight out of my head,"

"Yes, here is a drop if you would like it"

"Thank you."

Dick took the proffered jug, and found its contents to be some excellent old ale, to which he did ample justice, and then handed it to Jim, who, with the characteristic salutation, "I look towards you, sir!" took a hearty draught.

After this they felt quite old friends, and the officer resumed his pipe.

"Your companion in the hall told me the inquest would be held here in half-an-hour," began Turpir.

"Yes, that is the case."

"But where are the jury to sit?"

"Oh! they won't sit here. They will come and view the body, and sit in the club-room of the 'Bull and Gate,' round the corner."

"Oh! ah! I thought so. Well, now I may as well tell you that a client of mine, an old gentleman, is missing. I don't say that is him in the next room, but I couldn't swear that it is not. However, I shall stay here to watch the case, you understand, in case anything should turn up in the evidence."

"Quite right, sir."

"In the meantime, I should be very glad if you would favour me with an account of all you know of the murder, as it may be of the utmost importance to me."

"Of course, sir. You have, I fancy, come to the right party, for I know all about the affair from beginning to end."

"Oh! do you, indeed? Then I am very glad to hear it."

"Very good, sir."

The officer, who was an intelligent man of his class, then proceeded to give a full account of the affair, but as the reader is already acquainted with the particulars, we need do no more than say, that he was the very man who had seen the cloaked stranger and his followers enter the house, and who had returned the moment after the commission of the murder.

Much of this was quite new to Dick, especially that part where Adrian was caught and taken to Newgate, under the belief that he was the famous highwayman.

But the reader's knowledge only extends to a certain point, and therefore we shall resume Jim, the officer's, narrative at that place.

It will be recollected that we have described how the mistake was discovered, and how the cloaked stranger had demanded to be released, and how, at that moment, there came a violent knocking at the wicket of Newgate.

At this point we resume.

CHAPTER CCLVIII.

A VERDICT OF WILFUL MURDER IS RETURNED AGAINST ADRIAN WINBERRY AND HIS TWO ACCOMPLICES.

"Of course," continued Jim, the officer, "everybody stopped still, and the governor—that is Mr. Cawthorne, you know—shut his mouth in the middle of what he was saying.

"The man on the lock, however, turned the key, and opened the door at once.

"In came a party of officers with two prisoners.

"The moment they got inside, the two prisoners, who were men, uttered an ejaculation which showed that they and the man who had been brought to Newgate in mistake for Dick Turpin, were acquainted with each other.

"The outer door was closed, and then, in answer to Mr. Cawthorne, who asked who the prisoners were, one of the officers stated what had taken place in the haunted house, and how they had captured two of the culprits, while one had made his escape into St. James's-park, and the other over the house-tops."

"But," interrupted Turpin, "I thought you told me that three men only were seen to enter the house?"

"Quite right, sir, but then there might have been one left inside. At any rate, there is very good evidence that there were four of them altogether."

"Oh! indeed."

"Yes—but let me go on."

"Oh! yes, go on. It is the most wonderful story I ever heard in my life. Take a pinch of snuff."

"Thank you, sir. Well, this man—I mean the one who was taken in mistake for Dick Turpin—disclaimed all knowledge of, and acquaintance with, the two prisoners, and with all that had taken place."

"Did he?"

"Yes; but yet it was thought there was sufficient grounds for keeping him in custody, and bringing him before a magistrate."

"And was this done?"

"Yes, sir. All three were locked up in separate cells, and brought before the magistrate in the morning."

"And what then?"

"All three were committed to take their trial. His worship would have allowed bail for the one, but nobody came forward, so he was carried off along with the rest."

"And do you think he had any hand in the murder?"

"Well, that's more than I can tell."

"Did you find anything of the man who escaped over the roofs?"

"No."

"Had you any idea of who he was or what he was like?"

"None at all. It was quite dark at night, and we lost sight of him almost directly."

"It is a strange piece of business altogether?"

"Very, sir. Now, I have had a good deal of experience, one way and another with murder, but this beats them all."

"I should think we shall learn something at the inquest that will give a clue. I was in hopes some paper had been found, but you tell me there has not?"

"No; there was nothing. Suspicion is very strong upon the three men in custody, don't you think?"

"On two, certainly. They declare that they merely acted by the directions of the man in the cloak; but he altogether disowns them, and says he never saw them in his life before."

"Very odd. What's that?"

"The jurymen, I suppose. At any rate there is some one knocking at the door."

Jim rose and so did Dick.

"I will go now," said the latter.

"There's no occasion, sir. Perhaps you had better be here when they view the body, in case anything should turn up?"

"Well, perhaps it will be better. Tom will let them in."

At this moment there came a tapping at the door of the chamber of death, and the officer hastened to open it.

As he expected, the jurymen were outside, and the whole body of them, headed by the coroner, and the rear brought up by the beadle, entered.

The coroner perceived Dick, and made a slight inclination of his head, while a look of inquiry appeared upon his face.

The highwayman understood what it meant, so he, too, bowed, and then said—

"Pardon me for this intrusion, but I am a solicitor, and hearing of this murder I came up to town this morning in order to look at the body, as desired by a client of mine."

"Oh! indeed, sir."

"Yes; that is it."

"And do you identify it?"

"Not at present, sir."

"What do you mean by not at present?"

"I mean that the features are so much destroyed as to make recognition, by means of an inspection of them merely, quite impossible; but I think it probable that something may transpire, and therefore wish to be present at the inquest."

"Oh! certainly, sir—certainly. I have no objection whatever; and if this fearfully dark affair can be cleared up, no one will rejoice more than myself."

"I, too, shall be glad."

"Now, gentlemen," said the coroner, addressing the jurymen, "be good enough to stand round, and we will proceed to view the body. Mr. Tripp, turn down the sheet."

Mr. Tripp was the name of the parish beadle, and as soon as the coroner spoke he bustled forward and did his bidding, after which he stood looking on in a majestic attitude.

One by one the jurymen looked at the cold and hideous corpse, and Turpin, though he strove to look another way, found it impossible to withdraw his gaze.

This ceremony occupied but little time. Most took but one glance, though some of a more morbid turn of mind made a close examination.

This done, the party adjourned to the public-house Jim, the officer, had spoken of.

Turpin followed.

He shrunk a little, though, when he got to the bottom of the stairs, for several police-officers were in the hall, and among them was his old enemy, Mr. Wriggles.

The two officers, who had been left in charge of the house, were relieved from their duty as their presence was required at the inquest.

It was only the first sight that startled Dick. He recovered his composure almost instantly, and walked steadily forward.

His disguise was about to be put to a severe test, but if Mr. Wriggles did not recognise him, he should feel tolerably certain of escaping detection altogether.

The individual in question gave a good look at him, but Dick returned his gaze without flinching.

But the redoubtable police-officer took no further notice, from which the highwayman inferred that he was unknown.

The distance from the haunted house to the "Bull and Gate" inn was only about a couple of hundred yards, so that Dick was not for long exposed to the gaze of the people in the street.

The inn was one of those rambling, comfortable places which our forefathers delighted to build.

It was tolerably full of company, for the murder had caused what would now-a-days be called a "sensation."

The large room on the first-floor had been set aside for the inquest.

With as little delay as possible the jurymen seated themselves round the table, and the coroner sat down in the arm-chair at its head.

The investigation was commenced.

In the examination of the different witnesses, however, very little additional information was gathered.

Turpin was seated at a little side-table where he could see and hear all that was going forward.

He was much struck with the appearance of Adrian Winberry, for such he announced his name to be.

In him he could scarcely recognise the cloaked stranger, who wore so conspicuous a black beard.

His face was smooth-shaven, in accordance with the prevailing fashion.

A lawyer defended him.

But all his eloquence, and he was a perfect master of the art of rhetoric, failed to remove the suspicion which hung around his client.

The two men when they were examined endeavoured to set aside what they had previously said.

That they had witnessed the murder they did not deny, but they stated they had been employed by a stranger to accompany him to the house where they were found, and that the murder was committed without their having any idea of it and without their being able to prevent it.

Adrian Winberry smiled in a triumphant and defiant manner when this statement was made; but there was not so much importance attached to it as he evidently expected.

The former words which they had made use of were distinctly sworn to by several witnesses.

That they had been tampered with somehow or other, and induced to depart from their original declaration, there could not be much doubt, and the coroner expressed an opinion to that effect.

A verdict of wilful murder was then recorded against the three prisoners.

The lawyer engaged by Mr. Winberry then rose, and in an eloquent speech proposed that his client should be released on bail; but the application was peremptorily refused.

Dick had taken rough notes of the chief events which had transpired, but otherwise he took no part in the proceedings whatever.

When all was over he, having full confidence in his disguise, went to different places and purchased all the accounts of the murder that were published.

By the time he had finished it was nearly dark, so he bent his steps in the direction of the "White Horse."

By virtue of the previous committal, Adrian Winberry and his two accomplices were conveyed to Newgate.

But the unnatural brother had by no means lost hope, and his peculiar line of conduct will quickly become apparent.

CHAPTER CCLIX.

DICK TURPIN REPORTS THE SUCCESS OF HIS MISSION TO THE MYSTERIOUS LADY.

THE hour was verging upon midnight when a single horseman took his way, at a rapid pace, along the western road.

The clattering of his steed's hoofs was the only sound that broke the silence which reigned around.

There was no moon as yet, but the stars shone brightly over head, and in the eastern horizon could be seen some faint indication of the coming of the queen of night.

Occasionally the horseman shifted his riding whip—which he carried more for defence than aught else—from his right hand to his left, and when he did so he would pat his steed on the neck and speak to it in an encouraging tone of voice, and by the way in which the beautiful creature tossed her head and neighed, it would seem as though she perfectly comprehended what he said.

Our readers cannot be at a loss to recognise this horse and rider.

It was Dick Turpin, mounted on his bonny mare, Black Bess, on his way to keep his appointment with the young and beautiful lady, whose name was unknown to him at present.

His thoughts, however, ran greatly upon the daring scheme which he had formed and almost carried out.

He was thinking of the young prince and the disappointment he would feel.

Some means or other must be found of communicating with him.

It was not possible for Dick to think of this without remembering his three friends, from whom he had been so long separated.

He wondered what they were doing and where they were.

They might not even have reached the shores of France in safety.

He had not heard a single word of them from that morning when they parted on the little plateau in front of the entrance to the cavern which had been the scene of so many remarkable events.

Between Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack and himself there had not existed that feeling of intimacy and friendship that there did between him and Tom King.

The latter he felt the warmest possible interest in, and the feeling could not have been greater if he had been his own brother.

It would have been a satisfaction to him of no ordinary character if he could have felt certain of his welfare and his safety.

He would, too, have much liked to have had his assistance in the affair he had then under hand. It would have been invaluable.

He determined, however, as soon as he had brought it to a conclusion, provided he did not hear or see anything of his comrade in the meantime, to set out at once in quest of him.

The moon rose.

Her beams at first were sickly, few, and faint, but they soon increased in power, bringing out the different objects in the landscape with marvellous distinctness.

"The road is empty to-night," muttered Dick. "I have not met a single person since I fairly got clear of London. Well, perhaps it is as well, for I should not be able to resist the temptation of stopping them, and it might only serve to place the officers upon my track, and I shall have sufficient trouble with this business without that. Woa, mare. Gently, lass—gently. What is it?"

Black Bess had reared suddenly when Dick spoke.

He was paying no attention to what he was about, and had he been a less practised rider than he was, he would inevitably have been thrown.

As it was, he retained his seat in the saddle with great difficulty, for his usually docile mare paid no attention to the soothing words he uttered, and the attempts he made to calm her by patting her upon the neck.

Much surprised at this extraordinary behaviour, he looked up to see what it was which had produced it.

His eyes fell upon a spectacle that was quite enough to fill the heart of any one with dread and horror.

Just where a narrow winding lane turned off from the high-road was a gibbet.

From its blackened cross-beam depended a ghastly and horrible burden.

It was the body of a man.

Many and many a long year must have elapsed since that malefactor was suspended there as a terror and a warning to others.

Spring winds, summer suns, autumn rains, and winter frosts, had all wreaked their repeated effects upon it.

The long and massive iron links, with which the body was held together and hung from the top, were corroded with rust.

They creaked and clanked dismally, however, as the fitful gusts of cold night air blew upon it, and made it swing slightly to and fro.

Here and there the bleached bones of the doomed man glistened with a sickening lustre in the moonlight.

In one or two places, too, something that looked like long strips of clothing fluttered in the wind.

It was loathsome to the eye—to the ear—to the smell—and well indeed may the highwayman's mare be excused for the alarm she manifested.

Turpin himself, although a shudder of horror swept over his whole form, could not for a moment remove his gaze, which seemed to be riveted and fascinated.

By an effort, however, he broke the spell, and turned his eyes in another direction.

But he was unable thus easily to remove Bess's fear. She pranced and reared, nor could he by any means calm her down.

His way lay directly past that gibbet, but his mare resolutely refused to pass.

To have punished her for this natural alarm would not only have been cruel, but futile, and he knew it.

He dropped the reins, therefore, upon her neck, and placed his riding-whip between his teeth, where he held it firmly.

This left both hands at liberty, so, stooping forward, he placed one over each of his mare's eyes, thus shutting out entirely from her view the horrible object which had so much alarmed her.

The ruse succeeded.

He struck her flanks lightly with his heels, and she obeyed the impulse forward readily.

The road was level and unobstructed, so he allowed her to go for some distance in this manner, and then he gradually removed his hands, and resumed his hold upon the reins.

The alarm of Black Bess had ceased as soon as the gibbet was shut out from her view, and she went on now quietly enough.

In a little while now the stone front of the house came in view, and he quickened her speed slightly, for he feared he was behind his time.

Orders had been left at the lodge for him to be admitted, for, so soon as he reached the entrance gates, they were flung open.

Dick trotted up the gravelled path, taking the same route precisely as he had done the preceding evening, when in company with the carriage.

The little door before which they had stopped was soon reached, and at it stood the steward who had played the part of coachman.

Seeing this, Dick alighted, but scarcely had his feet touched the ground, when a slight figure, shrouded in a large dark cloak, bounded forward.

It was the mysterious lady.

The steward led Black Bess towards the stables.

"Pardon me," he said, "I must see her housed."

"Ah! yes, I had forgotten. But I am so impatient."

"I will be back as quickly as possible. I have much to tell you."

Turpin hurried off after the steward as he spoke, who had almost got out of sight.

We need do no more than say that Dick saw his mare properly attended to, and then, in company with the steward, returned.

Under the direction of the latter, he was led to the same apartment as before.

The steward knocked lightly at the door, and in a low, sweet voice the lady said,

"Come in."

The steward opened the door and ushered Dick in.

The lady was standing near the fire.

With her left hand she leaned rather heavily upon the corner of the massive oaken table.

There are some faces which look beautiful when first seen, but which fade under a second examination.

But the lady's was not one of these.

On the contrary, Dick thought she looked even more lovely than before.

Anxiety—the most intense anxiety and suspense—were depicted upon her countenance, and she looked into Dick's face with the utmost intentness, in order to gather something from its expression, if possible.

The highwayman advanced, and in obedience to a sign given him, seated himself in the antique arm-chair by the fireside.

The lady, too, sank back into a seat.

As on the preceding occasion there was no light in the room save that which came from the fire.

But its beams were very, very bright, though somewhat flickering and unsteady.

It was only after two efforts that the lady found her voice to ask for the news which Turpin brought her.

"Tell me—tell me all at once, I beg. Pray do not keep me any longer in suspense. You cannot tell what a fearful state of anxiety I have been in all day, and how I have longed for night to come. I have learned the worst, surely. You cannot have any more evil intelligence to communicate. Speak, and tell me!"

"Willingly, lady; but I must ask you to be calm. You have nothing further to dread."

"And Blanche—Blanche, where is she? What have you learned respecting her? Where is she?"

Turpin shook his head.

"That is more than I can tell; but for your sake, lady, I will know no rest until I find out."

CHAPTER CCLX.

DICK TURPIN FINDS A PLACE OF REFUGE FOR TOM DAVIS AND ELLEN, AND FOR HIMSELF AS WELL.

A slight flush suffused the lady's cheeks as Turpin uttered the words with which the last chapter concluded.

"Thanks," she said, with a faint smile, which was the only notice she took of the highwayman's bold speech.

We have followed Turpin through all his adventures in London, and therefore we will not force the reader by repeating them.

Let it suffice to say he told the lady all with which the reader has been made acquainted, confining himself, of course, to that which had especial reference to her affair.

"And now," said the lady, when she had heard him to the end, and expressed her thanks for all which he had done, "And now what am I to do?"

"That is a very serious question to answer."

"I know it."

"Yet a course of action must be decided upon at once, for the trial will take place, I believe, to-morrow."

"To-morrow; surely not so soon as that."

"I think so; but midnight has passed, and to-day is here."

"Oh! I see. It is then the day after to-morrow."

"Exactly, if you take it so."

"I thought it could not be so soon as I imagined. Now what is to be done? Is such an unnatural villain as he has proved himself, to be allowed to escape the penalty due to his crime? Is he to come away from the trial in triumph and usurp my cousin's rights? Oh! no, no! that would be monstrous in the extreme."

"Do not excite yourself so much, I pray you. Such a flagrant wrong is of course not to be permitted."

"But how am I to prevent it?"

"Let us consider first and weigh the matter over, and then without a doubt we shall be able to come to a decision."

"I am much beholden to you. Your words are wise."

Turpin bowed.

"You flatter me. However, don't let us waste time in trivialities. I think in your narrative you mentioned a lawyer?"

"The one who prepared the will?"

"Yes. Is he living?"

"No."

"Is his son?"

"I believe so."

"Who is the family solicitor? for, of course, there is one."

"I am sure I cannot tell you, but I will ask the steward."

"Stay; never mind. The name is of secondary importance. You are sure there is a family solicitor?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then my advice is, you send for him at once and let him see me."

"See you?"

"Yes, it will be running a great risk, but I shall trust to his honour not to betray me."

"No, no! I cannot—will not consent to that. You have already exposed yourself a thousand times too much for my sake" ——

"Pardon me, lady, for interrupting you. Do not think I made this proposal without having calculated the probability of danger. I have done so, and do not find it so great as you seem to imagine. The solicitor to a family like this cannot, I should think, but be of honourable principles. He will have the interests of it at heart, and would do all that lay in his power. Do you think I am right in surmising this?"

"Doubtless you are, but" ——

"Nay, do not raise objections. With your permission, I should propose that you sent off for him at once—indeed, I ought to have suggested the adoption of so obvious a course before: yet still it is not too late. When he arrives I will see him—that is, with your permission. I need not reveal myself in any way, and that he will be able to recognise my features, I think hardly likely. I have had a wide experience in human nature, and I am not afraid to say that I shall be able to correctly estimate how far it will be safe to trust him at first sight. If I find that full confidence is to be placed in him, I shall relate what I have seen, and the information I have gathered respecting the murder. At the last, should circumstances require it, I shall not scruple to disclose myself and tell him who I am."

"Oh you make me tremble with dread for your safety. No, no! This cannot be. You must think of something less dangerous to yourself."

"I am afraid, lady, I cannot."

There was a pause, during which the lady appeared to be thinking deeply.

At length she spoke.

"I cannot think of any other plan so good, but yet I am reluctant, most reluctant, to accept it. Can you not think?"

"I cannot. It seems to me that is the only course to be pursued."

"And so it seems to me."

"I am glad. As for the danger, dismiss it from your thoughts, it is no more than I incur daily. I shall be able to judge best. Let me remind you of the importance of what we are about. The circumstances are most singular. You are alone in the world—have no one to whom you can appeal for assistance and advice. It seemed like the work of Providence that I should be cast into your way as I was. It looks as though I was predestined to set this dark matter right. Most fervently indeed, do I trust that it is so! Mine has been a life in which has been enacted many a dark deed, but here and there I have had a chance of doing a good action, and I have always embraced that chance, for I have always clung to the belief that those good actions have atoned, in a great measure, for the others."

"I have heard this of you," replied the lady, who listened to all that Turpin said with the most profound interest, "and I fully believe in the correctness of your philosophy."

"It rejoices me to hear it, for it encourages me to pursue the plan of action which I had worked out. In all the good actions which I have performed there has never been so glorious a chance afforded me as this. I shall be the means, I trust, of bringing to justice as great a miscreant as could be well conceived. I shall be the means of avenging his brother's death, and keeping from him not only these estates, but also the poor girl Blanche, whose fate, though yet enveloped in obscurity, I am determined to discover."

"You speak like one who has a brave and noble heart, and in such an undertaking as this, let the past be what it may, I do not think you can come to any harm."

"I, too, have a similar conviction. And now let me request you to send off to London for the solicitor. There is no time to lose, if our efforts are to be successful."

"There is not, indeed. I will call him."

She rang a bell as she spoke.

The summons was responded to by the steward.

He was a gray-headed, honest old man, who had been in the service of the family from his birth, and he looked up to every member of it with reverence and affection.

"Shockley," said the lady, "who is the family solicitor?"

"The family solicitor?"

"Yes; what is his name—where does he live?"

"That is more than I can tell you; but I have no doubt you will find it in the library."

"Ah! A good thought. I shall find it there, surely. Fetch me a lamp."

The steward departed upon his errand, and quickly returned, bringing with him one of those curious old oil lamps, some of which may be seen in our museums.

Holding it high above his head he led the way, the lady and Turpin, by her desire, following.

A large corridor was crossed in a diagonal direction, and then an antique door was reached.

This the steward opened, and then the highwayman found himself in a large gloomy apartment, the recesses of which the light of the lamp was quite unable to reveal.

A chill air, too, seemed to come from it and strike to the blood, so that he fairly shivered.

The steward crossed the library and stopped before a shelf, upon which were several boxes containing documents of various kinds.

He placed the lamp on the table, and then took down one of these.

The lady produced a bunch of keys, and in a little while had the box open, and commenced searching among its contents.

Dick stood a few paces in the rear, for he by no means wished to appear intrusive or inquisitive in things that concerned him not.

The search in the box continued for some time, but at length a packet of letters was found.

"This will tell us what we want to know," said the lady, addressing Turpin.

As she spoke she locked the box, and rose to her feet.

Returning then to the chamber, in which they had before sat, she drew a letter from the parcel.

"The name of the solicitor appears to be Kersey—John Kersey."

"And from what place is the communication dated?"

"The Temple."

"That is enough. Does it say from what part of the Temple?"

"No. 'The Temple,' merely."

"That will be quite sufficient, and now, Shockley, you will start at once, and make all speed to this gentleman's office. You had better take the carriage. Tell him his presence here is desired upon the most urgent business, and ask him to return with you."

The steward looked at the young lady inquiringly for a moment, in order to know whether he should be doing right by taking the commands of a stranger.

She understood him, and at once added—

"Yes, that is right, Shockley. You will do precisely as this gentleman has told you, and for your late dear master's sake, and for the sake of his dear daughter Blanche, let me implore you to make all the speed you can, but do not return without bringing the lawyer with you."

"I understand you," he said. "It shall be done, and I will be as quick as it is possible for any human being to be."

"Thanks, Shockley. Depart at once."

"I am off, lady," replied the steward.

A short silence followed his departure during which both listened.

Presently they heard the trampling of hoofs, and the rumbling of wheels, which told them that Shockley had already commenced his journey.

CHAPTER CCLXI.

SOME MORE COMPLICATIONS OF THE VILLAINOUS PLOT AGAINST BLANCHE AND HER FATHER ARE MADE APPARENT.

THE remainder of the night was spent in conversation.

The lady could not retire to rest, and as for Turpin, he felt no need of it.

When morning came, breakfast was served, to which Dick and the lady sat down together.

It was while they were discussing this meal that a carriage drove up the gravelled path, and stopped before the front door.

Both started eagerly to their feet, for they, of course, supposed that it was Shockley who had returned, bringing Mr. Kersey with him.

A loud summons for admittance was given upon the knocker, and the lady, when she heard the sound, turned with an inquiring look upon her face.

"Strange visitors at the hall," she said; "that is never Shockley!"

"Who can they be?"

"I have no more idea than yourself."

"What is to be done?"

"How?"

"Will they enter here?"

"Most likely."

"But—but—you comprehend me?"

"What?"

"I must not be seen by any one."

"True—true. How foolish of me to forget."

"Nay, nay. It is natural. Who can it be I wonder?"

Tap—tap.

Some one knocked gently upon the panel of the door

"Come in."

A servant entered.

"Mr. Josiah Skinner."

"Who?"

"Mr. Josiah Skinner."

"What does he want?"

"To see you, my lady."

"I am astonished," said the lady, turning to our hero. "Do you not know him?"

"No. What shall I do?"

"I should recommend you to give him an interview, by all means You know not what important intelligence he may have to communicate."

"And you?"

"Never mind. Give your servant orders to show the gentleman in here."

The lady did so, and as soon as the domestic had left the room, she turned to Dick, and said—

"Now tell me what you intend to do. Pray do not be rash, or bring yourself into danger."

"Trust me. With your permission, I should like to be a witness of this interview."

"But you must not expose yourself."

"I know it."

"What do you propose?"

"To conceal myself."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"But I see no hiding-place."

"I will soon find one if you will give me your permission."

"You have it freely."

"Well, then, if I mistake not, that is a fire-screen folded up in yonder corner?"

"It is."

"Unfold it, then, and I will hide myself behind it. I shall then be able to hear all that is said without being seen."

"Agreed. Quick! or he will be here."

The fire-screens in use in those days are not often seen now, and therefore a few lines, to convey an idea of what they were like, will not be out of place.

They were made in narrow strips about five feet high, and one in width, hinged together so that they could either be folded up into a small compass, or stretched quite across the fireplace, generally then no inconsiderable width.

They were painted with many curious devices.

A better hiding-place than that which one of these would afford could scarcely be found

It was unfolded, then, and placed across the recess at the side of the fireplace.

Turpin stepped behind it, and scarcely had he done so, than the door opened and Mr. Josiah Skinner entered.

He was a tall, stout man, dressed in a suit of solemn black, and he made a low bow on his entrance, as he said—

"I beg you will excuse me, lady, for thus breaking in upon you, but I have some important business to transact here."

"Important business?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Skinner, coolly taking a chair, and seating himself in it. "Very important business, and I trust you will give me your attention for a few moments."

The young lady bowed.

She was too terrified to reply in any other way.

Turpin peeped cautiously and curiously through a little crevice in the fire-screen, for he anticipated that something of more than common interest was about to occur.

"In the first place," said Mr. Skinner, his tone becoming at every word more authoritative and overbearing. "In the first place, I want to know what other members of the family are in the house besides yourself?"

"By what right do you ask that question, sir?" said the young lady, assuming as much boldness of behaviour as she possibly could, though inwardly she was almost ready to sink to the ground with terror. "I think your behaviour very extraordinary, indeed."

"Do you, indeed! I will so far satisfy you as to say that I have a statement to make, and I wish it to be heard by the whole of the family, so, perhaps, to save me the trouble of continually repeating the same thing, you will call them in."

"Speak to me, sir."

"Am I to understand, then, that you are the only member of the family at present in the house?"

"You can, sir."

"Very good. Then have the kindness to listen to me."

Mr. Skinner's mode of speech kept getting more and more offensive and insolent.

"I am listening to you, sir; and perhaps you will be kind enough to put what you have to say in as few words as possible, in order that I may be relieved from your presence, which I can assure you is most distasteful to me; nor can I see anything to warrant your intrusion here."

This was a very courageous speech for the lady to make, and she would never have ventured upon it had she not felt how close she was to Dick Turpin, and that he would effectually shield her from all harm.

"Ha! ha!" said Mr. Skinner. "Very good—very good, indeed. Can't see anything to warrant my intrusion. Capital. Ha! ha! I like that. But wait a minute—wait a minute."

Mr. Skinner commenced rummaging his pockets as he spoke.

"I have already waited long enough," replied the lady. "Let me know your business here, and then depart."

"Ha! ha!" Now don't, miss; please don't. I shall die of larfin'. I know I shall. Depart? Lor' no; not yet, I hope. Bless you, miss, you and me are fated to become a great deal better acquainted with each other before I depart. We are, I can assure you. Ah! that's it."

Mr. Skinner alluded to a crumpled-looking document.

While speaking he had taken several packets of papers from his pocket, and he selected one out of the miscellaneous heap when he uttered the satisfactory ejaculation.

The lady looked on in surprise and terror.

She dreaded that something terrible was about to happen—that the presence of this insolent man heralded some calamity.

Her forebodings were right.

"You see this paper, miss," said Mr. Skinner, as he held the document in his hand. "Very well, then; that's my authority for what I'm doing, do you understand that?"

"Go on, sir."

"Very well, ve—ry well. Then listen. I, Josiah Skinner, attorney-at-law, hereby take possession of this house and all the estates and appurtenances thereto belonging, as well as everything in this house, without any exception whatever. Do you understand that?"

"I quite understand your words, sir, but on whose behalf do you take possession of this house and premises?"

"That of my client."

"And who is your client?"

"Mr. Adrian Winberry, to whom the whole has been assigned for a *quid pro quo*."

"Indeed."

"Yes, indeed, and in fact, too. I have the fullest authority for what I come to do, and you will please to remember that it is your duty to obey me in all things."

"I shall do nothing of the kind."

"Won't you? We'll see about that. Call the servants, and save all bother by telling them all about it. Do you hear me?"

"I hear you, certainly."

"And will you not obey?"

"Never! Quit the house this moment, sir. I refuse to recognise your authority. Begone, and do not let me see you another moment, or I will call the servants as you suggest, but it shall be to have you turned out."

"Turned out," said Mr. Skinner. "So it's come to turning out, has it? Then we'll soon see who is to be turned out. Now, my lady," he cried, jumping off his chair, "I have had enough of your impudence. I know who you are. You needn't think to impose upon me. Troop off this very moment. Leave the house, and never enter it again. Do you hear? Be off."

The lady uttered a faint shriek, and cried for help.

"Ha! ha!" exclaimed Mr. Skinner. "It's all very fine. Call for help as much as you like. You have confessed there is no one in the house but yourself, so I shall be able to have it all my own way without any trouble. Be off with you, I say. I take possession."

The lady drew further back, but it was towards the screen behind which Turpin was concealed.

"Go," continued Mr. Skinner, following her. "Go—go of your own free will, or I will thrust you forth. Go, I say. What—you won't? then I'll make you."

He endeavoured to grasp the lady's wrist as he spoke, but ere he could do so, Dick Turpin glided from behind the screen like an apparition, while he said quietly—

"No you won't, Mr. Skinner. Just let the lady alone, if you please."

CHAPTER CCLXV.

TOM KING AND HIS COMRADES, SIXTEEN STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL, COMMITS A ROBBERY UPON THE FRENCH HIGHWAY.

Such a long time has elapsed since we either saw or heard anything of Dick Turpin's three comrades—Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack—that we feel ourselves now in duty bound (albeit, we leave Turpin himself in rather a peculiar situation) to turn our attention to them for a little while, and describe the adventures which befel them.

The reader will remember that when we saw them last was after their shipwreck upon the rocky islet, when Claude was fortunate enough to perceive a sail.

It was only just in time.

The limit of their endurance had been reached.

Hunger, thirst, heat, cold, all had done their work as they alternately oppressed them, and on that evening of the second day after the shipwreck they were in such a deplorable condition that it is very questionable whether they could have survived till sunrise.

The cold upon that barren sea-washed rock during the long winter nights was most intense.

But Claude had been fortunate enough to perceive a sail, and as soon as he felt sure that it was no delusion of the senses, he had stripped off his shirt, and holding it by the sleeves let it flutter out like a flag.

Fortunately for them the signal was perceived, and the ship's course was turned towards them.

They approached as close as they could with safety, and then a boat was lowered.

When they hailed the ship, they did not think of the danger of their position in case it should prove to be an English one. That danger was prospective—the present was immediate.

But it seemed as though at last the tide of fortune was to turn in their favour.

The ship was not an English one, but the French man-of-war of which the boatman had spoken.

He knew it again in a moment, and lost no time in communicating the joyful intelligence to our friends.

In a little while they were all on board, and as soon as they stated who they were, the greatest attention was paid to them.

The surgeon was sent for to examine their hurts, but they were nothing to speak of; and after partaking of some refreshment and enjoying a long sleep, the three highwaymen woke up, feeling very little the worse for their adventure beyond a sensation of weakness, which would at times seize upon them.

In the morning they came on deck.

They were making all speed for France.

Our friends felt very far from satisfied with their position.

Now and then they would wish they had never seen the Pretender, or embarked themselves in his cause, but being in they determined to go on, and never once thought of beating a retreat.

The young prince himself, whose frame was not so hardened as those of the highwaymen were, was still below in his hammock.

As evening was coming on the three friends strolled aft, and leaning over the taffrail conversed together upon various topics, chiefly the adventures they had severally in the course of a long career met with.

While thus engaged, they perceived in the distance something, which a closer investigation showed them to be a ship.

They looked at it for a long time unthinkingly.

Tom King was the first to notice that it was sailing dead in their wake, and evidently sailing at a much greater rate of speed than they were.

Then the idea suddenly darted into their minds that it was a vessel in chase of them, and they were about to hint as much to the captain, when they found that the sail had already been seen, and its character made out.

A scene of great apparent confusion now ensued, as the



[TOM KING COMMITS A HIGHWAY ROBBERY UPON THE CALAIS ROAD.]

sailors sprang into the rigging to execute the orders which were given them to crowd all sail.

And now the ship came close enough for the highwaymen to be able to make out her character.

She was an English man-of-war, and one of the largest they had ever seen.

An encounter would be inevitable.

They saw that at once.

The excellence of the English over the French ship in point of sailing, was evident; for despite all the efforts which the latter made, they could not increase their distance from her.

On the contrary, little experienced as our three friends were in nautical affairs, they could see that the English man-of-war was rapidly gaining upon them, and that an engagement was imminent.

The captain of the vessel upon which they stood evidently by no means wished to tackle the enemy. His policy was to run away.

He had only one chance in favour of doing this, and that was, night might come upon them and enable them to get away from their adversary under cover of the darkness.

This was rather a forlorn hope.

Night was coming on, it is true; but then some hours would elapse before it was actually dark, and during that time the English vessel would be able to come up with them.

Every stitch of canvas they carried was spread to the breeze, and the masts cracked and bent to the strain.

Whether their escape had been discovered, and the ship sent out to re-capture them, was of course more than the highwaymen could tell, yet it looked very probable.

If so, the utmost exertions would be made to overtake them.

It might, however, merely be an English vessel or a privateer.

At any rate, on it came, and with extreme rapidity.

Preparations were made upon the French vessel for a fight.

The guns were run out, loaded, and put ready for immediate service, while small arms, such as swords, pistols, etc., were served out to the crew.

The shades of evening drew on.

The sun sank behind an immense bank of clouds on the north-west horizon.

Still on came the pursuing vessel.

"Look! look!" exclaimed Claude Duval to his two comrades, and pointing to the English vessel as he spoke, "they have fired the first shot!"

"Down with you, then, every one!"

"They are too far off to injure us."

"You don't know that. Down! down!"

The highwaymen crouched down, and the moment they did so, the sullen boom of a cannon reached their ears.

Tom had seen the wreath of white smoke, and had given the warning in time.

As it happened, it was not needed, for the ball fell far short of the mark. The shot was fired long before they were in range.

But it showed the enemy to be in earnest, and after a short interval another shot was fired.

This, like its predecessor, did not reach its mark, but it came nearer, and served to show how fast the enemy was gaining on them.

A deep silence reigned on board the French vessel. Everything which would serve to urge them through the water at the utmost speed had been done, and nothing remained but to wait patiently for events to take their course.

An anxious glance was occasionally cast up to the rigging, as the masts cracked or bent more than usual, but that was all.

Another shot was fired from their enemy, and this time it carried away some of the tackle at the stern.

It was easy to see that these were nothing more than trial shots.

As soon as they found they were fairly within range, they would have something more to expect.

Still the dusk came on, and one singular effect of it was by rendering the outline of the enemy's ship less distinct, it made it seem as though it had not gained upon them.

But this was a delusion, as the shots proved.

The excitement under which our friends laboured was most intense.

Were they, after all, to be overhauled when they had succeeded in escaping so far?

It would be most vexatious, after taking so much trouble and running so many risks.

But there was a strong probability of it.

They had long been aware of the superior powers of the English ship as a sailer, and now they saw she was larger and better appointed in every way.

By the aid of a glass, dense masses of men, all armed and ready for action, could be seen swarming her decks, and all apparently full of eagerness for the prospective contest to begin.

The French man-of-war was well manned and well provided with guns, though certainly in every respect inferior to the English one.

To be sure, a battle is at all times a rather uncertain thing; but anyone looking at the two vessels would declare in favour of the English winning the victory.

And now through the deepening gloom there came a vivid flash of light, followed by a roar like thunder, with which mingled the sound of broken woodwork.

The English ship had fired a broadside at her opponent.

It was aimed rather too high, however, for it whistled through the top part of the rigging without doing any very serious damage.

Then the highwaymen heard the French captain give orders to return the shot.

The order was obeyed instantaneously, for the men were all in readiness.

After this, the firing began to grow continuous and incessant.

The vessels came nearer and nearer to each other.

A thick smoke, too, enveloped them, and it was only occasionally that a glimpse of the enemy could be obtained.

The slaughter on board the French ship was terrible.

The cannon seemed all to be fired with a life-destroying aim, for while but comparative little injury was done to the ship itself, the men were cut down by scores.

Suddenly the mainmast was struck near its junction with the deck.

It trembled, and before it could recover itself, another ball buried itself close to its predecessor, and the tall mast, with all its intricate tackle in the shape of rigging, sails, yards, and spars, fell bodily over the side into the sea.

The natural result of this was that the ship keeled over to that side in an alarming manner.

But men were at hand provided with hatchets, and by the aid of these the whole mass of cordage was cut away, and the ship, as soon as it was freed from this incumbrance, righted itself beautifully.

Their sailing powers were now, however, very much diminished; indeed, what little hope they might hitherto have had of outstripping their adversary was now destroyed—it was a matter of impossibility.

But it must not be supposed that the English ship had altogether escaped the effects of the encounter.

Her rigging had been seriously injured, and many of her crew killed or desperately wounded.

CHAPTER CCLXIII.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN, AFTER MANY PERILS, SUCCEED IN REACHING THE COAST OF FRANCE.

When the three highwaymen saw the critical turn which affairs were taking, they, after a brief consultation, went below, in order to speak with the Young Pretender.

He had risen from his hammock, and was sitting in one of the cabins.

He looked very weak and ill, and there was upon his face that wearied, heart-broken expression, which was distressful in the extreme to see in one so young.

Now that the bright and glorious dream, with which he had from boyhood indulged himself, was swept away, he felt that he no longer cared to live.

In a few words our friends managed to make him thoroughly acquainted with the state of affairs above, and seeing the desponding state in which he was, endeavoured to rouse him from it.

To a partial extent they succeeded.

"And now," asked Tom, "it remains for us to devise some plan by which we can escape or avoid capture."

"Is there no chance of our obtaining a victory over our antagonist?"

"I fear none."

"Or, if there is," interrupted Claude Duval, "it is too slight for us to count upon it."

"Just so. The contest may be prolonged, but eventually I think there can be no doubt about the result."

"And what do you advise?"

"I can hardly tell what would be the best. On the water I am entirely out of my element. Had we been on land I should have known what to do at once."

"Are we far from France?"

"I have not the least idea, but it is a point which ought to be ascertained, so I will go up on deck at once and inquire."

It was Sixteen-String Jack who spoke, and as he uttered the words he left the cabin and made his way on to the deck again.

Darkness had now completely set in, and he had great difficulty in picking his way through the *debris* which strewed the deck.

At length, however, he was fortunate enough to find the captain, who was standing with his back against one of the masts, issuing orders to his men with unabated valour and resolution.

For a long time Jack found all efforts to speak in vain, but an opportunity presently occurring, he said—

"How far are we from the Coast of France?"

"The captain understood English, for it was in that language that Jack had asked the question, and he replied—

"I don't know."

"But you can give us some idea."

"I should think about thirty miles."

"No more?"

"It might be forty."

"That is enough."

The captain resumed his occupation of giving orders.

"We are between thirty and forty miles from France," said Jack, as he re-entered the cabin.

"That is good news, then," said Tom King. "Some other vessel may come to our assistance."

"But that is a forlorn hope."

"Well, yes it is, and scarcely one to be relied on."

"By no means. We may be taken prisoners before then. I consider our great question is, 'How are we to escape?'"

"And leave the vessel to its fate?"

"Why not?"

"Oh! I don't know why not."

"Yes, let it be that," said the Young Pretender, looking eagerly at the idea.

"Desert the ship?"

"Yes."

"But how?"

"That I leave to you."

"I will think of it."

"We can do no good here. Our aid will not reverse the side of battle."

"True."

"Then let us seek safety in flight."

"But that is no easy matter."

"There is the boat."

"We might get in one and lower it over the side of the ship furthest from the enemy."

"To be sure we might."

"And then row off. We shall not be out of danger, but still I think we could manage a distance of thirty miles."

"Is that agreed upon?"

"It is."

"Come on deck, then, and get the boat in readiness. We shall see, too, how the battle is progressing."

The three highwaymen made their way on to the deck again, which presented about the same general appearance.

More of the dead and dying lay about than there did when they left it, and the deck itself was redder with blood.

A scene of the greatest slaughter and devastation met their view.

Yet the firing from both vessels continued with unabated fury.

The English had made more than one attempt to board them, but each one had failed.

Another effort was being made, however, just as our friends reached the deck, and every one was intently occupied in repelling it.

But grappling-irons had been thrown, and the vessels were firmly lashed to each other in many places.

Indeed, it seemed as though the crisis of the fight had come, and that a very little while would suffice to show who had the victory.

Seeing this, our friends hastened their preparations.

On the opposite side of the vessel they found three boats, and selecting the largest one, they lowered it into the water.

The sea was tolerably calm, though there was a good stiff breeze blowing. Still the boat would be able to carry itself in it, beyond a doubt.

Tom returned to the cabin to tell Charles Stuart all was ready.

He found him in the same dejected, melancholy attitude; but he arroused himself upon Tom King's approach, and said—

"Is all ready?"

"Quite."

"Come, then."

"There is, indeed no time to lose."

"Which has the advantage?"

"The English. They are superior in every respect, and have had it all along."

They reached the top of the ladder as they spoke, and the Young Pretender, as he cast a glance upon the field of battle, turned away with a shudder.

"This way," cried Tom King. "Quick—quick! or I fear, after all, we shall be too late."

The din of the battle was terrific.

Tom led the Young Pretender across the deck to where the boat awaited them.

Then with all speed they entered it, and cast off.

It was a four-oared boat, and the requisite number of oars to propel it had been placed in the bottom part.

One was taken by each, and they pushed off as rapidly as they could, being anxious in the darkness of the night to escape all possible observation.

They had every reason to believe that their departure was unnoticed.

And now, when they had drifted some distance from the vessel, our friends with one accord looked earnestly up into the sky, in order to ascertain, by an inspection of the stars, whereabouts they were, and what was the course they had to take.

They looked up for the north pole star, for they knew that when they had found it, if they kept their backs towards it, they must, in time, reach France.

It was Claude Duval who was the first to point out its position to his comrades.

The two ships, though lashed together, were by no means at anchor, but were sailing along with great speed; so the consequence was, that when the boat had been cut away they had swept rapidly away from them, and now the two vessels seemed miles off in the darkness.

Their situation was made quite palpable by the intensely bright flashes of light which shot from them.

It was the best policy of the fugitives, for such they might with propriety be designated, to keep as far away from the ships as they could, lest, after all, they should be captured.

Suddenly, however, their senses were assailed by a bright flash, immediately followed by a loud report.

An intense darkness succeeded—the two ships vanished from their view, and there was not so much trace left as a faint glimmer, to show where they had been.

"The powder magazine of one of them has exploded," said Tom King, "and all is over now. Perhaps both ships have been involved in a common destruction. If so, we had need be thankful that we are here."

They bent to their oars still more steadily as they spoke.

The three highwaymen rowed.

The Young Pretender sat at the tiller, keeping the little bark as well as he was able in its proper course.

Time passed on and our friends grew tired, still they were very loath to acknowledge the abatement of their strength.

No more reports or flashes came from any point of the horizon to indicate that the ships had renewed the conflict. Tom King was quite right, doubtless, when he said that all was over.

Beyond the vague piece of information which they had got from the captain, they had no idea whereabouts upon the wild waste of waters they were.

But by keeping as much as possible in a southerly direction they could not do wrong.

Still a long time might elapse before they reached the port.

The little boat, which looked like a nutshell upon the immense expanse, bounded bravely over the crests of the waves as she was urged forward by the rowers.

But little was said, for each one was busily occupied in looking for the dawn, which came at last.

Gradually over the whole surface of the sea there stole a faint and misty light, which made those in the boat look like spectres wearing the human form.

But the light brightened, and that effect departed.

Well pleased were the three highwaymen as they bent their backs to the oars to find that the dawn had come first in that portion of the sky which lay to their right hand,

Up to the present, then, they had been going in a right direction.

They had some assistance now from the wind, which blew a gentle breeze from the north, and made their passage over the waves much easier.

At last the sun showed his bright face above the horizon's verge. There were no dark clouds to dull the glory of his majesty, and his bright golden beams fell with a beautiful and sparkling effect upon the rippling ocean.

CHAPTER CCLXIV.

OUR FRIENDS MEET WITH MORE PERILS AND ADVENTURES ON THE DEEP, BUT AT LENGTH ARE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO REACH THE SHORE.

"No land in sight," said Tom King, with a sigh of disappointment, as he turned round and looked eagerly to southward as soon as there was light enough. "No land in sight!"

"No," said his comrades, who had turned to look with him; "but we are holding on a proper course, and have done so, I think, from the commencement. Patience! patience!"

Tom King said no more, but again bent himself to his task.

All three, however, from having had the oars so long, were horribly fatigued; but it would never do to give in so soon, so neither said a word about it.

The Young Pretender was silent and moody.

And so more time passed.

The sun climbed up in the sky higher and higher, and began to make not only his light but his heat manifest.

From time to time our friends cast anxious glances behind them to the southward, in the hope of seeing land, but there were no more signs of it than at first.

This was terribly disheartening.

Yet they would not give way until Sixteen-String Jack spoke, who said in a voice of grave concern—

"I am very hungry. Who put any provisions in the boat?"

There was a silence for a moment, and then Tom King said—

"That was forgotten. We are without provisions, and without water too."

"Then I trust we shall soon reach land."

"And so do I, indeed, or else our case will be most desperate. In the hurry and bustle of our departure, I forgot all about food and water."

"So did I!" exclaimed the others.

"And even if I had remembered it, I should not have known where to look to find what I wanted; and a vain and bootless search would probably only have had the effect of hindering us until too late."

"True—true!"

"Our best plan is to think as little of our convenience as we can, and make all speed for land, from which, surely, we cannot be very far distant now."

"I see no signs of it as yet, Tom," said Claude Duval, as shipping his oar he stood upright in the boat, and looked long and keenly in a southerly direction, "I see no signs of it yet."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Then we have no resource but to keep on as we have. Land must come in sight ere long."

"And soon I hope," said Jack, "for my arms and back are so stiff and tired, that I feel as though I could scarce draw another stroke."

"Mine are the same," said Claude Duval.

"Mine too," said Tom, "but it will never do to despair. Say, shall we rest awhile? One will be sufficient to keep the boat's head in its proper course, and we can drift with the tide."

His two comrades hesitated.

"You had better rest now," he added, than when you are too fatigued to feel the benefit of it."

There was sound wisdom in this, and they felt it, so without another word they shipped their oars and rested, while Tom kept the boat's head as near due north as he was able.

Oh! how sweet was that rest! but as their bodies grew cooler, another want began to make itself apparent, an awful want.

It was thirst!

But not one mentioned it. Neither said a word respecting the fierce thirst which burned within him.

They looked all round them, but they seemed to be the only living creatures on the sea. They were far from easy in their minds. Some English vessel might come up and put out a boat to take them aboard, but this they determined, if possible, to prevent.

It was for about the space of one half-hour that they rested, taking in turns the duty of guiding their little vessel, and then they fell to their work again.

They did not know how long it was since they left the ship, but fancied it must have been eight or ten hours, and if they were correct in this they ought ere now to have had a glimpse of land.

But nothing whatever of the kind was visible.

And now the sun reached almost the highest point in the heavens to which he would attain, and as the heavens were free from clouds, the heat that he sent down upon the heads of our friends seemed absolutely scorching.

It materially increased their thirst. Their tongues were dried up and parched, and their lips cracked, but there was nothing wherewith to moisten them but the salt sea, to drink of which would be nothing but utter madness.

The Young Pretender, perhaps through the influence which the conduct of those by whom he was surrounded afforded him, bore his sufferings with a fortitude which elicited the warmest admiration.

And so the time passed on—passed on without bringing to their sight that which they so longed to see.

Not a word was spoken.

They found that to utter words dried their mouths and aggravated their thirst, therefore they wisely abstained from speech.

In this condition things remained until the sun declined—and declined—until his disk almost dipped beneath the horizon.

It was now quite clear that either the captain was very far out of his reckoning when he said they were only thirty or forty miles from the coast of France, or else our friends, in some incomprehensible manner or other, had been sailing in a wrong direction.

Which of these two it was it would be impossible to say as yet.

The sun sank.

A cold wind seemed to sweep across the waters as soon as he disappeared, but the sudden chill which was felt by all, was to be attributed to the withdrawal of the light as much as anything.

Was another night of horrors to be passed through?

It seemed so.

The fair and beautiful daylight faded away.

One by one the stars came out, according to their different degrees of brightness, and they resumed their old mode of steering.

Rather anxiously they looked up to note the position of the north pole star.

They found it where they hoped to find it, and this set their minds tolerably well at rest that they had not come out of their course.

The captain, then, must have been in error about the distance.

It was impossible to say how far he was wrong. Perhaps they had still more than forty miles to go before they could touch land at its nearest point.

Should this be so, what were they to do for food and drink?

Already they thought the utmost limit of their endurance had been reached.

The cravings of hunger and thirst were really terrible.

A whole volume might be filled with the depiction of their sufferings.

To add, too, to their perplexities, the wind changed and began to blow fiercely from the north-east.

This increased their labour and made the task of keeping in their proper course a most difficult one. Each moment, too, the wind increased in violence, while clouds began rapidly to come up from the windward quarter.

Our friends marked these things with a feeling which might almost be called dismay.

They were no sailors, and quite inexperienced in nautical affairs.

Up came, too, the clouds with great swiftness and in prodigious quantities.

Very soon the whole face of the heavens was covered by them.

The stars were completely blotted out.

They had now no compass whatever to steer by.

The wind increased to a gale.

The waves swelled and rose to a great height, while their crests were tipped with a white foam, which glistened faintly through the darkness.

What were they to do now.

To hope to keep in their proper course, without some fixed object to guide them, was quite impossible, and, knowing it, did not even make the attempt.

Their whole attention, too, was demanded for the care of the boat, which every moment seemed in the most imminent danger of sinking.

They soon found they had but one chance of keeping her afloat, and that was to let her head be before the wind.

They scudded then before the wind with fearful speed.

Weak and exhausted, our friends threw their oars into the boat, and in a manner of speaking resigned themselves to that adverse fate which seemed to pursue them so malignantly.

Away, away they scudded with terrible velocity over the rapidly rolling foaming waves; but the little boat seemed strong and taut, and bounded freely on its way.

With anxious blood-shot eyes, throbbing pulses, burning brains, parched lips, and exhausted frames, the four inmates of the little boat endeavoured to pierce the obscurity around them.

But all was of one uniform blackness, and they could distinguish nothing.

That they were now going out of their course considerably, all felt certain. They might, perhaps, never come near the coast, but be drifted out to sea, and so be lost.

On board of a large ship the wind, that blew with so much force upon our friends, and seemed to them a hurricane, would but have been a breeze to waft them on their course.

At length the ears of Claude Duval heard a sound with which he was familiar.

It rose plainly above the wind.

"Breakers!" he shouted. "Breakers! we are near the land now with a vengeance!"

Looking in advance, they saw a white line of foam

The next moment they swept over it.

Fortunately at a lucky moment.

The boat was light, and they shipped one wave, but that was all.

They were now riding in comparatively smooth water.

The oars were resumed with a better spirit, and in a few minutes they felt the keel grate against the sand.

They were so exhausted and overcome that they could scarcely find strength to crawl out of the boat.

But at length they did so, and all four together made their way wearily towards a light which they saw in the far distance.

They had, indeed, reached France.

The Young Pretender quickly made himself known to the authorities, and then our friends had every attention paid to them which their condition demanded.

CHAPTER CCLXV.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS RESOLVE TO RETURN ONCE MORE TO ENGLAND, AND COMMIT A HIGHWAY ROBBERY ON THE CALAIS ROAD.

THERE is, or rather there was, at the period of which we are writing, behind the convent of Carmes Deschaux, Paris, a piece of waste ground much used as a spot where duels might be fought, or meetings take place without much fear of an interruption.

Indeed, it had rather a bad reputation, that convent of Carmes Deschaux, which was a stone edifice, rapidly crumbling to decay.

It was one morning rather more than a week after the events which we described at the end of the preceding chapter, that four persons stood upon this piece of waste ground behind the convent to which we have alluded.

Had any one seen them they would at once have come to the conclusion that a duel was about to be fought, for all were well armed and had serious countenances.

The time, too, would have favoured that supposition, for it was early morning, and the huge city yet slumbered.

The early rays of the morning sun fell with a beautiful and picturesque effect upon the moss-grown crumbling walls of the convent, and upon the attire of the four persons.

They were old acquaintances of the reader.

One of them stood a little apart from the other three, who he was addressing in a rich, calm, but sad voice.

His words will be quite enough to explain all, and we need do no more than simply chronicle them.

"My friends, for such from the first you have proved yourselves to be, I have appointed to meet you at this place in order that we may have a little conversation with each other, which shall be heard by no one but ourselves."

The others bowed, and the speaker continued—

"I need hardly tell you that I am a disappointed man. The dream of ambition wherewith I have beguiled myself is utterly dispersed. I have made, in the face of the most discouraging circumstances, an attempt to recover that which I cannot help considering my rightful inheritance. In that attempt you have aided me like brave men But fortune was against us. The enterprize failed. Never mind. Let us hear no more of it. We have escaped from our enemies. Our lives are yet our own. But it was not to tell you that which you must know well already that I called you here. No. It was in a few words to say that I must retire into an obscurity from which I can never emerge. I am poor. I have no money. All the wealth we possessed was lavished upon this enterprize, and has been lost. It is, then, very unwillingly that I confess that I have nothing wherewith I can reward you but my thanks. Those you can have. Believe me, they are most cordial and sincere ones. You have done all that men could do, and who could accomplish more? But I wish you to understand me. In this obscurity to which I am about to consign myself, I shall have only my poverty for my companion. I must, therefore, part from you, for when I withdraw from the world there is no reason why you should withdraw with me. It grieves me exceedingly that I should have to part with you—to dismiss you from my service without rewarding you. But it cannot be avoided. To your companion I owe my present life and liberty. The daring scheme which he had the boldness to attempt to carry out, and of the success of which he spoke so confidently, he may perhaps, though it is somewhat doubtful, bring to a successful termination. Should he do so, I shall consider the reward offered by the English government for my dead body as lawful spoil. Therefore, when I leave you, I must beg of you to return to England and rejoin your comrade. Should he have been lucky enough to obtain the reward, it is my particular desire that it may be divided equally among you. You will then have, each of you, enough to live upon, and you will be able to quit that mode of life which is derogatory to you. Courage and honour. I shall never forget you, and the zeal you have displayed in my cause, and I shall be eternally grateful for it.

The Pretender paused.

Respect forbade either of the three highwaymen to interrupt him, so he spoke on to the end in the manner we have recorded.

But though we set down the words, we are wholly unable to represent the tone of deep pathos in which they were uttered.

"We shall ever remember you," said Tom King, at length; "and you do not yourself regret the failure of this enterprize more than we do. But it is past. And now, my prince, allow me to dissent from you. Let us stay here until we hear from England."

"No; I am firm. I have decided upon my course. If you respect me, as I believe and hope you do, show that respect by not prolonging this to me most painful scene, but bid me farewell, as I requested."

"If such is your wish, prince, we of course obey."

"It is my wish. Farewell! farewell! We shall meet no more. Let me give each of you some souvenir by which you can remember me. The gifts are simple; would that they were of greater wealth."

He took four rings from the fingers on his left hand as he spoke, and gave one to each of our three friends.

Then, holding up the fourth, he said—

"This is for your companion. I must beg of you, when you rejoin him, to place it upon his finger in my stead, and with my best wishes. Now, farewell! Do not prolong the parting. Farewell!"

The Young Pretender turned rapidly away as he spoke and was quickly lost to sight round an angle of the building.

"And so this is the end," said Claude Duval, after a pause; "and we are free to return to England. Well, for my own part, I am glad of it."

"And so am I," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"I know you both joined the enterprise chiefly because Dick and I did so. Well, we have come to no great harm, as it so turns out, and there is a chance that we may come to some good, for I have great faith in Dick."

"So have I; and I should not wonder if, after all, he does not succeed in carrying off the reward."

"I trust he may, for the sake of us all; but I am afraid too many inquiries will be made, and too much delay will take place."

"Time will show us.

"I am anxious to know. There is nothing to keep us here; and since we are free to do so, let us set off for England at once."

"With all my heart."

"Come on, then!"

"Stop a moment. How are we off for funds to prosecute our journey?"

"Badly."

"I thought so."

"But how are we to remedy that? In the old fashion?"

"Why not?"

"I see no reason why not."

"Nor I."

"Nor I."

"But where are horses and accoutrements to be found?"

"Yes, that is a serious question."

"Not very, either. We present a tolerably decent exterior."

"Thanks to the prince, yes."

"But what has that to do with getting horses?"

"Everything. We will go to a livery stables somewhere and hire three for a day."

"A day?"

"Yes, and stick to them."

"Rather dangerous. We should soon have them in pursuit of us."

"What does that matter?"

"Oh! not much."

"We are going to make our way straight out of France, only stopping to pick up money by the way. We shall be off before they can catch us."

"Well, we will try it."

Having resolved upon this plan of action, the three highwaymen immediately bent their steps to the city, and soon reached a place where horses were let out on hire.

Being so early in the morning, there was no one about but the ostler in charge of the cattle, and our friends immediately propitiated him by giving him a liberal gratuity—so liberal, indeed, that he jumped to the conclusion they were gentlemen.

It was no unusual thing for strangers to come there and hire horses for a time, so that our friends got what they wanted with even less trouble than they had anticipated.

They were quickly in the saddle, and trotted off down the street.

The ostler stood at the entrance of the stable-yard and looked after them, jingling the money he had received from them in his pocket.

He little thought that he was never fated to see those horses again.

The steeds of which our friends had got possession seemed of excellent quality, but desiring to attract as little attention as possible, they trotted gently along the streets until Paris was left behind them.

Upon gaining the open country, they increased their speed, and stopped at the next town to refresh the horses while they purchased pistols and ammunition, for they were wholly unprovided with those necessaries.

They were easily obtained, though the people of whom they were purchased, finding them to be foreigners, charged them a most extortionate price.

Sixteen-String Jack, too, bought some cloth which he divided into three portions.

In these holes were cut to see through, and being placed upon their heads, and their hats used to keep them in their places, formed excellent masks.

Thus provided, they kept upon the road all the day, resting occasionally at quiet inns, so as not to knock the horses up too soon.

During daylight they offered no molestation to the persons they met upon the road, but when it grew dark they prepared for action.

A dispute then arose as to who should stop the next conveyance that looked worth the trouble.

All were anxious to have the honour.

Finding it could be agreed upon in no other way, they determined to draw lots for it.

The chance fell upon Claude Duval.

Scarcely had this little arrangement been made, than the rumbling of wheels upon the silent road came to their quick ears.

"Here goes," said Claude. "Keep back all of you, and do not interfere without you find my safety demands it."

He trotted forward towards the carriage, which was a huge affair drawn by two horses.

"*Halte là!*"* he shouted to the coachman, and in an agony of fright the driver pulled up in a moment.

"*Au secours!*"† he yelled at the top of his voice, but Claude discharged his pistol in the air, and the man fell to the ground as though dead.

The carriage window was let down at this moment, and a voice cried—

"*Voleurs de grand chemin. Au secours. Au secours.*"‡

Claude was at the window in a moment, and holding his pistol in a threatening attitude, commanded silence.

He saw the occupants of the carriage were well dressed, and male and female.

CHAPTER CCLXVI.

MR. JOSIAH SKINNER UNDERGOES A LITTLE DISCIPLINE AT THE PUMP, AND IS DESERVEDLY WHIPPED OFF THE WINBERRY ESTATE.

THE expression of Mr. Josiah Skinner's face when Dick Turpin stepped so unexpectedly from behind the screen was really a sight to see. It was a most absolute picture of ludicrous fright and horror.

He released his hold upon the mysterious lady instantly, and alarmed excessively at Dick's hostile appearance, sank in a collapsed condition in the chair which was nearest to him.

"Now, Mr. Skinner, if such is your name, be good enough to explain the meaning of your intrusion here, and when you have done that you will have to account to me for your behaviour to this lady here!"

"Oh! I shall, shall I?" asked Mr. Skinner, assuming a courage though he felt it not. "I shall, shall I."

"You will, and bear in mind I am not to be intimidated by you. What is the meaning of your intrusion here?"

"Here's my authority," said Mr. Skinner, slapping the letter he held in his hand in the most approved melodramatic fashion. "Here's my authority to enter this house and to take possession of the same."

He rose from his chair as he spoke, and elevated the document in his hand.

"Oh! indeed," said Dick. "That authorises you to enter here, does it? We'll just see."

As he spoke, and before Mr. Skinner could have divined his intentions, Turpin snatched the paper out of his hand.

The attorney uttered a howl, and made an attempt to recover it, but Dick was not so easily taken by surprise.

He took a pistol from his coat pocket, and deliberately cocking it, he held it in the face of the man of law.

"Sit down," he cried, "and don't move, or so sure as this is a loaded pistol you are a dead man."

"A dead man! Oh! lor!" ejaculated Mr. Skinner, who had a mortal dread of firearms. "I'll sit down, sir; I'll sit down."

Dick opened the paper, and saw it was signed and sealed in a very imposing and legal manner; but as for the contents, they were a little beyond him, and, indeed, he made no attempt to interpret the mass of legal jargon.

"And so this is your authority, is it?"

"It is."

"And am I to understand that it is by virtue of this you act?"

"You are."

"And that if you had not this document you could not act."

"Certainly not, it would be informal."

"Ahem! Thank you. Now, Mr. Skinner, attorney-at-law, what do you think of that?"

As he asked this question, Dick Turpin rapidly and skilfully tore the paper to shreds, and then threw them in the lawyer's face.

"Murder! Murder!" he shouted, "Oh! murder!"

"Sit still and hold your row!" cried Dick, again presenting his pistol.

Mr. Skinner sank back.

"Now how can you act? Where's your authority?"

"Murder! murder! I have that paper, I legally take possession of this house and all that belongs to it, in the name of my client, to whom they have been assigned."

* Halt there

† Help

‡ Highwaymen! Help! help!

"Who is your client?"

"Mr. Adrian Winberry."

"Oh! you avow that?"

"Avow it? Of course I do."

"Very well. Where is he now?"

"I decline to answer that question."

"I daresay you do, but it is all one."

"How all one?"

"I know."

"You know, do you?"

"Yes I know."

"And where is he, pray?"

"In Newgate, committed to take his trial on a charge of murder."

"Pho!—pho!"

"Which he committed."

"Eh!—eh! Committed? Take care what you say. You may have to prove your words."

"I am quite ready to do so."

"Eh! what?" ejaculated Mr. Skinner, a look of alarm overspreading his countenance. "Ready to prove that he committed the murder?"

"Is what you have just attempted to do quite legal?"

"Quite legal?" Of course it is. Why?"

"Nothing. Only it is a good thing for you if it is. Now, why did you inquire so particularly whether there was anybody in this house besides the lady?"

"That's my business."

"It may be, but it looks to me as though you were doing something not exactly on the square. Now, suppose any one else had been in the house, should you have taken possession?"

"I—a—I—why—oh! yes—that is—no! Of course I should."

"Very good, that is quite clear and satisfactory."

"Of course it is."

"As you very justly observe, of course it is. Now, Mr. Skinner, just listen to me."

"I'll listen; but I am not going to be bullied, I can tell you that," exclaimed the lawyer, once more endeavouring to show a valorous front.

"It seems quite clear to me that your authority for acting in the manner you have was never very good, and now you have no authority whatever. And now that we have settled that part of the business, just look here. You came like an unprincipled villain as you are, the agent or tool of a villain, an unprincipled villain. You thought to find this house in the possession of this lady, and intended to abate into it. But I am here to defeat your abominable schemes. I have told you that you should answer to me for your conduct, and so you shall."

"Mercy, mercy! I assure you, sir, that it is quite right and legal—quite right and legal. Mercy!"

"Silence!" said Dick, who had caught the unfortunate lawyer by the nape of his neck. "Silence! You shall not depart hence until you have received condign punishment."

"What would you do with him?" asked the lady.

"Leave him to me. The steward has gone to London. What other male domestics have you got in the house?"

"The butler and the keeper."

"Capital; they will do."

"What for?"

"Call them."

The lady did so.

The two men hastily obeyed the summons, for they found something unusual was taking place, and were on the alert accordingly.

"You will please obey me," said Dick.

The lady nodded her head assentingly.

"What is it, sir?"

"You see this man. He has offered an insult to the lady here, and has illegally tried to take possession of your master's property; and would, no doubt, have succeeded, had it not been for my presence."

Mr. Winberry was much loved and respected by his servants, and they gave a bound forward, which terrified Mr. Skinner exceedingly.

The intelligence of their master's death had not been imparted to them for several reasons.

"Where is master?" they asked.

"He is dead," said Dick.

"Dead!" they exclaimed, horror-struck. "How?—when?—and where?"

"That you shall know presently, but not in the presence of this man. He has endeavoured, however, to despoil Miss Blanche of her father's possessions. Now, what does he deserve?"

"Let me get at 'un," said the keeper, "and I'll show him what's what."

"Murder!"

"Stop a minute," said Dick; "have you got such a thing as a horsepond?"

"Yes! yes!"

"Duck him in it, then!"

"I am afraid there is not water enough."

"Oh!"

The lawyer's countenance brightened.

"But there is a beautiful pump."

"A pump!"

"Yes."

"The very thing."

"Oh! it is such a pump! It draws nearly two gallons at every stroke."

"Excellent."

"And then the water!"

"What of the water?"

"Why, it comes out a well that is I don't know how many yards deep!"

"Yes—yes."

"And I do believe it's colder than ice."

"Capital! Show the way to the pump, and I'll bring the lawyer. We will have him under it for half an hour."

"Bravo! Hurrah!" shouted the servants, in an ecstacy of delight.

"Murder! murder!" yelled the lawyer, making frantic struggles to escape his impending fate. "Murder! murder!"

But it was all in vain.

The lawyer was but a diminutive, shrivelled-up specimen of humanity, and possessed of about as much strength as a cat.

The grasp Dick had of him was a tight one, and he could no more wriggle himself out of it than he could fly.

His struggles were, however, most desperate.

He clung frantically to every object he came to in his way, movable or fixed.

To prevent this confusion, Dick took hold of him with his other hand, and this time by the seat of his breeches.

He shifted his hold from his neck to his coat-collar, and fairly carried him before him into the hall.

He kicked, he writhed, he swore, but it was all to no use.

Out of the back-door he went into the yard, and at length the pump was reached.

Dick deposited him, breathless and exhausted, in the capacious trough beneath.

"Now keep him there, my men," he said, "and I will use the pump."

"All right, sir," said the servants, seizing the unfortunate Mr. Skinner, and compelling him most reluctantly to remain in his uncomfortable position.

Dick went to the pump-handle.

It was a massive affair, and of great length.

He raised it, and brought it down with hearty goodwill.

He was rewarded by seeing an immense gush of water follow the application, and certainly when the keeper said two gallons were thrown at every stroke, he did not much exaggerate.

Mr. Skinner howled and screamed, but Dick was deaf to his cries.

Up and down, up and down went the pump-handle, as fast as his muscles could make it, and he never paused until, utterly exhausted, he was unable to work it any longer.

CHAPTER CCLXVII.

DICK TURPIN MAKES A STARTLING COMMUNICATION TO MR. JOHN KERSEY.

MR. SKINNER was thoroughly exhausted, too.

When the two men released him, he never offered to move, but lay like a limp piece of rag in the trough under the pump.

The dressing he had had was a very severe one.

It was a cold winter's morning in the first place, and the air was quite frosty.

The water came from a very great depth, and was proportionably cold.

"What shall we do with him now, sir?"

"I think he has almost had enough."

"But he must not stop here."

"No, he must not. Run into the hall and fetch a horse-whip, and whip him off the estate."

The alacrity with which they ran off showed their extreme willingness to obey this order.

Indeed, they enjoyed the sport mightily.

Back they came, cracking the whips most formidably.

Still Mr. Skinner did not offer to stir.

The keeper, however, upon reaching the pump, gave his whip a "flick," as he called it, and the extreme point of the lash caught the lawyer on the tender part of his person.

Mr. Skinner had been in a state of partial insensibility up to that moment, but that roused him.

He uttered a most awful yell, and scrambled to his feet.

Crack—crack! went the two whips, as soon as he was fairly on his legs.

His natural impulse was to run, which he did with a speed that was really astonishing.

The two servants followed, answering his cries for mercy with loud peals of laughter.

Away they went, the lawyer quite blinded with the water which ran down out of his hair into his eyes, bounding on like some india-rubber ball.

The servants kept well up to him, and when he flagged, a stroke with the whip accelerated his speed in a manner wonderful to behold.

More than once he caught his foot against or fell over some obstruction, and on such occasions he really did not stop to pick himself up, but kept rolling on and on until he rolled on to his legs again.

Dick stood on the steps leading into the hall, from which elevated spot he had an excellent view of the chase for a long time.

The men literally obeyed the orders they had received. They whipped him off the grounds.

They got him at last to the high-road, but he was in a meadow, and to reach it he would have to surmount a very high and very thick hedge.

Away he went at it, never seeing what was in his course until he was close to it, and then he gave a frantic bound to get over.

But he fell short of the mark.

He alighted in the most prickly part of the hedge.

Here, to the intense delight of the servants, he struggled and fought like a madman, until at length he rolled into the dusty high-road in a most deplorable condition.

Unfortunately for him just as he reached this place, which he did with a bang sufficient to break every bone and knock all the wind out of his body, there came along a drove of boys who were on their way to the village to school.

Directly they saw him they set up a yell.

The lawyer heard it.

The pursuers were close behind, he thought.

Up he scrambled.

Bruised, covered with weals from the whip, soaking with water, caked with dirt, and his clothes hanging about him in shreds, he looked just like an animated scarecrow.

The boys, astounded at the sight, pursued him along the road to the village, pelting him with stones as they went.

On reaching the houses, however, he saw the door of one standing open, and made a rush into it.

"Murder!" he yelled. "Call the police! Call the police! Murder, murder!"

It was into a little cottage that he rushed, and the woman who occupied it was busily engaged in scrubbing the floor on her hands and knees.

At this sudden intrusion her fears and alarm were so great that she put her head into the pail of water instead of the scrubbing-brush.

The neighbours soon came up, and among them, of course, the parish constable and beadle, who put an end to Mr. Skinner's persecutions.

But we have other and more important matters to attend to, and therefore direct the attention of the reader to the proceedings of Dick Turpin.

When he had watched Mr. Skinner until he could see him no longer, he turned into the hall again, and made his way to the room in which he had left the lady.

To his surprise he found her seated near the fire, and crying bitterly.

She looked up as she saw him enter, and, mastering her emotion, said, in a voice broken by sobs—

"Oh! what is to be the end of this? I am terrified to death. Where is Blanche? Oh! I shudder when I think what may be her fate."

"Calm yourself," said Dick. "Calm yourself, I beg. This violent agitation will do nothing but unnerve you. I pray you now be calm. There is no fresh danger."

The lady dried her tears and looked at Dick.

"I do not know what I should have done," she said, "had not chance thrown you in my way. Think of this morning."

"Yes, the rascally attorney has met with the treatment he so richly merited. He will keep his distance of this place for the future, I'll warrant."

"But what do you understand by his presence?"

"I think I can easily explain it."

"Pray do so."

"Adrian Winberry would send for this man in Newgate. He would tell him that this charge against him is a device to keep him from an inheritance, and, to prove his words, would show him the deed which his brother signed. He would then employ this lawyer to abate, that is, to enter upon possession of these premises on his behalf, in order to prevent any one else doing so, for 'Possession,' as the proverb says, 'is nine points of the law.'"

"I see."

"Upon further thoughts, however, I am inclined to think that Adrian Winberry has taken this Mr. Skinner more into his confidence than I at first imagined, as some of his words prove. If so, then the punishment he has received is indeed most richly merited."

"It is a terrible affair."

"It is, indeed: but I trust I shall be able to set it right. But, hark! What is that? More visitors?"

At this moment there came a loud knocking at the front door.

"It is, perhaps, Shockley returned from London with Mr. John Kersey, the lawyer."

"Most likely. I had forgotten that."

The lady was right, for the steward soon appeared, ushering in the individual mentioned.

Mr. Kersey was a man of about fifty years of age.

His hair, what little there was upon his head, was quite white.

His face had a kind benevolent look, and this was most perceivable in his eyes.

But yet he was a man of acumen and intelligence.

Dick was favourably impressed with his appearance directly he saw him.

He felt that he was a man to be trusted.

"You have sent for me, miss," he said politely.

"Yes, sir, upon very serious business. I pray you be seated."

Shockley handed Mr. Kersey a chair, and then left the room.

"This gentleman," said the lady, indicating Turpin, "will make you acquainted with the nature of the business upon which we have summoned you for your assistance and advice."

The lawyer bowed, and assumed an attentive attitude.

Dick then related those facts with which the reader is already acquainted, and which it will be unnecessary for us to repeat.

We ought to observe that he most carefully concealed who he really was.

"This is a very serious business, indeed," said the lawyer. "My father used to say that Adrian would come to no good. I have seen the account of the murder, but never knew until this moment that my client William was the murdered man."

"Yet such is the case."

"And you saw this murder committed, you say?"

"I did.

"Then why did you not proclaim at once all you knew, and step forward boldly."



[THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN CLAUDE DUVAL AND THE GENDARME.]

"There are reasons."

"No matter, you must give your evidence. It will be indispensable."

"Stop a moment, sir!"

"For what?"

"I will tell you. I believe you are much attached to this family."

"I am."

"And you would do a great many things to benefit it."

"All in my power."

"Enough. Would you receive a communication in confidence, and keep it inviolably secret, provided that by so doing you perform an inestimable service to your clients?"

"I would, indeed. Try me! You can trust me."

"I think I can, sir. Well, then, the reason that I did not come forward is because I am inimical to the laws of this land."

"Inimical!"

"There is a reward offered for my apprehension."

The lawyer looked very grave.

"I have it in my power to save this family, to defeat the machinations of a villain. Will you listen to me? Will you receive, in solemn confidence, the communication I am about to make to you? Answer me, yes or no!"

"I will. I may have scruples, but the magnitude of what is at stake is enough to induce me to set them aside."

"I am glad to hear it."

"Now then, sir, for your communication."

"Prepare yourself for a surprise—an overwhelming surprise; and in the astonishment which my avowal will elicit, do not forget the terms under which I make it to you."

Mr. Kersey looked rather anxiously at Dick, as he replied—

"Begin, sir. I am ready."

"What I have to say will take but a moment to utter."

"What is it?"

"I AM DICK TURPIN, THE HIGHWAYMAN!"

CHAPTER CCLXVIII.

MR. KERSEY RECOVERS FROM HIS ALARM, AND GIVES HIS ATTENTION TO DICK TURPIN.

It is quite certain that no other announcement would have produced such a startling effect upon Mr. John Kersey as the one did which ended the last chapter.

He opened his mouth to its full extent, and drew his breath in strange, hurried gasps.

Had he been standing, he would, doubtless, in his astonishment, have started back several paces. As it was, he gave his chair an impulse backwards, and its legs grated as it moved over the polished floor.

Dick Turpin enjoyed the amazement of the lawyer excessively, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he controlled himself from laughing aloud.

Mr. Kersey's speech entirely deserted him.

His first shock of astonishment over, he endeavoured to say something, but the effort was a complete failure.

His lips moved, but no sound came forth from them.

His eyes glared.

"Come, come, Mr. Kersey," said Dick, at length, "do not look so much alarmed and astonished. There is no occasion for it, I assure you. But let me remind you of the conditions under which the avowal was made."

Mr. Kersey spoke at last.

"Do—do you really mean to say that you are the des—no, I mean the noto—that is, cele"——

"If you mean am I really and truly Dick Turpin, the highwayman, I say yes."

"Oh!"

"Remember your promise."

"I will, but"——

"But what?"

"How came you here in this place, and how came this lady to know you?"

"I have already told you, Mr. Kersey, that, pursued by my foes, I took refuge in a deserted and reputed haunted house in Birdcage-walk, St. James's-park. While there, as I related to you at length, I heard the conversation which took place between the half-brothers, and witnessed the murder of the elder by the younger."

"Yes, I know all that."

"And do you clearly comprehend it?"

"Most clearly. It would be impossible to mistake it."

"I am glad of that. You understand what I have since learned in London?"

"Fully."

"Then, Mr. Kersey, the reason we have sent for you is, we want to know our best course of action. Give us your advice as to the plan to be adopted to preserve these properties and recover Blanche, and how to punish the perfidious half-brother for his black-hearted villainy."

"It is a matter requiring much deliberation," said Mr. Kersey, "and the circumstances are altogether of so extraordinary a nature that I own myself completely at fault."

"I like you all the better for making that admission," said Turpin, bluntly, "but you must think how much more you would have been at fault had it not been for my presence here, and having accidentally witnessed what I have."

"True, and yet there lies the difficulty."

"In what way?"

"Ahem—well—a"——

"Speak plainly, Mr. Kersey. You need not be afraid of offending me by what you say. Pray speak plainly."

"Well, then, I will. You cannot very well walk into the witness-box, and give your evidence."

"No, that is the worst of it."

"I presume you would not care to do that?"

"Not if it could be avoided."

"Certainly not. But supposing that it could not be avoided?"

"Why, then," said Dick, in a tone calm but resolute, and which left no doubt of its sincerity behind, "then I should not scruple to step forward in the cause of justice, let the consequence to myself be what it might."

"Is this possible?" said Mr. Kersey, full of admiration.

"I fully mean what I say; but of course you will understand that I should do this not from choice, but from necessity."

"Certainly."

"The peril to myself would be doubtless great; but I should think the sacredness of my cause would shield me from capture."

Mr. Kersey shook his head.

"I don't know that," he said. "I am afraid not."

"No, no," said the lady, "I will not permit that. Some other means less dangerous to yourself must be found. I cannot consent that for our sakes you should peril your life, as you would do if you were to act in the manner you propose."

"Can any other means be found?" said Dick. "If so, then no one would be more glad to embrace them than myself, for I confess myself to be by no means tired of my existence, though in it there is little of happiness and enjoyment. However, that is neither here nor there."

"It is not."

"Mr. Kersey."

"Sir."

"You have been put into possession of all the facts of the case. You agree with me that it would be little short of madness for me to make my appearance in the witness-box."

"I do."

"But you also agree with me that it would never do to let Adrian Winberry escape the punishment which is his due for lack of sufficient evidence; nor would it do to let his nefarious scheme of taking possession of this place succeed."

"I cannot do otherwise than agree with you."

"I have been told, Mr. Kersey, that you are the solicitor to this family, and that your father had that situation before you. Such being the case, you cannot fail to feel a more than common interest in the welfare of its members."

"I cannot, sir."

"For myself, I hardly know why I feel the very great interest I do; probably I could find a cause for it in the strange manner I have been mixed up in it, and the detestation I feel for the monstrous villainy of Adrian Winberry."

"Just so, sir."

"Then, Mr. Kersey, I once more ask you to advise us. I am willing to do all, but yet I do not wish to expose myself unnecessarily."

"I think I may venture to say that I comprehend you perfectly in all that you have said. The worst of it is, we have so little time before us."

"You are right; the trial will take place to-morrow."

"I am aware of it. You see that leaves us with hardly any time before us."

"Well, Mr. Kersey, what is your advice?"

"I must really refrain from saying just at present. I wish I could advise you, but at this moment I am unable—that is to say, I do not see how anything could be proved against Adrian. To be sure, he might be convicted of the murder, but that is not all. No one saw him commit the crime, with the exception of yourself and his two accomplices. Now, if those two men—and from what I can hear, I think they are unscrupulous enough—if, I say, they choose to deny that Adrian had anything to do with the transaction, we shall obliged to call upon you for your evidence."

"I see all that quite clearly. But would my evidence be received?"

"The question may be raised. Have you ever been convicted of any offence?"

"Once in my boyhood."

"That is a pity. What was its nature?"

"Nothing important. I was tried for deer-stealing, and at the time of my conviction, considerable doubts were raised whether I really was or was not guilty."

"And were you?"

"What?"

"Guilty?"

"That is almost beside the question, I think."

"So it is. But were you convicted?"

"I was."

"Then your guilt or innocence don't much matter. I don't think that will damage your evidence in any way."

"I am glad of that. And now there is one thing more."

"Name it."

"Could I not give my evidence by proxy?"

"No; certainly not."

Turpin was silent a moment. Then he added—

'But suppose it was stated to the court that there was an important witness in this case whose evidence would be sufficient to prove the guilt of the prisoner, but circumstances prevented that witness from standing before the court and delivering his testimony."

"Well, sir."

"Do you think in that case the court would be induced to throw the shield of its protection before this witness, and allow him to enter the witness-box and give his evidence, and after doing so, permit him to depart unmolested?"

"I cannot precisely answer that question. I do not know whether it would be in the power of any judge in this kingdom to do such an act."

"Well, then, suppose the reasons for the non-appearance of the witness which I just now uttered were given to the court, and that you produced a document signed by me, which contained a narrative of all that had taken place, do you think that document would be received as evidence?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"I am afraid not, and more especially in a case of murder."

"And so, you think, neither of the proposals which I have made practicable or feasible?"

"I could hardly go so far as to say they were, not but I am afraid that they are not."

Turpin looked disappointed, and a brief silence ensued, in which all those three who were present at this singular conference gave themselves up to deep and earnest thought.

Dick was the first to speak.

"But, Mr. Kersey, if you think that neither of my schemes will answer, there is no reason why they should not successively be tried."

"None whatever."

"Then by all means let them be tried. If they are successful, then so much the better. If they fail, we shall be none the worse off, and the last resource will still remain."

"Very true. But I should be sorry to see you driven to it, because your liberty, and necessarily your life, would most certainly be the forfeit. The judge would have no power to prevent your capture."

CHAPTER CCLXIX.

MR. KERSEY AND DICK TURPIN COME TO A DEFINITE UNDERSTANDING.

DICK TURPIN'S lips were curled with a dissenting smile when Mr. Kersey said that his capture must of necessity follow his appearance in the witness-box; but, except by this smile, he did not in any way contradict what he said.

As to the latter part of his speech, that might have been, and doubtless was, correct.

"If the object so much wished for cannot be attained by any other means, I am willing to run the risk."

"But, my dear sir—"

"Mr. Kersey!"

"Listen to me"——

"Nay, sir; you listen to me."

"I will, since you wish it; but"——

"No buts. As you must already know, I am a man of rather an uncommon kind. I am one who never suffer danger to dismay him or turn him aside from the execution of any purpose upon which he had determined.

"That may be; but still I consider it to be the duty of every one to preserve himself."

"And so do I," said the lady, "and I will never consent to this sacrifice, for I can call it by no other name."

"It is a sacrifice," said Mr. Kersey, "and however much you may be admired for making it, or offering to make it, still I think it is one which ought not to be permitted."

"I am sure it ought not."

"I am in your hands," said Turpin, "and nothing is further from my wishes than to act contrary to your inclinations. I have merely made these proposals; and if anything else can be suggested, I shall be pleased, for you must not think that I wish to expose myself for the mere sake of doing so."

"That is a very sensible speech," said Mr. Kersey. "It seems very strange, I can assure you, sir, for me to be sitting down in your society; and I can hardly bring myself to believe that I am awake or in my senses."

"I dare say it does seem strange, sir. I have trusted you. I have taken your word; I shall rely upon that as a guaranty that you will not betray me."

"I am offending against the law," said Mr. Kersey, with a smile. "I ought, if I did the strict letter of my duty, to denounce you with all speed possible to justice; but, then, circumstances alter cases."

"You are right, sir."

"You can trust me, then, and safely."

"I believe you. I came to the conclusion that I could do so as soon as I saw you. Your countenance is the countenance of a man who can be trusted."

"You flatter me."

"Not at all—not at all. And now, Mr. Kersey, should you like a few hours for reflection? If so, I am sure you can have it."

"Oh! yes, Mr. Kersey," said the young lady.

"No, no; I shall not require it. I should like to find some other means of bringing Adrian to punishment, but I am afraid I shall not be able. The trial coming on so quickly as it does, leaves us no time for deliberation, and very little for action. With your permission I will return to London and hold a consultation with one of my brethren."

"But, Mr. Kersey"——

"Rely upon my discretion. I will take care that you are not jeoparded in any way."

"I spoke for fear you should forget my peculiar position."

"I will recollect it. I shall have to instruct counsel; indeed, I shall not have a spare moment from now to the commencement of the trial."

"You will not, indeed."

"Both of you had better see me to-morrow morning, before the commencement of the trial."

"Very well, sir."

"And you," added Mr. Kersey, addressing himself more especially to Dick, "I should recommend you to employ all the time between now and then in writing down on paper all that has taken place, omitting no particular, no matter how trivial. We may have no want for such a document, but still it will be far the best to be prepared with it in case it should be required."

"I will sit down and do it immediately after your departure, and will make it as complete as I can. But there is one thing more before we part."

"What is that?"

"Where are we to meet in the morning?"

"At my house."

"Your private residence?"

"Yes."

"Where is it situated?"

"No. 7, Red Lion-square."

"I shall recollect: and what time shall we be there?"

"Not later than eight, I think."

"Oh! yes."

"Well, eight be it, then. And now, Mr. Kersey, it so happens that, being in my way a rather celebrated character, I am known by sight to many persons in London."

"I daresay."

"You will, then, I hope, see the necessity of having no prying domestics about."

"You can leave all that to me with perfect confidence," said Mr. Kersey. "At eight o'clock to-morrow morning I shall be at my front door waiting to receive you."

"I shall be there."

"With this I think all is quite arranged."

"I think so."

"Do you, lady?" asked Mr. Kersey, turning to the mysterious female, who had taken so little part in what had been going forward.

"I shall leave that for you two to decide, as I have all the other," she said. "I consider you are by far more competent to do it than I am."

"Well—well; but you will be at my house in the morning?"

"I will."

"That is enough. And now, could Blanche be found, all would go well. The overthrow of the villain Marlac will be complete; but I am afraid"——

"What—oh! what?"

"That, standing as she did in the way of his possessions, and likely as she would be to interfere with all his future projects, that he has disposed her somewhere in so safe a place that we shall have great trouble in finding her, if we ever succeed."

"I will find her," said Dick, "if she is upon the earth. I have previously determined to strain every nerve to do so."

"Then all I can say is, may you be successful. It is monstrous that a father should be ruthlessly murdered and a daughter abducted from her home."

"It is; but the crime shall not go unpunished."

"I am glad to hear you say as much, for I can tell you are a man who always carries out what he resolves upon. From this day I shall alter the opinion I had formed of you."

"Doubtless you believed I was all that is infamous and bad in human nature. If so, I rejoice at having the opportunity of showing you I am not."

"I am already satisfied; and now let me depart. You set about performing your part, and I will do the same."

The lawyer then exchanged farewells with the unknown lady and Dick Turpin.

Shockley, the steward, drove him back to town.

Soon after his departure, the lady had brought into the apartment where Turpin was sitting materials for writing, and left him to commence his task.

Now Turpin had received but a small amount of education. To be sure, he could read and sign his own name; but his accomplishments did not go much further than that.

When it came to writing down, and succinctly and deliberately writing all that had taken place, he found himself completely at fault, and he spoilt many sheets of paper in the attempt.

At length, after about an hour had been spent in this fruitless manner, the lady entered to see what progress he had made.

"I have undertaken what I cannot perform," he said, "without you will lend me your assistance."

"In what way can I assist you?"

"If it would not be too much trouble, I should like to tell you what occurred, and for you to write it down correctly."

"I shall have no objection," replied the lady; "indeed, I consider myself bound to do all I can in return for the services you have rendered me."

"Do not speak about that."

"I will not, since you do not wish it. But if I write this, you will have to read it over and sign it."

"So I am aware, and I can do that."

"Very well. Let us commence at once."

The lady sat down, and as Turpin spoke, put down upon paper one of the most extraordinary adventures he had ever met with in the whole of his career.

As Turpin entered into every detail, it of course occupied a great deal of time, and it was dusk before the lady's task was finished.

It is not necessary to give the contents of this document, because the reader is already acquainted with every detail which it contained.

When finished, however, the lady read it over aloud to Dick from the beginning to the end, and having pronounced it quite correct in every particular, the highwayman affixed his name to it.

The evening meal was then prepared, and Dick did full justice to it.

When over, he made his way to the stables, where his mare was placed, and as he had expected, found she had been treated with every care, and that, had he done it himself, she could not be more to his satisfaction than she was.

The groom was there, and Dick gave him a liberal present, for he considered the man fully deserved it.

Then, returning to the hall, he found the lady in the same apartment as that in which he had left her, but he could see that she was suffering greatly from fatigue.

At his request she retired to her apartment, for in the morning they would have to rise early to be in London at sight.

She was glad enough to yield to his request, and soon afterwards Shockley, the steward, entered, and showed Dick to a sleeping chamber where he could pass the night.

Dick was very weary and greatly in want of repose, and besides which, he wished to recuperate his energies as much as possible, to be in readiness for the ensuing day.

It must not be thought that Dick either underrated or was blind to the amount of danger he would incur.

CHAPTER CCLXX.

DICK TURPIN AND THE MYSTERIOUS LADY SET OUT FOR LONDON, AND REACH IN SAFETY THE LAWYER'S RESIDENCE IN RED LION-SQUARE.

Long before daybreak Dick Turpin awoke.

The lamp, which he had left upon the dressing-table, was burning dimly.

A momentary confusion followed his awakening, for he was at a loss to think where he was.

That feeling, however, quickly vanished, and springing from his couch, he trimmed the lamp, and looked at the time.

It was just five.

Even as he looked there came a faint tapping at the door, and the voice of old Shockley, the steward, said—

"Rise, sir, please. Breakfast is ready, and we shall have to start to London soon."

Dick replied, and hastily apparelled himself.

He was one who, in a general way, bestowed but little trouble upon his personal appearance.

The present occasion, however, proved an exception to the general rule.

He took the utmost pains possible with his toilette, and as there was every convenience necessary to the purpose ready to his hand, he succeeded marvellously.

Still he did not consume much time over the process, but when he descended, the unknown lady was waiting for him to make his appearance.

The breakfast was soon despatched, and then they prepared for their journey.

The care of the equipage was given to Shockley, who, as before, acted as coachman.

Dick rode inside.

It was barely light, and bitterly cold when they started.

But as they travelled on, the dawn advanced with rapid strides, though the sun did not show his face above the horizon until they had almost reached London.

When he did break forth the light he gave was trifling, for his brilliancy was hidden by the fuliginous exhalations which hung upon the horizon.

The time passed quickly enough, for during the whole of it, from the time they started, the two strangely-assorted occupants of the carriage were busy in talking over the momentous events of the day.

Punctually at eight o'clock, the vehicle drew up before the residence of Mr. Kersey, in Red Lion-square.

According to the promise which he had made, the lawyer was standing upon his threshold waiting to receive them.

Shockley got down off the box—it was a plain travelling carriage—and opened the door.

Previous to his doing so, Dick had taken a cautious peep all round him, and, to his satisfaction, no one was in sight.

He alighted, therefore, with confidence, and, turning round, assisted his companion to alight also.

To cross the pavement and pass through the lawyer's door did not take a moment.

According to instructions which had been given him before starting, Shockley took the horses to livery-stables close by.

Mr. Kersey closed the door behind his strange guests without uttering a word, and then led them across the passage to a room which he had had fitted up like an office, and where he transacted a great deal of private business when he was at home.

To the intense surprise of Turpin, here was seated a gentleman, who rose from his seat as soon as they entered.

He was thin and pale, and seemed at first sight to be sadly deficient in physical energy, but that was far more in appearance than in reality.

A second glance would have shown that, though the frame was thin, yet it was wiry and muscular.

But his head was really remarkable.

Across his forehead, from temple to temple, it was an enormous width, and was circular in shape; but this width of forehead was in some measure taken off by its height, which was proportioned to it.

From this great width at the temples, his face tapered off like the two sides of a triangle, of which his chin formed the apex.

His eyes were small and deeply set.

The frontal bone projected over them to an unusual distance, and his cheek bones were high and prominent, so that the eyes seemed literally buried in two deep sockets.

But, nevertheless, despite the smallness of their size, and the peculiarity of their position, they were intensely bright and piercing

They had in them always a particular sparkle when they were directed to anything.

The above outline—for description it cannot be called—imperfect as it is, will serve to give the reader some general idea of what kind of man it was with whom Dick so suddenly and unexpectedly found himself face to face.

He turned an inquiring glance towards Mr. Kersey, who shut the office-door, and said, indicating the singular-looking individual we have mentioned—

"This is Mr. Serjeant Nuttall, the gentlemen to whom is intrusted the case for the prosecution."

Dick bowed.

Mr. Kersey saw that the highwayman was not at ease, so he added—

"I have had a long conference with him, and placed him in possession of all the facts which you communicated to me yesterday. I have also entrusted him with the secret of who you are. But you need fear nothing. It was indispensable, and I obtained from him a promise that he would keep your secret, and do nothing whatever calculated to cause your capture."

Mr. Nuttall had risen when Dick entered the room, but it was more out of habit than politeness and respect that he did so.

He resumed his seat immediately, and fixed his sparkling eyes upon our hero's countenance, as though he would read him to the soul.

It was evident that he was not inclined to be very friendly.

The words that he first spoke, however, will serve better than anything else to indicate the state of his feelings.

"Mr. Turpin," he said, "what my learned brother has just stated is quite correct in every particular. I have given such a promise as he has mentioned, and I shall consider myself in honour bound to keep it; but I can assure you that nothing but the sacred cause of justice, and the desire I feel that the guilty should be punished, would have induced me either to give or make such a promise."

"I am content, sir, so that you do keep it. Of course, I desire to do this service, and preserve my liberty at the same time: though, as for your motives, they are not of the slightest consequence to me."

Mr. Nuttall was too old a practitioner to allow anything to disconcert him; and though he winced under Dick's words, and the half-contemptuous manner in which they were uttered, yet he did not permit the muscles of his face to indicate it in any way.

He spoke, and the tones of his voice were as calm and unruffled as it was possible for any human being to be under the least exciting circumstances.

"I can hold out no hope to you of retaining your liberty. If you come into court it will be entirely at your own risk; I shall be quite powerless to assist you in any way."

"I cannot help that, sir. I do not wish to expose myself, as you can readily believe; but I am resolved to do so should there be no other means of making the heinous guilt of Adrian Winberry apparent."

"Much as I may and do detest you in your general character," said Mr. Nuttall, "still, in this instance, your behaviour is so praiseworthy and noble that I almost forget who you are; and, indeed, it seems quite inconsistent and impossible for a highwayman to speak as you have just spoken, and announce his intention of acting in the manner you have just stated."

"I am glad that I have been the means of showing you that a highwayman is not wholly and utterly bad—that he has his natural impulses as well as others, and perhaps as good a notion of honour as many of those have who rank themselves above him."

"Come, come, gentlemen," interposed Mr. Kersey, "we ought not to go to work in this spirit, we ought not, indeed. Mr. Nuttall, pray bear in mind what Mr. Turpin is about to do; and let me ask you, where could you find any one who would have come forward and acted as he has offered, and I firmly believe intends to do."

"I cannot withhold my admiration of his conduct," said Mr. Nuttall; "it would be impossible to do so; and I shall feel heartily sorry if any harm comes to him."

"That is better. Now let us proceed. Have you the document written which I spoke to you about?"

"Yes; here it is."

"And does it contain all the particulars?"

"I think it contains them all."

"Let me see it," said Mr. Nuttall, extending his hand for the paper.

Mr. Kersey, who had taken the paper from Dick, placed it in Mr. Nuttall's, who opened it, and became immediately absorbed in its contents.

Mr. Kersey addressed Dick and the lady in a low tone of voice.

"Mr. Nuttall, here," he said, "is a very singular but clever man, and when I heard that the case for the prosecution had been confided to him, I brought him here and had a long conference with him, which, indeed, could scarcely be said to have ended when you arrived. He feels a more than common interest in the case, especially now I have put him in possession of so many facts of which he was previously in ignorance. But you must understand that his prejudices are all against you. When I first mentioned your name he ripped out dreadfully, but I partially calmed him, as you may see. That his feelings should be like this is nothing more than natural. All his life he has been occupied against such as you are."

"I quite understand all that."

"You may rest assured that you have nothing to fear from him; he will not betray you. On the contrary, I should not feel surprised if he does not warmly interest himself in your favour."

"And what course is going to be pursued at the trial?"

"That which you yourself proposed. Namely, that this document you have written be endeavoured to be given in evidence instead of you; and if that does not succeed, for an application to be made to the court to shield you from the consequences of coming forward."

"Very good, sir; and should both these fail, you will, as I before told you, find me ready to come forward and give my evidence, taking whatever risk I may incur in doing so upon my own head."

CHAPTER CCLXXI.

DICK TURPIN IS MENACED WITH GREAT DANGER IN MR. KERSEY'S HOUSE IN RED LION-SQUARE.

During the brief silence which followed this speech, there came distinctly to the ears of all present the low murmuring of voices.

Dick Turpin, although the others heard the sounds as well as himself, was perhaps the only one who attributed them to their proper cause.

His face paled slightly, and he put his hand in his breast-pocket, as he strode towards the door of the apartment.

The two lawyers and the lady looked at him in surprise, and were about to speak, but Dick held up his hand with so expressive a gesture that they checked themselves and were silent immediately.

The murmuring sounds continued, and Turpin put his ear against the panel, but he could not make out what was said. The conversation was carried on in too low a tone of voice—

Finding this to be the case, he looked down and saw the key was sticking in the lock.

To turn it was the work of a moment, and then he crossed the room and beckoned Mr. Kersey towards him, who came at once, and so did Mr. Nuttall and the lady.

"Mr. Kersey," said Turpin, "who is in your hall talking?"

"I have no idea, but I will quickly see."

"Nay, stay! Who is there in the house that you have made acquainted with my secret?"

"No one but Mr. Nuttall here."

"Do you occupy this house yourself?"

"Yes, why?"

"Who have you in it?"

"My wife and servants, and my private clerk."

"Private clerk?"

"Yes."

"And who is he?"

"A young man who attends to my private business."

"Does he know anything about my being here?"

"No. At least, not that I know of."

"You have not told him?"

"Certainly not."

"What sort of a young man is he?"

"Oh! ordinary kind."

"Do you think he might have found out who I am, and that I am here?"

"He might; but yet"——

"You may depend he has. The large reward which is offered for my apprehension has tempted him, and he has called in the police. Now if I am taken, not only will it seriously compromise you, but it will nullify my evidence. Besides which, I have made a resolution never to be taken prisoner, but to die with my sword in my right hand."

The face of the mysterious lady looked the picture of dismay when she heard the words Dick spoke.

But she had presence of mind enough to control any impulse which she might have felt to cry out.

She only gazed with clasped hands and half-open lips into his countenance.

But Dick himself was perfectly self-possessed.

"Do you think they are really officers in the passage?" asked Mr. Kersey.

"I have very little doubt about it."

"Then it is a most perplexing circumstance. What is to be done?"

"I should think the best thing would be to ascertain whether you are right in your suppositions," said Mr. Nuttall. "They might not be officers after all."

"But who would be likely to be carrying on a whispered conversation in your passage, Mr. Kersey?" asked Dick.

"No one."

"Very well, then. However, if they are officers they will quickly make their presence manifest."

There was another silence after this, during which all stretched their senses of hearing to the utmost.

About Mr. Nuttall and Mr. Kersey there was a certain amount of excitement visible, which they could not conceal or subdue.

Dick had his eye upon the door.

Presently there was a faint sound.

Some one turned the handle cautiously, and tried to open it.

But they were unsuccessful, in consequence of Dick having had the prudence to turn the key in the lock.

The handle turned round in the opposite direction, and that attempt to enter the room was abandoned.

Dick exchanged glances with the two lawyers, as they perceived this surreptitous attempt to enter.

But he motioned to them to be silent, and watch further.

Some one now tapped lightly upon the panel.

"That's Francis," said Mr. Kersey, in a whisper.

"Who's Francis?"

"My clerk."

"How can you tell?"

"I know his knock."

"Oh!"

Tap—tap—tap!

"What does he want?"

"To come in."

"So he shall, and then we shall find out all about it."

Dick crossed the room as he spoke.

He gently and carefully turned back the key in the lock.

Then he turned the handle.

The moment he felt that this was done.

The moment he felt he could draw the door open swiftly, he did so with his left hand.

His right hand he held in readiness, and as soon as the door was open he thrust it outwards like a tiger's claw, and caught hold of something

Then, with the same speed, having once got his grasp quite firm, he dragged this something into the room, and closing the door, locked it again.

So suddenly was all this done, that those who witnessed could scarcely believe their own eyes.

It seemed as though the door had been swiftly opened, and as swiftly closed, without an appreciable interval of time taking place between the two actions.

But, to their astonishment, the something which Dick had managed with so much adroitness to drag in, was a young man, who in a moment flopped down upon his knees in a supplicatory attitude.

"That's Francis!" said Mr. Kersey.

Dick did not pause, nor did he release his hold upon the trembling, abject wretch.

Ere he could open his mouth and cry for help, Dick thrust the barrel of a pistol into it, at the same time he dragged him to that portion of the room farthest from the door.

"Speak," he said, in a low whisper, but which sounded most alarmingly distinct in the ears of the lawyer's clerk. "Speak, and tell me all I ask, or I will blow your brains out this very moment!"

The clerk's teeth chattered against the barrel of the pistol, and he endeavoured to say, mercy!

"Silence!" said Dick again. "Now tell me, on pair of death, who is in the passage?"

He removed the pistol a little.

"No one, sir," moaned the clerk.

"No one! Be careful what you say. Who was whispering?"

"No one, sir. Oh! good sir, let me go! I'll declare there was no one whispering."

"You lie! We heard them."

"No! no! you are mistaken. You can look in the passage if you like; there is no one there; indeed there is not."

Certainly there was one thing which looked as though the clerk was speaking the truth.

No notice was taken of the attack which had been made upon him, and Dick argued in his mind that, had the officers been there, they would then have immediately made some demonstration of their presence.

But the stillness of the grave now reigned outside.

Dick was puzzled.

In the shifting glance of Francis, the lawyer's clerk, Dick could perceive an immense amount of duplicity and cunning.

He mistrusted him.

But it would be no good to remain in that state of uncertainty, so he resolved upon a bold and daring plan of clearing up his doubts.

He had never released his hold upon the collar of Francis's coat, and, uttering the most awful threats, he drew him across the room against the door.

The clerk's legs trembled beneath him.

His knees smote each other.

But not heeding him in the least degree, Dick unlocked the door and flung it wide open.

He had a pistol ready to his right hand, and he grasped it with the rapidity of lightning.

But to his unbounded astonishment, when the door was flung open, not a soul was to be seen in the passage beyond.

Dissatisfied, however, he dragged the clerk completely into the hall.

He was followed by the two lawyers and the lady, all of whom were much bewildered and alarmed at the strange events which were taking place.

But in the hall all was quite still. There were no traces whatever of the presence of anyone.

Dick's face assumed an expression of great uneasiness.

He was sure he had heard voices, and now where were the speakers?

He looked all around him, but nothing was to be seen.

He distrusted that calm however.

There was a mystery in it.

But what was its character?

It was important he should know, and that at once, for it would never do for him to be detained by anything, and his presence at the trial made impossible.

"Back into the office," he said. "We must have this affair well looked into before we go any further. Back into the office, I say."

He addressed these words to Francis, the clerk, who made a feeble resistance to accompany him.

The whole, then, once more entered the office.

There was a large arm-chair in which Mr. Kersey habitually sat, and into this Dick flung his prisoner.

He fell into a strange huddled up position, for he seemed as though what little animation he was blessed with had deserted him.

Once more Dick held his pistol threateningly before him.

Francis glared at it with a look that would have been rather difficult to interpret whether it was abject terror or assumed fright.

"Mr. Francis," said Dick, "your life hangs upon a thread. One touch with my finger, and you quit this world for ever! Of the two, I would rather not take your miserable life. It is not worth the having. Now tell me, at once, who was whispering at the door, and what the whispering meant? You won't answer? Well, then, I will count three distinctly, and as I pronounce the last word, if you do not speak, I will plaster that chair with your brains as sure as you now draw breath."

CHAPTER CCLXXII.

DICK TURPIN TRIUMPHS OVER FRANCIS AND MR. WRIGGLES.

A very peculiar, dusky-yellow kind of tint overspread the countenance of the lawyer's clerk, as Dick Turpin enunciated these menacing words.

"One!" said Dick.

The yellow tint deepened, but Francis did not speak.

"Two!"

His lips opened.

Dick put the pistol on full cock, and carefully examined the priming.

Then, finding all quite right, it could be seen by his resolute eye that he would say the word, and keep his promise, too."

"Mercy—mercy!" said Mr. Francis.

"It is useless to ask for such a thing, yet it is in your power to earn it. Confess all."

"I will—I will."

"Do so, then, at once. It is the only chance you have of saving your life. What was the meaning of the whispering in the passage? Who was it?

"Mercy! mercy!"

"Speak! I say."

"I am—I am—I listened at the door."

"Go on! I suppose you heard my name mentioned, and thought you would like the reward."

"Mercy!"

"Is that it?"

"Yes."

"And what did you do?"

"I cannot tell you."

"You can either do so or die."

"I will tell you, then. But you will promise not to take my life?"

"If you tell me, I will not."

"I called in the officers."

"Just as I thought."

"Eh?"

"Just as I thought."

"Did you think it?"

"Of course I did."

"Oh! mercy."

"No more of this delay. You called in the officers. What did you do next?"

"We came in the hall, and I told them you were in this room, but they would not come in. They would rather wait outside and take you as you came out, when you were not aware of it."

"Oh!"

"That's it."

"Is it?"

"I assure you it is."

"Then why did you tap at the door?"

"I wanted to come in."

"For what purpose?"

"To stay in here if I possibly could, in order to keep a sharp eye upon you. But it seems I am done."

"You certainly are. I wonder you had so little respect for your life as to attempt such a thing. You will yet live to repent of it!"

"You promised to spare my life."

"I have, and I will do so."

"Thanks—thanks. Let me go now, I beg of you."

"No, sit still. If I made the promise I did, I did not intend for you to get off scot free—neither shall I."

Francis uttered a hideous groan.

"Silence!" cried Dick, who was fearful the sound would reach the ears of the officers, for he did not know where they were hiding; "silence, on your life! Tell me this moment, in a whisper, whereabouts the officers have concealed themselves."

"Just outside, in the doorway."

"Oh! the front doorway?"

"Yes."

"And how many of them are there?"

"Four; but they have sent off for more."

"Oh! have they?"

"What is to be done?" asked Mr. Kersey, for the little episode between Dick and Francis had happened so quietly, that neither of the spectators were able to interfere or interrupt. "What is to be done? Time is speeding fast. We ought to be at the Old Bailey now."

"We ought indeed," said Mr. Nuttall. "But how in the world are you going to get there?"

"Leave that to me," said Dick. "You start, and never mind me. Yet stay. A thought strikes me."

"What is it?"

"Come here, Mr. Kersey, and I will whisper to you, and you can communicate it to the rest."

Francis's curiosity was roused to its utmost pitch, but he could not hear what the highwayman said, though he strained his ears to the utmost.

Whatever it was Dick said, met with Mr. Kersey's approval, for he smiled and nodded, and then drew the two others aside to relate it to them.

"He proposes," he said, "to get a long cloak, and, enveloping Francis in it, take us out with him. This he calculates will deceive the officers. Seeing some one muffled in a cloak, they will make sure it is the man they want, and will pounce upon him. Turpin himself will be prepared, and take advantage of that moment to leave the house by another door which opens into a court, and he will then make all speed to the Old Bailey."

"It is a hazardous scheme," said Mr. Nuttall; "and I fear, through your clerk's meddling, we shall get into some bother, and be compromised in this highwayman's affairs."

"It cannot be helped now. As for the scheme, it will answer, I am confident. I will go and fetch the cloak."

Mr. Kersey left the office and quickly returned, bringing with him not only a long horseman's cloak, but a felt hat also, of a very similar description to that worn by Turpin.

Under threats of his life, Francis was compelled to rise from the chair, and wrap himself in the folds of the cloak, and to put the hat on his head.

He seemed to have a good deal of fear of Mr. Kersey, his master; but that was doubtless, in a great measure, the effect of habit.

As soon as he was equipped, Mr. Kersey spoke to him in a very stern tone of voice, and took his arm beneath his own.

He led him to the front door.

Then he drew aside, to allow Mr. Nuttall and the lady to pass him, he judging it would be best that he and Francis should come out last.

The position of the private door was pointed out to Turpin, and he stood at it in readiness to depart as soon as the officers made their capture.

As for Francis, he was getting bewildered. He could not comprehend what was about to take place.

All being quite ready, Mr. Nuttall unfastened the front door, and opening it, walked out with the lady leaning on his arm.

His eyes glanced all round, and he saw the faint shadow of the men.

But he did not look, for fear of arousing their suspicions.

Mr. Kersey and his clerk followed closely.

No sooner, however, did they appear, than a number of men—eight at least—darted forward, and laid their hands upon the latter.

One, who was very stout and had a purple-looking face, cried out exultingly—

"Hurrah—hurrah! Caught at last! I knew it would come to this. Caught at last! Hurrah!—ah!"

The last ah! was anything but a cry of exultation.

The cloak fell from the person of the lawyer's clerk.

The hat was knocked from his head.

Then the recognition was instantaneous.

"Done!"

"Help! help shrieked Francis. "Let me go! help! help!"

Mr. Wriggles—for that was the name of the officer with the purple face—caught hold of Mr. Kersey by the sleeve of his coat.

"Stop, sir!" he said. "Stop!"

"What for?"

"There's some mistake."

"Mistake! what do you mean? Release me, sir!"

"Shan't! I am a police-officer."

Mr. Wriggles flourished his staff, with the little gilt crown on the top of it, as he spoke.

"And I am a solicitor," said Mr. Kersey; "so I should advise you to be careful what you are doing."

Mr. Wriggles drew back a little on receipt of this announcement, but he said, rather fiercely—

"I have received information, sir, that the notorious Dick Turpin was in your house—Dick Turpin, the highwayman, and that he would come out with you, sir."

"Don't be violent!"

"I am violent."

"I see you are. But your information must be wrong. Do you think it likely that Dick Turpin would be in my house, and that I should walk out of it with him having hold of my arm? Absurd! absurd!"

Mr. Wriggles released his grasp, and glared in the lawyer's face.

It did seem absurd.

"Some one has been playing you a hoax," continued Mr. Kersey; "that is my clerk, Francis."

"Yes," said one of the officers, "and it was he who told me that Turpin was in the house, and would come out with you."

"Then he must have been amusing himself at your expense."

This idea took root immediately, and the officers were, in their wrath, about to make a unanimous attack upon Francis, when that individual cried—

"It's all right! What I told you is all right! They have only brought me out here to play you a trick. They found it out, and Dick Turpin is in the house now! I have seen him myself!"

No sooner did the police receive this intimation than they rushed simultaneously into the house, with Francis at their heels.

Mr. Kersey smiled, and so did Mr. Nuttall and the lady.

The ruse had succeeded to admiration, and by this time Dick was doubtless far on his way to his destination, and quite out of the reach of all pursuit.

Just at this moment, in accordance with Mr. Kersey's orders, a carriage drove up to the kerb-stone.

All three then seated themselves in it, and the order was given to drive to the Old Bailey with all speed.

The house was left to the officers.

With great expertness, they searched the house from top to bottom, and then they came to the private door.

Francis assured them that it was through that which Dick had made his escape.

But in the court not a soul was in sight, and Mr. Wriggles was so convinced of the futility of getting up a pursuit against him that he did not even attempt it.

He uttered some curses, though, in a very diabolical tone of voice, while his face changed from purple to black, as he thought how neatly he had been done.

CHAPTER CCLXXIII.

DICK TURPIN IS RECOGNISED AT THE CORNER OF RED LION-STREET, AND HAS TO FLY THROUGH THE STREETS FOR HIS LIFE.

If Dick Turpin had been aware that it was his old enemy Mr. Wriggles he was about to defeat, his glee and satisfaction would have been much greater than they were,

Of all the rest of the Bow-street officers he had made himself conspicuous for attempting the capture of the redoubtable highwayman.

Every attempt which he has hitherto made has, as the reader well knows, signally failed; but whether this is a state of things that will always continue is more than we can tell at present.

Certain it is that, after every defeat which he experienced, Mr. Wriggles grew more and more exasperated, and more determined to devote his whole energies to bringing the daring offender to justice.

We shall see what success his future exertions met with.

When the officer caught hold of Francis, Dick flung open the private door leading into the court and darted out.

He had previously possessed himself of the key of it, and now he thrust it into the lock on the outer side, and tried to turn it in the lock.

But, some how or other, whether from long disuse or some other cause, the wards would not act, and he could not shoot the bolt; so, fearing to lose any more time, he left it as it was, and ran down the court at the top of his speed.

The court wound round about in a rather intricate manner, but in all its windings Dick took good care to preserve the proper direction.

At length he emerged at the lower end of Red Lion-street, close to its junction with Holborn.

He paused here a moment, and resolved to hail a hackney-coach, which would take him all the more quickly and safely to his destination.

But at this moment a man lounged past him.

The circumstance was a trivial one.

But this man—who was a kind of hanger-on, or supernumerary police-officer, at Bow-street—no sooner caught a glimpse of Turpin than he uttered a cry which had the effect of arresting the attention of everybody who happened to be within a hundred yards of where he stood.

At the same time he made a dart forward and endeavoured to clutch Dick by the throat, but the highwayman was too quick for him.

Doubling his fist, he struck the man a blow with the whole strength of his arm.

It alighted on the man's forehead exactly between his two eyes.

He fell down as though shot.

But many people had witnessed this, and Dick found himself almost surrounded.

No one, however, seemed to exactly understand what was amiss, and Turpin was elbowing his way through the crowd, and was in a fair way of getting off.

But, unfortunately, it so happened that a police-officer, who had been drinking at the bar of a public-house at the corner, came out to see what was the cause of the tumult.

He knew Dick and the prostrate man at a glance, and at once guessed what had occurred.

"Stop thief!" he cried, in stentorian tones. "Stop thief! Dick Turpin, the highwayman! A thousand pounds reward, dead or alive! Stop thief! Stop thief! Dick Turpin, the highwayman! Whoever catches him has the reward!"

A roar came from the populace as they heard these words.

An instant and universal desire to possess the reward flamed up in the hearts of every one.

They dashed forward in pursuit of the highwayman.

But Turpin never for a moment lost his presence of mind.

When he saw what occurred he knew what would be the consequence.

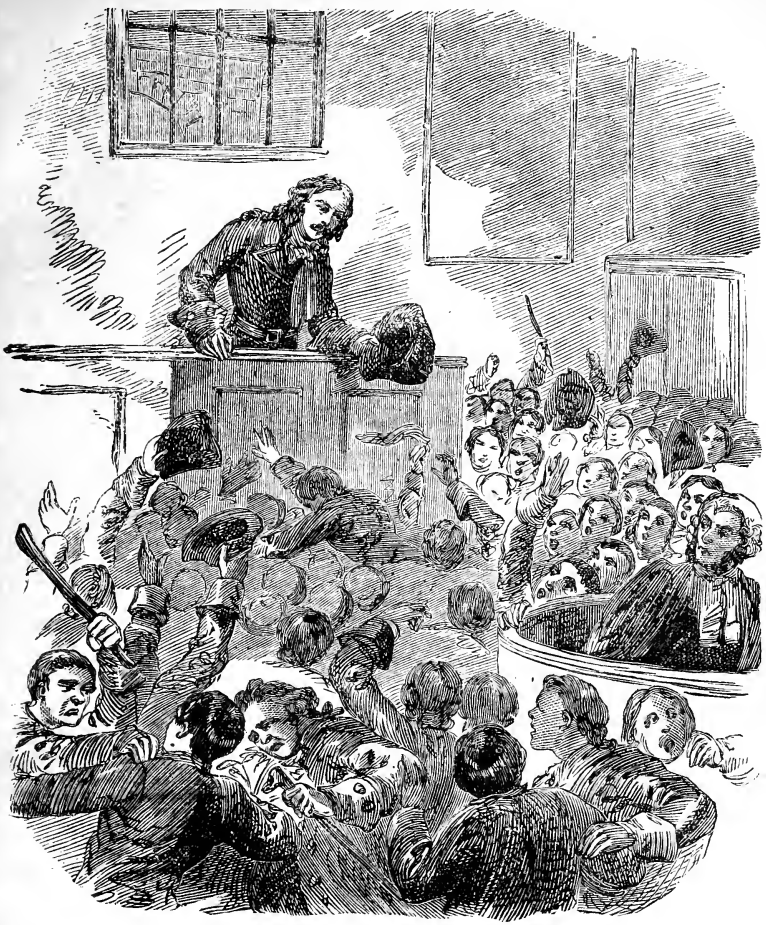
With one effort of strength he broke away from those who held him, and ran up the street ere the officer had finished his vociferations.

But the concourse of people, hooting, yelling, shouting, and screaming, were quickly after him.

Every moment, too, saw fresh persons joining in the chase.

It was up Red Lion-street, in the direction of the open country, that Dick ran.

To have turned down Holborn would, he knew well enough, be nothing short of absolute madness, for, in so crowded a thoroughfare, it would not have been possible for him to go at any speed, besides which, there would have been all the greater risk of capturing him.



[DICK TURPIN MAKES HIS APPEARANCE IN THE WITNESS-BOX AT THE OLD BAILEY.]

Accordingly, we say, he made his way up Red Lion-street to escape from his foes.

But from the courts and alleys that branched off from this thoroughfare the people came in shoals.

Dick had got a good start, and being a swift runner he was able to maintain it.

Just as he reached the corner of Guildford-street he saw what he had first looked for.

A hackney-coach.

It was empty.

Turpin dived his hand into his trousers-pocket.

He drew forth two guineas.

He held them aloft in the air.

The driver saw them, and stopped.

"Two guineas for your fare," said Dick. "Be quick! Two guineas. Drive round the next two corners like the devil, and they are used."

"All right, sir."

Dick gave the man the coins.

Then opening the door, he sprang into the coach.

The jarvey—as the drivers of hackney carriages were generally called—stimulated by the large sum of money which had been given him, whipped his horse, and made them go at a speed that no one to have looked at them would have thought them capable of.

A hundred people at least saw Dick get into the coach, and they hastened forward to intercept him.

But they were too late.

The coach rolled before them and turned a corner.

For a moment it was out of their sight.

But they soon had it in view again, but only to lose it round a second turning.

When he was out of sight of his pursuers, Dick projected his head from the carriage window, and cried—

"Round the next corner on your right, and then keep on. Don't stop. I will get out and shut the door. You will be caught, I daresay, and they will find no one inside, you know."

"All right, your honour! Lor' bless you! it ain't the

first time I've done this trick for gents in distress. Out with you, and I am off like a shot!"

Dick was pleased to find that the driver so well understood what he meant, and was so willing to aid him.

He unfastened the coach door, and let it swing open on its hinges.

He looked behind him.

His pursuers were out of sight.

The entrance to a court was just before him.

Such a favourable opportunity might not occur again.

He sprang instantly off the step into the roadway, and ran for a moment by the side of the coach while he refastened the door.

The clumsy vehicle lumbered on down the street, which was a long, straight one, and quite empty, so that it formed a very conspicuous object.

Dick in one more moment was within the mouth of the court.

It was a narrow, dark archway, and he felt that he should be almost well enough concealed if he remained just where he was.

Besides, he wanted to see the sport.

A minute elapsed.

Then there came upon his ears the roaring of a vast multitude.

His pursuers had much increased in numbers, and were close upon his track.

They rushed into the long, empty street.

In the distance they could see the object of their pursuit.

The coach.

Another roar came from their lips, and then yelling, shrieking, swearing, fighting, they kept their eyes upon it, and tore along at full speed.

There was a rush, and then the mob passed by the archway in which Turpin was concealed.

He pressed himself as close to the wall as he could when they swept by.

But he need not have troubled himself.

Had he stood in the street, they would scarcely have noticed him, so intently were their eyes fixed upon the coach, inside of which they felt sure he was, for had they not seen him enter it with their own eyes?

When the last stragglers who brought up the rear of the main body who went by had passed, Dick ventured to look out from his place of concealment.

The mistake had not been discovered.

The mob still held on to the pursuit of the coach, which baffled all their attempts to catch it.

Dick stood for a moment reflectively.

He hardly knew what to do.

He leant rather heavily against the wall.

He was breathless and exhausted, for the short ride he had had in the coach had not enabled him to recover from the immense exertions which he had made.

He took off his hat and wiped the perspiration from his forehead, which stood there in huge drops.

Drawing his breath rapidly and painfully, he half-muttered—

"Curses on this accident, which has produced so much delay. After all, now, I may be too late, or, what is quite as bad, the court may be so crowded that I shall find it impossible to enter. What shall I do? Perhaps the whole affair may have got wind, and, if so, I shall find plenty of officers outside the prison waiting to pounce upon me the moment I make my appearance."

This was a very likely supposition.

How much the clerk Francis overheard, was more than he could tell, but most probably he knew all.

"Never mind," said Dick. "I have sworn to appear in the witness-box if events should make it necessary, and I will do so if a thousand officers bar the way, or if my immediate capture is the result."

With this resolution firmly fixed upon his mind, Dick looked about him, in order to ascertain the direction he ought to take, and then made his way at a rapid pace to Newgate.

CHAPTER CCLXXIV.

RETURNS TO TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, AND RELATES HOW THEY WERE PURSUED BY THE GENDARMES.

In order that the remarkable events which are about to be related should be properly understood, it will be necessary to leave Dick Turpin in his perilous position for a little while, during which time we must turn our attention to the proceedings of his three intimate acquaintances, Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack.

We have said that Claude Duval, upon looking into the interior of the carriage, saw that its inmates were male and female.

His acquaintance with the French language was but slight; still, from having occasionally resided in that country, he had become familiar with those expressions in colloquial use.

Consequently his orders for silence, uttered as they were in a deep, stern tone of voice, met with immediate attention.

The female occupant of the carriage, and who fell back into a half-fainting attitude, was a woman about fifty years of age.

She was thin even to scragginess, and her pretensions to beauty rested upon a very slight foundation.

On the opposite seat was a man about a match for her in age, but not in slenderness, for he inclined rather to corpulency.

We will translate what took place.

"Be silent!" cried Claude, in French. "Offer no resistance. Hand over as quickly as possible all the valuables you carry about you, and you will avoid all further ill-usage, and be allowed to continue your journey without interruption."

The gentleman—for such by his dress he appeared to be—to whom these words were addressed, made no other response to Claude's speech than to utter, with extreme volubility, some very diabolical French oaths.

But Claude put an end to them before the old Frenchman had exhausted his vocabulary, which seemed to be unusually copious, by thrusting his arm into the carriage, and placing the muzzle of the pistol against his forehead.

"Quick!" he said. "Quick! I cannot afford to waste time like this listening to your foolish words. Quick! I say, or you will repent it. Hand out your purse, watch, rings, and what other valuables you may carry about with you."

The old Frenchman very unwillingly put his hand into his pocket, and withdrew a purse.

With still greater unwillingness he handed it to Claude, who transferred it to his own pocket with a dexterity which could only have been acquired by long practice.

"Now your other valuables," he said. "You carry a very fine ring on your finger, I see. Pass it this way."

The old Frenchman looked wistfully at the article which Claude had mentioned.

It was a diamond ring, and a glance was enough to show that it was worth a considerable sum.

Just, however, as Claude was about to take it, he was startled by the rapid trampling of horses' hoofs in his rear.

Still he did not allow that to disconcert him, but took hold of the ring.

At the same moment, however, he heard Sixteen-String Jack cry at the top of his voice—

"Fly, Claude—fly! Do not wait on any account. There is a party of armed men behind us, and I believe they are gendarmes. At all events, they are armed, and doubtless in pursuit of us. Fly at once!"

Even as Sixteen-String Jack spoke, he and Tom King swept past the carriage at a rapid gallop.

The old Frenchman appeared to be well acquainted with the English tongue, for he gave vent to a cry of exultation when he heard what Sixteen-String Jack said.

Claude, however, took no notice of it.

He judged, by the actions of his comrades, that the danger must be imminent.

Therefore he turned his horse's head away from the carriage-window, and gave it a sharp impulse forward.

He was by the side of his companions instantly.

Glancing behind him, he saw the glitter of accoutrements, and heard the loud trampling of many horses' hoofs.

A momentary halt of the whole body took place, however, when they reached the carriage, and our friends took all the advantage of that moment which they possibly could.

The road was rough and uneven, so that to travel over it with any great speed was to run a great amount of risk.

That danger, however, great as it was, under the present aspect of affairs, was a minor one, and the highwaymen thought but little of it.

It would seem that the gendarmes stopped at the carriage only just long enough to ascertain what had taken place, and then they set off again at full speed, which showed clearly enough that our friends were the objects of their pursuit.

And now a word is necessary to explain how it was that they had approached so closely without Tom and Jack giving the alarm.

While Claude rode forward to attack the carriage, they, as we have already stated, kept in the rear.

They had just passed a rather broad cross-country road, which intersected the highway which they were travelling, but no more than a passing glance was bestowed upon it.

The fact was, however, that this, though not very much frequented, on account of its evil reputation, was a much nearer way from Paris than that by which they had come, so that, had they taken it, they would have reached the spot upon which they now stood a considerable time earlier.

Down this lane, however, there came a party of gendarmes, or military police, who had been dispatched in pursuit of our friends.

In consequence of their taking this route, and as the miry state of the lane necessitated their going at a slow pace, they were actually upon the highway before they had the slightest idea that enemies were so near.

Upon perceiving it, they, as we have seen, lost no time in giving the alarm to Claude, and bidding him to fly without delay.

Their horses began ere long, they found, to evince the most unequivocal symptoms of exhaustion.

But upon each occasion the poor beasts received a sharp application of the spur, which stimulated to a great extent their failing powers.

They proved themselves nevertheless to be steeds of an excellent quality, and our friends were in nowise deceived in the estimate they had formed of them.

This rapid pursuit was a thing which they had not counted upon.

In a long race a little start is a great matter, and so the present occasion proved.

Of course, from the first our friends had had the advantage, though certainly it was not much.

They gained again when their pursuers halted at the carriage—though that halt was about as brief a one as well could be.

In addition to this, they were not so heavily mounted as the gendarmes.

Having all these things in their favour, it is scarcely anything to surprised at that they should keep well ahead of them.

The rate at which they were going had the effect of quite taking their breath away from them, so that no conversation passed between them.

Besides, the whole attention of each one was centred on his steed.

Unfortunately, so far as their chances of getting away were concerned, there was a peculiar white misty sort of light, which made distant objects easily perceivable; but, had it not been for this, it is scarcely probable they would have gone so far without meeting with an accident of some kind.

This idea occurred to Tom King, and even as it was passing through his brain, his horse, from some cause or other, stumbled, and fell heavily to the ground.

Of course, the rider went down too, but Tom was so accomplished a horseman that, quickly and suddenly as the whole affair had occurred, he had had time to disengage his feet from the stirrups.

The consequence was that personally he received little or no injury, but the accident was a most serious one.

The horse, from the time it tumbled, made not the slightest effort to stir. It had, in fact, all the appearance of being thoroughly overpowered.

Had not this been the case, it might have recovered its footing, but, once down, it did not seem to have the strength to make an attempt to rise.

The other two highwaymen, upon perceiving what had occurred, reined in their own steeds as quickly as they possibly could, and turned the whole of their attention to succouring their comrade.

But Tom was on his feet before they had time to do that reach the spot where his horse lay.

"The horse is quite done for," said Tom King. "It is hopeless to think of getting him up again."

"What are we to do, then? In a few minutes the gendarmes will be upon us."

"I know it, and a hand to hand conflict would not suit us. Claude, you have the strongest horse. Let me mount behind you."

"Agreed. But be quick about it. The gendarmes have gained upon us tremendously, and, whatever slight advantage we may have gained by our furious galloping, we have lost again."

Tom did not need telling to make haste. He knew the peril of their position, and was aware of the imminency of their danger quite as much as his comrades were.

He was on the back of Claude's horse in a moment, and in this manner they resumed their flight.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, came the sounds of the pursuing gendarmes behind them, and each beat appeared to sound louder than its predecessor.

The tired horses, under the repeated application of the spur which they received, kept up wonderfully, though now and then a dangerous stagger would show how much their strength was spent.

The double burden which it carried soon began to make a difference to Claude's horse, so that, after a few miles, they were compelled to halt again, while Tom King dismounted, and took his seat behind Sixteen-String Jack.

CHAPTER CCLXXV.

IN WHICH CLAUDE DUVAL HAS A SWORD COMBAT WITH THE GENDARME, AND THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN SEEK REFUGE IN THE RUINED MILL.

THIS, of course, produced another delay, and, slight as it was, the difference was perceptible.

But, though they goaded the poor animals to make fresh exertions, it must be apparent that their chances of out-distancing their pursuers were very slight indeed.

Indeed one might say that it was impossible, for the gendarmes had had a relay of horses since they left Paris, and those horses, though strong and heavy, were yet capable of making excellent speed.

After the change had been made, however, they got on much faster than before.

Away they flew over the ill-kept roadway, their horses' hoofs continually striking fire as they caught against the flint stones which bestrewed it.

Somewhat to their astonishment, our friends soon afterwards found that, despite the adverse circumstances which oppressed them, they still maintained their distance from their foes, if, indeed, they did not slightly increase it.

But this is not so much to be wondered at when we give the subject a few moments' thought.

Without calling in the musty adage that a stern chase is a long chase, we will call the reader's attention to a little circumstance which otherwise might have escaped them.

When a troop or body are in motion, and in pursuit of some object, one of the first things that is observed is for all to keep together, each one having his particular place, and each keeping pace with the others.

Now, in a number of horses, there will always be found a difference of quality. They may be all apparently up to one standard, and, for a certain distance, all of equal fleetness, but, after a time, when endurance is called into question, they will vary.

So it was with the horses upon which the gendarmes rode.

There were several in the troop who, singly, would quickly have caught up with the highwaymen, but by far the greater majority were quite incapable of it.

Such being the case, in order to keep together, those who could go fast had to accommodate their speed to those who went slowly, and thus our friends were able to keep ahead of them.

The gendarmes were not slow to perceive this, nor were they ignorant of the cause of it. Still it did not give them much disquietude, for they confidently calculated upon running down their prey in the long run.

The second in command of the troop, however, who was perhaps the best mounted of all, spoke to his superior officer, and requested leave to ride forward singly and overtake the fugitives, and if possible delay them until the main body of the troop came up.

The proposal was received with immediate favour, and accordingly this officer, who was quite a young man, struck his horse sharply upon the flank with his spurs, and quickly shot ahead of his companions.

The highwaymen soon became conscious of what had taken place, and they could hear this single horseman coming along at a furious pace behind them.

He was gaining, too, upon them, and that most rapidly.

Claude quite understood the tactics of this young officer, and could not but admire his bravery; still his own safety demanded that his attempt should be defeated.

Still he went on at the top of his speed, taking no further notice, while Sixteen-String Jack did the same.

Tom King, from his awkward and uncomfortable seat, looked back with very great anxiety.

On came the gendarme at a speed that was really terrific.

At length he reached them.

Quick as thought, Claude Duval at that instant wheeled his horse round, while he called to his companions to continue their flight.

This injunction, however, was not obeyed.

Sixteen-String Jack halted, though, of course, from the awkward manner in which he was situated, he was not able to render the least assistance.

Claude Duval held his drawn sword in his hand.

The gendarme was similarly armed.

At the instant, then, that Claude wheeled round and made a desperate slash at his adversary, the gendarme put up his own weapon, and received the blow upon it, immediately giving Claude a blow back in return, which he only escaped by a movement of his horse.

This at once let Duval know that he had no novice in the use of the sword opposed to him, and it would require his utmost skill to bring the encounter to an end in a few seconds.

Of course, if it was prolonged, the main body would come up with them, and then resistance would be futile.

There were very few, however, who could match with Claude in the use of the broadsword.

He had made it his particularly study, and had brought the art to the summit of perfection.

In addition to this, he had the advantage which a huge frame and immense personal strength gave him, so that every blow he gave, while it was delivered with great skill, descended with a force almost sufficient to break through all guard opposed to it.

Knowing, then, the importance of being speedy in what he was about, Claude attacked this young gendarme with great force and fury.

Their weapons clashed together with that sound which can be likened to nothing else, while the long blades of their swords gleamed with a faint radiance in the misty light.

The horses tramped, and neighed, and reared, and, like their riders, seemed in the excitement of the moment to forget the fatigue which they had undergone.

The combat did not last above eighty seconds.

During that brief interval of time, however, an incredible number of blows were given and received; but at the expiration of it, Claude, perceiving his opportunity, rose up in the stirrups, and brought down his sword with full force upon his opponent's head-piece.

The violence of the blow may be imagined when we say that it shivered Claude's sword like glass.

But it was effective for all that.

To be sure, the weapon did not cut through the steel helmet and reach the gendarme's head, but the concussion was so great that it completely stunned him, and he fell to the ground like a log of wood.

The horse stood still, trembling with fear.

Throwing away his now useless sword, Claude Duval caught hold of it by the bridle.

"Here, Tom!" he said. "Quick! mount. Here is a capital steed for you!"

Tom King slipped off Sixteen-String Jack's horse in a moment, and ran towards Claude.

He was in the saddle instantly.

"Now forward. We have a better chance now. Spur your horses, or they will yet capture us."

Neither of his comrades required much urging to do this.

Their position was now considerably improved, and they began to indulge in the hope that they would, after all, succeed in baffling their foes.

But there seemed no signs of their being tired yet. They paused when they came to the body of the officer lying across the roadway, and one dismounted to attend to him, while the others swept on in pursuit, now much more exasperated against the highwaymen than they were before.

Previously they had acted merely because it was their duty. Now a kind of personal feeling was infused into the matter.

A personal feeling is always to be dreaded.

This young officer was much liked and respected, and they all pressed forward eager to avenge his death, for they jumped to the conclusion that he was either killed or fatally wounded.

And now our friends saw with dismay not only this additional impartment of vigour to their pursuers, but also that the two horses were in such a frightfully exhausted state that they threatened to fall down every moment.

The result of a hand-to-hand contest on foot, with four or five times their number opposed to them, could not be doubtful.

And as if the measure of their inconveniences should be full, they came to a long steep hill, up which they, with the greatest difficulty, urged their exhausted cattle.

Within about twenty yards of the top, Sixteen-String Jack's horse fell, and almost at the same instant that of Claude Duval.

Tom King was now the only one mounted.

His friends urged him to fly and make his escape while he had the opportunity, but this he refused to do.

"We must leave the high-road," he said, "and seek a shelter somewhere. We have a minute or two to do so, for the gendarmes will not be easily able to ascend this hill."

"They will not, indeed; but they are already at the foot."

"We must be speedy, then. Let us run to the brow of the hill, my friends, and endeavour to look around us. Perhaps we shall be able to see some place that will serve us for a shelter."

"Or, at all events, for a place which will enable us to intrench ourselves, and so give us a better chance with our foes than we should have upon even ground."

All three now ran to the summit of the hill, and looked about them, as well as the darkness would allow them.

Over a low wooden fence on their right hand, and about a hundred yards off, was a building of some sort or other, but what they could not tell.

They could only see an undistinguishable mass of something, the outlines of which were confused and dim.

But it was the only thing in sight, so they resolved to make their way towards it.

The gendarmes were now about half-way up the hill.

Tom King let go the bridle of his horse, and, hitting sharply, sent him at a gallop down the hill.

He and his two companions then leaped the fence, and, alighting, found themselves in a kind of meadow.

Upon a closer approach, they found the building to be a windmill.

It was built quite upon the brow of the hill.

But even in the night as it was, they could perceive that it was in an advanced stage of ruin and decay.

One of the long arms had been half broken away, while round about its base was spread an accumulation of rubbish, such as one always finds in places deserted by human beings.

"This will be the very place," said Tom King, "provided we can only make an entrance; and that I doubt not, from the appearance of the place, will be an easy enough matter."

"You must be quick," said Claude, "or the gendarmes will be upon us."

CHAPTER CCLXXVI.

DICK TURPIN REACHES THE OLD BAILEY IN SAFETY, AND IS TAKEN INTO COURT BY MR. KERSEY.

A cold frosty wind was careering through the streets when Dick Turpin, after his narrow escape from capture

turned in a direction which would lead him towards Newgate.

His body being greatly heated made him more sensible of this coolness in the atmosphere than he otherwise would have been, and he drew his apparel more closely around his person.

As he did this the natural thought occured to him, that if he walked into the first clothier's shop he came to, and purchased one of the long ample cloaks at that period so much in vogue, it would not only shield him from the cold, but also serve as an admirable disguise.

Having come to this conclusion, and feeling the necessity there was for him to conceal his personal appearance in some way, Dick looked about him for a clothier's.

In London then, as now, he had not long to look for what he wanted.

Just a little lower down on the other side of the street he saw a tailor's.

It was no flaunting, pretentious establishment, such as might be seen now-a-days, but a quiet place, where only a little business appeared to be carried on.

But this was in appearance only.

Dick crossed over the street, and entered the shop without hesitation.

It went down a step from the street, and the highwayman was far from displeased when he found that the interior was quite dark—so dark, indeed, that he did not see the man who was minding the shop, until he spoke to him.

Dick quickly signified his wishes, and the man, taking his measure with his eye, soon supplied him with the article he required.

Turpin put it on, and making some remark about the coldness of the morning, drew it close up in his neck, and sallied out of the shop, looking quite a different personage to what he did when he entered it.

In a few minutes afterwards he reached Holborn, and this time the lower part.

The distance to Newgate was still considerable, so that if only for the sake of the time it would save, he sprang into a hackney-coach.

Having entered this unperceived, the chance of his being recognised was but slight.

Soon afterwards the cumbersome but really comfortable vehicle turned out of St. Sepulcher-street into the Old Bailey.

A large number of persons were loitering about, while near the entrance to the vestibule of the prison, an unusual commotion appeared to be taking place.

But Turpin knew not the cause of it, though he might have hazarded a pretty good guess.

Passing by this, they came to that part of the huge, heart-chilling structure where the witnesses enter at such time as the court is sitting.

Before these doors the hackney-coachman halted, and then, gymnastically descending from his seat, came to the door and opened it.

Dick paid him about six times his proper fare before he alighted, so the driver was civil accordingly.

According to immemorial custom, several police-officers were lounging about the steps, or parading to and fro, but there was not one whose face was familiar to Turpin.

Wrapping his cloak around him, he descended from the carriage, and then almost the first person upon whom his eyes lighted was Mr. Kersey.

The lawyer had a very anxious look upon his face, and he was glancing up and down the street in a fidgety manner, as though he was waiting for some one who ought to have made his appearance earlier.

He did not recognise Dick, muffled up as he was, but the highwayman tapped him on the shoulder.

"Thank goodness you are here!" said the lawyer, with a sigh of relief; "I was beginning to get terribly alarmed about you.

"And well you might; I can assure you I have had a narrow escape of capture."

"But you are free?"

"Yes."

"Come this way, then."

"Have the proceedings commenced?"

"Yes, the court is opened."

"Then I am late?"

"Yes."

"But not too late, I hope?"

"Oh! dear, no."

"I am glad to hear that."

"The trial in which you feel so great an interest has not come on yet, though it stands next on the list. The one they have on now is a trivial one, and will not occupy much time."

"That is a great relief."

"And so was your presence to me. Come this way. The court is crowded to excess, but I shall be able to find a corner for you to stand in."

"That will do, and the more I am removed from public gaze the better I shall be pleased."

"Of course you will. I think I can manage that for you, and now understand, as we shall not have another chance of speaking together, that you will not be called upon unless it is absolutely necessary. Mr. Nuttall will do all he can to prevent it, but if he is obliged to call you, he will not do so until he has made an appeal to judge and jury to protect you."

"Enough, Mr. Kersey, I feel sure you will do all you possibly can for me."

"Rely upon that. Now, this way."

Mr. Kersey pushed open the door, and then Dick found himself within the precincts of the court.

It is scarcely possible for a stranger to enter this place without emotion.

The semi-darkness.

The strange, hushed silence.

The low monotonous voice of the judge.

All conspire to produce a benumbing influence upon the spirits.

The breath even is drawn painfully and by stealth, while every one has his sense of hearing stretched to the utmost.

The judge was passing sentence when Dick entered, so the court was unusually and profoundly silent.

The case, as Mr. Kersey had said, was a trivial one, and, indeed, it looked as though it had been arranged as a kind of prologue to the after part of the day's proceedings, as theatrical managers, when they produce any important drama, first have performed a piece of minor excellence, which serves as a foil to the one that follows it, and makes it seem all the better by comparison.

No such idea as this entered the minds of the officials, still the appearance to the breathless spectators was the same.

The prisoner—a woman—was removed from the dock, after which a brief interruption took place.

But soon all was still and orderly again.

The different counsel at the table busied themselves with their briefs.

The clerk of the arraigns turned over his parchment documents.

The oath was administered to the jury.

The judge took a fresh pen in his hand, and prepared paper, as though he anticipated he should have to take copious notes.

He was a venerable-looking man, with thin white hair scrupulously brushed, and having a benevolent expression of countenance; but his occasionally contracted brow, his steady glance, and firm compression of his lips, indicated that he was one who would administer justice with an impartial hand.

His decisions would be just and legal. There was neither leniency nor harshness; he was what is seldom to be found—an upright, strictly conscientious, and honourable judge.

Would there were more like him!

Then, when all these preparations were completed, there was a momentary pause in the proceedings.

But it was only momentary.

Then there came into the dock—

First, one of the men who had been captured in his attempt to escape from the haunted house.

Secondly, his companion.

Then Adrian Winberry.

His appearance created in the court an immense sensation.

Every eye was in a moment riveted upon his countenance.

Considering the important part he has played lately in our narrative, and, as he has appeared disguised, we think a few lines descriptive of his personal appearance cannot be out of place.

On the present occasion he had evidently taken immense pains with his toilette.

Perhaps he was desirous of winning the suffrage of those who might chance to see him.

In height, then, he was close upon six feet.

His form was in proportion to his height, for he was exceedingly muscular in appearance, and well built.

His hair was black, and his face of a dark, tawny colour, as though his skin had been for some time exposed to the fierce heat of a tropical sun.

The same thing was observable with his hands—they were almost the hue of a mulatto's.

His face was clean, and closely shaven.

The slight moustache that was upon his lip when he was examined before the magistrate had now disappeared.

But the most singular characteristic of his face has yet to be noticed.

His forehead was very broad, and very high.

Indeed, the hair seemed to have been removed from it, or else he was partially bald.

This portion, in consequence of being always covered, was quite white, and in contrast to his swarthy face seemed dazzlingly so.

At this singular appearance no one could help looking.

Having been once fully seen, he could be ever afterwards identified.

Upon taking his stand at the bar, he drew himself up with a haughty movement to his full height, and glanced round him proudly and calmly.

Then he made a deep and courteous bow to the judge, who unconsciously returned it.

A smile either of assured innocence or else of desperate hardihood was on his face.

Which of the two it was the reader knows.

But a human tribunal, like all other things human, is fallible and erring.

The guilty, when brought before it, are not always punished, nor are the innocent invariably set free.

CHAPTER CCLXXVII.

IN WHICH THE COUNSEL FOR THE PROSECUTION STATES THE CASE AGAINST ADRIAN WINBERRY AND HIS TWO ACCOMPLICES.

Amid a profound and deathlike silence, the clerk of the arraigns rose from his seat.

The faint rustling noise which he made as he turned over his papers, was plainly audible to every one within the crowded area.

Then, in a rapid voice, he read the indictments against the prisoners.

It is not necessary to trouble the reader with the contents of this document, full as it was of the technicalities of legal phrascology.

The substance of it will appear in the speech for the prosecution.

And every one appeared to think so—so very little attention was paid to what the clerk said.

It seems to be always a point aimed at by these gentry to read over the indictment without pausing once to draw breath, and without making any stop between their words.

Why they do this is best known to themselves, but if they think it makes them better understood, they labour under an extraordinary delusion.

But perhaps they look upon it as a necessary but troublesome form they have to go through, and they feel that the sooner it is over the better both for themselves and those who have to listen to it.

Be it how it may, the clerk quickly gabbled over it, and then sat down looking very red in the face, and very much out of breath.

Then there was another pause.

The spectators drew a long breath.

They felt that the trial was now about to begin in good earnest.

All three of the prisoners put in the plea not guilty.

With breathless expectation they waited for the counsel for the prosecution to commence his speech.

Mr. Nuttall and Mr. Kersey whispered together, and then the former rose.

He settled his gown about him, and took from the hands of one of his assistants a folded paper.

Then he commenced his address as follows:—

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—

"It is my duty on the present occasion to lay before you the details of one of the most remarkable cases that have ever fallen under my notice, and I have no doubt you will coincide with me as regards its singularity.

"The charge against the three prisoners at the bar, as shown by the indictment, involves abduction, conspiracy, and murder, three of the most heinous crimes they could possibly commit.

"The evidence that I shall bring before you is of a character that will fully bear out and substantiate all that I am about to say.

"My province is as briefly and as clearly as possible, to lay before you a succinct account of all that has taken place.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury, the best way in which I can do that is to begin at the beginning, and relate things as they occurred.

"Between the villages of Hendon and Hampstead there stands a large stone residence surrounded by spacious grounds, which was in the possession of a gentleman much loved and respected in the neighbourhood in which he lived, for the consistent kindness and urbanity of his behaviour to all persons, and upon all occasions.

"The name of this gentleman was William Winberry, commonly called by his tenants and the residents around, Squire Winberry.

"This house and estate had been bequeathed to him by his father, who was one of the richest merchants in the city, and amassed a large fortune by his industry and frugality.

"William Winberry was the eldest son, and consequently the heir. He had a brother some years younger than himself. I should, perhaps, say half-brother, for they were by different mothers, Mr. William Winberry having been twice married.

"As has been the case from the earliest times, and as the case always will be, these two half-brothers were not friendly with each other. Yet, in impartiality, I must say, that this unfriendliness was wholly and solely caused by the younger brother, Adrian Winberry, the prisoner at the bar."

Upon hearing these words everyone, without a single exception, who was in the court, bent their eyes upon Adrian, who shrank slightly before so close and undivided a scrutiny.

He was much paler than he was when the investigation commenced, and those who were near noticed he pressed his teeth closely together.

He had never expected the revelations that had just been made.

Nothing that had previously taken place in the proceedings gave him any clue to it, and his guilty heart told him that the counsel for the prosecution, from the manner in which he had commenced, was in full possession of all the facts of the case.

He felt his position to be a very dangerous and awkward one.

But he was not master of his own actions. He would have to stand where he was, and abide by the result.

Mr. Nuttall continued, and his whole attention was absorbed by what he said. He literally hung upon every word.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—

"It ill becomes any one to speak ill of the dead, but there are certain things which I cannot pass over without making some allusion to them.

"Mr. William Winberry, senior, then, the father of the prisoner at the bar, lived very unhappily with his second wife. The circumstance is well known, and the motives which caused unhappiness need not be mentioned here. These are unimportant.

"Suddenly, however, it is not known from what cause, Mrs. Winberry totally altered her behaviour to her husband, and they seemed once more to live happily together. But soon after this she fell a victim to an epidemic which was decimating the neighbourhood.

"To this disorder her husband likewise fell a victim, and died a few days after. Both were interred in one grave."

"My lord," said one of the barristers, rising to his feet, "I must really protest against the manner in which

my learned friend is opening the case for the prosecution. This family romance to which he is now treating us is most irrelavent to the case and prejudicial to my client, the charge against whom is that of murder upon the person of an old man whose body is not known."

The judge looked inquiringly at Mr. Nuttall, who hastened to reply.

"My lord, my learned brother, who appears to be intrusted with the case for the defence is slightly in error with respect to the statements he has made, for I shall bring witnesses to prove the relevancy of this piece of family romance, as my learned brother calls it, and also witnesses who will identify the body, and give such evidence as will in every respect bear out what I say.

"That is enough," said the judge. "Proceed."

"But, my lord"—— said the counsel for the defence.

"You will have an opportunity given you for making whatever remarks you may think proper as regards this case now under investigation."

The counsel sat down with a mortified look upon his face.

Adrian Winberry scowled.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury," resumed Mr. Nuttall, "I will continue my narrative from the point at which it was interrupted.

"After the funeral of Mr. and Mrs. Winberry, of course the will was sought for.

"This, the lawyer stated, he had seen put by the deceased into a cabinet of antique workmanship, which stood in his bed-chamber.

"But, on going to this cabinet, no will was to be found.

"This, however, proved to be of no consequence, for the lawyer stated that, in anticipation of some such occurrence, two wills had been drawn up, both of which were exactly the same. One of these was in his possession, and accordingly he produced it.

"By virtue of this document the bulk of the wealth and property was bequeathed to the eldest son, William, and to Adrian was left a clear annual income of eight hundred pounds, and no more.

"After reading the will, the brothers met and quarrelled. What passed between them, of course none can tell. After it, Adrian departed, and was not seen at his brother's house for many years. What became of him during that period no one knows.

"And now William Winberry, about two years after his father's death, married, and the issue of that marriage was one child, a daughter, whose mother died in giving her birth.

"And passing over a long period of years we come to the things which have recently happened, but which could not have been properly understood without this allusion to the past.

"During this interval, Mr. Winberry led the calm and happy life of a country gentleman. His daughter grew up in grace and beauty, and he doated upon her with a rare affection.

"But this happy state of things was destined to be interrupted.

"After all this long absence Adrian returned.

"He sought for and obtained an interview with his brother.

"It afterwards transpired what took place between them on this occasion. Adrian, large and sufficient as his annual income was, had squandered it all, and had come back, not to ask his brother for assistance, but to endeavour to wrest money from him.

"This William Winberry refused to permit, and for a second time did the brothers part in anger.

"About a month after this, Blanche—for that was the name of the daughter—disappeared.

"She had last been seen walking out in the grounds alone, as was her wont, but although the closest search was made, not a trace of her could be found.

"On one of the occasions, when all hope of finding her had been abandoned by all but the father, the bereaved parent set out alone upon his melancholy search.

"That night he never returned.

"Nor the next, nor the next, and from that time nothing could be heard of either father or daughter.

"The only person left in the house besides the domestics was a young lady, a playmate and companion of Blanche's, who will come forward as one of the witnesses in this dark and intricate affair."

CHAPTER CCLXXVIII.

IN WHICH THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE CROSS-EXAMINES THE POLICE-OFFICER, AND ACCUSES DICK TURPIN OF THE MURDER.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—

"I am well aware that my opening speech has already exceeded the limit considered usual in these cases, but I must beg of you to bear in mind that I have used no circumlocution, but have confined myself to a bare recital of facts.

"But much as I have said, more remains to be told. Indeed, my speech here naturally divides itself into two portions, each of which bear equally upon the other.

"I now come to the part which seems, nevertheless, more intimately acquainted with the matter in hand.

"Without saying how or by whom these persons were abducted, I will take up the thread of my narrative at the point where the charge against the prisoner begins.

"In the Birdcage-walk, as that broad road leading through St. James's-park is called, there stands a row of mansions.

"Not one of you, perhaps, have failed to see them.

"These houses are all well built, commodious residences, and from their desirable position and splendid prospect, command a large rent.

"But the property has recently deteriorated in value from a rather remarkable cause.

"One of these houses to which I am alluding incurred very many years back the imputation of being haunted.

"Whether the grounds upon which this imputation rested were well or ill-founded it is not for me to say, but at all events the house was shut up and abandoned to ruin and decay, for no one could be found to live in it.

"From this cause, then, the adjoining property suffered abatement in value.

"And now, on the twenty-seventh of the past month, and close upon midnight, one of the police-officers employed at Bow-street, whose name is Pursford, was walking along in front of the houses mentioned, when his attention was suddenly arrested by the stealthy and mysterious approach of three persons.

"Secrecy was evidently desired by them, from the manner in which they walked along the street.

"Two of these men were attired in ordinary costumes, the third was enveloped in a cloak which completely concealed his form.

"Perceiving the suspicious appearance of these persons, Pursford, the officer, shrank back into the shadow of the houses, and resolved to keep a watch upon their actions.

"What was his surprise to see them, after cautiously looking round to ascertain whether they were observed, cross the road and disappear beneath the projecting doorway of the haunted house.

"This looked more suspicious than before.

"Pursford left his place of concealment, and came to the doorway of the haunted house.

"It was closed.

"The three mysterious individuals had entered it.

"Convinced that something was wrong, Pursford, being alone, ran off for assistance, and returned about half-an-hour afterwards, bringing a strong force with him.

"Finding the door fast, they broke it open, and ascended the stairs.

"In a room on the second floor they found the body of a man weltering in his blood, his head being almost shattered by a pistol-ball—the features were so disfigured as to make identification by them impossible.

"Seeing a door before them, the officers rushed through it, and captured the two men—one in the gardens, and the other in the act of leaping over into St. James's-park, whither the one in the cloak, and doubtless the principal in the crime, had already made his way.

"But in that large space there was little hope of finding any one, so they gave up the attempt, and contented themselves with leaving the house in charge of the police, and escorting their two prisoners to Newgate.

"And now I must break off to say that on that particular night a notorious criminal had concealed himself in the park, all the avenues from which were guarded, while others searched the grounds.

"Suddenly the man who was on duty at Spring-gardens' gate heard some one approaching, and pounced upon him.

"The other party of searchers now came up, and labouring under the idea that he was the person of whom they were in quest, they carried him straightway to Newgate.

"In the vestibule of the prison, however, the mistake was discovered. They had not caught the person they thought, but Adrian Winberry, the prisoner at the bar, who thereupon indignantly demanded his release, and was about to be set free, when the officers arrived, bringing the two men they had captured at the haunted house.

"Between them and the prisoner at the bar a mutual and immediate recognition took place, which will be distinctly sworn to by several persons.

"Afterwards, however, the recognition was disclaimed by the prisoners, the one asserting that he knew them not, and the others saying that they had made a mistake, as the officers themselves had.

"At any rate, the governor of Newgate thought fit to retain Adrian Winberry a prisoner, and on being brought before a magistrate in due course, he, in common with the men beside him, was pronounced guilty of murder, and sentenced to take his trial in this court, at the bar of which he now stands.

"Such, my lord, is the case against the prisoner at the bar, who stands accused of obtaining a document from his brother, William Winberry, by force, in which the whole of his wealth and estates were made over to him, and also of sending down an attorney to his brother's house, and commissioning him to take possession of the place in his name.

"And now, my lord and gentlemen of the jury, I have brought to a conclusion the longest address I have ever before delivered; but it ought rather to be termed a statement of bare facts than an address.

"It now remains for me to call such evidence as will substantiate that which I have stated to you, after which it will be your province to decide."

Mr. Nuttall sat down amidst a slight hum of applause, which was immediately stifled by the crier.

Mr. Nuttall was quite exhausted, and therefore one of his assistants rose to call the witnesses.

The first witness called was Shockley, the steward.

It is not requisite to give his evidence in full—it is enough to say that he deposed to the main facts in the life of William Winberry, and also how both his master and daughter had been carried off, all which entirely agreed with what Mr. Nuttall had stated, so that that part of the question was disposed of.

The next witness called was the police-officer.

"Abel Pursford!" said the crier.

In obedience to this call, and in an off-hand, every-day manner, the police-officer entered the witness-box, and swore to the facts which the counsel for the prosecution had related.

The counsel for the defence had not troubled Shockley, the steward. Perhaps he felt that there was nothing to be made out of him.

But as soon as the junior counsel for the prosecution had done asking Pursford questions, he was upon his feet in a moment.

Assuming a loud dictatorial manner, he said—

"Now, Able Pursford, listen to me, if you please."

"Yes, sir."

"You saw three men enter the haunted house, you say? Now, what sort of looking men were they?"

"I could not see very well, because it was dark. They were ordinary-looking men, and one wore a long black cloak."

"Oh! ordinary-looking men, were they? Now, what do you mean by ordinary?"

"Ordinary?"

"Yes; do you mean they were just such looking men as you would find in London streets at any time?"

"Yes, sir; with the exception of the one in the cloak."

"Oh! very good. With the exception of the one in the cloak? Now, what was there not ordinary about him?"

"The cloak, sir."

"Oh! and was it a very extraordinary looking cloak?"

"Well, no, sir; not very."

"Not very? Not a very extraordinary looking cloak? Just so. Now, it was quite a common-looking cloak, I dare say, and such as any gentleman might put on to keep him warm on a cold winter's night?"

"Well, yes, sir, it might."

"I thought so. There turns out to be nothing remarkable about it, after all. It was a little bit heightened by your imagination, I dare say. You admit that the three men you saw enter were just such as I might meet in the street at any time?"

"Well, yes, sir."

"Exactly," said the counsel for the defence, looking round him with a triumphant air.

He had certainly achieved a great deal, for he had destroyed the identity of the prisoners. Mr. Pursford could not swear they were the same he had seen enter, after making such an admission as that.

"Stop a moment, Mr. Pursford, I have not done with you yet. After you watched these three men in—by-the-by, will you swear they are the three prisoners at the bar?"

"Well, sir, I"——

"Will you swear the men you saw enter are the prisoners at the bar? Recollect you are on your oath, and perjury is punished heavily, both in this world and the next. Can you swear to them?"

"Not by their looks I can't, sir."

"Of course not. Then how else can you swear to them?"

"I'll swear that those two standing this side are the same that I captured in the house when I broke into it, and that is much the same thing to my thinking."

"Oh! but it isn't. It's quite a different affair altogether. Will you swear to the other prisoner?"

"No, sir, I can't swear to him."

"Very good, then, that is just what I wanted to come at; but stop a moment, I have not done with you yet. I have a question or two more to ask you Mr. Pursford."

CHAPTER CCLXXIX.

THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE TRIES TO BOTHER THE JURY, AND CHARGES DICK TURPIN WITH THE MURDER OF WILLIAM WINBERRY.

THE counsel for the defence inflated his cheeks as he spoke, and looked very knowing and pompous, while the spectators looked anxiously to see what piece of cleverness was going to follow.

But Pursford, the police-officer, preserved an unruffled demeanour.

It was not the first time he had stood in the witness-box, nor was it the first time he had stood the test of a cross-examination.

His coolness seemed to aggravate the counsel slightly, for the officer seemed to say by his looks, "Proceed, I am quite ready to answer any question you may think proper to ask me."

"Now, Mr. Pursford."

"Yes, sir."

"You say you saw three ordinary-looking people enter the house in Birdcage-walk, to whose identity you do not like to positively swear?"

"I have already answered that question."

"Oh! very good—very good. You have already answered that question. Well; perhaps you will have no objection to answer another. When you watched these persons in, you went to the door yourself, did you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And found it fast?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you set out for assistance. Now, how long do you think you were away?"

"About half-an-hour."

"Just so; and, during your absence, did you leave any watch upon the door of this said haunted house?"

"No, sir."

"Oh! you did not leave any watch? Just take a note of that, if you please, gentlemen of the jury. He left no watch at the door while he went away. Then, Mr. Pursford, it is just possible that some other persons might have entered the house during his absence, and that those he saw enter might have left it."



[TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK ARE BESIEGED BY THE GENDARMES IN THE OLD MILL.]

"Really," interrupted the judge, "I cannot see the drift of these questions."

"I beg your pardon, my lord," said the counsel for the defence, not abashed in the slightest, for his object was to bother the jury, and get them into a kind of fog. "I beg your pardon, my lord, it concerns the identity of my client."

"Not at all—not at all. The witness says he cannot swear positively that those were the men he saw enter the house, though I believe I am right in saying that such is his impression. But this the witness does most distinctly swear to—the two prisoners at the bar are the men he captured while endeavouring to escape from the haunted house, therefore I cannot help considering these questions unnecessary and irrelevant."

"I bow before your opinion, my lord," said the counsel, "and will take up my questions at another point, and I trust I shall be able, not only to remove the imputation of guilt from my innocent client, but fix it upon the real culprit."

These words were spoken with great emphasis, and had the effect of attracting the attention of every person in court, while the jury nodded their heads, and looked preternaturally wise.

"Now, Mr. Pursford, said the counsel for the defence, as he adjusted his gown to his satisfaction, "when you broke into the haunted house—I believe I am right in saying you broke in?"

"Quite right, sir."

"Just so, Mr. Pursford—just so! Now, when you broke in you were on the ground floor of the house, of course."

"I was, sir, in the entrance-hall."

"Exactly, as you say, in the entrance-hall. Now, such being the case, will you be good enough to inform the jury what circumstance induced you to go upstairs, because it appears to me by my notes that you found the dead body on the second floor."

"You are quite right about where we found the dead body. It was upon the second floor."

"Then what induced you to go up there, for it appears to me that you did go up, and that direct, too. Be good enough to answer that question, Mr. Pursford."

"Certainly, sir. Before we struck a stroke upon the door we all heard the loud report of a pistol."

"Who do you mean by we? Take care, sir; you are upon your oath, recollect."

"Myself, and the police-officers I had got with me."

"Oh! am I to understand that you heard the report of the pistol yourself?"

"Yes, sir, I did hear it."

"Very good. You swear that?"

"I do."

"That is enough, then; hearing the report of the pistol I suppose, coupled with the suspicions which had arose from what you saw, removed whatever scruples you might have had, and you at once proceeded to demolish the door?"

"You are right, sir; that was just it."

"But am I also to understand that as you stood outside of the house, and heard the report of a pistol, you could tell precisely from what portion of the house the sound came, and that you mounted to the second-floor accordingly."

"No, sir."

"How was it, then?"

"When we got inside, the first thing we all did was to unmask our lanterns and look about us. The first thing we noticed was the dust on the floor."

"What made you notice such a trivial thing as that? Gentlemen of the jury, don't be impatient, I shall get the piece of information I am short of directly."

"The house had been shut up for a considerable length of time," said the police-officer, in reply to the question propounded to him by the counsel for the defence, "and the consequence was that the dust had accumulated in it in the most surprising quantities, and on the floor of the entrance-hall it lay almost as thickly as snow."

"Oh! indeed, very singular, but if it lay as thickly as snow, I presume it was of rather a different look."

"It resembled snow in this respect—it left the distinct impression of every foot that trod upon it."

"Oh! did it."

"Yes, and upon looking down on the ground we saw by the aid of the light which the lantern afforded us, that there were the impressions of very many feet, and we at once followed them."

"Then, I suppose it was these footprints in the dust that conducted you so quickly to the second floor?"

"It was, sir; and not only that, we could smell the gunpowder, and hear the rapid tramping of footsteps, as of persons attempting to escape."

"And then, according to the evidence you have given, you entered the room and found the dead body of a man, and you captured two men escaping from the premises."

"That is right, sir."

"And did you look at the faces of the men you captured?"

"I did."

"When and where?"

"At the time of capture and at the time I gave them into custody of Mr. Cawthorn, in the vestibule of Newgate."

"And now, looking at the two men at the bar, are you prepared to swear that they are the two you captured?"

"I am, sir, quite ready."

"Which are the two?"

'Those standing nearest me."

This was conclusive, and the counsel for the defence could say nothing to it.

And now several persons in the court witnessed Mr. Kersey and Mr. Nuttall sending mysterious little billets one to another, and at the end Mr. Nuttall said, addressing the judge:

"My lord, I am instructed by the attorney for the prosecution to ask this witness one or two more questions of very great importance, which will serve to throw considerable light upon the question of the identity of the prisoners."

The judge bowed his head assentingly, and amid a general curiosity, Mr. Nuttall asked Pursford, the officer, the following questions, to which he replied readily enough.

"When you arrived at Newgate with the two prisoners was not something of rather an unusual character taking place there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Be good enough to explain, as briefly as you can, what was taking place."

"Mr. Cawthorn, the governor, and several turnkeys, and other persons were in the vestibule all engaged in talking about something very excitedly, and the subject of the conversation was Mr. Adrian Winberry, the prisoner at the bar, who was there a prisoner."

"Just so. Now you are quite ready to swear you make no mistake. Is it the same who now stands at the bar?"

"It is, sir."

"Well, now, something else took place, did there not?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"The moment the two prisoners caught sight of Adrian Winberry, they uttered ejaculations of recognition."

"And did Adrian Winberry recognise them in return?"

"I cannot swear so positively to that, but it is my belief he did, for he started and looked extremely vexed when the two prisoners said they knew him."

"That is sufficient. There were several others present who noticed the recognition?"

"Oh! yes, sir."

"And are you prepared to swear that the prisoner at the bar, Adrian Winberry, is the same person that you found in custody in the vestibule of Newgate upon the occasion in question?"

"I am, sir."

Mr. Nuttall sat down.

But the counsel for the defence was on his legs again instantly.

"Now, Mr. Pursford, attend to me. It appears you have a tolerably good recollection of what took place in the vestibule of the prison?"

"I recollect all the circumstances quite well."

"Then did it not transpire that Mr. Adrian Winberry had been taken prisoner by mistake?"

"Yes, sir. They had taken him under the idea that he was another person."

"And pray who was the other person they mistook him for, Mr. Pursford?"

"Dick Turpin."

"Dick Turpin, the highwayman?"

"The very same, sir."

"Now, gentlemen of the jury," said the counsel for the defence. "Now, gentlemen, I have arrived at the point of which I spoke. Please to bear in mind that this witness distinctly swears that my client, Mr. Adrian Winberry, was taken prisoner in mistake for Dick Turpin, the highwayman."

CHAPTER CCLXXX.

THE MYSTERIOUS LADY REVEALS HERSELF, AND HER BEAUTY CAUSES HER TO BE A POPULAR FAVOURITE.

Now, if the truth must be told, the jury themselves did not see anything in this to make such a rumpus about; but they said nothing, and waited in dignified silence to hear the rest.

More imposingly than before did the counsel for the defence arrange his robes and settle his immaculate peruke upon his head.

"Mr. Pursford, have you ever seen Dick Turpin, the highwayman?"

"Yes, sir, once."

"Only once?"

"That is all, sir."

"Should you know him if you saw him again?"

"I think I should. Once seeing a person is generally enough for me."

"I have no doubt. That, of course, is a part of your profession. Well, will you swear that the person in the cloak was not Dick Turpin?"

"Which person, sir?"

"The person who was enveloped in a cloak, and accompanied by two others, you saw cross the road and enter the haunted house."

Mr. Pursford hesitated.

The counsellor saw it, and the question was repeated in a louder and more emphatic tone of voice.

"I won't swear that is was not——"

"There! The witness won't swear that the man in the

cloak was not Dick Turpin, from which I think the inference is clear, that this villainous highwayman, who has made all England ring with his crimes, is the author of this murder!"

This announcement, uttered as it was with extreme vehemence, took the court by surprise.

Dick Turpin, however, was the one who was the most astounded.

Never in all his life had he felt such an inclination to knock any one down as he did to knock down the counsel for the defence.

Knowing all the circumstances from first to last, of course the reader is well aware how utterly groundless was this charge which the counsel brought against him.

Nothing but the thought of the service he should be able to render the mysterious lady and Blanche, whom he had never seen, could have kept him back.

As it was, however, he remained immovable.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, I proclaim my client to be perfectly innocent of the crime wherewith he is charged, and Dick Turpin, the highwayman, guilty of it."

Hearing this, Mr. Pursford was about to step out of the witness box, but Mr. Nuttall, with a wave of his hand, stopped him.

"You seemed to break off in what you were going to say just now, is it not so?"

"Yes sir."

"Finish your sentence, then, if you please."

"I intended to say, that, though I could not swear that it was not Dick Turpin I saw with the two men cross the road and enter the haunted house, yet I did not for a moment think it was him."

"Oh! very good, that will do."

"May I stand down?"

"Yes, provided my learned brother does not want to ask you any more questions."

"No, there is nothing more," said the counsel for the defence.

"Mr. Pursford," said Mr. Nuttall, struck with a sudden thought, and preventing the officer accomplishing his escape from the witness-box, which he seemed very desirous to do. "You can go now, but, in all probability, I shall want to call you again at another stage of the proceedings."

With this injunction, Pursford was allowed to take his departure.

"So far there was very little elucidated, though all that they had heard served but to stimulate the desire they felt to hear the sequel.

After Pursford several more witnesses were called, who did no more than corroborate what he had said, but it is not worth while to give all in detail, since it would be nothing but a recapitulation of what has gone before.

We pass on.

"Maud Gouldman!" said Mr. Nuttall's assistant.

The name was repeated by the crier.

Dick Turpin looked up when he heard this name pronounced, curious in the extreme to know who would respond to it, though he more than half suspected who it was.

Nor were his anticipations wrong.

The mysterious lady, in whom Dick felt so much interest, was ushered into the witness-box.

She commanded the instant and universal attention of the whole court.

She was attired as she had been during the whole of the time Dick Turpin had known her—that is to say, in deep black.

The dazzling fairness of her alabaster skin was displayed to the utmost advantage by it; and her extreme beauty drew many a sigh of envy from those females who were in the court, and many a sigh of admiration from those of the opposite sex.

Judge and jurymen alike turned round and gazed upon her while they prepared themselves to listen to what she was about to say with more than ordinary attention.

Such is the influence which personal beauty will always produce.

From where he stood Dick had an excellent view of her.

He had seen her very many times during their brief acquaintanceship, and under many aspects.

In all she had looked extremely beautiful.

Her beauty, too, was of that kind which never fails to win the human heart, and elicit its warmest sympathies.

Her beauty was of that bold attractive character which some so much admire.

One expression was ever on her countenance, and so plain a one that no one could mistake it.

That expression was pure, candid, truthful innocence.

Her features were small and somewhat Madonna-like in their general configuration, especially when she was pensive.

Her forehead was broad, but not particularly high—still high enough for the peculiar style of beauty.

No Parian marble could have vied in whiteness with it, and the contrast between it and her dark—almost black hair, which was parted smoothly upon it—made that whiteness all the more apparent.

Upon finding herself in so conspicuous a position, and with so many eyes fixed upon her, a flush of colour mounted up into her cheeks, and remained there, enhancing in a very great degree her wondrous loveliness.

Mr. Nuttall considerately paused a few moments before questioning her, in order that she might recover her composure somewhat, and be able to reply to him with clearness and precision.

At length he spoke.

"Your name is Maud Gouldman, I believe?"

She inclined her head.

"That answer is not deemed sufficient. You must be good enough to reply in words."

"It is, sir."

"That will do. Will you be good enough to relate what you know as touching this case now under investigation?"

She began thus.

Her voice at first was low and almost inaudible, but as she proceeded she gathered confidence, and spoke in a louder tone.

But so desirous was every one to hear every word that came from her lips, that the silence of the grave prevailed in the crowded court.

"I am distantly related to the family of the Winberrys Between Blanche Winberry and myself there has always existed a strong attachment—it dates from our infancy. We are not, strictly speaking, cousins, but from our intimacy we have assumed that title."

"Does this bear upon the case?" asked the judge, looking towards Mr. Nuttall.

"It does, my lord. But should you prefer the witness to tell her story in her own way, or shall I elicit the testimony I require from her by questions?"

"By questions, I think."

"Very good, my lord. I have no doubt it will save time." Then, looking at Maud Gouldman, he said—

"From your infancy you have resided with the deceased Mr. Winberry, have you not?"

"I have. I was an orphan, and he adopted me."

"Will you be good enough to look towards the prisoners at the bar?"

The witness turned her eyes in that direction.

"Do you know either of them—I mean, have you seen either of them before?"

"I have sir."

"Which one?"

"Mr. Adrian Winberry."

"Point him out to the court."

"He is the one standing furthest from me. The dark one with the white forehead."

This was so prominent and distinguishing a feature that there could be no doubt whatever about the identification.

"When have you seen him?"

"Only once."

"And when was that?"

"About six weeks ago."

"What was the occasion?"

"It was at the Hall."

"You mean the residence of Mr. William Hampstead."

"Yes sir."

"Under what circumstances did you see him?"

"I was in the library with Blanche and her father, when the servant announced Mr. Adrian Winberry."

"Continue, please."

"Mr. Winberry desired us both to leave the room, saying

as he did so, that he did not wish us to take any notice of him."

"What then?"

"We obeyed—that is, Blanche and myself—but, in crossing the hall, we encountered him."

"Mr. Adrian Winberry?"

"Yes."

"Did he speak?"

"No, he merely bowed and passed on."

"But you saw him very plainly?"

"Oh! yes, he had his hat off as he has now, and I noticed the difference in colour in the upper and lower parts of his face."

"So you can swear to his identity unhesitatingly."

"I can sir."

"That point, then, I presume is settled. Can you tell what took place between the brothers at the meeting spoken of?"

"I was not present, but, after he had gone, I returned with Blanche to the library, where we found her father much agitated. His daughter, of whom he was extremely—doatingly fond, questioned him closely respecting his agitation, and tried her best to soothe him, when he told her, in my presence, that his brother had squandered away the income left him by his father, and had endeavoured to compel him to advance him money, which he refused to do. High words rose between them, and he said that he had forbidden him ever to enter his doors again."

CHAPTER CCLXXXI.

MAUD GOULDMAN'S EVIDENCE PROVES TO BE VERY IMPORTANT INDEED.

It is questionable whether there could have been found in the whole court a single person who did not implicitly believe every word which Maud Gouldman uttered.

All, save one, bent upon her looks of approval and admiration.

That one was Adrian Winberry.

With folded arms and lowering brows, he stood at the bar and scowled at her.

No stranger was he to those effects by which the human heart is swayed, and he saw with execration the feeling of favour with which this witness was received.

He knew how fearfully every word she uttered would militate against him, and how hopeless would be the attempt to disprove a single one of her statements.

But, like a straw upon the surface of the water, he had no control over himself, but was forced to drift with the tide.

Mr. Nuttall made another pause, affecting to be searching for something among his papers, in order that Maud should quite recover herself, and not lose her presence of mind and say something which would at all tend to throw discredit upon her evidence.

"Now what is the next event which happened in connexion with the present matter? Did you see Adrian Winberry again?"

"No, sir; he did not come near, and Blanche's father particularly requested us never to mention his name to him, because he wished to forget that he had so unworthy a brother in existence."

"Those were his words, I presume?"

"Yes, sir; as nearly as I can remember them."

"Just so; and now what happened next?"

"It was about a month after the visit of Adrian to the hall that Blanche went out to walk in the grounds in the evening, as she was frequently in the habit of doing."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see her go?"

"Yes; she kissed me before she went, and I stood at one of the windows and watched her across the lawn."

"What time was that?"

"I do not remember exactly, but it was some considerable time before sunset."

"What then?"

"I have never seen her since that time."

"Then, I understand you to say that she walked out alone in the manner you have described, and never returned again."

"Yes, sir, that is it."

"Now continue, if you please.

"When it grew dusk her father inquired for her, and then it was discovered that she had not come back from her walk. Her father, whose affection for her knew no bounds, got terribly anxious and alarmed, but suspecting no ill, I went out with him in search of her."

"And that search was resultless?"

"Quite; not a trace of her could we find. We returned to inquire whether she had come back, and were replied to in the negative. It was then quite dark, and we all grew frightened. Her father, accompanied by the menservants on the estate, and provided with lanterns, set out again in search of her, bidding me keep the house. They returned some hours afterwards, tired out, and unable to find the least trace of the object which they sought."

"And she was not found, you say?"

"Never! The neighbours all—for they knew and loved her—joined with her father in the search for many days ensuing, but at last all except her father gave it up in despair. He, however, continued it alone, being all the time distracted with grief for the loss of his daughter, whom he loved more than he loved his own life."

Upon reaching this point in her evidence, Maud broke down.

More than once she had stifled the sobs which rose up in her throat, and restrained the tears which were ready to gush from her eyes.

But at length she found she could do so no longer.

Her emotion could no longer be subdued, and she wept bitterly.

There were many moist eyes in the court, for the simple, clear, and truthlike manner in which she had given her evidence touched the hearts of all, and even the stern judge, under the pretence of wiping the perspiration from his forehead, wiped a tear from the corner of his eye.

A chair was called for and placed in the witness-box for her to sit down upon.

A glass of water was brought for her to drink.

Indeed, all seemed to vie with each other in offering her attentions.

But after a brief pause, during which she composed herself, she rose to her feet to show that she was ready for her examination to continue.

"Would you like a longer rest?" asked Mr. Nuttall, kindly.

"No, sir, I thank you; I do not wish to waste the time of those present; I am quite ready, if you will resume your questions."

"Very well, then; I will do so, and as briefly as I can, in order to release you from your unpleasant situation."

Maud bowed.

"You were speaking of Mr. Winberry?"

"Yes; I said that though his friends and neighbours gave up the search in despair, he did not, but continued it himself."

"Did he go alone?"

"Not at first; he took the servants with him, but in a little while he tired them completely out. As for himself, he seemed unconscious of fatigue, and rather than relinquish the search, continued it himself alone and unaided."

"For how long did he continue it?"

"Only a few days. Like Blanche, he went out and never returned."

"How strange."

"Very strange. I was then the only one left at the hall with the exception of the domestics, and what to do I knew not."

"What did you do eventually?"

"I asked for advice, and was referred to Mr. Winberry's solicitor, Mr. John Kersey, who came down to the Hall, and to whom I related all the particulars."

"Just so; then that, I presume, is sufficient so far. Now, be good enough to tell me what followed."

"By Mr. Kersey's advice I came up to London to his house. He then took me to view the body of a man who had been found murdered in a house in the Bridewalk."

"Well."

"The features were much disfigured—obliterated I might say—but I recognised him instantly."

"And who was it?"

"Blanche's father."

A strange sound in the crowded court followed this announcement.

Everybody expected the reply which would be given to the question, and the moment the simple words, "Blanche's father," were uttered, every one in court drew in his breath involuntarily, and it was this simultaneous inhalation of breath into so many lungs, which produced the strange sound we have mentioned.

United, they formed a kind of gasping sob.

But Mr. Nuttall, after waiting a moment for this reply to have its full effect, resumed his interrogation.

"You are quite certain that you were not mistaken in the identity of the dead body?"

"Quite sure."

"It was he whom you had known in life as Mr. William Winberry?"

"It was."

"But if the features were, as you say, almost obliterated, how is it you can be so positive with regard to his identification?"

"I went by his general appearance to some extent, and besides, I was shown the clothes, which I could swear to as being those worn by him when I last saw him."

"And was there anything more to assist you in this identification?"

"Yes, something which put it beyond all reasonable doubt."

"Will you tell us what it is?"

"Mr. William Winberry was slightly lame in his left foot, and was in the habit of walking with a stick. The lameness was caused by a heavy weight once falling upon his foot and almost crushing it. I believe some of the bones were crushed, but at any rate it left the upper part of his foot a purplish-black. The accident happened when I was a little child, though I remember it perfectly well, and have seen his foot as I have described it to you a thousand times."

"And did the left foot of this dead body exhibit the appearance which you have just described?"

"It did."

"And therefore you dismissed all doubts from your mind?"

"I did."

"And when did you see this body?"

"This morning, just before the commencement of the trial."

"Where?"

"In an adjoining room."

"My lord," said Mr. Nuttall, "I have done with this witness for the present. The evidence she has given, you cannot fail to see, is most important. In my humble judgment there should be a pause made in the proceedings here, in order that the jury may have an opportunity of inspecting the body of the deceased, and ascertaining whether it presents the appearance she has described. Of course, I say this without prejudice to my learned brother for the defence, who may wish to cross-examine Miss Maud Gouldman."

The defending counsel rose up—

"I have no questions I wish to ask Miss Maud Gouldman. I would not be guilty of the rudeness of insinuating that she has misstated or perverted any fact."

This sentiment, concurring so well as it did with the opinion of the mass of spectators who thronged the court, produced a loud demonstration of applause, which no one attempted to check.

The counsel for the defence sat down with a smile on his face.

A politic man was that counsel for the defence.

He knew well enough that he shared in the odium which hung over his client.

He knew that the popular feeling was against him.

He knew the unfavourable nature of the comparis on which would be instituted between Adrian Winberry and Maud Gouldman.

To have asked a single question—to have made the least attempt to throw discredit on her testimon y—would only have increased the public dislike.

But his object was to win for himself and for his client as much suffrage and sympathy as possible, and that object was gained.

By the refusal to cross-examine, and by the utte rance of that sentiment, he had ingratiated him self more than he could possibly have done by any other means, and he cannot but be admired for the tact and management with which he had successfully achieved his end.

And though his cause appeared so hopeless, yet he by no means despaired of gaining the acquittal of his client, Adrian Winberry.

CHAPTER CCLXXXII.

THE COUNSEL FOR THE PROSECUTION MAKES AN APPEAL TO THE JUDGE FOR PROTECTION FOR HIS WITNESS, WHICH IS REFUSED HIM.

THE suggestion made by Mr. Nuttall to the effect that there should be a temporary suspension of the proceedings while the jury went to view the body, was immediately acted upon.

The corpse of the deceased Mr. William Winberry had been removed to the Sessions-house, Old Bailey, and placed in one of the ante-rooms adjoining the court.

Mr. Kersey was aware of this, and though he would fain have spared Maud Gouldman the additional horror of gazing upon the disfigured corpse, still the sacred cause of justice rendered it imperatively necessary.

Nerving herself, then, as well as she was able, to bear the revolting sight, she had, as she had stated in her evidence, entered the room and identified the body of the murdered man.

As soon as the jury had left their seats, Mr. Kersey made his way towards the witness-box, and, taking Maud by the hand, led her to an obscure seat.

The prisoners, too, were allowed to sit down, while in the body of the court there arose that hum and murmur which ever takes place upon such occasions.

All was confusion.

The jury, however, were not long absent.

They were satisfied with one glance at the ghastly and horrible form.

Then they turned away sickened and disgusted.

The foot, however, was shown to them, and its appearance entirely corresponded with the description which the fair witness had given of it.

Moreover, one of the jurymen, who by profession happened to be a surgeon, gave it to be his deliberate opinion that what they saw had been caused by a weight falling upon it and crushing it.

This, then, was satisfactory in the extreme, so far as the identification of the body went, and this also established the connecting link between the two divisions of the counsel for the prosecution's address.

They then all returned to the court, and took their seats.

Silence was restored.

Mr. Kersey was next placed in the witness-box.

The facts he swore to were unimportant, but still corroborative of what had been stated in connexion with him.

The counsel for the defence was asked whether he wished to put any questions to this witness, and he replied in the negative.

Then there was a pause.

The judge spoke.

"Is this the case for the prosecution?"

Mr. Nuttall rose.

There was something he wished to say, but he did not know how to give it utterance.

"It is, and it is not, my lord."

"What do you mean?"

"This, my lord. If you consider the evidence we have adduced sufficiently conclusive to substantiate the charge against the prisoners at the bar, the case is ended: but if we should be of a contrary opinion, and think the evidence not sufficient to support the accusation, we have another witness to call."

"This is something very extraordinary. I am not in a position to express an opinion. I should be taking the function out of the hands of the jury. Why not call this witness at once?"

"My lord, I wish sincerely that I could, because the evidence that he would give would be so much to the point, and so terribly conclusive, inasmuch as he was positively a spectator of the murder of which the three prisoners at the bar stand accused."

This announcement, which Mr. Nuttall uttered in a

loud, clear, and distinct voice, created a profound sensation in the court.

The counsel for the defence looked doubtful and anxious, though he was on the watch to lay hold of any circumstance that might take place.

But as for the three prisoners, they were the most affected by this speech.

It was easy to see that the self-possession which they had hitherto preserved forsook them, and Adrian Winberry, turning ghastly pale, grasped the front of the dock with a nervous grip.

Who was this witness? he asked himself.

Who was in that foot-forsaken place at the same time as he was.

What invisible eye had witnessed the foul murder?

These were the questions which succeeded each other with lightning rapidity in Adrian's mind.

But all those questions, terribly and vitally important as they were, were unanswerable.

With straining eyes and bated breath, he glared at the counsel for the prosecution, anxious to catch the next words which came from his lips.

"This, then," said the judge, "is an all-important and indispensable witness. Why do you hesitate to call him?"

"My lord, there are cogent reasons for it. Chance alone—Providence—call it what you will, caused his presence in the haunted house when the murder was committed. But he was there, and an unsuspected witness of the murder which was perpetrated."

"Then why did he not come forward on the inquest? This conduct, you will find, will have the effect of throwing discredit on his evidence."

"I trust it will not, my lord, when you hear the reason of his non-appearance."

"What is that reason?"

"Personal danger."

"Personal danger!" repeated the judge, in accents of the utmost surprise. Believe me, I am curious in the extreme to know what personal danger a witness can incur in coming into court to give his evidence."

"My lord, he does incur very great personal danger. It was hoped that he would be spared the necessity of coming forward. That hope, however, which was a frail one, has turned out fallacious."

"Be good enough to come to the point, brother Nuttall."

"I will, my lord. Do you think that the personal attendance of this witness could be avoided?"

"Certainly not."

"I am sorry to hear you say as much, my lord. I thought if he put down in writing what he had seen, and swore to it before witnesses, that the reading of such a document would enable you to dispense with his appearance."

"It might under some conditions, perhaps, but decidedly not where so grave a charge as the present is at stake. It would be most prejudicial to admit written evidence of such a kind."

"I am in duty bound to bow to your decision, my lord."

"What is the nature of the personal danger which the witness will incur by stepping into the witness-box?"

"Capture by the police, my lord."

"Ahem. That is awkward. Why is he liable to capture?"

"He is liable to a charge of felony."

"Oh! indeed."

"That is precisely the case, my lord; or rather, to have it in full, thus. The witness of whom I speak, being pursued by the police, took refuge from them in the haunted house, which has to-day so frequently been made mention of. While hiding there he saw the three prisoners enter, and also saw the murder committed. Then, as Pursford, the officer, has related, he broke in; and this witness was again compelled to fly for his life, and only escaped capture by making his way over the housetops, to the imminent hazard of his life."

The judge glared at Mr. Nuttall while he made this statement, and, not knowing what else to say, uttered his former ejaculation of—

"Oh! indeed."

Mr. Nuttall held up a small folded paper.

"I have here," he said, "in writing, and sworn to in the presence of two witnesses, an account of what the person witnessed, to whom I have alluded; and as he cannot make his appearance without exposing himself to the certain risk of capture, I think your lordship would not be doing wrong in permitting this document to be read as evidence."

Before the judge could reply, the counsel for the defence rose to his feet.

"Pardon me, my lord, one moment," he said. I have not spoken before, because I wished to see how far my learned friend for the prosecution would go in this matter. Surely, my lord, you will not do my client—of whose perfect and entire innocence I feel convinced—I say you will not do him such an injustice, nor establish in this court so dangerous a precedent, as to receive the written evidence of a witness who dares not come forward. The mischief that would hereafter ensue is incalculable."

"I beg your pardon," said the counsel for the prosecution, "the witness of whom I speak does dare to come forward; but, as he perils his liberty by doing so, it was wished to try whether it cannot be dispensed with. My lord, I wait for your decision."

"Has this man been guilty of many serious crimes?"

"He has not been tried and found guilty of any, though several have been laid to his charge."

"Is there a warrant out against him authorising his apprehension?"

"I believe so, my lord."

"It appears to me that the evidence you say it lies in his power to give is indispensable, and such as no other person can give?"

"Just so, my lord."

"It is very awkward."

"My lord, I have yet another proposition to make to you. If this document cannot be received as evidence, would you throw the shield of your protection round this witness, and prevent his capture?"

"I fear I have no power. My jurisdiction is confined within the four walls of this court."

"But, my lord, if this man comes here voluntarily in the cause of justice, and at the peril of his own liberty, surely, I should think, he ought to be protected."

"You say he will come forward?"

"Yes, my lord; he is in the court at the present moment awaiting your decision."

There was a visible commotion all over the court, caused by each person looking earnestly and eagerly into the face of his neighbour.

Dick did not shrink back and strive to avoid detection. Such a course would, he knew, immediately ensure detection, so he assumed as much curiosity as those who happened to be standing near him, and who returned his gaze without suspecting him to be the person alluded to.

"My decision is this," said the judge. "If the witness chooses to come forward and give his testimony, it will be entirely at his own risk—I am powerless to protect him. Still, should he be captured here, the circumstances under which the capture took place will doubtless have the effect of mitigating the rigour of his punishment."

Mr. Nuttall shook his head.

"That is poor encouragement. Still, I cannot help your decision. Of its justice I do not say a word. The witness is here, and has overheard all that has passed. If he likes to step into the witness-box he can. If he does, the punishment of the guilty must follow, and it appears to me his capture also. The risk is to be run. He can come forward or not, just as he may think proper. Only I think he ought to be warned what will be the result."

"If a warrant is out against him," said the judge, "I cannot interpose between him and the officers of justice."

CHAPTER CCLXXXIII.

DICK TURPIN, AT ALL RISKS, ENTERS THE WITNESS-BOX, AND IS RECOGNISED BY MR. WRIGGLES.

A STRANGE hushed silence followed this decision, which was enunciated in a low tone, yet with extreme distinctness.

It will be seen that this last speech of Mr. Nuttall's was intended entirely for the edification of Dick Turpin, so that he should not come forward in ignorance of what would be the consequence.

There was little very tempting in it, and Dick asked himself the question whether he should be justified in throwing away his life—for it would be doing nothing less

for one chief good of some one he had never seen—namely, Blanche Winberry.

His eyes roamed round the court after the counsel had spoken, and they rested upon the countenance of Maud Gouldman.

That decided him.

She did not perceive his glance; her attention was rivetted upon the judge and Mr. Nuttall.

But that one glance decided Dick.

Drawing his cloak close up to his chin, he moved aside those who were before him, and strode in a direct line towards the witness-box.

The movement of this one cloaked figure from among the mass attracted immediate attention.

All eyes were fixed upon it.

Those who could not see so well rose up and craned their necks over the heads of those who sat before them.

A lane was opened.

Every one stood aside.

Seeing this, Dick availed himself of it to make all speed possible, and then, not without a strange fluttering at his heart, which he tried in vain to subdue, he stood within the witness-box.

He held his hat in his hand.

The lower part of his face, however, was covered with his cloak.

A faint cry came from the lips of Maud Gouldman as she saw him, and she said:

"No, no, it must not be—the sacrifice is too great."

"Nay," replied Dick, "I am here."

The full, rich tones of his voice penetrated like music into the utmost recesses of the court.

The curiosity of all persons received a fresh addition, and no small degree of attention was directed to Maud, who, covering her face with her handkerchief, shrunk back from the public scrutiny.

It would be hard to say who looked at Dick with the greatest amount of eagerness.

Adrian Winberry glared at the cloaked and unrevealed character which was to utter such conclusive and condemnatory evidence against him.

The judge was the first to recover himself.

Looking at Mr. Nuttall, he said:

"Is this the witness of whom you spoke?"

"It is, my lord. You see, despite the warning words I uttered for his special behoof, he has, of his own free will, made his way into the witness-box. He knows the penalty of what he has done, but he is there to further the ends of justice, and take the responsibility of his own actions."

"Then," said the judge, with some degree of fervour, "be he whom he may, such behaviour is in the highest degree praiseworthy and commendable."

Dick bowed deeply in reply to this complimentary speech.

"Let the witness reveal himself," added the judge.

"One moment, my lord," said Mr. Nuttall. "Ere it be too late, let me make a last appeal, that as he has come forward in the manner you have seen, you will screen him from the consequences."

"I have already said it does not lie within my power. If it did, I should only be too glad to act in the manner you request."

"There is no resource, then. Witness, are you willing to reveal yourself?"

Dick made no reply by words.

He released his cloak, which he held around him with one hand only, and it fell flutteringly to his feet.

He drew himself proudly up to his full height, and stood exposed to the gaze of all.

But there was no sudden cry of recognition, as he had more than half suspected.

The book was handed to him, and the customary oath proposed.

It was taken.

Then was propounded the first and vitally-important question:

"What is your name?"

A breathless silence followed the utterance of this query.

A silence that was positively painful.

Dick once more glanced around him.

Then he said, quietly:

"John Palmer."

Scarcely had the words passed his lips, than a man near the door of the court gesticulated furiously, and cried:

"False—false! A thousand pounds reward! I claim it! False—false! That is not John Palmer, but Dick Turpin, the highwayman! Seize him! seize him!"

The scene of confusion that now ensued is perfectly indescribable.

As if by magic the interior of the court was converted into Bedlam.

For a long time all attempts to restore order were in vain.

The judge stood up.

"Clear the court!" he cried, "clear the court! Am I to be insulted in this manner? Clear the court!"

These words had the effect of restoring silence.

"Where is the man who cried out just now?" exclaimed the judge, as soon as he could make his voice heard. "Bring him before me! Where is he?"

"It is me, my lord. Here I am," said a voice, and some one struggled forward to the centre of the court.

Dick knew him at a glance.

It was his old foe, Mr. Wriggles.

Now the judge, when he saw this man was a police-officer, was not so wrathful, still he demanded what he meant by breaking the peace of the court.

"Pardon me, my lord," said Mr. Wriggles, "but that man in the witness-box is no other than the notorious and desperate highwayman, Dick Turpin, and for whose apprehension I have a warrant now in my possession. May I seize him, my lord?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Officer, certainly not. He stands here in the sacred position of a witness on the side of truth, and as such he is entitled to protection, at all events until he leaves the place where he now is, after which I have no power to prevent you from exercising the duties of your office upon him."

The former part of the speech was greeted with applause by the spectators of the court, but the latter portion with loud expressions of disapproval.

It was easy to see that Dick was a favourite, and that the popular feeling was entirely on his side.

He bowed several times to the mass of people during the manifestation of their suffrage.

This appeared to give them unqualified delight, while abuse of all kinds was levelled at the head of Mr. Wriggles; nor could silence be obtained until they set about clearing the court.

The desire to hear the rest of the remarkable proceedings, which had now reached their most interesting point, triumphed over every other consideration, and seeing the officials fully in earnest, they suddenly became as quiet as mice.

Mr. Wriggles gradually worked his way to the witness-box, until he got so close that he could, by reaching out his arm, have touched Dick Turpin, had he been so minded. There was on exultant grin upon his features. He had entered the court, still smarting under the defeat he had just experienced, and wondering how he should get the highwayman in his clutches, when suddenly he appeared before his very eyes.

And now this interruption and excitement over, the business of the court resumed its ordinary manner.

The judge himself addressed our hero.

"It appears, then, that you are the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin. I can now understand your reluctance to coming forward as a witness; and that you should do so at all risks fills me with admiration."

Dick bowed.

"I am not afraid to say that this is the first time such a thing has occurred," continued the judge, who could not overcome his surprise; and I am scarcely able to believe it. However, not to take up the time of the court, for this case has been prolonged for a considerable length, be good enough to state what you know about this transaction. Speak freely and fully."

There was an intense desire to catch the first words from the highwayman's lips.

"My lord," he began, in a calm voice, and not like one who stood in so perilous a position. "My lord, as you have already been told in court, I wrote down the whole of the particulars of this business, so far as I was concerned in it."

"Yes, we have had that stated already by the counsel for the prosecution."

"I was about to ask whether you would permit me to have that paper to refer to, so that I shall not make any mistake, or omit any detail. It was written with great care and attention."

The counsel for the defence rose to his feet.

"My lord," he said, "will you have the kindness to inform me whether it is your intention to receive what this man says as evidence?"

"Assuredly."

"Then, my lord—pardon me for my boldness in saying so—I consider you have decided very improperly."

"Sir!"

"Pardon me, my lord, but this man is a common felon—his life is forfeit to the hangman; besides, I accuse him of being the perpetrator of this foul murder."

"You are slightly in error, I think, brother," said the judge, calmly. "You wish to throw discredit on what this man is about to say."

"I consider he ought not to be believed upon his oath, my lord."

"And I am of an entirely different opinion. The very fact of his forfeiting his liberty, and consequently his life in the manner that he has, is sufficient proof, I should think, that he comes here on the side of truth and justice."

A loud cheer from the spectators greeted this speech, but it was immediately checked by the criers.

"I shall certainly hear what this man has to say," said the judge, "and shall note carefully how what he says corresponds with the evidence which has formerly been given."

"Shall I hand him the paper for which he asked?" inquired the counsel for the prosecution.

"No; give it to me. I will myself peruse it, and question him from it, which will be imposing a severer test."

In accordance with this determination, the paper was handed to the judge, who looked at it for some moments in silence.

The substance of it seemed quite satisfactory, so he turned round to Dick and prepared to question him.

As he did so there was upon his face too plain an expression of interest and compassion to be mistaken.

Seeing what was going to follow, it must of necessity be full of interest. There once more reigned in that court the death-like and oppressive silence which had more than twice marked the day's proceedings.

CHAPTER CCLXXXIV.

DICK TURPIN GIVES HIS EVIDENCE AGAINST ADRIAN WINBERRY, AND SWEARS TO THE IDENTITY BOTH OF HIM AND HIS ACCOMPLICES.

"On a certain night," said the judge, "you, Richard Turpin, the highwayman, were pursued by the police, and took refuge in St. James's-park. Is that so?"

"It is, my lord," replied Dick.

"After you had gained the inclosure, be good enough to relate what took place."

"My foes were hard upon my track, and I ran across the Mall, which brought me to the palings protecting the inclosure containing the piece of ornamental water. I had previously sprained my ankle, and I suffered acute pain. I intended to climb over these palings, but owing to the pain, I was not able to do it at the first trial."

"Go on; that exactly corresponds with what is set down here."

"While standing here to recover myself, I heard the loud blast of a bugle somewhere within the park, which was presently answered by another on my right, another on my left, and another before me."

"Just so. Please continue. These are minor particulars, but still they may turn out to be of importance as the evidence proceeds. What next?"

"I was at a loss to think what this meant, until the thought occurred to me that my foes, knowing I was somewhere in the park, had communicated with the soldiers who guarded the various exits from the park, for them to allow no person to pass out."

"Precisely."

"Having come to this conclusion, I succeeded in climbing over the palings, and made my way to the ornamental water. To have gone round it would have taken me too much time, so I swam across it."

"Yes, Proceed, so far you are quite right according to the paper."

"Upon reaching the opposite bank, I felt I had a few minutes' rest and reflection left me, so I paused, and thought what means I should adopt to get out of the park. I then all at once remembered that one of the row of houses which are in Birdcage-walk was shut up and deserted, being haunted. To this I determined to make my way, and try and effect an entrance to it, for I feared my foes more than apparitions."

"Go on."

"Having taken this resolution, I made my way with all speed to my destination, and, as the distance is not great, I reached it in a few moments. My desperate emergency lent me strength, and I mounted those palings also, and dropped into the garden of the haunted house, for such it has all along been called.

"I need not describe all the difficulties I encountered in seeking to effect an entrance to this deserted mansion. Let it suffice I entered through the door leading into the lower kitchen.

"From this last-named place I made my way up to the floor above, which was, of course, the ground-floor of the mansion.

"The whole place was intensely silent, and the only thing that can be compared to its silence is its profound darkness.

"Upon reaching the entrance-hall I could, by the aid of the fanlight over the front door and the two narrow windows which were upon either side of it, see tolerably well about me.

"On my left hand, as I stood facing the front door, was a flight of stairs very noble in their appearance and with richly-carved balusters.

"I had now to consider what should be my next step to escape, so I determined to ascend the stairs, and try and find (if I could) some hiding-place above."

Dick paused for breath.

"Go on," said the judge. "You are quite right so far."

"I ascended the stairs, then, but before I reached the first turn in the staircase, I heard a slight sound which in the stillness of that empty house sounded like a loud one.

"At first I did not know what produced it, but I soon remembered it was a key rattling in a lock, as though some one was rather impatient about unfastening it.

"This, considering the reputation of the house, was a strange and suspicious occurrence, so I crouched down upon the stairs to see what was about to take place.

"I was not kept long in suspense, for the door was thrown open and three men entered."

"Will you swear distinctly that you saw three men?"

"I will, my lord; for, having entered and closed the door behind, one called for a light, and immediately a dark lantern was produced. By the aid of this I saw them, though not so distinctly as I did afterwards. One, however, (he who had called for a light), wore upon his head a large felt hat with slouching brim and a long black cloak muffled up in his neck."

"You saw that?"

"Yes, but more distinctly a little while after, as I will relate to your lordship."

"Go on, then."

"As you may suppose, my lord, I felt so much interest in this stealthy visit at the hour of midnight—for, as I take it, it was somewhere about that time—that I forgot to a great extent my own danger, and the occasion of my presence in that house, and became quite absorbed in watching their actions.

"I was well hidden where I was, and thought I should not have to move, but in this I was mistaken, for the three men came directly towards the stairs, and commenced ascending them.

"This, of course, necessitated a change of position, and, therefore, I silently ascended the stairs before them, and did not pause until they stopped upon the second landing.

"Here there was a massive-looking door, and it was before this they all halted."

"I presume," said the judge, "from the position you occupied upon the lower portion of the third flight of



[MR. CAWTHORN IN TRIUMPH ESCORTS DICK TURPIN TO THE NEWGATE CELL.]

stairs, you had a full view of the door of the room in question?"—"I had, my lord."

"Continue your narrative."

"The one in the cloak pushed aside his cloak and felt for the key which he presently produced. I mention the displacement of the cloak because I then saw the clothing beneath it, which was of a rich and costly material, and such as would be worn by gentlemen."

"Did you see the face of the person who wore the cloak?"

"I saw the lower portion of it, my lord, as he stooped down and fitted the key into the lock. The beams of the dark lantern, which one of the others carried, fell full upon it."

"Now look carefully at the prisoners at the bar, and tell me whether you recognise either of them as the person you saw fitting the key into the lock of the door?"

"My lord, the one standing furthest from me, with his hand clutching the front of the dock, is the one. He has made some changes in his personal appearance, but I can swear to him, for all that. I saw him so distinctly, not only at the time now referred to, but afterwards."

"In what respect has he changed his appearance?"

"My lord, you now see him with his face smooth-shaven. When I saw him he wore a profusion of hair upon the lower part of it."

"That will do, and now continue your narrative, which, up to the present time, you have given with remarkable clearness and accuracy, so far as corresponding with this document goes. The principal, and by far the most important portion of your evidence, I see, remains to be given, but do not be hasty. Let us have the whole straightforward."

"I will try my best, my lord. I left off where I stood watching them fit the key into the lock. The door was opened, and the moment it was I heard some one within the room into which it led utter some words in a shrill and shrieking tone of voice, and so strained was it that I could not tell at first whether it was a man or whether it was a woman who spoke."

"What was the purport of those words?"

"That, my lord, I can hardly tell you, they were so disjointed and incoherent; but they were to the effect that he would not listen or be persuaded to do something."

"And you do not recollect any of them?"

"No, my lord."

"Continue, then."

"The one in the cloak bade those with him to enter, saying, at the same time, he would follow. All three passed into the room, the door of which they left ajar.

"Immediately upon their entrance the shrieks ceased, and I, more curious than before, stole down the stairs, and stood close to the partially open door.

"From where I stood I could not see into the interior of the room, but I could hear every word that was said. The exact words I cannot remember, but the substance of what was said is this. The tall man in the cloak, who I could recognise by the deep and peculiar tones of his voice, was endeavouring, by threats and persuasions, to induce some one to sign a deed transferring his property to him.

"Stop a moment," said the judge. "You swear that is the substance of what passed?"

"I do, my lord."

"I will make a note of it, then."

"The person to whom he addressed himself, and who appeared to be kept in this room as a kind of prisoner, refused to accede to what was demanded of him, but the argument that the one in the cloak brought forward oftenest, and laid the most stress upon was this. If he would sign the deed, his daughter should be restored to him. He also agreed to leave sufficient to keep them both in comfort, provided he would sign the deed."

"Was the name of this daughter mentioned?"

"Yes, my lord."

"What was it?"

"Blanche."

"Indeed! This affair grows blacker and blacker. And was this daughter Blanche spoken of by the one in the cloak as being in his power?"

"She was, my lord; and he also held out threats as to what her fate should be if he refused to do as he required."

"What next?"

"Some harsh recriminating words followed, in the course of which things which had happened in the past were referred to. This conversation let me know that the one in the cloak and the person to whom he addressed himself were brothers—or rather half-brothers, being sons by the same fathers but different mothers."

"You could not repeat that conversation?"

"No, my lord, I cannot recollect it word for word, but what I have just said is what it all amounted to."

"Proceed, then."

"Up to this point, my lord, I had heard without seeing, but it occurred to me that if I made a change in my position, I should be able to see into the interior of the room, which would materially assist me to comprehend what was taking place."

"And could you see?"

"Yes, my lord; I moved, and then found I could see the chief actors in the interesting scene I had overheard."

"Be good enough to describe what you saw."

"My first ideas respecting it, my lord, were quite realized. The door led into an apartment, at one end of which, and full in my view, was seated in an old-fashioned chair an emaciated, white-headed old man.

"His arms were held down on either side of him by the two men, who kept a firm grasp upon them—for every moment the old man strove to rise from his seat, but each time they forced him back into it."

"Stop," said the judge; "I will make a note of that."

CHAPTER CCLXXXV.

DICK TURPIN IS CROSS-EXAMINED BY THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE.

Not a single word in the shape of interruption had been uttered from the time when Dick Turpin commenced to give his testimony.

From the mere fact of the judge having questioned him all through in the manner he did, it can be seen how deep an interest he felt in all that fell from his lips, and how much value he set upon what he said.

Himself and Dick, then, were the only speakers in the court, and had been so for some time.

As for the spectators, their first excitement over, they had sat mute and motionless, listening to the romantic narrative which Dick related with breathless and feverish interest.

The reader is, of course, acquainted with it all from first to last, but it was deemed expedient to set down in this place the words exactly as they came from Dick Turpin's mouth, because the counsel for the defence afterwards cross-examined him upon many of the points upon which he spoke, being engaged all the time Dick was speaking in taking down his words in shorthand.

The judge finished his note, and turned over a fresh page.

"Now," he said, "I have written here, that from where you stood, you could see the men as they held the old man down in the chair. Is that right?"

"Quite right,"

"Be careful, please, for this is a serious business."

"I am aware of it, my lord, and am relating to you just what I witnessed, and no more."

"Exactly; now tell me, could you see the faces of these two men?"

"I could, my lord; and their forms also."

"Indeed. Well, then, look at the prisoners at the bar attentively, and then tell the court whether you can see the two men who held the old man down in the chair."

The two accomplices of Adrian Winberry looked very uneasy upon hearing these words, and screwed up their faces so as to baffle Dick if they could.

But they failed in their attempt.

Like the police-officer, Pursford, who, in giving his evidence said that when he once saw a person he always knew them again, Dick had a remarkable memory of faces.

When he looked at the two men, then, he knew them instantly—for, of course, while he stood at the partially-open door, he had had an ample opportunity of studying their countenances.

"My lord," said Dick, "I am quite prepared to swear that those two men, who are standing nearest this way, are the same I saw in the haunted house, holding the old man down in the chair."

It was easy to see that these words, uttered as they were in a tone of firm and earnest conviction, produced a great effect on the jury.

"That is quite conclusive. Now relate what else you saw and heard."

"I will, my lord. The means by which I saw the old man and those who held him was afforded me by the dark lantern, which they had placed on the table with the door open, so that the light which it emitted was diffused, and not concentrated, as it would have been if the lens had been before the light.

"At first I did not see the one who wore the cloak. He was standing where the door had hid him from my view. Presently, however, he stepped forward, and I saw him as distinctly as either of the others, and that is the reason why I swore so positively to his identity before when you asked me."

"I will make a note of that," said the judge.

Several of the jury did likewise.

The judge, having finished his writing, looked up to Dick, who understood from the action that he was to continue.

"I saw him with a paper in his hand, which he spread out and put upon the table. From its general appearance, seeing it from the distance, I took it to be a deed. The one in the cloak rested one finger upon it, and renewed his solicitations to the other to sign it.

"Still the old man refused.

"As the conversation went on, I soon found that the conditions were that the old man should be released from his present place of confinement, his daughter Blanche be restored to him, and an annual income settled upon him if he would sign this deed, and transfer the whole of his wealth and property to him."

"But you say that this proposal was rejected?"

"Yes, my lord, for a long time; but at length he did consent. In order to be reunited to his daughter he sacrificed everything. With a hasty hand he seized the pen and affixed his signature to the document."

"Did you see him do it?"

"I did not see him write his name, my lord. I was not near enough, but I saw him take the pen and write something rapidly."

"Yes, that is what I thought."

"My lord, I ought to tell you that I anticipated the perpetration of some atrocious treachery, and, could I have done so, I would have warned the old man not to sign. But I was powerless to interfere."

"What did you see next?"

"Scarcely had the old man finished making the few strokes with his pen, than the one in the cloak with great rapidity pulled a pistol from his apparel, and holding it against the old man's head, fired it."

A lond cry of irrepressible horror rose from all in court upon hearing the particulars of this cold-blooded assassination.

But, seeing the judge's lips move, all were again instantly silent.

"Did you not, then, seeing what was his intent, spring forward, and prevent the consummation of the murder?" asked the judge.

"My lord, I had no time. You could not have drawn breath between the time when the deed was signed and the pistol fired. Nevertheless, I started forward, and was about to dash into the room, when my footsteps were suddenly arrested."

"Arrested? How? By whom?"

"By a loud knocking at the front door. In a moment I thought of my pursuers, and the wish to preserve my own life and liberty rose superior to every other consideration."

"I understand."

"The sound of the blows told me that they were attacking the front door in good earnest, and that they would soon have it down I felt sure, so, without further hesitation, I sprang up the flight of stairs leading to the third story, intending to make my escape by the roof. In this I succeeded, though not without great peril."

"And does that conclude your testimony in this case?"

"It does, my lord. Chance threw me in the way of those who were sufferers by the villainy I had witnessed. Without my testimony it was considered the guilty could not be convicted. At the same time, it was quite certain if I did come forward and state what I knew, it would be at the sacrifice of my life. However, I resolved for the sake of the family of the murdered man, to come forward at all risks, and I have done so, as you see. If you will believe me, it was not without the hope that when all the circumstances were known, I should be allowed to go forth unmolested. I am well aware that I stand charged with committing several offences against the laws, and that a warrant has for a long time been issued empowering my apprehension. Still, for all that, I trust that the evidence I have given will be received, and that the guilty will be punished, while I am allowed at least a chance for my life, for all know that I have perilled it voluntarily, and in a righteous cause."

There was a hum of applause in the court as Dick thus spoke.

He was popular with those who were assembled there, beyond all doubt, and he felt hopeful, for they might yet be able to render him assistance; for, from what the reader knows of Dick's character, he must be aware that he was not likely to submit tamely or give in easily.

But, if the truth must be told, Dick cherished in his heart the hope that some protection would be afforded him—that, in fact, he would be set free.

Whether this hope was doomed to realization or disappointment time only can determine.

"Silence!" cried the usher.

Then the judge spoke in answer to Dick's appeal.

"I have no power to protect you from the officers except while you are within the precincts of this court, during which time you will be regarded in the sacred light of a witness, and free from the grasp of any officer."

"I sincerely thank you, my lord. Have you any further questions to ask of me?"

"No, none; what you have said entirely corresponds with what is here set down. Perhaps, however, one of my learned friends may wish to put a few questions to you."

Both Mr Nuttall and the counsel for the defence rose instantly to their feet, but Mr. Nuttall, from the fact of his being on the side of the prosecution, was allowed the precedence.

"I have nothing further to say just at present," he said, "though I may, perhaps, have occasion to recall you. You can stand down now so far as I am concerned."

"Wait a moment, please," cried the counsel for the defence, "wait a moment; if my learned friend has done with you, I have not."

Dick bowed, and a very perceptible hiss arose in the court somewhere.

"Turn that man out of court," said the judge.

But all were suddenly silent again, so the order was rather a difficult one to carry out.

The counsel took no notice; he was a man not very easily disconcerted, and went on with what he intended to say.

"Ahem! Mr. Dick—or, perhaps, I ought to say Mr. Richard Turpin—it appears to be quite admitted on all hands that your character is none of the best, doesn't it?"

"Bad or good," said Dick, "I would much rather stand here before my fellows in the capacity I do than appear as the accomplice of a murderer."

The counsel turned very red in the face and for a moment speech was denied him, so great was his rage.

The audience applauded.

"My lord," he cried, "my lord, I must request you to call the witness to order."

"I consider," said the judge, "that you fully deserve what you have got."

"Hear! hear!" said a voice, and the judge issued no order for the speaker to be turned out of court, but continued—

"If you had begun to cross-examine the witness properly, he would not have replied to you in the manner he did. I questioned him, and he treated me with no rudeness. My learned brother overlooks the circumstances of the case. You should bear in mind, not that he is an offender against the laws, but as one who has nobly—for I can call it by no other name—one who has nobly come forward at the peril of his life to give evidence in the cause of truth."

A loud burst of applause followed this speech from the judge, and he made no attempt to suppress it until it became too boisterous.

The time that elapsed, however, before order was obtained, permitted the counsel for the defence to recover himself from the confusion into which he had been thrown.

But he resolved not to quit Dick, though he began questioning him in a far different tone and manner than he did before, though there was a good deal unpleasant in it.

"I have some notes here," he said, "a few notes that I took down while you were giving your evidence just now, and I wish to ask you a few questions respecting them, in order that this matter may be cleared up a little. Yours is a very plausible and well got-up story, but we are not going to take all you say for gospel, Mr. Turpin, if you are a highwayman, and a witness on the peril of your life."

CHAPTER CCLXXXVI.

IN WHICH THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE COMMENCES HIS ADDRESS TO THE JURY, AND MAKES THINGS LOOK VERY BLACK AGAINST DICK.

DICK TURPIN did not condescend to make any reply to this offensive speech, but looked up at the ceiling attentively.

However, the counsel for the defence had the good sense to take no notice of it, and he at once asked the question to which he had made such obscure allusion.

"You say that on the night in question you were in St. James's-park?"

"I was," replied Dick.

"Why were you there?"

"I have already stated that I took refuge in that place from my pursuers."

"Very good; and after that you made your way into the haunted house?"

"Just so."

"Just so! Well now, Mr. Highwayman Turpin—you

are on your oath, please to bear in mind—personally, I have no doubt you attach but small importance to that little circumstance, but I take occasion to remind you of it, nevertheless."

"You might have saved yourself the trouble. The 'little circumstance' has not escaped my memory. I am here to speak the truth, and I will speak it without the slightest reservation."

"I hope you will," said the undaunted counsel; "because that will make matters so much simpler. Begin at once, then, by confessing that you were the person seen by Pursford, the officer, wearing the long cloak and accompanied by two companions, enter the haunted house."

"Who? I?" said Dick, staggered for a moment by the question. "Certainly not. I most indignantly deny it."

"I thought so. I knew how far your confessions go. You are determined to put me to the trouble of proving it, I see."

"You will have a great deal of trouble to prove it, it strikes me," said Dick.

"I shall do it," said the counsel; "not by attempting, in the course of a cross-examination, to entrap you into making a wrong answer. I feel you have got your tale too well conned over for that, so you can stand down now, so far as I am concerned, until you are wanted again."

Hearing this, Dick gladly enough descended from the witness box.

Upon reaching the floor of the court, however, he found his old foe, Mr. Wriggles, standing in disagreeable proximity to him, and the officer nodded and winked in a satisfied manner, as much as to say, "I have got you safe at last."

There was a pause.

Mr. Nuttall turned over his papers anxiously.

He could see that the battle was not won, and that he should have a great deal of trouble in achieving the victory.

"Does this terminate the case for the prosecution?" asked the judge.

"It does, my lord."

The judge looked across to the counsel for the defence, who was busy with his papers.

Seeing him not prepared, he rose and retired to an adjoining room for refreshment.

Only a partial silence was reserved after his departure.

The jury bent down their heads, and talked earnestly together.

This state of things continued for about ten minutes.

Then the judge resumed his seat upon the bench.

The counsel for the defence rose.

Amid a profound stillness, which was caused by the universally felt desire to know what he said, he commenced his address in the following terms—

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—

"When my learned brother for the prosecution, commenced the delivery of his address to you, he spoke of the present case as being one of the most remarkable that had ever fallen under his notice.

"Without arrogating too much to myself, for, of course, I have not had the lengthened experience which my learned brother has enjoyed, I think he would not have gone too far if he had styled it the most remarkable in all the annals of criminal jurisprudence.

"The time occupied already has been immense, yet reluctantly enough I say it, we have not got half way through the more simple part of this difficult business.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, I am here to-day as the advocate for the cause of Adrian Winberry, now standing at the bar of this court.

"I have been deputed to rebut the charges brought against him, and this is the defence.

"My client distinctly and emphatically pleads three things.

"Firstly, that he is innocent of the crime of which he stands accused.

"Secondly, that he was never in the so-often-mentioned house in the Birdcage-walk in his life.

"Thirdly, that he never had any dealings with the men who stand beside him, and that the first time he saw them was in the vestibule of Newgate, to which place he had been taken prisoner by mistake, for Dick Turpin, the highwayman.

"Now, gentlemen of the jury, while pending upon these three several and distinct denials, let me draw your attention to one important fact.

"I allude to the words which terminated the third negation—

"My client was taken to the vestibule of Newgate in mistake for Dick Turpin, the highwayman.

"Now, who was it made the mistake?

The officers?

"Now, in the evidence for the prosecution it was stated with particular emphasis, by the witness Pursford, that when the two men who had been captured in the haunted house were brought into the vestibule of Newgate (which happened while my client was there), I say the witness Pursford stated that mutual recognition took place between them.

"This I deny.

"When the two prisoners, who were undoubtedly captured in the haunted house, were brought in, they appeared to recognise my client.

"But that was in consequence of an error.

"The prisoners took him for another person who it may be presumed he resembled, but upon a second look they acknowledged their mistake.

"From this it will appear that the recognition was all on one side.

"My client could not have recognised them, because he had never to his knowledge seen them in his life before.

"Now, my lord, and gentlemen of the jury, I will ask you what is the most natural deduction to be inferred from this?

"My client was mistaken for another person.

"First, by the officers.

"Secondly, the two men.

"This is strange.

"We know, from the evidence which has just been given, who it was that the police-officers mistook him for.

"It was for Dick Turpin, the highwayman.

"That they did fall into this mistake is certain.

"If they did so, it is easily supposed that the two men did the same, and that both made a precisely similar error.

"By their confession these two men declare that they were hired by an unknown person, for an unknown purpose.

"That person might have been Dick Turpin for the reasons I have just stated.

"But let the person be whom he might, he accosted these two men, and offered them a certain sum of money to accompany him; and they, having no idea that murder was intended, consented to receive it. When the officers broke in, which, as you have been told in evidence, was almost simultaneous with the firing of the pistol, they, having the example of their employer before them, and the consequences in view, overcome with horror, attempted to escape, but were captured in the attempt.

"So far, then, gentlemen of the jury, such is the true state of affairs, and I wish in the next place to explain the presence of my client in the park at the time mentioned when he was mistaken for the murderer, and under that impression conveyed to Newgate.

"I shall bring before you in evidence a witness who will prove to your satisfaction that on the night in question, and at the time spoken of, Mr. Winberry was at his house in Birdcage-walk, and having transacted some business together, Mr. Winberry, wishing to make his way as quickly as possible to Charing-cross, was let out by a gate leading into St. James's-park, and when last seen was crossing the enclosure in the direction of Spring-gardens.

"Upon reaching this gate, however, in consequence of the order which had been issued to the soldiers on guard, he was stopped, and, in spite of all his protestations, carried off to Newgate, where he has remained until the present moment.

"Such, gentlemen of the jury, is a simple statement of the whole case, and I trust that when you have heard the evidence which I shall bring forward, you will find my client innocent, and give your verdict accordingly.

"In conclusion, I would wish to remind you of the strange manner in which the highwayman, Dick Turpin, is mixed up in the business.

"He first comes before you as a witness for the prosecution.

"Then it appears that he was in the haunted house.

"A mutual mistake was made.

"My client was taken for Dick Turpin by the officers of police.

"He was taken to be the individual who had employed the two men to go with him to the haunted house.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, it is while asking you to bear these things well in mind that I call upon my first witness, Mr. Josiah Skinner."

Dick started.

He recollected the name.

There was another person, then, more intimately mixed up in the plot than he had at first imagined.

The witness called was the rascally attorney, to whom he had caused to be administered such a well-merited punishment.

Mr. Kersey, too, who was acquainted with all the particulars concerning him, likewise remembered who he was, and hastily wrote down something on a slip of paper, which he handed to Mr. Nuttall, who perused it, and nodded his head.

"Mr. Josiah Skinner," cried the usher of the court.

In reply to this call, the attorney stepped forward, and entered the witness-box.

Upon the book being presented to him to kiss, after he had taken the oath, he smacked his lips loudly, in order that no one in the court should make any mistake about his not having kissed the book.

The counsel for the defence began his examination by asking the apparently useless question—

"What is your name?"

"Josiah Skinner."

"Very good. Where do you reside?"

"I have apartments on the ground-floor of a house, the back windows of which overlook St. James's-park."

"Is the house situated in the Birdcage-walk?"

"I believe that is what it is called."

"Just so. Have you a door through which you can gain access to the park if you wish it?"

"Yes; there is a gate in some pailings which divide the garden at the back of the house from the park."

"Very good, Mr. Skinner. Now, look at the prisoners at the bar."

Mr. Skinner did so.

"Do you know either of them?"

"Certainly."

"Which one?"

"The one standing furthest from me."

"What is his name?"

"Mr. Adrian Winberry."

"Very good, again, Mr. Skinner; so far that is quite satisfactory. Now—please be careful—do you recollect when you last saw him?"

"Certainly I do. I recollect the occasion perfectly well."

"When was it?"

"On the twenty-seventh of the last month."

"Gentlemen of the jury, please pay attention to the date mentioned by this witness. The twenty-seventh of last month."

CHAPTER CCLXXXVII.

MR. NUTTALL MANAGES TO FIND SOME FLAWS IN MR. SKINNER'S EVIDENCE.

DICK TURPIN took note of the date as well as the jury.

How the case was to end in consequence of the recriminatory defence set up by Adrian Winberry, was more than he could tell.

The twenty-seventh of the last month was, he knew well enough, the date when the murder was committed.

Was an *alibi* about to be proved?

Was he, after all the risk he had run in his effort to do good, to be convicted of a crime of which he was perfectly innocent?

It looked very much like it.

With a breathless interest he watched the unfolding of the schemes of the opposing counsel.

He knew not how far he would be involved in them.

Well might Dick Turpin tremble for his safety.

The defending counsel was a man who would stick at nothing.

"Mr. Skinner," he said, resuming his interrogation, "you say it was on the twenty-seventh of the last month when you last saw Mr. Winberry?"

"It was."

"Do you remember what time in the day it was?"

"No, I do not."

"You do not?"

"No, for a very simple reason."

"What reason?"

"It was not day at all."

"Oh!"

"It was night."

"This is quibbling, Mr. Skinner."

"No, no—not at all. I like to be exact."

"Just as you like, but please do not take up the time of the court unnecessarily."

"I will be careful not to do so, sir."

"Then it was at night when you last saw my client, Mr. Winberry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Late at night?"

"Yes, very late."

"Can you recollect the time?"

"Not exactly."

"That is a pity."

"I can form an idea."

"Let us have it, then."

"It was after midnight."

"After midnight?"

"Yes."

"Much after?"

"No, very little."

"How can you tell?"

"I remember hearing the clock at Westminster Abbey strike twelve."

"You swear that?"

"Yes."

"Where were you when you heard the clock strike?"

"At my house."

"And was Mr. Winberry with you?"

"Yes. He came to pay me a visit."

"Very good; and how long was it after the clock struck twelve that he left you?"

"Only a few minutes."

"Only a few minutes?"

"It might be a quarter of an hour."

"Well, say a quarter of an hour, then.'

"When I heard the clock strike, I said to him"——

"Said to who?"

"Mr. Winberry, my visitor."

"Well, what did you say?"

"Something about it having struck twelve; and he said something in reply about his not knowing it was so late, and that he had an appointment at Charing-cross, and he feared if he did not make haste he should be late."

"What next?"

"He stayed chatting some moments, and then I suggested to him that his nearest way to Charing-cross would be across the park, and through Spring-gardens gate."

"Please to go on with your statement."

"He inquired how he could gain the park, and I told him there was a gate in my garden leading into it, and he agreed to avail himself of that means of egress; and he did so."

"And you have not seen him since?"

"No, sir."

"That is all you know about the matter?"

"It is, sir."

"Then you can stand down, without my learned friend for the prosecution wishes to put any question to you."

Mr. Skinner did not stop to hear the last part of this speech, but hurried out of the box.

He would fain have avoided a cross-examination, but Mr. Nuttall called him back.

"I won't keep you long, Mr. Skinner," said Mr. Nuttall, "as you appear to be in a hurry."

"I am in no hurry, sir, only I thought the evidence I gave was so simple, I was done with."

"Oh! the error is of no consequence. Now attend to me, if you please."

"Yes, sir."

"What is your profession?"

"Profession?"

"Yes—avocation, or what you please to call it—or are you one of those favoured few who are not dependent upon their exertions for their livelihood?"

"I am an attorney, sir."

"Oh! indeed. You did not mention that before, I think?

"No, sir. I was not asking the question."

"Have you known Mr. Adrian Winberry long?"

"Not very long."

"How long should you think?"

"About four months, as nearly as I can remember."

"Oh! indeed. Then I might say the acquaintance is quite recent?"

"Just as you please, sir."

"And in what capacity did you become acquainted with Mr. Adrian Winberry?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Did you become acquainted with him as a client, or as a friend?"

"As a client."

"Oh! as a client. What was the nature of the business that brought you together?

"I decline to answer that question."

"Do you?"

"I do, most emphatically."

"Very well. I will not press it, being of no great importance, but will ask you another question. Was it a friendly or professional visit that Mr. Adrian Winberry paid you on the evening, or rather night, you referred to, while giving your evidence a little while ago?"

"A professional visit."

"Oh! indeed. But are you in the habit of transacting business at your house in Spring-gardens? I understood you to say that was your place of residence."

"So it is, sir; though I sometimes transact business there if it happens to be of a private, urgent, or important nature."

"Oh! indeed; then we may come to the conclusion, I suppose, that the business you had with Mr. Adrian Winberry may be classed under one of those heads?"

"It might, sir."

"Then, perhaps, you might tell us exactly under what head?"

"The business comprehended all three."

"Ah! It was private?"

"Yes."

"Urgent?"

"Yes."

"And important?"

"Very."

"Did any one else see Mr. Adrian Winberry at your house on the occasion referred to?"

"I think not."

"You think not. Can you not speak with certainty?"

"I do not know of any one who saw them. We entered together. I have a latch-key, so that I can gain admittance at any hour."

"Oh! I see."

"Some one might have observed us. I am not prepared to swear that no one did."

"Oh! and did no one see his departure?"

"No one but myself, for I took him, as I told you, to the little gate in the pailings, and I soon lost sight of him in the darkness of the park."

"And that is the last time you saw him?"

"Yes."

"You are quite sure you have not seen him since that time until you were brought face to face with him in the court to-day?"

"No."

"No! What do you mean by no? Have you seen him since?"

"Yes."

"Why, you have twice distinctly sworn that you have not. Let me remind you to be careful, Mr. Skinner; you are on your oath."

"I saw the prisoner at the inquest. I thought you meant the last time I saw him to have any dealings with him."

"Oh! Now, Mr. Skinner, please to refresh your memory. Are you prepared to swear that you have never seen him either between his visit to your house on the twenty-seventh of the last month and the inquest, or between the inquest and his appearance here this morning?"

Mr. Skinner shifted about uneasily, and hesitated.

The whole of his evidence, from beginning to end, was a tissue of falsehoods, and he began to tremble, for, from the manner in which the last few questions were put, he suspected that something was known.

Therefore, and from that sole cause, he hesitated to reply in the affirmative, lest he should immediately be detected in his perjury.

"Answer me!" said Mr. Nuttall, in a tremendous voice. "Answer me without hesitation or prevarication. You are on your oath. Have you, or have you not, seen the prisoner between the times I mentioned?"

"Once," replied Mr. Skinner.

"Oh! once since," said Mr. Nuttall, raising his voice to a still higher note. "Once since; and pray when was that?"

"I decline to answer."

"Decline to answer! That reply will not do, sir. I command you, answer my question."

"The counsel for the defence rose.

"My lord," he said, addressing the judge, "I must really appeal to you to interpose between my learned friend and the witness."

"Interpose!" said the judge. "Wherefore, I should like to know?"

"He is using intimidation, and trying to frighten replies out of him."

"Nothing of the kind. I call upon the witness to reply at once to the question he has been asked, and I take this opportunity of warning him to be careful what he says. As it is, I do not know whether I ought not to commit him for wilful perjury, since it is plain to see he must have told an untruth somewhere."

Upon hearing these words from the judge, the defending counsel sat down, and Mr. Skinner turned biliously white, and trembled visibly.

"Answer my question," said Mr. Nuttall. "When did you see the prisoner at the bar?"

"After the inquest."

"Where?"

"In his cell in Newgate."

"In his cell in Newgate, eh? Now, under what pretence was it you visited him in his cell? Tell me that."

"It was under no pretence at all," said Mr. Skinner, plucking up a little courage. "I visited him as his legal adviser."

CHAPTER CCLXXXVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED, BUT MOST IMPORTANT, WITNESS APPEARS FOR THE PROSECUTION.

MR. JOSIAH SKINNER, attorney-at-law, was making a sad bungle of his evidence, and up to the present time he had done Adrian Winberry more harm than good.

Mr. Nuttall saw that he had gained an advantage, and he improved upon it to the utmost.

"Dear me!" he said; "it is very singular that you should have done that, and then sworn positively that you had never seen him since the night of the twenty-seventh of last month, when he had an interview with you! Please be careful. Now, just be good enough to tell me the nature of the business you transacted with him."

"I have before said that I decline to answer that question."

"But I shall insist upon your answering, sir."

The counsel for the defence got up again.

"I object to that question, my lord."

"The witness must answer it, nevertheless," replied the judge. "I should not have decreed so had it not been for his tergiversation. He must give a clear account of all his dealings with Mr. Adrian Winberry."

The counsel sat down again, with a mortified, discomfited look upon his face.

Mr. Nuttall resumed—

"Now, Mr. Skinner, answer me this. Was not your business with your client in the first instance to draw up a transfer of all the Winberry property from his brother to him? Answer me, and don't take up the time of the court."

Mr. Skinner glared despairingly around him.

But stern immovable faces, with their eyes fixed upon him alone, met his gaze.

"Answer me, I say," said Mr. Nuttall, raising his voice till it became a shout, "and don't prevaricate."

"It was," said Mr. Skinner, in a feeble voice.

"I thought so," said Mr. Nuttall, triumphantly. "Note, gentlemen of the jury," he added, "first the tergiversation of this witness, and then the collusion between him and the prisoner at the bar."

"And did you make out this deed of transfer?"

"I did."

"And what were the conditions of the bond? Quick—tell me."

"The whole of the estates and personal wealth of Mr. William Winberry were to become Mr. Adrian Winberry's absolutely."

"And what was Mr. William Winberry to have in return for this transfer?"

"There was nothing mentioned."

"And when was the deed to take effect?"

"Upon the death of Mr. William Winberry."

"Oh! indeed. Upon his death? That looks very suspicious—most suspicious. That would make his death very advantageous to your client, would it not?"

Mr. Skinner was silent.

Mr. Nuttall did not press him for an answer, simply because an answer was needless.

He took up his examination at another point.

"Then, Mr. Skinner, I understand you to say that you visited your client in his cell in Newgate in the capacity of his legal adviser?"

"I did, sir."

"Well, then, after that interview, will you swear that you did not go down to the residence of Mr. William Winberry, and try to make an abatement into it?"

"I went down to take possession of the property in his name."

"Oh! then, Mr. William Winberry must have been known by you to be dead, or else the step you took would not have been a legal one."

"I was informed he was dead."

"By whom?"

"By my client."

"While he was in Newgate?"

"Yes."

"How did he know it?"

"It is not in my power to answer that question, for I don't know."

"Who would convey the information to him while he was in his cell?"

"I cannot tell."

"Yes, you can; you know very well no one did."

"I don't."

"No one would be permitted, so I think it only fair to infer that your client knew of his brother's death before he was incarcerated in Newgate; don't you?"

"I am not bound to tell you what I think."

"But you are bound to depose to facts. Now, answer me this."

"What, sir?"

"When you saw your client in the cell, and he empowered you to go down and take possession of the property for him, what authority did he give you for doing his commands?"

"He showed me the deed."

"The transfer-deed?"

"Yes."

"I think you said you had drawn up that deed?"

"I might have said so."

"Then, of course, you knew it was all right—I mean without a flaw, or anything of that sort?"

"I might."

"We want positive replies here, Mr. Skinner, not conditional ones. Please bear that in mind.

"You say your client showed you the transfer-deed, which had been properly drawn up by yourself, and which was quite free from all flaws?"

"Yes," said Mr. Skinner, faintly.

"Was the deed signed?"

"It was, sir."

"By William Winberry?"

"By William Winberry."

"Did you see the signature?"

"Yes."

"Did you examine it?"

"No."

"Are you acquainted with Mr. Winberry's writing?"

"No."

"But you saw the deed properly signed, and did not hesitate to go down according to your client's instructions, to take possession of the property?"

"Certainly not. Such a proceeding was quite legitimate."

"Did you take possession then?"

"No."

"No? How was that, when you were armed with such powers?"

"I had been told"——

Mr. Skinner checked himself, but Mr. Nuttall insisted upon his completing the sentence he had began.

"I was told that the only person in charge of the property was a young girl."

"Well?"

"But when I got there"——

"Go on."

"I found she had got a sweetheart, or somebody hidden in the room, and"——

"And what, Mr. Skinner?"

"He interfered, and would not allow me to take possession."

"Oh! indeed. And pray how did he interfere?"

"In a very bullying manner."

"And how was it he prevented you from taking possession?"

"He used force."

"Describe the nature of it."

"He used force."

"Did he not call the servants to his assistance?"

"Yes, he did."

"And did they not carry you out into the yard, and put you in the trough, and pump on you till their arms ached, for the insulting manner in which you behaved to the young lady?"

Mr. Skinner was silent.

"And did they not horsewhip you off the grounds for your rascally behaviour, and dare you ever to show your face there again, under pain of being subjected to the same punishment?"

Mr. Skinner was silent still.

"Of course they did, and you know it, and you also know that you fully deserved what you got. And now, in the next place, where is the deed about which so much has been said? Where is it? Produce it."

"My lord," said Mr. Skinner to the judge, imploringly; "you will not compel me to give up the deed?"

"Certainly," said the judge, who seemed to see through Mr. Skinner's lies and subterfuges without much trouble. "Hand it over to me at once."

Mr. Skinner would have refused if he had dared, but he had not the courage to do so, and he knew the consequences too well to think of defying a judge on the bench.

Therefore, with an ominous groan, which echoed through the court, he drew from the breast-pocket of his coat a small parcel tied up with red tape, which he surrendered into the hands of the usher with another groan.

The usher handed it to the judge, who unfolded it, and soon became immersed in its contents.

Mr. Skinner seemed to collapse.

"What is this?" said the judge.

"What, my lord?"

"This deed is signed by two witnesses. What are the names of the two prisoners at the bar?"

The clerk of the arraigns referred to his documents, and then said—

"John Norman and Richard Sare, my lord."

"I thought so," said the judge. "Here, then, is a most important and unlooked-for piece of evidence. This deed, the purport of which has been correctly described, is signed by William Winberry, and the signature has been witnessed by John Norman and Richard Sare, the names, it appears, of the two prisoners at the bar."

These words caused a profound sensation throughout the court.

The judge had the deed handed to the jury, who, one by one, examined it.

"I have done with you," said Mr. Nuttall to Mr. Skinner. "You can stand down."

Mr. Skinner did not need telling twice.

He was out of the box like a shot.

But the judge was not going to let him escape so easily, so he said—

"Officers, detain that man. Do not let him leave the court until I give him permission."

Mr. Wriggles was close at hand, so he made himself useful by taking the rascally attorney into custody.

The counsel for the defence looked very wrath at Mr. Skinner for the woeful botch he had made of the affair.

But instead of giving up, as one would have thought, he resolved to stick to the battle to the last.

"Call Robert Hood," he said.

"Robert Hood," repeated the usher.

All looked eagerly and anxiously to see who the next witness for the defence could be.

They were rather disappointed when they saw a Bow-street police-officer enter the witness-box.

The oath was administered, and then the counsel for the defence said—

"Is your name Robert Hood?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are a police-officer, employed at Bow-street?"

"I am, sir."

"Do you recollect the night of the twenty-seventh of the past month?"

"Quite well, sir."

"Be good enough to tell the jury what happened on that night which causes it to live in your memory.

"Take your time, and be careful."

"Yes, sir."

CHAPTER CCLXXXIX.

THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE MAKES A BEWILDERING SPEECH TO THE JURY, AND THE TRIAL MEETS WITH A STARTLING INTERRUPTION.

THERE was not a person present who did not wonder what this officer could have been called to swear to.

But their wonder was soon satisfied.

The officer proceeded to give his evidence in that mechanical kind of way for which such gentlemen are noted.

"I was at the station in Bow-street, when Pursford, the officer, came in and asked for assistance."

"Well."

"I was one the inspector sent with him."

"What did he want assistance for?"

"He said he had seen three suspicious-looking persons enter the haunted house in Birdcage-walk."

"And you were one who accompanied him, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then be good enough to relate what took place."

"We made our way to our destination as fast as we could, and, on arriving, we went straight up to the front door."

"Well?"

"We had scarcely gained it when we heard the loud report of a pistol from somewhere within, and we considered that sufficient to authorize us to break down the door, which we did with implements we brought with us for the purpose, in expectation that we should have some such work to do."

"Please to continue what you saw and did."

"When the door was broken down, we of course found ourselves in the entrance-hall of the house.

"With our lanterns we looked all about us, and the first thing we noticed was a number of footprints on the floor, the dust upon which had left the impressions just as snow would."

"What next?"

"We followed these traces, and found they all, without deviation or exception, led to the bottom of the stairs. Up these we ascended, until the footprints terminated—some at the door of a room on the second-floor, while others went up to the higher portion of the house."

"Yes;—what of those which went up to the upper portion of the house?"

"I stood at the bottom of the stairs, by Pursford's orders, in order to see that no one either went up or came down, while the others went into the room."

"Never mind their proceedings, continue your own."

"Some were left at the bottom of the stairs, while I and several more ascended them to see what was above."

"And what was the result of your search?"

"We found by the prints in the dust that one person, and one only, had ascended the stairs, and those footprints terminated at an attic door, which we broke down.

"We were, however, rather too late. Whoever it was had managed to get out of the window, and most perilously draw himself up on to the roof."

"Did you see this man?"

"No, at least when I say no, I did just catch a glimpse of him, but that was all."

"What next?"

"We went out on to the landing, and got out on to the roof by means of a trap-door; but we were too late, our prey had escaped, nor could we find the least trace of him, although we hunted closely all over the roofs."

"And then you returned to your companions, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"That will do, then. I have no further question to ask you."

"Stay," said Mr. Nuttall, as the officer was about to leave the box. "When you came down after your unsuccessful search, you went to your comrades, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had they made any prisoners?"

"Two, sir."

"Did you see them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you notice their faces?"

"Yes, sir, for I thought perhaps I might be called upon to swear to their 'dentity."

"Well, then, look at the dock, and tell me whether either of those men you see standing there are the same as you saw in custody at the haunted house."

"Yes."

"Which are they?"

"The two standing next me, sir."

"Did you accompany them to Newgate after their capture?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you notice them recognize the other prisoner?"

"Yes, they cried out when they saw him, as though they were surprised to find him there."

"Oh! did they? Now, did you notice whether the other prisoner responded to that recognition in any way?"

"He looked angry. That was all."

"Very good. You can stand down, Mr. Hood. I have nothing further to say to you."

The counsel for the defence, who had been eagerly engaged in a whispered conversation with a barrister who sat next to him, now rose to his feet.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—

"The witness just dismissed is the last one I shall call for the defence, and I shall do no more than crave your indulgence for a few moments, while I recapitulate a little, and call your attention to one or two points in the evidence, both defensive and prosecutive.

"In the first place, you cannot have failed to have perceived that the most militatory evidence against my client is that given by a person to whom you ought to be most careful how you give credibility, since he avows himself a highwayman, and a violater of those laws by which society is banded together.

"At the same time, it must not be forgotten that he is obnoxious to the charge of murder, as the evidence produced has testified.

"The presence of my client in the Birdcage-walk has been most satisfactorily accounted for.

"His capture followed as a matter of course.

"And now, as to the deed, which I maintain should never have been given into the hands of the court.

"I consider that altogether beyond the question.

"What arrangement might have existed between my client and his deceased brother is more than I can say, but that the deed was signed by him cannot be disputed.

"This empowers him, of course, to take possession of all.

"But, my lord, and gentlemen of the jury, you must see that there are certain persons whose interests would suffer greatly by such a state of things as this, and that they would endeavour to set aside this deed of assignment if they possibly could do so.

"The treatment which Mr. Skinner received when he went to the hall on a perfectly legal errand will serve to bear out what I say.

"The hypothesis I humbly submit is this.

"By some means or other it got to their ears that Mr. William Winberry had made a deed of assignment of all his property and personal effects to his brother Adrian.

"I then assume that they called on the assistance



[DICK TURPIN IN HIS CELL IN NEWGATE.]

of the notorious Dick Turpin, and concerted with him as to what means should be adopted to set this deed aside.

"They then, with great ingenuity, devised the death of Mr. William Winberry, under such circumstances as would tend to fix the guilt upon Adrian.

"But they rather reckoned without their host. The capture of my client so soon was what they scarcely expected, and was brought about by accident alone.

"What they would have wished, no doubt, would be, not to bring the case to the light of day in this court, but compel my client to flee the country.

"But that object failed.

"Such, my lord, and gentlemen of the jury, is the theory for the defence, and it will be for you to decide how far it is borne out by the facts that have been brought before you.

"That it carries upon the face of it a certain amount of plausibility is certain.

"With confidence, then, I leave the case to you, gentlemen of the jury, for your decision, under the firm conviction that you will acquit Mr. Adrian Winberry of the crime imputed to him, and also the two men from any complicity in the murder, since they were hired without having the remotest idea that any such crime as murder was intended."

The counsel for the defence sat down.

Every person in the court drew a long breath.

They looked at each other with a puzzled air as they seemed to ask the question—

"Are we dreaming, or are our intellects so stultified that we have quite misunderstood this case from the first, and is Adrian Winberry innocent, after all?"

Certainly the counsel's extraordinary speech was rather bewildering.

The jury looked at each other like men in a dream.

They were fairly puzzled.

The intellects of jurymen are never over keen. Indeed, those who are gifted with the smallest modicum of intellectual powers are usually selected for the office

Those on the present occasion were, for the most part, men whose brains or minds were capable of holding but one idea at the time.

The counsel for the defence knew this.

He knew, too, that his cause was hopeless, or nearly so.

He knew, however, that the jury would be most impressed with those facts which came last before them.

The trial had lasted for very many hours.

Of a necessity, he argued, they must by this time have got confused on the subject.

But if such was the condition of the minds of the jurymen and spectators, it certainly was not of two persons at least.

One was Mr. Nuttall.

The other the judge.

Their acute, well drilled, and logical minds retained everything tangible from beginning to end.

Still they were staggered by the audacious statements put forward by the counsel for the defence.

But that effect soon evaporated.

Mr. Nuttall rose to his feet.

It then became apparent that he was about to exercise his right of reply.

Much has been said both for and against this right of reply, and it is only occasionally that the prosecuting counsel enforce it; but surely, if ever it was needed, if ever it was justified, it was in this instance.

An intense desire to hear what Mr. Nuttall was going to say took possession of all without reservation—judge, jurymen, counsel, spectators, prisoners, officials—every one, indeed, who stood within the crowded area of the court.

He waited a moment before he commenced speaking, in order that every noise might be allowed to subside.

Seeing why he paused, everyone became immediately silent.

Then he began.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—"

But before he could do more than utter those few, oft-repeated, stereotyped words a great hubbub and confusion took place at the door of the court.

The judge rose.

An angry look was on his face.

"Silence!" he said. "Silence! or no matter at what cost or trouble, I will clear the court."

But his words, although they were uttered in firm, decided tones, were without effect—the noise grew louder and louder.

CHAPTER CCXC.

BLANCHE WINBERRY MOST OPPORTUNELY MAKES HER APPEARANCE IN COURT.

OUR powers of description are quite inadequate to describe the scene of confusion which now raged in the heretofore quiet court of justice.

The tumult, too, instead of lessening, perceptibly increased—one by one the spectators joined in it.

The judge himself, although much annoyed at the unseemly interruption, could not control or subdue the curiosity he felt to know what had caused it.

That it was no ordinary event he felt sure, and with his hands resting upon the desk before him, he leaned forward, and strained his eyes to the utmost, in order to be the first to catch a glimpse of what it was that had caused the disturbance.

But he could see nothing.

The people swayed to and fro, and uttered cries.

That was all.

Suddenly, however, the door of the court was thrown open.

The din increased.

But above all the clamour a voice rose.

Its tones, let it belong to whoever it might, were absolutely stentorian.

"Make way, good people, make way," it said, "make way, in the name of justice and the dead! Stand aside! There is another witness—another witness for the prosecution! Stand aside gently, good people all, and leave a path to the witness-box. It is a young girl. The witness is a delicate young girl. Let her have clear way! Stand aside! stand aside! She is here!"

These words reached the ears of the judge.

They reached, too, the ears of everyone in that court, which was now so crowded that one would have declared it an impossibility for another person to be squeezed into it.

They reached the ears of the three prisoners at the bar, and what little hope they might have entertained up to the present moment was dissipated.

They had no longer any hope to cling to.

Their guilty hearts told them who the witness was that was coming, and whose advent had caused so great a sensation.

But crowded as the court was, the people pressed back.

A kind of lane was formed extending to the witness-box.

It was a narrow passage, it is true, but still it was wide enough for one person to squeeze through.

And here it should be stated that the crowd in the various avenues leading to the court was quite as great as was the one within it.

Whoever the witness was that was coming, we know that she was a female from the words uttered by the man with the stentorian voice. She had to force her way through these.

Her progress was slow.

But it was sure.

At length she passed through the doorway, and stood fairly within the court.

Then the judge, from his elevated and advantageous position, saw her.

The jury, too, who had one and all risen to their feet, could see her also.

She was young.

She was fair.

She was beautiful.

That they could see at the first glance.

But her hair was dishevelled.

Her apparel torn.

There were traces of the deepest anguish upon her countenance.

But, despite of these drawbacks, her beauty was visible.

Then Maud Gouldman, who, like the rest, was full of interest to know who the witness was, at last caught sight of her.

She recognized her.

She clapped her hands together.

Then in a tearful voice, she exclaimed, heedless and forgetful of those by whom she was surrounded, and the strange manner in which the meeting took place—

"Blanche!—Blanche! It is Blanche! It is Blanche, my dear cousin, come back again! I had given up all hopes of seeing her; but she is here. She is here, and her evidence will suffice to complete the conviction and prove the guilt of her father's murderers. Blanche!—Blanche! It is Maud, your cousin, who calls to you! Blanche!—Blanche!"

These words were spoken with hysterical vehemence and volubility.

They produced an electrical effect upon the mass of spectators who crowded the court.

It might have been that very many of them, from the facts they had become familiar with during the progress of the trial, had something more than a suspicion of who this witness was who had made so strange an intrusion into court at the eleventh hour.

But the words which Maud Gouldman spoke were quite sufficient to set all doubts at rest.

The mysterious Blanche, of whom they had heard so much, was to appear before them.

As we said, a kind of lane was formed, extending from the door of the court to the witness-box.

Along this Blanche passed, until the words her playmate and companion uttered struck upon her ear.

But she did not pause a moment after those words were uttered.

She seemed fully conscious of the fact that there was no time to spare.

Merely waving her hand to Maud, she passed on.

To reach the witness-box, however, she had to pass very near to the dock at which the three prisoners stood.

The expression of Adrian's face when she came so near him was awful to behold.

Its expression even struck the turnkey who was in the dock on guard over him, and kept a watchful eye upon

his actions, for he feared that he would offer some violence to the witness, whose evidence could not be but most prejudicial to his case.

But Blanche passed on in safety, and now she came close to where Dick stood, and he had a full view of her.

It might have been said with perfect truth that every one in court looked at her with the greatest curiosity. But let their curiosity have been as great as it might, it fell far short of that felt by Dick Turpin.

He saw before him the being about whom he had heard so much but never seen, and whose fortunes had become so strangely interwoven with his own.

He saw before him the being to whom he was utterly unknown, and yet for whom he had perilled his liberty and his life.

He was much struck with her appearance.

Despite the unfavourable circumstances under which they met, he could see that she was of surpassing loveliness—yet loveliness altogether different in style to that of Maud Gouldman.

She stepped into the witness-box.

In modest confusion she bowed her head before the myriad eyes that were fixed upon her.

The crier stepped forward.

He had a small book in his hand.

We have already reverted to the extraordinary silence which several times had taken place during the trial—remarkable, because even the breathing of the closely-packed mass made an audible sound.

But thrice had even that sound been hushed into silence.

That phenomenon again took place at this moment.

It might have been that judge, jury, counsel, and spectators, all held their breath for a short time.

But let it be how it might, that remarkable and profound silence again prevailed.

The judge sank back in his chair.

Mr. Nuttall, whose speech had been so strangely interrupted, sat down likewise.

The jury regained their seats.

Then the oath was formally proposed to Blanche, and when she kissed the book, she did it with so much grace that it won the hearts of even the least susceptible who saw it.

The judge looked towards Mr. Nuttall, and the worthy barrister, who perfectly understood the meaning of that glance, rose to his feet.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—

"I must once more crave your attention to this remarkable case, upon which, I doubt not, a clearer and better light is about to be thrown.

"Much that we could only have surmised at, and stated as the result of surmises, will be made quite patent.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury. Believe me, I must unfeignedly rejoice in the appearance of this witness for the prosecution."

Mr. Nuttall had got thus far when the counsel for the defence rose.

Turning to the judge, he said—

"My lord,—In the course of this investigation I have frequently been compelled to rise to my feet, and protest against the manner in which it has been conducted.

"I cannot refrain from doing so again, and I trust your lordship will not be offended by this attempt to recall you to your duty."

The judge frowned, but said nothing.

Not in the least daunted, the counsel for the defence went on—

"My lord,—I must humbly recall to your notice the evident fact that the case for the prosecution is closed—entirely closed—and it is now too late for them to call any witnesses. I have made my speech for the defence."

The judge replied.

His voice was low and calm, but the words he uttered were stinging ones, and made even the counsel for the defence wince again.

"My learned brother could not, with an hour's rhetoric, have furnished us with a better exemplification of the unsoundness of his case than he has done by the few words he has just spoken. Truth fears nothing, and additional evidence can only serve to elucidate it. I hold that, in this case, I have executed my duty fairly and impartially; at any rate, I have endeavoured to the best of my ability to do so. Far be it from me, because the case for the prosecution is closed, and the speech for the defence made—far be it from me, I say, on such grounds as those, to set a seal upon the lips of the witness who now stands before the court. Let us patiently hear all that she—the daughter of the man whose murder we have assembled to adjudicate upon—may have to say; and let us hope that what she says will enable us to come to a better understanding of this intricate case—prevent us from falling into error, and assist our fallible and prone to err judgments to come to a proper and just decision, that the real culprit may not escape, but receive the penalty which attaches itself to the perpetrators of the heinous crime of murder."

CHAPTER CCXCI.

MR. NUTTALL EXAMINES BLANCHE WINBERRY, AND EXTRACTS SOME IMPORTANT EVIDENCE.

THERE was a universal and spontaneous burst of applause when the judge concluded this speech.

When he commenced, there was not the least excitement visible either in the tone of his voice or in his gestures, but as he proceeded he warmed with his subject, and no longer spoke with the slow, measured accent he did at first. On the contrary, his voice rose, and as his utterance became more rapid, so did his whole body participate in what he said, and at the conclusion of his address he was dramatic and impassioned.

But not even this, nor the expression of approval with which his speech was greeted, had the effect of intimidating the counsel for the defence.

He rose, and before Mr. Nuttall could commence his examination of Blanche Winberry, he spoke as follows, in a voice of deep, affected humility—

"My lord, with what you have just now said, I and all in this court most fully and cordially agree. But in the administration of justice, though the main object must always be to elicit truth, yet in the elicitation of that truth there must be certain forms observed, or else the whole would become a chaos. But, my lord, I trust, you will excuse me if I say that I have noticed throughout this day's proceedings that the personal beauty of the witnesses has exercised an improper influence upon the judgment. Let me, then, caution you, gentlemen of the jury, to shut your eyes to all attractions and blandishments of form and feature, and take the evidence of the witnesses for just what it is worth, and no more."

The counsel for the defence sat down.

The judge evidently considered the speech as not calling for reply; at any rate, he made no reply to it.

Mr. Nuttall had not sat down during this little discussion between the judge and the opposite counsel, and, at a sign from the former, he continued his speech.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—

"The counsel for the defence thought fit to interrupt me in the remarks I was making to you. The objections he raised as to the examination of this witness have been set aside by his lordship; therefore I shall proceed with my questions, in the first place promising to take up no more time than I am compelled.

"First, however, let me cordially endorse what my learned brother for the defence has said with respect to not allowing our judgment to be biassed by the personal attractions of the witnesses.

"He has gone so far as to accuse us of having already given way to that natural feeling, but on my own part let me state that the cause referred to has had no effect whatever upon me.

"But the caution, nevertheless, is a wise and good one, and with him I trust that it will be borne in mind by all when the time for decision arrives."

After thus speaking, Mr. Nuttall turned towards the witness whose evidence he deemed sufficiently important to justify his questioning her himself.

"What is your name?"

"Blanche."

The accents of her voice were low and musical.

"That is only your Christian name," said Mr. Nuttall; "what is your surname?"

"Winberry."

"Thank you. And now tell me your father's name."

"William Winberry."

"Where did he reside?"

"At the Hall."

"Where is the Hall situated?"

"About midway between Hendon and Hampstead."

"Upon what occasion did you see your father last?"

"It was at the Hall, sir."

"How long is it ago?"

"A long time it seems to me, sir—so long, indeed, that I cannot tell when, for in my solitary prison I have lost all count of time."

Blanche sobbed convulsively.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—Excuse me for interrupting myself to make a remark relative to this witness. Having only just made her way into the court, she must of necessity be altogether ignorant of all that has transpired in the course of these long proceedings, which fact cannot fail to impart additional importance to all she says."

Then turning to Blanche, who had somewhat recovered her composure, he said—

"You cannot recollect how long it is since you last saw your father?"

"No, sir, I cannot, but it is a long time."

"You saw him at the Hall, I think you said?"

"Yes, sir. It was one afternoon—or rather evening. I left him in the library, while I went out to take a ramble through the grounds, as was my usual custom."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"What was your destination?"

"A walk."

"Oh! simply a walk."

"Yes, sir."

"Who was the last person you saw, after leaving the Hall?"

"My cousin Maud."

"Where was she?"

"At a window which overlooked the lawn, across which I took my way. She watched me, and waved her hand repeatedly."

"Exactly. We were acquainted with all these particulars. Now be good enough to tell the court what happened to you after you got out of sight of your companion Maud."

Blanche hesitated.

From what source no one could tell.

"I presume, sir, you do not wish to know all that took place after the time you mention, but simply wish an account of the manner I was abducted, which was while I was on my way back home?"

"If anything of a private nature took place during your excursion, not relating to the subject in hand, we have no wish to press you."

Blanche looked relieved.

It then became clear that there was some secret in connexion with her solitary rambles.

It was noted by several that the counsel for the defence took a note of this circumstance, so it was clear he had not lost all hopes of winning the battle, or that, at all events, it was still his determination to fight to the last gasp.

"You say it was while you were returning home, after your walk, that you were carried off?"

"Yes, sir; I was passing through the shrubbery, which adjoins the lawn, when suddenly I heard a crackling noise, but before I could turn round to see what it was, or utter a cry for succour, something was thrown over my head."

"What was this something like?"

"It seemed to me, sir, to be a kind of cloak, such as are sometimes worn by gentlemen in cold weather, either when riding or walking."

"And something of that sort was suddenly thrown over your head?"

"Yes, sir, and drawn closely over my shoulders, so that I could neither see who my assailants were or cry for help. Nor was I able to struggle, for my arms were seized with a powerful grasp."

"What happened next?"

"One of my captors spoke, and threatened to slay me on the spot if I refused to accompany them. I was terrified and half-fainting. I was carried away without being wholly conscious of what was happening to me."

"Pray, go on."

"I was hurried along for some distance on foot, and then we came to a halt. Immediately I was raised up and set down again. I could not see, but the feel told me I was in a carriage or a vehicle of a similar description."

"And all this time you did not so much as catch a glimpse of the countenances of your abductors?"

"I did not, sir. The cloak was kept close down over my face."

"Then the vehicle in which you had been seated was, I presume, set in motion?"

"It was, sir, and I was taken some distance; how far I know not, nor do I know how long a space of time the journey lasted, so extreme was my agitation. At length the carriage stopped. The cloak was still over my face, so I could not tell where I was. However, they led me forward a few paces, and then a door was closed."

Blanche paused a moment, and the usher handed her a glass of water, which she drank with evident pleasure.

The interest that was felt in her narrative far transcended any that had been felt that day, when so many strange transactions were brought to light. All she said not only presented all the glowing attractions of romance, but it also had the additional charm of being true.

After a brief pause the witness resumed.

"I heard a door closed behind me," she said, "and securely fastened. Then I was forced to ascend a great many steps, so many, that when I reached the top I was quite breathless. Here another door was opened and then closed.

"I remained immovable for several minutes, until the deep silence with which I was environed terrified me. Then I made a desperate attempt to remove the cloak, and succeeded.

"I should have done so more easily if I had gone more gently about the task. However, as soon as the cloak was removed, I looked as well as I could about me.

"I was alone.

"I was in darkness.

"But the darkness was only partial, and doubtless, in consequence of my eyes having been kept from the light so long, I was able to see tolerably well about me, and to define the kind of place I was in.

"It was a small apartment, rudely furnished, like a bedchamber. The roof was low and irregular in shape, as though it was immediately beneath the roof.

"The light came in through a small window, and I at once hastened towards it in the faint hope of accomplishing my escape.

"But on a closer approach I found the aperture, which was scarcely large enough to admit the passage of my body, was strongly defended by a network of iron bars.

"I then burst into tears, and wept till daylight.

"When the dawn came, and the different objects in the room became more distinguishable, I looked out of window in the hope that I might form some idea whereabouts I was.

"Nothing, however, met my gaze, but a number of roof-tops and little attic windows, packed as closely as possible together, and extending as far as I could see in every direction.

"I then felt sure that I must have been carried to London; and while I wondered what was the cause of my abduction, I wept when I thought how slight a chance my father would have of finding me in a huge place like London.

"As I had fancied in the night, the room in which I was confined was an attic immediately beneath the tiles. The door through which I had been brought was opposite the window. I had not been to it; I had not tried to open it and endeavour to make my escape that way, because I felt certain that it was securely fastened.

"However, as a kind of forlorn hope, I crossed the room in that direction, but before I could reach it, I heard someone removing the fastenings."

CHAPTER CCXCII.

BLANCHE WINBERRY CONCLUDES HER EVIDENCE, AND IDENTIFIES THE BODY OF HER FATHER.

AGAIN did Blanche Winberry pause for breath in her wondrously interesting narrative.

She had spoken with considerable rapidity, being anxious to take up no more time than she possibly could help; but it seemed that there were times when the

recollection of the dangers and the difficulties she had gone through overpowered her.

With a perceptible effort, however, she regained her composure, and continued—

"When I heard those sounds I knew that some one was about to enter the apartment, and instinctively I drew back as far as possible from the door, while my heart beat so painfully that I could scarcely breathe.

"One of my abductors was doubtless about to make his appearance. Perhaps I should learn the reason why I had been carried off.

"The door was thrown open and a man appeared upon the threshold.

"At first, however, I scarcely obtained a glimpse of his countenance, for he turned round the moment he entered, and carefully closed the door behind him.

"Then he stood with his back to it, and looked at me attentively.

"I returned his gaze as well as my terror would allow me.

"I knew him in a moment, although I had only seen him once before; but the circumstances of our meeting were of such a character that it made it impossible for me to forget him."

"What were those circumstances?" asked Mr. Nuttall.

"I was in the library with Maud and my father, when Mr. Adrian Winberry was announced. My father desired Maud and myself to leave the room, and let him have his interview in private, for it was not his wish that we should make the acquaintance of our uncle."

"And did you leave the room in accordance with his desire?"

"Yes, sir."

"And yet you saw him then?"

"I did."

"How was that?"

"We left the room——"

"Your companion and yourself?"

"Yes. We determined to take a ramble together in the grounds, and, while we were crossing the hall, we encountered my uncle, who was then going in the direction of the library."

"And that was when you saw him?"

"Yes; he had his hat off, and I saw him very plainly. I looked at him more attentively than I should have done, but I felt curious about this uncle whose acquaintance my father did not desire me to make."

"Did your uncle speak to you?"

"No, sir; he merely bowed and passed on. When we returned from our walk we found father in the library very much agitated. He was a long time before he would tell me the cause of it, until I elicited from him that my uncle, having squandered away the annual income left to him by my grandfather, had endeavoured to extort money from my father."

"But he did not succeed in his endeavours?"

"No, sir. My father refused him, and solely on account of the manner in which the demand was made."

"And you say the person you saw in the hall announced himself as your uncle, Mr. Adrian Winberry, and was acknowledged by your father to be such?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you saw his features distinctly?"

"I did, sir."

"And you recognized the person who came into your room as your uncle, Mr. Adrian Winberry?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are sure you made no mistake?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Well, then, be good enough to look carefully at the three prisoners at the bar, and then tell the court whether you recognise any one of them as being the individual you saw upon the two occasions referred to, namely, your uncle, Mr. Adrian Winberry."

As directed, Blanche turned her eyes towards the bar at which the prisoners stood.

As she did so, the eyes of every person in the court followed hers, and settled upon the prisoners with a concentrated gaze.

It was observant that all three shrank before it.

They looked like three miserable objects in whose breasts all hope was dead.

The gaze which Blanche fixed upon the prisoners was a clear and steady one,

She was slightly puzzled with the change which Adrian had made in his personal appearance.

But that white mark upon his forehead, which seemed set there like the brand of Cain, that he might be known of all men, prevented her having any serious doubts of his identity.

She raised her arm and pointed towards him, while he cowered down in the dock like a guilty wretch before the finger of the accusing angel.

"That is the man!" she said.

"Which?" asked Mr. Nuttall.

"The third one from me! He who stands furthest off!"

There could be no mistake as to who the fair witness meant.

"Will you swear positively to his identity?"

"Most positively. He has made some changes in his personal appearance since I last saw him, but nevertheless I have not the least doubt upon my mind!"

"That is quite sufficient; continue your relation. Yet, stay! Do you know the other two prisoners at the bar?"

"Yes, I have seen them both before!"

"Indeed! where? Under what circumstances? In company with the other prisoner?"

"Yes, sir; I have seen them both at the house where I was confined. They appeared to live in it."

"You are sure of that?"

"Perfectly sure!"

"And it is a long time since you saw them first?"

"Oh! yes; but I saw one of them on the first day of my incarceration. He brought my food!"

"Indeed!" Then turning to the judge, Mr. Nuttall said—

"My lord, this portion of the evidence given is most important, since it serves to altogether demolish the theory set up by the counsel for the defence, and of which this witness knows nothing. You must couple, too, with this the fact of their names being upon the deed, which I think clearly shows them to be accomplices, and criminal in the highest degree."

"I have not allowed any of the facts to escape my observation, brother Nuttall. The case is now rapidly becoming clearer, and I think we shall have but little trouble in bringing the guilt home to the right parties. Be good enough to continue the examination of this witness."

Mr. Nuttall bowed assent, and then turning to Blanche, he said—

"You swear, then, to the identity of all three prisoners at the bar?"

"I do, sir, most unhesitatingly."

"Then we will leave that point. Will you be good enough to return to that portion of your narrative at which you broke off, namely, the intrusion of Adrian Winberry into the room in which you were confined?"

"I will, sir."

"What happened after he entered and closed the door?"

"He stood with his back to it, and regarded me attentively, until at length he spoke. I cannot pretend to repeat what he said, word for word, but the substance of it was this. He told me that he had carried me off because my father had refused to accede to his demands to furnish him with money, and that he was resolved he should comply with his wishes—that he would compel him to do so, in fact. He knew the deep love my father bore me, and he determined to use that as a weapon to carry out his ends. Hence my abduction."

"Was he candid enough to avow all this to you?"

"He was, and the circumstance much amazed me, for until then I could not conceive that any one would be bold enough to avow such villainy. But he did, and moreover endeavoured to force me to write a letter to my father, telling him my circumstances, portraying my horrible fate, and entreating him by his love for me to accede to his brother's demand."

"This is monstrous," exclaimed the judge. "Do you swear to all this?"

"I do, my lord," replied Blanche, firmly, and somewhat haughtily, for she did not like the question.

"It surpasses all belief! Continue, I beg."

"I resolutely refused to assist him in his infamous designs in any way whatever. I dared him to do his

worst. I did not fear him, and that neither threats, arguments, or ill-usage would bend me to his purpose."

"Did he renew his solicitations?"

"Not then, sir. He left me with the idea that my firmness would soon give way. But he was mistaken. He did not know the person with whom he had to deal. On the next occasion he found me as at first."

"And did you never give way?"

"Never; but when I was alone devoted the whole of my energies to making my escape. But, alas! my prison was too strong for me to break out of it."

"And you saw the three prisoners frequently?"

"Oh! yes. The two standing nearest to me brought me food, and appeared to occupy the house. Though whether they did so or not, is more than I can say for certain."

"But you made your escape?"

"Oh! yes; but not unaided. All at once my three jailers disappeared. On the last few occasions my uncle told me that he had my father securely in his custody in a place where he would never be found, and that if he did not consent, he should slay him. But this threat I heeded not, because I did not believe my father was in his custody. I thought that was only said to terrify me."

Here Blanche again burst into tears, but by a powerful effort she controlled her emotions, and continued—

"After this, days passed, and I saw nothing of my jailers. No one came near me. Fortunately I had been left with a tolerable stock of provisions, or I should inevitably have died of starvation; but I eked them out as well as I could.

"Last night, however, or rather, I should think, very early this morning, though it was not light, I was aroused from a light sleep I had fallen into by hearing a tapping at the window of my prison.

"I ran towards it instantly. I felt sure it was a friend who had come to rescue me. My heart told me so! No enemy would have come in such a fashion! On reaching the window I found I was right, that a friend had indeed found me, and was about to rescue me.

"I threw open the window, and then we could speak to each other——"

"Pardon me," said Mr. Nuttall; "but was this person who appeared at the window known to you?"

Blanche looked distressed.

She hesitated.

She stammered as she had done on a former occasion.

She glanced furtively at Adrian Winberry.

Then her eyes roamed over the court as though she was in quest of something.

But that something, let it be what it might, did not seem to meet her gaze, and once more she glanced at Adrian Winberry.

This behaviour was strange.

It was noticed by all.

Various interpretations were put upon it.

And though the trial had lasted so long as it had, yet it could be seen that the interest which was taken in the proceedings increased rather than diminished.

CHAPTER CCXCIII.

IN WHICH A FRESH CHARACTER APPEARS UPON THE SCENE OF ACTION, TO THE DISMAY OF ADRIAN WINBERRY.

THERE was some mystery in this behaviour of Blanche Winberry, but what that mystery was, was more than the acutest intellect there present could surmise.

She wished to speak.

Yet some consideration made her hold back.

Mr. Nuttall, whose interests lay solely with her, and who knew that her hesitation and disinclination to speak arose from no improper motive, was desirous to remove as much as possible the injurious effect which it could not fail to have upon the minds of all.

He addressed himself to her in a calm and gentle voice.

"You hesitate to reply to the question I have asked you. You hesitated upon a former occasion. It may be that such hesitation is quite natural, and that you have a good reason for it, but I must request you, for your own sake, and for the sacred cause of justice, to speak freely and fearlessly. Make no reservation, lest that which you should hold back should militate against you. Tell me, in a word, whether the person who attracted your attention by tapping at the attic window was known to you?"

"He was known," said Blanche, faintly. "That is—"

"What?"

"I had seen him many times."

"Then you must have known him?"

"Yes, I did know him."

"That is all we wished to ascertain," said Mr. Nuttall.

Blanche gave an evident sigh of relief.

The mystery was not elucidated yet, though doubtless it soon would be.

"When I opened the window we spoke to each other. He told me how he had been searching for me ever since my disappearance, but that he had only just succeeded in finding me. To the bottom part of the house he could not obtain access, nor could he force away the iron bars which guarded the attic window. At length he determined to make a breach through the roof, and this, after incredible labour—for he had no tools—he accomplished. He drew me through the aperture on to the roof, and from thence without much trouble, we made our way to the ground. With all speed I made my way to the hall, and, upon arriving there, learned what had happened, and what was taking place here to-day, and, in spite of all obstacles and objections, I made my way here, and, as I hope and trust, not too late to be of service."

One of the jurymen rose.

"I have to suggest that this witness, having identified the prisoners, should, in order to make her evidence complete, be taken to view the dead body, and identify that also."

"I would fain have spared the witness so painful a task," said Mr. Nuttall, "but if you think it necessary to the ends of justice, I am sure she will not hold back."

"I leave the matter with his lordship," said the juryman.

"I think it will be best to identify the body."

"I am ready," said Blanche, in a low, firm voice.

We will not linger upon this painful portion of our story.

Let it suffice to say, simply, and once for all, that Blanche was taken to the anteroom where the corpse lay, and that she of course identified it as being that of her father.

She returned to court, and then the trial was continued.

"I have no more questions to ask this witness," said Mr. Nuttall, "and she may stand down, without my brother for the defence wishes to put any questions to her."

The counsel for the defence rose to his feet.

"Really," he said, "this case has been conducted in such an extraordinary manner—there has been such a complete abrogation of all existing forms and precedents, that I very candidly confess I hardly know how to act. The first thing that strikes me, however, is that we have nothing to prove the identity of the witness, who has just given what I may call the most romantic narrative for evidence that was ever heard within the four walls of this court."

Mr. Nuttall rose.

"If the identity of this witness presents any difficulty to my learned friend, and he would like to have her sworn to, there are at this moment a dozen persons in court who are willing to do so."

"We will pass over that point, then," said the counsel; "I merely adverted to it because it was the first that occurred to my mind. Admitting that the witness is what she professes herself to be, I think it quite evident that she has not told the whole truth in the matter. I am the more sure of this, because once or twice during her examination by my learned friend, she faltered and hesitated, either like one who had something to conceal, or else like one who had but imperfectly learned the part she was to speak. Which of this two it is, as you are aware, is out of my province to decide."

"The witness awaits your cross-examination, if you wish to put any questions to her," said the judge.

"Then, my lord, I will just ask this witness to tell the court what took place after she left her father's house on the occasion referred to."

Again came that distressed and agitated look over the countenance of Blanche.

Again did she glance furtively at Adrian Winberry.

Again did her eyes roam over the sea of faces in the court, as if in search of a particular one.

But this time she seemed to succeed in seeing that for which she looked, for, upon her eye resting somewhere, the expression of her face underwent a total change.

She looked up into the face of the counsel for the defence calmly, and as though quite prepared to answer any question he might ask her.

This little bit of bye-play had not been lost on any one, though it was inexplicable to all who saw it.

The counsel took a note of it in his own mind, and then seeing Blanche apparently waiting, he repeated the question he had previously asked.

"After crossing the lawn," said Blanche, "I entered the shrubbery which adjoins it. Passing through this I came to a stile, where I waited."

"For what reason did you wait?"

"I had an appointment."

"Indeed," said the counsel for the defence, with a triumphant look at the jury, as much as to say, I have got hold of something important at last. "Indeed!"

"Yes, sir."

"Would you be good enough to say with whom?"

"I cannot."

"Cannot?"

"No."

"But you must."

"I cannot."

"Why not?"

"Because I do not know."

"That is a very satisfactory reason; but excuse me for making the remark, it seems a little singular that you should have an appointment, and not know with whom!"

"I did not know his name."

"Oh! Then it appears the appointment was with one of the masculine gender, whose name you did not know? I am afraid, now, if the whole truth is told, your disappearance from home will be very easily accounted for."

"I do not understand you, sir!"

"Will you save trouble now at once by confessing that the story of the abduction, with all the romantic incidents belonging to it, is a fiction?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Oh! you won't save trouble?"

"What I have sworn to, sir, is the truth, and I call upon heaven to witness it."

The counsel shrugged his shoulders and continued—

"Well, then, be good enough to say what took place while you waited at the stile."

The person for whom I waited came."

"And you had some conversation with him?"

"Yes."

"What next?"

"We parted."

"Parted?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quite, sir."

"What caused you to part?"

"Our meeting was a secret one—it had already lasted some time, and I was afraid we should be discovered, so we parted."

"With a promise to meet again?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what took place after your parting?"

"What I have previously related to you."

"That a cloak was thrown over your head, and you were carried off?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now, then, was not the person you met at the stile the one who carried you off?"

"What, Mr. Adrian Winberry? Oh! no."

"It was not Mr. Winberry who carried you off?"

"That is not what I meant."

"What did you mean? I should really advise you to be careful, for you are trifling with your evidence in a very improper manner."

"I am not, sir. It is you who wish to pervert and put a wrong construction upon all my replies. What I said was, that the person I met at the stile had nothing to do with my abduction, and it was he who rescued me, and without whose aid I could not possibly have been here to day!"

Blanche spoke with great spirit and energy, and a hum of applause followed her words.

But the ushers soon hushed it by uttering their monotonous cry, "Si—lence, Si—lence!"

"And do you positively swear to that?"

"I do, sir."

"Then why did you hesitate and appear confused when you were questioned upon this point by my learned brother for the prosecution?"

"Because"—

"Because what?"

"The person had requested me to avoid, if possible, all mention of him."

"Indeed, then, there is something mysterious in that, and it is always a safe rule to call anything or any one mysterious, suspicious likewise."

Blanche's eyes again roamed over the court.

"Now, witness," said the counsel for the defence, "look at me, and tell me whether the person you speak of is in court?"

Blanche looked appealingly at the judge.

"Must I answer that question, my lord?"

"It will be best to do so."

"Then he is in court."

"Then," said the counsel for the defence, "I trust, my lord, you will give orders for no one to be allowed egress from this place. This mysterious individual, of whose identity, however, I have more than a suspicion, must be brought forward."

"You may save yourself the trouble," said a voice from the body of the court. "I am here, and am quite ready to step forward."

The voice that pronounced these words was stern in its tones, and yet anyone could tell it was a youth who spoke.

But the effects of that voice upon two persons was marked and extraordinary.

Blanche Winberry started, and a crimson glow overspread her countenance.

Adrian Winberry started, and at the same time uttered such a horrible cry, compounded of rage and fear, that every one shrank back appalled.

It was evident he recognized the voice of the person who was willing to come forward.

But what was there in that recognition to cause him to utter such a cry? Why should it have produced such a remarkable effect upon him?

These are questions to which the next few lines will afford an adequate answer.

CHAPTER CCXCIV.

IN WHICH THE MYSTERIOUS WITNESS REVEALS HIMSELF, AND THE JUDGE COMMENCES SUMMING UP THE CASE TO THE JURY.

THAT the person who said he was ready to come forward fully meant what he said could be seen by the vigorous manner in which he set about forcing a passage through the crowd.

He made his way in a direct line towards the witness-box.

From the judge on the bench, down to the meanest official or the most uninterested spectator among the audience, there was not one who did not feel the keenest desire to see what this person was like.

Those, too, with whom he came in contact, gave way right and left before him.

It took him but a moment to reach the witness-box, and as soon as he did reach it, without waiting for Blanche to descend, and without being told what he ought to do, he pulled open the little door, and stood in the narrow place by her side.

Then he looked fearlessly round the court.

All saw, then, that he was a young man about twenty years of age—that time of life when the high aspirations and poetry of youth have not become lost in manhood.

He was strikingly handsome, not merely in his features but in his form, which was manly and robust, while he carried himself with an air which could not fail to win the admiration of all who saw it.

But though his eye was bright, and its expression fearless, yet it could be seen that if he had been left to his own choice in the matter, he would never have revealed himself, though for what reason none knew.

The attention of all in court was so much fixed upon this young man, that very few, if any, noticed the expression of Adrian Winberry's countenance.

It was awful in the extreme.

He glared at the young man who stood in the witness-box with the deadliest hatred in his eye.

In fine, the expression was such that if he had been possessed of any means of taking away his life he would not have shrunk from doing so.

As they stood in the witness-box Blanche and this mysterious youth formed a well-matched pair; nor did it require much foresight to see that they loved each other.

But it was against the usage of the court for two persons to stand together in the witness-box, so the usher held open the door for one of them to descend.

"Who do you wish to remain?" asked the judge.

"The young man," said the counsel for the defence, "though I may probably wish to recall the other witness."

Blanche had no resource but to quit the witness-box, and which, to tell the truth, she was by no means unwilling to do.

The counsel for the defence looked for a long time at this young man, and then he said—

"What is your name?"

Mr. Nuttall rose.

"Pardon me," he said addressing the judge, "but as this is a witness for the prosecution, though somewhat strangely brought forward, it is my right to be the first in putting any questions to him."

"Certainly."

"But I claim him for a witness for the defence, my lord!" said the opposing counsel, "and I maintain that I have the right to question. My learned friend for the prosecution may cross-examine at his discretion."

"If you will listen to me," said the young man from the witness-box, in a clear but sad tone of voice, "I can give an account of all I know without being questioned by any one."

"I decide in favour of the counsel for the prosecution," said the judge.

The counsel for the defence sat down with a bang.

Mr. Nuttall turned his attention to the witness, and of course put the same question as the other had done.

"What is your name?"

"Be good enough to understand that though I am acquainted with Miss Blanche Winberry, yet she is not only in ignorance of who I am, but does not know even my name. Chance brought us together in a simple manner, which need not to be told here. I had a reason for concealing my name."

"That reason cannot hold good here," said Mr. Nuttall, "so you will be good enough to tell the court what it is."

"I intended to do so. Only I thought it would be best to make that statement."

"Very well, sir. Now tell us your name?"

"Adrian Winberry!"

Had a bombshell fallen into the court it could not have produced a greater sensation than the mere utterance of that name did.

All were positively aghast.

As for Blanche, she uttered a faint scream, and shrunk back when her unknown preserver revealed himself.

Mr. Nuttall, it seemed, could scarcely credit his own ears, for he said—

"Did I understand you to say that your name is Adrian Winberry?"

"You did, sir. Such is my name."

"Then you are a relative?"

"I am, sir."

"In what degree do you stand related to her?"

"I am her cousin!"

"You are, then, a relative of the prisoner at the bar?"

"I am, sir."

"You are sorry for it, no doubt? Be good enough to tell the court in what precise degree of relationship you stand to him?"

There was a moment's silence after this question was propounded, during which the spectators looked from the Adrian Winberry who stood at the bar and the Adrian Winberry who stood in the witness-box.

As they did so, all could trace certain points of resemblance between the two, so that when the witness, in a sad and unsteady tone, said—

"He is my father!"

None were surprised. They had anticipated the reply.

"Your father?" exclaimed Mr. Nuttall. "Then of course you will give no evidence against him?"

"I trust I shall be spared that trial. Yet I can corroborate a portion of Miss Blanche Winberry's statement without doing so."

"Then we shall be very glad to hear you."

"I suppose it does not matter in what way the acquaintanceship between Miss Blanche Winberry and myself began. It was, as I before stated, in the first case the result of a mere chance accident."

"We are bound to believe that part of your testimony. But I think you said Miss Winberry was unacquainted with your name until you now pronounced it. Is this so?"

"It is, sir."

"But, on the occasion of your first meeting, I presume you knew who she was?"

"I did, sir. She told me. Then I knew that my father had an ill feeling towards this part of our family, and he strictly forbade me ever to make the acquaintance of any member of it."

"But how came you to be near Hampstead on the occasion in question?"

"I had not long returned from Spain with my father. I was born in Spain. I accompanied him to Hampstead. He said he was going there on business with this brother whom he so detested, and would not allow me to enter with him, so I had to wait in the lane until he came to me."

"I understand. It was then, while waiting, I presume, that chance threw you in the way of Miss Blanche Winberry?"

"You are right in that surmisal, sir."

"And were your meetings afterwards continued?"

"They were, sir; and with that perverseness which so often manifests itself, a mutual affection sprang up between us which neither could control."

"But did you not confide the secret of who you were to the lady?"

"No, sir. On the contrary, I implored her to keep all that had passed between us a profound secret, because I argued that, as the hate was mutual, she would only draw much ill usage upon herself."

"Indeed."

"That is precisely it. I saw her many times, and when I last left her, it was with a promise upon her part to meet me at the same place on the following evening. I went, but she came not, and then I learned the intelligence, from various people I saw in the neighbourhood, that she had mysteriously disappeared."

"And was that all the intelligence you possessed upon the subject?"

"It was, sir."

"Where was your father?"

"I cannot tell, sir."

"Why not? Do you refuse to do so?"

"By no means. I simply say I cannot tell you, because I do not know; he said he should be absent for some time, and desired me to remain at the hotel at which we had taken up our quarters during our stay in England."

"And did you?"

"Not altogether. When I heard of the mysterious disappearance of Miss Blanche Winberry I directed the whole of my attention to finding her. I could not join in the search in a legitimate manner, as I could have wished, because of revealing myself. But I worked in solitude and secrecy, and after infinite trouble, succeeded in finding her almost dead with cold and hunger in the garret of a house in Lambeth."

"Well, sir?"

"I freed her from that place, and accompanied her to her father's residence, with the intention of avowing who I was, and of asking the hand of his daughter. Upon arriving, however, we found the whole place in an uproar, learned that Mr. Winberry, her father, had been murdered, and that the trial was even then in progress. Accordingly, at the urgent request of Miss Winberry, I brought her here, and with what has happened since you must already be acquainted."

The young man paused.

It will be noticed that not one word of the evidence he gave criminated his father in any way. All he did was to



[TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK LEARN IMPORTANT INFORMATION AT THE ROAD-SIDE INN.]

corroborate the statements made by the being whom he loved and valued more than any one in the world beside.

Mr. Nuttall made a sign that his examination had concluded, and the counsel for the defence, on being asked whether he had any questions to ask, gave a surly reply in the negative.

CHAPTER CCXCV.

THE JUDGE SUMS UP THE CASE AGAINST ADRIAN WINBERRY IN A VERY CLEAR AND LOGICAL MANNER.

THE aspect presented by this trial at the present juncture was certainly without all precedent.

But the protracted proceedings were now close upon termination.

The counsel for the defence had, beyond doubt, fought his client's battle well.

He had fought it in the face of the utmost opposition, and in defiance of common sense.

Such a battle might be prolonged, but victory would be quite hopeless.

It will be recollected that when Blanche made her sudden and somewhat dramatic appearance in the court, the counsel had made his speech for the defence, and Mr. Nuttall had began to make his reply.

In what way, then, were the proceedings to be resumed?

The evidence which had just been given, so complete as it was, and bearing, as it did, so intimately upon the case, was altogether against him, nor could his acute intellect perceive any point upon which an attack could be made with any prospect of success.

If he had, he would have cross-examined his client's son, though perhaps he thought it quite as well to leave him to himself.

The judge, however, passed the compliment of asking him whether he had any more to say.

He replied in the negative.

"I quite ignore the latter part of this case," he said,

"I have made my speech for the defence, and the matter now rests awaiting the verdict of the jury."

With these words he sat down.

Mr Nuttall rose.

"Since this is the determination of my learned brother, I shall not trouble the court with my reply, but leave the case to his Lordship to sum up."

Mr Nuttall sat down.

The judge turned over his notes.

They were more than usually voluminous, and it would speak well for the clearness of his intellect if he was able to have them all in view, and give a luminous summary of the whole.

Those who had listened to the proceedings thus far felt like those who have watched at the bedside of a loved one laid prostrate with a lingering illness, and then been told that the time for the crisis had arrived, and that the patient would either recover or die.

There was no occasion, then, to call for order while the judge looked over his notes. Indeed, all were intently occupied with gazing upon his countenance, as though they could see there the shadow of coming events.

But the attempt was a futile one.

His stern face, compressed lips, and clear bright eye, were inscrutable.

At length he commenced the delivery of his address in the following terms.

His voice, when he began, was low and somewhat indistinct, so that his hearers were compelled to stretch their senses of audition to the utmost to catch at the purport of what he said.

But as he proceeded his voice grew stronger, until eventually it filled the whole of the courthouse, and every one could hear with perfect distinctness.

"Gentlemen of the jury—

"When opening their speeches, both the counsel for the prosecution and the counsel for the defence adverted to the singular nature of the case upon which you are now called upon to adjudicate.

"I cannot refrain from commencing in the same manner, and endorsing what they have said. The case is certainly a most singular one, and there is nothing in the whole course of my recollection like it.

"It is complicated, too, to a most extraordinary degree, and I much regret that so much feeling—so much romance—so much extraneous matter has been imported into it.

"The difficulty of separating the incidents is great, and that the incidents do require separation is evident, in order that some kind of clear conclusion may be come to.

"It is my duty to put the case before you in this manner, gentlemen of the jury, and if I do not properly accomplish that important duty, I hope you will do me the justice to take into consideration the perplexing character of the evidence, and the voluminousness of the notes I have been compelled to take, which conspire in a very great measure to increase the difficulty of my task.

"However, I will do the best I can, and occupy as short a space of time as I possibly can.

"In the first place, then, we have the clear evidence to show that a murder has been committed.

"The body of the murdered man has been seen and sworn to by two witnesses who ought to be relied upon. One was the daughter of the murdered man, and the other the constant and intimate companion of that daughter.

"We may then, I think, safely say that the question of the identity of the murdered man is beyond all cavil and dispute.

"And now, it having been settled who this man is, the question naturally arises, what circumstances led to his death? and by whom would the crime most likely be committed?

"With respect to the first of these questions, it has been shown you in evidence that Mr. Winberry was a gentleman residing on his own estate, which has been stated to be situated about midway between Hampstead and Hendon.

"It has also been deposed that the deceased Mr. Winberry had a brother—or rather a half-brother—named Adrian, who, it is admitted on all hands, stands at the bar of this court, in company with two other prisoners.

"It is also clear that a certain amount of ill-will or dislike subsisted between the two brothers, the cause of which hatred has been ascribed to the father's will, by which the bulk of the property, both real and personal, was left to the elder brother William, and merely an income of eight hundred pounds a year to Adrian, the younger brother.

"With the terms of this will, whether just or unjust, we have nothing whatever to do, nor does it signify whether the will was the cause of the ill-feeling, or whether the will was sufficient cause for it.

"With all this, I say, you have nothing whatever to do, so that you will bear in mind the clearly established fact that the brothers were unfriendly with each other.

"In consequence of this unfriendliness, the younger brother, Adrian, appears to have left England, and according to a statement made by his son, while under examination, took up his residence in Spain, in which country there is every reason to suppose he remained for a considerable length of time.

"At length, however, having made away with the allowance granted him, it would seem he returned to England, and sought out his brother, demanding of him some kind of pecuniary assistance, which was refused him, and the two brothers separated greater enemies than ever, Mr William Winberry strictly prohibiting his brother Adrian from entering his doors again.

"But upon the occasion of this visit, the younger brother was distinctly seen by two witnesses, who have both sworn to his identity in the most unhesitating manner.

"So far all is, I think, very straightforward and satisfactory. Unfortunately, the complications have yet to come.

"You have been told how, after these events, Blanche, the daughter of William Winberry, went out one evening for a walk in the grounds, and never returned.

"By her own evidence you have been shown that she had, by chance, made the acquaintance of the son of her father's younger brother, and that dating from the commencement of that acquaintanceship, a mutual affection sprung up between them, though this Adrian Winberry, junior, carefully concealed who he was, the probability being that had he not done so his suit would have come to an end there and then.

"The witness Blanche then related how, after parting with this secret lover, she had hastened home, when her progress was interrupted—in fine, she was carried off.

"The evidence of this witness is in very many respects most important.

"She has sworn that she was taken by her unseen and unknown abductors to a garret at the top of a house in London, where she was left alone.

"She then further affirms that the first person who came in was Adrian Winberry, her uncle. She knew him, she says, instantly, and from this it may be inferred that he presented himself before her free from any disguise.

"The object of his visit was, according to her statement, to endeavour to compel her to write a letter to her father, stating where she was, and what peril she was futurely threatened with, coupled with the request to accede to the request made by her captors.

"This, with praiseworthy firmness, the young lady refused to do, nor could any threats or arguments induce her to alter her decision. The conditions to which her father was to consent in order to procure her liberation were, that he should transfer his wealth and title to his younger brother, reserving only a sufficiency to keep them in comfort.

"This, gentlemen of the jury, must strike you as being a most monstrous proposition, and you cannot wonder if Miss Winberry resolved to suffer a great deal before she made such a request to her father; for she feared that out of his love for her, and consequent grief for her loss, he would be induced to grant the request, in order to have her restored to him, great as the sacrifice was.

"And now it must be borne in mind that the witness positively swears that she saw all three prisoners at the bar in the house in which she was confined, and her impression was that they were the tenants of it. This alone, without any additional evidence, would serve to show that the three prisoners were accomplices, and not, as stated by the counsel for the defence, perfect strangers to each other.

"But I shall shortly come to a more conclusive proof of their accomplicity, but I would wish to finish with

what I am upon. It will be presented to you in due season.

"I wish to recall to your mind that the witness states that for several days before she effected her release or escape, she was not visited by any one, so that she was in imminent danger of starvation. This points to the identity of the prisoners, because during that time they were detained in custody in Newgate."

CHAPTER CCXCVI.

THE JUDGE CONTINUES HIS DIFFICULT TASK, AND STANDS UP BOLDLY IN FAVOUR OF DICK TURPIN.

HAVING reached thus far in his summing-up, the judge paused to wipe his face, which was hot and flushed.

The spectators took advantage of the lull, and gave a sigh of relief.

Their pent-up feelings required some outvent.

But the pause which the judge made was only a momentary one, and he resumed in the following manner.

It was observed that several of the jurymen took rough notes of the principal points to which the judge directed their attention.

"Up to the present time, gentlemen, you will perceive that the inclination of the whole of the evidence is to fix the onus of the guilt upon the prisoners at the bar, who were beyond question mixed up with the affair of the abduction.

"This point being conceded, then, see how accurately the whole drift of that evidence chimes in with the other proceedings of the prisoners. I mean with reference to getting possession of the Winberry estates.

"The evidence of Mr. Adrian Winberry, junior, is only valuable for its corroborative qualities, since he can swear that Miss Blanche Winberry was found by him in such a place as she describes.

"This portion of the case, then, can, I think, be left just as it is for the present, while we turn our attention to the discovery of the murder.

"Pursford, who is a Bow-street officer of experience, has stated upon oath how he saw, on the night of the twenty-seventh of the past month, three persons cross the road and enter a house in the Birdcage-walk, which was known to him (Pursford) to be deserted and under the imputation of being haunted.

"This, gentlemen of the jury, was deemed by the officer to be a very suspicious circumstance. He saw these three men at the hour of midnight enter the empty house, and the conclusion to which he came was a very natural one, namely, that they were there after no good.

"In his evidence he states that he went up to the door and found it fast. He listened, but he could hear no sounds of any kind within. He was alone, and conceived it his best plan of action to set off immediately for assistance. He did so, and returned with several men, who had been placed by the inspecter at the police-office under his command.

"On their arrival, they gave a summons for admission in the name of the king, but at the same moment there came to their ears the sound of the report of a pistol, and this was judged sufficient to warrant them to break down the door, which they did, and then rushed into the house in a body.

"You will doubtless recollect that in his evidence he gave at length the causes which led them upstairs to the room on the second-floor, in which was found the corpse of the murdered man.

"They had also, in their ascent of the stairs, heard voices and the trampling of feet, as though those in the house had heard the approach of the police, and were seeking safety in instant flight.

"On entering the room in which the murder was committed, they saw opposite to them an open door, and through this they went in search of the murderers.

"And now, gentlemen of the jury, I wish to direct your attention very particularly to this point—the counsel for the defence having, at one time, tried to destroy the identity of the two prisoners at the bar, John Norman and Richard Sare.

"Passing through this open door, of which I spoke, and crossing another room, the police-officers came to a flight of stairs.

"These led into a passage of some kind or other, which terminated in the small plot of garden ground which lies at the rear of these houses, and is separated from the Birdcage-walk by iron palings, as I daresay many of you have seen the house in question, it having recently acquired no small share of notoriety.

"In the act of making their escape from this little piece of garden ground, the two men I have just mentioned—Norman and Sare—were captured.

"They were captured, too, by the very police-officer who has given his evidence to you. He swears, without the slightest hesitation, that the two prisoners at the bar are the same as he captured, having looked in their faces attentively both at the time of capture and also at the time of his delivery of them into the hands of the governor of Newgate.

"In the meantime, Mr Adrian Winberry had been captured and brought to Newgate.

"I do not wish to touch upon his capture now; I would much rather the circumstances attending it were considered separately.

"What I now wish to draw your attention more particularly to is this. Pursford, the officer, swears that when he took his two prisoners into the vestibule of the prison, and they caught sight of Adrian Winberry there, they, doubtless under the surprise of the moment, were incautious enough to utter cries of recognition.

"Whether the other prisoner responded to these recognitory cries is not clear.

"And now, gentlemen of the jury, I wish you to connect the several links of my evidence together.

"Miss Blanche Winberry swears that Adrian, the prisoner at the bar, came into the room in which she was confined, and made those propositions which have already been given at length.

"She also swears that the two other prisoners, Norman and Sare, appeared in the room, their errand being, as I take it, to bring her the necessaries of life.

"Now observe what Pursford, the officer, swears.

"He swears that he saw three persons enter the haunted house.

"He swears that, being directed by certain sounds and indications, he found in a room upon the second floor the body of a man who had been cruelly murdered, and the evidence given at the inquest serves to show that when the officers broke in the murder had only just been committed, and that life was scarcely extinct.

"He swears most positively to the identity of Norman and Sare, and is convinced they are the two men he captured escaping from the haunted house, and delivered into the custody of the governor of Newgate.

"Then he swears, gentlemen of the jury, and this, in my humble judgment, is a most important point, that these two prisoners recognised Mr Adrain Winberry, and appeared surprised to find him in the vestibule of the prison.

"In connexion with what I have just now stated this says a great deal, and I wish you to ponder over it while I take up another thread in this intricate affair, which I have now the strongest hopes of thoroughly unravelling.

"It unfortunately happens that the events themselves are complicated with minor and extraneous incidents, which make my task difficult to a degree.

"However, I will begin with considering the evidence of one who has come before you in a very remarkable manner—I am not afraid to say in such a manner as no witness ever before came into a court.

"You know, of course, the person to whom I allude, it being, unfortunately for him, no other than the notorious highwayman, Richard Turpin.

"The evidence he gives is all important, but before we consider the evidence itself, there are one or two things requiring your attention.

"As you have heard, the counsel for the defence strongly opposed his evidence being received at all. But though, in his capacity of highwayman, Richard Turpin stands charged with the commission of many crimes, yet he has never been convicted of any.

"But being pursued by the officers who hold a warrant for his apprehension, and having had very many narrow escapes of capture at their hands, it must follow that his apprehension would be the immediate consequence of his appearance in the witness-box to-day.

"Urged, however, by some good feeling, you see he made his way as a spectator in the body of the court. An appeal for protection was made to me on his behalf by

the counsel for the prosecution. But that appeal was quite beyond my jurisdiction. I had no power to protect the witness whatever.

"In spite, however, of this, as you saw, gentlemen of the jury, he came forward and sacrificed his own life—I say sacrificed it, for he has virtually done so, in order that justice should be done upon a daring criminal, who, by committing the revolting crime of murder, has made a happy home desolate.

"Gentlemen of the jury, the circumstances under which the witness came forward must go far to stamp all that he says with truth, and to remove the prejudice against receiving his evidence, which the counsel for the defence endeavoured to establish.

"Taking, then, into consideration all the various circumstances under which he came forward, I think, gentlemen of the jury, you cannot do wrong by receiving his evidence, and attaching that importance to it which I am sure it deserves.

"For my own part, I cannot help characterizing the conduct of this witness as noble in the highest degree, and let me ask where would another person be found to step forward boldly, as he has done, when they were perfectly assured their death would be the result.

"I may say no more. It is possible this witness, by his conduct in this matter, may endeavour to palliate his past misdeeds. How far he may succeed in any such endeavour it is difficult to say.

"There, can however, be no harm in stating that if it had laid in my power I should have allowed him free passage from the court to-day, and given him, at least, a chance for his life."

A loud cheer followed the termination of this speech, and there were very few indeed in the court who did not join in it.

The judge was, in spite of all his skill and judgment, not insensible to popular applause. Indeed, it is sweet to all, from the sovereign on the throne to the pauper in the workhouse.

The judge held up his hand for silence, but the gesture was only replied to by renewed cheering.

At length, however, by the strenuous exertions of the ushers and other officials of the court, order and silence were restored.

The judge resumed his address to the jury.

"Perhaps" he said, "you will consider I have dwelt a little too long on the point of the evidence of this witness being received. I feel that if I am understood I need go no further, simply stating that though ere now there have been many undoubted cases of a witness giving false evidence, yet I think I may make bold to say that a case was never heard of where the witness threw away his own life to do it.

"The fact of the witness being able to make his way through the crowd of officials who throng the entrances to this court without being detected speaks volumes in favour of his keeping out of the clutches of the officers if he was surrounded.

"Nevertheless, he is here! He has avowed himself, and the consequence will be that upon the termination of this trial he will be taken under the escort of the police to one of the strongest cells in Newgate.

Loud expressions of dissent from among the populace responded to this speech, which was far from being in unison with their feelings.

Unheeding it, however, the judge went on.

"Gentlemen of the jury—

"We have yet some important work to do in the shape of reviewing the case, which it is necessary to do completely. I have exceeded the limits I marked out for myself in speaking of this witness, but I will endeavour to compensate for my prolixity.

"In the first place, then, let us carefully weigh over the substance of the testimony given by Turpin, which in one part has a very remarkable connection with the accidental manner in which Adrian Winberry was taken prisoner.

"It appears, then, that on the night in question, Turpin was pursued by his foes, and took refuge in St. James's-park.

"But it seems it was not his intention to remain in the inclosure, but make his way out by one of the many gates around it without loss of time.

"When, however, near the piece of ornamental water in the centre of the park he heard some bugles blown, and doubtless from experience he knew the meaning of the signals.

"They signified, it seems, that the soldiers on duty at the different gates were not to allow any person egress from the park, which would then become a place where their prey could be speedily hunted down.

"Turpin, however, in this esperate emergency, remembers a house reputed to be haunted, situated in the Birdcage-walk, and with the determination of making his way into it, if possible, he crossed the park in that direction.

"By his own statement he succeeded in his attempt, and got into this empty house—how, does not matter. It seems he did get in.

"His next step was to ascend to the upper regions of the house, and when going up the first flight of stairs, he heard a key rattle in the lock of the front door, which was immediately opposite to him.

"And now, gentlemen of the jury, pray mark what follows, and how it coincides with the evidence given by Pursford, who is an officer well known for his skill and integrity, and whose testimony no one will attempt to controvert.

"From the outside Pursford, the officer, saw three men enter the haunted house.

"From the inside, Turpin, the highwayman, who was hiding from his foes, saw the very same thing.

"Moreover, the description given by him of the personal appearance of these three men perfectly coincides with that given by Pursford, the officer.

"But Turpin does more. He saw the faces of the three men distinctly, and he avers they are the prisoners at the bar.

"The case against two of them, then—Norman and Sare—is quite complete and conclusive. They are sworn to by Turpin, who saw their faces at the time the murder was committed; they are sworn to by Pursford, who captured them in the act of making their escape; they are sworn to by Miss Blanche Winberry as being concerned, if not in her abduction, at any rate in her imprisonment in the house in Lambeth.

"All this accumulation of testimony must, I think, leave their guilt apparent, and therefore I will say no more about them, but proceed to sum up the evidence against Adrian Winberry, the prime mover and instigator in the whole affair."

CHAPTER CCXCVII.

THE JURY HAVE SOME LITTLE DIFFICULTY IN AGREEING UPON A VERDICT.

THE judge referred to his notes again before he entered upon this the most important portion of his whole address.

It gave the jury the opportunity of whispering to each other, and commenting upon the evidence against the two prisoners.

But the judge did not stay long, for having in his own mind no doubt whatever of the guilt of the three prisoners, he was anxious to bring this very protracted case to as early a termination as possible.

He went on in the following words—

"Gentlemen of the jury,—

"In entering upon this part of the question now under consideration, I must request you to give me your earnest and undivided attention.

"I shall commence by directing your attention to what was sworn to by the witness Maud Gouldman, as being the cause which brought Adrian Winberry into contact with his elder brother William, after so many years of separation.

"She had it from the lips of William himself, who told her that Adrian, having squandered the allowance left to him by his father, had sought him out and endeavoured to extort money from him, but he refused to listen to his application.

"Then, with that on your minds, I shall direct your attention to the account which Miss Blanche Winberry gave of the interview she had with her uncle Adrian after her abduction.

"That interview was not sought, for it was thrust upon her by her uncle. She was a prisoner confined in the garret of a house stated to be situated in Lambeth. The

account she gives of her uncle's proposal is simply this: Knowing the great love her father had for her, he had torn her from him, in order thereby to achieve his ends, which now seem not merely to extort a sum of money, but the audacious idea of inducing his brother to transfer his wealth and estates to him, reserving only an income for their support, thus, indeed, totally reversing the conditions of the father's will.

"But as I have before had occasion to remark, with most praiseworthy firmness Miss Winberry refused to do this, though threats of a sufficiently terrible nature were held out to her to make her hesitate to refuse.

"She did refuse, and now connect these two together, and the motive of Adrian Winberry appears the same.

"With these two examples, however, connect the evidence given by Turpin as to what took place in the haunted house.

"You will remember in his statement he deposed to standing at the door of the room in which the interview took place, first where he could only hear what took place, and afterwards where he could both see and hear.

"The purport of what he overheard is this. Adrian Winberry was urging his brother, then a prisoner in his hands, to sign a deed, which would make over to him all his wealth and estates, with the reservation above mentioned, and in return he was to be restored to freedom himself, and his daughter Blanche given up to him and saved from some terrible fate with which she was threatened.

"Here, then, you have Adrian Winberry sworn to by three different people, and strange to say, while they each identify his personal appearance, they at the same time show him actuated by the same motives; they have all three seen him under one aspect.

"The witness Turpin deposes that he saw the three prisoners at the bar in the room in the haunted house. The light of a lantern which was placed upon the table revealed their features fully to him.

"Two—John Norman and Richard Sare—had hold of the deceased Mr. Winberry by the arms, and kept him in his seat, while the other, Adrian Winberry, pressed him by these arguments to sign the deed of transference.

"In the end his arguments prevailed, and the elder brother affixed his signature to that document.

"No sooner had he done so than, horrible to relate, upon the evidence of this witness, Adrian drew a pistol, and blew out his brother's brains.

"Then Turpin, hearing the sounds which Pursford made in breaking in, and naturally jumping to the conclusion that his pursuers had tracked him to his hiding-place, felt that his own safety demanded his first consideration; therefore he ran upstairs, and made his escape over the roof-tops.

"One of Pursford's companions has given evidence which fully bears out this portion of the witness's story, for he was the one who pursued Turpin in the upper part of the house.

"Now if there was any doubt about this deed, that doubt must be dissipated, for behold, here is the identical deed made mention of!"

As he spoke these words the judge held up the deed, of which Mr. Skinner had so unwillingly relinquished possession.

"And mark," continued the judge, "this deed is taken from one of the witnesses for the defence—not from one for the prosecution; and mark as well, that it is signed by the two prisoners, John Norman and Richard Sare, who have all along, by the evidence of other witnesses, appeared as the accomplices of Adrian Winberry.

"Gentlemen of the jury, will it please you to inspect this document?"

Thus speaking, the judge gave the deed to the usher, who passed it to the foreman of the jury.

It was handed from one to another, and carefully examined by all.

"Now this deed, it appears, by his own confession, was drawn up by one Josiah Skinner, who is now in custody upon a charge of perjury, for his evidence is nothing more than a tissue of wilful misstatements. In his cross-examination, the prosecuting counsel also elicited the fact that he had endeavoured to abate into the premises of the deceased Mr. Winberry, by the advice of his client Adrian, but that attempt, it appears, was frustrated.

"I have now to touch upon the manner in which Adrian Winberry was apprehended, which certainly furnishes one of the most remarkable exemplifications of the means which are taken by Providence to work out its ends.

"After this I shall make some remarks upon the theory set up for the defence, and then leave the case in your hands for decision.

"You must bear in mind, then, the rather peculiar aspect which St. James's-park presented upon that particular night.

"A large number of persons were searching the park in every direction, the object of their pursuit being the capture of Dick Turpin, whom they knew to have taken refuge in it.

"Besides this, the usual exits to the park were guarded by soldiers, whose orders were to allow no one to pass out.

"This state of things, however, was known to but few persons, and certainly Adrian Winberry was not one of the few who were in the secret.

"And I must remind you, gentlemen of the jury, that if Pursford, the officer, had been one moment later than he was, he would have failed to capture the two men he took into custody, for, as already stated, they were in the very act of making their escape into the park.

"And now we have only to suppose that Adrian Winberry was the first in the flight, and that he managed to get over the palings before Pursford arrived, to account for his presence in the park.

"Being here, however, his first impulse would be to make his way to one of the gates, and he appears to have made his way in a direct line to the one situate in Spring Gardens.

"Here, however, the soldier on duty, in obedience to the orders he had received, took him into custody, and, upon the others coming up, he was carried off to Newgate.

"In the vestibule of the prison, however, the mistake that had been made was discovered, and then Adrian Winberry, declaring who he was, complained bitterly of the treatment he had received, and indignantly demanded to be set at liberty.

"This demand Mr. Cawthorn, the governor, declined to accede to, and in the midst of the dispute, Pursford, the officer, arrived with his prisoners, and then, according to his evidence, the recognition took place between them.

"Now all this, as a sequel to the rest, looks very black indeed, nor does the theory of the defence at all account for it in a satisfactory manner.

"The principal evidence, indeed, is that given by Mr. Skinner, and the tendency of that evidence is to set up an *alibi*. I cannot think, however, that it has succeeded in doing this. On the contrary, his evidence is more damaging than otherwise against the prisoners.

"This, gentlemen of the jury, is as clear a statement as I can give of this extraordinarily-involved case, which, at first sight, seems to set summary at defiance.

"With respect to the defence, the counsel employed has, I think, inclined more to utter wild and insupportable statements, none of which he, or any one else, could substantiate, than to shift the guilt from the shoulders of his client or clients—for I am not clear whether he appears on behalf of one or all three of the prisoners.

"Among these random charges, the one which needs most reference is that which charges Dick Turpin with the committing of the crime which he saw committed by another.

"To charge another person with being guilty, does not have the effect of proving the innocence of another.

"In my opinion, however, the charge is utterly groundless and ridiculous, and based upon the most improbable of suppositions, and I, in my own mind, feel quite clear that the highwayman is guiltless of that one crime, at least.

"And now, gentlemen of the jury, I conclude, and it rests with you to pronounce a verdict in accordance with your convictions. If you have any reasonable doubt about the guilt of the prisoners at the bar, your consciences and your duty compel you to give them the advantage of that doubt; but if you feel assured of their guilt, then does your duty to society at large compel you to register a verdict in accordance with that conviction."

The judge sat down.

A hurst of applause greeted the termination of his address.

Considering the great length of the trial—the many and complex incidents which had been brought into it, the contradictory nature of some of the evidence, and the number of witnesses examined, he had certainly performed his onerous task with more than usual ability.

To retain all those things in the mind required a memory of no uncommon tenacity, and to produce them in a tangible shape required a clearer intellect than many could boast of possessing.

The jury conferred busily together, as though there was some diversity of opinion relative to the guilty parties.

The judge leaned back in his chair, with his eyes closed.

He was an old man, and the exertion he had been obliged to make had tried his energies greatly.

We may avail ourselves of this pause to take a glance at the different actors in this strange drama of human life.

In the first place, then, we will turn to the three prisoners at the bar.

They were ghastly pale.

On their stern-looking countenances there was no ray of hope.

With a fixed and burning gaze they glared into the jury-box, and watched the every movement of those twelve of their human beings with the same intentness as a cat will watch every movement of its intended prey.

Not a single glance—not a single motion, however slight, escaped their notice.

Their lives hung upon the next few moments.

If in the solitude of his prison-cell Adrian Winberry had been able to close his eyes to the awful nature of his position, assuredly he was not now. It must have pressed with full force upon his breast and brain.

What were his reflections, what tongue save his own could tell?

All noted, however, his awful haggard look and his bloodshot eyes, which never for a single instant wavered in their direction.

Then there was Maud Gouldman.

She was still in the same place as she had been when Blanche entered the court. She had not been able to move a step.

Her attention was divided between the prisoners, the jury, and Blanche.

And there was one other to whom she felt deeply thankful. One who but for whose aid her case would have been sad indeed. One whom she had, in spite of her better judgment, learned to like, and who had cast away his life for her sake.

At least, that was what the judge said, but she had better hopes, and visions which would never be realized passed through her mind.

Then there was Blanche.

With a beating heart and colourless cheek, she waited for the verdict.

Alas! poor girl, her troubles in life had begun early, and seemed likely to continue.

She had conceived a passion without knowing who he was—with the son of her father's murderer.

Unhappy fate!

It was impossible, she felt, that her dreams for the future should be realized.

Whether Adrian Winberry, her lover's father, was pronounced guilty or acquitted, would be all the same to her.

Alas! poor heart.

When, where, and how would her troubles cease?

Standing very near her was the object of her thoughts. His eyes were fixed upon her countenance occasionally with a mournful gaze, and then he would look up at the dock where his father stood and utter a bitter curse upon his evil fortune.

He knew the bar that now stood like a wall of adamant between his cousin and himself; he had, too, the bitter pang of knowing how greatly he had added to the unhappiness of her he loved, for he should never have introduced himself to her, or, at all events, have kept her for so long in ignorance of who he was, and won her pure first virgin love.

CHAPTER CCXCVIII.

THE JURY RETURN A VERDICT OF GUILTY AGAINST THE THREE PRISONERS, AND RICHARD SARE MAKES A CONFESSION OF HIS GUILT.

From a contemplation of these proceedings we turn to our old friend Dick Turpin.

He was far from satisfied with his position.

He was in doubt, too, how the case would terminate.

To be sure the judge had expressed his own convictions pretty plainly, but then the jury will not always be ruled by the judge. Indeed, their disposition would rather be to run counter to it.

And so Dick felt doubtful for the result, and those doubts rapidly increased when he found the length of time the conference continued.

Mr. Wriggles had passed Mr. Skinner into the custody of a brother-officer who happened to be near, while he himself kept a sharp look-out upon Dick, determined not to lose him this time, let things turn out how they would.

Dick treated his old foe in a very friendly manner, occasionally interchanging a whispered remark with him.

The hope that Turpin had hitherto entertained, namely, that the judge would interpose on his behalf, had quite left him. He saw that it was foolish to expect it.

But there was the mass of people who filled the court. They were all on his side, and had manifested their partiality several times.

Would they, then, assist him?

Would they prevent his capture by the myrmidons of the law?

He had slight hopes of that.

He knew how little dependence was to be placed upon a body of people.

And so he waited for the verdict, and for his own fate as well.

And now we think we have taken a glance at all in whom we feel any interest, without we include the counsel.

He for the defence sat down at his table, biting the feather end of a quill-pen in a rather disconsolate manner.

Mr. Nuttall had upon his thoughtful face an expression which seemed to say, I have done my duty.

Mr. John Kersey still looked on anxiously, impatient for the verdict to be given in.

But there seemed to be a discussion of some kind or other going on among the jurymen.

At length, however, they turned round, and all sat down.

The clerk of the arraigns rose, and said—

"Gentlemen of the jury, do you find the prisoners at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

There was a moment of breathless suspense.

Literally, every one seemed to hang upon the lips of the foreman of the jury.

He was a fussy, pompous little man, and seemed to be aware of the important position in which he just then stood.

He waited, then, for every noise to subside, and when a silence of several seconds' duration had prevailed, he said, in a very important tone of voice—

"Guilty!"

Again followed that same rushing sound which we have before described.

It was caused by every one in court giving a sigh of relief.

Then some one tried to get up a cheer, but the criers nipped it in the bud.

The prisoners did not by any outward sign show the effect which this verdict had had upon them.

The usual question whether they had anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon them was put.

Adrian Winberry tried to speak—to make a reply of some kind or other.

He moistened his lips, and endeavoured to clear his throat of something which seemed to be choking him.

"My lord, my lord!" he gasped, "I protest against the verdict of the jury. I am an innocent man, my lord, only the case has been placed in hands not competent for its conduction. I say I am innocent, innocent—quite innocent, and if I am hanged, I shall be a murdered man!"

A shudder ran through the court upon hearing this assertion, made at so awful a moment.

The judge looked at him sternly.

However, he did not speak.

One of the prisoners, however, was endeavouring to do so, or appeared to be, by the way in which his lips moved.

It was Richard Sare.

He was the youngest of the three, and there was not upon his countenance quite so hardened an expression as there was upon that of his companion.

The judge stooped down.

He knew for what object.

He fumbled about, and at length from a drawer in the pedestal before him, produced that ominous thing the black cap.

Dread, horrible, yet significant memento of past times, when the administration of justice was accompanied with very many more forms than it is now.

As he held this cap in his hand, then, previous to placing it upon his head, he saw that Richard Sare seemed about to speak.

He paused in what he was about, and asked the question—

"Have you anything you wish to say, prisoner?"

"I have, my lord."

"Say on, then."

The judge put his cap down on the top of the pedestal.

The moment Sare spoke, Adrian Winberry turned round like lightning.

He seemed to read the intention of his accomplice in iniquity in his face.

Uttering a howl of rage, he sprang forward past Norman and clutched him by the throat with so violent a grip that his fingers were almost imbedded in the flesh.

Sare fell down with his antagonist upon him.

A shriek arose in the court, and then a scene of the most awful imaginable confusion ensued.

So suddenly did all this take place.

So totally unexpected was the murderer's attack that the jailers who stood in the dock to keep watch over the prisoners were thoroughly taken by surprise.

Recovering themselves from their shock of astonishment, they threw themselves upon the struggling men, and endeavoured to separate them.

After several fruitless attempts they succeeded.

Adrian Winberry seemed to divine the intention of his accomplice, and resolved to prevent him from carrying it into execution if possible.

But the jailers tore him from his prey, though not until he had almost strangled him.

Then, livid with rage, he was forced to stand up in the dock, held firmly in the grasp of two men.

A universal cry of execration greeted him the moment the people caught sight of him, and several missiles were thrown.

More dead than alive, Richard Sare was sat up in a chair.

Meanwhile, the confusion and turmoil in the body of the court increased rather than subsided.

The judge rose.

In a voice that made itself heard above every other sound, he cried—

"Unless there is instant silence, clear the court. Clear it, let the consequences be what they may, unless there is immediate and total silence! Clear the court!"

There was no doubt about the speaker being fully in earnest in what he said.

The desire to hear the termination of the trial triumphed over that to create a disturbance, and the people, one and all, became silent instantly.

Not even a murmur rose.

In the meantime some pungent essence had been held to the nostrils of the man Sare, and he had recovered somewhat.

His first act upon regaining his consciousness was to look where Adrian was standing, and when he saw his foe so well guarded he seemed to take heart.

He rose from the chair, and assisted by two of the turnkeys, stood at the front of the dock.

All could see where the talon-like fingers of Adrian Winberry had actually infixed themselves into the flesh, and tiny streams of blood trickled from several wounds.

The attack which had been made upon his life was a sudden and desperate one, and it is much to be wondered at that it did not succeed.

"You were going to speak," said the judge, "were you not?"

"I was, my lord."

"Speak now, then."

"I wanted to make a clean breast of all this business, and I suppose Mr. Adrian guessed it, and thought to stop my voice."

"It is the most outrageous thing I ever heard of, but before you proceed to make any confession let me give you a word or two of warning. You must not forget that you have been pronounced guilty of murder by the verdict of twelve of your countrymen, and nothing now can reverse that verdict. If, however, you like to make any statements to the court you are at liberty to do so, but you must distinctly understand that nothing you can say will have a mitigatory effect upon the sentence I am about to pronounce upon you, nor can I hold out any hopes of your obtaining a commutation of that sentence."

The prisoner hesitated.

"I cannot make my situation worse by telling you what I know; can I, my lord?"

"Certainly you cannot; and if you confess your guilt you will take away any doubt there may be upon our minds as to the justice of the decision we have come to."

"I will tell you what I know, my lord; and I hope you will try to do what you can for me. You must know that about two months ago, or it may be more, Mr. Adrian Winberry came to my house in Fore-street, Lambeth, and said he had work for me to do, if I was in the humour to do it."

"How came he to know your address?"

"He had it from Mr. Josiah Skinner, my lord. Mr. Skinner recommended me to him."

"Oh! indeed. Then it seems Mr. Skinner has taken a greater part in this business than I had expected. Officers, look well to him. You have him already in custody."

Mr. Skinner's face changed to the colour of some old parchment deed which had not seen daylight for a hundred years or so.

But he made no struggle.

He had not the courage to make an attempt to preserve his own life.

The judge looked at Sare to continue.

"It's no good for me to deny it, my lord. We came to terms together, and he engaged my mate as well, who lived in the same house with me, and promised to reward us well if we would be faithful to him."

"Well?"

"Our first business was to lay in wait for Miss Blanche Winberry, and carry her off to London. We were to keep her locked up securely in the attic during the pleasure of our employer."

"And this you did?"

"Yes, my lord; we caught her in the shrubbery, as she herself says, by throwing a cloak over her head, and carrying her to a carriage. Then we drove to London."

"Go on."

"But the scheme did not seem to succeed so well as was anticipated, and another was to be tried; so me and my mate had another journey down to the hall, and, spying our opportunity, we made Mr. William Winberry a prisoner, and carried him off as well!"

"Did you take him to your house in Lambeth?"

"No, my lord; that was not judged prudent! Mr. Skinner suggested that Mr. Winberry should be taken to the haunted house in Birdcage-walk, of which he had the key, and confined there until such time as they thought fit to set him free."

"Had you, then, no idea that the unfortunate gentleman was brought to that lonely house in order to be murdered?"

"None whatever, my lord; I never dreamt such a thing as murder was intended, or I should not have had anything to do with it. When Mr. Winberry was a prisoner we paid several visits to him, and each time Mr. Adrian pressed him to sign a deed making over the property to him."

"Stop a bit. You signed that deed, did you not?"

"I did, my lord, and so did my mate. We were only to witness it. Well, sir, on the night of the twenty-seventh of the last month, we three all went to the haunted

house, and not dreaming we were watched, or that there was any one in the house, we went into the room where the prisoner was, and, as I now recollect, leaving the door ajar. The lantern was put down on the table. Me and my mate had hold of the gent by his arms, while Mr. Adrian put the deed down on the table, and asked him to sign it. At last the old chap did as he was asked, and then I thought Mr. Adrian would be satisfied, and that he had got what he wanted, but all at once he whipped a pistol out of his pocket, and before I knew what he intended to do, he fired it, and his brother lay dead on the floor!"

The auditors of this awful tale could not refrain from a groan upon hearing this horrible statement of a cold-blooded and heartless murder.

But, at a sign from the judge, the prisoner continued—

"At the moment the pistol was fired, we heard some heavy blows struck upon the front door, and we dreaded capture. Mr. Adrian told us to follow him, and that we should be all right. We were horror-struck about the murder, and spoke to him, but he cursed us for a reply, and went out of the room. I spoke to my mate, and then hearing some one coming, we thought we had better fly with all speed, which we did, but we were too late. We were captured in the garden, and brought prisoners to Newgate, and when we got there who should we find but Mr. Adrian. Of course we spoke to him, but he looked terribly angry, and made on as though he did not know us. We were all locked up, and the next day Mr. Skinner came to see us, and he said he would get us out of all the trouble if we would do as he told us, which we promised to do. Then he said we were to make on as though we did not know Mr. Adrian, but to say it was a mistake, and that we were strangers to the man who had hired us, and that we had no idea murder was meant, so we did as he told us."

"And that is a plain statement of the case, is it?"

"It is, my lord. I am ready to take my oath of it at any moment."

"Very well. Have you anything more to say?"

"No, my lord, except that neither me nor my mate knew that Mr. Adrian meant murder, and it was done so quickly there was no time for us to prevent it."

"Does your mate, as you call your fellow-prisoner, agree to the truth of what you have just said?"

"I don't know whether he will confess, my lord."

"Yes, my lord, I confess," said John Norman, "and I hope as how we shall be leniently dealt with. I am ready to take my Bible oath at any minute, that what my mate has said is quite true in every respect."

CHAPTER CCXCIX.

THE JUDGE PASSES SENTENCE OF DEATH UPON THE PRISONERS, AND MAKES AN APPEAL TO THE JURY ON BEHALF OF DICK TURPIN, WHO IS, HOWEVER, CONFINED IN A CELL IN NEWGATE.

THE judge drew on the black cap.

The task he now had to perform was one from which any one would shrink.

But now that the prisoners had confessed, and added their testimony to that which had been given by the other witnesses, agreeing as it did in almost every particular, his duty was less responsible and disagreeable.

Still, it is an awful thing for one human being to doom three of his fellow-creatures to death, no matter what the circumstances may be, nor how imperatively their deaths should be called for.

In those days, however, so much was not thought of hanging a man as there is now. In the good old times, as some call them, there was always a gaping, riotous, disorderly throng round Tyburn-tree, and they were pretty sure of being presented with two or three trembling wretches, if not more.

This judge, however, as the reader cannot have failed to see by his conduct, was a man somewhat in advance of his time. He had enlightened thoughts, and took a more comprehensive view of things in general than was usual at that time.

His voice lacked firmness when he spoke, and all in the court could see the extent of his emotion.

He spoke as follows.

But, low as his voice was, there was not in all the court a single person who did not hear distinctly every word he said.

"Prisoners at the bar,—

"You have been tried by a jury of your countrymen, and have been by them decreed guilty, and I have now to conclude these proceedings by passing the last sentence of the law upon you.

"Prisoners at the bar,—You have had a long and patient trial. Every circumstance connected with the horrible tragedy of which you are decreed guilty has been carefully weighed and examined. With the justice of the verdict which the jury has returned, I may say I fully and cordially agree, more especially as since that verdict has been recorded two of you have made confessions of your guilt. The mere fact of your having done so has taken a great load off my mind, and so it must have done to the jury themselves. The painful duty I have to perform is materially lightened, and I shall have less compunction in passing sentence upon you.

"But first, I feel it to be my duty to animadvert upon the conduct of you, Adrian Winberry. The part that you have all through played in this dark drama is such as to make you hated and detested of all men. You have no excuse to make for your monstrous villainy. It appears, upon credible evidence, that you were left by your father an income quite sufficient to keep you in comfort, if not in luxury. But you thought fit to squander that income in extravagances, and then sought to extort money from your brother. Many events have been hinted at by the witnesses as to what took place at the time of your father's death, which show you in anything but a favourable light. With those events, however, we have, of course, nothing to do.

"Situated as we are with respect to yourself, it is impossible for us to say what were your intentions when you first mooted the question of money to your brother, nor are we in a position to say what passed between you on that occasion. A witness states, however, that the reason your wishes were not complied with was solely owing to the manner in which the demand was made.

"It may be that up to that time you had formed no designs upon your brother's life. It may be that during that very interview something took place or was said which roused your hatred against him. But let that be how it may, you sought to break his heart by carrying off his daughter. What were your intentions with respect to her it is out of my power to say, and perhaps always will be. Not content with this, however, you carried off the father, and confined him in a gloomy and terrible prison-house—a place which would be most calculated to exercise an effect upon the mind of the person confined in it. Then, by specious arguments, you won him to your purpose, and the deed was signed, entitling you to possess all you coveted. One would have thought that would have satisfied you, but so far from doing so, you murdered him in cold blood. Oh! it was an awful crime; so awful that the watchful eye of providence would not allow it to go unpunished. When any one begins to think of the peculiar position of affairs on that night, and the extraordinary manner in which you were captured, no one can help being struck with admiration at the manner in which one circumstance hinges upon the other. The avenging spirit was behind you, and drove you onwards blindly to destruction.

"Your crimes have been brought to light, and are about to receive their punishment. For yourself not one word in the shape of palliation can be said—there is nothing to excuse you in the least. Murder comprehends under its name various ways of taking life. The life may be taken in a moment of passion under circumstances of the utmost provocation. But you cannot plead either of these. Yours was long premeditated. That is established by the manner in which the murder was committed. You had resolved that so soon as he signed that document he should die. When your brother took the pen in his hand, yours, beneath your cloak, grasped the butt end of a pistol. You held it in your hand in such a manner as to produce it in an instant. You did so, and your brother's brains were scattered on the floor. Oh! it is a crime so horrible as to send a chill of horror through the blood of the most callous. In speaking of this fiendish crime, well could I say, in the words of one to whom the human heart and all the feelings that swayed it were laid open like a book, well could I say with him—

"Murder most foul, as in the best it is,
But this most foul, strange, and unnatural."



[BLANCHE WINBERRY AND MAUD GOULDMAN VISIT DICK TURPIN IN HIS CELL.]

it is a description that fully agrees with the one of which you have been found guilty. To slay a brother—to commit fratricide—to commit the crime for which Cain suffered—is indeed most unnatural under any circumstances, and most foul under the circumstances in which you slew your brother.

"Prisoners at the bar, for none of you can I hold out the slightest hope of mercy. Yet two of you, having made the confession you have, may be entitled to some commutation. But it is not for me to hold out any hopes to you. The sentence of this court upon all three of you is, that you be taken from the dock at which you stand to the place from whence you came, and from thence to the place of public execution, there to be hanged by the neck until you be dead, and may the Lord in his goodness show that mercy to your souls which we are forbidden to show to your bodies."

With these impressive words the judge concluded his remarks.

They were followed by an intense silence, for no one after those awful words seemed to have the power of speech and motion.

But the turnkeys were the first to move.

They tapped their prisoners upon the shoulders to intimate to them that they were to prepare to go.

But the judge held up his hand for silence, and then it became evident that he had something more to say.

He turned towards the jury-box and said—

"Gentlemen of the jury—

"Before I dismiss you from your seats, I must crave your attention to some little matters connected with the trial which is just concluded.

"The first concerns Mr. Josiah Skinner, who states himself to be an attorney-at-law, though I hope, for the credit of the legal profession generally, that statement may be found to be untrue.

"I have ordered him to be taken into custody.

"From the evidence laid before us, it appears pretty clearly that he was an accessory to all that has taken place. Perhaps much of it may be due to his instigation

still, I think I have ample grounds for committing him to take his trial."

The foreman of the jury nodded his head.

The officers tightened their grasp upon Mr. Skinner.

The judge continued.

"The next point upon which I wish to address you is that of one of the witnesses for the prosecution, who came forward in a very singular manner and under very extraordinary circumstances to give his evidence.

"Of course, gentlemen of the jury, I allude to no other person than the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin.

"It is not, I imagine, necessary for me to dwell upon the manner in which he entered the witness-box.

"But as he lies open to the charge which my learned brother for the defence has brought against him, I think it will be best for me to revert to his behaviour on the present occasion.

"Above all ought these facts to be borne in mind.

"He is a highwayman, and an offender against the laws, for which reason one would scarcely look to find in him any of the virtues and refined feelings which might be expected from one holding a respectable position in society.

"But, nevertheless, let that be as it may, it seems there are certain ranks and differences in crime, and that there are some of so atrocious a character as to fill the mind of a highwayman with horror.

"And if you will all bear in mind, though the fact ought not to be admitted in extenuation or palliation of their deeds, it is, however, certain that a certain degree of romantic generosity is always ascribed to knights of the road, as they are popularly called.

"For the moment, I cannot recall an instance in which a case has been brought before me of a highwayman committing any further offence against the person than that of robbery, and during the evidence the defending counsel has always elicited that the robbery was unaccompanied with any violence whatever.

"From this it would not be going too far to infer that there exists in the breasts of these depredators generally a kind of wild, lawless, chivalric spirit, such as might have belonged to the knights errant of the middle ages, between whom and the knights of the road of our own day there is less difference than many people imagine.

"Such, then, being the case, it is not difficult to believe that Dick Turpin, highwayman as he is, was horror-struck when he saw the atrocious crime committed in the manner which has been described to you in evidence.

"Some concatenation of events, unnecessary to be described here, brought him, it seems, into contact with the members of the family of the murdered man.

"He would see their grief and the unutterable woe which the mysterious disappearance of the head of the house would cause in the hearts of all his descendants.

"Then he would know that he alone was a witness of the awful crime—that his evidence alone could complete the conviction of the murderers.

"But how was he to come forward?

"Too well would he be aware that a price was set upon his head, that the officers of the law were in search of him, and that, if he disclosed himself, his capture and incarceration would inevitably follow.

"But we see that this all-important consideration did not triumph over his desire to do justice to the family of the murdered man, and accordingly he has stood before us to-day in his true character, and stated upon oath all the particulars with which he was acquainted.

"And let not too light a value be set upon his coming forward.

"By some it will be urged that he could not have escaped apprehension, but that I beg leave to doubt.

"It is a matter of notoriety and public comment that, for a very long time past, all efforts which have been made to take him into custody have proved unsuccessful.

"And from one little event which has happened in connexion with his presence in this court, I am inclined to infer that all attempts would have been equally unsuccessful for a long time to come.

"The fact to which I allude is this.

"To-day being a day appointed for trial, this court-house and all the passages contiguous to it are thronged with spectators and officials belonging not only to Newgate, but the various police-officers.

"Such being the case, then, who would for a moment have thought it possible that Dick Turpin, the well-known highwayman, should, undisguised, have made his way in with the rest, unrecognised and undetected.

"This, in my judgment, speaks volumes in favour of the supposition that for a length of time to come he would have been successful in defying capture by the police.

"For my own part, it seems impossible for any one to have been single-minded enough to have acted in the manner in which he has acted.

"That he should expect some consideration to be shown him is, I think, only natural; and I much regret that it is not in my power to hold out protection to him—but I am powerless to do so.

"Nor by a detractor could it be said that he came here ignorant of the consequences to himself.

"He was in the court and was expressly warned before he came forward as a witness what would be the certain consequence of his doing so.

"But this did not have the effect of keeping him back or of causing him even to hesitate.

"He gave his evidence clearly and satisfactorily, and the moment he stepped out of the witness-box he was arrested by an officer of police, in whose custody he still remains.

"And now I wish to refer to the charge which has been brought against him by the counsel for the defence.

"He broadly and unconditionally accuses him of having committed the murder himself.

"But, gentlemen of the jury, a moment's consideration will be sufficient to convince you of the utter absurdity of this accusation.

"It seems impossible to all of you, I am sure, that any one could have acted in the manner in which I have described Dick Turpin acting.

"But if this is your opinion, should you not think it more impossible still—admitting for a moment that impossibility admits of comparison—I say, gentlemen of the jury, should you not have considered it still more impossible for a man placed as Dick Turpin is to commit a murder and then come into the witness-box at the sacrifice of his own life, in order to give false witness against another?

"The one case I have put to you can be ascribed to a kind of romantic chivalrousness, but the other is totally beyond all the bounds of sense and reason.

"What my learned friend the counsel for the defence will bring forward in support of his accusation it is not for me to say; but if the charge was, as I expect, brought forward without anything to substantiate it, I should recommend him to withdraw his accusation before the matter proceeds any further."

CHAPTRE CCC.

THE PEOPLE IN THE COURT MAKE AN UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORT TO RESCUE DICK TURPIN.

THERE was a faint hum of approval from the body of the people in the court when his lordship thus spoke, and all looked curiously towards the counsel for the defence in order to see what notice he would take of the appeal.

He rose to his feet and the judge remained silent, in order to afford him an opportunity to speak.

"My lord," he said, "since you have been pleased to allow me a chance to retract what I have said, I beg to take it, and therefore say, once and for all, that I individually draw back from the accusation."

The counsel sat down.

His lordship resumed his remarks.

"I think you have acted very wisely. And now, gentlemen of the jury, I will not detain you above a moment longer.

"Dick Turpin is now free from the charge of the murder of Mr. William Winberry, but I have yet a word or two more to say respecting him.

"It was not solely with a view of allowing my learned brother for the defence an opportunity of retracting his charge that I addressed myself to you.

"This highwayman has rendered signal service to society at large by the manner in which he has acted in this trial, and has set an example worthy to be followed.

"Under such circumstances, then, I think some steps ought to be taken in his behalf. I, for my own part, shall interest myself to the utmost in his favour, and all that I can do, I may safely say, shall be done. I trust my example

will be followed by all those who have taken an active part in to-day's proceedings."

Another round of applause, which made the roof of the court ring again, followed this speech.

The judge continued.

"At present I have no alternative but to leave him in the hands of the officer who has taken him into custody, and I think it will not be out of place to give him a few words of advice as to the manner in which he conducts himself."

Then, looking at Dick, and addressing himself more particularly to him, he went on—

"Let me advise you," he said, "to make no resistance. Such a proceeding could not possibly be attended with any good results, or I should be the first to countenance it, for your behaviour has filled me, if no one else, with the utmost admiration. Submit quietly. You will be taken to a cell in Newgate, but that you must put up with. While you are there, I trust you will create no disturbance, and rest assured that every exertion will be made to obtain some amount of leniency from the crown on your behalf.

"I cannot promise anything, however. The jury I have retained in their seats, in the endeavour to interest them on your behalf also. And, now, attend to my last words. Do nothing to aggravate the charges which have been made against you. Remain for awhile passive, until you learn that the exertions made for you have proved unavailing."

Dick bowed to indicate his consent to what the judge had just said.

"I have now a few words to say to those who have met here to-day as spectators and auditors of this strange trial.

"Throughout the course of the investigation I have noticed that you have all greeted the witness of whom I have been speaking with a considerable degree of favour.

Whenever you saw an opportunity of applauding him, you seized upon it, in defiance of the rules and regulations of this court.

"This breach of the peace, however, we will pass over, and come to the point upon which I wish to address you.

"From the manifestations spoken of, it has occurred to me as not being unlikely that you would not think it right for this witness to be detained a prisoner, and that consequently you would attempt his rescue.

"For the sake, not only of him, but also of yourselves, let me intreat you not to make an attempt to interpose between the law and its victim.

"If you, however, persist in making the attempt, you will be sure to be defeated, and not only will you accomplish no good in that way, but you will also render nugatory those efforts which I have pledged myself to make.

"Therefore, leave this court in peace and quietness, even as you entered it, and if any of you have decided upon the rash undertaking, rescind that decision ere any harm be done."

As the judge concluded these words, he leaned back again in his chair.

Just for about a moment no one in the court moved hand or foot.

Then the jury, no doubt glad enough to be released from their protracted sitting, got up and proceeded to leave the box.

Next the turnkeys took away the three prisoners in the dock.

A few persons noticed that, while attention was attracted by these movements, the judge hastily wrote something on a slip of paper, and passed it to Mr. Wriggles.

That worthy functionary, as soon as he received it, nodded his head with a pompous air.

Then he whispered to Dick—

"Step this way His lordship wishes to speak to you."

What could Dick do but obey this mandate?

The judge had certainly throughout behaved in a most considerate manner towards him, and it would have looked very ungrateful to have refused so slight a request.

Immediately upon passing the note, the judge retired to the little room immediately behind him, admittance to which was gained by a heavy curtain.

Dick did not for a moment hesitate to accompany Mr. Wriggles.

The distance they had to go was short.

Therefore, almost before any one perceived the movement, he was out of sight, for, as soon as the curtain was raised and he passed through, it was allowed to fall into its proper place again.

The people in the court had not offered to stir.

Had it not been for the last words the judge had uttered, they would assuredly have one and all sprang forward to the rescue of our hero.

As it was, they were undecided and hung back, pondering the while on what had been said to them.

And it was during this momentary indecision that Dick passed out of their sight.

Then some one among the crowd cried—

"Hurrah for Dick Turpin, and down with the police! Fetch him out, friends! Never mind what the judge says; he isn't king. We won't have the bold highwayman scragged! Three cheers, mates, for Dick Turpin, and then we will set him free!"

The three cheers were given with startling effect, and then, like a mighty torrent, the crowd pushed forward.

But it was in vain they surged to and fro. They found themselves everywhere opposed by the officers, who poured into the crowded space from every imaginable point.

A furious contest ensued.

Then one or two of the populace, more daring than the rest, sprang on to the judge's bench.

They were soon followed by others.

Then, with a dash, they reached the curtain.

One hasty snatch, and it lay in a mass at their feet.

There was nothing now to bar their entrance to the little room.

They dashed into it.

But to their astonishment and dismay, the place was empty.

Not a soul was in it.

There was a small arched door opposite to where they entered, and towards this they made a rush as soon as they realized that Dick had really gone.

It was fast.

But that was an obstacle that they resolved to overcome.

They made a simultaneous dash at it.

There was a creak and a crash, and then the door gave way.

It opened into a narrow arched passage, and the first discovery the mob made after the door was broken down was that this passage was literally choked up with officers, who did not wait to be attacked, but pressed forward to disperse the mob.

But this was not so easily done.

Mobs are obstinate.

And especially so when they are opposed.

Now all this opposition which they had already met with only served to stimulate them to an extraordinary degree, and they were more than ever determined to accomplish their object.

But there seemed little hope of success.

The numbers of the police kept continually augmenting.

Some of them, too, adopted a rather novel and curious, but very effective, method of clearing the court.

These were the officers who stood nearest the doors.

Their plan was this.

They would make a dart into the court, and seize some individual and drag him out.

Then he was handed to another and another, through numerous passages, until he suddenly found himself propelled into the Old Bailey.

It was really wonderful to see with what expedition this was performed.

To be sure, only one was taken out at a time, and a great many ones filled the court, but then the process was prosecuted with so much rapidity that its effects very soon became perceptible.

Then those officers who were in the passage, pressing forward in a phalanx, soon forced those who were in the judge's private room out on to the bench again, and off the bench into the court.

Here, however, the mob made a bold and determined stand, resolved not to give up the accomplishment of their purpose without one more struggle.

The scene that ensued baffles description.

Mingled with the mob were many who took no part in their disorderly proceedings, but who, nevertheless, suffered severely from them.

From these arose loud shrieks and cries as the mob fought.

Among them might be counted several with whom the reader is acquainted.

For instance, Blanche Winberry and her lover and Maud Gouldman, as well as Mr. Nuttall and Mr. Kersey.

They were all inextricably involved in the general confusion—for what chance did they have of leaving the court?

It was in vain they tried to maintain a stand or a position in one place—the effort was altogether a useless one. They were drifted hither and thither with the crowd.

The pressure at times was fearful.

And still the infuriated people fought manfully with the police, although they could not gain any possible advantage either to themselves or any one else by so doing.

With an exertion of considerable strength and agility, young Adrian Winberry, who had never left the side of Blanche for a single moment, climbed up into the jury-box.

This was a place of refuge.

If he could manage to get Blanche there, she would be perfectly safe.

He held down his arms, therefore, and the instinct of preservation made the poor girl seize his hands.

She took a firm hold, and then, to his infinite joy, Adrian succeeded in drawing her fairly into the jury-box, and placing her on one of the seats.

Then he held down his arms for Maud, who was clinging with all the desperation which despair and terror could give her to the woodwork.

Mr. Nuttall was near her.

It was observable that from the first commencement of the disturbance he had left his seat at the table and placed himself beside her, shielding her as much as he was able from the rude assaults of the crowd.

And now, when he saw what young Adrian Winberry was about, and that the jury-box would be a place of security, he raised Maud in his arms and assisted her to reach the young man.

In another moment she was beside Blanche and in safety.

The mob still continued its vain efforts.

The people who composed it were wound up to the utmost desperation, and they were quite blind and heedless of what they were about.

The police-officers, however, who were armed with staves, laid about them in good earnest.

But the numbers were too great for them to be able even by this means to make a rapid impression.

Every movable article within the place was overturned.

The benches and seats were broken up to fragments, and were either hurled about the room or used as weapons for defence.

Officers and people were struck to the ground every moment, and the dismal groans they uttered, and the shrieks and yells which came from their lips, all combined to make this terrible scene still more horrible.

It might have been that Dick took it as a demonstration of popular feeling on his behalf, but the worst of it was it offered him no advantage.

At length, however, the officers succeeded in quelling the disturbance, and the ringleaders of the riot were taken into custody.

The others, who were unwounded, made their escape in the best way they could.

Then all that remained were the wounded on the floor, who were unable to crawl away.

The police achieved a victory, but not without a very severe struggle.

When the court was clear, Maud and Blanche expressed their wish to leave it.

Young Adrian Winberry, who looked really heart-broken, went to the door of the jury-box, and, opening it, allowed them to pass out.

Mr. Nuttall and Mr. Kersey were there waiting to receive them.

Blanche was very pale.

She was terrified by the awful scene of tumult which she had just witnessed, and could not control her agitation.

As she passed him, Adrian just bowed to her, and that was all.

He did not descend himself.

Blanche appeared scarcely conscious of it.

Mr. Kersey offered her his arm, and Mr. Nuttall offered his to Maud.

Thus escorted they made their way out of the court.

Mr. Kersey hailed a hackney coach, and directed the driver to take the whole party to his house in Red Lion-square.

They reached this place in safety, and, having paused a little while to rest and refresh themselves, Shockley was called, and the carriage brought to the door.

Mr. Kersey undertook to see to all future matters, and to communicate all he heard from time to time to them.

With this understanding they parted.

Shockley drove direct to the Hall.

Inside the carriage Blanche Winberry and Maud Gouldman sat clasping each other's hands.

Scarcely in all the world could have been found two sadder hearts than theirs.

Both were weeping.

Weeping silently, and for different causes.

Neither had the power to address the other.

And so, in silence and in tears, they leaned back in the carriage as it rolled upon its way towards the Hall.

Here for the present we must leave them, but, ere long, we shall return, for this strange episode in the life of our hero is not yet over.

These two young girls, now so doubly left alone, will be again introduced to the reader under circumstances both strange and perilous.

It is hoped that an interest is felt in their varying and cruel fortunes.

Alas! that it should be so; their troubles are not over yet.

CHAPTER CCCI.

DICK TURPIN IS LEFT IN THE CELL TO MEDITATE UPON HIS PROSPECTS AND POSITION.

LEAVING, then, these two fair and unhappy girls to continue their journey towards their desolate home, we will return to Dick Turpin, and relate what took place after his obeyal of the request made by the judge.

Dick assented to it without hesitation, because, from the whole tenor of his words and actions, he could tell that his lordship was favourably disposed towards him, and that he had nothing to fear in the shape of treachery and harm from him.

Therefore Turpin followed Mr. Wriggles very willingly.

The distance he had to go was very short. A dozen steps, indeed, brought him to the curtain, which served the purpose of a door.

It was drawn aside, and he entered with his captor.

He found himself face to face with the judge, who was standing with one arm resting upon the back of a chair of elaborate and antique workmanship.

Besides himself, there was only one person in the room.

That was Mr. Cawthorn, the governor of Newgate.

As the reader knows, this worthy had filled the office he now held for a limited time only.

Upon the occasion of the suspension of Mr. Tapner, owing to the extraordinary behaviour of that intemperate individual while Tom King was in custody, it will be recollected he was placed in the situation temporarily, during the inquiry which was made into Mr. Tapner's conduct.

That investigation, however, terminated in the way in which it ought to have terminated.

Mr. Tapner was dismissed.

The next step, of course, was to appoint a new and permanent governor in his stead.

Applications were numerous, but owing to the influence he had with those in whom the appointment rested, Mr. Cawthorn gained the situation, and he had ever since retained it.

There was nothing particular to be said against him. He was a stern, strict man, but yet not unjustly rigorous towards the prisoners under his care.

They were, however, well looked after, and every precaution was taken in order to prevent them making their escape.

Indeed, Mr. Cawthorn is fairly entitled to the credit of

being one of the very first governors who made an attempt to reclaim the abuses of Newgate, which had hitherto enjoyed unchecked growth.

Mr. Cawthorn, then, and the judge were the only two persons present in the little ante-chamber when Turpin entered.

He made a profound bow to the judge, for he could not help feeling a respect for him.

His lordship kindly returned the salutation, and then said—

"Turpin, I have sent for you here in order that you might quietly surrender up yourself, and be taken to your cell. I more than anticipate some misguided attempt to rescue you may be made by your friends in the court. I should be glad to avoid it, if I could, and I trust you will assist me. If those without do attempt your rescue, they cannot succeed, so strong is the muster of police-officers assembled within these walls to-day. Your capture is inevitable; therefore, take my advice—give in quietly. Not only would all the resistance you could make prove futile, but it would be offensive to me. I do not like to say too much of myself, but still, as you must know well enough, I have power and influence. I will give you my word to exert both of them to the utmost in your behalf; I will promise that your conduct in this day's affair shall be represented in the proper quarter in a proper light. Nothing shall be overlooked. I consider myself bound to do this for the manner in which, up to the present time, you have behaved. I give you now into the hands of Mr. Cawthorn. He is already acquainted with all the particulars, and, moreover, knows what my intentions are. Therefore, from him you may expect to receive nothing but proper treatment. Accompany him. He will place you in a cell, but his duty compels him to do that. Your stay in it, however, I hope will be brief; and now, farewell; I hope you understand all that I have said, and I further hope that you will not mar what I am doing in your behalf by any injudicious attempt to escape from your confinement."

"I am deeply indebted to your lordship," said Dick; "I feel it better than I can express it. I will carefully attend to all your wishes; not one of them shall be disobeyed. More than once I have said that I would never yield myself a prisoner with life—that I would never be taken except in death; but I feel these circumstances are so exceptional, that I should be justified in foregoing that determination; and therefore, my lord, I am quite willing to do all that you request."

The judge was pleased with this reply, and made a sign to Mr. Cawthorn, which that individual immediately understood.

He came close up to Dick and said—

"I am ready. Follow."

Dick readily complied, for he judged it was the best policy to do so.

Mr. Wriggles, however, with a rather puzzled expression upon his countenance, kept close by his side, determined not to lose sight of him until he was safely placed in a cell.

If Dick had tarried a moment longer than he had, the people would have forced themselves upon him at the interview.

As it was he got out just in time.

The door was closed.

The passage filled up with officers.

The judge accompanied the procession a little way down the passage, and then he turned off to the left.

The governor of Newgate, Mr. Wriggles, some few turnkeys, and Dick Turpin took the high-road to the cells.

Mr. Cawthorn was pleased immensely to think he had at last got the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin, in custody.

Accordingly, he strutted on before in the most pompous manner conceivable.

No fetters of any description were placed upon Dick, and during their progress to the cells, Mr. Wriggles chose to make a remark about it.

"Ah! Dick," he said, "you are a lucky fellow. You are inside Newgate at last, but it's without any bother, and without any jewelry upon your person. Ah! well, it isn't every highwayman that has the head beak on his side. But I am afraid you have done too much to get off very easily, but still it can be tried."

"So it can," replied Dick, "but, as I said just now, I should never have yielded myself up under other circumstances, for I had made up my mind to fight to the last, and never to give in till death."

"You are a brave chap, Dick, and I like you."

"Like me?"

"I do, I do. I wish all was like you. But some do not. They talk about the time coming when there will be no highwaymen, but, if it does, what will the officers have to do?"

"Ah! what indeed? I never thought of that before."

"Very likely not. But, thank goodness, that event is not very likely to take place, either in your time or mine, so leave it, I say, for those who come after us."

Dick was silent.

But Mr. Wriggles went on—

"Dick, you're a trump. A regular trump. The more I think, the more I think so, and, if you come to grief, it will break my heart, there now."

"Silence," said Mr. Cawthorn, coming to a halt. "Smithson, where are you?"

"Here, sir."

"Open this door."

"Yes, sir."

The door to which the governor was alluding, was a massive-looking one, deeply set in the wall.

There were others of a similar kind beyond it.

Smithson was the name of one of the turnkeys.

He took from his pocket a huge bunch of keys, and, applying one of them to the door, opened it.

The whole party walked in.

As Dick had expected, the door led into a cell.

It was a large one, and doubtless, for a cell, very comfortable.

The last rays of daylight found their way into it when they entered, and allowed Dick the opportunity of seeing what his prison was like.

The first glance did not prepossess him.

But scarcely had he betaken that glance, than the daylight which had illumined the cell faded away.

Immediately it became involved in obscurity.

"My orders," said Mr. Cawthorn, "are that I should not place any fetters upon you."

Dick bowed.

"But I think you ought not to be left thus. Still, will you give me your word of honour that you will not attempt to escape?"

"What I said to the judge I will certainly stick to," replied Dick; "and, as for asking me for any more, it's no good at all."

"Very well—very well. I know what that means. I have received instructions not to put any irons upon you, and don't choose to disobey it. But, for all that, I shall take a few precautions of a different kind to make sure you do not escape."

"That you are quite at liberty to do. I hope you won't allow me to interfere with any of your projected arrangements."

"Here you are, then, and here you will remain for the present. I am quite ready to stake my life about that."

"I should advise you not to be rash, Mr. Cawthorn. There is no knowing what may happen."

"I know this, though," said the governor.

"Know what?"

"Why, that you are in a cell under my charge, and here you will remain until you are either taken out for a ride, or I receive an order for your release."

"Very well. I have no objection."

"Will you give me your word of honour, then, that you will not attempt to escape?"

"Certainly not. I made the judge a promise in your presence."

"And shall you keep to it?"

"Certainly I shall."

"That is quite enough, then. But I am suspicious of you."

"So it seems," said Dick, "but I can't help that. You are master here, and can do as you like."

Mr. Cawthorn was evidently far from easy in his mind about his prisoner.

He well knew the world-wide notoriety he had obtained, and how the intelligence of his incarceration in Newgate would disperse itself over the length and breadth of the land.

The means which had been taken to secure this notorious offender were well known, and also that hitherto every scheme had met with signal failure.

If now, after he had been safely lodged in prison, he was to make his escape from thence, Mr. Cawthorn thought, and justly, too, that he would not for long afterwards retain the situation he had been so desirous of gaining.

Hence, then, his anxiety, which was greater than it seemed, and much greater than he liked to acknowledge, even to himself.

Dissatisfied with the replies Dick gave him, and puzzled and perplexed as to what would be the best thing for him to do, Mr. Cawthorn left the cell.

Mr. Wriggles and the other prison officials of course followed him.

The door was closed, and the governor secured it himself.

The care he took to see that the bolt of the lock shot properly into the box provided for it, and that the bolts fitted securely into their sockets, was almost ludicrous to behold.

Then, last of all, he saw the strong iron bar put up, which went in a slanting direction across the door.

This done, he gave a last glance, and took his departure, leaving, however, one of the men outside the cell in the passage, as a sentinel or guard.

Somewhat relieved in his mind, but not with his heart altogether at rest, the governor made his way to his own apartments in the prison.

As soon as the door was closed, Dick turned round, and made another effort to look around him.

Darkness was deepening rapidly, but his eyes were accustoming themselves to the obscurity.

In one corner, just under the little grated aperture which served for a window, was a rude kind of pallet or bed.

Towards this he walked and sat himself down upon it.

From this point he endeavoured to survey his cell, but the outlines of it were so indistinct that he found the effort was a futile one, and he determined to postpone it until daylight.

Having come to this decision, he changed his sitting posture for a recumbent one.

Then his brain became crowded with numberless thoughts.

He was alone, and he found it some relief to mutter his thoughts aloud.

"And so," he said, "I am at last, really and truly, where I had made up my mind I never would be—in the interior of a cell in Newgate—a prisoner. I, who have defied the officers so long, that they must have considered it quite a hopeless task to capture me—yet here I am.

"But what a strange series of events have brought me here! They surpass, in strong and sustained interest, all that I ever read or heard. Certainly, nothing like it has ever before happened to me.

"I have made some friends, that is quite conclusive, and, I hope, friends who have power and influence, which they will exert to the utmost to get me out of this present difficulty. But I wonder what conditions they will attach to it?

"I like the judge. He seems an upright, honourable man, and very different to many who now sit upon the bench. I must esteem myself lucky that he presided on this occasion. Had it not been so, I should not have fared so well as I have. I have given him my word that I will not escape, and I will keep it, even if I was free to walk out of Newgate this moment. If he fails in what he is going to try to do, well and good; I shall then be absolved from that promise, and shall be able to meditate upon escape, for something seems to tell me that I am not near the end of my career."

"I think he will keep his word with me. I don't think I ought to doubt him. I will not. I should soon find whether he really was interesting himself in my behalf."

"How strange it seems for me to be here! I can scarcely realize my position! How strange, too, are the circumstances which brought me here! I cannot help thinking about that. I cannot dismiss it from my mind. During the trial, too, it came home to me very forcibly. To think that the simple fact of my taking refuge in that haunted house, at the particular time I did should have produced such wonderful results!

"I might have gone there earlier or later than I did, in either of which cases I should never have known anything.

"How strangely, too, was the capture or Adrian Winberry effected! Upon any other night, at any other time, he would have been free to leave the park unnoticed and unquestioned, and then he would have escaped the righteous doom which has overtaken him.

"Then there is Maud Gouldman. How wonderful I should meet with her as I did. Maud—Maud. Beautiful Maud—I wish"——

Dick was suddenly interrupted in his meditations by hearing some one unfasten the door of his cell.

CHAPTER CCCII.

RELATES HOW THE FRENCH GENDARMES ATTACKED THE RUINED MILL IN WHICH TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HAD TAKEN REFUGE.

BEFORE we proceed to relate who it was that thus sought an entrance to Dick Turpin's cell so soon after he had become an inmate of it, we must revert to some events of a wild and startling nature which were taking place elsewhere.

Doubtless the reader would much rather not be left in suspense, but, unfortunately, it is unavoidable.

As soon as we possibly can, however, we will return to our hero.

It will be recollected that, since the commencement of the long trial we have just concluded, the narrative has met with no interruption.

This proceeded from two causes.

One was because the author desired to place the whole of the trial before his readers in such a manner that their attention should never once be diverted from it by other incidents.

For this reason, many interruptions which actually did take place in the proceedings were passed over in silence.

But, now that the trial is over, we must remind the reader of the length of time their undivided attention has been given to Dick, to the exclusion of other characters in the history.

But now that he is in Newgate.

Now that some little time must elapse before he can do anything but sit there supinely awaiting the progress of events, we feel certain that a better opportunity of leaving him could not be found.

Moreover, in order to understand subsequent events, it is necessary that we should turn our attention elsewhere.

And so, while he is half sitting up upon his pallet, watching the door to see who was about to enter, we will leave him, and return to Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack.

It will be remembered that the three highwaymen were making the best of their way to Calais, in order to get a boat there of some kind or other, so as to cross over to Dover.

But they had the ill-luck to be closely and hotly pursued by a large party of gendarmes.

They had, however, urged their jaded horses to the utmost, until, upon reaching the top, the horses of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack dropped exhausted to the ground.

Tom King was mounted, and the hill having been ascended, his steed would doubtless be able to carry him down it, and this his two friends urged him to attempt, and so escape, leaving them to do the best they could.

But Tom King, with that rare generousness which formed so prominent a trait in his character, refused to do so.

He resolved that, if his comrades were captured, he would be captured with them.

So he alighted instantly, for there was not a moment to spare, their foes being close behind them, and releasing the bridle of his horse, he sent him off at a gallop down the hill.

Then all three leaped over a low wooden fence which skirted a meadow.

Before them, in the darkness, they could just distinguish the outlines of some building, which, upon a nearer approach, they found to be a ruined windmill.

From its very dilapidated condition, they judged they would not have much trouble in obtaining an entrance to it.

And in this expectation they were not disappointed.

But if they got in so easily, was it a good place in which to take shelter?

That was the thought that occurred to our friends.

A moment's reflection served to answer it.

It was not a good place for shelter, and yet they would stand a better chance in an encounter with their foes than they would have done without any shelter at all.

Besides, there was just a chance, and no more, that they might not be tracked there by the gendarmes.

However, there was no time to spare for deliberation, so, after scrambling over an immense quantity of rubbish, they fairly crawled into one of the chambers in the mill.

It was through a small aperture like a window that they made their way, and was quite high up in the building, which was buried to a depth of several feet in the rubbish that had from time to time accumulated round it.

The first thing they did, after rising to their feet, was to go to this place and look out, in the hope of being able to catch a glimpse of their foes.

Nor were they defeated in their expectation.

Just dimly visible as a something darker than the night sky was the troop of gendarmes.

They must have been standing in a group together.

Doubtless they were looking about them for some trace of their prey, or listening for some sound to come to their ears which would indicate their whereabouts.

Then they scattered themselves—some leaping their horses over the fence into the meadow.

Suddenly there arose a shout from this portion of the party, and our friends, though they were too far off to hear the words, could tell by the tone that they had noticed the windmill.

And the next movement on the part of the gendarmes showed them that this supposition was a correct one.

The cry we have mentioned was responded to by another from those on the high-road, and then the remainder of the troop jumped over the fence and rejoined their companions.

Frenchmen are always fond of gesticulation and vociferation, and the chattering that now ensued baffles all description.

Rather anxiously our three friends peeped out of the window in the mill, and watched their actions.

A word of command was given in a loud voice, and then the whole body came at full gallop up to the windmill.

Of course, being mounted, they reached it in much less time than our friends did, who were on foot.

But, before they came near enough to hear what they were about, the three friends busied themselves with blocking up the window through which they had been peeping, with some pieces of timber and other rubbish which they found convenient to their hands.

Then a rapid exploration of the building seemed to show that there was but that one opening through which admission could be gained.

But, so frail was the whole of the building, that very little trouble would enable the gendarmes, well armed as they were, to cut an entrance into it, for the body of the mill was composed of nothing but planks of wood.

Just as they finished blocking up the aperture all but a small hole, which was reserved for the purpose of reconnoitering the enemy, the troop dashed up to the mill and surrounded it.

A few moments elapsed, during which the men were posted round the mill so as to form a perfect chain, and some one in command made a loud speech in French to the fugitives.

All three of our friends being well acquainted with the tongue, Tom King from education, and Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval from residence in the country, they could tell what was said.

It was nothing more in substance than an appeal to surrender themselves prisoners for the glory of *la belle France, la grande nation*.

But, of course, our friends took no notice of this; they were hardly the sort of men to do so.

When this officer had finished his harangue, he waited patiently for a minute or two for a response, and then gave the order to his men to attack the mill.

They began by climbing up on the heap of rubbish round it, and battering the woodwork with the butt end of their guns.

It was old and rotten, and a few vigorous blows would soon make a breach for them to crawl through.

Being on the inside, our friends could tell exactly which was the spot the dragoons were attacking.

That point, then, must be defended.

A very ready and ingenious means suggested itself to them.

The machinery of the mill was, for the most part, lying in a confused mass upon the floor.

It was composed of heavy pieces of iron and stone, and they set about placing them against that part of the wall of the mill which the gendarmes were trying to batter in.

This made a vast difference.

Their blows no longer produced the effect they did at first.

It did not seem, however, that they suspected what had been done, for they continued their attack with unabated vigour.

Doubtless they suspected that they had come upon some part of the mill that was stronger and better able to resist them.

But they persevered, and our friends soon saw to their dismay that this would not avail them much longer.

But the same voice which had before called out now did so again.

The men who were attacking desisted from their attempt.

Then followed another demand for our friends to surrender.

But, as before, they took no notice of it.

This seemed to enrage the official personage, for, in a very intemperate voice, he said—

"Fire!"

The command was followed by a little delay, and then a rattling discharge of musketry took place, which was directed to every part of the building.

It was a wonder our friends could be in the building and escape injury, but they did.

The bullets flew around them in every direction, but did them no injury.

This discharge over, the attack was resumed while the others reloaded.

Claude Duval felt in his pockets, and produced a small dark lantern, which he ignited.

His comrades looked at him in silence.

"It will never do to stay here," he said. "Those gendarmes seem terribly in earnest. We must make our escape somehow."

"But how?" asked Tom and Jack.

"That is the question. We shall certainly never find an answer to it by standing here doing nothing. I will look about me."

"Be careful of yourself."

"All right; but we must either get away from here somehow or other, or else wait and be comfortably shot or captured."

"But I can't see any means of getting away," said Tom King; "and if we do get out, we shall not be any better off than we were at first before we got in."

"I don't know; but we can't do worse than stop here. Ah! what is that? a ladder?"

"Yes, but it leads up to the top of the mill."

"Never mind, we may find something."

Claude Duval ran to the foot of the ladder, and hastily ascended it.

It led up to a trap-door, which he pushed open.

Then he found himself in the top chamber of the old mill.

Passing through the trap-door, he got on to the floor of the upper chamber.

His two comrades, after pausing a moment, followed him.

The chamber was encumbered with machinery, and it was also much smaller in size than the one that was beneath it.

There was a small hole on one side, and upon going to this, our friends saw that the piece of wood supporting the sails passed through it.

Their enemies were beneath.

"Here is a chance of alarming our foes," said Sixteen-String Jack. "They are immediately underneath these long sails. Let us cut away this rotten beam of wood, and allow them to fall down upon them!"

"Agreed!"

"Help me, then, both of you, and we will soon do the business."

Claude hung the lantern, by a contrivance with which it was provided, to his belt, and then all three drew their swords and began hacking away at the rotten beam of wood.

As Jack had said, the wood was rotten, for an impression was easily made upon it.

The centre gave them the most trouble, for there the wood was more sound.

But in less than five minutes the beam was completely severed, and then the sails, having nothing to support them, gave way.

They went down with a tremendous crash, carrying away a portion of the top and side of the old mill with them.

There was a shout from the soldiers beneath, and they hastened to get away, being impressed with the idea that the ruinous old building was about to fall bodily upon them.

For a few moments there was a scene of unutterable confusion, and then by degrees they gradually recovered from their panic.

Some suspicion as to the truth of what had occurred crossed their minds, for the officer again gave the command to fire, and nearly all the shots were aimed at the top portion of the mill.

But our three friends, having produced this consternation in the ranks of their foes, took all the advantage of it they could.

Claude instantly renewed his explorations, and a cry from his lips had the effect of calling his two comrades to his side.

"Look here," he said.

He pointed as he spoke to a rude flight of steps, which seemed to descend to a great distance into the interior of the mill.

"But that is going down again," said Jack.

"I know it," replied Claude, "but it does not take us into the same part as that from which we have just ascended. I am in hopes now we shall either get away or else find some place of security."

"I hope we shall."

"Follow me, then, and we will make the attempt."

"The gendarmes seem rather alarmed at what we have done."

"They do, and that will give us all the better chance of escape."

"I am afraid their panic will not last very many minutes."

"Never mind. It has lasted, you see, until we have got to the bottom of the steps."

"And no longer," replied Tom. "Hark."

At this moment they heard the order given to fire, and when such deadly and particular aim had been taken at the upper portion of the mill.

"And lucky for us we descended when we did," said Claude Duval, "for, if we had been above, we could not have escaped that murderous fire. We should all have been annihilated."

"We should," said Jack; "and how we are to escape eventual capture I am at a loss to think."

"We are in a desperate position, and desperate diseases require desperate remedies."

"Very true, but what are we to do?"

"The best we can, and trust to luck for the rest."

"Follow me carefully and as quickly as you can," exclaimed Claude Duval. "These steps seem to lead down to the very foundations of the mill, and there, perhaps, we may find some outlet."

CHAPTER CCCIII.

THE POSITION OF THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN IN THE RUINED MILL BECOMES CRITICAL.

This was a very faint and, most likely, fallacious hope, but still our friends grasped at it as drowning men will grasp at a straw, in the hope that it may save them from drowning.

Accordingly they followed Claude Duval down the crumbling, decaying steps, which every moment threatened to give way and precipitate them to the bottom.

But they proved strong enough to take them down, for, after the lapse of a few minutes, they reached the bottom in safety.

They were now upon what was evidently the lowest story of the mill above ground.

And, in reality, this was not above ground, for the rubbish which we have spoken of as having accumulated round the mill, reached up considerably higher.

They were, therefore, tolerably safe until the gendarmes should positively make a breach into the building and attack them sword in hand.

Certainly they were in no danger from fire-arms discharged from without.

"What's the best thing to be done now," asked Claude.

"I daresay we shall have a minute or two to deliberate."

"I don't know what had best be done," replied Tom King. "We are in an awkward fix altogether, and I can assure you I can't tell how we are going to get out of it."

"We must trust to luck, as I said before."

"It is a thousand pities we stopped that carriage."

"Well, so it is, viewing what has taken place since; but then who could have expected it?"

"No one; and, besides, it is no more than our fortune. We have been in perils before to-day, and I hope to be in many more before I die."

"Oh! don't talk of dying. It always makes me uncomfortable whenever that subject is mentioned."

"It is not a very agreeable one, I confess; but we are very near it just now, I am afraid."

"Never mind that. What had we better do?"

"That is a question."

"An important one."

"Yes, as you say, an important one."

"What are we to do, then?"

"Cannot you suggest anything, my friend?"

"No. I have been trying in vain."

"I thought so."

"We are in an awkward fix. Hark! there they go again."

A tremendous discharge from without testified that the gendarmes were keeping up the siege in good earnest.

"I tell you what it is," said Sixteen-String Jack. "You have said a great deal about our being in an awkward fix, but if we allow ourselves to be defeated by a set of gibbering Frenchmen, I shall consider we fully deserve the worst that can happen to us."

"It's all very fine for you to say that, Jack, but how are we to get out of our difficulty? that's the thing."

"I know it is."

"As for the gibbering Frenchmen, as you call them, they are gendarmes, all picked men and capital officers."

"Pho—pho!"

"They are, and you ought to know that before to-day."

"Do you mean to say, Claude, that if they were English Bow-street runners and we in here, that they would have been as long outside this rotten mill as these fellows have? Why, they would have been in like shot instead of peppering away at the woodwork in that simple fashion, upon the mere chance of hitting us."

A terrific crash followed these words, and completely drowned what was said in reply to them.

But it was soon over, and then our three friends looked in each other's faces as well as they could, in order to gather their expression.

"The mill is certainly coming down about our ears," said Tom King. "I wish we were safely out of it."

"The gendarmes have got inside at last, you may depend."

"What shall we do?"

"Why, in the first place, make it as difficult for them to get at us as you can."

"How shall we do that?"

"Demolish the steps."

"Oh! yes."

"They will then have to jump rather further than they will like in order to stand by the side of us."

"So they will."

This hint was acted upon at once.

With their long, heavy swords our friends slashed away at the flight of steps which had enabled them to reach the spot upon which they stood.

The steps were very frail, and so their task was easy enough.

By cutting away the lower part, they succeeded in pulling down the other.



[THE POLICE OFFICERS MAKE AN ATTACK UPON THE "WHITE HORSE" INN.

Just as it was falling, Sixteen-String Jack said—

"I am afraid we have done a very foolish thing."

"Do you mean by cutting away the steps?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"Why, how can we get out again? We shall be starved to death here, like rats in a hole, if not worse."

"That is, supposing there is no other outlet from here," said Claude.

"Still, that ought to have been ascertained first."

"So it ought; but we must make the best of it, and set about it now."

"Hark! here come the gendarmes."

There was the hasty trampling of feet overhead, and, mingled with the sound, the voice of the officer in command.

They had clearly made a breach through some part of the side of the mill, either where their original attempt had been made, or else where an entrance was more easily effected.

The position of the highwaymen was now critical in the extreme.

Imagine, if you can, reader, a small chamber about eight feet in width, by ten in height.

The walls and ceiling composed of wooden planks roughly nailed together.

The floor also of wooden planks.

Just overhead the square aperture in the ceiling, up to which the demolished steps had led.

Such was the appearance of the place in which our friends were literally imprisoned.

Above them, coming closer to the square aperture referred to every moment, and entirely surrounding the mill, a large body of gendarmes.

These latter, however, knew not in what part of the mill to find our friends.

They had made their way into the same chamber as our friends had when they first entered it.

Should they—and beyond a doubt they would—find where their prey was hidden, nothing would be easier

than for them to stand at the square hole in the floor above and open a most murderous fire upon them.

The hasty trampling of so many feet caused the old building to shake in the most alarming manner.

But, heedless of this, the gendarmes continued their search.

And now our friends set about doing that which they ought to have done at first.

And that was to see whether there was any kind of outlet from this chamber.

To be sure, there were some steps leading down to a kind of vault which was just above the foundation of the mill, but then it was not likely they would find any outlet from thence, except the means by which they had entered it.

They, however, as a kind of forlorn hope, decided to go down and see, as they could not make their position worse by so doing.

Accordingly these steps were descended, and upon reaching the foot of them, our friends found they were standing in a kind of vaulted chamber of very limited dimensions.

Claude had the lantern, and directly he found himself standing upon firm ground, he flashed the light of it about him.

But there was little to see.

The walls and floor were composed of a kind of clayey earth, beaten hard and flat.

Several huge beams, doubtless used for the support of the structure above, crossed the place in various directions.

But, beyond this, there was nothing to see.

A closer inspection was, however, made, in order to ascertain whether there was any means of exit.

Owing to the limited dimensions of the place, a search did not occupy many minutes.

On one side, half-hidden by one of the huge wooden beams, was a door.

It opened to a touch, and our friends, without hesitation, passed through the portal, Claude carrying the light and leading the way.

The atmosphere in this inner vault was very impure and damp; so much so, indeed, that our friends found considerable difficulty in breathing, while the lustre of the lamp perceptibly diminished.

But this was principally owing to the door having been closed.

The foul, pent-up air rapidly rushed out, while fresh poured in in its place.

But this circumstance did not look well for finding an outlet.

Glancing round, our friends saw they were in a kind of cellar or vault.

For what purpose it had been designed was more than they could tell, nor did they stop to inquire.

It was quite sufficient for them that such a place was there.

The sounds, which from time to time came to their ears, showed them that the gendarmes were rapidly approaching.

They had no time to lose.

They had been forced to burrow in the earth like foxes, and there was every probability of their being speedily unearthed.

Considerable tact had been displayed by the gendarmes in their attack upon the mill.

If they were slow in what they were about, they were sure.

Upon forcing an entrance, and standing fairly within the building, they looked all round them, but no trace of those they sought could they see.

The officer in command then gave his instructions in the following fashion.

Half the gendarmes remained outside.

They formed themselves into a ring round the mill, standing within a few feet of each other.

Every man held his musket in his hand, ready for immediate service in case either of the fugitives should make their appearance.

In the event of their doing so, they were not to wait for further instructions, but to fire at them, and, if possible, they were to wound and disable them without taking their lives.

The remainder, along with the chief officer, having entered the building, were, by his orders, sent to the very top of the mill.

Then, having satisfied themselves that they could not possibly go any higher, they set about the task of searching narrowly all around them.

As soon as they felt quite certain there was no one there, they went down to the next floor, repeating just the same mode of operation as before.

And so they went steadily down thus, thinking to make quite sure of their prey by driving them to the earth.

There was only one thing to be said in disfavour of this plan.

It took time.

Rather too much time to be altogether safe.

In such cases speedy measures are the best.

However, the gendarmes got down to the lower floor of the mill, and having searched that, and met with no better success than had hitherto attended their efforts, they proceeded to go still lower, when they discovered that the communicating steps had been cut away.

Fearlessly enough, however, several of them, finding there was no one in the chamber below, lowered themselves into it, and dropped down.

They then renewed their search.

How they were to escape not one of the highwaymen had any idea.

They could tell the gendarmes were very close at hand, and yet they seemed as far off attaining their object as ever.

They ran hastily round the vaulted chamber, into which they had made their way, and discovered a small opening on a level with the floor, looking like the entrance to some cavernous place.

Indeed, from the first, Claude Duval had been inclined to think that caverns must exist somewhere in the huge hill upon the crest of which the mill had been built, and it was this which encouraged him to continue these explorations underground.

The supposition was not an unlikely one, and it would turn out a very lucky thing for our friends if good grounds were found for it.

Certainly the rude little arched passage which Claude found seemed to lend colour to the idea.

The gendarmes were too close behind to allow them any time to deliberate whether they should seek safety by crawling through this arch, so Claude Duval set the example at once, leaving his comrades to follow him.

The archway, as he had expected, formed the entrance to a passage which in shape more resembled the entrance to a vault than aught else.

Still it was high enough to allow Claude to walk through it in an upright posture.

The length of this passage was only a few feet, and they emerged from it into a large cavern.

The most noticeable thing in this was a most tremendous rushing of water, as of a cascade, though at a considerable distance from where they stood.

The place was as dark as it is possible for any place to be, even were it in the very inmost recesses of the earth.

"Now, Claude, what are we to do?" asked Tom King, as soon as they emerged from the passage.

"Have you anything to suggest, Tom?"

"No, without we were all to make a stand at this narrow entrance, and defend ourselves from any one who attempted to pass through it."

"Our numbers are too unequal for us to do any good at that; besides, they would collect together and rush forward in a body with sufficient impetuosity to break through any guard which we might oppose to them."

"I am afraid so."

"What then is to be done?"

"We must continue to retreat. We have certainly been very lucky in getting so far as we have. It is more than either of you expected."

"It is."

"Come on, then, as quickly as you can, or else our foes will come up with us, and we shall be quite done for. This cavern seems to me, so far as I can tell, of vast extent, and somewhere in the distance I can hear the dashing of a waterfall."

"And you think that shows some prospect of our finding an outlet?" said Tom King.

CHAPTER CCCIV.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND HIS TWO COMRADES ESCAPE FROM THE GENDARMES BY THE ADOPTION OF A PERILOUS CHANCE.

"I HOPE so, at any rate," replied Claude.

"There are many more unlikely things."

"I wish we could stop up the passage, and so put a stop to pursuit, for some time at least."

"It would be a good thing."

"Shall we do it?"

"I think we had better not. We have no time, and we have no tools or materials suited to the purpose."

"That is very true."

"Our best plan is to keep as great a distance between our foes and ourselves as we possibly can. This cavern seems to stretch out a long way, let us make our way in as direct a line across it as we possibly can."

There was sound sense in this proposal, and so his comrades resolved to accede to it.

To take a path in a direct line across the cavern was a more difficult matter than one would be apt to think at a first glance.

The place was so dark that none but those who have been in a similar place could form any idea of what it was like.

The only means they had of dispersing this darkness was the lantern which Claude Duval carried in his hand, and, as may readily be supposed, this was quite inadequate for the purpose.

They could not, indeed, see more than a yard before them—the light was more like that emitted from a star than anything else.

Claude held it in such a manner that the principal rays which passed through the lens fell upon the ground close before his feet.

By taking this precaution he avoided coming in contact with any article.

As they advanced, which they did in true Indian file, the sound of rushing water continued to come more and more plainly to their ears.

In a little while afterwards the beam of light which the lantern sent forth shone upon water.

A halt was made, and then our friends found themselves upon the banks of a stream.

Claude Duval flashed the lantern about him in order to take in, if possible, the general aspect of the place.

To his surprise he found the cavern had grown much narrower—indeed, he seemed to be in one corner of it.

The black walls were visible all around him.

Straight in front was a narrow stream, the water in which was rushing along with the greatest impetuosity.

The channel in which it flowed seemed to be solid rock, worn away by constant attrition.

Seeing this, our friends ran along the bank for some distance, until they came to the place where the water fell down.

This was at one end of the cavern.

From some height which they could not see, even when the light of the lantern was directed upwards, the water came pouring down with great force, forming, indeed, quite a cascade.

It was this which made the rushing, roaring noise they had at first heard.

Now that they stood so near, the ground seemed to fairly tremble beneath their feet, so heavily did the water fall down into the kind of basin which it had hollowed for itself out of the rock.

In their surprise at seeing so strange a spectacle as a waterfall in a pitch dark cavern, our friends for a moment forgot the peril of their position.

But they were quickly reminded of the imminency of the danger which impended over them by the appearance of their enemies the gendarmes.

These had been able, with some little trouble, to track the fugitives to the cavern, and then they set about procuring lights to assist them in searching it.

This was easily enough done, as the materials were all ready to their fingers.

One of the gendarmes, by means of a flint and steel, struck a light.

Then the others with their swords chopped off large pieces of the many beams of wood that were in the mill, and readily hewed them into a torch-like shape.

They then ignited them, and the wood, being exceedingly dry and of a resinous quality, burned up brightly and answered the purpose of giving a light as well as the best torches could have done.

Every gendarme was thus provided, and, as they were in rather large numbers, the light which they cast around them was almost enough to illuminate the whole of the cavern, which was not so vast as the highwaymen at first imagined it to be.

It was in this way the gendarmes made their way through the passage into the cavern.

They held their extemporized torches as high up in the air as they could, so that their light should be diffused as much as possible.

But, of course, they did not see our friends as quickly as our friends saw them.

Claude immediately masked his lantern, and spoke in a whisper to his comrades.

"We must be quick," he said, "and endeavour to find our way out of this place."

"We must, but how?"

"As the gendarmes carry so many lights it will be easy for us to avoid coming into contact with the gendarmes."

"Certainly; but which way must we take that will give us the most likely chance of escape?"

"We cannot go any further this way?"

"No."

"Then let us follow the course of the stream. You see, it flows in a straight direction as far as we are able to see."

"But where will it take us to?"

"That I know not, but a stream of water like that must flow out somewhere, so I think we had better keep along its banks until we find out where it really does go."

"That is a good idea, Claude, and excellent advice."

"I am glad you think so."

"Lead on, then, quickly; we will follow behind you in Indian file."

"Come on, then."

"Go as quickly as you can, Claude."

"I will."

"Look how the gendarmes are dispersing themselves about the cavern. It is a thousand to one now if we are not intercepted before we go a dozen yards further."

Claude glanced round, and saw what his companion said was perfectly correct.

The gendarmes were rapidly dispersing themselves over the area of the cavern, and searching about with a vigour which bid fair in a little while to unearth our friends.

A faint reflected light came from the distant torches—so faint, indeed, that the foaming, rapidly-flowing water was but just discernible to Claude.

But it enabled him to make his way along the bank of the stream without wandering from his proper course.

The thundering din of the waterfall effectually drowned the slight sound which the footsteps of the fugitives raised.

On they went with tolerable rapidity, but the gendarmes were quicker in their movements, and ran hither and thither with bewildering quickness.

They were, doubtless, making a thorough search of the cavern, and eventually the highwaymen must have been discovered if they remained in it.

Suddenly, however, Claude came to an abrupt standstill.

His friends quickly learned the cause of it.

He had reached the wall of the cavern, through which the water flowed, and he could get no further.

Dimly—very dimly—they could see the outlines of a low and irregularly-shaped arch.

Underneath this the water flowed.

But to where?

That was a mystery.

It might be that it took its course deep down into the very bowels of the earth, where it went to supply some huge subterranean lake from which there was no outlet.

Under the arch all was darkness.

Not a single ray of light came to inspire the hope that in that direction they might be able to make their escape.

Claude's idea was that, by following this stream, he should be enabled to gain some other cavern and finally reach the open air.

He did not anticipate that the passage would construct itself into an arch.

The stream narrowed considerably, and the water rushed under the archway with tremendous speed, foaming and hissing as it went.

What were our friends to do?

Looking round, they found to their dismay that they had got into a portion of the cavern which was elongated in shape.

Indeed, the whole was very irregular in its figuration, and contained numerous indentations and projections.

It was into one of these indentations that our friends had got, and they saw with the utmost uneasiness the contracted space in which they stood.

But it was too late for them to emerge from it.

The gendarmes had already searched the whole area of the place, and were coming directly to them.

A good idea can be had of the kind of place in which the highwaymen were by saying that the recess in which they stood was like a funnel in shape, the funnel being laid upon its side.

The entrance to this recess was very large, and gradually tapered off until the water flowed through a space about equal in proportion to the hole at the bottom of a funnel.

The gendarmes were advancing rapidly.

To have attempted to pass them would have been impossible.

The space too limited for them to hope to do so undetected.

Then how were they to act?

The question was more than either could answer.

If they stood there, although they might maintain a resistance for a time, yet eventually they would be overpowered by numbers.

They could not fly.

If they attempted they would be captured or slain.

If they stayed where they were they would meet with precisely the same fate.

There was but one alternative open to them, and that was of so horrible a nature that it is not surprising if, bold as they were, they shrank from the adoption of it.

There was no time for hesitation.

If they did not make up their minds at once they would be deprived of even that one desperate chance.

Yet they did hesitate, and shrank from embracing it.

At the worst, however, they could but meet with death.

That would be their fate if they remained.

But the other did offer them a chance of life.

The reader will perhaps guess what the alternative alluded to is.

We think so, because it suggested itself spontaneously to the three friends, and though not a word was said, yet each came to the same conclusion respecting it.

It was this.

To commit themselves to the current of the stream, and allow it to drift them beneath the arch.

But though that promised a chance of safety, yet there were such contingencies attached to it that made them hold back.

To what place that stream might flow they could form no accurate idea.

It might be that if they once passed beneath that arch they would never again emerge into the light of day.

It might be that the arch grew narrower and narrower, until the bulk of water filled it quite up, and the passage became converted into a pipe.

Or it might be that the cause of the water had a downward tendency, and that the rapidity of its motion would increase to such a degree that they could not prevent themselves from being dashed to pieces against its jagged banks.

Or it might lead to the inmost recesses of the earth, from which it would be impossible for them to get away.

Or if these dangers were passed through, how could they tell what horrible creatures inhabited those waters, and whose instinct caused them to prey upon human life?

Then how horrible it would be, in that dark place, to suddenly find themselves in the cold grasp of some slimy monster.

The brain turns sick at the contemplation of such horrors.

But our friends did not wish to be captured.

In a strange country they knew they would meet with a short shift, and they were not many seconds reasoning themselves into the belief that, as they had to die, it would not matter how.

Tom King touched his two friends.

"There is no help for it, we must adopt this last resource. For my own part, I have determined to dare and do anything rather than be captured. Follow me, my friends. Quick—quick! or it will be too late."

Tom King's words had an immediate effect upon his comrades.

They had already made up their minds to do as he had determined upon doing.

No sooner had he spoke than Tom King leaped into the stream.

His companions followed his example.

They were either seen or heard by the gendarmes, for they could not avoid making a slight splash.

A loud cry assailed their ears, however, and the men rushed forward, casting the light of their torches upon the water.

The current was very strong, but the stream was not very deep, so the highwaymen were able to keep their footing.

Tom King was the first to pass beneath the arch.

He had to assume a stooping posture to do so.

The current seemed stronger beneath it, perhaps owing to a still further constriction of the channel.

But by stretching out his arms, he was able to touch the walls on either side of him.

This was of great assistance, for by pressing against them, or occasionally grasping at those pieces of rock which projected from them, he was able to preserve himself from being carried away by the tide.

In the most intense darkness he groped his way onwards, more than once striking his head against the roof, the height of which was very irregular, and from which, in some places, pieces descended like stalactites.

He found that, to avoid serious injury from them, he should have to stoop still more, and so he proceeded with his back bent and his lips almost touching the water.

His two comrades followed close after him; Sixteen-String Jack coming next, and Claude Duval bringing up the rear.

But as soon as they were out of sight beneath the arch, the dragoons arrived at the spot upon which they had so recently stood, and the light from their torches showed them plenty of indications which pointed to the direction the fugitives had taken.

CHAPTER CCCV.

THE OFFICER COMMANDING THE GENDARMES ENTERS THE PASSAGE AND MEETS WITH A HORRIBLE ADVENTURE.

A LOUD guttural kind of yell, which came plainly to the ears of the three highwaymen, arose from the gendarmes when they discovered the route the fugitives had taken.

But though, beyond all doubt, there were amongst them several brave men, yet not one could be found who did not shrink from the thoughts of entering that narrow gloomy passage, though they had the powerful influence of example before them.

It seemed too much like walking into the tomb.

The officer in command looked for a moment all the surprise he felt at the daring of the three Englishmen, who had already given himself and his troops so much trouble.

But a feeling of rage and anger soon supervened, and he determined by a summary process to put an end to the whole business at once.

Least of all did he like the idea of entering the narrow sewer-like passage.

But, notwithstanding his disinclination to follow them further, he was resolved they should not escape.

Accordingly, he spoke to his men, and commanded them to stand together in a throng, facing as nearly as possible the little archway.

Then rapidly followed the words:

"Make ready!"

The rattling of muskets followed.

"Present!"

The words were uttered in a loud tone, and came plainly enough to the ears of the three highwaymen, who felt uncomfortable according.

But all they did was to press forward with still greater

rapidity along the narrow passage in which they found themselves.

Before giving the final order, the officer in command of the gendarmes addressed himself as follows to the three fugitives.

"Surrender! Surrender yourselves at once, and your lives will be spared. I will give you one minute to consider of my offer. Surrender, I say, and save your lives. Otherwise, if you refuse, I shall give the word to my brave followers, and they will fire up this narrow passage. If they do your lives must be lost, for how can you escape a dozen bullets when you are in a place no larger than will just admit your bodies? Surrender, I say, and your lives will be spared."

The officer paused.

Doubtless he fully anticipated that our friends would not hesitate a moment, but yield themselves up to him without further trouble.

But let us see how the highwaymen received his announcement.

The reader will guess that, desperate as was their emergency, they did not intend to give in so ignominiously as to crawl out of the tunnel, and be taken one by one as they did so.

Such a proceeding was not at all in accordance with their ideas.

Claude Duval who was last, and who consequently stood the worst chance, when the gendarmes fired did not flinch, but simply cried to his comrades in advance—

"Make haste—make haste! Be as quick as ever you can, or those confounded Frenchmen will put an end to us."

"All right, my friend," responded Tom King; "press on as quickly as you can; you need not fear overtaking us."

The time having elapsed which the officer had specified without his receiving any reply, he spoke again.

He evidently wished to take them prisoners and not to slay them.

"You make no reply," he cried, getting as close to the entrance of the passage as he could; "I shall call upon you once—I shall call upon you twice—I shall call upon you three times; and then, if you do not respond, I shall give the word to fire."

No notice was taken of this speech; and so, grown somewhat furious, the officer cried—

"Surrender, once."

No reply.

"Surrender, twice."

Still silence.

"Surrender, three times."

Then, as no reply followed this last appeal, he cried to his men—

"Fire!"

The gendarmes had stood with their fingers on the triggers of their muskets.

The muzzles of every one of them were pointed to the little arch.

They had also assumed such positions as would cause the shots to carry the greatest possible distance.

As soon, then, as their commander gave the word, they simultaneously pulled their triggers, and a terrific report and a blinding sheet of flame followed.

For an infinitesimal small space of time the interior of the cavern was lighted up with it.

Then succeeded what looked like a double darkness.

The bullets from the muskets went crashing against the rocks.

But no sound came to the listening ears of the gendarmes to show that their murderous volley had met with the success they intended it should.

As quickly then as possible, the officer commanded them to reload and fire again.

He was obeyed with true military promptitude.

Again was the cavern illuminated.

Again did the ear-deafening report of the weapons raise a thousand echoes amongst its recesses.

Again did the bullets come in crashing contact with the jutting rocks.

But with the same result as before.

If there was anything more calculated than another to fill the officer of gendarmes with vexation it was this.

If he had heard a yell of anguish—a groan—or a cry for mercy, he would have felt more satisfied.

But silence was most perplexing and annoying.

He did not know what to make of it.

Had they been annihilated by the first discharge?

That seemed scarcely probable.

Had they, by means of that dismal looking passage, emerged into another cavern similar to that which they had left?

That was possible, but still he was not sufficiently assured of it to follow them.

Or had they already come by their death?

Did the floor of the passage abruptly change its level, and had they been carried over the verge of the abyss, and plunged perhaps fathoms down in the bosom of the earth?

It might be so, or numerous other casualties might have befallen them, any of which would produce instantaneous death.

The officer soon made these reflections, and he came to the determination, in his own mind, that he would not fire again.

He paused a moment to consider what had best be done, and consult, in a low tone, with a few of his subordinates.

The result of the conversation was this.

The men were called upon to volunteer who would run the risk of entering the passage.

All were silent until the chief officer announced his intention of leading the way, and then the gendarmes, ashamed of the pusillanimity which they had displayed, pressed forward in a body.

The chief did not shrink, but took a torch from the hands of one of his followers.

Then, with his drawn sword in his other hand, he stepped into the stream, and walked boldly up to the little arch.

Having their leader before them, and with his example exerting its influence upon them, the gendarmes could not for shame hold back, so they all crowded closely at his heels.

The passage was entered.

In the same manner as the highwaymen had done, the gendarmes made their way along it.

The chief, however, went at a more steady pace than they did, and waved his torch about him in the expectation of coming upon some signs of the death of those of whom he was in search.

But nothing of the kind met his gaze.

The velocity of the current increased, and more than once he all but lost his foothold, so he was forced at length to consign his sword to its sheath and proceed unarmed, using his right arm as a means to cling to the rock, by which alone he could hope to retain his footing in the treacherous current.

A kind of mist, caused doubtless by the rapid flow of the water, rose in the air, mingled with fine spray, which threatened every moment to extinguish the torches.

However, they did just keep alight, burning in a dim, sickly fashion, and yet serving to illuminate the recesses of the passage.

They were able to avoid those projections of which we have spoken as being such serious impediments to our friends.

Suddenly, however, the chief of the gendarmes came to a halt.

He was about twenty yards within the passage—that is to say, he was about that distance from the arch by which he had entered.

His followers stopped also, and those who were nearest to him peeped over his shoulder, in order to ascertain what was the cause of the abrupt stoppage.

Those who did so were immediately satisfied.

In their path—a few feet only in advance—and seeming to block up the passage entirely, was some strange, shiny, half-defined object.

What it was none could tell, but in the centre of this dark mass, and separated from each other by a space of not more than two inches, were a couple of bright luminous objects.

A glance was sufficient to show what they were.

They were eyes.

There could be no doubt about that.

They were bright, fierce-looking eyes, too, and such as were calculated to make any one shrink back in half-defined terror.

To what kind of animal they belonged one could not tell.

But certainly to no human being.

A strange puffing, snorting noise came to the ears of the gendarmes, and it evidently proceeded from the creature which blocked up the passage.

Had it been in some fair open spot, and in the broad daylight, it is possible that the gendarmes would have looked upon this animal with very different feelings to what they did.

But in that intensely dark, cavernous passage, standing up to their knees almost in cold water, and in such a confined place, where they had no means of seeing what it was, or forming some idea of the power of mischief which it possessed, they felt nervous and terrified, when perhaps there was very little foundation for it.

Involuntarily they drew back a step, and the chief did so likewise.

He by no means relished the position which he occupied, and the thought of an encounter with the strange inhabitant of that dark place made him feel anything but comfortable.

The puffing, roaring noise increased in loudness.

It was a sound expressive of anger.

The creature was irritated.

The eyes seemed to glare more fiercely.

In vain the chief of the gendarmes raised his torch and strove to send some of its rays upon the object before him, in order to come to some kind of conclusion as to what it was like.

All he could see was something black, like the rocks which formed the walls and roof of the passage, and where its outlines ended and the others began he could not for the life of him discern.

He was prudent enough not to make any aggressive movement; if he had done so, he might have placed himself in a situation of much danger.

And now another fact pressed itself rather unpleasantly upon his notice.

The eyes seemed to be growing larger and larger.

Their brightness increased also.

At first he was unable to account for this, but soon the conviction forced itself upon him.

The animal—if such it were—was coming nearer.

It was doing what they were afraid to do.

Advancing to the attack.

If he any doubts upon this point, they were removed by the splashing of the water, which he heard plainly enough as the creature forced its way through the stream.

The chief of the gendarmes drew back.

It only needed that movement to lend wings to the feet of his companions.

Thoroughly dismayed and terrified, not only at their strange position, but also at the unknown creature before them, they were glad to seize upon any pretext for a retreat.

The movement which the chief gave communicated itself to the whole of the troop, and they turned and fled along the passage in the direction of the cavern which they had just left.

Many a time they stumbled in their slippery path and fell into the water, or knocked their heads terrible blows against the pieces of rock which depended from the ceiling.

But, heedless of all the injuries which they received—intent only upon getting out as soon as possible, which made them insensible to all else—they still continued their course.

Those who fell scrambled in some incomprehensible manner to their feet again, and those whose heads came into contact with the rocks most marvellously escaped unconsciousness, though many of the blows received were quite sufficient, under ordinary circumstances, to produce it.

Having penetrated so short a distance as they had, of course it was not long before they all emerged into the cavern.

No one can conceive what a sigh of relief they gave when they found themselves there in safety, nor could any one believe what a comfortable place they thought it after the vague horrors which beset them in the passage.

As soon as the chief of the gendarmes emerged into the cavern, in justice to him let it be said he regained his self-possession.

The panic which he had been a victim to left him.

He was once more a cool, intrepid officer.

He ordered his men to prepare their muskets and stand in readiness to fire.

He was obeyed, for soldiers will obey mechanically under almost all circumstances, so thoroughly is the principle of implicit obedience drilled into them.

The soldiers stood in readiness.

The position they occupied was the same as before when they fired a volley into the passage.

The chief then cautiously approached the little arch, and listened.

He could still hear the same puffing, snorting noise, although the roar of the waterfall almost made it inaudible.

He caught one glimpse of the gleaming eyes.

The creature had then followed them along the passage, undaunted by their numbers.

He was full of wonder to know what it could be.

But, great as his wonder was, it did not make him forgetful of the fact that now they had the creature at a manifest advantage.

He had no idea what its aggresive powers might be if it once emerged into the cavern, nor how difficult and dangerous it might be to achieve a victory over it.

CHAPTER CCCVI.

OUR THREE FRIENDS HAVE SOME FURTHER PERILOUS ADVENTURES IN THE CAVERNS.

But wedged in the passage as the creature appeared to be, the advantage was greatly upon his own side, and the chances of obtaining an easy victory over it almost certain.

Like a skilful general, then, who never allows such a favourable opporunity to slip, he gave the order to his men to prepare to fire.

The muskets were carried to the shoulders of the gendarmes, and their muzzles pointed to the entrance of the passage, close to the mouth of which the strange creature must be.

The men had their fingers upon the triggers, awaiting the word to fire.

But this the chief did not give.

He was watching the little dark arch, and had determined to give the word of command only when he caught sight of those horrible gleaming eyes, which had caused such a sickly feeling of terror to gather about his heart.

He had not long to wait.

Courageously the creature came on, never dreaming for a moment of the danger in which it stood.

The officer saw the eyes.

The gendarmes saw them too, for their gaze was intently fixed upon that same spot.

"Fire!"

The word rung out with extreme distinctness in that vast cavern.

It was obeyed with greater promptitude than any order was ever obeyed before.

Scarcely was the word pronounced than there was the simultaneous discharge of the muskets which the gendarmes held.

Once more was the interior of the cavern transiently illuminated by a bright flash almost blinding in its brilliancy.

Once more were the echoes of the place raised by the thundering discharge.

But scarcely one bullet struck against the rock, so accurate was the aim which every man had taken.

Mingled with the reports of the muskets there arose a strange yelling cry, the like of which not one of those who heard it ever listened to before.

It was, however, clearly a cry indicative of great bodily pain.

Then all was still.

Not one of the gendarmes moved hand or foot.

With an effort the chief officer shook off the effect which these strange adventures had upon him.

His words aroused the men.

By his orders the torches were trimmed, and fresh ones obtained and lighted.

Then, with feelings which we could not describe—feelings brought about by the strange nature of the place in which they stood—the gendarmes in a body pressed

forward to see what kind of creature it was that they had slain.

Slain? They were by no means certain upon that point.

They knew well enough that many wild animals when badly hurt would feign death, and that so cunningly as to deceive any one until, upon a near approach of its adversaries, it would gather all its remaining strength, and in an expiring effort inflict great injury upon them.

And this reflection caused the gendarmes to approach the arch with great caution, lest one of them should be badly hurt by their strange antagonist.

But there was one thing which they entirely overlooked or forgot.

And that was the strength of the current and the impetuosity with which it flowed beneath the arch.

The animal, as we have seen, had been able to overcome the resistance which the rapidly-flowing water offered, and make its way to the arch.

But when the gendarmes fired that terrible volley, the contents of so many muskets being concentrated upon so small a spot, it had the immediate effect of depriving the animal of that strength which had hitherto enabled it to make a stand against the current, and it was with great swiftness drifted along the passage.

By the time, then, the gendarmes, in their cautiousness, had reached the arch, the body of the creature was far away.

Their disappointment was very great when, upon looking and expecting to see their adversary, they found the arch quite clear and just as it was when they first entered it.

They were at no loss to account for this, and they felt angry with themselves that the thought had not occurred to them.

They held a torch as far underneath as they could, but nothing but the foaming water met their gaze.

There was nothing to be seen.

Nor was there any means of ascertaining the nature of the creature which they had the encounter with, except by once more entering the gloomy passage.

But all naturally enough shrunk from doing this.

They withdrew, and the chief officer once more held a brief consultation as to what would be the best thing for them to do.

Not one of his arguments, however, could induce the gendarmes to enter the passage which was inhabited by such dreadful and mysterious creatures.

They were willing to fight against men, they said, to the last gasp, but they could not fight animals which they could not see, and of whose powers of mischief they were entirely ignorant.

The chief officer himself, if the truth must be told, felt no individual inclination to enter the passage again.

He had already had enough of that sort of thing.

Eventually he determined to leave six of his men as a kind of guard in the cavern.

They were to station themselves close to the arch, with their muskets ready for immediate service, and to shoot the first living thing that made its appearance.

Then he himself, with the remainder of his men, left the cavern, with the intention of finding whereabouts the stream emerged.

Men were left, however, at short intervals, and this was continued until the exterior of the mill was reached, so that a ready and easy means of communication was established between those above and those below.

The result of what had taken place was communicated to those gendarmes who had been on duty surrounding the mill.

These, of course, had seen and heard nothing of those whose capture they were so anxious to effect.

A slight change was also made.

Those men who had been in the caverns were left to surround the mill, and those who had previously been occupied in the performance of that duty accompanied the chief officer in his search for the spot where the stream of water, flowing through the passage, found its way out into the earth.

The hill upon which the mill was built was one of a chain of hills which extended for some considerable distance right and left of where he stood.

These hills were both high and large enough to contain many caverns underneath them, and doubtless there were many.

The officer had certain knowledge that there was at least one.

But we will leave him to prosecute his search, while we more particularly turn our attention to describing the adventures and proceedings of the three highwaymen themselves.

It will be recollected that the last time we saw them was upon a very critical occasion, namely, when the gendarmes were about to fire into the narrow passage.

When the chief officer made the speech in which he called upon them to surrender, our friends heard every word he said with the greatest distinctness.

But they never for a moment dreamed of yielding themselves prisoners in the kind manner proposed.

They pressed forward with increased speed, and immediately afterwards Tom King uttered a faint cry of satisfaction.

His comrades heard it distinctly enough, but they did not have any occasion to ask what was the cause of it.

It was very simple.

Tom King had reached a certain point in the passage where it turned off to the right, at an acute angle from the direction it had previously taken, which was undeviatingly straight.

It was incident upon making this discovery that Tom King uttered that ejaculatory cry of satisfaction, and he was round the corner in a moment.

He was followed, with extreme quickness, by his two comrades—for they knew the imminency of the danger in which they stood.

Just, however, as Claude Duval turned round, the order to fire was given, and the next instant many of the bullets passed over the spot upon which they had so recently stood, and flattened themselves against the wall, formed by the sudden curve in the passage.

Our friends were much delighted, too, to find that the passage increased in size as they proceeded, and that very rapidly.

So they did not wait to see what else the gendarmes did after the discharge of their volley, but hastened along the passage in the hope that ere long they should emerge into the open air.

At every step they took the passage grew wider and higher, and, of course, one effect of this was that the velocity of the current was much diminished, and they were consequently able to walk in the bed of the stream with much more convenience than before.

But their hopes of being conducted to the open air were doomed to disappointment.

The termination of the passage through the rocks was reached, and then they found that it was no more than an unpleasant means of communication between the cavern they had left and another of very similar general appearance.

Claude Duval now ventured to unmask his lantern, the light from which he had hitherto carefully concealed, and handed it to Tom King, who at once led the way out of the stream on to the dry floor of the second cavern.

His two comrades quickly stood by his side, but, before they had time to exchange a word with each other, they were startled with a strange sound.

It was like that which would be produced by some unwieldy animal when out of breath.

They instantly drew their swords and put themselves in an attitude of defence, for they did not know with what danger they might be threatened.

Tom King, too, waved the lantern about him so as to diffuse its light.

Their eyes then fell upon a singular object.

On a projecting piece of rock, which was only about a foot above the surface, was one of the most singular-looking creatures they had ever beheld.

In length it was about seven feet—in width, at the thickest part, about four.

It had a small head in proportion to the rest of the body.

But the head had a very intelligent look, as small heads frequently have.

The shape of it, and of the face also, was quite unlike anything our friends had before seen in the whole course of their experience.

But one of the most remarkable features connected with this creature, whatever it might be, were its eyes.

They were large, round and full and intensely bright.

They seemed even to possess some degree of luminosity of their own, so brightly did they appear to gleam.

They shone in the darkness like two bright orbs of light.

This small head was joined to a neck which was round and sleek.

This neck was supported by two massive shoulders. These, indeed, seemed the most massive part of the animal, for it was just there where its width and height was the greatest.

It was furnished with two feet or fins, our friends could not tell which. Doubtless they were intended to serve the purposes of both, and were shaped accordingly.

From the thick unwieldy shoulders the body of this strange specimen of the animal creation tapered off until it terminated in a tail, in all respects like the tail of a middling-sized fish.

The colour of the whole body was either black or something approaching it, and shone like highly-polished marble.

For some few moments the three highwaymen stood looking at this strange creature with the utmost surprise, interest, and curiosity.

They found that the snorting noise they had heard, and which had first attracted their attention, was caused by the animal breathing, which it seemed to do with great labour and difficulty.

"What do you think of that?" asked Claude.

"I have no idea," replied Tom King, to whom he addressed his remark. "Do you think it meditates making an attack upon us?"

"It looks very fierce," said Sixteen-String Jack, drawing back a step. "I wonder whether it can move quickly."

"I do not know. I never saw the like of such a creature before. What a lucky thing we did not meet it in the passage."

"In the passage?" exclaimed Tom King. "Stop! I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"An idea for ridding us of our foes—for a time at least."

"How?"

"Why let us drive this strange-looking creature into the passage."

"What for?"

"I should not wonder if the gendarmes, who must by this time be thoroughly enraged, do not attempt to follow us through the passage."

"Oh! I see now what you mean, Tom. You think if you can drive this creature into the passage, it will so terrify the gendarmes that they will turn back."

"That is just it."

"Then it is a capital idea, and I wish you success. And another thing: if we can drive it before us as we wish, who knows?—we might work it up to such a pitch of fury that it would actually attack the gendarmes, and force them to retreat."

"It is a capital notion," cried Claude Duval. "Let us set about it at once, for we have no time to lose. For all we know, the gendarmes may at this very moment be half-way through the passage."

"Most likely."

"The chief difficulty will be to get the creature into the passage. It may refuse to stir."

"Do not anticipate that. We can but try."

"Come on, then. You had better draw your swords."

The three highwaymen, with their drawn swords in their hands, now cautiously approached the shelving piece of rock upon which the strange animal lay.

It evidently viewed their coming with dissatisfaction, and a sort of growling sound mingled with the puffing, snorting noise of which we have before spoken.

It did not offer to move, however, even when its assailants were within a few feet of it.

Our friends were certainly running a great risk in thus provoking a conflict with an animal of whose powers of destruction they were completely ignorant.

But so much would be gained if they could carry out their original intention that they felt they could afford to run a good deal of risk.

Tom King held the light so that the beams fell full upon the face of the creature.

It blinked its eyes, but did not offer to stir.

Then Sixteen-String Jack waved his sword, but the animal took no notice of that hostile demonstration.

There was nothing more to do now than to proceed to harsher measures, so Jack with the point of his sword just pricked him gently where he fancied the skin would be thinnest and most sensitive.

CHAPTER CCCVII.

THE SITUATION OF THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN BECOMES STILL MORE CRITICAL.

The growling sound to which the strange amphibious creature had given utterance increased in loudness.

It showed its teeth, too, and a vicious kind of look came over its whole face.

But Claude Duval seconded the attack which his comrade made, and then, with a cry of pain, the animal sprang off the piece of rock into the stream.

The victory was so far gained, and the highwaymen of course followed up their advantage.

The creature was a great weight, and it fell into the water with a tremendous splash.

With the points of their swords the highwaymen continued to prick the skin of it, and it naturally shrunk every time a puncture was inflicted.

In this way, then, they succeeded in driving it in the direction they wished it to take.

When it once fairly got into the passage, their task was very much easier.

They pricked it more vigorously, so as to enrage it as much as possible.

At full speed, then, it made its way along the passage towards the first cavern.

Soon such sounds came to the ears of our friends as incontestably proved that the gendarmes had entered the passage, and were in full pursuit of them.

Upon making this discovery, they deemed it prudent to go no further, so Claude Duval gave the poor creature one vigorous parting thrust—such a one as would, he imagined, carry it the remainder of the distance.

Maddened, and thoroughly infuriated with the pain which it suffered, the creature continued its way along the passage until it confronted the gendarmes.

Then it came to a stand.

But only for a moment.

Blinded by fury it made a rush forward.

The gendarmes retreated.

The rest we know.

When that volley was fired, the creature was just beneath the arch.

Indeed, a portion of its body was already within the cavern.

Nearly all the bullets that were fired lodged in its body.

The cry, then, that the gendarmes heard was the last one it uttered.

It fell down dead, and the current carried it far away in a moment.

But our friends did not know this.

Their troubles, nevertheless, were far from being over.

They retraced their steps to the second cavern without meeting with any accident.

Their unanimous decision was to get out into the open air as soon as possible.

Accordingly, they made a rapid examination of the cavern, the result of which was that they found it very similar to the other.

At one end was the passage by which they had entered.

The stream of water flowed in a serpentine manner across it, and passed out again under another arch.

Than this there was no other exit that our friends could find.

After some hesitation they determined to try their luck. The former one having been passed in safety gave them courage to make a second attempt.

In the hope, then, that this stream might conduct them out of these gloomy regions, the three highwaymen again stepped into the bed of the stream and passed underneath the arch.

But it was not without great misgiving lest they should be so unfortunate as to meet with some other inhabitant of it, with whom they by no means desired to have an encounter.

This second passage was very much longer than the first; it was, too, more irregular, winding in and out in a perplexing manner.



[BLACK BESS IS WELL CARED FOR DURING TURPIN'S ABSENCE.]

It was not long before a very disagreeable circumstance forced itself upon their notice.

The bed of the stream sloped rapidly.

This downward tendency filled them with the utmost uneasiness, and they began to fear that after all they had got into these caverns, and that they should have great difficulty in emerging from them alive.

But neither spoke of this, although the thought was uppermost in the minds of each.

Down—downward the stream went, until it became difficult to keep their feet.

Indeed, it was only by clinging close to the rocks that they were enabled to do so.

A roaring noise, too, came to their ears, increasing in loudness every moment.

It was like that which they had heard upon emerging from the foundations of the mill.

And now a thought occurred to their minds of so awful a character that the pulsations of their hearts almost ceased.

It was Tom King who first spoke, though, when he raised his voice, his comrades knew well enough what he was about to say.

"Jack—Claude," he said.

"Yes, Tom," replied his companions, with difficulty raising their voices sufficiently to be heard above the roaring water.

"We are lost."

No pen could possibly describe the tone in which these three words were uttered.

"You fear, then——"

"I don't fear, but I am sure that we have got either into the vortex of a subterraneous whirlpool or cascade. Cling tightly to the rocks, or you will lose your footing. The water seems to rush by with more and more violence every moment."

"Can we retrace our steps?" said Claude.

"We can try, but I fear we have got too far down the treacherous current, and the bed of the stream is more slippery than ice."

"Let us try, then, at once," said Claude, "before we go further."

"Lead the way," said Tom King; "and be careful to secure your footing."

The three highwaymen turned round and made a desperate effort to retrace their steps along this underground stream.

But alas! the effort was a vain one.

Unconsciously they had approached the verge of a waterfall, and were in that portion of the stream which is called the rapids, from the great increase of the flow of the water just before it reaches the place of its descent.

It is well known how easy it is to be engulfed in a treacherous stream, even in broad daylight, so that it is no matter of surprise that our three friends, surrounded by darkness as they were, and under the excitement produced by the pursuit of the gendarmes, should not have discovered their terrible situation until too late.

It was not until Claude turned round and tried to return that he fully found how far they had been lured to their destruction.

The rapidity with which the water flowed seemed to have increased ten-fold.

And the bed of the stream, which rose with alarming rapidity, afforded not the least foothold.

Before, then, he was aware of such a catastrophe, he felt his feet give way beneath him, and himself carried with fearful swiftness down the stream.

He uttered a cry of horror, and made a terrific effort to clutch the point of some of the rocks which projected into the stream.

But the attempt was utterly futile.

He could not obtain a firm grasp of any one of them.

Sometimes he would take a precarious hold, but ere he could tighten it, the slippery rock would slip between his fingers, while he was carried with augmenting speed down the stream.

As we have said, the three highwaymen almost simultaneously turned round to retrace their steps. With difficulty they preserved their footing, until Claude lost his, and of course, the weight of his body coming against them had the effect of destroying their equilibrium.

Away, then, all three were swept like straws along the remorseless torrent.

In a little while they altered their endeavours to grasp the sides of the rocks in order to arrest their descent, to keeping into the middle of the stream, for they were continually receiving bruises from the sharp, jutting points.

How long they were drifted in this manner, they had no idea.

It was not for long, however, though, to them, the time seemed prolonged into an age.

Suddenly, and with an awful rush, they felt themselves carried with still greater rapidity forward, and then carried over a precipice.

They had long since given themselves up for dead men, for where else could that cataract fall but into the very bowels of the earth?

Down—down—they went, with a speed that almost deprived them of breath and consciousness.

Then they felt themselves plunged into a boiling seething mass of water, until there seemed to be tons of water upon them.

Then they rose to the surface—stunned, and almost insensible.

They did, however, possess sufficient instinct to crawl towards the side of the stream, and having done so, they lapsed into a swoon of so deathlike a character, that no one would have believed they lived.

In this state they continued for a long, long time.

Claude Duval, who was, perhaps, the most inured to hardships of various kinds, and who was gifted with the strongest constitution, was the first to recover his senses.

But for full two minutes after he returned to consciousness he was unable to recollect what had taken place, and where he was.

By degrees, however, recollection dawned upon him, and then he became aware that he had escaped from what he had made up his mind was inevitable death.

He was drenched to the skin, and he found that where he lay the descending water splashed over him.

His first thought was to seek for a light, but his immersion had effectually deprived him of all means of obtaining one.

Then he groped about in the intense darkness in the hope of finding his comrades, though he more than feared that they had perished, and that he was the only one who had escaped.

Presently he came in contact with something which he knew immediately to be a human form.

Passing his hands over it, he reached the face.

But the moment he touched it he was startled by hearing a loud cry.

He recognised the tones of that voice.

To his joy, Sixteen-String Jack was alive as well as himself.

A few rapid words passed between them, and then Sixteen-String Jack, who did not feel much the worse for his perilous adventure, assisted Claude to search for Tom King.

They found him at only a few paces distant, and so near the stream that if he had rolled over he must have fallen into it.

The darkness of the place they were in was most intense, but they succeeded, nevertheless, in removing Tom King from his perilous situation.

Then they adopted the best means within their reach to restore him to consciousness.

After a time they succeeded, and then the two, feeling much better, rose to their feet, and endeavoured to pierce the darkness which environed them.

But the effort was a complete failure.

If they held up their hands close before their eyes, they could not perceive any trace of it.

Nor could they consequently see each other, so they adopted the very wise precaution of keeping hold of each others hands.

At that moment they would have given anything for a light, in order to ascertain what kind of a place they were in, and whether it had any outlet to it.

Perhaps they thought they had only been spared death by drowning in order to perish by one ten times more terrible.

But a light was out of the question. The water had put out the one they carried and inevitably damaged the materials wherewith they might hope to obtain another.

With a roaring, crashing sound the water continued to fall from the height above.

The highwaymen were all under the impression that they were very far down below the level of the surface of the earth.

To them the cascade down which they had fallen seemed to be hundreds of feet high, at the very least, though it is probable that the darkness led them into error upon this point.

Certain, however, it is that their position was an unpleasant and alarming one.

Destitute of light, and food, and tools, what chances had they of once more standing beneath the pure blue sky?

Very little, indeed, unless fortune should stand their friend.

For a long time our friends remained just as they were, casting their eyes around them, but still unable to see anything but the darkness, which to their strained vision, seemed to take all manner of strange and alarming shapes and roll rapidly towards them.

At length they agreed to step forward for a few paces, all three keeping in a straight line, and each one putting his foot forward and securing a footing before he moved the other.

This was certainly about the best thing they could do.

In this way they proceeded some distance, until, indeed, the loudness of the cataract had much diminished, so that they were able to make themselves heard without straining their voices.

They then again paused.

But still there was nothing that they could see.

Suddenly, however, Sixteen-String Jack uttered a cry which sounded like one of joy.

"Look," he cried, addressing his comrades. "Look."

"Look where? At what?" they asked, eagerly.

"Yonder—yonder. Straight before you. Cannot you see something which looks like a faint and tiny star?"

His two companions strained their eyes to the utmost, but were at first unable to distinguish the faint speck of light to which Jack alluded.

At length, however, they caught a sight of it, and

having once done so, could not be persuaded to take their eyes off it.

They were filled with joy when they saw it, for not one had any kind of doubt as to what it meant.

"Keep it steadily in view," they cried to each other. "Do not lose sight of it a moment, lest we should be unable to find it. Keep straight on towards it, for that will lead us to freedom."

With these words of encouragement on their lips, and their hearts full of hope, the three highwaymen stepped forward, still, however, taking the same precaution in their progress that they had done hitherto, namely, not to move one foot until they were certain of a secure resting place for the other.

In this way they went on and on for a long time, until that which looked at first so faint, and dim, and star-like, increased in magnitude and brightness, until at last they could see that it was really an opening in the rocks.

Through what kind of a place it was that they were making their way they had no idea.

It might have been some vast and spacious cavern, across which they were making their way out—it might have been a narrow passage only, extending but a few feet beside them.

The din of the cataract was now almost inaudible, which proved that the distance they had come was considerable.

Still they had a long way to go, for the opening must either be a very small one, or else at a great distance.

They found the latter to be the case, and, on a closer approach, saw that it was a rude natural arch, through which the stream of water flowed into the open air.

Thankful that its course was not, as they at first feared, directed into the very bowels of the earth, they once again committed themselves to the stream, for there were no means of passing under the arch on foot.

The stream was not, however, deep, nor had they far to wade through it.

In a few moments, to their intense satisfaction, our three friends stood upon dry ground, and with nothing but the sky above them.

It was broad daylight, and the sun was shining with full power and splendour.

Never before, in the whole course of their existence, had the face of nature looked so beautiful.

Certainly the spot at which they had emerged was about as lovely a one as could well have been imagined.

As far as they could see was a wide expanse of well-cultivated country.

To be sure, the summer had gone and the winter was close at hand, but still it was one of those bright, sunny mornings which even in mid-winter sometimes come and give us an idea of summer.

CHAPTER CCCVIII.

TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AT LENGTH LAND UPON THE SHORES OF ENGLAND.

But our friends were soon recalled from their contemplation of the beautiful scene spread out before them by their thoughts.

Dangers had been avoided and perils escaped without injury, but, for all that, they were far from being in a position of security.

The gendarmes would not easily relinquish their search, after the determined opposition they had met with, and the mischief they had done.

They would, doubtless, scour the whole country for miles round.

Looking behind them, they saw that the arch underneath which they had passed, and through which the water flowed, was situated at the base of a high hill, doubtless the one upon the brow of which the ruined mill had been built, or else one contiguous to it.

On foot they would stand but a poor chance of escaping from the well-mounted dragoons, whose horses would by this time have rested sufficiently to recover from their fatigue.

But our friends were in a very uncomfortable situation.

They were hungry and weary.

Their clothes were dripping with water, which was as cold as ice itself.

Every now and then they would shiver from head to foot.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Tom King; "we cannot stay here in such a condition as we are now, nor can we hide."

"But what, then, can we do?" asked his two comrades.

"We must endeavour to reach, unperceived by our foes, some small auberge where we can have shelter and accommodation. It will be easy to remove the suspicions which our appearance would be likely to excite, by saying that we had been capsized."

"We can try it. The chief difficulty will be to avoid the gendarmes, but, when that is done, the rest will be comparatively easy."

"Make haste, then. The gendarmes are doubtless searching all about for us, but then, if they are, we have a very good chance of escape, for they are nowhere in sight."

"Come on, then."

The three highwaymen set forward on their search for an auberge or inn.

It was not long before they came across a narrow sinuous lane, and, passing this, they shortly emerged upon a high road.

Somewhere along this they made no doubt they should be able to find what they sought.

But, having walked at least four miles without perceiving any more traces of what they wanted than they had seen at first, they began to grow disheartened.

Presently a peasant came in view.

He was trudging along with his eyes on the ground, but, upon hearing the sound of Tom's voice, who addressed him in French, he raised his head.

He looked surprised when he saw the appearance which his interlocutors presented.

Tom King had some trouble in making this fellow understand, and still more in understanding what he said in reply, for he spoke in one of the horrible barbarous dialects in the north of France.

But at length they gleaned that there was an auberge about a mile further along the road.

Tom tossed the peasant a small coin for his information, and with renewed vigour the three highwaymen continued on their journey.

The auberge was at length reached.

It was a small, poor-looking place, but still they thought it would answer their purpose.

Upon entering, Tom told the tale agreed upon, namely, that they had been out upon a pleasure excursion, and that the boat had unfortunately capsized. They had lost their way, being strangers in the neighbourhood, but would pay liberally for any accommodation afforded them.

This sounded a very plausible story, and the landlord of the auberge was completely taken in by it.

Perhaps the exhibition of a well-filled purse had something to do with his acquiescence.

However, be that as it may, our three friends were shown to sleeping chambers, and while there their clothes were taken and dried.

Fortunately for them, they seemed to have got quite out of the way of the gendarmes, who must have been searching another part of the country.

But the highwaymen stayed no longer than they were obliged because of the danger to which they exposed themselves.

Their clothes were brought to them thoroughly well dried and cleaned, and they put them on with the greatest satisfaction.

Then, descending the stairs, they called for refreshments, and dispatched a hearty meal.

They did not linger over it, however, and as soon as they had finished they prepared to start.

"The sooner we get away from here," said Tom King, "the better it will be for us, for there is no knowing how soon the gendarmes may make their appearance."

"That is uncommonly true, Tom," said Claude, "but we shall stand a poor chance of getting away from them if we have to travel on foot."

"We shall. What are we to do for horses?"

"I think it might very likely be managed."

"How?"

"Let us count up how much we are all worth in ready money. You must recollect I took a good-sized purse from the old man in the carriage."

"Oh! did you, Claude? I have been going to ask you what sort of luck you had, only the gendarmes were down upon us so soon that I have had no chance."

"Empty your pockets, and count up. I am in hopes we shall muster amongst us enough to buy three horses, and then we are off to England!"

"For one," said Sixteen-String Jack, "I shan't care how soon we get there. I am thoroughly tired of France."

"We are all the same about that, I think; but come, out with the money."

The highwaymen complied with this demand, and there was soon a goodly heap of coin upon the table.

Claude counted it, and, when he had finished that highly-interesting operation, he said—

"Good news, my friends. Unless horses are much dearer here than they are in England, we have enough money to buy three, and something to spare."

"Let us call the landlord, then, and ask him about horses for all three. Perhaps he can supply us."

"There is no harm in asking him, at any rate. Call him in."

The landlord was called, and, upon his making his appearance, he was questioned with respect to his capability for finding them with horses.

"I have three magnificent creatures in my stable," he said, "that have been left here for sale."

"How much each?"

"You shall come and look at them, and then we will talk about the price."

Our friends rose and followed the landlord to the stables at the rear of the inn.

Here they were shown three horses of middling quality. But still, although not very handsome, they seemed of that tough, wiry sort, which can endure any amount of fatigue, and get over the ground at a rapid rate.

"How much do you want?" asked Claude.

"I cannot take less than seven hundred and fifty francs each for them."

"That is a long price."

"What?"

"I say they are dear."

"No—no. Cheap."

"How much is seven hundred and fifty francs in English money, Tom?"

"Thirty pounds."

"Then that is a great deal too much," said Claude, turning to the landlord, "but I tell you what we don't mind doing."

"What?"

"Why, we will give the money you ask, if you will throw the furniture into the bargain."

"Throw the furniture? I do not understand."

"I mean, we will give you thirty pounds apiece for the horses, if you will find saddles and bridles also for the same money."

The landlord hesitated for a moment, and, as he had been told to sell the animals for three hundred francs, he thought he could afford to give in, and accordingly he did so.

Saddles were found, and, in a few minutes the horses were ready for the road.

The reckoning was paid, and then, the three highwaymen feeling rather more like themselves, trotted out into the high-road, and made the best of their way to Boulogne.

This place they reached without meeting with any particular adventure worthy of special mention.

By Tom King's advice, they resolved upon a bold course of action.

That was to go to the appointed landing place like ordinary passengers, and take places for themselves and their horses on board the boat which plied between that port and Dover.

It is often the case that a bold course is the safest, and so it proved in this case.

In an easy, off-hand sort of way our friends secured their places and got on board.

Once there, however, they took care to keep as much out of sight as possible.

Another circumstance was in their favour.

It was quite dark when they got on board, and, of course, as the passage across the channel is a short one, it was dark when they landed.

It was, in fact, about an hour past midnight.

Somehow or other the English Channel had been very unfortunate to our friends.

They had never been upon it without meeting with some perilous adventure or another.

But this time they crossed without the occurrence of any incident whatever, beyond those which always take place upon such occasions.

The reader must please be good enough to bear in mind that the three highwaymen were in total ignorance of all the varied and extraordinary incidents which had befallen Dick Turpin since they parted with him at the entrance to the cavern where they had made a temporary stay.

They were full of anxiety respecting him, and much wondered what had taken place during the last interval when they had had so many narrow escapes from death.

Not for one moment, though, did they anticipate what had really taken place.

Little did they think that, at that very moment, Dick Turpin was an inmate of a cell in Newgate.

That little surprise was in store for them.

It is needless to say how much Dick was liked by his three comrades.

During the course of this history we have seen how they have all looked up to him as a superior spirit.

Indeed, he had, by general consent, been elected captain, the other three to form a band and act under his directions.

But circumstances had taken such a turn that this was never properly carried out, though the other three when they landed recollected it, and determined to have the arrangement renewed and fulfilled.

They did not know what obstacles even then stood in the way of it.

Whether they were eventually to accomplish their aim, time alone, the great unfolder of all mysteries, can determine.

Full of these thoughts, and impatient to see their old companion, Claude and his party did not stay a moment longer at Dover than was necessary to land and get their cattle on shore.

As soon as this was done, they mounted and set off at full speed along the London-road, for it was in the metropolis that they thought Dick Turpin was most likely to be found.

To London, then, they directed their steps, nor did they halt until they had performed a considerable portion of the journey.

Of course the endurance of their cattle had a limit, and they were obliged to halt several times in order to allow them rest and food.

But no unnecessary time was lost.

On one of the occasions, when they halted at a roadside public-house, where they regaled themselves with some of the finest old October ale they ever remembered to have tasted, they received the first intimation of Dick Turpin's position.

They had not dismounted from their steeds, but sat in the saddle at the front door of the inn and had the ale handed to them.

They were waited upon by the landlord—a real jovial specimen of an Englishman—and his pretty daughter.

Mine host was inclined to be communicative.

"Are you much of travellers on the road?" he asked.

Of course, he was replied to in the affirmative.

"Then I have a piece of good news to tell you—if you have not heard it already. I don't suppose you have, for it has only just been brought down to me direct from London."

"No, we have heard nothing. What is it?"

"You'll rejoice, I'll be sworn. You will be able to perform your journey on the highway with more security and less risk than you have done for a long time past."

"How so?"

"Why, I have been told, upon the very best authority, that the notorious Dick Turpin, who has for so long past been a terror to all travellers on the road is—why, bless my life, how astonished you look!"

The landlord might well make the remark.

Upon the first mention of their old comrade's name, which they heard at a moment when they least expected it, neither of them could avoid exhibiting the surprise they felt.

But they would not allow the landlord to break off in

the middle of his sentence, but impatiently clamoured for him to continue it.

"Why, gentlemen, I didn't think his name would so much surprise you, but the fact is, Dick Turpin, the highwayman, is"——

"Yes—yes! What?"

"Safely lodged in Newgate."

"In Newgate?"

"Yes. I always said he would get there at last, and you see my words have come true."

"In Newgate is he?"

"Yes. I have no doubt about the correctness of my informer. He is in Newgate safe enough."

"When was he taken there?"

"Three days ago."

"Indeed; then it is quite recently?"

"Quite."

"Well, you saw we were surprised?"

"I did."

"I am not at liberty to tell you the reason of it, but it was a very good one. I may say, however, that we were in search of Dick Turpin, and at the very moment you spoke we were thinking about him."

"Indeed! Then you are officers?"

"Mum!" said Tom King, holding up his finger in a mysterious manner. "I can't say what we are. Be sure you don't say a word about what we have told you. Good morning."

"Hi! Stop!" said the landlord, as the highwaymen trotted off. "I'll be shot if you have told me anything!"

CHAPTER CCCIX.

DICK TURPIN DISCOVERS THAT, AFTER ALL, NEWGATE IS NOT SUCH AN UNCOMFORTABLE PLACE AS HE EXPECTED TO FIND IT.

HAVING brought the adventures of Turpin's three companions up to this point, we feel that we can leave them for awhile, and turn our attention to Dick Turpin himself.

We suppose they have not forgotten where they saw him last.

He was seated in his dungeon in Newgate, reflecting upon the strange string of events which had terminated by his being placed there.

In this occupation he was interrupted by hearing the fastenings of his dungeon door undone.

Curious to see who it was that had come to disturb him so soon, Dick raised his head, and looked towards the door.

It was thrust open rather roughly, and a couple of men entered.

One was a turnkey, and the other was the man employed to go the round of the prison at certain intervals and supply the prisoners with food.

He put down a small pitcher of water just inside the cell, and a small loaf of contract bread upon the top of it.

Dick was hungry, but the sight of the fare set before him did not tempt him to eat.

But the regulations of the great city prison were very different then to what they are now.

Dick had money in his pocket, and he was well aware that while he had that he should not have to go short of luxuries.

So, when the man put down the pitcher, he said—in a tone of affected hilarity—

"Is that the best fare you can set before the prince of highwaymen? Nothing but water and black bread?"

"No offence, Mr. Dick," said the man, with as much deferential civility as he would have used if he had spoken to the governor himself; for among the officials of Newgate, Dick Turpin was looked upon as being a very distinguished character indeed. "No offence, Mr. Dick; only as *juty* is *juty*, why, of course, I was obligated to bring you the pervisions which the reggleations pervides."

"Oh! I daresay it's all right."

"Oh! yes, it's all right."

"Well, I feel rather peckish. What could you get me for supper?"

"Anything your honour wants."

"Very well; here's a guinea. Get what you like that is nice, and you can keep what you have left for your trouble."

"That's right, your honour," said the man, as he took the coin from the highwayman's hand and slipped it into his pocket. "I don't want to get no profit out of you, captain, and I won't. You shall have the worth of your guinea, every hap'orth. You shall have a supper fit for a king."

"All right," returned Turpin, who was well aware of the policy of keeping on good terms with all the prison officials with whom he came in contact. "Treat me well. You will find it answer your purpose best."

"Lor' bless you, captain," said the man, looking towards the turnkey, "we know a real gentleman, don't we, Jim?"

"In course we does. We have seen plenty in our time, so we are able to judge."

"I suppose so," said Dick; "and now, as I feel rather hungry, the sooner you can get my supper the better I shall be pleased."

"What will you have to drink, captain?"

"Oh! some prime old ale, if you can get it."

"You can get anything here, captain, by paying for it."

"I suppose so. Well, here is another guinea. You can spend the first, and divide the second between you."

Highly satisfied with their prisoner's bounty, the men withdrew.

In about half-an-hour afterwards they returned, bringing with them as nice and tempting a supper as could possibly be imagined.

"Eat it in comfort, captain. The governor has gone out, so we shan't be troubled with him. Ah! times is sadly altered to what they used to be. I can hear talk, too, of fresh changes, but I hope they won't be in my time. Why, I actually heard that they intended to take our perquisites off us!"

"No," said Dick, sympathizingly, "you don't mean that?"

"I do, indeed."

"Then, it's too bad."

"That's what I said."

"It's infamous. However, what did you say about the governor just now?"

"I said that he had gone out, so we shouldn't be troubled with him just at present."

"Then, does he make himself busy in prying about the prison?"

"Oh! very. You never know when to expect him. Instead of keeping in his own room, like a governor, and leaving the proper *fishals* to look after the prison, he keeps poking about here and there and everywhere."

"But you expect to be free from him for a little while?"

"Oh! yes."

"Then I'll tell you what you shall do."

"Anything you like, captain, besides letting you out of this here place."

"You need not trouble yourself about that."

The man gave a knowing wink.

"I am speaking earnestly," said Turpin. "I have given my word of honour to the judge that I would make no attempt to escape."

"He means to get you off himself, then?"

"Well, I fancy he will try at it."

"And suppose he don't succeed?"

"Why, of course, that will be another matter. But, come, I have not said yet what I was going to say."

"What is it, captain?"

"Why, as you don't expect the governor just yet, I want you to sit down here and help me eat my supper."

"Lor', captain!"

"Don't refuse. I can't eat without I have company; so sit down and make yourselves at home."

Highly delighted with the invitation, the men sat down, and without any further pressing, commenced a vigorous attack upon the tempting viands before them.

Dick was hungry, and as the supper was of such a character that it would almost tempt the appetite of an epicure, it may be believed that he did ample justice to it.

As for the two turnkeys, somehow or other these gentry are always in feeding condition, and the quantity they put under their waistcoats was really alarming.

But still there was enough and to spare, for the meal was not only of so excellent a quality, but it was excellent in quantity—sufficient having been provided for half-a-dozen men at least.

During the dispatchment of this meal they beguiled the time with various reflections upon things in general.

But above all, these men were struck with the nobleness which Dick had displayed by coming forward as a witness in the manner he did.

"Where is Adrian Winberry?" Dick asked, at length.

"Oh! he is safe enough. His cell adjoins yours."

"Does it?"

"Yes."

"Oh! which side?"

"That."

The turnkey pointed to the wall which was on your right hand as you entered the dungeon by the door.

"Oh! that is his cell, is it?"

"Yes."

"Does he know I am next door to him?"

"Oh! dear, no; and we should not think of telling him."

"Yet you have told me."

"Ah! but you and him are two different people."

"I suppose so."

"What we tell you we should not tell him; that's what I mean."

"I know. How does Adrian behave himself?"

"Like a wild beast."

"How is that?"

"He sits crouched up like a tiger, and when you enter his cell he looks at you like a maniac, but never offers a word."

"You seem rather afraid of him."

"Well, I shouldn't like to go within reach of his clutches, I can tell you."

"Is he chained?"

"Oh! yes, very heavily, and a good watch is kept upon him, because it is feared that, having powerful friends outside, he may attempt to escape—and perhaps get off."

"It will be an eternal disgrace to all in the prison if such a wretch is allowed to regain his liberty."

"Don't you be afraid of that. Such a strict watch is kept that he could not possibly go half-a-dozen steps without being seen."

"I should advise you myself to keep a sharp eye upon him. He might give you the slip, you know, and I am sure if anyone ever deserved a ride to Tyburn, he does."

"You are right, captain."

"How does he behave to you?"

"Like a wild beast, as I told you."

"Does he live on the prison fare?"

"Yes, what little he does eat."

"Oh! You never get anything for him?"

"Never."

"And never speaks?"

"No. So, in course, we don't speak to him. Why, if he was to lay down ten guineas for me to do for him what I have done for you to-night, I would say no."

"I am much obliged to you for your good feeling, I am sure."

"I would have done it for nothing for you, captain, if so be you was hard up and hadn't got no chink."

"I am well provided, though, as it happens," replied Dick, "though I thank you all the same. You will find I shall act liberally towards you."

"I know you will."

"Well, now then, what about Adrian's two accomplices—where are they?"

"Do you mean Norman and Sare?"

"Yes."

"They are in a couple of cells on the other side of the corridor."

"What do you think of them?"

"Why, I feel sorry sometimes."

"Do you?"

"Yes. I fancy they were led into the business without being awares of the nature of it."

"Well, I think so, too."

"Now, in my opinion, the worst one of the whole bunch is old Skinner, the lawyer, and I am afraid he will get off the lightest."

"I daresay he will."

"Don't you think he is the worst?"

"In one way I do."

"As how?"

"I think he put a great deal into Adrian's head which he never would have thought of himself."

"I am sure of it."

"Whereabouts have you put him?"

"He is in the next cell to Adrian Winberry."

"Then he is between us?"

"Adrian Winberry is."

"Yes. I mean Adrian Winberry is between us; I am in the cell on one side of him and Skinner in the one on the other side."

"Just so."

"But how comes it that we are all here in one place? These ain't the condemned cells, are they?"

"Oh! no."

"Well, that's where Adrian and his two accomplices ought to be."

"I know that, captain. But you see there is some repairs going on in that portion of the prison where the condemned cells are situated, and so we thought they would be safest here. Why, these are about the strongest cells in all Newgate."

"I suppose so."

"Because you are put in one of them?"

Dick nodded.

The turnkeys laughed.

"They want to take care of you, captain."

"Well, perhaps they had better; and I should also advise them to keep a very sharp eye upon all Adrian's movements."

"You needn't fear; but, captain"——

"What?"

"We must bid you good-bye."

"Oh! don't go yet; let's have a little more of your company, for I hate to be alone. Don't go the moment you have finished your supper."

"We should like to stay, captain, uncommonly; only, as I told you before, *juty* is *juty*, and if we stay here much longer, we shall have the governor popping in upon us, and, of course, if that was to be the case, why, we should have an end put, very likely, to all future meetings."

"Then go, by all means. Don't let me be the means of getting you into trouble."

"I think we had better start at once, then, captain."

"Very well, then. I shall see you at breakfast time?"

"Oh! yes. What should you like?"

"Anything. I am not at all particular, so long as it's nice. I'll pay you for it when you bring it."

"All right, captain; you may depend upon us."

"Can't you leave me the light?" asked Dick, as the men rose preparatory to leaving the cell, and took their lanterns in their hands.

"It breaks my heart to refuse you, captain."

"Can't you do it?"

"If I do I shall sure to be found out."

"How?"

"Why, there's a hole over the top of the door, and the light would come through into the passage, and if Mr. Cawthorn was to see it, I should lose my place, for he is awful strict."

"Take it away, then," said Turpin. "Don't get yourselves into trouble upon my account, only if you could have left the light, why, of course, I should have liked to have it."

"I know you would, captain, but we can't do it."

"Well, good night, then. And don't forget a good breakfast in the morning."

"All right, captain. Good night."

"Good night," said Turpin, again.

The two turnkeys who had shown themselves to be thus friendly disposed towards him, left the cell, and closed the door after them.

Then Dick was left in profound darkness.

It seemed doubly so after the light he had had, for, though not a brilliant one, still it was amply sufficient to illuminate the dungeon.

He was left in solitude, too, and Dick was of a sociable disposition, fond of company, and one who did not like solitude for long together.

And when the reverberations raised by the footsteps of the turnkeys as they walked along the passage died away, he was left in the most profound silence.

He was then in solitude, in darkness, and silence.

Not a single object was discernible in his cell, save the small grated aperture high up in the wall, through which a glimpse of the night sky could be obtained.

Dick groped himself towards the bed, and threw himself down wearily upon it.

The fatigues and excitements which he had so recently passed through had their effects upon him, and though at first his thoughts were busy, yet he soon lapsed into a sound slumber.

CHAPTER CCCX.

DICK TURPIN IS VISITED IN HIS CELL BY BLANCHE WINBERRY AND MAUD GOULDMAN.

And so passed Dick Turpin's first night in Newgate.

To be sure it might have been much worse, for a prison is never a pleasant place for any one.

But, then, Dick was indulged in various ways.

He had supped as heartily and luxuriously as he could have wished to have done.

He was unfettered.

The bed upon which he lay was a hard one, but, then, he was used to inferior accommodation in that respect.

At any rate, he slept soundly enough, though his dreams were somewhat disturbed, being a distorted reflex of all the events which had recently occurred to him.

Daylight was streaming into his cell when he awoke, and he was able to have a better look at it than he was the night before.

It was built of huge blocks of masonry, clumped together at various places with bands of iron.

The window, or rather the hole which received that designatory appellation, was as high up in the wall as it could conveniently be put, considering the size of the cell.

It was very strongly barred. Indeed, so close were the pieces of iron put together, that a cat would have found it impossible to squeeze between them.

Nearly opposite this window was the door.

Dick's principal attention was given to this.

It seemed a miracle of strength and security.

The inner side was entirely covered over with sheet iron, and, where the pieces joined, they were lapped over for about a couple of inches, and then strongly riveted together.

Dick had heard how many daring spirits had succeeded in breaking out of Newgate, when their limbs were so loaded with fetters that they could scarcely walk, and he wondered however it had been done, or however the prisoner had had the heart to set about a task which presented so many apparently insuperable obstacles.

It might be that, at this moment, the thought occurred to him that he should have to owe escape from his cell to his own exertions alone.

He rose whether or not, and, going to the door, passed his hand over it, and endeavoured to shake it in its frame.

But he might just as well have tried to shake one of the massive stone walls.

He was quite as likely to succeed in one as the other.

This was his own opinion upon the subject as he paced up and down the cell.

It must have been early morning, for he could hear none of the officials astir.

The cell was very cold, and Dick's blood was chilled, but, after taking a few turns up and down, he succeeded in increasing its circulation.

He was thus engaged when he heard footsteps and voices in the corridor, and he came to the conclusion that his breakfast was about to make its appearance.

But he was disappointed.

He could hear the voices and footsteps, and he could hear the various cell doors in the corridor outside opened and closed.

At length they came to his, and the same turnkeys who had visited him the preceding night made their appearance.

One of them carried a large-sized tray covered with a beautiful white cloth, which was of itself quite appetising to look upon.

"Excuse us, captain," said the other, as he closed the door, "for keeping you so long; but the fact is, we thought we had better attend to the other cells first, so that we could come here last and wait upon you."

"All right," said Dick; "I am much obliged to you."

"What do you think of that, captain?" asked the other, as he removed the covering from the tray, and disclosed the tempting articles which were spread upon it.

"It's first-rate," said Dick, as he rubbed his hands. "Sit down, and we'll make an attack upon it."

The men did not require to be told twice, so they sat down and began their breakfast.

There was just the same profusion as there had been the preceding evening.

There were viands of all sorts, and drinkables of various kinds.

Among the latter was some hot coffee, then not so common a breakfast beverage as it is now.

Dick was chilly, so he drank heartily of it, and it soon had a beneficial effect upon him.

The turnkeys were as much inclined to be companionable and pleasant as they were upon the former occasion.

As before, Dick asked after Adrian Winberry.

"He don't look as if he had had such a good night as you," replied one of the turnkeys.

"I have had a pretty good night," said Dick, "but the place is so infernally cold."

"Ah! cold nights is coming on now," replied the janitor. "I shall expect to hear lots of complaints."

"I should think so, if the other cells are as cold as this one is."

"As cold, captain! why there's some as would freeze the breath as it came out of your mouth; this here is reckoned one of the warmest cells in the prison."

"Then I ought to esteem myself lucky?"

"You ought, captain, for take my word for it, you might be lodged very much worse than you are."

"I daresay; but come, you don't eat!"

"Thankee, captain, I am getting on pretty well; now do you like your breakfast?"

"It is first-rate, and I hope I shall have as good a one as long as I am here, which I hope won't be for long!"

"Now, don't say that, captain."

"Oh! no offence to you, you know, but you understand."

"Oh! yes, captain, we understands."

"Is the day fixed for Adrian Winberry's execution?"

"Well, the warrant hasn't been delivered, I don't think; but I daresay they will be tucked up on the usual day."

"Monday?"

"Yes."

"Then they have got a short time of it. Does he seem to feel his position at all?"

"Not that I can see. He looks just like a wild beast, as I told you before, and how could you expect a wild beast to feel his position?"

"Why, not very well."

"Of course not. But we must go again, captain. It grieves us to leave you, but the governor's so strict."

"He is awful," said his companion; "and if he was once to find us here so friendly with you, the first thing he would do would be to put us on some other duty."

"I should be sorry for that," said Dick; "so pray take every care of yourselves. I would do anything rather than you should get into trouble on my account."

"Oh! captain, you are one of the right sort. It's a thousand pities that ever you should be here; but I shall never forget you, no, not to the longest day I live."

With these words the turnkeys left the cell.

"They are disposed to be friendly to me," muttered Turpin, when they had closed the door, "and I will take care not to offend them. I have heard it said that it is the worst policy to offend any one, let them be ever so humble; and I shall make it my study to keep on good terms with my jailors, for I fully believe in the truth of the saying. The day may come when I shall be glad to avail myself of their assistance—who knows?"

Dick paced up and down the dungeon as he spoke.

"I wonder what sort of success the judge will meet with in his endeavours on my behalf? I fear he will find the authorities very obstinate, for I have made myself notorious, and, at the same time, brought them into bad repute. Well—well, I must wait my time. I am not so uncomfortable here as I expected I should be, and no harm can possibly arise if I remain and await the current of events.

"It will be dreary work, though. I am not used to being cooped up between four stone walls—on the contrary, I have ever loved to have the pure, open sky above me. And Bess—bonny Black Bess—my matchless mare, without whom Dick Turpin would have been nothing—how is it I have forgotten her? I wonder how she has

fared lately? Well, doubtless, for the inmates of the Hall would, out of respect for the services I have done, attend to the wants of my steed."

If the reader will remember, upon the occasion of Dick's return to the Hall, which for distinction's sake, we may as well call Winberry Hall, he had delivered his mare Black Bess into the care of Shockley, the steward, who conducted her to the stables belonging to the mansion, whither Turpin himself followed him.

He had seen her carefully bestowed, and in addition gave the ostler a liberal gratuity.

So Dick did not feel much uneasiness and alarm respecting his mare.

He felt pretty sure she was safe and comfortable, and where his enemies would not think of looking for her.

Then Dick's thoughts, finding a rest here, travelled to his three companions.

"What a long time it is," he said, "since I parted from them. I wonder what vicissitudes they have had? Perhaps they are no more, and yet I can scarcely think that, for somehow or other, I have a presentiment that I shall see them soon. I wish they were here now, I should then feel more at ease than I do; and yet, what have I to fear? I must be still and bide my time.

"If they should return to England, how astounded they will be when they learn that I am here, and by my own free will, as I might say. They will recollect my oft-repeated words of preferring death to capture, and will wonder what has happened to cause me to alter my determination.

"They will never suspect, I fancy, for I will scarcely acknowledge it to myself. And yet why should I fill myself up with a hope that must, in the end, bring nothing but disappointment and despair? But I love her—I love her! I cannot help it. The feeling is one over which I have no control. I can arrest it by no effort of the will. I love her. I felt the change about my heart when I first looked into her face. But she is not for me, and never from my words or from my actions shall she glean the state of my affections towards her. I should be a baser villain than I am were I to do so. I can see she is possessed with a rare romantic spirit, which I cannot but think delightful, and which so well accords with my own.

"What a strange and romantic notion it was upon her part to seek me out, and yet how fortunate a circumstance it proved to be—if not for me, at least to those to whom Maud is endeared. Beautiful Maud, I love you—dearly, fondly, truly love you—but it is with that kind of adoration which one might pay to some dear object far, far above him, which it would be impossible for him to reach. I will be content with that distant worship.

"It is now that I regret that fate has made me what I am, and yet how can I help that. We are all creatures in the hands of destiny, and have our separate paths carved out. I was to be a highwayman, and a highwayman I am, and, I am free to say, a bolder one never took up his station upon heath or road.

"But oh! if I could blot out the past, not only from my own recollection, but the memory of all men! But why think of that? It is impossible, and therefore folly of me to do so.

"But if I cannot love Maud as I should wish to love her, if I cannot receive from her those sweet tokens of affection which would convert this life into Elysium, still I can be ever at hand unknown to her, watching over her, and shielding her from every peril with which she might be threatened. I will do that. I must be content with the lesser happiness which that will afford me.

"Yes, I will do it. I will be her guardian spirit, ever at hand to protect and shield her from all harm. Yes, that shall be the future occupation of my life; but no word to her, no sign even that would betray the secret of my heart."

Dick Turpin was much moved as he uttered these words, and something came into his eyes which made his vision dim and indistinct.

His voice grew husky, too, with emotion, and he struck his breast twice or thrice with his clenched hand, as though by that means he could subdue the agitation which tumulted beneath it.

Then he ceased his hasty walk, and sat down facing the grated window, upon the only movable seat there was in the place.

This was a rickety, rudely-fashioned chair.

How long he thus sat, with folded arms, gazing out upon the piece of sky which he could see through the grating, he knew not, but it must have been for some time, for the sun rose higher and higher in the heavens, and then declined towards the west, when a sunbeam found its way into the cell, and the excess of light caused him to turn his eyes away.

Then he became aware that he was about to receive an interruption.

The securements of the dungeon door were one by one undone, and then it was thrown open.

Dick had scarcely curiosity enough to turn towards the door, and look who it was that was about to enter.

He quite made up his mind that it was his jailors bringing his mid-day meal.

But he heard a voice which showed him that he was mistaken in this supposition.

It was the voice of Mr. Cawthorn, the governor of Newgate, that he heard.

"This way, if you please," he said, in the most deferential tones. "This way, if you please, ladies. Be careful of the step."

Then the governor made his appearance in the cell, ushering in some one who was as yet invisible.

When he heard the words he uttered, however, and the rustling of silk in the passage, a wild kind of hope sprang up in Dick's breast, which gave him so much delight that he could scarce contain himself.

The reader will no doubt understand his feelings.

Could it be possible that she who had become so dear to him—with whom his thoughts had been so long and busily engaged, and who was uppermost in his mind—could it be possible, he asked himself, and his heart beat rapidly as he did so, that she had remembered him, and had come to visit him in his lonesome prison-house.

Feverishly and eagerly Dick had risen to his feet.

He clenched the back of the chair upon which he had been sitting with his left hand, and, by tightening his grasp, strove to conquer his emotion.

With a burning gaze he looked towards the door, in order to ascertain whether his presentiments were true.

He was not kept long in suspense.

In reality it was not a moment, though to him it seemed ten times as long.

The governor had preceded the visitors along the passage by a few steps only, and in courtesy entered the cell first.

Dick's anticipations were not mistaken.

There was a light step, and he then saw standing before him Blanche Winberry and Maud Gouldman.

"A couple of visitors," said the governor, briefly, and, as he spoke, he left the cell.

With his senses in a whirl, and with the sound of her voice murmuring like sweet music in his ear, Dick Turpin, still keeping his hold upon the back of the chair, placed his right hand upon his heart, and bowed deeply and respectfully to his fair visitants.

Ere we relate what took place between them, we will go back a little and narrate the causes of their being there.

CHAPTER CCCXI.

BLANCHE WINBERRY MORE THAN SUSPECTS THE NATURE OF MAUD'S SECRET.

It was quite dark and late at night when Shockley, the steward, drew up at the door of Winberry Hall.

During the whole of their ride from London, Maud and Blanche had sat in the carriage in silence and in tears.

Scarcely a word passed between them during the whole of their journey; their hearts were too full to allow them to speak, although they had so much to communicate to each other.

Blanche especially was much cast down.

She had suffered greatly since her abduction, and in her own account of what happened to her she stated how, during the latter portion of the time, she had been upon the very verge of starvation.

And there is scarcely any instance when the body and mind suffers separately. Indeed, it may be asserted that there is no ailment of the body, however trifling, which does not produce corresponding and proportionate influence upon the mind.

Feebleness of body is always attended with feebleness



[CLAUDE DUVAL'S STRUGGLE WITH THE POLICE-OFFICER.]

of mind, and that is the reason why strong men, and Englishmen as a rule, are so strong in all their opinions and prejudices.

Debilitated, then, to no ordinary degree, Blanche Winberry, as soon as her escape was accomplished, without resting scarcely a moment, undertook a fatiguing journey to the Hall, only to learn upon her arrival there all the disastrous and grievful events which had happened during her absence.

Distracted with grief and maddened with excitement, we have seen how she posted back to London, determined to make her way to the trial.

We have seen, too, how she forced her way into court at a most critical moment.

Then she had to go through the long and trying ordeal of an examination in the witness-box.

And not only that, but to proceed to the anteroom and identify the body of her murdered father.

Oh! it was terrible and soul-crushing.

What, except the deep love she had for her parent, and the sense of duty towards society, would have sustained her through that awful day?

Then came the terrible discovery that her lover was the son of her father's murderer!

And yet she was sustained. She seemed, indeed, endowed with a strength of mind that was absolutely superhuman.

Not once had she faltered, or wavered, or broken down, but had given her evidence clearly, straightforwardly, and truthfully.

Still she bore up, and then, last of all, there came that terrific scene of confusion in the courthouse, where the crowd made the frantic effort to rescue their favourite, Dick Turpin, from the clutches of the myrmidons of the law.

And so, when she got into the carriage, what matter for wonder is it that she at once gave way, and sank under her accumulated trials.

On her return home, however, she succeeded in somewhat composing herself.

But the hour was so late that they proceeded without delay to the sleeping-chamber they occupied in common, and had done from their earliest childhood.

Many days had elapsed since they last shared it, however, and this thought came to the minds of both of them as they threw themselves into each other's arms and indulged in a warm and affectionate embrace.

It was an antique room in which they stood, and well in keeping with the exterior of the hall, which was quaint and old fashioned.

The small hand-lamp they had brought with them had been placed upon the old broad mantle-shelf, in its accustomed position.

But the light which came from it was quite inadequate to illuminate the distant corners of the vast apartment, in which the dispersed darkness seemed to accumulate in large and weirdlike masses.

On this occasion, however, the light of the lamp was rendered more than usually useless, for a full moon that was shining brightly in a southern sky, her lustre undimmed by a single cloud, poured her rays full into the chamber, distinctly revealing the figures of the two young grief-stricken girls.

It was a very large-sized window, and filled with innumerable diamond-shaped panes.

Some of these were of uncoloured glass, while others were beautifully stained in many colours, and elaborately embellished.

And as the bright, pure, silvery beams of the moon passed through these, they acquired their tint, borrowing their colour from them, and fell with a beautiful effect upon the polished oak flooring of the chamber.

For a few moments the two lone creatures remained in that embrace, speechless and motionless.

Then Maud, making a great effort, raised her hand from Blanche's shoulder, and, passing her arm round her waist, said—

"Come, Blanche; we shall be calmer then."

It was evident the fair and beauteous girl understood what her companion meant, for, rousing herself slightly, she moved in the direction of the window.

Maud half-supported her.

It was a bow-window, one of that ancient make, so commodious and yet so pleasant.

The recess in it was as large as a small apartment, and all round, at a convenient height, was a broad, polished, oaken seat.

Upon the floor, and against that portion of the seat which was under the front part of the window, was a velvet cushion.

In the darkness and shadow it could not have been seen by any one save those who knew of its existence there

But Blanche and Maud did not look for it even. They knew its exact position, and so, upon reaching the window, with their arms still encircling each other's waists, they sank down on their knees upon it.

Then clasping their hands over their faces, and resting their arms upon the window-seat, they prayed silently and fervently.

It was a beautiful and touching spectacle to see these two young girls, so utterly alone as they were, thus prostrating themselves in adoration to and communion with their Creator.

As they knelt thus, the bright rays of the moon fell with full force and brilliancy upon them, revealing every outline of their features with a distinctness that was remarkable.

And so, in the silence of this vast and antique chamber, they knelt and prayed for aid and strength and assistance in their troubles to Him who alone could vouchsafe such blessings to them.

And the soothing beneficial of calm and holy prayer soon made itself manifest upon them.

After thus pouring out their souls in fond devotion, their hearts grew gradually lighter and their troubles less.

But still they knelt and prayed until they were perfectly composed.

Then, raising their heads, they once more threw their arms about each other's waists.

Now they found they were able to speak calmly, though very, very sadly over what had happened.

Blanche Winberry's lip quivered, and her voice trembled more than once, for her trials and sufferings were almost more than she could bear.

But she grew better after confiding them to her old playmate Maud.

The latter, however, could not forbear reproaching her for the secret she had kept so closely locked within her bosom, for, until she had heard her say as much in the court, Maud had no idea that Blanche had got a lover, with whom she had secret assignations.

"Forgive me, Maud," said Blanche, the tears ready to start from her eyes. "It is the only secret I have ever kept from you, and I have suffered enough for it. Oh! what an unhappy, wretched girl I am. What have I done to merit such a cruel fate?"

"Do not repine, Blanche, darling. There is One above who ordains all for the best, though we, afflicted with soul-blindness, cannot see it. I forgive you, Blanche, though it was unkind of you. But that is all past now."

Blanche let her head fall upon her companion's shoulder.

"Do not rise yet, Maud, but tell me all that has happened during my absence. Don't omit anything, however trifling; I shall feel more at ease then, for you cannot think how anxious I feel."

Maud complied with the request, for, being so strongly urged, she feared to refuse it.

But, as the reader is already acquainted with the whole of the particulars from first to last, it is not needful to set down at length all that Maud said.

But she dwelt greatly upon the nobleness of Dick's conduct in behaving in the manner he did, and drew such a picture of the celebrated highwayman, that, when she had done, Blanche felt scarcely a secondary interest in his welfare to Maud.

All that Dick had done, all that he had said, was elaborately described. From the way in which each incident was given, and none forgotten, it was evident how deep a root they had taken in her memory.

From the love she bore her father, Blanche felt grateful to this unknown man for the manner in which he had given his testimony in his behalf, and brought the guilty ones to justice, and when she learned the result of his noble self-sacrificing behaviour, she was filled with pity.

"Oh!" she cried, "he must not perish, he must be set free. My father had influence with the authorities, he was beloved and respected by them all, and doubtless they will listen to the supplications of his daughter."

"And shall you really interest yourself, and do the best you can towards obtaining his release from his imprisonment, dear Blanche?" said Maud, gently, as she pressed her companion more closely to her bosom.

"Certainly I will, for I feel that my duty, if not my sympathies, require it of me."

"Oh! I am so glad to hear you say that, Blanche, dear. I know you can do so much if you only try."

"How anxious you are. Do you desire his freedom so very much?"

"I do, indeed. Oh! Blanche, if you could but see him! He looks so noble and so handsome, and when he speaks it is so gently, and his voice sounds like music. And he looks so well, too. He is so strong and vigorous, and look as though he could protect any one. I don't believe any danger would daunt him, and"——

"Maud!" interrupted Blanche, raising her head, and striving to obtain a glimpse of her companion's face. "Maud, do you know what you are saying?"

Maud made no reply, but buried her countenance still deeper in her shoulder.

Blanche continued—

"Why, Maud, if you were to speak about any one else but a highwayman like that, I should think"——

"Think what?"

"That you were in love with him; but as it is, I know it is impossible that you could forget your dignity so far."

"You are right, Blanche," said Maud, with a sigh, "you are quite right. If he was anything but what he is I should love him; I could not help it, nor you could not help it if you were to see him and be with him as I have been. Oh! it is a thousand pities that one so gifted with noble qualities as he is, and with such a self-sacrificing spirit as he evidently possesses, and with so much single-mindedness, it is a thousand pities that he should ever be a highwayman."

"It is, Maud, darling," said Blanche, who was less romantic than her cousin; "but you must not let your

feelings carry you too far. You must recollect what he is, although he has done us such a service, and he must be content if we show our gratitude by procuring his release."

"Oh! if we could but accomplish that!"

"You heard what the judge said?"

"I did."

"Well, then, let us try to rest, and in the morning when we rise, we will go to London and call upon this judge, and ask him what success he has met with, and inform him of our intention of interesting ourselves for him to the utmost."

"Will you do that, Blanche, dear?—will you do that?"

"Yes, certainly; but you must come to bed at once, and wait patiently until morning."

With a heart considerably lighter than she had had for many hours, Maud complied.

But she could not rest, let alone rest in patience.

Her mind was filled with the image of the highwayman who had made so deep an impression upon her heart.

In fact, although she denied it to her own heart, Maud loved him.

She strove to call in her reason to banish the idea—to conquer it.

But in vain.

She felt that she loved, and that without any power upon her part to prevent it.

But she resolved to keep a close guard upon her feelings.

Not for one moment did she dream of allowing her passion to become known. She determined to nurse it in silence.

Her pride, position, and dignity, all forbade her to be anything more to the bold highwayman than she then was.

But she would nourish his image in secret.

How she kept repeating to herself all through that weary night as she tossed restlessly upon her couch, that the object of her love had been anything but what he was.

She felt that if such had been the case, she could have permitted a little hope to have access to her heart, but now she was compelled to utterly preclude it.

Not for one moment did the thought occur to her that Dick's feelings were precisely similar to her own. It never once occurred to her mind to take that view of the case.

If she had done so, it is hard to say in what way she would have acted.

However, the morning came at length, and then she rose and carefully attired herself.

Blanche, too, although she scarcely felt herself equal to the task, rose and attired herself also, for she saw how Maud had set her heart upon her journey, and she had too much regard for her feelings to disappoint her if she could possibly help it.

But there was another cause for Maud rising so early as she did on that particular morning.

While lying awake, she all at once recollected that Turpin's mare Black Bess was at that moment, or, at all events, ought to be in the stables attached to the hall.

She was no stranger to the numberless wondrous deeds which were ascribed to the highwayman's steed.

She knew, too, how often she had been told that her rider was indebted solely to her exertions for his countless escapes from death and capture.

But, most of all, she was aware of the anxious consideration for the welfare of Black Bess which Turpin manifested during his stay at the hall. She remembered every eulogistic word which he had uttered respecting her, and how he attended to her wants with his own hand.

And Maud determined that, now that Turpin was imprisoned and incapable of performing all those little offices which he would have done if he had been free, she would take his place in that respect, and personally see that the noble animal was well cared for and allowed to want for nothing.

And it was after making this determination that she rose from her bed so early, having made up her mind to lose no time in carrying her resolve into execution.

Long, then, before Blanche was ready, she had dressed herself and, muttering some words of excuse, hastily descended the stairs.

CHAPTER CCCXII.

MAUD GOULDMAN AND BLANCHE WINBERRY SET OUT FOR LONDON, AND HAVE AN INTERVIEW WITH THE JUDGE.

ALTHOUGH the hour was such an early one, yet Maud found, when she went down, that the few domestics who were employed at the hall were all astir, and they greeted her with a kindly word, for Maud was universally liked by all the household for her unaffected and charming manner.

But hastening on, Maud passed out of the door in the rear of the hall, and crossed the large yard in the direction of the stables, which were built at some considerable distance from the residence.

The whole place was very familiar to Maud, for, being of so gentle a nature as she was, she was, of course, fond of animals. Above all, however, horses were her favourite pets, and in happy days past she had spent many an hour in the stables, feeding and caressing them.

Accordingly she made her way in a direct line to the stable door.

It was open, and the groom was there.

He touched his cap respectfully when he saw Maud.

The stables belonging to Winberry Hall were models of construction. They were light, high, and well ventilated, while each horse was allowed plenty of room in his stall.

Maud did not require to be told which was Black Bess. It was impossible for that noble creature to be confounded with any other. The elegant symmetry of her form, the sleekness of her skin, and the proud arching of her neck, and the flashing of her eye, all testified the excellence of her breed.

Without fear or hesitation, Maud walked up to the beautiful animal, and stroked and patted her on the neck.

Bess neighed, and evinced signs of pleasure and satisfaction. She was accustomed to the caresses of her master.

With her own hands, then, Maud fed her.

The groom looked on with a smile.

"That's a beautiful creature, miss," he said, respectfully.

"Beautiful, indeed. For my sake, Robert, I hope you will pay her every attention, and see that she wants for nothing. Her master is a friend of mine, and will be absent for a time. During the period, however, his steed will remain here, and I have promised to be responsible for its proper treatment until his return."

"You leave it to me, miss. I'll give you my word she shall go short of nothing. I have seen a good deal of horse flesh in my time, but that caps all of it. Do you say the owner of it was a friend of yours, miss?"

"Yes, Robert."

"Well, miss, if you hadn't have said that, do you know what I should have thought?"

"No."

"What I should have been ready to lay a wager about?"

"No."

"Why, that that was no other than Dick Turpin's celebrated mare, Black Bess."

"Black Bess?"

"Yes, that is the only steed I have ever heard of that could come up to this, but, of course, it can't be, because you say it belongs to a friend of yours."

"Exactly so, Robert; so don't let me hear any more such foolish gossip. I wonder what he would think if he knew his favourite steed was taken for a highwayman's!"

"Oh! no offence, miss. You will excuse me for making the remark, for do you know, at one time or other, feeling a good deal of interest in horses, I have heard such a lot about this Black Bess, and the wonderful things she has done, that I really thought to myself when I saw this mare, 'that is exactly what I picture Black Bess to be like,' and the funniest thing, too, is that she is all black, and, if you pat and stroke her and say 'Bess,' she really seems as though she knew what it meant, and that that was her name."

"Well, Robert, you quite surprise me. Now you speak of it, it does seem rather singular, but, Robert"——

"Yes, miss."

"I beg you will not say a word about this to any one, because, if it was to get to the ears of our guest, he would be highly offended, and I should be very sorry for that, because he is a particular friend of mine."

"All right, miss, I won't say a word. I shouldn't have mentioned it to you, only I thought it was so singular."

"Then, do not let that be a reason for your mentioning it to any one else."

"No, miss, I won't You can depend upon me."

"I will, Robert; and I trust you will prove yourself worthy to be depended upon. Above all," she added, "let me hear no more such remarks as you have made to me."

The groom touched his hat in silent acquiescence.

Maud then left the stable.

But, as soon as she had gone, Robert looked at Black Bess with a puzzled and dissatisfied air, as he muttered—

"Dang me if I can understand this here business. There's summut in it. I am sure there is summut in it. But dang me if I can find it out. However, mum's the word, since Miss Maud desires it."

On her part, Maud, when she got out of the stable, murmured in a low tone—

"Oh! what shall I do? He seems already to be suspected, and it will never do for him to come here and reclaim his mare, even if he succeeds in getting his freedom. Oh! what shall I do? I will see him, and tell him all that has taken place, and ask him for his advice."

With a look of the greatest anxiety upon her fair forehead, Maud entered the Hall.

Upon proceeding to the breakfast-room, she found Blanche already there awaiting her.

But she said not a word respecting the manner in which she had been engaged, and luckily Blanche was too much immersed in her own thoughts and griefs to make the inquiry, so she was spared the necessity of owning the truth or inventing any excuse.

There was much to occupy Blanche's mind.

Until that moment when the horrible disclosure was made, she had no idea how much she loved young Adrian Winberry.

Now, however, she felt that he was twined round her heart in such a manner that she could not tear him from it without destroying it.

She felt, nevertheless, that she could never be the bride of the son of her father's murderer, yet, at the same time, she was conscious that she could not be the bride of another.

His image was prominent in her mind before everything else, and though she strove to turn her thoughts to other subjects, she found, upon every occasion, that the effort was a vain one.

Breakfast was partaken of in almost perfect silence.

When it was over, Blanche summoned Shockley, and told him her destination.

"I have been the coachman before," he replied, "and perhaps I had better perform the part again."

"I should feel so much more at ease if you would, Shockley," said Blanche.

"I will, then, miss, and the carriage shall be at the front door as soon as ever it is possible for me to get it ready."

With these words on his lips, the faithful servitor withdrew from the presence of his young mistress.

By the time they were attired, Shockley was waiting.

Entering the carriage, they directed him to drive to Mr. Kersey's, in Red Lion-square.

Upon arriving here, they found the lawyer was not at home.

This was a disappointment, for they fully expected to learn from him the name and address of the judge who had promised to interest himself upon Dick Turpin's behalf.

However, undaunted by this, Blanche went to Newgate, and obtained the information she required from Mr. Cawthorne, the governor, who received her with the greatest civility, for it was always, in his opinion, good policy to be friendly with those whose friendship was worth having.

The name of the judge was Holycak, and his residence was situated in the Oxford-road.

To this place, then, Blanche directed Shockley to drive.

The hour was quite an early one when they arrived.

But, nevertheless, the inmates of the judge's house were all astir, and, upon sending in their names, an audience was immediately granted to them.

They were shown into a room plainly yet handsomely furnished.

The walls were lined with books, and the table in the centre of the apartment was covered with papers.

The judge rose from his seat, and politely placed chairs for his two visitors, then sat down and prepared himself to listen to what they had to say.

Without any preface or circumlocution, Blanche began to speak upon the subject which had brought him there.

"You doubtless recollect me, sir, do you not?" she asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "You appeared in the extraordinary trial which was brought to a conclusion yesterday, and announced yourself to be the daughter of the man whose murder we were then investigating."

"Precisely so," said Blanche, in a failing voice, for these words brought vividly back to her mind all the painful occurrences connected with the trial.

"And you, if I mistake not," continued the judge, indicating Maud Gouldman, "also gave important evidence at the commencement of the trial in question."

"I did, sir," she replied.

"Then may I inquire the nature of the business which has brought you here so early this morning?"

This question was more particularly addressed to Blanche, and she at once replied to it.

"I will tell you, sir, and in as few words as I possibly can. I am sure you recollect that during the trial a witness came forward, and, at the sacrifice of his own life and liberty, delivered his testimony."

The judge nodded.

"You allude to Dick Turpin," he said

"I do, sir, for I find that is who he is. He is quite a stranger to me, though my companion, Maud, singularly enough, encountered him, and one by one these things came out."

"The encounter was an accidental one?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I do not see that matters much just now, so, with your permission, we will waive that part of the question."

"I do not wish to take up any more of your time than I can possibly help. I was about to say that, being the only daughter of Mr. William Winberry, I cannot help feeling that, highwayman as he is, a deep debt of gratitude is due from me to him."

"I think so, too; for the evidence he gave was all important and conclusive. Had it not been for him, we should never have known the precise manner in which the deceased was murdered, nor so certain who were the guilty persons."

"You will see, then, sir, that I feel myself under a great obligation to him."

"Just so."

"And I am desirous of repaying it. Now, from your manner at the trial, and what I subsequently heard, you seemed inclined to intercede for him."

"I not only seemed inclined, but gave my word to exert all the influence which I possess, and when you entered, I was at that moment engaged upon the business."

"I am glad to hear so much, sir. Have you any hope that you will be successful in your efforts?"

"I have. In the first place, coming direct from me, the application will have great weight, and moreover, I know just how to put it into its proper channel."

"I trust you will succeed, sir," said Blanche, earnestly; "for if he was to perish in consequence of what he has done, it would be a source of the deepest grief to me, and therefore I had determined to question you upon the point, and ascertain your opinion whether he would be more likely to be released if I personally came forward in his favour?"

"What could you do?"

"My father was a man who had much influence in the city, and who was much respected by the greatest men who dwelt there, and so I thought that if I, as his daughter, presented myself before them, they could not refuse to listen to my supplications."

"They would listen to you, no doubt, but that, I am afraid, would be all you could accomplish. I am sorry to put a damp upon so laudatory an undertaking, but really I do not think that the amount of good you could effect would be of any importance, and most certainly would not recompense you for your trouble."

"My trouble, sir, I think nothing of."

"I am glad to hear you say as much. But I can put you in the way of doing Turpin more service than you could by your single exertions."

"Let me know what it is, sir, and judge of my sincerity by the readiness with which I promise to do it."

"I have here a petition addressed to the highest authority in the land, which I have had carefully drawn up. In it the whole of the circumstances are clearly and expressly stated, and the conduct of the highwayman throughout the course of the trial expressly dwelt upon. I have only just received the document from the hands of the person I instructed to prepare it, and have just finished perusing it. I consider it exceedingly well calculated to answer the purpose required. The deed is as yet unsignatured. Now, if you, the daughter of Mr. Winberry, would be the first to sign it, I think your name would have great effect in inducing others to sign it likewise."

"Do you, sir? then I will write my name at once, and Maud, too. She shall write her's as well."

The judge spread the petition out smoothly upon the table, and, giving Blanche a pen, directed her where to sign.

With trembling fingers she obeyed.

Maud came forward next, full of eagerness to do anything that would help the highwayman out of his present perilous situation.

With a firm hand she wrote her name immediately beneath that of Blanche.

"And you think," she said, "that we have done more good by signing our names there, than we could do if we were to attempt to get up a similar petition ourselves?"

"I do. Leave the affair in my hands, and you may depend upon my doing all that could possibly be done."

"I am much obliged to you, sir, and we shall rely upon you."

"Pray do so."

"But there is another favour I should like to ask of you," said Maud.

"Speak," replied the judge, "and, if it lies in my power, it shall be granted."

"Can you write an order that will allow us ingress to the prison, so that we can have an interview with Turpin?"

The judge was silent for a moment, and then he said:

"Your request seems a strange one. What is the motive for your visit?"

"Merely to thank him for what he has done, and assure him that we will do and are doing all we can for him."

"Such a motive as that is right enough, but, if I give you this order, pray do not, through any mistaken idea of kindness towards the prisoner, in any way abuse it. I mean, as to supplying him with tools, or in any way assisting him to make his escape."

"You may rely upon our doing nothing of the kind," said Maud, earnestly. "But do not refuse me the order for admission."

The judge seemed full of surprise at this request.

He hardly knew what to think of Maud.

However, as she had given him her word not to make any improper use of it, he could not well refuse, so he wrote an order to the desired effect.

Upon receiving it, the young girls again expressed their thanks for the trouble he had already taken, and thus the interview terminated.

CHAPTER CCCXIII.

DICK TURPIN'S INTERVIEW WITH BLANCHE WINBERRY AND MAUD GOULDMAN.

ARMED with this pass, Maud Gouldman felt ten times more happy than ever she had done in her life before.

Blanche and herself entered the carriage, and instructed Shockley to drive them direct to Newgate.

When Maud made the application to the judge for an order to visit the celebrated highwayman in Newgate, Blanche was completely taken by surprise.

She had no idea that her companion was about to prefer such a request, but when she made it of course she could not well step forward and interfere.

But she viewed the act with very great uneasiness, and she felt convinced that the suspicion which had dawned upon her mind on the preceding evening, that Maud felt a warmer interest in the highwayman than she ought to do, increased in consistency and strength.

"Maud!" she said, when the carriage had been set in motion.

"What, Blanche?"

"I had no idea that you were going to ask the judge for an order to visit this Turpin in Newgate."

"Had you not? I thought we had come to the resolution to do so last night."

"No, I cannot remember that a word was said about it."

"But surely you cannot be vexed at having the opportunity afforded you!"

"To see this highwayman?"

"Yes. Not to gratify any curiosity you might feel upon such a point, but to thank him as a daughter ought for all that he has done. You must remember he has sacrificed his liberty for you, if not his life; for I do not for a moment buoy myself up with the hope that the judge, influential though he may be, will secure for him a full pardon."

"What then?"

"He might save him from death; but if he does, it will only be for the lingering punishment of perpetual imprisonment."

"And is it possible he has done all this for my sake?"

"Yes; and yet not altogether for your sake, either. He has done it for the sake of justice, and in order that so base a villain as Adrian Winberry should not achieve a perfect triumph. He would have slain you, or something worse, and would have taken possession of the estates, had it not been for the intervention of this highwayman."

Blanche sighed.

"I am afraid it would have been so," she said.

"I am sure of it; but you see, by sacrificing himself he has prevented that, and surely it would not be too much for you to pay him a visit, and in person thank him for all that he has done on your behalf, and assure him of the exertions which are being made for his preservation."

"It seems you thought so."

"I did, and I thought as well that I ought to do just as I have done, and here we are before the walls of Newgate. Do not go against your inclination. Do you feel desirous of expressing your thanks?"

"Yes," said Blanche; "as we have the order we will make use of it."

At this moment Shockley appeared at the door of the carriage, and opened it.

The reader must not fall into the mistake of thinking that Blanche Winberry was unwilling to utter her thanks to the generous witness.

On the contrary, she would have done anything in order to obtain an interview with him, but it was Maud that made her hesitate and draw back.

She feared that an impression had been made upon the susceptible heart of the young girl, and she dreaded anything to take place which would tend to deepen it.

But now that she was at the grim portals of Newgate, and was authorised to pass through them, she thought she would avail herself of the chance afforded her, but at the same time determined that Maud should never pay another visit if she could possibly help it.

Accordingly, when Shockley held the door open, she alighted, but not until after Maud had done so.

Upon presenting the order, they were immediately admitted into the lobby of the prison, but were not permitted to go any further until Mr. Cawthorn was sent for.

The governor was not long in making his appearance.

He saluted them with the utmost respect, and upon the order being handed to him, he called a turnkey, and proceeded to escort the fair visitors to the cell himself.

We have seen how the governor led them in, and then retired. We have also seen how Turpin respectfully saluted them.

It is at this point that we resume.

By a great effort Dick regained possession of himself. With another and yet deeper bow he said—

"To what circumstance, ladies, may I attribute the honour of this visit?"

"You know us, I presume," said Blanche.

"I do, lady. You revealed yourself at the trial as the

daughter of the unfortunate Mr. Winberry, and your companion I have already had the pleasure of seeing many times."

"You are correct, sir."

"Pray pardon me," said Dick. "I am a rough, rude man, and but little accustomed to the usages of polite society. The accommodation offered by this cell is slight, yet before this I should have asked you to be seated."

"Nay, never mind," replied Blanche; "we would rather stand. I have come here because I felt that I was under a deep obligation to you. The service you have rendered me is a great one, a very great one, and no words of mine would ever be sufficient to express my gratefulness for the chivalric manner in which you have acted."

"I need no thanks," said Dick, "though, at the same time, I cannot but feel pleased at hearing you express them. Still, at the same time, I feel deeply honoured to think that you should have sought out the highwayman in his cell to express your obligations to him."

"I cannot do so in words," continued Blanche, much struck with Turpin's gentlemanlike behaviour, "but I have chosen to do it in another way. I have just had an interview with the judge who presided at the trial. He is exerting himself immensely in your favour, and I have lent all the assistance in my power. If the object sought for is not achieved, it will not be from any negligence upon our part. I have great hopes myself, however, that this, so far from turning out an unlucky event for you, will prove a fortunate one."

"I sincerely thank you," said Dick, "sincerely thank you. Indeed, I cannot attempt to express my feelings. In this matter, although a highwayman, and with the hands of all men raised against me, yet I have merely acted in the manner which a sense of honour prompted me to act. I will not say, however, that I anticipated being made the inmate of this dungeon. My own conviction was that protection would be extended to me, and that I should at least be allowed a chance of my life."

"I should have expected the same thing, and yet, in one way, you have the chance you speak of. The representations of the judge, made as they will be in the proper quarter, cannot fail to have a great effect, and I trust that the end will be that you will be allowed to pass out of the portals of this prison a free man, and with nothing to fear as the consequence of your past deeds."

Dick shook his head.

"I should not like to buoy myself up with such a hope as that. I am afraid it would be expecting too much. Be under no apprehension, however, about my life. Until the result of what the judge is doing is known, I have given my word of honour not to make any attempt to escape. But, when that result is known, and it should be unfavourable to my life and liberty, I shall consider myself absolved from that promise, and, then, doubt not, I shall be free, for I have powerful friends outside the prison walls who are aware of my situation."

"I trust," said Blanche, "that you will be spared the necessity of calling upon them for aid, but that you will be set at liberty in a legitimate manner, and with the chance before you of beginning life afresh."

"I am deeply grateful for the good feeling which you manifest towards me. I am sorry that I was unable to prevent the consummation of the catastrophe which has plunged you into so much grief."

Blanche wept.

"Adrian Winberry is in the cell next to this," continued Dick. "Yonder stone wall is all that divides us from him. In the cell beyond is the villainous lawyer, Mr. Skinner."

"You seem to know a great deal about the interior of the prison, considering you have been for so short a time an inmate of it."

"My knowledge of it is more extensive than you would perhaps imagine. You will see that in less than twenty-four hours after I receive the intelligence that the judge has tried and failed, I shall be out of Newgate. But, now, I would not go if there was not a single obstacle interposed between me and liberty."

"And why not?"

"You will, perhaps, smile incredulously when I tell you the reason, but it is because I have given my word of honour not to escape, and at all hazards I shall certainly keep it."

These words were spoken in a tone of firm and unalterable decision, and without any boastfulness.

Blanche Winberry could not avoid being much struck with Turpin's manner, and unconsciously she repeated mentally the words which Maud had spoken on the preceding evening, namely, that it was a thousand pities he was a highwayman.

As for Maud, she had stood silently beside Blanche, drinking in every word Dick uttered, and dwelling upon every gesture and change of expression.

It was then she felt that love was a thing over which the mind had no control.

She loved this highwayman—she felt it—she knew it.

In vain she struggled against the feeling, and endeavoured to dismiss it as unworthy of her—it would come again and again.

And now Dick turned himself to her and spoke.

He wished to ask her a question and elicit a reply, in order that he might once more hear the tones of her voice.

"Lady," he said, "if you will remember when I set out with you to London I left my mare, Black Bess, in your stables; need I tell you that I prize her almost as dearly as I do my own life? I would not part with her for her weight in gold. While I am cooped up here a prisoner, would it be asking you too much to continue to grant her an asylum, and see that she wants for nothing? If you would, I should consider any obligation which you may feel yourself under to me more than repaid—indeed, I should think the obligation was on my side."

"I have already seen to her wants," replied Maud, quietly; "I thought by so doing I should be proving my gratitude for what you have done. I am not mistress at the hall, but yet I think I could take upon myself to promise that your request shall be granted; and that, so long as you wish, a safe asylum for your steed shall be found in the stables, where she shall have every attention. Am I right, Blanche?" she added, turning to her companion, "in promising this much?"

"You are, and I confirm it. I will make it my especial care to see that all her wants are supplied."

"Thanks—thanks!" ejaculated Turpin. "I wish I could say how very much I appreciate and feel this kindness! Now that I know my bonny mare—who has brought me in safety out of a thousand perils—is in safety, I shall care little for my incarceration, and await with patience the progress of events."

"Farewell, then," said Blanche, extending her hand—for the more she saw of the highwayman the more did her feelings change towards him. "Farewell! When next we meet, if we should ever do so, I trust I shall find you a free man."

Dick made no reply to this speech, but raised the hand proffered him respectfully to his lips.

Blanche drew it away with a slightly offended air, which Dick pretended not to notice by making a low bow.

Fain would Blanche have prevented Maud from taking her leave of the highwayman.

But just then it was out of her power to prevent it.

Timidly—with her heart fluttering so violently that she could only catch her breath by short and sudden gasps—with the colour mounting in her fair cheeks, Maud Goldman held out her hand to Dick in the same manner as Blanche had done, and, making a great effort, articulated the word "farewell."

As before, Dick took the small, fair hand that was held out to him between his own, and with an inclination of the most profound respect, touched the tips of the fingers with his lips.

As he did so, a thrill shot through both with the rapidity of an electric shock.

It as suddenly ceased.

Dick released the hand, but not without a slight pressure, which he could not prevent himself from giving.

Then, with his head still bent down, he murmured in a tone of deep seriousness—

"Farewell."

When he raised his head his visitors were gone.

The cell-door was closed.

Dick sank down upon the chair.

But, starting the moment afterwards to his feet, he paced up and down the cell with rapid strides.

This interview produced a great effect upon him, nor could he prevent its doing so, or banish it from his mind.

By the quick motion up and down the cell, however, he succeeded, after a time, in subduing his agitation.

He was interrupted by the appearance of his jailors, and, though he strove to conceal from them all traces of his emotion, yet they did not fail to perceive that something had taken place which had moved him much.

But, by a forced hilarity, Dick strove to disguise his sadness.

"I have got a piece of news for you, captain," said one, at length, when dinner was over.

"Indeed—what is it?"

"The warrants have arrived."

"Well?"

"The condemned are to suffer on Monday morning."

"All three?"

"Yes. Adrian Winberry, John Norman, and Richard Sare, are all three to be executed at Tyburn on Monday morning."

"But Norman and Sare expected a respite."

"Yes, I think they did, but it has not been granted them. I saw the execution warrants myself."

"To-day is Friday, is it not?"

"Yes."

Dick dropped off into a fit of musing.

Finding themselves unable to arouse him from it, the two jailors left the cell.

And so the day passed away—a long weary day it seemed to Dick. He fancied night would never come.

But if the time appeared to pass slowly to him, there were those to whom it seemed to pass by with lightning-like rapidity.

Those were the three men condemned to death.

They had so few hours to live that they were easily numbered.

Norman and Sare were utterly prostrated.

They had filled themselves with the hope that, after making a confession as they did, the capital sentence would be commuted.

But now that that hope had proved to be utterly fallacious, they had given themselves up to the most abandoned grief.

They wept, they shrieked, they implored for mercy, but to no avail.

With Adrian the case was different.

He knew he had no hope to expect, and, therefore, after the reception of the warrant, his demeanour underwent no alteration.

CHAPTER CCCXIV.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN REACH THE WHITE HORSE IN DRURY-LANE, AND TOM KING ANNOUNCES HIS INTENTION OF RETURNING THE COMPLIMENT TO DICK TURPIN, WHEN THE OFFICERS MAKE A SUDDEN ATTACK UPON THE INN.

The landlord of the public-house at which Tom King and his comrades had learned such important information respecting Dick Turpin, looked after the highwaymen with deep indignation, until a turn in the road hid them from his sight.

"Don't tell anything, indeed," he muttered, wrathfully. "I wonder what I could tell, if I was a mind to try?"

In the meantime our friends continued on their way to London.

"What are we to think of this?" said Tom King.

"Dick Turpin in Newgate!"

"I can scarcely believe that such a thing is true.

"Nor I, Claude," rejoined Tom King. "You know how often he said he would never yield himself up a prisoner, but that he would rather die a thousand deaths."

"Oh! yes, he always declared that."

"He did; and yet we are told he is there. Well, it is no good for us to speculate upon it, because we should be sure not to get at the truth. The best thing we can do is to push on for London at full speed, and learn all we can as quickly as possible."

"That is the plan, Tom. But whereabouts shall you go?"

"Why, to old Matthew's in Drury-lane. We are sure to hear tidings of him there."

"Of course we are," said Claude. "I had forgotten all about him."

"You would not have done so if you had known him as long as I have. He is a real friend, and no mistake."

"Then, let us make our way there at full speed, for, if Dick is in Newgate, why, of course, we must get him out."

"Of course we must; but it is no good our trying to do that until we have learned the full particulars."

"Forward, then. The sooner we reach Drury-lane the better."

This was an opinion in which all three unanimously acquiesced, so they urged their horses forward with all the speed they possibly could.

It was growing dusk when all three pulled up in Vere-street, Lincoln's-inn Fields.

It was Tom King who set the example, and the others immediately followed it.

"I think we had better not go any further on horseback," he said.

"Why not?"

"We shall attract so much attention, and that is what we ought to avoid, if possible."

"Certainly."

"I propose, then, that we alight here, and give our horses in charge of some one or other."

"What shall we do with them eventually?"

"Why, when we get to old Matthew's, I will tell him, and then he will send some one to fetch them, by which all suspicion will be avoided."

"So it will, that is a capital idea."

The three highwaymen immediately alighted from their steeds.

It was not long before they found a man who was quite willing to take charge of their horses for a little while.

Then, singly and on foot, they made their way up White Horse-yard.

Tom King went first, taking care to reconnoitre.

But he saw nothing suspicious, so, in a bold and confident manner, he crossed the threshold of the old inn.

The place seemed, for a wonder, to be quite void of customers.

Tom knew every part of the building well, so he walked down the passage to the door leading into the bar, which we are sure the reader will remember.

To reach this of course he had to pass the bar window, where the customers were served.

As he stepped swiftly by, he saw old Matthew ensconced in the depths of a huge arm-chair.

Without making any more noise than he could avoid, Tom turned the handle of the door and entered.

Old Matthew was sound asleep.

There was a chair just opposite to where he sat, so Tom silently sank into it, intent on giving the worthy landlord a slight surprise.

Having composed himself to his satisfaction, he took a tobacco-pipe which was standing against the grate, and made one end of it rather warm by putting it between the bars.

Then he touched Matthew upon the back of his hand.

The effect was electrical.

Old Matthew uttered a shout, and opened his eyes.

Then he closed them again, for he thought he must be dreaming.

But upon opening them once more, he saw, still in the same position, Tom King.

Before he could recover from his surprise or utter an ejaculation, another figure glided in.

That was Sixteen-String Jack.

The landlord rose to his feet just as another form entered.

That was Claude Duval.

"Bless my life, gentlemen!" he said, at length, "what can be the meaning of this?"

"Do you know us?"

"Know you? ask me if I know Drury-lane from any other street in London. But you mustn't stop here and be seen. Come in—come in!"

He opened the inner door as he spoke, and ushered the three highwaymen into the private parlour, which no one was allowed to enter without his permission.

He placed seats for all, including himself, and then put a number of bottles and tankards and glasses upon the table, so that they could partake of whatever they thought proper.

"Then, as he deposited himself in a chair, he said—

"Now, pray do not keep me in suspense a moment!

longer, but tell me, what brings you all three here? Why, do you know I had quite given up all hopes of ever seeing you any more."

"It's a long time since we met, certainly," said Tom King, "but I am very glad we have met once again."

"So am I. Come, now, stand upon no ceremony. When you are here, you are at home. Pour out for yourselves, and drink just as much as ever you like."

"Thanks, Matthew. You are a real good sort, you are, but there is something we want you to do for us at once."

"What is it?"

"Why, we came here on horseback, but we thought if we all three rode up to the door, we should attract a good deal of attention, so we alighted in Vere-street, and got a man there to take charge of the horses until we sent for them."

"And very wise of you. I can tell you, it was a lucky thing for all of us that you had so much thought."

"Why, is there anything particular the matter?"

"No, only lately you would not believe what a close watch the police have kept upon this house. They have rushed in once or twice, but they were not clever enough to find anything."

"I suppose not, Matthew. It strikes me you are more than a match for all the Bow-street officers in London, if you only feel inclined."

"They did not find anything," added the landlord, "because there was nothing."

"Oh! indeed. But come, send for the horses."

"I will at once."

"I suppose you can find room for them?"

"Oh! yes."

"That is all right, then."

Old Matthew left the room for a few minutes, but he quickly returned.

"I have put that matter all right," he said. "I wish I could manage everything as easy. Now, then, tell me what brings you here? Where have you been? What have you been doing?"

"Well, that would be a long story to tell."

"So much the better."

"We can't stop to tell it."

"But you must."

"I tell you we can't."

"Why not?"

"Because time is too precious for us to waste a moment of it."

"What is the matter, then?"

"Dick Turpin."

"Oh! ah!"

"He is in Newgate."

"So I have heard."

"Is it really true?"

"It is, indeed, I am sorry to say."

"But how did it come about? He always said he would never yield himself a prisoner."

"I know he did."

"But what induced him to alter his mind?"

"I don't know all the particulars, but all I do know you shall very quickly be made acquainted with."

"Go on, then, we are burning to hear it."

"I have a good mind not."

"Why?"

"Because you would not satisfy my curiosity with respect to your adventures."

"You shall have them in full, never fear, but not until you have told us all about Dick."

"I will tell you all I know."

"Do so, then."

Old Matthew then proceeded to give an outline of what had taken place at the trial.

He did not know all the circumstances, but he was pretty well acquainted with all that had taken place at the Old Bailey.

The three highwaymen were filled with admiration when they heard of the noble manner in which Dick Turpin had come forward to give his evidence, and proportionably indignant when they learned the judge had refused to hold out any protection to him, and prevent him being taken prisoner.

They heard of the riot which had ensued with feelings of greater satisfaction.

But that Turpin had been actually locked up in a cell after all, they thought was incredible in the extreme.

Old Matthew, however, took care to inform them of the words which the judge had uttered, and the promise he had made to interest himself on Dick's behalf.

But to this the highwaymen attached less importance than they really ought to have done.

They had no faith in judges being their friends.

"And so Dick is still in Newgate?" he said.

"He is."

"Have you seen him?"

"No."

"Have you tried?"

"Of course I have. I went to the door of the prison as soon as I heard the news, but they would not let me see him. They knew me, and turned me away."

"Oh! indeed!"

"Yes. What could I do?"

"Nothing."

"Just so. But I heard a bit of news which filled me with surprise."

"What is it?"

"Why, the judge succeeded in gammoning Dick into making a promise that he would not attempt to escape."

"Bah!"

"It's a fact. The judge promised in return that he would do all in his power to procure his release—he was so pleased with his conduct at the trial."

"Well, there might be something in that, but I don't like it."

"Nor I."

"Well, then, Matthew, what is to be done?"

"That is just what I want to know."

"Of course we can't let him stay in Newgate?"

"Certainly not."

"Then we must get him out."

"I am afraid that will be a thing very difficult to accomplish."

"It won't be very easy, that's certain."

"No, it won't; and I don't think the judge will do much good, for Dick has balked the authorities so long, and has played such a desperate game with them, that now they have once got him into their clutches, they won't be very willing to let him go again."

"That is precisely my opinion."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Tom King. "Dick is in Newgate, and we must get him out. You don't dispute that, do you?"

"No."

"Very well, then. It is no good for us to attempt to do anything tending that way without establishing a means of communication with him of some sort or other."

"But, how is that to be done?"

"I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"I will tell you. Do you recollect when I was in Newgate?"

"Yes, very well."

"Dick came to the prison and paid me a visit."

"And nearly got nabbed."

"Never mind, he escaped."

"He did, that's true."

"'Well,' said he to me, 'you will never have to return the compliment, for I intend to die before ever I am taken prisoner; consequently, I can never become a live tenant of Newgate.'"

"He said that, did he?"

"He did."

"I have heard him speak to the like effect myself."

"Listen. Now it seems I am in a position to return him the compliment, though he never thought I should be."

"But you don't intend to do so?"

"I do; and I have got a capital scheme in my head."

"To see Dick?"

"Yes."

"Then let us hear it at once."

"I intend——"

Tom suddenly ceased.

"What's that?" he asked.

Old Matthew sprang to his feet.

"Quietly," he said. "Don't move or make a noise. It may be nothing after all."

The others followed his example, and rose.

The noise which had interrupted Tom King in what he was about to say, was the trampling of feet and the cries



[DICK TURPIN FRUSTRATES ADRIAN WINBERRY'S ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE.]

of voices, and as these sounds continued old Matthew drew a couple of bolts at the top and bottom of the door.

Scarcely had he done so than some heavy blows were struck upon it, and a commanding voice shouted, in a loud tone:

"Open the door, in the king's name!"

Then, without waiting sufficient time to know whether the order would be obeyed, a vigorous attack was made upon the door, which soon began to show signs of giving way before the blows which were rained upon it.

"The officers have made another attack," said old Matthew.

"Confound them! what a nuisance they are."

"What shall we do?"

"I am afraid they know you are here."

"What then?"

"It makes the chance of hiding you all the more difficult."

"I know that, but what shall we do? If you are not quick, they will have the door down."

And this looked very likely indeed, for it was giving way in all directions—it never having been intended to withstand such an attack as that which was now made upon it.

"I vote we give them pepper!" said Claude, and, as he spoke, he went to the fire-place, and very deliberately took up the poker.

Armed with this formidable weapon, he made his way to the door.

He reached it at an opportune moment.

CHAPTER CCCXV.

THE POLICE-OFFICERS MAKE AN ATTACK UPON THE HIGHWAYMEN AT THE "WHITE HORSE" INN IN DRURY-LANE.

One of the officers who were outside had succeeded in partially forcing his way through the door, in spite of the efforts which Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack made to prevent him.

To swing the poker round his head was, to Claude Duval, the work of a second only.

He brought it down with full force upon the shoulder of the officer which was plainly visible between the door and the doorpost.

The man uttered a howl of agony as he felt the weight of the crushing blow which Claude inflicted, and he made a desperate effort to withdraw himself from the dangerous position which he had taken upon himself to occupy.

He was induced to make a second effort ten times more desperate than the first, by another blow which Claude administered with the poker.

This time he succeeded in withdrawing himself, and the door was again closed as well as the dilapidated condition of the fastenings would permit it to be.

But a voice was now heard to cry—

"Fire, my men—fire! Give them one volley through the door, and then follow me, and down with it."

A rattling noise followed this order, which filled our friends with no little dismay.

"Stand aside," cried old Matthew in a low voice, and yet loud enough to be plainly heard by our friends, "stand aside, all, or you will be injured by the bullets."

The caution came just in time, for at that moment there came a loud report of firearms, with which the sound of crushing wood, as the bullets made their way through the door, was mingled.

But when old Matthew spoke it was the easiest matter conceivable to step on one side so as to be out of the range of the shots, and our friends, therefore, escaped without the least injury happening to them.

There could be no doubt, however, about the officers being fully in earnest in what they were about.

And here let us give a word of explanation.

It is ever our wish to avoid mystery. It is not to that which we look for interest, and therefore we do not attempt to preserve it. No circumstance is intentionally left unexplained to the reader.

During the conversation which he had had with the three highwaymen a few minutes before, old Matthew had stated that of late he had been much troubled with the police.

And this was the fact.

Old Wriggles was aware that Matthew was a firm friend to all the family generally, and to hightobymen in particular, and that this was well-known among the classes referred to was quite certain.

That astute, or, as they say now-a-days, intelligent officer, determined to keep close watch upon the "White Horse," and make periodical incursions into it whenever anything of a sufficiently suspicious nature occurred to justify him in doing so.

But hitherto old Matthew had been a match for him.

It might have been that he really had no one concealed on his premises, but whether that was so or not, he put on an appearance of great candour, and placed his house at their disposal for them to search it as they thought proper.

At present, then, no good had been achieved by the officers in these attacks.

But they had had no precise information.

Now the case was different.

Undaunted by the numerous repulses they had met with, and the unsuccess which they had hitherto had, the officers, under the direction of Mr. Wriggles, still maintained their watch.

And what was it they expected to find?

Dick Turpin had been seen in London, and had been captured.

His three inevitable companions, they argued, were somewhere not very far off.

Where so likely a spot to look for them as the "White Horse" Inn, the landlord of which had to their knowledge on more than one occasion signally befriended them?

This was the reason, then, why the watch was kept, and why old Matthew had been so much troubled.

We have now to account for the present attack.

Our friends certainly acted very wisely in coming to a halt in Vere-street, Lincoln's-inn Fields, instead of proceeding on horseback direct to White Horse-yard.

If they had done so, they would inevitably have been captured, for the officers were even then upon the watch. Luckily, however, this was avoided.

By going on foot as they had, and taking such precautions to reconnoitre, they had entered without being perceived by their enemies.

But our friends had been seen when they alighted from the horses, although they were not aware of that unpleasant fact.

It was an officer who saw them, but, like a prudent man, he affected to take no notice, and when the highwaymen bent their steps towards Drury-lane, he made no attempt to follow them.

He contented himself with keeping a sharp eye on the cattle, the owners of which were not, he was sure, going very far away.

His watching was soon rewarded.

Presently a man came who had been dispatched by old Matthew upon that especial errand to fetch the horses.

Cautiously, then, this officer followed the horses, until he saw them housed in the stables at the rear of the "White Horse."

Then, convinced there was no more to be seen at present, he made his observations known to Mr. Wriggles, who at once resolved upon what he should do.

He would attack the inn so vigorously and rapidly that no chance should be given either for concealment or escape.

He had little or no doubt in his mind that the three daring highwaymen of whom he had so long been in search, and who had given him such a deal of trouble, were at that moment under the roof of the inn.

He sent off then for reinforcements, and surrounded the inn as well as the number of his men would allow him.

Then, placing himself at the head of the remainder, he rushed in.

We have already detailed the commencement of the attack, and described the success he met with.

The position of our friends certainly looked critical in the extreme.

But we have faith in old Matthew, and are not void of the hope that somehow or other he will be able to trick the officers.

At any rate, owing to his timely warning, they escaped all injury from the volley with which Mr. Wriggles thought fit to favour them.

But before the din of the explosion was well out of their ears, he beckoned to the highwaymen to leave the position they then occupied, and follow him across the apartment.

Of course they did this quickly and willingly enough.

At that very moment Mr. Wriggles and his officers dashed vigorously against the door.

Matthew did not speak, but having reached one side of the room, he opened a door, of the existence of which our friends were utterly in ignorance.

And so they would have been if they had been in that room a thousand times oftener than they had.

It was invisible.

We will describe how this was.

The parlour behind the bar of the "White Horse" was papered with a rather gorgeous complicated patterned paper.

There were curious curves and scrolls upon it, and huge bunches of flowers of variegated hues.

In one of the darkest corners of the parlour was the door we speak of.

But there were neither fastenings nor hinges visible.

It was covered with the paper, and presented a level unbroken surface with it.

The crevice, too, which one would have thought would have marked the shape of the door, was invisible.

The eye running round it failed to detect anything of the kind.

How was this?

It was simple enough.

The shape of the door had been cut to correspond with the extraordinary pattern of the paper referred to.

If the paper took a capricious curve, the shape of the door followed it.

Then in these curves one portion was shaded very deeply, so that, when the door was closed, it would have taken a sharp eye to have discovered it.

The darkest and obscurest corner had been chosen for it, and the back of the door had been lined with some substance which would have caused the wood to emit

a dull sound like brickwork when struck, so that it would stand the ordeal of the most usual tests applied for the discovery of secret doors, namely, to strike the walls with the butt-end of a pistol, and listen for a hollow sound.

But, as the reader may suppose, the highwaymen did not have much time afforded them to examine this door

A dark recess was disclosed by it.

Old Matthew spoke hurriedly.

"This is the best I can do for you this time. Make haste! Get in there, and I will shut the door."

"But——"

"Never mind. Listen! You will be able to hear all that passes. If you find this hiding-place is in imminent danger of discovery, you must quit it."

"But how?"

"I will tell you as rapidly as possible if you will not interrupt me. At the back of you is a door which you can open easily enough; it leads into the yard. Here you will see another door; that leads you into White Horse-yard. But don't leave this place of concealment without you find it positively necessary."

The three highwaymen instantly gave their promise to comply with the instructions given by the landlord.

No sooner had they done so, and squeezed themselves into the cupboard—for the recess looked more like that than anything else—than old Matthew closed the door, which fastened with a spring.

He had evidently a particular course of action marked out to perform, for he seized the poker which Claude Duval had used to such good advantage, and stood with it in his hand in an attitude of defence.

In the meantime, Mr. Wriggles and his men had made a second rush against the bar door, flinging their bodies against it with all the force they were capable of.

This second rush was effectual, so far as the demolition of the door went, for down it fell and the officers with it.

But springing to their feet, they rushed forward to the attack, when to their surprise, they found there was no one to confront them but old Matthew, the landlord, who, however, held up the poker in a menacing manner, and looked as though he had fully made up his mind to defend himself if attacked.

Panting for breath—his eyes flashing fire—and his usually red face now of a purplish-black hue — Mr. Wriggles, pistol in hand, rushed into the little parlour with his men.

Old Matthew, preserving upon his countenance an expression of perfect calmness, retreated a step or two towards the fire-place as the officers advanced.

That these worthies had fully made up their minds that the persons they sought were in this parlour was fully proved by their looks of disappointment and rage when they saw that old Matthew was the sole inmate of it.

By an effort, Mr. Wriggles commanded his voice and spoke.

But it was in a gasping, jerking sort of way that the words were uttered.

"Wh—what's—the—m—meaning of this?"

"I think I am the proper person to ask that question," said Matthew, coolly, "and you the proper person to reply to it."

"Th—that won't do."

"I shall try, at any rate."

"Do you mean to say you have not had three highwaymen in here, and that you have hidden them somewhere?"

"Yes, I do."

"Who attacked us, then?"

"You attacked me."

"Pho—pho. One of my men has had his shoulder-bone smashed with a blow from a poker."

"And here is the poker," replied old Matthew, still with the same calmness, and holding up the article mentioned as he spoke.

"But where is the man who used it?"

"Here he is."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"By what right did you use it?"

"The right which every man has to defend his own house."

"Pho—pho—nonsense. That won't do. You knew we were police."

"No I didn't. You broke in here like thieves, and without saying a word to anybody, tried to break the door down. Of course, I defended myself. I should not have been a man if I had not. Then you must fire a volley of bullets through the door, and smash it down completely."

"Where are the highwaymen? They are here. I have evidence of that. You have hidden them."

"I tell you what it is, Mr. Officer. You have got a spite against me, that's the long and the short of the matter. But I'll see whether there's any law in the land, or whether there's not. I am a patient, easy-tempered man, or else I shouldn't have put up with this sort of thing so long as I have, but I don't intend to put up with it any longer. You have made a dead set at me, but I don't know for what reason. I never did you any harm that I know of, and I don't believe I ever have done you any. But I should just like to know what harm you have done me. You have taken away my character as a respectable publican and you have quite ruined my trade, for who would ever think of going into a house which was continually watched by the police, and where they were liable to be pounced upon at any moment? Why no one, of course, and yet that is just the state of things here."

"Hold your row," said Mr. Wriggles, at length succeeding in stemming the current of the landlord's eloquence. "Hold your row. We don't want none of that gaff. We know our birds are here, and we means to have them."

"Take them, then."

"We shall."

"You'll get yourself into trouble. Here was I sitting quietly in my private room—mark that, if you please—private room—I say, here was I sitting in my private room——"

"Oh! d—n your private room," yelled Wriggles, in a rage. "D—n your private room, and you and all."

"Oh! just as you like, but I say you broke in all at once like a parcel of thieves, so, of course, I stood up and defended myself. And that's the truth of the matter."

"Don't pay any attention to him," cried Wriggles. "Search the house, my men, from top to bottom, and, if he obstructs you, I give you my authority to take him into custody. I will take the responsibility of that upon myself."

CHAPTER CCCXVI.

MR. WRIGGLES FINDS OLD MATTHEW RATHER MORE THAN A MATCH FOR HIM.

FROM their well-contrived place of concealment our friends could hear with perfect distinctness every word uttered, and they could not help feeling mightily amused when they heard old Matthew give vent to his well-acted indignation.

Finding that so far they were menaced with no particular danger, they remained perfectly still, fearful of betraying their hiding-place by making the slightest movement.

But the reader can without doubt imagine to some extent the anxiety which they experienced, and the eagerness with which they listened to what was going forward.

After the order had been given to take him into custody, old Matthew assumed a deeply injured air.

He seated himself in the chair by the fireside, the back of which was turned to the secret door.

Then looking the officers in the face, he said—

"Now, gentlemen, here I am, quite powerless. Be good enough to finish knocking my house to pieces. You have begun it very nicely. There lies one door, burst from its hinges and riddled with bullets. Go on, gentlemen, and knock the house down!"

"If we do," said Wriggles, "you will have no one to blame but yourself."

"How do you make that out?"

"You know how I make it out, without asking me."

"No, I don't."

"You do, I say."

"Tell me how I am to blame for you knocking my house to pieces and ruining my trade. Just answer me that."

"Why, as everybody knows, your house is the most notorious resort for highwaymen and 'family' men of all descriptions in all London."

"Who says so?"

"I say it."

"I know you do."

"That is enough, then."

"No, it isn't."

'What more do you want?"

"Prove it."

"Prove it?"

"Yes, prove it, Mr. Wriggles. What authority have you for making such a statement? Have you ever found any highwaymen or 'family' men in my house? Just answer me that."

And as he spoke, the landlord stamped his foot upon the hearth, and in the act caused the arm-chair in which he was sitting to run back upon its castors until the back touched that part of the parlour wall where the secret door was placed.

He thought he was putting at least one more barrier between our friends and the officers.

Mr. Wriggles evidently did not see anything suspicious in the movement, for he went on in reply to old Matthew Gale's remarks.

"You have always been one too many for us, Mr. Gale. I know we have never found any one we wanted in your house, but that is only owing to your superior cunning. But we have seen people who were wanted enter your house, and never come out again."

"Don't talk nonsense."

"Nonsense?"

"Yes. There isn't one of the whole 'family' in London who does not know how sharp a watch is kept upon this place by your police, and do you think they are such fools as to enter it?"

"Well, let that be as it will, I have the clearest proof that three well-known highwaymen, Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack, entered this public-house not half-an-hour ago. Now I know very well they have not left it, because the inn is well surrounded. Consequently they must be here."

"Find them, then."

"I daresay you think you can defy us to do that without feeling uneasy. Come, landlord, don't be a fool. You know the men we want, and you know they are here; and, what's more, you know a good reward is offered for their apprehension. Now, I'll make you an offer."

"What is it?"

"I know the men are here."

Matthew shrugged his shoulders.

"You seem to have got that idea pretty firmly fixed in your head."

"I have. Very well, then; produce those men. Give them up to me, and I will guarantee that you shan't get into any trouble through their being found in your house; and, what's more, you shall share the reward upon the same terms as the rest."

Matthew heaved a deep sigh.

"I wish I could," he said, "that's all. But the thing's impossible. If they were here, however, I would give them up in a moment upon such advantageous terms being offered me."

And this was said with an air of so much apparent sincerity, that the officer would have been completely deceived by it if he had not known old Matthew as well as he did.

But Mr. Wriggles was not deceived.

He merely put his finger in a waggish manner by the side of his nose, and looked as cunning as he possibly could.

"Won't do," he said, "won't do. Now, Matthew, do, for your own sake, think over the offer I have made you. I know the men I want are in this house, although you have denied it before so many witnesses. Now I will find them, if I have to pull the 'White Horse' down brick by brick, and when I do find them, why, of course, I need not tell you you will be placed in a very awkward position indeed."

There was no one better aware of this fact than old Matthew himself, but still that did not have the least influence upon him.

He would not have betrayed our friends, even if his life was at stake.

But he spoke to the officer.

"Mr. Wriggles," he said.

"What? Have you thought better of it?"

"Better of what?"

"You know of what. Do you agree to accept my offer?"

"I tell you, I only wish I could, but I desire you will listen to me for a moment, and I will tell you something that will benefit you."

"What is it? You see I am in no hurry, because my precautions are so well taken that a mouse could not get out of this place without being seen by some one."

"Very well. Such being the case, take it easy."

"What were you about to say?"

"Oh! I forgot. You have been kind enough to picture what would be the consequences to me if those you seek are found concealed on my premises."

"Yes."

"Well, you say you have seen them enter, and use that as an excuse for having acted in the way you have. Now, if you fail to find them, or make good your accusation, you shall suffer for it if it costs me all my savings to make you. I am tired of this sort of thing, and am resolved to have an end put to it."

"Very well — very well," said Mr. Wriggles, in a cracked tone of voice, and with an uneasy sensation about his heart. "We have wasted time enough, my men. Now, then, to business. Search this apartment thoroughly. Don't leave a corner unexamined, and we will serve all the house just the same."

"You are quite at liberty to do so, gentlemen," said old Matthew; "only I warn you, Mr. Wriggles, of what will be the consequences of your failing in your object."

"I'll chance that. Now, my men. About it."

The police-officers dispersed themselves about the parlour, and peeped under the different articles of furniture, without, of course, discovering anything.

At length they were satisfied they had pried into every corner.

During the search old Matthew preserved his equanimity in a most admirable manner.

He had retained his seat in the arm-chair, never offering to move an inch, and narrowly watching every movement of the officers.

In the position he occupied, he certainly was of great service to our friends, for it prevented that part of the room from undergoing so close an examination as the rest.

And, so well did he perform his part, that no suspicion generated from his actions.

When the men had finished their search, Mr. Wriggles gave an ironical smile, and said—

"I have not quite done yet, Matthew, my friend. I'll show you something else."

As he spoke he took from his coat pocket a small hammer.

It was entirely made of iron—handle, head, and all. The handle was very thin, and the head of a circular shape on one side, and elongating into a spike on the other.

"There's a pretty little tool," he said, affecting to eye it with admiration. "It's really beautiful, that it is."

"What is it for?" asked old Matthew, who could have given a tolerably good guess.

"Why, my friend, I think you may have heard of such things as secret doors in the walls of rooms."

"I have, before now."

"Well, this little instrument is especially intended to discover them."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. You see it is nicely balanced upon a slender handle. That is for the convenience of the person making use of it. Then look at the head. On one side it's rounded. That's to knock the wall with. If a dull sound is produced, it's all right—you know there's nothing but a wall. If hollow, a door."

"That's all very well," said Matthew, "but the butt-end of a pistol would have answered the purpose just as well."

"Oh! no, it wouldn't. Sometimes you feel rather doubtful as to whether the sound is dull, like a wall, or hollow, like a door. When that is the case you can easily satisfy yourself. To do that, you must bring the spiky part into requisition."

"Very interesting!" said old Matthew, who, although he preserved his coolness, looked upon the instrument with which Wriggles seemed to be so pleased, with distrust and uneasiness.

He did not know the exact extent of his powers.

Having given this explanation, Mr. Wriggles set about his task of sounding the walls.

He did this with great care, not leaving a single square foot of the wall without a blow, using for this purpose the blunt or rounded end of the hammer's head.

While he was thus engaged old Matthew was struck with a fresh thought.

So excellent a one was it that he felt he could fairly rub his hands together for very glee.

But he did not venture upon so great a demonstration of satisfaction as that.

But he could not prevent his eye from sparkling.

Hitherto he had looked upon Mr. Wriggles' operations with an indifferent air.

Now, however, he affected to cast uneasy glances upon the walls, and more especially upon the corner of the fire-place on the side of the room opposite to that upon which he sat.

It was not long before this was noticed.

Mr. Wriggles was the first to perceive it.

But though he noticed the spot to which the landlord's eyes were continually and uneasily turned, he took no notice further than to get to that part of the room as quickly as he could.

At length he reached it.

Cautiously and gently he rapped with his nammer.

As he approached, which he did in what he considered an artful manner, he looked at old Matthew out of the corners of his eyes, and observed the changes in his countenance as he neared the important spot.

Full of exultation, and doubting not that he had the game entirely in his hands, Mr. Wriggles tapped away at the wall.

But he ought to have known old Matthew better by this time.

The fact was, the officer was blind just at that moment to everything else but his own superior cunning.

Tap—tap—tap.

As yet the walls had returned a uniformly dull sound, and Wriggles knew that up to the present moment he had struck upon nothing but brick.

Now, however, he struck another blow, and this time the sound which followed was of a decidedly different character.

To use a common simile, it sounded as hollow as a drum.

Old Matthew gave a great start, and pretended to clutch the arms of the chair for support, as though the discovery had come.

He did this because he saw Mr. Wriggles was peeping at him.

"Ha! ha!" laughed that individual, his exultation taking quite a facetious form. "Ha! ha! Mr. Landlord; there's something here. Ha! ha!"

Old Matthew opened and shut his mouth several times in a gasping manner, as though he wanted to speak and could not.

"What's this, I wonder?" continued Mr. Wriggles. "That gives a decidedly hollow sound. Ha! ha! I must call in the assistance of my spiky friend to prove that. Ha! ha!"

As he spoke he turned the handle of the hammer in his hand.

Then he prepared to strike a blow with the spike.

Old Matthew fell back in the chair.

Mr. Wriggles poised the hammer in the air, but paused before he gave the stroke.

He was like a cat which feels secure of its prey, and thinks it a piece of excellent amusement to play with it for a while.

And so it was with the police-officer.

When he thought that he had tormented the landlord enough he struck the blow.

There was a crashing sound.

The spike upon the head of the hammer buried itself in the wood.

"Ha! ha! Mr. Gale! you'll alter your note now, I rather think. You are a very clever man—a very clever man indeed; but, dear me! not near so clever as some one else I know. The secret's out now. But come, I'll be generous with you, old chap; give them up, and you shall hear no more about it, and have your share of the reward."

Old Matthew knew by this time that he had quite hooked his fish.

The bait, so cunningly held out, was swallowed.

A great change took place in his manner.

He assumed a defiant, off-hand way of speaking, and laughed at what Wriggles could do, and defied him to do his worst.

And this so cleverly that the men thought the behaviour only put on—like that kind of conrage which fails to make itself apparent until the animal is forced to bay.

"There's nothing," he cried, hoarsely, "there's nothing there. Come away, I say. I tell you there is nothing there."

"Ha! ha!" was the reply made by Mr. Wriggles. "We shall soon see about that. Take care of him, my men, and be prepared for action. I will knock the door down myself, and then you be prepared to grapple with the highwaymen as soon as they make their appearance. Hurrah! my boys, we have them! The reward is ours!"

CHAPTER CCCXVII.

CONTINUES TO RELATE THE INTERESTING PROCEEDINGS OF MR. WRIGGLES AT THE "WHITE HORSE" INN.

MR. WRIGGLES was not more sure of his own existence than he was that he had really hit upon the place where the highwaymen were concealed.

He had achieved his end at last.

The hollow reverberatiug sound whic.. had followed the blows with the blunt end of the hammer, proved that there was a recess.

Then the blow with the sharp end had quite set the matter at rest, as well as shown that there was a concealed door.

And what could be behind that door but the highwaymen?

Then he considered old Matthew's behaviour as an additional assurance.

But the cleverest people are sometimes over-matched, and those who pitted themselves against the landlord of the "White Horse" generally came off worst in the encounter.

Mr. Wriggles did in this instance.

He took a pistol from his pocket, and, cocking it, took up a position in front of the door, and at a few paces from it.

He commanded his men to do the same, and with faces full of the expectation of anticipated triumph, they obeyed.

Old Matthew pretended to be quite overcome.

And now Mr. Wriggles proceeded to "draw the badger," for by this term he designated what he was about to do.

His first proceeding was to knock three times upon the hidden door.

Then he said, in a loud, pompous voice—

"Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack, we, officers of police, know you to be concealed behind this door, and, in the name of his most gracious majesty the king, we call upon you to surrender yourselves to us. If you refuse, the consequences will be upon your own heads. We shall call upon you three times, and if, when we have done so, you do not deliver yourselves into our hands, we shall attack you."

Of course, for the very best of all reasons, there came no response to this speech from behind the door.

Although, in their hiding-place, the three highwaymen could not see what was taking place in the parlour, yet they were well aware the officers were upon the wrong scent, so they did not trouble themselves in the least.

"Once!" cried Mr. Wriggles; "we call upon you to surrender."

A pause.

No reply.

"Twice!"

The same result.

"Three times! we call upon you to surrender."

But no more notice was taken than there had been upon the two preceding occasions.

There was silence still.

Mr. Wriggles began to grow angry at this contumacy.

At the same time he could not conceal from himself that a disagreeable presentiment was stealing over him that he was doomed to be "done" in some way.

"Fire!" he cried, in a husky tone of voice. "Fire, every one of you, since they will have it."

The men had nothing to do but to obey orders, besides, their chief set them the example of firing first.

The report of so many pistols in so confined a space was rather stunning and tremendous.

The concussion of the air broke several of the window-panes, and the glass fell with a clattering sound into the yard outside.

The parlour, too, was filled with blue smoke, which was some seconds in clearing away.

When it did so, a glimpse of the spot at which their shots had been aimed could be obtained.

A number of holes were visible, and in many places splinters of wood could be seen.

But no cry as of anguish from a wound reached their ears, nor nothing which could be construed into a death scream.

The uncomfortable feeling which we have described Mr. Wriggles as experiencing increased in intensity.

But, calling to his men to draw their cutlasses, he sprang forward with his own in his grasp, and commenced slashing away at the woodwork.

By the united exertions of the police the door was soon pulled down, and then a dark-looking recess was disclosed.

But it was empty.

A glance assured them of that fact.

But Mr. Wriggles, dreading the worst, as he had begun to do, could scarcely bring himself to believe that such a horrible state of things could be real, and that, after all his cunning, his exultation and his trouble had been thrown away.

Cutlass in hand, he dashed into the little recess.

It was about four feet in depth only, and the width of an ordinary door.

He minutely examined the walls, the floor, and the ceiling, but without any good result.

He was forced at last to come to the conclusion that there was no means of outlet to this place, save the legitimate one.

Turning round, with his heart swelling almost to bursting with furious passion, his eye fell upon old Matthew, the landlord.

One glance at that individual's countenance almost maddened him.

He was laughing—yes, positively laughing at and enjoying his discomfiture.

And yet he seemed to be stifling his mirth, for he inflated his cheeks, and then drew them in again, while the shaking of his fat sides communicated a movement to the chair upon which he was sitting.

It was really too bad of old Matthew to so exasperate a discomfited foe.

But he did it.

He felt that it was his turn to rejoice.

"What do you mean, you hoary-headed old villain?" said Mr. Wriggles, striding up to him, his rage quite overcoming his prudence. "What do you mean by this?"

"Ha! ha!"

"Look out that you don't suffer for it."

"Mr. Wriggles!"

"Curses!"

"Mr. Wriggles, I can't help laughing, indeed I can't."

"What have you got to laugh at?"

"Why, you, to be sure."

"Me?"

"Yes, to think what a jolly fool you have made of yourself."

"You mean what a jolly fool you have made of me."

"Oh! have it that way if you like, only my modesty would not allow me to put it so."

"Oh! d—n your modesty!"

"Very well. Just as you like. But I can't help laughing. Now didn't I tell you as plain as ever I could speak that there was no one there?"

"You said so, but it was not likely I was going to believe you."

"So it seems."

"But you have not conquered me yet, Mr. Gale."

"Oh! you are going to give yourself more trouble, then?"

"I am. The failures I have met with do not daunt me in the least. On the contrary, they do but serve to increase my vigour and determination."

"Very well, search away, but if you will take my advice you will just go quietly about your business."

"Bah!"

"I know very well you will not be advised by me. If you had, you wouldn't have made that great hole in the wall there."

"The very fact of your having such a place in your parlour wall is suspicious."

"Oh! is it?"

"Yes, it is."

"But suppose I didn't know it was there?"

"No one would ever suppose such a ridiculous thing."

"Oh! wouldn't they. Well now, do you know what that place is that you are making such a grand fuss about?"

"Yes, I do."

"What is it, then?

"A hiding-place for gentlemen who are wanted."

"Now, don't get such foolish ideas in your head."

"Foolish ideas?"

"Yes, foolish ideas. For that place is nothing more and nothing less than a cupboard which used to be there when I first took the house, but as I had no use for it and considered it spoilt the look of that side of the room, I had the door nailed up and papered over as you see, and so it has remained to this day."

"Then why couldn't you tell us so?"

"Why, you wouldn't have believed me any more than you did a moment ago, when I told you the highwaymen were not here."

"But they were watched in, and their horses are at this very moment in your stable."

"Ah! it's no use talking to you, I am sure. Go on—go on. But if you don't find them I can tell you you will have to suffer for it."

"I will run the risk of that."

"Very well. You are free to act just as you think proper."

"Of course I am."

"Go on, then."

"I will pull this house down, I tell you, and examine every brick one by one, but what I will find them."

Matthew waved his hand, and was about to speak.

But the words he had almost began to utter, died away upon his lips.

His cheek blanched.

A sound had come upon his ears and also upon the ears of Wriggles and the officers.

They started, and, with cries of rage upon their lips, darted out into the bar.

The sounds which they had heard were those of evident conflict.

The idea that struck them all was that the highwaymen were making their escape from some part of the premises, or, at all events, were trying to do so.

Old Matthew guessed, perhaps, just exactly what had occurred.

But we will properly relate to the reader what had taken place.

To do so we must direct attention to the place where our friends were hidden.

We know that up to a certain time they had remained here in perfect safety, until, indeed, after Mr. Wriggles's attack upon the door.

It will be recollected that when old Matthew left our friends, he gave them some parting instructions, to which he requested their particular attention.

They were to be acted upon in case they should be threatened with discovery, and related to the means which they were to adopt in order to make their escape.

At present there seemed to be no probability of their being put into requisition.

The space, however, in which they had to stand was a limited one, and they experienced considerable inconvenience; yet they did not dare to stir, for fear their movements should be heard by the officers, and their hiding-place betrayed.

But when they heard them preparing to fire a volley at the door on the opposite side of the apartment, they considered that a favourable opportunity to endeavour to make some change in their position.

They did slightly succeed, but only slightly.

They were more comfortable than they were before, but not much.

Then came the little altercation between Matthew and Mr. Wriggles.

During this, Claude, who could not gain anything like a comfortable position, moved gradually and silently until his back was against the wall, opposite to the door by which they had entered.

Against this he rested, when, to his unutterable dismay, he felt it give way behind him.

But he recovered himself quickly enough from falling to the ground, which he had a narrow escape of doing.

He saved himself.

The fact was, he had leaned up against the door of which Matthew had spoken, and which, he said, would take them out into the little yard at the rear of the public-house.

Whether the door was secured by a spring and Claude had accidentally pressed upon it, or whether it had not been securely fastened, is hard to say; but, certain it is, from one or other of these causes the door gave way in the manner we have described.

This was a most unlooked-for and dangerous occurrence, for no sooner was the door open than some one called out as though to give the alarm.

This some one was a police-officer, who had been stationed in that identical back yard by his strategic chief in order to keep watch.

Claude guessed this, and the peril of their situation made him more than usually rapid in his actions.

With the swiftness of a tiger's leap, he sprang out through the unexpected aperture into the yard.

There he saw an officer.

To spring upon him and clutch him by the throat with no friendly grip, was the work of a moment.

But the officer was a tall and stalwart man, and Claude could tell that, strong as he was, he had opposed himself to one who was almost his equal.

But putting forth his utmost strength he grappled with this man.

It was but for a moment he had to sustain the conflict single-handed.

His two companions feeling certain that, after what had occurred, their hiding-place would be no further good to them, emerged into the yard, closed the door after them, and hastened to Claude's assistance.

Against such odds, of course the officer did not stand the ghost of a chance.

Sixteen-String Jack, watching his opportunity, clenched his fist and struck him a heavy blow on the side of his head.

But, of course, all this had not been done without making a noise.

It was these sounds of conflict which had reached the ears of old Matthew and Mr. Wriggles in the bar, and which had caused such a tint of deadly paleness to overspread the countenance of the worthy landlord.

It was this struggle which had caused the police-officer and his men to give vent to the cries of rage they did, and to rush out into the bar.

They knew of no other means by which they could reach the yard.

No sooner had they disappeared than old Matthew sprang to his feet.

He looked anxious and disconcerted.

But quick as thought he moved his chair, and, pressing the spring, caused the secret door to fly open.

He passed through it, and closed it after him in a moment.

Then he saw the door opposite to him, which led into the yard, was open.

Two steps took him to the threshold of it.

He could then see into the yard.

The officer who had uttered the alarm lay on the ground without motion.

His companions and Mr. Wriggles had not yet arrived.

But doubtless they would be there in another moment.

Anxiously old Matthew glanced round the yard in search of our friends, for even now he had not lost all hope of saving them.

CHAPTER CCCXVIII.

RETURNS TO DICK TURPIN IN HIS CELL IN NEWGATE, AND GIVES SOME INTERESTING PARTICULARS RELATIVE TO THE PROCEEDINGS OF ADRIAN WINBERRY.

ALBEIT we leave Dick Turpin's three brave companions in so perilous a situation, the exigencies of our narrative compel us to revert to the proceedings of Dick Turpin himself.

It will be seen that our hero's stay in the great city prison was destined to be marked by the occurrence of some very remarkable events.

It will doubtless be remembered that when we saw Dick last was on the Friday.

That Friday which preceded the Monday fixed for the execution of Adrian Winberry and his two companions in guilt.

The jailers who were upon such friendly terms with Dick, had informed him of the arrival of the warrants ordering their execution.

The interview which Turpin had with Maud Gouldman and Blanche Winberry produced a great effect upon him.

He tried to shake off the feeling, but found the effort quite a vain one.

He longed for night to come, and yet when darkness descended upon the earth, and the different objects in his cell were shrouded from his view, he felt no better off than before, and, with the same impatient restlessness, longed for day to come again.

But time lagged.

The hours passed by slowly and wearisomely, and Dick Turpin, like Richard III., felt his stern impatience.

> Chide this tardy-gaited night,
> That, like a foul and ugly witch, doth limp
> So tediously away.

But what a contrast there was between him and Adrian's two accomplices, Norman and Sare.

Horrible thought to such souls as theirs'—they knew they had but so many hours to live.

So many? Say rather how few, for they were able to count them easily.

To them the minutes flew by with lightning-like rapidity.

The day was gone, and as the last rays of daylight faded from the cell, they felt that they would only twice more see that spectacle.

Oh! it was horrible to feel as they felt. The mind is unable to form a proper estimate of their sensations.

Hour after hour slipped by so swiftly that they seemed like minutes.

At that awful hour they repented, when it was too late, that they had been weak enough to allow themselves to be persuaded by the inducements and arguments which Adrian Winberry held out to them.

How gladly would they have recalled the past.

And so, in fruitless groans and shrieks for mercy, which the stone walls of their cell heeded not, they passed away the night.

They did not dare to sleep, for they dreaded the elapsion of time during unconsciousness. Miserable though they were, they wished to live as long as possible.

And now let us take a glance at Adrian Winberry.

From the time of his condemnation he had unvaryingly preserved a dogged stoicism of manner.

It had completely fixed the idea in the minds of all the officials by whom he was visited, that he had given himself up to despair.

But such was not the fact.

From what the reader has casually seen of Adrian Winberry, he can easily believe that he was not the kind of man to allow himself to be daunted by whatever obstacles might obstruct his path.

Neither was he the kind of man to tamely submit to circumstances without making an effort to turn the current of them.

From the very first moment of his incarceration one word and one idea had been unceasingly uppermost in his mind, and before his mental vision.

And that was escape.

He had resolved to free himself from his confinement.

Hitherto, however, he had not been able to make even an attempt.

Now time pressed, and he felt that if he was to escape at all it must be without further loss of time.

On this Friday night, then, to which we adverted, he determined that a trial should be made.

With an eagerness which equalled that of Dick Turpin, he waited and watched for the night to come.

The jailers made their accustomed rounds, and found him in his usual position—that is to say, crouched up like a wild beast.

He vouchsafed not a word to them when they placed his food upon the floor of the cell, but only glared at them with his haggard eyes.

But as soon as they closed the door his demeanour underwent a remarkable alteration.

Springing to his feet, he seized upon the loaf of bread, and, coarse and repulsive as the fare was, began to devour it eagerly.

He did this, not because he was particularly hungry, but because he did not know how long a time would elapse before he had the chance of tasting food again. And, moreover, he wished to endow himself with as much vigour as possible, so as to be the better able to prosecute his escape.

He did not cease till the whole of the loaf had disappeared.

By this time night had fully come.

The faint, roaring hum which had reached his cell, telling him of the busy world without, came no longer to his ears.

Nothing could be heard stirring within the prison.

"It is time," he said, and as he spoke he rose to his feet and paced the cell.

It is probable at that moment he was elaborating some plan of escape which he had engendered in his scheming brain.

At length he paused, and groped his way upon his hands and feet towards the spot where the jailer had deposited the water.

It was a large, strong, stone pitcher.

Raising this to his lips, Adrian drank deeply of its contents, though the quality of the water was not of the purest kind.

He drank again and again at frequent intervals, and then, turning the pitcher over, he allowed the remainder of the water to flow away.

What was he about to do?

In what way was he to accomplish his escape?

We shall see.

The reader must bear in mind we have not mentioned that Adrian Winberry was supplied with any tools.

Nor was he.

But, by noting his actions, we shall see what steps he took to remedy that deficiency.

Having drank his fill, and having, as he imagined satisfied his thirst for a long time to come, he poured away the water.

As soon as the pitcher was empty, he raised it in his hands as high above his head as he could.

Then dashed it down with considerable force on to the floor of the dungeon.

The crash sounded with alarming loudness in the silence of the night.

But no notice appeared to have been taken of it.

He listened, however, for several seconds, and then, hearing no sound indicative of an alarm having been given, or of the approach of anyone, he stooped down.

The pitcher had been broken into several large fragments, which lay scattered about the floor of the cell.

One by one, and with extraordinary patience, he collected them together.

Then he felt them—for he had no light and could not see—and selected from among the rest one piece, which he calculated would best answer the use to which he was about to put it.

This much done, he rose to his feet and looked about for the little grated aperture through which light was admitted to his cell.

He was easily able to fix his eyes upon this, because it was somewhat lighter than the rest of the walls.

By this simple means he was able to exactly and correctly ascertain his precise whereabouts.

With a steady step, as though he had fully resolved upon what he was about to do, he turned to the left, and walked until his further progress was stopped by the stone wall.

It was not, however, as some would have thought, the stone wall leading into the passage before which he paused, but the one dividing his dungeon from the one next to it.

Was it his intention to first make his way into that?

If so, for what purpose?

He had learned that his lawyer, Josiah Skinner, was in the cell adjoining his, and his resolve was to work his way into that and obtain the co-operation of his legal adviser, who, perhaps, would be provided with tools, which would make the task of escape lighter.

But, if he had not, he considered he should still have the advantage which the assistance of Mr. Skinner would give him.

There was another motive, too, which induced him to adopt this line of conduct.

The cell in which he stood, and which had been chosen for his reception, was doubtless one of the strongest in the prison, so that it would be a matter of great difficulty, if not impossibility, for him to make his way out of it.

But with the cell in which the lawyer was confined the case might be different.

The same precautions for strength might not have been taken.

At any rate, if the cell was just the same, it could not be more difficult to escape from, and he would have the certain advantage which assistance would give him.

And so, for these reasons, instead of making his attack on the wall which divided his cell from the passage, he made it upon the one that separated his from the one in which he believed Mr. Skinner was confined.

As yet that worthy was only in custody on the charge of perjury which the judge had preferred against him, and therefore no great strictness would be exercised towards him.

Pausing, then, before this wall, Adrian Winberry carefully felt it with his hands.

He passed them over the huge block of stone of which it was composed, until the ends of his fingers came in contact with the mortar which cemented them together.

He ran his fingers along the crevice or indentation between two blocks of stone.

Then, satisfied apparently with the result of his labours, he knelt down on the floor of the dungeon, and, with the piece of the stone pitcher he had selected from the rest, began to pick out the mortar in small fragments.

For this the piece of pitcher was admirably adapted, for it had a sharp point, which dug into the somewhat moist mortar easily and gradually removed it.

But still the task of dislodging a huge piece of stone by such means would never have been undertaken save by a prisoner, and that prisoner animated by the hope that each tiny grain that he picked out took him so much nearer to freedom.

It was in this light that Adrian Winberry looked upon his superhuman task.

It was this thought which encouraged him to continue his exertions and endowed him with the requisite amount of patience.

He put forth his whole energies, and it was really wonderful to see what a quantity of mortar he removed, and how soon he had worked his way all round the stone.

And now, as he proceeded, he found the difficulty of what he was about increase.

So much so that, looking back, and judging by what he had to do, the first portion of his laborious work looked like insignificant child-play.

The deeper he worked his way into the interstices of the stones, the more trouble he had to introduce the piece of pitcher and dislodge the mortar.

But he persevered, never allowing his courage to abate for a moment—never suffering his mind to experience the least sensation of depression.

Presently a curse broke from his lips.

In using the piece of pitcher which had done him such good service rather roughly, it had broken in his hand, leaving a portion sticking in the wall.

This compelled him to pause, and when he did so he found how much his exertion had heated him.

The perspiration poured off him in streams.

With a hasty movement he brushed away the clustering drops from about his face, and, having done so, groped his way to where he had left the other fragments of the pitcher, and began to search among them for another piece which would perform the duty he required of it.



[TOM KING IS DETECTED IN HIS DISGUISE.]

At length he found two, and, in the anticipation of meeting with another accident, took them both and renewed his operations.

The piece of pitcher sticking in the crevice was removed.

Time passed, and still Adrian was at his work—for two hours he never rested once, except for the purpose we have mentioned, but kept on untiringly.

At the expiration of that time, however, he paused, but only because his task was so far accomplished.

He had worked all round the four sides of one of the huge blocks of stone, until the crevice he had made was so deep that the piece of pitcher was not long enough to reach the mortar.

Surely now, he thought, he should be able to loosen the stone in its setting somewhat, so he rose and, putting his fingers as far as he could in the top crevice, exerted all his strength and pressed downwards.

To his great joy, the mass gave way beneath the pressure, slowly and gradually.

But he stopped and placed the piece of pitcher in the under crevice, so that it should not sink so far that he should be unable to raise it again.

This precaution was one very necessary to take.

In this way, then, and with incredible patience, he worked the block of stone up and down—backwards and forwards—until he had loosened it in a surprising degree.

The services of the pitcher were then again called into requisition, and, taking the strongest fragment he could find, he used it like a lever, and, by slow degrees, worked the stone out into his cell.

This was a very tedious operation, but, when the stone projected about half an inch, he seized it with his fingers, and strove to pull it towards him.

He broke his nails and bruised his fingers in the attempt, but he did not care for such minor inconveniences as these, and, at last, to his inexpressible gratification the block of stone lay upon the floor of the dungeon.

CHAPTER CCCXIX.

ADRIAN WINBERRY MAKES A FATAL ERROR, AND DICK TURPIN FRUSTRATES HIS ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE.

To Adrian Winberry this seemed a good deal done towards the accomplishment of his purpose, and he felt inspired with hope accordingly; but anyone looking at it as a partial escape from the prison at Newgate, and taking into account what would have to be done before freedom was attained, would be apt to consider the displacing of that stone as a very trifling thing indeed.

But flushed with the success which had hitherto attended upon him, the prisoner, without allowing himself more than a moment's rest, returned to his work with undiminished vigour.

It was now that he felt how welcome a draught of the water he had thrown away would have been to have cooled his parched lips and burning throat; but he consoled himself with the thought that ere long he should stand within the dungeon occupied by the rascally attorney, where, beyond doubt, he would be able to slake his thirst with abundance of water—for, he argued, Mr. Skinner would have had no motive to pour his away.

A large square aperture was now presented in the wall where the stone had been taken away, and thrusting his head and shoulders into this, Adrian, by the aid of his sense of touch, commenced a careful exploration of it.

The flakes of mortar crumbled away beneath his fingers, until he could again feel the crevice round another stone.

Undaunted by the awkward position he would have to assume in order to set to work again, Adrian took up the piece of pitcher, and resolutely picked away at the mortar.

He had the satisfaction of finding that he made very rapid progress, for in the middle of the wall where he was now at work the mortar was quite moist, and consequently easily removed.

Still it was a weary time, and his arms ached insufferably before he was able to work that stone up and down as he did the other.

But at last that time came, and, feverishly impatient, he loosened it in its setting.

Then the next thing was to remove the stone.

He did not attempt to draw it towards him this time.

On the contrary, as he judged that stone was all that divided him from the contiguous dungeon, the easiest and best method by far would be to push it from him.

And accordingly he applied the pressure in that direction.

At first without result, but presently he felt it gradually slipping before him.

Encouraged, he pushed harder and harder, until, with an ominous crash, the huge stone fell into the next dungeon.

To writhe through the aperture was, to Adrian Winberry, the work of a moment, but when he did so and regained his feet, he met with a surprise that he was little prepared for, and he uttered a shout either of anger or of fear.

The next moment he felt himself tightly clutched round the throat by some one.

But in order to make things quite clear, we will just for a moment revert to the doings of Dick Turpin upon that eventful night.

After all his longings for the time to pass away, the night had come, but without bringing any relief to his vexed spirit.

He paced up and down the narrow limits of his cell with an impatient tread, till, tiring of the exercise, he flung himself upon the rude couch which did duty for a bed.

But though he thus sought for repose, sleep did not come to him—indeed, he never remembered being so very wide awake as he then was.

The silence and the darkness at last, however, had the desired effect upon him, and towards the time when Adrian Winberry commenced his operations, Dick fell into a restless and uneasy slumber.

In this state he continued for a long while, until, in fact, Adrian had dislodged his first stone.

Just then Turpin sat up on the bed and strove to look about him.

But he could see nothing save the darkness and the light square patch in the wall where the window was situated.

He had awoke with some faint, peculiar sound in his ears, but what it was he was at a loss to think.

Now, however, all was profoundly still.

Under the impression that his fancy had misled him, and that his awakenment was due to an awkward position, or some such trivial circumstance, he proceeded to lie down again.

But almost immediately he heard a faint scratching sound.

Had it not been for the intense silence which prevailed within the cell, it would have been inaudible.

Dick heard it, however, and he lay quite still and listened with the utmost intentness.

Convinced that his imagination was playing him no trick, he gradually and quietly rose.

Then slipping off the bed, he stood upon his feet on the floor of the cell, and turned himself round until he was quite sure his face was turned in the direction from which the noise proceeded.

This much done, he crept stealthily forward, until his further progress was arrested by the wall.

The scratching was on the other side of it, for a certainty.

Now this was a sound which Dick could not altogether make out the cause of.

The sound seemed to come from what he had been told was Adrian Winberry's cell, but that that individual should be working his way into his cell he conceived was too absurd a supposition to be indulged in for a moment. And yet, as the reader is aware, such was actually the case.

But then Adrian Winberry was labouring under a mistake.

He had the idea implanted in his mind that he was working his way into the company of his associate.

But he was in some way wrong in his information as to the side of the cell upon which Mr. Skinner's abode was situated.

And instead of getting nearer to his friend, or progressing in his escape, he was in reality labouring so hard to get into the presence of one who had by his actions proved himself to be his greatest enemy, and if it had not been for whom he would, in all probability, have completely succeeded in his nefarious undertakings.

Dick Turpin, as we say, could scarcely bring himself to believe that the sounds he heard were produced by Adrian Winberry, because he was at a loss to think what motive he could have for making his way into his presence.

It seemed altogether preposterous, and yet he could not help the idea occurring again and again to him, because he could not think what else it could be.

Puzzled and perplexed, Dick made his way to the chair, and sat down upon it.

"I suppose," he said, "I can do nothing better than await the progress of events. It's a very extraordinary circumstance—very, indeed. I can't think it's Adrian Winberry. Perhaps it is some friend of mine, who thinks by getting into my cell to enable me to make my escape. I shall be sorry if such proves to be the case, because, as I have given my promise, I could not avail myself of his services, and, upon the discovery being made, my position would become worse instead of better."

This was unquestionably true, because the authorities would be put more upon their guard, and their prisoner would be hemmed in with so many precautions that ultimate escape would be a very doubtful affair indeed.

And for this reason Turpin hoped that it was no friend of his who was at work with the intention of effecting his escape.

Impatiently Dick waited to see what was going to happen next.

As he sat thus waiting, he became conscious that the cell was gradually growing lighter.

He could distinguish the walls—his own limbs—and the rude table upon which his meals were served.

At first he was inclined to attribute this increased vision to the expansion of the pupils of the eyes, for he had more than once noticed how, after a short stay in a place that had at first seemed utterly dark, he had been gradually able to define objects.

But the lightness kept increasing, and that to such an extent that he was unable any longer to attribute it to the cause which we have named.

Raising his head he looked towards the grated aperture

of the cell, through which a small glimpse of the sky could be obtained.

Then the mystery of the accession of light was dissipated at once.

A number of small, white, fleecy clouds were flitting rapidly across.

Dick Turpin had not been out upon so many nocturnal excursions as he had without noting with a particular eye the various aspects of the ever-varying sky.

By the mere look, then, of these fleecy clouds, he was able to tell with certainty that the moon was not far distant, and that it was her silvery rays which gave them the appearance that they wore.

This would account for his being able to see about him so well as he did.

And he was destined to see even more distinctly, for the edge of the moon now appeared at one side of the grating.

At first it was but a mere silver thread, but as the moon continued her rapid motion towards the west, it increased in size, until the whole of the full round face of the orb of night was visible.

When this was the case, the interior of Dick Turpin's cell was even more brilliantly lighted up than it was during the greatest part of the day, and every object could be seen with remarkable distinctness, though, as is always the case with moonlight, sharp black shadows were thrown.

It was just when the moon had thus attained her full power, and the cell was so well illuminated, that the scratching sound became louder and louder, until it suddenly ceased.

It was succeeded by a creaking, cracking noise, and this was caused by Adrian's efforts to move the stone up and down, and so loosen the mortar where he could not reach to pick it away with his rude yet effectual implement.

It so happened that the rays of the moon, coming as they did in rather a slanting direction into the cell, fell with full force and distinctness upon the very wall on the other side of which Adrian was at work.

Such being the case, it was an easy enough matter for Dick, who was guided by the sound, to fix his eyes upon the identical stone which was being displaced.

He saw it rise and fall, and move to the right side and then to the left, with a slightly perceptible motion.

Then that ceased, and the stone began to gradually and gradually come out of its setting, until it projected from the wall.

Dick Turpin knew that the jailers had told him that wall was all which divided him from Adrian Winberry, and yet he fancied he must have made some mistake, and that he was situated on the other side of the cell.

He was puzzled to find a motive for Adrian working a way into his cell.

What possible object could it serve?

He had fancied he would make an attempt to escape, from the daring with which he had attempted to carry out his other schemes, and had expressed his opinion to that effect upon more than one occasion when conversing with his jailers; but then, he thought, the last place Adrian would think of attacking would be that wall, upon which, however, it was plain an attack was most unquestionably being made.

For, behold, the piece of stone projects further and further into the cell as the pressure from behind is steadily applied to it.

Ere long the mystery of this nocturnal worker would be revealed.

So, with straining eyes, Dick watched the moving stone, upon which the moon's rays fell with such brightness that he could see every grain in it.

The stone grated and creaked as it came forward little by little, until at length, as we have described, it fell with a crash upon the floor of Turpin's cell, into which, of course, Adrian was immediately able to see.

The cry which had come from his lips was caused by his first view of Dick's countenance.

He recognised him instantly, for Dick's face was fully turned towards the moonbeams.

On his side Dick Turpin was not slow to recognise the countenance of Adrian Winberry, which was such a peculiar one, and so firmly imprinted upon his memory, that it was impossible for him to mistake it.

In an instant Dick comprehended, by the cry and the look of vexation and rage which overspread Adrian's features, what had occurred.

Adrian had forced his way in there by mistake.

When his eyes rested upon his sinister-looking face projecting from the hole in the wall, and clearly defined by the light, Dick sprang to his feet, and almost immediately recovering from his surprise, clutched Adrian tightly round the throat, and with main force strove to drag him into the cell.

But he did this easily, for Adrian Winberry, so far from doing anything to impede his progress, actually assisted it.

As soon, however, as he felt his feet upon the firm floor of the dungeon, he made a sudden stand, and with an exertion of strength which we should never have given him credit for possessing, he released himself from Turpin's grasp, and followed up this advantage by fixing his bony fingers in his throat with a vice-like grip.

Dick felt the power of the compression, and knew that unless he succeeded in releasing himself from his adversary's grasp at once, he would soon be put out of the power of doing so.

A furious struggle now ensued.

Adrian Winberry was choked with rage and endowed with thrice his ordinary strength.

The thought that he had had all his careful work for nothing maddened him, but he resolved if his escape was frustrated, he would not be baulked out of his revenge.

He saw before him—he held in his grip—the man who had proved himself to be his most dangerous enemy, and to whom might be entirely attributed his discovery, condemnation, and imprisonment.

Nerved, then, with hate, he struggled furiously with Dick.

But our hero soon recovered his coolness.

By a skilful manœuvre he extricated himself from his grasp.

Then throwing the whole weight of his body into one blow, he bore his antagonist to the earth.

Here the struggle was renewed.

But Dick was uppermost.

And now the most unequivocal signs were given that the prison authorities had been aroused by the tumult.

CHAPTER CCCXX.

ADRIAN WINBERRY IS ACCOMMODATED WITH A SET OF JEWELLERY, AND FORTHWITH REMOVED TO STRONGER QUARTERS.

Lights gleamed along the corridor, and there was the trampling of many feet without.

The alarm had been given, and the various officials whose duty it was to watch during the night were hastening to the scene of tumult.

Dick heard them coming with no little satisfaction, for Adrian Winberry, in his present furious state of mind, was anything but a comfortable opponent, and he would not care how soon he got rid of him.

Accordingly, hearing the turnkeys approach, he raised his voice, and called aloud to them.

He was heard, and directly afterwards a key was thrust into the cell door, which was unlocked and thrown open.

An astonished-looking group appeared upon the threshold.

What was their surprise to see two persons on the floor of the cell, struggling furiously with each other.

Those turnkeys were, however, rather accustomed to sudden surprises, and they soon recovered from this one.

Several of them, darting forward, seized hold of both the combatants, and forcibly separated them.

It was then they received another shock, for, to their unbounded astonishment, they found one of the combatants was Adrian Winberry.

Having made this discovery, they did not require to be told how he had gained admission there.

One glance at the breach in the stone wall was enough to tell them that.

"Run for the governor," said one, "and bring him here at once."

A turnkey immediately set off upon this errand.

While he was gone, those who remained divided themselves into two groups.

One held Dick Turpin tightly in their grasp, in order that he should not make any sudden attempt at escape, or rush at his foe.

The other kept hold of Adrian Winberry for precisely the same reason.

But the courage and strength which had hitherto sustained that bold bad man, seemed at this juncture to utterly abandon him.

He had received rather rough usage during his struggle with Dick, and he showed upon his person several marks of it.

His head was now bowed down upon his breast, and he looked utterly dejected.

And who can wonder at it?

He had had the chance of escape, he had used what might fairly be deemed superhuman exertions, but, owing to one fatal error, he had lost all, for now their suspicions were aroused, he would be effectually debarred of all further chances of accomplishing his aim.

He must resign himself to that death which he so well deserved.

Not many minutes elapsed before the turnkey who had been dispatched to fetch the governor returned, bringing that individual with him.

Mr. Cawthorn prided himself upon his personal promptness on all matters connected with the prison.

As he came along the turnkey had communicated to him an outline of the facts which had occurred, so that the governor did not display that astonishment which he would have done if he had entered the cell wholly unprepared.

He set about questioning the turnkeys first, who deposed to having heard shouts and cries, and the scuffling noise which a struggle produces, and, finding the noises to proceed from that cell, they entered it, when they found Dick Turpin on the floor of the cell with Adrian Winberry beneath him, and that, upon turning to look how he came there, they had seen the hole in the dungeon wall.

The governor walked up to this and examined it himself with great care and attention.

Then, turning to Turpin, he asked him for an account of what had taken place.

Dick complied with his demand, and, as he had no reason for keeping back any circumstance connected with the affair, he told all—how he had been awoke from sleep by some slight noise—how that noise had been repeated—and how he watched the wall from which it appeared to come, until the stone was forced out of its setting, and Adrian Winberry's face appeared at the aperture, when, coming to the conclusion that he was in the act of endeavouring to effect an escape, he had clutched him by the throat until the turnkeys arrived and spared him the necessity of doing so any longer.

To this narrative Mr. Cawthorn listened with the most profound attention, and, upon looking round again, he could see so many things corroborative of it that he could not withhold his belief.

He ordered a set of heavy fetters to be brought into the cell, and for the smith to be called up.

While his men were absent upon this errand, Mr. Cawthorn occupied himself with an examination of the hole in the wall through which the prisoner had made his way.

For this purpose he took a lantern from one of the turnkeys, and disappeared through the aperture into the adjoining cell.

In the meantime, the other jailers, who had received no orders to the contrary, kept a firm hold upon Adrian and Dick.

Upon crawling through the opening, Mr. Cawthorn saw the corresponding stone lying in the next cell, with a heap of mortar near it.

Still he was at a loss to think how it had been dislodged.

He saw the fragments of the broken pitcher, but the thought never once occurred to him that they had been used for the purpose, or that, indeed, they could be of any possible service.

But there were the stones, sure enough, and by the appearance they presented it was quite evident that they had been freshly removed.

This was the extent of the governor's discoveries in that quarter, and so, probably as it was the nearest way, he crawled back through the hole into Turpin's cell.

At this moment the smith arrived, carrying a small portable anvil, some rivets, and a hammer.

There was a sleepy look about his eyes, and every now and then he yawned in such a manner that his jaw-bone was in imminent danger of dislocation.

Behind him came a couple of turnkeys, who dragged after them a set of fetters.

The passage of the iron links over the floor of the corridor made a hideous noise.

In answer to the question which the smith propounded, as to which of the prisoners he was to oblige with a set of jewellery, Adrian Winberry was pointed out, so he at once turned his attention towards him.

But his task was easy enough.

The prisoner was quite passive in his hands, and suffered himself to be loaded with the chains without the least resistance.

The task of riveting them on did not occupy much time, and then Adrian was quite helpless, and in a much worse position, so far as effecting his escape went, than he was before, because now, as a preliminary step, he would have to divest himself of the heavy mass of iron.

As soon as all this was done, Mr. Cawthorn directed Adrian to be removed, specifying the dungeon to which he was to be taken.

It was in a part of the prison even then rarely used for the incarceration of prisoners.

At the present day it has wholly disappeared, and scarce even the tradition of its existence remains in the memory of the officials.

It was entirely underground, and its position may be indicated by saying it was under what is now the western portion of Newgate-market.

This was a remnant of the old prison, built some time in the eleventh or twelfth century.

The dungeons in this part were, of course, almost always in a state of utter darkness.

Noisome exhalations and disgusting reptiles, ever the accompaniments of such places, were there in plenty, making it a most disagreeable part to sojourn in.

But to make an escape from that part of Newgate was justly held to be impossible, from the fact of it being underground, and from every precaution having been taken to prevent any prisoner confined there from making his way through the surface.

Mr. Cawthorn did not accompany the turnkeys who led Adrian Winberry, heavily laden as he was, to this cell, but determined to visit him after he was properly installed there. As soon as he had departed, he made a sign to those who held Turpin in their grasp to release him.

They obeyed.

Mr. Cawthorn was not and could not be blind to the value of the service which Dick had rendered him by interfering and putting a stop to what, judging by what had been done, looked like Adrian's successful attempt to escape from Newgate.

But it was not exactly the thing for the governor of a prison to be on good terms with one of the prisoners, no matter what services might have been rendered.

And yet Mr. Cawthorn did not like to go without saying something.

"How was it," he asked, "that you interfered in this matter? Why did you not join your services to his and endeavour to effect an escape between you?"

"For a very simple reason."

"What is it?"

"In the first place, I have pledged my word not to make any effort to escape; and in the second, I have such a horror and detestation of Adrian Winberry and his crimes that I could not put myself under an obligation to him, or act in concert with him in any way."

"I see. And so you grappled with him, and held him tightly until assistance arrived?"

"Just so."

"Well, Turpin, I may as well confess the fact as not, but by acting in the manner you have to-night, you have rendered me a very great service, and I am not the sort of man to forget it."

Dick bowed.

"By what I can see," he continued, "he seemed to have every prospect of finishing what he has so successfully began, and I need not conceal from you the fact that, if any one so [illegible] as he is had succeeded

in making his escape, I should in all probability have forfeited my situation."

"If what I have done is any good to you," replied Dick, "you are heartily welcome to it, but nothing was done with that intention, speaking candidly."

The govenor smiled.

"Well—well," he said, "I daresay you don't look upon me with very friendly eyes, but I can't help that, you know. But you might be in prison under a worse governor, I can tell you that."

"I have no fault to find with you," said Dick, "and as I said before, if what I have done is of any benefit to you, I am glad, and you are heartily welcome."

"Very good—very good. But there is one thing which puzzles me."

"What is it?"

"Why did Adrian work his way to your cell, instead of out into the passage?"

"There I confess you puzzle me."

"Do I?"

"You do, indeed."

"Have you no idea?"

"I could scarcely say no to that, and speak truthfully."

"Then you have some idea?"

"Yes."

"What is the opinion you have formed? for if you will believe me, I am quite at fault in the matter."

"I may be wrong, but still this is the view I take. Is not Adrian Winberry's lawyer, Mr. Skinner, confined in one of these cells?"

"Yes."

"In the one which adjoins that?"

Dick pointed, as he asked this question, to the cell which had up to such a little while ago been tenanted by Adrian.

"Yes."

"In fact," said Dick, "as Adrian stood in his cell, my dungeon was on one side of him, and Mr. Skinner's on the other."

"Precisely. He was placed between you both."

"That is what I thought."

"But what of that?"

"Adrian would perhaps learn in some way the contiguity of his rascally accomplice, and think that he should have a better chance of success if he broke into the lawyer's cell, and obtained his assistance."

"I see. And so you think that Adrian made a mistake somehow, and took your cell for Mr. Skinner's."

"Just so."

"And did not find out his mistake until you had him by the throat?"

"Yes."

"Well, it may be as you say. At any rate, I cannot help expressing my obligations to you. I shall have to find you fresh quarters, of course, but I suppose you will not object to that."

"Not if I am no worse lodged than I am at present."

"I will see to that."

"Would you allow me to make a suggestion?"

"Certainly, what is it?"

"It is that you should visit your other three prisoners, Norman, Sare, and Skinner."

"I had intended to do so."

"I see you understand your duties better than I can tell them you."

The governor bowed, and felt pleased at this compliment.

"Come this way," he said. "You shall have the next cell along the passage."

Dick Tarpin was led out of the dungeon by the jailers.

He could not leave it without some regret, because it was there where he had been honoured with a visit from the idol of his heart, Maud Gouldman.

He could fancy just where she stood, and stand upon the same spot himself, but now he was going to be deprived of even that slight pleasure.

Regretfully, then, Dick cast his eyes around the cell, and took a farewell glance at it.

The next moment he stood in the passage, and directly afterwards was installed in the next cell, and which was in every respect similar to the one which he had just left.

Mr. Cawthorn acted upon Dick's suggestion, and made a round of the prison.

But he found his prisoners all safe.

Last of all he repaired to Adrian's dungeon, and had him carefully searched, but he was unable to find upon his person any instrument which would have assisted him to remove the two large stones.

He quite overlooked the pieces of platter.

CHAPTER CCCXXI.

OLD MATTHEW GAINS A COMPLETE VICTORY OVER MR. WRIGGLES.

THE effect of the blow which Sixteen-String Jack struck the officer who was struggling with Claude Duval in the little bit of a yard belonging to the "White Horse" Inn, was instantaneous.

It was delivered with great precision.

His fist went with full force against the officer's ear.

He dropped down like a shot.

They had nothing further to fear from him for some time at least.

He was quite incapable of speech and motion.

But the three highwaymen were fully conscious that an alarm had been given—that, indeed, the sounds of the little conflict they had had must have reached the ears of the police-officers in the private bar-parlour.

It, therefore, became incumbent upon them to make up their minds quickly as to what was the best thing to be done, and to lose no time in carrying their designs into effect.

The reader may be sure they did not forget that old Matthew had made particular mention of a door which he informed them would take them out into White Horse-yard.

They glanced hastily round in search of it, and, as soon as it met their view, they made a dash in that direction.

Not a word was said, but the action was simultaneous.

This door was situated in a high brick wall.

It was locked, but the key was sticking in the lock, so, without loss of time, they turned it round and flung the door open.

It was at this moment that old Matthew made his appearance in the manner detailed at the close of a preceding chapter.

The officers had not arrived.

Our friends were in the act of rushing through the door, when the voice of old Matthew restrained them.

They halted and looked round.

They saw his face pale with anxiety.

"Quick—quick," he said. "Quick, for your lives, and for my credit. Leave the door wide open just as it is, and come to me. Quick—quick; all will yet be well."

Our three friends had unbounded faith in old Matthew's ability and willingness to aid them, so, without an instant's hesitation—without, indeed, reflecting upon the matter, they obeyed his commands to the very letter

They hastened to where he stood, which was just inside the recess which had hitherto found them such a secure hiding-place.

He dragged them back into it again and closed the door—which from the yard could not be distinguished from the rest of the wall—just in time.

Before he had time to slip the little bolt which secured it into its sockets, the officers, with cries of rage, rushed into the yard.

But Matthew, unflurried by this circumstance, properly fastened the door, and then said to our friends—

"Remain where you are, and do not offer to stir for your lives. I have not time to explain what I am going to do, but you will know presently. Have faith in me and all will be well."

Then, wheeling his arm-chair until it occupied just the same position as it did when the officers left him, he sank down again into it in precisely the same attitude as before.

Old Matthew did not wait to hear any reply to this speech, but hastily made his way into the parlour again, and with all speed possible closed the cunningly contrived secret door.

The reader, doubtless, comprehends the motive for his conduct, and guesses at the means by which he meant to baffle Mr. Wriggles and the officers.

He calculated that upon making their way into the yard and catching sight, first of their prostrate comrade and then of the open door, they would fall into the mistake of supposing that they had made their escape through it, and rush off in consequence.

Then, in the event of any of them returning to the parlour they would find him composedly seated just where he had been left.

Old Matthew's calculations were cunningly made, and the sequel proved that they were in every respect correct.

The officers, and Mr. Wriggles included, fell blindly into the trap which he had laid for them.

We will relate what took place.

Mr. Wriggles, upon hearing the shout which the officer in the yard uttered, knew in a moment that his prey had been seen.

But, ere he could move, so quick were Claude Duval's motions, he heard a struggle, which ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

Uttering a shout to his men, he dashed out of the parlour into the bar, and out of the bar into the passage beyond it, with the intention of making his way into the yard from which the cry had come.

But the "White Horse" Inn was built in rather an intricate manner, and for a stranger, it was no easy matter for him to find his way from one part of it to another.

Excited as Mr. Wriggles was, it is scarcely to be wondered if he did what any one in his cool blood would be likely to have done—namely, missed his way to the yard.

But altogether he did not lose a couple of minutes, but, when important events are taking place, a couple of minutes is a long time.

It is long enough to decide the fate of a kingdom.

But Mr. Wriggles discovered his error, and made another, and this time more successful, effort to reach the yard.

As old Matthew had fully anticipated, the first thing which met his gaze and the gaze of his men was the police-officer lying at full length in the yard, just as he had been struck down by Sixteen-String Jack.

Beyond a cursory glace, however, Mr. Wriggles paid no attention to this prostrate officer.

Other and more important objects occupied him.

He gave a hasty glance round the yard.

No one was visible.

There were no traces of any one.

The door which old Matthew had closed, and which was all that separated our friends from their foes, was perfectly invisible, and all of a piece with the wall in which it was placed.

Perhaps a very close examination might have detected it, but Mr. Wriggles just then was not likely to bestow a close examination upon anything.

He saw the door leading into White Horse-yard.

He could not have helped doing so.

There was no concealment about that.

It was flung wide open upon its hinges, as far as ever it would go.

Now the idea which immediately seized upon Mr. Wriggles, as well as those who were with him, was one which would have seized upon anybody.

It was that the highwaymen had got out into the yard, struck down the officer, and then rushed through the gate.

He could scarcely arrive at any other supposition.

Accordingly, with a loaded pistol in one hand and his drawn sword in the other, he rushed out into White Horse-yard.

He then had the choice of turning either to the right or the left in the alley.

The first would have taken him to the slums of Claremarket and Lincoln's-inn Fields.

The other to the classic region of Drury-lane.

There was nothing to guide them either way, so he shouted out an hasty order for his troop to divide itself into two portions, one to take one route, and one the other.

He chose himself to go in the direction of Claremarket because he thought that would be the most likely.

In Stanhope-street, however, he found one of the men who had been set to keep watch.

Breathless and exhausted, Mr. Wriggles stopped before him, and asked whether he had seen anything of the three highwaymen.

The man replied in the negative, and averred that they were the only persons who had emerged from White Horse-yard while he had been standing there, because he had fixed his eyes upon it, and never moved them off once.

This was conclusive, and Mr. Wriggles was driven to the conviction that the highwaymen must have turned up towards Drury-lane.

Accordingly, without losing a moment, he made his way in that direction.

But, just as he was entering the alley, he met the other half of his men returning.

Upon asking them the reason, they said that they had come to the conclusion that the highwaymen had gone Lincoln's-inn Fields way, because the man on guard at the Drury-lane end of White Horse-yard had most solemnly declared the three highwaymen had not passed him.

Mr. Wriggles glared like a hyena in the face of the man who made this communication.

Then he uttered a dismal howl, and turned round two or three times upon his heels.

But that process did not seem to have much effect in clearing his brains.

Somehow or other the conviction crept over him that he had been "sold."

But how it occurred he could not for the life of him make out.

In such a state of rage and anger that he scarcely knew what he was about, he knocked his hat firmly on his head and ran back to the inn yard.

His men followed at his heels in a disorderly throng.

Arrived here, Mr. Wriggles looked once more about him.

But there was nothing more to see.

The officer, however, who had been knocked down, began by this time to evince symptoms of returning animation.

He was raised to his feet.

"Bring him in," shouted Wriggles. "Follow me. Bring him in, I say."

Thus speaking, the irate police-officer made his way back into the inn.

Upon entering the private parlour, he saw old Matthew, the landlord, seated in his chair just where he had left him.

He never once thought he had moved.

"Haven't you found them?" asked old Matthew, quietly.

The question seemed to exasperate the discomfited police-officer to the utmost degree.

He caught hold of his hat, and uttering a volley of curses, dashed it on the ground.

His wig followed, the only difference being that this was dashed down with even greater vehemence than the hat.

Then, in the extremity of his rage, he executed a kind of war-dance upon them, all the while pouring out curses with great volubility, until at length he was compelled to stop from sheer want of breath.

In the meantime the officer was led in, and sat down upon a chair.

One of his comrades took French leave with the brandy, and, pouring some from a bottle on the table, forced it down his throat.

The man gasped and coughed, and began to show signs of rapid recovery from his state of insensibility.

Old Matthew grew uneasy again.

He did not know how much this man might have seen, or how much he was in a position to tell.

Most fervently did he wish that Sixteen-String Jack had hit him a little harder.

But he would have to abide by the course of events, he could do no more just then but float like a straw upon the current.

The man was revived.

Then questioned.

At first his answers were rather confused, for his mind was not in a very lucid state.

All that could be elicited from the fellow, however, was this

He had seen the three highwaymen suddenly make their appearance in the yard.

Then one grappled with him, and while they were struggling another came up and knocked him down.

After that he recollected nothing, except that he had a remembrance of seeing three shadowy figures rush across the yard and open the gate.

Old Matthew drew a long breath.

He was safe.

Mr. Wriggles rubbed his bald pate with a puzzled air.

As yet he had elucidated nothing, or at all events, nothing but what had tended to confirm his own previous ideas on the subject.

He turned to old Matthew.

"You have had a narrow squeak this time, old fellow," he said. "The men I wanted were here, that's clear enough, although you so stoutly denied it, and they appear to have got away, but how I can't exactly make out. I shall soon hear tidings of them, never fear."

"Mr. Wriggles."

"What?"

"I wish you would leave me in peace."

"I daresay."

"Why do you persecute me like you do?"

"Ha! ha!"

"You have never found anything in my house."

"Through your cleverness."

"And never will."

"I hope so."

"You won't. As for these three highwaymen, if they did come in it was without my knowledge or contrivance, and if they hid themselves anywhere about the premises they appear to have got off and without my knowledge or contrivance, too, for have I not been seated here all the time?"

Mr. Wriggles could not deny the latter part of old Matthew's speech, but he considered the commencement of it was open to very grave doubt indeed.

However, he did not say a word about that, but merely remarked—

"I suppose I must give up the game this time, but mark me, my friend, I shall keep a very sharp look-out after you."

"Oh! never mind; don't trouble yourself about that," said Matthew.

"Oh! it's no trouble, I assure you."

"Well, if you don't like to spare yourself the trouble, I wish you would spare me the inconvenience of your visits."

"I daresay. But it's easy enough—you shouldn't find shelter for such gentry as you do."

"There you go again. You really are the most ridiculous man——"

"Well—well, Matthew," said Mr. Wriggles, assuming an off-hand air which sat with very bad grace upon him, "we will say no more about what has happened. I daresay they have got far enough off by this time, and are pretty safe. I am sorry I had any suspicions of you. Good morning, Matthew, good morning. Follow me, my men. We will be off, for we can do no more good here. Come—along, come along. Good morning, Matthew."

"Good morning. But are you really off?"

"Yes."

"Won't you have anything to drink?"

"Not now, thank you. We must be off, or the gentlemen we want will get too far away for us. Good morning."

In another moment Mr. Wriggles had gone, taking his men with him.

CHAPTER CCCXXII.

AFFAIRS GROW STILL MORE COMPLICATED AT THE "WHITE HORSE" INN, AND OUR FRIENDS FIND THAT THOUGH MR. WRIGGLES HAS GONE AWAY THEY ARE IN AS MUCH DANGER AS EVER.

No sooner, however, had Mr. Wriggles passed through the doorway, after having uttered the words with which the preceding chapter concluded, than old Matthew, who had never offered to move from his arm-chair, put his finger to the side of his nose, and perpetrated a series of knowing winks, although there was no one by to perceive them.

Then in a low voice he muttered, as well as a subdued chuckling laugh would let him—

"Not so green, Mr. W., not so green. Old Matthew wasn't born yesterday, and it would require a cleverer bit of acting than that to take him in. All right, my boy, you are done—done brown."

As he uttered these words, old Matthew rose quietly from his seat and crept stealthily across the parlour.

He could see into the bar, but not one of the officers were there—or at all events none were visible.

The worthy landlord was in a fright for fear the highwaymen should jump to the conclusion that now the officers had left the parlour the coast was clear, and injudiciously make their appearance.

He was equally in dread of communicating with them, and telling them to be sure not to move until he gave them permission to do so, for he had more than a suspicion that Mr. Wriggles had hit upon some clever scheme, and was about to play some very deep game indeed.

But whatever it was, we are not afraid of old Matthew being equal to it.

Mr. Wriggles' sudden change of manner, from the extreme of ungovernable rage to forced hilarity, was carefully noted by the landlord, and he drew his own conclusions from it.

Just at present, owing to being alive to the necessity of being well upon his guard, he felt himself to be in a quandary.

However, he felt the only thing he could do would be to rely upon the discretion of our friends. He fancied they would have too much good sense to emerge from their hiding-place until they were told it was safe for them to do so, especially after having such a narrow escape as they had.

Accordingly, he stepped into the bar.

Going to the window, from which a view of the passage and the front door could be obtained, he looked towards the street.

But there was no one about.

The police-officers certainly seemed as if they had left the premises.

From the bar window old Matthew made his way to the front door.

He looked up and down Drury-lane, first to the right and then to the left.

But there was not the least trace of any one of them visible.

While standing on the door-step, a man lounged up to him and said—

"Then you have got rid of your disagreeable visitors, Mr. Gale?"

Old Matthew turned round sharply, and looked keenly and suspiciously in the face of the man who had addressed these words to him.

He was a stranger—at least, the landlord had no recollection of having seen him before.

"Yes, they have gone I fancy."

"Oh! yes, I saw them myself."

"Oh! did you? Which way did they go?"

"Down Wych-street."

"Towards the Strand?"

"Yes."

"Oh! I didn't know which way they had gone. They have put me to a great deal of trouble, and I am glad enough to get rid of them."

"I daresay you are," said the man, with a knowing wink; "they didn't find who they wanted, did they?"

"No."

"You're a clever one, you are. I shall come to you when I am in trouble."

"Oh! shall you?"

"Yes, I know you will be able to hide me from the grabs safe enough."

"Don't you place too much confidence in me, my friend; but I must go in and put my house to rights, for they have upset everything."

"I don't s'pose they are very particular about what they do, eh?"

"Not very."

"Well, I'll just come in and wet my whistle."

Old Matthew would much have preferred his room to his company, but he could not tell him so without exciting his suspicion, and that was a thing to be most specially avoided.

So he said not a word, but walked in doors with the man close at his heels.

It is almost unnecessary to say that old Matthew suspected this man to be some agent of Wriggles.

But still he was not sure.

Matthew walked into the bar, and the man stood just at the little window through which the different liquors were served.

"I'll have a 'go' of gin," he said.

A small quantity of gin was put into a measure and handed to him.

The man seemed much inclined to stand and be talkative.

Leaning his hands upon the window-ledge, he looked at the door communicating with the parlour, which had been battered down by the police.

"They have been knocking the place about, I see," he said. "Now, do you want anybody to help you put your house in order, because, if you do, I'm your man? I have got no work to do to-day, and I'm a capital carpenter."

"No," said old Matthew. "I have a man that I always employ to do any jobs about the house."

As he spoke, Matthew fidgeted about the bar, and went into the parlour and came out again, but all to no purpose, there stood the man as provoking as possible, as though he did not intend to go for some time yet.

Old Matthew went out of the bar, and turned the key in the lock.

He directed his steps towards the back door.

While he was in sight of the man he sauntered along, but as soon as he felt sure he could not see him, he ran with great quickness across the yard to the bar-window looking out into it.

He got close to this and peeped in, allowing the smallest portion possible of his head to be seen.

He was well rewarded for his trouble.

The man who had drank the glass of gin gave a stealthy glance around him, and, seeing nothing, imagined the coast to be clear.

In a moment, then, and with the exertion of an agility really remarkable, the man raised himself on to the window-ledge.

Then he carefully and quickly lowered himself till he stood inside the bar.

Here, however, he did not hesitate, for doubtless he was aware of the necessity there was for being quick in his movements.

He glanced quickly round him, as though in search of some place of concealment.

He espied, just under the counter we have so often mentioned, a small cupboard.

The key was sticking in the lock.

He turned it, and opened the door.

The interior seemed to afford him satisfaction, and in much less time than it takes us to write it, he was inside the cupboard.

Then he pulled the door close after him, though, of course, he was unable to lock it.

Convinced that he had no more to see, old Matthew withdrew from his position at the window looking into the yard.

His suspicions were now fully realized.

He was sure beyond all doubt, that this man was a spy employed by Mr. Wriggles to watch for the spot where the highwaymen were concealed.

Matthew could not divest himself of the idea that there was at least one police-officer concealed, either in the bar itself or else somewhere close at hand.

He had still a very difficult part to play.

The officers were by no means foiled yet.

The most important and necessary thing for him to do was to give warning to the highwaymen, and let them know what was taking place.

But how to do this was the difficulty.

Suddenly old Matthew thought of communicating with them through the secret door which opened into the yard.

When the thought occurred to him, he was quite at a loss to think how it was it had not crossed his mind before.

However, there was plenty of time yet for it to be acted upon.

Matthew stepped across the yard, and as a precautionary measure, secured the door.

Having done this, he looked about him, but he could not see anyone.

Going then, to the secret door, the exact position of which was well known to him, he knocked upon it in a significant manner.

Then he said, in a low voice, and yet he spoke in a tone loud enough to reach the ears of those for whom it was intended—

"It is I—Matthew. Open the door a little way, but silently. Make no noise. I have something important to say to you."

"What is it?"

"There is danger."

The words were uttered with great rapidity.

He put his mouth close to the crevice of the door as he spoke.

He was heard.

Tom King, as silently as he possibly could, withdrew the little bolt, and opened the door to the extent of about half-an-inch.

Conversation was now an easy matter.

"What is it, Matthew?" asked Tom King; "did you say there was danger?"

"Yes."

"Imminent?"

"Very."

"What next?"

"Listen to me."

"We are all attention."

"You have not moved?"

"No."

"Nor attempted to get out?"

"No."

"That's fortunate."

"You give quite a sigh of relief."

"And well I might."

"Why?"

"Old Wriggles has gone."

"We heard him."

"I mean he has pretended to go."

"Oh!"

"And he is in hopes of catching us. But patience. You keep still where you are, and leave the rest to me. I'll be a match for him, I'll warrant."

"And so will I. We are much beholden to you, Matthew."

"Oh! don't mention it."

"We won't move."

"No, pray don't, until I come to the door and give you permission, or you will spoil all."

"But you won't keep us in here longer than is necessary?"

"Not a moment."

"That's all right, then."

"Now I'm off. There's a man concealed in the bar."

"The devil there is. Do you think he can hear us?"

"No."

"I breathe again. What are you going to do with him? How shall you manage?"

"Leave that to me."

"I can do that safely, I know."

"If I dont' give him pepper, and make him wish he had never seen the 'White Horse' in his life, call me a Dutchman."

With these words, which perhaps the vanity of the landlord was not free from thinking were very appropriate ones to close a conversation with, he closed the door, and directly afterwards had the satisfaction of hearing the little bolt shot into its socket.

With great deliberation Matthew crossed the yard.

"Now for the gentlemen in the cupboard. It will do me good, that will. It almost makes my eyes water when I think of it."

What excellent plan it was which old Matthew had devised for the discomfiture of the spy, we shall very quickly see.

Having crossed the yard, he entered the house by the legitimate back door.

But he did not go direct to the bar.

On the contrary, after having given one glance to see that all was right, he proceeded a few paces along a passage, until he came to a flight of stairs leading to some underground region.

It was to the kitchen.



[JUDGE HOLLYOAK'S INTERVIEW WITH DICK TURPIN.]

Entering the place, which was in a state of semi-darkness, he directed his steps to the fireplace in search of something.

What it was could not be seen at first, but presently he lifted off the coals a kettle.

It was a large kettle.

From the careful way in which he had handled it, and from the fact of his carrying it at arm's length, one might easily come to the conclusion that it was full of boiling water.

And such, indeed, was the case, and when the worthy landlord emerged into the passage, where it was somewhat lighter, clouds of vapour could be seen issuing from the spout and from the lid, which kept fluttering up and down.

In this place old Matthew's face could be caught a glimpse of, and its expression noted.

His eyes were twinkling, and very bright.

His mouth was distorted into a grin.

Altogether, any one looking at him would have come to the conclusion that he meditated some very capital practical joke, or, at all events, that he was bent upon mischief of some sort.

So he was, and, not only that, he meant to have a little revenge as well.

Crossing the passage, he paused a moment at the bar-door while he unlocked it.

Then entering, he put the kettle of hot water down on the counter, at the same time muttering in a half-audible tone, some disrespectful remarks about Mr. Wriggles.

CHAPTER CCCXXIII.

OLD MATTHEW HAS HIS REVENGE UPON THE SPY CONCEALED IN THE CUPBOARD.

If the unfortunate spy who had so cleverly concealed himself in the cupboard had had the least idea of what kind of fate was awaiting him, he would not have stopped there, screwed up into a most uncomfortable position, a moment longer, but, risking all, he would have made a

clear bound out, and got as far away from the "White Horse" as he could, in the smallest possible space of time.

But, alas! the spy was in utter ignorance of the doom which was impending over him, and, so far from feeling any presentiment or dread, he was felicitating himself upon the great success which had attended his clever manœuvre.

He was safe, he thought, and, from his capital place of concealment, all he had got to do was to watch all that was done, and take notice when the highwaymen appeared and were well off their guard.

The instructions given him by Mr. Wriggles—for that individual was firmly of opinion that the highwaymen were concealed somewhere about the premises—were to keep strict watch, and, when the favourable opportunity arrived, to blow a whistle shrill which he carried about him.

Mr. Wriggles and his men would take care to be somewhere close at hand, so that they could hear the signal as soon as it was given.

This was a very excellent plan, and great credit is due to Mr. Wriggles for having so promptly devised it.

One thing only was necessary to its success, and that was that the spy should hide himself somewhere and not be seen.

Now the spy was quite confident he had done this, although much easier than he could have hoped for.

But as we are aware, old Matthew peeped through the window and saw him.

Such was precisely the aspect which affairs presented upon that very memorable day, or rather evening, for night was fast closing in.

"Hullo!" said old Matthew, as he put down the kettle on the bar counter in the manner we have recorded. "I wonder where the chap is that had the go of gin. Oh! here's his glass, so I suppose he has gone. Confound him, if he had stayed I would have set him on at this door, for the sooner I get it mended the better I shall be pleased."

The spy was almost ready to groan when he heard the landlord utter these words, and he fervently wished he had stopped a little longer, for, of course, while employed in the capacity mentioned, he would have a much better chance of performing his mission.

But still, he tried to make himself content, and over and over again congratulated himself that Matthew had no suspicion of him, and that least of all he had an idea he was concealed in the cupboard.

By accident, apparently, Matthew managed to kick against the cupboard door, which was a little way ajar, and then in the most natural way in the world he muttered something about the door being unlocked.

At the same moment he stooped down, and pressing the door, shut it, and turned the key in the lock.

The spy was fast.

Old Matthew's face beamed all over with satisfaction.

As for the man in the cupboard, he could in no way interfere with what Matthew had done, though he mentally uttered some very diabolical curses upon his head.

Still he was impressed with the idea that his presence was quite unsuspected.

We have all seen a cat play with a mouse before destroying it, and we suppose it was some such feeling which prompted old Matthew to dally with the officer when he might have done what he wanted to do at once.

Time was precious, however.

The top of the little cupboard formed a part of the bar counter.

Old Matthew moved aside the different articles upon it, and then, just in the centre of the top of the cupboard was a round hole about three quarters of an inch in diameter, into which a cork had been very tightly fitted like a plug, and the top cut off so as to be on a level with the rest of the counter.

This hole had been stopped up in the manner described because there was now no longer any use for it.

But, previous to some alterations that had been made, this hole was used to carry off whatever quantity of liquor was spilt, and for this purpose a pitcher was placed in the cupboard immediately under the hole, so as to receive all that ran through.

But now another place had been made, and a pipe was attached to it, which was a very great improvement, and much more convenient and clear than the old method.

Matthew, however, as soon as the counter was cleared, seemed as though he was about to revive the use of it, for he took down a corkscrew which hung on a hook, and, inserting the point into the cork, proceeded to draw it just as he would out of a bottle.

This he did without much trouble, although it had been fixed in its present position for a very long time.

As soon as the cork was out of the hole, he took a funnel, or tundish, and put the end of it in.

What the spy thought of all this is hard to say.

He was a prisoner.

Doubtless he heard old Matthew at work above him, though he would not be able to conjecture what he was about, nor, doubtless, would the ray of light which streamed through the hole above tend to enlighten him in any way.

He certainly did not anticipate the horrible fate of which he was soon to be made a victim.

It must be understood that the cupboard was of very limited dimensions.

The bottom of it was on the floor, and the height to the top about four feet.

It had no shelf dividing it—the inside was quite empty.

As for the width and depth of it, those dimensions just allowed the spy to squeeze himself into it, though in a very huddled-up fashion.

From this it will be seen that he occupied nearly the whole of the interior of the cupboard.

Old Matthew's plan must now be manifest, or, at all events, guessed at.

Having fixed the tundish into the hole in the counter, just as he would have fixed it into the neck of a bottle he wanted to fill, he raised the kettle of boiling water, and poured it into the vessel as fast as he could.

Of course, the result of this was the scalding fluid ran in a heavy and continuous stream on to the officer.

A horrible howl, which echoed and re-echoed through the building, was the result.

Then the officer commenced a violent struggle to release himself.

No flesh and blood could stand such treatment as that.

Old Matthew, however, took no notice.

With the utmost composure he continued emptying the boiling water out of the kettle.

When full, it held about a gallon, and it was little short of that quantity which the landlord emptied upon the spy.

It must have been dreadful to have received it. In the position he occupied, he must have been scalded from head to foot.

The officer made a terrible clamour.

He yelled, and shrieked, and struggled, and fought.

But all to no purpose.

Old Matthew had him secure.

Then the spy, maddened with pain, put the whistle to his lips, which he had all the time held conveniently in his grasp, and, concentrating all his energies into one blast, he blew it with such shrillness that old Matthew was fain to drop the kettle and stop his ears with his hands.

Having done this, the spy commenced afresh his efforts to release himself from his uncomfortable situation.

But the signal had been heard.

Mr. Wriggles and his men, who were lying in wait close at hand, as soon as the shrill, piercing sound reached their ears, felt confident that the trick had succeeded, and that the highwaymen were at last as good as in their power, so they rushed pell mell into the bar.

They arrived just in time to hear some furious yells, which came with full force of bodily anguish from the lips of the spy, and to see the cupboard shaken visibly.

Old Matthew assumed a look of the utmost surprise, curiosity, and dismay.

Before Mr. Wriggles could do more than glare about him—at any rate, before he could utter a word, there was a terrible crash.

The cupboard door was dashed open.

Out rolled the spy.

"Murder," he shouted. "Oh! murder! Fire! The devil! Oh!—oh!—oh! Murder! Fire!"

"A man—a man," cried old Matthew, acting as though he knew nothing. "You have arrived just in time, Mr.

Wriggles. Seize him. Seize that man. Take him into custody. He is a thief, doubtless, and has concealed himself on my premises, intending to rob me. But, fortunately, an accident has discovered him. Take him into custody, Mr. Wriggles—take him into custody. I give him in charge."

"Murder," roared the spy. "Oh! murder. I'm murdered. I have been murdered with boiling oil. Oh! murder. The devil."

Now, Mr. Wriggles could tell to a trifle just what had taken place, but, nevertheless, he said, in his off-hand, blustering way,

"What's the meaning of all this?"

"Why, Mr. Wriggles," began the spy.

"Silence," said the officer, in a voice of thunder.

"I'll tell you all about it," said old Matthew, working himself up into a state of the utmost excitement. "I'll state the charge. Take him into custody. See that he does not escape."

"Do not make such a row," said Wriggles, with a frown which old Matthew enjoyed mightily. "Tell me what you have to say."

Mr. Wriggles found himself in rather a disagreeable predicament.

Old Matthew knew he had got him "in a hole," as he called it, and he determined to make the most he possibly could of the advantage he had gained.

"It's a most fortunate thing you came in just as you did. I wanted to clean down my place here after your visit, and see, there is the kettle I went to fetch to do it with. When I went out I left that man drinking gin at the bar-window, and when I came back his glass was there, but he was gone, so I supposed he had finished his draught and left the house. But it seems I was wrong. In doing down the counter, some of the hot water went down that hole, and then I heard a most awful howling. I was scared, I can tell you, when you came in, and then the cupboard was dashed open, as you saw. I give that man into your custody as a Bow-street officer. My charge against him is concealing himself on my premises with intent to commit a robbery."

Old Matthew uttered this long speech with the utmost volubility.

It was in vain Mr. Wriggles and the spy strove interjectionally to stop the current of his eloquence. He would not stay until he was compelled to do so by the exhausted condition of his lungs.

"Now look here, Matthew," said Mr. Wriggles, "you are a very clever fellow, and I give you credit for it. But don't come it too strong."

"No, d—n it!" yelled the spy. "I am all of a blister from head to heel."

"Silence," said Mr. Wriggles.

"Yes, sir—oh! yes, sir. But if you had only been in that infernal cupboard, and had a gallon of boiling water poured on to you like I have, you would not take it so d—d easy. Oh! curses."

A fresh accession of intolerable pain brought a volley of most horrible imprecations from his lips.

"Silence," said Mr. Wriggles again.

The discomfited spy's curses subsided into groans.

"Now, Matthew," continued Mr. Wriggles, addressing the landlord, "you have carried this game on very well, and so far you have been victorious, but you can't carry the joke any further. Of course you know and I know what it all amounts to. You have outwitted me this time. I sent my man to keep watch, but I suppose he played his part so clumsily that you detected the deception."

Old Matthew gave one of his most knowing winks, and put his finger to the side of his nose in a very sagacious manner.

"You don't get the better of me very easily, Mr. W., I can tell you that. I suppose, however, it's no good my telling you that those you want are not here?"

"Not a bit of good."

"I thought not. You are a most unreasonable man. Well, I tell you so again, and you can do as you like about believing me. But, whether they are here or whether they are not, you will have to try some very good scheme before you catch them. So, for the present, I should advise you to give it up."

"I suppose we must. But, mark me, I am not more sure that I am an officer than I am that you have got the highwaymen hidden somewhere on the premises. Don't deny it!—it's no good you doing so. Now, I give you warning, I will surround this house in such a manner that not a soul shall leave it without my knowledge."

"You are free to do just as you like about that. I should advise you, though, not to try the dodge on of sending a man in, or he might get into trouble."

"Yes, curse me!" said the spy, whose hurts were really of a very serious character indeed; "curse me, if ever I get into a cupboard again."

"I should think not, my friend," repned Matthew. "Now, Mr. Wriggles, don't let's have any ill-will about this matter. You have done your best and I have done mine, so that's all right. Let's shake hands, and have a glass together."

"I don't mind if I do," said Mr. Wriggles. "for I have had almost enough of it this time."

"If you haven't, I know who has," said the spy, with a dolorous groan. "Whatever shall I do?"

Mr. Wriggles and old Matthew were unfeeling enough to laugh.

CHAPTER CCCXXIV.

OLD MATTHEW ACHIEVES A COMPLETE VICTORY OVER MR. WRIGGLES, AND HOLDS A CONSULTATION WITH THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN RESPECTING DICK TURPIN'S SITUATION IN NEWGATE.

It looked rather strange to see all the officers, Mr. Wriggles included, sit down in the parlour in the very seats our friends had occupied such a short time before, and throwing off all appearance of enmity, proceed to enjoy themselves.

Willingly enough old Matthew covered the table with plenty of drinkables of every description, and then he sat down at the table himself.

They were, now business was over, the best friends imaginable, and no one to have looked at them would have believed that they had so lately occupied such antagonistic positions with each other.

Such a scene as we are describing is, perhaps, one that would not be met with now.

On the whole, the police regulations of the present day are vastly superior to those of the good old times.

The police-officers and old Matthew were now hail fellows well met. They laughed, and talked, and smoked, and told tales; and in fact, enjoyed themselves, as Shakspeare has it, to the "top of their bent."

As for the highwaymen, cooped up as they were in the narrow recess, they were anything but jolly and comfortable while the officers were enjoying themselves, and they heartily wished them at the bottom of the sea.

However, as everything must have an end, excepting a circle, this carouse of the officers was at length brought to a conclusion, and they separated at length with expressions of the utmost goodwill towards each other.

As soon as they were gone—and old Matthew took care to see that every one went out—he fastened up the front door, determined for that night at least, as he had no company, to shut up the house.

Having done this, he, with a great deal of reconnoitering, and watching, and prying into out-of-the-way nooks and corners, to make sure no one was hiding, went to the secret door in the wall and gave our friends permission to emerge.

They were heartily glad to do so, though they had kept their promise to the letter, and had not made the slightest attempt to come out, though they had the power of doing so.

But, having once got permission, the reader may be sure they did not lose any time, but stepped out into the bar, and stretched their limbs with the appearance of great relief.

And certainly they had found it very irksome to remain so long in one position without being able to move, though they preferred doing that to being captured.

They hastened, however, to press round old Matthew and congratulate him upon the success he had met with all through the adventure, and expressed their gratitude for the magnitude of the service he had rendered them.

Then they sat down—the table was cleared, the fire replenished, fresh pipes brought in, and then they were quite comfortable.

The only thing which cast a gloom over their spirits

was the circumstance of Dick Turpin being a prisoner in Newgate.

It was only in a confused, impartial manner that our friends had heard what had taken place, so they would have old Mathew to tell all from beginning to end, which he did with a very great deal of willingness, for he had imbibed just sufficient to make him feel pleased at hearing himself talk.

Our friends were content to laugh heartily at the graphic description he gave of the agonies of the spy, and they could not withhold the admiration which they felt for the worthy landlord's capital plan of serving him out.

They were all quite inclined to think Mr. Wriggles was defeated, and that they would not be troubled with him for some time to come.

Whether they were right or not will very quickly appear.

They were jolly enough now about him, and exulted over his failure, for they knew he could not make another razzia upon the inn without their having ample notice of it, because all the doors were secured.

Their mirth waxed fast and furious.

It was Tom King who, in a manner of speaking, recalled them to themselves.

He spoke in a serious tone of voice.

"It's not just the thing for us to be here enjoying ourselves as we are and never so much as giving a thought about our absent companion!"

"That's very true," chimed in old Mathew, his voice becoming grave in a moment, for Dick Turpin was a special favourite with him, and he would gladly have incurred any amount of danger or personal inconvenience provided it was the means of doing him a service. "It's very true we ought not to be laughing and talking about nothing at all, like we have been, but we ought to avail ourselves to the utmost of the favourable chance presented to us of having a little quiet conversation together. I vote that before we separate we come to some sort of conclusion as to what is the best thing to be done."

"Hear, hear! Matthew," said the three friends in chorus.

"Bravo, Matthew! we quite agree with you."

"Very good, gentlemen, then what do you propose?"

"Let us consider a little first before we make a proposition," said Claude Duval.

"If I recollect right," remarked Sixteen-String Jack, "Tom King was in the act of saying something to us when his speech was interrupted by the officers breaking in."

"You are quite correct," said Tom King, seriously; "I was in the act of announcing my determination, and if you will allow me, I will resume where I left off."

"Hear—hear."

"Stop a moment," said old Matthew. "I have an amendment to propose."

"What is it?"

"You will excuse me for speaking?"

"Oh! of course. Let us hear what you were going to say."

"Well, then, gentlemen, since we had our conversation this afternoon, so many things have occurred that I declare they have quite driven all I have heard out of my head. Now, you must be something the same, so, in my humble judgment, it will be the best for all parties to make a fresh beginning, and reconsider the matter from the commencement."

"Agreed, Matthew, agreed. So we will."

The landlord complacently resumed his pipe and leant back in his chair, prepared to pay the utmost attention to all that might be said.

"Now we will retrace our steps," said Tom King, "but I don't think we need go any further back than this. You told us Dick was in Newgate, and all the events which had conspired to bring him there."

"Yes, I did."

"We may begin at that point, then."

"Very good."

"Well, then, continue."

"As I said before," resumed old Matthew, "as soon as I heard what was o'clock I started off to Newgate, in the hopes of being able to obtain an interview with Dick, and ask him how he was, and see that he wanted nothing, but when I got to the wicket, the man on the look knew me, and wouldn't let me in."

"What a shame."

"That's what I said, but it was no use. I tried all manner of schemes to get admission, but they all failed."

"It seems they keep a very good guard".

"They do. They mean to keep him safe if they possibly can. You see, Dick has done such a many daring, desperate things in his lifetime, and the officers have never been able to lay hold of him once."

"He was very lucky."

"But, now they have got him into their clutches, they won't let him go very easily, I can tell you."

"We shall see, Matthew. Do you recollect what conclusion we came to before the officers interrupted us?"

"What was it?"

"Why, that as Dick Turpin was in Newgate, we must get him out."

"Just so."

"Now, from what you have just said, I opine that will be a very difficult matter."

"It won't be the easiest thing in the world, certainly."

"But never mind, Matthew, we don't mind running the gauntlet of a little danger, provided we can save a comrade's life by doing so, and, as for you, I know you have the wit and the cleverness to devise some scheme which we can carry out."

"Really, gentlemen, you flatter me—you do, indeed," said old Matthew, putting his hand upon his heart, and bowing in a deprecatory manner.

"No—no, not a bit of it, Matthew. Yours was capital scheme to convey a couple of files into Newgate, when I was confined there. A capital scheme!"

"I'll try what I can do," said old Matthew.

"One thing is certain," said Tom King. "If we are to do any good for Dick as regards effecting his freedom, we must establish some means of communication with him, and in my judgment that is the first thing that ought to be done."

"It seems very necessary."

"I think so. But how is it to be done?"

"It will be difficult."

"We might get hold of a turnkey who was friendly to Dick, and by means of bribes win him over to our interest. But the worst of it is, there is no trusting them."

"There is not. I should feel inclined to say no to that proposal at once. They would lead you on, ten to one, and at the last moment turn against you and ruin all."

"But if we discard them," said Sixteen-String Jack, "what are we to do?"

"I will tell you," replied Tom King, "and that will just bring the conversation round again to where I left off."

"What is it?"

"Do you remember the time I was in Newgate?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, didn't Dick disguise himself as a farmer, and passing himself off as my father, pay me a visit?"

"He did," replied old Matthew, "though I used every argument I could think of against it. It was all to no purpose, however—go he would."

"Certainly he did, and we had an interview together."

"Yes, but just think of the risk he ran in doing it, and what a narrow escape of capture he had."

"I know all about that; but he got off freely enough."

"By little less than a miracle."

"It doesn't matter how it was, so that he did get off."

"Well—what of it?"

"I shall just put it to all of you impartially," said Tom King, "and ask you for your decision."

"Very good."

"Not that your decision, if it goes against me, will have the slightest effect in turning me from what I intend to do."

"That's good—but go on."

"This is the point. Dick Turpin having visited me when I was a prisoner, in order to give me a chance of making my escape, do you think I ought to allow myself to be outdone by him?"

"Outdone by him?"

"Yes. Certainly not—that's your reply, of course; and if it isn't, it's mine. When I was talking to Dick about it, I said 'I am heartily obliged to you, comrade, and whenever I have the chance I will return the compliment.'

"'Do you mean visit me in my cell?' Dick asked.

"'Yes,' said I.

"'Then you'll never have the chance.'

"'Why not?' I asked. 'You must not be too confident. If you have escaped hitherto, it does not follow that you always should.'

"'I know that, Tom,' he said, 'but I have made a determination, and I have expressed it many a time. It is that I will never yield myself a prisoner, but fight to the last gasp, so you see, Tom, although I am much obliged to you for your offer, you will never have a chance of returning your compliment, because I shall never be in Newgate alive.'"

"I have heard Dick say a similar thing," said Matthew.

"And so have I," said Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

"But you see, friends," continued Tom King, "that, contrary to his expectations, he is where he made up his mind he never would be."

"That's true. We none of us know what we may come to. But now, Tom, you may as well speak out at once. I know very well what you are going to say."

"You can form a pretty good guess, no doubt."

"There should be no guess work about the matter. Come, speak up."

"Well, then, what I have firmly made up my mind to do, is to go to Newgate and pay Dick a visit."

"I knew it," said old Matthew, "I knew it."

"Well, then, my friends, now that I have announced my determination, do not try, any of you, to get up arguments against it. If you do, they will have no effect upon me, so far as making me change my determination is concerned, and they might perhaps unnerve me, for I know to the full the dangers of my undertaking."

"I hope you do."

"I am sure I do. I have thought the matter over thoroughly from first to last."

"I am sorry your mind is so firmly made up, and that you are resolved not to listen to reason, for I should have liked to have had a try at persuading you to give up the notion, but, as it is, I suppose the best thing I can do is to spare my breath."

"Quite the best thing. And now, what I want you to particularly bear in mind is, that I am not going to return the compliment, as I call it, just for the mere bravado of the thing, but I shall do a great deal of good."

Old Matthew did not speak, but shook his head.

"Listen to me," said Tom King, eager that they should be convinced by his arguments, "listen to me. You have agreed upon the necessity of communicating with Dick, now who could you find better qualified to do that than myself? I could hear all he had to say, and bring it back to you. We should then be able to agree as to what must be done."

"I am afraid the risk is too great, Tom," said Claude Duval. "You yourself have admitted how sharp a look-out they keep."

"I know."

"And, besides that," said Sixteen-String Jack, "you may depend every one who pays a visit to Dick will be very closely scrutinized indeed. Not only that, but they will have the recollection of the trick Dick played them such a short time ago, and therefore they will be doubly on the alert."

"I don't dispute that," said Tom King.

CHAPTER CCCXXV.

TOM KING RESOLVES TO DISGUISE HIMSELF IN FEMALE APPAREL, AND TO PAY A VISIT TO DICK TURPIN IN HIS CELL IN NEWGATE.

"You speak in a very confident tone, Tom," said Claude Duval, "and from that I argue that you have got some good scheme on hand, by which you think you will be able to get the better of the officials of Newgate?"

Tom nodded.

"In fact," added Sixteen-String Jack, "I recollect you said something about it."

"Did I?" said King. "Well, then, without further preface, I'll let you know in a word or two what I intend to do."

"That's the sort," said old Matthew; "I am dying to hear it."

"Well, if you can suggest any improvement in the plan I am going to lay before you, I shall be very glad indeed, and also ready to modify it if necessary; but don't throw cold water on it or try to make me give it up altogether."

"We won't; begin."

"I will. In the first place, then, I intend to pay Dick a personal visit in his cell. You quite understand that, don't you?"

"Quite."

"As we have every reason to believe the utmost vigilance will be exercised, therefore the necessity of disguise becomes immediately obvious. You grant that, don't you?"

"Oh! yes."

"That point being conceded, then, we pass on to the next. In consequence of the extraordinary vigilance anticipated, the disguise, if it is to be effectual, must be a most excellent one."

"There's the difficulty. You will be scrutinized too closely for any disguise to stand it."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. With disguises you must bear this thing in mind. If there is no suspicion directed towards you, well and good, but, if people are on the look out, they will penetrate your disguise and detect you."

"Just leave that part of the question for the present, and listen to what further I have got to say. I will answer your objections presently."

"Go on, then."

"Assuming the difficulty of disguising myself to be very great, we will proceed to consider what kind of disguise would be least likely to be suspected."

"That is a point to be considered, certainly."

"It is a very important point, indeed, and one that requires the utmost consideration."

"Have you considered it?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. What disguise have you chosen?"

"A woman's apparel."

"A woman's apparel?"

"Yes. You know I am thin and slightly made, then my face is small, and my features small also. Altogether I think you will find I shall make up as a woman first-rate."

"I shouldn't wonder now," said Old Matthew, as he surveyed the lithesome form of the young highwayman, which had a decidedly feminine appearance. "I congratulate you upon your scheme. It's a good one, and ought to succeed."

"I think it will succeed. The Newgate officials may have their suspicions, but I fancy they will never fancy looking for Tom King, the highwayman, in the disguise of a woman."

"No, perhaps not."

"Now, Claude and Jack, what do you think?"

"Why, a good deal better of the scheme altogether than I have done all along."

"I am glad to hear that. And now, Matthew, I want your assistance."

"You can have it to the full extent of my power."

"I know I can."

"What is it you want to know?"

"Why, can you tell me any one who would be able to furnish me with a good disguise, or could you tell me where I could get one."

"Well, rather."

"You can."

"Oh! I forgot for the moment. I thought you had already made the acquaintance of my old friend the costumier."

"No, I have not."

"But we have," said Claude and Jack. "He disguised us when we went to hear your trial."

"Oh! did he?"

"Yes, and what's more," said old Matthew Gale, "he disguised Turpin on the occasion when he paid a visit to you in your cell."

"Then he is very clever in his art, that's all I can say; for I didn't know Dick until he spoke."

"He is very clever. You see he has been connected with the theatre all his life, and been accustomed to dress the actors for their different parts, so you see he has acquired a kind of proficiency."

"I understand."

"You can safely leave the matter to him. If any one can disguise you beyond all power of recognition, he can

"I am glad to receive these assurances, because it makes my task all the lighter, and diminishes the difficulties. Now, do you think he could make me up to look like a respectable female?"

"I have not the least doubt of it. Now I come to look at you I find your appearance is decidedly feminine."

"So much the better, then."

"Tom, I don't mind telling you I have a much better opinion of your plan than I have had."

"Hurrah!"

"And upon mature consideration, I think there are some chances of its being successful."

"I think so too," said Tom. "And now the only thing I want is the approval of my comrades here."

"Will you permit me to say a word?" asked Sixteen-String Jack.

"A dozen, if you wish it. My desire is to hear all you can possibly say upon the subject."

"Well then, I admit, of course, that it is necessary, if we are to rescue Dick Turpin, we must open a means of communicating with him, but I am sadly afraid the officials at Newgate will keep too sharp a look-out for us to manage it."

"And then," said Claude Duval, "you must recollect who is the governor of Newgate. It is Mr. Cawthorn. He got the appointment through looking extra sharp after his prisoners, and you may depend he will try to retain it by adopting the same means, and being on the watch for every one who enters. You will have a good deal of trouble in passing him undetected."

"I can't help thinking that you magnify the danger, though you must not think that I do not place proper value upon it."

"The real fact of the matter is this," said Matthew Gale. "We don't like to run the risk of losing you, and we think the chances of our doing so are very great—that's it."

"I know it is, and I feel very grateful to you. I quite understand it. But we must think of duty. We are banded together, and one of the conditions of our union is, that we mutually aid and assist each other. Now, as for rescuing Dick, I consider it to be my especial duty to do so."

"You must be very careful."

"You may depend upon that."

"If they were to detect you, and confine you in a cell as well as Dick, we should be very awkwardly placed."

"So you would, Jack, but I will try my best to provide against such a contingency as that. And now, Matthew, what about this costumier? Where shall I find him?"

"I will find him."

"But I shall have to go to his house."

"Oh! dear no. He lives close by, in Bow-street, next door to Covent Garden Theatre."

"Will he come here?"

"Yes; in the first place to have a look at you; then he will go back to his warehouse, and return with all the articles necessary for disguising you."

"Capital. Why, when I was ready, you could call a hackney-coach to the door, and I could get into it without any one being the wiser."

"Oh! yes; you could do that."

"Come, I have better hopes than ever."

"But do not elate yourself too much. In an ordinary case I should say success was certain. Being dressed as a female, you could keep a veil down over your face, and that would prevent any one seeing your features very distinctly."

"Good again. But why shouldn't this case succeed?"

"Well, if you must know, I think you will be examined so closely that it will be impossible for you to avoid being found out."

"We must try that, and now I propose that we separate, and try to get a few hours' repose before daylight. It is no good for us to lay our plans any further until I have seen Dick, and brought back word what he says, and then we shall be able to speak decisively."

"So we shall."

"Until then speculation is useless."

"There is one thing which I should very much like to know."

"What?"

"Why, where Dick Turpin's mare Black Bess is."

"Don't you know?"

"No; do you?"

"Of course not, but I thought, to be sure, you would know where she was."

"But I don't, and I have no more idea than you have. I often feel anxious when I think about it. It is to be hoped she is somewhere safe."

"Yes, if anything was to happen to her, I do believe Turpin would give up at once if he was to lose his mare."

"She is certainly a beautiful creature. If she was mine, I should prize her quite as much as he does."

"So should I."

"I have taken care of her many a time," said old Matthew, "and I was very fond of her."

"I should be inclined to think she was safe," said Tom King, after a pause.

"Why so?"

"Because Dick Turpin seems to have gone into the court deliberately. I mean, he had fully made up his mind what he was going to do, from which we may argue that he had calculated all the chances of his position, and come to the conclusion that there was at least a doubt about his coming out again. Such, then, being, in all probability, the case, he took care to bestow his mare, Black Bess, somewhere where she could remain in perfect security."

"That is very good reasoning," said the landlord, "and it carries conviction along with it. I have no doubt that it is just what Dick has done."

"Well, we shall know that when I see him," said Tom King, "for I will take care to make some very particular inquiries upon the subject; and when I return I will tell you all about it."

"I hope you will."

"Do not be down-hearted, Matthew; I have faith in the power of your friend to disguise me efficiently, and I have faith in my own powers to keep up the character I shall assume."

"Well, I hope you will. Of course, the great stake you have in the case will insure your being careful; and when you see Dick, be sure you ask him very particularly about the promise he made to the judge."

"I will."

"I mean as to the precise nature of it, for upon that a great deal will depend."

"Trust me for that. And now, as I said just now, let us seek a little repose, for I can assure you I feel greatly in need of it."

"I daresay you do. I am ready whenever you are."

"Stop a minute," said Claude Duval, "I have an amendment to propose."

"Speak."

"In the morning we cannot tell what may happen, and the chances are a thousand to one against our having such a good chance of consulting together as we have got now, so I propose we devote a few minutes to the consideration of a point which seems to have been entirely overlooked or disregarded."

"What is it, Claude?"

"Why, this: you cannot disguise the fact that there is, to say the least, a probability of your disguise being detected and yourself made a prisoner!"

"There certainly is a probability, but"——

"Never mind. I know what you are going to say. I think, as there is a probability, we ought to take it into our calculation, and determine what should be done in the event of your being detained a prisoner."

"And very right, too," said old Matthew. "The design promises well, but it may fail. There can be no harm in making up our minds as to what we should do under the circumstances proposed."

"Certainly not," said Tom King, though, by the indifferent tone in which he spoke, it could be told that he thought it rather an unnecessary precaution.

But it was not, as events will prove.

"I think," said Claude, "we can put it in this way. If you do not return by a certain time, we may come to the conclusion that you are nabbed."

"How long will you give me?"

"Till to-morrow night. If you are not back by dark we shall make up our minds you are a prisoner."

"Very well."

"You may then depend upon us, without loss of time, setting about procuring your freedom, and taking those steps which are the likeliest to answer the end aimed at."

"Very good, but I hope to save you the trouble."

"And you can easily believe we don't want to have it."

"Of course you don't."

"Well, gentlemen," said old Matthew, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, "I think we have done all we can do, and the best thing now will be to get a good rest, in order to be equal to any fatigue which you may be put to."

"I am sure that will be the best," said Tom King.

"Then, gentlemen, as you are all so unanimous, be good enough to follow me, and I think I can promise you a good night's rest."

"I don't think Mr. Wriggles will trouble us again."

"Nor do I. You need fear nothing, however, on the score of capture."

"Why not?"

"Neither Mr. Wriggles or any one else could get into the house without my knowing of it plenty time enough to bestow you in some safe spot."

"That's a comfort, certainly, and as we have all the greatest confidence in you, we shall go to sleep without the slightest apprehension."

"You can safely do so, for I can assure you you will come to no harm under my roof while I am alive."

"I quite believe that, Matthew."

"Come this way, then," said the landlord, as he preceded them up the stairs and showed them into a comfortable sleeping apartment.

CHAPTER CCCXXVI.

TOM KING IS DETECTED IN HIS DISGUISE, AND ONCE MORE BECOMES THE TENANT OF A NEWGATE CELL.

THE night passed away without the occurrence of any event tending to disturb the three highwaymen, who therefore slept well and soundly—for such was the faith they had in the fidelity of old Matthew, and his power to shield them from any danger which presented itself, that they felt not the least apprehension.

When morning came the friendly landlord had a substantial meal laid for our friends in one of the upper rooms in the house, where they would be less likely to meet with molestation or interruption.

"I have sent for the old costumier," he said, as he came into the room after the highwaymen had dispatched their meal.

"That's right," said Tom King. "When will he be here?"

"He sent word back that he would come directly," replied Matthew, "so he is sure not to be long."

"The sooner the better. What time is it now?"

"Nearly nine."

"It is full early yet—I thought it was much later."

At this moment the faint tinkling of a bell somewhere in the lower regions of the house reached the ears of the little party.

"What does that mean?" asked Claude.

"Oh! it's all right. It means that the costumier has come; I will go down and fetch him."

Old Matthew departed, and shortly afterwards made his appearance, bringing the old costumier with him, who has already been more than once or twice introduced to the reader of this narrative.

In his usual cringing manner he made a low bow, and desired to learn the gentleman's pleasure.

Tom King informed him how he wished to be disguised, and also stated what a close scrutiny he expected would be made of it, so that he would require him to exert his utmost skill.

The old man smiled. He liked to have an opportunity of displaying the perfection to which he had brought his art, and he was quite anxious to set about his task.

He looked at Tom from head to foot, as though he would take his measure with his eye, and then he said—

"My friend Mr. Gale, the landlord, informs me that you wish me to come here and disguise you?"

Tom nodded.

"I must go back, then, to my house. I shan't be long away. I will return with all the things requisite for disguising you. I shan't be long."

With these words on his lips the old costumier left the room.

When the door had closed behind him, Tom said—

"Does he know us, Matthew?"

"I daresay he does."

"Can he be trusted?"

"Can I?"

"Of course you can."

"Then I will be responsible for him."

"That's sufficient. I want no better guarantee."

"He has only to go to Bow-street, so he won't be many minutes."

And he was not, for in much less time than either of our friends could have believed so old and decrepit a man could have gone the distance, he returned, bringing with him a very large bundle, which was, however, of very inconsiderable weight.

Untying this, he displayed to the gaze of our friends an assortment of female clothing.

His task now commenced.

It was a tedious one, but it will not take us long to describe it.

The female apparel was put on over that which Tom wore.

By skilful padding, his form was made to assume that of a woman's, after which a dress of very good quality, and such as any respectable woman might not be ashamed to wear, was put on over it.

When this was done, the transformation was pretty complete, but as yet the old costumier had not proceeded to the manipulations of his craft.

He first trimmed Tom's hair, cutting it rather short.

Then he took a box containing some kind of white paste or enamel, and carefully smeared it all over the highwayman's face.

The effect of this was to remove the deep brown tint which the sun of France had given to it, and it also covered from view the marks upon his chin and lip, where the hair had been shaved off.

It made, too, a greater difference in his personal appearance than any one would have thought.

Over his hair the costumier then placed a very neat wig, with curls hanging down on both sides.

Then, when he had surmounted it with a hat and feather of the kind then most in fashion, and thrown over his shoulders a shawl, a complete change was immediately effected.

His disguise was now complete.

There was a gauze veil attached to the hat, and, when this was drawn down over it, his features were nearly concealed, and so much altered that no one could have recognised them.

Claude and Jack actually clapped their hands with delight when they beheld the metamorphosis, and they had now but little doubt that Tom King would be successful in his perilous enterprise.

"I have done all that I can do," said the costumier, deferentially. "The rest will now remain with you. Mind you do not forget the part you are playing. In order for the disguise to be complete, and for it to rouse no suspicion, you must adopt a feminine gait as well as a feminine voice; and, indeed, in all respects comport yourself as a woman would."

"I will try my best," said Tom, "and I have sufficient conceit to think I shall succeed."

It was at this moment that old Matthew re-entered, having left the room while the disguising was going on in order to attend to his business.

He was really astounded at the change, and when Tom made an elaborate curtsey, as it was then the fashion for females to do, he was struck with admiration.

He had already a very high opinion of the costumier's skill, but he considered this to be his masterpiece.

Tom's slim figure was just suited to the character he had assumed.

"Then you think I shall do, Matthew?"

"I do. It all rests with yourself now, I fancy. I shall let you go with much less reluctance than I should have done."

"And I have every confidence myself. But it is time I started."

"I will send for a hackney-coach."

"Do, at once."

Old Matthew left the room for this purpose, and then Tom bade his two friends adieu, and they repeated their instructions to each other.

This done, Tom gave the costumier a liberal recompense for his trouble.

There was a stand for hackney carriages close to the theatre, so that one was quickly at the door.

Tom King descended the stairs.

He bade the worthy landlord farewell, and thanked him for the trouble he had taken, and then entered the hackney coach.

The coachman was then directed to drive to Newgate.

Off went the cumbersome, but really comfortable, vehicle at a speed of quite four miles an hour.

Tom King did not much note the length of time it took him to reach his destination.

His thoughts were busily occupied in speculating upon what he should say and do, and what would be the result of his perilous errand.

It must not for a moment be thought that Tom King was blind to the danger into which he was about to run.

He had thought the matter over, and weighed every circumstance of the occurrence of which there was the least probability, most carefully in his mind.

But he had confidence in his own powers and his own address to free him from any dangerous combination of events.

At length the carriage drew up before that door of Newgate by which visitors are admitted.

The driver got down off his seat, and, opening the door, assisted his fare to alight.

"Shall I wait, miss?" he asked.

"Yes. I shall not be long. I am only going to visit a prisoner."

"All right, miss; "you'll find me here a waiting for you."

Not forgetting that he was now a female and not a male, Tom crossed the pavement, and, ascending the steps, knocked timidly at the door of Newgate.

How strange it seemed that he, above all other men, should voluntarily have come to such a place.

But, in the cause of friendship, much has been done and many perils incurred.

A bold heart, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, might well have shrunk from going so far as to do what Tom did.

The last time he passed from beneath those walls was in the hangman's cart, sitting on the coffin intended for the reception of his own body, and on his way to Tyburn.

Yet here he was again. His life still liable to the law.

The first timid summons which Tom gave was disregarded, so he repeated it, and this time a little louder than before.

The little panel in the door was dashed aside, and a man's face appeared behind the bars.

"What do you want?" he growled, for, though Mr. Cawthorn had been successful in making the jailers and turnkeys partially polite, yet, when they had a chance, they always snubbed those who applied for admission, that is, provided the governor was not at hand to hear them.

We ought to state here that the day of the week upon which Tom thus stood at the door of Newgate was Saturday.

The day, indeed, after the events we have last described as happening to Dick Turpin.

It will be remembered that it was on the Friday night when Adrian Winborry had made his abortive effort to escape, and that Dick's cell had been changed.

"What do you want?" growled the turnkey.

"To see a prisoner."

"Who?"

"One who calls himself Richard Turpin."

"Eh?"

"Yes."

"Where's your order?"

"I have none."

"Can't see him, then."

Bang shut went the wicket.

Tom's heart sunk.

This was an obstacle he had not calculated upon.

He thought he should be able to obtain an interview with the prisoner without going through the formality of presenting an order.

How was he to get one?

What magistrate would listen to his application?

He knocked again.

He felt that was the only chance he had, and determined to persevere.

The knock this time was obeyed with the utmost promptness.

The same face presented itself at the grated aperture.

But so changed was it that Tom almost failed to recognise it.

He was at a loss to account for it.

There was, however, no less an alteration in his words and manner than there was in his looks.

"Oh! it's you again, miss, is it? I am very sorry, but if you haven't an order, you can't see the prisoner."

This speech astonished Tom.

But he soon arrived at the mystery, for he heard a voice say, in an authoritative tone of voice:

"What's that, Wilks?"

"If you please, sir, it's a female."

"What does she want?"

"She wants to see Dick Turpin, sir, but she hasn't got no order."

The grating had not been closed, so, standing close by as he did, Tom could hear every word of this little dialogue.

The person with the authoritative tone of voice was no other than Mr. Cawthorn, who had just made his appearance in the vestibule, and it was in consequence of this that the remarkable change took place in the demeanour of the man on the lock, as we have described.

When the governor heard Wilks say that it was a female who sought admittance to Dick Turpin, he thought it just possible that it might be one of the two ladies who had visited him on a former occasion, so he had the door opened, and gave instructions for the visitor to be admitted into the lobby.

Tom felt his heart beat strangely, and a tremor to seize upon all his limbs as the door was flung open, and he had nothing more to do than to lift up his foot and cross the threshold of the prison.

But without a perceptible hesitation, he obeyed the man on the lock and entered.

The moment he did so, Tom found himself confronted by the governor of Newgate, who he immediately recognised, because he had seen plenty of Mr. Cawthorn during his recent incarceration.

A glance assured the governor that the female who now stood before him was not either of those he had seen upon a former occasion.

Still his manners underwent no great alteration.

In a tone of great politeness he repeated the question which Wilks had asked.

Of course, Tom made the same reply.

The governor shook his head.

"You must be aware," he said, "that no one is allowed to visit the prisoner without a special order."

"Have not you any discretion in the matter?" asked Tom, who performed the part he had assumed with great perfection. "I thought the governor of Newgate would allow visitors to enter. I have only just come to London, and I am a stranger here."

Mr. Cawthorn rubbed his hands together in a disagreeable fashion.

There was an expression about his face which Tom by no means liked.

"Ha! yes. The governor has a discretion in these affairs."

"I thought so," said Tom; "and the thanks of a poor woman will be your due if you will be kind enough to allow me a few minutes' speech with the prisoner upon family matters."

"Ahem—yes. Johnson."

"Yes, sir."

"Show this lady to Turpin's cell."

CHAPTER CCCXXVII.

TOM KING'S INTERVIEW WITH DICK TURPIN IN THE NEWGATE CELL, AND ITS RESULTS.

Beyond a doubt the governor of Newgate had some reason for thus granting the visitor's request, and what that motive was will very quickly be made apparent.

For a moment Tom felt a sickly sensation creep over his heart.

But he banished the feeling quickly.

It might be the success which had attended his endeavours made him suspicious that all was not well.

At anyrate he felt a presentiment of coming danger.



[CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AWAIT THE COMING OF THE MAIL COACH.]

He thought, however, that it might be the walls of the prison which cast this shadow over his soul.

Johnson, whom the governor had addressed, was one of the turnkeys who were lounging about, and, in obedience to the instructions of his superior, he led the way down a corridor in the direction of Turpin's cell.

As soon as Tom had disappeared, Mr. Cawthorn, with an expression which it would be hard to define, hastily left the vestibule by a different door.

He made his way through several passages, and then up a flight or steps leading to a corridor, from which several doors opened.

Here he paused a moment as if for reflection.

Then he went forward several paces and stopped before one of the doors to which we have alluded.

By his actions he seemed to wish to pass through one of them for some particular reason, but was undecided as to which would best answer his purpose.

After a brief calculation, he opened one of the doors, and passing through it, closed it quickly behind him.

For the present, however, we must not describe any more of the cunning governor's proceedings, but turn to Tom King and relate what befel him.

He walked along the corridors, then, along with Johnson, the jailer, still taking the utmost pains to keep up his character, and not to do anything anomalous to it.

In good time the door of the cell in which Turpin was confined was reached.

The ponderous fastenings were one by one removed, and finally the door itself turned slowly back upon its hinges with a disagreeable grating sound.

"A visitor," said the turnkey, gruffly, as he stood aside and allowed Tom to pass him.

The latter took care to do so without betraying any undue haste.

The cell was light, especially in comparison to the passage they had been traversing, and Tom's eyes had become accustomed to the gloom to a considerable extent, which enabled him to see every object in his companion's dungeon with perfect ease.

When Turpin heard the jailer pronounce the words, "a visitor," a wild hope sprang up in his breast that Maud Gouldman, with whom his thoughts had been busily occupied for some hours past, had come again to see him.

And this supposition was increased when he heard the rustle of female garments, which came quite plainly to his ears, for Tom was attired in a black silk dress.

On his side, Tom King was fearful that Dick would recognise him, and betray him by a sudden ejaculation, so he held back, and kept the veil down over his face.

The turnkey closed the door, but did not fasten it.

Strictly he should have remained in the cell, and heard all that passed between the prisoner and his visitor, but then, if he had done that, he would only have done his duty, whereas by going outside he was almost sure of having a fee of some kind.

Dick did not speak, but remained with his head bent down waiting to be addressed, for the illusion had not yet been dispelled.

Indeed, he had scarcely raised his eyes to look at the form of his visitant.

Tom was struck with surprise.

Could the humble deferential-looking being standing before him be his old comrade in many a desperate highway exploit?

"Surely no," he thought. "There is some mistake. This cannot be Dick, or else he is changed indeed."

And yet a second glance at the outlines of his form showed him that he had made no mistake, so he was forced to adopt the latter supposition.

But Tom could not bear this state of things, so in a whisper he spoke.

He was astonished, however, at the distinctness with which the faint sounds came to his ears, and, looking up, he saw that the top of the cell was circular in shape, rising, in fact, into a kind of a dome, and he attributed it to that.

"Dick," he said, "Dick—don't start—don't speak. Do you know my voice?"

It is true these words were uttered in the faintest possible tones, but Dick recognised them, as was plainly evidenced by the start he gave.

"Good heavens!" he cried aloud, in spite of Tom's injunction. "It cannot be you, and in this guise—impossible!"

"Hush, Dick, do not speak so loud. I am here under peril of my life."

"Forgive me, I will be all caution now. My surprise is over. Give me your hand, Tom. I am pleased to hold it once more in my grasp."

"That's something like yourself, Dick. Why, when I came in I am sure I did not know you. You stood there quite humbled and cast down. Whatever is the meaning of this?"

Dick smiled in a sickly sort of fashion as he said—

"Sit down, Tom, my friend, and listen to what I have got to tell you. I have a long history, and one that will much surprise you."

"Be quick and tell me, then, but don't be any longer than you can help, for I suppose they will send me away presently, and I have much to say to you myself."

"No doubt, Tom. When did you return to England?"

"Only a few days ago."

"And Claude and Jack?"

"They came with me."

"Brave hearts! I wish I was with them once again."

"And so you shall be before long. Keep your spirits up. But I don't wonder at your getting gloomy in this place; it gave me the horrors, I can tell you. But come, let us hear what you have to say."

In compliance with this request, Dick gave his old comrade a brief account of all that had happened to him since their parting at the mouth of the cavern in Scotland. With all this the reader is acquainted, so it is needless for us to repeat it here.

There was only one thing that Dick omitted, and that was to declare his passion for Maud Gouldman.

Of course he had to make mention of her, and he also set Tom's mind at ease about Black Bess by telling him where she was.

To all Tom listened with the utmost attention.

The things which had hitherto looked so strange were now clear enough, and Turpin's behaviour was no longer any mystery to him any more than it is to the reader.

In return Tom related the adventures of himself and his two comrades by sea and land, and ended with the statement that Claude and Jack were staying at the "White Horse," whither he was about to return.

"And now, Dick," he said, "the little time we have left to be with each other must be devoted to the consideration of our future proceedings. What about this promise you have made?"

"It simply amounts to this. I have passed my word that I will not make any attempt to escape from this place until I learn from the judge who showed himself so friendly disposed towards me that the efforts he is making to procure my liberation are ineffectual."

"And do you believe he is taking any steps?"

"I am sure of it, by what Blanche Winberry and Maud Gouldman told me when they paid me a visit."

"Well, Dick, this is really about the most wonderful and romantic series of events that I can remember. But to proceed. If the judge tells you he has succeeded, what shall you do?"

"Why, then all will be well."

"Perhaps. But if he fails?"

"Then I shall be released from my promise, and I shall at once set about making my escape."

"Then that's what I want to talk about, and just let me give you a word of advice. Don't let the judge keep you dallying too long, or else you will let the chance of escape pass by."

"Do not fear."

"I do fear. Judges are our enemies, and I should never think of trusting one so far as you have. Was I in your place, I should cast my promise to the winds. You have friends without the prison who are ready and willing to render you valuable aid, and you are much to blame if you neglect to avail yourself of it."

"I cannot break my word, Tom, so do not press me to do it. No one yet has ever been able to say that Dick Turpin ever broke his word after having once given it."

"I know that."

"Then don't let this prove an exception. Be content as I am to let events take their course. Ere long, I shall doubtless have an answer from the judge, and then I shall be able to decide how to act."

"But how shall I know what is his decision?"

"It will soon be known. I fancy it will give you little trouble to ascertain from some of the turnkeys."

"That can be managed; and now, suppose the judge tells you he has failed."

"Well."

"We must decide upon what we are to do. It is true, owing to my admirable disguise, I have succeeded in making my way to your cell unsuspected, but the second time I might not be so lucky."

"I should be very sorry for you to run the risk a second time. If you will recollect, when I came to see you, I got into the prison all right. It was the getting out that was the difficulty. If it had not been for the pistols I had secreted in my pocket, and which escaped their search, I don't know what I should have done."

"It is to be hoped I shall be luckier than you. I don't think any suspicion is aroused at present."

"You must be careful, Tom. Mr. Cawthorn is rather a cunning man, and he might, perhaps, find you out."

"Never mind that. I shall have to go directly. Now, Dick, look here, we will make this arrangement."

"Go on. I am listening."

"Come closer, for fear the turnkeys should overhear us. I will take care to learn the result of what the judge communicates to you, and when he communicates it. On the following night you must do your best to work your way out, and, in the meantime, we will think of the best means of aiding you."

"All right."

"That is agreed between us?"

"You may consider it so."

"Very good; and now, Dick, don't you suffer yourself to be bamboozled by this judge, and put you off to the last minute. If you must know just what I think, he has not, in my opinion, the remotest chance of success."

"Why not? I believe he is a man of great influence."

"That may be, but the fact of the matter is, you have set the authorities at defiance for a long time, and done more desperate deeds than half-a-dozen other men. For this reason I think you have no chance of pardon."

"Don't look on the gloomy side of things, Tom."

"Your imprisonment has done you no good, Dick."

"Why?"

"It has taken away to a very great extent that energy and self-reliance for which at one time you were so remarkable. You should not have listened to the words of the judge, no matter how softly they were spoken. Had you thrown yourself upon the protection of the mob, you would, ten to one, have got out safely, and with very little trouble."

"It's no good to talk about the past, Tom, not a bit. What is done can't be undone. Here I am, with my word pledged, and here I shall remain until I am released from it."

"I can't altogether blame you for that; the only misfortune is that you should have made such a promise."

"But we understand each other, do we not?"

"I think so."

"Time's up long ago," said Johnson, the jailer, putting his head into the cell.

"All right," replied Tom. "One moment, and I will be with you."

The jailer retired.

"Now, Dick, I must bid you good-bye; but it won't be long, I hope, before I see you mounted on your bonny mare in company with us once again. When you came to see me while a prisoner here, I told you I would return the compliment, and, in spite of your confident assurances to the contrary, I have done so."

"You are a true friend, Tom," said Turpin, grasping his hand—"a true friend. My confinement here does seem to affect my spirits, but when I mount, a gallop in the fresh air will dissipate all that gloom, and I shall be myself again."

"I trust so."

"Oh! I shall be right again when I am free from this place, and something like an inward conviction sustains me and assures me that I shall be free, and that we shall have yet many a glorious adventure together which will by far surpass all that we have ever done."

"Spoken like yourself, Dick. I shall be able to carry back a good account of you to Claude, and Jack, and old Matthew."

"I quite understand all your instructions, Tom, and shall trust to you to find out when the judge has his interview with me, and act accordingly."

"You can trust me fully, and perhaps some means may be found by which we can communicate with each other; at all events, we will do so should anything occur of a different nature to what we expect."

"Very well."

"Good-bye, Dick, then; good-bye; and ere long I trust to grasp your hand with nothing above us but the sky."

"Good-bye, Tom; and believe me, I heartily echo your wish, for I am sick of this place."

"I daresay you are. Once more, good-bye. Here is the turnkey."

Johnson entered at this moment, and Tom, after once more pressing Dick's hand within his own, hastily left the cell and followed his guide along the passages to the vestibule of the prison, where a slight surprise awaited him.

CHAPTER CCCXXVIII.

MR. CAWTHORN HAS TOM KING CONFINED IN A CELL, AND TAKES SOME VERY GOOD PRECAUTIONS TO PREVENT HIS ESCAPE.

WE must now return to the proceedings of Mr. Cawthorn, the governor of Newgate, and furnish a clue to his mysterious behaviour.

When he closed the door behind him in the manner we have described, he was surrounded by the most intense darkness.

The governor, however, did not take any means to procure a light, from which it may be inferred that he did not need one.

He lowered himself on to the floor of the apartment, if such it was, and commenced groping his way along it, making in his progress a scarcely audible sound.

At length he paused.

He had then reached the centre of the chamber.

When we describe the position of this chamber, the reader will have a suspicion of what is about to follow.

It was immediately over the cell occupied by Turpin.

The cell into which our hero had been placed after his adventure with Adrian Winberry, was one of a series which had been constructed in a peculiar manner for a certain purpose, though it was very rarely, from some cause or other, that they were made use of in the manner their projector intended.

It will be recollected that when Tom King entered his old comrade's dungeon, he spoke in a whisper, and was astonished at the loudness with which it sounded.

Then glancing up at the ceiling of the cell, he attributed the effects produced to its dome-like shape, and in this he was perfectly correct, as such a construction magnifies the sound in the same manner that a convex lens will magnify all objects seen through it.

But further than this Tom did not go.

The idea never for one moment struck him that the cells were built in that shape for the sole reason of making faint sounds audible, and still less did he imagine that in the ceiling there was a small aperture communicating with a chamber exactly overhead, and through which sounds were transmitted as through a speaking-trumpet.

Yet such was actually the case.

The contrivance was an ingenious one, and the end for which it was devised requires no explanation.

There is no longer any mystery with respect to Mr. Cawthorn's conduct.

Acquainted with all which we have just set before the reader, he resolved to set at rest those suspicions which sprang up in his mind when Tom applied for admission.

Likely enough, he thought, his suspicions were utterly without foundation, but then he had an easy means of satisfying himself upon that head.

He resolved to do so.

His hesitation upon reaching the corridor was caused by the uncertainty he felt as to which of the doors would take him into the chamber over Dick's dungeon.

By counting the doors, however, he arrived definitely at this piece of information.

Lying down, then, at full length upon the floor, Mr. Cawthorn placed his ear over the orifice in the topmost portion of the dome and listened.

In this position every word which was uttered by the two highwaymen reached his ears with the utmost plainness, and the intelligence he thus learned was important indeed.

The seeming female, who had come to see Turpin, was no other than the almost equally notorious highwayman, Tom King.

Tom King, who had once been in his hands, but who had cheated the gallows in a most surprising manner.

Of this he had no doubt.

"A capital invention this," he muttered, mentally. "They little think I am hearing every word they speak as plain or even plainer than they can themselves. An excellent invention, truly!"

The governor was quite pleased with it, because it answered his purpose.

But there are few, we think, who would altogether approve of it, though, for some reasons, they might be disposed to do so.

It seems treacherous, and anything savouring of treachery is repugnant to the feelings of a true Englishman.

It was quite certain our two friends spoke to each other under the impression that there was no one at hand to overhear them.

When the conference was over, Mr. Cawthorn rose from his recumbent position, and made his way out of the little chamber, again closing the door behind him with the same silence as before.

Then, bending his steps direct to the vestibule of the prison, he stood not far from the man on the lock.

There were two or three turnkeys besides, sitting on a bench, which was provided for their accommodation.

A quizzical kind of look was on Mr. Cawthorn's face, as, standing in his favourite attitude, with his hands clasped behind his back, he looked in the direction which Tom King was to come.

The men knew that something was about to happen, but they could not tell what.

However, they kept themselves on the alert.

Mr. Cawthorn had not to stand long.

The sound of footsteps could be heard in the corridor leading to the cells.

Now, Tom King was under the conviction that his enterprize had been successful to a degree, and he consequently felt the greatest confidence in his disguise.

To be sure, there was the danger of leaving, but he considered that as little or nothing.

As for the turnkey, Johnson, who had so considerately kept out of the way, and allowed them to have their talk to themselves, Tom thought he deserved some recompense.

Accordingly, as they came together along the passage, the disguised highwayman took an opportunity to slip a liberal gratuity into his palm, and an immense amount of deference and respect was the result.

Alas! Tom King had no presentiment even of what was about to happen.

Everything was going on in a most satisfactory manner.

At length, the door which separated the corridor from the vestibule was reached, and Johnson, taking a ponderous key from his girdle, thrust it into the lock and opened it.

Tom gave a hasty glance into the vestibule.

At first he could not see the governor.

A projection of the masonry hid him.

Straight in front was the half-door leading out into the street.

No sooner, however, did Tom emerge from the corridor and fairly stand within the vestibule, than he caught sight of Mr. Cawthorn, and the glimpse he got at his face was anything but assuring.

With his hands behind his back, and in an attitude of great affected cleverness—his face screwed up into an expression of comical derision—the governor of Newgate peered into the countenance of Tom King.

Gladly would our friend have passed him without saying a word, and he made an attempt to do so, but it failed.

Mr. Cawthorn did not intend him to pass.

He planted himself exactly in his path.

"Ahem!" he said.

Then for the first time the thought darted through Tom's mind that he had been discovered, and he gave a despairing look at the outer door.

"Seen your friend, I suppose, eh?" continued the governor.

"Yes, sir, I thank you," replied Tom, commanding his voice as well as he was able. "I am very much obliged to you for your kindness."

"In-deed!"

Mr. Cawthorn swayed gently backwards and forwards on his toes and heels.

"Yes sir, and I can only say again, that my best thanks are your due."

"Ahem. Yes. It's really quite pleasant to be in a position to render you a service which affords you so much satisfaction. Ahem!"

"No doubt," said Tom, whose heart misgave him more and more.

He feared that he had rashly ventured into the lion's den, and that it would be no easy matter to leave it unscathed.

But what could he do?

Mr. Cawthorn stood exactly between him and the outer door.

To attempt to rush past him and endeavour to get into the street by main force was quite out of the question, and he felt it was so.

The man on the lock, too, and the other turnkeys gathered round the governor, and looked on curiously

His behaviour was so extraordinary.

They all knew it portended something.

"Well," continued Mr. Cawthorn, "I suppose you found your friend all right and properly attended to."

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! What relation did you say you were to the prisoner?"

Tom did not recollect mentioning the relationship, but still he said—

"Oh! cousin, eh? That's another form of sweetheart, I suppose, eh?"

Tom made no reply.

"We omitted one little ceremony," continued the governor, "but it is not too late to remedy the omission. Hicks and Moggs!"

"Yes, sir," replied two of the turnkeys.

"Just take hold of that lady for a moment."

The men darted forward, and took a firm grasp of Tom's arms.

Possibly he might have shook them off, and yet he did not want to disclose his secret.

It was quite time when he was found out.

Tom resolved to keep up the character of a female—at any rate for a little longer.

"Hicks," said the governor, addressing the turnkey on Tom's right hand

"Yes, sir."

"Take off the lady's hat."

This command was rather roughly obeyed, for Hicks took hold of the hat by the brim, and pulled it with some violence off Tom's head.

Then the governor pretended to discover what he all along knew very well.

"Ha!" he said, when Tom's features were fully exposed to his view. "Hold him tight. Help, here. Just what I thought. That is Tom King, the highwayman!"

Not one of the turnkeys had expected this announcement, and they were astonished accordingly.

But, being in the habit of having surprises, they had a knack of quickly recovering themselves, and, in less than a moment, Tom found himself surrounded by a number of men, everyone of whom took hold of him somewhere or other.

In spite of the odds against him, however, Tom made a desperate effort to recover his liberty.

He struggled and fought with all the insensate fury of a madman.

He knew the result of his struggles.

Not only his liberty but his life depended upon his getting free, for, of course, having been already condemned, the first opportunity would have been taken of carrying the sentence into effect.

The man on the lock joined the fray.

The key of the outer door was in his pocket, so he was quite sure the prisoner could not escape.

The racket was prodigious, and, in a very little while, the whole of the prison was roused.

From the corridors leading to the different ranges of cells turnkeys poured forth, while passers by in the street, hearing the uproar, ascended the stone steps without in a dense crowd, and effectually choked up the entrance.

No weapons, save those with which Nature had provided them, were used.

Tom had pistols about his person, but up to the present he had not succeeded in getting his hands at liberty for a sufficiently long period of time to draw them.

As for the turnkeys, their sole object was to secure him—he was already a prisoner—but they found the task of slipping handcuffs on a very difficult one to accomplish.

In the struggle, the voluminous female apparel with which he had been clothed was torn away, until, at length, not a shred remained, and then Tom was exposed in his ordinary dress—for it will be remembered the costumier put on the female apparel over his clothes.

He was now readily enough recognised, for the wig had been one of the first things to disappear.

Tom felt that he cut a rather ludicrous figure, and was enraged accordingly.

Notwithstanding all his efforts, however, he was in the end overpowered by numbers.

But he did not give in while he had strength left to resist.

At length one of the officers, more dexterous than the rest, slipped on a pair of handcuffs.

Resistance was then entirely at an end.

Still keeping their hold of him, the men stood aside, and permitted the governor to have a glimpse at his prisoner.

There could now be no doubt whatever about Tom King's identity, though Mr. Cawthorn was made quite certain on the point by what he had overheard.

"So this is your trick?" he said, sneeringly; "and a pretty one it is. The idea to dress up in women's petticoats. Ha! ha!"

"Ha—ha!" laughed the turnkeys in chorus, as though it was the funniest thing in the world.

They always laughed when the governor did.

"Well, you have done a good thing for yourself, Mr. King. Really Newgate is quite honoured. Dick Turpin and Tom King both under its roof at once! I'll declare it will be a thousand pities if you are not both tucked up at Tyburn together. Ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed the turnkeys again.

"You ain't quite sharp enough, Mr. King. Do you think I was going to be taken in by such a shallow device as that? Pah! Well, here you are, and here you will remain, for I will take care there are no escapes made from the prison while I am governor of it. Secure him well, my men. He is a desperate character, truly. Take care of him, and if he escapes you shall every one of you suffer for it."

"Shall we try some irons, sir?"

"No, never mind irons. What's the good of irons? Put him in a cell, and watch he don't come out of it.'

This was very good advice of the governor's, so far as the detention of a prisoner was concerned—the means proposed were far better than trusting to bolts and bars.

CHAPTER CCCXXIX.

JUDGE HOLLYOAK COMMUNICATES TO DICK TURPIN THE UNSUCCESSFUL RESULT OF HIS ATTEMPT TO OBTAIN HIS PARDON.

The turnkey who had so officiously proposed hampering Tom's limbs with fetters, shrunk back when he saw that his proposal was not relished.

In obedience to the orders of the governor, the prisoner was dragged to one of the cells.

We say "dragged," because Tom King did all he could to impede the progress of his jailers.

But his resistance was overpowered, and he was gradually forced along the passage.

At length a door was reached, which Mr. Cawthorn doubtless considered would answer the purpose he required of it.

It was opened, and a strong-looking stone cell was disclosed.

Into this Tom was hustled rather roughly, and the door was closed upon him.

The rage of our friend was so great that it almost threw him into a fit of madness.

To think he should have succeeded in his designs, as far as he did, and then at the last moment to be baulked by the extra cleverness of the governor.

The reader must bear in mind that Tom had no idea how it was the governor had penetrated his disguise.

He was, however, now left to his own reflections and speculations upon the matter.

His first ebullition of rage and passion died away, and then he began to think more calmly of his position.

While doing so, he, at some pains, removed from his person all the fragments which remained of the female apparel he had worn.

When this task was completed he felt rather more at home with himself, and he seated himself upon the bench, which apparently was to serve him for chair, table, and bed.

"This is awkward," he said to himself; "most awkward. How am I to communicate with Claude and Jack? Curses on it all! nothing could be more provoking. Then there's myself. I am by no means comfortably circumstanced. Let me see. To-day is Saturday; they will have some hanging on Monday, and if I am here I shall be included among the number. I must escape. But how? Confound that Cawthorn! there's no such thing as getting the better of him. How did he find out my disguise?"

In such reflections as these did Tom occupy himself with continually the same result.

He was driven every time to the same conclusion—the only and inevitable conclusion.

He must escape.

As for Mr. Cawthorn himself, it would scarcely be possible to find in all England a man more content and satisfied with himself than he was.

Dick Turpin, the most famous highwayman in the world, was in his custody.

Now he had captured that famous highwayman's comrade, under such circumstances as would ever redound to his credit.

He considered his reputation established.

No pains or trouble should be spared by him, he determined, to keep his slippery guests safe under lock and key.

"I shall have him tucked up on Monday," he said to himself, "along with Adrian Winberry, and Norman, and Clare. Capital. I could not be blamed for Tom King's former escape, but, if there was the least blame attached to me, it would be quite removed by my recapture of him. Ha! ha! I shall have a pension yet."

And so, while Tom King fretted and fumed, Mr. Cawthorn congratulated himself upon the aspect of affairs.

It was not long before Dick Turpin was made acquainted with what had taken place.

His regret was exceedingly great, because he knew the immense peril in which Tom stood.

Beyond a doubt he would be executed off hand.

This was serious, because Dick could not help considering himself to a certain extent the cause of his death.

From his place of espial overhead, Mr. Cawthorn had not heard a word uttered about tools, nor did he think for a moment that Dick had been furnished with any.

But it was a point upon which he resolved to be quite sure, and to have no doubts upon whatever.

Accordingly, accompanied by several turnkeys, he made his way to Dick Turpin's cell.

He had him carefully searched from head to foot, so that nothing whatever could be concealed about his person without inevitable discovery.

Being quite assured upon that point, he did not search the cell, as being a useless labour, but quietly had Dick removed to another, so that, if he had secreted anything in it, it would cease to be of any value to him.

Nothing, however, had been given to Dick, so the governor went to all this extra trouble for nothing.

Turpin learned that Tom had been confined in one of the strongest cells in the prison, and that Mr. Cawthorn had given express instructions for him to be well watched over.

The jailers who were friendly to Dick communicated this and other intelligence.

That memorable Saturday was an anxious day for Dick Turpin.

He repented now over and over again that he had passed his word not to attempt to escape.

Indeed, he almost felt inclined now to break it, although it was given.

He wished to achieve the rescue of Tom King.

And, unless he was very quick in his movements, he would be too late.

Hanging day, as Monday was always called, was close at hand, and, if Tom did not escape before then, it would be all over with him.

For himself, however, it was somewhat different.

He had yet to be put upon his trial, so that some time must intervene, at any rate, before his execution could take place.

There was no such formality in the case of Tom King.

Well, then (knowing as we do the friendship which subsisted between them), might Dick Turpin feel anxious and alarmed.

The affair was a most unfortunate one, let it be viewed in what light it might.

In this way the day passed wearily away.

It was growing dusk when Dick Turpin, as he sat in his cell, heard the sounds of voices and footsteps in the corridor without.

They paused before his own door.

The ponderous fastenings were removed, and then it swung open with a creaking sound.

"A visitor," said the turnkey

As the man spoke, an elderly gentleman, dressed in black, stepped into the cell.

At first sight, owing to the darkness in the place, Dick did not recognise his visitor, but a second glance showed it to be Mr. Hollyoak, the judge who had presided at the trial of Adrian Winberry.

Dick rose and made a profound bow as soon as he found who his visitor was, and waited for him to speak.

With the manner of one who has a disagreeable duty to perform, and who wishes to get through it as quickly as possible, the judge addressed him—

"I need scarcely tell you the motive of this visit to you, since you must know it well already."

"I do know it," said Dick. "It is to communicate to me the result of the exertions which you have made in my behalf."

"Just so."

"And are you in a position to do so?"

"I will tell you in a few words. I set about performing the promise I made to you, and by a proper representation of the case, succeeded in interesting a great many people in your favour."

Dick bowed.

The judge continued.

"Having done this, I had a petition drawn up, setting forth the whole case, and proceeded to get signatures for it. The first were those of Blanche Winberry and Maud Gouldman, two very near relatives of the deceased."

"And did they sign?"

"They headed the list. I then proceeded to get other names, and when I found I could obtain no more, I forwarded the petition in the proper quarter."

"I am much beholden to you, sir," said Dick. "But have you yet had any reply with reference to this petition?"

"I have."

"And that reply?"

"Is simply this. All that is stated there shall be borne in mind at your trial, and it will serve to obtain, most likely, some commutation of your sentence."

"And is this all you have been able to effect?"

"You speak in a tone of disappointment, but I don't wonder at it. My own expectations were much higher, I confess, but I have been able to accomplish no more."

"I am much obliged to you for what you have done, sir," said Dick; "but will you grant me one request?"

"What is it?"

"Release me from the promise I made you."

"Not to attempt to make your escape?"

"Yes, sir."

"Should you keep your promise until I did?"

"Most certainly."

"Then I release you."

"Many thanks, sir, for that, and all that you have done for me besides."

"And now, tell me. Do you think there is any prospect of making your escape?"

"I shall try."

"That is not exactly an answer."

"I am aware it is not."

"Then you think there is a chance?"

"I do."

"I beg to differ from you there. So many precautions have been taken that it will be an impossibilty."

Turpin smiled.

"I have not moved hand or foot since I have been here, though I have had plenty of good chances of escaping. Now, however, that I am released from my promise, the case will be different."

"We shall see."

"We shall, sir."

"I am heartily sorry I have not been able to do more good for you than I have. Still I have tried my best. I think if the matter goes to trial the petition will not have much effect with the judge and jurymen."

"I am of the same opinion, sir."

"I think, considering the manner in which you came forward, the authorities ought to have allowed you one more chance for your life."

"That was all I wanted, sir.

"I know that was all you asked for."

"I hope, sir," said Dick, "you will allow me to say how very grateful I feel for all the trouble you have taken."

"Pho—pho. Do not mention that."

"Should I come to trial, I hope I shall have the good fortune to appear before you."

"I hope not; because if you were I should do my duty strictly and impartially, which in this case would be very painful."

Dick liked the judge all the better for this candid acknowledgment.

A few words of no importance or interest to the reader passed between them, and then the judge withdrew.

When the door closed behind him Turpin rose to his full height, and said—

"Now I am free, and master of my own actions. Tom, my friend, it will go hard with me if, ere long, you don't find a change in your position and prospects. I must think—I must think."

He paced the cell hurriedly as he spoke, and strove to hit upon some scheme which afforded some reasonable prospect of success.

For a long time he was unsuccessful.

Night came and found him with the problem still unsolved.

Many difficulties were in the way.

Dick wanted, not only to escape from Newgate, but to take his comrade with him.

He had, however, not the least idea where his cell was situated.

Nor did there appear any ready means by which he could find out.

When the turnkeys came with the supper, they found the "captain," as they always called him, in a not very amiable frame of mind, and so they were wise enough to leave him to himself.

Any other night the time would have lagged, and every minute seemed prolonged into an hour.

Now, however, when so much was at stake, the hours flew by like minutes.

The rapid flight of time chafed Dick terribly.

Every moment was, as he well knew, of the most vital importance.

But, nevertheless, the night was wasted in indecision, and Sunday morning came and found him as far off the result as ever

He never slept a moment all the night.

In the morning he looked pale and haggard, and his eyes were bloodshot.

There remained now only twenty-four hours, and, if something was not done for Tom King during that time, he must inevitably perish.

It was this which weighed, too, heavily upon Dick's mind, and prevented him thinking so clearly as he would have done.

He was over anxious, and the feeling defeated its own object.

Then, as now, it was the practice to take all the prisoners to church on the Sunday morning, for which purpose a chapel is provided in the building.

Here, at least, Dick thought he should be able to obtain a glimpse of his old comrade, if nothing more.

Perhaps he should be able to learn some important information.

At length the time for service arrived, and, according to custom, Dick, as well as the rest, were marshalled into the chapel.

For a long time Dick could not see Tom, for the prison just then was rather full of tenants.

Presently, however, he saw him.

Tom was looking round him anxiously, doubtless for the same reason as himself.

Dick kept his gaze steadily fixed upon him, and at length their eyes met.

A glance of intelligence was exchanged between them, but that was all.

After service they were taken back to their cells, and Dick was no nearer his object than before.

CHAPTER CCCXXX.

OLD MATTHEW AND THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN HOLD AN ANXIOUS CONSULTATION RESPECTING THE FATE OF TOM KING.

So remarkable an occurrence as the capture of Tom King in the manner we have recorded soon spread with amazing swiftness over the whole city of London, and before the Saturday night had come, there were few who had not heard some exaggerated version or other.

Amongst the first who learned what had taken place was Matthew Gale, the landlord of the "White Horse," in Drury-lane.

Somehow he was scarcely surprised at the intelligence.

Ever since Tom had taken his departure in the hackney-coach, the heart of the worthy landlord had been haunted with a vague presentiment of coming danger.

The feeling was one which could not be shook off. Indeed it seemed all the efforts which he made to this end only tended to increase it.

The news of Tom's capture was only the realization of his forebodings

As soon as he ascertained the particulars, he hastened upstairs to the room in which Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were confined, and communicated all to them.

The concern of the two highwaymen, who had the warmest possible admiration for Tom King, was extreme.

Unlike old Matthew, they refused to give credence to the tale, and insisted upon his obtaining some verfication of what he had stated.

This he had no objection to doing, if merely to satisfy himself.

"I will go," he said. "It will be less dangerous for me to do so than to confide the mission to any one else."

"You will run no great risk," said Claude; "all you will have to do will be to conduct your inquiries cautiously."

"Trust me for that," said old Matthew. "I won't be any longer away than I can help, and when I return you can rely upon my bringing you full and correct information."

"I know we can."

"You will start at once?" asked Sixteen-String Jack.

"Without a moment's delay."

"That is well. Pray go at once. We shall be anxious till you come back."

"I am off, and I will be back as quickly as I can. While I am away, be sure you stay where you are; don't show yourselves upon any account, and then I don't think you will have anything to fear."

"All right, Matthew."

"I am off, then."

The worthy landlord, who certainly never looked at his trouble when he was serving our friends, left the room, and set out for Newgate.

As the distance from his house to the prison was not great he determined to go on foot.

One reason that influenced him in this was the thought that he might be able to pick up some information on the road.

He made several inquiries, and entered into brief conversation with many persons, but without his eliciting in either case more than he knew already.

The story of Tom's capture was repeated to him with very few alterations or variations, and this went a long way towards convincing him that it must be somewhere near the truth, or they would not agree so well as they did.

At length the prison was reached.

Old Matthew looked up at the black and gloomy structure, and very wistfully at the little door through which visitors passed on their way into the prison.

From the man on the lock he knew every information could be obtained, but that surly official would never have communicated it to him.

Old Matthew was thrown upon his own resources to learn what he wished to know.

As on other occasions he was not at fault.

He had partly made up his mind what to do.

In the first place he went to the pie-shop on that side of the Old Bailey which faces the prison, and saw his friend Coles.

The reader will remember Coles.

He was the man who, at old Matthew's request, had so cunningly secreted the spring saws in the crust of one of his pies.

He was to be trusted.

Here Matthew thought he was sure of getting every information, for the jailers and other prison officials were continually coming or sending over for pies, and Coles was frequently sending for dishes after the pies had been eaten.

Nor was old Matthew disappointed in his expectation.

Coles was very glad to see him and pressed him to stay, but Matthew told him how urgent the business was upon which he had come.

Nevertheless, the subject was not broached until old Matthew sat down in the little room behind the shop.

"Now, Matthew," said Coles, as he closed the door, "speak freely, and let me hear what you want."

"I will, Coles."

"Go on, then."

"Something rather extraordinary took place over the way this morning, didn't there?"

"At Newgate?"

"Yes."

"I believe you, why"——

"Stop a moment, my friend; I want you to be good enough to give me all the particulars you are acquainted with without any embellishments of your own."

"As for particulars," said Coles, "I can't say that I know many of them, but, if the main facts of the case will do, I can supply you with them."

"Those are just what I want to know."

"Well, then, by all I can learn, it appears that this morning Tom King, the highwayman, disguised as a very respectable young woman, called at Newgate and asked to see Dick Turpin, who is confined in one of the cells, and waiting for his trial."

"Yes—yes."

"At first no suspicions were excited, and the seeming young woman was allowed to go into the cell."

"He did have an interview with Dick, then?"

"Tom King?"

"Yes."

"I believe so, for after he had been to the cell he came along the passage and was going to be let out, when who should be standing in the lobby but Mr. Cawthorn!"

"That's the governor?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"Fill up your glass again."

Old Matthew did so.

Then he nodded to his friend to continue.

"The governor must have had some suspicions—though what they exactly were perhaps no one knows but himself. However, he had the female apparel pulled off, and there stood Tom King in his own clothes."

"What next?" asked old Matthew, eagerly, for the reader can believe he felt a more than common interest in what he said.

"Tom King, when he discovered he was found out, made a desperate resistance. He had no arms, or, at all events, did not make use of any, and in the end he was, as you may think, completely overpowered by numbers, and carried to a cell; but I believe he struggled and fought to the very last."

"And that has really happened?"

"Oh! beyond all question. I will vouch for the other part."

"How?"

"Why, I heard a tremendous uproar, and could see something curious was going on, for I stood at my shop door at the time, so I ran across the road and peeped over the top of the wicket."

"What did you see?"

"Why, Tom King, sure enough, fighting the jailers—there was a dozen of them at least—like the very devil!"

"You knew him."

"In a moment."

"And you saw him carried off to a cell?"

"Yes."

"That is enough, then. I suppose you have nothing more to tell me."

"Nothing certain, but I'll tell you what Johnson the turnkey, said when he was in the shop about half-an-hour ago."

"What?"

"Why, that on Monday Adrian Winberry and his two accomplices are to be executed for murder at Tyburn, and that Tom King is going with them."

Old Matthew sprang to his feet.

"Tom King?" he ejaculated.

"Yes."

"Going with them?"

"Yes."

"Impossible!"

"It's true, if it is."

"But how can they execute him so soon?"

"Well, I asked Johnson that question."

"And what did he say?"

"That the reason was this: Tom King has already been tried, cast for death, and the warrant sent to the prison for his execution."

"Yes."

"Well, that warrant was never carried out. He was taken to Tyburn, and escaped by a hair's-breadth."

"Yes—yes."

"Consequently the warrant against him remains in full force, and they are determined it shall be carried out as quickly as possible, and they will take such precautions with respect to a guard of military, that a rescue will be impossible."

"Indeed."

"To-day is Saturday, you know, and Monday being so close, the authorities think Tom will not have such a good chance of escape as he would if it was put off for another week."

"I see. Coles, my friend, I am much obliged to you. The information you have given me is important—indeed, very important."

"Fill your glass again."

"No, I thank you. I have just emptied it because I must be off. I can't stay a moment longer."

"I can guess."

"What?"

"What you are going to do."

"Well, if you can, keep it to yourself, for any revelations would spoil all."

"You can trust me, Matthew. I wouldn't say a word for the world."

"I know that, Coles. I may want your services. I can't tell, but, in the event of my doing so——"

"You can have them."

"That's right. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Old Matthew shook hands with Coles, and then made the best of his way back to the "White Horse."

The intelligence he brought with him was important indeed.

Not only was it confirmatory of all that he had before heard, but he had gleaned some additional particulars, which were of the greatest importance.

He found all at the house just as he left it.

There had been no disturbance.

No alarm.

No attack by the police.

Claude and Jack waited very impatiently for Matthew to return.

To them he seemed to be absent an endless time.

At length they heard him ascending the stairs.

They ran to the door and opened it.

As soon as they caught sight of his face that was enough. They had no need to ask whether what they heard was true.

Nevertheless, they did put the question.

In a voice of great concern, Matthew told them all that he had heard from his friend Coles, and, as he proceeded, the faces of the two highwaymen assumed quite as grave an expression as his.

"This is indeed most serious," said Claude Duval. "We shall have to be very speedy in our movements, or he will perish."

"He will."

"I had no idea," remarked Sixteen-String Jack, "that he was in so much danger; but I might have known it if I had given the subject a moment's thought."

"He has not time to make an escape," cried Claude. "What is to be done?"

"Affairs have assumed a very serious aspect," said old Matthew—"a very serious aspect; and, frankly speaking, I have no idea what would be the best thing for us to do."

"Nor I."

"But," said Sixteen-String Jack, "we must not allow him to perish."

"Not if we can prevent it."

"But we must prevent it."

"How?"

"I cannot answer that question."

"Nor I," said Claude.

"But we must reflect," said Sixteen-String Jack. "There is a little time between now and nightfall; let us all three occupy it by thinking the matter over and considering it in our minds."

"Agreed."

"Surely between us we shall think of something!"

"It is a very ugly affair altogether," said Matthew. "You see, we had quite enough to do to think how we should get Dick Turpin out of his difficulty, and we wanted Tom to help us to do that."

"And now he is the worst off of the two."

"Decidedly."

"But if an old comrade is in ever such great danger we will not desert him. Never mind the risk. We can but save, or perish with him."

"Let us do the former."

"With all my heart."

"Come—come," said Sixteen-String Jack, "all this discussion leads to nothing, and wastes valuable time besides. Keep quiet, and let us think of something."

"I must leave you," said old Matthew; "the business below requires my attention, and if I am too long absent from it, suspicion may be awakened."

"Take care of it."

"I will, you may be assured. I will, however, come back as soon as it is dusk, and that will be in about an hour's time, I fancy."

"About that."

"Very well, then. I will think the matter over in the bar, and do you talk it over the while between yourselves up here."

"We will."

Old Matthew went downstairs, and kept his word.

Jack and Claude occupied the hour he was absent in proposing a thousand schemes by which the liberation of Tom King could be effected, but they were rejected one after the other as being unsuitable.

And so the time wore on until the shadows of evening crept into the room in which they sat.

Then came the sounds of old Matthew's feet as he slowly ascended the stairs.

CHAPTER CCCXXXI.

A DESPERATE PLOT IS HATCHED BETWEEN THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN AND THE LANDLORD TO EFFECT THE LIBERATION OF DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING FROM NEWGATE.

When old Matthew opened the door and entered the apartment, our friends saw he carried a lighted candle in his hand.

It was not quite dark enough for one to be absolutely needed, but still the gloom in the room and the gloom in their minds made a light look cheerful and pleasant.

Without a word being spoken by either of them, Matthew closed the door behind him, put the candle on the mantelpiece, and sat down. He looked inquiringly into the faces of the two highwaymen, and then spoke:

"You look very dull and glumpish," he said. "What's the matter? Can't you make up your minds as to what is the best thing to be done to save Tom King from Tyburn Tree on Monday morning?"

"No, Matthew, we can't; and that's just the fact of the matter."

"Nor can I."

"Oh! you can."

"I can't."

"I have faith in your powers."

"Then don't have too much faith."

"But you have thought of something."

"No, I have not."

"Not of anything?"

"Of nothing that promises the least chance of success."

"How unfortunate!"

"And you have not?"

"No. We have discussed a thousand different plans, but we have discarded them all as being unsuitable."

"I'll tell you how it is," said old Matthew. "We are over anxious, that's the reason we can't think of something. Now, we ought to get quite cool, and talk over the matter quietly, striving not to think of Tom's great danger, and the little time we have got to get him out of it."

"Very true, Matthew; but the difficulty lies in forgetting that and keeping ourselves cool."

"I know it does; but if you will take my advice, you will fill your pipes, and have a smoke, and I will do the same. There is nothing like a smoke, in my opinion, to calm your mind."

"Well, we will try your remedy, Matthew."

"Do."

Pipes were reached and lighted, and after a few whiffs the conversation recommenced.

"How do you feel?" asked old Matthew, anxious that this remedy should be approved of; "are you calm?"



[THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN THE HIGHWAYMEN AND THE MOUNTED PATROL.]

"I think so."

"Try a few more whiffs."

Our friends did so, and then the landlord broke out into the following remark—

"You may depend the only way we shall do Dick and Tom any good will be by making a very bold stroke."

"How?"

"I don't know how, but you may take my word for it that only some desperate scheme, and such as no one would think of doing from its very daring, will succeed."

"I see."

"You understand me?"

"Quite, so far as your remarks go."

"Exactly; what now remains is to devise some very bold and daring scheme, and put it into execution."

"Very true. But there are a great many difficulties in the way."

"I know that. But they will never be overcome if you do not resolutely attack them."

"But, Matthew, having advanced so far as you have with your propositions, can't you tell us something that will enable us to achieve our purpose."

Matthew shook his head.

"Are you sure?"

"I can't just at present, and yet, stop. I have an idea."

"What is it? Let us hear it."

"You will laugh at me."

"No—no."

"But it is so preposterous when I come to think of it a second time."

"Is it?"

"It is, indeed. No, it won't do."

"Then, never mind. And yet, just for curiosity sake, suppose you tell us what the idea was that occurred to you."

"I don't mind telling you if you won't laugh at me, for I can't bear to be laughed at."

"Go on—go on; we won't laugh at you."

"Very well, then, the idea which just came all of a

sudden into my mind, was that we should attack Newgate as we should a castle, and fetch those we want out of it by main force."

"Ha! ha!"

"There you go. Now you said you wouldn't laugh at me."

"I know I did."

"And you do."

"But it's such a comical idea. The very notion, now, of we three storming Newgate. Ha! ha!"

"Stop a minute," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"What is it?"

"Well, as you know, there's many a true word spoken in jest."

"Oh! yes."

"Well, then, I don't see why a good plan of action should not be suggested in the same manner."

"What do you mean?"

"You shall hear."

"Surely you do not entertain old Matthew's idea of storming the citadel."

"I do, though."

"Ha! ha!"

"Never mind, Claude. Let those laugh who win."

"But, my dear fellow, the idea seems so excessively droll."

"Not so droll, perhaps, as you would first imagine."

"Explain yourself."

"Willingly, if you will allow me the opportunity."

"We shall only be too glad to do that."

"In the first place, then, just carry your thoughts back to what old Matthew expressed his conviction to be."

"What for the scheme to have any chance of success, must be a desperate one."

"Just so."

"Well, what then?"

"Isn't the scheme daring?"

"Certainly."

"Desperate?"

"Absurdly so."

"No—no; don't go so far as that. Just admit that it is desperate."

"What next?"

"I am surprised you do not catch at my idea."

"I do not."

"I will soon make matters clear to you."

"Pray do, for though I began in jest, I feel by this time fully in earnest."

"I intend you to be."

"We are, then."

"Matthew."

"Yes, Jack."

"In the first place, I address myself to you."

"Very well."

"After the trial of Adrian Winberry, and Dick Turpin was taken prisoner, what did you tell me the people in the court did?"

"Why, made a desperate scrimmage, and tried to rescue him with might and main."

"Precisely so. Now what does that argue?"

"Argue?"

"Yes. What conclusion could you come to from that circumstance?"

"Do you mean that the people in the court were friendly to Dick Turpin?"

"Certainly, that's just what I do mean. I think it's quite clear the people were disposed to stand Dick Turpin's friend, and liberate him if they could, or else they would not have tried to rescue him as they did."

"That is clear enough," said Claude Duval.

"Then put that and that together."

"No, I would rather you."

"I will, then. At first I was, like you, inclined to laugh at old Matthew's idea of storming Newgate, but then I thought that it might be done, and that the very daring of the enterprise would insure its success."

"Very likely; but I don't see how it is to be done."

"The thing seems to you to be an impossibility."

"It does."

"I'll make it plain. It's very certain we three can't do it unaided."

"Very true."

"Then we must get some one to aid us."

"But who? That's the difficulty."

"Not at all."

"Not at all?"

"No."

"How? Who could you find who would take part in such a serious affray?"

"*The 'family'*."

"The 'family'?"

"Yes."

"And I'll be sworn," said old Matthew, springing to his feet, with a joyful expression on his countenance, "and I'll be sworn that they will join you, every one."

"Perhaps they would," said Claude Duval.

"I am sure of it."

"I think they would," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Now, what do you think of that for a daring plan?"

"I don't think that one more daring could possibly be devised."

"Nor I."

"And yet have so many chances of success."

"We have not touched upon that part of the question yet."

"I have thought of it, however."

"Well?"

"You may depend, in the event of such an attack as I contemplate being made, those who are opposed to us will be completely paralyzed with astonishment, and we shall achieve our purpose before they recover from their surprise."

"What kind of an attack do you think of making?"

"We would enlist every member of the family in our cause, and I don't think myself there would be much trouble in doing that. We should have a very large force at our disposal, of which Claude and myself could take the command; and I am not afraid to say that we should storm Newgate even if it was twenty times stronger than it really is."

Old Matthew drew in his breath with an audible sound.

"It's an awful plot to talk over," he said.

"It is. But what will be the consequences? We shall break into the prison and liberate those we wish set free."

"Well," said Matthew, "I suppose it can't be helped; and as I said before, unless we adopt some desperate measure we can't succeed."

"That being the case, then, what more desperate means could you conceive than the one I have proposed?"

"None, certainly."

"Very well, then."

"It seems too dangerous."

"Pho—pho!"

"It does."

"But think how likely to succeed."

"Stay a moment, Jack."

"What is it?"

"I want you to tell us in few words what your plan is."

"To give an outline of it?"

"Just so."

"I will do that with very great pleasure. We must see all the 'family' somewhere. Go to one of the large inns and propose what we want, namely, that they should place themselves under our leadership and storm Newgate—break into it, and set Dick Turpin and Tom King free. We could have horses ready and take advantage of the confusion to make our escape with all speed. Then we will all four once more cry "Hurrah! for the Road!"

"It will be worth something to be able to do that. I am sick of the life I have been lately leading."

"So am I."

"That reminds me that I have got an amendment of your plan to propose."

"Let us hear it, Claude."

"Suppose to-night we ask Matthew to get us a couple of first-class horses."

"Yes—yes."

"Provide us with arms."

"Yes."

"And then we would set out and spend the night in search of booty and adventures."

"Hurrah!" cried Sixteen-String Jack. "Capital. I second that motion at once."

"Come on, then. Now Matthew, let us have the horses."

But the landlord shook his head,

"You are not content," he said, "with what you have done already, but must incur fresh and unnecessary peril. Suppose you are captured to-night. How will your friends stand then?"

"You must not look at things from such a gloomy point of view, Matthew. We will, for our own sakes, take great care of ourselves."

"I suppose it is no good my advising you."

"Yes it is, Matthew. What do you think of our plan for enlisting all the 'family' in our service?"

"It is a good one."

"That's right. And you think we shall succeed?"

"You have a chance of success."

"Very well, then, Matthew, go and fetch the horses."

"No—no."

"Will you if I give you some good reasons for doing so?"

"I will try."

"In the first place, we ought not to go asking favours of the 'family' without money in our pockets."

"No."

"Then we have none. So you see we require a booty for that. Isn't that a good reason?"

"It is the risk I speak of."

"Then there you make a great mistake. I have shown you we are in want of booty, and the next thing will be to show you we are in want of an adventure. Now do you know how I shall do that?"

"No."

"Well, then, Claude and myself have been cooped up so long, and kept from any adventure on the highway, that our talents are quite rusting away. Our blood is getting chilled in our veins, and we want a good ride along the high-road to warm it. We shall then be in good condition for our work, so you see the reasons why we should make an excursion to-night are excellent."

"Well, well," said old Matthew, "I won't baulk your fancy, for fear, after all, that something should go wrong in consequence, and then you would shift all the blame on to my shoulders."

"Just as you like, so long as you get us the horses."

"I will do so, but it will never do for you to mount here, everybody will be aware of it. You had better make your way out of the back door on foot, and as quietly as possible, and without attracting any more notice than you can help, direct your steps to the Oxford-road, where the horses shall be waiting for you."

CHAPTER CCCXXXII.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SET OUT ON THE OXFORD-ROAD, AND MEET WITH A VERY REMARKABLE ADVENTURE.

THE two highwaymen were too well acquainted with the perils of their position not to see at once the wisdom of the little arrangement proposed by old Matthew, and they immediately acquiesced in it.

If there was anything that would warm the blood of our friends and steady their nerves, a gallop along the high-road and a spirit-stirring adventure, such as they had had in past times, would assuredly produce that effect.

In fact, the hide-and-seek sort of game which they had been playing so long did not suit them any better than the close confinement they had had ever since their arrival at the "White Horse."

Then they were rather poorly off for cash, and they knew some money would certainly be required in the carrying out of their designs.

For instance, when paying their visit to the "family," at the ken, one very requisite thing would be to treat those assembled all round with whatever they liked to call for, and if a couple of hundred happened to be present that would cost something.

Then again, they could not tell what emergency might occur in which money might not be of the most essential service.

Under these circumstances, and influenced by these reflections, there certainly did seem every reason that they should set off on their little expedition.

Old Matthew, however, although he unwillingly gave his consent, took rather a different view of the affair than our two friends.

There was great danger attached to their excursion.

Mr. Wriggles, he felt sure, had by no means given up his search for them, although he had made no demonstration lately; but then he might perhaps be trying to lull them into a sense of false security.

That was the first danger, but by no means the last.

A knight of the road was exposed to many perils.

They might have an end put to their career at any moment by a chance or well-directed shot, or by capture, or a thousand other accidents inseparable from their calling.

There was no reason why, if they had escaped so far, that they should escape to-night.

Then, if anything happened to them, how would Dick Turpin and Tom King fare in the Newgate cell?

This was the view which old Matthew took of the affair, but which was not participated by our two friends themselves.

Danger was a thing with which they were so familiar, that they had long ceased to look upon it with ordinary feelings.

They disregarded it completely.

Matthew requested them earnestly to take all possible care on this night at least, and painted the consequences which would occur if they should not return.

They readily promised.

Thus satisfied, the landlord set out to look after the horses.

Our friends, while he was gone, occupied themselves with making an examination of their different weapons, and placing them in such a condition that they would be available for instant service.

"Which road shall we take, Claude?" asked Sixteen-String Jack. "We may as well make up our minds before we start."

"To be sure, Jack."

"Then, which do you say?"

"I hardly know. It seems ages to me since I cried 'Stand and deliver!' upon an English high-road!"

"And to me."

"Well, which way shall we take?"

"Suppose we say the Oxford-road?"

"Agreed. That will suit us as well as any."

"I have had many a good booty there."

"Oh, we will say the Oxford-road."

They had agreed upon this point when Matthew entered.

"I have sent off to a place for a couple of horses where I am sure of having good ones from, and I have told him to have them waiting in half-an-hour in front of the railings before Montague-house."

"That is in Bloomsbury Fields, is it not?"

"Yes."

"But you said the Oxford-road, Matthew?"

"I know I did, but this was a second thought."

"Oh?"

"You see, Montague-house is in a very retired spot—it is not so far from here to there as the Oxford-road."

"It will suit you for that, then, admirably."

"So it will."

The Montague-house referred to by our friends was a rather ancient edifice, which has, however, long since disappeared. Its site, however, is occupied by the British Museum, so it will be easy for our readers to understand its position.

Indeed, some will remember that the street on the east side of the British Museum, leading from Great Russell-street to Russel-square, is called Montague-street to this day.

This was the rendezvous which old Matthew had appointed.

No sooner had the half-hour expired, than the two highwaymen, who were in a state of perfect readiness, shook hands with old Matthew and departed.

Claude Duval had asked for a piece of rope, and had been accommodated with a coil of that material, which he wound round his waist.

He thought such a thing might come in useful. At any rate, if it was not wanted it would not much matter.

Thus equipped they started off.

They were allowed egress—not from the front door, but by the door in White Horse-yard.

Upon reaching this place, they looked up and down it as well as the darkness would allow them, but they saw nothing of their foes.

Encouraged by this, they, after a moment's deliberation, turned to the left, preferring to go in the direction of Drury-lane.

Upon emerging into this thoroughfare, the same searching glances were given, but neither Mr. Wriggles nor any of his men were in sight.

The night was early as yet.

The streets were tolerably thronged with people, though not so thickly as at the present day, for London a century and a quarter ago did not number so many inhabitants as it does now.

It would seem that, after all, Mr. Wriggles had given up the task of capturing the highwaymen.

Without any interruption whatever, Claude and Jack made their way along Drury-lane until they reached the top of it.

Then crossing the end of Holborn, they passed along a narrow street—now called Museum-street—which led them direct to their destination.

In the dim nightlight Montague-house looked huge and sombre.

Advancing close up to the railings, the highwaymen stood with their backs to them, and waited for the appearance of the horses.

They had not long to wait.

Out of the gathering gloom they saw a man come mounted on a horse, and leading another by the bridle.

He was walking the animals slowly.

"There they are," said Claude, and, as he spoke, he hastened forward and addressed the man, who pulled up as soon as he saw them.

"Were you waiting for us?"

"Who are you? I am waiting for two gentlemen."

"And we are waiting for you."

"Give me some proof."

"We are friends of Matthew Gale's, the landlord of the 'White Horse' in Drury-lane."

"All right," said the man, slipping out of the saddle; "he ordered them."

Sixteen-String Jack gave the man a crown piece, and then followed Claude's example and mounted.

They seated themselves firmly in the saddle in a moment, and set off at a sharp trot.

The commencement of the Oxford-road was soon gained.

Claude and Jack, as soon as they were mounted, experienced that sense of exhilaration which no one can fail to feel when mounted on a good steed.

The motion, too, warmed them without fatiguing them.

"A gallop!" cried Jack, "a gallop! I feel once more as if I was a free man!"

He touched his steed lightly with his spur as he spoke, and the gallant creature responded to it by bounding forward at a rapid speed.

Claude followed.

The Oxford-road was then quite free from houses, except a few which stood back surrounded by their own grounds, and they were very few about.

The road was almost deserted, so our friends had no obstacles to their progress.

On reaching Tyburn Gate our friends drew up, and Claude, thrusting his hand into his pocket, pulled out a handful of loose silver, which he gave to the tollman.

Having passed this obstruction, they proceeded at a more gentle pace.

They did not wish to exhaust their horses, but to reserve their powers until they had occasion to make use of them. It was a glorious night, and one which well suited their purpose.

There was no moon.

But the sky was thickly studded with brilliant stars which seemed to cast a faint twinkling radiance upon the earth.

With the exception of the slight illumination received from them, it was profoundly dark, yet not so dark as to prevent Claude and Jack from seeing the hedgerows and tall trees on either side of the road.

They were now fairly in the country, and quite away from all houses.

"This is glorious, Claude," said Sixteen-String Jack. "I feel myself again."

"We want something."

"What?"

"The presence of our two comrades."

"Dick and Tom."

"Yes, we do indeed."

"We shall have them, ere long."

"I trust so, and then we will see whether our old plan cannot be carried out. I mean the one which we devised immediately after Tom King's escape from Newgate."

"You mean forming ourselves into a band of four, with Dick Turpin to act as our captain."

"Just so."

"That would be glorious."

"Thus united, we will perform some deeds which shall by far transcend all that we have hitherto accomplished."

"We should be strong enough to overcome almost any force opposed to us, should we not?"

"Certainly."

"Do not let us speculate upon the future too much; you must recollect it looks very dark and uncertain."

"It does, indeed."

"Hark!"

"What!"

"Halt. I fancy I heard the sound of horses' hoofs."

Claude pulled up in a moment and so did Jack.

Then the two leant forward in their saddles, and listened intently for the repetition of the sound which the latter had heard.

It came quite plainly to their ears.

Undoubtedly it was the sound of horse's hoofs.

But unaccompanied by the rumbling of carriage wheels. The horse was coming at rather a slow walk.

"What are we to do, Claude?"

"Stop him."

"He is coming this way, I think."

"Oh, yes, he is coming to London. I wonder what makes him walk his horse so slowly as that?"

"I don't know."

"It seems strange."

"It does. The tread is quite measured and slow, as though the rider was in no sort of hurry."

"It is something unusual and strange, and that is quite sufficient reason for us to be cautious."

"It is."

"Let us draw aside as close under the shadow of the hedge as we can, and then, when the horseman passes us, which he is sure to do presently, we will have a look at him, and, if he seems of the right sort, it will be easy for us to overtake him."

"If he goes no faster than he does now."

The sounds came with greater and greater distinctness to the ears of our friends.

It was high time, they thought, that they took up their position, so they did so at once, and as noiselessly as possible.

Having done so, it would have required an eye of more than usual sharpness to have distinguished them from the hedge behind them. The only difference was the ground looked rather darker.

Our friends did not speak for fear the light breeze which was blowing should carry the sounds with it upon the still night air, and waft them into the ears of the approaching horseman.

They did not want him to have the least suspicion that they were on the road in ambush.

Should they attack him, their success would in a great measure depend upon taking him by sudden surprise.

With the same slow, steady motion the horseman came on.

There was something excessively odd about any one travelling the road at night at such a pace as that, and our friends could not make it out.

Anxiously they waited for a solution of the mystery.

To while away the time, each of the highwaymen drew a pistol from his belt, and, cocking it, held it in their right hands.

They were then armed and in readiness.

Five minutes elapsed.

Then, as Claude and Jack strained their vision down the road, a moving object came in sight.

They, assisted probably by their fancy, quickly made out its outlines to be a horse and rider.

Nearer and nearer he came, at the same slow walk.

He became more and more visible.

At length he came to within a few yards of our friends, who then saw that they were quite right.

It was a horse and rider.

The latter was clothed in garments of some dark colour, so dark, indeed, that his form was scarcely distinguishable.

On he came.

Suddenly, to the great surprise of our friends he pulled up in the middle of the road exactly opposite to them.

CHAPTER CCCXXXIII.

CLAUDE DUVAL HITS UPON A VERY INGENIOUS EXPEDIENT FOR BRINGING THE OXFORD MAIL COACH TO A STANDSTILL.

THERE was something very strange and mysterious in all this, but the two highwaymen nevertheless felt that the mystery would be still further developed.

Straining their eyes until they positively ached again, they watched all the movements of the strange horseman.

They saw him look up the road, and to the right and to the left.

Then he assumed a listening attitude.

"I thought I heard horses' feet upon the road," he said; "but all is still now, so I suppose I was mistaken. And yet I could almost have sworn to it."

The horseman listened again, and somehow or other the idea came into the minds of Claude and Jack that the man on horseback was of the same trade as themselves, and that he was on the lookout for travellers.

Nevertheless, they did not move hand or foot, but continued to keep their eyes fixed upon him.

That they were perfectly invisible and indistinguishable from the hedge in the shadow of which they stood, they felt certain, for the horseman had several times looked in the direction of them, and never made the least movement or sound to show that he had seen them.

"I can't hear anything," said the horseman, aloud. "Curse it! what confoundedly dull work it is. Here have I been pacing up and down this road for more than an hour. I shall be glad when my time is up. However, I'll turn back, and try and meet my mate, and if we have a bit of chat together, that will pass away the time better. Come up, will you."

As the horseman addressed these last few words to his steed, he turned round, and walked slowly away in the direction he had just come.

It was not until the sounds of his horse's hoofs had entirely died away, that the highwaymen ventured to address each other, or even to move.

And then Claude Duval spoke.

"What do you make of that, Jack?"

"To tell the truth, I don't know what to make of it."

"Nor I, exactly."

"If he had spoken on purpose to mystify us as to who he was and what he wanted, he could not have done it better."

"It was a strange speech."

"Very."

"Did you hear what he said about riding down the road to meet his mate?"

"Yes."

"What did he mean?"

"I am no better able to judge than yourself."

"I don't like it at all, because I don't understand it; and anything I don't understand I don't like."

"Nor I."

"The best thing we can do, I fancy, is to walk forward very quietly, and, as soon as we come to a gap in the hedge, or a gate, or anything of that sort, we will make our way through it."

"And then follow this mysterious horseman, and try to overhear what he says to his mate."

"Just so."

"We shall then, no doubt, come to the root of the matter."

"So we shall."

"Forward, then. There is a dry ditch here. Walk along that, and then we are not so likely to be heard."

This good advice was followed.

About twenty yards further on along the road there was a gap in the hedge.

They resolved to avail themselves of it as a means of getting into the meadows.

Both dismounted, and getting through the gap first themselves, took hold of their horses by the bridles and drew them up after them.

They then mounted, and finding there was a quantity of short grass behind the hedge, they pushed on at a gentle trot.

The ground made the beat of the horses' hoofs quite inaudible.

At every few yards they would pull up and listen for the sound of the mysterious horseman.

At length they heard him.

He was going at the same slow, steady pace as before.

Presently their practised ears could detect the sounds of another horse approaching them, also at a walking pace.

It may be that some suspicion of who the rider was crossed the minds of our friends, but, if so, they did not make any remark to each other concerning it.

Indeed, it would not be prudent for them to have done so.

Gently they kept on their way.

At length they heard a voice say:

"Is that you, Jenkins?"

"Yes, mate."

The trampling of horses' feet ceased, and the highwaymen came to a standstill.

"What awful dull work this is."

"Awful."

"Have you heard anything?"

"No. Have you?"

"I fancied once I heard horses' feet coming from London, but I must have been mistaken, for I listened and could not hear them."

"Oh, you were mistaken, no doubt. I wonder when the relief will come?"

"Not for half-an-hour yet."

"How dreadful."

"It is. This patrolling the road is the dullest work I have ever had to do."

"I am sure it is that I have."

"I'd sooner be at Bow-street a good deal. When you are in London there is a chance of your getting shelter and some one to talk to."

"And something to drink."

"Yes, but here we are up and down this road without a house or a human being in sight."

"It's dreadful work."

"It is that. I had no idea what it was to patrol a road for two hours every night, but now I have found out to my cost."

"We have been on this job now for a matter of two months, and I am tired of it, I can tell you. We have never had an alarm of any sort all the while, have we?"

"Not once."

Sixteen-String Jack touched Claude on the arm.

"Come," he said, in the faintest possible whisper.

He pressed his heels against his horse's flanks as he spoke, and at a walk led the way across the meadow, going in a direction at right angles to the road.

Their progress was almost noiseless, and they got off without being heard by the men in the road.

The meadow was of considerable length, but our friends did not stop till they came to a hedge which barred their further progress. Then, feeling they were quite out of earshot, they spoke.

"What do you think of that, Claude?" asked Sixteen-String Jack.

"Why, I think we have acquired a piece of very important and useful information."

"Very, indeed."

"I understand it all, now. The police authorities must have appointed a troop of mounted men to patrol the roads contiguous to the metropolis."

"That's it."

"And we have just seen two of them."

"Who don't seem very well pleased with their job."

"It must be awful dull work."

"Unquestionably."

"That accounts for his walking up and down the road in that mysterious manner. I couldn't make it out at first."

"Nor I."

"I am afraid this will interfere with us a great deal."

"It is sure to."

"I wonder old Matthew did not mention it."

"You may depend he knows nothing at all about it."

"Perhaps so."

"We discovered it by an accident."

"And a fortunate thing it was for us that we did."

"Decidedly."

"But I suppose you don't intend to let them baulk you of your intention."

"Oh, dear no. It will surprise me if I go back to London empty handed."

"And me."

"Jack."

"What, Claude?"

"Do you recollect I asked for a piece of rope?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what I wanted it for?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, I may as well tell you. I have set myself a task."

"What is it?"

"You will join me, I know."

"Let me hear what it is."

"Well, then, I set out with the intention of stopping the Oxford Coach."

"The devil!"

"It's a bold scheme, isn't it?"

"It is, and more especially so now the roads are patrolled by mounted police."

"That makes it awkward certainly, but I'll tell you how I shall do it."

"How?"

"I shall pick a nice dark piece of road, with trees on each side, and I shall tie the rope right across."

"I understand."

"That will throw the horses down in a moment."

"It's a good plan, Claude, and I don't see why it shouldn't answer. We should have to be quick."

"Yes. But just think what a good booty we should have from all the passengers, without counting the mail-bags, which are sure to carry something worth having."

"That will set us up for a bit."

"It will. Now, if you will take my advice, you won't stop any one else if you have ever so good a chance."

"Why not?"

"Because it can't be done without raising an alarm."

"I see."

"Which would be fatal to us. When we have stopped the coach we will make our way in as direct a line as possible to London, and not trouble after anything else."

"Agreed."

"Come on, then. We will follow this hedge a little way, and then get into the high-road again."

"Perhaps, if we get further out into the country, we might miss the patrol."

"Very likely."

Our friends again resumed their way, taking their way along the hedge which divided the meadow from the one next to it, and which ran parallel to the road.

It was a very fortunate thing for our friends that they discovered the existence of a mounted patrol on the road as they did.

If they had remained in ignorance of that fact, they might have been made acquainted with it at rather an awkward juncture, and in rather an awkward fashion.

Now, however, they were on the alert, and probably would not have much difficulty in avoiding the danger now that they were made acquainted with its presence.

The soft turf in the meadow was very grateful to the horses' hoofs, and they trotted along rapidly.

At length they came to another hedge, which put a stop to their progression in a straightforward direction.

They did not jump this as they might have done, but made their way towards the highway again.

As they had fully expected, they found a gate leading out into it.

It was fastened with a padlock, but Claude alighted from his horse, and soon got rid of that difficulty.

The gate swung open, and they all passed out into the road. They listened intently, but they were unable to hear anything of the patrol.

As quickly as possible, then, they made their way forward in such a direction that they must inevitably meet the Oxford Coach.

It was a daring feat for any two men to attempt under any circumstances, but especially so now the road was so well guarded as it appeared to be.

But our friends were bent upon the accomplishment of it, and the reader by this time must be aware that it was no trifle which prevented them from carrying out anything they had taken in hand.

We are rather inclined, however, to tremble for their safety.

Should they be either killed or captured, the aspect of affairs would be rather serious.

But, without the least dread whatever upon their minds, they trotted along the road as though nothing in the world was the matter.

At length, without meeting with any interruption, and without the occurrence of any incident, they arrived at a spot which Claude considered very well calculated to answer their purpose.

From some reason or other, the road was some few feet narrower than elsewhere.

It took rather a sharp curve, too, to the right.

On both sides were some very tall trees, which grew to a great height, and, as a natural consequence, cast a deep shadow on the roadway.

That was increased by the tendency which the tops of the trees had to touch each other—indeed, in some places they were actually in contact.

So far all was favourable.

But there was something else which induced Claude to select that spot above all others.

The driver of the coach, would, of course, be aware of the sharp curve in the road, and, as a measure of safety and precaution, not only to himself, but to anything approaching, he would rein his horses in, and come round slowly.

This was just what was wanted.

Sixteen-String Jack saw the advantage at once.

"This will be the place, I think," Claude said.

"Oh, yes; you could not possibly find a better."

"Then just hold my horse a moment, and I will alight and tie one end of the rope to a tree in readiness."

"Do so."

Claude slipped off his horse, and, as he did so, he said:

"I will put my ear to the ground first, and listen if any one is coming."

"It will be prudent."

Claude laid himself down at full length in the roadway, and, placing his ear on the ground, listened very intently. No sound, however, came to his ears.

Satisfied of this, he slowly uncoiled the rope from round his waist, and then proceeded to tie one end of it very firmly to the trunk of one of the trees.

This done, he walked across the road, holding the rope slackly in his hands.

In another moment, however, their ears were assailed by the blast of a horn.

"The Oxford Coach," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Fasten the rope, Claude, we are just in time."

CHAPTER CCCXXXIV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL PLUNDER THE OXFORD MAIL, AND BOTH HAVE A NARROW ESCAPE FROM DEATH.

ANOTHER blast of the horn followed Jack's words, which, though louder than the preceding one, was feeble—though, doubtless, had the coach been nearer than it was, it would have sounded a lusty note.

Claude Duval slipped the end of the rope round the tree on the other side of the road, and pulled it tight.

He held it in this position a moment or two, ready to let go in an instant should anything else want to pass before the stage-coach came up.

But there seemed to be no other vehicle upon the road.

The rumbling of the wheels could now be heard with a distinctness which momentarily increased.

Claude now ventured to secure the rope.

Having done so, it formed a line right across the road, about two feet from the ground, and was a barrier of a very formidable character indeed.

It was tight and well secured. The rope was strong, and there were no fears of its breaking or the knots

giving way, at all events, until the service it was designed to perform was completed.

Claude put his hand upon it near the middle and tested its firmness, and feeling quite satisfied upon that point, he remounted his horse.

The coach was now very close at hand.

The rapid revolutions of the wheels upon the hard turnpike road made a continuous grating, showing the speed at which it was coming to be very great.

The horn was blown at frequent intervals.

In one of their calculations, however, our friends proved to be in error.

They had reckoned that, upon approaching the bend in the road close to which they had taken up their station, that the driver of the coach would slacken his speed, and come round carefully, for fear of a collision with any other vehicle which might be coming towards them.

But the driver did nothing of the sort.

He did not perceptibly check his horses, but the guard kept on blowing his horn almost unceasingly, the meaning of which was to let all people on the road know the stage-coach was coming, and to warn them to get out of the way.

From their advantageous position on horseback, our friends could see over the hedgerows, and after the lapse of a few moments they could see the reflection of the lamps on both sides of the vehicle, which shone with a strange effect upon the vegetation.

Little did the driver and guard and passengers think what sort of an adventure was awaiting them.

In fact, ever since the mounted patrol had been established, a feeling of great security had taken possession of the breasts of the public.

This owed its existence to the fact that, since the mounted police had patrolled the road, no robberies had been committed.

To stop a coach filled with people, many of whom were well armed, was at any time a daring undertaking for two men to resolve upon, but trebly so when the roads were watched by mounted police officers, whose particular duty it was to see that no such act was consummated.

But our friends had resolved upon it, and a few minutes now will serve to show what sort of success they met with.

The coach rolled on.

Claude and Jack backed their horses as close as they could to the bank on one side of the road, and then, with their pistols already in their grasp, they waited.

But at the same time they listened intently, so as to be aware if anything else besides the coach approached them. At length, with a sudden dash, the huge conveyance, with its four spirited horses, came round the corner of the road.

"Now, Claude," said Jack, "be ready. Cry 'Stand.'"

"All right."

Sixteen-String Jack made this last request because Claude Duval had got a stronger and louder voice than he had himself.

The rope across the road must have been perfectly invisible to both the coachman and his horses.

Claude left his place of concealment.

He had two pistols in his hands.

One was loaded with ball.

The other with powder only.

This latter he discharged in the air, and immediately throwing it on the ground, passed the loaded one into his right, and, followed by Jack, reached the side of the stage-coach.

Our friends had found discharging a pistol loaded with powder only an excellent device.

They were able to load it heavily, and ram the charge down hard, so that, when the pistol was fired, not only would the report be tremendous and startling, but an intensely bright red flame would issue from the muzzle.

The sight and the sound of this had the effect of frightening people.

It made the highwaymen seem as though they were in good earnest.

Scarcely had the report of this pistol ceased than Claude, in his most stentorian tones, cried:

"Stand and deliver! Halt! Pull up, coachman—pull up, I say, or I will send a bullet into your brains."

"Highwayman, eh, lad," said the coachman, as he made a vain effort to rein in his horses, who were startled by the report of the pistol and the sudden burst of flame proceeding from it.

But just at that moment the feet of the two leading horses got entangled in the rope which had been placed across the road for that purpose.

The others could not stop themselves, but fell down likewise, so the coach was brought somewhat suddenly to a standstill.

A succession of shrill shrieks now came from the interior of the coach.

By an arrangement to which they had mutually agreed, Sixteen-String Jack looked after the passengers on the roof of the coach and levied his contributions upon them, while Claude Duval performed the same interesting operation upon those who occupied the interior.

Now the guard of a stage-coach, who always sits at the back in a seat provided for his special accommodation, was provided with two instruments which he was to make proper use of as occasion required.

One was a long tin horn.

The other was a blunderbuss.

The first was to herald the approach of the coach.

The other was to defend the passengers from any attack which might be made upon it.

Both hung in wicker baskets provided for their reception, in very loving contingency with each other.

The guard, then, as soon as he saw Sixteen-String Jack, who had ridden close up to the coach and demanded the purses of the outside passengers, the guard, we say, with many wise shakes of the head and hushes, proceeded to draw the blunderbuss from its receptacle.

Then, when he had it out, he cocked it, and placing the butt against his shoulder, took careful aim at the highwayman.

The huge, bell-shaped mouth of the instrument looked terrifying to a degree. With a triumphant and exultant feeling about his heart, the guard pulled the trigger.

The result was rather startling to the guard, and decidedly not pleasant.

It was many a day since the clumsy firearm had been discharged.

Now it was overloaded.

There was a flash of white smoke.

Then a roaring report like the discharge of a small cannon.

Mingled with the sound was an awful cry.

It came from the lips of the guard.

It was echoed by many of the passengers on the roof.

The barrel of the blunderbuss had burst, and the guard, with the hideous yell we have mentioned, fell bleeding and wounded, from his seat at the back of the coach into the roadway.

It was the recoil of the weapon which did it.

Several of the outside passengers were injured, but not seriously.

But how did Sixteen-String Jack fare?

He escaped unhurt.

But how?

His attention had been attracted towards the back of the coach.

He saw something was going on.

The next moment he caught sight of the bell-mouthed barrel of the blunderbuss pointed straight at him. He knew how little dependence could, in a general way, be placed upon those weapons.

Still he did not like to run the risk of this one being powerless to harm him.

Directly he saw it he slipped off his horse on to the ground.

Nor was he a moment too soon.

The discharge followed instantly, and a perfect storm of missiles flew over his horse, and which must have riddled him through and through had he remained.

No sooner was the danger over than he recovered himself, and, springing into the saddle, called out so that his comrade should know he was unhurt.

He spoke in somewhat sterner tones than before.

"Quick—quick. Give me your purses every one of you. Throw them into my hat. If any one hesitates, that moment will be his last."

This threat had the desired effect, and purses of various kinds were thrown into the hat.

Jack rapidly transferred them to the capacious pockets of his coat, and then cried:

"Now, gentlemen, your watches."

There was a little demur to this, but the sight of Jack's pistol silenced all scruples, and the watches were handed to him.

Jack now turned his attention to the driver, from whom he expected to get by far the most valuable portion of booty.

"Coachy," he cried, "do you want to see the sun rise to-morrow?"

The driver glared at him, but made no reply.

"Because, if you do," continued Jack, "the only way by which you can do so will be by immediately handing me the mail bags which you know are in the box under your seat."

"The mail bags," gasped the coachman. "I am a ruined man. Oh, good gentlemen, protect me."

But the passengers were deaf to his appeal.

If they did not feel inclined to imperil their lives for the salvation of their own valuables, they were scarcely likely to do so for those belonging to other people.

"Coachman," said Jack, "hand me those bags. If you refuse or hesitate a moment longer, so sure as you now breathe, you are a dead man."

"Murder."

"You may call it murder if you like, but I should call it suicide."

"Suicide?"

"Yes, for you will be throwing your life away when there is no occasion for you to do so. Come—come. I cannot linger longer. The mail bags, I say, without you want me to shoot you first and take them afterwards, for to have them I am determined."

With a dismal groan, as he reflected upon what would be the consequences of this night's work, the coachman got up off his seat and opened the box to which Sixteen-String Jack had alluded, and which was provided for the reception of the mail bags.

The coachman was very reluctant to give them up, because he was responsible for their safe keeping.

But then, he thought, as the highwayman was determined to have them, that he had better give them up than be shot, and have them taken afterwards just the same.

With a heavy heart, then, he handed them to Jack, who threw them before him on the saddle.

Having related so far what befel Jack in his attempt upon the outside, we will proceed to turn our attention to the success Claude had with the inside passengers.

Riding straight up to the door of the coach, he caught hold of the window with his left hand, and let it down with a crash.

Scarcely had it finished clattering down in its frame than there was a sudden report.

Claude felt his hat fly off his head, and a tingling sensation all along his scalp.

This, of course, startled him for the moment, but Claude had been fired at more than once in his life, and he knew from experience that if you hear the report of a firearm you are alive.

So on this occasion he was certain that, beyond a slight wound, there was nothing the matter.

Without, then, a perceptible pause, he put his head in at the carriage window, and projected the barrel of a pistol into the vehicle.

An oil-lamp cast a tolerable radiance around, and by the aid of this Claude was able to see the different passengers.

The inside of the coach was quite full.

"That's a rough welcome," said Claude, in off-handed tones, as though it was the simplest matter in the world. "But never mind, I must have my shot back, or else it would not be fair."

Claude used his eyes well while he made this speech, for the double purpose of seeing when anyone made an attempt upon his life, and who it was who had fired the shot which was so near being a fatal one.

When he spoke about returning it, he saw one gentleman shrink back.

That was enough.

Claude knew him.

"Come, ladies and gentlemen," he said. "You don't seem very well pleased. However, we must have business first and pleasure afterwards. I will attend to you, sir, in a few moments."

These words were addressed to the man who had shrunk back, and who Claude suspected of having fired the shot.

He was still further confirmed in this suspicion by seeing him change colour visibly.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "time presses. Be good enough, therefore, to be as quick as possible. Your money, watches, rings, and other valuables. Hand them to me quietly, and you will receive no personal violence whatever. But you must be quick, and give them up without resistance. Now."

Still the passengers hesitated.

"Come now," said Claude, "this is really too bad. You cannot escape, and it will be much better for you to give the things up with a good grace than compel me to use force, which I shall be compelled to do. Now, then, I will begin with you, sir."

Claude addressed an elderly gentleman who sat next the door with his back to the horses, and whose face was a picture of ludicrous fright.

In a helpless, confused sort of way, he put his hand into his breast and pulled out a pocket-book, which, in less than a minute afterwards, was safe in Claude's pocket.

CHAPTER CCCXXXV.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK ARE ATTACKED BY THE PATROL.

"THAT'S a beginning," he said. "Come, follow this gentleman's example. Really, it's too bad of you. You don't deserve to have any forbearance shown you—you don't, indeed. Come, I shall proceed to harsh measures."

The passengers looked at Claude and saw the determined expression on his countenance, though he spoke so good-temperedly.

They also looked at the long, bright barrel of the pistol, which was resting in a negligent sort of way upon the side of the coach window.

They thought it best policy to submit.

Purses, watches, rings, brooches, ear-rings, and all the valuable articles worn by people tolerably well off, were one after the other handed to him.

The booty was considerable, and must have represented a very large amount.

Claude was highly pleased with the success he had met with, and felt inclined to pardon the man who had fired at him, and who after all had only done his duty, and acted just as he would have done himself had their positions been reversed.

But something else occurred which produced a complete revulsion of feeling.

While Claude's attention had been wholly occupied in receiving the various valuables as they were handed out to him, this man, with the utmost secrecy and caution, managed to draw another pistol.

He was not perceived by anyone.

Then, when Claude was off his guard, and in the act of making the reflection we have recorded, he hastily put the weapon on full cock, raised it to a level, took aim, and pulled the trigger.

The first intimation that Claude had as to what had taken place was the click of a piece of steel.

But the pistol missed fire.

The powder merely flashed in the pan.

With a terrible oath, this man flung the useless pistol full in the face of the highwayman, in the hope that he might thereby do him a serious injury.

But Claude drew aside just in time to avoid the well-aimed and dangerous missile, which fell harmlessly enough into the roadway.

There was now an end to all Claude's pacific intentions. His life had been a second time deliberately and treacherously aimed at.

Nothing but the chance circumstance of the pistol missing fire saved his life.

Had it not done so, he must have inevitably perished, for his body quite blocked up the coach window, so as to make it an impossibility to avoid hitting him somewhere. But providentially he escaped.

There was, however, a flushed and angry look upon the



[THE THIEVES' KEN IN WHITEFRIARS.]

face of Claude Duval, as turning the handle of the coach door, he flung it open.

"Come, sir," he said, addressing the man who had fired, "I must trouble you to alight. You have had what you would call two fair shots at me, and I must have what I call two fair shots at you."

"No—no."

"No, say you? But I must. I presume you are a gentleman."

"Precisely so; and it is for that reason I cannot exchange shots with a highwayman."

"Such a pretext as that will avail you little. I have no such scruples, and I tell you, once for all, if you do not alight, I will fire at you where you are. There will be the risk of hitting some of the other passengers, but that will be entirely your fault."

"No—no, good Mr. Highwayman," cried the other passengers. "Make him alight. Don't fire in here—pray don't. Why, all the way along that gentleman has been swaggering and boasting, and saying how he should like the coach to be attacked by highwaymen, just to show us what he should do."

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Claude Duval, "I should be very unwilling to injure any of you in the slightest degree, or even to run the most distant risk of doing so, but really you must, in self-defence, compel the gentleman to alight."

"We'll soon do that, sir, if you will wait a moment," cried the passengers, and, as they spoke, they set about forcing the gentleman to alight.

To facilitate them in what they were about, Claude opened the coach door.

The whole of the passengers made common cause against the boasting traveller.

They pushed him with all their might, and, as their united strength by far exceeded his, they succeeded in getting him close to the coach door.

Then Claude, leaning forward on his saddle, stretched out his hand, and, seizing him by the collar of his coat with a firm grasp, drew him out into the roadway.

The old gentleman who sat next to the door slammed it shut in a moment, leaving him to his fate.

The boasting gentleman fell rather heavily into the roadway when Claude released his hold.

But he quickly scrambled to his feet.

"Now," said Claude, "I give you a chance for your life. I will count three, and, if by the time I pronounce the third word you are not out of the range of this pistol, you will have no one to blame but yourself. Now! One!"

"No, my fine fellow," said the traveller, plucking up a courage that had a great deal of desperation in it. "No, I will try what I can do for you."

He fumbled in his pockets while speaking.

Claude took no notice, but quietly said:

"Two."

The traveller turned round, and prepared to fly.

"Three," said Claude.

But his adversary had taken one bound, and then gone through the hedge.

However, Duval fired his pistol after him, though whether it took any effect he did not stop to inquire, for he heard the sudden trampling of horses' hoofs, which showed that some one was approaching at a very rapid rate, indeed.

At the same moment, Sixteen-String Jack, who had quite finished with the outsides, cried—

"Off and away, Claude! Off and away! The grabs are after us! Off and away!"

At the same moment, Sixteen-String Jack struck his spurs into his horse's flanks, and galloped in the direction of the country.

Claude lost no time in following his example, for the sound of horsemen, coming from the direction of London, reached his ears with a great deal too much plainness to be pleasant.

The hearts of the highwaymen were elated with the success they had met with in their perilous adventure, and they looked upon this prospect of a gallop into the country with feelings of pleasure rather than otherwise.

A few words passed between them as to what kind of booty they had been able to obtain, and the question was asked as to what kind of hurts they had received, which were really too insignificant to be mentioned.

"We have done a daring thing, and got off well in every respect," said Claude Duval. "To-morrow all London will ring with this."

"It will, indeed."

"Hark, what is that?"

With a sudden rush two horsemen darted forward and planted themselves exactly in the path of our friends, who were consequently compelled to pull up or be thrown down. Of course they chose the former alternative.

"Surrender!" cried the two horsemen, by whom they were confronted. "Surrender!"

"For what?"

"You know for what. We are perfectly well aware of who you are. You are highwaymen, and our prisoners."

"We may be the one but we are certainly not the other," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Let us pass."

"Not so fast, my fine fellows; we have got you, and we mean to keep you."

"As for having us, I think we could show you a clean pair of heels if we wished it."

"And meet the next patrol along the road."

"Is that it? Then we will try, if you like, whether we are your prisoners or you ours?"

Our friends noticed that the two mounted police-officers held drawn swords in their hands, and as they (Claude and Jack) carried such weapons by their sides, they drew them from their sheaths.

The next moment the four bright blades were crossed.

The steel clashed together with a ringing sound.

The two police officers, who were well skilled in the sword exercise, did little more than defend themselves from their antagonists.

They were prolonging the conflict as much as they could, so that the sounds of the affray should reach the ears of the other men patrolling the road, and so that they should surround them, thus making them an easy prey.

From the way in which they dallied, this suspicion soon entered the minds of the highwaymen, and shouting out their convictions to each other, at the same moment precipitated themselves with the utmost vigour upon their foes.

The fight now commenced in real earnest.

The weapons rang together.

The bright blades flashed in the murky light.

The horses reared and plunged.

The officers had much ado to defend themselves from the furious onslaught thus made upon them, and they were effectually prevented from taking any undue advantage by firing a pistol or otherwise, because the left hand was continually employed in holding the reins and manœuvring the horse, while with their right they had to ward off as best they could the furious attack which the highwaymen commenced.

It was no longer child's play.

It was not long before the two police-officers became aware that, skilful as they were in the use of the sword, their opponents were far superior to them.

Anxiously, then, they strained their sense of hearing to the utmost, in order to catch some sound which would indicate the coming of assistance.

Whenever they could, too, they cast uneasy glances up the road, but they could see nothing.

Suddenly, however, there came upon the ears of all four of the combatants the trampling of horses' hoofs upon the road.

The sound was faint.

But distinct.

Our friends had everything to dread from that sound.

Their foes everything to hope.

The consequence was that both redoubled their endeavours.

The highwaymen were quite certain that unless they disposed of their adversaries, and that at once, they should be surrounded and opposed by such a force as would make resistance futile.

Still, let it be said, that they did not take or attempt to take any unfair advantage of their foes.

They merely fought with greater desperation.

And now Claude, by putting into execution a skilful feint, threw his enemy off his guard.

It was only for a moment.

But that moment was enough.

Changing the position of his sword with the rapidity of lightning, he made a thrust at the officer's breast, and before he could recover his guard, the sharp steel entered his breast with so much violence, that the point protruded from his back.

Claude withdrew his sword instantly, and held it in an attitude of defence, for he did not know how much his foe might have been injured from this thrust.

And well for him was it that he did so.

The officer, who seemed maddened with rage and pain, attacked Claude in such a frantic manner that he had the greatest difficulty in defending himself.

Soon, however, the vigour with which the wounded officer dealt his blows, abated, and one more slashing cut in the shoulder from Claude's sword sent him headlong to the ground.

Sixteen-String Jack had found himself opposed to a man much his superior in those physical qualities necessary to a swordsman.

He was a taller and a stronger man than Jack, and had besides a very great advantage which a long arm bestows.

Notwithstanding these disadvantages, however, Sixteen-String Jack did not shrink from the encounter, but put forth all the cunning tricks in fencing of which he was the master.

It was only by this that a balance of any kind was preserved between them.

Jack, however, had been wounded twice, and rather severely too, but still he did not show the slightest symptoms of giving way.

He was still engaged with his foe when Claude freed himself from his antagonist.

Of course the first thing to which Claude Duval directed his attention was the condition of his friend.

He saw him much the worst off in the affray, and he hurried to his assistance, for the trampling of the horses' hoofs sounded with a distinctness that was really alarming.

It was evident that in less than another minute they would reach the spot upon which he now stood.

The police-officer who had so nearly obtained a victory

over Sixteen-String Jack, finding that his comrade had fallen and that he was opposed to both, flung down his weapon and sued for quarter—although assistance was to all appearance so close at hand.

Quarter was granted to him on condition that he dismounted, which he immediately did.

Claude then caught hold of his steed by the bridle, and compelled him to gallop along by the side of his own, into whose flanks he struck the spurs rather deeply.

Sixteen-String Jack did the same.

With a rush, then, the defeated police-officer was left in the roadway, for the horses had all grown excited while the battle was in progress, and, consequently, feeling the spur, they darted off at a very rapid rate indeed.

But though our friends had come off victorious in this encounter, yet they were far from being secure.

On the contrary, they were placed in a position of the greatest danger.

Sixteen-String Jack had received two severe wounds from the sword of his opponent, from both of which the blood flowed in great quantities.

Then the horsemen they had heard approaching from the direction of London were, by the time they started, fully in sight.

A cry which they uttered had the effect of making the highwaymen aware they were seen, and they turned round quickly to see who their pursuers were.

One glance was sufficient.

Coming along at a tremendous gallop was a large body of police-officers.

They saw the highwaymen turn round, for they set up a shout the moment they did so, which sounded in their ears like a demand to surrender.

This our friends were not likely to pay any attention to, without their position was very much worse than it was.

All they did was to strike their spurs once more into their horses' sides, which caused them to tear along the road at full speed.

CHAPTER CCCXXXVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SEEK SHELTER IN AN INN, AND HAVE A TERRIBLE ADVENTURE.

CLAUDE DUVAL quickly found the horse he held by the bridle was a very great incumbrance.

He would not have burdened himself with it at all if he had not thought by so doing he should be depriving the defeated officer of the means of following them.

And this he quite succeeded in doing, for the other horse, when his rider fell headlong to the ground, was naturally much terrified, and he galloped off over the fields at a great rate, and was out of sight almost immediately.

Having effected his object, Claude thought he could not do better than release his hold upon the bridle, which he accordingly did.

The horse, however, seemed by no means disposed to part company, but galloped by the side of them just as before.

There was no objection to his doing this. On the contrary, it might, for all they knew, turn out to be a great advantage to have a spare horse in case either of their own should fail.

The officers in pursuit, who had reached the stage-coach soon after the highwaymen had stopped and plundered it in the manner we have related, there learned all the particulars of the outrage.

A description of the two highwaymen was furnished them, and they were also told in which direction they had gone.

They set off in pursuit at once, leaving the coachman and passengers to do the best they could.

The horses, who had grown very restive after the rope threw them down, had broken the harness and done other mischief, so, in all probability, some little time would elapse before they would be able to resume their journey.

The police-officers, however, cared nothing at all about the passengers, nor about the inconvenience they suffered.

They were intent upon capturing the highwaymen.

After a short gallop they were so fortunate as to get in sight of them, and this acted as a considerable stimulus to their exertions.

Going at such a rapid rate as they were—and their horses' hoofs making such a din upon the ground as they did—the two highwaymen found conversation a very difficult thing indeed.

But it was necessary they should speak to each other, so, raising his voice to its utmost pitch, Claude asked—

"Are you hurt much, Jack?"

"Yes," replied his companion, but although he strove his utmost, his voice was so faint that Claude could scarcely tell what he said.

"You alarm me, Jack."

"No—no."

"You do."

"The wounds are merely flesh wounds."

"Oh!"

"But they bleed profusely, and it is from loss of blood I am suffering as much as possible."

"Cannot you do anything to staunch it?"

"Not while we are going at this rate; and to stop would be madness. No, no, my friend; we must push forward at our utmost speed, and distance our pursuers."

"I think we are doing that now. At any rate, I am sure they are not gaining upon us."

Sixteen-String Jack listened as well as he could to the sounds which came from his pursuers in the rear, and he was certain they were much fainter than they had been.

But this, so far from making them feel satisfied with the exertion and the progress they had already made, induced them to urge their horses to still greater efforts.

The gallant creatures obeyed them well.

Doubtless old Matthew had chosen the horses himself, and was aware of the excellence of their quality—a thing so necessary to our friends.

Away they went, then, at a tearing gallop.

Sixteen-String Jack felt very faint and giddy.

With difficulty he retained his seat in the saddle.

Every now and then he would sway from side to side, and be in imminent danger of falling off.

But each time he recovered himself. A thing more attributable to his skill in horsemanship than anything else.

He had received two wounds, and both almost in the same place—that is to say, in the fleshy part of his right shoulder.

They were deep, and the blood flowed from them in surprising quantities.

The rapid action, too, increased the hemorrhage.

Presently, upon Claude calling out for him to do so, he pulled up.

Both listened.

It was only in a very faint manner that the hoof-beats of their pursuers came to their ears, but the ever-increasing loudness of it told them they were pushing forward with all possible speed.

"Now, Jack," said Claude, "let me bind up your wound."

"No—no. Never mind. Push on a little further, until we are quite out of the hearing of our foes, and then we will take to the fields."

"If you can wait, Jack, until then, it would be much better for us, as some time must be lost in the operation, and we might have a great deal of difficulty in regaining the advantage we now have."

"To be sure we shall. Forward—forward!"

Sixteen-String Jack struck his spurs into his horse's sides as he spoke, and set the example of galloping forward.

Claude Duval could not help admiring the pluck which he displayed.

It was some time before they came to a halt again, and when they did a large piece of ground had been passed over.

The most attentive listening could not, on this occasion, bring to their ears the least sound of the officers in pursuit.

"Now, Jack," cried Claude, "all is well. We have distanced them at last. A few minutes more and we shall quite elude them."

"Thank heaven for that," said Sixteen-String Jack, faintly.

"Cheer up, my friend. Your voice is low."

"I have lost much blood."

"I am afraid so. But, look! here is a white gate which leads apparently into some meadows. I will dismount and open it. When we have passed through I will close it again, so as to cause no suspicion."

As he spoke, Claude slipped off his horse and opened the gate, which was merely fastened with a piece of chain, but in such a manner that any one not let into the secret of it would not undo it without a great deal of trouble.

But it was the business of the highwaymen to make themselves acquainted with fastenings of every description, so the probability is, that Claude opened the gate with as much ease and quickness as the farmer himself could have done to whom the field belonged.

He fastened it again, and then remounted.

"This is a ploughed field," he said. "We shall have to cross it slowly or we shall knock our horses up completely. Still as I cannot hear anything of our foes, it will not matter, and you will besides have an opportunity of putting a rude bandage of some kind round your shoulder. Here, you had better take my neckcloth; you will find that answer the purpose admirably."

Claude Duval pulled off his neck the obsolete piece of attire he had mentioned, and handed it to Jack.

It was already in the form of a bandage, and he slipped it over his shoulder without much difficulty.

They went at a walking pace across the ploughed field, so that he was enabled to drop his reins upon his horse's neck, and proceed in perfect safety.

By this means he had both his hands at liberty.

The flow of blood was checked in a very great degree, but the wound was not properly bound up.

By the time he had done this the opposite side of the field was reached.

There was a gap in the hedge through which they led their horses.

They then found themselves in a spacious meadow.

This they crossed, and proceeded in a straight line for a considerable distance across the country.

They had now every reason to believe that they had completely baffled their pursuers and thrown them off the scent.

Believing this, they came to a halt; and then the first thing Claude did was to bind up his companion's wound afresh, and in as skilful a manner as he was able.

The bandage was already saturated with blood.

Jack was very faint and sick.

The quantity of blood he had lost was incredible, and the wonder is that he could have borne up against its loss with so much impunity as he did.

He was, however, in reality in a fearful state of weakness and the feeling increased in intensity every moment.

Jack did not complain, but Claude could tell his condition, and the necessity for his seeking shelter and rest somewhere was imperative.

But they seemed to be in one of those sparsely populated agricultural districts, at that time by far more common than they are now.

Nowhere could the least signs of a habitation of any kind be seen.

But they determined to push on in the hope of meeting with one ere long.

After the elapsion of about half-an-hour, they came to what they had all along expected to find by proceeding in one direction, and that was a lane.

It was a broad one, and extended right and left as far as they could see.

But to what place it led they had no idea.

They could see the lane through the interstices of the hedge, but none of these were large enough to admit of a passage.

But our friends felt convinced that they had only to go a certain distance to find a gate through which they could pass without any trouble.

Indeed, there was one in sight just at their left hand.

Upon reaching it they found it was secured by a padlock, but a large stone happening to be close by, Claude picked it up, and dashed it with full force upon it, smashing the whole affair at once.

This done he pulled the gate open upon its hinges, and his friend passed through.

Claude Duval had not grown so far confused in his geography as not to know in which direction to go along this lane in order to get nearer London.

He had to turn to the left.

This was the way, then, he went at an easy pace for the comfort and convenience of his wounded companion, all the time keeping a sharp look-out for a dwelling of some kind.

But they went three miles at least, without meeting with a shed even.

Suddenly, however, Claude's quick eye detected a bundle of straw hanging by a rope to a post.

In the olden time the proximity of an inn was often denoted by this means.

Riding up to this post, Claude saw a board projecting from it, upon which in the faint night light he could see some letters were painted, but he could not make them out.

But when he lighted a small lantern which he carried in his pocket, he was easily able to do so.

The words were these—

"The 'Spotted Dog.' First turning on the right. Good accommodation for man and beast."

Claude read these words aloud to Jack, who said—

"Do you know this inn, Claude?"

"No."

"Will it be safe to stop there, think you?"

"We will risk it, my friend. In the state you are in a little rest and proper attention to your wounds are imperative, or you will eventually suffer severely."

"I do want rest, Claude."

"I know you do."

"Shall we be safe?"

"We will run the risk. If danger comes we must be prepared to resist it, and defend ourselves."

At this moment a narrow turning was reached, and Claude added—

"Here we are."

"It looks a dismal-looking entrance.

"It does. If I had been travelling along this road, I should never have thought of turning up there to find an inn, if the inscription on the board had not warned me to do so."

"Nor I."

A shudder crept over Jack's frame as they turned down this narrow lane.

Why he could scarcely say.

He attributed it to the blood he had lost.

But certainly the aspect of the place was rather forbidding.

The lane which apparently led to the "Spotted Dog" was a very narrow one, being barely wide enough to allow the passage of one vehicle.

On one side of this lane was an unusually high hedgerow, with tall trees at frequent intervals.

The other side appeared to be bordered by a plantation of considerable extent.

Being so narrow, these trees cast a very deep and black shadow over the lane, so that it was more like entering a cavern or a tunnel than aught else, except that the blue sky and stars could be discerned overhead.

It was certainly a very extraordinary locality to choose for an inn, and with so forbidding an entrance, Claude thought that it must have been seldom they had any customers.

After proceeding some twenty yards, however, the lane widened somewhat, and then on the left-hand side of the lane Claude saw a faint light.

It looked as though it came from a candle placed close to a window-pane, and this was really the case.

The sound of their horse's hoofs must have been heard, for a man emerged from the inn, carrying a stable-lantern in his hand.

The inn was built upon that side of the lane which was bordered by the plantation already spoken of.

The trees which grew in it consisted chiefly of dark firs and horse-chestnuts, which gave it a gloomy and sombre appearance.

Our friends could not see what kind of a man it was who approached, for he held the lantern before him in such a manner that none of the beams fell upon his own person.

"Hullo!" he said, in a gruff voice, "Hullo! there. Who are you?"

"Travellers. We saw your board up, and the truss of straw a little way down the road, and we want to rest ourselves and our horses for a little while."

"All right, gentlemen," said the man with the lantern. "You will find the best of accommodation at the 'Spotted Dog.'"

CHAPTER CCCXXXVII.

SOME VERY STRANGE ADVENTURES BEFALL CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK DURING THEIR STAY AT THE "SPOTTED DOG" INN.

"LEAD the way, then," cried Claude Duval, "and we will follow you."

"All right, gentlemen. This way, if you please. This way. John—John!"

"Yes," said a sleepy, surly voice, and then Claude and Jack heard a heavy footstep.

The next moment he came within the light of the lantern, and it could be perceived that he was attired like an ostler.

But the expression of his countenance was forbidding in the extreme.

He came towards the horses, and held the stirrups for our friends to dismount.

As soon as his feet reached the ground, such an accession of weakness came over Sixteen-String Jack that he almost fell to the ground.

Claude ran to his assistance, and was just in time to save him.

"My friend has been wounded," he said, addressing the ostler and the man who held the light. "I am afraid he is in a state of extreme weakness, but I don't think he is seriously injured."

"I will help you to take him indoors," said the man, putting down his lantern. "We have only a step or two to go."

Of course Claude Duval did not reject the aid thus proffered, and between them Sixteen-String Jack was led to the door of the inn.

This was closed, but it opened to a touch.

They entered a room on the ground floor, where there was a light and a fire burning in the grate.

As soon as he was placed upon a seat, Jack fainted.

Claude called for water and a sponge.

They were quickly brought, and with the aid of these the coagulated blood was washed away, and then two very ugly-looking, gaping wounds were disclosed.

But Claude Duval's surgical knowledge assured him that those wounds looked to be by far more dangerous than they actually were.

He applied cold water plentifully, and then skilfully bandaged his shoulder.

Still Sixteen-String Jack continued insensible, and in this condition he was, by his comrade's directions, carried upstairs and placed upon the outside of a bed.

Left to himself, Claude proceeded to recover him from his swoon, and after some time succeeded.

Almost immediately afterwards, however, Jack fell off into a deep sleep, which Claude did not attempt to interrupt, for he knew that would more than anything tend to recuperate his strength.

He sat beside him and watched.

From his pocket he produced one of the numerous watches he carried about him, and looked at the time.

It was half-past eleven.

"The night is young yet," he muttered. "We can stop here some hours, and then manage to return to London before daybreak, which will suit very well."

Having come to this conclusion, Claude, who felt not in the least sleepy or fatigued, proceeded to count up the booty they had taken from the passengers in the Oxford mail.

He found it represented a very large sum, being, in fact, about three times as much as he required for his immediate purpose.

Having done this, Claude looked round him at the nature of the place he was in.

It was an ordinary looking apartment, with one plain bed, without hangings, in one corner of the room.

The floor was uncarpeted.

Claude could not but think the behaviour of the inmates of the inn rather extraordinary.

He had seen no one but the two rough-looking men we have described, and these had willingly enough left him and his wounded companion to shift for themselves.

No questions had been asked about him or the condition in which he was.

All that they seemed to care about was to get them into the inn.

Not the least sound from below reached his ears. It might as well have been in an uninhabited house.

After listening for a moment, he went to the window.

It was one which opened like a door, and, undoing the catch, he pushed it back upon its hinges.

Then looked out.

He found the view exceedingly circumscribed.

He could see nothing but the black-looking trees in the plantation, the branches of some of which were almost long enough to touch the window-panes.

There was nothing to be seen there, so he closed the window again.

The intense stillness of the place made Claude feel uneasy, and a thousand vague apprehensions entered his mind.

The strange position of the inn—so retired—so out of the way as it was—struck him as being very strange and unusual.

Then there was the forbidding countenances of the two men.

The more he thought, the more did gloomy feelings creep over his mind, so at last he was fain to rise to his feet and endeavour to chase them away by walking up and down the room.

But in this he failed entirely.

They increased.

The chamber was but dimly lighted by a solitary candle which he had placed upon the mantel-piece, because he thought there its light would be most diffused.

Sixteen-String Jack was breathing laboriously.

Claude was anxious about the condition of his comrade, because he knew so much was dependent upon his exertions on the morrow.

He took the candle in his hand and walked towards the bed, in order to judge, if possible, by his looks what kind of condition he was in.

The heavy slumber entirely produced by the exhaustion of his system, still continued, and there was upon the face of the sleeper an expression of great agony.

Doubtless the pain of the wound was great, though Jack was unconscious of it.

The bleeding had, however, entirely ceased, or at any rate, it had not penetrated through the wet bandages which Claude had tied over it.

We have said that he had caused Jack to be laid on the outside of the bed.

But now, perceiving that he shivered at short intervals, he considered it must proceed from the cold, and that it would be best to cover him over in some way and keep him warm.

He would feel the cold, he thought, in consequence of the blood which had been drained out of his body.

It was easy to cover him, Claude thought, without disturbing his position in the least, by simply going to one side of the bed, and turning the clothes over him.

This he resolved to do, so he deposited the candle on a chair by the bedside, and, taking hold of the clothes, he folded them half over, by this means of course, covering his companion completely, for the bed was wide and of an old-fashioned make.

In turning the clothes over, although he was not aware of it at the time, Claude had taken hold of them all, the bottom sheet included, so that when they were in the position we have indicated, the bed was exposed to view.

Claude did not notice this until he took the candle up in his hands again, and held it down to look at his friend once more.

The light of the candle then fell with full force upon the striped fabic which contained the bed.

Mechanically Claude's eyes rested upon it, but his attention was attracted by a large dark stain, only one half of which apparently was disclosed to view, the other half being under the folded clothes.

There was something peculiar about this stain, and Claude held the candle so as to look more closely at it.

As he did so, he felt a cold, clammy feeling about his heart, and all those vague suspicions and sensations of alarm which he had previously experienced swept over him again with redoubled intensity.

There was something very strange about this large dark stain in so strange a place.

Claude bent closer over it.

A glance almost showed him what the dark stain was, and he turned away with a shudder of horror.

That dark stain was blood.

Not blood which had been recently spilt, or which could have flowed from his comrade's wounds.

There were no traces of it upon the sheets, but upon the ticking of the bed only.

Moreover, by the yellowish tint it had in places assumed, Claude could tell that it had been there some time.

To satisfy himself, he touched it with his finger, and found just where the stain was the bed was hard and stiffened with the serum of the blood.

What tale did this stain tell?

What deed of horror was it the sole trace and witness of?

Claude could not tell, but the suspicions he had previously and vaguely entertained took consistency and shape.

A murder had been committed in that very room.

Into what kind of place had they got?

Claude was no stranger to the tales which were afloat respecting inns where travellers stayed, and were never seen again.

Such dens of murder were unfortunately too common.

Was there not every probability that he had fallen into one?

Surely, yes.

The strange position of the inn itself.

The forbidding countenances of the two men.

Their strange behaviour.

The plantation at the back, so well adapted for the concealment of any crime.

And lastly, the crimson stain upon the bed.

All these things were confirmatory of such a suspicion.

Claude had a horror of assassination.

For a fair fight he would care little, but he knew very well that such a proceeding as that would be altogether in opposition to the conduct of murderers.

He drew his sword from its sheath and laid it across the bed.

He also examined his pistols, and placed them so that he could take hold of them in a second should any emergency occur.

Then he paused a moment to reflect.

What should he do?

He looked at his watch.

It now wanted about ten minutes to twelve.

Would it be best for him to awake his companion and communicate his suspicions to him?

Sleep and rest for a little while were, he knew, very essential to Jack, so he muttered—

"No, I will not wake him. I will sit here and keep watch, and woe to those who attempt anything against him or me. I am more than a match for a couple of such wretches as those, and, perhaps, after all, there is no occasion for me to be alarmed."

While he spoke these words, Claude Duval seated himself on the bed beside his wounded and slumbering companion.

From this position he commanded a full view of the door.

And now he saw something in connexion with the door which he had not previously noticed.

There were no fastenings upon it, with the exception of a drop-latch, which could be raised with as much facility from without as within.

This, then, could scarcely be called a fastening.

Anxiously, then, and with his heart pulsating rapidly, Claude fixed his eyes upon the door, and stretched his sense of hearing to the utmost.

But the same remarkable stillness of which we have spoken continued.

Nothing would have pleased Claude better than to have taken the candle and gone downstairs, in the endeavour to solve the mystery, but if he did this, he should be compelled to leave his comrade, and during his absence the worst might happen.

So he was forced to content himself with keeping watch where he was.

Slowly and wearily the minutes passed by.

It is always so when one is watching.

At every few moments Claude would take a watch from his pocket and look at the time, but growing tired of that he put the watch upon the bed, so that he could look at it any moment he wished.

Half an hour elapsed.

During that time nothing occurred to recompense Claude for his trouble.

Sixteen-String Jack still slept, but he breathed much easier than before, and a faint tinge of colour was beginning to come back to his cheeks.

Claude looked upon these symptoms with favourable eyes.

"Jack will be all right soon," he said. "Perhaps after all I have been frightening myself with a shadow, or perhaps if they had any evil intentions they would be afraid to engage themselves with us."

It was just as he was making these reflections that Claude heard a faint creaking sound.

He was on the alert instantly, and listened with great intentness for a repetition of it.

He had not long to wait.

It came again, and this time with much greater plainness than before.

Someone was ascending the flight of rickety stairs leading to the room in which he sat.

Presently the sounds ceased, and then Claude heard some one whispering.

There could be no doubt about what it was.

He did not move from the bed, however, but fixed his eyes still upon the door.

The candle now required attention, but he could not give it. The wick had grown a preternatural length, and the illumination was consequently much enfeebled.

It cast a dim, shadowy light over the chamber.

Suddenly the whispering ceased, and then Claude heard the creaking of footsteps on the staircase again.

On—on they came, until they paused just outside the door.

Here some more whispering took place.

Claude had not the least doubt that there were two persons without, and that those two persons were the men he had seen, and who possessed such forbidding physiognomies.

His mind's eye enabled him to see through the door, and he pictured the two just as they were standing whispering to each other.

What they said, however, was more than he could make out, although he stretched his sense of hearing to the utmost in endeavouring to do so.

The whispering ceased.

A brief interval of silence followed.

Then Claude heard some one tap very gently on the door with his knuckles.

CHAPTER CCCXXXVIII.

THE LANDLORD AND THE OSTLER AT THE "SPOTTED DOG" VERY DESERVEDLY COME TO A BAD END.

AFFAIRS in the bed-chamber of the "Spotted Dog" are now beginning to assume a critical and interesting aspect, and it is, we confess, with considerable anxiety and interest that we look for the termination of this adventure.

What could be the meaning of this tap on the door, Claude could not precisely say, but the hypothesis which he adopted was doubtless the correct one.

And that was, that the tapping was meant to ascertain whether he was asleep or awake.

Suppose he feigned the former.

His doubts and suspicions would surely then be confirmed or dispersed.

He resolved upon this course.

As silently as possible, then, he slipped off the side of the bed, taking his weapons with him, and crouched down close to the floor.

The bedstead was now between him and the door, so he was tolerably well hidden from the view of anyone coming in.

The tapping came again, and this time it was a little louder.

Still Claude took no notice.

Then the whispering outside recommenced, after which the latch was slowly and silently raised.

Then the door was pushed open to the extent of a few inches.

Claude raised his head so that he could just see over the bed-clothes.

When the door was open far enough a rough-looking head was projected into the room.

One glance at the features was sufficient to show Claude

that it belonged to no other than the man who he took to be the landlord of the "Spotted Dog" Inn.

It is probable the dim light of the candle rather baffled and confused the intruder's vision, for he put his hand up to his eyes as though to assist his sight.

But he was apparently satisfied with what he saw, for he ventured to step stealthily into the room, and then turned and beckoned to some one without.

Another head then appeared in the doorway.

This Claude also recognized without difficulty.

It belonged to the man who had played the part of ostler.

It was impossible, having once seen those faces, to mistake them.

"Hush," said the first comer. "Be quiet. I told you they were both asleep by this time. If one was awake do you think he would let the candle burn like that?"

"It has got a thundering long wick, Joe, that's certain."

"Hush, I say."

"I'm whispering."

"I know. But let us get this business settled. We shall be well paid for our work this time. Come on. Never mind about there being two. If they are asleep we can manage them easily enough, and, besides, isn't one almost dead already. Why, it would be doing a good action to put him out of his misery."

"Ah! ah! Joe! you is a rummy one, you is! the idea of that, now."

"We have got the truss of straw and the direction-board to thank for this slice of luck. They little thought we carry it out there every night to get the people here, and bring it away every morning."

"Come on, Joe! Business—business! I know you are always fond of talking about that finger-post affair, because that was your own invention."

"And a good one, too! Ah! ah!"

"Hush, Joe! Let's settle them, and then we can talk afterwards."

"All right, mate."

The two villains, about whose murderous intentions towards their guests there could be no sort of doubt, now produced from their breasts, where they had concealed them, two long bright, glittering knives.

Then, with the stealthy tread of trained assassins, they crossed the room on tiptoe.

They reached the side of the bed.

"Here's one," said the man who had been addressed by his companion as Joe; "but where's the other?"

"All right, I'll be bound! But let us make sure of this one first. We shall then be able to attend to the other."

"Of course we shall!"

The ruffianly ostler raised the hand in which he held the long bladed knife high in the air above the breast of Sixteen-String Jack.

Another moment and it would have descended, and the gallant heart would have ceased to beat for ever.

But that moment was not destined to arrive.

He had not yet reached the end of his career.

Like an armed apparition, Claude rose up from his crouching position to his full height, and no sooner had he done so than, having taken a careful aim, he pulled the trigger of the pistol and fired.

The report of the pistol was something tremendous.

The ostler uttered a yell of fear and agony, and fell in a huddled-up mass upon the floor.

The bullet from Claude's pistol had entered his brain, and killed him instantly.

The arm which had held the knife was now powerless.

Sound as Jack's slumber unquestionably was, the discharge of a pistol within a few inches of his ear was sufficient to break it, and he started up to a sitting posture on the bed as though galvanized.

The landlord of the inn, seeing the fate which had befallen his comrade, and that he was one man opposed to two, turned to flee.

Claude sprang over the bed after him.

In his right hand he held his sword, and in his left the other pistol.

The landlord darted to the door and pulled it open.

He then stood at the top of the flight of stairs.

Claude saw that if he was not speedy in his movements the man would be off, and being acquainted with all the intricacies of the place would probably escape, or perhaps summon some associate to his assistance.

These were both two very undesirable things indeed, and Claude felt that he must adopt summary means to provide against them.

Accordingly he raised his second pistol and fired.

The bullet struck the landlord in the back, and came out at his breast.

He uttered a dismal yell, and throwing up his arms, fell headlong down the staircase.

So suddenly did all this take place, that Sixteen-String Jack had only just time to get off the bed and come to Claude's side.

What he saw puzzled and bewildered him.

"Claude," he cried, "what in the world has happened? Where am I? Am I mad or dreaming?"

"Calm yourself, Jack—calm yourself. You must not get excited. I will tell you all presently."

Sixteen-String Jack rubbed his head in a very confused manner. He could not make it out at all. He had not the slightest recollection of his arrival at the "Spotted Dog."

Therefore he looked at the dimly-lighted chamber with very peculiar feelings.

Claude was not sure the ostler was dead, so he approached him with the candle to look.

One glance was enough.

The man was quite dead.

He had now to ascertain the condition of the landlord, who he had not heard move after reaching the bottom of the staircase.

The fearful fall he had had without the wound was quite enough to kill any ordinary man, but then Claude knew very well that gentry of his class took, in a general way, a great deal of killing.

So, with the candle in his grasp, he descended the little flight of stairs.

The body of the landlord lay in a huddled-up mass at the bottom.

"Hold the light, Jack," said Claude to his comrade, who had followed him downstairs. "Hold the light, and let us see whether the wretch is really alive or not."

A groan followed these words.

It came from the object at their feet, and at once let Claude know the rascally landlord was not dead.

Sixteen-String Jack, however, took the light, and Claude stooped down over the prostate form.

It was rather repugnant to his feelings to touch the wounded wretch, but he noticed he was lying in a very peculiar manner, so he mastered his feelings and turned him over with his foot.

The moment this was done, a yell, apparently of dreadful agony, came from the landlord's lips.

It was followed by a gush of blood from the mouth.

Then a spasm of shudder seemed to convulse the whole body.

That was death.

Sixteen-String Jack was so bewildered at what he saw, and so utterly incapable of comprehending it, that he gazed at Claude like a man in a dream.

But Duval, being assured that the two assassins were quite dead, resolved to give him some explanation, which would clear his mind from the mists of doubt which hung over it.

"Come," he said, addressing Jack, and stepping over the dead body of the landlord as he spoke. "Follow me, and I will relieve you of your astonishment and bewilderment. But first tell me how do you feel—are you better?"

Sixteen-String Jack passed his hand over his eyes in a bewildered sort of way, as he replied—

"Oh! yes. I recollect now. I was wounded."

"Yes, by the patrol."

"And we escaped."

"Yes, but that is not an answer to my question. Do you feel better?"

"I am very weak and faint."

"I was afraid so."

"But I find myself better each moment."

"Come on, then. A little drop of wine will put you right beyond a doubt."

"But, where are we to get it?"

"I will try to find some."

"I can tell you this, Claude. If I quite understood

that has just taken place, I should feel very much better."

"Say you so; then I will tell you in a half-a-dozen words."

Claude then rapidly made his companion acquainted with those circumstances which are already well known to the reader, and which consequently do not require recapitulation.

Jack's astonishment was very great.

"I had no idea, Claude," he said, "that such atrocities could possibly be perpetrated."

"Nor I. But from the few words uttered by the two villains, and the stain upon the bed, it is pretty clear they make a regular system of decoying people here during the night, and then murdering them."

"We have had a narrow escape, my friend, and the sooner we get away from this place, I think, the better."

"And so do I; but do you think you are strong enough?"

"I fancy so."

"I am glad to hear that; but still I should recommend you to adhere to my advice, and have a drop of wine—that will give your blood new vigour."

"But where are we to find any?"

"Why, without doubt, there is some in the house, so we have nothing else to do but look."

"Then here goes for an exploring expedition."

"Just so."

"And who knows what else we may find!"

These words were uttered in a tone of deep significance, and as though the speaker quite expected to make some discovery.

"I will carry the candle, Claude," said Jack, "and then I shall at least be making myself useful, if no more."

"Agreed."

In this way the two friends made their way through several rooms on the ground floor, but without seeing anything unusual, and without finding what they sought.

At length, opening a door, they felt a gush of cool air upon their faces, and upon closer examination they found that before them was a flight of brick steps, leading apparently to the cellars.

They hesitated a moment, in doubt whether they should or should not descend and prosecute their as yet unresultful search any farther.

Claude made up his mind that the cellar should at least be searched. He was very anxious that Jack should not set out on his return journey to London without a stimulant of some kind.

Accordingly, he called to his companion to follow, and commenced the descent of the steps.

But not until he had his sword handy in his grasp, so as to be prepared to meet any attack that might be made upon him.

The steps were slippery and steep, and, in order to feel sure of his footing, he soon discovered the necessity of holding the wall with his left hand.

The steps were about twelve in number.

The bottom was reached without the occurrence of any accident, and then they found they were standing upon sawdust, with which the floor of the cellar was literally covered.

A number of barrels were now disclosed to view.

It was some time, however, before they found, stocked in a corner, a number of bottles.

Claude took one from the top of the heap; and, as he held it in his hand, a fresh thought struck him—namely, that it would be dangerous to a degree to drink anything they found in that murder den, for fear it should either be drugged or poisoned.

The same thought struck Sixteen-String Jack at the very same moment, for he said—

"Claude, we have had our trouble for nothing; I should feel afraid of drinking anything we found here."

"And so should I, though the thought did not occur to me until just this moment."

"Nor to me."

"Depend upon it, the best thing we can do is to make the best of our way back to London, and the sooner we reach old Matthew's, the better.

"So say I, but do you think you are equal to the journey?"

"Oh! yes."

"Come on, then."

"Where are the horses?"

"I'll be hanged if I know."

"Did you not see them stabled?"

"No; the fact was, I was so engaged with you—for you swooned as soon as you got off your steed—that I never troubled about the horses, but left them to the ostler."

"The chap you shot upstairs?"

"Yes."

"Then I think the best thing we can do is to set about finding them at once, and——But hark, what is that?"

"What—what?"

"Hark!"

CHAPTER CCCXXXIX.

THE POLICE-OFFICERS MAKE A DESPERATE ATTACK UPON THE "SPOTTED DOG."

BOTH the highwaymen assumed listening attitudes, and then there came to their ears with undesirable distinctness a loud knocking, as though some one was hammering at a door demanding admittance.

There could be no sort of mistake about the character of the sound, and our friends looked rather inquiringly in each other's faces as they wondered who in the world it could be.

Bang—bang—bang!

The knocks succeeded each other with a rapidity which spoke well of the flexibility of the muscles of the person who struck them.

It was a simultaneous impulse which made Claude and Jack, without saying a word to each other, rush in the direction of the steps leading out of the cellar.

They ascended them at full speed, the din of the knocking all the while sounding in their ears.

On reaching the bar they hurriedly opened the door leading into the passage which led from the front to the back of the inn.

They were then certain upon a point of which they had had some doubts before, and that was, that the knocking was at the front, or principal door of the inn.

A very interesting question was now suggested to them, and that was, who could those persons be who were outside?

Were they friends or enemies?

They scarcely thought it possible that those officers from whom they had had such a narrow escape, could have tracked them to their present destination.

But, if not, who could those be who demanded admission in so clamorous a manner?

They did not knock like guests.

Very soon, however, all doubts were set at rest as to who the parties were, for the hammering ceased a moment, and then some one said, in a loud and commanding tone of voice—

"Open—open! Open in the king's name. We call upon you in the name of the king, to open this door, and we give you notice that, if you do not obey us at once, we will break in! Open, in the name of the king! We are his officers of police!"

After these words, it was quite a matter of impossibility for Claude and Jack to have any sort of doubt respecting those who were at the front door.

They were police-officers, unquestionably.

They might not be those they had encountered—their errand to the "Spotted Dog" Inn might be wholly unconnected with them, but whether this was so or not, it was quite clear that the best thing our friends could do would be to get away from the ill-omened spot with all possible speed.

This, however would be attended with a good deal of difficulty, for when the police attacked a house like they did this inn, they generally took pretty effective measures to prevent anyone leaving surreptitiously.

And, unfortunately, as we have already described, Claude, upon his arrival, had felt his attention so wholly attracted to his wounded comrade that he forgot the horses, and neglected to perform the necessary duty of seeing where they were housed, and making himself sufficiently familiar with the place to be able to find his way there alone without hesitation or delay.

Now that he had, probably for the first time in his life, omitted this, he realized its full importance.

Could he have only known where the stable was, he felt the rest he would have to do in making his escape



THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE VISITS TOM KING IN THE CONDEMNED CELL.

would be comparatively easy, though in reality such would not be the case.

His ignorance upon this point was, however, as all our readers can see, a very serious matter indeed.

There was not, either, any time for deliberation, for the officers, having repeated their formula and found that no more notice was taken than on the preceding occasions, had set about demolishing the door in good earnest.

It was a strong door, being wholly made of oak, and defended with oaken beams placed horizontally across it, but it was not strong enough to withstand such heavy blows as the police-officers now rained upon it.

At first the blows only sounded like hard knocks, being clear, sharp, and distinct, but they very quickly changed their character, and a crashing noise succeeded.

It was the stout oak door splitting and giving way in all directions.

This was quite enough to unnerve any one, but it was particularly calculated to produce that effect upon our friends.

It was very important that they should not be captured and kept prisoners for a short time even, for if so, then Dick Turpin and Tom King would assuredly perish at Tyburn, for who was there to render them assistance if they were prevented?

And it was having this responsibility upon their minds which made Claude and Jack lose a great deal of that self-possession upon which they so prided themselves, and which was so very necessary to them.

What was to be done?

The door was clearly giving way, and ere many more minutes passed away, the officers would certainly have it down.

Opposite to this front door was another much smaller, one which, from its position, the highwaymen fancied must lead somewhere at the back of the inn.

But, if they opened it, they would probably expose themselves to much danger.

There was a strong probability that a portion of the officers had taken up their positions there.

And yet, on the other hand, they might not have done so.

But what a fearful risk it was to run to ascertain whether they were or not!

Better that, however, than remain where they were with the certain knowledge that the police would be face to face with them in a moment or two.

If any were at the back door, they thought surely they would ere this have demonstrated their presence by making an attack upon it.

They must run the risk.

Having their weapons ready in their grasp, so that, if occasion required, they should be able to make immediate use of them, they quietly drew aside the fastenings which secured the back door.

Then they opened it gently a little way.

There was nothing to cause alarm as yet.

Emboldened by this, they hastily pulled the door wide open upon its hinges, passed out as swiftly as they could, closed it after them, and stood with their backs placed against it in attitudes of defence.

At this moment there was a tremendous crash, which announced the fact that the officers had at last succeeded in breaking down the front door.

Claude and Jack peered eagerly around them, but they could see nothing of the police-officers.

This was a great load off their minds, so, sheathing their swords, they proceeded to make a search among the out-buildings.

The back of the inn, they found, was built close against the large plantation of which we have made mention, and what yard there was had been formed by clearing away a few of the trees.

There were several sheds, apparently of wood, contiguous to the main building, and these the highwaymen very naturally imagined would form the stabling.

Accordingly they directed their steps towards them.

Before, however, they had gone half-a-dozen paces in that direction, a loud voice cried—

"Who goes there? Stand, or I fire!"

Our friends stopped instantly, for the threat just uttered might be the opposite of an unmeaning one.

Looking in the direction from which the voice proceeded, the two highwaymen perceived a dusky figure hastening towards them.

Another voice now uttered the same words, and another form came running towards the fugitives.

The alarm was spreading.

Doubtless, if it came to an encounter, Claude and Jack would have proved more than a match for these police-officers, for such they were; but then the time occupied by the struggle would enable the other officers to come up with them, and the issue of a contest with, perhaps, four times their number would be very doubtful indeed.

There seemed to be no resource but immediate flight.

It was certain they would have to abandon all idea of getting their horses out of the stable, at any rate for the present.

But the plantation was within a few yards of them, and they dashed off in the direction of it at once, for its leafy coverts were well adapted for concealment.

The officers now began to appear in greater numbers, for they had heard something unusual was taking place, though they did not know what.

Quickly, however, they saw the flying forms of the two highwaymen, as well as the course they were taking, and they put forth their speed, not in the endeavour to overtake them, but to intercept them.

But they were too late to practise this manœuvre successfully.

Seeing this, they called to them to surrender, but no heed was taken of their words, so, fearful of losing their prey altogether, the police-officers drew their pistols and fired.

But the distance was too great for the clumsy, ill-constructed weapons which they carried to be effective, and the bullets crashed harmlessly among the trees.

One more dash, and then Claude and Jack found themselves fairly among the branches.

A sensation of comparative safety now came over them, for among the intricacies of such a place as that the officers would have the greatest difficulty in following them.

The trees grew very close together, and there was, too, an exaggerated growth of underwood.

Both these circumstances impeded their progress greatly.

But they plunged boldly into the recesses of the plantation, quite heedless of the numerous bruises and scratches they received.

The officers fired again, but this discharge was, if possible, more harmless than its predecessor.

And now Claude and Jack began to think that, after all, the loss of their horses was not so serious a thing as they at first thought.

If they had mounted and rode away, the officers would have been very close indeed behind them.

They might not have come up with them, and yet they might have dogged their footsteps into London.

It was quite certain if they had been on horseback they could not have availed themselves of the protection which the plantation afforded them, for the simple reason that it was quite impassable to horses.

So out of these circumstances our friends gathered new hope, and crashed on through the underwood, each moment penetrating deeper and deeper into the plantation, and each moment becoming more and more involved in the darkness which prevailed there.

For this they cared little, because there was all the more difficulty for their pursuers to see them.

They made all speed possible, being satisfied that if they could once get out of the hearing of the police, they should be able to escape from them altogether.

As it was, the loud crashing of the branches and the crackling of the twigs as they forced their way through them, formed a capital guide for their pursuers.

See them they could not, for Jack and Claude could scarcely see a yard before their own faces.

From time to time, however, the officers, as if to show how determined a pursuit they were making, called out to the highwaymen to surrender, and fired their pistols.

But all this was quite useless.

Sixteen-String Jack several times felt his strength fail him, for he was by no means equal to such violent exertion; but each time he felt the sensation of weakness come over him, he shook it off with a vigorous effort.

It is wonderful what capability the mind has of subduing the body to it.

Sixteen-String Jack kept on, and was very little in the rear of his unwounded comrade.

Gradually, to their great relief and joy, they heard the sounds which the officers made in pursuit grow fainter and fainter.

They were either falling off, or else they had taken some wrong direction.

Fancying that it might be the latter, and that the sound of their progress might bring them on the right track again, our friends stopped still and listened.

They could then hear the officers forcing a passage through the dense vegetation which covered the ground.

It was then that Sixteen-String Jack made a suggestion which, from the simplicity of it, is a wonder had not entered their minds before.

"Let us ascend one of these trees, Claude. If we are not seen or heard we shall be quite safe, and we shall be able to remain there until the officers have left the spot. Then we can descend, and act as we may in the meantime determine."

"Agreed," said Claude. "That is, I fancy, about the best thing you could do. Ascend first, and I will assist you. I shall not be far behind."

With this Claude assisted Jack to climb the lower part of the trunk of the tree, and as soon as he caught a fair hold of the branches, he left him to himself, while he began to climb also.

In doing this he was careful to make as little noise as possible, for every moment he could hear the sounds which indicated the approach of the police-officers grow plainer and plainer.

To Claude the feat of climbing a tree was an easy one, and he was soon ensconced among the leaves of an umbrageous chestnut, and seated by the side of his old comrade in arms.

They did not venture to speak, lest the sound of their voices should reach the ears of the police-officers and betray them, nor did they move after having once seated themselves.

With some anxiety and suspense they now stretched their sense of hearing to the utmost.

On came the officers, crashing their way through the trees.

The murmur of their voices presently became heard.

It was in vain that the two highwaymen peered down, and strove to pierce the darkness beneath them. It was too intense, and, moreover, the leaves of the chestnut-tree effectually hid the ground from their sight.

CHAPTER CCCXL.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK ELUDE THE OFFICERS IN THE PLANTATION, BUT RUN AGAIN INTO THE LION'S MOUTH.

THEY had, therefore, only their sense of hearing to depend upon, and this faculty they stretched to its utmost extent.

Louder and louder grew the sounds, until, at length, the two highwaymen were certain that their foes were actually beneath the tree in which they were hidden.

They were talking loudly to each other, and the highwaymen easily distinguished what was said.

"Stop a minute," said a voice, "it's no good going on like this. Stop a minute, and then, perhaps, we shall hear something of them, for, curse me! it's so dark, there's no seeing a yard before you!"

The police-officers came to a halt, and then there was silence of a few minutes' duration.

They were listening, no doubt.

Claude and Jack took care not to make the slightest movement in the tree so as to attract suspicion towards them.

"I can't hear anything," said the voice which had before spoken, and which, doubtless, belonged to the officer who had some sort of command over the others; "I can't hear anything, and as for hunting for them in this dark place without any clue, why, it's nothing but d—d folly, so let's go back to the inn."

"The place seems as silent as the grave, sir," said another voice.

"It does. The rascals have doubtless hidden themselves somewhere, and if so, we might look for ever without finding them. Follow me. We will go back to the inn, where doubtless we are wanted."

The trampling of feet followed this speech, as the officers turned round to make their way back to the inn.

In a few minutes the sounds of their retreat completely died away, and then Sixteen-String Jack commenced the descent of the tree.

But Claude Duval laid his hand upon his arm, and arrested his further progress, saying as he did so—

"Stop a minute, Jack. It may not be quite judicious to quit our place of concealment so soon. These officers consider themselves artful fellows, and they may have merely made the speech we overheard in the hope of being able to throw us off our guard."

There was some sense in this, so Sixteen-String Jack acquiesced at once, and made no further movement.

But in a low tone of voice Claude Duval addressed him.

"What do you think of these officers, Jack?"

"In what way?"

"I mean, do you think they knew of whom they were in pursuit?"

"No I do not."

"Nor do I."

"If they had, they would not have relinquished the pursuit as they appear to have done. My view of the case is this. The authorities have in some way become acquainted with atrocities which have unquestionably been perpetrated at the 'Spotted Dog,' and these police-officers have been dispatched to take those who were found in the inn into custody, and when they saw us escaping they took us for the rascally gang."

"That is precisely my view of the case, Jack. I don't for a moment think that they suspect who we are, and I feel pretty sure these officers are not the same that pursued us after our encounter with the patrol."

"So am I, or they would have arrived much sooner than we did, for we left no clue behind by which they could follow us."

"Certainly not."

"The officers will find, though, when they enter, that we have been rather beforehand with them."

"They will, indeed. Do you think it will be safe to descend now?"

"We will listen a moment first."

"Agreed."

The highwaymen listened intently for some time, but nothing save the rustling of the tree-tops, as they were dashed backwards and forwards by the wind, reached their ears.

"All is still," said Claude, at length.

"Yes, all seems still."

"Before we attempt to descend, however, I think there would be no harm in considering our position a little."

"I was going to propose the same thing."

"In the first place, then, we ought to get back to London as soon as possible, but how are we to do it?"

"That is just the question."

"We are some distance from town, and I am sure the state of your wounds is such that, after the exertion you have already undergone, it will be impossible for you to walk the distance."

"I fear so; but even if it was possible, we should have to relinquish all ideas of such a thing because of the time it would necessarily take."

"But what are we to do? Our horses are gone."

"Don't you think it possible to regain them?"

"How?"

"By going to the stable, and trying to get them out unperceived."

"That would be running a very great risk."

"I know that; but just think of the advantage that would be gained by it."

"I admit that."

"For my own part, I am inclined to think that as yet the officers are quite unaware of the horses being in the stable, and, if so, we might creep back quietly, enter unknown to them, mount in the stable, and be off at full speed before they are aware of it."

"It is a bold plan."

"But a good one."

"I think so."

"Then let us lose no time in setting about it. Admitting our conjectures to be true, the officers will have quite enough to do in searching the inn, without troubling about the outbuildings."

"Very likely."

"Come on, then, at once, for if we are to make the attempt at all, the sooner we make it the better. As it is, I fear we shall have some ado to reach old Matthew's before dawn."

"I am ready."

"Descend, then, and I shall be glad if you will assist me."

"I shall do that willingly enough, you may depend."

Claude Duval lowered himself easily, and then, catching hold of a branch, swung for a moment and dropped to the ground.

He assistad his wounded comrade also.

Upon reaching the ground, however, they found themselves in rather a serious dilemma.

All around them was as dark as pitch.

In coming from the inn, the two highwaymen had been too much occupied in escaping from their pursuers to take any notice of the route they had taken, and now they found as they stood at the foot of the tree that they had not the remotest idea in which direction the inn lay.

They had turned round and round so often that they had quite lost their bearings.

They stood undecided for a moment, and then suddenly they heard the report of a pistol.

It was no difficult matter for them to say with certainty from which direction the sound came.

What it meant they knew not, but they faced round towards it.

It seemed to indicate the whereabouts of the officers, and as a matter of course, of the "Spotted Dog" also.

In this direction they proceeded, using the greatest possible amount of caution.

How far they had penetrated into the plantation they had no very definite idea, but they felt sure, from the speed they had made, that it must be a considerable distance.

They kept on for some time, however in profound darkness, but apparently without coming any nearer to the boundary of the plantation, which they might naturally expect to be indicated by the trees growing at a greater distance from each other.

Suddenly, however, the two highwaymen perceived a faint light glittering before them, and after some hesitation, they advanced cautiously towards it.

On a nearer approach they found that this light proceeded from one of the windows of the inn, which was not far off on the left hand of where they stood.

This light formed an excellent beacon for them, and enabled them to make direct for their destination.

At every few steps they would pause and listen.

But hearing nothing alarming, they gathered more confidence.

At length they saw before them, just dimly visible in the darkness, the outlines of the sheds which appeared to belong to the "Spotted Dog" inn.

With the stealthy tread of Red Indians on the war-trail, Claude and Jack crept towards these sheds, keeping as much as possible in the dense shadows that fell everywhere around.

To their joy and satisfaction they at last reached them, without having raised an alarm of any kind.

After a time they found a door, which they opened.

As soon as it swung back upon its hinges, the unmistakable odour of stables saluted their nostrils, and convinced them that they had reached their proper destination.

With every confidence, then, they stepped inside and closed the door behind them.

Claude then ventured to produce a light.

He gave it to Sixteen-String Jack to hold, and then looked about him.

He found himself standing in stables of rather a spacious character, and such as one would scarcely have expected to find in such a situation.

There were but two horses in the stalls, and those the highwaymen immediately recognised as their own.

"Look here, Jack," said Claude, as they went close to the animals. "This shows the necessity of always following the plan we have adopted of first of all seeing our horses properly attended to."

And, indeed, the sight before them was ample evidence of the truth of Claude's remark.

The horses had been led into the stables just as they were, and never touched.

They had not been rubbed down, and the mud, with which they were plentifully bosprinkled, had caked upon them in large masses.

None of the trappings had been removed. They stood there saddled and bridled, in fact, just as they were when Claude and Jack alighted.

The mangers were quite empty, and it was pretty certain the horses had neither had anything to eat or to drink.

At any other time the discovery of this would have produced a great deal more anger in their breasts than it did; but the fact is, the feeling was submerged in the anxiety they felt to get away.

They turned the horses round in the stalls, and prepared to mount, but, just at that moment, they heard a hurried trampling of feet.

They listened.

The sound approached them.

Dreading the worst, Jack put out the little bit of lighted candle he held in his hand, and ran to the door.

Looking through it, he saw a number of police-officers in the yard of the inn.

They carried lanterns, and one of them extemporized a kind of cresset, such as were used by the watch in olden times.

This diffused a bright ruddy light.

They came in a straight line to the door of the stables, and the only inference to be derived from this was that our friends had been seen to enter it.

Jack did not wait to see any more, but closed the door at once, and rapidly secured it by means of a couple of huge bolts and a swinging bar, which his sense of touch easily enabled him to discover.

This done, he waited rather anxiously for the result.

His apprehensions might be without foundation.

Time would soon decide that.

The officers advanced steadily in a direct line to the stable door.

They reached it in another moment, and then the doubts and fears which the two highwaymen entertained were completely set at rest.

In the first place, they tried to open the door, but finding the attempt a fruitless one, they struck some heavy blows upon it, and called upon those within to surrender.

The two highwaymen seemed now to be in a more perilous position than before.

How were they to escape?

There seemed to be but one mode of egress from the stable, and that was the door by which they had entered, and which was now commanded by their foes.

They remained profoundly still after the officers had called upon them to surrender.

But, if they hoped by this course to induce a belief from the minds of the officers that they were not there, it was a total failure.

The next words that were uttered quite testified this.

"You may as well open the door and submit quietly," said a voice, "because we know you are here, and have surrounded the stable that you cannot possibly escape, so give in at once, and your lives shall be spared."

To this speech Claude and Jack paid no more attention than they did to the other.

The officer who had spoken waited a moment in anticipation of receiving a reply, but finding none came, he cried, in a voice of exasperation—

"Curse them! how much more trouble are they going to give us? I am sick of this sort of work, and I don't mean to put up with it any longer. Down with the door, my men! Down with it! We will capture the rascals either dead or alive. It don't matter a dump to us which. Come on. Down with it!"

A succession of heavy blows upon the door followed these words, which showed that the officers had set about breaking it down in right good earnest.

Leaving them to this work, we will turn our attention to what Claude and Jack were about.

The door was a very ill-fitting one, and in it there were numerous chinks.

Through any of these a tolerably good view of the yard could be obtained.

What they saw was anything but encouraging.

Round the door, in a compact mass, was about a dozen men, all police officers, as their dress fully indicated.

They were armed with various heavy weapons, all of which were well calculated for the execution of the task they had before them.

"What was to be done?"

This was the question the two highwaymen asked themselves as they looked anxiously and inquiringly into each other's faces.

It is probable at this moment, finding themselves environed with so much danger, that they repented of having been so temerarious as to return to the inn after having once got clear of it.

CHAPTER CCCXLI.

THE POSITION OF CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK IN THE STABLE OF THE "SPOTTED DOG" BECOMES CRITICAL.

THE din made by the officers hammering on the door was something terrific, and had a rather confusing effect upon the intellects of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

Just for the satisfaction of the reader we will break off our narrative, and, in as few words as possible, simply state what officers they were who made this attack upon the "Spotted Dog" inn.

We may begin, then, by stating that the two highwaymen were perfectly correct in the conclusions they came to. The errand of the officers to the inn was in no way connected with them.

The fact was, that some rumours of rather a disagreeable character, respecting the proceedings at the "Spotted Dog," had reached the ears of the police authorities, and, having received some rather definite information, they thought it high time to send a force to the spot in order to ascertain whether what they had heard really was or was not the truth.

Hence their arrival in strong numbers, and, finding the front door secured — for the intended murderers had taken the precaution to fasten it—they gave the noisy summons for admission which had reached the ears of our friends while in the cellar.

Before attacking the door in this manner, the officer in command had posted several of the men in various posi-

tions round the inn, with instructions to raise an immediate alarm if they saw any one attempting to leave the premises.

We have seen how this was done when Claude and Jack endeavoured to cross the yard of the inn.

The officers of police never dreamt for a moment that the two men they were pursuing were no other than Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack; if they had been aware of it, they would have been more energetic than they were.

They were baffled in the intricacies of the plantation, and forced to beat a retreat without having accomplished their errand.

With an audacity that was really wonderful, the two highwaymen returned to the stable.

They were seen to enter it by one of the officers, who had the prudence not to raise an alarm which should reach the ears of those they wished to capture, but hastened off to the chief to communicate the intelligence quietly.

The result of this we have seen.

The officers came in a body, and attacked the door of the stable with a vigour and determination that bid fair to have it down in a very few minutes indeed.

The position of the highwaymen was critical in the extreme.

But they soon recovered themselves from their surprise, and coolly set about making a rapid examination of the stable, in order to find, if possible, some means of egress from it.

In this, however, they were unsuccessful. It was clear there was but one means by which the stables could be entered or left, and that one was commanded by the police-officers.

What must be done? they again asked themselves, and this time with increased anxiety.

To be sure, they might have adopted the desperate expedient of flinging open the door and making a sudden sortie.

But there was so much risk about that course.

Had those who were opposed to them been any other than trained men, or had there been fewer of them than there were, they would unquestionably have availed themselves of this hazardous expedient, but as things stood they rather shrank from doing so.

It was too much to hope that they could succeed in taking these men by surprise, and dashing through their ranks before they recovered themselves.

"I can see but one other chance," said Sixteen-String Jack to his comrade in a hasty whisper; "and I have serious doubts as to the practicability of that."

"What is it? Speak, be quick. Another moment and he door will be down."

Sixteen-String Jack cast an uneasy glance towards the door, and saw that what his companion said was only too true, and that the officers would quickly demolish the only impediment which stood between them and entering.

"Look at the back of the shed, Claude," said Jack. "It seems to me that the boarding is very rotten, and that we might make a breach in it in a few moments."

"What is there on the other side?"

"I have peeped through one of the numerous crevices, and there seems to be a kind of lane."

"What a pity we did not think of that before. Now, I am afraid, it is too late."

"No—no. Do not say that. The door holds bravely upon its hinges, but it is the bar which we put up that does that. Just look at the back of the shed."

Claude hastened to comply with his comrade's request, and found that what he said was quite correct.

The shed was wholly built of wood, and this, in some parts, seemed in the last stage of decay. No doubt this was where the boarding had been more exposed to the influence of the weather.

As Jack had said, there were numerous crevices, and looking through one of these, he saw that the only thing which interposed between them and the narrow lane in which the inn stood was a few rotten wooden planks.

Hope rose in his breast in a moment, and he cried to Jack in a low, but exultant tone of voice—

"We are free—we are free! Lend me your assistance, and in less than a moment we shall have a breach large enough for us to lead the horses through with comparative ease!"

Jack did not require to be told this twice, but proceeded to assist his comrade with the greatest good will.

A vigorous push sent one of the planks flying into the lane, and when one was gone the removal of the rest was easy.

Indeed, the boards gave way before the pressure that was applied to them, just as though they were so much pasteboard, and, in far less time than it takes us to write it, they had made a hole large enough to lead the horses through.

The crashing blows which the police continued to deliver upon the door, effectually drowned the slight noise which our friends made, and they were quite in ignorance of what they were about.

But when Claude and Jack mounted, which they did before they attempted to pass through the breach, they glanced at the door, and saw that it had quite lost its perpendicularity, and that a very few more blows must level it with the ground.

Indeed, this was done before they could properly seat themselves in their saddles.

As the hole was just in front of the door—or rather just opposite to it—the officers saw in a moment what had taken place, and, with a yell of dismay upon their lips, they dashed into the stable.

But the highwaymen were too quick for them.

One touch with the spur upon the flanks of the high-mettled horses made them bound through the aperture in a moment.

Sixteen-String Jack went through first, and Claude Duval followed, but there was so little time between the two actions that any one would have declared they occurred simultaneously.

"Fire—fire!" yelled the officer in command. "Fire—fire! Ten thousand curses! they will escape us yet."

The officers drew their pistols from their belts as hastily as they could, and fired an irregular volley.

It had not the slightest effect, however, for the persons at whom they fired were not within range.

The chief officer appeared to be in a state of great exasperation. No doubt, from the kind of resistance he had met with, the suspicion dawned upon his mind that those of whom he was in pursuit were not exactly what he thought they were.

Having leaped through the hole in the stable, the two highwaymen turned their horses' heads, and sped down the lane at a rate that soon left the "Spotted Dog" behind, and made any attempt of the officers to overtake them quite futile.

The high-road was soon gained, and, without saying a word or relaxing their speed in the slightest, they turned in the direction of London.

There was good policy in thus at once placing as great a distance as possible between their enemies and themselves, because it made pursuit all the more difficult.

They had, too, another motive for making all speed which was quite independent of the last.

It was this.

The many strange adventures which had befallen them upon that most eventful night, had occupied a great deal of time, and, by glancing up at the sky, they could see that they would have very great difficulty indeed in reaching London before it was fairly daylight.

The worst of it was, too, that their horses were tired, and not in condition to put forth much speed, while Sixteen-String Jack was by far too weak to endure any violent exertion.

It is really wonderful, when we take into consideration the nature and extent of the injuries he has received, that he should have borne up against their effects in the remarkable manner he has.

But, then, he had a powerful incentive.

Now, however, that a great deal of the excitement which had been the means of keeping him up had passed away, the reaction commenced, and every now and then a sensation of deadly weakness would come over him, and he would fairly reel in his saddle.

This was in consequence of the immense quantity of blood he had lost.

With regard to the wounds themselves, they were not at all of a dangerous character, and, doubtless, a day's rest at the "White Horse" inn, together with the skilful attentions of old Matthew, would put him all right for the night.

The reader will please to bear in mind that it is now early on Sunday morning—that Sunday preceding the Monday which was fixed for the execution of Tom King.

Time was short, and, as yet, there was very little done towards effecting the escape of the two highwaymen from Newgate.

Still, if all went well they saw very little grounds for apprehension.

More than once Claude and Jack reined in their steeds and listened for any sounds betokening pursuit, but nothing of the kind struck upon their ears.

Every moment now they found it grew rapidly lighter, and yet they were a long way from their destination.

They continued to urge on their exhausted horses, however, and, by means of whip and spur, maintained a tolerable speed.

One thing, it being Sunday morning, people were not likely to be up so early as on any other morning during the week, so they would not run quite so much risk of detection.

On their way to the metropolis they did not meet with a single person, or an adventure worthy of recording.

By the time they had fairly entered London, it was broad daylight.

People were abroad lounging listlessly about the streets and many of them casting inquiring glances at our friends whose appearances were calculated to excite suspicion.

They were covered with mud, and as for Sixteen-String Jack, he was besmeared from head to foot with the blood which had flowed from his wounds.

In this plight they could not fail to attract attention.

According to the arrangement which had been made, our two friends rode up to the front of Montague-house, the spot from which they had started.

Here they found a man waiting for the horses.

He came up to them as soon as they arrived, and assisted them to dismount.

The distance from Montague-house to the top of Drury-lane is very short, and so Claude and Jack soon reached it.

Once beneath the shadow of its houses they felt that they were tolerably safe, for then this thoroughfare boasted even more courts than it does now.

The "White Horse" was reached without any hindrance being offered them.

Both kept a sharp look-out, but they saw no one whose appearance seemed foe-like to them.

They turned down White Horse-yard, and knocked at the secret door. They were necessitated to do this, because the front of the house was closed.

The door was opened almost as soon as their summons was given upon it.

Old Matthew had been on the watch for them all night, and when dawn came without the highwaymen having arrived, he grew agitated in the extreme.

He feared the worst.

His joy at seeing them was proportionally great.

The door was quickly closed behind them.

Refreshments were already laid upon the table in the parlour behind the bar, and Claude and Jack did ample justice to the good things set before them.

Old Matthew had some knowledge of surgery, and he washed and dressed Sixteen-String Jack's wounds in a manner that would have been no discredit to a professor of the art.

They then communicated to him the successful result of their excursion on the highway.

They poured out their booty upon the table before him, and he was really astonished at the amount.

"There will be a devil of a row about this," he said.

"Never mind."

"Well—well, the risk must be run. And now I must beg of you to take my advice."

"What is that?"

"To go and lie down and get all the sleep you possibly can till dusk. I will call you then without fail, and it will be quite time for you to set about your business then."

"Quite time."

"Follow me, then, and get your strength up, for you don't know what you may have to do. Be thankful that you have succeeded so well as you have."

"Lead on, Matthew; we shall be glad enough to follow you; and if, while we are resting, you can get a change of apparel for both of us, we shall be very grateful."

"It shall be done."

Old Matthew led the highwaymen upstairs to a sleeping chamber, and there left them to prepare themselves in the best manner they were able for the startling events that were to happen that night.

The day passed away quietly enough, and without the occurrence of any incident of an alarming or threatening character.

CHAPTER CCCXLII.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK VISIT THE THIEVES' KEN IN HANGING-SWORD-ALLEY, WHITEFRIARS.

Conformably with the promise he had made, old Matthew awoke Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack just as dusk was coming on.

They changed their apparel for some which he had provided for them, and then they descended the stairs and partook of a hearty meal.

While they were discussing this, they talked over their plans, and speculated upon the probabilities of their coming to a successful issue.

"I have ascertained one important fact for you," said old Matthew.

"What is it?"

"Why, that the largest meeting of the 'family' to-night will take place at the 'Jew's Harp,' in Hanging-Sword-alley, Whitefriars."

"Indeed! That bit of intelligence is of the utmost importance."

"I know that."

"We shall certainly proceed there. Until you spoke, we were wondering where we should go, but now you have decided us."

"Just so."

"Do you know what time the meeting is to take place?"

"No, but I should recommend you to get there early."

"We will start at once."

"I think that will be the best plan. You can rely upon the assistance of all the family."

"I am glad to hear that; and they won't have their trouble for nothing."

"Go—go. I am most anxious for this business to be over. If your plans were to miscarry, it would be all over with poor Tom; and if he was to come to grief, I know you would never forgive yourselves."

"I am certain we should not."

"Take every precaution, then. If you fail, Tom King has only fourteen hours to live."

A clock struck the hour of six as Matthew spoke.

"We will do our best, you may depend, and no one can do more. But quiet your apprehensions. In seven hours' time both Dick Turpin and Tom King will be out of Newgate."

A few more words passed, and then the highwaymen bid old Matthew adieu, for it was very uncertain when they should see each other again.

At a rapid pace, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack made their way from the "White Horse" inn, in Drury Lane, to Hanging-Sword-alley, in Whitefriars.

They said but little to each other upon the road.

Both were busily occupied with their own thoughts, and, moreover, they were fearful of being overheard.

The thieves' ken to which they were proceeding was one of the largest and best known in London, though neither of our friends had ever paid a visit to it.

Still they knew its situation.

With some amount of curiosity, therefore, they looked about them as soon as they had ascended the flight of steps which led into Hanging-Sword-alley.

The place was as dark as pitch, for the alley being narrow, and the houses on each side being very high, a deep shadow was upon the ground.

At first, although they walked up this alley from beginning to end, our friends could see nothing of the "Jew's Harp."

Presently, however, they saw a light appear at the window of a house, the remaining portion of which was in utter darkness.

Towards this they proceeded, and then they saw that it was a public-house.

They had little doubt it was the one they wanted.

The front door stood invitingly open, and there was

nothing whatever which bore a suspicious look about the place.

Upon reaching the bar window, however, they were roughly asked what they wanted.

Claude Duval replied in the peculiar dialect then employed by the thieves in London, and which was as unintelligible to any one not acquainted with it as any foreign language possibly could be.

The countenance of the man who had spoken to the highwaymen underwent a complete change when he heard the few words which Claude uttered.

They were simply an announcement of who they were.

But the man's surprise seemed to be succeeded by a kind of disbelief, for he peered closely into the countenances of both.

Satisfied, however, with his scrutiny, he opened the bar-door and allowed them to enter.

He still spoke in the thieves' dialect, but, as it would be quite incomprehensible to our readers, we will not trouble them with it, but translate as we go on.

"Do you want to attend the meeting here to-night?"

"Yes," replied Claude. "I have a particular proposal to make to the 'family' with respect to Dick Turpin and Tom King, who are, as I daresay you know very well, at this moment prisoners in Newgate."

The man nodded.

"I think they will relish the proposal, and, moreover, it will not be a bootless one, for all who do anything will be well paid for their trouble."

"That's better. There will be a strong gathering here to-night."

"So we were told."

"By whom?"

"Old Matthew."

"What, the landlord of the 'White Horse' in Drury-lane?"

"Yes."

"All right, then. I have no doubts now."

"Then you have had some?"

"Well, you ought not to be offended if I say, yes. You see, we are obliged to be very careful. The grabs are up to all manner of tricks."

"Of course."

"You are full early. The meeting won't take place for a couple of hours yet. Would you like to wait here, or go at once to the room? A few have arrived, but not many."

"If it's all the same to you, we would much rather go where we are least likely to be seen. The grabs are after us, and have given us a great deal of trouble lately. We had a sharp skirmish on the Oxford-road last night."

"Were you on business?"

"Yes."

"Then you had better go into the meeting-room at once, to guard against accidents. The time will soon pass away, and you will find plenty to amuse yourselves with."

"I don't fear that. We came early purposely."

"Will you follow me if you please, gentlemen?"

"Willingly."

The man with whom they had had this brief conversation opened a door which led from the bar into an inner apartment.

As soon as our friends had crossed the threshold, he carefully closed the door after him.

The apartment in which the highwaymen now stood was a small one, and tolerably well illuminated by an oil lamp which hung from the ceiling.

The appearance of this place was ordinary enough, and would not have generated suspicion in the minds of any one.

It was plainly furnished, and when they entered, was apparently unoccupied.

The man made no stay in this room, but walked straight across it in the direction of the fireplace, which was placed so as to be opposite to the door.

On each side of this fireplace were two large cupboards reaching from the ceiling to the floor.

They were closed.

It was not exactly to the fireplace that this man went, followed by Claude and Jack, but to the cupboard on the left-hand side of it.

Taking a small key from his pocket, he unlocked this cupboard, and threw the doors open.

A large recess was then disclosed, looking more like a closet than anything else, and quite destitute of shelves.

The back of this cupboard appeared to be formed of oak wainscoting.

All this was quite fresh to our friends, so they looked at all that was taking place with the interest which novelty produces.

The man walked into this cupboard—for so we must call it for want of a better appellation—and going to the back part of it, he stooped and raised the lower half precisely in the same manner as he would have raised the bottom sash of a window.

It slid up into grooves, and there was the creaking of pulleys, which showed that the principle of construction was the same in both.

When the lower half of the back of the cupboard was thus raised, a gloomy-looking recess was disclosed.

"This way, gentlemen, if you please," said the man, as he stepped aside so as to allow them to pass him. "You will find a flight of steps there, and when you have descended them you will find yourselves in the meeting-room."

Claude and Jack stepped into the cupboard, and upon looking more closely at the gloomy recess, they saw that there was indeed a flight of steps leading down into positive darkness.

Naturally enough, they shrunk a little from descending.

The man noticed their hesitation.

"It's all right," he said. "The stairs are straight and safe. When you get a little lower down, you will see a light."

The highwaymen were forced to content themselves with this assurance, and accordingly they went down the steps.

As soon as both fairly stood upon them, the man who had so far acted as their guide drew down the cleverly-constructed back of the cupboard, and restored it to its ordinary appearance.

Then he closed and locked the cupboard door.

Had they wished to do such a thing, Claude and Jack would have found it rather difficult to effect a retreat.

No such thought, however, entered their minds, and they descended the stairs with a feeling of the utmost security.

Ere long, they saw the light of which the man had spoken.

It was very faint at first, but as they went lower and lower it grew brighter, until at length they found it proceeded from an oil lamp of large dimensions which was hung from the ceiling.

On reaching the bottom of the steps, Claude and Jack saw before them a strong-looking door, which they pushed open at once.

It led into a large department, to which we will devote a line or two of description.

As a matter of course, this chamber was underground; the mere fact of their having descended so many steps as they had was sufficient proof of that.

It was of considerable length, but disproportionately low and narrow.

Down the centre of this place there was a long narrow table, on both sides of which seats were placed.

It was lighted by means of a rude chandelier, consisting of two pieces of wood nailed across each other, and into which candles were fixed.

These were suspended from the roof at uncertain intervals, but as there were several of them, they served to illuminate the apartment tolerably well.

Only two or three people occupied this place when our friends entered, and they were busily talking to each other.

They looked up as Claude and Jack entered, but beyond that they took no kind of notice of their arrival.

They turned back and resumed their conversation.

Claude and Jack sat themselves down close by.

A waiter now made his appearance, and stood before them for orders.

It was said that the best of everything in the shape of drinkables could be had at the "Hanging-Sword" ken, and Claude resolved to test the truth of popular rumour.

Placing a guinea in the waiter's palm, he desired him to bring in a bottle of the best wine there was in the place, and to keep the change himself.

The lad who performed the duties of waiter assigned

the guinea to his pocket with great satisfaction, and soon returned with a bottle of old port, which, upon being tasted, the highwaymen pronounced to be of most excellent quality.

The group of persons who alone seemed to occupy the apartment were talking rather noisily to each other, and Claude and Jack could not avoid overhearing some of the words they uttered.

At first they carried no meaning, but the highwaymen quickly found that the subject of the conversation was the exploits they had performed on the preceding evening.

The account that was given was rather an exaggerated one, and at times our friends could not forbear or control a smile.

The narration, however, was wound up with a piece of intelligence that was quite fresh.

Information of the robbery, and a description of the two robbers, had been forwarded to all the police-officers, and their instructions were to leave no stone unturned and no place unvisited, but, at all risks, to capture these two highwaymen.

It was just as they finished that some fresh arrivals took place, and in less than half-an-hour the huge place was full, which proved the truth of the man's words who said that the gathering would be a large one.

It was a palpable fact that all those who came in cast glances upon Duval and Jack, but beyond this they did not venture to make any recognition, such a proceeding being at variance with the rules of the society.

At last, when all were assembled, the chairman made his appearance, and took his accustomed seat.

There was now some approach to order.

Rising to his feet, the chairman said—

"My pals,—You, as well as myself, I daresay, have been told that there are in our company to-night two gentlemen, who we all feel proud to know are amongst us. You have been told, like me, I make no doubt, that these gentlemen—these ornaments of our profession, as I might call them—have come here to-night with an object in view—with a proposal to make."

"Hear—hear!" cried those assembled, banging their drinking vessels violently upon the table.

"What that proposal is we don't know, but we are very anxious to find out. We shall know soon. Pals all, only this very last night you have heard what a glorious deed these two gentlemen have done. You have heard all the particulars. Well, then, I say we ought to be proud that we have got two such gentlemen in our company to-night."

"So we are—so we are!" shouted the turbulent throng. "Shut up! and let's know what the proposal is."

"Order, pals!" vociferated the chairman. "I hereby call upon the two gentlemen, by name Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, to step forward and state their proposal to the company!"

CHAPTER CCCXLIII.

CLAUDE DUVAL PROPOSES TO THE "FAMILY" THAT THEY SHALL ATTACK NEWGATE, AND RESCUE DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING BY MAIN FORCE.

A PERFECTLY deafening round of applause followed this last speech made by the chairman.

It was quite certain that the utmost curiosity was felt to know what it was that the two famous highwaymen could have to say to them.

They were impatient to a degree.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack forced their way through the throng until they got to the end of the table, and then the former said—

"Gentlemen,—I beg that the first thing you will one and all do will be to drink up whatever you may have before you, so that I may have the pleasure of treating you all round."

The cheer which responded to these words was something tremendous.

The hearts of all present were won at once.

With the greatest avidity they drained their glasses, and placed them on the table before them in an inverted position to show that they had fairly done so.

"Now, gentlemen," cried Claude, "you are at liberty to call for whatever you like, no matter what it is. There's something towards paying for it."

He flung a heavy purse upon the table as he spoke.

"Punch—punch!" cried everybody, as with one voice.

"Punch be it, then," said Claude. "You shall have enough to swim in if you like."

Punch was a drink always in requisition at the ken, and preparations had been made on an extensive scale for the manufacture of a large quantity.

The consequence was that very little time elapsed between the issuing of the order and the steaming drink being placed on the table.

The glasses were all filled, and then the company stood up while the chairman proposed the health of their entertainers.

Of course this toast was drunk with the greatest applause.

As soon as the tumult subsided, the two highwaymen responded, and then Claude said—

"Gentlemen all, fill your glasses again, and fill them this time to the brim, and drink the toast I am about to propose to you."

The glasses were filled, and then, amidst a breathless silence, Claude stood up and spoke as follows:—

"Gentlemen all, the toast I want you to drink is this: May Dick Turpin and Tom King make a speedy escape from the stone jug in the Old Bailey."

Not a sound followed this speech.

The toast was drunk in perfect silence.

The glasses were placed down upon the table without it being broken.

Claude continued.

"By the look of every one of you I can tell that you expect what I am going to say. It is this. Dick Turpin and Tom King are at this moment prisoners in Newgate—you must all know that. You must all know how it was that Dick Turpin was taken prisoner, and confined in one of the cells, so it is not necessary for me to say a word about that."

"Hear—hear!"

"While he was a prisoner, his old comrade, Tom King, anxious to procure his freedom, disguised himself and visited him in his dungeon. But somehow his disguise was detected—he was made a prisoner, and confined in one of the cells also. That was in the cause of friendship."

Murmurs of admiration followed these words.

"You see his design failed. Now, we are the only two friends they had left. We wanted both released from Newgate, but, single-handed, how were we to effect their liberation? We were harassed, too, by the knowledge that we had no time to spare, for to-morrow morning is fixed for Tom King's execution at Tyburn, along with the murderer, Adrian Winberry."

There was a general groan of execration at this announcement.

"Gentlemen all,—The strictest watch is kept in Newgate—the place is trebly guarded. The authorities are determined that these two flowers of our profession shall be at once cut off. But, gentlemen, shall we suffer it? Shall we permit them to have their own way? No, gentlemen; I have a proposal to make to you, and I feel sure you will accede to it. We will do a glorious deed! The stone jug is a disgrace to us—a lasting disgrace! Gentlemen, why should we suffer it to exist? Why should we not level it with the ground? Why should we suffer one stone to stand upon another? Down with it! Down with the stone jug, I say; and we will set Dick Turpin and Tom King at liberty!"

The effect which these few startling words produced, spoken as they were with fiery vehemence, is indescribable.

The fiercest cries came from the lips of those who listened; they rose to their feet and gesticulated violently; but, above all the other cries, came the words, "Down with it—down with it! Down with the stone jug!"

The uproar was perfectly deafening.

It was in vain that Claude Duval held up his hand in an attitude which he spoke his desire for silence.

At first not the least attention was paid to it, but by degrees the turbulence of the assembled company abated, and they turned towards Claude, anxious to hear what further he had to say.

Not, however, until there was the most perfect silence, did he attempt to speak.

"My friends, I think you have caught at the glorious



[THE BURNING OF NEWGATE AND RESCUE OF DICK TURPIN.]

idea which I wished to convey to you, and I think as well that my proposition is very far from being a distasteful one."

"Hear—hear! Hurrah!"

"If you will allow me, however, I will set forth the proposition in much plainer terms than I have done. I will tell you exactly what I wish you to do, and how and when you are to set about it."

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Silence for Claude Duval! Let us hear him!"

Claude, while these words were being uttered, turned round to Sixteen-String Jack, who handed him a bag which was crammed to the mouth with the proceeds of their last night's robbery.

Then he got on to the table, and looked round at the numerous fierce faces by which he was surrounded.

Expectation was the prevailing expression upon all of them.

Claude held up the bag in such a position that every one could see it.

He saw the eyes of the men sparkle as they looked upon it.

When he was sure that every one had looked at it, Claude spoke—

"My friends—you see this bag. It is large—it is heavy. Its contents are the proceeds of the toll which we levied last night upon the passengers in the Oxford coach. That money is destined to be shared equally among you, provided you agree to perform the service I am about to ask of you."

"Hear—hear! Speak—speak! Let us know what we are to do!"

"When I tell you, I daresay you will all be willing enough to bear a share in such a glorious undertaking without receiving any reward for so doing, but the fact of your receiving several guineas each to do something you would be glad to do for nothing, will not abate your ardour, I know."

"Go on—go on!"

"This is the proposal, then. I want every member of

the glorious 'family' to assemble together within two hours from now. I want them to place themselves entirely under the orders of myself and my comrade. We will then lead the way from here to the prison of Newgate, where Dick Turpin and Tom King languish as prisoners in their gloomy cells. When we arrive opposite to this building, which has witnessed the last hours of many a gallant heart, we will rush forward; we will attack it; we will batter down the doors, and force an entrance into its stone corridors; we will release Dick Turpin and Tom King, and all other prisoners who are worthy of liberation"——

"Hurrah—hurrah! We'll do it—we'll do it. Lead the way. We'll follow. Down with it. Down with the old stone jug!"

Claude endeavoured to make himself heard, but he found the effort a fruitless one, so he desisted.

Presently, seeing that he had something more to say, the uproar subsided.

Then Claude continued—

"Friends all. This ready and unanimous consent is more than I could possibly have hoped for. I am rejoiced to find you so willing, because willing hearts always succeed in what they undertake. As I said before, we will set free all prisoners now in Newgate, and then, when we have done that, we will level it to the ground. We will not leave one stone standing upon another, and to-morrow morning nothing but a mass of ruins shall show where the prison of Newgate so lately stood."

"Fire it!" cried a dozen voices. "Set fire to it! Burn it down! That's the plan! Burn it down!"

"A good suggestion," cried Claude. "We will free the prisoners, and burn Newgate down."

"Hurrah—hurrah!"

"Are you all agreed, my friends? Do you consent to the proposition I make to you? All those that do, let them hold up their hands."

A forest of hands was immediately shown.

There was not a single person in the room who did not in this way testify their approval of the plan proposed.

Some, in their enthusiasm, held up both hands as high as their arms would let them, while others would have held up both feet as well, if such a thing had been possible.

The feeling was quite a unanimous one.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were much pleased with the result of their efforts. It was far more than they had expected, for they quite thought they should have a kind of battle to fight, and have to use a great many arguments to bring the "family" to a right state of mind.

But they had succeeded without, as one might say, the least trouble.

The fact was, Dick Turpin was an immense favourite with every member of the "family," both great and small.

Had it been for any one else, they would not have been so ready to risk life and limb to do them a service.

There was another thing, too, of which Claude and Jack were in ignorance.

The circumstance of Dick Turpin being a prisoner in Newgate had been frequently spoken upon, and already they had devised several plans among themselves by which they would be able to set him at liberty.

Not one, however, had thought of such a bold, daring, and desperate scheme as that which Claude Duval had just proposed.

They wished to set Turpin at liberty, and would freely have done all in their power towards doing so.

But they considered, at the same time, that to destroy the great prison of Newgate, which was an incubus to so many of them, was a glorious thing indeed.

And then, again, there happened to be at that very moment—as there generally was every sessions—a great many of their companions inmates of the city prison.

They would have an opportunity of procuring the liberation of these also.

Altogether the enterprise appeared before them clothed in the most alluring colours.

They had several objects to gain, and they had got two men for their leaders who would shrink from nothing.

The chairman of the meeting rose to his feet, and endeavoured to restore something like order.

To a partial extent he succeeded.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I must say that the proceedings to-night, although important, have been very irregular—very irregular indeed. It seems, however, that you all quite agree with the proposal made by the two illustrious highwaymen who have honoured the ken with their presence this evening."

"Yes—yes."

"Then we will consider that settled, and say no more about it. In the next place, I wish to call to your recollection the fact that you have been offered a large sum of money to do that which you were quite willing to do without any payment at all."

"Yes—yes."

"Then I have a proposal to make to you respecting that money. In the bulk, it is a very large and handsome sum indeed; but when it is divided it will not amount to much each. Now, if this money was to be put aside we could make a sort of fund of it, and use it in this way. Suppose one of us was to get into trouble, and a good counsel would get us off; why, we could use this money to pay the lawyer's fee."

"I beg to second that proposition," said Claude Duval. "It is a very excellent one indeed, to my thinking."

"Hear—hear," said the remainder, but not in a very vehement sort of way.

Still it was agreed to.

The object was a good one, for, by the means proposed, the money would be made available for a good purpose. But if distributed among all, they would not individually or collectively be any the better for it.

Claude hastened to turn the conversation.

"As for the distribution," he said, "I shall leave that entirely with you. Here is the money. Do with it just as you please. I believe I am right in understanding that you are quite ready and willing to place yourselves under our orders, and liberate Dick Turpin and Tom King from Newgate."

"Yes—yes. We are all agreed to that—every one. We will burn the place down, and set the prisoners free!"

"Exactly. It will be a glorious achievement. Such a one as will never be forgotten. We shall succeed easily enough, because the authorities will never dream we have such a thing in contemplation. We shall have all the advantage which taking our foes by surprise will give us."

"Hurrah—hurrah!"

"You are ready for action, I can tell by your voices."

"We are—we are."

"Good. It is now ten o'clock. In two hours' time I shall want every member of the 'family' assembled. We shall be able to collect together without suspicion. At precisely one o'clock you are all to be opposite Newgate, in readiness for action. We shall be there, and at the word of command you will rush forward, batter down the entrance doors, force your way through the prison, and burst open all the cells. Then, when the prisoners are at liberty, we will set the prison on fire in half-a-dozen places!"

"That's it—that's it. Down with the old jug. Down with it. Don't let us leave anything more than a heap of stones to show where it stood. Down with it. Hurrah! hurrah!"

"More punch!" cried Claude Duval, in such stentorian tones that they rose clear and distinct above the Babel of other sounds. "More punch, and we will drink to the downfall of Newgate."

CHAPTER CCCXLIV.

TAKES A GLANCE AT DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING IN THEIR RESPECTIVE CELLS IN NEWGATE.

While these energetic-looking proceedings for effecting the release of Dick Turpin and Tom King from Newgate are in progress, we will just take advantage of a few minutes to have a peep at them and their doings.

The tide of events has, for some little time past, carried us away from the gloomy old prison, and we now avail ourselves of this first opportunity of returning to it.

It will be recollected that the last we saw of Dick Turpin and Tom King was on the Sunday morning when, after the usual service had been performed, they had been marched back to their cells.

The sermon, which was preached by the reverend ordinary, was what was called a funeral one—it being the custom to bring in the names of those prisoners who were to suffer at Tyburn on the following morning.

Those against whom the sentence was to be carried out were Adrian Winberry, John Norman, Richard Sare, and Tom King.

For the three first-named, warrants had been sent to the prison in the usual and legitimate course, so that was all right enough.

But for Tom King the case was rather different.

The warrant which had been delivered at the time of his former incarceration was still unexecuted and in force, for, as the reader is very well aware, the terms of that warrant were never fulfilled, for Tom King was never hanged.

That, then, was the document, upon the authority of which they proceeded to act, but the sheriffs were of opinion that it ought to receive a fresh endorsement.

About obtaining this it was not expected there would be any difficulty or delay, and there was not, for a messenger very quickly returned with it.

The governor's mind was now quite at ease.

Tom King and Dick Turpin, as we have described in a former chapter, were fortunate enough to obtain a glimpse of each other as they sat in the chapel during service, but they did not exchange any further communication than a glance.

As may be supposed, Tom was in a far from enviable state of mind—indeed, he was in a desperate fidget.

He was annoyed to think that his scheme for seeing Dick, about which he had spoken with so much confidence, should have terminated so unsuccessfully.

He had not accomplished the least good, and had got himself into a very awkward situation.

It was the shortness of time which troubled him most.

He had no idea that the authorities would hurry on his execution in the manner they had, and when he reflected how few hours intervened between them and the hour fixed for his death, a cold clammy perspiration broke out all over him, and he almost gave up all hope.

Then he would think of his friends.

He knew they were staunch and true, and that the nature of his situation would be well known to them.

That they would not stand idly by and see him perish he could have staked his life; but with so short a notice what chance had they of getting up a plan of escape with success?

Moreover, he had not heard a word from his friends outside. The governor took the greatest care that no communications whatever should reach him.

From this it may be conceived that the state of Tom's mind was wretched enough.

He could not turn his thoughts in any direction and rest upon a ray of comfort.

All was blank despair.

He would start to his feet a thousand times, and, despite the great weight of his fetters, would pace up and down the cell with hasty strides, as far as the chain by which he was secured would allow him.

He was distracted.

It was not either so much for his own fate that he cared, nor would he have grumbled if, by becoming a prisoner, he could have procured the liberation of his friend; but it was so aggravating to think that he had not bettered Dick's position in the least degree, and yet he had thrust his head into the halter.

At length his thoughts began to assume a more settled form, and it was fortunate they did, for, if his present state of mind had continued, he would certainly have gone mad.

The conclusion to which he come was this.

He must by some means or other get his execution postponed for a week.

"I will protest against being hurried out of the world like this. It is too bad. I will send for the governor. I will speak to him, and try whether I cannot get it put off. Why, a week will make all the difference in the world to me. That must be it. I must have a week's grace. Now for the governor."

Tom King had arrived at a decision, and he felt all the calmer in consequence, but those who know the disposition of Mr. Cawthorn will, we think, come to the conclusion that the chances of obtaining a week's delay were very slight indeed.

However, Tom was rather hopeful in the matter.

His chain would not permit him to reach the door of his cell, or else he would soon have made such an uproar by battering upon it, as would have brought all the officials in the prison to know what was the matter.

Some other means must be adopted, because, for the reasons mentioned, it was quite out of the question.

Tom knew there was a turnkey stationed in the corridor, but how to attract his attention was the difficulty.

He knew from experience that it was no good to shout. He might bawl himself hoarse for all the notice that would be taken of it.

Just within his reach, however, was a stone pitcher, in which his allowance of drinking water was placed.

That gave him an idea.

He picked it up and drank heartily of its contents.

Then what water there was left he poured out on the floor of the cell and allowed it to flow away.

He next took the empty pitcher in his hand.

It was very heavy.

He swung it backwards and forwards, so as to give it an impetus, and then, letting go, it went with full force against the door of the cell, and was broke into a thousand fragments.

The crash was tremendous, for the door was lined with iron.

Scarcely had the sounds died away than Tom was rewarded for his expedient by hearing the trampling of footsteps in the passage.

The next moment the door was flung open, and the governor of Newgate, with a turnkey at his back, appeared upon the threshold.

The look of half-fear, half-curiosity which was depicted upon his countenance when he first appeared, quickly changed to one of anger.

"What do you mean by such violent conduct as this?"

"I wanted you," replied Tom, coolly, folding his arms.

"Wanted me?"

"Yes; and, as I knew it was no good to call out, I adopted this means of arresting your attention."

"Oh! indeed."

"I hope you won't be offended, Mr. Cawthorn; but, the fact is, I want to speak to you upon rather a serious affair."

"Oh! very well. Say on—say on. I am bound to listen."

And the governor, as he spoke, assumed his favourite attitude, which consisted in placing one hand behind him and the other in the bosom of his vest, while he swayed gently to and fro upon his heels.

"Mr. Cawthorn," began Tom, "I want to know whether to-morrow morning has really been fixed for—for—my execution?"

The governor grinned.

"Well, yes; it has," he said.

"But you cannot be in earnest. You do not intend to carry such a monstrous thing into effect?"

"Indeed we do, though."

"But I protest against it."

"Protest, then."

"Mr. Cawthorn, I appeal to you as a man. Is it right for me to be brought suddenly into this cell, and told that I must perish so soon? It is monstrous. What time is there left for repentance?"

The governor looked into Tom's face with a comical expression, which, under any other circumstances, would certainly have provoked a smile upon the lips of the prisoner.

"Now, Mr. King."

"What?"

"You must think me jolly green——"

"No—no."

"I say yes. You must think me jolly green, or you wouldn't try on a dodge like this. It's no good. You will find it won't answer. So say no more."

"What dodge?"

"Why, trying to get your execution delayed. Now listen to me, and I will give you a few words of friendly advice. Abandon all thoughts of obtaining any postponement of your execution. You may just as well, for we don't intend to allow you the ghost of a chance to escape, if we can help it. Do you understand that? Let me advise you, then, to occupy your time between now and to-morrow morning in the best way you are able, for I can assure you you will not cheat the gallows this time."

"It's a monstrous piece of iniquity, then."

"I daresay it is, in your judgment, but it is quite the

reverse in mine. I have got your warrant indorsed, so that will be all right. Every preliminary has been arranged, and to-morrow at this time you will be dangling at the end of a rope on the triple tree at Tyburn."

With these highly consolatory words upon his lips, the governor turned round and passed out of the cell

The turnkey hastened to close the door.

As soon as it was shut, Tom sank back upon his seat.

"That is over. They are determined to kill me. They have resolved that I shall die. But something or other comes over my mind like a conviction that I am not yet at the end of my career. Claude and Jack are at liberty and doubtless doing all they can for us, and I will not lose hope until the very last moment, and even then I shall not quite lose it, for I shall remember how narrow an escape I had before."

Tom put his hands to his throat as he spoke.

He always felt an uncomfortable sensation there whenever he thought about his little adventure at Tyburn.

Tom King little dreamt what very energetic measures his two old companions in arms were taking, and how well calculated those measures were to insure success.

He was forced to content himself with the reflection that they were doing all they could for him, and that they would not let him perish if they could avoid it.

And so the remainder of the Sunday passed.

It was a dreary, wretched day for him.

From Tom King we will turn our attention to the hero of our story, Dick Turpin, who lately has not received so much notice as he ought to have done.

We may simply state that he still remained on the same good terms as heretofore with the officials of the prison.

His life was rather monotonous, and there were few incidents indeed to disturb it.

He passed the greater part of his time alone in his cell.

Few people are calculated mentally to endure a life of solitude, and most certainly Dick Turpin was not one of that number.

His was a convivial, jovial spirit, and he was never so happy as when surrounded with plenty of his fellow-creatures.

Such being the case, his solitary confinement preyed somewhat heavily upon his mind, nor could he prevent its doing so.

Then he had heard but little intelligence of a cheerful character.

The news that Tom King's clever disguise had been detected by the governor, and that his old comrade had been taken prisoner and lodged in one of the cells, very quickly reached his ears.

He felt much concerned with respect to his position, for he also heard that there would be no delay in issuing a fresh warrant for his execution, but that they would proceed by virtue of the old one, which they alleged was in full force.

Later still, in order to preclude all possibility of a hitch in the business, he heard that the old warrant had been freshly indorsed.

Dick could not forbear a shudder when he was made acquainted with all these preparations for hurrying his comrade into eternity.

His soul revolted at the indecent haste.

Too well he knew the cause of it.

Luckily Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were aware of their incarceration, and they might render efficient aid, but Dick was one who never placed much reliance upon any one's help but his own.

During the whole of Sunday he was to the full as anxious and restless as Tom King himself, and he counted every minute that would elapse until the time arrived for his companion to be taken to Tyburn.

At length night came.

That night which the authorities had fully determined should be the last that Tom King should pass on earth.

Whether they were doomed to disappointment or not we shall very quickly see.

As the different objects in his cell faded from his view, and darkness came stealing on, Dick Turpin sprang to his feet.

"This will never do," he said. "Surely the damps of this cell have struck a chill to my heart. But I will shake off the feeling. Surely I yet possess some portion of that energy for which I was once so famous. I will summon to my aid what I have got left. Tom King must not perish while I live. I will free him, or perish in the attempt."

It was something with his old manner of speaking that Dick Turpin pronounced these words, and when he had uttered them he felt a fresh accession of vigour fill his whole frame.

"I have been here long enough," he added. "The iron will eat so deeply into my soul if I stay here any longer, that I shall never be able to recover myself from the effects of it. I must escape. Yes, that is it. I will be free from these stone walls, and I will not place myself under an obligation to any living person for that favour. I will be free, and that by my own unaided exertions; and when once I stand in the corridor on the outside of this cell, I will wager my life that, ignorant as I now am upon the subject, I shall not be long before I find out in which cell my friend is confined. Then, when I have made that discovery, few minutes will elapse before he is freed from it, and then it will be hard indeed if we are not able to force a way out of Newgate after having accomplished this much."

CHAPTER CCCXLV.

DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN BEATING OUT OF THE NEWGATE CELL, AND HAS A STRANGE ADVENTURE IN THE PAVED YARD.

THERE was a wild excitement in Turpin's manner as he uttered the words with which the last chapter concluded, and, when he ceased, he drew himself proudly up to his full height, and seemed to breathe defiance to all the numerous dangers which environed him.

It required a man of no ordinary stamp to boldly look such peril in the face as he did.

There was no vapouring—no idle boasting. His words exactly expressed his meaning, and no more. There was no one to hear what he said—indeed, he was unconscious of having spoken aloud. He merely uttered his own inmost thoughts.

But what man, unaided by tools, or any other person, could hope to accomplish that which Dick had so daringly projected?

Not one, unless he had as powerful a motive to urge him on to make the utmost exertion as he had.

Not only was he striving for his own life and liberty—and it is well known what powerful incentives these are—but he was striving for the life and liberty of his friend, who, he felt certain, without his aid would most assuredly perish before the sun that was so soon to rise had crossed the meridian.

It was, however, easy enough to make such resolutions as Dick had; the difficulty was to carry them into practice.

Dick glanced around his cell as well as the obscurity which prevailed in it would permit him.

But his eye rested upon nothing that looked at all likely to aid him.

The movable objects were very few, and those that did exist were unwieldingly and unserviceable.

It was not, however, because he was in search of anything that Dick glanced round the cell.

It was merely to ascertain how far the night had advanced, and to judge as near as he could what time it was.

He had been the inmate of that gloomy cell for a sufficient length of time to be able to tell with tolerable accuracy, by the deepening shadows on the wall, how much of the night had gone.

"I must pause awhile," he muttered. "I shall do no good by beginning yet. The turnkey will make his last round in a few minutes, and then I shall be able to commence operations with the certainty of not being disturbed."

With these words Dick Turpin sat down upon the rude stone bench which served him for a bed.

Scarcely had he done so, than his quick ears caught the well-known sounds of the turnkey's footsteps in the corridor without.

He threw himself back upon the bench in an attitude of assumed indifference.

Slowly the numerous and ponderous fastenings of the cell door were withdrawn, and the heavy door grated back upon its hinges.

But it was only opened wide enough to allow the turnkey to project one hand and his head into the cell.

In this hand he carried a lantern, and he flashed the light of it about him, until at last its rays fell upon the form of the notorious highwayman.

Dick pretended to be aroused by the light falling on his face, and, rising to his feet, he said in a cheerful voice, as he was wont to do—

"Is that you, Parker?"

"Yes. Mr. Turpin; it's me."

"All right. You roused me out of a bit of a nap, I fancy. I suppose you have come to see that all is right for the night?"

"Yes."

"Take a look round, then; for I feel very sleepy to-night."

"Oh! I don't want to take no look round, Mr. Turpin. It's all right, I know. It's a mere matter of form—one of the new-fangled regulations that have lately been made in the prison."

"So I believe."

"Good night, Mr. Turpin."

"Good night, Parker. I hope I shall be able to get a few hours' rest."

"So do I, sir. It's a shame you are here. But I can't help it. Good night. Good night."

With these words on his lips, Parker, the jailer, who had not only a friendly feeling towards Turpin, but admiration and respect for him as well, closed the door and carefully refastened it.

Dick Turpin was once more alone.

No sooner did the door close than he sprang silently towards it, and listened with feverish impatience to the replacement of the fastenings.

Listened as no one else but a man similarly situated to himself could listen.

To him every creak had an interest and was full of importance.

Those bolts which the jailer so easily shot into their sockets would take him hours to remove, and it was also very necessary for him to know what fastenings he would have to contend with.

First there was the lock.

There could be no mistake about the sharp snap with which it shot into the box provided for it.

Then there were the two bolts at the top and bottom of the door.

He heard those slowly worked into their sockets.

And, lastly, the ponderous iron bar which the turnkey could scarcely lift—for its strength was considered in proportion to its weight—was placed in its staples and securely fixed.

Then the jailer retired.

From the inner side of that door who could hope to be successful in removing those fastenings which was only done with difficulty by the man outside.

But Dick was not disheartened by the prospect he had before him.

None of the obstacles were new ones.

They had existed from the first, and he was acquainted with them all.

Soberly and steadily he set about removing them.

In the first place he groped his way to an obscure corner of the cell, and picked up something small, which he had doubtless placed there for security.

Had there been a light in the cell, it could have been seen what that object was.

It was a knife.

Such a knife as is commonly used at table.

It had come into Dick's possession in a very simple manner.

In former chapters we have related at full length how he had his meals brought to him in the cell, how he paid for them himself, and how he invariably invited the two jailers to eat with him.

This had been done so frequently, that what little caution the men at first exercised was relaxed—whether purposely or not would be hard to say.

However, on the preceding day Dick saw an opportunity of secreting the knife, which he had used to eat his dinner with, and he could not resist the temptation of availing himself of the opportunity, for he thought the time would come when that knife would be of inestimable value to him.

We are inclined to think that the turnkeys were aware of his having abstracted it, but they said nothing.

At any rate, it is quite clear that the knife must have been missed by them.

But although it was a good deal to be possessed of a strong table knife, yet it seems but a poor and inefficient instrument wherewith to effect an escape from a cell in Newgate.

And yet that was the sole tool which Dick possessed, and he not only hoped to escape, but had determined at all hazards to do so.

We will observe his proceedings.

Having taken the knife in his hand and felt the strength of the blade by bending it, Dick crossed his cell again in the direction of the door.

By this time the interior of the cell was involved in darkness, and none could see where the door was situated; but Dick walked direct to it in the dark, so familiar had he become with the topography of his dreary cell.

As he well knew, the inner side of this door was covered with sheet iron, which was riveted on to the woodwork of which the door was composed in such a manner as to leave no part of the wood visible.

The lock was still further protected by another independent plate formed of such well-tempered steel that no drill could penetrate it.

Dick Turpin sunk down into a kind of sitting posture close to the bottom of the door, and began carefully feeling the iron plating with his fingers.

It was well secured in every part.

Undaunted, however, by this, he took the knife, and after many efforts, succeeded in introducing the blade between the iron plate and the door itself.

He considered this a great deal done, and he proceeded with greater confidence to execute the remainder of his task.

That was, to raise one corner of this sheet iron, and gradually lift it up until a sufficiently large portion of the woodwork was exposed to enable him to cut a hole through it.

But he soon found this to be utterly impracticable.

The knife was not strong enough to move the rivets.

A small strong crowbar would have been required to do it, and he possessed no such instrument.

He bent the blade of the knife until he was afraid to do so any longer, for fear it should break off close to the handle, and leave him weaponless.

He paused in his operations.

What should he do?

He was loth to relinquish this means of making his way out of his cell.

He was reluctant to confess to himself that he had failed at the very outset of his undertaking.

But such was the case.

He left the knife sticking where it was, and gave himself up to thought.

Mechanically he raised his eyes to the little grated aperture in the wall which did duty for a window, and which could be distinguished from the black wall of the cell by the faint light which appeared behind it.

The aperture was small, very small, and it was strongly defended with iron bars.

Still, as Dick looked up at it, and then thought of the iron-plated door and the massive stone walls, he thought surely it must be easiest to make a way through here.

Dick knew where that grating looked to.

It was into one of the paved yards of the prison.

He had ascertained that by placing the table under the window and a chair on the table.

By standing on the chair he was enabled to look through the bars.

But he had noticed how firmly they appeared to be fastened in their settings.

Still they did not now seem such impassable barriers between himself and freedom.

Abandoning all hope of being able to remove a small portion of the iron plating on the door, Dick withdrew his knife from the crevice in which he had taken so much trouble to introduce it, and placed it in his bosom.

Then he moved the table, and placed it just beneath the window, and then he put the chair on the top of that.

To ascend these was a matter of no difficulty.

In another moment Dick was looking out through the grating into the paved yard before him.

It was surrounded by high walls, and very little of its general appearance could be distinguished.

As it happened, however, that was a matter of very little importance, for Dick was familiar with the place.

While he looked through the grating, preparatory to taking any more decisive steps, he heard St. Paul's strike the hour of midnight.

The sound was taken up in a jingling fashion by the various churches in the vicinity.

At length the echoes of all died away, and then Dick was startled by hearing a footstep in the yard before him.

He drew back a little way from the bars, and looked down with eagerness and curiosity.

Who could it be?

The mystery was quickly solved.

The sound of the footstep grew louder and louder, and then Dick saw a faint light like a small star.

He comprehended all instantly.

It was one of the prison watchmen making his round.

Dick looked at him with increasing attention, and, by straining his vision to the utmost, managed to make out the outline of the man's form.

He strolled across the yard in a sleepy, negligent sort of way.

When that man was first set that duty he had performed it in a very different manner.

He had flashed his lantern about him, and looked into every corner, not leaving one unvisited.

But, after a time, he grew rather tired of this, for it never resulted in anything, and, as a matter of course, carelessness followed, until he had taken to strolling through the yard in the semi-somnolent state we have described, and not paying attention to anything.

But this is always the case.

Dick watched this man cross the yard and then disappear through a small door in the wall.

Dick now considered he should have the coast clear for a little while.

Taking the knife from his bosom, where he had placed it, Dick Turpin, with the greatest patience, began to pick away the mortar surrounding the stones in which the bottom bars of the grating were imbedded.

The operation was a tedious one, but not half so tedious as he expected to find it, for the mortar was either not of first-rate quality, or else the weather had had an undue effect upon it.

It was softened considerably, and Dick picked it out in large pieces.

For such a purpose as this the knife which he held in his hand was most admirably adapted, and before the various churches chimed the hour of half-past twelve, he had loosened the whole of the bottom row of stones.

He placed the knife once more in his bosom, and, taking hold of the stones with both hands, he exerted his utmost strength and drew them towards him.

At first the iron was obstinate, but the leverage power he had got was great.

The bars bent at the top.

Encouraged to no ordinary extent by the amount of success which had so far attended upon his efforts, Dick redoubled his exertions.

Another half-hour passed.

The clocks struck one.

At the expiration of that time he had so twisted, bent, and broken the iron bars that there was room enough for him to pass through the aperture.

With his heart beating high with hope, and his whole frame in a state of the greatest possible excitement, Dick Turpin prepared to make his descent into the yard.

This was no easy matter.

But while thus engaged his ears were assailed by a strange sound, the like of which he never remembered to have heard.

Instinctively and involuntarily he paused to listen.

The strange sound continued

It increased in force and intensity.

CHAPTER CCCXLVI.

RELATES DICK TURPIN'S ADVENTURES IN NEWGATE WHILE DISGUISED AS A WATCHMAN.

For a few moments, so absorbed was he in what he heard, Dick Turpin forgot where he was and the peculiar position he occupied.

All his thoughts and faculties were concentrated in the sense of hearing.

He was intent only to catch every sound.

For a very short time did he remain in ignorance from whence those sounds proceeded.

It was from the Old Bailey.

Dick Turpin knew this because in the afternoon a faint reflected beam of the setting sun used to make its way into his dungeon through the grating at which he now stood, and from this fact he knew that he must be facing the west.

And, if he was facing the west, he must of a necessity be facing the Old Bailey, for that street runs from north to south along the west front of the prison of Newgate.

It was from the street, then, that Dick Turpin felt confident that the sounds came.

And those sounds.

There was no mistaking their character or nature.

They were produced by the trampling of many hundreds of feet.

The murmur of many hundreds of voices, none of them speaking, perhaps, much louder than a whisper.

Evidently a large body of people was assembling in the Old Bailey.

But for what purpose?

In the present day, when malefactors are executed in front of the prison, such a question would be easily enough answered.

On a Sunday night, when a hanging is to take place on the ensuing Monday morning, it is no uncommon thing for a crowd to assemble.

But at the time when Dick Turpin lived, and for a very long time afterwards, prisoners were not executed in front of Newgate.

Such a thing had never been thought of, nor the device of a movable scaffold either.

In those days the executions took place for the most part at Tyburn.

The condemned men were pinioned, placed in an open cart, attended by a powerful escort, and drawn to Tyburn.

Now, it was at this last mentioned place that people might be expected to collect early and in large numbers.

To be sure there was always a crowd to see the procession start, but then its size was insignificant compared to the other.

Knowing all this, Dick Turpin was at a loss to think why the crowd had assembled there at such an early hour.

And such a large crowd, as from the sound he felt quite sure it must be.

Dick was compelled at last to give it up in despair.

He turned his attention to the business he had under hand.

Little did he imagine that the crowd he heard collecting had so intimate a connexion with him and his fortunes as it really had.

Little did he think that it was owing to the exertions of his true and well-tried friends, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, that the crowd had been drawn together.

Still less did he think that he was taking all the trouble he had been taking and was about to take for nothing; that he would have been released if he had been content to sit quietly in his cell and await the coming of his liberators.

Of all this he was in the most profound ignorance.

He considered the crowd had no connexion with him whatever, and therefore he bent all his energies to the task he had under hand.

It was by no means an easy matter, now that the bars were removed, to pass through the small aperture and descend into the yard outside, which was several feet lower than the floor of the cell.

After some trouble, however, Dick succeeded in thrusting his feet through, and then he gradually lowered himself to the ground.

In another moment he was standing on the stones in the yard.

He drew a long breath of relief, and fancied he was already free, though actually he was as far off freedom as ever, or so nearly so as not to make much difference.

Still he felt that he had achieved a great deal, and felt stimulated accordingly to do still more.

Dick glanced around him, and endeavoured to take in the general aspect of the place in which he stood.

He could only very dimly see about him.

Suddenly, however, he heard a faint rattling noise, for which he could not at first account, and then all at once he knew it was caused by some one rattling a key in a lock, as though attempting to unfasten it in too great a hurry.

The moment he made this discovery, Dick drew back into the shadow of a wall.

He had scarcely done so than a door close to his left hand was opened, and the same watchman as he had seen a little while back cross the yard, again made his appearance.

Dick watched him close the door through which he had just passed, and then an idea entered his mind which he lost not a moment in carrying out.

Watching his opportunity when the back of the watchman was turned towards him, Dick sprang forward and grasped him tightly by the throat.

So tightly did Dick grasp him that, though the watchman made a desperate effort to cry out, he failed to articulate a sound.

"Silence!" exclaimed Turpin, between his teeth; "silence, and your life will be spared. If you make the least sound you are a dead man."

The watchman appeared to collapse upon hearing these words.

He dropped his lantern, but fortunately it fell upon its bottom, and preserved an upright position, so that it was not broken.

With great dexterity and swiftness, Dick pulled off the watchman's hat and great coat and threw them on the ground.

This done, he pulled off his cravat, and, with the aid of this, tied his hands behind his back.

Dick now released his hold of the watchman's throat, and he took immediate advantage of that circumstance to utter a sepulchral sort of howl.

"Oh! you won't be quiet, won't you?" said Dick. "Then I must try if I can't make you. I haven't a gag at the present moment, but this will answer the purpose quite as well."

As he spoke, he made a snatch at the short stick, or bludgeon, which the watchman carried, and gave him a rather sharp crack on the head with it.

The man fell down in a moment in a state of insensibility.

"You would have it," said Dick; "and, now you have got it, I hope you like it."

With this philosophical remark, Turpin dropped the stick, and proceeded to attire himself in the watchman's great coat and hat.

When he had put on these articles of apparel, the change in his appearance was very great indeed.

A feeling of much greater security now came over Dick's mind, and his hopes of being able to achieve his design increased in a proportionate ratio.

He had certainly a much better chance of getting through the prison unnoticed.

But Dick did not stop with the appropriation of the coat, hat, stick, and lantern.

He went to the body of the prostrate watchman, and after searching nearly all his pockets, produced a bunch of keys.

They were the only things he thought it was worth while to take away with him.

Thus armed, Dick Turpin, with a bold and confident step, took his way across the yard.

He found the lantern a most useful and agreeable companion.

He flashed the light round him fearlessly enough, because he knew that if it was seen no suspicion would be excited.

Now Dick did not think it would be altogether prudent to go through the door by which the watchman had just entered the yard, so he looked about him for some other means of leaving it.

On the opposite side he found a door of similar appearance.

He held the light close to the keyhole, in order to judge of the size of key he should require, and then proceeded to select one which from its size he thought was likely to fit.

He was so lucky as to hit upon the right one the first time.

He had the door open in a moment, and he closed it rapidly after him, of course taking the precaution to lock it.

Looking round him, he found himself in a sort of corridor, or passage, at the extremity of which was a flight of stone steps.

Now he had entered this passage and closed the door, the noise made by the mob in the street became inaudible.

To, this, however, Dick attached very little importance indeed, being still under the impression that the assemblage had nothing to do with him whatever.

There were no doors opening from the passage in which Dick Turpin now found himself, and so he hastened along it with all possible speed.

Ascending the steps of which we have made mention, he found his further progress was barred by a door.

This was now no obstacle to him, and he opened it easily enough by means of the bunch of keys.

He then found himself in another paved yard.

This sort of thing was not what Dick wanted.

He wished to gain the interior of the prison, and not keep hovering about the outworks.

However, taking all things into consideration, he had not much to grumble about.

Again, however, there came to his ears, and this time with much greater distinctness than on the former occasion, the uproar produced by the mob in the street.

This might proceed from two causes.

Either he was much nearer to the Old Bailey, or else the noise had increased.

Dick was inclined to think the latter.

At this moment St. Paul's chimed the half hour past one.

Time was speeding on, and Dick felt that he had a great deal to accomplish.

Going close to the wall in this second paved yard, he walked completely round it.

He counted no less than five doors.

One of these unquestionably led into the street, and into the Old Bailey, too.

That door was the only barrier between him and liberty.

Indeed, it could scarcely be considered a barrier, for that word implies something which would have to be difficultly surmounted.

But there could be no possible difficulty for Dick to pass through this door, because the bunch of keys he held in his hand would most certainly have furnished him with the means of passing through it.

His life was in danger.

He had but to make one step and be free.

The temptation was a great one, and no one, without they stood in the same position as Dick Turpin, could say how great a one.

But if he availed himself of this means of escape, he must abandon his friend to his fate.

The idea of doing this never entered Dick's mind for a moment, and he turned away from the door without a feeling of regret.

Back into the jaws of danger he went with a steady tread.

From the door opening into the Old Bailey, he could command a tolerable view of the prison of Newgate.

He walked straight across the yard to a door which, from its situation, he imagined would lead him direct into the prison.

Oh! how he wished he had found Tom King, and that instead of standing there alone as he did, that his old comrade was with him; how easily then could they have effected their escape, and laughed to scorn all ideas of pursuit.

But such was not to be.

Just as Dick was about to introduce the key into the lock, he was startled by hearing a hoarse sort of cry from the mob outside.

What it portended he knew not.

It was followed by the rapid rush of many feet, apparently in one direction.

Then there came a tremendous battering noise.

Dick was surprised, but not for one moment did the faintest glimmer of the real truth dawn upon his mind.

But the reader, from the facts of which he has been put in possession, will be at no loss to understand what these sounds meant.

Passing through the door, which he closed and locked after him, Dick Turpin raised his lantern, and found himself in a kind of vestibule or lobby.

This place was dimly lighted, and at a glance our friend saw several doors opening from it.

Dick did not doubt now that he was on the right track, and that the doors he saw before him led into the corridors from which the cells opened.

No sooner, however, had he closed the door and advanced a pace or two, than a man rose from a seat upon which he had been sitting, and said—

"Hullo! Wilks, what the devil are you doing here? Your post is on the outside of the prison."

Here was a dilemma.

Dick had encountered one of the watchmen, in whose bosom at present it was tolerably certain there was no suspicion.

But how was Dick to act?

As soon as this man found out the mistake he had made, he would raise an immediate alarm.

If Dick retreated through the door again, suspicion would be roused.

If he advanced he would be detected.

Upon the spur of the moment, he adopted the only course that appeared to be open to him.

Assuming a very mysterious aspect, he beckoned to the watchman who had questioned him, and at the same time advanced in a cautious stealthy manner.

The deluded watchman quite fell into the snare thus laid for him.

He thought that something peculiar had come under his notice, and that he wished to impart it to him.

Full of expectation, and quite unsuspiciously, the watchman allowed Turpin to come close to him.

To his great surprise, however, the seeming Wilks raised the short thick stick he carried, and brought it down upon his head with such force and suddenness that he fell to the ground insensible, without having time to utter a sound.

"I could not help it," said Dick. "I could not stop at trifles, and that bit of a crack on the head won't do you any harm, I know."

As he uttered these words he heard a tremendous crash.

Then a bell began to toll most dismally.

It was the alarm-bell of Newgate!

CHAPTER CCCXLVII.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING HAVE A NARROW ESCAPE OF BEING BURNED TO DEATH IN NEWGATE.

LEAVING Dick Turpin in his very peculiar position, we will just turn our attention to the proceedings of his two friends, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, and relate what success they met with in their desperate enterprise, as well as explain the meaning of the sounds which had from time to time reached Dick Turpin's ears during his extraordinary perambulation of the prison.

The "family" had a ready means of communicating with each other, and in less than an hour from the time when Claude's proposal was agreed to, not a single member of the large fraternity was in ignorance of it.

It would not be going too far to say that there was not one unwilling heart amongst them.

Dick Turpin was an immense favourite with them, and they would gladly render him any service in their power, but, on the present occasion, they were perfectly mad for the hour of action to arrive.

To them it seemed like being free from the trammels of the law if the huge prison-house could be destroyed.

Long before the appointed hour small groups of men collected in the open space in the Old Bailey which faces the prison, and their numbers kept continually augmenting, so that in a very short time a large body of people had congregated together.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack had stipulated that the conduction of the whole affair should rest in their hands.

They were to be the commanding officers, so to speak, whose orders were to be promptly and unconditionally obeyed.

Their preparations were soon made.

Their directions were simple.

Just under a gateway that faced the prison, four horses were to stand in a state of perfect readiness for our friends.

A man was appointed to take charge of each of these horses.

It was in this way that our friends provided for their retreat.

Then the general instructions to the body of the people were—

First, to make a dash at the doors leading to the prison—to break them down—overcome all the resistance offered to them, and, proceeding to the cells, open the doors of every one, thus setting all who were prisoners at liberty.

Dick Turpin and Tom King were to be got out of the prison as quickly as possible, mounted on their steeds, and taken away from the spot by Claude and Jack, before pursuit could be commenced.

The mob were then to complete their work of demolishing the building.

These plans were well laid, and well calculated to achieve the end proposed.

The only thing was to get them carried out, and with so fierce and turbulent a body of men this would be no easy task.

However, Claude and Jack felt a great amount of confidence as to the result.

At length the whole of the "family" had assembled, or at all events quite enough of them for the purpose required.

Then the word of command was given.

There was not a man present who was not well armed with such weapons as were likely to be of the most service to them.

As soon as the word of command was given, then, the compact mass made a dash across the Old Bailey, and began battering at the different doors leading to the prison.

These men were armed with large, heavy axes.

The doors of Newgate were strong, but not strong enough to withstand such weapons as those.

Splinters of wood flew about in all directions.

The first door that was forced was that little one at the top of the flight of stone steps which lead into the vestibule.

The turnkeys in this place made no attempt to defend the door, but as soon as they became convinced of the hostile intentions of the mob, made all speed to the governor's apartments, locking all the doors they possibly could in their progress.

Then the other doors were smashed in.

The alarm in the prison of Newgate was now very great and general.

There was quite a rush to the alarm-bell, which was pulled by half a dozen hands.

The clangor was terrific.

The alarm-bell of Newgate was a huge affair, fixed in the roof of the prison.

It was intended to be used as a signal to give notice that a prisoner had escaped, or in the event of any extraordinary occurrence.

The dismal sounds echoed far and wide over the sleeping city.

The people living nearest to the prison were of course the first to take the alarm, and soon many anxious faces could be seen peering out of the windows, while others ascended to the house-tops.

As soon as the men got fairly inside the prison they lost all recollection of what had been said to them, and at once set to work.

They fired the building in a dozen places.

In fact, wherever they saw a chance of setting fire to it they did so.

There was a great deal of wood work about some parts of the building, and the fire, of course, made rapid progress.

Moreover, several of the men had carried in armsful of dry twigs, which they were anxious to get rid of, so they threw them down and set fire to them.

It would have been by far more prudent to have released the prisoners first.

In a dense mass however, which there was no resisting, they swept into the passages and burst down all the doors which opposed themselves to them in their onward progress.



[THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN MOUNT THEIR STEEDS BENEATH THE ARCHWAY.]

Foremost in the throng, and making almost superhuman exertions, were Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

To the full were they conscious of the many difficulties that stood in the way of their achieving their aim, and now that they were so much nearer to it they felt a proportionate amount of anxiety.

Indeed, as they then stood beneath the roof of Newgate, for the first time in their lives, they felt far from safe, although their position was so peculiar.

There was something in the very atmosphere of the place which oppressed them.

Brandishing the axes with which they had armed themselves, they dashed forward and furiously attacked every obstacle which opposed itself to their onward progress.

But, above all the din and racket which was made, could be heard the dismal tolling of the alarm-bell of Newgate.

Oh! how our friends wished they could only find the rope which was attached to it.

How quickly would they have severed it.

Unless the din was stopped, the whole of the city would be aroused, and then what a desperate situation would be theirs.

Claude and Jack were well aware of the amount of dependence which could be placed in the mob ostensibly under their control.

They knew how fickle and unstable they were, and how likely to give up the enterprise at the very moment when they might be successful.

Our readers may, therefore, imagine what a load of responsibility was at their hearts.

Already Claude and Jack found a portion of the instructions they had given had been disobeyed.

They could feel the hot breath of fire upon their cheeks.

It was impossible for them to say what sort of progress it would make, or what hold it had taken of the building.

It might spread with great rapidity, as fires sometimes and generally will.

It might seize upon the whole of the edifice in such a

manner as to make it impossible for them to escape with their lives.

Very little good would, however, be done by thinking of this. Other and more important matters called for their attention.

They had only a vague and general idea of the position of the cells, and no definite idea whatever as to the locality of the ones in which their two comrades were confined.

Down went the doors as soon as they came to them, and whenever a flight of steps appeared, having a downward tendency, they descended them immediately.

At length the corridors from which the dungeon doors opened were reached.

The mob had now something to do.

With loud cries, they dashed at the cell doors.

But they were repulsed.

The iron doors were too strong for them.

Then they noticed what they might have seen before, if they had only taken the trouble to look, and that was, that not only were the doors themselves of the strongest possible material, but that they opened outwards, and that the pressure they applied only had the effect of shutting them closer.

Moreover, the fastenings were on the outer side, and it would only be a few minutes' easy work to remove them.

When once they had made this discovery, they set about removing the fastenings at once.

The creaking bolts were withdrawn.

The ponderous bars lifted from their staples, and flung on to the floor of the corridor.

There then remained nothing but the locks.

But these were such insignificant obstacles that they thought nothing of them.

They were either wrenched off, or else the boxes provided for the reception of the bolts were knocked to pieces.

Then the prisoners were released.

They immediately joined the throng of their liberators, and set about doing the same service for others.

In those cases where the prisoners were secured with chains they were violently and roughly freed from their fetters.

Some dozen or twenty cells were opened in this manner and their inmates set free, but as yet they had not succeeded in finding either Dick Turpin or Tom King.

Claude and Jack continually occupied themselves with shouting out the names of their missing comrades, but no reply was vouchsafed to them.

They got terribly anxious, for they feared Newgate would soon be too hot to hold them.

They were not only apprehensive of the fire, which was raging with great fury in many parts of the building, but they feared that the alarm would spread rapidly, and that a force might be opposed to them that might be death or madness to resist.

One after the other the whole of the doors in the corridor had been opened, but without the wished-for discovery having being made.

Retracing their steps, however, they proceeded to another corridor.

Claude and Jack were the first to enter it.

They ran down to its farthest extremity, calling out to their comrades in the loudest tones, but without meeting with the wished-for response.

Still more uneasy, and fearful that, after all, they should not accomplish the misson, they left the chief part of the mob to the task of liberating this fresh lot of prisoners while they sought in other directions.

They were followed by a great number of people.

Presently the loud cries of Claude Duval were responded to by a voice, which, though it sounded weak and faint, he immediately recognised.

He cried out in a joyful tone to his comrade, Jack, who hastened to his side.

Claude spoke again, and once more came the reply.

It was from a dungeon on his right hand that the response proceeded.

"Here is Tom," cried Claude, "and it is to be hoped Dick is not far off. Lend me your aid, my friend, and we will try if we cannot quickly release him."

Claude and Jack had taken care before they started upon their enterprise to stow away about their persons a multitude of articles, of which they might possibly want to make some use.

Jack produced a bunch of skeleton keys, and fitted one into the lock, while Claude withdrew the bolts and removed the iron bar.

By the time he had done this, Jack had found a key which would fit the lock.

He turned it round, and had the satisfaction of finding that it acted upon the wards at the first trial.

The door was swung open.

A glare of light was projected into the dungeon, and then, heavily ironed in the manner we have described, they saw their companion, Tom King.

Astonishment of the most unbounded character was expressed upon his face.

In the silence and solitude of his darkness he had heard the fearful uproar without, but he was quite at a loss to find a cause to which he could ascribe it.

He knew that something of an unusual character was going on, because he could hear, above all other sounds, the clanging din of the alarm-bell at Newgate.

After waiting in anxious suspense, the sounds of many footsteps in the corridor without came to his ears, and then he heard himself called upon by name.

At first, so overcome was he that, though he made a tremendous effort to speak, he found it was impossible.

His emotions overpowered him

He could scarcely credit his own ears.

Again and again, however, he heard his name repeated, and by the same friendly and well-known voice.

Then he managed to speak in a low tone at first, but the second time much louder.

In a cheerful voice he heard Claude Duval bid him to wait with patience for a moment, and then he should be free.

There could be no sort of doubt or mistake about the meaning of the words that were uttered, for they were immediately followed by the withdrawal of the fastenings of the door.

Surely, he thought, he must be dreaming.

How on earth could Claude and Jack be in Newgate? and how came it that they showed themselves so indifferent about being heard as they evidently did?

His brain was in a whirl.

Not for a single moment did the least glimmering of the real state of the case dawn upon his mind.

But whatever doubts he might have entertained with respect to the reality of what was taking place, they were dispelled entirely when the door of the cell was thrown open, and his two comrades appeared upon the threshold.

He sprang forward as far as the chain by which he was confined to the floor would allow him.

The greeting between them, although much hurried, was a warm one.

No time was to be spared for much speech or lengthy explanations.

Sixteen-String Jack produced another bunch of skeleton keys, of a much smaller make than the others, and concentrated all his energies upon the task of freeing Tom King from his fetters.

CHAPTER CCCXLVIII.

TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, DETERMINE TO SAVE DICK TURPIN FROM THE BURNING PRISON, OR PERISH WITH HIM.

THIS was far from being an easy matter, for, out of compliment to the prisoner, the irons were secured in a very intricate manner.

But with the assistance of the various instruments with which he was provided, Jack soon rid Tom of these encumbrances, and right glad was our friend to find himself once more with his limbs at liberty.

"Follow us," cried Claude and Jack to him. "We cannot stay to give explanation now. Follow us! we have yet a great deal to do."

"Dick Turpin," cried Tom, whose first thought was for his old and well-tried friend. "Dick Turpin, where is he?"

"We have not found him yet."

"On—on, then!" cried King. "You were right when you said you had much to do. The most important part of your enterprise has yet to be achieved."

"Do you know where his cell is situated?"

"No; I have no better idea than yourselves."

"We have no resource, then, but to adopt the same plan as enabled us to discover you."

"And what was that?"

"To shout at every cell door, and listen for a reply."

"Newgate is a vast place, and that will take a long time."

"It will. More time than we can spare. Can you hear that roaring, crackling sound?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Fire."

"Is the prison on fire?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens, we are lost."

"Nay, calm yourself."

"But I can feel the heat now of the flames upon my face, and the corridor, I see, is full of smoke. How are we to escape with our own lives, let alone rescue Dick Turpin?"

"I have no very serious misgivings respecting the fire—at all events just at present."

"Then you know something of it?"

"Yes. The arrangement was that you and Dick should be liberated, and then the prison set on fire, but they were so impatient that they could not wait until the proper moment, but fired the prison in a dozen places."

"Good heavens! You fill me with alarm. And see what a monstrous flame that was that swept past the ends of the corridor. I fear the fire is of a much more serious character than you imagine."

And this really was the case.

The old prison was in the interior fitted with wood, and these fittings the fire had caught.

Then the devastating element had spread to the roofs and ceilings until the whole of the building was fairly in flames.

The mob on the outside saw the tremendous progress the fire was making, and shouted out in alarm for the safety of those within, and desired them to come out while there was yet time.

The alarm thus uttered entered the battered-down doors of Newgate.

It spread from corridor to corridor.

It reached the ears of those within, and, as they heard it, they one and all made a simultaneous rush to the different exits.

It reached the ears of the terrified officials, who from the first had fled before the mob, intent only on placing the greatest possible distance between them.

They were now in the upper part of the building.

At length the note of alarm reached the ears of the three highwaymen in the corridor, and it almost maddened them.

Was it possible that, so far from rescuing Dick, they had doomed him to destruction—to a worse death than the law would have awarded him?

The reflection was poignant in the extreme.

With loud wild cries upon their lips, they dashed up and down the corridors.

Every cell had been broken open, but no trace of Dick could they see.

It was, they tried to think, just possible that he had been rescued by some other portion of the mob, and was by this time in safety on the outside waiting for them to make their appearance; but all that they knew of Dick's character and disposition gave the lie to this supposition.

The numbers of those around them rapidly decreased, until at length there remained only their three selves.

But, although abandoned by those who had sworn to aid them, they determined not to follow their example and abandon their comrade.

Yet, where could he be?

They had searched all the cells they could find.

In what other part were they to look?

Distracted, scorched, and half blinded by the smoke, they tore madly up and down the passages, and called upon Dick Turpin until their throats were hoarse, and they could shout no longer.

At length, convinced—and most reluctantly were they driven to the conviction—that he was nowhere in the cells in the corridors on a level with where they stood, they were driven to ascend to a higher level, where it was just possible he might be found.

But when they came to the staircase which led to the upper part of the prison—or, more strictly, that part which was on a level with the ground, for our friends were now beneath it—they were met with such a blinding, scorching sheet of flame that they were compelled to shrink back before it.

It was the horrible roaring sound it made which dismayed them as much as anything.

They waited a moment, in the hope that the violence of the flames would abate.

But they were disappointed.

It seemed, on the contrary, to be gaining fresh force.

There was but one course open to them.

It was a disagreeable one.

It was to make up their minds to be scorched by dashing swiftly through the blaze.

There was, however, no alternative in the matter, without they chose to remain where they were, and that they considered worse than death itself.

Mounting the steps as high as the raging flames would allow them with comfort, they prepared to make a sudden rush.

Up the few remaining stairs they bounded—how, they scarcely knew.

Through the wall of flame they dashed, and fell breathless and scorched in the corridor beyond.

Springing with all haste to their feet, they hurried along in the direction where the flames were less fierce, and where, in consequence, the heat was least.

The cries of many voices now came to their ears.

They were in advance of them, and in that direction they ran.

The sounds became plainer and plainer as they went on, and, in a few moments more, a gush of cool air met their faces most refreshingly.

Ten more steps brought them to an open door.

It led them into the Old Bailey.

The street they saw was one mass of people, all swaying to and fro in the greatest disorder.

Loud and fierce cries came from their lips.

Their faces were plainly revealed by the ruddy beams of light which came from the blazing building.

The houses which were visible had a crowd of faces at each window, while the roof-tops of others were covered.

There seemed to be something going on in the crowd of a character which excited them to the utmost fury.

They groaned—they hissed—they yelled—and swayed backwards and forwards like the waves of a monster sea.

There was no hope of ever gaining the slightest command over such a turbulent seething mass as that.

This was the reflection that simultaneously crossed the minds of the three highwaymen as they stood in the doorway watching the maniacal throng.

A tremendous roar now came from the throats of the nearest portion of the mob, and Claude and his companions strained their eyes in the endeavour to ascertain what was taking place.

The only thing which caught their eye was a bundle of something which was tossed here and there above the heads of the mob, as a cork might be tossed upon the surface of greatly agitated water.

Backwards and forwards the bundle went—first one way, and then another.

It bore an appearance of elasticity, for it seemed to bound up into the air every time it reached the mob.

But that was not caused in reality by any power possessed by the bundle itself.

It was caused by the people holding up their arms and catching it as it was about to fall.

Then hurling it up in the air as high as their strength permitted.

And all this was accompanied by the most discordant cries and yells and execrations that ever came from the throats of an excited mob.

Our friends were entirely at a loss to account for what they saw.

They could not make it out at all.

This spectacle was one which they were quite unprepared to see.

No words could be distinguished as coming from the lips of the excited throng, or these might have furnished some clue as to the meaning of the proceedings.

As they gazed thus for the space of a few minutes, and saw what we have described, as well as made the reflec-

tions which the scene called for, their attention became so absorbed, that they forgot all else.

Perceiving a man close before him to whom he was known, Claude Duval seized hold of him, and by main force dragged him inside the door where his associates stood.

The man made a desperate resistance at first, but upon seeing who it was that held him, he became suddenly still.

"Speak," said Claude Duval, "and tell me at once! What is the meaning of the strange scene going on before us?"

"Strange scene?"

"Yes. What bundle is that the people are throwing about, and what are they throwing it about for?"

"It ain't no bundle."

"What then? And why do they yell in that frightful manner?"

"You ask me two questions at once," said the man, "and I don't know which to reply to; but if you will be quiet a moment, I will tell you all I know."

"Say on, then."

"Among the prisoners who were released from the cells, was a man named Adrian Winberry, whose execution was fixed to take place to-morrow morning."

"Enough, I know him."

"It was through him that Dick Turpin was captured."

"It was."

"Well, then, the mob, when they found who it was they had let out of the cell, determined that he should not escape the fate he so richly merited, but die a more horrible death."

"What death?"

"They carried him out into the street, despite his furious struggles. They denounced him as the murderer of Mr. Winberry, and hurled him at the people's heads. He was caught as he descended, and tossed up again, and so he has been tossed about ever since, and so he will continue to be while there is a breath of life left in him."

"Oh! this is horrible!" exclaimed Claude Duval. "Bad the man may be, but surely he does not deserve so terrible a fate as this."

"You cannot help it. Besides, if you could induce the people to desist, it would be no good. He must be quite dead by this time."

With these words on his lips, which he spoke in the most unconcerned manner possible, the man turned, and would have mingled with the crowd again.

But his progress was arrested by Tom King, who clutched him tightly by the arm.

"You said just now, did you not, that you saw some prisoners liberated from their cells?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, then, can you tell us whether one of the prisoners set free was Dick Turpin, in whose behalf this attack upon Newgate was principally made?"

"No, he was not. I have not seen him, and I am almost—nay, quite—certain that he is not at liberty."

"I feared as much," said Claude Duval. "Now, my friends, what are we to do?"

"Do? we can do but one thing. If Dick Turpin is not free, he must be somewhere within the building, where he will perish unless we find him."

"Forward, then," cried Tom King. "I, for one, will either save or perish with him, and I know both you will be of the same mind as myself. Follow me, and we will search the building from the roof to the foundation but what we will find him."

And, as he spoke these words, quite heedless of the peril of the course he was about to adopt, Tom King dashed back again into the burning building.

He did not turn his head to see whether he was followed by his companions.

That, he knew, would be quite useless.

He was certain they were close behind him.

"Back, then, into the blinding smoke and scorching flame they went, intent upon rescuing their gallant comrade from the fate which threatened him.

From chamber to chamber they went, up staircases and down, through long dreary corridors, all the while shouting for him at the top of their voices.

But Newgate is a large place, and, besides, neither of our friends were acquainted with its intricacies, and, therefore, they were not likely to be very successful in their search.

In the meantime the fire spread with the most alarming swiftness, and in a little time it became clear that the fire had seized upon the whole of the building.

Maddened by the want of success which had hitherto attended their efforts, the three friends rushed from room to room.

Still to no purpose.

And now the flames increased in force and heat, and more than once they were compelled to retreat before them.

But, gathering courage and fresh strength from each repulse, they persevered and fought their way onwards.

They had, they fancied, been all over the edifice, but they might have been mistaken, for the smoke was confusing, and the stone chambers and the vaulted corridors were bewilderingly alike.

No words of ours could possibly express the dread and anxiety which filled the hearts of the three highwaymen as they found all their efforts unresultful.

Every moment, too, that elapsed threatened them with fresh danger.

When they got outside the building they expected to have many difficulties to contend with.

The mob might be attacked by the military, for there had been time enough for the alarm to spread all over London.

Suddenly they came to a door which they did not remember having seen before.

It was unfastened, and they flung it open in a minute.

To their disappointment they found it led into the Old Bailey.

The people were still assembled in a dense mass.

Their countenances were still lighted up by the ruddy light.

Our friends were about to turn away again, when a cry burst from the lips of the mob, which had the effect of instantly arresting their attention.

CHAPTER CCCXLIX.

DICK TURPIN HAS SOME HAIR-BREADTH ESCAPES IN THE BURNING PRISON, AND GIVES MR. CAWTHORN ONE FOR LUCK.

Let us leave Claude Duval and his two comrades for a few moments—they have had lately a full share of attention—and let us relate the further extraordinary adventures of Dick Turpin in the prison of Newgate.

The reader will doubtless recollect that, when we last left him, it was under rather peculiar circumstances.

He was disguised in the exterior articles of apparel which had been worn by the watchman he had left insensible in the paved yard.

The long white coat, the felt hat, the short thick stick, the lantern, and the thick woollen comforter which was wound round his throat made a very efficient disguise indeed, and almost any one, casually glancing at him, would be deceived by it.

It had deceived the watchman in the vestibule, for he had addressed Dick by the name of Wilks, which probably was the name of the man who lay so quietly in the yard.

We have related how Dick succeeded in getting close to this watchman without exciting any suspicion in that individual's breast, and how he had suddenly taken advantage of his proximity to deal the watchman a blow with his stick on his head, which gave forth an ominous sort of crack.

The watchman dropped down on the floor of the vestibule as if he had been shot.

It was just as he had done this that Dick heard a tremendous crash.

What it was, or what it meant he had really no idea.

It was the mob, who had just succeeded in breaking down one of the outer doors of the prison.

Then Dick's ears were assailed by the clanging of a bell, which he recognised as being the alarm-bell of Newgate.

Something of an unusual character was now evidently taking place within the prison, and the idea that naturally first presented itself to his mind was that his escape from the cell had been discovered.

He drew in his breath, and clutched the stick firmly in his right hand.

It was the only serviceable weapon he had got.

He then looked around him, determined not to abandon his idea of rescuing his comrade.

He counted no less than seven doors opening from the vestibule.

It was only natural that he should hesitate a moment as to which he should take.

It was while in this state of indecision that he heard the trampling of feet, and then the door which happened to be facing him, was thrown violently open.

A crowd of persons rushed in.

By their attire Dick could tell they were Newgate officials every one of them.

They seemed to be in a state of the greatest panic and consternation.

Nearly all carried lights.

Some were only partially dressed, and among these was one who Dick Turpin recognised instantly.

It was Mr. Cawthorn, the governor of Newgate.

He presented quite a picturesque appearance.

But his countenance was expressive of the utmost alarm.

"What shall we do?" he cried; "what shall we do? We shall be murdered, every one of us, or burnt to death, or something. We can't get out, because of the mob, and the mob won't let any one come near us who would render us assistance. Hullo! what is this?"

He saw the body of the prostrate watchman.

"Here's Wilks," said some one. "What brings Wilks here? He ought to be on the outside of the prison."

"That is not Wilks," cried Mr. Cawthorn, as a ray of light from one of the numerous lanterns fell upon Dick's face. "That isn't Wilks, you idiot. Seize him!"

The men rushed forward in a body to execute this command, but they beat a precipitate retreat directly.

Dick saw his danger, and did the wisest thing he could.

That was to place his back against the wall of the vestibule.

He met the onslaught of his foes with a vigorous flourish of the short thick stick.

He brought it down upon their heads, or any other part of their bodies that came in his way, with right good will, and they fell back bruised and bleeding.

"Confusion!" cried Mr. Cawthorn, as he witnessed the defeat of his men. "Upon him again! That is Dick Turpin in disguise. Seize him! A hundred pounds will be divided among those who succeed in making him a captive!"

These words produced a wonderful effect upon those to whom they were addressed.

Mr. Cawthorn was a man who happened to be gifted with an extraordinary memory of faces.

He only needed to see a man once to tell him ever after.

Now with Dick's appearance he was, as the reader may suppose, owing to his long sojourn in the jail, tolerably familiar; and so he was with Wilks, the watchman.

He saw, then, at a glance that it was not Wilks, and another glance enabled him to identify the disguised man as Dick Turpin.

How he came to be there, or how he had succeeded in disguising himself in Wilks' apparel, he did not know.

Finding himself known, however, and certain that the cumbersome clothing he had put on would no longer be of any assistance to him, Dick Turpin pulled off the watchman's hat and comforter, and then divested himself of his coat.

He stood there then in his own proper character, and ready to do battle with his foes.

They numbered twenty to his one.

But the mode of action he adopted rather astonished them and took them aback.

Instead of waiting for the attack, which they were preparing to make, and which, doubtless, would have been a successful one so far as his capture was concerned, Dick uttered a loud yell, enough of itself to strike terror into the boldest heart; then, whirling the watchman's stick round his head, he dashed forward, and vigorously attacked his foes.

This was a manœuvre which they never for a moment expected, and they were in consequence for a moment too much surprised to do anything in the shape of warding off the attack.

It thus happened that during this movement Dick Turpin was able to do a great deal of execution.

His enemies seemed to fall before him like grass before the scythe.

Right and left they gave way before him.

Then Dick made a leap which carried him a good four feet towards the door through which Mr. Cawthorn had entered.

Mr. Cawthorn himself was standing close to it, and Dick thought this a capital opportunity of paying off old scores.

The governor of Newgate could tell perhaps by the expression of Turpin's face what he was about to do, and he darted aside.

But he was not quick enough to evade the blow which Dick aimed at him.

Crack! came the end of the watchman's stick on to the top of the governor's head, and then in an instant he measured his full length upon the floor.

Without stopping to see how far the blow had been effectual, Dick darted through the door close to which he was, and slammed it behind him.

Hastily turning round, he felt for the fastenings.

He found a couple of bolts.

It did not take him a second to shoot them into their sockets.

He was only just in time.

With a tremendous rush, the men dashed against the door, no doubt under the expectation that it would immediately give way, but they were deceived.

It remained as firm as a rock.

Dick turned round, and found himself in a low, arched passage, which seemed to extend in a straight line for a considerable distance.

There were no doors opening from it, so he was forced to run along it, no other course being open to him.

At the extremity of this passage there was a flight of steps, which led upwards, and the top of which he could not see.

This was not what Dick wanted.

He was quite low enough down in the prison to be where the cells were situated, and, if he went any higher, he would get out of the way of them altogether.

There was no choice left for him, though.

He must either ascend those steps, or go back to his foes.

The latter alternative was so out of the question as not to amount to any choice at all.

Up the stairs he went, then, taking two at a time, in order to get to the top as quickly as possible.

Upon reaching it, however, the unmistakable odour of fire came to his nostrils.

In the distance, too, he could see dense volumes of smoke.

By listening he could hear the roaring and crackling of the flames.

He then recollected what the governor had said about the prison being attacked by a mob and set on fire, and then the conviction came over him that all this was to be attributed to his friends, who were, doubtless, taking this means of rescuing him.

This was to him, under the circumstances in which he was placed, a very consoling thought.

Perhaps they had already succeeded in freeing Tom King from his cell.

But Dick did not like to trust to this supposition without having some better proof than he had at present.

On arriving at the top of the stairs, he found himself on a little square landing, from which only one door opened.

The steps commenced again in a corner, and still led upwards.

Disregarding them, Dick turned all his attention to the door.

It was fast, but, exerting all his strength, he burst it open.

No sooner had he done so, however, than such a mass of flame rushed forth, that he was compelled to either draw back or sacrifice his life.

What was on the other side of the door, or where it led, Dick was, of course, unable to form any idea.

Rapidly he retreated, for the flames, having found an outlet, rushed forth with great fury.

Dick was still compelled to ascend.

He ran to the corner where the stairs commenced, pur-

sued by a long tongue of flame, which seemed intent upon reaching him.

But Dick gained the race, and was quickly out of the way of that danger.

There was one comfort. The fire would form a tolerably good barrier between himself and his foes, and they would not be able to pursue him with such readiness as they otherwise might.

Up the staircase, then, he sprang, determined to go no higher than he was obliged.

The staircase was a spiral one.

Coming, at length, to a kind of landing, he saw a door, which he pushed open.

There was a great deal of smoke beyond, but Dick did not hesitate to pass though the door, and close it after him.

He found himself in an apartment, which was comfortably furnished as a bed-chamber.

There were many little valuable article lying about, and the materials of which every object was composed were of excellent quality.

Indeed, although Dick Turpin only took a hasty glance around him, he was rather surprised to find such a looking place inside Newgate.

The thought did not at first strike him that he had made his way into that part of the prison occupied by the governor, but such was the fact.

This will account for his friends having searched so unsuccessfully for him among the cells.

Dick did not stop to make any examination of this room.

There was an uncomfortable feeling of heat in it, and the smoke was rapidly increasing in volume and density.

The thing which took Dick's attention was the door, and he hastily opened it.

He saw another room beyond.

Uttering an exclamation of impatience, Dick crossed it.

The fire was beginning to give him very great uneasiness.

He was fearful that Tom would perish in the burning mass.

It was some means of getting lower down that he wanted to find. He knew that while he remained where he was, or went up higher, he should only be wasting time.

A feeling of great satisfaction, then, came over his heart when, on crossing this room and passing through the door of it, he found himself upon a spacious staircase, which went both up and down.

He chose the latter direction, and went down at what might, with great propriety, be called a breakneck speed.

As he went down, however, he found the heat increase in an astonishing degree.

The smoke, too, became thick and blinding.

Plainly could he hear the roaring sound which flame produces—a sound which, once heard, can never be forgotten.

Still he kept on, determined, if possible, not to allow himself to be turned back.

He felt his face scorch, and his hair singe, while his clothing seemed ready to burst into flame at a dozen places.

Then he paused, and abandoned the idea of descending any further, for to look down was like looking into a furnace.

Under this impulse, Dick stepped back a few paces, and well was it for him he did so.

If he had remained any longer than he did upon the spot he had just occupied, he would have assuredly perished.

With a tremendous crash a large piece of the staircase, which, by the action of the fire, had been rendered unable to sustain its own weight, gave way, and fell into the blazing depths below

It had the effect for a moment of subduing the raging of the flames.

But they soon broke forth again with redoubled fury, as though from the restraint that had been put upon them.

Turpin shuddered when he thought of the narrow escape he had had.

It was certain that he would have to find some other means of descending than that

He looked around him.

He was standing on a landing from which several doors opened.

Selecting one of these at random, he found it give way before the pressure he applied to it.

Crossing the threshold, he entered another bed-chamber.

The floor beneath his feet felt burning hot.

Looking down, he could see between the crevices of the boarding long bright lines of light.

For the first time the idea crossed his mind that he was in a situation of extreme peril, and that he might have the greatest difficulty in saving his own life.

Convinced that he should do no good to his friend by perishing in the fire, he advanced towards the window, with the intention of making his way out of it before the fire in the room beneath made such a thing impossible.

CHAPTER CCCL.

DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN MAKING A PERILOUS EXIT FROM NEWGATE, AND IN JOINING HIS FRIENDS IN THE STREET BELOW, WHERE HE FINDS HIMSELF BESET WITH FRESH DIFFICULTIES.

No sooner did Dick Turpin make his appearance at the window, than he was greeted by a loud shout, which seemed to come from a hundred thousand throats.

It was not, however, a yell which greeted him, but a cry of satisfaction and pleasure.

There was no mistaking the character of it.

Looking down, Dick saw that the window at which he stood was a considerable distance from the ground, and that beneath him was the Old Bailey.

He knew the street instantly.

It was brilliantly illuminated by the flames which rose from the blazing building.

Opposite he could see the well-known and familiar shop kept by Coles, the pie-maker.

The Old Bailey was filled with people.

Never in all his life had Dick Turpin beheld such a vast assemblage.

Once afterwards he saw a vaster.

He could tell those beneath him were his friends, and he waved his hands repeatedly to them.

Each time that he did so they gave vent to a tremendous cheer, which made all the place echo again.

Dick Turpin looked down as he meditated making his descent.

There was a window immediately below the one at which he stood.

Through this the flames and smoke poured in volumes.

Through this, too, he would have to pass, before he could reach the ground.

While he stood for this short time in doubt, the fire broke through the flooring from the room below, while smoke surrounded it.

The people noticed it and gave a loud cry, which warned Dick of his danger.

There was clearly no resource for him but to leave Newgate, and that at once.

If he remained he would surely perish.

He must give up all hopes of rescuing his comrade, and console himself with the reflection that some one had been beforehand with him.

The reader will remember that at the close of a previous chapter we stated that Claude Duval, Sixteen-String Jack, and Tom King were about to turn back into the prison, and renew their search for Dick, when their footsteps were arrested by a cry which came from the throats of the people outside.

It was the cry which greeted Dick Turpin's appearance at the window.

Something of an extraordinary nature had happened they felt certain, and it was very necessary for them to know what it was.

They made their way therefore into the crowd.

The first thing they noticed was that the people all turned their faces in one direction.

They followed them, and then they saw the person for whom they had been so anxiously searching, standing at one of the front windows of the prison.

But he seemed to be literally surrounded by flame and smoke.

No sooner did they see this, than the three highway-

men at once gave up the idea of making their way into the interior of the prison.

They pushed through the crowd so as to get as close to the windows as they could.

But they would never have got through the compact mass in the way they did, if it had not been for the circumstance of their being recognised.

They were known as being the intimate friends of Dick Turpin, whose position looked so perilous, and they would doubtless do all in their power to rescue him.

In holding this opinion the mob were perfectly correct.

A lane was opened just wide enough for the highwaymen to get through, and as soon as they passed it was closed up after them.

In a comparatively short space of time, then, they managed to get just beneath the window at which Turpin stood.

Then they shouted and waved their hats, in the endeavour to attract his attention.

In this they were also successful.

Down through the mass of smoke Dick looked, as the well-remembered tones struck upon his ears, and then a friendly gust of wind blew the smoke away, and he saw his old comrades making encouraging signs to him.

"Descend—descend!" they cried to him, at the top of their voices. "Descend! Get something and let yourself down as low as you can. We will be beneath and catch you."

Dick nodded, and then his comrades knew he comprehended what was said to him.

As he looked down through the smoke the first person Dick saw was Tom King.

He was quite overjoyed to see his old companion at liberty. So much so that, with a light heart, and unconcerned manner, he set about freeing himself from his perilous situation.

Tom was free.

The object for which he had risked so much was gained.

He had now nothing to do but to drop into the friendly arms that would be extended to catch him.

Turning round, then, Dick strove to look across the apartment, and see whether there was anything that looked likely to aid him in his descent.

But so filled was the chamber with a dense, blue, suffocating smoke, that he found to look across it was a matter of impossibility.

Then Dick recollected having noticed that the apartment was fitted up with great elegance and taste as a bed-chamber.

He remembered the exact position of the bed itself, and also that it was furnished with white hangings.

If he could reach this bed, then, and obtain possession of a couple of long curtains which hung at the head of it, he would be furnished with a rope that would go a long way towards aiding his descent to the street.

No sooner did this recollection occur to him than he abruptly left the window, and, in spite of the bewildering smoke, made his way towards the bed.

He heard the people give a shout as he disappeared from their view.

The floor cracked beneath Dick's footsteps.

It was all but burnt through, and he was fearful that, after all, it might give way, and precipitate him into the furnace that was raging underneath.

Moving, then, as quickly as possible, so as not to leave his weight in one place any longer than he could help, he made his way to the bed.

Dimly before him he could see the white hangings.

He clutched the one nearest to him, and gave it a sudden snatch; using so much force that the rings, or whatever the fastenings were at the top, gave way, and the curtain came down in his hands.

Leaning over the bed, he caught hold of the one which hung on the opposite side, and, by a similar snatch, brought that down also.

This done, he made his way back with all speed to the window.

His appearance was greeted with a vociferous cheer.

Quickly tying the two long curtains together, Dick proceeded to fasten one end to the window-sash.

He then found he had a rope of about twelve feet in length, and though this was by no means long enough to reach the ground, still, if he descended by it, it would materially break the force of his fall.

The more expeditious he was in his movements now, the better it would be; so, having assured himself that the knot was firmly tied, he proceeded without delay to lower himself through the window.

He projected his feet first, keeping hold of the curtains as he did so.

It was quite time he left the chamber.

Indeed, it is questionable whether he could have remained in it above another moment, for the flames now burst forth through the casement with the utmost fury.

Dick felt the hot blaze scorch his back.

Without losing his presence of mind for a single instant, however, Turpin steadily descended the rope.

With great anxiety his friends stood below in readiness to receive him.

Dick allowed the rope to slip through his fingers until the end was reached, and then he paused.

He was at least fifteen feet from the ground, and that seemed a long way to fall.

Part of the distance, too, was through a mass of flame, the ascending heat of which almost roasted him when he hung.

But through this, when he let go, he would pass with great rapidity, so the probability is that he would receive only slight injuries.

The immense crowd of human beings that filled the street were now intensely silent.

Not a sound came from any one of them.

Their interest was wholly concentrated upon the scene that was taking place before them.

The only sound that rose above the roaring of the flames and the tolling of the alarm bell, was the voices of Dick's friends encouraging him to let go.

Dick obeyed.

He relaxed his hold of the rope, and closing his eyes, allowed himself to fall.

There was a sudden sensation of heat.

A still more sudden shock.

Then he was safe and surrounded by friends.

A thousand hands were now outstretched to grasp his in a friendly pressure.

As well as they could, his three friends kept off the pressure of the mob.

They had now only one object to achieve, and that was to get away as quickly as they were able.

But this was destined to be a very difficult matter.

The crowd was quite solid, and it seemed as impossible to force a way through it as to force a way through the strong stone walls of Newgate.

Claude Duval had laid his plans well, but this was a little obstacle which he had not foreseen.

Under an archway, on the opposite side of the Old Bailey, and just facing the principal entrance to the prison, were four horses of first rate quality.

They were in the charge of men upon whom the utmost reliance could be placed.

This archway, then, under which the horses were kept waiting—saddled, bridled, and ready for instant service—led into a kind of inn-yard.

On the left-hand side of this yard there was another gateway, similar in all respects to the other.

But this led from the yard into Fleet-lane—a very narrow and disreputable thoroughfare, which is now partially in existence.

From this description the reader will be easily able to obtain an insight into Claude's plan.

He calculated that they would be able to reach the archway and mount the horses there.

Then, when they had done this, the cattle were to be walked down the yard, and out of the other archway into Fleet-lane.

This thoroughfare would be sure to be deserted.

For the convenience of those who may not be acquainted with the locality, we may as well state that Fleet-lane is a narrow street which runs at right angles out of the Old Bailey, and connects that thoroughfare with Farringdon-street.

But, at the time of which we are writing, Farringdon-street was not in existence. The space now known by that name was then designated Fleet-market.

It was down this Fleet-lane, then, that Claude thought they would be able to make their way without having to encounter any obstacles.

And, doubtless, his calculations would have proved to be quite correct.

But there was the difficulty of getting to the archway.

It was in vain they strove to force a way through the mob.

Every individual of whom it was composed seemed intent upon grasping Dick Turpin by the hand.

It might be very satisfactory to know that one possessed so many friends, but just then their demonstrations of amity were rather undesirable.

Suddenly, however, there was a loud cry, and signs were given that something of an unusual character was going on upon the outskirts of the mob.

This caused a favourable diversion.

And here let us take an opportunity to pause a moment.

We have been altogether led away from describing the effects of the actions, and have simply described the actions themselves.

In the first place, then, there was the prison of Newgate.

From having been set on fire in so many places, the flames had spread with great swiftness over the whole edifice.

A great portion of it, being built of stone as it was, would, doubtless, for a long time withstand the action of the fire, but there was fuel within which would burn for a long time.

Indeed, it soon became evident that nothing but the shell of the building would be left.

The alarm-bell had ceased to toll.

The inmates of the prison, we mean the official inmates of it, finding the desperate aspect which affairs presented, had made their way to the roofs, and from these had succeeded in gaining the roofs of the adjoining habitations.

In these days, when there are so many means of quenching a fire, and so much promptitude in making use of them, some effectual step would long since have been taken; but the case was entirely different a hundred and fifty years ago.

The alarm, of course, spread—it could not fail to do so.

Indeed, the intelligence had been diffused nearly all over London.

Numbers of police-officers arrived, but they were in such a decided minority, when compared with the crowd that filled the space in front of the prison, that they were powerless to do anything but remain passive spectators of the scene.

They could make no impression on such a superior force.

And so the mob had things all its own way.

They remained wedged tightly together, and refused to budge an inch.

While they did this, the officers could do nothing but watch the progress of the flames.

The utmost consternation and excitement prevailed in the immediate vicinity of the prison.

All the people who dwelt there were in the greatest possible fright.

Having stated these facts, the reader will be at no loss to understand how it was the mob was allowed to pursue its course unmolestedly, and how it was that the highwaymen remained in the prison so long as they did.

The cry, however, of which we have just spoken, showed that something peculiar was taking place.

The crowd began to lose its stability.

The reason was simply this.

The police, finding how utterly useless they were, had despatched some of their number to the nearest barracks, in order to call in the aid of the military to quell the disturbance.

This was done, and the cry announced the arrival of a large troop of mounted dragoons, who were all well armed.

The mob shrank back a little at the sight of such formidable antagonists as these looked to be, and the soldiers, perceiving this slight advantage, hastened to follow it up.

The mob still began to give way, though very slowly.

Still they did give way, and were only prevented from giving way still further by their inability to do so.

From mouth to mouth the intelligence passed that they were attacked by a regiment of dragoons, and at last the tidings reached the ears of the four highwaymen, whose chances of reaching their horses under the archway now seemed to be very much diminished.

CHAPTER CCCLI.

DICK TURPIN, TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MOUNT THEIR HORSES UNDER THE GATEWAY, AND ARE PURSUED BY THE POLICE.

From what has just been said, it will be seen that the aspect of affairs was rather peculiar.

The four highwaymen were now menaced by a danger they had never counted upon.

It was danger from those who had been so friendly to them.

A kind of panic seemed to seize upon the mob when they found they were opposed to a military force, of which they had a very reasonable and natural dread.

Besides, they considered they had accomplished all that they had set out with the intention of doing.

Newgate was nothing but a mass of blazing ruins.

Dick Turpin and Tom King were at liberty.

The other prisoners had been released.

Vengeance had been wreaked upon Adrian Winberry.

What occasion, then, was there to oppose themselves to the dragoons, and be finally dispersed after receiving many wounds, when they might as well quietly disperse, and escape the consequences of what had been done?

Looking at things from this point of view, the conduct of the mob was nothing but rational and consistent.

Quietly, then, they began to disperse along the different streets.

In this movement, however, the highwaymen did not wish to participate.

They wanted to get to the opposite side of the way, but it was like thinking of crossing a torrent.

To remain where they were would be but to court destruction.

In what way were they to act?

Dick suggested that they should mingle in the stream, taking care not to lose sight of each other, and, while going in the same direction as the mob, to endeavour to cross it in a diagonal manner.

This was a course that would have answered very well with a real current of water, and might answer with this current of people.

At any rate, as this was the only feasible plan that could be thought of, it was adopted.

The regiment of dragoons had approached the Old Bailey from the Ludgate-hill end, and, of course, the people drifted towards Newgate-street and Snow-hill.

In this direction our friends went.

They found it easy enough to follow the tide, but not very easy to carry into effect the second part of Dick's suggestion.

Slowly, however, but surely, they increased the distance which intervened between them and the stone walls of Newgate, until, at length, they had got fairly into the middle of the road.

To be brief, they succeeded, after awhile, in crossing the street, and standing in safety, all four together, on the opposite pavement.

It was nearly at the top of the street, however—close to the corner of Skinner-street, in fact—and they had now to work their way back to the archway.

This was at least a hundred and fifty yards distant from where they stood.

They would have to force their way, too, in a direction contrary to that which was taken by the mob.

This they were able to do by going in single file, and keeping very close to the houses.

When the pressure was greater than usual, they were able to withstand it by clinging to such projections as they met with.

In this way they forced a passage, and got on much more quickly than any one would have thought.

To their great satisfaction, however, Dick Turpin and Tom King at length heard Claude and Jack say——

"All right—here we are at last. Turn down under the arch."

Another moment and all four of the highwaymen stood beneath the gateway of which we have spoken.

The red reflection of the fire illuminated this place, and



[THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN SALUTING DICK TURPIN AS CAPTAIN.]

they were easily able to see the horses and the men who were there in charge of them.

A great load was now removed from the breasts of our friends, and they thought themselves completely out of danger, but in this they were slightly in error, as succeeding events will quickly show.

A word had been agreed upon, the pronunciation of which should be a signal to the man who held the horses that the right persons had called for them.

With all speed possible they mounted their steeds.

By the time they had fairly seated themselves in the saddle, and were in readiness to move, the first part of the soldiers had reached the end of the archway, and were fighting desperately with the mob.

More than this the four highwaymen did not wait to see.

Giving their horses the impulse forward, they made their way into the yard to which the gateway led, and from thence to the other gate, which, as we have already said, would enable them to gain Fleet-lane.

As Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack had arranged between themselves what was to be done, Dick Turpin and Tom King held back and allowed them to take the lead.

The gates were closed, but the man who had been left in charge of the horses ran on in advance and opened them.

There was now nothing to obstruct them.

Passing under the archway they emerged into the narrow lane.

No sooner had they done so, than they heard a voice, which came from the direction of the Old Bailey, say in loud tones—

"There they are—there they are! Hurrah! Forward, my lads! We shall have them, and a good night's work it will be for us! There is two thousand five hundred pounds to be divided between us if we can succeed in capturing them! Forward—forward!"

Instinctively the four highwaymen looked in the direction from which this sound proceeded, and there they saw

what seemed to be a very large body of mounted police-officers.

They were in strong enough numbers to completely block up the thoroughfare.

Of course our friends did not wait to do more than fling one hasty glance at their adversaries.

Having done this, they turned their horses' heads in the direction of Fleet-market, and, just grazing their flanks with their spurs, darted off at full speed.

The officers raised a loud shout, and set off after them at the best speed their horses were capable of making.

The rate at which the four highwaymen tore down Fleet-lane was rather alarming.

Several people were in the street, but they hastened to ensconce themselves in the doorways that were nearest to them.

With a rush the highwaymen turned the corner into Fleet-market.

This place was crowded with stalls, barrows, baskets, and such litter as may now be seen around Covent Garden-market early in the morning.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were still in advance, and, without saying a word, they turned to the right, taking their course up Fleet-market towards Snow-hill.

At the period of which we are writing, and long afterwards, a kind of open sewer, called the Fleet Ditch, flowed through this place.

The Stygian stream was spanned by a rude wooden bridge.

Over this the highwaymen clattered at unabated speed, but the officers, who valued their necks a little more, slackened speed slightly as they crossed it.

Up Snow-hill—across Smithfield—our friends went with the police-officers at their heels.

Shots were fired every now and then, but they were harmless.

It is a difficult matter to take aim at anything on horseback while going at full speed.

Continually the officers shouted out to the highwaymen to surrender.

But, as a matter of course, they paid not the slightest attention to them.

The officers were mounted upon horses of excellent quality, and were almost equal to those our friends bestrode.

Such a race as this was, then, could not fail to be full of interest.

As they looked back, and saw how close the troop of officers kept behind them, the four highwaymen became uneasy.

The issue of the race seemed doubtful.

It was in vain they applied, with all possible vigour, both whip and spur to their animals. They were going at the utmost speed, and could not exceed it.

The officers goaded their horses cruelly.

A little horseflesh did not matter much to them; the reward was all they looked for.

Claude led the way towards Islington, then a little village some distance from the metropolis, and not, as it is now, a portion of the huge wilderness of bricks and mortar.

They were in the open country.

London was already far behind, and on both sides of them was nothing but meadows, bordered by tall hedge-rows.

They now reached the foot of a long, steep hill.

The horses showed the most unequivocal signs of exhaustion, and it was pretty certain that, if they were galloped up the hill, they would not be good for much by the time they reached the top.

However, they spurred them onwards, and got half-way up the hill.

Then Dick Turpin, seeing how matters stood, and that it would be something like madness to keep up such a race, cried out "Halt!" at the top of his voice, and, at the same moment, brought his own horse to a stand-still.

His friends were somewhat surprised, and wondered what could be the matter.

But, for all that, they obeyed his command, and came to a full stop.

Dick Turpin turned round and faced the officers.

His comrades did the same.

The officers, who were about twenty in number, were about a quarter of the way up the hill.

Upon seeing their prey stop and turn round in the manner we have described, they were filled with astonishment, and, under the impulse of that feeling, reined in their horses also.

A curious spectacle now presented itself.

The pursuers and the pursued sat regarding each other in silence.

They were just out of the range of pistol-shot.

While the officers continued for a short space of time in this condition of astonishment and indecision, Dick Turpin spoke rapidly to his comrades, thus anticipating the questions which he knew would be asked him.

"It is no good keeping on like this," he said. "We don't stand the ghost of a chance of getting away from them. They will keep on our track like bloodhounds, and follow us everywhere. We had no start, and it is impossible to gain one."

"But what are we to do? We cannot engage with a force so much our superior in point of numbers."

"I have thought of a plan. You see the state of indecision they are in. Already they know not what to think of our sudden movement. From our advantageous position let us charge down upon them. Rely upon it, they will give way before us like chaff before the wind."

This was a bold and daring proposition, and just such a one as we could conceive Dick Turpin to make.

His comrades were surprised at it for a moment, but they soon saw its advantage, and determined that Dick's plan of operations should be followed.

They felt sure the officers would be completely taken by surprise.

Moreover, owing to their advantageous position, they would be able to sweep down upon their foes with a velocity which there would be hardly any resisting.

In the meantime, however, the officers appeared to have recovered from the panic into which they had been thrown, for one of their number, who probably was the one in command, rode forward a few paces with a pistol in his hand.

"It's no go," he cried, at the top of his voice. "You had better give in handsomely, for we mean to have you anyhow. You can't escape, so surrender at once, and I will give you my word you shall not be subjected to any ill-treatment. Come, now, that's a fair offer, seeing as how you're as good as captured already."

"We are of a different opinion," cried Dick, "and we will try to bring you to think the same as we do. Forward, my friends! Down upon them! Hurrah!"

The loud hurrah which Turpin gave was well echoed by his companions, and then, plunging their spurs deep into their horses' flanks, they set off at a fearful gallop down the hill.

The officers saw this movement on the part of the highwaymen with the utmost surprise and consternation.

They made an irresolute sort of stand for a moment, and then, finding how the highwaymen came thundering on, they one and all, as if animated by the same impulse, turned round, and galloped down the hill.

They fully bore out what Dick had said; namely, that they would scatter like chaff before the wind.

The holsters of all the saddles were furnished with pistols, so the highwaymen took the reins between their teeth, and grasped a pistol in each hand.

These they fired, and it was wonderful to see what an impetus the discharge gave to the movements of the officers.

Their speed was much increased.

It was by no means part of Dick's intention to pursue the officers back to London.

As soon as they could after reaching the bottom of the hill, they reined in their horses, and then turned round.

Back up the hill they went, urging their horses to make all the speed they could, because a little distance then in the shape of a start would make a great difference to them.

It would almost seem as though the report of the pistols had had the effect of exciting or frightening their horses, for they tore along at a rapid rate, and seemed oblivious of their fatigue.

Upon reaching the top of the hill, however, our friends paused, and allowed them a short breathing time; but while they did so, they took care to keep a sharp look-out

down the hill, so as to be aware when their foes made their appearance.

It was here, then, that the four friends had the first opportunity of exchanging a few words with each other.

The greeting between them was of the warmest and most cordial description.

There was not, however, much time for the interchange of courtesies.

Important matters pressed upon them, requiring speedy consideration.

In the first place, Dick wanted to know the arrangements which had been made by Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

Upon inquiring, however, he found that these arrangements had not extended any further than bringing them to the spot where they now stood.

The expedience of getting to some place of cover was now very palpable.

The officers were not in sight, though, doubtless, not many minutes would elapse before they made their appearance.

Now was the chance of getting shelter somewhere, and such a chance might not occur again.

It would be too much to expect that the same manœuvre would answer a second time, though so successful on the first occasion.

All four, therefore, set their wits to work to hit upon some scheme which would enable them to outwit the officers.

"There is one plan," said Turpin, speaking very slowly, "which I have put into operation a great many times, and never without succeeding; and why should not the same plan answer now?"

"What is it?" asked his comrades eagerly.

"It is to get into the meadows unperceived, and lie down behind the hedge, thus allowing the officers to pass by."

"A good suggestion," cried Claude Duval, "and a thought has just struck me which will, I fancy, enable us to put this ruse successfully into execution."

CHAPTER CCCLII.

BY ACTING UPON CLAUDE DUVAL'S SUGGESTION THE HIGHWAYMEN SUCCEED IN DOUBLING UPON THE POLICE-OFFICERS.

"THAT is good news, Claude," cried Dick Turpin; "let us hear what you have to propose."

"Oh! it is very simple, but it is not less likely to be successful on that account."

"Cerainly not."

"Let us break through the hedge, or get through in some manner that will not leave any trace of where we have gone, and then, instead of lying down behind the hedge, let us creep gently down the hill again."

"I understand you."

"Stop a moment. By dismounting and holding the horses by the bridles we shall be able to lead them down under cover of the hedgerow. There will then be less danger of our being seen."

"But how about the officers?"

"When we hear them approaching we must remain profoundly still. There will be or ought to be nothing to cause them to stop, but will continue their course up the hill, under the impression that we are descending it on the other side."

"A capital plan."

"I am glad you think so, but I have not told you all yet."

"What else is there?"

"If you decide upon acting as I recommend, dismount, for there is no time to lose, and I will tell you in the meanwhile."

"Agreed."

The four highwaymen having resolved upon the adoption of the course proposed by Claude, dismounted from their horses, and proceeded without further delay to look for some gap or opening in the hedge through which they could make their way without leaving anything to show which direction they had taken.

Claude continued.

"As soon as the officers have passed us—as I have no doubt they will—and as soon as we feel sure they have got far enough to be out of ear-shot, we will continue our progress down the hill until we reach its base. We shall then be able to take one of the numerous cross-roads that will be spread before us."

"Better and better, Claude. Really, that is a capital expedient, and I have no doubt in my own mind that the officers will be completely deceived by it."

"You must make haste," said Sixteen-String Jack. "If you do not, you will be too late, for I can hear the hoof-beats of the officers' horses."

The sound to which Jack had alluded came quite plainly to the ears of his comrades, and it acted as an incentive to them to make all the speed they were able.

As is very often the case in England, the road was bounded on both sides by a bank several feet in height, and on the top of this a hedge was planted so thickly as to be impervious to anything.

Our friends went on in the hope of finding a gap through which they could scramble, but nothing of the kind presented itself to their view.

The hedge was in too good a state of preservation.

At length, however, and just as they were beginning to despair, they came to a gate.

But it was locked.

Such a thing as that was not likely to interfere much with the progress of the highwaymen.

Sixteen-String Jack had it unfastened in a moment.

He held the gate open and allowed them to pass through.

Then, closing it, he restored it to its original position.

The trampling of horses' hoofs could still be heard, though the sound was so faint that any less practised ears than theirs would have failed to detect it.

The officers were, however, at a considerable distance, and some time must elapse before they could reach the top of the hill.

There was consequently an opportunity for our friends to make good speed.

There was no fear of their being heard, for the meadow was covered to a depth of several inches with long grass.

Upon this the horses' feet raised no sound.

The summit of the hill was soon reached, and then the descent was commenced.

Presently they could hear the officers were very close at hand, so they slackened their pace to a walk, and finally became still altogether.

They had no fear of being seen from the road; the bank, and the hedgerow above it, effectually secured them from all possibility of detection.

There was only one thing that was in the least difficult.

That was to keep the horses perfectly still, so that no sudden movement should betray their presence to their enemies.

By patting the creatures, and otherwise caressing them, they were in hopes of doing this.

The officers came on at a gallop.

They were talking very loudly to each other, but the highwaymen could not detect the words they used.

They swept past in a moment.

Our friends drew a long breath, but did not venture to move for several minutes.

At length, when they considered all danger was past, they continued their course down the hill.

The bottom was reached in perfect safety.

Breaking through the hedge, they emerged into the high-road.

The officers were now before them.

The pursuers and the pursued had changed positions.

But they did not care about continuing this.

Mounting their steeds, they kept on along the road, looking carefully about them for a cross-road.

They had not far to go before they found one, and they plunged down it without hesitation.

It was a matter of the most perfect indifference to them where it led.

As there was no pressing need for speed, they judged it unadvisable to distress their cattle unnecessarily.

At a gentle trot, then, they took their way along the umbrageous lane.

From time to time they stopped and listened, but they could hear nothing of their pursuers, and they now began to indulge in the hope that they had baffled them altogether.

With this feeling of partial security in their minds, the

four friends talked over the various occurrences of the past.

They had much to speak about, but there is no necessity for us to do more than allude to it, because the occurrences of the past have been chronicled at length.

Over and over again did they congratulate each other on having made such a fortunate escape.

They now saw in the sky indications of the coming day.

A faint gray tint was overspreading the sky, and the sun was about to rise upon that day which so many people confidently anticipated would be the last that Tom King would pass upon earth.

It was his second narrow escape.

He had need be careful of the third time.

He was, however, light-hearted enough now, and laughed and chatted gaily with his comrades.

The danger was past, and no longer thought of or heeded.

That they were all greatly fatigued after what they had gone through, our readers can easily believe; and, now that the day was advancing, they looked rather anxiously about them, in order to find some place of shelter.

It might be, however, that they would have to travel a considerable distance before they came to a house, for they had got quite far enough from London for houses to be things of very rare occurrence.

A substantial meal and an hour's rest at some roadside inn would be a good thing both for their horses and themselves.

In the desire to reach an inn as quickly as possible, they put spurs to their steeds and increased their speed.

Presently the end of the cross-country road was reached, and here, as they had more than half expected, they found a public-house.

The junction of a cross-road with the main highway was the place generally chosen for their erection.

Although the hour was such an early one, the inmates of the public-house were all astir.

The sounds of their horses' feet brought the landlady and the ostler to the door.

It was Dick Turpin who inquired whether they could take the horses into bait for an hour or two, and find them with a meal.

He was answered in the affirmative.

Accordingly they dismounted, and, having seen their steeds disposed of in the stable and properly attended to, they returned to the house.

Upon entering the huge, comfortable kitchen they found that a substantial repast had been laid for them, and they sat down to it with hearty good will.

Their exertions and the keen morning air had made them as hungry as hunters.

They washed their food down with copious draughts of some of the finest October ale they had ever tasted.

They remained at the inn nearly two hours, at the end of which time the day had fairly began.

However, they had their horses saddled and brought to the front of the inn; then, mounting them, they turned their heads in the direction of the country.

When they left the inn they had to ascend a hill—being, in fact, another portion of the one they had ascended a short time before.

Upon reaching the top the four highwaymen paused to look about them.

The scene that was spread before them was truly magnificent.

The day was an unusually clear one, and the ground, being rather flat, they were able to see round them in a circle that was very many miles in diameter.

Not a word had been said about pausing at the top of the hill, nor was the reason for doing so mentioned, but all did so, and all, shading the extraneous rays of light from their eyes with their hands, took a long and earnest look around them.

But it was not at the splendid scene which lay before them that they looked.

On the present occasion the beauties of Nature had no charms for them.

They were looking for traces of their foes.

But, though they looked long and carefully, they were unable to see anything of their pursuers.

It was too much to hope that they had given up the chase.

Still, as we have said, there were no signs of them to be seen, although our friends had such a good post from which to take an observation.

It was Dick Turpin who first turned round and broke the silence which had fallen upon the little party.

"I cannot see anything of our foes," he said, "but we must not allow that circumstance to lull us into a state of false security. If we do, we shall assuredly be taken by surprise, and perish."

"You are right enough there, Dick," muttered his comrades.

"We must keep ourselves constantly on the alert, and betake ourselves to some place of safety. It is not possible that the occurrences of last night will be allowed to pass over without notice. The authorities had fully determined upon making an end of us, and they will be enraged accordingly, when they find we have escaped. Then that web is a serious business; and then to conclude, there is the burning of Newgate. All these events, my friends, will have the effect of directing the attention of the whole of the country to us, which will materially increase the danger that has always environed us. This is very serious, and demands our attention; and, to come to the point I wished to reach, what have you made up your minds to do in the future?"

"That entirely depends upon yourself, Dick," said Claude Duval; "we are quite ready to place ourselves under your direction, and be guided by you. I am, however, of rather a different opinion to yourself with respect to the consequences of last night's actions."

"How so?"

"You take too serious a view of it. That we shall be the focus of a great deal of attention in consequence of what has been done, I do not attempt to deny, but that we shall be in any more danger than we have been all along, I beg leave to dispute."

"On what grounds?"

"The simplest in the world."

"I am curious to hear them."

"Then I will tell you. For a long time past the authorities have done their best to capture and destroy us. They have made every effort—strained every nerve. But they have failed. Is this true, or is it not?"

"It is quite true."

"Very well, then. If the authorities have been trying to do their best, you will very much oblige me by telling me how they can do any more."

There was a general laugh at this.

"I think it is quite clear," said Dick Turpin, "that it will take too serious a view of the matter, you take too trivial a one. You are certainly open to that accusation. At any rate, it is necessary we should be exceedingly cautious and careful."

"Oh! certainly—certainly. Public attention will be fixed upon us for the space of nine days perhaps, and during that time the burning of Newgate will form a general topic of conversation, but after that you may rely upon it things will resume their wonted course."

"There is a good deal of sense in your remarks, Claude," said Dick Turpin; "and now that we have got so far, and now that we appear to have a favourable opportunity, I do not think we can do a better thing than walk our horses gently along the road, and talk over our future plans and prospects."

"We ought to do so."

"We have already broken the ice, so let us continue. There are no police-officers in sight, so we will go down the hill gently and talk."

"Agreed."

"If you like, I will tell you what my opinions are."

"Do so—do so."

"There will be such an outcry made about what has taken place, that even were they not inclined to do so, as they are, the public voice would compel them to put into execution some very energetic means of effecting our capture."

"I should not wonder."

"Nor I."

"Still, that is not much to dread," persisted Claude.

"We shall see."

"Very true."

"But, just suppose for a moment that the authorities should talk it into their heads to organize a very strong force, whose especial duty it should be to search the

country for us, what, in your opinion, would be the best means we could adopt in order to secure our safety?"

"That is a question more easily asked than answered."

"So I am aware."

"Still, it is not unanswerable."

"You have something to propose, then?"

"I have."

CHAPTER CCCLIII.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN REACH ENFIELD CHASE IN SAFETY, AND DICK TURPIN IS MADE CAPTAIN OF THE BAND.

DICK TURPIN, Tom King, and Sixteen-String Jack looked, with an expression of great interest visible in their features, at the face of Claude Duval when he uttered the words with which the preceding chapter concluded.

Claude had showed himself rather more inclined to take the lead than usual.

"Let us hear your answer," cried his comrades; "and, if your scheme is a good one, we will adopt it."

"You are very kind."

"Come, the answer."

"In the event, then, of the occurrence of such a circumstance as you have mentioned, I should advise, in order to ensure our mutual safety, that we should plunge into some thinly-populated part of the country—where there is a forest, for example—and that we should there secrete ourselves until such time as we should find it safe to emerge. In the intricacies of a forest we could easily set all the efforts of our enemies at defiance."

"Excellent—excellent," exclaimed Claude's three companions, who immediately caught at the idea he wished to convey to them. "Most excellent."

"I am glad the bare outline of my scheme, for it is nothing more, is so well appreciated by you."

"The idea is most excellent," cried Dick Turpin. "The more I think of it, the better it pleases me, and the more confident I feel that it will enable us to elude our foes."

"Of course it will; but you must bear in mind that a great part of safety will rely upon our whereabouts being kept a secret."

"Certainly."

"Well, then, since you are so pleased, what do you say to putting my plan into force at once? I don't know when we shall have a better chance than we have at present. It is beyond a doubt that there are none of our enemies in sight, and we have left no track by which we can be followed from the hill where we doubled upon them."

"Do you know of any place that would answer our purpose, or that corresponds with the description you have given?"

"It is a long time since I was in that part of the country, but I can recollect that, years back, there used to be an extensive forest near the village of Enfield. It was not exactly a forest either, because it was called Enfield Chase."

"I have heard of the place you name," said Dick Turpin, "though I have not been there to my knowledge. Do you think, then, that this Enfield Chase, if it remains in the condition it was in when you saw it last, would be likely to answer our purpose?"

"I do."

"Why so?"

"It is in a very quiet, out-of-the-way place, and is but little known. I think you three were all but ignorant of its existence."

"So we were."

"It is, however, a vast place. A hundred men might conceal themselves in it. Then, as for provisions, we should never want, for the Chase abounds with some of the finest deer that can be found in England."

"Bravo! excellent!" exclaimed Dick. "I see, we are going to lead a Robin-Hood sort of life in the greenwood."

"Just so; and we shall be four merry men, I promise you. If we can but gain this place unperceived, I am sure we cannot do better than remain there for a week, by which time the occurrences of last night will be best part forgotten, and, from our not having been seen during that period, people will come to the conclusion that we have left the country."

"I like Claude's plan vastly," said Sixteen-String Jack. "As you said a little while ago, Dick, the more I think of it, the better I like it. I question whether any place could be thought of offering us more chances of concealment and fewer of discovery."

"I am perfectly agreeable to it," said Tom King "While admitting the force and efficiency of all your arguments, it would be very agreeable as a change from the cells of Newgate, which are by no means to my liking."

"Then it seems," said Dick, "we are quite unanimous upon this point."

"Quite."

"Very good; then we will make our way to Enfield Chase at once—that is, if Claude Duval will direct the way."

"I dare say I shall be able to do that when I have considered our bearings a little. Let me see. Yes; if we keep along this road until we come to the next turning on the right, and go down that until we emerge into the high-road again, we shall only have to follow that to reach the place I have named."

"Very good, then. Let us increase our speed a little, because, having made up our minds where we are going, the sooner we reach our destination the better. You, Claude, lead the way."

In this light-hearted manner the four highwaymen made their way towards the place which they had agreed upon for a resting-place.

No one to have seen them laughing and chatting gaily, as though such a thing as care was utterly unknown to them, would have guessed the part they played on the preceding night.

It was the joy of their reunion which went a good way towards banishing those gloomy feelings which they might individually have felt.

Dick had been separated from his companions for a long time—ages it seemed to them—and they were rejoiced to once more see him in their midst.

We need not trouble the reader with the details of their journey to Enfield Chase.

This magnificent forest, though now no longer in existence, was, at the time of which we are writing, in full glory.

Its size was somewhere about equal to that of Epping forest at the present day.

It was thickly grown with trees of all description, and stocked with deer, which fully deserved the eulogy that Claude Duval passed upon them.

Other kinds of game were to be found there in abundance.

Scarcely a tree now stands to mark the spot where this royal chase once stood.

It was disforested in the year 1779, and since that time it has rapidly dwindled away until it has become merely a thing of the past, and ere long it will be forgotten that there was ever such a place in existence.

It was a capital suggestion of Claude Duval's, that they should make this extensive chase their hiding and abiding place, and his comrades acted very wisely in falling in with it.

Indeed, it may be questioned whether, if they had perplexed their brains for months, they could have hit upon any plan so likely to set at nought any exertions their enemies might make to effect their capture.

If they reached the chase, and fairly plunged into its tangled recesses without being seen to do so, they were what might be called safe.

Nothing but some extraordinary accident could discover them.

The chase itself, admirably adapted for concealment as it was, had many other special recommendations.

It was situated in a part of the country that was but thinly inhabited, and in a place which really deserved the appellation of out of the way.

It was about three hours before noon when the four highwaymen arrived at the outskirts of Enfield Chase.

All the way they had been careful to keep a very sharp look out, and from time to time had ascended trees and eminences in order to assure themselves that they were not followed.

Upon no occasion had they seen the least signs of a human being.

Indeed, the only living creatures which had fallen under their vision were the cattle in the pastures.

Even these were few in number.

With hearts full of hope, then, our four friends guided their horses beneath the wide-spreading branches of the stately trees, and fairly entered the chase.

Each step they took filled them with delight.

Having been cooped up between walls so long as they had, our friends felt all the keener enjoyment of what they saw.

But the scenery around them was of such a beautiful sylvan character, that no one could withold their admiration, no matter how dead they might be to the appreciation of the beautiful.

It was autumn, and the trees presented that variegated appearance which they always do at that season of the year.

The bare branches were not yet exposed, though decaying leaves lay in large quantities upon the ground.

The morning was one of unusual fineness for the season. It was like summer.

The birds carolled sweetly in the trees, and in the air there was that delicious hum which is often heard in the country, and which proceeds from thousands of insects.

With the exception of this hum, and the faint rustling of the boughs of the trees, there was not a sound to break the profound silence.

As they proceeded, however, taking their course in a direct line into the centre of the chase, the murmuring of a waterfall came upon their ears.

The faint, rushing, gurgling noise of the water, as it bubbled over some obstruction, sounded pleasantly on the ear.

The mimic stream was not, however, discernible.

It was hidden by the dense undergrowth with which the chase was covered.

The ground had a downward tendency, and presently our friends found themselves in a kind of dell, or dingle, which was of more than magic beauty.

Its sides were clothed with trees of every imaginable shape and hue, while down one side the little brook they had heard, came pouring in a kind of mimic cascade.

The water was sparkling and bright, and with the sun shining upon it with full power, it looked doubly so.

It fell into a kind of natural basin which it had hollowed out of the soft rock

From this there arose a cloud of spray.

Never in their lives had the highwaymen seen a scene of such enchanting loveliness, and so much delighted were they with it, that they resolved to halt there and go no further.

Accordingly they dismounted, and tethered their horses to the trees in such a manner that they could crop the short, sweet herbage which grew there in abundance, covering the ground as with an emerald carpet.

Our friends sat down close to the little waterfall, and quenched their thirst with its pure fluid.

All were charmed with the spot, and declared they could make it a permanent residence if it was necessary.

Birds of various kinds flew about in every direction, and from their tameness, it was pretty certain that they had remained for a long time unmolested.

The highwaymen were furnished with arms and ammunition, so, as they sat, they amused themselves by firing.

They soon brought down enough birds to last them for the day.

The reports of the pistols sounded with great loudness in that silent spot, but they considered they had penetrated far enough into the forest for it to be safe.

A short search among the neighbouring bushes soon supplied them with an ample store of fuel in the shape of dry twigs and grass.

These they made into a heap, and set fire to by means of the flints attached to the locks of their pistols and a little gunpowder.

In rather a primitive fashion the birds were dressed, and hung before the fire to roast.

But hungry men are easily satisfied, and our friends were content because they could have nothing better.

They were as happy and contented as it was possible for any four human beings to be.

That Dick Turpin really did for a time make a home in Enfield Chase is a matter of history.

Such was actually the case.

An anecdote the writer once heard, and which now comes to his recollection, will bear out the truth of it.

It was from the lips of a personal friend—a gentleman well known to the reading public by his powerful writings—that the author heard the anecdote.

He stated that, when a young man—now about fifty years since—he was on a visit to Enfield, and, during his stay, spent a great deal of time in rambling about the chase, the beauties of which filled him with admiration.

In these excursions he was generally accompanied by an old gray-headed man, who held the post of steward over the estates belonging to the gentleman with whom he was staying.

This gray-headed man, from the fact of his always from a boy having resided within a short distance of the chase, was intimately acquainted with all its intricacies, so he was admirably qualified for a guide to lead the way to those places which were worthy of notice.

On one of these occasions the steward paused opposite to a tree, and pointed out to his companion a large iron hook, which was very cleverly concealed under one of the lower branches.

This hook was rusty, and over-grown with moss.

It was driven firmly into the trunk of the tree.

On being asked his reason for pointing out this hook, the old steward replied—

"I never fail to show that hook to anyone who accompanies me to the chase. It is full of interest to me, and so it will presently be to you."

"In years long back, many and many a fat buck taken from the king's deer has been hung upon it."

"But by whom?"

"By my uncle."

"Your uncle?"

"Yes."

"Then he was a deer-stealer."

The steward nodded.

"And a good many other things besides."

"But it seems strange that you should point out to a stranger the crimes of one of your relations."

"It does seem so; but do you know who my uncle was?"

"No."

"Did you ever hear of the famous highwayman, Dick Turpin?"

"A thousand times; but surely you are not his nephew?"

"I am," replied the steward. "Dick Turpin, the highwayman, was no other than my uncle. I believe I am the only descendant of the family that now remains alive, and, as you see, I am an old man and not likely to live many years longer."

"But you have children?"

"No."

"Then you are the last of your race."

"I am. My name is George Turpin. Now look at that hook. Dick Turpin has hung many a king's deer upon it, and it has been pointed out to you by the only relative of the highwayman in existence."

CHAPTER CCCLIV.

DICK TURPIN BIDS FAREWELL TO HIS COMRADES, AND SETS OUT UPON HIS PERILOUS EXPEDITION.

SUCH is the substance of the anecdote related to the author when the first number of this romance was published. It is interesting from its personality, and about its authenticity there can be no doubt, for upon making enquiries in the neighbourhood, the gentleman alluded to found that what the old steward had told him was quite correct.

Like most other persons, this gentleman felt a deep interest in any little personal particulars connected with the bold highwayman, and he had frequent conversations with the steward upon the subject.

In this way he became possessed of many little details that would have remained unknown, but of which the writer, as the narrative proceeds, will be enabled to avail himself.

He found the steward, who was a trustworthy, confidential servant, was the only son of Dick Turpin's only brother.

"It was through my father," said the old man, "on one occasion, that my uncle Dick got into trouble."

"Indeed," asked the gentleman; "and how was that?"

"In a very strange manner. Dick Turpin, after his famous ride to York, was apprehended on suspicion, and lodged in York Castle, which, as I dare say you know, serves the purpose of a prison."

"I have heard as much."

"Well, when he was apprehended the officers did not know who he was, and Dick accordingly gave them a false name. The crime of which he was accused was a highway robbery, which I firmly believe he never committed."

"Do I understand you to say that your uncle was apprehended on a charge of highway robbery, and lodged in York Castle without the authorities knowing who he really was?"

"Just so. That is the case. Well, my uncle thought he should be easily enough able to prove an *alibi*, and thus escape; so he bribed one of the jailers in the prison to bring him pens, ink, and paper. This done, he sat down and wrote a letter to my father—that is, to his brother."

"I quite understand you."

"Well, in this letter he was very explicit. He told him how he had been apprehended on a false charge, and how he should be easily able to escape if my father would only come forward and say where he was at the time when the crime was alleged to have been committed. In this letter he also told my father that he had not given his real name, but a false one, and cautioned him not on any account to let his real name be known, for if he did, it would be all over with him."

"And did your father refuse to come forward?"

"I will tell you, sir. Having written the letter, the substance of which I have made you acquainted with, my uncle carefully sealed it up, and then, watching his opportunity, got the jailer he had bribed to carry the letter to the post. It was addressed to my father at Thaxted, in Essex, where he dwelt, and the postage amounted to one-and-tenpence. Dick gave the jailer a crown piece, and expressly desired him to pre-pay the letter, and added that he might keep the change.

"Well, sir, you would have thought the jailer would have executed this little commission all right, but he did not.

"He took the letter to the post-office, and dropped the letter into the box without paying the postage at all, thus keeping the crown piece to himself."

"And what was the result?"

"Why, very serious indeed to my uncle, as you shall hear. In due time the letter reached Thaxted, and when it arrived my father found there was three-and-eightpence to pay. Now, only the week before some friends of his had played him a trick by sending a blank sheet of paper through the post in the form of a letter, and causing him to pay two-and-fourpence for it. Of course he was vexed, for no man likes to be made a fool of.

"Now, when this second letter arrived, the first thing he thought of was how he had been duped before, so he looked at the postmark, and found it York.

"He knew very well he had no one in that part of the country to whom he was related, or who would be likely to write to him; so, convinced this was only another trick, and that he should be laughed at again, he resolutely refused to take the letter.

"In the end it was carried away and forwarded to London, where it was opened, in order to see by whom the letter was sent, and so as to be able to return it to him. Well, of course, when the letter was opened at the post-office, London, the whole secret was out. The police were communicated with, and Dick was detected."

This, and much more, did the old steward communicate, and the writer will be able to embody these facts in the narrative when the proper time for doing so arrives.

For the present, however, we must confine ourselves to a relation of the occurrences which immediately took place.

In accordance with the suggestion of Claude Duval, they remained for the space of one week without daring either individually or collectively to stir from their hiding-place.

They had rather a rough time of it, for, though the days were fine, the nights were cold, and they could find nothing better than the trees to shelter them.

But they were unmolested, and this compensated for a great many of the inconveniences they were compelled to endure.

Their time was pretty fully occupied in telling over each other's adventures.

At length, on the evening of the seventh day after their arrival in the chase, and just as it was beginning to grow dusk, Dick Turpin called his comrades around him.

"We have been here a week now," he said; "and what Claude said has proved quite right, for I don't believe there is another place in England where we could remain so long undisturbed."

"Nor I."

"But, my gallant comrades, it is quite time we ascertained what was going on in the world. We are complete strangers to the transactions of the past few days, and who knows how important it may be to us to learn the transactions of the last week."

"I have been thinking about that," said Tom King. "In fact, I may say, we have all been thinking about it, and, if you had not spoken just when you did, I should have made a request which I will warrant now is forestalled."

"My friends, I dare say you feel as anxious as I do to know what has happened. I am exceedingly anxious, and would fain gain some particulars."

"I know what you mean," said Claude Duval. "You want us to go to London, and we will do it."

"You are not quite right, Claude, this time. I want to learn what has taken place, but I do not want you with me."

"Oh!"

"I will tell you why not. It appears to me that, if they are making search after us, they will look to find us all four together. For this reason, I think if I go alone, I shall not run so much risk of detection."

"I partly agree with you," said Sixteen-String Jack, "but not altogether."

"Where is the difference?"

"Why, it will be better for one to go than four; but, then, I don't think you are the most suitable one."

"Why not?"

"Because you are the best known of all four of us, and the most likely to be recognised. Now, with me the case would be different."

"I know all you are going to say, Jack," interrupted Turpin, "so you can spare your breath. You want to convince us that you are the person best qualified to go. In fact, you all want to go."

"That's about it," said Tom King.

"But need I say how injudicious such a course would be? Only one must go. And there is another thing I wish to remind you of."

"What is it?"

"When you have asked me about my mare, Black Bess, I have invariably told you she was in perfect security, and I firmly believe that such is the case. But we must not doom ourselves to a life of perpetual inaction here. Such a life would never do for me. 'Hurrah for the road!' is my motto."

"And mine—and mine!" said his comrades.

"I know it. And now let me ask you a question. What would Dick Turpin have been without his bonny Black Bess? Why, nothing—absolutely nothing. The fame all belongs to her; and, if we are to go on the road again, as I hope we shall for many and many a bright night, how could I hope to achieve anything without her?"

The three highwaymen waited to hear what further he had to say.

"I could not hope to achieve anything. Now, I alone know where she is, and this is the proposition I wish to make to you. Will you three remain here for the remainder of to-night, and allow me to set out upon my two-fold errand; namely, to fetch Black Bess, and to ascertain what has taken place in London during our absence from it?"

"It is very necessary that we should obtain the information, and also that you should regain possession of your mare, but that does not make the slightest difference to what I said."

"How so?"

"It will be better, and less hazardous, for me to go to London than yourself; and then, as for not knowing where Black Bess is to be found, you can tell me that, and then there will be an end of that difficulty."

"Not quite," said Dick, with a smile, "though I see

you are bent upon going if you can. The persons in whose charge Black Bess is left will deliver her to no one but myself, and so it will be useless for you to try."

"You mean you are bent upon going, Dick. However we shan't say you nay. Indeed, I will tell you what we have made up our minds to do."

"What?"

"What we made up our minds to a very long time ago, but which we have never been able to carry out, from the interposition of adverse circumstances."

Dick smiled.

He guessed what was coming.

Sixteen-String Jack continued:

"We have resolved," he said, "to make you our captain, to place ourselves entirely under your control—to elect you, in fact, our leader. We have already done so, in fact, and now the time has come for the arrangement to be carried out."

"You will force this honour upon me," said Dick, "though, if you will believe me, I would much rather be without the responsibility. Still I am well aware of the advantages which must always accrue from a leader—upon having some one whose word shall decide what is to be done in the moment of danger."

"That is just it. And you consent?"

"How can I refuse?"

"Three cheers, comrades."

The highwaymen gave three lusty cheers, which made the old chase ring again, and then Dick said:

"I warn you I shall take advantage of the authority you have vested in me to do just what I was proposing a little while ago."

"I expected that."

"We must give way," said the others.

"I trust you will," said Dick. "For my own safety's sake you may depend I shall be very careful. I will make what inquiries I can, and then, without further delay, I shall make my way to Winberry Hall, for it is there I left Black Bess."

"And I hope you will find her all right again, Dick."

"I hope so too. Not that I have any doubts."

"You have got the whole of the night before you, so you ought to be able to conduct your enterprise comfortably."

"Yes, the night is young yet, but do not in consequence of that expect me too soon. I may be detained, but something will be wrong if I am not back by daybreak."

"We shall be anxiously expecting you, captain."

"Above all things, do not be tempted to roam from this spot, no matter how great may be the inducement. The consequence of your so doing might be serious, and I should be deeply vexed if so capital a place of concealment as this has proved to be is discovered."

"It would be a thousand pities,"

"It would indeed, and therefore I hope you will be guided by what I say. And now I will prepare to start; there could not be a more favourable time."

In this Dick was perfectly correct.

Evening was just deepening into night, and a vague kind of obscurity prevailed everywhere, which had the effect of confusing all objects.

Dick selected the best horse of the four, and rapidly put on his saddle and bridle.

That done, he mounted.

He felt something more like himself than he had done for a long time past.

He looked carefully to his weapons, and took care to be well supplied with ammunition.

Then, fully armed and accoutred for the rather perilous undertaking he was about to perform, Dick Turpin, followed on foot by his three faithful comrades, took his way at a walking pace towards the borders of the chase.

Just visible above the tree-tops was the rising moon, and this enabled Dick to direct his course with tolerable certainty.

He wished to proceed due west, so all he had to do was to keep his back to the moon.

But little was said on their way to the borders of the chase.

All four, however, were busily occupied with their thoughts.

At length, when the increasing thinness of the vegetation, and distance from tree to tree, warned them that they would soon emerge into the open country, the little party paused.

It was Dick Turpin who halted first.

The probability is, that if he had not taken the initiative in the matter, his companions would have continued walking by his side for some distance further yet.

"Farewell," he said, raising his cap as he spoke. "We had better part here. You may expect to see me here to-morrow by daylight, accompanied by Black Bess."

"Farewell, captain," said the three highwaymen, taking off their hats, and bowing profoundly to Dick. "Farewell, captain. A safe journey to you."

Waving his hat, Dick reiterated his injunctions for them not to attempt to leave the place until he returned. Then, striking his spurs into his horse's flanks, he rode rapidly away.

CHAPTER CCCLV.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD GOULDMAN ARE PURSUED BY THE POLICE.

THE strange adventures which befel Claude Duval, Tom King, and Sixteen-String Jack in Enfield Chase after parting with their captain, must be deferred to another chapter.

So much interest is attached to the expedition ... which Dick was about to set out that we are perforce compelled to follow him, and narrate what adventures he met with upon the road.

The reader will doubtless not be at a loss to find the true reason for Dick being so very anxious to fetch Black Bess himself.

It was not that his comrade could not find Winberry Hall, or that Black Bess would not be delivered to him when he did find it, and applied for her.

No, neither of these was the reason.

The fact was, that Dick could not banish the recollection of the beautiful Maud Gouldman from his mind.

To be sure, he did not try to banish all thoughts of her quite so hard as he might have done.

Dick loved her.

For the first time in his life he felt the influence of that power of which some dullards have attempted to deny the existence.

Ever since the first time he had seen her he loved her, and all subsequent events had only tended to increase the violence of his passion.

It was for her dear sake that he had perilled his life and liberty in the way he had, and very nearly forfeited both.

But now he was free he felt an insatiable desire to see her, and he rejoiced to think he had so good an excuse ready at his hand as that which fetching Black Bess afforded him.

With his mind filled with pleasant thoughts Dick took his way along the broad high-road.

His blood coursed through his veins.

As the poet says—

"His bosom's lord sat lightly on his throne."

Higher and higher climbed the moon, and as she rose in the pure blue vault her light became brighter, and fell with a wondrous and beautiful effulgence upon the various objects in the landscape.

But her brightest rays seemed to glitter and fall upon the person of the highwayman and upon his steed.

Very handsome and very picturesque he looked in the romantic light.

His body was erect and his head high.

A pleasant smile was on his lips.

From time to time he spoke kind and encouraging words to his steed.

Only a little time would have to elapse, he told himself, and then he should bestride his bonny mare Black Bess.

That would be a delight of no common order.

So eager was he to reach Winberry Hall, that he departed from the agreement he had made with his comrades.

This was, that he should first proceed to London and learn the state of affairs, and then go for Black Bess.

But, now that he was upon the road, Dick determined upon leaving London until the last as being less important.

After proceeding for some distance across the country



[BLACK BESS RECOGNISES HER MASTER.]

from east to west, he stood up in the stirrups and looked about him.

He seemed to recognise his locality, for he nodded his head complacently, and continued on his way.

Dick met with many vehicles and travellers in the course of his journey, but he drew aside and avoided all of them.

Without the occurrence, then, of any important or interesting incident he arived in front of Winberry-Hall.

He recognised it in a moment.

As it stood before him, the occasion when he had first looked upon the structure rushed vividly across his mind.

The whole place now seemed to him to wear an air of desolation.

There were no lights visible at any of the numerous windows, though the hour was too early a one for the inmates of the hall to have retired to rest.

For some moments Dick sat unmovable upon his steed looking at the building.

Then, recovering from his fit of abstraction, he touched his horse slightly with the spur.

He directed his course to the door at the back of the hall which he so well remembered, and through which he had so often passed.

The back of the hall faced the south, and the moon was now near the meridian.

Consequently her beams poured down upon it with full force.

He could distinguish every object with the greatest ease.

There was the door.

There were the stables.

There was the pump, the never-to-be-forgotten pump, under which Mr. Josiah Skinner had received such a well-merited punishment.

But, taking only a hasty glance at these things, Dick rode up to the door and dismounted.

He then knocked lightly upon the panels with his riding-whip.

To him it seemed an age before his summons was attended to, but in reality only a few seconds elapsed.

A domestic unknown to Dick opened the door.

He carried a candle in his hand, and looked curiously and suspiciously at our hero.

"What is it you want?" he asked, in a voice that well corresponded with the expression upon his features.

Dick hesitated a moment before he gave a reply, and the servant repeated his inquiry in a tone of the greatest impatience.

But Dick, who had made up his mind how to reply, said—

"I wish to see Mr. Shockley, the steward. Be good enough to ask him to come here to the door and speak to me."

As he uttered these words, Dick slipped into the hand of the surly domestic a coin.

The touch of the precious metal produced an immediate change in his behaviour, and, desiring Dick to wait a moment, he hurried off to deliver the message.

Dick had not long to wait.

The summons was such an unusual one that the worthy steward made all possible haste to respond to it.

He recognised Turpin in a moment, though he did not betray his recognition otherwise than by a start, which escaped the notice of the domestic who had brought the message, and who, at the command of Shockley, now retired.

"And can it really be you, sir, that I see?" he said.

"You may credit the evidence of your own eyes; but time is precious to me, Shockley. Tell me, is your young mistress in the house?"

"She is, sir."

"And her companion?"

"Miss Maud?"

"Yes."

"Yes, she is within."

"Let them know that I am here, Shockley. If they will vouchsafe me an interview, I should feel gratified. I should not like to think that I have seen them for the last time."

"They will see you, I am sure."

"Why so?"

"I have heard them speak about you so often."

"Well then, Shockley, announce me; and, if you will permit me, I will stay here and await the result of the announcement."

"No, no; come in."

"I would much rather stay here. Let me have my own way: I will wait here."

"Well, since you will have it so, I suppose I must give way."

With these words on his lips, Shockley turned away.

Dick listened to his footsteps as he walked along the paved flooring of the hall.

He returned in a moment, and said—

"The young ladies will see you. Come this way."

Dick now did not hesitate to enter.

He followed the steward along the hall to the door of the room he knew so well.

Here they halted, and Dick was shown into the apartment in which his first mysterious interview with Maud Gouldman had taken place.

Little did he imagine what would be the consequences of that interview.

As he crossed the threshold he cast an anxious glance around him, but somewhat to his relief the room appeared to be empty.

And the words uttered by Shockley were confirmatory of this, for he said—

"Sit down a moment, sir. The ladies said you were to wait, and that they would be here directly."

The steward withdrew as he spoke, closing the door after him.

Slowly Dick crossed the vast antique apartment.

As on the occasion which was so vividly before his mind, there was no other light in the room save that which the fire afforded.

This, however, was amply sufficient for all purposes of illumination, with the exception, perhaps, of reading or writing.

The fire was composed partly of coal and partly of wood, and it sent up a large bright flame into the chimney.

Dick sat down on one of the antique chairs by the fireside, and waited for the coming of Blanche and Maud.

Maud! His heart beat strangely and his breath came irregularly from his lungs as he mentally pronounced her name.

Before he had time to indulge any further in his reflections the door opened, and the object of his thoughts, accompanied by Blanche Winberry, appeared before him.

Dick rose, of course, in a moment, and bent low in profound salutation.

They acknowledged his bow, and then, with that ease which good breeding can alone bestow, requested him to be seated.

In this they set him the example.

They indicated a chair which was placed exactly in front of the fire, while they sat down upon either side of it.

There was a silence of a moment's duration, and Dick, fearful that it might grow into a pause of embarrassment, hastened to begin the conversation.

"I trust, ladies," he said, in those deep, rich, and yet respectful tones which he knew so well how to assume, and which never failed to cause a feeling of interest in the breasts of his auditors, should they be of the softer sex, "I trust you will excuse this intrusion, but"——

"I cannot accept of any excuses or apologies from you," said Blanche Winberry, "so do not utter them."

Dick bowed.

He was much struck with the altered tones of her voice.

They expressed a world of sadness, suffering, and woe.

Such tones striking upon a sensitive ear would be almost sufficient to produce tears.

But how much had the poor girl suffered!

She had suddenly found herself bereft of every hope.

Her father, whom she loved with that passionate adoration sometimes experienced by an only daughter to her sole surviving parent, had been snatched from her under circumstances of the most terrible anguish.

Then the young man, for whom she felt an undying, unalterable affection, and which sprung up in her breast at once, and continued to burn with undiminished vehemency—that young man who loved her, too, with an affection only equalled by her own—what a terrible barrier had sprung up between them.

Her dreams of bliss had been rudely and violently dissipated.

He was the son of her father's murderer.

Oh! horrible combination of events!

Under the affliction which the bereavement of her father occasioned, what a solace it would have been to her had there been some one who possessed her heart, and to whom she could unburthen all her sorrows!

But this was denied her, and fresh cause for poignant grief given instead.

From the time they had parted in the court she had seen nothing of him.

He had studiously kept himself aloof from her, and had not made the slightest overture.

He felt that it would be hopeless.

That the gulf which yawned between them was so wide as to be quite impassable.

And for this the love she felt for him, and always should feel, was increased.

It bore out the estimate she had formed of his character.

But, without any description of ours, we think the reader, placed as he is in full possession of all the extraordinary incidents relating to this affair, will be able to picture for himself the grief of this young girl, and the effect which it must have, both bodily and mentally, upon her.

Then Maud Gouldman was not less wretched than her much-loved Blanche.

The reader cannot have failed to penetrate the secret of her heart.

She loved Dick Turpin.

Loved him with all the fond fervour which might be expected from so romantic an attachment.

It was in vain she called in common-sense and reason to her aid.

Those good and safe counsellors were unable to make themselves heard above the voice of love, which spoke with impassioned accents in her heart.

And now, when she gazed upon the really handsome countenance of the highwayman, and marked his robust and symmetrical figure—coming, as both did, so fully up to the idea of what a man should be, she felt her passion for the bold highwayman increase.

CHAPTER CCCLVI.

BLANCHE WINBERRY COMMUNICATES SOME IMPORTANT INTELLIGENCE TO DICK TURPIN

A SLIGHT pause had followed the last words spoken by Blanche Winberry, but now Dick Turpin hastened to break it.

"You excuse this intrusion, then," he said, smiling slightly. "I thought you would, or otherwise I should not have ventured here. My errand is, however, a simple one; it is to assure you of my safety, and to request you to give me back my steed, for which you have been kind enough to provide an asylum."

"We have heard of your escape," said Blanche, "and have taken pains to learn all the particulars of it that we possibly could. How you have reached here in safety I know not."

"I have met with no opposition; but, pardon me, your last speech seems to intimate something more than it expresses."

"It does."

"To what did you allude?"

"I believe the police have had some sort of suspicion that you would make your way here, for they have several times surprised us, and insisted upon making a thorough search of the hall."

"Indeed," said Dick, contracting his brows. "I am much vexed that you should have been subjected to so much annoyance on my account."

"Do not mention it. So long as you were not here I did not care, and I thought while the officers were here upon a false scent, you might be somewhere else in safety."

"I cannot express my thanks for this feeling in my behalf."

"Nor need you. What I have done has been in requital of what you have done for me, and when the two are placed together, how insignificant mine seems! Can I ever forget that had it not been for your generous behaviour, a villain would have succeeded in effecting his purposes? Had it not been for your self-sacrifice, I should not be here now, nor would my father's murderer have been discovered."

Her voice faltered as she made this allusion to her father, and Dick, who always felt uneasy when he heard his own praises sounded, hastened to change the topic of conversation.

"You have said the police have been here."

"Yes."

"How many times?"

"Three times."

"Indeed. Their suspicions must have been strong, then. When was the last time?"

"The day before yesterday."

"And how did they depart?"

"Apparently satisfied that it was no good looking here any longer."

"Apparently satisfied?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I fancy they are not satisfied. Shockley told me he was almost certain they were lurking somewhere in the neighbourhood."

"This is serious."

"It may be so; but, should the officers make another attack to-night, be under no apprehension—they will not find you. I shall be enabled to show my gratitude."

"I accept that, then, as an assurance of safety," said Turpin, cheerfully. "I have kept myself closely concealed during the past week, in a place where my foes would never think of looking for me."

"I am rejoiced to think you have got so secure a place in which to conceal yourself."

"My comrades are there now awaiting my return. We have been kept close prisoners, and they are impatient in the extreme to be set at liberty."

"They must be cautious. The authorities are using the most strenuous efforts to secure your apprehension and theirs also. They are determined that the daring outrage you have committed shall not go unpunished."

"Ah! well," said Dick, "we shall see! I am not afraid of them! I have set them at defiance for a long time now."

"You have, indeed."

"And shall do again, never fear for that!—and when I have Black Bess once again."

"She is quite safe," said Maud, breaking the silence which she had preserved all through the interview. "I have seen to her safety and comfort myself."

"Many thanks!" said Turpin, his soul thrilling with the music of the words he had just heard. "When I am once seated upon her back, I shall care nothing for my foes."

"We have trembled for your safety many and many a time," said Blanche, "and we were pleased beyond measure when Shockley told us you were here."

In acknowledgment of this Dick could merely bow.

"I am not insensible," he said, "of all that you have done on my behalf. The judge who showed himself so warm a friend to me told me all about it."

"It was all done out of gratitude," said Blanche. "Indeed, when I think back upon the past, I seem as though I should never be able to show myself sufficiently grateful, and to repay you would be impossible."

"Enough! enough!" said Dick, "I did my duty; and if this is what may be considered a good action, I trust it will palliate the many bad ones that I have in my lifetime committed. I can assure you that, had I the same motives, I would do the same thing to-morrow."

"I do not doubt your singlemindedness; but what a dreadful fate it was that overtook my uncle."

"Dreadful, indeed!"

"Far worse than he deserved."

"Perhaps so. His sufferings must have been terrible; but the mob was incensed, and it would have been as easy to quench the raging of the sea as to have caused them to desist."

"I know it."

"I was not, thank heaven! a witness of that scene, but my comrades told me the particulars of it."

"And what has become of Skinner, and the other two accomplices of my uncle's?"

"I know not. Probably they were set free along with the rest of the prisoners, and have escaped."

"I have heard nothing of them, though I have made every inquiry."

"Perhaps, then, you would be able to afford me some information with respect to what has taken place in the metropolis during the past week."

"You mean with respect to yourself?"

"Just so."

"I have not much to tell beyond what I have already told you. The police authorities, assisted by the military, are making the most strenuous efforts to capture all four of you, and should they do so, no doubt their proceedings would be very summary indeed!"

"I do not doubt it. And now, what about the prison?"

"Newgate?"

"Yes."

"We drove past there three days ago."

"And how did the place look?"

"It is nothing but a ruin. The ruins were smouldering and smoking even then, and a large number of people were assembled, gazing upon it. Nothing but the strongest walls remain, and they are charred and blackened by the intense heat. The whole place will have to be rebuilt."

"Is it possible?"

"Do not let my description, however, so far influence you, as to make your curiosity overcome your prudence."

"Well, I will confess that I should much like to look upon the scene, but that idea must, I suppose, be abandoned."

"If you place any value upon your life."

"The excitement will soon subside, however."

"It cannot long remain up to the present pitch."

"I reckoned upon its having quite or nearly died away by this time."

"Then you will be disappointed, for I think it is fiercer than ever. You are quite safe here, however, for there are hiding-places in the hall so cunningly contrived that they would defy detection."

"Do you anticipate an attack?"

"I have no reason for doing so, but you may have been seen to enter the place."

"I think not. I knew there was danger, and I omitted no precautions."

Blanche rose as he spoke, and rang a bell.

"You will partake of some refreshments ere you leave?" she said.

Dick bowed.

Shockley appeared.

"Have supper laid in the dining-room, Shockley."

"Yes, miss," replied the old steward, retiring to execute her order.

"I must not stay here too long," said Turpin, "though I shall be loath to tear myself away, but I promised my comrades I would return before daybreak, and I must make some allowance in case of interruptions on the road."

"Have you far to go to reach your destination?"

"Yes, many miles; and my comrades will be alarmed if I am later than the time I mentioned."

At this moment the steward returned to say that the supper was quite ready.

Dick and the two ladies followed him to the dining-room.

The interior of Winberry Hall was tolerably familiar to Dick in consequence of his stay there.

A comfortable meal was laid upon the table, and Dick did not omit to do justice to the good things before him, for his fare of late had been something of the roughest.

How long they would have permitted him to stay is more than we could determine, nor was Turpin at all anxious to quit company so pleasant.

As he from time to time stole a glance at Maud Gouldman, and saw how lovely she was, his heart burned with love, but that was soon succeeded by an aching sensation when he thought of the difference between them.

Dick Turpin, however intoxicated he might be with love, was not oblivious of the fact that the night was passing away, and that his comrades were impatiently awaiting him.

Accordingly, after some more conversation of too general a character to merit being placed before the reader in detail, he excused himself to go.

They knew his reasons, and made no effort to detain him.

Besides, they were aware how dangerous it would be for him to travel by daylight.

"If you will show me to the stables," he said, "I will depart. I would rather not attract the attention of your groom. I can saddle Black Bess myself."

"I will go with you," said Maud, rising.

"Nay, nay," cried Dick. "If you will call Shockley, that will do. Or, indeed, I could find my way there alone."

"You had better have a guide," said Blanche.

"I will lead the way," said Maud. "Black Bess has been solely under my care during her stay here."

"Then she has been well attended, I'll warrant. Lady, I am deeply grateful to you for your kindness to my steed; it touches me more closely than kindness to myself."

"You come with me, Blanche," said Maud.

"No, I dread the cold, and I have suffered so much illness lately, and I should be afraid of encountering the night air.

"I cannot suffer either of you to come," said Turpin. "Let me go alone."

"It is a consideration for your safety which causes me to refuse that request. I wish your departure to be as quiet and unnoticed as possible. Come with me. I will show you to the stable-door and also to the stall in which Black Bess is. Could you saddle her in the dark?"

"With ease. Besides it will not be dark; the moon is shining with so much brightness that it seems like day."

"Come, then."

Dick bade Blanche Winberry farewell.

Tears came to her eyes as she pronounced the word.

She forgot that it was a highwayman who stood before her.

His behaviour, from the first to the last, had been so noble, so generous, so self-sacrificing, that she could scarce believe that he was really what he was.

Indeed, on that night it is questionable whether she did not regard him with some stronger feeling even than admiration.

She felt that she was looking upon him for the last time.

Fain would she have put some question to him respecting her father, and the dark transactions in the house in Birdcage-walk, but her emotions so far overpowered her, as to deprive her of the faculty of speech.

Indeed, she found herself unable to articulate the word farewell.

Dick saw how much she was agitated, and hastened to withdraw.

The spectacle was painful for him.

Blanche made no opposition to Maud leaving with Dick.

The errand seemed to her a perfectly reasonable one.

As soon as the door had closed behind them, she felt that she could no longer control her tears.

She buried her face in her hands, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

Poor girl! her sufferings were almost more than she could bear.

The effects of her grief were visible upon her countenance, and the black mourning-dress which she wore rendered her appearance even more ghastly.

In this state of grief, then, she remained, and while it continued she was quite oblivious of all else.

The duration of Maud's absence was, therefore, unnoticed by her, until, hearing a loud uproar at the back of the house, she started to her feet, and then she recollected all that had taken place.

"Where is Maud?" she asked. "Oh! heavens, what has happened?"

CHAPTER CCCLVII.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD MEET WITH A SLIGHT SURPRISE IN THE STABLE.

Dick Turpin's perceptions were not so obtuse as to prevent his perceiving that there was something peculiar in this behaviour of Maud Gouldman.

The reasons she had given for accompanying him to the stable appeared to be ridiculously insufficient.

But it was not likely that he would quarrel with them or make any remark upon the subject.

He was only too delighted at the idea of having her company for a few moments, and the privilege of bidding her farewell alone.

And Dick had determined to bid her farewell, although the love which filled his heart had increased rather than abated.

Let not this be wondered at, for there were few better qualified to command love from all hearts than she was.

Dick Turpin, however, in despite of this passion, overwhelming as it was, did not forget that rude sense of honour which had regulated his whole career.

He determined not to utter one word of love, but to bid her farewell, and then take every precaution not to see her again.

About, then, to take what he fully intended should be an eternal adieu, he rejoiced at the opportunity of doing so without having any eye to observe them.

But his heart fluttered when he asked himself the question, why had Maud been so eager to have no one present at the parting.

One or two things which had taken place had impressed Dick with the idea that the passion he experienced was reciprocated, and he fancied that, led away by a romantic affection, she might be tempted to say and do that which she would afterwards repent.

We need not remind the reader how rapidly a whole train of thought will pass through the mind, and Dick made these reflections during the brief interval which elapsed between his bidding farewell to Blanche and his passing out into the passage.

Maud closed the door behind her.

There was a lamp burning in the hall, and by the aid of this Dick saw the face and form of his companion.

He had always thought her incomparably beautiful, but never more so than at this moment.

There was a kind of bewitching confusion visible in her countenance and manner as she turned towards him.

She held down her head, and her eyes sought the ground.

Dick hesitated a moment, and then, encouraged by her manner, bowed politely and ventured to offer her his arm.

It was accepted, and with a readiness that betokened anything but displeasure.

How his heart thrilled, and how every nerve in his whole

body appeared to vibrate when he felt the pressure of her hand upon his arm!

Still, with her head down and silent, she walked with him along the hall in the direction of the door through which he had a short time before entered.

There was not a single person visible, nor did any sound arise to indicate the proximity of any one.

Indeed, the household at Winberry Hall had, since the death of Blanche's father, been much reduced, and those few servants who remained were at this moment in their own quarters in a distant portion of the building.

The whole place was, of course, familiar enough to Dick, and he opened the door with as much ease and readiness as his companion could have done who had lived there all her life.

Crossing the threshold, they passed into the yard.

It was then that Maud spoke for the first time.

She requested Dick to close the door after him.

He did this in a moment.

The moon, which, when he started from Enfield Chase, was only a short distance above the horizon, was now a little past the meridian, and as near the zenith as the moon ever is in England.

There was not a cloud nor even the thinnest vapour visible in the sky, which was of an intense and beautiful blue.

The stars shone, but their brightness was obscured, and in some cases extinguished, by the superior brilliancy of the queen of night.

There was no wind, and the most perfect silence prevailed, giving an air of delicious repose to everything.

It was a night that fully accorded with the feelings that held a place in the hearts both of Dick Turpin and Maud Gouldman.

The yard was crossed in silence, and the range of buildings constituting the stables was reached.

Dick opened the door, and the pair entered.

The interior of the stable was very light.

In the roof several skylights were fixed, which, for the purposes of ventilation, were so constructed as to admit of their being raised or closed at pleasure.

Through these skylights the rays of the moon came with full force, and the place was almost as well illuminated as it was in the day time.

Maud Gouldman led the way to the stall in which Black Bess stood.

She knew it well, for she had made it a practice to feed her with her own hands.

It so happened that Turpin's mare stood exactly under one of these skylights, so that she could be seen with the greatest distinctness.

Dick was full of joy to see his bonny mare, to whose exertions on so many occasions he had owed his life, in such comfortable circumstances.

She was certainly in first-class condition, for everything in the shape of good feeding and grooming had been done.

Maud withdrew her hand, and Dick, with an impatience which he could neither control nor conceal, hastened up to the manger, and patted Black Bess upon the neck.

He spoke to her at the same moment.

Although so considerable a period had elapsed since he had seen her, the gallant creature recognised her master in a moment.

Uttering a joyful, half-neighing, half-whinnying sound, she turned round and responded to the caresses her master bestowed upon her by rubbing her head against his breast.

Had it been some dog who had for a length of time been separated from his master, he could scarcely have exhibited more joy than Black Bess did.

Again and again did Dick pat and caress her.

"You see she is quite safe," said Maud, perhaps with the intention of distracting Dick's attention from his steed to herself.

"Yes, thanks to your kindness and attention," replied Dick, turning round and taking hold of her hand, which he pressed warmly. "How shall I be able to repay you for it?"

"Nay, how shall Blanche and myself repay you for what you have done in our behalf? Do not for one moment imagine that we have forgotten how much we owe you; and that, if it had not been for you, the murder of Mr. Winberry would never have been discovered and brought home to the guilty parties. Oh! it was noble of you—truly noble, to risk your life and liberty in the way you did for the sake of the orphan and of justice."

"Do not speak of that."

"Why not?"

"As I have said, I do not like to hear my own praises sounded."

"But I cannot refrain from expressing that admiration which such conduct as yours is so well qualified to call forth! Had I been told of such a thing, I should have discarded it as being beyond the bounds of belief."

"Well, well, say no more upon the point."

"Blanche feels her loss very, very keenly. She loved her father with all the affection of an only daughter. We, of course, expected you to make your appearance, and I know Blanche intended to ask you some questions respecting the last moments of her father; but I am afraid that her emotion was too great to allow her to do so."

"I could have told her very little, I fear; and certainly not more than I have related to you, and which I dare say you have repeated."

"I have, but then she would have felt a consolation in hearing only that much from your lips."

"Would I had been aware of it earlier, and then I would have approached the subject somehow; but, as it was, I was studious to avoid it, for I feared to hurt her feelings."

"I understand the motives which kept you silent. It is only natural that you should think any mention of the subject would be painful to her feelings. Again, however, let me express our heartfelt thanks for the service you have rendered us, and the admiration we feel for your noble-hearted conduct."

"Enough, enough. I shall be quite content if it will weigh against some of my other deeds."

"It will, it will; rest assured it will. But I will not detain you thus. I know every moment now is of the utmost importance to you. Look, here are the trappings belonging to your steed. I have had them placed here in anticipation of your visit."

She led the way to the stall adjoining the one in which Black Bess stood, and which was unoccupied.

In this were the articles of which she spoke.

Dick hastened to remove them, and in a few moments had his mare fully caparisoned, so that all he would have to do would be to mount.

He turned her head round towards the stable-door.

Then he paused.

The hour of parting had arrived.

It was at this moment that he fully realized how deep an impression Maud Gouldman had made upon his heart.

He was about to bid her farewell, and for ever.

He tried to command his voice to speak.

But in vain.

His throat swelled and ached so terribly that he found it impossible to articulate a word.

On her side, Maud seemed scarcely less affected.

The bright moonlight, as it shone down through the skylight upon the noble-looking forms of the highwayman and his steed, lent them a charm and an air of romance which, in daylight, they would not have possessed.

The idea uppermost in her mind was a fervent wish that Dick Turpin was anything but what he was.

She loved him; but she shrank from avowing, even to herself, that she loved a highwayman.

Observing his emotion, and guessing its cause, she hastened to speak, if only a word, so as to break the awkward and embarrassing silence which now prevailed.

The sooner the parting was over, she thought, the better, for she felt scarcely able to trust herself.

She held out her hand.

"Farewell!" she said, faintly, as she did so, "farewell! It may be that we shall never part again, and therefore you—you——"

She paused, and could go no further.

Her throat seemed to swell up and choke her.

"In all probability," said Dick, "we shall never meet again! Indeed, I shall studiously avoid a future meeting, for the sake of my own peace of mind."

He took her extended hand, which hitherto he had not ventured to do, and pressed it slightly.

"Lady," he continued, "for such is the title by which such a one as I should address you—lady, believe me, this is our last meeting, unless some unforeseen accident

should bring us face to face again. I shall try to avoid even the possibility of such an accident."

"Why?" asked Maud, in so faint a voice that none but the ear of a lover could have caught it.

"Do not ask me why, but believe that I have a good and sufficient reason for coming to such a determination."

"I cannot feel content with that," said Maud; "tell me what this reason is."

"Lady," said Dick, becoming, as he proceeded, more and more respectful, "it has been my good fortune to create in your mind a favourable impression concerning me—you have said as much, and I am bound to believe it; indeed, I would not doubt for worlds! But it is such a rare thing for anyone to hold me in esteem, and the knowledge that at least one person does so is so pleasant, that I should be loath indeed to say anything which would be calculated to reverse your good opinion."

"I am not afraid of your doing so," said Maud, huskily.

"Then do not ask me for my reason."

"You are unkind—unjust."

"I would not have you think me so for worlds."

"Then tell me."

"And lose your good opinion?"

"No, no; be under no apprehension upon that point, I beg you. I will give you my word that I will not allow anything you may say to prejudice me in your disfavour. Now tell me—surely you can do so after such an assurance as that."

"If I could be sure of not incurring your displeasure."

"You may be sure."

"Then, lady, I will tell you why I have resolved never to see you more, why I have determined that this shall be our last meeting. The resolution will be a hard one for me to keep. It is because I love you!"

It is impossible to describe the tone in which these words were uttered.

Maud was silent, and so was our hero, until at length the latter said—

"You see I have offended you. But no matter. It is, perhaps, my fate not to retain the good opinion of anyone. Farewell! farewell! I will leave you, and forget that you ever saw or knew Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

He tried to release her hand, but he found himself unable to extricate his own.

She pressed it with such tightness that he could not disengage it.

She came a step or two closer, and placed her other hand upon his breast.

"No," she said, "I am not offended; believe me, I am not. And so far from having lost my good opinion, I think a thousand times more highly of you now than I did before. Oh! I am carried away. I cannot express myself! I"——

Her head sunk upon Dick's shoulder.

But at this moment there was a rapid rush of feet, and a voice cried, in a loud tone—

"Dick Turpin, you are my prisoner! Surrender at once! Resistance is worse than useless! You are surrounded!"

CHAPTER CCCLVIII.

DICK TURPIN IS ATTACKED IN THE STABLE BY MR. WRIGGLES AND HIS OFFICERS.

So very suddenly and unexpectedly these words came upon Dick Turpin's ear, that for the space of about a moment he was rooted to the spot, unable to recover himself from his surprise.

Maud Gouldman uttered a piercing shriek, which plainly told how deep an interest he felt in the highwayman's safety, and clung to his arm with frantic tightness.

The voice which uttered the words with which the last chapter concluded was familiar to Dick, and he recognised it instantly.

It was the voice of Mr. Wriggles, the Bow-street police-officer.

But before we relate what ensued consequent upon this attack, we feel that it is due to the reader to explain to him how it was that Mr. Wriggles learned Dick Turpin's whereabouts, and how it was he broke in upon him at so inopportune a moment.

In a former chapter we have stated that the police had made one or two appearances at Winberry Hall, and had searched the edifice from the roofs to the foundations, each time, of course, without receiving any recompense for their trouble.

They did not find what they sought.

Upon the last occasion, however, Mr. Wriggles, who was at the head of these little expeditions, went away far from satisfied.

Finding himself unsuccessful, and clinging to the idea that Turpin was at Winberry Hall, he resolved to change his tactics.

Hitherto, he had proceeded to the accomplishment of his design in what he considered to be a very open manner.

That did not succeed, so now stratagem and cunning must be tried.

Accordingly, he affected to withdraw all his men, and dropped some hints to the servants that he supposed he must give it up, and search elsewhere.

This he had no intention of doing.

Going to a short distance, he halted at a public-house with the intention of taking up his quarters there until he received some additional information.

As soon as night came, he called aside one of his men who, he judged, would be best able to carry out his instructions, and spoke to him in a low tone.

The police-officer fully understood what was required of him, and he set out at once, alone, in the direction of Winberry Hall.

He approached the place carefully, and spent the night in keeping watch round the premises.

But, as this was the night preceding Dick's arrival, of course he had all his trouble for nothing.

He returned to the public-house soon after daybreak the next morning, as Mr. Wriggles had instructed him to do, and there communicated his unsuccess.

Mr. Wriggles was almost ready to give the job up in despair, but in the end he resolved to have one more trial.

But it was not until late at night that he made up his mind—later, indeed, than on the preceding evening.

In consequence of this, it so happened that Dick arrived at the Hall before the officer, and was comfortably sitting down.

The officer, however, prowled round and round the premises, but without making any discovery.

At length, when his patience was all but exhausted, and he had come to the conclusion that it was "no go," his attention was attracted by the opening of the back door.

Keeping close in the shadow of the outbuildings, close to which he stood, he set himself to work to observe who came forth at that unusual hour.

The bright moonbeams enabled him to see with perfect distinctness two figures, male and female, emerge from the house and cross the yard.

He began now to have better hopes, but he had the prudence to remain quite still.

He watched the two figures, who, as the reader is aware, were no other than Dick and Maud, cross the yard in the direction of the stables.

But, whether they entered them, was more than he could perceive in his present position, and he was fearful of having been seen if he stepped out into the moonlight.

He waited a moment or two, therefore, and then the footsteps of those he had seen having ceased to be audible, he ventured to creep, with a stealthy tread, in their track.

Upon reaching the stables, there was no trace of them to be seen.

Where they had gone he was unable to determine.

He spent some little time in making a tour of the premises, and being still unable to see them, he came to the conclusion that they had not left.

Returning, he made a closer examination, and noticed something which had escaped his observation on the previous occasion.

The door leading into the stable was a little way open.

He approached with a silence that would have done credit to a Red Indian.

The murmur of voices struck upon his ear.

He listened intently.

At first he could only hear a confused murmuring sound, but, by degrees, he could distinguish several words, though he was not able to make connected sense of them.

One sentence, however, reached his ear in full, because it was spoken with greater loudness than the remainder of the conversation.

The voice that uttered it was a manly one, and the words of which it consisted were—

"Forget that you ever saw or knew Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

The reader will remember that in the course of his conversation with Maud Gouldman, Dick Turpin uttered those words.

Stimulated by what he heard, the officer stretched his sense of hearing to the utmost.

He was afraid to believe in the reality of such good fortune as those words seemed to presage.

Could it be possible that the notorious highwayman was in the stable?

A few succeeding words convinced him that such was really the case.

No sooner had he come to this conclusion, than his movements became rather extraordinary.

Like a shadow he glided away from the stable-door.

He crossed the yard.

Then, standing in the shadow of a wall, he produced from his pocket a small round object, about four inches in length and one and a-half in diameter.

He next took from his pocket a long thin stick.

With as much haste as possible he tied the round object we have described to the end of this piece of stick, and then in a moment it became evident what it was.

It was a sky-rocket, though one of rather unusual size.

The officer stuck one end of this stick into the ground, taking care to give it a slanting direction.

Then, by means of what is called a thief's match, and which resembled in many particulars the lucifer now so common, he procured a light, which he applied to one end of the rocket.

With a rushing sound it sped into the air, leaving behind it a long stream of fire.

This was not seen so plainly as it would have been had the moon not shone so brightly.

However, it was plainly visible.

And now this rocket showed itself to be not one of the ordinary kind.

As the reader must know, these ascend until they have attained their greatest elevation, and then burst.

But this rocket, going high into the air, described a complete semicircle, leaving behind it a train of fire as it descended, just as it did when it rose.

Then, on reaching the ground, it exploded, doubtless with great violence and loudness, for where the officer stood he could faintly hear it, and it fell at the distance of nearly half a mile.

But the performance of this wonderful rocket was not yet over.

Upon exploding in the manner we have described, it did not go out, but burnt with a steady, bright blue flame.

This was the signal that Mr. Wriggles had devised, and a capital one it was.

It was an almost instantaneous means of letting him know what had taken place.

And, not only that, the officer who gave the signal would be able to keep his prey in sight, so that Mr. Wriggles would have no difficulty in getting upon their track.

With all these proceedings, however, Dick Turpin and Maud Gouldman were entirely ignorant.

No thoughts of any such thing entered the minds of either.

The signal was, of course, seen by Mr. Wriggles and heard too.

He was on the look out for it, though he hardly dared hope to see it.

The horses were all standing in the stables adjoining the inn in a state of perfect readiness.

All their harness was on, and they were turned round with their heads to the stable-door.

The men were all armed, and ready to mount instantly.

Mr. Wriggles lost not a moment in telling them to do so; and, in a space of time which seemed miraculously small, the officers were all mounted and on their way at full gallop to Winberry Hall.

The officer who had given the signal perceived their approach.

They halted close to the Hall, and the greater part of them, by the order of their leader, immediately dismounted.

On tip-toe they approached the stable.

From what has just been narrated, it must be perfectly clear that the time which elapsed between the officer making the discovery that Dick Turpin was in the stable and the arrival of Mr. Wriggles with his band, was short indeed.

The exultation of the chief officer knew no bounds.

He could not subdue it.

At last, he thought, his prey was securely in his grasp, and that escape was utterly impossible.

Under the influence of this feeling, then, he had dashed open the stable-door and spoken the words with which the last chapter concluded.

Dick Turpin was more taken by surprise than ever he had been in his life.

The reason was simple.

His mind was intoxicated with love, and the manner in which Maud had spoken and acted were well qualified to produce such an effect.

She loved him.

Dick knew it, and his heart swelled when he became conscious of the knowledge.

Despite of his profession she loved him, and did not shrink from avowing her affection.

But he was soon aroused from such blissful dreams.

The piercing scream which burst from Maud's lips went as far towards recovering him as anything.

But she clung to him with terrified violence, nor could he disengage himself.

And she was deaf to his request to release him.

It seemed as though he was safer while she retained her hold upon him.

But that was an error attributable to the excitement of the moment.

It was fortunate for Dick that Black Bess was ready for the road.

His left hand grasped the bridle.

To his right arm and shoulder Maud clung.

"With you," she cried, "with you! Escape! escape! With you, with you!"

Dick understood her meaning.

There was no time to hesitate without he chose to yield himself a prisoner.

There was no time to urge those scruples which, at another period, he would have urged.

Besides which the voice of love, which is nearly always more powerful than that of the mind, influenced his conduct.

The officers, who surrounded the door in a dense mass, now began to show signs of making an attack, though it was clear they all shrunk from entering the stable and coming to a personal encounter with our hero.

"Surrender, Dick," cried Mr. Wriggles, who held a brace of loaded pistols in his hands. "You may as well give in quietly as not. What is the good of being wounded unnecessarily, and you can't escape! I will count three, and if you do not choose to give in by then we shall all fire, and the consequences will be upon your own head!"

To this long speech Dick Turpin paid no attention.

His whole thoughts were concentrated in what he was about.

With an easy exercise of his enormous strength, he took hold of Maud and lifted her into the fore part of the saddle, or, rather, on to the withers of his steed.

Then he mounted after her.

He passed his left hand round Maud's waist, thus sustaining her in her frail seat, and grasped the reins.

He plunged his right hand into his coat-pocket and drew forth a pistol.

Mr. Wriggles saw what Dick was about, and could hardly credit the evidence of his senses.

That he should even think of resisting seemed incredible.

Uttering a howl of rage, he commanded his men to follow him.

He rushed into the stable.

But before he could reach the stall in which Black Bess stood, Dick Turpin was firmly in the saddle.

Mr. Wriggles, however, darted forward, and caught hold of her bridle.

"Surrender!" he said; "surrender! or I will give my men the word to fire, and you will be blown to atoms!"

Dick's blood ran cold about his heart.

It was not, however, for himself that he cared, but for the fair creature in the saddle before him.

Black Bess, who, from her long rest, was full of fire and spirit, did not approve of Mr. Wriggles holding her by the bridle.

Suddenly, then, she lifted up her fore foot and kicked out with great force.

Mr. Wriggles uttered a dismal yell, and fell to the ground.

Black Bess's iron-bound hoof had come into violent contact with his leg, and, as he believed, had broken it.

At the same moment that this occurred Dick Turpin pressed his knees tightly against his mare's sides.

She needed no other impulse forward.

CHAPTER CCCLIX.

MR. WRIGGLES AND HIS OFFICERS PURSUE DICK TURPIN AND MAUD GOULDMAN ALONG THE WESTERN ROAD.

THERE was a rush as of a heavy body falling through space, a short, sharp neigh of satisfaction, and the rapid clatter of horses' hoofs.

Right gallantly did Black Bess obey the only impulse forward her master was in a position to give her.

Dick cheered her by uttering those words which, from experience, he knew to have an animating, exhilarating effect upon her, for he knew her work was far from being over.

A second did not elapse before he reached the stable-door, round which the police-officers, under the command of Mr. Wriggles, stood in a dense throng.

They made a kind of stand, or rather attempted to do so, when they saw Black Bess coming, with the intention of stopping her.

But it was vain to think they could oppose themselves to a body moving with such swiftness.

They gave way, and some were knocked down by the shoulder or legs of the gallant steed, and trampled under foot.

Those who were fortunate enough to be able to draw back with safety did so, and, taking a hasty aim at the flying figures, fired.

The report of so many pistols, fired, as we might say, all at once, was both startling and tremendous.

But it was not the explosion which gave Turpin any uneasiness.

He had felt the bullets sweep by, leaving him unhurt, but he shuddered as he thought that his fair companion might not have been so fortunate.

The shot which had passed him scathelessly might have injured her.

"Speak! speak!" he cried, in loud tones; "tell me that you are not hurt."

"I am not hurt," said Maud Gouldman.

When this little conversation had taken place, Black Bess had crossed the yard.

The officers were still at the stable-door, where a scene of indescribable confusion was taking place.

Dick pulled up.

He turned round so as to face his foes.

At that moment the door leading to Winberry Hall was thrown open, and Blanche, accompanied by a number of terrified domestics, made their appearance, in order to ascertain what was the occasion of the uproar.

They would have appeared sooner, only Blanche had previously given them all strict instructions to retire to rest; and, hearing such alarming sounds, she was afraid to venture forth unaccompanied by them.

What they saw astonished them not a little.

Clearly visible in the bright moonbeams, which seemed to shine upon him with particular effulgence, was Dick Turpin.

There, too, was bonny Black Bess, her sleek, ebony coat shining like velvet.

But, most astonishing of all, seated upon her back, her arms clinging round Dick, and his arms supporting her, was Maud Gouldman.

They could not believe their eyes at first, and when they were convinced that it was indeed no optical delusion, they were quite at a loss to think what conjuncture of circumstances had conspired to place her there.

The officers scrambled to their feet.

Mr. Wriggles was assisted to rise.

He limped to the door of the stable, and there standing only a few yards off was Dick Turpin.

Uttering an impotent curse, he yelled in tones loud enough to reach even the ears of our hero—

"Fire! fire, my men! Wing him if you can! Bring him down!"

An irregular volley followed this command.

But Dick was at a safe distance.

Seeing that the shots were ineffectual, Mr. Wriggles shouted—

"After him! after him! Mount, my men! We won't lose sight of him! We'll run him to earth! Oh! curses."

The last ejaculation was wrung from his lips by the pain which his leg gave him.

For the moment he forgot, in his excitement, the injuries he had received, and he attempted to run towards the horses.

But his recollection soon returned to him.

Dick Turpin had faith in the power of his mare.

That faith was the result of frequent trials.

With an air of the greatest coolness he raised his hat from his head, and bowed low in the saddle.

"Come on, gentlemen," he said, calmly. "It seems you are inclined to have a ride, and I am not in the humour to baulk your inclination. Come on! we shall probably see some sport!"

These words aggravated the officers until they could scarcely bear themselves.

They made a frantic dash towards the spot where they had left the horses.

The officers who had charge of them now led them towards the stable.

Then ensued an immense scrambling into their saddles.

Dick waited to see no more.

Replacing his hat upon his head, and grasping the reins more tightly in his left hand, he seated himself firmly in the saddle, and urged his mare forward.

Black Bess responded to the impulse freely.

She sprang onwards, at that long sweeping gallop for which she was so famous.

Without appearing to make any very great exertion, she flew over the ground with immense speed.

As he passed the corner of some outbuildings, however, a man sprang forward and strove to interrupt their progress by clutching Bess's bridle.

He did, indeed, seize it, but his grasp was only a temporary one.

Dick now held in his hand a strong riding whip, which he carried, not for the purpose of using it upon his steed, but as a weapon of defence when in close quarters.

In his saddle there was a little place made on purpose for the reception of it, and he had taken it out a moment before.

He had twined the thong round and round his hand, so as to have a strong hold of it.

The handle was loaded with lead, and it now swung in his hand like a bludgeon, or the modern life-preserver.

Swinging this round once, he brought it down with full force upon the officer's head.

An ominous crack was the result, and he fell down in the roadway, as if shot.

There was a rush, and he was far behind.

He had scarcely impeded our friend's progress at all.

Away, away they went.

The lane was reached—the open, broad high road was gained.

But the officers were now all mounted, and in full pursuit of the highwayman.

The hoofs of their horses made a terrible clatter on the stony road, for otherwise there was not a sound to break the silence.

From time to time a pistol was fired, but without any result.

Maud Gouldman had fainted.

Still she clung with great tightness to Dick's breast, while he supported her with his left arm.

And, as she leant back, there was but little difficulty in keeping her in her seat.

Away, away, then, with the velocity of a race-horse, went Black Bess—her hoofs striking fire upon the flinty ground beneath her feet.

Dick Turpin took the road leading into the open country.



[THE DYING POACHER REVEALS THE SECRET CAVE TO TOM KING AND HIS FRIENDS.]

To have gone towards London would have been madness.

He was careful, too, to take a road that led him away from Enfield Chase.

He was fearful of being seen to go in that direction, lest the suspicions of the officers should be aroused.

That was a safe refuge only while their presence in it was unknown and unsuspected.

Going, then, in a westerly direction, instead of an easterly one, which would have taken him to his destination, Dick rapidly left that and his pursuers behind.

The distance between both was increased every moment.

The police-officers, however, did all they could to keep up with the highwayman's matchless steed.

They lashed and spurred incessantly, and altogether behaved as though they had not the least regard for their own necks.

But though at the first Black Bess had shown herself insensible, or nearly so, to her double burden, she now gave indications of feeling it.

It was not so much the actual weight, but where that weight was placed.

It was too far forward for her to be able to use her fore legs with proper freedom.

Indeed, Maud was actually seated upon her withers.

As much as possible Dick had striven to counteract this by leaning as far back in the saddle as he could.

To a certain extent he had succeeded in his object, but only partially.

Unwilling to distress the gallant animal, and satisfied by the start he already had of his pursuers, he reined her in.

He was the more inclined to do this, because he saw just a little way on before him a rather steep hill which they would have to climb.

A loud shout, like one of exultation, coming from the rear, told Dick that his pursuers had noticed the abatement of his speed.

He cared not for it.

Mr. Wriggles was almost frantic.

Such a chance of capturing the highwayman he felt sure he should never have again.

In spite of the pain he suffered—for his leg was almost broken by the kick Black Bess dealt it—he insisted upon being placed in the saddle.

Then he started in pursuit.

He urged on his men, and commanded them to urge on their steeds.

They did so.

They were animated, too, when they perceived, as they thought, that the highwayman's mare was flagging.

Every inch of ground they gained—thus lessening the distance between them—they felt fresh stimulus.

From time to time Dick looked back, to see what kind of progress they were making.

He saw they were rapidly approaching.

But he cared little for that.

He knew he could soon recover lost ground.

Slowly, then, he allowed Black Bess to make her way up the hill.

The officers did not draw in a bit.

But in spite of all their efforts they could not make their horses go up-hill at the same speed as they had gone over level ground.

When Turpin reached the top of the hill, they were rather more than half-way up.

He stood for a moment on the summit, and looked down upon them.

He did this with a double motive.

It was to keep an eye upon their motions, and at the same time to allow Black Bess a moment to recover her wind.

Soon the gallant creature champed her bit, and showed herself impatient to be off.

It was time.

The officers had got much nearer, and Dick could hear them shouting something, but what the words were he could not make out.

Nor did he care much, for if he had heard them the chances are a thousand to one whether he would have paid any attention.

Suddenly, however, a shot was fired.

It did no damage, being merely a trial shot to ascertain whether they were within range.

But Turpin considered it was now high time to start.

Wheeling round, he again set his mare in motion.

There was a gradual descent from the top of this hill to the bottom, and down this they went like the wind.

Nor did the officers lag behind.

But what is that in the distance which gleams in the moonlight with a ghastly whiteness?

A second glance was enough to show Dick.

It was a toll-gate.

The road was wide, and the toll-house was built in the middle of it, with a gate on each side.

The whole seemed to have been freshly painted white.

It was this which made it so conspicuous, and caused Dick to see it so soon.

He drew in slightly.

A shout came from the rear.

It was one of triumph.

His capture was now considered certain.

It was not without some apprehension that Dick saw this obstruction in his path.

The gate was a high one.

The chance that it would be opened to allow him to pass through was a faint one.

Had he alone been upon the back of Black Bess he would have laughed at such an obstacle.

But now, with a double load, and after having made so much exertion, he felt somewhat apprehensive of the result.

And now the toll-man, aroused probably by the trampling and shouting, opened one of the windows in the toll-house and projected his head.

As soon as he saw this, Dick gave up all hopes of having the gate opened.

Black Bess must either leap it, or he must be captured.

The former seemed impossible.

The gate, upon a nearer approach, seemed to be of an unusual height, and the top bar was garnished by a row of sharp iron spikes.

Shutting his teeth close, Dick kept on.

The officers shouted with gratification.

It was evident that, great as might be their opinion of the powers of Black Bess, they looked upon the feat of her leaping a toll-bar after such a long, fatiguing gallop as an impossibility.

"Hurrah!" shouted Mr. Wriggles, though the pain in his leg was almost more than he could endure. "Hurrah, my men! Forward—forward! We have him at last!"

CHAPTER CCCLX.

BLACK BESS CLEARS THE TOLL-GATE, TO THE CONSTERNATION OF MR. WRIGGLES AND HIS OFFICERS.

"HOORAY!" cried the toll-keeper, in a high, screaming, excited voice. "Hooray! This will do it!"

From an advantageous post—one of the upper windows in the wooden house—he was able to command a good view of all parties.

He knew in a moment what it meant.

It was not the first time he had witnessed a chase after a highwayman.

Thus, though Mr. Wriggles and his men shouted out at the top of their voices, he could not tell what they said—he knew a highwayman was on the road.

He, too, considered he was as good as captured, and it was under this impression that he gave vent to the triumphal ejaculations recorded above.

What he meant by the latter portion of his speech, when he intimated that something would do it, could very soon be seen.

He produced an enormous brass bell-mouthed blunderbuss—a species of firearm now obsolete, but at that time one upon which great reliance was placed.

The butt of this he placed to his shoulder, and the muzzle he pointed in the direction in which Turpin was coming.

"Pull up!" he screamed. "Pull up, or I'll fire and blow you to bits!"

Dick Turpin heard these words, and so did the officers.

Both looked towards the toll-house, and both, by the aid of the bright beams of the moon, saw the toll-man at the window with the blunderbuss in his hand.

The officers raised a shout of exultation when they saw this unexpected ally.

Dick's situation was now truly desperate.

He could hear the thundering hoofs of his pursuers.

Black Bess must leap the gate.

Steadily he led her to it.

He uncoiled the lash of the whip from round his hand, and grasped it firmly by the handle.

Then he smacked it twice.

The unexpected sounds made a marvellous impression upon his steed.

With three bounds she reached the gate.

Then, snorting loudly, she gave another bound, just as Turpin for the third time smacked his whip.

Up into the air rose the gallant creature, clearing the obstruction bravely.

She left full a foot to spare.

A cry of astonishment came from the lips of the toll-man when he witnessed this, as he believed, impossible feat.

So surprised was he, that he forgot he held a blunderbuss in his hand, and, though his finger was on the trigger, he did not fire.

Black Bess reached the ground with a scarcely perceptible jar, and then bounded forwards at full speed.

Ejaculations of rage burst from the lips of the police-officers when they saw their prey again escape them, at the very moment when they believed they had him safely in their clutches.

A moment before, the advantage was all on their side, and now just the contrary was the case.

It was quite clear that not one of their horses was equal to the task of leaping the gate, and they wisely forebore to make even the attempt.

With a chorus of imprecations they drew up.

"Gate—gate!" they yelled. "Open the gate! Be quick! Open the gate!"

The toll-man had scarcely yet recovered from his surprise, and, in the confusion of the moment, he fired off the blunderbuss.

Luckily for the officers, it was not pointed towards them, or the consequences would have been serious.

As it was, there was a tremendous explosion, which seemed to shake the frail building to its foundations.

"Come down, you d—d fool," roared Mr. Wriggles, foaming with rage and impatience, for he knew what vast importance every moment was to him. "Why the devil couldn't you fire before, and do some good?"

"Who are you calling a d—d fool?" roared the toll-keeper, wrathfully. "Open the gate yourself, and be d—d to you!"

He slammed the window shut as he spoke.

Mr. Wriggles was convulsed with rage.

His countenance was contorted into all manner of shapes, and his mouth opened and shut like that of some huge fish gasping for air.

He was past swearing.

He took off his hat, and flung it with frantic vehemence upon the ground.

Then he caught hold of his hair, and tore it out by handfuls, each one of which he flung with the utmost fury into the road.

One of the officers, however, who happened to have his senses about him rather more than the rest, dismounted his steed, and, going to the gate, made an examination of its fastenings.

He found it was secured by a chain and padlock.

These obstructions he did not despair of overcoming.

Drawing a holster pistol from his pocket, he held the muzzle within an inch of the padlock and fired.

The effect of this was to shatter it completely.

"The gate is open!" cried this very clever officer, as he swung it back upon its hinges.

Without stopping to thank him, the whole of the troop dashed through, leaving him to mount his horse and follow in the best way he could.

Muttering curses at this treatment, for now his chance of obtaining the reward was considerably lessened, he turned round, but at that moment he found himself in the grasp of some one.

Turning round furiously, and inwardly rejoicing at having an object upon which he could vent his resentment, he found that his adversary was the toll-man.

"Hullo, my spark!" said the latter; "that's how you does it, is it? Blest if that isn't a fine look-out! Do you think I am going to be bilked of the toll like that? And to break the lock, too! I'll lock you up till you make the damage good."

"Don't be a fool," said the officer, whose anger cooled as soon as he saw the toll-keeper was a stronger and bigger man than himself. "Don't you see that we are officers of police in pursuit of a highwayman? We were bound to get through the gate, or lose the reward. Why the devil didn't you fire that blunderbuss of yours a little sooner than you did? and then you would have come into your share."

"I was flabbergasted," said the toll-keeper; "I was flabbergasted; that's what I was!"

"Well, let me go; I shall never catch him if you don't."

"But who's to pay the toll?"

"Mr. Wriggles."

"Who's he?"

"One of the head runners at Bow-street."

Upon receipt of this intelligence, the irate toll-man released the police-officer, who made immediate use of his freedom to mount his horse.

But while this little altercation was taking place, his comrades had got almost out of sight.

As for Turpin, he was nowhere to be seen.

Leaving this unfortunate officer to follow his companions in the best way he is able, and to catch them if he can, we will take a glance at the proceedings of our hero.

After Black Bess had jumped the gate, he felt a sensation of almost perfect security.

He knew that none of their horses would be able to do what his had just done.

And he knew that there must of necessity be some delay while the gate was opened.

During that space of time he should be able to do wonders.

The unwonted sound of a smacking whip still rung in the ears of Black Bess, and she sped along the road at a kind of frightened gallop.

Dick let her have her head freely, and go at her own pace.

A little exertion now would enable her to rest all the sooner.

Owing to the expedient of blowing the lock to pieces, which the officer had devised and adopted, the gate was got open much sooner than he expected.

The consequence of this was that the officers were in full pursuit of him before he had got quite such a good start as he intended to have.

Still the distance which intervened between them was considerable, for when the officers dashed through the gate in the tumultuous manner we have described, they could barely distinguish Turpin in the distance, though the road spread level and straight before them.

The horses had breathed a little during the altercation at the toll-gate, and they now set forward with renewed vigour.

The lash and spur were, however, liberally bestowed.

It soon became clear that Dick was gaining upon them.

They were afraid at first to admit this, but the fact soon became so palpable that it was impossible it could be concealed.

Still they did not despair of achieving their aim ultimately, if they could only keep him in sight.

But this Dick determined should not be.

While he had such an advantage it was manifestly his best policy to improve upon it, and distance his foes completely.

In pursuance of this determination, then, he continued to urge Black Bess to make good speed.

Certainly that night she had achieved wonders, but she showed no signs of exhaustion.

Away, away they went—the hedgerows and trees seeming to flit by them with lightning speed.

Maud Gouldman recovered from her swoon—indeed she had never been utterly unconscious of what was taking place around her.

Still she was too much alarmed either to move or speak.

And as for Dick, his whole thoughts were absorbed by the danger of his situation.

He had taken an opportunity once or twice to speak to his fair burden, but as he failed in each case to extract any reply, he concluded that she was still unconscious.

Suddenly, however, Black Bess stumbled and almost fell.

She regained her feet, however, with a tremendous effort.

But she galloped no longer.

She limped along, dead lame.

Full of despair and grief at this circumstance, and making no doubt now that he should be overpowered by his foes, Turpin forced her to come to a halt.

How terrible was his position now!

He dropped his whip, and wiped away the large beads of perspiration which had started forth upon his forehead.

"What is the matter? Why have you paused?" asked Maud faintly.

Dick dreaded to answer her.

"Wait," he said. "Sit still. I must dismount a moment."

"No, no."

"All will be well."

"Me, too. I must dismount if you do."

She clung to him as she spoke.

"Come, then," said Dick, who not only felt unable to refuse her request, but also knew there was no time to be lost in argument.

He assisted her to the ground as he spoke, and then dismounted himself with a beating heart.

What could be the cause of his mare's lameness?

What was the result of it?

Those were questions that would intrude themselves upon his mind, and to which he could frame no reply.

Stooping down, he proceeded to make an examination of her hoof.

What words could express his relief when he found she had picked up a large flat pebble.

It fitted completely in the cavity of the hoof, and, by pressing upon the frog, was the immediate cause of the lameness.

No doubt the effect would cease when the cause was removed.

He hoped so, however.

Quick as thought he drew out his knife, and by means of that removed the stone.

So far as he could see the foot was unhurt.

But, as he stooped down, his ears caught the dull beat of his pursuers' hoofs upon the hard roadway.

He took advantage of the occasion to move the saddle further back.

Then, hastily mounting, he held out his arms, and his companion gave a spring and was placed in her former seat.

She was, however, more comfortable than before, and her weight was not so likely to interfere with Black Bess's movements.

Now came the anxious moment.

Was the mare lame or not.

Dick was almost afraid to make the trial.

He set her in motion, but with a beating heart and a mind full of apprehension.

To his unspeakable relief and joy, however, he found that she stepped freely, and that she had sustained no hurt.

Thankful for this narrow escape, he allowed the reins to fall upon her neck.

She responded to the signal by darting forward at something like her old swift gallop.

But, looking back, Dick could just discern in the distance the figures of his pursuers.

Whether they saw him he was too far to judge.

It might be so.

His heart was now comparatively light, for he did not doubt that he should soon recover the ground he had lost.

But now he had a fresh cause for solicitude.

The moon, which had given so much light, was now almost level with the horizon.

In a few minutes she would set.

By this Dick knew that dawn could not be far distant.

Indeed, as he turned back and looked towards the east, he could distinguish a faint leaden tinge creeping over that portion of the heavens, and which seemed to increase with terrible rapidity.

He felt anxious respecting his companions.

He knew they would expect him with the dawn, according to their agreement, and yet here it was at hand, and he nearly a day's journey from his destination.

He was increasing his distance from it, too, every moment.

CHAPTER CCCLXI.

DICK TURPIN PUTS UP AT THE "BULL AND GATE" INN, AND MEETS WITH A SLIGHT SURPRISE.

THE moon sunk, and as soon as she disappeared below the horizon the dawn fairly came.

Over tree and bush stole the pale gray light, revealing all things through a kind of misty obscurity.

Again did Dick look behind him.

No trace of his pursuers could he see.

Nor did the least sound indicate their coming.

He had fairly distanced them, and he determined to quit the high road and make his way in a diagonal direction across the country, his intention being to reach Enfield Chase as soon as possible.

He would have turned towards it sooner only he did not want to lead his pursuers at all in that direction, and he resolved that should they by any means get upon his track, to immediately change his course, and not repair there until he was certain he could so in secrecy and safety.

As he expected, he had not far to go before he found one of those narrow lanes so common in England.

Down this he instantly turned, still hearing nothing of his foes, and leaving no trace by which they could follow him.

A lane better adapted for his purposes could not have been found.

It was serpentine to a degree, and on each side of it the hedgerows grew to a fabulous height.

These were, too, planted upon the top of high banks, so that as he sat in the saddle Dick could not see into the meadows.

This was a circumstance favourable in the extreme, for had the top of his hat been visible above the top of the hedge it might have been seen, but now all fear of such a thing as that was effectually precluded.

After a short time Dick slackened speed a little, but not much.

He was too near his enemies to feel comfortable.

The lane was of considerable length, and upon reaching its extremity Dick found that it debouched upon another high road similar to the one he had left.

The lane was continued on the opposite side, but deeming it now high time to change his direction, Dick turned to his right along this high road.

He imagined this must be the road back to London, and coming presently upon a milestone, he was confirmed in that idea.

This was a place quite unsuited to him, especially by daylight, so he took the next turning, still being careful to proceed towards his destination.

In this manner he travelled for full three hours, until, indeed, the day had really and truly began, it being about eight o'clock.

He was now in quite a different part of the country.

He had neither heard nor seen anything of his foes since he turned down the first lane.

He could not conceive any means by which they could get upon his track again.

Under these circumstances of security, he made up his mind to halt at the first inn he came to, the exterior of which took his fancy.

He found, besides, that it would be impolitic to continue to travel to his destination by daylight; for, though it is true he met with few persons, yet they looked at him and his burden with great curiosity, which, in some case, might have a dangerous result.

These thoughts were occupying his mind when he espied before him a place which he imagined would precisely answer his expectations.

It was a large, old-fashioned roadside hotel, standing back a long way from the road, with a tall sign-post near the footpath, and adjoining it a horse-trough.

Then, as for the house itself, it looked to be the very pink of cleanliness and order.

Dick had a great fancy for clean people.

He always fancied when he saw a house with clean windows and clean curtains—and, in fine, that an aspect of cleanliness overspread the whole building—that the inhabitants of such a house were kind-hearted and fit to be trusted.

Whether Dick was right or not we cannot say, but we do know that he had had a great deal of experience, and that ought to go for something.

Pleased, then, with the appearance of this roadside inn, the sign of which he saw was the "Bull and Gate," he rode up to the front door.

He dismounted before anyone appeared, and assisted Maud to dismount too, who never questioned him as to what he was about to do.

When he had done this, a stout, florid, middle-aged man, with a long pipe in his mouth, came to the door.

He looked at our travellers a moment, and Dick said—

"Have you any ostler on the premises? I suppose you have, as you advertise good accommodation for man and beast."

Dick pointed to the sign as he spoke.

"Arn't you seen Obi?"

"What Three-fingered Jack?"

"No, no! I mean our ostler. His name's Obadiah, only we call him Obi for shortness, you see."

"No, I havn't seen him."

"Oh! that boy, that boy! He'll drive me mad, I know he will. Now, sir, I am not afraid to say that he's fast asleep in the hay-loft this very minnit. But, never mind, sir, I'll take your horse."

"And I will go with you," said Dick.

"I'll take care on him, sir."

"I don't doubt that, but I'll go with you all the same."

Then, turning to Maud, he added, in a whisper—

"We shall stop here a little while. Black Bess must rest. Go into the house. You will meet with every attention from the landlady, who doubtless will come forward to receive you. I shall not be a moment before I rejoin you. I am only going to see where my horse is placed."

Maud Gouldman inclined her head in token of assent, and entered the inn as she had been requested.

"Lead on," said Turpin, addressing the landlord, who looked all the surprise he felt at the appearance of his

visitors. "Lead on to the stables, and I will follow you."

He took hold of Black Bess by the bridle as he spoke, and the landlord at once started off in the direction of the stables.

Dick kept close at his heels.

"You wouldn't believe," said the landlord, "what trouble I have with that Obi. He's the *aggravatinest* lad that ever lived. I can't keep him awake. He sleeps all night and all day too, and there's no such thing as rousing him. I'll warrant we find him fast asleep in the hayloft."

"Why do you keep him, then, if his services are of so little value?"

"Ah! there it is.'

"Where?"

"Why, it isn't me at all, you see, but my wife

"Oh! indeed."

"You see, she has taken a kind of fancy to Obi, so its no good my complaining, or anyone else saying a word against the lad. She shuts her ears to it all."

"And what is the reason of her partiality?"

"Eh?"

"I say, why is Obi a favourite?"

"Ah! there you puzzle me completely. You see, women is such rum *creturs*. There's no accounting for them or their tastes."

"Very true."

"But here is the stable, sir. Just lead your horse in, for the place happens to be empty just at present; and then you come up into the loft, and there we shall find Obi, I will wager my life."

Dick led Black Bess over the threshold of the stable, and she walked into one of the stalls, and put her head in the manger in the most natural manner possible.

Almost before the landlord knew what he was about, Dick had divested his mare of the whole of her trappings, and put a halter over her head.

The saddle and bridle he hung on the end of the stall, in such a manner as to be readily taken hold of.

He requested the landlord to allow them to remain there, for he had officiously stepped forward, and was about to carry them off to the harness-room.

They now set off to find the ostler.

The landlord pointed to a ladder fixed perpendicularly against the wall, which led up into the loft, and commenced ascended it.

Dick followed him closely.

The loft overhead was profoundly dark, and Dick did not venture to stir from the top of the ladder until the landlord had removed the shutter which covered the circular aperture.

The place was then, comparatively speaking, well illuminated.

There was a plentiful supply of hay and straw in the loft, and, on going to one corner, there they found the ostler, snoring away as if for a wager.

Dick looked with some curiosity at this somnolent individual.

Imagine a lad about eighteen years of age, short, and so enormously fat as to make it a debatable matter whether he was not broader than he was long.

His clothes fitted him almost as tightly as his skin, and how he managed to get in and out of them seemed a mystery.

The seams, indeed, had burst in many places, leaving the stitches gapingly visible.

Such was the ostler of the "Bull and Gate," and the particular favourite of the landlady.

Dick Turpin regarded him for a minute or two in silence, and then the landlord said—

"What do you think of that, sir?"

"I am not at all surprised at his sleeping so much."

"No?"

"Not a bit."

"How is that?"

"Why, the fellow is so enormously fat that I don't suppose he could keep awake if his life depended upon it."

"I don't suppose he would."

"And you have tried to cure him?"

"Oh! yes."

"But failed?"

"As you see. I gave the job up in despair."

"Now I'll tell you how to cure him."

"How? Tell me, and I will thank you for ever."

"Oh! the means are very simple. I wonder the same thought has not struck you."

"What is it?"

"Starve him!"

"Starve him?"

"Yes. Don't let him have anything to eat for a week, and you will soon find a difference in him."

"Not give him anything to eat?"

"Nothing at all."

"Why, my wife would break her heart."

"Eh?"

"I say my wife would break her heart."

"What for?"

"If he had nothing to eat. Why, she is always fretting about him, and feeding him when he happens to be awake. She says she is sure the poor fellow can't have half enough to eat."

"Ha! ha!"

"You laugh."

"I do, my friend. I can't help it. You may depend you will have to put up with your sleepy ostler, or else get rid of him altogether."

"Oh! that's quite out of the question."

"Is it?"

"Yes; my wife would never submit to that, I feel confident."

"Ah! well, it can't be helped then. Wake him up."

"I will, sir. But he do sleep uncommonly sound."

"He appears to do so."

The landlord was doubtless experienced in waking Obi, for he stooped down and caught hold of his ear with so much violence that Dick thought he would surely have pulled it off.

It had the desired effect of arousing him.

He rubbed his eyes, and looked about him with a stupid, silly expression.

But when Dick saw he had fairly got his eyes open, he took half-a-crown from his pocket, and said—

"Look here, Obi. Here's half-a-crown waiting to go into your pocket, if you will just rub a horse down with a wisp of straw."

These words had an astonishing effect.

The ostler sprang up, and sleep seemed to fly from his eyelids at once.

"Come on," said Dick. "I'll show you the horse."

Obi manifested every desire to follow him, so Dick descended the ladder.

In another moment all three stood in the stable.

Obi set about his work with right good will, and in a manner that showed he was well aware of what he was about.

But half-a-crown was a stimulant he rarely met with.

Dick stood by according to custom, and saw his mare properly attended to, for he knew by experience that ostlers were not to be trusted.

This done, he fed her himself, and then put the promised guerdon into Obi's hand.

His dull eyes sparkled when he felt the contact of the precious metal, and he consigned the coin to his pocket with an air of the greatest satisfaction.

Dick could not help being much amused by this ludicrous incident of the fat ostler, and as he walked towards the house he felt no small degree of curiosity to see the landlady who had made choice of such an extraordinary pet.

It might be that Dick surmised the occasion of her partiality, but if he did he made no remark to the landlord concerning it.

Upon entering the inn, the first person he saw was the landlady.

He was a little surprised at her appearance.

She was exactly the reverse of the ostler.

She was very tall, and very, very thin. Indeed, she would have done well to personate the character of a living skeleton.

There seemed to be scarcely an ounce of flesh on her bones.

She had, too, rather a vinegar-looking expression of countenance, and she looked at Dick closely and suspiciously.

He, however, looked at her with a smile upon his countenance.

He was thinking of the fat, sleepy ostler, and contrasting the two with each other.

He inquired after Maud, and was told that she was in a private room, awaiting his arrival.

The door was pointed out to Dick, who made his way with rather a slow step towards it.

CHAPTER CCCLXII.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD GOULDMAN AT LENGTH COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING WITH EACH OTHER.

FOR the first time since his interview with Maud in the stable, Dick Turpin began to have a little reflection.

So many incidents had taken place of the most startling character, and they had succeeded each other with so much rapidity, that he had really neither opportunity nor leisure for cool thought.

Now, however, his recollections almost overpowered him.

It was in consequence of this, then, that he walked so slowly towards the door of the room in which Maud was awaiting him.

When he reached its threshold, he hesitated and faltered.

"I have acted like a villain," he muttered; "like a base villain! I see it now while I am in my cool blood, but I did not then. My brain was in a whirl. I love her! I feel that I love her, and, unfortunately for her, she seems to love me too! But I ought not to have taken advantage of her passion in the way I have done. I ought to have resisted all her entreaties. It is too late now, however. No, not too late. It is not too late yet to make reparation for the fault I have committed. I will do so though I break my heart! I will do so! I am resolved!"

Having come to this determination, Dick Turpin, still repeating the words, "I am resolved," entered the apartment.

He found Maud seated near the fire in a pensive attitude.

But upon seeing him enter, she rose and came towards him with a smile.

With the quickness of a woman's apprehension, she saw, however, that some change had taken place.

She drew back suddenly, and then looked at him with a wondering expression.

Dick had composed his face into a stern regard.

He felt that he had a difficult part to go through, and one that would require all his fortitude and self-command to sustain.

He tried to speak.

But his voice failed him.

"What has happened?" asked Maud, at length. "Something terrible has taken place. Tell me what it is. Let me know the worst at once. I can bear anything better than suspense."

"I will tell you," said Dick, huskily. "Sit down a moment."

He placed a chair as he spoke.

"And you sit down too."

"No, I will stand."

Maud turned pale, and looked up into his face.

This total change of manner alarmed her. She had never seen Turpin under such an aspect before.

She was at a loss to think what it could portend.

The prominent idea in her mind was that he had found himself menaced by some fresh and terrible danger.

Anxiously and suspensely, therefore, she looked up into his countenance, eager to catch the first words that should fall from his lips.

"Lady," said our hero, "you see before you one who has, for the first time in his life, acted a villain's part."

"How? I do not understand you."

"I will explain, and endeavour to make my meaning clear. To begin, I love you! I am not ashamed to make the confession. I love you! How much it would be hard for me to say. Our meeting was a strange one, and the events which afterwards occurred were much stranger still. The tendency of all was the same. It was to bring me into closer connection with you; and the result of this was the love of which I speak, and which I found totally beyond the power of my control"——

"But I"—— began Maud Gouldman.

"Pardon me," said Dick, interrupting her. "Hear me out. I beg that you will do me the favour to listen to all that I have to say. You know what I am. I am a highwayman, a violator of the public peace, a law-breaker, a fugitive from justice, a criminal so far as committing robberies is concerned. For me to raise my eyes towards you was wrong—wrong in the extreme. But I did so. For me, however, to love something, all beauty, all goodness, all purity of heart, was nothing surprising. Who could remain insensible to such attractions? Presently, however, as time passed on, though I religiously forbore to allow the faintest trace of my passion to be visible, several little things occurred which generated a suspicion in my breast that you have conceived a similar passion to myself. At first I refused to give credit to the evidence before me, but soon I had proof. I regretted this, but still I thought the feeling was nothing more than gratitude inspired by those services which it was my good fortune to be in a position to render you."

"One word," said Maud. "Let me speak one word."

"Nay, listen. I have but little more to say. Although my own love for you was so great, I made up my mind never to avow it. It would have been folly and presumption for me to have done so. I determined, then, to see you once more—to to bid you a farewell which I intended to be an eternal one, and, having parted from you, to have adopted such precautions as would have prevented the possibility of a future meeting.

"There is a gulf between us, so wide and so deep that to cross it would be impossible. I came—I saw you. I looked, as I thought, for the last time upon your countenance. But I was weak. I ought to have resisted the temptation of bidding you adieu alone. However, I did not. And here let me frame the only possible excuse I can for the base blackness of my conduct. In our conversation we were surprised by the sudden appearance of the police-officers. From that moment all was confusion, and that confusion has continued until this moment, and now you are here with me."

"I am here," said Maud, quietly, "and of my own free will. You have suspected my love. It overmasters every other feeling. I know what you are. You have never disguised yourself, and I am willing to dare all and share all with you."

When he heard these words, Dick's first impulse was to spring forward and clasp the lovely girl to his heart.

But a second thought enabled him to restrain the impulse.

His countenance assumed a more mournful expression.

"Alas! alas!" he said.

"Why do you say alas?"

"Because I regret to hear what I have just heard. Oh! lady, I pray you pause. Pause and reflect. Pause, ere it be too late. We were never intended for each other. You know not what I am—you know not the nature of my life."

"I care not," said Maud. "I love you. Fervently, indeed, do I wish that you were anything but what you are. That, however, is useless. The past cannot be recalled."

"It can be forgotten."

"By some."

"Let it be by you; forget that you ever saw me."

"No, no. That would be impossible. I have seen you under many aspects. In the hour of danger I have seen you cool, collected, and daring. I have witnessed your courage, your devotion, your singlemindedness—in fact, all those qualities which call forth admiration. What am I? An orphan—a dependant on the bounty of another."

"Do not depreciate yourself," said Dick. "I know too well the whole circumstances of your life. You are as far above me in station as you are in virtue and innocence. Lady, I pray you, forget this mad infatuation. Forget, as I before asked you, that Dick Turpin ever had existence."

"Never! never!"

"Oh! you wound me to the heart."

"Will you listen to me?"

"I am bound to do so."

"But I mean, will you pay attention to what I say, and believe that I am in earnest and sincere in all I say?"

"I cannot refuse you."

"Well, then, let me tell you that I have well weighed the consequences of the step I have taken. I knew you loved me—I was quite sure of it: a thousand things have occurred to place it beyond all doubt. For my own part

I loved you. At first I fought against the feeling, and strove to subdue it. In vain. The more I tried the stronger did my love become. I then relinquished the struggle; I relied upon your love. I had the vanity to feel that I could do so with security. I devised our parting. You saw it. Then came the hour of danger. What I felt I cannot describe. I had but one idea, and that was that I must be with you. Need I say more? I am here."

Dick Turpin listened to these words with mingled emotions.

He saw before him a girl—young, inexperienced, and enthusiastic. He saw her carried away by the violence of a romantic passion. What should he do?

The position was a trying one.

Had he been heart-whole, the case would have been simple.

Now it was complicated by the love he felt for her.

It required something more than human strength to be proof against the temptation.

Who could renounce the proffered love of one who was adored with all the ardour of a first affection?

To the justice of our hero be it said, he made the attempt.

It is probable that, under no other circumstances than those which actually occurred, would Maud Gouldman have left Wiuberry Hall under his protection.

Now, however, he felt that fatal step had been taken—that her reputation would be sullied—that for her to return would be impossible.

Torn and distracted by contending feelings, he endeavoured to address her.

"You tell me you have duly considered the step you have taken: let me hope for your own dear sake that you have done so. Oh! Maud, dearest," he exclaimed, taking her hand and passionately pressing it, "I love you a thousand times more than life itself. I would not have you share the dangers and hardships of such a life as mine for worlds; such a fate would be too horrible. Hitherto, you have seen but one scene in my life. I am a fugitive. I am allowed no rest—I am hunted from one place to another by the minions of the law. It is as much as ever I can bear; but what would become of you? Oh! my heart bleeds when I think of what I have done! It would have been better a thousand times that I had suffered the officers to slay me than have fled, taking you with me. But, alas! my love blinded me, and I have done you an injury which I cannot repair."

"I cannot allow you to accuse yourself of that. Whatever injury I may have sustained has been of my own bringing on, and I alone ought to be the sufferer. Listen to me. So far from regretting the step I have taken, I should do the same thing again."

"Impossible!"

"I am speaking of myself. And now I have another word to say, for I hope we shall never need another such an interview of explanations. Much as I loved you, I did not leave my home with the intention of becoming a highwayman's bride. No; I saw that you were qualified for better things, and trusted I had the power to reclaim you. You have spoken of your mode of life—its perils and inconveniences. But you spoke as though they must endure for ever. Why not quit this dangerous course? You are young, and there is time to repent."

"Alas!"

"Again that word."

"I regret that you could have set out with an idea so chimerical. You do not know that in England, if a man once transgresses the laws, he is an outcast from society. He can never enter it again. It is so with me. Dick Turpin has for so long been a highwayman that the world would not allow him to be anything else. You must dismiss that as a vision."

"I cannot, and I will not," said Maud, with energy. "It is a thousand pities that one so gifted by nature as you are should so abuse those gifts. But we will quit the theme. Farewell!"

She rose abruptly as she spoke.

"Farewell!" repeated Turpin, in astonishment.

"Yes, farewell. Mine is a wretched lot. I thought you loved me—could have laid my life of it. For your sake I have left home and all that I hold dear, and even you spurn me from you."

She burst into a passionate flood of tears as she spoke.

The sight of those tears at once drove away all Turpin's hesitation.

He wavered in his strong purpose.

Springing towards her, he clasped her by the hands, and in a voice broken by emotion said—

"Oh! Maud, Maud. You know not how false are the words you have just uttered. I do love you, and it is because I do love you that I am acting as I now am. Believe me, a time will come when, looking back upon this scene, you will rejoice that—that"——

"Never," said Maud, through her tears. "I comprehend your conduct. I know its motives. I comprehended all from the first. I love you for it all the more. In your single-heartedness you would not hesitate to sacrifice all that you hold dear. But could I be happy in knowing your despair? No. You have acknowledged, have you not, that I have already committed myself in the eyes of the world?"

"Is it not so?"

"I care not if it is. I rejoice that I have done so. I cannot return. That is impossible. Tell me, then, which you will do. You have the choice of two alternatives."

"What are they?"

"You must either leave me friendless, alone, and unprotected upon the wide world, or take me with you."

"Fain would I be spared either."

"I know the feeling which prompts you to make that remark. But I am here. To return is impossible. I would die rather. We love each other. The fact cannot and need not be disguised. Why, then, should we make ourselves wretched when happiness is within our reach? I have told you that I am ready and willing to share your lot, whatever it may be; still it will be with a hope of bringing you to better things. Choose, then, between our mutual happiness or our mutual despair. The fate of both of us is in your hands!"

Turpin was silent.

He saw too well the position of the young girl before him, and yet he dreaded to allow himself to be convinced by her reasoning.

He hesitated, and Maud observed.

Gently she approached him, and, stealing her arms round his neck, laid her face against his breast.

She conquered!

CHAPTER CCCLXIII.

DICK TURPIN'S THREE COMRADES HAVE A REMARKABLE ADVENTURE IN ENFIELD CHASE, AND MAKE AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

Having traced thus far the proceedings of Dick Turpin and his fair companion, we must request the reader to direct his attention to Enfield Chase, where, during Turpin's absence, events of the greatest interest have been taking place.

It will be recollected that the last we saw of Dick's three faithful comrades was when they had bid him farewell upon the outskirts of the forest.

They stood for some time after his departure without moving or speaking.

They listened to the sound of his progress through the wood.

But gradually those sounds became inaudible, and then, turning round, they took their way to the inmost recesses of the wood, to spend the time in the best manner they were able until their comrade should return.

They felt a considerable amount of uneasiness respecting him, for they knew the enterprize was a dangerous one.

Yet, such was the dread that they all had of inaction, and such was the despision they felt for danger, that they all coveted the undertaking.

"This is awful dull work," said Claude Duval, as they walked down a broad glade in the forest. "Here we have told over all our exploits, and have got nothing left to talk about."

"It is dull work," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but I am in hopes it won't continue long."

"If I thought it would," exclaimed Claude Duval, "I would be off this moment."

"Fair and softly," said Tom King. "We are safe."

"A fig for safety."

"That's all very well; but you were one of the first to be in favour of a rest."

"I know that."

"And now you are the first to get tired of it."

"I can't help that. Here we are cooped up in this wilderness of a place, with nothing to do and no chance of meeting with an adventure."

"I'll tell you what you shall do, Claude."

"What?"

"Tell us the story of your life. You have promised to do so many a time, and where would you find a better opportunity than the present?"

"Capital. That will pass the time away better than anything else. Come on, Claude. We will go back to our old quarters, and then, Claude, you must begin."

"Well, I don't mind."

"Come on, then."

Having made up their minds to do something, our friends felt more at ease, and strode with a more rapid step.

They had made up their minds, in order to diminish the chances of discovery, to get always as far as possible into the heart of the chase, and it was towards this spot that they now made their way.

The little dell, or dingle, so full of natural beauties, where they had first halted, was where they had fixed upon.

They had not been tempted to stray far from that lovely spot.

It was sheltered and retired.

A rather long walk brought them to it.

But at length they arrived.

The moon was shining brightly, so they were able to find their path with the greatest ease.

Seating themselves near the root of a gigantic tree, they all prepared to listen to the story of Claude's early adventures, of which they were perfectly in ignorance.

Claude seemed to gather his thoughts and recollections together for a moment, and then he said—

"If I am to begin with the beginning, I promise you I shall have rather a long story to tell."

"So much the better. We shall have plenty of time to listen to you between now and daybreak."

"So you will."

"Begin at the beginning, then."

"Very good. My parents, then"——

"Go on. Why do you pause?"

"Did you hear nothing?"

"No."

"But I did."

"Nonsense. Go on with your story, and don't keep us in suspense."

"I tell you I heard something."

"What was it like?"

"I can hardly tell you. Listen a moment, we may perhaps hear it again. I am certain I was not mistaken."

All now listened attentively, for, situated as they were, it behoved them to pay attention to all sounds of an unusual character.

For some moments all was still.

The trees rustled slighly as their topmost branches swayed to and fro in the night wind, but that was all.

Claude himself began to fancy that his ears had deceived him, and was about to say as much, when all three were startled by a repetition of the sound he had before heard.

It was a low, faint, moaning cry, as of some living creature in great pain.

There was no mistaking the sound, nor the character of it, and our friends sprang to their feet.

There seemed a chance of an adventure.

Although they had heard the sound, they were unable to say with precision from which direction it proceeded.

Before they ventured to move then, they listened for a repetition of it, in order to have some guide for their footsteps.

They had not long to wait.

The sound came again.

But this time with much greater distinctness than before.

Having listened for the express purpose of ascertaining the direction from which the sound had come, and being in anticipation of hearing it, they were now all three in a position to say which course they ought to take.

Without uttering a word further, Claude Duval sprang forward, and the others immediately followed him.

Regardless altogether of the various obstacles in his way, Claude strode on in a straight line for the point he wished to reach.

But, having gone for some considerable distance without meeting with anything to reward their search, and without hearing another cry confirmatory of the previous ones, they paused and once more listened.

As they did so, they naturally looked around them.

They then noticed, for the first time, that they were in a portion of the forest which they did not recognize as having seen before.

It had a much wilder look than the part they had frequented.

The trees were larger and grew closer to each other, so that their branches, intermingling above, made one huge canopy, through the interstices of which the moon's rays streamed with a remarkably beautiful effect.

The undergrowth, too, was much more luxuriant and of a more impenetrable character.

At every step they took they experienced a constantly increasing difficulty in forcing their way.

The scene itself was, however, grandly and sublimely beautiful.

But, although they looked around them and noted the different peculiarities of the landscape we have mentioned, they did not bestow much attention upon it.

They were occupied with the mysterious sound which had interrupted the tale Claude was about to tell, and longing to hear it once more.

They were not kept much longer in suspense.

The sound came again.

But this time, although they were quite certain in their own minds that they had drawn considerably nearer to the spot from which it emanated, it was much more feeble than on the preceding occasions.

It had, too, a more wailing and mournful character.

Evidently, however, our friends had some distance further to go before they would be able to clear up the mystery.

But they did not care much for that.

Noting the direction from which it came, they struggled through the underwood with the best speed they were able to make.

At every step they took the scenery grew wilder and wilder, while the ground rose into deceptive mounds, or sank into treacherous hollows, thus making their route very difficult and perplexing.

But, in the pursuit of any important object, all minor inconveniences are disregarded; and so the three highwaymen did not heed those obstacles from which, under ordinary circumstances, they would have felt inclined to shrink.

For some considerable time the ground had had an upward tendency, though the rise was so gradual that it was some time before they noticed it.

Now the ascent became abrupt.

After proceeding thus for a little more than a hundred yards, they came to a sudden halt.

It was Claude who stopped first, and he called out to his companions to follow his example.

They did so at once, and without hesitation.

To their unbounded astonishment, they found themselves upon the brink of a tremendous precipice.

Had they incautiously advanced a couple of steps further, they must have fallen headlong into the abyss and perished.

It was a wonder and a mercy that Claude saw the danger when he did, for the brink of the precipice was overgrown with shrubs and underwood, which would have almost allured anyone to destruction.

Moreover, the sides of the precipice, in some places, formed a roothold for trees.

The danger of this spot at once ceased when its nature was known.

Cautiously, then, our three friends approached the verge of the precipice.

By the aid of the moon, shining as she was in a perfectly unclouded sky, they were able to see about them with great ease and distinctness.

As nearly as they could estimate, the precipice was about a hundred feet in depth.

But in their position it was difficult for them to form any accurate idea of distance.

Below them was a small open space, upon which



[THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN KIDNAP THE PARSON.]

nothing grew, owing probably to the rocky nature of the soil.

Beyond that the forest stretched as far as the eye could reach, and from their elevated position they commanded a tolerably extensive prospect.

Nothing was visible but tree-tops.

The precipice consisted of an almost perpendicular wall of rock.

Its colour was white, and it glistened strangely as the moon's rays poured upon it.

But, on looking down at the ground beneath, the whole attention of our friends was immediately absorbed by perceiving the dim outline of a shadowy-looking figure.

As they gazed their ears were assailed by the same strange cry.

There was no doubt that it ascended from the ground below, and from whence could it proceed save from the shadowy figure which they could just faintly distinguish?

There was nothing else to be seen from which such a cry could come.

More intently, then, they gazed down upon it, and strained their eyes in a vain endeavour to make out what it was.

But the distance was too great, and the light not sufficient, to enable them to do this.

It might be a human form—indeed, it looked more like one than aught else.

But the cry which they had heard?

Was that human?

Their curiosity was stimulated to the utmost degree by these questions, which naturally suggested themselves to their minds.

With one accord, they looked around them at the nature of the place upon which they stood, to ascertain what means there was of reaching the ground below.

It seemed clear they would have to make a considerable detour in order to do this.

While they were thus engaged, they again heard the moaning sound, and this time they fancied they could faintly distinguish a word.

And that word was help.

But it might be fancy only; for they were by no means certain that the form beneath them was a human one.

"We must descend somehow or other," said Tom King. "Surely there must be a means of doing so; and if it is, as I suspect, a fellow-creature lying at the base of these rocks, we ought to lose no time in rendering such assistance as lies in our power."

"Certainly—certainly!" cried his comrades.

"Follow me, then, and we will try if we cannot find some means of descending to the foot of this rock."

As Tom King spoke he led the way along the top of the precipice.

His companions followed closely in his footsteps.

The rock seemed to extend as far as they could see both to the left and right of them, and varied but little in its average height.

They had no resource but to follow along this, for it was quite impossible for them to lower themselves down the side of the abyss.

Presently, however, they noticed that the depth to the ground below materially and rapidly diminished.

This was caused not by the ground they were upon tending downwards, but by that below rising upwards.

In a little while, no doubt, all became of one uniform, unbroken level.

But they did not go far enough to ascertain this.

As soon as the depth of the abyss had decreased sufficiently for them to lower themselves with safety, they did so.

Upon feeling their feet touch the ground, they hastened along, keeping close to the face of the rock.

But now they had changed their position, the general aspect of the place was, of course, changed also, and they were unable to recognise the spot where they had seen the figure lying.

CHAPTER CCCLXIV.

THE DYING POACHER TELLS THE STORY OF HIS LIFE, AND REVEALS TO OUR FRIENDS THE SECRET CAVE AMONG THE ROCKS.

In this delemma, then, they paused, after having gone, as they imagined, far enough to reach the desired spot.

But they could see nothing lying at the base of the rocks.

This was annoying.

They had, however, no resource but to remain profoundly still, and await a repetition of the cry.

But none came.

Puzzled and perplexed, the three highwaymen, after having waited for a considerable time in vain, set forward, under the impression that they had not gone far enough to reach the object of their search.

But every now and then they would pause and listen.

In this manner they went a long distance—so far that all three unanimously agreed they must have passed the spot where the figure had been lying.

Under this impression they retraced their steps.

Scarcely had they turned than the moaning sound came upon their ears.

It was somewhere close at hand, and they at once proceeded in the direction from which it appeared to come.

They were now more fortunate than they had been.

Lying close to the trunk of a huge tree, which was situated about twenty yards from the face of the rock, was a man.

There could be no mistake about the matter, for through an opening in the trees came a bright ray of light, which revealed him fully.

In all probability it was from the lips of this man that the startling cry had come.

His dress was that of a common labouring peasant. Indeed, he seemed to be nothing more than a farm-labourer.

He was quite motionless, and lay with his face upturned.

The moon's rays fell upon it with full force.

It was furrowed and swarthy, and the lower part of it was buried in a beard—rough, shaggy, and of many days' growth.

Our friends were not a little surprised to see this man. He was the first they had seen since they had been in the chase, and they imagined they had the place entirely to themselves.

Now it became clear that this was a mistaken notion.

Upon a closer approach, this man presented every appearance of death, with which all three of the highwaymen were familiar.

For some moments they stood gazing upon him in silence, until, at length, they were startled by a faint moan, which came from the lips of the apparently dead man.

Its character was precisely similar to the sounds which they had previously heard, and which had so much attracted their attention and curiosity.

"He is not dead," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack. "Poor fellow! I wonder who he is? But never mind, let him be who he may, he shall not perish if this will revive him. I have nothing better to offer."

As he spoke, Sixteen-String Jack produced a small flask of brandy of the strongest quality.

He always made a rule of carrying this with him, not for the purpose of drinking it, but in order to have a stimulant should any accident happen to make one necessary.

He pulled out the cork, and requested Claude to raise up his head a little while he poured some of the spirit down his throat.

This Claude set about doing; but, upon nearing the prostrate man, he saw him show symptoms of reviving, and endeavour to commence a struggle with him.

He evidently feared him as an enemy.

But, taking no notice of this, Claude raised his head as his companion had requested.

Jack now approached, and, in spite of the feeble resistance the man made, poured a good drop of the brandy down his throat.

A violent spasm now convulsed his frame, but it quickly passed away, and then the man, opening his eyes, glared wildly around him.

He saw our friends in a moment, and, under the impression that they must be enemies, tried to rise to his feet, and either escape or attack them.

But his strength was insufficient for this, and he sank back again.

Jack made a sign to Claude that he wished to renew the application of the brandy.

Again Claude raised his head, and again Jack poured a quantity of spirit down his throat.

This time the man was conscious of what was taking place, for he made no struggle as he did on the former occasion.

He swallowed the brandy, but with great difficulty, and then he said, in a faint voice:

"Spare your trouble, spare your trouble. You need not take me prisoner. There is not half-an-hour's life in me! I can feel that. So let me lie where I am, and die under the shade of the old trees!"

The highwaymen were at first not a little surprised at the style of this address, but they soon understood how it was.

The dying man—for such he had proclaimed himself, and such he appeared to be—mistook them for his foes.

But Tom King soon spoke, and tried to remove this erroneous impression.

"You are labouring under some mistake," he said. "We are no enemies of yours, and are even inclined, let you be who you may, to be your friends. Look at us, and be undeceived. We heard your cries from a distance, and with some difficulty have traced you to this spot."

It was evident these words reached the senses of the man, for, making a great effort, he raised himself upon one arm, and looked about him. The forms of the highwaymen were clearly enough visible in the moonbeams.

But he passed his hands over his eyes, as though his sight was dim and he wished to clear it.

"No—no," he said. "You do not wear the garb of keepers. I can see that, now, although my sight is going fast."

At hearing these words, the three friends exchanged significant glances.

"Can we do anything for you?" asked Sixteen-String Jack. "If so, do not be afraid to speak."

"No—no," replied the man. "You can do nothing for me, but leave me here to die."

He sank back again upon the ground as he spoke.

"Speak to us," said Claude. "We have heard in the silence of the night strange and unearthly cries. Did they proceed from your lips?"

"They did."

"And, as we stood upon the top of the rocks, yonder, was it you we saw lying down at the base of them?"

"It was."

"And you crawled here?"

"Yes."

"But—pardon me—how comes it that you are here alone, and, as you say, dying? You can speak to us in all confidence, and rely upon our doing no harm to you."

"I will tell you," said the man. "I will tell you."

He again, and apparently with great pain, raised himself up upon one arm.

"I will tell you what has brought me into this plight. You see me now—you see what I am. Look upon me, for in me you behold a victim of the accursed game laws."

"You are a poacher, then?"

"That is the name which is applied to me."

"But how have you been wounded?"

"Let me tell my tale in my own fashion, and do not interrupt me. I shall live just long enough to tell you the whole, perhaps, but not longer; for I can feel that my injuries are mortal."

"What is the nature of them?" asked Sixteen-String Jack. "Let us know that, and then, perhaps, we may be able to relieve you."

"No—no. My hurts are past all relief, even the most skilful; but if you wish to know how it is I am here—how it is I am wounded; if you wish to listen to a tale of terrible, cruel, and unjust oppression, listen to what I have to say. If you do not, I will be silent."

And he sank back again upon the ground.

"Nay, speak," said Claude Duval, whose curiosity was strongly excited. "Let us hear what you have to say. We will promise not to interrupt you; and, as for harming you, that is quite out of the question, for we are fugitives from justice ourselves."

As he expected, the man was somewhat reassured by this piece of information, and he raised himself once more, but this time in such a manner that he partly rested himself against the trunk of the tree beneath which he was lying.

Then he spoke.

"Two years ago," he said, "I was looked upon as being the smartest young fellow in the country side. My parents were well to do, and I was their only child.

"Nothing important in my life took place till about two years ago, when I fell in with a company of young men, all somewhere about my own age.

"Well, they were free, rollicking fellows, every one of them; and nothing delighted them so much as sport and mischief.

"We carried on all manner of innocent freaks for a long time, and included among them snaring a hare now and then, or shooting a few pheasants occasionally.

"We had more than one skirmish with the keepers, and the intelligence was quickly communicated by them to the lord of the manor.

"He was a man good enough in many things, but he was what is called an upholder of the game laws—that is to say, he would only allow those the pleasure of sporting that he thought proper, and that favour was never accorded to his tenants, one of whom my father was.

"He sent a very threatening message concerning me and my depredations, as he called them; and my father, who knew his violent and vindictive temper, cautioned me to be careful.

"Well, so I was for a few days, until I fell in with the old lot again, and they proposed another night excursion. I had my father's warning ringing in my ears, and, for a moment, I hesitated; but unfortunately for me, I went.

"It seemed the keepers had some inkling of what was going to take place, and had made preparations accordingly. At first we saw nothing of them, and soon bagged a considerable quantity of game; and, when we had everyone of us got something or other in our possession, the keepers came upon us suddenly, and in great numbers. A desperate struggle ensued, and many hard blows were given on both sides.

"Several of my companions escaped.

"The remainder were taken prisoners.

"I was among the latter.

"We were placed in very safe custody, for our captors determined that none of us should escape.

"In the morning we were brought before the lord of the manor, who, in conjunction with two other gentlemen, officiated as magistrates.

"You may guess, under these circumstances, what sort of mercy we had to expect.

"I knew, in a moment, we should be punished with the utmost rigour of the law.

"The crime, for such it was called, was clearly brought home against all of us.

"We were, in consequence, committed to take our trial at the next assizes.

"Bail was refused, although many offered it, and we were all haled off to the county jail, there to await the next assizes.

"This would be in nearly six months' time, for the last assizes were just over.

"In the jail, then, we were forced to remain until the expiration of the time I have mentioned, so we already suffered one sentence of imprisonment before we were tried.

"A good deal of indignation was expressed by several persons when they learned the particulars of the affair; but that made not the least difference to the lord of the manor, who determined that we should be severely dealt with, and made an example of.

"At length the assizes came round, and we were duly brought up for trial. I knew what we had to expect when the lord of the manor was our prosecutor.

"In short, for I may as well make an end of my tale, we were all sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment in the common jail.

"I quite despair of making you comprehend what an effect this affair had upon my parents.

"I was the first in their family who had ever become liable to the law, and they felt the degradation keenly.

"Besides this, the lord of the manor was not content to wreak his vengeance solely upon myself. During my imprisonment the term of my father's lease, under which he held the farm, expired, and he refused to renew it. This was a severe blow to my father, who had laid out all the little capital he possessed upon the farm, and now he found himself obliged to sacrifice it, for the landlord was inexorable.

"They had to turn out of the farm almost at a moment's notice.

"That ruined him.

"He was already almost broken-hearted to think that his only child should be the inmate of a jail.

"Well, gentlemen, he pined and pined away, and placed as I was, what could I do to assist him in the least? Over and over again did I curse myself for my foolishness, the lord of the manor for his unkindness, and my country, whose laws permitted such monstrous evils to exist.

"The next blow that came was the death of my mother. She was ailing and delicate, and this sudden reverse of fortune was too much for her to bear in her weak state.

"This was, you may depend, a severe blow to my father. Indeed he never rallied from it, and, on the day when the term of my imprisonment expired, he died.

"There I stood, then, alone in the world, without a friend, and with the curse of a crime hanging over my head.

"I walked to my native village.

"But the people, when they saw me, all shrunk from me. I had the contamination of the prison-house about me."

CHAPTER CCCLXV.

THE POACHER'S STORY INCREASES IN INTEREST.

A VIOLENT fit of coughing seized upon the poacher at this moment, and interrupted the continuation of his strange narrative.

The three friends exchanged glances, and then bent the whole of their attention upon the form at their feet.

Tom King thought, from the tone of this cough, that it was feigned, with a view probably to concealing his emotion.

And such was really the case.

By an effort, however, the poacher recovered himself.

The brandy which had been poured down his throat had recalled, in a wonderful degree, his fast-expiring energies; but now he felt that his strength was waning fast, and he hastened to bring his story to a conclusion ere death should seize upon him and prevent him.

And, indeed, the highwaymen, as they looked down upon his countenance, which the ghastly moonbeams rendered so distinctly visible, felt no small apprehension that death would appear before he had time to finish, for the traces of it were already to be seen.

It was the emotions which this recapitulation of the past had conjured up that overmastered the poacher, but, having recovered himself, he continued—

"All shunned me, and mine was a proud spirit. I could not brook their aversion, and I determined they should see me no more.

"And so I turned my back upon my native village, with the resolution firmly fixed in my mind that I would never return to it.

"But where was I to go?

"That was a question which very soon obtruded itself upon my notice, and which demanded my immediate attention.

"But I could not reply to it.

"Wherever I went, the taint of the prison-house would be upon me. I should be shut out from all the ordinary employments of my fellow-men.

"These thoughts were gloomy enough, and my mind was gloomy, too.

"It was while I was in this state that I entered a road-side public-house—for I was hungry, tired, and thirsty, and felt as though I must have rest and refreshment before I proceeded a yard further.

"Upon entering the kitchen of the public-house, what was my surprise to find seated there the whole of my prison companions. I mean those with whom I had been captured, and who had shared the jail with me.

"They greeted me, of course, and I recognized them readily enough, for I felt there was a kind of bond of misfortune between us.

"All spoke bitterly of what we were compelled to endure for so trivial an offence, for we could not look upon it in any other light; and after we had sat awhile and partook somewhat freely of the good things the house afforded, we vowed to band ourselves together and have a deep and lasting revenge for what we had sufferad.

"We stayed at the public-house, talking the matter over, until night came, and then we went out.

"I ought to have told you that the place where this public-house was situated was a small village called Waltham.

"It is not very far from where we now are.

"Near this village there is a chase—almost as extensive as this one is.

"Towards this chase, then, which was only a short distance from the public-house, we went.

"We determined to take up our abode in it for the present, and fully concert our future proceedings.

"That very night, as we sat beneath some of the wide-spreading trees in the chase, we matured our plans, and swore a solemn oath of secrecy.

"We resolved that our revenge should be this.

"We would arm ourselves, and go in succession to the residences of all those persons who were in any way connected, directly or indirectly, with our imprisonment, and then make them suffer dearly for what they had done.

"When we came to this determination, we captured a fine deer, and the following night set out upon our errand of retribution.

"We had taken care to provide ourselves with arms, and we had sworn a solemn oath to continue true and steadfast to each other.

"We had also sworn not to allow any circumstances to cause us to desist until we had fully accomplished our mission.

"In order that we should not be recognized, we disguised ourselves in large white smock-frocks, and blacked our faces with a mixture of gunpowder.

"This not only answered our purpose of baffling recognition, but also imparted to us a most horrible and unnatural appearance; so that, we calculated, the very looks of us would strike terror into the stoutest heart.

"The arms we carried, too, gave us an exceedingly ferocious appearance.

"Thus equipped, we set out.

"I need not relate all the deeds which we performed, now, should I live long enough to be able to do so. Let it suffice to say, that we obtained our revenge upon almost all our persecutors before we suffered anything from the consequences of our actions.

"The whole country side was, however, soon thrown into the utmost confusion and dismay.

"Not knowing our intentions, people who had nothing whatever to apprehend from us grew terribly alarmed; and, in short, a general panic soon spread throughout the country.

"From the first, our depredations being almost wholly confined to one spot, and from our always being seen with our faces blacked, we received the appellation which has ever since clung to us.

"That appellation is THE WALTHAM BLACKS."

When the three highwaymen heard this announcement, although they were, in a manner of speaking, prepared (having anticipated it), they could not control a slight start of surprise.

From time to time they had heard of the atrocities committed by, or, at all events, attributed to, the Waltham Blacks; and now strangely enough, one of their number lay at their feet.

With greatly increased interest, therefore, they listened to the continuation of the narrative.

"The authorities were aroused, and very prompt and energetic measures were taken for our capture; but for a long time we eluded them, and still pursued our scheme of vengeance.

"As soon as we had consummated it, it was our intention to separate, and seek safety by flight to different quarters of the country.

"But until our design had reached a consummation, we were bound by our oath not to separate.

"A good many of the things which we did must have reached your ears, and, therefore, I will not repeat them.

"At length, the good fortune which we fancied had hitherto been ours, deserted us.

"Two of our band were captured one night, and on the succeeding day two more.

"This reduced our strength very materially, and on the third day the police-officers, having received some information of our whereabouts, came stealthily to the spot, and surprised us.

"Finding ourselves thus attacked, we fought desperately.

"But it was in vain.

"Their numbers were three times as great as ours.

"Retreat was cut off.

"We were surrounded, and, in the end, every one of us was taken prisoner.

"We were deemed such desperate offenders that there was but one prison in the kingdom considered strong enough to hold us, and that was Newgate.

"Towards this place, then, we were all led without delay.

"My companions all seemed to give themselves up to despair, and to resign themselves to their fate.

"But I did not.

"I resolved to make my escape, if such a thing was at all within the bounds of possibility.

"This resolve I kept before my mind to the exclusion of all other thoughts, and keenly watched for any opportunity with which I might be favoured.

"As we got nearer and nearer to London, however, my hopes diminished.

"But I would not despair.

"At last, however, we fairly entered London.

"We traversed its busy streets, until at length the gloomy prison of Newgate was reached.

"As we paused beneath its portals, a shudder passed over me, and hope fled.

"Suddenly, however, as we were being marshalled into the prison, I saw a chance, if I made one desperate effort, of effecting my escape.

"I resolved to make that desperate effort, for, let me do what I would, I could not make my position worse than it was now.

"Urged on by despair, I struggled furiously when it came to my turn to be led into the prison.

"They were unprepared for this attack.

"I was the last, and all the others had gone in quietly and peaceably enough.

"You know what it is if you can take your opponents by surprise.

"I broke from their hold.

"I was free.

"A little crowd of people had collected, as they always do, round the door of Newgate, and when they saw my bold action, they applauded me, and, separating, allowed me quick passage through their ranks.

"The officers were, however, very soon upon my track.

"I was running for my life, and the exertions I then made seem, when I look back to them, as being utterly beyond belief.

"However, in the end I escaped. I am compelled to hurry over the remainder of my story, for each breath I draw, comes with difficulty from my lungs.

"It is enough to tell you I escaped, but I was the only one who was so fortunate.

"The rest of my companions were brought up for trial, and sentenced to death.

"They all suffered at Tyburn.

"Thus I was left alone.

"Some kind of fascination seemed to draw me to the scene of my former exploits.

"I still continued my depredations. Indeed, since the time I have mentioned, I have made my home almost entirely in this forest and those near to it, but——"

The voice abruptly ceased.

The poacher, with a faint groan, fell back.

"He's gone at last, poor fellow!" said Tom King.

"No—no; I think not," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Quick! Claude; quick! Hold up his head again, and let me pour some more brandy down his throat."

This was done, and then, somewhat to the surprise of Tom, the man gave signs of fresh life and of recovery.

It was a minute or two before he could speak, although he tried several times to do so.

At last, however, he gasped out—

"Water—water!"

Claude Duval no sooner heard these words, than he hastened off to procure some, if possible.

His two comrades remained.

The poacher drew himself up again, but manifestly with great pain, and he said—

"I am going—I am going fast. Listen, and I will tell you the rest. I have lived here a solitary life. You told me, did you not, that you were fugitives from justice?"

"We did."

"And such is the case?"

"It is."

"Then I will repay your good offices by the disclosure of something which may prove to be of as much value to you as it has been to me; for when, many a time, I have been hard pressed by the keepers, I——"

"What—what?" said Tom King, anxiously bending over him.

"I have found safe refuge there. Look! do you see the rocks yonder, which form the precipice at the base of which you found me lying?"

"Yes—yes."

"Well, then, if you will go from here in a straight line, you will see a large bush of prickly thorn. I can see it here, or my dying eyes deceive me. Look—look!"

"Yes, I can see a bush," said Tom King, "or what looks very much like one."

"It is one. Go up to it, and take hold of one of the top twigs, and bend it down. You will find, with a little pressure, it will almost lie flat upon the ground. Upon doing this, an opening in the rocks will be disclosed. It is the entrance to a cavern, and so cunningly hidden as to defy detection, for when you release your hold upon the thorn-bush, it will fly up into its natural position, and the opening in the rock will then be invisible."

The two highwaymen listened eagerly to these words, but the poacher continued to speak rapidly; and, fearful that they should lose some important information, they forbore to interrupt him in any way.

"That secret cave has been a place of shelter for me many a time; and now let me make all clear to you. Two nights ago, as I was coming through the chase, I trod unexpectedly upon a mantrap, of which there are many lying about. In a moment the sharp iron teeth fixed themselves in my leg.

"The pain was so great that I sank down on the ground in a swoon, from which, however, the dreadful agony I endured soon recovered me.

"I could not refrain from uttering several groans, my anguish was so terrible.

"For some time after I recovered myself from my swoon I lay on the ground without moving. My pain seemed to paralyze me.

"But the dread that the keepers would shortly make their rounds and discover me, inspired me with fortitude, and gradually I rose to my feet.

"I found myself, however, utterly unable to release myself. The spring was too much for my strength, and, moreover, I was in such a position that I could not obtain proper power over it.

"Finding this to be the case, I lay down and gave myself up to despair.

"I tried all I could to resign myself to the fate which I felt sure awaited me.

"In this way hour after hour passed by.

"The severity of my pain now somewhat abated.

"It seemed to subside into a feeling of numbness.

"Finding this to be the case, I raised myself a little from the ground, and had a look at the trap once more, in the faint hope that I might be able to free myself from it.

"But this second effort only served to show me the futility of the first one.

"I was never one, however, to succumb to difficulties.

"The idea struck me that I might unfix the mantrap from the ground, and drag it after me, either until I met with someone who could release me, or until I could find some means of releasing myself.

"I set about acting upon this idea at once, and after incredible suffering and labour, I succeeded in loosening the mantrap from its fastenings.

"I now tried to drag it along the ground with me, but the frightful anguish which the attempt occasioned me compelled me to desist.

"My position seemed now to be worse, if anything, than it was before."

CHAPTER CCCLXVI.

TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MAKE AN EXAMINATION OF THE POACHER'S SECRET CAVE.

THE dying poacher seemed to gain fresh energy as he proceeded; and he now continued the relation of his strange adventures in a rapid tone of voice, as though he was desirous of bringing it to a conclusion.

"Still I had done a good deal, I thought, and that stimulated me to make fresh efforts.

"Looking all round me, I at length espied a large round stone.

"Could I but crawl towards it and obtain possession of it, I thought I might perhaps be able, by using it as a hammer, to so break the springs of the trap as to be able to set myself at liberty.

"But the stone seemed to be far out of my way, and I feared I should not be able to reach it.

"By slow degrees, however, I managed to decrease the distance it was from me, until at length, by lying down and stretching out my hand, I was able to grasp it.

"A gush of joy came over my heart when I found that I fairly had it in my possession; and, impatient to test this mode of operations, I commenced my attack forthwith.

"The stone, I found, was but ill-adapted for the purpose I required; but I had no better tool, and I persevered.

"After hammering for a long while—I cannot tell you how long, I so far weakened the springs and otherwise broke the trap, that, in the end, I managed to free my leg.

"I fainted when this was done.

"As before I was brought back to my senses by the intolerable aching of my wounded limb.

"I sat up and tried to examine it.

"It was swelled to thrice its usual size.

"Blood was slowly oozing from it, for the sharp teeth had penetrated far into the flesh.

"It is a thousand wonders that the bone was not broken—indeed, I am by no means sure that it is not, for I have never had the slightest use in either leg or foot since.

"The chase was familiar enough to me, and I knew whereabouts to look for the nearest stream of water.

"Thither I made my way, and bathed my leg in the cool water.

"I then found that there was every symptom of inflammation, or something worse, having commenced.

"I bathed it, however, as well as I could.

"But when I had finished, I found my strength was almost gone; and my leg, though at first much easier after bathing it, now increased in painfulness to a terrible degree.

"I had no use in it whatever; and, when I stood up and tried to drag it along after me, it seemed as though it would drop off.

"But it is no good for me to linger over my dreadful sufferings. I found myself continually growing weaker, and, upon looking at the wounded place again, I could tell that it was mortifying.

"I could feel the pain which proceeded from it all over my whole body.

"It almost seemed as though the teeth of the trap had been anointed with some poisonous substance; though perhaps it was the rust with which it was encrusted.

"I felt confident that the hurt was a mortal one, and resolved to crawl, if I possibly could, as far as the secret cave of which I have spoken, where I intended to lie down and die unseen.

"As I made my way towards it, my torment became extreme, and, from time to time, I could not repress a cry of agony which was indeed forced from my lips.

"It must have been this which you heard.

"I crawled on and on until I arrived at the base of the rocks where you saw me. I was completely overcome, and my sufferings were so terrible that I groaned frequently.

"In the silence of the spot I heard you arrive at the verge of the precipice above. I heard you speak to each other, but I could not distinguish what you said.

"I was lying with my face upwards, and I could see you looking down upon me. The idea, of course, entered my mind that you were the keepers in quest of me; and acting under the influence of that impression, I crawled away among the underwood; but, when I reached this tree, my strength deserted me, and I could go no further."

These last few sentences had been uttered with increasing faintness, and Jack again administered some of the brandy.

At this moment Claude returned with some water.

But the man was too far gone for it to have a revivifying power upon him.

He passed his hands repeatedly over his eyes as he gasped, rather than said—

"The cave—the cave! I have told you all, now, and I shall die in peace. You will find it a good place for concealment, and it will be your own faults if you do anything to betray it. Ha! you have come at last! I have been deceived! False—false! Off! I say; off! Slay me, if you will; but you shall not take me prisoner! Off—off! I"——

The last words died away in an inarticulate gurgle, and he fell back dead.

For a moment or two neither of our friends broke the silence which followed the poacher's death.

Presently Claude spoke.

"It's all over with him at last, poor fellow! and I am very sorry for it. He was a brave fellow, there's no mistake about that; and it is a pity a brave man should ever die such a death as he has."

"It is, indeed, a pity," rejoined Sexteen-String Jack. "But it's no good grieving over it; the fault is none of ours."

"True, we have the consolation of knowing that we did all we could for him."

"So we have," added Tom King. "You were talking about our having an adventure, Claude, and we have with a vengeance."

"Yes," said Claude, "and I wonder what sort of a place this cave is that he talks about. I am afraid we shall find it all a myth."

"Why so?"

"It is quite clear that his senses wandered part of the time, and it may be that this cave was but some illusion of the imagination."

"We can soon put that doubt at rest," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but, first of all, I think we ought to ascertain whether he is really dead or not."

"By all means let us do so."

"An examination of the poacher's body was now made, and the result of it was that they found life quite extinct."

A feeling of curiosity caused them to look at the leg which had been caught in the trap.

They found that the bone was broken, and that mortification of the limb had taken place, which was the immediate cause of death.

"This is a nice state of things, is it not?" said Tom King. "I fairly shudder when I think of the risk we have so blindly run. We must be careful for the future where we tread."

"We must, indeed, or no one knows how soon that poor fellow's fate will be ours."

"As Tom says, I fairly shudder when I think of the danger we have been ignorantly exposed to."

"There is but one thing for us to do," said Claude, "and that is to exercise the utmost caution."

"You are right. But come, since it seems we cannot do any more for this poor fellow, let us find whether there really is a cave or not."

"With all my heart," replied Tom King. "But I don't quite agree with you when you say that we cannot do any more for this poor fellow here."

"You mean we might afford him decent burial, and so prevent his body being a feast for carrion?"

"Just so."

"We will do that, decidedly. But you know what I meant when I spoke?"

"Of course."

"Come on, then."

"The highwaymen now made their way to the particular part of the rock which the poacher had pointed out.

Upon arriving there they were somewhat puzzled, for they found that the rock for some distance was overgrown with the thorn bushes of which the dying poacher had spoken.

This was all the better, so far as the secrecy of the cave was concerned, but it made our friends' task of discovering it difficult.

It was Tom King who hit upon an excellent expedient for ascertaining which was the particular thorn-bush they sought.

He drew his sword, and plunged it into all of them in succession.

He was rewarded for his trouble after several trials, in each of which the point of his sword, passing through the bush, struck the rock.

Presently, however, the sword went in up to the hilt without coming in contact with any obstacle.

"Here it is," he cried, exultingly.

He sheathed his sword as he spoke.

In the meantime, Claude and Jack, who were full of anxiety, caught hold of the upper portion of the bush in the manner they had been directed, and, giving it a smart pull, they found it come towards them.

They continued their pressure until it reached the ground, and then a black looking opening in the rock was disclosed, which seemed just about large enough for a man to enter.

This was confirmation of what the poacher had told them.

The curiosity of the highwaymen was by no means appeased.

They wanted now to explore this cavern, and ascertain its character.

But all within was most profoundly dark.

This did not much signify, for the highwaymen took care to be never unprovided with the means of obtaining a light.

"A torch will be the thing to assist us in our explorations," said Tom King; "and we can soon form one from the branch of the first resinous tree we come to."

"Of course we can."

"Then let us look about us, my friends, and provide ourselves with several, in case they should be needed."

Our friends had not far to look for the species of wood

they required; and, having rudely trimmed half-a-dozen pieces into the form of torches, they returned to the entrance of the secret cave.

As before, they pulled down the thorn-bush, and Claude Duval held it in that position while Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack entered.

They halted just inside the entrance, and there, being sheltered from the wind, they proceeded to ignite one of the torches.

As soon as it had fairly caught light, and there was no fear of its being suddenly extinguished, Claude entered, too.

By seizing some of the twigs on the inner side, and pulling them towards them, they were able to fill up the gap completely, and so that no one could have told what was behind it from the other side.

Tom King had the torch, and he held it as high above his head as he could.

By the aid of its light they found they were standing in a rude, arched passage, rather narrow and tolerably high.

It seemed to extend for some distance in a straight line, though to where it led the light they carried did not enable them to determine.

The air did not seem altogether of the purest, for the torch burned but dimly.

Finding they had so little light, two more torches were ignited, which were carried by Claude and Jack.

The ground beneath their feet was firm and level, and they made their way at a rather rapid rate along the passage.

It was about a hundred feet in length, and so irregular in height, shape, and width, as plainly proclaimed it to be the work of nature unassisted by art.

After going the distance we have mentioned, they suddenly emerged into a spacious cavern.

A cold chill struck them as they entered it, and the air seemed much purer and fresher than that in the passage.

The torches burned more freely, but still the light they gave was quite inadequate to illuminate the vast extent of the cavern.

Claude Duval stationed himself at the entrance of the passage with a torch in his hand.

This was a by no means unnecessary precaution, for, if it should prove that there were other recesses in the cavern presenting a similar appearance, they might be puzzled to find their way out again.

While Jack and Tom King were thus engaged in their explorations, they found that a soft, gentle light began to pervade the whole of the cavern.

It stole upon them so gradually that they were unaware of its approach until the cave was quite filled with it.

At first they could not account for this phenomenon.

The place was quite dark when they entered it, and now it was every moment getting lighter, and they could see, not only the sides of the cavern, but also numerous natural columns, which appeared to have the effect of supporting the roof.

This, however, was invisible.

A kind of hazy mist seemed to have settled there, which hid it from view.

It was evidently from this mist that the light proceeded.

What could it be?

After a little thought our friends hit upon it.

The roof of the cavern was an immense distance from the floor, and, doubtless, in it were numerous small crevices through which the light came.

But, if this was the case, day must have dawned, and the time arrived when Dick Turpin promised to return.

No sooner did they recollect this, than they precipitately left the cavern.

Upon emerging into the open air, they found that, not only day had dawned, but that the sun had risen.

Finding this to be the case, they hastened towards the spot where they expected to find their comrade.

But they might have spared themselves the trouble, for, as the reader is aware, at that very moment Dick Turpin was flying for his life.

CHAPTER CCCLXVII.

A TROOP OF OFFICERS ARRIVE RATHER UNEXPECTEDLY AT THE "BULL AND GATE," AND DICK'S POSITION BECOMES EXCEEDINGLY CRITICAL.

"Look! look, Dick! What is that yonder? Do you see that cloud of dust? What is it? Oh! what is it?"

It was Maud Gouldman, who, in an anxious tone of voice, addressed these words to our hero.

As she spoke, she pointed in a particular direction with her finger.

It was close upon sunset, and they were standing together at one of the windows in the "Bull and Gate" inn.

Some hours have elapsed since we saw them last.

The time was occupied in coming to an understanding with each other.

And now, having succeeded in doing this, they were standing, as we have said, at one of the windows in the public-house.

They had been looking at the magnificent prospect spread out before them, for the room in which they were was on the upper floor, and was fitted with a large, old-fashioned bow-window.

It was the best room in the inn, and was never used except upon special occasions.

But the liberal manner in which Dick paid for what he had, caused the landlord to offer him the best accommodation he had at his disposal.

When she spoke, Dick Turpin looked immediately in the direction to which his fair companion pointed.

It was along the road, and the way they had come.

The glowing rays of the setting sun shone somewhat perplexingly into the room, and Dick put up his hand to shade his eyes from them, so as to have a good look in advance.

There, as she had said, he could distinctly perceive a cloud of dust, which indicated the approach of some large troop either of horses or men.

"What is it? Oh! what is it?" said Maud, anxiously, repeating her former inquiry. "Tell me at once."

"I am by no means certain what it is."

"But it may be our foes?"

"It may be, but I scarcely think it probable."

"Still it is possible."

"It is."

"Oh! fly! fly! Let us fly at once! Do not let us incur any unnecessary danger. Let us fly at once."

"I would rather ascertain whether they really are officers upon the road."

"How can you do that?"

"We shall see them presently."

"No, no; a thousand times no! Such a course would be by far too dangerous. We should not have time to fly, then."

Dick smiled at the alarm of his companion, which was, however, nothing more than natural.

"I will tell you what I will do," he said, "and that will quiet all your apprehensions. I will summon the landlord, and tell him to have Black Bess saddled and brought to the back door. Should there be any danger we shall then be able to fly, and leave our pursuers far behind."

Maud consented to this arrangement, but with considerable reluctance.

Dick, however, called the landlord, and gave him his instructions.

He was promised immediate obedience.

During this time Maud had not once removed her eyes from the cloud of dust which she had seen.

The road extended before them in a straight line, until it vanished to a point.

It was at this point where she had first seen the cloud of dust.

Now, however, it was very much nearer, which showed that whoever was on the road was coming at a good speed.

Still, nothing of them could be seen.

Dick rejoined Maud at the window, and, not without feeling some anxiety himself, looked out.

He had stayed at the inn until now for several reasons.

Perhaps the first one was on account of Black Bess.

He knew how much depended upon her fleetness and endurance.

Her strength had been severely tried during the past

night, and he was anxious she should have rest sufficient to recover from it.

They had, too, a long way to go before they could reach Enfield Chase.

And Black Bess would have to carry a double load.

These reasons alone were sufficient to cause Dick to remain, but there were others as well.

He did not know what other means could be found of conveying Maud to Enfield Chase without their destination being known, which he wanted to keep a profound secret, unless he adopted the same means as before.

But this kind of travelling was, in the highest degree, calculated to excite attention.

For this reason Dick resolved to postpone the commencement of his journey until night.

He calculated upon reaching his destination about dawn the next morning.

There was only one point upon which he felt any anxiety, and that was that his comrades, finding he did not return at the appointed time, would fear that some accident had befallen him, and would, contrary to his injunctions, set out in search of him.

If the truth must be told, Dick felt but little alarm when the cloud of dust was pointed out to him, for the simple reason that he could not conceive by what means the officers could have got upon his track.

Nevertheless, he did not regret the precaution which, for the sake of soothing his companion's fears, he had taken.

All around was very still, and presently Dick's keen ear could distinguish a faint sound, which was perfectly well known to him.

"They are horsemen who are approaching," he said; and, after he spoke, Maud noticed that he looked with much greater eagerness than before.

She was soon able herself to recognize the trampling of horses' hoofs.

Louder and louder they grew, but still the riders continued invisible, in consequence of the dust which enveloped them.

Suddenly, however, Dick drew back from the window.

The horsemen had come near enough for him to know who they were.

They were mounted police-officers.

Maud did not require to be told this.

She guessed it in a moment.

"They are your foes," she said.

"They are officers," rejoined Turpin; "there can be no doubt about that."

"Then fly—fly at once! Why do you hesitate?"

"Because I was considering whether I should not do better by remaining here."

"What, and be captured?"

"Nay—nay; I did not mean that. But do not look so alarmed, or suffer your mind to be so filled with apprehension. Believe me, I do not think we are in any danger."

"Why, then, are the officers on the road?"

"That I cannot tell you, but they might be there without having the slightest connection with me. I do not think it possible that they could have tracked me hither. If it had, they would have been here long before this."

Maud was only half-satisfied with this reasoning, but she was silent.

Dick was anxious to reassure her.

"If these officers who are now approaching so rapidly are on the look-out for someone else, my safest place will be here, because they will pass by; and, believe me, I would willingly allow those gentlemen the precedence, and have them on the road before instead of behind me."

"I can understand all that," interrupted Maud; "but the danger."

"I have considered that. Suppose, now, that these officers were not in pursuit of me, that their business had nothing to do with me, and I was to go out and gallop away. I should be seen, and a pursuit be instantly commenced; and this, if only for your sake, I would fain avoid."

"But how shall you learn whether they are in search for you until too late?"

"How too late?"

"For you to make your escape."

"Easily."

"The officers are close here now."

"I can tell that by the sounds. You stand by the window, and keep a look-out. I will keep here, in the middle of the room, and so avoid being seen. How far are the officers off?"

"Only a few yards."

"They have slackened speed, have they not?"

"Yes."

"What are they doing?"

"They seem to be talking to each other in an excited manner, as though they could not agree about something."

"But they are still slowly approaching the inn?"

"Oh! yes."

"Draw back a little. Do not let them see you if you can avoid it."

Maud obeyed.

But she did not remove her gaze for one second from the group of officers.

They were now coming at a walking pace, and presently, to the great alarm of Maud, one of them raised his riding-whip and pointed to the inn.

He accompanied the action with some words uttered in a loud tone of voice; but what the words were she could not tell, although she strained her sense of hearing to the utmost.

Dick now began to grow terribly anxious and fidgety.

"Tell me," he said, "if they go on, or whether they stop at the inn-door."

"We shall soon know that. Oh! fly! Fly at once, while there is yet time!"

"There is plenty of time; and, by acting precipitately, I might draw down upon myself that very danger which I am so anxious to avoid."

Finding him thus determined, Maud Gouldman urged the matter no longer, but continued to rivet her attention upon the officers, among whom a dispute of some sort or other was unquestionably taking place.

Some were of one way of thinking—some of another.

But Maud could not ascertain what the difference arose from.

They were all walking very leisurely.

The horses looked tired and weary, and their sides were wet with perspiration.

How Maud's heart beat as the momentous crisis arrived!

Would they pass the inn?

How that would lighten her heart of the fearful load which now weighed it down!

Alas!

It was not to be so.

The dispute, whatever it was, terminated.

The officers drew up in front of the inn.

More than this Maud did not wait to see.

With her face the picture of alarm, she rushed towards Dick, who, during the last few moments, had occupied himself in loading and repriming his pistols.

"Fly—fly!" she cried. "I fear it is too late."

"No, no. Be calm, and then all will be well. Are you sure the officers have stopped?"

"Yes."

"Go once more to the window, and see whether they have passed on."

Maud felt there was a slight hope in this, and she obeyed instantly.

She almost shrieked with terror.

"No, no," she cried. "They are all dismounting hastily from their steeds, and entering the inn. Oh! what shall we do?—what shall we do?"

"Calm yourself," said Dick, quietly, whose manner afforded a striking contrast to that of his companion; "calm yourself, I pray! It is the time for action! Come!"

He passed his arm round her waist as he spoke, and, going towards the door of the room, he opened it and passed out.

The sounds of many loud voices struck upon his ears, convincing him of the truth of the intelligence which Maud had just given him.

But he could not tell what was said, so many were speaking at once; nor, indeed, did he stay to listen.

He had noticed the interior arrangements of the inn, and he was certain he could make his way anywhere about it without difficulty.

He reached the top of the stairs, but paused ere he descended them.



[THE MARRIAGE OF DICK TURPIN IN ENFIELD CHASE.]

He fancied he could hear voices at the foot.

Thus, perceiving, as she thought, all hope of retreat cut off, Maud suffered an agony of apprehension.

But not so our hero.

With a stealthy tread, he passed the top of the stairs, and entered a room the door of which was nearly opposite and only a few paces distant from the top of the stairs.

The room was vacant, and fitted as a bed-chamber.

There was a large window in it, with a folding casement which opened like a door.

This opened on to a kind of rude wooden balcony, or gallery, which ran along the back of the building, on a level with the first floor.

Dick opened this window with all speed, and passed through it.

Then he assisted his companion to follow him.

No sooner was Dick on the wooden gallery than he looked over the railing which protected it.

From this place he commanded a view of the back door.

No Black Bess was there.

But, looking in the direction of the stable, he saw the fat Ostler, Obi, leading her along.

So far, then, all seemed well.

Maud grew calmer and more collected when she saw the chances of escape thus increase.

There was at both extremities of the wooden balcony a rude flight of steps, which led down to the yard below.

To the nearest of these Dick now directed his own and his companion's footsteps.

As yet he saw nothing of the officers.

They made all the speed they possibly could, and the top of the flight of rickety steps was quickly reached.

Down this they sped with a rapidity which astonished themselves, and caused Obi to look up with a kind of sleepy wonderment.

CHAPTER CCCLXVIII.

DICK TURPIN HAS A GREAT DEAL OF DIFFICULTY SHAKING OFF HIS PURSUERS.

But Dick paid little, if any, attention to the sleepy ostler.

His thoughts were intent upon one object.

That was to reach Black Bess in the smallest possible space of time.

Right glad was he to see that his gallant mare was fully caparisoned for the road, and ready for instant service.

The exertions she had already made did not seem to have had any effect upon her.

Her coat was sleek, and her neck proudly arched, while at every step she took she seemed to "spurn the ground."

Dick felt his eyes glow with admiration as they lighted upon the steed to whom he owed so much, and to whom he was about to trust to save himself from the foes who were so close at hand.

He did not pause when he reached the bottom of the wooden steps, but hastened forward to where Obi stood.

With great promptitude he swung Maud up on to the fore part of the saddle.

Having done this, he put his hand into his pocket, and drew forth another half-crown to reward the sleepy ostler for his services.

Just as he was placing it in his hand, however, the back door of the inn was thrown open.

The sound caused Dick to turn in that direction, and there he saw the landlord of the "Bull and Gate," with a throng of Bow-street officers around him.

"There he is! there he is!" they cried, and, as they uttered these words, they made a rush to the spot where Turpin was standing.

But, ere they could reach it, our hero had vaulted into the saddle.

In an instant he passed his left arm round Maud's waist, thus retaining her in her position, and took hold of the reins.

In the other hand he held a loaded pistol.

He did not wait to see or hear what the officers would do, but, the moment he found himself fairly in the saddle, he fired the pistol at his foes, producing considerable confusion among their ranks, and then threw the discharged weapon among them.

At the same moment he touched Black Bess lightly on the flank with the heel.

The touch was sufficient.

She gave one tremendous bound, and then set forward at a gallop which she alone was able to perform.

A shout came from the officers, and they made a simultaneous rush to the front door, where they had left their horses standing.

Then ensued an immense scrambling into saddles.

But, though they made all speed, by the time they were ready to start, Dick had got a long way ahead.

He had leaped a low wall that bounded the inn yard, and gained the high road, along which he sped at a rate that made pursuit appear ridiculous.

But the officers did not intend to give in without making an effort, at least, to capture their prey.

The large reward that was offered, and the renown that they would gain should they succeed in capturing the celebrated highwayman, acted upon them as very powerful stimulants for action.

Plunging their spurs, then, into the flanks of their exhausted cattle, they tore along the road.

Dick Turpin was just visible in the distance, but the reason of this was the straightness of the road, which enabled them to see for a long way.

Our hero was never aware of one circumstance connected with this affair; and it is as well, perhaps, that he was not, for the knowledge would only have supplied him with cause for vexation.

But there is no reason why the reader should remain in ignorance of it.

The troop of officers, then, who were now in full pursuit, and who had been perceived by Maud, had not the least idea, when they halted at the door of the inn, that Dick Turpin was staying there.

They were in search of him, however.

Indeed, all the principal roads round the metropolis were at this time patrolled by large bodies of officers, whose duty it was to keep a sharp look-out for Dick Turpin and his comrades, and to spare no means of taking them prisoners, either dead or alive.

They had been upon the road for some hours, and both horses and men were tired; so, upon perceiving in the distance the sign of the "Bull and Gate" inn, they slackened speed, and a rather animated discussion ensued as to whether they should pause there a little while for refreshment, or push on.

In the end they resolved to stop, and they accordingly did so.

In all probability, having no suspicions upon the point, they would have left without knowing that Turpin was there, or disturbing him in the least.

But fate had decreed it otherwise.

Upon alighting at the door of the inn, they spoke to the landlord, who came forward to receive them, and then entered.

The horses were, however, left at the door in charge of one of the officers.

The remainder inquired for the ostler.

The landlord then replied that he would be disengaged directly, as he was at that moment engaged in saddling a gentleman's horse.

The officers walked down the passage, and into the inn kitchen, which was situated at the back of the house, and had a large bow-window, which commanded a view of the yard.

Nothing was more natural than that, on entering this place, the officers should look through the window into the yard.

Indeed, they could scarcely avoid doing so, for the door was immediately facing the window.

They looked through it, then, and the first thing they saw was Obi, the ostler, leading a beautiful black horse.

Now, of course, these officers had been furnished with very accurate descriptions both of Dick Turpin and his steed, and the first glance they gave at this black horse in the yard engendered the suspicion in their minds that they had by accident fallen upon what they so wished to find.

Ere they could recover from their surprise, or, indeed, give a second glance at the beautiful black steed, they saw two figures move rapidly across the yard towards the ostler.

Here they paused; and, with a rapidity that bewildered them, they saw Maud swung on to the saddle.

They then had a good view of Dick.

They recognized him instantly.

A wild sort of howl came from their lips, and, as if actuated by one impulse, all rushed towards the back door of the inn.

They were in hopes of being able to surround Dick, or reach him before he was able to mount.

But in this hope they were disappointed.

His movements were much quicker than they thought they could be.

What now ensued the reader is already aware, and from what he knows of the character of Black Bess, for swiftness and endurance, he will think that the officers stood rather a poor chance.

But pertinacious perseverance will do a great deal, and we must wait and see what the officers will accomplish by hanging on the track of the highwaymen.

As for Dick himself, as soon as he saw what a capital start he had got, he dismissed all thoughts of uneasiness from his mind, and let his mare go at a pace which, though a swift one, was not swift enough to distress her.

From time to time he cast anxious glances back, and so did his companion.

But the sun had now set, and darkness was fast beginning to render distant objects indistinct.

This was a favourable circumstance for Dick, since it made his chances of escape all the greater.

Coming at last to a long, steep hill, he allowed his mare to ascend at a walking pace.

Upon reaching the summit, he halted and faced round to the direction in which he had just come.

From the top of the hill a very extensive view of the surrounding country could be obtained.

But the outlines of the various objects were confused and indistinct.

Only the highest features of the landscape could be distinguished.

The valleys were filled with darkness.

Looking back upon the road he had come, Dick strained his eyes in an endeavour to pierce the obscurity which lay below him, and to obtain a glimpse of his foes.

But both attempts were equally unsuccessful.

On the top of a hill, however, Turpin was aware that sounds could be heard from a great distance—more especially if he applied his ear to the ground.

He resolved to adopt this expedient, and, having acquainted Maud with his intention, he dismounted.

He laid himself down at full length, and, putting his ear flat on the ground, listened for some moments with the utmost intentness.

But all was still.

He could not distinguish any sound, however faint, which indicated the approach of his enemies.

From this circumstance he came rather too abruptly to the conclusion that they had given up the chase.

He, therefore, leisurely rose to his feet, and again mounted his mare.

But, although he was so easy and confident, his companion was quite the reverse.

To her the danger of their situation seemed magnified a thousand times.

As Dick placed his foot in the stirrup, she said to him, anxiously—

"Look, look. Oh! what is that over the hedge? Look! I can see men, and horses too. Oh! Dick, your foes are upon you. We are lost!"

These words were spoken in a low, suppressed voice, and in accents of the utmost terror.

They were calculated to have rather an embarrassing effect upon Dick—just at the moment when he was felicitating himself upon being so uncommonly safe.

Dick was one, however, who never allowed surprise to long retain the mastery over him.

He was in the saddle in a moment.

But before he had time to look and ascertain the truth of Maud's information, there was a flash and a report.

He felt something hot whistle by his cheek.

Then he heard a voice cry—

"Forward! forward, my lads, and we have him! I winged him that time, I'll be sworn! Forward! forward!"

There was a hasty trampling of feet, and the cracking of twigs, as the words were uttered.

Dick comprehended the state of affairs in a moment.

The officers had been cunning enough to leave the high road and take to the fields.

On the soft turf they made scarcely any sounds in their progress.

They had continued to push on at full speed, and had galloped up the hill while Dick walked it.

When they reached the top they saw him.

Had it not been for the warning received from Maud Gouldman, Dick would have found his position much more serious than it actually was.

However, he knew that he was unhurt, and that the best thing he could do was to set off at full speed.

He did so, and shortly received from Maud the gratifying assurance that she had not been in any way injured by the pistol-shot which had been fired.

This was the only thing which Dick cared for; and, having received the assurance that she was unhurt, his heart grew light again.

Still, he resolved to shake off his foes as quickly as possible.

He was annoyed with himself to think he had allowed them to gain upon him in the manner he had.

One thing was certain.

He must shake off his foes at once, or else give up all idea of making his way to Enfield Chase, or they would be too much upon his track and the secret of his retreat be in danger of discovery.

Indeed, as it was, he thought it would be better if he could change his course, and so mislead them as to the direction he had taken.

Impressed with this idea, he turned down a lane that branched off from the high road.

The officers descended the hill with break-neck speed, and followed after him.

Dick heard the clatter of their horses' hoofs.

Convinced that they were in the lane, Dick now urged Black Bess, for once in her life, to put forth her utmost speed.

The result was surprising.

Away she flew, at a speed which would be deemed incredible, and which, perhaps, none but a mare of her matchless breed could accomplish.

The faint clattering of the officers' horses' hoofs died away into utter silence.

Still Dick was careful not to pull up too soon, and so run the slightest risk of making his enemies aware of his intentions.

Presently, however, he pulled up.

He listened for a moment, but all was still.

He then backed his mare close to the bank of the ditch on one side of the road, and made her face the hedge on the side opposite.

It was only a low one, and he was convinced she would clear it easily.

Nor was he mistaken in his calculations.

She gave one spring, and alighted on the soft ground in the meadow.

Dick had considered his position, and he now shaped his course across the field, in what, he thought, was as nearly as possible a straight line to Enfield Chase.

His judgment did not deceive him.

In a short time he emerged upon the high road, along which he took his way at an easy gallop.

He was now tolerably free from apprehension.

He could hear nothing of his foes, and he doubted not that he had baffled them completely,

But he resolved to waste no more time, and not to allow them another opportunity to come up with him.

He beguiled the tediousness of his journey by conversing with his companion, who now began to experience a feeling of greater security than she had hitherto done.

CHAPTER CCCLXIX.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD GOULDMAN AT LENGTH ARRIVE SAFELY AT ENFIELD CHASE.

It was just about daylight on the morning following when Dick Turpin and Maud Gouldman came in sight of Enfield Chase.

The night had been occupied with travelling incessantly.

Black Bess had rather a tired look, but still she sped along as though she was aware the termination of her journey was almost reached,

Dick had taken the opportunity, which their long ride had afforded him, to explain to his companion his exact position in life.

He also mentioned his three companions, who, the reader will bear in mind, Maud had never seen, and never even heard of.

Dick put the worst face upon everything; but Maud still continued willing to share his lot, whatever it might be.

Our hero could not avoid being touched with this devotion, and a sharp pang shot through his heart as he asked himself what was to be the termination of this romantic affection.

Indeed, the thought was so painful a one, that he endeavoured to banish it from his mind altogether.

Dick could not help feeling anxious with respect to his comrades.

He was now something like twenty-four hours beyond the time he had appointed for his return.

He knew their impatience, and felt almost certain that it would not stand such a trial as that.

They would be ignorant of the cause of his delay, and would doubtless come to the conclusion that some mischief had befallen him.

When once they had got hold of this idea, he knew they would not rest until they had set out in search of him.

And this was what he dreaded, for of course they would be ignorant of the presence of so many of their foes upon the road, and their danger would be that much increased.

He did not keep his thoughts secret from Maud, but freely told her what was passing through his mind.

At length Dick reached the spot where he had parted from his comrades, and which they had mutually agreed should be the meeting-place.

He looked around him in vain for some signs of their appearance.

All was still.

The birds had scarcely yet begun to chirp and leap from bough to bough.

Dick was quite sure he had not been observed to enter the chase by anyone.

A long time had elapsed since he had seen a human being.

And now, as they stood thus upon the appointed spot, they might, without any great stretch of the imagination, have easily imagined themselves alone in the world.

The hour was, perhaps, about the stillest of the whole twenty-four, and they were in one of the thinnest populated districts in England.

Dick waited anxiously and impatiently for several minutes, but no sign of his comrades appeared, and his worst suspicions were realized.

They had gone off in search of him, and the result of this would probably be that they would either be taken prisoners, or their hiding-place discovered.

As a last hope, and not that he thought it would be responded to, Dick uttered a kind of chirping whistle, with which, in olden times, he had been wont to summon his comrades.

The shrill sounds died away upon the silent air, but there was no reply.

Dick dismounted, and assisted his companion to alight.

"This fills me with uneasiness," he said; "but it is no more than I expected. What to do, I know not. If I go away in search of them, I may only be the means of incurring fresh danger!"

"Why not stay here," said Maud, "and await their coming?"

"I am afraid I cannot do better."

"Wait with patience. It may be that they will return in safety."

"I trust they may."

With such conversation and speculations as these, they whiled away the time.

Presently their ears were saluted by a faint sound, which could not have reached their ears but for the intense stillness of the place.

Dick drew back yet further into the shadow of the trees, and listened.

The sound grew plainer, and its character soon became perceptible.

It was a rustling noise, as though someone or something was forcing a way through the dense undergrowth with which the ground, to a depth of a couple of feet, at least, was covered.

Someone was approaching.

But who?

That was a question which he could not determine, though he hoped to find it one of his companions.

He peered forth, at the same time taking care to keep himself concealed.

He could distinguish the sound of a horse's hoofs, but could not see either animal or rider.

Suddenly the sound ceased.

Still he could see nothing.

Wound up to the highest pitch of excitement, he listened.

He heard a voice say—

"I am back first, it seems, and I am a good deal behind my time. I hope they won't be long, or I shall be uneasy."

Dick felt as though he could shout for joy.

He knew the voice.

It was that of his old comrade, Tom King.

He whistled again, and then emerged from his place of concealment, leading Maud Gouldman by the hand.

His whistle was this time responded to by a cheerful cry, and the next moment Tom King alighted from his steed, and came hastening towards them.

But when Tom saw that Dick was accompanied by a lady, he shrunk back a little.

Turpin, however, advanced, and, grasping him by the hand, shook it warmly.

"I am back safe, you see, and have brought some one with me. You are surprised, no doubt, but this is Miss Maud Gouldman, to whom I have been fortunate enough to be of service, and she has rewarded me for what I have done by consenting to share my future lot."

Tom King looked astounded.

But he quickly recovered himself.

He had had his suspicions before upon the point, though he had never said a word about them, and now he saw them more than confirmed.

Tom King had received the education of a gentleman, and it was in quite a courtly way that he acknowledged Dick's introduction.

He raised his hat, and made a graceful and profound bow, after the manner of the times.

Maud Gouldman was surprised, although Dick had somewhat prepared her for those she had to meet, by describing their persons, manners, and history.

She was impressed in Tom King's favour immediately; and, indeed, his personal appearance was well qualified to produce such an effect.

But, as for our old friend, he looked upon her mistrustfully.

She vividly brought back to his mind the half-forgotten memories of the past.

He felt that he could never again trust a woman.

But no expression corresponding with this feeling was permitted to appear upon his countenance.

He turned towards Dick.

"I am rejoiced to see you safe back again," he said. "You have no idea what anxiety we have suffered on account of your long absence."

"I can form a good notion of it. But, Claude and Jack—where are they? And where have you been? since, to my knowledge, you have only just returned to the chase."

"One question at a time, Dick—one at a time! After we parted from you, the night before last, we returned to the chase, and there met with a marvellous adventure, the particulars of which I will presently communicate to you."

"Well?"

"This adventure occupied us for some hours, and it was daybreak before we were aware of it. However, as soon as we made the discovery, we hastened off to this spot, expecting to find you here waiting for us."

"But you were disappointed?"

"We were. Well, we waited here until it got fully day, and then we imagined something or other had detained you, and we made up our minds to wait for night with what patience we could, for we did not expect you before then."

"Go on. You have not answered my question."

"I will in a moment. But, if you will just pay attention, you will understand all that has taken place."

"Very good."

"Having made up our minds, then, that you would not return until night, we retired to the chase to get a few hours' sleep, of which we stood greatly in need, as you will readily believe when I relate our strange adventure."

"You fill me with curiosity, Tom. I am at a loss to think what adventure you can have had."

"Never mind that, just at present; it will take too long to tell. We slept for several hours, and woke up a little before sunset. We then had something to eat, and by the time we had despatched our meal, we found that it was fairly night."

"What then?"

"We repaired once more to this spot, in the hope of seeing you shortly make your appearance. But in this hope we were disappointed, and at length we found it impossible to wait idly any longer."

"What did you do then?"

"We agreed to go in search of you."

"Just as I thought!"

"We could not rest here. Well, we got our horses, mounted them, and separated, each one of us taking a different road, and agreeing, whether successful in our search or not, to meet here as soon after daybreak as possible."

"I understand now."

"I thought you would. Of course, my search, like theirs, has been a fruitless one. I am glad to see you back, for if you had not been here when we returned, we should have run the risk of going to London."

"I was in dread that you had already done so; but, since you have not, all is well."

"As you say, all is well. In all my excursion, and I have been some miles, I have not met with a single living creature."

"So much the better. But where are Claude and Jack?"

"That is a question I can answer no better than yourself. You know the agreement we made with each other when we parted. I suppose they have gone further than they were aware, and found it impossible to return at the appointed hour. I was myself somewhat late for that very reason."

"Yes, it was daybreak when we arrived, and we had been waiting here some time when we heard the sounds of your approach."

"Of course, you did not know who I was?"

"Of course not, and hence my caution. But, hark!"

"Some one approaches."

"Claude or Jack?"

"That I do not know."

"It will be no harm to stand aside and reconnoitre."

"Certainly not. Let us do so."

All three once more betook themselves to the shelter which the trees afforded them.

It was a horse approaching, and it stopped somewhere about the same spot as Tom had a little while before.

In another moment there was a low whistle.

"That is Claude," said Tom King, in a whisper, as he replied to the signal.

They then emerged from their concealment, and found Tom to be quite correct.

It was Claude Duval who had just arrived.

His delight at seeing Dick safe back again can easily be imagined by the reader without our describing it.

He was much struck with the beauty of Maud Gouldman, whom he treated with more respect than he would any princess; and Claude Duval always bore the character of being the "gentleman highwayman."

Ere they had time to do little more than exchange greetings, Tom King espied Sixteen-String Jack at a little distance.

He was making his way for the spot upon which they stood, and would arrive in another moment.

Our friends were thus happily reunited, though fate destined that it should not be for long.

Every face bore a light-hearted, happy expression, and to have looked at them just then, no one, not knowing them, would have dreamed what they were.

On foot, they all turned towards the chase, and plunged into its leafy recesses.

Each led his own steed by the bridle.

On their way, Tom King related to Turpin and Maud their adventure with the wounded poacher.

When Dick learned what had occasioned his death—namely, that mantraps were laid about—he felt a pang of alarm and apprehension.

He stopped short in a moment.

But his comrades assured him that they had carefully examined the route they were about to take, and were quite confident that there was no fear of mantraps.

Thus reassured, Turpin ventured forward again; but his companions could not avoid noticing the extreme caution he observed at every step he took.

But it was not for his own safety that he was anxious, but for Maud's.

The secret of the existence of the cavern was now communicated to him, and he was also told that that was the place of their destination.

This was welcome intelligence indeed to Dick, for he had been wondering where he could find a shelter for his fair companion.

He trusted the cavern was a comfortable place, and fit for habitation, and he questioned his comrades closely upon the subject; but they could afford him but little information, having made only a casual examination of the place.

They told him how a soft, gentle light, in some way or other, managed to make a way into it; and that circumstance filled him with hopes that it would prove a comfortable place.

CHAPTER CCCLXX.

CLAUDE DUVAL, TOM KING, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SET OUT UPON AN IMPORTANT EXPEDITION.

In a few minutes now they reached the face of the rocks in which the concealed cavern was.

Dick Turpin and Maud Gouldman both looked around them with surprise, interest, and curiosity.

Especially was the mind of the latter filled with these feelings.

To her, all that she saw, and all that was taking place, had the ineffable charm of novelty.

All accorded, too, with her own romantic disposition, and she gazed upon the lofty trees, and the rugged surface of the rocks, with inconceivable delight.

She would not have changed her position for a home in the noblest and grandest mansion in the land.

There are some minds which are so constituted.

But to nearly all, we fancy, there must be a great charm about leading a primitive life in some vast forest.

If so, it is very natural, for such originally was the state of man.

Dick's three companions had well marked the appearance of the particular thorn-bush which hid the entrance of the cave, and they were able, without the least difficulty, to distinguish it from the others that grew near it.

Claude caught hold of the top of the bush, and pulled it down.

He kept it in that position by placing his foot upon it.

In the meantime his comrades had removed all the trappings from their steeds.

They carried them just inside the passage, and piled them up in a little angular recess, which was admirably adapted for their reception.

The horses were then left at liberty to feed on the rich herbage that abounded there.

They were not afraid of their straying far away.

When this was done, they all entered the passage, with the exception of Claude Duval.

This place was in total darkness, so Tom King lighted one of the torches they had made use of for the previous occasion.

When this was done, Claude entered, and replaced the thorn-bush; taking care to do so in such a manner as to defy detection.

A few minutes enabled them to reach the termination of the gloomy passage, and then they emerged into the cavern.

Here the torch was not only unnecessary, but useless; and so Tom extinguished it, and thus got rid of an incumbrance.

Outside the cavern it was now broad daylight.

Looking up to the roof, from which the light manifestly proceeded, our friends found, after a little attention, that their conjecture was perfectly correct.

They were just able to detect numberless small crevices in the rock; and it was through these that the daylight made its way in a kind of misty radiance.

Upon gaining the cavern, Dick's first impulse, after having looked up to the roof, was to ascertain, if possible, the size and extent of it.

There was not much difficulty about doing this, for the whole of it was thoroughly illuminated; and, as their eyes got more and more accustomed to the subdued light, they were able to distinguish even the minutest object.

The cavern was in shape somewhat circular—it approached this form more nearly than any other.

At a rough estimate, its diameter in its widest part was about fifty feet, and in its narrowest thirty.

The height was a hundred, or perhaps more.

The walls of the cavern were in many places covered with some kind of glittering ore, which reflected the rays of light with a remarkably beautiful effect.

From the roof depended numerous stalactites, some of which were only a few feet in length, while others were so long as to reach the floor, and had the appearance of being natural supporting pillars.

But this was only in appearance.

The floor of this cavern was composed of some kind of hard earth, and this seemed to be the only thing that was artificial about the place, and even this might have been natural.

Such were the most prominent characteristics of this remarkable place.

Upon looking about them more closely, however, the highwaymen found several indications of the place having, at some time or other, been inhabited.

In one part of the floor was fixed a large flat stone, and

upon this there still remained the extinct embers of a wood fire.

Then, pushed into a kind of recess, of which there seemed to be a great number all round, were a table and some seats, all roughly made with the rudest of materials, and yet competent to perform the service required of them.

Our friends were glad of these necessaries, which would so materially conduce to their comfort, should they think of remaining long.

Having found these articles in a recess, prompted them to renew their search in the remainder.

They resolved to go regularly round the cavern, and take each one in its turn as it presented itself.

Ere they had gone many paces, they came to a very large deerskin, which was hung up on the wall of the cavern.

Thinking there might be something behind this, Dick took hold of it and pulled it aside.

An opening in the wall was now disclosed.

Looking in, they saw a small chamber, about ten feet square, which seemed to be lighted in the same manner as the outer cavern.

But what immediately attracted Turpin's attention was a dark-looking mass of something in one corner.

He strode towards it in a moment, in order to ascertain its character.

He found it to be a great many deerskins, all laid perfectly flat, and one on the top of the other.

The use of this was obvious at a glance.

It was, indeed, to serve as a couch, and no doubt it would make a very soft one.

Highly pleased with this discovery, they left the little chamber, and on making the circuit of the cavern they were astonished to find seven more chambers of a similar character, and all furnished with skins in the same manner.

This promised them something better in the shape of sleeping accommodation than they had had lately.

All were now quite in high spirits.

"I believe we shall be able to live here like merry men," exclaimed Dick Turpin. "There seems to be almost every convenience we can require."

"There does indeed, and we ought to feel glad we have got so secure a place where we can stay until our last affair blows over a little."

It was Tom King who said this, but Claude added—

"It would do for a time, no doubt, but you would find being here terribly dull. Indeed, I have found it so already."

"Yes," said Sixteen-String Jack, "but why should we not take permanent possession of this place, and make sallies from it whenever we think proper?"

"That sounds better," rejoined Claude Duval.

"You feel the want of some employment, Claude, do you not?" said Dick.

"I do, and that's just it."

"I thought so. Now, I have a little expedition for all of you, if you think proper to undertake it."

"You are our captain. Command, and we obey!"

"Very good, if you like to look upon it in that light."

"What is it to be?"

"Do not be so impatient."

"But I can't help it."

"Why, you have only just come back from one expedition."

"Very true; but I met no one. I had nothing but a solitary ride."

"Well, then, this is what I want you to do."

Dick Turpin whispered something in Claude's ear.

He looked amazed for a moment, and then he said—

"All right, captain. It shall be done."

"What—what?" asked his comrades, eagerly.

"He shall tell you presently," said Turpin.

"Shall we start at once?" asked Claude.

"What do you think?"

"It's daylight."

"So it is."

"I think we had better wait till dark."

"Agreed; there will be much less danger then."

"You are right, captain."

Here the subject dropped, but Claude was obliged to whisper in the ears of Tom and Jack what Turpin had said to him.

As they became the recipients of the intelligence, their countenances for a moment expressed the same amount of astonishment as his had.

At any rate, nothing was to be done till night, and that was far distant, the day having only just begun.

They occupied their time making several preparations.

Fuel was brought in, and a fire made up on the hearth, for the season was far advanced, and the cavern was chilly.

A dense volume of smoke arose from the fire, and then our friends thought they had done a very injudicious thing.

The smoke would make its way out of the numerous crevices in the roof of which we have spoken, and should anyone happen to pass by a discovery must take place.

There was, however, but little fear of any one visiting that unfrequented spot, and yet such a thing might happen at the most inopportune moment.

In order to set this point at rest, they all resolved to leave the cave, and get upon the roof of it, if such a thing was at all practicable.

On emerging from the cave, their first care was to take accurate note of the bearings of different objects; and, having done this, they proceeded to ascend to the top of the rocks.

In order to do this, they had to make a considerable detour.

At length, however, they were convinced they stood upon what was the roof of the cavern.

The smoke was imperceptible, and so, too, were the crevices through which the daylight penetrated.

These latter were so small, and so overgrown with dense vegetation as to be quite invisible, unless the closest search was made.

And, even then, they seemed nothing more than cracks and fissures in the rock, through which it was impossible to see down into the cavern.

Then, as for the smoke, the only way they could account for not being able to see that was that, by ascending to so great a height, it was converted into an impalpable vapour before it reached the surface.

In order to set the point at rest, several coins were dropped through the crevices.

Upon re-entering the cavern, these coins were all found lying upon the floor of it.

The highwaymen now experienced a feeling of the greatest security with respect to the secrecy of their strange habitation.

The more they found out about it, and the better they became acquainted with it, the more they liked it.

By this time the fire had burned up, and was quite clear, and the next thing to be thought about was a meal.

This they set about having in their usual primitive fashion, and here it was they experienced the full benefit of Maud's presence among them.

The meal was served up with the best of all sauces, and that was a keen and vigorous appetite.

It was wonderful to see how soon all adapted themselves to their new quarters, and began to feel quite at home.

When the meal was over, some hours were spent in cheerful conversation, in which the various actions of the past were fully discussed.

Presently, however, Dick Turpin's three comrades withdrew.

They had recollected something which they had promised to do, but which had been forgotten until the present moment.

The reader will perhaps guess what it was.

It was to bury the remains of the poacher to whose confession they were indebted for the comfortable habitation they had got.

There was something abhorrent to the feelings of all three of them in the thought that his inanimate remains should become the prey of the wild denizens of the forest.

A very little trouble on their parts would prevent it.

This, then, was the reason they withdrew, leaving Turpin and Maud in the cavern, who probably did not much regret the circumstance of being left alone.

The body of the dead poacher was but a few paces from the entrance to the cave, so Tom and his two comrades quickly reached it.

They found that the carrion crows had already begun

their feast, and they had some difficulty in scaring the loathsome birds away.

They were but ill-provided with tools requisite for digging a grave, but for such a thing as that it was not likely they would hold back.

With the aid of their swords and some fragments of wood, they succeeded in making a hole large enough and deep enough for their purpose.

In this they placed the body of the poacher, which already presented a terrible spectacle.

The earth was shovelled in and hammered down hard.

By the time this was done they were surprised to find that darkness was rapidly closing in around them.

But winter was very close at hand, and the days were short.

Returning to the cave, they signified to Dick their intention of setting out at once upon their little expedition.

To this he made no demur; but, on the contrary, pressed them to be as speedy as possible, and not to return on any account until their object was accomplished.

To these terms they consented; and, pleased with the idea of having some business on hand—and business, too, in which they felt a peculiar interest—they set out with light hearts.

Their steeds were saddled, and Maud and Dick accompanied them to the outskirts of the chase, where they bade them adieu.

What was the nature of the business upon which they were engaged, and what sort of success they met with, we shall very quickly see.

CHAPTER CCCLXXI.

RELATES WHAT BEFEL THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN UPON THEIR MYSTERIOUS EXPEDITION.

When the three highwaymen left Enfield Chase, it was not quite night, though darkness was fast approaching and increasing.

Objects at a short distance were invisible, and a general gloom overspread the whole of the landscape.

The night offered a remarkable contrast to the preceding one, which had been so unusually bright and beautiful.

Now, however, the heavens were entirely covered with one dense, sad-coloured cloud, which permitted not a glimpse of the blue ether to be obtained through the smallest rift in the whole of its vast expanse.

So far, too, from the moon pouring down upon the earth a flood of bright and beautiful light, her position in the heavens could not even be distinguished.

To our friends, though, and the expedition they were upon, this night was unusually favourable.

In a short time their eyes became accustomed to the insufficient illumination, and they were able to see their path with the greatest ease.

Ere they had gone a hundred yards, however, they drew rein, and as well as could be distinguished in the darkness, looked at each other irresolutely.

It was Claude who broke the silence.

"My friends," he said, "I have already acquainted you with the nature of the business we have to carry out to-night, but the subject requires some little consideration. In the first place, the question arises, where are we to look for our destination?"

"That sounds a strange question, Claude," replied Tom King, "but I perfectly well understand what you mean. I am not able to answer you, but perhaps Jack is."

"Well, yes, I am," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Where—where?"

"As I was out early this morning, on the look-out for Dick, I saw just the place we want."

"Did you indeed?"

"Yes."

"But did you notice its position well enough to be able to find your way back to it in the dark."

"I think so, for I maintained the same direction all the time."

"That will do, then," said Tom King. "It is lucky you noticed it, for I saw nothing of the kind, I am certain."

"Nor I," said Claude Duval.

"Never mind, all is well. Just bear round a little to the left-hand, then you will come to the high road; keep along it, and you will soon be where you want to be."

"Have you got what I asked you to provide yourself with?" asked Claude Duval.

"Yes," answered Sixteen-String Jack; and, as he spoke, he patted a little bundle of something, which he had got strapped before him on the saddle.

"That's all right enough, then, and we can look upon the whole of the business as settled."

"I hope we may. I have been engaged in many a strange adventure before to-day, but never in one half so strange and curious as this."

"The same here," exclaimed the two others; and, as they spoke, they turned their horses' heads in the direction of which Sixteen-String Jack had spoken.

There was now a silence of some minutes' duration, but it was broken by Claude Duval, who, addressing Tom King, said—

"What do you think of this last affair of Dick's?"

"You mean about Maud Gouldman?"

"Yes."

"Why, taking all things together, I am sorry it happened."

"Are you?"

"Yes; and if I do not mistake, you are of the same opinion as myself."

"Well, Tom, I am."

"So am I," said Jack.

"Then we are all quite unanimous upon the point." continued Claude.

"Well, I don't wonder at it. You see it will upset everything, and, let you look at the matter in what way you will, it presents a disagreeable aspect."

"True; and for that reason I think we ought to make the best of it we can."

"We cannot alter it, that is very certain."

"Of course it is; then, in my judgment, the best thing we can do is to submit to the change with the best grace we can."

"We must try to do so; though it strikes me we shall find it very disagreeable."

"Well, if so, we must put up with it, that's all. But here we are at the high road at last."

The three highwaymen leaped the low wooden paling which skirted the meadows they had been crossing, and alighted in the high road.

"Now follow me," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and I will lead the way, But we have some distance before us, I can tell you that."

"Never mind; our cattle are thoroughly refreshed by the rest they have had. Forward! forward!"

At a sharp trot, which got over the ground in a really amazing manner, they took their way along the high road.

Their horses' hoofs made a tremendous clatter, which made conversation too difficult to be pleasant; and, as they had nothing more to talk about than the expedition they were upon, they were silent.

Each, however, busied himself with his own thoughts; and, unconsciously, they all dwelt at the same moment upon the same topic.

And that was about the advent of Maud Gouldman, and the changes which were likely to result from it.

In this way they continued for a long distance—until, indeed, the winter evening had deepened into night.

The air was raw and cold.

The whole atmosphere seemed to be loaded with dampness, and nothing but the strongest necessity would have induced ordinary travellers to be abroad.

But the highwaymen paid little attention to the inclemency of the weather.

During the whole of their journey they had scarcely met with a single individual, and they had not passed a vehicle of any description.

The road was a lonely one, and at such an hour, and in such unfavourable weather, it was deserted entirely.

Sixteen-String Jack continued to lead the way without the slightest hesitation, and his friends followed him with the most implicit faith in his power to guide them.

At length they reached a small village, which straggled for some distance along the high road.

What was the name of it they had no idea.

Passing through it, however, without perceiving a single inhabitant, they kept on for about a quarter of a mile further, and here they halted.

"Is this the place, Jack?"

"Yes," was the reply. "Look yonder!"

Sixteen-String Jack raised his riding-whip as he spoke, and pointed to what appeared to be the square tower of a church.

As soon as his friends perceived it, they said—

"Oh! yes, this must be right. Have we much further to go?"

"I suppose not, but I cannot precisely lead the way; for, when I passed this spot this morning, I was going at a rapid rate, and did little more than cast a hasty glance around me."

"We must approach and reconnoitre."

"We must. Come this way quietly."

The three now took their way across the road; and, after going a few yards, arrived at a low stone wall, over which a few white gravestones could be distinguished glistening in the darkness.

This showed that the building to which Jack had pointed was no other than a church. Indeed, they could now perceive the dim outline of the ancient sacred edifice.

"I should think this churchyard would be a good place to leave the horses while we do our business; that is, if we can get into it pretty easily."

"Go on a little further. You are almost sure to come to a gate."

They did so, and quickly discovered one of those white gates which, in country places, so often open into the graveyards.

This gate was simply secured by a ponderous iron latch, and this Claude raised with very little difficulty, and the party fairly entered the churchyard.

They dismounted, and led their horses by the bridle until they reached an alder-tree, which grew at the junction of the two broad paths intersecting the churchyard.

To this they secured their cattle, though in such a manner as allowed them liberty to graze.

This done, they paused, and endeavoured to pierce the darkness which surrounded them.

In this attempt they were unsuccessful.

But, luckily for them, the clouds just at that moment parted, and, through a long straggling rift in them, the moon shone sweetly down.

Her rays seemed all the brighter in consequence of the darkness which had hitherto prevailed, and which was now completely dissipated.

Those objects which had before been invisible were now distinctly revealed.

The massive square tower of the church could now be seen, even from a considerable distance; and, in addition to this, something which instantly attracted the attention of the highwaymen.

This was a stone building, contiguous to the church, and, from its position, doubtless the residence of the vicar.

They pointed this house out to each other in a manner which plainly indicated that the business they were upon was in some way connected with it.

With hasty steps they crossed the churchyard, and went straight towards it.

A small gate separated the garden of the vicarage—for such it was—from the church; and this the highwaymen opened, and passed through.

The front door was reached by a flight of broad and handsome stone steps, and it was surmounted by a portico of great solidity and beauty.

No notice was as yet taken of the intrusion of our friends, who looked up at the various windows of the dwelling before them, in order to ascertain whether a light appeared at any of them.

But all was dark, which seemed to indicate that the inhabitants had all retired to rest.

The highwaymen were not satisfied of this, however, until they had looked all round the building; having done which, they returned to the front, and took up their former position.

And now the moon, who by her light had rendered them such good service, was again completely obscured by the clouds.

For this they cared not, as they had already performed all the service which lay in their power.

In a whisper, however, Claude spoke—

"There is one piece of information which it is very desirable we should be in possession of."

"What?"

"The name of the parson."

"But how are we to find that out?"

"There's the difficulty."

"Stop."

"What?"

"I know how we can find it out."

"How?"

"By going to the door of the church. Don't you know that the name is always painted there on a board?"

"Of course it is. I might have thought of that myself."

"Make haste, it will not take us a moment; and such a piece of information will be valuable in the extreme to us."

Being of this opinion, they hastily left the garden in front of the vicarage, and re-entered the churchyard.

It was easy enough to go straight up to the porch, and, having arrived there, they felt about for the position of the notice-board.

Having found it, Tom King lighted a thief's match.

He fancied this would burn just long enough to answer his purpoee, and so it did.

They saw the name, and managed to make it out, though the letters were half effaced.

Being in possession of the name of the parson, they returned to the garden.

They were now ready for action.

Sixteen-String Jack had removed the bundle from the front of his saddle, and he held it under his arm.

What its character was could not be distinguished.

With stealthy tread the three highwaymen ascended the little flight of stone steps in front of the vicarage, and stood close to the door.

At a sign, Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval retired behind one of the pillars, where they were completely out of sight.

No sooner was this done than Tom King seized the knocker, and banged away with right good will.

The hollow sound reverberated through the dwelling, but no immediate notice appeared to be taken of it.

In consequence of this, Tom, after pausing a moment, renewed the assault, and this time with a vigour that was really terrific.

Ere he had ceased, one of the upper windows was violently thrown open.

The swinging leaf of the lattice went back with a crash against the wall, and the clattering of broken glass followed.

Tom looked up, and in the imperfect light, he could just distinguish the white night-capped head of someone.

Whoever this individual was, he appeared to see our friends, for he instantly called out—

"Who's there? What do you want?"

The tones of the voice were angry and insolent.

"Is that the Reverend Mr. Martext?" asked Tom King, in a voice of well-affected grief and concern.

"What if it is?"

"If it is, reverend sir, although I am very sorry to trouble you at such an unseasonable hour, I must ask you to come and see my brother. He lies even now at the point of death, and is sadly in want of you, holy sir, to administer spiritual consolation to him."

"Who is your brother, eh?"

"A stranger to you, I have no doubt, reverend sir," said Tom King, still keeping up, with consummate skill, the peculiar tone of voice he had assumed.

The parson hesitated.

He was not fond of being called up of a night after having gone to bed.

Tom continued—

You will only have a few yards to go, reverend sir, and, with your permission, I will lead the way. My brother is dying, and he so earnestly requests to see you that I do hope you will not refuse."

Mr. Martext, the parson, was completely deceived by this statement of Tom King's, and no suspicion of its genuineness once crossed his imagination.

Nevertheless, could he have got out of the job of having to leave his home at that hour of the night, he would gladly have done so.



[DICK TURPIN AND MAUD ARE ATTACKED BY THE SERPENT IN THE CAVERN.]

But he could not.

He knew his position in the parish too well to dream of refusing.

Should he do so, the fact would, of course, become public, as all disagreeable facts are sure to do, and the result would be considerably to his prejudice.

So he resolved, after a moment of hesitation, to visit this dying man, and he called out to that effect from the window.

But, as the reader will not fail to have observed, it was not from any desire to smoothe the passage of a dying soul from this world to the next that he gave his consent, but merely from a selfish feeling.

It would not do, in a worldly sense, for him to refuse.

He closed the window, however, with very angry and unchristian-like feelings about his heart, and commenced attiring himself.

The sufferings he presently underwent seemed almost like a species of retribution.

It is quite certain he fully deserved the punishment he met with.

He was not long putting on all his clothes, and, as soon as he was dressed, he descended to the front door.

The night was cold, and he was seized with sudden fits of shivering.

He put the lamp down on a little side-table in the hall, and undid the fastenings of the door.

He opened it and passed out.

Tom ascended the steps, and came towards him.

Seeing he was there, the parson closed the door.

He advanced to the top of the flight of stone steps, and there he paused.

"Now," he said, "how far do you want me to go? Where is your brother? and who is he? Answer these questions, or I won't go a step further. I don't know you."

"Mr. Martext," said Tom, in the same assumed voice,

"my brother is a stranger to you, but the distance you will have to go to find him will be very short."

"Where is it?" asked the parson, angrily, about whose heart strange suspicions began to gather.

"Close at hand," said Tom. "Close at hand, I assure you."

"Then I shan't go, for I don't like your looks. Ha!"

This last was a sudden ejaculation of surprise.

The parson tried to turn round, and rush back into his house.

But he was too late.

He had suffered himself to be ensnared before the suspicion that anything wrong was taking place had entered his mind.

What had happened we will now proceed to relate.

CHAPTER CCCLXXII.

THE EXTRAORDINARY MARRIAGE OF DICK TURPIN AND MAUD GOULDMAN IN THE GLADE IN ENFIELD CHASE.

WHEN Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, at a sign from Tom King, had slipped behind one of the pillars of the portico and concealed themselves, the latter took the bundle from under his arm and unfolded it.

It fluttered down, and, as he held his hands before him, reached to his feet.

But what it was, the darkness of the place in which he stood did not allow it be seen.

In this way they waited during the little dialogue which took place between Tom and the parson.

As soon as they were aware of the result of it, they prepared themselves for action.

They heard the door opened, and dimly saw the figure of the parson cross the threshold and advance to the head of the steps.

As soon as he had done this, they glided from their place of concealment as noiselessly as two spectres.

The parson never suspected who was behind him.

Cautiously, silently, and slowly they drew nearer and nearer to him while the little conversation took place between him and Tom King, which was purposely prolonged by the latter, in order to give his comrades proper time to achieve their design.

It was a bold and novel one.

Having stationed themselves behind the parson, both highwaymen took hold of the mysterious object which Sixteen-String Jack had carried rolled up like a bundle.

It could then be seen what it was.

It was a sack, and one of rather unusual dimensions.

Claude and Jack had hold of it near the mouth.

The ejaculation which came so promptly from the parson's lips was caused by his suddenly finding the upper part of his body enveloped in the sack, which Claude and Jack had drawn over his head.

To use a common expression, "before he knew where he was," the sack was slipped down as far as his feet.

In vain he struggled.

In vain he tried to turn round, and gain the secure asylum which his home afforded him.

He was lifted off his feet with bewildering rapidity.

At first he was totally at a loss to think what had happened to him, and the agony of uncertainty which he experienced was something terrible.

He struck out wildly with his arms, and plunged madly with his feet.

But he did not achieve his freedom thereby.

He was lifted up by Claude and Jack.

The mouth of the sack was firmly secured by Tom King.

Parson Martext was then a complete prisoner, and wholly in the power of his captors, for them to do with him as they might think fit.

A position in which he was less capable of helping himself could scarcely be imagined.

He could not see what was going on, or judge by the expression of his captors' countenances what sort of fate was destined for him.

What strange and terrible thoughts swept like a dismal phantasmagoria through the brain of the unfortunate parson when he found himself in this inexplicable situation, no tongue can tell.

He made up his mind, however, that his doom would be death at least.

One would have thought, from his occupation, and the doctrines he enunciated when standing unthreatened by the least prospect of danger in his pulpit, that death would have presented few terrors to him.

But such was proved to be anything but the case.

A most abject fear took possession of him, and he shook like one afflicted with the ague.

He tried to command his voice sufficiently to implore the mercy of his captors, but his tongue refused to do his bidding.

In the meantime, the sack, having been properly secured, Claude Duval took hold of it at one end and Sixteen-String Jack at the other.

Tom King then led the way across the garden and through the churchyard, and, in a few minutes, the highwaymen emerged into the lane.

The parson was deposited on the ground while the highwaymen regained possession of their horses.

It was while he lay thus that Parson Martext became aware of the fact that the mysterious object in which he was confined was nothing more nor less than a sack.

But this discovery in no way enlightened him as to the motives for which he had thus been made a prisoner, nor did it tend to remove in the slightest degree the apprehensions under which he suffered.

Before he had time to make any further reflections, the three highwaymen arrived with their horses

Parson Martext heard them pause.

He heard them whisper to each other.

But he could not distinguish the words they uttered, for they spoke in a very low tone of voice.

"It won't do for us to ride straight off now we have got him," said Tom King. "I daresay he knows every trick and turn about the place, and, if so, in spite of his being in the sack, he will find out where we take him to."

"What shall be done?"

"That is a point well worthy of consideration."

"We must decide quickly."

"Oh! certainly. The less time we lose, the better. What do you propose?"

"I don't know."

"The thing we want to do is, to thoroughly confuse him, and cause him to lose all idea of whereabouts he is—supposing him to have any idea upon the subject."

"Just so."

"Well, how is it to be done?"

"I have an idea," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"What is it? Let us hear it once," exclaimed his comrades.

"You know, when they play at blind man's buff, they always make the one whose eyes are bandaged turn round several times?"

"Of course they do."

"And what do they do it for?"

"To confuse his ideas, and make him uncertain in which direction his face is turned."

"Exactly. You have hit it. Now, this is what we want to do with the parson."

"It is. But, then, how are we to make him turn round in the manner you mention?"

"I confesss, at first sight, that seems very difficult; but, as I don't see why we need be very particular with him, I think it may easily be got over."

"How?"

"Why, we will so turn, and roll, and bundle him about, that he will no more know where he is than if he had been suddenly put down in the moon."

"Bravo! That will do."

These last words were spoken rather more loudly than those which preceded them, and, the consequence was, they reached the over-strained ears of Parson Martext, who immediately put upon them the most terrible signification.

He thought they must allude to his murder.

No sooner had they come to the decision we have recorded, than they at once set about putting it into execution.

The first thing they did was to pick up the bag at both ends, and then to run round and round in a circle with it, as though for a wager, to the parson's great amazement, who found this circumstance more inexplicable than the others.

He soon grew giddy, and sick, and faint; but, heedless of that, the gyratory movement was continued.

Suddenly, however, they stopped, and then ran round in the opposite direction to that which they had taken before.

This lasted for a few moments, and then, deeming the unfortunate prisoner not sufficiently bewildered, they made him stand upon his feet.

This, however, he was scarcely capable of doing, and he was only prevented from falling by the following means.

The three highwaymen stood round him in a triangle, and near enough for them to be within arm's-length of their prey.

First Claude would seize him by the arm, or some other portion of his body, and give him a whirl round.

Then, before he could fall to the ground, he would be seized by Tom King, who would whirl him round in precisely the same manner, and then pass him on to Sixteen-String Jack.

Thus the parson was knocked about from one to the other of them, until at length they ceased, for they were completely tired.

He sank breathless and exhausted on the ground, and incapable of making the slightest movement.

It was while he was in this state that Mr. Martext was lifted up on Tom King's horse, which happened to be the strongest animal of the three.

The manner in which he was placed upon it was anything but an agreeable one.

He was laid across the withers of the horse, just as a sack of corn might be.

Tom got up and sat behind him in the saddle.

He grasped the sack with one hand in such a manner that it could not possibly fall off, and then held the reins in the other.

The order to advance was now given, and off they set at a canter which jolted Mr. Martext about in a terrible manner.

After going for some distance, Tom King relinquished his burden to Claude Duval, who, in his turn, passed it to Sixteen-String Jack.

Thus taking it in turns, they at length reached Enfield Chase.

Their design had been to thoroughly baffle and bewilder the parson, and this they succeeded to the fullest extent in doing.

Whether he had gone north, east, west, or south, he had not the remotest notion.

The pleasant little dell where they had first halted on entering the chase, and which had so often been a rendezvous, was the point to which the highwaymen directed their steps, for it was here they had agreed to meet Dick; and, from the length of time they had necessarily been absent, they fully expected to find him.

Nor were they mistaken.

Immediately upon their arrival at the sweet sylvan spot which the moonbeams now lighted up, for the dense clouds had dispersed, they saw Dick and Maud emerge from the shadow of the trees, to which they had retired upon hearing their approach, in order to be quite certain it was their friends before they made themselves visible.

With all speed the highwaymen alighted, and Parson Martext, still enveloped in the sack, was laid upon the ground.

The horses were led away, and a few words passed between Dick and his companions.

The result of it was that Dick withdrew with Maud for a little while to some distance.

He was to return to the dell upon receiving a signal from his comrades.

In the meantime they made themselves very busy indeed.

A small empty cask, which had served them for a seat, was placed on end upon a level piece of ground.

Then they proceeded to untie the bag and release their prisoner.

When the sack was removed, they were somewhat alarmed to perceive that the parson lay quite still, without exhibiting the least signs of life.

Conjecturing, however, that he had merely fainted, Claude Duval fetched some water from the natural basin into which the mimic waterfall fell, and plentifully besprinkled him with it.

He was quickly rewarded for his trouble by seeing the apparently defunct parson stretch forth his arms and open his eyes.

Observing these signs of recovery, the administration of a little spirit was next resorted to, and it was wonderful to see what a revivifying effect a small quantity of it produced.

In a few minutes they had him thoroughly restored to consciousness.

It was some time before the reverend gentleman could recall to his mind the occurrences of the past.

He glared round him with mingled surprise and curiosity.

He was quite at a loss to think to what place he had been conveyed, for the trees by which he was surrounded possessed no distinctive character by which he could recognise them.

As soon as he had partially recovered from his state of mental confusion, Tom King addressed him.

The sound of his voice had the effect of bringing all that had happened full before the recollection of the parson, and again he was seized with the horrible fear that he was destined for some terrible death, which had formerly possessed him.

Perceiving this, and the great extent of his fright, Tom endeavoured to reassure him.

"Fear nothing," he said; "your life and body are in no danger. Do you comprehend that you are in no danger?"

The parson opened and shut his eyes in a wild and convulsive manner, and made several ineffectual attempts to speak.

He made several pantomimic gestures with his arms.

"I say again," repeated Tom King, observing the effect his former words had upon him, "I say again, you are in no danger. I tell you, once more, that your life is safe, but only upon certain conditions."

"Conditions?" repeated the parson, at length being able to speak.

"Yes, conditions. Your life will be spared, and your person carefully preserved from all harm, if you do exactly as you are told. But the moment you refuse, or even hesitate, to do what is commanded, that moment will be your last, and you will be handed over to a terrible fate."

"Oh! good gentlemen," said Parson Martext, rising to his knees, for he now began to find that his situation was not so bad as he had thought it—"Oh! good gentlemen, spare my life, pray spare my miserable life, and I will do anything you ask; indeed I will. Try me, gentlemen! I will do anything you ask, if you will but spare my life."

"That is well," said Tom King. "In the first place, then, you must swear——"

"Oh! yes, gentlemen. Contrary to the regulations of my profession as it may be, and unseemly as it may appear, yet, to save my life, I will even swear. D—n you all! D—n me for a fool! D—n all the world!"

Our three friends could not control their laughter at this ludicrous interruption; for, of course the sort of swearing in which the reverend gentleman indulged was not the kind that Tom King required, and as he would have found if he had only had patience enough to allow him to finish what he was about to say.

They judged, however, from this that the parson was rapidly recovering from the abject fear with which he had been possessed, and this was really the case.

Tom King, however, spoke to him with some severity.

"You must swear," he said, "not to reveal to a living soul any of the events of which to-night you may be a witness. A solemn oath will presently be proposed to you, which, if you refuse to take, you will that instant cease to exist; for we are desperate men, and should think no more of taking your life than we should of taking a sparrow's."

"I will take any oath you like to propose to me, gentlemen," said the parson; "but, oh! spare my life—spare my life."

"You will be uninjured if you will consent to the terms I have proposed. Am I to understand that you do so?"

"Yes, yes, gentlemen. Anything to spare my life."

"Very well, then. Listen."

"I am listening, merciful sir."

"You have been brought here to-night to perform the marriage ceremony upon two persons between whom no legitimate impediment exists."

"Anything but that, good sir. Ask me anything but

that, and I will obey you. But I cannot do that. Indeed, I cannot."

"Then prepare yourself for instant death."

"Mercy! mercy!"

"Have mercy on yourself. You have been brought here for the express purpose of solemnizing a marriage, and, if you refuse to do it, you die at once."

"But, good sir, pray reflect."

"There is neither time nor need for reflection. I tell you, again, you have these two alternatives, and the choice you make depends upon yourself."

"But if, as you say, there exists no legitimate impediment why these two persons should not be joined together, why do they not in a proper manner present themselves at a church?"

"There are good reasons why such a thing is impossible; and with those reasons you have nothing whatever to do. Decide! Will you perform the ceremony, or will you die at once?"

As he spoke these words in a very determined manner, Tom King took out of his pocket a pistol, which he loaded, primed, and cocked.

The parson watched his every movement with an intentness that was really ludicrous to witness.

Advancing close up to him, Tom King thrust the muzzle of the pistol rather roughly in his ear, as he said—

"I shall count three, and if you do not consent then, the moment I pronounce the word three, I shall pull the trigger, and your brains will be scattered upon the sward."

The contact of the muzzle of the pistol had a remarkable effect upon the parson.

There was no doubting that Tom would carry out the intention he had expressed; and then, as for the pistol, he knew that the slightest pressure on the trigger would do the business—for he had seen it loaded with his own eyes.

In a screaming voice he cried out—

"Oh! yes, gentlemen. I will do it; I will do it. Anything to spare my life."

"Agreed," said Tom, as he removed the pistol. "Believe me, you have chosen wisely, for I should not have hesitated to keep my word."

"I shall be ruined through it, though."

"Pho—pho!"

"It is against the express orders of the bishop."

"Oh! bother the bishop."

"It's all very well for you to say, bother the bishop! You are independent of him, and I am not."

"That's very true. But I suppose you will only be ruined when the intelligence of what you have done reaches the bishop's ears?"

"No, not till then."

"All right, my friend; then you have nothing whatever to fear, for, of course, you would not be such a fool as to tell him yourself."

"No, I should not tell him."

"Then, you may rely upon it, the information will not reach his ears from any of our lips, for it will be to our interest to keep the matter a secret. So you need have no apprehensions on that score."

The clergyman smiled in a feeble and ghastly sort of way.

"Where are the bride and bridegroom?" he said.

"They are in waiting," said Tom King, "and will make their appearance as soon as ever we are in readiness. Now, let us have no further trouble. We shall keep a close watch upon you, and the moment you refuse or hesitate to obey us, you die!"

CHAPTER CCCLXXIII.

RELATES THE MANNER IN WHICH THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY WAS CELEBRATED BETWEEN DICK TURPIN AND MAUD GOULDMAN IN ENFIELD CHASE.

PARSON MARTEXT was now thoroughly subdued, and he prepared to resign himself to his fate with the best grace he was able to command

Tom King looked round, and saw that his comrades had completed their preparations.

Mr. Martext still continued on his knees.

Tom took hold of his arm, as he said—

"Rise at once, and follow me."

With a groan, which he tried in vain to repress, the parson did his bidding.

Tom kept hold of his arm, and led him towards the spot where the cask had been placed.

"Do you see that?" he asked.

"Ye—es," stammered the parson, misgivingly.

"Well, then, mount it."

"Mount it?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Don't ask questions, but obey! You will stand upon it to perform the ceremony."

Mr. Martext had no resource but to submit.

With a very bad grace, he got upon the cask.

He was a little man, and, like most little men, had a very great idea of his own dignity and importance.

The head of the cask was only just large enough for him to stand upon, and he cut a rather ridiculous figure.

"Now," said Tom King, "stand perfectly still, as you value your life. Where is your prayer-book?"

As he heard this question, a gleam of hope shot across the parson's face.

He fancied that perhaps, after all, he should be able to escape the solemnization of the ceremony.

"I have no prayer-book," he said; "and, therefore, I cannot read the service."

This was an entirely unlooked-for obstacle.

The three highwaymen stared blankly at each other.

Mr. Martext ventured to smile.

Was their project after all to be defeated, at the very moment, too, when they had begun to felicitate themselves upon its speedy accomplishment?

It seemed so; for, as our readers may suppose, the highwaymen were not in the habit of carrying prayer-books about with them in their pockets.

The parson's smile expanded into a grin.

He saw the dilemma in which they were placed.

"I don't believe the rascal," said Claude Duval, at length. "We have only his word that he don't carry a prayer-book. Search his pockets, and see."

"Agreed."

Claude and Jack sprang forward, and, in spite of the resistance which he made, proceeded to search the parson's pockets.

"What's this?" asked Sixteen-String Jack.

He had taken hold of the parson's coat-tails, and his hand came in contact with some hard substance, which, from its shape, he felt certain must be a book.

He plunged his hand into his pocket.

His conviction was confirmed.

He drew forth a book.

"Now, then," he cried; "who would take the word of a parson?"

"I told you he was not to be believed," said Claude Duval.

"What do you mean by telling us such a deliberate falsehood?" said Tom King, angrily, addressing the parson. "Do you know you are playing with your life?"

"He deserves to forfeit it," cried Claude Duval, indignantly.

"He does, indeed."

"Mercy, gentlemen—mercy!" exclaimed Mr. Martext. "You promised to spare my life!"

"I know we did; and, in return for our mistaken clemency, you tell us a deliberate falsehood."

"No—no."

"Shame—shame!"

"No—no!" screamed the parson, again; "I haven't told you a falsehood."

"I say you have."

"But I haven't."

"Didn't you say that you could not perform the marriage ceremony, because you had not a prayer-book with you?"

"Yes, I did."

"You admit, then, that you told us a lie?"

"No—no!"

"But you must have done. Here is the book."

"No there isn't; that is not a prayer-book."

"Not a prayer-book?"

"No."

"What is it, then?"

"A hymn-book."

"Oh! d—n it!"

Sixteen-String Jack opened the book, and, by the aid of

the moon, saw that what was printed in it was divided into lines and verses, just as hymns would be.

The parson was doubtless right.

He had triumphed; and it was easy to see, by the expression of his countenance, that he enjoyed it.

But Claude Duval came to the rescue.

He was determined that they should not have all their trouble for nothing, if it could possibly be helped.

Turning towards Mr. Martext, he said—

"Now, sir, listen to me, and answer truthfully the questions which I shall propound."

"If you don't," exclaimed Tom King, "I'll blow your brains out!"

The stern tone in which these words were uttered made the parson's knees tremble under him.

"What is it you want to know?" he asked.

"How long have you held your present situation as parson?"

"How long?"

"Yes, how many years?"

"Nearly twenty."

"Oh! nearly twenty. Well, then, Mr. Martext, perhaps you will be good enough to inform us how many times during the twenty years you have performed the marriage service."

"I really cannot recollect."

"Why not?"

"Because I have performed it so many times."

"Exactly; that is just what I thought."

"Oh! is it?" said the parson, with a puzzled air.

He could not perceive to what point Claude's questions tended.

"Yes. But we will try if we cannot form some idea of the number of times. We shall not be particular to a few. Now, on an average, how many times do you read the marriage service in the course of a week?"

"On an average?"

"Yes. You understand what I mean by the term, I suppose?"

"Oh! yes."

"How many times, then?"

"Why, about three."

"No more?"

"No."

"How many times did you perform it during the past week?"

"Five times."

"That, then, is over the average?"

"Oh! yes."

"Well, we are bound to believe you. Just stop a minute, and you will discover the object of these questions. You say you have been parson for twenty years; and, on the average, have celebrated three marriages every week during that time?"

"Yes."

"Well, then. There are fifty-two weeks in every year. Three times fifty-two comes to——Let me see. I'll tell you directly. Three times fifty-two comes to exactly one hundred and fifty-six. Now, that number must be multiplied by twenty—the number of years, you know; and that gives three thousand one hundred and twenty."

"Quite correct," said Tom King.

"Now, Mr. Martext," continued Claude, "do you see the drift of my questions? If you don't, I'll soon make you. If you, by your own confession, have performed the marriage service over three thousand times, it is quite clear you must know it by heart; and, therefore, a prayer-book is superfluous. You can repeat the words just as well without one as with."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Claude's two comrades, clapping their hands with delight at the clever manner in which Claude had got the better of the parson.

"I forget it altogether," stammered the parson.

"Stuff!" cried Claude. "You don't expect we shall believe that, do you? You must know it off by heart."

"But I have a very bad memory-"

"Then we will see if we cannot improve it."

"Parson Martext," said Tom King, "we can't afford to waste any more time. You must solemnize the marriage at once. Here, take this book; no expostulations, they will not avail you. Take this book, I say. It will answer your purpose just as well any other."

"Of course it will!" interrupted Claude, "and I will soon improve your recollection. Do you see this?"

As he spoke, he took out of his pocket a rather large-sized pocket-flask.

He held it up close to the parson's nose.

"Do you see this?" he repeated.

"Ye-es," stammered Mr. Martext.

"Do you know what it is?"

"No.

"Then I will tell you. It is a powder-flask and, if you don't like to believe me, look here."

Claude took an unloaded pistol from his pocket, and poured some of the powder the flask contained into the pan of it.

He pulled the trigger, and a bright flash succeeded.

"You see there is no deception about the matter, so just pay attention to what I am going to do."

The parson watched him with the utmost intentness.

Claude took the flask, and poured a small quantity of the powder it contained all round the cask.

"What's that for?" asked Mr. Martext, in the greatest trepidation.

"Hold your tongue," said Claude; "you will see in a moment."

As he spoke, he continued to pour out the gunpowder; and, having surrounded the cask, he laid a train of it in a straight line, which he extended until his flask was emptied.

"Let me get down," roared Mr. Martext. "I don't like to stand here."

"If you move an inch," said Tom, "I will blow your brains out."

"Mercy—mercy!"

"Stand still, then."

"What does that powder mean?"

"It means just this," said Claude. "I am now about to summon the bride and bridegroom, and the moment they arrive you must begin and read the service without making any more fuss. If you don't, or if you hesitate about the words, or appear as though you were performing the ceremony against your will, I shall touch the end of this train of gunpowder with a match which I shall hold in my hand already lighted, so as to be in perfect readiness. The spark will fly along the train with the rapidity of lightning. It will reach the cask upon which you now stand. That cask is nearly full of gunpowder. It is in communication with that which I have sprinkled round the outside. The same moment, then, that I touch the end of the train with a lighted match, you will be blown up in the air, and, when you come down again, you will find yourself in a thousand pieces."

During the whole of this alarming speech, the countenance and gesticulations of the unfortunate parson were most amusing to witness.

His eyes rolled.

His teeth chattered.

His whole body trembled convulsively.

Indeed, his whole appearance was the embodiment of the most absolute fright.

No sooner, however, had the last words of Claude's speech been uttered, than he suddenly seemed to collapse.

All those muscles whose office it was to maintain his body in an upright position, seemed suddenly to lose their power.

He doubled up, as it seemed, into an inconceivably small compass, and rolled off the cask on to the green sward.

The highwaymen could not forbear laughing at this result of their threats.

However, as too much time had already been wasted, they determined to dally no longer.

Moreover, they feared Dick would lose all patience; and, not only that, they had a great deal of work to do before daybreak.

Tom King, therefore, went up to the spot where Parson Martext lay, a huddled-up mass.

He did not say a word, but clapped the muzzle of the pistol to his ear in the same manner as he had done before.

Horrified as the prisoner was by the information which had just been imparted to him, and confused as his whole mental faculties were in consequence, he still retained sufficient sense to understand the fresh danger with which he was menaced.

He started up into an undignified sitting posture.

"Mercy—mercy!" he yelled.

"Silence," said Tom, "and listen to what I have to say."

"Ye—es, good sir; I am all attention."

"Very well, then. If you don't want me to blow your brains out this moment, you will mount up again on to that cask."

"No—no! Mercy!"

"I will show no mercy if you do not obey me."

"But the gunpowder?"

"You have nothing to apprehend from that. If you perform the service properly, you will be as safe standing on the top of that cask of gunpowder as you would be if you were standing upon an empty one."

"I can't do it."

"You have you choice between that and certain and immediate death. Which do you choose?"

"Oh! I am a dead man. Have mercy upon me, a miserable sinner!"

"Your alarm is quite groundless. I tell you, over again, you have nothing to fear if you will only comply with our demands. Rise, or sit still and have your brains blown out."

It would seem by his manner that the parson set a very high value upon this article, for any mention of it made an immediate effect upon him.

He rose tremblingly to his feet, and looked around him with a pitiful expression, which was, however, a comical one.

"Mount that cask," said Tom, pressing the muzzle of the pistol into his ear with still greater force.

Reluctantly the parson obeyed.

He mounted the cask with the air of one who mounts the scaffold.

When upon it, his knees trembled so excessively as to make it problematical whether he would stand or fall.

"Keep still," cried Claude Duval, in a tremendous voice; "and now understand your position. Take this."

He thrust the hymn-book into the parson's hands as he spoke.

It was taken submissively.

"Never mind about it's being a hymn-book," continued Claude. "I am quite certain you know the marriage ceremony by heart; so, when the bride and bridegroom kneel before you, you will repeat it as though the words were before you. If you do this, all will be well; no harm will come to you. To guard against all accidents, however, and to secure your compliance with what I have proposed, I shall stand at one end of the train with a lighted match in my hand, and, if you fail in any way to perform your contract, I shall not scruple to blow you to atoms."

At this awful contingency, the parson seemed again in imminent danger of falling off the cask.

He recovered himself, however, when Tom presented his pistol.

Claude went on.

He judged he had already frightened and threatened the parson sufficiently, and so he thought he had better reassure him a little, for fear he should be too much overcome by his terrors to do what was required of him.

"On the other hand," he said, "if you perform the service to our satisfaction, and take the oath of secrecy which we shall propose, not only will you be perfectly free from all injury, but we will make you a present of a round sum of money, and take you in safety to your own house again. Now, silence. Those are our terms. You may accept them or not, just as you please. Prepare yourself. I am now going to summon the bridegroom."

As Claude spoke, he uttered the agreed-upon signal, and Dick immediately came forward in response to it.

He was at a loss to think what had been the cause of the delay, though he fancied it must proceed from some contumacy on the part of the parson.

Maud accompanied him.

She leaned heavily upon his arm.

Of the means taken to bring the parson to the chase she knew nothing.

She was, however, a consenting party to the solemnization of the ceremony.

Entirely led away by the romantic attachment which she experienced for Dick, she did not take into calculation all the results which must inevitably follow the step she was about to take.

If she is really in love, however, when does a woman pause or reflect upon future consequences?

At the last moment Maud felt some slight misgiving.

But she shook it off, and would not allow her determination to be shaken by the strangeness of her position.

She could not avoid feeling it acutely, in spite of her efforts not to do so.

Unresistingly, then, she allowed Dick to lead her up to the cask upon which Mr. Martext was standing.

She knelt down beside him, at his request.

Then Claude, who held a long piece of lighted touchwood in his hand, made an imperative signal to the parson to commence reading the service.

Fearful of the consequences of a refusal, he began.

But he was in such a state of agitation that he could not speak properly, and all that reached the ears of the bride and bridegroom was a confused, mumbling sound.

Whether it was right or not, they had no idea, but they took it for granted that it was.

As Claude had assumed, Mr. Martext knew the marriage service by heart perfectly well.

He faltered and hesitated once or twice, but, each time that he did so, Claude put the lighted match closer to the train of gunpowder.

This was sufficient.

The parson would recover himself, and proceed with renewed vigour.

He had a mortal fear of his life, and would rather do anything than sacrifice it.

As the reader may be sure, there was in reality no gunpowder in the cask.

That was a little fiction invented purposely to terrify Mr. Martext.

The cask was an empty one, which had been found among the miscellaneous odds and ends in the cavern, and had been used for a seat, for which purpose it answered very well indeed.

The powder which had been sprinkled about was genuine, but then scarcely any harm would have resulted to anyone if it had exploded, and Claude by no means intended that it should.

It shows how much the parson must have suffered his fears to get the better of him, or else he would have known that he was in no danger of an explosion, because the others would have been involved in the same destruction as himself.

That idea, however, never once occurred to him.

In a gabbling voice, he proceeded with the service until he had ended it.

He signified this by closing the hymn-book with a smart slap.

Then, completely overcome, he once more doubled up and rolled on to the ground.

The ceremony was over.

Dick Turpin and Maud were man and wife.

There was only one thing that was wanting to complete it, and that was a wedding-ring.

This deficiency, however, was not material, and could be supplied at the first convenient opportunity.

The union of the highwayman and a lady such as Maud was, was a strange conjunction of destinies, and we look forward with interest to trace its results.

Raising Maud to her feet, Dick at once led her away from the dell, leaving his comrades to square accounts with the parson.

This they at once set about doing, for time was fleeting fast; and ere long, they knew, the night, which had witnessed so many strange occurrences, would completely flit away.

They had a great deal to accomplish.

The dismay of the parson was to them a source of the greatest amusement.

Tom King had all along taken the initiative with respect to any proceedings connected with him, and he now continued to do so.

Knowing by previous experience the remarkable effect which the cold muzzle of the pistol had upon him, Tom once more pressed it into his ear.

The parson rose the moment he was commanded to do so. He assumed a kneeling posture.

"Shake off your fears," said Tom. "You have done what we required of you, and you have now nothing whatever to dread from us in the shape of personal violence."

The repetition of this assurance seemed to have a revivifying effect upon him.

He struggled to his feet.

"We have promised to take you back to your house," continued Tom, "and you may rely upon our performing that part of the contract. Have you any idea where you are?"

The parson looked round him.

Observing he did not immediately reply, Tom repeated the question.

"I am in a wood," said Mr. Martext, at length.

"You needed no conjuror to tell you that; but what wood?"

"Ah! that I don't know."

"Then I should advise you not to attempt to find out. As we don't want you to know, you cannot be surprised if we take steps to make such a thing utterly impossible."

"You were good enough to promise me something for my trouble."

"Right," said Tom. "I am glad you reminded me; I always like to fulfil all my engagements."

Then, turning to Claude, he added—

"You carry the purse, so I leave that part of the business to you."

The parson turned round eagerly and avariciously towards Claude, who drew forth a large leather bag, and, plunging his hand into it, drew forth a number of guineas.

These he pressed into the parson's hands, who extended them impatiently.

The next moment they were conveyed, with a sigh of satisfaction, to his pocket.

Mr. Martext was poor, and the amount he now received was more than his annual stipend.

He by no means repented his night's work.

He considered himself amply paid for all the inconvenience, alarm, and terror he had suffered.

He professed his utmost willingness to take any oath of secrecy which they might think fit to propose.

Claude dictated one, which Mr. Martext readily repeated.

He seemed anxious to convince them of his good faith.

"We will now take you back to your residence, as we promised," said Tom King, "and you must not feel angry with us if we adopt such means as we think will prevent you discovering this retreat."

"Do anything but put me into that sack."

"If you have so great an objection to it, I daresay we can devise some other equally effective mode."

"Do so, then, I pray you, for the sack is excessively distasteful to me."

The highwaymen consulted together for a minute or two, upon this request.

It was at length agreed that Mr. Martext should merely be blindfolded, and placed upon a horse behind one of them.

To this the parson himself consented, and they at once proceeded to carry out the arrangement.

The long neckcloth which he wore was taken off, and bound over his eyes in such a manner as to make it an impossibility for him to see in the slightest degree.

Tom King then mounted his steed, and his two comrades lifted the parson on to the horse behind him.

"Clasp me round the waist," said Tom King, "and hold on for your life. If you don't, you will probably find yourself in the roadway."

Mr. Martext did not require twice telling to do this.

He clasped Tom convulsively.

There was no fear of his hold being shaken off.

Claude and Sixteen-String Jack now mounted their steeds, and accompanied Tom to the high road—it being their intention to take it in turns to relieve Tom of his burden.

They were careful, too, to take every precaution they could think of to baffle the parson, and confuse him as to the direction taken.

For this reason Tom would cause his horse to wheel round and round for several times in rapid succession, and then to set off in a straight line—but in what direction he judged it to be out of the parson's power to tell.

And in this he was quite correct; for though, when they set out, Mr. Martext had made up his mind to accurately observe the route taken, he soon became so completely bewildered that he gave up the attempt in despair.

CHAPTER CCCLXXIV.

CLAUDE DUVAL HAS AN ADVENTURE ON THE HIGHWAY, AND MEETS WITH A SAD MISHAP.

Having succeeded in baffling the parson as to the route taken, the highwaymen set forward, at the best speed of which their horses were capable, in the direction of his dwelling.

This they reached without the occurrence of any incident worthy of record; but, when just within sight of the church, the same manœuvres were repeated.

Then, suddenly darting forward, Tom drew up with a jerk just opposite the gate leading into the churchyard.

Claude and Jack dismounted; and Mr. Martext, upon receiving the intimation that his home was reached, suffered them to lift him down.

When once they had got him in their grasp, they did not release him, but with great swiftness carried him to the palings, and, lifting him over, dropped him on to the soft soil in the graveyard.

The parson uttered a yell when he found himself falling, and, as soon as he reached the ground, he made a desperate effort to remove the bandage which covered his eyes; but, long ere he could succeed in doing so, he heard the trampling of horses' hoofs die away in the distance.

When, at length, he removed it and looked around, he found himself alone, sitting on a mound in the churchyard, and with no human being in sight.

Our friends considered that they had managed this business very cleverly, and congratulated themselves upon it.

The road before them was straight and level, so they put their horses to speed; for already upon the eastern horizon could be perceived some faint indications of the coming day, and they wished to gain the shelter of the chase before it got thoroughly light.

Gradually, however, a faint gray tinge overspread all objects, rendering them indistinctly visible.

As this pale, spectral sort of light increased in brightness, a curious kind of white mist became perceptible.

It seemed to rise from the ground and to increase in density as they proceeded, until, at length, they appeared to be enveloped in a cloud of white steam, making it impossible for them to see half-a-dozen yards beyond their horses' heads.

This was a phenomenon which all three of the highwaymen, when returning from their excursions on the road had frequently witnessed, and more than once they had owed their escape to it.

Never was the white mist more acceptable than on the present occasion, and they earnestly hoped that it would continue until they reached their destination.

It was of the utmost importance that they should not be seen to enter the chase by anyone, because the safety of their refuge there depended entirely upon their presence in it being unsuspected.

Despite the manifest danger, then, of so doing, they pushed on at full speed through the mist, trusting more to the sagacity of their horses than their own to keep them clear of any obstacles.

Soon, however, it became evident that the mist was local, or else that it was passing away; for, as they continued on their way, its density rapidly diminished.

Suddenly as they looked in advance, the three highwaymen saw simultaneously some huge, black, shadowy object.

It was approaching them rapidly.

Under the impulse of the moment they pulled up, and drew their horses close to the side of the road.

No sooner had the clattering of the hoofs of their own steeds ceased, than another sound reached their ears.

They recognised it in a moment.

It was that peculiar grating, crushing noise which is produced by a vehicle passing rapidly over a gravelled road.

Before they had time to more than notice this, the huge shadowy object which they had first perceived swept by them at full speed.

They then saw that it was a large travelling carriage, which appeared larger to their eyes than it really was, in consequence of seeing it through the mist, which, though thin, magnified and distorted all objects in a remarkable manner.

There was a sudden rush, and then the vehicle became lost to sight, though the grinding of the wheels could still be heard.

"It was a fortunate thing," said Tom King, "that we perceived that carriage when we did and drew aside. If we had not, we must inevitably have come into collision with it, and we, beyond all doubt, should have been the greatest sufferers."

"There can be no question about that," coincided Jack; "for they never reduced their speed in the least. I wonder who they can be, travelling at such a tremendous rate, and at this unusual hour, too?"

"I have a great mind to find out," said Claude Duval; "for, I can assure you, what I gave the parson has reduced the amount of our wealth very materially."

"No—no, Claude."

"But I say it has."

"I don't mean that."

"What do you mean, then?"

"Why, don't think of stopping that carriage."

"Why not?"

"Because, as sure as you do, we shall not reach the chase until long after daylight; and I should not like the secret of our place of refuge to be discovered just yet."

"Nor need it be. This is a thinly-populated piece of country, and we need not feel so afraid of being seen."

"Well, do not let us run the risk on this occasion."

"Why not? I cannot allow a good booty, such as that probably is, to pass me without making an attempt to obtain possession of it."

"But it will be unwise to do so in this instance."

"Not a bit."

"Besides, while we have been talking the carriage has got quite out of hearing."

"Never mind that—I can easily overtake it."

"What! going at such a speed as it was?"

"Yes."

"But think how late it will be when we return."

"Not at all. The business will be over in ten minutes; and it is so long since I had an adventure on the road, that I feel it to be a matter of impossibility for me to let this one pass by."

So saying, Claude struck his spurs sharply into his horse's flanks, and, before his comrades could say another word, or make the least attempt to stay him, he darted off at full gallop in the direction the carriage had taken, and which was, of course, away from Enfield Chase.

Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack could not help feeling annoyed to find their comrade act in so headstrong a manner, and they feared the worst results would ensue.

However, the mischief was now done, and the only thing they could do was to make the best of it.

Accordingly, then, they turned their horses' heads in the direction Claude had taken, and followed him, determined to share whatever danger he might incur, and also to be at hand in case their presence should be needful.

But such was the impetuosity with which Claude had set forward, that he was already out of sight and hearing.

They, however, spurred their horses and endeavoured to come up with him.

The reader will doubtless recollect that, several times lately, Claude expressed his dissatisfaction at the dull, inactive life they were leading.

He longed for the excitement of an adventure on the road; and on the present occasion, as we have seen, this feeling got the better of his prudence.

He knew the danger and risk that he would run, but the knowledge did not deter him; and he galloped off alone in the manner we have related, calculating that his companions would follow him, and caring very little whether they did or not.

He soon found, however, that the carriage had got much further in advance than he could have believed possible; and, although his own speed was so terrific, it was some time before he came in sight of it.

When he did so, day had fairly dawned, and the faint light in the east was rapidly extending itself over the whole of the heavens.

In spite of this circumstance—and he could not fail to notice it—Claude kept on.

He was certainly gaining on the carriage, and he pressed his steed to make a still greater effort, and overtake it as speedily as possible.

The clattering of hoofs was terrific, and sparks flew from the flinty stones upon the road at every bound he took.

It seemed as though the sounds of his approach reached the ears of those of whom he was in such hot pursuit.

At any rate he fancied their speed was much increased. Still he gained on them rapidly.

Claude looked back once or twice, but he could see nothing of them.

A few more minutes elasped, and then he approached within a yard or two of the carriage.

He held a loaded pistol in both hands, having taken the reins between his teeth.

Judging himself to be near enough to effect his purpose, he fired one of the pistols in the air, and, the moment he had done so, dropped the now useless weapon into the road.

His left hand was now free, and he seized the reins with it.

Then, when the report of the pistol had died away, he cried, at the top of his voice.

"Halt! coachman. Pull up your horses, or you are a dead man!"

The first pistol Claude had fired in the air, but the explosion terrified the coachman, and he was by no means sure whether he was not dead already.

However, he still retained his senses sufficiently to comprehend Claude's command, which fell upon his ear with painful distinctness.

Mechanically he tightened his hold upon the reins, and the four horses by which the carriage was drawn came to a standstill.

The vehicle itself swayed about a great deal on its springs in consequence of having been stopped so quickly, but before the oscillation ceased the window was let down with a tremendous clatter, and a man's head was projected through it.

"Drive on, coachman!" he cried, in tones of startling energy. "Drive on, I say! How dare you take orders from anyone but myself?"

Implicit obedience was the coachman's duty, and now he did not scruple to give the horses a sharp slash with the whip, in spite of Claude's threat.

The high-mettled steeds plunged and reared for a moment before they started off.

During that moment Claude reached the side of the coach.

"Halt!" he cried again. "Halt, I say, or it will be the worse for you."

With great suddenness the man who had put his head out of the carriage window turned round, and, before Claude had the least idea of what was about to happen, he levelled a pistol at him with great rapidity, and fired.

It was evident that he was a proficient in the use of the weapon, or he could not have taken aim so hastily as he did.

"Take that!" he cried, as he pulled the trigger.

At the same instant the carriage was set in motion.

Claude's finger was on the trigger of his pistol, and he fired.

But the shot was an aimless one, and the trigger was drawn only by a convulsive contraction of the muscles.

He reeled in his saddle.

A gasping sob came from his lips.

The discharged pistol and the reins dropped from his strengthless grasp.

A film gathered before his eyes.

Still he made a desperate effort to retain his seat in the saddle.

It was in vain.

Another gasping sob, which sounded almost like a groan, came from his lips.

He swayed twice from side to side in the saddle.

Then dropped like a log of wood into the road.

CHAPTER CCCLXXV.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD GOULDMAN HAVE A TERRIBLE ADVENTURE WITH A SNAKE IN THE OLD CAVERN.

As we have already related, Dick Turpin, as soon as the marriage ceremony was concluded, led his newly-made bride from the spot at once, leaving his friends to square accounts with the parson, of which scene he by no means desired that she should be a spectator.

He was married to her under the name of John Palmer, for it would not have done to trust the parson with the secret of who he really was.

He thought, if his comrades properly carried out the



[TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK DISCOVER THE LIFELESS BODY OF CLAUDE DUVAL.]

instructions he had given them, that no more would be heard about the matter.

Whether he was right or not in this conjecture, we must leave for time to determine.

As might be expected, Maud expressed her surprise at the extraordinary behaviour of the parson, and questioned Dick closely as to the cause of it.

But he returned only evasive answers to her interrogations, and endeavoured to change the subject of the conversation.

This he had but little difficulty in doing.

A keen wind swept through the forest-glades, and Maud shivered more than once.

"Come," he said, "the night air is cold; let us seek the warmth and shelter of the cavern."

"And Claude and his two comrades, where are they?"

"Fear nothing on their account. They are about to go out upon an expedition, from which they will not return for some hours. Most probably it will be at daybreak, and that is now far distant. Come, then, to the cavern, where we can depend upon not being interrupted."

Maud assented, and permitted Dick to lead her in the direction of the entrance.

She was now a highwayman's bride, and, though she repeated the words over and over again in her mind, still she could not realize fully her position.

However, she said nothing, although she could not banish a slight feeling of depression.

But, when she looked up into Dick's countenance, and saw it beaming with love, and the deepest possible respect, she felt cheered and reassured.

At length the cavern was gained.

A wood fire was smouldering on the stone which was set in the floor.

It was dim, and seemed on the point of expiring; but close at hand was a heap of brushwood, placed ready to replenish it, and this Dick cast on pretty freely.

The wood was dry and the twigs small, so the fire quickly burned up, and diffused, not only a comfortable warmth, but a cheerful light over the cavern.

Dick drew one of the seats they had found close up to the fire, and, seating his companion upon it, placed himself by her side.

For some moments both were silent.

Dick's thoughts were busy, and so were Maud's.

The former was reflecting upon the change which had taken place in his position, and the effect it was likely to produce upon his future prospects. The latter was considering by what means she could win him from his present mode of life.

As the interval of silence increased in length, it became more painful, and Dick resolved to make a bold effort and break it.

He placed his arm round Maud's waist, and gently drew her towards him until her head reclined upon his shoulder.

Then, in as cheerful a tone as he could command, he reverted to the occurrences of the past, and the extraordinary concatenation of events by which they had become acquainted with each other.

He alluded to all the manifold incidents which had since occurred, and all of which must be familiar to the reader, so that it will be unnecessary for us to repeat their conversation.

As he proceeded, however, Maud became insensibly interested, and joined in his remarks.

Most particularly did they dwell upon Blanche's unhappy lot, and Maud found it out of her power to restrain her tears.

She told Dick how much the poor girl had suffered, not merely from her father's death, and all the terrible circumstances connected with it, but from the fact that she had fallen deeply and violently in love with the son of her uncle, Adrian Winberry, but who in no way resembled his bad parent.

Still, whatever his good qualities might have been, she found it would be impossible for her to unite herself to the son of her father's murderer.

From such a union no good could possibly result.

And so she pined and grieved in the hopelessness of her affliction.

In this way the time passed rapidly and pleasantly.

Suddenly, however, Maud raised her head.

As she did so her countenance became convulsed with sudden terror.

Her lips parted, as though she was about to utter a shriek, but no sound issued from them.

Her eyes were fixed upon some object which rendered her speechless with horror.

She had encountered it the moment she raised her head, and found it impossible to remove her gaze.

It was fascinated.

But Dick saw nothing.

Maud knew it, and strove with all her might to speak, and warn him of the frightful danger with which he was menaced.

But in vain.

The faculty of speech was utterly denied her.

Still, she clung with convulsive energy to her companion, and her grasp tightened rapidly.

Surprised, Dick looked down to ascertain the cause of it, and was astonished to find her countenance distorted with horror.

He saw her eyes were intently fixed upon some object, and in a moment he turned his face in the direction in which she looked.

As he did so, a shout of surprise, but hardly of fear, burst from his lips, and he sprang suddenly to his feet.

A sickening, hissing sound, which chilled the life-blood in their veins, followed the movement.

Dick staggered back a step, and, in doing so, overturned the seat upon which they had been sitting.

Brave and bold-hearted as we know him to be, Dick Turpin may well be excused for the emotion he exhibited.

The object upon which his eyes had fallen was enough to dismay the stoutest heart.

On the side of the fire opposite to that upon which he sat was a huge serpent. In some strange way it raised its long, shiny body upwards, and moved its head about with a restless, uneasy motion.

The height at which it held its head from the floor, was at least four feet.

Its body was of immense thickness, and covered with scales, which glittered with a hideous brightness in the firelight.

At every movement they sparkled vividly, and assumed a thousand different hues and tints—from the brightest yellow to the deepest black.

Well calculated to inspire fear and disgust as such an animal could not fail to be, its most terrible features have yet to be described.

Its head was large and broad, and furnished with two comparatively small eyes, but of the most intense brilliancy that can possibly be imagined.

No words could possibly describe their peculiar character. They possessed a strange power of fascination.

When Maud first saw the serpent, her gaze was immediately riveted upon its eyes, and she found it impossible to look in any other direction.

As we have seen, it deprived her of every faculty.

She was like one spell-bound.

Every muscle was rigid, and insensible to her will.

She was rooted to the spot.

Precisely the same effect was produced upon Dick, but not in the same degree.

When he looked in the direction to which Maud's terror-stricken countenance was turned, he saw the hideous creature, and, under the first shock of surprise, had uttered a shout and started to his feet.

His eyes had been riveted upon those of the serpent, and he felt it beyond his power to remove them.

He made several efforts.

They were all vain ones.

The serpent's mouth was stretched open to its fullest extent.

Its horrible, forked, fang-like tongue played in and out with a ceaseless motion.

A sickening hiss issued from its throat, which seemed to increase in loudness and malignancy every moment.

It appeared preparing for a spring.

Dick was appalled.

His breath came from his lungs in short and unequal gasps.

Suddenly the serpent moved, as though about to glide round the fire and attack them.

For a moment, then, Dick's eyes were freed from their horrible fascination.

He took advantage of that moment.

He grasped the hilt of his sword, and drew it from its scabbard.

The polished blade gleamed brightly in the firelight.

With his other hand he still supported Maud.

On came the snake.

This time, however, Dick took care not to encounter the glittering, reptile-like eyes.

He stood prepared to destroy the snake, which, from its general appearance, he felt convinced was of a venomous character.

One touch of those long poisonous fangs would be sufficient to cause death either in himself or his companion.

Dick was ignorant, too, of the full powers of mischief which such a creatnre possessed.

Steadily it came towards them, with a hideous, undulating motion.

Dick fancied it had the power to spring upon them from a distance.

He held his sword in an attitnde of defence, determined to use it upon him should an opportunity present itself.

Maud was motionless. She was once more under the influence of the serpent's fascination.

Dick tried to release himself from her hold, and spring forward and attack it.

But he could not shake her off.

Gradually and stealthily the snake came nearer, until Dick fancied he could reach it.

He raised his sword and brought it down with the full force of his arm.

It hissed through the air.

But he missed his aim.

The serpent saw the sword descending, and drew back its head just in time to avoid the blow which was levelled at it.

Infuriated at his failure, Dick started forward a few paces, despite the danger of so doing, and struck another blow.

He did not wait to see the result of the blow, but drew back precipitately.

It was well he did so.

He inflicted a slight wound upon his adversary, but that was all.

Enraged by the pain the wound doubtless occasioned, the vibrations of the snake became more rapid.

It was about to dart upon them and enfold them in its embrace, when Dick, instigated by the courage of desperation, again sprang forward, although Maud tried her best to hold him back.

Again he struck at the snake, aiming as well as he could at the creature's head, which, he believed, was the only mortal part about it.

The sword descended with terrific swiftness, but the snake swerved aside, and the keen blade inflicted only a slight wound near its neck.

Terrified by his failures to produce an effect upon the creature, Dick darted aside with all the rapidity he was master of, dragging Maud with him.

It was well he did so.

Maddened by these repeated attacks, the serpent darted forward, and would have inevitably struck them, had they continued to stand upon the same spot.

As it was, they escaped.

But Dick was now growing alarmed that, ere he could destroy this noxious reptile, one or both of them would be afflicted with its venom.

The snake, baffled in its first attempt, turned round with surprising rapidity.

Dick retreated.

The snake followed with a rapid motion, leaving a streak of blood behind it on the floor of the cavern to mark its progress.

CHAPTER CCCLXXVI.

THE NON-ARRIVAL OF TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AT THE CHASE AT THE APPOINTED HOUR, FILLS DICK TURPIN WITH UNEASINESS AND ALARM.

THE danger with which Dick Turpin and Maud were assailed was of no ordinary description.

The present adventure was one totally dissimilar to any he had ever had before, and therefore, it is not to be wondered at if he failed to act with his usual coolness and daring.

As the serpent approached, therefore, he retreated, endeavouring to keep the fire continually between himself and it.

The behaviour of the serpent now indicated the utmost anger and ferocity.

It darted its forked tongue in and out of its mouth, with inconceivable rapidity, and hissed incessantly.

Still Dick managed to keep out of its reach.

This, however, was a state of things that could not last, as all hopes of tiring the animal would be futile.

He would have sheathed his sword and drawn a pistol, and endeavoured by means of that weapon to defeat his adversary, but he feared that, during the time it would necessarily take to do this, the serpent would make an attack upon him.

As for his companion, she was too much overcome with fright to be of the least assistance to him—in fact, she was an incumbrance rather than otherwise, for, without her, Dick doubted not that he should be able to vanquish the reptile.

As it was, she impeded the freedom of his movements.

At length Dick paused.

He felt that he could not continue thus retreating round the fire, for it required increasing vigilance.

Moreover, to add to the perplexity and horror of his situation, the fire showed evident symptoms of expiring.

The light it now gave was dim and perplexing, and the flames were fast subsiding into a dull red glow.

A vigorous stir would have altered this, and caused the fire to burn up brightly; but, placed as Dick was, it was out of his power to do even this simple act.

Confusing shadows were cast around, but still Dick's keen eye caught sight of the snake stealthily approaching.

Slowing it came, with its body flat upon the ground, and its treacherous-looking head raised only a few inches from it.

By a rapid motion, Dick changed his position somewhat.

He now stood with Maud more behind him than he had done hitherto.

His intention was to shield her from harm as much as possible.

Then, holding his sword in an attitude to strike, he awaited the approach of his enemy.

Either unconscious, or unheedful, of the uplifted sword, the snake continued to advance.

Dick knew the danger of allowing it to come too near to him, and, watching his opportunity, he darted forward with great suddenness.

Just at that moment, the snake made a spring.

But Dick observed the oscillation of his body, and was prepared.

Down came his sword, but again the rapid movement of the creature rendered his aim untrue, and instead of the sword striking him full upon the head, as he fully intended it should, it fell upon the fleshy part of the snake's body, about two feet from the head.

But such was the force and precision of the blow, that the body was completely severed.

Dick now considered the victory was gained, but he soon found that the battle had yet to be won.

Both portions of the snake now writhed themselves into strange contortions, and he quickly perceived that the vital principle, which is so strongly implanted in this class of reptiles, was far from being extinct.

The fangs were still charged with poison, and he had a narrow escape of coming into contact with them.

Providentially, however, he escaped.

Blood flowed in prodigious quantities from the severed body of the snake, and literally dyed the floor of the cavern.

One more blow would, however, be requisite to despatch the creature, but how to deliver it he knew not.

Maud clung to him with frantic violence.

Her fear was fast becoming more demonstrative.

She was deaf to all Dick's entreaties and commands to release him, and allow him to slay the monster.

He had no resource but to drag her with him, and this he found was no easy task, for she was no longer passive in his hands, as she had been.

In some unaccountable manner the severed serpent still continued to writhe itself toward Dick, still animated by the idea of doing him an injury if possible.

At length it came near enough.

For the last time our hero raised his sword.

This time his aim was not destroyed.

The sharp blade descended full on the middle of the serpent's head.

There was a horrible, sickening crash, and then the awful creature ceased to exist.

By this one blow Dick had divided its head between its eyes.

It was dead.

He gave a sigh of relief, and, flinging down his sword, he caught Maud in his arms.

For a moment he dreaded she would swoon, but she recovered herself.

It was the dread that Dick had been hurt by the fangs of the serpent that enabled her to do so.

She was terribly frightened and agitated, and our hero had much ado to calm her.

At length he did so, and, upon learning that he was wholly uninjured she burst into a flood of tears.

They soon relieved her heart, and she was able not long after to look up into Dick's countenance with a smile.

That smile he would have given empires to purchase.

Looking up, he saw, near the roof of the cavern, a dim, hazy light, which showed him that dawn was at hand.

For the present the cavern could not be otherwise than disagreeable to Maud, and she required but little persuasion to be induced to leave it.

"I expected my three comrades back again ere this," said Dick, as they emerged from the passage into the open air; "but they have not returned, and I cannot imagine what has occurred to delay them."

"Let us walk towards the borders of the chase," said Maud.

"I was just about to propose that we should do so. It may be that we shall meet them on our way."

"Was the expedition upon which you told me they had gone a dangerous one?"

"By no means. But you tremble. Are you cold?"

"No, no; but I cannot divert my thoughts from the terrible conflict you had in the cavern with the snake."

"You think too much about it. Try to banish it from your mind."

"I fear that will be impossible, for, to the longest day of my existence, I fancy that awful spectacle will be before my eyes."

"It was an awful spectacle," said Dick, "and we ought to feel thankful we have escaped so well as we have."

"I think I shall never be able to venture into that cavern again."

"Nay, nay; I think that fear a groundless one."

"But we may be attacked again."

"Such a thing is possible."

"Then, who could run such a danger a second time; or, if anyone was found willing to do so, how could he hope a second time to be the best off in the encounter?"

"That is very just; but serpents are by no means common in England, and, in all probability, this is the only one for miles round. I now remember having heard that these strange creatures have a strange affection for fire, and have been known to travel many miles in search of one."

"That, then, may have been the occasion of our visitation."

"In all probability it was so. Do you not recollect that, when we first perceived it, it was close by the fire?"

"It was—it was; and it may be that, if we had not molested it, it would never have hurt us."

"That, too, is possible, but I should not have liked to have trusted to it. However, when Claude, and Jack, and Tom return, I shall relate the whole affair to them, and then, with their aid, make a thorough exploration of all the hidden intricacies of the cavern. Our safety demands that we should not delay doing this."

"But the danger?"

"It will be less than remaining in ignorance of the place, and, besides, we shall all the time keep carefully on guard. It is a disagreeable event and I am much annoyed that it has happened."

"Hark! Dick, what is that?"

Both listened.

"I hear nothing," said Dick at length.

"Nor I now."

"What kind of sound was it that attracted your attention?"

"It sounded as though someone was creeping through bushes, and trying how silently it could be done."

"But I heard nothing."

"The noise was very slight."

"And now all is still."

Both listened again, but no sounds reached their ears except those peculiar to the forest.

It was a few moments after this that both reached the borders of the chase.

Not only had day fairly dawned, but the sun had already attained a considerable altitude above the horizon.

There was an anxious expression upon Dick's countenance as, having noticed this, he looked around and saw no signs which indicated the approach of his companions.

He was entirely at a loss to account for their being so much longer than he had anticipated; and, as the time continued to slip by without bringing him any indications of their coming, he began to grow much alarmed.

This uneasiness did not escape Maud, and she questioned him as to the cause of it, for she now began to think that the expedition upon which they had gone was of by far more dangerous a character than Dick had led her to believe.

He, however, assured her to the contrary.

"What can have delayed them," he said, "I am quite at a loss to think. I fear they have fallen into some unexpected danger."

"We can but wait with patience," said Maud, "and hope for their return. They may arrive almost immediately."

"I fear not."

"Upon what grounds?"

"I do not think they would venture to return to the chase while it is light; but, then, where can they be?"

Dick was much perplexed, and very uneasy.

He paced up and down with hasty strides, striving to calm the commotion of his mind.

Fain would he have leaped upon the back of his gallant mare Black Bess, and sallied forth to ascertain the fate of his companions, but the impossibility of leaving Maud behind him, and the manifest danger he must be the means of bringing down upon them all by thus exposing himself, put such a thing entirely out of the question.

As the day wore away without bringing any tidings of his absent comrades, his uneasiness increased, until at length he made up his mind that the worst had happened.

Never had a day appeared so long; but at length it passed away, and night came on.

Right grateful did Dick feel when he saw the lengthening shadows which the trees cast upon the greensward.

As the sun sank behind the horizon, a chill wind swept over the face of nature; but, heedless and insensible of it, he stood near the borders of the chase, listening for the faintest sound.

The twilight, which endured a short time after sunset, deepened into night.

But his comrades came not.

All things became involved in the general gloom.

Still Turpin waited at his post in vain.

The silence remained unbroken.

CHAPTER CCCLXXVII.

TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SET OUT IN SEARCH OF CLAUDE DUVAL.

From what has already been related, we doubt not the reader will be able to understand why it was that Dick Turpin and Maud waited vainly at the appointed spot for the return of the three highwaymen.

We will return to them, and relate what further happened on that eventful morning.

When Claude had ridden up to the travelling carriage and stopped it, he little dreamt of the fate he was bringing upon himself.

The particulars of this adventure will be fresh in the mind of the reader.

He had fired a pistol in the air, and then, as soon as the noise of the explosion had ceased, commanded the coachman to stop.

His order was obeyed, for the report of the pistol still rung in his ears, and the coachman was not quite certain whether he was shot or not.

No sooner, however, had the vehicle been brought to a standstill, than the occupant of the carriage let down the window, with a terrible clatter, and, in a voice of extreme irascibility, inquired how he (the coachman) dared take orders from anyone but himself.

He concluded by ordering him to drive on.

The coachman obeyed.

He smacked his whip, and the high-spirited horses, giving one plunge, set the vehicle in rapid motion.

At this moment, the occupant of the coach, turning his head round, saw Claude Duval.

He then, without waiting another second, fired a pistol at him.

Claude was quite unprepared for this sudden attack.

The aim was a treacherous one, and the person who fired was evidently an adept in the use of the pistol.

The bullet struck our friend full in the breast.

His finger was already on the trigger of his pistol, in readiness to fire, and the sudden spasm which shot through his form caused a contraction of the muscles in his fingers, and the weapon exploded.

The shot, however, was perfectly aimless.

Claude was conscious that he was wounded, and strove to retain his seat in the saddle.

The effort, however, proved an abortive one.

The hand of death seemed to grasp him tightly.

He swayed backwards and forwards twice or thrice as he endeavoured to retain an erect position in the saddle.

Each time, however, he grew more incapable; until at length he uttered a strange, gasping sob, and fell into the

roadway like a mass of inanimate matter, and not like a human being.

As he fell, the pistol he held in his hand slipped from his grasp on to the road, while his left foot in some way got entangled in the stirrup.

When he fell he was utterly unconscious.

Fortunately for him, his horse, though terrified to a degree, did not move from the spot, but stood exactly in the same position, trembling in every limb.

Had the horse started forward at a gallop—and such a thing was far from improbable—the consequences would have been terrible in the extreme.

Unable to make the slightest movement, and deprived of all power to extricate his foot from the stirrup, he would have been dragged, a bruised and mangled mass, at the heels of his steed, until death should have released him from his sufferings.

Claude Duval, however, was not destined for such an awful fate.

As we have stated, when he fell from the saddle to the ground, the horse, although suffering an agony of fright, stood profoundly still.

But of this Claude was ignorant.

The film that had come over his eyes appeared to him to be that of dissolution, and after that moment he remembered nothing.

It may, perhaps, be thought that he fully deserved the consequences of his own rashness and refusal to listen to the remonstrances of his comrades.

The danger of the enterprise upon which he had announced his intention of setting out, had been pointed out to him. But he heeded not what they said.

Intent only upon an adventure, which would vary the monotony of the life he had recently led, he cut short the brief dispute which had taken place between them on the subject by clapping spurs to his horse's sides, and darting off in pursuit of the carriage, which, owing to the swiftness with which it rolled over the ground, was no longer audible or visible.

For a moment or two after his abrupt departure, Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack sat in silence on their steeds.

The former was the first to break the silence.

"How foolish it is of Claude," he said, "to act in this manner. It seems as though he was quite indifferent whether or not our hiding-place is discovered."

"It is either that," replied Sixteen-String Jack, "or else the devil has got possession of him."

"You may depend it is the former," said Tom; "for latterly he has done nothing but grumble about the inactive life which we have been leading."

"So he has; and you think he has made up his mind to put an end to it?"

"I do."

"Well, I must say, he has gone the right way to work; for look, it grows lighter and lighter every moment, and we are a long way from Enfield Chase."

"It is very annoying, in every way you look at it. Not only will Dick be angry at such mad-headed conduct, but, doubtless, he is at this very moment standing at the appointed spot waiting for us."

"We shall not be there by daybreak, that is certain."

"No, for it is daybreak already, and Dick will be fancying all manner of evil has befallen us."

"But what are we to do? We must not stay here talking like this."

"I can hear nothing of Claude."

"Nor I. There's no knowing how far he may continue his mad gallop after that carriage."

"He will follow it until he overtakes it, you may depend."

"I suppose he will."

"That is just his character. For my own part, now that day has fairly dawned, I think the further we get away from Enfield Chase the better."

"Exactly, for if we are seen, as we are almost sure to be, and are at a good distance from it, the chase will not be suspected as our place of refuge."

"Precisely so. Then I propose that, instead of waiting here like this, we set off in pursuit of Claude."

"Agreed, my friend."

The two highwaymen, being both of the same opinion upon this point, struck their spurs into their somewhat jaded animals, and, at a steady gallop, took their way in the direction Claude Duval had gone.

It was fortunate for him that his comrades came to this decision.

The white mist, which we have mentioned, still hung in places on different parts of the road.

It seemed to have rolled itself up into dense masses, and then waited for a puff of wind to carry it away.

It thus happened that our two friends were unable to see very far in advance, for if they were not actually enveloped in one of these fleecy masses of mist there would be one on the road before them, through which they could not see.

Besides this, the morning light was faint in the extreme, and a considerable time would elapse ere the sun rose.

Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack were well pleased to find that all along the road they did not meet with a single human being; but this is scarcely to be wondered at, for the hour was one at which few people would be abroad even in populous places.

Our friends pursued this road, for a long while, without meeting with anything that indicated the presence of their absent companion.

At length, however, they entered one of those masses of mist of which we have made mention.

The road sank down into a kind of hollow, and the mist appeared to fill it completely.

It extended, too, for a great distance over the meadows on either side.

They quickly discovered, after going a few yards, that the mist was much denser here than they had hitherto found it.

This was in consequence, not only of the road being so much lower in this part than any other, but because of the immense tracts of swampy, marshy land in the vicinity.

In a short time, so dense did the mist become, that our friends could scarcely see beyond their horses' heads; and, as they were quite ignorant of the character of the road before them, except that they found it descended rapidly, they judged it prudent to reduce their pace to a walk.

The further they proceeded the denser did the mist become, until they were unable even to see their own horses' heads.

Consequently, they were invisible to each other.

They spoke continually, in order to be sure that they were not far apart; and it was only by this means that they were able to keep together.

To attempt to guide their horses was quite impossible, so they let their reins fall upon the animals' necks, and placed themselves entirely under their guidance, relying more upon the finer senses of their steeds than their own.

In this they acted wisely.

The horses went very slowly but surely, and they kept the middle of the road.

The silence that prevailed was something remarkable.

Indeed, it had a painful effect upon our friends.

It was not as though all was still, but as though the mist enfolded all things in its embrace, and deadened all sound.

Even the trampling of their own horses' hoofs only reached their ears in a muffled manner, the effect being almost the same as if they had trodden upon snow.

This was a natural phenomenon which neither of the highwaymen had ever before witnessed, and they longed to find the road rise, for, while it descended as it did, there was no hope of it getting thinner.

In this expectation they were disappointed.

The ground continued to have a downward tendency, though they fancied the descent was not so steep as it had been.

What was on either side of them they could form no idea, and their eyes ached with the efforts they made to pierce the uniform-coloured mass before and around them.

It was during this strange, hushed silence—if we may so speak—it was while the sounds of their own horses' hoofs reached their ears but indistinctly, it was during a pause in the conversation which the two highwaymen kept up with each other, that their ears were assailed with a sound so dreadful, so horrible, so utterly unlike

anything which they had previously heard, that the first shock of surprise caused them to fairly reel in their saddles before they could recover themselves.

A strange chill struck to the heart of Sixteen-String Jack as he heard this terrible and unearthly sound, and, in a voice of extreme agitation, he cried to his companion—

"What is that? Tom, Tom, what is that?"

CHAPTER CCCLXXVIII.

TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HAVE A MYSTERIOUS ADVENTURE WHILE SEARCHING FOR THEIR MISSING COMRADE.

Tom King did not reply.

He could tell by the tone of voice in which his companion asked this question how greatly he was agitated, and he could not conceal from himself the fact that, if he spoke, it would be in the same anxious, hesitating manner as Sixteen-String Jack.

Therefore he was silent.

But, had he been able to command his voice, he would not have been in a position to return a satisfactory answer to his question.

The sound he had heard was so totally unlike any other that had struck upon his ear; and he was quite at a loss to think from whence it could have proceeded.

It was, too, quite indescribable; and, though its echoes still vibrated in the air, they would have been unable to convey to a third person any idea of what it was like.

Tom reined in his steed.

At the same moment, by making a great effort, he was able to call out to his comrade to halt.

Sixteen-String Jack was only too glad to obey him.

Guided by the sound of his voice, he made his way close to his companion's side.

He extended his hand and touched him.

Tom King uttered a shout.

This circumstance will serve to show how much he was unnerved by the sound he had heard.

Sixteen-String Jack was perfectly invisible, and the shout he uttered was one of alarm upon feeling himself touched, without being able to see by whom.

Jack's voice, however, reassured him, and, holding out his own hand, he grasped that of his staunch comrade.

Here they remained, quite motionless and speechless.

They were listening for and longing to hear a repetition of the sound which had struck so much dismay to their hearts.

Whether the horses were alarmed by the sound, or whether the infection of the fear which their riders exhibited communicated itself to them, would be hard to say; certain, however, is it, that they manifested extreme terror.

They trembled in every limb, and their ears were projected forward as though they, too, were listening for the awful sound to come again.

The highwaymen were not kept long in suspense.

The sound came again.

But this time, it was louder and more horrible than before.

It was, too, more prolonged.

It died away in a kind of sighing moan.

What could be the meaning of such a sound?

It was certainly not human.

Tom and Jack were not more sure of their existence than they were of this.

What, then, did it portend?

They shuddered as they simultaneously asked themselves this question.

All men are superstitious.

This may sound a bold assertion, but it is a true one.

It seems to be a feeling, an impulse, implanted in every mind

As a matter of course, it varies with different persons, both in intensity and degree.

There may be some philosophic minds who would avow that they were free from all taint of it.

Doubtless, under most circumstances, they would be so.

But, surround them with something awe-inspiring—something which they cannot comprehend—something altogether out of the pale of their experience—and then observe the effect.

In spite of their philosophy, in spite of the scepticism which they will endeavour to call in to their aid, they will feel their soul shrink within itself, and their mind become a prey to superstitious influences.

So it was with our two friends.

Their daring and bravery have, on many occasions, been exhibited, and the reader will not require to be told that they possessed those qualities in an eminent degree.

But now they were surrounded with strange circumstances.

They were in a portion of the country wholly unknown to them.

They were surrounded by a mist possessing qualities different to anything they had previously known.

They were unable to see where they were, or form any conception of the perils with which they might be environed.

It was under such circumstances as these that they heard the terrible and heart-dismaying sound, and it was in consequence of this that it produced the effect it did upon them.

Had they heard it in the bright sunshine, or in some place with which they were familiar, the effect would have been different.

Boldly enough they would have proceeded to ascertain from whence it came.

But now they remained quite still.

Had this terrible sound some connexion with their missing comrade?

This was a question that would intrude itself upon their minds.

They could not divest themselves of the idea that it was in some way connected with him.

Was it the foretoken of his death?

Unable to move to ascertain this, they remained with their hands clasped.

At length, however, ashamed of this fear, which, though natural, they persuaded themselves was totally unworthy of them, they determined to push on cautiously for a few yards at least.

Accordingly, they patted their steeds upon the necks, so as to reassure them as much as possible, and strove to urge them forward.

In vain; they planted their forefeet firmly upon the ground, and, drawing their bodies back, refused to stir an inch.

An application of the spur produced no better results.

In fact, it served to confirm them in their obstinacy.

It was while thus engaged that our two friends again heard the terrible sound, and they now noticed something in connection with it which had previously escaped their observation.

This was that the sound appeared to proceed from somewhere very close at hand.

But whether it came from the right or the left, from above or below, they could not tell.

It seemed to fill all the dense white mist with which they were surrounded, and to reach their ears on all sides.

Rendered desperate by again hearing the sound, and furious that their horses should have disobeyed them, they renewed their efforts to urge them forward.

The horses, maddened with the sharp application of whip and spur, reared violently and swerved, but they did not advance.

If anything, their motion seemed to retrograde.

Suddenly the highwaymen ceased their fruitless efforts

They had made an important discovery.

The mist was growing thinner and more transparent, and, probably, ere long would completely disappear.

They soothed their horses, and induced them to remain still.

Further and further they were able to see around them, as the mist slowly but imperceptibly dispersed.

At first they were able to distinguish the horses upon which they sat.

Then the two friends could dimly see the outlines of their own forms.

But every moment they increased in distinctness.

Then the tall hedgerows which fringed both sides of the road came into view.

But the attention of both highwaymen became wholly absorbed in a contemplation of their steeds.

They stood with manes erect, and necks outstretched.

Their nostrils were expanded, and their ears directed forward.

They shook with terror.

It seemed as though they could see something before them which excited their fears.

Perhaps, however, it was only the effects of their former fright.

Vainly did both Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack strain their eyes and try to ascertain whether anything was on the road before them.

As yet the mist was too opaque for their vision to pierce it for any distance.

Again they tried to urge their horses onwards, for the mist was now fast losing the density which had previously characterized it.

It was to no purpose.

Their eyes were still fixed upon something.

Again came the awful sound, and when they heard it the horses started and shook, and gave utterance to a strange cry, which was doubtless expressive of fear.

Again the highwaymen bent forward in the saddle, and tried to learn what was on the road before them.

A black, dusky, shadowy-looking object at length met their straining sight.

They closed their eyes a moment, fancying themselves deceived.

Quickly, however, they opened them again.

Something like a huge and shapeless black cloud was evidently before them.

Its size was gigantic, and its outlines so faint as to be indistinguishable from the mist into which they merged.

What could it be?

They knew not, but they could not help feeling convinced that, let the shadowy object be what it might, it was from it that the horrible sounds proceeded.

Clearer and clearer grew the mist.

Gradually it faded away.

Its colour changed in some mysterious way, and this was another occurrence for which our two friends could not account.

The explanation of it, however, was simple.

The sun had risen, and it was his early rays irradiating the mist which caused the change of colour so inexplicable to the highwaymen.

In consequence of it the white mist assumed a golden, yellow tint.

As they gazed upon the black object, its indistinctness seemed to increase, and its size also.

What it was, however, they were still unable to form any idea.

At last its outlines became better defined.

Slowly they traced them, and likened them to various objects which, as they proceeded, they found to be erroneous.

At length Tom King spoke.

"Look, Jack," he said. "Look at it now. What is it like?"

"I cannot tell."

"Now, now," continued Tom, "it resembles a horse; but whoever saw a horse of such dimensions? It is larger than an elephant!"

"It does resemble a horse," said Sixteen-String Jack, after looking attentively for a few moments. "But that it should be a horse is quite impossible, for who ever saw a horse such a size as that?"

"There it is, my friend. That is what puzzles me; and yet I can liken it to nothing else. Its resemblance to a horse becomes every moment more striking. I am bewildered."

"So am I; but we cannot do better than remain where we are. The mist is rapidly fading away, and when it completely disappears, which it shortly must do, we shall then be able to come to a correct conclusion with respect to this extraordinary affair."

"You are right, my friend; we will remain still, and watch attentively."

Both the highwaymen now relapsed into silence.

They concentrated all their attention upon the mysterious object before them, which had caused them so much alarm and speculative conjecture.

So absorbed were they that, for the time being, their absent comrade was forgotten.

If they had been two statues they could not have remained more immovable than they did.

Suddenly, however, the mist disappeared, as if by magic.

The means, however, was simple enough.

A stiff breeze had sprung up, and the mist scattered before the first puff of it.

Away it rolled, it rolled in fleecy masses, over the meadows, leaving the roadway almost clear, and fully revealing the mystery which had so perplexed Tom and Jack.

CHAPTER CCCLXXIX.

CLAUDE DUVAL'S CONDITION IS FOUND TO BE VERY DESPERATE INDEED.

STANDING in the centre of the roadway was a horse.

There was no mistake now about the matter.

But the horse was shorn of its tremendous stature, and now presented itself of the ordinary size.

A moment's thought enabled our friends to come to a correct conclusion upon this point.

The apparently gigantic size of the animal had been caused in consequence of their viewing it through the dense medium of the mist, to which the sun's rays communicated extraordinary refractive power, causing all objects seen through it to appear magnified in a surprising degree.

If Tom and Jack had looked at each other, they would have perceived the same thing had taken place with respect to themselves, though not to so great an extent, in consequence of their proximity.

These reflections, however, did not occur to Tom King and Jack at the moment, though we have thought fit, for the satisfaction of the reader, to set them down here.

What they saw farther occupied all their thoughts and attention.

The horse, whose size had appeared so gigantic, was standing in an attitude of the utmost terror.

His mane was bristling, and his eyes, which were turned upon our friends, were almost starting from their sockets.

In a word, the whole appearance of the creature was indicative of the utmost extremity of terror.

In the surprise caused by the sudden discovery they had made, Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack had uttered a loud shout.

It was one of anguished horror.

It was not, however, the horse only which caused this.

Lying on the ground in a pool of blood, which had flowed from a wound in his breast, his arms outstretched upon the damp earth—with a pistol almost within reach of his hand—his left foot entangled in the stirrup, was Claude Duval.

Such, as the reader will remember, was the position in which we last described him, and such was the position in which he was discovered by his comrades.

This was indeed a dismal spectacle to meet their eyes, and one which they were far, very far from expecting.

It had never for a moment crossed their minds that they should find Claude in this unfortunate condition; and so great was their surprise that, for some moments, they remained without attempting to move.

No longer were they at a loss to understand why their horses had refused to advance.

The antipathy of such creatures to human blood is surprising.

They will scent it from afar off, and refuse to pass it.

Here the crimson fluid lay upon the road in large quantities.

Not only was Claude literally surrounded with it, but there was a long streak of it extending for some distance, showing that the horse had not all the time remained motionless as they found it, but had dragged the body of their companion along the road.

That, under such circumstances, he could continue to live, seemed quite out of the question—or, if he was alive, they felt convinced that life was held by the frailest and most uncertain tenure.

This was a point, however, which they would have to ascertain, and, in doing it, a considerable difficulty presented itself.

If they alighted from their steeds, they feared the horse, alarmed at the movement, would set off at headlong speed—dragging Claude, a bruised and mangled mass, after it.

This was so extremely likely, that the two highwaymen, with a terrible feeling of sickness at their hearts, remained still in their saddles.

The attitude of the horse, though expressive of so much fright, was one also that indicated his inclination to set off at a gallop upon receiving the slightest provocation to do so.

In such a state of excitement, the least thing would startle it, and our friends, necessarily, felt full of dread.

It seemed as though the least attempt to approach the animal would be sufficient to cause the death of their friend, if he was not dead already.

On the other hand, to permit him to remain in his present position was not less dangerous.

It was evident, then, that the horse would have to be approached and seized.

Now, when in their calmest and most quiet moods, our friends were well aware this was a by no means easy task.

For mere frolic they would gambol away from the hand outstretched to catch them.

Their hearts sank as they saw all the difficulties with which they had to contend.

Besides, while they were in this state of indecision, some other persons might arrive upon the scene, or something might occur to startle the horse.

The effort must be made.

At length, Sixteen-String Jack resolved to make the desperate attempt.

He spoke to Tom King, announcing his intention, and requesting him to remain perfectly still while he alighted.

Tom consented, for of the two he had much rather his friend endeavoured to perform the unpleasant task than himself.

Gently Sixteen-String Jack slipped off his steed.

Claude's horse, attracted by the movement, gazed at him affrightedly.

For some moments Jack did not attempt to move.

Slowly, however, he held out his hand in an encouraging manner.

The horse seemed to look at it wistfully and suspiciously.

Then Sixteen-String Jack spoke to it and in such a manner as he judged would be best calculated to soothe his apprehension.

The horse looked at him for a moment or two, and then stretched out its neck.

Encouraged by this, Jack ventured to advance a step, taking care to keep his hand still extended, and continuing to address it.

The horse took a step towards him irresolutely.

Jack advanced until he was almost near enough to touch it, and then he paused.

If he was too precipitate he would ruin all.

He had met with more success than he had dared to hope for, but still he did not allow it to bind his caution.

Circumspection was more than ever necessary.

Once more he advanced.

But this time the horse showed an inclination to start away.

Jack did not trust him further.

At the last moment he might deceive him and start off.

Measuring his distance, therefore, with all the accuracy of which he was capable, Jack sprang forward with great swiftness.

His aim was a correct one.

The horse started and plunged, but not until Jack had firm hold of him by the bridle.

He patted him with the other hand.

As soon as he saw that his comrade had secured the horse, and that there was no danger of his starting away, Tom King hastily dismounted and came to his assistance.

Leaving Jack to control the horse, Tom made his way to the prostrate form of Claude Duval, and set about releasing his foot from the stirrup.

He saw, at a glance, that, in consequence of the position of the foot, the easiest and quickest way of disengaging it would be by unbuckling the stirrup-leather.

This he hastened to do.

He had no difficulty whatever in the matter, for Sixteen-String Jack had quite succeeded in quieting the horse.

When the latter saw Claude's foot freed from the stirrup, he led the creature away and tethered it to the bough of a tree, which grew near the side of the road.

Then, with a heart full of anxiety, he ran back to ascertain whether Claude was dead or alive.

He was by the side of Tom King in a moment.

The first glance was anything but assuring.

His face was colourless and corpse-like, and his body rigid.

His eyes were staring wide open and covered with a kind of glassy film, which they always present in death.

Both shuddered.

Kneeling down, however, Sixteen-String Jack tore open his clothes in order to ascertain the character of the wound he had received.

A glance told him that it was caused by a pistol bullet, which had struck him in the chest.

From this the blood had ceased to flow, in consequence of the serum having coagulated over it.

His body was icy cold.

With a choking sensation at his throat, Sixteen-String Jack placed his hand upon his old comrade's heart.

He could feel no pulsation.

The action of that mysterious organ was stilled.

A deep groan came from Jack's lips, and tears started from his eyes.

Tom King was scarcely less affected, for his acquaintance with Claude was not a thing of yesterday.

"Alas," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, in a voice of anguish, "my first forebodings are realized; he is quite dead. Little did I think, when he rode away from us so suddenly, that that was the last I should see of him in this life. He is dead, and the truest, best, and bravest heart has ceased to beat!"

Jack ceased.

His emotions overpowered him.

He could speak no longer.

His friendship and companionship with Claude Duval had been of such long standing that he never thought that it could come to a termination.

Now, however, the end was reached.

So great was his grief, that he was oblivious of all things else, and it was some time even before Tom King became alive to the extent of their danger.

It was, however, imminent.

They were upon the broad high road, and day was rapidly advancing.

Discovery seemed certain; and it was clear they could not hope to remain much longer in their present exposed situation without being seen by someone.

Gradually Tom King made Sixteen-String Jack sensible of this, but for a long time he refused to take into consideration the danger in which he might individually be placed.

At length, however, Tom King succeeded in persuading him to stifle his grief for a short time, while they removed the body of Claude Duval to some more retired place.

The argument which had most weight with him—and, indeed, which induced him—was this.

Tom King hinted the possibility of the dead body of his much-loved comrade falling into the hands of the officers of police.

He at once consented to its immediate removal.

With a heavy and almost bursting heart, he assisted Tom King to raise the body,

Then the question arose, to what place should they take it.

Looking around them, they perceived at no great distance a clump of trees, which formed either a plantation or coppice, and to this they resolved to direct their steps.

It was too far off, however, for them to carry their comrade's body, so, at the suggestion of Tom King, it was placed across the back of his steed, which they would be able to lead in the required direction.

CHAPTER CCCLXXX.

THE MYSTERY OF THE HORRIBLE SOUND IS UNRAVELLED, AND TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK CARRY CLAUDE DUVAL'S BODY TO THE WOOD.

DURING the whole of these proceedings, Claude Duval exhibited no signs of life, but presented every appearance of a corpse.

There was not the slightest symptom to raise the hope that he was yet alive, though holding possession of existence by a frail and uncertain tenure only.



[DICK TURPIN COMMANDS THE EXECUTION OF THE SPY.]

Like a sack of grain he was lifted by his two sorrowful comrades, who, having carried him some distance, placed him on the back of his own horse.

The creature trembled and shook.

His eyes glared; and once again the two highwaymen heard the frightful and unearthly sound which had so much alarmed them.

Even now they started, and, in their surprise, almost let fall the body of their comrade.

The mystery was now explained.

The sound came from the horse!

Yes; strange as the assertion may seem, it is nevertheless true.

But it was such a cry as neither of our friends had ever heard a horse give utterance to; and, but for the evidence now before them, they would never have believed it.

The sound was one expressive of the utmost terror, and is never uttered by a horse except when severely hurt, or extremely frightened.

Its character was most unearthly, and could be likened to nothing else but what it was.

Claude's horse, with that sagacity which is so frequently exhibited in such creatures, seemed to comprehend what had befallen his master.

The cry might have been wrung from him through terror, or—who knows?—it may have been uttered for the purpose of bringing assistance.

Many and many a time during that night had he startled all those around with the horrible screaming, groaning sound.

That the creature was terrified to a degree, was quite certain.

Its glaring eyes, erected mane, and trembling form, all bore indisputable proof of the fact.

It was, too, bathed in perspiration, which nothing but fright could have produced.

Tom King and his comrade could not but feel gratified at this satisfactory solution of what seemed to be an inscrutable mystery.

The condition of Claude Duval, however, too much occupied their thoughts for them to exchange any remarks with each other respecting it, though, doubtless, at a future and fitting opportunity, they would have some conversation on the subject.

By this time day had fairly begun, and they were full of apprehension lest they should be discovered before they could reach the distant shelter.

Sixteen-String Jack took upon himself the mournful duty of holding Claude on the horse, so that the motion should not cause him to fall off.

The two other horses were close at hand, and these Tom King held by the bridle with his right hand.

With his left he grasped the rein of the frightened animal, which seemed possessed of fresh fear at its lifeless burden.

Tom, however, had little or no difficulty in leading it away along with the others.

Ere he started, he looked eagerly up and down the road, in order to ascertain whether they were observed.

All, however, remained silent.

There seemed to be no people at all upon the road, which he could not help thinking was an extraordinary circumstance, though a very favourable one to him just then.

Suddenly, however, his keen eye detected in the distance a small cloud of dust.

"Look, Jack!" he cried. "Look behind you! Someone is on the road. I fear now we shall be prevented from reaching the shelter of yonder trees unperceived."

Jack's eyes were dim with tears, which he found impossible to repress, and he had to draw his hand across his face before he could see what his companion pointed out.

When he saw the cloud of dust, upon which the sun shone with great power, causing it to be distinctly visible at a great distance, he said—

"Yes, Tom, horsemen are on the road, but they are a long way off. If we are speedy in our movements, we may get under shelter before they can perceive us."

"Come on, then, my friend."

"Lead the way; I will take care of poor Claude's body. Alas! I never thought that he would die such a death as this. Lead the way, Tom, and don't go too fast or you will shake him off."

Tom King looked up and down in search of some opening in the hedge through which they might make their way, but nothing of the kind presented itself.

As far as he could see, the hedgerow presented a uniform and unbroken line.

It was necessary that they should cross the hedge in some way or other, because the little clump of trees they wished to reach was on the other side of it.

This was exceedingly awkward at a moment when time was of so much importance to them.

The horsemen, whose approach the cloud of dust indicated, were rapidly drawing nearer, and every moment diminished the chance of being unseen by them.

If, as they more than suspected, these should be officers of police, their situation would be embarrassing in the extreme.

Hampered as they were with the body of their late comrade, they would be unable either to fly with sufficient rapidity to distance their pursuers, or successfully contend with them if it should come to an encounter.

No amount of danger, however great, would, we are persuaded, have had the effect of causing them to abandon the dead body of their comrade to their foes; no, not even if they were certain of securing their own positive safety by doing so.

Under these circumstances, then, and with all these thoughts fully before his mind, it is not to be wondered at that Tom King should experience a great degree of anxiety, and look eagerly up and down.

To remain where they were, however, would do no good, and to go towards the approaching horsemen would be little short of madness.

So, adopting the only course of action open to him, he led the way along the road in the opposite direction, hoping soon to see either a gate leading to the meadows, or else a gap in the hedge through which they could force their way.

Sixteen-String Jack found his task of holding his comrade's body on the horse by no means an easy one, and he also became conscious that they were leaving a track behind them which could be followed with the greatest ease.

From various parts of Claude's body, and also from his apparel, blood trickled slowly, and fell drop by drop upon the road.

This must be altered, or discovery would be inevitable.

He spoke to Tom King upon the subject, and for a moment they were puzzled what to do.

At length Sixteen-String Jack hit upon an expedient of which Tom signified his approval.

Both the highwaymen stripped off their coats, and wrapped their deceased comrade in them.

This was found to answer their purpose admirably.

The blood no longer trickled down upon the roadway; and, probably, the coats would prevent it doing so for some time.

This occupied them several moments, and, when they again started, they perceived that in the interim the horsemen had rapidly gained upon them.

Still, however, they found they were too far off for them to speak with any degree of precision as to their character.

Evidently they were in great numbers.

The size of the cloud of dust which they raised in their progress was ample evidence of this.

That they were either police-officers or soldiers, in search of the highwaymen, seemed beyond all doubt.

As rapidly as possible Tom pushed on.

Still he was vexed not to be able to see a gate.

They were now in almost the lowest part of the hollow into which the road sunk.

Both before and behind was a long, steep hill.

Down one the horsemen were coming, and up the other it seemed that Tom King and Jack would have to take their way.

There was a bend in the road not many yards before them, and, as soon as they passed round this, they hoped to be lucky enough to find a gate.

Even if they did not, they would be out of sight of those in the rear, for some minutes at least.

Presently the bend was reached.

Passing round it, almost the first thing that attracted Tom's attention was a gate, which was swinging open in the road in a somewhat dangerous manner.

This caused him to increase his speed.

As the gate was not very far off, it was soon gained.

As soon as they passed through it, they endeavoured to close it after them.

This, however, they were unable to do, for the fastenings were broken.

There was a large stone lying near, and this Tom King placed against the bottom bar of the gate in such a manner as to prevent it swinging open again.

They now found themselves in a ploughed field of vast extent.

At right angles to the gate, however, and the road they had lately been pursuing, was a tall, quickset hedge running in the direction of the clump of trees whose shelter they were so anxious to gain.

This hedge divided the ploughed field in which they stood from a meadow; and, as its direction was at right angles to the road their pursuers were coming, they were in hopes, by keeping close underneath it, of eluding their observation altogether.

Animated by this hope, they pushed on at even greater speed.

Just under the hedge was a narrow, beaten path, upon which they could walk without difficulty.

The ground rose rapidly beneath their feet, and they hoped to be able to pass the brow of it before the horsemen reached the pool of blood in the lane.

This, they calculated, would delay them a few moments at least.

If those who approached were officers, then a close search would be certain to take place.

If, on the other hand, they were merely civilians who were approaching, their first impulse would be to spread an immediate alarm, and look for the body

Now, if Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack were not recognized in their character of highwaymen, the circumstance of their being in possession of the dead body would be sufficiently suspicious to warrant their being detained and taken into custody.

The reader will, therefore, comprehend how manifold and cogent were the reasons which induced the highwaymen to shun observation as much as possible.

At length the crest of the hill was reached.

Below them were several fields, and beyond these the clump of trees which had first attracted their attention when in a higher part of the road.

To this they still resolved to direct their steps, for they could perceive no other place which offered them the promise of a shelter.

They commenced their descent.

Scarcely had they done so, however, than a loud cry, which seemed to issue from many a lusty throat, struck upon their ears.

They knew the meaning of it in a moment.

The pool of blood had been discovered, and the fact that they had no time to lose was pressed more urgently upon them.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXI.

A TROOP OF LIGHT DRAGOONS FOLLOWS HARD UPON THE TRACK OF THE HIGHWAYMEN.

ACCORDINGLY, their pace was accelerated as much as possible; but they were not able to go very fast, from the fear they had that Claude would be shaken off.

By this time, however, Sixteen-String Jack had succeeded in getting the body of his friend tolerably well balanced, so that he had not so much difficulty in holding him on.

At present, however, they were sure they were out of the sight of their enemies, and they hoped to be lucky enough to continue so until the wood was gained.

It was now not far off, and every moment seemed to materially increase the distance.

No more sounds reached them, except the one wild shout of astonished discovery; but whether this was because they were too far off to hear what happened further, or whether it was because no other cry was uttered, they knew not.

The horsemen, whose approach they had perceived, were part of a troop of light dragoons, who, in common with a great many more of the home troops, had been sent out on the (to them) unwelcome expedition of searching for the four highwaymen, whose late daring and desperate deeds had made the whole country ring.

The authorities had at last taken the matter vigorously in hand.

The length of time which had already elapsed since the daring outrage at Newgate, without the perpetrators of it having been brought to justice, caused a general outcry against the inefficiency of their means in dealing with such desperate characters.

For their own honour's sake, then, the authorities had taken the matter in hand, and they felt that their own reputation was at stake.

The large rewards they had offered for the capture of the offenders had proved quite useless.

If the police could not, under such a stimulus as this, accomplish the task set them, they were certainly quite incapable of doing it at all.

Having come to this conclusion, the police were set aside, and they resolved to try what could be done by military aid.

Orders were given in the proper quarter that so many troops should be singled out for the service, and this was accordingly done.

In a very military manner the soldiers, under the command of their officers, were made to patrol the roads within twelve miles round London.

They were divided into small detachments, each one of which had a particular piece of ground to go over.

Their instructions were commensurate with the exigency of the occasion.

Should they encounter any of the highwaymen, they were to pursue them with all possible speed and energy.

If they found it impossible to overtake them or to make them prisoners, they were to be shot down without mercy; as captured they were to be, one way or the other.

These orders sound somewhat sanguinary, and unlike those issued by the authorities in such matters generally; but the reader must bear in mind the peculiar posture of affairs.

The public prints of the period were loud in finding fault with the insufficiency of the means of dealing with these desperate law-breakers, and this caused the adoption of more stringent measures than, perhaps, would otherwise have been thought of.

Such, however, were the instructions given to the soldiers.

The highwaymen were to be captured, either dead or alive, and it did not seem to matter much which.

As for the military themselves, small mercy could be expected from them.

There was not a man among them who was not disgusted and angry with the extra and unsoldier-like duty they had to perform; and they made up their minds, as they were obliged to submit to their orders, to put an end to the affair as quickly as they could.

In quite an angry and revengeful spirit, then, from which our friends had everything to dread, the soldiers set about their new duty.

Up to the present moment, as we are aware, they had met with no success whatever.

Owing to the highwaymen having kept so close within the shelter of Enfield Chase, all their patrolling had been without result; and they had the additional aggravation of knowing that they had taken all this trouble for nothing.

It was by no means a treat to be obliged to leave the barracks and pace up and down a piece of roadway night after night—especially when the season was so far advanced as it was.

There was a sharp frost every night, and they felt the effects of it severely.

Still they met with nothing to reward them for their trouble.

The roads remained perfectly quiet; people made their journeys to and from the metropolis in safety, and nowhere was there any rumours of alarm.

From this it became clear to them that those of whom they were in search were hiding somewhere.

If so, they had only to wait patiently for them to make their appearance.

This was what they were least capable of doing; but the authorities were inflexible, and they had to continue their disagreeable duty.

The reader will easily understand how fraught with danger to the four highwaymen, in whose fortunes it is presumed they feel an interest, such a state of things as this must be.

But what was worst of all was that they were ignorant of the additional danger with which they were menaced.

Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack, as they made their way towards the plantation, thought that at most they were officers who were so close upon their track, and the idea of their being soldiers never once glanced across their minds.

Upon reaching the bottom of the hill which they had been descending for some time, and upon reaching the lowest part of the hollow into which the road fell, the horse upon which the foremost of the dragoons rode suddenly swerved; and, had he not been an accomplished and practised horseman, would certainly have unseated him.

As it was, he only preserved his balance with difficulty.

Looking down upon the ground to see what it was that had caused the animal's alarm, he perceived an immense pool of blood.

Under the impulse of the moment he gave utterance to a loud shout of surprise, which was echoed by several of his companions.

It was this cry which had reached the ears of Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack as they bore the body of Claude Duval over the fields.

Upon making this discovery, several of the dragoons, by the command of their officer, alighted, and made a closer examination of the pool of blood, and the ground in the neighbourhood of it.

From the appearance of the former they were quite of opinion that it had not lain there very long.

The discovery of the streak of blood which our friends had noticed followed as a matter of course.

This, the reader will remember, had been caused by the horse dragging the body of its rider after it.

Following this streak of blood, which they had no diffi-

culty whatever in doing, the dragoons found it extended only a short distance, and terminated in another pool of blood, the dimensions of which were almost equal to the one they had found.

Here, then, was ample enough evidence that a tragedy of some kind or other had been perpetrated, and they doubted not that, if they only took the trouble to look around them, they would quickly discover still further traces of it.

With this impression they examined the ground all round, but this afforded them very little information.

The ground was dry and dusty, and blurred all round with footmarks, produced both by horse and man.

Not a few were produced by themselves, and they found themselves puzzled to say which.

The discovery of the spots of blood which had flowed from the wounds of Claude Duval when he had been placed upon his horse by his two companions, was next made, but these ceased after they had followed them for a few yards.

They were unanimously of opinion that a struggle had taken place, though what evidence there was of it we know not.

Still, that was their impression.

They were of opinion, too, and in this they were indisputably correct, that the struggle had only taken place a short time before—an hour they thought at most.

To men who had been ordered out upon what they had been led to believe was dangerous service, but who hitherto had met with nothing to vary the dull monotony of patrolling up and down a lonely country road, this discovery which they had just made was quite an interesting one, and, for the mere desire of having something to do, and something to occupy their thoughts with, they set about making a vigorous search all around.

They had already consumed sufficient time in their explorations, and Tom and Jack made the best use of it they could.

Leaving the soldiers to prosecute their search along the road for something which should elucidate the mystery of the pools of blood, we will return to the proceedings of the two highwaymen.

When they heard the shout, they made sure that, in another moment, their foes would be upon them; and, stimulated by this impression, they made still greater speed.

They were well aware of the importance of their gaining the shelter of the trees unseen.

If they did so, they had a secure hiding-place; if not, they would only have the meagre benefit which the cover would afford them in an encounter.

Owing to the position of the hedgerows, which happened to run most conveniently for them, they were able to keep on their course without being exposed to the view of any persons who might be in the road they had so lately left.

This was very fortunate for them.

Had they been compelled to cross the open meadows to reach their destination, instead of being able to creep along under the hedges as they did, they would inevitably have been seen by the dragoons, many of whom stood up in the stirrups, and took as long a look round the country as they from their elevated position could.

For the reason just given, however, they failed to see our friends, who were effectually screened from all such observation.

With all steadiness and speed the two highwaymen continued their melancholy journey towards the little wood, which seemed to mock all the attempts they made to approach it, and to recede as they advanced.

This, however, was the effect of their own anxious minds.

Gradually they were nearing their much-wished-for destination.

All sounds from the rear had ceased, and they began to indulge themselves in the hope that they should be able to get off undiscovered.

It was a very narrow escape, for, had the mist continued much longer than it had, or had they any longer delayed the removal of the body, the dragoons would have been upon them before they could have got out of sight.

At length our friends reached a spot where there were no longer any hedgerows to cover the route they took.

They had reached a large piece of barren, uncultivated ground, with which the little wood appeared to be surrounded.

This they would have to cross.

The distance was not great, but all the way there was not so much as a shrub to shield them from observation.

Perceiving this, Tom King, who led the way, very prudently came to a halt, and resolved to reconnoitre before he went any further.

With this intention, he pulled aside some of the twigs in the hedge, and, peering through, endeavoured to ascertain whether anyone was in sight,

But, though he looked closely and carefully in every direction, he was not able to see anyone.

Fancying that it was now safe for them to cross this open space, Tom King once more took hold of the horses by their bridles, and the little procession once more started on its way.

Three minutes, or even less, sufficed to enable them to cross this piece of waste land, which apparently encircled the wood like a belt.

Quite a gush of joy came over their hearts when they found themselves fairly under the friendly shadow of the trees; but, before they pushed on into the interior, Tom King again paused, and, having taken up a requisite position, looked long and keenly in the direction they had come

With his eye he was easily able to follow the route which they had so lately travelled, even to the gate through which they had passed on quitting the high road; for the little wood was situated upon an eminence commanding an extensive prospect, and which caused it to be a conspicuous object for many miles round.

Although his scrutiny was so close and searching, Tom King was unable to see anything that was at all calculated to raise any feeling of alarm; and, with his heart relieved on this score at least, he struck at random into the wood, being intent only upon reaching some place of concealment.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXII.

TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK ARE INTERRUPTED IN THEIR MELANCHOLY TASK OF DIGGING A GRAVE FOR CLAUDE DUVAL.

He was fully impressed with the importance of doing this with as little loss of time as possible, not only on account of his pursuers, if such they were, but upon the account of Claude Duval.

He was anxious to satisfy himself that he was really dead, for he did not feel disposed to take that unpleasant fact for granted.

In fact, he would much rather remain sceptical upon the point until furnished with some more positive proof than he had at present.

There was, however, very little in the appearance of his comrade to inspire hope, for he had not, up to the present moment, shown the least signs of vitality.

Wrapped up in the coats which his two companions had so hastily placed round him, he looked a strange object, and no mass of inert matter could have laid across the saddle more helplessly than he did.

The trees in this little wood did not grow very closely together, and they met with little or no difficulty in leading the horses onward.

The ground rose rapidly beneath their feet, which was the chief thing they had to contend against.

The wood was, in fact, nothing more than a conical-shaped hill, overgrown with trees; so that, no matter at what part it was entered, the ground had a rapid upward tendency.

In spite of this, Tom King went on.

He was anxious to get as far away from the outskirts as he could, which would lessen the danger of discovery; he was in hopes, too, of shortly finding that the trees would stand more closely together, and afford a better chance for concealment.

In this, however, he was disappointed.

There was little or no undergrowth, such as is generally found in a wood; for the most part, short, sweet herbage took its place, and the trunks of the trees were, upon an average, two yards apart.

Notwithstanding this, the hill, when seen from a distance, seemed clothed with verdure from the base to the summit.

This was because the trees were evergreens, and with large leafy branches.

Up this steep ascent, then, our friends toiled—Tom King with the bridles of the horses in his hands, and leading the way, Sixteen-String Jack holding the body of Claude Duval upon the horse, and so overcome with grief as to be only partially conscious of whither he was being led.

Claude had been his intimate associate for so long a period that no one losing their nearest and dearest relative on earth would have felt the parting more keenly than he did.

From the rear no sounds of an alarming character reached their ears, and Tom King began to congratulate himself upon the circumstance of having entirely eluded the observation of those who were so close behind him on the road.

Suddenly a faint ejaculation of surprise came from Tom's lips, and, startled by the sound, Sixteen-String Jack looked up.

He, too, was astonished at the strange view before him.

The summit of the conical hill was reached.

A circular piece of ground, about twenty feet in diameter, upon which no trees grew, appeared.

It was covered with grass, and here and there were a few small, stunted shrubs.

It took but another moment for the little party to reach this level place.

They advanced to the centre of it, and then, pausing, looked about them.

Tom King then found his previous ideas fully verified.

Round them, in an irregular circle, grew a tall belt of trees, and the place upon which they stood was not only the summit of the hill, but the centre of the wood.

From the belt of trees by which they were environed the ground gradually sloped down to the level country.

It was a singular piece of natural scenery, and, being so, we have taken the trouble to particularly describe it.

Satisfied by the hasty glance they cast around them, Tom and Jack now turned all their attention to their comrade.

With great care he was lifted off the horse, and laid at full length upon the soft turf.

This done, Tom King took the three horses, and, leading them to a distance, tethered them to a tree in such a manner that they were able to crop the soft, sweet herbage.

He then returned to Sixteen-String Jack.

Claude Duval had been laid upon the ground with his face upturned to the sky.

Sixteen-String Jack was kneeling down beside him, and looking with a pained expression into his countenance.

This was as white and inanimate in its appearance as a marble statue.

The eyes were still blindly staring open, and covered with a glassy film; the teeth were still tightly clenched together.

The whole of his body was quite cold and rigid.

That he was quite dead there could be very little doubt, and yet both his comrades were loath in the extreme to admit it.

They would not, could not, believe in the possibility of such a thing.

Tom King observed the anguish of Sixteen-String Jack, and said not a word; but, going to the other side of the prostrate form, he knelt down and took hold of one of Claude's hands.

It was quite cold.

He placed his fingers on his wrist, but was unable to detect the least fluttering of pulse.

He let go the hand with a deep sigh.

It fell like a stone upon the ground, assuming precisely the same position.

In a voice, broken by emotion, Tom said—

"Jack, my friend, what is to be done? Alas, I fear that all is over, and that our gallant comrade is no more."

Sixteen-String Jack made no reply, but, burying his face in his hands, uttered a deep groan.

Tom leaned forward, and tearing open Claude's apparel, placed his hand upon his breast, immediately above the region of the heart.

Here he fancied he could detect some little warmth; but in this circumstance there was little hope, for, as he well knew, the heart and the parts surrounding it did not grow entirely cold until some hours after the spirit had fled.

He was anxious to know whether any beating could be distinguished.

But all was still, and he was at length forced to the conclusion that his heart had ceased to beat.

All, then, was over.

He withdrew his hand.

Jack still kept his face covered.

Tom addressed him,

"Cheer up, my friend; such grief as you exhibit, though a worthy tribute to your respect for your old comrade, is quite unavailing. It becomes our duty now to look to ourselves. We can do nothing for Claude, poor fellow; he is far beyond the reach of our aid. But we are surrounded with danger, and it is a duty we owe ourselves to look to our own safety and preservation. Cheer up, then, my friend, and let us do the best we can."

Sixteen-String Jack, thus addressed, removed his hands and looked Tom King full in the face, who was pained to a degree to witness the grief-stricken appearance which it exhibited.

"Tom," said Sixteen-String Jack, holding out his hand as he spoke, "let us part. As you justly say, you have your own safety to look to; as for me, my place is here, by the side of my old comrade and friend, and here I will remain, in spite of every obstacle."

Tom King looked at him with mingled grief and surprise.

"Jack," he said, "this is madness! But I can excuse you, for I know the causes which have produced it. It is not solely my own safety which I wish to seek, but yours as well, my friend. Can you forget the troop of horsemen who were so close behind us on the road? They may have got upon our track, and if so, they will be shortly here. Then what is to be done? Because your old comrade is dead, would you be content to resign yourself and his body into the hands of our enemies? Never! We must defend ourselves. I can pardon you for allowing your grief to obtain a brief mastery over your faculties, but now you must rouse yourself, and do that which is best."

Tom paused, expecting Jack to make some reply.

But he continued silent.

Undaunted, however, Tom King renewed his solicitations.

"We can do nothing for Claude now," he continued. "It lies in the power of no man to recall the dead to life. We have only one sad, mournful duty to perform. You comprehend it. It is to consign his body to the earth, and thus prevent the authorities from wreaking any indignity upon his lifeless remains. Surely, you would make an effort to prevent such an occurrence as that. Rouse yourself, then, and assist me to dig his grave! Alas! it grieves me quite as much as it does you to think that is the best service we can render him."

While Tom spoke thus energetically his companion became more himself,

Totteringly he rose to his feet.

In a broken voice, he said—

"You are right, you are right. It was weak and foolish of me, but——"

He ceased abruptly.

His sobs prevented further speech.

Impatiently he dashed his hand across his eyes, and endeavoured to repress his rising emotion.

"Come," he said, "I will help you. Claude now is no longer able to defend himself, and it is our duty, as you say, to prevent any indignity being wreaked upon his remains. We must not allow him to fall into the hands of his enemies. I am ready to assist you."

Tom was pleased to find that he had so far succeeded in rousing his companion.

He looked about him for a spot which would answer his purpose.

Then, crossing the little circular space, he halted beneath the wide-spreading branches of one of the largest of the trees that fringed the enclosure.

Jack understood him, and, after casting one glance upon Claude's lifeless form, followed him.

Not another word was said.

They had no better tools for digging a grave than the swords they wore by their sides, but it was by no means the first time they had turned them to such a use

Tom King now traced the outline of the grave with the point of his sword, and began removing the turf in such a manner as to enable him to replace it as it had been found, and so as not to excite any suspicion that the ground had been disturbed.

This was a work of time, but at length the task was completed.

It was now high time, Tom thought, to reconnoitre.

Accordingly, he threw down his sword, and, leaving his companion to commence the excavation of the grave, he prepared to climb the tree beneath whose shade he had been at work.

It was of considerable altitude, and, from its position on the summit of the hill, he doubted not that he should be able to obtain a very extensive prospect of the surrounding country.

The tree was one easily to be climbed.

As he stood upon the ground, he could reach the lowest branch, and, taking hold of this, he drew himself up with little difficulty.

With great agility, he made his way from bough to bough, until he judged he had reached a height sufficient for his purpose.

Standing upon one of the upper limbs of the tree, and retaining himself in this position by grasping a branch above his head with his left hand, Tom King looked keenly around him.

All, however, as far as he could see—and that was over many a mile of cultivated country—was peaceful and tranquil.

No trace of any human beings resembling those whose approach he had to dread met his view.

He turned round and looked upon the scenery upon all sides of him.

Suddenly his eyes were attracted by a faint glitter.

Looking more closely and earnestly, he perceived, upon a broad road at some distance, a troop of mounted soldiers.

They were those from whom he had so narrow an escape while in the lane; but this he knew not.

He gazed upon them attentively, being anxious to ascertain whether they were approaching or receding.

While in doubt upon this point a sudden turn in the road hid them from his sight, and he saw them no more.

Having made this discovery, he at once prepared to descend the tree.

The soldiers, even if their presence in that sparsely-populated district was connected with them, were so far off that a long time must elapse before they could reach the hill.

During that interval they would, he calculated, have ample time to perform their melancholy duty.

Upon reaching the ground, he found that Sixteen-String Jack had already dug to a considerable depth beneath the surface.

He had found this active exertion to be a relief to his over-wrought feelings.

In a few words Tom made him acquainted with the result of his reconnoitering, and requested him to stand aside for a little while, and he would relieve him in his toil.

This, at first, Jack refused to do, but in the end Tom prevailed upon him to accede to his request.

Tom King then leaped into the grave and commenced turning out the soil with great rapidity, for he knew the sooner the job was over the better it would be, for more reasons than one.

Sixteen-String Jack, meanwhile, had crossed the open space again to where his dead comrade lay.

Again he knelt down by his side, and soon became oblivious of all that was happening around him.

On his side, Tom King was so fully occupied with what he was about, and with his own reflections, that he heard not the stealthy approach of many footsteps, nor yet the occasional crackling of dry twigs, which denoted their progress.

Suddenly, however, there was a loud cry which struck upon the ears of both the highwaymen with startling effect, and, before they could recover from their surprise, they found themselves surrounded by a dense throng of persons.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXIII.

TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HAVE A REMARKABLE ADVENTURE IN THE WOOD.

THE first impulse of both the highwaymen, upon making this astounding discovery, was to place themselves in an attitude of defence; but this, they found, they were not capable of doing effectually.

Tom King had his sword already in his grasp, and he held it before him in such a manner as to enable him to ward off a blow. But then he was at a disadvantage.

He was standing in the grave, which was at least three feet deep, and the new-comers surrounded the brink of it in a moment.

He was then completely at their mercy.

As for Sixteen-String Jack, when he left the grave to throw himself upon his knee by the side of Clande's body, he had not even taken his sword with him, but left it sticking up in the ground, near the mound of upturned soil.

He was then defenceless, and before he could spring to his feet he was completely hemmed in.

Nevertheless, he started up, and, unprovided with the means of defending himself against a host, as he was, he placed himself beside the body of his slain comrade in an attitude to do battle with anyone who approached him too closely.

But the new-comers did not attempt to advance.

They contented themselves with standing round him in a dense throng, and at a respectful distance.

A glance at their forms was sufficient to show both Tom King and Jack that it was not their enemies who had so suddenly made their appearance.

The garb they wore in no way resembled that of either a police-officer or a soldier, though it was quite as distinctive.

The throng was composed both of men and women.

The total number was probably thirty.

There was not one unarmed.

They held in their grasp either a long dagger-like knife, or else a formidable bludgeon.

Their attitudes were threatening in the extreme, though, at the same time, their countenances expressed astonishment.

Then from among the crowd which surrounded Sixteen-String Jack and the body of Claude Duval, a man advanced.

He halted within a few paces of the former, who looked at him with an inquisitive glance.

This man, who stepped forward, seemed to be of an age almost patriarchal.

His hair was silvery white, and hung down over his shoulders in waving masses.

His beard, of the same hue, reached almost to his waist.

But notwithstanding these indications of extreme age, he held his body with great erectness; and it was in the manner of one habituated to command over others that he stood before Sixteen-String Jack.

His face was thin and wrinkled, and of a deep brown tint.

His whole form was very spare, and his great height and erect attitude made this more noticeable than it would have been had his stature been less.

Although in his whole frame there was not a superfluous ounce of flesh, yet all his bones were well covered with muscle, and he was, doubtless, in possession of unusual strength.

With his left hand he grasped a long staff, not unlike the quarter-staff, which was so favourite a weapon with our Saxon forefathers.

His eyes were bright and piercing, and he fixed them with inquiring keenness upon Jack's countenance, who, however, returned his gaze with equal firmness.

The attitude of the remainder of this throng, when the old man stepped forward, was submissive to a degree, and each one fixed his eyes upon him in order to obey the slightest movement he should make.

After bending upon Jack the inquisitive glance, as we have recorded, the old man spoke.

His voice was clear and sonorous, but it had a strong foreign accent.

The tones in which the words were uttered indicated both sternness and displeasure.

"Who are you?" he asked; "and what want you here?"

"Before I reply to that question," said Sixteen-String Jack, boldly, "I must know by what authority you ask it. At present I cannot see what better title you have to be here than myself."

The old man started back in surprise, as though unaccustomed to be spoken to with so little deference.

"What right had you," continued Sixteen-String Jack, "to rush in and surround us as you have done? We were in no way interfering with you."

"Down with him! down with him!" cried the motley crew, accompanying their words with menacing gestures.

The old man held up his hand, and in a moment, as if by magic, everyone became still.

"You speak with little respect," said the old man, addressing Jack. "Do you realize the fact that your life is in my hands, to take at any moment I think proper?"

"I do not. Your numbers are superior to us, and in an encounter we might, probably, be slain; that is, if all of you were cowardly enough to attack two men who have done nothing to provoke your hostility."

"You speak with singular boldness," said the old man, in whose manner Jack fancied he could detect something akin to admiration. "But with regard to having done nothing to provoke our hostility, there you are in error. You have done this."

"How? in what manner?" asked Sixteen-String Jack, in the utmost surprise.

"You have infringed one of our laws, and the penalty of that infringement is death."

"Yes, death!" echoed the wild throng around, and again their gestures became violent and menacing to a degree.

The old man, however, must have exercised over them some singular power, for they grew calm again the moment he uplifted his hand.

Then addressing himself to Sixteen-String Jack, he said—

"You have, doubtless, heard much but know little respecting Zingari—that race which always keeps to itself, and never dwells beneath a roof."

"Gipsies!" ejaculated Jack.

"Such is the name by which you English know us, and it serves as well as any other. But we are Zingaris. Our race is numerous, and we are all bound to each other by bonds we dare not break without incurring the direst consequences."

"But," said Jack, who was now perfectly calm and collected, "what has all this to do with me? Look yonder; surrounded by another portion of your crew, is my companion."

He pointed towards Tom King as he spoke, and all eyes followed the direction of his finger.

"You have taken him at unawares," added Jack. "You see he is in the earth up to his waist. Your band surround the brink of the pit, and he is unable to effectually defend himself."

"What does he here?" sternly demanded the old man.

"I ask again, by what authority do you put this question?"

"I was about to tell you, but you refused to listen."

"You told me you were gipsies."

"I told you we were a portion of that numerous race, which is dispersed all over England. We are wanderers, and have no place of settled abode; we wander whithersoever our fancy dictates. But we are bound together by universal laws which we are bound to recognise. One of them is, that a member or representative of every family should, once in every nine years, repair to this spot here to meet, to prostrate themselves before their king, and renew their oath of allegiance. This is the appointed and important day, and here, you see, we have assembled."

"But," interrupted Jack, "I"——

"Hear me out," said the old man, interrupting him in his turn. "For centuries immemorial the open space upon the summit of this hill has been the place where this important ceremony has taken place. From those remote ages, of which I have just spoken, a law has descended to us; that law decrees that, should we, on the day in the ninth year when the meeting is to take place, find upon this spot one or more of the house-dwellers, their lives should pay the forfeit of the intrusion. Now do you understand?"

"I understand your words perfectly well," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but I most resolutely refuse to recognise your power."

"Beware," said the old man, in a stern voice, which was echoed by an angry cry from those who eagerly crowded round.

"Beware of what?"

"I tell you, again, your life is in our hands. By the laws of our race it is forfeit to us."

"It will not be given up without a struggle," said Jack, coolly; "and now, as you have had your say, I must request you to attend to me."

"You are bold."

"Why should I not be? Listen."

The old man felt constrained to do so.

He could not but look upon Jack with admiration at the courage he displayed.

Jack spoke.

"You see this body here," and he pointed to the body of Claude Duval; "I and my companion, pursued by our enemies, brought it to this place, in the hope, first that he was not dead, and then, finding he had ceased to exist, to bury him here. When you abruptly broke upon this spot, you found me kneeling by the side of the corpse, and my companion yonder digging the grave. You outnumber us, but, although such is the case, you need not delude yourself into the idea that we shall tamely submit to be put to death because a sanguinary law has been handed down to you. I give you warning that, if you advance a step further to execute your purpose, I shall defend myself to the utmost, and, though I have little hope of achieving a victory, yet, before I am slain, I shall be able to wreak more mischief upon you than you may consider at all agreeable. And now I have spoken. Do as you think proper."

As he concluded this very daring and defiant speech, Sixteen-String Jack folded his arms across his breast, and gazed calmly upon the crowd of swarthy, angry faces by which he was surrounded.

His address evidently produced a great effect upon the old man, and he remained for a few moments in silent thought.

"You have spoken falsely," he said, at length.

"I have not," returned Jack, angrily.

"I say you have."

"In what particular?"

"That is not a corpse which lies at your feet."

When he heard these words Jack started as though he had been struck by a bullet.

The old man had spoken clearly, and his words reached, with the utmost distinctness, the ears of Tom King, who had also heard the whole of the preceding conversation.

Those around, however, were not prepared for the effect which this last statement had upon him.

He gave one spring, and leaped out of the grave.

So suddenly was this done, that no one was in time to prevent him.

He whirled his sword round his head, and, as they heard the keen weapon whistle through the air, they all instinctively drew back.

In three bounds Tom King was beside Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

He burst through the ring with which they were encircled before a hand could be raised to prevent him.

Then, standing over the prostrate body of his comrade, he cried—

"Who is it that says he is not dead, and by what authority does he make the statement?"

"I say it!" said the old man as he stalked forward a few steps, with a majestic air, "and my authority is the truth. That is not a corpse."

"Do you mean to say, by that, that my comrade is alive?"

"I do."

"Then I thank you from my heart for such a piece of intelligence, though I hardly dare believe it to be true."

"You may rely upon it. My eye is old and dim, perchance, but it does not deceive me."

"Then it was a blessed chance that brought you here," said Sixteen-String Jack, "or we should have consigned him to that most terrible of all fates—premature interment."

"Is this really so?"

"It is."

"Who are you, then?"

"It would be dangerous to proclaim ourselves, for a price is set upon our heads."

"By the house-dwellers?"

"Yes."

"Then I can spare you. I seek to know no more. Under these circumstances you are clearly no house-dwellers, but outcasts from them. This enables me to set aside the law of which I have spoken, but there is no other person, besides myself, who has the power to do so."

"Accept our thanks, then," said Tom King, seizing him by the hands. "For my own part, I can perceive no signs of vitality about our comrade; but I know your race hold possession of many secrets connected with life and death, and therefore I place reliance upon what you say."

"You may do so safely," said the old man, with a pleased expression of countenance.

"Restore, then, my friend to life," said Tom King, "and ask of me anything you like in return."

"I will do so," said the old man, if only for the courage your companion has exhibited. I must, however, attach one condition."

"You have only to name it for it to be complied with."

"It is that you keep profoundly secret all that has already come under your observation, and all that may futurely do so while you are with us."

"That we promise readily, and it will go hard with us if we do not find some more substantial mode of testifying to our gratitude."

"It is needless," said the old man, who then turned round and addressed some energetic words to those assembled, in a language which was quite unknown to our two friends.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXIV.

THE GIPSY WOMAN RESTORES CLAUDE DUVAL TO CONSCIOUSNESS, AND GIVES UTTERANCE TO A WARNING AND A PREDICTION.

THE whole of the occurrences which we have related at full length in the preceding chapter took place with such rapidity, and were, in themselves, of so bewildering a character, that Tom and Jack found their ideas in a state of great confusion.

By degrees they recovered the use of their faculties, and divided their attention between the body of their companion and the weird-like events which were occurring around them.

They were unable to form the least idea about what the old man said, but, let it be what it would, it met with immediate obedience.

From this, they argued, that the influence of this strange old man was very great indeed.

Like nearly everyone else, Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack had heard plenty about gipsies, and had occasionally encountered them; yet the amount of actual knowledge which they possessed upon the subject was very small indeed.

Of one fact, however, they were well aware, and that was, that certain members of this romantic race were acquainted with strange secrets in the healing art; and that, where wounds were concerned, instances were innumerable where they had effected a cure after the best surgical aid had failed.

This was more particularly the case at the commencement of the last century, when the science of medicine was very far indeed from the position to which it has since attained.

Therefore, although they could not see the least signs of life about Claude, yet they took the old man's word that he was not dead.

Great as might be the authority of the old man, this last command of his, although it was obeyed, was done so reluctantly.

The majority would much rather have obeyed the sanguinary law enforced by their ancestors.

The account which the old man had given of their strange meeting in that place was unquestionably correct.

Once every nine years, in accordance with immemorial custom, one member of each family had to present himself upon this spot, no matter how far he might happen to be distant from it, or what difficulties might intervene.

If any family omitted to send a representative, they were no longer considered as belonging to the true Zingari.

What was the object sought to be attained by this novennial meeting, would be hard to say; doubtless it was intended by the projectors to be a means by which these wanderers might preserve some of the characteristics belonging to distinctive races.

Be the object, however, what it might, it was this novennial meeting which had brought the gipsies together on this occasion.

One more word of explanation, and we have done.

The old man we have so often mentioned occupied the position and title of the king of the Zingari.

This title and position were hereditary, and had been faithfully transmitted from father to son.

As the whole tribe only united once every nine years, it was only on these distant occasions that the king was able to exercise the authority which devolved upon him.

It was probably this circumstance which caused him to be so implicitly obeyed.

The children, too, were taught by their parents, from their tenderest years, to obey the king in all things.

It was a strange fancy for these outcasts to have a king, but doubtless they felt it added to their importance.

The sceptre, however, was a barren one to the possessor of it.

The present king was a man who happened to be gifted by nature with sentiments more human than generally fell to the lot of his subjects; and to this we may attribute his manifest inclination to save the lives of Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack, as was demonstrated by the readiness with which he twisted the circumstance of their no longer having claim to the title of house-dweller in their favour.

The reader is now in a position to comprehend what follows, and we at once resume.

When the gipsy king had uttered these words of command to his subjects, they dispersed, and no longer showed any manifestations of hostility.

There were many, however, who bent upon our friends a ferocious glance.

The old man now pronounced a single word which sounded like a name—at least, it was the manner in which it was pronounced, more than aught else, which induced this belief in the minds of our friends.

It was confirmed by their shortly afterwards seeing a woman approach, who presented every appearance of extreme age.

She had long outlived the brief space of time allowed for human life.

She supported her steps by means of a stout stick.

She made her way up to the gipsy king, and stood in an attitude of great deference before him, as though awaiting his instructions.

Her whole frame trembled like an aspen in consequence of her extreme age.

Tom King and Jack looked at her with the greatest curiosity and attention.

It was in vain, however, that they listened to the instructions which were given her.

They were uttered in a peculiar language, which might as well have been Greek for all the information which it conveyed to their ears.

The old woman, however, understood them readily enough, since the language in which they were spoken was the dialect of the tribe.

As soon as the old man had finished addressing her she made a deep obeisance, and then, turning round, hobbled towards the spot where Claude Duval still lay upon the ground, and, for aught our friends could tell to the contrary, quite dead.

The old woman knelt down beside him, and, having removed his clothing sufficiently for her purpose, placed her ear upon his heart and listened intently.

Apparently satisfied with this examination, she said something to two young men, who immediately disappeared.

This old woman fulfilled the functions of surgeon-phy-



[DICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS ARE ATTACKED IN THE CAVERN BY THE DRAGOONS.]

sician to the tribe, and was reputed to be possessed of more than ordinary skill in the treatment of wounds and external hurts.

The two young men she had despatched quickly returned, one bringing water and the other some kind of unguent and bandages, such as would be required to dress a wound.

The first thing the woman did was to wash away the mass of coagulated blood, which entirely covered the orifice of the wound from observation.

When this was done, Claude did not present half such a terrible spectacle.

We need not tell the reader with what intentness Tom King and Jack watched every movement.

As soon as the congealed blood was removed, the old woman commenced an examination of the wounds, and by the way she set about doing this, our friends could tell she was no stranger to her work.

A strange cry came from her lips, and she looked up to the countenances of the two highwaymen.

In tolerably good English she said, with the greatest surprise perceptible in her tones,—

"Is it possible you thought him dead?"

"We did, indeed, think so," replied Tom King, "and were filled with grief on that account. But why do you speak in so surprised a manner?"

"Because I cannot account for your having fallen into such a mistake!"

"Mistake?"

"Yes, mistake. It is true he has received a wound from a pistol-shot, but it has done him little harm."

The two highwaymen looked incredulous.

"Speak," they both cried, as with one voice; "explain yourself!"

"See here," said the old woman. "The bullet struck here," and she touched Claude upon the breast as she spoke, "but it did not enter. Of course, had it done so, the wound would have been mortal, but it struck against the bone and then glanced off. It has inflicted a long,

ugly gash, but has really done no further mischief. Owing, perhaps, to some strange position of the body, an immense quantity of blood has flowed from this wound, and your friend now lies in this miserable state for the want of it."

"And is it possible," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, who hardly dared believe in this sudden reverse of fortune, "is it possible he is in nothing but a swoon from loss of blood?"

"That is all," replied the old woman; "and, if you will leave him in my care, you will soon find him as well as ever he was."

Prepared as he was for this welcome intelligence, Sixteen-String Jack was almost overcome by it.

He had begun to mourn for Claude as dead, and to look upon him as no longer belonging to this life.

To hear that he had only been insensible from loss of blood was, indeed, startling intelligence to our friends.

There was no doubt, however, as to the veracity of what the old woman told them.

They could see for themselves that the bullet had not penetrated his chest, but had struck obliquely upon a bone, and glanced off, leaving a deep gash to mark its course.

From this blood had flowed in prodigious quantities, and it was this immense loss of the vital fluid which produced those appearances which we can scarcely feel surprised at Tom and Jack taking for death itself.

Great, now, was their joy upon receiving so favourable an account of Claude's condition, and they now watched every proceeding of the old woman's with redoubled interest.

Fortunate, indeed, was it for all concerned that this strange encounter with the gipsies had taken place; for, had it not have happened, the probability is Claude Duval would have been buried alive, as the contiguity of the troop of dragoons would have caused them to hurry over their melancholy task.

Happily, all this was averted.

Having removed from the wound every morsel of extraneous matter, the old woman dressed it with the ointment which had been brought her.

Then, with surprising skill, she bandaged it up, assuring our friends, as she did so, that the wound, being only a superficial one, would require no further attention, except that the bandages should not be removed until it was thoroughly healed.

All this time, however, Claude Duval remained in the same state of death-like torpor; and how it was the gipsy king had told at glance that he was alive seemed a mystery.

It might be that, in his long life, he had had opportunities of comparing the difference between death and insensibility.

Be that, however, as it may, his statement was proved to be correct.

Having properly attended to the wound, the old woman now proceeded to restore Claude to consciousness.

From the breast of her gown she produced a small bottle of green glass, which was partially filled with some sort of milky-looking liquid.

Removing the stopper, she held the open mouth of the vial close under Claude's nose.

For a moment no effect was produced, but, at the end of that time, the two highwaymen were pleased to perceive a slight movement of the body, and then a faint sigh came from their wounded comrade's lips.

They would have pressed forward and spoken to him, but the old woman would not permit them to approach.

"He is now in a state of extreme weakness, and great caution must be used," she said. "Wait a moment until I have done."

As she spoke, she took up a bottle which had been brought along with the ointment and bandages.

It contained a somewhat thick fluid of a bright crimson colour.

This she suffered to let fall drop by drop into Claude's mouth, who possessed just sufficient strength and sense to swallow these small quantities.

This fluid the old woman continued to administer drop by drop, until the patience of our friends was fairly exhausted; but still she kept on, until the bottle was drained of its last drop.

Next, taking some of the cold water, she caused him to swallow it.

This done, she drew back to watch the effect.

Gradually Claude's eyes closed, and he dropped off into a profound sleep.

When she was sure that the potion had fairly taken effect, the old woman turned round to our two friends and thus addressed them—

"This sleep," she said, "will probably last many hours; I cannot say how many, as that depends entirely upon circumstances. On no account, however, must his slumber be broken. He must be kept perfectly quiet, and allowed to wake of his own accord. When he does this, you will find he has recovered a considerable portion of his lost strength, and it will hourly increase. As for the wound, as that is merely in the flesh, you need not trouble anything further about it. It will get well of itself, and with rest he will soon recover his strength. But the faculty of looking into the future is given to me, and, as you are his friends, bid him, when he awakes, to beware of the next wound he receives, as it will assuredly be a mortal one."

CHAPTER CCCLXXXV.

CLAUDE DUVAL TAKES ONE MORE GLANCE AT THIS WORLD.

It was the peculiar circumstances under which this prediction was uttered that caused it to produce the effect it did upon the minds of Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack.

At any other time they would have laughed at the idea of the old decrepit woman before them having the gift or power of fortelling events—especially if the prediction had been uttered by itself.

But she had been speaking of Claude's condition, and telling them how he would awake; then, more in the manner of a friendly caution than aught else, she uttered the remarkable words with which the last chapter concluded.

As soon as she had spoken she rose to her feet, and, mingling with those assembled, was in a moment lost to sight.

Upon looking around them, our friends found that the number of the gipsies had very much increased during the time that they had been watching the old woman's proceedings, and fresh arrivals kept continually taking place.

Tom and Jack would have mingled with the throng, and singled out the old woman, to whom they wished to give some more substantial token of their gratitude than mere words, but they were prevented by the gipsy king, who placed himself directly in their path.

"Whither go you?" he said.

"To see the woman who has dressed our comrade's wounds, in order that we may reward her for what she has done."

"No reward is required, young man," said the gipsy king. "What she has done has been done freely."

"Still"——

"Attend to me, if you please," interrupted the old man. "You are here upon sufferance only, and you must be content to do as you are bidden. In the first place, then, you may take my word for it that the condition of your friend is by no means serious, and when he awakes from his sleep he will be almost himself again."

"Those are most welcome words to us," said Sixteen-String Jack, "for we had already mourned for him as one dead, and we are proportionably overjoyed to find that he is yet alive. It is for this reason that we would fain do something to testify our gratitude."

"I am about to afford you an opportunity," said the gipsy king.

"Speak! You have only to tell us what it is, and it will be done."

"In the first place, then, I shall require you to take a solemn oath of secrecy, not only as to what you have witnessed in this place, but all you have been told in explanation; for I need scarcely tell you that the secret of our meeting on this spot is known to no other housedwellers than yourselves."

"We will readily take any oath you may think fit to propose."

"That is well, then. And now, in the second place, although you are here, we cannot allow you to remain and be a witness of the ceremonies which are performed on this occasion. Some of our race will construct a kind of litter of the boughs of these trees, and, placing your

comrade upon it, will carry him to the base of the hill, where you must promise to remain and watch him."

"To all this we readily consent. If you will have the litter constructed, we will carry him down the hill ourselves."

"Nay, nay; for reasons of our own we will do that, too."

The gipsy-king then turned round and addressed a few words of command to some young men who were standing at no great distance.

These the highwaymen conjectured to be connected with the construction of the litter, and such proved to be the case, for the young men set about hastily lopping off several of the lowest branches.

In a very short time they had sufficient for their purpose, and they weaved them into a litter with very great skill indeed.

As soon as it was ready they placed it down by the side of Claude, and, with the greatest care and gentleness, lifted him upon it.

The next thing was to carry it down the hill, which they did with the same amount of care.

Tom and Jack followed it; but not until they had expressed their thanks to the gipsy-king—not only for having saved their lives, but also for his attention to Claude Duval.

Then they freely took the oath which he proposed to them, after having done which, they descended the hill again very willingly, leaving the gipsies to perform their mystic ceremonies unobserved.

Neither of them had forgotten the soldiers which Tom had seen in the distance from the summit of the tree, but so long a time had elapsed since then without their making their appearance, that they very correctly came to the conclusion that they were retreating when they saw them.

The lower part of the hill seemed, then, quite as likely to afford them the shelter they needed as the upper portion of it.

The litter was deposited upon the ground, and Claude was allowed to remain in it.

The horses, too, were then brought down and tethered close at hand.

The gipsies then left them, though not until they had received a reward from our friends.

Tom and Jack watched the gipsies out of sight, and then the former turning to the latter said—

"Well, Jack, I think, of all the strange adventures I have ever had, this is the strangest."

"Unquestionably," said Jack. "I never before knew anything like it."

"I have heard many strange things concerning the gipsies, but never anything to surpass or even equal this."

"The most surprising thing is the coincidences," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"In the first place, there was our selecting the wooded hill as our place of concealment; and then, to think that when we arrived there was upon the occasion, in the space of nine years, when the gipsies repair to it."

"It seems more strange the more we reflect upon it."

"It does, indeed; but most of all do I rejoice in the discovery that Claude is still left to be among us. I confess at times I can hardly believe in the reality of such good fortune."

"I am puzzled to think how the gipsy king could have told at a glance the difference between death and a state of insensibility."

"That seems very surprising."

"And he was right."

"Did you notice one thing the old woman said?"

"What? About Claude taking care how he received his second wound?"

"No, that is not what I meant just then."

"What?"

"In speaking of the wound, she said it had bled copiously, but doubtless that the flow of blood had been increased by his body having remained for some time in a position calculated to drain it of blood."

"Yes, she said that."

"And then think of the position in which we found Claude."

"It was certainly just what she seemed to indicate."

"Just. His foot being in the stirrup, and his head upon the ground, the blood was naturally drained out of his body."

"You must recollect, my friend, that at present we have no idea how it was that Claude came to be in the state in which we found him."

"I know we have not, and we shall have to wait patiently until he wakes before we can know."

"His sleep seems very heavy, almost like death."

"It does, except that you can see he is breathing rather heavily."

"I would give a trifle for a box of the wonderful healing ointment which the old woman carried."

"If its virtues are what she represents, it would be invaluable to us."

"It would, indeed."

"I wonder how long Claude will sleep."

"I know not; but I am certain Dick must be full of alarm and agitation at our non-appearance."

"We must contrive to get back to the chase before daybreak to-morrow morning, or he will be setting out in search of us."

"What time is it now?"

"Noon has passed. It will, however, be six hours, at least, before darkness comes; and let us hope, by that time, Claude will awake and be well enough to accompany us. If we started early in the evening, we could travel slowly, and yet reach the chase before dawn."

"So we could."

"That is what we must hope for, then."

In such conversation as this, the two highwaymen whiled away the time during which they watched by the side of their slumbering companion.

Without some such conversation, the time would have passed slowly indeed; and, as it was, they found it hang rather heavily on their hands.

At length, however, they observed that the shadows of the trees grew rapidly longer, and by this they knew the sun was sinking in the west.

In a short time from now it would be dark enough for them to commence their journey; the only thing was, would Claude awake?

The injunction, not on any account to rouse him from his slumber, was urged upon them with too much earnestness for them to think of disobeying it.

At present Claude showed no signs whatever of awaking.

His sleep seemed as profound as it had been at its commencement.

Anxiously his two comrades looked upon him, as well as the fading light would permit, in the hope of being able to see some signs of returning animation.

But none appeared.

Weary with watching, they at last turned away.

The sun sunk, and the brief autumnal twilight which succeeded quickly deepened into night.

Darkness came over all things, and beneath the shadow of the wide-spreading branches of the trees it was profound, and they were unable to distinguish each others' forms.

Fain would they have lighted a fire with some of the dry brushwood which was lying about, and which they could easily have gathered together, but they feared to do so lest it should prove a beacon to their enemies to show them their whereabouts.

For this reason, then, although they had the means of procuring a light, the fire was not ignited.

As the darkness increased they seated themselves as close as they could to the litter upon which the slumbering form of Claude Duval reposed, in order to be aware, by their sense of hearing, the moment when he awoke.

Their patience was put to a severe trial.

Time glided onward, but still he awoke not, and were it not that in the silence of that place they could occasionally hear his somewhat laboured breathing, they would have fancied he was not sleeping but dead.

A circumstance now occurred which afforded them some consolation.

The moon, which was only a few days past the full, rose majestically from the eastern horizon, and, in a short time, attained to such an altitude that our friends were able to see her silvery face above the tree tops.

The light she shed was clear and beautiful, and once more the form of Claude Duval became revealed to their eager gaze.

Motionless and deathlike he lay, however, as the cold moonbeams poured their lustre upon him.

As they gazed, strange thoughts of the stories they had heard flitted across the minds of the two highwaymen.

They recollected the prevalent and apparently well-authenticated superstitions of the vampire, and the lifeless looking form of Claude Duval, with the pale moonbeams flooding it, was well calculated to recall such a superstition to their recollection.

They had both heard how the dead body of a vampire, should it be exposed to the moonbeams, became restored to a horrible and loathsome vitality; and, as they gazed upon Claude's pallid countenance, they wondered whether the moon's light really did possess resuscitative powers.

Neither spoke, but the same thoughts occupied their minds.

Suddenly both started.

They had observed Claude make a slight movement.

Ashamed of the superstitious ideas which they had permitted to run riot in their brains, they turned round and watched eagerly for some other signs of his awaking.

They soon came.

The effects of the liquid which had been administered to him were rapidly passing away.

Claude's whole frame trembled, and his eyelids fluttered.

At length, with a deep sigh, he awoke.

He started at once into a sitting posture, and looked about him like one bewildered to think where he was.

That feeling, however, immediately subsided when he caught sight of the forms of his old comrade bending over him.

They spoke.

"Lie down again, Claude," they said. "Lie down again for a moment, and collect your thoughts. All is well; we are with you."

Claude laid down again as his companions had requested, and, closing his eyes, endeavoured to collect his scattered thoughts.

For a moment or two he was unable to do this, but, with a rush, a full remembrance of the past came upon him.

In a rather faint tone of voice, he said—

"I have been wounded."

"We know that well enough," replied Sixteen-String Jack, in a cheerful voice; "but your hurt was a slight one, and, by this time, you will perhaps feel little of it."

These words encouraged Claude, and made him feel much better.

With comparative ease he raised himself to a sitting posture, and then became immediately curious to know what had befallen him since he had received his wound.

Mutual explanations rapidly followed, but we need not trouble the reader with a detail of them, since every incident has been related.

When they had come to an understanding with each other, Tom and Jack expressed their wish to return to Enfield Chase with as little delay as possible, because of the anxiety which Dick Turpin would experience.

Claude was equally desirous to return, and declared that he could feel himself grow stronger every moment.

If this really was the case, and he did not allow his fancy to deceive him, the draught administered by the gipsy must have been a potent and invaluable restorative.

Claude, indeed, was willing to start at once, but his two comrades urged him to remain a little longer where he was, in order to recover himself as thoroughly as possible.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL, TOM KING, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK REACH ENFIELD CHASE IN SAFETY, AND DICK TURPIN HAS A SLIGHT ALARM.

Half-an-hour quickly passed away in pleasant conversation upon the events that had recently taken place, and, at the end of that time, Claude Duval expressed his impatience to commence the journey.

It is quite certain, however, that his recovery from what looked so much like certain death, was little less than miraculous, and so his friends considered it.

As for Claude himself, of course he had no due appreciation of the amount of danger through which he had passed, and, finding himself tolerably well, he immensely overrated his strength.

This is nothing to be surprised at, since those who have been sick almost invariably do so.

He would have mounted his horse and set off at a trot, but his two comrades had too great an amount of prudence to permit him to do any such thing.

They assisted him into the saddle, however, for he would insist that he was strong enough to ride.

Tom and Jack determined on no account to go any faster than at a walking pace.

This they doubted not he would be able to accomplish, for it could scarcely be said to fatigue anyone.

Having seen him properly seated in the saddle, his two companions mounted their horses, and the little party at once emerged from the wood.

The moon was shining with extraordinary brightness in a sky which was not even speckled by a single cloud.

Although her light had been so useful to them such a short time ago, they would now willingly enough have dispensed with it altogether.

This, however, they were unable to do.

Tom and Jack both judged it expedient not to approach the road upon which they had discovered the body of Claude, for fear suspicion should be attached to them.

Accordingly, after having carefully noted their position, they made their way in almost a straight line for their destination.

The only times when they deviated from a direct course was when they encountered some insurmountable obstacle which compelled them to do so.

This was a kind of travelling with which our friends were familiar, and, in spite of occasional detours, they lost very little ground indeed.

The pace at which they went, however, was one that took them a long while to go a short distance, but they soon perceived how wisely they had acted in adopting it, or their wounded comrade would have been completely overcome.

He found his strength had rapidly evaporated, and it now required him to make continual efforts to retain an upright position on the back of his steed.

Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack noticed this, but said nothing.

Efficacious in such cases as the gipsy's cordial unquestionably was, still it was hardly to be supposed that it would supply the place of the immense quantity of blood which Claude Duval had lost.

Nevertheless, its effects were wonderful, or he would never have been able to travel in the manner he had.

At length, to the satisfaction of all three, Enfield Chase appeared in the distance.

Its immense size, and the circumstances from portions of it being at a considerable elevation above the surrounding country, made it a conspicuous object for many miles.

The bright moonbeams on that night made it visible at a great distance.

The sight of his destination seemed to have a strengthening and invigorating effect on Claude Duval, and he sat more erectly in the saddle.

Right glad would he be when the journey was over.

As, however, the chase, although in sight, was still a long way off, and as they would, on account of the slowness of their progress, be a long time in reaching it, they propose a halt, to which Claude only assented with great reluctance.

Happening to be in a very lonely and unfrequented part of the country, Tom and Jack felt there would be little risk in halting for some time.

Not only would Claude regain fresh strength by the rest, but they should still have ample time to reach the appointed spot before daybreak.

The place they had chosen for their halt was far away from any public road or private footpath, and they seated themselves and tethered their horses in the deep shadow of a hedgerow.

Here they had little fear of being seen.

Sixteen-String Jack produced a flask of spirits, of which he compelled Claude to partake very sparingly.

The small quantity he drank acted upon his body as a stimulant, and endowed him with fictitious vigour.

Still, he did not drink enough to produce any ill effect.

Their halt was a short one, but this was principally

upon Claude's account, who manifested extreme impatience to recommence his journey.

Once again, then, in compliance with his urgent wishes, the trio mounted their steeds and set out towards the chase.

It was encouraging for them to be able thus to see the termination of their journey.

Much time was occupied in speculation as to the effect which their long absence would be likely to have upon Dick Turpin.

All hoped that he had not been tempted to set out in search of them.

As the three highwaymen are not likely to meet with any interruption or further incident during the remainder of their journey, we will leave them slowly approaching the chase, and occupy ourselves in relating the proceedings of Dick Turpin.

In a former chapter we have described how, after their perilous adventure with the serpent in the cavern, Maud and our hero had made their way to the spot which had been appointed for a meeting place.

Here they watched the faint light of the new day gently steal through the trees, and gradually bringing all things into view; but, though they listened intently, and waited patiently, they could not hear anything to indicate the approach of the three highwaymen.

The extent of Dick's anxiety upon their account can be imagined; but, when the sun rose, and the day fairly passed away without the least symptoms of their return, he was in a state of mind bordering on distraction.

Although he did not for a moment think that his three comrades would venture to approach or enter the chase during daylight, yet Maud could not induce him to quit the spot upon which he knew they would first appear.

During the whole day he manifested his agitation by pacing the green sward, with rapid and unequal strides.

At length, to his relief, the sun set, though his impatience had made him think that that event would never come to pass.

Never had a day appeared of such tremendous length.

As the sun declined behind the bank of clouds on the western horizon, and the faint twilight crept over the scene, Dick's impatience, so far from abating, increased.

Nothing but the fact of Maud's presence in the chase, and the impossibility either of leaving her in it or taking her with him, would have had the effect of causing Dick to remain in the same spot all day like he did.

Indeed, now, the impulse to mount his bonny mare, and sally forth in quest of his absent comrades, was so strong as almost to be irresistible.

He, however, possessed sufficient strength to struggle with, if he did not overcome, the feeling.

Maud's anxiety was scarcely less than Dick's, and most fervently did she hope that the three highwaymen would rapidly return.

Her left hand was resting lightly on Dick's arm, and both had their attention fixed and their countenances turned in the direction in which they expected them to come.

Every moment Dick grew less and less able to control himself.

The twilight passed away, and was succeeded by the darkness of night.

Still no signs of his comrades.

Somehow the idea had taken hold of his mind, almost from the first, that they had fallen into the hands of the police.

Perhaps, at that very moment, when he stood there so vainly watching and waiting for them, they were all three confined in some place of strength and security.

This was a reflection that maddened him, and, the more he pondered over the idea, the more convinced he became that it must be the actual state of affairs.

He was well aware that, if they had all three been taken prisoners, they would have had neither the means nor the opportunity of communicating that unpleasant fact to him. All, then, was uncertainty and doubt.

Suddenly he felt Maud's hold upon his arm increase to a degree of tightness almost painful, while she clung close to him, convulsively.

Surprised at this incident, he forgot for the moment the harassing thoughts which had so long held possession of his mind, and questioned her eagerly as to the cause of the alarm she exhibited.

Instead of replying to his question, however, Maud only clung still closer to him, and implored him, with the greatest anxiousness, to be silent.

He looked around, as well as the dim light would permit him, but no alarming object met his view.

"Speak, Maud," he said. "Speak. Tell me at once, I implore you, the cause of this alarm."

"Hush! hush!" replied Maud, in accents of the utmost terror, but in a voice so faint that it could not have reached any other ears than those for which it was intended. "Hush! hush! Do not speak so loud."

"Tell me, then, the meaning of this sudden alarm," said Dick, who sank his voice until it became a faint whisper.

"Tell me. It may be of the utmost importance."

"I fear we are observed," said Maud, glancing around her in extreme terror, as though she every moment expected her eye to rest upon some terrible object.

Dick started.

Her alarm was too great for it to be unreal.

Like a flash of light he drew his sword, and stood upon the defensive, with his arm encircling Maud's waist.

"You fear we are observed?" he said, repeating her words. What grounds have you for such a dread? In this place we are alone."

"No—no," said Maud, in the same low, whispering tones; "we are not alone."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I thought"——

"What, dearest? Tell me, I pray you. Keep me no longer in this dreadful state of suspense."

"I thought I heard a faint rustling among the bushes."

"What, again?"

"Yes, again; and the sound was precisely similar to that which I heard this morning."

"Ah! say you so?"

"Yes."

"You describe it then as though some one was endeavouring to creep through bushes as silently as possible."

"Yes—yes; that is the sound."

"And you have heard it again?"

"Yes—yes."

"When?"

"This moment; when I pressed your arm."

"Indeed!" said Dick, and, as he spoke, he looked around him as well as the dim light enabled him.

But he could see nothing and hear nothing save the murmuring sound which is always audible where trees grow together in large quantities.

"This is most serious," he added. "Are you quite sure you were not mistaken?"

"Quite."

"But I heard nothing."

"Nor did you this morning."

"I know I did not."

"That, then, is because, perhaps, your faculties are so absorbed by thinking of your comrades."

"Perhaps so. But this matter is serious in the extreme; and you must give me all the information in your power. Be under no apprehension, however. I am with you; and let the danger be what it may, all will be well."

"For me, perhaps, but not for you; and it is on account of your safety that I feel alarm, and not on my own."

Dick pressed her still closer to him, as he said—

"But this sound which you have heard, and which has caused you so much alarm? Tell me all respecting it, for I can assure you I heard nothing."

"I did, and I am sure I am not mistaken. It was as though some person was endeavouring to crawl through the underwood without his progress being heard."

Dick's face became more anxious.

"When I heard the sound," continued Maud, "I grasped you by the arm, and no sooner had I done so, than"——

"What—what? Oh! what!"

"I distinctly saw some dark object move."

"Where?—where?"

"Yonder, among those bushes."

Dick looked in the direction in which she pointed, but could see nothing.

"The object I saw is no longer there," said Maud.

"What was it like?"

"It was gone too soon for me to be able to say for certain, but I thought it was like the head of a man."

"Release me a moment," said Dick. "This must be looked into."

As he spoke these words, he somewhat rudely disengaged himself from the hold which Maud kept upon him.

Sword in hand, he dashed among the bushes which grew where Maud had pointed.

With a faint scream she darted after him, for she feared he would receive some injury.

Dick laid about him most vigorously with his sword, and plunged it into every bush, but without encountering any obstacle.

He continued his exertions in spite of Maud's entreaties, until he had searched all around him for a considerable distance.

He met with nothing to reward him for his trouble, and at length he ceased his fruitless search.

He could not help feeling somewhat alarmed at what Maud had told him.

He feared some of his foes were upon his track, and taking steps to encompass his destruction.

He would have been much better pleased if he could have fallen across some animal which would have caused Maud's alarm, but his being unable to find anything filled him with uneasiness and made him dread the worst.

Over and over again he questioned his fair companion, but he was still unable to come to any conclusion.

He resolved to be more attentive, and to keep his ears open to catch the slightest sound.

It was not long before he heard a slight noise, which each moment increased in loudness.

"That is not the same sound as I heard before," said Maud.

As she spoke, Dick's practised ear told him that the noise he heard was caused by horses' feet.

He grasped his sword tightly by the hilt, and held Maud in such a position that he should be able to defend her should an encounter take place.

On came the horsemen—nearer and nearer, until at length three mounted horsemen presented themselves before him.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXVII.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS TWO COMRADES HAVE A CONVERSATION UPON A SUBJECT OF GREAT IMPORTANCE.

So entirely was Dick Turpin's attention occupied by this fresh incident, that for the time being he became quite oblivious of the fact that the reason he was waiting there was that he was in expectation of the return of his comrades.

As the reader has no doubt surmised, the three horsemen, who so suddenly made their appearance, were no other than our old acquaintances, Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack.

Dick Turpin, when he heard them coming, connected the sound which they made in their approach with the cause of Maud's alarm, and the attitude in which they found him was a very hostile and threatening one.

His comrades looked all the surprise they felt, but Dick, perceiving in a moment the mistake he had made, flung down his sword, and, springing forward, greeted them warmly.

He overwhelmed them with questions as to the cause of their late appearance, but Tom, bidding him be patient, said he would relate all at the first opportunity.

So saying, he and Sixteen-String Jack sprang nimbly off their steeds, and then going towards Claude Duval, assisted him to alight.

This was the first intimation Turpin had that his comrade had met with a misfortune, and again he addressed a dozen eager questions, but all the information he could gather was that Claude had been wounded.

The remainder of the journey of the three highwaymen to the chase after we last saw them was, as we had anticipated, performed without the occurrence of any particular incident, and without their encountering a single human being.

At times a dreadful sensation of weakness and exhaustion would come over Claude, but on each occasion he rallied his failing energies by the thought that he had now only a short distance to go.

As we have seen, he gained the chase in safety.

Tom King took charge of the horses, and led them off by the bridle, while Sixteen-String Jack supported the steps of Claude Duval.

Dick Turpin and Maud brought up the rear.

The dawn of the new day was not far distant, and they debated whether they should enter the cavern or remain in the open air.

Dick, who knew the disagreeable sight which would be presented to them when they entered it, briefly described his adventure and encounter with the serpent.

The information that the cavern was frequented by such creatures was received by the three highwaymen with anything but pleasurable emotions.

It was only reasonable to suppose that where one had been seen there were others not very far distant.

Such companions as these they had a decided objection to, and they already exhibited a reluctance to re-enter the cavern.

Their unwillingness, however, was overruled by Claude Duval, who complained that his limbs were cramped with cold, and that he must have a fire to warm himself.

This decided the matter at once, and, overcoming their very natural repugnance, they bent their steps in the direction of the entrance.

At a word, however, from Dick Turpin, Tom King, having disposed of the horses, made his way into the cavern first, in order to remove, as well as he could, the disagreeable evidences which remained there of the creature's presence.

Dick and Maud held back until informed by Tom that all was ready, and that they might enter.

It was no wonder Claude complained of the cold.

He was in a condition now to be more than usually susceptible of its effects.

A keen east wind swept through the forest, and that dampness which always prevails soon after daybreak seemed to increase its chilliness.

As the wind blew upon them, it seemed to be laden with minute aqueous particles, of icy coldness.

The whole of the party, then, having been for some time subjected to it, felt the shelter of the cave to be very welcome and desirable.

Of course, the fire which Dick had left burning so many hours ago was extinct, and all traces of its warmth had dissipated; but Tom King had already heaped another pile of fuel on the hearthstone and ignited it.

Little more than smoke proceeded from it at present, but that state of things would soon be altered.

Claude Duval, who, now that all excitement was over, felt his weakness momentarily increase, was temporarily placed by Sixteen-String Jack upon a rude bench.

Leaving his side, he made his way to one of the inner chambers, and quickly returned with as many of the deer-skins as he could carry.

These he laid smoothly upon the floor of the cavern, near the fire, in such a manner as to form a comfortable-enough couch.

Upon this Claude was placed.

By the time this was done, the fire had begun to burn up and to diffuse a cheerful light and warmth around it.

The excitement of their meeting having now subsided, the cravings of nature began to make themselves felt.

All were hungry, but they were not at first able to see how their appetites should be appeased.

There was nothing whatever in the cave of an eatable character, so an excursion into the chase was imperative.

The matter was finally adjusted in this manner.

Claude Duval, whose weakness proceeded in a great measure from hunger, was clearly not competent to accompany them; so he was left upon his couch of deer-skins by the fireside.

Maud was to remain with him, and replenish the fire when requisite.

Dick Turpin, Tom King, and Sixteen-String Jack equipped themselves for a hunting expedition, and set forth in order to obtain something comestible which would serve them for a breakfast.

There was little fear that they would be any longer away than they were compelled, for they were almost famished.

Then they would not be likely to be detained in consequence of the scarcity of game.

Indeed it was more than probable that they would be

able to obtain what they required immediately upon gaining the entrance of the cavern.

Such, however, on the present occasion was destined not to be the case.

Maud showed great unwillingness to part with Dick, but the thought that he was not going far away, and would not be absent long, somewhat reconciled her to it.

Upon entering the chase, after having carefully concealed the entrance to the cave, Dick Turpin demanded from his two comrades a full account of all that happened since they last parted with each other.

This they were well able to do: and as Claude had told them all that happened to himself, they were in a position to present Dick with a tolerably well-connected account of all that had taken place.

With all this the reader is acquainted.

It was not, however, until this relation was fairly over that they thought in good earnest of the errand upon which they had been sent, and they now began to look about them for game of some description.

There was a considerable risk in firing a pistol, as they well knew, but there was no hope of their being able to avoid doing so.

In trampling through the bushes, a large deer suddenly started up, and set off at full speed.

Two young fawns were with her, and hastily aiming at one, Dick fired.

The shot was a true one.

The bullet did its work, and the pretty, innocent looking creature, which it really seemed an act of cruelty to slay, rolled over and over upon the turf, mortally hurt.

The mother of the fawn, perceiving what had taken place, stopped suddenly short in her course and bounded to its side.

The speedy approach of our three friends, however, startled it away.

This was a lucky shot, and the purpose with which they set out having been fully accomplished by it, Tom King slung the little creature over his shoulder, and they bent their steps towards the cavern, from which, while so occupied with conversation, they had strayed much further than they were aware of.

The fawn was now quite dead, and as it was a very young one its weight was inconsiderable, and Tom carried it with ease.

On their way back Dick spoke in a rather serious tone of voice to his comrades.

It was unlike the mode in which he generally addressed them, and in consequence it commanded their instant attention.

"My friends," said Turpin, "during your absence something has occurred with which it is necessary that you should be made acquainted, and when I have told you what this is, I shall expect to receive your advice upon the matter."

This commencement filled his two comrades with curiosity, and they impatiently requested him to begin.

"It may be," continued Dick, "that this may turn out to be an unimportant affair, but there is doubt in it, and where there is doubt with us there is danger."

His companions assented.

"Early yesterday morning, after the adventure with the serpent in the cavern, which I have already related to you, Maud and myself made our way towards the spot at which I expected you to arrive. Just as we reached it, Maud started suddenly, and asked me whether I had heard anything? I replied in the negative, and at the same time inquired what kind of sound she had heard? She described it as though some persons were creeping through the bushes, and endeavouring to do so without being heard."

Tom and Jack both started.

The matter was more serious than they had imagined.

Dick continued to speak with great rapidity.

"Knowing how much she had been alarmed such a short time before, I fancied she must have deceived herself as to the character of the sound, which probably was one common to the forest. Under this impression I soothed her as well as I could, and, having succeeded in calming her apprehension, I thought no more about the matter. Just before your arrival, however, and while we were standing almost on the same spot, I felt Maud suddenly clinging to my arm with great violence, turning towards her, I found her whole countenance exhibiting the utmost terror. Upon inquiring what had alarmed her, she informed me that she had been startled by a repetition of the sound she had previously heard, and, in addition, she had seen some dark object among the bushes move suddenly, which she fancied was the form of a man This was sufficient to alarm me I could not believe that she had been twice led into the same error. At my request, she pointed out the particular spot from which the sound had appeared to come, and where she had seen the figure move. Sword in hand, I rushed in that direction, and searched the underwood narrowly around. I could, however, find nothing. Just then I heard you approaching. It was only natural that I should connect this sound with what had so recently taken place, and this will account for the attitude in which, to your surprise, no doubt you found me."

This communication, which Dick thus made to them, was of so important a character, that they forebore to interrupt him, but listened with the utmost attention to all he had to say.

When he had finished, Tom King said—

"This is, indeed, a strange affair, and my heart misgives me much respecting it."

"What do you think, then?" asked Dick.

"I dread the worst."

"So do I," coincided Sixteen-String Jack.

"It seems, then, that we are unanimous," said Turpin.

"You may depend," said Tom King, "that in some mysterious way or other our place of retreat has been discovered. Maud, no doubt, is right; and what she heard was some spy stealing cautiously through the bushes, and endeavouring to hear your conversation."

"If such is the case," said Turpin, "and I fear what you say is only too correct, the sooner we leave this place the better it will be for us."

"I do not quite agree with you," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Why not?"

"Because you have nothing like proof that all this is correct. The sounds Maud has doubtless heard might easily have been produced by some harmless denizen of the chase, and it would be vexatious if we were driven from a secure retreat by the mere shadow of danger."

"You are right, Jack; but what do you propose should be done?"

"In the first place, that we lose no time in returning to the cavern; and, in the second, that we take no active steps in the matter until we receive some more definitive intelligence than we are in possession of. We can be vigilant. The apprehended danger may pass away, but let things be how they may, we cannot improve our position by leaving the chase."

CHAPTER CCCLXXXVIII.

TOM KING DETECTS THE SPY, AND DICK TURPIN COMMANDS HIS IMMEDIATE EXECUTION.

THE view which Sixteen-String Jack had taken of this rather puzzling question was a common one, and the conclusions to which he came were of such a rational character that they at once convinced his two auditors that nothing better could be done at present than to use extra vigilance, and be guided entirely by what events happened in the future.

Having come to this determination, the hearts of all three became lighter, and they made their way back to the cavern as rapidly as they could.

Upon their arrival, they found Claude Duval and Maud anxiously awaiting their return.

In the best manner they could the fawn was dressed and cooked, and in a short time they had quite a tempting meal before them.

Not in the length and breadth of all England could five persons be found who sat down to a meal with a keener relish.

While it was discussed not a word was said respecting their late conversation.

There was nothing better than water to wash down the delicious viand, but of this there was plenty of excellent quality.

This was an inconvenience which they could easily put up with.

The effect of this meal upon Claude was really astound-

ing, and it was now the extraordinary virtues of the medicine that he had taken began to manifest themselves.

He grew rapidly stronger, until at length, when the meal was concluded, he declared that he had never felt better in his life.

His comrades advised him, however, not to try his strength too far.

He, however, laughed at their caution, and stated that he felt nothing but a slight soreness from his wound.

Lightly and cheerfully they talked about their past and future dangers, and, for a time, all was merriment.

It was destined to be of short duration.

A sharp, crackling noise, which was heard plainly above other sounds, startled them all.

Tom King was the first to spring to his feet.

He drew his sword.

His actions were rapidly imitated by his companions, upon whose faces wonderment was most visibly impressed.

The sound which startled them evidently came from the passage which led from the cavern into the open air.

"I know the meaning of that sound," said Tom King, speaking rapidly; "our worst suspicions are confirmed. Some one has entered the passage. I am sure of it, because I took the precaution when we came in just now to place several dry twigs just inside the entrance to the passage. Some one has trodden upon them. That is the explanation of the sounds we have heard."

These words produced an electrical effect.

No sooner had he spoken than Tom King, with the velocity of an arrow, rushed down the passage.

His companions were close behind him.

In his excitement, Claude Duval forgot all about his having received a wound.

Upon reaching the end of the passage, there appeared every confirmation of the truth of what Tom King had said.

When, a short time before, they had passed through the secret opening in the rocks, Tom had handed the fawn to Dick, while he replaced the bush in its proper position.

It was while doing this that the thought occurred to him that he might as well adopt some simple means which would inform them at once if any other person attempted to enter the cavern.

For this purpose he had, as he had hastily stated, placed several dry twigs just within the passage, in such a position that one of them could not fail to be trodden upon, the immediate result of which would be a snap of sufficient loudness to reach his ears.

This had evidently happened, and he had reason to congratulate himself upon his forethought in putting such a scheme into execution.

Upon reaching the end of the passage, instead of things presenting the same appearance as they did when he left them, the bush was found drawn away and trampled upon the ground.

Not heeding this, the highwaymen gave one bound and were in the open air.

The first thing that struck their notice was a rustling sound, and a commotion among the bushes at a little distance.

They rushed in that direction, but, before they could reach the spot, they saw a man spring to his feet and run rapidly across the chase.

They commenced a pursuit immediately; and how it would have terminated would have been hard to tell, had not the flying man, in his blind speed, caught his foot against the root of a tree, which projected rather above the ground.

The result of this was that he measured his full length upon the turf, and, before he could regain his feet, the highwaymen were upon him.

All three seized him, and compelled him to rise.

The man trembled in every limb.

Our friends looked at him with curiosity.

He was dressed in a very ragged suit of clothes, but there were several things connected with them which at once convinced the highwaymen that they were merely donned for the purposes of disguise.

This man had evidently been set by some one as a spy upon their actions, but he had incautiously betrayed himself.

To this conclusion they unanimously came.

Here, then, was no doubt the explanation of the slight sounds which the quick ear of Maud had caught, and which she fancied were produced by some one stealing stealthily among the bushes.

She was unquestionably right.

In a stern voice Dick Turpin addressed himself to this man.

"Who are you?" he asked; "what want you here?"

The man endeavoured to put on an air of determination, and to brazen it out.

"What's that to you?" he said; "I have as much right to be here as you."

"I should advise you to be a little more civil," said Claude Duval, "or it may be the worse for you."

"Answer me at once," said Dick; "tell me what you are doing here!"

"That's my business."

"You will find it concerns me as well as yourself."

"Shall I? I don't see that. This ere chase is as free to me as it is to you."

"That may be; but why were you stealing into the cavern?"

"That's my business."

"Then am I to understand by that that you refuse to give any account of yourself?"

"Yes—for I don't see why you ought to ask it."

All the time this little conversation had been going forward the man had been fumbling with his hands after something.

Our friends still retained their grasp upon him, but allowed him this much liberty, for they were curious to know what he was about to do.

The reader may be sure that not one of his motions escaped the observation of the highwaymen, by whom he was held captive.

With great suddenness, this man, after fumbling in the breast of the coat he wore, produced a bugle.

With a wrench, he freed his arm sufficiently to enable him to place this to his lips.

Another moment and he would have, doubtless, produced a loud note from the instrument; but ere he could command his breath to do so, Tom King dashed it from his hand.

"Ho! ho! my fine fellow," he said. "You are a dangerous customer, I see, but we know you now."

The man groaned and gnashed his teeth with rage at being prevented from giving this signal with the bugle.

He was defeated, and he made the most desperate exertions to get free.

It was in vain, however.

The grasp by which our friends held him was too tight a one to be shaken off very easily.

His struggles were futile.

The aspect of affairs was becoming serious, far more serious, in fact, than they had imagined.

Dick was resolved to obtain all the information he could from this man.

There was but one way by which he could hope to succeed in this design, and that was by threatening to take his life.

In his struggles with Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack, a portion of his clothing had been dragged aside, and Turpin now perceived that round his waist this man had got a quantity of strong rope coiled.

For what purpose this was intended he was at a loss to think, though Dick was aware that police-officers occasionally provided themselves in this manner when out upon any dangerous service, in case rope should be required to securely bind their prisoners.

But there was something about this man's appearance which was quite unlike that presented by a police-officer, and Dick came to the conclusion that he did not belong to that fraternity.

As soon as he spied the rope, our hero hastened up to the man, and, taking hold of it, quickly unwound it.

The spy looked at him apprehensively.

The piece of rope was a good length; and Dick, finding he had plenty to serve his ulterior purpose, drew his sword and cut off a portion of it.

He then beckoned to Claude to assist him, while he said to his two other comrades—

"Hold him firmly, my friends, and we will pinion his arms behind him with this convenient bit of rope we've



[THE DRAGOONS KEEP WATCH FOR THE HIGHWAYMEN IN THE OLD CAVERN.]

he has been kind enough to furnish us with, and then you will not have so much trouble with him."

Claude advanced, and, with Turpin's assistance, they quickly tied the spy's arms securely behind his back.

To hold him then became a comparatively easy matter.

"Now," said Dick, "once for all, and all for once, will you tell us your business in this wood?"

"I will not."

"What was your intention when you tried to blow that bugle?"

"I decline to say."

"Very well, then. The bird that can sing and won't sing must be made to sing."

The spy looked at Dick suspiciously as he uttered this rather enigmatical speech.

But he was not for long left in doubt as to what he meant by it.

Dick Turpin now stooped down, and picked up the longest piece of rope.

The spy watched him eagerly.

His first proceeding was to make a running noose in it.

He did this with great deliberation.

Having tied the knot to his entire satisfaction, Dick looked round for a tree which had a good stout projecting branch not many feet from the ground.

In Enfield Chase he had not to look far to find a tree of this description.

Indeed, he was standing within two yards of one, which could not have done better if it had been made on purpose.

Coiling the rope round his hand, Dick swung it backwards and forwards several times, and then, having taken his aim, threw it over the arm of the tree.

The first time he did not succeed in his object, but he did the second.

He pulled the rope, and, finding it all right, he cried to his comrades—

"Lead the prisoner this way, and we will soon see whether he will speak or not."

The man attempted a resistance, but he felt it was so utterly useless, that he gave in at once, and reluctantly suffered himself to be led to the tree.

Dick held that end of the rope which had the noose in it, and, as soon as the man was led beneath the tree he dropped the noose over his head.

With one snatch he drew it just tight enough for the man to feel what was round his neck.

Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack did not require to be told to take hold of the other end of the rope.

They did that at once.

Then Turpin stood back a few paces.

Addressing the man, he said—

"I am willing to give you a chance for your life, but the only means by which it can be spared will be by your disclosing your true object in stealing into the cavern."

"I tell you that's no business of yours."

"Very well, then; all I can say is you must perish in your obstinacy. I shall give you three minutes to make up your mind. If, at the end of that time, you do not think fit to make a full disclosure, I shall give the word of command to those who hold the rope, and up you will go at once! Now, understand, you have three minutes to decide whether you will be hanged, or whether you will give me the information I require."

Dick spoke these words in a very resolute and menacing tone, and the man looked at him furtively, as though anxious to ascertain whether he was in earnest.

But Dick's countenance was stern, and fully corresponded with the words he had just uttered.

Turning to Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack, Dick said—

"Be prepared, comrades, to swing him up the moment I utter the word 'now.' You need not wait for any further instructions, but pull him up at once, for we have no time to spare, and the sooner this job is over the better."

"All right, captain," was the reply, given with great readiness, and willingness too the man thought, and he glared around him with increased apprehensiveness.

"Time is speeding," said Dick; "that you are a spy, I feel convinced, and with your object I am pretty well acquainted, but I desire some more definite information than I possess. Quick, tell me, and spare your miserable life."

"I have nothing to tell," said the man, doggedly.

"That may be a misfortune, and it may be a fault. Anyhow, I am sorry for it, for if you do not tell me what I want to know, up you will go."

The man was silent.

"Will you tell me, or will you not? I ask you now for the last time."

"I have nothing to tell."

"Very well; I am sorry for that. Now, my comrades, up with him!"

CHAPTER CCCLXXXIX.

THE SPY CONSENTS TO SAVE HIS LIFE BY MAKING A FULL CONFESSION.

ALTHOUGH the tone in which Dick Turpin had spoken was so firm and decided, that the spy felt sure he was in earnest, yet the reader, from his knowledge of our hero's character, may almost feel certain that it was never his intention to murder this man in cold blood—for, had he swung him up to the bough of the old tree, by no other name could the deed be designated.

Such a proceeding as this was entirely foreign to Dick's nature; and this his comrades well knew, although the spy was ignorant of it.

Thus was it, then, that, even after his injunctions, the command he had given was not put into immediate execution.

Dick had not communicated his precise intentions, but they knew quite well how they were to act without his doing so.

Accordingly, the moment their captain spoke, they, with great apparent good earnest, gave the rope a sudden jerk, which tightened it in a most uncomfortable manner round the spy's throat.

At this manifestation, which seemed remarkably real and earnest, the man altered his mind about holding his peace.

He believed that, in another second, a vigorous pull at the rope would lift him completely off his legs.

When that was once done, it would be out of his power to speak, no matter how much he might then wish to save his life by making a full disclosure.

Instantly, then, he bawled out that he would tell all if they would only spare his life.

This was enough, and exactly what Dick Turpin required.

He made a signal to his three comrades with his hand, which they immediately understood.

They slackened the rope, and the man, with chattering teeth and rolling eyes, again implored them to spare his life.

His close proximity to death had frightened him exceedingly.

At first he had thought his life was not in danger, but the apparent earnestness of our friends deceived him.

"As I told you," said Turpin, still speaking as resolutely as before, "you have a chance of your life, if you only like to avail yourself of it. The only condition upon which your life can be spared is, that you at once disclose your object in creeping about the chase, and stealing into the cavern."

"And if I do this you will spare my life?"

"Most certainly; I pledge you my word to that effect."

"Take the rope off my neck, then."

"Not just at present, my friend. In order to guard against the possibility of future trouble, we will just listen to what you have got to say with the rope still round your neck."

While Dick spoke these words, the spy looked very eagerly all round him, on every side, and assumed, at the same time, a listening attitude, as though he was in expectation either of seeing or hearing something which would benefit him in his present strait.

This was not lost upon the highwaymen, and they continued to observe his countenance attentively.

They then perceived that it became clouded with disappointment.

"Come," said Dick, again, "if you are going to make us any disclosures, speak at once, for we cannot afford to waste time by remaining here. Either speak or not, just as you please. We shall not dally, I assure you; so, you have your choice of life or death before you, and we cannot be blamed if you choose the latter."

"What do you want to know?"

"That you have already been told. Will you give us the information we require, or not? If you won't, up you go."

By way of a comment upon what Dick had just said, Tom King jerked the rope again to the dismay of the spy, who thought he was going to be lifted off his feet.

"I will tell you!" he yelled. "I am a telling you. Do not hang me up. Let go of the rope. I am telling you, I tell you!"

The rope was slackened again.

"I know you all four," continued the spy, now speaking with great volubility, and pointing successively to the highwaymen in the order indicated by the following—"You are Dick Turpin, you are Tom King, you are Claude Duval, and you are Sixteen-String Jack."

"You are quite correct," said Dick, who took upon himself to reply for his comrades; "but does it not strike you that it is a very dangerous piece of information for you to avow yourself in possession of?"

The spy looked at him uneasily.

"You have promised to spare my life," he said, at length.

"True, true," replied Turpin, as though suddenly recollecting himself. "Go on. You know us; but what else? We wish to hear something about you."

"I suppose you are aware," said the man, "that the military have been called out in quest of you?"

"No, I did not know it," exclaimed Dick, who was betrayed into this admission by the surprise which the unexpected piece of intelligence occasioned him.

"Then, if you don't know that," said the spy, "I suppose you are not aware that there is a reward of a hundred pounds for anyone who can give any precise information as to your whereabouts."

"Proceed," said Dick. "What of that?"

"There is such a reward offered, and I can tell you a good many have been trying to earn it, but no one has succeeded as yet. You must understand it don't apply to

any way to your capture, but the money will be given to any one who can lead the military to where you are."

"Oh! indeed. Then I suppose this will account for your presence here?"

"Well, it might."

Answer me at once, and decisively; is this what brought you here."

"It was."

"That will do; I know what to make of such answers as these. And now, then, there is something else. How came you to know we were here?"

"I thought this was a likely place for you to hide."

This might be a correct answer, and it might not; but our friends were compelled to take it, and it was sufficiently plausible as not to be open to a positive doubt."

"But how did you recognise us? Tell us that," interrupted Tom King.

The man hesitated a moment, and then he replied—

"From the printed descriptions which I have seen, you are very accurately described."

"Oh! indeed; that is it."

"Yes, gentlemen, it is, I assure you."

"And you have skulked about the chase, finding out all you could, and I suppose by this means discovered the secret entrance to the cavern?"

"I found the place where you disappeared, and guessed it led to a cavern. I was trying to find out when I trod on those cursed twigs, and then you heard me."

"Just so, and your capture followed. There is one thing, however, you must tell us, and tell us truly, otherwise you swing."

"What is it?"

"To whom have you communicated the important discovery you have made?"

"No one, more's the pity!"

"I don't agree with you there."

The man looked sullen, and said nothing.

What he had stated entirely agreed with what they had suspected, and their situation was very critical.

The chief difficulty in which they now found themselves was whether they were to believe all that the man had told them.

It might be that he had spoken the truth, and it might be that he had lied, but which it was they were quite unable to tell.

"Release me!" exclaimed the man. "I have kept my word, and told you all. Let me go."

"Do you think we are mad?"

"You promised to spare my life."

"I know I did; but I did not say a word about setting you at liberty—you must be mad to think of such a thing."

"Release me!" said the man. "Let me go, and I will promise not to reveal a word."

"It is, perhaps, an unfortunate thing, but we cannot trust you. Wait a moment. You are quite secure as you are, and I will confer with my comrades as to what we are to do with you."

The spy looked uneasy when he heard this, and, for the first time, began to wonder what fate was in reserve for him.

Not heeding this, however, Dick Turpin crossed the sward to the spot upon which his comrades stood, holding the rope.

An anxious consultation now ensued, which the spy watched with such intentness as a man only could watch who happened to be in his situation.

He could gather little that was satisfactory from the countenances of the highwaymen.

Our friends were now exceedingly puzzled, and for a long time they were unable to decide what would be the best thing they could do with their prisoner.

To take his life, even had they at first felt inclined to do so, they could not, after having promised to spare him as they had.

To release him would be an act of utter madness, for it is not likely that he would hold his peace respecting these events, no matter how many oaths he might take to do so.

To keep him a prisoner seemed no less disagreeable than embarrassing and impossible, so that, whichever way the highwaymen looked at the matter, nothing but difficulty was presented to them.

It was necessary, too, that they should decide quickly, in order that they might have an opportunity to consult together respecting this fresh danger with which they were menaced.

They seemed to be driven to the resource of keeping him a prisoner, but they had no means of doing this properly, and he was almost certain to escape.

At any rate, there was no place in the cavern where he could be kept in security.

At length, after a great many suggestions had been made, and the matter had been looked at from every possible point of view, Sixteen-String Jack hit upon an expedient.

It was not, perhaps, quite so good a one as might be devised, but, as no better could be proposed, they resolved to adopt it.

The proposition was a simple one.

It was this.

The spy was to be led, pinioned as he was, into the deepest recesses of the wood.

He was then to be bound both hand and foot, and afterwards to be blindfolded and gagged.

In this hopeless and helpless condition he was to be bound to a tree, with the rope which was at that moment about his neck.

This, at first sight, looked a very merciless proceeding, and one little short of murder; but, as Claude suggested, it would do no harm for the man to remain there while they decided as to what proceedings should be taken.

This, then, was ultimately agreed to.

The spy knew in a moment by their dispersing that they had come to a decision, and he wondered what would now happen to him.

So great was his impatience, that he implored to be enlightened on this point.

But our friends were deaf to his entreaties.

"Ask no questions," said Dick. "Come with us; you will know what your fate will be soon enough."

The man, finding that part of their intention was to march him away from the spot where he now was, made up his mind not to stir on any account.

As for our friends, having made up their minds as to what they should do, they, with great speed, set about carrying out their design.

The piece of rope was pulled off the bough, and the prisoner requested to move.

However, true to his determination, he refused to budge an inch.

"Leave me to deal with him," said Dick Turpin, as soon as he discovered what the man's intentions were, "leave me to deal with him, and you will see he will be all right enough then."

As he spoke, our hero once more drew his sword.

The rope, as we have said, had been pulled down off the bough, but it had not been removed from the prisoner's neck, round which it still clung with unpleasant tightness so far as his own comfort was concerned.

Dick held his sword in his right hand, and with his left he caught hold of the rope about four feet from the noose.

"Now," he said, to the spy, "follow those who walk before you. If you refuse, I shall proceed to harsh measures, and compel you."

The man still persisted in remaining as though his feet were rooted to the ground.

Dick Turpin stood behind him, and, extending his sword, he pricked him with it.

The incision he made was only just in the skin, but the spy felt it, and, uttering a howl of agony, sprang forward several paces involuntarily.

Dick had touched him in about the tenderest part of his person.

"Now," he cried, "go on, without you want it again."

The pain of the one slight wound he had already received seemed, however, to be quite sufficient for the spy.

He walked on after Turpin's three comrades with all imaginable submission.

Presently, however, when he found that he was being conducted into the darkest and gloomiest portion of the chase, he came to a desperate stand.

But Dick was prepared for him.

He still held the sword easily in his grasp, and once more punctured a hole in the spy's skin with it.

Another howl of agony was the result, and he continued on his way again without murmuring.

Into the deepest recesses of the chase the three highwaymen directed their footsteps.

The ground beneath their feet was soft and swampy, and thickly overgrown with rank vegetation such as is ever to be found on such a soil.

At every step they took their feet sank into the morass, but, altogether heedless of this, they pushed onwards.

Not only, then, did the undergrowth of the forest increase tremendously in its exuberance and rankness, but the trees themselves—the legitimate occupiers of the ground—grew rapidly larger.

The circumferences of their trunks increased until the girth was prodigious, and their branches, shooting out in every direction, crossed and recrossed each other to such an extent, that they almost shut out the light of day.

At length our friends paused, imagining they had reached a spot well suited to their purpose.

The spy looked apprehensively around him, and, as well as he could, into the countenances of his captors—endeavouring to gather from their expression some idea as to his doom.

Nothing was satisfactory or cheering.

Cold drops of perspiration started out upon his trembling body, and he once more glanced around him.

Of all others he thought that spot best calculated for the commission of some awful crime, and he shuddered as the conviction forced itself upon him that he was destined to be the victim.

"Help — help!" he shrieked. "Mercy — mercy! You promised faithfully to spare my life if I would tell you all, and I have done so! Mercy—mercy! Spare my life, and I will do anything you wish!"

"We have no intention of taking your life," said Dick, "without you compel us to do so by continuing to cry out in the manner you did a moment ago. We are going to keep you in safety, that's all."

There was nothing very encouraging in this; but the spy, when thus again assured that no harm was intended him, so far as his life was concerned, gathered hope from it.

Without further delay, our friends now proceeded to carry out their arrangements.

A piece more of the cord was cut off, and with this the spy's ankles were tied together.

His arms were already pinioned; and in this perfectly helpless condition he was placed in an upright position against the trunk of one of the trees.

The rope was then removed from his neck, and with it his body was securely and firmly bound to the tree.

All that now remained was to blindfold and gag him.

Despite his remonstrances and entreaties, our friends accomplished their purpose.

They stepped back a pace, and, on looking at their work, came to the conclusion that for a time he was perfectly secure, and what they were eventually to do with him would be a matter for future consideration.

They had first of all their own affairs to settle.

Seeing him all secure, they turned back to the cave, taking precautions to leave such a track as would enable them to proceed direct to the spot upon another occasion.

During their walk back to the cave, the information the spy had given them was thoroughly canvassed.

It was not, however, until the last moment that Dick Turpin recollected that, when they had left the cave with so much precipitation, they had left Maud in it.

What had become of her, he asked himself, during his absence?

Terrified and alarmed she would sure to be; and, under the dominion of those feelings, she would probably rush out of the cave in search of them, and fall into some danger.

With his heart oppressed with forebodings, and over and over reproaching himself for having left the cavern in such a manner, Dick Turpin hastened back, having communicated his fears to his comrades, who shared them in an equal degree with himself.

But they had yet far to go.

The distance from the spot where they had captured the spy to the cave was considerable, and Dick's anxiety now made it seem three times as far as it really was. Regardless of the obstacles which lay before him, he rushed onward, forgetful of everything but the fact that, through his carelessness, Maud would certainly suffer much uneasiness, if not danger.

Leaving him for a few moments, however, we will direct the attention of the reader to a widely different scene which took place some hours before the events we have just described, and the consequences of which proved eminently disastrous to our friends.

It is in this way we shall account for the unexpected presence of the spy, and show how far correct the account was which he gave to Dick Turpin and his three companions.

CHAPTER CCCXC.

GIVES SOME INFORMATION ABOUT THE CAPTAIN OF A DETACHMENT OF DRAGOONS, AND RELATES HOW A SPY WAS SENT TO ENFIELD CHASE TO DISCOVER THE HIGHWAYMEN.

It was just about dawn on the morning preceding the one upon which Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack discovered the apparently lifeless form of Claude Duval in the roadway, that the officer in command of a small troop of dragoons, whose duty, in common with many others, was to patrol the roads in search of the four highwaymen, called out "Halt!" to his men.

The word was pronounced in the true military manner, and the little troop at once reined in their steeds.

There was for a moment the faint jingling of accoutrements, and then all was still.

The piece of roadway to which this particular troop had been appointed to patrol was at no very great distance from Enfield Chase, which was, when they turned their eyes in one direction, a very conspicuous object.

It was, in fact, the highroad leading from London to Enfield town. The dragoons wondered for what purpose they had been told to halt, and looked rather curiously towards their captain for an explanation.

The detachment consisted of twelve well-mounted and well-armed men, and the officer who had the command, and who assumed by courtesy the title of captain, made the thirteenth.

It must not be supposed that there was one of these men who at all admired the duty upon which he had been sent.

Indeed, it is questionable whether any feeling could be more universal than this among all the military.

To do what was, as they considered, their own duty, they never grumbled, but they did not like the idea of being made police-officers of, or being got to do that which the regular force had failed to accomplish.

They had no resource, however, but to submit to the commands of their superior officers; the only thing they were left to do was to grumble, and this they did to their hearts' content.

Nevertheless, it did not reconcile them in the least degree to the duty they had to perform.

Perhaps the reader can, in his imagination, realize the difference between spending the night in barracks, with only the customary hours of guard, and between this duty upon which the dragoons were now sent.

For the whole of the live-long night — no matter whether it was wet or fine, cold or warm — they had to mount their horses, and pace up and down a certain piece of road which was appointed them, until the rising sun should warn them that their watch was over.

No doubt the persons who travelled just at that period very much approved of the additional safety with which they performed their journey, but these were the only persons who benefited by the manœuvre.

The authorities made a mistake in sending men to do that work for which they felt the greatest possible amount of dislike, and they could scarcely expect it to be performed efficiently.

They looked only at the rewards which were offered, and certainly anyone would have thought that these were large and tempting enough to induce them to do anything, no matter how repugnant.

The united rewards for the capture and conviction of the four highwaymen amounted to a sum considerably over two thousand pounds, and in addition to this very large amount, a further sum of one hundred pounds had recently been offered to anyone who would give information as to where these daring characters were to be found.

The Secretary of State, who had taken the affair in

hand on behalf on the Government, was much annoyed to think our friends should have so completely disappeared as they had, for nothing had been heard of them for more than a week after the burning of Newgate, although inquiries had been made in every possible direction

This reward of a hundred pounds, however, to be paid to anyone who should merely disclose or discover where they were lurking, no matter whether they were captured or not, would, he flattered himself, be productive of some very gratifying result.

But he was disappointed and deceived.

Nothing came of this extraordinary offer, which he thought was such a master-stroke of policy; and he was now at his wits' end to know what else he could devise.

Such was the precise aspect of affairs upon the morning to which we now desire to direct the reader's particular attention.

The captain of the little troop, as we have said, called out to his men to halt just about the time when they were thinking that, for that one night at least, their lonely task was over.

What the captain was going to say to them they could not for the life of them conceive, but they were not for long left in darkness upon this point.

"My lads," said this officer, "we have done one more night of this disagreeable duty—I call it a disagreeable duty, and so do all of you, I know."

Various murmurs came from the troop, but silence immediately ensued, and the captain continued—

"I don't like this any better than you do; and the sooner we cease to be police-officers the better I shall be pleased. I am tolerably certain, though, that we shall not be called off this duty until these highwaymen are captured. From this, it is clear, our wisest plan will be to catch them, if we can. The reward will be well worth having, and then there will be an end to this work."

"That's all very well, captain," said one of the soldiers; "but where are we to look for these fellows? We should like to set eyes on them well enough, but they appear to have vanished into air."

"They do," replied the captain, "and that is what I wanted to talk to you about."

The men bent forward in their saddles, eager to hear what he had to say.

"There is one thing," began the captain, "which is quite certain, and that is, that these fellows have gone into hiding somewhere, and have made up their minds not to stir from their retreat until this storm has blown over. They have, doubtless, taken their measures very cleverly; and, while the roads continue to be guarded like they are, depend upon it, they will never make their appearance. They will tire our patience out first, I am certain."

"There's no doubt about that, if you like, captain," said the man who had before spoken, and who seemed to be the privileged mouthpiece of his comrades. "I say, captain, there is no doubt about that; for, hang me! if they havn't done that already!"

There was a faint laugh, and something like applause, from the remainder, as he said this.

The captain continued—

"Your patience is exhausted, no doubt; but you must wait a little longer. I have something which I want to propose to you; and, unless I am very much mistaken, it will be the means, not only of our obtaining and dividing among us all the rewards offered, but also free us from this everlasting pacing up and down a dreary road."

This announcement on the part of their captain was received with acclamation, which he was too well pleased to hear to attempt to suppress.

The curiosity of the men, however, who were anxiously impatient to hear what he had to propose, effectually prevented its endurance for any length of time.

"I think we can take for granted," he resumed, "that these gentlemen are hiding themselves somewhere. If they were not, we must have heard of them before now. Taking this for granted, I have occupied myself with thinking in this way:—'Suppose I was one of these highwaymen,' I said to myself,' where should I look to find a place that would shelter me—some place where I should not be found?' For a long time I could not think where would be best, until all at once the idea occurred to me that I should try to find some out-of-the-way place in the country where few people were ever about, and where my enemies were unlikely to look for me. Well, when I thought this far, I was able to get farther. I thought of what part of the country we happened to be in, and it seemed just the sort of place that I had made up my mind would be suitable, for there's no houses anywhere near. However, I needn't go through with my thoughts; it will do if I tell you the conclusion I have come to. It is this. Do you see that great wood yonder?"

As he spoke he raised his hand and pointed to Enfield Chase, the topmost trees of which the rising sun had just began to tinge with a beautiful golden hue.

"Yes, yes; we see it," exclaimed the dragoons, "and we know it too; that's Enfield Chase."

"As you say, it is Enfield Chase. Now, I only go by hearsay, but I believe it is a more extensive forest than most people imagine, and, to make a long matter short, it's my opinion, though I have no more grounds for it than I have told you, that Dick Turpin and his three companions are to be found somewhere in it!"

A deep silence followed the utterance of this very remarkable speech, during which the dragoons pondered over the idea which had been suggested to them, and which was what they had never suspected.

The more they reflected, the more likely they thought that either in this or some similar place the four highwaymen were hiding.

They said as much to the captain, who was naturally pleased to find his own notion appeared a probable one to other persons besides himself.

"We agree so far, then," he said, "and now listen to what I have further got to say. As you all know, there's a hundred pounds to be earned by anyone who finds out whereabouts these highwaymen are. Now that's a very handsome sum, to my thinking, and if I was not put here as captain, I should try very hard if I could not earn it."

"How—how?"

"Patience, and I will tell you. I am shut out from this, but you are not. First of all, though, suppose those we want should be in the chase yonder. Well, if we all went in a body to look we should never find them, because it would be impossible to keep our presence a secret. The highwaymen, if they were there, would instantly take to their heels, and we should have all our trouble for nothing."

"But how should we do?"

"I have thought of a plan, and if you will only be patient for a moment I will tell you what it is."

The dragoons pressed forward with increased eagerness.

"Although I cannot be spared from the troop myself, as I am held responsible, there is no reason why one of you should not. Now, one of you had better get a disguise in the first place, and, having done that, creep stealthily into the forest. Whoever goes will then be able to skulk and pry about; and, in the end, if the highwaymen are there, cannot fail to discover them. If this is done it will be a capital thing, because we should be at hand to make them prisoners, and we should get in that way all the rewards; and, if they were not there, why we should have our trouble for nothing, and that would be no great matter. What do you think of that, my comrades?"

The dragoons were one and all enraptured with the brilliant scheme which had been placed—not without a good deal of art—before them.

Everyone was anxious that the affair should be commenced at once, so great was their impatience.

The captain was well pleased to perceive this, and stimulated them to the utmost of his power.

"It now remains to be decided which of you shall disguise himself and go on an exploring expedition into the forest."

"Send me, captain; send me, captain!" was the cry that came from every lip; for they were all equally desirous of availing themselves of this chance of earning the hundred pounds which would of course belong exclusively to the man who made the discovery.

"I cannot send you all," said the captain; "I would much rather that one volunteered to go upon this duty. Who will volunteer?"

All pressed forward in a moment.

"I see you all want to go; but that is impossible. You must adopt some mode of making a choice."

"How? captain—how?"

"You had better draw lots; that will be the fairest way."

Against this nothing could be said, and the proposal was at once agreed to and adopted.

They did this in a peculiar manner among themselves by tossing up a halfpenny, and guessing whether it was head or tail.

The result of this was, that the enviable duty fell upon one of their comrades.

Of all the rest, this man was least liked; and the captain, when he saw who fate had appointed to carry out his scheme, felt much vexed, and could not help wishing it was someone else.

To alter this, without producing disaffect, he well knew was impossible, so he very wisely forbore to make the least attempt.

The man stepped forward from the rest, and prepared to receive his instructions from the captain.

These were few, and were comprehended in what he had already said.

He was to disguise himself, steal into the wood, skulk about until he made a discovery, and, when he had learned all that he was able, he was to return and communicate the intelligence to the captain.

In addition to this, a bugle was given him, and, should anything extraordinary happen, or should he fall into any danger, he was to blow a long note upon it—the captain assuring him that he would take care to keep with his troop within reach of the sound.

Matters being thus adjusted, they retired to their quarters, where they passed the day; and the fortunate soldier, as he was considered, having had a long and refreshing sleep, disguised himself and set out for his destination.

He was sure he reached the chase unobserved, and skulked about for a long time without being able to find out anything.

This man, as the reader must be aware, was the very spy that our friends so fortunately captured.

It so happened that he entered the chase at a point far distant from that portion of it which was frequented by our friends.

Consequently the spy, although in the forest during the time the extraordinary marriage ceremony was performed between Dick Turpin and Maud, saw nothing of it.

He was a persevering man though, was this soldier, and he did not allow this want of immediate success to daunt him, and he determined not to lose all hope until he had thoroughly searched the chase in every part.

From its vast extent this would be a work of time.

Steadily pursuing his object, he worked his way round to that side of the chase opposite to the one by which he had entered it.

When he arrived here it was close upon daybreak.

Having reached the confines of the chase, he, with a feeling of disappointment and vexation which he could not repress, prepared to turn back again.

It was just as he was about to do this that he startled by a faint sound.

He paused instantly, and listened.

The sound came again, and with increased distinctness.

Anticipating, and yet scarcely daring to hope for a discovery, the spy crouched down until the dense undergrowth of the chase completely concealed his form.

The sound he had heard soon attained a decisive character.

It was the sound of footsteps.

Some persons were approaching.

Eagerly he strained his eyes, and gazed in the direction from which the sounds came.

Presently he could distinguish voices mingling with the footsteps.

The darkness baffled him, and he could see nothing but those objects which were very near him.

He was consoled by the knowledge that the sounds came nearer, and that the murmuring of voices became plainer.

At length the dim and shadowy figures appeared in sight, and continued to advance.

Fearful that if they continued they would discover his whereabouts, the spy, as silently as he was able, slunk through the bushes.

In his progress, however, he could not avoid making a slight rustling sound.

It was this that reached the ears of Maud; for, of course, it was no other than Dick Turpin and herself who the spy both saw and heard approaching.

A faint, gray light now began to steal through the trees.

It was dark in the chase long after it was light in the plains, and when the sun rose there was never more than a dim, hazy twilight.

This was the light that now began to bring different objects into view.

The spy was aware in a moment that his movements had excited suspicion, but he had the presence of mind to remain profoundly still.

The alarm then ceased.

By a slight change in his position, which he effected noiselessly, he could hear some of the conversation which passed between Maud and Dick, and it was not long before the spy was able, by attending to what they said, to come to the conclusion that Dick Turpin stood before him.

This was, indeed, important information, and, as day was fast coming on, he thought he had better creep away from where he was, and communicate the result of his errand to his officer.

With great caution he stole away, so far as he could tell, without giving a second alarm.

Once at a distance he rose to his feet, and made his way at full speed to the place where his comrades had taken up their quarters.

Upon arriving he at once had an interview with his captain, who was delighted with the information given him, though he could not help thinking it was too good to be true.

As the spy had obtained no information respecting the other three highwaymen, the captain dispatched him again the same night, with instructions to be particularly careful, and to find out all he could, so that, when the dragoons made an attack upon the highwaymen, they could make sure of the victory.

Again, then, this man set off on his perilous errand.

We have seen how it eventuated.

He went direct to the spot where he had seen Dick and Maud, and, somewhat to his surprise, found them still upon the same spot.

On this occasion he was enabled to approach them very closely without being perceived, and he also overheard sufficient of their conversation to let him know that they were waiting for the return of their comrades, who had gone off upon some expedition or other.

It was only now and then, however, that he could distinguish what was said, and he tried to creep still closer.

The quick ear of Maud Gouldman again detected him, and this time he had much difficulty in escaping the rigid search which Dick made after him.

However, he did escape, and shortly afterwards he saw three horsemen arrive upon the scene.

CHAPTER CCCXOI.

THE SPY BREAKS LOOSE FROM HIS BONDS, AND CARRIES IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO HIS CAPTAIN.

THE three horsemen who now arrived were no other than Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack.

As we have related in a precedent chapter, they had just returned from their long and perilous excursion.

Under the excitement of this meeting the alarm they had so recently experienced was forgotten.

They all repaired to the cavern, and the spy took good care to keep upon their track, though at a very safe distance.

The exultation which now filled his heart knew no bounds.

His task was not over yet, however.

He had to track the highwaymen to their secret haunt.

Like an Indian he kept upon their trail, halting when they halted, and all the time accommodating his own speed to theirs.

In this manner he followed them into the cavern.

But he did not see them enter.

Prudence compelled him to keep in the rear, and it thus happened that it was not until some time after they entered the cavern that he became aware that they had disappeared.

Where they had vanished to he knew not, but, being

able to form some idea as to the spot where the disappearance had taken place, he wisely resolved to conceal himself in the vicinity and keep watch.

His patience was not put to a very severe trial, for, as the reader will remember, almost as soon as the fire was lighted, Dick Turpin, Tom King, and Sixteen-String Jack set out upon their hunting expedition.

The spy did not see them emerge from the secret passage, but he caught sight of their almost immediately after they had done so.

Seeing the rocks before him, it was very natural that he should come to the conclusion that there was a hiding-place somewhere among them.

He argued, too, that the three highwaymen, who he could hear forcing their way through the trees, would presently return.

Under this impression, he took up such a position as enabled him to command a view of the whole face of the rock in which the opening of the secret passage was situated.

Here he waited patiently, and, ere long, he had cause to congratulate himself upon having acted in the way he had done.

He saw our three friends again make their appearance, and he saw that one of them carried a fawn slung over his shoulder.

Never did the soldier look so earnestly at all that now took place.

He saw the bush pulled down in the manner we have so frequently described—he saw the highwaymen enter the passage, and the bush pulled back into its former position, thus effectually concealing the opening through which they had passed.

For a moment or two after they had disappeared the spy remained profoundly still, moving neither hand nor foot, and keeping his eyes fixed upon the particular bush as though he feared that, if he once removed them, he should never be able to pitch upon it again.

Having waited what he considered a safe period, he cautiously stole towards it.

But in his progress he never gave one glance at where he was going, but steadfastly fixed his gaze upon the bush, and continued to do so until he had reached it.

Then he drew a long breath, and listened.

But all was still as the grave itself.

He drew yet closer.

He placed his ear against the prickly bush, and listened again.

But he could hear nothing.

The passage leading to the cavern was of too great a length for any sounds made by our friends to be audible where he stood.

What to do now the spy scarcely knew.

His curiosity was very strongly excited.

He wished to communicate his intelligence to the captain, and he wished to obtain even more information than was at present in his possession.

After a brief period of hesitation he resolved, as all continued so still, to pull down this bush as he had seen the highwaymen do, and find out what kind of place it was beyond.

Accordingly, he did so; and the result of this action we already know.

Seeing a long, dark passage, he made one step into it, and trod upon some of the dry twigs which Tom King had so cunningly placed there.

The crackling sound came with startling loudness in the silence of that rudely-vaulted passage; and, when he heard it, his heart seemed almost to turn to ice.

So overcome was he, that he could not move, but leant against the rocky wall.

The sound of Tom's voice, however, and the hasty trampling of feet, warned him of the danger of remaining, and, making a violent effort, he started off, and concealed himself among the nearest bushes.

Terrified by the rapid approach, he started off, and was hotly pursued by them.

With all that afterwards took place, up to the moment he was bound to the tree and left there, the reader is acquainted; and, now that these additional circumstances have been related, it will be seen that the confession he made to Dick Turpin was in most respects correct, though he concealed quite as much as he disclosed.

It will be now easy to understand why he was so bitterly disappointed when the bugle was dashed from his lips at the very moment he was going to blow a blast upon it, which would have brought his companions to his immediate assistance.

When he failed in this, a remarkable change in his behaviour took place, and much of the hardihood and courage which up to this period he had displayed evaporated.

When he was tied to the tree in the manner we have described, he listened with the greatest anxiety to the retreating footsteps of our friends.

He could not call out to them and implore them to return.

He was gagged, and, but for this circumstance, he would have made the wood resound with his oateries.

At last the footsteps of the highwaymen became inaudible, and then terrible thoughts took possession of his mind.

Of what he endured no description could convey an adequate idea.

After a time, however, he turned his attention to freeing himself from the bonds by which he was held.

But this appeared a really hopeless task.

The highwaymen had taken particular care that he should be quite secure, and although he struggled desperately to free himself from the ropes, the only result he achieved was to become more than ever convinced of their strength and security.

Never until that moment did he fully realize what useful things his hands were.

He would have given anything to have one of them at liberty.

He struggled hard at the cord, but to no purpose.

By continuing his efforts, however, and by the total sacrifice of the skin round his wrists and on the back of his hands, he fancied he slackened the tightness of the rope in some degree.

This encouraged him to continue, and, after suffering incredible agony, he released one of his hands.

When he had done this, the rest was comparatively easy.

But he had a strong stimulant to urge him on to make the most desperate exertions.

Smarting with pain, and with his hands dripping with blood, he removed first of all the bandage which covered his eyes, then the gag which prevented his speech, and, finally, the cords by which his ankles were tied together, and by which his body was secured to the trunk of the tree.

He was then free.

His first act was to utter some horrible maledictions upon the heads of those who had served him in this manner, and if the troop had been anywhere near at hand, there was no doubt that, under the influence of passion as he was, he would have placed the bugle to his lips, and availed himself of the quickest and readiest means of summoning his comrades.

As this was out of the question, he burst forth with a few more curses, and dashed off in the direction which would take him to them.

He had a long way to go, and the rapid exertion soon exhausted him.

He kept on, however, and at length reached his destination.

The captain, perceiving him return, questioned him eagerly.

The spy had a long tale to tell, but the captain was rejoiced at the tidings he received, and from that moment looked upon the large reward as already earned.

He determined, however, not to do as the spy wanted him, which was to set off at once, but to wait until night fairly came, and approach the enemy under the cover of the darkness.

This was unquestionably the best course to be adopted, and the soldier was compelled, though much against his inclination, to bow before the order of his commanding officer.

The time to nightfall would be but short, for already the sun was rapidly declining behind the clouds on the western horizon.

The captain, in the meantime, employed himself in questioning and cross-questioning the man, and he did this with so much address and skill, that he made himself familiar with every incident, however trivial.

When he was sure that he knew all, he considered

his plans for a little while, and gave particular instructions to every member of his troop.

By the time this was done it was almost dark, and it was quite so when they were all mounted and in readiness to start.

Upon arriving at the chase the whole party dismounted, and tethered their horses in such a manner that they were perfectly secure, and, at the same time, able to crop the short, sweet grass which grew plentifully around them.

This done, the spy at once took upon himself the task of leading his companions, and never was a service more willingly performed.

They advanced with the greatest possible caution.

The spy had noted the position of the cavern well, for he made his way towards it without deviating from his course in the least.

Upon reaching the entrance they came to a halt.

It was, however, a brief one, for the captain had already made up his mind what to do.

With his own hand he seized the thorn-bush, and, pulling it down, disclosed the commencement of the passage.

He was pleased to see this, because it was important confimatory evidence of what the soldier had told him.

At a sign, two of the men seized the thorn-bush, and pulled it up by the roots, thus leaving the opening clear.

"Now, my lads!" he cried, in a low but emphatic voice, "follow me, and the reward will be ours!"

The soldiers made no response, but followed closely in the footsteps of their captain, who rushed into the passage.

Truly were our friends now menaced with a danger of no common or ordinary description.

The secret upon which they so much relied was discovered, and foes who, from their skill in the use of their weapons they had everything to dread, were close upon them.

In order to understand what follows, it will, however, be necessary for us to leave the dragoons in the passage for a little while, during which we will revert to the proceedings of Dick Turpin and his friends.

Anxious in the extreme to ascertain whether any harm had befallen Maud, who he had left so hastily and so thoughtlessly, our hero made his way back to the cavern with all the speed which he was capable of making.

His heart was filled with dread that she had either encountered some terrible danger by remaining in the cavern alone, or else that she had incurred extreme peril by venturing to leave it.

Over and over again did he reproach himself for what he had done, but it was now too late. From what the spy had said, and from his behaviour, Dick feared that he had some companions in the chase, and who he relied upon coming to his assistance.

He could account in no other manner for the singular boldness he had displayed.

At length Dick came in sight of the entrance to the cavern.

It was still open, with the thorn-bush lying down upon the ground just as they had left it.

To his joy, however, he saw Maud standing just within the passage.

She was safe and unhurt.

As soon as she found who was approaching, she bounded forward, and our hero felt full of joy to think the apprehension under which he had laboured was groundless.

One glance into all their countenances was quite sufficient to let Maud know that something, both disagreeable and important, had taken place; and she was impatiently anxious to know what had taken place, as well as to have an explanation respecting the alarm which had caused them to rush out into the chase with so much precipitation.

Dick asked her to be patient, and led the way into the cavern, where he was followed by his companions.

Tom King remained behind to place the bush in its proper position.

This done, he rejoined his comrades, who by this time had reached the cavern.

A very anxious consultation as to what had best be done now took place between them, in the course of which Maud was made aware of the precise nature of the danger with which they were threatened.

Her terror was excessive, and Dick found his efforts to calm her agitation were scarcely sufficient.

The position of our friends was now exceedingly embarrassing.

Doubtless a great deal of what the spy had told them was correct, but in other points he might have deceived them, or suppressed something.

There was danger every way.

If they remained in the chase they were almost certain to be attacked, and the result of such an encounter would be very doubtful; and if they ventured to leave their place of concealment, such a watch would doubtless be kept all around that they would be pounced upon and captured merely through the numbers of their assailants being so superior to their own.

Claude Duval was of opinion that the secret of the whereabouts had been discovered, but that their foes, not altogether liking the idea of attacking them in their stronghold, had adopted the expedient of sending this spy in order to frighten them out of the chase, when they would immediately attack them with every advantage.

This was a view of the case which might or might not be a correct one.

At any rate there was a doubt upon the matter.

Knowing the cunning of their foes, it was not unlikely that they should adopt some such mode as that described by Claude Duval.

The more they considered this subject the greater dilemma did they find themselves to be in.

Claude Duval, however, strenuously opposed their leaving their present quarters.

There was no other place to which they could take themselves where they would be more safe.

They were not quite certain, either, whether they would be attacked.

In the end, however, they unanimously came to the conclusion that to attempt, just at present, to leave the chase would be dangerous in the extreme, and that the best thing they could do was to remain patiently where they were, and await the result of what had happened.

They fancied that should they be attacked by their foes they should be able to stand a siege of some length, and, in anticipation of this event, they set about putting it into as good a state of defence as they could.

Materials were collected and placed together in a heap, by means of which they could barricade and block up the entrance of the cavern, and, in short, nothing was left undone that was at all likely to add to their security.

Maud watched all these proceedings with great apprehensiveness.

She could not help thinking they were in most imminent danger, and that it was next to impossible that they should be able to escape.

The coolness with which the four highwaymen looked upon it inspired her with some slight degree of courage and confidence.

Sixteen-String Jack made a proposition which he at once proceeded to carry out.

It was to make his way to the outside, so as to give warning of the approach of anyone.

This was a very sensible undertaking, and his comrades highly approved of it.

They agreed to take this duty upon themselves by turns.

They were uneasy chiefly upon one point.

They were very short of ammunition, and they had no means of obtaining a fresh supply.

This would prove a second drawback to them, should they be attacked.

Such, then, was the aspect which things presented in the old cavern after the discovery of the spy.

Sixteen-String Jack was watching and waiting, close to the thorn-bush which concealed the opening in the rocks, and his companions inside adopting every means which they thought would conduce to their common safety.

There were several fragments of rock lying about in various places on the floor of the cavern, and these they all piled up close to the opening of the passage, so as to block it up with them, should circumstances occur to render such an expedient necessary.

In short, nothing that they could think of was left undone.

And now night came on.

The highwaymen had said that, if that night passed



[DICK TURPIN STEALS UNAWARES UPON HIS FOES.]

over without any attack being made upon them, they should have better hopes of remaining unmolested.

Presently, as the darkness deepened, the vigilance of our old friend Sixteen-String Jack increased.

He paced up and down in front of the cavern like a sentinel, making use of all his faculties to detect any sign of an enemy's approach.

At length, in one particular direction, he fancied he heard a crackling, rustling sound.

He paused and listened.

He was not mistaken.

Pressing onward, but with great caution, he saw the troop of dragoons advancing in the manner we have already described.

This was enough for Jack, and, without waiting to hear any more, he hurried back to the cavern.

CHAPTER CCCXCII.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS ARE ATTACKED IN THE CAVERN BY THE DETACHMENT OF DRAGOONS.

Breathless—not only with the speed he had made, but with the discovery of the dragoons—Sixteen-String Jack entered the passage, and replaced the thorn-bush as quickly as he was able.

Upon reaching the cavern, he found that his three friends were all standing up with anxiety imprinted upon their countenances.

They had heard his hasty approach, and had started up, impatient for the intelligence of which they questioned no the was the bearer.

The interior of the cavern would have been quite dark but for the wood fire smouldering on the hearthstone, and, as this was for the most part composed of dry wood, it diffused a cheerful light around it, and brought out into salient relief the rugged outlines of the cavern.

By the aid of this firelight the three highwaymen were

could perceive the expression on the countenance of their friend, and, before he had time to speak, they judged that something momentous had taken place.

He hastened to let them know the worst.

"Quick—quick!" he cried. "There is not a moment to be lost! Our foes are upon us! Some ten or twelve men—soldiers—for I saw the glitter of their accoutrements, are making their way through the chase in the direction of this place, and, doubtless, with the intention of attacking us. Block up the entrance as we determined to do, we shall then have a barricade behind which we can fight!"

Almost before he had finished speaking Sixteen-String Jack seized several of the fragments of rock, and began in good earnest the laborious task of blocking up the passage with them.

In this he was instantly seconded by his comrades, who could tell by his manner that there was every need for them to be urgent.

As the piece of rock had been placed there for this purpose, they were able to perform their work quickly, and they soon had the opening completely blocked up.

They were only just in time.

Ere the last block could be wedged into its place the dragoons had entered the cavern, and with great impetuosity rushed forward.

Their onward progress was checked by the mass of rock.

They were compelled to halt.

This was an obstacle which the captain scarcely expected to find.

It told him at a glance that preparation had been made for their reception, and that they would have to fight the matter out.

Calling out in an encouraging manner to his men, and telling them that their prey was almost within their grasp, he commanded them to storm the barricade.

This was a work to which the soldiers were accustomed, and they responded to his command with hearty good will.

But though the hastily-constructed mass of stones trembled before the attack which was made upon it, yet it did not give way.

Our friends had taken care that each piece should be wedged in firmly.

Repulsed on this first occasion, the soldiers immediately prepared for a second and more vigorous charge.

They made use of the butt-ends of their muskets for this purpose, and the concussion was so tremendous that several of the fragments were dislodged from their position, and rolled on to the floor of the cavern.

They were now able to see before them, though not much, for the highwaymen had scattered the fire about, and attempted to extinguish it.

The only illumination there was, was a dull red glare, which proceeded from the fast-expiring embers.

By the aid of this they could, nevertheless, see into the interior of the cavern.

Another rush removed some more of the fragments, and the consternation of our friends can be imagined when they saw their barricade thus rapidly demolished.

The captain of dragoons, having made this demonstration, conceived it to be his duty to call upon the highwaymen to surrender.

He did this in a very loud tone of voice, but no notice whatever was taken of his words.

He could neither hear nor see anyone in the cavern, and but for the fact that the last stone of the barricade had been added when he was within a short distance of it, he would have fancied the place to be untenanted.

Finding his first summons to surrender disregarded, he hazarded another, and this time coupled with the threat that if they did not immediately surrender, he should command his men to fire, and the consequences of their resistance would rest upon their own heads.

No more notice was taken of this than there was of his former appeal.

He waited a moment or two, however, when finding all remained still, he commanded his men to storm the barricade and enter the cavern.

Dick Turpin and his comrades now felt that they could no longer hold back from action.

At this crisis something must be done.

Nearly half the barricade had been removed, and the lower portion would probably be stormed with greater ease than the upper.

There was only one thing that would prevent this, and that was that the bottom block was of enormous size.

Nevertheless, our friends determined to strike a blow at their foes.

Suddenly, advancing into the middle of the cavern, they levelled the loaded pistols they held in their hands, and fired a volley.

Maud, who had been left by Dick in a place of safety, sprang forward, terrified for Dick's safety.

She clung to him, and he instinctively clasped her round the waist.

"Back—back!" he cried. "Back for your lives!"

He set the example of doing this while he spoke.

It would have been madness for them to have remained where they were, and to have exposed themselves to the fire of their enemies.

The detachment of dragoons was very densely packed in the little passage, which was only just wide enough for two men to stand abreast in, and the four bullets which came from the pistols of the highwaymen told upon them with terrible effect.

Enraged by this unexpected return for his temperate speech, the captain commanded his men to fire.

"Make ready!" he cried, in the stern, abrupt tones of military command. "Present!—fire!"

The command was obeyed instantly.

Almost before the last word had left his lips, a rattling discharge from the muskets of the dragoons raised a thousand echoes in that subterraneous place.

The bullets, one and all, harmlessly expended themselves against the wall of the cavern.

Indeed, it would seem as though the captain's object in causing this volley to be fired was more with the idea that it would cause a feeling of intimidation in the breasts of the highwaymen than aught else.

Certain is it, they were nowhere to be seen when the men fired.

If this was his object, it failed most lamentably; for our friends were the last people in the world to be dismayed into a surrender by the firing of a few musket-shots.

The captain was soon convinced of this, for the highwaymen, as soon as they found their foes had fired, stepped forward to the opening in the rock, and poured forth another volley, precipitately retreating as soon as their fingers had pressed the triggers.

This made the captain almost frantic.

Such a disastrous reception as this he had never counted upon.

In fact, his calculation was that the highwaymen would be overawed by his very appearance.

The repulse he met with, however, only served to make him still determined to effect his object.

He had now an additional motive, and this was a more powerful one than that which had first prompted him to undertake the expedition.

This was revenge.

He looked upon the death or capture of the four highwaymen with quite a personal feeling, and he determined within himself that, no matter at what risk, one of these should be accomplished.

He had himself received a slight wound in his left arm, and the pain which this occasioned tended not a little to enrage him.

Sword in hand, he rushed furiously upon the mass of rock, and set the example of scrambling over it.

This was what all his men had hesitated to do, because of the manifest danger they incurred by thus exposing their persons to the enemy.

But the captain was now wound up to such a pitch that he became utterly heedless of this.

After a desperate effort, he succeeded in scrambling on to the top of the barricade, and from thence he rapidly descended to the floor of the cavern.

To his surprise, he found that no attack whatever was made upon him, either while he was on the rock-work or when he reached the floor.

Inspired by his example, and encouraged by perceiving that their captain met with no mishap in consequence of this exploit, those dragoons who were unhurt, or only slightly wounded, also scrambled over the barrier into the cavern.

Almost as soon as his feet touched the ground, the captain found several of his men close behind him.

The interior of the cavern was now, however, in utter darkness, and they were unable to distinguish anything.

The fire had become quite extinct.

The highwaymen had scattered the embers which composed it in every direction, and, after having smouldered for a short time, they one after another expired.

At the present moment there was not one which emitted even the feeblest gleam of light.

All was silent too.

Their foes, who, from what had taken place, they imagined would greet them warmly, made no movement.

The captain turned round on his heels once.

Nothing, however, met his straining eyes but uniform, utter darkness.

The silence, too, continued.

Where were the highwaymen, from whom they had already suffered so severely?

That was a mystery.

They made no demonstration of their presence whatever.

The captain began to grow terribly apprehensive.

He dreaded he knew not what.

The prominent idea in his mind was that he was about to be stricken down by some hideous, unexpected, and invisible danger.

A thousand times more preferable would it have been to his feelings had the highwaymen continued to attack them as they had done at first.

"Lights! lights!" he cried, in a voice rendered so unlike his own by apprehension and anxiety, that his men scarcely recognised it. "Lights, I say! Let us have lights!"

When he had thus imperiously uttered this command, he felt calmer.

He knew that in a moment or so he would be obeyed, for his men were all provided with materials for obtaining a light readily.

It was while in this suspenseful state, however, that there came to his ears a hollow, rumbling sound.

All his men heard it, for the noise was considerable, but what it proceeded from they were unable to form any idea.

It was like nothing which they had heard in the whole course of their lives.

They could only compare it to the muttering of thunder, or the roaring sound which is heard from a cannon when discharged from a great distance,

This added not a little to the uneasiness of the captain's mind.

He connected the sound, naturally enough, with the highwaymen; but then, he asked himself, what could they be about?

The horrible thought that they were about to take some step which would involve himself and his men in utter destruction, took possession of his mind, and the thought was of such a nature as almost to drive him mad.

Fortunately, at this moment the soldiers succeeded in igniting the torches which they had brought with them.

They held them high in the air, so as to diffuse their light as much as possible.

At first they were quite inadequate to disperse the darkness, which seemed to hang about the cavern in large clouds.

Gradually, however, their brightness increased.

With his eyeballs almost starting from their sockets, the captain of the dragoons glared all about him.

But his gaze rested not upon the forms of his foes, nor did they, even now, make the least demonstration of their presence.

This was most bewildering.

Snatching a torch from the hands of the soldier who stood nearest to him, the captain waved his sword round his head, and advanced still nearer to the centre of the cavern.

But he saw no one.

Heard no one.

Again he raised his voice, and called upon the highwaymen, in the king's name, to surrender, and again pronounced that, if they would submit quietly, and without resistance, their lives should be spared, and their persons be uninjured.

But he might as well have addressed his words to the rocky walls of the cavern for all the notice that was taken of them.

By this time the torches had all fairly caught light, and by their aid he was able to see around him.

But his eyes rested not on the forms he wished to see, and the thought obtruded itself, and refused to be banished, that he should even now be baulked of capturing them, although a little while ago he seemed to stand so good a chance of doing so.

With his heart relieved from a great many of the vague apprehensions that had pressed upon it, the captain commenced a rigid exploration of the cavern.

Its area was large, but it was not long before he had been all over it.

He had encountered no one, nor had he been able to perceive the least trace of those he so much wished to find.

His doubts now began to multiply, indeed, although he would not have confessed it, he almost feared that his chances of effecting their capture were small indeed.

In the cavern they certainly were not.

He was quite convinced of that, because he had been over the whole area of it himself.

He had noticed, however, that there were numerous recesses in the rock, and these he determined should be thoroughly explored, one by one, so that if they had concealed themselves they should not escape detection.

With this end in view, he first of all caused a man to seat himself upon the partially-demolished barricade, who was to see that no one attempted to leave the cavern by that means, while he, with the rest, who were in a condition to do so, entered the recesses in succession, and explored them in every part.

We have previously alluded to and described these places.

They were simply indentations in the rock, and had no outlet.

Of this the soldiers quickly satisfied themselves.

One after another they entered these places, but without achieving any result whatever.

The highwaymen were not in any of them, nor was there a trace of their recent presence.

There were more recesses, however, to examine, and they houyed themselves up with the hope of making the wished-for discovery in one of these.

As they proceeded, however, and increased the number of recesses they had discovered, their hopes grew less and less.

At length they came close to the one they had first entered.

Close to this was one more cavity, and this was the only one left to examine.

If they did not find the highwaymen here, their disappearance would remain an inscrutable mystery.

Hoping, and yet scarcely daring to hope, when they thought of the many disappointments they had already experienced, that they were on the right track at last, and that the highwaymen would either be discovered or the mystery of their disappearance elucidated, the captain and his soldiers thronged into this recess, the entrance of which was much narrower than any of the rest.

CHAPTER CCCXCIII.

THE DRAGOONS FAIL TO DISCOVER THE HIGHWAYMEN, BUT THE MYSTERY OF THEIR DISAPPEARANCE IS REVEALED TO THE READER.

SUCH being the case, it immediately became blocked up, and the dragoons in their efforts to enter it quickly, did nothing but impede their own progress.

The captain was first, however, and he knocked his torch against a projection of the rock so as to remove the charred portion, and caused it to burn more brightly.

He then glanced about him.

In its general appearance this recess differed but slightly from those he had previously examined, except that it grew rapidly wider and higher.

Pressing forward, and not paying so much attention to where he trod as he ought to have done, he called out to his troopers to follow him, and they obeyed with great alacrity, the moment the difficulty of passing through the narrow entrance was overcome.

Suddenly the captain, after proceeding about twenty

paces, came to a halt, and, at the same time, uttered an exclamation of surprise and astonishment.

He discovered that he could go no further.

Before him was a mass of earth which completely blocked up the passage.

From the peculiar smell which this earth gave forth the captain could tell that it had been recently disturbed.

There was some deep mystery here, he felt convinced, and he waved his torch anxiously round and round his head, in the endeavour to discover something more.

In this, however, he was unsuccessful.

His men now all crowded eagerly around him.

They, too, held their torches aloft, and, though there was now a great accession of light, yet it did not seem to show them any more than they at first perceived.

The fresh smell of this earth, coupled with the manner in which the passage was blocked up with it, made the captain fancy that a portion of the roof of this passage had recently fallen in.

He then remembered the peculiar roaring sound which he had heard while in the outer cavern, and for which he had not been able to account.

The noise now, he all at once recollected, was such as would be occasioned by the fall of a large mass of either rock or earth.

By what he saw before him, he was driven to the conclusion that this had taken place, and, on conferring with his men, he found they were of the same opinion as himself.

This seemed to afford a clue to the disappearance of the highwaymen which had so much perplexed him.

They might have sought shelter in this place, and either intentionally caused the roof to fall, or else they had been buried beneath it.

Which of these two it was he had no idea, and both were merely suppositions, so that it was possible for him to be mistaken.

The passage being obviously filled up with a mass of earth which had fallen from the roof was a suspicious circumstance, but nothing more.

For some time both he and his men remained gazing blankly at the obstruction in their path, but awakening at last to the inutility of this, he turned round, though still undecided as to what he had better do.

He almost repented now that he had embarked in this enterprise at all.

He had gained nothing by it but disappointment, and had lost two or three of his men.

The prospect, too, of his being able to gain anything seemed slight, and his breast was filled with a feeling of deep vexation.

At length he determined to make his way into the outer cavern, and there hold a council of war with his men.

He felt it a relief to have decided upon something, and he ordered his men to leave the passage.

He was never more willingly obeyed than in the present instance; for the soldiers, having come to the conclusion that the roof had fallen in, exchanged anxious glances with each other; for they did not know how soon the portion beneath which they stood would also fall and crush them.

This was by no means a pleasant thought; and as soon as they were commanded to do so, they cleared out with uncommon expedition.

The captain never once dreamt of this danger, and he wondered at the extraordinary alacrity which his men displayed.

He followed them, and, on emerging into the cavern, his ear was saluted with a succession of groans.

These came from the lips of his wounded soldiers.

The two volleys which our friends had fired had done terrible execution, for it was like shooting down a tube thronged with men.

Several of the dragoons had been severely hit, and it was feared that the hurts of one or two would prove fatal.

The captain had forgotten this, and now that he was reminded of it, he felt greatly exasperated as this result was so different to what he expected.

The wounded dragoons, hearing and seeing their companions approaching, cried out for assistance, and implored for a light to be left with them.

While in the passage, the captain had had all the men who carried torches along with him, so that the cavern was plunged in utter darkness, of which the wounded men bitterly complained.

Their leader felt that he was imperatively called upon to see that their injuries were attended to.

Now that the fire no longer burnt upon the hearth, a chill atmosphere filled the cavern, and the captain shuddered as he felt its influence.

The night was one of intense frost, and the biting air found its way through the numberless crevices in the roof.

At this moment the captain struck his foot against something, and, looking down to find what it was, discovered it to be a partially-burnt piece of wood.

It was a log that had been knocked off by the highwaymen when they had dispersed the fire and scattered the materials of which it was composed about the floor of the cavern.

"Make a fire," cried the captain, as soon as he saw what it was that lay at his feet. "There seems to be plenty of material, and you have your torches to light it with. Make haste, and then we will consult together as to what had best be done."

The stone slab, which was fixed in the floor for the purpose of a fire, was quickly discovered by the men, as they roamed about picking up the fuel, and as there were several of them engaged in the work, there was soon a goodly heap piled up upon it.

With the torches they ignited it.

The half-burnt wood, some of which was still quite warm, lighted readily, and in less time than one would have thought possible, a large cheerful fire was burning, which not only dispensed that warmth of which they so much felt the need, but illuminated the cavern with much greater power than the torches had done.

The wounded dragoons were now placed at a convenient distance from the fire, and their comrades attended to their hurts as well as they were able.

Two, however, were judged to be in such a precarious state that the captain judged it his duty to despatch one of his men to fetch a surgeon, for it would never have done to have moved them.

There was water in abundance in the cavern, and with this their wounds were washed, and their parching thirst assuaged.

Nothing more could be done for them now until the surgeon arrived, and the brave fellows, aware of this, did not utter another murmur, but waited patiently until he came.

In the meantime, the fire having been replenished, the captain called his men around him to hold his intended conference.

Happening to see a cask, he rolled it up to the fire, and sat down upon it.

It was the identical cask upon which the Rev. Mr. Martext had stood when he performed the remarkable marriage ceremony between Maud Gouldman and Dick.

A rather animated consultation now ensued as to the course it would be most prudent for them to adopt.

Many suggestions were made, and many hypotheses started to account for the disappearance of the highwaymen.

The prevalent notion appeared to be, not that they had been buried by the fall of the roof, or that they had escaped, but that they were hiding somewhere close at hand, and waiting for them to take their departure.

Many arguments were brought forward in support of this view; and, in the end, it was determined that they should all remain where they were with their ears open—until the surgeon arrived, at least—by which time they thought something would happen to show whether they were correct or not.

Having brought themselves into this frame of mind, we will leave them seated by the fire, listening eagerly for any slight sound which might happen to strike upon their ears, while we proceed to give the real and true explanation of the mysterious disappearance of our friends.

We should have done so earlier, but that it was deemed best to relate the whole of the proceedings of the soldiers to this point, so that, when we once commenced, we should not have to break off the thread of the narrative.

We resume, then, at that period when our friends, rapidly advancing, fired their second volley, after having done which they rapidly retreated.

They were just in time to avoid the bullets from the

muskets of the dragoons, which flattened themselves against the opposite wall of the cavern.

It may be imagined that our friends suffered no small amount of apprehension when they saw the very energetic manner in which they were attacked, and when they perceived how little their ardour was damped by the execution they felt certain they had already done among them.

"It is all over with us," whispered Dick, who took in at one comprehensive glance all their chances and all their dangers. "It is all over with us, without we can contrive to leave the cavern in some way. In another moment they will be upon us, and if it comes to a hand-and-hand encounter on level ground I fear we shall get the worst off, for their numbers seem to exceed ours by far, and you may depend they are well skilled in the use of the weapons they carry."

"You have hit the right nail on the head, Dick," said Tom King: "but how we are to leave the cavern I cannot imagine. We have once explored it, and were only able to find one outlet."

"True! and yet, ever since that affair of the serpent I have fancied that we must have been in error."

"We can but make the attempt to leave the cavern," said Claude Duval; "if we fail in doing so, we cannot make our situation worse than it is at present."

"That is, if we are expeditious."

"Certainly."

"Come, then; there is an opening in the rocks just behind us. Let us enter there."

They did so.

Dick Turpin, with his arm round the waist of Maud, followed Tom King, who was the first to enter the recess.

The rear was brought up by those inseparable companions, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

They were only just in time in entering the recess, for at this moment the captain of the dragoons was climbing over the barricade.

Sixteen-String Jack had in his pocket a small dark lantern, and as they walked along he lighted it.

A bright beam of light came through the lens, and though this was by no means sufficient to light up the place in which they were, yet it enabled them to see to some extent where they were going.

As they advanced, they found the indentation in the side of the cavern increase rapidly in width and height.

Sixteen-String Jack directed the ray of light for them.

Suddenly Tom King paused.

The passage became narrower, and the roof lower.

"Take care," he said; "the roof is much lower here, you had better stop here all of you."

As he spoke, he set the example of doing as he had directed, and continued on his way.

Claude Duval came last, but, either owing to his great height, or else to his not having stooped sufficiently, caught his head rather a violent blow against a sharp piece of rock, which hung down from the roof like a stunted icicle.

He uttered a cry, which instantly attracted his companions' attention, and they turned round, for, of course, they could not tell what had happened.

"Confound it," said Claude, "I have struck my head a tremendous blow against something."

He turned round as he uttered these words, and then perceived the curiously-shaped piece of rock which hung down from the centre of the roof of the passage in an exceedingly dangerous and awkward manner.

"This is it," he cried, the moment he saw it.

"Come on," Claude cried to his companions.

"All right, I am coming."

Our old friend had taken hold of this piece of rock while he had been speaking, and now, instead of letting go of it, he gave it a vigorous pull.

It was the pain of the blow he had received which prompted him to do this as being a species of revenge.

But he was totally unprepared for the startling effect produced by this apparently simple action.

To his unutterable astonishment, the piece of rock came away in his grasp as he tugged at it, and immediately there came the rushing, roaring sound which had struck so much alarm to the heart of the captain of dragoons.

The roof of the passage had fallen in.

Fortunate for them was it that our friends did not linger while Claude did this.

If they had done so they could not possibly have escaped destruction.

As it was, Claude Duval almost paid with his life for what he done.

When he seized the piece of depending rock and pulled it, he was already in the act of following in the steps of his companions, and, ere the roof fell, he had got several paces.

To this alone can be attributed his escape.

Had he remained stationary, he must have been buried beneath the mass.

Even as it was, he felt himself suddenly prostrated to the earth by the earth falling upon him.

Both Turpin and Sixteen-String saw their companion's danger.

The first released himself from Maud, and the second dropped the lantern.

Together they darted forward, and, seizing Claude by both his arms, dragged him from his terrible situation.

Scarcely had they done so, than a fresh quantity of earth came rolling down, so that, if he had not been thus promptly extricated, he would have been smothered before their eyes.

He was so lucky as to escape with only a few slight bruises and a shake.

For some few moments there was such a cloud of dust that our friends could hardly breathe, but it subsided.

They were now in total darkness, for the lantern was extinguished by its fall.

Their situation now was terrible.

They could not tell how soon some other portion of the roof would fall and involve them in a common destruction.

The first thing Sixteen-String Jack did, after rescuing his friend, was to stoop down and grope after the lantern.

At length his hand encountered it, and, almost dreading to see what its light would reveal, he ignited it.

Upon the faces of all an expression of the greatest consternation was depicted.

Slowly Jack raised the lantern.

All eyes followed the direction of the bright beam of light, eager and yet dreading to see what it might disclose.

By chance it so happened that Jack's face was turned towards the spot where the roof had fallen in, and, as a matter of course, the light of the lantern turned in that direction also.

The same, or nearly the same sight, met their gaze as the captain of dragoons saw from the other side.

The way by which they had gained the spot upon which they stood was entirely blocked up with a mass of crumbling earth.

Speechless and surprised, they gazed upon this extraordinary phenomenon.

How to account for it they scarcely knew.

The only conclusion they could come to was that the piece of rock which Claude had seized was like the keystone of an arch, and alone supported the immense mass of earth above.

CHAPTER CCCXCIV.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMPANIONS FIND THEMSELVES IMPRISONED IN A LIVING TOMB.

THERE can be very little doubt that if this piece of rock had remained undisturbed much longer, it would have given way of itself.

It was manifestly inadequate to support so tremendous a weight, and Claude, seizing it as he did, only anticipated that which would ere long have taken place of its own accord.

Sixteen-String Jack directed the light of his lantern over every part of the fallen earth, but he did not speak.

Dick Turpin was the first to recover himself.

He spoke in a tone of encouragement to his companions.

"There is a barrier now," he said, "between our enemies and ourselves, which, I fancy, they will have some trouble to surmount."

"It has been a narrow escape for us," said Claude Duval, drawing a long breath as he thought of his own danger, "but we ought not to feel displeased at this accident, for the earth falling as it has, between our enemies

and ourselves, looks like a good omen, and will prove an insurmountable obstacle to them."

Sixteen-String Jack said nothing, but turned round.

A thought had occurred to him to which he felt he scarcely dared give utterance.

It was an awful one, and his heart fluttered strangely, and his hand shook.

His companions, however, did not appear to observe his agitation, or if they did they took no notice of it.

Perhaps they attributed it to the peril from which they had so recently escaped.

But such was not the cause of it.

It was a peril that was in perspective, and which did not seem to occur to the others at all.

Slowly, then, as we have said, he turned round until his back was towards the fallen earth.

Then he directed the light of the lantern before him, and glanced in that direction.

He could not repress a slight exclamation which rose to his lips, though he strove hard to do so.

Before him he should have seen a continuation of the passage.

But he did not.

The light of the lantern fell only upon an almost perfectly smooth piece of rock.

"Trapped!" he exclaimed. "My worst fears are realized."

These words at once made the others sensible of the extent of their danger.

"Trapped!"

All echoed his word.

They could do no more.

Tom King sprang forward, and Sixteen-String Jack flashed the lantern rapidly around him.

The only result which followed this, however, was the complete realization of what he had stated.

An examination of the place in which they were showed it to be a small and nearly circular cavern, the diameter of which was somewhere about fifteen feet.

Its height they could not estimate.

The rays of the lantern, when directed upwards, became lost in the deep gloom, and discovered no signs of a roof.

The falling earth had choked up the passage which led into this cavern, which was formed in some places of a kind of clayey soil, and in others of masses of rock.

They were prisoners, hopelessly prisoners, and as they gazed into each others' countenances, by the dim light which the lantern afforded, they saw nothing but the utmost consternation imprinted upon each.

Maud clung tightly to Dick's arm.

Her whole form was convulsed with terror.

It was excusable if they all felt appalled by their frightful situation.

The danger which they had just escaped seemed now to be not half so great as it had first appeared.

It was some moments before either of them could command their voices sufficiently to speak with calmness.

The silence of that dark and gloomy cavern was truly terrible and heart-chilling, while the darkness with which it was filled seemed to press upon their spirits like a pall.

It was during this strange and awful stillness that the dragoons came into the recess, and arrived at the opposite side of the mass of earth which choked it up.

But our friends heard them not, and were altogether unconscious of their proximity.

The quantity of soil which separated them was so great that scarcely any sound, no matter how loud, would have been able to penetrate it.

Sixteen-String Jack roused himself from the state of abject abstraction into which he, in common with the rest, had fallen.

Once more he waved his lantern around, and successively let its light fall upon different portions of the walls of the cavern.

Almost mechanically the eyes of all followed upon its devious course, but without meeting with the least encouragement.

The damp walls of the cavern looked inexpressibly gloomy, and their spirits sunk still lower in their breasts.

Could they but have thought of some words of encouragement to utter to the rest, they would have spoken.

It was vain for them to try this, for there was nothing to suggest hopefulness.

Dick Turpin, feeling probably that he was looked up to as a chief by the others, was the first to shake off this apprehensive kind of nightmare which pressed so heavily upon them all.

But it was not until after he had made violent and repeated efforts that he was able to do this.

"My comrades," he said, in a voice shaken with emotion.

At the sound, all turned towards him, and Sixteen-String Jack raised the lantern, so that the bright beam of light which streamed through the lens should fall upon his countenance.

"My comrades," said Dick again, "in escaping from one danger we have fallen into one which seems to be of even a more terrible character. Before we had at least the chance which an encounter would have given us; now it seems we are imprisoned in the bowels of the earth. The examination we have already made has shown us that this cavern has, or had, but one entrance and exit. That is now choked up with many tons of earth—so many that it would be useless for us, with such inadequate tools as we possess, to attempt to tunnel our way through it. Here is a cheerless prospect, but yet I think we ought not to lose all hope."

Dick said this, but he did not feel it.

He was desirous, however—and it was a praiseworthy desire—to instil hope into the bosom of his companions, who he could tell had abandoned themselves to despair.

No one liked to say where are we to look for hope, or there seems no prospect of it, and yet that was precisely what all thought.

The probability that the circular cavern in which they stood would prove to them a living tomb was so frightfully strong that it seemed to palsy all their energies.

Turpin's speech, however, produced one good effect.

It seemed to break the spell of silence which had fallen upon them.

Now that he had spoken, the others recovered the use of their speech.

They endeavoured, too, to speak in a strain which was at total variance with the state of their feelings.

It was Sixteen-String Jack who said—

"It is true we have not been able to discover any outlet as yet, but still, for all that, one may exist."

"When we searched, you must bear in mind we were in a state of great excitement, in consequence of the shock of alarm which we had received. When we have recovered our calmness, I should recommend that we commence our examination afresh."

"If we can but succeed in effecting our escape from this place," said Tom King, with a slight shudder, "the circumstance of the roof of the passage having fallen in will be a fortunate enough one."

"True," said Claude Duval; "and I think there is some consolation to be derived from the fact that I escaped being buried as I did."

"You have had two narrow escapes of your life, lately, Claude," said Turpin, "but as yet all is well."

"To be sure, my case has looked very desperate, but yet here I am, and not much the matter with me either," replied Claude; "so there is, to some, hope to be distilled out of that."

"It is to be hoped that things will turn out better than they at present promise to do," said Tom King.

"If there is one thing I hate more than another, it is burrowing in the earth in this manner," said Claude Duval; "and once let me get out of this scrape, and I don't think you will ever find me getting beneath the surface of the earth again."

"There is something very disagreeable about it, I admit," replied Dick Turpin. "But come, my comrades, this talk is all very well, and may, perhaps, in one way have done us some good. I propose, however, that we set about a careful and rigid examination of this cavern."

This proposition was immediately agreed to by all.

It would either have the effect of consigning them to despair, or else would fill their breasts with hope.

They did not dare to think of the consequences, should this second examination terminate in the same manner as the first.

Wisely they looked at the brightest side, and continued to hope on for the best.

Sixteen-String Jack handed the lantern to Dick Turpin,

who, the moment he received it, set about making this important examination—the result of which would be so serious.

Maud released the hold which she had hitherto maintained upon his arm, and, clasping her hands together, followed him in speechless anxiety.

Dick commenced his examination of the wall of the cavern at the spot where the earth had fallen in.

By this means he would be able to tell for certain when he had completed the circuit of it.

Some such mark as this was quite necessary.

The cavern walls looked very cheerless

In most places they were damp with the moisture which exuded from the clay of which they were composed.

Strange fungic vegetation covered them in many places.

After examining the wall for some few paces, Dick perceived a cleft or fissure.

It was but small, and so narrow that it would not have admitted the person of one of them; still it might lead somewhere.

If so, then, the opening could be enlarged.

Under this impression he plunged his sword in.

But the blade penetrated a few inches only, and then struck against the rock with a sharp sound.

That hope, then, was destroyed, and he once mo e continued.

He did not hurry.

He well knew that there was time enough and to spare, and so he resolved that the examination should be a rigid one.

With this intent he let the bright beam of light rest for a moment upon every square inch of the wall, from the floor of the cavern up to as high a point as the ray would reach.

What was above, or how high the roof might be, he had no means of telling.

He only knew that it must be very many feet above their heads.

Gradually, then, Dick Turpin, accompanied by Maud and his three comrades, worked his way round the cavern.

At every step that was taken the frail hope into which they had cheated themselves faded away, until at length, when they reached the mass of fallen earth again without having found what they so anxiously sought, it was dissipated completely.

They were now forced to the conclusion that there was but one mode by which that strange, circular-looking cavern could be entered and left, and that was by the outlet which the earth had completely filled up.

There was not one now who dared to look into the countenances of their comrades.

Too well they knew the expression which appeared upon their own, and they desired to encounter it upon the countenance of another.

Dick Turpin groaned slightly, as he said—

"My friends, our last hope is over now. Our fate threatens to be a fearful one, but we must meet it with what boldness we can."

"It is clear there is no means of leaving this place, and the consequences of a long stay here are so obvious that I need not mention them. It seems as though we were all destined to perish from starvation. If such is to be our fate, let us endeavour to meet it with firmness."

A deep silence followed these words.

Under such circumstances, who could speak?

Death—lingering, painful death—stared them in the face.

It was impossible for them to escape.

They must remain where they were and perish by slow degrees.

To add to the inconveniences of their position, Dick now found that the lamp was beginning to burn dimly, and showing unequivocal symptoms of expiring.

Anxiously he inquired whether any of his comrades had the means to replenish it.

But they had not, and, after flickering for a few moments, the flame went out.

They were now plunged in total darkness.

The consolation that the light of the lamp would have afforded they were deprived of, and their situation, terrible as it was before, seemed now to redouble in horror.

It was now impossible for them to see each other, and the only proof they had of the existence of their comrades was when they spoke or touched them.

A more deplorable condition than theirs now was could not be imagined.

Destitute of food, deprived of light, without fire, buried alive in the bowels of the earth without the faintest hope of release, such was the position of those whose fortunes we have followed with so much interest.

Everyone now abandoned themselves to despair, and it is not to be wondered at that under such circumstances as these they lost all strength of mind.

In this state time passed slowly and wearily away.

How many hours elapsed they knew not.

They were dead to all such knowledge.

There was one thing which slowly forced its way upon their minds.

It was this.

The cavern had been examined by them and found to have no outlet.

Nevertheless they became aware that it was filled with fresh, cool air.

Where this came from was a mystery, and they were endeavouring to account for it, when they became conscious that a soft and gentle light was beginning to fill the place.

This at once brough the outer cavern to their recollection, which, as we have already described, was tolerably well lighted in the daytime by meaus of the crevices innumerable in the roof of it.

From some such cause as this the light, which now every moment increased in power, proceeded.

Wearily and listlessly they turned their eyes upward

They were right.

It was day, and the soft, beautiful light that illuminated the earth above came streaming down upon them.

It so happened that all looked up at precisely the same moment, so the discovery was made simultaneously.

A cry of hope and joy came from their lips.

The light came through the roof of the cavern, but, instead of finding its way through so many small openings as it did in the outer one, it came through one aperture of apparently considerable dimensions.

It was high above their heads; but, as the sun rose and the light increased, they were able to see the blue sky, upon which they had scarcely hoped to look again.

It was afar off, it is true; but still they derived some consolation from the bare fact of being able to look upon it.

"Hope! my friends, hope!" cried Dick Turpin, in almost joyous tones; "there is hope for us yet! Do you see that opening in the roof above? It is at a great height from the floor, but we must reach it by some means, and then our freedom will be secured."

His companions shook their heads.

"Do not be sanguine, captain, over this."

It appears to be about as easy for us to reach that opening as it does for us to bore a hole through the earth."

"Not so, not so," cried Dick; "it will be, no doubt, a difficult task for the first person to reach the earth above us, but the others will have little trouble. The one who stands above will be able to render immense assistance to those below, and help them out of this place easily."

"But how is the opening to be reached?"

"That is a point which we have plenty of time to consider; but, before we attempt to do anything, there are one or two things that we must take into consideration and consult upon."

CHAPTER CCCXCV.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN EFFECTING HIS ESCAPE FROM THE CAVERN, AND STEALS UNAWARES UPON HIS FOES.

THE cheerful, animated tones in which Dick Turpin spoke could not fail to be productive of a good effect in the minds of his comrades.

They felt themselves revived by them, and roused from that despairing apathy into which they had been plunged.

They looked about them with better spirits, and prepared themselves to listen attentively to what their captain had to say.

The daylight, too, which found its way in and revealed their countenances to each other, had an invigorating

effect upon their spirits, and altogether the alteration in their feelings which now took place was really wonderful when contrasted with their state a few moments before.

Dick spoke:

"My comrades," he said, "in our anxiety to escape from this place we must not forget that the chase is occupied by our foes, to whom our sudden disappearance must seem almost marvellous. That they will search narrowly for us you may be sure, from the vigorous and determined manner in which they attacked us. Such being the case, it will be our most prudent course to remain here for a time, so as to give them an opportunity to withdraw."

To this all assented, but as they did so, they glanced up at the aperture so far above them, as much as to say, "It is well for us to talk of remaining when there is such a slight chance of our getting away."

Dick could tell this was the thought that occupied their minds, but he did not allude to it.

"I have more to say, my comrades," he continued, "if you will listen to me."

"You may depend upon our doing that, captain," they replied.

"Very well, then. Under the circumstances, then, I think even if we had the chance it would be very unsafe and unwise for us to leave this place until we had some knowledge respecting the dragoons, or found out, in some way, that they had left the chase."

"Exactly, captain, but—"

"Nay, listen, and do not interrupt. I will be brief in what I have to say. This place serves us as a place of concealment, and I think there is little fear of our being discovered here by our foes. Is not that your opinion?"

"Most certainly.

"Then I will tell you what I have to propose, and I think, when you hear it, that you will agree with me that it is the best thing we can do."

"Speak, captain; we are all impatience."

"Fortunately, then, we have all made a hearty meal, and though we may be hungry, yet we can manage, no doubt, to go without food for some hours to come. I would recommend, then, that we stay here until night. By that time I doubt not the patience of the dragoons will be exhausted, and they will withdraw for a time. We ought to ascertain, however, before we leave this place, whether they have gone or not."

"It would be quite as well, captain, but how is it to be done?"

"That is just the point. Now I think that I shall be able to reach the roof of the cavern, and if I can succeed in this, all will be well. I must confess I have no doubt about being able to do this in my own mind, and therefore, with your permission, we will suppose that it is done."

His comrades could not forbear smiling at the confident tone in which he spoke.

Unheeding this, however, he continued.

"When I reach the top, I shall want you all four to remain perfectly still where you are until I come back to you. My course of action will be this. As cautiously and stealthily as I can I shall make my way about the chase, and endeavour to discover whether the dragoons have left or not. I shall be able to ascertain this beyond all doubt. If they have taken their departure, well and good. I will procure a rope or something of that kind by which I can assist you to leave this place. Then as to when we once stand under the sky again, future circumstances can alone determine."

The three highwaymen exchanged glances with each other while Turpin was speaking, and as soon as he had finished, Tom King said—

"If one of us can get out of the aperture above, all will be well. You say you have some scheme in your head for doing this?"

"I have."

"I rejoice to hear it. You will tell us what it is?"

"Of course."

"Then I have an amendment to propose."

"What is it?"

"Instead of going yourself, I will go."

"Nay, nay, Tom. I guessed what you were about to say, but I tell you, once for all, my mind is made up, and I will not allow myself to be turned by anyone!"

"I am sorry you are so determined as you appear to be, because I consider that it would have done quite as well if I had gone on this reconnoitring expedition."

"Don't oppose me, Tom. I have set my heart upon it."

"I shall not gainsay a word you may utter, captain."

"Very good, then. Do not press this. It will be useless if you do. I shall remain firm."

"That is enough, then."

"I am glad to hear you say as much. And now I think you will agree with me that it would be better if we were to remain here until nightfall."

"Decidedly."

"The dragoons will be more likely to have taken their departure by that time than if I was to start now."

"We don't question that, captain."

"Well, then, the best thing we can do is to make ourselves as comfortable as we can in these uncomfortable quarters."

To this his comrades immediately assented; and such was the implicit confidence they had in him that they did not even urge him to tell them how he proposed to perform the apparently impossible task of climbing up to the roof of the cavern.

Having made up their minds as to what should be done, and feeling the amount of confidence in their leader which they did, the day passed away much more pleasantly than anyone would have expected.

To be sure, the brief winter's day seemed to them to equal the longest one in summer. But this is scarcely surprising.

As well as they could they relieved the monotony by conversation, and at length, towards mid-day, thoroughly overcome with fatigue and exhaustion, they laid down upon the damp floor of the cavern and slept.

They were aroused by some kind of noise.

What, they knew not, but they instinctively directed their gaze upward.

What they saw there was enough to unnerve them, and, if in their surprise they had shouted out, they could scarcely have been wondered at or blamed.

As it was, they remained silent.

They were so astonished and so absorbed that they were deprived of the power of utterance, until they became aware that it was necessary to their safety to remain silent.

The cause of the noise which had disturbed them became manifest at once.

Upon looking up to the orifice in the roof, they perceived that it was darkened by something which they could not at first make out, but almost immediately they discovered that several men were standing round the opening, and endeavouring to look down into it.

These could be no other than the dragoons.

Our friends were not much alarmed at this, because they knew it was impossible for them to be seen by anyone standing on the brink of the pit, for such it would appear to be to anyone standing on the level ground in the chase.

The dragoons were talking, and by listening attentively our friends could distinguish all they said.

"This is a strange looking place; that's all I can say about it," remarked one.

"You are right there."

"What should you take it to be?"

"A pit, unquestionably."

"That's what it is, I think myself."

"Do you think it can have any communication with the cavern?"

"Ah! there you puzzle me, comrade, and I feel myself unable to give an opinion."

"It might be so."

"As you say, it might."

"It's a very strange thing where those fellows can have disappeared to."

"Well, my conviction you already know; there is some secret passage leading out of that cavern. They have availed themselves of it, and are, doubtless, far enough away by this time."

"I fear you are right."

"I fear so too; and this enterprise, which promised to turn out so well, will prove a failure."

"I am afraid so, but if it does it will be no fault of ours. We have done the best we could."

"Very true, comrade, and I think we shall do little if any good by remaining here any longer. Have you any



[DICK TURPIN AND MAUD ESCAPING FROM THE CAVERN.]

idea whether the captain intends to stay, or what he was going to do?"

"No. That wound in his arm, which he at first thought nothing of, is playing the bear with him, and there is no knowing what he will do."

"There it is, but I am more disgusted with this police officers work now than ever."

"Don't get on to that subject. What do you think about this pit? The very fellows we want might be concealed in it."

"They might, but I don't think it's very likely. I'll tell you what we will do."

"What?"

"Form round in a circle and fire a volley down into it."

"A good thought."

"Stop a moment comrades," said another voice; "do you see this large stone?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, instead of wasting our powder and shot by firing down on them, let us roll the stone over and over until it falls in."

"Agreed; that is a capital idea."

"You see comrades," said the man who had proposed the expedient of rolling the stone down; "if the pit is deep the stone will break into a thousand pieces on the bottom, and if anyone is there we shall know of it, I'll warrant."

"Let us call out first," said another, "and let them know what we are going to do; perhaps they will call out."

"There can be no harm in trying."

"Call out, then."

"No, you."

"Very well, I have no objection."

One of the dragoons now advanced to the mouth of the pit.

What the feelings of our friends were when they heard this conversation, we will leave the reader to guess.

They did hear it, however, and every word too.

The man who had agreed to warn them of their fate now called out—

"Hallo! below there! Is there anyone below there?"

He listened for a moment, but no reply came; and then, turning round, he addressed his comrades, saying—

"I don't think there is anybody there. However, I think I will call out again."

"Here, I will," said another; "perhaps your voice is not loud enough."

"There's no fear of their not hearing you, Samuel," said the rest.

A tall, bulky dragoon now stepped forward, and placing his hand to his mouth, bawled out—

"Hullo! below there. If there is anyone below, speak up, as we are going to roll a stone down. Hullo! Below, I say!"

This dragoon had a voice as powerful as his form, and it reverberated with extraordinary loudness in the dome-shaped cavern.

Still no notice was taken of it.

The dragoons listened, but there came no sound from below to indicate the presence of a living creature.

"There's nobody there," said the dragoon with the powerful voice.

"Never mind, we'll roll the stone in for all that."

"Oh! yes, by all means, for they are quite artful enough to keep quiet."

"So they are; but if they don't cry out when they hear this stone come down upon them, it's odd to me."

The idea of the soldiers was that it was a pit into which they looked, and they never dreamt that it might grow larger towards the bottom.

With one accord they now set about their self-imposed task of rolling the stone.

It was an enormous fragment of rock, and required their united strength to move it.

Slowly and gradually they got it towards the brink of the abyss.

A deep indentation was left in the earth where they had rolled it.

At length it overhung the brink.

One more touch and it would plunge down, and would, in consequence of its weight, acquire considerable momentum in its descent.

It would almost seem as though the soldiers had some dim and indistinct consciousness that there was someone below, for, having thus far carried out their intention, they paused, and made another appeal to those below.

But the result was the same.

As before, their words were responded to only by the echoes of their own voices.

Resolved, then, to dally no longer, they put their shoulders to the stone.

There was one united effort of strength, and then it gave way.

The earth on the verge of the abyss crumbled, and fell down in a shower, like a presage of that which was about to follow.

Then, with a rushing sound, the huge stone disappeared.

The dragoons, as they stood on the brink, heard the hissing sound of the air which was displaced by its descent.

Animated by a universal and spontaneous impulse of curiosity, all crowded round the pit, and looked down into it, or rather strove to do so, for, of course, they could not see far down.

They could not see the stone, but they fancied they could.

Anxiously they listened for the sound which should indicate that it had reached the bottom.

It came.

Crash!

The immense mass of rock struck the stone floor of the cavern, and broke, as the dragoon had prophesied, into a thousand fragments.

But after the awful sound had reached their ears, and the strange echoes which it raised had died away, they listened in vain for any cry or groan which should testify to the presence of those they were so eager to find.

The silence of the very grave itself ensued, and, after listening for a long time, the dragoons were compelled to confess themselves defeated in their expectation, and turned disappointedly away.

Unwillingly they were forced to come to the conclusion that they were mistaken, and they had no other resource than to recommence their search elsewhere.

This, as we know, would be resultless, and so we will not follow them on their bootless expedition, but relate how our friends fared when the heavy stone was rolled down upon them.

We have already stated that, by straining their sense of hearing to the utmost, they could hear almost every word of the conversation that took place between the dragoons, who spoke in rather a loud tone of voice.

The danger did not therefore fall upon them unawares.

They had time to think and devise some means of safety.

But this seemed to be impossible.

The floor of the cavern was, of course, very much larger in area than the opening in the roof, but still there was nothing to hope for in that circumstance.

There could be very little doubt that the stone would break into fragments, and that those pieces would fly with incredible velocity in every direction.

That none of these would strike our friends appeared in the highest degree improbable.

Indeed, they were threatened with severe injuries from them.

How were they to escape?

That was the question that immediately suggested itself to their minds, and they looked about them anxiously.

It was a question of such vital importance, that it had the effect of driving all others from their minds.

The dragoons spoke, but they heeded not their words—they were very thankful to think they had so much the more time left them for reflection, and to make their preparations.

"There is only one thing we can do," said Dick, hurriedly, after having looked around him. "There is only one thing that we can do, and that is far from being so safe and good as I could wish."

"What is it, Dick?" asked his comrades anxiously, for in that hour of imminent peril they naturally looked up to him as their leader. "Let us know what it is at once!"

"We had better all lie down," replied Turpin, "and get as close to the wall of the cavern as we can. That is our only chance. The fragments which will be chipped off the stone by its fall will have a natural tendency to fly upwards, and this is the sole means by which we can avoid them."

"We will do it," cried his comrades, in a suppressed voice. "We are saved from that danger at least."

"What we have most to apprehend," rejoined Dick Turpin, "is the large stone. But hasten, my comrades. Quick! quick, or we shall be too late!"

Not another word was said.

Choosing different parts of the cavern, our friends laid themselves down at full length on the floor of it, and turned their faces towards the wall.

Breathlessly, then, they awaited the result.

They heard the earth clatter down, and the next moment the huge piece of rock came swinging through the air.

CHAPTER CCCXCVI.

PARTICULARLY DESCRIBES THE EXTRAORDINARY MANNER IN WHICH TURPIN ESCAPED FROM THE CAVERN.

Involuntarily all suspended their breath.

They continued to do so while the stone descended.

It would be a vain task to endeavour to describe their feelings during this brief interval of time, and therefore we shall not attempt it.

The sensations apparently of hours were compressed into a few seconds.

They could not tell what would be the result of the fall of the fragment of rock.

It might be that one or more of them would be dangerously hurt, perhaps killed.

They were powerless to do anything to avert either.

At length, after to them an interval of sickening horror, the crush came.

It was terrific.

It smote upon their ears as no other sound had hitherto done.

The stone, striking upon the mass of rock of which the floor of the cavern was composed, was dashed to atoms.

The small fragments flew about like hail.

For about a second this fearful shower lasted, and then all was over.

The fragments struck against the walls of the cavern, and rebounded with incredible violence.

Soon, however, they all lay still upon the floor of the cavern, which was literally covered with the remains of the huge stone.

Then one by one our friends ventured to look up, each anxious to know whether the other had escaped.

Fortunately such was the case.

The precaution which Dick had suggested, and which had been adopted, was proved to be a good one.

As he had stated, the pieces that were chipped off by the violence of the concussion all flew upwards, and, from the position they occupied, they escaped without sustaining any injury whatever.

It was with the utmost joy they learned that they all had escaped the frightful peril with which they had been so fearfully menaced.

They crowded round each other, and expressed their satisfaction in whispers, for they were fearful of any sound reaching the listening ears above.

As they glanced upwards they could distinguish the dark forms of the dragoons as they bent over the abyss, and strove to pierce the obscurity which hid all things from their sight.

Our friends, however, were looking from darkness into light, and the forms of the dragoons were clearly defined against the morning sky.

At length they withdrew, and after waiting for a little while in silence, our friends ventured to speak with less restraint to each other.

Still they were cautious to a degree, for it was impossible for them to be sure that there was not one of their foes listening attentively above.

"We have one more narrow escape to be thankful for," Dick Turpin observed at length. "Believe me, I scarcely dared to hope that we should all remain unhurt as we have done."

"It is entirely owing to the excellence of the means you devised, captain," replied Tom King.

"Let us hope that we shall never be exposed to so terrible a danger again," said Sixteen-String Jack, shivering as he spoke.

"We must not forget," added Turpin, "that this circumstance will now turn out to our benefit. Our foes having, as we have seen, assured themselves that we are not here, will search for us elsewhere, and the chances are a thousand to one against their making any further examination of this place; consequently it will be the most secure place for us to remain in that can be imagined."

"You are right enough there," said Claude Duval; "but there is one thing which you must not overlook."

"What is that?"

"We are without provisions, and, consequently, for us to remain here longer is a sheer impossibility."

"I grant that freely. But do not for a moment imagine that I had forgotten anything about this. It is a great drawback; but what I have to propose is this. As soon as night comes on I will leave the cavern—or, at any rate, try to do so—and, when I have gained the open air, I shall reconnoitre the enemy. Doubtless, while on this excursion, I shall be able to obtain some provisions, and, if so, all will be well."

"But, supposing," said Tom King, "that you have succeeded in reaching the upper air—by-the-bye, I don't see how you are to do it—supposing it done, however, what shall you try to do?"

"Why, in the first place, to ascertain the whereabouts of our foes. When that much is accomplished, I should endeavour to find out as much respecting their movements as I could. If I thought they would remain here for a length of time, I would procure some provisions and rejoin you; if, on the contrary, I found they were about to leave the chase, I should keep in their track and watch their departure. I should assure myself that all left, and left without the intention of returning, and should notice whether any straggler was left behind or not. Then I should obtain the means of releasing you from this dungeon, for such it might well be called; after having done which, it would be quite time to consult and decide upon our future plan of operations."

"That sounds all very well, captain," said Sixteen-String Jack, "but the enterprise which you propose to undertake is both a difficult and a dangerous one."

"I am aware of that," rejoined Turpin; "and now that you know my intentions, let us consider the matter as settled. I shall be displeased if any one wishes to take my place."

This was enough.

The three highwaymen had too much respect for their captain to gainsay him in anything.

As for Maud, she did not speak.

She merely pressed tightly on Dick's arm.

After what he had said she would not have dreamt of raising her voice in opposition to his.

She trembled at the frightful amount of danger which, as a matter of course, he would incur, and which would be perfectly unavoidable.

Nevertheless, she had confidence in Dick's powers.

He had ere now been the hero of adventures apparently far more dangerous, and why should he not succeed in the present instance?

Maud believed that he would succeed, and this conviction was a great consolation to her.

She knew that they must all perish if some means of leaving the cavern could not be found.

About the achievement of this task Dick had spoken with great confidence.

But his companions appeared to look upon it as an impossibility.

If he was so much better able to overcome this difficulty than they were, why should it not be the same with all the rest?

From these considerations, then, did Maud forbear to utter a single word of remonstrance against his departure.

She deserved all praise for this manifestation of sound sense.

She looked upon the matter in a proper light, but there are few who would have looked upon it in this manner.

She did so, however, and Dick was pleased with her for it.

As for his comrades, they no longer continued to press their point.

Tom King, however, spoke.

"You have told us what you intend to do when you reach the upper air, captain," he said, "but you have not told us how you intend to leave this cavern."

"You will see in good time."

"But I am full of anxiety upon the point. Allay my curiosity, for I cannot help deeming it an impossibility. Could I be shown that it was not, I should feel all the more content."

Tom King was warmly seconded in this appeal by the two other members of the band, and Turpin, unable to withstand their importunities, consented to explain this to them.

He spoke as follows—

"When I was a boy," he said, "I saw a man—a mountebank—perform a feat very similar to the one I am about to attempt. At the time I saw him I was much struck with it, and the natural result of this was that I practised the feat continually until I was able to accomplish it."

At this commencement, the highwaymen prepared themselves to listen to what he had to say with redoubled interest.

"I will describe what I saw as well as I am able. An upright piece of wood was fixed in the ground. Its height appeared to be about thirty feet. The shape of this piece of wood was square, and it was perfectly straight. It was fixed in an upright position on the village green, where the exhibition took place. This post, if such I might term it, was pierced with circular holes, each about an inch in diameter, and at a distance of about two feet from each other. These holes commenced a short distance from the ground and were continued to the top."

"Do you mean that two sides of the square post were pierced in this manner, captain?" asked Claude Duval.

"Yes."

"I understand."

Dick continued.

"The mountebank now came forward and invited the company to observe this exercise of muscular strength, for

so he termed it. He held in his hand two round pieces of wood. They were about ten inches in length, and about three quarters of an inch in diameter, so that they would fit easily in the holes drilled in the post, as I have mentioned. These pieces of wood having been inspected, he held one in each hand as one might a dagger. Advancing to the post, he raised his arm as high above his head as he could, and made a stab at the post. So correct was his aim, that the piece of wood he held in his hand entered one of the holes drilled to receive it. Keeping his body in a perpendicular position, this man raised himself off the ground slowly and gently by the mere strength of the muscles in his arm and in the hand where with he grasped the stick. He continued so to raise himself until his head was level with this peg, for the piece of wood, when thrust into the post in the manner I have described, had that appearance. Having done this much, he raised his other arm high above his head and thrust the piece of wood he held in it into the hole which was next above him. With this hand he raised himself in precisely the same manner, and continued to repeat this action until he had reached the top of the post, upon which a broad flat piece of wood was fixed, and on this he seated himself."

"It was a very remarkable feat," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and one that I have never seen or heard of."

"Nor I—nor I," coincided his companions.

"Of course," continued Dick, "the feat was a wonderful one from the amount of muscular strength necessary to perform it."

"Just so."

"One word more, and I have done; this man repeated the feat several times in succession, sometimes ascending with incredible speed and at other times very slowly. All this time, you must understand, his body hung down in a perpendicular position."

"Yes, but"——

"Wait a moment, and let me finish. As I told you, I was much struck with this feat, so much so that I practised it continually, and at length was able to perform it with as much dexterity as the man I had seen do it!"

"You will excuse me, captain," said Claude Duval, bluntly, "but although I have listened with great attention and interest to what you have just been saying, for the life of me I can't see how you are going to turn this to any account."

"Well, wait a little while and I will show you," replied Turpin, good humouredly; "I shall be able to do that much better than I shall be able to explain it. It will be dark ere long."

This conversation, which we have just set down, lasted for a considerable period, for we have given all that was said as briefly as possible.

A long time had elapsed since the stone had been hurled into the cavern, and since the dragoons had taken their departure, and the short winter's day was rapidly drawing to a close.

In a little while Turpin would put into execution his scheme for leaving the cavern.

His companions were full of curiosity upon the point, but he would not satisfy them.

At last he commenced his preparations.

He first produced from his pocket a strong, dagger-like knife.

It did not shut into a handle, but fitted into a sheath.

It was remarkably strong, and Tom King carried one exactly like it.

This Dick now asked for, and it was immediately given him.

Thus provided, our hero walked round and round the cavern, narrowly inspecting the walls. Pausing before one particular spot, he glanced upwards

"Now," he cried, "I am going to try my scheme, and you will no longer be in ignorance of what it is. I hope I shall be successful in what I am about to attempt."

His three companions, when they saw him with these two dagger-like knives in his hands, seemed to have some dim notion of his purpose, but all was doubt and uncertainty.

We have before had occasion to remark that the walls of the cavern differed widely in character.

In some places they were composed of solid rock, in others of clay, and in others of clay and small-sized pieces of stone mi

was before a part of the wall of this description that Dick Turpin paused, and from previous observation during daylight, he was aware that it continued of the same quality up to the top.

Going close up to it, he raised one hand in the manner he had described, and then, striking one fierce blow, he buried the dagger-like knife up to the haft in the earth.

Our friends then understood in a moment what he was about to do, and they shook their heads, for they believed such a feat to be utterly impossible.

In a similar way to the mountebank they now saw that it was Dick's intention to plunge these knives into the side of the cavern, and, trusting to their hold, raise himself up by slow degrees.

Dick saw them shake their heads, and noted the incredulous expression on their countenances; but, paying no attention to it, he set about the very difficult task before him.

When led by the spirit of emulation to imitate the deeds of the mountebank, Dick little thought that this one would prove to be of such service to him.

Without having practised this feat he could never have performed it.

The first time he had stuck the blade of the knife into the wall of the cavern it was merely by way of experiment.

The principal thing he had to ascertain was whether this would suffice to sustain his weight.

He tried, and was overjoyed to find that, though the knife bent slightly, it showed no symptoms of giving way.

His heart was now comparatively light, and, with feelings of great confidence at his heart, he set about commencing his ascent in good earnest.

Requesting his comrades to stand beneath, so as to catch him should he be unlucky enough to fall, he clutched the hilt of the knife tightly, and drawing himself up until his head was almost on a level with it, he stuck the other knife in about two feet higher up, and sustained himself by that.

He now discovered that to extricate this lower knife was no easy matter, but at a second attempt he succeeded in doing so, and again, drawing himself up, stuck it in at a considerable distance from the ground.

A more fatiguing exercise for the muscles, or one that would tax them more, could scarcely be found.

Dick Turpin, however, had inured himself to this exercise, and though a long time elapsed since he had had any practice, yet he was pleased to find that he had lost none of his former strength and skill.

With eager anxiety and suspense, his companions watched his ascent, fearful, every moment, of witnessing an accident.

Slowly and steadily, however, Dick continued to get higher and higher, until his form was almost lost to view in the gathering gloom.

As he approached the surface of the earth he spoke encouragingly to his comrades below, and expressed his conviction that he should be able to accomplish the task he had set himself.

Upwards he went, until at length he found that one more effort would suffice to place him on the turf in old Enfield Chase.

Summoning up all his energies for this last effort, he raised himself up, and, with a tremendous exercise of strength, swung himself on to the earth.

A faint cheer from his comrades below reached his ear.

But, entirely overcome with his exertions, he lay for some moments on the grass without being able to move.

CHAPTER CCCXCVII.

DICK WATCHES THE DRAGOONS LEAVE ENFIELD CHASE, AND PAYS ONE MORE VISIT TO THE OLD CAVERN.

What words could possibly convey an adequate idea of the feeling of thankfulness which crept—not over the heart of Maud—but over the hearts of those who stood by her side when they found that the daring feat which their leader had proposed was thus successfully carried out!

Now that he had reached the surface, all experienced a feeling of great security—perhaps greater than was warranted by circumstances

For a moment they were oblivious of the presence of the dragoons in the chase, and that Dick might be captured by them.

Soon, however, they recollected this; but they then relied upon the confidence they had in their captain.

That he would be cautious in the extreme, they felt certain; and that he would run into no unnecessary danger they were assured—not only for his own sake, but for theirs, who without his aid, would surely perish in that place.

It was under the impulse of the moment that they uttered the faint cheer when they found he had reached the ground in safety.

Then they listened intently for some sound from their captain's lips; but for a little while, which seemed to them an age, none came.

Quickly, however, Dick Turpin recovered himself from the effects of his late exertion, and fully anticipating that his comrades would expect him to speak to them, he crawled closer to the brink of the abyss.

Holding his head over, he looked down, but he found that those below were totally invisible.

It was just as though he had plunged his gaze into some fathomless gulf.

Nor could he discover anything that would lead any one to the belief that it was a cavern; on the contrary, its appearance was only that of a deep and irregular-shaped pit.

But, if his friends were out of the reach of his vision, they were assuredly not out of the reach of his voice, and he at once addressed them.

As they looked up, however, they could see his head plainly enough.

"All is well, my faithful comrades," said Dick Turpin—"all is well. So much of my enterprize I have performed with safety and success. Let us gather encouragement from it as to the remainder. Stay where you are, rest yourselves in perfect security, and await, with what patience you may possess, my return. As soon as I have ascertained that it will be safe for you to leave this place of refuge, I will come here with such means and appliances as will enable you to do so. Until then, farewell. Do nothing—attempt nothing until I return. You may be sure that I shall not be long."

Dick Turpin's companions responded heartily to his farewell, and then our hero, rising slowly to his feet, took a long and earnest gaze about him.

Nothing but the green trees, however, and the waving undergrowth met his gaze, nor did any sounds strike upon his ears save those which were common to the forest.

No traces either remained of his enemies who had been so lately upon that spot, save where the ground had been trampled by their heavy boots.

The necessity of using the utmost caution in all his movements was clearly before Dick's mind.

Trees grew thickly and plentifully around, so that there was no difficulty about keeping under cover.

He glided, therefore, to a tree, the girth of whose trunk was unusually great, and from this point, feeling more secure, he gazed about him, and endeavoured to form something like a correct idea as to his precise whereabouts.

Short as had been Dick's residence in Enfield Chase, it had sufficed for him to make himself tolerably familiar with the whole of it, and quite so with respect to that portion of it which environed the cavern where he had hoped to remain in safety with his comrades for a much longer period than fate had allowed.

Such being the case, it was not long before he was in a position to say with certainty just in what direction to go in order to reach the entrance to the cavern.

To this point he had determined to repair with all the stealth he possibly could, for, reasonably enough, he conjectured that it was here where he would most likely be able to learn something about the motions of his foes.

With great caution, then, taking care not to make more noise than he could possibly avoid, and darting from tree to tree, he made his way in a circuitous manner to the place he wished to reach.

Every time he paused he listened, but hearing nothing indicative of the proximity of the dragoons, he continued to creep onwards.

As he drew nearer to the entrance to the cavern, his vigilance increased.

The same stillness prevailed, however, and he could almost have brought himself to believe that the dragoons had already left the wood.

Satisfactory as it might be to him if they had done this, yet he would much rather have watched their departure, because then he would be in possession of positive intelligence in the matter, and, in the former case, it would have merely been conjecture.

This silence, however, was both strange and suspicious, and our hero could only account for it by supposing that they had either left the wood, or else were all in the cavern.

Nearer and nearer he approached, until at length, as he stood behind a tree, he was able to see the face of the rock in which the indentation was that led to the cavern.

Here were evident signs of the presence of his foes.

The grass was trampled down, the branches of the bushes broken, and the thorn-bush that had so well concealed the entrance to the cavern, had been uprooted, and lay withering and dying on the ground.

In contrast with its former aspect, this spot now presented an appearance of utter desolation.

Dick sighed as he saw this, for he had almost began to love the place, which would probably no longer afford a shelter for them.

A profound stillness reigned about this spot, and at length, so long did it continue, that Dick felt almost inclined to venture into the passage.

Very fortunately, however, he did not do this.

While he was debating the matter in his mind he was startled by the sound of approaching footsteps.

They were at a distance, and came from the direction of the cavern.

Several persons were evidently coming, and Dick Turpin glanced upwards at the branches of the tree beneath which he was standing, and resolved to hide himself among them; for his present place of concealment was scarcely deserving of the name, and he ran, in consequence, a great risk of being discovered.

It so happened that this tree had a horizontal projecting branch, the distance of which, from the ground, was barely eight feet.

This was just what Dick wanted.

Giving a slight spring, he seized hold of this branch with his hands, and easily and rapidly drew himself up into the tree.

It was an evergreen, and the large leaves which grew upon it formed an excellent and most effective screen.

He had just time to settle himself in a secure position, when a dragoon made his appearance at the mouth of the passage.

He was followed by another, and another, until Dick counted, in all, fifteen.

But they were not all dragoons though all wore a species of uniform.

Two were surgeons, and two of the dragoons were carried by their companions upon rudely-constructed litters.

These were the two who had been so dangerously wounded by the bullets from the highwaymen's pistols.

The surgeons walked by the side of the litters.

The captain had his arm in a sling, and his face was expressive both of pain and vexation.

The result of this adventure, so different to what he had expected, annoyed and chagrined him exceedingly.

He had had all this extra trouble, had received a wound, had had two of his best men badly hurt, and had gained nothing whatever in return.

Under these circumstances, it is not wonderful that he should feel so mortified as he did.

A dejected, jaded look was also visible upon the countenances of the other dragoons, who, of course, had been much harassed by their service, and scarcely one had escaped receiving a wound of some sort or other.

Much wondering what this little procession meant, Dick looked earnestly at them.

They all came to a halt as soon as they had emerged from the passage, but this our hero easily understood.

It was in order that the bearers of the litters might be changed.

As soon as this was done the captain gave the word to march, and in a compact throng the troop of dragoons directed their steps across the chase.

From the tree in which he was hidden, Dick was able

to command an extensive prospect, and some moments elapsed before the soldiers got out of sight.

As soon as ever he found himself unable to perceive them, our hero quitted his place of concealment and hastened after them.

To follow in their track was an easy enough matter, for so many persons forcing a path through the brushwood rendered the way they had taken plainly perceptible, for the dragoons took no pains to disguise their route.

At a cautious distance, Dick followed them.

His heart was elated with the idea that his foes, thoroughly weary of their search, were about to leave the chase.

To ascertain whether he was right was his motive for following them as he did.

The supposition was not at all an unlikely one, and from the direction they took, Dick became more and more confirmed in his notion, for if they did not change their course they would in a short time reach the borders of the chase.

With increasing hope at every step, Dick crept after them.

Occasionally the sound of their voices, and the jingling of their weapons would reach his ear, but he was unable to hear what was said, and to have approached them more closely would be dangerous to a degree.

Wisely, then, he restrained his curiosity, and maintained the same distance between them.

As they drew nearer to the borders of the chase, where the trees were not of such huge dimensions, and where they grew at a greater distance apart, Dick's progress became exceedingly difficult, and the chances of his being seen were very much increased.

He was forced at length to adopt the expedient of crawling on his hands and knees.

By this means he was enabled to advance without exposing his form to observation.

Suddenly, however, he was forced to come to a halt, for the dragoons no longer continued to advance.

Looking up stealthily, our hero saw that they had now reached the confines of the chase.

The bushes, which had so far afforded him a shelter, extended only a few yards further.

Beyond these grass grew, and on this spot the horses belonging to the dragoons were grazing.

"Surely," Dick thought, "I shall now know for certain whether it is their intention to leave the chase or not. Patience, and no doubt I shall learn all."

The litters were now deposited upon the grass, and the dragoons began to prepare to mount their horses.

The captain was assisted into the saddle by two of his men, for the state of his arm would not allow him to mount unaided.

All, then, followed his example save four, and these had to carry the wounded men.

The surplus horses were led by the bridle.

When this much was done, the little cavalcade again set itself in motion.

But they went only at a walking pace, for the condition of their comrades would not permit them to go faster.

Most eagerly did our hero watch them, until he was unable to do so any longer.

He waited a minute or two, until he thought it was safe, and then crossed the open space.

He could now see them once more, though they vanished from his view almost immediately.

Still he knew that they had really left the chase.

At this scarcely hoped-for departure of his foes the exultation of Dick Turpin knew no bounds, but all at once he sobered down as the thought occurred to him that some members of the troop might yet be left in the chase.

He had seen rather a large number depart, it is true, but there was no evidence to show that all had gone.

It was well he made this reflection when he did, or he might have incautiously run into much danger.

What he should next do was rather a puzzling question, but, after some few minutes' reflection, he came to the conclusion that, if any dragoons had been left behind, they would most likely be in the cavern.

Towards this place, then, he resolved at all risks to go again.

The bright and beautiful moon, which was only a few days past the full, was high in the cloudless heavens, and enabled him to see about him with great distinctness.

At length, upon passing a tree which had a small piece of its bark chipped off, as it seemed, with a knife, Dick turned, and, after a momentary hesitation, changed the direction in which he had been going.

He just then recollected that these pieces had been chipped off in order that they might readily find their way to the tree to which the spy had been bound.

Curious to learn something respecting him, Dick made his way towards this tree.

He reached it in a few moments, and then discovered, as he had more than half expected, that his prisoner had gone.

Dick thought very likely he had been released by his comrades, but we happen to know that this was not the case.

The spy had got off without any one to help him but himself.

Recollecting that he had been bound with rope, and that this would now be useful in the highest degree to him, Turpin looked about for it.

He succeeded in finding nearly all of it.

There were several yards, and he took possession of it with a feeling of great satisfaction.

Having done this, he once more made his way towards the cavern.

The distance was considerable, and some time necessarily elapsed before he reached it, because his safety demanded that he should proceed with caution.

At length he came in sight of the opening.

This faced the direction in which the moon beams fell, and, in consequence, the rock could be seen with great distinctness.

The moon's rays penetrated a little way into the passage.

But they revealed nothing but the bare earth, and the rugged sides of the rock.

A deep silence prevailed in this place, and the longer Dick stopped and listened, the more did he feel convinced that his foes had taken their departure.

Eventually he made up his mind, after arguing the matter *pro* and *con* for some time, that he would at all risks enter the cavern, and ascertain whether it was empty or not.

He was well aware that the danger he would incur by this proceeding would be of no common description, but, considering the importance of the knowledge he would gain, he thought he ought to make the attempt.

Having come to this determination, and encouraged by the silence which still continued, he crossed over the little open space, and in a moment stood just within the passage.

Here he paused and listened.

But he could hear nothing, and on tip-toe he proceeded towards the cavern.

As a precautionary measure, he drew his sword and projected it before him.

He would then be prepared should any sudden attack be made upon him, or should he run into an unexpected danger.

At every few yards he took he would stop and listen, and then, encouraged by the unbroken silence, would advance.

In his progress he felt certain that he made a scarcely audible sound.

Of course the passage was buried in profound darkness, but he was familiar with all its intricacies.

He strained his eyes in a vain endeavour to pierce the gloom, for every moment he expected to see a gleam of light come from the direction of the cavern, for should anyone be there, it was scarcely likely they would remain in darkness.

CHAPTER CCCXCVIII.

DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN RESCUING HIS COMPANIONS FROM THE CAVERN.

But no gleam came.

Both the silence and the darkness of the tomb prevailed in that gloomy region, and, the nearer Dick got to the termination of the passage, the more convinced did he feel that he was the only living human being anywhere near the place.

Nevertheless, he did not abate his caution, for he remembered that a barricade had been erected, and he knew not whether it had been removed.

If not, he would have to take care to avoid any contact with it.

As he slowly put one foot before the other, assuring himself before he placed it on the ground that there was no obstacle before him, he found, by the difference in the temperature of the atmosphere, that he had really entered the cavern, so that the barricade, it was clear, had been removed.

It was equally clear, too, that the cavern was empty.

Our hero now became conscious that a faint, misty kind of twilight found its way into this place, and, glancing upwards, he perceived that it proceeded from the rays of the moon finding their way through the crevices in the roof.

As the Queen of Night rose higher and higher in the heavens, this hazy twilight increased in brightness, and Dick Turpin quickly became able to see about him with tolerable ease.

One by one, the many and well-remembered features of the old cavern came into view, until, after standing for a little while near the entrance of the passage, he was able to observe the whole outlines of the place.

The pale moonbeams, penetrating through those small apertures above, had an exceedingly beautiful effect.

As soon as he found himself able to discern one object from another, Dick Turpin moved from the spot upon which he had been standing, and confident that there was no other person in the cavern besides himself, he walked boldly to the centre of it.

Unconsciously he paused close to the hearthstone, and he almost instantly became sensible of an increase of warmth.

The cause of this was, of course, no mystery to him, and with the point of his sword he stirred together a few embers that were upon the stone.

They were at the point of extinction, but by stirring them about Dick succeeded in procuring a blaze.

It was a fitful one, it is true, but still it served to light up the cavern with a much greater degree of brilliancy than the moonbeams.

There was no longer any need for apprehension, for had any person been in the cavern besides Dick, his presence would ere now have been manifested.

Still, he held his drawn sword in his hand in an attitude ready for immediate service, so as to guard against the possibility of a surprise.

Some more dry twigs were close at hand, and these he cast on the fire as soon as he perceived them.

A bright light was the result.

Very curiously, now, Dick looked about him.

On every side he saw traces of the recent presence of his foes, but nothing to lead him to the belief that they would return.

The conviction that they had in earnest taken their departure deepened in his mind; and he resolved, without further loss of time, to release his companions from their unpleasant place of refuge.

The thought, however, occurred to him, that he was but ill-provided with the means of doing this, and that in the cavern he might very likely find something of great use, which had been left behind by his foes.

In a moment, then, he took a fire-brand from the hearth, and commenced an examination of the cavern.

Almost the first thing he saw was a coil of thick rope lying upon the floor.

What it had been brought there for, he could easily guess; and he supposed that it had been left where he found it through negligence or accident.

Dick seized it with an exclamation of pleasure.

It was of great length; and with the pieces he already had in his possession, he should, doubtless, have sufficient for his purpose.

This was a good commencement to his search, and he continued it with additional ardour.

He found nothing, however, that promised to be of the least service to him; and rightly imagining that his companions would feel uneasy at his long absence, he resolved to return to them without delay.

Accordingly, he made his way towards the entrance of the passage, which he traversed with as much speed as he could command; and, in the space of a minute or two, found himself in the open air.

To reach the upper ground in which the hole was situated, he was compelled to make a considerable detour; for to climb up the perpendicular face of the rock was an impossibility.

But Dick's heart was light and his steps fleet, so that a very short time elapsed before he reached his destination.

Lying down at full length upon the ground, he held his head as far over the abyss as he dared.

Before he had time to speak himself, he was addressed by his friends below.

To them an endless time appeared to have elapsed since his departure, and their eyes had been continually directed towards the aperture in the roof, in the hope every moment that they would see him make his appearance.

They had cheated the time of much of its tediousness by conferring together upon their future prospects, and endeavouring to come to some conclusion as to the best course of action to be adopted by them in future.

In this Maud felt but little interest.

Her thoughts were wholly occupied in thinking about our hero, and wondering whether he was in safety, or whether he had fallen into the hands of his enemies.

No sounds of alarm had reached her ears, though she knew that Enfield Chase was large enough for a great disturbance taking place in one portion of it to be unheard in another.

Her heart beat with joy when she saw him approach the aperture, for she did not dream it could be anyone but he whom she had so anxiously expected.

"All is well," said Dick Turpin, in reply to the salutation of his comrades: "I have the best of all news to communicate. The dragoons have left the chase; I saw them depart myself!"

The three highwaymen uttered a faint hurrah, and then Claude Duval said—

"I am glad to hear that, captain; and the next thing will be to get us out of this place."

"That shall be done as soon as possible," said Turpin, in a cheerful voice; "I have a good deal to do, though, in the way of preparation."

As he spoke he rose to his feet, and proceeded to make an examination of the rope.

He found he had a pretty large quantity—even more than he thought he should require.

The first thing he did was to tie all the pieces of rope together, having done which he tied one end firmly to the tree that grew nearest to the aperture, and pulled it with all his strength, to make sure it was perfectly secure.

He had at first intended to tie some large knots in this rope to facilitate the process of climbing up it, but he suddenly thought of a fresh expedient, which would answer to the purpose much better.

This was to cut down some pieces of wood from the branches of the trees, each about eight inches in length.

These he resolved to tie in the rope in such a manner that they should be horizontal to it, and thus form a rude kind of ladder.

With one of the knives he carried it was perfectly easy to cut these pieces of wood, for there was no lack of material.

This, then, was his next proceeding.

Although it took him but a few minutes to cut each one, yet as a great many were required, the operation naturally ran into a great deal of time.

At length having, as he fancied, cut as many as he required, he proceeded to tie them in the rope.

This was an easy matter.

All he had to do was to tie the rope into a loop, thrust the prepared piece of wood into it, and draw it tight, so that the tighter the rope was pulled the firmer would the horizontal pieces become.

They were fixed at rather irregular distances, but the average was about a foot.

At last Dick completed this rude kind of rope-ladder, and announced the fact to his companions.

All that now remained was to ascertain whether it was long enough to reach the bottom of the cavern, but Dick had estimated this, and felt very little doubt.

Nevertheless, he lowered it with a slight feeling of anxiety.

Eagerly and joyfully did our old friends Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack watch its descent.

They were thoroughly tired of their present quarters.

and had been for a long while, so that this prospect of escape was really delightful.

Suddenly Dick, as he was lowering the rope, felt it become tight, and, at the same moment, a cry from below announced to him the fact that his companions had reached it.

"Pull it tight!" he cried, when he found they had taken hold of it.

He was willingly obeyed.

In another moment the rope was pulled quite tight.

"Hang upon it with all your weight," said Dick, "in order that we may know whether it will be safe to ascend by it."

This was immediately done, as the importance of obtaining this piece of knowledge was obvious.

The rope stood the test bravely.

The three highwaymen were now impatient to ascend, but Turpin requested them to wait a moment.

They did so, and then, somewhat to their surprise, they saw him lower himself over the brink of the abyss and commence a rapid descent.

In less time than they could have believed possible, he was standing among them.

With a low cry of joy Maud sprang forward, and Dick clasped the devoted girl fervently in his arms.

So great was her joy at thus finding him in safety by her side, that it was only with the greatest difficulty that she prevented herself from fainting.

Turpin turned round to his comrades.

"Ascend, my gallant friends," he cried; "the means of escaping from this dismal place are before you. Ascend with all convenient speed, for the sooner we reach the open air the better. I should advise you, however, to ascend one at the time."

"And you, captain?"

"I will follow you as soon as you are above in safety."

"Nay—nay. You go first. We will follow."

"Not so. You go first. Do not waste time about this. Ascend."

The highwaymen no longer hesitated, but they took good care to follow their captain's excellent advice.

Claude Duval was the first to climb.

The two others held the rope steady for him.

Nothing could be easier than to ascent the rope by means of the horizontal pieces of wood, and Claude was very quickly at the top.

Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack followed him, and reached the surface of the earth without accident.

They now looked down rather anxiously for the captain and his fair companion to make their appearance.

While the three friends had been ascending, Dick had occupied himself in endeavouring to calm the agitation under which Maud laboured.

The poor girl was dreadfully excited, and she clung to Turpin's arm with almost frantic violence.

For the first time Dick now wondered by what means Maud was to leave the cavern.

In her present state he was certain that it would be in the greatest degree dangerous for her to attempt to ascend by the rope in the same manner as his companions had done.

Some other mode must, therefore, be devised, and this for a little while completely baffled him.

At length he hit upon an expedient which he thought would answer his purpose, provided the rope was strong enough.

At all risks, however, he resolved to attempt it, for, by lingering there, they were perhaps incurring great danger and diminishing their chances of escape.

He called out to his comrades to make sure that the rope was firm and had not given way in any place, and having received a satisfactory reply, he addressed himself to Maud.

"Cheer up, dearest; pray, cheer up. This is weak of you; indeed it is. Our greatest peril is over now, and, believe me, there is little need of apprehension. The dragoons have gone; I watched them leave the chase with my own eyes. All we have to do is to rejoin our comrades at the top, and then to decide upon what we shall do in future."

"I know all that, said Maud; "but what distresses me is the fear that, after all that you have done, I shall not be able to ascend. I feel that my strength would abandon me, that I should grow giddy

"If that is all," replied Dick, "do not let that distress you a moment longer, for I have thought of a means by which we'll be able to ascend."

"Have you? How thoughtful you are! Tell me what it is, and I will try my best."

There was a hopeful tone in her voice.

"Show me, then," said Maud; "for in you I have every confidence."

"I hope you have," said Dick, earnestly.

"Believe me, I have. Tell me what I am to do first?"

"Clasp your hands together, and hold them out before you."

He was immediately obeyed.

Our hero then took off his cravat, and by means of this he ingeniously tied Maud's wrists together in such a manner as to be quite firm, and yet without giving her much pain.

What this was for she could not conceive; but she asked no questions.

As soon as he had assured himself that her wrists were securely tied together, Dick led her towards the rope.

Grasping it with both hands, he said—

"Now, Maud, dearest, show your confidence. Place your arms round my neck."

There was only one way by which she could do this, and that was lifting her hands and putting them over Dick's head

This was what he desired her to do.

"Cling firmly to me," he added, "and we shall reach the surface without trouble."

"No—no!" exclaimed Maud, when she saw what Dick intended. "It is impossible that you can ascend the rope with me hanging on your neck in this manner."

Turpin laughed.

"Have confidence," he replied; "and then you see."

At the same moment he commenced the ascent.

With her wrists tied in the manner we have described, Maud's arm formed a kind of loop round Turpin's neck.

This made her secure so far as this went but our hero, though he had spoken so lightly of this achievement, found that in reality, it was a most difficult one.

He had, every possible inducement for exertion.

Clinging to the cross-pieces of wood with his hands he slowly but surely mounted, using his feet as a means to assist him.

Maud held her breath.

At every moment she expected that Dick would loose his grasp, and that they would both be precipitated to the rocky floor below.

As they ascended higher and higher, however, without meeting with any accident, she began to grow less apprehensive.

In reality the danger now was greater than it had been.

Dick found that it required the exertion of his utmost strength to preserve his balance, and to continue to raise one hand above the other.

He felt his muscles strained until they almost cracked—his fingers threatened to give way—while his heart throbbed painfully and irregularly.

Every second served to take him nearer to the surface, and it was this which encouraged him to renew his efforts.

Perspiration streamed from every pore, and occasionally his whole body would tremble like an aspen.

At last, however, the top was safely reached.

CHAPTER CCCXCIX.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MAKES A PROPOSITION TO DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES.

Had not Dick Turpin's three companions been waiting on the brink of the abyss, the escape from the cavern, though so far accomplished, would never have been completed.

When his hands grasped the last cross piece of wood, our hero felt that, if the rope had been one foot longer, he should not have been able to ascend it.

To have even now fairly reached the ground would have been impossible, had it not been for the assistance his comrades rendered him.

Bending over, they took hold of Maud by the arms, and fairly lifted her up.

She hung a dead weight upon their hands, and almost immediately they discovered that she had fainted.



[DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMPANIONS BIDDING ADIEU TO ENFIELD CHASE.]

Accordingly they laid her down upon the turf, and turned the whole of their attention to their captain, who, in truth, required all the assistance they were able to render him.

When he had been relieved of the weight of Maud in the manner we have described, he felt most thankful, for he feared that he should not have been able to retain his hold a moment longer.

Now, however, it was comparatively an easy matter; though, when he tried to reach the ground, he found his strength insufficient for the performance of such a feat.

It was while he was exhausting himself with making fresh efforts that his comrades arrived.

To seize him by both arms, and drag him over the brink, was the work of less than a moment.

At first he could do nothing; but, summoning the whole of his strength, he rose to a half-sitting posture, and inquired eagerly after Maud.

Tom King assured him of her safety, adding, at the same time, that she was insensible.

The violent exertion which Dick Turpin had just gone through was really quite enough to exhaust anyone, but he was not long in recovering himself.

He was anxious about Maud, and he immediately made his way to where she was lying upon the ground.

She was now evincing unequivocal signs of recovering her senses.

Almost as soon as he bent over her she opened her eyes.

Her glance fell in a moment upon his countenance, and then she uttered a faint sigh of joy and satisfaction, for she knew that he was safe.

That was her first thought, and that was her sole anxiety.

At Dick's request, she did not attempt to move for a few minutes, until she felt herself strong enough to be able to do so.

Sixteen-String Jack had a flask containing a very small quantity of brandy.

This he handed to the captain, who partook of it eagerly.

it was wonderful to see what a difference the stimulant made to him.

He next assisted Maud to her feet, and then all five of them stood together in a huddled-up group.

The moon still continued to shine with great force and power, though she had some time passed the meridian.

What our friends now had to do was to seek some temporary place of shelter, and then decide upon what should next be done.

At a word, then, from their captain, the three highwaymen left the open space upon which they had been standing, and concealed themselves among the trees and underwood which grew at a short distance.

Close to where they halted the trunk of a huge tree lay upon the ground.

It seemed as though it had been struck down with lightning, and had evidently remained for a long period in its present position.

Upon this they sat down, and, amid the deep silence and solitude of nature, prepared to consider their present position and future prospects.

It was well that our friends were so light-hearted as they were, or they would have shrunk dismayed from the view before them.

They waited in silence for Turpin to speak, although, during his absence, they had talked the whole matter over, and come to their own conclusions.

Dick understood their silence.

"You are waiting for me to speak," he said, "and to advise what had best be done. I cannot take upon myself to do this, though I have given the subject much reflection."

"So have we," replied his comrades.

"Then, I doubt not," rejoined Turpin, "that we shall be able to come to a decision. In point of fact, what we have to make up our minds about, is this. Shall we remain in the chase, and risk another attack being made upon us, or shall we take our departure?"

"That is exactly it, captain," said Tom King; "we have those two alternatives, and we must choose one of them. Which will suit us best, is a matter for deliberation."

"Right!" replied Turpin; "there is much to be said in favour of both modes of action. We must weigh the subject thoroughly in our minds, consider it under all its aspects, and then determine."

"I was in hopes," said Sixteen-String Jack, "that the chase would have afforded us an asylum for a long while, or, at any rate, until the violence of the pursuit after us had abated."

"That hope is at an end now, however," replied Claude Duval. "Our presence here is not only suspected, but known."

"True," said Dick; "but our foes, as yet, have failed to discover us, and I watched them leave the chase early in the evening."

"But that," remarked Tom King, "may only be a ruse upon the part of our enemies, so as to lull us into a sense of false security, while, in the meantime, they take such measures as will make our escape from the chase a matter of impossibility."

"I fear that is but too reasonable a supposition," said Dick Turpin; "and yet, they may have withdrawn from the chase solely in the expectation that we should leave it, and perhaps a large force is assembled on the border waiting for us to make our appearance, and in readiness to pounce upon us."

"That is a supposition," said Sixteen-String Jack, "that, to my fancy, is quite as probable as the one put forth by Tom King."

"Just so," said Dick Turpin; "and it is this which makes decision such a difficult matter, for, of course, all will depend upon which we do."

"Decidedly!" said his comrades, as with one voice.

But for a short time we will leave them in this state of doubt and perplexity—remaining idle when they ought to be active—and consulting earnestly as to what should be done, while we turn our attention to the proceedings of the dragoons, and enlighten the reader with respect to their movements, about which, no doubt, a great amount of interest is felt.

We will briefly record their proceedings from the moment when we left them seated round the fire in the cavern.

Throughout the live-long night did they keep guard, listening attentively to all sounds; but they learned nothing respecting the highwaymen.

Two surgeons arrived within a short time after they had been sent for, and when the wounds of the dragoons had been attended to, the captain discovered that his own arm was very painful, and he applied to have it dressed.

This was done at once; and when the surgeon made an examination of it, it was discovered that a bullet had passed completely through the fleshy part of his arm.

After it was dressed, the captain experienced a great deal of pain from it, and this added not a little to the ill-humour which he felt consequent upon the unsuccessful result of his expedition.

In a wearying, tedious manner the night passed away; and at length, to the infinite satisfaction of the unwounded dragoons, day broke.

They requested the captain to allow them to make a search in the chase for the four highwaymen, and strive to obtain some clue to their whereabouts.

To this request he consented, though he did not for a moment think it would be productive of any important results.

With a portion of what took place on this occasion, the reader has already been made acquainted.

We have described how the dragoons, in the course of their search, came to the orifice in the roof of the cavern, in which our friends were imprisoned and concealed.

We have related, too, how they rolled the fragment of rock down, after having done which, they listened.

But as no sound whatever came from below, they not unnaturally came to the conclusion that there was no one there, and took their departure.

For some hours longer they continued their search in the chase, but there can be no interest in describing it, because they had all their trouble for nothing, and achieved no result whatever.

Thoroughly tired out, they returned to the cavern, and acquainted their captain with the failure of their expedition.

As this was just what he anticipated, he did not feel in the least disappointed.

A consultation now took place as to what they should do, and one of the surgeons, a shrewd Scotchman, joined in the conversation.

He was especially ready with his advice, and one of his suggestions was by all present deemed such a good one that they resolved to act upon it without delay.

His proposal was this.

They were one and all to leave the chase—really leave it, and not pretend to do so—taking care to proceed with great deliberation, and not to attempt the least concealment.

He argued from this that the highwaymen, seeing them depart, would depart also.

They would then be in readiness to pursue them, and when they had once started their game, the other detachments would join in the pursuit, so that capture would in the end be certain.

From this it will be seen that the highwaymen were in very great jeopardy indeed, and their danger was in reality much greater than they fancied it to be.

The dragoons had only to be patient, and, sooner or later, they would accomplish their object, for it was subsequently determined that, should many hours elapse without the highwaymen making their appearance, according to expectation, they were to re-enter the chase and thoroughly search it in every part.

Owing to the circumstances which have already been related to the reader, the specified time passed by without anything being seen, and the captain, whose impatience was now wrought up to the highest pitch, ordered his men to march, and once more entered the chase.

All was profoundly still, however, with the exception of the noise which they themselves made in their progress.

No trace of their prey could be seen, but, undaunted, they pressed onward with the firm determination of searching every bush until they had unkennelled them.

They had evidence that the cavern had been frequented by the highwaymen, because they had been seen to enter it, and because they had, to their knowledge, so mysteriously disappeared from it; so, naturally enough, they made their way back to this place.

They were careful to make no more noise in their pro-

gress than they could possibly avoid, and for this purpose all dismounted from their steeds, and left them in charge of one of their companions.

A root, then, they stole through the leafy glades of the forest, animated by the hope that they should at length be able to steal unawares upon the highwaymen.

From what has just been narrated, it will be seen that our friends were both right with respect to the interpretation which they put upon the dragoons leaving the chase.

To them we will now return.

Little did they think, as they sat there conversing, that their enemies were stealing so stealthily upon them.

Little did they dream that they were threatened with a danger of so imminent a description.

"I am afraid," said Turpin, in reply to his comrade's observation, "that the probabilities of both are so evenly balanced, that, without some more definite information than we at present possess, or are likely to obtain, it will be impossible for us to come to a decision. It is, I think, quite certain that, now that our presence here is known, it will never do to remain; if we do, we are sure to be captured. As we must leave, then, let us do at once."

"But the roads," said Tom King; "you must not forget that all the roads are nightly patrolled by detachments of dragoons, and it is scarcely possible that we shall be able to escape being seen by some of them."

"That is a danger," replied Turpin, "which, however great it may be at present, will certainly never grow less; therefore the sooner we leave it the better chance we should have."

"So I think," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and, if you will listen to me for a moment, I will tell you what I think had better be done under the circumstances."

"Speak—speak!" said Dick Turpin, "let us hear what you have to propose, by all means."

"I can say it, then, in a very few words, but I think it will be best to lead you on by degrees."

"Just as you like."

"Very well, then. In the first place, I think you will admit that it is well known to our foes that we are all four together."

"Certainly."

"Consequently, then, the dragoons will look out for a party of four, and you may depend that no such party would pass them without examination."

"Well—well."

"I agree with the captain that the difficulties in the way of leaving the chase will never be less than they are at present. We must leave it at some time or other—and why not now?"

"That is just my opinion," said Dick Turpin.

"And mine—and mine," said Tom King and Claude Duval.

"Then it seems we are all of one opinion with respect to the advisability of leaving this place without delay."

"We are—we are."

"Then I have something else to propose, which will, I hope, meet with your full approbation."

"Go on—go on."

"It is this. You have admitted that the dragoons, who are on the lock out for us, will expect to see us all four together."

"Yes."

"Then I propose that we should separate."

"Separate?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"I thought we had agreed to keep together," said Tom King.

"So we had, and the principal reason for our doing so was because we thought it would be conducive to our common safety. Now, however, I think that our safety would be best secured by our separating."

There was a few moment's silence after Sixteen-String Jack pronounced these words, but at length Dick Turpin said—

"I had not thought of this, but now that you mention it, I am almost inclined to think it would be best. In what manner do you propose the separation shall take place?"

"I do not quite understand you."

"Do you mean that we should separate into four parties or two?"

"Oh two, most certainly."

"You and Claude, I suppose; and Tom King and myself."

"That was what I thought, captain."

"Well, I have nothing to urge against such an arrangement."

"Nor I," said Tom King.

"I entirely agree with Jack," said Claude Duval.

"But," added Turpin, "I cannot think that this separation, which is brought about solely with the view of promoting our personal safety, is intended to be permanent."

"By no means!" said Sixteen-String Jack, warmly, "by no means. You wrong me by entertaining such a thought."

"Enough—enough!" replied Turpin. "It now remains for us to decide upon some place at which we are to meet at a certain time."

"Just so."

"Where, then, shall this place be?"

"Wherever you like."

"Nay, mention some place which, in your judgment, is least likely to be suspected by our enemies."

"Do you know Finchley?"

"Certainly."

"Do you know where the road divides, one portion leading to London by way of Highgate, and the other by way of Hampstead?"

"Yes—yes, quite well."

"Then you must have noticed that there is a triangular piece of land overgrown with grass where these roads separate."

"There is—there is."

"Let that, then, be our meeting place."

CHAPTER CCCC.

OUR FRIENDS BID ADIEU TO ENFIELD CHASE.

"AGREED," exclaimed the three companions of Sixteen-String Jack, speaking as with one voice. "Agreed."

"I am glad that you approve of my suggestion," he said.

"I do," replied Turpin. "I highly approve of it. I know the spot you mention well, and a more lonely and unfrequented one could not, I think, be found within twenty miles of London."

"Ever since a most horrible murder was committed there some fifteen years ago, the neighbourhood has been shunned by every one," said Sixteen-String Jack; "and, knowing this, prompted me to name it as our place of rendezvous."

"Nothing could suit us better."

"It is, then, determined that we shall meet there?"

"Yes."

"But when?"

"On the third night from this."

"That will do. By that time we shall certainly be able to repair to the appointed spot, and, when we meet, then it will be time enough to decide upon some future plan of operations."

"Just so."

"Are you all quite agreed as to what is to be done?" asked Turpin. "It is time we decided, for the night is waning."

"Yes, we are all agreed; and we think the sooner we leave Enfield Chase the better, at any rate for the present."

"So I think. We cannot lessen our danger by doing so; and, if we remain, I am afraid we shall increase it."

"So am I," remarked Tom King. "Do not say a word about remaining, I beg."

"There is no need to do so. The first thing necessary to be done will be to secure our horses."

"Yes, I have been thinking about that," said Claude Duval, "and I am sadly afraid that will give us a great deal of trouble."

"The dragoons may have disturbed them, perhaps," said Turpin; "but they did not capture and lead them away, I am quite sure of that."

"But how shall we capture them?"

"I think it will be done with greater ease than you imagine. The cattle are almost sure to keep together, and I have a particular whistle, by means of which I summon Black Bess."

"And will she obey it?"

"Beyond all doubt. You will find that, when I give

utterance to the signal, she will neigh, and make that whinnying noise that horses always do when they are released, and then she will make her way towards me."

"But the other horses, captain; what about them?"

"I am of opinion that they will follow Black Bess."

"Well, perhaps they may; and it is to be hoped that they will do so."

"At any rate, we can but try. Should they arrive, all will be well; if not, we must adopt some other means."

"Do you think," asked Sixteen-String Jack, "that Black Bess will make her way to this spot if you give the signal here?"

"Assuredly, if she is within hearing."

"Then I think Claude and myself had better make our way to the little recess just within the entrance of the passage, where, as you well know, the saddles and bridles were deposited."

"True," said Turpin. "I had forgotten that. I am afraid, however, that our trappings have fallen into the hands of our foes, and if so, we shall be very awkwardly situated indeed."

"I scarcely apprehend anything on this score, for the place where they are deposited is dark, and little liable to discovery."

"Away, then," said Turpin, "and make use of all possible expedition; in the meantime, I will give the signal to Black Bess."

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack now rose from the trunk of the tree and hastened in the direction of the cavern, while our hero uttered that shrill chirping whistle which we have so frequently described.

In the intense silence of the forest it sounded with surprising distinctness, and echoed far and wide through the leafy recesses of the chase.

But the sound died away into nothing without creating any response, though Dick listened eagerly and intently for Black Bess's answering neigh.

As the silence continued, he resolved to try again, and, should he be unsuccessful, to remove to another spot and try the effect there.

Once more, then, he whistled, and this time with much greater loudness than before.

The result was all that he could expect.

Before the echoes had died away, the sound he had so much wished to hear came upon their listening ears.

It was the short, sharp neigh of which Dick had spoken, and, in a moment afterwards, the crashing of branches, as the bonny mare bounded towards her master, made itself heard.

Again and again did Dick repeat the signal so as to encourage the noble animal, and enable her to reach the spot upon which her master stood.

The sounds she made in her progress sufficiently indicated the direction in which she was coming, and Dick Turpin, together with Maud and Tom King, eagerly turned towards it.

Their patience was not put to a very severe trial.

In another moment the bushes before them were rudely trampled down, and Black Bess appeared.

At first she stood motionless, but as soon as Dick repeated the signal she bounded to his side.

Our hero patted and stroked his magnificent steed, to whom he was so deeply indebted.

He was delighted to once more behold her, and the gallant creature seemed to be herself no less delighted, for she rubbed her head against his breast as playfully as a dog.

Dick was roused from caressing her by hearing Tom King speak.

"You are right, captain," he said. "Here are the other horses. They look frightened, but we shall doubtless be able to capture them."

Looking up as his old comrade spoke, Dick saw that the other three horses were standing at a little distance with their faces turned towards them.

By their attitude and appearance he could tell that the least thing would send them off at a gallop.

It would, therefore, be necessary to use the utmost caution in approaching them.

Taking Black Bess by the forelock, our hero led her towards the three other horses, who now seemed to suffer much less apprehension.

Tom King followed closely behind Turpin.

In this manner, and by speaking coaxingly every few moments, they succeeded in getting close up to the animals, and, at last, patted them.

After this, all was easy.

About Black Bess Dick Turpin knew he had no occasion to trouble himself; he therefore released the hold which he had previously retained upon her, and grasped the two others, while Tom King secured the remaining one.

Scarcely had they done this, than Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, laden with the trappings belonging to the four steeds, came running towards them.

At a glance they could tell, not only by the expression of their countenances, but by their very air and manner, that something of an unusual and exciting character had taken place.

At full speed they came to where Dick Turpin was standing, and then, flinging down the heavy articles with which they had been encumbered, they strove to speak, but they were so breathless with the exertion they had recently undergone that for a few seconds they were quite unable to articulate a word.

At length, in a gasping sort of voice, Sixteen-String Jack said—

"Quick! quick! For your lives, be quick! Saddle the horses instantly! Mount, and be off with all the speed you can make! Quick! quick! I say. Saddle the horses!"

"What is the meaning of all this?" asked Dick Turpin, to whose arm Maud was again clinging, dreading, yet hoping to hear the news.

"There is no time for explanation," said Sixteen-String Jack. "On with the saddles and bridles! Quick! I say! I will tell you more presently. But, believe me, there is now no time to lose."

Urged by the energetic manner in which he spoke, as well as by his example, Dick Turpin and Tom King hastened to accoutre their steeds.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack occupied themselves in a similar manner, and with that rapidity which long practice had given them, they saddled and bridled their steeds.

In answer to Dick's repeated inquiries, Sixteen-String Jack said—

"We gained the cavern in safety, and found the trappings just where he had deposited them. Taking them up, we were about to return, when our attention was attracted by a slight sound. What it meant, we knew not, but deemed it important to ascertain.

"Creeping through the brushwood cautiously, we discovered that a troop of dragoons were making their way towards the cavern which they had just left. More than this we did not wait to see, but hastened hither, as you have seen."

This was, indeed, alarming intelligence, and Dick Turpin and Tom King no longer wondered at the alarm which their comrades had manifested.

By the time, however, that these explanations had taken place, the horses were saddled and ready for immediate use.

With activity they sprang into their saddles, and prepared to start.

Turpin had no other means of conveying Maud at present than he had formerly made use of—namely, to place her on the saddle before him.

This he at once did, though he determined at the first opportunity that occurred to find her some more comfortable mode of conveyance, and one not so likely to attract attention.

While he carried her thus, everyone they passed could not fail to notice it as being something unusual and peculiar.

To attract attention was what he least desired; but there was no help for it in this instance, as there was no other manner in which Maud could be carried.

No time was lost in making a start after they were once in readiness to do so, and these reflections occurred to Dick as he forced his way through the undergrowth.

There was another circumstance, too, in connexion with carrying Maud in this manner.

With a double burden it was not likely that Black Bess could put forth that marvellous degree of speed for which she was so celebrated; and it seemed more than probable, on the present occasion, that there would be the greatest and most pressing need for her utmost powers to be tried.

Already their foes were close behind them.

To be sure, at present, they had made no manifestation of their presence, but our friends could not tell how suddenly or unexpectedly this might happen.

They hoped, however, to be able to emerge from the chase with due caution and deliberation, and not be compelled to fly from it for their lives.

In the one case, they would have, at least, a chance of avoiding any of their foes, who might be stationed round the chase to watch for their appearance, but in the other, detection would be inevitable.

On their way towards the borders of the forest, Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval both declared that the dragoons, whose approach to the cavern had so much alarmed them, had not heard them, and had no suspicion of them, but they could not tell whether or how soon they might be followed.

This intelligence was much more cheering and hopeful than our hero had hoped to receive; still, he clung more than ever to his original idea, that the sooner they left the chase the better it would be for them.

His companions had fallen back and allowed him to lead the way, so he directed his steps in as straight a line as he could to the outskirts of the forest.

After proceeding in this manner for some distance without hearing anything of their enemies in the rear, they were warned by the rapidly-increasing thinness of the vegetation that they were close to the open country with which Enfield Chase was surrounded.

Dick now came to a halt, and his companions did the same.

"We had better part here," Turpin said, "since we have agreed upon the separation taking place. It will be better to emerge by twos than all four together."

"Certainly!" said Claude and Jack.

"There is no need for any delay over the ceremony of parting, and we have no time to spare. You understand the place at which the meeting is to take place?"

"Yes; do not forget, captain—the triangular piece of ground, the junction of the two roads near Finchley."

"Depend upon me," replied Dick. "I know the spot well; and on the third night from this I will most surely be there."

"At what hour?"

"It is impossible to say what hour, for we cannot tell what may occur. Let it be some time between midnight and daybreak."

"Agreed!"

"One word more, ere we part."

"What is it, captain?"

"It will be necessary for the sake of your own safety that you use the utmost caution and circumspection in your progress. Remember, the roads all round London, as we have been informed, are nightly patrolled by detachments of dragoons, whose sole duty it is to endeavour to capture us. You will, I fear, have much trouble in eluding them."

"Rely upon our being cautious to a degree, captain."

"I will do so. The only chance you have of escaping them, I think, is this. I shall adopt it myself."

"What is it, captain?"

"To avoid the main roads altogether, and travel only through narow and unfrequented lanes."

"A good thought. As you say, we cannot do better; and you may depend that in this, if in nothing else, we shall follow your example."

"I am glad you have resolved to do so, because it will have the effect of removing a great deal of uneasiness from my mind."

"We shall try our best to elude our foes, you may depend. It is not the first time we have had to run the gauntlet, and, for my own part, I feel little apprehension."

It was Claude Duval who spoke.

"Let us part, then," said Dick Turpin. "We have already lingered here too long. Yet, ere we say farewell, look back for the last time upon the shelter we are about to leave. I thought old Enfield Chase would have proved a place of refuge for us for a much longer period than it has, but that hope is over. Our sojourn there, though brief, has been a very happy one. Our foes have forced us to quit it. Farewell!"

As he spoke these words, his comrades looked back upon the scene they were about leaving, probably for ever.

They could not but regret their departure from this place under such circumstances.

They had hoped that in future times it would have been a place to which they could have repaired, and hidden themselves from their enemies.

Now that hope was entirely over.

Not only had their retreat been discovered, but even the secret of the cavern, which they had hoped to preserve to themselves, was now a secret no longer.

After this one long glance at their greenwood home, the highwaymen turned round.

There was some emotion visible in the countenances of each of them.

It was caused by their leaving the forest and the cavern.

Barely was it that they were permitted to remain so long in one place as they had been in this, and already they had begun to look upon it with those feelings with which everyone regards home, and they felt leaving it with a keenness which none save those in their position can comprehend.

"Farewell!" said Dick, again; and, as he spoke, he extended his hand.

It was in succession warmly grasped by Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, who repeated the word of valediction.

They also shook Tom King warmly by the hand, and bade adieu to Maud.

"Now," said Turpin, "forward! You shall go first, and we will follow."

"Right, captain. Farewell! Remember the third night from this on the Finchley-road, some time between midnight and daybreak."

"I will be there," said Turpin, "if I am in life. Fear nothing upon that head."

"Once more, then, farewell!" exclaimed Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack; and, as they spoke, they urged their horses forward.

Again and again did Dick Turpin repeat the word "Farewell!" until their comrades had fairly vanished from view.

For a moment or two all three were silent and motionless.

An uncomfortable feeling of foreboding came over them as soon as Claude and Jack had disappeared, and it was in vain they tried to shake off the depression under which they laboured.

Dick Turpin was, however, the first to recollect himself and the peril in which they stood.

CHAPTER CCCCI.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING ARE ATTACKED AND PURSUED BY THE DRAGOONS, AND MAUD HAS A NARROW ESCAPE OF HER LIFE.

"We are forgetting that our enemies are so close behind us," he said. "Now, Tom, do not let us linger any longer. Our two comrades have gone, and let us follow their example. We will, however, endeavour to emerge at another spot."

"It will be most prudent to do so."

"I am of that opinion."

As he uttered these words, Dick Turpin set his steed in motion.

Now that the trees grew at a greater distance from each other, and the undergrowth was not so dense, it was perfectly easy for Tom King to ride abreast with Turpin, and he accordingly did so.

Instead of going in a straight direction, which would in a few moments have led them clear of the Chase, they crept round the borders, intending to emerge at some point at a considerable distance from that where they had parted with Claude and Jack.

Scarcely, however, had they proceeded fifty paces, than they were startled by a sudden blast upon a bugle.

It came from somewhere very close at hand, and struck upon their ears with so much suddenness that it for a moment deprived our friends of sense and motion, accustomed as they were to sudden surprises of all descriptions.

The horses, too, reared slightly, for even they were alarmed by the startling abruptness of the sound.

Ere the two highwaymen could recover from their astonishment, a sudden crackling and crashing of the bushes made itself heard, and then immediately there appeared before them a man, who, at a glance, they saw by his uniform, to be a member of the troop of dragoons

He held in his hand one of those short-barrelled carbines which they carry; and placing this in a moment to his shoulder, he said—

"Surrender! you are my prisoners! Surrender, or I fire!"

These last words were almost drowned by a tremendous uproar in the distance.

Our friends now understood all.

Indeed, there was no difficulty in coming to a correct conclusion upon the matter.

The troop of dragoons, which Claude and Jack had seen approaching along the cavern, had dispersed themselves over the chase.

Each one had been furnished with a bugle, with instructions to blow a loud blast upon it the moment they caught sight of the highwaymen.

The effect of this bugle blast would be to cause the whole of the little troop to make their way, with all speed, in the direction from which the sound came.

The dragoon who so boldly and daringly called upon our friends to surrender had suddenly caught sight of the two horsemen, who he knew to be those he sought, from the description which had been given him.

True to his commands, this dragoon placed the bugle to his lips, and blew the shrill blast upon it in the manner we have recorded; then, eager to earn as much of the reward as he could, he sprang through the bushes, with his carbine in his hand ready for immediate use.

That he was a brave man his conduct is quite enough to prove.

Raising his weapon to his shoulder, and covering those he addressed with it, he called upon them to surrender.

All this took place with so much rapidity that Dick Turpin and Tom King, who, under the first impulse of the moment, had reined-in their steeds, had not had time to set them in motion again.

The remainder of the detachment of dragoons was very close at hand, and, directly they heard the sound of the bugle, they rushed towards the spot from which the sound appeared to come.

It was their approach which caused the uproar that had followed so close upon the command of the dragoon to our friends to surrender.

Truly, they were now in a serious dilemma, and it is not to be wondered at if for a moment they hesitated as to what they should do.

To be driven out of the chase with a party of dragoons at their heels, was what they most wished to avoid, for it made their discovery almost certain.

Yet, to remain where they were, was quite out of the question.

They saw at once that an encounter with the dragoons could not but be most disastrous to them, and that there would be no hope of their being able to fight it out and remain the victors.

The real fact was, that our friends, skilful and courageous as they were, would not have stood the ghost of a chance with a body of men so well drilled in the use of the weapons they carried as these soldiers were.

They had, therefore, but one resource, and that was to fly.

There was a risk in doing this, for the dragoon pointed his weapon at them with a correct aim, and that he would fire the instant they attempted to move was quite certain.

Still this danger, great as it was, must be braved.

Ere another second could elapse, the greater portion of the troop would be upon them, for already they could perceive the glitter of their accoutrements as they forced their way through the underwood.

Loud shouts and cries, too, came from their lips.

It was for Maud that Dick felt most apprehension.

He was terribly afraid that she would be wounded.

By her manner, and the way she trembled, he could tell how great was the alarm she felt.

If was to Tom King's rapidity of motion that her safety may be attributed.

Suddenly drawing a loaded pistol from his belt, he fired it full in the face of the dragoon with the carbine, who was taken by surprise.

But his finger was on the trigger, and he fired.

But Tom's shot caused him to lose his aim, and the bullet with which the piece was loaded flew high above their heads.

"Forward," he cried to Dick Turpin, his voice mingling strangely with the report of the discharged firearm. "Forward—forward. Use your best speed, and we may yet escape."

While he spoke, he struck his spurs deeply into his horse's sides, while Dick Turpin just pressed with his heels upon the flanks of his bonny mare.

That was enough.

She bounded forward at a gallop that was truly marvellous to witness, and before the dragoon could recover from the shock, and before his comrades could arrive upon the scene, the prey, which at last they made sure was in their grip, had quite got out of sight.

At this their anger knew no bounds.

It so happened that all the dragoons were on foot, for they had found it impossible to conduct their search on horseback, and had, therefore, dismounted.

Nearly all of them had been close enough to see the highwaymen gallop off at the tremendous rate they did, and, consequently, were well aware that to attempt to pursue them on foot was worse than useless.

Nevertheless several ran in the direction they had taken, and had the satisfaction—or rather dissatisfaction—of seeing them at a considerable distance pushing across the open country surrounding the chase with all the speed they were able to make.

These, having once caught sight of our flying friends, did not remove their gaze, but closely watched the direction which they took, so as to be able to follow them with greater certainty.

This was a very useful precaution.

In the meantime, the captain, with a ready forethought, for which he deserves due credit, commanded the man next to him to blow three blasts upon the bugle.

This signal was intended for the men who had charge of the horses, and they had been previously instructed to make their way to whence the sounds came without loss of time.

The clear, sharp notes of the bugle rang out with great effect on the clear night air, and made themselves heard over a large tract of country.

Even our friends heard it in their wild flight, and much wondered what it meant.

The musical sounds reached, too, the ears for which they were intended, and were obeyed with that promptitude which characterizes the soldiery.

A serious delay, however, took place in bringing the horses to the required spot, although not a second was lost.

As soon as they arrived, however, the captain, commanding his men to vault into the saddle, showed them the example by doing so, and was mounted first.

He then called out to them to follow him, and, with the same reckless impetuosity, dashed forward before he had time to see whether he was obeyed.

Considering the difficulties they had to contend with, the dragoons were fairly mounted, and in full pursuit, in an incredibly short space of time.

Some minutes had, however, necessarily elapsed, and to our friends these few minutes were everything.

They enabled them to get such a start of their pursuers as made their chances of escape much greater.

When the captain rode out of the chase they had entirely disappeared, and though the country was lighted up with extreme brilliancy for many miles by the slant rays of the moon, yet he was unable to even catch a glimpse of them.

Nor was there any sound to indicate their locality.

The only chance they had laid in the fact of several of the dragoons having watched our friends out of sight, so they were able, at any rate, to get upon the right track.

The horses of the dragoons, thoroughly rested and refreshed, were in excellent condition for the road, and their riders taxed their powers to the utmost.

Away, then, they flew, as though upon "the wings of the wind," and the rate at which they sped over the ground seemed, at least, to promise them a chance of overtaking the fugitives.

Whether or not they were destined to do this will very shortly be seen.

It is, however, we fancy, in the pursued that the greatest interest is felt, and not in the pursuers.

Leaving, then, the dragoons to push on with all speed after the highwaymen, we will describe what happened to them.

Owing to the pistol which Tom King had so judiciously fired, the dragoon had been baffled and his aim confused.

Consequently, although he fired, yet the bullet with which his piece was loaded did not the least injury to either Dick Turpin, Maud, or Tom King.

How they then darted off, has already been told.

The two highwaymen had been pursued too many times in their lives not to know the importance of making all they could of the short time that would elapse before their foes would be in a condition to follow them.

In a chase of this description a good start would be everything, and, if they should only be lucky enough to obtain it, they did not doubt, should nothing disastrous occur, that eventually they would be able to shake them off altogether.

Our two old friends did not say a word to each other; the rate at which they were travelling entirely precluded conversation, but there was no necessity for speech, they perfectly understood what was to be done.

Urging their horses to the utmost, they flew over the country at a speed which entirely took away their breath and carried them out of sight of their enemies.

They did not take to the road, but kept in a straight line across the face of the country.

For the most part they had to traverse meadow lands, and the only obstructions to their headlong course were such as hedges and ditches.

Over these they forced their flying steeds to leap.

From time to time they cast anxious glances back in the direction of the chase, but they could see nothing of the dragoons, who were, as we have related, waiting for their horses to be brought to them.

This cheered their spirits, and encouraged them to make fresh exertions, for could they once get clear out of sight, they felt sure they would escape.

It was a circumstance which rather struck them with surprise that they had encountered none of the other troops of dragoons, of whose existence the spy had informed them, and with whom they fully expected to come into contact.

It might be that the reason of this was that they had not taken to the high road anywhere, but had kept clear across the meadows.

This conjecture was partially correct, but there was another reason with which the reader will presently be made acquainted.

It is certain that the flying highwaymen felt much pleasnre in consequence.

Suddenly, however, they came in sight of a narrow, cross-country lane, and immediately drew in their steeds.

They were separated from it by a low hedge only, and over this they leaped.

When they alighted in the road they remained for a moment or two immovable, for the double purpose of allowing their steeds to recover, to some extent, from the tremendous exertions which they had made, and to allow Dick and Tom an opportunity of looking back and ascertaining whether their pursuers were on their track.

But though they looked with keen and practised eyes in the direction of the chase, they were nnable to see anything of them.

Rejoiced at this circumstance, the two highwaymen ventured to address a few words of encouragement and hope to each other.

Dick Turpin cheered Maud as well as he was able.

The poor girl was in a terrible state of alarm, but events had lately taken place with so much rapidity that she was scarcely able to realize the full extent of her danger.

She was unhnrt, and our hero felt no small amount of joy upon being made acquainted with this important fact.

She was breathless, however, not with terror alone, but with the rapidity with which she had been carried along.

"Our foes have no horses ready," said Tom King; "yon may depend that is the reason we have been able to get so far in advance of them."

"It may be," replied Turpin; "but we must not trust to that."

"Certainly not."

"I think, now that we have arrived at this cross-country road unperceived, that the best thing we can do is to keep along it at tolerable speed, but not so as to exhaust our horses quickly."

"That is precisely my opinion, Dick," said Tom King. "We shall be able to turn, and wind and double upon our course in such a manner that our pursuers will be fairly puzzled if they attempt to follow us."

"We will try if we cannot bring about such a desirable result; and by confining ourselves entirely to these narrow lanes, and not venturing out upon the high roads at all, I think we shall be able to avoid coming into collision with the other troops that may be patrolling the roads."

"Just so. I think there can be no doubt about that."

"Forward, then. We ought to be moving, and our horses by this time have rested long enough to recover their spent wind."

Dick Turpin gave Black Bess the reins as he spoke, and the noble animal immediately set off at an easy gallop, but which, nevertheless, got over a large piece of ground in a surprisingly short space of time.

It was a pace, too, which Tom King was able to keep up with.

The lane wound about as country lanes nearly always do, and scarcely any time could they see twenty yards before them.

This it was not likely they would find fault with, because it gave them a better opportunity of keeping out of sight of their pursuers.

Unfortunately for them, however, the hedges on both sides were not high enough to conceal them from the view of any persons who might be in the meadows.

This they could not remedy, so, very wisely, they made the best they could of their position.

They now perceived, though, that the moon was rapidly declining towards the western horizon, and they knew by this that dawn was not far distant.

This was an inducement for them to increase their speed, for, from the mere fact of his having Maud upon the saddle before him, it made Dick desirous of reaching some place of shelter and safety before daylight fairly came.

CHAPTER CCCCII.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING ARE LULLED INTO A SENSE OF FALSE SECURITY.

It was quite certain that the attention of anyone who passed them would be at once attracted by so unusual a circumstance.

Curiosity would be roused—the whole affair would be commented on, and, as a natural consequence, the dragoons would have little or no difficulty in tracing them.

This consideration, then, which he communicated to his companion, induced Dick to accelerate his speed.

At that early hour of the morning—an hour at most before sunrise—it was scarcely likely they would meet with any persons in these lonely lanes; but as soon as the sun rose it would be a different matter, for rural inhabitants are usually early abroad.

All around them the country was monotonously level, but with this they were well enough pleased, for it enabled them to get over the ground in much less time, for they had no steep hills to climb.

Lower and lower sunk the moon, until at length she disappeared beneath the western horizon, and still our friends continued their way.

There was nothing to be seen of their enemies, and if they were in the rear they were at so great a distance as to be completely out of sight.

This was encouraging to our friends, whose hopes of ultimately being able to elude their foes increased every moment.

Day dawned.

A faint, cold, misty sort of light crept by slow degrees over the whole country.

Gradually, distant objects were brought to view; and when at length day fully came, our friends reined in their steeds, and Tom King, standing in his stirrups, looked long and eagerly in the direction they had just come.

Attentively he scanned every object, no matter how small or remote, but still he was unable to detect anything moving.

For a long time he continued thus scanning the country, and shading the extraneous light with his hands.

Still he could see nothing; and at length, with an expression of content and satisfaction upon his countenance, he once more seated himself in the saddle.

"All is well, Dick," he said. "That capital start we had did the business. We have fairly got rid of our pursuers. They are, I am convinced, no where in sight."

"I am glad to hear that," said Dick. "And now I think the next thing we must see about doing is to find some place where we can remain all day, and where our horses will be able to have proper food and rest."

"Decidedly. If we are not careful to attend to their wants, it will be all over with us."

"You are right; our lives wholly depend upon them, and, therefore, we cannot be too careful."

"We had better jog on gently. I should think, before we proceed much further, we shall certainly be able to meet with some place where we shall be able to put up for a time."

"I hope so."

"What we want to find is some quiet, out-of-the-way road-side public house—one as far removed from other dwellings as possible, and the less frequented, the better."

"You are right; that is just the sort of place we require."

"We must look out for it. Come forward! it will be best not to linger. I expect every moment to meet with someone."

The highwaymen urged their horses to go faster, and quickly reached the termination of the lane.

It opened into a broad country road.

Upon reaching this place our friends paused to reconnoitre.

No one appeared to be in sight, however, but a little distance down this road to the left could be seen the roof and chimneys of some building.

A second glance showed them that at that portion of the road which was opposite to the dwelling a post was fixed, which carried a swinging sign.

It was about a quarter of a mile off.

The early rays of the rising sun fell upon this sign-board and revealed some gilding upon it, but what it was they were too far off to see.

"There is the very place we are looking for, it appears to me," said Tom King, as he pointed towards it; "I do not think we can do better than make our way towards it."

"I am of the same opinion," replied Turpin, "though, had I been permitted any choice in the matter, I should have preferred one in some less busy road."

"In some respects such a one might have been more desirable, but perhaps it is better as it is. I am inclined to think that we shall act wisely by taking up our quarters there."

"So am I; and the thing which influences me most is the fatigue which Black Bess so palpably exhibits. A double load is too much for her."

"It is; but what you have just said has put me in mind of something which I am sure demands our earnest attention."

"What is it"

"If you ride up to the inn yonder with Maud still seated on the saddle before you, suspicion will be immediately aroused."

"True. I am glad you mentioned it."

"At any rate, it will be provocative of curiosity and comment, and we want to be as little noticed as possible."

"Just so."

"What means you would like to adopt to get over this difficulty, I know not. At any rate, some means must be devised."

"Unquestionably. Have you any plan?"

"No."

"I must think of one, then."

Dick Turpin relapsed into silence.

He comprehended in a moment the full force of what his comrade had said to him, and was aware of the imperative necessity of diverting all observation from them as much as possible.

"There is only one plan that I can think of by which this difficulty may be overcome," he said, at length.

"What is it?"

"I am not at all pleased with it," he replied, "and if you could devise some other, I should be glad."

"Let me hear it."

"It is this. Suppose Maud alights, and remains for a little while in the road. In the meantime, we will make our way to the inn, see to our steeds, and then sit down in one of the rooms, saying that we expect a lady presently, and that they are to show her into the room."

"I understand," said Tom. "Maud would walk out towards the inn."

"Just so."

"It is a good plan, and one well calculated to divert suspicion."

"I think so; but, at the same time, I am very unwilling to leave Maud here in the road to walk on by herself."

"If that is the only thing you have to urge against the plan," said Maud, gently, "consider it as nothing. I am willing to do much more than that to secure your safety. Let me alight."

"Brave girl," said Dick, as he pressed her still closer to his breast. "I am most unwilling that you should incur the danger of walking to this inn."

"What danger can there be? Your enemies are far behind. I heard you say as much."

"True, but there is always danger, and I dread to allow you to be a moment out of my sight."

"It will not take many moments, and I shall scarcely be out of your sight. Let me alight. I am sure no better means could be found of averting suspicion."

This was exactly what Dick himself thought, but still he was reluctant to agree to its adoption.

At length, however, after she had renewed her entreaties, he assisted her to the ground, after giving her very particular instructions as to what she should do.

To all of them she promised implicit obedience, and a few words of parting having taken place between them, the two highwaymen started off, leaving her on foot upon the road.

A feeling of uneasiness, for which he was totally at a loss to account, filled Dick's breast upon thus leaving her behind him, and all his efforts to banish it were unavailing.

At every few yards he turned back to look where she was standing, until he was warned by Tom King of the danger of indulging in this propensity.

The reader must be pleased to understand that, what we have just described, took place near the end of the lane, and not upon the broad road into which it debouched.

The reason for this was that they were fearful of being seen by any of the inhabitants of the inn, some of whom might be at the upper windows.

As soon as they had started, however, Maud ventured to emerge into the roadway, where she stood, with clasped hands, watching their disappearance.

A similar sensation to that which filled Dick's breast weighed also upon her spirits.

She felt a strange foreboding, such as she had never before experienced.

She felt inexpressibly lonely, and, though Turpin was fully in sight, it seemed to her as though she had parted from him for ever.

So strong was this idea, that it was not without difficulty that she restrained her impulse to call out to him to return.

Ashamed of this weakness—for so she termed it—she forebore to do so.

She saw him turn round in the saddle and look after her, and she waved her hand in token of recognition.

Her eyes filled with tears as he receded more and more from her view, and a terrible dread that she should see him no more—that she was then taking her last look of him—filled her bosom.

She saw them both halt before the inn, and then enter the yard.

Upon seeing them thus utterly vanish, she burst into tears.

Her impatience and anxiety would not allow her to remain any longer where she was, and, with slow and tottering steps, she walked along the dusty road towards the inn.

Here we will leave her, and return to the two highwaymen.

It was well that Tom King had sufficient forethought to warn his comrade against continuing to look back in the manner he had done, for such a proceeding would have inevitably caused suspicion.

"It is necessary that we should be cautious to a degree," continued Tom King. "You may depend everybody is on the alert."

"No doubt—no doubt."



[TOM KING CONCILIATES THE OSTLER OF THE MOUNTAIN RILL INN.]

"And that reminds me when we go to the inn, be careful to choose a sitting-room upstairs."

"Why?"

"Because, from an upper window we shall be sure to have a more extensive prospect than one on the ground-floor, and I should recommend that we keep a continual look-out for our foes, for you cannot tell how soon the dragoons may get upon our track, and it will never do to be taken at unawares by such adversaries as those."

"You are quite right," said Dick Turpin, "and I am pleased to find that you have lost none of your old prudence and ability. It really seems like old times for us both to be upon the road together, and makes me long for an adventure."

"Hush!" said Tom. "We may be overheard."

As he spoke, he checked his steed, and Dick immediately did the same.

Early as was the hour—being only just after sunrise—there were ample indications that the inmates of the inn were all astir.

As soon as our friends paused before the door, a stout but somewhat aged man appeared upon the threshold.

There was something in the expression of this hale old man's countenance that gave our friends quite a feeling of satisfaction to look upon.

It was beaming with health and good humour, and there was a merry twinkle visible in his clear, bright, gray eye.

His head was almost bald, and his shining pate made him seem at once venerable and agreeable.

All this our frieds noted in a moment, and the next thing that struck them favourably was the scrupulous cleanness that was visible, not only in his person, but over the whole of the house.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said cheerfully and respectfully, carrying his hand to his forehead as he spoke.

"Do you want to bait here?"

"Yes, if we can do so."

"Then you can. I think, if you will give it a trial, that there is the best of accommodation, both for man and beast, at the 'Mountain Rill.'"

"That is the sign of the house, I suppose."

"Yes; you can see it is, if you will just glance up to the sign-board, and you'll see my name underneath it—Timothy Goodridge."

"Well, Mr. Goodridge," said Turpin, "we will try the accommodation you speak of."

"Thank you, gentlemen. Would you please to walk in?"

"Not just this moment. We would prefer to see our horses safe first."

"You leave that to me," said Timothy Goodridge. "I'll call the ostler out; he will take care of them."

"Oh! never mind. That's the way to the stables, I suppose," said Dick, pointing under an archway. "We will find the ostler ourselves."

As he spoke, our hero turned his horse's head in the direction of which he had spoken, and Tom King instantly followed his example.

The landlord knew very well that it was always injudicious to oppose the inclinations of his customers, so he ran after them, calling loudly upon the ostler as he did so.

That worthy very soon made his appearance, and took hold of the horses' bridles while they alighted.

During the time he was removing their trappings, Dick took the landlord on one side.

"If you can accommodate us with a private room for the remainder of the day, and a couple of bedrooms, we should feel much obliged. Can you do so?"

"Certainly, gentlemen; certainly."

"Have you any sitting-rooms up-stairs?"

The landlord scratched his head.

"There's the best room in the front of the house on the first-floor."

"Is it engaged?"

"No."

"Then we will take it."

"As you please, gentlemen."

"And there is something else, which I shall want you to attend to at once."

"I am entirely at your service, gentlemen."

"I expect a lady to call here in a few moments. She will inquire for us. When she does so, you will be good enough to show her into the best room of the first-floor, of which you have spoken."

"Very good, gentlemen; your orders shall be obeyed. But please to come to the house. The ostler will take care of the horses."

"All right, we will follow you immediately. Do you make haste to the front door, for I cannot tell how soon the lady may arrive."

After this the landlord found it impossible to stay any longer, so he waddled off at once.

As soon as he had gone, our friends turned their attention to the ostler, whose sympathy it was in the highest degree necessary for them to elicit.

The preliminary present of a crown-piece had the effect of placing them on excellent terms with each other, and the highwaymen adroitly kept him in conversation with them while he groomed and fed the horses.

Having satisfied themselves upon this point, as well as ascertaining the position of the stable, its distance from the house, the place where the saddles and bridles were deposited, as well as the manner in which the door was fastened, they crossed the yard, all the time looking carefully about them, and entered the inn by the back door.

CHAPTER CCCCIII.

THE CONDUCT OF TIMOTHY GOODRIDGE, THE LANDLORD, BECOMES SUSPICIOUS.

That there was nothing whatever calculated to arouse suspicion in the manner in which our two friends had arrived at the "Mountain Rill" inn, the reader must be well aware.

For two horsemen well mounted to halt as they did for refreshment, both for their beasts and for themselves, was a thing that happened frequently in those days, when the facilities for travelling which we now possess did not exist.

Neither was there anything suspicious or extraordinary in the very legitimate message they gave the landlord respecting the arrival of a lady.

All this was due to Tom King's caution, who, although they were so near to Enfield Chase, and consequently so close to their foes, nevertheless hoped that they would be able to remain at this inn for a sufficient length of time to enable them to recuperate their strength and consult upon what was to be done in the future.

For our own part we cannot help considering their position somewhat ticklish, and by no means share the confidence which they not only exhibited but felt.

Just as though he had lived there all his life, Dick Turpin placed his thumb upon the latch of the back door, and, raising it, entered the inn.

He found himself in a large and comfortable kitchen, in which, however, there was no company, though this was easily accounted for by the fact that the sun had only just risen.

Nevertheless, a cheerful fire was burning in the grate, and the whole of the room presented that appearance of cleanliness, neatness, and order which had impressed our two friends so favourably when they first halted in front of the inn.

A mere passing glance, which they cast around them as they crossed the kitchen, showed them this.

Just before them was a partially-open door, and to this they, of course, directed their steps.

It led into the passage communicating with the front door.

Here the landlord still stood.

He was looking earnestly down the road, and shading his eyes with his hands, for the sun shone into them in a perplexing manner.

So intently occupied was he, that he did not observe our friends approach.

It was evident from this that Maud had not arrived.

For this the highwaymen were not sorry; they would have preferred to have got comfortably seated in their private room.

As they approached the front door, however, the landlord turned round.

As soon as he caught sight of them he came towards them.

"You took me at unawares, gentlemen. I thought you would have come back the other way. Pray pardon my not being here to receive you."

"Don't mention that, I beg; but tell me, has the lady about whom I spoke to you yet arrived?"

"She has not, sir. Will she come on foot?"

"Why do you ask that question?" said Tom King.

"No offence, sir, I hope; but I was going to say that if so, there is a lady slowly coming this way."

"That is her, then," said Turpin. "Be sure that you are at hand to receive her."

"All right, worthy sir. Would you like to go upstairs at once? It will be some minutes, no doubt, before the lady arrives."

"Yes. Who is there to show me to the apartment?"

"I will, sir."

"But I want you to stay at the front door and keep watch."

"The lady is a distance down the road, sir; and it won't take me a moment to run upstairs and show you your room."

"Very good, then; make haste!"

The landlord was almost as good as his word.

The length of time it took him to show our friends into the front room was short, indeed; and, having done, he descended the stairs with greater alacrity than anyone would have imagined possible.

Dick Turpin's first impulse, upon entering the room, was to make his way to the window.

Tom King closely followed him, and the glance which he cast into the roadway was but little less anxious than that of his captain.

There was no Maud to be seen.

What could be the meaning of this?

They had fully expected to catch sight of her approaching, and to have increased her confidence by showing her that they were in safety.

"Did not the landlord say he could see her at some distance down the road?" asked Turpin, anxiously.

"He did, Dick."

"But I can see nothing of her."

"Nor I. Yet stay. I have a thought. How foolish of us, to be sure!"

"How—what do you mean? I do not understand you."

"Why, we have been long enough talking to the landlord and getting to the window to allow Maud to have reached the door."

"Of course. I did not give the matter a thought, and expected to see her at a distance still."

"She has arrived, you may depend."

"This window does not command a view of the front door, which appears to me to be immediately below us."

"Doubtless it is."

"There will not be much risk in opening the window. Let us do so. You see it opens like a door. We should then be able to see easily enough."

"Let us do so."

Dick Turpin hastily turned the little fastening of the latticed window, and opened it carefully.

Then both looked out.

The sound of voices reached their ears, and almost instantly they saw Maud standing at the door.

The landlord was there, and appeared to be questioning her closely.

Doubtless his curiosity was aroused, and he desired to learn all he could about his customers.

There was a look of deep distress upon Maude's countenance that made Dick angry to witness.

Doubtless she was alarmed at the cross-examination to which she was being subjected.

Dick could not contain himself sufficiently to remain a spectator of this scene for a moment.

"That will do, landlord!" he called out. "That is the lady I expect; let her come up."

This action of Dick's was rather an injudicious one, but perhaps it did not matter, as there was no one in sight. He was conscious that he had acted incautiously the moment after he had spoken, and drew in his head hastily.

When the landlord looked up he had disappeared.

Maud gave vent to a faint scream of surprise as the well-known accents fell upon her ears.

Where they came from she knew not, for when she looked around Turpin was nowhere visible.

With considerable confusion perceptible both in his voice and manner, the landlord spoke.

"This way," he said, "this way. Be good enough to walk this way. The gentlemen you desire to see are in the best room upstairs."

Maud followed, of course.

The mere fact of her arrival at the door of the inn will suffice to assure the reader that she performed her walk in safety.

What, then, the forebodings portended which had so filled her breast she knew not.

Dick Turpin, after having spoken from the window in the manner we have recorded, hastened to the door of the room, and, opening it, listened for Maude's approach. He could soon hear the sounds of the landlord's voice, which, somehow or other, had grown distasteful to his ears.

He was apologizing to her for having detained her.

In another moment the couple reached the top of the stairs, and the landlord, with many bows, ushered her into the apartment.

With a low, hysterical cry of joy, Maud sprang forward. Dick caught her in his arms.

He was somewhat surprised at this exhibition of feeling. He endeavoured to soothe her.

In the meantime, Tom King, who had all his wits about him, ingeniously got rid of the gaping and curious landlord by ordering him to bring the breakfast up as quickly as possible.

After this order, Mr. Timothy Goodridge could do nothing but retire, and he reluctantly left the room.

His curiosity was strongly roused, and as yet he had not been able to elicit any information calculated to quell it.

Dick soon succeeded in soothing Maud and calming her agitation.

When she fully realized that Turpin was safe, her excitement passed away.

Our hero questioned her closely with respect to her conversation with the landlord.

It was just as he had expected.

The landlord had asked a multitude of questions, all having the same tendency; namely, to elicit from her some information respecting his two early visitors.

Maud, however, had been fully on her guard, despite the excitement under which she laboured, and Mr. Goodridge had not succeeded in exacting anything from her at the moment when Turpin put an end to the colloquy by speaking from the window above.

All was now well, and after a few more words had been exchanged, Maud retired to the bedroom to arrange her disordered dress and attend to her toilette.

Turpin and King, too, were not at all sorry to do the same thing, and when the landlord came up with a first-rate breakfast, consisting of a host of homely delicacies, all three presented a much more civilized appearance than they had done a short time previously.

That all three were blessed with a good appetite the reader need scarcely be told, and, notwithstanding the dangers which they had so recently passed through, and the no less serious ones which seemed to menace them in the future, they sat down to this tempting meal with as light hearts as any in Christendom.

Even Maud smiled, and looked as gay and happy as her two companions, though occasionally her fair face would become clouded when her thoughts were directed to the future.

By the time the breakfast was finished—washed down as it was by copious draughts of ale of excellent quality—our friends felt much inclined to be at peace with all the world, and they became oblivious of all that was suspicious and disagreeable in the landlord's character while thinking of the good fare he had placed before them.

Aware, as they all of necessity were, of the importance of sleep in recuperating the body from fatigue, and being also conscious that some length of time might possibly elapse before they would have so good an opportunity of slumbering as they had at the present time, they agreed that they should sleep, if possible, till nightfall.

For both the highwaymen to have surrendered themselves to slumber would have been dangerous to a degree, and so it was arranged that Turpin and King should take it in turns to watch.

The lot fell first upon Tom King.

Drawing the dingy curtain which hung before the window, he sat down in such a manner that though he could command a good view of the country around, yet it would have been difficult for any one on the outside to have caught sight of him, and to have distinguished his form and features would have been impossible.

Here, then, he sat, with his eyes roaming constantly over the vast expanse of flat country spread out before him, in order to ascertain at the earliest moment whether the dragoons were approaching.

His first care was to make his eye thoroughly familiar with every feature of the landscape spread out before him, so as to be the better able to detect quickly the appearance of anything unusual.

This was a wise precaution, but there really seemed no need of it, for the time wore on, and still there were no signs of the approach of the dragoons.

From this Tom began to indulge in the hope that they had really been successful enough to elude them altogether.

At length the termination of his time of watching was reached, and, punctual to a moment, Dick entered the room to relieve his friend.

A few words passed between them as to what had taken place.

Dick was well pleased to hear that Tom had not seen anything of the dragoons; and he, too, ventured to hope that for a time they were safe from their enemies.

Tom King was right glad to be relieved, though he exhibited no hurry to retire; but Turpin could see by his haggard face how much he stood in need of rest.

At his urgent solicitation, he betook himself to the bedchamber which had been provided for him, and Turpin resumed his place at the window.

With no less eagerness and keenness than his companion he scanned attentively the various features of the landscape.

But all was satisfactory.

Where the dragoons were, or how it was they had not succeeded in tracking them to their present place of refuge, he was at a loss to think.

From the window at which he sat he had a prospect of many miles, but Enfield Chase was far beyond the limits of his vision.

Still his caution did not relax, and well was it for him that it did not.

As noon approached, he suddenly perceived in the far distance something which glittered brightly in the sun.

Instantly his eyes were fixed upon it with a most piercing gaze.

The glittering object moved, although but slowly.

Still it did move, and not for long did Dick remain in doubt as to what it was.

The great distance at which the object appeared to be would at once account for its motion seeming to be so slow.

It was a portion of the troop of dragoons.

It might be that their horses were going at a walking pace only, but that it was from the accoutrements of the soldiers that the glittering proceeded Dick felt confident.

He did not yet venture to arouse his companion, but resolved to do so should the troop draw nearer.

But this they did not appear to do.

Their course, slow as it seemed, was still continued at the same rate; but Turpin fancied that they came no nearer to the inn.

After a time he was convinced of this, and then he came to a correct conclusion upon the point.

The dragoons he had seen were pursuing a road parallel with the one on which the inn was built, and he was presently confirmed in this idea by perceiving that the dragoons slowly receded from his view, till at length they vanished altogether.

It was just after this that Tom King entered the room.

The time allotted to him for sleep had now expired.

CHAPTER CCCCIV.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING ENDEAVOUR TO ARRANGE THEIR FUTURE PROCEEDINGS.

So absorbed was Dick Turpin's attention, that he was unconscious of Tom King having entered the room.

He did not hear the unclosing of the door, nor yet his comrade's footstep as he approached him.

It was not, indeed, until Tom placed his hand upon his shoulder that Dick became aware of his presence.

He started and turned round, but he was reassured the moment he caught sight of his companion's countenance.

"Haa my term of watching just expired, then?"

"It has. Has the time passed so quickly that you were unconscious of it?"

"The fact is, Tom, my attention has been much absorbed for some time past."

"What has happened?"

"Nothing of an alarming character, I hope."

"That's well."

"Sit down a moment, Tom, and I will tell you."

"Do so. I was about to ask you to remain. I, too, have something I wish to say, and perhaps we shall not be able to find a better opportunity than the present."

"What is it you wish to say?"

"That you shall know presently. Let me hear you first."

Dick made no demur or hesitation, but at once told his comrade what he had seen.

We need not repeat his words, for the reader already knows the subject of his communication.

At first Tom was anxious, but, by the time our hero had finished his narrative, his uneasiness very much abated.

"The dragoons are hovering around us, that is certain, and the sooner we get to some other part of the country from this the better."

"Undoubtedly; and that at once brings me to the subject upon which I wished to speak to you."

"What, our leaving this place?"

"Yes."

"I had made up my mind to take my departure this very night and to travel until daybreak, by which time we shall be at a considerable distance from the scene of our late exploits."

"So we should; and, what I regret is, the difficulties which lie in the way of our departing from here to-night."

"Difficulties?" repeated Dick. "What difficulties?"

"Can it be possible that you are ignorant of them?"

Dick reflected a moment.

"I see, the same thought has not occurred to you," continued Tom King. "The difficulty is Maud."

"Maud?"

"Yes. Cannot you see that it will be impossible to leave here without doing so in a manner highly calculated to excite the suspicions of the landlord, whose curiosity we have good reason to believe is already so much inflamed? Cannot you see that, as we are now situated, we cannot direct our steps to a place of safety without both distressing Black Bess, and calling forth the attention of all those persons we may chance to encounter?"

"I see it all now," said Dick, who had been silent and thoughtful during his companion's long speech. "I see it all now, and am at a loss to think how I could have overlooked it."

"I have been thinking of it for some time," returned Tom King; "and I think the matter one of sufficient importance to call for immediate attention."

"It is, it is."

"We ought, too, to make some kind of arrangement as to our future plan of action. We have much to reflect upon ere we can come to a decision."

"We have, indeed."

"But first of all we must make up our mind as to what we are to do to-night. I am of opinion that to remain here will be running a greater risk than we are justified in incurring."

"Yet, what is to be done? Maud cannot be left behind."

"True; and it is equally certain that it will never do to take her with us as we brought her here. It would be folly to think of reaching a place of safety."

"What do you propose, Tom? If you have considered this matter over I am sure you have come to some conclusion. You are not one to point out a difficulty without being able to suggest a remedy."

"I have certainly thought over different modes of getting out of this dilemma."

"And you found one that was better than the rest; one, in fact, that would perfectly answer the end we have in view."

"I cannot say for that; but still I have a plan."

"Let me know it, then. Tell it me at once."

"In the first place, then, our difficulty is in taking Maud with us with the means of which we are at present in possession."

"Just so."

"It is clear that Maud must accompany us, and, therefore, what remains is to find some means by which she can do so."

"But what means can be found?"

"That is just it; and much will depend on the reply you give to my next question."

"What is it?"

"Can Maud ride?"

"Oh, yes."

"You are sure of that?"

"Oh, quite."

"That is all right. The rest is easy."

"Pardon me, but you have not explained yourself very clearly."

"I know I have not, but will do so in a moment. Let us call the landlord and ask him whether he has a horse to dispose of. Doubtless he has, for I saw several in the stable as well as a side-saddle."

"I see now. Your plan is a good one."

"I am glad you think so. It may, perhaps, look suspicious for us to have a female travelling with us in this manner, but it is quite certain it will not be so suspicious as to have her seated before you."

"Certainly not. Tom, I heartily approve of your plan, and am much obliged to you for suggesting it to me, or otherwise I should probably not have seen the danger until at the last moment."

"Shall we call the landlord?"

"If you like."

"I think it will be best to settle this part of the business first. We shall then be better able to talk over our future arrangements."

"Agreed."

"We will call the landlord, then, at once."

"Just so. But I have a caution to give you. I have already said how much his curiosity is inflamed. It will, therefore, be necessary to use great caution in addressing him."

"Trust me for that."

"I can do so, I know; but still, there was no harm in breathing a caution."

"None whatever."

The landlord was now called.

He obeyed the summons with alacrity.

As Tom had truly said, his curiosity was much inflamed.

He felt convinced in his own mind that a mystery of some kind hung over his customers, and though a thousand different solutions suggested themselves to his mind, he failed to hit upon the right one.

He was glad enough to make his way into the chamber, for he hoped thereby to glean some additional information.

Assuming a most obsequious manner, he bowed low as he entered the room, and said—

"What are your commands, gentlemen?"

"A bottle of your best port and three wine-glasses, landlord," said Dick Turpin.

Mr. Goodridge bowed, and withdrew.

"Three wine-glasses!" he muttered, as he descended the stairs. "What can they want with three wine-glasses? The lady is not with them, but perhaps she will come presently. That must be it! The third wine-glass is for the lady."

Thus muttering and ruminating, the landlord proceeded to execute his guests' commands.

Then, going up once more into the room, he was surprised to hear Dick say—

"Put the bottle and glasses on the table, landlord, and bring a chair and sit down with us. We want to speak to you."

The landlord was completely taken aback.

This was what he was furthest from expecting.

Nevertheless, he retained sufficient self-possession to obey, and, drawing a chair to the table, he sat down in an attitude compounded of assurance and deference.

In the meantime, Turpin proceeded to draw the cork from the bottle of wine, and, having done so, filled the three glasses.

One was pushed towards the landlord, who took it with a trembling and expectant hand, and a toast having been proposed, he raised it to his lips.

The two highwaymen emptied their glasses at one gulp, and then Dick Turpin somewhat abruptly approached the business he had in hand.

"Landlord," he said, "I have called you to see whether you can assist us out of a little difficulty. You look a man of discernment and experience, and, for that reason, we have ventured to trouble you with our affairs."

At this very flattering speech the landlord grinned complacently, and, bowing his head with an affectation of modesty, said nothing, but waited for our hero to proceed.

"I fancy I was not wrong in thinking that you would do your best to serve us in our present strait."

"You were quite right, sir," said the landlord; "and, in this business as well as in every other, it will be my constant effort to deserve satisfaction."

"That is all right," said Turpin; "and now to come to the point. That young lady who called here to see us wishes to continue her journey in our company, but, unfortunately, it is impossible."

"How impossible?"

"Why, you see, we have but a horse a piece, and she cannot ride upon one of these."

"Certainly not."

"Well, then, what we want is to find some means of allowing her to travel along with us."

"I understand," said the landlord; "and it so happens that I can get you out of your difficulty without any trouble at all."

"I am glad to hear that," said Dick. "Have another glass of wine."

He pushed the bottle towards the landlord as he spoke, who did not hesitate to replenish his glass.

"I can seen my way clear enough," continued Mr. Goodridge, "provided one thing."

"What?"

"That the lady can ride."

"Oh! yes; the lady can ride."

The landlord rubbed his hands together in a satisfied manner.

"Then," he said, "I have got as nice a lady's horse in my stable as ever was foaled. I bought it very cheap some days ago, thinking I might some day sell it to advantage."

"Well, an opportunity has now offered itself. I am quite willing to buy the horse for the lady if it is a good one."

"Come down and see it," said the landlord, forgetting his curiosity in the prospect of selling the horse advantageously. "Come down, and I'll show it you at once."

"All right, so we will; but we will finish this bottle first."

More glasses were filled and emptied, and then all three rose.

Tom King and the landlord went first, but Turpin lingered behind.

Tom knew his motive, and contrived to occupy the whole of the landlord's attention.

Turpin tapped at the door of Maud's room.

She opened it in a moment, and her face lighted up with pleasure when she saw who it was.

"Fear nothing, Maud; all is well. I am going down into the inn-yard to try and purchase a horse for you to ride upon. Do not detain me."

After speaking these hasty words of explanation, Dick hastened down the stairs and overtook the landlord and Tom near the bar, where they had paused and waited for him.

Maud closed the door of her room, and sprang to the window, from which, as she was well aware, she could see the whole of the inn-yard and the stables.

Ere she had occupied this post a moment, she saw the trio make their appearance, and she watched them as they took their course towards the stables.

It is with the doings of the highwaymen, however, that we are chiefly interested.

With an alacrity which he could not conceal or diminish, the landlord hurried across the yard, calling out lustily to the ostler as he did so.

That worthy made his appearance after a brief delay, for he had been upon the loft cutting chaff.

At the bidding of the landlord he re-entered the stable and fetched the lady's horse.

It was a fine-looking animal, and our two friends were pleased the moment they saw it.

A closer examination had no other effect than to confirm them in their good opinion.

It was really a first-class animal, and, apparently, without the slightest defect or blemish.

The landlord, like a keen man of business, noted the expression of pleasure which appeared upon their faces, and took his cue from it accordingly.

"What is your price?" said Dick, when he had finished making his examination.

The landlord paused a moment, and Tom King added—

"You told us you bought the horse cheap. Now, don't try to get too much out of it. We did not anticipate having to make this purchase, and we are rather short of funds."

At this announcement the landlord calmed down somewhat, and altered the sum he had just thought of mentioning.

"I'll tell you what I can do, and it will be fair both for you and for me. As to what I gave for the horse, that's neither here nor there. It's honestly worth eighty guineas; but I will take sixty, and that's the very lowest."

To this offer our friends at first said nothing, and having considered a moment or two, said—

"You ask a good round sum for the horse."

"He's worth twenty more; and I should not have named the price I did, had it not been for what your friend said. Of course I want to sell him as soon as I can, because the longer I keep him the less profit I shall get."

"Of course. Now, look here, landlord; besides a horse we want several other things. We want a bridle, a side-saddle, a lady's riding-habit, and a whip. Can you supply us with these?"

"Certainly; I have them all on the premises. They are not new, being those I keep to lend out on hire."

"That will not matter," said Dick. "And now, landlord, I will make you an offer, and you can please yourself about taking it. If you like to let me have the horse and the other things I have mentioned for sixty guineas, why, here's your money."

Our hero clapped his pocket significantly as he spoke.

The landlord hesitated a moment, and then he said—

"Well, it's driving a hard bargain, and I was in hopes of doing better. However, if you'll make it sixty-five guineas, I don't mind."

"Well, agreed."

"It's a bargain, then."

"Yes."

Tom King bent his mouth close to Turpin's ear, and whispered:

"We are in a fix now. We haven't got half sixty-five pounds between us."

CHAPTER CCCCV.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN PLAN AN EXCURSION ON THE HIGHWAY.

Dick Turpin changed countenance slightly when Tom King made this announcement, but, recovering himself almost immediately, he said to the landlord:

"I am not quite sure whether we shall start to-night."

"All right, gentlemen, as long as you like. My house and myself are quite at your disposal."

"However," continued Dick, "to do things fair and business-like, as well as to clinch the bargain, look, here is something on account."

So saying, our hero took from his pocket a leather bag, from which he counted out twenty guineas into the landlord's hand, who received them with evident satisfaction.

"We will consider the matter as settled now," he said.

"Just so."

The horse was then led back into the stable, and our friends returned to the house.

Upon entering their own room they sat down near the window, and Tom said:

"Well, Dick, you have bought the horse and paid twenty guineas on account, but where the remaining forty-five are to come from I don't know."

"Don't you? then I will tell you. Where plenty more has come from."

"It would be ridiculous upon my part to affect to misunderstand you. You mean, you would seek for the remainder of the money by an adventure on the road?"

"Just so."

"But think of the danger."

"It is great, I admit."

"You cannot help doing so. It is something more than great."

"Nevertheless, the danger must be braved. Tom, my friend, listen to me. You were at some pains, a little while ago, to show me that Maud must have a steed for herself. We obtain one, and not having money enough to purchase it, we must get the remainder how we may."

"I know all that, but think of the inevitable effects that would result from our levying contributions on the highway just at the present time. The idea is suicidal in the extreme. The roads are filled with dragoons, and if we have so far eluded them, a robbery would immediately set them upon our track."

"I am quite willing to admit the amount of danger there must be in any such attempt, but nevertheless, the money must be obtained. But stay; a fresh thought strikes me. I have nothing but your word that we have not money enough between us to make this purchase. Turn out the contents of your pockets and let us see."

Tom King willingly enough complied with this request, for he would have been only too glad to have owned himself in error, and discovered that they really did possess sufficient money.

But he had small hopes of this, for, some little time back, he had taken the trouble to ascertain with tolerable exactitude the state of their finances, and it was in consequence of this that he spoke to Turpin in the manner we have recorded at the close of the preceding chapter. As for Dick himself, with characteristic carelessness, he never troubled himself about the amount of funds in hand, and the probability is, he would not have discovered he was short of so much until the actual time of settlement arrived.

Thanks, however, to the forethought of Tom King, this disagreeable occurrence was avoided by being made known in good time.

Turpin quickly produced from his pockets all the money he possessed, and then, sweeping his own and his comrade's into one heap, began to count it.

Long before he had finished his task, he became painfully aware that there was nothing like sufficient.

Tom King was right.

The total amount of money before them was under thirteen pounds.

"That is what I said," exclaimed Tom King, as soon as Dick had announced the result. "And we are in a much greater fix than you feel inclined to admit."

"Not so."

"I say we are. Doubtless one good adventure on the road would place in our possession the money we require to complete the purchase, but then think of the imminent danger of such an adventure at the present time. Our position is, in my opinion, by far more ticklish than you seem to think it. Our only chance to preserve our lives and liberties is to keep quiet for some length of time; and one such exploit as you propose would bring all our enemies upon our track before we had time to get fairly off."

"I understand all this quite clearly," said Dick Turpin; "and you must not fall into the error of supposing that I underrate the danger. I do not. I quite agree with you as to the policy of keeping as quiet as possible, and no other circumstances than those which have occurred would induce me to attempt an adventure on the highway. But the money must be had, and, for my part, I can see no other means by which we can obtain it."

"Nor I. In fact, there is no other."

"Very well, then; we must resign ourselves to necessity, and try our best to avert the consequences you have just foretold."

"Then there is another thing," said Tom King. "A little while ago you agreed with me in saying that it would be unsafe in the extreme for us to pass the night in the inn, but in the event of an excursion such as you propose, how are we to avoid doing so?"

"That is a serious objection, I must confess, and yet I think it can be got over."

"How so?"

"Night is fast closing in. Look! Dusk has unconsciously stolen upon us."

It was as he had said.

The time had passed rapidly, and now they found that the shadows of evening were beginning to gather in the room, rendering all things indistinct.

The brief winter's day was fast approaching a close.

"In a little while," continued Turpin, "it will be quite dark. As soon as it is so, I will depart, and, if luck befriends me as she hitherto has done, I shall return here before the night is so far advanced as to prevent our departure."

"Stay a moment," said Tom King, gravely. "I beg that you will attend to what I am about to say."

"What is it?"

"I can see that the money must be had, and that there is no other means of obtaining it than by going upon the road, great as is the danger of such a proceeding, and much as I wish it could be avoided. But that is, unfortunately, quite out of the question. Turpin, you have spoken about setting out."

"Certainly I have."

"Then I hope you will understand me properly. For a long time we have been friends; and, by the long continuance of that friendship, I desire you to grant me a favour——"

"You need not go on any further with your speech," interrupted Dick Turpin, with a smile. "I know the favour you wish to beg."

"It is that I may depart upon this expedition instead of yourself."

"I knew that."

"And you will let me?"

"Nay—nay. I do not see how I can do so. It is on my account that the money is to be obtained—it is through me that this extra risk will have to be run—and surely I ought to be the person who should have the responsibility."

"That seems correct," said Tom King; "but I think I shall get you to consent to remain here while I depart upon this errand."

Dick smiled, and shook his head negatively.

"I still think so," said Tom King. "I admit all that you say, and must admit that it sounds just and reason-

able. But, for all that, I think I ought to go, and not you."

"Why?"

"Simply on account of the landlord."

"The landlord?"

"Yes; from his inordinate curiosity we have everything to fear."

"Still I do not comprehend"——

"But you will in a moment. Maud is a woman. You will scarcely be able to disguise from her the errand upon which you are going, or, even if you do, she, knowing as she does the perils with which you are surrounded, will be in a state of dreadful anxiety and suspense until you return. It is tolerably certain that I shall not be able to soothe her—that nothing that I can say will have any effect in calming her agitation."

"Yes, I know all that; but"——

"Do not interrupt me, but listen until you hear all that I have to say. With the landlord's curiosity aroused, as it certainly would be, by your departure, he would infallibly notice Maud's agitation, and then there is no means of ascertaining the consequences which may result from his prying inquisitiveness. On the other hand, should I go in your place, you will be able to keep Maud calm and quiet, and the landlord would find no fresh food for his curiosity. I have one more reason to urge why I should go instead of yourself, and that is, I should be cooler and calmer than you, and, for that reason, more likely to meet with success, because you would feel anxious as to what was taking place here; and, in the hour of danger, that very anxiety might so much unnerve you as to cause your destruction."

To the arguments thus set forth by his comrade, Dick Turpin listened with profoundest attention.

He could not conceal from himself that all that Tom said was marked with the utmost good sense, yet he did not like the idea of allowing Tom King to depart on an expedition which he considered so peculiarly his own.

Tom King could derive no profit from it, and certainly would run into very great danger.

In the end, however, after much discussion, Dick Turpin was prevailed upon by his companion to abandon his original intention, and stay at the inn while he went in his place.

It was on Maud's account, however, that Dick relented, for he was unwilling to give her more cause for anxiety and uneasiness of mind than he could help.

That Tom King stood a much better chance of succeeding in the enterprise there can be little doubt, for he could be cool, and calm, and collected, while Turpin could only be so by the maintenance of a continual effort.

Yet it was reluctantly and unwillingly that Dick did give way, and more than once he felt inclined to rescind his decision.

On each occasion, however, Tom King overruled him.

By this time darkness had fully come, and they were aroused by a faint tapping at the door of the chamber.

Upon permission being giving to enter, the door was thrown open, and the landlord appeared upon the threshold with two lighted candles in his hand.

"I waited for some time, gentlemen," he said, in an apologetical tone of voice as he advanced and set the candles down upon the table, "but, finding you did not ring for lights, as I fully expected you would, I made so bold as to bring them without having any commands to do so."

While the landlord spoke, both of the highwaymen fixed their eyes with great intentness upon his countenance.

But they could glean nothing from it.

Its impassable expression baffled them.

His sudden entrance, uncalled for, they could not help looking upon as a suspicious circumstance.

Whether they were right or not time alone could show.

His entrance had, however, one good effect.

It confirmed Dick in the policy of remaining with Maud while Tom King was absent upon his hazardous expedition.

Perceiving that the highwayman made no reply to his speech, the landlord asked a direct question.

It was his old and oft-repeated one.

"Have you any commands for me, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tom King.

The landlord looked at him expectantly.

"I want my horse saddled immediately. I am going out for an hour or so."

"Very well, sir," returned the landlord, with his usual imperturbability; "you shall be obeyed."

He turned round and left the room as he spoke.

As soon as the door was closed, Tom King said—

"What do you think of the landlord, now?"

"I am at a loss to say."

"So am I, except that I consider his conduct grows more and more suspicious, and it behoves you to keep a careful look out upon him while I am away."

"I shall do so, you may depend. I can assure you I feel anything but comfortable when I think about him."

"There is no immediate dread," said Tom King, as he carefully loaded his pistols, "though I quite think you ought to be careful. Have your eyes open to every occurrence, no matter how trivial."

"Trust me."

"Very well, then. As I am ready, I will go. Farewell."

"Nay, nay; I will accompany you to the stables."

"Upon no account."

"Why not?"

"Because I want to have a few words with the ostler."

"But I shall not prevent that. You will have nothing to say to him that you do not want me to hear?"

"No, no; you mistake me entirely. I want to get that meddling, officious, inquisitive landlord out of the way. If we both go to the stables he will be sure to accompany us, in the hope of finding out something, and he will not be at a loss for an excuse."

"But he will accompany you if you go alone."

"No, not so; when I descend I will send him up to you, and tell him you want to see him. Upon some pretext or other contrive to detain him until I am off. You will have little difficulty in doing so."

"Oh, none at all—none at all. But, Tom, I cannot help expressing my admiration at the ready way you have of getting out of a difficulty. I will take care the landlord don't trouble you if you will send him up to me."

CHAPTER CCCCVI.

TOM KING ONCE MORE FINDS HIMSELF UPON THE ROAD, AND MEETS WITH A STARTLING ADVENTURE.

"VERY good," said Tom King; "and, as that is all arranged, and as I am quite ready, I will be off at once. It is not worth while to delay."

"Be careful," said Dick Turpin, as he took his comrade's hand and shook it warmly. "Remember how much depends upon your success."

"I will be careful, rely upon it; and now, for the present, farewell!"

"Farewell!" said Dick; "and you may rest assured that ere long I shall find some means of requitting this service."

"Pho—pho; Never mention that. Hark! I hear the stairs creak. Some one is ascending."

Scarcely had he uttered these words, than there came a faint tap-tap at the door, and, upon permission being given, the landlord entered.

Bowing low, he said—

"Your horse is quite ready, sir, and waiting; and, if you will be pleased to follow me, I will lead you to the stables."

At these words Turpin and King involuntarily changed glances.

They so exactly bore out what the other had said.

"I am just ready too," said Tom King, in reply.

"This way, if you please," said the landlord.

Tom King fully expected that Dick would say something to detain the landlord, but to his surprise he did not.

Nevertheless, feeling sure that his comrade understood him, and that he might safely leave him to do as he promised, he did not hesitate to follow the landlord out of the room and down the stairs.

When they had gone about half way down, he had reason to congratulate himself for not having interfered, for just then he heard his comrade call out—

"Landlord—landlord!"

Of course Mr. Goodridge paused.

"My friend wants you," said Tom King, quickly; "run

up and see what he wants. I can easily find the way to the stables myself."

The landlord uttered an ejaculation of impatience, but he had no resource but to obey.

Most unwillingly, then, he reascended the stairs.

Tom resolved to make the best use of his time, so ran down the remainder as fast as he could and hurried to the stable, for he was by no means certain that Dick would be able to keep the landlord upstairs.

From his manner when he turned round to obey the call, it was clear that he had quite set his heart upon going to the stables and seeing Tom off.

The first thing our friend did on emerging from the back door of the inn, was to look up at the sky and note its aspect.

He was pleased with its appearance, for he saw that the night was one that just suited his purpose

The whole face of the heavens was covered with one huge black cloud.

There was no wind, and a slight hazy fog floated here and there, giving an appearance of indistinctness to all things.

On such a night Tom felt the most daring enterprise could be carried out successfully, and he walked across the yard towards the stable with a feeling of light-hearted confidence.

The ostler must have heard his approaching footstep, for, when he drew near, he opened the door of the stable, and led the horse out fully caparisoned.

A lamp was burning just inside, and this illuminated the ground round the stable for some distance.

Ere he ventured to mount, he carefully examined all the trappings to see that all was right, for he knew by experience how necessary it was to ascertain this before starting.

The ostler had, however, done his duty well, for the highwayman was unable to find anything out of place.

In another moment, Tom King had vaulted lightly and easily into the saddle.

The ostler held the horse by the bridle while he did so. Tom King took the reins, and then plunged his hand into his pocket.

He drew out a five-shilling piece.

"Ostler," he said.

The man addressed grinned and touched his forehead.

"You have done your duty well, so here is a crown-piece."

"Thank you, sir," was the reply, as Tom King slipped the coin mentioned into his hand.

"I hope you will understand," continued the highwayman, "that we feel inclined to be liberal with you if you will only serve us faithfully, and obey our orders promptly. That is but an earnest of what you will receive. I am going out for an hour, perhaps four or five. Don't go to bed while I am away. Sit up until I return. As soon as you hear me coming, run out, take the horse, groom it instantly, and place it in the stable in such a condition that no one could tell it had been out. Do you understand me?"

"Quite well, your honour."

"Very well, then. Attend to my instructions and you will find you will have no cause to regret it."

The ostler once more touched his forehead, and promised strict attention and obedience.

Having thus made matters right, Tom King seated himself firmly in the saddle and touched his steed lightly with his heavy riding-whip, which formed, when the lash was coiled round the hand, a very formidable weapon of offence and defence.

It was then somewhat similar to the modern weapon miscalled a life-preserver.

The horse's hoofs made a prodigious clatter on the stones with which the inn-yard was paved, and just as he emerged into the road, our friend caught sight of the inquisitive landlord standing at the front door of the inn.

But Tom did not check his speed in the least, and in less than a moment was lost to sight in the obscurity of the evening, though not to hearing, for the beat of his horse's hoofs rung out clearly and sharply upon the night air.

At length, they, too, ceased, and then the landlord, with a sigh of disappointment, turned back into the inn.

There was a wild, gleeful feeling about Tom King's heart as his horse bounded gallantly over the hard road.

His blood circulated in his veins with redoubled speed, and such a sensation of exultation took possession of him that he felt as though he could cry out aloud for very joy.

This impulse, however, he restrained, and by degrees reined in his steed, for he had no wish to distress it unnecessarily.

Subsiding at length to a trot, which the horse could perform with ease, he began to look about him for an adventure.

But he seemed to have the road all to himself, for, as yet, although he had come a considerable distance from the inn, he had not met with a single individual.

During the whole of the time, too, he had kept his ears on the stretch, listening intently for the slightest sound, for he could not tell how soon he might encounter one of the numerous troops of dragoons, who, he knew, were patrolling the roads.

He thought it probable, however, that the discovery that they were in the neighbourhood of Enfield Chase would have the effect of concentrating the soldiers about that spot.

As the reader may be sure, Tom took the road that would lead him not only away from Enfied Chase, but away from London also.

This was wise, for, as a matter of course, it diminished the chances of meeting with his foes.

A long time had elapsed since he had an adventure on the road, but in the interim he had forgotten none of his skill.

For this reason, then, although he was so environed by danger as he was, he hoped to be able to escape capture.

Being now, however, as he considered at a sufficient distance from the inn, he decreased his speed still more, until at length his horse proceeded at a walk only.

Suddenly a faint sound struck on his ear.

So faint was it, that it scarcely rose above the other noises with which the night air was filled, but the practised ear of the highwayman detected it.

He was, besides, able at once to recognise its character.

It was the sound produced by horses' hoofs.

They came from before him, though, from the extreme faintness of the sound, the rider whose approach was thus indicated, must have been at a considerable distance.

Tom King continued to advance at a walking pace, and had the satisfaction of hearing the sound increase in loudness and distinctness every moment, until there was no longer room to doubt the nature of it.

Presently Tom paused.

He had reached a piece of roadway which would, he considered, answer his purpose admirably, and he determined to go no further, but here await the coming of the traveller.

The place needs some description.

The roadway just where he had taken up his position was bounded by an embankment on both sides.

From the shape and general appearance of this, it would seem as though the greater portion of a hill had been cut away, in order to reduce the road to a more uniform gradient.

Such places are common in England, and, as the road alone is reduced to a level, and the fields on each side left untouched, the natural consequence is the formation of an embankment or cutting.

Tom paused as near as possible in the centre of this place, where the embankment on both sides was highest.

The effect of this was to plunge the piece of roadway into profound darkness.

One horseman alone was approaching—the sound of the horse's hoofs assured the highwayman of this—and he backed his horse as close to the side of the embankment as he could, turning his head away from the direction the traveller was coming.

Next, taking a pistol from his pocket, and holding it in an attitude ready for immediate service, Tom patiently awaited his coming.

The horseman, whoever he was, came on at a swift trot. Little did he think of the danger to which he was hurrying.

Doubtless aware that he had a disagreeable piece of road to traverse, he increased his horse's speed in order to pass through it as quickly as possible.



[DICK TURPIN, TOM KING, AND MAUD ARE ALARMED AT THE APPROACH OF THE DRAGOONS.]

On he came, but, somehow, as he drew nearer and nearer to the spot where the highwayman was lying in ambush, his pace faltered, and he insensibly drew in the rein.

Still he came on at a trot.

And now, when he came within a short distance of him, Tom King again exerted all his powers of hearing, in order to learn for certain whether the coming traveller was or was not alone upon the road.

Had he heard the echoing beat of another horse's foot he would have allowed the horseman to have passed by unmolested, as it would have been running too great a risk to attack him.

But all was still.

No other sound broke upon the universal silence.

The traveller was alone.

Tom King prepared for action.

He gathered the reins up in his hand, and grasped his pistol tightly.

One touch with his heel would, he knew, cause his obedient and well-trained steed to bound forward like an arrow.

On came the traveller.

Nearer and nearer he came at the same strange, faltering, hesitating pace.

In another moment, Tom, whose straining eyes had, to a certain extent, become habituated to the darkness, caught sight of his horse's head.

He was abreast with him.

Like a dart, Tom's steed bounded forward.

"Halt!" cried the highwayman, in tones of startling abruptness, which rung out loud and clear. "Halt! I say, or I fire, and the consequences be upon your own head."

It was easy to see that the rider was completely taken aback by the suddenness with which the highwayman had pounced out upon him.

But he was a brave man.

Recovering himself instantly, he plunged the rowels of his spurs deep into his horse's flanks.

With a cry of agony—half a snort and half a groan—

the poor creature reared up, and then bounded forward at a pace which could be designated by no other term than the appropriate one of break-neck.

It was evident the rider did not feel inclined to stop when he was bidden, and preferred to take the consequences of a refusal upon his own head.

To speak the truth, Tom King was scarcely prepared for this.

Nevertheless, he was as good as his word, and fired his pistol at the flying form, while at the same moment he urged his own horse to make his utmost speed.

The discharge of the pistol was followed by a blinding sheet of flame, which, for a moment, revealed the wild-looking aspect of the scene, and the tremendous report which echoed and re-echoed among the hills.

Whether his shot had taken any effect, Tom King knew not.

He had fired too suddenly to take anything like a correct aim, and he had no doubt in his own mind that the bullet had buried itself in the soft earth of which the embankment was composed.

He was confirmed in this opinion by the rapidity with which the traveller tore along.

The ground had a slight tendency downward, and this made his progress more rapid.

As we have said, Tom King urged his horse to the utmost.

But, in spite of all his efforts, he was unable to overtake the traveller's horse, which, maddened by pain and terrified by the explosion of the pistol, tore over the ground as no other horse had before.

Still he did not gain much upon Tom King, who, however, could not overtake him.

The bottom of the hill was reached, but on the level ground the horse continued his unabated speed.

In the excitement of this chase Tom King forgot everything but his determination to overtake the traveller.

He forgot the caution it was so necessary he should exercise.

He forgot that the dragoons were on the road along which he was flying at such a tremendous rate.

He forgot that his capture was imminent should he approach them too closely.

But the bold highwayman was oblivious of everything save his resolve.

His streaming eyes were fixed upon the forms of the traveller and his steed, which seemed to flit before him through the darkness with the swiftness of a phantom.

CHAPTER CCCCVII.

TOM KING PURSUES THE TRAVELLER DOWN THE LANE, AND MAKES AN UNEXPECTED AND TERRIBLE DISCOVERY

SUDDENLY, however, and when his speed appeared to have attained its maximum, the traveller's horse swerved rapidly on one side, and darted down a narrow lane that ran at right angles to the main road.

So swiftly was this done, that, though Tom King was in the rear and witnessed it, yet he was unable to check the progress of his own steed sufficiently to follow his example.

He pulled tightly at the rein, and the gallant creature strove to stop itself, but was unable to do so until the lane had been passed.

It was then necessary to come to a dead stop, and turn round.

This Tom did, and at a swift trot swept round the corner.

He found himself in one of those beautiful umbrageous lanes which are to be found nowhere else in the world but in England.

It was bordered on both sides by tall, thick hedges planted upon the top of an embankment, while here and there tall trees grew up in the summer time, casting a delicious shade over the lane, but now the branches were quite bare and leafless, giving an appearance of melancholy to the whole scene.

Tom King just gave a glance at the scene, and then directed all his attention to the object he had in view.

Faintly—very faintly—there came upon his ear the dull and rapid beat of a horse's hoofs.

The traveller had evidently got a good start, but the highwayman was determined that he should not escape.

Urging his horse forward by means of voice, whip, and spur, Tom tore over the uneven ground in the lane with a speed that was truly dangerous.

But King was wrought up to a pitch of desperation in consequence of what had taken place, and he determined not to abandon the chase until he was convinced that there would be no good in continuing it.

He was annoyed to think that in the first instance he had managed things so badly as to allow the traveller to slip through his fingers.

Away, then, he went down this narrow, winding lane.

It was very dark, for the thick clouds with which the sky was covered, effectually shut out the beams of the moon, although she was some distance above the horizon.

A faint, gray tint in the clouds denoted her whereabouts, but that was all.

As he continued his headlong course down the lane, Tom King leaned forward in his saddle, and listened with the utmost intentness.

Suddenly the sound of the horse's hoofs ceased.

What could be the reason of it?

He was sure that the cessation of sound had not taken place in consequence of the traveller having got out of earshot.

If this had been the case, the sound would have died gradually away.

But so far from this, he heard the hoof-beats one moment, and the next they ceased.

There could be but one explanation of this event.

The horse had come to a sudden stop.

Tom King grasped a pistol in his right hand, holding it in such a manner as to be available for immediate service, for he could not tell the meaning of this manœuvre.

He slackened his pace, too, so that if necessary he could pull up in a moment.

It was well he took these precautions.

The dense clouds parted, and through the rift the moon shone with beautiful effect, bringing into view all the different objects with which the highwayman was surrounded.

It was just as this took place that Tom King went round a bend in the lane.

To his surprise, he then saw before him, by the aid of the moonbeams, a pair of large iron gates.

Before these stood the traveller's horse, but he was riderless.

Tom King uttered an ejaculation of astonishment as he saw this.

The horse was making a strange moaning, groaning sound.

Eagerly Tom King glanced about him, anxious in the extreme to ascertain the whereabouts of the traveller.

The moonbeams were of great service to him on this occasion, for, coming from a high point in the sky, the roadway was rendered clearly visible.

A moment's glance enabled him to descry upon the ground the body of a man, or something that looked marvellously like it.

It was lying near the horse.

It was the traveller, no doubt.

When this extraordinary scene presented itself before him, Tom King reined in instinctively directly he caught sight of it.

He was about twenty yards from the horse.

In an infinitesimal portion of time more can be seen than can be described in an hour.

Briefly, however, we will endeavour to show the reader all that Tom King beheld.

As we have said, a dark-looking mass, which, from its general appearance, he imagined to be the body of the traveller, was lying by the side of the horse, and partially in the shadow which his body cast upon the moonlit lane.

The horse, trembling and groaning, was standing with his head close to the iron gate, as though he was desirous to pass through it.

This, however, was impossible; and its great height made it a barrier which no horse could overleap.

These large iron gates, which looked like the entrance gates to a nobleman's or a gentleman's grounds, were flanked on both sides by a massive stone wall of great

height, and which extended to the right and left as far as Tom could see.

On the other side of the wall, and through the foliage-work of the gate, could be seen a kind of park, beautifully laid out and well stocked with trees.

Over the tops of these the chimneys, gables and roof-tops of a mansion glittered in the clear moonlight.

The picture was one of exquisite beauty, and one that any person could have gazed at for a long time without weariness, because some fresh beauty presented itself at every moment.

Such, then, is a feeble description of the scene which was spread before Tom King when he halted after having passed round the bend in the lane.

He could not forbear to pause and look upon it.

It was evident that the lane led nowhere else, save to these gates, and these gates clearly led to the mansion.

It was certainly not the front or main entrance—perhaps it was the one made use of by the domestics.

The tall hedgerows grew right down to the massive buttresses of the gates, and the stone wall divided the park, if such it was, from the meadows.

This lane was, then, probably a private road leading only to the mansion.

Why, then, should the traveller have turned down it, for it was only taking him into a trap.

Tom knew not.

To linger there, however, gazing as he was, would certainly accomplish nothing; and so he touched his horse lightly with the spur to urge him forward, for he was anxious to obtain a closer view of the traveller.

To his surprise, however, the horse resolutely refused to stir.

He then, for the first time, noticed that his steed gave indications of suffering under the greatest terror.

His nostrils were dilated, his eyes expanded, and he exhibited every token of alarm.

Tom patted his neck; but, perceiving how great was his disinclination to advance, did not press him to do so, but alighted, and secured his steed by the bridle to the trunk of a tree that grew by the side of the lane.

He then stepped forward on foot, but to his annoyance the rift in the clouds, through which the moon had been shining, closed up, leaving the lane in all the greater darkness from the contrast.

In spite, however, of this adverse incident, he continued to advance towards the iron gates, which were still visible.

It took little more than a minute to reach the spot where the traveller was lying, for the distance was not more than twenty yards.

Upon arriving here he looked anxiously up at the sky, in order to see whether there was any prospect of the moon breaking forth again—for her light would have rendered him essential service.

To his joy he saw a long, irregular shaped fissure, in which the stars could be seen twinkling brightly.

The moon was on the borders of the fissure, and in a moment or so more would certainly break forth.

He waited, therefore, until this time arrived before he attempted to do anything.

Gradually, as the moon got nearer and nearer to the fissure, her light shone through the thinner clouds which fringed it, and cast a dim halo around.

Gradually this brightened, and once more the details of the extraordinary scene were brought before Tom's view.

Without loss of time he stooped down over the prostrate form.

It was a man, and he was lying in a strange, huddled-up position.

That he was either dead or else seriously wounded, there could be no doubt.

Repugnant as it was to his feelings, Tom took hold of one of his arms and dragged his body into the lane, where the moonbeams would fall unobstructedly upon it.

The face was turned upwards, and its peculiar expression told Tom in a moment that the traveller, whoever he was, was dead.

From various portions of his clothing came various scintillations of light, which showed where diamonds were fixed upon it, and the material was of the best description, most elegantly and expensively trimmed.

The wearer was some person either of wealth or rank—probably both.

The pallid features were delicately formed, and, even in death, had an aristocratic appearance.

How he had come by his death was, at first, uncertain.

It might be that the horse, stopping short, had thrown him out of the saddle, or it might be that he owed his death to the pistol-shot which Tom had fired at him, but which the highwayman did not think had taken effect, because it was fired without aim, and because the traveller had continued his headlong speed.

This was a point, however, which Tom King resolved to ascertain.

Stooping down over him, he looked closely at him.

At first he saw no wound, and was about to adopt his first supposition as the true one, when he felt something wet on the breast of the traveller's coat as he passed his hand over it.

Tom held up his hand in the moonlight and looked at it.

It was stained with blood.

Hastily wiping it away, he unfastened the traveller's clothing, and at length his breast was exposed to view.

In this a small round hole was visible, from which the crimson fluid welled slowly.

The wound was such as a pistol would have produced, and was situated on the right-hand side of his breast.

Very little blood indeed flowed from it, and his clothing was little more than stained.

It was evident, then, that the wound had bled inwardly, and, from its position and proximity to his heart, he felt sure it must be mortal.

This was a discovery which Tom King far from anticipated, and he shuddered with horror at the suddenness with which it had come upon him.

The body was quite warm, but the heart had ceased to beat, and the features were fast becoming fixed in the stern rigidity of death.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Tom King; "can it be possible? I had no idea that the shot which I fired at random, and under the impulse of the moment, would prove to be a fatal one. But it seems it is so. But how comes the traveller here? Suffering under such a wound, how could he have retained his seat in the saddle long enough to reach this place—and with the horse going at such a frightful speed? And then there was the sudden turn out of the highroad. It is a mystery. I cannot conceive how it was he retained his seat. He must have been a brave man, and one well skilled in the art of riding, or it never could have happened."

As he spoke, Tom King, with sadness upon his countenance, looked again into the face of the traveller.

"Quite dead!" he added; "quite dead. I never saw the impress of death more distinctly visible. Well, it is in vain to grieve. It cannot be helped. I am sorry for what has occurred, but I can do no more than make the best of it. Had he attended to my demands, I should not have fired, and his life would have been spared. It is all over now, though, and all the regrets in the world will not bring him back to life."

So saying, Tom King rose to his feet, and made two steps towards the spot where he had tethered his horse.

Then he stopped suddenly, as he said—

"I forget—I forget my errand. It is money that I require; and from the dress of that dead man, he doubtless carries plenty in his pocket. Now he is dead it can be of no further service to him. Why, then, should I scruple to take it from him? And yet—but I must not give way to such scruples. The night is going fast, and it is important for all that I get back to the inn without delay or further loss of time. Another adventure will be impossible, and the chances are quite against my meeting with anyone like this. He is dead, quite dead, and why should I hesitate? It is weakness, folly! The money is, then, to be had for taking. I wish all this had not occurred, but yet I must have it."

CHAPTER CCCVIII.

IN WHICH TOM KING LEARNS SOME PARTICULARS RELATIVE TO THE IDENTITY OF THE DEAD TRAVELLER.

ALTHOUGH he uttered these last words in a very resolute manner, yet Tom King advanced towards the body of the dead traveller with a slow and hesitating step.

He felt a certain and very natural amount of repug-

nance to approaching the man for the purpose of rifling his pockets.

It was a deed that he seemed instinctively to shrink from, and most certainly it was one which he had never committed before.

Yet, as he said, why should he recoil from taking it now, when he would have deprived him of it while he lived without remorse.

Now, however, he was dead; and it seemed as though his body ought to be held sacred, and not profaned by the robber's touch.

So powerfully did Tom King feel all this, that had the need of the money been any less urgent than it was, he would have mounted his horse and rode away, leaving the pockets of the dead man untouched.

But he knew how valuable the time was.

They would be compelled to leave the inn that very night, for to depart by daylight would be dangerous to a degree, and there remained to them only one night to to find some place of refuge and safety for Maud, as the night after they had appointed to meet their two comrades on the Finchley-road.

The sooner, then, that he was back at the inn the better it would be for their general safety.

Much time had already been consumed, and if he left the traveller, and looked out for another adventure, he might be detained for an indefinite length of time, and in the end run the risk of not obtaining the requisite sum.

Now, however, it was beyond all doubt within his reach, for the prostrate man looked like one who would not travel without valuables.

He was the more inclined to think he carried articles of great value about him from his very conduct.

Had he carried a light purse, he would have surrendered it rather than have run the risk of being fired at.

All these reasons pressed powerfully upon Tom King's mind as he made his way towards the traveller, with a slow and hesitating step.

Making a sudden effort, however, he passed over the remaining space which intervened between them.

Here he knelt down once more upon the ground.

He was easily able to find the pockets, but he did not put his hand into them.

He contented himself with feeling the outside, in order to learn whether there was anything of a bulky character within.

In the breast of his coat he felt something like a pocket-book.

He thrust his hand into his pocket, and found he was quite right.

It was a pocket-book, and, by its appearance, seemed to be full of something.

He opened it; and, as the moon continued to shine, he was enabled to make an examination of its contents.

They were bank-notes.

These were articles that Tom King never cared much about; but, on the present occasion, he thrust them into his pocket.

There was at that time an extreme difficulty in passing bank notes; and he thought perhaps the landlord of the "Mountain Rill" might refuse to take them as payment.

The first feeling of repugnance which he had entertained had now passed away, and he resolved to learn whether the traveller had any gold about him.

He was glad he made this second search, for it discovered to him a large bag of gold, which was in the other breast-pocket of his coat.

This Tom took with very great satisfaction.

Just, however, as he was about to rise to his feet, he heard a loud shout, coming apparently from many throats.

He was upon his feet in a second, with his face turned in the direction from which the sound had appeared to come.

Once more the clouds swept over the moon, entirely involving her in their obscurity.

But her beams were not on this occasion wanted by the highwayman, and he was glad when he found this had taken place.

The shouts which he had heard came from the other side of the iron gates, and that was the direction towards which Tom King's face was turned.

He saw immediately a number of moving lights; and, after a second glance, he felt convinced they proceeded from lanterns carried by some persons.

What was their object, he knew not; and he was also completely in the dark as to the meaning of the cry to which they had given utterance.

That they were approaching the gate was evident, and the speed at which they came was very great.

Tom King hesitated for a moment as to what he should do.

If he mounted his steed and hastened away, the mere fact of his doing so would put these people on his track, for they were so near that the trampling of his horse's hoofs could not but be heard.

To fly seemed, then, injudicious; and yet, to remain where he was, would be perilous to a degree.

Tom King, however, felt a great degree of curiosity to learn something more than he at present knew respecting the man who lay there so still in death.

Could he conceal himself somewhere close at hand, he felt that he would gladly do so; for, not only would such a course be more conducive to his own safety than any other, but it would also enable him to hear what took place, should the body be discovered; in the event of which, he would surely, he thought, hear something concerning him.

Already in his own mind, though almost without knowing it, he had connected the dead rider with the mansion which he had seen through the trees.

Having come to this resolution, he hastened to the spot where his horse was tethered.

The creature still showed symptoms of fright, and Tom feared that he should have some trouble with it yet.

A glance over his shoulder showed him that the people carrying the lanterns were very close to the gate, and he would have to be very expeditious to escape being seen by them.

What he had to do was to get into the meadows that skirted both sides of the lane, and take his horse with him.

But how he was to accomplish this was the difficulty.

He had not taken particular notice as he came down the lane, but he had no recollection of seeing a gate which led into these fields.

As he now stood, with his hands on his horse's bridle, he glanced up and down; but no gate was in sight.

Then the hedges were too high to be easily or quickly surmounted, and they seemed to be kept in first-rate preservation, so that there were no gaps in it through which he could force his way.

He saw all this at one brief and comprehensive glance.

He untied his horse from the branch of the tree, and then he noticed, for the first time, that there was a small space between the trunk of it and the hedge, which did not grow close to it.

There looked scarcely room to pass through such a place, but there was no choice, so Tom had to make the attempt.

He first of all scrambled up the bank, and managed to get into the meadow, at the expense of a few scratches only.

Then, holding the bridle, he spoke in a low voice to his horse, and tried to pull him up.

The horse seemed to perfectly understand what it was required to do, for he placed his fore feet upon the bank.

Tom pulled again, and the horse, making a kind of leap, forced his way into the meadow.

Tom patted it caressingly.

The grass in the meadow was short, but it was thick, so Tom had no fear of being heard walking over it.

He led the horse close under the hedge, and paused just opposite the spot where the body of the traveller lay.

The hedge was plenty high enough to conceal both Tom King and his steed from the view of anyone standing in the lane, but there were several interstices through which he himself would be able to see all that took place.

He had reached his place of concealment just in time, and that was all.

The party of men he had seen carrying the lanterns had now just reached the gate, which they unfastened and passed through.

No sooner was the gate opened, however, than the traveller's horse, which had continued to stand near it, gave utterance to a snorting sound that alarmed every one who heard it, and then bounded through into the

park—if such it was—with a speed that was absolutely astonishing.

It was out of sight among the dark trunks of the trees in a moment.

Two of the men who were in the act of passing through the gate were thrown down with great violence, and trampled under foot.

Several others were also slightly injured, and a scene of the utmost confusion ensued.

Recovering themselves, they emerged into the lane, and then almost immediately they discovered the body of the traveller.

Those who first beheld it, uttered a shout which caused the others to gather round them.

One stooped down and raised the head, while the others directed the light of their lanterns upon the face.

"Alas! alas!" said one, "this is by far worse than I feared."

"It is indeed a sorry sight," said the one who held his head. "He is quite dead, and as cold as a stone!"

"I knew something was the matter," said another, "when I came by the gate and heard someone groaning. I was too frightened to stop to see what it was, so I ran up to the hall to you."

"Oh! what shall we do!" cried an aged man. "Alas! alas! Little did I think I should live to witness such a sight! Poor master murdered, and at the gates of his own park!"

"It's horrible! How shall we let missus know what has taken place?"

"Alas! I would not be the one that had to communicate such tidings to her."

"Nor I, nor I," said many voices.

"But who could have done such a barbarous deed? He was the best master that ever lived! And now dead—quite dead! Who is there that will tell us what has happened?"

"Do not let us give way to our sorrow in this manner," said one who had not yet spoken. "We do not know that master is dead. He may be in a swoon, or something of that sort. Carry him up to the hall at once, and I will start off for a doctor."

This was so rational a suggestion, that it was immediately acted upon.

"I fear there is no hope," said one. "He is getting quite rigid now, and look where his clothing has been torn open. Poor master has been robbed as well as murdered!"

A shout of execration came from the lips of the domestics as they heard this announcement, and they pressed forward eagerly, so as to assure themselves of the truth of it."

"Perhaps," continued the one who had just spoken, "the robber and murderer is lurking somewhere close at hand. Let some carry the body up to the hall, and let the rest of us make a search for the murderer."

"Agreed! agreed!" they all cried, with one accord.

Four now took up the body, and carried it tenderly through the gate into of the park.

The others, to the number of six or seven, dispersed about the lane.

It was not, of course, very long before they saw the foot-marks on the embankment up which Tom had climbed, and all clustered round this spot as soon as it was discovered.

The horse, too, in scrambling up, had dislodged a great deal of the loose soil, which had rolled down into the roadway.

With great boldness the men rushed up the bank into the meadow.

But here all was still.

So dark, too, was it, that they could see nowhere beyond the sphere of light which was cast by the lanterns they carried.

The clouds, however, were flitting across the moon, and presently her light broke forth in all its glorious effulgency.

It seemed to have the effect of extinguishing the light of the lanterns, which now looked only like so many stars.

The men embraced the opportunity to look about them.

Ejaculations of anger broke from their lips.

At the farthest extremity of the meadow could be seen a mounted man, who was urging his horse to make its utmost speed.

They saw it but for a moment, and then it disappeared.

Under the impulse of the moment, they rushed forward at full speed, but they soon checked themselves when they saw the utter futility of their attempt to overtake a horseman going at such a speed.

But they hastened back to the hall for horses and further assistance, as they were determined not to let the murderer escape if possible.

The reader scarcely requires to be told that the rider they saw in the distance was no other than Tom King.

He had lingered behind the hedge, and heard and saw all that we have described.

He did not attempt to move, indeed until he heard the men announce their intention of searching for him.

He then judged it high time to be off, so he mounted noiselessly, and led his steed away from the spot at a gentle rate, so as not to attract notice.

As soon as he was far enough off, however, he plunged his spurs deep into his horse's sides.

The poor creature flew over the level meadow with maddened bounds.

From time to time Tom looked back upon the road he had just come, and, as he did so, he noticed that, in the far distance, he could see the twinkling of lights.

There was a low hedge before him, and over this he leaped.

This will account for his sudden disappearance from the gaze of the men.

He alighted in another meadow, but as now he had nothing to fear from a pursuit, he allowed his horse to go at a more gentle rate.

He changed his course slightly, and then directed his steed over fields, and streams, and hedges, taking an almost straight line to his destination.

CHAPTER CCCCIX.

TOM KING SURPRISES DICK TURPIN BY HIS AGITATION AND HORROR.

It was nearly half an hour after this that a horseman, whose steed showed palpable signs of exhaustion and fatigue, trotted leisurely up to the gateway that led to the stables belonging to the "Mountain Rill" inn.

The hour was by no means a late one, and from several windows in the little roadside public-house came long, bright beams of light.

The horseman seemed to be well acquainted with the premises.

He glanced up to the old-fashioned bow-window on the first floor, and saw the dusky figure of some person standing at it.

He just waved his hand in token of recognition, and then he guided his horse underneath the archway.

In another moment he was in the yard at the rear of the inn.

A door was abruptly opened, and an elfish-looking lad appeared upon the threshold.

In his hand he held a lantern, the door of which was opened, in order that it should give a better light.

Behind him could be seen the figure of a man.

It was the ostler.

The liberal manner in which Tom King had behaved to him was not without exercising a sensible effect upon him.

He had sat on a corn-bin near the stable door during the whole period of Tom's absence, listening attentively for any sounds that would indicate his approach.

The reader will scarcely need to be told that the horseman who had just arrived was no other than our old friend Tom King.

He had seen nothing more of the domestics who commenced a pursuit after him; but, nevertheless, he made his way to the inn at full speed, for he was well aware that there was no time to lose.

Not only that Turpin would grow uneasy if he was long absent.

Tom dismounted rapidly from his steed, and gave his instructions to the ostler as to how the horse was to be treated.

The fellow promised implicit obedience to all his commands, but Tom would not allow himself to rest contented with the assurance merely, and though he had tolerably good faith in this ostler, he, nevertheless, waited and saw

everything done, although he was impatient in the extreme to rejoin Dick.

It was while he was thus occupied that Timothy Goodridge, the landlord, made his appearance.

In a smiling, jovial, off-hand sort of way, he stepped up close to where Tom King was standing.

"Ahem!" he said. "I see you are back again, sir."

"Yes," replied Tom, who by no means desired to encourage the landlord in his loquacity, "I have come back."

"Quite glad to see you back safe so soon," continued the landlord, not checked in the least. "I am very glad to see you safe back again. Your horse looks tired. Has he been far, sir?"

"Pretty well."

"Ah! I thought so. You have come fast, too. I can see that. Really, it is not the thing to compliment anyone to their face, and it is a thing which I am not at all in the habit of doing; but, sir, you are a magnificent rider. I was standing at the front door when you started, and really, you sat in the saddle as though it was your cradle, and you had never been out of it all your life. Perhaps you have been in the habit of riding, sir?"

"Oh! yes, occasionally."

"Occasionally? Well, really now, do you know I should have thought, from seeing you, that you were in continual practice. You seemed so much at home."

"I am glad my riding has pleased you," said Tom, drily. 'I wish you could say the same thing to me about your talkativeness."

This was an oblique hint, but the landlord either did not or would not take it, but continued to gabble on in the same strain, his object evidently being to extract from Tom all the information he could.

But he found that Tom was not very easily pumped; and, when he had finished, he was not much wiser than he was before.

In his present frame of mind, this garrulity upon the part of the landlord was excessively distasteful to Tom, but he had no means of escaping the infliction.

He was compelled to listen to all.

The ostler, however, was very nimble; and, in much less time than Tom King believed was possible, he thoroughly groomed the horse, and turned it into the stable.

Tom King did not leave until he had superintended the feeding.

Then, gladly enough, he turned away, for he was thoroughly wearied with the landlord's inquisitive questions.

He was so good-tempered, and said everything with such apparent frankness and goodwill, that Tom found it impossible to offend him.

At length, however, when he had seen all was properly done, our old friend directed his steps towards the inn.

He was sure Dick had seen him arrive, and he was rather surprised that he had not ere this made his appearance, but he hoped that he should have a reason given for it.

The landlord would insist upon accompanying him to the door of the room, though Tom did all he could to prevent him.

Finding his efforts ineffectual, however, he was compelled to submit, and get rid of him only when he entered the room.

Turpin advanced eagerly towards him, but, by a look, Tom cautioned him not to speak until the landlord had withdrawn.

This Mr. Goodridge was reluctantly compelled to do, for he had no excuse whatever for remaining.

Maud was seated near the fire, and her face lighted up with joy when she saw Dick's faithful comrade had returned unhurt and in safety from his perilous expedition.

She noticed in a moment, however, the peculiar expression of his countenance, and wondered what could have caused it.

She fancied it might proceed from having failed to accomplish his purpose, but in this she was mistaken.

Dick Turpin noticed the strange, wild, haggard look upon his comrade's face, and would have spoken had not Tom placed his finger on his lip, as a signal for him to remain silent.

At the same time he took our hero by the hand, and, leading him up to the window, he said in a faint whisper—

"Do not raise your voice. The landlord's suspicions are, I am sure, aroused, by the questions he has just put to me."

"Has he been questioning you, then?"

"Yes, while I have been looking after my horse. Why did you not come down?"

"Because Maud did not wish to be left, and because I was undesirous of doing anything to further rouse the landlord's curiosity."

"It was as well, perhaps. You saw me arrive?"

"Yes; I have been watching at the window, here, nearly ever since your departure—not merely for your return, but to guard against being surprised by our foes."

"A wise precaution—a very wise precaution indeed, and we shall do well to continue to adopt it."

"Good. We will stand here and talk. But Tom, my friend, speak—tell me what has happened. Why do you look so strangely? Your face is ghastly white, and your eyes roll fearfully in their sockets. Do not keep me any longer in suspense. Speak! Tell me all. I am sure something terrible has happened."

"Hush!" said Tom, in a low but impressive whisper, casting his eyes all around him. "Hush!"

"This mysterious behaviour fills me with unknown dread," said Turpin, clutching his comrade tightly by the arm. "Answer my questions—relieve my uneasiness, I beg you."

"Be calm, and I will tell you all."

"Are our foes at hand?"

"No—no. I believe not—at least, not to my knowledge."

"You have failed, then, in your enterprise?"

"No—no; I have not failed. Look here. This bag contains gold to a large amount, and this pocket-book, bank-notes."

As he spoke these words, Tom King, not without a certain wildness of manner which much alarmed his comrade, produced from his pocket the articles he had named, and thrust them hurriedly into Dick's hands.

"What, then, is the meaning of your agitation, my friend?" he asked.

"I have had an adventure."

"An adventure?"

"Yes; one of such a fearful character that I have never had before, and I hope and trust I never shall again."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Turpin. "Speak—speak no longer in these ambiguous terms, but explain yourself. Tell me what has happened."

"Patience—patience, and I will do so. I have not yet been able to overcome my horror; indeed now I reflect on what has occurred, it seems to redouble in intensity."

"Calm yourself—calm yourself, I pray!"

"You forget my caution. The landlord may be at the door listening, and should he overhear our conversation, we are lost."

"I will be careful. But tell me, I pray, what has taken place?"

"I will do so as briefly as I can. Listen!"

As he spoke, Tom drew Dick close to him, and inclined his mouth to his ear.

"I would not have Maud hear what I am about to communicate for worlds," he whispered; "so listen."

"I am listening," said Dick. "I am quite at a loss to think what can have occurred to have produced such an effect upon you. Your nerves are well strung. It cannot be a trifle which has so overcome you."

"It is no trifle, as you will say when you have heard me out. This is what has taken place—this is what has filled my very soul with horror and thrown me into this state of agitation."

Tom King then related to Turpin his adventure, which we have already placed in full before the reader, and, therefore, there is no need of ours to repeat it in his own words.

He had not exaggerated its horror.

Well might he utter the wish that such an adventure should never again befall him.

"To think, Dick," he added, in conclusion, "that, unaware of it, I for so long pursued a dying, perhaps a dead man! By what mysterious means he contrived to retain his seat in the saddle, I know not, for his steed's speed was tremendous. I do not for a moment believe that he guided the animal to its destination. I believe the animal

carried him home by the mere force of its own instinct, and doubtless it would have carried him still nearer to his house had not the iron gates shown themselves to be an obstacle which he could not surmount."

"It is very terrible," said Dick; "but you take this too much to heart. The fault is not so much yours as his. Had he complied with your demands, he would have been unhurt."

"True, true! He wished to preserve his life and money!"

"And so he lost both. Tom this is really not so terrible as you seem to think it. Had he fallen anywhere save at the gates of his own park, you would not have thought it half so dreadful."

"Perhaps not. It would, however, have been better for my future peace of mind if I had not stayed to witness the finding of the body. I ought to have fled from the spot, but, as it was, I witnessed all—all! Never until my last moment shall I forget the terrible scene."

"Come, come," said Dick, anxious to rouse his comrade from this depressed state of mind. "Shake off these feelings; they are unworthy of you—they are unworthy of anyone. What took place was clearly an accident. You did not aim the bullet, although it struck a fatal blow. It was purely a chance shot. Do not take the event so much to heart, I beg. It is wrong of you to do so."

"Perhaps it is, Dick; perhaps it is. But had the need of money been any less urgent than it is, I should have turned and fled the moment I discovered the lifeless body in the lane. As it was, I robbed the dead!"

"And what of that. Why should you object to take that from his body while dead, which you would not have scrupled to take while living? Pho! pho! Where is the difference? Only in this. The dead man would not be sensible of his loss."

"It is well for you, Dick, to speak thus philosophically; but had it been you, I fancy you would have found the difference. It has given my nerves a shock such as they will be a long time recovering from. But come, let us quit this subject. We have other matters of much greater importance pressing upon us. This is the time for action, not for talk!"

"You are right, you are right; and I hope you are cool, calm, and collected enough to talk upon our future proceedings."

"I am, I am."

"What, then, are we to do?"

"Depart without delay."

"I think that will be the best plan. But stay. Tell me. I forgot to inquire before. While you have been out, have you seen or heard nothing of the dragoons?"

"Nothing at all."

"Well, then, that is good news. It seems to promise us that we shall be able to leave this place without molestation from them."

"It does, indeed. I am surprised we have been so little troubled with them. I cannot make it out."

"It is strange."

"Very strange. I wonder how Claude and Sixteen-String Jack have fared. You have no idea how anxious I am about them. I cannot help thinking that the reason we have not seen the dragoons, is that they are all in pursuit of them."

"Do not give way to such gloomy speculations as those, I beg. Let us prepare to start at once. As a preliminary step, we will call the landlord, pay the remainder of the money that is owing for the horse, and settle off the score."

"Pray do. Let us summon him at once. But, hark! Listen, Dick! What is that? Louder and louder! Plainer and plainer it becomes! What is it? I am afraid to say!"

"Be calm," said Turpin. "You do not seem yourself."

"Can you hear nothing?"

"I hear the trampling of many horses' hoofs."

"Yes—yes! That is the sound! We are lost! We have delayed our departure until it is too late! Hark! They are the dragoons! By some means they have tracked us to this place! Look out—look out, and tell me what you see!"

CHAPTER CCCCX.

THE DRAG—ONS HALT AT THE FRONT DOOR OF THE "MOUNTAIN RILL" INN, AND THE POSITION OF THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN BECOMES CRITICAL TO A DEGREE.

During the time that Tom King related to Dick the particulars of his terrible adventure on the highway, Maud had retained her seat near the fire.

Her eyes were directed towards both, but their forms were partially concealed by the gloom of the chamber and the dingy curtain which hung before the window.

Where she sat she could only hear the murmuring of voices, but could not detect a word, except on those occasions when Dick spoke, when he was immediately cautioned by his comrade to lower his tone.

It was well for our friends that they were thus prudent.

Tom King had good reason to fear the landlord's curiosity.

At that very moment he was crouching down upon the stairs with his ear close to the bottom of the door, between which and the floor there was a space of nearly half an inch, for the door was an old one, and now fitted very badly.

If Maud, sitting by the fireside, could not hear what Tom King said, it is quite certain the landlord could not, and so he had all his pains for nothing.

He heard a confused, murmuring sound, but that was all.

When, however, Tom King spoke the words with which the preceeding chapter concluded, she could tell, not only by the disjointed syllables which fell upon her ears, but by the excited manner in which they were uttered, that something wrong had taken place.

Ever on the look-out for danger, and apprehensive of every circumstance, Maud sprang in a moment from her seat, and hastened towards the window.

She clasped her arms around Dick, as she said, in fearful accents—

"What is amiss? Tell me—oh! tell me at once what is amiss."

"Hush! hush! Maud. Be not alarmed; it may be nothing. We can but prepare ourselves for the worst. Let us hope that the danger with which we are threatened will pass away."

Maud clung still more tightly to Dick Turpin, as he spoke these words, for she knew they foreboded peril.

In the meantime, Tom King had taken the two candles off the table, and placed them in one corner of the room, so that none of the rays of light from them should fall upon the window.

This would enable them to look out without so much danger of being seen by those who were approaching.

When first the quick ear of Tom King detected the sounds of horses' hoofs, they must have been a long way off.

Now, however, they were close at hand.

Anxiously the three fugitives crowded in the space of the old bow-window, and looked down the road.

It was dark without; and yet through the obscurity they could distinguish a dark mass approaching in various portions, of which something glittered brightly.

That peculiar, jingling sound which is ever heard when soldiers are on horseback, reached their ears.

That it was the dragoons who were approaching there could be little or no doubt, and yet the danger of their presence might be less than it appeared to be.

They might be possibly doing no more than patrolling the road, and, if so, the best thing for our friends to do would be to remain perfectly still where they were, since any hasty movement to escape might have only the effect of bringing immediate destruction upon them.

In the hope, then, that the dragoons who were approaching would pass the house, our friends stood at the window, looking out eagerly into the darkness.

On they came; the trampling of the horses' feet and the jingling of the accoutrements sounding plainer and plainer each moment.

Their speed did not relax.

On they came, and the hope that they would pass by and leave them in safety grew stronger and stronger in their breasts.

The approaching troop was a large one; the largest our friends had ever seen.

It seemed almost as though the numerous small bodies

of soldiers that had been hanging about had coalesced into one.

If this was so, and if they would only pass the inn, then all would be well.

The circumstance would turn out a most favourable one for our friends.

Nothing would be easier than for them to take their departure as soon as the dragoons were out of sight, and go in a direction contrary to them.

Here every step they took would increase the distance between them, and conduce to their safety.

On the other hand, should the dragoons have by some means or other traced them to the "Mountain Rill," and made an attack upon them, their position would be one of the most imminent and deadly peril.

The circumstance of the dragoons having combined together in such a large number, seemed quite in accordance with this latter supposition.

It would account for such a thing at once, because they would consider by appearing in such great force they would be able to make sure of the victory.

Such were the reflections that swept through the minds of both the highwaymen with the rapidity of thought.

They did not speak to each other, or communicate their ideas, but both coincided in a remarkable manner.

They felt that their fate would depend upon the occurrences of the next few moments, and, therefore, the reader will easily be able to imagine for himself the suspenseful anxiety with which they watched the approaching troop.

Their lives and liberties depended upon whether they passed by or whether they stopped.

As they came nearer and nearer, so did their suspense increase.

At one moment hope would maintain the ascendency; at the next, fear and despair.

Fortunately for them, their suspense was not of very long duration.

The dragoons came on at a slow, jogging trot, such as is peculiar to the military.

They were now within ten yards of the inn.

The critical moment had arrived.

Would they pause?

No, they kept on at the same steady rate.

Hopeful and more hopeful grew our friends.

They ventured to breathe more freely.

The danger would pass by.

Another moment, and the danger would be over.

The dragoons will continue on their way.

No!

Suddenly—startlingly—there came upon the ears one word.

"Halt!"

That was the word.

It was uttered with that abruption upon which military officers so pride themselves.

It was like the report of a pistol, and it seemed to produce upon our friends the same effect as a suddenly-delivered blow.

They staggered back, and a faint scream came from Maud's lips.

It was drowned by the noise made by the soldiers reining in their steeds.

In an incredibly short space of time all were still.

Turpin and King had not moved from the window.

They seemed incapable of motion.

The dragoons halted immediately beneath them.

That is to say, at the door of the public-house.

"All is lost," said Maud, moaningly, with her face blanched by terror. "All is lost."

The despondent words were echoed by the hearts of her two companions, but not by their lips.

But the sound of her voice seemed to have the effect of rousing them into action.

Rapidly both withdrew from the window, where there was so much hazard of their being seen, now that the dragoons were so close at hand.

The rooms on the ground-floor of the "Mountain Rill" had low ceilings, and as the soldiers sat on horseback, they could almost reach to look into the bow-window.

Turpin and Dick paused near the centre of the room.

By common consent they looked at the priming of their weapons.

"What must be done now, Dick?" asked Tom King.

"Something and that right quickly," was the reply.

"But what?"

"We must not remain here, or we shall be taken prisoners."

"Where can we go? If we descend the stairs we shall be detected immediately."

"The landlord's suspicions are aroused, and if the dragoons do not know already that we are here, they will ask the landlord, and he will recognise the description, and then all will be over with us."

"Our position is truly desperate, and unless we adopt some desperate expedient, it will be all over with us."

"We must escape! We must leave this place at once!"

"But how?—that is the question."

"We must think—ah! an idea. Come, I believe there is hope yet."

As he spoke these words, Turpin passed his arm round Maud's waist, and led her towards the door.

"What are you about to do?"

"Follow us, and you will see," said Turpin. "It will be better than for me to stop and explain it."

Turpin had recollected all in a moment that the room which Maud had occupied was in the rear of the house, and that the window overlooked the stable-yard.

Towards this he made his way.

He crossed the landing, and entered the chamber.

As he did so, he called out to Tom King, who was close at his heels, to secure the door.

He was instantly obeyed.

All would now depend upon the speed they were able to make.

Turpin opened the window.

It was a large casement, and the leaf swung back suddenly against the wall.

"Joe—Joe," he cried. "Here."

"Let me call him," said Tom King. "I am on good terms with him."

"Do not speak too loud."

Tom called, but there was no response for a moment.

"What do you want with him?" asked King.

"To bring a ladder and place it against the window. We shall then be able to descend into the yard, and, perhaps, steal away unperceived."

"An excellent thought. But the ostler, I fear, is out in the front attending to the soldiers' horses."

"I forgot that."

"Never mind," continued Tom King; "the distance to the ground is not so great but what I can drop it easily. Then, if there is a ladder, I will place it for you."

"Stop," exclaimed Turpin; "what is that?"

He pointed to a dark figure standing in the yard as he spoke.

"It is the ostler!" ejaculated Tom King. "All is well."

Dick called him again.

"Here I is," said a voice, which Tom instantly recognised as the ostler's. "Where be you?"

"Here, at the window."

"Oh! I sees you. What do you want?"

"Joe, if you want to earn five pounds, listen to me, and do just as I tell you."

"Oh! won't I?" said Joe, as he came nearer. "What do you want?"

"A ladder! Quick! In an instant! Place it against the window!"

"Ain't got never a one."

"No ladder?"

"No; but here's some steps."

"Put them here."

"They ain't tall enough."

"Never mind; we will try to make them do."

The ostler did not waste any more time in argument, but produced the steps he had mentioned, and placed them where Dick had directed.

They were manifestly too short, but yet our friends thought they would answer the purpose.

Tom King slipped through the window, and lowered himself until his feet touched them.

Then, taking a firm foot-hold, he asked Dick to hand Maud down, and he would assist her to descend.

At the same time he turned round to the ostler, and said—

"Run into the stable and saddle our two horses as quickly as you can, and put the side-saddle on the horse we bought to-day of your master. Be quick, and you shall have not five pounds but ten!"



DICK TURPIN, MAUD, AND TOM KING ARRIVE AT THE RUINED MANSION.

The offer of this immense sum seemed for a moment or two to have a paralyzing effect upon the ostler, but, quickly recovering himself, he rushed into the stable, and began saddling the horses with maniacal speed.

He was used to his trade, and soon performed the duty.

In the meantime, in obedience to his friend's injunction, Dick Turpin assisted Maud through the window, and Tom, standing on the steps, helped her down.

She reached the ground safely and easily.

For Turpin to follow was an easy enough matter.

In fact, he almost disdained to make use of the steps at all.

So far, then, all was well, and with renewed hope they hurried across the yard into the stable.

Their satisfaction may be imagined when they saw the wonderful progress which the ostler had made in caparisoning the steeds.

Both highwaymen sprang forward to his assistance, and, in less than a moment more, all were ready.

They mounted in the stable.

But their difficulties were far from being over.

So far as their own knowledge extended, there was but one means by which the yard could be entered and left, and this was by means of the gateway.

Round this the troop of dragoons were clustered, so that it seemed absolutely impossible for them to emerge without being captured, and, if they remained in the yard, the same event would take place.

This was a dilemma truly.

They appealed to the ostler, who was, indeed, their only remaining hope.

"Quick, tell me," said Turpin; "is there any other means by which this yard can be left besides by the gateway?"

"No, that is the only one."

"Are you sure?"

"In course I is."

Our friends were in despair.

"But is there no place in the yard where the wall is so low that we could jump over it into the meadows or some thing?"

"No, but I'll tell you what there is."

"What?"

"A little door that leads into the paddock."

"The paddock?"

"Yes, that is where we turn the horses in to grass; it is just at the back of the stable."

"The very thing. But where is the door?"

"I'll show you. Follow me."

"We will, never fear; but pray be quick, as our lives are in danger."

The ostler ran out into the yard, and our friends followed him.

They walked their horses, but even then they could not help making a slight noise, which they were fearful would reach the ears of the dragoons.

Their fear was realized.

They heard a loud shout, which came from the direction of the gateway, and then a prodigious clattering of horses' hoofs on the rough stones with which it was paved.

Our friends heeded it not, but bent upon the ostler the whole of their attention.

He ran swiftly across the yard, and opened a small door in the wall.

"Through there," he cried. "You must stoop, or you will break your heads."

The caution was a necessary one.

Maud and Turpin passed through first.

Tom King followed, and, as did so, thrust a handful of guineas into the ostler's hand.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "Keep right straight across the paddock, and you will come to a bit of a fence. Jump that, and you will be in Throttle Goose-lane."

"Thanks!" said Tom. "Close the door after me; and, if you can, send the dragoons off upon a false scent."

CHAPTER CCCCXI.

SHOWS HOW TIMOTHY GOODRIDGE, THE LANDLORD, WAS OF GREAT SERVICE TO THE HIGHWAYMEN WITHOUT KNOWING IT.

TOM KING did not wait to hear the ostler's reply; indeed, he did not know whether he made any, for, as he spoke, he stooped and urged his horse forward.

In a moment he was through the narrow portal and out into the paddock.

He saw two dim figures before him, and halted.

They were Turpin and Maud.

"On—on!" he cried; "on for your lives! Keep straight across the place, and then we shall come to a hedge, on the other side of which is a country lane. On—on!"

Turpin did not need much urging.

He took hold of the bridle of Maud's steed, and followed Tom King, who took upon himself to lead the way to the hedge of which he had spoken.

Here we must, for a moment, leave them, in order to give an account of the proceedings of the dragoons.

Already we have seen how they came up in rather strong numbers to the door of the "Mountain Rill" inn.

They were the very same troop that had made the attack upon the highwaymen in Enfield Chase, and drove them from that comfortable place of shelter.

From time to time they had been reinforced by other detachments they had met with upon the road, and so their number became greatly swelled; for as soon as the other dragoons heard that the game had been fairly started, they were eager in the extreme to join in the pursuit.

However, they had lost the scent, and, in spite of all their efforts, they could not find it again.

But they had persevered untiringly, for they were convinced that in the end they must come up with the object of their search.

In this manner, the whole of the day was spent, which the highwaymen passed so snugly at the inn, and so, too, they spent the night that followed, until they arrived in the manner we have related.

The reader will bear in mind that Tom King and Dick, as they stood watching the soldiers approach, were uncertain, up to the last moment, whether they were going to stay or continue on their journey.

This inability of theirs to decide is easily accounted for.

The officer in command of the dragoons had no intention of halting at the "Mountain Rill" inn until just as he came in sight of it.

Seeing the inn reminded him that he stood greatly in need of refreshment, and no doubt his men were in the same predicament, for they had not quitted the saddle for many hours.

The horses, too, would be all the better able to perform their service if they had a bait; and so all at once the officer cried out, "Halt!" no less to the surprise than to the satisfaction of his men.

They pulled up with military promptitude, and sat still, waiting for further commands.

From this it will be seen that the dragoons had no idea that those of whom they were in search had taken up their quarters at this very identical place, so that the alarm of our friends was somewhat premature and unnecessary.

It was well, however, that they took the prompt steps they did to leave the place, as the sequel will prove.

Had they known that the soldiers had no suspicion of their presence there, they might have been tempted to remain.

Lucky, however, was it for them that they did not.

Had they lingered, the worst and most disastrous consequences might have ensued.

Upon hearing such a tremendous clattering of hoofs before his door, of course the inquisitive landlord left off in the midst of what he was doing, and hurried to the front of the house to learn what had taken place.

His surprise was not so great as might have been expected, for he was aware that for some time past the roads had been patrolled by detachments of dragoons; nor was it the first time they had made a temporary halt before his door.

He was glad enough to see them, and, in a bustling and obsequious way, ran up to the officer's horse.

"This is the 'Mountain Rill' inn," he said, "and I am the landlord, Timothy Goodridge, as you would see on the sign, if it was only a little lighter. There is the best of accommodation for man and beast."

"Of course, of course, every landlord says that," replied the officer.

"You will find that I don't say it without good cause," replied Mr. Goodridge. "Will you alight, gentlemen, or"——

"Stop a moment," said the officer, who was struck with a fresh thought. "I have a question to ask you."

The landlord assumed an expression of great importance, and prepared to listen.

"I believe," said the officer, "that you are a man who generally takes notice of all that takes place around you, especially if it is of an extraordinary or unusual character?"

"Well, yes; I generally keep my eyes open as to what is going on in the world."

"Just so. I expected as much, and so I want to ask you a question."

"I shall be glad to answer it if I have the power."

"If you possess the information we require, you will find that it will answer your purpose to place us in possession of it."

The landlord brightened up, and impatiently waited for more.

"You must know that we are on the look-out for five persons, four of whom we very much desire to capture. Now, have you seen anything of them? Can you give us any information respecting them?"

"No," replied Mr. Goodridge.

"You have not seen them, then?"

"Not as I knows of, but"——

"But what?" asked the officer, quickly, whose hopes of learning something had revived.

"You haven't given me any sort of description of these five people, so I might have seen them and I might not."

"To be sure," said the officer, "I forgot that. Well, then, one of the five is a young and good-looking woman—girl, I might also say."

"Yes, yes."

"Have you seen her?"

"Go on—go on."

The officer then proceeded to give a brief description of the personal appearance of our four friends.

He concluded by saying—

"Now, Mr. Landlord, if you can give us any information about these individuals, or any of them, you will be entitled to a reward of a hundred pounds, which will be paid to you by the Secretary of State."

Mr. Goodridge gasped for breath, and then in a nervous sort of way he said—

"Ah! ah! I have—ah!—earnt it."

"What!" exclaimed the officer. "Speak, explain yourself. What do you mean by that?"

"I have earnt it," repeated the landlord; and as he spoke he pointed in a mysterious manner to the low window on the first floor.

The officer grew impatient.

"What is the meaning of all this mummery?" he said.

"Early this morning," said Mr. Goodridge, "two men, whose appearance corresponds exactly with the description given me, arrived here on horseback. One was on a beautiful black mare, which is in my stable now."

The officer uttered an ejaculation, and sprang from his horse.

"Listen to me," said Mr. Goodridge, placing his hand on the officer's arm. "Wait, and I will tell you more."

"Quick, then, be quick! There is no time to lose."

"It's all right," said the landlord.

"Besides these two that I have spoken of, there came a girl also, on foot, and they are now all three sitting comfortably enough in that room there. I left them in it when you arrived, and they have not come down, because yonder is the stairs, and we should have seen them if they had."

This intelligence for a moment or so evidently overcame the officer.

Then, in a hasty voice, he commanded a dozen of his men to alight from their steeds and follow him into the inn, while the others remained mounted and on the look-out, in case their prey should make a dash to escape, when they would be able to intercept them.

Under the guidance of the landlord, who was elated at the idea of earning a hundred pounds so easily, he made his way up the staircase with his dozen dragoons close at his heels.

Of course, Mr. Goodridge was the first to enter the room.

When he saw the door standing wide open, when he knew he had left it closed such a short time before, his heart misgave him.

Upon entering, his worst suspicions were confirmed.

It was tenantless.

"Gone!" he exclaimed. "Gone! and all my money. Oh! I am a ruined man."

"How? what? gone?" said the officer, sharply. "What is the meaning of all this? If you do not explain everything clearly and to my entire satisfaction, I shall take you into custody!"

At this moment a shout came to their ears.

It was uttered by the dragoons without.

It was immediately followed by the trampling of many horses' hoofs upon the stones within the gateway.

"Something has happened," exclaimed the officer, and, with breakneck precipitation, he and his men descended the stairs.

The meaning of the shout was simple enough.

Those dragoons who had been left outside to watch were thoroughly on the alert for any little circumstance that might take place.

All at once they heard the trampling of horses' feet in the yard behind the inn.

The sound was slight, but yet they heard it plainly.

It suggested in a moment the thought that their prey was making their escape, so, to attract the attention of their comrades within the inn, they called out and dashed down the archway.

We must now once more, and for the last time, step back, and then all will be clear enough.

We have now explained how it was that our friends had sufficient time to make their escape into the yard, saddle their steeds, mount, and be off; and now we have to describe the proceedings of the ostler, who had the utmost inclination to serve those people in every way he could who had behaved so liberally to him.

It will be recollected that when our friends first called to him out of the window, he appeared to be out of sight and hearing, but almost immediately they saw a dark figure emerge from the gateway into the yard.

Tom recognised it in a moment as the ostler.

The reader must not suppose that Joe heard them the first time they called.

His presence in the yard was not in any way attributable to that.

Hearing the dragoons ride up to the door, he had hastily slipped on his clothes—for he had retired to rest some time ago—and made his way to the front of the inn, in order to see whether his services were required.

He had just come back to fetch a truss of hay and some water for the dragoons' horses, when our friends saw him and called out to him.

What afterwards took place we know.

The ostler, of course, preferred to attend upon our friends than on the dragoons, for he knew by experience that he was not likely to get much out of the latter.

No sooner had Tom King passed through the narrow door in the wall leading into the paddock, than he closed it after him and bolted it, muttering as he did so—

"I'll serve you all I can, blest if I won't."

The dragoons, however, were close at hand; but, from the darkness which prevailed in the yard, they had not been able to see where our friends were; besides which, the door was situated in a distant corner, the route to which was rather intricate, for the yard, like most old-fashioned inn-yards, was piled up with lumber.

The dragoons could hear no longer the sound of horses' hoofs, which had at first attracted their attention; for, of course, as soon as our friends gained the soft turf in the paddock, their horses' footsteps became inaudible.

The dragoons called loudly for lights, and dismounted, for they found the task of searching the inn-yard whilst mounted to be impossible.

The ostler, having closed the door, began to consider what would be the best thing he should do.

He feared, and not without reason, that he would be suspected of having aided the escape of the guilty parties, and he was apprehensive of the consequences of such suspicion.

What should he do?

He had but scant time for consideration, and, naturally enough, the first thought that suggested itself to him was that he should hide himself.

As a matter of course, the ostler was perfectly familiar with the inn-yard and everything it contained, having spent the greater part of his life in it.

Glancing round him, then, as well as the darkness would allow, he saw a large butt, which he remembered was empty.

This seemed a capital hiding-place, and, without further reflection, he climbed up, with the agility of a monkey, and lowered himself into it.

He did not think of the consequences of what he had done.

Should he be found, suspicion would be directed towards him with ten times greater strength than before.

He never thought of this, however.

His mind was fully occupied in felicitating itself upon its cleverness in devising such a capital place of concealment.

But he got into the butt only just in time.

The other dragoons, as well as the landlord, many of them carrying lights, made their appearance in the yard, and an active search at once commenced.

The landlord was furious to a degree.

In the first place, he called upon Joe, the ostler, in a voice of thunder.

Joe heard him, but he had too much prudence to reply,

CHAPTER CCCCXII.

JOE, THE OSTLER, IS DISCOVERED BY THE DRAGOONS, AND HAS A NARROW ESCAPE.

And he did was to crouch down still lower in the butt, as though, by that means, he could more effectually conceal himself, while he strained his sense of hearing to the utmost, in order to learn, if possible, whether he was in any danger.

Mr. Goodridge was quite surprised when he found that the ostler did not respond to his call, but, nevertheless, he

made his way into the stables, the door of which was swinging wide open.

A cry of anger and horror came from the landlord's lips as soon as he entered, and he danced about in the most frantic manner imaginable, to the infinite amusement and astonishment of the dragoons, who had no idea what it meant.

The stable was empty.

At a glance, Mr. Goodridge saw that not only were the two steeds belonging to the visitors gone, but also the one upon which he had only received a small sum on account of the purchase of.

Curses, both loud and deep, issued from his lips, and once more he called frantically upon the ostler.

But, as before, he met with no response.

The officer in command strove to arrive at some conclusion from the landlord, but at last he was compelled to give up the attempt in despair, for Mr. Goodridge did nothing but curse and swear.

"Search the yard," cried the officer. "Search the yard. They are somewhere close at hand I feel confident Search all around."

The dragoons dispersed themselves immediately over the yard, and, assisted by the lights, which were carried by many of them, they proceeded to make an examination of the whole of the premises.

Before they had done much, the landlord recovered the use of his senses sufficiently to cease cursing and swearing in the stable, and he came outside looking and behaving more like a rational creature than he had recently done.

"We heard the sound of horses' hoofs in the yard here," said one of the dragoons, addressing his superior officer, "but we can see nothing of them."

"They did not pass out of the gateway?"

"Certainly not. They could not have done so without being seen and captured by us."

Mr. Goodridge was standing close by, and so turning to him the officer said—

"Now, landlord, can you help us out of this difficulty? Is there another way out of your yard, or is there some place where these fellows may have concealed themselves?"

The landlord rubbed his head perplexedly, and then he said—

"Curse that Joe! I know d—d well he is at the bottom of it."

"So I am," muttered Joe, as he heard the remark, for he thought his master alluded to the butt, having only imperfectly heard the preceding sentences. "I wonder how he knew that. It's all up now, I suppose."

Nevertheless, Joe, the ostler, had the prudence not to make the least movement.

"Who's Joe?" asked the dragoon, impatiently. "Why don't you answer my questions at once, when you know how important it is that we should not lose a moment?"

"I tell you, Joe's at the bottom of it," said the landlord again.

The ostler groaned slightly.

"Oh! lauks," he said, "it is quite certain that master knows where I be, and I expects they'll have me out pretty quick."

"Who's Joe?"

"He's the ostler. I know as well as if I had seen him, that he has shown these fellows the little door in the wall that leads into the paddock, and"——

"What, wretch!" cried the officer in a towering passion, and clutching the landlord by the throat as he spoke. "What, villain! Do you mean to tell me that there is another means of leaving the yard?"

The landlord nodded desperately.

Speak he could not, for the hold which the officer kept upon his throat made utterance an impossibility.

"It's all up, then," said the officer, as he released his hold.

Mr. Goodridge coughed violently, and then he cried—

"I know he's done it; and if he has, they're far enough off by this time, you may depend."

It was now the officer's turn to swear, and it was soon evident that he was quite as well skilled in this accomplishment as the landlord himself.

"This is all your fault," he said. "D—d if I don't believe you're in league with them! I'll take you into custody."

"It's Joe," said Mr. Goodridge; "I know it's Joe! How could it be me? I have been with you all the while, but he has been aiding them to escape."

"Where is Joe?" cried the officer. "Who has seen him?"

The unfortunate ostler, "distilled almost to a jelly by the act of fear," heard every word of the foregoing conversation.

Affairs had taken a very unpleasant turn, and he found his situation in the empty water-butt not half so comfortable as he had thought it.

"I will try to be off," he said to himself. "Master knows where I be, and he will tell the sojers. I'll cut, or they'll lock me up; for if I stay here, they will have me sure enough."

Now this was about the most unwise resolution that Joe, the ostler, could possibly have come to; for, if he had remained where he was, there was just a chance that he would not be discovered.

But, as we have seen, he was under the impression that his master was, by some means, acquainted with his hiding-place, so it was not safe, of course, to remain there any longer.

Cautiously and slowly, so as not to make the least noise, Joe, the ostler, rose to his feet.

He was then just able to see over the top of the water butt.

The inn-yard was tolerably well illuminated with the lights the soldiers carried.

He saw them standing close to the butt.

The landlord was showing them the door that led into the paddock.

The bolt was drawn instantly.

Their backs were towards the butt, and Joe thought this was the favourable moment to leave it.

He drew himself up without being either seen or heard, for the dragoons were wholly occupied by the discovery of the door and attending to the orders of their superior officer, who, having once more got upon the track of the highwaymen, resolved to renew the pursuit without delay.

It thus happened that the slight noise which the ostler could not help making, was unheeded, and he, at length, gained the summit of the wall in safety, which was only a few inches above the top of the water-butt.

But the success which had hitherto attended him, now deserted him.

The top of the wall was crumbling and decayed, and portions of it came away and rolled down into the yard.

This was a circumstance which could not fail to instantly attract the notice of the dragoons.

They looked up by common consent, and they saw Mr. Joe on the top of the wall, looking the very picture of dismayful fear.

"Present arms!" said the officer to his men, with startling abruptness.

He was obeyed instantly.

Then, turning to Joe, he said—

"Descend this moment, or you are a dead man."

The ostler glanced at the glittering barrels of the carbines presented to him.

That was enough.

As though he had been shot, he rolled off the wall.

But he took good care to fall into the paddock.

The dragoons darted through the door in a moment, and seized him ere he could rise to his feet and make a run for it, as he fully intended.

Trembling in every limb, and in a most unsavoury condition—for he had fallen into a dung-pit—he was led to the commanding officer, who looked at him sternly, while he said to the soldiers—

"Hold him firmly, my men; see that he does not escape."

The dragoons tightened their hold.

"So it is you, is it," said the officer, "who assisted the highwaymen to escape? Do you know you will be transported for life for it?"

At this terrible announcement Joe's knees knocked together, and he would have sank to the ground had he not been held up by the firm grasp of his captors.

His teeth chattered, and his eyes rolled wildly as he looked from one to the other of the stern faces which surrounded him.

"Speak," said the officer, "speak."

The unfortunate ostler made several attempts to do so, but failed.

"You admit your guilt, then?" continued the officer. "You confess that you assisted the highwaymen to escape?"

A ray of hope at this moment flashed across the ostler's mind, and he recovered himself somewhat.

"I didn't know they were highwaymen," he said, with an effort.

"But you assisted them to escape?"

"I was obliged."

"How?"

"They clapped a pistol to my head, and swore they would blow my brains out if I said a word, or refused to do all that they told me; and for fear of my life I obeyed."

This sounded such a plausible excuse, that Joe began to pluck up his courage a little, and he ventured to indulge in the hope that his case was not quite so desperate as he had imagined it to be.

"Where have they gone? Tell me, and that at once!"

"They made me show them the door leading into the paddock, and then they bolted through it like winking."

"Which way did they go?"

"Across the paddock, I think."

"But what brought you on top of the wall?"

"I was trying to get away."

"What for?"

"I was afraid I should get into trouble for what I had done. But I could not help it. If I had not obeyed them, they would have blown my brains out."

"You are sure they went across the paddock?"

"Yes."

The officer reflected a moment.

He was not altogether pleased with Mr. Joe, and he had half a mind to take him prisoner, and the only reason he hesitated to do so was because he knew what an incumbrance he would be.

"Release him," he said to his men, as soon as he had finished his reflections.

Joe was accordingly set at liberty, to his no small gratification, as the reader will easily believe.

"We will waste no more time here," said the officer. "Mount, every one of you. We will renew the pursuit without further delay; but in giving my account of this matter, I shall not omit to state my suspicions both of you, Mr. Landlord, and you, Mr. Joe."

"I am sure I am not in the least to blame," said the landlord. "That's one drop more, however, to my cup of aggravation. I am suspected of aiding the escape of those rascals who have gone off with a horse that I could have get eighty guineas for to-morrow."

"Well—well, that may be; but I have my suspicions nevertheless. I can't help it. They may be unfounded. I don't say they are not."

"I ain't to blame," said Joe, who had grown bold with success. "You would have done as I did, if you had been placed in the same position."

"I have nothing to do with that," said the officer, as he glanced round to see whether his men were mounted. "Are all here?" he added.

"All—all."

"Follow me, then; and, though these villains have got such a long start of us, it will go hard with me if I don't capture them before daybreak. Now they are out of cover again, we won't rest until we have hunted them down."

As he uttered these words, in a very determined voice, the officer of dragoons directed his horse towards the little door.

"Mind your head," said Joe. "Stoop as you go out."

The officer was thankful for this caution, for he escaped an ugly blow in consequence of it, and he began to think better of Mr. Joe.

The same caution applied to the rest.

One by one they defiled through the narrow doorway, and, when all had gained the paddock, they set forward at a sharp trot.

Joe and the landlord watched them until they were out of sight, and then the former closed the door, and bolted it carefully.

With the landlord and the ostler we have now no more to do.

Other and more important events are pressing upon us for attention.

It is, however, certain that Joe reaped a great deal more benefit from the highwaymen's visit than his master did, for he had upwards of ten pounds in his pocket, which, to one in his position in life, was an enormous sum, while the landlord had received nothing for the use of his rooms, the eatables and drinkables he had supplied, and the feeding of the horses.

All he had got was twenty guineas on account of the purchase of a horse, which he had refused fifty guineas for only the day before.

CHAPTER CCCCXIII.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING HAVE SOME DIFFICULTY IN FINDING A PLACE OF SHELTER.

From what has just been related, the reader will perceive that Dick Turpin and Tom King had an excellent start of their pursuers.

Without meeting with the slightest molestation they crossed the paddock adjoining the inn, and quickly arrived at the hedge of which the ostler had spoken.

As he had truly said, it was a low one, and on the other side could be seen the country lane he had mentioned.

Tom King showed the example in leaping over it.

"All is well," he cried encouragingly, as his horse alighted on the clayey ground. "There is excellent foothold."

These words were highly satisfactory to Turpin, who, nevertheless, turned towards his companion with great anxiety.

"Maud, dearest," he said, "do you think you could venture to take that leap in safety?"

"Oh! yes," was the reply, given in an encouraging tone of voice. "Do not be afraid."

As she spoke, Maud touched the horse lightly with the riding-whip.

He understood the signal, and, giving a spring, he cleared the obstruction with the greatest ease.

Maud was an excellent rider.

In former times it had been her chief delight, and scarcely a day passed without her indulging in this favourite exercise, for Squire Winberry had kept two beautiful steeds expressly for the use of Maud and Blanche.

A more formidable obstacle than the low hedge had many a time been cleared by this brave girl, and now she performed the feat to the infinite admiration of Turpin and King.

The former just pressed Black Bess upon the flank, and was by her side almost instantly.

"Which way shall we take, captain?" asked Tom King; "the right or the left? There is really no time to lose."

"Let us wait a moment," replied Dick. "Can you see anything of our pursuers?"

Both highwaymen looked in the direction they had just come.

They could see the inn, which was at no great distance, and the out-buildings attached to it, but not their foes.

"I cannot see them at all," said Tom King at length, in a tone of voice which fully expressed the amount of surprise he felt at this circumstance.

"Nor I," replied Dick. "It is very strange. I cannot make it out. When we passed through the door I thought they were close at our heels."

"They were not far behind us, that is certain," said Tom King; "but when I gave the ostler a trifle for his trouble, I asked him to send the dragoons off upon a false scent if he possibly could."

"It looks as though he had done it, too, Tom, for I cannot see them. It is quite certain they have not yet left the inn-yard."

"Let us hope, then, that they may be detained there a little longer, and improve this chance to the utmost. We shall get a good start of them, let things turn out how they may."

"Agreed. But it seems to me that if we turn to the left this lane will bring us out on to the high road again, and not far from the inn."

"I have no doubt of it," replied King, as he glanced keenly about him.

"That, then, is the road we ought of all others to avoid," continued Dick, "so we must turn to the right, and trust to our luck."

"To the right be it, then. Forward, Dick; I will bring

up the rear. I must say that at any time, when I am in doubt as to which way I ought to go, I would always take the right in preference to the left."

"It is to be hoped this will not take us wrong," said Turpin.

As he spoke, he once more took hold of the bridle of Maude's steed, and allowed Black Bess to proceed at an easy gallop, which was, however, in reality, little more than a canter.

This was the pace that would be least fatiguing to Maud, and it was for this sole reason that Turpin adopted it.

The horses, too, would be able to continue it for a long time without distress.

As he had promised, Tom King brought up the rear.

He kept about twenty yards behind Maud and Dick, and every few moments he would look behind him, so as to become aware at the earliest moment when his enemies got upon their track.

But the night was a dark one, and the inn gradually faded from his sight, without his either seeing or hearing anything to excite his apprehension.

When he could see the inn no longer, and when he had convinced himself that the dragoons were not upon the road behind them, Tom increased his speed, and in another moment was riding abreast of Maud and Dick.

He lost no time in communicating the gratifying intelligence to them.

By Maud at least it was received with satisfaction.

Indeed, she could scarcely bring herself to believe that they had so completely escaped from a situation of so much peril.

But such was the case.

Nevertheless they did not reduce their speed, for they could not tell how soon their enemies might make their appearance, and the sooner they got out of that part of the country, the better it would be for their safety.

In this they at once agreed.

"We must not forget," said Turpin, "that we have yet a great deal to do. There is our appointment with Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack. We must not forget that."

"I had not forgotten it," replied Tom King; "to-morrow night we must be upon the agreed-on spot."

"In the meantime we must find some place of shelter; but where?"

"I think we cannot do better than occupy our minds with pondering upon this point. It is one of the utmost importance."

"It is, indeed."

"For my part, I think we cannot do better than spend the remainder of the night in journeying towards Finchley or Barnet, because the nearer we are to the spot where the meeting is to take place the better chance we shall have of keeping the appointment."

"Just so. Have you any idea how far we are off our destination?"

"None whatever."

"Nor I."

"This part of the country is almost wholly unknown to me, and I am not by any means certain whether we are not going away from Finchley instead of towards it."

"I hope not."

"It is a matter of the merest chance in the world, I can assure you."

"The best thing we can do, then, is to ascertain as soon as possible whereabouts we are."

"Undoubtedly; but I cannot exactly see how we are to do it."

"We must trust to chance."

"At any rate, it will not do for us either to pause or to change our course just at present."

"Very true. Forward, then. The night must be far advanced, and who can tell how far we may yet have to go?"

"I would give much to know what can be the reason we have not been troubled with the dragoons. That ostler must be a clever fellow to have kept them off our track."

"I wish I knew the reason of their non-appearance. As it is, I cannot help feeling mistrustful and suspicious about it."

"Pho—pho!"

In such-like talk as this did the two highwaymen beguile the tedium of their journey.

The lane which skirted the paddock belonging to the "Mountain Still" inn led into another, and so on, and they had never once crossed or came in sight of a turnpike-road, which was a rather peculiar circumstance and showed how little inhabited that part of the country was.

Up to the present moment the face of the heavens was covered with clouds, which had seemed stationary.

Now, however, a movement became perceptible; and it was evident that, ere long, the moon would break forth, for already her position in the sky was visible.

The highwaymen would much rather have dispensed with her light, as it might be the means of bringing them into danger, and yet, when the clear, pure light did break forth and bring into view the country round, they could not help experiencing a sensation of pleasure.

They were able to see the ground—the nature of the country through which they were travelling, as well as each other's faces.

This was a satisfaction to all.

The clouds now gave evident signs of completely dispersing before the slight wind which had sprung up, but the moon was verging towards the west, and would, ere long, sink beneath the horizon.

Suddenly a turn in the lane brought our friends to a spot where two other roads branched off at right angles to each other.

Which of these would have been best for them to pursue, our friends would have found it very difficult to determine, had they not caught sight of a finger-post, with three white, spectral-looking arms, which was planted just where the three roads joined.

By the distinctness with which this object was visible in the moonbeams, our friends fancied it had been recently painted.

"Now," said Tom King, with satisfaction perceptible in his tones, "we shall be able to learn at last whereabouts we are, and where we ought to go. Halt a moment, Dick; halt here underneath the shadow of this hedge, and I will ride forward and decipher, if I can, the words that are painted on yon finger-post."

"With all my heart," said Turpin, as he brought Black Bess and Maud's steed to a halt at the place which King had mentioned.

Tom now rode boldly enough into the triangular-shaped enclosure in which the finger-post was planted.

The three arms pointed, of course, in the direction of the three roads.

The one which pointed to whence they had just come, Tom took no notice of, but went up to the one on his right hand.

The letters were painted black upon it, and doubtless, in the daylight, were distinct enough, but by moonlight it was quite another matter.

Brightly as the beams had appeared to fall, Tom found, now that he was nearer, that they were sadly deficient in the defining quality.

However, he did not despair of being able to make out the inscription.

Riding as close to the finger-post as he could, he raised himself in the stirrups and caught hold of the projecting arm with one hand.

He was thus able to approach it very closely.

The first letters he was able to make out were those nearest his right hand.

They gave him but scant information.

"It's three and a-half miles to somewhere, Dick," he said, "but I'll be shot if I can make out where."

"Look again."

"I am. I can make out some more of the letters now. I can see 'n,' and 'o,' and 'th.' Ah! and here is 'r.' That makes North. It's three miles and a-half to some place beginning with North. What place can that be?"

"I cannot assist you, my friend," said Dick Turpin, "for I have no idea what part of the country we are in. There is a place called North Mimms."

"It can't be that," replied Tom King, "for there's only two more letters, and one of them is 'w.' And stop! the other is 'a.'"

"That seems an extraordinary name for a place. What do you call it?"

"I can see plain enough, now, and without being mistaken in the least. It is Northaw."

"Northaw?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever heard of such a place?"

"No."

"Have you?"

"No; and yet I think there is a village of that name some twenty miles north of London; but that can't be our whereabouts, surely?"

"I'll look on the other arm that points the contrary way, and try whether I can make that out. Yes, I can, I daresay we shall know better where we are."

Tom King, without more ado, turned his horse round and approached the other side of the finger-post.

"That ought to lead to London," said Turpin. "Does it?"

"Wait a moment, and I will tell you. Yes, you are right. I can see the word London. Oh! yes; that is the way to London."

"How far does it say we are from it?"

"Why, I can't see very well, Dick; the figures seem blurred. Wait! It's six; no, it's sixteen miles to London."

"Then I was not far out, was I?"

"No; you were remarkably near the mark. Now, Dick, where are we to go? which way are we to go?"

"If we are to follow out your idea of finding a place of shelter, somewhere near the spot appointed for our meeting with Clande and Jack, we cannot do better than take the road towards London. I suppose it is about eight miles to Finchley?"

"Somewhere about that."

"Then let us take this road to London. Clearly it is not a highway—probably some cross-country road, and, therefore, we are not so likely to meet with any interruption."

"I agree with you entirely, Dick."

"Forward, then! There is no occasion to distress our cattle, and I think we may fairly congratulate ourselves upon having for the time being completely eluded our foes."

"I think so, too; but we must not feel too secure. We may be surprised, unless we keep continually on our guard."

"We must be cautious."

"We will not go quite so far as Finchley, Dick; and it would be better if we got somewhat to the west of it, as in that case we should be all the further from Enfield Chase."

"That is a good suggestion, and it shall be acted upon. It strikes me, after all the events that have recently taken place, that it will be a long time before it will be at all prudent for us to show ourselves in that part of the country again."

CHAPTER CCCCXIV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN SUDDENLY COME IN SIGHT OF AN UNEXPECTED SPECTACLE.

At a pace which did not distress their horses in the least, and which enabled the three friends to converse together without difficulty, they performed the remainder of the journey.

Tom's suggestion that they should go as far to the westward of the village of Finchley as possible, was a very wise one, and no better reason could be found for adopting this course than that which he himself gave.

They would be further from Enfield Chase, which was in the east, and, consequently, they would be less likely to encounter any of their foes, who would have no suspicion of their being in that part of the country.

At the first available turning, our friends struck off from the road they were pursuing, and directed their course as much due west as possible.

In this they were assisted greatly by the moon, which was just upon the point of declining behind the western horizon.

This was an excellent guide to them, and they experienced a feeling of great regret when the radiant orb entirely disappeared.

Luckily for them, this did not take place until they had gone a considerable distance, and it would now matter very little if they inclined slightly towards the south, for Finchley was some distance from them.

By the time the moon had sunk, there were some faint indications in the opposite quarter of the heavens that dawn was fast approaching.

A long, bright streak of light, which perpetually increased in length and breadth, warned them of the advent of the new day.

The hour, however, was a very early one; and, in that lonely part of the country, the highwaymen did not apprehend much danger from being seen.

Still, the sooner they got under cover, the better; for the day was coming on with rapid strides.

They were now, they thought, quite as near the place of their destination as they desired to be.

At present they had not made up their minds what place of shelter they should seek; and, probably, they would not.

In such matters they preferred trusting to luck entirely.

It was not possible for them to arrange their plans to any great extent as to what they should do in the future, for they could never tell what effects the next hour would produce.

Now, however, that it was so fast becoming daylight, the necessity of finding some place where they could remain out of sight until midnight, forced itself powerfully upon them.

It would not do any longer to delay; and, therefore, as they rode along the narrow lanes, Turpin and King looked over the hedgerows on the right and left of them, in the hope that they should presently perceive something that would answer their purpose.

It was easy to tell by the expression of his countenance that Dick Turpin's mind was busily occupied about something.

His brows were knit with anxiety, and his lips moved slightly, as though he was communing with himself upon some important subject.

Tom King was too much engaged in looking about him to notice it; but, as the reader may be sure, it did not escape Maud's observation.

She looked curiously and furtively into his countenance, as though she would fain have read his thoughts, but she found this to be a task far beyond her powers.

She could tell he was suffering great anxiety from some cause or other, but there her knowledge ended.

She hesitated to question him, for she was well aware that their perilous situation demanded much earnest thought, and a double responsibility rested upon him, for in the hour of danger both looked up to him to receive instructions how they were to act.

Maud little thought that the anxiety under which Turpin laboured, proceeded chiefly from herself.

But such was the case.

It was upon her account that Turpin felt so much anxiety.

He was wondering what place he could find where she would receive those comforts of which she stood so much in need, and not only that, Dick felt that it would be quite impossible for her to accompany him in all his excursions.

Such a thing was entirely out of the question.

But, then, what should he do with her?

There was but one answer to this question.

He must find some place of refuge for her where she could remain in perfect safety while he pursued his hazardous career.

Where, however, in all the length and breath of England, was such a place to be found?

What shelter would be secure from the prying eyes of the police-officers, who were so intent upon his capture?

That was the difficulty in which our hero found himself, and this was the reason why his countenance wore such a thoughtful expression.

Thought after thought passed through his brain, but he was obliged to reject them one after another as unfeasible.

In the meantime, the day came speeding on.

The sun rose, and tinged with his golden and early beams the wintry-looking landscape, giving it an aspect of great beauty.

And during all this time they had not come in sight of a single habitation of any description.

Nothing but fields, meadows, and pasture-land met their view.

They were unable, too, to see for any great distance in any direction, owing to the rolling masses of mist which rose up from the damp earth, and floated about before the faint early morning breeze.

As the sun rose higher and gained greater power the mist would be dispersed, but, from their quantity and density, this would not be for an hour to come at least.

At length Tom King noticed that Dick Turpin did not speak, and that a long time had elapsed since he said anything.

Accordingly he turned round towards him, and then he noticed his thoughtful aspect.

"What is the matter, Dick?" he asked. "Has anything gone wrong?"

Dick started when he was addressed like one suddenly awoke from sleep.

Recovering himself instantly, he said—

"I have been wondering what would be the best place of shelter we could find. I should wish something as comfortable as possible. It is not as though we were alone; if we were, we could rough it."

"So we could, Dick; but when I turned round I was just going to ask you what place of refuge we should be able to find."

"I have no idea, though I have been perplexing my brain for some time upon that very point."

"I can think of nothing but some quiet road-side inn, where we could put up for a few hours."

Turpin shook his head.

"We must think of something better than that. Our late experience at the "Mountain Rill" ought to show us that an inn is not a place at all suited to our purpose."

"Yes, I thought of that. Now, if Tom Davis had got a place"——

"Don't mention that," said Turpin. "If that worthy fellow kept an inn now as he used to do in olden times, all our difficulties would vanish at once. He would sacrifice his own life rather than any harm should come to us."

"He would—he would. You know more of him than I do, and yet, from what little I have seen, I am sure you are right."

"Quite right. Ah! Tom, you little think what a pang it gave me when I found them reduced to absolute beggary. You will recollect—I once told you of it."

"I know you did."

"It is often in my thoughts. On that occasion I did all that was in my power to aid him, which, unfortunately, was not much. Since then, I have been so hunted about, that I have never had the least opportunity of looking after them. It is a duty which I ought to perform, and nothing that I could do would ever repay the debt of obligation I owe to him. He has saved my life more times than once."

"So you have said, Dick—so you have said. I can tell that this is a most painful subject for you to speak upon, and so let us change the topic. We have no time to pursue it now. Look how fast the sun rises in the sky. We must get under cover, and that at once. If we delay much longer we shall be seen, and then all hopes of safety in this quarter will vanish."

"That is true enough, Tom; and I know Maud would only be too glad to quit the saddle, in which she has sat for so many hours."

He turned towards her as he spoke.

With a faint, and somewhat weary smile upon her lips, she replied—

"Do not heed me; believe me, I am not fatigued; but, as Tom says, I am fearful that we should be seen and recognised now that it is broad daylight."

"Your fear is a just one, and I only wish we could remove it."

"Look yonder," said Maud, pointing over the hedge-row with her whip as she spoke. "I can see a building of some sort there. What is it, think you?"

"That, I know not. It is a strange-looking place. What do you think of it, Tom?"

"I was just looking. You see that confounded mist which keeps rolling about prevents us from obtaining anything like a clear view of it, but it appears to me to be some kind of ruin."

"It has, most certainly, a ruinous appearance. I wonder what it can be?"

"I think we cannot do better than try to get close to it," said Tom King. "If it should be a ruin it will probably be uninhabited, and if it will not afford us permanent shelter, it will do for a time."

"Agreed," said Turpin, "for I can see nothing else."

"We must look about us for some means of approach to it. It is some distance from the side of this lane, and we are on a piece of rising ground."

"Forward, Tom! Doubtless a little further on we shall come to a turning that will lead towards it."

When Maud had spoken all three had come to a halt, but now they set themselves in motion again.

The building to which she had directed their attention seemed a very large one, but it could only be seen imperfectly in consequence of the masses of mist which were floating over the meadows.

Indeed, all that could be seen of it were the chimneys and some of the higher portions of the roof.

It was these which presented a ruinous appearance.

The chimneys and chimney-pots were much mutilated, and one was completely broken away.

Such a condition of things as this seemed to indicate that the place was uninhabited.

Our friends trusted that it might prove to be so, in which case they would have no further trouble.

As they descended from the rather elevated piece of ground upon which they had halted, they lost sight of the building altogether, as the hedge-rows and the mist combined completely hid it from sight.

Both Turpin and King, however, kept on the look out for some turning which would lead them in a direction somewhere to the left of that they were now taking.

They were, however, unable to find any such turning, though they noted that the lane itself wound round gradually to the right, and seemed to promise, if they followed its devious course, that it would lead them past the building.

In this hope they pressed onward with additional speed, for they were fearful every moment of meeting with some one, and their presence in that lonely district, where strangers were scarcely seen, would be sure to be commented upon.

Should they be seen in the vicinity of this building, it would cease to promise them the least security.

At a kind of gallop, then, the three friends continued their course along the lane, until suddenly they came in sight of some large gates.

They drew rein at once.

"Is this the entrance, think you?" asked Tom King.

"I fancy so, by the rusty and dilapidated condition of the gates; but I can seen nothing of the building itself."

"Nor I."

"What do you say? Shall we enter these grounds and explore them? We may find it well worth our trouble to do so."

"I have no objection to such a proceeding. The gate hangs open temptingly, so we shall be saved any trouble in effecting an entrance."

Tom was right.

The massive iron gates, which once no doubt had been very handsome ones, were now almost eaten away with rust.

Those elaborate portions which had once given it such an appearance of elegance, were now completely filled up with oxide, and the perpendicular rods were in some places so attenuated, that they were no thicker than thread, and could have been broken as easily.

The massive stone pillars upon which the gates were hung, also exhibited symptoms of decay.

The stonework was chipped and cracked, while the upper portion, upon which some figure had no doubt been placed, had completely crumbled away.

One of the gates retained its proper position, though it was drawn sadly out of shape, but the other one had swung open and there remained.

The upper hinge had given way, and the mere weight of the mass of iron-work had caused it to sink deeply into the damp ground.

Weeds and curious creeping shrubs had grown up and around it, and now to close the gate would have been a matter of impossibility.

On both sides of the gate a row of trees had been planted, forming, no doubt, at one time, a handsome avenue.

But now winter had stripped the trees of every leaf and bud.

Nothing but the bare, dead-looking branches remained, which looked like so many arms stretched out menacingly towards those who approached.



[CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK STOP THE FARMER ON THE HIGHWAY.]

The trunks of these tall and stately trees were covered with some green, parasitic kind of moss, which seemed to flourish and look green in spite of all the bitter blasts of winter.

The ground between these trees was completely overgrown with such wild and rank vegetation as is to be found in the dampest and inmost recesses of a wood.

It was clear that a long time had elapsed since any human foot had trodden that place.

The same thing was observable in the land itself. It seemed as though it was rarely, if ever, visited.

CHAPTER CCCCXV.

DICK TURPIN, TOM KING, AND MAUD, AT LENGTH ARRIVE AT THE RUINED MANSION.

THIS very strange spectacle of desolation came somewhat suddenly upon our friends. An abrupt turn in the lane had brought them in view of it.

For at least a moment they were so surprised at the strange sight that they did not speak, but having reined in their steeds, did nothing but gaze about them.

Such a scene of ruin and neglect could scarcely have been conceived.

Its contemplation had a chilling effect upon the blood, and unconsciously our three friends shivered as though smitten with an ague.

Tom King was the first to speak.

"Well," he said, "I really do think this is about the most lonesome and cheerless spot I ever beheld. I should never have believed that such a spectacle of desolation could have existed."

"It is inexpressibly dreary," said Turpin.

"Very so, but we must not mind that. We ought to look upon these visible and unmistakable signs of the place being deserted by everyone with feelings of the utmost satisfaction, since it seems to promise us that safety and security which we so much desire."

"You are right," said Turpin. "Such is, indeed, the light in which we ought to look upon it. From the appearance of the place, I can have little doubt that these are the entrance gates leading up to the ruined building of which we caught a glimpse from the summit of the hill. I think we may be sure that we shall be able to remain here unmolested."

"It seems so. But look, Dick, what is that? Do you see that board, or whatever it is, that seems to be fixed on the bars of the gate?"

"Yes, yes. What is it?"

"That is just what I should like to know. There seems to be something painted on it. If I can decipher it, it may give us some necessary information."

"I am afraid you will not be able to do that, my friend."

"Nevertheless, I will alight and try," said Tom; "and I think, if we are to pass through the gates, you had better alight as well."

"Wait a moment. You shall look at that curious board first."

Tom King alighted from his steed in a moment, and, holding him by the bridle, led him towards the gate.

The piece of board to which he had alluded was of that shape which is generally employed for painting notices upon.

As he drew near to it, however, Tom perceived that it was in the last stage of rottenness and decay.

It looked as though the whole would have crumbled away beneath the least touch.

Still there were traces left upon its surface which showed that at some time or other an inscription had been painted upon it.

But what was its purport would now be a vain task to conjecture.

Tom could just see some letters, and one line that seemed to stretch right across the board.

After an attentive examination, and by dint of deciphering one or two of the letters, he pronounced this line to consist merely of the word "Trespassing" or "Trespassers."

"It is probable, then, that this board was simply a warning to trespassers."

"It seems very much like it. Shall we pass through the gates and try what further we can discover?"

"I think so."

"Let me advise you to alight then. If you do not, you will have a great deal of trouble in preventing your heads coming in contact with those low boughs of the trees!"

Turpin acquiesced in this, and immediately quitted his saddle.

He then assisted Maud to alight.

Taking the bridles of the horses in their hands, all three passed through the dilapidated gateway, and took their course along the neglected avenue.

They found walking by no means an easy task.

At every step they took their feet sank deeply into the soft oozy soil, and became entangled in the clinging, trailing plants that grew in such wild luxuriance in every direction.

It would, however, have been no less disagreeable had they remained on horseback, for the majestic trees, with which the avenue was lined, had been allowed to grow in all their native wildness.

The branches straggled across the avenue in the most perplexing manner and in every conceivable direction.

Even as they walked on foot they had occasionally to bend their heads or step aside in order to avoid some low-lying or interlacing branch.

As is generally the case, this avenue of trees was serpentine in shape, so that at no time could they see far before them.

As for the building, that was completely hidden from view, and they had no idea in which direction they ought to look for it.

Suddenly, however, Turpin caught sight of some of the chimney-tops, which were visible through the trees

In a moment more they vanished again.

They had now scarcely, if any, doubt that these neglected and deserted grounds, through which they were with so much difficulty forcing their way, belonged to the ruinous building they had seen from the summit of the hill.

If this was so it seemed as though the highwaymen had accidentally stumbled upon a place which would offer them every promise of safety and security.

Occupied with these thoughts, and occasionally speaking to each other, they steadily kept on along the apparently interminable avenue, wishing every moment to reach the end.

The silence which prevailed about this place was really terrible, and had a most depressing effect upon the spirits.

At almost every step they took some wild bird or animal started off swiftly, making the dried, frost-bitten branches of the trees rustle and crackle in their progress.

From all these considerations our friends were warranted in coming to the conclusion that no other feet besides theirs had trodden upon that soil for a long, long time.

How long it was out of their power to tell.

It seemed to them that the further they got from the gates the wilder and more desolate the whole place appeared to be.

At no other season of the year than the present would it have appeared more dreary and wretched.

In the glorious summer time, when the trees were all in full leaf, when the grass and shrubs were green, and when wild flowers were blooming all around, the scene would have been one that would have charmed the soul from its mere wildness—so suggestive as it was, of those times so long gone past never to return.

Now, however, that sole charm was altogether absent.

There was much in a general way to make our friends somewhat gloomy, and it required them to be light-hearted to a degree so as not to sink beneath the perils of their situation.

It is not to be wondered at, then, if this cheerless-looking place should throw a gloom over their souls.

All felt its influence, and they found all their struggles to resist it quite in vain.

The one who felt this most of all was Maud, and yet, strange to say, she was the one that exhibited it the least.

The length of this avenue must have been a mile at least, though, to our friends, owing to their impatience and the difficulties they met with at every step, it seemed more than double the distance.

At length, however, its extremity was reached, and then, and not till then, did they obtain a view of the building of which they had had two transient glimpses.

The avenue terminated somewhat abruptly upon a lawn of rather contracted dimensions.

It was surrounded by a low wall, and two steps led up to it.

But now few of the appearances which a lawn presents were discernible.

It was one tangled mass of weeds and thistles.

Upon this, however, the eyes of the highwaymen and their fair companion did not linger.

Their curiosity had been much excited with respect to this building, and now that it was fairly before them they had eyes for nothing else.

It was a strange and wild, weird-looking place, which corresponded well with the scenery that surrounded it.

A glance was almost sufficient to assure them that it was untenanted.

No human beings would take up their abode in such a place unless from the direst necessity.

All the windows were closed and protected by wooden shutters.

Upon these green moss had grown thickly, affording unquestionable proof that they had not been touched for a long period.

A door, too, presented the same appearance.

The walls were everywhere crumbling and ruinous, and threatening to fall.

It was now day, and an hour when most people would be astir; but from no one of those quaint and broken chimneys came the thinnest wreaths of smoke.

Such a silence, too, reigned all around as was quite incompatible with the presence of human beings.

It was as though the three persons who composed the little party were alone in the world.

Tom King raised his riding whip and pointed with it to the desolate building.

"What think you of that?" he asked. "It does not present a very tempting appearance, does it? and yet I should think it must be safe."

"No doubt of that," said Turpin; "but I must confess

that, if I had been permitted, I should have chosen some more comfortable-looking place."

"Pho! pho! Dick; never heed that. It is all the better. We may safely say that this place, for some cause of which we are ignorant, is shunned by every one. I looked carefully about me all the way hither, and could nowhere see the least trace of a human foot."

"Nor I. And I, too, looked closely."

"Then I think we may go as far as to say that no one knows precisely that we are in this part of the country. I am sure we have passed no one who could set our enemies upon our track, and it is quite certain the dragoons who pursued us were not close enough upon our track to note the direction we took."

"I grant all that, Tom."

"Very well, and you must know as well as I do to what point my remarks lead. No one knows we are here; no one visits this place. Therefore, I say, that here we are likely to remain unsuspected and in safety."

"There does seem every probability of it, and I suppose that makes you think that we ought to overlook any of the disagreeables?"

"It ought to reconcile you with the whole of them."

"Well, come, I will not say that it does not; but it strikes me we are talking a little too soon. It would be better if we were to get nearer to the building, and ascertain first whether it is or is not tenanted; and secondly, whether we can obtain an entrance into it."

"If we can get over the first difficulty you can leave the second to me. That would be no obstacle, I know. I will guarantee to get in if there's nobody there."

"Very well, Tom. And as I think we have stood here talking quite long enough, I propose we approach the place a little closer. It is fortunate all the windows are provided with shutters, for if they were not, and anyone was within, we have stood a good chance of being perceived."

"I think that is a needless apprehension, Dick, for all the windows appear to me to be protected with shutters, which look as though they had not been touched for years."

"They have that appearance. But come, you lead the way, Tom, and we will follow."

"With all my heart," replied Tom King. And as he spoke he stepped forward, leading his horse at the same moment, and without difficulty ascended the two steps which led up to the lawn.

Dick Turpin, Maud, and the other two horses followed closely behind him.

Very little traces of a lawn were now perceptible in the piece of wild-looking ground which spread out before the mansion.

The grass upon it reached almost to their knees, and it was thickly intermingled with thistles and other weeds of a prickly character, which made walking somewhat unpleasant and disagreeable.

Disregarding these minor inconveniences, our friends struck across it in a straight line to the front of the mansion.

They did not halt until they reached the foot of the flight of stone steps, but here were compelled to pause.

"Now," said King, "a question arises. If we find, as we anticipate, that this mansion is uninhabited, and consequently make our way into it, what shall we do with our horses?"

"They must not be forgotten, certainly."

"They must not be forgotten, because we owe our present and future safety to them entirely."

"Just so. But do you think that I should have forgotten Black Bess. Still I think we had better see to ourselves first, and then attend to the horses afterwards."

"Just as you like."

"You have halted before the front-door, Tom. Do you think that the best point at which to attempt to effect an entrance?"

"Well, no—not exactly. Upon second thoughts, I think we had better go round to the back."

"I think so, too. Indeed, we ought to survey the building all round before we make an attack upon it."

"It will be more prudent by far to do so."

Having agreed upon this, they made their way round to the back of the mansion.

In doing so, they were surprised at its extent, which was much greater than they had imagined.

They kept a careful look out all the time, and it may be said with safety that no portion of the building whatever escaped their observation.

All was silent and deserted, and the rustling which they made in forcing their way through the rank vegetation sounded with ominous loudness.

At length the back of the mansion was reached.

Here they found numerous buildings, which probably served in former times for servants' offices; and, as they looked towards them, our friends felt certain that here, if anywhere, would be found the inhabitants of the place.

CHAPTER CCCCXVI.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN SUCCEED IN EFFECTING AN ENTRANCE INTO THE DESETED MANSION.

We are thus minute in describing the approach of the highwaymen to this deserted mansion, because the events which afterwards occurred there were of so strange, wild, and wonderful a nature as to make some such introduction necessary, lest, coming upon the reader with too much suddenness and unexpectedness, they should be deemed improbable.

It may, however, be easily believed that the awful stillness which reigned about this spot—rendered more striking as it was by their footsteps being the only sound that broke upon it—was not without producing a great effect upon the minds of the three persons who composed the little party.

There was a strange, fluttered feeling about their hearts—an indescribable tremor, which extended over the whole of their body—which indicated that their minds were worked up to a high degree of excitement.

Without knowing it, they felt a conviction that they were standing upon the threshold of a most remarkable adventure—one that would make all their former achievements seem tame and dull.

In this place let us take the opportunity of describing briefly the exterior appearance of the mansion which was destined to be the scene of these strange occurrences.

We can do so while Turpin and Tom King and Maud are occupied in walking round it and examining it.

The style, then, in which it was built is that which now-a-days is termed the Elizabethan.

But it is probable that this building, although presenting this appearance, had been built—or, at least, the greater portion of it—before Queen Bess ascended the throne of England.

Despite the aspect of desolation which hung over it, it was not without a certain picturesqueness, which would, however, have been much increased had the surroundings been more cheerful.

But the ground around, which, doubtless, once had been in a high state of cultivation, had now such an appearance of neglect that it made the building seem ten times more dreary than it really was.

In addition to this, our friends first saw it soon after sunrise on a gloomy winter's morning, so that everything disadvantaged it.

Still, its mullioned windows, its quaintly-shaped and elaborately-finished gables and chimneys, its pointed roofs, all had a pleasing look.

No doubt in former times this place had been very beautiful, for now there were so many traces of that beauty left.

But the beautiful carving with which the stonework had been adorned was now so much worn away by time that its elegancies could not be distinguished.

Indeed, the whole edifice was in a state of crumbling ruin and decay, and seemed as though in a short time it would cease to be inhabitable unless prompt and efficient steps were taken to make it so.

So much for the dwelling itself.

It was entirely surrounded by grounds of vast extent, once beautifully cultivated, but now allowed to return to primitive wildness.

All these things were noted by the highwaymen, and commented upon as they made the tour of the building.

They arrived, at length, once more at the rear, where the out-buildings were situated, without having been able to detect the least signs of the place being inhabited.

In fact, they felt themselves justified in entertaining the

conviction that no footsteps besides their own had trodden there for many years.

Still, with a due and requisite amount of caution, they approached the servants' offices, for such they undoubtedly were, or rather had been.

These did not present quite such a dilapidated appearance as the rest of the structure, but probably they had been more recently erected.

Here, as elsewhere, all was still.

Seeing before them a door, which seemed to be the back entrance, our friends made their way towards it.

Upon a nearer approach they discovered that this door was overgrown with the same kind of green moss which had spread everywhere around, and which had unquestionably been engendered by the damp.

The steps, the door-posts, and the brickwork adjoining were all covered with the same parasitic growth, and it was clear that that door had not been opened recently, or traces would remain of it.

Our friends noticed, too, that where they trod the moss disappeared, being crushed into the soft earth or ground to water upon the stones.

Looking back, they could see that where this had taken place was just where they alone had trod.

This seemed proof positive that they had the place entirely to themselves.

Tom King surrendered the bridle of his horse to Dick, and mounted the three steps that led to the back door.

Upon this was a huge knocker.

As soon as he perceived it, he said –

"I don't believe there's anyone here, Dick; but still, before we break in, suppose I was to knock. That summons being so legitimate a one, would surely be attended to?"

"There can be no harm in trying," replied Turpin. "For, of course, it is important in the first degree that we should know whether there was or was not anyone within."

"Here goes, then," said Tom King; and as he spoke he seized the knocker vigorously with his right hand.

It was his intention to execute a rather startling rat-tat with it.

But, to his astonishment, he found that it required the exertion of his utmost strength to raise the knocker in the least, and then, when it was lifted about two inches from the door, it required the same, or nearly the same amount of strength, to bring it down into its former place again.

From this it was evident that the knocker had not been very lately used.

It had actually become so incrusted with rust as to make it thus difficult to move.

This was encouraging to Tom, who endeavoured to push the door open by main strength.

But in this attempt he failed most signally.

The door was as firm as a rock.

No doubt, had all the fastenings been removed, it would have been somewhat difficult to force the door open, for probably the wood had swelled with the damp and stuck it firmly in the frame.

"We must try some other place than this, Dick," said Tom.

"There is a window yonder. The hinges of the shutter before it seem to have rusted away. Suppose you try to move that."

Dick Turpin alluded to a mossy-grown shutter, which covered a small window on the ground floor.

Tom hastened towards it, and seizing the woodwork at the lower part of it, gave it a sudden jerk.

A creaking, splitting sound followed, and this encouraged him to make another effort.

Turpin, seeing that the shutter was fixed more firmly than he had fancied, let go the bridles of the horses, and came to his assistance.

One more pull, given with their united strengths, completely removed the shutter.

A small-sized, latticed window was then disclosed.

With the butt-end of a pistol Tom broke those panes which were nearest to the clasps with which the casement was fastened, and introducing his hand, undid them easily, though he found these even were covered with rust.

The window was composed of one leaf, which opened on two hinges like a door, as all windows opened before the introduction of the modern rope and pulleys.

Within, all was darkness, so that Tom could not tell very well into what sort of place it was that this window led, but it seemed to be a small-sized room.

"Here is the way into the house," he said, "and I think we may feel pretty sure that we have the place all to ourselves, or we should have seen something of the inhabitants before we had got thus far with our proceedings."

"I think we have no longer cause to feel apprehensive upon that head."

"Well, then, I think before we go any further, we ought to look to the horses. Having placed them somewhere in safety, we shall be able to enter through this window with very little trouble."

"It will be best to dispose of the cattle at once, and then we shall have that trouble off our minds."

"Do you think it would be safe to turn them loose? The grass seems very rank, but still their instinct would prevent them from eating anything injurious."

"It would, no doubt; but I fear it would be an unwise and dangerous proceeding to let them have their liberty."

"They might stray away."

"They might, but that is not what I chiefly apprehend. There would be a great risk of their being seen, and then our presence here would no longer be a secret."

"Of course. It will not do for that reason to let them loose, because our safety here will depend solely upon no one knowing anything of our whereabouts."

"Just so."

"But what is to be done?"

"Do you see that building yonder at a little distance?"

"Yes."

"That looks like a stable, does it not?"

"I have no doubt that is what it is."

"Then we will break the door open, and put the horses in there. Then there will be no fear of their being seen."

"But how about fodder?"

"Ah! that is another difficulty. There is little hope of our finding any in the stable."

"None at all, I should say."

"There is only one thing we can do. We must gather the grass as well as we can, and give it them to eat."

"I do not see what else we are to do."

"Nor I."

"Come, then; let us see if we can get into the stable."

The highwaymen then crossed what had once been a paved yard, and presently halted before the door of the building in question.

In appearance it in no way differed from the others they had seen, so far as being overgrown with moss was concerned.

But it was not a strong door, and was fastened with a padlock and chain.

As soon as he saw this, Tom knew that it would be easy enough to get into the stable, and he immediately looked about him for a stone.

There were several large pebbles at a short distance, and he selected one of them.

Holding this in his hand, he struck the chain and padlock some very heavy blows with it.

In this manner he completely shattered the padlock, and then the door opened to their hands.

As they expected, it led into a stable, which was divided into several stalls.

There was room for at least a dozen horses.

This was just what they wanted, so with all convenient speed they divested their steeds of saddle and bridle and led them up to the mangers.

There was nothing in them to eat, nor did they think it worth while to look for any fodder in the loft overhead, as, if they had found any, the chances were a thousand to one that it would be unfit for the horses to eat.

Instead of wasting their time, therefore, they went outside, and set to work in good earnest to gather a quantity of grass.

This was done with much greater ease and speed than they had expected, for the grass being of great length enabled them to take hold of it firmly, and the ground being very soft it came up by the roots with ease.

Having in this manner gathered a very large heap, they proceeded to carry it into the stable, giving each horse an equal quantity.

This was the best they could do for the present, so they left them to look after themselves.

As the reader will easily believe, it took some time to do all that we have described, and when our friends once more stood before the window through which they hoped to gain admission to the mansion, they found, on looking up to the sky, that the sun had attained a considerable altitude.

All three were much fatigued by their recent exertions, and they looked forward to a rest with feelings of great pleasure and satisfaction.

"I will get in first," said Tom King; and as he spoke he stepped on to the window-sill, for it was so near the ground that he was able to do so with ease.

In another moment he had passed through the casement and was standing in the little room—if room it was, for its dimensions were so contracted as to make it doubtful whether it deserved such a name.

"Now let Maud come," said Tom. "You can assist her on that side, and I can assist her on this."

"All right."

With Turpin's help Maud easily got on to the window-sill, and then Tom King, taking hold of her hand, enabled her to jump down.

Dick followed quickly, and closed the window after him.

The glance which they cast around them was one of very great curiosity.

It was not long, however, before they came to the conclusion that the place in which they stood had once been a butler's pantry.

But now nothing, save the damp, bare walls was left.

A small door, and seemingly a strong one, was the only means of exit.

To this Tom King at once advanced.

As he had more than half expected, it was fast.

The lock was on the inner side, and Tom ascertained, with the blade of his clasp-knife, that the bolt had been shot.

At first he tried to force the bolt back by inserting the point of his knife, but he failed, and, having broken a piece off the end of the blade in the attempt, he desisted.

Turpin then suggested that he should remove the screws which screwed the lock to the door.

This was a tedious operation, but Tom set about it in good earnest, for he could see no other means by which the door could be opened.

CHAPTER CCCCXVII.

OUR FRIENDS BEGIN TO HOPE THAT, AFTER ALL, THE DESERTED MANSION WILL AFFORD THEM SAFE SHELTER FROM THEIR FOES.

SLOWLY and steadily Tom King proceeded with his work, and at length the screws were one by one removed.

A sudden wrench, then, forced the lock completely away, and the door swung open, leaving a clear passage before them.

They shrank back, slightly, from entering the darkness beyond, but this was a feeling which they shook off almost immediately.

Turpin's duty was to remain with Maud.

She clung to him as though terrified.

And who could wonder at it, when the strange scene by which she was surrounded was taken into consideration.

Tom King, therefore, was the one who took upon himself to lead the way.

The darkness, however, was very disagreeable, and he consulted his comrade as to the expediency of lighting one of the pieces of wax-candle he had in his pocket.

Turpin consented at once, chiefly on Maud's account, who he fancied would be cheered and reassured by a light.

There might be some danger in its being seen, but he resolved to run the risk of that.

Moreover he had noticed, when outside, that all the shutters were closed, therefore the whole of the mansion would be in utter darkness.

Strangers in it as they were, they might fall into some danger while pursuing their explanations, if they had no light.

Tom King was quite willing, and then Turpin said—

"Where did you get that candle?"

"It's a brave bit, isn't it? and I have got another piece in my pocket, quite as large."

"Where did you get them from?"

"From the inn. I took them out of the candlesticks and put them into my pocket, for I thought they would come useful some time or other."

"I am glad you did so. They will prove of great service to us."

A tiny flame now appeared, which quickly increased in brightness, and then they were enabled to see about them with tolerable comfort.

They were in a short, narrow passage, from both sides of which several doors opened.

There was also a door at each end of it.

One of these doors, from the position it occupied, Tom felt certain was the one at which he had so ineffectually endeavoured to gain admittance.

Accordingly they did not trouble themselves in the least about that, but directed their attention to the one at the opposite end of the passage, and which they felt no doubt communicated with the mansion itself, for they were now only in the out-buildings or servants' offices which surrounded it.

About twenty steps took them to this door.

At a glance Tom saw that it was well secured.

When the house had been left, no matter for what reason it had been abandoned, great care had been taken to secure it from being entered, and from this circumstance alone our friends were led to believe that they were on the threshold of making some important discoveries or other.

Everything they saw was indicative of substantialness and strength.

The door before which they now stood seemed a impassable barrier to those who had not the proper tools to set to work upon it.

But Tom did not despair.

He gave Turpin the candle to hold, and with his broken knife he commenced an attack upon the lock.

He treated it in the same way as he had the preceeding one, and after some delay the way laid open before them.

As soon as the door was pushed open they perceived there was no longer any need for the lighted candle.

They found themselves at the lower end of what was evidently the entrance-hall of the mansion.

This was filled with a soft, dim, and beautiful light, the source of which they did not immediately discover.

As they advanced, however, they saw that it came in part from the fanlight over the front door, and partly from a skylight in the roof of the mansion, for the staircase was somewhat of a well-shape, and ascended to the top of the building.

Our friends gazed around them in admiration.

There were traces of grandeur and beauty visible in that deserted hall, although the hideous aspect of ruin and desolation was so obtrusive.

The dust lay thickly everywhere, thus showing that, however closely and carefully the doors had been closed, they had not been closed carefully enough to exclude this mysterious substance, which seems to possess the faculty of penetrating everywhere.

Several doors opened from this hall, but all were shut, and doubtless fastened.

They did not try any of them, but Dick said—

"I think we may safely come to the conclusion that there is no one in this house, and that we have it all to ourselves."

"Oh! decidedly," said Tom King. "If there had been anyone here, we should not have been allowed to proceed as far as we have without some notice being taken of our intrusion. You may depend, for some reason or other, this house has been shut up and deserted, and allowed to fall to ruin just as it pleased."

"That seems a very strange state of things, Tom."

"It does. But do you recollect Durley Chine?"

"I shall never forget it."

"I am reminded of it by this place. But as for finding this mansion in this state, I do not think it anything to be surprised at. Such a thing is far from being uncommon. Sometimes it is the result of caprice upon the part of the owners, and sometimes it is owing to legal proceedings, such as the property being in Chancery, or without an heir, or something of that sort."

"Doubtless," replied Turpin, "there are plenty of means by which the desertion of this place could be explained; but I do not think it worth our while to trouble our heads about them."

"Certainly not. Our own affairs, if we will only give them proper consideration, will suffice to occupy the whole of our time."

"Well, then, let us first of all try to find some place in this house where we can rest ourselves. I should prefer to try the upper floor."

"So should I, because then we should be able to command a good view of the country round."

"Let us ascend these stairs then."

"With all my heart; for it seems there is nothing for us to see on the ground-floor, without we choose to take the trouble of forcing open all these doors."

The little party now began to ascend the stairs.

Their footsteps raised strange echoes in that deserted habitation, and, as they heard them, strange thoughts and feelings filled their breasts.

But they strove, as well as they could, not to succumb to their influence, and spoke to each other upon indifferent topics.

At length the top of the staircase was reached, and here they paused.

As they had ascended they noticed that all the doors that opened from the landings were closed, and these upon the topmost flight of all were no exception.

But the doors were not of a heavy make, and the two highwaymen doubted not that they should be able to burst one open.

Tom advanced, and tried the handles in rapid succession.

All the doors were fast.

"Break one open," said Turpin, "and let us see what kind of place there is beyond."

Tom turned the knob of one of the doors, and pressed against it in a peculiar manner with his knee and shoulder.

He was in such a position as to be able to exercise his utmost strength, and he pushed firmly and steadily.

The door cracked ominously, and gave signs of giving way.

But Turpin, fancying his comrade's strength was insufficient for the task, came to his assistance.

By their joint efforts the door was quickly burst open.

It led into a small chamber, in which, to their surprise, they found a few articles of furniture remaining.

Perhaps they were deemed not worthy of the trouble of carrying away.

At any rate, there they were.

The articles consisted of a small rude table, a few chairs, and a bedstead, which was in one corner.

By the appearance of this latter object, it would seem as though it had been devoted to a servant's use.

All the things were of a more antique fashion than any our friends had ever seen, and Maud looked about her with some interest and curiosity.

"Come," said Dick, in a cheerful voice, as he took in at a glance the general aspect of the room, "we shall be far more comfortable here than I thought we should be. Here are chairs to sit down upon, and a table and a bedstead. When we have made a fire the place will be as comfortable as you please."

The cheerful manner in which Dick Turpin spoke was not without producing a due effect upon his hearers.

The chamber, rude and comfortless as it really was, assumed a more cheerful aspect.

"And here is a window," said Tom King, in the same tone of voice, "which commands an extensive view. We shall be able to see danger long before it comes near us."

This window was somewhat important to them, so they all crowded towards it.

It was a small latticed casement, unprovided with shutters, like the rest of the windows in the house.

Our friends were able to see for a long distance.

Beneath and all around them were the neglected grounds belonging to the deserted mansion.

They were in the front of the house, and with their eyes they could easily follow the route they had just come.

There was the weed-grown lawn, the avenue of trees, but not the gate by which they had entered.

That was hidden from their view by trees.

A prospect of beautiful country, many miles in extent, spread out before them, and in summer the view must have been a lovely one to gaze upon, but now all was bleak and wintry looking.

They continued to look out of the window for some time, until, indeed, their eyes had grown familiar with the different features of the landscape.

Then they turned away, and Turpin said—

"In the first place, we must find something to make a fire with, and then we shall be comfortable enough."

"I am afraid though," said Tom King, "that we shall be obliged to forego that comfort."

"You fear the smoke will be seen?"

"Yes, and if it is, the secret of our being here will immediately be known."

"I think we may reduce the smoke to a mere trifle. When we light the fire we must put on but a small quantity of fuel, and then replenish it by slow degrees, so that the smoke will leave the chimney in the form of an impalpable vapour."

"We might succeed in doing that."

"We must try, for without a fire this place will be unbearable."

"But where are we to find fuel?"

"We must look."

"Suppose we were to break open another of the doors, and cut that door up into fragments with our swords."

"That will answer the purpose admirably; and then, not only that, we might find some articles in the next room which would do for firewood."

"So we might."

While speaking our friends passed out of the room again on to the landing, and paused before another of the doors.

This was forced open in the manner we have previously described.

The chamber, however, contained no other article of furniture, save a bed, and this they never thought for a moment of destroying, since it was likely to prove so useful.

"I firmly believe," said Turpin, "that chance, in directing us to the house, has brought us to a place of permanent shelter, where we shall be able to remain in safety as long as ever we think proper."

"I hope so," said Tom King, "for such a place would be very convenient to us."

"It would, indeed; but let us carry out your suggestion. We will break this door to pieces with our swords and use it for firewood. Stand aside, and I will make the first stroke."

With their swords it was a comparatively easy matter for the highwaymen to chop the door to pieces, and they soon had such a heap of fragments lying on the floor as would last them for some time to come.

Taking a small quantity they re-entered the other room, and, placing them in the grate, set fire to them; for, as we have often remarked, the highwaymen took care never to be without the means of procuring a light readily.

With great anxiety they watched the ascending smoke, and, by the exercise of great caution, contrived to prevent it rising in large quantities.

The wood being dry made their task easier, for it soon burst into a blaze, and then the smoke was consumed.

When the fire had fairly burned up, the wood was brought and placed close at hand so as to replenish it without trouble; the rickety table was drawn up to the fire, and the chairs placed close by.

In these our friends seated themselves with manifest pleasure, for they were thoroughly wearied by their recent exertions.

All three were in high spirits, and a happier trio than those who now occupied the little room in the empty mansion could scarcely have been found.

CHAPTER CCCCXVIII.

RETURNS TO CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, AND RELATES WHAT BEFEL THEM AFTER THEIR PARTING WITH DICK TURPIN IN ENFIELD CHASE.

SURELY the reader cannot have forgotten our old friends, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack!

A long time has elapsed, however, since we last occupied ourselves with their adventures, and we think a more fitting time than the present for returning to them could not be found.

When we saw them last, as all, doubtless, well remember, was when they parted from Dick Turpin and Tom King in Enfield Chase.

They were to get off as well as they could, with the understanding that all were to re-unite upon the ill-omened

spot upon the Finchley-road, which had been selected as being well known to them, and not likely to be visited by their foes.

Indeed, it was a desolate and fearful spot.

It must be understood that the day on which we leave Dick Turpin, Tom King, and Maud in the empty house, is the one preceding the night upon which the meeting was appointed to take place.

To describe the adventures of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, we shall then be obliged to go back three days.

When they parted with their three friends, they rode off with extreme reluctance, and looked back from time to time, anxious to keep them in sight as long as possible, for they thought how uncertain it was whether they should ever all meet again.

But the thick-growing trees in the chase soon hid them from their view.

Claude and Jack then occupied themselves solely with attending to their own safety.

They were close to the borders of the chase, but they knew not whether it would be safe for them to emerge into the open country.

They might suddenly find themselves assailed with a fresh danger, which might be fatal.

Upon this they held a consultation, and in the end determined to get as near the borders as they could, and then reconnoitre.

With this resolve they pushed forward slowly and cautiously, and, at length, came to a halt.

One more yard would take them beyond the shelter of the trees.

From this point they peered out, but could see nothing of their enemies.

Emboldened by this, they were about to proceed, when they were startled by the report of a gun.

"Turpin and King are in trouble," said Claude. "Let us rush to their assistance."

"Nay, nay," said Sixteen-String Jack, restraining him; "I have faith in their skill and ability to get off, and perhaps by going towards the spot from whence the sound of the shot appeared to come, so far from doing them any good, we shall only be getting ourselves into additional trouble."

"All right," said Claude Duval. "I had forgotten."

Just as he spoke, there came the clear, ringing sound of a bugle.

The reader will remember how, when, and by whom the signal was given.

Claude and Jack heard it responded to from various points around them, and they looked at each other with an expression upon their countenances which said plainly enough—

"Something imminent is going on."

Directly after this they heard the dragoons forcing their way among the trees, all of them going in the direction from which the shot had proceeded.

"I think the best thing we can do is to be off," said Claude Duval.

"So I think," rejoined Sixteen-String Jack. "We shall never have a better opportunity than the present, for our foes seem to be all going in one direction."

"They do."

"Forward, then. There is no one in sight, and we will make a bold rush to get off."

"Agreed, I am ready."

At the same moment they touched their horses lightly with their spurs, and emerged at a smart trot.

A belt of waste, uncultivated ground surrounded the forest.

It was overgrown with furze bushes and brake.

To keep on through this was not an easy matter, but the two highwaymen knew better than to hesitate.

Despite the difficulties, they would not allow their horses to reduce their speed.

It was well for them that they did not.

A loud shout rang in their ears, and, turning round in the saddle, they perceived a number of dragoons making towards them with all speed possible.

They were mounted and well armed, and it was evidently their intention to give chase.

The two highwaymen took off their hats, and waved them defiantly.

Then reaching a less obstructed piece of road, they goaded their horses with their spurs, and set forward at a speed which seemed to make all pursuit a hopeless matter.

Nevertheless, the dragoons showed that they had no intention of giving up the chase thus easily.

The prey was fairly on the road before them, and they resolved to spare no effort to hunt it down.

In this they thought they could scarcely fail, when they recollected how many bodies of dragoons were occupied in patrolling the roads, so that the highwaymen would continually find fresh and untired pursuers at their heels.

Capture, then, seemed inevitable, and, in high good spirits, the dragoons commenced the pursuit.

It was a change from the dull, inactive life they had so recently been leading.

Soon, however, they found that their own heavily accoutred horses were no match in point of fleetness for those belonging to the highwaymen, although, perhaps, they would be able to keep up longer.

It seemed to mortify them exceedingly, though, when they found the highwaymen gradually but perceptibly increasing the distance which intervened between them.

At length they got out of sight altogether, and eventually out of hearing also.

Still the dragoons kept perseveringly upon their track.

Their numbers had already been considerably reinforced, and they were well aware that, if the highwaymen continued along the road as they were then going, they must inevitably fall foul of the next patrol.

But Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were not unmindful of this danger.

As soon as they had got so far ahead of their pursuers for the sound of their horses' hoofs to be inaudible, they pulled up.

"Claude," said Sixteen-String Jack, "this sort of thing will not do; if we keep on like this we shall gallop over the next lot of dragoons who are patrolling the road. We must turn aside. If we are only careful what we are about we shall distance those lumbering dragoons easily enough, for our horses are fresh and strong after their long rest."

"Let us go on more slowly, then, and the next lane we come to let us turn down it."

"We cannot do better."

Once more the highwaymen put spurs to their horses, and, at an easy gallop, swept along the smooth high road.

Both took care to keep a sharp look-out on both sides of them, and suddenly Sixteen-String Jack cried out—

"Halt! Claude, here is the very place."

They slackened speed as he spoke, and turned down a dark and narrow lane.

The darkness was caused by a quantity of tall trees which grew close together on both sides of it.

To see the ground was an impossibility; nevertheless they galloped along at a speed which seemed to evince an utter recklessness for their personal safety.

But the horses, feeling, no doubt, that all depended upon them, kept their feet admirably, by means of the wonderful instinct with which they are gifted.

Away they went, then, at a truly furious rate.

In a few minutes the end of the lane was reached, and they once more emerged upon the highway.

No sooner, however, had they done so, than they found they had run into the very danger they had been so solicitous to avoid.

Not ten yards from the spot where they emerged a troop of dragoons were trotting slowly along the road towards them.

No sooner did they catch sight of our two friends, than sudden ejaculations came from their lips, which showed that the highwaymen were recognised.

In an instant all put spurs to their horses and galloped forward.

Our friends stood no other resource than to fly before them.

A loud voice from the rear came upon their ears.

"Halt!" it said, "halt! If you refuse, we fire; and the consequences be on your heads, not ours."

Jack and Claude could not forbear shuddering slightly—not so much at the words as at the cold-blooded tone in which they were uttered.

Of course they did not halt, but urged their horses to make their utmost speed.

A long pause followed, during which their hearts seemed to stand still, and the blood in their veins to grow cold.

Then one word broke the silence, and warned them that the moment of danger had come, perhaps the last moment they were destined to spend on earth.

The one word was—"Fire!"

The command was scarcely uttered before it was obeyed.

The dragoons all had their carbines ready

Their fingers rested on the triggers

Then came the rattling discharge.

A volley of bullets flew around our friends.

The horses swerved, and plunged, and galloped away with the speed of terror.

No sooner had they fired than the dragoons came lumbering on.

In an anxious voice our friends addressed each other.

Both, however, were unhurt—at least comparatively so.

Sixteen-String Jack had been grazed on the cheek by a bullet, which had also chipped off a bit of his ear; but of so slight a misadventure as that he thought nothing of it.

"Forward, Claude, and all will yet be well. Take to the first lane on the left hand that you come to. If you turn to the right it will take you to Enfield Chase."

"Halt then," cried Claude, suddenly. "Gently. There is a lane. Go round the corner gently, and then put forth your speed."

Jack saw the turning of which his comrade spoke.

It was a few yards ahead, and he slackened speed as he approached it.

In another moment he swept round it, and then the dragoons lost sight of their prey.

But they were close enough at their heels to see where they had gone, and they, too, followed the highwaymen into the lane.

But the darkness was now baffling to a degree.

Still, the soldiers strained their sense of hearing to the utmost, and then they could just catch the dull echo of the flying steeds before them.

This encouraged them to keep on.

Of course the dragoons, as they were somewhere about twelve in number, made a great deal more noise than the two highwaymen, so that Claude and Jack could hear them come thundering after them for a long time.

By degrees, however, the sound grew fainter and fainter, until it was only at intervals that they could distinguish it.

They had traversed many lanes, as they found they led one into the other, but had not come to another public road.

For this they were glad, and the reader may be sure they would be careful how they emerged upon the next one.

They would not do so as unguardedly as they had before, the reader may depend.

At length, however, the end of the lanes was reached.

But they halted some distance from the turnpike-road, and listened.

The dull thump—thump of the dragoons' horses became more audible now that they had ceased to be in motion.

It was clear, then, that they had by no means given up the pursuit.

Every moment, then, was of importance, and our friends listened eagerly.

But no sound came from the direction which they wished to take.

Cautiously, then, they advanced a few paces, until they emerged from the lane, just far enough to be able to glance up and down the broad high road into which the lane led.

Not a soul was in sight.

Taking heart at this, the two highwaymen left the shelter of the lane altogether.

They resolved, however, not to remain on the highway a moment longer than they could help.

At a swift gallop they tore down the road.

Quickly they glanced from side to side in search of a turning.

But the uniform line of the hedgerows remained unbroken.

Suddenly before them they saw two small twinkling lights.

They seemed to spring into existence all at one.

They were approaching.

The highwaymen came to the conclusion in a moment that they proceeded from some vehicle.

"Halt!" cried Claude Duval. "Pull up, Jack—pull up! Whatever this may be that is approaching, we will pull up and allow it to pass."

CHAPTER CCCCXIX.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL ROB THE FARMER ON THE HIGHWAY.

Sixteen-String Jack obeyed his comrade's injunctions with remarkable promptitude.

He was, indeed, in the act of reining in his steed when Claude spoke, and so he was able to quickly bring him to a stand-still.

He, too, had become convinced of the policy of drawing on one side, and allowing the vehicle to pass.

By this means they hoped to elude the observation of those within it, who otherwise, seeing them pass, would give information to the dragoons in the rear.

As soon as they had stopped their horses, our two friends backed them as close under the hedge as they could, in order to leave the roadway clear.

Scarcely, however, had they taken up their position, than Claude Duval addressed his companion in a low tone of voice.

"Jack," he said. "Jack."

"What, Claude?"

"That vehicle which is approaching"——

"Well?"

"Shall we let it pass us?"

"To stop it would be very dangerous."

"A fig for danger. I never yet stood on the highway, and allowed travellers to pass toll free, and I can't do it."

"But the dragoons?"

"Never mind them. I am in hopes they are a long way behind us. But come, we must make up our minds quickly. In another moment it will be too late."

This was true.

Whatever vehicle it might be, it was coming along at a rather swift rate, and in something less than the time Claude had named, it would pass them.

"I think we had better not meddle with it, Claude."

"Pho! pho! How much money have you got?"

"I don't know."

"You can guess."

"It is very little."

"I thought so; but let you have ever so little, you will still have more than me."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, for I have not a fraction."

"I have only a few shillings."

"Well, then, Jack, that proves we must have money, and that at once. You can't tell what emergency may arise, and, ten to one, if we have a better chance of filling our pockets than we have got now."

"I see you are bent upon it."

"I am, Jack, and for more reasons than one. Come, you need not fear the dragoons, I am certain; and we might just as well stop whatever is coming as let it pass. We shan't increase our danger either way. Now, Jack! Quick! prepare!"

Sixteen-String Jack somewhat unwillingly took a pistol from his pocket and cocked it.

"I don't half like this business, Claude," he said; "it is too mad-brained by far. I expect every moment to hear the trampling hoofs of the dragoons' horses."

"Pho! pho! we have not heard them, Jack, since we emerged from the lane. Are you all ready?"

"Yes, I am ready."

"Then we shall have this business over in less than no time; and, can't you see, if we only get fairly off before the dragoons arrive, the cart and the man who has been robbed will detain them a moment or so."

"Yes, but it will hinder us."

"Now, Jack, there is no time for another word. We must have money, for I intend to put up at the first convenient inn we come to."

Sixteen-String Jack said no more, for really there was not time.

The vehicle which was approaching was on two wheels.

They could tell that by the sound.

They could also tell that it was drawn by one horse only.



[MAUD PASSES THE NIGHT ALONE IN THE DESERTED MANSION.]

In another moment it was nearly opposite to them, and the two highwaymen, riding out with great suddenness from the place where they had been in ambush, cried—

"Halt! halt! Pull up your horse, or you are a dead man. A dead man in a moment if you disobey. Halt!"

As these words were spoken, the two highwaymen placed themselves one on each side of the vehicle, which they could now see was a cart of rather clumsy manufacture.

An ejaculation of fear fell upon their hearing.

Claude and Jack presented their pistols full at the head of the man who sat in the cart, and who had given utterance to the cry of terror.

He was the sole occupant of the vehicle.

Whether he checked the horse, or whether the creature understood the words which our friends had uttered, would be hard to say.

At any rate, the horse stopped and looked half-terrified.

The man who sat in the cart, and who was the sole occupant of it, dropped the reins as soon as he had given utterance to the ejaculation, and assumed an attitude of the most ludicrous fright.

"Spare my life—spare my life!" he cried. "Take all I have, but spare my life!"

"Your life is in no danger," said Claude Duval; "provided you at once, and without hesitation, hand over to me whatever valuables you may have about you. Quick! your money or your life!"

The man uttered a groan by way of reply to what the highwayman said.

"I am only a poor farmer, gentlemen," he said. "Nothing more, I can assure you."

"A poor farmer! Ha! ha! That's a good joke," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Why, there never was such a thing known. Come, be quick. Hand over."

The farmer uttered another groan.

It was clear he valued his life, and did not feel disposed

to throw it away merely for the sake of whatever money he might have about him.

Slowly he put one hand into his pocket.

"Be quick," cried Claude Duval. "Be quick. We cannot waste a moment. If you do not give us your money quickly, we will heave you out of the cart and take it from you; and you may depend we shan't be over gentle when we set about it."

The firm, resolute tone of voice in which Claude Duval spoke was quite enough to convince the farmer that he was in earnest, and that he fully meant what he said.

The farmer fumbled in his pocket, and presently produced a small leather bag.

Claude took it.

"This is too light," he said; "by far too light. This will not do, Mr. Farmer."

"It is all I have, good sir."

"Pho! pho! I know better. Now, look you, 'tis perfect folly for you to think of getting off and taking any of your money with you. We are determined to have it. Which will you do? Give it us, or will you compel us to take it? You will find the first the most comfortable to yourself."

The farmer uttered another groan—this time of a far more dismal character than before.

"Oh! gentlemen," he said. "Be satisfied with what you have got. If you take all, I shall be a ruined man."

"We can't help that," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Quick. Dub up. We cannot stand parleying here."

The farmer, finding all his entreaties in vain, now put the best face on the matter that he could, and from another pocket in his coat he produced another leather bag, which was not only larger, but very much heavier than the first one.

Claude took it from him in an instant.

"There, you villains," said the farmer, "you have got all now."

"I don't know that," said Claude, "and"——

"Hark! hark!" cried Sixteen-String Jack, suddenly. "Hark! I hear our foes upon the road again. We must be off without delay. Forward, Claude, for you life."

Duval listened, and in a moment became convinced of the truth of what his comrade had said.

The dragoons were on the road, and not far off, for the hoof-beats sounded with alarming clearness.

Claude did not hesitate.

Thrusting the bag which he had last received into his pocket, he turned his horse's head round at the same moment as his old comrade.

Then, touching their horses with the spur, they started off at a speed that filled the farmer with amazement.

While going at such a rate conversation was not an easy matter. Nevertheless, Sixteen-String Jack managed to say—

"Keep on, Claude, at full speed, until we come to the next turning. You may depend the dragoons will stop when they get to the cart, so we shall have some slight advantage there."

Claude did not reply.

He thought it needless, but he let Jack know he fully understood him by doing as he had advised.

They had not very far to go before they came to a narrow lane that led off at right angles from the high road in the direction they wished to take.

They turned down it without hesitation.

They paused a moment, however, and listened.

They could no longer hear the sound of the horses' hoofs beating upon the road, and they rightly surmised that they had stopped when they came to the farmer's cart.

This was sufficient.

With fresh hope and confidence they gave their horses the rein freely, and darted down the lane.

It was narrow and winding, like most country lanes are.

Suddenly, however, Claude pulled up, and, somewhat in surprise, Jack followed his example.

"What has happened?" he said. "What has happened?"

"Nothing serious, only we have just passed a spot where another lane turns out of this one."

"We have—we have."

"Let us turn back and go down it, then. I cannot hear anything of our foes. Probably they will take the turning out of the high road, as they have done before, and I think we shall stand a better chance of throwing them off the scent."

"I quite agree with you. Come!"

The highwaymen turned their horses round and retraced their steps until they came to the narrow lane of which Claude had spoken.

It was much narrower than the one from which it branched off.

They galloped along it without hesitation.

All at once, however, they were compelled to come to a full stop, and our friends looked in each others' faces with dismay.

The lane was not a thoroughfare.

It was simply a private road leading from the lane to a farmhouse which they could just discern in the distance.

There was no outlet to it.

They had the choice of either entering the grounds belonging to the farm or turning back again.

Both courses seemed equally fraught with danger.

"I should have thought of this," said Claude, taking all the blame of what had occurred to himself. "I ought to have thought of this. Instead of bettering our position, as I hoped, I have only worsted it."

"Never mind," said Sixteen-String Jack; "we must make the best of it we can. It has turned out an unfortunate circumstance, but the idea of turning down this lane in order to throw our enemies off the track was so good a one, that I am sure anyone would have adopted it as we have done."

"No doubt, no doubt. But still, we might have known that, in nine cases out of ten, these lanes which branch off thus lead only to some farm or homestead as this does."

"But what is to be done?"

"There you puzzle me. Can you hear anything of our foes?"

Both listened with great intentness, but the silence which reigned about that spot remained unbroken.

"I can hear nothing, Claude."

"Nor I."

"I have a thought. Do you remember our intention was to seek some place of shelter as soon as we could?"

"Yes."

"Well, suppose we make our way to the farmhouse yonder and ask for refuge."

"It would be dangerous."

"Why so?"

"The suspicions of the people would be excited."

"Not if we were careful, I think."

"And at this hour the inmates will be all retired to bed."

"Do you think so? Have you any idea what the hour is?"

"No."

"Well, look yonder over those trees. Do you see that faint gray streak of light? That shows the dawn to be close at hand."

"It does, it does. I had no idea it was so late."

"So early, you mean."

"Well, just as you like."

"Farming people are in the habit of rising very early at this time in the year. You may depend they are up before the dawn."

"But what excuse could you make for intruding on them?"

"That we must think of. Doubtless we shall be able to invent some plausible tale which will prevent them from having any suspicions."

"If we do not, it will be fatal to us."

"It will not do for us to turn back, will it?"

"It would be equally dangerous as going forward."

"Then forward be it, then. The dragoons may lose the scent altogether, and then if we can only remain at yon farmhouse until night, we shall be able to push on towards Finchley at an easy pace."

"It would certainly be as safe to remain at that farmhouse as at an inn."

"Perhaps safer."

"Do not, then, let us waste any more time in talking about what we shall do. Look how light it is getting, and I should not relish being hunted by daylight."

"But how are you going to excuse yourself to these people?"

"I must think."

"I don't know how it is to be done."

"I do. I have a fresh thought—quite a fresh thought.

CHAPTER CCCCXX.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL HAVE TO BEAT A PRECIPITATE RETREAT FROM THE FARMHOUSE.

As he spoke these words, Sixteen-String Jack, very much to the surprise of his comrade, Claude Duval, slipped off his horse, and, lying down on the ground in the lane, rolled over and over several times.

The natural result of this operation was that he speedily became completely beplastered with mud, for the lane was covered with this substance.

Having accomplished this much, Jack got up.

He then presented a very ludicrous appearance.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Claude Duval, in a tone of voice which showed how much he was bewildered by this action. "What in the world have you done that for?"

Sixteen-String Jack seemed to enjoy his amusement, for he laughed as he said—

"It is in order to get shelter at the farmhouse without exciting suspicion."

"But how can rolling yourself on the ground and getting yourself all over mud in that style contribute towards it?"

"I will tell you, Claude; but first, as I am down, I will unfasten this gate, and as soon as you are through, I will fasten it again."

"A wise precaution," said Claude. "But shall you be able to open the gate, think you?"

"Oh! no doubt I shall."

Sixteen-String Jack felt for the fastening of the gate as he spoke.

As he had quite expected, it consisted merely of a piece of chain, which was twisted and secured in such a manner as would have puzzled a stranger to undo.

But Jack was in possession of the secret, and, with as little trouble, probably, as the farmer himself would have had, he opened the gate.

Claude passed through at once, leading his comrade's horse by the bridle.

Sixteen-String Jack then fastened the gate again, and remounted his steed.

A kind of continuation of the lane led towards the farmhouse, and along this they proceeded at a walking pace.

"Come," said Claude Duval; "tell me your intentions. You have roused my curiosity to the highest pitch."

"It is very simple," said Sixteen-String Jack, "but I think the scheme will be all the more successful for that."

"Let me hear it, then."

"When we ride up to the door of the farmhouse you must give out that I have been thrown from my horse."

"Thrown from your horse?"

"Yes. Being covered with mud from head to foot, as I am, will make it appear as though such an accident had taken place. I will also act as though I had been slightly hurt."

"Capital," cried Claude Duval, enthusiastically. "That is a capital plan. They are sure to find you shelter, and they will have no room for suspicion."

"I hope not. We can say the accident happened a little way from here, and that we made our way to the farmhouse because it was the nearest habitation."

"Just so. Jack, you deserve great credit for hitting upon such a capital device, and if those dragoons will only be kind enough to go another way, we shall be able to have a comfortable day's rest."

"Come on, then. I can't say anything about the dragoons. In that respect we must trust to our luck."

"Entirely."

"Hush! hush! Say no more. We are too close now to the house to speak with safety."

Upon this, both were silent.

The little path—for road it could scarcely be called—led right up to the farmhouse, passing through the wood on the way.

As soon as the highwaymen entered this last-named place, the door of the farmhouse was opened, and several persons appeared upon the threshold

Upon the countenances of all the utmost astonishment was depicted.

Claude hastened forward, leaving Sixteen-String Jack to follow at a more gentle pace.

Raising his hat, and making a most graceful bow, Claude addressed himself to the persons who stood at the door, but particularly to a very short, stout man, with a fiery visage.

This man, he rightly enough conjectured, was farmer, and the others members of his family.

"Excuse me, sir," said Claude, "for trespassing upon your grounds in the manner I have done, but I trust, when you hear the cause which has led me to do so, you will not be displeased."

The landlord nodded his head violently, but said nothing, though Claude fancied he got a trifle redder in the face.

At this moment Sixteen-String Jack arrived.

He halted by the side of his companion.

As may be easily supposed, the plight he was in attracted the immediate attention of those who beheld it.

Their countenances assumed an expression of curiosity.

"You see my friend here," said Claude Duval. "He is the occasion of our presence here. You see the condition he is in. It is the result of an accident. His horse shied suddenly, and threw him. Fortunately he is not dangerously hurt, but still he is much bruised and shaken. This being the nearest habitation, we made our way towards it, not doubting that you would allow us shelter for a little while, until he recovers sufficiently to resume his journey."

"Certainly—certainly," said the farmer, in a cheerful voice. "You shall, of course. You did quite right to come. Here, Jack, Tom, Bill, help the gentleman from his horse."

Three young men, apparently sons of the farmer, sprang forward as he spoke, and began to assist Sixteen-String Jack, who made believe to be very much hurt and very helpless indeed.

Claude hastily alighted, and came to their assistance.

Between them, Jack was fairly lifted out of the saddle and carried into the farmhouse.

With every imaginable care he was placed upon a large settle, which stood at one side of the fire-place.

He groaned slightly.

It will be recollected that, when the dragoons fired their volley at the highwaymen, one of the bullets had grazed Jack's cheek, and just nipped a piece out of his ear.

From this blood had flowed, thought not in very great quantities.

Nevertheless, mingling with the mud, it gave him the appearance of being badly hurt.

The farmer, who, like most of his class, was a hospitable man, was most assiduous in his attentions.

He imagined that the travellers must be persons of distinction, or they would not travel on horseback.

Before Claude was aware of it, the horses were led into the stable.

He did not wish to appear over anxious about them, lest it should give rise to suspicion, yet he felt he would have much preferred to have seen where they were disposed.

An opportunity for visiting the stables would, no doubt, very shortly occur, and so he controlled his impatience.

It would have seemed strange to have neglected his friend, who seemed so seriously injured, in order to look after the horses, which he was over and over again assured were in perfect safety.

He was compelled to rest content.

The family had not long risen, and when they had been startled by the sudden appearance of our friends, they were sitting down to breakfast.

Sixteen-String Jack acted his part to admiration.

None but a doctor could have told that he was uninjured.

The simple-minded inmates of the farmhouse, however, never for one moment dreamed of calling into question the truth of the tale they had been told, and the muddy state of Jack's vestments was to them super-abundant proof.

They washed the mud from his hands, and bathed his face.

Then the wound he had received was disclosed.

Fortunately this happened to be just such a one as would be produced by a fall from a horse, should the rider chance to fall upon a sharp stone.

This wound was carefully bathed and strapped up by the farmer's wife, while the daughters were busily occupied in cleansing the mud from his apparel.

By the time their attentions were over, Sixteen-String Jack thought fit to show himself a little better, for he was

afraid, in their solicitousness for his welfare, that they would send off for a medical man, and he by no means wished to run that risk.

Accordingly, he made an effort as though to rise.

He was immediately assisted, and upon gaining a sitting posture, he declared he was wonderfully better.

A great improvement in his personal appearance was perceptible, and he spoke in a louder and firmer tone of voice than he had previously done.

At this the whole of the inmates of the farmhouse expressed themselves much delighted, and they pressed Claude and Jack to join them in the breakfast, which had been interrupted by their arrival.

The highwaymen did not hesitate to accept this invitation.

Their food for a long time past had been somewhat of the roughest, and they eyed the substantial viands which were placed upon the table with feelings of considerable satisfaction.

In less than a quarter of an hour, then, they had made themselves quite at home, and it was evident the honest farmer and his family were much delighted with their company, which was quite an event in their monotonous existence.

Sixteen-String Jack said, with a smile, that he had been by far more frightened than hurt, and made a capital breakfast.

Nevertheless, although they seemed to all outward appearance to be so thoroughly contented and happy, our friends in reality were not so.

They were a great deal too near the dragoons to be either safe or pleasant, and every now and then, when there happened to be a lull in the cheerful conversation, they listened attentively for any sound that might indicate the approach of their enemies.

But all was still; and as minute after minute passed away they gradually began to believe that they would be left unmolested.

That belief was fallacious, and they were destined to be made aware of it in a very abrupt manner.

During the breakfast Claude thought continually of the horses.

When he alighted and followed Jack into the farmhouse, they had been led off he knew not whither, though he was particularly assured by the farmer that they were all right.

Of this he had little or no doubt.

What he wanted to know was just where they were placed, so as to be able to make his way to them direct, in case any emergency should arise.

He was fidgety and anxious, and made up his mind that, as soon as ever breakfast was over, he would make some excuse to go out and find them.

But at a farm the breakfast is the principal meal, and occupied what seemed to him an intolerable time; but that was caused by his anxiety.

Besides, breakfast had hardly been begun when they arrived.

Still all continued silent, and he breathed more freely.

Whether the dragoons had lost the scent or not was a question they could not answer.

As we have said, not even an acute observer would have for a moment fancied that they were otherwise than light-hearted as they seemed, for not a trace of anxiety was perceptible.

Suddenly, however, Claude started.

Jack started at the self-same moment, as though by sympathy.

Their countenances changed slightly.

Ere they could move or speak, however, there was a hubbub of voices, and the trampling and prancing of horses' feet.

"Tracked," exclaimed Claude Duval, springing to his feet, "and done, I am afraid."

Sixteen-String Jack also sprung to his feet.

But the inmates of the farmhouse took little or no notice either of their movements or words.

The whole of their attention was directed to something that was going on outside the farmhouse, for they had one and all flocked to the door the moment the sounds we have described assailed their ears.

The two highwaymen gave one glance through the window.

That was enough.

Coming rapidly towards the house were the dragoons.

There was fifteen or twenty of them at least.

As Claude had said, they had been tracked.

Truly was the position of our friends most desperate.

"Fly!" exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, with startling energy. "Fly! it is our only chance."

"Where? where?"

"To the back of the house. Here, this way."

"Our horses?"

"Give up all thoughts of them. I know not where they are. We must escape without them."

"Impossible. We might as well surrender at once."

While speaking these rapid words the reader must not suppose the highwaymen were idle.

They had previously noted a door that appeared to lead to the back of the house.

They darted towards it just as the dragoons reined up at the front door.

They heard them address some question to the farmer.

But what it was they knew not.

In another moment they were through the door.

There were a couple of bolts upon it, and these they shot into their sockets instantly.

They were then in a kind of kitchen which looked into the yard at the rear of the farmhouse.

A door led into the farmyard, and through this they dashed with the utmost precipitation.

"Quick!" cried Jack. "On, Claude, on. Yonder are some buildings; the stables, doubtless. On, I say; we may reach them yet in time. If we can only mount our steeds, all will be well."

Claude saw the buildings to which his comrade alluded and made all speed in that direction.

CHAPTER CCCCXXI.

THE DRAGOONS MAKE A RUSH INTO THE STABLE, AND REACH THE LOFT OVERHEAD ABOUT A MINUTE TOO LATE.

It is wonderful how much can be done under the impulse of some powerful incentive.

Had not our friends been fully conscious that their lives and liberties solely depended upon their exertions, they could not possibly have done what they did.

The time which it took them to reach the door of the stable was infinitesimal.

They thought the buildings must be stables when they first glanced at them, but as they drew nearer they became convinced of it.

The door was standing wide open, and they could see into the interior, which set all doubts at rest.

Just as they reached the door, however, a loud shout fell upon their ears.

They turned round with the rapidity of lightning.

The sight they saw was one that was quite sufficient to extinguish in their breasts the least lingering hope that they would be able to effect their escape on this occasion from their persevering foes.

Coming towards the stables at full speed was the whole of the troop of dragoons.

They learned in a moment from the farmer that two men had arrived a little while before on horseback, and their flight was discovered the moment after.

What were the highwaymen to do now?

There was no longer the faintest possibility of concealing themselves from their foes.

Where, too, where they to go?

It was a natural instinct that caused them, the moment after making this discovery, to turn round and dash with frantic speed into the stable.

It put off their danger for a moment, but nothing more.

To be sure, they slammed the door shut, and fastened it ere the dragoons could arrive, but then how were they to get out of the stable without being captured?

It was quite certain, too, that they could not stand a siege.

A dozen vigorous blows upon the frail door would demolish it.

Both were so breathless with the speed they had made, and by the imminency of the danger with which they were threatened, that they could scarcely command their voices sufficiently to speak to each other.

It would be folly to attempt to saddle their horses.

Before they could get half-way through that operation, even supposing every necessary article was at hand, the dragoons would have the door down, for the first thing they did was to strike some violent blows with the butt-ends of their carbines, which were admirably adapted to such a purpose.

What were they to do?

"The loft!" cried Claude Duval. "The loft! Let us gain that. We may then find some means of leaving this place."

"No use—no use!" gasped Jack. "We had better give in at once."

"Never while I have life!" said Claude Duval, with resolution.

"The door will be down in an instant!"

"This way—this way!" cried Claude. "It is our only chance, and, if we do no more, we shall protract our capture to the last moment, and even that is desirable. Quick! After me! This way!"

Claude hastened across the stable as he spoke, and Sixteen-String Jack followed closely after him.

The inside of the stable was tolerably light, and Claude's quick eye had detected one of those perpendicular ladders fixed up against the wall, by which the loft overhead is generally reached.

Never were those steps so quickly ascended before.

Just, however, as they gained a footing in the loft, there was a terrific crash.

The door had given way, and the dragoons, hastily dismounting, came pouring into the stable, under the conviction that they had only to make one vigorous rush, and then capture their prey.

They had never given the loft a thought, and at first they looked about them in some surprise, unable to account for the disappearance of the highwaymen.

A slight movement, however, attracted their attention to one portion of the stable.

Having reached the floor of the loft, the idea had occurred to Sixteen-String Jack to try whether the ladder was moveable.

To his joy he found it was.

He had now the means of interrupting, to some extent, the progress of the dragoons.

They would not be able to follow them either so easily and quickly as they otherwise would.

It was the movement of this ladder which attracted the attention of the dragoons.

They sprang forward quickly, hoping to be able to seize the ladder and drag it down again, but they were too late.

Sixteen-String Jack flung the ladder down on the floor of the loft, and turned to observe the proceedings of his comrade.

Claude was busily engaged in making a hole in the thatched roof.

"Help me," he cried. "We will get through here as soon as the hole is large enough."

"But what are we to do then?"

"Drop down and run for it. We shall be on the outside of the farmyard, and the dragoons will either have to come our way, or else surmount the high wall which encloses the farmyard."

While speaking, both worked with a good will at the thatch.

It was the easiest matter in the world to make a breach in it, and they were out on the roof of the stable before any of the dragoons could reach the loft.

"Look, Jack!" cried Claude, "here are the open fields, and yonder is a plantation, or wood, or something of that kind. We can drop down, and then we will run for it."

The reader must understand that the stable had a roof, one portion of which inclined towards the farmyard and the other towards the fields at the back.

It was in the last described piece of roof that the highwaymen had made a breach.

Consequently they were out of sight of those dragoons who remained on the watch in the yard.

Claude's suggestion was evidently the best that could be made, and it was immediately acted upon.

Slipping down to the edge of the roof, they held by their hands a moment and then dropped.

The distance was by no means great, and they alighted upon some fine soft turf, so that they felt scarcely a shock.

Directly they reached their feet they started off as fast as they could run across the fields, making direct for the plantation which Claude had spoken of.

It was not more than a quarter of a mile distant.

A cry from their foes let them know that they were seen.

By the exercise of very great gymnastic skill, a dragoon had succeeded in getting up into the loft, and the moment he did so he let the ladder down, which enabled his companions to follow him with all expedition.

They ran, of course, first of all to the breach in the roof, and there they saw the highwaymen running with great swiftness across the meadow.

The cry which reached the ears of Claude and Jack was uttered by the dragoons upon the impulse of the moment upon finding that their prey had got so cleverly out of their reach.

It was a cry compounded of anger, rage, and fear.

Some scrambled through the hole in the roof and rolled down recklessly on to the ground.

The others, giving the alarm to their companions, turned round and descended into the stable again.

With great expedition they remounted their steeds, and then, to their dismay, they found they would have to go round some distance to gain the meadow at the back of the stable, for the wall which we have spoken of as enclosing the farm buildings was several feet too high for them to leap.

It was no good grumbling, however, and the less time they lost, the better, for every moment was of infinite value to the highwaymen.

With the utmost speed they got round in a straggling kind of troop into the meadow at the back of the stable, but by the time they arrived here, they found the highwaymen were just plunging into the plantation.

Towards this they galloped at a tremendous rate, for they were determined not to give up the chase until forced to do so.

Our friends had got a tolerable start, however, and both felt themselves to a certain extent safe when they gained the cover of the wood, which was of great extent.

Here the dragoons would have to follow them on foot, for the trees grew too closely together for the horses to make their way between them, so that they would be upon more equal terms with their foes.

Moreover, they had a chance of getting out of sight of their pursuers, and hiding themselves somewhere.

The reader will, however, concede that the dragoons were remarkably expeditious in their movements.

They had descended from the loft, mounted their horses, rode round till they came to the gate leading out of the yard, and reached the meadow, while Claude and Jack, going at their utmost speed, had only been able to run about a quarter of a mile.

Those dragoons who had so precipitately and inconsiderately got through the hole in the roof quickly gave up their idea of chasing the highwaymen on foot.

The weight of their accoutrements, and being so encumbered with weapons, prevented them from taking two steps, while the highwaymen took three; and those who had ridden round reached the confines of the plantation before them.

The soldiers could not forbear from uttering an oath of vexation when they found the highwaymen had fairly taken shelter beneath the trees.

They knew well enough how much it would diminish their chances of effecting their capture.

Nevertheless their blood was up, and they were too much interested in the hunt to give it up, so they alighted from their horses again, and plunged into the wood.

Nothing, however, of Claude and Jack could they see; nor could they, by listening attentively, hear the least sound of their footsteps.

The case began to look hopeless.

So many ways spread out before them, only one of which could be the right, and how were they to distinguish it from all the rest?

Leaving the dragoons to get out of their difficulties in the best way they may, we will return to Claude and Jack, who were by no means out of danger yet, although they had materially bettered their position.

They had ran as they had never ran before, from the stable to the wood, which appeared to them a haven of safety.

The only thing was, should they be able to reach it time enough?

They scarcely dared to think about this.

So far they had succeeded much better than they could have hoped for.

Sixteen-String Jack was amazed, for he had felt inclined to give up at first, so hopeless did it seem to think of escape.

But by the courage and promptitude with which Claude had acted, they were now much better off.

Their heads spun round and round, however, with the violent exertion they had been compelled to make.

Perspiration streamed from every pore, and they gasped painfully for breath.

Their hearts throbbed, and the veins and arteries in their bodies swelled and threatened to burst.

But, in spite of this exhaustion, they kept on at a speed that was absolutely astounding.

As soon, however, as they got beneath the shelter of the trees, they gave a sigh of deep relief.

Success, however, only prompted them to fresh exertion.

Now was the time to render available the advantage they had been lucky enough to gain.

A glance behind them, before plunging into the wood, showed them the dragoons in the distance, galloping with tremendous speed towards them.

This convinced them that they had, indeed, no time to lose.

Choosing their path at random, for they felt that to them all would be alike, they kept on steadily in one direction.

It was important that they should do this.

In a wood it is easy enough to run round in a circle without being conscious of it.

So they kept steadily on.

The wood was of vast extent, as we have previously remarked.

Strictly speaking, however, it was not a wood, but rather a plantation or preserve.

It was the property of the lord of the manor, and it was one extremity of it which abutted upon the grounds in the occupation of the farmer, who rented all from the lord of the manor before mentioned.

As the highwaymen proceeded, they found the trees grew closer and closer to each other, while its appearance of wildness increased.

Suddenly, however, as they ran staggeringly on, Claude, who was first, caught his foot against the root of a tree, which projected slightly above the ground.

He fell down as though shot, for in his exhausted state it did not need much to take him off his legs.

Jack, who was close behind, saw the accident, but not in time to stop or turn aside, so he fell headlong over his companion.

Thus they lay, breathless, and utterly exhausted, unable to move either hand or foot.

CHAPTER CCCCXXII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL DISCOVER A CAPITAL HIDING-PLACE IN THE WOOD.

CONSCIOUSNESS, however, did not abandon them, although they reached the ground with so much violence.

Although they were deprived of speech and breath, yet they were sensible of what had happened, and knew that the dragoons would quickly be upon them.

This was a terrible thought to have.

Unless they could recover themselves sufficiently to rise and seek some hiding-place, they would have all their trouble for nothing.

Indeed, what they had done with so much toil would only disadvantage them, for now they were not in such a good position to resist their foes as they were at first.

If the dragoons came up now they would make them prisoners without any trouble.

They would be bound unresistingly.

Terrible were the efforts which the worn-out highwaymen made to regain their feet.

All, however, were in vain.

They could do nothing but gasp for breath.

They were not able even to curse their own impotency.

It seemed to them, in the excited and anxious state of mind in which they were, that they laid thus helpless on the turf for a long, long time.

But this was a delusion.

In reality, hardly two minutes elapsed.

At the end of that time, they, with many struggles, rose to their feet.

They listened, but they could hear no sounds which indicated a dangerous proximity to their foes.

When they stood up they felt much better, and every second that now elapsed witnessed an improvement.

"All is well so far, Jack," said Claude Duval. "I have hopes, after all, that we shall be able to make our escape. In the first place we must find a hiding-place of some sort or other. Come, follow me."

"Do not go fast, Claude; there is no occasion for us to increase our distress by making great speed. Keep on gently. We are now, I take it, in the very heart of the wood."

"It seems so, for the trees grow close enough together."

"They do, and this undergrowth would almost serve us as a hiding-place."

"We will endeavour first to find a better, my friend."

While speaking thus, the highwaymen, at a walking pace, penetrated still deeper and deeper into the wood.

At every step the growth of vegetation became denser and denser.

This was a pleasant discovery for them to make, because they were aware of how much it would diminish the chances of their foes being able to perceive them.

Whether the dragoons had started off on some wrong track they knew not.

It seemed strange that they could hear nothing of them.

But our friends were too wary to be lulled into a sense of false security by this silence.

On the contrary, they were the more suspicious and apprehensive, for they believed that it portended some deep-laid scheme on the part of their foes.

The highwaymen, however, had left no visible track behind them.

The dragoons were not well enough skilled in woodcraft to be able to trace them by their footsteps on the grass, or by the twigs which they had broken and displaced in their progress.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, if they wandered off in a wrong direction.

Claude and Jack, as they got more and more involved in the intricacies of the wood, looked keenly about them on all sides in search of a hiding-place, but nothing of the kind could they discover.

There was the brake, and the gorse, and furze bushes, beneath which they could have easily concealed themselves, but there was too much danger of discovery, for the dragoons would probably make a close search, and beat the underwood in all directions.

At length Claude paused.

"Jack," he said, "there is no good going on like this; we shall travel till we come to the other side of the wood, and then a nice fix we shall be in."

"What do you propose, Claude? Where is there that we can hide ourselves?"

"That is the question. It seems to me that the best thing we can do is to climb up a tree."

Sixteen-String Jack shook his head.

"I am afraid that will not prove a very good or very safe hiding-place."

"Why not? The wood is full of trees, and how are the dragoons to tell in which particular one we take up our quarters? Clearly they have no idea of our immediate whereabouts, and it would be an endless task to search the trees one by one."

"Very true, Claude, it would. I begin to think now that a tree would answer our purpose best."

"It would, you may depend."

"I should have no doubts upon the matter if it were night, but you must not forget it is broad day."

"I know it is, and that is a circumstance in our disfavour. Still, a tree served us once excellently, and I think one will again."

"I hope so. But you must remember that, when we had ourselves in one before, it was at night."

"So it was. But come, since we have decided upon what we are to do, let us look out for a tree that seems best adapted for our purpose."

"We shall not have much trouble in doing that, for we have plenty to select from. Look, yonder seems to be a

regular thicket of branches. They grow so thickly together, that you can't see the sky between them."

"That will be the place, then, my friend. Come on. Hark! I am afraid we have dallied too long."

Both listened, and very faintly they could hear the murmuring of voices and the crackling of bushes, as persons forced their way through them.

"We must make haste if we are to hide ourselves."

"Yes, come on. Here we are."

Our friends were very fast recovering from the effects of their tremendous exertions.

They were able to speak to each other freely and easily, and beyond all doubt they would be able to perform the feat of climbing up the tree.

Claude and Jack paused before one, the trunk of which was of extraordinary dimensions.

They selected it because it grew very closely to four or five others, and the branches of the whole overhead united, and formed an impervious mass of branches.

Besides which they were evergreens, and their long dark leaves seemed to afford them every facility for hiding themselves.

From the fact of the trunks of the trees growing so close to each other, the highwaymen were able to climb up with tolerable ease.

The one with the large trunk had many rough inequalities in its bark.

These they grasped, and not without some difficulty, managed to scramble up.

As soon as they could reach to take hold of the branches their progress became easier, and, in less time than it takes to write it, they reached the top of the tree.

Here, however, a surprise awaited them, and it was fortunate for their personal safety that they made the discovery at the moment they did.

The tree with the large trunk was really a natural phenomenon.

Upon reaching a certain height, our friends found that very few branches actually came from it, but its upper portion was completely buried by the leaves and branches of the other trees that grew in such immediate proximity to it.

This trunk was hollow.

The whole of the inner part of the tree had completely decayed away.

Still the circle round it was of no inconsiderable thickness, and it was from this circle that the boughs of this singular tree received their nourishment.

"What do you think of that, Claude?" said Sixteen-String Jack, as he pointed to the hollow in the trunk which we have described.

"It is the most singular place I ever saw."

"What do you think of it for a hiding-place?"

"A hiding-place?"

"Yes."

"Why, I confess I should like the idea of dropping down into it. In the first place there would be the difficulty of getting up again, and then there is the danger that it is the lair of some wild beast or other, for the place seems excellently well adapted to that purpose."

"There's a good deal of sense in what you say; but with regard to the first objection, I don't think we should have much trouble in getting up again if we lower ourselves down."

"Well, perhaps not; but how if some other creature has taken up its quarters here?"

"We can soon ascertain that."

"How?"

"Drop something down. A pistol will do."

Claude took an unloaded pistol from his pocket and dropped it down the hollow of the tree.

They heard it strike against the bottom, but no other sound followed.

From this they came to the conclusion that it was empty.

It was just at this moment they were startled by some sounds, which showed very unequivocally that the dragoons were close at hand.

"Quick, Claude!" said Sixteen-String Jack. "Make up your mind at once, or it will be too late. In another moment the dragoons will be upon us."

"What do you advise?"

"I should say drop down at all risks. I consider the chances are all against the dragoons finding us in such an unlikely hiding-place. We have left no clue by which they can follow us to this place; and while we are hidden in the trunk of this tree, we shall escape a danger to which we should most certainly have been exposed if we had concealed ourselves among the branches."

"What is that?"

"Why, you may depend that the dragoons, if they heard the least stir among the branches of a tree, or if they fancied they could distinguish any dark object among them, they would not scruple to point their carbines at it and fire."

"True."

"To be sure, we might not be hit; and yet again we might one of us receive an ugly wound."

"That decides me. Let us go down into the trunk."

"Hush! Quietly! Make no more noise than you can possibly help. The dragoons are almost within sight. Do not speak again."

This good advice was taken.

Rapidly and yet noiselessly, Claude lowered himself down into the trunk of the tree.

He held by his two hands at his full length, and then, not without a slight feeling of misgiving at his heart, let go.

He reached the bottom in safety, and gave his comrade a whispered assurance to that effect; who, however, immediately cautioned him to be silent as he valued his life.

Sixteen-String Jack now lowered himself into the tree, and, in less than a moment, was standing in safety by the side of his companion.

Owing to the enormous girth of the tree, the inside portion, that was hollow, was large enough to have contained at least four persons to stand within it, though they would have had some trouble to move.

But the two highwaymen had plenty of room to move about.

They kept perfectly still, however, for fear that any movement they might make should reach the ears of their enemies, who were now very close at hand indeed.

The highwaymen would have given anything could they but have seen what was going on outside, but it was perfectly useless to think of such a thing as this, so they were forced to content themselves with stretching their sense of hearing to the utmost extent.

What they heard was far indeed from being encouraging.

On the contrary, it was calculated to produce an opposite effect.

No sooner had they placed their ears against the tree to listen, than they heard a confused Babel of voices, and the trampling of many footsteps.

Then the next sound almost shot through them like a bullet, so suddenly did it come upon them.

That word was "Halt!"

From the manner in which it was spoken our friends could tell that a soldier had pronounced it.

Why should the dragoons halt there, so close to the spot where they were hidden?

Could it be possible that they had been heard or seen?

Their hearts almost ceased to beat as they fancied this, perhaps, was the case; for the place in which they were, though good as a hiding-place, yet was bad in case the dragoons should learn they were there.

The suspense which they endured can therefore be imagined.

The command was instantly obeyed.

The trampling of feet and the murmuring of voices abruptly ceased.

"This is as near the centre of the wood as can be," said a voice, which sounded so close to our friends that they could scarcely forbear a start.

"Very well, then," said another voice, "we will commence at once."

"Shall I order the bugle to be blown?"

"Yes."

The word was given, and then, very much to the surprise of our friends, three clear notes upon a bugle were given.

The pretty musical sounds awakened a thousand echoes in the leafy recesses of the wood.

Scarcely, however, had those echoes died away than the bugle-call was responded to by several others, which seemed to come from a great distance.

Then another bugle-note was blown close to the tree.

This was repeated at brief intervals.

In their uncomfortable position in the tree, our friends heard all this, and wondered what in the world it meant.

CHAPTER CCCCXXIII.

THE OFFICER OF DRAGOONS TAKES SOME VERY EFFICIENT MEASURES TO PREVENT THE ESCAPE OF THE HIGHWAYMEN FROM THE PLANTATION.

In order to account for these inexplicable movements on the part of the dragoons, we must go back to the time when they arrived at the wood just five minutes too late.

The officer in command saw that it would be ridiculous to run through the wood at random after the highwaymen, and so he hastened to summon his men about him.

Then the plan which he adopted and the orders which he issued, were military in the extreme.

He had seen with his own eyes our friends enter the wood, and he resolved to besiege them there, and take such precautions as would effectually prevent them leaving it without his knowledge.

Accordingly he commanded the greater portion of his troop to mount, and to post themselves round the wood in such a manner as to be in sight of each other.

Then he (the commanding officer), with a few of his men, would make his way to as near the centre of the wood as he could get.

As soon as he arrived here, one should blow three loud blasts upon a bugle to announce the fact.

These sounds the others were to reply to, and then enter the wood, taking care to leave no bush unexamined in their progress.

All were to make their way towards the centre where he was standing; and, in order that they should have no difficulty in knowing where the centre was, the bugleman should blow a note upon his instrument at frequent intervals, which sound would form a capital guide to them.

This, then, was the explanation of the strange sound which the highwaymen had heard, and, as the reader will readily believe, they puzzled their brains in vain to account for it.

It was not likely that they would be able to arrive by speculation merely at the real state of affairs.

The commanding officer and the few men who were with him, all unconsciously followed almost in the very steps of the highwaymen.

They kept a sharp look-out on their way, but they were not keen-sighted enough to see anything that was calculated to excite their suspicions.

At length they reached the very tree in which the highwaymen had concealed themselves; and, judging themselves, to be in the centre of the wood, the blasts had been blown upon the bugle in the manner we have related.

The answering notes were given, and the dragoons, who had formed a circle round the wood, set themselves in motion, each one directing his steps towards the centre of the wood.

On their way they beat all the bushes with their carbines, and peered narrowly among the naked branches of the trees, but, of course, without being able to see anything, though several random and useless shots were fired.

At first the dragoons, who formed a circle round the wood, were at some considerable distance from each other, but, as they drew nearer to the centre, the circle became diminished in circumference, and they got yet closer to each other, until they were able to touch, and, finally, they were compelled to form a circle two deep.

It was a good idea to endeavour to drive the highwaymen into the centre of the wood, for they could not have broken through the ring; and had they not sought shelter as they did, or had they concealed themselves among the bushes, as they at first thought of doing, they would inevitably have been discovered.

As it was, the soldiers had all their trouble for nothing, and their officer's very clever scheme produced no results.

Ere long the centre was reached.

The men advanced to their officer in an unbroken circle, but they drove no highwaymen before them

Upon seeing this, the officer in command uttered a curse of vexation, for he made sure that this excellent scheme would answer the purpose he had in view.

But it did not.

"What is to be done now?" asked the one second in command.

"It is quite certain they are in the wood?"

"Quite, sir."

"They have hidden themselves, then?"

"I am afraid that is it."

"What are we to do then?"

"Well, the men have tramped through pretty well every square foot of the plantation without finding them, and one might just as well look for a needle in a bottle of hay as try to find them!"

"I am afraid so. But look you, I will not give up this adventure until I have captured or slain them. I am determined not to have all this trouble for nothing. My blood is up, and let them beware!"

"What do you propose, sir?"

"Let me think a moment, and you, Locksley, try if you can suggest something that you think likely to answer our purpose."

As the speakers were within a yard of the hollow tree in which the highwaymen stood, of course they overheard every word; and, with an impatience which perhaps may be conceived, they waited to hear what was further said.

A silence of some few minutes' duration ensued, and then the officer said—

"Have you thought of anything, Locksley?"

"Yes, I have thought of one scheme, sir."

"What is it? Let me hear it at once."

"I propose, then, that the men should be stationed round the wood at a short distance from each other, and ordered to keep close watch, and to give an immediate alarm if anything of an unusual character took place."

"That is just what I had thought of, Locksley," said the chief officer.

Locksley bowed.

It was generally in this manner that his superior availed himself of his suggestions.

"Then you think that is the best thing that can be done, sir?" said Locksley.

"I do."

"So do I. These villains are hidden somewhere in the wood, and no doubt, while it is daylight, will keep close enough; but as soon as night comes they will try to steal off."

"Then, Locksley, I will place such a guard round this plantation that not even a hare could leave it without my knowledge."

"You cannot do better, sir."

The officer now called his men together, and marched them off to the outskirts of the plantation, where he saw to their being posted himself.

He also took the trouble to particularly impress their duty upon them one by one.

He had not so many men under his control as he could have wished for this service.

He would have preferred to have had them much closer to each other.

This was impossible, and he was obliged to do the best he could.

The men would have to be a little extra vigilant, that was all; and he took care to impress upon them that it would answer their purpose to be so, since there would be all the fewer to divide the reward among.

The men promised to be more attentive, and with this assurance the officer had to remain content.

Let us now return to Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack in their perilous and uncomfortable position in the tree.

They heard the conversation between Locksley and the officer with a feeling akin to dismay.

They did not venture to speak or move, however, until some time after all the dragoons had left the spot, and then, in a low and anxious tone of voice, Sixteen-String Jack addressed his companion.

"Claude—Claude!" he said. "Can you hear me?"

"Yes—yes."

"Speak low, for fear we should be overheard. What do you think now?"

"I think we have escaped one great danger."

"Yes, unquestionably we have; but then we are threatened with one of equal magnitude."

"I fear so."

"I am certain. If we wait here till night, I am afraid shall be discovered if we attempt to leave."

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[DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING AWAIT THE ARRIVAL OF CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.]

We must wait till night comes. It is some hours off yet."

"I know that."

"We cannot do better, then, in my judgment, than occupy ourselves with considering what stratagem we can adopt to elude the vigilance of the soldiers."

"But, Claude, do you forget we have lost our horses?"

"Certainly not."

"Do you bear in mind that the dragoons are mounted, and that, if we attempt to fly from them on foot, we shall be overtaken easily?"

"I know all about that, my friend, and you must not be cast down by these numerous dangers. We shall get out of them if we will only keep up our courage. Think what we have already done.

"Our escape so far is little short of miraculous, I grant."

"Pho! pho! It was brought about entirely by promptitude of action and presence of mind."

"Well, well, Claude, whatever credit there is must certainly belong to you, and I grant it to you readily enough. But what chances are there that we shall be able to keep our appointment with Dick Turpin and Tom King?"

"There are obstacles in the way of it, I confess; but then the hour fixed for the meeting is a good way off yet, and we shall have in the meanwhile to surmount the obstacles which obstruct our path."

Jack laughed.

"You take the matter very coolly, Claude!"

"I do; because, having been successful so far, I cannot help thinking we shall be able to get out of the difficulty."

"I hope we shall."

"These dragoons are but thick-headed fellows at the best of times, and so soddened with discipline that they would scarcely do anything without an officer was behind them to give the order. I grant, then, that they would obey quickly enough."

"But Claude, seriously; what do you think of doing?"

"It is certain we must remain here until night, or rather until it is quite dark. I should then recommend that we get out of this tree and creep towards the outskirts of the plantation as stealthily as ever we are able, and watch the opportunity to get off."

"What then?"

"We must steal away unperceived."

"Difficult."

"It will depend, in a great measure, upon the amount of vigilance the sentinels make use of and the darkness of the night. Now, if it should happen to be bright moonlight, it would be difficult, I grant you."

"There is no fear of that, then. The moon is in her last quarter, and does not rise until just before daybreak."

"That is all right, then."

"What about our horses?"

"I am afraid we must abandon them."

"But if we are pursued, what chance shall we have of escaping while on foot?"

"We must do the best we can. You may depend our horses are taken great care of, and if we were to go near with the intention of regaining possession of them we shall be nabbed to a certainty."

"We must give up that idea, then. I am reluctant, I confess."

"So am I, for they are a couple of serviceable, valuable animals. Luckily, however, through stopping the farmer last night, we have got enough to purchase two more, of quite as good quality."

"I suppose that is what we shall have to do."

"Wait till night comes, and we get free from the wood, we shall then be better able to see what we shall do."

"I am afraid, Claude, by the way you speak, that you under-estimate our danger."

"I don't think I do, but I should prefer that to over-estimating it."

"I suppose you mean that for me?"

"No, not particularly so; but I shall think it very strange if we are not able to get the better of these dunder-headed dragoons."

"You force me to smile."

"So much the better, then. It was very kind of the dragoons to allow us to remain at the farmhouse long enough to make such a good meal as we did. It will enable us to go some hours without food without feeling much inconvenience."

"You are right enough, there."

"Come, Jack, if we talk to each other, the time that we are doomed to spend here will pass away all the more quickly and more pleasantly than if we remain silent."

"I am philosopher enough to know that."

"Prove it, then, by acting so. I fancy you are too much cast down by our danger. It is great, I confess, but not so great as that which we have passed through unhurt, and I am in hopes that all will yet be well."

CHAPTER CCCCXXIV.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN ARE DETECTED IN THEIR ATTEMPT TO LEAVE THE WOOD.

In this manner, then, did the two highwaymen endeavour to wile away the time between then and nightfall.

But, in spite of all their efforts, it seemed a long and weary time.

They were cramped and tired with remaining so long in one position.

To be sure, they rested themselves as well as they could, by planting their heels firmly in the ground and leaning their backs against the tree, but that was irksome and tiresome.

During all the hours which elapsed they heard nothing whatever of the dragoons, so they came to the conclusion that they were all posted on the outskirts of the plantation.

Such was the case.

The men were scarcely less tired than our friends.

At first they were uncommonly sharp, and looked keenly about them whenever they heard the least sound, but they soon got off this when they found each time that the alarm was a groundless one.

Sounds, which at first would have attracted their utmost attention, were now allowed to pass by unheeded.

If this state of things continued, it would afford the highwaymen an additional chance of escape.

But, as all things must have an end, so had this day, which certainly seemed to Claude and Jack to be the longest one they had ever spent in their lives.

To their relief, however, darkness began gradually to steal over the face of nature.

Still they stirred not.

They calculated correctly that the dragoons would be roused into fresh attention by the approach of night.

Clearly, then, it would be best to wait until this feeling had time enough to wear off.

It was well they did so.

Soon after sunset the commanding officer went round and visited the sentinels.

He stopped before each one, and expressly bade them to be vigilant, for night having come the highwaymen would be almost certain to attempt to get off.

That they were in the wood he was certain; had they left it he must have been made aware of the circumstance, therefore he told the men that it depended solely upon the quickness of their eyesight whether they received the reward.

This had the effect of sharpening the soldiers up again a little.

It grew darker and darker, until at length night fairly came.

Still they heard nothing of the highwaymen.

No unusual sound broke the silence of the night, and they fast began to relapse into their old state of restlessness.

That Claude and Jack were heartily glad when night did come, the reader need scarcely be told.

Still they did not offer to move for a long, long time; until, indeed, they fancied the vigilance of the dragoons had again relaxed.

At length, however, they deemed it time to make a move.

As had at first been feared, they found it rather a difficult task to get out of the hollow tree, for the inner surface was just as smooth as the outer was rough.

Had there been only one person, escape would have been impossible without the assistance of some one, but as it was, Sixteen-String Jack got upon Claude's shoulders, steadying himself by the sides of the tree.

When here he found he could reach the top easily enough, and in a moment drew himself up.

Then leaning down he took hold of Claude's hands, who, by this assistance, was enabled to reach the top in safety also.

Here they paused for a moment to listen.

But all was still, and they ventured to descend.

In order to make all quite clear, it may be as well to state that this night was the one upon which Tom King had his terrible adventure on the road.

Having reached the foot of the tree, the highwaymen looked up at the sky.

The stars were twinkling overhead; and, after gazing a a moment, they perceived the pole-star.

This was enough to indicate the route they wished to take.

Their course was westward, and that was the direction which they took.

At every few steps, as they made their way through the wood, they paused to listen; and when they had assured themselves that all was well, they went once again.

It so happened, that by going in a westerly direction, as they did, they took the longest way out of the wood, which stretched out in that direction until it terminated in a point.

After some time the thinness of the vegetation, and the increased distance which appeared between the trees, warned our friends that the outskirts of the plantation were close at hand.

It behoved them now to be doubly cautious.

Their only hope of escape, and, under the circumstances, it was a very frail one, was that they should depart instantly out of the wood, unseen by any of the dragoons.

This was difficult; but, if they were once seen, their capture would be certain, for the dragoons being mounted, would overtake them in a moment, let them run as fast as they could.

Finding how near they had got to the outskirts of the

wood, the highwaymen redoubled their care, and crept through the bushes with a silentness that would have done credit to a red Indian.

Lying down at full length upon the ground they crawled along like snakes.

Suddenly Sixteen-String Jack paused, and placed his hand upon Claude's arm.

He stopped immediately.

Jack pointed forwards.

Claude followed the direction of his finger.

He then found that the outer limit of the wood had been reached.

Another yard and they would be out of its shelter.

Eagerly they looked out into the darkness.

But though they strained their eyes to the utmost they could see nothing of the sentries.

Before them there seemed to be a long, flat, open space, and beyond in the distance they could perceive a number of twinkling lights.

From what they proceeded, or what they meant, our friends were equally ignorant.

They gazed at them for a few moments, for, of course, their curiosity was excited when they saw anything that they could not understand.

But gazing did not dissipate their ignorance in the least.

The one part of it seemed as though the lights proceeded from a mansion, every window of which was illuminated; but there were numerous other twinkling lights, besides these stretching in every direction, and at various irregular distances from this ground, and from each other.

The more our friends gazed at this the more they were puzzled.

Jack was about to make some remark in reference to it, when Claude abruptly checked him.

He was silent, and then there came upon his ears the faint sound of a horse's hoofs.

This was the sound which Claude's ears had caught.

The horse was coming at a walking pace.

Doubtless it was one of the sentinels.

Eagerly our friends gazed in the direction from which the sounds came.

At length they perceived, though dimly and indistinctly, the figures of a horse and rider.

Upon the latter there was some glittering object, which caught the rays of light and reflected them.

It was a dragoon, and, in accordance with his instructions, he was pacing up and down that portion of ground which had been allotted him.

The highwaymen never took their eyes off him for a moment.

Steadily he advanced, and presently arrived opposite to them.

He did not pause, but still continued on his way.

By degrees he faded from their sight, and then, in the faintest possible whisper, Claude Duval ventured to address his companion.

"Now, Jack," he said, "we have a chance to speak. What are we to do?"

"That is a sentinel."

"I know it."

"We must find out how long it takes him to go up and down his beat, and ascertain by the time when he is furthest from us. That will be the moment for us to creep out as we now are; for if we keep close to the ground, and make no noise, I will defy them to perceive us."

"Good. Listen!"

They did so, but the sound of the horse's feet died quite away, nor did they hear it again for some little time.

This was at once a proof that the soldier had rather a long distance to go.

It would now be necessary, before they moved, to ascertain when the sentinel was furthest away from the spot where they lay.

This the highwaymen ascertained by counting the time it took him to go from one end of the beat to the other, and then halving it.

They counted one hundred and thirty from the time he passed them till he returned again, so it followed that when they had counted sixty-five, he would be just about to turn round, and, consequently, at the greatest distance from them.

That would be the opportunity.

The sentinel passed them again, and once more they began to count as nearly as possible at the same rate as before.

When they had reached up to fifty they began to move.

Like two snakes they crept forward.

Their hearts beat painfully as they got out into the open space.

But though they listened with the utmost intentness they could hear no sound.

The least precipitation would ruin all, and so they did not quicken their pace, but continued to crawl on in the same slow and stealthy manner.

Soon they heard the sentinel returning, but they had the presence of mind not to allow it to cause them to hasten and so betray their whereabouts.

Although their progress was so slow, still every moment seemed to take them further and further from the wood.

They were thus congratulating themselves, when their hands came in contact with something that seemed like wire or strong twine.

It was stretched tightly, about six inches above the ground, and their hands struck against it as they crawled onwards.

Ere they could think what it was a tremendous report ensued, which was immediately followed by another.

Then two fierce blue-lights sprung up which illuminated all around for a considerable distance.

Our friends started, bewildered, to their feet.

Then bugles were blown, and the trampling of horses' feet followed.

They were discovered.

They had fallen into some snare which the cunning dragoons had laid for them.

What kind of snare it was they did not pause to think.

At that instant the bare knowledge was sufficient.

Their first thought was to run for their lives, and they set forward at a speed which was absolutely wonderful.

Upon their fleetness their safety would depend.

For a moment we must pause in order to explain to the reader by what means their discovery had been brought about.

The dragoon, Locksley, who acted as a kind of lieutenant to the officer in command of the troop, was a man most fertile in expedients.

He had set his heart upon the capture of the highwaymen, and he resolved to leave no means untried to bring about that desirable event.

Accordingly, when the men had been posted round the plantation, he began to tax his brain for some other scheme by which he could make sure of them not leaving the wood undetected.

Several plans suggested themselves to him, and at length he hit upon one which he thought would exactly answer his purpose.

The scheme was really a good one, and as soon as it was proposed to the commanding officer it was adopted and acted upon.

It was this.

A quantity of twine was procured and cut into certain lengths.

The ends of each of these pieces of twine were tied round the triggers of two loaded carbines.

Then these were planted in such a manner that the string from them was stretched tightly across the ground, so that the least pressure upon it would draw the well-oiled triggers and cause the carbines to explode.

But this was not all.

Close to each carbine a heap of inflammable matter was placed, in such a manner that the discharge of the firearm would set light to it.

This was so arranged as to light up the surrounding scene and enable them to see the highwaymen.

The reader will admit that this was a capital scheme.

Locksley thought our friends would catch their feet against the string as they were walking onwards, which would inevitably produce the discharge.

But the highwaymen touched it with their hands, and the same result ensued.

The wood was surrounded in this manner, so that unless the highwaymen were aware of what they were about, it would be utterly impossible for them to get away unseen.

The bugles were blown as a signal to the sentinels that it was no longer needful for them to watch.

And the bright light which was burning served them as a beacon, and enabled them to make their way to the right spot without delay.

CHAPTER CCCCXXV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL STRUGGLE DESPERATELY AGAINST THEIR FATE.

Such, then, is the explanation of what occurred, and it will be seen that our friends were now more menaced with danger than they had been hitherto.

Those dragoons who were nearest to them at once caught sight of their flying forms, as they were brought into view by the bright light, and a pursuit at once commenced.

The highwaymen were in a state of mind that fairly baffles all description.

Still they were sufficiently master of their thoughts to know that what they had to do was to run as fast as their legs would carry them.

But they could hear the dragoons come thundering in the rear, and how were they to out-distance horses?

They kept on in a straight line.

Just before them were the twinkling lights.

As they looked they saw that their first conjecture was correct.

There was a mansion there, every window of which was lighted up with extraordinary brilliancy, as though some unusual merriment was going on within.

But the other lights remained a mystery, until, upon a nearer approach, our friends found that they were tiny lamps suspended to the branches of some trees, with which the mansion was partly surrounded.

The strains of music, too, came upon their ears, telling that some scene of great rejoicing was going on.

Seeing this, a fresh thought sprung up in the minds of the highwaymen.

In this place, where many persons were assembled, they would, doubtless, be able to conceal themselves.

It was their only chance.

Before them was a low wall, and over this they leaped with reckless agility.

They were now within the grounds of the mansion.

Heedless of the obstacles which stood in their way, our friends flew rapidly onwards, past the house, and to the other side of the grounds, where all the trees were also illuminated.

The mansion was the property of the lord of the manor, and it was a lucky thing our friends sought shelter where they did.

The dragoons saw them leap the wall, but did not follow them.

The officer had too much respect for the occupants of the mansion to disturb their merrymaking by an intrusion with his soldiers.

There was a ball there in honour of the marriage of the lord of the manor's only son, and some of the highest and noblest were present at it.

The dragoons were therefore bidden to keep a sharp look-out, while the officer, attended by one or two, dismounted and got over the wall.

They hoped, by this course, to either capture the highwaymen or drive them away from the place where they had sought refuge; and if they succeeded in doing the latter, the dragoons who were stationed outside would seize them.

On went Claude and Sixteen-String Jack, aware only of one circumstance, and that was that they had got a start of their foes.

Suddenly, however, as they ran along a path, they heard voices and approaching footsteps.

They paused instantly.

Discovery seemed imminent.

There could be no doubt some one was approaching them.

They had no resource but to turn back, for on each side the path was bounded by a thick-set hedge, through which it would have been impossible to force a way.

Accordingly they turned back.

They recollected that a moment before they had passed what looked like a summer-house.

Perhaps this would afford them a momentary shelter while the persons who were coming passed by.

They were the more inclined to do this, because they were so terribly exhausted by the speed they had made.

Into the little summer-house then, for such it was, they darted, and shut the door behind them.

A small lamp hung from the dome-like ceiling, and by the aid of this they could see about them.

There was a little round table in the centre, formed curiously of the trunk of a large tree.

There were quaint, old-fashioned seats, too, in the place.

But they glanced around them anxiously, eager to find some place of concealment which would serve to prevent them from being seen should any one chance to enter.

There was but one place that offered the least chance of safety, and that was so slight a one that they hesitated to make use of it.

But as there was no other, and as they could hear footsteps coming nearer and nearer, they were driven to make use of it.

Across one of the corners in the summer-house was a wooden screen, such as may be seen in many houses at the present day.

It formed a seat somewhat like a bench, and was furnished with a tall back, which served the double purpose of a rest for the back and a shield from currents of cold air.

As this screen was placed across the corner, there was, of course, a space behind it which was quite large enough to conceal our friends.

They pointed it out to each other, and then, as we have said, were driven by the exigency of the moment to seek shelter there.

Quickly, then, they scrambled over the back and let themselves down behind it, where, at any rate, they were out of sight.

They were only just in time.

Scarcely had they settled themselves, than the door of the summer-house was opened.

The murmur of voices fell upon the ears of the highwaymen.

They listened eagerly and intently, for they felt that all that occurred concerned them.

"Come this way, dearest," they heard a voice say in tender accents. "Let us enter here and sit down awhile. It will be a relief both to you and to me to escape from the giddy throng which have to-night assembled here."

It was a man's voice who spoke these words in that tone which a true lover ever adopts.

The highwaymen could also tell by the sound of his voice that he was a young man.

He was replied to by a faint whisper—so faint that our friends could only guess its purport.

The rustling of a dress followed, and then both seated themselves upon the very screen behind which Claude and Jack had hidden themselves.

A cold perspiration broke out upon the brows of both.

They were now prisoners, inasmuch as they could not move without discovery, and they might remain so for an infinite period of time; for how could they tell how long the lovers—for such they were—would remain seated in the arbour?

Discovery and capture were now most imminent.

Their hiding-place was too flimsy and artificial to answer their purpose.

In a moment or two the dragoons would arrive.

They would search the summer-house as a matter of course, and it would follow as a natural consequence that they would be found.

Indeed, in all probability, the space behind the screen would be the first place where they would look.

Yet there they were.

To move or to remain would both be fatal.

They could not leave without being seen by the people.

An alarm would be the result.

The dragoons would be upon the right track, and then there would be an end.

Feeling convinced that they could not possibly better their position by moving, they resolved to remain quite passive, allowing events to take their own course, and trusting wholly to their luck.

Both repented now that they had entered the summer-house at all, but that regret was perfectly useless now.

The words of the young people fell upon their ears, but still they listened to them.

Indeed, they found it impossible not to do so.

Indeed, as minute after minute glided by, and they heard nothing of the dragoons, our friends felt their hopes revive a little.

"Do you not feel more at ease here, dear Minnie?" said the young man to his companion, his voice sunk almost to a whisper. "Do you not feel more at ease here, in the silence and solitude of this place, than in the apartments of your father's mansion, among those who have met there to-night?"

There was a faint sigh, and then the young girl who had been called Minnie, said—

"Yes, Ernest."

"You sigh, dearest, in a way that seems to deny what you have said. No, no; you cannot mean that?"

"I do not, Ernest. You wrong me if you entertain such a thought; but when you mentioned my father"——

"Alas! alas!"

"I could echo your words. Oh! Ernest, although you are with me, I feel very, very wretched."

"No, no. Do not say that, Minnie dear; pray do not. I know why you are wretched. It is because you fear that"——

"I fear that my father will discover all, and then his anger will, indeed, be terrible. Oh! Ernest, I think we had better leave this place for fear we should be found here together."

"That is a groundless apprehension, dear one; I am sure it is. As you know full well, this summer-house is situated in the most retired spot in all the grounds, and is rarely visited by anyone. Then the guests are all within the house, and it is thought that you are in your chamber, suffering from sudden indisposition."

"I know all that, Ernest, but yet I cannot help feeling terrified. My heart is weighed down with a presentiment that something terrible is about to happen."

"Dismiss your fears, my dear one; you have, indeed, nothing to apprehend."

"Perhaps not, Ernest; but do you know when you met me on the staircase I was sick at heart. I had retired from the banquet, for I could not bear to contemplate my brother's happiness and think on my own misery."

"Oh! dearest"——

"I was forced to return, Ernest, and then you met me. I saw my father smile upon my brother Edgar and his new-made bride, and then I thought of you, Ernest; and —and—I knew he would never smile on us as he did on them."

A gush of tears choked further speech, and the young man strove earnestly to alleviate her anguish and cheer her spirits.

The two highwaymen were deeply touched and very much interested by what they had heard.

Fragmentary and incomplete as the story was, they were nevertheless able to fill up the missing links in the chain without difficulty.

The plaintive tone in which the young girl, Minnie, had spoken went straight to their hearts, and so deeply were they engrossed with her distress, that they to a great extent forgot their own danger.

Gradually Minnie—for by this sweet name we may as well in future call her—grew calmer as her lover continued to pour his arguments into her ear.

Her sobs ceased, and tears no longer came from her eyes.

"Be of good heart," said Ernest; "be of good heart. Let us hope that ere long things will wear a brighter aspect."

"What hope is there that such will be the case?" asked Minnie. "I tremble when I think of the anger of my father, should he by any unlucky chance discover our attachment."

"Do not anticipate evil," said her companion. It will be bad enough when it really comes."

"I know that, Ernest; but I feel so low-spirited to-night. I am sure something dreadful is going to happen."

"You think too much about your brother."

"I do think of him, and I cannot help it. Alas! his choice is approved by my father. Oh! how very, very happy he must be."

"Think not of him, dear one. Would, indeed, that your father approved of your choice! Let us hope that ere long he will do so."

Minnie shook her head.

"I am afraid that is hopeless, Ernest. But let us go now. We must part. If we were discovered here together"——

"There is little fear of that, dear one; but since you wish to leave, I will not detain you against your inclination. You are unwell; you are suffering from nervousness. I will go with you towards the house as far as I dare, and then you must retire. In the morning you will be better."

"Yes. Let us go now," said Minnie. "Let us go."

"One moment, dearest. Let us say farewell here while we are alone, for fear we should not be afforded another opportunity."

A silence followed, which was broken only by the sound of kisses, which were distinctly audible to our friends.

But hark!

The silence is broken in upon by another sound.

The lovers start to their feet with faces blanched with terror.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack draw in their breaths, and prepare themselves for the worst.

The sound grows louder and more unequivocal, until at length no doubt can be entertained of its character.

It was the measured tramp, tramp, tramp, of heavy footsteps.

CHAPTER CCCXXVI.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD HAVE AN EXPLANATION WITH EACH OTHER.

IMMINENT and critical as the position of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack now is, we are compelled to break off for a brief space and return to the doings of the chief characters in our narrative, and, having brought their adventures up to a proper point, we shall be able to revert to the summer-house, and describe the strange occurrences that there took place on that most eventful evening.

It is to the ruined mansion in which Dick Turpin and Tom King and Maud have for a time been taking up their abode, that we wish to direct the attention of the reader.

It is the day preceding the night upon which the meeting on the Finchley-road was appointed to take place, though it does not seem at present that Claude and Jack stand much chance of keeping it.

The abundant supply of firewood which Dick Turpin and Tom King had obtained by breaking up the door was a great comfort, and, by throwing small pieces on the fire, they were able to keep it replenished without causing much smoke, the escape of which from any of the old chimneys would at once betray their presence there.

They were not short of food, for both Turpin and King had carried away as many eatables as they conveniently could from the "Mountain Rill" inn, and of a small portion of this they now partook.

They resolved to be sparing, for they had not enough to last them very long, and there might be a good deal of trouble about procuring a second supply.

When this scanty meal was over, Tom King rose and announced his intention of going to look after the horses, as he was sure they required attention.

"Be cautious, Tom," said Turpin. "If you are seen it will be all over with us."

"Never fear, Dick. I will be careful. I shall not be long away."

Tom King left the room for a double purpose.

It was necessary that he should pay a visit to the horses, but he wished to leave Maud and Turpin alone, for he knew that some explanation would have to take place between them.

Dick understood him, and, almost as soon as the door closed, he said—

"Come, Maud, dearest! what do you think of this old mansion?"

"It is a gloomy, dispiriting old place; but I doubt not that it will afford us a safe shelter."

"I have every hope that it will do so. It depends chiefly upon ourselves. It is not my intention to remain here long, however. I think I shall be able to find a more comfortable abode."

"But would it be as safe?"

"Quite. Indeed I may say safer."

"Safer?

"Yes; but before we talk further upon this subject we must have Claude and Jack with us."

"It is to-night that you have appointed to meet them is it not?"

"Yes, dearest; and that brings me to the point which I wished to reach."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, you were present when the appointment was made and agreed to, and, therefore, I need not repeat anything about it."

"No, you need not. It is on the Finchley road?"

"Yes; and Claude and Jack will be there some time between midnight and daybreak."

"Just so. Well, Maud, of course we shall set out shortly before midnight. The distance we have to go is really insignificant."

"And me?"

"That is it, Maud. You are fatigued. We are about to visit a wild and dismal spot, and there may be danger. I want you, then, if you think your heart is bold enough, to remain here until we return."

"No, no; do not ask me that, pray do not."

"Come, Maud, be firm; this is foolish of you."

"Oh! do not say that. The idea of remaining here alone fills me with nameless terror."

"What have you to apprehend, dear one?"

"I—I know not."

"There is nothing to apprehend. Our absence will not be for any lengthy period, and when we return all will be well."

Maud wept.

Dick was much distressed to see these tears, but he did not know how he was to check their flow.

He sat hesitating and silent for a moment, during which Maud recovered her composure more easily than she would have done had he addressed her.

"This is weak and foolish of me," she said at length, placing her hand upon his shoulder as she spoke. "It is very foolish of me; but I cannot help it."

I know you cannot, dear one, and yet I hope you will strive to overget these idle and useless fears."

"I shall do so, never fear. I feel that it is foolish of me to think that I shall be able to accompany you everywhere you go; but you must not wonder at me, for hitherto we have never been separated."

"We have not," said Dick, as he drew her closer to him.

"We have not, and nothing save necessity shall ever part us; but on the present occasion I feel that it will be better and more prudent for you to remain here while we go to meet our two comrades. When they have joined us, then we shall be better able to arrange what is to be done in future."

"We shall. I am firm now, and I will forget my fears. But when you go, promise, oh! promise me that you will not be long away."

"I will not be a moment longer than I can help, believe me I will not."

"Every moment will seem an hour until your return."

"I know it will, for this is a dreary, wretched place, and whatever may be its advantages in some respects, I shall abandon it as soon as I can find some other place of refuge."

"Do not let me be the means of taking you into any additional danger."

"I will be careful, you may depend. And now, Maud, are you quite certain that you will not be afraid to remain?"

"No, I will not be afraid."

"That is a brave girl! We may have to run for it, and then we should be able to adopt a dozen expedients to get clear of our enemies, not one of which we should be able to put into practice if you were with us."

"No doubt, no doubt, and that alone would be quite sufficient to reconcile me to remaining here alone."

"That is a proper view to take of the case, dear one, and I am glad that you are able to look at matters in so sensible a light."

"Hush!"

"What is it?"

"I hear something."

"It is Tom King, doubtless."

"True, here he is."

At this moment Tom re-entered the apartment, taking care, before he did so, to fumble with the lock for a moment, in order not to take his companions at unawares.

"Is all right?" asked Turpin, as soon as he came in.

"Yes, Dick, all is well below. The horses seem to relish the grass, and I have given them some more of it, though I would fain have some more substantial food for the poor beasts."

"So would I. But we must see what can be done. I propose, when Claude and Jack arrive, that we hold a general council, and agree upon our future proceedings."

"It is a wise and necessary precaution to take. I have been thinking of it myself."

"It is highly necessary."

"And will you permit me to have a voice in the matter?" asked Maud, with a smile.

"Certainly," answered her husband, "we shall be very glad to listen to anything you may have to propose."

"I shall have something to propose then."

"I promise you it shall have attention."

"And I, too," said Tom King. "But, captain!"

"What, my friend?"

"You remember our little appointment?"

"Yes. I have spoken to Maud about it, and she has agreed to remain here while we go and meet Claude and Sixteen-String Jack."

"That is all right, then. It takes a load off my heart."

"Does it indeed?"

"Yes. I was afraid Maud would insist upon accompanying you, and I felt that would be running too much risk."

"Well, that apprehension is removed, then. It is a terrible place to leave her in alone. I feel that; but still she has bravely promised to remain here until we return."

"All will be well then."

With this the conversation dropped.

It was growing dusk, and as the evening came on with rapid strides, Maud grew low-spirited at the prospect of the parting.

Still, with a noble fortitude, she concealed as well as she could the real state of her feelings.

Dick noticed it, but he judged it best to say nothing in allusion to the topic.

Very wisely he talked busily and volubly respecting other matters in the hope of being successful in distracting her attention.

Still she became more and more downcast as the hour of parting approached.

Tom King busied himself in piling up a quantity of firewood close within reach of her hand, so that she could replenish the fire without much trouble.

The different things they had brought from the "Mountain Rill" were placed upon the table, and everything done to make her as comfortable as possible.

Tears now and then started to her eyes, but by an effort she restrained them.

There was a sickening and dismal foreboding about her heart that something was about to happen, and strive as she would she could not banish it.

At length the time arrived when it was necessary for them to start in order to be at the appointed spot at the proper hour.

Maud now fairly gave way, and Dick had much difficulty in soothing and composing her.

At length he placed her in the old-fashioned chair before the fire, and, kissing her, followed his comrade from the room.

For a moment Maud was too much overcome to move, but then, suddenly starting to her feet, she bounded to the top of the staircase.

Her first impulse had been to descend, but now she paused.

She felt that it could do no good; and a cold shiver swept over her.

She grasped the massive balustrades tightly in her hands, and by this means prevented herself from falling.

Recovering herself somewhat, she looked down.

As we have already said, the staircase was so constructed that when you looked over the balustrades you could see down out to the paved flooring of the hall below.

It was an anxious glance which Maud now cast down, and then she caught sight of the shadows of Turpin and Tom King as they slowly descended the stairs.

She watched them until she could see them no longer, and then she listened for their footsteps.

The faint sound which they made in crossing the hall distinctly reached her ears.

Then a door was closed, and after that all was silent.

The closing of that door seemed to knock against Maud's very heart, and for a moment or two she was incapable of motion.

Oh! what a dread and awful stillness was that which now surrounded her.

It made her blood turn cold and her heart cease to beat.

Truly did she now seem to be alone.

The feeling was a terrible one.

Alone!

Alone at the midnight hour, in that strange, deserted mansion, the very atmosphere in which seemed laden with mystery.

Oh! it was a time for all those superstitious fancies, which have a lurking-place at the bottom of every human heart, to rise up into being.

The silence was as of the grave, and she stood there in the darkness of the grave, too, for the only light there was proceeded from the fire, and this now only dully smouldered.

Maud gasped for breath, and for a moment she felt as though she was about to faint.

Doubtless she would have lapsed into insensibility had not a fresh thought occurred to her, and this was of a nature to call into re-existence all the dormant springs of action.

From the window in the room where she was to watch and wait, a view of the grounds in front of the mansion was obtainable.

She resolved to repair hither, and to take a last parting look at the forms of the two highwaymen.

It was this desire which enabled her to recover herself from her state of semi-unconsciousness—it was this which lent her strength, after quitting her hold of the baluster, to re-enter the room.

She walked straight to the window, and flung the little casement open.

The cold night air streamed in, and it fell upon her cheek with delicious coolness.

After she had taken one or two inspirations she felt much restored, and many of the terrible thoughts which had crowded about her heart and brain were dispersed.

At length a slight sound struck upon her attentive ear, and she looked out of the window with an increased intensity of gaze.

CHAPTER CCCCXXVII.

MAUD HAS A TERRIBLE AND STRANGE ADVENTURE IN THE DESERTED MANSION.

No other ear than Maud's could have detected so slight a sound; but it grew louder and louder, and she leaned out of the window to a dangerous extent, in order to hear with more distinctness.

She strained her eyes, too, and presently, assisted doubtless by her fancy, she made out the forms of Dick Turpin and Tom King, both mounted upon their steeds, and making their way across the uncultivated lawn.

The crackling of twigs as they forced their way among the bushes most unquestionably fell upon her ears.

But that sound grew fainter and fainter, until at length it died away altogether.

Still Maud did not quit the window.

She remained with her arms leaning upon the sill, looking out into the darkness.

And the darkness without was something terrible.

The moon would not rise for some hours to come, and the light of the stars was obscured with drifting clouds.

How long she remained thus dreamily gazing upon vacancy she knew not, but she was roused by the cold.

She shuddered and felt half-frozen.

Closing the window carefully, she looked round, and found the fire was on the point of extinction.

This circumstance, slight as it was, had a beneficial effect.

It roused her into action, for she was well aware of the necessity there was to keep the fire burning.

There was plenty of dry wood close at hand, and a small quantity of this she threw on; for, though it was dark, she was fearful that the smoke should betray her.

The fire would not burn, and gave her a great deal of trouble

While thus busily employed, the time passed quickly.

At length the difficulty was overcome.

The wood caught light, and a cheerful blaze sprang up.

Maud seated herself in the chair which Dick had placed for her, and leaning back she gazed upon the burning wood with half-closed eyes.

This attitude, this occupation, and the silence around her, were all well calculated to provoke thought, and, almost unconsciously, she found herself running over in her mind the strange and varied occurrences of the past.

She thought of the strange life which she had voluntarily adopted, and contrasted it with that which she had quitted without a sigh of regret.

She thought of her cousin Blanche, and wondered whether she had ever seen the son of her wicked uncle, Adrian, and, if she had met him, what had passed between them.

She sighed deeply as she thought of the poor girl's unhappy love.

It was a love which she could never indulge in.

And when she contrasted her cousin's unhappiness with her own, she felt it sink into insignificance.

These and a thousand other kindred thoughts occupied her mind until a sound struck upon her ear, which had the effect of dissipating every one of them.

She started violently, and assumed a listening attitude, while her cheeks grew blanched with fear?

What the sound was she hardly knew.

It had struck upon her ear with so much suddenness, and had so abruptly ceased, that she was unable to form any clear idea as to its character.

Anxiously, then, she listened for a repetition of it, in order to come to a more definite conclusion upon the subject.

But all was still.

The fire crackled, but no other sound broke upon the silence.

Nevertheless, with her lips parted and her hands clutching the massive carved handles of the chair, with painful tightness she stretched her sense of hearing to the fullest extent.

She seemed to have a conviction that if she was patient she should hear the sound again, and that the instant she ceased to be attentive it would make itself heard again.

She was not deceived.

The sound did come again.

But she was prepared for it, and yet she started when it came.

It was one long wailing cry.

There could be no mistaking the character of the sound, and the blood curdled about her heart when she heard it.

The cry was strangely prolonged.

It came upon the hearing, first so faintly as to be almost inaudible; then it grew louder and louder, until it almost became a shriek, after which it faded away as gradually as it had arose.

While this sound lasted Maud never drew her breath, nor did she move a single muscle.

She was spell-bound, and incapable of doing so.

When it ceased a long sigh issued from her lips; and, relcasing her hold of the arms of the chair, she sank slowly back.

Although she had listened so attentively, yet even now she was unable to pronounce from whence the sound had come, and what was its precise character.

It seemed to rise until it filled the whole atmosphere of the place, and it seemed to come from all corners of the room.

Then as to the nature of it? That was more puzzling still.

Maud was unable to form anything like an idea.

She strove to be calm, she strove to think upon what had taken place with coolness.

But both attempts were equally vain.

Her heart fluttered, and she drew her breath in short and fitful inspirations.

Had it been light instead of dark, had it been day instead of night, had she been in some cheerful room instead of that gloomy apartment in the deserted mansion, the sound she had heard would, even under these circumstances, have appalled her, and deprived her of the power of action and clear thought.

Such being the case, the reader will be able to comprehend the effect it had upon her here, at a moment

when she was ready to give way to fear and yield to supernatural influences.

With parted lips, then, and with wide, staring eyes, she remained leaning back in that antique chair.

Had her life depended upon it, she could not have moved a limb.

And all this while her sense of hearing was so stretched that it became preternaturally acute.

She hoped, yet dreaded, and feared that she should hear the awful sound again.

With a strange contradiction of the mind, she felt that if she did not hear the sound again she should be wretched, and yet, if she did hear it, she should go almost mad.

In this terrible state of uncertainty and suspense she remained for some moments.

The silence was awful, for the fire had ceased to make the crackling sound which it had given out a little while ago.

The wood was almost consumed.

The blaze had ceased, and nothing but a dull, red glow proceeded from the embers.

At last Maud begins to think that she shall hear the sound no more.

A dim idea floats through her mind that it must have been caused by her fancy only.

Nevertheless, she cannot shake off the spell by which she is held down to the chair.

Then the sound came again.

She started violently, as though she had received an electric shock.

Low and faint at first, like the moaning of the wind, it came and rose gradually, until it became a shriek, so shrill, that, had she had the power, Maud would have clasped her hands over her ears and shut it out.

But she could not make the slightest movement.

The sound having reached its highest pitch, then died away with the same regular cadence as it had arisen.

With an effort Maud shook off the oppression that weighed her down, and started to her feet.

Her very lips were blanched with terror, and her eyes gleamed with fright.

"This is terrible," she said, "most terrible! I cannot endure it! If I sit here listening thus, I shall go mad; and yet what—what am I to do? What can such a cry portend?"

Maud started, and clutched the corner of the table with a nervous grasp.

She thought the sound was coming again.

But she was mistaken.

Listening fearfully, she strove to think what the sound could mean—tried to fix in her mind the direction from whence it came.

It sounded like a cry from one in great physical agony.

And yet, was it possible that any human being could give utterance to such an unearthly cry?

She thought not. She was obliged to think there was not, though she was loth to admit her conviction.

But if it was not human, what could it be?

Whence did it come, and why was she doomed to listen to it?

She had heard how terrible and shrieking cries had ere this been portents of some deadly ill.

Her heart sickened at the remembrance.

Could Turpin have fallen into some unexpected and frightful peril?

He had told her himself, and Tom King had confirmed his words, that there was danger in their enterprise.

Could it be that this sound had come to apprise her of it?

It was only for a brief time, however, that these thoughts remained tenable in her mind.

She banished them as unworthy of her.

"No, no," she cried, in a faint hoarse whisper, "I will not render up myself to any such fancies. I will not believe that there is any connexion between this sound and my absent husband. I will resist such a belief to the last moment."

She listened again.

"What shall I do?" she moaned. "To continue thus is ten times worse than death itself. The sound came from below. I think it came from below. Let the danger and the horror be however great, I will penetrate this mystery. I will learn from whence these sounds proceed, and what it is that produces them."

This was a bold resolution; but Maud felt all the calmer after she had made it.

Her mind seemed relieved of an intolerable load.

Still she trembled.

Her whole frame trembled in every limb like the quivering aspen.

She threw more wood on to the fire, and again a bright blaze sprung up.

Then, with shaking hands, she felt upon the table for the piece of candle, which she knew was there.

She found it.

Going, then, to the fire, she, after many unsuccessful efforts, succeeded in igniting it.

But her hand trembled so that the tiny flame which first hung around the wick threatened each moment to expire.

She steadied herself against the curiously carved mantelpiece, and waited till the candle had fairly taken light.

Soon the flame increased in size and brilliancy, and, with a tottering, hesitating step, Maud made her way across the room towards the door.

Her limbs threatened to sink beneath her, and more than once she had to pause to recover herself

At length she reached the head of the stairs which was, indeed, only a few steps from the door of the room in which she had sat.

Here she was again compelled to pause, for she hesitated whether to descend.

It was a fancy, more than aught else, which made her think the sound came from below, and now she stopped in doubt, and asked herself whether she was able to descend.

It was while she mentally asked this question that again there rose upon her hearing the mysterious cry.

It did not take her at unawares.

The faint moan reached her ears first, and swelled until it seemed to deafen her.

But when it had died away there no longer remained in her mind the slightest doubt that it came from below.

She could tell the sound arose, and, with a feeling of utter desperation, she grasped the balusters with her left hand, and held the candle aloft in her right, so that its beams should be dispersed as much as possible.

Then she commenced the descent, slowly at first, but by degrees courage returned to her, and she increased her pace.

The rustling of her dress upon the stairs sounded with ominous loudness in the intense stillness, and she could hear the rapid and violent pulsations of her heart.

At length the landing beneath was reached.

Here all was still, and so she continued to descend until she paused again upon the one lower still.

She listened.

A faint, far-off, ringing, clashing sound, makes itself heard.

She approaches the next flight of stairs.

It comes from below.

With her lips painfully and tightly compressed, she descends these two.

At every step she takes the clashing grows more and more distinct, until at length no doubt remains as to its character.

It is the clashing of swords, as the weapons ring together in some deadly encounter.

Paler and paler grows Maud's cheek, but still she does not pause.

Guided by the sounds, she descends the stairs, crosses the landing, and pauses before a door.

It is closed.

From the other side of it the sounds proceed.

She can hear the swords clash and clang together.

Then they abruptly cease, and again the awful, shrieking cry strikes upon her ears.

Overcome by horror and fright, Maud gives vent to a piercing shriek, and falls insensible on the threshold of the mysterious door.

CHAPTER CCCCXXVIII.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING REPAIR TO THE MEETING PLACE ON THE FINCHLEY-ROAD, AND WAIT IN VAIN THE APPEARANCE OF CLAUD DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

When Dick Turpin and Tom King left Maud, they made their way with all possible speed to the stables.

Here they found their horses in perfect safety, and



[THE DRAGOONS ENTER THE SUMMER-HOUSE IN SEARCH OF CLAUDE AND JACK.]

thoroughly refreshed by the rest they had had, although their fodder had been of such poor quality.

The saddles and bridles were close at hand, and in a very few moments Black Bess and Tom King's horse were saddled.

This done, the animals were led out, and the two highwaymen, who were in perfect readiness for the road, mounted.

Maud was not deceived when she fancied she could hear them.

Dick looked back, but he did not catch sight of the loving face that was looking so eagerly after him.

On reaching the gate which led into the lane they paused, resolved not to emerge until they were sure that they could do so safely.

They listened, but no sound save the murmuring of the wind and the rustling of the leafless branches broke the silence that reigned about that lonesome spot.

Satisfied that there was no one near to observe them our friends gave their horses an impulse forward, and passed out into the lane.

Once here they did not pause, but swept along at a rapid speed towards their destination.

The night was profoundly dark.

It was only occasionally, when the clouds parted a little, that even a glimpse of the twinkling stars could be obtained.

But no night could be too dark for our friends, and they were pleased at the deep gloom which hung over all things.

They knew nothing whatever of the piece of country through which they were travelling, and had no other guide to the meeting-place than such bearings as they were occasionally enabled to take of the stars when the clouds parted sufficiently for them to do so.

Nevertheless, they kept on with as much confidence as they would if they had been quite familiar with their route.

Without meeting with any incident, they at length emerged into the high road.

Here they paused and looked about them, for they were by no means certain whether they were on the road leading to London through Highgate, or the one that passed through Hampstead.

It was at the point where these two roads formed a junction with each other that the meeting was to take place.

The intense darkness of the night baffled them, and they for some time looked about in vain for some familiar object.

Without a guide of some kind or other it would be difficult to proceed, for they were uncertain whether they would have to turn to the right or to the left.

This was a dilemma which they had not calculated upon.

After some moments' hesitation, Dick said—

"I think the best thing we can do, Tom, will be to turn to the right and gallop on for a little while. We shall then soon find out whether we are right or wrong."

"Yes; I suppose that must be it, and yet I wish we could have found out in some other manner."

"Because of our foes?"

"Yes. We shall run great risk of being seen, and I think you will admit that the less we gallop up and down the high road the more conducive it will be to our safety."

"There is no disputing that, Tom, but, in the present aspect of affairs, what is to be done?"

"I fear there is no help for it, Dick; but, hark! what's that?"

Dick listened, and then there came upon his ears, though very faintly, a pleasant jingling sound.

It was mingled with the tramp of horses' hoofs and the rumbling of heavy wheels.

"Do you hear that, Dick?" said Tom King.

"Yes; I hear it plainly enough."

"That is a waggon. It is approaching. When it arrives opposite to us we will stop it, and the driver will give us the information we require."

"So he will. This is a capital way of getting out of the difficulty. I should never have thought of it."

"Nor I. But hush now. We will wait in silence until it arrives opposite to us."

"Will you call, Tom?"

"If you like, Dick."

"Very well; then do so."

Both highwaymen now relapsed into silence, and occupied themselves in listening to the approach of the waggon.

The cumbrous vehicle was at no great distance when they first heard it, so it would not be long before it arrived.

In a few moments they could discern through the gloom the huge affair.

At short intervals there came, too, upon their ears the cracking of a cartwhip, as the driver urged his cattle forward.

"Hoy!" cried Tom King, as soon as the driver was within hailing distance. "Hoy!"

"Murder!" cried the driver, "it's an highwayman!"

A chorus of shrieks from the interior of the vehicle followed these words.

At the time whereof we write, the reader must bear in mind that the only means by which people in humble circumstances could perform long journeys was by waggon.

"Don't be a fool!" cried Tom King. "I'm no highwayman! I am a traveller, and want to know the way to Finchley."

In the silence of the night the clear tones of Tom King's voice sounded with great distinctness.

The alarm of the persons who were inside the vehicle subsided, and the driver repeated—

"To Finchley?"

"Yes; which is the way?"

"You are on the high road to it now. Keep on the same way as I have just come, and when you come to the fork where the two roads divide, keep to the left."

"Thanks, my friend. Here's a half-a-crown for you."

"Much obliged to your honour. Keep on, sir; you can't miss your way."

With this the driver set his team in motion again.

During the conversation Dick Turpin kept altogether out of sight.

Tom started down the road at a gentle pace, and in a few moments was overtaken by his companion.

"We are all right, then," he said.

"Yes, Dick, and we shall be there in good time, for it can't be much past midnight"

"Do you know any particulars of the murder which Sixteen-String Jack spoke about as having been committed some years ago near this very place?"

"No; I am not acquainted with any of the particulars."

"Nor I. But I thought, perhaps, you might be"

"No. All I know is that on this triangular-shaped piece of ground, formed by the junction of the two roads, a gibbet stands, and from its crossbeam, suspended in a kind of framework of iron, hangs the body of the murderer."

"Yes; I was aware of so much," said Dick, with a slight shudder. "I have seen it many times."

"So have I. The spot is well chosen in one respect, for what with the evil reputation in which the whole place is held, and what with the ghastly fruit hanging from the gibbet, no one cares to be near, especially between nightfall and daybreak."

"The meeting-place is well chosen in that respect, it is true, for I think, myself, that we are not very likely to be interfered with."

"Never fear. But look! Here we are."

As Tom King spoke these words both the highwaymen paused.

The triangular-shaped piece of ground had, indeed, been reached.

At this moment the moon, which had not long risen above the horizon, cast a beam of light through the clouds, and then the whole aspect of the horrible and dismal place was fully revealed.

Upon a small piece of ground, triangular in shape and covered with rank vegetation, was a gibbet.

As Tom King had truly said, from the crossbeam the lifeless body of the murderer depended.

The pale, sickly, yellow rays of the moon gave this object a more horrible and loathsome appearance than under any other circumstances it could possibly have presented.

Our two friends had halted not many paces from the foot of this gibbet.

They had approached it unconsciously, and were made aware of its proximity with startling suddenness.

Although they had both seen this spectacle before, and were prepared to see it now, yet when it burst so unexpectedly upon their sight, they could not avoid shuddering with horror.

But that they should give way to this feeling is not to be wondered at.

By the law of the land such was the penalty attaching to what they had done.

The horses, either from real fright, or else from some feeling communicated by their riders, trembled perceptibly, while, with erected manes and starting eyes, they glared upon the spectacle before them.

For some moments the two highwaymen remained motionless and silent.

By a fascination, whose influence they were powerless to resist, their eyes were fixed upon the body of the murderer.

Had it been day, they would, doubtless, have felt so much abhorrence that they would have turned away; but now, at night, with the pale moonlight streaming upon the gibbet and its fruit, and only partially revealing their hideousness, causing the curious fancy to imagine what was not, they felt themselves constrained to gaze.

Dick Turpin was the first to recover himself sufficiently to speak.

"This is a fearful fate for a human being to encounter," he said at length.

"It is, indeed, Dick," replied his comrade; "but, if what I have heard be true, the villain upon whose remains we are now gazing, most richly and fully deserved the fate, however fearful it may be."

"Perhaps so—perhaps so. But let us withdraw a little. I cannot bear to look upon it, it is too horrible—too sickening."

"With all my heart, Dick, for I care no more about looking at it than yourself."

"Claude and Jack have not arrived yet," said Turpin,

as they removed to a spot where their eyes were no longer offended with the sight of the gibbet.

"No, they have not come. But it is full early yet. We must give them till daybreak. Doubtless, they will have some distance to come."

"I would they were here, Tom," said Turpin, "for *I* feel sick at heart."

"Pho! pho! Shake off the feeling. But I don't care how soon they arrive, for it won't be very pleasant to remain standing about this place till daylight."

"It will not, indeed. But, look, Tom; yonder seems to be a kind of thicket. Let us gain the shelter of that, and then we shall be much safer from observation."

"By all means let us do so; for you may depend that, ere long, some one will pass us on one side or the other."

"Exactly; and, while we are in the thicket, we shall have no difficulty in perceiving the approach of our two comrades."

"None whatever."

"Come, then."

While speaking, Dick Turpin led the way to the little thicket of which he had spoken.

It was formed by a few trees growing rather thickly together.

Beneath the deep shadow of these they directed their horses' footsteps.

They did not penetrate to any depth, however, but were content just so that their bodies and those of their steeds were concealed.

Having taken up this position, they remained quite motionless upon their steeds, awaiting the arrival of their expected comrades.

From where they stood they commanded a view not only of the road on either side of them, but also of the triangular-shaped piece of ground with the broad united road stretching beyond.

A more advantageous position could not have been found.

Of course, as soon as Claude and Jack made their appearance they would ride forward and greet them.

Until that moment arrived they would be perfectly secure from observation.

No one could have the least suspicion they were there.

When they spoke they addressed each other in low tones, although they had not heard or seen a soul.

Dick was impatient.

At least an hour had elapsed, and there were no more signs of Claude and Jack than at first.

Another hour passed by in the same manner, and then he grew truly desperate.

He pictured poor Maud alone in the deserted mansion, anxiously awaiting his promised return.

Suddenly he was aroused from these reflections by Tom King, who leaned forward and touched him on the arm.

Having succeeded in attracting his attention, Tom, without uttering a word, raised his finger and pointed straight before him.

Dick followed with his eye, and caught sight of something in a moment which had the effect of arresting the whole of his attention.

Standing on the triangular-shaped piece of ground were three men.

The outlines of their figures were dim and indistinct, being revealed only by the misty light which came from the moon, as she shone feebly through a semi-opake cloud which hung before her and obscured her brightness.

The light had a strange yellow tint, and gave a spectral-like appearance to every object which it brought into view.

These three men looked, then, more like ill-defined shadows than aught else.

Who could they be?

Surely not Claude and Jack!

They would never have brought a third person with them.

Besides, one of these men was on horseback, the other two on foot.

By their attitudes it would seem as though the one on horseback was giving orders of some description to those on foot.

The two highwaymen gazed with the utmost intentness, wondering what this could mean.

Were these men connected with them?

Did their presence then bode them good or ill?

They could not tell; for, though at times the murmur of a voice would reach their ears, the speakers were too far off for them to overhear their conversation.

CHAPTER CCCCXXIX.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING OVERHEAR THE DETAILS OF A MOST VILLAINOUS PLOT.

In all human probability these three men were in no way whatever connected with our friends, and yet it was wonderful what an amount of interest Turpin and King felt in their proceedings.

They made up their minds that they could not be Claude and Jack.

Clearly, then, it was no business of theirs who they were.

Likely enough, having sat so long together on their horses, waiting without seeing or hearing anything, made them feel interested and curious.

Let the cause, however, be what it would, certain is it that the two highwaymen gazed upon the three shadowy figures with all-absorbing interest.

They received an addition to their curiosity and wonder.

After speaking for a few moments, all three approached the thicket where our friends were concealed.

Seeing this, they could not avoid asking themselves the question whether, after all, their presence was not connected with them.

Should they move and attempt to get out of the way, or remain where they were and abide the issue?

After a moment's reflection they resolved upon the latter.

The three men steadily advanced, and as they came nearer and nearer their forms could be distinguished with more precision.

The one on the horse accommodated his speed to that of those who were on foot, and who walked at either side of his horse's head.

On they came, across the piece of waste ground, taking their course in a direct line towards Turpin and King, who could not help feeling a certain amount of uneasiness and alarm.

Another half-dozen paces, and then discovery would inevitably ensue.

But those half-dozen steps were destined not to be taken.

Suddenly the man on the horse cried—

"Stop! this will do. There is no occasion whatever to go any further."

The tones of his voice reached the highwaymen's ears plainly enough, for they were very close indeed to him, and they would have to keep very still to avoid discovery.

Like two statues, then, they sat upon their steeds, resolved not to lose a syllable of the conversation that was about to ensue.

One of the men on foot hastened to reply to the one on horseback who had just spoken.

He uttered his words in a tone of great affected humbleness.

"Very good, sir;" he said, "but I think it was quite a wise proceeding to remove hither. Where we stood yonder we were exposed to the full view of anyone who might pass by, and suspicion might be directed towards us. Now, however, there is no fear of our being either seen or heard; and so, sir, you can speak freely, and give us your instructions."

"And, sir," chimed in the other man, before the horseman had time to speak, "you may depend that whatever orders you may please to give us will be fully and thoroughly carried out."

"That is a comfortable assurance," said the horseman, in deep and thrilling tones, which were, however, so peculiar, that the two highwaymen felt certain that they should always be able to know the man by his voice; "that is a very comfortable assurance, indeed. But now listen to me."

"We are all attention, worshipful sir."

"I do not want you to talk, but to act. I want deeds, not words. Look here!"

The horseman produced something as he spoke, but what it was the highwaymen could not see.

He held it out in his hand.

"Look here," he continued. "Here are two bags of gold; one for you, and one for you."

He distributed them to the men as he spoke.

They took them eagerly.

The horseman continued—

"Each bag contains fifty guineas; and, when you have performed the service I require of you, you shall have two more bags containing the same amount."

"Let us know what the service is that is to be so liberally paid for."

"Come closer, and give heed to my instructions. See that, in the carrying of them out, you do not fail in a single particular."

"We'll warrant that, your honour."

"Good. You are armed?"

"Yes, worthy sir; even as you bade us."

"With a brace of pistols each?"

"Yes."

"Are they carefully loaded and primed?"

"They are, your honour."

"Enough, then; that will do. But I must have no misfires."

"What are we to do, worthy sir?"

"Peace. I will tell you. It is not the first time you have done a job of the same sort. Do you see the road yonder?"

"The one that leads to Hampstead, worthy sir."

"Yes."

"We see it."

"Good. Do you see yon hedge, which divides this piece of waste ground from the highway?"

"Oh! yes, your honour."

"Well, then, when I command you to do so, betake yourselves to that hedge and conceal yourselves behind it. You will have no difficulty in doing this."

"None at all, your honour."

"Very well. You will then each take out your pistols, and hold them in such a position as to be able to make instant use of them if necessary. You understand now what you have to do?"

"Not altogether, worthy sir."

"When we have taken up our positions"—

"You will remain as I told you. I expect a certain person, about whom you need not trouble yourselves in the least, to come this way. I will ride down the road when I have seen you placed, and come back and let you know of his approach. You will then keep watch for him, and as soon as you see some one approach on a white horse you will raise your pistols and fire all four of them. He will not escape so many shots."

"And what then, sir?" asked the man, with cold-blooded coolness, which seemed to prove the truth of what the horseman had said. "When we have shot him down, what then?"

"I shall be close at hand, and when I hear the report, I will make my way to the spot. I will give you the money I have promised, and you can then take yourselves off where you like."

"And the body on the road, worthy sir. What about that?"

"Leave that to me. Don't you trouble yourself in the slightest degree about that. Do as I tell you. Take your reward and depart."

"Very good, your honour."

"You are quite sure you perfectly understand what you have to do?"

"Oh! yes, we perfectly understand. When are we to conceal ourselves?"

"Now, at once. I do not expect him just yet, but better be too soon than too late."

"Quite best, sir."

"Go, then, and hide yourselves, and lie in readiness. I will ride down the road, and when I see him coming I will return and let you know, so as to prevent all possibility of mistake. Come, follow me to the hedge!"

With these words, the rider turned his horse's head towards the hedge of which he had spoken.

He was followed by the two men, who spoke to each other in whispers.

The two highwaymen looked after them until they were out of hearing; and then, with a slight shiver, Dick Turpin said—

"What do you think of that, Tom?"

"Why, I think that we have overheard one of the most damnable assassination plots that ever was planned."

"I think so, too, my friend. It fairly makes my blood run cold when I think of the coolness with which all three treated the subject."

"By their manner they seemed to be discussing some every-day affair."

"They did. But what a dreadful snare to lay for a fellow-creature?"

"Dreadful, indeed! I wonder who he can be?"

"Of that I can form no better idea than yourself."

"I know that, only it seemed natural to make the remark."

"I think it a most providential thing that we overheard the plot in the way we did."

"Very so, indeed. How strange that they should come to this spot for greater security."

"Very, very; but what is to be done?"

"Something must be done."

"Most certainly; for if, after hearing what we have, we were to remain here without stirring hand or foot, we should virtually be the murderers of this traveller."

"We should, unquestionably."

"But how are we to prevent them from carrying their plot into execution?"

"We must decide upon some measure, and that right quickly; for, as the horseman said, better too soon than too late."

"It is a good maxim, I grant; but you must not forget our original purpose in coming to this spot."

"To meet Claude and Jack?"

"Yes."

"They do not come."

"They do not; and their non-appearance gives me a great deal of anxiety."

"I do not know how to account for it."

"Well, we have waited for them, and for a long time, too; and, when they come, if they find us absent on this little business, they must do the same for us."

"That is it; and, now, what are we to do?"

"Time is speeding."

"Did you notice which way the horseman went?"

"Towards Hampstead."

"Then we cannot do better than follow cautiously in his steps, for that is the direction from which the traveller will come."

"We must be careful not to be seen or heard."

"We must; and that makes me think that the best thing we can do is to force our way through this thicket, which does not seem to be of very great extent, and, instead of emerging on to the Hampstead road, make our way behind the hedges that bound it; we shall then be less likely to be discovered."

"We cannot do better."

"Then let us set about it at once."

Having come to this determination, the two highwaymen pushed their way through the thicket, taking care to make no more noise in their progress than they could possibly avoid.

They were agreeably surprised to find that the thicket was much less in extent than they had imagined it to be, and a few minutes only elapsed before they emerged on the other side.

Crossing a ploughed field, Turpin and King reached the tall hedgerow which bounded the Hampstead road.

This was quite high enough to conceal them from the view of anyone in the road, for the hedge was planted on the top of a steer bank several feet in height.

At the foot of this bank was a narrow, but well-beaten, footpath, which served admirably for the horses.

The highwaymen listened, but were unable to hear anything, so at a sharp trot they made their way along the footpath, until they came to a hedge, which divided the ploughed field from another.

This hedge was no great height, so they leaped it.

They alighted on the soft turf of a meadow.

Just at this moment, the faint sounds of a horse's hoofs upon the road reached their ears.

They listened.

It was some one a little in advance of them, who was proceeding at a walking pace.

The highwaymen did not speak, but, at an easy trot, urged their horses over the turf.

In a little while they could tell they were abreast with

this horseman, who, they doubted not, was the man they had overheard giving the directions to the assassins.

It was, however, too dark for them to satisfy themselves by ocular proof that they were not labouring under any mistake.

All they could do was to keep abreast with this horseman and observe all that took place.

The only thing that confirmed them in their belief that they were right, was that this man was proceeding at a walking pace.

Now this is somewhat unusual for a traveller, when making his way across the country at so late an hour.

Suddenly the rider pulled up.

Our friends imitated him instantly.

"I thought I heard something? What was it, I wonder? All is still now. It must have been my fancy. I am a fool to give way to such weakness."

There was no mistaking the voice which pronounced these words.

They were uttered in the same thrilling tones as those which they had heard when the horseman addressed himself to the assassins.

This was a great relief to our friends, who kept thinking what the consequences would be if they were so unfortunate as to make a mistake.

Now, however, all was well, and they remained motionless upon their steeds, waiting for the horseman on the road to give them the signal to advance.

But he stirred not.

They heard him speak again.

Doubtless he felt it to be a relief to his mind to speak his thoughts aloud in the silence and solitude of that place.

"I will go no further," he said; "I have come far enough already. I will wait here and listen for his approach. When I hear him coming, then it will be time enough for me to ride forward and ascertain whether it is really he, and afterwards ride back and tell my men in ambush that he is on the road. I will tell them to shoot the next horseman who passes by them."

CHAPTER CCCCXXX.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING RENDER THE AMBUSH BEHIND THE HEDGE ABORTIVE.

It may seem strange to our readers that Dick Turpin and Tom King in the meadow should hear with so much distinctness what the rider spoke while in the road, but we are in a position to give a very simple explanation of the cause of it.

The horseman, having halted, had backed his horse under the hedge behind which the two highwaymen stood.

Consequently they were only a few feet distant from each other, the hedge being all that divided them.

When he spoke his thoughts aloud, then, they were easily able to catch every syllable.

They had to use the utmost care to keep still, lest their presence should be discovered; and, from what the rider had said when he reined in his steed, it would seem as though he had heard something.

He would, beyond doubt, be on the alert.

It was, perhaps, lucky for our friends that they were not destined to remain for any length of time in such close quarters.

They were the first to hear the faintest clattering of hoofs which indicated the approach of another horseman.

Directly afterwards, however, the man who was on the watch heard the sound.

"He comes," he said; "he comes. He comes to meet his death."

Having spoken these words, he rode out into the road, and trotted gently in the direction in which the traveller was coming.

Our friends followed over the meadow.

It was only for a few moments that the horseman continued to trot.

He soon subsided into a walk, and the highwaymen followed his example without delay.

They were now wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement, and they felt that the events of the next few moments would be of a very startling character indeed.

The traveller, whose assassination had been so coldly planned, came on at a canter.

Our friends could tell that by the regularity with which the horse's hoofs struck the ground.

Nearer and nearer he came, until at length he passed them.

He passed his murderer, who went on steadily, at a walk.

Almost immediately, however, he turned round, and struck his spurs deeply into his horse's flanks.

The poor creature uttered a short cry of pain, and set forward at a furious gallop.

He was past his victim with lightning-like rapidity.

His errand was to tell his creatures to prepare to perform their work of death.

"Now," said Dick Turpin, "what are we to do?"

"We must apprise the traveller of his danger without delay. Quick! or it will be too late."

"But, how are we to do so? How are we to pass this hedge which divides us from the road?"

"Why, yonder, a little further on, is a gate; let us make our way through that and overtake him."

Tom King pointed to a white, wooden gate, which led out of the meadow into the highroad.

It took them but a moment to reach it.

It was padlocked.

This did not trouble Tom King.

He alighted, and, going to that end of the gate where the hinges were, lifted it up.

He lifted it off the hinges easily enough, and made a path into the road.

Mounting his own steed, he followed Dick Turpin down the road.

But he could not keep pace with him.

Dick was anxious to overtake the traveller, being fearful that his warning might come too late; and so, for once in a way, he allowed Black Bess to go at her own speed.

With a long, sweeping gallop she flew over the ground.

At such a rate it took very little time to come in sight of the traveller.

Dick's first impulse was to shout and tell him to stop; but, if he did this, the sound might reach the ears of the ambuscaded villains as well.

In another moment he was abreast with the traveller, who had accelerated his pace.

"Hold, sir!" Turpin cried, in an imploring voice. "Hold, for your life's sake, and I will tell you more. You are riding on to certain death."

This was an appeal of a character well calculated to arrest the progress of anyone, and the person to whom it was addressed reined in his steed with great abruptness, and, in a scared tone of voice, he said—

"Hilloa! there; hilloa! What is it you say, sir?"

"Halt!" said Dick, "and I will tell you all. Wait a moment, and my companion will be here, who will bear testimony to the truth of what I am about to relate to you."

The traveller halted, and looked about him in mingled surprise and alarm.

The darkness of the night, however, prevented him from being able to see Dick with any degree of distinctness

Tom King could be heard approaching, and directly afterwards he checked his panting steed.

The traveller seemed to look upon the advent of Tom King with a certain degree of suspicion, for with great swiftness he drew a sword which he carried at his side.

Whirling it around him, he said with a voice of great determination—

"I know not the meaning of all this, but do not think you have a fool to deal with."

"You need be under no apprehension from us," said Dick. "We have put ourselves considerably out of the way to render you a service; and that service is no other than the salvation of your life."

"Explain yourself, sir, I pray you," said the traveller, in an altered tone of voice. "Do not speak so imperfectly. You said before, that I was riding on to certain death."

"And so you were. Myself and my companion, having an appointment to meet two friends of ours, took up our position in a thicket from whence we could perceive their arrival without being seen ourselves. While here, three men approached. One was on horseback, the other two on foot. Knowing nothing of our presence, they spoke; and we could not avoid overhearing all that was said. The man on horseback gave the men on foot two bags of gold, each containing fifty guineas. They were to have two

more bags, containing each a hundred guineas more, when they had performed the service which the man on horseback required of them. Is not this correct?" asked Turpin, addressing himself to his comrade.

"Perfectly true, in every particular," said Tom King.

"Pray proceed, sir, with your strange narrative. I know not what to think of this."

"I have little more to tell," said Dick. "The men having agreed to do what he required of them, he posted them behind a hedge, with instructions to shoot you down as you passed by."

"Shoot me down?" said the traveller, who was a young man. "Shoot me down?"

The accents of his voice were full of horror.

"Even so," replied Dick Turpin. "I heard the rider tell the men that you would be mounted on a white horse."

"Yes, my horse is white."

"I see it is, sir. With my own eyes I saw the men secrete themselves behind the hedge. They are well armed; and when their rascally employer gives them the signal that you are approaching, they will watch till you pass by, and shoot you down without mercy."

"Oh! this tale is too horrible to be true," said the young man. "This is some deep-laid scheme of your own to hold me here to answer some villainous purpose."

"You wrong us by such a supposition," answered Turpin; "and, under other circumstances than the present, I should not trouble you any further, but ride off, leaving you to your fate; but, as so serious a thing as your life is at issue, I cannot do this."

"Pray forgive me," answered the young man. "I ought not to have entertained such suspicions; but what you have told me is so very strange, that"——

"You could not help it."

"Exactly."

"Make no apologies; I should have been the same myself."

"Will you, then, sir, tell me more?"

"I will; and it so happens that I shall be able to give you some sort of confirmation as to the truth of what I say. Did not some one pass you a little while ago at a walking pace, and afterwards overtake you at a gallop?"

"Yes, sir, there did; and my mind was filled with wonder as to the cause of this when I heard you behind me."

"Well, then, sir, that man who walked his horse past you did so in order to look at you and avoid any mistake; then, having satisfied himself that all was quite correct, he wheeled his horse round, and galloped back, so as to give his men warning of your approach."

"Forgive me, gentlemen, for my suspicions. I can see that they were groundless ones."

"We pardon you readily and freely; but come, sir, tell us, have you no enemy?"

"Yes."

"You have?"

"I have. He is my sworn and bitter foe, but he would not stoop to such a midnight assassination as you have described."

"Well, sir, that you know best about; but, so far as my belief goes, it is the same enemy you spoke of who sought to do you this ill turn."

"It may be so. But this intelligence of yours troubles me greatly."

"Nay; never let it trouble you now. All is well. Knowing of the ambush you are safe. You can avoid it."

"But it is important to my interests that I keep on along this very road. How, then, am I to pass the hedge behind which these villains are concealed?"

"Oh, you need not trouble about that; we will accompany you."

"Accompany me?"

"Yes; that is, if you have no objection to our doing so?"

"I should be right glad of your company, but I cannot consent to lead you into this great danger."

"Pho! pho!" said Dick, "there is no danger whatever."

"How so?"

"I will tell you. These men I have spoken of are on the look-out for a *single* horseman. We will ride past the hedge, the situation of which I know full well, while three abreast. Then, take my word for it, we shall be unmolested."

"Certainly we shall," said Tom King; "and as our way lies in that direction, we will willingly go with you. You will admit there will be no more danger for three to pass by than two?"

"Well, be it so, gentlemen. I shall be for ever beholden to you. You have saved a life of more importance than you perhaps imagine. But enough, I will avail myself of your escort."

"Forward, then. We had better lose no more time. Believe me, the danger is past. We have nothing further to apprehend."

The little party now set forward at a trot.

Dick Turpin placed himself on one side of the traveller, and Tom King placed himself on the other.

"We guard you thus," said Turpin, "because your enemies are aware that you ride upon a white horse. If we are careful to keep abreast, they will have some difficulty in noting it."

"How shall I ever repay you for this service?" said the stranger, in a voice of deep emotion. "Had it not been for your friendly intervention, I should have rode on, blindly, to my death. Alas! alas! what can be the meaning of this ambush?"

"You are under no obligations to us," said Turpin. "By chance we overheard this detestable plot against your life, and it was simply our duty to ride forward and meet you, and apprise you of it."

"Had we not have done so," continued Tom King, "but have allowed events to take their course, we should have been your actual murderers."

"Silence! No more," said Turpin. "Yonder is the hedge. Ride with us freely, sir, and unconcerned. Believe me, you have nothing to fear. There is no danger; they will not molest us."

Although Turpin spoke in a voice of great confidence, the stranger was scarcely able to bring himself to believe that all was so safe as was expressed.

It was in an anxious frame of mind, therefore, that he rode the next few yards.

The two highwaymen sedulously kept him between them, and presently Dick said—

"The hedge is passed; the danger is over; but keep on a little way further. If we pause we may attract suspicion, and—bark!—what is that?"

A confused noise from the rear now came upon their ears.

It was succeeded by the beating of a horse's hoofs, coming on at a full gallop.

The stranger halted suddenly, and wheeled his horse round.

Our friends impulsively followed his example, and, at the same time, placed themselves across the road in such a manner that the approaching horseman could not pass them easily.

This, however, was not attempted.

The rider came on.

They were not certain of it, but our friends believed that this was the man with the deep, thrilling voice, who had posted the two men in ambuscade.

If so, a meeting must take place in another moment with the stranger whom their warning had saved from such deadly peril.

The climax of this strange adventure was then about to be reached, and the two highwaymen prepared to observe all that passed with a greater degree of interest than they had ever before felt.

On came the horseman at the same speed.

Then, suddenly, he checked his steed's career, and, at the same moment, there was a flash and a loud report.

He had aimed a pistol at his victim, who, not expecting such an act, sat unsuspiciously upon his horse.

CHAPTER CCCCXXXI.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING ARE SPECTATORS OF A SINGULAR SWORD COMBAT ON THE HIGHWAY.

FORTUNATELY, however, the bullet flew wide of its mark, for the aim had been too swiftly taken to be a sure one.

The discharge of the weapon took all three by surprise.

The young stranger was the first to recover himself.

Like a flash of light he drew his sword, and spurred his horse forward.

"Dastardly villain!" he cried, fiercely, "whoever you may be! I know you not, but"——

A loud cry came from the young stranger's lips, and checked his further speech.

At this moment the moon again broke forth and showed him the form of his adversary.

It was clear he recognised him, and the cry to which he had given utterance was clearly caused by that recognition.

He recovered himself again with great quickness, and in a loud voice he said—

"Can this be possible?"

"Yes!" cried the other, in a voice of thunder. "You now know all. You have escaped the fate I had designed for you, but you shall not escape me altogether. I have sworn to have your life, and I will keep my oath! Dastard and villain in your teeth! Take that! and if you have the courage and manhood to do so, meet me face to face with your sword, or admit yourself for ever a coward."

As he uttered these words in a loud, screaming voice, the speaker drew off his gauntleted glove, and flung it with great violence in the face of his adversary, who he thus challenged to the combat.

At the same time he alighted from his steed and drew his sword.

The young stranger lost not a moment in following his example, and, ere our friends could interfere, the combatants had crossed swords with each other.

Seeing Dick and Tom King approach, the stranger with the deep voice said—

"Ha! ha! coward! I thought so. You will fight me, but while you do so you will have these bullies at your back."

The young stranger turned round with terrible calmness, and, addressing the two highwaymen, he said—

"My friends—for such you are, although I know you not, and have never seen you till this hour—my friends, you have done me one service; now add another to it. I charge you, as you are gentlemen, to stand aloof and take no part in this affray. It must be decided between us, foot to foot and sword to sword. I am willing to abide the issue of this contest. My foe is before me, and on this night one of us must die, for it is impossible for both to live. Promise me that you will stand merely as spectators of this conflict, and do no more than see fair play between us."

"We promise," said Dick. "We cannot refuse."

"'Tis well," said the deep-voiced stranger. "I confess it is more than I expected. As you have truly said, it is impossible that both can live, and that, on this night, at least one of us must die. Come on!"

The combatants threw off their coats, and crossed their swords.

The steel clashed, and the weapons glistened in the fast-increasing moonlight.

This had all taken place so suddenly, that both Turpin and King were somewhat bewildered.

They had looked for some strange termination to this adventure, but, most certainly, not to such a one as this.

Both saw in a moment that the deep-voiced stranger had every advantage over his more youthful assailant.

He was much taller, had greater length of reach, was much more muscular.

Added to this, his sword was longer than the one wielded by his opponent.

Nevertheless, the young stranger laid his own weapon across it without a moment's hesitation.

The eyes of the two combatants sparkled with rage, and their countenances wore an expression of the most unmitigated ferocity.

As for the deep-voiced stranger, his face became perfectly fiendish.

No sooner were the swords crossed, than he proceeded to attack his adversary with the utmost impetuosity.

The young man, however, stood calmly enough upon his guard, and warded off all the desperate blows aimed at him with perfect ease.

Our two friends looked on with all-absorbing intentness.

Had the issue of the conflict concerned them nearly, they could not have watched every movement of the combatants with greater interest.

Not a single movement escaped them, and more than once they held their breath in suspenseful fear when a more than usually furious stroke was aimed at the young stranger.

Presently, however, he changed his tactics.

He no longer contented himself with remaining quietly on his guard, but in his turn assailed his foe with great vigour and determination.

Blow followed blow in such rapid succession that the highwaymen could scarcely tell by whom they were delivered, while the combatants whirled about in such rapid evolutions that their eyes were powerless to follow them.

Never once did they pause to rest, but kept on unceasingly.

How many moments this desperate encounter continued our friends had no idea.

Suddenly, however, they heard a fierce scream of anguish, and then the deep-voiced stranger fell heavily to the ground.

The young man stood over him for a moment with his drawn sword, but by degrees he lowered the point of his weapon, as he perceived that his foe was no longer able to injure him.

Dick Turpin and Tom King now ventured to approach.

The young man dropped his sword and staggered back.

He would have fallen, had not Tom sprang forward and caught him in his arms.

He feared, at first, he was wounded, but he quickly recovered himself.

He had half fainted from exhaustion, but, having rallied himself, he advanced once more towards his foe.

Here Turpin was standing.

He saw, at a glance, the wound was a mortal one.

The sword of the young man had passed completely through his heart.

Death was almost instantaneous.

Perceiving their approach, Dick said—

"All is over. He is quite dead."

"Then I call you both to witness," said the young man, "that he fell by my sword in fair fight."

"As fair a fight as could possibly be fought," said Turpin, "and yet not so, for the advantages were all on his side and none on yours."

"All is over then," said the young man. "Little did I foresee the occurrences of this night. But every moment is of importance to me. I must begone. Gentlemen, I know you not, but you have this night done me a service which I can never repay."

"We wish for no repayment."

"I know you do not. But, tell me, do you know who I am?"

"Certainly not."

"Will you swear it?"

"Unhesitatingly," said the highwaymen, in the utmost surprise.

"'Tis well. Enough. Do you know who lies there?"

"We do not. We never saw him until to-night."

"Well, gentlemen, who I am I would fain keep a secret. It is necessary that I should do so. However, should I ever see you again, I shall be able to recognise you if you wear these rings. Here is one for each of you. Wear it always. You may find it useful. Farewell! Once more, a thousand thanks for your service. Farewell!"

The young stranger, while speaking these words, first gave Dick and Tom a ring each, which they put upon their fingers, and then mounted his steed and rode away.

In a few moments he was out of sight, but the two highwaymen stood gazing in the direction in which he had gone, until the beating of his horse's hoofs upon the road was no longer audible.

Then, turning round to his old comrade, Turpin said—

"Well, Tom, my friend, what do you think of this adventure?"

"I think it is about the strangest that has ever befallen us during the whole course of our careers."

"I think you may go so far as to say it is the very strangest of all."

"It is, when the fact of our knowing so little is taken into account."

"Just so; that is what I mean. Think over what has passed. Who is the man who lies here so cold and dead? How fiercely he hated the one who has ridden away so suddenly! What was the cause of their enmity?"

"Perhaps we shall know some day, Dick: for my own part, I should like to know who the young man is that we saved from death."

"So should I. He is clearly some one of importance."

"And how he asked us whether we knew him!"

"He fancied we were acquainted with him, and had done the service with that knowledge."

"Then he never made a greater mistake."

"And these rings. What are we to do with them?"

"Wear them, by all means."

"It is possible that some day or other they may turn out to be of benefit to us—who can tell?"

"It will be best to wear them; there cannot be two opinions about that. But, come! we must not occupy ourselves too much with this strange adventure; we must think over it at our leisure."

"True; we have other things that claim our attention."

"You are right."

"But, about the body of this rascal; what shall we do with it?"

"Leave it where it is."

"I would sooner do that than meddle with it."

"I think we shall be wise to let it alone; but where are the two men, think you, who were to have committed the assassination?"

"That I know not. Most likely they have decamped with all possible speed, taking what money they had along with them."

"That sounds very probable. But what strange light is this which is creeping around us. Look."

"It is the dawn."

"Impossible."

"It is dawn, indeed. In a very little while it will be broad daylight."

"Quick—quick, then; let us make our way without an instant's delay to the appointed spot."

"Come on. I am ready. Let us hope that they are there awaiting our arrival."

With these words the highwaymen set their steeds in motion.

The reader must understand that the combat between the two strangers took place some distance from the triangular-shaped piece of ground.

Towards this the two highwaymen made their way.

It was not long before they came in sight of the gibbet with its grisly burden.

Morning was advancing with great rapidity, and objects at a distance were easily distinguishable.

Eagerly our friends looked all around them.

Their eyes travelled over every part of the triangular-shaped piece of ground.

But in vain.

They saw not what they hoped and expected to find.

Claude and Jack were not there.

At first they could scarcely believe it, but soon there was no room for doubt.

It was a moment or two before they could address each other, and then, after a painful pause, Turpin said—

"What are we to think of this, Tom? I fear the worst. I am certain that, if they had been at liberty, Claude and Jack would not have failed to be upon this spot at the appointed time; but now where are they? Alas! I fear they are captured."

"I fear so, too. The good luck we have had in eluding the dragoons they do not appear to have met with, and yet, Dick, after all, perhaps we are alarming ourselves without a cause."

"How; what mean you?"

"Why, it is dawn. Claude and Jack are not on the green yonder, that is certain, nor would they be likely to be. Would they not rather, like us, hide themselves somewhere where they could see us if we made our appearance?"

"There is some hope in that, and I hope we shall not be disappointed. Come, Tom, we will ride forward boldly on to that green spot, and halt close to the gibbet, and then if Claude and Jack are concealed anywhere, they will lose no time in discovering themselves to us."

Animated by this hope, Dick Turpin and Tom King made their way on to the green, and halted close to the gibbet.

Here they remained for some moments.

The pale, gray light of early morn, which every instant increased, revealed their forms with great distinctness.

Had Claude and Jack been concealed anywhere, they could not have failed to see them.

But no one moved.

They came not.

Turpin, at length, looked into his comrade's countenance.

"That hope is gone," he said. "Now tell us what is to be done?"

"I cannot," said Tom King. "Let us stay here a moment or two longer."

"But the danger! How can we tell who is observing us?"

"It is too great a risk. Look all around you, Dick, once more, and tell me whether you can see any signs of their approach."

CHAPTER CCCCXXXII.

THE DRAGOONS MAKE A CLOSE SEARCH IN THE SUMMER-HOUSE FOR CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

LET us now leave Dick Turpin and Tom King upon the lonely spot appointed for the meeting-place, and revert to the proceedings of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, who we last left in such a very critical situation.

It will, no doubt, be fresh in the remembrance of the reader, that, after a hard chase by the dragoons, the two highwaymen took shelter in a summer-house, and concealed themselves behind a screen with a tall back, which which was placed across one corner of it.

Scarcely had they concealed themselves in this imperfect hiding-place, than two persons, a young man and a girl—lovers—entered and seated themselves upon the screen, thus making our two friends prisoners.

A conversation had then taken place between Minnie and Ernest—for such were the names by which they addressed each other—to which Claude and Jack listened with great interest.

They were about to part and leave the summer-house, when they were startled by a sound, which drew a cry of terror from the young girl's lips, for there was nothing she so much dreaded as the discovery of her presence in that place in company with the young man Ernest.

The sound was the measured and regular tramp of many footsteps.

Minnie had started to her feet, so great was her alarm, and doubtless she would have darted out of the summer-house had not her lover flung his arms protectingly about her waist.

It was, then, only natural that she should cling to him for safety.

To our friends the sound was intelligible enough, and they felt quite as much alarm as the young girl, although they did not give such audible expression to it.

The dragoons were approaching; of this they were quite sure, and it was also certain that their discovery would inevitably take place.

Still they had the presence of mind not to do anything that was at all calculated to precipitate matters.

They remained profoundly still, resolved to let events take their natural course.

All they did was to shrink still closer to the soft ground of the summer-house.

An anxious moment followed, and then the door of the summer-house was flung open.

A party of dragoons entered.

They were led by the officer, whose mind was filled with vexation to think he should have to intrude with his men upon the lord of the manor's ground upon such an occasion as the present.

As soon as he entered the summer-house he caught sight of Ernest and Minnie.

The moment he did so he called out to his men to halt.

He saw directly that he had made an unwelcome intrusion, and he deeply regretted that he had done so.

A glance was sufficient to show him that Minnie was of elevated rank.

Her dress at once bespoke that, without her personal appearance, which was eminently aristocratic.

Then her companion, Ernest, though only plainly and neatly dressed, was exceedingly noble in his deportment, and he looked upon the intruders with flashing and angry eyes.

The officer of dragoons, perceiving that he had interrupted a love scene between two of the lord of the



[CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK BIND THE SERVANTS TO THE TREE.]

manor's guests, bowed low, while he said, in a voice of great civility and respect:

"I ask a thousand pardons of you, fair lady, and of you, noble sir. I regret this intrusion exceedingly, and nothing but serious duty should have tempted me to make it. But know, noble sir, that myself and my men are in search of two notorious and most desperate highwaymen. We have tracked them to these grounds—almost to this very spot. We have entered this summer-house in search of them. I am sorry, very sorry"——

"Pray, make no further apologies," said Ernest, interrupting him, "but do your duty without delay. Search the summer-house and depart. It will not take you long to do so."

"Would you answer me a question, noble sir?" asked the captain of dragoons.

"What is it?"

"How long have you been in this summer-house?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Simply because, if you have been here some time, and you have not seen the men we seek, we need not disturb you with making a search."

"We have been here some time," replied Ernest. "I could not take upon myself to say precisely how long; we have not seen the men you speak of or heard them."

"That is enough, then," replied the officer of dragoons.

"Nay, nay," said Ernest. "Stay a moment, I beseech you. They may have entered here and concealed themselves before we came in. It will not take you a moment to search the place, as there is no hiding-place in it; therefore, I pray you, do so."

"As you have no objection to such a proceeding," replied the officer of dragoons, "I should much prefer looking around me. As you say, it will not take a moment."

With these words, the officer advanced a few steps into the summer-house.

The hearts of the highwaymen sunk within them.

A moment before they had ventured to indulge in the hope that the great danger with which they were menaced would pass away, leaving them unhurt.

But the words which Ernest uttered filled them with despair again.

It was quite clear that the officer of dragoons was only too glad to avail himself of the opportunity of searching the summer-house.

Courtesy and deference to the two persons who occupied it would have prevented his insisting upon the point.

"We will not trouble you with our presence for more than a moment," he said. "This place is very small, and, as you say, contains no hiding-place."

The officer turned round to his followers, and called two of them forward.

"Now, my lads," he said, "look closely about you, and be as quick as you can."

Ernest troubled himself no further either with the dragoons or their proceedings.

He found that Minnie was in a terrible state of agitation, and it required all his attention to endeavour to calm and soothe her.

That which she had most of all dreaded had come to pass. She had been seen alone in the summer-house with Ernest when it was thought she had retired to her chamber from indisposition.

This occurrence filled her mind with the utmost alarm, and this feeling was heightened by the appearance of the dragoons, who had a very military and ferocious look.

From the description we have already given of the place, the reader must be aware that it did not take the dragoons long to perform their search.

The officer assisted them.

In less than a minute every corner was examined with a minuteness that was perfectly unnecessary, except the one across which the screen was placed.

The reason for this was simple enough.

Ernest and Minnie stood close against the screen, and the dragoons were fearful of being too intrusive.

But Ernest, perceiving that every other part had been searched without result, anticipated the wishes of the commanding officer by saying—

"You have searched everywhere but here. If you will allow us, we will step aside."

He removed a few paces as he spoke.

"Well, just for satisfaction's sake," replied the officer, "I will just jump up and have a peep behind the screen; not that I think there is the slightest probability of our finding there those we seek; but still we shall be able to say we left no portion of this building unsearched."

"Exactly!" said Ernest.

The chief officer now sprang up on to the seat of the screen.

The back was so tall that he could only just see over it then.

Of course, the corner was in profound darkness.

"I can't see anything here," he said. "I will soon satisfy myself, however, and then we will take our departure."

With these words the officer drew the long cavalry sabre which he wore by his side.

While holding it firmly by the hilt in his hand, he placed it over the back of the screen, and allowed it to hang at the full length of his arm.

He scraped it along the woodwork, and struck it against the sides of the summer-house.

These were the only obstacles he encountered.

Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval quite gave themselves up for lost when they heard the officer announce his intention of searching behind the screen.

Nothing could save them now.

Can the reader imagine their feelings when they heard the officer spring upon the seat?

They heard him draw his sword, and their hearts sickened at the sound.

They looked up, and saw the bright blade thrust over the back of the screen.

Closer and closer they crouched unto the ground, while, with straining eyes, they watched the movements of the sabre, as the officer waved it about in all directions.

They shuddered as its point passed within a hair's breadth of them.

Had the officer's arm been an inch longer, or had the back of the screen been low enough to allow him to lean over it, they would have been touched.

This would have discovered them, for the officer would be able to tell in a moment whether the point of his sword touched anything like a human body.

But by a miracle the highwaymen escaped

The officer had waved his sword about in every possible direction without feeling any obstruction, and he was convinced there was no one behind the screen.

Once or twice, however, they had a narrow escape, when the point of the sabre approached them so close as almost to touch.

But they escaped; and, contrary to all their expectations, the officer jumped down off the screen as he said—

"I ask you ten thousand pardons for this interruption. The rascals are not here, that is very certain, although we traced them to within a few yards of this very spot. I did not think it possible they could be here, however, as you have been occupying the place for some time. Good evening, lady, and good evening to you, sir; I am much obliged to you for your kindness in allowing me to search this place, and I again ask ten thousand pardons for the intrusion."

"Make no apologies, I beg," returned Ernest.

"Good evening, sir."

The officer bowed and took his departure, followed by his men.

The lovers stood listening to the sound of their retreating footsteps.

The ears of the highwaymen likewise drank in that sound.

They could not at present realize that they had escaped—that the dreadful danger had passed away.

But such was really the case.

It would not be possible to imagine a more hair-breadth escape.

The highwaymen owed their safety, however, unquestionably to the idea which had got possession of the officer's mind.

He had made the search more for the mere form than anything else.

When Ernest told him he had been there for some time, he jumped to the conclusion that he must look elsewhere for his prey.

How different would have been the result if he had entered the summer-house with the full conviction that those he sought were there!

He would not have rested until he had made the closest search.

He would not have been content with examining the recess behind the screen with his sword only, but he would have removed the screen itself.

Discovery would have then followed.

As it was, he missed them when the highwaymen were within arm's-length of him.

Claude and Jack had quite made up their minds they should be captured.

They determined to remain where they were up to the last moment, without moving a muscle; but, when they were found, they resolved to struggle desperately with their foes before they submitted.

It was, then, through these combined circumstances that they remained in safety.

When Ernest and Minnie had entered the summer-house so soon after them, they looked upon it as a most unfavourable circumstance.

It had proved their salvation.

It would have afforded our friends great pleasure if they could have spoken, and congratulated themselves upon what had taken place.

But they were denied this gratification.

It would not do to move until the lovers had quitted the summer-house.

This brought to their minds the unpleasant fact that, although they had escaped this time, they had not eluded the dragoons for all that.

In the contemplation of their late close danger, they forgot that their real position was in no way improved.

They had heard the officer say that he had tracked them close to the summer-house.

If so, after all the pains he had taken, and the determination he had shown, it was not very likely he would very readily abandon the search.

He would place his men on the watch so as to discover

when the highwaymen made an attempt to leave the ground.

This was a very uncomfortable reflection, and each busied himself in endeavouring to decide upon some plan which would enable them to elude the vigilance of the dragoons.

They then recollected that they were totally ignorant of the nature or extent of the grounds surrounding the mansion where such a scene of festivity was taking place, and, what was worst of all, they had no horses, while their enemies were well provided with these useful creatures.

Indeed, it seemed as though the more they pondered upon their situation the more dangerous and difficult it appeared to grow.

How they were to get free they knew not, but they agreed that unless some event of a very extraordinary nature indeed took place they must be captured.

They were terribly cramped, too, in their uncomfortable post behind the screen, and yet they dared not move in consequence of the presence of Minnie and Ernest.

How long the lovers would remain they knew not, but it was quite certain they would not be able to stir until after their departure.

CHAPTER CCCCXXXIII.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK FIND THEIR POSITION IN THE SUMMER-HOUSE BECOMES COMPLICATED.

Such, then, is a brief summary of the disagreeable reflections which chased each other through the minds of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack after the dragoons had taken their departure.

To correctly describe their position, it would be necessary to say that they were environed by danger.

Such was actually and really the case.

They almost felt inclined to relinquish hope altogether.

Their attention was, however, attracted by the lovers, whose presence now they would willingly have dispensed with, although such a little while ago it had been of such service to them.

Minnie and Ernest were talking, and the subject-matter of their discourse was of so interesting a character, that the highwaymen became completely absorbed in listening to it.

After the dragoons had left, the lovers stood for some moments looking in the direction in which they had gone, and listening to the sound of their footsteps.

But when the sounds had completely died away, Ernest led his fair companion back to the screen again.

She suffered him to do so, and to seat her upon it, and to place himself at her side.

She made not the slightest resistance.

She trembled violently, and seemed as though she was about to faint.

Ernest observed this with alarm, and strove to rouse her and cheer her up.

"Come, Minnie, dearest," he said; "do not be so alarmed. "Cheer up, dear one; there is nothing to fear. Speak to me, darling; speak to me!"

"Alas!" replied Minnie, in a faint voice, that was half-choked with tears and sobs. "Alas! dearest, what I most of all feared and dreaded has come to pass. We have been seen here together and alone, and at this time of night, too!"

"It cannot be helped, dear one," replied her lover; "and yet the fault is mine. It is I, and I only, who asked you to come hither, and then, when you did come, pressed you to stay longer than you wished."

"No, no; it is not your fault. But, oh! Ernest, what is to be done? When my father hears of this"——

"You alarm yourself unnecessarily, dear one. Those soldiers do not know us."

"How can you be sure of that? I fancy, by the manner of the officer, that he recognised me."

"Well, dearest, and what if he did?"

"My father"——

"Well, he must know of it some day, must he not? And why not to-night?"

"Oh! I tremble at the thought. The moment when he learns our attachment will be a terrible one! It is but yesterday since he spoke of you in a manner that almost broke my heart."

"He is unjust, Minnie; he is unjust. He speaks wrongly of me. It is not so long ago that he seemed to love me as his own son; at any rate, he thought he could have no better companion than myself, and now look how great the change is!"

Minnie sobbed.

"It is true my father experienced a sudden and unexpected reverse of fortune. But what of that? Except in worldly wealth I was not changed, and yet, from that unfortunate hour, how he has treated me! He has broken off the friendship which existed between me and your brother; he has forbidden me ever to approach his house; he loads me with foul epithets—as beggar, upstart, and the like! Is not this unjust?"

"Most unjust, dear Ernest," answered Minnie.

"But I have not changed either with your fortunes or with theirs."

"You have not, my darling; and if this malicious stroke of fortune has accomplished so much evil, yet there is good mixed with it, for it has proved the truth and constancy of your love."

A slight pause followed, and then Ernest continued—

"I do not want to raise false hopes in your breast, and yet I wished to tell you there is a chance of our being able to recover our lost position. I cannot tell for certain yet, and do not buoy yourself up too much with the hope, lest your disappointment should be proportionately bitter."

"I am glad there is hope, Ernest, very glad; but still I think, even if you were to gain your lost position, that my father would change again, and be as he was before. You know, as well as I do, that he has wishes of his own. In his own mind, he has already decided upon whom my hand is to be disposed."

"I do know it, dearest; and the knowledge would crush me with despair, did I not also know that you will resist so great a stretch of parental authority."

"I will resist; and yet, when I look into the future, I shudder. The prospect to me is truly full of terror. Oh! Ernest, my father's wrath will be fearful to witness!"

"Let us hope for better things, Minnie."

"I wish I could see room for hope; you know not how gladly I would seize upon any, even if it should prove to be a straw. My father's pride would prevent him from receiving you again, no matter how much your worldly prospects might be bettered. His true motive for treating you as he has is a mercenary one; but he has endeavoured to conceal it by substituting others. It would be too transparent if he was to welcome you in your fresh-found felicity after having once turned his back upon you."

"I fear you speak only too truly, Minnie," said Ernest, in a sad tone of voice. "I can see but one means, dearest, of securing our happiness."

"What is that?"

"Do not be offended with me if I propose it. It is that we both fly together from this spot. You need not fear to trust yourself with me. I love you dearer than I love my life. No harm shall come to you, and I will exert my best efforts to make you a happy wife."

"No—no, Ernest! I cannot listen to such a proposal as that. I cannot—I cannot!"

"Let me add one more word. You have said yourself that your father is unjust: then let me ask you, is his injustice to doom us to perpetual unhappiness? No—no! Ten thousand times no! He has not the right to make us wretched. We love each other truly. Happiness is within our reach; why not embrace it?"

"You cannot tempt me, Ernest!"

"But you say you have no hope. Just for a moment, dear one, let us look the terrible future steadily in the face. If we do so, rely upon it, half its terrors will disappear. You say your father will never consent to our union. I believe it. I do not think he ever will. Have you then made up your mind to forsake me, or will you consummate your happiness and my own at the same moment?"

"Oh, Ernest, I must think—I must reflect. Besides, there is no need for precipitation, and—ha!"

A piercing scream suddenly came from Minnie's lips as she abruptly paused in the middle of her sentence.

The highwaymen wondered greatly what could be the cause of it, and listened for an explanation.

It soon came.

Some other person had entered the summer-house, and they heard a stern and angry voice say—

"How now, minion? Is this the obedience you owe your father? By heaven! when I heard of this clandestine meet I refused to credit it, and came here solely to confute my informer. Come here, unworthy girl; and you, dastardly villain! prying beggar! sneaking upstart! by what right do you intrude upon my grounds?"

Another shriek from Minnie's lips followed this speech, and then her father, for such he was, sprang forward, and, seizing her by the wrist with great violence, drew her towards him.

Ernest's eyes flashed, and his hand sought the hilt of the sword that was suspended from his side.

But he recollected himself, and, in a quiet tone of voice, said—

"Had any other person save yourself, my lord, given utterance to the words which have just come from your lips, you should have paid for them with your heart's best blood. But you are her father, and I hold your person sacred."

"Ha! ha! These are the romantic speeches which have caught the ear of my foolish daughter, but they will have no effect upon me. Pah! I spit upon you, as I would upon some noxious reptile or loathsome wretch!"

"Look to your daughter," said Ernest, calmly, and without taking the least notice of the other's words. "Look to your daughter; she is fainting!"

"I will see to her, sirrah, and take better care of her for the future than I have done hitherto. Begone, villain! Quit my sight, or I will call my servants to whip you off my grounds!"

"My lord, forbear! You have no need to proceed to such extremities."

"Then go."

"Look to your daughter, my lord," repeated Ernest, in the same calm, level tone of voice.

"I will, sir. And since you promise to depart, I will allow you fifteen minutes to do so. If, after that time, you are found upon my estates, you shall be publicly horsewhipped off. And look you, sir, should you come here again in the same clandestine manner as you have to-night, beware! My servants will be instructed how to treat you if they find you."

To these words Ernest made no reply.

It cost him, however, a great effort thus to subdue his rage, for he was by nature of a violent and impetuous disposition.

But the recollection that the person who stood before him was the father of Minnie enabled him to retain his self-possession.

He stood quite still and silent.

Minnie had fainted, but her father's arm sustained her; and now he raised her in his arms and carried her from the summer-house.

Still Ernest did not move.

He gazed in the direction they had gone, and said—

"And so this is the end! All is over now. The dream of my life has passed away. Minnie, I know, is of too gentle and yielding a disposition to set herself up in vigorous opposition to her father. I dare not approach. I have lost her for ever! I have seen her for the last time!"

He paced now up and down the narrow limits of the summer-house, and gave way to the deepest grief.

"It is in vain," he muttered, "quite in vain, to think that I shall ever be able to win her father's consent. Nothing could be more impossible. And then Minnie? She will not, I am sure, become my wife without it. I must banish her from my thoughts. From this time forth I must forget all happiness that I had pictured in the future. Nothing is now before me, save cheerless, blank despair. Well—well! Perhaps it was to be so!

He sank down again upon the screen and buried his face in his hands.

He sobbed audibly, and his whole frame shook with the intensity of his emotion.

Then he raised his head.

"I will take one more glance at this place," he continued. "It is here where I last beheld her; here where she last sat! I have seen her for the last time; but the appearance of this place will be for ever imprinted upon my memory. I shall never be able to forget it. It is a sad pleasure. I will gaze for a moment longer, and then depart. I know her father's character too well to think that he would shrink from carrying out his word. I will go."

He rose to his feet.

During the time he had been thus giving audible expression to his thoughts, under the belief that he was alone, Claude Duval had been busy with his thoughts.

A fresh idea had occurred to him altogether.

He fancied he should be able to accomplish at one stroke two very desirable things.

One was to secure the happiness of those two who so fondly and truly loved each other; and the second was to accomplish their own escape.

The only difficulty he was in was how to make his companion acquainted with his intentions.

That, however, was simply impossible.

Claude, however, believed that he could carry out his scheme successfully; and so, when Ernest rose to his feet, as we have related, Claude touched his comrade, so as to attract his attention, and then, to Sixteen-String Jack's unutterable surprise, he got up.

Claude was tall, but yet, when he stood at his full height, he could not see over the top of the screen.

This difficulty, however, he soon overcame.

Taking hold of the top of the screen with his hands, he raised himself up by the muscles in his arms.

"Hish!" he said. "One moment, sir. I wish to speak to you."

It was to Ernest that Claude addressed himself, and that individual was not a little surprised to hear himself called when he felt so sure he was alone.

Claude spoke again.

"Wait a moment," he said, "I want to speak to you, sir!" I have something of great importance to communicate."

This was quite a pacific speech; but, nevertheless, Ernest, who had thoroughly recovered himself, drew his sword, and stood in an attitude of defence, as he said—

"I know not who and what you are, nor whether you speak true. If, however, you have any evil or sinister design, beware, for I am a desperate man, and one that will not bear trifling with."

"You have nothing to apprehend from me, I can assure you," said Claude, as he began to scramble over the back of the screen. "As I told you, I have something of importance to communicate, and you will find it to your interest to pay particular attention to what I am going to say."

Upon receipt of this assurance, Ernest lowered the point of his sword, and Claude stepped down on the ground.

"My comrade is with me," said Claude Duval. "Here, Jack; come over. All is well."

Ernest looked rather uncomfortable when Sixteen-String Jack responded to his companion's call, and likewise scrambled over the back of the screen.

"Pardon me," he said, "I cannot understand how you could come from behind that screen. The officer of the dragoons searched that corner."

"I know he did, sir," replied Claude, gaily; "but you see he did not find us."

"Then—then you—you are the persons of whom he was in search?"

"Just so."

"Highwaymen?"

"Exactly."

Ernest raised his sword again.

"I have already cautioned you," he said, "and I again say, beware!"

"Put down your sword, sir; you have nothing to fear from us. We are highwaymen. We admit it. You will excuse us, sir, for not having introduced ourselves properly. It is not too late to repair the omission. This, then, sir, is my old comrade in many an adventure, by name John Rann, but better known to the world as Sixteen-String Jack. As for myself, my name is Claude Duval."

Ernest gave two starts when these two names fell upon his ear.

At the conclusion of his speech, however, Claude took off his hat, and made quite a courtly bow.

Sixteen-String Jack followed his example.

It was, perhaps, mere habit that made Ernest return the bow, but he did so, and said, rather stiffly—

"My name is Ernest—Ernest Leigh, at your service."

The two highwaymen bowed again, and Claude said—

"Now, Mr. Ernest Leigh, if such is your title, I have something to say to you which I am certain will elicit all your interest."

CHAPTER CCCCXXXIV.

CLAUDE DUVAL UNFOLDS TO ERNEST LEIGH A VERY CLEVER AND INGENIOUS PLAN OF ESCAPE.

THE young man assumed an attitude of attention, in spite of the amazement and uneasiness that he felt.

He could not for the life of him imagine what this communication could be about, and his curiosity was roused to the utmost pitch.

He scarcely knew what to think of the two highwaymen.

He did not sheathe his sword, but held it negligently in his hand, and picked holes in the ground with it.

Claude perceived that Ernest was all attention, and waiting for him to speak, and felt rather confused.

He knew not how to begin, but, urged on by necessity, he said—

"I hope, sir, that your mind is clear enough to see that the fact of our being a couple of highwaymen does not incapacitate us from possessing some information which will be of service to you. Assuming this, I wish you also to understand that we contemplate no direct nor indirect attack upon your purse. A parson is not always preaching, and a highwayman is not always committing robberies."

"Proceed, sir," said Ernest; "that is quite sufficient introduction."

"I am glad to hear it," said Claude, much relieved. "That prefaces myself. To come to the point—myself and my comrade, being pursued by the dragoons, entered these grounds. While hastening onward, we suddenly heard footsteps before us. We paused and listened. The footsteps approached. If we had kept along the gravel-path, we should have been seen by the persons who were advancing. It was necessary that we should be unseen. We could not retreat over the garden-beds, for the path of which I speak was bounded on both sides by a tall quickset hedge. We had no alternative, save to retreat. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly, but I must say I cannot, for the life of me, see how this concerns me."

"Have patience for a moment, sir. I wanted to account for our presence behind the screen yonder, which, I should think, seemed not a little mysterious to you."

"I confess it does. Pray, sir, proceed, and tell your story, after your own fashion."

"Suppose we sit down, sir. We shall be able to talk more in comfort then."

"Agreed."

Claude and Jack seated themselves upon the screen, while Ernest Leigh just rested himself against the table that was placed opposite to it.

Then Claude went on—

"Well, sir, hearing some one coming, we retreated until we came to this summer-house, which we entered in the hope that those who were coming would pass by, and leave the path clear for us. Still we thought it prudent to conceal ourselves. We looked round, but could perceive no other hiding-place than the space behind this screen. There was no time for delay, so we scrambled over the top with all speed."

"Well?"

"Scarcely had we done so, than we heard some one enter. Need I say who?"

"Myself and"——

"Just so. You came in and seated yourselves. Can you imagine our consternation? We were prisoners, for we could not even move without discovery. Not to linger over this portion of my story, placed where we were, we could not avoid overhearing every word that was said."

"But," said Ernest, "I cannot understand how you escaped the sword of the officer when he waved it about."

"We did so by a miracle. I felt it hiss past my face once or twice."

"So did I," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"But we had the presence of mind to keep perfectly still."

Ernest Leigh looked from one of the highwaymen to the other, in admiration at the cool and off-hand manner in which they spoke of their narrow escape from capture.

Claude continued—

"You will think I have been a long time in coming to the point, but I have reached it at last.

"We have—quite unavoidably—overheard all that has been said during the time we have been in concealment. What has reached our ears, though not exactly a narrative, yet embodies so many important facts, that we have no difficulty whatever in comprehending the precise position of affairs."

"Well, sir?"

"I hope you will take no objection to my blunt way of speaking; but, as you know, we have heard all. I can't see any reason why we should mince matters. I understand, of course, your relations to the young lady you call Minnie. I also know what her father's mind is."

"Ah! I had forgotten his parting promise."

"Pho! pho! Never mind him. You have, I suppose, not given up all hopes of making this young girl your wife?"

"Excuse me," said Ernest; "the subject is too painful and delicate a one to be discussed before strangers."

"But we are no strangers; we know all about it; and all I can say is, that, if you have given up all hope, you are a very different young gentleman to what I took you to be."

"Well, sir, what if I hope still?"

"Just this. I think you will find that, now her father has behaved with so much harshness to her, and, now that she knows it is madness to hope that he will ever give his consent to your union—I say, knowing all this, I think you will find that the young lady, rather than give you up, will be inclined to listen to you if you propose some well-laid plan of flight."

Ernest Leigh shook his head.

"I have no such hope."

"Pho! pho! You have—or you ought to have. At any rate, you will not give her up without making at least one effort to obtain her."

"Oh! sir, I know not what to think. I have, indeed, had no time for the reflection; and the strangeness of the events which have just occurred have set my brain in a perfect whirl."

"Then, let me think for you, and save you the trouble, for, under the circumstances you name, thought is a very difficult thing indeed. Let me propose a course of action to you. You can please yourself whether you carry it out."

"Well, sir, go on."

"If you will take my advice, the first thing you will do will be to set his lordship's commands, about quitting the grounds, at defiance. Then, in the second place, you will obtain an interview with the young lady, and, if you will only make use of some good arguments, I'll warrant she will come round to your way of thinking."

"You raise strange hopes in my breast—hopes which I dare not entertain; and yet, until you spoke, my mind was filled with nothing but despair."

"I know it, and now it is filled with hope."

"No, no; I cannot entertain such hope. You speak of impossibilities. How can I set all his servants at defiance, and obtain an interview with Minnie?"

"If you will make up your mind to do so, you will find you will not have much trouble. The old proverb says—'Love laughs at locksmiths.'"

"Well, sir, I must admit you have given me fresh hopes. I will not relinquish her hand without, at least, an effort to retain possession of it. But there is one thing I cannot understand, and that is your motive for troubling yourselves in this affair."

"If I told you that it was a disinterested motive, in all probability you would not believe me, and most certainly it would not be the truth. Our motive is to escape."

"But how?"

"Well, sir, that depends if you can succeed in persuading the young lady to fly with you; and, mind, I don't think you will fail. It will afford us an opportunity of eluding the vigilance of the dragoons. Without the adoption of some stratagem to get away, we shall, in the end, be discovered. For instance, the first thing the officer of dragoons will do, having failed to find us, will be to post his men all round this place, and give them strict injunctions to look out for us."

"I see. But how am I to help you?"

"We shall not require you to do anything more than

carry off the young lady. If you fail in this, we must adopt some other plan."

"This is the strangest thing I have heard of."

"If you like," said Claude Duval, "I will give you full details of our plan."

"Pray do so, for my curiosity is roused to the utmost."

"I will do so, then, in as few words as possible. In the first place, then, we will assume that you have succeeded in persuading the young lady to fly with you."

Ernest Leigh smiled, and said—

"Well?"

"You will have to be careful what you do, for her absence would be discovered, and a close pursuit commenced."

"I suppose so."

"It is quite certain. Now, sir, the first thing I want to know—have you got a carriage?"

"No."

"No!" repeated Claude, in a disappointed voice.

"No, I have not. But is it so essential?"

"Well, yes. But do you know anyone who is here to-night with a carriage?"

"Yes, several."

"Could you borrow one?"

"I am afraid not."

"Ha! then you throw me out. But never mind; I shall, perhaps, be able to think of some means by which the difficulty may be overcome; or, perhaps, you may be able to suggest something. I will narrate to you my original plan."

"I shall be glad to hear it."

"I imagined, then, that you were one of the guests at this place, and that you would have a carriage. In the event of such being the case, I should have proposed that you called your servants aside, and ordered them to have changed dresses with us."

"With you?"

"Yes; we would then have returned, instead of the two servants, and take their places. One of us would have got up behind and the other seated himself on the box. We should then take you on your way at such a rapid rate as would defy pursuit, and accomplish our own escape at the same time, for the dragoons would never think of looking for us under that disguise."

"Bravo!" cried Sixteen-String Jack, as he clapped his hands together. "Capital!"

The reader will remember that the details of the plan thus unfolded were quite new to him.

He was delighted beyond measure.

But as for Ernest Leigh, he was completely taken aback at the boldness of it.

"Can it be really possible that you contemplated carrying out such a desperate scheme?"

"Pho! pho! my dear sir, it is nothing. Our position just at the present time is, I confess, somewhat desperate, and therefore we must employ desperate means to get out of it."

"But as I have no carriage here, and as it is not possible for me to borrow one from any of the guests, how then?"

"We shall get out of that difficulty, never fear," said Claude Duval. It struck me, however, as being a very simple way of bringing about certain desirable events."

"Claude," said Sixteen-String Jack, just one word with you."

Jack whispered something in his ear.

"Ha! To be sure. The very thing!" were Duval's comments as he listened.

Then, turning towards Ernest Leigh, he said—

"With your assistance, sir, I have no doubt we shall be able to carry out the scheme I proposed."

"In what way can I be of service to you?"

"You can give us some information, which it is necessary we should have, and of which we are, at present, deficient."

"What is it?"

"In the first place, what is the name of the owner of this domain?"

"Lord Mortimer."

"Very good. I will remember it."

"Is that all you desire to know?"

"Yes; just at present."

"Can you tell me whether any of the guests are taking their departure?"

"I cannot say for certain, but I think it very likely that, as the hour is so late, several are about to start."

"Just so. And it is usual for the carriages to remain in a kind of rank for a little time until the owners of them are in readiness."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, then, can you take me by an obscure and unfrequented road to this place?"

"Yes."

"Then I must trouble you to do so, and then we can talk a little further."

"Come on, then. I shall be right glad to quit this place. I have been expecting an interruption every moment."

Ernest Leigh went towards the door of the summer-house as he spoke.

The two highwaymen rose instantly to their feet.

"You must understand that it is essentially necessary that we should not be seen by anyone."

"All right; I can take you where you want to go over the garden-beds, and through the shrubbery. I am well acquainted with the place."

"Then your knowledge will now be of good service. Lead the way, sir; we will follow."

Ernest Leigh stepped forward, taking his way with the manner of one who was quite confident about going right.

His mind was in a very strange state of agitation, however.

Had anyone told him he would voluntarily become a companion to two highwaymen, he would have laughed the idea to scorn.

And yet, here he was.

They had spoken to him courteously and kindly.

Had they been of his own station, they could not have comported themselves in a more gentlemanlike manner.

They had spoken words of consolation to him.

They had inspired him with hope at the moment when he was utterly downcast and despairing.

In addition to this, he possessed that strong love for strange adventures which seems inherent in every human breast.

He had no doubt now about the good faith of the two highwaymen.

Had they professed that their sole object was to advantage him, he would have had his suspicions.

As it was, however, they had frankly and truly stated their own position, and shown him how, while serving him, they would achieve their escape from a difficulty which could not be over-estimated.

It would answer their purpose to befriend him.

But the reader, who must be familiar enough with the dispositions of the two highwaymen, will know well enough that they would gladly undertake so pleasant an adventure as that of assisting two young people to be happy.

With his mind occupied with these reflections, Ernest Leigh led our friends in a straight line over the garden-beds, trampling down in his course, without any remorse, the choicest and most beautiful of flowers.

By-and-by the shrubbery was reached.

Claude and Jack conversed together in low, whispering tones, and further elaborated their plan of escape.

Presently Ernest paused, and turning round said—

"If you advance a few paces further, cautiously, you will be able to see what you desire, I think."

Claude and Jack immediately stepped forward, taking care, as they did so, to make no more bustling with the twigs than they could help.

Then, looking through, they could see a broad avenue in which was a long line of beautiful carriages.

The coachmen and footmen were sitting and standing about, waiting to take their turn to drive up to the hall door, for many of the guests were taking their departure.

Claude beckoned Ernest to come nearer.

"Do you recognise any of those carriages?" he asked.

"Yes, several."

"Then we will have whichever one you like to select."

"But how?"

"Leave us to manage that. Just say which one."

"It is immaterial."

"Is there a carriage there the owner of which you owe a grudge to, because if there is it would be a good joke to make use of that one to escape with."

CHAPTER CCCCXXXV.

THE COACHMAN AND FOOTMAN BELONGING TO THE COUNTESS OF FARLAND'S CARRIAGE ARE EASILY DUPED BY CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

Ernest Leigh laughed silently as Claude pronounced these words, and he replied—

"Well, now you mention it, it would be a very good joke, and, strangely enough, there happens to be just before us the carriage of a certain old lady who has been the means of embittering Lord Mortimer against me more than anyone or anything else."

"That's the carriage for us, then. Which is it, sir?"

"That one just opposite with the pair of black horses, and the footman in the blue livery, faced with silver."

"I see it. All right. And now, what is the name of this lady?"

"The Countess of Farland."

"That is enough. We shall do now, never fear! The next thing will be for you to obtain an interview with Minnie, and persuade her to be the companion of your flight. Why do you sigh, sir, and shake your head?"

"I was thinking of the difficulty of the task, of which you speak with so much lightness."

"Pho! pho! A faint heart never yet won a fair lady! She loves you. That is sufficient. Rely upon it, sir, if you make up your mind to this course, you will succeed."

"I have no doubt of it," said Sixteen-String Jack. "You must not forget, sir, that chance compelled us to be auditors of what passed between you. She listened to your proposal at the first; and now that her father has interfered, depend upon it, when you renew your suit, she will consent."

"I think so, too," said Claude; "at any rate, make the effort. Were I in your place, I should not relinquish the lady without a severe struggle."

"Well, gentlemen, I will take your advice. You have filled my breast with renewed hopes. From my intimate knowledge of the premises, I have no doubt I shall be able to approach her."

"Then, when that is done, take my word for it, the rest will follow easily enough."

"But stay! We must make some further agreement. Where shall I find you?"

"I think we cannot do better than remain where we now are."

"You cannot do better."

"Then you will find us here."

"And the carriage?"

"When you arrive with the lady we will not keep you many minutes."

"Agreed, then." Farewell, sirs, for a time. I will try my fortune."

"'Confidence begets success.' Remember that in your undertaking. Bear in mind, too, that as you love this lady so dearly, your earthly happiness and her own depend upon yourself."

Ernest Leigh waved his hand and disappeared.

As soon as he was out of hearing, Claude said—

"Well, Jack, my friend, what do you think of my scheme?"

"Why, I think it as excellent a one as was ever devised."

"I like it myself; and I must say, too, that I admire your suggestion for overcoming the difficulty of getting a carriage."

"I think it can be done."

"I am sure of it. If you leave it to me I will guarantee it."

"You are confident."

"Oh! Jack, it is such a glorious thing to think how we shall pass right under the noses of these troublesome dragoons. No doubt, their officer will be cunning enough to peep into every carriage that goes out of the gates, but he would never think of looking for us acting the parts of coachman and footman."

"It is a rare scheme, Claude, a rare scheme; and, perhaps, even now we may be lucky enough to reach the gibbet on the Finchley-road before daybreak."

"Ah! I wonder whether Dick and Tom King are there, or whether they are held fast in some place or other, as we are here?"

"We cannot tell. We must wait and see. How lucky that your carriage has a pair of horses in it? They look good ones, too. They will do for us, and replace those we have unluckily lost."

"We shall want saddles."

"Oh! never mind that. Such a difficulty as that will be overcome without much trouble."

In such like conversation as this did Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack pass away the time which elapsed before Ernest Leigh returned.

To them it seemed an intolerable time, and they were fearful that the carriage they had decided upon making use of would start away before he came back.

They listened attentively for the slightest sound which might indicate his approach, but all remained silent.

They began to grow fidgety and impatient.

How long a time elapsed they knew not, but at length their ears were gladdened by a slight rustling sound.

They looked eagerly in the direction from which it came.

In another moment Ernest Leigh appeared.

His manner—his very walk—his attitude even showed our friends before he spoke that all was well.

Claude spoke first.

"You have succeeded?" he said.

"Yes, my friend. Contrary to my expectations, I have succeeded. I have had great trouble—first in getting access to her, and then in persuading her; but now all is arranged."

"I am very happy to hear it; but where is the lady?"

"She will be here directly. I shall return almost immediately, and she will accompany me. My object in coming here was to tell you, in order that you might have all in readiness."

"Good. We shall be ready, never fear."

"Enough, then. I will depart again."

"Stay a moment. Have you any idea how long you shall be?"

"I cannot tell to a few minutes."

"Shall you be less than a quarter of an hour?"

"No, I think not."

"Very well; in a quarter of an hour from now you can come to Lady Farland's carriage in safety and enter it. We shall be there as footman and coachman, and you can tell us then where we are to drive."

"Very good. You will be sure and perform your part?"

"Never fear for us, sir."

"We can come to the carriage-door with safety?"

"With every confidence."

"Well, you are a couple of clever fellows; and how you are going to manage it, I don't know."

"All is arranged; and now, sir, there is no time to lose."

"There is not."

"Farewell, then, for a quarter of an hour."

"Farewell."

Ernest Leigh, feeling quite like another being, turned away.

As soon as he had taken his departure, the two highwaymen set to work to carry out their scheme.

They had set themselves a great deal to do in a very short space of time.

We shall see whether they accomplished it.

They spoke with great confidence about the matter, and as though they had little fear of failure

"You stay here in readiness, Jack," said Claude Duval to his companion, "and I will go up to the carriage."

"All right, my friend. Be sure and act your part well."

"Never fear me," returned Claude.

As he spoke, he emerged from the shrubbery into the avenue.

Crossing this, he directed his steps in a straight line to the carriage.

The coachman—who was as fat as any coachman need wish to be—was sitting on his box, apparently in a doze, while the footman was standing near, conversing with one of his liveried fraternity.

Claude Duval made his way up to the footman with a confident and commanding air.

He touched him slightly on the arm as he said—

"Can you tell me whether this is the Countess of Farland's carriage?"

The footman looked at Claude from head to foot, and then, drawing himself up into what he doubtless deemed

himself was an imposing and dignified attitude, he replied in a pompous voice—

"Yes, sir; this *air* the Countess of Farland's *cawwidge*."

"I thought so. The description given me was quite correct. You are one of her ladyship's domestics, I presume?"

"Yes, sir, I *air*."

"Yes; his lordship told me that your livery was blue, faced with silver."

The footman looked down at his attire complacently.

"If you will be good enough to step aside a moment," continued Claude, "I will deliver his lordship's message."

The footman waved his hand to the companion he had been talking with, who fell back a few paces.

"What is his lordship's pleasure?" asked the footman.

"I have just left Lord Mortimer and the Countess of Farland together. They have sent me to say that you and the coachman are to accompany me at once."

"Very good," said the footman. "You had better jump up on the box along with the coachman."

"No, no. You don't understand me."

"Oh!"

"You must not take the carriage, but come on foot with me."

"And who will look after the equipage?"

"They did not say anything about that."

"Oh! didn't they?"

"No. But I don't think they will want you for more than a minute or two. Perhaps your friend would just give an eye?"

"My friend?"

"Yes; the one you were talking to when I arrived."

"Oh! to be sure."

"Make haste, then."

"He won't mind, I know."

"That's right; ask him. There is no time for delay."

"I don't know who you are, sir, but it's a strange order. However, I suppose it will be all right?"

"Yes, you will find it all right."

The footman spoke a few words to his late companion, who replied to what he said by nodding his head.

So far, then, all was well.

The footman then came up to the coachman and touched him with his long bâton or staff.

"Hi! coachy!" he said. "You are momentuously wanted. Get down. Leonidas will have an eye on the equipage."

The coachman, hearing these words, descended from his box with as much alacrity as his obese body would allow.

"What's up?" he asked.

"We air to follow this gentleman," said the footman "so come along, because his lordship's in a hurry."

The coachman never for one moment dreamt of considering about anything.

It was enough for him to be told.

He obeyed.

Claude Duval was rejoiced beyond measure to think he had so easily succeeded in effecting his purpose.

It was more than he hoped for and expected.

He had prepared himself for a difficult task, but he found the coachman and footman fall into the snare with remarkable ease.

"Just follow me," he said to them, "and I will take you by the nearest route to where his lordship and your mistress are awaiting you."

They promised to do so.

Claude led the way to the shrubbery.

He wound his way through this.

According to the agreement which they had made with each other, Sixteen-String kept out of sight until the two servants had passed him.

As soon as this happened, he stepped silently from the tree behind which he had concealed himself, and brought up the rear.

He had no trouble in following, but he took care to keep at sufficient distance to be out of their hearing.

Claude Duval led the way with quite a confident step, and no one would have believed for a moment that he was wholly ignorant of the extent and arrangements of the grounds.

All he was intent upon, however, was to make his way in as straight a line as he possibly could to some place as far as possible removed from the mansion and the carriages.

A few minutes brought them to a very retired part of the grounds.

The coachman and footman now began to wonder whither they were being led, and a dim, uncomfortable idea that something was not altogether right took possession of their minds.

This idea soon expanded, until they became convinced that something was actually wrong.

Just as the footman was about in a whisper to intimate his suspicions to the coachman however, he was startled by feeling someone clutch him suddenly by the throat.

At the same moment he felt something cold thrust into his mouth.

Then a voice said, in tones of terrible menace and determination—

"This is a loaded pistol which I have just thrust into your mouth, and if you utter a sound above a whisper, I will pull the trigger and blow the top of your head off!"

It was Sixteen-String Jack who had thus cautiously and silently approached the footman, and seized him by the throat.

When he had finished uttering the threatening words we have recorded, he rattled the pistol against the footman's teeth, in order to give due effect to them.

Precisely at the same moment that Sixteen-String Jack thus seized the footman, Claude Duval turned round and grasped the coachman.

He held a pistol in his hand, and he presented it at his head, as he said—

"If you attempt to move or speak you are a dead man."

This speech appeared to have the effect of depriving the coachman of all his strength.

In some strange manner he collapsed and doubled up.

He would have fallen to the ground; but it so happened that a rustic garden-seat, which was close to him, received his bulky body.

There he sat, in about the most comical fashion imaginable, with his face and whole attitude expressive of the most ludicrous fright.

He opened his mouth to a preternatural width, and gasped for breath.

But he made no effort to speak.

He could tell, by the significant manner in which Claude had spoken, that the threat was not an idle one.

The footman, too, came directly to the conclusion that the best thing he could do was to make no resistance.

It is a singular thing that those persons whose lives are clearly of the least value are always the most particular in taking care of them.

Having thrown them into this state of fright, the two highwaymen proceeded to reassure them a little.

"Look here, both of you," said Claude Duval, "and pay particular attention to my words. You are in no danger; you have nothing whatever to fear—that is, if you do exactly as we command you. Do you understand?"

Claude raised his pistol as he spoke, and so did Sixteen-String Jack.

Mindful of the caution which had been given them not to speak above a whisper, the unfortunate footman and coachman contented themselves with nodding their heads in a furious manner.

Understanding by this that they understood what was said to them, Claude continued—

"Now then, listen to our commands, and obey! If you refuse, you are dead men. We want your clothes; off with them! Be quick! or we will slay you first and take them off your dead bodies!"

The two servants looked at each other in blank dismay.

A cold perspiration broke out all over them.

"Do you hesitate?" asked Claude, fiercely.

"Do you refuse?" asked Sixteen-String Jack, more fiercely still.

The response was a violent shaking of heads.

"Come, then, begin. Off with them! Quick! for your lives."

The footman groaned faintly, and took off his laced cocked hat.

The coachman divested himself of his wig and hat.

"I am glad to see you behave in such a sensible manner," said Claude Duval. "You would be perfect



[MAUD WELCOMES DICK TURPIN BACK TO THE DESERTED MANSION.]

madmen to resist; and as we are bent upon having your clothes, you may as well surrender them to us quietly as not. Come! off with the rest!"

Both seemed to be of this opinion; and, finding they could not help themselves, they began to rapidly pull off their clothes.

As soon as any garment was thus thrown down, our friends put it on, and in this manner they became gradually metamorphosed.

Sixteen-String Jack put on the footman's clothes, and Claude Duval the coachman's.

It was truly laughable to see with what eagerness they pulled off their clothes. Never before in all their lives had they undressed themselves so quickly.

In a little while the two unfortunate servants were stripped to their shirts

CHAPTER CCCCXXXVI.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL ENACT THE PARTS OF FOOTMAN AND COACHMAN TO GREAT PERFECTION.

THE reader must understand that Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack put these things on over their own, so that they could, at any time when they found it necessary, cast off the disguise which they were now so anxious to assume.

Having, by working upon the fears of the Countess of Farland's servants, succeeded in their design, another consideration forced itself upon the highwaymen, and demanded their immediate attention.

It is true by their threats they had obtained a complete mastery over these men, but as soon as they departed their influence would vanish; and then, naturally enough, the first thing the coachman and footman would think of doing would be to raise an alarm.

This would be fatal, and therefore it became clearly necessary to prevent this in some way or other.

After a moment's consideration, Claude and Jack agreed to gag them by tying their own neckcloths tightly over their mouths.

No sooner was this resolved upon than it was done.

Threatening the most terrible things they could think of if they made the least resistance, the two friends effectually put an end to all fear that the servants would raise an alarm by the tightness with which they bound them.

This was not all.

They would have to be deprived of the power of running away.

It is not to be supposed that the prevention of this presented many difficulties to the two highwaymen.

Sixteen-String Jack had a nice piece of strong rope which he had brought with him from Enfield Chase, and with this he resolved to bind them to a tree.

The poor wretches shivered in the cold night air, and their teeth chattered together like castanets.

But our friends were unfeeling and pitiless.

By using more threats, they compelled both to rise and place themselves in a convenient position against a tree.

Then with the aid of his piece of rope, Sixteen-String Jack bound them firmly to it.

As probably they did not possess the skill of the Davenport Brothers, there was little fear that they would free themselves and run off.

Then, as for calling attention to their situation by calling out, that was quite impossible, for they could not produce any articulate sound.

Having thus safely and securely disposed of them, our friends proceeded to give the finishing touches to their disguise.

The long great coat which the footman had worn was in itself quite sufficient to disguise Sixteen-String Jack without anything else, for when it was buttoned it concealed the whole of his apparel save his boots.

With Claude, however, it was different.

He had more difficulty.

There was a very great difference between his size and the size of the coachman; and the coat and waistcoat, when he put them on, like Falstaff's skin, "hung about him like a lady's loose gown."

To deceive the eyes of the man who had been left in charge of the carriage, it would be necessary to pad himself in some way.

Jack at once took off his own coat and waistcoat and gave them to him, so that all he had on were those taken from the footman.

Claude rolled them up in a very skilful manner, and, placing them in the proper position, gave himself the appearance of possessing great obesity.

"Now, Claude," said Jack, "let us be getting back. A quarter of an hour has elapsed, I am certain; and it would be a thousand pities for the plan to be spoilt, after succeeding so far, by Ernest and the lady arriving too soon."

"You are right, my friend. Come, I am ready; and a minute or two will serve to take us to the carriage."

"Forward, then, Claude, and lead the way."

At a sharp walk the two highwaymen took their way towards their destination, leaving the unfortunate flunkeys to their miserable fate.

How long they might stay there before they were found, our friends did not trouble themselves to speculate about.

They only hoped they would remain there in quiet until they had got beyond the reach of danger.

Claude had noted carefully the way he had come, so that he was able to retrace his steps without difficulty or hesitation.

Looking out on to the avenue from the shrubbery, they saw the countess's carriage just where they had left it.

They crossed over, and Claude Duval climbed on to the coachman's box with great nimbleness and agility.

The footman who had promised to look after the carriage was still there.

Seeing Sixteen-String Jack in the dark, he did not perceive the substitution that had been made.

He saw the blue livery [illegible] silver, and that was all.

"I am glad you have come back," he said. "I could not have waited a moment longer. I'm off! I suppose I shall see you to-morrow?"

Without waiting for any reply, the footman hurried off.

He had been called some time before and had already stayed as long as he dared.

Perceiving this, Sixteen-String Jack chuckled with satisfaction, for he was afraid he should not be able to deceive this fellow, who, doubtless, knew the real footman well.

Fortune seemed to favour them, however, to a degree for which they dared not hope.

The sooner, now, that the lovers made their appearance, the better it would be.

Sixteen-String Jack looked about for them anxiously.

Every moment they stayed here was fraught with danger.

The countess might call for her carriage, and then they would be in a regular fix.

Just when he had worked himself up into a perfect fever of excitement and agitation, Jack caught sight of two forms, evidently male and female, approaching him.

The obscurity was too great for Jack to be able to see with any degree of distinctness, and he was not sufficiently well acquainted with the personal appearance of Ernest Leigh to be able to say for certain whether he was one of the two approaching.

But Jack got nearer to the door of the carriage in order to be in readiness.

There was a kind of shrinking timidity and hesitation in the approach of these two figures, which made him think that he was not deceived.

In another moment they came near, and the light of the lamp belonging to the carriage falling upon them, revealed the face and form of Ernest Leigh.

Minnie was clinging heavily to his arm.

It seemed as though she had to support her steps.

What means or arguments the young man had made use of in order to induce her to accompany him in his flight Jack knew not.

It was sufficient for him that they were there.

As soon as he was quite sure that it was those who he expected who were approaching, he said—

"Quick, Mr. Leigh! Be quick, if you please. We are all in readiness, and waiting only for you. Quick! quick!"

The two lovers increased their speed.

A dozen more steps brought them to the door of the carriage.

Jack held it open for them to enter, and, putting his finger to the brim of his hat, in the most approved fashion, asked where they desired to go.

"To London," replied Ernest Leigh, without the slightest hesitation.

Jack closed the door, and, without making any reply, scrambled up on to the footboard at the back of the countess's carriage.

"To London, Claude," he said.

Claude Duval perpetrated a slight whistle, and then touched the horses with the whip.

The high-mettled creatures, impatient in the extreme at having been kept waiting so long, reared and plunged, and finally set off at a swift trot.

Claude Duval found that he had now a very difficult duty to perform.

It had only just then presented itself to his mind.

How was he to find his way out of the grounds?

The reader must remember he was totally in ignorance of them, and to take a wrong turn would be fatal.

He felt, however, that it was useless to perplex himself with this.

All he could do was to trust to his good luck for a guide, aided by keeping a sharp look-out around him.

Other carriages before him were on the move, and he thought he could not do better than follow them.

He did so, and presently found that he had reached the entrance doors of the mansion.

Here the other carriages stopped to take up their owners, and then drove off again.

But Claude did not stop.

He drove past the doors, and followed a carriage which had just started from them.

He did not doubt that if he kept close behind this he should be able to go the nearest way to the gates.

In this expectation he was not deceived.

After going a long way down a broad, serpentine avenue, he came in sight of some large iron gates.

Here there appeared to be some obstruction.

The carriage just in front stopped, and Claude was compelled to stop too.

After a brief delay it went on, but it stopped again just as it was about to pass through the gate.

Wondering what could be the meaning of this unusual proceeding, Claude looked keenly in advance, and Sixteen-String Jack stretched his body over the top of the carriage in order to catch a glance, if possible, at what was going on.

He could not make it out; but Claude, who occupied a far more favourable position, soon distinguished the forms of several dragoons mounted upon their horses.

They were ranged on each side of the gate in such a manner that every vehicle would have to pass between them.

What took place during the delay, Claude could not ascertain.

At length, however, the carriage preceding his was suffered to go on, and, not without a misgiving that after all their cleverness something had gone wrong, Claude set his horses in motion again.

Ere he had gone many yards, however, a voice cried—

"Pull up a moment, coachman."

For a moment Claude hesitated as to what he should do.

Would it be better to give his horses the whip and send them off at a gallop, or should he remain where he was and run the risk of discovery?

He did not hesitate long.

He pulled up.

He had confidence in the excellence of his disguise, and resolved to have it tested.

If he did not obey the command just uttered suspicion would be aroused, whereas by remaining he had hopes that he should be able to withstand the test.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were not alone in feeling alarmed.

The sensation was shared in both by Ernest and Minnie.

Nor was their dismay in any way diminished when the window of the carriage was rather rudely let down from the outside.

A man's face appeared.

Ernest and Minnie recognised it instantly.

It was the face of the officer of dragoons.

He, too, evidently recognised the fugitives, for he smiled, while he took off his hat and made a low bow.

"Really, sir," he said, addressing himself to Ernest, "it seems as though I was doomed to intrude upon you to-night. On the present occasion I have no better excuse than that which I offered before. The two highwaymen, of whom we are in search, we have not yet been able to succeed in capturing. That they are somewhere in the grounds we are certain. They are quite clever enough to adopt some cunning scheme to escape, even to that of concealing themselves in a carriage, therefore I have determined to allow no carriage to depart unsearched. You can easily satisfy yourselves whether there is anyone concealed in your own vehicle, and then I will not detain you a moment longer. Be good enough then, sir, if you please, to look under the seats."

During this long time, Ernest Leigh had ample time to recover himself from any consternation he might have felt.

Willingly enough, then, he proceeded to look under the seats, and the dragoon was immediately convinced that the two highwaymen were not there.

"I ask a thousand pardons, but duty must be done," added the officer. "As soon as the guests have taken their departure, the lord of the manor will permit me to explore the grounds thoroughly. In the meantime they cannot escape. I have posted my men all round in an unbroken circle. If the villains attempt to leave they will be instantly discovered, while if they remain here until daybreak we shall be sure to find them. Good evening, sir. Some other carriages are waiting for my scrutiny."

With these words the officer of dragoons drew up the window of the carriage, and, standing aside, allowed the vehicle to pass on.

As soon as they had got to a safe distance Claude Duval crowed exultingly.

It was clear that the dragoons were completely baffled.

Much time would be spent in examining the different carriages, and there was every possibility that their flight would not be discovered until daybreak.

This, however, could not be far distant, so it behoved them to make good speed.

The horses in the carriage were of first-class quality, and the rate at which they drew the vehicle over the muddy roads was something surprising.

That both Claude and Jack were deeply grateful to Ernest and Minnie for furnishing them with the means of escape from a very dangerous position the reader need not be told.

They were, therefore, quite willing to undergo considerable danger in their behalf.

Nothing could be more unwise than for them to proceed to London, and yet Claude and Jack did not hesitate to take them there.

They drove off straight towards the metropolis.

During the ride, Ernest made Minnie acquainted with the strange incidents which had befel him since parting with her, and how it was they were performing their journey in the Countess of Farland's carriage.

It was while thus occupied that Ernest remembered that he had not asked the highwaymen whether it would be dangerous for them to drive into London.

He could not fail to be grateful to them—highwaymen as they were; for had it not been for them he would not have been so blessed as he was at that moment.

As soon as the thought occurred to him, then, he pulled the check-string.

Claude stopped at once, and Sixteen-String Jack got down and came to the door to know what was wanted.

"Excuse me," said Ernest Leigh, quickly; "when I asked you to drive to London the thought did not occur to me that it would be very dangerous for you to make your way thither. It would be dangerous, would it not?"

"I cannot truthfully say 'No' to that question," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but we are unwilling to do our service by halves."

"Never mind, you shall not drive us to London."

"We have already reached it."

"Is it possible?"

"Well, when I say we have reached it, we have very little further to go."

"What is to be done, then?"

"That I leave entirely, sir, to you. We will take you to any place you desire to mention."

"I shall mention none, because I do not wish to draw down upon you any unnecessary danger. Propose something yourself. Tell us what you would like to do."

CHAPTER CCCCXXXVII.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN MEET AT THE GIBBET ON THE FINCHLEY-ROAD.

"I AM much obliged to you, sir," said Sixteen-String Jack. "If you will allow me, I will speak to my comrade, and ask him his advice."

"Do so—do so."

Jack approached Claude, and spoke to him for a few moments.

Then, returning to the door, he said—

"My comrade is obliged to confess, that, to enter London, even while so well disguised, would be placing our lives in great jeopardy, and he has proposed a plan which he would like to see carried out—that is, if it meets with your full and entire approval."

"What is the nature of the plan?"

"He wishes to draw up at the next public-house he comes to."

"I have no objection to that."

"He then wishes you to alight, and give the landlord instructions to fulfil our commands with respect to the carriage and horses."

"Well—well."

"And then he wants you to perform the remainder of your journey in a post-chaise."

"What do you want to do with the carriage and horses?"

"The carriage we would leave at the inn. The horses we would have saddled and bridled."

"I see; and you would then mount them and ride away?"

"Just so, sir; for we have an appointment of a very serious nature at daybreak this morning, and we shall have great difficulty, even then, in reaching the appointed spot in time."

"Well, I see no reason why your plan should not be adopted. I care nothing about the Countess of Farland's carriage, or her horses either; besides, you obtained both, not I. You have been kind enough to give me a ride, that is all, and I am much obliged to you."

"Don't mention that. Only, sir, you will be looked upon as the legitimate person to give orders about the disposal of the horses and carriage. All we want you to say is, that we have your full permission to do what we think proper; that, in fine, we have received our instructions from you."

"Good; drive on, then, and stop at the next public-house where a post-chaise can be obtained. Unless I mistake not, you will have to make great speed to reach the appointed spot in time—that is, if it is far distant."

"It is a long way from here, sir."

"We will waste no more time. Forward again, and stop at the next inn."

Sixteen-String Jack briefly announced to Claude Duval that his proposal had been accepted, and the vehicle was once more set into rapid motion.

It so happened that the piece of road upon which they had halted was not more than half a mile from an inn of rather pretentious aspect.

Before the door of this Claude immediately drew up.

He was somewhat surprised to find the inn open so late, or rather so early, but he afterwards learned that they were awaiting the coach which stopped there every morning on its way to London.

The landlord made his appearance with great alacrity when he discovered that a carriage had stopped before the door.

Sixteen-String Jack jumped down and assisted Ernest and Minnie to alight.

Then Ernest made a sign to Claude, who got down off his box.

Addressing himself to the landlord, he said—

"You will please have the carriage and horses taken round to the stables."

"It shall be done, sir, in a moment."

Then, turning to Claude and Jack, Ernest said—

"Follow me into the inn at once, and I will give you instructions what to do."

The ostler led the horses round to the stable, while the landlord, bowing at every step, ushered his guests into his best private room and retired.

"I have asked you to come in," said Ernest, "because I wished to say farewell, as the chances are that we shall never meet each other again."

"We are much obliged to you," said Claude and Jack. "You have been kind enough to do us a great service, for without your aid we should never have escaped."

"And without you," said the young man, warmly, "I should not feel so happy as I do at this moment. However, farewell! I know you must be anxious to be gone."

Farewells were then exchanged, and Ernest rang the bell.

The landlord appeared with an alacrity that seemed rather suspicious.

"Landlord," he said, "I have given my servants instructions how to act, and you will allow them to proceed without interference."

"Certainly, sir."

"Lead them to the stables, then, and afterwards return to me."

The landlord bowed, and led the two highwaymen to the stables.

On the way, Claude said—

"You understand what my master said to you?"

"Yes—oh! yes."

"Well, then, I want you to supply us with two saddles and two bridles."

"Very well; shall you want horses too?"

"No; we will take those belonging to the carriage; they have not come far, and are quite fresh."

"Just as you like."

"There is only one thing more. Make haste! My master is in a great hurry. We are going to ride forward in order that some preparations may be made, and he will follow almost immediately in a post-chaise."

This was all very legitimate, so the landlord spoke to the ostler and returned to the inn.

It did not take Claude and Jack long to get the two horses ready.

Mounting with all speed, they set off at a sharp trot, which became a gallop so soon as they were far enough off from the inn.

The two highwaymen took the road towards Finchley, but they had no hope of being able to keep their appointment at the proper time.

Already in the sky a faint tinge of gray was perceptible, and they had yet a long way to go.

Coming presently to a steep hill, they allowed the horses to ascend it while they occupied themselves in casting off their disguise.

This was soon done, and, in a few moments, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack presented their ordinary appearance.

"This has been a night of strange adventure, has it not?" said Claude, as he threw the last portion of his borrowed garments over the hedge into a field.

"You are right there," said Jack. "I was thinking so when you spoke."

"Well, I can't help thinking we have done some good for others besides ourselves. If those two young people are not happy, they ought to be!"

"They will be happy, never fear. The only thing I am afraid of is that we shall be the means of getting them into trouble."

"I do not think so, and, besides, it cannot be helped. Come, let the horses breathe a moment on the top of this hill, and then forward again. I sadly fear that when we reach Finchley, Dick Turpin and Tom King will have left, having given over all hope of our appearance."

"We can but ride forward and see. These horses will make good speed if they are put to it, and though it is a long way to Finchley, yet I think we shall reach it before the day has much advanced."

"Well, so we shall. And there is another thing, Turpin and King may have been prevented from keeping the appointment, like we have been."

"It may be so. We have had some very narrow escapes, and, ten to one, if they have fared any better."

"Besides, they had Maud with them."

"True; so their danger will be greater than ours. Forward, my friend; I am in hopes that, after all, we shall be in time."

Once again, then, were the horses put in motion.

Refreshed even by their brief rest, they flew down the hill at a speed that would have dismayed horsemen less skilful than our friends.

A better time for performing a journey across the country without being seen could scarcely have been found.

Our friends knew that the hour before the dawn was the one in which fewest people were abroad, and they wished to take every advantage they could of it.

In spite of their efforts, however, the dull gray tint which they had perceived overspread the whole face of the heavens before they had got halfway to their destination.

With unabated speed, however, and choosing the lanes and byways in preference to the high road, they galloped on.

But the light increased with marvellous rapidity.

Presently, in the eastern horizon, they could perceive the approach of the sun.

As soon as the "god of day" was fairly above the horizon day would begin, and people in numbers be abroad.

But, as they gazed about them, the highwaymen discovered that they were in a very lonely part of the country indeed.

There was not a habitation of any kind in sight.

The horses began to show evident symptoms of exhaustion, but they still urged them on.

Suddenly Jack raised his hand and pointed.

"Yonder is Finchley," he said. "One more effort, and we shall be there."

With increased rather than abated speed, they made the remainder of their journey.

At length they slackened speed.

They had come in sight of the gibbet.

Jack pointed it out to his companion.

"That is the place," he said.

"Shade the sun from your eyes, and take a long look before you, and tell me whether you can see anything of them."

Claude held up his hand to keep off the sun-rays, and did as his comrade wished him.

"I can see no one," he said. "There does not appear to be a single human being in sight."

"Alas! that is sad news."

"It is, indeed!"

"Look again. Are you sure?"

"There is no one there."

"Then they have either been and gone again, or else have been prevented from keeping the appointment."

"Do not let us be too hasty. We are yet some distance from the meeting-place. Let us make our way to it, and then see."

This was a wise determination, but, nevertheless, it was with sad and heavy hearts that Claude and Jack approached the deserted bit of ground.

At length they arrived, and then a nearer view proved the truth of Claude's words.

There was no one to be seen.

Let us pause a moment.

We will return to Dick Turpin and Tom King.

The reader will remember that they lingered near the gibbet until early dawn.

Then, when the day began to come, they grew apprehensive of discovery.

But, for all that, they were unwilling to leave the spot.

At the request of his companion, Dick Turpin stood up in the saddle and looked all around.

But his keen eye failed to catch sight of those for whose approach he was so anxious.

Turning round to Tom King, he said—

"I can see nothing of them. They are nowhere in sight. Now, tell me what you think will be the best thing for us to do?"

"I am loath to give them up, Dick."

"So am I."

"Suppose, then, we return to the thicket again; there we shall be seen by no one, and we will wait a little longer."

"And if they do not come?"

"Then we shall be obliged to return to the empty house, and repair here as soon as it grows dark."

"I would we were there now, Tom. I am sure this lengthened absence will fill Maud's breast with alarm."

"It will, indeed; but it cannot be avoided."

"I only hope she will not be tempted to leave."

"I do not think you need fear that. But, come; let us return to the thicket. If they do not come soon, we shall be forced to give them up, and Maud, having waited so long as she has, a little longer will not make much difference."

As he spoke these words, Tom King led the way across the barren piece of ground in the direction of the thicket.

Dick Turpin followed, dejectedly.

The shadow of coming ill hovered over his heart.

He felt that something had happened of a terrible character, or else that some ill was impending over them which would presently fall.

Nevertheless he followed Tom, and concealed himself in the thicket.

Here they remained, in a state of the greatest suspense and anxiety, until, at length, the sun rose, and cast his golden beams around.

Seeing this, he said—

"Come, Tom, it is no good waiting any longer. Our return journey will be full of danger, for we shall run great risk of being seen. It is useless to remain longer; let us depart."

"I fear we shall be obliged to do so; and yet, stay. Look before you, Dick, and tell me what you can see."

Dick Turpin looked in the direction in which Tom King pointed.

In the extreme distance he could see something approaching them.

What it was they knew not—it was so far off.

They watched closely, and, after some time, made it out to be two men on horseback.

As soon as they were convinced of this, Tom was about to sally forth.

But Turpin detained him.

"Hold!" he said. "Let us wait a moment. It is true that two horsemen are coming, but they are too far off for us to recognise them. Two mounted travellers is no uncommon sight. They may even be two of our enemies."

"Your caution is a good one," replied Tom King. "We will wait here in silence until we are assured that those approaching us are our friends."

"Such will be the wisest course."

Accordingly our friends waited, until at length Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack—for it was indeed they who were approaching—reached the foot of the gibbet.

There was now no longer the slightest doubt, and Dick Turpin and Tom King sallied forth.

They came in sight of their companions just as Claude and Jack were beginning to give up all hope.

This unexpected meeting was a happy one.

They greeted each other with the utmost warmth.

Each one was glad to find his comrade was unhurt.

"We have had some strange and hairbreadth escapes since we parted last," said Claude Duval; "and if you could have seen us only a few hours ago, you would have thought it an impossibility for us to have reached this place."

"You must not think you have had all the adventures to yourself," replied Turpin. "You have no idea what we have gone through since we left you in Enfield Chase."

"You will excuse me for saying," interrupted Tom King, "that this open spot at broad daylight is not exactly the place fitting for talking over our adventures."

"Right!" said Turpin. "We must postpone that for another time. Follow me, my friends. We must be careful not to excite attention: fortunately, we have not far to go."

"You have some place of refuge, then?" said Claude Duval.

"Yes; Maud is there. I think the best thing we can do is not to ride all four together. Suppose I go first, along with Tom King, and you and Sixteen-String Jack follow at such a distance that we may be just in sight of you and nothing more?"

"Agreed—agreed! We shall not be near so likely to attract attention."

"Forward, then," said Turpin; "for now that it is day, the sooner we get under cover, the better."

With these words the highwaymen commenced their journey towards the deserted mansion in the manner they had agreed upon.

CHAPTER CCCCXXXVIII.

DICK TURPIN, TOM KING, CLUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK ARRIVE IN SAFETY AT THE RUINED MANSION.

Let us now return to Maud.

The current of events has for some time drifted away from her.

When we saw her last it was when, after hearing that strange and unearthly cry, she had mustered up courage and resolution sufficient to rise from her seat and endeavour to discover from whence it proceeded.

With trembling hands she had made her way down the spacious staircase, and was guided by the sound to a door opening from a landing far below her.

At last the door was reached, and then she heard from within the sound of clashing steel, as though persons were engaged in mortal strife.

These sounds abruptly ceased, and then that awful cry arose again, and this time came upon her ear with deafening loudness.

Overcome not only by the horrible nature of the sound itself, but by the place in which she was, Maud gave utterance to a piercing scream, and fell at full length on the landing.

She lay just on the threshold of the mysterious door.

The candle she held in her hand flew from her grasp, and, after flickering for a moment or two, went out.

Then the profoundest stillness that the imagination could ever picture, or the senses realize, prevailed in and about that deserted mansion.

It was accompanied, too, by its fitting attendant, darkness.

How long she lay thus, Maud knew not.

Time to her was then an utter blank.

Whether the strange and terrible sounds of which she had been an auditor were resumed, or whether they altogether ceased, she was perfectly ignorant.

She was unconscious of everything, even of life.

A swoon, however, never lasts very long.

Left to herself, Nature soon recovers herself, and reawakens the dormant energies.

When Maud came to her senses, though, she found that daylight was streaming full upon her.

She was puzzled and perplexed to think where she could be, and some moments elapsed before the occurrences of the night presented themselves to her mind.

Then, with great suddenness, every circumstance rushed before her mind.

In a moment she started wildly to her feet, and looked around her.

"It is day," she cried, perceiving for the first time that the light came through the window. "Day has dawned. Oh! heavens, something terrible has happened. What I have heard was a presentiment—an intimation of the occurrence of some dire catastrophe—but I—I did not understand it. Now, however, all is plain and clear enough. Day has dawned. My husband and his comrade have not returned. They are either slain or taken prisoners, for they assured me they would not be long absent, and now many hours have elapsed since they left me."

Maud tottered towards the stairs with the intention of descending.

But she found this was impossible, so wholly had her strength deserted her.

She was fain to sit on the top stair.

Clasping her hands over her eyes, she gave full vent to her grief.

She sobbed and wept as though her heart would break.

The sounds of woe made themselves heard with painful clearness all over the dismal habitation, until, at length, the whole of the building resounded with her cries of dolour.

"What shall I do?" she asked, wringing her hands bitterly. "What shall I do? Where shall I look to find him? In prison? Yes, perhaps he is in prison! It may be that his foes became acquainted with the meeting-place, and placed themselves in ambush there. Heaven help me! I know not what to do. All is uncertainty and conjecture."

It was some time before Maud could obtain the least mastery over her grief.

By degrees, however, she calmed down.

It was through pure exhaustion, nothing more.

Then she struggled to her feet.

"I will leave this place," she murmured. "To stay here is impossible. I shall go mad. I will get into the open air."

Having made this determination, Maud set about carrying it into execution.

Grasping the massive balustrade with one hand, she slowly and difficultly descended the stairs.

At every few steps, however, she was compelled to pause.

But, at length, the spacious hall on the ground floor was reached.

Gliding across this like a spectre, she made her way to the door through which they had entered.

Passing through this, she gained the little chamber, and, mounting on the window-sill, jumped down on to the ground.

When she found that the roof of the deserted mansion was no longer over her head, Maud felt wonderfully better.

The very atmosphere which filled the place had so much oppression in it, that it seemed to weigh her down like lead.

The fresh, cool, morning air revived her.

She drank it in at large draughts, and after each inspiration felt better.

The strange feelings of supernatural terror, which she had experienced in their full intensity, passed away.

She was able to think more clearly.

It was a lovely morning.

The heavens were unspotted with a single cloud, while in the trees the birds chirped gaily, as though it had been early spring and not mid-winter.

The air was balmy and fresh, while the sweet repose that reigned around came gratefully upon the senses.

But as Maud looked up, and saw the sun shining brightly over the tree tops, she sighed deeply, and then burst into tears again.

She gave her grief full vent, for in the solitude of the place she knew there was no one to observe her.

After his promise to return soon, it was only natural that Maud should think some terrible danger had befallen her husband.

Before he departed, he admitted to her that there might be peril in the enterprise, and for that reason desired her to remain in safety at the deserted house.

Nothing, she told herself, would be able to keep him away from her like this save capture.

Already she pictured him as she had once before seen him, a prisoner within one of the gloomiest cells in Newgate.

What should she do?

At one moment she thought she would fly at once from the gloomy habitation, but then a second thought restrained her.

It might be that her husband and his comrade were in danger, but they were accustomed to it.

It might be that she exaggerated the extent of that danger.

They might, perhaps, merely be prevented from returning by some officers, who they feared they could not pass unseen.

This might easily be.

If so, they would watch their earliest opportunity of rejoining her.

If, however, she left the place, they would immediately depart in search of her, and thus bring double danger upon themselves.

The result of these reflections was that, hard as she felt the task to be, Maud made up her mind to remain where she was until night came.

If they did not return then she should give up all hopes of them.

Although she made this determination, she did not attempt to re-enter the mansion.

To her it was full of horror, and she could not have remained there alone.

"I will try and find my way to the entrance gate," she said "I may, perhaps, see them coming."

To speak the truth, Maud had very, very little hope of this.

But she felt that she was giving herself some employment, and while occupied in doing something her grief was not so great.

She made her way round to the front of the mansion, and crossed the neglected, weed-grown lawn.

Then she came to the avenue, and along this she walked slowly, for she did not wish to learn too quickly that her husband was not in sight.

She was anxious to retain the hope of being able to see him as long as possible.

At length the gate was reached.

The one leaf was still sticking open, as it was when she had first seen it.

But suddenly Maud utters a cry.

Then she draws back, and conceals herself behind the buttress of the gate.

As she glanced up the lane, she saw some horsemen approaching at rather a rapid rate.

She was about to rush forth, but she restrained herself as she thought that they might be police-officers who were approaching.

It was for this reason that she sprang back, and concealed herself behind the buttress.

From this position, however, she was able to look out with little fear of being seen by those who were approaching her.

They were still at some distance, and she was not able to distinguish them with any degree of clearness.

Besides which, tears dimmed her eyes and obstructed her vision, for she fancied that the horsemen who were coming were four in number.

She was afraid to think this, lest she should be disappointed.

The sharp clatter of the horses' hoofs came upon her ears, and she dashed away the drops that filled her eyes, and by an effort prevented any others taking their place.

Then a cry of joy came from her lips.

It was, indeed, her husband and his three comrades

were coming, and it needed but that one glance to show her that they were safe and unhurt.

The joy of this discovery was so great that she reeled, and her senses seemed to forsake her.

She was overpowered by her joy.

Recovering herself, however, she sprang through the gate with the agility of a fawn.

With another cry of joy, she seized Black Bess by the bridle, and then clung there, half-fainting.

Dick Turpin had been riding a little in advance of his companions.

He was anxious to get back, because he knew how great would be the uneasiness that his long absence would occasion Maud.

He was surprised, however, to see her make her appearance so suddenly, and felt vexed that she should be so incautious as to leave the house.

This feeling quickly passed away, however, when he saw how helplessly she was clinging to the bridle.

Hastily dismounting, he placed his arm round her waist.

She clung to him frantically.

Turning to Tom King, Turpin said—

"Take care of Black Bess, my friend, and I will follow you to the house."

Tom complied, and the three highwaymen passed on first, and allowed Dick and Maud to follow.

Turpin was not a little surprised at the emotion which Maud exhibited, but he was far—very far, indeed, from surmising the real motive of it.

He little dreamt what strange events had befallen her during his absence.

He imagined that it proceeded solely from his long absence and her consequent joy upon his safe return.

They walked up the avenue leading to the deserted mansion at a slow pace.

In a few minutes Dick made Maud acquainted with all that had taken place since he had parted with her, and she listened with the most eager interest to the account he gave of the traveller he had saved from such a cold-blooded assassination.

When she had heard all, she could not help admitting that Dick could not well have acted in any other manner than he had done.

He had been rewarded for waiting by seeing Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack make their appearance when he had given up all hopes of them.

Having satisfied her upon all these points, he proceeded to inquire how she had passed the night, and how it was he had found her standing at the gate.

She shuddered, and then made him acquainted with all those events which have already been placed at full before the reader.

Dick knew not what to think of this, and he listened with the utmost attention to the end.

When she had finished her narrative, he said—

"Maud, dearest, I am afraid you have been suffering your imagination to get the better of you. What you describe has not in reality taken place. It is merely fancy. Finding yourself alone at night in that gloomy, deserted mansion, you have yielded yourself up to supernatural fancies. I cannot wonder at it. You have every excuse."

Maud shook her head.

"It is no fancy," she said, earnestly. "I should be one of the last to let my fears get the master of me in the manner you suppose. Believe me, it is no fancy. All that I have described is as real as anything that has occurred since I met you."

Turpin smiled.

"I can see you are not convinced," pursued Maud. "But tell me this. If it was fancy, how is it I made my way down to a door on a lower storey, and there fainted? When I recovered myself it was daylight, and I still lay where I recollect falling."

"I cannot account for that," said Turpin. "We must speak upon this matter at another opportunity. In the meantime, let us quit the subject."

"Well, be it so. When I recovered my senses, and found it was daylight, and that you had not returned, I gave way terribly to grief, for I pictured the worst concerning you. To remain in the house after such dreadful events had occurred there, I felt was impossible; so I made my way out into the open air, and immediately felt better. My anxiety for your safety was so great, that I was compelled to go towards the gate, and no sooner did I arrive at it, than I caught sight of you in the distance. I concealed myself in order to make sure, and then you know the rest."

"I do know the rest," said Turpin, as he pressed her closer to him. "As for the sounds you have described, we will listen for them to-night, and if we hear them, rely upon it, we will discover from whence they proceed, and what is the cause and meaning of them."

The cool, determined tone in which Dick Turpin spoke had the effect of inspiring Maud with confidence, and she had not the slightest doubt that her husband would be as good as his word.

By the time this point in the conversation had been reached, they arrived opposite to the window through which they gained admission to the house.

Here they paused a moment, and looked towards the stable, whither Dick's three comrades had gone with the horses.

Tom King, Claude, and Jack almost immediately made their appearance, and, having closed the stable-door, came straight towards their captain.

"You have seen to Black Bess all right?" said Turpin, inquiringly, as soon as Tom King was within speaking distance.

"Yes, captain," was the reply. "She is as comfortable as the rest, but it vexes me to death to think that she has no better food than this rank grass."

"I was about to propose," said Turpin, "as soon as we get indoors, that we take into consideration, not only what we should do for provender for the horses, but for ourselves as well?"

"I think we have a great deal to talk over," said Tom King, "and the sooner we begin, the better. When we get inside, let us sit down and avail ourselves of the present opportunity, for it is impossible for us to tell when we shall have a chance again."

"I quite agree with you there," said Turpin. "I should have proposed the same course of action myself. But do not let us stand here. Enter! I will follow."

"I will show the way," said Tom King.

As he spoke, he got through the window with great agility.

He was instantly followed by Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, who looked about them with great curiosity and interest, although, on the way back from the meeting-place, they had been made acquainted with the nature of the shelter that had been found.

Dick Turpin and Maud came last.

Without any trouble or delay the little party reached the entrance-hall of the mansion.

Upon seeing this place, Claude and Jack could not withhold their admiration.

It had an appearance of great splendour.

The sun had now risen to a sufficient altitude to emit his greatest light, so that, owing to the fantastically-shaped skylight at the head of the staircase, everything could be seen with great distinctness.

Let them look in what direction they would, traces of great magnificence were discernible.

The last inhabitants of that mansion had certainly been the possessors of great wealth, for they had left traces of it all around them.

Although the dust lay thickly and heavily upon every object, yet it could be seen that the decorations about the hall had been originally of the most costly and beautiful description.

The balustrade of the staircase was, of itself, a perfect marvel of workmanship.

It was most elaborately carved into curling wreaths, and in many places had been ornamented with gold.

Although Maud and Turpin and Tom King had seen the hall before, yet it had never appeared to such advantage; and even they looked around and noted with interest several objects which had previously escaped their attention.

Having gazed their fill, however, they proceeded to ascend the stairs.

They did not pause, but kept on right up to the top where the room they occupied was situated.

Just, however, when they were crossing one of the landings, Maud pressed Dick Turpin's arm slightly, while she said in a whisper, audible only to him—

"Look! look! That is the door from the other side of which those terrible sounds came. That is where I swooned; and, look! there lies the piece of candle which I held in my hand!"

CHAPTER CCCCXXXIX.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN TALK OVER THEIR PRESENT AND FUTURE PROSPECTS, AND DICK TURPIN OFFERS A RATHER PECULIAR PROPOSAL FOR THEIR CONSIDERATION

THERE was something too circumstantial about the account which Maud had given of the occurrences of the night for Dick to think it was all imagination.

He felt convinced, indeed, that something of a mysterious and inexplicable character had occurred, and at all risks he resolved, when the time should come, to find it out.

He did not let Maud know that he thought this, and, when she spoke to him in the manner we have recorded at the end of the preceding chapter, he made no other reply than a simple inclination of the head, which showed that he heard and understood what she had said.

He did not pause, or if he did it was imperceptible, and he kept on behind his three comrades, who had preceded him up the staircase.

In a few more moments all three stood within the little attic chamber in which they had agreed to take up their quarters.

This now had a somewhat gloomy look, for the fire was out and the grate filled with ashes.

This disagreeable state of things was, however, soon put an end to.

Exercising the same care as before, a fire was lighted, after which the room recovered its former pleasant aspect.

More chairs were fetched from the adjoining room, and then the rather large party—consisting, as it did, of five persons—sat down to discuss their future proceedings.

All were hungry, but there was very little to appease their appetites.

Still, what there was, was equally divided.

"It is quite certain that something must be done towards obtaining some provisions," said Dick Turpin; "but I can see no other means of obtaining them than by waiting until night, when one of us, under cover of the darkness, could repair to the nearest village and procure some."

"That would be attended with considerable risk," said Tom King; "for, in a quiet country village, where everybody knows everybody, our appearance would be particularly noticed, and largely commented upon."

"You may make up your mind to that," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"But we must live, and we cannot live without food," remarked Claude Duval.

"Two well-known and incontestable truths," replied Turpin, with a smile.

"But if we are to remain here," said Jack, "we must make some good arrangement in this respect."

"That is just the difficulty I have had before my mind," said Turpin; "and now that we are all together, that is what I want to talk about."

"Proceed, captain—proceed."

"Well, then, you must know, when I first found out what kind of place this is—when I discovered how lonely and unvisited it is—I thought to myself, this is the very place for us; here we shall be able to remain safely as long as we think proper."

"I thought the same," said Tom King.

"But I soon found," continued Turpin, "that there were a great many difficulties in the way, and these so multiplied that I came at last to the conclusion that a lengthened residence here would be impracticable."

"How so?" asked Claude Duval. "For my part, so far as I have seen, I rather like the place, and I shall be very loth to quit it."

"I will tell you my objections, then."

"Go on, captain."

"The first one that presented itself was the horses. You must bear in mind that we have five of these animals now, and they have rather voracious appetites; besides, if we do not keep them in good condition, they will fail to be of the least value to us."

"Well, I admit that."

"Then, tell me, where is fodder to be found? You may say there is plenty of grass; but, then, we cannot turn them out to graze; because, if we do, they will be seen by someone, and then our residence here will be discovered."

"What other difficulty is there?"

"Why, this. While we could remain here without anyone having the least inkling of our whereabouts, I grant you, we should be safe enough; but, I take it, we cannot imprison ourselves here, and I am convinced we could not leave many times, as there are so many of us, without being seen by some person or other."

"I grant that."

"Well, then, that is almost enough to show you, I should think, that this place will not, as I thought, afford us shelter. There is the obstacle of procuring our own food. We might obtain it once or twice without attracting suspicion, but each time there would be more risk."

"True—true."

"Country people—I mean the inhabitants of little villages, such as we should find about here—are, above all human beings, intolerably curious, and they would spare no pains to find out who you were, and where you came from."

"True, too."

"To be sure, we might find someone in whom we could place confidence, but then that would be running a very great risk."

"That would never do."

"Then you begin to see that this place is untenable?"

"We do—we do; but where are we to find a place of refuge exempt from all these disqualifications?"

"My comrades," said Turpin, "I am not the one to tell you you are in a fix without being able to show you the way out of it. I have something to propose."

"Let us hear it, then."

"I will; but, first of all, I think we ought to decide as to the qualifications necessary for a secure and safe place of refuge."

"Well, captain, go on."

"In the first place, then, we shall require a shelter where we can arrive and depart without caring whether our arrival or departure is noticed or not."

"But where can that be, Dick? No, that is impossible. Let it be where it would, our safety would depend upon our presence being unknown."

"Then, in that case, you would be no better off than we are here, where discovery would be neither more nor less than fatal to us. Rely upon it, my friends, that, for the shelter to be of any service, it must possess the qualification which I have just mentioned."

"Well, we cannot see where it can be, or in what manner it could be possible."

"But, if I showed you that it was possible"——

"I am afraid there is slight chance of that."

"Wait a minute. Let me go on with the qualifications, and then, when I have done mentioning them, you will be in a position to say whether the scheme which I have to propose will answer the purpose or not."

"Very well, then; go on again."

"I will do so. The second qualification required will be that we should be able to procure just what provision we wanted, just when we liked, without exciting suspicion. A place where we could have the most tempting and delicious viands—a place where we could give the order, and directly afterwards have the table covered with delicacies, each one fit for the stomach of an epicure."

"Don't, Dick, don't!" cried Turpin's companions, in chorus.

"How can you bear to talk about such things! Do not say a word more. We are half-starved to death now, and the bare mention of anything nice to eat makes our mouths water unbearably."

Turpin laughed.

"Well, I was getting a little enthusiastic, I confess; but, under such circumstances as the present, who could avoid being enthusiastic on such a theme?"

"Oh! don't, don't. Never mind that qualification. Go on with the next."

"I think there is no need for that," said Claude Duval. "If he can name a place possessing merely the qualifications he has already named, without any others, we will be satisfied."



[THE HIGHWAYMEN FORCE OPEN THE DOOR OF THE MYSTERIOUS CHAMBER.]

"So we will, so we will!"

"Have patience, my friends," said Dick Turpin, "and hear a little further. We require a place where we could bring our horses, put them in a comfortable stable, have them properly cleaned and attended to, and where they could have plenty of good food when we came back from a long ride."

"That would be very desirable, indeed," said Tom King; "but I, for one, cannot see how such a thing comes anywhere near the bounds of possibility."

"Nor I! nor I!" cried his companions.

"A place," continued Turpin, not heeding the interruption, "where we could, when necessary, leave Maud in perfect safety and security, and where we could come and rest just whenever we thought proper, and enjoy ourselves in any way we liked."

"There, there, Dick, stop! We won't hear another word! Stop at once! We won't listen! We don't want to hear any more necessaries. If you can mention a place that possesses only one-half of the advantages you have named, we shall be doubly satisfied. Come, speak; don't keep us in suspense any longer."

"Well, I will not. Since you have decided that the qualifications mentioned are sufficient, well and good. There is, of course, no need whatever to mention any more. But I can assure you, impossible as you seem to think it, that it is quite possible to obtain a place of refuge—a home, indeed—possessing all the advantages I have named, and many more besides."

"Then let us know without delay, for this delay is dreadful."

"Well, I will tell you in a few words first, and hear what you think of it. I can proceed to the particulars afterwards."

"Do so; do so, pray."

"Well, then, my proposition, placed before you in its most simple and naked form, is that we take a road-side public-house."

"Take a roadside public-house?"

"Exactly."

"Nonsense!"

"Then you do not think the scheme feasible?"

"I don't know how it is."

"Don't be precipitate, but listen to me, and I will tell you in a straightforward manner."

"But, Dick, you forget that, in order to take a roadside inn, it is necessary to——"

"I forget nothing. I have thought it all over, and when you have heard me out you will find all your objections answered."

"Go on, then, once more."

"Well, then, I propose that we find some person in whom we can place the fullest and most absolute trust."

"Ahem!"

"Don't cough in that doubtful manner, I beg. I shall be able to get over that obstacle in a manner perfectly satisfactory to everybody."

"So much the better."

"This person, then, in whom we could place unlimited confidence, we should furnish with funds, and then instruct him to take a roadside public-house somewhere not far from London, and to do all things in a perfectly legitimate manner."

"Ah! Dick."

"When we have found the person, I don't think there would be much trouble in getting him to do this, and certainly no danger."

"No, certainly not—*when* you have found the person. That's where the difficulty lies."

"Oh! does it, then? I am glad of that."

"Glad?"

"Yes; because I can remove it at once. For the present, however, let it suffice to say I *have* found the person."

"Who is it, then?"

"That I will tell you directly. The person, having found a public-house suitable for the purpose, will open it in a perfectly straightforward way, and carry on business just as business is carried on in all the inns all over the country."

"Well, that might be."

"Very good, then. The rest follows. We should be able to ride up to the inn like ordinary travellers; we should be able to put up our cattle and have them thoroughly attended to. We should be able to come when we liked, stay as long as we thought proper, and go away just whenever it answered our purpose to do so."

"Yes; but——"

"Have patience, and hear me to the end. We should be able to do all this without exciting the least suspicion. Care would be taken to select an inn at some considerable distance from any other habitation, so that a close watch would be impossible, and where we should not have to fear betrayment to the police."

"This is all very well, Dick, but you see there is this to be said, where are you to find a man that will do all this for you?"

"That is a question I can answer with the utmost readiness. The man must be one unknown to, and unsuspected by, the police. He must always be at hand to attend to us, and the only thing we should have to do would be to be careful not to go anywhere near the public-house when pursued, so as to leave no clue to our hiding-place, for if the police once got on the scent it would no longer be of service to us."

"Well, we grant all that; but you must tell us the man in whom we should be able to place so much confidence."

"Do not you know of one?"

"Well, I know one who would be all right so far as putting trust in him goes. But then he is well known to the police, and suspected to be a particular friend and ally of ours."

"You mean old Matthew Gale, the landlord of the 'White Lion,' in Drury-lane?"

"I do."

"Ah! he would not do for us. You may depend Mr. Wriggles and his subordinates keep an eye upon all his movements."

"I suppose so. No, the person I mean is well known to all three of you as being true and faithful. I allude to poor Tom Davis, once the landlord of the 'Hand and Keys,' at Hornsey Wood."

"Tom Davis! Why, Dick, you must be dreaming."

"How?—why?"

"The same objection that there is against old Matthew applies with full force to him."

"As how?"

"Why, can you possibly forget how well known he is to the police? Has he not even been brought before a magistrate, charged with being an accomplice of ours at the time when Tom King was a prisoner in Newgate, and was not the girl Ellen with him?"*

"I grant all that," said Dick Turpin; "but I think I can give you a little information which will surprise you. Of course, you all of you remember Tom Davis perfectly well. I have no need to say a word about him. You recollect how he was taken up before the magistrate and afterwards dismissed with a caution. Mr. Tapner, the then governor of Newgate, tried all he could do to get him into trouble, but he failed in his endeavour."

"Yes; we recollect all that perfectly well, and such events having occurred, how can you for a moment consider him eligible for our purpose?"

"I will tell you. Mr. Taplow was terribly disappointed to think he should be defeated, but he determined to be revenged, so he set the officers on to the 'Hand and Keys.'

"They watched the place day and night in the closest manner, and the officers took no trouble to disguise their proceedings. It soon got known. Every person who entered the inn, no matter who it was, was subjected to a close scrutiny by the police. Now, as you may know, this sort of thing would not be relished by anybody, so Tom Davis suddenly found himself bereft of his custom. Another man came, opened a house close by, did a roaring trade, and, in the end, Tom was obliged to give up his business altogether, and the old house, which had been built by an ancestor of his more than a hundred years before, and which had been in the possession of the family ever since, passed away into strange hands."

"And what became of Tom Davis?"

"Why, he, poor man, and his wife, and the poor apprentice Ellen, who they so kindly adopted, were all turned into the streets, to beg for bread."

Dick had to clear his throat, for his voice grew husky with emotion.

The past, and all the varied occurrences pertaining to it, rose up vividly before his imagination.

Tom Davis had been a friend to him on more than one occasion, and nothing would have pleased Turpin more than to hear that he was doing well.

Perceiving his silence, Claude spoke.

"But how is it you know this?" he said. "We have heard nothing of it before. How is it you have not taken any steps to alleviate their distress?"

"Pardon me a moment, my friends," said Dick Turpin; "but so many things belonging to the past, which I had forgotten until the present moment, come surging up into my mind, that I do not feel able to continue. I will proceed directly."

The tones of Turpin's voice were husky and indistinct.

It was easy to be seen that his emotions had been powerfully excited by some recollection of the past.

His three comrades remained perfectly still and silent until he should recover himself, though they were anxious and impatient to know what it was that had moved him so greatly.

CHAPTER CCCCXL.

DICK TURPIN MORE FULLY UNFOLDS HIS PLAN TO HIS COMPANIONS.

A PAUSE of some few moments ensued, at the end of which Dick Turpin, by a palpable effort, recovered himself sufficiently to continue his narrative.

"I will begin by answering your questions," he said. "The reason that you heard nothing of all this, was because at the time I learned the particulars you were absent in France. I have never told you about it because, in some incomprehensible manner, the whole occurrence had slipped my memory, and that is why I reproach myself as I do now."

"Come—come! Cheer up, captain. You are getting quite downhearted. Let us hear more."

* See Chapter CXXXV., pages 199, 200.

"I can tell you the remainder in a few words. Early one morning, being, as it was, about an hour before daybreak, I was making my way through a densely-populated part of London. My destination was the 'White Horse'—old Matthew's, you know—in Drury Lane."

"Yes—yes."

"As I was proceeding, at a rather slow pace, through a narrow street, I was surprised by hearing a faint cry, and immediately a young girl bounded forward and pronounced my name."

"Pronounced your name?"

"Yes. At first I did not recognize this girl. Her features were familiar enough to me, and yet I could not call to mind who she was or where I had seen her. In a moment afterwards, however, I recollected. The young girl was the orphan-apprentice, Ellen, who I had so long before rescued from the brutality of her employer, and placed in the charge of Tom Davis and his wife, who, having no children of their own, adopted her for their daughter. About Tom Davis's misfortunes I then knew nothing, having only a short time before returned from Scotland, as you will remember. Knowing the circumstances under which I had left her, I was naturally much shocked and surprised to see her thus. Her apparel was ragged and torn, her face and form emaciated to a degree, and her whole appearance presenting an aspect of the direst poverty."

"Do not let it affect you, Dick; go on."

"I questioned Ellen eagerly, and then I learned from her that they had been turned out into the streets to starve, and that for a long time past they had procured a precarious subsistence by begging from door to door. When I heard that, my comrades, I felt as though my heart had been pierced with a knife, for I knew well enough that I was the sole cause of all his misfortunes."

"You must not reproach yourself too keenly, captain; you could not help it."

"Well, well! I asked Ellen where Tom Davis and his wife were to be found? She raised her hand, and pointed. I followed with my eyes the direction of her finger, and saw two figures seated on a doorstep.* I sprang instantly from the saddle and hastened towards them. But, my comrades, after all that I had heard, I was ill prepared for the sight which I beheld. I pictured things bad enough, I thought; but the reality far surpassed all that I had imagined. Without the girl, Ellen's, word, I should never have recognized the two miserable figures before me. I knew Tom Davis and his wife intimately—had seen them continually for several years—but they were so altered as to make recognition a matter of impossibility. You recollect, my friends, what a portly figure poor Tom Davis had. Well, that was at an end. His bones were absolutely fleshless, and the skin hung about them in festoons."

Dick paused again, for this narration of his friend's misfortunes was too much for him.

His hearers were much surprised, and could scarcely bring themselves to believe in the truth of what they had heard.

Turpin, however, hurried on, and hastened to bring his melancholy narrative to a close.

"You, my friends," he continued, "who know what it is to be cut off almost entirely from contact with the world, will be able to form some idea of the feeling I had for Tom Davis. He has proved himself my staunch, true friend on more occasions than I could well count. I have trusted him with my life when I could have trusted no one else with it, and felt myself perfectly secure; and then to think of the condition in which I found him! A poor wandering mendicant, with body and soul just clinging together, and without any place of shelter in which to lay his head."

"It is very, very sad. Did he know you?"

"No. I spoke to him, I touched him on the shoulder, and tried in a variety of ways to attract his attention, but failed in every one. He seemed quite apathetic to all around him. I shall never forget that night."

"And Mrs. Davis?'

"She was in quite as bad a condition as her husband, and the two poor creatures sat together upon the doorstep the very personification of want and woe. But dawn was coming on with rapid strides. The police-officers were looking out for me in every direction. I was some distance from my destination, and to traverse London streets by daylight would be neither more nor less than suicide; besides, I had some business of a very important character on hand, which would not brook delay. Finding that I could not arouse either Tom Davis or his wife to anything like consciousness, I turned again to Ellen. I told her how grieved I was to encounter such a spectacle, and yet how glad I was that I had seen them. I told her I had an affair of the utmost importance on hand, and gave her all the money I had about me, which represented a rather large amount, and bade her take lodgings in some quiet spot. Then, when she had made the old folks comfortable, I told her to bend her steps to the 'White Horse' inn and see old Matthew, and leave word with him where they were to be found. I promised that, as soon as the business I was occupied with was off my mind, I would find some means of making them comfortable for the rest of their lives."

"And did you do so?"

"I did not."

"Did not?"

"No. You may well echo my words in a tone of surprise. I did not."

"But how was that—after giving your promise?"

"I will tell you. It was almost immediately after this that I was made a prisoner and confined in Newgate."

"We remember now."

"With what has taken place after my daring escape from the great city prison you are well aware, for you have been with me nearly all the time. You must be aware that, since my escape, I have never been near White Horse-yard."

"You have not had a chance."

"Well, that is the reason I have not performed my promise. Had I thought of it before, as I ought to have done, I should have made my way there at all risks. I cannot think how it could have slipped my memory."

"There is no difficulty about that, captain. It is easily accounted for. You have been so fully occupied with other things."

"I have—I have."

"You have nothing whatever to reproach yourself with. Under the circumstances you have done the best thing you could."

"Nevertheless, the recollection quite overcame me, and I felt sure I had been guilty of neglect to one of the few friends I possess."

"Did you tell Matthew that he might expect Ellen?"

"Oh! yes; and it was from him that I learned most of the particulars of what had occurred at the 'Hand and Keys' during our absence in Scotland."

"Well, then, you may depend all is well. For your sake alone, Matthew would see to their wants without you. We shall find them all right."

"That is my only hope. If Ellen has obeyed the injunction I gave her, all will be well. And, if she has neglected it, the fault will not be yours."

"Well, I suppose not."

"Certainly not."

"But she would be sure to go. And now, my friends, do you comprehend my proposition a little better than you did a short time ago? In consequence of what I have told you, I think it is pretty certain the police have lost sight of Tom Davis. Then, his appearance is so greatly altered, that there would be no fear of his being recognized."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure; for I did not know him myself; and who could be more familiar with his appearance?"

"Very few."

"None. And now, my comrades, having explained everything to you at full length, let me know what you think of my proposal. We shall be conferring a benefit on ourselves, and on an old friend at the same time. He would know how to conduct the business properly, and we should have to take care not to be seen arriving and departing too often."

"There is no doubt, captain, that it is the very best scheme for our comfort and safety that could possibly be devised. The only thing we fear is, that it would be impossible to carry it out."

"Why so?"

"Because there are so many difficulties in the way."

"Which are they?"

* See Chapter CCLIV., pages 366—7.

"Why, in the first place, it is quite certain, in order to obtain information about Tom Davis, we must go to White Horse-yard."

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, under the circumstances, I take it, it would be a very perilous journey."

"There would be some risk, of course; but that difficulty can be dismissed in a moment. I shall go myself."

"That's just what we expected, and dreaded to hear. You will go, and nabbed you will be to a certainty; for, rely upon it, old Matthew's house is closely watched."

"Let us leave this point for a moment, and pass on to the next obstacle."

"Why, how are we to get the public-house, and have it all fitted up and opened?"

"I shall leave that all to old Matthew and Tom Davis. We must furnish them with the funds necessary for carrying out our purpose, and they will do the rest."

"And, in the meantime, we must remain here?"

A silence now followed, during which the highwaymen occupied themselves with revolving in their minds the proposition their captain had placed before them.

Could the design be carried out, there was no manner of doubt about its being an excellent thing indeed.

They could all see that, by exercising proper caution in arriving and leaving, the place would afford them excellent security.

At length, Tom King spoke.

"I have thought the plan over," he said; "and the more I consider about it, the better it seems. There are difficulties and risks, but what enterprise worth a pin is without them? I am of opinion it can be done, and that we should be much safer there than we possibly could be anywhere else. I have only one thing to propose as a kind of amendment."

"What is that?"

"Simply that you will allow me to go to old Matthew's, in Drury-lane?"

Dick laughed.

"Then, in spite of the danger," he said, "you don't mind going yourself?"

Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval had been whispering to each other during the last few minutes, and the latter now said—

"Jack and myself have come to the same conclusion as Tom King, only we think——"

"That you would like to go, I suppose," said Turpin, with a laugh.

"Well, that's about it."

"No—no, my friends; I cannot consent to allow any of you to go. I feel that it is peculiarly my duty, and I flatter myself that I shall be best able to succeed."

"Well, captain, you command here, not us."

"Let me exercise my captain's power for this once. I will go, and, rely upon it, we shall succeed. There will then be no disagreeables whatever to contend with. How great a contrast it affords to our present position? Besides, we cannot tell how soon our sojourn here may be put an end to. We know not why it is that this mansion is left in its present state. We cannot tell how soon it may be visited by those who belong to it, and what more awkward event than that could possibly take place?"

"It would be very awkward."

"Of course it would, and we cannot tell how soon it may happen. Then, again, I cannot leave Maud here as I should be able to do with Tom Davis and his wife. I should know she was safe from all alarm."

"But we must remain here for some little time?"

"Yes, if we can do so. It will take some days to get everything ready, but then we shall have much to do ourselves. Considerable funds will be required for the carrying out of this project, and we must obtain them."

"In the old fashion, I suppose?"

"Most assuredly."

"Well," said Claude, "I really must confess I should relish a few adventures on the road."

"And I—and I!" said Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack.

"Well, comrades, you will have a good chance of satisfying your inclination. What I should like to manage is this."

"What?"

"To obtain sufficient money to be able to take some public-house that is already doing a quiet trade. We should then be able to step in without any trouble."

"That would be decidedly the best."

"I think so. If we had money enough, we might agree with a landlord who wanted to leave, to pay so much down, and take everything as it stood."

"That would be glorious."

"It would be the saving of a world of trouble."

"And it would be well, too, if we could buy the house itself, and then we should not be troubled with a meddling landlord."

"It would be well, as you say, to dispense with a landlord."

"How much money do you think would be required for the execution of this project?"

"I can hardly tell. Somewhere about a thousand pounds, I should think."

"That is a large sum of money."

"It is, indeed; and seems especially so when we think that we have got to obtain it all."

"That's it; for, though we might muster up a few guineas between us, the whole lot would not amount to much."

"Well, comrades, you see what has got to be done. We have not much time before us, and it is necessary that a thousand pounds should be obtained, or else the scheme cannot be carried out."

"Let us set about it at once."

"Nay—nay, let us be patient. We shall do no good by precipitation. I would wish you to bear in mind that we are all fatigued, and our horses are fatigued also. For this night I think we cannot possibly do better than remain where we are, and to-morrow night we will set out."

"And what shall we do for provisions in the meanwhile?"

"Well, that is the most awkward part of the affair. I am afraid, when night comes, one of us will have to mount, and ride off and fetch some."

"I will do that," said Tom King. "Let me go alone; and I will saddle my horse, and ride off several miles, get what I want, and come back with it—taking all the precautions I possibly can against being perceived by anyone."

"Well, Tom," said Dick Turpin, "you shall go. You had better start as soon as it gets dark."

"I shall not have long to wait, then."

Tom King spoke truly.

The short winter's day was already drawing to a close, and ere long it would be quite dark enough for Tom's purpose.

While the conversation—which we have placed at full before the reader—had been going on, Maud had sat near the fire, seemingly paying but little attention to what was going forward.

In reality, however, she was drinking in every word with the utmost eagerness.

She had said that when this consultation took place she should have a proposition to make to them.

It was that they should all quit their present mode of life for a better one.

When the moment came, however, for her to make this proposal, her heart sank within her, and she found herself unable to say a word.

She made one or two efforts, but failed each time, and finally gave up the attempt in despair.

She felt that the present was not a favourable time, either, for her to make her proposal.

She fancied that now, above all other times, they would be least of all inclined to listen to her, and so, wisely enough, deferred her purpose.

But it must not be thought that she abandoned it.

On the contrary, she determined, whenever she saw a suitable opportunity, to urge the subject with all the eloquence she was in possession of.

Turpin, however, was not forgetful of what she had said, and, turning round to her, he spoke.

"Come, Maud," he said; "now that we have done talking over our own affairs, let us hear the proposition which you announced your intention of making to us."

"Not now," she replied. "I would rather not make it now."

"Do not be afraid to speak, dearest," said Turpin, encouragingly.

"I am not afraid, only I find I have not yet sufficiently considered the subject, and I should wish to defer it to some other time."

"You shall have your own way in this," said Dick; "and now tell me whether you approve of our proposition?"

"I like it well enough. It will be better than staying here," she replied, with a shudder; "but there is the risk——"

"Never mind that; there will always be risk. When this is accomplished, however, we shall be much safer than we have ever been before."

Darkness now came on with rapid strides, and soon the different objects in the room could only be distinguished by the bright firelight.

Tom King rose to depart upon his errand.

He was accompanied downstairs by Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, who went to attend to the wants of the horses, and Maud and Dick Turpin were left alone in the little chamber, not dreaming of the strange events that were to take place so soon.

CHAPTER CCCCXLI.

THE HIGHWAYMEN BREAK OPEN THE DOOR OF THE MYSTERIOUS APARTMENT IN THE DESERTED MANSION.

We think our readers will all be of one opinion with respect to the excellence of the scheme which Dick Turpin placed before his comrades, albeit it is somewhat elaborate.

Still it possessed more advantages than any other course of action possibly could.

The highwaymen were the more sensible of this when Tom King had to set out to buy them provisions.

He would not be able to procure any great quantity, and the risk would be very disproportionate to the object to be gained.

Then the horses would quickly fall away and depreciate if they did not have food of a proper quality.

The rank stuff they had lately eaten could not fail to do them injury.

At an inn, however, where they could put up, the horses would not only have proper food, but proper grooming, and the latter alone will make a wonderful difference to a horse.

Having resolved upon their plan of action, however, all they could do was to wait with patience until it could be carried out.

Tom King quickly saddled his horse and mounted.

"Now, Tom," cried Claude Duval, as he was about to depart, "let me entreat you to make haste. Recollect, we are all hungry, and that we depend upon you. If a good adventure lies in your path—never mind, pass it; come back to us."

"Should you do so, Claude?"

"Under such circumstances."

"Then so will I; and you may rely upon me coming back as soon as I can obtain the articles we require."

"We shall depend upon you, Tom."

"You can do so without fear."

So saying, Tom King put his horse in motion, and set out upon his dangerous expedition.

There was danger, because the mere fact of a man going into a shop to buy a certain quantity of provisions would be looked upon with surprise if not suspicion.

Claude and Jack watched him depart, and then returned to the little chamber at the top of the deserted mansion.

Here they found Maud and Turpin.

During their absence, Dick had thought much about the strange story Maud had told him about the unearthly sounds.

He could not attribute it all to her imagination.

The narration was too clear and circumstantial for that.

There was some mystery connected with it, and he had firmly made up his mind to find it out, or, at any rate, to try his best to do so.

He had said nothing to his comrades as yet, and resolved not to do so for the present.

His chief object in wishing to pass the night in the deserted mansion was in order to satisfy himself as to what sounds were heard.

So, when Claude and Jack entered, he turned the conversation to quite another channel.

Dick Turpin was truly a brave man.

He feared neither man nor spirit, and he felt no sensations of dread or fear while resolving upon his course of action.

The time during which Tom King was absent was occupied in talking over the scheme that had been proposed, and suggesting a few improvements in it.

While thus employed, their hours did not lag so heavily.

Nevertheless, they could not but be conscious that Tom King was a long while absent.

In their conversation they would suddenly break off, and listen when they fancied some slight sound reached their ears, but each time they would turn again and continue speaking.

At length, however, a sound came from below which they could not possibly mistake.

Someone was ascending the stairs.

Claude and Jack made their way out on to the landing, and almost immediately returned, bringing Tom King with them.

He had succeeded in his enterprise beyond all reasonable hope or expectation.

With a boldness which could scarcely be sufficiently admired, he turned his horse's head towards London.

He galloped on at full speed, and then, coming to a shop which he imagined would answer his purpose, since eatables of every description were sold in it, he paused, and purchased as many articles as he could conveniently carry about with him.

This done, he set off at full speed, and made his way by a very circuitous route to the deserted mansion, which he reached in about three hours after quitting it.

That his comrades were glad to see him safe back, bringing with him the eatables of which they stood so much in need, the reader does not require to be told.

They were all placed on the table, and, after making a rough calculation, they found they should have enough to last them two or three days.

They were, however, compelled to be sparing, because of the risk of procuring any more.

After this plain and sparing meal had been disposed of, Turpin said—

"My comrades, I have something which I wish to speak to you about, and concerning which I should very much like to have your advice."

They became attentive immediately.

Dick then, in a very clear manner, related what had happened to Maud during their absence.

With all this the reader is well acquainted, and, therefore, it is needless to repeat it.

Dick concluded with these words—

"That is just a simple statement of facts as I received them from Maud herself. It remains for you to draw your own conclusions from them."

"It is very strange," said Tom King.

"There is a mystery somewhere," continued Dick Turpin; "and I am resolved to get to the bottom of it."

"We will help you, captain!"

"Thanks, comrades! You may depend that something of a very peculiar character must have occurred here at some time or other, or else we should not find the house in the shut up and abandoned condition in which it now is. What could have been the motive for deserting so elegant a mansion I am no better able to jugde than yourselves. All I can say is, that it must proceed from the occurrence of some very unusual circumstance."

"There can be no doubt about that," said Claude Duval; "and what you have just said has had the effect of rousing my curiosity greatly. We will try to find out the meaning of all this. Can Maud point out the door from the other side of which the sounds came?"

"Certainly she can."

"Then let us go down at once and break it down. We shall then soon arrive at the heart of the mystery."

"Gently! gently!" cried Turpin; "it is never worth while to set about anything with undue haste."

"But why pause?"

"Why, I confess I should very much like to know the meaning of all this, and I should be terribly disappointed if we were to break into the room and then be able to find nothing."

"It would be aggravating, that is true; but then, what are we to do?"

"Why, let us sit here in patience, in the hope that the strange sound will make itself heard again. If it does, then we will rise and descend the stairs. If we find it comes from the other side of a certain door, we will burst it open, and find out, if we can, what there is within."

This mode of action was immediately agreed to, and the highwaymen sat in patient expectation of the ominous and unearthly cry.

Maud had to give her account over again, which she did with very great minuteness; and when she had finished, whatever doubt might have existed in the minds of her auditors was completely dissipated.

Still, time passed on, and the deep silence which prevailed in the deserted mansion was unbroken.

All were anxious and uneasy.

That strange, undefined feeling of alarm which creeps over the soul when one stands upon the threshold of a mysterious discovery, took full possession of the highwaymen's breasts.

The conversation flagged.

They spoke to each other for a moment, and then silence supervened.

All were listening.

But no sound smote upon their ear.

Suddenly all started, and Maud uttered a faint ejaculation of alarm.

The cry came.

Just as she had heard it so many times on the preceding night, it commenced faintly and slowly until it arose to a perfect scream.

Then it subsided with the same gradual cadence as it arose.

The highwaymen started to their feet, and gazed into each others' faces with consternation.

While the sound had lasted, they had been unable to move a muscle.

They seemed paralyzed.

Each one fancied he had realised in his mind, from Maud's description, just what the sound was like.

But all found they had failed most signally.

Their imagination had been quite inadequate to convey to them any notion of its character.

Never had anything so horrible, so unearthly smote upon their sense of hearing.

"That is no human sound," said Dick Turpin, who was the first to recover himself sufficiently to make use of his voice. "I will stake my life that that is no earthly sound. Hark! there it comes again."

All became silent instantly.

They had plenty of warning when the swelling sound was about to come.

This time, however, it seemed even louder and more terrible than before.

The countenances of all present were considerably paler than they were wont to be, and Turpin said, in a voice which showed how greatly he was agitated:

"Oh! this is horrible!—most horrible! If such sounds continue, farewell for ever to this house—a brief sojourn in it would be impossible. Heard you ever such a cry? Well you might be alarmed, Maud! I wonder it did not have the effect of driving you into madness."

"We must find out what this means," said Tom King, endeavouring to assume a resolute tone and manner, but it was easy to see how greatly he was moved. "Come, my friends; it will never do for us to stay here like this."

"I agree with Tom King," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Let us descend the stairs, and ascertain, if we can, from what part of the mansion the unearthly sound proceeds, and what it is that causes it."

"Yes, come," said Claude Duval, as he advanced a few steps towards the door.

"Pause a moment," said Dick Turpin. "It may be that we are about to encounter some danger. Do not run into it unheedfully. Draw your swords and be in readiness, in case you should have to defend yourselves. I mention this not that I think you will meet with anyone to combat with, but as a precautionary measure, which, at any rate, we are justified in taking."

The good sense of these words went home, in a moment, to the hearts of those who listened.

They drew their swords, and held them in such a manner as to be able to make instant use of them.

Claude Duval, too, produced a pistol.

"Now, my friends," said Turpin, "let us descend the stairs and try to pierce the heart of this mystery."

The highwaymen did not need to be told twice.

They were only too eager to obey.

Maud clung to Turpin's arm.

She trembled excessively, and it was easy to see that she suffered extreme terror.

Turpin soothed her to the best of his ability, and endeavoured to inspire her with confidence.

To some extent he succeeded, and with her still leaning on his arm, he descended the spacious staircase.

His three comrades were some distance below him, for their impatience would not allow them to linger.

Presently, however, they hesitated and paused.

They were afraid they would descend too far.

They determined to await the coming of the cry once more.

While here they were joined by Dick Turpin and Maud.

The latter looked around her for a moment, and then, pressing Turpin's arm, she said in a whisper:

"That is the door."

Dick looked in the direction she indicated, and there beheld what he believed was the door she had, on a former occasion, pointed out to him.

All were now profoundly still.

The silence of that mysterious mansion seemed to increase and intensify.

On this occasion our friends were kept waiting for some time.

But at last he came.

Before they thought the loudness of the cry was deafening, but now it absolutely stunned them.

They clasped their hands tightly over their ears, but still they could not shut out the horrid sound—which pierced their very brains.

As before, however, it slowly and gradually died away, and they removed their hands.

The four highwaymen were bold men, as many of the deeds which we have chronicled will fully prove.

But now their bravery seemed to vanish, and they glared at each other with wildly-staring eyes, while their very lips were blanched.

They could tell that, beyond all doubt, they were close to the place from which the sound emanated.

Indeed, all involuntarily turned their faces towards the identical door which Maud had pointed out.

They were certain that it was through this door that the cry came.

The reader will have noticed that, in speaking of this sound, we have been compelled to use very vague terms to express it.

The reason is that the sound itself was indescribable.

We have called it a cry, but its tone bore little resemblance to any cry that has ever saluted the reader's ears.

Still, the word is the only one that can be used, though it is altogether and totally inadequate to convey the faintest notion of it.

The cry was not a shriek—it was not a scream—it was not a yell—nor a moan—nor a groan—nor a howl—nor a wail—nor a shout.

It seemed to be composed of all these.

It seemed to borrow whatever was most horrible and dismal in each.

It is in vain, however, for us to labour on in a vain endeavour to describe that which is really and truly indescribable.

If the reader can vividly realise what has been attempted by way of description, he may be able to form some faint conception of the nature of the sound in the same way as a person could watch a tiny ripple on a lake and imagine the ocean when agitated by a storm.

The one would bear about the same comparison as the other.

What wonder is it, then, that, brave as the highwaymen unquestionably were, they felt the blood curdle in their veins, and their hearts grow as cold as ice within their bosoms.

It was merely natural that they should experience such emotions.

But now another sound of a totally different character came upon their ears.

It was a sound which Maud's narrative prepared them to hear.

It was a sound such as they had listened to many a time without feeling the least alarmed.

But now they stood as if spellbound.

Stood as if turned to stone.

They did not possess the power to move a limb, nor did they possess sufficient mental resolution to attempt to do so.

They were content to remain motionless.

All their faculties were merged into one.

That one they stretched to its fullest extent—to an extent that seemed preternatural.

That was the sense of hearing.

The sound that came upon their ears was as the clash and ring of steel.

There could be no doubt upon the point.

The sound was that produced by swords ringing and clashing against each other, while wielded by persons in deadly conflict.

Clash — clash! the sounds came with the utmost regularity and rapidity.

But there was no other sound mingled with it.

They could not hear the breathing of the combatants; they could not hear their feet as they must have advanced or retreated.

All was hushed and silent, save the furious clatter of the steel.

By degrees, however, they became conscious that the violence and rapidity of the blows abated.

It seemed to our friends as though one of the combatants was growing weary or faint of the deadly strife.

Suddenly, however, the clashing ceased.

But it was succeeded instantaneously by the cry which they had heard before, save and except that its horror and loudness were a thousand times increased.

It was too much for Maud to bear.

Dick Turpin felt her suddenly become a dead weight hanging on his arm.

He caught her round the waist, or she would have fallen.

She had swooned.

CHAPTER CCCCXLII.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN BECOME SPECTATORS OF A STRANGE SCENE IN THE DESERTED MANSION.

In some respects it was a fortunate event that Maud thus lost her consciousness, for it had the effect of arousing the highwaymen from the kind of trance of horror into which they had fallen.

They immediately hastened to her assistance, and, for a moment, their thoughts had some other occupation than that of brooding over what they had just heard.

Maud seemed to be quite lifeless, and our friends were at a loss to know what to do to restore her to her senses.

They placed her upon the stairs and rubbed her hands, which were as cold as ice itself.

Still, she evinced no signs of returning animation, until Turpin, struck by a sudden thought, drew his sword and placed the blade against her face.

The steel was cold, and the contact sent a kind of shuddering shiver through her body.

Then she opened her eyes and looked around her.

She seemed terrified to a degree, and Dick hastened to speak to her.

"Do not be alarmed," he said; "pray do not. You have no cause for fear. We are with you, and are able to ward off all harm. Cheer up, dear one. Be yourself. All is well."

Hearing these words, Maud grew calmer, and allowed herself to be raised to her feet.

But she clung to Dick's arm with frantic violence.

Turpin would have descended and approached the door, but she held him back and implored him not to move.

Dick listened to her request, for he could tell how extreme her agitation was, and he by no means desired to increase it.

He turned round, therefore, to his comrades, who were standing together in a group exchanging whispers with each other.

"My friends," he said, "what we have just now heard surpasses all belief and defies all explanation. How are we to account for that awful sound, which has nothing earthly or human in it? What are we to think of the tragedy which appears to have been enacted on the other side of yon door?"

The three highwaymen made no reply.

"It is no delusion of the senses," said Turpin, "for we heard it all alike; moreover, what we have heard agrees exactly with the description which Maud has given us. What it may mean I can offer no conjecture. In the course of my life I have met with strange and mysterious occurrences, but nothing half so strange and mysterious as this."

"It is terrible," said Claude Duval, "and I shall never know what it is to rest again until I have thoroughly explored this mansion."

"We ought to have done that upon first taking possession of it," said Turpin. "As it is, we have only seen the interior of two rooms. All the others appear to be locked up."

"Then we must break into them, that's all about it," said Claude Duval. "I cannot stay here another day until I have looked into every nook and cranny."

"We will do so. And now, my friends, what do you think had better be our next proceeding?"

"To break down that door," said Tom King, "and see what there is upon the other side of it."

"Well, agreed. That shall be done. Down with the door at once!"

Turpin again attempted to move forward, but again Maud held him back.

Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack reached the door in a moment.

It was furnished with a massive glass handle.

This they turned round, but the door did not yield.

It was evidently fastened in some other manner.

"We must use force," said Jack. "Now, Tom, put your shoulder to it at the same moment as I do, and exert your utmost strength."

Tom King did so.

But the door was strongly made, and apparently, securely fastened, for it resisted all their efforts.

Both highwaymen put out their utmost strength, but the door remained immovable, and they were forced to retire from it and confess themselves defeated.

"We must find some other means," said Tom King, "or we shall never effect our object."

"That is quite certain," said Claude Duval; "but we will not be defeated. Stand aside a moment, and I will try an experiment."

Claude had a double-barrelled pistol in his hand; and holding it firmly in his grasp, he approached the door.

His comrades stood aside as he had desired them.

As soon as they caught sight of the pistol, they understood what it was that he intended to do.

"Bravo, Claude!" they cried. "Try the effect of that."

He said nothing, but, having examined the priming, placed the muzzle of the pistol near the keyhole.

Then he pulled both triggers at once.

A deafening report followed, which raised a thousand echoes in the silent mansion.

For a moment nothing could be seen but smoke.

By degrees, however, the blue vapour curled away and dispersed.

They then looked towards the door, and found that Claude's pistol had made a great breach near the lock.

A closer examination showed them that the lock had been completely blown away.

They tried the door again.

It yielded.

But they only pushed it open to the extent of about a couple of inches.

They paused then, and were irresolute.

Now that the way lay open before them—now that there was no obstacle to be overcome—now that they could, beyond all doubt, walk into the mysterious chamber, they shrank back and hesitated to do so.

The strange and superstitious ideas which had lain dormant in their breasts, were now aroused into full vitality.

What they had heard was above all things calculated to produce this effect.

They shrank from entering.

Their imaginations were busy in suggesting to them what they might see beyond.

How long this state of things would have continued is hard to say.

But it was put an end to by Dick Turpin.

He spoke.

"Courage, my comrades," he said; "the way now lies open before us. Courage—courage! I can feel that we are on the eve of making some strange and terrible discovery; and, no doubt, the same feeling has sprung up in your minds. But courage, friends, and all will be well."

These words, simple as they were, produced a wonderful effect upon those to whom they were spoken.

They shook off their superstitious fancies, and became themselves again.

"Come, captain," they cried, "you have, as you ought to do, taken the lead in this adventure up to now. We have obeyed all your injunctions. Now, continue to perform your duty. Lead the way, and we will follow."

Maud trembled and shook excessively when she heard these words, for she knew full well that Turpin would not shrink from his duty.

What, then, should she do?

She was afraid to accompany him, lest her sight should be blasted by some frightful and horrible spectacle; for somehow she had a presentiment that there was something truly terrible to be seen.

She tried to hold Turpin back, but this time it was in vain.

She dreaded equally to be left alone.

"Release me, Maud," said Turpin, quietly. "You see, my friends look to me to take the lead in this affair. You had better not come with us for fear you should see some horrible sight; and I am certain you are not able to stand the shock which it would produce."

"But I should die with terror if I remained here alone."

"Then you must accompany us."

"I am terrified to death at the mere thought of it."

"Come, Maud, this is unreasonable. We will not go far. Supposing you sit down on the stairs here; we will leave the door open, and——"

"No—no—no!" said Maud, with a shudder.

"What, then, is to be done?"

"Remain with me."

"Impossible."

"Alas! alas!"

"Come, Maud, release my arm. It is weak and childish of you to behave thus."

"I—I will go with you. But blindfold me; tie something over my eyes, so that, if there should be any horrible sight, I shall not see it. I shall be able to cling to your arm, and then I shall feel perfectly safe and secure from all harm."

Dick Turpin was well pleased when Maud suggested this means of getting out of what seemed to him to be a very difficult position. So, without saying another word, he took off his neckcloth and bound it over Maud's eyes.

It was now quite impossible for her to see.

She took hold of Dick's arm, however, and clung to it tightly.

She suffered him, in this way, to lead her wherever he chose.

Upon reaching the threshold of the mysterious apartment, Dick Turpin felt a strange, hesitating feeling come over him, and, almost without being aware of it, he paused.

But his comrades were behind him, and he recovered himself instantly.

Maud clung to his left arm.

In his right hand he held a drawn sword.

With a confident, bold step, he entered the room.

The rubicon was now passed.

He was disappointed, however, when he found that the chamber, which he had been at such pains to enter, was a very small one.

A few articles of furniture were placed against the walls, but that was all.

The chamber contained nothing else.

The highwaymen looked around them with an expression of disappointment visible on their countenances.

"What are we to think of this?" asked Turpin, as he turned round and addressed them. "There is nothing here. I never saw a room that had a more ordinary, commonplace appearance."

"Nor I," said Tom King.

"It looks to me merely like an antechamber," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"And that is what it is," said Claude Duval. "Look, yonder is a door, and, by the appearance of it, I should say that it leads into some other apartment."

"No doubt that is the real solution of the difficulty. Come, friends! let us examine the door and endeavour to open it. Doubtless, on the other side of it, we shall find a solution of all that we have heard."

His comrades hastened forward to the door as he spoke these words, and tried it.

It was fast.

They tried to shake it in its setting, but in vain.

It was as immovable as a rock.

"This is, indeed, secure," they said. "It will not move in the least, and how we are to force it open is a mystery."

"Set to work," said Turpin. "Do not let our progress be stayed by a door, let it be ever so strong a one. This anteroom, by disappointing me, has but inflamed my curiosity, and, doubtless, it has produced the same effect upon you all."

"It has—it has."

"Well, then. Try the door again. Down with it."

"I think, as a pistol did us such good service before, we had better try it again."

"Agreed."

Claude Duval now produced another pistol, the fellow to the one he had just fired, and placed it close to the keyhole as before.

Then he pulled the trigger.

The lock was blown off and shattered to atoms; but when they came to try the door, it was as immovable as before.

Clearly the mode in which it was secured was quite independent of the lock.

The next thing to ascertain was the manner in which it really was fastened.

They were not long in discovering this.

The door was nailed up, and in such a manner that those who performed the task certainly intended that the door should never be opened again.

Even our friends had some doubt in their minds as to whether they should be able to make their way into the room, beyond which they were now doubly desirous of reaching.

They were quite unprovided with the tools necessary for breaking it open, and they looked at each other inquiringly, each in the hope that his comrade would be able to suggest some expedient by which this obstacle could be overcome.

But not one could give even a hint, until Turpin, happening to glance round the little apartment in which they stood, perceived the fireplace.

On the hearth were the fire-irons, though completely covered with rust.

As soon as he saw them, he pointed them out to his companions.

"There are some weapons," he said; "doubtless they will answer our purpose. Take them, and try whether you cannot batter the door down."

His comrades sprang forward alacriously enough to seize the fire-irons, which were of a very massive make, as most things were that were used by our forefathers.

Thus armed with these unexpected implements, the highwaymen commenced a vigorous attack upon the door, which, nevertheless, threatened to be proof against all their efforts.

But our friends plied their weapons with great vigour and determination, and, after a time, the door visibly shook before the assault that was made upon it.

They also used their swords whenever practicable, and the wood flew about in large chips.

The door had evidently been nailed up from the inner side, and when they made this discovery it afforded them fresh matter for wonder.

Could any persons have imprisoned themselves there, or was there some other mode of exit from the room?

This point they were at present unable to decide.

In a few moments, however, they would have demolished the door sufficiently to make an entrance.

They redoubled the strength of their attack, and presently the last remaining opposing portion of the door fell with a loud crash, that startled even those who were in expectation of hearing it.

Without loss of time Dick Turpin led the way across the threshold.



[DICK TURPIN ON HIS WAY TO OLD MATTHEW'S IN DRURY LANE.]

His comrades followed as closely behind him as they well could.

How it was, our friends scarcely knew, but they had, one and all, made up their minds that it was into some large apartment that they were about to make their way.

The extent of their surprise may therefore be imagined, when they found that, instead of an apartment, they found themselves in a kind of long corridor or gallery.

The roof was high, and from the ceiling depended banners of all shapes and sizes, each one heavily loaded with dust.

Along the walls armour of every description was hanging.

There were shields, and helmets, and breastplates, of every imaginable character, while weapons belonging to every age and every country were arranged in numberless quaint devices.

The whole aspect of this place was so strange and so different to anything which they had ever seen before, that the highwaymen paused the moment they set foot in this gallery, and looked around them with the greatest curiosity and interest.

Wherever their eyes fell they encountered some singular object.

At regular distances on pedestals were complete suits of armour, each one, however, differing widely from the other.

There could be no mistake as to the nature of the place into which they had intruded.

It was an armoury, or rather, a place set aside for the bestowal of curious arms of offence and defence.

It was, indeed, a perfect museum of such curiosities of antiquity, and the highwaymen remembered that they had frequently heard of persons taking extreme pleasure in making such collections.

The place had evidently not been opened for many years, for dust, in incredible quantities, had collected and lodged upon every object.

It was some few moments before the highwaymen could take in a clear idea of this place, and so absorbed were they by what they beheld, that, for a moment or two, they almost forgot the occasion of their presence there.

Very soon, however, recollection came back to them.

The corridor was of great length, so long, indeed, that they could only just discern its further extremity.

All along it was furnished in the manner we have described.

Altogether, it had a very strange appearance.

The atmosphere in it, too, seemed thick and heavy, and appeared almost as though it possessed the quality of weighing down the spirits of those who breathed it.

Dick Turpin felt its influence creeping over him, and, by the exercise of a great effort, he turned round to his comrades, and said—

"Forward, my friends, forward! It is in such a strange place as this, if anywhere, in which we are to look for the solution of the mysterious sounds we have all heard."

CHAPTER CCCCXLIII.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES MAKE A HORRIBLE DISCOVERY IN THE ARMOURY, AND FIND THE MYSTERY AND HORROR OF THEIR POSITION INCREASE.

Dick Turpin was right.

It was, indeed, in some such sombre and mysterious place as this that they would be likely to find an explanation of that which had so puzzled them.

They had heard the clash of steel, and there were swords of every description hanging around them.

But by whom were the weapons wielded?

The silence of the grave itself filled the corridor.

When Turpin ceased to speak, and his voice had died away in dull and dismal echoes, they could hear their own breathing and the beating of their own hearts with a distinctness that was absolutely painful.

With slow steps they made their way along the corridor.

As they did so, they glanced keenly about them in every direction.

Their eyes rested with interest on the curious weapons they passed on their way, but they did not pause to examine one of them.

Suddenly Dick Turpin paused.

His companions, who were behind him, instinctively followed his example, without knowing what it was that had caused him to stop with so much abruptness.

"What is it, Dick?" they asked, anxiously. "What is it?"

"Look before you," replied Turpin, pointing with his drawn sword as he spoke.

"Where—where?"

"On the floor yonder, in the very middle of the corridor, cannot you see something?"

His comrades strained their vision to the utmost.

"Something dusky and indistinct," they said.

"Yes—yes," answered Turpin; "that is what it appears to me to be. A mass of something on the floor."

"What can it be?"

"That I know not; and, I do not mind confessing to you, that I feel a strong disinclination to advance and ascertain, but I must shake this feeling off. It is a foolish one."

"Well, now you have mentioned it, Dick," said his comrades, "we can feel a very similar sensation."

"Pho! pho! We are worse than children. It is the dark, thick atmosphere of this place, its peculiar appearance and solemn stillness, which produce this effect upon our minds, and, unless we make a strong effort, and that immediately, we shall be unable to resist its influence. It will grow upon us. Come, my friends, forward. I am deceived else, or that dark, dusky, undefined mass which we can see yonder will resolve itself into an explanation of all these singular events."

Dick Turpin spoke these words with tolerable calmness, and once more grasping his sword firmly by the hilt, so as to be able to make instant use of it if necessary, he stepped carefully and slowly along the floor of the corridor.

His companions did not hesitate to follow him.

At every step they took, the dark, dusky mass became more and more plainly visible.

What could it be?

Dick's heart prompted a reply, but he refused to listen to it.

It was something that, in a confused and huddled-up heap, lay upon the flooring of that corridor.

It was quite motionless.

Closer and closer came Dick Turpin and his comrades, but as they approached their footsteps became slower and slower, until at length their advance was almost imperceptible.

They stretched their heads forward as far as they could and strained their eyes, but they were not able to define the outlines of the dusky mass.

But Turpin became more and more convinced that his original surmise was, indeed, a correct one.

How or why it was, we cannot say, but the same surmise found a home in the breasts of all his companions, and yet not a word had been spoken in reference to it.

Dick advanced closer, and then whatever lingering doubts he might have entertained were completely dispelled.

Lying before him on the floor were two human bodies.

They were plain enough to be seen now.

The indistinct mass had resolved itself.

Prepared as their minds were for what they were about to see, the highwaymen, when the sight was fully revealed to their eyes, did not manifest that amount of surprise that they would have done, had they come upon it quite unexpectedly.

The first shock, however, being over, they drew nearer still, and proceeded to look with curious eyes upon the sight before them.

Ejaculations of surprise and awe fell from their lips during this examination, for each moment brought to view some new and astonishing particular.

Let us describe this sight as well as we have power to do it.

Lying on the floor of the corridor were, as we have said, the bodies of two men.

They were both in the strangest possible attitudes.

Their faces were both turned upwards, and their limbs and bodies drawn up and contracted as though from the effect of some more than mortal agony which had seized upon them at the dying moment.

The apparel which they had on was of a fashion that had long been obsolete when the highwaymen looked upon them.

Neither of our friends could ever recollect seeing anyone in such a garb, except in some curious old picture.

The dresses had been rich ones—such, no doubt, as were worn by the noblest or wealthiest in the land; for even now, thickly covered with dust as they were, here and there the faint glitter of some ornamental jewel could be distinguished.

But something else glittered with far greater brightness than any of the jewels.

This was two swords.

Upon the brightly-polished blades of these weapons not a speck of dust appeared to have fallen.

Their brilliancy seemed to equal that of glass.

The highwaymen looked upon these weapons with silent wonder.

Looking more closely, they saw that both were hacked and gapped from the hilt to the point, thus indicating the desperate nature of the combat that had taken place.

How the highwaymen shuddered when they recollected how the clashing of steel had struck upon their ears when they stood upon the staircase.

Each of the combatants, for such they were, held his sword firmly in his grasp, as though his last impulse had been to fight.

Death had come upon them in some sudden and mysterious manner. The King of Terrors had overtaken them at a moment when their minds were full of strife; and the clutch with which they held the swords was a death grasp.

Not a word was spoken by the highwaymen when the first feeling of astonishment at what they saw had subsided.

Whether those men, whose bodies lay there so motionless and so strangely huddled up, had received their deaths at each other's hands—whether the single combat in

which they had been engaged had terminated in the deaths of both of them, was more than they could tell.

It was probable, however, that each had inflicted upon the other a mortal wound, and that death had come upon them too quickly to enable them to remove from the spot upon which they had been fighting.

At any rate, there their bodies lay, still and cold in death, and in some strange manner preserved from the ravages of decay.

By looking at their hands and faces, our friends could see that the flesh had become dried up and mummified, while the skin had the colour, and appeared to have the consistency, of shrivelled parchment.

Dick Turpin was glad that Maud had consented to have her eyes bandaged.

It would had vexed him exceedingly if she had been made the spectator of so horrible a sight.

But as for Maud herself, finding that something peculiar had occurred, she felt her curiosity greatly roused, and was more than once inclined to remove Dick's neckcloth.

But, dreading that her eyes should be blasted by beholding some dreadful spectacle, and overawed by the silence which followed the ejaculations of wonderment to which the highwaymen had given vent, she resisted the inclination and remained perfectly still.

Dick Turpin was the first to speak.

It might be that he was the first to recover himself sufficiently to do so, or, perhaps, his comrades remained silent in order to hear the first words he should utter.

At any rate, after a long pause, Turpin spoke.

Maud listened eagerly to every word which came from his lips.

"My friends," said Dick, "this is a strange and unexpected sight—one that I was unprepared to see. What can be the meaning of it I am at a loss even to surmise. We shall have to spend some time, I fear, before we can approach even a reasonable conjecture."

"I fear so, too," said Tom King. "This surpasses all which I have previously met with in the whole course of my life. I cannot think, however, that the presence of these two dead bodies here can account either for the horrible sounds we heard or the clashing of steel which afterwards came upon our ears."

"And yet," said Claude Duval, "these two men have at some time been engaged in combat. They appear to have fallen by each other's hands. That the conflict was a desperate one the state of the swords will testify; but yet, as Tom says, I cannot bring myself to believe that these weapons produced the sounds we heard."

"There is a deep mystery in this," said Sixteen-String Jack; "one that at present we are totally unable to solve. We have nothing to guide us to a decision; and, then, the howling cry? Whence proceeded that?"

"I wish I could answer that question," said Dick Turpin; "but it is wholly out of my power to do so. However, my friends, let us leave these bodies here; we have seen all of them that we can see; and let us pursue our explorations in some other quarter."

"Agreed, Captain," said his comrades; "and I trust we shall be able to find some explanation of the dreadful tragedy which has clearly been enacted here."

"Yes, those two bodies are the consummation of it. I fervently echo your wish. Come, forward friends! Forward!"

Dick Turpin placed his left arm round Maud's waist, and, with his drawn sword in his right hand, passed the two dead bodies, and directed his footsteps towards the other extremity of the corridor.

This they soon reached, for it was only a few feet distant.

It terminated in a blank wall.

In this they could perceive no trace of door or other means of outlet, and they were at length forced to come to the conclusion that there was no exit in this direction.

This was strange.

Nor was there anything around them to be seen of a more peculiar character than the antique armour and curious weapons.

The highwaymen were much disappointed at this.

They had quite expected that they would have found something in connexion with the two bodies on the floor.

But there was nothing.

They lingered for a moment, and then slowly retraced their steps.

In doing this they divided themselves into two portions, one going on one side and one on the other, for they thought it not unlikely that there might be some doorway opening from the side of the corridor.

But nothing of the kind met their view.

They reached in a few moments the spot where the two bodies lay.

"How strange this is," said Turpin. "I could have declared there was some exit from this gallery at the end from which we have now come. But there is none, it seems."

"If there is," said Tom King, "it must be some cleverly concealed secret entrance."

"It is quite probable something of the kind exists. However, my friends, do not let us confess ourselves baffled. Here are the bodies; we can make nothing of them, save that they are the remains of two men who must have fallen in single combat. We must look further afield for the elucidation of this mystery."

"If we do not discover the meaning of all this," said Claude Duval, "the recollection of it will haunt us to the longest day of our lives."

"It will—it will. Come on; we will leave these two bodies undisturbed."

After casting one last lingering glance upon them, Dick Turpin and his comrades took their way along the corridor in the same manner as before.

They looked searchingly at the walls, but they could discover no traces of a door.

Without making any discovery whatever, they came to the door by which they had entered the armoury, for such it seemed to be.

Here our friends paused irresolutely.

"There seems to be but one means by which this corridor can be entered and left," said Dick Turpin, "and this is it. What are we to think of so singular a circumstance?"

"It is perfectly bewildering," said Tom King.

"It is, indeed."

"You cannot have forgotten that we found this door nailed up, and very strongly, too."

"And the position of the nails," said Dick Turpin, "clearly proved that the door was nailed up on the inner side."

"It is quite certain that those by whom the nails were driven in stood in this armoury to do it."

"That drives us to come to one of two conclusions. Either those persons, who lie still in death yonder, made themselves prisoners in this place and hammered the nails in, or else there is some other mode of leaving the corridor with which we are at present unacquainted.

"The last supposition seems to me to be the most likely one."

"And to me too."

"And yet it might not be so."

"Without some more definite information than we at present possess we cannot possibly decide."

"Very true."

"Well, then, my friends," said Turpin, "here we stand upon the threshold of the ante-room, for such I take it to be. Now, say what we are to do."

"We cannot surely have made any mistake about the place from which the sounds proceeded?"

"I do not think we can possibly have done so."

"Then I am afraid there is but little hope that we shall be able to find out anything more than we at present know. The sounds seem to have altogether ceased, and no longer afford us any clue. What, then, shall we do?"

"I do not like to be beaten thus."

"Nor I—nor I."

"You may depend there is some deep mystery in all this," said Dick Turpin. "Whether we shall be able to find it out I know not, but we will not confess ourselves baffled until we have tried our best to obtain a solution of the mystery."

"We agree with you there, captain," said his comrades; "but what shall be our next proceeding?"

"Well, now that the sounds have entirely ceased, and there appears no signs of their renewal, we have no clue to guide us to further explorations. Under the circumstances, I think we had better make our way to our quarters above, and then, if we hear anything, we can immediately descend.

"We shall have no obstructions to hinder us this time.

"We shall not, as you say. We shall be able to enter this corridor at once."

"Then I think we had better ascend. It seems that there is nothing further to be discovered by remaining here."

"No, all is still. We cannot hope to find out more than we already know."

"Come, then, ascend," said Dick Turpin. "If I live till to-morrow, I will make such a search through this old mansion, that let the secret be what it will we will unkennel it. We shall have daylight to aid us, and that alone will disclose much that the night would conceal. We will not leave a corner in this place without prying into it. Come, then, my friends, we will, if we can, snatch a few hours' repose, and then set about our task in the morning."

With these words, Dick Turpin ascended the stairs, having first removed the bandage from Maud's eyes.

His three comrades followed him.

CHAPTER CCCCXLIV.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS ARE BAFFLED AND BEWILDERED BY THE DISCOVERY IN THE OLD ARMOURY.

THE reader will not require to be told that the highwaymen were all exceedingly dissatisfied with the results of their exploring expedition.

It was certain, however, that they could not do better than act in the manner which had been proposed.

In a minute or two, then, they reached the upper portion of the house, and here they separated, while each one sought that repose of which they stood so much in need.

All were very—very weary, and when they awoke, the day was far advanced.

They had not been disturbed by any sound whatever.

Some time was consumed in attending to the horses, for our friends were well aware that it would never do to neglect them.

Some more of the provisions which Tom King had been so lucky to obtain the night before were divided amongst them.

"Comrades," said Dick Turpin, "have you thought over the plan of future action which I proposed to you?"

"We have—we have."

"And what is the ultimate result of your deliberations?"

"We approve of the scheme highly; it is impossible for us to do otherwise, but we wish there was not quite so much risk."

"You exaggerate the amount of the risk," said Dick Turpin. "To be sure, it looks, at first sight, a very hazardous and daring thing for one of us to make our way to the 'White Horse' Inn, in Drury-lane, but I have come to the conclusion that in reality the danger is not so great as it appears to be."

"Why not? How do you make that out?"

"In this way. After my escape from Newgate you may depend that old Matthew's crib was very closely watched indeed."

"There is no doubt about that."

"Now I think myself, and I feel pretty well sure, that the same vigilant watch would be kept up until the time when it became known, for certain, that we had taken up a temporary residence in Enfield Chase."

"And do you think it would be discontinued then?"

"I do, for they would see the uselessness of keeping it up. Since then we have been hunted about from one part of the kingdom to the other, and in such a manner that the very last thing our foes would dream of our doing would be going back to London, or, at all events, to Drury-lane."

"I understand you now. You think the officers would consider it such a mad-headed freak, that they would make up their minds that we should never attempt it."

"Just so."

"Well, there may be something in that, but there is the danger just the same."

"So there is, and so there always will be, whenever we ride out upon the road; but come, friends, this talk is idle. In your own minds you must be conscious of the immense advantages which will accrue from this proceeding, therefore I shall no longer hesitate."

"You have quite made up your mind, captain?"

"Quite. As soon as ever it gets dark to-night, I shall saddle Black Bess, and set out. If I do not return in the morning, do not be alarmed. It may be running some extra risk to return, and old Matthew will be able to find me a secure hiding-place until nightfall."

"Then, you think it probable you will remain there all day to-morrow?"

"I may do so. I merely mention the contingency in order that my non-return may excite no apprehension. When I come back, you may depend I shall be the bearer of some important news."

"We can only wish you good luck, captain."

"Leave all to me. I have hoped that we shall be able to search this old mansion thoroughly, but we have slept too late, and the days now are so very short—in an hour or so it will be quite dark."

"It will—it will."

"However, my comrades, we will occupy that hour by visiting that strange place into which we last night forced our way. I have hopes that the daylight will reveal to us what the night concealed."

"There is a chance of that."

"Come, then. Let us go at once, or we shall have no time."

Upon this the whole of the little party made their way to the corridor which they had visited on the preceding night.

Dick Turpin, in answer to Maud's queries, had told her what kind of discovery they had made; and her mind being thus prepared, she felt that she should not fear to look upon the forms of the two dead combatants.

Accordingly she accompanied them.

Upon reaching the door which led from the antechamber into the armoury or corridor, they paused in order to see whether the door really had been nailed up from the inner side.

This second investigation had the effect of assuring them that they were quite correct.

There could not be the shadow of a doubt about it.

The door had been nailed up from the inner side.

What could be more puzzling than this?

Unable, however, to come to any conclusion respecting it, the highwaymen crossed the threshold and stood within the armoury.

Seen by daylight, this place presented a very magnificent appearance, in spite of the dust with which every object was covered.

But a chill struck to their very hearts when they entered this place, which seemed more deserted than any other portion of the deserted mansion.

It was now quite easy to see to the farther extremity of the corridor, and a broad ray of light fell upon the two bodies.

Dick and his comrades began their search at once.

They examined all the walls with the utmost minuteness, in order to ascertain whether they could find any traces of another mode of leaving the armoury.

But, as on the preceding evening, they failed completely.

They could discover nothing.

The walls were perfectly uniform and even, and every square foot almost was covered with weapons of various kinds.

Then they reached the bodies.

An impulse of curiosity, which they could not resist, induced them to pause and gather round these two prostrate forms.

They were eager to learn what appearence they presented by daylight.

There was not much difference, except that they were able to see with greater distinctness.

They were able to see the expression upon the countenances of these two men.

It was that of deadly and inveterate hate.

Their brows were contracted into a deep frown, and their teeth tightly clenched together.

Upon the swords, too, near the points, could be seen the stains of blood.

This seemed to confirm the supposition that the combatants had both perished by each other's hands.

Then they noticed, too, that the floor near them was of a much darker colour than it was elsewhere, as though it had been dyed with blood.

"The mystery deepens, I think," said Dick Turpin.

"It does," said Tom King.

"Setting aside what we heard," exclaimed Claude Duval, "how do you account for the bodies being preserved in the way they are?"

"I cannot account for it."

"Nor I."

"Their garments appear to be whole and perfect. I wonder whether in any of their pockets we should be able to find anything that would give us a clue to this mystery?"

"It is possible."

"Then I will try it," said Claude Duval.

As he spoke, he stooped down and took hold of the lapel of one of the coats.

To his surprise, the moment he touched it, it all crumbled away in his fingers, as though it had been so much cobweb.

He started up in astonishment.

"You see everything is in the last stage of decay," said Dick Turpin, "which alone proves how long these bodies must have laid here, if the style of their dress was not evidence sufficient."

"By what means, then, have the bodies escaped corruption?" asked Claude Duval.

"I cannot tell," replied Turpin. "In this instance the usual course of nature has been suspended. What causes have operated to produce this I know not."

"The bodies seem to have dried in some way," said Tom King.

As he spoke, he stooped down,

There were no foolish fears of death in Tom King's mind, and he did not hesitate to take one of the dead hands in his own.

As he had more than half expected, it crumbled to dust in his grasp.

"Had we come upon this spectacle in the most casual manner," he said, "it would have afforded us ample matter for speculation; but, coupled with the strange circumstances——"

"Stay! stay!" said Turpin. "Do not be too fast to connect the sounds we have heard with these two dead bodies. I should be loath, indeed, to believe that they had anything to do with them."

"And yet what else can we think?"

"Anything but that," interrupted Turpin, hastily. "As I said before, there is some deep mystery here. Whether we shall be able to discover it or not I cannot say, but I hope we shall be able to do so, because of the feeling of satisfaction which it will give us. But come, we will look at the further end of the corridor. If we linger much longer, we shall have darkness come upon us."

With these words, the highwaymen aroused themselves, and hastened to the extremity of the corridor.

But not the slightest sign could they see of any other doorway.

In the end they were compelled to own themselves baffled, and yet Dick Turpin and his comrades could not divest themselves of the idea that there was some secret means of exit and entrance, but that it was too cleverly concealed for them to be able to discover it.

They cast one last, lingering glance at the bodies, and then, as night was coming on with great rapidity, they returned to their chamber above.

Here they partook of another scanty meal, and then Turpin said—

"My comrades, you will remain here during my absence. In your charge I leave Maud. I know I can do so safely. During the night, should the sounds which we have previously heard be repeated, I should like you to hasten down the stairs and rush into the corridor, and try to penetrate this mystery."

"We will do so."

"If, in the meantime, you can suggest any improvement to the scheme I have laid before you, I should like to hear it. Until I return, we cannot proceed further."

"We certainly cannot, captain."

"If it is possible, I shall return here before daybreak. If, however, I find I shall incur an extra amount of danger by doing so, which might be avoided by remaining in Drury-lane until the following night, I shall not hesitate to stay."

"No, it will be your wisest plan; for above all things it behoves you to look after your own safety."

"I shall make it my chief business to preserve it. I must confess, though, I should have parted with a lighter heart if we could have discovered the meaning of all that we have seen and heard."

"Do not think about that, captain."

"I shall try not to do so. Still I am always uneasy when anything occurs for which I am unable to account."

"It is very natural."

"An adventure occurred to me on the same night that I took the silver cup from Lord Mayor Fungo. You have heard me speak of it before?"

"Oh! yes; often."

"I mean the body of the man I found in the small cavern beneath the hut in the wood, which served as a haunt for a band of robbers."

"Somewhere near Wimbledon, was it not?"

"Yes. Well, that puzzled me exceedingly, and the adventure often recurs to my recollection, just because I have never been able to come to any satisfactory conclusion concerning it."

"But perhaps you may do so."

"There is some hope of that, though I fear not much. Still, I should not like the mysteries in this deserted mansion to elude us."

"They shall not, if it is possible for human beings to find them out; and, captain, while you are out on the road to-night you may depend, if we hear anything, we will hasten down the stairs as quickly as we can."

"Do so—do so; and I hope you will be rewarded for your investigations. Do not give up easily."

"We will not, you may depend. But, captain"——

"What, my friends?"

"Before you start, tell us what you think of doing."

"No more than I have said. I shall saddle Black Bess and leave here. I shall make my way by the most circuitous and unfrequented road I can find to old Matthew's at Drury-lane. When I get there, I shall talk the matter thoroughly over with him, in the hope that he may be able to afford us a few practical suggestions."

"That is all as it should be," said Tom King; "but when I started on my little mission last night, I had to give a kind of understanding that I would not allow myself to be led off into any other adventure."

"And I suppose you would like me to enter into an engagement of a like character?"

"That's it. We do not want you to incur any more danger than you may be absolutely compelled."

"Leave all that to me, my friends," said Dick Turpin; "you have trusted me before to-day."

"We have—we have."

"Rely upon it, I will do my best to perform my errand, and, if for Maud's sake merely, you may depend I shall take the utmost care not to get into trouble through being rashly adventurous."

"I suppose we cannot ask more?"

"Do not. Do you think, now, that it is sufficiently dark to answer my purpose?"

"I think so," said Tom King; "by the time you have completed your preparations night will be fairly come, and I for one would prefer to see you return before daybreak, instead of being absent during the whole of to-morrow; and if you stay till too late before you make a start you will have no opportunity."

"True—true."

As he spoke, Dick Turpin set about the task of loading and priming his pistols, so as to be able to rely upon making use of them when the critical moment arrived.

Maud watched this proceeding with silent dread.

To her the enterprise upon which Dick Turpin was about to start seemed to be of the most dangerous character conceivable.

She trembled excessively when she thought of it.

The moment of parting, too, would be a dreadful one.

At lenth Dick Turpin completed his preparations, and, turning round to his comrades, he said—

"We will shake hands and part here."

But to this proposal not one of them would consent.

"No, no," they cried, "it is night now, and there is no fear of our being seen by any prying eye. We will go down with you and see you fairly start."

Perceiving how bent they all were upon this, Dick Turpin gave his consent, for he could see no reason for opposing their wish.

Accordingly they descended the staircase.

Maud hung heavily upon Dick's arm, and he could tell that she was weeping silently.

He affected to take no notice of this, but, in a low voice, did his best to remove her apprehension by showing her that the enterprise was not so dangerous a one as she imagined.

She listened to his words, but she could not altogether credit them.

She knew that if she magnified the danger he diminished it.

Tom King and Claude and Jack hastened toward the stable, their object being to allow Dick Turpin and Maud to say a few parting words to each other.

Of this opportunity they availed themselves. Turpin had the satisfaction of perceiving that before he reached the door of the building which they had made use of for a stable he had succeeded in removing a great many of her fears.

By the time he arrived Black Bess was saddled and bridled, and in readiness for her rider.

Tom King led her out.

Dick Turpin's eyes glistened with pleasure when he caught sight of his bonny mare.

As for Black Bess, she seemed to reciprocate that pleasure, and to recognize her rider too, for she neighed slightly and arched her neck, while she pawed the ground with her forefoot impatiently.

CHAPTER CCCCXLV.

DICK TURPIN HAS A PERILOUS ADVENTURE ON HIS WAY TO LONDON.

DICK TURPIN stepped forward a pace, and patted Black Bess upon the neck.

The noble creature neighed again and tossed her head, which proved that she really did recognize her master.

He spoke a few words of encouragement to her, and she reared and pranced with evident delight.

It would almost appear that she was aware she was once more to go forth alone upon the road with her master on her back.

Dick's heart glowed at the prospect before him.

He felt that he would not have omitted that journey for worlds.

"Farewell, Maud! farewell, comrades!" he cried, in a cheerful voice. "Farewell, for a brief space of time only. Ere long I shall return, and bring with me news such as will gladden the hearts of all. If possible, I shall return before to-morrow's dawn."

"We shall be glad to see you, captain," cried his followers; "but do not run any extra risk upon that account; it would never be worth while."

"So I think; and so, once more, farewell. I am off."

Dick kissed Maud and shook hands with his comrades.

Tears sprang into Maud's eyes; and though she was much more reconciled to the parting than she had been, still she could not repress them.

Dick Turpin sprang into the saddle.

He took off his hat and waved it to his friends.

Then, at a kind of prancing gallop, which would have disconcerted any but a practised horseman, Black Bess took her way across the neglected garden at the back of the house.

The last sound which Dick heard from his comrades was a brief caution to keep clear of danger.

He tried to bring Black Bess to something more like an ordinary pace, but the noble creature's delight appeared to be so great as to be beyond the reach of all control.

In a little while, however, her excitement wore off, and by the time Dick Turpin had reached the neglected gates which led out into the lane, she walked along as quietly as he could wish.

Dick halted and reconnoitred.

Then, not being able to see or hear anything that denoted the presence of a human being, he passed out into the roadway.

The stillness of the forest itself prevailed around him.

For some distance he could proceed without fear of an interruption.

A word to Black Bess was sufficient to let her know that her rider was in readiness for her to set forward.

Rearing in the air until she was almost upright, she gave a terrific bound forward, and flew along the road at a speed that positively astonished Dick Turpin himself.

There are few things more exhilarating than a gallop on horseback across the country.

Dick felt immediately a sense of the most exquisite enjoyment.

A long time had elapsed since he had had such a gallop alone, and he enjoyed it to the utmost.

Indeed, so great was the gratification, that he made no attempt to check his mare's tremendous speed.

On the contrary, he allowed the reins to fall slack upon her neck, so that she could go at whatever speed she thought proper.

The blood seemed to circulate like lightning through every vein in the highwayman's body.

By degrees, however, as the novelty of the glorious sensation wore off, he awoke to a recollection of the fact that it was just the reverse of prudent for him to gallop along the road at such a speed.

Not without reluctance, though, he gently drew in the rein, and so diminished Black Bess's speed by degrees, until it became merely a gentle trot.

Then Dick glanced about him.

He had reduced his speed just in time.

A few yards further on he could see where the lane debouched upon the broad London road.

The highwayman's pulse beat rapidly, and he felt such an elation of spirits as he had for a long time been a stranger to.

His heart bounded freely and lightly.

He felt himself once more the bold, brave, daring knight of the road.

On such a night he felt that, let the risk and danger be what it might, he must have an adventure.

No night more fitting could possibly be found.

The air was clear and frosty.

Overhead the stars glittered with unusual brilliancy.

There was not a single cloud visible on the dark blue dome of the heavens.

The moon was absent.

She had just peeped above the horizon for an hour, and then departed to shed her silvery beams upon some other quarter of the earth.

The moon was only one day old.

The ground beneath was frozen as hard as iron.

The very piercingness of the air itself, without anything else, was calculated to raise the spirits to an infinite degree.

Dick Turpin thought that he had never felt so light-hearted and joyous in the whole of his life.

He fancied even that he was too merry for the atmosphere and the mere excitement of a gallop to have produced it.

But he drew in deep inspirations of the pure fresh air, and at each breath felt his spirits rise.

"Yes," he said to himself, as he emerged at a gentle pace into the high road, and turned his mare's head in the direction of London; "yes, I must have an adventure. I feel almost as though an adventure of more than usual interest awaits me. Most assuredly I shall not allow one to pass me by. This is, indeed, the night for a life on the road!"

The pronunciation of these last words seemed to have the effect of recalling to his mind the words of some ballad or light ditty, for almost immediately afterwards he commenced singing in a low but joyous tone.

It was merely natural that his happiness should avail itself of this vent.

The words were these.

They were sung to a lively, rollicking tune, which accorded well with their nature.

There's no life like a life on the road,
Fal la,
No life like a life on the road,
Fal la;
With bonny Black Bess,
Who all will confess
Is the steed for a life on the road,
Fal la.

There's no life like a life on the road,
Fal la,
No life like a life on the road,
Fal la,
On common or heath,
With the green grass beneath,
There's no life like a life on the road,
Fal la.

There's no life like a life on the road,
Fal la,
No life like a life on the road,
Fal la;
When the moon gives no light,
And a coach comes in sight,
There's no life like a life on the road.
Fal la.

There's no life like a life on the road,
Fal la,
No life like a life on the road,
Fal la;
"Hand over your gold!"
Cries Turpin so bold,
"For to-night I take toll on this road."
Fal la.

Dick Turpin ceased somewhat suddenly.

At the same time, too, he reined in his steed.

He assumed a listening attitude.

A faint sound had struck upon his ears while he was singing, and now he listened for a repetition of it.

It soon came.

A rumbling, grating, grinding sound.

To Dick's ears it was audible enough, though anyone less practised would scarcely have heard it.

"A coach!" he said, in tones which showed how much gratification the circumstance afforded him. "Yes, it is a coach, or some vehicle. It is a long way off, and most certainly approaching. Can I let it pass me toll-free? Surely no. Dick Turpin is on the road to-night, and requires money to carry out his plans. Hurrah for the road! As for my comrades, never mind them, I shall reach the White Horse plenty time enough."

Dick Turpin got his pistols in readiness.

He looked at the primings carefully, and was repaid for taking the precaution.

The priming of one of them had got shaken out during his gallop.

Had he been ignorant of this it might have cost him his life.

The omission was, however, easily remedied.

By the time he had made these little preparations the sound had greatly increased in loudness, and there could not be the least doubt as to the cause which produced it.

The clatter of the horses' hoofs upon the hard, frosty road and the rumbling of the wheels could be clearly distinguished.

Black Bess pawed the ground impatiently with her feet, as though she, too, knew what that sound meant.

Dick allowed her to proceed for a short distance at a walk.

Then coming to a portion of the roadway where a tall quickset hedge cast a deep shadow beneath it, he paused again, and backed his steed until they were both completely concealed by the shadow.

In this position he awaited immovably and patiently until the vehicle arrived.

His patience was not put to a very severe trial.

The coach—for such it was—came on at the rattling pace of about ten miles an hour, which, before the invention of railways, was thought to be a very wonderful speed indeed.

It was the St. Alban's coach which was approaching.

It received this designation from the fact that it ran between London and the town of St. Alban's.

It was now on the way from London.

Dick would have infinitely preferred that it was making the other journey, for he had found from experience that those coaches which came from distant places to London always afforded a better booty than those returning from the metropolis.

However, he had to take things as they came.

The coach he was determined to stop, single-handed as he was.

The booty would be acceptable for carrying out his plans, and, as we have seen, he was just in the humour to undertake any temerarious feat.

Glancing along the road, he perceived in the distance two bright, glittering, star-like lights.

Upon these he fixed his eyes.

Gradually they became larger and brighter, until at length he could see what a light they cast around them, and how clearly they brought into view the different objects upon the wayside.

The gleaming light fell with a strange effect upon the branches of the leafless hedges and on the brown trunks of the trees which fringed the highway.

Then the dim, shadowy outline of the coach itself, with the driver perched up on his high seat, came in view.

This was the moment for action.

Fixing his hat firmly upon his brows, gathering up the reins somewhat tightly in his left hand, and grasping a pistol in his right, Dick Turpin pressed his heels against the flanks of his bonny mare.

Black Bess bounded forward in the direction of the coach.

As soon as he was near enough for his voice to have full effect, Dick cried—

"Halt!—halt! Coachman, pull up! Pull up this moment, or you will have a bullet through your brain."

"Murder!" cried the driver of the stage-coach. "It's a highwayman. Murder! murder!"

But he pulled up.

"Dismount!" cried Turpin, as soon as he found he had succeeded so far. "Down into the road with you, or you are a dead man."

"Oh! cuss it!" said the driver, mutteringly, as he descended. "There will be a precious row about this; but I ain't a going to be such a fool as to sit still and be fired at like Bob Clark."

When he descended from the box, the coachman dropped the reins, so the horses were left to themselves.

As they had come from London at full speed without stopping, they were glad enough of a rest, and there was no fear that they would start off of themselves.

By this time the alarm among the passengers, both inside and out, was very great indeed, and a medley of oaths and shrieks came on the highwayman's ears.

He put into practice a ruse which hitherto had never failed him.

Apparently addressing himself to the hedge, as though there were persons concealed there, Dick cried—

"Keep your weapons ready. If anyone moves or resists, fire at once, and settle them all."

The passengers on the top of the coach, who just before had been very clamorous, became silent immediately.

They had a very wholesome and natural dread of being shot down like so many pigeons, and, under the circumstances, they thought the most prudent thing they could do was to remain perfectly still.

Having thus spoken, and perceiving that his words had produced the effect he desired and expected, Dick Turpin rode coolly and boldly enough up to the door of the coach.

In their desire to learn what was the matter, the window had been let down, and several heads had been protruded.

But seeing Dick Turpin approaching, these were rapidly withdrawn, and an attempt was made to close the window again.

The highwayman, however, was in time to prevent this.

He still held the undischarged pistol in his hand, and placing this, in an apparently negligent manner, upon the window-sill, he said—

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am really sorry to have been the cause of interrupting you on your journey, but as you know such obstacles as tolls still exist, and, for to-night I am appointed to take the money."

"Stuff! fudge!" said a voice. "Take that, and much good may it do you. I can tell you, it is all you will get out of me."

With these words, a man, who was seated in the middle of the coach, drew a pistol from his breast, and, cocking it, presented it full at the highwayman's head.

But Dick Turpin never moved.

The trigger was pulled.

The powder flashed in the pan.

But no report followed.

"Oh! that's it, is it?" cried Dick. "Then, if that's all you are able to give me I suppose I may say thank you for nothing; however, you have had your shot, and now it is my turn."

Turpin slowly raised his pistol as he spoke.

"No!—no!" cried the man who had been so fast with his fire-arms; "no!—no! Murder!"

"It would be, only I fear I shall hurt the others in the coach; however, money I must and will have, and if you

will surrender quietly whatever money and other articles of value you may have about you, I will use no harsh measures; if, on the contrary, you refuse, I shall have to take what I want, and then you will find I shall be more rough than pleasant."

"But this is monstrous," said a voice. "Monstrous to a degree! Why there are, counting myself, five men in the coach; and are we to tamely submit to be robbed by one man? Pho, stuff! Assist me, and we soon prove ourselves a match for him."

"You forget my men are waiting behind the hedge," said Dick Turpin, quietly. "At a word from me they will come forward; and, when they do, you will heartily wish that the thought of resistance had never entered your heads. Come, now, take good advice, and hand over quietly. If you do not, I shall take what I want; so that, in the end, it will be all the same; and I am sure the way I have proposed is by far the best for you."

Dick Turpin dropped the reins as he spoke.

He knew he could trust to Black Bess not to move until he gave her a signal to do so.

Taking off his hat, he held it inside the coach, as he said—

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, put your money and valuables in that, and then there will be no harm done."

Not a movement was made.

Seeing this, Dick held the pistol at the head of the passenger who sat next the door, and held his hat just before him.

"Now, sir," he said, in a sterner tone of voice than he had hitherto employed, "comply with my demands, or, as surely as you are alive at this moment, you will be a dead man if you refuse or even hesitate!"

CHAPTER CCCCXLVI.

DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN TAKING A GOOD BOOTY FROM THE ST. ALBAN'S COACH, AND BLACK BESS MEETS WITH A MISHAP.

The passenger thus addressed glared fearfully at Dick Turpin.

He was a big, stout, pompous-looking man, with a countenance of a purple hue.

But the close proximity of the muzzle of the pistol produced a remarkable alteration in the colour of his visage.

It assumed a dusky, bilious-looking tint.

Dick saw that he made an impression, and he hastened to improve it.

Accordingly, he pressed the muzzle of the pistol into the bloated cheek of the fat traveller until it positively touched the bone.

"Now," said Turpin, "which will you do? Will you hand over your things to me, or shall my followers rifle them from your dead body?"

A deep groan was the response.

And then, in a manner which showed how much it went against his inclination, the traveller took a pocket-book from the breast of his coat and dropped it into Dick Turpin's hat.

"Quicker, sir! quicker!" said our hero. "Recollect there are others waiting to take their turn, and I am desirous that you should all continue your journey with the least possible delay."

"Won't that do, villain?" asked the traveller.

"No hard names, if you please," said Dick, good-humouredly. "I now want that watch, the chain of which I can see dangling from your fob, and I want besides the diamond pin out of your neckcloth, and those two rings off your fingers!"

The fat traveller groaned again.

But feeling that it would be madness to resist, he complied with the highwayman's demands; for he had the good sense to value his life at more worth than the possession of a few jewels.

So he gave Dick the articles for which he had asked, though to do so went sorely against the grain.

Satisfied with this individual, Dick removed the pistol.

The fat traveller sank back in the corner, and watched his fellow-passengers with an air of savage satisfaction.

Dick took them all in turn.

The compliance of the pompous gentleman in the corner seemed to have a good effect upon the rest, who surrendered their property with no more hesitation than might have been expected.

Dick had to transfer the contents of the hat to his pockets several times.

He was overjoyed at his success.

But inside the coach he showed no favour or partiality.

He levied his contributions upon all alike, and would not leave any until they had handed over all the valuables they had about them.

Dick grew more and more elated as the money and jewels kept falling into his hat.

At length he despoiled the last passenger.

Then making a low bow with his hat, he said—

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have the pleasure of wishing you a very good evening. I am sorry to have hindered you so much, though I must say the fault is partially your own. However, our acquaintance, though very brief, has been very agreeable to me at all events, and so good night, ladies and gentlemen."

With these words Dick Turpin placed his hat upon his head.

"Oh! d—n your politeness!" he heard a voice say, but he affected to take no notice of it.

Stimulated by the success which had so far attended his efforts, Dick now resolved to turn a portion of his attention to the outside passengers.

He could see no reason why they should be allowed to escape scot-free when those inside had been obliged to pay toll so heavily.

Besides, he knew that the outsiders were often persons who carried large sums about with them.

Scarcely, however, had Dick Turpin changed Black Bess's position in order to carry out his intention than he was startled by an occurrence which we must go back a little to explain.

The reader will, perhaps, have noticed that we have made no mention of the guard of the coach.

Now as this happened on a stage-coach to be a very important functionary, the omission cannot fail to appear extraordinary.

We proceed to account for it.

The guard of a stage-coach was always provided with two articles, which might be looked upon as the insignia of his office.

A long tin horn.

A blunderbuss.

Those were the two articles.

They were suspended from the roof of the coach on either side of his seat, and were covered with wicker-work cases to protect them from the effects of the weather.

The one was to be used whenever they were approaching a village or place where they stopped, and the loud discordant noise which could be produced by blowing into it served to give timely notice of their arrival.

The other—the blunderbuss—was to be used by the guard to protect the passengers and the coach from any attack that might be made upon them.

Why, then, did not the guard on this occasion do his duty, and make use of this formidable weapon of defence?

The reason was simple in the extreme.

The guard was a prudent man.

He remembered that the road was patrolled by a detachment of dragoons.

The coach had passed them not long before it was stopped by the highwayman.

This guard, then, being aware that absolute trust was not to be placed upon the death-dealing qualities of the blunderbuss, and, knowing also that if he failed to slay the highwayman when he fired it, his life would, in all probability, pay the forfeit, he bethought himself of another plan of proceeding, which was, in his judgment, an infinitely better one.

In this belief he lost no time in putting his plan into execution.

Instead, then, of making the slightest demonstration when Dick Turpin rode out and stopped the coach, he slipped quietly from his seat into the road.

He was not perceived.

As soon as he gained his feet, he ran along the road under the shadow of the hedge, taking the direction in which they had just come.

His purpose may be guessed.

It was to run back until he either met or overtook the troop of dragoons which he had passed.



[THE MEETING BETWEEN DICK TURPIN AND OLD MATTHEW IN THE BAR OF THE WHITE HORSE INN.]

The guard calculated correctly enough that the highwayman was not likely to meet with much resistance, and that it would take him some considerable time.

While he was thus employed, the guard doubted not that by making good use of his legs he should be able to reach the dragoons, and return with them before the highwayman finished.

He succeeded beyond his anticipations.

It so happened that the dragoons, having gone to the end of their beat, were returning.

The consequence was he met them.

A very few words sufficed to make the soldiers aware of the actual state of affairs.

This was quite enough to animate them.

Without troubling about the guard, the officer of dragoons called out to his followers, and the whole troop set off at a full gallop down the road, leaving the panting and exhausted guard to come after them in the best manner he could.

The reader will now understand what it was that attracted Dick Turpin's attention when he was about to levy his contributions upon the outside travellers.

He was surprised first of all by a loud shout of gratification which came from one of them.

Dick's eyes glanced like lightning in the direction to which the man's face was turned.

Then he saw and comprehended his danger in an instant.

Only a few yards off was a troop of dragoons.

They were coming on at a full gallop.

Somehow or other Dick had forgotten all about the dragoons until he was warned by the glitter of their accoutrements as they came galloping towards him along the road.

But Dick did not lose his presence of mind.

It was clear he would have to forego his purpose of taking toll from the passengers on the roof of the St. Alban's coach.

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Taking a firm grasp of the reins, he spoke a few encouraging words to Black Bess, and wheeled her round.

The dragoons increased their speed by goring their horses with their spurs, until the poor beasts were maddened by the pain.

In another instant they would be upon their prey.

But Dick Turpin made Black Bess face the hedge on one side of the road.

It was no very great height, though it was planted on the top of a bank.

Still Turpin felt sure that his mare could leap it easily.

He uttered the word that was requisite to give her the impulse.

She seemed to draw her body into a small compass, and drew her head in until it almost touched her breast.

She gave one bound forward.

The next moment she alighted on the other side of the hedge.

But Dick was only just in time.

Even as Black Bess alighted on the soft turf of the meadow which happened to be on the other side of the hedge, so did the dragoons arrive on the spot.

But such was the speed at which they came, that they found it impossible to pull up just opposite the coach.

The reason of this was, that they fancied the highwayman, upon seeing them approach, would turn round and fly, and they wished to keep up their speed so as to have a better opportunity of overtaking him.

But Dick was not likely to turn back, because that would lead him away from his destination.

He wished to go in the direction of London, and so he leaped over the hedge on the eastern side of the road.

This movement, then, being altogether unexpected by the dragoons, quite disconcerted them.

They overshot their mark considerably.

Dick turned round and waved his hat in a defiant and ironical manner.

Then, letting the reins fall loosely upon the neck of his bonny mare, he uttered a few encouraging sounds, which he knew would have the effect of inducing her to make all speed.

Away, then, like some phantom horse and rider, Dick Turpin and Black Bess flew over the meadow.

By the time the dragoons entered it, Dick leaped a hedge that took him into another.

Glancing back, over his shoulder, at his pursuers, he saw, by their manner, that they intended to make a chase of it.

But Dick Turpin, unencumbered as he was in any way, felt that he could laugh all their efforts to scorn.

He laughed lightly.

"Well—well," he said, "I have been successful beyond all expectation, and I feel light-hearted in consequence. These gentlemen desire a gallop, and they shall have one. I will lead them a pretty dance though, and when they are tired out I will shoot off out of their reach."

These words will be enough to show what Dick Turpin intended to do.

Looking back once more, he found that he had got a start of at least half a mile.

While that distance was preserved between them of course it would be all right enough, for they were unable to do him any injury until they came to closer quarters.

Having noted this, he made a rapid calculation as to the speed which the dragoons would be able to make.

This speed he found Black Bess would be able to perform with ease, and without distressing herself in the least.

The dragoons' horses were much heavier than Black Bess, and consequently not able to keep up a rapid pace for so long.

Then the soldiers themselves were much heavier than Dick, who might almost have been considered a light weight.

Besides this, the dragoons were encumbered with accoutrements and trappings of various kinds, which, taken altogether, made a material difference in the weight.

It follows, then, that the speed which these horses could with difficulty accomplish, would be performed by Black Bess with the greatest ease, for she was clean-limbed as a race horse.

Dick Turpin, then, resolved to keep up such a speed that he should preserve the same distance from his foes as there then was between them, feeling confident that he could out-distance them at any time he thought proper.

This was all very well, but still a prudent person would have been more likely to have got out of danger as quickly as they possibly could.

Dick's calculation, though ingenious and correct, was unfortunately, liable to be easily deranged.

However, without troubling himself about anything more than the dragoons, who were in the rear, Dick Turpin set off with a light heart across the second meadow.

A faint shout came upon his ears.

But he heeded it not.

At a long, sweeping gallop, which made it appear as though the ground glided from under her feet, Black Bess sped over the meadows.

Dick had said that he should make his way by a circuitous route to Drury Lane, and it seemed as though he was about to be as good as his word, for the direction in which he was now going was one that took him quite away from his destination.

Still, though he directed his course to the eastward, he inclined more and more to the south.

No doubt the dragoons, perceiving that the distance was not increased, had strong hopes that they should be able in the end to run down their prey.

They were scarcely likely to arrive at the real state of affairs.

On they came, then, in the highest possible spirits, all the time on the look-out for a reinforcement.

But it so happened that Dick, though purely from chance, took a direction which led him clear of all the other bands that were patrolling the various roads.

At length, however, when he had kept this up for some considerable time, and when he felt sure that the horses of the dragoons were well-nigh exhausted, Dick Turpin resolved to put an end to the chase.

He was the more moved to do this because he was gradually nearing London, and he by no means wished to be tracked into any of the streets of the metropolis.

Accordingly he determined to urge Black Bess to put forth her utmost speed for a few moments, which would, he knew, suffice to take him out of sight of his pursuers.

"Quick, old lass," he cried, addressing Black Bess. "One more effort, and then all will be over. You shall have good rest and plenty of food, of a far better quality than you have partaken of lately."

The cheery tone of voice in which Dick spoke made a wonderful difference to the speed of Black Bess.

If she did not understand the words themselves, she assuredly comprehended the meaning of the tone in which they were uttered.

But before he started her off, Dick resolved to clear the hedge that was just before him.

As he came closer he saw that this hedge skirted a broad high-road.

Up and down this road, however, he was able, from his elevated position on the back of Black Bess, to see for a long distance.

A hasty glance in both directions satisfied him that there was no one in sight, or, at any rate, no one mounted.

If there had been, he would have most certainly perceived them.

The hedge was rather high, but still it was no great obstacle to Black Bess, who possessed marvellous powers of leaping.

She saw the obstacle before her, and a touch on the flank was all the urging she required to clear it.

Then, when she was within a proper distance, she rose lightly and beautifully into the air.

Another faint cry from the rear told Dick Turpin that this action had been perceived by his pursuers.

The next moment Black Bess alighted in the high-road.

Along this Dick resolved to continue for a little distance before taking to the fields again, as over the opposite hedge was a large expanse of ploughed land.

Over this Black Bess would only be able to go slowly, and, besides, it would fatigue her immensely.

Accordingly, Dick turned her head round and cheered her onward.

To his surprise—we might almost say horror—he felt that she limped painfully.

Black Bess had fallen dead lame!

CHAPTER CCCCXLVII.

DICK TURPIN DISCOVERS THE CAUSE OF BLACK BESS'S LAMENESS, AND HAS A NARROW ESCAPE OF HIS LIFE FROM THE CARBINES OF THE DRAGOONS.

For a moment Dick felt as though deprived of breath—of life.

He could not realise the truth of what had just occurred.

But he was soon forced to the reality of it.

Black Bess was lame.

So lame, that it was with difficulty and evident pain that she was able to put her near fore foot on to the ground at all.

What could have produced this sudden lameness?

Before the leap Dick had felt nothing of it, but he became sensible of the fact the moment she alighted

Had the leap caused it, then?

It would seem so; and yet he had not noticed that she had dropped to the ground with particular heaviness.

Certainly not with heaviness sufficient to have injured her leg.

But what an unfortunate moment it was for so unfortunate an accident to occur!

The start of his pursuers which he had hitherto preserved would soon become diminished.

He could hear them in the distance, as, with loud shouts and cries, they came across the meadows.

In three minutes they would be upon him.

What was to be done?

Black Bess made an effort to continue on her way.

But Dick checked her.

He knew the dauntless mettle of his bonny mare.

She would keep up her speed, no matter how great the pain.

But her master was not content to allow her to injure herself thus.

It was just possible that, in alighting from her leap over the hedge, she had dropped upon a stone, which would be quite sufficient to cause her sudden lameness.

Dick Turpin glanced in the direction of his foes.

He could see them coming.

He could tell, too, by their manner, that they perceived he had come to a standstill.

They were striving all they could to take the utmost advantage of it.

Having satisfied himself by this one glance as to their precise distance, Dick Turpin suddenly dismounted from his steed.

He at once proceeded to examine her injured foot.

He was not without a hope that a stone had lodged in it, and that when he removed it he should remove his mare's lameness at the same time.

As soon as he took hold of her foot this hope was dissipated.

He saw, in a moment, the true cause.

Black Bess's shoes were thin, and in alighting upon the hard road the shoe upon the near fore foot had been broken into two pieces.

One of these pieces had disappeared.

The other was twisted round in such a manner that it presented a sharp edge to the frog—the tender piece of horn in the middle of a horse's foot, so called from its resemblance to the leg of the frog when bent up.

The sharp edge of the shoe was then twisted round, so that whenever Black Bess put her foot upon the ground it pressed against this tender piece of horn.

The pain thus produced would cause her to limp.

Dick uttered a cry of rage when he saw what had happened, and now that it was too late, repented of his foolhardiness.

He wished that he had been content to gallop right away at once.

Regrets, however, were useless, and so, very wisely, he set about repairing, in the best manner he could, the mischief that had been done.

The first thing he did was to take hold of the fragment of iron shoe.

A sudden wrench enabled him to disengage it entirely from his mare's foot.

Then he looked at it closely, but could not see that she had injured herself.

No doubt her lameness was now removed.

But then another difficulty presented itself.

How was she to run without a shoe?

A gallop over the hard road would do her irreparable injury, and make her lame in earnest.

Besides, ere she had gone far the hoof would be completely knocked away, so as to make it impossible for her to proceed, even at a walk.

Truly was Dick Turpin in a dilemma.

Besides, he had no time to invent some scheme that would enable him to elude his enemies or provide Black Bess with a substitute for her shoe.

Indeed, it seemed before he could even mount again, his foes would be upon him.

They were more than half-way across the meadow, and in a moment or two more would reach the hedge.

Despite these distracting and dispiriting circumstances, Dick Turpin all at once thought of a means by which he could render Black Bess fit for the road.

He no sooner thought about the plan than he set about adopting it.

Quick as thought, he took his thick but soft felt hat off his head.

He unwound his voluminous neckcloth from about his throat.

With the same speed he put Black Bess's foot into the hat, and bound it tightly round her leg with the neckcloth.

Although he worked so rapidly, he took care to do his work securely.

It would be fatal to him if it came undone.

But he fancied, and with good reason, that if he could envelop his mare's foot in the felt hat, and tie it on in such a manner as to prevent all fear of its coming off, Black Bess would feel but little inconvenience from the loss of her shoe.

Upon the spur of the moment he could think of no other plan that seemed so likely to succeed.

Ere one would have thought it possible, he had bandaged up Black Bess's hoof.

So long as the felt remained between it and the ground, all would be well.

She would receive little or no injury and feel but slight inconvenience, for Dick had been careful, in tying on the bandage, to do it in such a manner as would not impede the free motion of the leg.

This done, he rose from his stooping posture and prepared to mount.

But while he had been occupied in the manner we have described, his enemies had not been idle.

Dick was absolutely staggered with surprise when he looked up.

We will describe what had taken place.

The dragoons became aware, almost immediately, that the object of their pursuit had met with a mishap of some kind or other.

If not, why should he pause on the road, and then afterwards dismount, for they saw him do this quite plainly.

In the hope, then, that they should be able to put an end to this long and fatiguing chase, the dragoons spared neither whip nor spur in urging their horses onwards.

But the poor creatures flagged perceptibly, nevertheless.

The dragoons kept straight on towards the hedge that divided the meadow from the high-road.

The highwayman had leaped it, and why should not they be able to do so?

They resolved to make the attempt.

But as they galloped forward, the horses, perceiving the obstacle before them, and not having strength to surmount it, swerved on one side, and came to a halt; nor could they be induced to face the hedge, even though brought round to do so several times.

Some very horrible curses came from the lips of the dragoons when they found that their horses so steadily refused to clear the hedge.

All this while Dick Turpin was engaged in binding up Black Bess's foot.

They could see him a few yards further down the road plain enough.

But what were the dragoons to do?

Naturally enough, they looked towards their leader for instructions.

He did not hesitate.

"Two of you remain here," he said, "behind the hedge

Shoot the rascal down if he attempts to move, but call out first and give him warning. I will go with the rest along the hedge. If I mistake not, I saw a gate some distance further down, and when we get through that all will be easy enough."

The two men selected to remain did so, and the remainder galloped along the meadow in the direction London.

At this extremity of the field there was a gate, the officer in command of the dragoons laboured on no mistake.

The instant, then, that Dick Turpin finished his task and rose to his feet, he was startled to perceive, just on the other side of the hedge, a couple of his foes, the dragoons.

They were only a few yards' distance from him

They were mounted, and therefore were easily able to see over the hedge into the road.

Each one held a carbine to his shoulder, with the muzzles turned towards the highwayman.

"Move a single step," they said, in loud, clear tones, "and we fire! You cannot escape at this short distance, so beware. Remain where you now are, and attempt to move at your peril!"

Dick was paralysed for a moment by this address.

He did not believe it possible that his foes could so soon have got so close to him.

He was astonished, too, to see only two of the dragoons looking over the hedge.

Where had the remainder gone?

Mechanically glancing up the road he caught sight of them flying along the meadows, and going in the direction of London.

Their bright steel caps were just visible above the hedgerow.

In an instant, then, Dick Turpin understood the state of affairs.

These two dragoons had been left on guard over him while the remainder made all speed they could to the gate which led out of the field into the road, and which he imagined was at that end of the field that lay towards London.

Dick Turpin now felt himself in a very peculiar and dangerous position indeed.

It is not to be wondered at if, for a moment, he was at a loss to know what to do for the best.

But the reader may be sure that the last thing Dick Turpin would have thought of would be to remain in the road until the other dragoons came round and made him prisoner.

Such a course of proceeding as that was altogether foreign to his nature.

But death or capture seemed to stare him in the face.

He had a choice of those two evils, certainly, but how was it possible for him to escape both?

It seemed impossible.

All this flashed through Dick Turpin's mind with that rapidity of which thought is alone capable.

He looked at the dragoons.

There they sat immovably upon their steeds, with such an expression of savage ferocity upon their countenances as left Dick no sort of doubt that they would be as good as their word if he attempted to move.

How was he to mount?

Before he could seat himself in the saddle, his body would be perforated with their bullets.

Dick's fertile brain, however, suggested a means of getting free from this difficulty, though it would be a fearful risk to attempt it.

He felt, however, that his position was so bad that he could not possibly make it worse.

It may be that this feeling had the effect of inspiring him with a desperate and reckless sort of courage.

Be this as it may, however, he resolved to carry his design into execution.

The reader must understand that the dragoons were on guard on the off side of the road.

Dick Turpin had been attending to Black Bess's near fore foot.

Such, then, being the case, it follows that Black Bess was interposed between Dick Turpin and his foes.

In fact, he saw them as he stood by the side of his mare and looked over her back.

Consequently, the only portion of Dick Turpin's body which was visible to the dragoons was his head and shoulders.

Suddenly, then, Dick Turpin took hold of the pommel of the saddle with both hands, and stooped down so that his head was out of sight of his foes.

At the same time he gave utterance to a cry which he had taught Black Bess to understand.

It meant that she was to gallop forward with all her speed.

She understood the signal, and obeyed it instantly.

The dragoons were rather taken by surprise, and under the impulse of the moment, fired their carbines.

This was just what Dick Turpin calculated upon, just what he hoped for and expected.

The bullets did no injury, but went whistling harmlessly through the hedge on the other side of the road.

By clinging to the pommel of the saddle, he was able to keep up with Black Bess.

Then, suddenly swinging his body upwards, he dropped into the saddle.

This feat is by no means so difficult as it looks.

Every reader must, at some time or other, have seen the same thing done in the circus.

It is one of the easiest feats performed.

In the same way, then, as these riders take hold of the broad band fastened round the body of the horse, and, after running by the side for a moment, swing themselves on to the horse's back, so did Dick Turpin, after running by the side of Black Bess while clinging to the pommel, swing himself into the saddle.

He had many a time performed the feat in sport, and now it became useful to him.

The dragoons were quite aghast with surprise when they saw Dick Turpin perform this feat, and, before they could recover themselves, he was far off down the road.

Uttering a curse, they galloped after their companions.

Dick could tell he was unhurt, and was almost certain that his priceless mare had not received any injury.

The bullets had gone too high.

The felt hat seemed to answer its purpose admirably, and Black Bess flew along the road at one of her old sweeping gallops.

But the danger was not yet over.

Dick, of course, had taken his way along the road in the direction of London—and not away from it.

The consequence of this was, that he reached the gate that led out of the field in a very short space of time indeed.

Here were the remainder of the dragoons.

Upon reaching this gate, they found it had been very securely padlocked, doubtless with the intention of keeping out trespassers.

This lock gave them a great deal of trouble to unfasten

At last they thought of what ought to have occurred to them at first; and that was, that it would be an easy matter to lift the gate bodily off its hinges.

As soon as one proposed this it was quickly done.

But, even while they were in the act of lifting the gate, the report from the discharge of their comrades' carbines reached their ears.

The next moment they heard the clatter of Black Bess's hoofs upon the hard roadway.

They uttered a shout, and, in a disorderly throng, rode out into the highway just as the highwayman was coming.

Dick saw them, and understood in a moment that he would have to run the gauntlet between them.

He did not draw in.

On the contrary, he urged his steed to still greater exertion.

Taking the reins in his teeth, he drew his sword, and took a pistol in his left hand.

Notwithstanding this, and the violent rate at which he approached, the dragoons formed a line across the road so as to stop his progress.

On came Dick Turpin with the velocity of an avalanche.

Keeping straight in the middle of the road, he dashed into their ranks.

He fired his pistol, and waved his sword round his head.

It gleamed like lightning.

The dragoons gave way.

In another moment Dick was past them.

That danger was over, and he had sustained no injury, while he believed that his hat would be the means of

protecting Black Bess's foot from injury for a considerable time.

Turning half round in the saddle, he saw that the dragoons, in spite of their defeat, seemed in no way inclined to abandon the pursuit.

So far from it, they had formed themselves into a troop, and came along the high-road at a rate that was really wonderful, considering the weight of their horses and their riders, and the distance they had already come.

CHAPTER CCCCXLVIII.

DICK TURPIN FINDS DANGER EVEN IN THE BLACKSMITH'S SHOP AT EDMONTON.

This gave Dick Turpin but little apprehension.

Had not his mare lost her shoe, he would have felt no apprehension at all.

But the events which had just taken place inspired him with confidence that the substitute would answer his purpose.

The road along which he was now galloping led direct to London; and, if he continued without changing his course, he would soon arrive there.

But it was quite certain it would never do to ride into the metropolis with a troop of dragoons at his heels.

Besides, there was great danger, that he would either overtake or else meet with somebody.

Dick determined to get a little start of his pursuers, and then change his course.

Every few minutes, then, he turned and looked back, and each time had the satisfaction of perceiving that the distance between himself and his pursuers had materially increased.

A little further, and he resolved to leave the road.

Recollecting that, on the former occasion, the dragoons' horses had not been able to leap a hedge, Dick began to look about him for a meadow into which he could leap, and so make off across the country again.

He was now approaching London in a north-easterly direction, so that, if he took to the meadows on his right hand, and kept slightly to his left, he would be able to enter London in a northerly direction, which would enable him to get to Drury Lane very well, since the spot where the British Museum stands was in Turpin's time known as Bloomsbury Fields, and fields they were in reality, continuing to High Street, St. Giles's.

Presently, seeing a meadow which was defended by a tall hedge, and the gate leading into which was some distance further on, Dick determined to leave the high-road without delay.

Looking back, he was rejoiced to find that the dragoons were a long way in the rear.

But still they were within sight and hearing too.

Black Bess showed but slight symptoms of the immense exertion she had undergone.

Dick stopped and backed her close to the ditch on the left-hand side of the road.

He turned her round to face the hedge opposite, the height of which was rather formidable.

Before he gave her the impulse forward, however, he looked down at her foot.

The felt hat seemed to have answered its purpose most admirably.

Black Bess's hoof had not yet come in contact with the hard road.

It was fully protected.

All was well, and so Dick Turpin patted her upon the neck.

Black Bess appeared to understand that the hedge was to be leaped.

She drew herself up, and then gave a tremendous rush forward.

Up into the air she rose, and dropped down lightly and easily in the meadow.

Dick Turpin wasted no more time in looking after his pursuers.

They were a long way in the rear. He was sure of that, and with this knowledge he rested himself content.

Over the soft turf in the meadow he took his way, taking care to keep in the proper direction.

With as much ease as ever, Black Bess leaped another hedge into a second meadow.

Over this she sped.

Dick urged her on to the utmost, although she showed signs of exhaustion.

He knew that just an effort now was all that was required to place him in safety.

It was after a hard gallop of some twenty minutes' duration that Dick Turpin drew rein.

He had once more reached the high-road.

He turned round, and, standing up in the stirrups, looked long and anxiously in the direction from which he had just come.

But he was not able to see the least signs of his pursuers.

Beyond doubt he had succeeded in completely outdistancing the dragoons.

Having satisfied himself that there was nothing to be apprehended in this quarter, Dick seated himself in the saddle again.

But he did not put Black Bess in motion.

By this attitude, it could at once be seen that the highwayman was in deep thought.

The subject of his reflections may be guessed.

"Shall I push on to old Matthew's, just as I am?" he asked himself. "I think the hat will last until I get there, especially if I go gently; and then when I am there, he can get her fresh shod, and yet—that will not do. No—no, that will not do. It will be too dangerous. It would, in all probability, be the means of letting the officers know where I am. No, no; I must not run that risk. I would do anything rather than anyone should know of Black Bess's presence in Drury Lane. Let me think. What shall I do? She must be shod, and to stop at any farrier's shop on the road would be fraught with danger. But it must be done! It must be. I will go on until I reach the next village, and call at some blacksmith's shop, and have new shoes put on her. I must run the risk of discovery. If I am careful I may be able to prevent him from having any suspicions of who I am. Yes, it must be so! There is no other way. Come, Bess! Cheerily, old lass! All will yet be well!"

He allowed her to proceed at a walk.

He would not go at any faster pace now that there was no longer a necessity for it.

Dick looked about him.

He was not quite certain as to his whereabouts, but doubted not ere long he should find something that would inform him where he was.

In this supposition he was not mistaken.

Before him, on the high-road along which he was travelling, he could see a number of twinkling lights, which showed him he was approaching a village.

When within some distance of it he recognised it.

It was the village of Edmonton.

This showed he was going right for his destination, for as many of our reader are doubtless aware, this village is on what is called the Great North Road, which leads from London to York.

Dick hesitated a moment as to whether he should make a detour and avoid this village, or whether he should ride boldly through it, and take the risk of doing so.

The former was the more prudent course; but Dick, after a brief consideration, resolved to adopt the latter.

The reason for this was that he hoped on the way to pass a blacksmith's forge, where he could have Black Bess's shoes attended to.

This made him decide upon running the risk.

Edmonton was now only about a quarter of a mile further on, so Dick dismounted, and removed his hat and neckcloth from Black Bess's foot, for he fancied if he went into the village bareheaded, he might attract attention.

Upon making an examination, he was pleased to find that the thick felt hat had admirably answered the purpose of protecting Black Bess's hoof from injury.

The felt had not been anywhere cut through, so that the hoof was quite sound.

This gladdened Dick's heart exceedingly.

His hat was all the worse, and his neckcloth too, but he did not care for that; such injuries could easily be repaired.

So he straightened his hat, and brushed the mud off it as well as he could, and put it on his head.

It did not look very decent, but Dick thought it would do well enough for night.

With this reflection he put on his neckcloth again, and mounted his mare.

At a walking pace, which he knew could not do her the least harm, as the road was soft and loamy, Dick Turpin took his way towards Edmonton.

It was still comparatively early in the evening, although so much had taken place after his departure from the deserted mansion.

But, then, he had started as soon as darkness fairly covered the earth, and in midwinter it is dark early.

Dick did not doubt that he should find the inhabitants of the village all astir.

It was a few minutes after this that he entered it.

The whole place was tolerably familiar to him, but, nevertheless, he looked keenly both on his right side and his left, in order not to miss the place of which he was in quest.

A village, surely, would boast one blacksmith's shop—indeed, it could hardly be a village without one.

But, though he passed houses, and inns, and shops of all kinds, he did not see one of the kind he wanted.

Just, however, as he was emerging from the village into the open country again, he caught sight of the cheerful, ruddy blaze which always marks the presence of the blacksmith's forge.

The rude shed, from the interior of which the light came, was situated several yards back from the main road.

The intervening space was used, as it appeared, for the stowage of all kind of lumber.

Through this, then, Dick threaded his way; and, upon reaching the door of the shed, alighted and held Black Bess by the bridle.

In the shed he caught sight of the dusky figure of a man.

He was standing at the anvil, hammering a piece of iron which looked white hot.

The sparks flew about in all directions, as the heavy hammer swiftly descended upon it.

The red glare of the forge fell upon the blacksmith's swarthy countenance, and afforded Dick a good opportunity of perusing its lineaments.

Dick Turpin was not altogether pleased with the physiognomy thus revealed.

It was a treacherous, crafty-looking face; and Dick felt that he could not have trusted the man upon the most unimportant and insignificant business.

But Turpin just then was not in a position to be over particular.

He would have to avail himself of the man's services—that is, if he could obtain them.

All this passed in a moment.

The blacksmith looked up, and saw some one standing on the threshold.

In a gruff, disagreeable voice, he asked what was wanted.

"I have met with a misfortune," said Turpin. "My mare has cast a shoe, and I want a fresh one put on. I have had to walk her for some distance. Yours is the first forge I have come to."

"Well, it's a nice time of night to come about such a job, I must say," said the blacksmith, grumblingly. "A very nice time, indeed. Bring your mare in, and let's have a look at her."

"All right," replied Dick. "I know the hour is late; but, if you don't mind putting yourself out of the way to oblige me, I sha'n't mind paying a little extra for the work when it is done."

"Very good, sir— very good," said the man, in a mollified tone.

He took Black Bess by the bridle as he spoke, and led her up to one side of the shed.

There was no other light than that which the fire on the hearth afforded; but the smith raked the embers together, and caused a bright blaze to spring up, which illuminated every object with the greatest distinctness.

He looked at Black Bess's feet one by one, until he came at last to the foot where the shoe was deficient.

He looked at this for some time attentively, and then, releasing it, turned round to Turpin.

"She has cast her shoe in a very strange manner," he said.

"But she has not injured her foot, I hope?"

"No, I don't think she has, though she might have done."

"She might, as you say," coincided Turpin, "for you see she broke the shoe first, and lost one part of it, and then, in some strange manner, got the other part twisted round under the frog, so that the first intimation I received of what had happened was by her suddenly falling dead lame."

The blacksmith nodded.

"So I got down and removed the piece of broken shoe, and walked her here. Fortunately, the roads are soft. I do not think she has broken her hoof much?"

"She has not, sir; she has not."

"I rejoice to hear it. I am pressed for time. Put a good shoe on her foot, and I will pay you liberally for your trouble."

"Thank you, sir; but could you put off the continuation of your journey until to-morrow?"

"No; I could not possibly do so. But why do you ask?" inquired Dick, rather suspiciously.

"Simply because I do not like to put shoes on a horse at night if can help it."

"Why not?"

"Because there is so much danger of driving a nail in the wrong way. But, however since you must proceed, I will try my best."

"Do so—do so."

"But all her shoes are as thin as paper, sir. She ought to be shod all round."

Dick knew this, and thought the present might be a favorable opportunity of having the job done, but he said:

"I am afraid I cannot stop while you shoe her all round. However, set about the one and do that. I shall know then about how long it would take you to do the three others."

"Very well, sir—I will set about it at once."

The blacksmith had taken the dimensions of Black Bess's hoof with his eye, and he now looked up to the ceiling, from which a number of shoes were suspended, in the hope that he would be able to find one that would fit already made.

If he could do so, he knew it would save a good deal of trouble.

He selected several, and proceeded to try them.

The second one was almost a fit, and required but slight alteration.

"That's capital," he said. "There's a better shoe than I could make in a hurry, and a few strokes on the anvil is all that it wants to put it right."

"I am glad to hear that."

"Where will you wait, sir?" asked the blacksmith.

"Here," said Turpin.

"Then, sir, as you are in a hurry, and I am all by myself—my apprentice having gone home—perhaps you wouldn't mind helping me a little. It would save time."

"I should be very glad to do anything that could save time," replied Dick. "In what way can I assist you?"

"By blowing the bellows to heat the shoe; and while you are doing this, I will pare her hoof, and get it all ready to receive the shoe."

"I will do that willingly, then."

The blacksmith put the shoe on the fire and covered the embers over it.

Then, for the first time in his life, Dick Turpin performed the part of bellows-blower to a blacksmith.

While working the long handle up and down, however, he took care to stand with his back to the road, so that the glare of the forge should not reveal the outlines of his countenance to anyone who might chance to be passing by.

The blacksmith set about his work in the manner of one who understood his trade, and by the time the shoe was red-hot the hoof was ready for it.

As he said, a few strokes of the hammer made the shoe of such a shape as to fit Black Bess properly.

This done, he nailed it on.

Dick was delighted.

The time occupied was really very trifling, and the highwayman determined to avail himself of what appeared to be such a good opportunity of having his mare's shoes put in proper order.

He therefore agreed to have the other three put on.

The man, who seemed to think that he had got hold of

a good customer, seemed nothing loth to do the work, although the hour was so late a one.

He reached down some more shoes, and selected three that required scarcely any alteration.

He put one in the fire, and set to work to prepare another hoof.

Dick Turpin worked the bellows with right good will and while so employed forgot all about the man having such a sinister countenance as he possessed.

CHAPTER CCCCXLIX.

THE BLACKSMITH MAKES A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE DICK TURPIN.

In really quite a short space of time, considering the amount of work that was done, the blacksmith put the other three shoes on.

The conversation which passed between him and the highwayman was not sufficiently interesting to warrant us in putting it before the reader.

Let it suffice to say that he had no suspicions as to who his late customer really was.

That is, not until the last moment.

Just as he was driving in the last nail into the last shoe, the thought darted into his mind that the mare he had shod was Black Bess, and that the good-tempered gentleman who stood by the forge was no other than her master, Dick Turpin, the celebrated highwayman, for whose capture so large a reward was offered.

What engendered this suspicion he could not for the life of him tell.

It came upon him with the suddenness of a lightning-flash.

To be sure, that very afternoon, while sitting in the ale-house opposite along with one of his companions, the conversation turned upon Dick Turpin and the reward offered for his apprehension.

The largeness of the sum dazzled the humble blacksmith's intellect; and as he sat listening to the conversation, he made a mental resolution that if chance so far favored him as to throw Dick Turpin in his way, it would go hard with him if he did not capture him, and that, too, without calling any other persons to assist him, with whom, of course, he would have to divide the reward.

He meant to have it all to himself if ever he had the chance, for he knew he was possessed of enormous muscular strength, and fancied he should be more than a match for any highwayman.

This much it was necessary to state, in order to give a clue to his conduct.

We have said how the suspicion occurred to him.

He clenched the nail, and let go the foot.

Then, without appearing to do so, he walked round the mare, and narrowly criticised her appearance.

It agreed exactly with the description that had been given of her.

His suspicions became confirmed.

However, he determined not to act too rashly, for he knew well the consequences would be very serious if he happened to make a mistake.

So, in order to have time to reflect a little, he went to his tool-box and took out a rasp.

With this he rasped smooth the inequalities at the edge of the shoes.

While so employed his thoughts were very busy.

From time to time, too, when he had the opportunity, he glanced towards his customer.

Dick was sitting carelessly on the anvil, waiting for the blacksmith to finish, and little dreaming of the nature of the thoughts that filled the man's mind at that moment.

While sitting thus, the dull red glow and occasional fitful flame that came from the fire on the hearth, fell upon his face and form, revealing both fully.

Dick did not notice the man's stealthy glances.

He fancied he was busily engaged upon his work.

The man's countenance was hidden in the deep shadow.

As for the blacksmith, every glance he took convinced him that the suspicion, which had darted so suddenly and strangely into his mind, was a well-grounded one.

There was most certainly five hundred pounds sitting on the anvil.

Five hundred pounds, which he had only to grasp and become possessed of!

The blacksmith was a bold man, as his actions proved.

But his boldness proceeded from two causes.

The one was his strength.

He imagined he was strong enough to obtain an easy conquest over the highwayman.

The other was avarice.

The desire of having the reward all to himself, which would be the case if he effected the capture unaided.

These were two things well calculated to inspire courage in any breast, and the blacksmith had never had the imputation of cowardice cast upon him.

Having made up his mind that there could not possibly be any mistake, he let fall Black Bess's foot, and, with the rasp in his hand, came towards the anvil, upon which Dick was seated most unsuspiciously.

Seeing the man approach, so far from thinking there was anything sinister in it, Turpin put his hand into his pocket, intending to reward him handsomely for what he had done.

The blacksmith saw his opportunity.

Dropping the rasp, he sprang forward like lightning and grasped Dick by the throat.

Our hero was completely taken at unawares, and therefore was not in a position to resist so well-considered an attack.

"Yield, villain!" cried the blacksmith, in a suppressed voice. "Yield at once, without struggling further. I am possessed of thrice the strength of such a one as you. I know you! The reward is mine! You are Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

Until the blacksmith pronounced these last words, Dick made no attempt to stir, but sat still on the anvil.

He did not recover from the shock of surprise which the sudden and unexpected attack gave him, until the blacksmith ceased speaking.

Then he comprehended the full extent of his danger, and was prepared to face it boldly.

The blacksmith had underrated Dick's strength.

Directly he understood how things were, Turpin started to his feet, in spite of the desperate attempt the blacksmith made to force him backwards over the anvil.

Had he succeeded in doing this, he would have had the highwayman at his mercy.

But it was not to be.

Turpin succeeded in gaining his feet.

At the same time he grappled with his adversary.

Then began a struggle of a truly fearful nature.

The blacksmith was struggling for the reward of five hundred pounds.

Dick Turpin for his life.

But the blacksmith felt another incentive, of which the highwayman was in ignorance.

The blacksmith felt his honor was involved in this struggle.

After the boasts he had publicly uttered as to what he should do, should chance bring him face to face with Dick Turpin, he felt that, if defeated, he should never be able to appear before his fellow-villagers again.

Their sneers and derision would drive him mad.

This made him struggle with redoubled strength.

Round and round they went in frantic gyrations.

Sometimes with a crash they would come into violent contact with the walls of the shed, or some of the heavy objects contained in it.

Now one would seem to have the advantage.

Then the other.

Dick Turpin found that it was no child's play.

The man to whom he was opposed was, indeed, possessed of great strength, which had been developed to the utmost by the nature of his calling.

Dick had never had such an antagonist before.

The issue of the struggle was very doubtful.

The bodies of the two men were locked in a close and deadly embrace.

Which would be the conqueror?

Presently, as they whirled round and round, they reached the fire.

From this both had shrunk.

But now a feeling of utter desperation had taken possession of Dick Turpin's breast.

He shrunk from the fire no longer

By a skilful turn, he got the blacksmith's back turned towards the hearth.

Then, summoning all his strength to his aid, in order to make one last effort, Dick endeavoured to force his foe backwards on to the glowing coals.

The blacksmith resisted to the utmost.

But Turpin had the advantage of position.

Moreover, he felt himself endowed with a fresh accession of strength.

Slowly, but surely, the blacksmith felt himself being forced backwards.

Not all his efforts could prevent it.

Still he strove manfully.

But he felt the heat at the back of his head become greater and greater.

His flesh seemed to singe.

But he kept his hold of Dick's throat.

He did not release a muscle.

"Let go," cried Dick Turpin, in a guttural voice. "Let go, or I will bury your head in the fire."

The blacksmith made no reply, but ground his teeth, fixed his fingers more firmly in his opponent's throat, and strove to raise himself.

But he failed.

Dick forced him further back.

His head touched the embers.

His hair caught alight, and blazed up like a torch.

"Let go," cried Dick, again. "Let go, I say, or you will repent it."

A suppressed, guttural cry came from the lips of the half-choked blacksmith.

But that was the only notice he took of Dick's speech.

Turpin's blood was now fully up.

He was enraged, too, at the man's obstinacy.

He had the advantage, and Dick felt that if he forced his opponent's head into the fire, the pain thus caused would induce him to quit his hold.

He bore down, then, with all his might.

A terrific yell, indicating extreme agony, was the result.

Instinctively, when he felt his head burning, the blacksmith let go his grasp.

Dick released him at the same moment.

But he by no means intended to allow his antagonist to recover himself.

Seizing hold of him again, he plucked him from the fire; and then, exerting all his strength, flung him with full force into the corner of the shed.

There was a crash. Then all was still.

Dick Turpin wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Confound the fellow," he said, panting for breath; "what an obstinate fool he was! Well, I hope it will prove a lesson to him for the future, and let him know that highwaymen are not to be meddled with with impunity."

Dick Turpin was thoroughly exhausted by the desperate struggle he had had, and he was forced to sit down upon the anvil again to recover his breath and strength.

He was soon better, and then he said:

"How lucky the fellow did not have his suspicions until he had finished shoeing Black Bess! If he had made his attack a little while ago, when he had three of her shoes off, I should have been in a very awkward situation indeed. However, it's all right now. He might have had a good reward, but he must put up now with what he has got. He has no one to blame for it but himself."

Dick was getting better.

He rose to his feet, and went towards that part of the shed where Black Bess was standing.

She uttered a sharp neigh when he approached.

"Bravo, Bess, lass!" Turpin cried, as he patted his steed upon the neck. "You are all right now, old girl, and we will be off, or it will be dawn when we reach London."

He released her bridle from the hook to which it had been fastened as he spoke.

He was about to lead her out of the shed, when a sudden thought struck him, and he paused.

"Before I go," he said, "I'll just have a look at my friend in the corner, and see how he is getting on."

With these words, he approached the blacksmith.

He was lying in the corner of the shed, in a strange, huddled-up mass.

He exhibited no signs of life or motion.

"I think you will be all right for some little time to come," said Turpin, coolly; "and when you wake up you won't be in a very good temper, I know."

With this remark, the highwayman turned on his heel and left the shed.

Black Bess followed him.

He mounted as soon as ever he got outside, and threaded his way through the heaps of lumber that encumbered the piece of ground in front of the blacksmith's shop, and presently gained the high-road.

He then immediately set forward at a trot, which quickly left Edmonton behind.

After a moment's hesitation, Turpin rode straight on through Tottenham.

But as soon as the end of the village was reached he paused.

He was undecided whether to keep straight on or turn to the right.

He finally took the latter direction, by pursuing which he should be able to make his way by an unfrequented route to Bloomsbury Fields.

He went no faster than a trot, because Black Bess was tired, and because that was a pace not so likely to attract attention as a gallop.

"I have had pretty well of adventures since I started," he remarked, mentally; "more than I thought for, I am sure. Never mind; the first was a most profitable one, and I shall have a good chance now of turning what I have taken into cash. However, they say the third time pays for all, and if, on my way, I meet another traveller, I will certainly cry 'Stand!' to him."

Having arrived at this determination, Dick looked to his ammunition, so as to be fully prepared.

While thus engaged, he passed along the Seven-Sisters' Road, and then, turning down a narrow lane on his left hand, made his way, in a tolerably straight line, to his destination.

But there seemed little likelihood that he would meet with anyone while travelling through so lonely a neighbourhood as he then was.

Ere long, however, the highwayman could perceive in the distance a number of twinkling lights, which indicated that he was drawing near to London.

Bloomsbury Fields, however, lay rather to his right, and he turned his mare's head in that direction.

It was along a rather broad cross-country road, that Turpin took his way, and as he was at so short a distance from the metropolis, he fancied he should be sure to meet with one passenger at least.

In this expectation he was not deceived.

Ere he had gone much farther, a familiar, well-known sound came upon his ears.

It was the clatter of a horse's hoofs.

Dick planted himself in the middle of the road and halted, determined to await the approach of the traveller.

On he came, at a very fast trot indeed.

Presently Dick could see something dark and shadowy coming towards him.

It was the horseman.

He, on his side, seemed to perceive something in the road before him, and slackened speed slightly so as to avoid it.

Dick spurred forward.

He held a pistol out at the full length of his arm.

"Pull up, traveller!" he cried, in a loud, commanding voice; "pull up your horse, or you are a dead man. Halt! I say. Your money or your life!"

"The devil!" exclaimed the traveller, abruptly, as he obeyed the highwayman's injunction and reined-in his steed.

"Oh, no," said Turpin, "not the devil but the toll-keeper. Come, sir, quick—to prevent violence and save time, hand over as quickly as you can whatever valuables you may have about you."

"There you are, my friend," said the traveller, "and much good may they do you. You see they lay in a small compass."

As he spoke he pulled his hand from his pocket, and levelled a long-barrelled pistol at the highwayman.

A bright flash and a loud report followed.



[MR. WRIGGLES DISCOVERS DICK TURPIN'S HIDING-PLACE.]

CHAPTER CCCCL.

DICK TURPIN AT LAST SUCCEEDS, THOUGH NOT WITHOUT GREAT DIFFICULTY, IN REACHING THE "WHITE HORSE" IN DRURY-LANE.

DICK TURPIN was too old a hand at affairs of this sort to be taken by surprise by any sudden movement.

He had his eye on the traveller, and guessed his intention.

So, the moment the pistol was levelled, he caused Black Bess to swerve suddenly on one side.

The bullet buried itself in the trunk of a tree that grew by the roadside.

Perceiving that he had failed in his attempt upon the highwayman's life, the traveller, with great presence of mind, turned his horse's head round and clapped spurs to his sides.

The animal started off at a tremendous pace, but Dick gave chase immediately.

Black Bess had very little trouble in coming up with the stranger's steed, and then she kept by his side easily enough.

"Halt!" thundered Turpin. "Halt! I say; or you are a dead man."

The traveller was wise enough to pull up, for he thought if he disobeyed the injunction the highwayman would very likely be as good as his word.

So he came to a halt again.

"Now," said Turpin, "you have had a shot at me, and you cannot do less than expect one in return."

The traveller was silent.

"However, I am not revengeful. Hand over your money and valuables. I will do you no injury."

"You take things coolly, I must say," remarked the stranger.

"Why not? But come, which will you do? Will you hand over your things to me, or will you give me the trouble to take them from your dead body?"

"Oh! curse it!"

"Curse away, sir, if you think it will do you any good."

"Well, d—n me, if you are not about the coolest hand I ever met with."

"Come, sir," said Turpin, "this is trifling, and I very soon may lose my patience."

"Here. Well, take what I have."

"I am no pickpocket," said Turpin. "I will accept anything you may choose to hand me."

"A fine distinction, truly. However, here is my purse. Take it, and let me pass."

"One moment," said Turpin, jingling the purse. "It appears to me there is very little here. The purse is outrageously light. You must find me something more. I am not satisfied."

"I assure you that is all the money I have with me."

"Well," said Turpin, "I will do what, perhaps, some of your acquaintances would not do."

"What is that?"

"Take you at your word."

The traveller laughed.

"I have a watch, and a ring or two, but no articles of any very great value. I will give them to you if you make the demand."

"Pass your watch, then."

"You will find it will fetch you little," said the traveller, as he handed over the article named. "It is very old, and is a kind of heirloom in our family."

"Then, if that is the case, and you set some extrinsic value upon the possession of it, take it back again."

The traveller was much surprised at this speech.

"It would have grieved me greatly had I been compelled to relinquish possession of it."

"Take it, then, by all means."

Dick Turpin handed back the watch as he spoke.

"Well," said the traveller, as he restored it to his pocket; "this is the most singular adventure I have ever had. For the purse I care nothing. You are heartily welcome to it. But before we part tell me your name."

"Dick Turpin," was the reply, given after a moment's hesitation.

"I thought so," said the traveller. "I thought so."

"Then good-night to you," said Turpin.

Without waiting to hear whether the traveller responded to his valedictory salutation, Dick Turpin touched Black Bess on the flank with his heel, and in a moment was lost to sight.

But not for long did the highwayman allow his gallant mare to proceed at this rapid rate. He gradually slackened her speed as he came nearer and nearer to London.

It was now necessary that he should use the utmost circumspection in his progress.

The night was far advanced, which was a favourable circumstance, since he was not so likely to meet with people on his way to his destination.

"I wonder if old Matthew's house is still watched by the police?" muttered Dick, as he paused in Bloomsbury-fields, not far from Montague House, upon the site of which the British Museum now stands. "I should very much like to be possessed of that piece of knowledge. I think it cannot be, however. It is so long since I was there, and my foes have had such a good clue to my whereabouts, that they would not hang about there any longer, and surely the last thing they would think of would be that I should make my way there to-night."

This was by no means so certain as Dick Turpin tried to persuade himself it was.

He could not overcome the unpleasant conviction that he was about to run a very great risk indeed, for should any police-officer observe him enter the "White Horse," his position would be perilous in the extreme.

The former defeats they had met with would only have the effect of making them more determined to effect their purpose.

But it was now too late to hesitate, and the thought of abandoning the enterprise upon which he had set out never once occurred to him.

At a gentle trot Dick made his way along the lane that skirted the wall belonging to the gardens surrounding Montague House, and then, turning to the left, he wound his way through a number of narrow streets, now no longer in existence, until at length he stood in High Holborn, at the top of Drury Lane.

Down this narrow and unsavoury thoroughfare he trotted without hesitation.

He kept a sharp look-out ahead, and on both sides of him, but he could see nothing that seemed at all suspicious.

Indeed, the usually busy thoroughfare was now comparatively deserted.

It was, too, intensely dark, for the inhabitants of that region were rather prejudiced than otherwise against hanging lamps from their houses, as was done in most places in the city.

But Dick Turpin knew his ground well.

Passing the top of Long-acre, he quickly came in sight of the old theatre on his right hand.

Leaving this behind, he slackened speed until Black Bess's trot became a walk, and finally he paused before the entrance of an alley on his left hand.

It was White Horse yard.

Black Bess seemed to know where she was, for she turned down this narrow thoroughfare without being guided by her rider.

Dick glanced with the utmost keenness around him, but he saw no one.

Under the full belief, then, that he had reached his destination unperceived, he pulled up before the little secret door in the wall, which we have so frequently had occasion to mention.

He dismounted rapidly, and, going to the doorpost, pressed upon the concealed spring, the situation of which was so well known to him.

This spring caused a particular bell to ring.

The highwayman awaited the result in silence.

He was kept in suspense for some time—so long, that he fancied his first signal must have been unheard.

He was about to press upon the secret spring once more, when he was startled by hearing a slight sound.

The next moment the door was opened, and old Matthew appeared.

In one hand he held a candle, which he shielded from the draught with the other.

A beam of the light fell upon the countenance of Dick Turpin, the highwayman.

Old Matthew recognised him in a moment.

A gasping sort of cry came from his lips, and he fairly staggered back several steps.

Dick took advantage of this moment to enter.

He led Black Bess in after him, and closed the door.

"Help! Murder! Good gracious! It's him, for certain. Help! Murder!"

These ejaculations came from old Matthew.

His surprise and astonishment had by no means abated, and he continued to stagger back, uttering these words in a tone of voice scarcely louder than a whisper.

Walking backwards, he did not perceive what was behind him, and suddenly he came against an empty beer barrel which was turned upon end.

He sat down upon it with a shock sufficient to knock the head in.

Then the candle fell from his grasp.

He opened his mouth and eyes to an incredible extent, and gazed upon Dick as though he had been some apparition.

"Why, Matthew," said Turpin, as he stooped down and picked up the light, "what on earth ails you, man? Be yourself. Don't look at me in that flabbergasted sort of way. What is the matter?"

"Oh, Dick," said old Matthew, "you have given me such a turn!"

"A turn?"

"Yes. I don't know now whether I am standing on my head or my heels."

"You are doing neither, old fellow; you are sitting on the top of an empty barrel. Come! Recover yourself. Here, shake hands."

Dick held out his hand as he spoke.

Old Matthew mechanically extended his.

Dick shook it warmly.

"There," he said, "it's all right. Come, come! What are you surprised at?"

"Oh! dear me!" said Matthew, with a groan.

"What in the world is the matter, old friend? There, never mind; follow me to the stable, and while we are making Black Bess comfortable we can talk a bit."

"No, no!" cried Matthew, with more energy than he

had yet displayed. "Mount, mount! and ride off for your life, and never come near this place."

"What is the matter?" asked Dick, who began to fear that something serious was amiss. "Speak out now, and let me know the exact truth."

"Oh! Dick! How could you ever have been so foolhardy as to thrust your head into the lion's den in this manner?"

"Lion's den?"

"Yes, for this place is now little better."

"Oh! the officers have not done troubling you?"

"They haven't."

"Hark ye now? Tell me, and tell me truly, are there any in the house at this moment?"

"No, no, no."

"That's all right; then what's amiss?"

"Why, I don't know how it is, but the officers seem to have got it into their heads that you would pay a visit to this place sooner or later, and not a day passes, or a night either, without my having a visit of some sort or other from them."

"Is that all?"

"All, do you call it? Is it not too much? I never cared, for I didn't think you'd come, and yet here you ride up to the door as bold as ever."

"Dismiss your fears, my friend," said Turpin, shaking his hand again. "Come, let us go to the stable. I am almost confident no one observed me near this place, and I know you can conceal both Black Bess and myself if necessary."

"But the place is so closely watched," said old Matthew, whose alarm seemed to have slightly subsided. "I do not see how you could possibly get here unseen."

"And yet I firmly believe that I have done so. However, here I am, and we must make the best of it. However, Matthew, for your own satisfaction, I will tell you that I should never have come here to-night had I not felt myself, in a manner of speaking, compelled to do so."

"What has happened then?"

"Nothing serious; but come, follow me to the stable. We can attend to Black Bess, and talk over our affairs at the same time."

With a deep sigh old Matthew rose to his feet, and followed Dick down the passage which he knew so well.

He shook his head continually as he did so, and from this it may be inferred that he considered Dick Turpin in very great danger indeed.

Our hero found his way to the stable readily enough.

The reader will understand that the stable thus spoken of was a secret one, and was quite distinct from the one which belonged to the inn, and about the existence of which no secret was attempted to be made.

The stable which Dick entered adjoined it, and there was a concealed means of communication between the two.

Black Bess walked up to the manger with great readiness, which showed that she perfectly well recollected having been there before.

Dick stuck the candle in a tin sconce that was fixed against the wall.

This done, he proceeded to divest his mare of her trappings, while old Matthew busied himself in preparing for her a good feed of corn.

Turpin rubbed her down himself.

"Now, Matthew," he said, while he was thus employed, "I hope you are a little calmer. If, as I fancy, I have reached this place without being perceived by my enemies, all will be well, and I shall only have to take care how I go back again; that is all."

"I hope it is," said old Matthew, "I hope it is. But since I saw you last you have no idea what a trouble I have had with the officers. They have been a perpetual torment to me, and I have never known a moment's peace since. They make their appearance at all hours, and when they are least expected; and so far from being disheartened by their numerous disappointments, I believe they grow more eager every time!"

CHAPTER CCCCLI.

DICK TURPIN HAS SOME CONVERSATION OF A VERY INTERESTING CHARACTER WITH OLD MATTHEW IN THE ROOM BEHIND THE BAR.

DICK TURPIN listened to this statement of old Matthew's with unfeigned and undisguised regret.

"My friend," he said, "I am very, very sorry that I have intruded upon you. But I will go at once. Farewell!"

Old Matthew noticed the changed tone in which these words were spoken, and he said—

"Now, I have offended you. Forgive me; I meant nothing."

"Nay—nay; I am not offended; but I feel that I ought not to come here and be the means of perpetually embroiling you with the authorities. However, I will do so no longer, and depart."

"Fiddlestick!" cried old Matthew, with something like his old manner. "Fiddlestick, I say! Why, did you think that it was out of consideration for myself that I spoke as I did? Do you think I mind the officers coming here a bit, so long as you are not here? Nothing of the sort! It gives me a pleasure to see them take so much useless trouble. But now you are here"——

"Then, is it possible that all this alarm, and all this confusion and regret, which you have exhibited, proceeds solely from the interest you feel in my welfare?"

"Most certainly it does. The greatest pleasure I have is when I see you, but then I always think of the danger."

"But I have always escaped hitherto."

"You have, to be sure, but you have had some awfully narrow touches, and you are sure to be nabbed one of these days."

"Come, come, old boy, you must not take such a gloomy view of things. Black Bess is all right now. Let us leave her, and make our way to your little snuggery behind the bar."

"Come along then. I daresay we shall be all right until morning."

"Why? Have you closed?"

"Yes, some hours since. I had gone to bed, indeed, when I heard the bell ring."

"Then I am sorry I disturbed your repose."

"Pho! pho! Don't mention that. Come along, we shall be able to chat for some hours at least without being disturbed."

"That is a good job, then, Matthew, for I have a great deal to say."

Old Matthew and the highwayman now made their way into the house.

In a few moments they reached the little room behind the bar, in which so many startling incidents have taken place.

The fire was still burning, which showed that the place had not been left very long. Some more fuel was thrown on, which quickly caught light and burst into a blaze.

"Now, Dick," said old Matthew, "I do hope you will believe me, when I tell you that all the time you stop here you will be in the greatest possible danger; mark that, the greatest possible danger! Wriggles has firmly made up his mind to recapture you, and I do not believe he ever thinks about or does anything else."

"Well, well, Matthew, there is no need to feel afraid just at present."

"I don't know that; besides, when danger does come, it will come with very great suddenness, and so I want to prepare you beforehand, in order that when the critical moment arrives, you may know exactly what to do without having to hesitate a second."

"That is very good," said Turpin. "In the moment of peril the least hesitation might cost me my life, and, you may depend, I shall pay the greatest of attention to what you are going to say."

"I rejoice to hear you say so," replied old Matthew, in a tone of voice which showed how much importance he attached to what he was going to say. "I rejoice to hear it."

"Well, Matthew, what is it?"

"I will show you a hiding-place."

"Is it where you concealed Claude and Tom and Sixteen-String Jack?"

"They told you about that, then?"

"Yes. Is this the same?"

"Yes."

"Go on, then."

"I know no better one; and this place has been searched several times without its being discovered."

"A biding place could not have a better recommendation than that."

"It cannot, as you say. They told you about the position of it?"

"Yes."

"Then that will save me a great deal of trouble in explaining matters," said old Matthew, who, without further delay, walked up towards that corner in the room where the secret door was situated.

We have already particularly described the excellent manner in which this door was concealed, and those of our readers who may wish to refresh their memories may turn to the three hundred and fifteenth chapter of this history.

The first thing old Matthew did was to show Dick Turpin the spring, by means of which the door could be opened.

Having done so, he requested Dick to press upon it

Dick obeyed.

In a moment the door flew open, and disclosed the dark-looking little recess.

Turpin was about to enter, but old Matthew restrained him.

"Wait a moment," he said; "and let me show you all. It is highly important that I should do so, in order that your safety may be all the better secured."

"I am all attention."

"Well, then, in the first place, this spring, upon which you have pressed, looks just like the head of a nail, does it not?"

"It does; that is what I should have taken it to be."

"Very good. So would anyone else, I fancy; and you will admit that, under ordinary circumstances, seeing a nail knocked into a wall would not be likely to arouse any suspicions; but, then, there is just a possibility that some clever officer might think it meant something, and, if so, the most natural thing for him to do would be to press upon it in the way I directed you to do."

"Certainly."

"Then, in the event of such a thing as that, which is by no means unlikely, the door would fly open in a moment, and the secret would be discovered."

"But you have guarded against this in some way?"

"I have; and now that I have explained myself so far, follow me."

The pair then passed through the secret door into the recess.

Matthew shut the door.

"Now," he said, as he held up the candle, "do you see those two bolts?"

"Yes—yes."

"Well, they are well oiled and strong. Now, should you have to take refuge here, which is very likely, the first thing you must do is to shoot those bolts into their sockets as quickly and as noiselessly as possible."

"I understand," said Dick; "and so, if the spring is pressed upon, no result will follow, and so it won't matter."

"Just so. Now, that part is over, and you understand at present what you have to do?"

"Perfectly; and I feel very much obliged to you for taking so much trouble."

"Pho! stuff! Now look here. This, I fancy, will give you increased confidence in the security of your hiding-place."

"What is it?"

"Do you perceive that the door is lined with something?"

"Yes," said Turpin, as he put out his hand and touched it, "it is something soft."

"Just so. It is half a dozen thicknesses of black felt nailed closely over the door."

"What is that for?"

"To deaden the sound."

"Deaden the sound?"

"Yes. I see you don't understand me, so I will explain. When officers have any suspicion of a hiding-place in the walls, the first thing they do is to knock with the butt-end of a pistol, or an instrument provided for the purpose. If a dull sound is produced it shows the wall to be solid; if a sharp sound, it indicates a hiding-place."

"I see; and this felt?"

"This felt being placed as you see it, would cause the concealed door, when struck on the other side, to sound just like the walls on both sides of it."

"Matthew," cried Turpin, who was delighted beyond measure, "you are a genius, a real genius, upon my word. This place does you credit, it does indeed. It is most ingenious."

Old Matthew smiled with satisfaction.

It was easy to see that he thought Dick's praises were deserved.

He really took a great pride in this place, for it had stood the ordeal of so many close searches.

"I am quite satisfied now," said Turpin. "Why, I should be as safe in here as if I were a hundred miles from my foes. It is capital. It is perfect."

"Do you think so?"

"I do."

"Then," said old Matthew, "you happen to think differently to what I did. I thought to myself in this way—'Now this place is all very well, but still it may be found out;' and so I set my wits to work again."

"But the chance of being discovered is so small."

"I don't know that. I thought to myself, 'Now, this place would be quite perfect if there was some means of retreat from it if necessary;' and so I'll tell you what I did."

"You amaze me, Matthew."

"Now, you must see very clearly that you won't be taken by surprise very suddenly. As you stand here, if you put your ear to the door you will be able to hear all that is said."

"Shall I?"

"You will, easily. So you will know when you are menaced with danger. Even if the door should unluckily happen to be found out, it will take the officers a minute or two to knock it down, and that will give you plenty of time to make your retreat. Look here."

Old Matthew then turned to the back of the recess, in which, as the reader is aware, a door was situated, which led into the yard at the back of the inn.

He showed Dick how to open this door.

"Now," he said, "you can, if you find it necessary, be through that door and into the yard in a twinkling. When you are there, you could find the way to the stable."

"I believe as easily as you could yourself, Matthew."

"Very well, then. You must saddle Black Bess with all speed, and when you have done that, you must go into the ordinary stable—you know."

"Quite well."

"From there you can make your way into the passage, which leads from the stable into Stanhope-street; and then off you will be, before the officers know what has happened."

"Capital, Matthew! capital!" cried Dick Turpin, as he rubbed his hands quickly and delightedly together.

"I am glad you are pleased," said the landlord, quietly, as he led the way back into the bar again, and closed the secret door.

"Pleased!" cried Turpin. "I am more than pleased. Why, from what you have shown me, it is quite clear that I shall be safer here than I possibly could be elsewhere. Shake hands, Matthew. Let me shake hands; for you are decidedly the best friend I have got."

Old Matthew's face beamed with genuine satisfaction as he grasped the hand that was so cordially extended towards him.

"Welcome, captain," he cried. "Welcome once more to the old 'White Horse' inn, and all that it contains."

"I know it is a hearty and well-meant welcome," replied Turpin, "and I feel thankful accordingly. You have, indeed, a rare invention, and wonderful mechanical skill, too, or you could never have planned and executed such a piece of work as that."

"Draw it mild, captain—draw it mild," said old Matthew, modestly. "I have done the best I can, and it seems to meet with your perfect satisfaction."

"How could it do otherwise, I should like to know? How could it do otherwise?"

"Well, say no more about that. This is idle talk, and time is precious. Sit down in that arm-chair by the fire-side, and I will make you as comfortable as I am able."

"I am quite sure you will do that."

"I will try, captain."

Dick Turpin sat himself down in the easy-chair alluded to, and old Matthew bustled about.

In a very short time he had spread upon the table a very plentiful and tempting repast, while the table was graced with a huge flagon of the very best ale the house afforded.

Dick was hungry, and he partook of the meal heartily.

Old Matthew, too, declared that he did not mind taking a snack just for the sake of bearing the captain company, and a jollier couple than those who thus sat down in the room behind the bar could not possibly have been found in all London.

When the meal was over, spirits and hot water were produced, and the landlord, having filled his pipe and lighted it, sat down in another arm-chair, which faced that occupied by Dick Turpin.

Both were now on excellent terms with each other, and old Matthew sat puffing his pipe, and looking at Dick Turpin with undisguised admiration, for he knew the highwayman's character thoroughly, and had a warm friendship for him, as his actions would alone be sufficient to prove.

CHAPTER CCCCLII.

OLD MATTHEW FINDS A PLACE OF SHELTER FOR THE HIGHWAYMAN, AND IS RATHER ALARMED BY A KNOCKING AT THE FRONT DOOR OF THE INN.

"Now," said old Matthew, "as everything is so comfortable, just be good enough to tell me the nature of the business which has brought you here?"

"I was about to do so."

"Yet, no. I can't consent to do that yet. It is a long time since we saw each other, captain, and a great deal must have happened since we parted. Tell me all that has taken place. It is some time to daylight."

Old Matthew would take no denial, nor did Dick Turpin feel inclined to refuse so simple and so easily granted a request to one who was willing at all times to do so much for him.

And so Dick Turpin related at length all that had happened since their parting.

With the whole of this the reader has already been made acquainted, and that spares us the necessity of setting down the conversation at full length.

As may be easily surmised, much that the worthy landlord heard was of such a character as to fill him with astonishment and curiosity.

At length, however, Turpin brought his narrative down to the time when they arrived at the deserted mansion, and then he spoke of the plan which he had proposed to his companions.

Old Matthew did not require to be shown the advantages of this scheme, if properly carried out, and as Turpin had fully expected, he expressed himself warmly in its favour.

"It's a first-rate plan, Dick, it is, indeed; and I will aid you all I can to bring it to perfection. A great many difficulties stand in the way, however; but you must be aware of all that?"

"Oh! yes. And now, Matthew, I want you to tell me all you can about Tom Davis; for, do you know, I fancy he is the man."

"He is, certainly; and I can tell you all I know concerning him in a very few words indeed. When you were here last you told me you might expect to see him."

"And did he come?"

"No. He sent the young girl—Ellen they call her"—

"Yes—yes! The poor apprentice who I saved from so much ill-usage, and who Tom Davis adopted as his daughter."

"Well, she came; but it was not for a long time after I saw you. She then said that the money you had given her had sufficed to keep them in tolerable comfort up to that moment, and now, as the supply was exhausted, she had, in compliance with your instructions, come to me."

"That was right."

"I asked her how Tom Davis and his wife were, and she said much better, but that the loss of the public-house had so preyed upon their minds, and the hardships they had since endured had wrought such havoc with their bodies, that, being merely the shadow of what they used to be, they would not be themselves for a long time."

"I can easily understand that," said Dick Turpin. "I know Tom Davis's character well."

"He is a worthy fellow. However, to go on with my story. I supplied her with what she needed, of course, as I had received instructions from you to do so, and at the same time I asked her for her address, in case there should be a necessity of communicating with her."

"That was very prudent of you. She gave the address, of course?"

"Oh! yes. I have got it written down somewhere."

Matthew got up as he spoke, and reached down a kind of ledger in which he kept his accounts.

He turned over the leaves, and then he said suddenly—

"Yes, here it is. No. 4, Cain's-place, Camden Town."

"Camden Town? Then they are quite out of London?"

"Yes; and so much the better."

"As you say, so much the better. Have you seen Tom Davis?"

"Yes; twice."

"Then he came here, then?"

"No I fancy he would be above that. Tom was always very proud, and he would have felt the degradation keenly."

"Then you paid him a visit, Matthew?"

"I did. I went twice to see him, and the second time I could perceive a visible improvement. They had comfortable lodgings, and Ellen worked hard at her needle. Tom was grieving because he could not do something for himself."

"Well, we will alter all that," said Dick Turpin, gaily "Is he much altered?"

"Very much. Indeed, had I not been told who he was, I could never have recognised him."

"That is all right again, then, because the officers would not recognise him by any chance, and he could easily assume another name. Then, again, it is fortunate he has not been in the habit of coming here, and that the girl Ellen has only paid one visit to this place."

"It has turned out all for the best."

"It has, indeed. There is no reason, that I can see, why you should not carry out your scheme, nor why it should not bring you a very great amount of safety."

"I hope such will prove to be the case. You understand now why I came to see you."

"Perfectly."

"It seems you know just where to find Tom Davis, and the only obstacle that remains is the finding of sufficient money to take a public-house with."

"That need not be any obstacle."

"Still, a good round sum of money would be required, and it would be well, if such a thing was practicable, to buy the place out and out, and so do away with the supervision of a landlord."

"That would be very desirable, for landlords are generally very troublesome beings. But we must talk about that at another opportunity."

"There is plenty of time; and now, Matthew, I will tell you what I should very much like you to do."

"You have only to speak, captain."

"Well, then, I think the fact of my having remained here so long without being disturbed, is pretty good proof that my arrival was not noticed. I should like, then, to remain here all day, and set out on my return after dark."

"You are heartily welcome to do that, captain."

"I knew it; but there is something more."

"What is it?"

"I should like you to pay a visit to Tom Davis and broach the matter to him, as well as give him instructions to set about looking for a roadside inn at once."

"I will do so willingly."

"Rely upon it, if anything will rouse Tom's energies, that will. It will make a new man of him. Some funds will be required, however, and that reminds me of something else. While you are out, I want you to dispose of these little nicknacks for me."

As he spoke these words, Dick Turpin produced from his various pockets the booty he had been so successful as to take while on his way to his destination.

Matthew looked on with astonishment.

"You had better be quick," he said, "for look up. Can't you see that daylight is streaming through the shutters, and if I do not open at the usual hour suspicion will be excited."

"So it will—so it will. However, this will not take long, and when this is done, I think we have talked over everything."

Dick Turpin completely emptied all his pockets, in order to ascertain just how much he had got.

The result was highly satisfactory.

He had a large sum in cash, and this he roughly divided into two portions, the smaller of which he returned to his pockets for his own use.

Then the remainder of the trinkets, such as watches, rings, and the like, he gathered up into another heap

"You have made a rare booty, captain," said old Matthew, with sparkling eyes.

"I was in luck's way, beyond doubt."

"You were, indeed."

"And now, Matthew, do you know any place where you could take these things, and dispose of them without getting yourself into trouble?"

The landlord nodded.

"I know a first-rate place where I can get ready cash, and no questions asked."

"That is the place then; and so you understand, I leave that part of the business entirely to you."

"You have confidence in me, then?"

"More than I have in any other living human being."

Old Matthew smiled with evident gratification, as he said—

"You will find your confidence not misplaced."

"I know that well enough, my friend."

"Then I will take these things, and you may depend I shall get the best price for them I possibly can."

"But do not bring me the money."

"Not bring you the money?"

"No. I want you to take what cash there is, and put the proceeds of the trinkets to it, and then, when you have done that, to give the whole sum to Tom Davis, and instruct him about getting a public-house at once; for, through you being so well known, it would never do for you to appear in the business."

"It would spoil all directly, for I am so well known to the police, and they would guess something was up directly."

"They would. You must be especially careful to keep out of sight."

"I will do so, you may depend."

"Then, Matthew, if you will take the swag, I think we shall have settled everything."

"There is only one thing more," said the landlord, as he rapidly transferred the various articles to his pockets.

"What is that?"

"Why, what do you intend to do with yourself while I am absent? As you must be aware, it will take some time to do all that you have instructed."

"You will find it will take you the best part of the day."

"I quite expect that; but what shall you do in the meantime?"

"I can easily answer that question. For a very long time past I have not known what it is to have a comfortable sleep, and just at the present moment, do you know, I feel very tired and worn out, and a little repose would be a perfect blessing."

"Very well, then, Dick, you shall have it; and I think I can place you where you will be able to sleep in perfect security."

"That's the ticket, then."

"Will you come at once?"

"Decidedly, for I don't know when I felt so thoroughly worn out and exhausted. I had such a night of adventures."

"You did, indeed. Wait a minute, and I will fetch a candle."

"Oh! never mind. Can't you see it is daylight?"

"Yes, so it is: I had forgotten. Come along, then."

Old Matthew led the way towards the staircase, and Dick followed behind with very great willingness.

He was, in truth, quite spent, and he felt that until he had had several hours' slumber he should be fit for nothing.

When they reached the passage, the roar and clatter without told them very plainly that day had began, and that regular business was once more in full swing.

It was evidently quite time old Matthew opened his shop, or else, if he did not, his neighbours would very likely come to the conclusion that something was amiss.

Matthew led Turpin up to the top of the house to the room which he had more than once occupied, and outside the window of which existed such an easy means of reaching the roof.

There was a key in the lock on the inside; and the landlord, having shown the highwayman into the chamber, took his leave, and desired him to secure the door carefully, so as to guard against any sudden surprise.

This Turpin promised to do, and old Matthew took his departure.

Dick closed the door, and fastened it.

Then he went to the window, and looked out.

All was well, and so he threw himself, dressed just as he was, upon the bed.

He had not assumed the reclining posture a moment before he was sound asleep.

Here we will leave him for a time, while we follow the fortunes of old Matthew, who, in the expedition which he had undertaken for Dick Turpin, was destined to meet with some adventures of so singular a character that the reader cannot fail to feel deeply interested in them.

Descending the stairs, then, he hastened to the front door, with the intention of opening it and taking down the shutters.

Before he could reach it, however, he was startled by a loud knocking.

What this could mean he knew not; but it was only natural he should apprehend danger.

There was a little side window, from which he could command a view of the front door, and he hastened towards it.

Peeping through, he saw that the person who was knocking at the door was the barber, who lived on the opposite side of the way.

Like most of his profession, he was an inquisitive busybody, and the reader may be sure he was a character that old Matthew cared nothing about.

However, when he saw from whom the knocking proceeded, old Matthew felt his apprehensions vanish, and he immediately made his way towards the door, with the intention of unfastening it

CHAPTER CCCCLIII.

RELATES THE STEPS THAT OLD MATTHEW TOOK TO DISPOSE OF THE BOOTY.

DIRECTLY old Matthew began to draw the bolts, the knocking ceased.

It took him but a moment to remove the fastenings, and then he flung the door open.

The barber from over the way stood upon the threshold.

"Hullo, neighbour!" he cried, "you're all safe, I see."

"What's the matter?"

"Oh! nothing; only it's half-past nine, and, as you had not opened your shop as usual, I fancied something must have happened."

"Oh! thank you," said Matthew, as he coolly proceeded to take down the shutters; "there's nothing amiss. I am obliged to you. I had no idea it was so late, however—not the least idea in the world. The fact is I did not go to bed very early last night, and, when I did get between the sheets, I could not close my eyes a wink; but towards morning I must have dropped off, and, when I awoke, I found it was daylight."

"I am glad it's all right, Matthew," said the barber, familiarly; "but when a man does not open his house at the usual time, it is only natural to conclude that something is amiss."

"Quite natural, as you say, and I am very much obliged to you," said old Matthew, still going on with his task of taking down the shutters.

"Oh! no thanks, no thanks. It was a little neighbourly civility, that's all. But I must be off; there's a customer just gone into the shop."

"And a deuced good riddance," muttered Matthew to himself, as the inquisitive barber stepped across the road to his own shop.

Old Matthew, having caused the house to assume its usual aspect, partook of a light breakfast, and then gave the bar in charge of a young woman, who fulfilled several duties in the house, and told her he should be back shortly.

Ere he started, however, he went upstairs and made some slight alterations in his toilette, which made a decided improvement in his appearance.

For instance, he put on a blue coat, ornamented

with large gilt buttons, which was never donned except upon some very extraordinary occasion.

Thus attired, and having the booty which Dick had taken from the St. Alban's coach secreted about him, the landlord set forth upon the very perilous errand of disposing of it.

This was never a very easy matter, and yet old Matthew fancied he knew a place where he could dispose of the lot with little difficulty, and for a very fair price as well.

With this hope old Matthew set forth.

It was a beautiful sunshiny morning, though the air was frosty and keen.

Still it was a morning for a walk to be one of the pleasantest things imaginable, and as he stepped briskly along the streets, it seemed as though the worthy landlord enjoyed it to the utmost.

His destination was Cheapside, and so he took his way along the Strand and Fleet-street, and round St. Paul's-churchyard.

He halted at length before a jeweller's shop, which was situated at the corner of Milk-street.

The window was filled with valuable articles of every description, and it really seemed to be the first shop in the street.

Such articles of value as the wealthy alone purchase and find use for were crowded into the window, while through the glass it could be seen that the shop was stocked with goods of the costliest description.

In a word, we may as well say that the shop before which old Matthew halted had every appearance of being a first-rate jewellers and silversmiths.

Surely our friend never contemplated disposing of stolen property in such a quarter as this!

We shall see.

Having just peeped in at the window, as an intending purchaser might do, old Matthew entered.

The half-glass door opened to his touch, and he found himself surrounded with property, the value of which must have been very great indeed.

The opening of the door set a wire in motion, which caused a little bell to ring in the little room at the back of the shop.

By the time old Matthew reached the counter, a very respectable-looking gentleman made his appearance behind it.

He was very dark, with jet-black hair, which was scrupulously parted and arranged with very great care.

His dress was plain black, though the cloth of which it was composed was of the very best quality.

A few articles of jewellery, though of a plain description, glittered here and there about his person.

He smiled blandly, and made a kind of half-bow, as he said—

"What can I have the pleasure of doing for you this morning?"

"Business, Mr. Foss—business," said old Matthew, quietly.

"Oh! ahem; excuse me. Didn't know you at first. Obliged to be careful, you know. Step this way. All right."

Old Matthew went lower down the counter.

"What have you got?" asked Mr. Foss, who was the proprietor of this first-class jeweller's shop.

"Some first-class things, and I want you to give me a good price for them."

"I will do the best I can. Let me see what you have got."

Old Matthew produced the things one by one from his pocket, and placed them on the counter.

Mr. Foss made a mental inventory of them as he did so.

"Be quick," he said; "and be careful to put all the things on that little shelf."

He alluded to a piece of wood with a ledge round it, which was on a level with the counter.

Old Matthew obeyed.

"Is anything amiss?"

"Nothing serious; only I fancy the police have got their suspicions."

"Then you ought to be doubly careful."

"I am—I am; and when they catch me I shall confess they are very clever indeed. However, if anything happens, don't be surprised."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"But don't be so vague. You had better tell me all, and then there won't be so much fear of mischief."

"Well, then, I'll tell you. What makes me think the police are suspicious is this. When anyone enters on business, as, for instance, you have done, some person or other is sure to follow, and ask some trivial question or other."

"Then you may depend the police suspect something."

"I am afraid they do."

"Rely upon it they do."

"Well, then, if anyone should come in do not, on any account, exhibit the least surprise, no matter what takes place. I will give you a fair price for the swag."

"Is this all?"

"Not quite," said old Matthew. "I——"

"Hush!" said Mr. Foss.

Matthew turned round, and at the same moment he heard a sharp click.

The shop-door was pushed open, and a rather elderly man entered.

There was nothing peculiar in his appearance save his eyes, and these were riveted upon old Matthew instantly.

The landlord had never seen such eyes in his life.

They were like a hawk's.

He turned away with an uncomfortable feeling.

Despite, however, the injunction which Mr. Foss had laid upon him, old Matthew could not forbear starting slightly.

And no wonder.

The valuables which he had deposited upon the shelf had wholly disappeared, without leaving a trace behind.

In a moment, however, he recovered his composure.

It was wonderful to see how Mr. Foss preserved his calmness.

There was not the least flurry about him, as he walked up to the other end of the counter the moment the stranger entered.

He seemed quite unruffled, and with the same bow as he had greeted Matthew, and with just the same smile, he said—

"What can I have the pleasure of doing for you to-day, sir?"

"I see you are engaged," said the new-comer, looking scrutinizingly towards old Matthew. "I am in no particular hurry."

"Never mind, sir—never mind; I will attend to you if you will mention your wishes."

The stranger hesitated a moment, and then he said—

"I want to look at some scarf-pins, but as I am in no hurry I will take a seat and wait until you are disengaged, and then you can attend to me."

"Very well, sir," said Mr. Foss, with the same unruffled demeanour. "I shall be at liberty directly."

The stranger bowed and seated himself in a chair, but he took good care to sit with his face turned towards old Matthew, so as to observe all that went on.

This man, as Mr. Foss more than expected, was no other than a police-officer in disguise.

He had entered the shop upon a mere pretext.

In fact, Mr. Foss was suspected of having illegal dealings with stolen property, and the police were put upon the watch.

As yet, however, they had found out nothing.

But the elderly gentleman who sat so composedly in the chair, with his face turned towards old Matthew, was one of the most experienced detectives in London.

He was sure that, if there was anything going on amiss, he should detect it.

But Mr. Foss's behaviour to old Matthew underwent a remarkable alteration, which at first puzzled that individual considerably.

Going up to him, he said—

"Wait a moment, my good man, and I will give you a reply to your letter."

Old Matthew stared, for the speech was highly enigmatical to him, for he knew very well he had brought no letter.

But the landlord of the "White Horse" had all his wits about him, and he comprehended that Mr. Foss was playing some very deep game indeed.

He had no time to make any reply, for Mr. Foss, as soon as he had spoken, retired to a little glass counting-house at the far end of the shop.

He entered this place, and the rustling of papers followed

In a moment or two he came forth.

He held a sealed letter in his hand.

"Ahem!" he said, as he approached old Matthew, "you will be good enough to give this reply to your master, and tell him from me that his orders will be carefully attended to."

"Very good, sir," said old Matthew, as he took the letter and placed it carefully in his hat. "Good morning."

"Good morning," said Mr. Foss.

Old Matthew beat a retreat immediately, but without exhibiting any undue haste.

Scarcely, however, had he closed the door than the elderly gentleman started to his feet.

"Good gracious!" he cried, "there goes my friend Brown! Good morning, sir. I will call again. An old friend of mine, who I have not seen for years, has just passed the window. I must make haste, or I shall not overtake him."

With these hastily uttered words the elderly gentleman left the shop.

The moment he had disappeared Mr. Foss put his finger by the side of his nose, and slowly shook his head from one side to the other.

"No—no!" he cried. "It won't do. It won't do at all! You are sold, Mr. Officer, and I have had another escape!"

Leaving Mr. Foss to his congratulations upon his own cleverness, we will turn our attention to the disguised officer.

Of course what he said about an old friend of his having just passed the window was all gammon.

He had seen no one, but that was the best means of getting out of the shop quickly that he could think of.

He was out in Cheapside directly after old Matthew.

He saw our old friend only a few yards in advance.

"His master," muttered the disguised officer. "Bah! stuff! That's all a device. But I must find out what's in that letter. I wonder where he is off to?"

Old Matthew stepped rapidly along the pavement, elbowing his way through the passengers.

But the officer never lost sight of him for a moment.

Old Matthew kept steadily on along Cheapside, and then, watching his opportunity, he tore open the letter.

The police-officer saw the movement and smiled.

"That's how he treats his master's correspondence, is it?"

Old Matthew gave one glance at the letter, and then nodded his head, as much as to say:

"All's right."

Not even that slight action escaped the lynx-eyes of the detective.

Old Matthew walked up the Poultry, turned round to the left, crossed a street, and kept along Threadneedle Street until he came to the entrance of the Bank of England.

He passed through the solemn-looking portal, and the still more solemn-looking beadle, who stood there as though on guard, without the slightest hesitation.

CHAPTER CCCCLIV.

THE POLICE-OFFICER FINDS HE IS NO MATCH FOR MR. FOSS AND OLD MATTHEW.

THE officer did not follow old Matthew into the Bank, but crossed over and stood on the steps of the Royal Exchange, as though admiring the architectural beauties of that building.

But in reality his eyes were fixed upon the door through which old Matthew had passed, and he anxiously awaited his re-appearance.

His patience was put to rather a severe trial; but at length he saw old Matthew emerge.

That individual had a satisfied smile on his face; and, having looked around, turned as if to go in the direction of Cheapside.

The disguised officer ran down the steps, crossed the street, and entered the Bank in a moment.

He hurried up to the counter.

"My name is Hambleton," he said. "I am a detective."

The clerk behind the bank-counter became attentive in an instant.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A man was in here a moment ago. He has just left. A stout man, with a bright blue coat and gilt buttons."

The clerk nodded.

"You recollect him?"

"Oh! yes."

"What did he want?"

"Brought a cheque."

"Did you cash it?"

"Yes."

"Who drew the cheque?"

"A regular customer of ours."

"Mr. Foss, a silversmith, in Cheapside?"

"Yes. Is it a forgery?"

"Oh! no. Who was the cheque made payable to?"

"No one."

"No one?"

"That is, merely the bearer."

"Confusion!"

"Eh?"

"Let me see the cheque a moment."

The clerk went to a drawer and took a slip of paper.

"There it is."

The detective seized it eagerly, for he was not without the hope, even now, that it would afford him important information.

He ground his teeth with disappointment.

The cheque was the one generally in use.

All it said was merely this—

"*Pay the bearer fifty pounds.*

"EMANUEL FOSS."

"Foiled!" cried the officer. "This gives no information whatever, but it certainly confirms my suspicions. Here, take the cheque. Good morning."

So saying, the officer left the bank at full speed, to the intense astonishment of the clerk, who could not, for the life of him, make out what was meant.

Upon gaining the street, the detective ran as fast as his legs would carry him towards Cheapside.

Down this thoroughfare he hurried till he came to the corner of St. Martin's-le-Grand.

Here he paused, and was compelled to confess himself baffled, for he had not caught a glimpse of old Matthew, and it was impossible for him to tell in what direction he had gone.

We will now describe old Matthew's proceedings.

No doubt all that has occurred is understood by the reader, and, assuming so much, we need not enter into further explanation.

Upon gaining the outside of the shop, Matthew muttered:

"Clever man that Foss! Deuced clever fellow! That officer is diddled for certain! Ha! ha! Capital! I wonder how it was the swag disappeared so suddenly. It startled me, I confess, for I was not prepared for it. He must have touched a spring; and, now I think of it, I did hear a click."

Old Matthew, with his usual sagacity, had hit upon the real solution of the affair.

"I suppose this letter contains a cheque for the swag," he continued. "I don't see that elderly gent, so I'll just break the seal and make sure."

A glance showed old Matthew he was right.

The letter contained a cheque drawn on the Bank of England, and payable to bearer for the amount of fifty pounds.

"Bravo! that's a liberal price. Now I'll be off to the Bank, and get the cash, and then for my visit to Tom Davis."

At a very quick walk, Matthew took his way to the Bank, but just as he was entering, he caught sight of the officer crossing the road.

"He's after me," he thought. "Never mind, I'm safe."

The cheque was paid to him by the clerk without any hesitation, as it was Mr. Foss's usual way of doing business.

Having got the cash, Matthew departed.

He glanced around him quickly when he came out, and saw the detective standing on the steps of the Royal Exchange.

He took no notice, however, but went towards Cheapside.



[THE DESPERATE ATTEMPT OF THE OFFICERS TO CAPTURE DICK TURPIN.]

Then he glanced behind him, and saw the detective enter the Bank.

"Ah!" he said. "He's gone to make some inquiries about the cheque. Well, he is heartily welcome to do so, so far as I am concerned. I will get out of sight though, for I don't want him dogging my heels all day."

A hackney-coach lumbered by at this moment, and Matthew hailed it eagerly, and directed the coachman to drive him to Cain's-place, Camden Town.

Off went the crazy vehicle, which was, nevertheless, vastly more comfortable than the cabs which at the present day ply for hire in the metropolis.

On his way, old Matthew occupied himself with thinking over the occurrences of the morning, and in considering what he should say to Tom Davis.

It was some time before the vehicle reached its destination, and then Matthew alighted and paid the man his fare.

The reader must not consider the Camden Town of a century and a quarter ago to be the Camden Town of to-day.

At the time of our story, and for many a year after, it was nothing but a pleasant country village.

No. 4, Cain's-place, was the end house in a small row of cottages, about half-way between Camden and Kentish Towns.

Although the season was winter, and the trees destitute of leaves, yet, as the sun shone, the cottage had a pleasant look.

It seemed delightful to old Matthew after living long in Drury-lane.

There was a garden in front of the cottage, and a little wicket gate led into it from the lane.

This gate Matthew opened and passed through, and strode slowly along the gravel path.

Ellen was sitting at the window sewing.

As soon as she saw old Matthew approaching, however, she threw down her work and hastened to the door of

the cottage, which she opened just as old Matthew reached it.

The landlord entered.

Tom Davis and his wife were sitting by the fire-side, but upon his entrance they looked up and feebly bade him welcome.

Their present inactive life, and the thought that they were living on the bounty of another, destroyed all their spirits.

Matthew saw with pain the condition to which his old friend was reduced, but he was cheered by the thought that he had that to say which would effect a total change.

He approached his subject cautiously.

We need not give the proposal in his own words.

The nature of it is already well known, and that is sufficient.

The reader must imagine the delight with which Tom Davis and his wife and Ellen listened to old Matthew's proposal.

We feel that we are unable to describe it.

They were delighted.

The change in Tom Davis was something to be wondered at, and serves to show how great an influence the mind exerts upon the body.

From the tottering, decrepit man he had seemed to be just before, he was suddenly transformed into what seemed like his former self.

"Hurrah!" he cried, in the exultation of his heart, "I feel quite young again! I will set about this business as soon as I can, and depend upon it I shall do my best."

"I know you will, Davis," replied Matthew; "but at the same time it will be necessary for you to be cautious to a degree."

"I will be so, never fear. I feel now as I used to feel when"——

"Well, well; never mind the past!" interrupted old Matthew, hastily; "forget even the present if you can, and wholly occupy your minds in looking to the future."

"That is good advice," said Tom Davis, "and it shall be followed."

"I rejoice to hear you say as much. You are sure you perfectly comprehend what you are to do?"

"Quite sure."

"That is enough, then. Here are sixty-three pounds, which Dick has sent. You are to take it and make use of it in case a deposit should be required. Set about your task at once. He leaves everything entirely to you. You are to act just as if you were acting for yourself, and in the meantime you shall be communicated with, and supplied with money to the extent you may require."

"And is the choice of the situation of the house left to me?"

"Yes, with these restrictions: you are to choose some place where none of us are known, and yet not too far away from London. Then, again, it must be a road-side inn, and at a distance from a village."

"All right, Matthew!" cried Tom Davis; "I know just the kind of place you want, and I will set about looking for it without delay."

"Do so—do so; and yet understand there is no reason for hurry. Dick is not yet prepared with the requisite amount of funds, though no doubt he will be by the time you have completed your arrangements."

With some further instructions of no special interest, old Matthew took his departure.

It was a long walk home, but he resolved to go there on foo

By the time he reached Drury-lane the brief winter's day had come to a close, and the sky gave indications of a rough night.

Matthew walked quickly.

He was anxious to get back, for he had been absent from home several hours, and he could not tell what disaster might have happened after his departure.

It was quite dark when he reached the door of the "White Horse," and all objects had a confused and indistinct appearance.

He had looked about him narrowly, but so far he had not seen anything at all calculated to excite suspicion.

He walked along the passage and entered the bar.

The girl whom he had left in charge was sitting down in a chair near the fire, and from her composed attitude and contented look the landlord argued that nothing of a alarming character had taken place.

With his heart lightened of a considerable load of anxiety, he spoke to the girl, who told him all was well, but that the place had been visited by several men, who came in one after another, and stood at the bar while they took some refreshment.

The girl hinted her belief that they were officers, and old Matthew thought most likely she was right.

It was enough to make him resolve to be doubly cautious.

Seeing that so far all was well, old Matthew ascended the stairs in order to change his apparel and also to pay a visit to Dick Turpin.

He knew the highwayman would feel anxious to a degree, and the time would appear very long to him in the solitude of that room.

He reached the door and tapped at it lightly with his knuckles.

He was responded to immediately by Dick, who cried—

"Is that you, Matthew?"

"Yes."

The click of the lock followed, and the next moment the door opened.

Old Matthew entered.

"Well," he said, "have you had a good rest?"

"Excellent! I feel like a new man, I must have gone to sleep as soon as I laid down, and I did not wake until about half an hour ago, and I have been putting myself in order a little.

Matthew looked at the highwayman with undisguised admiration.

Never did he look more like himself than he did at that moment.

Never did he look the character of the bold, dashing knight of the road to more perfection than he did then.

His face glowed with the ruddy hue of health, and his eyes sparkled with unusual brightness.

"Bravo!" said old Matthew. "You look yourself to-night, and no mistake."

CHAPTER CCCCLV.

MR. WRIGGLES MAKES A SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED ATTACK UPON THE "WHITE HORSE" INN.

"No complaints, Matthew," said Dick Turpin, with a smile, for he felt more light-hearted than he had done for many a day past; "no compliments, but just tell me the result of your expedition, and after that I will trouble you for something to eat."

"Oh! dear, yes. Why, you have had nothing. I quite forgot all about that. It is very careless of me."

"Never mind—never mind; there is plenty of time."

"But there is not; and it will take a long time for me to tell you all, and while I am so engaged your wants must be attended to."

"I can wait."

"But I can't permit it. Just listen to me for a moment, will you?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, when I came back, the girl I left in charge of the bar told me that several men had been in, who, from their appearance, she took for police-officers."

"Can they suspect my presence here?"

"That is more than I can tell. I merely mention the circumstance in order to show you how great the necessity is that you should be careful to a degree."

"All right, Matthew."

"But still I don't intend to let the officers spoil all our pleasures. I will tell you what I am going to do."

"What?"

"I am going downstairs, and I shall leave you on the first-floor landing while I go to the front door and look about me, in order to see whether the coast is clear."

"Yes—yes."

"If I find that it is all safe I shall whistle; and when you hear that sound you will understand that you are to run downstairs as fast as your legs will allow, and then whip into the parlour behind the bar. When you are once there you are safe, you know."

"Go on, Matthew. I would much rather be there than here."

"Of course you would. You can have something to eat and drink while I tell you my adventures."

"Be off with you at once."

"I am going, Dick. Follow me as far as the first-floor landing."

As he spoke old Matthew descended the stairs, Dick Turpin kept close at his heels.

They paused on the first-floor landing, and here, according to agreement, the highwayman remained, while the landlord went down to reconnoitre.

Dick's patience was not put to a very severe trial.

In less than a moment he heard a faint, clear whistle.

No sooner did the signal reach his ears, than he descended the stairs with a rapidity that had in it something marvellous.

Then he made one dash through the bar, and was in safety in the private room behind it.

"Bravo!" said Matthew, as he closed the door. "That's done well, and no mistake. No one has seen you, I feel quite sure."

Dick Turpin seated himself in one of the large, comfortable old-fashioned arm-chairs with which the parlour was furnished.

It did not take old Matthew long to produce a very tempting and substantial repast, to which he, as well as his guest, did ample justice.

It was while he was thus engaged that old Matthew told Dick Turpin all that had occurred to him during the day.

To the highwayman every word of this narrative possessed a special interest.

As soon as old Matthew had finished, he said—

"Well—well. I congratulate you, first of all, upon getting such a fair price for the booty. Why, there is not a fence in London that I know of where you could get a better."

"Nor I. He can afford to give a good price, because he is able to make so much out of the things."

"How so?"

"Well, that's more his business than mine; but I rather fancy he melts down the cases of the watches to make new ones with, and puts the works into other watches, by which means he must realize a very large profit indeed."

"He must; but he has fallen under suspicion."

"He has, it seems, though I was not aware of it until this morning. He will find it will interfere with his trade most materially, no matter what caution he employs."

"Well, never mind him for the present. I rejoice to hear that Tom Davis grasps so readily at our scheme, and I feel no doubt he will carry it out successfully."

"I hope so. But, Matthew, I have got all my work before me. A large sum of money will be required, and it must be obtained."

"Never fear for that."

"Why not?"

"With the exertions of yourself and your three comrades, you will soon get the required sum together."

"I hope we shall; and that reminds me, Matthew, that it is almost time I thought about bidding you adieu. They will expect me before dawn, and I would fain spare them all the anxiety I can."

"I suppose so," said old Matthew, with a sly smile. "Well, there is now nothing to keep you, though I shall be sorry when you go away; nevertheless, we have transacted our business."

"Yes," cried Dick, "and, thanks to you, in a most satisfactory manner; and I—but ah!—what was that?"

Dick Turpin's voice and manner considerably changed as he uttered the remaining portion of this sentence.

"What's amiss, Dick?" asked old Matthew, who was quite ignorant of the cause of the highwayman's alarm.

"I can hardly tell; but while I was speaking I happened to glance at the half-glass door which leads into the bar"——

"Yes—yes."

"And there, if I mistake not, I saw a man's face."

"A man's face?"

"Yes. He had his countenance pressed as close to the glass as it possibly could be, but the moment I spoke he vanished."

"This is serious, Dick," said old Matthew; "some danger may be impending over you. I know the officers are hanging about, and if they have seen you it is all up with us."

"I may be mistaken. Did you see anyone?"

"No; but that is easily accounted for. I was looking at the fire at the moment."

"What is to be done?"

"I don't know at present. It may be a false alarm. Perhaps it was the face of the girl I have set to mind the bar that you saw?"

"It may be so."

"However, it is well I arranged with you about beating a speedy retreat. You recollect what you have to do?"

"Perfectly well."

"That's all right then, and now remain here a moment while I make some inquiries."

"Nay—nay, Matthew. I will begone at once. There is no longer any need for me to stay, and the sooner I get back the better."

"Perhaps it may be best, and yet, after all, very likely it was"——

Old Matthew ceased suddenly.

A sound came to his ears which at once arrested further speech, and blanched his cheeks.

Dick Turpin's hand wandered to his pocket where his pistols were.

The sound was the hurried tramp of many footsteps.

"Quick—quick! Dick," cried old Matthew suddenly. "For God's sake, be quick! The officers are upon us! The secret door! Quick—quick! Remain in the recess without you are compelled to leave it by its discovery, and all may yet be well, for the house in all probability is surrounded. The secret door! Quick—quick, I say!"

Dick Turpin did not hesitate to obey the commands of old Matthew thus hurriedly and impetuously given.

He rushed across the room, pressed the spring, passed through the secret door, and closed it after him with incredible celerity.

He was only just in time.

The footsteps came nearer, and then, with a sudden crash, the little parlour-door was thrown open.

A tumultuous crowd of police-officers entered.

They were headed by our friend, Wriggles, whose countenance, perhaps in consequence of the exertions he had made, was even more purple than of yore.

Old Matthew had just had time to sink into a chair and replace his pipe between his lips, when the officers entered.

But before we go any further, we will explain how it was that the officers made this sudden irruption upon the inn.

The explanation will not take up much space.

In the first place, then, the reader may be sure that Mr. Wriggles was not exactly the sort of man to be cast down by repeated disappointments and defeats.

Had he been of such a nature, we should long since have ceased to hear anything about him.

It seemed as though he lived but for one object.

That was to capture Dick Turpin.

His frequent failures appeared to make him more determined to effect his object.

In spite of the fact that Dick Turpin had been seen in distant parts of the country, Mr. Wriggles still clung to the belief that, if he waited patiently, he should have the satisfaction of perceiving the object of his pursuit reappear at the "White Horse" inn.

For this reason, as it was no great distance from Bow-street, he was continually hanging about the spot himself.

It was also an easy enough matter for him to contrive to have men stationed there continually, so as to be upon the watch.

Nevertheless, Dick Turpin managed, by great good fortune, to turn down White Horse-yard without being perceived, and this only will account for his having remained so long unmolested.

At the precise moment when he arrived, the officer who was supposed to be on the watch was engaged in some little business of his own, for though at first the men had been vigilant enough, they had eventually grown tired of their resultless watch.

But in the morning it was noticed how late it was before old Matthew opened his house, and this circumstance was duly communicated to Mr. Wriggles.

Then, not long after, old Matthew was seen to go out, and this was a very rare circumstance, for it was very seldom he left anyone in charge of the house.

This being communicated to Mr. Wriggles, he at once came to the highly rational conclusion that something of an unusual character was going on.

Now, let that be what it might, it was highly necessary that he should know the precise nature of it.

Accordingly, he sent several of his own men disguised to drink at the bar, and peer about them, and let him know immediately if they perceived anything unusual.

This, as we know, was done, but the men saw nothing.

Still Mr. Wriggles did not despair, and he waited until old Matthew came home.

Some time after his arrival, he sent one of his men, upon whose acuteness he knew from experience he could fully rely, to drink at the bar of the "White Horse."

Accordingly this individual—or rather spy, for such he was—entered the house upon his errand.

He lounged up to the bar, and called for a glass of hot rum-and-water.

The girl served him, and he put down a shilling in payment.

While she was occupied in giving him change from the till, he endeavoured to enter into conversation with her, being not without the hope that if he could succeed he should be able to extract important information from her.

But the girl would have nothing further to say to him than brief monosyllabic replies to his questions, and as this was not what he wanted, the spy desisted.

He fixed his eyes, however, upon the half-glass door, which led into the private parlour.

But he could not obtain a glimpse of the interior, in consequence of the yellow gauze curtain that was hung across the panes.

He fancied, however, that the murmuring of voices came upon his ears once or twice, but he was not quite certain.

As it happened, his fancy did not deceive him.

At that very moment Dick Turpin and old Matthew were conversing together.

The spy sipped his hot rum-and-water slowly and in silence.

The girl, every now and then, would cast a furtive and suspicious glance upon him.

This he heeded not.

He determined not to leave the bar until he had peeped through the half-glass door, and seen who it was that occupied the parlour.

CHAPTER CCCCLVI.

RELATES, AT LENGTH, THE RESULT OF MR. WRIGGLES'S ATTACK UPON THE "WHITE HORSE" INN.

It was all very well for the officer to make this determination, but the thing was to carry it into effect.

While the girl retained her present position it was simply impossible for him to execute his design.

Chance favoured him, however, to an unexpected extent.

Some customers who were in the tap-room in the front of the house knocked loudly on the table with the bottoms of their drinking vessels, which was the mode they adopted to summon the attendant.

The girl glanced around her with an undecided expression.

She did not know what to do about leaving the bar while the officer remained standing at the counter.

She thought, at first, about calling old Matthew; and this is what she ought to have done, but, upon second thoughts—which, in this instance, at least, were not best—she determined to hasten to the tap-room, and lock the door leading out of the bar into the passage after her.

The spy watched all her movements with increased attention, for he heard the knocking, and was anxious to know what she would do, though he thought she would leave the bar.

She did so, and the spy felt that the critical moment had arrived.

He watched her along the passage into the tap-room, and then, the moment she disappeared, he hastened to the door that led into the bar.

The key was sticking in the lock, and he turned it instantly.

Then three steps brought him to the half-glass door which he so much desired to reach.

He was tall enough to see over the curtain, and he pressed his face closely against the pane.

There he saw, sitting comfortably at their ease, Dick Turpin and the landlord.

The former was sitting with his face turned towards him, so he could not possibly make any mistake.

It was, indeed, Dick Turpin, the highwayman.

The spy removed his face from the window instantly, for he fancied he was perceived.

He dashed across the bar, shut the passage door, and locked it.

He met the girl returning.

Without saying a word he made his way out of the house.

Mr. Wriggles and a body of men were in waiting.

He quickly communicated what he had seen, and Mr. Wriggles, with a self-satisfied nod, gave orders to a certain number of his men to surround the house and guard every point of exit.

This done, he gave the word "Forward!" and the whole troop rushed into the passage.

This was the sound which had caused so much alarm.

However, Dick Turpin, as we have stated, had just time to conceal himself, and old Matthew to sit down in the chair.

When Mr. Wriggles entered, therefore, all he could see was the landlord sitting down by the fire-side, calmly smoking, and exhibiting no more confusion than their sudden appearance might be supposed to cause.

But although Mr. Wriggles saw no one but old Matthew, he did not feel he was defeated.

The disappearance of the highwayman with so much suddenness pointed clearly to the fact that there was some hiding-place or other in the bar, which had escaped him in his previous examination.

But he was resolved it should not elude him now, as his information was so very precise.

"Hallo! Mr. Wriggles," cried old Matthew, with well affected astonishment, "whoever would have thought of seeing you so suddenly. What in the world is the matter?"

"Now, Matthew, my friend," said the police-officer, with ill-concealed exultation, "don't let us have any of your blessed gammon, because it will be quite thrown away. It will be no good at all—not a bit."

"Indeed. What's in the wind?"

"Now, Matthew, do for once listen to reason. You may as well be friends with me as not; and now you have an excellent opportunity of making me forget any unpleasantness that may have taken place some time back."

"Friends!" cried Matthew, "I always thought we were the best of friends."

"We shall be if you will just listen to me."

"Go on, then, I am listening."

"In the first place, then, I have thoroughly surrounded the house."

"There, there, that will do," cried old Matthew. "You are at your old games again."

"You mean you have been at your old games."

"Bah! stuff!"

"I tell you you have. Not five minutes ago Dick Turpin was seen sitting in this bar."

"Who by?"

"Me," cried the officer, who had looked through the glass door. "I seed him sitting in this here d—d identical old arm chair."

He tapped the chair with the barrel of a pistol as he spoke.

"Yes," said Mr. Wriggles, "and he can't have got far away. Certainly he has not left the house, nor can he do so without being seen and captured by my men."

Old Matthew smoked his pipe phlegmatically.

"Now, if you have got any sense," continued Mr. Wriggles, "you will just say where he is and save any further bother; if you do not, I shall be sure to find him. If you do as I want you, why you will hear nothing more about his being concealed on your premises. Think of that."

"Mr. Wriggles!"

"What?"

"Do you think I am such a fool as to run such a risk? Bah! not a bit of it. If I could deliver up Dick Turpin to you, or tell you where he was concealed, I would, but I can't; and if I can't, how can I? just tell me that."

"Very good, Matthew; very good. It won't do though; oh! dear, no; not a bit of it. I know your little game."

"All right!" said the landlord, with admirable coolness. "What do you make all this d—nable fuss about? If you think he is hidden, why don't you look for him, and not bother me with your d—d rubbish!"

"Oh! go on Matthew—go on. You'll alter your tune before long. I shall look, you may depend; and I shall not only look, but I shall find. I should have set about my search at once, only I wanted to bring you to reason if I could. I am in no hurry. I am so sure he is in this house, and that he can't leave it without being seen, that I can afford to spare a little time."

"Well, of course, Mr. Wriggles," said old Matthew, "you ought to know your own business best, and it is not for me to say a word. Conduct the search in what manner you think proper. I know you won't listen to reason."

"Listen to reason!" ejaculated the police-officer, whose easily-kindled anger was beginning to spring up. "Listen to reason! It's you that won't listen to reason."

"Stuff and nonsense! I tell you it's no good your looking. The man you want ain't here."

"I tell you he is."

"Oh! very well—very well. I give in, of course."

"Now, Matthew, once for all, and all for once, will you listen to me?"

"I am a listening."

"I don't want to make any more bother and unpleasantness than I can help. I am bound to have my man, and you ought to see that it is your best policy to give him up to us."

"Well—well."

"Will you do so, Matthew? It will save me knocking the place to pieces, and it will keep you out of trouble."

"Mr. Wriggles, once for all, and all for once, I tell you, if I could do as you wish me, I would, but I can't."

"That's a very artful speech, Matthew, and I quite understand it. However, you have chosen to be obstinate, so you will have to take the consequences upon your own head.

"On my head be it, then," said old Matthew, and then he went on smoking with greater deliberation than ever.

The landlord's calmness exasperated Mr. Wriggles to a very great extent indeed.

Finding, however, that there was no hope of inducing Matthew to disclose the secret of Dick's hiding-place he resolved to set about looking for it at once.

Mr. Wriggles had already made a tolerably good examination of the little parlour, and the traces of his former violence were still visible on the walls.

He felt, however, that he could place implicit confidence in the statement made by his spy, to the effect that he saw Dick Turpin sitting in one of the arm-chairs.

He was now invisible.

This pointed clearly to the fact that he must be concealed in some place to which ready access could be had.

While these thoughts were passing through his brain, Mr. Wriggles turned round on his heels once or twice and looked at every portion of the room.

He was considering where the hiding-place could be.

He came, at length, to the very natural conclusion that it must be somewhere in the walls; and, though he had failed to find on his former examination any traces of such a thing, he yet believed and hoped he should be more successful upon a second trial.

"Yes," he said, mentally; "there must be some secret door in the wall, and I will find it."

He put his hand into his coat-pocket and produced the hammer, one part of the head of which was elongated into a sharp spike.

He handled this weapon with evident delight, and he twirled it in his fingers while he made up his mind upon which portion of the wall he should commence his operations.

Old Matthew watched all his movements very closely, though he did not appear to do so.

He viewed the production of this hammer with great dissatisfaction.

It was a weapon well calculated to discover any secret door, no matter how well contrived.

However, he comforted himself that the secret door had already once withstood an examination with that very instrument, and he hoped that it would stand the test another time.

Mr. Wriggles looked sideways at the landlord in order to see what effect the sight of the hammer would have upon him.

But old Matthew's countenance afforded no key to what was taking place in his mind.

It was truly an imperturbable countenance.

He seemed to be looking at what was taking place with just a natural amount of curiosity.

There was one thing we ought to have stated.

Old Matthew had seated himself in the arm-chair that occupied that corner of the parlour where the secret door was situated.

The back of the chair was, indeed, in contact with the door, and he hoped, by remaining here, to prevent that portion of the room undergoing such close examination as the other.

Whether he was successful or not, or whether Mr. Wriggles observed it, we shall very quickly see.

However, with a self-satisfied air, the officer walked right up to the fireplace, choosing the side that was opposite to the one upon which old Matthew sat.

He raised his hammer and struck the wall with it.

He used the spiky part, which pierced the plaster with ease, and each time he withdrew it, a small quantity of fine mortar followed.

He resolved to go steadily all round the room in this manner.

He struck the wall just as high as his breast, and he left a horizontal distance of about a foot between each blow.

If he persevered in this manner, and, beyond all doubt, he fully intended to do so, no secret door could withstand discovery.

Old Matthew watched all this with great uneasiness.

Still he was aware that, in the event of the door being found, Dick would have a good chance of escape, and this afforded him very great consolation indeed.

Slowly and steadily Mr. Wriggles worked his way round the parlour.

His men looked on with the most intense curiosity and interest.

All had their weapons ready for immediate service, in case the necessity should arise for making use of them.

Mr. Wriggles came to the door which he had previously demolished.

There was now no secret about its whereabouts, and he opened the door.

He found the recess had been converted into a cupboard.

The man he wanted was not there, and he did not expect he would be; he merely looked in for the satisfaction of being able to say he had left no place, likely or unlikely, unexamined.

Then he went round the walls, until he came to where Matthew was sitting.

"Ahem! Mr. Gale," he said. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind getting up a moment, so that I can finish my examination. Ahem!"

CHAPTER CCCCLVII.

MR. WRIGGLES BELIEVES HE HAS MADE A WONDERFUL DISCOVERY.

"CONFOUND you!" cried old Matthew. "You're an intolerable nuisance, that's what you are! Of course, I'll get up, and you can examine the corner as much as you like. It's nothing to me, except a very great bother."

"Ahem!"

"Oh! d—n your ahems! What do you mean by it?"

"Nothing, Mr. Gale; oh! nothing. I'm just waiting for you to get up, you know; that's all; and then—why, we shall see what we shall see."

"Of course we shall," said old Matthew, as he rose reluctantly from his seat.

He knew it was no good to resist, and any hesitation, so far from warding off the discovery, would only have the effect of making Mr. Wriggles more suspicious, if that was possible.

So he got up and allowed the chair to be moved.

But he had spoken in a very loud tone of voice, so that he had given Turpin plenty of time to be upon his guard.

The obstruction to his examination being removed, Mr. Wriggles continued his operations with the hammer.

Several strokes followed, but mortar appeared after every one of them.

Can the reader imagine the feelings of old Matthew?

Can he conceive the intentness with which the landlord watched the police-officers?

He saw that another moment must inevitably disclose the secret of the recess upon which he so prided himself.

Mr. Wriggles struck another blow.

Old Matthew knew just where the door was, and he saw that the very next stroke that would be delivered would fall upon it.

He held his breath.

He had not heard the least movement, but he hoped and expected that Dick Turpin was no longer there.

Crash!

That was the sound the spike of the hammer produced as it entered the door.

It was very different to the sound produced by striking the wall.

"Ha! ha!" cried Mr. Wriggles, in a yelling voice of anticipated triumph; "ha! ha! What have we here, I wonder? Let me try again."

He withdrew the hammer, which had sunk deeply into the wood, and struck another blow a few inches off.

The same result followed.

"Just as I thought," said Mr. Wriggles, exultantly; "just as I thought. I know Dick Turpin was in this place five minutes before I entered it, and here is his hiding-place beyond all reasonable doubt. Now, Matthew, what do you think of that?"

Old Matthew shook his head.

"What are you shaking your d—d head for?" asked Wriggles, in a passion. "Do you think there's anything in it?"

"I shook my head, Mr. Wriggles," returned old Matthew, quietly, "because I was sorry to see how wrong you are."

"Wrong?"

"Yes."

"How do you mean wrong?"

"In your conclusions. You think because you have hit something that sounds different to the other parts of the wall, that you have found a hiding-place."

"Of course I do."

Matthew shook his head again, and pointed to the door on the other side of the parlour.

"Do you recollect that door?" he said.

Mr. Wriggles made a wry face.

"Ah! you do. But you don't like to talk about it. Do you recollect how confident you were, and how you disbelieved and laughed at me when I told you you would find nothing there?"

"Curse you! yes. I recollect, but I am not mistaken this time. I feel convinced that is Dick Turpin's hiding-place."

"I thought it would be no good to say anything to you," said old Matthew, with a sigh, "you are so awfully obstinate."

"Am I? Well, we will see if we can't soon set this matter at rest. And look here, Matthew."

"Well?"

"If I find him, as I know I shall, as I am sure I shall, woe be to you, that's all! I'll have you imprisoned for harbouring him in your house, and you shall suffer dearly for it.

"Alas! alas!"

"You will cry alas!"

"No, no; you mistake. I said alas! because I know how dreadful disappointed you will be."

Old Matthew's words had the effect of causi Mr. Wriggles some misgivings, but he would not allow them to be visible.

In a high, cracked tone of voice, he said—

"We will d—d soon settle it! And so I bid you beware!"

Old Matthew shook his head again, and went on smoking his pipe.

Mr. Wriggles now approached the door again, and pulling out the spike, he struck three distinct blows upon the woodwork with the hammer.

"Dick Turpin," he cried, "I call upon you in the name of our sovereign lord the king to surrender yourself unto us, his said majesty's officers of police. If you come forth, no harm will be done to you. If you refuse or resist, the consequences will be upon your head—not ours."

Old Matthew made a curious clucking movement by touching his palate with the tip of his tongue rapidly, as though to express his derision of what the officer was saying.

"What the devil are you making that a—d noise for?" asked Mr. Wriggles. "Whose chickens are you calling?"

"I was thinking what a fool you were," said old Matthew, "to stand preaching to the parlour-wall in that manner."

Mr. Wriggles's men all grinned when they heard this speech.

If anything was calculated to make the chief police-officer's exasperation complete, that was.

He actually danced with rage.

"D—n you all!" he cried as soon as he could command his voice. "We will soon settle the matter. Draw your cutlasses and cut the door down."

He sprang forward with his own cutlass as he spoke, and commenced a violent onslaught on the concealed door.

It was never intended to be proof against such an attack as that, and it speedily gave way.

Mr. Wriggles seemed to possess the strength of a madman.

But he could still hear old Matthew's contemptuous clucking, and that galled him excessively.

"Hold!" he cried. "Two of you advance and seize that man. Seize him, I say; he is your prisoner. I apprehend him upon the charge of being an accomplice of Dick Turpin's, and of feloniously concealing him in his house, contrary to law."

"You had better mind what you are doing, Mr. Wriggles. You'll have to prove your words."

"Talk to my elbow," cried the irate police-officer. "Hold him tightly, and never mind what he says," he added, addressing his men.

They obeyed him, and old Matthew was a prisoner.

Once more, then, Mr. Wriggles turned towards the door, which was already in an advanced state of demolition.

With main strength he seized one of the largest fragments and pulled it down.

The little recess was now revealed.

But it was empty.

His dismay may be imagined.

But there could be no doubt about it.

The cupboard-like looking place was empty.

Old Matthew uttered a triumphant chuckle, as I said—

"There now. What did I tell you?"

"D—n you all!" cried Wriggles. "Pull the rest of the door down, so that I can enter."

His men obeyed him, and, in another moment, the whole of the door had disappeared.

Mr. Wriggles now frantically dashed into the recess.

But he could see nothing suspicious.

It looked just such a place as he had formerly discovered.

"A light!" he cried, for he was determined not to give in if he could help it. "A light! There is some mystery here, I feel convinced, and it will go hard with me I do not fathom it."

A light was handed to him, and with this he commenced a rigid examination.

Almost the first thing he saw was the bolt that secured the door leading into the yard.

"Ha! ha!" he yelled. "What is this, I wonder?"

The bolt was not shot into the socket, but he pressed against the door, and it immediately gave way.

He found himself in the yard at the back of he inn.

Not the secret yard which Dick had entered the night before, but the public yard belonging to the inn

Mr. Wriggles struck himself some violent blows on the head.

"Done!" he cried. "Done again! Done by that infernal scoundrel, old Matthew! I can see it all now! At the first alarm Turpin would slip into that d—d cupboard, and, as soon as he found he was in any danger, he would make his way into the yard."

In this supposition, as the reader well knows, the police-officer came very near the truth.

"But, stop!" he cried; "there's hope yet. This house is surrounded by my men, and I am quite certain he could not leave it without being seen by some of them. Let me think now. Where would he be likely to go when he got out into the yard?"

This was a difficult problem to solve, but Mr. Wriggles

quickly found a solution of it, though it was not the correct one.

"He's hiding himself. Perhaps he is somewhere very close at hand. Here goes for a search."

He summoned his men around him, and directed them to search the yard thoroughly.

As this was a small place, bounded by high brick walls, this was no difficult matter.

The hiding-places in it were very few.

All were peeped into, even to the water-butt that stood in one corner.

Not a sign of the highwayman, nor even a trace of his recent presence could be seen.

Mr. Wriggles was frantic.

There was but one door opening from the yard, and this he now opened.

As he was well aware, this led into White Horse-yard.

Just outside this door a man was stationed.

"Is that you, Collins?"

"Yes, Mr. Wriggles."

"Have you seen any one?"

"Not a blessed soul, sir."

"You are sure no one has come out through this door?"

"Quite sure, 'cos why, I have stood with my back agin it all the while.

Mr. Wriggles rubbed his head with a puzzled air.

"I will stand here a moment. You run up to the top of the court. Who is stationed there?"

"At the Drury-lane end, sir?"

"Yes."

"Figgins, sir."

"Go and ask him whether he has seen anything."

The man ran off, and returned quickly, for the distance he had to go was trifling.

"Well?" said Wriggles, inquiringly.

"He hasn't seen nothing, sir."

"Curses!"

"Shall I run down to the other end and ask Evans?"

"Yes, do."

The man ran down to the Stanhope-street end of the court and returned, saying—

"He hasn't seen nothing neither, sir."

"Keep a sharp look-out, then, for I shall unearth him presently."

Mr. Wriggles turned back into the yard.

But it was rather despairingly.

He began to be afraid that he was about to receive another defeat, and old Matthew another victory.

This was gall and wormwood to him, and he set about making another search in the yard, though he had little hopes that any good would result from it.

But he was agreeably disappointed.

He found what had escaped him before.

That was the narrow passage leading to the stable.

He called his men around him.

"Here is something at last," he cried. "Follow me! Fol——"

He ceased abruptly in the middle of the word, and stared aghast.

The sounds of a desperate conflict came upon his ears.

He heard the report of fire-arms, the clash of steel, and the cries of many voices.

Recovering from his astonishment, he cried—

"Hurrah! They have him at last! Follow me."

As he spoke he darted down the narrow passage followed by his men.

CHAPTER CCCCLVIII.

DICK TURPIN FINDS MORE OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF LEAVING THE "WHITE HORSE" THAN IS AT ALL THOUGHT FOR.

In order to explain the meaning of the sounds which came so suddenly and so unexpectedly upon the ears of Mr. Wriggles and his officers, it will be necessary to revert to Dick Turpin, and chronicle his proceedings.

He had scarcely time to shoot the bolts into their sockets, after entering the recess, before Mr. Wriggles and his officers dashed into the bar.

He could imagine their surprise and dismay upon finding only one person there.

He placed his ear close against the door, and, by adopting this means, he was able to hear, with tolerable distinctness, all that was said and done.

From the first he had feared that the hiding-place would be discovered, and he prepared himself at once for instant flight.

He left the door leading into the yard so that he could push it open in a moment.

The noise which Mr. Wriggles made in striking the walls came plainly enough upon his ears.

In great suspense and anxiety, he awaited the result of this proceeding.

He laughed silently at the aggravating manner in which old Matthew behaved to the police-officer.

At length, however, he heard the demand made for Matthew to move his seat, and so of course he heard the landlord's reply, for it was purposely spoken in a very loud tone of voice.

Discovery was now imminent, and therefore it was high time to be off.

Still Dick lingered.

He heard Wriggles strike the first blow, and, indeed, he was near receiving a severe injury from the spike of the hammer, which came through the door, quite close to where he was standing.

This decided him not to remain any longer.

As noiselessly as possible, he passed through the door that opened into the yard, and closed it after him.

With all the speed he could make, he darted down the narrow passage, and in another moment he was standing in the stable, by the side of his bonny mare.

But he took care to secure the stable-door as well as he could.

This done, he took the saddle and bridle, and put them on Black Bess with a rapidity which only long practice would have enabled him to make.

But for one thing all the articles he required were close at hand.

Having properly accoutered Black Bess for the road, Dick Turpin took hold of the bridle and led her towards the door that opened into the other stable.

Through this they passed, and he closed the door carefully behind him, but he could not fasten it, as the bolts were on the other side.

Dick did not pause now for anything, for he was well aware the sooner he got clear of the "White Horse" the better it would be for him.

The entrance to the inn stables was from Stanhope-street, from which thoroughfare there was a long passage, on both sides of which were the backs of several small houses.

Upon gaining this passage Dick immediately mounted.

His weapons he well knew were in excellent order, and he could depend upon them should any emergency arise.

He loosened his sword in his sheath, however, and prepared himself for action, for he saw no reason to disbelieve the statement Mr. Wriggles had made about the house being surrounded.

He anticipated a struggle.

But his heart was light.

Having accomplished so much, he did not care one jot for the rest.

At a very slow walk he allowed Black Bess to make her way down the passage until he was within a few yards of its termination.

Then he pressed his mare's flanks with his heel, and uttered a faint cry, which he knew she perfectly well understood, and which he never made use of except when he wanted her to put forth her utmost speed.

She obeyed on this occasion with a suddenness that would have unhorsed an unpractised rider.

She bounded out of the passage into Stanhope-street like an arrow.

But here some of Mr. Wriggles' men were stationed, for Dick Turpin had been known to make a sudden appearance here more than once before.

They were, therefore, prepared for him.

Pistols were fired at the flying figure, but with what result they could not tell.

Dick did not hesitate to return these shots, and likewise to draw his sword, and slash savagely at his opponents.

These were the sounds which had attracted Mr. Wriggles' attention.

It was easy enough for him to guess at the cause of them.

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There could be but one explanation, and that was that Dick was endeavouring to break through the line of men that he had posted round the house.

He called out to his men, and dashed frantically down the passage without being at all clear in his mind as to where it led, and without knowing whether it would take him to the scene of conflict.

He hastened on, however, until his progress was stayed by the stable-door, which Turpin had been prudent enough to fast

Against this he flung himself with the full force of his body, being quite regardless of the extent of the bruises he might sustain by such an operation.

The door withstood the first onslaught, though it showed signs of giving way.

A second rush, and then the way was clear before them.

Upon entering the small stable where Black Bess had been lodged, Mr. Wriggles looked about him in great surprise.

He had that night become acquainted with more secrets connected with the "White Horse" inn than he ever dreamed were in existence.

Upon the present occasion, though, he felt that he dared not linger.

A door was before him, and opening it, he found himself in what may be fairly called the legitimate stables belonging to the old inn.

The door leading into the passage was open, and seemed to indicate the route the highwayman had taken.

At this moment the sounds of conflict ceased.

Mr. Wriggles redoubled his speed, and, panting and exhausted, he reached Stanhope-street just in time to hear the clatter of horses' hoofs in the distance, and to see a dark, shadowy figure turn into Princes-street.

On the ground lay a man who, by his motionless attitude, appeared to be dead.

Two others were wounded, but not severely.

"What's all this?" cried Mr. Wriggles, suddenly. "Speak someone. Tell me what has happened."

"Dick Turpin," said one of his men.

"Death and fury! what of him?"

"Not a minute ago he darted out of the passage, but we were on the look-out for him."

"Well—well?"

"We tried to arrest his progress, and, finding we could not do that, fired, and he fired in return."

"But he has got off?"

"He has."

"Is he wounded?"

"I can't tell, sir. A great many shots were fired at him, and surely some must have taken effect. He cannot have escaped all the bullets."

Mr. Wriggles, during the foregoing brief and hurried conversation, had taken from his pocket a whistle, which he blew shrilly.

Scarcely had the sound died away, than from a contiguous thoroughfare there came a troop of horses.

All were saddled and fully equipped for service.

They were led by one man.

"Quick, all of you! Mount! mount! Follow me! He is, doubtless, hurt; but, whether he is or not, we'll give him chase; he cannot have got far ahead of us!"

The men scrambled as fast as they could into their saddles.

Mr. Wriggles was one of the first.

In a space of time, then, which anyone would have declared totally inadequate for the performance of as much, Mr. Wriggles and his men were mounted and in full pursuit of the flying highwayman.

The chief police-officer had laid all his plans well.

He had taken into his calculations the possibility of Dick Turpin breaking through the guard he had placed round the house, and seeking safety by flight.

In the event of the occurrence of this contingency, he had had a man in waiting with a troop of horses.

His instructions were, as soon as he heard the whistle, to hasten to the spot from whence the sound proceeded.

We have seen with what an amount of promptitude these instructions were carried out.

And now to turn to Dick.

When he found himself so suddenly attacked, he defended himself with great vigour and determination.

But the men hemmed him in and surrounded his steed, so he had literally to cut his way through them.

During this struggle, shots were freely exchanged.

At last, however, one stroke with his sword cut down a man who was tugging at Black Bess's bridle, and the next moment the gallant creature bounded like an antelope along the narrow street.

Whether he was hurt or not, Dick knew not.

In moments of such excitement, the blood is too hot for the body to be sensible of pain.

Whether, too, his mare had escaped injury, he was equally ignorant; but this was a point upon which he should have precise information.

Dick made his way direct to Lincoln's Inn-fields, for this, in the last century, was quite a deserted place.

Indeed, it was unsafe to walk there after dark.

Upon gaining the enclosure Dick paused and listened.

But no sound of approaching horsemen came upon his ear.

Here, then, he resolved to pause while he had the opportunity.

First, then, as to himself.

He fancied he could feel the perspiration pouring down his face and trickling into his eyes.

He put up his hand to wipe it away.

When he withdrew it, however, his fingers were wet with blood.

Even at the moment of making the discovery he became conscious of a strange feeling in his head.

He had been wounded.

He took out a handkerchief and wiped his face.

Then he endeavoured to ascertain, by the sense of touch alone, the extent of the injuries which he had received.

He found a bullet had struck the side of his head, and made a deep furrow in it a couple of inches in length at least, leaving the bone of the skull quite bare.

He felt sick, and reeled in the saddle.

But at that moment he could hear sounds which plainly indicated that a pursuit had been commenced.

He rallied himself.

Twisting the handkerchief into a rude kind of bandage, he tied it tightly round his head so as to check at least, if not to stop, the flow of blood.

This done, he moved his limbs; but was soon convinced that he had sustained no other hurt.

The next thing was to ascertain the state of his mare; and though he could hear his pursuers were frightfully close at hand, he did not hesitate to dismount and make an examination.

Everything depended upon it.

If he found his mare was unharmed, he would be inspired with a feeling of confidence which would go far to clear him of his danger.

Rapidly, then, he passed his hand over every part of her body, and, to his extreme gratification, he found she had not received the least injury whatever.

He went round and prepared to mount.

But at that moment such a frightful feeling of giddy dizziness came over him that he lost all strength, and had he not seized the pommel of the saddle with one hand and so supported himself, he must have fallen to the ground.

As it was, he was able to prevent this.

He strove to rally himself.

A strange, humming, ringing sound was in his ears, mingled with which were the hoarse cries of his pursuers and the loud clatter of their horses' hoofs.

CHAPTER CCCCLIX.

DICK TURPIN'S POSITION BECOMES DEPLORABLE INDEED.

Truly was that a critical moment for Dick Turpin.

It was only in a dreamy, half-conscious way that he heard his enemies approaching, and though he knew they were so close, yet he felt as though he was sinking away from them—far, far away—down into the very bowels of the earth.

But that feeling was only produced by the weakness consequent upon the immense quantity of blood he had lost.

What an easy prey the bold and dashing highwayman now seemed to be for those who were approaching.

He would offer them no more resistance than would come from a puny child.

His head partially rested against the flap of the saddle, and his right arm hung powerless by his side.



[DICK TURPIN AT THE GATES OF THE RUINED MANSION.]

The feeling of weakness, however, passed away.

The strange ringing sound in his ears subsided, and, as it did so, the sounds of his pursuers became more and more distinct.

Surely, now they could not be many yards off.

This conviction lent Dick Turpin the amount of strength requisite to mount his horse.

But he succeeded in seating himself only after great pain and difficulty.

At the moment he took the reins in his hand he heard a loud shout, which came from many throats.

It was followed by a brisk volley of pistol-shots.

Mr. Wriggles and his officers had just come round the corner of Duke-street into Lincoln's Inn-fields.

To their surprise they saw before them, seated on his horse, the man of whom they were in pursuit.

The shout which came upon Dick Turpin's ear came from the throats of all.

It was compounded or surprise at his unexpected appearance, rage for the losses and injury they had sustained, and hope that ere many more minutes had elapsed his capture would have been effected.

That shout, however, seemed to have upon the highwayman the effect of an electric shock.

He started, and then suddenly found himself possessed of sufficient strength to seat himself firmly in the saddle, and give Black Bess a sudden and powerful impulse forward.

She obeyed, and it was just as she gave a bound and burst into a gallop that the volley was fired.

That sudden movement most unquestionably saved Dick Turpin's life.

Had he lingered another moment, he must have fallen to the earth, with his body riddled with bullets.

As good luck would have it, however, he escaped without any additional injury.

Excitement now enabled him to contend successfully with the weakness that oppressed him.

He turned the corner of Great Queen-street like a shot, and then the next turning on his right hand took him into Holborn.

Across that thoroughfare he bounded like a shot.

He was no sooner seen than he disappeared.

He kept straight on through Russell-square, well knowing that if he persevered in that direction it would quickly take him out into the open country.

But the police-officers were close at his heels.

He had really had no start of them, and as yet they had been able to keep him fully in view.

The manner in which they laid on to their poor horses, to enable them to keep up their speed, was really dreadful to witness.

They gored their flanks, too, with their spurs until the blood trickled down into the road.

But, with Dick Turpin just before them, and with a full belief that they should capture him before long, it was not likely the officers would feel inclined to spare their horses.

In a few minutes, Islington was reached, and then the highwayman was in the country, with green trees and fields on every side of him.

At his back, however, and by unwearied exertions preserving the same distance between them, were the officers.

Every few moments, however, such a dreadful feeling of exhaustion would come over Dick Turpin, that he would reel from side to side in his saddle, and only preserve his balance with great difficulty.

But habit is a great thing, and Dick had been so accustomed to horse-riding, that he retained his seat almost unconsciously.

Every time, however, that he felt himself sway from one side to the other, he would make a strong effort to recover himself.

Fortunately he was too far off Mr. Wriggles and his followers for this state of things to be noticed.

They guessed, however, that he was wounded, but not seriously.

Most horses, when coming fresh out of the stable, and when urged to the utmost by voice, whip, and spur, will make wonderful speed, and so it was with the horses which the officers bestrode, and which Mr. Wriggles had caused to be selected on account of their superior fleetness.

This, then, will explain how it was that they were able to keep up with the highwayman so well as they did.

In a little while, however, their strength was spent, and their speed abated, nor could all the efforts of their riders cause them to go at an accelerated rate.

It was now that Black Bess's superiority made itself manifest.

With the same sweeping gallop as she had started with, and which had enabled her to keep ahead of the officers' horses, she still continued on her way, apparently not in the least exhausted, and maintaining her speed without any urging on the part of her rider.

Dick Turpin's brain was in a strange, confused state.

He was just conscious that he was pursued, and that he was flying at the top of his speed across the country, and that was about all.

Presently, however, he got so far out of the hearing of his foes that he could hear no sounds from the rear.

Having made this discovery, he shaped his course as well as he could to the deserted mansion where he knew his comrades were anxiously awaiting him.

He guessed the direction which he wished to take as well as he could.

After an hour's riding, he reached the lane which branched off from the main road and led to the dilapidated gates belonging to the ruined mansion.

By this time, however, his weakness had dreadfully increased.

Mists of blood seemed to float before his eyes and obscure his vision.

The wound he had received was a very serious one.

Blood had flowed from it in large quantities, and the handkerchief which he had bound round his head, though it checked the hemorrhage to some degree, did not stay it altogether, for, by degrees, the crimson stream forced a passage through the linen until the bandage was completely soaked.

Each moment he grew weaker and more unconscious of what was taking place.

He believed he had out-distanced the officers, and in this he was unquestionably right.

After completely knocking their horses up, Mr. Wriggles and his companions had been compelled to turn back to London and confess themselves once more defeated.

The manner in which Dick Turpin swayed backwards and forwards, while Black Bess, at a steady pace, took her way along the lane, was really fearful to witness.

It seemed as though he must inevitably fall to the ground.

By great good fortune, however, he retained his seat.

And it was now that his gallant mare displayed to the utmost the extraordinary amount of sagacity which she possessed.

She seemed to fully understand that something had happened to her rider.

But she exhibited no terror.

On the contrary, she reduced her pace to a steady walk.

Along the lane she went without being guided in the least by her almost insensible rider.

He is lying in some strange manner across her neck.

His fingers are entangled in her long silken mane, and it is by the aid of these alone that he retains his seat.

Indeed, it was wonderful how he escaped a fall.

At length the mysterious and deserted mansion appeared in sight.

But Dick Turpin saw it not.

He had not the remotest idea of where he was, being dead to all that was surrounding him.

At frequent intervals he would make an effort to rise in the saddle, but each attempt was more feeble than the last, until he became unable to lift his head from his mare's neck, though he made several abortive efforts to do so.

Guided only by her own instinct, Black Bess took her way towards the gate of the deserted mansion.

She reached it.

But to enter the long serpentine avenue leading up to the house she took a somewhat sudden turn, which had the effect of completely throwing her rider off his balance.

He was conscious that he was falling, and made a desperate attempt to save himself.

But it was in vain.

His muscles had quite lost their usual strength, and he slipped off on to the ground where he lay at full-length.

Black Bess must have felt him going, for she immediately stood as still as a statue.

From this cause, and this only, Dick Turpin fell upon the soft turf without sustaining any injury.

His feet slipped out of the stirrups, and, after one ineffectual attempt to rise, he rolled over on to his back with extended arms.

And so he lay, without sense or motion; and anyone to have looked at him, would have declared he had ceased to exist.

Such was not the case, however.

The mysterious essence called life still inhabited that body, though the tenure by which it held possession was frail indeed.

Black Bess trembled, and held her head close to her rider's breast.

But he stirred not, and the gallant creature still remained in the same position.

She could tell something was amiss.

And so, in the intense silence of that solitary spot, lay Dick Turpin, almost lifeless, with no one to watch over him and defend him from any danger with which he might be assailed save his gallant mare.

Those in the deserted mansion who were, beyond a doubt, so anxiously expecting him, were profoundly ignorant of his arrival.

Nor was there any means by which they could be informed of it, for the last thing they would have thought of would have been the occurrence of so strange a catastrophe.

How easy a prey was the gallant highwayman now!

His foes would have but little trouble in effecting his capture.

Was he destined to fall thus into the hands of his foes?

We shall see.

Suddenly Black Bess started.

She raised her head and projected her ears forward, while her neck was outstretched and her nostrils expanded.

Some slight sound has struck upon her sensitive ears, and now she listens intently.

At length the sound becomes plainly audible.

It is the clatter of horses' hoofs.

Louder and louder becomes the monotonous sound, which, once heard, can never be mistaken.

It is plain that the sound is approaching, and rapidly, too; so rapidly that, in another moment, the rusty dilapidated gates will be reached.

CHAPTER CCCCLX.

RELATES WHAT TOOK PLACE AT THE DESERTED MANSION AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF DICK TURPIN.

Ere we explain who it was approaching the deserted mansion at that unusual hour, it is necessary that we should go back a little.

We would wish to take the reader to the deserted mansion, and describe the strange events which took place after Dick Turpin's departure.

In a former chapter we have described how Maud and Tom King and Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack watched Dick Turpin ride away.

As he disappeared all those foreboding feelings which had sprung up in Maud's breast, when Dick first spoke of his intended expedition, returned with full force, and she felt that she could have given worlds for the power to call him back.

Under the impulse of the moment, she did call out in an imploring voice, but as she did so she became conscious that it was too late, for Turpin had already disappeared from view.

Tears sprang into her eyes, but she dashed them impatiently aside, and strove to school herself to be calm.

And who shall say that the presentments of evil were unfounded?

Were they not indeed more than realized, for she never imagined things half so bad as they really were.

It is probable that, if she had been alone, Maud would have stood for some time on the spot where she had bidden adieu to her husband, but she was aroused by Tom King, who said, in a cheerful voice—

"Come, come! We will not linger here now. Dick has gone, and we can do nothing more than await his return with what amount of patience we possess. Come, let me lead you to the house."

Maud suffered Tom King to take her hand in silence, and the little party at once bent their steps towards the deserted mansion, which, let its faults be what they might, was certainly a more comfortable place than the open air.

In a few moments, then, all were seated in that room at the top of the house in which they had taken up their quarters.

The fire was replenished, and the chamber had quite a comfortable look.

It was no more than natural that the conversation should turn upon the strange sights and sounds which they had all seen and heard.

But they could do no more than speculate upon it, and having only slight grounds, their speculations were soon exhausted.

All felt curious and anxious to know whether on this night there would be a repetition of the strange, howling cry, which had so startled and alarmed them.

This they could only ascertain by patient waiting.

The conversation then turned upon the scheme for the future which had been suggested by their captain, and then Claude Duval said—

"My comrades, I know you will agree with me about the excellence of the scheme, and all that; but still a considerable sum of money will be required before we can carry it out."

"True, true."

"In my humble opinion, then, the sooner that money is obtained the better, because one can never tell what to-morrow may bring forth."

"What are you driving at, Claude?" asked Sixteen-String Jack. "You may as well speak out at once, and say what you mean."

"Well, so I may; and I can tell you what I want to say in a very few words."

"Speak, then."

"Well, you know Dick's instructions when he left us were that we should remain here until he returned?"

"Yes, yes."

"But it is easy to see why he gave such instructions. He wanted us to take care of Maud, and guard her from any injury."

"And quite right, too."

"I admit that, of course; but, then, it appears to me that it does not require three of us to perform this duty."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, simply this. I propose that two of us mount our horses, and go out on the road to-night, and try how much booty we can obtain, while the third remains here for the purpose of keeping guard; and, in my humble judgment, one is quite sufficient for such a purpose."

This proposal or suggestion provoked a great deal of remark; but one thing was quite clear, and that was that it was relished by all.

"The chief difficulty I can see," said Tom King, "is who shall stay at the house. I must confess I should not like to be the one left behind."

"Nor I—nor I."

"Of course not. No one would; but it is quite certain one must."

"We can get over that difficulty," said Claude Duval; "we will draw lots and abide by the result."

"Agreed."

"Let us settle it at once, then. The sooner those start who Fortune allows to do so the better."

The truth of this was at once assented to, and they set about making their preparations to draw lots.

Tom King was not the only one who had no desire to remain behind. Both his comrades wished to go quite as much as he did, but they knew full well that the undesired duty of keeping guard must devolve upon one of them.

By common consent the superintendence of the lot-drawing was entrusted to Claude Duval.

He took from his pocket several guineas, and from them selected three, each of which was stamped with a different year.

"Here," he said, "are three guineas, and we shall soon settle our luck with them. One is dated 1714, another 1722, and another 1725."

"But what are you going to do with them, Claude?" asked his comrades.

"I will show you," he replied. "I will put them in my hat thus, and put my hat on the table. Now that is done, you will please take a coin each, and hold it concealed in your hand; then, when the word is given, you must show what you have got."

"Well?"

"And the one who is unlucky enough to draw the lowest number—that is to say, the guinea with 1714 on it, will have to stay behind and keep guard."

This was a very fair way of settling the matter, as Claude's comrades at once admitted.

The coins were now placed in the hat and the hat put on the table.

Then walking up to it, the highwaymen each took a guinea without looking at it, and held it within closed hands as Claude had directed.

Had their lives depended upon the issue, they could not have manifested a greater amount of eagerness.

Then they opened their hands.

Claude Duval uttered an oath.

"I am in for it," he said. "Look, here is 1714!"

It was so.

Claude Duval, who was probably the one who was least of all willing to stay and keep guard, found it to be his lot.

He did not grumble, however, because he knew the arrangement must be abided by, or it would be of no use.

"Lucky fellows," he cried to his companions. "But never mind; I have one consolation, and that is, that I shall be out upon the road to-morrow night."

"So you will, Claude; but, above all things, keep good guard, for if anything amiss were to happen Dick would be displeased, because even now we are disobeying his orders."

"Never fear for that. You leave it all to me. I will undertake that all is safe, and I hope you two will take care of yourselves."

"You may depend upon that," replied Tom King, who, as well as Sixteen-String Jack, was carefully employed loading his pistols.

In a few moments they were ready to descend.

They bid adieu to Claude and Maud in the chamber, and would not permit the former to accompany them to the stable, as he desired to do.

The reason for this was that Maud would have been put to the trouble of descending also, and they wished to spare her this trouble, for after what had occurred, it was impossible for her to remain in the house alone.

After a few more parting words, Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack descended the stairs, and made their way to the stable.

It took them only a few moments to caparison their steeds, and this done, they led them out and mounted.

Side by side they made their way down the long, winding avenue, until at length they paused just before the dilapidated gates.

"Is there anyone about, Jack?" asked Tom King.

"I think not," was the reply. "We had better wait here a moment and listen."

This was done, but no sound came to their ears, save that which the wind produced as it whistled through the branches of the leafless trees.

"It is all right," said Tom King, at length, "and now, Jack, what shall we do? Shall we keep together, or shall we separate?"

"Just as you like."

"Nay, nay! I should like to have your opinion."

"Well, then, I think, as we are going out solely with the intention of getting as much booty as we can, we had better separate."

"That is what I think. I fancy, if we both go different ways, we shall obtain more than if we were to go together."

"You may depend upon it."

"Then we will part, Jack. Take care of yourself, and do not attempt too much. Above all things, keep clear of the dragoons, by whom, I dare say, the road is well watched."

"All right, Tom. Good-bye! We will part here at the gates."

"And return by daybreak?"

"Yes, yes; of course."

With these words the highwaymen again set their steeds in motion.

Passing through the gates, Sixteen-String Jack turned round to the left, and Tom King to the right.

Once more, bidding each other farewell, they started off at a rapid pace, and were soon out of hearing of each other.

Whether Dick Turpin would have sanctioned these proceedings it is very hard to say.

He would have endeavoured to make them sensible of the great amount of danger they would incur.

It will be our task to follow the fortunes of both highwaymen on this eventful night.

Strange incidents befell them, and the peril they encountered was greater than they had anticipated.

The reader will please to bear in mind that the night of which we are now speaking is the one upon which Dick Turpin stopped the St. Alban's coach single-handed, and afterwards had so narrow an escape from capture.

As stated in a former chapter, the new moon had set shortly after Dick set out, and now all was dark, save the faint and uncertain illumination that came from the stars.

A better night for such an expedition as that upon which Sixteen-String Jack and Tom King had set out, could scarcely have been found.

CHAPTER CCCCLXI.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HAS A DARING ADVENTURE ON THE HIGHWAY.

We confess we scarcely know whether to give the precedence to Tom King's adventures or to Sixteen-String Jack's.

Perhaps it had better be the latter.

After parting, then, with his comrade in the manner we have related, he took his course along the lane in a westerly direction.

He had never been this way, and had but a rude idea as to where it would lead him.

By keeping due west, however, he knew he must sooner or later emerge upon the Edgware-road, and this was the locality he had decided upon as the scene of his night's exploits.

Ere he had gone very far Jack found, as he had more than expected, that the lane came to an abrupt termination.

There was evidently no thoroughfare, and the only purpose the lane served was to form an approach to the deserted mansion, and, perhaps, to some of the meadows on the estate surrounding it.

There was rather a high fence across the end of the lane, over which could be seen a large expanse of meadow land.

After a moment's deliberation, Sixteen-String Jack determined to push straight across this, until he should reach another lane or cross-road.

The fence was too high for him to feel inclined to run the risk of jumping his horse over it, more especially as there was a gate close by, through which he could pass without difficulty.

Accordingly he dismounted, and, having opened the gate, he led the horse into the meadow, and then closed it again.

"Now for a gallop, just to circulate my blood," he said, as he sprung into the saddle again. "The ground is as smooth as velvet."

With these words he touched his horse with the spur, and the really beautiful creature started off at a gallop, that soon took him to the extremity of the meadow.

Beyond this, however, another appeared, which was merely separated from it by a low hedge.

Over this the horse bounded in gallant style, and then their onward course was continued until they arrived at a rather broad cross-road.

Jack walked his horse along until he came to a gap in the hedge, and then he forced his way through.

A glance up at the sky enabled him to ascertain which was the direction he ought to take in order to reach the Edgware-road, which was, at the time of which we write, a very long way out of London, and only dotted here and there with houses.

Still there was considerable traffic upon it, because it was the high-road to so many places.

Jack listened first; and, as he could hear no sound indicating the approach of anyone, he did not hesitate to push on towards his destination with all speed.

It was not upon such a road as he was now travelling that Jack expected to find a booty worth taking, and his anticipations were confirmed, for he reached the highway without having met with a soul.

But now it was highly requisite that he should call into play every care and caution.

When, therefore, he saw the high-road was before him, he slackened his speed and kept as close under the hedgerow as he could.

It was well that he did so, for, when about a dozen paces from the corner, there came upon his ear the tramp of many horses' feet.

This sound was quite sufficient to induce Jack to come to a halt there and then.

The cross-road was, however, a very narrow one and profoundly dark; for, not only were the hedgerows on either side of it of an unusual height, but it was bordered by trees, which cast a deep shadow on the ground.

Along the side of the bank upon which the hedge was planted was a dry ditch of tolerable width.

In this ditch Jack's horse stood, while the person of the highwayman himself was quite undistinguishable from the mass of foliage so close to which he stood.

But from this position he was able to command a good view of the road, and he would be able to see anything that passed along it.

Silent and motionless Jack remained here, shading his eyes with his hand, and listening intently to the sound of the horses' feet, which grew plainer and plainer every moment.

They were evidently approaching.

In less than a moment more the horsemen came in sight.

At a pace which could neither be called a walk nor a trot—for it was between the two—they passed by at the top.

Jack saw their forms plainly enough, for they had nothing but the light sky behind them.

A glance told him they were dragoons.

And even if he could not have seen their uniforms as he did, the jingling of their accoutrements would have been quite sufficient to inform him upon this point.

Several of them appeared to look towards the spot where Jack was standing, but the highwayman felt tolerably certain that he was invisible to their eyes.

He counted the troop—which was one of those who had been commanded to patrol the roads—and found that it consisted of an officer and twelve men.

They were quickly out of sight, but Jack did not venture to leave his place of concealment until they were out of hearing as well.

"I must be careful," he said. "There is more danger than I looked for. It would be no joke to encounter so many well-armed men single-handed."

This was true enough, and, in the event of such contest taking place, there could be no doubt about its result.

At last the sounds died away in the distance, and then the highwayman ventured to leave his place of concealment.

But he did so slowly and thoughtfully.

"I think I had better push on towards Watford," he muttered. "That is a part which has not been visited lately, and is some distance from London. Ten to one if the dragoons are patrolling the roads beyond it. I will try to find out, at any rate."

Having now made up his mind what to do, Jack increased his pace.

The Watford road branched off in an angular direction from the Edgware road, and after looking about him for a minute or two, Jack came to the conclusion that he was several miles from Stanmore, the name of the village where the roads divide; and, consequently, in order to reach Watford, he would still have to make his way in a straight line across the country.

But such a course of proceeding as this was far from distasteful to Jack. It suited him better than the high-road.

First assuring himself that the Edgware road was clear, Sixteen-String Jack emerged into it.

Crossing straight over to the other side, he made his way along until he came to some place which would allow him to enter the meadows beyond.

Coming presently to a spot where the road was bounded by some wooden palings, he put his horse to it, and made him leap over.

The rest was easy enough.

The ground beneath his feet was soft yet firm, and so the gallant steed flew over the meadows at a gallop.

It was about a quarter of an hour after this that Sixteen-String Jack emerged on to the high-road a little way below Watford.

He could hear nothing, however, indicative of the approach of a traveller, and so he kept on down the road until he came to a narrow lane that turned out of it.

Just within the mouth of this lane he paused, resolved to wait until an opportunity occurred, when he would pounce out upon his prey.

He was not kept long in suspense.

By the time he had finished making an examination of his weapons, and getting himself into a state of readiness, his quick ear caught a sound, which he knew in a moment was produced by the rapid approach of some vehicle.

As it came nearer and nearer, he discovered that it ran upon four wheels, and was drawn by at least two horses.

Further than this he was scarcely able to go.

To be sure, he knew it was not a stage-coach that was coming. The rapidity of its approach, as well as the evident lightness with which it rolled over the ground was quite sufficient to assure him of that.

"It's a post-chaise," cried Jack, as he grasped the pistol tightly, "and coming from London, too. Bravo! I am in luck. What a pace they are coming at! But perhaps they changed horses as they came through Watford, and these are fresh. Oh! yes, it is a post-chaise, certainly."

Jack was quite certain he was not mistaken, so he crept a little nearer to the high-road.

Glancing in the direction of the coming vehicle, his gaze was immediately attracted by the lamps, which seemed to burn with unusual lustre.

They lighted up the banks and hedgerows on each side with a strange effect.

They brought, too, partially into view the outlines of the chaise, and the horses by which it was drawn.

Then, somewhat to his surprise, Jack found that the latter were four in number, and that one of them was mounted by a postilion.

Seeing this raised Jack's spirits considerably, for he felt more certain of obtaining a booty that would repay him for his enormous risk.

It would be no easy thing to check the progress of a vehicle coming at such a rate as was this post-chaise; in fact, to bring it to a stop suddenly was simply impossible, but Jack soon made up his mind what to do.

He had tried the plan before, and knew well that it answered the purpose perfectly.

The post-chaise was now close enough for him to set about putting his design into execution.

Accordingly, Jack trotted out of the lane, and took his way gently along the road in the same direction as the post-chaise.

While doing so, he took care to keep close on the left or near side.

His pistol was consigned for the time being to his pocket.

In his left hand he held the reins.

His right hand and arm hung loosely by the side of him, in readiness for the service he designed them to perform.

He held his feet in such a manner that, when the right moment came, he could touch his steed sharply upon the flank, and cause him to set forward at full gallop.

By the time he had completed these arrangements, the post-chaise was close behind him.

In another moment the glare of the bright lamps shone upon him, and he could hear the loud breathing of the horses.

The postilion saw the rider thus suddenly come into view, and uttered a shout.

It was not one of fear, but one of warning to the horseman to get out of the way.

It was just then that Sixteen-String Jack touched his horse with the spur.

With a snort of pain the animal bounded forward, and the highwayman had no trouble in keeping abreast with the two leading horses.

His right hand he now held in readiness.

Watching his opportunity, he seized hold of the bridle of the horse nearest to him.

Then, guiding his own steed so as to curve round, he caused the other to obey the movement.

This was sufficient to alter the course of the carriage entirely, and in less than a moment it was broadside across the road.

CHAPTER CCCCLXII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK TAKES A GOOD BOOTY, AND FINDS HIMSELF IN A POSITION TO RENDER THE LADY IN THE POST-CHAISE AN IMPORTANT SERVICE.

HAVING thus cleverly succeeded in bringing the post-chaise to a standstill, Sixteen-String Jack produced a pistol from his coat-pocket. He held it close to the postilion's head.

"If you are a wise man," said the highwayman, "you will let the horses alone. If you attempt to set them in motion, I will blow your brains out, if I have to gallop after you a hundred miles to do it!"

The postilion guessed by Sixteen-String Jack's tone that he fully meant what was said, so he dropped his whip, and clasping his hands together, roared heartily for mercy.

Jack now rode up to the coachman, who was sitting on the box with an expression of utter bewilderment visible upon his countenance.

"You heard what I said to the postilion," he cried. "Drop the reins, and, as sure as you move, I will blow your brains out!"

The coachman dropped the reins in a moment.

It was pretty evident that he did not intend to disobey the highwayman's injunctions.

Having settled these preliminary matters, Sixteen-String Jack, with the cocked pistol still in his hand, rode up to the door of the post-chaise.

But ere he could let down the window, as he fully intended to do, it was opened by someone within.

The moment the glass descended, Jack thrust the pistol into the carriage.

"Death! death!" he said. "Death will be the portion

of whoever resists! Save your lives, and hand over whatever valuables you possess!"

"Death! death!" said a masculine voice from within, mimicking Jack's tones. "Death to those who interfere with peaceable people!"

Like a flash of light, something bright and glittering was thrust out of the window of the post-chaise.

It was a rapier.

Jack had not anticipated this prompt and resolute attack; and, therefore, he was taken completely by surprise.

He had no time to move to avoid the point of the weapon, which was thrust forth with amazing swiftness.

Fortunately for him, however, the thrust was too hasty to be accurate, and instead of the cold steel piercing through his heart, as the inmate of the carriage no doubt fully intended it should, it went a little wide of the mark, passing between Jack's left arm and his body, close to the breast.

It ripped up the skin in its progress, but beyond that the highwayman sustained no injury whatever.

And now Jack exhibited a presence of mind that was, under the circumstances, really wonderful.

The instant he felt where the rapier was, he pressed his left arm tight against his side.

Then causing his horse to wheel round suddenly, he snapped the blade, leaving the traveller with the hilt and little more in his grasp.

Jack lifted his arm, and the broken blade fell to the ground.

He was at the window again immediately.

"Now, sir, he said, "you have made an attempt upon my life when I was least of all prepared for it. Why should not I do the like with you?"

There was no reply.

"You will find it difficult to answer that question. But I don't want to wrangle, neither do I desire violence. To prevent the latter you must at once hand over to me your purse, watch, rings, and jewellery."

"You are an infernal rascal," said some one, in a voice that seemed half-choked with passion. "How I missed you I am at a loss to think."

"Suffice it you have done so. Come, sir, I am impatient, and have other business to do to-night."

"Curses!"

"Your money. Quick."

"I wish I had more weapons."

"You are best without them. But, come, this will not do. I will count three, and if before I pronounce the last word you do not place your purse in my hand, I will take it from you; and I shall not be over gentle in my treatment, depend upon it."

While speaking these words Jack perceived for the first time that the post-chaise was occupied by two persons.

One of them was a man—by his attire unquestionably a gentleman, even if he did not possess some higher title.

His hair was thin and white.

His countenance was puckered all over with numberless wrinkles.

His body was shrivelled and bent, and, in a word, he presented every appearance of extreme age, though it was certain that the greatest possible pains were taken to conceal the ravages which time had wrought.

Jack was rather surprised that one so old, and apparently so feeble, should have acted in so resolute a manner.

The other occupant of the post-chaise was a female.

She was sitting on the seat opposite to the old gentleman, and in the corner near the other window.

Her countenance Jack could not see, but from the outlines of her form, he came to the conclusion that she was not yet old enough to lay claim to the title of womanhood.

Jack could not see her face because it was buried in her hands.

She was bending forward, as though in deep dejection or grief, and the highwayman fancied he could hear faint, stifled sobs.

In what relation the pair stood to each other he knew not, nor did he pause to inquire.

In spite of himself, he could not help feeling a considerable degree of interest and curiosity.

He felt sure there was some mystery in what he saw.

Sixteen-String Jack saw all this, and made these reflections while uttering the words we have recorded; and now, in a monotonous tone of voice, he said—

"One!"

The elderly traveller gnashed his teeth.

"Two!" cried Jack.

As he spoke the last word, he raised his pistol and levelled it carefully, as he added—

"When I pronounce the next word, I fire."

"No—no," cried the female in the further corner of the carriage, removing her hands from her face and clasping them together in an attitude of supplication. "Have mercy upon us! Spare our lives, and you shall have what you desire!"

The tone in which these words were spoken, Jack thought was the sweetest he had ever heard.

He was confirmed, too, in his supposition about the youth of this female.

She was a mere girl, but so beautiful in form and feature, and with such an expression of trusting innocence upon her countenance, that Jack felt that nowhere could her equal in real loveliness be found.

Almost involuntarily he raised his hat as she spoke, and, bowing low, he said—

"I regret that you should be so much alarmed. Believe me, however, I contemplate no violence—that is, if my demands are complied with."

"Give him gold," said the girl, timidly, addressing her companion.

"Silence," he cried, roughly. "What is it to do with you?"

She shrank back abashed.

Jack was so enraged with the traveller for speaking in so harsh a tone of voice to the young girl, that it was with the greatest difficulty he could keep his hands off him.

Controlling himself, he cried—

"Enough—enough! Hand me your purse, or, as surely as I now speak, if you refuse, I will take what I want from your dead body! Quick, before I say three!"

With a deep groan the traveller thrust his hand into his pocket and produced a purse.

Jack snatched it from his trembling grasp.

"Bah!" he cried, contemptuously. "This will not do. I would advise you for your own sake not to trifle with me. You will be the sufferer in the long run."

"It's all I have."

"Don't tell a lie over such a thing. People who ride in post-chaises are better provided to meet the expenses of the journey than you would make out yourself to be."

"Why risk your life for what wealth you have about you?" said the young girl, indignantly. "If you gave him the whole of the large sum which you carry with you in the carriage, you would not feel the loss. What proportion does it bear to your vast, ill-gotten wealth?"

A scream of anger came from the traveller as the girl spoke, and he sprang forwards as though he would inflict some personal violence upon her.

If this was his intention, it was effectually prevented by Jack, who seized his arm, saying—

"Come, come! I feel less disposed than ever to dally now. Hand over the money of which the lady has spoken!"

"Oh! curse you," said the traveller, addressing his companion. "But wait till I get you home, you minx! You shall suffer dearly for this, depend upon it. Only wait! only wait!"

"I hope you will accept my thanks for the valuable information you have given me," said Sixteen-String Jack, addressing the young lady, and speaking in a tone of the greatest respect. "Were it not for you, he would find himself more hardly dealt with than he is. It is for your sweet sake that I forbear."

The lady shrank back still further as Jack spoke.

But the patience of the highwayman was now completely exhausted.

The intelligence that there was a considerable sum of money in the carriage made him impatient; and, moreover, he was anxious to bring the adventure to a close lest he should be interrupted by some other travellers.

Thrusting the barrel of the pistol somewhat rudely into the traveller's mouth, to the great detriment of his false teeth, he cried—

"I will dally no more! Give me the money, or I will blow the top of your head off!"

"It is in vain to threaten him," said the young girl. "He values his wretched money more than he does his still more wretched life. He will not speak, but I cannot

sit here and see him murdered for his obstinacy. You will find the money in that valise under the seat."

She pointed to a small portmanteau as she spoke, a portion of which was just visible.

To seize this took Jack but an instant; but the traveller, apparently rendered desperate by the imminent danger of losing his treasure, stooped down, and clutched the valise as well.

Sixteen-String Jack was not inclined to put up with any interference of this kind, so he wrested the valise from the old man's hands, and, swinging it round, struck him rather a sharp blow on the head with it.

A shriek came from the young girl as she witnessed this action, and, springing forward, she cried:

"Oh! you have killed him. This is wrong of you, after your promise."

"Fear nothing, fair one!" said Sixteen-String Jack. "He is not hurt, believe me. Accept my best thanks. I heartily wish it was in my power to render you some equivalent service in return."

Jack uttered these words quite seriously.

To his surprise, however, the young girl clasped her hands together, and looked imploringly into his face.

But she did not speak.

Still the action was sufficient to let the highwayman know that she desired something.

"Speak, speak!" he cried. "You can trust me. If there is anything that I can do to serve you, command me freely. I am quite in earnest in what I say, and would willingly go through fire and water to serve one so truly beautiful!"

And as he spoke, Jack placed his hand upon his breast and made another deep and courtly bow.

CHAPTER CCCCLXIII.

THE YOUNG LADY IN THE POST-CHAISE MAKES SOME EXTRAORDINARY REVELATIONS TO SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

It would seem that Sixteen-String Jack had hit the old gentleman in the post-chaise a harder blow on the head with the valise than he had either thought for or intended.

He laid quite still upon the floor of the carriage without offering to make the slighest movement.

As for the young lady, after Jack spoke, she looked at the prostrate form and shivered as she did so.

Then raising her eyes, she fixed them upon the highwayman's countenance with such expressive earnestness that, had he been attempting to deceive her, some signs of confusion must have made themselves visible upon his features.

But as Sixteen-String Jack fully meant what he said, he underwent the scrutiny unflinchingly.

Still the young girl was irresolute, though Jack fancied that proceeded more from timidity than aught else.

"Speak!" said Jack, again, for he was anxious to reassure her, if possible. "Have no doubts whatever of my good faith. You wish to make some request; let me hear you. Speak freely."

A gush of tears came from the lady's eyes as these words fell upon her ear.

Half-sinking down upon her knees, she cried:

"Save me! oh! save me! Save me, if you have the power to do so. Save me, and I shall be eternally your debtor."

"Save you?" repeated Jack. "From what—from whom?"

"From him."

She pointed as she spoke to the still prostrate form of her travelling companion, and, as she uttered these words, an unmistakable expression of deep and utter loathing swept over her lovely face.

"Tell me how I can save you from him," said Jack. "What is it you require?"

"Oh! I shall be compelled to enter into some explanations, and yet I would fain be spared so unpleasant a task."

"I do not wish to pry into your affairs, far from it," said Sixteen-String Jack. "All I want to know is in what way you require to be saved from him. What power has he over you?"

"He has bought me!"

"Bought you?" repeated Jack, in tones of the utmost astonishment. "You must surely be dreaming. We are in England. How could he have bought you?"

The young girl dashed the tears from her eyes as she said:

"I know we are in England; but he has bought me nevertheless."

"How—how?" asked Jack, whose curiosity was raised to a still greater extent than ever it had been before. "Explain yourself, lady, for I confess I am totally at a loss to understand you."

"You will comprehend all, I think, when I tell you that he who lies so still at my feet is my husband."

"Your husband?"

"Yes, he has been so for twelve hours. Look at him, and look at me. He is white-haired and old; he trembles on the very brink of the grave, into which it would be a charity for him to fall. I stand merely on the threshold of life. I have not crossed it yet. What is there prepossessing in that old man, think you, to tempt a young girl like myself to be his bride?"

And again there came over her features the same expression of intense loathing and abhorrence.

Jack was so surprised at her words, that though she paused after asking him this question, he could not recover himself sufficiently to make her a reply.

Perceiving this, she went on.

As she did so her manner became even more excited than before.

Her cheeks grew red, and her eyes sparkled in the dim light that filled the interior of the carriage like two stars.

"It was no natural impulse that brought us together. As I told you before, he bought me, and by making me his wife has completely wrecked my happiness."

"Be calm," said Jack; "be calm, I pray you. This excitement in one like yourself seems in the highest degree unnatural. It is a strange thing to interfere between husband and wife; but, if the service you require of me is to rid you of him, I——"

"Nay, nay; do not misunderstand me. Listen a moment, and I will make all clear. I will tell you how it was that I consented to become his wife."

Jack bowed.

Pointing to the form which lay at her feet, she continued:

"He is a money-lender, a usurer, and, as a matter of course, immensely rich; but he knows not how to enjoy his ill-gotten wealth. He is a miserable, pitiful miser. There is only one human attribute which he possesses, and that belongs more to beasts than man. It is sensuality; and, to satisfy his unholy desires, will part with his money freely. You marvel at my words, but it is necessary for my justification that I should speak freely. Knowing all this respecting him—knowing it full well—what, think you, was it that induced me to stand before God's altar and become his wife?"

This question was asked with even still greater vehemence than before, and Jack's bewilderment at what he heard very rapidly increased.

The lady did not seem to require any answer to this question.

It was because she panted for breath that she paused.

Quickly recovering herself, she went on with her strange narrative.

"You look at me," she continued, "as though you thought me mad, but I am not; though if this goes on, I care not how soon I may be, if in my madness I could forget both past and present, and become perfectly indifferent as to the future. If that is madness, there is nothing I so much yearn for."

Jack shuddered when he heard one so young and so beautiful pronounce such a dreadful wish, and he wondered what she could have endured to bring her mind into such a state as to wish for that which is universally deemed a calamity.

Perceiving, however, that her excitement increased rather than abated, he strove to soothe and quiet her.

"Once more," he said, "let me entreat you to be calm. This violent excitement cannot fail to be harmful in the extreme. Although you have raised my curiosity to the highest pitch, I would rather that you ceased at once than you should so terribly excite yourself."

"You are right. This violence is as foolish as it is useless. As temperately as I can, I will tell you that which you should know, and then I will appeal to you for

your opinion. When you understand everything, I will call upon you again to save me, and see whether you will do so."

"Nothing would give me greater joy than to serve you all I could," replied Sixteen-String Jack. "But excuse me if I remind you that time is fleeting, and that I run great danger in lingering here. Therefore, I should be glad if you would speak quickly."

"I will—I will, for I am truly desperate. You are the only friend I can see a chance of making, and I cling to you even as a drowning man would cling to a straw to save him from sinking. Now listen."

"I am listening to every word."

In a tone of voice, the even calmness of which contrasted strangely with her previous vehement excitement, she went on—

"I have told you he is a money-lender. In an evil hour my father applied to him for assistance, and from that moment was hopelessly in his power. Deeper and deeper he got in debt to him, until all hope of being able to repay so gigantic a sum was at an end. My father had this horrible consciousness upon him, and trembled when his debtor approached. He, too, knew it and pressed for payment. Then, when he had driven him to the utmost, he told him there was one means by which the debt between them could be cancelled."

Jack nodded.

Matters were becoming clearer now.

"That means, I need scarcely tell you, was the sacrifice of myself. He desired me for a bride. Bitter were the tears my father shed when this proposition was made to him. But it was in vain; he was in that wretch's grasp, and he exerted his power to the utmost. I need not enter into the sickening details of my story. I have no heart to do so. Let it suffice to say that in the end I consented to make the sacrifice."

With a groan, the young girl clasped her hands tightly over her face.

"Then you were bought," said Jack, indignantly; "and the rascal deserves hanging for forcing you in to such an odious marriage!"

"But, oh!" cried the young girl, in tones of heart-rending pathos, "if I could only tell you what I have suffered since this morning! Too late I found that I had done wrong. I ought not to have succumbed to such a fate. I ought not to have destroyed my own happiness. But, oh! the agony of my soul when I pronounced the words too late. Yes, yes, it was too late!"

A flood of tears at this moment came to her relief.

After this Jack had no difficulty in understanding the nature of the service the young girl required of him.

The reader may be sure that Jack's sympathies were all on the side of the young girl.

The story was somewhat imperfect, but he was able to supply the missing links easily enough.

That he pitied her heartily, and that he would do all he could to ameliorate her position was quite certain.

He waited until the violence of her flood of tears was over, and then he said—

"Tell me, tell me in what manner I can aid you?"

"Alas! I know not. I am his wife!"

"In name only."

"But still his wife."

"True."

"And if I returned to my father's house he would have power to take me away from there?"

"Most certainly he would."

"Alas! alas!"

"But, tell me," said Jack, "is there not a further cause for your grief than you have named?"

"What mean you?"

"Is there not someone who at this very moment is shedding bitter tears at your fate, and whose happiness is wrecked as completely as your own?"

"There is—there is; that is, I believe—I mean, I hope there is."

"Just so. And that is who, had you been left to your own choice in the matter, you would have selected as your husband?"

The young girl was silent.

"I am right," said Jack. "Now, who this is, I know not. I only hope he is worthy of one so peerless as you are."

"But why these questions?" she asked hesitatingly.

"Simply for this. If you will take my advice—I may be wrong, you know—but if you will take my advice, you will make all speed to where your lover is to be found—and doubtless you know that well enough—and when you have found him, the best thing you can do is to leave the country instantly, and go somewhere where you will never be found, and where your husband, if he deserves the name, will have no power over you."

Once again the young girl clasped her hands over her face, but this time it was in deep thought.

"Do you like my advice?" asked Jack, after a pause; "because, if you do, I will put you on the way of joining your lover, and when I have done that, I must leave you to yourselves."

"Oh! yes—yes! I consent. And yet my heart revolts at such a course. Still, it is not too late to recover the false step I have taken; anything would be better than a life of misery with that man."

"I quite agree with you, and don't think you will be much to blame if you follow my advice. You were entrapped into this unnatural marriage, or rather you were forced into it by circumstances which had no right to urge you, and therefore I consider you quite justified in acting in your own defence."

"My own defence?"

"Yes. Do not allow yourself to become the victim of circumstances. Stand boldly up before them, and you will achieve a victory. You would commit a sin were you to allow yourself to be driven further by that which ought to have no power over you."

"I will go—I will go!" said the young girl, making up her mind suddenly. "I feel that you are right, and I will go. But tell me how I am to reach a—a——"

"Your lover. I will put you in the way of that."

"And my husband?"

"No longer call the polluted wretch by such a name."

"He will pursue us."

"No doubt; but if you will leave that to me, I will take care he does not overtake you."

CHAPTER CCCCLXIV.

THE YOUNG LADY IN THE POST-CHAISE AGREES TO FOLLOW SIXTEEN-STRING JACK'S ADVICE.

THESE last words were uttered in a very significant tone, and the young girl, with an air of perfect fright, said—

"Surely, you—you would not——"

"I won't hurt him," replied Jack; "but still, at the same time, I will put it out of his power to overtake you, that is, of course, if you feel inclined to follow my advice."

A struggle now evidently took place in the young girl's mind as to what she should do.

Naturally enough, she shrank from leaving her husband and flying to her lover.

It was in the highest degree repugnant to her.

But it was clear she had but two alternatives.

Either she must follow the highwayman's advice.

Or else she must make up her mind to live with her husband a life of misery and wretchedness, in comparison with which death would have been delightful.

What wonder is it, then, that looking at things in this light, and with Jack's arguments ringing in her ears, that she should, after a slight hesitation, decide in favour of the former?

"I will go," she said; "I will leave him, for I feel I could do anything rather than remain with him."

"Then you will excuse me for saying," said Sixteen-String Jack, "that I think you have come to a very wise determination, and I will help you so far as ever it lies in my power."

"Thanks, thanks. But why should you take this interest in my happiness?"

"Simply because I cannot help doing so," replied Jack, bluntly. "You must not forget that you did me a service in letting me know the nature of the contents of this valise, and I am anxious to return the favour as well as I am able."

"What will you do?"

"I will tell you what you shall do."

"What? Oh! what?"

"Take heed and attend to my instructions, for if you omit to carry them into effect your husband may overtake you, and no law can separate you from him."



[TOM KING'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE TWO FOOTPADS.]

The girl shuddered again.

"In the first place, you will make your way to where your lover is to be found. You know where he is?'

"Yes; in London."

"Very well. You will go there as fast as this post-chaise will carry you."

"But——"

"Never mind your objections just at present. Leave it all to me, and I will make every necessary arrangement."

"I will."

"As soon as you arrive, you will explain to him as briefly as possible what has taken place, and, if he loves you with the same amount of fervour as I am sure you love him, he will jump into the post-chaise along with you, and you will make all speed to the nearest seaport town, and get on board a vessel bound for some foreign country. After that I leave you to yourselves."

"But my father?"

"Eh?"

"My father?"

"You must leave him."

The young girl wept.

"Without a farewell?" she murmured.

"Yes; forget him. Although he is your father, he is not worthy to be remembered by you. He sold you like a slave."

The girl sobbed bitterly.

"And," continued Jack, solemnly, "you must not think, simply because he is your father, that he is entitled to any extra degree of consideration in that respect. You are not bound to love and respect him for that alone, and when he ceases to act uprightly, he loses his claim upon your love."

"But," said the young girl, between sobs and tears, "my father owes that man money. What will become of him when I am gone?"

"Why, it will be out of his power to make another such iniquitous bargain. Besides, you were married, and that

will cancel the obligation. If he loses you after your marriage, that is his look out, and not your own."

"Heaven help me," said the young girl. "I know not what to do. I feel half-maddened with grief and despair."

"Act as I have advised you," said Jack; "and then, when you have leisure for reflection, you will rejoice that you followed my directions."

"Then I will be guided by you, for you can have no end of your own to gain by proposing such a course."

"None whatever, believe me."

"Then I consent."

"That is sufficient. Remain where you are a moment while I make the requisite arrangements."

Jack dismounted, and led his steed to the side of the road, where some short, sweet grass was growing, and which he fell to eating with great apparent relish.

Convinced that he would not stray far from that spot, Jack troubled no further about him.

Breaking open the valise, he found it contained a large sum in gold, neatly tied up into little cylindrical parcels.

Taking two of these, Jack closed the valise and strapped it on to the saddle.

Then going to the coachman, he said—

"Look here, coachy; you have acted like a sensible man in this affair. Do you see this? Take it."

Jack held out one of the little packets.

"They are guineas," he said; "twenty, at least. Put them in your pocket—they are yours."

Rather amazed at this unexpected piece of good fortune, the coachman stared at the highwayman.

But he consigned the guineas to his pocket for all that.

"Of course you understand I shall want you to do something for the money I have just given you."

The coachman nodded.

"I want you to turn back and drive to London with all speed. The young lady will give you further directions when you arrive there. Do you consent?"

"In course I do; leastways, that's if Jem is agreeable."

"Who's Jem?—the postilion?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. I will soon make it all right with him."

Sixteen-String Jack now made his way up to the postilion, to whom he gave the second packet of guineas.

He had no trouble in getting him to consent.

All this being arranged, Jack prepared to turn back to the chaise, when he was startled by a rapid succession of piercing screams.

Beyond all doubt they came from the interior of the vehicle.

"The old gentleman's up to some of his devilment," he muttered, as he hastened towards the door.

To open it was the work of a moment only, and then his eyes fell upon a scene which fairly took him by surprise.

The old gentleman who Jack thought was lying insensible at the bottom of the post-chaise, was now on his legs again, and really looking very little the worse for the hard tap on the head he had received.

So completely was his attention occupied by what he was about that he did not notice the opening of the door.

"So, so, you jade! you Jezebel!" he screamed. "That is the way you behave, is it? Very fine to rob me! But you shall smart for it! Don't think you are going to have things all your own way! Take that, and that! Curse you! Take that!"

While speaking these words, the old wretch had thrust his fingers into the young girl's beautiful hair, and, with the other hand, he struck her some heavy blows in the face.

But not for long was he permitted to exercise his brutality.

With a cry of anger, Jack scrambled into the vehicle, and seized him behind by the collar with a grasp that would have required ten times the strength the old man possessed to shake off.

"You abominable old rascal!" cried Sixteen-String Jack, in tones of the greatest rage. "Take that, and that, you wretch, and tell me how you like it!"

The old man uttered a howl of rage and pain, and released his hold of the young girl's hair.

"Under any other circumstances I should have scorned to touch you," said Sixteen-String Jack. "But I could not keep my hands off you, when I saw you ill-treating this lady in such a brutal manner. Have you not done her enough injury already?"

A regular coward was this old man.

He made no attempt to strike Jack, or even to struggle with him, but cowered down tremblingly, while he prayed that his life might be spared.

"I'll teach you a lesson," said Jack, "and one that you won't forget in a hurry, I'll be bound."

"Mercy! mercy!"

"Lots of that."

The old man groaned.

"Come along," cried Jack, "you shan't encumber this post-chaise any longer."

As he spoke, the highwayman began to drag him out violently.

He uttered dismal howls and shrieks, and strove to save himself by clutching at the cushions.

But it was all in vain.

The bare idea of setting his strength in opposition to Jack's was ridiculous.

In another moment he was in the road.

The young girl—we do not like to call her his wife—came to the door of the post chaise.

She seemed sick and faint, and her face exhibited palpable signs of the brutal ill-treatment she had received.

Nevertheless she pleaded for him.

"Do not injure him," she cried. "Do not injure him! I forgive him freely. Keep him secure while I depart, and nothing more.

"Do you hear that, you hoary-headed old villain?" said Jack, as he shook him violently to and fro. "Do you hear that? If anything would make you ashamed of yourself, that ought to do so. Do you hear, you old miscreant?"

"Mercy! mercy!"

"Oh! you may depend upon having plenty of that. And now, lady, commence your journey; and, as you value your future happiness, do not lose a moment. The coachman will drive you back to London, and, when once you are there, you must give him further instructions."

"Thanks—thanks," said the young girl, weeping freely. "You have been a friend in need to me. You appeared when I least expected one. Keep this in remembrance of me."

The young girl took from her finger a ring, which she handed to the highwayman, who accepted it with a bow.

"Farewell," he said. "I hope your future will be as happy as the present is wretched."

"Farewell," she cried. "I shall never forget you."

"Drive on, coachman," cried Jack. "To London with you as fast as your horses will take you."

The coachman flourished his whip, and in less than another moment the post-chaise disappeared round a curve in the road.

Jack looked after it until he could see it no longer, and then he turned to the old man, who, he had agreed, should not overtake the young girl.

He had watched the disappearance of the chaise in silence, but, as soon as he perceived the highwayman turn round wrathfully towards him, he sank down upon his knees, and sued for mercy in the most abject manner.

Sixteen-String Jack took no notice whatever of his appeal, except that he tightened his grasp somewhat.

He looked all around him at the different objects by which he was surrounded with a meditative air.

Suddenly, however, he heard the dull trampling of horses' feet in the distance, and, after listening a moment, he said—

"The dragoons, I fancy. I must be careful, or I shall get into trouble yet."

CHAPTER CCCCLXV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK DISPOSES OF THE OLD GENTLEMAN IN A VERY CLEVER AND INGENIOUS MANNER INDEED.

EVIDENTLY the old man heard the sounds which indicated the approach of several horsemen, for he assumed a listening attitude, and at the same time threw off a great deal of his abjectness.

He had everything to hope from any persons who came by, and he trusted that he should be rescued from an un-

pleasant position, for he had made up his mind that he was about to be subjected to a great deal of ill-usage.

Sixteen-String Jack, however, was not likely to allow those who were coming to interfere with his proceedings, and he at once made up his mind as to the course he should pursue.

It was quite conjectural on his part when he said that those who were coming were dragoons.

This was, however, most likely correct, and therefore it behoved him to get out of the way.

The greatest necessity existed for him to be speedy in all his movements, for it was evident, from the sound of the horses' hoofs, that the riders were not far off and were coming at a sharp trot, so that they would soon reach the spot upon which he stood.

Upon the spur of the moment, Sixteen-String Jack could think of no better plan than that of getting behind the hedge, and by threats compelling the old man to be silent until the dragoons had passed.

The difficulty was how to do this.

The hedgerows on both sides of the road were high and very thickly planted, so that there was no hope whatever of being able to force a way through them.

His only hope was that there was a gate not far off.

In this hope he compelled the old man to follow him along the road while he also led his horse by the bridle.

To his great joy he perceived a large white gate a little further on.

Upon reaching it he felt about for the fastenings, and found them of the simplest character, consisting merely of a hasp and staple through which an iron pin, attached by a chain to the gate post, was passed.

Jack opened this gate in a moment, and, passing through, closed it after him and replaced the fastenings.

Then, holding the old man by the back of his collar with one hand, and the bridle of his horse with the other, the highwayman led the way along the meadow, keeping as close as possible under the hedge.

After going a little way, he came to a halt.

The dragoons were now not many yards off.

Securing his horse to a stout twig, Jack took from his pocket a loaded pistol.

He cocked it instantaneously.

Then, thrusting the muzzle somewhat roughly into the old man's ear, he said—

"Now, I am a man that when I say a thing I fully mean it, so just listen to me. You may think of calling out to those who are approaching and so attracting them to our hiding-place, but you had better forego any such intention, for, as sure as you make the attempt, I will blow your brains out."

The old man gnashed his teeth.

"It is a disappointment to you, I daresay, but you must not think that you have a fool to deal with. I have a great mind to blow your brains out now without further provocation, and if you raise your voice to a whisper or make any sound likely to attract notice, that moment I shall pull the trigger, so beware."

Jack said no more, for the dragoons were now so close that they might have heard his voice.

Sixteen-String Jack had but little doubt that if he kept perfectly still, the dragoons would pass by unsuspectingly.

The hedge did not grow so thickly as to prevent him from seeing into the road, and so he turned his face in that direction.

The old man trembled and shook.

But he was perfectly silent.

Something in the tone of the highwayman's voice, and in his manner, told him he was in earnest, and that he would neither scruple nor hesitate to carry his threat into effect.

A glance through the hedge now showed Sixteen-String Jack that the horsemen were really dragoons.

They were chatting carelessly to each other, though he could not tell what they said.

To his joy they all passed by, and in a little while were out of hearing.

"That danger is over," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and now, sir, rise and follow me. I must dispose of you somehow or other, and prevent your making a pursuit after the post-chaise."

"Let me go, let me go," said the old man; "I won't trouble her any further. I did not call out, you know."

"And a good job for yourself that you did not, let me tell you. However, make no more bother. Rise, I say, and follow me."

With many groans the old man rose to his feet.

Jack untied his horses and led him by the bridle, and the old man by the collar as before.

He was rather at a loss how to dispose of him so as to make it out of his power to commence a pursuit with any chance of success.

In the hope, however, that ere long he should be able to find out something that would answer his purpose, he directed his steps across the meadow, preserving a direction that would take him back to the deserted mansion.

In this manner the meadow was crossed, and another, and another beyond it.

Jack was beginning to get tired of this sort of fun, but still he could not see any place where he could dispose of the old man.

Suddenly, however, he perceived in the distance a windmill.

He changed his course, and made straight for it at once.

Here he fancied he would be able to imprison his companion for a length of time sufficient to answer his purpose.

Upon a nearer approach, however, Jack saw what he had at first failed to notice, namely, that the building seemed to be in the last stage of decay.

This did not matter much; perhaps it was even better.

Ere long the mill was reached.

Jack's first care was to secure his horse, and when that was done he looked about him for some means of gaining admission to the interior of the mill.

A slight examination showed him a flight of crazy-looking steps which led up to a door.

So insecure, however, did they appear that he hesitated to risk his neck by attempting to ascend them, but as he could not perceive any other means of entrance he was forced to try it.

His companion, too, seemed to have the greatest possible amount of objection to ascend the ruinous steps, but he was compelled to yield to the wishes of his captor.

The steps creaked ominously beneath their tread, but did not give way.

Jack dealt the door at the top a kick, to which it at once yielded.

It flew open, disclosing an intensely dark space beyond.

There was a level floor beyond the threshold, and on to this Jack stepped, though not without due caution.

By pushing the door open to its extreme width, he was able to obtain sufficient light to see about him.

He was in a chamber the full size of the mill, in the centre of which he could just perceive the dark outline of the machinery.

It was Jack's intention to convert the windmill, for the time being, into a prison, though he could not at present see how he should be able to secure his prisoner in such a way as to render it impossible for him to make his escape.

A slight search, however, showed him some sacks, and the brilliant idea of putting the old man into one of them at once occurred to him.

It would be necessary, of course, to bind his hands, but this there would be little difficulty about, for Jack had some cord in his pocket that would answer the purpose admirably.

No sooner did this thought occur to Jack than he proceeded to put it in execution.

So dexterously did he perform the feat of binding the old man's arms behind his back, that it was done before he was aware of it.

He beheld this proceeding with dismay, and wondered what would be done next.

He was not long left in doubt.

Jack picked up one of the sacks and slipped it over his head in a moment.

The old man struggled desperately, but all to no purpose.

Jack tripped him up, and he fell rather heavily to the floor.

The next thing that the highwayman did was to pull the sack over his feet and carefully secure the mouth of it with some cord.

A dismal howl came from within.

Taking no notice of it, however, Jack dragged the sack along the floor as though it contained so much grain, and

finally deposited it in the most distant corner he could find.

"There," he said, "you won't trouble any one for some time to come, I rather think. When the miller comes he will be too frightened to let you out, and I should not be at all surprised if the mill was to be set down as haunted from this day. Good-bye to you. I'm off."

The old man addressed something to the highwayman in a supplicating tone of voice.

But he took no notice of it.

Cautiously making his way to the door, which he closed behind him, Jack descended the crazy steps, and in another moment was by the side of his horse.

He stood as though about to mount, and fell into a train of thought.

"What shall I do now?" he said to himself. "I have had a strange adventure, but I think a profitable one. So far as I can judge this valise contains a large sum of money. I think, therefore, that under the circumstances, the best thing I can do is to let well alone, and make my way back to the deserted mansion with all speed. I will go straight across the country. That will be safest. And I shall have no time to spare," he added, as he looked up to the sky. "I shall have to make good speed to reach my destination before dawn."

This was true.

Sixteen-String Jack had a long way to go, and the night was much further advanced than he had thought for.

The adventure with the post-chaise had occupied a great deal of time.

Having made up his mind as to what he should do, Jack sprang lightly to the saddle, and took his way at a hard gallop over the meadows.

By adopting this course he was well aware he was much less liable to meet with any interruption.

Nor was he likely to encounter the dragoons, whose duty consisted simply in patrolling the high roads.

He had a long ride before him, but he performed it without meeting with any accident, and without the occurrence of any incident that deserves record.

On his way, his thoughts were pretty well employed in thinking over the details of his strange adventure.

He rejoiced at the part he had taken in the affair, for he could not think of the beautiful young girl becoming an inmate of the old man's house without a feeling of abhorrence.

Most fervently did he wish that she would find her lover, and that they would both succeed in leaving England before the old man had time to prevent them from doing so.

That they would be happy he had little or no doubt.

The adventure was a pleasing one, not only on account of the service he had been able to render the lady, but also because he had obtained a larger booty than he had for a moment hoped for.

Occupied with these reflections, he passed through the gates leading to the deserted mansion in safety, and having attended to his horse, ascended the stairs, and found Maud and Claude Duval awaiting him.

Tom King had not returned.

CHAPTER CCCCLXVI.

TOM KING SETS OUT ON HIS EXPEDITION, AND HAS A RARE ADVENTURE WITH THE TWO TRAVELLERS, BUT IS FORCED TO FLY FOR HIS LIFE.

HAVING brought the adventures of Sixteen-String Jack up to this point, it is now necessary that we should, for a time, follow the fortunes of Tom King, and relate what occurred to him on that eventful night.

After parting with his comrade, Tom trotted up to the top of the lane.

Here he paused, reflectively.

"What shall be the scene of my doings to-night?" he muttered. "I ought to have asked Jack which way he intended to take. It won't do for us both to be on the same road. Which way shall I go?"

Tom King could not make up his mind for several minutes, but at last he said—

"At all risks, I will try the Oxford-road. We have not visited it lately, and I am almost sure to find a better booty there than anywhere else. It shall be the Oxford-road."

Having made up his mind to this point, Tom King set spurs to his horse, and went off in the direction of his destination.

He avoided the high roads, because of the danger there was of falling in with some of the troops of dragoons.

But although this was a safe course, it was not a profitable one, for in the narrow lanes along which he took his way, there was but little likelihood of meeting with a traveller.

Without any accident, Tom King at length gained the Oxford-road.

He emerged into it some little distance above the toll-gate at Tyburn, now long since swept away.

At this hour of the night the gate was closed.

Tom rode up to it boldly enough, and knocked smartly against the door of the wooden toll-house with his whip.

An irascible-looking man opened the door in response to the summons.

"Tuppence! tuppence!" he cried.

"All right," cried Tom. "Open the gate, and when you see me again just recollect me. Here's a guinea for you."

As Tom spoke, he placed in the man's hand the coin he had mentioned.

The toll-taker touched his hat and opened the gate.

"I'll recollect you, sir. The guinea won't be thrown away. Perhaps, some time or other it might answer my purpose to fumble with the lock, or drop the key, or something of that sort, if anyone was in a particular hurry to come through."

"You would find such a thing answer your purpose very well," replied Tom King. "It would pay you better than taking your share of the reward among the officers."

"Oh! cuss them officers, say I. They are more trouble to me than a little. They calls me up at all manner of hours, and passes through without so much as tipping a fellow a blesssed mag."

"It's just like them," said Tom King. "They are a shabby set of rascals, every one of them."

"They are—they are."

"Do you think you should know me again?"

"Well, rather, I should think."

"Then, if I want to come through in a hurry some night, it will pay you better to let me do so than to try and stop me."

"Lor' bless you, sir, I knows that."

"Good night, then. There is another guinea for you, and don't forget I am out on the Oxford-road to-night, and may have to return this way."

"Good night, sir, and many thanks to you," said the toll-keeper, respectfully.

In another moment Tom King had passed through the gate, and was trotting swiftly along the road.

The highwayman was well enough pleased to find that the toll-taker was inclined to behave in so friendly a manner towards him, and considered the two guineas he had given him as money well invested.

Tom King was well aware how advantageous it was to have a toll-keeper for a friend; for to be able to pass through the gate quickly and unmolested would probably be equivalent to escaping death or capture.

Moreover, as the man had himself hinted, it would be in his power to delay the officers for a minute or two should he be hard pressed, and a minute's delay at such a crisis is a very important thing indeed.

Keeping a keen look out on both sides of him, and well enough satisfied with what he had done so far, Tom King kept steadily along the broad, level Oxford-road.

Ere long the heavy grating of wheels made itself heard, and the next moment the highwayman perceived in the distance the flashing of two star-like lights.

"What is this, I wonder?" he said. "It promises to be an adventure. I will draw on one side and see."

With these words Tom King backed his horse under the hedge on one side of the road and waited.

Louder and louder grew the crushing, grinding sound which the wheels produced, and which is so plainly audible in quiet country places.

What kind of vehicle it was that was approaching London at this rapid rate, Tom King knew not until he heard a long winding blast upon a horn.

"The Oxford coach, beyond all doubt," he muttered. "That blast upon the horn is no doubt a signal to the toll-keeper at Tyburn. I will let it pass. A coach on a well-patrolled road is too dangerous a thing to be meddled with single-handed. It goes against the grain to let it pass, but on this occasion I am inclined to think discretion the better part of valour. I will ride on and let it pass."

Under the circumstances, we think this was a very wise and prudent resolution for Tom King to come to

As he spoke he left his place of concealment, and rode quietly along the road.

It was not long before he met the rapidly-advancing stage-coach, which was, as he had expected, the Oxford mail.

It seemed to be full both inside and out, and rolled by with great velocity.

In an instant it was far behind.

Tom King did not like to allow anything to pass him, but on the present occasion the risk was too great.

"Never mind," he muttered, by way of consoling himself. "I shall not go far along this road without meeting with something worth taking, I know."

He trotted on very leisurely.

Contrary to his expectations, he went some distance further without meeting with anyone, and he was beginning to grow very impatient, when all at once the clatter of horses' hoofs reached his ears.

"Now for an adventure," he said, as he settled himself more firmly in the saddle, and drew a pistol from the holsters.

Tom trotted on in the same unconcerned manner as heretofore, keeping as well as he could in the centre of the road.

In a few moments he perceived something dusky in advance, which almost immediately afterwards resolved itself into the forms of two horsemen.

"The devil!" said Tom. "I am not in luck's way to-night, that is certain. Why don't they separate? However, I don't intend to let them pass me untried, although it is not the easiest thing in the world to stop two mounted men at once."

This was obviously true, but Tom King resolved to make the attempt in spite of the difficulty.

The advancing travellers, perceiving the manner in which he monopolized the centre of the road, drew on one side in order to allow him to pass.

But, to their unbounded astonishment, instead of doing this, Tom King wheeled his horse before them and paused suddenly.

Both were compelled to draw rein in order to avoid a collision, and under the impulse of the moment, they did so.

Tom King dropped the reins, and, producing a couple of pistols, held one at each of their heads, crying aloud as he did so—

"Stand! or you are dead men. Stand and deliver! Your money or your life!"

So suddenly was all this done, that the travellers had no time to recover from the surprise into which they had been thrown.

But the last words the highwayman uttered seemed to have the effect of restoring them to their senses, for one said—

"This is cool, d—n me if it isn't."

"No foolery," said Tom King. "If you like to hand me your purses, well and good; if you do not, you must take the consequences."

"And so must you," said the other traveller, who produced a pistol with great swiftness, and levelling it at the person of the highwayman, pulled the trigger.

But the ill-made fire-arm only flashed in the pan, as the old flint-and-steel pistols often did.

Had it not been for this chance circumstance, Tom could not have escaped a serious, if not fatal, wound.

Luckily he was unhurt.

Preserving his coolness, he said—

"I forgive your attack upon me on condition that you drop the pistol at once."

The traveller obeyed.

But his fellow-companion, perceiving how Tom's attention was distracted from him, also drew a pistol, and was in the act of taking aim with it, when Tom saw what he was about.

As quick as thought he struck the traveller's arm upwards.

He was just in time.

The pistol exploded with a loud report, but the bullet with which it was charged wounded nothing but the air.

"Go on, gentlemen," said Tom King, with a coolness which had something unnatural about it. "When you have done making a noise with those playthings we will proceed to business."

"You are a bold rascal," said the one whose pistol had flashed in the pan. "Here, take my purse; you deserve it."

He handed Tom a purse as he spoke.

Tom took it, and consigned it to his pocket with an air of great satisfaction.

"And here is mine," said the other traveller; "and after that I hope you will allow us to pass on in safety."

"In a moment," said Tom King, as he pocketed the second purse; "but the fact is I have a perfect mania for jewellery—a perfect mania, I assure you. I perceive you both carry watches. I must really trouble you to hand them to me."

"Well, d—n your impudence!" they both cried. "What next?"

"One thing at a time is my motto," said Tom. "Be quick, or"——

The highwayman paused suddenly.

The two travellers uttered cries of satisfaction.

Then there came a loud shout, and the rush of many horses.

Tom looked before him, and could just distinguish, though dimly, the outlines of a body of horsemen.

"The dragoons!" he cried.

At the same moment he turned his horse's head towards London, and, clapping spurs to his horse's sides, set off at a gallop that seemed to bid defiance to all pursuit.

The travellers drew on one side quickly, as they shouted—

"A highwayman! a highwayman! After him! Quick! quick! A highwayman!"

The troop of dragoons, for such they were, needed no cries on the part of the travellers to urge them to greater exertions.

Already they were flying along at the very top of their speed, their accoutrements making a jingling accompaniment.

Before them they could plainly see the outline of Tom's form, and they called aloud upon him to stop.

Of such a demand as this the reader may be sure Tom took no notice.

Away he went, intent only upon one thing.

That was to urge his horse forward at its utmost speed.

"On! on!" cried the chief officer of the troop of dragoons. "On! on! Do not flag! Spare neither whip nor spur! Tyburn toll-gate is only a little way further on, and there we shall have him, you may depend. Forward! forward!"

Encouraged by these words, the dragoons goaded their horses in a still more dreadful manner than before, in the hope of coming up with the object of their pursuit when he reached the toll-gate.

But they could not conceal from themselves the unpleasant fact that in spite of all their efforts the highwayman was rapidly increasing the distance between them, until he got out of sight, and out of hearing, too.

Under the belief, however, that they should come up with him at the toll-gate, they increased rather than relaxed their exertions.

CHAPTER CCCCLXVII.

TOM KING HAS GOOD REASON TO REJOICE AT HAVING CONCILIATED THE TOLL-KEEPER, AND FINDS HIM A FRIEND IN NEED.

UNDOUBTEDLY the best thing Tom King could do, was to turn and fly in the manner we have described.

The road was smooth and level, so he was not afraid to urge his horse to put forth his utmost speed.

There was only one thing that Tom King wished, and that was that he was flying towards the country, and not towards London as he was.

Had it been the former, he would have stood a much better chance of getting off.

The hedges on both sides of him were of such a height as to make leaping them quite out of the question.

The only thing that gave the flying highwayman any

consolation, was that he was rapidly out-distancing his pursuers—so rapidly as to make it a matter of no doubt that he would escape them altogether.

But there was this danger to be considered.

The troop at his heels was only one of several that would be posted along the Oxford-road, and, if he kept on to a certain distance, he would run full tilt into another troop.

Should he do this, his position would be perilous and awkward in the extreme.

Death or capture was the certain result.

How was he to escape this hideous danger?

He could not go to the right or to the left.

If he kept on, he would encounter another troop.

If he held back, he would be overtaken by those in the rear.

Truly was Tom King in a serious dilemma, and he glanced anxiously from side to side, unable to tell what to do.

Suddenly he came in sight of the white toll-gate stretching across the road.

He congratulated himself upon having made friends with the toll-man in the way he had, for he made sure of being able to pass through quickly, while his pursuers would be detained as long as possible.

But, in reality, this was not much.

Tom King, in fact, began to despair.

In another moment he reached the toll-gate.

Scarcely had he reined in his horse, than the toll-keeper came forth.

"You are soon back again, captain," he said, as he thrust his key into the padlock with which the gate was secured.

"Yes—yes. Be quick; I am hard pressed. There's a troop of dragoons in full cry after me."

"The devil there is, captain. But just listen to me a moment."

"I cannot. Every moment is of inestimable value."

"I know that. But let me tell you that if you keep on along the road towards London you will overtake another troop of dragoons in less than five minutes."

While speaking these words, the toll-keeper had opened the gate and Tom had passed through.

The highwayman was about to clap spurs to his steed and gallop on, when the words uttered by the toll-man came upon his ears.

He paused at once.

"I must fight it out," he said, "and I may as well do it here as anywhere else. Hark! they come."

The dull sound made by the hoofs of the dragoons' horses striking the ground came with painful plainness upon their ears.

"Hi! captain—captain!" said the toll-keeper, as he locked the gate again, so that there was one obstacle between Tom and his foes. "I s look here; don't go for to talk of fighting it out with a lot of sojers. Why, they would shoot you as dead as a nut."

"I can't help it," replied Tom King, re-priming his pistols. "Flight is fruitless, and I will not yield without a struggle."

"Listen to me, captain, and I'll toll you what to do."

"What? what?"

"Why, I will show you how the toll will bilk the dragoons, for the dragoons have bilked the toll many a time."

The toll-taker seemed to think this an excellent joke, and laughed at it heartily.

"Now, captain," he cried, "are you a mind to trust me? If you are, say the word, and I'll guarantee to get you out of this fix. Be quick! or else it will be too late."

"I will trust you," said Tom; "and if you really do show me a way to escape, you shall have something more substantial than my thanks for a reward."

"All right, then. There's no time to explain, but you leave all to me with confidence. Jump off your horse. Be quick! the dragoons will be upon us in another moment, and if you are seen the scheme won't answer."

Tom hesitated to dismount, but something in the toll-keeper's manner made him think he was sincere, so he hastily slipped out of the saddle.

What the toll-keeper intended to do, or how he was to achieve his escape, he had not the remotest idea.

"Take your horse by the bridle, and follow me," said the toll-man, speaking with extreme rapidity. "Make haste, or you will be too late, after all."

Tom did not want urging.

The dragoons he could see were not many yards distant.

The toll-taker led the way to the door of his little wooden house in the centre of the road.

Tom followed him closely, leading his horse by the bridle, as he had been requested.

"Come in, captain, come in," cried the toll-keeper. "The place is just big enough. Come in."

Tom obeyed, and led his horse into a small room, which was barely large enough to hold them all three.

The toll-keeper shut the door.

"What do you intend to do now?" asked Tom King, who felt far from comfortable in his present quarters. "Give me an insight into your plan."

"All right. When the dragoons come, I shall"——

At this moment there was a sudden uproar outside.

There came the sound of many loud voices.

The trampling of horses' feet, as the animals were hastily brought to a standstill.

Then succeeded a terrific banging with the butt-ends of carbines upon the wooden walls of the toll-house.

They were delivered with almost sufficient violence to batter them down.

"Open! open!" cried a stentorian voice. "Gate! gate! Open, I say!"

The toll-keeper turned towards Tom King, and placed his finger in a very waggish manner by the side of his nose.

"All right," he whispered. "Leave me to settle them. The only thing you've got to do is to remain perfectly quiet and silent. Don't move, and don't let your horse move, as you value your life!"

Bang! bang! bang! came the knocking again.

Then the same stentorian voice renewed a demand for the gate to be opened.

The toll-keeper sallied forth.

"Hullo! hullo!" he said. "What the devil's the matter? Are you going to knock the house down? What's the matter?"

"Open the gate, you idiot!" roared the chief officer, "and be quick about it. We are after a highwayman, you dolt! and if we don't make haste, we shall not overtake him."

"Oh! all right, all right," said the toll-keeper, advancing with the key in his hand. "You quite scared me. I could not think what was the matter for a moment or two. There you are, sir."

The toll-keeper opened the gate as he spoke, and the dragoons passed through.

"Did you say you were after a highwayman, sir?" he cried.

"Yes—yes! Have you seen him?"

"I don't know."

"Has he passed here?"

"How can I tell? Just listen a minute. Is he a dashing captain sort of chap, mounted on a beautiful bay horse that can fly over the ground like a deer?"

"Yes—yes! He outrun us. Have you seen him?"

"Well, I seed a chap about ten minutes ago, or maybe more. He was what I describe, and mounted on a bay."

"Go on—go on."

"I is going on, isn't I? Well, I heerd somebody coming, and I looked out and saw him. A dashing captain sort of chap, mounted on a beautiful bay horse."

"D—n you, you said that before."

"Oh! did I? Well, on he came, like the wind, and when he came to the gate, instead of stopping and axing me to open it for him, as I thought he would, he didn't draw in a bit, but gives a kind of a whistle, and up went the horse in the air, and dropped down on this side of the gate."

"He jumped the gate, then?"

"Yes, he did, cuss him!"

"What next?"

"Why, away he went up the road towards London, as though the devil was at his heels. Tuppence!" I cries, "tuppence! but, cuss me, if he took any notice whatsomever."

"Come on, my men," cried the officer of dragoons. "This is important information. Our horses have breathed a little. Forward—forward! We shall not overtake the rascal, but we shall be in at the death, for if he keeps along the road he will fall foul of Godfrey's troop, and then it would be all over with him. Forward—forward!"

The chief officer set the example of pushing on at a gallop, and in another moment the dragoons were far away down the road.

The toll-keeper, as soon as they were at a safe distance, went through some rather remarkable evolutions.

In the first place, he put the end of his thumb against the tip of his nose, and spread out his fingers fanwise.

Then he expanded his cheeks with wind, and suddenly put both hands to his sides.

Then his whole body shook violently, and though no sound came from his lips, it was evident he was enjoying a hearty laugh at the expense of the dragoons.

The capers he cut were really fantastic; but after a moment or two he ceased, and then entered the toll-house.

The moment he opened the door, Tom King sprang forward and clasped him by the hand.

"Thanks! thanks!" he said. "You have, indeed, saved my life! A thousand thanks! The scheme was a most excellent one."

"How jolly green they must be! But, captain?"

"What?"

"If you are to be safe and keep me out of trouble you must be off at once."

"I would not compromise you for worlds."

"That's a crackjaw sort of a word; but never mind, I know what you mean well enough. You push right on towards Oxford as quick as you can, for they will soon find out that you have not gone towards London. They will overtake the other troop immediately."

"I hope you will not be suspected of what you have done."

"Oh! never fear. I have only got to swear that I saw you, and stick to it. They will think you took to the meadows, or something of that sort."

"True, true. So they will. My best thanks, however, are your due. Without your aid I do not see how I could possibly have escaped."

"Well, do not linger. You cannot tell how soon they may return, and the further you are off the better."

"I will go at once; and to prove to you that I appreciate the service you have rendered me, take these two purses, and make the best use you can of their contents. I don't know how much there is, but when I come by this way again I shan't forget you."

"Thanks," said the toll-keeper, as he pocketed the purses. "Now, then, be off with you."

"Lead the way, then."

Tom King took his horse by the bridle and followed his new friend out into the open air.

He mounted immediately.

"Good-bye, captain," cried the toll-taker, as he opened the gate. "Push on as fast as you can. You have nothing to fear from me. I won't set the dragoons upon your track."

"I know that," said Tom King. "Good night. The next time I come by I shall remember you."

CHAPTER CCCCLXVIII.

TOM KING RESCUES A LADY FROM TWO FOOTPADS, AND FALLS INTO A TERRIBLE DANGER HIMSELF.

With these words, Tom King pressed his horse into a gallop, and in a few minutes the toll-gate was left behind.

"That's what I call a lucky escape," he said to himself. "I knew it was good policy to be friends with the toll-keeper, but I did not think he would be in a position to render me a service so soon. He has saved my life, that is certain, and I will show him that I know how to be grateful for it."

The highwayman now began to look rather anxiously about him in the hope that he should see a chance of taking another booty, for though his former adventure had been a profitable one, yet, as he had given the toll-taker both the purses which had been surrendered to him, he was no richer than he was before.

Tom was not forgetful of his object in taking to the road, and as the night was rapidly fleeting away, it would be necessary for him to make use of the time intervening between then and daybreak.

From some reason or other, however, the Oxford-road was on this night more deserted than he had ever remembered to have found it.

He rode on for a long distance without meeting with a soul.

Every now and then he would draw rein, and compel his horse to halt for a moment.

Then he would listen for some sound that would foretell a traveller's approach.

But in vain.

He was now beginning to regret that he had allowed the stage-coach to pass him unmolested.

While his mind was occupied with these regrets, he once more brought his steed to a standstill.

Even as he did so, there came upon his ears a loud and piercing shriek.

The cry evidently came from female lips, and from some distance in advance.

Another and another shriek followed in rapid succession.

"This promises an adventure," cried Tom King; and as he spoke the words he clapped spurs to his horse's sides and galloped at full speed along the road.

In less than a moment he perceived something in the distance, which at once had the effect of bringing an angry exclamation to his lips.

In the road before him was a lady seated upon a beautiful bay horse.

She was struggling desperately with two men.

The horse was plunging and rearing in a manner that threatened to throw his rider.

But she maintained her seat admirably.

She was attacked by two rough-looking men, one of whom held her steed by the bridle, while the other seized her violently by the arm and held a pistol in a threatening manner towards her.

Well might such a spectacle as this call forth an angry ejaculation from the lips of Tom King.

What could be more cowardly than for a couple of great, hulking fellows to dart out upon a young and defenceless girl and threaten her in the manner they evidently were.

It was part of Tom King's creed always to treat the fair sex with chivalrousness, and no female stood in need of a protector while he was by.

No matter how great the danger was to himself, he would have defended them without hesitation.

But, to waylay and rob a solitary, unprotected female, was in the highwayman's eyes a crime of no common magnitude.

He was rejoiced to think that fortune had favoured him so far as to permit him to be on the road when such an outrage took place.

As he made his horse fly over the ground, he produced a couple of pistols, which he cocked ready for immediate service.

The thundering sound of his horse's hoofs reached the ears of the two villains, and they looked up aghast.

But Tom was upon them in a moment.

"Dastardly cowards," he said, at the top of his voice; "release the lady, or you are both dead men."

"Help—help!" cried the lady on the horse, who felt inspired with fresh courage when she heard Tom King's voice, and witnessed his intrepid behaviour.

"Hold the gal, Joe," cried one of the ruffians; "and I'll soon settle this young spark's hash for him. I'll learn him to come interfering."

"Will you, indeed?" said Tom King, as the man came towards him. "Perhaps you will take that, and tell me whether you would like any more of the same article."

As he asked this question, Tom King struck the man a couple of terrific blows on the head with the butt-end of one of his pistols.

The first blow made him reel, and upon receiving the second he fell prostrate in the roadway.

The man who had been called Joe by his companion, uttered an angry shout when he saw the fate of his comrade, and, releasing his hold of the lady's bridle, he seized a gun which was resting against the trunk of a huge tree that grew by the roadside.

He grasped the gun by the barrel, for that was the part that came readiest to his hand, and swinging it round his head, made a blow at Tom King before he was aware of the attack that was thus made upon him.

By a nimble movement he escaped the blow; but the stock of the fowling-piece alighted rather heavily upon his horse's neck.

The man finding he had missed his aim, gave vent to another ejaculation of rage, and, recovering his weapon, swung it round his head a second time.

Tom's blood was now fully up, and before the man could bring the gun down, he raised a pistol rapidly to a level and fired.

The report was rather tremendous, and the lady uttered another scream. It was echoed by one from the man, who threw up his arms wildly, and then fell to the earth, where he writhed about in a manner that was horrible to witness. Tom King having thus disposed of his two assailants, turned round to the lady on whose behalf he had been thus exerting himself.

By the time he did so, she had succeeded in calming her steed, which was now as quiet and docile as it had before been restive and unmanageable.

"Thanks, sir—thanks," she cried, as Tom King approached her. "I know not how to express the extent of my gratitude. You have done me a service which I can never repay, and a service, too, of a much more important character than it can possibly appear to be."

"No more thanks, lady," said Tom King, as he took off his hat and made a respectful bow. No more thanks. The service which I have rendered you is one which anyone, gifted with a spark of manly feeling, would perform."

"Still I cannot help feeling very — very grateful," replied the lady, "although I am at a loss how to express myself."

"Do not trouble yourself to do so," said Tom King, gaily. "You are heartily welcome to the service which I have performed for you, and if there is anything else that lies in my power to do, command me freely."

Tom King made another low bow as he spoke.

The lady acknowleged the salute by an inclination of the head.

"I thank you," she said, gently; "but there is nothing more."

"Pardon me," said Tom King; "but I ought to have asked you the question before. Have you received any injury at the hands of those men?"

"No; I am unhurt."

"That is fortunate; not only for you, but for them. They should have suffered dearly for any violence."

"They are already punished."

"But not half as they deserve to be. And now, lady, one question more. Do you journey further along this road?"

"Only a short distance."

"Then, if that is the case," said Tom King, "as I am travelling in the same direction, perhaps you would permit me to become your escort."

"If such is the case, I shall only be too glad to avail myself of your protection, for I confess I am greatly alarmed by what has just taken place."

"No doubt—no doubt. Have you recovered sufficiently to resume your journey?"

"Yes—yes. Oh! yes. I wish to push onward without loss of time."

"I am ready, then."

The lady set her steed in motion, and at a gentle trot the pair took their way along the broad Oxford-road.

That Tom King was running a very great amount of danger by offering to be this lady's escort, the reader will not require to be told, though from his calm demeanour no one would have suspected it. Under the circumstances, however, he could scarcely avoid making such an offer.

After a slight pause, the lady spoke:

"I accept of your protection with all the greatest readiness and gratitude," she said, "because what has happened makes me fearful of further interruption."

"Indeed," said Tom King, as he looked to his pistols.

"Yes, and when I said a little while ago that you had rendered me a more important service than you imagined, what I meant was that it is highly necessary that I should reach my destination with all possible speed, and had it not been for your fortunate presence, I should have been much delayed."

"I see! I see. Would you like to increase your pace?"

"Not just yet. I have scarcely recovered from my fright."

"It was a dastardly attack," said Tom King. "I suppose plunder was their object."

"I suppose so; but it is more than I can tell. It may be that it was intended to delay my return to the hall. I have come at full speed from London."

"There is a mystery here," muttered Tom King to himself, whose curiosity was greatly roused by the words which had just been uttered—"there is a mystery here, and it will go hard with me if I do not penetrate it."

Then in a louder tone of voice he added:

"What were their motives for such a cowardly attack doesn't matter. They fully deserve the punishment which they have received. As for any other attack, I think you may make yourself easy."

"Thanks—thanks! It is not far that I have to go, and——"

"Hark!" said Tom King, suddenly. "What was that?"

"What?—what?"

"Do you not hear it?" said Tom King. "Someone comes."

And now there rose upon the still night air the unmistakable sounds of horses' hoofs. They were approaching, and evidently in great numbers.

Something in Tom King's manner must have struck the lady as being strange, for she looked at him keenly for some moments in silence.

Then, when the sound grew more and more distinct, she said:

"All is well—all is well. Now, I know those sounds well. It is the dragoons who patrol the road."

Tom King knew this well enough, without being told, and he felt very uneasy.

It was evident he did not look upon their approach with the same amount of satisfaction as the lady did.

"Yes," he said, with a forced laugh. "It is the dragoons, no doubt. They make a great show of patrolling the road, but it seems to me that in one respect, at least, they are like police officers—they are never in the way when their presence would be beneficial."

"Nay, there you are unjust," said the lady, warmly. "I know they have been of the greatest service in protecting us from the attacks of bands of highwaymen, who made the roads impassable."

Tom smiled.

"And yet you were attacked by two men," he said.

He spoke these words lightly, and, as it seemed, half jestingly.

The lady little imagined what his feelings were at that moment.

The dragoons were now very close at hand.

Tom's position was ticklish in the extreme.

Had he turned and fled he would have been pursued immediately, and all chance of following up his adventure with the lady would be at an end.

On the other hand, if he remained he ran a very great risk indeed of being recognised.

It was the rule for the dragoons to allow no persons to pass unquestioned, and how would Tom pass through such an ordeal?

A careful and correct description of his personal appearance had been industriously circulated among the soldiers, and doubtless they had taken care to impress all the particulars upon their minds.

At the very first glance, perhaps, they would recognise him, and then how perilous would his position become.

There was no time for flight, however, nor was there much time for deliberation, for the dragoons now were very close at hand indeed.

Under this aspect of affairs, Tom King resolved to make a virtue of necessity, by putting a bold face on the matter, and riding along the road with a lady.

With a degree of calmness which cannot sufficiently be admired at, the highwayman spoke freely to his strange companion, trotting along as though nothing whatever was amiss, and as though he was not in any sort of danger.

Two minutes elapsed, and then the dragoons arrived.

Tom King's heart beat quickly and his face flushed a little, when he heard the commanding officer call out to the dragoons and bid them halt.

With a clattering sound the whole troop came to a standstill, and then the officer rode up to Tom King and the young lady.

"Pull up!" cried the officer; "pull up for a moment. My orders are not to allow anyone to pass me on the road



TOM KING'S ADVENTURE WITH THE MELANCHOLY STRANGER.

without challenging them. Would you be kind enough to rein in your horses for a moment?"

The lady stopped her horse at once, and Tom King could do nothing more than follow her example.

Five minutes more would decide his fate.

Should he be recognised, his death or capture was inevitable.

Escape would be out of the question.

What wonder is it, then, that his heart should beat more quickly and painfully than it was wont, and that his frame should exhibit traces of agitation?

This was so slight, however, as not to be noticeable, and by the time his steed had stopped, and the officer approached him, he was quite calm, and he saluted him with one of those deep, courtly bows which were then the fashion.

The officer replied to the salute, and then he said—

"There is a little form which we are instructed to go through, but we will not detain you for a moment. It is that you should furnish us with your real names and some proof of your identity. This proceeding may seem strange, but the reason is that, in spite of all our care and patrolling, highway robberies are nightly committed on the road, and we are determined to put a stop to them by adopting the measure I have mentioned."

CHAPTER CCCCLXIX.

LIEUTENANT GRENNE IS CLEVERLY DELUDED BY TOM KING.

THESE words, uttered by the officer of dragoons, revealed another dilemma.

There was, to be sure, just a chance that Tom King would be able to pass through their ranks unrecognised; but now that something like a passport was demanded, the danger was immensely increased.

Indeed, detection seemed certain.

Had any of his comrades seen him at this moment, literally hemmed in on all sides as he was by his foes, they would have trembled for his safety.

We tremble ourselves.

A sort of pause followed the utterance of the speech with which the last chapter concluded, during which the officer sat waiting, and glancing alternately from Tom King to the lady by his side.

The latter, perceiving that her new acquaintance did not speak, said—

"I believe I have the pleasure of knowing you, Lieutenant Grenne?"

"Indeed," said the officer, in a changed manner, and with the accents of his voice slightly tinged with pleasure; "indeed, miss, your voice is familiar to me in the extreme."

"My name is Minton"——

"Of course, Miss Minton of the Hall yonder. I must really apologise, but I did not recognise you at first, or I should not have stopped you."

"No matter, lieutenant," said the lady, who, now that she has avowed her name, we may as well call Miss Minton. "No matter; it is best to perform your duty to the letter. I, for one, shall be glad when you have captured the highwaymen."

"But I shall not, if it affords me the chance of such pleasant meetings as these."

"A truce to your compliments, lieutenant," said Miss Minton, her voice showing, plainly enough, that she was quite the reverse of displeased. "Are you satisfied? Can I pass on?"

"Most certainly. I should have recognised you had it not been for the darkness of the night, or I should say morning, rather; and besides, I scarcely expected to see you at such an unusual hour."

"I daresay not. No apologies. We shall be always glad to see you at the Hall when duty permits."

"Many thanks. You may depend I shall avail myself of the invitation. This gentleman is a friend of yours, I presume?"

"Oh! yes; though our acquaintance has been short, being half-an-hour long, at most."

"Oh! indeed," said the officer, turning towards Tom King with quite a changed expression, "a friend only half-an-hour old?"

"Yes," said Tom King, coldly. "I have had the honour of the lady's acquaintance for about that length of time."

"Oh! indeed, sir."

"And in fact"——

"Perhaps, then," said Lieutenant Grenne, "you would have no objection to let us know who you are?"

"None whatever, sir; but my humble opinion is, if it is your duty to guard these roads, it would be much better if you were to ride on."

"And pray sir, what the devil have you got to do with my duty?"

"Very little, perhaps; but if you will appeal to the lady, she will tell you under what circumstances our acquaintance took place."

"Oh! yes—yes, lieutenant. I owe this gentleman a very deep debt of obligation, indeed. He has rendered me a most important service. A little way further down the road, towards London, I was stopped by two men, who would have robbed, and perhaps murdered me, had it not been for this gentleman."

"Stopped on the road? What, by robbers?"

"I suppose so. At least, I do not know what else they could be."

"They were robbers, depend upon it," interjected Tom King. "I think I have done for them both, for a little time, at least. You will find them lying on the road, I rather fancy."

"This is serious," said the lieutenant.

You will now understand what I meant," continued Tom King, who perceived the advantage he had gained. "You see, in spite of your patrolling and needlessly stopping peaceable travellers, this young lady was stopped by two men within a mile of her own residence."

The lieutenant was aggravated by the way in which Tom spoke, but he could say nothing.

"It is quite true," said Miss Minton. "When this gentleman saw how I was attacked, he rode forward and had a desperate conflict with them. He was victorious, and he left the men lying senseless on the road."

"I will ride off at once. I hope these will prove the gentlemen of whom we are in search. Nevertheless, sir, perhaps you would be kind enough to tell me who you are."

"Certainly, sir; my name is Queen."

"Queen?"

"Yes; Sir Thomas Queen. I am a baronet, and justice of the peace. I am on my way from London to my own residence at Burnham, in Buckinghamshire. Perhaps you may know the place?"

All this was said with so much readiness, and without the slightest hesitation, that the officer of dragoons believed it at once. And the announcement that he was a baronet and a justice of the peace, quite accounted for the manner in which he had spoken.

In a very respectful voice, Lieutenant Grenne said—

"I have not the honour of knowing either your name or your residence, but your word is quite sufficient. It is easy to distinguish a gentleman."

"Thank you for the compliment. And now, lieutenant, if you will condescend to be guided by me, you will ride off down the road without any more delay in search of the two rascals. I would return with you myself, and point out the spot where the outrage took place, but I have promised this lady to escort her to her home; and I am, moreover, anxious to push on towards Burnham, having been considerably delayed."

"All right, Sir Thomas. I am off. I hope you will meet with no further interruption."

"Thanks."

"Good evening, Miss Minton. Pray do not lay the blame of the outrage that has been perpetrated upon my shoulders."

"I shall do," said the lady, with a light laugh, "if you do not capture the wretches, and bring them to justice."

"I will try my best to redeem myself so far. Once more, good night. Now, my men, forward!"

With a clatter the troop of dragoons rode off down the road, and, as they did so, Tom King drew a long breath, for he thought what a narrow escape he had just had.

The lieutenant could not have been very well acquainted with his appearance, but his failing to recognise him will not be wondered at if it is borne in mind that the night was a very dark one, and that he did not recognise the young lady, Miss Minton, until she declared herself, and yet he was personally acquainted with her.

Then, again, the intelligence that Miss Minton had been stopped disconcerted him, and he was in consequence less cool and clear-sighted than he usually was.

And so, from a combination of strange circumstances, the dragoons rode by Tom King without having the least suspicion concerning him.

He smiled when he thought of the name by which he had declared himself, and which was so easily suggested by his real one.

That was about the most daring piece of the whole business, for, for a moment, Lieutenant Grenne had been suspicious.

Take it altogether, it was about the strangest adventure he had had.

Still, he was amused at it now the danger was past.

The lady rode on for a few yards in silence.

Fancying she was, perhaps, waiting for him to speak first, Tom said—

"It seems, then, that you and this young officer of dragoons are old acquaintances?"

"Well, scarcely, Sir Thomas," replied the young lady, in a more friendly manner than she had hitherto addressed him. "I have known him but for a short time; that is, since he has been appointed to patrol this road.

"Not a very pleasant occupation for a soldier, I should think."

"Oh! he grumbles about it dreadfully, and declares he will make short work of the highwaymen if he should be lucky enough to meet with one of them."

"Ah!" said Tom.

"And I should think he would, too; for he is a brave young fellow."

"Ah!" said Tom, again.

"Dear me, what a strange ejaculation. What do you mean by that?"

"Oh! nothing."

"But, Sir Thomas, if you will look before you, you will see the gabled roofs of a building. That is Minton Hall."

"Your residence."

"Exactly; and I hope, sir, you will not refuse to enter and receive my father's thanks for the service you have done me."

"Nothing would give me greater satisfaction—that is to say, at any other time than the present moment. But, the fact is, I am extremely anxious to reach Burnham. I ought to have been there hours ago, but I have been delayed in one way or the other, so that really I must decline your invitation."

"I am sorry for that; but you will, probably, be passing by this way soon."

"Oh! yes. I am on the road frequently."

"Then, will you promise that when you pass again, you will call?"

"Oh! certainly. I shall have great pleasure in doing so."

"Thanks. And now, Sir Thomas, while we perform the rest of the journey, I should like to ask your advice."

"My advice?"

"You are surprised, no doubt. But, if I recollect right, you said you were a justice of the peace."

"Ah!"

"That strange word again."

"Excuse me. It's a habit I have got. It means yes."

"Oh! indeed. Well, as you are a justice of the peace, I thought I would ask your advice upon a matter which has very much perplexed me."

"I shall be happy to render you all the assistance in my power."

"I knew that, and it emboldened me to address you."

"Do not fear to speak freely," said Tom King. I will promise to keep secret anything you may confide in me."

"Well, then, Sir Thomas, it concerns my being out at such an hour as this alone. That must have seemed strange to you."

"I confess it did."

"In asking your advice, I shall explain it. To be brief, late last night I received a letter—an anonymous letter."

"Indeed!"

"I have it with me now, but there is not light enough to read it. However, I will make you acquainted with its contents as nearly as I can recollect."

"That will, perhaps, answer the purpose quite as well."

"I hope so. The writing was in a man's hand, and commenced abruptly—

"'*Your brother is in great danger—in danger of his life. It is in your power to save him. If you wish to do so, you will hasten to his chambers in London. You must get there at least two hours before dawn, or you will be too late, and he will surely perish. Be speedy and secret.*'"

"Was that all?"

"Yes; and, I think, almost the very words."

"It is a mysterious letter."

"Very. I pondered over the contents, and at length resolved to set out; and I did so, as you see."

"And did you find your brother?"

"No. You must understand he is studying for the law, and he has chambers in the Temple. I went there."

"Were you in time? Were you there two hours before daybreak?"

"Oh! yes; three at the least."

"And he was not there?"

"No. And he had not been seen since early on the preceding evening."

"And what did you do then?" asked Tom King, whose interest in this strange narrative rapidly increased.

"I made all the inquiries I could," was the reply, "and then I resolved to gallop back home, which I have done."

"And you could neither see nor hear anything of your brother?"

"Nothing."

"How strange!"

"Now, sir, I want to ask your advice. What had I better do? What does it all mean?"

"I am quite puzzled to say," replied Tom King. "It is really a most mysterious affair from first to last. But stop a moment. I have an idea. It was on your return that you were attacked by those two men?"

"Yes, it was."

"Did they demand any money from you?"

"No. It appeared as though they desired to drag me from the saddle. All took place so suddenly, however, that I cannot recollect perfectly."

"It is my opinion, then," said Tom King, "that the letter was written for the purpose of decoying you from your home—for what purpose or for what reason such an outrage should be planned, I am not able to hazard an opinion."

"But," said Miss Minton, "if my abduction was the end in view, why was I suffered to proceed in safety as far as London?"

"That is a difficult question; perhaps you set out earlier than was expected?"

"It might be so."

"Have you an enemy? Do you know anyone who would stoop to such an act?"

The lady paused, and for a moment hesitated.

Then she said—

"No; I know no one who would be guilty of so great an outrage."

"Then I must confess myself baffled."

"I was afraid so," said the lady, with a sigh. "I am perfectly bewildered. But, stay! These are the gates leading to the Hall. Are you sure you will not enter?"

"I cannot to-night."

"Farewell, then, for you have told me you were anxious to reach home, and I have no right to detain you any longer. For all that you have done in my behalf, I trust that you will accept my best and deepest thanks. I told you what had occurred, in the faint hope that you might be able to throw some light on this extraordinary affair."

"I deeply regret that it is not in my power to do so."

"I am sure you do; and, once more expressing my thanks, I say farewell."

"Farewell, too," said Tom King. "Before we part, however, I should like to free you from the deception I have played upon you. I am not what I have declared myself. I am one of those highwaymen whom you hope your friend, Lieutenant Grenne, will speedily bring to justice."

"Impossible."

"It is quite true."

"You a highwayman?"

"Yes."

"And your name?"

"Tom King."

CHAPTER CCCCLXX.

TOM KING HAS A MYSTERIOUS ADVENTURE WITH THE MELANCHOLY STRANGER.

WITHOUT waiting to hear what the lady would say after hearing this announced, and without waiting to see what she would do, Tom King touched his horse with the spur, and set off at a gallop in the direction of London.

Once, and once only, he glanced over his shoulder, and when he did so he saw her sitting upon her steed and looking after him, her face and attitude expressive of the utmost astonishment.

After this Tom King did not look back, so what became of her he knew not.

He had terminated the interview somewhat abruptly.

The reason was that he was warned it was time to break up the conference by seeing in the eastern horizon some long pale beams of light, which indicated that dawn was at hand.

He had a long way to go to reach the deserted mansion, and by the time he arrived there he felt quite certain it would be daylight, and broad daylight, too.

Clearly, then, it was the best and wisest thing he could do.

He had, strangely enough, learned more than he had ever hoped to become acquainted with.

The simple chance of his having declared himself to be a justice of the peace had induced Miss Minton to make a confidant of him, and in a matter which was well calculated to perplex anyone.

When he had obtained all the information, however,

which it was in her power to give, and when he saw those harbingers of the coming day, Tom King determined to be off without any more delay.

He had revealed his true person for several reasons, and one of them was that he had nothing whatever to fear from the declaration

He felt tolerably certain that the lieutenant in command of the dragoons would learn how neatly and easily his prey had slipped through his fingers, and Tom rejoiced in the prospect of the amount of annoyance and vexation which he would feel.

"I have had a fine night of it," he muttered to himself, as he galloped along the road; "a very fine night, indeed. Here I am, with daylight shining on me, and on my way back, and not a penny richer than I was when I set out. I have had all this danger for nothing—absolutely for nothing. Was ever anybody known to have such bad luck? But let a traveller show himself, and let him be who he may, and let the danger be as great as it likes, I will stop him, and, what is more, take every penny he has about him!"

With this resolution, Tom continued on his way, though he shaped his course nearly in a straight line to his destination.

On his way his mind was occupied with thinking over all that the young girl had said.

The adventure, take it altogether, was one well calculated to provoke thought and find materials for reflection.

And now the dawn advanced with great rapidity.

Streak after streak of grayish light shot up from the horizon, and shed a pale glimmer upon the still sleeping earth.

Although indulging in the reflections which we have mentioned, he kept a sharp look-out around him, and presently an ejaculation came from his lips.

At the same moment he quickened his horse's speed, and turned his head in a slightly different direction to the one he had been pursuing.

The reason of this was, because he had seen a single horseman emerge from the shadow of a copse, and take his way across a piece of open ground of considerable extent.

In the dim, dawnlight his figure, and that of his steed, looked hazy and indistinct, and as they crossed the piece of common or heath, they looked more like some shadowy, spectral horse and rider than aught else.

It was, then, this which had brought the exclamation to Tom's lips, and which had caused him to press his horse to make still greater exertions.

The rider, be he who he might, was at a considerable distance, and Tom saw that a hard gallop was inevitable if he was to overtake him.

This was nothing.

He was intent only upon one thing, and that was to come up with him, and demand whatever money and valuables he carried.

With this intention away he flew.

The traveller, however, did not look back, and seemed perfectly unconscious of the fact that someone was pursuing him.

His steed was going at a kind of half gallop, a speed very comfortable to the rider, who sat in the saddle as though plunged in deep and melancholy thought.

The common or heath, across which he was taking his way in a diagonal direction, was covered with soft, crisp turf, upon which the horse's hoofs produced scarcely an audible sound, so that the highwayman was enabled to get very close to the traveller before the latter was aware of it.

Upon a closer approach, Tom King discovered that he was quite a young man, being, indeed, just about to enter into manhood.

His attire was plain and simple, and dark in hue.

At his side he carried a long, straight sword.

But it was this stranger's countenance that attracted Tom King's attention.

No one could gaze upon the delicately-formed features, with the expression of pensiveness upon them, without feeling immediately and deeply interested.

Tom at once wondered what could have produced so profound a melancholy in one so handsome and so young.

In spite of this, however, he did not feel in the least inclined to forego his intention.

He was rendered desperate by the want of success he had had throughout the night.

Spurring his horse still more, he in a few bounds was side by side with this young man.

"Halt! halt!" he cried, levelling a pistol at him as he spoke. "Halt! I say. Your money or your life!"

Almost mechanically, as it seemed, the traveller pulled up his horse.

"You will have but a poor booty from me," he said, in sad tones. "I have nothing about me of any greater value than my sword, and that I shall struggle to prevent you from taking possession of."

The words were spoken sadly, quietly, and yet firmly.

Somehow, he could not tell why, Tom King fully believed what this young man said.

He would have staked his life he spoke the truth. There was such an air of earnest ingenuousness about him. Nevertheless, Tom could not control his disappointment, and he said—

"Do you carry no trinkets or ornaments?"

"No, none," was the reply. "Look and satisfy yourself."

With these words, the melancholy stranger unclasped his riding-cloak, and allowed Tom King a full view of his person.

It fully bore out the truth of what he had just said.

He carried no trinkets or ornaments about him, and Tom, glancing at his hands, saw that there was not a single ring upon any one of his fingers.

Looking, however, to the hilt of his sword, he saw that it was ornamented in a most elaborate and expensive manner, and must have been worth a very large sum of money.

It seemed strange, Tom thought, for anyone carrying such a weapon, to have no articles of value about him whatever, and so he said—

"Come, sir, if you have nothing else, I am sure you carry a purse. Hand me that."

"It is not worth your taking," was the answer. "It contains less than a guinea, in silver. However, take it; here it is, and I feel that I could ask you to take my life as well, if it would be of the slightest benefit to you."

These words were spoken in a tone of even greater dejection than before; indeed, the young man seemed as though his heart was breaking.

Tom felt his disappointment and vexation subside in the intense desire which he felt to learn the cause of this young man's deep sorrow.

He could not account for anyone, occupying the station in life that he evidently did, being out upon the road in such a penniless condition.

The stranger put an end to Tom's speculations by saying—

"Come, sir, here is my purse. Take it, and let me be gone, as the errand I am upon will admit of no delay."

"Nay, you are free to pass."

"But, my purse?"

"Keep it. I would not deprive you of anything; indeed, I feel as though it would give me a pleasure if I could be of some assistance to you."

"Indeed!" said the stranger.

Without another word he replaced the purse in his pocket and set his horse in motion.

"No luck again," muttered Tom King, as he turned round with the intention of retracing his steps. "No luck again! Well, after this, I will give up altogether, and go straight back. It is quite certain fortune is against me. That is clear enough. She is truly called a fickle jade, for such I ever found her."

At this moment he was startled by a dull sound in the rear, and he immediately faced about.

To his surprise, he found the melancholy stranger close to him.

Reining in his steed, the latter said—

"You are surprised, no doubt, that I should have galloped after you; but the fact is I want to speak to you for a moment."

"I am entirely at your service," said Tom King, and as he spoke he raised his hat, and made a deep and respectful bow.

The traveller returned the salute with that air of melancholy which seemed to pervade all his actions.

Some slight surprise was also visible when he saw the graceful manner in which Tom bowed.

"I was convinced," he said, "that you were no common robber, and if I needed any confirmation your behaviour would supply it."

Tom made no other reply to this highly flattering speech than to bow again.

"I have hastened after you in order to ask a favour. I am impelled to do so, because I can see that you have the bearing of a gentlemen."

How true this remark was!

It sent a sharp pain through Tom King's heart when he heard it, for it had the effect of bringing the past vividly before him.

There is something in the deportment of a real thoroughbred gentleman which can neither be defined nor imitated.

Tom King had been born and had lived a gentleman, and the bearing he had then acquired—or, rather, which came to him as by a sort of natural instinct—had never left him, and, in spite of all his efforts to disguise it, it would at times peep forth.

This melancholy traveller had detected it, not only in his speech, but in the manner in which he had comported himself.

The stranger had paused, but finding that Tom said nothing, he continued—

"That you have also the feelings of a gentleman, I do not doubt, although you appear in the singular character of a highwayman."

"I cannot tell what the tendency of these remarks may be," said Tom King, "but if it is in my power, I shall be glad to render you any service you may ask, for I have experienced from the first a strange feeling of sympathy for you."

"And I for you. And now to tell you in a word or two, for time is precious, the nature of the favour I wish you to grant me."

"I am all attention."

"In order, then, to convince you that all is just and honourable, I will tell you who I am—the cause of this deep melancholy—and then ask you the favour. You will then be able to say whether you will grant it or not."

"I shall grant it, no doubt."

"Well, then, to begin with. My name is Roderick Minton."

Tom King could not help starting violently when this surname fell upon his ear.

It was the same as had been given by the young lady he had saved from the two men.

The coincidence was a most remarkable one, and he prepared himself to listen with redoubled interest.

The sudden movement did not escape the notice of the traveller, but he made no remark concerning it.

He continued to speak in the same plaintive tone of voice.

"By birth and education," he said, "I am a gentleman. I am the only son of Frederick Minton, of Minton Hall, at no great distance from this place. Having a fancy for the law, however, I have taken chambers in the Temple, in order to prosecute the study of it. So much for myself."

"Enough—enough," said Tom King; "this explanation is not needful. Let me hear the nature of your request."

"In one moment. I have an only sister, for whom I have a more than brotherly affection. Some time since, a suitor presented himself, and demanded her hand. His name was Godfrey Royston. My father referred him to my sister for his reply, at the same time stating that he had not the slightest intention of biasing his daughter's inclinations. He presented himself to my sister, and was rejected. After this we met as of old, and I saw no change in his manner; but I was warned by one who knew him, and who stated him to be of a treacherous, revengeful disposition, and, above all, one who never overlooked any slight that might be put upon him. After receiving the caution, I resolved to be careful. Not many days afterwards, however, I and Godfrey met. At first all went well; but, eventually, we quarrelled. To give you the grounds of the quarrel, or to relate the particulars concerning it, would take too long to tell now, for the rapid advance of the morning warns me to be brief. In a word, then, we quarrelled, and a challenge was the result. We agreed to fight a duel. The weapons chosen were swords. We agreed to meet at a spot which was scarcely ever visited, and where we should have no fear of interruption. We were each to be attended by one second. It was to be a duel to the death. And now to the cause of my sadness and melancholy. Ever since the challenge I have experienced such a feeling of depression as I had before not the least conception of. I seemed at once to lose all my spirits, and I tried in vain to recover them. The duel is to take place at sunrise this morning. In spite of myself my dejection has increased, and this morning it received a great accession. I received last night, or rather early this morning, a letter from the friend who had promised to act as my second, to say that he should be compelled to decline. I had my doubts about the genuineness of this letter, for it seemed so strange to me that my friend should alter his mind so suddenly, and then not to let me know of it until the last moment. There was no time to obtain another second, so I made my way to the residence of my friend, for I could not help thinking the letter was a forgery. Why I should think this, I know not, for I was at a loss to find a motive which could induce anyone to send me such a forged communication. However, I went to my friend's house. He was not at home, and had not been seen for several hours. I could gain no information as regards where he was to be found. This seemed to confirm my suspicions. By this time, however, the hour had arrived—passed, indeed—when it was necessary for me to set out in order to reach the appointed spot in time, and I was unwilling to allow my opponent the advantage of being able to say that I was late. And so, being unable, upon the spur of the moment, to find another second, I set out alone, resolved to attend the duel without the company of a second. But all the way I have experienced a feeling of depression for which I am quite unable to account. I feel, indeed, as a man would feel who was being led out to execution. I am no coward, though I have never yet been in an encounter where my life was at stake. I feel that if I had a second with me my dejection would vanish, and I should once more become myself. And now that I have told you all, you can probably guess the nature of the favour I was about to ask at your hands."

CHAPTER CCCCLXXI.

IN WHICH TOM KING BECOMES THE SPECTATOR OF SOME VERY SINGULAR EVENTS WHICH TAKE PLACE IN THE OLD QUARRY.

TOM KING had sat perfectly still upon his horse while the melancholy stranger spoke.

He made not the slightest attempt to interrupt him, but listened attentively.

The story which he told was in itself simple enough, and yet Tom felt deeply interested, so deeply, indeed, that he forgot his own danger in being abroad at that hour.

What he had heard was, he felt certain, nothing more than the prologue to some act of more than common interest.

Of course, he had not failed in an instant to identify this melancholy young man as the brother of Miss Minton.

It was this that made him start.

How events would develop themselves was, of course, more than he could tell; but that something strange would result he felt certain.

As soon as the young man had finished speaking, however, Tom King hastened to reply—

"I can easily guess your request," he said, "and feel great pleasure in acceding to it. If you are willing to accept of my services, I shall be very glad to act as your second."

"Thanks! thanks!" replied young Minton. "It is true we are strangers to each other, and that our acquaintanceship has begun in a very strange manner. Nevertheless, under the circumstances, I shall be much obliged to you if you will consent to act in that capacity."

"I consent willingly enough. Is it far that you have to go?"

"No; I had almost reached my journey's end when you stopped me."

"Let us proceed at once, then; for, if you are to keep your appointment, you have no time to lose. The sun will rise shortly."

"I suppose so. Come, sir, set forward. I am ready."

"If it pleases you, as we have not far to go, let us proceed at a canter. We shall then be able to converse with each other; for, strange as it may seem, I have something to say which will form a kind of commentary to what you have just told me."

"Indeed! is it possible that you are acquainted with me?"

"No, not exactly that; but, without further preface, I will recount to you the particulars of an adventure I had not long ago, and which intimately, I believe, concerns yourself."

"Pray proceed, sir, for you have greatly awakened my curiosity."

Tom King then related to the young man the particulars of the attack upon his sister in the lane.

He told him how he had rescued her; how, to save himself from imminent danger, he had announced himself under a false name; and how, in consequence of that, the young lady had appealed to him, and asked him his advice upon a matter which had puzzled her exceedingly.

The young man listened to this extraordinary narrative with mingled feelings.

Then Tom continued.

"I must confess that, when she asked me what I thought of all this, I was puzzled to reply, but I hazarded an opinion that the anonymous letter had been sent to her with a view to secure her abduction. I had then little grounds for such a belief, but what you have since told me confirms me in it."

"How so?"

"It may seem strange, but I connect the two letters together. I believe that both came from the same hand."

"But for what motive?"

"I think I can tell you. Did you not say that this Godfrey Royston was a rejected suitor of your sister's."

"Yes—yes."

"And that you had received a bad character of him, and been cautioned to beware?"

"Yes, too."

"Well, then, I believe the whole to be a scheme of his to gratify his revenge."

"But how about the disappearance of my friend—the one who promised to be my second in the duel?"

"That is strange, I admit; but, granting that the letter you received was a forgery, it is only natural to still further suppose that he was decoyed away in some manner, and prevented from keeping his appointment. Rely upon it, that those who would forge a letter would not scruple to do that, and I much fear that even worse remains behind."

"You seem to fancy, then, that this strange dejection to which I have been a prey has some special meaning."

"I do; for I am one who has been taught, by long experience, the folly of disregarding presentiments. I do not hesitate to say that I fully believe in them."

"Then mine was a presentiment?"

"Yes: a foreboding of great danger about to happen. It is to be hoped, however, that by keeping strictly upon our guard we may be able to avert it."

"I hope so, too."

"And now, there is one more question. When you have replied to it I shall perhaps be able to make something from the tangled threads of this strange affair."

"What is the question?"

"Where is the spot appointed for the duel?"

"It is close by."

"In an unfrequented spot?"

"Yes; but you must think nothing of that. We wished to be secure from interruption."

"Yes—yes; I know. What place is it, though. A wood?"

"No; a quarry."

"A quarry?"

"Yes."

"What a strange place for such a meeting."

"It seems so; but I ought to explain. It presents little of the appearance of a quarry. Very many years, indeed, have elapsed since it was worked. Tradition almost forgets it. Some extensive operations must, however, at some remote period have been carried on here, for the place is both deep and vast. All the stone has been dug up and carried away, so now the sides and the bottom are covered with dense, luxurious vegetation, the growth of many ages upon a rank soil."

"It must be a wild, romantic spot."

"It is, indeed; and picturesque in the extreme. But you will see it shortly, and then you will say a more appropriate spot could not possibly be found. You will say it is a misnomer to call the place a quarry, but it retains its name from what it once has been."

"That is easily enough understood. But I should have thought that a picturesque, romantic spot, such as you describe, would be the resort of many pleasure-seeking persons."

"At one time it used to be, but some years ago it was made the scene of a most horrible and brutal murder, and since that time it has been shunned by almost everyone. Many firmly believe that it is haunted."

"You have quite raised my curiosity about this old quarry, so much so that I forgot for the moment that there were other and more important things to talk about."

"You must be speedy, for the sun is about to rise. Look how fiery red the east now is, and yonder, by that clump of trees, is the excavation I have spoken of."

Young Minton pointed to a group of trees about a hundred yards distant.

"Well, then, I must be brief in what I say. Beware of your opponent. It is my impression that he has some sinister end in view, therefore I say, beware!"

"I will be careful."

"You have need to be; for although I have never seen him, my impression concerning this Godfrey Royston is that he is a very unscrupulous personage."

"What do you advise?"

"You must meet him, of course. But be all the time fully upon your guard. If I must give my own opinion, it is that he has removed your second in order to be better able to carry out some nefarious design he has in hand. I believe he intended to carry off your sister, but, happily, in that he has been foiled."

"Yes, through you, my friend."

"Friend! You forget yourself. I am a highwayman."

"Nevertheless, you have fully established your claim to my friendship."

"Be it so, then; and now a fresh thought has struck me."

"What is it?"

"Should you not like to know whether these suspicions which you have of Godfrey Royston are just or unfounded?"

"I should, indeed. I would give much to obtain such knowledge."

"I will tell you how I think it may be gained."

"How?"

"In this way. If our suspicions are well grounded, he will expect to see you arrive at the quarry this morning without a second."

"He would, assuredly."

"Then my presence in that capacity would, in all probability, have the effect of deranging his plans."

"If we are right."

"Just so. But it would, I fancy, be very desirable to know whether we are right or wrong."

"Very, indeed. But I don't see how it can possibly be managed."

"I will tell you. What are the weapons chosen?"

"Swords."

"I thought I heard you say so. Well, such being the case, you will have a chance of defending yourself. Are you well-skilled in the use of the weapon?"

"I have practised well. But what is the drift of your remarks?"

"I propose that you should descend into the quarry alone, as though you had no second with you. Keep a wary eye upon your opponent, and, if he tries any mischief be ready to defend yourself."

"And you?"

"With your consent I will conceal myself somewhere close at hand, and, should circumstances render it necessary, I will interfere."

"Agreed. I am well pleased with such an arrangement."

"I am glad to hear you say so. But, pray bear in mind that my suspicions are very strong. Do not relax your vigilance in the least, or permit yourself to be thrown off your guard by any circumstance. I have the worst possible opinion of your foe."

"You may depend I shall be careful. Forewarned, forearmed, you know."

"Of course. Rely upon it, by adopting this measure, we shall arrive at the whole truth of the affair."

"I consent—I consent. But where shall you conceal yourself."

"In the most fitting situation I can find. I should like to be where I can see and hear all that passes without being seen myself, and also where I should be able to render you ready assistance if it was required."

"The latter, I fancy, will be difficult; but we shall see when we arrive."

"We are full early."

"True; and yet I think the sun will rise in a minute or two at most. Yonder is the brink of the quarry."

"Then, if agreeable to you, we will dismount here, and secure our horses to this tree."

"Agreed."

The pair dismounted, and the horses were secured as proposed.

"It may be," said young Minton, "that my adversary has already arrived. If so, it will spoil our plot if we are seen together. Do you wait here, therefore, and I will go on in advance. You follow me cautiously to the brink of the abyss, and if you lie down you will be able to look over."

"Yes—yes!"

"If I see nothing of my foe I will give a low whistle, and when you hear it you will descend with all speed and conceal yourself somewhere close at hand."

"I understand."

"Pause here, then, and as soon as I disappear over the brink, follow."

Tom King promised compliance with this request, and young Minton set forward.

The distance to the brink of the old quarry was merely a few yards, so the distance was quickly passed over.

When he saw him disappear, however, Tom King felt a strange foreboding sensation come over him, and he wished some other arrangement had been made.

He feared some harm would befall the young stranger, who he already began to like, though so short a time had elapsed since their first meeting.

He darted forward in a moment, though he was careful to sink down, as he had been directed, and look over the brink while lying face downwards.

By adopting this precaution it was scarcely possible for him to be seen by anyone who might happen to be below, since only a part of his head and the upper portion of his face was visible.

Looking down Tom perceived that young Minton had already descended to a considerable depth by means of a rude and precipitous winding path.

The scene which the highwayman beheld from this point was one of rare sylvan beauty.

Below him was a huge, irregular-shaped dingle, which, as the young Minton had truly said, was completely overgrown with dense vegetation.

Here and there huge masses of rock jutted boldly out, thus relieving the monotony of the scene.

Take it for all in all, it was as delightful and picturesque a spot as could be found all over England.

The depth of this excavation was in proportion to its vast extent.

The consequence was, that a kind of gloom rested near the bottom, for there was not yet light enough in the sky to illuminate this singular place.

As he continued to gaze, however, Tom's eyes became more and more accustomed to the obscurity, so that he was able to follow the movements of young Minton with great ease.

Down he went, still lower and deeper down, until at length he paused upon a small plateau, formed by a ledge of rock.

Upon this, however, dust and seeds had from time to time fallen, so that now it was covered with soft fine turf.

It was here that young Minton paused.

Drawing his sword, he looked around him, and Tom expected every moment to hear the faint whistle arise from the depths below.

But he was disappointed.

Young Minton started, and uttered a faint ejaculation. Tom saw he was looking across to the opposite side of the quarry, and he followed his gaze in that direction.

He then caught sight of the form of a man who was making his way down into the quarry in the same way it seemed as young Minton had done.

"That is Godfrey Royston, I suppose," Tom muttered to himself; "and he is alone, too. That confirms my suspicions. How carefully he descends! I wish I had not made that arrangement with young Minton. He is a long way off me if anything should occur I fear I could render him but little assistance. He must look to himself, however. For my own part, I will get a couple of pistols ready; but it seems from this point I can be nothing more than a mere spectator of what goes on below."

CHAPTER CCCCLXXII.

TOM KING IS A WITNESS TO A TERRIBLE TRAGEDY IN THE OLD QUARRY.

THE aspect of affairs in the old quarry was curious and peculiar, and promised to become more and more so every moment.

As Tom King had truly said, he was a long way off to render any assistance should circumstances arise such as would make his appearance necessary.

However, it was too late now to make any alteration, and regrets were worse than useless.

Having placed a couple of pistols on the turf beside him, in such a position that he could seize them instantly should occasion render it necessary, Tom laid himself down quite flat, and peeped cautiously over the edge of the abyss.

The time it had taken him to put his pistols in order for instant service was very short, and when he once more looked into the quarry, he found that the new comer was still some distance from the little plateau upon which young Minton was standing.

From his attitude, and from the appearance of the place, Tom judged that this little plateau was the spot selected for the encounter.

He was confirmed in this supposition by perceiving that the individual who he had made up his mind was Godfrey Royston, made his way towards it, while young Minton stood quietly on his guard awaiting his arrival.

The sun had by this time risen, and a material increase in the amount of light was the consequence, so that Tom could see right down in the depths of the quarry with great distinctness.

It must be understood that the plateau we have referred to was about two yards square, and was situated about half-way down the quarry.

On one side of it was the sharp edge of a precipice which descended to a frightful depth.

The highwayman, who was by such a singular concatenation of events destined to be a spectator of this scene, felt all his attention absorbed in watching Godfrey Royston—for he indeed it was.

As he came nearer and nearer to the plateau, and as the sun climbed higher in the sky, Tom was able to observe his personal appearance.

He was a young man, tall, thin, and, for an Englishman, unusually swarthy.

His walk was ungainly, and his limbs were just the reverse of well-knit—his joints having the appearance of being loose.

Nor was his face—at least, what portion of it that was visible—a pleasing one.

His plumed hat was drawn down over his brows, and his chin was buried in the ample cloak that was loosely wrapped around him.

He made his way over the unlevel ground with more agility than one would have given him credit for.

Just below his cloak could be seen the polished tip of the scabbard of his sword, and Tom noticed that Godfrey's right hand was kept in a constrained manner underneath his cloak.

After having seen him, Tom felt his previous suspicions intensified.

He felt that he was a man capable of any amount of villainy.

How far Tom King was correct in his estimate, we shall quickly see.

He wished he could whisper a caution in the ear of

young Minton, but, unfortunately, it was not in his power.

His only hope was that the young man was fully on his guard.

By this time, Godfrey Royston arrived upon the plateau.

At the same moment, the sun made his appearance above the edge of the quarry, and sent down a rosy beam of light upon the spot which had been selected for the conflict.

Upon his arrival, Godfrey Royston saluted his opponent with a slight inclination of the head.

He was responded to by a bow that was equally formal.

Then Godfrey Royston, having reached to within about a dozen paces of young Minton, paused and spoke.

His voice came upon Tom's ears with peculiar clearness.

The sound, of course, had a tendency to ascend, and the air was remarkably pure, while as deep a silence reigned in and about that old quarry, as could well be conceived.

"You are surprised to see me here alone and unattended," Godfrey said; "and it seems you are in the same position; but the friend who promised to be my second, failed to keep his appointment with me this morning, and having had to search for him is my excuse for being late. I am not much behind my time, however, and I trust I have not kept you waiting long."

All this sounded plausible enough, but Tom King's suspicions in nowise abated, and he looked down upon the combatants with an interest that had now reached fever point.

Young Minton did not make any verbal reply to Godfrey's speech.

He merely bowed in token that he had heard what the other had just said, and he waved his sword as though to bid his adversary proceed.

And then Tom noticed that there had come over his new friend a fresh accession of that deep despondency from which he was suffering when he first accosted him.

He deeply regretted seeing this, for he believed, and not without reason, that it would give Godfrey the advantage over him.

"My search was an unsuccessful one," continued Royston. "I could not find my friend, and so I came here alone, for I felt I could rather do that than incur an imputation upon my courage. But you are alone and unattended, too. Can it be possible that so extraordinary a coincidence can have taken place? Has your friend disappointed you?"

"He has," said young Minton, in a tone of voice with so much sadness in it that it went direct to Tom King's heart. "He has failed me. A duel without witnesses on either side I cannot possibly engage in, as the consequences would be serious to the survivor. Our meeting must be put off until we can stand fairly face to face."

"It must be as you say," replied Godfrey Royston, who still kept his right hand concealed beneath his cloak. "It is a most vexatious occurrence, but I suppose the only thing we can do is to mutually apologize to one another for the defection of our friends. Ha! What is that at the top of the quarry? Look up!"

These last words were spoken with a very rapid change both in voice and manner.

As a matter of course young Minton started and looked up.

Not only were the words spoken well calculated to cause anyone to do so, but he fancied in a moment that his adversary had perceived Tom King peering over the edge of the abyss.

Tom King thought the same, for Godfrey Royston looked up when he spoke.

It was, then, only natural that he should draw back, and his gaze should be no longer directed into the depths of the quarry.

Almost as he did this, the thought darted into Tom's mind that Godfrey Royston had spoken these words with a sinister intention, and he resolved to peep over again, even at the risk of being seen.

Before he could carry this resolution into effect, however, the intense silence which prevailed about that spot was broken by the loud and ringing report of a pistol.

Tom echoed the sound with a groan.

It was at this instant that he peeped over.

Upon the little plateau one person alone was standing.

It was Godfrey Royston.

Young Minton had disappeared.

Godfrey's hat had fallen to the ground, and his cloak hung loose from his shoulders, so that his face and form were more distinctly visible than they had yet been.

His counteuance was distorted by such an expression of demoniac exultation that it made Tom shudder to look upon it.

Godfrey's hand was no longer hidden beneath his cloak.

His right hand and arm were now in full view.

In his hand he held a pistol, from the muzzle of which the faint blue smoke was curling in fantastic wreaths.

The sun's rays shone glitteringly upon the long and highly polished barrel.

It was for an infinitesimally small space of time that Godfrey Royston stood in this position, for Tom saw him directly after the shot was fired.

And now, with a guilty glance around, the murderer crossed the little plateau with shrinking steps.

He made his way towards that side of it which was bounded by the precipice.

He paused on the brink, and shading the sun from his eyes with one hand, peered down into the depths below.

What had taken place during the moment that Tom King ceased to look scarcely requires to be recorded.

Godfrey Royston, by whose connivance both the seconds had been kept from the scene of action, spoke in the manner we have described, for the purpose of throwing his victim off his guard.

He succeeded only too well.

Quickly and unsuspectingly young Minton raised his eyes, and, at the moment he did so, Godfrey drew his hand from beneath his cloak and fired the pistol, which he had held there concealed, cocked, and ready for instant use.

Young Minton saw his danger, for he looked down again quickly, but he was too late to save himself.

Instinctively he darted back to avoid the bullet.

But it was too late, and he fell backwards over the precipice into the frightful depths below.

It was easy for Tom to surmise what had occurred, although he had not actually witnessed it, and so enraged did he feel to think that such a treacherous and cold-blooded murder had been perpetrated, that he seized one of the pistols he had placed handy to his grasp, and fired it at the figure of the murderer below.

The aim was too hasty a one to be effective at such a distance.

But the sound was sufficient to apprize Godfrey of his danger, and he turned round with a shriek of dismay.

It is a thousand wonders that he did not fall over the precipice after his victim, for the start that he gave almost threw him off his balance.

He recovered himself, however, and turned to fly.

But Tom King was determined that he should not escape.

Taking up his other pistol, he levelled it with greater care, and then fired after the flying form of the dastardly murderer.

This time the shot told.

With a loud scream, Godfrey Royston threw both his arms in the air, and then fell, writhing on the ground like some wounded reptile.

All that we have been compelled to describe at some length, occurred with marvellous rapidity.

As soon as he he had fired this last shot, Tom King commenced a very rapid, and, indeed, reckless descent into the quarry.

He reached the little plateau in the space of a few minutes.

He paid not the slightest attention to Godfrey Royston, who lay groaning on the ground at some little distance.

Going direct to the edge of the precipice, he looked down.

His blood ran cold, and his brain grew giddy when he saw what a frightful depth it was.

He could see nothing of young Minton.

He raised his voice, however, and called to him.

Then waited for a response.

He fancied a faint groan smote upon his ear.

This was enough.

He begun without delay to look about him for some means of accomplishing a descent to the lowest depths of the quarry.



[CLAUDE DUVAL WITNESSES THE ESCAPE OF THE MURDERER FROM THE ROADSIDE INN.]

He soon discovered a continuation of the winding path, by means of which he had reached the plateau, and he at once set about making an effort to descend by it.

It was a difficult and dangerous enterprise, and more than once he had a narrow escape from falling into the abyss.

But he heeded not his perils.

If it was possible, he would rescue young Minton from his dangerous situation, or, at any rate, he would ascertain the extent of his injuries.

He feared the worst, however; for, even if he had escaped altogether the bullet from Godfrey Royston's pistol, the fall down such a fearful place would be enough to kill him.

"That dejection was but a foreboding of his approaching death, poor fellow," said Tom King as he leaped from a ledge of rock into the lowest part of the quarry.

The body of the unfortunate young Minton was now plainly enough visible.

He lay in a huddled-up mass at the foot of the precipice.

As he approached him, however, Tom felt certain he saw him move, and then he heard him groan feebly.

This was sufficient to cause him to increase his exertions, and he hurried to the spot where the sufferer lay as quickly as the uneven character of the ground would permit.

And now Tom noticed, for the first time, that in all the hollow places at the bottom of the quarry a great quantity of vegetable and other *debris* had collected, forming a comparatively soft place.

If young Minton had been fortunate enough to fall into one of these hollows there would be some chance of his having escaped severe injuries by his fall.

Upon reaching him he found that such was the case.

At the base of the precipice a larger than usual quantity of *debris* had collectd.

It was formed of myriads of leaves which had fallen

down from the shrubs above, and also of the half-decayed branches of trees.

"Speak—speak," cried Tom King, as he placed young Minton in a more comfortable position. "Speak, if you can, and tell me whether you are much hurt."

The young man groaned, and Tom King took this as a sign that he was conscious, and that he understood what was said to him.

Young Minton, however, was in a very desperate state.

He did not appear to have broken any of his limbs by the fall, but from his breast the blood was flowing in a crimson tide.

Tom bent down over him.

The glassy eyes of the sufferer were fixed upon him, and his lips moved.

But Tom could not catch the sound.

He listened again, and then young Minton, making a greater effort, feebly gasped—

"Water—water!"

"All right; you shall have it," said Tom King, and he rose to his feet as he spoke, but he had not the remotest idea where water was to be found.

He looked about him, however, and at some considerable distance perceived a pool of water.

He hastened towards it at full speed.

Upon reaching its edge he found it was merely a hollow in the rock, apparently filled with rain-water.

Taking off his hat, he filled it with the limpid fluid, and hastened back to his wounded friend.

He found him insensible.

By sprinkling a few drops of water upon his countenance, however, he restored him to consciousness.

He then allowed some more of the water to trickle down his throat, and with the remainder washed away the blood which had congealed round the orifice of the wound.

Upon examination, he found that the bullet had entered the right breast.

Having bathed it well, Tom took off his neckcloth, and having soaked his handkerchief in the water, folded it up and placed it in a lump over the wound, and secured it in its place by means of the neckcloth.

During this operation young Minton fainted again, but the cold water again revived him.

Tom next placed him in a reclining position against the perpendicular wall of the precipice, making him as comfortable as possible.

Young Minton expressed his thanks by a sad, wan smile.

His face was as white as ashes, and he gasped painfully for breath, and, as he gazed upon him, Tom King feared that his trouble would be productive of no beneficial result.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXIII.

TOM KING FINDS HIMSELF THREATENED WITH MUCH DANGER AT MINTON HALL.

THE shadow of death seemed already to have fallen upon Roderick Minton.

The whole appearance of his countenance had changed.

No traces of dejection were visible, but his features were overspread with that unnatural serenity which so frequently is the precursor of death.

Tom King's heart ached when he looked upon him.

By degrees, however, those spasmodic gaspings for breath, to which we have adverted, became less frequent, and he breathed more easily.

Perceiving this, Tom knelt down beside him and addressed him.

"Are you much hurt?" he asked.

Young Minton shook his head.

But whether he meant that he was not much hurt, or whether he did not comprehend the extent of his injuries, the highwayman could not tell.

Tom King spoke again

"Tell me, my friend, what I can do for you. I reproach myself for having made the suggestion I did. Had I not done so, this would not have happened."

Roderick made an impatient gesture.

"I anticipated evil," continued Tom; "but nothing so bad as cold-blooded, treacherous murder. But these regrets now are perfectly useless, and cannot do the least good. Tell me what I can do to alleviate your sufferings."

"Water!" said Roderick, again.

More water was given to him, and then Tom renewed his question.

The wounded man raised his eyes and looked up at the edge of the quarry high above their heads.

"The ascent is ragged and precipitous," said Tom King, in reply to his glance. "It was with difficulty that I made my way down. I cannot carry you up, for, as you are wounded, you will require to be moved with the greatest care."

Young Minton nodded.

"What, then, can I do? I do not like to leave you here."

There was a short pause, and then Roderick, who was evidently recovering from his frightful fall, spoke in a whispering tone of voice.

"I know you cannot carry me up the sides of the quarry. You will find great difficulty and danger in ascending yourself."

"But I will go—only I do not like to leave you here. Do you think you would hurt if I was to make my way up above, mount my horse, and ride off for assistance?"

"You forget."

"Forget what?"

"You are a highwayman."

"True."

"It is now broad daylight, and it will be perilous in the extreme for you to think of carrying out your kind intention."

"Never mind the peril. I will do it if you think you will be safe remaining here."

"A thousand thanks. But Godfrey Royston? The villain fired at me when I was off my guard. Where is he?"

"I do not think you need fear anything from him."

"Why not?"

"Because I was so exasperated at his treachery that I fired at him from above."

"And you hit him?"

"Yes, I brought him down just at the moment when he was felicitating himself upon the achievance of his triumph."

"The villain was justly punished. Have you killed him?"

"No, I think not; but he is, certainly, very badly wounded. You see, therefore, that you have nothing to fear from him. And now, if you like, I will go."

"How can I thank you for this?"

"Nay, it is merely an atonement. Where shall I go to for assistance? Doubtless you know the locality well. Where is the nearest place that I can obtain assistance?"

"Minton Hall."

"I know it well, and will hasten there at once."

"A thousand—thousand thanks."

"Hush—hush! I am not worthy to receive them. But when I reach the Hall, shall I not be looked upon with suspicion?"

"It may be so."

"Do you think you could write?"

"I will try."

"Have you writing materials about you?"

"Yes; in this breast-pocket you will find a memorandum-book and a lead-pencil. Take them out, and give them to me."

Tom obeyed, and, having taken out the book, opened it where there was a blank leaf.

Roderick Minton took the pencil, though he could scarcely close his fingers round it.

Tom King held the pocket-book as firmly as he could in a convenient position, and young Minton traced some irregular words upon it.

They were great, sprawling letters, and the few lines he wrote completely covered the page.

When he had done, he signed his name, and then said—

"Read it aloud to me."

Tom King complied, and read as follows:—

"DEAR FATHER,—*I am badly hurt, and lie in the depths of the old quarry. The bearer of this has succoured me at the peril of his life, and has promised to convey this scrawl to you. Send speedy assistance, or I shall die.*—RODERICK MINTON."

"That will do," he said.

"I will deliver the letter with all speed," said Tom King, placing the book in his pocket. "Is there anything

more I can do to render you comfortable while I am absent?"

"No—no. I feel easier now. Be speedy."

"I am gone," said Tom King. "Farewell for a short time only. Ere long you will see me return with ample assistance."

With these words, Tom hastened to leave the quarry.

But he found the task of ascending by the narrow, winding path much more difficult and toilsome than he had anticipated.

At length, however, the little plateau was gained.

Here Tom paused to gather breath and strength for accomplishing the remainder of the ascent.

He glanced around him in search of Godfrey Royston, but he had disappeared.

Tom did not waste time by stopping to look for him, but climbed up the remainder of the distance.

Upon gaining the summit, the whole scene around was as tranquil as when he left it.

The two horses remained tethered to the tree, and were busily engaged in cropping the sweet herbage which grew about its root.

To hasten to his own steed, unfasten the reins, mount, and gallop away, took Tom King but a moment.

Away he flew over the fields at a speed that was absolutely alarming, but he felt that he was bound upon an errand of life and death.

No thought of his own deadly peril in galloping in broad daylight across the open country entered the highwayman's mind.

His thoughts were intent upon but one object, that was, reaching Minton Hall in the shortest possible space of time.

Soon, then, appeared before him the gabled roofs of the picturesque old mansion.

Boldly enough Tom King made his way towards it, not checking his horse's pace in the least degree.

At length he pulled up suddenly before the iron entrance gates, at which he had parted with Miss Minton not many hours before.

The gates were closed, but espying a massive bell handle, he pulled it vigorously.

A clanging peal was the result, and a man immediately appeared, with a key to open the gate.

"Quick—quick!" cried Tom King, as soon as he saw him. "Let me in, I must see Mr. Minton immediately upon a matter of life and death."

The gates were accordingly opened with unusual alacrity, and Tom King, passing through them, galloped up the broad avenue leading to the hall.

Upon reaching the front door he pulled up and sprang himself off his panting steed.

"Mr. Minton," he cried to the domestics who made their appearance. "Take me to him at once. My business is most urgent."

"This way, sir; this way. Follow me. Mr. Minton is in the oak parlour.

Tom King followed the speaker across the hall, where he paused at a partially-closed door.

The murmur of voices fell upon the highwayman's ear.

The servant knocked, but his summons was disregarded.

"And so you see," Tom heard a voice say, "you were deceived—deceived as completely as anyone ever could be. Ha! ha! We shall always have the laugh of you after this. Ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed another voice.

When the sounds of merriment had subsided somewhat, the servant tapped again.

This time, he was bidden to enter.

Tom King, however, plucked him back just as he was about to do so, and entered himself, closing the door carefully behind him.

The scene which he beheld was rather a curious one.

Seated at the fireside, in a luxurious easy-chair, was an elderly gentleman, whom Tom King immediately recognised as Mr. Minton, from the strong resemblance he bore to Roderick.

Two other persons occupied the apartment,

One was Miss Minton.

The other was Lieutenant Grenne of the dragoons.

Having closed the door, Tom stood with his back against it.

A scream came from the lips of Miss Minton, and a rattling oath from those of Lieutenant Grenne, who immediately laid his hand upon his sword.

Mr. Minton sat still, staring in the utmost astonishment, for, of course, the intrusion was unexpected by him.

Before anyone could speak or move further, Tom King raised his hand with such an impressive gesture that all became silent.

Then, in a loud voice, he said—

"Mr. Minton, I bring you tidings of the dangerous condition of your son, Roderick."

Miss Minton uttered another shriek, as she cried—

"Then the warning was not a false one, after all?"

"Here, my fine fellow," said Lieutenant Grenne, advancing a step, "be good enough to consider yourself my prisoner. If you resist, or attempt to escape, you are a dead man."

Tom looked at him calmly, as he replied—

"My errand concerns Mr. Minton. I tell him again, that his son, Roderick, is in peril of his life, and requires immediate assistance."

"You have robbed and half-murdered him, no doubt," interposed the lieutenant.

"No—no! I will not believe that," said Miss Minton.

"Take this pocket-book," said Tom King, handing it to her opened at the page upon which Roderick had written. "Read what it says there, and tell me what you intend to do."

"It is Roderick's hand," she cried.

Mr. Minton had by this time recovered himself sufficiently from the first shock of his surprise, and he looked at the pocket-book.

Miss Minton read the words aloud.

"Oh! heavens!" she cried. "What must be done?"

"Let assistance be sent at once," said Tom King. "If he is brought here carefully, I fancy that even now all may yet be well. If you wish it, although it is perilous to myself, I will lead you to the spot where he is to be found."

"Not so fast, my friend," said the lieutenant. "You are my prisoner, recollect."

"Don't be a fool."

"Sir!"

"I say, don't be a fool."

"I don't intend, Tom King, and that is why I arrest you now."

"Stand off, sir—stand off!" exclaimed the highwayman. "Mr. Minton, chance brought about a meeting between myself and your son, Roderick, and he entrusted me with that pocket-book. It is for you to look to it. He lies, bleeding, and nigh unto death, in the deepest depths of the old quarry."

"He shall be rescued at once. But you, sir—who and what are you?"

It was old Minton who spoke.

"I am Tom King, and a highwayman."

Old Minton was staggered when he heard this declaration.

"And as such," said Lieutenant Grenne, "I make you my prisoner. You shall suffer for last night yet."

"Bah! don't be a fool. Mr. Minton, shall I lead you to the quarry?"

"Yes—yes. My poor boy—my poor boy!"

"But I'm d—d if you lead the way anywhere except to Newgate, you villain," cried Lieutenant Grenne. "Move an inch at your peril!"

"Mr. Minton," said Tom King, "you have heard me declare myself; you have heard my motive for intruding upon you; after that you surely will not allow me to be made a prisoner beneath your roof?"

Old Minton was about to reply, but the lieutenant prevented him.

"If he or anyone else," he said, wrathfully, "attempts to obstruct me in the discharge of my duty, they will have to take the consequences."

"Very well," said Tom King. "That is enough."

Then, turning to Mr. Minton, he added—

"Sir, I have performed my mission; I have made you acquainted with the desperate condition of your son; I have brought his own writing to avouch it. The rest remains in your hands. The position of the old quarry must be well known to you, and you can find it easily enough. He is where I have described. Be speedy if you wish to find him alive."

"Lieutenant," said old Minton.

"Sir?" replied the officer.

"After hearing this, surely you will not carry into practice your threat of making this man a prisoner?"

"Shan't I, by ——? But you'll find I shall, sir," was the reply. "And now, Mr. Highwayman, let's have no more of your d—d nonsense. You are my prisoner. Hand me your weapons."

"Wouldn't you like it?" said Tom King. "Take that, and that, and catch me if you can!"

As he uttered these words, Tom sprang forward with great suddenness, and gave the lieutenant a couple of terrific blows with his clenched fists.

So powerfully, rapidly, and skilfully were the blows administered that the officer had no time to defend himself, and before he could tell what had happened, he measured his full length on the floor.

Having obtained this victory, Tom King sprang on to the low sill of the window, which opened like a folding door.

He turned the little button that secured it, and flung the window open.

For a moment he paused where he was to speak to the two Mintons.

"Farewell," he cried. "By the love you have for Roderick, send assistance to the old quarry. If you linger you will find him a corpse. Farewell."

As he spoke, Tom sprang off the window-sill on to the lawn.

At the same moment the lieutenant, who had recovered himself, fired a couple of pistols after the flying form of the highwayman, and then springing through the window himself commenced a vigorous pursuit.

Tom King, however, had no difficulty in reaching the front door where his horse was still standing.

He vaulted into the saddle in an instant, and set off at full speed down the avenue.

The lieutenant ran a few yards, and then he felt how ridiculous it was to follow a mounted man on foot.

He had no intention of given up the chase so easily, however, but ran to the stable and saddled his horse with his own hands, for the intelligence which Tom King had brought had filled the whole house with consternation.

He was not long in performing this service, but when he got outside of the lodge-gates and looked around him, he could see no signs whatever of the daring highwayman.

He feared that after all he had had his trouble for nothing, and that for the second time in less than twelve hours Tom King had got the better of him.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXIV.

CONTAINS THE SEQUEL TO THE STRANGE OCCURRENCES IN THE OLD QUARRY, AND RELATES HOW TOM KING HAD A STRUGGLE WITH LIEUTENANT GRENNE.

We fancy the reader will feel more interested in the fortunes of Tom King than in those of Lieutenant Grenne of the dragoons, and, therefore, we shall not hesitate to leave the latter in order to follow the former.

When Tom King, then, galloped off down the avenue, he reached without accident or interruption the large iron gates leading out into the high road.

They were closed, but the highwayman, glancing behind him, satisfied himself that he was not pursued, and so pulled up and waited calmly until the lodge-keeper should open the gates.

This was done without many moments' delay, and Tom, throwing the man a handful of silver, darted through them, and continued to gallop along the road at full speed.

Finding, however, that there were no signs of a pursuit, he abated his horse's pace, and then muttered—

"What had I better do now, I wonder? I should like to see young Minton fairly out of his present strait, and, if it was not for that confounded, officious lieutenant, I would do it. Let me think, now. What had I better do? I almost think the wisest course would be to make my way back by the most lonely and unfrequented routes I can find to the deserted mansion. I will do that, but at the same time I will contrive to pass the old quarry on my way. Yes, that shall be it."

Having come to this determination, Tom King took his course rapidly in a straight line to the place he had mentioned.

The distance was not great, and he soon arrived.

He reined in his steed near the brink, and took a long and careful look about him.

The ground around the old quarry was remarkably level and open, so that the highwayman could see for a considerable distance.

Nothing, however, met his view of a character to alarm him.

"The expedition has not started yet," he said. "Even now I shall be able to see all that goes on. I will try, though, for more reasons than one, to be an unperceived and unsuspected spectator."

He looked all around him in search of some hiding-place, not only for himself, but for his horse as well.

The level character of the ground around afforded not the slightest opportunity, and so he was driven to the quarry as his only resource.

There, and there alone, could he hope to find a place of concealment.

But it seemed impossible to lead his horse down such a precipitous place, and if he left his horse above while he descended and concealed himself, he would not only be deprived of the means of making a rapid escape, but the horse being seen would plainly indicate that he was somewhere close at hand.

The quarry, however, was of vast extent, and Tom was not without the hope that at some portion or other of its circumference he should be able to find a more easy path by which the descent could be made than any he had yet seen.

With this hope, he walked his horse along the brink of the abyss, looking narrowly below him as he did so for some indications of such a path as he wished to find.

After going rather a long distance, however, without being able to see anything of the kind, he suddenly came upon a rude kind of cart-road, which appeared to him to lead down to the lowest depths of the quarry.

This path was on the side opposite to that upon which the murder had been committed, and from its appearance the highwayman concluded that in former times it had been used for the purpose of conveying the masses of stone to the surface.

In this conjecture he was probably right.

At any rate, there was the road—rather rough and precipitous, it was true—but still it was perfectly possible to descend by it.

Without loss of time, Tom King, as soon as he perceived it, slipped off his horse, after having given one searching glance about him to ascertain whether any of his foes were upon his track.

But he could see nothing of them, though coming from the direction of Minton Hall he saw a throng of persons who, he rightly judged, had set out for the purpose of rescuing Roderick.

They were in the far distance, and Tom had no fear of being seen by them.

All seemed well; so, taking his horse by the bridle, he began to lead him down the dangerous road.

It was formed apparently of solid rock, but it had been overgrown with some kind of parasitic moss, which liquified when trodden upon, thus materially adding to the difficulty of the descent.

Tom's horse was sure-footed, and the sagacious animal seemed to understand what was required of it, and so trod with the utmost care and deliberation.

And so, by slow degrees, they descended lower and lower, until at length Tom found himself upon a flat, open space, which on three sides was bounded by a precipice, and on the fourth by the side of the quarry.

Here he paused.

It was no part of his intention to lead his horse down to the bottom of the quarry, if he could possibly avoid it, because of the great difficulty of getting him up again.

Nor was there now any need for such a thing, for on the kind of platform we have mentioned stood the ruins of a wooden shed, which many years ago might have served as a place in which the workmen could keep their tools.

Although the shed was in the last stage of dilapidation, Tom fancied it would serve well as a place of concealment for his horse, and he approached it at once.

With some trouble he led his steed over the threshold, but when once he stood beneath the ruined roof of the shed all was well.

As quickly as he could, Tom tied the reins to a projection in the woodwork.

Then, leaving his steed to his own devices, he made his way with as much speed as was consistent with safety to the spot where he had left young Minton, being almost fearful that those he had seen approaching would arrive before he had time to address him.

A tolerably easy winding path led from the plattorm to the depths of the quarry, and having reached here, Tom took his way over the rugged ground towards the opposite side.

As the quarry was small at the bottom in comparison with its dimensions at the top, it took him but a few minutes.

Upon arriving, he found young Minton just as he had left him.

He was propped up against the rock, and did not appear to have moved in the least.

He was not unconscious, for when Tom approached he looked up as though he heard the sound of his footsteps.

His face brightened with pleasure when he saw who it was.

Tom King knelt down beside him and took his hand.

It was cold and clammy.

"I have performed your mission," he said, in reply to the wounded man's inquiring glance. "All is well. Assistance will be here in a few moments."

Roderick thanked him with a smile.

He had no longer the power to speak.

He glanced in the direction of the little pool of water.

Tom comprehended that glance, and gave him more of the refreshing beverage.

An improvement was immediately visible.

"You have been in danger?" he said, inquiringly

"Do not exhaust yourself with talking," said King. "It is true I have been in danger from a lieutenant of dragoons, who seems to be quite at home at Minton Hall; in fact, the one I spoke to you about. Had I consulted my own safety merely, I should have placed as great a distance as possible between this spot and myself."

Young Minton endeavoured to interrupt him.

But Tom went on.

"I felt I could not rest," he said, "until I had seen you in safety, for I consider I am partly the cause of what has happened."

Young Minton made a dissenting gesture.

"When your friends come they will probably be accompanied by Lieutenant Grenne; it is therefore necessary that I should conceal myself. If he does not form one of the party I shall come forth and assist to carry you to the ground above. If he does, I shall, perforce, be compelled to remain hidden."

Young Minton nodded, and looked steadily across the quarry.

Tom followed his gaze, and then he saw that the expected aid was close at hand.

They were coming down the same path as he had himself descended by.

Probably it was known to them as being the easiest means by which the bottom of the quarry could be gained.

"I must hide now," said Tom King, "and if I find it safe to emerge I will do so. There is a projecting rock yonder, and if I get behind that there will be little fear of my being seen."

With these words, Tom darted towards the piece of projecting rock to which he had alluded, and crouched down behind it.

Provided that there was no suspicion of his being hidden somewhere in the vicinity, it would answer his purpose very well, although the hiding-place was of such an artificial character.

He was only just in time, for now, with loud shouts and cries, the party from the Hall dispersed themselves about in search for Roderick.

It was not long before they found him.

His father was loud in the expressions of his grief when he saw the state to which his only son had been reduced, and he uttered loud curses upon his murderer.

Miss Minton, too, was there, and she flung herself down on the rock near her brother.

He smiled faintly, and strove to take her hand in his.

"Home—home," he gasped; "home as quickly as may be."

At this moment, those persons who had formed part of the expedition, and who consisted of domestics from the Hall, cried out—

"Here comes Doctor Bache — here comes Doctor Bache!"

A young and pleasant-looking man now made his appearance upon the scene.

He was the nearest medical man, and he had been sent for with an urgent request to return with the messenger.

He did so.

All drew back now, in order to allow him an opportunity of examining the hurts of the wounded man.

By this time Tom King had ascertained that Lieutenant Grenne did not form one of the party, but he was so interested in what was going forward, that he forgot to disclose himself.

Doctor Bache looked grave when he rose up after having completed his examination, and he said—

"This is a dangerous case, and the greatest care will be required. Some of you must go and procure a litter, or something of the kind. Be as quick as you can, for we cannot remove him without."

Several of the domestics at once quitted the scene for that purpose.

Roderick Minton now signified his wish to speak, but the doctor would not permit it.

At this moment Tom King came from his place of concealment.

All looked surprised when he made his appearance.

Roderick Minton uttered a faint, but unmistakable cry of joy.

All observed it.

"I am here," said Tom King, "because I wish, in the presence of all here, to relate how and in what manner Roderick Minton received the injuries which I feared were fatal."

"But, my dear sir," said Doctor Bache, "why repeat them to us? A magistrate is the proper person to receive your depositions."

"I am aware of that. But, hear me out first, and I will give you my reasons afterwards. I charge you all to pay particular attention to what I say, so as to be able to recollect it at another time. Mr. Roderick Minton will witness whether I speak the truth, because, from time to time, I shall pause in my narrative, and then, if he nods his head, you will understand that I have spoken the truth."

This was assented to.

Then Tom King commenced a brief but full relation of all those circumstances with which the reader is already well acquainted.

It can be imagined with what mingled feelings his narrative was listened to; which, it is needless to say, young Minton confirmed every time he was appealed to.

Having finished, Tom said—

"And now, having performed my mission, and atoned for my share in what has happened, I will tell you who and what I am, and then you will say that I have adopted the only course that was open to me."

Just as Tom spoke, those who had been dispatched for the litter returned, and made their appearance upon the scene.

They were accompanied by someone who came for the first time to the old quarry.

It was Lieutenant Grenne.

He had tired his horse by an unsuccessful search after Tom King, and, happening to be near the quarry when the bearers of the litter arrived, he resolved to descend with them.

He caught sight of Tom immediately, and drawing a pistol, he cried—

"In the king's name I call upon all here present to seize upon that man. There are five hundred pounds reward offered for his apprehension, alive or dead. It is Tom King, the highwayman."

Doctor Bache and those who were unaware of Tom's identity looked as astonished as they might well do upon hearing such a revelation made.

"Stand where you are, sir," said Lieutenant Grenne, addressing Tom King, and pointing his pistol at him as he spoke. "You are my prisoner. If you attempt to move, I fire."

"Fire away, then," cried Tom King, defiantly. "I am no man's prisoner as yet. Farewell all."

As he spoke, Tom darted suddenly from the spot upon which he had been standing, and made his way towards the winding path by which he had descended to the quarry.

At that instant Lieutenant Grenne fired.

But the highwayman had been quick in his movements, and so escaped the shot.

The lieutenant uttered a scream of vexation.

Mr. Minton, Roderick's father, caught him by the arm.

"Surely, sir," he said, "after all that has occurred, surely you will let him go?"

"If I do, may I be d—d. Let go your hold, sir."

He wrenched his arm from Mr. Minton's detaining grasp as he spoke.

But this detention, trifling as it was, was of great service to Tom King.

It enabled him to get a wonderful start of his pursuer, for Lieutenant Grenne at once gave chase after breaking away from Mr. Minton.

Tom King dashed up the precipitous path in the manner a man would who knew he was flying for his life.

The lieutenant made good speed, too, but happening to miss his footing, he fell heavily to the ground.

All the other persons who had collected in the quarry, Roderick himself included, looked upon the chase with all-absorbing interest, and something like a cry of gratification came from the lips of all of them when they witnessed the discomfiture of the dragoon.

But in a marvellously short space of time the lieutenant was on his feet again.

Heedless altogether of the bruises and scratches he had received, he recommenced the pursuit with great vigour, determining not to be baulked in his object.

In the meantime, Tom King had gained the little shed in which he had left his horse, and had brought him forth.

A cheer from those in the depths below greeted him as he did so.

He raised his hat and bowed.

At this moment he saw how close behind him the lieutenant was, and he fancied that after all he should be obliged to have a tussle with him before he could get free.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXV.

FORTUNE FAVOURS TOM KING ON HIS RETURN TO THE DESERTED MANSION.

And so Tom King abandoned his intention of mounting his horse and turned round to face his adversary.

With a scream of anger, the lieutenant of dragoons rushed from the winding path on to the platform.

Tom King ran forward to meet him.

Lieutenant Grenne had not drawn his sword, and still held in his hand the pistol he had so ineffectually discharged.

Tom closed with him at once, not giving him the opportunity of providing himself with another weapon.

The lieutenant dropped the useless pistol, and grappled with Tom King.

A furious struggle then ensued.

Lieutenant Grenne was really a brave man, and he called for no assistance.

He sternly determined not to suffer another defeat, but to capture this highwayman single-handed.

With this intention he put forth his utmost strength and skill.

In height and weight he had greatly the advantage of Tom King, whose figure was inclined to slimness.

But Tom had skill and courage, while his muscles were as hard and as pliant as steel.

Between two such combatants as these the struggle was sure to be a severe one.

It was a dangerous place, too, for both of them, for the rocky platform was of very limited area indeed, and a fall over either one of its three precipice-bounded sides would result in the certain death of both.

When the lieutenant felt his opponent firmly in his grasp, he made sure of victory, forgetting at the moment that Tom King had far more incentive to struggle to the utmost than he had.

Round and round they went—now to one side, now to the other, mutually avoiding the edge of the precipices.

Lieutenant Grenne was not long in finding that he had no common enemy opposed to him, and his rage and vexation knew no bounds.

Tom made every effort, and it is not to be wondered at that he should do so, for, apart from all other considerations, he could not tell how soon some of the lieutenant's companions might peep down into the quarry and see what was taking place.

In the event of that, there would be all end to an escape.

The combatants had several times fallen to the ground, locked in each other's embrace, but they had rose both at once, neither appearing to have gained the advantage.

The bruises which they thus sustained made them still more furious.

And so the struggle went on.

In a short time, however, the dragoon felt that he was getting the worst of it, and he began to despair of achieving the victory about which he had felt so much confidence.

A feeling of utter and reckless desperation took possession of him when he made this discovery.

Feeling that he could not win, he made up his mind that his now more-than-ever-hated foe should not.

He should not, even if he had to perish with him.

Maddened by the conflict, and regardless of all personal consequences, the lieutenant endeavoured to drag Tom King towards one of the precipices.

When he had done so, he fully intended to fling him over, even if his own certain death was the immediate result.

But Tom was not long in penetrating this design, and he felt that the moment had arrived when the contest must be put an end to.

Gathering all his remaining strength and skill, Tom disengaged himself for a moment from the grasp of the dragoon.

Then clenching his fist he rushed at his opponent, and delivered a terrific blow just as he was coming with full force towards him.

The lieutenant staggered, but did not fall.

He was, however, effectually prevented from seizing his antagonist a second time.

But he came forward with that intention, and Tom received him with a second blow, which he closely followed up by a third.

Lieutenant Grenne then lay motionless and prostrate on the ground.

After having thus gained the victory, Tom wiped his dripping brow, and made another bow to those who were standing in the quarry, and whose interest was so strongly excited that they had not moved a limb.

A ringing cheer came from all of them, in which the wounded Roderick feebly joined.

This plainly enough evinced their partiality to our old friend, who, after bowing again, took his horse by the bridle and commenced leading him up the steep and rugged path.

To have attempted to ascend while mounted would have been perfect madness, for, owing to the slipperiness of the rock, the horse could with difficulty advance.

At length, however, the top was gained, and then Tom King sprang into the saddle.

Another cheer came from the depths of the quarry.

Tom waved his hat in reply, and at once galloped off, having the satisfaction about his heart that through him young Minton would be well attended to, while the guilty Godfrey Royston would not escape condign punishment.

Tom King once more turned his horse's head towards the deserted mansion, which he now resolved to gain without further loss of time.

He knew how great would be the anxiety of his comrades, and they would surmise the worst had happened when they found he did not return at the appointed hour.

The day was well advanced, and his journey could not fail to be attended with much danger.

But he put into execution every means he could think of in order to escape observation.

Very wisely, he made the resolution not to be tempted into stopping any other traveller, but to put up for the time being with his ill-luck, and wait until a better opportunity presented itself.

On his return, his mind was pretty fully occupied with thinking over the details of the adventure which had last befallen him.

The reader will admit that it was of a character to furnish ample food for reflection.

He was baffled and puzzled when he remembered some of the incidents, and he felt convinced that he had not learned all.

Probably, the confidence that had been so strangely placed in him was not complete.

He was much struck with the subtlety with which the murder of young Roderick Minton had been planned.

To have decoyed the youth to that lonely spot would have been difficult, if not impossible, without the adoption of some such scheme as a duel.

By causing the seconds not to keep their appointment, which could easily be done, he made sure of his victim, and but for the chance of Tom King's presence upon the scene he would have succeeded, and the body of the young man would never have been found in the lonesome depths of the quarry.

But with all his cleverness, Godfrey Royston was destined not to succeed in his nefarious schemes.

It was while he was engaged in these reflections that Tom King came in sight of the deserted mansion.

He looked cautiously around him to make sure that he was not observed, but all was still, not a human being was in sight.

Satisfied upon this point, he continued on his way with great confidence.

At every few yards he would look around him, but with the same favourable result.

Presently the mansion gates were reached.

His horse hastened through them and along the avenue with a feeling of pleasure, for the intelligent creature knew well enough that she would now be permitted to take a little rest.

Almost immediately after taking a turn in the avenue that concealed the lane, Tom was accosted by Claude Duval.

His delight when he found that his comrade had returned sound in wind and limb can be imagined.

Tom's first question was whether Sixteen-String Jack had returned, and he was, of course, replied to in the affirmative.

Dick Turpin, too, had not returned—for the reader must bear in mind that the incidents we are describing took place on the day that followed the night when Turpin set forth.

At the time Tom King arrived at the deserted mansion, the reader will remember that Turpin was sleeping soundly in one of the bedrooms at the "White Horse," while old Matthew was running some serious risks in disposing of the booty.

Tom led his horse to the stable, and, having attended to its wants, followed Claude Duval upstairs to the room where Maud was waiting for them.

As for Sixteen-String Jack, he was sleeping off his night's fatigue, but, upon hearing that Tom King had returned, immediately made his appearance.

He, too, was rejoiced at his return.

As Tom was thoroughly worn out by all that he had gone through, he hastened to throw himself down on one of the beds, after first partaking of some slight refreshment.

Sixteen-String Jack returned to finish his nap, and in this way the remainder of the day was spent.

Towards dusk they rose, and then they had to give an account of their adventures.

Tom could not help feeling a great deal of chagrin when he found how successful his comrade had been, for the valise taken from the post-chaise contained a very large sum in gold indeed.

"There is some satisfaction for me to-night, at all events," said Claude Duval, as he rubbed his hands briskly together.

"What is that?"

"Why, it will not depend upon the date on a guinea whether I go out on the road to-night. I am independent of that, and have made every preparation."

"Yes, that's true enough," said Tom King. "It rests between Sixteen-String Jack and myself to-night."

"I am sure to go, and I only hope fortune will favour me a little better than she has you, Tom."

"I hope so, too, with all my heart. If she does not, you will be badly off indeed."

"Nevertheless, you had some highly-entertaining adventures."

"I don't dispute that; but they did not help us at all in our design."

"Very true, and that is what we have got to do just at present."

"Of course it is."

"Well," said Claude, "in a little time I intend to be off."

"Good luck to you. Which road shall you take?"

"I have not decided."

"It will be best to make up our minds before starting."

"I quite agree with you. I think I shall try the Edgware-road."

"Good, but take care of the dragoons."

"Oh! let me alone for that; and now, as we have settled that point, suppose you draw lots with each other as to which is to go and which is to stay."

"Agreed," said Tom. "Now, Jack, get a couple of guineas of different dates.

This was done, and the lots drawn in the same manner as before.

Chance favoured Tom King at last.

The lot fell upon him, and Sixteen-String Jack had to keep watch and ward.

After all, this was no more and no less than it ought to be.

It would scarcely have been fair for Sixteen-String Jack to be successful two nights in succession.

By this time the darkness had considerably deepened, and Claude Duval and Tom King announced their intention of setting out without further delay, in order to take advantage of the best part of the evening.

Maud was very still and sad.

As the reader will have perceived, she took no part in the highwaymen's conversation.

She had seated herself near the fire, and, leaning her head upon her hand, gazed pensively at the glowing embers.

She was thinking about Turpin, and wondering where he was, and whether he was threatened with any serious danger.

A heavy foreboding of coming sorrow sat heavy at her heart and crushed her spirits.

She scarcely glanced upwards when Claude and Tom announced their intention of taking their departure.

Sixteen-String Jack persisted in accompanying them to the stables, though they wished him to stay and keep company with Maud, whose melancholy and dejection they could not fail to notice.

Still they judged it would be best to make no remark about it, and were silent accordingly.

Upon hearing Sixteen-String Jack express his wish to descend with them, she desired him to do so, stating that she should not be at all afraid to be left alone for a short time.

That Jack must have had some motive in so strongly urging his wish to accompany them his comrades were aware, and so as they were crossing the little bit of neglected garden that led to the stables, Tom King said—

"Now, Jack, what is it you wish to say to us? I can tell there is something by your manner."

"It is perhaps not very important, but still I felt desirous not to speak upon the subject in the presence of Maud."

"What subject?"

"Why, the mysterious sounds which we have all heard. What sort of night have you had."

"Ah! tell us, Claude," said Tom King. "I suppose my ill-luck puts me out, but I quite forgot to ask you anything about it."

"I did not mention it myself," said Claude Duval, "on account of Maud, and I am glad we have got the opportunity of saying a few words to each other alone."

"What has happened?"

"Come into the stable, and I will tell you there. We shall then be losing no time, for we shall be able to go on saddling our horses just the same."

This was at at once assented to and the three highwaymen entered the stable.

"Now," said Tom King, "begin, Claude, for I am burning with impatience to hear what you have got to say."

"It is nothing definite. About the usual time we were startled by a repetition of the same hideous sound which had previously alarmed us."

"Well—well. What then? Did you discover anything?"

"I will tell you. Upon hearing the cry, which seemed ten times louder and more horrible than before, Maud manifested so much terror that it was as much as I could do to calm her."

"And did you succeed?"

"Only partially. The poor girl was frightened to death, and I must confess that I myself fairly felt my flesh creep on my bones."

"What next?"

"I soothed Maud as much as I could, and endeavoured to lessen her agitation. Before I could succeed, however, the cry came again."

"Did you descend?"

"No. Maud was so petrified with fear that she could not move, and clung to me so tightly for protection that I felt I dare not leave her by herself.

"How long did the sounds continue?

"We heard it four times."

"And you did not descend?"

"No."

"Did you hear the clashing of steel?"

"No."

"Is that all?"

"Nearly. After Sixteen-String Jack returned, I descended to look for you, and took the opportunity of entering the old armoury."

"Yes—yes!"

"But I found all things precisely in the same state as they were when we saw them together."

CHAPTER CCCCLXXVI.

DESCRIBES HOW CLAUDE DUVAL SET A TRAP FOR THE TRAVELLERS ON THE DOVER ROAD.

A PAUSE ensued after Claude Duval had spoken these words.

His comrades looked in each others' countenances aghast.

"There is some deep mystery in all this," said Tom King, presently. "I will find it out, too. It must be found out. If things go on in this manner, we shall be driven mad."

"We cannot put up with it."

"Of course not. Jack, my friend, if you should happen to hear those sounds to-night—and doubtless you will—try your best to discover what it is that produces them. I could almost feel it in my heart to abandon my enterprise, and spend the night watching and waiting in the old armoury."

"No—no; that will never be worth while," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Go on, and good luck to you. I will find out all I can if I have the chance."

"Agreed, then. But you had better return to Maud. She will be terrified at being left alone so long."

"And you are just ready to start?"

"We are."

"Farewell, then. But, above all, try to return before dawn."

"We will."

"I mention it, because I expect Dick, and I should like you to all get back before he arrives."

"All right, Jack. Bear in mind what we have said."

"Oh! trust me for that."

"Once more, then, farewell."

With these words Tom King and Claude Duval set their horses in motion, and in a minute or two reached the gates we have so often had occasion to mention.

Here they paused for caution's sake, for it was important to learn whether anyone might chance to be in the lane.

But all was still; and, after listening a moment longer, the two highwaymen rode forth.

"And now, Tom," said Claude Duval, "what are your intentions?—which way do you intend to take?"

"The Windsor-road; that is, if you have not decided upon it."

"No," returned Claude. "I have been thinking matters over, and I have made up my mind to have an adventure of a very startling character indeed."

"Be careful."

"I have made every preparation, and arranged in my mind all that I intend to do."

"Which is the road?"

"The Dover-road."

"The Dover-road?"

"Yes. We have not shown ourselves in that quarter; and I think I shall be able to pick up a first-rate booty there, if I am not altogether out in my calculations."

"What are your calculations?"

"Well, never mind just at present. If I succeed, you will, on my return, hear all about it, but, until then, I have made up my mind to be silent."

"Very well, just as you like. I have not arranged any further than the particular road I am going to try."

"Very well, then. I hope, with all my heart, you won't be so unlucky as you were last night."

"No, confound it."

"We had better part here, I think, and each take our separate ways."

"Yes, we must part. Good night."

"Good night," was the reply.

The two highwaymen then trotted off in different directions, and were quickly out of sight of each other.

The night was young; indeed, to speak truth, it was as yet only evening; but Claud Duval set off at a sharp pace.

He had a long way to go, and, unless he made good speed, he would not be able to reach his destination until after the time he had arranged in his own mind.

As usual, Claude took the most unfrequented paths, in order not to meet with the dragoons; for, after what Tom King had said, the necessity of avoiding them was all the more apparent.

Without meeting with any accident, however, and without the occurrence of any incident deserving of being placed before the reader, Claude Duval cantered into the Dover-road.

Before the invention of railways, this was one of the busiest roads leading out of the metropolis, and, of course, a hundred and thirty years ago looked very different to what it is to-day.

Of all the roads he could think of, this one promised to be the most profitable, and an inspection of the map will show that Claude's expectations were well grounded.

He did not venture to emerge into the Dover-road, however, until he was some distance from London, for he calculated that the further into the country he got, the less fear there would be of his meeting with the dragoons.

Had anyone been near enough to observe him, it would have been seen that there was upon his countenance an expression of very great satisfaction, as though he was highly pleased at something or other.

"A little further on," he said, gleefully, "and then I will set my trap. If I do not catch something that will astonish them, it will be very odd to me."

From these words it will be seen that Claude had resolved upon some very peculiar plan of action indeed.

What it is, we need not pause to describe, because we shall have a good opportunity of observing all his actions.

On he went, allowing several persons to pass him without molestation.

At length he came to a small village, through which he trotted at full speed.

He soon left it behind him, and, after continuing his way for about five miles, all at once drew rein.

He was now in a lonely part of the Dover-road that lay between two insignificant villages.

They were nearly ten miles apart, and scarcely a house could be seen all along the road between them.

Claude calculated that where he had halted was, as nearly as possible, half-way between these two villages, and, therefore, he had little fear of interruption.

"Now to set the trap," he said; "and if it does not answer first-rate, I never made a greater mistake in all my life. It is a first-rate place to try it. There's no mistake about that. Woa! gently, now—gently, will you?"

These last words were addressed to his steed, which seemed rather inclined to be restive.

With great agility Claude then dismounted, and secured his steed to a convenient branch.

This done, his next proceeding was to lie down at full length in the middle of the high road, with his ear turned towards the ground.

He then listened intently.



[TOM KING COMPELS LORD STRACEY TO DISMOUNT AND SURRENDER HIS HORSE.]

By the adoption of this manœuvre he was able to tell whether anything was approaching.

Satisfied apparently with this, he sprang lightly and easily to his feet, saying, as he did so—

"Now for the trap!"

Turning up his long vest, he proceeded to uncoil something that was round his waist.

That something was rope.

It was fine, but very strong, and of considerable length.

He had concealed it about his person in the early part of the day when he first resolved upon the stratagem that he was now about to put into execution.

In less than a minute the whole of the rope was unwound.

Claude then took one end in his hand, and walked to the side of the road.

Here, and on the other side likewise, some tall trees were growing.

To the trunk of one of these, and as near the root as possible, he secured the rope, taking care that the knot he tied was a good one, and well able to bear a sudden strain.

He tested it several times as well as he could, and then, with a nod of satisfaction, he ran across to the opposite side of the highway.

The rope was plenty long enough for the purpose, and he passed the other end round the trunk of another tree, and secured it in the same careful manner as before.

When this was done, the rope was stretched tightly across the road at a distance of about six inches from the ground.

In the darkness it was quite invisible, so closely did the colour of the rope assimilate to the colour of the road itself.

When he had done this, Claude rubbed his hands briskly together, to show how well pleased he was with what he had done so far.

Going into the centre of the highway, he stooped down,

No. 100 will be Published next Thursday.

and, pressing on the rope with his hand, found that it yielded just about as much as he intended it should.

"I think it will do," he muttered. "And now to keep watch. I would lay any odds the trap answers."

With these words, Claude returned to the spot where he had left his horse, and sprang once more into the saddle.

Here he sat still enough, listening intently for any faint sound that might betoken the approach of a traveller.

He whiled away the time by looking to the priming of his pistols, for it was important that they should not fail him when the moment for action arrived.

He knew they were well loaded, so that the only thing he had cause to be solicitous about was the priming.

Suddenly, however, as he was thus engaged, there came upon his ears a sound which seemed at once to inspire him with new life.

The sound was the clear, ringing hoof-beat of a horse.

A single mounted traveller was approaching.

Claude backed his horse into the shadow of the hedge and remained there motionless.

Dimly beneath him, he could see the rope that was stretched across the roadway.

On—on, nearer and nearer came the horseman.

The iron shoes upon his horse's feet rang out sharp and clear upon the dry, hard road.

He was coming from the direction of the country, and therefore, as a matter of course, going towards London.

Impatiently Claude awaited his arrival.

The traveller came nearer, and as he did so changed the pace of his horse from a gallop to a trot.

In another moment the trap would be reached.

Little dreaming of their danger, on came both horse and rider.

Claude held his breath.

The rope was reached.

Down went the traveller's horse, as though struck with lightning, the moment his fore feet caught against the rope.

Flying over his head went the traveller, and then, after rolling over and over once or twice, both lay still.

"I knew the trap would answer," said Claude, as he slipped from his horse.

It would seem, though, that neither the traveller nor his steed were much hurt by their fall.

The latter, with a snort of alarm and pain, rose to his feet, and, riderless as he was, galloped off at full speed along the road towards London.

The traveller was only stunned for a moment, and he was rising when Claude reached him.

"Hold!" he cried. "Stir not a limb. If you disobey me, your life will pay the penalty!"

"Ten thousand curses!"

"Your money, sir! Quick! Hand it over to me! Do not delay, if you wish to escape with your life."

The tones of Claude's voice were threatening in the extreme.

"Let me get up," said the traveller, "and you shall have what you require."

"All right. Sit up, then," replied Claude. "But recollect that I hold a loaded pistol in my hand, and if I see the least signs of treachery, I will blow your brains out without mercy."

The traveller shook visibly, and removed his hand from the breast of his coat, where he had thrust it.

"Spare my life," he said, abjectly. "Spare my life."

"I will, but only on one condition, which is, that you hand over to me, without a moment's further delay, everything you have about you that may happen to be of the slightest value."

With a groan, the traveller produced a purse.

"More," cried Claude, as he pocketed it. "More, and be quick, or I may grow impatient, and if I do, it will be far from pleasant to yourself, I can assure you."

With several other groans the traveller placed in Claude's hands a number of other articles, nor would the highwayman express himself satisfied until he had taken everything.

"Now," he said, "rise to your feet."

The traveller obeyed.

"Where is my horse?"

"Gone on towards London. Make haste, and you will overtake him."

The traveller uttered an oath.

"I will count three," cried Claude; "and, when I have done so, I shall fire, so the best thing you can do is to run on as fast as possible, and then I shan't have such a good chance of hitting you. One!"

The traveller gnashed his teeth.

"Two!" cried Claude, as he brought his pistol to a level.

With a yell of fear, the traveller ran off down the road towards London, and, before Claude could say "three," he had disappeared in the darkness.

"So far, very good," said the highwayman, complacently. "There is nothing very valuable here, but still it shows the trap answers its purpose admirably. I will just see whether it is all right."

He went up to the rope as he spoke.

It was now rather slacker than before, but still it was none the worse for that; so very contentedly Claude remounted his steed, and waited to see who would next be unfortunate enough to come along the road.

Scarcely had he seated himself in the saddle, than he saw in the distance two small but flashing lights.

"The Dover coach!" he cried. "The Dover coach, as I am a living man! What shall I do now? I had not thought of this. How will the trap answer for this, I wonder? I think I had better untie the rope, and let it go by; it is rather too much for one to tackle. And yet, no. I never let anything pass me yet, and I won't. I will draw back a little, and see how the trap answers. If well, why, then, I shall know what to do."

Claude Duval arrived at his determination just in time, for the Dover coach came rolling along the road at full ten miles an hour, which, all things considered, was a very wonderful rate indeed.

The halo, which the bright lamps cast around them, was distinctly visible, as well as the horses, which were now reeking with steam.

Indeed, he could scarcely have had time to slacken the rope, even if he had been disposed to do so.

He moved a little from where he had been standing, and then, with a rumble like thunder, the mail coach arrived.

The two leading horses entangled their feet in the rope in a moment, and down they went, to the great consternation of the coachman, who was in the middle of a very interesting narrative, addressed to the gentleman who sat near him.

So suddenly did the two leading horses reach the ground, that the other pair, before they could stop themselves, fell over the same obstruction.

But the rope snapped now, unable to bear such sudden and violent shocks.

A tremendous uproar now ensued, every one wanting to know what was the matter.

The coachman, as the saying is, was completely taken aback.

To him the sudden fall of the horses seemed nothing less than magical.

Before anyone could recover from the first shock of alarm the loud report of a pistol was heard.

It was Claude Duval who had fired.

The trap had answered better than he could possibly have expected, and he fired the pistol for the purpose of creating an additional feeling of alarm in the breasts of the passengers.

He succeeded in his design, for everybody fell back, as though the bullet had found a home in their particular breast.

With two bounds Claude Duval reached the carriage.

"My errand is a peaceable one, ladies and gentleman," he said; "that is, if you will let me have my own way. For those who resist there will be nothing but death."

CHAPTER CCCCLXXVII.

CLAUDE DUVAL TAKES A GOOD BOOTY FROM THE DOVER COACH, AND ACHIEVES A SIGNAL VICTORY OVER THE DRAGOONS.

SUNDRY screams of alarm, evidently from female lips, came from the interior of the Dover coach after Claude concluded his highly pacific speech.

Taking no notice of these, the highwayman added—

"Quick!—quick! Hand over to me whatever articles of value you carry, and no further harm shall be done. If you do not yield quietly I shall summon my comrades

to my assistance, and they will be by no means gentle, I can assure you."

"Oh! d—n you and your comrades as well," cried one of the inside passengers. "Do you think we are going to sit here quietly and be robbed on the king's highway?"

"Don't lose your temper," said Claude, calmly. "You can be robbed quietly or not, just as you please, but robbed you will be; there is no doubt whatever about that."

"Curses!"

"Curse away, sir, if it eases your mind at all. Don't mind me, I beg."

The other travellers could not forbear a smile at Claude's imperturbableness.

The traveller's ire increased.

"Has nobody got a pistol?" he cried. "If so, hand it to me, and I will show you all how it ought to be used. Has anybody got a pistol, I say?"

He glared fiercely around him as he spoke.

It would seem, however, that none of the passengers had firearms, for no movement was made.

Claude then saw that there was but one male passenger besides the one he had had the little altercation with.

This other was a very thin, light-haired, meek-looking young man, who did not appear to have courage or life enough in him to do battle with a fly.

The other four passengers were females.

Claude saw there was not much chance of securing a good booty, so he determined to bring the scene to an end.

Accordingly, when the irascible traveller demanded a pistol from one of his fellow-passengers, Claude projected the one he held in his hand into the interior of the carriage, saying as he did so—

"Look here, sir. You see I have a pistol. I don't want to use it if I can help it, but I shall not hesitate to do so if you trifle with me. My finger is on the trigger. Hand over your purse and watch, or I'll blow your brains out first, and take them from your dead body afterwards."

At this horrible menace, the ladies shrieked again.

The angry traveller turned just a shade paler, and then put his hand in his pocket and produced a purse.

Claude relieved him of it immediately.

"Now, sir, your watch."

With a groan, the watch was drawn forth.

A few more articles of no great value were also handed to Claude, who then turned his attention to the other traveller.

He was as white as a ghost, and had screwed himself up into the smallest possible compass in one corner of the coach.

"Now, sir," said Claude, "it's your turn. Make haste; I have no time to spare with you."

More dead than alive, the young man rapidly gave the highwayman all the articles he carried which were of the slightest possible value.

Claude then turned to the ladies.

He took off his hat, and made a profound bow.

"I am really very sorry, ladies," he said, "to have put you to so much terror and inconvenience. Had I known that the Dover coach contained so much youth and beauty, I should have allowed it to pass by unmolested."

"Then I'm d—d sorry you didn't know," grumbled the irascible traveller.

Claude continued, without noticing the interruption—

"What is done cannot be undone, but I regret what has occurred—deeply regret."

"Oh! d—n your regrets," interrupted the traveller again. "Why don't you ask the women for what they have got, and allow us to continue our journey in peace?"

"Ladies," said the highwayman, "I am Claude Duval, and I make it a rule never to take anything from the fair and lovely sex."

"Bah! bosh!" said the traveller.

At this moment Claude heard something going on at the top of the coach, and he withdrew from the window precipitately.

It was well that he did so.

If he had been a little slower in his movements, the consequences would have been fatal to him.

A terrific report, which seemed to annihilate the sense of hearing, followed a blinding flash of fire.

A perfect shower of bullets passed over the spot upon which Claude Duval had so lately stood.

It was the guard who had fired his blunderbuss.

He made sure of sweeping the highwayman from the face of the earth.

But Claude was unhurt.

It may seem strange that the guard did not fire his blunderbuss earlier.

But there was a reason for it.

He had had an encounter with highwaymen before, and had got decidedly the worst part in the affray, and so he resolved on this occasion not to get his body into trouble by interfering.

So he sat quite still, and it was not until he was urged and threatened by the passengers on the roof that he attempted to use his weapon.

Seeing, however, that he had a good chance of taking the highwayman at unawares, and, fearing the consequences of refusing compliance with the travellers' request, he had fired.

Some words uttered by one of the travellers on the roof warned Claude of his danger, and, as we have seen, he drew back just in time.

As for the coachman, the downfall of all four of his horses had been so sudden that he felt certain it was the work of enchantment.

He was some moments in recovering from the state of surprise into which he had been thrown.

When he did recover, his first act was to descend from his lofty seat, and set his horses on their legs again.

He was thus engaged when the guard fired.

Claude now felt that he had experienced all the resistance that would be offered him, and he proceeded to levy his exactions upon the outside passengers.

As for the guard, he shrank down into his seat, being only too anxious to escape observation.

With a very ill grace the outsiders surrendered their purses and watches.

But Claude would not permit one of them to escape.

When he had done he looked for the coachman.

He found him groping on the ground, trying to discover what had thrown the horses down.

Pointing a pistol at his head, Claude sternly commanded him to resume his seat and drive on to London.

The horses were all on their feet, trembling excessively.

The coachman mounted and took the reins in his hand.

He cracked his whip, and then the cumbersome conveyance was once more set in motion.

"Look out, coachy, another night," shouted Claude Duval, "and mind you don't try to drive your horses over a rope."

In a few minutes the Dover coach was far away on its road to London.

After its departure Claude sat quite still upon his horse in a reflective attitude.

"So far, very good," he muttered. "The trap has fully come up to my expectations—it has answered most admirably. Already I have a capital booty. Let me think, now. What had I better do? Shall I ride off at once, and be satisfied with my luck so far? Perhaps it would be the wisest plan. And yet I have been lucky twice, and why should I not be lucky a third time? I will try it. I will set the trap again. I fancy I am quite far enough in the country to have nothing to fear from the dragoons, who guard the roads around London only. Surely they will not come so far as this. At all risks, however, I will try."

From this it will be seen that Claude Duval had not got prudence enough to let well alone.

Instead of riding off with what he had obtained, he resolved to tempt fortune further.

The rope, as we have said, had been broken by the horses belonging to the stage coach, and so Claude slipped off his horse for the purpose of repairing it.

This he found was an easy enough matter.

He had but to unwind one end from the trunk of the tree round which it had been coiled, tie the rope in a secure knot in the middle, and make it fast to the tree again.

As he was stooping down for this purpose, however, there came upon his ear a sound which convinced him he had taken his trouble for nothing.

He rose to his feet and looked keenly along the road in the direction of London.

He could see nothing, but the sound he had heard grew plainer and plainer every moment.

It was the regular beat of horses' hoofs upon the hard road.

Claude could tell there were many of them.

They were the dragoons.

He had been in error when he thought they did not penetrate so far into the country.

On they came, and at a rapid speed, too, as though they had some other object in view than merely patrolling the road.

"They have met the coach," muttered Claude, "and of course have learnt all the particulars of my attack upon it. They may even have met the horseman. Never mind. I will be off. It was fortunate I heard them before they got any nearer."

He sprang into the saddle as he spoke, and as he did so a fresh thought entered his mind.

He chuckled loudly with pleasure.

"Bravo!" he cried. "Bravo! That is excellent. I did not think of that. But I can see plainly enough that, for the third time, the trap will be of service to me. I will let the dragoons come on, and then down they will go for certain."

Claude Duval rejoiced exceedingly in this prospective discomfiture of his enemies.

It would be a glorious thing, he thought, to send them all sprawling in the dust, and would be a revenge indeed.

Instead of galloping off and securing his own safety, as one would have thought he would have done, Claude walked his horse a few paces along the road towards Dover, and then bringing him to a halt, turned him round and paused in the middle of the road, with his face turned towards London.

The rope was about thirty paces before him.

In the meantime the dragoons had come very much nearer, and now Claude could perceive a dark mass approaching as well as hear the jingle of accoutrements.

He chuckled again when he saw how confidently they came on.

Their downfall would be sudden and certain.

And now the dragoons came within a few yards of the rope.

Claude could see them plainly, and he also found that they could see him, for they reined in their horses.

Still Claude maintained his position in the middle of the road, and never moved a muscle.

The dragoons had stopped just about as far on the other side of the rope as Claude, so that the trap was about half-way between them.

"Claude Duval!" cried one of the dragoons, in a loud and commanding voice, "surrender yourself! You are our prisoner! You cannot possibly escape! Surrender, or we fire!"

Claude took off his hat and made an ironical bow.

"You don't expect me to come to you, do you? I am not your prisoner yet. If you want me, you must come and fetch me."

Claude half turned his horse round as he spoke.

The officer of dragoons—for it was the officer who had spoken—fearing that the highwayman was about to gallop off, cried out—

"Forward—forward, my lads! We shall have him! A sharp touch will do it! Don't spare your horses! Forward, I say!"

Inspired by these orders, the dragoons struck their spurs deeply into their horses' flanks, and set forward at a good speed.

In a straggling body they neared the trap.

To encourage them to keep up their pace, Claude cantered a little way down the road, looking back all the time that he did so.

Then the foremost of the dragoons reached the rope.

Had they been that instant stricken down by lightning, they could not have fallen to the earth more suddenly than they did.

It was as though some potent magician had waved his wand.

Down they went with tremendous force.

As quick as the eye could wink, the road was completely blocked up by one inextricable mass of horses and men.

The rope was broken by the first almost who fell, but the others, who were close behind, and who saw what had occurred, had not time, nor, in many cases, presence of mind enough to rein in their horses.

The consequence was, they fell headlong over their prostrate companions.

Not one dragoon remained upon his horse.

All fell and rolled over and kicked each other with the greatest fury imaginable.

The horses snorted—the dragoons cursed and swore.

Their anger was a thing to be imagined, not described.

In spite of this accident, however, they did not lose sight of their original intention, and, therefore, in what may truly be termed an incredibly short space of time, they all scrambled to their feet.

But such a rueful-looking lot were surely never seen before.

There was not one who had escaped injury.

Many had been hurt by the horses' hoofs as the terrified creatures attempted to rise; others had been gored by the spurs on their comrades' heels, while all had been more or less bruised and scratched by their fall on the hard road.

But, when they looked about them, the highwayman, who they concluded was the author of this mischief, had disappeared.

Slowly and painfully, and muttering horrible curses all the while, the dragoons remounted their horses.

But there was nothing to show them which direction the highwayman had taken.

He was out of sight and out of hearing too.

Nevertheless, maddened by rage and pain, the officer commanded his men to set themselves in motion.

With a very bad grace the men obeyed.

They took their way along the road towards Dover.

They came at length to the small village we have before alluded to, and which was about five miles distant.

On their way they had not met a soul, nor had they seen the least signs of the highwayman.

Weary, dispirited, and in pain, they pulled up before the one solitary inn of which the village could boast.

It was open because the coaches stopped there.

Leaning against the horse-trough in front of the inn was a man, who came towards them when they stopped.

It was the ostler.

"How long have you been standing here, friend?" asked the officer.

"Maybe half-an-hour," was the reply. "I'se waitin' for the Lunnun coach. She's very late to-night."

"We are after Claude Duval," said the officer. "He is on the road somewhere, but we have lost sight of him. Have you seen a mounted man pass here?"

"No, that I ain't."

"Are you quite sure?"

"I'm certain."

"Then we're done!" said the officer. "There's no knowing where he is now: pursuit will be vain."

"You look knocked about a bit," said the ostler, as he surveyed the whole party with a critical eye.

"Yes," replied the officer, his face turning crimson with vexation; "we have met with an accident. It's no good pursuing our man now, so the best thing we can do is to stay here a little while and look to our own and our horses' hurts. Dismount!"

He was obeyed in a moment, and the horses were led to the stables at the back of the inn.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXVIII.

CLAUDE DUVAL IS A SPECTATOR OF SOME STRANGE SCENES AT THE ROADSIDE INN.

CLAUDE DUVAL only waited long enough to see that the downfall of his foes was complete.

He knew they were not the right kind of men to lie long on the ground after the occurrence of such a disaster, and so with a loud laugh of triumph and exultation, he settled himself firmly in the saddle, and quickened his horse's pace into a gallop.

But he did not long continue to make his way along the highroad.

After going some distance he paused, and turned down a narrow country lane which intersected the main road at right angles with it.

His intention now was to return to the deserted mansion.

The night was young, but he had a long journey before him.

The distance, in a straight line even, was great, but he would have to travel in a roundabout manner in order to avoid the troop of dragoons that were patrolling the roads.

It was, therefore, quite time for him to turn back.

He had no intention of seeking out another adventure, for he was well satisfied with the result of his night's work.

Still he would not allow any traveller to pass him by.

If he did not seek an adventure, that was no reason why he should avoid one if it came in his way.

For upwards of an hour, however, he travelled through narrow country lanes, and during that time he did not meet a soul, and scarcely passed a single habitation.

The road was rough and tiring to his horse, and, at the expiration of the time we have mentioned, Claude found that his steed manifested most unequivocal signs of exhaustion.

This was not to be wondered at, for the gallant creature had travelled many miles at a rapid rate, and with very little rest.

Besides this, the food upon which he had been fed while in the stable in the deserted mansion was of a very poor quality indeed, and not at all calculated to keep up his strength.

He now shook visibly, his exhaustion increased every moment, and Claude perceived with dismay that he would not be able to perform the remainder of the journey without both food and rest.

This was very awkward, for Claude Duval had little time to spare.

Still the wants of his steed were imperative, and demanded instant attention.

Where food and rest were to be obtained, however, Claude scarcely knew.

The gallant highwayman was not like an ordinary traveller, who could put up, without fear of the consequences, at the first inn he came to.

Yet he must halt somewhere, and the sooner he did so, the better it would be.

At a slower pace he continued on his way.

He made up his mind to halt at the first place he came to which offered him the least chance of safety.

As far as he could see, however, no trace of a house was visible.

Presently, however, while he was wondering where he should find a resting-place for his tired-out horse, a sudden turn in the road brought him in sight of a curious-looking, rambling roadside inn, such a one as would be vainly sought for now throughout the length and breadth of England.

It was situated low down in a hollow, and was almost hidden by the trees that grew on all sides of it.

The building itself was of no great height, which, independent of the lowness of its situation, would account for Claude not having seen it until he arrived in front of its very door.

Claude approached with caution, being anxious to learn what kind of place it was.

Looking in advance, the highwayman saw a small cluster of houses, which indicated that he was near some hamlet or village.

The roofs of the houses alone were visible, but Claude doubted not that at that late hour all the inmates were asleep.

Drawing still nearer to the inn, he perceived that the whole structure had a rustic air which was inexpressibly charming.

It was built entirely of wood, with the exception of the roof, which was covered with dull red tiles.

The casements were small and fitted with old-fashioned diamond-shaped panes.

Along the first floor there ran a rude kind of wooden balcony, which was supported by stout upright posts.

This was prettily overgrown by climbing parasitic plants, and presented a really lovely appearance.

In front of the door there was a quaint old porch, composed of woodwork, which had been twisted and carved into various ornamental shapes.

This, too, was prettily overgrown with long creeping plants, upon the cultivation of which much care was evidently bestowed.

Several paces from the porch was a tall post, which served to carry a signboard.

Adjoining this post was a long horse-trough, as was common in those days.

The signboard swung slowly and lazily to and fro.

What was upon it Claude could not see, for the night was dark and the letters half effaced by time.

Just below the signboard there was a small wisp of straw, secured by a piece of thin rope, which indicated that there was accommodation for both steed and rider.

The whole aspect of this place was so calm and so content, that Claude felt nothing but serene happiness could be abiding there.

He hesitated for a few moments, cast one glance around him, thought of the condition of his steed, and then resolved, at all hazards, to bait at this inn.

In so quiet and retired a spot he felt sure he should be safe.

He drew nearer.

The door of the inn was closed, but from one of the upper windows, that looked into the balcony, there came a dim and uncertain radiance.

It was as though some faint night light was burning in the chamber.

Claude reached the door.

His mind was made up, so, holding his riding-whip by the thong, he knocked loudly with the bone handle.

His horse seemed startled by the sudden sound, for he bounded from the door and reared.

The stock of Claude's riding-whip raised strange reverberations.

His steed was terrified, and, fatigued as he was, seemed inclined to start off at headlong speed.

With great difficulty Claude restrained and endeavoured to calm him.

It was while he was thus engaged that the highwayman was startled by a loud clashing sound.

It came from above, and, under the impulse of the moment, he looked up.

He saw in an instant what had caused the clashing sound.

The window through which the feeble gleam of light had shown had been opened suddenly and violently, and dashed back against the wall.

Then a shadowy form, the outlines of which were dim and indistinct, sprang out of the chamber on to the balcony.

Then the window was closed.

As this was done, Claude saw the shadowy figure more distinctly.

It was a man.

But what sort of man was more than he could see.

Motionless and surprised, Claude sat stone-still upon his horse, watching the occurrence of these strange events.

Having closed the window, the man hastened along the balcony towards one of the wooden supports which we have mentioned.

Seizing hold of it, he climbed over the rustic woodwork, and commenced a rapid descent to the ground.

This descent was accomplished easily enough.

There were numerous projections, which served admirably as resting-places both for his hands and feet.

So rapidly did all this take place, that before Claude could exactly understand what was going forward, the man had reached the ground, and bounded off into the darkness.

"What is the meaning of all this?" ejaculated Claude. "There is something very strange going on, that is certain. Good heavens! what is that?"

This ejaculation was caused by a loud growl, such as might come from the throat of some half-famished wolf.

The next moment a huge black dog of the Newfoundland species darted past Claude, and disappeared in the darkness as the man had done.

The highwayman looked about him with a puzzled and bewildered air.

Only just before he had been thinking what a quiet, peaceful spot that was, and even while the thoughts were passing through his mind its whole aspect changed.

It almost seemed as though the knocking upon the door had been a charm which set all these strange events in motion.

Not the least notice was taken of his summons for admission.

The man and the dog were both out of sight.

Involuntarily Claude raised his eyes to the window which had been opened.

The feeble light still glimmered through the tiny panes.

"I wonder what is in that room?" Claude muttered. "I will see. I fancy it will be almost as easy to climb up into that balcony as it was to descend from it. I will make the effort. It may be that I shall see something well worth the looking at."

While speaking these words, half-aloud and half to himself, Claude slipped off his horse, and secured the bridle to the upright post.

A vigorous spring enabled him to reach the lower part of the balcony with his hands.

His grasp was firm, and he drew himself up.

In less than a moment he stood upon the balcony.

At that very moment, a dismal, smothered groan smote upon his ears.

He started, and his heart failed him when he heard the sound.

It seemed to have the effect of turning his blood to ice.

It was only for a moment, however, that he succumbed to this sensation.

Two steps took him to the window.

He did not attempt to open it, but pressed his face against the panes, and peered into the room.

A rushlight was burning on a table, and by the aid of the illumination it afforded, the different objects in the room were revealed.

Claude had to strain his eyes, and shield them from the extraneous light with both his hands, before he could see distinctly into the chamber.

It was a bed-room, furnished in a rude and antique fashion.

Round the huge, four-post bedstead the dingy curtains were closely drawn, so that Claude could not see whether it was occupied or not.

There was no one in the room that he could see, and he was puzzled to know from whence the groan he had heard proceeded, without it came from some one lying in the bed.

All that we have described Claude saw at one glance, and in an infinitesimal portion of time.

Before he could make up his mind what he should do next, however, he perceived the door, which was opposite the window, slowly opened.

Claude gazed eagerly, and with re-awakened interest.

A strange kind of conviction came over him that he was destined to be the spectator of events more strange than he had yet beheld.

Slowly—slowly the door opened, and then, with a gliding, stealthy movement, a man crept into the chamber.

There was not light enough to enable Claude to observe him with any degree of distinctness.

Having crossed the threshold, the man paused and assumed a listening attitude.

Fearful of being seen, Claude crouched down on the balcony, so that his eyes were on a level with the window-sill.

And now the stealthy intruder, satisfied apparently by the deep silence that all was well, closed the door behind him.

Then a sudden gleam of light dispersed the darkness.

Claude knew well enough whence that beam proceeded.

The man carried a dark lantern, and had withdrawn the slide which prevented the light from passing through the powerful lens.

Just where that broad beam of light fell, everything was revealed with remarkable distinctness, but the man himself still remained almost invisible to an unsuspected watcher.

With a long, striding, noiseless step, the intruder made his way towards the bed.

His purpose was an evil one beyond all doubt, and Claude Duval held the window in such a manner that he could dash it open and spring into the room in a moment if circumstances should arise to make it necessary.

Upon reaching the bedside, the intruder paused again and listened.

He shifted the position of the lantern a little, and then some rays of light fell upon his face.

Murder was stamped upon it in legible characters.

After one glance at his countenance, Claude Duval had no sort of doubt as to what his intentions were.

The errand which had brought him to that chamber at that silent hour was one of blood.

But, had there been any doubts lingering in the highwayman's mind, they would have been dispelled by what he next saw.

In order to draw back the curtains which surrounded the bed, the man transferred something from his right hand to his left.

It was in his left hand that he held the lantern.

Claude saw what that something was.

It was a knife—a long-bladed, murderous-looking knife.

Claude rose to his feet, for the man's back was now turned towards him, and he prepared to spring into the room.

The man drew back the curtains.

He took the knife in his right hand again, and let a beam of light fall upon the bed.

At that instant, however, he started—staggered back—and then a yell, such as Claude had never heard before, came from his lips.

So ear-piercing was it, that Claude was riveted to the spot upon which he stood.

Almost immediately, however, the highwayman regained possession of his faculties.

Tearing open the window, he sprang into the room, and seized the intruder by the throat, and held him with a grasp of iron.

"Speak, villain!" he cried. "Speak! Tell me at once the meaning of all this!"

The man made no reply.

His countenance was distorted with extreme horror, and the muscles about his mouth twitched convulsively.

The dark lantern fell from his trembling grasp.

Claude was about to repeat his demand, when the murmur of voices and the trampling of footsteps struck upon his ear.

The inmates of the inn were alarmed, no doubt, and hastening to learn the cause of the disturbance.

Claude, then, changed his intention, and instead of addressing himself to the man, he called out for help at the top of his voice.

His cries were evidently heard, for the murmur of voices grew louder, and the trampling of footsteps nearer.

At length the door of the room was dashed open, and a tumultuous throng of half-dressed persons rushed in.

All at once wanted to know what was the matter.

Their astonishment may be conceived when they saw Claude Duval standing in the centre of the apartment, clutching the trembling wretch by the throat.

"Lights here! more lights!" cried someone.

The first uproar soon subsided, and then Claude Duval, turning towards them, said—

"Silence, silence all! I, and I alone, can give you a partial explanation of what has taken place."

"Who are you? Where have you come from? How did you get here? What is the matter?"

These, and a hundred other questions followed Claude's words.

In vain the highwayman held up his hand for silence.

Finding they could get no reply, the excited throng ceased their questions.

At this moment someone entered the apartment, carrying a tall wax candle in each hand.

The room and the inmates of it were then fully revealed.

It was a strange picture.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXIX.

CONTINUES TO RELATE THE EXTRAORDINARY INCIDENTS WHICH OCCURRED AT THE ROADSIDE INN.

"WHERE is the landlord?" said Claude Duval. "Let him come forward, and I will explain to him how and why I am here."

The throng divided, and disclosed a short, stout man, whose countenance was of a fiery rubicundity.

"I am the landlord," he said.

"Very good. Listen to what I have to say. First of all, however, let someone hold this man."

Two men at once sprang forward.

"Why," said the landlord, aghast, "that's the gentleman out of No. 2 bedroom."

"Never mind that. Keep him safe for a little while."

There was not much difficulty in doing this, for the prisoner made not the least attempt at resistance.

In a few words, Claude Duval then gave an account of what he had seen.

There is no need to repeat his words, because all that he said is already well known to the reader.

Once the throng would have sprung forward to the bed, but Claude waved them back, and entreated them to wait until he had finished his recital.

He was reluctantly and unwillingly obeyed.

As soon as ever he had done, he said to the landlord—

"Now go to the bed; draw back the curtains, and see what is there. I know not, but guess it must be some horrible sight from the yell which came from that man's lips."

No second bidding was needed.

The landlord and all those who had entered the room, comprising every person who happened to be in the inn at that moment, rushed to the bed.

The curtains were drawn back, and then ejaculations of extreme horror came from the lips of all.

They had been prepared for a sorry sight; but what they saw filled them with dread.

Lying on the bed, the clothes of which were in the utmost disorder, was the body of an aged man.

He was lying literally in a pool of blood.

He had been murdered—cruelly murdered.

His head was almost severed from his body, and his long white hair was dabbled in gore.

After one glance at this sickening spectacle all turned away appalled.

"I am innocent!" shrieked the prisoner, finding his voice for the first time. "I am innocent, I tell you! I—I did not do the deed! No, no! I am guiltless of it!"

"That will have to be seen," said the landlord. "Run somebody and fetch Doctor Barnard, and Garrat, the police-constable."

One of the domestics belonging to the inn hurried off to do the landlord's bidding.

"I fear the doctor will be of little service," said Claude Duval, turning to the bed. "Life must surely be quite extinct. But you forget there is some one else implicated in this affair. Pursue the man I told you I saw escape. Doubtless he is the real murderer."

"Did you not say a dog followed him?" asked the landlord.

"Yes, a large black Newfoundland dog," replied Claude. "Whose was it?"

"His!" said the landlord, pointing to the ghastly-looking object on the bed.

"Indeed! That is very strange. But who is this man?"

"I no more know, sir, than yourself," replied the landlord. "He arrived here last night, and asked for a bed. Of course, he was accommodated. He had luggage with him, and a small package, about which he was very particular.

"A small package!" cried Claude. "Where is it?"

"He brought it up to bed with him."

"What did the package contain?"

"I cannot tell you. Something very valuable, no doubt, or he would not have taken such care of it as he did."

"That is the key to the murder, then," said Claude. "Perhaps the old gentleman slept with the package under his pillow?"

"Very likely. See how the clothes are tossed about!"

"Do not let us stay here speculating," said Claude; "we ought to be acting. We can do no good by remaining. Let some follow me, and we will endeavour to capture the man I saw descend from the balcony. The dog will keep upon his track, no doubt. Come! This way: it is the nearest."

As he spoke, Claude Duval stepped through the window on to the balcony, and speedily descended.

He was followed by three gentlemen who appeared to be stopping at the inn.

Claude found his horse just where he had left him, and, untying the bridle, he sprang into the saddle.

Having seen in which direction the murderer had run, Claude naturally enough took the lead.

Ere they had gone many yards along the road, the distant baying of a dog came upon the ears of all.

"Forward!" cried Claude, as soon as he heard the sound. "Forward! The faithful animal is on the track of the murderer, and will enable us to hunt him down."

With these words, Claude pressed his horse into a gallop, forgetting that those on foot would be unable to keep pace with him.

When he discovered this, however, he did not slacken his pace, but kept on.

As for those on foot, they ran after Claude's horse at the top of their speed, and so were not very far in the rear.

The barking of the dog was incessant, and Claude found that he was rapidly approaching the spot from whence the sound came.

After going about half-a-mile further, he pulled up.

He called aloud to those who were following him, and desired them to quicken their steps.

Lying in the middle of the road was a mass of something which Claude easily made out to be a human form.

He alighted from his horse in order to look more closely.

It was as he had expected.

The large black dog had overtaken the murderer.

He had sprang upon him, and brought him to the earth.

When Claude looked, he was crouching down over the prostrate form.

The faithful but savage creature raised his head when Claude approached, and growled as though he had no intention of allowing his prey to be interfered with.

At this moment the three men on foot arrived, panting and breathless, on the scene.

Some dismal groans came from the murderer, and by the dim light Claude and the others saw that he had had a severe encounter with the dog.

His body was lacerated in a most fearful manner, and he was bleeding in at least a dozen places.

The dog, too, was bleeding.

The murderer had, in the struggle, stabbed the dog with the same knife that had drank the life-blood of his master.

The abject wretch begged to be released from the dog, but this appeared to be no easy matter.

It was while they were debating this that they first found the dog was wounded.

They discovered it in consequence of the noble creature falling on its side, and uttering low moans.

It was exhausted from the quantity of blood it had lost.

At length, gasping for breath, it rolled off the body of his foe.

Claude and the three others now endeavoured to raise the murderer to his feet.

But when he saw that they were about to touch him, he screamed aloud.

"Off! off!" he said. "Do not touch me! That dog has killed me! Let me lie where I am! If you move me, the agony will be more than I can bear! I am dying! dying!"

And, indeed, it seemed as though he was speaking no more than the truth.

Now that the dog had moved, the injuries he had sustained were more plainly visible.

They were of a dreadful character, and it did not seem possible that he could survive them.

If he did, he would only be able to crawl about, maimed and disfigured for ever.

"If you are dying," said Claude Duval, stooping over him, "relate how you have got into this trouble. I saw you escape from the inn, and hurry off. Confess! confess!"

"Confess what?" said the man, faintly.

"The crime of which you have been guilty. Make the only atonement you have left. Did you not murder the old man at the inn?"

The man trembled and shook, and then he gasped—

"I did it."

"For what reason? Speak, ere your voice fails you."

"I followed him to the inn," was the reply, given in a feeble, gasping voice. "He carried with him a package containing gold and jewels to a large amount."

"Go on."

"I determined to possess them, and so I tracked him to the inn, and found out the room he occupied. I entered it by the window, for to climb on to the balcony was easy. I had no thought of murder. I only wanted the packet."

"Where is it?"

"Let me go on. I knew he slept with it under his pillow. I tried to take it, and he awoke. Then I killed him in self-defence."

"And the packet?" said Claude.

"It is here, on the ground close by."

An immediate search was now made, and the packet was found lying by the roadside.

Claude took it up.

It was a box, or something that felt like one, but it was very light.

"This contains no gold," he muttered.

Then going to the dying wretch, he said—

"How did you know this packet contained gold and jewels?" he asked.

"I supposed so, because of the care with which it was guarded."

"Fool!" cried Claude; "you have lost your life for nothing. From the weight, I am sure this packet can contain nothing heavier than papers."

The murderer groaned, but whether from disappointment or pain they could not tell.

Claude turned away and looked to the dog.

But the noble creature had lost its life in avenging the death of its master.

The wound it had received was a severe one, and it had bled to death.

Claude turned to the three persons who had accompanied him, and, placing the packet in the hands of one of them, he said—

"Take this, and remain here. I will mount and gallop back to the inn for assistance. I shall be able to go much quicker than either of you. Keep guard over this man, and remember the confession he has made."

With these words, Claude mounted and returned to the inn.

Upon arriving, he made his way round to the back of the inn and placed his horse in the stable.

To give him a good feed of corn took him but a moment or two, and, having done this, he entered the inn.

He found it a scene of greater excitement now than it was when he had left it.

The reason was, the whole of the inhabitants of the little hamlet close by had been aroused, and they had all flocked to the inn.

With some difficulty, Claude elbowed his way through the throng.

The constable had arrived, and so had the doctor.

The latter was also a justice of the peace.

Claude at once acquainted them with the discovery of the murderer, and the confession he had made.

By the direction of the magistrate, the constable was at once despatched to the place described by Claude.

Never before had the old and peaceful inn been the scene of so much turmoil and ferment.

Claude sought out the landlord, and, not without some trouble, drew him away from the rest.

As the reader well knows, Claude had no intention of remaining until the whole of these mysterious occurrences were cleared up.

Such a proceeding, however much he might wish it, was too much fraught with danger to be entertained for a moment.

Before he went, therefore, he felt that he should like to hear as much as he could.

It was for this purpose that he took the landlord aside.

He inquired respecting the man who he had seen enter the chamber, but all the information the landlord could give him amounted to this:—

The murdered man had arrived and ordered a bed. Soon afterwards another stranger entered with the same demand. He was shown into bedroom No. 2. The household then retired to rest, and the landlord was ignorant of all that happened from then until the moment when the awful yell had aroused him and all the other persons in the inn.

The traveller who had hired bed-room No. 2 said nothing more than that he was innocent of the crime.

That he had intended to commit it, was evident enough to Claude, though he was puzzled by the complicated aspect of affairs.

He waited some time longer, but found he could learn nothing more, so, watching his opportunity, he slipped out unperceived, and made his way to the stables.

He found his horse much better for the brief rest and hasty meal he had had, so he led him out and quickly mounted.

The people at the inn were too busily occupied to notice him, and so he rode off unseen by anyone.

Claude's curiosity was much excited by this singular adventure, and though compelled to leave in the manner we have described, yet he determined not to let the matter drop.

Some other time he would make his way to the inn and hear the other particulars.

It was more satisfactory for him to come to this determination than to endeavour to account for all that had happened himself.

As may be expected, however, he had plenty of food for thought on his return journey.

Still, adhering to his original intention, he made his way by lonely and unfrequented routes to his destination.

He was so lucky as not to meet with a soul.

He allowed his horse to go at an easy pace, and so by the time he drew near to the deserted mansion, dawn was very close at hand.

As he drew nearer to this place of refuge he increased his caution.

It was in the highest degree important that he should not be seen anywhere in the vicinity, because of the danger of discovery.

But at that dark hour which precedes the dawn the road was completely deserted.

It may, perhaps, be as well to remind the reader that this was the morning when Dick Turpin was pursued and wounded by Mr. Wriggles and his officers.

Not many minutes before Claude Duval reached the top of the lane that led from the high road to the deserted mansion, Dick Turpin, in the strange semi-conscious state we have described, passed down it.

Upon reaching the top of the lane, however, and just when he was about to turn down it, Claude Duval heard a horse approaching at a rapid pace.

Nearer—nearer came the sounds, and he hesitated what to do.

The lane, he thought, led to no other place than the deserted mansion, and if so, he might keep down it with safety.

But then it might not be so.

The horseman who was approaching at so swift a pace might be one of his foes, and if so, the consequences of being seen would be disastrous to a degree.

These reflections enabled Claude to make up his mind how to act.

A large field was situated at one corner of the lane, and was defended by a high hedge.

Through a portion of this where there was a gap he forced his way, leading his horse after him.

Having done this, he hastened to the thickest and highest portion of the hedge.

It was quite tall enough to hide both him and his horse from anyone in the roadway, and so he stood still, with his hand on his steed's neck.

The horseman was now very close at hand indeed, and Claude had taken up his position only just in time.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXX.

TOM KING LOSES HIS HORSE, AND FINDS AN ADVENTURE ON THE WINDSOR ROAD.

AND now, in order to bring our narrative up to one point, the only thing that remains for us to do is to describe the incidents which befel Tom King upon this most eventful night.

It will be remembered, that just before parting with Claude Duval he announced his intention of seeking his adventures upon the Windsor road.

Whether on this evening Fortune favoured him any better than she did on the preceding one we shall very shortly see.

The watchfulness of the dragoons made it necessary for Tom King to make his way circuitously to his intended scene of action.

The night before had given him a pretty good idea of what sort of foes he had to contend with, and it would not be possible for him to be too cautious.

Before he set out he had made all his preparations, so



[THE INANIMATE BODY OF DICK TURPIN IS CARRIED TO THE DESERTED MANSION BY TOM KING AND CLAUDE DUVAL.]

that the only thing he had to do was to look out for an adventure.

After about an hour's hard riding across a lovely piece of country, he emerged upon the Windsor-road.

At this time King George II. was residing at Windsor Castle, and, in consequence, there would sure to be people of rank and distinction perpetually going backwards and forwards.

Under these circumstances it was only natural that Tom King should expect to find better booty on this road than any other.

The only thing was, this road would be sure to be watched with greater closeness by the dragoons than any other.

But Tom was desperate.

He was exasperated by the ill-fortune he had met with the night before, and resolved to run a little extra risk in order to make up for the time he had lost.

Looking about him, he saw that the portion of the Windsor-road in which he found himself was admirably adapted for his purpose.

It was bordered on both sides by a park, the trees in which grew very closely together, and cast quite a deep shadow around.

Backing his horse under the outspreading branches until he was close to the palings, Tom sat still and waited.

He had satisfied himself that that would be a much better course of action than to ride on with the risk of meeting some of the dragoons.

The Windsor-road was made good use of; so, before Tom had taken up his position five minutes, the grating of wheels struck upon his attentive ears.

He roused himself at once, and gathered the reins tightly in his hand.

The vehicle—which by the sound it made the highwayman tell was a light one with four wheels—was coming at an extraordinary rapid pace from the direction of London.

PRICE ONE HALFPENNY.

As it came nearer, Tom could hear the hoof strokes of four horses.

They were coming at full gallop.

But, though he strained his eyes and looked up the road, he could see no indications of carriage lamps.

This struck him as being not a little singular.

To travel at such a tremendous speed along a dark road without lamps was dangerous in the extreme.

While he was making these reflections there came suddenly upon his ears a scream of so heart-rending a character that he felt appalled.

It was a female voice.

Tom knew that by the peculiar shrillness.

But from whence did it come?

He thought from the carriage, which in another second or two would pass him.

If he had hesitated whether he should stop the carriage, or not, that scream would have decided him.

We have seen, on more than one instance, that Tom King carried his devotion to the fair sex to an extreme limit.

Here, evidently, was a female in some peril, and he felt himself called upon, in spite of everything, to interfere between her and her foes.

Just then, like a huge dark shadow, the carriage rushed past.

It was nearer to him than he had imagined; nevertheless, with great promptitude, he stuck his spurs into his horse's flanks, and galloped off in pursuit.

"Halt—halt!" he cried. "Halt! I say. Halt! or I fire."

But no notice appeared to be taken of his words, except that the speed of the vehicle was accelerated, if that was possible.

Still Tom galloped on, determined to overtake it.

The carriage was only just before him, but, in spite of all his efforts, he found himself unable to decrease the distance which intervened between him and it.

Enraged at this, Tom rapidly raised his pistol and fired.

The shot was instantly replied to.

Tom saw the flash and heard the report, so that he knew he was unhurt.

He fancied his horse stumbled at the moment, but he was too much engrossed by the chase to pay any attention to it.

He still galloped on, goading his horse to the utmost.

It was but rarely that his command to stop was disobeyed, and in this instance he blamed himself for not having being quick enough at the first.

Tom raised another pistol and fired again.

No notice was taken, but the carriage suddenly turned down a lane that branched off at right angles from the main road.

There was something mysterious in all this, and Tom felt a greater desire to stop that carriage than he had ever done to do anything in his life.

But his efforts were quite vain.

The horses that drew the carriage were swifter than his own, and even as he found the distance much increase, his horse stumbled again, and almost threw him out of the saddle.

This was strange, but he spurred him again.

The gallant creature, however, trembled and shook, and advanced with difficulty.

He stumbled again, and then, with a loud snort of agony, fell heavily to the ground.

Tom slipped his feet out of the stirrups, and cleared himself just in time.

He now comprehended what had happened.

The first shot which had been fired had wounded his horse, but his mettle had kept him upon his legs until he dropped.

This was a serious accident, and Tom knew not how to repair it.

Kneeling down, he saw in an instant that his horse was in his last dying agonies, and that there was no hope of his ever being able to rise to his feet again.

The bullet had struck him full in the chest, and the blood had flowed from the wound in immense quantities.

It was wonderful to Tom how he had kept on his legs so long.

It was no good wasting time, however, by remaining there, and so, taking the pistols from the holsters, Tom hurried off, leaving the horse just where he had fallen.

He was more determined than ever to stop the carriage.

But, if he could not overtake it and bring it to a standstill while mounted, how was he to hope to do so on foot?

So excited was the highwayman, that he never once thought of this, but ran off down the lane in the direction the carriage had taken.

He ran with all his might for a few yards, and then he came to a sudden halt.

He had recovered the use of his senses, and not only that, his further progress was barred by some huge wooden gates, which looked as though they opened into some nobleman's domain.

Had the carriage passed through these gates?

Tom felt sure it must have done so, for there was no other route which could have been taken.

The lane was evidently nothing more than an approach to the large wooden gates before which the highwayman stood.

His chance of stopping the carriage now seemed further off than ever.

Doubtless it had by this time reached its destination.

What was to be done?

Clearly Tom's best and safest plan would be to give up the attempt at once, and endeavour to repair the loss of his steed in the best manner he was able.

But he did not like to confess himself defeated, and he resolved not to do so until he had made at least one more effort to achieve the victory.

Moreover, there was the mystery connected with the scream.

That must be elucidated; and, though probably there would be no profit attached to the adventure, yet he felt it was against his nature to leave a female in the hands of those who would use violence against her.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, Tom King looked up at the gates as though he contemplated climbing them.

But one glance at their height and smoothness convinced him of the futility of making any such attempt.

He turned from the gates, and found they were flanked on each side by a wall of corresponding height, apparently presenting as insurmountable an obstacle as the gates themselves.

But, perceiving that some tall trees grew close to this wall, Tom hastened towards them.

One had wide-spreading branches, several of which stretched themselves over the wall.

Here, then, was a means of effecting an entrance.

The trunk of the tree was rough and rugged, and so Tom climbed it easily enough.

In a very short space of time he was among the branches.

Selecting the strongest, he crept cautiously along it until he grasped the coping of the wall with the ends of his fingers.

In another moment he was sitting astride the wall.

He looked around.

Beneath him there appeared to be some highly-cultivated grounds, very tastefully laid out in winding walks, and adorned with numerous statues and fountains.

Upon these Tom's eyes only rested for a moment.

They wandered off to a large, irregular pile of building, the outlines of which were only partially discernible.

It was clearly a mansion—one of those large, picturesque residences such as our fathers prided themselves upon building, and in which one might easily lose oneself.

All that Tom could make out distinctly were the stacks of twisted chimney-pots and the quaint, gabled roofs.

All the rest of the building was one indistinguishable mass of gloom.

From none of the windows came even the feeblest gleam of light.

All was as dark as though it had been uninhabited.

A silence, too, of a most profound character reigned around, and Tom began to wonder whether, after all, he had not been mistaken, for the place did not appear to have been visited for years.

But he soon satisfied himself that the carriage, about which he felt so much curiosity, had passed through those gates, and had probably driven up to the mansion, although now there were no traces of it whatever to be seen.

Tom determined to descend and explore further.

But now another difficulty presented itself.

The garden was a long way beneath him, and how was he to reach it?

Even if he hung down to the full length of his arms, and then dropped the remainder of the distance, he would have many feet to fall.

But this was the only means he had, and he resolved to risk what injuries he might receive by the fall.

He was inclined to do this because, upon looking down, he saw there was a garden bed just under his feet, and the soil of this would be soft for him to fall upon.

Without more ado he executed this intention.

He was bruised and shaken a little, but that was all, and he sprang nimbly to his feet.

But he sank down again immediately, and concealed himself as well as he was able behind a laurel bush.

He had been alarmed by the sound of footsteps, which were rapidly approaching.

Voices, too, came upon his ear, and, straining his eyes in the direction from which the sound came, he presently made out the forms of two men.

They were talking to each other, and, when they were a little nearer, Tom heard one of them say—

"I am almost certain I heard something, though what, I can't say. I hope it isn't that meddling fool who was kind enough to fire those shots after us."

"Yes, d—n him," replied the other man, in an angry voice. "He has broken the bone of my arm."

"But didn't you hear something?"

"I fancy I did; but it was only some insignificant sound, depend upon it. Come on. Never mind looking. It's no business of ours, you know; we have done our share of the business and got our money, and the only thing left for us to do is to take ourselves off."

"Very well. Of course, as you say, it is no business of ours, but I do hope that shot of mine settled him."

"So do I."

Tom heard no more.

The voices faded away in the distance, and became inaudible.

"I crouched down just in time, it seems," muttered Tom King, as he once more rose to his feet. "I am on the right track, that is certain. What I have just overheard is ample proof of that. Now then, to clear up this mysterious affair."

With these words, Tom King glided with rapid steps across the garden, keeping as much in the shadow of the shrubs as he could, until at length he paused on the boundary of the lawn in front of the house.

"Confound it!" he said, as a fresh thought occurred to him. "Those rascals, no doubt, were on their way to the gate, and, as they go up the lane, they cannot fail to see my horse lying there. I wish I had dragged him into the ditch. Never mind; it's too late to wish that now."

Tom turned his attention to the exterior of the mansion, which, now that he was so close to it, he could see with tolerable plainness.

It answered exactly to the idea he had formed of it.

But still all the windows in the front were plunged in darkness.

Tom determined to creep round the house, and ascertain whether this darkness prevailed on all sides of it.

Still skirting the extreme boundary of the lawn, he made his way round one of the wings.

There was darkness still.

He pushed onwards, however, but with the greatest possible amount of caution.

At length an abrupt turn in the building brought him in view of a window, which was lighted up, and yet not exactly that, for it was only a faint glimmer that shone through it.

This window appeared to be on the first floor of the house.

Somehow, the idea entered Tom's head, and would not be banished, that the room into which that window looked was occupied by the girl who had uttered the piercing scream.

Of course this was a mere fancy, and more likely to be wrong than right; but, nevertheless, Tom crept across a kitchen garden, and did not pause until he stood beneath the window.

He felt now that he would have given almost anything for the privilege of being able to take a peep into the room above him.

He glanced around to ascertain whether it was at all possible for him to do such a thing.

Equally to his surprise and joy, he found that a quantity of strong old ivy grew all over the back of the house.

By its aid he felt sure he should be able to climb up to the window, for its interlacing branches would afford many a foothold.

Without, then, a moment's hesitation he commenced the ascent, and in a few minutes his head was on a level with the window, through which he had so longed to peep.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXXI.

TOM KING SHOWS HIMSELF A TRUE FRIEND IN THE HOUR OF NEED.

If the truth must be told, Tom King was so absorbed in this adventure, that he forgot all about his original intention.

With straining eyes, then, he peered into the room.

It was a small, elegantly-furnished chamber.

On every side evidences of abundant wealth were visible.

There was not a single piece of furniture that was not of the richest and costliest character.

Paintings, representing a variety of subjects, and fitted in massive gold frames, almost concealed the walls.

Numberless little nick-nacks were scattered here and there, all trifling in themselves, and yet valuable.

Upon the floor a magnificent Turkey carpet was spread, while on the hearth a fire, composed of logs of scented wood, was burning brightly.

It was the ruddy light which came from this fire that shone upon the window-panes, and first directed Tom's attention to it.

As the blaze rose high up the chimney, everything was revealed with perfect distinctness.

But it was not upon the articles we have described—although he saw them all—that Tom King's gaze was riveted.

He had given one comprehensive glance around, and then his eyes had fixed themselves upon the form of a young girl, who was lying at full length, as though sleeping, upon a couch which had been drawn close up to the fire.

The lower end of this couch was in deep shadow.

But upon the upper part the light of the fire shone with full force, displaying to the utmost advantage the features of the fair sleeper.

Since his bitter disappointment, Tom King's heart had never been very susceptible to female beauty.

But now he was charmed.

Never had it been his lot to gaze upon anyone half so lovely.

It was a fair, girlish face, with small, regularly-formed features.

Her hair was a beautiful gold colour, and contrasted richly with the deep crimson covering of the couch.

Her countenance was very pale, however, and upon her cheeks could be perceived the traces of recent tears.

Her sleep was troubled and uneasy.

At times she would start and tremble violently, while her face would become clouded with sadness.

Then she would grow calm again.

It was evident that she had suffered much terror and anguish, and that she was sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion.

Tom King jumped immediately to the conclusion that this young girl had been carried off against her will—that the shriek he heard came from her lips, in the hope that she would be able to obtain assistance, and that means had been taken to prevent her from repeating the cry of alarm.

Then she had been brought in the close carriage which he had vainly endeavoured to overtake, and that she had been deposited upon that couch in an utterly prostrated condition.

Whether Tom's supposition was correct or not, time alone will show.

How long he stood clinging to the ivy and gazing through the window upon the young girl's lovely face, he knew not.

He was startled by a sudden sound.

It was a sharp snap, as though a door had been unlocked.

Tom glanced in the direction from which the sound came.

The door was opened, and a man stepped into the room.

Tom could not see him very plainly at first, but, having closed the door carefully behind him, he crossed the apartment, going towards the couch.

Tom now saw him as plainly as ever he had seen anybody in his life.

He was of rank.

That was evident by his dress, for in those days the difference in degree was strongly marked by the apparel.

The intruder was dressed with great richness and taste.

Jewels sparkled on his fingers, on the hilt of his dress-sword, and on various parts of his person.

He might be considered young, for, judging by his appearance, he was not more than thirty—perhaps he looked older than he really was.

His face was handsome, and his form robust and manly, but all was spoiled by the unmistakable signs of debauchery and dissipation.

Upon the soft Turkey carpet his feet made not the slightest sound, and he paused only a few feet from the young girl's couch, without awaking her.

He gazed upon her for some moments.

Tom King could not see his face, and so he had no clue as to the nature of his thoughts.

At length, arousing himself from the contemplation of the beautiful girl, he stepped forward, as though he intended to awaken her.

But, if this was his intention, his purpose was abandoned as soon as it was formed.

He stopped, shook his head, moved his lips, as though he muttered something, and then retreated, locking the door carefully behind him.

The sharp click of the lock aroused the young girl, for she moved and half opened her eyes.

Then she closed them again, and for about a moment lay profoundly still.

Doubtless she was endeavouring to remember where she was, and what had happened to her.

Then she opened her eyes again, this time widely, and rose to a sitting posture.

Those eyes!—they were of the most beautiful blue that the fancy could picture.

With astonishment and dismay depicted upon her countenance she looked around her at the different objects by which she was surrounded.

She pressed her fair hands tightly upon her brow, as though by that means she could calm her whirling thoughts.

She remained thus for several minutes, Tom King all the while watching her with unabated interest, and oblivious of everything else, save that he was gazing upon her.

At length, with a sigh of despair, the young girl rose to her feet.

She seemed to have only in a partial degree overcome her recent prostration, for she steadied herself by clinging to the arm of the couch.

Once more her eyes travelled all round the apartment, until they rested upon the door, and then, with a faint cry of joy upon her lips, she sprang towards it.

She turned the handle, and then found the door was fast and immovable—that it was locked.

This discovery seemed to overpower her.

"Alas—alas!" she cried. "What can I do? What is to become of me? I am lost indeed."

She burst into a flood of tears as she spoke.

Tom was tempted to disclose himself at that moment, but he forebore to do so just at present.

The girl in despair turned again to the door, and shook it in its frame.

But it showed no signs of yielding, and her grief increased.

Tom could not remain a passive spectator.

He resolved to let her know that a friend was at hand—one who would not hesitate to protect her in the hour of need.

With this view, he tapped lightly with his finger-nails upon the window-panes.

The faint sound was unheard—at any rate, it was not heeded.

Tom tapped again, and this time with greater loudness.

The young girl started, and looked towards the window.

She seemed terrified in the extreme.

Her hand was pressed upon her heart, and her lips were half opened in fear.

Tom paused, and then knocked again.

Tremblingly the young girl approached the window.

"What—what was that?" she said.

"A friend," said Tom, in a low voice, for he was fearful of being overheard. "Do not be alarmed. I say again, I am your friend, although you know me not; but I will serve you as far as my power goes."

The tones in which Tom spoke were such as would convince anyone of his sincerity.

The young girl felt convinced that he was in earnest.

Tom continued—

"Make no sound. Be still for a moment, and I will enter, when I will explain to you how it is I am here."

The young girl stood quite still as she had been bidden.

The window was opened like folding-doors, and Tom discovered he was in a very awkward position to effect an entrance.

The girl saw this, and, approaching the window, unfastened it and flung one of the leaves open.

Tom was then able to make his way into the room.

He closed the window, and then he said, in a respectful voice—

"Lady, who you are, I know not; but I have reason to believe that you have been brought here against your will."

"I have—I have," was the reply. "Assist me to leave this place at once, and I will bless you. I have been torn from my parents and my home. They will be distracted when they discover my disappearance."

"Calm yourself, fair one," said Tom King. "Pray be calm. I have reason to believe this place is well guarded, and, therefore, it will be no easy task to escape. At any rate, it will be necessary to proceed with caution and deliberation. The least precipitation would ruin everything."

"You are right—you are right. I will be calm."

"Pray endeavour to be so. When I heard your scream, I tried my best to stop the carriage, but I could not, nor could I overtake it."

"Then you were fired at."

"I was; and that will show that your abductors will scruple at nothing. My horse was shot under me, but I escaped unhurt, and, after some trouble, tracked you here, for I felt sure you sorely needed assistance."

"Oh! thanks—thanks, sir; a thousand thanks. If I do not express my gratitude as I should do, it is not because I do not feel it, but because the occurrences of this night have completely overwhelmed me."

"Enough! enough! For what I have yet done, which is nothing, I deserve no thanks. I will, however, endeavour to deserve them."

"What do you advise? How shall I act?"

"We will leave this place at once, and I will try my best to effect your escape. You have one enemy, I feel sure of it—a powerful and dangerous one. He visited this chamber while you slept."

The pallid face of the young girl suddenly flushed crimson, and she said—

"Visited this chamber?"

"Yes. From my post outside the window I watched him enter. He gazed long upon you as you lay sleeping. Once he seemed about to wake you, but he changed his purpose, and then he left the room."

"Oh! sir," exclaimed the young girl, in great anguish, "you fill me with even more alarm than I have yet felt. Oh! let us leave this place at once. Let us"——

"Hush!" said Tom, in a whisper, suddenly interrupting her. "Someone comes. It is too late."

The young girl seemed about to faint when she heard these words, but Tom grasped her arm hastily, as he said—

"Be calm, be calm. You are in no danger. I will conceal myself behind this curtain, and if it is necessary I shall disclose myself."

Tom could say no more.

A key rattled in the lock, and he had just time to slip behind the ample curtains at the side of the window, when the door was opened.

The young girl sank down half-fainting on a chair.

Tom could not see who had entered.

He heard the door carefully locked, however, and then someone approached with a slow footstep.

Cautiously Tom moved the curtain a little, and then he was able to see what was going forward.

He had to use the utmost care, however, to avoid being seen.

As he had fully anticipated, the person who had just entered the chamber was the same nobleman who had before paid it a visit.

He walked straight up to the chair upon which the girl was sitting.

Upon reaching it he sank down on one knee before her, and took one of the young girl's hands in his.

She was conscious of what was going forward, but she was so overcome with terror that she could not move a limb.

The nobleman—for such by his dress he appeared to be—carried the hand he had seized to his lips, and covered it with kisses.

The young girl shuddered, but terror froze all her faculties, and she could not draw her hand away.

Apparently misunderstanding her passiveness, he said, in a low, deep voice—

"Fair lady, you see at your feet one who loves you more than words can express. That love, so boundless as it is, must be my excuse for the means I have taken to secure your company. Show me by some sign that you reciprocate my passion. Say that you will be mine! I am rich—I am one of the noblest of this proud land. It is in my power to obey your every wish. Speak, then. Tell me that you will be mine!"

But the young girl still sat there, like one deprived of life.

Her lips moved.

She tried to scream.

But no sound followed.

The nobleman then rose to his feet, leaned over her, passed his arm around her waist, and covered her face with kisses.

This act served to break the spell which terror had cast over her.

With a suddenness that surprised the nobleman, she sprang to her feet and broke from his embrace.

"Stand back, sir!" she cried. "Thank heaven, I recovered my consciousness in time to prevent you from offering me further insult. Fie upon you, sir! to take so mean and base an advantage of a helpless woman."

The nobleman shrank back several steps, after his victim had thus boldly and heroically spoken.

Recovering himself, however, almost immediately, he said—

"Come—come! let us have no more of this. I hate such stagey airs. Become yourself, and we shall not be long before we come to an understanding with each other."

"You mistake me, sir," said the young girl, with noble firmness, retreating as the libertine approached. "It is true that you have torn me from my home. So far you have succeeded in your nefarious scheme, but you shall carry your success no further. You have no longer any power over me."

"Ha! ha! No power? Why, silly fool, you are wholly in my power. But come, do not let us continue thus. I have power, but I have no wish to exercise it—that is, providing you give me no necessity for so doing."

"Stand back, sir! Approach me not. You have been mistaken in my character. I loathe you, feel more abhorrence for you than words could possibly express."

There could be no mistaking the tone of sincerity in which these words were spoken.

The nobleman's countenance flushed with rage.

"Do not tempt me too far," he cried, excitedly. "I tell you again, you are wholly in my power. I can do with you as I wish without fear of interference. This house is mine. It stands far away from every other human habitation. The only persons who are in it are wholly devoted to my interests. You cannot, therefore, escape. Yield, then, and make a virtue of necessity. You will find you will have no cause to repent doing so. If you refuse, the consequences be upon your own head."

"Then I do refuse," said the young girl; "most positively refuse. I"——

"Come, I am sick of this," interrupted the libertine. "I should have wished you to yield with a good grace, but since not"——

He sprang forward suddenly as he spoke.

But his intended victim nimbly eluded him.

Then, feeling that the scene had lasted quite long enough, Tom King glided quietly from his hiding-place behind the curtains and interposed himself between them.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXXII.

TOM KING'S ADVENTURE COMES TO A MELANCHOLY AND TRAGICAL TERMINATION.

Tom King held his drawn sword in his hand, and, turning its point towards the libertine's breast, he exclaimed—

"Forbear, sir! Forbear! You see you cannot have things quite so much your own way as you expected. Forbear, I say!"

The expression upon the nobleman's countenance when Tom thus addressed him was really a sight to see.

Rage, fear, astonishment, anger, by turns predominated. But anger had the ascendency.

Drawing his sword rapidly from its sheath, he, without saying a single word, precipitated himself upon the highwayman.

From his manner it was evident that he meant to make short work of him.

He commenced a most violent attack, but Tom King met him calmly, keeping quietly on his guard.

Finding this would not do, the nobleman changed his tactics, and fought more carefully.

Then Tom, perceiving an advantage, wounded him slightly in the arm.

This rendered him once more furious, and it required all Tom's skill and attention to parry the rapid thrusts that were made at him.

As for the young girl, she stood behind Tom King, with her hands clasped, and looking too terrified to move.

And now Tom's adversary began to find that, for once in his life, he had met with some one who was more than a match for him, and so he begun to retreat, though very slowly, towards the door.

Tom King had a sharp eye upon all his movements, and guessing that, in the event of defeat, the nobleman would call some one to his assistance, managed by a skilful manœuvre to change their positions.

Before his opponent was aware of it, Tom was standing with his back against the door.

Seeing this, he lowered his sword, and, almost bursting with anger, he cried—

"Who the devil are you, sir? What brings you here? Why do you interfere with me or my designs? I warn you to desist at your peril."

"Bah!" said Tom King, with a laugh. "Talk something like common sense. I am here to defend that helpless young girl from your infamous addresses, and I will do it, too."

"Take the consequences due to your folly then," said the nobleman, springing forward with great suddenness.

No doubt he thought to take Tom by surprise.

But, if he did, he was never more mistaken in his life.

Tom parried his thrust with ease, and, at the same time, inflicted a wound upon his breast which would have been a serious one had he not thrown himself back just in time.

Tom followed up his advantage, and the conflict grew more desperate than it had yet been.

But well skilled as this nobleman was in the art of fencing he was no match for Tom King.

Still it was some time before our friend saw a chance of putting an end to the conflict.

He tried a feint.

The nobleman was deceived.

Quick as thought Tom changed the direction of the point of his sword.

The nobleman was too late to parry it, and the keen weapon passed through his breast.

He dropped his sword, and fell to the floor with a loud groan.

The young girl screamed when she beheld this catastrophe.

"Quick! quick!" cried Tom King. "This is no place for us. We must fly, and that at once. If we linger we shall have no chance of escape."

Tom dragged the young girl to the window as he spoke.

Dashing open the casement, he showed her the means by which he had ascended.

"That is your only chance," he said. "Haste! haste! and you will yet be free. Take tight hold of the ivy with your hands, and lower yourself gradually to the ground."

Half-paralyzed with fear, the young girl obeyed.

Tom followed her with all speed, and assisted her as well as he was able.

The ivy was old, and had taken a firm grasp of the walls, and it bore their weight bravely.

In less than a minute they stood in the garden.

"Now," said Tom, impressively, "keep up your courage for a few moments, and all will be well—you will be free! We have but to cross the garden, surmount the wall, and gain the high road, and then you are safe."

"Thanks, thanks," replied his fair companion, placing her hands trustfully in his; "thanks, thanks. I will try to be brave. Oh! would that I could make you some return for the service you have performed. You have rescued me from that which is far worse than death!"

She shuddered as she uttered these last words.

"We will talk of that anon," replied Tom. "Are you strong enough now to take a run across the garden, think you?"

"Yes. Oh! yes."

"Come, then; we shall have to climb over a high wall, but that will not prove, I hope, an insurmountable obstacle."

"With you I could do anything," said the young girl, tenderly.

"Then haste—be quick!" said Tom. "It is impossible to say how soon a pursuit may be commenced after us, for your persecutor, though hurt, is not killed."

"I am ready."

Holding the young girl's hand in his left, and his drawn sword in his right hand, Tom ran across the garden in the direction of the wall. He soon reached it.

But the height was great, and he could see no means by which its summit could be gained.

In the hope of meeting with a tree, Tom ran quickly close under the wall.

Ere he had gone far loud cries from several voices, coming from the direction of the mansion, struck upon his ears.

The young girl trembled.

"Courage! courage!" said the highwayman. "We shall yet escape. Do not be frightened; all is well."

Glancing back, however, Tom could see the flashing of many lights about the garden, as though close search was being made for them.

Just at this moment, however, he perceived, not far in advance, a tree that grew close to the wall.

He hurried towards it.

The branches grew low down to the ground.

"I will ascend," said Tom King, addressing his companion; "and then I will assist you to follow me."

So saying, he grasped one of the lower branches, and at once drew himself up into the tree.

Then, getting as secure a position as possible, he held down his arms, and taking hold of the young girl by the hands, drew her up after him.

To ascend higher in the tree was comparatively an easy matter.

Then, having climbed high enough, Tom got upon the wall.

Bestriding it, and holding tight by his knees as he would have done if he had been riding, he held out his arms to his fair companion.

She gained the wall in safety, but how she could scarcely tell.

Under less exciting circumstances than the present, it is probable that she would never have been able to perform the feat.

Just, however, as Tom received her in his arms, and placed her on the wall, preparatory to making a descent on the other side, a loud report came upon his ears, and then he heard a voice say—

"I rather think I had him then."

The trampling of feet followed.

The young girl had uttered no sound, but now she suddenly lost her balance, and swayed over to one side.

Tom tried to save her, but the effort was a vain one.

She overbalanced him as well, and both fell heavily to the ground together.

Fortunately for them they fell on the outside of the garden.

The violence with which he reached the earth partially deprived Tom of his consciousness, but, recovering himself, he bent down over the young girl.

She was lying on the ground quite still.

Tom spoke to her, but she made no reply.

Then, and not till then, did the horrible thought enter his mind that the shot which had been fired had taken away her young and innocent life.

Involuntarily he groaned when this idea occurred to him with all the force of a conviction.

The interest he had felt in her was of no common character.

Eagerly, then, he stooped over her, in order to ascertain whether she had received any further injuries than those which had resulted from her fall.

He placed his hand upon her bosom.

He withdrew it instantly.

Her dress was soaked in blood.

His forboding, then, was realized.

With another groan, he bent still more closely over her.

"Speak—speak to me," he cried. "Give me some proof that you yet live."

He fancied her lips moved, but he heard no sound.

Then, with a palpable effort, the wounded girl raised her arm and placed it painfully around Tom's neck.

The highwayman felt a thrill shoot through every nerve in his body such as he had never before felt.

In his great anxiety he had bent down until his face nearly touched hers, and now she evidently tried to draw him still closer to her.

"They have killed me," she said, in a whisper, so faint that, although Tom's face almost touched her lips, it was only just audible. "They have killed me. I am sure they have killed me. Life is going fast. Fly—fly, my generous preserver, without you wish to share my fate. You cannot assist me. I am beyond all aid. It is a bitter thought, but I can feel that I have only a few minutes to live. Heaven bless you. Closer—closer. Kiss me."

The pressure of the arm about his neck increased, until Tom's lips touched those of the young girl who had met with such a cruel death.

She clung to him with one long kiss of fervent gratitude.

Then her head sunk back, a slight shudder overspread her whole body, and she was dead.

Still Tom clung frantically to her, and implored her to speak again.

Between those two who had met so strangely, and who were wholly unknown to each other, a sudden affection had arisen, though Tom was not aware of it until she died.

It was in vain he called upon her to answer—to speak to him once again.

She was dead.

He felt heartbroken—his throat swelled, and his eyes filled with tears.

He was aroused from his deep grief by the trampling of footsteps and the murmur of voices.

He looked up, and saw several men approaching him.

They were creatures in the pay of the nobleman, and had not made their appearance on the scene before because they believed that both fugitives were shot, and that their best plan was to go round and pass through the gates.

This they had done, and arrived upon the scene at the moment we have described.

Once more Tom bent over the now inanimate form.

Once more, and for the last time, he pressed his lips to those of the young girl, and then he started to his feet.

His foes were now close upon him.

Their number was so great as to make it impossible for him to achieve the victory.

But he determined to avenge the death of the beautiful girl, whose name he knew not, and yet who he loved with ardent devotion.

Rapidly drawing a couple of pistols from his belt, he fired them at the approaching throng, having done which he was compelled to seek his own safety in flight.

It grieved him to leave the young girl there, but he could not carry her with him, and to have remained by her side would only have been to court his own destruction.

The shots he had fired produced a momentary confusion among his enemies, and, taking advantage of this, Tom bounded off into the darkness.

As soon as his foes recovered themselves somewhat they fired several shots after his retreating figure, but Tom was already too far off for these to injure him.

With his heart swelling almost to bursting with grief, the highwayman plunged onwards, dashing through obstacles which at any other time would have made him pause.

Now he was quite reckless, nor did he regain possession of his usual calmness until he broke through a hedge and found himself in the high road.

He paused then and looked about him.

He felt giddy and sick.

He listened, but could hear nothing.

Doubtless he had completely distanced his pursuers.

With a groan, he sank down upon the bank upon which the hedge was planted and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

His heart beat with such frightful rapidity that he felt as though it must burst.

And all the time there was before his eyes the form of that beautiful girl, lying stark and dead, and dabbled in blood, beneath the wall surrounding the garden of the mansion.

We make no attempt to describe Tom's feelings, for we are conscious, before we make the attempt, that it would be a failure.

After the lapse of some time, however, he grew calmer, and looked about him.

"I must banish from my recollection all that has taken place to-night," he said. "I must never recur to it again. I must occupy my thoughts with some other subject."

This was, undoubtedly, a wise resolution for Tom King to come to.

The only thing was, it was a difficult one to put into practice: for, in spite of himself, his thoughts would recur to the unfortunate girl who had made so sudden and so deep an impression upon his heart.

And so, for some length of time, Tom sat upon the bank, making vain efforts to keep his resolution.

At length he was aroused by a sound which was of all others the best calculated to rouse him to action.

It was the approach of the dragoons.

Tom had heard them too often to make any mistake about the matter, and he wondered what he should do to escape them.

He thought once of breaking through the hedge again, but finally determined to lie down at full length in the dry ditch by the side of the road.

This he did, and was, of course, invisible.

Without the dragoons had positive information as to his whereabouts that moment, it was impossible that he should be discovered.

Still, his pulse throbbed when he heard them coming nearer.

They came from London way, and were going in the direction of Windsor.

In a few moments they trotted by Tom's hiding-place, little dreaming that one of the highwaymen, whose capture they had so anxiously sought to accomplish, was so close to them.

On they went, and Tom was, so far, out of danger.

He listened to their horses' hoof-beats for some moments, and then rose.

"I am in no humour for an adventure to-night," he said, as he looked about him. "After what has occurred, I feel that I should like nothing better than to return to the deserted mansion. But how am I to reach it on foot? Truly has this night been one of loss and ill-fortune. Hark! what is that? A traveller is approaching, and from Windsor, too. What shall I do? Stop him, or stand aside and let him pass?"

CHAPTER CCCCLXXXIII.

THE BODY OF DICK TURPIN IS DISCOVERED BY TOM KING AND CLAUDE DUVAL IN THE AVENUE LEADING TO THE DESERTED MANSION.

TOM KING made up his mind upon this point almost as soon as the question had passed his lips.

A single traveller, mounted on a good steed, was approaching.

The patrol had just passed by, and so there would be no fear of an interruption from them.

He needed a horse to take him back, and he carried weapons which he well knew how to make use of.

Therefore, drawing a pistol, the highwayman saw that it was in readiness for instant service, and took up his stand in the middle of the road.

The traveller came on at a canter.

When he was near enough, Tom spread out his arms suddenly before the horse.

The noble animal reared in affright.

To catch the bridle with his left hand took Tom King but a moment.

Then presenting the pistol to the astonished rider, he cried—

"Save your life by handing over to me your purse and watch. If you refuse, I shall fire."

"Let go my horse's head," said the traveller, mocking Tom's manner. "If you refuse, I shall fire."

And he lost not a moment in carrying his threat into execution, and Tom narrowly escaped having the bullet through his brain.

But the traveller fired too hastily for his aim to be accurate, and so our friend was unhurt.

"Come, sir," he said, "you have given me ample provocation to fire at you, but I will not do so if you surrender your purse quietly."

"Fellow," said the traveller, "do you know who I am? I am in the service of his Majesty. I am Lord Stracey!"

From the manner in which these words were pronounced, it was evident the traveller expected they would make some remarkable impression upon the highwayman.

But he was disappointed, for Tom said—

"I don't care a rush who and what you are. I can only tell you this, if you do not give me what I ask for in a peaceable manner, I shall proceed to extremities. Come, sir, don't be so foolish as to throw away your life for the sake of a paltry purse. Hand it over to me!"

Lord Stracey, as he had called himself, though we should doubt whether that was his title, appeared to see the force of Tom's reasoning, for he drew forth a purse and a watch, which articles he surrendered quietly.

Tom put them in his pocket.

"Now let me ride on."

"No," said the highwayman, "I have not done with you yet. The fact is, I have had the misfortune to have my horse shot under me to-night, and so I must trouble you to dismount and lend me yours."

"Dismount, and lend you mine?"

"Exactly so."

"I'll see you"——

"Now, don't—don't swear, my lord. What is a horse to you? Dismount. I will take the greatest care of him. He seems a fine fellow."

"D—n your impudence!"

"As you like, my lord. But your horse I must and will have. Dismount!"

Tom presented his pistol again, as he spoke.

Lord Stracey grasped the pistol he had discharged by the barrel, and aimed a desperate blow with it at his assailant.

By a nimble movement the highwayman escaped.

"I warn you," he cried. "If you do not dismount now I will fire, let the consequences be what they may!"

"I wish those dragoons were not so far off," muttered his lordship, glancing behind him.

Tom took advantage of this movement to put into execution a manœuvre which he thought would answer his purpose.

He had stopped quite long enough, and did not feel inclined to shed blood over the matter.

Therefore, when his lordship looked back, Tom suddenly took hold of his left foot, and exerted all his strength to hoist him out of the saddle.

So suddenly was this attack made, that his lordship lost his balance before he was aware of it, and after one vain and ludicrous effort to retain his seat in the saddle, he fell heavily on to the ground.

To spring on the horse took Tom but a second.

"Farewell, my lord," he cried, in an ironical voice; "take a good look at your horse, for I fancy you may never see him again!"

A howl, that would have done credit to a wild beast, issued from Lord Stracey's lips.

Tom touched his new-found horse with the spur, and darted off at a gallop.

Lord Stracey fired two shots in rapid succession, but neither of them injured the highwayman.

Tom was not many moments in making the discovery that the horse he had so strangely come into possession of was of excellent quality.

He moved his limbs with unusual freedom and vigour.

Tom was no loser by the exchange, for the steed which he now bestrode was immensely superior in every respect to the one he had left lying dead in the middle of the road.

In pursuance of his original determination, Tom made his way in almost a straight line across the country to his destination.

The occurrences of the evening made him feel disinclined to have another adventure.

He felt that many days would have to elapse before he should be able to banish from his mind the image of that young girl.

He could not have regretted her untimely end more deeply than if she had been his sister or his nearest relative.

It was a strange case of mutual love at first sight, and it ended as abruptly as it had commenced.

Pensively, then, Tom directed his course over fields and hedges, across lanes and winding streams, through copses and tangled brake, until at length he emerged into the Finchley-road, not far from the spot where the lane leading to the deserted mansion branched off from it.

He came on at a rapid pace, being anxious to reach the friendly shade which the unfrequented lane afforded him, for he fancied he had heard some one else besides himself upon the road.

But this might have been imagination merely, for he could hear nothing now.

At length the corner of the lane was reached, and he was just about to turn round when he was startled by hearing a voice say, with great abruptness, "Halt!"

The reader will remember that Claude Duval, hearing someone upon the road, had thought it prudent to conceal himself behind the hedge at the corner of the lane until the horseman had gone by.

This he did, and he found that, by looking through the leafless hedge, he commanded a full view of the road.

The moment the rider came in sight Claude recognised him as his old comrade, Tom King.

Fearful of the consequences that would be the result of any mistake, he waited until Tom was quite close, when it was impossible for him to have any doubts as to his identity.

Then he called out the word "halt!" in the manner we have stated, and immediately added—

"It is all right, Tom. It is I, Claude. Wait a moment, and I will be with you."

Tom King knew the accents of his friend's voice instantly, and he did not hesitate to obey his injunctions.

The next moment Claude made his appearance in the lane.

A mutual explanation then took place.

Both agreed as to how strange it was that they should have so met.

It was not long, however, before Claude Duval perceived that his old comrade was not in his usual frame of mind.

"How dejected you seem, Tom!" he said. "Has anything happened amiss? Have you had bad luck again?"

"Do not question me now, my friend," replied Tom King; "when I am calm, and more myself, I will give you as good an account of what has taken place to-night as I am able."

"Well—well. But you seem so terribly downcast."

"Well, Claude, to tell you the truth, I am. My mind is depressed by strange forbodings of coming evil. I feel a presentiment that something terrible has happened."

"Pho! pho! Tom. I am surprised that you should give way to such weakness. You have been upset by the occurrence of some unusual incident, that is all."

"Well, it may be so; but I cannot help feeling that something dreadful has or is about to happen."

"Well, then, let us make haste to the mansion, and satisfy ourselves that all our friends are safe and well."

"With all my heart."

The two highwaymen now accelerated the speed of their horses, and trotted swiftly down the lane, until at length they drew rein before the dilapidated gates.

At the end of the four hundred and fifty-ninth chapter, we related how Dick Turpin and Black Bess reached those same dilapidated gates.

The time was only a few minutes before the arrival of Claude and Tom King.

It will be remembered that Turpin became perfectly insensible, and slipped from the saddle on to the ground.

He fell too slowly and gently to hurt himself, and, when he had reached the ground, Black Bess had bent her head over him almost as a dog might do.

She had no voice, however, like a dog by which she could summon assistance to her master.

She was dumb.

Maud and Sixteen-string Jack were in the upper room in the deserted mansion, profoundly ignorant alike of the arrival of Dick Turpin as of his dangerous condition.

And then Black Bess raised her ears and listened.

She could hear the rapid approach of horses' footsteps.

The reader now does not require to be told who it was that had arrived thus opportunely.

It was Tom King and Claude Duval.

It was not until the two highwaymen had reined in their steeds and entered the avenue, that they perceived Black Bess.

They halted at once.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Tom King, for he was the first to recover himself sufficiently to speak. "Here is Black Bess riderless. What can have happened?"

"It seems your forebodings were not so groundless as I thought them."

"Dismount—dismount. Look, here is Dick lying on the ground like a log of wood."

Tom hastily slipped from his horse as he spoke these words, and Claude as hastily followed his example.

They found the sad intelligence was unfortunately too true.

Stooping down, Tom tore open the breast of his captain's apparel, and placed his hand above his heart.

A slight degree of warmth was perceptible, but no pulsation.

Then his eyes rested upon the pallid face and the blood-soaked bandage which was bound round his head.

"Alas—alas! Claude," cried Tom King, in a voice of the utmost anguish. "And this is the end. The bravest, boldest, truest heart is still. The firmest, stanchest friend is no more. Little did I imagine that this would be the result of my foreboding feelings."

While Tom King was thus giving audible expression to his grief, Claude Duval also stooped down over the body of Dick Turpin.

He looked at his eyes, and saw with a painful feeling about his heart that they were fixed, wide open, and staring blindly.

They were covered, too, with that glassy film which always overspreads the eye after death.

He touched him on the cheek.

It was as cold as marble, and seemed only a degree less rigid.

Black Bess again bent her head down over the body of her beloved master, and a deep, moaning sound, that was awful to listen to, issued from her throat.

It seemed almost as though the gallant creature understood what had happened, and was mourning for his death in her own peculiar fashion.

Such, at any rate, was the idea which entered at the same moment the minds of Tom King and Claude Duval.

Tom King seemed stupified by this overwhelming and unexpected discovery.

"Little did I dream of this," he murmured; "little did I dream of this. I never imagined for a moment that this was to be the end of our long-enduring friendship! I have lost the best and truest friend I had on earth!"

"Come, Tom," said Claude Duval, gently; "do not give way to your grief thus. It is weak and unmanly. This is the moment for action. You cannot but know how dangerous it is for all of us to remain here so close to the lane."

"What matters it for danger now?" interrupted Tom, passionately. "I care for nothing now."

"Calm yourself, my friend—calm yourself. It may be, and I hope it will turn out so, that you are too hastily giving expression to your grief. Cheer up! Be a man! Assist me to carry him to the house. We may, perchance, find that life is not yet extinct."

It was some time before Tom could be brought to listen to this hope, and Claude could not help acknowledging to himself that it was a very faint one.

At length, however, Tom King grew calmer, and succeeded in overcoming the violence of his grief, which was as sincere as it was demonstrative.

Slowly and sadly he rose to his feet.



[SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HIDES FROM THE POLICE OFFICERS IN THE OLD CHURCH.]

"It is a frail and slender hope," he said, mournfully; "but I will cling to it. There will, at least, be some consolation in doing so."

"There will—there will!" returned Claude. "Do not let us mourn for him until we have ascertained, beyond all possibility of doubt, that he is no more."

"I will not. Even now I feel lighter-hearted than I did, which shows how firm a hold that slender hope has already taken upon my mind. I hope it will be verified, or otherwise I fear the disappointment will be more than I can bear."

"Enough of words. Come—come, be a man! Calm yourself. Do not burst forth into these sudden storms of excitement. Be calm, and then you may be of service to our captain, which, while you continue as you are, you cannot be."

Claude Duval had reason and common sense on his side, and Tom King could not avoid feeling it.

Subduing, then, the more audible expression of his grief, he turned his attention towards the carrying out of his comrade's instructions.

Clearly, the best and wisest course of action would be to carry Dick Turpin to the deserted mansion with all speed, and really ascertain whether life was or was not extinct.

Accordingly Claude said:

"Take hold of him carefully under the shoulders, Tom, and lift him up. I will take hold of his feet, and between us we shall be easily enough able to carry him."

Tom obeyed.

Stooping down with a groan, he moved Dick's head a little, and then took hold of him under the arms.

Claude raised his feet.

Slowly and mournfully then, they carried him towards the mansion.

Up the long, winding, dismal avenue of trees, with the faint light of early morning struggling over the landscape, they went.

Claude had taken the precaution, while Tom King was giving way so keenly to his anguish, to start all three of the horses up the avenue.

He knew well enough that their instinct would enable them to find the stable.

Never had that avenue of trees appeared of such a length as it did on this morning.

At last, however, the neglected, weed-grown lawn was reached.

Over this they passed without resting, and in another moment stood before the window through which they always gained admittance to the mansion.

Close to it Black Bess was standing.

The other horses had continued on their way across the garden and had entered the stable.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXXIV.

DICK TURPIN IS RESTORED TO LIFE BY THE EXERTIONS OF HIS COMRADES, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SETS OUT UPON A HAZARDOUS BUT NECESSARY EXPEDITION.

But Black Bess—bonny Black Bess—with an affection and intelligence almost human, stood before the window.

A moaning cry came from her lips.

With that delicate perception which thorough-bred horses possess in such a high degree, she comprehended that something terrible had happened to her rider.

Tom King and Claude Duval were deeply touched by her manifest distress.

Though almost mute, yet how eloquent was it!

But they could not linger there.

Not without some difficulty, the inanimate body of Dick Turpin was lifted through the window.

When this was done, the shutter was closed, and the burden was carried into the great hall.

At the foot of the spacious staircase Claude Duval paused.

"Stop, Tom!" he said. "We have forgotten Maud. This dreadful intelligence must be broken to her gradually. If she receives it suddenly, the shock will be almost greater than she can bear."

"True—true!" replied Tom King. "But I was so wholly absorbed by my own grief for the unfortunate occurrence, that I altogether forgot others, and the effect it would produce upon them."

"Place Turpin here," said Claude. "You can remain with him, and I will go upstairs and break the dreadful news."

"Too late—too late!" said Tom.

Even as he spoke the hasty rush of footsteps on the stairs at once caused them to look up.

Maud was descending at a speed so rapid that she seemed to glide from stair to stair.

Sixteen-String Jack was following, and making every exertion to keep up with her, but in vain.

The rate of her descent was double his

Instinctively the poor girl seemed to know that something terrible had happened.

Her eyes were widely open, and her lips apart, and she gasped painfully for breath

Claude held up his hand.

"Hold!" he cried. "Descend more slowly, and prepare yourself for such a sight as makes me wish that I had died, rather than lived to witness it!"

Maud uttered a piercing shriek, but instead of obeying Claude's command, she increased her speed.

In an instant she reached the foot of the staircase.

One glance was sufficient to show her the motionless body of Dick Turpin lying at full length on the cold stones with which the hall was paved.

With another shriek she bounded forward, then cast herself down upon the body of her husband.

Her grief was heartrending to witness, and more than we can describe.

We shall not attempt it, further than she sobbed and cried most bitterly.

With a thousand frantic gestures, she endeavoured to extract some token of life from the inanimate form.

But she could not.

As well might she have appealed to the stones upon which he lay.

As for Sixteen-String Jack, he seemed stupefied.

It was some time before he could manage to speak at all.

Then, clutching Claude by the arm, he cried:

"Tell me—tell me at once what is the meaning of all this! Am I awake—or is it some horrible dream?"

"It is reality," said Claude Duval, and then, in a few words, he informed his comrade how and under what circumstances Dick Turpin had been found.

Jack listened in horror.

Claude then advanced, and, kneeling down, endeavoured to raise Maud, and impart some consolation to her.

"Rise—rise!" he said, tenderly. "The worst is over now. Let us carry him to the room above. You must remember that as yet we have made no examination of his hurts. It may even turn out—though I do not wish to raise your hopes too high—that he is not dead, but that he is only insensible from loss of blood."

Claude was not prepared for the avidity with which Maud seized upon the hope thus imparted.

As soon as ever she learned that there was just a probability that life was not extinct, she subdued her grief and rose to her feet.

She was not one of those poor, helpless creatures who in the hour of tribulation can do nothing but moan and wring their hands.

Believing he was dead, she had given way to her grief without restraint.

As soon as she learned that he might yet be alive, she rose to her feet, and at once assisted in rendering every possible service that she could think of and that lay in her power.

Knowing that water would be required, and the sooner it was at hand the better, she left the three highwaymen to carry the senseless body of their captain upstairs, while she went on a kind of exploring expedition in the lower regions of the house in search of water.

In an outhouse she found a broken stone jar, and in the garden was a well.

From this she obtained the water, and then hastened back.

By the time she returned she found that the three had achieved their task.

Dick Turpin was laid at full length upon one of the rude beds we have mentioned.

Experience had taught all three of the highwaymen a good knowledge of wounds, and so, with a speed and dexterity that did them infinite credit, they removed the bandage which Dick had managed to tie round his head.

It was soaked through and through with blood.

Then Maud was at hand with the water.

By the plentiful supply of this the wound was washed quite clean, and much of the ghastliness of its aspect was then removed.

With an amount of anxiety that can perhaps be guessed at, the wound was examined.

Maud watched them with breathless eagerness.

An ejaculation of satisfaction came from the lips of Tom King.

"My worst fears are over!" he said. "There is no fracture of the skull, nor has the bullet lodged anywhere."

"Then he may live?" said Maud, with earnest interrogation.

"He may if he has not gone too long without aid, but his body seems to be almost drained of blood!"

"But there is hope?"

"Oh, decidedly there is hope."

Maud sank down and burst into tears

But they were tears that did her good to shed.

They relieved her o'erfraught heart.

With even more anxiousness than before, the wound was re-examined.

But that examination only served to show that the bullet had struck alarmingly close to the temple, and that it had in some way glanced off, inflicting a long gash, extending to the back of the head, which left the bone of the skull completely bare.

It was an awkward, ugly-looking wound to say the least of it; but after the apprehensions our friends had suffered that their much-loved captain was no more, it sank into comparative insignificance.

With great care and skill, the wound was bound up with the best bandages they could manufacture.

These bandages were all well soaked in clean water before they were put on, for that was the only thing in the shape of healing ointment that they happened to possess.

Water was kept at hand, too, in order that the bandages might be wetted from time to time, and by adopting this expedient they hoped to be able to avoid inflammation.

Every means they could think of was tried to restore Dick to consciousness, but in vain.

Some pungent essence was required, and this, as a matter of course, they did not possess.

Still it was imperative that Turpin should be roused from the kind of trance into which they felt persuaded he had fallen.

Unless something was done, that trance would certainly end in death, for it was too much to expect Nature to recover him from it.

But their efforts all failed, and they began again to dread the worst, and to think that they had been buoying themselves up with false hopes.

Dick presented every appearance of death.

Maud did not weep now.

Her tears were dried, and her cheeks wore a hectic flush, while her eyes glittered with unnatural and painful brightness.

Nothing that they could do would restore vitality.

A little brandy or some other ardent spirit would doubtless have been of good service; but they had none.

At last, with desperate hope, Maud suggested they should search in Turpin's pockets.

All wondered that they had not thought of this before, and it was done at once.

A moment's search discovered a small bottle.

The cork was drawn, and the odour at once proclaimed that it contained brandy.

This was a joyful discovery.

Turpin had slipped it into his pocket while at the White Horse, little thinking at the time of the value it would be to him.

Cautiously, Tom King poured a small quantity of brandy into Dick's mouth.

He had to force his teeth apart to administer it, and he watched the result with great anxiousness.

No effort to swallow was made, but suddenly they perceived Turpin was turning black in the face.

Alarmed at this symptom, they hastily rolled him over, in order that the brandy might be ejected.

A gurgling noise followed, and then he seemed to choke.

Still more alarmed, they struck him some desperate blows on the back, just in between his shoulders.

This was rather violent usage, but it produced beneficial results.

Giving a gasping sort of sigh, Turpin swallowed the brandy, and opened his eyes.

With an hysterical cry of joy, Maud flung herself beside him.

Turpin smiled feebly.

He evidently recognised her, as well as his three comrades, who were all so anxiously bending over him.

But the extent of Dick's power and strength was comprised in that one feeble smile.

He could do no more.

It was a great consolation to all of them, however, to see him awake with the full and proper use of his faculties.

Tom King held up his hand, and strictly enjoined Dick to be silent, and not to make the least effort to speak, as the consequence of so doing might be serious.

A movement of the eyes was the only reply Turpin could make.

There was no fear that he would speak—that was quite beyond his power.

He closed his eyes, and appeared to sleep.

The three highwaymen withdrew, leaving Maud alone with Turpin.

Upon gaining the adjoining chamber, Sixteen-String Jack said:

"The next thing that must be done will be to procure some light, nourishing, and strengthening food. Without it, we cannot hope to secure the captain's recovery."

"Very good!" said Tom King; "but the difficulty is to get what we require."

"I know that; but we must have it, let the difficulty be as great as it may. I propose to take that task, or duty, upon myself."

"Nay, I——" interrupted Claude.

"Listen to me! You have both just returned from an excursion. Your horses are exhausted—mine has rested all night. Say no more, then—I am resolved to go."

"Where?"

"That I cannot say, at present. I shall go to the likeliest place I can think of."

"It will be frightfully perilous by daylight!"

"But do not the circumstances justify an extra risk?"

"Most certainly!"

"Then we will debate the matter no longer. I will go!"

"At once?"

"Yes—immediately! I shall make what hasty changes in my appearance I am able to do, and trust to good luck to befriend me."

"But, stay!" said Tom King—"you have not told me whether anything happened to you during the past night?"

"Never mind that now!" said Jack; "at another opportunity I will tell you all—I cannot stay now!"

"Well, well, you shall do so! You will not be long gone?"

"Not if I can help it! You may depend I shall return as soon as ever I am able to obtain those articles of which Dick stands in so much need!"

"Good luck to you, then, Jack!"

"Farewell!"

With this word on his lips, Sixteen-String Jack descended the stairs hastily.

Upon pushing open the shutter before the window, he was startled to see Black Bess standing there, with her neck outstretched and her ears projected forward.

The gallant creature had remained there ever since her master was carried through the window.

She had followed him as far as she had been able.

Jack spoke a few words of encouragement to her as he stepped out into the garden.

Black Bess suffered him to take hold of her bridle, and to pat her upon her neck.

Then he attempted to lead her towards the stable.

But she refused to move, and it was only after coaxing her for several minutes that he induced her to comply with his wishes.

All the horses required attention; and, judging that his comrades would be too busily engaged with Dick Turpin to think about them, Jack paused to collect as much grass as he could.

This done, he saddled his own steed, and, after taking unusual pains to reconnoitre, sallied forth.

The enterprise upon which he was bound involved a more than ordinary amount of risk and danger, and therefore Jack felt that he could not be too careful.

There was another point to be considered, which was the best place at which to obtain the articles he required.

London naturally suggested itself; but, after a brief consideration, Jack determined to obtain his supplies somewhere else.

The nearer he got to London, the greater would be his danger.

The closer he got to the metropolis, the more vigilant was the watch kept up by the dragoons, and the greater, too, were their numbers.

But, in going to some country place, more notice would be taken of him; but he fancied this was the less danger of the two.

This was the course, then, that he decided upon and proceeded to carry out.

"I wonder which will be the best place for my purpose! Let me think! There's Hatfield. That's only ten or eleven miles from here, and at least twenty from London. Surely, the dragoons do not reach so far as that! It is a good market-town, and my coming will not be noticed so much as in a village. Yes—I will try Hatfield!"

We need scarcely inform the reader that Sixteen-String Jack took his way across the open country, making his horse leap over all obstacles that presented themselves.

At the present day, it would be an easy enough matter

to gallop for miles over an agricultural district without meeting with a soul; and at the time of which we are writing, when the population of the kingdom was nothing like so great, it was an easier matter still.

We have mentioned this, lest the reader should think it strange that Jack should reach his journey's end without meeting with any interruption.

But he did so.

The only persons he had caught sight of were at work in the fields, and he avoided approaching them at all closely.

There were, however, very few of these, for it was the wrong season of the year for any farming operations to be carried on.

It was not until he was quite close to the little market-town that he met people.

Believing that the dragoons did not extend their lines so far, and that he had little to fear, if he only put on a bold front.

Accordingly, when within a short distance of the town, he leaped over a hedge into a lane, and continuing along this, at length emerged into the high-road.

At an easy trot he directed his horse's steps towards the town as any other passenger might have done.

Curious glances were, from time to time, cast upon him, but none ventured to interfere, and he continued on his way without molestation.

It happened to be market day, and the streets were thronged with people and vehicles.

This was at once a safety and a danger.

A safety, because amongst so many his presence was not so likely to attract notice and remark.

A danger, because some of these people, coming, doubtless, from different parts of the kingdom, might recognise him.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXXV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK FINDS THE OSTLER AT THE "TIGER'S HEAD," AT HATFIELD, A FRIEND IN NEED.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK pulled his hat as low down over his brows as he could, in order to conceal his countenance.

Wisely, he determined to stop at the first quiet inn he came to.

There his horse could obtain a feed of corn, of which he knew he was badly in need, and at the same time he could take steps to execute his mission.

Fortunately for Jack, it was growing dusk, though the afternoon was yet young.

But the day had been dark and gloomy, and night was setting in at an unusually early hour.

This was a state of things, however, that the highwayman was by no means disposed to quarrel with, inasmuch as it suited him admirably.

Turning down a narrow street on his right hand, Tom trotted on until he paused before an old-fashioned public-house, which was furnished with a huge swinging sign, on which was painted a rather terrific tiger's head.

Perceiving a gateway, Jack trotted down it without hesitation.

The sharp sound of his horse's feet upon the rough stones with which the gateway was paved served as a summons to the ostler, for that individual at once made his appearance, and running up to the horse, held the bridle for Jack to dismount.

The highwayman slipped from the saddle immediately.

"I can have a private room here, I suppose?" he said.

"Oh yes, sir!"

"Very good! Here's half-a-crown for you. Lead my horse to the stable, and let me see how well you can groom him down and how good a feed you can give him."

The ostler touched the tattered peak of his cap, and said, "Yes, sir," to every word.

The present of the half-crown made a wonderful difference to him, and he thought Jack a lord, at least, for though persons who halted there generally gave him something, yet that something, for the most part, consisted of a few coppers, given just when they were about to ride off, and when he had been holding their horses for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour.

But never had it come within his experience for anyone to give so large an amount as half-a-crown, and certainly never a penny, beforehand.

From the moment, then, that the half-crown found a resting-place in his pocket, he became wholly and solely devoted to Jack, and was prepared to render him any service.

The highwayman looked carefully all around him, and yet without appearing to do so.

He knew full well the importance of making himself familiar with any strange place at which he might stop.

He observed, too, with particular care, the situation of the stables, the fastenings upon the door, the stall in which his horse was placed, and also the exact spot where the saddle and bridle were deposited.

When his horse had been well groomed, and furnished with a liberal quantity of provender, Jack bade the ostler lead him to the inn.

Upon entering, he asked the landlord for a private room.

The mere demand produced a profusion of low bows from the landlord, for the inn in general had but little trade.

Jack was shown into a comfortable room on the ground floor, and the landlord stood near the door, bowing, and waiting for orders.

"I want some dinner," said Jack, as he threw himself carelessly into a chair. "What is there that you can get ready in the smallest possible space of time?"

"What would you like, sir?"

"Anything that can be had quickly. I have no mind to wait. What have you in the house that you can cook?"

"Some fine home-cured hams."

"Good—the very thing! Put down a couple of slices and some new-laid eggs."

"It shall be done, sir."

The landlord bowed and left the room, while Jack leaned back in his chair, contemplating with satisfaction the prospect of partaking of a civilised meal.

As he sat waiting, Jack began to consider more carefully in what manner he should carry out his mission.

Being on horseback, it would look very singular to see him loaded with provisions.

The difficulty of obtaining what he wanted did not appear to be so very great—the thing was to transport it to the deserted mansion.

This was a knotty point, and when the landlord presently entered with the meal he had ordered, he seemed to be as far off its solution as ever.

Sixteen-String Jack was frightfully hungry, and when the tempting meal was placed upon the table, he forgot all about his difficulties.

A stone jug of foaming home-brewed ale was placed upon the table by the landlord, and then Jack said:

"Have you any good wine in the house?"

"Port, sir?"

"Yes."

"I have a few bottles in the cellar, the quality of which, I make bold to say, is first-rate."

"I am glad to hear it. When I ring the bell, you will please to bring up a couple of bottles."

"A couple of bottles? Oh yes, sir! When you ring the bell? All right, sir!"

With another profusion of bows, the landlord withdrew.

Two bottles of wine at one time was an overpowering order.

Jack devoured his meal with great avidity.

There was no light in the room save that which came from the fire, and this was quite sufficient to serve his purpose, for the dusky twilight which had settled over the town did not seem much deeper than it was an hour ago, though by this time the sun had set.

By the firelight, then, in the really comfortable room in the old-fashioned inn, Sixteen-String Jack despatched his dinner.

Once, however, as he was raising the jug of ale to his lips he happened to turn his eyes in the direction of the window.

He could not avoid starting and spilling some of the ale upon the table-cloth, so surprised was he at what he saw.

A man was standing outside, with his face pressed close against the window-pane.

He was shielding his eyes from the extraneous light

with both his hands, and evidently trying to make out all that there was in the chamber.

Sixteen-String Jack pushed his chair back from the table.

The spy outside must either have seen or heard him, for he disappeared instantly.

This circumstance troubled Jack greatly.

Despite the peril of such a proceeding, he hastened to the window and looked out.

The houses on the opposite side of the way looked rather dim and indistinct, but still the outlines of all objects were tolerably well defined.

Not a single human being was in sight.

The man, whoever he was, had made a precipitate retreat.

How long he might have been standing there peering through the window was more than Jack could tell, for it was by the merest accident in the world that Jack raised his eyes and saw him.

What could be his purpose in watching him?

Had he been recognised or suspected?

Such a thing was very probable.

With these thoughts passing through his mind, Jack still stood at the window.

Nothing passed by, however, but the small carts which were transporting various commodities from the market.

Suddenly, on the other side, he perceived three dusky figures, and he strained his eyes to the utmost to make them out.

But, except that they were men, he could see nothing, for the gloom was increasing rapidly each moment.

He saw these three dusky figures gesticulating, as though some conversation of a very animating character was going on between them.

They pointed several times to the inn, and, as Jack thought, to the very window at which he was standing.

This might or might not have been his fancy.

Then the three dusky figures disappeared, and he saw them no more.

"That looks remarkably as though mischief was brewing," said Jack, at length; "and it may be that I am frightening myself about nothing. I will not be scared by a shadow. I would give much to allow my horse a little more rest. Nevertheless, I will take what precautions I can, so that, should danger arrive, I shall not be altogether unprepared for it."

This was a very prudent resolution indeed to make, and Jack rang the bell.

Then, sitting down to the table, he resumed his interrupted meal.

Some few moments elapsed before the landlord appeared in answer to the bell, but when he did come, he brought with him the two bottles of wine that had been ordered.

The gloomy duskiness with which the room was filled prevented the highwayman from accurately noting the expression of the landlord's countenance.

"Put the bottles down on the table," said Jack, "I shall not open them just yet. Oblige me by telling the ostler to come here, I want to give him some instructions about my horse."

"Very good, sir. Do you want him to come now?"

"Yes, certainly."

"All right, sir. I will go and fetch him."

"Do so; I want to speak to him at once about my horse's stifle-joint."

"All right, sir. Would you like some candles, sir?"

"Not just at present, thank you. It will do after I have spoken to the ostler."

The landlord said no more, but bowed and withdrew.

As the door closed after him, Jack muttered:

"I don't like your ways, Mr. Landlord, and it strikes me very forcibly that I have got into a hornet's nest. I must be careful. The ostler, however, will, I think, stand my friend. I have no other chance, and if he fails me, my position will be desperate indeed."

Just as Jack had got so far in his ruminations, there came a faint tapping at the door.

"Come in," he cried.

The door was opened, and the ostler entered.

That is to say, he thrust his head into the room, and touching his forehead with his finger, said:

"Want to speak to me, sir?"

"Yes; come in and shut the door."

The ostler obeyed, and shut the door with great speed.

Then, before Jack could utter a word, he (the ostler) ran up to him and said, in an emphatic whisper:

"Mum! mind your eye! Guv'nor's outside!"

"But——"

"Hush—he's listening! Can't stop—suspicious—you're in danger! I've got the saddle on!"

"Hush!" said Jack: "speak more plainly—I don't understand you."

"Oh lor! Well, I must not stay a moment else the guv'nor'll know summat's up."

"What do you mean by danger?"

"Officers."

"You know me, then?"

"Yes, I heard them talking about you."

"Who?"

"Guv'nor and officers."

"You will be my friend?"

"Rather!"

"You will find it will answer your purpose. Here, take these."

Jack pressed a handful of guineas into the ostler's palm.

"Oh my!" he said.

"Put them in your pocket."

"Many thanks. You is an out-an'-outer, and no mistake!"

"But what do you propose to do?"

"Help you to get off."

"How?"

"I'll have your horse ready in a moment. Watch your opportunity to slip out, and off you can go."

"All right. You shall be well rewarded for this."

"Have you drunk any of that wine?"

"No. Why?"

"Don't."

"Why not?"

"Don't, I say. Mustn't stop, or guv'nor will be suspicious."

With these words the ostler hurried out of the room.

Jack sat down, and, clasping his hands over his head, strove to think.

"What does all this mean?" he murmured. "Is this ostler in earnest, or is he luring me to my destruction? I must think—I must think!"

After a few moments spent in reflection, Jack raised his head.

"I will trust him!" he said. "I would sooner do that than doubt. Yes, I will trust him, and if he attempts to deceive me, let him beware—that's all!"

He sprang to his feet.

His eyes fell upon the two bottles of wine on the table.

"I wonder what the ostler meant?" he continued. "Never mind—I will take them in my pocket for Dick, though I will try to learn something about them, for all that."

With these words, Jack put the bottles of wine in the skirt pockets of his coat, and then saw that his pistols were ready for immediate service.

By this time he doubted not the ostler had got the horse in readiness—that was, supposing he had not played him false.

Jack went to the window and looked out, or rather endeavoured to do so, for the street was now profoundly dark.

All seemed quiet, too, and so he turned away and went towards the door.

He approached it on tiptoe, then paused to listen.

But here also all was still.

He placed his right hand upon the stock of one of his pistols, which was cocked, and ready for instant use.

He placed his left on the handle of the door, and opened it quickly.

The passage was beyond, but he could see no one in it.

Emboldened by this, he stepped forward, his intention being to make for the back door as quickly as possible.

Scarcely, however, had he taken half a dozen steps in this direction than a man sprang forward and attempted to seize him by the throat.

At the same time this man set up a cry, which had the effect of calling his companions to his assistance.

With a sudden exertion of strength, Jack shook off the grasp of this man.

There was no time for flight, so he placed his back against the wall of the passage, and drew both his pistols.

His determined attitude caused the men to pause, and they stood before and around him in a throng.

One glance showed Sixteen-String Jack that they were police officers.

The landlord was in the background.

"Sixteen-String Jack!" cried one of the police officers, "you are our prisoner! Surrender yourself quietly. It is in vain to make the least resistance. Our instructions are to take you alive or dead!"

The officer who spoke these words advanced a step.

"Hold!" cried Sixteen-String Jack, in a voice that made the officer start. "If you decrease the distance there is between us by half an inch only, I shall fire, and at such a short distance as this I cannot fail to blow your brains out!"

The officer did not like the tone of Jack's voice; but nevertheless, putting on a bold front, he said:

"Come, come, my lads! Forward! It will be a sharp tussle for a moment, and then all will be at an end! You know your duty! Forward, and the reward is yours!"

But the men held back.

They did not like the look of the pistols which Jack held so threateningly towards them.

Nor did their leader, albeit he spoke so boldly, set them the example of rushing forward to secure the capture.

But it was not likely that this state of things would continue long.

Observing the effect he had made, Sixteen-String Jack slowly began to retreat, still keeping his back to the wall.

With one accord, they made a rush forward.

Jack fired one of his pistols over their heads, and rushed to the door.

The report produced a momentary check, and he took advantage of the opportunity to fling open the door that led out into the yard.

But before he could cross the threshold, the officers were upon him.

"Seize him! seize him!" cried the one in command. "You know your orders are to take him, dead or alive! Forward!—there's not many of us to divide the reward amongst!"

The officers seemed determined to carry their point, for they attacked Jack with great resolution, and the one in command discharged a pistol the moment he had done speaking.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXXVI.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SUCCEEDS IN OBTAINING A PARTIAL VICTORY OVER HIS ENEMIES.

FORTUNATELY, Sixteen-String Jack moved suddenly at the moment, and so escaped the bullet that was levelled at him.

Directly afterwards, he returned the shot, this time aiming at the throng, and not above it.

One officer fell writhing to the ground, and those near him seemed scarcely to know whether they were hit or not.

Their hesitation lasted but for an infinitesimal portion of a second, yet it enabled Jack to make a bold and rapid rush towards the stables.

Looking before him, he saw the ostler, with a grin on his face, holding his horse by the bridle.

Could he but reach him and mount, then he felt all would be well.

But the officers had recovered themselves, and, with cries of rage, pursued him.

Another shot was fired, but the aim was too hastily taken for the bullet to be effective.

Sixteen-String Jack was then about half-way across the yard, so he stopped suddenly, and turned round.

This was a course of action for which the officers were totally unprepared, and they, too, came to a halt.

Jack's intention may be guessed.

It was to strike them, if possible, with another panic, and, while they were under the influence of it, to run the remainder of the distance across the inn yard, and mount his horse.

But he recollected he had no more loaded pistols about him.

The other brace that he carried were in the holsters of the saddle.

Simultaneously with making this reflection, he recollected that he had in his pockets the two bottles of wine which the landlord had brought him, and which the ostler had cautioned him not to drink.

Quick as thought, then—for there was no time for deliberation—Jack pulled these bottles from his pockets and flung them at his foes.

His aim was accurate.

Crash went the bottles as they came in contact with the officers' heads.

The hardness of officers' heads has passed into a proverb, and they were certainly harder than the bottles.

In a moment, two of their number reeled and fell.

Jack hardly waited to see whether his aim had been true, but turned round and ran towards his horse as soon as the last missile had left his hand.

This attack, however, did not prove so effectual as the last, for, with redoubled anger, those officers who were unhurt continued the pursuit.

Jack heard them coming, but still he ran, for he was close to his horse.

He succeeded in taking hold of a lock of his mane, and getting one foot in the stirrup.

Another second and he would have been fairly mounted; but just as he was about to spring, an officer grasped him from behind.

At the moment of succeeding, Jack had to give up.

He turned round like lightning, and snatched a pistol from the holster.

He found himself confronted by two officers, who saw with dismay that the pistol was a double-barrelled one.

"Fall back," cried Jack, "or I fire!"

"Come, come," said one of the officers, prudently getting behind his comrade, "this sort of thing will do you no good, Jack—not a bit! You had better give in without further fuss. You can't escape!"

"Cripple his horse!" said a voice at this moment. "Cripple his horse with something, and then you have him secure!"

With flashing eyes, Sixteen-String Jack turned his head towards the direction from which these sounds came.

He saw one of the officers, who had received the blow with the bottle of wine, slowly rising to his feet, and wiping the blood from his face.

It was this man who had uttered the words we have recorded.

If anything was calculated to enrage Jack, that was; and under the impulse of ungovernable passion he brought his pistol rapidly to a level, and took deliberate aim.

The report followed instantly, and with a shriek the brutal officer fell writhing and bleeding to the ground.

Jack looked about him again, and saw that another officer was endeavouring to act upon the hint which had been given him.

Some gardening tools were placed near the stable door, and seizing a spade, this officer raised it in the air, and with it would doubtless have inflicted some severe injury upon the horse had not Jack rushed forward just in time to prevent him from carrying his diabolical design into execution.

With a strength which passion alone could have lent him, Jack seized the spade and wrenched it from the officer's hand.

The next instant it descended with a sickening crash upon his head, and he rolled over and over as though suffering more than mortal agony.

But reinforcements were now hastening across the yard from the direction of the back door of the inn, and Jack saw that, although he had been successful so far, there was yet much to be done.

Hurriedly firing his remaining pistol, he sprang into the saddle.

This time he was not prevented.

Thrusting his hand into his pocket, he drew forth a purse, which he threw to the ostler, at the same time advising that individual to make himself scarce.

One touch with his spur, and his gallant steed dashed through a gate which opened into a lane at the back of the inn.

Just as he did so, two more shots were fired, but, happily for him, without producing any hurtful effect.

The highwayman's horse was invigorated by the hearty and substantial meal which the ostler had given it, and dashed forward at a pace which threatened to set pursuit at defiance.

But the officers had taken much better measures for securing him than he at all anticipated, and in order to explain how it was that the officers had not at the first attacked him in a more systematic manner, it will be necessary to go back for a moment.

It so happened, then, that on the day Jack entered Hatfield, a large party of mounted officers from Bow Street arrived there, in consequence of some information they had received respecting a gang of coiners who had taken up their quarters in that town.

The officers arrived by twos and threes, so as not to create too much attention, for they wished to take the numerous gang as much by surprise as they possibly could.

One of the officers, then, saw Jack in the High Street as soon as he arrived, and fancied he recognised him, but was not certain.

Under these circumstances, being alone, he kept his eye upon Jack, and tracked him to the Tiger's Head.

Having done this, he sought out his superior, and gave him the information.

This matter was deemed so important that he forthwith put their original purpose on one side, and determined to proceed without delay to the inn that had been mentioned.

If the information should turn out to be correct, and he should be able to capture this daring highwayman after the many failures the dragoons had made, he felt it would be quite a feather in his cap.

It should be mentioned that this chief police officer was well acquainted with Sixteen-String Jack's appearance, and expressed his conviction that he should be able to recognise him at the first glance, so that the matter would speedily be put at rest.

This officer then walked to the Tiger's Head, and commenced spying about in the hope of picking up some information.

Being in front of the inn, and being, too, a dusky night, nothing was more natural than that he should peep through the windows and see by whom the different rooms were occupied.

The first window he came to belonged to the private apartment which Sixteen-String Jack had engaged.

He found our friend very comfortably and quietly enjoying the tempting meal which was before him; but, owing to the gloom with which the room was filled, he could not distinctly make out Jack's features.

Suddenly, however, a brighter flash than usual came from the fire.

This, falling upon Jack's face, revealed its outline fully.

The officer recognised him.

He was sure he made no mistake.

It was just at this moment that Jack, happening to turn his eyes towards the window, saw a man's face pressed close against it.

The sudden movement Jack made let the officer know he had been perceived, and he darted off instantly, so that by the time Jack reached the window the officer had got a considerable distance down the street.

Then crossing over on the opposite side, he walked towards the inn again

He was then joined by two of his men, and these were the three figures which Jack had indistinctly seen.

These two men the chief officer sent off with instructions to bring the main body down to the inn with the least possible delay, but still not in such a manner as should be the means of giving an immediate alarm.

The chief himself then entered the inn, and drew the landlord on one side.

It did not take him long to convince the latter who he was, nor was he much longer in inducing the landlord to assist him in his attempt to capture the highwayman.

This was all satisfactory enough, and now nothing more could be done until the officers arrived.

The landlord, in obedience to Jack's orders, went down into the cellar to fetch the two bottles of wine, at the same time apprising the officer of what he was about to do.

This gave the latter quite a fresh thought, so he said:

"Go and fetch the wine, but don't take them into the room to him till I return. I shall not be a moment, and most likely shall be back as soon as you have got the bottles ready."

With these words the officer put on his hat and rushed down the street to a druggist's shop, which he noticed only a few doors off.

Here he revealed himself, and by this means obtained a drug which would render anyone who partook of it helplessly insensible.

This was the very thing the officer wanted, so he hastened back with it.

His purpose can easily be guessed.

He was induced to adopt this means of capturing the redoubtable highwayman, because all the attempts to apprehend him by open violence had signally failed.

If he could, however, secure his taking a small quantity of the wine with the drug dissolved in it, all would be easy enough.

He entered the bar just as the landlord came up out of the cellar.

Between them they carefully drew the corks, dropped a small portion of the powder in each bottle, and then replaced the corks again.

But while they were thus pleasantly engaged, they had an unsuspected watcher.

That was the ostler, who had managed to overhear some of the former conversation between the officer and his master, which, joined to his own suspicions, made him aware of Jack's identity.

He saw he was in great danger, and resolved to warn him of it.

He was deliberating upon the means when he was summoned to Jack's room.

With what passed the reader is already in possession of.

When Jack issued, then, the preparations which the chief officer had made were not complete.

Still, several of his men had arrived, and with these, rather than lose the chance of effecting the capture altogether, he resolved to make an attack with what force he then had, and trust to the speedy arrival of reinforcements.

The results of that we have just described, but it unluckily happened for Jack that a large party of mounted police officers were then in sight of the inn.

The moon was up and shining brightly.

They saw Jack dart out of the inn yard and gallop off at such a rapid pace, and, guessing what had occurred, they, without waiting for any instructions, clapped spurs to their horses' flanks and galloped off in pursuit.

The clattering sound which their horses' hoofs produced soon made Jack aware that he was pursued, and he urged his horse to make still greater exertions.

But the officers were capitally mounted, and filled with the hope of being able to run him down.

Jack took his course over the open country, going in a direction at right angles to the deserted mansion.

It would never have done to have led his foes towards that place of refuge, more especially while Dick Turpin was in such a helpless condition.

Away, then, he went, with three important things to do

These were—to escape from his pursuers, to avoid those dragoons who might be patrolling the roads, and to lead his enemies away from the deserted mansion.

But Jack's blood was fully up, and he was ripe and ready for any adventure, no matter how desperate

His steed, too, seemed full of life and vigour.

He had but to give him the rein freely, and away he flew like the wind, leaping clear over obstructions that made Jack hold his breath when he saw how swiftly he was approaching them.

But, with extraordinary pertinacity, the officers kept upon his track, for they hoped, even if they did not succeed in overtaking him, that he would, ere long, be intercepted by some of the troops of dragoons.

And this latter was what Jack feared most; but so far, by keeping steadily over the open country, he had escaped them.

The moon, which seemed to shine with ever-increasing brightness, rose rapidly in the sky, shedding a flood of silvery lustre over the whole of the extensive landscape, and rendering objects at a great distance distinctly visible.

Thus it happened that the officers were able to keep the

flying highwayman steadily in view, and this encouraged them to make still greater efforts to capture him.

From time to time Jack looked behind him, but whenever he did so he still perceived the throng of officers coming on at unabated speed.

This was a state of things that would never do, but the question was, how could he make an alteration?

"Confound them!" he muttered. "If I keep on at this rate I shall not be able to get back to the deserted mansion by daybreak. What shall I do? I must double upon them somehow or other—that is my only chance, and to do that I must get out of sight."

This was easier said than done, but upon looking back once more Jack fancied that the distance between him and the officers was materially increased.

Upon this he goaded his willing horse with the spur.

With a snort of pain the gallant creature bounded forward with a speed which made his former rate of travelling seem tedious and slow.

Jack looked back again.

He had gained wonderfully upon his foes, for it seemed to him that their horses were greatly exhausted by their long gallop.

Nevertheless, although there seemed a probability of outstripping them altogether if he kept on, yet Jack felt that his best course would be to hide somewhere, and then allow his enemies to pass him.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXXVII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SEEKS REFUGE FROM HIS PURSUERS IN THE OLD CHURCH.

But this was in truth a very difficult matter, and one that would have to be carried out with a great amount of caution.

Without delay, however, he looked before him in search of some place which would serve to conceal him.

But he could see nothing save a large, old, square-towered church in the distance, upon the grey walls of which the moonbeams shone with a very pretty effect.

Jack pushed onward with unabated speed and without changing his direction, which would take him straight to the old church we have mentioned.

Looking back again, he saw that the police officers were further off than ever.

Jack had travelled many miles in a very short time, and his horse showed signs of flagging every now and then.

A sharp push, however, and then all would be over, and he would be able to allow him a rest.

From the distance which now intervened between the officers and himself, Jack felt sure that it was almost impossible for them to be able to distinguish his form.

He had, then, all the better chance of hiding himself.

But where?

The only place that seemed to afford the least facility for such a thing was the old church.

But the idea of taking refuge in a sacred edifice scarcely even entered the highwayman's mind.

As he came nearer, however, and saw how lonely the church was, the thought struck him that that would be the best possible hiding-place he could find, as the officers would scarcely think of looking for him there.

Upon reaching the church, Jack pulled up his panting steed and looked behind him.

His keen eye enabled him to discern a small black mass in motion in the far distance.

One thing, however, pressed itself upon his attention, and that was, that if he passed behind this church he would certainly be out of sight of his foes.

He did so, and then he saw the door was before him.

Whatever hesitation or doubt he might have had up to the present moment vanished now.

He determined to hide in the church, and surely the officers would never think of looking for him there.

A few paces onward he saw the gate that opened into the churchyard, but it was of such a character that he could not lead his horse through it.

Some palings only a few feet in height surrounded it, and over these his horse leaped with the greatest ease.

A narrow gravelled path led from the churchyard gate to the porch before the church itself; and having dismounted, he led his horse along it.

The moonbeams shone upon the strange scene, and tinted with a magic though spectral beauty the silent graveyard, with its moss-grown tomb-stones, and the square, ivy-covered tower of the church.

Sixteen-String Jack gave but one brief glance around—not at the beauty of the scene, though it was striking enough, but rather in order to ascertain whether his pursuers were in sight.

All was well, for the church was between him and them.

It took the highwayman a few moments only to reach the door leading into the church.

It was old and massive, like the rest of the building, and was reached by some steps ascending from the grave-yard.

Sixteen-String Jack left his horse, and ran up these steps to the door.

He tried it, and, as he expected, found it fast.

It was a large, heavy, iron-studded door, and seemed strong enough to be a barrier to a besieging army; but Jack did not despair of opening it.

He knew the only fastening it could have would be the lock, and to pick that was the easiest thing imaginable, for a glance showed him that the keyhole was large enough for him to put three fingers in.

In the good old times a lock was not thought a strong, secure one without it was of enormous size, and furnished with a key weighing half a dozen pounds, at least.

Such being the case, a large nail, bent at one end, or any similar implement, would undo the lock quite as quickly as the proper key.

Jack knew all this, and hastily searched in his pockets for a little tool that he always carried with him.

It was a picklock.

Armed with this instrument, he attacked the lock.

A few skilful movements enabled him to take hold of the bolt of the lock.

A sharp snap—almost as loud as the report of a pistol—followed.

A slight push sent the huge door slowly creaking open upon its hinges.

This was enough.

Turning back to his horse, Jack took hold of him by the bridle, and gently coaxed him to ascend the steps.

The gallant creature was greatly exhausted by the exertions he had made; so he obeyed Jack's wishes much more willingly than he otherwise would have done.

But when he stood fairly within the sacred edifice he seemed startled, and Jack had much ado to calm him.

The next thing necessary was to close the door, in order that there should be nothing to lead his pursuers to suppose he had sought shelter.

There was no time to lose, for he had already been several minutes in effecting his entrance.

He closed the door then, and locked it too, for by a skilful use of the picklock he was able to accomplish this feat, and having done this, the highwayman felt tolerably secure.

He now turned round and looked about him.

He found he was standing in a kind of lobby.

Some folding-doors were before him, and upon applying pressure to them they yielded.

He led his horse through, and then stood fairly in the church.

Jack looked round him with curiosity, mingled with awe and pleasure.

A repose and silence such as is to be found nowhere on earth save in a church by night filled the air around him.

So intense was the silence that he could hear the beating of his own heart and the panting of his horse with painful plainness.

Through the tall, narrow windows in the sides of the church, and through the richly-stained window over the communion-table, came the silvery lustre.

In large patches of light and shade fell the pale moonbeams, lighting up with extreme beauty the quaint old monuments which were placed around.

Involuntarily, Jack held his breath as he gazed around him, and strange feelings took possession of his heart—feelings which he had never before experienced.

A kind of spell seemed to fall upon him as he continued to gaze upon the solemn scene, and he almost wished that he had not chosen such a hiding-place.



[DICK TURPIN MAKES AN IMPORTANT PROPOSITION TO HIS THREE COMRADES.]

It was only natural that such feelings as these should take possession of the highwayman.

He would be something more or less than a man who could contemplate such a scene without emotion.

It was only for a few moments that Sixteen-String Jack continued as it were spellbound.

It required a strong effort to shake off the nameless influence which oppressed him, but he did so.

"I will move about," he muttered, "and then I shall not feel as I do now."

Accordingly he commenced to walk his horse up and down the aisles, but his iron hoofs raised such loud and endless reverberations throughout the building that he felt that silence was preferable.

The horse, too, seemed alarmed by the unwonted clamour which his footsteps raised.

It happened by chance that Jack paused opposite to a door not far from the one through which he had entered.

He tried to open this door, for he was curious to see what was beyond, but it was fast.

The services of the picklock were again called into requisition, and another snap told that it had been used successfully.

Tom pushed opened the door and led his horse into a square chamber, which at a glance he recognised as the vestry.

There he resolved to remain, for if the officers suspected he was in the church they would hardly think of looking in the vestry for him.

He closed this door and locked it.

The stillness in the vestry did not seem half so depressing as in the church itself, and Jack looked about him and felt much more at his ease.

"I wonder where the officers are?" he said. "I should think they must have passed by this time. I should like to know whether they have or not."

There was a window in the vestry, but it was very high up in the wall.

In the gloom he did not at first notice that there was a table close under this window.

But no sooner did he perceive it than he sprang on to it.

He was now high enough up to look through the window.

He did so with great curiosity and interest, for he fancied he could faintly distinguish sounds which indicated his enemies' approach.

Before him lay the beautiful moonlit landscape, but he could see nothing in motion upon it.

The sounds which had first caught his ear, however, increased in loudness, and he no longer had any doubt about what caused them.

Suddenly, round an angle of the church, the police officers appeared in sight.

There were several of them, and they all, as well as their horses, looked dreadfully fatigued.

To the surprise of Jack, they slackened speed as they approached the vestry window, past which they would go if they continued in the same direction as they were then taking.

They were evidently reining-in their horses, and Jack shrank back from the window, fearful that he had been or would be seen.

In another moment the police officers came to a dead stop, and then the one in command of the rest swore in the most fearful manner for about five minutes.

In this delectable occupation he was ably seconded by his companions.

Of course it is no part of our plan to lay before our readers this very pretty harangue, though Jack could not help hearing and being edified by it.

The officers commenced by cursing themselves, cursing their horses, cursing the highwaymen—against whom the most fearful anathemas were uttered—until at last, when quite exhausted, they wound up by cursing all the world at large, and all that was contained in it. This was so comprehensive that they found it impossible to go any further.

Accordingly, the "torrent and whirlwind" of their passion subsided. Some one has compared rage to high-pressure steam in a boiler, and swearing to an escape valve, alleging that as the valve relieves the boiler of the strain which the superfluous steam puts upon it, so in the same manner is the pressure of ungovernable passion relieved by swearing.

Certain is it that the officers grew calm after a few minutes' indulgence in this pretty pastime, and then in quite a rational tone of voice one of them said:

"I suppose we may as well give up at once. Our horses are completely done over, and from where we stand we can see three miles at least, and he is nowhere in sight!"

"That's true enough," said another, "his horse was so much better than any of ours! The way he gained upon us towards the last was wonderful. We were fools to follow so far as this!"

"That may be," said another, "but, for one, I don't like the idea of slinking back like a lot of dogs with burnt tails."

"But what else are we to do?"

"That's the knotty point!"

"Of course it is! Either he has galloped off out of sight or else——"

"Or else what?"

"Or else he is hiding somewhere!"

"Yes, it is either one or the other, but I should feel more inclined to think the former than the latter, for with such a start as he had got he would never think of hiding himself."

"Well, perhaps not; and, if he has hidden himself, you may depend it is in some safe place or other, and then we have not the slightest clue to his whereabouts."

"True—true! There is no help for it. We must turn back and confess we have failed; that is the only thing we can do."

This was assented to with a little cursing, which we omit.

"Come on, will you!" said the commanding officer, in a tone of voice which showed very plainly what sort of a temper he was in. "What's the good of stopping here? Come along, will you!"

The officer turned his horse's head round, and left his men to follow his example. This they were nothing loath to do, but rode off after him at once.

Sixteen-String Jack heard plainly all that passed between the officers, though he took care not to be seen.

He was rejoiced to see them depart; and, after listening to their footsteps for a moment or two, jumped down off the table.

By this time he had had enough of the church, and thought he could not do better than be off.

But, upon second thoughts, he resolved to wait a little, for he could not be too cautious.

The officers might have had some suspicions, and perhaps would not go far away, but pounce upon him at an unexpected moment.

Decidedly it would be best to wait, although he was to the last degree impatient to execute his mission and rejoin his comrades, for the reader must not forget that Jack had not obtained anything for Dick, although he had been out so long, and there now seemed to be even less chance than ever of his being able to effect his purpose. But Jack would not despair, although the prospect of success was so slight.

He jumped on the table and listened for some sounds that would show that his foes were retreating, but all was still.

He opened the window and listened again.

He was rewarded for his trouble by hearing the dull sound of their horses' hoofs.

The officers were, then, riding away, and he had nothing to do but emerge quietly, and take his way in a direction diverging from theirs.

This he resolved to do without delay, for, though the night was young, yet he could not tell how much trouble he might have in obtaining the articles he required, nor how long it would be before he could return to the deserted mansion.

Unlocking the door of the vestry again, he led his horse out into the church.

Jack was getting used to his quarters, and he was by no means so much affected now as he was before.

But his horse was restive, and it was with difficulty that he induced him to approach the folding doors.

At last he succeeded, and just as he did so, Jack fancied he could hear approaching footsteps.

He patted his horse on the neck, and used every means he could think of to keep him still.

Now that the echo of his own footsteps no longer frightened him, he stood still again.

It may be imagined with what intentness Jack listened. Footsteps were most certainly approaching.

They paused before the door.

A whispering ensued, and then a key or some similiar instrument was cautiously introduced into the lock.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXXVIII.

IN WHICH SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HAS AN UNPARALLELED ADVENTURE.

Sixteen-String Jack held his breath.

Here was a terrible dilemma!

He did not dare to move, and he suffered an agony of apprehension lest his horse should do so.

If the least sound reached the ears of those outside—and these he concluded at once must be his enemies—he would be discovered.

And if he remained where he was, and suffered the door to be opened, his discovery would ensue just the same.

What could he do?

There was no time to decide upon any course of action. He was fairly bewildered by this unexpected occurrence.

He patted and stroked his horse to keep him still.

He did not dare speak to him caressingly.

He could tell by the animal's manner that the slight noise outside was alarming him—the strange place in which he stood, and the occurrences which had recently

taken place, having apparently had the effect of working him up to a pitch of nervous excitement,

Then the lock snapped.

The sharp sound, coming upon his ears so suddenly as it did, and in the silence of the church sounding very loud, put the finishing touch to his terror.

Uttering a loud snort of fright, he gave a sudden plunge, which snatched the rein from Jack's hand, and then galloped up the aisle.

The uproar was terrific, but the highwayman was little prepared for the results it would effect.

A deep groan and a yell came from without; then there was a scuffling sound, followed by rapid footsteps.

Jack pulled the door open, and caught sight of a couple of men climbing over the palings which skirted the graveyard.

No doubt the sounds they had heard seemed most unearthly and hideous, and, under the influence of the terror they felt, they had taken to flight.

An anxious question now occurred to Jack.

Who were these men, and what was their errand to the church at that hour of the night?

Were they the police?—were they in search of him?

Jack thought not.

There were only two of them, and they looked very unlike police officers.

At this moment, Jack perceived, lying down at the foot of the steps, a bundle of something.

Taking this up, he found it was a bag containing a a sack and a number of rather clumsily-made housebreaking implements.

Looking to the door, the highwayman then saw that a picklock, similar to the one he had himself made use of, was sticking in the lock, thus proving, beyond all doubt, that these two men were gaining admittance to the church in a surreptitious manner.

If they were burglars, and their intention had been to carry off the communion-plate, they must have been terribly alarmed by the din created by Jack's horse's hoofs upon the paving of the church.

Our friend came to this conclusion, and with a laugh, turned to look after his steed.

He could hear nothing of him, so he had evidently stopped in his mad gallop.

Advancing cautiously up the middle aisle, he saw him standing within the railings that separated the chancel from the communion.

He had leaped over these, and then, finding he could go no further, stood still, trembling violently in every limb.

Jack opened the gates in the railing, and took firm hold of the reins.

Then, quickly springing into the saddle, he touched his horse lightly with the spurs.

The bound forward that he gave was something marvellous, and the force with which he descended must have broken some of the paving-stones.

Away he went at full speed.

The doors were open, and the way was clear before him.

Like an arrow, he darted through the doorway, then cleared the steps at a bound, and leaped over the palings.

Jack looked around him; but all was still.

The men whose burglarious designs he had so strangely interfered with were nowhere to be seen.

Feeling that he had lingered long enough, and his horse being fully upon his mettle, he considered he could not do better than gallop off, and let him have the rein freely, until he slacked speed of his own accord.

Away, then, over the level face of the country they flew, more like some phantom horse and rider than aught else; and in a few minutes afterwards, when Sixteen-String Jack looked back, he could only just distinguish the old square-towered church in the far distance.

It was soon after this that his horse's intense excitement wore off, and he proceeded at a more moderate pace.

A glance up to the stars sufficed to show Jack which way he was going, and he looked about him cautiously on every side, in order that he might not pass by any opportunity of obtaining the articles he required.

Presently, however, he drew rein, and came to a standstill.

Before him was a tall hedge, and on the other side of this was the high-road.

It was this which had induced him to halt, for it would have been dangerous to a degree had he attempted to cross it without reconnoitring.

It was well that he was thus prudent, for the grinding of wheels upon the road was the first sound that struck upon his ears.

He could see through the hedge plainly enough, and he at once endeavoured to ascertain what kind of vehicle was approaching.

Before it came in sight, his practised ear told him that it was a light spring cart, drawn by one horse, and was coming along at a very rapid rate indeed.

It was very close at hand, and in less than a moment came in sight.

He looked at it curiously enough, and then, somewhat to his surprise, saw it was one of those light carts which he had noticed passing by while looking through the window of the public-house at Hatfield.

It was, indeed nothing more nor less than a light covered cart, filled with articles of every possible description, which had been purchased at the market.

At the time of which we write, things were ordered very differently to what they are now.

A hundred years ago it was quite a common thing for people living in remote and inaccessible districts to drive to the nearest market-town, and purchase a sufficient quantity of provisions and other articles to last them until the next market-day.

It was by this means only that village shopkeepers obtained the goods which they sold.

Of course all this was well known to Jack, and he recognised the character of the conveyance immediately, and no sooner did he do so than he muttered:

"The very thing! How ever was it that I never thought of that before? This cart contains, beyond question, an abundance of every article I require! Hurrah! I can see my way out of my difficulty! I shall obtain what I want, and return to the deserted mansion before dawn, after all!"

This was by no means so certain as Jack's speech made it out to be.

In the first place, even while muttering his thoughts aloud, the market-cart had passed him, and was a long way off down the road.

That, however, gave the highwayman very little concern, for he fully believed that he was still far enough away from London to have no fear of interruption from the dragoons.

Turning his horse's head in the direction which the cart had taken, Jack galloped over the fields, keeping close under the hedge.

Coming at length to a kind of gap, he made his steed face it, and leaped into the road.

The grinding of the cart wheels still reached his ears, and he galloped onward.

Each moment the sound became more and more distinct, until he presently perceived the cart on the road before him.

In another moment he was alongside.

So far as he could tell by the hasty glance which he alone had an opportunity of giving, this cart was occupied by one man, and he was holding the reins.

In a loud and peremptory tone of voice Jack called upon him to pull up, on pain of receiving a shot if he refused.

To his surprise, however, no notice was taken of his words, the man continuing to drive on just as though nothing had been said to him.

Jack repeated his demand in a louder voice, and with increased fierceness of tone.

The result was the same.

This was what he had anticipated.

It was the easiest matter in the world for him to keep abreast of the man in the cart, and he made his demands while retaining this position.

The moon was shining with greater brilliancy than before, but, nevertheless, Jack could not see the man's face distinctly, because it was shaded by the canvas covering of the cart.

Still, he fancied there was something peculiar about him, for he swayed his head backwards and forwards in a manner very curious to behold.

For the third time, Jack commanded the man to pull up his horse, but he met with no more attention than before.

Sixteen-String Jack could not help thinking that there was something very singular in all this.

Never before had any traveller treated him with so much stolid indifference—for the man who drove the market-cart neither answered him nor made any sign.

This was a state of things which Jack resolved to put a stop to, and that in a very short space of time, for it would never do for him to be galloping along by the side of the cart as he then was.

Quickening his pace a little, therefore, he was soon on a level with the horse's head.

Then, reaching out his hand, Jack took hold of the rein himself, and compelled the horse to come to a standstill.

He stopped very suddenly, for Jack had given the rein a sharp snatch, being, as he was, just a little put out by the small attention which had been paid to him.

But the highwayman little expected what would be the result of stopping the vehicle so suddenly.

The strange man who was driving was seated in a precarious manner on the top of some goods.

Turning round, Jack saw him swaying from side to side, and then he gave a sudden lurch to one side.

Before Jack could save him or even properly comprehend what was taking place, he fell heavily into the roadway, and lay quite still where he had fallen, without evincing the least signs of life.

The affair grew more and more extraordinary.

Sixteen-String Jack passed his hand over his eyes, in the manner of one who is not quite sure whether the events occurring before him are real or unreal.

But there could be no possible doubt about it.

There was the horse and cart, and there lay the man in the road as some log of wood might have done.

Jack was bewildered.

But he did not lose all presence of mind.

His first care was to look to the horse in the cart.

He saw the poor creature was reeking with sweat, and trembling as though under the influence of some great terror.

Jack dismounted, and tied his horse to a tree by the roadside, and which happened to be almost within reach of his hand.

This done, he approached the terrified horse in the cart, and soothed its agitation as well as he could.

Believing that it would not start off of its own accord, Jack next turned his attention to the man, over whom he felt sure there hung some air of mystery.

Jack stooped down.

The man lay with his face to the ground.

He was tall and bulky, and dressed in rustic attire.

Seizing hold of one arm, Jack, at a second effort, turned him over on to his back, so that his face was fully revealed to the moonbeams.

Some indistinctly-muttered words came from the man's lips, but the highwayman strove in vain to catch their import.

One glance at the man's face, however, served to make all clear, and to remove all mystery.

The man was in a state of hopeless intoxication.

This accounted for everything.

The horrible odour of stale fermented liquors with which his breath was tainted, would alone have sufficed to prove the fact; but the sleepy-looking eyes, the rubicund, bloated countenance, and the indistinct utterance, were so many additional testimonies.

Jack comprehended how it was that no notice had been taken of his command to stop.

The man could not hear him—or, if he could hear, could not understand—or, if he understood, had not the power to draw the rein.

How he preserved his seat was something astonishing.

The sudden cessation of motion, however, was enough to throw him off his balance, and down he fell.

Jack had often heard of people driving home from market in a state of utter intoxication, and here was a case in point.

This man was wholly under the dominion of drink, yet he was holding the reins, and doubtless would have reached his home unhurt, from the fact of his horse having sufficient intelligence to find its way back to its own stable.

All these thoughts passed very quickly through Jack's mind, and now he wondered what he should do under this singular conjunction of events.

There lay the man, about as helpless as any man could be, and there stood the cart containing those articles he was so anxious to obtain.

The question was, how should he act in order to turn things most to his advantage?

Sixteen-String Jack was not long in deciding upon a plan of action, and he was induced to be as quick as he could in coming to his conclusions, because he could not tell how soon some one might make their appearance on the road.

In the first place, then, he stooped down, and taking hold of the drunken man just under the arms, dragged him to the side of the road, where he would be out of danger from any vehicle that might pass by.

He was a great weight, and Jack found it quite a task.

Eventually, however, he succeeded in dragging him into the dry ditch, and placing him in a half-sitting position, with his back resting against the sloping bank upon the top of which the hedge was planted.

Some hours would evidently have to elapse before this man recovered his senses or recollection, for he made no opposition to what Jack did, though now and then he would seem to be half conscious that something unusual was going forward.

Even when he did awake to a full and proper use of his faculties, he would be rather puzzled to remember what had occurred.

Sixteen-String Jack was disgusted with the man's beast-like condition.

"That's a disagreeable job!" he said, as he straightened himself after placing the man in the position we have described. "I have done him a great service, and I ought to have something for my trouble!"

CHAPTER CCCCLXXXIX.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK BECOMES THE DRIVER OF THE MARKET-CART.

As he spoke these words, Sixteen-String Jack stooped down again, and made a rapid examination of the man's pockets.

The result of his search was that he found a number of articles of no value, which he tossed aside, and a leather bag tied up with string, which he placed in his own pocket.

We have said that Jack had decided upon what he should do next, and so he had.

Going to his own horse, he untied him from the tree and fastened him to the tail-board of the cart.

Then, jumping up into the cart himself, he took the seat which the driver had occupied, seized the whip and reins, and set the horse in motion.

The creature had by this time recovered from its fright, and a sharp application of the whip caused him to set forward at a rapid rate, for really it was a capital hack, and worthy of something better than to run in the shafts of a market-cart.

Away went Jack, then, rolling along in quite a new character, and feeling rather surprised himself at the strange events which had just taken place.

It was a change of circumstances as strange as it was unexpected.

The highwayman's heart, however, was now light enough.

He had succeeded in his design.

Beyond all doubt, he had in that cart everything that Dick Turpin could require, and provender enough to last the whole of them for some time to come.

The prospect before him looked bright enough—much brighter than it had for a very long time; but such is generally the case when some sudden reverse is about to take place.

It did not form any part of Jack's plan to continue his course along the high-road.

At the very first lane he came to, which promised to lead him in the direction of the deserted mansion, he turned down it, though the horse was very unwilling to make any change, and Jack had to enforce obedience to his wishes with the whip.

The animal doubtless knew it was not going towards home, and a great change in its rate of speed took place.

Jack very soon made the horse aware that he was

master, and, having established this position, away he went at the same rattling speed as before.

It was not very long, however, before Sixteen-String Jack became aware that all things were not so straightforward and simple as he thought they were.

It is true, he had got all he had required; but how were the goods to be transported to the deserted mansion?

It would be running a great amount of risk were he to attempt to drive boldly down the lane and through the ruined gates.

It was very certain that the horse and cart would be missed, and equally certain that very close search would be made after them.

The highwayman was well aware that such bulky articles as a horse and cart are not easily hidden, and it would be a thousand pities to peril the discovery of his comrades' present hiding-place by any such injudicious proceeding.

But what else was to be done?—that was the question.

Jack put on his considering-cap.

He had plenty of time for consideration, for he would have to drive many miles before he came anywhere in the neighbourhood of the deserted mansion.

Clearly, then, he could not occupy his thoughts better than in deciding upon what should be done.

From time to time he looked up to the stars above and calculated his position, for the piece of country in which he found himself was almost unknown to him.

From one winding lane he went on to another, probably going many miles further than it would have been by the main road; but, then, he was safe, for since he had begun to drive he had not been passed by a single person.

He was exceedingly anxious that he should not be seen by anyone, lest the appearance of the cart should be noticed and remembered when inquiry was made.

At length, the different objects in the landscape became familiar to him, and then he knew he was at no great distance from his destination.

He had racked his brain for some plan better than the one that had first presented itself to him; but he had been unable to do so, and, in the end, agreed to adopt it.

What that plan was, we need not tell the reader.

It will be sufficient to describe Jack's proceedings.

Not very far from the deserted mansion—that is, not far in a straight line across the country—was a wood of rather considerable extent.

Towards this wood Sixteen-String Jack made his way, and finally arrived under the shadow of the trees.

It so happened that he was able to penetrate some distance into the wood by pursuing several open glades.

At length, however, he came to a standstill, but not until he was, as he fancied, in the centre of the wood.

He now got down out of the cart, and going to the back, untied his own horse and let down the tail-board.

Taking up the first package he came to—which was a box containing eggs—he carried it right into the wood, and concealed it under the brake and gorse-bushes.

This done, he returned to the cart, whence he took a flitch of bacon, which he hid in the same manner, and at a little distance.

Thus he proceeded until the cart was empty, for all the things it contained were of an eatable or drinkable description.

Although all hidden in one place—namely, the middle of the wood—yet the different articles were distributed over a large space of ground, and each lot far enough away from the other to escape being found should one lot happen to be accidentally discovered.

The goods had evidently been bought to supply a provision shop, such as are to be found in small country towns and villages at the present day.

Sixteen-String Jack took care to retain and conceal about his person as many of those articles which Dick would require as he could, and then he prepared for return.

On the succeeding night he hoped, by the aid of his three companions, to be able to convey the whole to the deserted mansion.

This proceeding had of necessity occupied a long time, and now Jack prepared to return with all possible speed.

Both horses had plentifully regaled themselves upon the short sweet grass in the wood while he had been thus actively employed, and were now in good condition for the road again.

Jack took up his former position.

That is to say, he tied his horse at the back, and drove the now empty cart in the same way as he had before.

A very short space of time indeed now sufficed to take him clear of the wood, and he drove straight on towards the Finchley road.

As before, he took his way along the narrow country lanes.

In about half an hour the highway was reached.

Jack pulled up, and having listened carefully, descended, taking the long cart whip with him.

He passed the reins over a hook at the side of the cart, doubtless placed there for such a purpose.

He next untied his own horse and mounted him.

Then riding up to the cart, he struck the horse a couple of severe blows with the whip.

Away he flew at a prodigious rate, and with as much vigour as if he had not trotted a mile.

He took the road towards London, simply because his head happened to be turned in that direction.

Jack watched the cart until it disappeared from sight.

Then, dropping the whip, he set off towards the deserted mansion.

On the whole, he considered he had arranged things very cleverly indeed.

He had been absent a long time, and had run a great deal of danger, it is true; but he had not only succeeded in his original design, but had hidden, close at hand, provisions enough to last a month or more, and he had hidden them, too, where, owing to the precautions he had taken, there would be little likelihood of their being found.

As for the cart, he believed he had effectually destroyed all clue with respect to it.

The drunken man would recover his senses—would find he had been robbed, and that his horse and cart were gone.

The latter would be found, in all probability, somewhere on the high-road between Finchley and London; but Jack did not believe there was anything to connect him with the transaction.

In addition to this, the goods were concealed where they could be recovered with very little risk and trouble.

As Jack drew nearer and nearer to his destination, and recollected what a very many hours he had been absent, his breast began to be filled with feelings of the liveliest alarm for the safety of his captain.

He could not help thinking that Dick Turpin's condition was desperate indeed.

The wound in the head was a very ugly one, and, placed as he was beyond the aid of proper medical attendance, the chances were rather against than for his ultimate recovery.

This subject was such a painful and uncomfortable one that Jack tried his best to dismiss it from his mind, and felt heartily glad when at last he saw before him the dilapidated gates.

He was terribly fatigued, and so was his horse.

Before he had got half-way up the avenue, a figure glided out from the shadow of the trees.

A ray of moonlight fell upon it, and then Jack knew who it was.

It was Claude Duval.

He hastened to his old comrade's side.

"Well, Jack," he said, "what luck?"

"I have succeeded beyond my utmost anticipations!"

I am glad of that; but, as you may easily think, your prolonged absence made us dread that you had fallen into the power of our foes."

"I have had some narrow escapes, I can assure you, but you shall know all at the first opportunity I have of relating my adventures to you. First of all, tell me about Dick."

"I cannot tell you much, except that he seems very bad indeed; but you must see him. I fancy it is food he wants as much anything."

"He shall soon have that, then, and of the most nourishing character."

"That is good news again! I feel very uneasy about him myself."

"And I too—and I too!"

While this little conversation was in progress, Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval had made their way along the avenue and across the lawn and garden to the stable.

Here the horse was placed, and his wants having been hurriedly attended to, the two friends ascended together to the upper portion of the house.

They were met on the stairs by Tom King, who fully shared Claude Duval's anxieties, and equally rejoiced at Sixteen-String Jack's safe return.

The latter hastily deposited upon the table the various articles he had brought with him, and then, in company with his two comrades, entered the adjoining chamber, in which Dick Turpin lay.

They found him awake and sensible.

An unmistakable smile of pleasure came over his face when he saw that Sixteen-String Jack had come back.

"I am better," he said, in a faint whisper—"I am sure I am much better. I should feel almost well were it not for the low, faint feeling which at times comes over me, and that, I am persuaded, arises as much from want of food as anything, for I have lost an immense quantity of blood, and many hours have elapsed since a morsel of any kind has passed my lips.

"Then if that is all you require, captain," said Sixteen-String Jack, in a cheerful tone of voice, "you will soon be all right, for I have brought just what you require; and, better still, I have secreted close at hand a sufficient quantity of provisions to last us all for a month at least."

Dick smiled again, in token of satisfaction.

The effort it required to speak was too much for his weak state.

In the meantime, Maud, who had slipped out of the chamber at the moment the three friends entered it, now returned, bringing with her a portion of the provisions Jack had brought.

Turpin made a slight meal—they feared to let him take too much—and then he immediately fell asleep.

Sixteen-String Jack was only too glad to retire and do the same.

Towards evening they all assembled again.

Turpin was improving in a manner that was really wonderful to witness, and there was no doubt that by receiving plenty of proper food and rest he would soon be all right again.

Sixteen-String Jack then related at length the strange adventures which had befallen him since his departure, Dick Turpin listening to the whole with the greatest attention.

When, however, he described the different articles he had hidden, the joy of all was unbounded.

It seemed pretty clear that they would have to keep close for a time, until Turpin was better, and therefore Jack's intelligence was all the more welcome.

For fear what he had hidden should be discovered, it was agreed upon that they would fetch some of the things that very night.

Sixteen-String Jack would have to go, because he alone would know where to look for the various articles; and it was agreed that Claude Duval should accompany him, while Tom King remained on guard.

As soon, then, as the hour was sufficiently late, the two highwaymen set off on foot for the little wood.

They agreed to go on foot because the distance in a straight line was not great, and because they were less likely to attract attention than if they were on horseback.

It would be easy to take as much as they could carry, and conceal it at the mansion.

This was what they did.

Of course, they were careful to avoid being seen by anyone, and succeeded, for they were far away from any high-road, and the only lane was the one from which the dilapidated gates opened.

The task was a tiring one and many journeys had to be made.

Long before the faintest streak of dawn in the eastern horizon betokened the approach of the new day our friends had succeeded in performing their duty.

Sixteen-String Jack found everything undisturbed, just where he had left them, though they might not have continued so.

At last, as we have said, every article was carried away, including several that were scarcely worth the trouble of transit, but they removed them in order that they should not afford a clue to the whole transaction.

Thoroughly wearied out, they flung themselves down to rest, in order to be prepared for any emergency that might arise.

CHAPTER CCCCXC.

DICK TURPIN PROPOSES THAT HIS THREE COMRADES SHALL SET OFF FOR THE NEW FOREST IN SEARCH OF THE MISER'S BURIED CHEST OF GOLD.

SEVERAL days passed by without the occurrence of any particular incident, save that Dick Turpin rapidly progressed towards his recovery.

The utmost attention was paid to his hurts, and this, combined with his perfect rest, wrought the most salutary effects.

Every morning exhibited an improvement in his appearance.

As for his three comrades, they were so anxious not to do anything that might lead to their discovery while he was in such a precarious state, that they kept close in the mansion, and never once showed themselves abroad.

It was about a week from that morning when Dick Turpin was discovered lying close to the gates, that he was so far recovered as to be able to sit up in the old-fashioned chair and join in conversation.

The wound itself was nearly well, and what he most suffered from was a state of utter weakness, but this slowly improved from day to day.

There was no doubt time was the only thing required to set all right.

It was, then, one evening, a week after his accident, that those five persons in whom the reader feels so deeply interested were grouped around the fire in that chamber in the deserted mansion which from the first had been their head-quarters.

Dick Turpin, with his head bandaged up, was sitting in the antique chair, which had been drawn close up to the blazing fire, for, though spring was approaching, the weather was chilly.

Behind the chair, with one arm resting on the back of it, was Maud.

She was looking eagerly into Dick's face, and listening with the utmost attention to what he was saying, for Dick was addressing his comrades in animated tones.

Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack were near the fire, and also listening to their captain.

"There is really no time to lose," Turpin was saying. "It was a most unfortunate thing that I should have been wounded just when I was."

"But it might have been worse," said Maud, gently. "Be thankful that your wound has not proved fatal."

"True—true! I ought to be so, and yet I cannot help feeling some degree of vexation at being laid by just at the time when all things were progressing favourably."

"It is no use to regret that."

"No, Tom, my friend, it is not; and I want you, as I said a little while ago, to talk over some plans for the future."

"You have some plan of action to propose, of course?"

"A thought has certainly occurred to me, but whether it is carried out depends entirely upon yourselves."

"Let us hear what it is, captain."

"In good time. In the first place, then, I think I may say that our original plan is still to be adhered to?"

"Most certainly—a better could not possibly be found."

"So I think; and it is with regard to that I wish to speak."

"We are all attention."

"Well, then, you have already collected a tolerable amount towards the sum that will be required?"

"Yes, pretty well, considering the little time we have had."

"But yet not sufficient for our purpose?"

"Oh, nothing like enough!"

"I thought not."

"But what is it that you have to propose?"

"Why, something that I wonder has not occurred to you before, and how it is that I never have thought of it until to-day I cannot make out. I never knew anything so slip out of my memory."

"What—what?"

"Why, I happened to recollect where probably thrice the amount we want is lying, and to be had for the trouble of fetching away."

"I know what you mean, Dick," interrupted Tom King. "I had thought of it before, if you hadn't. It won't do."

"Why not?"

"It won't."

"But that is not enough reason."

"Stop—stop!" said Claude and Jack, both speaking together. "You must recollect that we don't at all understand what you are talking about."

"Let me explain," said Turpin.

"Pray do so at once."

"I think you have heard me relate the adventure before, so that probably the only thing necessary will be to remind you of it."

"Well, what was the adventure?"

"An incident that befel Tom King and myself some time before our meeting with you—before, indeed, those occurrences connected with Durley Chine, with which you are well acquainted."

"Yes—yes!"

"It was, then, one night when we entered the New Forest, and there saw a miser digging for a chest of money which he had buried."

"Oh yes, we recollect now! You and Tom found the chest of treasure which had been stolen from the miser, and buried it somewhere in the wood yourselves?"

"Just so—that is precisely it. Friend Tom here did not care much about it, and had the matter been left to him he would not have disturbed the treasure at all."

"Why not?"

"He would have it that some kind of ill luck would always attach itself to it."

"Ha, ha!"

"You laugh! I could not help doing so myself. And now let me make a long story short. I have said quite enough to enable you to guess my intentions."

"Oh yes! You think it would be worth while to dig up the miser's chest?" said Claude Duval.

"Certainly; and in that, rely upon it, there is three times as much wealth as we require."

"I have thought of it," said Tom King.

"And you think it won't do, of course?"

"Yes, I do, and I have the best of all reasons for thinking so. If I had not, I should have mentioned the matter before."

"And why won't it do?"

"The treasure is no longer there."

"No longer there! How do you know that? What do you mean? Explain yourself!"

"I can do so easily. Have you forgotten my first imprisonment in Newgate, when I was tried and condemned to death?"

"Oh yes! But why call up such disagreeable past events?"

"Simply because it is necessary to do so. In order that I might have no chance of making my escape, two men, named Biggs and Wilson, were placed in the cell along with me. I had resolved to escape, and conceived that I might be able to win these two men over to my interests by the offer of a large sum of money. I tried the experiment, and related to them at length the full particulars of our adventure in the New Forest, at the same time telling them that we had buried the chest not far from the dingle. I agreed that they should accompany me to the place, when, in return for my freedom, I would show them where the chest of treasure was hidden, and surrender the whole of it to them."

"But what of that? You did not escape."

"I know that. It seems Mr. Tapner, who was at that time Governor of Newgate, had been listening at the door to all that was said, and just when I had won the turnkeys over, he abruptly entered, gave them both in custody, and put two fresh men in the cell."

"How aggravating!"

"Very so!—was it not?"

"But what has this to do with the treasure not being where you buried it? You did not show them where it was?"

"I certainly did not, but I told them pretty well! You may depend upon it that when these two men were released, as they would be, they would hasten off to the New Forest, and, guided by the information they possessed, would make the closest search for the buried treasure."

"And do you think they would succeed?"

"I consider it very likely, having such a good clue as I gave them, and they wouldn't be very sparing with their trouble, depend upon it."

"Still," said Turpin, "I don't think they would find it."

"But," urged Tom King, "there is something further to be considered. Mr. Tapner, the Governor, who was dismissed in disgrace, also heard the particulars of that interesting adventure. Now, when he found himself deprived of his office, he would be inclined to try any desperate sort of speculation, and so off to the New Forest he would go, nor would he rest until he had found the treasure."

"There is just a chance," said Dick Turpin, after a pause, "that the box has been unburied by some one, but I think that it is far more likely that it lies where we left it undisturbed. What do you think, Claude?"

"I think as you do, for it is not very easy for anyone to hit upon a particular spot of earth in such a place as the New Forest."

"So do I, and therefore what I propose is that as the environs of London are so well watched by the police that it is only with very great danger that we can obtain a booty, and I think it very desirable that we should go further afield. In the meantime, the alarm in and about the metropolis would subside. As for myself, I shall have to keep quiet for some time longer in order properly to regain my strength."

"You will indeed. Do not venture out too soon."

"I shall not, depend upon it. And now to come directly to the proposition I wished to make to you. Because I cannot stir out is no reason why you should be imprisoned. Now, if you will leave me here with Maud I shall do very well; and if you will all three set off to the New Forest you will be advancing our scheme very much. For instance, if you fail to find the treasure—I am not much afraid, but still, supposing you do fail, you will have a much better chance of obtaining a good booty down in that district than you would about London, and the danger would not be half so great."

"I see what you mean, Dick," said Tom King, "and now you put it in that light I think it is the best thing we can do."

"So do I," returned Sixteen-String Jack, "because, as you have such a good stock of provisions, you will have no occasion to leave the place, and while you keep snugly hidden, I think you have little to fear on the score of being found out by our foes."

"The length of time we have remained here undiscovered," replied Turpin, "says a good deal in favour of the excellence of our hiding-place. I begin to think we shall not be suspected."

"I don't think you will," said Claude Duval. "That is, if you are only properly cautious."

"Of course," returned Turpin. "And then, with respect to your journey, you will be able to set out together, and so will be a mutual defence. If you find the miser's treasure, why, so much the better; if not, you will have the chance of doing a good stroke of business, and by the time you come back, I hope I shall be recovered, and that you will be in a position to enable us to put our scheme into execution."

"And so do we all, I fancy."

"Is it agreed upon, then? First, that you leave me here with Maud to attend upon me; second, that you all three join company to the New Forest in search of the buried treasure; and third, that, whether you find it or not, you will make as good a booty as opportunity will admit?"

"And when we return——" said Tom King.

"You will come here," said Turpin; "when, I hope, you will find me more like myself than I am now."

In this manner, then, the expedition to the New Forest was agreed upon.

Little did they think, when planning the future, what strange and unlooked-for events would take place, which would have the effect of deranging all their schemes.

But we ought not to anticipate.

It will be sufficient for us to recount what befel the three highwaymen upon their excursion, and also what happened to Dick Turpin and Maud during their lonely sojourn in the deserted mansion.

By the time their future proceedings were agreed upon, the night was very far advanced, and so, very wisely, they all retired to rest, for it was necessary that they should be in possession of their full bodily energies, in order to be able to contend with the numberless difficulties which would be sure to assail them.

It was late the next day when they all assembled; and

having partaken of a hearty meal together, they set about making their preparations, for the three highwaymen had resolved to set out upon their journey that very night.

These preparations lasted them till nightfall, by which time they had everything properly arranged.

The horses had been attended to, and got into as good order as possible, though they were not in such condition for the road as could have been wished, in consequence of the poor quality of the food they had eaten.

This, probably, they would be able to remedy.

At last the hour for parting came.

Under any circumstances it is hard to separate from friends, and the highwaymen felt it particularly so.

Cut off as they were from all intercourse with mankind, it is only natural that the attachment they had formed for each other should be of a deep and more lasting character than of those persons who have all the world before them to choose acquaintances from.

Added to this, there was the doubt whether they should ever see each other again.

To one or more of them that might prove to be a last parting.

Their situation was extremely perilous and critical, and they could not tell how soon a catastrophe might occur.

All these gloomy thoughts filled the minds of our friends when the moment came for them to bid adieu to their captain, and they were more than half inclined to abandon their enterprise, and remain along with their captain until he was strong and well enough to defend himself.

Well would it have been for all of them had they allowed themselves to be more influenced by their forebodings than they did.

Things were doomed to take a different course, however. The forebodings respecting this parting were shared in by all, and yet neither expressed them.

All were glad when the farewell words were spoken.

Turpin was not well enough to descend into the garden, but he placed himself at that top window which overlooked such a large portion of the grounds, and watched them take their departure.

When the three highwaymen mounted, the night had just begun, and the bright and nearly full moon was only a few degrees above the horizon.

On leaving the deserted habitation which had furnished them for so long with a safe shelter, they felt as though they were bidding adieu to home—and, indeed, it was a home to them.

Upon reaching the lawn, they paused and looked back.

At the top of the window we have mentioned, they could see—though indistinctly—the faces of Maud and Dick Turpin.

They waved their hands in token of farewell.

The three highwaymen returned the salutation, and, then, setting their horses in motion, were the next moment lost among the trees which fringed the avenue.

CHAPTER CCCCXCI.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN ARE AFFORDED THE OPPORTUNITY OF REDRESSING AN INFAMOUS WRONG.

Passing through the gates, the three highwaymen struck straight across the country, apparently in a direction quite opposite to that which they ought to take.

But they had carefully considered which would be their best route, and galloped over the fields because they had found there was so much less danger of being intercepted by their foes.

When they got a certain distance from London, they imagined they would have things very much their own way.

To be sure, they would not have anything to fear from their worst foes, the dragoons, for it was only those roads immediately surrounding London that were regularly patrolled.

But the highwaymen were not aware how industriously handbills and placards, describing them with great accuracy, had been distributed all over the kingdom, and the very large reward which was offered for their apprehension had the effect of putting everybody on the alert.

In every direction people were on the look-out for them, and Sixteen-String Jack's encounter with the officers at the Tiger's Head at Hatfield had created quite a ferment.

It had the effect of stirring up all the police in every county town for miles.

In perfect ignorance of all this, our friends took their way over the meadows.

Although they appeared to go in a straight line, yet in reality they bent slowly round to the left, which was the direction in which they wished to go.

The high-roads leading out of London had to be crossed several times, and once or twice they had a narrow escape of coming into collision with the dragoons.

Fortunately, however, they avoided this.

When they found themselves once fairly in full gallop across the country, they forgot, to a great extent, their foreboding feelings, for the rapid motion of their steeds had a remarkably invigorating effect.

At length, after two hours' hard riding, the highwaymen deemed themselves sufficiently distant from London to emerge into the high-road.

At any rate, they did so, and continued to take their way along its level surface at a gentle trot, for their horses were exhausted, not only from the miles they had travelled and their rapid speed, but chiefly in consequence of the uneven character of the road over which they had to go.

As far as ever they could see, not a single habitation was in sight.

On all sides of them were meadows and green trees, and all those objects which go to make up a purely rural landscape

Here, then, were the highwaymen, quite out of the reach of their enemies, and they had but one wish, which was, that their captain formed one of the party.

The hour was very late—almost too late for them to hope to meet with any passengers. For this, however, they cared little; their object was to get as far away from London as possible.

With light and careless conversation the highwaymen whiled away the time, and to have heard or seen them as they rode along the moonlit highway, no one would have believed that they were in danger of their lives.

But so it was.

In a short time they were compelled to allow their horses to reduce their speed to a walk, for the poor creatures were utterly exhausted.

"The fact is," said Claude Duval, "we shall have to put up at the first public-house we come to where accommodation for our cattle can be found. The rank green stuff which they have lately been eating has weakened them terribly."

"There is no doubt of that," said Tom King. "Good sound corn is what they want. The other stuff they ate gave them no support."

"I feel rather doubtful about putting up at public-houses, after my last adventure."

"And well you may do. But what else can we do?"

"Nay, that I know not."

"There is nothing else. Our horses must be fed, and we must be extra vigilant to guard against the risk."

"That is it," said Tom King; "and you must recollect that we are a long distance from London now, and consequently the chances of our being recognised are much diminished."

"Very true. Then, may we consider it as settled that we are to stop at the next inn we come to?"

"I suppose so."

"It will soon be morning now, and you know that in the country most inns are open before sunrise. It appears to me that we shall have some distance to go, for as far as I can see there is no sign of human life."

"We will push on gently. Doubtless, by the time the sun rises we shall approach some village."

It was very tiresome, however, to journey along at such a pace, but there was no help for it, though they did not resign themselves without grumbling.

In order to rest their horses still more, and for the sake of the change, they dismounted, and led their steeds by the bridle. It was a strange mode of proceeding, but still it was not altogether an unpleasant one.

They were now able to talk even more at their ease.

Ere long, the night slowly glided along, and morning came. The light was faint at first, but soon it increased in power.



[THE LITTLE GIRL MAKES AN APPEAL TO THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN.

Just as the ruddy tint in the east gave token that the sun was about to rise, our friends remounted their horses and continued on their way at a slightly quickened pace.

In a little while they caught sight of the roofs and chimneys of a house.

They jumped in a moment to the conclusion that it was an inn.

But before they could make any remark about it, Tom King suddenly exclaimed:

"Look—look, my friends! What is that yonder? Look—oh, look!

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack at once looked in the direction in which Tom King pointed.

There was a curve in the road, about a hundred yards before them, and it was round this curve that the building was situated which they had taken for an inn.

The chimney-pots and roof were, as we have said, visible above the tree-tops.

Round this curve in the road, then, there came at a rapid pace a young girl—a child, indeed, for her age could not have been more than thirteen.

She was evidently running at the top of her speed, and that speed was something marvellous, and could only have been attained under the pressure of some extraordinary circumstances.

It was the speed of the hunted fawn.

Upon her young and lovely countenance there was an unmistakable expression of extreme terror.

Her alarm, as could be seen at once, was excessive—her lips were apart, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes unnaturally dilated.

Such was the spectacle which had burst suddenly upon Tom King's vision, and had caused him to utter the exclamations we have set down.

So great was the little girl's agitation, that she did not see that our friends were on the road until she had come close to them.

Then she paused irresolutely for an instant.

During that brief space of time, she looked in rapid succession into each of their countenances.

It would seem that Tom King pleased her best, for, clasping her fairy-like hands together, she hastened forward as rapidly as before until she came up to him.

To Tom King's great surprise, no sooner had she done so than she seized his right hand with both her own.

The astonishment of our friends at this sudden meeting may be imagined, and they gazed upon the little girl with the greatest curiosity.

On her part, she looked up appealingly and imploringly into Tom's face.

Her large brilliant eyes became suffused with tears, and her lips parted as she strove painfully to speak.

But so great was her terror and excitement, that she could not utter a single syllable.

Tom King, perceiving this, endeavoured to soothe her agitation.

"Fear not, little one!" he said; "we will not harm you! What is it you want—You grasp my hand, and look imploringly at me, as though it was in my power to aid you in some way."

The little girl nodded her head while Tom spoke this last sentence, as though to imply that he was quite correct in his supposition.

Still she could not command her voice to address him, and the tears flowed faster than ever down her cheeks.

As some elder brother might have done, Tom King drew the little girl towards him.

She still retained the hold which she had taken of his one hand.

The other Tom placed on her head, as it rested against his breast.

"Now, little one," he said, in cheerful and kindly tones, "let me know what your request is, and rest assured it shall be granted. Tell me what I can do to serve you."

"Mamma!" said the little girl—"not me, but mamma! I want you to serve mamma!"

"Your mamma, little one?"

"Yes, my mamma! I want you to save her from Richard and from Mr. Tagg!"

The little girl broke out into sobs and tears again.

"We shall be as glad to serve your mamma as we should be to serve you, little one," said Tom King; "but you must tell us in what way we can be of service."

"Yes, yes! I will!"

"In the first place, you must tell me, who is Richard, and who is Mr. Tagg?"

"Oh yes! I had forgotten! I must tell you that?"

"Certainly you must."

The young girl dashed her tears aside.

"Now," said Tom King, "tell who is Richard."

"My brother."

"Your brother?"

"Yes; but not my real brother, you understand."

"Excuse me," said Tom King, "I don't quite understand. If Richard is not your real brother, how can he be your brother at all?"

"He is not my brother, though my papa—not my real papa, you know—would make me call Richard my brother. He beat me until I consented."

"Beat you?"

"Yes."

A cry of indignation from the lips of all three of the highwaymen followed this avowal.

To them it seemed the most horrible profanation to think that anyone should adopt such harsh measures to one so fragile and so beautiful.

Still, they were quite at a loss to understand what she meant about her real papa and her real brother.

Tom King stroked caressingly the fair, beautiful hair upon the child's head.

She grew calmer under the influence of their kindness.

"Now," said Tom King, "try if you can tell us quietly what you want us to do."

"I will try sir, I will indeed—but I have been so frightened!"

"You seem terrified, but if you do not explain matters to us we cannot possibly help your mamma in any way."

"I know that."

"I am glad you comprehend that: and now—are you calm?"

"Yes, yes—I am—I will be!"

"That will do; and now, first of all, tell us precisely who Richard is. You say he is your brother, but not your real brother?"

"Yes!"

"Well, I do not understand that. I want you to explain to me what you mean. If Richard is not your real brother, who is?"

"I have no real brother."

Tom stroked his chin.

The child was evidently quite as much at a loss to explain herself as he was to understand her.

He resolved to try another tack.

"Have you a papa?"

"No."

"No papa?"

"No; my real papa is dead, and so is my other papa. My other papa is Richard's papa, but Richard is not my real brother, I know, because mamma told me so."

Tom nodded his head.

This last sentence had made all clear, both to him and to his comrades.

The little girl before them had been taught to call her mother's second husband papa, and Richard was only her half-brother.

Such a thing is common enough, but the little girl knew very well that, although she called them by the dear titles, they were not her real papa and brother.

CHAPTER CCCCXCII.

IN WHICH THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN LEARN SOME FURTHER PARTICULARS CONCERNING RICHARD NARES AND LAWYER TAGG.

The reader can scarcely conceive the interest which this simple incident had awakened in the breasts of the three highwaymen.

Had they been asked why they felt so much interest, they would have been at a loss for a reply.

Perhaps it was because the meeting had taken place so unexpectedly—perhaps because the incident differed so remarkably from any that had previously befallen them.

But the cause which produced their interest matters little.

All three, however, seemed to feel that what had just taken place was but the prelude to some events of a still more interesting character.

Some tale of wrong and suffering seemed already to be shadowed forth by the few words which the child had uttered, and the circumstances under which they had met seemed to heighten the idea.

There was much to learn, however, and time would probably be an object of importance, while it would still be of importance that they should receive full and accurate information.

Tom therefore resolved to question the little girl still further.

"Then you have had two papas?" he said.

"Yes, but only one real papa! He died a long while ago, when I was such a little one! I so loved my real papa, and he loved me too!"

"No doubt—no doubt! Who could help loving you? But you have not had two mammas?"

"Oh no, no!"

"And it is your real mamma who is, as I take it, in some sort of danger from your half-brother Richard and some one else named Tagg?"

"Yes, a lawyer!"

"Oh indeed! The interest increases! Now there is a lawyer, there will certainly be some villany in the matter! After your papa died, your mamma married again?"

"Yes, that was to my other papa!"

"Exactly; and when your mamma married him he had a son named Richard, and you were told to call him your brother?"

The little girl clapped her hands.

"Yes, yes!" she cried, in joyous tones, "that is it! That is quite right; but I would not call him brother Richard till my new papa beat me and made me do so!"

"And did your mamma let him beat you?"

"She couldn't help it, for he used to beat her as well!"

"The infamous wretch!"

"He is dead!" said the little girl gently.

If anything had been wanting to complete the charm which the highwaymen fancied hung over the little girl, those words would have sufficed.

The death of the man who had treated her and her mother so shamefully had robbed her of the resentment which it was only natural she should feel.

Tom was so delighted that he stooped down and kissed her gently on the forehead.

"Bless you!" he said, "you are truly as good as you are beautiful."

A pause ensued after these words were spoken.

Tom King broke the silence.

"We understand better now!" he said. "You can recollect when your mamma married your new papa?"

"Oh yes! I am thirteen now, and she married him when I had just turned ten!"

"Then it is about three years ago. And how long is it since your new papa died?"

"Two days."

"Only two days?"

"That is all."

"How did he die?"

"We don't know, but he used to drink a great deal of wine, and come staggering home when he could hardly walk! One night mamma sat up for him, but he never came home, and the next morning we found him in the fishpond on the lawn!"

And you suppose he fell in while staggering home in the way you mentioned?"

"Yes."

"And he is not buried yet?"

"No."

"And Mr. Tagg?"

"He is a lawyer, a friend of Richard's."

"That is your new papa's son?"

"Yes."

"His only son?"

"Yes."

"Then your mamma had a daughter when she married your new papa, and he had a son?"

"Yes, that is quite right."

"And there are no more children?"

"None."

"And now about this Mr. Tagg?"

"Richard brought him."

"When?"

"The same morning that my new papa was found in the fishpond."

"Well?"

"The lawyer by Richard's directions took possession of everything."

"And what did your mamma say to that?"

"She was in a very delicate state of health, and very frightened of Richard, so she went up into her own room, and took me with her."

"Well, what next?"

"I persuaded mamma to let me go and see what Richard and Mr. Tagg were about so I went downstairs and watched them."

"And what did you see?"

"Richard and the lawyer looked over all my new papa's papers, and ransacked every drawer and box, but they seemed disappointed, and I heard Mr. Tagg say:

"'You have been a bit too fast, Richard! Take my word for it, there is no such paper in existence, so you have had all your trouble for nothing, and not only that, you have destroyed all chance for the future!'"

"And what did Richard say to that?"

"He said some very wicked words, and said he would succeed in spite of everything."

"What paper did he mean?"

"I don't know!"

"Had you ever heard anything about a paper before?"

"Oh yes, and so had poor mamma! My new papa used to come with a paper that he wanted her to sign, and he used to threaten dreadful things and to beat her too, but mamma would never sign it!"

"Oh indeed! That throws considerable light upon the whole affair!"

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack nodded, for they thought so too.

The interest they had felt in the little girl increased, and now that she had grown calmer they were delighted to hear what clear and ready replies she was able to give to all Tom's questions.

"And did your mother ever tell you what that paper was about?"

"Not exactly!"

"Do you know what being rich is, little one?"

"Oh, yes!" replied the girl, looking up in wonder at the question.

"Well, was your real papa rich when he died?"

"Oh, very!"

"How do you know?"

"He often told me so."

"And when he died, do you know what became of his money?"

"Yes, he left it to mamma—absolutely!"

The little girl added this last word after a pause.

"Absolutely, little one! Where did you hear that word?"

"I heard the lawyer tell mamma that papa—my real papa, you know—had left her all his money and property absolutely, so that she could do just what she liked with it!"

"Just so! You have a good memory!"

"I recollect that quite well!"

"And this paper that your father wanted your mamma to sign! Have you any idea what it was about?"

"Yes; mamma cried one day, and said that my new papa wanted her to sign a deed that would leave the property to him."

"And she refused, you say?"

"Oh yes!"

"Was your new papa rich?"

"Oh no!—he had no money except what he made mamma give him."

"And now he is dead, you say?"

"Yes."

"Did Richard know that his father wanted your mamma to sign the paper?"

"Quite well. Richard used to demand money from his father, and they often used to quarrel together about it, until at last Richard was turned out of the house, and told never to come into it again."

"Who turned Richard out?"

"His father."

"And when was that?"

"About a week ago."

"And did Richard keep away?"

"Yes."

"And did not come back until the morning when his father was found dead in the fishpond?"

"No—not till then."

"One more question. Did you ever see Mr. Tagg until he came with Richard?"

"Yes, once."

"When was that?"

"He came to see my new papa."

"Was that before your mamma was asked to sign the deed?"

"Yes, just before."

Tom King and his companions exchanged glances.

They understood by that that Mr. Tagg had drawn up the deed.

"And this was the paper they were looking for?"

"I expect so. But they could not find it. I ought to tell you that mamma had been so tortured, that the day before papa was found drowned she made a sort of half promise to sign the deed."

"That is very important; and now, to bring this long examination to a close, what did Richard and Mr. Tagg do?"

"They came to mamma and asked her for the paper. She told them that she had it not, and that she had never signed it."

"What did Richard and Mr. Tagg say to that?"

"Richard said nothing, but Mr. Tagg said she would have to sign it."

"What did your mamma say?"

"She cried very much, and told them how cruel it was of them to serve her so, but declared that she would not sign the deed and disinherit her child to benefit Richard Nares."

"Is that his name?"

"Yes."

"What next?"

"Mr. Tagg said he should take means to make her sign the deed. I was standing near the bed, so he caught hold of me, and said he would lock me up in a room at the top of the house, and I should stay there either until I was starved to death, or until my mamma chose to sign the deed."

"The monster! Go on, pray!"

"Mamma screamed, but she was too weak to defend me. I screamed and nearly fainted when I felt that dreadful lawyer touch me; but I was no match for such strength as he had. My mother refused to sign, and Mr. Tagg carried me shrieking and screaming up to the top of the house, and shut me into a large attic that was never used. He locked the door, and then nailed it up, and went downstairs again, but not until he shouted through the keyhole, 'You shall stay there and starve to death! You shall have nothing to eat and nothing to drink until your mother has signed the deed!'"

CHAPTER CCCCXCIII.

IN WHICH THE LITTLE GIRL PROVES HERSELF TO BE A REAL LITTLE HEROINE.

Tom King had perhaps taken the longest means to obtain the particulars of the little girl's story, but if the longest, it was the best.

By asking such questions as suggested themselves to his mind, he obtained a more complete account than the child could possibly have given without some such assistance.

As it was, Tom believed he had drawn out every important fact.

He believed that he understood the whole story, from first to last.

The only thing he had yet to learn was the means by which she had escaped from her prison.

Upon this point he naturally felt curious, for the little girl did not look like one who would attempt to carry out any desperate plan of action.

As to the service she wanted them to render her mother, that was clear enough.

It was to free her from the infamous persecutions of Richard Nares and Lawyer Tagg.

Although our friends had particular business of their own on hand, and no spare time to devote to the concerns of other people, yet they never hesitated a second about what they should do in the present instance.

First of all, however, Tom said

"My dear little girl, you have told us your story very well, and I think we comprehend all the important particulars connected with it. There is only one point upon which we feel anxious and curious."

"And what is that, sir?" asked the little girl, simply.

"Why, if you were locked up in the room in the way you describe, how comes it that you are here on the high-road at sunrise this morning? and where were you running to so fast when I first caught sight of you?"

A flush of colour came to the child's face when Tom thus spoke.

"I made up my mind," she said, "that I would not be the means of causing mamma to make away with her property; so, after Lawyer Tagg had nailed up the door, and spoken to me through the keyhole, I looked about for some means of making my escape."

"What a brave girl! Go on—what did you do?"

"I knew there was no chance of getting out by the door, so I went to the window."

"When were you locked in?"

"Last night."

"You did not remain a prisoner long, then?"

"No. I went to the window and looked out. The window was very high, and looked on to some sloping tiles."

"Could you open the window?"

"Yes, but the roof was so slippery and steep that I was afraid to venture upon it, for if my foot had slipped there was nothing to save me from falling to the ground."

"What did you do then?"

"When I saw how little hope there was that I should be able to make my escape, I sat down and cried; but after awhile I grew calmer, and when I thought of my poor mamma I felt quite strong."

The highwaymen looked with admiration at this lovely child, who possessed the qualities of a true heroine.

Never before, they thought, had they beheld anything so beautiful.

Her courageousness and fortitude were just calculated to please them.

"Bravo, my dear!" said Tom King, quite enthusiastically. "Do go on; we are full of impatience to hear the rest."

The little girl seemed somewhat confused by this last speech, but, encouraged by Tom King's looks, she continued her artless but interesting story.

"I got up after that. I had been crying a long time, for I found it had got quite dark when I tried to look about me. The attic was quite empty, and so I could look for no help from that quarter, and turned to the window again."

"And did you hear nothing of Richard and Mr. Tagg?"

"No. When I was locked up, I suppose they thought I was safe. But I looked out of the window, and though the tiles were so slippery, and the danger of a fall so great, I resolved to risk my life rather than lose my liberty."

"You are a little heroine!"

The young girl went on without heeding the interruption.

"I crept out of the window on to the roof. Perhaps it was as well that I waited until night before I made my desperate venture, because I could not see so much of my danger. I slipped once or twice, and felt giddy and sick, but I recovered myself, and crept along until I came to a place where I should have to descend several feet to get upon a lower portion of the roof. Fortunately the place below me was flat, and covered with lead. I lowered myself by my hands, and then let go."

"You did not hurt yourself?"

"Only a very little. I crept along again, and then came to the tanks. I dropped down upon these in a similar manner, and this time without any injury. From the tanks I got on to some outhouses, and from the outhouses to the ground."

"You are really the bravest little girl that ever I met with! And were you long in making your escape?"

"I can hardly tell, but I was either very long or else it was very late before I made the attempt. At last, however, I reached the ground, and then I resolved to run on along the high-road until I saw some one coming, and if I liked their looks, to tell them my story and ask them to help me."

"And you saw ?"

"Yes."

"And as you have told us your story, I suppose you liked our looks?"

"Yes; I felt that I could trust you fully, and so I told you all from first to last."

"You have, and in a manner that does you infinite credit."

"And will you help me;—will you save my poor mamma from Richard and Lawyer Tagg?"

"You may depend we shall! It will give us the greatest pleasure to defeat the two rascals whose villany probably is of deeper dye than you can possibly imagine!"

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind just at present. We will wait and see whether our suspicions are well or ill founded."

"Come, then; follow me, and I will take you to my mamma. You will save her, will you not?"

"Oh yes! Rely upon it, we will soon rid the house of Richard and his friend the lawyer!"

"Come, then, sir! Oh, do come at once, and bring these other two gentlemen along with you; there has been quite time enough lost already!"

"There has, but still I do not think your mamma is in any immediate danger, so do not alarm yourself on that account. They will not proceed to harsh measures, take my word for it; and they will not be long able to keep from her the knowledge of your escape."

"I am glad of that, for I could see mamma tremble when the lawyer announced his purpose."

"If anything would induce her to sign the deed, their power over you would have that effect. All will be well, however. You and your mamma will be freed from these villains for ever, and then you will both be happy."

"Oh, thanks, sir—thanks! A thousand thanks for your kindness towards us!"

And the child kissed Tom's hand eagerly.

"Lead the way!" he said, in a voice that was husky with emotion, for the behaviour and appearance of this gentle and beautiful being had made a deep impression

upon him "Lead the way, and we will follow! Your troubles will soon be over now!"

With willing gladness the little girl advanced along the road in the direction from which she had so recently come.

The three highwaymen dismounted again to follow her, and took this opportunity to converse together upon the mode of proceeding which they should adopt in order to carry out their plans.

What was agreed upon, we need not trouble the reader with.

Let it suffice for us to continue to describe their proceedings.

It was a fortunate chance which threw the little girl in the way of our three friends.

The reader of these chronicles is well aware that nothing was so pleasing to them as to be able to interpose their powerful presence between the oppressor and his victim.

It was ever their plan to place themselves upon the weaker side, and defend the helpless to the utmost.

There was something in the whole of this adventure which pleased them exceedingly.

The little girl, who, though so delicate, had yet proved herself so true a heroine, won their utmost admiration.

They felt that they would gladly do anything to render her a service, or run any amount of risk in her behalf.

Then their acute perceptions enabled them to see more deeply into the whole of this transaction than the little girl herself could.

Should their suspicions be confirmed, they felt they had such a power over Richard Nares and his rascally accomplice as would compel them to quit the house.

All this will be seen, however, as we proceed.

The little girl went on before with a rapid step.

She was anxious that her mother should be released from her persecution as speedily as possible.

Our friends were not less desirous of making haste, not only because they had no time to spare themselves, but because they feared if they lingered they would reach the house too late.

The fears of Mrs. Nares might be so worked upon that at the last moment she might be weak enough to sign the document.

It was very necessary to prevent this, though they had a scheme in readiness that would even clear them of this difficulty.

At last the curve in the road of which we have already spoken was reached.

It was a long, sweeping curve, and it took them some time to get round it.

The house, the top of which they had been able to see over the trees, was much more distant than they had at first imagined.

The clearness and brilliancy of the morning air had deceived them.

The sun was now fairly above the horizon.

The god of day shed his warm yellow beams upon the different objects which composed the charming landscape, and brought everything to life.

At length the building which they had so long seen came in sight as they passed round the corner of the road.

The reader will recollect that they had at first taken it for an inn, but now they found they had been mistaken upon this point.

It was a substantially-built red-brick residence, standing in its own grounds.

It was clearly a private dwelling, and not an inn.

"This is it!" said the little girl as they paused before it. "Look—there is the house, and there is the fishpond on the lawn!"

"Walk on!" said Tom King. "We won't stay here where we may be seen. Keep on, and now, my dear, point out to me, if you can, the window of the room in which you last saw your mother."

"I cannot do that from here."

"Why?"

"Because the window is not in the front of the house, but the back."

"Can you take us to the back of the house?"

"Oh yes, quite easily."

"Then do so at once. Are there any servants?"

"No."

"How is that?"

"The lawyer sent them all off."

"A strange proceeding!"

"Very, but he did. I fancy it was because they all loved mamma and me better than they loved Richard."

"Quite natural, and perhaps they did not want any witnesses to their nefarious proceedings."

The little girl led the three highwaymen down a narrow lane that seemed to run past one side of the house.

CHAPTER CCCCXCIV.

TOM KING AND CLAUDE DUVAL OVERHEAR AN INTERESTING CONVERSATION.

THIS lane did indeed run past the side of the house.

In fact, it was neither more nor less than a ready means of access to the back premises, which were very extensive, considering the size and style of the house itself.

In a few minutes they came to a wall, and here the three highwaymen paused.

"The gate is a little further on," said the child.

"Never mind that, my dear," replied Tom King; "we will just have a look over this wall before we go any further."

While standing on the ground, this could not be done; but by seating himself in the saddle, he could with ease.

His two comrades followed his example, for they, too, were curious to know what there was on the other side of the wall.

There was a very pretty and well-cultivated garden, though here and there some traces of neglect could be seen, the result of only a day or two's inattention.

They commanded a full view of the house, with all its outbuildings, and these were of such a character that they understood at a glance how it was the little girl had succeeded in performing the perilous feat of making a descent from the roof.

Not a trace of a human being could be seen at any of the windows.

Tom looked about him for some time in perfect silence.

Then, stooping down, he lifted up the little girl, and seated her on the saddle before him.

"Now, my dear," he said, "please to point out to me the window of your mother's room."

"It is on the first floor," she said.

"There are six windows there," said Tom. "Now, which one is it?"

"The fourth—counting from where we are."

"That will do. I understand now, perfectly. And that door, of course, leads into the house?"

Tom pointed to one which was furnished with a very pretty rustic porch.

"Yes; that is the back door."

Tom glanced at the building, and endeavoured to form some idea of its interior arrangements.

He was apparently quite satisfied, so he carefully placed the little girl on her feet again.

"We have got very important information now," he said, as he and his two comrades dismounted. "We shall be able to carry out our intention of entering the house surreptitiously."

"I am glad of that," said Claude Duval, "for you may depend we should fail entirely without we took them by surprise."

"I quite agree with you, and I believe that it can be done with much more ease than we had dared to calculate upon."

"Fraud and cunning must be fought with their own weapons."

"True. And now to carry out our arrangements. You, Jack, will remain here, and take charge of the horses and the little girl."

"All right!"

"And we will enter; and when you see the two rascals emerge, you can enter without fear."

"I understand."

The little girl crept up to Tom King, and took hold of his hand with both her own.

"You will not leave me?" she said.

"Only for a few minutes."

"Oh, do not leave me at all—pray do not! Take me along with you! Do not leave me here!"

"I think it will be much better to do so, little one."

"Why?"

"It is just possible that we may have to be rough with

Richard and Lawyer Tagg, and you might be injured, you know."

"Never mind that; take me with you!"

"Nay; it will be best for you to remain here."

After this, the little girl urged her point no further, but shrank back with tears in her eyes.

Sixteen-String Jack spoke kindly to her, and Claude and Tom prepared to make an entrance.

Tom had resisted the child's entreaty to accompany them, because he feared, from what he already knew of the characters of Richard and Lawyer Tagg, that, in their rage at being detected, they might do her some serious and perhaps fatal injury.

He fancied they were just the men who would be likely to vent their rage in such a manner.

Had it not been for this, they would gladly have taken the little girl into the house along with them, because then they would have had the benefit of a guide, whereas now they would have to rely upon their own sagacity.

But as the window of the room had been pointed out to them, they would have a tolerable clue as to the direction they ought to take.

Carefully reconnoitring the grounds and the house, our friends scaled the wall, and in less than a moment were standing in the back garden.

They made direct for the porch before the back door, because they knew well enough that when they stood here they would be quite out of sight of everyone.

The back door was closed, and they at first feared fastened too.

Upon trial, however, they found that it was only secured by a latch, and when that was raised, it yielded to their hands.

The silence of the grave appeared to reign about the spot, and it seemed as though the house, and all around it, was utterly deserted.

In contrast to the open air, the passage into which the door opened looked dark and gloomy.

The two highwaymen stepped into the passage in a moment, and closed the door behind them.

Their eyes soon became accustomed to the gloom, but they did not venture to move until they had.

They looked keenly about them, and by degrees one thing after another came into view.

Before them they could see the staircase, and towards this they hastened.

They had already satisfied themselves that their weapons were in good order and ready for immediate service.

The stairs were covered with a thick carpet, which enabled them to ascend without making a sound.

Gaining the first floor, they saw they stood in a winding corridor, which branched off in three directions.

From this corridor many doors opened.

It now became necessary for them to consider which was the way they ought to take.

While debating this point, they fancied the murmur of voices came upon their ears—faintly, it is true, but still the sound did come.

Tom King made a rapid sign to Claude that he intended to proceed in the direction from which the voices came.

Duval assented, and the two highwaymen stole on tip-toe along the corridor.

At each step they took, the sound of voices grew louder and louder, thus convincing them that they were beyond doubt upon the right track.

At length they paused before a door which was closed but not latched.

It was from the other side of this door that the voices came.

They stood upon the mat and listened with the utmost intentness.

Some one was speaking.

A man evidently, for the tones were too harsh and gruff for a woman's voice.

"Why stain your soul with murder?" said this voice, in grating accents. "Do you value the remnant of your fortune more than you do the life of your own child?"

"Fiend, have mercy."

"Have mercy yourself! You are the cause of all this! I am willing to settle an annuity upon you and your daughter, but you must sign this paper!"

"Never!"

"Your obstinacy is ridiculous! You promised my father that you would sign it!"

"Ah, Richard!" said the female voice which had spoken in reply, and now letting the listeners know that the speaker with the harsh voice was no other than Richard Nares—"little did I think I should live to repent and regret my union with your unprincipled father so bitterly as I do!"

"Bah!—stuff! Be silent!"

"I will not—I will not! With fair and specious words he won what little love still smouldered in my heart. I married him, and from that moment did my persecution commence. What I have suffered——"

"Peace, I say—peace! Be silent, or you may live to regret a refusal!"

"I have spoken! He has tried hard to beggar my child—to deprive her of the fortune which is lawfully her own; and now you have taken his place. But as he failed, so will you!"

"Failed, say you? Ha, ha! It strikes me, if the old gent had only lived a little longer he would have succeeded. All would have been settled then, and I should have been spared all this confounded trouble!"

"Richard Nares, your father I loved once, but you never! I blame myself for my momentary irresolution. He took advantage of me in a moment of weakness. Thank heaven, that is over! I am firm now!"

"Will you listen to me?" said Richard, and his quivering voice showed the intensity of his passion—"will you listen to me? I have listened long and patiently enough to your mad rant! It is now my turn to speak!"

"Say on—say on! I will listen, but do not think that you will succeed in moving my resolution! I am firm, and your arguments will be of no avail!"

"We will see! Once more, will you listen?"

"You may as well spare yourself the trouble of speaking!"

"I do not choose to do so! I would advise you to pay attention to my words! Did you not notice that my friend the lawyer left the room a little while ago?"

"I shudder when I hear his name!"

"Bah! Did you notice his departure?"

"I did, and felt grateful that my eyes no longer beheld his hateful form!"

"Ha, ha! Perhaps you listened after he went out! Ha, ha! I know you did! You heard him go upstairs?"

"Monster!"

"Just as you please, but that does not alter the fact in the least! Upstairs he went! Can you guess for what purpose?"

A pause followed this question.

It was asked in a manner that was absolutely devilish.

"You know your daughter was locked up in the attic! There she is now! Do you know that? I said she should stay there until she starved to death, without you chose to release her by simply signing your name to a slip of parchment. But that process proved too slow. You calculated that she could bear the pangs of hunger for some time—that she would not be starved to death in a day. You hoped that help would come. Well, I confess that scheme has, through your obduracy, been a failure. But we have devised other means—and means, too, which are far more effectual."

"My child—my child!" moaned the poor woman.

"Yes, that is it! I ask you now, did you not hear my friend the lawyer go upstairs? He did go up! His destination was the attic in which your daughter is confined!"

CHAPTER CCCCXC.

LAWYER TAGG MEETS WITH THE DEATH WHICH HIS CRIMES SO JUSTLY MERITED.

A WILD shriek came from the mother's lips when these last words were spoken by Richard Nares.

The tones of his voice were so exultant, so diabolical, that the mother's heart became at once alarmed.

She felt that some danger of a more than usual description menaced her child.

But what did Richard mean by asking her so often and in such a peculiar way whether she had heard Lawyer Tagg ascend the stairs?

That was a question which she could not so easi answer.

Her heart made her dread [illegible]

She resolved to maintain her firmness to the last, however, and not give way to any pressure.

Richard Nares perceived that he had gained an advantage, though a slight one, and, like a skilful general, he hastened to improve upon it.

"Do you see that clock?" he said. "Look at it! Dash the tears from your eyes, and rivet your gaze upon the dial-plate! Do you see the hour? It is half-past eight, exactly. Watch the motion of the large hand! The clock face is large, and you can perceive the almost imperceptible movement. Look—look!"

These mysteriously-uttered words seemed to produce an effect upon the person to whom they were addressed, for the highwaymen could hear a sudden movement.

"In thirty minutes," continued Richard Nares in the same strange voice, "that hand will reach the figure twelve—it will then be eight o'clock. Watch those minutes as they glide away one by one, and tell yourself, as you see the slender finger advance from one point to another, that your daughter has just one minute less to live! Look—the finger has already advanced two points! In twenty-eight minutes she will be no more!"

"No—No! Have mercy! You cannot mean that! My child—my child!"

"Be still, madam! Attempt to move at your peril! Look, another minute has gone! She has twenty-seven minutes only to live, unless you choose to relent."

"Villain—monster!"

"There are but six-and-twenty minutes now! See how time flies when you are importantly engaged! Lawyer Tagg is in the attic. He is holding his watch in one hand, and a loaded pistol in the other! Ha!—look! his watch, like that clock, shows that your daughter has but twenty-four minutes to live, unless I give the signal that you have consented and signed the deed!"

The unhappy mother did not speak, but she moaned in a manner that was terrible to witness.

"You will repent your obstinacy," said Richard Nares. "Tagg will be as good as his word, depend upon it! His orders from me were to go upstairs, and wait till eight o'clock; then, if I did not give the signal that you had consented, he was to place the loaded pistol to your daughter's ear and fire!"

"Help—help!" shrieked the poor woman, in frenzied accents. "Mercy—mercy! You could not do such a deed!"

"There are only twenty minutes left now; and bear in mind it is not I or Lawyer Tagg that will commit the deed and be guilty of it, but you—you, and you alone!"

Richard paused again.

Then he resumed:

"Eighteen minutes more, and then all will be over, unless you think proper to sign this paper. Understand, if you refuse, you are wholly in my power. I have dismissed the servants—not one remains. This house stands in a lonely, unfrequented spot, and it is not likely that strangers would be attracted to it. It contains only four living persons—myself, you, my friend the lawyer, and your daughter. Dismiss from your mind all hope of obtaining aid. You are wholly in my power, and only fifteen minutes remain. A quarter of an hour more, and so surely as I now speak, your daughter will be no more!"

There was again a silence.

No doubt the mother was trying to derive hope from some source or other.

It must have been a vain task.

"Let me repeat my proposition," said Richard; "I shall have just time to do so. There is no need to read the paper to you again, for you are already acquainted with its contents. You shall have an annuity, and so shall your daughter. If not, she dies in ten minutes from this time!"

"Heaven help me!" said the poor woman. "What am I to do? Let second marriages ever be accursed. My misfortunes have taken their rise from that source alone."

"If you are going to preach a sermon," said Richard, "you had best be brief. It wants something less than seven minutes to the hour, and Tagg will be punctual to the moment. Sign, then, before it is too late!—sign, lest you should at last repent that you have doomed your child to a dreadful death!"

"Richard Nares, you must be a fiend, and not a man; and I—Heaven help me!—I——"

"No snivelling!" cried Richard. "Here is the paper spread out before you—here is the pen I have already dipped in the ink. Take it and write your name; there is just time for you to do so. If you hesitate your daughter will perish! I tell you, Tagg will be punctual to the second."

There was a silence for a moment, and then Richard said:

"There, I will hold your hand and steady it. That is better. Quietly. Now then, one more touch, and——"

At this moment there was the loud report of a pistol.

The sound clearly came from somewhere above.

A piercing shriek escaped the mother's lips.

"Duped!" she cried—"duped! I have beggared myself, and my daughter is murdered!"

"No!" said a voice, in loud and thrilling tones—"your daughter is saved! Richard Nares, if you move a step you are a dead man!"

It was Tom King who spoke these words as he dashed into the room, to the utter consternation of Richard Nares.

First, however, we must describe the proceedings of the two highwaymen and the cause of the pistol-shot, for, as the reader must be well aware, Richard was only using an empty threat about the little girl.

The fact was, he had discovered the alarming fact that she had made her escape, and a consultation at once took place upon the subject between himself and his co-partner in iniquity.

They both agreed that it would be unwise in the extreme to make the least alarm, and that the best thing they could do would be to adopt some scheme that would bring events to a crisis.

They had then hit upon the delectable scheme, the full details of which had been revealed to the highwaymen while they stood listening at the door.

The means were well chosen, as was proved by the fact of the scheme having succeeded.

At the last moment, and under the influence of such terrific pressure, the half-distracted mother had affixed her name to the all-important document.

When our friends found that the lawyer himself was not in the room, Tom drew Claude aside, and said, in a faint whisper:

"In order to give the scheme an air of reality, the lawyer has doubtless gone up into the attic. Slip off and see—I will remain here and look after Richard—and if the lawyer is in the attic make him your prisoner."

This task was quite congenial to Claude, so he set off with the greatest imaginable readiness.

He proceeded with caution.

The stairs were before him, and, of course, he made his way up to the attic without difficulty.

The stairs creaked a little under his tread, but still he thought the sound was not sufficient to alarm anyone.

Ascending the topmost flight, Claude found they terminated before one door.

This led into the attic, which was of such dimensions that it extended over the whole top of the house.

Claude paused before the door and listened.

He could hear some one pacing up and down the room.

Convinced that he was on the right track, he felt cautiously for the latch, with which the door was doubtless secured.

Slowly and gradually Claude raised it, and opened the door silently to the extent of about half an inch.

Through this crevice, narrow as it was, he could see into the attic.

He caught sight of the individual he had heard pacing up and down the room.

He was a sleek, sanctimonious-looking man, and far more like a parson than a lawyer.

By his looks no one would have taken him to be the infernal rascal he was.

Claude could see by the movement of his lips that he was muttering something to himself, and so he strained his hearing to the utmost in the endeavour to catch what he said:

"I will do it!" he said, in rather a louder tone of voice, and still pacing restlessly up and down the room. "I will do it, Richard Nares, the term of your life is short! You are taking a great deal of pains to enrich me! I will take care that you do not share the plunder!"

Claude could scarcely refrain from chuckling aloud.

"If these rascals were left alone," he said, mentally, "they would doubtless do society a great service by ridding one another of their lives!"

Claude had been told, however, to make the lawyer prisoner if he possibly could, and so he resolved to seize the present opportunity.

Accordingly, he dashed the door open, and entered the room.

The lawyer was, however, more upon his guard than Claude had believed him to be.

Turning round with great suddenness, he fired the pistol point blank at Claude, and then rushed to the window.

Claude knew not for a second whether he was hit or not.

This was the report which had reached the ears of those below.

It is said that a guilty conscience needs no accuser, and the lawyer exhibited a remarkable proof of the truth of the proverb.

He jumped immediately to the conclusion that all was discovered.

Under this impression he felt there was only one thing left for him to do, and that was to escape as quickly as possible.

He made, then, one wild dash to the window.

Forgetting in his excitement the danger of such a proceeding, the lawyer scrambled through the window with the speed of madness.

He was out on the tiles before Claude Duval had recovered himself sufficiently to look about him.

But with one bound he reached the window.

A glance showed him the lawyer slipping down the tiles at a furious speed.

He had lost his footing, but he was not yet quite sensible of his danger.

The lawyer was only conscious that he was making a rapid escape from his foes.

But when he tried to stop himself—and it was not until he was close to the edge of the roof that he made the attempt—he found he had not the power.

Then a terrific shriek pealed from his lips.

A full consciousness of his dreadful situation burst upon him.

He could not save himself.

No one could save him.

In another second he would be precipitated over the vss.

Claude Duval watched him like one spellbound.

He could not move a limb.

CHAPTER CCCCXCVI.

RICHARD NARES IS DEFEATED IN HIS INTENTION OF ESCAPE BY SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

FRANTICALLY—most frantically did the lawyer grasp at the roof and strive to clasp the smooth and even tiles.

He broke his nails and tore the flesh from his fingers in the effort.

Indeed he did partially succeed in checking the rapidity of his descent—at all events his speed was not increased.

But the slight projections formed by the tiles lapping one over the other were not enough for him to grasp and sustain his weight by.

Down he went, slowly but surely down, in spite of all his efforts.

Screams of intense horror came continually from his lips as he fought and floundered about.

But at last the edge of the roof was reached.

In another second he was over.

But he did not fall.

That powerful instinct which causes everyone to cling with the utmost tenacity to life came more strongly over the lawyer at this moment, and the efforts he had previously made sank into insignificance when compared with those he now put for h.

As in many old-fashion d houses, the gutters to ca y off the rain-water were m de of stone.

This slight stone coping the lawyer managed to seize at the moment when he w as percipitated over the abyss.

He clung to it with a tenacity indescribable.

It was the tenacity of a death-grasp.

The lawyer felt that that was all that preserved him from death.

But his strength was already exhausted.

His bruised and broken fingers could not retain the grasp they had taken.

With a sickly sensation about his heart, the lawyer felt that his fingers were slipping from the smooth coping-stone.

Desperate indeed were the exertions he made to obtain a firmer hold, but in vain.

His fingers slipped more and more.

He felt that he was going.

A mist of blood came before his eyes, and he shrieked like one in the midst of some death-agony.

One hand failed him entirely.

It might be that he hung for about a second suspended by the other one.

Then that failed him too.

With another of those awful shrieks which had thrilled so repeatedly from his lips, he fell.

There was a horrible rushing sound, followed quickly by a dull, heavy, sickening crash.

The lawyer had reached the earth.

He fell upon the flight of broad stone steps which led up from the lawn to the front door of the house.

Down these he rebounded, until at last he lay motionless and lifeless upon the smooth green turf.

This Claude Duval did not see as he stood at the window; but he saw it afterwards.

The whole of the events that we have just described, occurred with a rapidity truly marvellous.

Claude Duval was one who quickly recovered himself from any sudden surprise; but when the lawyer had fairly disappeared from view, and the dull crash which told that he had reached the ground struck upon his ear, he passed his hand repeatedly over his eyes, for he was in doubt whether the whole was not a fevered dream.

He saw, however, that the attic was full of pale blue smoke, which curled around in fantastic wreaths.

The pistol, too, which the lawyer had discharged, and which in his alarm he had dropped, lay upon the floor at Claude's feet, and from its muzzle and lock the blue vapour still arose.

This was proof sufficient of the reality of the events which had taken place.

"What a horrible affair!" Claude muttered. "Never mind! From what I have heard, the rascal richly deserved such a fate, or even a worse one! However, I must not linger here; my presence probably will be required downstairs."

With these words, Claude crossed the attic.

Upon reaching the door, the sounds of some kind of contention came to his ears, and he rushed down the stairs with the utmost percipitation.

It is now necessary that we should return to Tom King.

From what we have just related, it will be seen that he alone overheard the latter portion of the conversation between the infamous Richard Nares and his poor victim.

It is very certain that Tom would not have allowed the feelings of the mother to be tried to such a painful extent had Claude been with him.

Every moment, however, he expected to see his comrade make his appearance, and Tom determined, as soon as he rejoined him, to rush into the room and make Richard a prisoner.

Tom did not wish to act alone in this matter, for fear Richard should either do some mischief or escape.

Both of these he wished to prevent.

Events at last came to such a crisis that he could no longer stand by without interfering.

Accordingly, he rushed in in the manner we have described.

In his hand Tom King held a pistol.

He pointed it full at Richard Nares, and the manner in which the pistol was levelled, as well as the stern tone of voice, and the highwayman's determined manner, made the cowardly rascal feel that Tom would be as good as his word.

The miscreant's consternation at Tom King's sudden entrance at the moment when he believed that there was no one at hand to interfere with his nefarious plans, is something which we cannot describe, but which, nevertheless, was well worth the witnessing.



[THE POLICE-SPY IN THE GARDENS OF THE DESERTED MANSION.]

He staggered back several paces.

But, great as his surprise undoubtedly was, yet he did not altogether lose his presence of mind.

For instance, Mrs. Nares had signed her name to the document.

She had just finished making the last stroke when the pistol was fired.

She had sunk back in a kind of swoon.

But Richard had seized the paper with avidity, and held it tightly.

Ere we go further we feel it necessary to describe the position of the different actors in this strange scene.

Mrs. Nares lay upon a large, old-fashioned bed—one was not undressed, but simply lay on the outside of the clothes.

The room was spacious, and antiquely furnished, and opposite the door was a large window.

It was a casement window—one half opening like a door—and was fitted with tiny diamond-shaped panes.

Close to this window stood Richard Nares, with the paper clutched tightly in his left hand.

He had sprung from the bedside to the spot upon which he stood at one bound, so surprised was he by the sudden entrance of Tom King.

But when our old friend had uttered that threatening speech, Richard stood as still as though he had been carved out of stone.

His eyes were wide open, and he glared fearfully at Tom.

Mrs. Nares was no longer conscious of what was taking place.

"Villain!" cried Tom,—"double-dyed villain! The hour of retribution has arrived! I am acquainted with all your manifold villanies! You thought you had triumphed, but you are defeated!"

Richard Nares was a coward at heart, but he had a spurious kind of courage, which came over him whenever he was forced at bay.

On the present occasion it exhibited itself.

The paper which he had sinned so deeply to obtain was in his hands.

He held in his possession all that he had toiled for so long, and could he but succeed in getting clear away, all would be well.

Having lived in that house from infancy, he was of course, perfectly familiar with every trick and turn in it.

His back was turned to the window, but he knew well enough that it was just behind him.

He knew as well, that he could dash open the casement with one touch.

To be sure, the distance to the ground was something over ten feet, but then just underneath the window was a garden-bed composed of particularly soft mould.

All this flashed in an instant through the mind of Richard Nares, and with great suddenness he made up his mind to leap through the window, and risk whatever injuries he might receive from his fall, believing that by adopting this course he should stand a so much better chance of making his escape with the paper.

Accordingly, just as Tom had ceased to speak, he, in spite of the warning he had received not to stir, turned suddenly round and dashed open the window.

But he was foiled in his intention to leap out.

Sixteen-String Jack and the little girl, it will be recollected, had been left in the lane with strict orders to remain there.

At first they were well enough disposed to obey these injunctions, but as the time passed on without any sign being made, the impatience of both increased until it became absolutely unbearable.

The half-hour which elapsed seemed to them like a whole day—it always seems so to those who are watching and waiting.

Then there came suddenly upon their ears the loud report of a pistol.

They could tell that the sound came from the house, but as they were at the back, they saw nothing of the scene on the roof when Lawyer Tagg met his righteous doom.

This put the finishing stroke to their impatience.

They felt that they could endure it no longer.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Jack, in an agitated voice, "what ever can be the meaning of that shot?"

"Perhaps your friends are in danger, sir," said the little girl, trembling violently. "Richard and the lawyer are both very violent men!"

"I can easily believe that. I can stay here no longer. Tell me how I can gain admission to the grounds, and lead the horses in as well?"

"Oh, yes! Follow me, and I will take you to a door in the wall a little lower down—through that you can enter easily."

"Do so, my dear, for I am full of alarm!"

The little girl was quite as anxious as Jack, and she ran down the lane at a speed that Jack could only just keep pace with.

Pausing presently, she opened a little door in the wall, which led into the garden.

Through this Jack passed, the horses following him docilely enough.

The gate was then immediately closed, and, leaving the horses to take care of themselves, Jack ran after the little girl, who made direct for the house.

"Stop—stop!" he cried. "This will answer our purpose best! Do not go into the house! Look here!"

Sixteen-String Jack had espied a ladder leaning against the wall, and, taking this on his shoulder, he ran with it towards the building.

"Now, my dear," he cried, "tell me which is your mother's window?"

"This is it—this is it."

"All right!"

In another moment Sixteen-String Jack had raised the ladder against the window.

He ran up it with an agility that was really remarkable.

He reached the top at a critical moment.

The one half of the window was dashed violently open, but before Richard Nares could spring out, Jack struck him a blow which hurled him back with tremendous violence into the room.

CHAPTER CCCCXCVII

RICHARD NARES IS TAKEN PRISONER, AND MAKES A FRANTIC ATTEMPT TO TRAMPLE THE LIFE OUT OF THE WOUNDED BODY OF LAWYER TAGG.

It was a thousand wonders, and a thousand mercies, too, that Tom King did not execute his threat of firing if Richard Nares moved an inch from where he stood.

Had he fired, it is more than probable that he would have seriously injured his old comrade Sixteen-String Jack.

One of the reasons why Tom did not fire the instant he perceived a movement upon Richard's part, was because he was startled at the same time by hearing a noise behind him, and quickly and instinctively he turned round to see by whom or by what it was caused, for of course he did not know but what it might be some ally of his adversary's.

One glance, however, showed him that this apprehension was unfounded.

It was Claude Duval who had entered.

As may be supposed, he was not a little surprised at the scene which he saw before him.

Richard's sudden leap towards the window—his encounter with Sixteen-String Jack—and Claude's entrance—all happened so quickly, that it seemed the simultaneous occurrence of so many different events.

And they were almost simultaneous.

The blow which Sixteen-String Jack had delivered with the full force of his right arm was a severe one, and Richard lay upon the floor apparently half stunned.

Directly afterwards, Jack leaped into the chamber, where he had the satisfaction of instantly perceiving that his two comrades were safe and unhurt.

The little girl felt too much anxiety about the safety of her mother and that of her new friends, to scruple about climbing up the ladder.

Indeed, she was at the top almost as soon as Jack was, and she sprang with the lightness and airiness of a fairy into the room.

She looked all around her, and then, with a cry of pain flung herself upon her mother's bed.

Mrs. Nares was just recovering her senses.

At first, she could not believe that it was indeed her much-loved daughter who was beside her, so firmly had the idea taken hold of her that she had been murdered.

But when she found she was there, without even a scratch or bruise, her joy was so great that she could neither speak nor move.

Passionately, she wound her arms about her, and strained her to her bosom.

The little girl wept plentifully now; but the tears which flowed from her eyes had the effect of relieving her overcharged heart.

She was the first, however, to recover herself, and, in a few words, strove to make her mamma understand what had taken place since they had last seen each other.

In the meantime, the three friends pounced upon Richard Nares, and, despite his desperate and almost superhuman struggles, succeeded in binding him hand and foot.

The precious paper which he had gone through so much to obtain was forced from his grasp.

Oh, how he gnashed and ground his teeth with rage!

The highwaymen glanced over the paper, and found that it appeared to be what it doubtless was, namely, a legal transfer of Mrs. Nares's property to her step-son Richard.

Lawyer Tagg had no doubt had the framing of the instrument and he would take care that there was no technical flaw in it.

Now, however, he was past reaping any benefit from his villany.

By this time, Mrs. Nares somewhat recovered herself.

The joy which she felt had gone a long way towards curing her indisposition.

"Do not attempt to thank us for what we have done," said Tom King. "Believe me—and I speak not only for myself but my two friends also—all has been done freely

and willingly, and simply because we always defend the helpless and innocent from the strong and guilty whenever the opportunity is afforded us of doing so!"

"But I must thank you, gentlemen! You can have no idea what persecutions I had had to put up with from that young man, who unfortunately happens to be my stepson."

"It is much to be regretted that he stands in such a degree of relationship to you. As to your persecutions, we have by one means and another become fully acquainted with them."

Mrs. Nares burst into tears.

"Be of good heart," said Tom King, soothingly; "you have nothing to fear now."

It was some time before Mrs. Nares could speak, but presently, she said, in a broken and tremulous voice:

"Alas! gentlemen—you know not the extent of my misfortunes. In a moment of weakness, I signed a paper which will make me and my child beggars for henceforth."

"Do not let that trouble you."

"I cannot help it."

"Nay—nay! You don't understand me! Look, here is the paper!"

Mrs. Nares looked at it through her tears.

"Do not let that circumstance trouble you. For see, this is the way I shall serve it!"

Tom King tore the paper into minute fragments as he spoke.

"There!" he added,—"you are all right so far as that is concerned; there is no proof that such a document was ever in existence, much less that it was signed."

"Oh, sir, I can see that you are determined to place me under a still greater obligation to you."

"Do not look at what we have done in that light, I beg."

Richard Nares had by this time abated the violence of his rage.

He lay in a strange, huddled-up position on the floor, with a look of sullen, angry viciousness upon his face.

He scowled fearfully when he saw the deed destroyed, though, of course, that event was no more than he expected.

In a low tone of voice Claude Duval spoke to his friends, and made them acquainted with the particulars of the fate of which Lawyer Tagg had been overtaken.

"I cannot help thinking," he added, "that he is yet alive, and if we make haste we may hear some important information, for when he finds he is in danger he will probably make a full confession."

"We will go to him at once."

"Let all go!" said Claude.

"What, Richard?"

"Yes, and Mrs. Nares and her daughter too. It is only by confronting the actors in these singular events with one another, that we can hope to learn all."

"Claude is right!"

"He is. Let it be done!"

This point settled, the three highwaymen turned towards the other occupants of the apartment.

The little girl who had so often proved her intelligence, now gave additional proof of it, for while our friends were conversing together she tried her best to console and calm her mother, and succeeded in a very considerable degree.

When the highwaymen turned round they were able to talk reasonably with her.

Without telling them their motive, Tom requested Mrs. Nares and her daughter to follow them downstairs.

They consented in an instant.

The highwaymen then turned to Richard, who seemed at first as though he intended to resist their commands.

But finding he was so helpless, and seeing how outnumbered he was, he agreed for once to surrender at discretion.

Sullenly and scowlingly he rose to his feet, and accompanied our friends downstairs.

It took them but a short time to reach the entrance-hall of the house.

Tom King advanced to the door and opened it.

The moment he did so a dismal groan struck upon his ears, which showed at once the correctness of Claude's supposition.

The lawyer was not dead.

The sight of his bruised and mangled body lying upon the smooth green lawn was a great shock to three persons, though it of course affected them in different ways.

Those three persons, the reader will scarcely require to be told, were, Mrs. Nares and her daughter, and her stepson Richard.

As for the latter, he seemed totally overcome by this sudden discovery of his guilty partner's fate.

He trembled and turned very pale.

Lawyer Tagg was evidently conscious that some one was approaching him, for in a faint, moaning tone of voice, he said:

"Help, help!—oh, help me! Do not leave me to die like this. Mercy—have mercy upon me! I cannot die yet! Help, help!"

"Wretched man!" said Tom King, in a solemn voice, "you are past all human help."

Lawyer Tagg looked up and saw that he was surrounded by a singular group.

First there were the three highwaymen.

Then there was Mrs. Nares and her lovely little daughter, whose mysterious escape had been so great a trouble to him.

Then, last of all, there was Richard Nares, with an expression upon his face which befitted a demon, and not a human being

The lawyer saw, too, that Richard's face was bruised and bleeding, and that he was a prisoner.

One brief yet comprehensive glance showed all this to the lawyer, who with a groan torn from him by the exquisite agony he was suffering, let fall his head upon the ground again.

Tom King bent over him.

"It is in vain you call upon us for help, you are past all human aid. It is impossible that you can survive the injuries you have received. How it is that you have lived so long is to me a mystery!"

A groan was the sole reply.

"I cannot do otherwise than think you were preserved from instant death for some wise purpose. You also must feel the same conviction. Atone, then, while it is in your power, for the mischief and evil you have wrought. There is but one way that you can do this."

"How?" asked the wounded wretch, in a hollow and almost inaudible murmur.

"By making a full confession to us of all your own and your companion's villainies."

"Why should I do that?"

"Because then, if I mistake not, you will place Richard wholly in the power of Mrs. Nares, and so preserve her from any future persecutions. Come, speak!"

At this instant, Richard Nares, by a sudden effort of strength, broke from the hold which Claude had upon him, and, springing forward, would have trampled upon the lawyer's wounded body had not Tom King seized him in the nick of time.

CHAPTER CCCCXCVIII.

LAWYER TAGG MAKES A FULL CONFESSION OF HIS OWN CRIMES, AND THOSE OF RICHARD NARES AS WELL.

A most ferocious expression distorted the sinister countenance of Richard Nares when he was thus foiled in his horrible intent.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack both sprang forward with great quickness, and the miscreant was totally overpowered.

His intention was palpable enough, and so was the motive which prompted him to the deed.

Lawyer Tagg evidently had something disagreeable to disclose, which would have the effect mentioned by Tom King, and Richard Nares had thought, by a little promptitude, to put it out of the lawyer's power to injure him.

How nearly he succeeded has been seen.

He was well enough aware by the appearance which his accomplice presented that the least thing would extinguish the spark of life which still clung to the mangled carcass.

Could he have stamped upon the lawyer, the injuries he would thus have inflicted, would doubtless have caused instantaneous death.

But it had been fated otherwise.

Richard's intention was not only palpable to all the

spectators of this singular scene, but to the wounded man also.

His eyes gleamed with unnatural lustre, and his teeth were tightly clenched together.

He knew what Richard had meant to do.

Passion lent him strength which, under other circumstances, he would not have possessed.

He raised himself a little on one arm.

Perceiving this, and judging that he wanted to sit up, Tom King moved, and, going behind him, propped him up.

Tagg glared savagely at Richard.

"Unnatural monster!" he shrieked, in tones that were horrible in the extreme to listen to. "Unnatural monster! but for this last act of yours, I would have died with my tongue tied, but now I will speak! Richard Nares, beware!"

Tagg gasped painfully for breath, as though utterly exhausted.

Richard's face turned perfectly livid, and he trembled as though suffering from an ague.

But when he saw how exhausted the lawyer was he looked on with eagerness.

In his baleful-looking eyes was plainly enough expressed the hope that death would supervene before the promised revelations could be made.

But in this hope he was defeated.

The lawyer recovered himself wonderfully.

"I must be calm," he said—"very—very calm, and then I shall be able to tell all. Who is there that can write?"

"I can!" said Tom King.

"Be quick, then!" returned the lawyer. "In my coat-pocket you will find a pocket-book containing several blank leaves. Find it, I say!"

"It is here!" said Tom, as he placed his hand in Tagg's pocket and drew out the article he had mentioned.

"You will find a pencil inside. Now, be quick and write down my confession."

"I am ready!" said Tom, as he placed the open pocket-book upon his knee and held himself in readiness to write down the first words that fell from the lawyer's lips.

"Begin thus," said Tagg.

And amid an intense silence, which was broken only by the rapid passage of the lead pencil over the paper, the lawyer spoke as follows.

His words were listened to with an eager interest, which the reader may perhaps be able to conceive:

"I, Stephen Tagg, of Thavies Inn, London, attorney-at-law, believing myself to be within a short time of my decease, do hereby make oath and testify—

"That on the night of Monday last past, Mr. Richard Nares, senior, while upon his way to his own home, was suddenly and violently set upon by his son Richard Nares and thrown into the fishpond on the lawn—in consequence whereof the said Richard Nares, senior, being as he was at the time somewhat under the influence of wine, was drowned and did die—the object of Richard Nares, junior, being to obtain possession of Mrs. Nares's property and money, and also to have his revenge upon his father, with whom for some time lately he had not been on friendly terms. I will also confess I did aid and abet the said Richard Nares, junior, but now do most heartily repent of having done so. To the truth of all the above I most solemnly swear!"

The lawyer ceased.

"Is that all?" said Tom.

"Yes. Is it not enough?"

"Ample."

"Good. Raise me up a little and give me the pocket-book and pencil, I have but little strength left, but what I do possess shall be employed in placing my signature to this document."

Richard Nares fairly howled with rage, but he struggled in vain to release himself.

Tom King raised Lawyer Tagg to a convenient position, and anxiously watched his movements.

It seemed as though, after all, the lawyer would die without accomplishing his purpose.

He made several ineffectual efforts to grasp the pencil firmly.

At last he succeeded in closing his fingers round it, and then slowly and painfully, letter by letter, he signed his name at the foot of the confession.

His hand faltered when he made the final g, and he made an attempt to affix the date.

This was a failure.

His muscles relaxed, and the pencil fell from his strengthless fingers.

Then a horrible sound began to make itself audible in his throat.

It was a sound which is always instinctively recognised.

It was the death-rattle.

Painfully he struggled.

He slipped from Tom's grasp, and writhed upon the ground.

Then there was one sharp contraction of the muscles and all was over.

The lawyer was dead.

For a moment or two after the decease of this bad man, a profound silence was observed by all present.

The general horror of the scene had been too much for Mrs. Nares and her daughter.

Their eyes were averted from the dreadful spectacle.

Now that the confession was signed, all that hardihood which Richard Nares had formerly exhibited disappeared

He seemed quite crushed and overcome.

Tom King was the first to break the silence.

He picked up the pocket-book and then rose to his feet.

"This is the bad end of a bad man!" he said, "but we must do him the justice to recollect that he made the only reparation that lay in his power."

Mrs. Nares turned round when these words were spoken.

"Can it be possible that what the lawyer has confessed to is the truth? Surely, Richard cannot have added parricide to the long list of his crimes!"

"No, no!" said Richard, eagerly catching as it seemed at the doubt thus expressed—"no, no! It is false—false, every word of it! I did no such deed! It was done out of revenge! There is not the slightest foundation for such a charge. I tell you I am innocent!"

"Richard Nares," said Tom King, "it has been my conviction from the very first that you were guilty of the murder of your father. I suspected you, and what this lawyer has just written confirms me in my suspicions. You are guilty—guilty of the unnatural crime of parricide The shifting colour on your cheek proclaims your guilt!"

"It is false!" cried Richard, hoarsely.

But this time his voice was not so confident in its tone.

"You are guilty!" said Tom, again.

"And if I am, what is that to you?" said Richard, suddenly, and with all the fierce courage of desperation. "Who are you? What business is it of yours? By what right do you hold me prisoner thus?"

"The best right of all!" said Tom. "It is our object always, whenever we are afforded the opportunity, to step in and aid and succour the oppressed. We have done so on the present occasion, and have also been so fortunate as to do not only that, but to confound and punish the guilty!"

Richard was silent.

Tom then turned to Mrs. Nares.

"My dear madam," he said, "I am glad, as I before told you, that we have been chosen the instruments to relieve you from your persecutions. You will say, however, that after we have gone your position will be no better than it was before—that Richard will renew his persecutions."

"I hope not."

"So do I. From the relationship in which he stands to you, I feel sure that, so far from placing the officers of justice on his track, you would assist him to fly."

"I would indeed!"

"I knew it; and now I will tell you what I will do. Here is the lawyer's confession. Take it, and guard it more preciously than your life! While you have that, Richard is powerless to do you harm."

Mrs. Nares took the paper, but it was with manifest unwillingness.

"Remember," said Tom, "that it is not only for your own sake that you ought to arm yourself with this paper, but for your child's. You must keep it. Should he renew his persecutions, or attempt in any way to injure you, place that paper in the hands of a magistrate, who will know what to do with it."

"But——"

"Nay, I can guess your objections: You will say that he will persecute you until you give up the paper to him, or else he will take it from you by force. I will tell you what you must do to guard against that; and, for your dear daughter's sake, I trust you will listen to my words."

"I will, sir, and act upon them."

"I am glad to hear you say as much. Go, then, to your best friend. Choose the person upon whom you can rely, confide to him the full particulars of all that has taken place, and give him the confession to place it somewhere in safety. Then, in the event of any mischief befalling either you or your daughter, he will forward it to a magistrate."

"But——"

"Pardon me, if I anticipate what you are about to say—you will find that I have provided against every contingency. The day has only just begun. Start, then, without a moment's delay, and lose no time in getting to the residence of your friend. How long will this take you?"

"About two hours."

"I will give you three, and then you will be safe from all danger. For three hours, we will remain here and keep guard over Richard Nares. You will have nothing to fear from him. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly."

"At the expiration of three hours we shall release Richard Nares from our custody. If he is wise, he will quit this part of the kingdom for ever, and seek some better life. Now depart. Let me see you begin your journey."

The little girl warmly seconded Tom King's proposal; and, after making a few preparations, the pair set out.

Not, however, until they had warmly and individually thanked our three friends for the inestimable service they had rendered.

And not until, with many tears, they had entreated Richard to flee the country, lest it should be discovered that his father died by foul means, and the crime be brought home to him.

But Richard only looked upon them with an evil scowl.

Tom King accompanied both down to the gate, and bade mother and daughter a last respectful farewell.

CHAPTER CCCCXCIX.

RICHARD NARES RECOGNISES THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN, AND SWEARS TO HAVE REVENGE.

We think, and our readers will think with us, that the present position of the three friends is almost as peculiar as any in which they have ever been placed.

There they were, left in quiet possession of a well-furnished mansion.

Left there by the owners, and under such strange circumstances.

They were to keep Richard Nares a prisoner for three hours, and at the expiration of that time they were to set him at liberty.

Then the house contained no servants—all the domestics had been sent away.

On the green lawn, like a foul emirch upon some delicate fabric, lay the crushed and mangled remains of a human form.

Inside the house, in one of the upper rooms, the windows of which were darkened, was another horrible sight.

That was the body of Mr. Nares, the owner and occupier of the mansion, who had been taken out of the fishpond on his own lawn.

Truly were the circumstances unparalleled.

Richard Nares appeared to have given up all ideas of resistance, but the highwaymen were not to be deceived into feeling a false security.

They mistrusted his quiescence.

Tom hastened to rejoin his comrades.

Addressing Sixteen-String Jack, he said:

"Where are the horses?"

"I brought them into the garden with me."

"Well, it seems there are some stables in the rear. Doubtless you will be able to find some provender in the lofts overhead. I will take your place here, and do you look to the horses, for as we are to stay here for three hours we may as well make ourselves as comfortable as we can."

"Decidedly so!"

Sixteen-String Jack rose as he spoke, and went towards the back garden where he had left the horses.

Tom took his place.

Richard Nares could not help seeing that his captors were determined to allow him no chance of making his escape.

Sixteen-String Jack found the horses readily enough, and, having secured them, led them into the stables.

Here he made them more comfortable than they had been for a very long time past.

There was plenty of food of all kinds ready to his hand, and he gave the animals a regular feast, for he could not tell how long a time might have to elapse before they again had an opportunity of getting any corn.

He rubbed them down and thoroughly attended to them.

When he had finished, he found a considerable portion of the allotted time of three hours had expired.

He found his two comrades still occupying the same positions as when he had left them.

Our readers may perchance be able to realise the amount of satisfaction the highwaymen felt at the adventure which had recently so wholly engrossed their attention.

It was a source of the greatest delight to them to think that chance had thrown them in the way of the little girl, whose actual name they knew not; but who, in an incredibly short space of time, had taught them to love her with a rare affection.

They felt perfectly rejoiced when they reflected how completely they had freed Mrs Nares and her daughter from the infamous persecutions of Richard.

Both were now safe from him, though it was solely owing to the interposition of our friends that they were so.

The three hours which had been fixed upon very quickly expired.

It was about one o'clock in the day, when Sixteen-String Jack repaired to the stables and saddled the horses ready for the road.

In so lovely a part of the country, and so far away from London, too, as it was, the highwaymen believed that they would be able to take their way along the high-road by broad daylight with almost absolute safety.

Accordingly, they resolved not to linger any longer at that house; though they might, had they so chosen, have remained there until nightfall.

But they judged it to be best and most prudent to depart at once.

From the time Tom King had taken his seat beside him, Richard Nares had not spoken a word, and had scarcely made a movement.

He sat there dogged and sullen; and the highwaymen, of course, made no attempt to lead him into conversation.

Shortly after one o'clock, then, the horses were brought round all ready for our friends to mount.

By this time Mrs. Nares and her daughter were surely in a place of safety.

As a very necessary precaution, they searched Richard's pockets, and removed all weapons, so as to make it impossible for him to do them an injury.

Then they loosened the bonds, by which his arms were confined in such a manner that in the course of a few minutes at most, he could free himself by his own unaided exertions.

Having done this, they mounted and rode slowly away, looking back from time to time to catch a last glimpse of the building in which such strange events had taken place.

Upon reaching the top of the lane, the three friends followed their original direction, resuming their interrupted journey.

If they had done nothing else, they had obtained a rest and a meal for their horses, which were now in excellent condition for the road, and equal to almost any amount of exertion.

While speaking of what had happened—for the reader will remember that this was the first opportunity they had had for conferring freely together—Claude said:

"It may be all very well, but I, for one, can't help

thinking that that confounded rascal Richard got off a great deal more easily than he ought to have done! He deserved a worse fate than the lawyer, in my opinion!"

"But don't you see how disagreeable such a thing would be for Mrs. Nares?" said Tom King. "Rely upon it, the best thing to be done was to give her the lawyer's confession, and give Richard the opportunity of leaving the country with all expedition."

"I don't think things could have been managed much better," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Nor I," said Claude Duval, "except that I can't help feeling that he got off a great deal too lightly."

"Indeed!" said a sneering voice, so close to them that all three started.

They had proceeded but a short distance.

The voice caused them all to turn their eyes in one direction, and that was towards the hedge, on the right-hand side of the road.

There in a gap in the hedge stood Richard Nares.

How he had contrived to release himself and get there in so short a space of time seemed really marvellous.

He could not have done it had he been less intimate with the grounds than he was.

His face was convulsed with passion, and he looked with the utmost malignity upon our friends.

"I have got off lightly, have I?" he said. "Ha, ha! But my time will come for triumph! I know you, my fine sprites! I know you all three! Ha, ha!"

So astonished were the three highwaymen by his sudden appearance, and the strange words he uttered, that they impulsively reined in their steeds, and gazed at him aghast.

He looked more like a madman than aught else.

"Ha, ha!" he chuckled again. "I know you, and, what is more, I will be even with you! I am one of those who never forget or forgive an injury, be it ever so slight a one. While you—you have put yourselves out of the way to thwart me, when you had not the slightest excuse for so doing. But I will have revenge, and full and deadly revenge! You have ruined the one grand scheme of my life—ruined it utterly—ruined it, too, when success had crowned my long and toilsome efforts! I held a fortune in my grasp, and it was wrested from me by you!"

As he proceeded, his excitement grew greater and greater, until now he foamed at the mouth like some infuriated animal.

He continued with impetuosity:

"You have done all this, but you will suffer for it! My plans are all defeated! Never mind! Henceforth I will live, and with but one object only! That shall be to hunt you to the death! I tell you that I know you—you, Tom King; you, Claude Duval; and you, Sixteen-String Jack! You see, I know you all three. The reward offered for your apprehension is great! I will have a share of it! From this moment I will know no peace till I have had you hunted down! Let it be a satisfaction for you to remember that there is now upon your track—watching your every movement, dogging your every step—one who will have the thoughts of past injuries and future vengeance to urge him on! Ha, ha! We shall see—we shall see!"

Tom King tried to make himself heard, but his voice was drowned by the villain's shrieking tones.

"I tell you you have now a mortal foe—such a one as you have never had before, or your career would long ago have been cut short! I tell you to beware! The hour will come when I shall triumph—then I shall shriek aloud, so that the tones may penetrate the inmost chambers of your brain, 'Remember Richard Nares—remember Richard Nares! He swore to have his revenge, and he has had it!' Ha, ha! those will be my words. You may fly—you may smile at my words—but your speed will not outstrip the speed of fate. I tell you I will have my revenge—revenge! Farewell! Remember I am on your track, and that now the sole object of my life is to compass your destruction!"

Ending his singular, maniacal speech with these words, Richard Nares suddenly disappeared behind the hedge, and the next minute could be seen flying over the meadow.

"Confound the villain's impudence!" said Claude Duval, and as he spoke he drew a pistol and fired it after the retreating form.

But Richard Nares had already gone too far for the shot to be effectual.

Evidently, however, the report reached his ears, for he stopped suddenly in his headlong course, faced about, made a contemptuous gesture, and hurried on again.

Claude looked half inclined to pursue him.

"Never mind him," said Tom King. "Come on. Put up your pistol and take no more notice of him. Come on."

"All right; but did you ever hear the like? But I told you he was let off a good deal too lightly, and this proves it."

"He seemed like one mad!" said Sixteen-String Jack.

"I believe he was mad," said Tom King. "It is quite certain he had entirely set his heart upon this little pet scheme of villany, and to find himself defeated at the moment of success has turned his brain. He is mad, depend upon it! No one but a madman would have spoken like that."

"He may be mad," said Claude; "but, if he is, all I can say is, there is a very great deal of method in his madness; and it is a sort of madness I don't at all care about. It strikes me he was uncommonly in earnest. I wish I had been a little quicker with my pistol, and then we should have had no further trouble with him. As it is, I can't help thinking he will be as good as his word."

"Bah!" said Tom King. "Think no more about him! Push on—we shall soon be out of his reach. I don't fear him, and I should feel rather glad, than otherwise, that he was looking after us, instead of persecuting poor Mrs. Nares and her daughter."

"Perhaps so," said Claude Duval; "but you can take my word for it we have made an enemy, and one, too, who has all the will, even if he has not the power, to do us serious mischief!"

"Let him do his worst!" said Tom—"I can only feel despision for such a miscreant!"

CHAPTER D.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN FIND THEMSELVES UPON THE THRESHOLD OF ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS AND TERRIBLE ADVENTURE.

After Tom King thus spoke, the highwaymen relapsed into silence.

Their horses' heads were turned towards their destination, and the animals were fresh.

A loosening of the rein was all that was required to set them in rapid motion, and they flew along the high-road at a speed that soon took them away from the scene of their recent exploits.

In the excitement of the gallop, the threats to which Richard Nares had given utterance became less and less impressive, until at last Claude Duval could smile when he remembered them.

Many miles were passed over before they slackened speed in the least, and then it was only out of consideration for their steeds.

It would have been unsafe in the extreme to have exhausted them entirely.

At any moment, a pursuit might be commenced after them; in the event of which, they would have to trust to the superior fleetness of their steeds for escape from their persevering foes.

They exchanged, then, their gallop for a trot; and, while going at this rate, it was the easiest matter in the world to converse with one another.

"Now, Tom," said Sixteen-String Jack, "we look upon you as our guide—I am quite ignorant of this part of the country."

"And I happen to be very familiar with it," replied Tom King; "so you can trust yourself to my guidance with perfect safety."

"Have we far to go?"

"Yes—many miles yet. If we push on, however, I hope we shall be near the outskirts of the forest by nightfall."

"Good! I am glad to hear it, for I feel a very great degree of curiosity to know how this adventure will end."

"And I, too!" said Claude.

Tom King laughed as he replied:

"Don't fill yourselves up with the notion that we shall find the miser's chest of gold, because I feel a firm conviction that we are a day after the fair!"

"It may be so; but the New Forest is a very large place, and, without more definite information than you

save given, I don't see how the buried chest is in danger of discovery."

"You have no idea now much the hope of obtaining a large sum of gold will sharpen a man's perceptions? It is really wonderful! And the three men I have spoken of would not rest until they had succeeded."

"Well, well! It may be that they are still prosecuting their search."

"It may be so!" said Sixteen-String Jack. "We can not tell until we go there; and I am sure the chance is well worth the trouble!"

"It is—it is!"

"By to-morrow," said Tom, "we shall be fairly within the deepest recesses of the old forest. When once we are there, we shall be perfectly free from danger; therefore I propose that we take the opportunity of giving our horses a rest, and obtaining a few hours' sleep ourselves."

"With all my heart!" said Jack and Claude.

"That is decided upon, then; and now for another point: I told you I knew this country well."

"Yes—yes, Tom!"

"Some distance further on we shall come to a cross-road. It is lonely and unfrequented—at least, it used to be; but, if we take it, we shall save at least a dozen miles."

"Will it be that much further if we continue along the highway?"

"Yes, quite!"

"Then let us take the cross-road, by all means!"

"I thought you would say that! Of course we shall save the distance I mention, but then there will be little likelihood of meeting with any travellers."

"That is a drawback."

"To some extent it is, but I have been thinking lately that perhaps it will be best for us to get to the New Forest as quietly as we possibly can. We had better not have a hue-and-cry about our ears if we can possibly avoid it."

"I quite agree with you, Tom, though until you spoke I had not taken that into consideration," said Claude Duval. "If we find the gold, we shall have no occasion to trouble the travellers."

"And if we fail," said Sixteen-String Jack, "we shall have a capital opportunity of making up for lost time on our way back again."

"Of course we shall, and, one way or the other, I have made up my mind to have a good booty."

"Bravo!"

"Well, then," said Tom King, as he pointed to a finger-post, the four arms of which were just visible over the hedge-rows, "there is the cross-road I spoke of, and if we continue to pursue that we shall in due time arrive at that portion of the forest in which the chest was buried."

"Are you sure you should know the spot again?"

"Oh yes! we took care to bury the chest at the foot of a tree of such a peculiar kind, that I could recognise it from a million."

"That is also satisfactory, and the more I think of it the surer do I feel that we cannot do better than let all travellers pass us by without molestation."

"If we do so there will not be a suspicion of our presence in this part of the country, for you know we have not been tracked at all."

"No, we have not, it is true," said Claude Duval, "but you must not forget Richard Nares."

"Bah!"

"You should never despise an enemy; rely upon it, he will be as bad as his word."

Tom King laughed.

Just at this moment they reached the cross-road, and turned down it.

"I told you it was very lonely," said Tom, as they trotted along it, "and it does not appear to have changed its character in the least. Look at the ruts—and see, the road is almost overgrown with grass."

"It is certain a long while has elapsed since any vehicle passed down this road," said Claude.

This was apparent enough, for the ruts were covered with a kind of moss, which must have been there some time.

The road was very rough, and bad for travelling, but there was no need for them to make great speed, so, after all, it did not matter.

There was little fear that they would be seen by anyone, and this suited them exactly now that they had agreed upon making a change in their plan of proceeding.

Engaged in conversation, the journey was pleasant enough, and the time passed away quickly.

At length the sun hid himself behind the clouds that were piled up in the western sky, a cool breath fanned their cheeks, and twilight crept over the face of nature.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack looked keenly in advance, but could see nothing of the forest.

"We shall reach the outskirts by nightfall, nevertheless," said Tom, "but you must understand that all round the New Forest, surrounding it like a belt, is a strip of waste land upon which no trees grow, but only such rank vegetation as you would find upon a heath or common."

"I know!"

"This belt of waste land is many miles in width in some places, in others only one or two. It is on the edge of this strip that I hope to arrive by nightfall."

"And how far is it to the actual forest?"

"To the tree?"

"Yes."

"Seven miles at least."

"Whew! Then, when we reach the end of this road we shall have seven miles to go over a heath?"

"Just so."

"Look there!" said Sixteen-String Jack. "It seems the road is not wholly untravelled. There's some one, evidently!"

It was as Jack had said.

A long way off, down the lonely road, and only just visible in the dusk of evening, was a man.

He was mounted upon a horse of perfect symmetry and rather unusual size.

This rider, whoever he was, remained motionless.

His steed was planted nearly in the centre of the road, and was as motionless as his rider.

The latter was looking up the road in the direction our friends were coming from.

In his left hand he held the reins, while with his right he shaded from his eyes the extraneous rays of light which have a tendency to obscure the vision when one is looking at distant objects.

He was evidently gazing intently at our friends.

There was something very peculiar in his manner.

The three highwaymen rather slackened their speed.

They looked towards the stranger with great attention.

"Whatever can be the meaning of this?" said Tom to his comrades.

His tone of voice showed how puzzled and bewildered he was.

"I know no more than you do," replied Claude. "It is very strange."

"If I told you what I thought about it," added Jack, "I think you would laugh at me."

"No, no! What is it?"

"Why, he looks to me as much like a highwayman as ever I saw anybody in my life!"

"Ha, ha!"

"I knew you would laugh at me."

"That is too droll," said Tom.

"And yet," said Claude, "how still he is, and how he gazes upon us! I wonder whether he will try to stop us?"

"He would be a bold highwayman," said Tom King, "who would wait in the road like that, single-handed, for the approach of three well-mounted, well-armed travellers!"

"He would, and yet why on earth should he pause in the road like this? Did you see him take up his position there?"

"No."

"Nor I."

"Nor I. When I first caught sight of him he was sitting there, just as he does now."

The singular appearance of this horseman did indeed form ample matter for speculation for our friends.

They could not understand why anyone should behave in so eccentric a manner.

Gradually the highwaymen reduced the speed of their horses until it became a walk.

Still the stranger never stirred, though, as they drew closer and closer, it became more evident that he was waiting for them.

But what on earth could be his motive for doing so?

That, at present, was an unsolvable mystery.

Having exhausted all their speculations, the highwaymen became silent.

They each occupied themselves in noticing what they saw, and drawing their own inferences from it.

A closer approach showed them that the mysterious stranger was dressed with great elegance and richness, though his garb seemed to be of foreign manufacture.

His horse was black, with a sleek, velvety coat.

The saddle did not seem an English one, but it was furnished with holsters, from which the brass-bound butts of some horse-pistols peeped forth ostentatiously.

A long black cloak was clasped round his neck, and hung in massive, though graceful folds over his person, and partly over the crupper of his steed.

On his head he wore a black hat of peculiar fashion, in which was one solitary feather, which stood up as rigidly as though it had been some steel ornament upon a helmet.

The stranger's complexion was very swarthy, and his countenance was almost entirely covered with black hair, which had been allowed to grow freely and luxuriantly.

In the times of which we write this was a very remarkable feature, for then it was the prevailing fashion to shave the face clean, though some military individuals at times cultivated a fine moustache, but even this was an innovation.

When, therefore, the highwaymen saw that the stranger's face was buried in hair, the interest they had previously felt was doubled.

It now became rather a nice question whether the stranger would accost them when they passed.

This was a point that would be quickly set at rest, for another moment or so and they would reach the spot upon which he stood.

When they came nearer, the stranger removed his hand from his face, and let it fall listlessly by his side.

He gazed attentively into the countenance of each of our friends in succession, then, raising his hand to his hat, he saluted them with deep and respectful politeness.

Yet there was a certain amount of constraint and hauteur in his manner.

Our three friends promptly returned the salute, and would have continued on their way, but the stranger, in whom they felt already most deeply interested, spoke.

His voice had a strong foreign accent, and he spoke with difficulty, like one who is but indifferently acquainted with the language, or as though he had to translate his thoughts from his own tongue before he gave them utterance. The hesitation thus produced came upon the ear with a peculiar but not unpleasant effect.

It is not our intention to trouble the reader with the difficulties of his speech.

He spoke as follows :

"Good gentlemen—good evening! I would speak with you. Have you a long journey taken ?"

Then, perceiving the surprise with which our friends regarded him, he added, in some confusion :-

"Pardon me, gentlemen, but it is with difficulty that I speak the English tongue. But be patient, and oblige me by listening."

The three highwaymen bowed, and Tom took upon himself to reply for his comrades.

"We shall listen with pleasure to what you have to say to us, sir."

"Thanks—it much pleases me to meet with a kind response. I will not detain you long, if you will only have patience to listen."

They bowed again.

"I ought to ask you, first, whether you far make your journey in thie direction? If you do not, then there is no need for further speech. If you do, I would earnestly beseech your attention to my words."

The three friends exchanged glances with each other, as much as to say, "Events are growing still more complicated—what can he mean ?"

This took but a moment ; then Tom replied :

"We intend to travel to the extremity of this road."

"You have already reached it, gentlemen, or nearly so. I mean, shall you cross the large open space between the end of this road and the forest ?"

The highwaymen exchanged glances again, for they could not imagine to what point these questions would tend.

Nevertheless, the stranger's manner, although so mysterious, was at the same time so earnest and impressive that Tom felt constrained to answer him candidly and truthfully.

"We are going to cross the open space you speak of," he said.

A strange expression came over the stranger's face.

"I thought so," he replied ; "and I am much obliged to you for listening to me with so much attention. Hitherto, when I have addressed anyone, I have met with nothing but rebuffs. I trust, however, you will hear me to the end."

"We will do so willingly."

"Well, then, I want you to allow me to accompany you in your journey across this place. I would willingly be an escort to every traveller across the dreary waste —until——"

The stranger sighed deeply.

This request our friends thought was a strange one, but they resolved to accede to it.

They felt that if the stranger contemplated treachery they should be more than a match for him, without, indeed, he lured them into some ambuscade.

But though he was a foreigner, yet he did not look like one who would be guilty of a base action.

He seemed sad and mournful, and the corners of his mouth were depressed, as though a long time had elapsed since he smiled

But Tom King, although he had made up his mind to consent, nevertheless remarked :

"Your request, sir, is, to say the least of it, a strange one. People are naturally suspicious of travellers they may encounter on the road. We shall therefore feel more at ease if you will give us some reason——"

"I will do so willingly, if you will only have patience to listen."

"We will listen with pleasure."

"Well, then, gentlemen, my presence must seem very strange, and I hasten to give you a faithful account of it. As you have guessed, perhaps, I am a foreigner."

The highwaymen bowed.

"I have not long been in England," he said, "and the circumstances which have brought me here are singular. They are painful, too ; but you shall know them, and then you will no longer have room to doubt my good faith."

The stranger paused, as though to control some powerful emotion.

"By birth and education," he said, "I am a German. Until about two months ago, I never quitted my native country—probably should never have done so except under the circumstances which have brought me here. In my own land, I am entitled to the rank of Count—the Count von Schoenen."

The highwaymen bowed when they received this intimation of the stranger's rank, and grew more deeply interested than before.

"I have, or had, a twin brother," continued the Count von Schoenen. "Although the difference in our age is insignificant, yet I was the first born. That did not matter, however. We were made the joint inheritors of my father's property and wealth. About six months ago, this younger brother of mine had occasion to visit England. He came over here alone. At first we heard regularly from him, and then all correspondence ceased."

The Count paused again, and cleared his voice.

"I loved my brother as few persons love their brothers, and when I ceased to hear from him I was anxious and terrified. At last I felt certain some evil had overtaken him, and I resolved to set out in search of him. I came over to England. I made my way at once to the place from which he had dated his last letter to me. This was an inn. Here I learned that he had put up for one night. I made my inquiries carefully, and found that he had travelled in this direction. I traced him to the spot upon which I now stand. But here all trace ends. I can learn nothing further. I have no clue to his disappearance. I have made many inquiries, but all have been fruitless. I am convinced that there is some mystery in that heath beyond. That is where he disappeared, but I can find nothing strange upon this heath. I have resolved, however, to accompany all travellers who cross it, in the hope that by so doing I shall be able to solve the mystery of my brother's disappearance."



[DICK TURPIN AND MAUD ARE ATTACKED BY THE POLICE OFFICERS.]

CHAPTER DI.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN SET OUT TO CROSS THE HEATH IN COMPANY WITH THE COUNT VON SCHOENEN.

THE COUNT VON SCHOENEN appeared to be deeply affected by this story of his brother's loss, and he paused once more, for his voice was very husky.

The reader will scarcely require to be told how deeply interested the highwaymen were in the narrative which they heard so unexpectedly.

That the count was sincere and what he professed to be they did not doubt for an instant.

Every word he spoke and every tone of his voice proclaimed that his narrative was true. They forebore to interrupt him by asking any questions.

They saw that he was deeply moved, and therefore would not be guilty of the rudeness of intruding upon him, but waited patiently until he should have sufficiently recovered himself to resume his story.

In another moment the count raised his head.

"You must pardon me for this display of weakness," he said, "but I cannot help it. As I have told you, I loved my brother. But I will continue, for I do not wish to detain you any longer than I can help, for it is unreasonable to suppose that you, being strangers, could feel as I do the keenness of this domestic affliction."

"Indeed, sir," said Tom King, with the utmost respect, "you are in error in supposing that we do not feel interested. We are most deeply interested, and hope that, if you have no objection, you will make us acquainted with all the particulars of this extraordinary affair. We shall not be wearied if you are ever so minute."

A pleasant smile came over the count's features as Tom King thus spoke.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he said—"many thanks! I

have spoken to many travellers, but never to any who have treated me with so much consideration."

"The reason is," said Tom, "that the roads in England are very unsafe, and English people are naturally cautious, so they look with great suspicion on every stranger they may meet with on the road."

"I see—I see! But we have nothing to fear from each other?"

"Nothing at all," said Tom—"we are three gentlemen travelling for pleasure."

This avowal seemed to set the count quite at his ease.

"I have very little more to tell you with respect to myself and my lost brother. As I said a little while ago, the last place from which he wrote a letter was an inn. Of course, when I began to make my inquiries, I went straight there, and managed to trace him to this spot, where he was last seen. But I have no further clue."

"Have you any evidence that he crossed the heath beyond?" asked Tom King.

"No direct evidence, but only the inference that he would do so, since this road leads nowhere else, but debouches upon the heath."

"Then we may take it for granted that he crossed it?"

"I think we may safely do so," said the count.

"But did you not say that you had crossed this heath?"

"Once, and once only."

"Were you alone?"

"Yes."

"And when was it?"

"This morning."

"Then you have not long been here?"

"No. I stopped last night at the inn I spoke of, and which is some distance from here. I learned there all the intelligence I could respecting my brother, and arrived here just before noon."

"What did you do?"

"I waited a little while, and then crossed the heath, but I could see nothing peculiar or suspicious, and I returned here to this spot."

"And have you remained here ever since?"

"Yes. Some other travellers have passed, but they all avoided me, and shrunk back whenever I attempted to address them."

"Yes, yes—people would be sure to do so. They would fancy you had some sinister designs upon them."

"I suppose that was it. At any rate, I have remained here ever since, and you are the only persons who have manifested any interest in my brother's fate, or rather, who have even listened to a word I have to say."

"It seems to me," said Tom King, after a pause, "that you have some suspicions that your brother disappeared upon the heath."

"I have. In fact, I am driven to think so. Here no harm could have befallen him, but the heath beyond is a very lonesome-looking place. I fear that he has fallen into the hands of robbers and murderers."

"That is far from unlikely."

"I feel almost sure of it, and I thought the best way in which I could ascertain would be to make some travellers acquainted with my purpose, and ask them to allow me to accompany them across the heath."

"You think that, by so doing, you would discover whether there really were any robbers on the heath who made a practice of waylaying and murdering such travellers as cross it?"

"Just so."

"Well, sir, I think your plan a very good one, and one likely to succeed. As for myself and companions, we shall be only too glad of your company, and shall rejoice if we are so fortunate as to be able to render you important assistance in this matter."

"Thanks, sirs—many thanks!"

"Evening is fast closing in," said Tom King, "and therefore the time is well chosen, for it is at night, and at night only, that we are to look for assassins."

"You are right."

"Let us, then, at once commence our journey. We will all keep together, and maintain a vigilant look-out."

This was assented to.

The Count von Schoenen was very much pleased with the way in which our friends had treated him, and he would insist upon shaking hands with them all three. When this little ceremony was gone through they were on the best possible terms with each other.

At a very gentle trot they passed down the lane, and emerged upon the piece of waste land of which Tom King had spoken as surrounding the forest like a belt.

It was, in truth, as the Count von Schoenen had described it—a most lonely and desolate-looking place, and in the dim evening twilight looked more sombre than it would have done at any other time.

The ground was very rugged, and there scarcely appeared to be a beaten track across the vast expanse.

Bushes and dwarfish shrubs grew all around, and sometimes a tall tree would be seen standing solitary and desolate in the plain like some sentinel on the outposts of an army.

These solitary trees, with their huge, leafless branches, added greatly to the desolation of the scene.

But they were very few and far between. In places there would be a kind of hollow or excavation, and these were invariably overgrown with prickly plants.

The three highwaymen looked about them with feelings of great interest and curiosity.

As may easily be imagined, our friends were much excited by the strange story that had been related to them by the Count von Schoenen.

They could not help admitting that this place seemed, of all others, just suited for the commission of the most atrocious crimes. On their way they chatted pleasantly enough, and Tom King said:

"If you will believe us, sir, it will give us the utmost gratification if we are successful in solving the mystery of your brother's disappearance. Take my word for it, we shall not think anything of either time, trouble, or danger."

It was a lucky chance for me that I fell in with you, gentlemen!" replied the count. "From the knowledge you probably have concerning the place, you will doubtless be able to render me more assistance than anyone else possibly could do."

"We are not very familiar with this heath, sir," said Tom King. "Indeed, I am the only one who has previously crossed it."

"And did you see anything peculiar?"

"Nothing. I was not molested in any way, nor did I see anything to arouse my suspicions."

"But how long is this ago?"

"Oh! it is some time back."

"Then you are almost strangers?"

"We ought almost to be considered such, but do not think that will make any difference. We will not give up until we have entirely cleared up the mystery."

"I am much indebted to you, and yet——"

"Pray speak without reserve."

"I was going to say, then, that I cannot think why you should take so deep an interest in my brother's loss as you evidently do."

"It is chiefly because it has come to our knowledge that in various parts of this country there are places which can be called by no other name than murder dens!"

"I feared as much."

"We have proof of it, as one of my comrades narrowly escaped the dagger of an assassin in one of them. We saw those villains safe in the hands of the officers of justice, as they deserved to be."

"And you think——"

"It appears to me almost certain that your brother's disappearance is to be attributed to this cause; and this alone would be sufficient to account for our interest, because we have a personal feeling against such miscreants. In addition, however, to all this, we hold the crime of assassination in such abhorrence, that we would gladly go to any length to punish it."

The count's face assumed an appearance of greater melancholy.

"I am afraid," he said, "that my brother is no more! I have endeavoured to call up hope in my breast, but I was wrong to raise such expectations. He has perished—perished beyond all doubt!"

"Nay, I would not make too sure of that," said Tom King, when he saw how full of grief the count was; "don't cast away hope, it may be he has escaped their murderous clutches."

The count shook his head.

"I am afraid not. If he had I should have heard from him before this."

Tom was silent, for he felt the truth of this remark.

"Let us hope for the best," said Claude Duval. "After all it may turn out that we are altogether wrong in our suppositions. At any rate, it would be best to retain hope as long as possible."

"Decidedly!" said Sixteen-String Jack. "It may turn out his disappearance may be otherwise accounted for."

Our friends' convictions were in direct opposition to their words.

The count seemed to understand that what they said was uttered only with the intention of consoling him.

He took their efforts in good part.

The darkness had by this time greatly deepened.

Objects which were more than a few yards distant could be with difficulty distinguished from the gloom in which they were enveloped, and the uneven, broken character of the ground demanded the whole of their attention, lest their horses should meet with some serious injury.

Up to the present moment, however, they had not seen anything of a suspicious or extraordinary nature.

But the wildest and most desolate portion of the heath was yet before them.

By slow degrees they all relapsed into perfect silence.

Each one was busy with his own thoughts, or looking keenly about him, in order that nothing should escape his observation.

There was a kind of pathway across the heath, but there was scarcely anything to distinguish it from the ground adjacent to it.

There was no fence or even low mound of earth, as there sometimes is along the sides of such roads, and it was overgrown with rank weeds and prickly bushes. So little was the road travelled that their growth was hardly checked.

To have deviated from such a path in the darkness would have been the easiest thing imaginable.

Indeed, the difficulty would have been to keep upon it.

The highwaymen, however, were very familiar with night travelling, and they saw things that would have escaped any less vigilant observation than they bestowed.

Suddenly, however, Tom King uttered a faint ejaculation.

"Hark!" he said, in a whisper—"hark! all of you, and listen attentively!"

He was obeyed in an instant.

But all was still.

Not a sound could be heard, save the faint moaning of the wind as it careered wildly over the vast expanse.

For at least two minutes the whole party remained immovable, during which period of time they listened with an intentness which cannot be described.

But they heard nothing.

Tom King was the first to move.

His companions addressed him eagerly.

But they spoke in the faintest possible whisper.

"What was it, Tom?—what did you hear, or fancy you heard? Speak!—tell us at once, all seems still!"

CHAPTER DII.

IN WHICH TOM KING BECOMES ACQUAINTED WITH SOME OF THE MYSTERIES OF THE HEATH.

"It is quite possible," replied Tom King, "that I was misled by my fancy; and, as all is so still, I am inclined to think I must have been."

"But your ears are quick. What was it you thought you heard?"

"The sound of voices. They seemed at a great distance, and I only caught one ejaculation."

"You may be right; and if so, depend upon it some one is lurking near."

"That we must find out."

"But how?"

"You must leave that to me."

"How?"

"Wait a moment. It will be necessary for us to proceed in this matter with the greatest possible amount of caution."

"That is quite certain."

"And we must not allow anything, no matter how trivial, to escape our observation."

"Right again."

"Well, then, it appears to me that it would be a very easy matter to discover whether my ears deceived me or not."

"How shall you find out, then?"

"Why, I shall ask you to remain here, just where you now stand, and to take care of my horse."

"And you?"

"I will slip off in the darkness, making no more noise than I can possibly help, and reconnoitre the ground all round about us!"

"Nay—nay!" said the count. "I cannot consent to allow you to run all this risk on my account."

"There is very little risk for anyone to do what I propose."

"Let me go, then," said the count.

"Nay! I think I can give you a reason which will convince you at once that I am the best person for this service, and that I shall run much less risk than anyone else."

"How is that?"

"Simply because I am tolerably familiar with my whereabouts, while you, and my comrades also, are perfect strangers."

"There is something in that."

"There is everything. And now, do not detain me any longer. I know the direction from which the sound appeared to come, and I shall proceed there straight. I shall then very quickly know whether or not I was mistaken. Do not hesitate, because if I linger the chance will be lost."

No one made any reply to this last speech of Tom King's, so he slipped off his horse as soon as the last words were fairly out of his mouth.

"Do not move from this spot," he added; "I will rejoin you in a few moments at the outside."

So saying, Tom crept rapidly away, and his form was quickly lost to his companions in the darkness which overspread the heath.

Tom King bent his steps in a direction nearly at right angles to the footpath.

With all that stealthiness of movement for which the Indians are celebrated, he crept over the rugged ground, crouching down every now and then behind some friendly bush, listening for some repetition of the sound which had first attracted his attention.

No such sound, however, came upon his ear, but he was so certain that he had not been deceived by his fancy, that he kept on again without hesitation, and without in the least degree relaxing the caution with which he had made all his former movements.

The gloom and darkness were, however, terribly perplexing to him, but in spite of all obstacles his progress was almost noiseless.

He was deeply interested in this adventure, and he determined to prosecute it to the utmost.

He fancied that he should not go far without making some discovery.

Onward and onward he crept until now he was a long way from his friends.

All at once he stopped.

Again there came upon his ears a faint sound, but this time it was not of voices.

It seemed rather that a door had been closed with some degree of violence.

Almost immediately afterwards, he distinguished in the distance a faint twinkling light—so faint that it afforded good proof of the keenness of his vision, or else he would never have seen it.

Tom King riveted his eyes upon this twinkling light.

In a little while he satisfied himself that the light, faint as it was, was a stationary one.

It looked like a star, but he knew it could not be that.

This light was not in the direction in which he had been going, but rather to the right of it.

He hesitated, therefore, for a little while whether he should keep straight on, or whether he should bend out of his course and endeavour to ascertain what the light was, and whence it proceeded.

He listened.

Still all was silent, and this made him determine to bend his course towards the light.

This was easy enough.

Fixing his eyes upon it, he crept stealthily but swiftly onwards.

Every now and then he paused to listen; but had he been in a desert the silence could not have been more profound than it was.

As he drew nearer, the faint light much increased in brilliancy

He perceived, too, that it had a ruddy tinge; and he was also convinced that it came from somewhere on the heath.

But so great was the darkness, that he could make out nothing else that was in advance of him.

The faintness of the light was evidently caused by the distance he was off when he first caught sight of it.

Upon a closer approach, he found it grow brighter and brighter.

"That must come from the window of some cottage," he said; "and yet what cottage can it be? I did not know there was a building of any kind within miles of this place. It must be a cottage!"

As he came closer, he was the more convinced that he was right in this supposition.

Ere long, he could distinguish the latticed casement through which the beam of light came.

This put the matter at rest.

Very faintly against the background of dark sky, Tom could distinguish the dim outlines of a small building, not many feet in height, but apparently extending over a large piece of ground.

As he was in such close proximity to this building, the utmost degree of caution became necessary in all his movements.

Not a sound indicated the presence of any human being.

He crept forward slowly and noiselessly.

He was crouched down on the ground, so that it would be a difficult matter for anyone to have distinguished him from a gorse-bush.

And now about twenty steps more brought him close to the hut, for such it was.

Having been so long in the dark, his vision had accommodated itself to the gloom, and he was now enabled to see that the hut was a building of the rudest possible kind.

It seemed to be composed of nothing more than thin wood plentifully plastered over with mud, in order to keep out the cold.

The roof presented exactly the same appearance.

There were other windows, but only one that was illuminated.

This window, like the rest, was composed of small diamond-shaped panes of glass.

The light appeared to come from a fire that was blazing on the hearth.

Tom had paused at a low fence with which the hut appeared to be surrounded.

The piece of land which it enclosed did not, however, present any marks of cultivation. It was to all appearances as rugged and barren as the heath itself.

Having listened, and found all perfectly still, Tom climbed over the wooden fence, and crouched down in the shadow which it cast.

But he had no occasion for alarm.

All was as still as before, and he could see no indications of the presence of anyone.

He now crept on tip-toe to the window.

He reached it in less than a moment, for he had only to cross the little piece of enclosed ground.

He stooped down until his head was just below the level of the window sill.

In this position he remained for a few seconds listening, before he ventured to peep into the interior.

At length he raised his head by slow degrees, and not an inch higher than was necessary.

It was only necessary for his eyes to be just above the level of the sill to enable him to see all over the interior of the cottage.

He was right in supposing that the light came from a fire.

On the hearth a pile of wood logs was blazing fiercely, and sending out a ruddy light, which was pleasant to look upon.

There was no other light than that which came from the fire, but this was amply sufficient to illuminate every nook and corner of the room into which Tom looked.

As he had expected from the appearance which the exterior of the hut presented, it was a very rude-looking place.

The walls were roughly plastered over with mud, and the floor appeared to be composed of nothing more than earth hammered hard and flat.

A few primitive-looking articles of furniture were placed here and there, but the room did not appear to be occupied by any living creature.

Tom looked all around, but could not see anyone, nor was there anything in the aspect of the scene before him to confirm the suspicions which had sprung up in his breast.

It was just as he was compelled, though rather unwillingly, to come to this conclusion that he saw a door, which he had previously noticed, slowly opened.

From its position, Tom fancied this door communicated with some other chamber in the hut.

His eyes happened to be turned in that direction when the door opened.

All his attention at once became fixed upon it.

The opening door disclosed the form of a very aged woman

She stepped at once into the light which streamed from the fireplace, and Tom was able to observe her distinctly.

How old she was would have puzzled anyone to say.

She looked more like the resuscitated mummy of some ancient Egyptian than aught else.

Her skin was dry and wrinkled, and the colour of musty old parchment.

As for flesh, she absolutely had none.

A more meagre figure could not possibly be seen.

Her sharp, angular bones were covered with nothing else but skin.

Her features were hideous in the extreme, and there was something about her whole appearance so terribly repulsive that Tom felt a shuddering, sickly sensation of loathing come over him.

Her hair, which was thin, was in the greatest disorder. Its colour was whitey-brown—a tint most probably acquired from dirt.

It was perhaps her unnatural leanness that made the woman appear much older than she really was.

Her step was firm and brisk as she closed the door and crossed the room towards a rude table which was drawn up before the fire.

But the closer view which he obtained increased Tom's disgust to such a degree that he was forced to turn his head away.

He felt, however, that it was most important he should keep an eye upon all her movements.

If ever anyone deserved the appellation of hag, most surely this old woman did.

Such horrible eyes she had.

They looked like those of some deadly serpent.

Her front teeth, too, had grown to an unnatural length, and hung down over her lower lip like two yellow, poisonous fangs.

But Tom King's attention was diverted from this contemplation of the hag's personal appearance by perceiving that she held something in her hand.

This something she had evidently brought in to the room with her; but as she had held her hand down by her side Tom had not noticed that she carried anything.

But upon reaching the table we have mentioned she seated herself upon a rickety three-legged stool, and flung the article she had held in her hand upon the table.

Tom King saw now what it was, and he peered through the window with redoubled eagerness.

CHAPTER DIII

MR. WRIGGLES OBTAINS A CLUE TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF DICK TURPIN.

THE tide of events has for a long time carried us away from the hero of our story—so long, indeed, that we feel ourselves constrained to return to him.

However much the reader may be interested in the fortunes of Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack, we feel convinced that a still greater degree of

interest is felt in the adventures of Dick Turpin and his fair companion.

In order, then, that we may chronicle what happened to him and to her, we will leave his comrades and the Count von Schoenen on that desolate heath on the confines of the New Forest.

We break off the narrative at this point because so much has yet to be told respecting the hut and its inmates, and the fate of the lost brother of the Count von Schoenen.

We left Dick Turpin, then, in that deserted mansion near to Finchley, which, contrary to his anticipations, had for so long been a place of safe refuge for his companions and himself.

He stood at the window in that room on the topmost story in which they had principally taken up their quarters.

Maud was leaning upon his shoulder.

They were both looking down upon the neglected lawn across which the three highwaymen were making their way.

Here they stood and watched them until they faded from their sight.

Turning away, then, the window was closed, and they sat down together by the fire.

Dick placed his hand to his head once or twice with an uneasy movement.

The excitement of the scene which he had recently passed through was too much for his feeble strength, and he felt the effects of it already.

Maud, however, was at hand to attend to him.

She insisted that he should keep himself perfectly quiet.

He took her advice willingly enough, for he was utterly exhausted and overpowered.

Presently, however, when the night had far advanced, the profound silence which reigned in and about that deserted mansion was broken by that horrible and unearthly cry which had before so frequently assailed their ears.

So suddenly and unexpectedly did the cry come upon them that Dick Turpin started violently.

But Maud restrained him.

"Be still!" she said—"oh, be still! These sounds are horrible; but we must bear with them, and shut our ears against them as best we may."

"Nay—nay, Maud!" said Dick—"do not seek to detain me. This is past all endurance! I must and will discover what this means!"

"Not to-night—oh, not to-night! You are weak and ill, and such excitement will have the worst results. Be calm—oh, pray be calm! You can do nothing—discover nothing—you will only exhaust yourself!"

Dick had sprung up; but now he found how terribly weak and exhausted he was.

His brain throbbed most painfully.

He could not conceal from himself that Maud was right, and that any exertion would have the worst results; and, by a strong effort, he kept down the desire he felt to descend and explore every corner of the building.

But, as Maud urged, he might have all his labour for naught, and so he determined that, let what would ensue, he would remain where he was, and put off to another opportunity the task of making a thorough search through all the chambers of the whole mansion.

It was horrible, though, to remain there under such circumstances.

The mystery seemed to weigh most painfully upon him, but he contented himself with the thought that ere long he would discover it.

And so passed away the whole of that night.

At irregular intervals, the awful sound—which cannot be described because it cannot be likened to aught earthly—came upon their ears.

Sometimes it would sound as though it came from afar off, and sometimes as though it was just outside the chamber door.

Both were grateful when the morning came.

In this manner, and without the occurrence of any particular event, nearly a week passed.

During the whole of this time not a night passed without the awful sounds making themselves heard until daybreak.

Not without difficulty had Dick Turpin adhered to his resolution.

Each day, however, showed a marked improvement in his personal strength, and he was rapidly becoming more like he used to be.

Still he was weak, and it would have been injudicious to try his newly-found strength too soon; and so, night after night, he had listened to Maud's entreaties to put off for a little while longer his promised exploration of the building.

But at the end of the week he felt himself so far recovered that he announced his intention of finding out the cause of this hideous sound.

And so, just one week from the night when he had parted with his comrades, Dick made his preparations to set out upon his exploring expedition.

On that night, however, events were destined to occur that they little dreamed of.

Had either Turpin or Maud happened to be at one of the windows overlooking a certain portion of the garden they would have been filled with the greatest consternation and alarm.

The reader will quickly understand what they would have seen if they will turn their attention to the proceedings of an old and troublesome acquaintance.

We allude to Mr. Wriggles.

That irate police officer was, as we have before had occasion to remark, almost mad with the repeated defeats he had met with in his efforts to capture Dick Turpin and his comrades.

But all his manifold disappointments did not make him despair, or think of relinquishing the object upon which he had set his heart.

On the contrary, he seemed to grow more and more determined and pertinacious.

The capture of Dick Turpin became the one object of his life. It amounted to a perfect mania with him.

He thought of nothing else, and he looked upon everything with the same object constantly in view.

He was no longer a man striving to gain a large reward, though that had been his first inducement.

But he despised that now—thoroughly despised it.

He had a personal feeling in the matter—he looked upon the highwaymen, and Dick Turpin in particular, as enemies of his own.

It was not the reward he wanted, but the satisfaction of triumphing over him—of atoning by a capture for his many defeats; of obtaining his revenge—for, in plain language, he felt that he must be revenged upon him.

From what we have just said, the reader will immediately conclude that Mr. Wriggles was not at all likely to sit down quietly under his last defeat.

On the contrary, it seemed to urge him to still greater exertions, for he was very well aware that he had been almost successful.

After what had happened, Mr. Wriggles came to the conclusion that Dick would keep himself quiet for some time, and that in consequence he should have a great deal of trouble in discovering his whereabouts from the want of a clue.

He resolved to keep quiet himself, and, for a little while, take no active steps, in the hope that by so doing he should, to a great extent, throw the highwaymen off their guard, and induce them to quit their place of concealment sooner than they otherwise would.

Very soon after this he received the intelligence that Sixteen-String Jack had been seen at Hatfield, and had been pursued for many miles across the country, but had ultimately escaped.

This led Mr. Wriggles off on a wild-goose chase over the country, which resulted in a manner he little expected.

While stopping at an inn for refreshment, he heard a man recounting a wonderful story of how he had found some provisions scattered about in a wood, and imperfectly hidden under the bushes.

Mr. Wriggles became all attention in a moment.

He had heard of the robbery of the market-cart, for the man had been found on the roadside, and taken home, while the horse and cart were captured near Hampstead.

As the owner's name was painted on the cart, there was no trouble in taking it to him, and he then made a terrible outcry about the loss of his goods, and also of a bag containing a large sum of money.

Now Mr. Wriggles, as he sipped his glass, put all these parts together, and came to certain conclusions respecting them.

"I have it!" he said at last. "I can see it all now! I shall have them safe enough! They are hiding in some out-of-the-way place or other—nobody knows where—and they were obliged to get something to eat, and so they hit upon the nice little scheme of robbing the market-cart. I am sure I am right so far!"

In this the reader will no doubt agree.

Mr. Wriggles thought the matter over still further.

"I will go to that wood!" he said. "I will go there without delay! They are hiding somewhere about there! I will warrant to say they are not far off! They would hide the goods close at hand, in order to get at them all the more easily! I know what I will do! I will make a circle round that wood, and consider every place I come to; and then, rely upon it, I shall find them out!"

This seemed very likely.

Mr. Wriggles's plan was an ingenious one, and had every prospect of being successful.

No sooner had he resolved upon this course of action than he proceeded to carry it out.

He called his men about him, and, by the offer of a five-pound note, induced the man he had heard talking to guide them to the exact spot where he had found the provisions.

Away, then, they went.

Of course their destination was the little wood that was situated not far from the deserted mansion.

Upon reaching this place, Mr. Wriggles made a slight change in his plan of operations.

He called his men together.

"Just listen to me for a moment," he said, making a tremendous effort to keep perfectly calm and unexcited. "I will tell you then what you must do."

"I have a thought too, Mr. Wriggles," said one of the officers.

"Eh?"

"I say I have a thought."

"Then you'd better keep it!"

"But——"

"Now, what are you trying to say?"

"Don't you think, Mr. Wriggles, that the chaps we want might be in this very wood?"

"No; but you may depend they are not very far off!"

"I think very likely they are here!"

Mr. Wriggles paused reflectively.

"No!" he said, at length; "I am sure they are not! But we will soon find out where they are!"

"How — how?" asked the men, crowding forward eagerly, for Mr. Wriggles had previously told them that he should take no share of the reward himself, but should divide it among them equally.

"Why, these things being here—or rather having been here, which it's all the same to them, seeing that they know no better—why, if we wait patiently, we shall see them come to fetch some more, and then we can pop out at once, take them prisoners, or follow them stealthily and find out their hiding-place, according as circumstances may be!"

This was not a very lucid speech, but the men understood from it that they were to place themselves in hiding near the spot where the goods had been secreted, and wait for the highwaymen to make their appearance.

This was a very cunning scheme, and did Mr. Wriggles very great credit.

It would have succeeded but for one little circumstance.

The police officers did not happen to know that the goods which had been found were only such as our friends had made up their minds were not worth the trouble of carrying to the deserted mansion.

CHAPTER DIV.

MR. WRIGGLES IS MORTIFIED TO FIND THAT HIS VERY CUNNING SCHEME IS NOT PRODUCTIVE OF ANY BENEFICIAL RESULTS.

UNFORTUNATELY, so far as they themselves were concerned, the police officers did not know that the highwaymen had paid their last visit to the little wood about twelve hours before, when they had taken away with them everything they wanted.

So it happened, then, that Mr. Wriggles's cunning scheme, like many more which had been hatched in his expedient brain, came to nothing in the end.

Most patiently did he and his men lie down on the damp earth, with their forms concealed behind the bushes, or beneath the brake and other undergrowth.

They looked like an army of cats all waiting near a tempting bait for the appearance of four small mice.

But their patient watching was unrewarded.

Morning came, and found them all very uncomfortable both in body and mind.

Their limbs were stiff with the dews which had fallen upon them, for they were afraid to move, lest by so doing they should give the alarm to the highwaymen, and put them on their guard.

Little did clever Mr. Wriggles and his officers dream of the essential service they had rendered the highwaymen by lying there so snug, for while they were doing so, the three friends set out upon their expedition to the New Forest.

Had Mr. Wriggles been out upon the road he might possibly have encountered them.

But he could not be at two places at once.

All were cold and tired, and all were in a terrible bad temper—but that did not mend the matter in the least.

As soon as the first streak of dawn appeared in the sky, Mr. Wriggles knew that it would be in vain to wait any longer, so he savagely told his men to break up their watch and follow him.

He led the way to a public-house at no great distance, and here they rested and refreshed themselves.

It must not be thought for a moment, though, that Mr. Wriggles had in the least lost faith in his scheme.

Far from it.

He told his men that they were to think nothing of such a disappointment as that, and that they stood a much better chance of effecting their object that night than they did on the previous one.

Upon taking this view of the case, the officers felt a little more reconciled to their task of watching all night in the cold, and they accompanied their leader to the appointed spot with feelings of considerable confidence.

But, alas! that night wore away just in the same manner as the preceding one; and morning came, and found the officers more sullen and bad-tempered than before.

Back to the inn they marched, and the day was spent again in eating and sleeping.

But, as soon as ever night came, inexorable Wriggles—loth to abandon the scheme upon the projection of which he had so prided himself, and yet feeling a great amount of misgiving that things would not turn out in the manner he had hoped for and expected—called his men about him, and resumed his place in the wood once more.

The result was the same.

Not a soul came near to disturb them in their lonely watch.

The state of mind in which they had all been at dawn on the two preceding mornings was amiability in comparison with the present occasion.

Again came evening, and the men seemed inclined to rebel against any more of that sort of work; but Mr. Wriggles suggested something which reconciled them to the idea of trying their luck once more.

"Don't despair, my lads!" said Mr. Wriggles—"Rome wasn't built in a day, you know! Let us be patient! I know these chaps of old! They would just take as much as they wanted, and never think of coming for more until they had demolished all they had got! Take my advice—we will try one more night; and if we fail, why, I shall be heartily glad if you will all put your heads together, and try to suggest some other plan."

Once again, then, did the police officers take up their forlorn station.

It was, of course, to no manner of use whatever.

While they were thus engaged, Tom and Claude and Jack were rapidly nearing the New Forest.

As for Turpin, he was in the deserted mansion along with Maud, and never for a moment dreaming of moving out of it.

Morning came; but the officers were no better off, and certainly no nearer their object than before.

"We must give this up as no go!" said Mr. Wriggles, vainly endeavouring to suppress his passion. "Come back—come back! and when we meet this evening, let me see whether you can think of something else!"

Grumbling and swearing, the officers went back to the inn.

Night came again, and found the officers again assembled in one of the rooms of the inn

Mr. Wriggles was very savage that his scheme should have failed; but still he had the wisdom to try to think of something else.

"Well, my lads," he said, endeavouring to make himself as agreeable as he could, "have you been able to think of anything?"

There was a silence.

"Ah well!" continued the chief police officer, "it doesn't much matter, as it happens, for I have thought of something myself."

The men had faith in their leader, and anxiously asked what this new scheme was.

"I think, then," commenced Mr. Wriggles, assuming an oratorical air—"I think we may take it for granted that they are lurking somewhere not very far off from where we now are!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Well then, my lads, what I have to propose is very simple indeed; it is, in fact, what I first of all thought of, though the plan is somewhat modified and improved. It is that we all separate from each other, and go on an exploring expedition round the country. When we come to a place that we think likely to afford a chance of concealment, we must approach with caution, and spy all about. Then we will meet here at sunrise and report what we have done."

The plan, which was really a good one, was agreed upon without hesitation.

The men separated at once, and each set out upon an independent search over the country surrounding the little wood in which they had so vainly watched.

Mr. Wriggles formed one of their number.

Each officer set out with a determination to try his utmost to accomplish the purpose in view.

This was the right spirit to go to work with.

But there was one officer in particular who set out with this settled determination.

This man was named Lickfold, and Mr. Wriggles looked upon him as one of the most promising members of his troop.

Like the rest, this man Lickfold separated from his comrades, and set out on an independent journey of discovery.

But when he had got some distance from the inn, peering about him with great care and minuteness, he suddenly stopped short.

Then clenching his fist, he struck himself quite a violent blow on the side of the head.

"You're a d—d fool, Jim Lickfold—that's what you are!" he said. "A d—d fool, and an idiot as well! To think now that that should never have entered my thick head before! How ever came I to forget it? But it's just like me! I shall forget my own name some day! Now, let me see. What had I better do? I think the best thing will be to run back and tell Mr. Wriggles. No, that won't do either, for he set out like the rest of us, and no one knows where he is by this time. No; it's no good turning back to him. What had I better do?"

Jim Lickfold rubbed his head reflectively.

"That's it!" he said presently, and with rather odd abruptness—"that's it! I will go myself and look about, and make sure, and then, if things turn out as I think they will, why I shall get old Wriggles's good word for ever. Only to think, now, that I should have been bred and born in this part of the country, knowing every lane and tree for miles round, and then not to remember the old shut-up house that everybody says—or used to say—is haunted! D—n me! I feel sure that's it! It's just the place where they would go to, for they would care no more about ghosts and goblins than I should about——"

Jim Lickfold paused for a moment, being at a loss for a word that would form a good simile, and then he abruptly ejaculated:

"Spiders!"

"Yes," he continued, after a brief pause; "they would care no more about 'em than I should care about spiders, or any other insect! That's where they are! I know the old house well, and I'll be off there at once. And if they are there, I'll warrant I'll discover them! It's only a short run across the meadows."

With these words, the officer leaped over a low fence, and struck across some pasture ground.

It was quite certain he spoke the truth when he said he was familiar with that part of the country, for he took his course in a perfectly straight line for his destination.

That destination, the reader will scarcely require to be told, was the deserted mansion.

On his way the officer continued to reproach himself in no very gentle terms for his forgetfulness and stupidity.

"The more I think of it, the more sure I feel that I am right. I wonder, now, whether any of the others will think of it. They are sharp chaps, very, and it's such a likely place that they could not help thinking of it! Ah, well! I'll be there first, at any rate. They sha'n't rob me of my share of glory!"

So saying, Jim Lickfold quickened his pace, and he soon had the satisfaction of seeing the deserted mansion appear in sight.

"Ah, there it is!" he said, pausing for breath and reflection, "there it is, looking just the same as it did when I was a boy! I will lay my life they are there! But stop! Caution, Jim—caution! If you are too fast you will ruin all—that you will! Caution—caution! That's the word!"

In a very stealthy manner Mr. Lickfold approached the gates which we have lately so often had occasion to mention.

This was a peril that Turpin never dreamed of.

He relied fully that, having escaped discovery so long, he should continue to do so, provided he kept close, and did not show himself.

And no doubt he would have done so, but for the chance fact that one of the officers composing Mr. Wriggles's party happened to be intimate with the country, and having got a slight clue, would therefore be able to follow it up with certainty and success.

He was, as the reader knows very well, on the right track now, and the discovery of the wounded and almost defenceless Dick Turpin appears inevitable.

And it seems that discovery cannot fail to result in anything save his death or capture.

Mr. Lickfold satisfied himself that he had gained the gates unperceived.

Having done this, the remainder of his course was easy enough.

The trees which grew so plentifully and thickly along the avenue afforded him most excellent opportunities of concealing himself.

Indeed, it seemed next to impossible that he should be seen.

Stealthily and slowly did this police spy creep through the gardens of the deserted mansion.

His ears were strained to catch every sound, and his eyes roamed constantly in every direction.

But as yet he had seen nothing to speak of.

At length the spy reached the outskirts of the lawn.

He crouched down behind the elaborate stonework, and gazed attentively before him.

There stood the large old house, looking just as he had always seen it look.

To all appearances, it was as much deserted now as it had ever been.

When he saw how dark the house was, and how little it was changed in its appearance, the officer abated something in his confidence.

He began to have some doubts now about the matter, and a strange sensation of dread, which he vainly endeavoured to shake off, crept over him.

He was dreadfully oppressed by the sepulchral silence that prevailed about that spot, and more than once he felt inclined to take to his heels, and leave the exploration of that place to his companions.

But he banished his fears, and put on as valiant an exterior as he could.

Then, having once more looked cautiously around him, he crouched down, and crept noiselessly across the lawn.

CHAPTER IV.

JIM LICKFOLD, THE POLICE SPY, DISCOVERS DICK TURPIN'S RETREAT IN THE DESERTED MANSION.

Without disturbing anything but the birds and a few bats, Jim Lickfold reached the deserted mansion.

He felt all right when he was in the shadow of the building, and he drew himself up to his full height.

But he was forced to confess that he had not as yet seen anything to confirm the suspicion he had entertained.

That strange uneasy feeling, too, which had come over him—that feeling which would have come over him had he been alone in a funeral vault, at the hour of midnight, beneath some large cathedral—increased in its intensity.

Forgetful as he was, at the present moment there was not one wild legendary tale which in his boyhood he had heard related concerning the haunted mansion that did not then vividly come before his mind—as vividly as if he only just heard the tale told.

He shivered and his flesh crept upon his bones, while his blood seemed changed to ice, and forced a sluggish progress through his veins.

And strive as he would, the spy could not get the better of these uneasy sensations.

Indeed, he found that while he stood still they increased rather than otherwise.

By a sudden effort he moved, and continued his prowl round the building.

He found at last that when he fixed his mind upon the large reward which was to crown his exertions he was best able to cope with the disagreeable feelings we have mentioned.

It took a long time, but Jim Lickfold made a complete tour round the mansion.

He reached at last the spot from which he had started.

When he paused here, he was forced to admit that he had not been able to see anything that tended in any way to give colour to the suspicions he had entertained.

All was still.

His most vigilant gaze had not been able to detect any sign that the old mansion was inhabited.

But he was getting more used to his situation now, and the nervous dread of he knew not what to a very great extent subsided.

Jim Lickfold was not brave enough to try the fastenings of the doors and windows in order to ascertain whether any of them had been opened lately.

In the daylight he might not have shrunk so much from such a task, but at that dark and midnight hour he felt it to be out of the question.

He would not do it even if he could make sure of obtaining ten times the amount of the reward.

But he could watch and wait.

Crossing the lawn again, he seated himself upon some of the ornamental stonework.

The silence was, however, unbroken.

More than once he felt inclined to give up and search elsewhere, but somehow a voice seemed to whisper to him, "Those you seek are here."

At last the spy felt his position on the stonework an uncomfortable one.

He was tired, and he thought he should be able to watch and wait as well if he laid himself down upon the grass, because he could still command a view of all around him.

He yielded to the temptation.

At first his position was only a half-recumbent one, his body being supported by his right hand and arm, but presently this grew tiresome, and he lay down.

The result may be guessed.

He was off to sleep in an instant.

Worn out as he was by watching, he could not resist the silence and the darkness, both of which were so eminently provocative of slumber.

How long he lay asleep he knew not—indeed, he was unconscious that he was asleep at all, until presently he opened his eyes and found the sun was shining down with full force upon him.

He nearly started to his feet in his surprise, but he recovered his presence of mind almost instantly, and remained quite still.

He found that his body was pretty well concealed by the long grass.

"What had I better do now?" was the first thought that presented itself to him. "Jim Lickfold, this is just like you. Upon my word, you are not worth a d—n!"

It was an odd habit this police officer had of apostrophising himself as though he was addressing some other person.

"Shouldn't wonder now if the game isn't all up; and yet I don't know. Perhaps it has all happened for the best. Now it is daylight, I shall have a much better chance of looking about me, and I shall be able to say for certain whether the old place has been inhabited lately or not. I must be very careful in all my movements, though, for should they be here and I be seen, my life would not be worth a fig. I must be careful, but I will set this matter at rest, I am determined!"

With these words, Jim Lickfold rolled over, and then crawled along like a snake to the friendly shadow of some trees close by.

Under the shadow of these he felt sure he should be able to make his way round the mansion unseen by anyone.

He set forward.

For some time he saw nothing suspicious, although his eyes travelled scrutinisingly over the building from the ground to the roof.

Suddenly, however, he paused.

"Hallo!" he said—"what's that? D—n me if I don't think I have found it all out! Let me have a look at that shutter. It looks to me as though it had been forced open, and lately too!"

The spy had paused just opposite to the shutter of the window through which our friends were wont to make their way into the mansion.

The shutter was closed, and to a less penetrating gaze than that which the spy bent upon it, nothing of an unusual character would have been seen.

But he was on the look-out for certain signs, and he believed he could see some of those that he looked for.

But, ere he could proceed any further in his speculations and meditations, he was interrupted in a manner which to him was as unexpected as it was pleasant.

He saw the shutter upon which he had fixed his eyes slowly opened by some one within the mansion.

As he perceived the movement, he shrank back still further among the trees, although he was already out of sight.

The shutter was opened with great caution, but at length it was fairly pushed back.

Then a fair face became visible at the aperture.

Jim Lickfold gazed upon this seeming vision with wide-open mouth and eyes.

He was powerless to move.

It was Maud who at this early morning hour appeared at the window.

Little did she dream, poor girl, what eyes were fixed upon her.

She believed herself quite safe, and yet she listened intently.

But, as she could hear nothing, she concluded that all was well.

Jim Lickfold guessed in a moment who she was, but he wondered what on earth had brought her there.

To his intense surprise, then, Maud sprang lightly and easily through the window into the garden.

Her errand was one that she never missed.

It was to gather some of the long grass, which grew plentifully everywhere, and give it to Black Bess.

She chose always that early hour, because she believed that was when she was least likely to be seen.

And every morning up to the present she had performed this duty without any prying eye being fixed upon her.

Lightly and easily she tripped away, and became in a minute lost to the view of Jim Lickfold.

He did not dare move, however, in order to see where she had gone, lest she should discover him, and raise an alarm.

This would ruin all, so he had the good judgment to remain just where he was, for, as he rightly imagined, she would speedily return.

He was not disappointed.

Maud was absent only a few minutes, and having gathered plenty of grass, she returned to the house.

Again she looked about her and listened, but the silence gave no token of the presence of the hidden spy.

Alas! poor girl, she little dreamed that they were menaced by a danger of such a terrible description.

She thought all was well, and was therefore in that worst state of all—a state of false security.

With the same fairy-like agility which she had before displayed, Maud leaped through the window, and having



[THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH SOME OF THE SECRETS OF THE OLD HUT ON THE HEATH.]

done so, closed the shutter carefully, and was lost to sight.

For quite a moment Jim Lickfold neither moved nor spoke.

"Oh, lor!" he at last ejaculated. "Only think of that now!—only think of that! It's just as I thought, after all! Jim Lickfold, if you will only be careful, your fortune's made, and no mistake! Oh, lor! only think of that! I wonder what she wanted out of doors so early as this?"

It was in vain to speculate upon such a point as this, and the spy soon desisted from doing so, and tried to make up his mind as to what was the best thing he could do.

"Wriggles!—Wriggles! I'll be off and tell old Wriggles! That's what I'll do! Then we shall have them all as safe as nuts! Oh, what a find! I must be a d—d fool, or else I should have thought of this haunted house before, and so old Wriggles will say when I tell him about it, and yet—stop a bit, Jim—stop a bit! Why should I tell him all? I won't—no, that I won't! If I did, I should be a d—der fool than ever! I know now! I'll make it appear that I found it all out by my own cleverness! That's what I'll do. I may as well get all the credit I can!"

With these words the spy relapsed into silence.

But his thoughts were busy if his tongue was not, and he was trying to decide upon the next step he should take.

"We were all to meet at sunrise," he said, "but Jim Lickfold won't be able to keep that appointment. Nevertheless, I'll get back as soon as I can, but I must take care not to be seen. Then, when I get back, I shall be able to give old Wriggles some news that will rather astonish him, and what's more, please him too!"

So saying, the spy assumed his old crouching posture,

and crept slowly away, keeping all the time in the shadow of the trees.

Maud was looking out of the window in the room in which she had already spent so many hours.

Her eyes were fixed upon the gardens and the scenery before her, but they were not keen enough to detect the skulking figure that glided from tree to tree.

Jim Lickfold was fully impressed with the importance of the discovery he had made, and the manner in which he crept through the garden was ample proof of it.

Indeed, he made use of twice as much caution as was really necessary; but he can scarcely be blamed for this, as it was a mistake on the right side.

At last he got fairly beyond the precincts of the buildings.

When he was quite sure he was out of the range of vision of any person who might be standing at one of the upper windows, a marked change took place in the manner of his progression.

He started off at a brisk trot, that got over the ground in capital style, and ere long he had the satisfaction of perceiving before him the inn in which he and his companions had temporarily taken up their quarters.

He entered the inn in quite a breathless condition.

"Where's Mr. Wriggles?" he asked the landlord, as soon as ever he was able to speak.

"In bed and asleep."

"Wake him, then!"

"I dare not!"

"Dare not? But I will!"

"Stop—stop!" said the landlord; "Mr. Wriggles came back in a terrible passion and went to his room, locked himself in, and swore he would send a couple of bullets through the door if anyone came to disturb him!"

CHAPTER LVI.

MR. WRIGGLES MAKES UP HIS MIND TO COMMENCE OPERATIONS AT THE DESERTED MANSION BY CAPTURING BLACK BESS.

JIM LICKFOLD was so impatient to make his chief, Mr. Wriggles, acquainted with the unexpected discovery he had made that he had already reached the door opening out of the bar on to the staircase.

But upon receipt of the intimation that he stood a good chance of receiving a couple of bullets for his pains, he stopped short, and took second thoughts upon the matter.

"If that's the case," he said, "I'll see him d—d before I wake him! But it will be a caution to him."

"How so?"

"Why, I have intelligence of the utmost importance to communicate, and when he knows it he will be ready to bite his head off!"

"Then you'd better wake him!"

"Not if I know it."

"But he's such a violent man, you know!"

"He is; and if he had not been quite so violent, he would have learned the news at once. As it is, I sha'n't stir a peg, but wait until he chooses to make his appearance!"

With this, Jim Lickfold sat himself down in the bar with a very dogged air, and called for something to drink.

After all, he thought it would not so much matter if they did wait until night.

Probably if Mr. Wriggles did know, he would not think of making his attack till after dark because then they would be able to approach the mansion unperceived.

Jim Lickfold sat in the bar weighing the matter over in his mind, and at times dropping off into a doze, until at last evening came.

One by one those who had been out upon the night excursion crept downstairs and seated themselves in the bar.

As a matter of course, they had been unsuccessful.

Jim Lickfold was questioned, but his comrades could get nothing out of him.

At last their leader made his appearance.

His countenance looked more purple and irascible than ever.

He glanced round him, and said:

"All here? Oh yes! Well Lickfold, where have you been? When did you come back?"

"About breakfast time. Couldn't get back any sooner!"

"What have you been doing ever since?"

"Sitting here."

"No luck, I s'pose?"

"Oh yes—lots!"

"What do you mean?"

"I've found them."

"F—f—found them?" said Mr. Wriggles, with a roar loud enough to lift the ceiling off.

"Yes."

"Found who?"

"Why, them you want, to be sure!"

Mr. Wriggles sank back into his chair.

But immediately afterwards his face became convulsed with passion.

Starting up, he seized Jim Lickfold by the throat with such violence that he very soon began to turn black in the face.

"What is it you say, villain?—what is it you say?" he shrieked. "You've found them, you say?"

Jim nodded his head desperately.

"You d—d fool!—and you've been sitting here ever since breakfast time!"

Jim nodded again, this time more desperately and spasmodically than before.

"Curse you! I've a good mind to do for you at once!" said Mr. Wriggles, absolutely foaming with rage. "Why couldn't you come and report to me—d—n you! why couldn't you come and report to me? Oh, ten thousand curses! Did ever any man have such natural-born idiots to deal with as I have! If you found them, they are gone by now—gone—gone! and I am done again!"

With these words, Mr. Wriggles let go his hold of Jim Lickfold, and sank back in his chair again, quite exhausted by the violence of his own passion.

Jim Lickfold, too, sank back, looking more dead than alive.

Mr. Wriggles was truly furious.

Jim recovered himself by degrees.

He glared at his superior as though he would like to shoot him, but he was too much knocked up to move.

He gasped painfully for breath.

Mr. Wriggles recovered from his passion, and then he felt that he had been just a little too hasty.

"Where are they, Jim?" he asked, in a mollified tone of voice—"where are they? We will try and find them yet. Where are they, Jim?"

But the appeal was a vain one.

Jim Lickfold felt he was an injured individual.

Instead, then, of making any reply, he pointed his left elbow at Mr. Wriggles, and patted it with his right hand in a defiant, triumphant manner.

What was precisely meant by this would perhaps be hard to say; but Mr. Wriggles looked upon it as a great insult, for his eyes sparkled, and he seemed more than half inclined to renew his attack.

But prudence for once had sufficient power over him to enable him to control his passion.

He recollected, too, that Jim Lickfold had a weak point.

That was an immoderate fondness for port wine and brandy mixed in equal proportions.

But this was too expensive a compound for the police officer to often indulge himself with it, and perhaps that made him like it all the more.

Mr. Wriggles was aware of this, and so he summoned the landlord.

"Bring half a pint of brandy and half a pint of port wine!"

This was done, and the two jugs were placed upon the table.

When Jim Lickfold saw this his face softened.

Mr. Wriggles poured the brandy into the port wine.

"There, Jim," he said, "try that. Forgive and forget, you know I am rather hasty, but we all have our failings."

Had the proffered beverage been anything but what it was, Jim would have refused.

As it was, the temptation was too great.

He took the jug and raised it to his lips.

He drank half of it off at a draught.

"Shake hands and be friends, Jim," said Mr. Wriggles. "I didn't mean no harm."

Jim Lickfold was appeased.

"I don't bear no malice," he said, as he grasped his superior's outstretched hand; "but don't you go for to try that on again!"

"All right. But why didn't you come and tell me at once? It was that which put me out."

"It was your fault," said Jim, in a grumbling tone. "I should have gone right upstairs and told you, but the landlord told me as how you had said you would send a couple of bullets through the door if anyone came near to disturb you."

"So I did, Jim. It's my fault, and I own it, and I can't do more than that, you know."

"Don't say another word, Mr. W.," said Jim, as he took another pull at the delicious beverage.

"Tell us all about it, then."

This Jim did.

We need not trouble the reader with his narrative in full, for events press heavily upon us for speedy recital.

It will be sufficient to say that the account he gave was a wonderful one, so far as his own cleverness and sagacity were concerned.

Mr. Wriggles heard him patiently to the end.

"Now, my lads," he said, "I will tell you what we will do. There are fifteen of us altogether, counting myself, and it will go very hard with us if we are not able to capture them all. You must make up your minds for a little sharp work. But what of it?—better that than have to divide the reward amongst so many."

This was a view of the case which was pleasing enough to the men, and they received the proposal with acclamation.

"We will take our measures carefully, and then we shall succeed. Shut up in this mansion, no doubt they think themselves perfectly secure, so that we shall be able to approach them closely, and then, one sharp tussle, and we shall have them."

'Hurrah!"

Mr. Wriggles ordered brandy-and-water all round.

The fiery beverage was quickly imbibed, and then they were ready to depart.

Jim Lickfold took upon himself to lead the way, and tho airs he assumed were important to a degree.

The distance was really not very great, and so they went on foot, because they would not be troubled with their horses, and because Jim Lickfold could take them by a near cut across some fields.

In a very little while they came in sight of the dilapidated gates.

Like a prudent and skilful general, Mr. Wriggles took a careful and cautious survey of the mansion and its surroundings.

Then he gave the order to advance.

Every precaution was taken that they could think of.

There was nothing either to see or hear that would indicate that the mansion was inhabited.

But on this very night, as we have before remarked, Dick Turpin fancied he was strong enough to set about his task of exploring the mansion, and arriving, if possible, at some solution of the awful sounds which night after night rung in their ears.

Without any incident occurring, Mr. Wriggles and his police officers crept up the avenue and reached the lawn.

No alarm had been given as yet.

"Stay where you are," he said, addressing his men, "and keep a sharp look-out for a few minutes."

Then, addressing himself to Jim Lickfold, he said:

"You, Jim, come with me!"

"All right, Mr. W.!"

"Be cautious! I want you to guide me round this place, and show me the window you spoke of!"

"All right, Mr. W.!" said Jim again.

The chief police officer and his subordinate glided off into the darkness, leaving the others close to the edge of the lawn to watch and wait for their return.

Without the least hesitation, Jim led Mr. Wriggles round to the mansion, and pointed out to him the window through which Maud had made her way.

They paused opposite to this.

"You say she jumped out of there?"

"Like a blessed ancient Roman!"

"Where did she go?"

"That's just what I should like to know. I was afraid to move."

"Well, that's the way in, at all events. Eh? Stop now, Jim, I've just thought of something!"

"Lor, Mr. W.!"

"I have. If these fellows are here——"

"Eh?"

"What do you mean by interrupting me in that manner?"

"You said 'if.'"

"I know I did."

"But there ain't no 'if' about it."

"Oh, d—n you, why don't you pay attention! I say if they are here their horses are here too."

"You're as good as a conjurer, Mr. W.!"

"We must get possession of the horses first, Jim—that will be a fine stroke of generalship!"

"Oh, will it!"

"Of course it will! Shan't we cut off the enemy's retreat?"

"We should."

"Then, first of all, Jim, we will find where the horses are. And, look here, Jim, I've something else to say——"

"What is it?"

"Why, if——"

"Go on."

"I hardly can, I'm so excited. But if Black Bess——"

"Black Bess?"

"Yes. If Black Bess should happen to be with the other horses, and it's more than likely——"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, if she is, and we can only get hold of her, Jim!"

"What's to prevent us?"

"Nothing that I know of."

"Well, then?"

"If we can get hold of her, she will fetch almost her weight in gold—that she would. Her fellow has got to be foaled yet. I tell you, she will fetch her weight in gold. But we'll keep this little affair to ourselves, Jim—there's no need for the others to know anything about it."

CHAPTER DVII.

JIM LICKFOLD AND MR. WRIGGLES ENTER THE STABLE TO CAPTURE BLACK BESS.

Mr. Wriggles clutched Jim Lickfold convulsively by the arm as he spoke these words in a low whisper.

He was almost breathless with his eagerness; and, if the truth must be told, he felt more excitement about the prospective capture of Black Bess than he did about the capture of her rider.

"Mr. W.!" said Jim—"I'm with you, flesh and bones I'm with you! I always said I was a d—d fool, and now I feel it more so!"

"How, Jim—how?"

"That I did not think of that myself!"

"We can't think of everything, you know, Jim; but come, let us find out if we can where the horses are."

"In some of the outbuildings, you may depend!"

"Oh, no doubt of that! Where are they? You ought to know!"

"I do know!"

"Lead the way, then!"

"Don't be rash, Mr. W., don't be rash! There used to be some stables belonging to this here very place, and daresay they are here still!"

"Of course they are, and that is where we shall find the horses! Go on! Show me the way!"

"We must be cautious!"

"Oh, of course!"

Jim Lickfold crept along in the shadow of the trees for some distance.

Then he stopped, and said:

"There they are, Mr. W.—there they are!"

"Where—where?"

"That long range of building just before us."

"I see! Come on!"

"I will lead the way. We must be careful how we cross this piece of garden, or we may be seen!"

Mr. Wriggles had the good sense to resign the leadership on this occasion to his subordinate

Jim Lickfold took a circuitous route to the point he wished to reach; but, by doing so, he avoided crossing the open space.

Like two spectres, the two police officers glided up to the stable door.

Their hearts beat with anxious suspense.

The door was unfastened.

They opened it slowly.

The interior of the stable was very dark, and they could not so much as see their hands before their faces.

But that state of things was soon remedied.

Mr. Wriggles threw open his coat, and took from his belt a dark lantern, where it had hung suspended.

This was lighted, but the dark slide was over the glass.

He pushed this back, however, in a moment.

A broad stream of light at once dissipated the darkness in the stable.

He waved the light about.

There were the stalls, and a great many of them, too; but those near the door were unoccupied.

A slight movement at one end of the building, however, attracted the attention of the officers, and they turned their eyes in that direction.

But they could see nothing.

"Come on!" said Jim Lickfold, in a whisper—"they are long stables, and there seems to be something at the far end. Come on!"

Mr. Wriggles followed without hesitation.

"There she is!" he suddenly exclaimed—"there she is!"

"Hold your row, Mr. W.—you'll have somebody hear you!"

"But look!"

"I see her!"

It was so.

Mr. Wriggles had indeed caught sight of Dick Turpin's priceless mare, Black Bess.

She was holding her head over one of the divisions of the stalls.

She appeared to be regarding the intruders, for her eye seemed strangely expanded, while her ears were laid flat back upon her neck.

She had altogether a very vicious look.

But how could she defend herself? or, rather, how would she be able to know that those who were approaching were her master's deadly enemies?

How was Turpin to defend her?

How was he to know that his foes were about to seize his mare, and cut off, by so doing, all possibility of his making his escape?

Surely Mr. Wriggles could not do otherwise than succeed in this portion of his undertaking.

But he paused just where he was, and so did Jim Lickfold.

"She looks an uncommon vicious brute," said the latter—"that's what she does!"

"I don't like her looks at all!"

"Don't funk, Mr. W.—don't funk! You are not frightened of a horse, surely?"

"Oh no—no!"

"Come on, then, and we'll soon have her! But we goes halves in this little affair!"

"Certainly!"

"Very good, then! Here goes! You hold the light, and I'll soon have her out!"

"Be careful!"

"Don't mention it. I knows what horses is!"

With these words, Jim approached the stall in which Black Bess was standing.

Alas! When the gallant creature is in the hands of the police, what is to become of Dick Turpin?

Wounded, weak, and almost defenceless—with Maud to protect and shield from injury as well as himself, what can save him?

How can he avoid falling an easy prey into the hands of his insatiate foes?

How, even, is he to know, until too late, that any enemies are near—that he is in danger of having an attack made upon him?

Under no circumstances could his position be worse than it was.

We confess we tremble for his safety.

Cautiously, and yet quickly, Jim Lickfold approached the stall and glided up to the manger.

Mr. Wriggles followed, holding the light.

Jim put out his hand to seize Black Bess.

He did not doubt that he should succeed.

But whether it was that Black Bess had some instinctive dislike to being handled by strangers, or whether she was alarmed by this intrusion into the stable, or whether, indeed, she recognised those two men as enemies of her master, we really cannot tell; but let the cause be what it might, certain is it that she rewarded Mr. Lickfold with a sharp bite upon the arm for his attempt to grasp her mane.

He uttered an awful howl, which was alone enough to frighten any horse.

Black Bess gave a loud snort, and struck out wildly with her four legs all at once.

Then, turning round in the stall with great suddenness, to the further discomfiture of Jim Lickfold, she made a wild rush out of the stable.

Mr. Wriggles turned round and made an effort to escape.

But Black Bess was quicker then he was.

She struck him violently in the back with her fore feet.

Down he went, and the mare rushed after him.

In less than a second, Black Bess reached the stable door.

Then she gave one bound, and immediately disappeared in the darkness of the night.

The oaths and curses that came from the lips of the two discomfited police officers were really awful.

The bite which Jim Lickfold had received was a severe and painful one, and he had, moreover, received some very sharp kicks.

As for Mr. Wriggles, he felt bruised to death by the mare's iron-bound feet, and unable to move a limb.

After he and his companion had relieved themselves by swearing tremendously, he struggled to his feet.

Jim Lickfold scrambled up at the same moment.

They had quite exhausted themselves with swearing, and could not keep up that amusement any longer, so they spoke like rational beings.

"Oh, Mr. W.!" said Jim Lickfold, ruefully, "what shall I do! Oh, murder! That infernal brute has bitten a piece clean out of my arm!"

"Hold your row!" was the reply. "It was your own fault! Why didn't you catch hold of her?"

"Catch be d—d! She laid hold of me in a minute. Where is she?"

"Gone! She galloped over me, and nearly trampled me to death!"

"But she cannot have got right away?"

"I will lay you ten to one you don't so much as clap eyes on the varmint! She's gone—as good a two thousand pounds as ever was coined!"

Here followed a fresh volley of maledictions.

They went to the door of the stable.

But the darkness was most intense, and they could not so much as catch a glimpse of bonny Black Bess.

She had successfully resisted the attack which had been made upon her liberty, and was now far away in the grounds surrounding the mansion.

"Just as I told you," said Mr. Wriggles. "She's vanished—vanished, and left no trace behind!"

"Well, it's a bad job, and can't be helped. Just bind up my arm, will you? We must make the best of it, I suppose."

Wriggles swore.

"I wish you'd had this bite on the arm instead of me! It's all your own fault, for if you had not proposed it I should never have thought of capturing the beast!"

"Bind your arm up yourself, then, and be d—d to you!"

"Come—come, Mr. Wriggles! No offence—no offence, you know, but when you have a bad hurt it puts you out of temper! I don't mean anything."

Mr. Wriggles tied up Jim's arm, which was bleeding profusely, for Black Bess had stuck her teeth into it to some purpose.

"Come, come, Mr. W., don't be downhearted over losing a horse! The best part of the game remains yet! If we can only catch the highwaymen themselves we need not regret losing their horses!"

"I will try to-night," said Mr. Wriggles, with desperate resolution. "I have tried before, but all my previous efforts shall be as just nothing at all in comparison with what I shall do to-night."

"That's the way to go to work with! You keep in

that mind, and we shall be bound to succeed! Come along! Lean upon me, and we will rejoin those we left waiting on the lawn. They will wonder what on earth has become of us."

"They will say we have lost a great deal of valuable time and done no good after all."

"Never mind! Don't be downhearted! I shouldn't care a d—n if it wasn't for my arm!"

"How did it happen?"

"Curse me if I can tell you! When she let me enter the stable and pass up to the manger so quietly, I fancied I should have no trouble at all, so I reached out my hand to take hold of her forelock, when all of a sudden she nipped hold of me, then she kicked out, and down I went, and that's all I know about it!"

"Hush—hush!"

"What is the matter?"

"Is not that the window you pointed out to me?"

"Yes, that is it."

"Then I think I cannot do better than keep an eye upon it."

"It might be as well."

"You go back to those on the lawn, and bring them all here as quietly as you can. In the meantime I will make up my mind how to act."

"All right!"

Grumbling and groaning, cursing and swearing, Jim Lickfold made his way back to those police officers who were left on the lawn.

They wondered, of course, what ever could have been the cause of his long absence, but Jim was not in the humour to gratify their curiosity, and remained silent.

In less than a moment they joined their leader.

"All right, boys! The time of action has come! Follow me quietly, and I will show you the way."

Mr. Wriggles glided across to the shutter.

His men followed like shadows.

A touch showed the police officers that the shutter was unfastened.

He opened it instantly.

There was no obstacle to his gaining admission.

It seemed rather strange for the police officers to be grouped round that window like so many burglars.

They were perfectly silent, and just as stealthy as any midnight robbers possibly could be.

But Mr. Wriggles wanted to gain admission without making the least sound that would give the alarm to those within.

The services of his lantern were again brought into requisition, and by the aid of its light he and his followers scrambled into the little chamber from which it opened.

CHAPTER DVIII.

MR. WRIGGLES AND HIS OFFICERS SUCCEED IN EFFECTING AN ENTRANCE INTO THE DESERTED MANSION.

"HUSH!" said Mr. Wriggles, in a faint whisper. "Are you all here?"

"Yes—yes."

"Close the shutters, then."

This was done.

"Now, my lads, be cautious! I want us to try if we cannot steal upon these fellows unawares! Come quietly,—we will creep on tip-toe until we come to the room in which they are, and then we will bounce in upon them!"

"Hurrah!"

"Hush—hush! Don't make a noise, or you will give the alarm!"

"All right!"

There was but one door leading out of the little chamber, and this they quickly opened under the commands of their superior.

The passage leading into the hall was beyond.

Along this they crept.

But before we follow them any further, we must return to Dick Turpin and Maud.

Is not their position of such a perilous nature as to demand our utmost and immediate attention?

Surely, yes, for by what means can they possibly hope to escape from their foes on this occasion?

We shall see to what extent Fortune favoured them.

It was, then, as we have already said, on this night that Dick set about exploring every nook and corner in the mansion.

Dick busied himself during the whole day in making his preparations.

He had four pistols and a slender stock of ammunition.

He loaded his weapons carefully, and he stowed the powder and ball about his person, so that he could readily reload his pistols, should a necessity arise for his doing so.

There was one small piece of candle, too, which he had carefully hoarded up, and which he hoped would be sufficient to enable him to make his researches.

He had made up his mind to wait until he heard the sound, and then immediately descend; but, strange to say, he waited till long past the usual hour without the cry making itself heard.

This was strange, but Dick resolved, nevertheless, not to forego his intention, but to carry it into effect.

Fain would he have persuaded Maud to remain in the chamber while he pursued his investigations alone, but she refused to listen for a moment to any such proposition.

"No!" she said. "Where you go I go!"

"But think, dearest; some horrible sight, too awful for you to look upon, may——"

"No matter! Let it be what it might, it could not be worse than remaining here without you!"

"Well, you have a bold heart, and so you shall accompany me. Perhaps it will be better that we should be together."

Dick Turpin afterwards had occasion to congratulate himself upon not leaving Maud in the upper room.

"We will start now," he said. "Perhaps before we have gone far we shall hear the sound again."

"I am ready."

"Come, then, and call up all your courage, for probably there are some strange discoveries awaiting us."

With these words, Dick passed Maud's arm beneath his own, and the pair crossed the room and emerged upon the landing.

Here, more from habit than aught else, they paused and listened.

But the silence of the very grave itself filled the deserted mansion.

They then commenced the descent of the stairs, nor did they pause until they reached the landing from which opened the ante-room leading to the old armoury.

Dick had said nothing about this being his destination, but from the manner in which he paused and handled his pistols, he evidently had intended it should be.

"Now, call all your fortitude to your aid," he said. "We know full well that there is one horrible sight to be seen in yonder room; but you have seen that once, and therefore it is shorn of half its horrors. I am convinced, however, that it is in this direction that we must look for the solution of all the horrible sounds we have heard."

Maud trembled.

"You are terrified already," Dick said. "Do you not think that it would be better to remain alone? Do not ask me to give up this enterprise, for I have set my heart upon it."

"I had no thoughts of making such a request," was the reply. "I shivered I know, but I fancy it was more from cold than aught else."

"Come, then. There is a draught here, I know. Let us enter the old armoury, and——Ha! What is that? Hush—hark!"

These last words were hurriedly spoken, and Dick sunk his voice to a whisper while he uttered them.

"I heard nothing!" said Maud.

"Hush—hush! Oh, hush!"

Dick Turpin assumed an attitude of intense listening, and bent over the balustrade.

Dreading she knew not what, Maud followed his example.

We have elsewhere stated that the staircase was so constructed that anyone looking over the balustrade could see down on to the floor of the hall beneath.

Dick looked down, but of course he could see nothing.

It was like looking down some well.

But though he could not see he listened.

All was still, however, and he raised his head.

"I must have been mistaken!" he said, anticipating Maud's anxious inquiry. "And yet——"

"Yet what?"

"I could almost stake my life I was not."

"What did you fancy you heard?"

"A faint sound as of footsteps, and a murmur as of voices in low but earnest conversation."

Maud's lips parted, and she with difficulty suppressed a cry of alarm.

"Hush!" said Dick.

But the caution was not needed.

"Oh!" she cried, "you terrify me."

"Nay, do not be too much alarmed."

"But whispering voices. Your foes——"

"Do not jump too hastily at conclusions, dear one. As we are well aware, this house is full of strange noises—we have ample evidence of that, and we ought not to allow even such sounds as I have just heard, or fancied I heard, to too much alarm us."

"But I am terrified!"

"Be calm—be calm—pray be calm! It may be—and indeed it is very likely—that what we heard was but the echo of our own voices!"

"And the footsteps?"

"No, it could not be that, for we were standing still at the time. Hush!—hark! There it is again!"

Both were now profoundly silent.

Again there came upon their ears the same whispering sound—for Dick's sense of hearing, which was wonderfully acute, had not deceived him.

Anxiously and eagerly they again bent over the balusters.

This time Dick Turpin took the precaution to conceal, as well as he could, the light which he carried.

He looked down.

But, as before, there was nothing to be seen.

The whispering sound of voices came, however, most unmistakably upon their ears.

They listened with suspended breath.

Dick felt the life-blood congeal about his heart as the supposition occurred to him that those persons who were evidently whispering below were his foes

That was, indeed, the most probable of all suppositions.

If so, what was he to do?

Still he was disinclined to think that they were officers.

Having kept indoors so close as he had, how could they possibly have discovered his retreat?

And if they were officers below, they must have done so; for were they not endeavouring to steal upon him unawares—had they not made a surreptitious entry?

Dick was fairly bewildered.

Had it not been for the strange sounds he had already heard, he would scarcely have hesitated a moment in saying that they were officers.

And now he was doubtful.

Perplexed and puzzled, he still looked over the balusters, straining his senses of vision and hearing to the utmost.

Suddenly, he caught sight of a faint ray of light.

Maud saw it as well as himself.

It was only for a moment that he saw it.

It disappeared instantly, and then all was as dark as before.

He drew back.

"I can stand this no longer!" he said—"I must and will know the meaning of all this! Remain here for a moment, dear one, and I will run down the stairs and find out what it is!"

Maud clung to him, but did not speak.

"Release me!" he said, again. "I will promise you not to run into any danger! I will creep downstairs silently, and, as soon as I find out whether officers are really below, I will come back again. There will be no danger!"

Maud let go.

"You are sure you will only descend low enough to find out what it is and then, when you have done this, you will return?"

"I promise."

"Go, then!"

Dick Turpin needed no second bidding.

He gave the little taper to Maud, and glided down the stairs like a spirit.

He was cautious to a degree.

But he did not pause until he reached the first landing.

The whispering sounds still came from below, but with so much additional loudness, that it was impossible to mistake their character.

Dick descended a step or two lower, until he could command a tolerable view of the whole of the entrance hall.

A faint light attracted his attention.

He soon was able to distinguish a mass of dark forms.

They were going from door to door.

Of course the reader will know from what has gone before that these were Mr. Wriggles and his officers.

After gaining the hall, as we have already described, they gave as good a look around them as the light of the lantern would allow them to take.

Then, going to the different doors, which opened out of the hall, they tried them all in succession, and found every one fast.

They were thus engaged when Turpin looked down upon them.

Still Dick felt so sure that the officers could not have penetrated the secret of his presence in the mansion that he was loth to think that the shadowy figures were those of his foes.

He was very little inclined to superstition, and yet he would more readily have believed that they were spectres than police.

Just as he made this reflection, however, the dark mass made a sudden movement.

Then he heard a voice, the accents of which were familiar, say, in a low tone:

"Come on, my lads! We must look a little further! They ain't anywhere upon the ground floor, I'll take my *David!* Be careful! We will go upstairs and try the doors above! We are sure to have them at last!"

It was Mr. Wriggles who spoke.

There was no mistaking the thick voice.

Dick had heard it too often to be mistaken now.

It came upon him like a revelation.

For a moment he seemed stunned.

How could his old pertinacious enemy have found him out?

That was a mystery to Dick.

But he was roused to his senses by the officers approaching the foot of the staircase.

Before he could move, however, and get away, a broad beam of light from the dark lantern was flashed up the staircase.

Dick was confident that most of the rays fell upon him.

He turned and fled.

A loud shout let him know that he had been seen.

"There he is!" roared Mr. Wriggles, for it was he who had directed the light of the lantern to the upper part of the staircase. "there he is! Quick, my lads—quick! Now we have him! At last we have him! I will wager my life that was Dick Turpin! After him—quickly, or he may escape! There is a thousand pounds to be earned by his apprehension alive or dead! Quicker—quicker, I say, or we shall be too late and he will escape! Quicker—quicker!"

CHAPTER DIX.

DICK TURPIN'S POSITION BECOMES MORE CRITICAL AND PERILOUS EVERY MOMENT.

UTTERING these whirling, incoherent words in a screaming voice and at the top of his lungs, under the belief that by so doing he was stimulating his men to make increased exertions, Mr. Wriggles, with the lantern in one hand and a loaded pistol in the other, bounded up the staircase at a speed which, considering the bulk of his body, was most miraculous.

His men followed him very closely.

There was no fear of their impeding each other's motions, for the staircase was quite spacious enough to allow double their number to ascend it.

But Mr. Wriggles found that his breath was not equal to shouting and running upstairs at the same time; and, as he was obliged to discontinue the one or the other, of course he dropped the former.

Maud echoed Mr. Wriggles's cries with a scream.

she was almost ready to faint with terror.

But in less than a moment Dick Turpin was by her side.

"Come!" he said, breathlessly—"quick—quick! as you value your life and mine!"

Maud wanted no urging.

"Where shall we go?" she asked. "How can we escape? Alas! there is no hope—you will be captured!"

"Peace—peace! This way, and then I will make up my mind what to do!"

As he spoke, he dragged Maud through the door of the ante-room.

The reader will remember that the lock had been blown off the door by a pistol.

Nevertheless, as soon as he had crossed the threshold, Dick Turpin closed the door.

He ran his hand along its edge, and near the top his fingers encountered a bolt.

To shoot it into the socket took him but a second.

Quick as thought, he stooped down and found another bolt near the bottom of the door.

This he also slipped into the socket.

He drew a breath of relief.

He had placed a barrier between himself and his foes.

It was a slight one, and would, no doubt, be easily demolished· but still it gave him time for a little reflection.

Maud clung to him, completely overcome by terror.

"What—oh! what shall we do?" she said. "Hark to the cries of that dreadful man! Listen to their footsteps! How fast they are coming up the stairs! In another moment, at the most, they will reach the door. Oh! what are we to do? How are we to escape?"

"That's what I was trying to think, only you confuse me just a little."

Maud understood this was a reproach, and became instantly silent.

Dick's thoughts were busy, and he looked about him anxiously.

He could not, however, see any outlet of escape.

He had had the start of his foes, and he had ascended the stairs more rapidly than they had been able to do, but by this time they were very close indeed to the door.

There was just a chance that they would pass it, in their haste, and continue their way upwards, in which event he would stand a chance of slipping down to the ground floor, where his means of escape could not help but be increased.

This hope, however, was such a faint one that he could not count upon it.

Still, he listened to the approach of his foes breathlessly.

All the while, his thoughts were active in the extreme.

Maud clung to his arm tightly; but she uttered no sound now.

She only gazed, as well as the feeble light of the candle would allow her, into the countenance of her husband, with her features rigid with alarm.

"Stop!" said the thick voice Dick knew so well—"stop—here they are, or I am mistaken!"

The police officers came to a halt on the landing just outside the door of the ante-room.

"Yes, this must be it! Down with the door—down with it!"

Dick waited to hear no more.

There was but one place into which he could retreat

That was the old armory.

He darted rapidly into it, dragging Maud with him.

The inner door was very much broken, but he placed it in its position as well as he could.

Some heavy blows were struck upon the door opening upon the landing, and then some words were uttered, but what they were Dick did not pause to listen.

Dick had gained the armory, but that, under the most sanguine view of things, could scarcely be called an advantage.

He had succeeded in getting away from his foes so far, it is true, but he had taken refuge in a place from which there was no mode of exit save the one at which the officers now stood.

He had taken refuge in a place which did not either possess any capabilities of defence.

He could not stand a siege there, because there was no barricade that he could place between himself and his enemies.

A succession of rapid, heavy blows were now dealt upon the door, which, if continued, must soon shatter it from its hinges.

Dick pressed his hand to his head.

Such a scene as the present was too much for his exhausted mental and bodily powers.

Where to turn—where to look for the least loop-hole of escape he knew not.

He seemed to have no other alternative than that of seeking refuge in the armory.

And yet, at the same time, he knew full well that he and his three comrades had made a close and searching examination of that very apartment, and had failed to discover any mode of egress from it.

Then they had plenty of time for the search and nothing to distract their attention.

Probability pointed very strongly to the conclusion that there must be some means of egress, but if it was so well concealed as to escape a search instituted under such circumstances, how could Dick hope that it would be revealed to him when his brain was in a whirl?

It was absurd to think of such a thing.

Bang, bang, bang!

Louder and louder—fiercer and fiercer came the blows upon the door.

"We have but one hope, Maud!" said Turpin—"only one frail chance of escape! Do you hear me, dear one?"

"Yes—yes! I hear you! What is it?" said Maud, faintly.

"Do you think you are calm enough to assist me?"

"Yes—yes! I am—I will be!"

"That is well. Now listen to me—to our only chance!"

"Oh, speak!"

"Take the candle, then! There, that will do! Now search about narrowly on every side for some mode of exit from this place. I believe a concealed exit exists! If you find it quickly, all will be well!"

"Yes—yes! And you?"

"Never mind me."

"Tell me what you will do?"

"I will keep them at bay for a few minutes! Fear not that I shall fail, or that I shall be in any danger! Do not throw away our only hope!"

"I will not!"

Maud spoke faintly but collectedly.

Dick did not have any misgivings on her account.

He rushed to the door of the armory.

His sole object now was to gain time.

He reached the ante-room only just in time.

Had he been a moment later the chance would have been lost.

The door was almost down.

"Hold!" he cried, in a tone of voice so loud that it rose clear and distinct above all other sounds. "Hold, I say!"

The blows ceased as if by enchantment.

There was for a moment the silence of the grave on the other side of that door.

Not a word was spoken—not a movement made.

At last Mr. Wriggles recovered himself sufficiently to say:

"Who is that?"

This was a needless question.

He knew full well who it was that spoke, for Turpin's voice once heard could ever after be recognised.

"I, Dick Turpin!" was the reply.

"Here he is, my lads!" said Mr. Wriggles, with a triumphant chuckle, addressing himself to his men. "I told you we should have him!"

"Who are you?" asked Dick. "What do you want?"

"Ha, ha! That's a good one!" said Jim Lickfold.

"Surrender—surrender, Dick—surrender!" shouted Mr. Wriggles. "I know that's what you've made up your mind to do, because you cannot hold out any longer! It's sensible of you, Dick! Give in handsomely, and spare us all further trouble, and you will have no cause to regret it!"

"Who are you?" bawled Dick again.

"Zounds! you know very well who we are!" roared Mr. Wriggles. "We are officers—his Majesty's officers o

police! and we call upon you to surrender in the name of his Majesty the King!"

"And if I surrender, what then?"

"You cannot do better than to give in. Our strict orders are to take you dead or alive! Make a virtue of necessity, Dick, and surrender! You cannot escape. We have you safe!"

"Will you treat me well if I give in without any resistance?"

"Yes, yes—depend upon it we will! You will find it will answer your purpose to allow us to earn the reward as quietly as possible, but we are determined to have it one way or the other!"

"Well, you have taken me at unawares, Mr. Wriggles! I confess that."

"Ha, ha!"

"You have, in fact, run me up into a corner!

"Ha, ha, ha!" said Mr. Wriggles, more triumphantly still. "I knew I should have you sooner or later!"

"I am in this place, and can't get out, without you like to let me!"

"Good, good!"

"So, if I surrender, will you promise to use me well?"

"Yes—yes."

"That is, if I behave handsomely to you, you will behave handsomely to me?"

"Haven't I told you so?"

"You have."

"Then, what more do you want?"

This was an unanswerable question.

Dick was puzzled how to prolong the conversation further.

He looked back.

Maud had not discovered the secret exit yet.

He began to despair.

He feared, after all, that he should be captured.

Mr. Wriggles and his men, too, were exceedingly delighted to find, as they thought, that Dick Turpin was hesitating whether he should or should not give himself up to them.

To be sure, by one rush they could demolish the door and capture the highwaymen, but in the event of their succeeding, one or more of their number would be sure to receive some fatal injuries.

But if he gave himself up, there would be an end to all risk, and they would preserve their carcasses whole as well.

It was this which made them willing to parley, for had they not received from the highwayman himself the admission that he was driven up in a corner?

"Come, Dick," said Mr. Wriggles, after a very long pause, "let us know what you mean to do! Say the word one way or the other! It's no good dallying here!"

"But I feel it to be a serious matter."

"Oh, stuff!"

"I do, I assure you."

Just at this moment Maud came running from the armory.

Her step was light and rapid.

There was no need for her to speak

One glance into her countenance was sufficient to let Dick Turpin know that she had succeeded.

He turned in an instant to the door.

"Mr. Wriggles?" he said.

"Yes. Are you going to give in? Say so at once! I won't wait any longer!"

"Grant me one favour, Mr. Wriggles! It's a serious matter, you know! Just give me three minutes to make up my mind in—only three minutes, you know! It can't make any difference to you, because, at the end of the three minutes you will be just as well able to knock down the door, and will stand just as good a chance of capturing me as you do now!"

CHAPTER DX.

WRIGGLES AND HIS OFFICERS FOLLOW DICK TURPIN TO THE VAULTS.

Mr. Wriggles rather demurred to this demand.

But eventually the desire of capturing Dick Turpin without bloodshed, and without fear of personal consequences, induced him to say yes.

"Very well, then," said Dick; "at the end of that time I shall have fully considered my position, and I will tell you whether I will give in or whether I will fight it out to the last!"

Of course, Dick Turpin had no such intention.

The moment the last words had left his lips, he seized Maud by the arm, and hurried her to the far end of the armory.

"Have you found the secret door?"

"Yes—yes! Here it is!"

"Where?"

"In that corner!"

Maud pointed to an adjacent corner.

Here Dick saw a narrow door standing open.

He rushed towards it.

"Stay—stay!" cried Maud. "Be careful—oh, be careful, or you will fall! I had a narrow escape myself. That door opens upon a flight of steep stone steps, that seem to lead down into the bowels of the earth!"

The caution came only just in time.

Dick narrowly escaped a fall.

"Come—come!" he said; "we must make the best use we can of the three minutes' grace I have been lucky enough to obtain!"

"I am ready."

"Come, then, and I will close the door. How came you to discover it?"

"By chance, just as I was about to give up in despair."

"You must give me the particulars when there is an opportunity."

While speaking these words, Dick Turpin assisted Maud through the narrow secret door in one corner of the room; and as soon as she was by his side upon the steps he closed the door after him.

He pulled it to hastily, and in his anxiety to descend the steps did not notice that he had failed to fasten it securely.

The spring which held the door fast in its frame was rusty with long disuse.

In ignorance of this, Dick descended the steps.

They were spiral in shape and slippery with damp.

Fear lent speed to their feet, and they descended with wonderful rapidity.

A damp, earthy smell saluted their nostrils.

In a little while, Dick felt sure they had reached the level of the ground, but still the steps showed no signs of a termination.

Down they went, with even greater swiftness than before, until their brains grew dizzy.

Soon they were, as Dick felt firmly convinced, far below the level of the earth.

Where these steps could lead them, or for what purpose they had been constructed, he could not imagine.

Nor could he tell whether he had in any way improved his situation further than by getting a greater distance from his enemies.

For aught he knew, the steps might terminate in some vault.

He reached the termination somewhat abruptly.

They were brought up suddenly by a small, strong-looking door, which was placed right along the foot of the steps.

This door was set in a low stone arch.

Dick's heart almost ceased to beat when the thought occurred to him that he was trapped in a well, as it were, for he made sure the door was fast.

He had not really the heart to try whether it was or not.

But Maud, whose presence of mind had not deserted her, did so.

She turned a handle, and the door opened.

A charnel-house sort of smell came through it, but this they heeded not.

Dick was almost overcome by this sudden occurrence, so different as it was to what he had expected.

He stepped across the threshold instantly, and Maud as well.

They found themselves still on some steps, but they were only two or three in number.

They led down into a vault.

Dick saw this at a glance, and, having done so, turned round to the door.

A cry of joy escaped his lips as soon as he had closed it.

The fastenings were all on the side on which he stood.

With eager haste, he shot the massive bolts into their sockets.



[THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN MEET UNEXPECTEDLY WITH AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.]

There was a thick bar and a chain, and these he also placed across the door, and when he had done so he felt that, taking all things into consideration, he was tolerably secure.

The only thing that remained was to find some outlet from the vaulted chamber or corridor in which he stood, though he could not help feeling very doubtful whether anything of the kind existed.

But as soon as he had secured the door, he hastened to Maud, and, placing his arm around her waist, he said:

"I think we may congratulate ourselves upon being fortunate so far, dearest. Cheer up! I begin to think that all will yet be well."

"Do you?"

"I do indeed! I look upon our position as being a doubly-safe one. That door would withstand a good attack. Look how strong it is, and then you must recollect that we have left no clue behind us as to the way we have come, and it is too much to suppose that those thick-headed police officers, who allowed me to get the better of them so easily, would find out the secret door, and——"

"Hush!" said Maud, her very lips turning white. "Hush! What is that? They have found the secret door! They are descending the steps! They come—they come!"

Thus were Dick's felicitations upon his escape interrupted.

He pressed his arm more firmly round Maud's waist, who leant against him half frightened to death, for she too had begun to think that all was well.

But there could be no doubt whatever about the nature of the sounds, and what produced them.

The police officers were tumultuously descending the steps.

Dick held his pistol negligently in his right hand.

He listened to the rapid approach of his foes with some anxiety depicted upon his countenance, though he had faith in the power of the door to resist any attack that might be made upon it.

His anxiety chiefly arose from the fact that he could feel that the end of his strength was reached.

He was but feeble at the best, and by no means equal to the exertion he had gone through, and now he felt a dreadful sensation of weakness seize upon him.

He strove to combat it as well as he could.

From the appearance of the vault, too, and the close, peculiar smell of the atmosphere within it, he began to fear that it was a vault and nothing more, and that there was no outlet from it.

If this should prove to be the case, his position was most desperate.

Even if the door withstood all the attacks that were made upon it, and proved impregnable, how then?

He would be as badly off as before.

The police officers could have no doubt about where he was, since the steps led to nowhere else save to the door of the vault.

They would have to surrender to their foes at the last, or else submit to the even worse alternative of remaining where they were, and perishing by a lingering death—starvation!

And so, in a dreadful state of weakness, with all these thoughts pressing at once upon his brain, Dick Turpin stood upon the stone steps just within the door of the vault, listening despairingly to the sounds which indicated the rapid approach of his foes.

One word now as to Mr. Wriggles.

When about two out of the three minutes had expired, the chief police officer felt some one touch him on the arm, and a voice say:

"Mr. W.—Mr. W.!"

"What is it, Lickfold?" he asked, as he turned round and saw who it was that had addressed him.

"You'll excuse me, Mr. Wriggles, I hope, but I feel——"

"Speak out."

"The conviction is stealing over me that this here blessed move about giving hisself up is a do—a swindle—a regular sell! He don't mean nothing of the sort!"

"I feel so, too!"

"Do you? Then depend upon it we are right!"

"I'll call him!"

"Do."

Mr. Wriggles did.

But no answer was returned, for just then Dick was rushing down the stone steps for his life.

"Didn't I say so, Mr. W.!" said Jim Lickfold. "We are done again! Done as brown as hammers! He's sold us! It's no go!"

"Down with the door!" yelled Wriggles, like a maniac.

"Down with it! Down——"

He suited the action to the word.

As he spoke, he gave a tremendous rush forward.

His men seconded him.

The crash with which they all came against the door was tremendous.

It was before almost trembling in its frame, and it was unable to withstand such a vigorous assault as that.

Down it went, and the officers too.

But with a celerity that was almost laughable, they one and all scrambled to their feet.

That must have been a wonderful lantern, for Mr. Wriggles still held it in his hand, and the light streamed forth through the lens as brightly as ever.

He waved it up and down.

Then uttering a loud cry, he sprang forward, calling out to his men to follow him.

In another instant they reached the armoury.

Mr. Wriggles waved the lantern again.

"Quick my lads, quick, quick! We shall have him now after all. This way, this way, I will——!"

Mr. Wriggles ceased abruptly.

In rushing along the armoury he came suddenly upon the two dead bodies which lay there in so singular a manner.

He stumbled, and such was his blind haste and confusion, that he could not recover himself, but went sprawling over the obstruction.

His men were too close behind to stop when they saw their leader fall, and the consequence was, they all fell headlong over him.

It was quite a minute before they could extricate themselves and get upon their feet again.

When the chief officer rose he was mad with rage, and with his drawn sword in his hand he rushed at his followers.

"Gently, gently, Mr. W.!" cried Jim Lickfold at the top of his voice. "Gently, gently! It was your fault! What did you fall over?"

These words changed the current of Mr. Wriggles's thoughts, and he began to search upon the floor, by the aid of his lantern.

He was not long in discovering the two bodies, or rather the remains of them, for they had almost crumbled away.

Still, the sight was so disgusting and horrible a one that they turned away loathingly after bestowing one hasty glance upon it.

"Come along, come along!" roared Wriggles, "Don't forget what you have to do! This way, I say!"

Rapidly, and yet skilfully, the chief police officer waved his lantern so that the bright beam of light rested for a second or so upon every object.

They were, however, unable to see any mode of exit from the armoury.

A more rigid examination, however, disclosed the secret door which Maud had been so fortunate as to discover.

It will be remembered that Dick had pulled this door after him, but in his haste did not notice that it did not properly fasten.

The spring was rusty, and the door remained slightly ajar.

While in this condition, the officers could hardly fail to notice it.

The shout of triumph to which they all gave utterance may perhaps be imagined.

Convinced that they were beyond doubt upon the right track, and that there was a strong probability of their being able after all to effect their purpose, the whole party rushed down the steps in a manner which showed that they were perfectly reckless of personal consequences.

In a few moments they stood before the door at the bottom of the staircase.

CHAPTER DXI.

TOM KING WATCHES THE TWO MURDERERS DISPOSE OF THE DEAD BODY.

It now becomes our duty to return to Tom King, whom we last left peering through the window of the hut on the confines of the New Forest.

He saw that the hag carried something in her hand, but what it was he could not tell until she threw it on the table.

He then perceived that it was a jacket such as would be worn by a naval officer.

There was nothing peculiar or singular in this, to all appearance, but Tom was convinced there was by the old woman's demeanour.

She glanced around her quickly and inquisitively, and then, satisfied apparently that all was well, she commenced a rapid examination of the pockets of the coat.

The first article she produced was a leather bag of tolerable size.

The hag's eyes gleamed with additional lustre as they fell upon this object, and a horrible chuckling laugh came from her lips.

She held the bag in her two hands caressingly for a moment, and then she untied the string by which it was secured.

From the appearance of it, Tom could tell that this bag contained money, and therefore he was in no way surprised when he saw the old woman hold it up and pour out a large number of guineas upon the table.

With trembling fingers she proceeded to count them, and place them one by one in little piles.

Tom watched her for some time, but the old woman still continued her occupation, and the probability was that she would do so for some time.

Accordingly, Tom King felt that it would be useless for

him to remain there any longer, and he crept off round the cottage, in the hope of making some further discoveries.

He stopped himself suddenly, and crouched down upon the ground.

A door was opened, and it was a thousand wonders he was not discovered.

But he sank down just in time.

Through the doorway came the dusky figure of a man.

He paused a few paces from the threshold, and listened intently.

"All is silent enough to-night!" he said, in a harsh, grating voice.

He peered about him, and then went back to the doorway.

"Is all well?" said a suppressed voice from within.

"Yes, all's well!"

"Take hold, then!"

"Where's old Poll?"

"Never mind her!"

"She's counting the swag, I'd lay my life!"

"So would I—but take hold! Make haste! We must get back as soon as we can."

"Yes—yes, or else we shall miss some of the swag!"

"Shall I make her come with us?"

"No—no. She had better stop and mind the place."

"As you like. Have you got hold?"

"Yes. Are you ready?"

"Quite."

"Come on, then, and shut the door after you!"

Two men now emerged from the doorway, carrying between them some heavy object.

Tom King strained his eyes to the utmost in his anxiety not to lose sight of what was going on.

They were tolerably accustomed to the obscurity already, and he could see things which would have been invisible to persons coming out of the light.

The two men moved away rapidly.

The object they carried appeared to be enveloped in a sack.

Tom did not know how it was, but strangely enough the idea took possession of his mind and would not be removed that this object was nothing more nor less than a dead body.

There was nothing to lead him to this conclusion, and yet he was as sure he was right as he was of his existence at that moment.

It now became necessary that he should follow these men, and ascertain where they went and what they did.

To do this would require the exercise of no ordinary amount of caution, for the silence was profound, and the least noise came upon the ear with remarkable clearness.

The men, if their errand was what Tom believed it was, would be more than ordinarily careful, and the cracking of a twig would rouse their suspicions, and make them think that they were followed.

But Tom King believed that he was equal to the task which he had set himself.

No Indian could have crawled along the ground more stealthfully or quietly than he did.

His eyes he kept continually on the forms of the two men, and he managed to preserve just the same distance between them as there was at first.

In this manner he proceeded for a considerable distance across the heath.

The men were talking to each other, and a slight breeze carried the sound towards our friend, but he could not distinguish any of the words.

It was lucky the wind blew in the direction it did, because it would have the effect of carrying any slight sound which Tom might make away from, and not to, them.

At times it became difficult to keep the two men in sight, but Tom was careful.

The route which they took was a devious one, but Tom followed it faithfully, because he understood that by treading in their steps as closely as he could he should be able to keep upon level ground.

He found this to be the case because the men avoided every hollow—and there were many of them—which proved that they were familiar with the ground.

At last they came to a halt.

Tom approached as closely as he dared, and then remained perfectly still.

Although he tried his best, he could not make out what they were doing.

They were standing beneath the shadow cast by four tall trees, which stood like spectres on the plain.

They were doing something, but what was a mystery.

Tom tried to creep round in a circle, but while he was doing so he had the mortification of seeing the men returning towards the cottage

Now that they were no longer shrouded by the trees, Tom could see them plainly.

They were walking side by side, and not one before the other, as they had been.

They were talking in suppressed tones.

Tom remained motionless, and in a minute or so the two men were out of sight and hearing.

"They are off back to the hut, I'll be sworn!" muttered the highwayman, as he rose cautiously to his feet. "Well, I have no occasion to follow them. But what of the dead body? What have they done with it? I am quite sure now that it was a dead body, and nothing else! Their object, of course, was to dispose of it. But where have they put it so quickly? It is mysterious, but we must find it out!"

Tom stood still reflectively, and then he muttered, half aloud:

"It was under those four trees that they stood while they disposed of the body. What shall I do? Shall I try to penetrate the mystery at once? No! I have been absent from my comrades too long already. I will return to them with all speed. If I linger longer they will grow alarmed, and may probably set off in search of me. If they do that, we may wander over this heath for hours before we meet. I will go back to them, and tell them what I have seen. It will be time then to decide upon what shall be done."

Tom had to consider for some moments before he could make up his mind which direction he ought to take in order to reach the spot where he had left his two companions and the Count von Schoenen.

"That's the way!" he said at last, in confident tones, and having so spoken, he glided off rapidly into the darkness.

There did not now exist so much necessity for caution, and so he hastened on.

In a few moments he arrived at the spot where his friends were waiting.

Claude Duval heard some one approaching, and he cried:

"Who goes there?"

"It is I—Tom," was the reply.

The next moment he stood amongst them.

As may be supposed, he was questioned eagerly as to where he had been for such a long time, and what he had seen.

Tom peremptorily refused to answer any questions, and insisted on giving an account of all from first to last.

This was by far the best plan, and occupied much less time than any other method.

When he had finished, his companions were in possession of all the circumstances.

"Now!" he concluded, "I have a question to ask you. What is to be done?"

"It is as I feared," said the Count von Schoenen, in a tone of voice so sad that it made the highwaymen sad for sympathy. "My worst forebodings are realised! There is a murder-den upon this heath! By some means or other my brother has been decoyed into it, and has perished!"

"Do not arrive too hastily at that conclusion," said Tom King. "That there is a murder-den upon this heath I am pretty certain—indeed I have discovered it, but if there is it by no means follows that your brother should have perished there."

"I know and appreciate the motive which causes you to speak thus," replied the count, in the same sad voice. "I am much obliged to you."

"Do not, then, give way to despair until you are driven to do so! You cannot tell what may be the result of the researches we are about to make."

"I loved my brother!" said the count, with a more

than brotherly affection "To the natural tie he added the dearer and more precious one of friendship!"

"Come—come!" said Tom King, "do not give way to grief! Let us discuss our next proceedings."

"I will—I will!"

"What say you, then, comrades? What shall we do first?"

"If you appeal to me," said Claude Duval, "I should say, lead us to the spot where you say they left the object which you declare to be a body."

"And so say I," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"That is precisely what I should have proposed myself," said Tom King.

Then, turning to the count, he said:

"Does the plan meet with your approbation?"

"Entirely."

"Come, then, at once—follow me! You had better dismount and lead your horses by the bridle, for the way is very rugged."

"It will be best."

Tom King's two comrades and the count rapidly alighted from their horses.

"We shall have the moon in a little while," said Claude, pointing to the eastern horizon. "We shall as soon as ever the moon rises above that bank of dark clouds."

"Forward, then! Let us gain the shadow of the trees before that takes place, for fear her beams should reveal our forms to some of the inmates of the cottage."

This was a wise speech, and all thought so, as was evidenced by the manner in which they hastened forward.

Tom King had paid particular attention to the bearings of different objects in the landscape, and so he was able to lead the way with great confidence and precision to the four trees of which he had spoken.

The distance was not great.

As soon as they had fairly arrived, and tethered their horses to a tree, the moon rose above the clouds, and shed a clear, silvery light upon the scene.

Brighter and brighter grew the light as the queen of night surmounted the vapours above the clouds, and, in a little while, every bush, and shrub, and tree, and indentation of the soil for a great distance could be seen.

It was as though a curtain of darkness had been slowly raised.

The air was unusually clear and pure, and the heavens—except round the horizon—were free from clouds, so that the moon shone with her full radiance, revealing the blades of grass and every stone upon the ground.

This was an aid towards making their researches upon which the highwaymen had not counted.

Their task was now very much easier.

"Now," said Tom, "here are the trees, and I will show you as nearly as I can the spot upon which the men stood. Had the moon been shining as it is now I should have been able to see all they did. Let me see! Yes—this must be about the spot! Here they stood, and in, as I may say, the twinkling of an eye, the body was disposed of!"

CHAPTER DXII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HAS A NARROW ESCAPE FROM FALLING INTO THE "DEVIL'S MOUTH."

Upon hearing these words, Claude and Jack and the Count von Schoenen advanced to the spot upon which Tom King was standing.

"It was here, you say, the men stood?"

"As near as I can tell."

"Then let us set to work and make an examination. It is possible that we may find the body secreted among some of the bushes."

This was a very likely supposition indeed, and all drew their swords and thrust them into the bushes.

Suddenly, the Count von Schoenen uttered an exclamation.

At the same moment he stooped and picked some dark object off the ground.

The others pressed forward, eager to see what it was.

The count held it up in such a manner that the moon's rays fell full upon it.

They saw then that it was a cap.

It was trimmed with gold lace, and it was just such a cap as would be worn by some officer on board a man-of-war.

"Ha!" said Tom King, that looks like another link in the chain! It certainly confirms my suspicions! Do you remember I told you it was such a coat as would be worn by a naval officer that the old woman threw upon the table and took the gold from?"

"Yes—yes!"

"It was, then, a coat that would exactly correspond with that cap!"

"Let me look at it!" said Claude. "It may be that we may find some mark inside it that will point out the owner!"

The count surrendered the cap immediately.

"Why, it's wet!" ejaculated Claude, as soon as he touched it.

"Wet?"

"Yes, wet and sticky too!"

Claude held up his hand, and examined it by the aid of the bright light which the moon afforded.

His companions saw a change come rapidly over his face as he said in altered tones:

"It is blood!"

Upon hearing this announcement, the interest which from the first had been felt in this article was redoubled.

All pressed round to examine it.

Very soon they found that it was soaked inside with blood.

But they failed to perceive any mark which would serve as a clue to its identification.

"Your brother would not wear such a cap as this, I presume?" said Tom King, addressing the count.

"No—no!"

"I thought not!"

"That cap must belong to some other victim!"

Tom did not reply, but he felt that the count had spoken the truth.

"This is proof of the truth of your narrative!" said Claude.

"The best proof," returned Tom. "And now, count, point out to us, if you can, the exact spot where you found the cap, because that shows most unquestionably that we are on the right track."

The count moved a few steps towards the trees.

"It was here," he said.

Tom at once stooped down, and narrowly examined the grass.

"Here is blood!" he said, at length.

His companions looked at the place indicated, and saw on the ground a large spot of blood.

It had only recently fallen there, for its colour was bright scarlet, and it had not sunk into the soft turf.

"This will be a guide for us," said Tom. "Look about all of you for another spot!"

In obedience to this, all stooped down and commenced a search.

"Here's another," said Claude, almost immediately.

It was still nearer to the trees, and not far from where Tom had said he fancied the men stood.

Spots were now found with great rapidity.

They all led in one direction—namely, towards the trees.

Sixteen-String Jack was foremost, and a sharp cry escaped his lips, which caused the others to turn round.

The Count von Schoenen was nearest, and he grasped Jack tightly.

He was only just in time to save our friend from falling down into what looked almost like a pit.

Jack's foot had slipped, for he had approached the edge of the abyss in total ignorance of the peril of his position, and he would have inevitably lost his life but for the promptitude with which the count seized him.

Jack had fairly slipped over the verge, and the count's strength was insufficient to pull him up again.

But Claude Duval and Tom King quickly came to his assistance.

He trembled from head to foot.

He had given himself up for lost.

But he soon became conscious that he was saved, and recovered his composure.

"That was a narrow escape!" he said.

"Very narrow! How did it happen?"

"I can hardly tell you. I was standing there, and took a step forward, and found I had nothing to tread upon."

"It was a wonderful escape."

"Most wonderful! Had it not been for your presence of mind, sir," said Jack, addressing himself specially to the count, I should have been no more. My heartfelt thanks are your due."

"Do not mention it. I rejoice that I was able to save you."

"Let us examine this place," said Tom.

"Approach with care."

"Do not fear, we have had a caution."

"An awful one," said Jack; "I would choose any death rather than such a one as that."

With very great circumspection our friends approached the verge of the precipice.

They found it a most treacherous place.

Some peculiar-looking long grass grew all along the edge of the precipice, the length of which was seven or eight yards.

The grass would make one think that no such place as a deep abyss existed.

It was this fringe of long grass—if we may so designate it—which deceived Sixteen-String Jack.

By advancing their feet cautiously, our friends were able to approach the edge of the precipice as nearly as was prudent.

Standing there they looked about them.

They found the place to be in reality a fissure in the earth of the depth of which they could form no accurate idea, but something seemed to tell them that it was very great.

In shape it was irregular.

As we have already stated, its length was seven or eight yards.

The opposite side at the widest part, and that was the centre, was about four yards distant.

From this width it roughly tapered off both ways until the two sides united at a sharp angle.

This description may, perhaps, convey a general idea of the place.

The four trees grew along one side of the precipice, and at a very short distance from it.

Some moments elapsed before a word was spoken.

Tom King was the first to break the silence.

"All is clear now," he said, "quite clear."

"Yes," added Claude, "we need no longer feel puzzled to know how the two murderers disposed of the body of their victim. They must have cast it down there."

"Most certainly."

"And there I was very near going myself," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"How deep is it?" asked Claude.

"I will get a stone," said Jack, immediately searching for one

Tom King remained standing in a thoughtful attitude, apparently paying but little attention to what was going on.

Sixteen-String Jack had very little trouble in finding a stone.

He picked up a round pebble about the size of his own head, and the weight of which was considerable.

With this raised above his head, in both hands, he approached the brink of the precipice, and when sufficiently near he threw it in.

All stood perfectly still.

The stone rebounded with rapid strokes from side to side of the rocky chasm.

But the sound of the blows grew fainter and fainter, and at the same time more and more rapid.

Our friends listened with the utmost intentness for the sound which would indicate that the stone had reached the bottom.

But they listened in vain.

The sound of the rebounding gradually died away.

"This is strange!" said Jack, after a long pause.

"Very!" said the count.

"The depth must be immense," added Claude. "That stone would fall with inconceivable velocity, and for what a length of time we could hear it!"

"And then we did not hear it strike the bottom."

"No."

"How strange!"

"Strange indeed! Let us try another stone."

"Oh yes, by all means! See—yonder is a large piece of rock. By our united exertions we may roll it over. Come!"

"With all my heart!"

"Come, Tom!" they said.

Tom King roused himself from his abstraction.

"What do you want?"

"To help us roll this stone."

"It is no good!"

"What is no good?"

"You hope to hear it strike the bottom of that abyss?"

"Just so!"

"But you will not."

"How is that?"

"You will not, if what I have learnt is true."

"Explain yourself!"

"I will willingly, to the best of my ability."

All three prepared to listen intently.

"As I have already told you," continued Tom, "I am to a certain extent, familiar with this locality, but my familiarity does not extend to the knowing all places."

"Proceed!"

"What I have just seen—I mean that place yonder—calls to mind something which I once heard, a very long time ago, but which until the present moment had quite slipped off my memory."

"What reminded you of it?"

"The look of that place."

"I guessed as much. What were you told?"

"You shall know. It was not very far from here, at a small roadside public-house, that I heard some people talking together. One was the landlord—an old inhabitant of the locality, and he gave a description of a place which went by the very singular name of the Devil's Mouth."

"The Devil's Mouth?"

"Yes! You are surprised, doubtless, that any place should have so singular a name! I can assure you I was; but let me hasten to give you an account of what the landlord said.

"He told them, on the borders of the forest, and situated in the barren ground around it, was a fissure in the earth, the shape of which, however, bore a rude resemblance to a large mouth!"

As soon as Tom spoke these words, his three listeners approached the precipice.

They were then struck with the remarkable resemblance which it bore to a human mouth when about half open.

A very little imagination would make the likeness perfect.

All wondered that they had not noticed the shape before.

Now that it was mentioned, their fancy made them think it was even more like than it actually was.

"It was, I suppose," continued Tom King, "from the size of the place and its horrible appearance that it received the name of the Devil's Mouth."

"Most likely. The name to me seems a well-chosen one."

"And to me. This place quite corresponds with the description which the landlord gave of it. I have never seen it before, but its shape, its situation, and another circumstance which I will immediately communicate to you, made me think it was the Devil's Mouth."

CHAPTER DXIII.

TOM KING COMMUNICATES TO HIS COMRADES SOME PARTICULARS CONCERNING THE "DEVIL'S MOUTH."

THE last words which Tom King spoke at once made his listeners aware that something of still greater interest than what they had heard remained to be told, and they waited impatiently for him to speak.

He did not keep them long in suspense.

"The most singular thing that the landlord mentioned in connection with the Devil's Mouth was that though hundreds of attempts had been made to find the bottom of it, not one had succeeded!"

All three started.

"I was thinking of all this," continued Tom, "and trying to recall these forgotten particulars to my memory, when I saw you throw the stone. As I heard it rebound from side to side, and listened to its endless reverberations, I thought to myself, 'Now I shall know for certain

whether this is the Devil's Mouth or not;' though, if the truth must be told, I had very little if any doubt.

"You know the result. You heard the stone fly from side to side, but you did not hear it strike near the bottom!"

"We did not!"

"Nor did I; and this told me I was right in my supposition, and confirmed what the landlord had said as well!"

"But this is very extraordinary!"

"I admit that, but it seems true!"

"It is!"

"But, my friends, can you think for a moment what facilities for concealing a dead body this awful place would present? Once cast into its depths, it would never be seen again!"

His hearers could not repress a shudder.

"I feel convinced this is it; but there would be no harm in trying the effect of that huge block of stone," said Tom.

"No harm at all," said Sixteen-String Jack. "I was about to propose the same thing myself, only you took the words out of my mouth."

"Let us bend our backs to the task."

Willingly enough all went towards the stone.

It was a huge fragment of rock, and must have weighed several hundredweight at least.

They could never hope to lift such a mass, but by their united exertions they might be successful in pushing it along.

At any rate, they resolved to make the attempt.

They put their shoulders to the block, and all pushed together.

It moved slowly.

Repeating their efforts, they at last, after an incredible amount of labour, succeeded in rolling it to the edge of the precipice.

"If anything will decide the question," said Tom King, "I should think this stone will!"

"Decidedly! If we cannot hear such a huge mass as this strike the bottom, I think we may safely conclude it is bottomless."

"Let us try."

One more push sent the stone over.

It balanced on the brink for a moment, and then it slipped down.

Our friends flung themselves down at full length upon the ground, and hung their heads over the precipice

The fragment of rock of course disappeared instantly.

But they could hear a strange hissing, rushing, singing noise caused by the rapid displacement of the air by the huge stone as it descended.

This sound, however, quickly grew fainter and fainter.

From some cause or other this huge stone did not bound from side to side as the smaller one did.

Perhaps it was in consequence of its weight and the tremendous swiftness with which it descended.

The noise which it made in falling through the air of course became very soon inaudible to our friends.

Nevertheless, with their heads over the abyss, they continued to listen.

All was silent as the very grave itself.

There was no sound of a stone striking upon the bottom, nor of the splash which its fall into the water would occasion.

They waited full five minutes before they would give up the hope of hearing the stone strike.

But, at the expiration of that time, Tom King set the example of rising to his feet.

The others quickly followed.

Somehow, Tom appeared to take the lead in the affair, and now they all remained silent, waiting for him to speak.

"You see, all is confirmed!" he said—"that mysterious chasm cannot be otherwise than fathomless! If it was, we should have heard that huge stone strike! This is the place the landlord described—there can be no doubt of that; this is the place into which the body of the young naval officer has been thrown—there can be no doubt about that, too!"

"And my brother!" said the Count von Schoenen, mournfully.

"No—no!" cried Tom King, quickly—"I did not say that—indeed I did not say that!"

"You did not say so, it is true!"

"Nor did I think so! We may have discovered a place upon this lonely heath into which travellers are decoyed and murdered—we may have seen the miscreants by whom such horrible murders were perpetrated—and, above all, we may have seen the place into which the dead bodies are flung; but it does not follow that your brother has been a victim!"

"No—no! Certainly not!" said Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, who spoke thus against their convictions, but with the praiseworthy motive of sustaining the hopes of the count as much as they could.

"But the inference is very strong!" said the count, with a sad smile.

"Still, we have no proof!"

"Not yet!"

"No, not yet, and we may not have! However, that is the point which requires to be cleared up! My companions and myself have promised you our aid in your attempt to discover your lost brother! We will help you all we can!"

"Gentlemen," said the count, in a broken voice, "I shall never be able to repay you for this service!"

"No—no! Say no more about that! If we can serve you, and, at the same time, root out the nest of villains who appear to have taken up their quarters here, we shall be quite content!"

Claude and Jack warmly seconded what Tom said.

The count was deeply touched by their behaviour.

Tom spoke.

"Now that we have proceeded so far, and made these discoveries, the next thing necessary will be to decide upon our future proceedings. The one thing we have to determine is this: Is your brother's sudden and mysterious disappearance in any way connected with the discoveries we have made to-night?"

"Precisely!" said Claude and Jack.

"I fear so," said the count.

"But you require to be satisfied upon the point?"

"I do; and yet I fear to be, lest all hope should be for ever destroyed."

"But," said Tom King, gently, "look on the other and equally probable view of the case. Suppose we should find that your brother's disappearance is not in any way connected with these murderous transactions?"

"How can it be decided?"

"I cannot tell you straight off; but I have no doubt if we gave the subject our attention we should quickly think of something."

"You are right—quite right!" said the count. "You have to show me perpetually what I have to do for the best. What a fortunate chance it was for me that I met you!"

The highwaymen took no notice of the last speech of the Count von Schoenen.

It would have been very difficult for them to have made a reply to it.

A pause followed, and the silence soon became awkward for all parties.

Neither of the highwaymen liked to break it, and they felt greatly relieved when the count spoke.

"I am already greatly beholden to you," he said, "and you will greatly increase the amount of my obligation if you will only tell me of some means by which I can ascertain for certain whether my brother has met with his death at the hands of these wretches!"

"We will try our best," said Tom King. "It is a very difficult affair, as you must know full well, but it is a point which cannot be left. It must be cleared up."

"It must."

"We cannot, of course, go straight up to the cottage and simply put the question to them. Some other means than that must be thought of."

A silence followed these words, during which each one was busily occupied in devising some plan by which they could gain the information they so much needed.

But they were baffled.

"It appears to me," said the Count von Schoenen, "that there is one, and only one means by which I can learn my brother's fate."

"And what is that?"

"A simple enough plan."

"Let us hear it."

"Willingly, for I should be glad of your opinion as to

its practicability. It is that I should go to the cottage as though an ordinary wayfarer. I might get up some plausible tale about being lost, and having wandered about for hours, and so on."

"But the danger?"

"It would not be great."

"I do not agree with you there."

"Why not?"

"I should be on my guard."

"But what precautions will avail against treachery? And then, what benefit would arise from this rash act? For so I cannot help considering it."

"I should be sure to learn something, and then, as for the danger, I do not think that much, because I have, and I hope rightly, counted upon your assistance."

"You may command us to the death."

"I believed so, and that is why I spoke as I did. Well, then, will you accompany me to the cottage? I can enter alone, and you can keep watch outside. You would then be at hand, and in readiness to render me assistance should I require it."

"Candidly speaking," replied Tom, "I cannot help thinking that the plan you have proposed is about the only one that could be adopted with any chance of success."

"Do you indeed think so?" interrupted the count.

"Yes, I do. But still there is great risk. You might purchase your information with your life, and that would be paying too dear a price for it."

"But I should be careful."

"So you might, and yet fail for all that. Now I have an amendment to propose if you will only listen to it."

"I listen with pleasure to all that you say."

"Well, then, it is this—that I should go to the cottage instead of yourself, and that you should keep watch outside instead of me."

"Never!"

"Never, do you say?"

"I do say never—never a thousand times!"

"But why?"

"I could never consent to such a thing! Why should you—a perfect stranger, run this risk, while I must surely be the proper person?"

"Nay, I can give you a good reason why I am a better person than yourself."

"I doubt it."

"I will tell you, then. I am used to such adventures as these, and I have been accustomed to deal with such characters as inhabit yonder cottage. I should—pardon my vanity—but I flatter myself that I should succeed where you would fail."

"I cannot think so, nor can I consent that you should run this risk. I will go."

"Nay, I will."

"You must give way to me in this."

"It will be best if I do not."

"I tell you I don't think so."

"Why?"

"I can furnish you with a good and sufficient reason. You knew nothing of my brother. You would pass over little things which I should notice, and which would prove, to some extent, that our worst fears are well founded. Can you deny the truth of what I have just said?"

"No. Though I pronounce the word reluctantly."

"I can tell you do. But you know nothing about my brother, except from the meagre account which I have given you of him, while I—I know him as well as I know myself, and the tiniest shred of clothing or the most insignificant trinket worn by him would be recognised by me the moment I cast my eyes upon it. This will, I hope, convince you that it will be best for me to carry out this plan."

CHAPTER DXIV.

THE COUNT VON SCHOENEN ENTERS THE MURDER-DEN ON THE HEATH, IN ORDER TO SET AT REST THE MYSTERY OF HIS BROTHER'S DISAPPEARANCE.

TOM KING did not urge his point any further, for he felt that it would not be well for him to dictate too much to the Count von Schoenen.

Nor could he help admitting to himself that it was far more reasonable for the count to go to the cottage than himself.

Claude and Jack were of the same opinion.

Yet, in spite of all, Tom was reluctant to give up the idea, for the adventure was one which he would have felt a great deal of pleasure in carrying out.

But it was not to be.

"You have convinced me," he said, with a smile, "but you may enter in perfect safety, for we will keep such a vigilant look-out that we shall be upon the rascals before they can harm you."

"That is, if they make the attempt."

"Which they are almost sure to do. Above all things, be on your guard yourself, and do not suffer yourself to be taken by surprise."

"I think you can trust me."

"We will do our best."

"I know you will."

"Come then, if we are to make this trial to-night—and I should not like to put it off."

"No, nor I."

"Then we must set to work at once, or else we shall have the night gone before we begin."

"We shall indeed, for it is already far advanced."

"Forward, then! Yonder is the cottage."

"That small, twinkling light?"

"Yes, that is the reflection of the fire shining through the window."

"Shall we mount?"

"No; I think we had better proceed on foot, leading our horses by the bridle."

This was the mode of progression that was decided and acted upon.

When within a hundred yards of the cottage, the little party paused.

Tom, Claude, and Jack tethered their horses to a tree.

"Now," said Tom, "I and my companions will creep forward and post ourselves outside the window through which the light is shining. When we have taken up this position you can advance—mounted, if you like—and request admission."

"Which will be given me!"

"Oh, no doubt! Enter boldly, and leave the rest to us. We will undertake to keep you safe—that is, if you are only moderately careful!"

"You need have no apprehension upon that point. But come; are you ready?"

"Quite."

"Forward, then."

As they had arranged, the three highwaymen crept stealthfully towards the cottage, taking a circuitous route to reach it.

At last they stood close to the window through which Tom had looked some time previously.

They believed they had not raised the least alarm.

The light which shone through the window was not so brilliant as it had been, for the fire had gone down.

The highwaymen crouched down and peeped through the window with the greatest curiosity and interest.

As for Tom, he was anxious to know what changes had taken place since he had his last peep, and his comrades were stimulated by the account which they had received.

Upon looking through, they saw the old woman Tom King had described.

She was crouching down by the fire.

Seated on a couple of stools were two men.

Doubtless these were the men Tom had seen carrying the dead body to the Devil's Mouth.

A sulky, evil look was on the old woman's face, and the two men were quarrelling with each other.

They were addressing some opprobrious epithets to the old woman, who put up with all with singular equanimity.

She neither moved nor spoke.

What the subject of dispute was, our friends could not make out, though Tom more than fancied it was caused by the purse of gold.

Doubtless they would have gained some further particulars, but just at this moment Count von Schoenen rode up to the door of the hut.

He approached at a walking pace, and the sound of his horse's hoofs quickly reached the ears of the inmates of the cottage.

No sooner did they catch the sound than their demeanour underwent a remarkable alteration.

Their squabble—whatever it might have been about—was set aside and forgotten.

They assumed listening attitudes and exchanged glances with each other.

Their lips moved, but our friends could not catch what they said.

The next moment a heavy, banging noise made itself heard.

It was the Count von Schoenen knocking at the door with the bone handle of his riding-whip.

The two men opened a narrow door, which appeared to lead into a kind of cupboard, and closing the door, were immediately hidden from view.

The old woman bolted this door on the outside, so that, to all appearance, the men were prisoners.

The sharp knocking continued, and the old hag having smoothed herself down a little, went to the door and opened it.

By slightly changing their position, the highwaymen were able to hear what was said.

"I am sorry to trouble you," said the Count von Schoenen, in his deep, rich voice, which seemed to borrow an additional charm from its strong foreign accent, "but I am a traveller, and have wandered out of my way. I have lost myself for some hours, and had almost given up the hope of finding a place of shelter for the night, when I caught sight of the light which streams from the window!"

"Ah, sir!" said the old woman, in a whistling voice, "this is a strange part! I don't often see travellers! I am a poor, lone woman, sir, that lives in this cottage all by herself! I don't have anyone come to visit me now, not hardly from one year's end to another!"

"Then you must be very lonely!"

"I am—I am!"

"But tell me—can you find me shelter for the night?"

"I am a poor, lone woman, sir, and there's not a house or a living creature besides ourselves within miles of this place!"

"Well, can you find me shelter?"

"Yes, sir, I will trust you! I don't think you are one that would harm a poor, lone woman!"

"I am not!"

"I will take you at your word, sir! You can enter! You are welcome to this poor place—very welcome! I wish it was better, for I don't think you are one that would harm a poor, lone woman!"

"Many thanks!" said the count. "I will avail myself of your hospitality. If your cottage be ever so poor, it is better than the open air."

"As you say, sir, it is better than the open air."

"And my horse," said the count—"what shall I do with him for the night?"

"Ah, sir, I can't tell you! I am a poor lone woman, and it isn't such as me as would have a stable."

"Then you cannot find my horse any accommodation?"

"No, sir, without it will do to let him stop in the garden all night."

"The garden?"

"Yes, but he can't injure it, sir. Nothing grows in it but grass, and the wall will keep him from straying away."

"Well, it seems, as I must put up with such accommodation as I can get, my horse must do the same. Ah well—he might fare worse! You shall be paid for your trouble, my good woman!"

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

The count dismounted from his horse, and having loosened the girths and removed the bit from his mouth, he left him to follow his own devices in the garden.

When he had done this he followed the old woman into the house, and the door was closed and locked.

Our friends could hear no more.

But they had listened to the foregoing conversation with mingled feelings.

As for Tom King, he felt divided between hatred for the old woman's treachery and admiration for her capital acting.

Tom King had seen much, and had met with many a strange adventure, gaining thereby a great deal of experience.

He was clever in judging of people, and finding out whether they were false or not.

But he could not help admitting that had he been travelling alone, and had lost his way, as the Count von Schoenen pretended to have done, he should have been completely deceived by the old woman.

She played her part excellently.

There was no violent desire exhibited to get the traveller beneath her roof; on the contrary, she had hesitated about receiving him.

Such behaviour was, above all others, calculated to throw anyone off their guard.

No doubt the old hag had had plenty of practice in her detestable part.

After the door closed upon the count, Tom King experienced a strange sensation, as though all was not about to go on as they had hoped for and arranged.

Dismissing his fears as well as he could, he and his comrades made their way close to the window, and looked with more eagerness than ever through the tiny panes.

The old hag, looking as amiable as she possibly could, ushered the count into the room, and requested him to seat himself at the table.

He complied, but when he sat down, he took care that his face should be turned towards the window on the outside of which his friends stood.

It now became impossible to overhear the conversation, which chafed the highwaymen a great deal.

They could see their lips moving, but could not tell a word that was said.

From the old woman's actions, however, it would appear that she had wanted the count to partake of some refreshment, and that he had consented to do so.

She laid the cloth over the little table, and laid upon it a rude and not very tempting repast.

She also produced a bottle, which apparently contained spirits.

Our friends had not thought to caution the count against partaking of anything in the shape of food or drink during his stay at the cottage.

Tom King now became excessively anxious to convey some warning to him.

But how?

That was a mystery.

He could not for the life of him think how he could put him on his guard, without at the same time attracting the attention of the old woman.

Tom's uneasiness increased to a perfect fever when he saw the count make every preparation for commencing his meal.

He wondered himself how he could be so thoughtless.

He waved his hand twice or thrice, as a signal to the count to desist; and each time that he did so he ran a great risk of being seen by the old woman.

On one occasion the count saw him and dropped his knife and fork.

The old woman appeared to ask what was the matter.

The count said something and smiled, and then went on with his meal as before.

But in a little while he ceased.

The old woman then poured some liquid out of the bottle into the glass, and pressed the count to partake of it.

The highwaymen watched his actions in the most dreadful state of suspense.

It was a great relief to them when they saw the count shake his head repeatedly, and say something with a smile.

The old woman seemed urgent, but the count was firm, though no one would have thought he suspected anything sinister.

The highwaymen watched the hag's countenance narrowly, and saw that it was clouded with annoyance, though she tried hard to suppress any exhibition of such a feeling.

The count took a large meerschaum pipe from his pocket, which he filled with tobacco, lighted, and smoked leisurely.

But while thus engaged, he continued to converse calmly with the old hag.

At length he rose, and the old woman produced a candle.

Our friends now understood the count was about to be shown to his bedroom.

They were confirmed in this idea by seeing the pair leave the apartment in which they had hitherto sat.

It now became of the most vital consequence that our friends should ascertain without delay which was the chamber into which the Count von Schoenen was about to be conducted.



[DICK TURPIN AND MAUD DISCOVER THE SKELETON IN THE VAULT.]

CHAPTER DXV.

THE COUNT VON SCHOENEN DISCOVERS TRACES OF HIS BROTHER IN THE MURDER DEN.

"Be quick—oh, be quick!" said Tom King, in a hurried whisper, to his three companions the moment the Count von Schoenen and the old woman had left the room. "This is a dangerous place, and we must not, if we can possibly avoid doing so, allow the count to be a moment out of our sight."

"True—true!"

"Follow me, then. We shall easily be able to ascertain into which chamber he has been led, because the candle carried by the old woman will shine through the window panes."

With these words our three friends glided round the garden—if it deserved the name—which surrounded the hut.

But when they had made a complete tour of it they had not seen the least sign of what they looked for

This was strange, and alarmed them greatly.

At Tom King's suggestion they separated from each other, and took up their positions in such a manner that between them they commanded the whole exterior of the hut.

Scarcely had this been done when Claude Duval gave utterance to a low chirping whistle, which was the signal agreed upon to be given by the one who first caught sight of the light.

The sound was so faint that it could not possibly have attracted the attention of anyone save those who were listening for it, and it could have been easily mistaken for the cry of some nocturnal forest bird.

Tom and Jack joined their comrade instantly.

Claude raised his arm and pointed to a window in the upper part of the hut, through the diamond-shaped panes of which there came a feeble light.

As they gazed upon it, it grew brighter, or seemed to do so—probably it was burning better in consequence of its having been set down somewhere.

That this light came from the room into which the Count von Schoenen had been shown there could be little or no doubt.

But a serious difficulty presented itself.

It was necessary that our friends should take up a position that would enable them not only to see into the room, but also to enable them to spring into it, should events arise that would make it necessary for them to do so.

But as they looked up they could see no means of attaining their object.

The hut was not lofty, it is true, but still the windows on the upper floor were much too high for our friends to stand on the ground and be able to peep through them.

How they were to do this seemed a mystery.

There was no friendly tree growing near, among the branches of which they could have ensconced themselves and watched what was going on within.

Nor was there indeed any object near which promised to assist them.

Anxious and distressed they sought all around them for something that would be of service.

They were much agitated as minute after minute slipped away without their having been successful.

All three were well aware that only a short time is required for the perpetration of a deed of blood, and while they were thus occupied in searching round the garden the count might be in imminent and deadly peril, and at the same time be relying upon them for the succour they had promised.

This was so very probable and reasonable that they felt more agitated than ever, and especially so when they could find nothing in the garden that would enable them to reach the window.

They were already beginning to give way to despair, when Sixteen-String Jack, while pursuing his researches, discovered a ladder.

With the greatest haste they raised this implement to the necessary position and placed it against the window.

In doing this they were excessively careful not to make the least noise.

To our friends a long period of time appeared to have elapsed, but that was fancy only, and the result of their extreme anxiety.

In reality a very short time had elapsed.

As soon as the ladder was placed against the window, Tom King hastened to ascend it.

Claude Duval followed, and Sixteen-String Jack remained for the present at the foot, partly because it was feared that the ladder would not be strong enough to sustain their combined weight, and partly in order that he should give them the alarm in case anything took place.

Having mounted the ladder, Tom King peeped cautiously through the window.

He saw that the count was the sole occupant of the chamber, and that with the candle in his hand he was making a rigid examination of every corner of it.

Perceiving this, Tom tapped lightly with his finger-nails upon the window-pane.

The count heard the sound, and probably guessed what it meant, for he rose immediately from the half-stooping posture he had assumed, and came towards the window.

Tom made a sign to him to open it.

The count nodded, but went first across the room to the door.

This he opened, and listened attentively.

Then closing it again, he succeeded in securing it by ingeniously placing the hilt of his sword on the floor, and lodging the point under the panel in such a manner that the door could not be opened very easily.

Then returning to the window, he placed his finger on his lips, and proceeded to open it.

Tom King was well enough pleased to see these signs of caution exhibited by the count.

It made him think him all the more competent for the adventure he had undertaken.

At first Tom was fearful, but now he was assured that he was quite equal to the task.

The count opened the window noiselessly.

"Hush—hush!" he said, in a faint whisper

"What is it?" asked Tom, in a voice as low as his own

"Have you discovered anything?"

"No—no!" returned the count, hurriedly; "but I am almost afraid to make the least noise, lest suspicion should be aroused. I have found one portion of what the old woman said to be false."

"What is that?"

"She told me that she was the sole occupant of the cottage; but after she went down, I crept on tiptoe to the stairs-head, and there heard the murmur of voices in conversation."

"Yes," replied Tom, "there are two men in the cottage besides herself. In my own mind, I have no doubt they are the same who carried the dead body and hurled it into the Devil's Mouth."

"I heard them whispering."

"They are no doubt in consultation."

"How have you managed to reach this window?"

"More by good fortune than anything else. We happened to find a ladder lying down in the garden."

"And you are standing upon it?"

"Yes, and one of my comrades. The other is at the foot on guard."

"I see; and if it is necessary you will spring in to my assistance?"

"I have been thinking about that, and I think I can propose something better."

"I am delighted to hear it!"

"If we remain here, I fancy we shall not be of so much service to you as we ought to be."

"How do you mean?"

"If any danger assails you, we ought to be able to rush promptly to your assistance. A minute's delay may cost you your life. Now, it will not be the easiest thing in the world to leap through the window——"

"I see—I see!"

"Therefore I think it will be better for us all three to enter and conceal ourselves in the chamber—we shall then be in a position to assist you instantly."

"It will be best. Come in, but quietly and quickly!"

Tom soon got over the sill into the room, and Claude followed his example.

In a whisper they told Jack to ascend, and in a moment afterwards the three highwaymen were standing with the Count von Schoenen in the bedroom of the hut.

The window was closed and then our friends glanced eagerly around them in search of some place of concealment.

But this promised to be no easy matter, for there did not appear to be any available hiding-place.

It was Tom King who said, after a short pause:

"When the candle is extinguished this chamber will be in utter darkness, and it will then be perfectly easy for us to conceal ourselves in any corner."

"So it will—so it will!"

"And then," continued Tom King, "you need not fear any interruption from the wretches below for some time to come!"

"Why not?"

"I know these gentry well; they will wait until they think you are asleep, and then, with noiseless steps, they will creep in upon you unawares and deprive you of your life, while you are utterly unconscious that it is in danger."

The count shuddered.

"Such," he said, "has no doubt been the fate of many a poor belated traveller who has sought shelter beneath this roof!"

"You may rest assured of it, but you shall not form another victim, and it will go hard with us if we do not destroy this nest of villains."

"I for one will try my best."

"I know you will. But first of all, to return to what I was about to say, you need fear no interruption just at present. We must be careful to speak no more than we are compelled, and to make as little noise as possible, for fear that we should be overheard by the old woman, for instance, who might crawl silently upstairs to listen and judge whether you were asleep or not."

"We have arranged everything, I fancy," said the count, "and therefore there ceases to be a necessity for further speech."

"You are right!"

"Let me, then, resume the search which your appearance at the window interrupted."

Not another word was said.

The three highwaymen seated themselves upon the side of the bed, and watched with anxious interest the movements of the Count von Schoenen.

Taking the candle again in his hand, he peered into every nook and corner, searching closely everywhere.

It would have been an awful shock to him to find in that room any article which he could recognise as having once belonged to his lost brother.

Such a discovery would point with terrible conclusiveness to the fact that he had perished by the foul hands of a midnight assassin.

The count wished most fervently that he might fail in finding anything, and yet he felt, at the same time, that if he did not, he should not feel satisfied.

The silence in the room was now most profound—even the breathing of the various occupants of it could be heard, and as it seemed, with a distinctness that was absolutely painful.

Suddenly the count started, and the candle trembled and almost fell from his grasp.

He had been stooping down, but now he rose with great quickness, and sank back upon a chair.

His face was of ashy paleness, and his eyes rolled wildly in their sockets—indeed, his appearance at this instant was the very personification of the extremest horror.

He trembled like an aspen leaf.

The moment our friends saw these signs, they understood that the count had found something belonging to his brother.

That he would make some such discovery the highwaymen fully expected, although they had been careful to conceal their convictions from the count as well as they were able.

They were not, therefore, exactly taken by surprise, but yet they were startled.

They were curious, too, to know what it was that the count had found, and whether the article, whatever it was, would furnish conclusive evidence of the fact that his brother had been in that chamber.

Still it was necessary that they should preserve their caution.

With that readiness of thought and promptitude of action for which he was remarkable, Tom King rose to his feet, while at the same time he made a hasty and imperative gesture to his comrades to remain seated.

They obeyed without hesitation.

CHAPTER DXVI.

THE TWO MEN STEAL INTO THE CHAMBER TO MURDER THE COUNT VON SCHOENEN, AND MEET WITH A SURPRISE.

On tiptoe, Tom King crept across the room to where the count was seated.

He took the candle from his trembling hand, and as he did so, he placed his lips close to the count's ear, and whispered:

"Speak—speak, I pray you! Tell me what has caused all this emotion. How is it that you are so greatly agitated?"

The count did not appear to hear what was said, and it was not until Tom repeated his words, that he looked up.

When he did look up, Tom King was startled at the change which had taken place in his countenance.

Already, the count looked years older, so great were the ravages wrought by his grief.

His lips quivered, and his dark, bright eyes, became filled with tears.

A sob, which sounded more like a stifled groan, came from his lips, and then he murmured:

"Alas—alas! My brother—my poor lost brother!"

"What of him?"

"My worst forebodings are realised! He has perished!"

"Speak more fully," said Tom King, "and endeavour to compose yourself! What proof have you of what you say!"

"Indubitable proof! Look there—there!"

The count pointed to a corner of the room as he spoke.

Tom King, although much excited, calmed himself as well as he could, and crept noiselessly across the room towards the corner to which the count pointed.

Stooping down, almost the first thing which met his eye was something small against the wainscot, that glittered brightly as it caught and reflected the rays of the candle.

Tom picked this up.

A glance showed him it was a jewel of some kind; but without pausing to examine it in any way, he rose to his feet again, and replaced himself by the side of the Count von Schoenen.

The count had covered his face with his hands, and had bowed his head down towards his knees.

Holding the little jewel between his finger and thumb, Tom King took hold of the count's arm, and strove to remove his hand from his face.

"Look!" he said. "Look—look! Is this what you mean?"

The count looked up, but the moment his eyes fell upon the jewel, he uttered a groan, and averted them.

"Once more," said Tom, "let me endeavour to persuade you to be calm. Time must be of importance, and let us economise it as much as possible. Tell me clearly what you mean? Do you identify this jewel as having belonged to your lost brother?"

"I do—I do!"

"Are you sure you recognise it?"

"Quite."

"But how? Is it possible that this stone is of such a peculiar kind and tint—or even the ornament itself of so unusual a kind that it could not have belonged to anyone else?"

"I do recognise it."

"But, pardon me, I cannot help fancying that you are allowing your feelings to lead you astray. This ornament may have been worn and dropped by some one else than your brother."

The count shook his head with the same mournful air.

"I am getting calmer now," he said—"I am fast becoming more like myself. I will tell you how it is I recognise that ornament. It is because the setting is of a peculiar character."

Tom glanced at the little sparkling gem in his hand, and saw that the count spoke the truth.

"And you are sure your brother had this jewel?"

"Oh yes! His dress was a peculiar one, and it was ornamented in various parts by those little pendant jewels. It was in consequence of his having worn this dress that the landlord of the inn at which he stayed remembered him. He had on this dress when he was last seen."

"Then that points to the fact that he has been here."

"It does, most certainly. It would be easy for him to leave such a trace behind him. The ornament may have become loose and fallen off, or it may have been torn off in his death-struggle with the miscreants who inhabit this hut."

"Hush—hush!"

"I had forgotten my caution. It was unwise to speak so loud. It is quite clear, my friend—for such I feel privileged to call you—that my brother has been here, and that circumstance, coupled with his disappearance, points inevitably to the conclusion that he—he has been murdered!"

Tom King was silent.

He, too, was of the same opinion, and he felt that it would be unwise to endeavour to raise false hopes in the breast of the count.

After awhile, however, he addressed the count in the same low whisper as before.

"What shall we do next?" he said.

"I leave the direction of affairs in your hands, my friends. I feel that I cannot do better. It is to you that I am indebted for all that I know—for the discovery of this hut, in fact, and of my brother's terrible fate! I feel now that the worst is over. The blow has been struck. It has been a severe one, but I am recovering from it. I shall be quite ready, however, to do as you wish."

Tom said no more, but returned to his companions.

Before he could speak to them, there came a faint sound from without.

A rapid sign was exchanged, and then Tom King extinguished the candle.

The room was now involved in total darkness, for the light which came through the window from the night sky was so trifling as not to amount to any illumination at all.

They listened, but the faint sound was not repeated.

After the expiration of about a minute, however, a creaking noise reached their ears, as though some one was ascending or descending the stairs in such a manner as to make as little noise as possible.

Gradually this died away, and our friends came to the conclusion that it was some one descending.

They were now more than ever convinced of the necessity of silence, and so they all sat still without exchanging a word.

The three highwaymen were on the bed; the Count von Schoenen was still seated on the chair on to which he had sunk upon making the appalling discovery that his brother had been an inmate of that room.

In this way perhaps an hour passed, and then the same creaking noise which they had before heard came upon their ears.

Our friends slipped silently off the bed and crouched down on one side of it, so that the bed was between them and the door, which would prevent anyone from seeing them on a first entrance.

The footsteps on the stairs came closer and closer.

The highwaymen almost held their breaths, although what was occurring was no more than they had expected.

At last the footsteps paused just outside the door, and the next instant they could hear plainly enough that some one was endeavouring to gain an entrance.

The count had removed his sword after our friends had entered, and as there were no fastenings of any description on the inside of the door there was nothing to oppose their entrance.

Claude Duval at this moment thought of something, and pressing his hands upon each of his comrade's shoulders in rapid succession, he got on to the bed, rolled over, and slipped down on the other side of it.

He was now within a yard of the door, and he placed himself with his back against the wall in such a way, that when the door was opened, he would be concealed by it.

In performing this feat, he had made scarcely any noise—certainly not enough to rouse in the faintest degree the suspicion of those without.

Like his two comrades, Claude Duval held his drawn sword in his hand, and having taken up his present position, he waited with more impatience than ever for what was going to happen next.

He was not left long in suspense.

The door was slowly opened.

Then some one said in a whisper, which was plainly audible to Claude, standing as he did so close to the speaker:

"I told you it was all right! Come on—he's asleep! We shall have no trouble this time, I tell you. Come on!"

"You go first!"

"All right!"

"Go on, then!"

The one who had first spoken entered the room.

At this moment a ray of light from the moon shone into the chamber, and feebly irradiated it.

The moon was fast sinking to the west, and it was only when she was in this position that her rays entered.

This light, feeble as it was, enabled Claude to perceive the dim shadowy figure of a man enter the room.

Then his companion followed, and as it seemed to Claude somewhat reluctantly.

He carried in his hand something shining.

At first Claude could not tell what this was, but almost immediately afterwards he found it to be a dark lantern.

The slide was drawn over the lens, and the glittering he had noticed proceeded from the light within shining through the crevices of the lantern.

The pair stole towards the bed, and from their manner it was evident that they had no doubt the traveller was reposing himself upon it.

As soon as the bedside was reached the second man removed the slide from the lens, and a brilliant beam of light fell upon the bed.

In an instant they saw it was untenanted, and an ejaculation of fear came from their lips.

The one with the lantern dropped his hand down to his side, so greatly was he terrified, and the simple action caused the ray of light to fall upon Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack, who were standing at their full height on the other side of the bed.

Upon catching sight of the two well-armed figures, a yell of fear burst simultaneously from the lips of the murderers, and they turned to fly.

But when they faced round, they saw that the door was closed, and that Claude Duval had placed his back against it.

He held his drawn sword in readiness, either to attack the two miscreants, or defend himself.

But murderers are always cowards.

These men would have shrunk from a hand-to-hand conflict with anyone—they were only capable of stealing into a room and murdering unsuspecting people while they slept.

With one accord, they made a rush towards the window, doubtless with the intention of leaping through it.

But in this direction they were confronted by the Count von Schoenen, whose face was at once pale and menacing as he stood there, resolved to have vengeance upon the murderers of his much-loved brother.

"Villains!" he cried, as he rushed forward impetuously to attack them—"villains, your career of guilt has reached a termination! Your guilt is discovered."

The two men appeared to be quite overpowered, and staggered back several paces without attempting to defend themselves from the furious onslaught which the Count von Schoenen made upon them.

But finding that all retreat was cut off, that all their iniquity was discovered, and that they stood not the least chance of making their escape, they became inspired with a fierce but spurious kind of courage.

It was the courage which some animals will offer when forced at bay.

The one who carried the lantern hurled it at the count.

It struck him with full force in the face, and for a moment staggered him.

But the three highwaymen hastened to attack the wretches, and so prevented them from following up the advantage which they had gained over the Count von Schoenen.

The moon had now declined so far towards the horizon as to pour the whole of her light into that chamber, so that our friends were able to see their antagonists with tolerable distinctness.

The one who had first entered the room carried in his hand an implement which attracted a great deal of the highwaymen's attention.

He used it as a weapon, and laid about him with it in good earnest, but fortunately our friends were able to ward off the blows that were aimed at them.

CHAPTER DXVII.

THE INHABITANTS OF THE HUT ARE OVERTAKEN BY A RETRIBUTION AS TERRIBLE AS IT WAS MERITED.

As Tom King and his companions made out what this weapon was, their blood congealed in their veins.

It was a poleaxe, such as is used to slaughter cattle, only it was made entirely of iron.

The handle was not above twelve inches in length, and the head was wrought on one side into a hatchet-like shape, while on the other it was elongated into a spike about four inches in length.

The use which was made with this weapon was obvious.

It was with this axe that the sleeping travellers were murdered.

The upper part was exquisitely balanced on the handle, and one blow would cause the sharp spike to pierce deeply into the brain.

Death would be instantaneous.

The Count von Schoenen looked upon this singular and awful weapon with a kind of fascination.

He was thinking of it as the instrument which had drank his brother's blood.

With this poleaxe, then, one of the miscreants attacked our friends, and defended himself.

The blow which the count had received from the lantern being flung with full force into his face was a severe one, and for a moment or so it half stunned him.

It was while he was recovering that his eye fell upon the iron poleaxe, which seemed to receive a larger quantity of rays from the moon than any other object.

But as he gazed, he reflected that not only did he see the implement before him with which his brother had been murdered, but his brother's murderers as well, and a kind of frenzy seemed to seize upon him.

Stooping down, he picked up his sword, which had fallen from his grasp, and then commenced such an attack upon the wretches as could not be withstood.

With one terrific slash with his sword he clove open the skull of the man who wielded the polcaxe.

The wretch sank to the earth gasping for life, and then, after one convulsive shudder, lay still in death.

His companion, who had carried the lantern, fought with a long, dagger-like knife, which, in the hands of one so desperate as himself, was truly a most formidable weapon at close quarters.

Tom King narrowly escaped a wound from it.

Nothing saved him except Sixteen-String Jack's sudden interposition.

Drawing a pistol, Jack fired, and Tom's adversary fell to the ground.

Both the murderers now lay weltering in their blood—one was quite dead, and the life was quickly ebbing from the veins of the other.

Victory had been gained, and our friends had met with no further injury than the count had received from the blow with the lantern in his face.

This was trifling.

Altogether, the encounter had occupied only a few moments.

Tom King stooped down to the man Sixteen-String Jack had shot, and said to him:

"Are you much hurt?"

A storm of imprecations was the reply.

The question, however, was almost a needless one.

The bullet had passed through his chest just above the heart, and a wound in that region is nearly always fatal.

Even as he cursed, his utterance became impeded, until at length a sudden rush of blood into his mouth compelled him to be silent.

"You are badly hurt!" said Tom. "For my own part, I believe you are hurt to the death! Before you expire, then, answer me one question!"

"What is it?" gasped the man, feebly.

The count guessed what was coming, and he bent forward with an anxious mournful look upon his face.

In all probability he was to hear his worst fears confirmed.

"It will do you no harm to answer the question," said Tom. "Will you tell me whether a traveller stayed here some days ago—a foreigner who wore a dress of singular manufacture trimmed with these jewels?"

Tom held up the one the count had found.

The man turned a shade paler, and he shook visibly as he replied:

"Ye—yes—a traveller did stay"

"And where is he?"

The man's eyes gleamed as he turned towards Sixteen-String Jack.

"Was he a friend of yours?" he asked.

Jack replied in the affirmative.

"Ha, ha!" he said. "I am glad he was a friend of yours—glad—glad—ha, ha!"

"Why?"

"Do you want to know where you can find him?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Listen, then, and I will tell you. Look, and you will find him in the Devil's Mouth!"

A groan from the count followed these words.

While speaking, the man had raised himself up on one arm, but it became evident that he had taxed his powers to the utmost, for there came another rush of blood, and he fell back a corpse.

For a moment there was silence, and then Tom King said:

"Come, comrades, let us quit this murderous place—I'm sick of it! The very air seems tainted with blood. Come, count, follow us—you can do no good by staying here! We have set at rest the mystery of your brother's fate. It is a sad conclusion to which we are obliged to come, though it is no more than I feared and expected from the first. He has perished, and his body has been thrown into that place, which, so far as we know, is unfathomable."

"I will follow you," said the count, "for I feel calmer now."

"The reason is you know the worst, and we have had a full vengeance upon your brother's murderers. Now let us quit this place."

"With all my heart!"

The friends made a movement towards the door.

But before they could reach it, it was dashed violently open, and the old woman rushed in.

She was the embodiment of frantic fury.

A wild shriek thrilled from her lips, and she threw herself upon the two dead bodies.

Rapidly she examined them, and then, finding they were dead, she screamed aloud.

"Both dead!—both my poor boys!—both my lambs! Dead!—dead! But I will have vengeance upon you all yet! Both murdered! I am their mother, I tell you—their poor mother! How you all came here, and how this has happened I know not—it seems to me like a dream! But they are dead!—dead!"

Tom King advanced with the intention of saying something to this old hag, but he was not allowed the opportunity to speak.

As soon as she saw him coming nearer, she sprang to her feet.

"Off!—off!" she shrieked. "Off, I say! Would you murder me as well as them? Off!—off! You would,—I can see it in your eyes! But you shall not! I will be free!"

With these words the hag rushed to the window, flung it open, and leaped out before our friends could recover from the astonishment into which her sudden entrance had thrown them.

But as soon as she disappeared, Tom said:

"Quick, we must follow her! No doubt we shall be able to gain some important information from her!"

"Yes—yes!"

"The ladder is outside—that will be the readiest way to descend."

In less than a moment all four were in the garden.

Before them, in the distance, her form well revealed by the moonbeams, was the old woman.

She was running at a speed which, for one of her years, was neither more nor less than wonderful.

All four commenced an immediate pursuit.

The old woman flew off across the heath, preserving a tolerably straight direction, and yet avoiding a descent into any of the hollows which abounded there.

At first they did not notice that she was running full in the direction of that strange fissure in the earth which went by the equally strange name of the Devil's Mouth.

This was not surprising, for of course they were not familiar with the route.

It was not until they saw the tall trees that Tom King recollected where he was.

They were already under their branches when he made this discovery.

He stopped instantly, and called out to his companions to do the same.

They were unable to stop all at once.

The old woman still continued on her frantic course, nor did she stop, but disappeared with the most awful suddenness.

She had jumped into the Devil's Mouth.

The Count von Schoenen and Claude Duval only checked themselves on the verge of the abyss.

Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack slowly approached.

But after the old woman had disappeared there was not a sound.

All turned round and gazed into each other's faces inquiringly. They could almost have believed that the occurrences of the past two hours were nothing but a delusion of their senses.

"This is strangest of all," said Tom King, at length. "Who would have supposed that she was bent upon the committal of such an act?"

"No one, I should think," said Claude.

"What could be her motive?" asked Jack.

"It seems plain enough to me," replied Tom King. "She would no doubt expect that we should follow her,

and her intention was to cause us to fall into the abyss."

"But she has perished."

"Still she may not have intended to do so, but merely have lured us to her death, and there is no knowing she may even have contemplated casting away her own life, provided while so doing she could compass the destruction of all four of us."

"I fancy that is it," said Sixteen-String Jack, "for did you not see how eager the man I shot was to be revenged upon me? When he thought the count's brother was a friend of mine with what malicious pleasure he told me of the murder!"

"Yes—yes! I noticed it, and no doubt the same feeling was strong in the breast of the old woman."

"It has been a night of strange adventures," said the count, "but such a night as I hope never to pass again. I have gathered some satisfaction, but it is a melancholy one. I know my brother's fate."

"You do. It would, no doubt, be more in accordance with your feelings if you could obtain one glimpse of his remains, but they will never again see the light of day, so that thought must be banished."

"It must—it must! I ought not to forget, however, that this excursion has not been without beneficial results. We have destroyed a nest of villains. Henceforth this heath will cease to be a snare for the unwary traveller."

"It will, and it was in the hope that this desirable result might be brought about, that I and my comrades joined you."

"I owe you many thanks—indeed, I can never repay you for your trouble! I suppose, now that all is over, we must say farewell. For my own part I am sorry that we are about to part, but our ways lie in different directions. It is my duty to return to my native land, bearing with me the sorrowful tale of my brother's loss."

"We are sorry too, to part from you," said Tom King. "But, as you have just said, and truly, henceforth our ways lie in different directions."

All four now in silence and in sadness too, made their way towards the spot where the horses had been left.

Those belonging to the three highwaymen were found tethered to the tree as they had been left.

The one belonging to the Count von Schoenen was in the piece of enclosed land which surrounded the cottage, and he suffered himself to be captured without difficulty.

In a few minutes they were all mounted.

It then became necessary for them to part, for the highwaymen were anxious to resume their interrupted journey to the forest, for they had already lost more time than they could afford.

As for the count, he would make his way with what speed he could to the nearest port at which he could obtain a vessel bound for his native land, for after what had occurred he felt but little inclined to remain in England.

CHAPTER DXVIII.

TOM KING SEES A SINGULAR INDIVIDUAL WHILE KEEPING WATCH AND WARD IN THE FOREST.

THE acquaintance between the Count von Schoenen and the three highwaymen had been of short duration, but the circumstances were altogether so exceptional, that it seemed, now the moment for parting had arrived, that they were about to be sundered from an old and valued friend.

It must be remembered that the count had no idea of who our friends really were. Nothing had transpired which would tend to suggest even the suspicion that they were other than gentlemen travelling for their pleasure.

"I must say farewell to you," said the count, "though I would fain have had your company for some time longer yet! However, that cannot be, and it is idle of me to speak thus. We must part. Before we separate, however, it would give me much pleasure if you would allow me to present you with some token by which you can remember me and the strange adventures of this night!"

"We shall be glad to exchange such gifts."

"I, too, should like to receive something from each of you," said the count.

As he spoke, he took from his vest a magnificent gold watch of foreign manufacture.

It was large; but in those days the tiny baubles which are now the fashion were not thought of, and it was literally studded with precious stones.

Tom hesitated about receiving this gift, for, as he said, it was not in his power to offer anything of equal value in return.

But the count would not listen to any such demur, and insisted upon Tom receiving the watch.

He then drew from his finger a ring, in which was set the largest diamond our friends had ever seen.

This he forced Claude to accept.

He seemed puzzled to find something else, and, turning to Sixteen-String Jack, he said:

"Unfortunately, I do not possess anything else of equal value to the articles I have given to your companions. All I have, indeed, is this brace of pistols, and if you will accept them, I shall feel greatly pleased. They are of exquisite and rare workmanship. Their fellows do not exist. They were given to me by the maker of them. They are of great value, being heavily mounted and ornamented with gold. But their greatest value is this—they have never missed fire, and are so exquisitely made that you can aim at the smallest object and be certain of striking it. Take them. Believe me, I wish they were more valuable!"

Sixteen-String Jack was well enough pleased to receive these pistols—indeed, a more acceptable gift to him could not be found, and he thanked the count for them and expressed how pleased he was.

The highwaymen then contributed some article of their regard, having done which, they shook hands and parted.

The count and the highwaymen each took opposite directions, and in a short time were lost to each other's view, for the dawn was close at hand, and the moon had sunk below the horizon, so that although the new day was coming, the darkness was deeper, and the obscurity greater than it had been for several hours previous.

"There goes a brave, free-hearted, generous man!" said Tom King, as he rode off along with his companions. "I should have been glad could I have prolonged the acquaintanceship. I shall always look back upon this night with pleasure."

"And so shall I," replied Claude—"that is, as far as the count is himself concerned, for it has been a night of strange and terrible adventure. It is a night we shall not forget very easily."

"I shudder," said Sixteen-String Jack, "when I think what a narrow escape I had of falling down that frightful place."

"And well might you do so," said Tom King; "I wonder how many poor victims have been hurled into those unknown depths?"

"That we shall never know, because those who done were able to give such information ow past oing so."

Very true, but we will speculate upon this and the other circumstances when we have decided what we shall do."

It was Tom King who spoke.

"What do you propose?" asked his companions.

"Well, for my part, I am very much fatigued, but that is nothing to be wondered at, considering what I have gone through; and I have no doubt you feel much the same as I do."

"You are right!"

"Well, then, if you're agreeable, we will push on until we get fairly into the forest."

"And what then?"

"Why, we will seek out some leafy and sequestered nook, and obtain a few hours' rest. Our horses will be all right, for we will tether them at some spot where sweet grass grows plentifully."

"They will be glad of a rest, for we have travelled many miles."

"We have. Say, then, does this proposal meet with your approval?"

"Certainly."

This being assented to, the little party made their way towards the forest, which was at no great distance.

Ere they were fairly beneath the trees, however, day had fairly dawned, and that grey light which betokens the advent of the morning crept over the face of the landscape.

Tom King was tolerably well acquainted with the

New Forest, and so he undertook the task of leading his companions.

He plunged at once into the darkest and deepest recesses, nor did he pause until he was at some distance from the point at which he had entered.

"Now," he said, at length, "we are a mile at least, from the borders of the forest, and we are far away from any human being or dwelling-place."

"Then I should think we are safe?"

"I think so."

"Will you pause here?"

"If you like the place."

"It will suit well."

As soon as these words were spoken, Tom King slipped off his steed, and his comrades instantly followed his example.

They tethered their horses to a tree in such a manner, and in such a place, that they could feed freely from the sweet pasture around.

"All that is necessary now to complete our comfort," said Tom King, "is a substantial meal and something good to drink. Sleep would be all the sweeter after that, but I suppose it is no good to think about it."

"Not a bit!"

"Then I will banish the thought."

"I don't think," said Claude Duval, "that we all ought to go to sleep at once. We may be in no danger, it is true; but, for all that, it would be more prudent for one to keep watch."

"Decidedly," said Tom King; "I was about to propose it. We can relieve one another every two hours."

"Good! But who is to take the first turn?"

"I will, if you like," said Tom.

"Let it be settled fairly," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Which is it, Tom—head or tail?"

He spun a coin in the air as he spoke, and caught it in his hand.

"Head!" said Tom.

"It's a tail. Try with Claude."

Tom did so, and eventually the lot fell upon himself.

His two comrades threw themselves down upon the grass beneath the shadow of a tree, and composed themselves to sleep.

It was not long before they were in a sound slumber, for both were worn out by the exertions they had undergone.

For awhile, Tom King paced up and down like a sentinel.

But he very soon grew tired of the exercise, and seated himself on the ground, with his back to a tree.

The position which he took up enabled him to command a view, not only of the horses, but of his comrades too.

He could not help envying them their calm repose.

The morning advanced with rapid strides.

Already over the trees in an easterly direction could be seen the early beams of the sun, which gilded with a rare beauty the massive foliage.

The deep silence which always prevails in the depths of a forest is provocative of reflection, and almost unconsciously Tom found himself thinking over the manifold occurrences of the past night.

He could scarcely fail to be interested in the Count von Schoenen, for that individual possessed many rare and touching traits of character.

"A strange discovery awaits some one!" he said. "In the course of time that lonely hut upon the heath will be visited, and then what will be thought of those two dead bodies on the floor?"

He had got so far in his reflections, when a rustling among the underwood attracted his attention.

Thinking that it might perhaps be some predatory animal, Tom drew a pistol from his belt, and held the weapon in readiness for instant service.

The rustling continued.

Tom fixed his eyes upon the spot from which the sound proceeded.

Something was forcing a way among the shrubs and brake which formed the undergrowth of the forest.

By this time it was so light that Tom could see with perfect distinctness all around him.

A slight movement among the bushes now attracted his attention, and the next moment a man, or rather something which seemed to wear a human shape, made his appearance in the glade.

Tom gazed earnestly upon him.

To use Shakspere's words, the figure before him was

"So wither'd and so wild in his attire

that

It looked not like an inhabitant o' the earth,
And yet was on't."

Picture the figure of a man long past the prime of life, with his face and hands thickly barked with earth, and with a profusion of white matted hair, streaming in the wind and falling upon his shoulders.

He was thin even to emaciation.

His face and hands and bare chest seemed literally bloodless, and the skin to be a mere covering for integuments and bones.

His clothing had once been good, such as would be worn by one of the middle class who was pretty well to do, but now it was but the ruin of what it once had been.

His coat was literally torn to tatters, and so was the long-lapelled, embroidered waistcoat.

The trousers, too, were torn in many places, and the boots he wore could have been but a very ineffectual protection against either the roughness of the road or the inclemency of the weather, for they were full of holes, and appeared to be totally destitute of soles.

Not the least singular feature in the face of this strange creature were the eyes.

They were preternaturally large and staring, and gleamed with a wild lustre.

His head, too, seemed to have a tremulous paralytic motion.

Such then is as good a description as we can give of the singular being who came thus suddenly and strangely to Tom's view.

The old man caught sight of Tom and his companions instantly, and came to a sudden stop.

He looked at them for a moment with great intentness.

Then, uttering a wild, screeching laugh, and whirling his arms wildly, he spoke some incoherent words.

What they were, Tom could not make out.

While they were still coming from his lips, the old man suddenly turned round, and bounded off among the brushwood.

In a second he was lost to sight, and even the rustling of the branches which he disturbed in his progress ceased to be heard in a little while.

Tom King sat looking in the direction in which the old man had disappeared, while his brain was in a strange, dreamy state.

He passed his hand two or three times over his brow, reflectively.

"What does that mean?" he at length murmured. "I don't know how it is, but somehow that strange figure seems familiar to me; and yet—yet how can it be? for I have never seen him before—I am quite sure of that."

Tom was puzzled, nor could all his reflections help him out of this difficulty.

Something, either in the old man's voice, or in the expression of his countenance, or in his general personal appearance, seemed to remind him of some one he had once seen

But who?

That was a puzzler, and he racked his brain in vain to recollect.

His thoughts being thus busily occupied, however, had one good effect.

It prevented the time from hanging so heavily upon his hands, and he could scarcely believe himself when, upon consulting the watch which the count had given him, he found that the allotted space of two hours had expired.

He was glad to find, though, that the time had arrived for him to take some rest, for he was very tired.

CHAPTER DXIX.

THE HIGHWAYMEN ARE PUZZLED AND SURPRISED AT THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE OLD MAN.

ACCORDING to the arrangement which they had made, Tom King awoke Sixteen-String Jack, whose turn it now was to keep watch and ward for two hours.

He sprang up willingly, for he was much refreshed by the short nap he had taken.

Before he laid down upon the greensward, Tom communicated to his comrade the particulars of the strange meeting which had taken place.

Jack listened with great interest to what his comrade said, and promised to keep a sharp look-out.

"I scarcely think it," said Tom, as he laid himself down, "but it is just possible that his presence bodes no good to us! Our enemies are very artful, and we must keep constantly upon our guard!"

"We must; and yet, how can our foes suspect our presence in this locality?"

"Have you forgotten Richard Nares?"

"I had, in good truth, forgotten him, but now that you mention his name, you rouse all my suspicions. He evidently recognised us!"

"He called us by our names, and you may rely upon it that he will not rest until he has attempted to gratify his revenge!"

"I am very glad, Tom, that you suggested his name to me, for I have been so absorbed in recent events that I had forgotten him."

"Very likely we have nothing to fear, but still it will be best for us to keep ourselves prepared."

"Decidedly! Close your eyes, Tom, and endeavour to catch that repose of which you stand so much in need."

"I know I shall be safe."

"Yes; I shall keep good guard."

Tom closed his eyes, and in a little while was sound asleep, in spite of the many thoughts which thronged into his brain.

During the two hours which his watch occupied, Jack maintained a vigilant look-out.

But nothing happened to disturb him.

The old man did not make a reappearance.

As soon as ever the two hours had expired, Jack awoke Claude, who took his place.

Tom was still fast asleep, and so Sixteen-String Jack informed Claude of the adventures which Tom King had had, and cautioned him about keeping a sharp look-out.

"I told you we should have some bother with that Richard Nares! I said at the time that we had let him off a great deal too easily! He will be no end of torment to us!"

"We don't know that he has anything to do with the present affair, Claude."

"I know that, but it seems very much like it; and besides, there is another thing which very much vexes me!"

"What is that?"

"Why, to think I did not fire a bullet after him!"

"Perhaps it is all for the best."

With this Sixteen-String Jack laid himself down to rest.

Without being tedious, we may say that the day was spent in this manner, the highwaymen sleeping and watching by turns.

When evening came, they were all thoroughly refreshed, and felt that they should not need any sleep for a considerable time to come.

But now that this want was supplied, they immediately felt they desired something else.

This was a good meal.

But there seemed but little chance of their being able to obtain it.

As Tom King possessed the best knowledge of whereabouts they were, he was appealed to to know whether there was an inn anywhere near at hand.

"There is one," said Tom, "but at a distance from where we now are. It will, however, please you to learn that it is all in our way as we pass on to our destination."

"That is good news."

"Indeed, the inn is not far from the tree beneath which Dick Turpin and myself buried the treasure. I should think there would not be much risk in stopping there."

"None at all, I should think."

"Well, then, let us mount and pass on. It will take us some considerable time to reach the inn, I can tell you that; but after we have had something to eat, we shall be all the better able to do our work."

"Of course we shall."

The horses were now put in readiness for the journey.

Like their riders, they were all the better for the rest they had had.

Our friends mounted, and, under the direction of Tom King, continued their journey through the forest.

The day was fast drawing in, but as Tom struck into a kind of rude path, they were able to travel at a good speed.

Suddenly, however, Tom King uttered an exclamation which caused his companions to look up.

"There he is!" said Tom, pointing before him—"there is the old man of whom I spoke!"

"You described him well."

Standing beneath a wide-spreading tree was the same strange old man.

He evidently did not perceive the approach of our friends.

They came nearer.

Their curiosity was greatly excited respecting him.

They had thought over all that Tom had said concerning him, but though they were in possession of these particulars, yet they were unable to come to any reasonable conclusion.

Not the least remarkable circumstance was the fact of Tom King believing that he had seen him somewhere before, and that his features were familiar to him.

The old man was leaning with his back against the trunk of a large tree.

His head was bent down, and his eyes apparently fixed upon the ground at his feet.

One hand was placed, as though reflectively, upon his forehead.

The attitude was that of a man in deep and serious reflection.

His demeanour now contrasted strangely with his former wild and incoherent manner.

So deeply absorbed was he that he allowed our friends to come close up to him before he was aware of their presence.

They pulled up when within a yard or so of the tree against which he was leaning, and looked at him attentively.

He appeared to be aroused from his meditations by Sixteen-String Jack's horse, which was restlessly pawing the ground.

He glanced around him with astonishment upon finding three mounted men before him.

But his astonishment soon subsided.

In an instant he became a changed being.

Starting from his former position, he threw himself into one of those wild attitudes which he had shown when Tom saw him first.

His eyes assumed the same unnatural glare, and he flung his arms about with all the wild frenzy of one in a delirium

Foam, too, gathered about his lips.

In a hoarse, screaming, shaking voice he spoke.

But his utterance was so rapid and irregular that it bore but a faint resemblance to human speech at all.

Here and there our friends could catch a word, but it carried no sense with it.

The remainder of his speech was perfectly incomprehensible.

All the while he was speaking—if speaking it could be called—Tom King kept his eyes constantly fixed upon his face.

The tones of the old man's voice struck every now and then upon his ear with a familiar cadence.

All at once, without their having the least idea that he contemplated such a thing, the old man broke off in the middle of his ravings, and, turning round, dashed into the wood.

He was out of sight instantly, but he could be heard, for his loud, discordant and unnatural laughter resounded loudly through the forest.

But it rapidly faded away, and became fainter and fainter, until at last it was inaudible.

Neither of our friends offered to speak or to move their position until the laughter had wholly died from away.

Claude then turned towards Tom King and said:

"Well, my friend, what do you make of it now?"

Tom King passed his hand over his brow, and a perplexed expression settled itself upon his face.

"I don't know what to make of it," he said.

"Nor do I."

"I have seen him somewhere," said Tom, "I am certain of it, because I have not only a dim recollection of his features, but several tones in his voice sound familiar to me. But where I have seen the one and heard the other completely baffles me."

"But independently of all that," said Sixteen-String



[BLACK BESS OBEYS DICK TURPIN'S SIGNAL.]

Jack, "there is something very strange and mysterious about him."

"His manner is peculiar."

"Very."

"It is idle to speculate upon it any longer," said Tom King at length. "Come, my friends let us resume our journey."

"Can't you recollect?"

"No; I couldn't if my life depended upon my doing so, and yet I seem every moment to be upon the brink of recollection."

"Forward, then! Perhaps as you go on you may be able to call the circumstances to your mind."

The three highwaymen resumed their journey towards the inn, Tom King, as before, taking the lead.

But his two comrades could scarcely get a word out of him.

"They could tell by his manner that he was taxing his memory to the utmost, and trying his best to deepen the shadowy recollection in his mind.

Claude and Jack fell back a little way in the rear, and left him to continue his reflections undisturbed.

They chatted with each other upon various topics.

It was just as the last flushed hues of sunset in the western horizon were sobering down into the darkness of the night, that our friends arrived at the inn of which Tom had spoken.

Although at least half an hour had elapsed since the sun had set, they were able to see about them with ease and distinctness, for all objects within the range of their vision were illuminated by the soft evening twilight.

The inn, which bore in front the conspicuous sign of the Golden Lion, was a fine old picturesque edifice that would have formed a delightful study for a painter.

It was erected upon a road which intersected the forest, and was situated just where the rude footpath which our

friends had been following joined the aforesaid high-road.

Many years had elapsed since it was built, for it was a style of residence that was then completely obsolete.

It was only one storey in height, and in consequence occupied a vast extent of ground.

It was constructed of wood—no doubt that was the material that came readiest to the builder's hands—and the roof was covered with a thick thatch, which added not a little to the picturesque beauty of the place.

Of course the straw of which the thatch was composed had long since lost its original tint, but the dark brown colour which it now wore was even more pleasant to the eye.

In front of the inn there was a huge swinging sign fixed upon a tall, upright post, at the foot of which was a, trough for horses to drink out of, and a rack for containing hay.

The windows in this old-fashioned inn were of a very primitive fashion, but yet they were pleasing.

Through the windows in front of the inn there streamed a bright, ruddy light, which showed that a bonny fire was blazing within.

Take it for all in all, it was, perhaps, a place above all others calculated to induce the passing traveller to halt and enjoy the comfort within.

Tom had seen the inn before, but Claude and Jack had not.

They were, however, perfectly charmed with it.

"That's the place to stop at, Tom! Why, it's really delightful; and how out of the way it is too! Nothing could be better. I should think that here we could rest perfectly content."

"Very likely. But the inn is not so out of the way as you might perhaps imagine."

"It seems to us to be in the heart of the forest."

"I know it does, and so it really is, but you must not forget that it is situated upon one of the main roads through the forest, and one which is well travelled. Many people pass along it, and as there is no other house for at least ten miles in either direction, you may be sure that almost everybody stops upon reaching the Golden Lion, so that in consequence the landlord does a roaring trade."

CHAPTER DXX.

IN WHICH THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN MAKE THEMSELVES VERY COMFORTABLE AT THE GOLDEN LION.

THE many evidences of prosperity around fully bore out the truth of Tom's assertion. None but a house of good trade could have looked as that did.

Under the guidance of Tom King, they approached the porch, but before they could reach it the landlord made his appearance.

He touched his hat, and commenced bawling aloud to the ostler.

"Glad to see you, gentlemen," he said, as he assisted them to alight—"very glad to see you! You are welcome to the Golden Lion, which—though I say it, as ought not, still, as it is to be said and must be said, I may as well say it for myself as let anyone else say it for me—is the best inn you'll find in the whole forest. Going to stay, gentlemen? You can't do better. Best of all accommodation can be had here, not only for your horses, but for yourselves as well. This way, gentlemen—this way!"

The landlord was excessively loquacious, and our friends were not able to interpose a single word. But that did not matter. The landlord was content if he could only manage to have all the talk to himself.

Tom King and Claude Duval followed him into the interior of the inn, but Sixteen-String Jack hung back and entered into conversation with the ostler.

It seemed almost ridiculous to apply such a term to the shock-headed youth who came forward in response to the landlord's vociferations.

Sixteen-String Jack, however, very quickly arrested the whole of his attention by telling him how liberally he should behave if he (the ostler) only attended to his commands.

Uncultivated and half-savage as he was, this youth understood the value of money, and promised the most implicit obedience.

While carrying on this very interesting conversation, Sixteen-String Jack managed to follow the ostler round to the stables at the back, the precise position of which he took particular care to notice, according to the highwaymen's invariable custom.

When he had done this, and seen that all three of the horses were properly attended to, he gave the boy a shilling, as an earnest of what he might expect to receive.

The youth opened his eyes to their utmost width so great was his surprise.

The coin which he had just received represented the amount of a whole week's wages.

He was ready to lie down for Jack to tread on him.

The landlord was so occupied in his conversation that he did not notice that Jack had slipped off with the horses.

Tom King took the first opportunity he could find to say:

"We are not going to stay very long, landlord, but we want to know whether you have got anything very nice in the eating line—something substantial, too."

"Gentlemen, upon my honour, you have dropped in at the right place, at the very nick of time, and so you will say when you hear what I am going to tell you."

Our friends waited impatiently.

"You must know, then, gentlemen, that we hold a grand supper here, at the Golden Lion, to-night. All the people who are employed about the forest. There's about twenty of them, and they meet here once a year. Ah, gentlemen, it was a lucky chance that you should arrive here on this night above all others!"

"And you have got quite a feast prepared, then?"

"Gentlemen, you have said it! Such a feast as your eyes never saw before!"

"And should we be allowed to join the company?"

"Oh yes, and proud and happy they would be to have three such gentlemen among them. Why, where has the other gentleman gone?"

Tom and Claude pretended now to notice his absence for the first time, and said, in an offhand way:

"Very likely he has gone to look after the horses."

"There was no occasion—no occasion, I assure you. The ostler is quite competent to look after them."

"No doubt—no doubt. It is only a whim of his; he will be here directly."

"All right, gentlemen—all right! Don't you think it was lucky you arrived here on this particular night?"

"Very."

"Ah, I knew you would say so! Come this way, gentlemen—come this way, and I will show you into a room where part of the company has already assembled, and they will be glad to make your acquaintance! You can't begin to be good friends too soon."

"Wait a moment," said Tom; "it is necessary that we should consult our friend upon the subject. He will be in directly, and then we will ask him; but if he has no objections, we shall be very glad."

With this the landlord was compelled to be content, and so he ushered Tom and Claude into a little private room, while he bustled off to attend to some fresh arrivals.

The door had scarcely closed before Sixteen-String Jack entered.

His two comrades drew him on one side, and spoke to him in a whisper:

"What do you think of it?" said Tom, after he had told him what the landlord had proposed. "Do you think there is much danger?"

"What is your opinion?"

"Well, frankly, that the danger is so slight as to amount to nothing at all!"

"That is just what I think! Do you, Claude?"

"Yes."

"We are doubtless known well enough by name down in these parts," said Tom King, "but the chances are a thousand to one against anyone being here to-night who has ever seen us."

"So I think."

"Then what have we to fear from recognition?"

"Scarcely anything."

"Oh, let us decide at once!" said Claude. "If there is a little danger, what does it matter? We will run the risk for the sake of having a smoking-hot supper! It's a very long time since I sat down to a good social meal, and it's a thing I'm very partial to!"

"And so am I!"

"Just think how delicious it will be! Don't hesitate any longer!"

"Our minds are made up."

"All right, we shall all have a jolly night of it! Rely upon it, no one will know us individually or suspect that we are in the neighbourhood, or if they did they would never imagine that we should sit down amongst them and take supper."

"You must not forget Richard Nares, Claude!"

"Confound that fellow, I am reminded of him at every turn! It's very aggravating, and makes me wish more than ever that I had not let him off quite so easy."

"I only mentioned his name in order that you might not make too sure about no one in these parts being aware of your presence! It was intended as a caution!"

"And as such I thank you for it."

At this moment there came a faint tapping at the door, and the landlord entered.

"Well, gentlemen, have you made up your mind to join the company? Rely upon it, you can't do better! Of course, if you like, you can have some of the good things brought into this room by yourselves, but if you take my advice, gentlemen, you will join the company! Say, then, which will you do?"

It was quite futile to attempt to check the torrent of words that came from the landlord's lips.

Our friends tried ever so many times to tell him their decision, but it was no good. He would not listen, but went right on, and never paused until want of breath compelled him to do so.

Tom then told him that they had made up their minds to join the company in the supper-room.

The landlord received the intimation with unfeigned pleasure.

"That's right!" he said. "It sounds English-like, and hospitable. I am going to preside, and, take my word, we shall make a night of it!"

"We shall not be able to stop long after the supper," said Tom. "Important business compels us to resume our journey. By this time we ought to be much further on the road than we are, but we have met with many delays."

"Well, gentlemen, of course you know your business best. I shall be sorry to see you leave early; but then I am a man of business myself, and I know business must be attended to."

So saying, he led the highwaymen across a passage into a long room, which was furnished with several tables, which were all laid ready for supper.

Round these tables and grouped about the room were about a dozen men, all of whom were employed in some capacity or other about the forest.

The landlord introduced them with a grand flourish, and it is no more than right that we should say they were received with a hearty good will.

The men were evidently pleased to have three gentlemen among them, for such, from their dress, they took our friends to be.

A space was cleared so that they could seat themselves round the fire, which was blazing on the hearth and which was a sight which did everyone good to see.

It was especially grateful to our friends, who had knocked about a good deal of late, and who had been deprived of anything approaching domestic comfort.

"Supper will be brought in in a very few moments, gentlemen, and I do hope you will have the goodness to do justice to it!"

"Landlord," said Tom King, standing up, and speaking in such a loud voice that he interrupted him, "as we are to wait for a few minutes, you cannot do better than furnish tankards full all round! I'll pay for them!"

The landlord vanished to execute this order, while a perfect tumult of applause shook the whole building.

Tom had taken the nearest way to all their hearts.

The men had before been disposed to treat them well, but now that so much liberality was evinced, their delight knew no bounds, and our friends reached the height of popularity at one leap.

Several more arrived, until the total number was reached.

Just as the last one arrived the landlord entered with the tankards of foaming ale.

"There," he said, as he placed them in succession before the guests—"there is a drop of the best October ale there is in my cellar!"

"Very good, landlord!" said Tom King, "and now go and draw yourself just whatever you think proper! I'll stand the damage!"

This put the landlord right, and then the healths of the three friends were drank in a style that could not do otherwise than gratify them, and the acclamations and applause made the old rafters ring again.

It would have been hard to have found throughout all England a number of men better pleased with themselves and all around them than those who were assembled on that night in the supper-room of the Golden Lion.

The substantial meal—which, from its character and the time at which it was taken, would have been called at the present day a dinner—was placed upon the table.

The viands were of the most excellent description, and the meal altogether did the landlord the very greatest credit.

Our friends enjoyed themselves immensely, for the fare, though very delicious, was at the same time very plain, and, in fact, just such as suited their palates.

The mirth soon began to wax

"Fast and furious."

Just, however, as the supper was about to be removed, our friends were startled by a loud, uncarthly peal of laughter.

The three highwaymen recognised the sound instantly.

Without knowing why, they felt the blood desert their cheeks.

They turned deadly pale.

The peal of laughter was repeated.

It was demoniac and hideous beyond all description.

All that were present in the room when the sound first made itself heard stopped suddenly in what they were about.

Those who were about to drink, hold their flagons halfway between the table and their lips.

Again, for the third time, came the peal of hideous laughter.

It seemed to cast a spell over all present.

They could not move—they could not speak, but only retain the listening attitudes which in the first instance they had instinctively assumed.

It was the landlord who first recovered himself, and, by way of putting his guests at their case, he said:

"Never mind, gentlemen all! Never mind! It is only Mad Tommy! He won't do any harm!"

CHAPTER DXXI.

TOM KING AND HIS COMRADES LISTEN WITH GREAT INTEREST TO THE PARTICULARS GIVEN BY THE LOQUACIOUS LANDLORD.

JUST as the landlord spoke, and declared who it was that had disturbed the harmony of the meeting, one of the windows was dashed violently open from without, and a face appeared at the aperture.

The strong light of the fire fell upon it, and revealed every feature with great distinctness.

It was the face of the strange-looking man whom the highwaymen had encountered in the forest, for once seen, it could never be forgotten.

Thrusting his head into the room through the opened window, Mad Tommy, as the landlord had called him, burst into another wild peal of laughter.

Then he added some more of those incoherent expressions such as we have already mentioned, but what they were would have puzzled anyone to make out.

And yet all did listen and try to make something out of what he said, but the attempt resulted in perfect failure.

The poor maniac—for such he seemed to be—wound up his long and unintelligible speech by another of his laughs, which were of such a dreadful and unearthly character that they made the flesh creep upon the bones of even the least sensitive of the assembly.

When he had concluded, he waved his arms wildly in the air, dashed the window shut again, and bounded off into the darkness.

Profound silence reigned in the room for at least a minute after he had taken his departure.

Tom King was even now more puzzled than before.

"Mad Tommy!" he kept repeating to himself—"I never knew a madman that I know of, and yet mad this poor creature is as sure as there is a disease called insanity. I am sure I am right! I cannot be so greatly mistaken as that—I cannot! His features are imprinted upon my memory, only I cannot remember who he is. I would give much to know some more particulars concerning him, for as he stood at the window his face looked even more familiar to me than it did at first."

Such were Tom King's reflections during the moment which elapsed after the maniac's disappearance.

He was puzzled and perplexed.

It was the landlord who, for the second time, broke the silence and the spell which the sudden event had occasioned.

He used the same words as before:

"Never mind, gentlemen all!" he said. "As I told you before, and as a great many of you must know very well, it's only Mad Tommy, and he would not do anyone any harm if he knew it, poor fellow!"

"Mad Tommy," said Tom King. "Who is he?"

"Ah, sir!" said the landlord, "you are a stranger in these parts, and so, of course, you don't know nothing about Mad Tommy."

"I should be glad to learn something!"

"No doubt, sir, your curiosity's roused, and I don't wonder at it!"

"My curiosity is roused, and if you would not mind the trouble, landlord, I should be glad to hear the particulars."

"Hear, hear!" said a man, who looked like a gamekeeper. "The landlord here knows all about it. Let him tell the tale. It's as strange a one as ever was listened to by the fireside on a winter's night!"

This proposal was received with acclamations, which showed plainly enough that a very great amount of interest was felt in Mad Tommy.

The landlord made but a feeble resistance to this request.

In fact, it came just in his line, for there was nothing he loved so much as to hear himself talk, and here was a glorious opportunity for the display of these particular powers of his.

He took half a dozen rapid whiffs from his pipe, and then placed it on the table.

Next he cleared his throat by a copious draught of old ale, and, these preliminaries done with, he commenced.

Tom King and his two comrades were seated together on one side of the huge fireplace.

From what had previously occurred, they felt the deepest interest in the narrative which fell from the landlord's lips, and this feeling soon became intensified as the landlord proceeded.

As for Tom King, he was completely absorbed, for the manners and appearance of the old man were both of so singular a nature that they would raise no ordinary amount of curiosity; but, in addition to this, there was the strange half-recognition of the features, the partial recollection, the absolute certainty of having seen him somewhere, but upon what occasion completely baffled him.

If the landlord of the Golden Lion prided himself upon one thing more than another, it was his manner of telling a story.

It was an occupation he loved.

Now, he had told all that he had been able to find out respecting Mad Tommy many a time and oft, but the story had not lost its charm to him.

No; he gloried in the manner in which he had arranged the incidents, coming as they did in proper order from first to last.

But after his preface, almost the first words he uttered were of such a startling character that our friends almost sprang up from their chairs in astonishment.

We will let the landlord tell his own story, for we are sure the reader cannot fail to be deeply interested in it:

"Gentlemen all, you have made a request to me which I have very great pleasure in acceding to, because it always makes me glad when I can do you a service in any way."

Here the landlord was interrupted with such a storm of cheers that he was obliged to rise and bow several times, while his countenance assumed a rubicundity of hue that was surprising to behold.

In a little while the excitement was over, and, with a gratified smile upon his countenance, the landlord resumed:

"Gentlemen, the pleasant task which you have set me is not, I can assure you, without its difficulties! But those difficulties can be set aside by you. I want to know how I am to tell my story?"

"In your own way—in your own way!" was the unanimous cry.

"Gentlemen, I am much obliged to you—much obliged, I am sure; but what I wanted to know was, shall I just tell you what I know about Mad Tommy, or shall I begin my tale at the beginning and acquaint you with the whole of the particulars which I have been at great trouble to collect?"

"Oh, begin at the beginning, landlord—begin at the beginning!"

"Thank you, gentlemen! That is, I can assure you, the course which suits me the best—much the best!"

Here the landlord was obliged to refresh himself with a draught of ale, after which he commenced his narrative in real earnest.

"Gentlemen all, nearly every one of you, excepting, of course, these three strangers—or, as I should say these three gentlemen and friends—yes, friends (hear, hear) who have so kindly consented to grace this meeting with their presence—I say, with this exception, every one of you must, in some way or the other, have heard mention made of Olinthus Furze!"

The words struck upon Tom King's ears with a strange familiarity, but again his memory failed him; he could not recollect where he had heard it.

"Olinthus Furze, the miser?" said several.

"Yes; Olinthus Furze, the miser!" said the landlord, slowly.

At this instant a light broke in upon Tom King's mind, and so great was his agitation, that, in his endeavour to appear calm by raising the tankard to his lips and partaking of its contents, he failed most miserably, for it slipped from his hands, and fell to the floor with a heavy crash.

This caused a momentary interruption to the landlord's story; but Tom King passed off the accident as well as he could, and begged him to continue.

The landlord gladly complied, and Tom King schooled himself to hear something startling now.

"Yes, gentlemen, Olinthus Furze, the miser! You have all heard about him—many must have seen him, for he was well known in these parts, and it is not such a very long time ago since he met with his death.

"Well, then, gentlemen, Olinthus Furze was a miser, who used to live in a miserable hut not very far from here, on the high road leading through the forest. Everybody said he had heaps of money, but I never yet found anyone who had seen anything of it! He looked like a miser though, for he never had any new clothes, never had enough to eat and drink, and used to spend the greatest part of his time in prowling about, turning over rubbish that had been swept out of houses, and picking up anything, even if it was worth no more than the ten-thousandth part of a farthing.

"Everybody said, however, that he possessed a great deal of money.

"There was one thing, though, that neither I nor anyone else ever could make out, and that was he used to keep a servant.

"Now, that's a common enough thing to do, of course, but it was something astonishing that Olinthus Furze should be guilty of such extravagance; but it was a fact—the man who was too miserable to buy himself anything to eat, or even to burn a bit of fire in the winter, actually kept a servant!

"What wages he paid, or whether he paid any, is more than I can take upon myself to say; but I know the servant looked as miserable a scarecrow as his master.

"Well, things went on in this way, and no notice was taken of old Furze until one day it was discovered he had disappeared.

"They broke into the house, but there were no signs of him there; and, what was more extraordinary still was the servant had disappeared as well.

"A great deal was speculated about this, and it furnished the subject for many an evening's conversation in the old inn here.

"At last, one day a boy came out of the forest.

"He looked very strangely did that boy.

"His eyes were almost starting out of their sockets, and he was so white that his very lips were like ashes.

"He gasped for breath, and his knees trembled and shook under him to such a degree that he could scarcely stand.

"We got him inside the inn, and gave him a drop of brandy, after which we tried to get out of him what it was that had frightened him so.

"It was a long time, I can tell you, before he could speak, and when he did we could not believe what he said.

"But he repeated his tale over and over again, and never wavered one bit.

"What he said amounted to this:

"He told us he was going through the forest, when he saw in the distance an immense flock of birds.

"Hoping to catch some of them, he went in that direction, until at last he arrived upon the edge of a dingle, over which these birds were hovering.

"The boy crept down the side of the dell until he was close to the bottom, and then he parted the bushes a little in order to see about him.

"What he saw almost deprived him of his reason.

"He stood just where he was, for he was rooted to the spot, and could not have stirred an inch if it had been to save his life.

"Hanging to the branch of a tree was the body of a man.

"It had evidently been there for some time.

"It was almost devoured by the birds which had been attracted to the dead carcass, and the body being in this half-eaten and decomposed state was a most horrible sight.

"It was no wonder that it produced on the boy, who saw it so unexpectedly, such an effect as it did.

"He did not wait to see any more; but, as soon as ever he had the power to do so, he scrambled up the side of the dell and ran through the forest towards the nearest house, which was this—the Golden Lion Inn.

"We made him tell his tale over and over again, and as he did not vary his account in the least, we came to the conclusion that he spoke the truth, and had not suffered himself to be frightened by his own fears.

"The very next day, after having communicated with the authorities, we set off upon our expedition into the forest, compelling the boy to act as guide.

"He manifested the greatest reluctance to visit the place again, but we were inexorable, and finding us so, he at length gave in.

"He led us to the dingle without hesitation.

"Before we had got half-way down the side of the dell we received confirmation of the truth of what he said.

"Here sure enough, swinging to a tree, was the body of a man, just in the same state and presenting the horrifying appearance which I have described to you.

"Having made this discovery we pushed on, being anxious to obtain a closer view.

"But when we reached the bottom of the dingle we found something yet more awful, and which amazed us not a little."

CHAPTER DXXII.

TOM KING AND HIS COMPANIONS AT LAST DISCOVER THE IDENTITY OF MAD TOMMY.

"You may think, gentlemen," said the landlord of the Golden Lion, "that I am going a roundabout way to tell you what I know concerning Mad Tommy—you may wonder what all this can have to do with him; but if you will let me go on with my story, you will find it is very intimately connected with it indeed!"

Tom King, of course, knew what was coming to a partial extent, but still he felt as curious and anxious as anyone could to hear what had followed the discovery in the dingle.

The landlord proceeded:

"When we got down to the bottom of the dingle, the first thing we noticed was a mound of dirt, and on the other side of this we found a hole, which looked as much like a grave as any hole in the earth well could.

"Its likeness was preserved, indeed, for lying inside of it, what should we see but another dead body.

"Like the one on the tree, it was almost devoured by the birds, and when we drew near, the flies rose up by thousands, and formed a perfect cloud.

"It was not a very nice task, I can tell you, but the body was got out of the grave; and though it was in such a frightful state, we managed to make out who it was.

"Our astonishment may be guessed when we discovered it was no other than Olinthus Furze, the miser.

"Yes, it was him, sure enough, though how he had come by his death, and how it happened that he was at the bottom of the grave we had no means of telling.

"But we did not give the old man as much attention as we perhaps should have done had it not been for the other dead body on the tree.

"Upon first identifying the miser, a great many jumped to a hasty conclusion, and said that the servant had murdered his master for the sake of his wealth.

"But we found, to our greater astonishment, that the man on the tree was no other than the miser's servant, so that that idea was done with at once.

"And now I ought to tell you that the miser's servant was suspended from the tree in a very singular manner.

"The rope was not round his neck, but tied under his arm-pits, and not in such a manner as to occasion death.

"And yet dead he was to all intents and purposes, but his body was so much decayed that it could not be told how that death had been exactly brought about.

"It was soon found, however, that there was a paper in one of the pockets, and this paper, when read, proved to be about the most extraordinary document ever heard of.

"It related, upon the testimony of two witnesses who signed it, that on a certain night they saw the servant deliberately shoot and murder Olinthus Furze, the miser.

"The paper then went on to say that they captured the servant and tied him up to the tree by the arm-pits; having done which, they went away, and left him shouting and screaming for help. Suddenly, however, the sounds ceased, and they retraced their steps to ascertain the cause, when they discovered that the miser's servant had apparently broken a bloodvessel in his screams, for the crimson fluid was streaming from his mouth.

"Now, gentlemen, is not this the most wonderful story you have ever heard, and to be true at the same time? You must say so. But the most wonderful part of the story remains to be told.

"You would never guess who were the two witnesses who saw the murder committed, and who signed the paper which I have mentioned.

"One of them was no other than the celebrated highwayman Dick Turpin, about whom you have heard so much, and the other was his scarcely-less celebrated companion Tom King!"

The landlord little thought that there should be something more wonderful than anything he had related in his story—namely, that one of the two celebrated highwaymen he had mentioned should be in the room at that moment, for whose especial behoof the preliminary portion of the tale was chiefly told.

In total ignorance of this singular circumstance, however, the landlord continued his narrative.

"Now, gentlemen, he said, "I come to that part of my story which is connected with Mad Tommy.

"Some time after the miser's death, two men came down to the forest, upon what errand I did not know, at least not for a long while.

"They put up at this inn.

"After staying about a week they informed me that they had formerly been turnkeys in Newgate, but, in consequence of their having been caught planning the escape of Tom King, they were discharged from their employ.

"But these two turnkeys—one of whom was named Wilson and the other Biggs—told me that what had induced them to consent to assist Tom King to escape was because he had promised to take them to a certain place in the New Forest, where they had buried a chest of gold belonging to a miser whom they had seen murdered.

"Recollecting, gentlemen, all the particulars connected

with the murder of old Furze, I pressed these men for particulars, and I learned that the account they had received of the transaction corresponded exactly with that written down upon the paper.

"These two turnkeys, then, told me that they had come down to the forest in order to try their luck at discovering this hidden treasure, but after spending a great deal of time without effecting any good, they finally determined to relinquish the attempt altogether."

"I suppose it was what I told them concerning old Furze the miser, confirmatory as it was of the information they already possessed, which made these two men stay a little longer at the inn.

"I noticed that they went out every day, and had no doubt in my own mind that they were occupied in digging for the miser's treasure."

"And did they succeed in finding it?" said Tom King, breaking for the first time the silence which he had preserved ever since the landlord began to speak.

It may be imagined with what important anxiety both Tom and his comrades waited for a reply.

Upon it, of course, depended whether they had or had not undertaken this journey in vain.

"I do not know, gentlemen, whether they succeeded in finding the treasure or not," said the landlord, with great deliberation and emphasis. "I don't think they did—leastways, they disappeared, and I have never set eyes upon them from that moment to this.

"And now to tell you about Mad Tommy. Very few, if any of you, have the least idea of who he is, and therefore you will be all the more surprised when I tell you that his name is Tapner, and that he was at one time the governor of the prison of Newgate."

"Tapner!" exclaimed Tom, in his intense astonishment quite unable to restrain himself. "Did you say Tapner?"

"Yes."

Tom struck his forehead with his clenched fist.

He recollected all now, and knew perfectly well who the old man was.

It was his enemy, the governor of Newgate.

It was no wonder that Tom should find the face and voice familiar to him, and it is not much matter for surprise that he should have failed to recognise his ancient foe under such altered circumstances.

But now that the landlord spoke it gave him the clue to all the rest.

He knew his enemy now, but simultaneously with this knowledge came the desire to know by what means he had been reduced to his present position.

How came it about that the boisterous, tyrannical governor of Newgate should have become changed into a harmless maniac, and be known familiarly by the sobriquet of Mad Tommy?

There was something to be learned, and Tom felt that he would willingly give a great deal to be informed upon this point.

Although he might have been excused had he cherished towards his enemy a feeling of vengeance, Tom King was quite free from any such feeling.

He was sorry indeed that he should have come to such a lamentable end.

After a slight pause the landlord continued his narrative, and Tom King listened greedily.

"Listen to this, gentlemen all," said the landlord, "and then I am done. You won't begrudge a few minutes to hearing the end of my story. I have learned from very good authority that on the night when Tom King won over to his interests the two men who had been placed in his cell by informing them about the chest of hidden treasure, Mr. Tapner, the governor, was listening at the door.

"He heard all that was said on both sides, and then just when they had made every arrangement, he burst into the cell, had Biggs and Wilson locked up for conspiring with the prisoner to make an attempt, and placed two fresh men in the cell.

"Well, some time after that, from some cause or other, I don't know what, Mr. Tapner lost his situation of governor of Newgate. I have heard that it was in consequence of gross misconduct that he was removed from his post; but that is neither here nor there.

"After he had lost his snug situation I suppose things went bad with him, and as he could do no better, he bethought himself of the information he had accidentally gained concerning the buried treasure.

"Accordingly down here he comes, and took up his quarters at this inn.

"He commenced making his inquiries in a very cautious manner, but my suspicions were aroused, and I was not long before I found that he had come down to dig for the treasure.

"Of course I took good care not to make him aware that I knew so much.

"He went off like the other two had done, and one night he, too, failed to return.

"But he was found the next morning not very far off.

"He was lying on the ground in a bleeding condition—he had evidently crawled for some distance, and was quite insensible.

"As he carried some money with him, the nearest doctor did not hesitate to undertake his case, but he said almost as soon as he saw him that there was very little if any hope.

"He gave it as his opinion that the terrific wound on the head which the governor had received had been inflicted by some such implement as a spade.

"At last Mr. Tapner got better, but it was in body only.

"The blow upon the head had fractured the skull, and had caused severe injury to the brain.

"The effect of this was that, though he recovered, he never gained his reason, and ever since that time he has been nothing but a hopeless, raving, but harmless maniac, for ever playing such tricks as you have seen to-night.

"He wanders continually about the forest, as though in search of the treasure. This is what some people say, though for my own part I don't believe he has got sense enough even for that."

Such was the landlord's tale.

It was a dreadful one, and even the highwaymen could not avoid feeling some amount of compassion for the ex-governor, although he had been such a bitter foe to Tom.

A dead silence followed the recital of this story.

"You have not told us one thing," said Tom King, at length, who had quite succeeded in recovering his composure.

"What is it, sir?"

"Why, you have told us that the governor was found badly wounded in the head, as it would seem by a spade. Now, by whom was that blow inflicted?"

The landlord shook his head.

"Ah," he said, "there are a great many who would like to know that!"

"Then, has it never been found out?"

"Never, from that day to this."

"How strange!"

"It is strange. I have always suspected that the two turnkeys, Biggs and Wilson, are guilty of the deed, for they always spoke bitterly of the governor."

"But you say they had disappeared before the governor arrived."

"Oh yes!"

"It is a great mystery!"

"And will remain so, I am afraid. Of course, if the governor could be once restored to reason he would no doubt be able to tell who his assailants were, but that seems impossible. He seems doomed to die, as he has so long lived—a raving maniac! But—but what is the matter, sir? What is amiss?"

These words were hastily addressed by the landlord to Tom King, who had sprang suddenly from his chair.

His eyes were turned towards the window, and Claude and Jack instantly glanced in that direction.

As they did so they comprehended instantly the behaviour of Tom King.

With his face pressed close against the window pane, and peering anxiously into the room, was Richard Nares.

CHAPTER DXXIII.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD FIND THE MEANS OF EGRESS FROM THE VAULT.

WHAT an unfortunate thing it was that Dick Turpin, in his haste, should have omitted to fasten that secret door which Maud's keen eyes had with so much difficulty detected!

But he knew that his enemies would not long be kept in check by the ruse he had adopted; and so, as we have already stated, he darted through the secret door, dragging his fair companion after him.

It is most probable that if Dick Turpin had been alone he would not have been so greatly agitated as he was, and would have retained that remarkable presence of mind and coolness to which alone on so many occasions he most unquestionably owed his life and liberty.

But that he was exceedingly anxious upon Maud's account, the reader can easily imagine.

Nor must it be forgotten that Dick Turpin had by no means recovered from the serious wound that had been inflicted upon his head, and which was so near proving fatal.

So far from this being the case, he felt giddy, sick, and faint, while every now and then a mist of blood would seem to collect before his eyes, and he would reel slightly.

He was too weak and enfeebled to be equal to such exertion as he had been making, and the excitement of the last few minutes could not but tell most fearfully upon him.

Such being the case, then, the reader will not feel surprised that Dick Turpin should hastily pull the door after him, and descend the flight of steps without first pausing to ascertain whether the spring had caught.

If he had done this, all would have been well, and he would have been saved much danger and distress.

His disappearance from the armoury would have seemed like magic to Mr. Wriggles and his officers, for the secret door was so well concealed that the chances were a thousand to one against their finding it.

But it was fated to be otherwise.

When Maud clung terrifiedly to him, and apprised him of the coming of his foes, Dick Turpin could scarcely credit the evidence of his own senses.

But as he listened, and the sound of footsteps rushing down the slippery staircase and the hoarse cries of the police officers came upon his ears with greater and greater distinctness, he was forced into a belief of that which he would gladly have discredited.

By what means the officers had found the secret door, he could not for the life of him imagine.

He recollected full well that on a former and not long-distant occasion he himself and his three comrades had searched narrowly in all directions, but without success.

How it was Maud had been lucky enough to find it in that moment of pressing need, he had not had time to inquire.

Still, she had been occupied for some time, whereas the officers had not appeared to be delayed one moment.

All this was puzzling and perplexing to Dick Turpin, who was labouring under the conviction that he had properly closed and secured the door.

He was not allowed the opportunity of thoroughly thinking the matter out.

Other matters of a more important nature pressed upon his brain, for was not his own and his companion's position more imminent and critical than before?

Surely yes, for while they were above the surface of the earth there did seem to be some chance of making their escape.

But now they had descended beneath the surface—they had taken refuge in a vault which seemed to have no other means of egress than the door by which they had entered, and before which the officers now stood in a dense throng, clamouring loudly for surrender and admittance.

Maud was ready to swoon with terror.

She firmly believed that all was over, and that the capture of her husband was a certainty.

With all her might she struggled against the feeling of faintness that came so strongly over her. She tried her utmost to be calm and to cheer her husband, but it could scarcely be said that she succeeded.

As for Dick Turpin, he was not himself.

He was not equal to the present emergency, and he felt it.

He was not so strong as he had fancied he was and he was alarmed at the rapidity with which one accession of weakness followed another.

His eyesight failed him, and he was fast falling into a dreamy, trance-like state, from which Maud could not rouse him, for she was half dead with fright herself.

Dick could hear his enemies banging at the door; he was dimly conscious that some one was speaking in a loud tone of voice, but what was said he knew not, and, what was more, he did not seem to have energy sufficient to make the attempt.

This state of things was dreadful to think upon.

The officers had only to break down the door—and, strong as it was, it could not be an insuperable obstacle,—and then what an easy prey the bold highwayman would be!

He would fall into the hands of his captors without a struggle.

Suddenly, the loud report of a pistol struck upon his ears, and, with a crashing, splitting noise, he could hear the bullet force its way through the wood-work.

In all probability, this was about the only sound that would have had the effect of recalling Dick Turpin to himself.

He started like one awaking from some awful dream.

His thoughts reverted instantly to his fair companion.

"Maud, Maud!" he cried, in a low but earnest voice; "Maud, Maud! Speak to me, dearest! Tell me that you are not hurt—tell me that the bullet has not injured you!"

Maud made a powerful effort to speak.

But her voice failed her.

A faint, murmuring, inarticulate sound was all that issued from her lips.

It was only natural that Dick Turpin should at once jump to the conclusion that she was wounded.

The bare thought produced an immediate and wonderful revulsion of feeling.

His weakness vanished as if by enchantment.

In a second he seemed to be endowed with the strength of a dozen men.

"Speak to me!" he cried, in anguished tones. "Tell me—oh, tell me!—are you hurt?"

"No—no!" said Maud, in a whisper.

This was the case.

It was terror alone which had prevented her from speaking before.

"Cheer up, then, darling!" said Dick, in something like his old voice—"cheer up! Perilous as our position seems, I somehow have the conviction that all will be well. Yes, yes! I do not feel as I am sure I shall feel when the hour is at hand when I am about to be delivered to my foes!"

"Hark—hark!" said Maud, whose courage rose now that she beheld the change which had come over her husband. "Hark—hark how they are hammering at the door. Surely, in a minute, or even less, they will have it down!"

"Nay, nay—do not be afraid! The door is very strong, and well secured. It will be no easy matter to force it from its hinges."

"But what hope have you of escape?"

"Have you forgotten, Maud, that we have made no examination of this place? It seems like a vault, but yet there may be an exit from it."

"Let us look, then."

"Lean upon me, Maud, and be of good cheer! Do not let your heart fail you!"

"But the door!"

"They are working away with right good will, I grant. But come this way, dear one! From the partial freshness of the air, I have every hope that there is some opening by which we can leave this dismal place."

Dick Turpin spoke this in order to cheer Maud's drooping spirits, for, in good truth, he was by no means assured of the correctness of what he stated.

But he hoped all would turn out as he had anticipated.

While speaking to Maud in the manner we have related, the reader must not fall into the error of supposing that he was idly standing still.

He was, on the contrary, looking eagerly around in search of some means by which he could leave the vault.

For a time he was unsuccessful.

The battering upon the door distressed and agitated him, and prevented him from prosecuting his search with that calmness necessary for success.

The police officers had evidently made up their minds to destroy the door, and were bending all their energies to the accomplishment of the task.

Already it showed signs of demolition, and no doubt ere long it would be forced from its hinges

It is easy to conceive that Turpin's attention was divided between what the officers were doing and the task which he had set himself to perform.

Suddenly, however, while he was making a second round of the vault, Dick fancied he perceived that in one part, near to the floor, the wall looked of a different colour to what it did elsewhere.

Stooping down, he tapped with the butt-end of his pistol against it.

The dull, heavy sound which was given forth convinced him it was wood.

But, at the same time, he found that the wood was in such a rotten, crumbling condition that the butt of his pistol sank deeply into it, almost as though it was sponge.

Upon making this discovery, Dick's hopes revived.

Restoring the pistol to his belt, he took hold of the piece of wood with both hands.

A slight effort of strength enabled him to tear this piece of wood completely down; and when he had done so, a small arched opening was disclosed, which seemed to lead into the very bowels of the earth.

The piece of wood which Turpin had displaced had evidently served as a door, but age and damp had completely rotted it away, so that it was nothing but a spungy mass.

Dick stooped down and passed under this archway without hesitation, dragging Maud after him, who naturally shrank from venturing into such a dreadful-looking place.

But she submitted passively to be drawn along by her husband.

The passage—for such it was—stretched straight before them, but it was narrow and very low.

In a half-stooping posture they ran along it.

Dick Turpin had made this discovery and entered the passage only just in time, for a loud crash and a shout, followed by a hubbub of voices and the trampling of footsteps, announced the fact that the door, strong as it was, had been broken down by the police.

There was now no obstacle—no barrier of any kind between Dick Turpin and his foes.

It was now just a question of which could run the fastest through those dismal passages.

Turpin felt the perspiration start out upon his brow, and he gasped painfully for breath, for he could not conceal from himself that his position was now far more desperate than it had been before.

The loud report of a pistol came at this moment upon his ears, but at what it was fired, or why, was more than he could tell.

The bullet did not injure either himself or his companion, and so he troubled himself no more about it.

Just at this moment, Dick came to a place where the passage divided itself into two, and branched off into two different directions.

He hesitated for a moment which way he should go, and then, feeling that it was a matter of complete indifference, he took the turning to his right hand.

Along this he ran as fast as Maud could follow him.

They could hear their foes plainly enough, and then the sound seemed to grow fainter.

Suddenly a tremendous discharge of firearms burst upon their ears.

It was followed without any appreciable pause by another, after which all grew still.

CHAPTER DXXIV.

DICK TURPIN DISCOVERS THE SKELETON IN THE VAULT BENEATH THE DESERTED MANSION.

WHAT was the cause of this volley, and what was meant by it, will presently be explained to the reader.

For a little while longer we must confine our attention to the proceedings of Dick Turpin.

That the terrific report of firearms in that narrow passage should be very perplexing to Dick Turpin the reader scarcely requires to be told.

He could not imagine what ever could be the motive that prompted so strange a proceeding.

In his astonishment he paused to listen intently, and as he did so he fancied he could hear groans, as though coming from persons who were badly wounded.

To linger, however, was most probably to court death or capture, and so, leaving this strange event unsolved, Dick Turpin hurried on along the passage.

Ere he had gone many yards further, however, his progress was arrested by a door.

It was in quite as decayed a condition as the one which he had pulled down with so much ease.

Placing his shoulder against it, he had the satisfaction of feeling it give way before the pressure he applied to it.

Another push, and the door was down.

Passing through it, they now found themselves in a vaulted chamber, in appearance not unlike the one they had so lately left.

But this vault was filled with so horrible an odour that they were compelled to draw back for some distance.

Maud shuddered.

"This is dreadful!" she said.

"It smells like a charnel-house."

"It does indeed! Oh, Dick, it would not be possible to bear such an atmosphere as that!"

"Wait a moment, dearest, and then all will be well! The foul vapours with which the atmosphere of that vault is loaded will rush out into the passage, while fresh air will take its place. Wait a moment!"

Maud stood still, but she was compelled to cover up her mouth while she did so.

A most suspicious stillness reigned in the direction from which they had come.

Had the officers given up the chase?

It seemed so, for as Dick stood and listened he found himself unable to detect the least sound indicative of their approach.

This circumstance, however, instead of imparting the least feeling of satisfaction to our hero, only made him still more anxious and alarmed.

He would have preferred a thousand times over to have heard his enemies hard upon his track.

He would have known then what he had to expect, but this mysterious cessation of hostilities boded, he felt convinced, no good to him.

Evidently his foes were adopting some deep-laid scheme, by which they hoped to secure his capture.

But if that scheme depended in the least degree upon the calculation that he would be thrown off his guard, Dick felt that it would fail.

He determined to be a thousand times more careful than he had ever been before.

Maud, however, experienced some degree of satisfaction upon making the discovery that their foes were no longer so close behind them, and Dick encouraged her in this idea, for he believed it would be foolish were he to make her a participator in his own fears.

"Let us advance now," he said; "the air within by this time will be comparatively pure. Come, follow me!"

"But, Dick——"

"What, dearest?"

"Where think you these gloomy passages will lead? What have we to hope for if we continue our progress along them?"

"That I can scarcely tell you. We must go on, and hope for the best."

Maud sighed.

She felt there was not much consolation to be derived from this, and yet she asked herself, what could they do?

Upon entering the vault, Dick Turpin looked anxiously about him for some means of egress.

But at the first glance his eye rested upon an object upon which his gaze became fixed instantly.

It was only dimly and indistinctly, however, that he could see what this object was, and, impelled by an irresistible curiosity, he advanced towards it.

Maud followed, but the moment the horrible spectacle was revealed to her vision in all its ghastliness, she shuddered, and clasped her hands over her face, so that her eyes should no longer behold it.

But Dick had seen strange sights before then, though he thought never one so truly horrible.

In a strange, huddled-up, sitting posture, with his back leaning against the wall of the vault, was the figure of a man.

It had, however, almost lost all semblance of humanity. From the head every particle of flesh had disappeared, leaving the skull bare and polished.

Such was the case with every part of the body.



[THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN DIG FOR THE BURIED TREASURE.]

Not one shred of flesh or skin anywhere adhered to it. The glistening bones were, however, covered in many places by fragments of apparel.

By these fragments of apparel the sex of the skeleton could alone be determined.

Sufficient, however, remained to enable Dick to pronounce the skeleton to be that of a man.

Truly was it an awful sight, and a strange one too, and it can scarcely be wondered at that the highwayman should look upon it with the amount of interest he evidently did.

The strangest thing of all was that the wrists and ankles of the skeleton were manacled.

The circlets of iron now pressed upon nothing but bone, and fitted loosely, yet there they were, and the chains proceeding from them were fastened to the wall.

Round the bony wrist was a stout belt of iron, which must have weighed many pounds.

To this was attached a chain of massive links, and this was secured to an immense iron ring which was strongly set in the stone-work near the skeleton's head.

From this, it was palpable that the form upon which Dick gazed had in life been a prisoner.

But how it was that he remained there in that condition was a mystery.

Many and many a rolling year had elapsed since that poor wretch had breathed his last, but there still remained sufficient of the apparel to indicate that it had been manfactured in an age long since gone by.

The most obvious inference to be drawn from this strange spectacle was that the unhappy victim had been chained to the wall in that noisome vault, and left to perish of starvation.

There was a pitcher at the skeleton's feet, which had doubtless once held water, but now it was dry.

Dick Turpin felt an amount of interest in this figure for which he could scarcely account.

He felt that he would give much to learn its history,

and he hoped—though the hope seemed a vain one—that the time would come when he should be acquainted with some of the particulars.

Maud shrank back.

"Come away, Dick!" she said—"oh, come away! Do not look upon that awful sight! It is horrible—most horrible!"

"It is horrible, Maud—I grant you that; but these poor relics of humanity ought not to have the effects of inspiring terror in your heart."

"They ought not."

"Uncover your eyes, then, and look upon it. Perhaps never again will you behold anything so singular!"

"I hope I never shall!" said Maud, as she uncovered her eyes for a moment, and then replaced her hands.

"But what an awful fate this must have been to have overtaken anyone! I tremble when I think of it. Before, I had no idea such barbarity existed, though I have seen enough of the evil side of human nature!"

"What barbarity?"

"Ah, Maud, I find in glancing hastily you have not noticed the most singular sight of all. Look, now—the poor figure cannot harm you! Do you not perceive that its wrists, ankles, and waist are heavily manacled, and that it is chained to the wall?"

"I do—I do!" replied Maud, who, when she heard this, felt her curiosity assume the mastery over every other feeling, and she now gazed intently upon the skeleton, despite the disgust which she strove vainly to repress.

"Is not that a horrible fate, Maud?"

"It is—it is!"

"You see it is quite clear and beyond all dispute that this unfortunate being, let him be whom he may, has been chained to the wall, and there left to starve until death freed him from his sufferings."

"Could such things be done intentionally?"

"I am loth to think so, and yet there are people in the world who never care a jot how much others suffer, so that they are free from pain themselves."

"But look!" said Maud, "it would seem that at some time or other he must have been supplied with food, or at any rate with water."

Maud pointed to the pitcher by the side of the skeleton as she spoke.

"It does seem like it, Maud," replied Turpin; "but this, I fear, is one of those things about which we shall never know any more than we do at present."

"It is very probable; but Dick——"

"What?"

"Surely you cannot have forgotten the danger we are in? While we are lingering here, the officers may take measures to surround us."

"It may seem strange to you, Maud," replied Turpin, who gave a sudden start when his companion spoke, "but if you will believe me, I was so entirely wrapped up in the contemplation of this sad spectacle, and so full of various conjectures concerning it, that I had in truth forgotten that we were in so much peril!"

"I feared as much."

"Thanks, Maud, for recalling me to myself! Above all others, this is not the time to linger over such things. How silent all this place is! Where can the officers be? Why have they abandoned the search?"

"I am bewildered."

"So am I. Still, the best and only thing to be done is to push on through these passages, in the hope that by doing so we may at length emerge into the open air."

"Do you think there is a probability of such a thing?"

"I do. I believe there is every probability of it."

"Why?"

"Because at the time when the mansion above us was built—and that must be hundreds of years ago—it was customary to construct such secret passages as these, so that, in the event of such a thing being necessary, the inhabitants might quit the dwelling unperceived."

"I have often read of such things."

"No doubt you have."

"And you expect that this passage will lead us to some distance from the house?"

"That is what I expect."

"I hope it will."

"So do I; but come, let us try to find some exit from this vault, though I feel convinced that were I to live a thousand years I should never forget that ghastly sight!"

"Do you not think it strange that the officers should have suddenly become so silent?"

"It is most inexplicable."

"I could almost bring myself to believe that while we remain here we shall be in no danger."

"You must not give way to this feeling, dear Maud! We are in danger, and the sooner we get out of here the better."

"I shall be glad to leave it."

"And no wonder. There is one thing which puzzles me. I would give a great deal to know what could be the meaning of the rapid discharge of two volleys of firearms in succession. Something must be meant by it, but what, I am at a loss to think. I am unable to arrive at any conclusion as to whether it bodes me good or ill. It was done by my foes, and therefore I ought to think the last. Still, I am baffled, and scarce know what is the best thing for me to do!"

CHAPTER DXXV.

MR. WRIGGLES AND HIS OFFICERS MEET WITH A TERRIBLE MISHAP IN THE SUBTERRANEOUS PASSAGE.

DICK TURPIN spoke the truth.

He was puzzled, and well he might be, for the singular occurrences set conjecture at defiance.

Strange as it may seem, it is nevertheless true that Dick longed to hear some sounds that would indicate that his foes were keeping up the chase.

He felt that would be a satisfaction could he but hear some sounds.

The reason is, that then he would have known just what he had to expect, and would have been under no sort of doubt or hesitation as to what should be his course of action.

He could not help thinking that the silence of the officers arose from the fact that they had hit upon some scheme by which they could make sure of capturing him.

From this it will be seen that Dick had all the time a feeling hanging over his head that something was about to happen of a disagreeable character.

No doubt the reader feels quite as curious about the proceedings of the officers as Turpin did, and also would like to have the mystery of those two rapid discharges of firearms fully explained.

To do this, we will for a little while leave Dick Turpin and Maud alone with the skeleton in that dreary vault, seeking to find some mode of exit from it, while we devote a brief space to the chronicling of the proceedings of Mr. Wriggles and his officers.

It will therefore be necessary for us to go back to the moment when the police officers, having found that Dick Turpin had played them a trick, had demolished the door and rushed into the armoury.

How they found this apartment vacant we already know.

The secret door standing partly open was a thing that could not escape the most cursory observation of the officers, who hurriedly dispersed themselves about the armoury in search of some indication of the route by which the fugitives had left it.

That was a glorious discovery, and with elated hearts they all rushed down the staircase.

Mr. Wriggles went first, and uttered the most horrible cries, indicative of the exultation which he felt.

How it was that they all reached the bottom of the spiral staircase in the incredibly short space in which they did without meeting with some serious accident is a mystery.

The steps were worn and broken, and slippery with damp.

The officers, however, were lucky enough to reach the bottom without having had a fall.

They were brought up with great suddenness by the strong door which was placed at the foot of the spiral steps.

They had not been on the look-out for such an obstacle, and consequently they came against it with great force.

The confusion thus caused lasted but a moment.

Mr. Wriggles waved his lantern, and caused the beams of it to fall in rapid succession over every portion of the door.

He ground his teeth when he saw how strong it looked and how well it appeared to be secured to the stone-work.

There were no fastenings, too, that he could see, and, therefore, as he not unnaturally imagined, they must be on the other side.

From the moment when he saw the secret door was open, he congratulated himself that his troubles were almost over, and that he should achieve his long-sought purpose without much trouble.

He had, as he considered, run the redoubtable highwayman to earth.

But now that strong door quite altered the aspect of affairs, and he foresaw that he should have a great deal of trouble.

This thought occupied his mind for but a moment.

Drawing a pistol from his belt, he seized it by the muzzle, and struck some heavy blows on the door with the butt-end of it.

A hollow, reverberating noise ensued, but no notice whatever was taken of his summons.

Raising his voice to its highest pitch, he shouted:

"Dick Turpin! Once for all, and all for once—will you surrender? I am determined to stand no more of your foolery! If you don't give in at once, you may make up your mind to expect the worst! Will you surrender? If you don't reply, I'll batter the door down!"

To this speech there came not a word nor a sound in reply.

Infuriated beyond measure, Mr. Wriggles rapidly reversed the pistol he held in his hand, and, taking a hasty aim, fired at the middle of the door.

There was a crash of wood-work, and, when the smoke had rolled away, Mr. Wriggles perceived that the bullet had gone through the door.

But it did not appear to have produced any other effect.

There was no cry or groan that would indicate that either of the fugitives had been hit.

Mr. Wriggles was furious at having been foiled again.

"Down with the door!" he yelled. "D—n you all! what do you stand on one steps like that for, like a parcel of stuck pigs? Down with the door!—batter it down, I say!"

"It strikes me, Mr. W.," said Jim Lickfold, "that's a d—d sight easier said than done! Howsomedever, here goes!"

The police officers now made one unanimous attack upon the door, with the firm resolution of battering it from its hinges.

But the door was strong and well set in the wall, and resisted bravely the furious onslaught that was made upon it.

It must not be forgotten, too, that the police officers were but ill provided with such implements as would serve to batter down a door.

They were, too, in a very inconvenient position to perform such a deed, for they could not stand fairly before the door.

In spite, however, of these difficulties, they hammered and slashed away with right good will.

The door was only a wooden one, and after the lapse of some time, the officers, by perseveringly continuing their efforts, succeeded in forcing the door from its hinges.

It was reduced almost to splinters, though, before it gave way.

Mr. Wriggles and his companions tumultuously descended the two steps that led down into the vault.

The former waved his lantern about him, and stood in readiness to fire, should his eye by chance alight upon the person of the highwayman.

But nothing save the dark walls of the vault met his straining vision, and an oath of disappointment escaped his lips.

"Where are they?" he gasped, and he turned round twice on his heels as he spoke—"where are they, I say?"

"D—d if I know, Mr. W.!" said an unmistakable voice. "This here is about the rummest start as ever I knowed, that it is!"

"Peace, fool!"

"Oh, you be d—d!"

"Mr. Wriggles turned round, and would no doubt have immediately inflicted summary chastisement upon Jim Lickfold, only that individual very prudently beat a hasty but by no means dignified retreat.

Mr. Wriggles shook his fist, but that was the only manifestation of his wrath he could make, for Jim Lickfold was out of his reach.

Subduing his anger as well as he could, Mr. Wriggles proceeded to make an examination of the vault-like place in which he stood.

That Dick Turpin was not an inmate of it no felt quite certain.

In pursuing his investigations, however, he discovered that there was a narrow arched entrance leading out of the vault.

It was a narrow passage, apparently extending in a straight line.

The first thing Mr. Wriggles did after perceiving this exit from the vault was to fire a pistol down it.

The report sounded with astounding loudness in that underground place, but no sound arose to indicate that it had produced any effect.

Calling to his men to follow him, and holding his drawn sword in one hand and the lantern in the other, Mr. Wriggles dashed off down the passage.

It was low, and he had to advance in a stooping posture, to prevent his head coming in contact with the roof.

Ere long he discovered that the passage did not proceed far in one direction.

He paused at a place where the one passage diverged into two.

This was a puzzler.

The passages branched off like the fork of a tree, and seemed to be at an equal angle.

Now, Dick Turpin was just as likely to have taken one of these passages as the other, and how was Mr. Wriggles to tell which way he had gone?

He could not tell, for, though he searched narrowly on the ground, he was unable to discover the least signs of footsteps.

In this emergency he was fain to consult Jim Lickfold.

"Jim," he said, suddenly, "come here!"

"All right, Mr. W.! What's the matter?"

"What's to be done now?"

"D—d if I know!"

"Think, fool!"

"Don't be so complimentary, Mr. W.! I can't abear to be complimented. However, if I must give you my opinion——"

"What is it?"

"Why, that Dick Turpin must have taken one of these passages."

"Of course; but which?"

"That's just what I should like to find out!"

"Can't you suggest anything?"

"Well, it strikes me, Mr. W., there's about only one thing as you can do."

"What is that?"

"Divide your force into two equal portions, and one half take one passage, and the other half the other!"

"I had thought of that," said Mr. Wriggles, "and I suppose it is the only thing that can be done. I don't like it, because, you see, it weakens our force, and consequently lessens our chance of capturing him."

"I grant all that, Mr. W., but you can't do nothing better."

"Well, I consent. I will take the lead of one half and you can conduct the other."

"Very good, Mr. W. Any mortal thing to oblige!"

The party of police officers now divided themselves into two equal portions, one of which Mr. Wriggles placed himself at the head of, and Jim Lickfold the other.

They then proceeded along the passages.

They were immediately out of sight and hearing of each other.

Under these circumstances, this was unquestionably the best mode of proceeding which the officers could adopt.

Neither party met with any obstacle.

The passage continued to be of the same height and width throughout.

Suddenly, however, the sound of footsteps came upon the ears of Jim Lickfold, and he advanced with greater caution, for he began to think that the glory of capturing Dick Turpin was about to descend upon himself.

It was singular, but almost at the same period of time the sound of footsteps came in the same way upon the ears of Mr Wriggles and his party.

He became at once attentive, and advanced with caution, so as to be in readiness for the attack.

There could be no doubt about the footsteps.

All his men could hear them.

"Now, my lads," said Mr. Wriggles, "don't wait for the word of command from me, but the moment you catch sight of your foes, fire, for the sooner we get this disagreeable business over the better."

The officers were all of just the same opinion.

Louder and louder came the footsteps.

Another moment, and some dusky figures could be seen.

In obedience to the commands they had received, the officers fired, Mr. Wriggles, however, setting the example.

Those in front returned the fire almost at the same moment, and the police officers were not a little surprised at the extent of the volley.

Deep groans, however, came upon their ears, and Mr. Wriggles dropped his lantern.

He had been wounded in the left arm.

Just at this moment, a voice which all recognised exclaimed, with the greatest emphasis:

"Well, I'll be d—d!"

CHAPTER DXXVI.

IN WHICH THE MYSTERY OF THE DISCHARGE OF THE FIREARMS IS FULLY ELUCIDATED.

It was Jim Lickfold who spoke.

There could be no mistaking his voice after it had once been heard, and he spoke as he did in consequence of his intense astonishment.

A few words will suffice to explain this matter fully to the reader.

The passage leading out of the vault diverged in the way we have described; but both these paths led to the same point, for the two passages converged into one.

What purpose this was intended to answer was more than they could tell.

Doubtless it was to enable anyone to have a better chance of escape in case of pursuit.

As is well known, those houses built in troublesome times were nearly always furnished with some secret mode of egress, by means of which the inhabitants could escape in case circumstances should arise causing them to fly.

The fact of the passage branching off into apparently two different directions, and then gradually converging into one passage again, would no doubt perplex and mislead those who were in pursuit.

We have seen how Mr. Wriggles fared.

So cunningly were the passages contrived, and so little did he anticipate any such event, that when he heard footsteps he made sure it was the highwaymen he heard approaching, for all the officers were under the impression that the four highwaymen were secreted in the deserted mansion.

The fact was, the approaching footsteps which he heard were those of Jim Lickfold and his companions.

Thus both fell into the same mistake.

Each took the other for the highwaymen, and hastily fired.

Luckily for themselves, the two volleys did not produce such disastrous effects as one would have expected.

Nevertheless, three of the officers were killed upon the spot, and two were so badly wounded that their recovery seemed very doubtful.

Others were hurt more or less, and Mr. Wriggles had been struck on the left arm near the wrist by a bullet.

The wound was not a very serious one, but it took all the use out of his arm, and so he dropped the lantern, thus adding darkness to the horror of the scene.

Although his astonishment was so great, Jim Lickfold was the first to recover himself.

He could not make out what had happened, but still he had sense enough to spring forward and pick up the lantern.

He was just in time to prevent its extinction.

He held it straight for a moment, and then it burned clearly enough.

By the aid of its beams, he took a survey of the dreadful scene around him.

Groans smote upon his ear from every side.

Those who were only slightly injured hastened to scramble to their feet.

Mr. Wriggles uttered the most horrible curses that ever came from the lips of a human being.

He saw that, by some inexplicable means, his divided forces had met, and each mistaking the other for the enemy, had fired, and hence the deplorable result.

It was frightful to think of.

Some time, of course, elapsed before they recovered themselves.

Those who were dead and those who were badly wounded were left just where they were.

This disaster, so far from inducing Mr. Wriggles to abandon his pursuit of the highwaymen, only served to make him more determined to prosecute it to the utmost.

Calling all the men together who were able to muster themselves, he once more led the way.

Upon going a few steps further, the mystery of their encounter was revealed.

"Why, d—n me," cried Jim Lickfold, "if those two passages don't join into one! Here's a go! I'll be d—d if this don't beat everything!"

"Come on—come on!" said Wriggles; "while we are hesitating here, we are allowing the highwaymen every chance of making their escape!"

"Oh, cuss them! It's d—d odd to me if they ain't far enough off by this time!"

"No—no!"

"It's d—d odd to me if they ain't!"

"It cannot be!"

"Why not? It seems to me that they know the ins and outs of this place, and we don't, and so they are off by now, depend upon it!"

"I will not take that for granted. Ten to one if they know this place better than we do, and perhaps at this very moment they are not very far off! Come on! Come on, I say!"

"Just as you like. Only, if you will take my advice, you won't make quite so much noise!"

"You be d—d!"

Although Mr. Wriggles spoke thus contemptuously, he must have thought Jim's advice was good, for he became immediately silent.

"Mr. W.," said Jim, "will you listen to me for a moment?"

Mr. Wriggles had been about to rush forward in pursuit, but he changed his mind.

He had great confidence in his follower, Jim Lickfold, though he had not the grace to show it in a proper manner.

Of course he never admitted it.

On the present occasion he stopped short, and in no very gentle tones, said:

"Well, cuss you!—what now?"

"You are excited, Mr. W.," said Jim, coolly, "and I don't wonder at it! However, if you could be calm a moment and listen to me——"

"Well, go on! Are you going to stop palavering all night?"

"No—no; but you may feel sure, as I told you before, the chaps we want are all above-ground by now, and are a larfin' at us! Don't swear, Mr. W.! But I feel sure I'm right! Depend upon it, the best thing you can do is to get back to the open air; and when we do, if we don't see something of them, never take my advice again!"

Mr. Wriggles paused irresolutely, and felt more than half convinced that the course of action which his subordinate proposed was the best that could be adopted.

"And then, Mr. W.," continued Lickfold, "just think of the result of this unfortunate mistake! Some of the chaps are badly hurt, and common humanity almost compels those who have been lucky enough to escape to carry their less fortunate comrades to some place where their hurts would stand a better chance of getting looked to than they could in this place."

This was a speech such as one would hardly have expected to hear from Jim Lickfold's lips.

It showed, however, that his heart was in the right place, and it is very certain that there are a good many worse people in the world than Jim Lickfold.

Mr. Wriggles did not remain long in a state of hesitation.

The longer he reflected, the more he felt convinced that Jim was right.

All that had happened seemed to point to the fact that the highwaymen were familiar with their whereabouts.

Mr. Wriggles was pretty sure that the highwaymen had taken up their quarters in that deserted mansion for a lengthened period, and he judged that it would be only natural for them to make themselves familiar with every part of the building.

Besides, his own wrist pained him very much, and so he altered his mind, and said:

"Well, Jim, I will take your advice for once, but it is more on account of those who are hurt than anything else, and I scarcely think you are right in supposing that they have left the vaults."

Jim seemed to know that his superior officer was not speaking with candour, and so he merely put his finger by the side of his nose, and cried:

"Gammon!"

Of this Mr. Wriggles affected to take no notice, though he must have heard the word.

As speedily as possible, those officers who were unhurt raised the bodies of their wounded and dead companions, and carried them along the passage until they reached the spiral flight of steps.

Up these they proceeded with rather more slowness, for, now that their excitement was over, they found out how slippery the steps were.

Mr. Wriggles was in a state of mind that is truly indescribable.

He had suffered more injury among his men from this unfortunate mistake than he probably would have done in a desperate encounter with the highwaymen.

It was agreed upon that the dead and wounded bodies of the officers should be deposited on the floor of the armoury.

This was done as speedily as possible, and having promised that the men should have assistance as speedily as it could be obtained, Mr. Wriggles commanded the rest of his force to follow him.

First of all, however, he took off his neckcloth and made it into a sling, in which he carried his wounded arm, for he felt that holding it down increased the pain until it became almost more than he could bear.

Jim Lickfold had stanched the blood by binding a handkerchief over the wound and tying it tightly.

Mr. Wriggles and Jim Lickfold both cut a very deplorable figure, and both suffered a great deal of pain.

The latter, it will be remembered, suffered severely from the teeth of Black Bess.

The gallant mare had left a mark upon him which he would not easily get rid of.

Both with their left arms bound up, Mr. Wriggles and Jim led the way along the armoury, down the stairs, and out into the open air.

In the course of his life, as these chronicles have fully shown, Mr. Wriggles had many and many an unsuccessful encounter with the highwaymen.

Many and many a time had these encounters ended in a most disastrous manner to himself and to the men under his command.

But never before had there been an expedition in which he had wasted so much time, had been so unsuccessful, or which had terminated so disastrously to all concerned.

As for the highwaymen, he did not believe he had inflicted the slightest injury upon them.

These were anything but pleasant reflections to be compelled to make, and Mr. Wriggles found them so

Curses, both loud and deep, came from his lips.

But as we have said, they at length reached the open air.

Mr. Wriggles was not quite blind to all caution, and so he mustered the remnant of his band of men just underneath the window we have so often had occasion to describe.

Having done this, he crept forward stealthily.

But although he looked keenly all around him, he could not see the least signs of the fugitives.

Jim Lickfold even began to be doubtful of the correctness of his supposition.

His heart misgave him.

But he would not give up.

He reflected a moment, and then he said, suddenly and with great briskness

"Come on, Mr. W.! This way! We don't stand no chance of seeing them here!"

"Not anywhere else!"

"Oh yes, we does! Come on! I took particular notice which way the passage ran! This is the direction! We shall have to go round to the other side of the house!"

These words set Mr. Wriggles thinking, and a few moments' reflection convinced him that Jim was right.

"Come on!" said Lickfold. "It's d—d odd if we don't catch sight of them after all!"

With these words, the party of police officers silently and cautiously made their way round to the other side of the deserted mansion.

Scarcely had they gained it than Jim cried, in tones of suppressed exultation:

"D—n me, I'm right, after all! There they are—there they are, Mr. W.! Quick! D—n me, we shall have them yet!"

CHAPTER DXXVII.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD AT LENGTH STAND BENEATH THE OPEN SKY.

WHETHER there was or was not any foundation for the outcries Jim Lickfold raised, succeeding events will very quickly show.

Having followed the police officers up to this point, we will occupy ourselves with the (to us) far more congenial task of relating what happened to Dick Turpin and Maud.

It must be stated first that Dick Turpin was by no means so well assured that there was an outlet to these passages as Maud thought he was.

Such a thing was, however, extremely probable.

It was a great pity that no kind fairy could have whispered in the highwayman's ears a faithful account of the precise state in which affairs stood.

That was quite out of the question—there was no possible means by which Dick could become acquainted with the facts which are in possession of the reader.

A few minutes' search served to show the fugitives another door similar to the two last they had encountered.

Upon removing this, Dick was much rejoiced to feel the cool fresh air blow against his face.

He drank it in as though it had been nectar, and as he did so, he murmured:

"Saved—saved!"

Maud, too, was sensible of the difference of the atmosphere, and inhaled it with as much pleasure as her husband, for after the noxious vapours of the dungeon it was doubly pleasant and refreshing.

"Did you say we were saved?" she asked, scarcely daring to believe in the reality of such glad tidings.

"Yes—yes, dearest!"

"How so?"

"This fresh air which blows so gratefully upon us shows clearly enough that there is an outlet not far off, and where that air comes in we shall be able to get out!"

"Oh, joy—joy!"

"You are rejoiced, and so am I. It will be a relief to gain the open air once more."

"And the officers?"

"I don't think we need fear them. The outlet to this passage must be, I should think, at some considerable distance from the house itself."

"Ah! I have thought——"

"Of what? You seem alarmed!"

"I am—I am!"

"What is the cause? Surely all is well!"

"No, no—all is not well!"

"What is not? Speak at once!"

"I may be wrong, but I feel almost certain I have arrived at the true solution of the officers' extraordinary behaviour!"

"Good heavens!"

"Hush—hush! I am so alarmed that I can scarcely speak!"

"Nay, nay—calm yourself, and speak! Do not keep me in suspense! If you are right, the sooner I know the better!"

"Yes, yes—I will try to tell you!"

Maud was breathless with agitation.

At length she spoke:

"Oh, Dick—Dick!" she said, "by some means or other they must have heard there was an outlet to this passage, and so they have hastened to it in order to pounce upon you at unawares as you emerge, and make you prisoner before you can defend yourself!"

Maud spoke these words with great energy, and Dick was absolutely startled.

The idea was an alarming one, and for a moment he believed that this was the true solution of the mysterious occurrence.

A little reflection, however, convinced him that this could not be.

He drew a long breath of relief as he said:

"No, no, Maud—you are wrong—quite wrong!"

"Wrong?"

"Yes, such is not the true solution!"

"How do you know that?"

"I feel sure of it!"

"Why?"

"If it was so, a portion of the officers would have remained in the passage, and would have driven us forward, or at any rate have prevented our retreat. No, no, Maud—you are quite wrong!"

Maud was by no means convinced of that, although Dick spoke with so much certainty and confidence.

Trembling in every limb, she followed him along the passage.

At every step he took, Dick felt more and more confident that the outlet was close at hand.

He fancied he could smell the sweet green turf.

Although he spoke as he did, he could not altogether divest his mind of every particle of doubt.

Maud might be right, although the more he thought it over the more he felt inclined to think that she was wrong.

Gradually and yet perceptibly the passage became lighter, until at last the fugitives could see before them a small patch of light.

This was the outlet.

A little while ago, they thought they would have rushed forward with joy upon making this discovery, and now Maud hung back, and prevented her husband from advancing quickly.

He suffered himself to be detained without making much resistance.

He was thinking that it was rather a fearful amount of risk to run to attempt to pass out through the aperture, and the thought was one well calculated to make him pause.

There was not only himself to think about, but his companion, whose life he prized far, far above his own.

When within about a dozen paces from the outlet which would lead him to freedom, Dick came to a dead stop, for he could not make up his mind to proceed any further.

He taxed his brain to the utmost, in the hope of being able to hit upon some scheme by which he could ascertain whether his foes were in ambush at the mouth of the cavern or not.

At last he nodded his head to Maud, and pressed her hand encouragingly.

"I have thought of a plan," he said, "by which I can ascertain whether the officers are outside or not. Stand still here for a moment!"

Maud clung tightly to him, and would not let him move.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Come with me, and I will show you. There is no danger."

With these words, Dick led Maud nearer to the entrance.

She trembled excessively.

But she soon comprehended what Dick was about to do, and grew a little calmer.

In the first place, Dick took off his hat and stuck it on the point of his sword.

Extending the weapon to the full length of his arm, Dick crept along the side of the passage until close to its extremity.

Slowly he pushed the hat outside the entrance, so that if the officers were outside and watching for him to make his appearance, they could not fail to see it.

With no small amount of anxiety and suspense, Maud watched for the result of this experiment.

But all was still.

Not the least movement was made.

"It's all right, Maud!" said Dick, with a sigh of satisfaction. "There's no one here—I thought there scarcely could be!"

Still, Maud shrank from advancing, and it was not until Dick threatened to go out without her that she overcame her fears.

Her heart ceased to beat, however, as they approached the end of the passage, so firmly had the idea taken possession of her mind that the officers were in ambush outside.

When she gained the open air, however, and found that her suspicions had no foundation, she burst into tears.

But they were tears of joy which she shed, and every one gave her relief and did her good.

Dick let them flow on, without making any attempt to check them.

But he spoke to her in as cheerful a voice as he could assume.

"There, Maud," he said—"I told you that your alarm was groundless. Here we are beneath the open sky, and at last free from danger!"

"Yes, yes—I see we are!"

"Well, then, all is well! Dry up your tears, dearest! Dick Turpin has had another narrow escape."

Maud shuddered.

But she dried her tears and looked about her, and when she saw that the night sky was above her, and that the stars were twinkling overhead, she felt more composed.

The deep silence, too, had a most soothing effect upon her, and she soon regained a considerable portion of her lost firmness.

She looked around her, and said:

"I see no officers."

"No, Maud, nor I; and, do you know, I have an idea connected with their apparently unaccountable abandonment of the pursuit."

"What is it?"

"Do not be alarmed. It is really quite a comforting idea."

"Then let me—oh, let me know it!"

"I don't know how it is the thought did not occur to me before. I suppose it must be the fresh air that has cleared my brain. Don't you remember that as we came along the passage there was one part that branched off?"

"Yes—yes!"

"If you will recollect, after some hesitation I chose the right-hand path."

"You did—I remember it well."

"Then you may rely upon it the officers turned off to the left, and at this moment they are doubtless wandering through the maze of passages which I feel convinced exists beneath that mansion."

This supposition sounded so very, very probable, that Dick did not hesitate a moment in believing that it was perfectly correct.

"All is well, Maud!" he cried. "Surely you will cheer up now! There is but one thing that we require, dear one, and then I would laugh at Mr. Wriggles and his officers!"

"What is that?"

"Cannot you guess?"

"No."

"It is Black Bess—my bonny, bonny Black Bess! Could I but gain possession of her, I should not care a jot! She has carried a double burden before to-day, and will do so again, especially after her long rest."

"But can you reach her?"

"I hope so. What is there to prevent me?"

"Nothing that I know of."

"Did you leave her safe in the stable?"

"Yes. I went in as usual this morning, and fed her well."

"That is right. A load is taken off my heart. Are all her trappings on?"

"Yes; Claude put them on—not properly, but still she carries all upon her back. The bit wants putting in her mouth——"

"Yes, and the girths tightening—that's about it. I am glad Claude was so thoughtful. It will be of important service to have her ready for the road."

"What are you about to do, Dick?"

"If you will be guided by me, you will remain here,

just where you are standing, and I will creep forward and enter the stable."

"No, no—do not leave me! Take me with you! If we are separated, I shall be terrified to death! I will be cautious—very, very cautious!"

"Well, you shall accompany me, for you have been truly brave to-night. We will mount Black Bess at the stable door, and then off and away!"

Nothing in the world would have induced Dick Turpin to approach the deserted mansion on this occasion, save the imperative necessity that compelled him to do so.

Without Black Bess he should be nothing: and, besides, he could not leave her in the hands of his foes.

Let the risk be what it might, he must regain possession of her

Of course the reader is full well aware that Dick was totally ignorant of the attempt which Mr. Wriggles and his officers had made to capture his gallant mare.

He little dreamed that he was running the risk of approaching the stable for no good.

At that very moment Black Bess was free and roaming who could say where?

CHAPTER DXXVIII.

MAUD GAINS COURAGE IN THE HOUR OF NEED, AND RENDERS DICK TURPIN AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE.

DICK TURPIN'S danger was now greater than it had been at any previous moment of that most eventful night.

Always before, he had known what risk he was about to run, and could form a good idea of the extent of his danger.

Now he was like one wandering in the dark.

The idea had unfortunately taken possession of him that his foes were down in the passages.

Instead of that, they were stealthily approaching him.

If he entered the stable, surely he would be caught.

Slowly and cautiously did Dick Turpin make his way towards it.

To do so, of course he had to come much nearer to the deserted mansion.

Suddenly a faint sound struck upon Dick's attentive ear, and then a shout, which told plainly enough that he had been seen by some of his enemies.

It was Jim Lickfold's sudden and exultant exclamation which he had heard first.

The shout which followed came from the lips of Mr. Wriggles.

He had caught sight of the forms of Dick Turpin and Maud, and he was so overjoyed that he could not contain himself.

He made a rush forward, and was quickly followed by his men.

"We must make a run for it now, Maud!" said Dick Turpin, hurriedly, between his teeth. "I did not think they were so close at hand. Come—come!"

Maud was almost paralysed with terror when she found they had so closely approached their foes.

She was ready to give up all hope now.

Dick did not say as much, but he felt that he was unequal to the exertion of running far.

Indeed, how he had kept up so long and so well as he had was a mystery, considering his physical condition.

It may safely be affirmed that it was intense excitement, and nothing else, which enabled him to go through and perform what he had done.

He had, of course, every incentive for exertion that a human being possibly could have.

But the time of reaction would of course have to come, and when it arrived it would be truly fearful.

He would be prostrated.

But he drew his breath hard, and nerved himself for the violent exertion he was so suddenly and unexpectedly called upon to make.

In addition to running himself, he had almost to carry Maud.

The poor girl felt every moment as though she must fall to the earth.

But she bore up bravely and did her best.

Dick Turpin of course made his way in a direct line to the stable, in which he imagined Black Bess still stood.

This was a proceeding which rather astonished the police officers, and puzzled them as well; but [illegible] may be expected, Jim Lickfold was the first to understand what it meant.

He laughed gleefully.

"All right, Mr. W.," he said—"all right! Lor' bless you, don't put yourself about! Take it easy! Easy does it! Don't you hurry! Can't you see what the blessed move is?"

"No."

"Dear me! It's as plain as the nose on your face! That's Dick Turpin yonder, and he is making full speed to the stable. That's where he's bound for!"

"How can that be? Black Bess isn't there."

"I know that, and it's a d—d good job for us she isn't. But Dick Turpin don't know that."

Mr. Wriggles uttered one of his peculiar yells, which rather alarmed the fugitives, who could not think what was the cause of it.

Still, they continued to run, and the officers to pursue them.

Dick Turpin had a good start at the first, and he was able to preserve it—indeed, it almost seemed as though he increased the distance that intervened between them.

"Let 'em alone, Mr. W.," said Jim. "They are running into the trap with their eyes shut! They won't find out that Black Bess is missing until they get into the stable, and then it will be too late! We shall surround the stable door, and then we shall have them as safe as bricks!"

And indeed there seemed every probability of things turning out in the way Jim Lickfold said they would.

How could Dick Turpin become aware of Black Bess's absence until he entered the stable?

So assured did they feel they should be spared all further trouble, that the officers slackened their speed a little, for they did not want to come up with their prey just yet.

It would be all the easier for them when they were inside.

Blindly, as Jim Lickfold said, did Dick Turpin hurry towards the stable.

Every step he came nearer, the more did he felicitate himself that all was well.

When he entered the stable, he calculated his exertions would be over.

Instead of that, they were about to begin.

Strange to say, Dick did not notice that the officers slightly slackened their speed.

He perceived that the distance between them increased, but he attributed this to his own superior fleetness.

The stable door was only a few feet distant.

Dick looked upon that stable as some belated mariner would look upon a harbour.

Once within that and all would be right, and he would cease to care about the past.

He felt that he was taxing his energies to the utmost.

His limbs flagged now and then, and he could not help it.

A minute elapsed.

Then, with a faint cry of joy, he crossed the threshold and stood within the stable.

The first thing he did was to close the door and secure it as well as he was able.

While he was thus engaged, Maud hastened to the stall in which she had left Black Bess standing, in order that no time might be lost.

Then a piercing scream burst from her lips.

Dick Turpin turned round with the rapidity of lightning.

He had put a strong bar across the door, and he sprang forward towards his companion, to whom he feared some dreadful accident had happened.

In tones of agony he cried:

"What—what is it? Speak, Maud—speak! Tell me what has happened!"

"Alas—alas!" moaned Maud

"Are you hurt?"

"No, no!"

"What is it, then?"

"Black Bess——"

"Ha!" ejaculated Dick, cold perspiration all over him. "What of Black Bess?"

"She has gone!"

"Gone?"

"Yes."

Dick clasped his hands frantically over his throbbing brain, and felt for a moment as though he should die.

At length he summoned up strength enough to gasp out:

"Gone—gone? Oh, no! Impossible!"

Bang, bang, bang! came three terrific blows upon the door at this moment.

Dick echoed them with three groans.

The moment of reaction had come.

All hope was over now, he felt assured of that.

His last and only chance was that he should be able to mount Black Bess, and ride away.

And now she was gone.

Gone!

No doubt she had been abstracted by his foes for the purpose of cutting off his retreat.

The mere loss of Black Bess—the thought that she had fallen into the hands of his hated foes—was surely enough to drive the bold highwayman to madness.

Such a thing was almost the worst calamity that could befall him.

Dick felt utterly crushed.

He knew now that his last hope had failed him—that there was not the slightest chance of making his escape.

His foes would conquer.

It would give the police officers but little trouble to force their way into the stable.

Then all would be over.

He might fall covered with wounds; but then there was Maud—what was to become of her?

The thought was madness.

Bang, bang, bang! came the blows upon the door.

Each one seemed to strike him on the heart.

He heard a yelling and exultant chorus of voices without.

He heard a formal summons made for him to surrender.

But he heeded it not.

He groaned bitterly.

Then, after a pause, a terrific attack was made upon the door.

The officers evidently intended to batter it down.

Still, Dick Turpin did not move.

His heart beat with such violence and rapidity that it seemed as though it would burst.

He was so weak, so exhausted, so completely paralysed that he felt himself compelled to lean against the wall for support.

He was now suffering from the effects of his tremendous efforts.

Now that the excitement had left him—now that he saw there was no longer the least possibility of his being able to escape—he was absolutely powerless.

He listened to the furious blows which the officers struck upon the door with a dull, apathetic feeling.

If one of them had entered, then they would have made him prisoner with very little trouble.

Mr. Wriggles did not think Dick would surrender, so he strained every nerve to break into the stable.

He made sure of having him this time.

But where was Maud all this time?

Dick fancied she was standing near, completely overwhelmed by this sad reverse of fate.

But she was not.

When she saw the effect which this discovery had had upon Dick Turpin, she felt her own courage rise.

She resolved to make some attempt to escape.

In her continual visits to the stable, Maud had noticed a door which seemed to lead into either another range of stables or else some inner room.

She had never had the curiosity to look where this door led, but now she recollected it, and resolved to ascertain whether there was any chance of escape in this direction.

Passing through the door, Maud found herself in a small apartment, which she saw immediately had been formerly used as a harness-room, though now it was quite empty.

A hasty examination showed her that there was no door by which they could escape.

But there was a window.

This was enough.

With her heart fluttering with joy and hope, she made her way back to where Dick stood in the strange, dreamy state we have described.

The officers by this time had made fearful progress in their attack upon the door.

It was already half demolished.

Maud was deeply grieved when she saw how downcast Turpin was.

She had to touch him twice upon the arm before he became cognisant of her presence.

He looked dreamily at her.

"Hope—hope!" cried Maud. "Rouse yourself—shake off this dreadful feeling of depression! If you are quick and attend to what I say, all will be well! Do you hear me?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Come this way, then—come this way, and I will show you the means by which you can without difficulty escape from the stable."

CHAPTER DXXIX.

BLACK BESS OBEYS DICK TURPIN'S SIGNAL, AND ONCE MORE SAVES HER MASTER'S LIFE.

Surely, if any words could have roused Dick Turpin from his state of partial unconsciousness, those would which Maud just uttered.

"Escape," he said—"escape? How can I escape?"

"Come with me, and I will show you."

"But have you found Black Bess?"

"No."

"Then it is folly to think of making an escape."

"No—no! Do not think so. Be persuaded by me! Do not linger—oh, do not! If you do, it will be too late. Look—the door is almost down!"

A glance showed that in less than another moment the officers would be able to rush into the stable.

Then the powerful instinct which prompted him to get as far away from his enemies as he could took firm possession of Dick Turpin.

By a sudden effort he seemed to shake off all that lethargy which weighed him down.

"Which is the way, Maud?" he said, with something like his old energy apparent in his tones. "Show which is the way! How can we leave this place?"

Maud did not pause for a reply, but, seizing Dick by the arm, dragged him across the stable to the door that opened into the harness-room.

Dick was surprised.

"I had no idea of the existence of this place," he said.

"Nor I, till now. Ah, they are here!"

These words were pronounced by Maud as she caught sight of the officers rushing into the stable, for the door had been completely battered down.

Dick closed the door leading into the harness-room, but felt in vain for some fastenings by which he could secure it.

He discovered that it was provided with neither bolts, bar, nor lock.

But at that moment his eye fell upon a huge chest that had perhaps been used for a corn-bin.

A sudden effort of strength enabled him to place it against the door.

But it would not form much of a barricade.

The officers were already hammering at this inner door when Maud pointed out the window to Dick.

To scramble through, however, took them but a moment, and as soon as they felt their feet touch the ground, they started off at the top of their speed.

But ere they had gone very far, several pistol-shots were fired after them, for the officers very soon forced open the door of the harness-room, and, rushing to the window, saw the fugitives flying for their lives.

They fired first, and then dashed through the window afterwards.

Dick ran for some distance, and then he paused.

"Maud," he said, "all is over! I can run no further—my strength is quite spent!"

"No, no, no! Don't say that, Dick!"

"I have but one hope, and that is a frail one. It may be that Black Bess has strayed out of the stable, and is somewhere in the grounds. If she is—if she has not been captured—I can call her to my side as easily as I could call a dog."

"Try—try!" gasped Maud. "The hope is faint, but yet——"



[CLAUDE DUVAL SETTLES OLD SCORES WITH RICHARD NARES.]

She said no more, for at that moment Dick Turpin uttered the peculiar whistle we have so often mentioned, and which he had taught his bonny mare was a signal always to be obeyed.

The notes pealed out clearly enough, and scarcely had they died away than there was a sudden rush among the brushwood, and the next instant Black Bess was rubbing her head against Dick Turpin's breast.

Oh, how overjoyed Dick was!

This deliverance was more—far more—than he had expected.

He uttered the whistle almost despairingly, for although he spoke as he did, he scarcely thought it possible that Black Bess would be able to respond to it.

And now his gallant mare was at his side, in readiness for the road. He had but to lift Maud to the saddle, and spring up after her, and then his frightful and terrible danger would be over.

The police officers, however, were alarmingly close behind, and when they saw the highwayman joined by Black Bess, they hurried forward with still greater speed.

They were well aware that the only chance they had of effecting his capture was to seize him before he could mount.

The distance they had to go was very short, and so they had every hope of success.

The possession of Black Bess seemed to have the effect of infusing fresh strength into Dick Turpin's frame.

Under the excitement of the moment he forgot all about his wound and the frightful weakness which had attacked him.

He lifted Maud up and placed her on the saddle, quickly and easily, and the next moment he was seated too.

Although this was done with so much rapidity, yet the officers had time to reach him. Just as he placed his foot in the stirrup, Jim Lickford, who was foremost, seized Black Bess by the bridle.

In another second Dick Turpin was surrounded.

Convinced that promptitude of action alone could save him, Dick drew a couple of pistols from his belt.

Without pausing to utter a word, he fired one full at Jim Lickfold, and the other at random amongst the officers.

With a loud cry, Jim released his hold upon the bridle, and fell bleeding to the ground.

Dick touched Black Bess with the spur, and then she bounded off, clearing her way through the officers, who vainly strove to check her progress.

They were dashed aside for their pains.

Mr. Wriggles was frantic, but, as often happened, his passion was perfectly impotent.

The garden surrounding the deserted mansion was separated from the fields beyond by a low hedge only, and Black Bess had leaped over this and galloped far away before the officers, who had been thrown down, had time to rise to their feet.

"Quick—after them!" screamed Mr. Wriggles excitedly. "We are not defeated yet! I will not give up till I have hunted him to the death! I will kill or capture him—I am determined! I have been very near having him twice—the third time I shall be successful! Quick! I say—mount your horses and follow me!"

Those police officers who were unhurt hastened off to obey Mr. Wriggles's command.

Jim Lickfold lay upon the ground just where he had fallen.

He was groaning as though suffering great agony, and was quite unable to rise.

Mr. Wriggles paid no heed to him.

His mind was too much engrossed by the all-important task of capturing Dick Turpin to take notice of any other circumstance.

Without so much as bestowing a glance upon him, he hurried off after the officers as fast as his legs could carry him.

It will be remembered that when Mr. Wriggles entered the deserted mansion he left the horses in charge of one of his men.

It was towards this spot that they all hastened.

They scrambled into their saddles in a perfectly reckless manner, and galloped off almost before they were seated.

Quite half the horses remained, for their riders were either dead or too badly wounded to join in the pursuit.

Mr. Wriggles fancied his men looked rather shy when they saw this, and he hastened to remove any uncomfortable idea from their minds.

"Now, my lads," he cried, endeavouring to speak in quite a hopeful and exultant tone of voice, "we are not all here of course, but still there are enough to capture one man, and you must know very well that the fewer the better, for when the reward is divided your shares will be all the greater. Come on—we shall make a good night's work of this yet!"

Mr. Wriggles shouted out these words at intervals, as he led the police officers across the garden, over the hedge, and into the field beyond.

But by this time Dick Turpin was out of sight.

They looked all about, but could not see the least signs of him.

Mr. Wriggles would not allow this to have a discouraging effect upon his spirits, and so he continued his vociferations to his men.

"Forward—forward!" he shouted. "We shall have him yet! It may be a long chase; but what of that?—we shall come up with him in good time; he can't keep up for ever; and if we only persevere we shall be able to overtake him!"

The officers tried to set up a shout in reply to this speech, but the attempt was a failure.

The truth was, they were, one and all, about as tired of the night's adventures as they well could be.

Still they didn't dare to disobey their leader, and so they followed him, but not with that eagerness and alacrity which is necessary for success.

Leaving Mr. Wriggles and his officers to continue their pursuit, we will return to Dick Turpin and Maud.

Once free from the officers who had surrounded him, the bold highwayman felt himself secure.

It was only for a moment that he had been apprehensive, and now Black Bess had got such a good start of her pursuers, he felt no fear for the result.

Maud clung to him in great terror.

Now that the danger had to some extent passed away, her feelings found vent, and she sobbed and wept bitterly.

That courage and boldness which had been of such service in the hour of need had completely deserted her.

It was a difficult task, but Dick Turpin tried his best to calm and soothe her.

With his left arm he supported her in the saddle, while in his right he held the reins, and guided Black Bess clear of the many obstructions that lay before him.

"Cheer up, Maud!" he said; "be of good heart, dear one! the danger is over now. Look up!—look about you, the police officers are no longer near; they have not yet been able to mount their steeds and commence the pursuit; by the time they do so we shall be far, far away—Black Bess will have obtained such a capital start that it will be impossible for them to overtake us! Cheer up, then!—dry your eyes and be happy, for now this night of peril is over!"

Maud continued to weep in silence.

She could not control this natural outlet to her feelings, and she felt, too, that these tears did her good, and made her feel much calmer.

The only reply she made to Dick's words was to cling still more tightly to him.

Presently she looked up with a smile upon her face.

It was a faint, weary smile, and when he saw it, Dick felt that he would have preferred to see her in tears.

From time to time he glanced back, but he could see nothing of the officers.

Dawn, however, was close at hand—in a little while it would be broad daylight.

It was necessary, then, that he should look out for some place of concealment.

It would never do for him to continue his gallop across the country in open day.

In a little while he would have such a band of pursuers at his heels that it would be quite impossible for him to shake them off.

As he looked about him, however, in search of some hiding-place which would escape the attention of the officers, he felt that dreadful sensation of utter weakness come over him which he had so frequently experienced during that eventful night.

His escape and his unexpected recovery of Black Bess at the time when he despaired of ever seeing her again endowed him with fleeting strength.

The excitement which had produced it passed rapidly away, leaving him, of course, ten times weaker than before.

All around him at that early morning hour was very calm, and this calmness seemed to have the effect of causing his weakness to increase.

Suddenly he felt himself sway to one side, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he recovered his balance.

That was the first intimation of his weakness which he received.

It alarmed him greatly, and he tried his utmost to shake the sensation off.

By a powerful effort of his mind he succeeded in doing this, and continued on his way.

They were travelling on a wide, cross-country road.

As far, however, as the eye could reach there was no place which would afford the highwayman shelter from his foes.

In the distance, and situated upon a piece of rising ground, was a fine-looking manorial building, surrounded by extensive and well-cultivated grounds, which reached almost to where Dick then was.

This was the only dwelling in sight, and it was not at all likely that Dick Turpin would be able to find refuge there.

Perceiving this, he urged Black Bess onward at a more rapid rate, and he made up his mind to struggle with his weakness for some time longer yet.

Maud had noticed Dick when he leant so suddenly on one side, but did not think what it was that had caused him to do so.

Looking up into his face, however, she was startled at its unusual paleness.

His whole countenance had a worn and haggard look, and his eyes looked dim and lustreless, but at this she could not be surprised, for what he had gone through

during the last few hours was sure to leave some trace behind it.

Just as she made this reflection Dick reeled again, this time more dangerously than before, and it was by the merest chance in the world that he saved himself from falling to the ground.

But he did save himself, and as if angry to think his weakness should have obtained the mastery over him, he touched Black Bess with the spur, although her speed at that moment was absolutely terrific.

Maud was alarmed without exactly knowing why She spoke to Dick, and asked what it was that ailed him but she received no reply.

He seemed unconscious that she had spoken.

Alarmed and terrified, she clung tightly to him, and spoke in a louder voice.

"Tell me," she asked—"tell me what it is that makes you look so strangely at me?"

By Turpin's manner and the movement of his lips it would seem as though he was trying to speak.

But, if such was his intention, he failed completely, for not a murmur issued from them.

More terrified than ever, Maud gazed into his countenance.

At length, after what was evidently a most painful effort, Dick said:

"Help!—he—lp—I—I!"

He could articulate no more

With a sudden lurch his body swayed to one side. This time he had no longer the power to make an attempt to recover his balance.

Quite helpless—quite insensible, Dick Turpin fell from the saddle and reached the ground with a dull crash, carrying Maud with him.

His arm was round her, and she was clasping him tightly.

Dick's left foot was entangled in the stirrup, and he was dragged along the road for several yards.

But Black Bess, with her rare intelligence, perceiving that something was amiss, brought herself to a standstill as soon as she was able.

She trembled in every limb, and her eyes were expressive of the utmost terror.

Maud had fainted with alarm, and Dick Turpin was insensible.

And so, as motionless as though dead, they lay together on the hard roadway, without anyone to look upon them save Black Bess.

Where was Mr. Wriggles now?

CHAPTER DXXX.

TOM KING MAKES AN EASY DUPE OF THE LOQUACIOUS LANDLORD, AND CLEVERLY CHEATS THE OFFICERS.

It was only for a moment that the countenance of Richard Nares remained pressed against the window pane, peering into the room in the Golden Lion, where Tom King and his two companions sat.

The hideous-looking countenance vanished almost as quickly as it had appeared, and the landlord and the others in the room never saw it at all.

As soon as the face disappeared, Tom King sank down into his chair again.

"What is the matter, sir?" asked the landlord again, his curiosity raised to the utmost pitch. "Pray tell me what is amiss? Why did you start so violently from your chair?"

The rapidity with which Tom King recovered his composure was really most remarkable.

But he was well aware that in all probability upon his calmness depended the safety of himself and his two companions.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack controlled themselves as well as they were able, but they had both caught sight of the countenance of Richard Nares, and felt certain that it boded no good to them.

They recollected the threats to which he had given utterance as he stood behind the hedge in the lane, and Claude Duval wished more than ever that he had put it out of his power to do them any mischief.

Although their acquaintanceship had been so short, Tom King had obtained a tolerable insight into the landlord's character, and he was certain that without he gave him some plausible account of what it was that had caused him to start up so suddenly and manifest so much agitation, he would not allow them to rest.

To invent something, then, on the spur of the moment that would satisfy the landlord's inquisitive curiosity was no easy matter, but luckily Tom King was struck with a happy thought.

He was not without a hope that he should be able to turn this incident to his own advantage.

When the landlord stood up and asked what was the matter, of course all the others who were assembled in the room looked anxiously towards Tom King in expectation of his reply.

Tom King threw an expression of great mysteriousness into his countenance, and beckoned the landlord towards him.

That individual advanced gladly enough, and then Tom King bent towards him and whispered in his ear:—

"Can I have five minutes' conversation with you? I want to take you into my confidence."

Now, if there was one thing more than another that the landlord of the Golden Lion was fond of, it was to be taken into anyone's confidence.

He was never so happy as when he was troubling his head with his neighbour's business.

His face quite lighted up with a smile, and he said:

"Certainly, sir, I am much obliged to you. Come this way."

Tom King rose, and beckoned to his comrades to follow him.

"We shall be back immediately," said the landlord, turning to the rest of the company—"I am going to have some private conversation with this gentleman."

This was said with such an air and tone of importance, that Tom King, although his mind was occupied with very serious thoughts, could scarcely refrain from laughing.

The landlord led the way out of the room, across the passage, and into a little private apartment that was situated behind the bar.

"Be seated, gentlemen,—pray be seated, and then I shall be at your service."

The highwaymen sat down, and then Tom King, turning towards the landlord, addressed him as follows, to the no slight astonishment of his companions:

"Landlord," he said, "it requires but a very slight amount of penetration to enable anyone to perceive that you are a man gifted with no ordinary amount of intelligence. It is also quite as easy to see that you are a man who can be trusted, and in whom implicit confidence may be placed."

The landlord of the Golden Lion had never had such a flattering speech made to him before in the whole course of his life, and, naturally enough, he was not a little confused and embarrassed.

"Gentlemen," he said, stammeringly—"that is, I mean—sir—or, gentlemen, at least—sir, you——"

"I quite understand your feelings," said Tom King, "and they do you infinite credit. However, I don't wish to compliment you, but I entrust you with a very important secret connected with Government."

The landlord was overpowered.

He had been entrusted with secrets before, and, as he believed, very important ones, and had experienced the utmost delight; but they all sank into insignificance when compared with a secret connected with Government

He was literally burning with impatience to know what his guest was about to say.

To speak the honest truth, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were scarcely less curious.

"You noticed me start up from my chair," said Tom King, "while you were speaking to me?"

"Y—es, sir, I did."

"I thought so—you have remarkable powers of observation. In all probability you saw what it was that made me spring up so quickly?"

The landlord hardly liked to confess it, and so it was with much hesitation that he said:

"I did not, sir."

"Ah, well—it don't much matter! I will tell you! First of all, however, you must understand that we are three detectives who have been sent down purposely from London."

The landlord looked aghast.

"Three detectives?"

"Yes, myself and my companions."

Claude Duval and Jack both nodded.

"Why—why, gentlemen, what's the matter?—what can have brought you down to these parts? I have not heard of anything, I can assure you—nothing at all!"

"Very likely," said Tom King. "We have come down here in pursuit of a great criminal; he made his escape, and we have tracked him to these parts."

"Oh, indeed!" said the landlord, breathing a little more freely, for he was frightened to death lest he should find that something had occurred in the neighbourhood that he knew nothing about.

"Yes," said Tom, "we have tracked him as far as the forest. Have you seen any stranger about?"

The landlord paused, and appeared to reflect deeply.

"Would you mind describing him, sir?" he said, at length.

"No, I have no objection!" Tom thereupon gave a full and accurate description of the personal appearance of Richard Nares.

He concluded by saying:

"We are making a very close search for him. Have you seen anyone within the last day or two answering to this description?"

Very reluctantly, the landlord confessed that he had not.

"When we came in," continued Tom, "we thought of having a good rest, for we had travelled many miles in pursuit. Duty, however, now calls us away."

"Why so, sir?"

"I forgot that I hadn't told you the reason why I started up from my chair."

"No, you have not told me."

"Well, it was because I saw the very man of whom we are in pursuit looking through the window into the room."

"Good gracious!"

"It's a fact, landlord, and so it's quite clear that he is lurking somewhere about! I have taken you into my confidence and entrusted you with this secret because I wish you to assist me in effecting his capture."

The colour faded a little in the landlord's face, for he was by no means a courageous man, and he asked, unconsciously:

"What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing that will give you very much trouble, and yet something that will render us great service."

The landlord looked relieved, and the colour came slowly back to his face again.

"We must capture this man in our own way, and you must say nothing about it. In the first place, you must lead us to the stables, and help us to get our horses ready. Then, if you can show us some other way of leaving your inn yard than the one by which people generally do leave it, you will be fully entitled to the reward of five pounds, which sum I offer you in the name of his Majesty the King."

If Tom King had made this proposition in a less skilful manner than he had done, the probability is that the landlord would have had his suspicions aroused; but Tom had found his weak points, and played upon them with great skill and advantage.

The landlord was quite carried away, and failed to perceive anything extravagant in what Tom said.

Taking his hat from off the peg behind the door upon which it hung, he put it on his head with great determination, and, buttoning his coat, said, emphatically:

"Gentlemen, I am a loyal subject, and ready to serve his Majesty. This way to the stables, gentlemen. You will see that I shall very quickly earn the five pounds."

The three highwaymen were almost convulsed with laughter, and they preserved their gravity with extreme difficulty.

The landlord seemed to be so full of loyalty and valour that Tom was afraid he would attract the attention of the other people in the inn.

"Hush!" he said. "You must be silent—you must not make the least noise. You might alarm him, and then he would again escape."

The landlord did not speak, but nodded his head, to show that he perfectly understood; he placed his fingers on his lips with a ludicrous gesture, and walked on tiptoe out of the private parlour into the bar, and along the passage to the back door opening into the yard.

He went first, and the three highwaymen followed; but the manner in which the landlord walked upon tiptoe was really too amusing, and they were obliged to indulge in a little silent laughter.

The landlord went straight to the stables, and assisted the highwaymen to saddle their horses and get them ready for the road.

This took but a very short time indeed, and our friends prepared to mount.

Just as the horses were led out of the stable-door, however, a loud knocking or hammering sound reached the ears of all.

The landlord turned round twice in surprise, and then said:

"Gentlemen, whatever is that?"

"I have no idea," said Tom.

"But—but, gentlemen, it sounds like some one knocking at my front door, and if they keep it up at that rate they'll batter it down completely."

"Never mind," said Tom King, "you must recollect that you are engaged in the service of his Majesty, and in the service of his Majesty's Government. All you have to do now is to show us the way out of the yard, and the five pounds are yours; and when you have got that you can run and see what all that knocking is about."

"This way, gentlemen. There's a door here through which you can pass easily enough, though it is not a very wide one,"

"And where does it lead to?" said Tom King.

"Into my paddock where I turn my horses."

"That will do excellently," said Tom King. "Here are the five pounds I promised you, and you may depend that I shall not fail to represent your conduct in the proper light to the authorities as soon as I return to London."

With these words, Tom King placed five pounds in the landlord's hands, and passed through the door leading into the paddock, leaving the landlord bowing and uttering his thanks, completely overwhelmed by his good fortune.

The forms of the three highwaymen quickly faded from his view, in the darkness.

How long he would have stood gazing after them is hard to say, only he heard the knocking which at first attracted his attention, and which now appeared to be going on more vigorously than ever.

Wondering what could be the cause of it, he ran into the house, and entered the passage just in time to see the front door opened, and a body of police officers rush tumultuously in.

As soon as the foremost of these officers caught sight of the landlord, he rushed forward and seized him.

"Explain this!" he cried. "What is the reason we have been detained so long knocking at your door? Explain yourself at once! Your conduct seems suspicious, and I feel strongly inclined to give you into custody!"

The landlord opened his mouth and goggled his eyes furiously, but uttered no sound.

"Search the inn thoroughly," said the officer who held the landlord—"leave no part unvisited! Beyond doubt we shall discover them!"

The officers at once dispersed themselves about the inn.

"Now, landlord," said the chief officer, "explain your conduct, or I shall give you into custody!"

"My conduct?"

"Yes. Why did you keep us so long at your front door?"

"I came as soon as I could, but I was engaged," and the landlord assumed an important air as he spoke. "I was engaged in assisting his Majesty and his Majesty's Government."

The police officer gazed in some astonishment into the landlord's countenance.

He fancied, and not unreasonably, that he must be just a little mad.

Having spoken, however, the landlord looked down with a kind of disdain upon the officer, who he now considered to be almost beneath his notice.

"Say that again," said the officer. "I can't accept that as an explanation; you must tell me in what manner you were assisting his Majesty's Government. I feel more suspicious of you than ever!"

"It is a secret," gasped the landlord, who began to feel rather alarmed—"it is a secret."

"Then, for your own good, I would seriously advise you to make a clean breast of it. You would find it so very comfortable thing to be marched off to Southampton Gaol!"

"March me to Southampton Gaol!" cried the landlord, indignantly. "I am sure his Majesty would never permit that, after the important service I have rendered him this evening."

"Are you mad?" said the officer. "You must be; I can't bring myself to believe that you are in your proper senses!"

Just at this moment the police officers who had been engaged in searching the inn returned.

"We can't find anyone, sir," they said, addressing their chief; "but we have learnt that three persons answering to their description were seen in the house a quarter of an hour ago."

"Arrest this man, then!" said the chief officer, pointing to the landlord. "Put the handcuffs on him immediately—he is a desperate character!"

Before he could recover himself, the landlord found he was handcuffed and a prisoner.

'None of your larks, now!" said the officer who held him—"you had best be quiet; if you ain't, it will be the worse for you!"

"But, gentlemen," said the landlord, who by this time began to realise the fact that he was in a very uncomfortable situation—"gentlemen, I say you are doing quite wrong—you are under some mistake."

"Why don't you speak out, then?" said the chief officer. "What were you doing?—why did not you open the door? In what way were you assisting his Majesty's Government?"

The landlord knew he was pledged to secresy, but yet he thought his wisest plan would be to tell all, for he imagined then he would be immediately set at liberty.

"It is a secret," he said, "but three detectives from London put up at this inn not long ago."

"Three fiddlesticks!" said the chief officer.

The landlord did not deign to notice the interruption, but went on:

"They told me themselves that they were in search of a great criminal. They saw him look through the window and then run off, after which they requested me, in the name of the King, to assist them in capturing him."

"And what did you do?" roared the chief officer.

"Do?" replied the landlord. "Why, as I am a loyal subject, I assisted them to serve the King."

"How—how?"

"I took them to the stables——"

A roar came from the officers.

"Helped them to saddle their horses, and showed them the way out of the inn yard into the paddock."

The landlord would have gone further with his explanations, but such a terrific uproar was raised by the police, that his voice could not be heard.

After several attempts, the chief officer succeeded in raising his voice above the tumult of sound.

"Keep the landlord secure!" he cried; "he must have thought we were natural-born fools if he imagined we were going to be taken in by such a tale as that. Assist his Majesty's Government!—a fine idea that! He has helped the three highwaymen to escape. It strikes me, my friend, you will look very queer when you are brought before the judge on the charge of having harboured, abetted, and aided those three daring highwaymen, Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack to escape from his Majesty's officers!"

Upon hearing these dreadful words, the landlord of the Golden Lion broke out into a cold perspiration.

His teeth chattered and his legs shook to such a degree that he could scarcely stand.

He began to find that he had made a horrible mistake—that, so far from having assisted his Majesty and his Majesty's Government, he had rendered himself liable to a charge of felony.

The prospect before him seemed to grow more and more alarming each moment.

The officers were in a terrible rage to think that they had been foiled when they were so near to accomplishing their object, and they were almost ready to sacrifice the landlord to their resentment upon the spot.

Probably the only thing that prevented them was the thought that he would be severely punished for what he had done.

"It is no good stopping here," said the chief officer; "of course they are far enough off by this time; but we will keep upon their track, and rely upon it we shall hear of them before long. You, Barrin and Philips, will remain here with the landlord, and I shall hold you responsible for his safe custody till I return."

The two officers named at once placed themselves on either side of the landlord, while the others hastily left the inn, mounted their horses, and rode away.

Before we describe the result of the pursuit, and before we return to the three highwaymen, we will in a few words explain the presence of the officers at the Golden Lion.

After Richard Nares had uttered the threatening speech which we have recorded in a former chapter, he lost no time in communicating with the officers.

In a very little while he had quite a large troop at his heels, who were all exceedingly anxious to effect the capture of the three highwaymen.

Richard Nares declared that he did not wish to take any portion of the reward, and this made the officers like him better than ever.

It is not necessary for us to describe minutely the progress of the officers to the Golden Lion.

Richard Nares led them in this direction, and upon reaching the inn—or rather upon drawing near to it—he requested the officers to halt while he went forward to reconnoitre and ascertain whether those they sought had happened to take up their quarters there.

This he did.

Approaching the inn carefully, he crept round it, peeping in at all the windows on the ground floor, until he came to the one which looked into the apartment in which the three highwaymen were seated.

He saw them at once and recognised them.

He was also aware that he himself had been seen, for he observed Tom King start suddenly to his feet.

He waited for no more, but hastened off to the spot where the officers were waiting.

In a few words he communicated the welcome intelligence that the three highwaymen were at the Golden Lion Inn, and so they hastened towards it.

With what happened afterwards the reader has already been made acquainted, and we will now occupy ourselves with relating the fortunes and misfortunes of the three highwaymen.

CHAPTER DXXXI.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN MAKE A SECOND ESCAPE FROM THE GOLDEN LION, AND SUCCEED IN DISINTERRING THE MINER'S TREASURE.

Tom King and his two comrades trotted quickly across the paddock which was situated at the back of the inn.

It was of no great extent, and in less than a moment they had reached its boundary.

This was simply a low wooden railing which divided it from the forest.

To leap over this was easy enough, and, under the guidance of Tom King, who was well acquainted with the locality, they plunged among the trees.

He led them into an open glade of considerable length.

Smooth green turf was beneath the horses' feet, and they galloped onwards at great speed.

Upon reaching the termination of it, they once more passed beneath the shadow of the trees.

"There is no occasion to hurry now," said Tom King "For the present, we are perfectly safe. We need not go faster than at a walk."

"You deserve very great credit, Tom," said Claude Duval, "for your ingenuity, and the cleverness with which you got us out of this last scrape."

"So say I," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, "though I should scarcely have thought you would have so easily made the landlord your dupe."

Tom laughed.

"I found out his weak points, that was all. I think, however, that we ought to congratulate ourselves upon our good fortune, for if those we heard knocking at the front door were not police officers, it is very odd to me."

"Confound that villain Richard Nares!" said Claude Duval. "He will give us a great deal of trouble yet. Oh,

now I regret now that I didn't put it out of his power to be a trouble to anybody!"

"It is no good regretting the past," said Tom King; "the best we can do is to make our way as rapidly as possible to the tree beneath which the treasure is hidden, and if we are lucky enough to gain possession of it, the sooner we take our departure the better."

"I quite agree with you," said Sixteen-String Jack. "We have had sleep, a good meal, and our horses have been properly attended to, so that we are quite in readiness for this adventure."

"Stop!" said Claude Duval, suddenly.

"What is the matter?"

"Did you not say that the treasure was buried?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, how are we to get at it? Where are our tools?"

"I had forgotten all about them," said Tom King; "but now you mention it, it will be necessary for us to get a pickaxe and a spade."

"I was afraid so," said Claude, "and that is why I spoke, but could we not manage to do without them?"

"No, for the chest is deeply buried. We must have both the implements I have named, and where in the world we are to obtain them from, I have no idea."

"I think I can get you out of that difficulty," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"How?"

"There would be some little risk and danger, but still I think it might be done."

"Speak out, then."

"Well, when I followed the ostler into the yard with the horses, I watched him feed them and such like, according to custom, and while doing this I noticed several gardening implements standing in one corner of the yard."

"You mean at the Golden Lion?"

"Yes."

"But how are we to get them?" said Tom King. "You may depend the police officers were pretty close behind Richard Nares when he peeped through the window, and indeed, as I said a little while ago, if that knocking at the front door did not announce their arrival, it is very odd to me."

"You may depend it was that and nothing else!" said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Well, then, while the officers are about, would it not be very dangerous to return?"

"It looks to me very much like putting your head in the lion's mouth!" said Claude Duval.

"The danger is a point to be considered," said Sixteen-String Jack. "The articles you want are in the inn yard. For my part, I think I could fetch them without running very much risk."

"We must have a spade and pickaxe," said Tom King, "that is very certain, but still I hardly fancy the idea of going back to the Golden Lion to fetch them."

"I think we could manage to approach the back premises unperceived," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Very likely we could."

"Well, then, I am on particularly good terms with the boy who does duty as ostler, and if he was about I should merely have to lean over the wall and ask him, and he would give me what we require in a moment."

"But suppose he should not be there?"

"Why, then I would go through the door myself, or, if it was fast, climb over the wall. I know just where the things are, and could get them and be off before the officers or the people in the inn had the least notion that we were so close at hand."

"I suppose necessity will compel us to run this risk," said Tom King, "though, believe me, I can hardly reconcile myself to it."

"Nor I," said Claude Duval, "for after having succeeded in getting away, it seems the height of foolhardiness to return."

"It is not worth while to stop lingering here," said Sixteen-String Jack. "In all probability, by the time we get back to the inn we shall find that the officers have left and commenced a pursuit after us. If that is the case, why then all will be well."

"Very good, then," said Tom King, "I will lead the way back."

He turned his horse's head round as he spoke, and made his way towards the back of the inn.

He took quite a different path through the trees, but this was a necessary precaution, as it diminished the danger of being seen.

In a little while they reached the railing which bounded the paddock.

Here they paused to reconnoitre, but finding all was still, they leaped over without hesitation.

Very cautiously they approached the wall that divided the inn yard from the paddock.

It was a good height, but still as they were on horseback they could look over it easily enough.

They found the yard was perfectly quiet.

Lights could be seen, however, at the various windows of the inn, and a loud hum of voices reached their ears, telling them plainly enough that some excitement or other was going on inside.

"It seems all right," said Sixteen-String Jack, in a whisper. "I don't see the ostler, but that doesn't matter; the spade and pickaxe are in yonder corner, and I can get them in a moment."

"Is the little door fastened?"

"Let us see."

Upon reaching the little door through which they had passed, they found, as they quite expected, that it was secured on the inner side.

"Never mind," said Sixteen-String Jack; "you hold my horse and I will be over the wall in a twinkling."

Claude Duval took hold of the bridle.

As he spoke, Sixteen-String Jack stood up on the saddle, and so gained the summit of the wall.

He sat astride it for a moment before he ventured to descend, but reassured by the continued silence, he cautiously lowered himself until he hung at the full length of his arms.

He was then within an inch of the ground.

He let go and stood perfectly still.

No one was about, and he stole swiftly across the yard to the corner where he had seen the gardening tools.

He possessed himself of the spade and pickaxe instantly, and as he did so he noticed that close by was a pair of steps which were probably used to clean the windows of the inn.

'That will help me over the wall bravely!"

As he spoke, he took hold of the steps and ran towards the wall.

When about half-way across the yard, however, the back-door was flung open, and a bright light streamed forth.

It so happened that this light fell full upon the form of Sixteen-String Jack, and revealed it with tolerable distinctness.

Jack heard the door open.

He didn't stop to look, however, but ran still more rapidly towards the wall.

The loud report of a pistol struck upon his ear, and at the same instant he felt a stinging sensation in his neck.

He knew that he was hit, and staggered slightly.

The wall, however, was just before him, and, making a desperate effort, he placed the ladder against it and hastily descended.

His two comrades were at the top.

Tom King took hold of the pickaxe and spade, and Claude Duval seized him by the arms and dragged him over.

While thus engaged another shot was fired, which was followed almost instantly by a brisk volley.

All that we have just described occurred with a rapidity that was quite bewildering.

The door was opened by the chief police officer, who had made up his mind that the landlord should show them by which route the highwaymen had left.

No sooner was the door opened than he caught sight of Sixteen-String Jack running at full speed.

He was within a few paces of the door.

To draw a pistol and fire it was the officer's first impulse.

The noise of the report attracted the attention of everyone, and the remainder of the police officers rushed tumultuously into the yard.

The one in command could just see the dusky figures on the top of the wall, and fired again, at the same time commanding his men to fire also.

He was obeyed, but before they fired all three highway-

men had disappeared from the top of the wall, so that no effect was produced.

The officers had heard the landlord say there was a door in the wall through which the highwaymen had passed, and they ran forward to find it.

They did so very quickly, and the bolts having been withdrawn, the door was dashed violently open.

Short as was the time occupied by these proceedings, yet Claude had been able to assist Sixteen-String Jack into the saddle.

The wound which the latter had received was not a serious one, but yet it bled profusely.

As he was heated with excitement, he thought nothing about it.

Just as the officers rushed through the door, the three highwaymen cleared the palings.

They were instantly among the trees, and so they succeeded in accomplishing their second escape.

The police officers were furious at their defeat, but they observed in which direction the fugitives had gone, and, mounting their horses, they commenced the pursuit.

As soon as they had gone a little distance, our friends paused.

Tom King and Claude knew that Sixteen-String Jack had been hit, and were anxious to learn whether the wound was serious or not.

They were not able to examine it very closely, but, as far as they could tell, it was only a flesh wound, that would require no other treatment than a simple bandage to check the flow of blood.

The large neckcloth which he wore served admirably for this purpose, and Claude folded it, and tied it with sufficient tightness round his neck to stanch the blood.

"I feel a little sick and faint," said Jack, in reply to his comrades' eager inquiries, "but otherwise I am all right."

"That feeling will soon pass away," said Claude. "The wound is a scratch, and nothing more."

"Forward, then," said Tom King; "follow me! We had better make what speed we can, for we are decidedly too near the officers to be at all agreeable."

It was greatly in their favour that Tom King possessed so good a knowledge of the intricacies of the forest as he evidently did.

He led them onward without hesitation.

From time to time they paused to listen, but on no occasion could they hear anything of their pursuers.

This was scarcely to be wondered at, for among the trees there were so many paths that it was next to an impossibility for the officers to be able to choose the right out of so many wrong ones.

Tom King carried the shovel, and Claude Duval the pickaxe.

"We are all right now," said the latter; "and if you, Tom, will only just lead us to the tree you have mentioned, we will quickly have the chest out of the ground; and then, in my opinion, we can't make too much haste out of the forest, for if we stay much longer we shall make it too hot to hold us."

"I will do so," said Tom King. "We have yet some distance to go, but still we shall not be very long reaching the tree. I quite agree with you, Claude; you may depend what has taken place at the Golden Lion to-night will cause no trifling amount of excitement."

Sixteen-String Jack was silent. His wound caused him more pain than he would have liked to confess.

While making their way towards the tree beneath which the miser's chest of gold had been hidden, our friends occupied themselves in congratulating each other upon the success they had had, not only with respect to their escape from a perilous position, but also with respect to the obtainment of the tools they needed.

At last, the much-wished-for spot was gained.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack looked about them with great interest and curiosity when Tom King said:

"Yonder is the tree near which the treasure is buried."

"Are you sure you are right?"

"Yes. I could tell that tree from a thousand. Do you not perceive that it has a monstrous hollow trunk—at any rate, it appears to be hollow—and from the upper portion of it there grows another young tree?"

"It is, in truth, a singular object," said Claude Duval, "and though I have never seen it before, I am sure I could recognise it again."

"A few yards to the left," continued Tom King, "is the dell you have heard me describe, and in which the poor old miser met with his death at the hands of his own servant."

Tom alighted from his steed as he spoke, and his two comrades followed his example.

"I think we are quite clear of our pursuers," he said, "and it will take only a short time to unbury the treasure, and when we have done that we will be off."

"Jack had better hold the horses," said Claude Duval, "as he is wounded—we will do what digging is required between us."

"Agreed!"

Accordingly, Sixteen-String Jack held the horses, and Tom King having pointed out the exact spot, Claude Duval set to work with the pickaxe, with great vigour.

When he had loosened a quantity of earth, Tom King cleared it out with the spade, and by thus working alternately, they quickly had a deep hole in the ground.

Suddenly Claude Duval felt the point of his pickaxe strike upon something hard.

"What is this?" he said.

He loosened the earth and Tom shovelled it out.

The top of the chest containing the miser's treasure was then exposed to view.

After about a quarter of an hour's hard labour, the earth was quite dug away from round the chest, and all that remained, was to lift it out of the hole.

This promised to be the most difficult part of the whole affair, and had not the chest been furnished with a massive iron handle at each end, it would have been well-nigh impossible.

Tom King and Claude Duval sat down upon it to recover breath, for they were quite exhausted by the tremendous exertions they had made.

But knowing time was valuable, they wiped the perspiration from their faces and started up.

"Now, Tom," said Claude, "if you will be kind enough to show us how to open this strong-looking chest, we will stow as much of its contents about our persons as we can, and then say farewell to the New Forest.

CHAPTER DXXXII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS OBTAIN POSSESSION OF THE MISER'S TREASURE, AND DIVIDE THE SPOIL AMONG THEMSELVES AND RICHARD NARES.

"You must not run away with the idea," said Tom King, "that I know anything at all about opening this box."

"The deuce you don't!"

"No; as I told you, we buried it without even so much as looking at the fastenings."

"Then," said Claude, as he stooped down and examined the front of the box more closely, "it strikes me we shall have a troublesome job to get it open."

"Very likely. The old miser would take good care to have it well secured; but we have some powerful tools with us, and we must do our best with them."

The box appeared to be fitted with three locks, while it was crossed and re-crossed in every direction by stout bands of iron.

"I am afraid we shall not be able to force open the lid," said Tom King, "it seems too firm; I should fancy the weakest part would be the bottom."

"Help me, then, to turn it over."

It required the whole of the united strength of the two highwaymen to effect this, but by the aid of the handles, they at last turned it bottom upwards.

It did not look as if this was a weaker part than any other, for it was divided into little squares by the bands of iron just the same as the top and sides.

"This is a puzzler, Tom," said Claude. "I don't know what we are to do."

"We must get the box open somehow. Suppose you try the effect of your pickaxe upon it?"

"With all my heart," said Claude, who thereupon commenced a violent attack with the pickaxe, but the only result achieved by this was the making of a number of deep indentations, for the wood of which the box was composed, having been buried so long, was soft and moist, so that, instead of splitting when these heavy blows were struck upon it, the point of the pickaxe sank in.

"That is no good," said Claude, after a few minutes' labour. "We must think of something else."

"Now that we have run so many risks," said Tom King—"now that we have to a certain extent succeeded, it will never do for us to be baffled by being unable to force open the chest."

"But how is it to be done?"

"Suppose we turn the box over on to its side, and try what effect the pickaxe will produce on the locks?"

"I should be inclined to think that it would demolish them completely," said Claude.

The huge chest was rolled over on to its side, so that the keyholes were uppermost.

Claude whirled the pickaxe round his head, and brought it down with terrific force upon the keyhole in the centre.

A crash was the result.

"That lock is considerably damaged, I should say," remarked Duval; and as he spoke, encouraged by his success, he struck it again in the same place, and then the lock appeared completely demolished.

The other two locks were now treated in precisely the same fashion, and after many heavy blows had been struck, they at last had the satisfaction of seeing the lid fly open.

Before, however, they could look to see what the contents were, their attention was attracted towards Sixteen-String Jack, who uttered a low warning cry.

"What is it?" they asked.

"I fancy I can hear some one approaching stealthily?"

This was serious, and the highwaymen assumed listening attitudes.

They heard the rustling of the underwood, then and there was a hasty rush of footsteps, and a voice cried:

"Now, my boys, be quick, and we shall have them! One sharp touch, and it will be over!"

Before these words were spoken, the highwaymen comprehended the full and exact extent of their danger.

They knew that by some means or other the police officers had managed to track them to this spot.

To attempt any resistance they knew would be nothing short of madness, as the officers so far outnumbered them.

Vexatious as it was to be interrupted at such a moment, and loth as they were to leave the treasure behind them, our friends were nevertheless compelled to mount as hastily as they could, and gallop away.

They were able to do this before the officers came near enough to attack them, although they fired several shots after their retreating forms.

This did no injury, for the highwaymen were instantly hidden among the trees.

A pursuit was not commenced, for one of the police having noticed the miser's chest with its glittering contents strewed upon the ground, set up a loud shout, which caused the others to look round.

No sooner did they see what had caused it than they resolved to let the highwaymen alone until another opportunity presented itself.

Running up to the chest, they surrounded it, and quickly emptied all that it contained upon the ground.

The party which had just arrived and put the highwaymen to flight comprised Richard Nares and most of the troop of officers he had induced to follow him.

Of course they knew nothing about the old miser, and were ignorant of the fact that the chest and what it contained belonged to him, or rather his heirs.

Reasonably enough, the officers jumped to the conclusion that the money and other valuables contained in this chest were the produce of some robberies, and that the highwaymen, being unable to carry away their booty, had buried it.

The chief police officer was not a very scrupulous man, and he considered for a few moments in what way he should act with respect to the discovery he had so unexpectedly made.

He glanced at his men, and saw that they all looked rather longingly at the glittering pile of wealth on the ground.

"A-hem!" he said, pretending to clear his throat—"just attend to me for a moment!"

His followers gathered about him, for they expected that something interesting was coming.

We have had a very troublesome job in pursuing these highwaymen, and as yet we have got no good for our pains. Now, this chest was no doubt buried by them some time back, and their motive for visiting the forest on this occasion, was to dig it up again. Of course, as you all know very well, we are in duty bound to make this discovery known in the proper quarter, and take some of the money ourselves, but I think, under all the circumstances, and considering what a deal of trouble we have had, we have a better right to it than anyone else."

His followers set up a shout, by which they intended testifying their entire assent to what their chief had just said.

"Well, then," he continued, "if you will only consent to my terms, we will have this money, and no one will be the wiser, and after we have got it, we can continue our pursuit of the highwaymen just the same. True, if we can catch them, the reward we shall obtain will be so great that, added to what is on the ground yonder, it will make us all independent men for life."

This was a very tempting prospect, and the police officers were very anxious to know what their chief's terms were, though some went so far as to promise to consent to them beforehand.

"Let me see," he said. "Including myself, there are twelve of us, and Richard Nares who gave us the information makes the thirteenth. Now, what I propose is, that the money and the other valuables are divided into fourteen portions, that you all take one each, and that I take two."

The police officers agreed to this without a murmur, and so did Richard Nares.

The miser's gold was counted out into fourteen shares, which were very quickly appropriated.

Each man had quite a large sum of money about him.

"Now then," said the one in command, "let us set off after these rascals, and if we can only capture them, all that I can say is, that we shall have made a very good night's work of it."

The officers set up a cheer, and, guided by their chief and Richard Nares, plunged into the forest in pursuit of the highwaymen.

Before our friends had gone far they discovered that no pursuit was being made after them, and so they came to a halt.

"Could you imagine anything more vexatious?" said Claude Duval, in a tone of voice which showed clearly enough how aggravated he was. "To think we should have had all that trouble, and then, just as the treasure was ready to be put into our pockets, for those lubberly police officers to make their appearance!"

"We are not pursued," said Tom.

"No; and a good reason why," replied Claude—"they would see the box, and would not hesitate to appropriate its contents to themselves, and they much prefer doing that to keeping up the pursuit after us."

"I suppose it is so."

"You may depend upon it. I wish you could just turn back quietly, and then you will see them dividing the gold, sure enough."

"I am quite willing to do so," said Tom King, "for now that we have had all this trouble and risk, I don't intend that they shall retain possession of the treasure if we can help it."

"Bravo!"

"I am afraid it will not be easy to get the money back again, for their numbers are very superior to our own."

"We shall see that," said Claude, and as he spoke the highwaymen turned round and retraced their steps towards the spot from which they had so precipitately fled.

They approached with great caution and stealthiness.

When at a short distance from the tree, they looked through the bushes, and saw that Claude was perfectly correct.

The officers were engaged in dividing the treasure.

Our friends remained perfectly still, watching them.

Then, as we have already stated, the officers darted off in pursuit, but they had no idea that the highwaymen were hiding so close to them, and they ran past the bushes behind which our friends were concealed.

In a few minutes they were quite out of hearing, and then the highwaymen ventured to speak.



[MAUD ENDEAVOURS TO RESTORE DICK TURPIN TO CONSCIOUSNESS.]

CHAPTER DXXXIII.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN AGREE TO PURSUE THE POLICE OFFICERS THROUGH THE FOREST, AND TO REGAIN POSSESSION OF THE TREASURE.

"I AM afraid we stand but a very poor chance of obtaining possession of any of that money; there are thirteen of them altogether, and thirteen to three is rather too long odds!"

"I agree with you in that," said Claude Duval; "but it will go very hard with me if I don't get that money back again; I don't think we stand much chance of succeeding by force, but we must use stratagem."

"Did you notice," said Sixteen-String Jack, "that Richard Nares was along with the officers?"

"I did!" said Claude, angrily. "A day of reckoning will come soon. I have a long account to settle with that gentleman!"

"He is certainly the occasion of all our troubles on the present occasion," said Tom King, "for had it not been for him we should not have been disturbed at the Golden Lion, and we should have been able to dig up the treasure and carry it off without anyone being the wiser."

"Don't talk about it!" said Claude Duval. "I can hardly contain myself as it is; but it will be a caution not to let another rascal off so easily as we did him."

"But what are we to do next?"

"I can scarcely tell. As regards the officers, we will keep pretty close to them."

Tom King laughed.

"That seems very odd!" he said.

"It does. It is a droll idea for us to be following the officers!"

"Very."

"From what the one in command said, I think we may safely argue that they won't rest until they have tried to capture us for some time longer; they are not wise enough to be satisfied with the money they have already got and disperse themselves! On the contrary, it seems to have made them more eager after the reward."

"It does; and you must remember Richard Nares——"

"Remember Richard Nares!" cried Claude—"I can assure you it will be a very long time before I forget him!"

"I can quite believe that; but what I was going to say was this:—You must remember that Richard Nares is along with the officers, and that he is especially bent upon our destruction, therefore he will not allow the officers to rest until they have made some further efforts. They will be in his power."

"How so?"

"Because, if they refuse to do as he wishes, he will threaten to disclose the particulars connected with the treasure."

"I see—I see—as you say, they will be in his power!"

"I can hear nothing of them," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and we ought not to lose sight of them altogether if we are to succeed in getting the money back again."

"We ought not, but still we need not feel alarmed about their leaving the forest. There are thirteen of them altogether. They will consider that they are quite enough to effect the capture of three persons, and so we need be under no apprehension about their communicating with other police officers, because their object will be to divide the reward among themselves, and not let anyone else in for a share."

"No, they will not leave the forest without they find that we have done so."

"Well, then," said Claude, "let us follow them, and we will try what stratagem can accomplish."

"The New Forest is a large place," said Tom King, "and it will hold us all easily enough. We must be careful not to be surprised by our foes, and in the meanwhile we must devise some plan by which we can get these thirteen men into our power, and take from them the money they each possess."

"Good! Morning will soon be here, and so I am afraid we shall not be able to accomplish much until night comes again."

"We must not show ourselves by daylight—that is certain!"

"No; I think I can take you to a place in the forest, into which the officers would hesitate to penetrate, without they knew that we had done so."

"And we could remain there during the whole of the day, I suppose?"

"Yes—yes; and occupy ourselves in thinking over some scheme by which we can get the better of our foes."

"Agreed! Lead the way at once; and as for the officers, for the present we will leave them to themselves. I am not afraid that they will quit the forest!"

"They will not do so, rely upon it; their own covetousness would keep them here, independently of Richard Nares, and he will not rest so long as he fancies the means of gratifying his revenge are in his reach."

"I am sure he would not, but we shall defeat him and circumvent the officers, I fell sure!"

"Is it very far, Tom," asked Claude, "to the place you spoke of?"

"No, we could reach it in half an hour."

"Then let us do so, for I fancy by that time it will be fairly dawn."

"We shall have to dismount," said Tom King "and lead our horses through some places"

"But safety is beyond?"

"O yes!"

"Well then, the more obstacles there are in the way the better, for then the officers will not be so likely to follow us."

"You are right."

The highwaymen dismounted, and, under the guidance of Tom King, threaded their way through the mazes of the forest.

As they had been told, there were some places where the vegetation was so dense that they had great difficulty in leading their horses through it.

To have proceeded while mounted would have been an impossibility, and on several occasions the only means by which they could proceed on their way was, by Claude and Tom King grasping the low-lying branches with both arms and pulling them aside, while Sixteen-String Jack led the horses through the opening thus made.

As they proceeded the trees grew closer and closer, and the underwood became more and more luxuriant.

The soil was of a swampy character, and their feet sank deeply into it at every step they took.

"This place is a morass of considerable extent," said Tom King, in reply to a question addressed to him by his comrades; "some portions of which are of such a treacherous character, and so soft that they would swallow up anyone who ventured to tread upon them."

"Are you quite sure you know the way, Tom?"

"I have no doubt I can guide you in perfect safety I am quite sure, indeed, without the place has altered greatly since I last visited it."

Tom King led the way with great confidence; apparently there was no path, but yet his companions noticed that where he led them the ground, though soft and oozy, was nevertheless sufficiently substantial to sustain their weight.

After going a little further the ground took an upward tendency, and rapidly became firmer.

In something less than half an hour Tom King paused in a small open space, entirely surrounded by trees.

It was covered with short green grass, and the soil was comparatively dry and hard.

"I don't think there is much fear that the officers will find us while we remain here," said Tom King.

"I fancy we are secure."

"Depend upon it we are; our horses will be all right they will rest themselves, and crop the sweet grass with great pleasure, and it will do them good."

"I shall be glad to rest a little while," said Sixteen-String Jack, "for I feel faint and dizzy."

"No doubt you are; you ought to keep still for a time after receiving such a wound."

"It has ceased to bleed," said Jack, "but before it was bound up, I am afraid I must have lost a great quantity of blood."

"I am glad you escaped so well," said Claude Duval.

"I was very fortunate. But after this trouble, and after receiving this wound, I, for one, shall not rest until we have got the better of Richard Nares and the officers. We have a whole day before us, and therefore there will be plenty of time for several plans to be devised; we cannot occupy our minds better, and we can decide upon the best one."

With this understanding the highwaymen flung themselves down upon the ground, and remained for some time perfectly silent.

Morning advanced with rapid strides, and soon the sun was pouring his rays upon them.

A most intense stillness reigned around that spot, and it was unbroken by the least sound that would indicate the coming of the police officers.

In this way the entire day was spent.

Several plans were thought of and discussed, and eventually one proposed by Claude Duval was agreed upon, after some slight alterations had been made by Tom King.

What that plan was we need not say.

It will be sufficient to see it worked out.

It was considered a very good one, and all three believed that it possessed every element necessary for success.

Now that they had devised what was to be done, they waited with impatience for the day to pass away and night to come.

The entire day passed without any interruption from their foes, or indeed, without our friends hearing or seeing anything of them.

Occasionally they would feel fidgety and apprehensive that the officers should think better of their situation, and determine to rest content with what they had got.

The day's rest made a wonderful difference to Jack.

The flow of blood had been entirely stopped, and as the wound in his neck was little more than skin deep, he felt no serious or painful effects from it.

In a few days at the most it would be completely healed.

The reader may be sure that he was well pleased to find himself in a condition to assist his comrades during their night's adventures; it would have galled him exceedingly had he been compelled to remain inactive.

At last, to the great relief of all three, the sun set, and darkness rapidly came on.

During the twilight the highwaymen, with Tom King for their leader, retraced their steps through the morass, and it was just as night might be said to have fairly

commenced that they passed beyond its precincts and gained the forest beyond.

They were in excellent spirits.

"Now, Tom," said Claude Duval, "lead the way once more. Had anyone told me so, I should never have believed that the day would come when, instead of wishing to get as far away from the officers as possible, I should be doing my utmost to come up with them and find out where they were."

"They are searching in the forest beyond a doubt," said Tom King, "and as they have no clue, will probably not stray far from the spot where they found the treasure. I have no doubt we shall hear something of them before long."

Tom King had from the first shown himself such a capital guide that his comrades followed him with perfect confidence.

They proceeded with caution, and listened at frequent intervals, for although they desired so much to learn where the officers were, yet they did not want to come upon them unexpectedly and be taken at a disadvantage.

Indeed, they were extremely cautious to guard against this, for if such a misfortune happened it would entirely ruin the scheme they had formed.

Suddenly Tom King paused and held up his hand in an imperative manner for silence, in order to check his comrades, in case they should be about to speak.

They listened, and they all heard plainly enough that peculiar rustling sound which is caused by persons forcing a passage through the fern and brake, and other vegetation which grows between the trees in a forest.

Every now and then the crackling of a twig would be heard as some stray branch was trodden upon and broken.

The sound of footsteps and of voices could also be heard.

Some persons were evidently approaching, and the three highwaymen shrunk back, for who could these persons be but the police officers?

As the night was profoundly dark, our friends imagined they should be able to escape being seen by the officers, providing they had no suspicions of their presence.

The footsteps came nearer and nearer, and the highwaymen grew somewhat alarmed, lest the officers should walk directly to the spot where they were concealed.

They did not dare to stir, however, for if they did, the rustling which would be made, although very slight, could not fail to reach the ears of the officers who were very close at hand.

From this it will be seen that they had no other resource than to remain perfectly still, and they were in great anxiety to know what would next ensue.

CHAPTER DXXXIV.

IN WHICH THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN CARRY THEIR DARING SCHEME INTO EXECUTION.

THE result of this extraordinary combination of circumstances seemed very doubtful.

The position of the three highwaymen was far more peculiar than pleasant.

With an anxiety that increased so fast that it rapidly became a feeling of alarm, they listened to the steady approach of the police officers.

On they came unswervingly, and our friends were quite certain that, without something occurred to cause them to turn to the right or to the left, they must run with full force against them.

Very luckily, the highwaymen happened to halt just before a kind of thicket, that appeared to be composed of brambles and other prickly plants.

The officers were on the other side of this thicket, and no doubt it would prove a check to their further progress in a straight direction.

This was their only hope.

While in this state of suspense and fear, their joy and surprise may be imagined, when they heard some one call out in a loud voice:

"Halt!"

The tones were abrupt, and such as would be used by one in command.

In fact the word was spoken by the chief officer, though the highwaymen were not certain of it, as they were not familiar with his voice.

The whole troop came quickly to a standstill.

The highwaymen could not see their foes, but they were certain that they were separated from them by a few yards only.

When they heard the chief command his followers to stop, they, naturally, quite expected that they should hear something more, and in this expectation they were not disappointed.

"What is the matter?" said another voice.

This they recognised without difficulty as the voice of Richard Nares.

The harsh, grating, surly tones once heard could ever afterwards be recognised.

"What is the matter, I say again? Why do you halt here?"

Evidently the words were addressed to the chief officer, and Richard Nares was in anything but an amiable frame of mind.

"I called out 'halt!'" replied the chief police officer, in a voice that did not sound one bit more amiable than Richard Nares's—"I called out 'halt!' because I thought I could not do better than bring my men to a standstill."

"Why—why?"

"What on earth is the good of tramping through the forest in this way? We have been at it now for several hours, and what is the result?—we have not so much as got a glimpse of the highwaymen, or heard the least sound to indicate their presence in the forest."

Richard Nares stamped his foot on the ground impatiently.

"I can understand it all!" he said. "It is plain enough to me and to everybody else, now you have got that money you don't care about the reward."

"You are wrong."

"No I am not. If I was, you would have tried better than you have to effect your purpose."

"I have done all I can!" returned the chief officer. "I am quite tired down, and so are all the men. What was the good of going on in this way, when we found there was nothing to be gained by it?"

"I say again," returned Richard Nares, fiercely, "you have not used your best efforts!"

"Perhaps you will take the direction of affairs into your own hands, and see how you will prosper then!"

"No, I won't do anything of the sort," replied Richard Nares—"it is not my business, I don't know anything about it."

"Then how can you say that I have not done right?"

"Because you have not succeeded."

"Bah—stuff!"

"Look here, Mr. Officer," cried Richard Nares, excitedly, "and weigh my words well. If you don't try better, and go to work more in earnest to capture these three villains, I'll split about the treasure!"

"You are as deep in that as we are."

"No I am not; and if I was I should not care; I would suffer a little myself with very great pleasure if I could only make sure of having you punished!"

"You are a nice youth, you are," said the chief officer.

"You had better be civil! I tell you—you are in my power. But it's no good wrangling like this; we shall do harm instead of good. Let us try what can be done."

"Well, don't let there be any illfeeling between us," said Richard; "for reasons of my own I will do and dare anything myself to make these men prisoners—you shall have my full assistance; I will accompany you with them when they are caught, and not leave them till they are delivered to the governor of the jail, and I do all this without wanting one fraction of the reward."

"Yes—yes! We know that."

"I give my share," continued Richard, "to be divided amongst you, and if you will only try a little more during to-night, I will divide what money I have about me amongst you all."

The police officers accepted this offer with very great satisfaction, though they looked upon Richard Nares as being a very queer character.

That, however, was no business of theirs, and if he was fool enough to give up his own share, why so much the better for them.

"Well, now that we have arrived at a friendly understanding," said the chief officer, "let us see what can be done."

"With all my heart," said Richard Nares, "for I want this business over, even more than you do."

"Very good; the sooner the better say I. However, we have been tramping about in this fashion for a long while, and we have not effected the slightest amount of good. Finding this to be the case, I called out 'halt!' so that we should consider over the matter, and adopt some other plan, as we had found this one fail to answer our purpose."

"That is all right and reasonable enough," growled Richard. "Let us hear what you have to propose?"

"I have not thought about anything yet."

"Can't you suggest something?"

"I will try."

There was now a few moments' silence, during which the brains of Richard Nares and the chief officer were actively at work.

The three highwaymen listened to this conversation with the greatest conceivable amount of interest, and they waited anxiously for the rest.

They were in an agony of apprehension, lest their horses should make some slight movement; if they did the sound could not fail to be heard by the officers, and their discovery would be the result.

Now it was highly important that they should remain undiscovered for a little while longer at least, because there seemed to be every probability that they would be able to overhear what their foes intended to do. Such a piece of knowledge as this would be valuable indeed.

So they sat and listened for what should be said next, stroking their horses silently all the while.

It was the chief police officer who broke the silence.

"Well," he said, addressing Richard Nares, "have you been able to think of anythiug?"

Richard replied by gruffly asking:

"Have you?"

"It appears to me that there is only one thing that holds out the least hope of success."

"Let me hear what that is?"

"It is this—hitherto we have all remained together, and this I think is a great mistako. Instead of doing so any longer I propose that we all separate, and creep about with all the stealthiness that we are masters of. Well, in this way you see it will be quite possible for one man to steal upon the highwaymen unawares."

"And what then?"

"The instructions I should give would be that, when any man heard the least sound which he fancied might come from those of whom we are in pursuit, he should blow his whistle."

"Go on."

"This signal would be obeyed by all the rest of us hastening towards him with all the speed we could, and by adopting this plan I fancy we stand a good chance of getting on their track."

Richard Nares was silent for about a minute, and then he said:

"I don't like your plan, but I can't think of anything better myself, and I suppose it must be adopted."

The chief police officer then gave his instructions to his men, adding:

"Don't be afraid about giving an alarm; it won't much matter if you make a mistake on the right side, and you understand, directly you hear a suspicious sound, blow your whistle—you may depend we shall be quickly after you."

Having given these instructions to his men, the chief police officer commanded them to follow him to the tree from among the roots of which the chest had been dug up.

It was close at hand, and his motive for this proceeding was clear enough.

He intended to remain there along with Richard Nares, so that should his men make any important discovery, they might know where to find him if they wished to communicate some intelligence silently.

Upon reaching this tree he repeated his directions to his men, and ordered them to disperse themselves at once

They did so.

When the police officers had left the spot upon which this consultation had taken place, Tom King turned round to his two comrades, and said:

"I think we cannot do better than get a little farther off; what we have heard, as of course you were aware, has had the effect of disturbing our plans in a very material degree."

With these words the three highwaymen withdrew, and placed a greater distance between themselves and their foes.

Having reached a convenient spot they halted.

"We are in luck's way for certain," said Claude, "we could not have counted upon such a piece of good fortune as being able to overhear the plans laid by our enemies."

"We could not, indeed."

"We know now exactly what they are going to do, and in their amazing cleverness, it appears to me, they are going to play into our hands."

"We could not have desired anything better."

"That is true. Jack will mind the horses as before, while we crouch down behind some bush, and whenever a police officer approaches us we will capture him."

"But it must be done silently."

"Leave me alone for that," said Claude, "I will undertake that part of the business."

"All right. Now that we are agreed, we had better lose no more time. Jack, you will remain here with the horses, Claude and I will take care that the officers don't discover you."

"It vexes me to think," said Sixteen-String Jack, that I am obliged to be idle while all this is going forward."

"You would have preferred helping us, no doubt, but it is the fortune of war."

With these words, Tom King and Claude, having alighted, crouched down behind a huge bush, which was very close indeed to where Jack was.

Here they remained in perfect silence listening intently for some sound that would inform them that one of their foes was approaching that spot.

For a long time all was still, and then, to their great satisfaction, they heard some one approaching.

It was too dark for them to see who this was, but they felt sure, from the stealthy manner in which he advanced, that it must be one of the officers.

At every few steps he would pause, and strike the bushes with something he held in his hand.

Our friends grew anxious and impatient while waiting for him, for this officer did not come direct to the bush behind which they were concealed, but flitted about in a devious, uncertain way.

At last he reached that bush, and struck it with his stick.

"Nobody here," the highwaymen heard him mutter. "Of course there is nobody here; we may keep on at this rate till dooms-day. What a nuisance that Richard Nares is to be sure; of course, the chaps we want are far enough off by now, and ——"

The officer suddenly ceased speaking.

He had walked round the very huge bush, and as soon as he got to the other side of it Claude Duval and Tom King rose quickly to their feet.

Claude Duval seized him by the back of the neck, and placed his hand before his mouth so quickly that the officer had no time to utter a cry of alarm.

At the very same instant Tom King just touched the officer's neck with the point of his sword, and as he did so he said, in a suppressed whisper:

"If you attempt to utter a sound—if you attempt to struggle, or make the least resistance, you are a dead man! Do you feel that? It is the point of my sword; it is entering your skin already; one thrust, and you would be a dead man!"

CHAPTER DXXXV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN MAKE FOUR PRISONERS, AND THE CHIEF POLICE OFFICER DISCOVERS HIS LOSS.

THE police officer was evidently a man who thought discretion the better part of valour, and he preferred to let events take whatever course they liked, so long as he remained uninjured.

Perceiving that they had made this capture, Sixteen-String Jack left the horses for a moment and came towards them.

In his hand he carried a short piece of strong rope, such as the highwaymen never travelled without, and a piece of wood which he had been occupied for several minutes in fashioning.

With the piece of rope he quickly tied the officer's arms behind him, then Claude removed his hand, and Jack gagged him with the piece of wood.

He submitted without a murmur, and suffered himself

to be led very quietly to the spot where the horses were secured.

The next thing the highwaymen did was to search his pockets.

As soon as he found what they were about the officer appeared to object very strongly to this proceeding.

He was not in a position to do much, however, and our friends paid no attention to him.

In addition to the fourteenth share of the miser's gold, they found a small store of ammunition and a couple of those stumpy pistols which the officers invariably carried.

Having done this, their first prisoner was laid down at full length upon the ground, and Sixteen-String Jack, with his drawn sword in his hand, was left to keep guard over him while Tom King and Claude returned to the bush and awaited the approach of another.

This time their patience was destined to be put to a more severe trial than before.

But they were delighted with the success they had already met with, which was so much greater than they had expected.

"If we can only nab them all one by one as easily as we have nabbed the first," said Claude Duval, "we shall do bravely."

Presently after this, they heard another officer searching about.

After some delay he approached the large bush, which would seem to anyone peculiarly fitted for a hiding-place.

Our friends got themselves in readiness.

When the officer was near enough, they started up and seized him in the same way as they had seized the other, but they were not so fortunate this time, for, before Claude could dash his hand before his mouth, the man uttered a cry.

It was not a loud one, and it ceased with great suddenness.

At first he seemed inclined to make a desperate resistance, but when he felt the sharp point of Tom's sword penetrating his skin, he thought better of it, and became quiet.

The police officer did not doubt that the highwaymen would carry their threats into execution without the slightest amount of hesitation, and being under this impression, and valuing his own life more than anything else on earth, he suffered himself to be gagged and pinioned even more quietly than his predecessor.

His pockets were emptied, and their contents transferred to those of the highwaymen.

Then he was laid down by the side of his comrade.

"Listen to me!" said Sixteen-String Jack, as he waved his sword very close to their faces—"listen to me! If you lie quite still no further harm will be done to you—your lives will be spared; but, as sure as this is a sword that I hold in my hand, I will run the first one through who moves hand or foot!"

Had the officers been two corpses they could not have laid on the ground more immovably than they did.

Being now quite carried away by their success, Tom King and Claude once again took up their positions behind the bush, and waited for the appearance of another of their foes.

The cry which their last prisoner had uttered did not appear to have reached the ears of his companions, or if it had they evidently attached no importance to the sound.

"I am afraid," said Claude, "that we shall have to wait some time for the next; this portion of the forest having already been visited by two officers will be considered to have been properly searched."

"That depends," replied Tom King, "upon the amount of method with which the search is conducted; for my own part, I am inclined to think that the officers will wander about searching at random, and if so, we can't do better than remain where we are, and pick them up one by one as they arrive."

"Hush!" said Claude, "I fancy I can hear some one."

Tom was silent, and he found his companion was quite correct.

Another officer was approaching.

He was already very close at hand, and almost directly afterwards he paused against the bush.

"I cannot help thinking," he muttered, "that I heard some sort of a cry, but it came and went so quickly that I was not quite sure. Curse this work! I wonder what good will be got by poking about among the trees in this way? I have a good mind to give them all the slip, and make off with the money I have already got; I will, too 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,'—that is the way! I'll go straight out of the forest!"

The officer was unconscious that he was uttering his thoughts aloud, and our friends did not hear quite distinctly all he said.

The last part of the sentence, however, they heard plainly enough, and feared that they were about to lose this one.

Fortunately, however, before they made a movement, they discovered that this third police officer was coming straight towards the bush, as though he intended to pass by it on his way out of the forest.

Claude and Tom was ready to receive him.

As soon as he came near enough, they pounced out upon him and made him a prisoner so quickly that he had not time to understand what had happened.

Matters were soon made clear to him, however.

There is a very little doubt, from what he had previously said, that he wished most heartily he had decided to have given his companions the slip, and leaving the forest a little sooner than he had.

There was no help for him, however, and he gave in quietly like the rest, for these officers, it must be remembered, were not from London, but from Southampton, and all the country officers had very exaggerated notions about what the highwaymen would do.

He was laid down by the side of his companions.

In spite of its peril, this adventure began to assume a very laughable aspect.

The natural order of things was completely reversed, and, curiously enough, for the time being Sixteen-String Jack was converted into a kind of jailer.

Upon reaching the bush, Tom King said:

"This is a very daring and dangerous trick, Claude."

"I believe you."

"We have succeeded so far in really a wonderful manner, but that ought not to blind us to our own peril."

"What do you mean? Surely, after getting on so well, and having so much encouragement, you would not wish to give up?"

"I almost think it would be prudent to do so."

"No—no! We will have one more, at all events. For my own part, if possible, I should like to keep on until we had captured them all."

"I daresay you would; but we must abandon that idea. It would not be at all wise to do so."

"I don't quite see that."

"But I do; our object in making these officers prisoners is not just for the mere fun of the thing, but in order that we may obtain possession of the treasure that we came down here on purpose to fetch."

"Just so."

"Well, you must recollect that there is a great deal of it altogether; even a fourteenth portion of the whole is a great deal. We have now three portions, and in a little while we should have more than we could carry away with us, and what would be the good of that?"

"No good at all; but still, we can carry a great deal more than we have got at present."

"Hush! not another word! As I live, there is another coming! Whatever attracts them to this spot?"

This seemed a mystery; but it really did appear that there was something which drew the officers towards this bush.

Another was coming, searching about much in the same way as the others had done.

Claude Duval considered this capital sport, and his fingers quite itched while he waited for this next one to approach.

At last he came, and was captured like the rest.

It really was most amusing to see how the highwaymen succeeded; it looked as though they were in a fair way to capture the whole lot.

When his pockets had been emptied, he was laid down on the ground beside the other three, and Sixteen-String Jack had one more to watch over.

"Successful as we are," said Tom King, "it won't do to keep this up."

"Why not?"

"Because in a little while they must discover the loss of so many of their companions."

Just as Tom King spoke, they were both startled by hearing a loud and prolonged whistle.

It came from some distance off.

Our friends listened to the sound with amazement, not altogether unmingled with uneasiness, for they could not imagine what was the meaning of this signal.

What could have been discovered?

Not themselves, certainly.

"Claude," said Tom King, "I think we cannot do better than to take a lesson of experience from these officers."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, let us be satisfied with what we have got, and be off while we have the opportunity. By waiting for more, we may, like them, lose that which we already have."

"Wait a little longer," said Claude. "Perhaps we shall be able to find out the meaning of that whistle."

Tom consented, and they both remained behind the bush listening.

A remarkable silence followed this whistle, and the highwaymen could not catch a sound.

"There is something going on," said Tom King. "I feel quite sure of that. I wish I could make out what it is."

"If we wait a minute or two," said Claude, "we shall probably make a discovery."

Quite five minutes elapsed.

At the end of that period, the silence was as profound as before.

The whistle was then blown again and again.

"Rely upon it," said Tom King, "in some way or other they have found out that four men are missing."

Tom King was quite right in his supposition.

The chief police officer and Richard Nares remained leaning against the tree for some time—so long, indeed, that their patience was completely exhausted.

Richard Nares grumbled and growled without intermission.

At last he induced the police officer to summon his men around him, and hold a consultation in order that they might try to find out some better plan of proceeding.

After a good deal of hesitation, the chief officer complied with Richard Nares's request.

He did so very reluctantly, for he had great faith in the excellence of his own scheme.

That, then, was the meaning of the first whistle the highwaymen had heard.

Upon hearing the signal, those police officers that were searching about, repaired with all possible speed to the hollow tree.

Nevertheless, several minutes elapsed before they had all assembled, for, at the time the signal was given, some of them were at a considerable distance.

The chief officer counted his men as they came up, and found he was four short.

He waited a little while, expecting them to come; but hearing nothing of their approach he began to grow uneasy.

He blew his whistle again, and then again.

But with no better result.

The silence remained unbroken.

"There are four short," said the police officer. "What can have become of them?"

His followers looked at each other with a vague feeling of alarm; they began to think that in some mysterious way or other, they had managed to escape a terrible fate.

They felt quite certain that their four comrades would not absent themselves of their own accord, and they came to the conclusion that they must have been cut off by the highwaymen.

They said as much to their chief, but he refused to support the idea.

"You are all a parcel of cowards and idiots!" said Richard Nares. "I have been unfortunate in bringing such a cowardly crew along with me. Why, you have had them in your hands two or three times, and then let them slip as though your fingers were buttered. Bah! I have no patience with you!"

CHAPTER DXXXVI.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN FIND THEIR PLAN SUCCEED TO ADMIRATION.

Richard Nares worked himself up to a pitch of furious excitement.

His whole frame shook with passion, and foam gathered about his lips.

Neither the chief police officer nor his men much liked being addressed in such a style by Richard Nares, but they felt they were not in a position to help themselves.

They had one and all had quite enough of the chase, and would very willingly have abandoned it.

"You are not very civil, Mr. Nares," said the chief officer. "We have done our best, and we are not altogether to blame if we have not succeeded."

"Yes you are; if you would try with a will, you would have been successful. I tell you I am sick of it!"

"But what else can be done?"

"That is your business."

"I can think of no other plan; and the last has failed more completely than the first, since we have done no good, and I have lost four men."

"Bah!"

"I tell you I have! I had eleven men; now count, and you will find only seven remain."

"And what's the reason?"

"That I can't tell. I feel very uneasy about it."

"Stuff. I can explain their absence at once."

"How?"

"Why, they have left the forest with what money they have got, and left you and the rest to carry on the pursuit."

The police officer was silent, for, in spite of his original suspicions, he felt it not unlikely that Richard Nares had given a true explanation.

"You know nothing about your business," said Richard Nares. "I dare say you would be able to take prisoner some poor, half starved wretch who had caught a rabbit, or who had pulled up a few turnips to satisfy his hunger. I say, I dare say you would be able to manage such a difficult thing as that, and it is about the extent of your capabilities."

"Find them yourself, then!" said the police officer, his passion getting the better of his reason; "for I'll be——"

"Gently, now; you are in my power, recollect, and must do as I tell you; if you don't you will suffer for it! However, I will look for them myself, but you must remain at hand to assist me in case I should make a discovery."

The police officers were pleased rather than otherwise with this speech.

They were very tired, for they had been walking for many hours without intermission, so that the prospect of remaining in one spot while Richard Nares went prowling about after the highwaymen was quite a pleasant one.

"Give me one of your whistles," said Richard Nares, to the chief officer.

"Here you are."

"That will do. I am going off myself, and as soon as I make a discovery I will blow this whistle."

"And we will run to your assistance without the loss of a moment's time."

"Very good."

"I will accompany you if you like."

"No, I will go by myself; great caution is needed. I feel certain that I shall be able to find them."

With these words, Richard Nares, holding the whistle in his hand, took his departure.

As soon as he had disappeared among the trees, the officers flung themselves upon the ground to rest, for they were very weary.

We will return now to the three highwaymen.

As we have said, they were very much puzzled when they heard the whistle sounded, and could not imagine what it meant.

They had overheard the instructions given to the officers, and wondered what discovery had been made to cause them to give the signal.

Then the whistle sounded twice more, and Tom King said:

"I cannot imagine what is the meaning of this."

"Nor I," said Claude; "without they have found a mare's nest of some kind or other."

"Perhaps that is it."

"Let us wait in patience a few minutes longer, and see whether another officer will appear on this spot."

"I would rather go at once."

"The night is young yet," urged Claude, "and it is very probable that by waiting a little longer we shall be able to get another share of the treasure with no more trouble than we have already had."

"Well, well, I'll stay."

After the whistles there was a long period of silence, during which the little discussion we have just recorded was going on between Richard Nares and the officers.

They began, indeed to lose all patience, and once or twice Tom King renewed his entreaties to Claude to leave the forest at once.

"Let us keep silent," said Claude; "the officers may have discovered their loss, and taken some fresh means to effect our capture. We may be overheard talking, and it would be a thousand pities if our voices betrayed our hiding-place."

After this Tom did not speak again.

At last the two watchers were rewarded for their trouble by hearing a very slight rustling among the underwood.

It was, however, with great vexation that they noticed at the same moment that the clouds which had hitherto covered up the whole of the sky now parted a little, and through a long, irregular opening in one of them the moon peeped forth.

In comparison with the previous darkness that had filled that spot, her light seemed absolutely brilliant.

The three highwaymen were able to see all around them—every tree, and bush, and leaf was revealed to them.

When Claude perceived this, he regretted that he had not taken his comrade's advice.

Now, however, it was too late to regret, and the only course they could pursue was to remain crouching down behind the bush in their old attitude, and trust to the shadow of it to conceal them from the view of anyone who might approach.

The rustling sound ceased for a moment, and then recommenced.

The highwaymen turned their heads in the direction from which the sound came, and tried to look through the bush.

They were able to see a little—but only a very little—of the trees.

Presently they saw a figure emerge from the shadow into the small open space before them.

The moon still continued to pour her rays down upon this spot.

At first our friends paid no attention to the appearance of this figure, for they made sure that it was a police officer.

Suddenly, Claude started, gazed more earnestly before him, and then clutched his companion by the arm.

The figure advanced across the open space, peering about in every direction, and pausing at every few paces to listen.

Claude put his mouth close to Tom King's ear, and whispered:

"Do you see him?"

Tom nodded.

"It is Richard Nares!"

Until this moment Tom had not recognised the approaching figure, but now as he looked he saw that his comrade was right.

It was no other than Richard Nares who was crossing that open space.

In one hand the rascal carried the whistle, and he looked about him with the greatest stealthiness.

He came to within about a dozen paces of the bush behind which our friends were concealed, and then he paused.

Something on his left hand appeared to attract his attention, and, with noiseless steps, he crossed over in that direction.

Claude was in an agony of apprehension lest he should escape.

When Tom King saw him retreating, he took the opportunity of whispering to Claude, for Richard Nares was too far off to hear such a slight sound.

"What are you going to do, Claude?" he said.

"Do? I was in good hopes I should be able to do something, but now the rascal has gone off over there."

"He may return?"

"I only hope he may, for if I can once get hold of him, I won't let him go until I have paid him all I owe him."

"Where is he now?"

"Confound him! he seems to have vanished entirely. No, there he is! He is creeping stealthily this way!"

"Claude!"

"What?"

"Do you intend to capture him?"

"Yes, like the rest."

"But you must be careful! No doubt the officers are very close at hand, and it would be unfortunate if just as we seized him he managed in some way or other to summon them to his assistance."

"That would be awkward, and I will take care he don't do it."

Claude became silent, for Richard was much nearer.

His approach was very stealthy, and, had our friends not been on the look-out as they were, in all probability the slight sound he made in his progress would have entirely escaped their attention.

Nearer and nearer to the bush he came.

The highwaymen almost held their breath in anxious expectation.

Suddenly Claude started to his feet.

In less than a second he seized Richard by the back of his neck with one hand, and thrust the other before his mouth.

He was only just in time to prevent Richard giving the signal, for as soon as he found himself seized he raised the whistle to his lips.

But Claude was just in time to intercept it.

Richard struggled most furiously, and strove hard to disengage himself from Claude's grasp, and to remove his mouth from his hand.

This, however, was beyond his power.

Tom King made quite a sharp incision in his throat with the point of his sword before he spoke.

Then he cried:

"Richard Nares, I warn you! If you don't cease your struggles you are a dead man!"

Richard felt the steel already entering his flesh, which made him think that Tom was fully in earnest, and with an inward groan he became still.

As before, Sixteen-String Jack approached with a rope.

With this he pinioned Richard's arms behind him, and after that a gag was thrust into his mouth.

Not alone was Claude Duval anxious to retaliate in some way upon the rascal who had given them so much trouble.

Both Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack were anxious that he should be punished in some way.

They consulted together in rapid whispers, and then Claude proposed something which met with the entire concurrence of his two comrades.

Richard Nares strained his sense of hearing to the utmost, in the hope of catching what was said, but with all his efforts he could make out nothing save a low murmuring sound.

The consultation was quickly over, and Sixteen-String Jack produced another piece of rope.

It was a good length, rather fine, but very strong, and capable of supporting a good weight.

Claude Duval still retained his grasp upon the back of Richard Nares's neck, and Tom King still stood with his sword just penetrating the skin.

Richard Nares looked upon the production of this piece of rope with great dissatisfaction.

He wondered what would be done with it.

His guilty fears suggested to him that the highwaymen were about to hang him.

Certainly, if any human being deserved such a fate, Richard Nares did, and what was more, he knew it.

This made him fearful.

He knew, after all that he had done that the highwaymen could not fail to be much exasperated with him, and they were not likely to put up with an injury calmly

CHAPTER DXXXVII.

CLAUDE DUVAL SETTLES OLD SCORES WITH RICHARD NARES.

THERE was not the slightest hurry visible in Sixteen-String Jack's movements.

He stood exactly before Richard Nares, and first of all passed the rope completely through his hands from one end to the other, coiling it up as he did so.

During this operation Richard Nares became more and more apprehensive.

But when he saw Sixteen-String Jack deliberately tie a running noose in one end of the rope his apprehensions increased to positive agony.

He glared wildly about him.

He was so terrified that he shook from head to foot like an aspen leaf in a storm, and the probability is he would have fallen to the earth had not Claude Duval held him up by the firm grasp he had got on the back of his neck.

A cold perspiration started out from every pore in his body.

He had no doubt now about the fate that was in store for him.

Helpless as he was, the highwaymen were about to tie him up to a branch of one of the trees.

He gazed upon the rope with a horrible kind of fascination as Sixteen-String Jack swayed it negligently backwards and forwards.

At last the noose was tied to Jack's entire satisfaction, and then, holding it in his hand and fixing his eyes upon Richard Nares, he stepped closer to him.

Had it been possible, the trembling wretch would have shrunk back.

But he could not move—he could not shout—he could not do anything to summon assistance.

A most horrible death was staring him in the face.

The thought that the police officers were so close at hand, and that if he could only give the agreed-upon signal he should be saved, inflicted an additional pang upon the villain's heart.

Had any doubt of the highwaymen's intention lingered about his heart, it would most certainly have been dispelled at the moment when, having got close enough to him, Sixteen-String Jack cast the noose over his head.

He was to be hanged.

Sixteen-String Jack kept hold of one end of the rope, and as soon as he had put the noose about Richard's neck, he said:

"Now I am ready."

"Forward, then!" said Claude Duval. And as he spoke he endeavoured to make Richard Nares follow.

But the wretch was so terrified, and his legs trembled so excessively, that he could not or would not move a step.

Perceiving this, Tom King removed the point of the sword from his throat, and, grasping him by one shoulder, he held the sword behind him and pricked his back with it.

It was only natural that Richard Nares should start forward to escape the wound which would have been inflicted.

After going a few steps, however, he paused again, and once more Tom had to urge him forward with the sword.

Sixteen-String Jack led the way towards the horses.

They were close at hand, and so they quickly reached them.

So firmly convinced was Richard that he was about to be hanged offhand, that he did not notice that Sixteen-String Jack, instead of casting the end of the rope over a branch of a tree, secured it in some manner to the saddle on Claude's horse.

Sixteen-String Jack was careful to make it quite safe.

And having done so, he said:

"I am ready!"

Claude turned towards Richard.

"We are going to punish you," he said, "for all your villainies, past and present, but not in the manner you probably suppose. Don't imagine, though, that we are going to let you off very easily."

Claude said this, because Richard, as soon as he had caught the first words that were said to him, appeared to revive.

The fear of immediate death passed away, although the halter still remained about his neck.

"Don't think you will get off very easily," continued Claude. "We mean to have a settlement in full—we intend to go to a more convenient place; there is a probability that if we remain here that we should be overheard by your friends the police officers, who are, doubtless, somewhere close at hand. Now then, just bear this in mind, you are our prisoner, and we mean to keep you so! We are going to take you some distance, and in a manner that will give us the least trouble! The least strain will draw that noose tight about your neck and strangle you! One end, you perceive, is fastened to the side of my horse; your arms are pinioned tightly behind you—I am not afraid that you will release them; your mouth is gagged—I am not afraid that you will shout, and so give an alarm. I am going to mount; I shall not go very fast, and you will have two alternatives—you can either keep pace with my horse, or you can stand resolutely where you are; in the one case the rope will be no tighter about your neck than it is now, and you will be unhurt; in the other case it will be drawn tight at once, and you will soon be out of your misery."

In spite of his manifest terror, there was an evil look upon the countenance of Richard Nares as Claude spoke, which showed what angry feelings were struggling at his heart.

He clearly understood, however, all that Claude said to him.

He did not like the idea of being moved from where he was, and yet how could he help himself?

Without he ran along after Claude's horse, and kept pace with it, the rope would be drawn tight about his neck, and he would be dragged to the ground, for as his hands were tied behind his back he could not assist himself in any way.

The three highwaymen now mounted their horses.

As before, Tom King led the way.

He went first, Claude followed next with Richard Nares at the end of the rope.

Sixteen-String Jack brought up the rear, so that should any unforeseen accident happen, Richard Nares would not be able to escape.

In this manner they threaded their way rapidly through the forest, and were soon at a considerable distance from where the officers were waiting.

Finding that he had no other resource, Richard Nares ran as fast as he could after Claude's horse; but in spite of all his care, there would come a slight jerk now and then that would have the effect of tightening the rope to a very painful degree.

Nor was Claude very particular about where he went, and more than once Richard Nares was compelled to scramble through a mass of prickly vegetation.

Of course, this materially added to his discomfort, and when at length Claude paused, the poor wretch was scratched in a dreadful manner.

No one could regret, however, that Richard Nares should suffer this pain—he fully deserved far more than he got.

When Claude stopped his horse, he stood panting, exhausted, and almost choked.

Claude made a rapid sign to his two companions, and alighted from his steed.

Going towards Richard Nares, he loosened the rope a little, which enabled him to breathe more freely.

He was surprised indeed to find the rope so tight, and all round Richard's neck there was a black mark, which he would carry for many a day.

"Recover yourself in the best way you can," said Claude. "You will need all your strength, I can assure you. I have not done with you yet!"

Richard looked at him in great alarm, and wondered what was in store for him.

Having spoken these words, Claude Duval began to search about upon the ground.

Not one of his movements escaped the notice of Richard.

At length Claude stooped and picked up a straight piece of stick, which was a portion of the branch of a tree which lay upon the ground.

Taking a large knife from his pocket, he set to work with great deliberation to cut and trim this stick, Richard Nares eyeing him all the while with the greatest uneasiness.

Perceiving what a state of fright he was in, Claude worked with more deliberation than ever, for he felt that



[DICK TURPIN APOLOGISES FOR HIS INTRUSION.]

even in this indirect manner he was inflicting punishment upon his captive.

When he considered he had tormented him long enough, Claude came towards him with the stick under his arm.

The first thing he did was to remove the gag from Richard's mouth.

No sooner had the highwayman done this than Richard sank down upon his knees, and in the most abject manner conceivable roared for mercy.

"All right!" said Claude; "we will talk about mercy when I have settled off the little account I have against you."

"Get up!"

Richard refused to move, and continued to pour out his frantic appeals for mercy.

"Get up!" said Claude, again.

Finding that no notice was taken of what he said, Claude took hold of the rope and gave it a jerk.

The noose tightened itself round Richard's neck, and stopped his vociferations in a very abrupt and summary way indeed.

"Will you get up now?"

Richard rose slowly to his feet.

As soon as he had done so, Claude loosened the rope again. With the knife he severed the cord by which Richard's arms were confined behind him, and then he flung the noose off his neck.

Richard made a frantic dash to escape.

But he was too late.

Claude twisted his hand into his neckcloth, and held him secure.

"Now, Richard," he said, "your time is come, and woe be to you!"

The abject wretch again howled for mercy.

"You can keep that up as long as you like now!" said Claude. "I thought you would make a great fuss, and that is the reason I brought you here; I am not afraid that the police officers will overhear you now!"

Although he was so terrified, yet he was literally burn-

ing with rage, and when the police officers were mentioned he ground his teeth savagely together.

"We made a mistake," said Claude, "and let you off a great deal too easily the last time, and this is the way you recompense us for it. You ought to have been dealt with more severely at first, and then we should have been saved a great deal of trouble; but it will be all the worse for you now! Then defend yourself as well as you are able, or, if you can't defend yourself, submit quietly to be thrashed!"

Raising the stick, Claude laid it about the back and shoulders of Richard Nares with right good will.

Disregarding all his howls of pain and rage, and all his appeals for mercy, Claude continued his discipline until his arm positively ached.

It soon became unnecessary to retain his hold upon Richard's neckcloth.

He spun round and round, he fell to the ground, he rolled over and over, and tried in every possible way he could think of to escape the blows with the stick.

But it was all in vain, Claude was inexorable, nor would he desist until he found himself quite unable to wield the stick.

By the time this was the case, Richard Nares was one mass of bruises from head to foot.

The punishment was a very severe one, and yet it was thoroughly deserved.

"Now," said Claude, by way of valediction "I hope this will be a lesson to you for the future! You see what you have brought yourself to; and for the future you ought to study to escape such treatment!"

Richard Nares writhed about on the ground and groaned—he felt himself utterly unable to rise.

"We are going now," said Claude, "and you must get out of the forest in the best way you can—that is no business of ours. I am afraid you have dropped your whistle; if you hadn't, you might have amused yourself with blowing it until the police officers came."

Richard Nares made no reply to this taunt.

"Beware," added Claude, "how you interfere with us again; if you do, you will find the result will be the same. Now I am going. Good-bye, and I fervently hope that I shall never catch sight of your ugly visage again!"

Uttering these words, Claude Duval turned away and mounted his horse again.

"I think we have given him what he deserves," he said to his two comrades.

"Not any more!" said Tom King. "But let us depart; we have lingered here longer than is prudent already."

"Stop a minute!" said Claude. "I have just recollected something which I had forgotten."

He flung himself quickly off his horse as he spoke, without telling his companions what it was that he alighted for.

He hastened to Richard Nares, who lay quite flat upon the ground, every now and then uttering a dismal groan.

"You have a share of the miser's gold with you," said Claude, as he bent over him, "and I don't intend you to keep it. I mean to have that myself!"

He felt on the outside of his coat as he spoke, and found that the money had been deposited in one of the side pockets.

In order to save time, Claude took out his knife and cut the pocket away entirely, carrying it off and all its contents.

Richard Nares was not able to make any resistance.

"Now I will be off," said Claude, as he once more mounted. "I think, after all, we have managed pretty well—at any rate, I fancy we have got money enough between us to carry out our plans for the future."

"I am glad you didn't leave Richard Nares any of it," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"I was very near doing so, for I had forgotten all about it until the last moment. However, we will say farewell to the New Forest."

"Yes," said Tom King. "What with one thing and another, we have been detained much longer than I anticipated. It is quite time we thought of getting back to the deserted mansion, for how can we tell what may have happened during our long absence?"

Claude and Jack murmured a reply, but they little thought what had occurred since their departure.

After casting one last look upon the form of Richard Nares, as he lay stretched at full length upon the grass, they took their way steadily out of the forest.

As soon as they had gone, Richard Nares, with many hideous groans, slowly raised himself to a sitting posture.

He was bruised all over, and it was evident that every movement he made, however trifling, caused him excruciating pain; nevertheless, he looked in the direction which the highwaymen had taken, and shook his clenched fist.

A look of deep hatred came over his face as he did so.

"I will have my revenge," he said, gaspingly, and uttering a groan at almost every word—"I will have my revenge upon you all three! I will not rest until I have it—I will live for nothing else, I will devote the whole of my energies to this one task, and I shall succeed—I know I shall succeed—I can feel it! But as for you, Claude Duval, your fate shall be a thousand times worse than either of your companions!"

A sudden accession of pain compelled him to cease, and he sank back upon the grass, and then he occupied himself by muttering his threats of revenge over again, varying them with occasional bursts of frightful imprecations.

CHAPTER DXXXVIII.

RELATES WHAT BEFEL DICK TURPIN AND MAUD IN THE CROSS ROAD.

HAVING related the result of the journey of the three highwaymen to the forest, and having shown what amount of success they met with, we will leave them on their way back to the deserted mansion, where they fully expected they should find Dick Turpin and Maud waiting their arrival.

Of course, as we know, they would be disappointed.

Dick Turpin had been hunted from that place of refuge by the indefatigable Mr. Wriggles and his men.

It is to that picturesque and charming country road where we last saw Turpin and Maud that we now wish to direct the attention of the reader.

It was a lonely road, and one that was rarely travelled except during the busiest part of the day.

At that very early hour, with the sun only a little way above the horizon, it was scarcely likely that anyone would be upon it.

From the windows of the mansion, however, which we have spoken of as being visible in the distance, a view could be obtained of that strange and interesting group.

Dick Turpin's swoon had been caused by sheer fatigue.

Only a short time before, he had been very, very close to death, and though his recovery had been rapid, yet he was not in a condition to bear an immense amount of fatigue and excitement, such as he had suffered the whole of that eventful night.

Dick was insensible when he fell from the saddle.

Maud, however, was in full possession of her senses until she reached the ground, when she became unconscious in consequence of her head striking against the hard roadway.

And so, neither of them showing the least signs of life, they lay side by side upon the ground, with Black Bess bending over them.

How long her state of unconsciousness continued Maud knew not.

Suddenly she recovered full possession of her faculties. For a time she lay perfectly still as she had fallen, being quite unable to comprehend where she was, and to recollect what had happened last.

Presently, with the suddenness of an electric shock, the remembrance of all that had occurred flashed through her mind.

She understood the full peril of their situation, and, with a cry of alarm upon her lips, she endeavoured to rise up.

Turpin had fallen upon her arm, and she had some trouble in disengaging it.

She wept and sobbed bitterly when she saw how motionless he lay, and the terrible conviction came over her that he was dead.

Her grief then was terrible to witness.

Some of the shots which had been fired, she thought, must have struck him; he had borne up against the effects of the wound as long as he could, until at length he had fallen a corpse from her side on to the roadway.

This was a terrible thought, and, as she gazed upon him and found that he still continued motionless, she felt more and more convinced that she was right.

At last she murmured through her tears

"The evil day which I have so long foreseen has come—he is dead and I am alone!"

She seemed at that moment as though she could freely, willingly have laid down by his side again and died too.

Fortunately, however, the thought occurred to her that it would be well to ascertain where the wound was, and what was its nature.

She passed her hand rapidly over his apparel, without being able to detect any signs of blood.

Hope once more entered her heart, and she rose to her knees while she continued her examination.

In less than a moment she satisfied herself that he had not received any fresh wound.

When she made this unexpected discovery, she was almost overpowered with joy.

She could scarcely believe in the reality of so much happiness, and she rapidly examined him again.

The result was the same.

There was no fresh wound.

"He has fainted," she said—"fainted from weakness; he was not strong enough—he was not sufficiently recovered to go through such a night of trouble, danger, and adventure as this has been!"

She placed her hand upon his heart, and found that it was beating slightly.

"I shall be able to recover him to life again!"

With these words on her lips she rose to her feet.

For the first time, then, she noticed that Black Bess was standing near to them, and that Dick Turpin's foot was entangled in the stirrups.

Her first act was to release it, and then she looked about her for water.

She searched hastily around, but was unable to find any.

While thus engaged, she happened to look back along the road they had just come.

It was a long, straight road, and had an upward tendency.

The morning was clear, and she could see a great distance.

She caught sight of something which caused her to utter a scream of terror, and, for a moment or two, she felt that her senses were leaving her.

By a powerful effort of the mind, she succeeded in shaking off this feeling.

Probably the reader will guess what she beheld that caused her so much alarm.

In the distance, but coming at a rapid speed, was a dark mass.

She could not see it distinctly, but her heart told her that it was Mr. Wriggles and his officers in pursuit.

They had kept upon the track well, and were now only a short distance off.

What was to be done?

After another hurried glance to satisfy herself that she had not been mistaken, she rushed frantically towards the spot where Dick Turpin lay in his death-like state of insensibility.

Excitement lent her momentary strength.

Kneeling down, she passed her arm under his head and raised him to a half-sitting posture.

She pushed his hair back from his forehead, and looked into his countenance.

Her anguish grew more and more poignant when she found that Dick's state of unconsciousness was as complete as before. He was evidently unaware that his position had been changed in the least.

Maud once more glanced hastily back along the road.

Already she fancied she could hear the hoofbeats of the officers' horses.

What could she do?

She shook Dick violently, and tried by a thousand means to restore him to animation.

But all in vain.

"Dick, Dick!" she screamed, putting her mouth close to his ear—"look up—arouse yourself—the officers are close behind you! Quick—oh, be quick, or it will be too late! You will be captured! Do you hear me? Open your eyes and look around! Shake off this lethargy! Dick, Dick!"

The poor girl fancied she could detect a slight movement of the highwayman's limbs, and as she looked into his countenance she saw that his eyelids were fluttering slightly.

With increased apprehension she looked back again.

As she knelt upon the road, she was now able to see her pursuers.

They were very much nearer than they were before, and they were coming on at full gallop.

Whether they could see her as she could see them, Maud could not tell, but she fancied such must be the case, or else why did they urge their horses so furiously as they did.

If they knew that Dick Turpin was lying senseless on the highway, what efforts they would make in order to come up with him!

It would be impossible to have a better chance of capturing him.

To take him prisoner while he lay helpless and unconscious with no one to defend him save Maud, would have been a very easy matter.

The poor girl thought so, and her eyes filled with tears.

Almost maddened by the danger, which increased at every moment, she turned round to Dick Turpin, and made another effort to restore him to life.

But, as before, she failed.

Some more powerful means than she possessed were required to bring back life to that exhausted frame. The repeated application of some powerful stimulant was the only thing that could drive off this swoon.

But nothing of the kind did Maud possess—not so much as a cupful of water to sprinkle upon his face, though if she had, it is doubtful whether it would have produced any effect.

In vain, then, she clung to him, and shook him as violently as her strength would permit.

In vain did she scream affrightedly into his ears, and call upon him by every endearing word that she could think of.

He was insensible to all her efforts.

Tears streamed down her cheeks, and her heart seemed as though it would break.

"At last," she thought—"at last he will fall into the hands of those who are thirsting for his blood! He cannot help himself, and I cannot help him, and I know they will have no pity!"

As she made this reflection, she heard the clatter of the horses' hoofs upon the road.

Her fancy did not deceive her; it was indeed such a sound that reached her ears, telling her with what frightful rapidity the officers were approaching the spot.

With her heart almost standing still, and with the blood in her veins cold and chill, she dashed the tears from her eyes and looked towards her pursuers.

They were frightfully close at hand.

To Maud's excited fancy it seemed as though another moment, or even a dozen bounds of their horses would bring them to where she was.

That was her fancy, however.

The clear morning air made the officers appear to be much closer than they were in reality.

When Maud looked upon this occasion they were considerably more than half a mile distant.

That, however, was a little way.

How soon those horses coming on at such a fierce gallop would perform so short a distance!

Capture was inevitable; for, even if Dick Turpin recovered, what time was there for flight?

All these dreadful reflections thronged rapidly through Maud's mind, and the poor girl felt positively maddened.

She clasped her hands tightly over her temples, in order to check their throbbing, which seemed to set thought at defiance.

"Am I quite useless?" she murmured—"cannot I do anything? Is there no plan that I can adopt by which he may be saved? No—no—I can think of nothing! The officers can see us here! They know that they have but to ride up and take him prisoner at once!"

Just at this moment a wild and desperate thought flashed through Maud's brain

She sprang suddenly to her feet, as though galvanised into life and action.

"I will try to save him!" she said—"I will try to save him! I fear it is impossible for me to succeed, but if I fail he will be no worse off than he is now; it is worth while to make the trial. Oh, how I wish that I was stronger! If I was only strong it would be easy enough!"

By this time the officers had considerably decreased the distance that intervened between them and the object of their pursuit

"Too late—too late!" moaned Maud; "and yet I feel strong—strength seems to have come into my arms! I will try—I will try!"

Hastily seizing Black Bess by the bridle, she led her close to Dick Turpin's side.

Then, stooping down quickly, she raised Dick from his recumbent position.

As she did so she fancied he showed signs of recovery

But she did not pause to ascertain whether she was correct or not—there was no time.

With the exercise of an amount of strength which she could not possibly have put forth under less urgent circumstances, Maude continued her efforts to raise Dick Turpin from the ground.

She succeeded in placing him upon his feet, and with a much greater amount of ease than she had dared to anticipate.

CHAPTER DXXXIX.

MAUD SAVES DICK TURPIN FROM CAPTURE, AND AFTERWARDS RESTORES HIM TO CONSCIOUSNESS.

MAUD seemed already to have accomplished a great deal, but in comparison with what she had yet to do it was insignificant.

Without pausing a second,—for she knew how important time was—she placed the insensible body of Dick Turpin against the saddle.

Her purpose now became clear.

The desperate thought which occurred to her, and which, impossible as it seemed, she determined to attempt to carry out, was to place Dick across the saddle and afterwards mount herself.

It was too much, however to suppose that she would be able to perform such a feat as this, requiring, as it did, three times as much strength as she possessed.

Black Bess stood perfectly still.

From the moment when her master had fallen from her back she had not ceased to gaze upon him.

The gallant creature was possessed of quite sufficient intelligence to be aware that something unusual was the matter.

With her head turned round, she had watched every movement that Maud had made.

It was on this occasion that Dick Turpin's celebrated mare gave a most striking proof of her extraordinary sagacity.

Apparently comprehending her master's helpless condition, and apparently comprehending Maud's intention, Black Bess, as soon as she felt him leaning against the saddle, knelt down upon her fore legs.

For about a second Maud wondered what it was Black Bess intended to do, but then she comprehended, and her heart became filled with joy.

The task, which just before had seemed quite beyond her powers, was now comparatively easy.

Almost as soon, then, as Black Bess sank upon her knees Maud succeeded in placing Dick Turpin across the saddle.

He lay there exhibiting no more signs of life than a sack of grain.

Maud put one foot in the stirrup, and seated herself in the saddle behind him.

She had been very quick in all her movements, and a very little time indeed had been consumed since the hope to place Dick on Black Bess's back had entered her mind.

Quick, however, as she had been, the officers were certainly not more than a hundred yards off.

Scarcely had she seated herself in the manner we have described, and almost before she was able to press her arms round Dick's insensible form and clutch hold of the bridle, than Black Bess started to her feet.

Uttering a loud, snorting sound, she turned round and galloped off at a speed that deprived Maud of breath.

How it was that she retained her seat, and how it was she kept Dick from slipping to the ground, she could never tell; in that moment of intense excitement she was only conscious that, in some extraordinary way or other she was holding him, and that she was clutching the saddle with such violence as to cause herself great pain.

She was aware that they were flying along at a furious speed, but nothing more.

In what direction she knew not.

The reins lay idly upon Black Bess's neck, and she went just wherever she chose.

As Maud had feared, it was indeed no other than Mr. Wriggles and the remnant of his men whom she saw so rapidly approaching.

But she made a mistake in thinking that they saw her so soon.

When, however, Mr. Wriggles actually caught sight of Dick Turpin lying in the roadway, and Black Bess standing riderless, he could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses.

He was only convinced when all his men declared with one voice they could see it too.

He absolutely screamed with joy and anticipated triumph, while his face had a deeper purple tint than it had ever been seen to have before.

"At last—at last!" he cried—"we have them now! I fancied he could not have escaped being wounded by one of the many bullets that were fired after him! He's hit—he's down! We shall have him without any trouble at all!"

He spurred his horse savagely while he spoke, and ordered his men to do the like.

The poor animals were already much exhausted; but the pain made them continue to bound forward.

Mr. Wriggles uttered several oaths when he saw Maud so busily engaged in raising Dick Turpin from the ground.

Still, he did not doubt that he should be able to effect his purpose, notwithstanding all her efforts.

But, as we have already seen, before he could arrive, Maud had succeeded in getting clear away.

This was an event which Mr. Wriggles had never expected.

He would not have believed it possible that such a feat could be performed.

To his extreme annoyance, however, he found he was once more defeated, and defeated too at a moment when he had counted with the most absolute certainty upon success.

"Come on!" he roared—"keep up the chase—we shall have them before long! That woman must be a fiend, or she could not ride in the way she does! Ah! she'll be off!" he exclaimed suddenly, upon perceiving Maud almost lose her balance. "Come on—we shall have them soon! She can't go far like that—she must fall to the ground!"

The police officers spurred and flogged their poor horses in the most unmerciful manner; but, in spite of all they could do, it was clear enough to them all that Black Bess was distancing them with very great rapidity.

The gallant creature taxed herself to the utmost, and never before had she made such wonderful speed.

Hedges and trees flew past with a speed that was absolutely bewildering, and in after times Maud thought that if the speed had been less rapid than it was she could not have retained her seat.

As it was, she had great difficulty in preserving her balance, and once almost fell to the ground.

Black Bess continued her terrific gallop, and soon the police officers were left far behind.

Strive as they would, they could not make their horses go at such a speed as that, and after a time the exhausted creatures became quite insensible or indifferent to the application of either whip or spur.

Thoroughly dead beat, they were at last compelled to give up.

"On—on!" cried Mr. Wriggles. "We will keep on at the little speed we can make! In a little time we shall come to an inn, where we shall be able to obtain fresh horses! We shall succeed yet—I feel convinced of it!"

In the meanwhile Black Bess continued her rapid flight.

She left the open road to take her course in a direct line across the country.

How long she would have continued to fly, or to what place she would have gone, is hard to say.

At length Maud, growing calmer, perceived that Dick Turpin showed signs of returning animation.

She turned her head round, and looked searchingly across the open country behind her, but she could see no signs of the police officers whatever.

From the rapidity with which Black Bess had travelled, and the length of time for which she had maintained the same rate of speed, made Maud easily believe that she must outrun the police officers completely

At this moment Black Bess leaped over a low hedge, and alighted in a narrow country lane.

On the opposite side were some palings, eight feet nigh at the very least, and so Black Bess changed her course, and continued along the lane.

Now that the officers were no longer in sight, Maud thought that the best thing she could do was to pause, and to use what means she could to bring Dick Turpin back to life.

She saw the reins upon Black Bess's neck, and, after one or two unsuccessful attempts, succeeded in taking hold of them.

Slowly tightening them, she gradually reduced Black Bess's speed, until at last she stopped.

It was early morning yet, and all around was still and calm.

A better place for coming to a stop Maud fancied could not be found.

It was very difficult to lower Dick Turpin to the ground, but she did so as gently as she could, and then alighted herself.

Black Bess appeared to be suffering severely from the tremendous exertions she had made.

For a long time past her food had been none of the best, and now she showed the effects of it.

She was covered with foam, while she was actually dripping with perspiration, for it gathered in large tear-like drops, and fell into the roadway.

Maud gave but one glance at her, and then turned her attention to Dick Turpin.

He seemed now every moment as though he would revive, and a little thing would doubtless suffice to restore him.

By the side of the lane there ran a little brook, and with some trouble Maud dragged Dick towards it.

When his head was near the mimic stream, she stooped down quickly and sprinkled plenty of water over his countenance.

A quick shudder shot over his whole frame when the cold drops were dashed upon him, and then he slowly opened his eyes and looked intently about him.

It could be seen at a glance that he neither knew where he then was, nor recollected what had happened.

Presently, however, his eyes rested upon Maud's face, as she bent anxiously over him.

He recognised her, for he smiled faintly.

Turning his head a little, he saw Black Bess standing within a yard of him.

This appeared to content him, for he closed his eyes again.

Maud feared at first that he had relapsed into unconsciousness, but such was not the case.

Dick closed his eyes to shut out surrounding objects, in order that he might be better able to recollect what had last happened.

This baffled him entirely.

The last thing he could recollect was being seated on Black Bess with Maud before him, flying at full speed from the officers.

He remembered how faint he felt, and how he was several times in danger of falling; but this was the extreme point to which his recollection reached.

He taxed his brain in vain in the endeavour to remember farther.

He opened his eyes once more, and endeavoured to raise himself up, but he found that his strength was not yet equal to such an effort.

"Lie still a little longer," said Maud, gently placing her hand upon his breast. "Don't attempt to move yet. Wait until you have recovered your strength a little more—you are quite safe now; you have nothing whatever to fear from the officers. They are far behind, and quite out of sight and hearing.

Dick smiled again, and nodded to Maud that he perfectly understood what was said to him.

He was silent a moment, and then he said:

"I suppose, Maud, I must have fallen from my horse? I felt myself grow giddy and weak, and I tried hard to overcome the feeling and preserve my balance, but I suppose I failed and fell to the ground."

"You did."

"I thought as much. And you—did you fall too?"

"Yes."

"And are you unhurt?"

"Quite."

"I am thankful to hear that, and I suppose, since I have fallen, you have been endeavouring to restore me to consciousness?"

Maud nodded.

She thought that she had better not tell him just yet all that had happened.

"How lucky," continued Dick, "that I had already managed to gallop so far and out-distanced the officers! Are you sure they are out of sight?"

"They were a little while ago," replied Maud. "I will go and look."

"Do so."

Maud rose to her feet, and, going to that hedge over which Black Bess had leaped, she climbed up the little bank, upon the top of which it was planted, and gazed long and earnestly over the face of the whole country.

She could see for a great distance, for the ground was very level, and there were not many trees to obstruct the view.

Her heart filled with thankfulness when she found that there was indeed none of their pursuers, and, leaping down into the lane again, she hastened back to where she had left Dick.

She found that during her absence he had managed to sit up, and he was looking about him with a puzzled expression on his countenance.

Upon seeing or hearing Maud approaching, he turned quickly towards her, and asked, anxiously, if all was well.

"Yes," she replied. "I have had a careful look-out, and I feel convinced that the officers are not within several miles of this place."

"That is a satisfaction indeed!" cried Dick Turpin. "Help me to my feet—I feel quite strong enough to stand."

Maud did so, but as soon as he stood upon his feet, Dick found that he had formed an exaggerated idea of the amount of his strength.

He felt as though he should faint again, and he leaned heavily upon Maud's arm.

The death-like sensation quickly passed away, and, still leaning upon her arm, he looked all round him, while the puzzled expression again became visible upon his countenance.

"Where are we?" he asked. "What place is this?"

CHAPTER DXL.

DICK TURPIN FINDS THAT HE IS INDEBTED TO MAUD FOR HIS ESCAPE FROM THE POLICE OFFICERS.

MAUD did not make any reply to this question; indeed, she could not, for she had not the remotest notion of where they were.

Dick Turpin passed his hand several times over his brow, and his countenance showed that he was more puzzled than before, while he muttered:

"I cannot understand this—I cannot understand this!"

"What," asked Maude anxiously—"what is it that bewilders you?"

"Why, to find myself where I now am!"

"And do you know where you are?"

"Yes, within half an hour's ride of Enfield Chase."

"Indeed—are you sure?"

"Well, that is what puzzles me. I feel as sure as I could feel about anything, and yet——"

"Yet what?"

"I am quite certain, that in the short time I was galloping, I did not get so far as this from the deserted mansion."

Maud could have given an easy explanation of all this

and at once put an end to Dick Turpin's bewilderment, but somehow or other, she felt strangely reluctant to confess that she had been the means of saving his life.

"I don't see why this should cause you any anxiety," she replied. "You ought indeed to feel glad that you are so much further from your foes than you had hoped or expected to be."

"Well, so I ought, and yet it is not that—there is some mystery in all this, I feel convinced."

"What mystery?"

"I have been trying to think back, and I remember now that just before I fell from my horse, I could see in the distance a handsome-looking mansion; now I look around me, and I cannot see any trace of it."

Maud was silent.

Dick looked into her countenance, and he seemed to gather from its expression the idea that his companion could give an explanation of that which had so puzzled him.

"Come, Maud," he said, "you know something about this; I am certain you can set me at rest upon this point. Pray do so, for anything in the shape of a mystery troubles me."

Being thus urged, Maud resolved to speak. She felt that it would be unwise to remain longer silent; she knew that in a few words she could disperse this mystery, and then Dick would think no more about it, whereas if she did not, in all probability his thoughts would be given to that when they ought to be directed to more important matters.

"When you fell," she said, "you were indeed in sight of an elegant mansion; it was built upon some rising ground. You must remember that your arm was round me, and that I was clinging to you, so that when you fell I fell also, and we both reached the road together."

"Good heavens! I didn't know that! I was unconscious of that until you spoke. Were you hurt?"

"No, no—not at all—scarcely scratched. The suddenness of the fall, however, deprived me of my senses, and when I recovered, I found we were both lying in the road, and Black Bess was standing near."

"And I?"

"You were quite insensible. At first I was greatly terrified, for I feared you were dead; I remembered the volley that the officers fired after us, and I fancied that you might have been seriously wounded by one of the bullets."

"No, Maud, I was not touched by any of them."

"I know! I soon made that discovery—I learned that it was weakness, and nothing more, which had caused you to swoon. Your death-like state alarmed me very much, and I tried every means I could think of to restore you to life, but in vain."

"Were you not alarmed?"

"I was, indeed; and then when I looked up, I saw that the police officers were approaching."

Dick started violently. He had no idea that he had been in such a frightful peril, and he waited with the utmost anxiety for Maud to continue.

"When I saw them I felt almost maddened; I did not know what to do, and I redoubled my efforts to recall you to life, but you remained as insensible as at first."

"And the officers," said Dick—"what of them?—how was it I escaped?"

"I saw them coming on at a rapid speed, and I could tell by their manner, or I fancied I could, that they were able to see you lying down in the road. In my despair I hit upon a desperate thought; it was to raise you up, to place you on the back of Black Bess, to mount behind you, and then gallop away."

"And you must have done this, Maud—you have saved me. I can understand all—indeed it is to you, and to you alone that I am indebted for my freedom! At this moment, had it not been for your courage, dear one, I should have been in the hands of the police officers!"

Dick Turpin was greatly overcome by this proof of Maud's devotion, and it gave him a great shock to think that he was in so much peril while unconscious of all around him.

He drew Maud to his breast and kissed her fondly, while he thanked her for having saved his life.

There was a silence between the two of several minutes duration.

On Dick's part it would have lasted much longer than it did, but Maud was the first to speak.

"Come," she said, "if you are better, and able to proceed, let us seek some better place of shelter; the officers are not at hand, yet they may succeed in tracking us."

"They may—they may; and I must look out for some means of providing for my safety. Let us walk a little way along this lane, and I will lead Black Bess by the bridle—I never saw her look so fatigued and so distressed as she does now!"

Dick patted his mare fondly as he spoke, and led her by the bridle, while his other arm encircled Maud's waist.

"As we walk on," he said, "I will try and decide upon what shall be our future proceedings. At present I don't know what we can do for the best. When you carried me off, what made you gallop towards Enfield Chase?"

"It was Black Bess's doings; she came in this direction of her own accord; I did not even hold the reins."

"I see—I see; her instinct would lead her to this place."

Dick Turpin became silent, and Maud did not offer to interrupt him, for she knew well enough that he was considering over his position, and endeavouring to come to a conclusion as to what was the best thing he could do.

In this manner they strolled on for a considerable distance.

It was not yet late, and the lane was so secluded that they met no one.

The ground had an upward tendency, and as they proceeded the rise became more and more rapid.

Dick tried in vain to think of some place that would afford him shelter.

Enfield Chase was not far off, but then he had a lively recollection of the perils he had encountered during his last stay there, and he felt but little inclination to return to it again. There seemed, however, no other resource than to take refuge among its trees.

Occupied with these reflections, Dick Turpin ascended the hill, and upon gaining its summit he paused for breath, for the ascent had tried his strength severely.

Maud, too, was tired and exhausted, as could be seen by her pale and haggard face.

From the brow of the hill a very beautiful view of the surrounding country could be obtained.

Almost the first thought which entered Dick Turpin's mind upon reaching this eminence was, that it afforded him an excellent opportunity of ascertaining whether or not any of his pursuers were in sight.

It was very important that he should ascertain this.

"Look out, Maud," he said, "your eyes are probably stronger than mine are now, for I can still feel the effects of that wound in my head! Look out—and I will do the like!"

Dick Turpin placed his hand so as to shade his eyes from the extraneous light, and he commenced gazing earnestly and searchingly in every direction.

Nothing, however, in the shape of horsemen met his view, and he was beginning to congratulate himself that he was completely out of the reach of his foes when he was startled by a sudden ejaculation from Maud.

He turned round quickly.

"What is it?" he said—"what can you see?"

"They are here, Dick—they are here, and close at hand, too. By some means or other—I cannot tell how—they have managed to follow in our footsteps!"

An anxious expression came over Dick Turpin's countenance, and he looked round piercingly.

"Where are they, Maud?" he said. "I cannot see anything of them!"

"But I saw them, and they are close—oh, so close at hand!"

"And where are they now?"

Maud looked again.

But this time she was unable to see that which had so much alarmed her.

"It must have been your fancy?" said Dick.

"No, no—it was not! Look—there they are—there they are! I can see them now quite plainly!"

"And so can I," returned Turpin, in a serious tone, for he had really fancied that Maud had been led astray by her fears.

"I see now how it was that they vanished—they were behind that row of tall trees yonder. Now they are all in sight!"

"Yes," replied Dick—"and there are five of them!"

"What shall we do, Dick? Oh! what shall we do?" asked Maud.

And as she spoke she clung in a terrified manner to his arm.

"First of all, we must get away from this spot, or else we shall be seen by the officers below."

"Do you think they have already seen us?"

"No, no—I am not afraid of that; but we will move from here. It's a lucky chance that brought us to this place, and made me think of looking around; if I had not, we should have been taken completely by surprise."

"We should, for I did not believe that they were anywhere near!"

"There is some consolation to be derived from the thought that they cannot now come upon us unexpectedly!"

"But that is a poor consolation! Can you tell us what we must do next?"

Dick Turpin looked troubled—for the life of him he could not think of a plan by which he might cheat the officers.

While pondering over this subject, he descended the other side of the hill.

"There is only one thing that we can do."

"And what is that?"

"We must find some hiding-place—a secure one—and that at once! To fly would be madness!"

"Why so?"

"Black Bess is already exhausted, and is not equal to a double burden. The officers will presently reach the top of the hill; when they do so, their first act will be to scrutinise the landscape; then they will see us, and of course would have no difficulty in getting upon our track! No, no—that must not be thought of!"

"But where can we hide?"

"I wish I knew, Maud! If I could think of some place of concealment, I should not care! I feel almost certain that the officers have not caught sight of us, and consequently they cannot tell just where we are! If we can hide ourselves before they reach the top of the hill, then all will be well; they will look, and, seeing nothing of us, will probably come to the conclusion that they have lost the track."

"But suppose they should not—suppose they should have a suspicion that we are hiding somewhere near?"

"Why, then we must rely upon the excellence of our place of concealment; and that is just what troubles me! It is necessary to find a place where we can hide without fear of being found!"

Maud shook her head.

"I am afraid that is impossible?" she said.

"I hope it is not, for I can assure you that is our last and only chance!"

CHAPTER DXLI.

DICK TURPIN HAS A VERY SINGULAR ADVENTURE.

JUST as Dick Turpin spoke these words the bottom of the hill was reached.

With a sinking heart Maud looked around, but, as far as the eye could reach, no place was visible which would serve their purpose.

In the distance could be seen a huge mass of trees, among which they might manage to find shelter; but in order to reach them they would have to cross the open country, and while doing that the officers could not fail to see them.

The landscape was almost level, and there was not a single object which held out the slightest promise of concealing them from the officers.

Although they could see for many miles, only one habitation was in sight.

This one was close at hand, and was a rather singular-looking mansion, surrounded by its own grounds.

From its general appearance, it was doubtless the residence of some person possessed of great wealth.

Maud just glanced upon this dwelling and turned her eyes away; she knew full well that the inmates of it were not the kind of people who would be likely to find shelter or a highwayman.

She was in despai

Every now and then she looked behind her, expecting to see the police officers make their appearance on the top of the hill.

Dick Turpin appeared to be reflecting deeply, but suddenly he aroused himself from his reverie, and spoke.

"Maud," he said, "there is only one course which I can adopt!"

"What is it?"

"A very dangerous one, for its failure or its success will be complete! If the latter, all will be well; but I am obliged to confess that the former is more likely!"

'And should it fail?"

"Why, then Mr. Wriggles and his officers would triumph!"

"Then I will not ask you what that plan is,—think of it no more."

"I must either adopt it or remain here," replied Dick "if the latter, the officers are sure to have us, while in the other case there is just a remote possibility that we may escape."

Maud wept.

"Dry your tears!" said Dick—"my scheme is a bold one, and I hope its boldness will ensure its success! Come, come—lean upon my arm again, and walk with me! You will see then what I intend to do!"

Maud obeyed—she felt broken-hearted.

Already in anticipation she saw Dick Turpin heavily loaded with chains, and carried off by the police officers.

As for Dick himself, although his position was so desperate, he was not without the hope that he should be able to elude his foes.

Maud still sobbed and wept most bitterly, but he tried to soothe and calm her in every way he could think of.

Very little success attended his endeavours, and for about a moment Dick looked vexed. He had formed a bold and daring scheme, but this agitation of Maud's threatened to spoil it.

Suddenly, however, a fresh thought appeared to strike him.

He placed his left arm round her so as to support her steps.

He led the way towards the large iron gates which formed the entrance of the grounds surrounding the mansion we have mentioned.

With his right hand he led Black Bess by the bridle.

Maud gave way so entirely to her grief that at first she did not notice in what direction Dick was leading her.

It was not until they actually reached the large gates that she suspected where he was going.

She looked up into his face in terror, but Dick smiled reassuringly.

"Be of good heart," he said; "I feel every confidence in the plan I am about to try,—I might almost say that I am certain to succeed. I shall be glad if it does, as you stand badly in need of rest. What has lately happened has proved too much for you."

"And for you," said Maud, sobbing still.

"And for me," replied Dick, "now that I suffer so much from that wound in the head Mr. Wriggles was kind enough to give me. I shall soon get the better of that, however. Now, our wisest plan will be to confine ourselves to the present,—it is not worth while to look forward to to-morrow."

Maud did not weep quite so violently as before, still the tears rolled down her cheeks, and every now and then she would sob heavily.

"Doubtless these tears relieve your heart," he said. "If they do, let them flow, for they will actually be of assistance to me in carrying out my plan."

"What is the plan?"

"Never mind that now dear one; there is no time to talk about it,—leave all to me. Look, here are the gates; one half is already open, so that we can pass through readily enough."

Such was the case; the large iron gates were not closed, and so Dick Turpin entered the grounds without any difficulty whatever.

But he took the liberty of closing the gates after him.

They now stood in a broad serpentine avenue, which doubtless led to the main entrance of the mansion, but a group of trees hid the mansion itself from their view.

Every object around showed that great pains had been taken to bring the grounds to a high state of cultivation.

Maud trembled excessively, and had it not been for the support of Dick's arm she would doubtless have fallen to the ground.

As it was she walked with great difficulty.

As for Turpin, however, now that he had once decided upon his course of action, he was bold and calm.

He walked along the smooth well-kept avenue with as much ease and confidence as he could have done had the estate owned him for master.

Every now and then he would look back to the gates through which they had entered, but still he saw nothing of the officers.

When at length a turning in the avenue took them out of sight of the gates and brought them in view of the mansion, he felt quite content, so assured was he of the excellence of the plan he had thought of.

Maud's distress and agitation increased at every step.

Had she possessed the power, she would have again asked Dick what he intended to do, but her tongue clung to the roof of her mouth, and she could not utter a syllable.

As he walked along towards the mansion, Dick Turpin continued his efforts to console her.

Presently a faint scream came from Maud's lips.

Dick frowned when he heard it, but looking up he perceived what it was that had caused it.

Coming towards them at a very rapid step was some one in the costume of a gentleman.

He was considerably past the prime of life, yet, for all that, he walked quickly and erectly.

He was very thin, and his cheeks were hollow and sunken.

The dress he had on was no doubt fashionable at the time when he was a young man.

On his head he had a wig, of the kind worn in the preceding reign, and the white frill of his shirt stuck out ostentatiously from his waistcoat.

Maud fixed her eyes upon him with the greatest apprehension.

Something seemed to tell her that he was the owner of the mansion and grounds.

Dick Turpin thought so too, but he still retained his calm, easy confidence.

The old gentleman looked flushed and angry.

He paused when within a few yards of the intruders, and striking his stick violently upon the ground, he said, in a querulous voice:

"How dare you?—who are you?—where do you come from?—what do you want?—who are you I say?" The old gentleman gasped for breath after each question.

Dick Turpin made no attempt to speak, but taking off his hat, bowed profoundly at the close of every sentence.

He bowed again when the old gentleman had done speaking, and with so much courtesy and grace, that the old gentleman could scarcely resist pulling his own hat off and bowing too.

"I am very sorry to intrude upon you," said Dick—very sorry indeed, I can assure you; but I have been compelled to do so on behalf of this lady, who has met with an accident; and all I desire is, that you will grant her that hospitality and assistance which is ever the delight of true Englishmen to afford!"

So saying, Dick bowed again and then put his hat on.

Maud listened in wonder, and so anxious was she to hear what Turpin would say next that she almost forgot her previous fears.

It is certain that she ceased to weep and looked up into Dick's countenance with great curiosity.

The old gentleman coughed.

"Accident, eh?—oh, indeed! Well, I don't know who you are—never saw you before; but if the lady has met with an accident, why, of course, I shall be glad to render her what assistance I can!"

"A thousand thanks," said Dick Turpin; "I felt assured that such would be your reply the moment I caught sight of your benevolent countenance."

The old gentleman smiled, and looked quite pleased. In plain truth, he had a most hideous physiognomy, which caused him to appreciate Dick's compliment all the more highly.

"You are too good sir," he mumbled—"too good!"

"Pray excuse me," said Dick; "I ought to have mentioned it before, but I am in the habit of being address I as 'my lord.'"

Maud clung closer to Dick—she was afraid he was carrying the joke too far.

As for the old gentleman, however, an expression of the almost astonishment first appeared upon his countenance but it quickly vanished, and then he made such a profusion of bows that he must have had quite a pain in his back for a long time afterwards.

"Ten thousand pardons my lord," he said—"ten thousand pardons! But if you will believe me, really I had no idea ——"

"Enough—enough!" said Turpin, waving his hand graciously. "Say no more, I beg. Of course you could not tell. However, if you will lead the way to your house, I will, while we are on the way, relate to you the nature of the accident which has happened."

"I shall be most happy, I am sure," said the old gentleman. "This is the way—straight along this avenue; it leads up to the front door."

"And now to explain," said Dick. "The fact is, that myself and my sister were on our way to join a large hunting party at Southgate. We were rather late in starting, and so we took the nearest way across the country."

Turpin paused, and the old gentleman, being under the impression that he ought to say something, cried quickly:

"Pray proceed, my lord—pray proceed!"

"That, then, was the primary cause of the accident. When within a little distance from here, we found our progress barred by a rather stiff hedge. My sister—who is all spirit—would insist upon leaping it, and I consented. We did so, and my mare cleared the hedge first rate."

Dick patted Black Bess on the neck as he spoke.

"My sister, however," he continued, "was not so fortunate—her horse jumped short and fell, before I could spring from my own horse and run to her assistance; but by scrambling to his feet, and then thoroughly terrified, he set off at a wild gallop for the meadows, leaving my sister lying insensible upon the ground."

"How dreadful!" said the old gentleman, anxiously—"I do hope the lady is not much hurt?"

"Not so much hurt as one would imagine; she is, however, greatly terrified and unnerved. I restored her to consciousness, and then looked around. Her horse was already out of sight, so I gave up the idea of capturing him. My next thought was to find some place of shelter for my sister, where she could rest a little while and recover herself. For this purpose, I stood upon a bank and looked round me, and discovered that yours was not only the nearest habitation, but in fact the only one in sight."

"It is, my lord," said the old gentleman, with a low bow—"it is."

"I looked at it," continued Turpin, "and felt sure that the owner of such an elegant structure would be sure to afford the shelter we needed. Such, then, is the simple account of our intrusion upon you."

"I hope you will pardon me, my lord!" said the old gentleman—"I do hope you will, indeed! But when I saw you approach——"

"Don't recur to that, I beg!" said Dick Turpin.

"Your lordship is too good—much too good!" said the old gentleman, with a pleasant smile. "Here, however, is my poor abode. You may not find it so comfortable as your own abode, but, such as it is, you are fully welcome to it."

"I thank you!" said Turpin; "not only on my own account, but on behalf of my sister's, who is much too agitated and alarmed to speak for herself."

The old gentleman ascended the steps that led to the front door of the mansion as he spoke.

Upon seeing their master approaching, several servants made their appearance, one of whom took charge of Black Bess.

Dick Turpin looked anxiously after his steed, and felt strongly inclined to accompany the servant and see where she was bestowed.

But if he did, their suspicion might be aroused, and so he contented himself with the thought that he would take the earliest opportunity of paying a visit to her in the stable.

The old gentleman offered his services to assist Maud to ascend the steps, and, in a few moments afterwards, the two fugitives found themselves beneath the roof of the mansion, and, as it seemed, in a place of absolute safety



[THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN ARE ALARMED WHILE COUNTING THE MISER'S GOLD.]

CHAPTER DXLII.

DICK TURPIN IS STARTLED BY THE SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF MR. WRIGGLES AND HIS OFFICERS.

"WELCOME," said the old gentleman, ushering Dick Turpin and Maud into a room, and bowing profoundly at every step—"welcome to my poor abode."

"A thousand thanks!" returned Turpin. "I trust it will not be long before I have the opportunity of returning this cordial hospitality."

"Your lordship is too good," said the old gentleman—"much too good. Allow me, my lord, to introduce you to my wife."

Upon entering the room, Dick Turpin had noticed that, seated near the fire, was a very stout and elderly lady, who, upon their entrance, threw down the book she appeared to be reading, and came towards them.

"Allow me, your lordship, to introduce you to my wife, Mrs. Tuttle."

Then, turning to his wife, he added:

"Sophia, allow me to introduce to you Lord ——."

He paused and stammered, then looked inquiringly towards Dick for a name by which he could announce him.

The highwayman did not allow this to embarrass him in the least, but spoke with great readiness the first name which came to the tip of his tongue.

"Alton," he said.

"Thank you, my lord! Sophia, this is Lord Alton and his sister."

The introduction was gone through with a vast deal of politeness and deference upon the part of the owners of the mansion.

Refreshments were brought, and then, for the gratification of Mrs. Tuttle, Dick had to relate over again the cause of his intrusion.

So freely and unhesitatingly did Dick speak, and so much coherence and circumstantiality did his narrative possess, that not a doubt was raised in their minds as to the truth of the whole story.

They well knew it was no uncommon thing for hunting parties to assemble at the place Dick had mentioned.

and such an accident as he had described was one very likely to happen.

Although his enemies were so close at hand, Dick Turpin preserved his calmness in a most admirable manner, and partook of the delicacies before him with as much ease as though he was Lord Alton in reality.

Poor Maud, however, could not control her terror.

The agitation and alarm which she exhibited were not attributed to the real cause, but to the accident which Turpin described as having befallen her.

And so all things turned out for the best.

As for Dick, he felt quite certain that he should be able to maintain the deception which he had commenced.

It was easy enough to see that Mr. and Mrs. Tuttle were completely overwhelmed by the unexpected honour which had fallen upon them.

Never before in their lives had their mansion been graced by the presence of any member of the aristocracy.

Dick Turpin was calm, because, having succeeded in effecting his object so far, he had no doubt about the success of the remainder.

He made sure that Mr. Wriggles would never dream of looking for him there.

In all this he was mistaken, and he was disagreeably reminded of the fact that it is never safe to trust to appearances.

While he imagined himself so secure, danger was in reality rapidly thickening about him.

Mr. Wriggles was making, what might be termed, without any exaggeration whatever, almost superhuman efforts to achieve his capture.

The success he met with will shortly be made apparent, but, for the present, it is our duty to occupy ourselves with the proceedings of the highwayman himself.

While seated in the comfortable room of the country mansion, Dick noticed, with some surprise, that the old gentleman managed to monopolise the whole of the conversation; and, above all things, appeared desirous of preventing his wife from speaking, for when he observed her about to make any remark, he would immediately say something himself, and in such a high, querulous tone of voice that it made what she said inaudible.

Mrs. Tuttle looked very red and indignant at being thus treated.

Unfortunately her voice was thick and soft, and would not reach for any great distance, while her husband's, being a shrill treble, seemed to pierce to the very brain.

At last she resolved to be kept in check no longer, and, observing an opportunity, she raised her voice as loud as she could, and said:

"Timothy, I am ashamed of you—and not no mistake! You engrosses the whole of the conversation, and don't give me not no chance of speaking to his ludship!"

When his wife thus spoke, Mr. Tuttle opened and shut both his hands and his mouth at the same instant, in a convulsive gasping sort of way, and no doubt he gave an inward groan.

Dick raised a glass of wine to his lips to conceal the smile this little episode produced.

He understood clearly enough now the reason why Mr. Tuttle had been so desirous of drowning his wife's voice, and preventing her from speaking.

A complete silence followed her words, for her husband was too overcome either to move or to utter a word, and so the good lady took advantage of this favourable opportunity to display her oratory.

"Your ludship must be quite disgusted with Timothy, I am sure! It is just like him—he ain't got no more manners nor a pig! But sir—your ludship—you're welcome to this 'ere house, and all that's in it, the same as if it was your own!"

Dick bowed and muttered his thanks.

"We are plain people, your ludship," she continued, "as I dare say you've found out! I ain't no lady, and Timothy ain't no gentleman—though he tries hard to pass himself off as such—but I don't. Show your true colours, and stick to 'em s allus my motter!"

"The sentiment does you infinite credit, Mrs. Tuttle," said Dick, and felt himself constrained to say something.

"Your ludship is too obleeging!" said the old lady, in a muster "But, as I said afore, show what you are! I ain't ashamed of my bringings up, if Timothy is! Many's the row I have had with him, your ludship, over this 'ere very subject; but I never would act the fine lady to please him! The fact is, it isn't in me!"

With his countenance expressive of the utmost dismay, Mr. Tuttle sat still in his chair without speaking a word, but every now and then he would dart furious glances upon his better half.

She, however, took not the least notice.

She was talking to a lord—a thing she had never done before in her life; and, what was more, the lord was listening to her with evident pleasure.

"Power out some wine, your ludship," continued Mrs. Tuttle—"don't spare it; and power some out for your sister. If you'll make yourselves at home, why then all's right. I hope your ludship won't be offended with Timothy for trying to make out he was somebody grand,—it's a failing of his, and so I often tells him. 'Lor, sir,—your ludship, I mean—'tain't so many years ago since we kept a chandler's shop in Bermondsey. Them was the times, your ludship, and I often thinks of them with a *sithe*. Timothy hadn't got so many fine notions in his head then as he has now, though he was allus a little given that way."

Dick bowed and sipped his wine, for it was not very easy to participate in Mrs. Tuttle's conversation.

"Our history, your ludship," continued Mrs. Tuttle, delighted with the idea that a lord was listening to her—"our history is exceedingly simple,—Timothy's uncle dropt off defunct one day, and left this 'ere crib and all the belongings to we."

At this disclosure Mr. Tuttle groaned aloud.

In spite of his dangerous position, Dick enjoyed this scene mightily.

It was by no means the first instance which had come under his notice of people trying to make themselves out to be much better than they really were.

"Not but what, your ludship," continued Mrs. Tuttle, "Timothy is a decentish man, allus exceptin' the fault which I have just been mentiouing; but, as I often say to him, 'Timothy,' say I, 'what's the good of your trying to make out you're a gentleman born when you know very well that you ain't, 'cos you know your father kept a knacker's yard at Dock Head;' but of course, that's neither here nor there—I don't wisb to expose you."

Mr. Tuttle's countenance assumed a greenish tinge.

Evidently he didn't know what to do with himself, and was much disgusted with his wife's conduct, for if ever he had desired to induce the belief that he was a gentleman, he had that morning, but, as usual, his wife, by her plain speaking, had disappointed him.

Gradually Maud forgot her fears, and listened to the disclosures of Mrs. Tuttle with a half-smile upon her countenance.

After this last speech of Mrs. Tuttle's came a long and strange pause.

When there are four persons only partially acquainted with each other, or in conversation, such pauses are common.

Already Turpin had found that Mrs. Tuttle's remarks were not provocative of comment or inquiry, and quite incapable of reply.

As for Mr. Tuttle himself, he was too far gone, and too overcome by his wife's revelations, to be able to open his lips.

Maud was silent, for she had not yet sufficiently overcome her agitation to take an active part in what was going forward.

Mrs. Tuttle's volubility seemed, in some mysterious way or other, to have received a sudden check, for she became quite silent.

Every second made this pause grow more and more unbearable—the only sound which reached their ears was the rustling of the trees in the garden.

Suddenly Dick Turpin started upright in his chair, and assumed a listening attitude.

His quick ear had detected a sound, which had escaped the attention of the others present.

It was that of heavy footsteps walking upon the gravel.

Before he had time to think anything about it, or even to listen long enough to the sound in order to make sure that his senses had not deceived him, the remarkable silence was broken in upon by a heavy knock.

Some one at the front door of the mansion had rapped

the ponderous knocker, and brought it down with a dab.

The sharp sound echoed and re-echoed through the mansion, and those who heard it started violently, as they would have done had a pistol been discharged suddenly and unexpectedly.

"Oh, crikey!" exclaimed Mrs. Tuttle. "What in the name of gracious, is that?"

Bang came the knock at the front door again.

Maud screamed slightly.

Mr. Tuttle started to his feet, and said:

"It's—it's some one at the front door!"

Bang came the knock for the third time, as if those who were without had determined upon entering.

"I'll—I'll go and see what it is!" gasped Mr. Tuttle.

And before Dick could interpose and prevent him from leaving the room, the ex-chandler opened the door and rushed into the passage.

He seemed glad to escape.

No sooner had he gone, however, than Dick closed the door behind him and locked it.

"Oh my, your ludship!" said Mrs. Tuttle. "What are you going to do?"

"Hush—hush!" said Turpin, coming towards her. "You have now an opportunity, if you desire to embrace it, of seeing my brains blown out and scattered upon the floor!"

"Your ludship's brains!" exclaimed Mrs. Tuttle. "What a awful idea!"

"You don't desire it, then?"

"Certainly not, your ludship!"

"Hush—hush! I am no lord! I have come here under false colours! I now feel heartily ashamed of myself for having done so!"

"Not a lud?"

"No, I am not a lord! But I am so pleased with your candid, open, and kindly disposition, that I don't hesitate to tell you who I am! Listen, then, and prepare yourself for a surprise! I am Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

Mrs. Tuttle screamed.

"Oh lawks!" she screamed, and then she sank back in her chair with such violence that it threatened to demolish it.

"Yes, I am Dick Turpin, the highwayman, and my life is entirely in your hands, for those knocks at the front door were given by the police officers in search of me For my own part, I would not ask your protection, but would take my own part; you see, however, that I have some one with me—not my sister, but my wife—it is her I want to spare from the police officers."

"But they are here," said Mrs. Tuttle; "how can I save you?"

"That I cannot tell," returned Dick; "if you can't do so in any way, I must do the best I can for myself."

"Oh dear me!" sighed Mrs. Tuttle. "Criky me if this ain't romantic! But as for the wosifers, your ludship, I hates 'em quite as much as you do, the sneakin' vagabones! I shall never forget a trick they once served me, which, however's, neither here nor there, and I would gladly do anything to spite the vagabones!"

"Then you have the opportunity of doing so," said Turpin, "and much more effectually than you could ever have hoped for. All you have got to do is to be quick and hide us in some place where they can't find us."

"Ah, wheels within wheels I allus do say; that reminds me of them folks' ancestors what lived in this 'ere crib afore. Mr. Tuttle's uncle once hid King Charles the First in this werry hidentical room."

"And was he found?" asked Dick, pointedly.

"No, he warn't; the sogers searched all about and gave it up in despair, and though they was very nearly-certain he was hidin' in the house somewhere."

"Show us this place," exclaimed Dick—"conceal us in it, and deny all knowledge of us to the officers, and you will not only render me and my wife a service for which we shall for ever be grateful, but you will also spite the officers to your heart's content!"

"I will do it," said Mrs. Tuttle, with an air of tragic resolution—"I'll do it—criky me if I don't—but I must be quick."

"You must," said Dick—"quick—quick, or it will be too late, and the chance will be lost!"

CHAPTER DXLIII.

MRS. TUTTLE SECRETES DICK TURPIN AND MAUD IN THE RECESS.

"Come this way—come this way!" cried Mrs. Tuttle, and she waddled across the room towards the fireplace, closely followed by Dick Turpin and Maud.

She paused at one side of the huge chimney-piece, and, pressing a concealed spring, caused a narrow door to open.

A dark-looking recess was disclosed beyond it.

"That is the place," she said. "Enter—be quick; it is not large, but will hold you both, and take my word for it, you won't be found!"

Mrs. Tuttle almost pushed the fugitives into the dark little recess, and as soon as they were fairly inside it she closed the door.

The snap which the spring gave when it flew into its place caused Dick to feel an uneasy sensation about his heart, for he could not conceal from himself the fact that his position was ticklish, that he was a prisoner, and that he relied for his safety entirely upon the excellence of his place of concealment.

And yet not exactly that, for Mrs. Tuttle would have to call into exercise all her tact.

Just as that lady closed the secret door, the thought suddenly crossed her mind that her husband had gone out of the room, and, as he had not been cautioned to the contrary, would disclose all to the officers.

She shook her fist at the door, and her face became clouded with vexation.

"There is no help for it," she muttered; "we must take things as they come, but how I am to manage with Timothy is more than I can tell."

She hastened towards the door, and unlocked it silently.

The footsteps which Dick had heard and which had just apprised him of his danger were indeed those of Mr. Wriggles and his officers, who had followed him so far and then lost the track.

From the top of the hill he had made an accurate inspection of the whole of the country, and found that those he sought were not in sight.

Yet he could not divest himself of the notion that they were somewhere close at hand.

The only habitation in sight was the residence of Mr. Tuttle, and the appearance of this mansion was such as to make it very unlikely Dick Turpin was hiding anywhere in its vicinity.

Mr. Wriggles, however, had discovered that Dick Turpin was one who would do without the least hesitation what anyone else would shrink from.

He thought as a kind of last hope, no harm would result if he made his way to the mansion and inquired of its inmates whether anyone answering to the description of the highwayman had been seen by them.

Accordingly this was the course of action he decided upon, and so we see him and his officers standing at the front door of the mansion knocking for admission.

Mr. Tuttle had ran out into the passage with the intention of opening the door himself, but after going a few steps he paused.

"Confound that beastly woman," he said, "she has thrown me entirely off my guard! The idea of my doing such a ridiculous thing as to run to open the front door—that just shows how she has flurried me. Oh, Sophia, Sophia, you are the plague of my life!"

The officers, impatient at the delay and angry that no notice was taken of their summons, knocked again.

Mr. Tuttle lived in as great style as he could, and so he had a hall porter, who sat in a huge leather easy chair, with nothing else to do but attend to the door.

Upon the present occasion the easy chair was vacant, and it would seem that the porter was in some place where the knock at the front door was inaudible.

Mr. Tuttle was very angry.

His servants gave him an immense deal of trouble, for they quickly found out who he was, or rather, who he had been, and despised him accordingly, and set him quite at defiance.

"I suppose I must open the door myself," said Mr. Tuttle. "I will discharge that villain this very day! He ain't fit to live in a gentleman's house. I'll discharge him!"

It was during this time that Turpin was having

the extraordinary conversation with Mrs. Tuttle which we have recorded in the preceding chapter.

Feeling very angry with himself, with his wife, with his visitors, with his servants, and with those who were knocking so persistently, Mr. Tuttle walked along the hall, and finally opened the door.

There stood Mr. Wriggles, with his countenance more purple and irascible than ever, and his men in a throng behind him on the steps.

Mr. Wriggles's suspicions had been excited and he roused by the inattention which was given to his summons for admission; therefore, as soon as the door was opened, he stepped in.

This proceeding and the appearance of the officers took Mr. Tuttle completely by surprise, and he glared at them in a manner that was ludicrous to behold.

"Why is all this delay?" roared Mr. Wriggles—"why was the door not opened before? I'll complain to your master, you blackguard!"

"My master?" gasped Tuttle.

"Yes, you ill-looking son of a gun! You are a good deal too old for service! You ought to be hung up on a hook, and pass the remainder of your days in peace!"

"Mind what you are about!" said Mr. Tuttle, shaking his fists indignantly. "I tell you an Englishman's house is his castle, and beware how you invade it! You have insulted me; but beware—beware, I say, or you will rouse the British lion within me!"

"Don't excite yourself, old cock, but just run and tell your master that his majesty's police are at the door. Make haste, or you will find yourself in the wrong box!"

"My master?" said Mr. Tuttle again. "What do you mean—are you mad?"

"No; but it strikes me you are—you must be an escaped lunatic!"

Mr. Tuttle shook with passion, and felt as though he would have liked to fell Mr. Wriggles to the earth, but he thought of their number and the probable result of an encounter, and his discretion got the better of his valour.

At this moment Mrs. Tuttle opened the door of the room in which she had been sitting.

"What is the meaning of all this?" she said. "Why is all this uproar?"

"Beg your pardon, mum," said Mr. Wriggles, taking off his hat and making a bow, "and meaning no offence to you, mum, but we can't get any satisfaction from this old bloke, who we take to be a lunatic?"

This gave the worthy lady an idea.

"Yes, yes. Alas!" she cried, "he is just a little bit touched."

Mr. Wriggles tapped his forehead.

"Don't pay any attention to him; fix you eye on him; he is quite harmless. What did you please to want?"

"Mum," said Mr. Wriggles, "I am very sorry to interrupt you, but we are in search of a great criminal. We have tracked him to near this spot, and I called to inquire if you had seen him, thinking it possible you might have done so?"

"Was *he* a man?" asked Mr. Tuttle.

"In course he was," said his wife. "Didn't the gentleman say so? Ho'd your row, Tim, and don't interfere!"

Poor Mr. Tuttle looked around him with a perfectly indescribable expression on his countenance. He was quite sure some one was mad, but he could not decide whether it was himself, or his wife, or his strange visitors.

Mr. Wriggles went on:

"He is dressed in a kind of officer's uniform: scarlet coat, trimmed with gold lace, and horseman's boots."

"Had he got his sister with him?" asked Mr. Tuttle.

"Why, old fellow," said Mr. Wriggles, "you don't mean to say you have seen him?"

"No—no!" exclaimed Mrs. Tuttle, quickly. "Don't pay any attention to him—he is mad!"

"Mad?" repeated her husband, looking more bewildered and enraged than ever—"mad? Yes, somebody is mad! It—it isn't me! Oh, Sophia—Sophia! What do you mean?"

"Beg your pardon, mum," said Mr. Wriggles, "I see you're right, his case is quite hopeless, I should say; only it strikes me as being strange, asking that question, as the very chap we are in search of happens to have a woman with him."

"Young and pretty?" said Mr. Tuttle again.

"Come, come, old chap, don't you interfere, but let me talk with the lady! I must fix my eye upon you."

"D—n your eye," said Mr. Tuttle. "I am no more mad than you are!"

"Cracked people always say that," remarked the police officer.

"Well, mum," he added, "that's the description, and if you happen to have seen any person answering to it, you will do me a very great favour by saying so. They are desperate characters, I can tell you!"

"Are they thieves?" said Mr. Tuttle.

"Well, one is Dick Turpin, the highwayman."

"D—D—Dick Turpin? And all my plate on the sideboard!"

"He—what?" said Mr. Wriggles quickly. "Say that again!"

"Don't heed him," said Mrs. Tuttle. "I tell you he is mad, and don't know what he says!"

"Oh, you false woman, you know I am not mad! You wicked old wretch—you know they are both in the dining-room, and one of them is Dick Turpin, and all my plate's on the sideboard!"

As he spoke these words, the owner of the mansion turned round and made a rush, as though he would have entered the room and seen after the safety of his property.

But his wife adroitly stepped before him, and caught him in her arms.

She stroked and patted him on the head, saying:

"Come, come, Tim—Tim, be quiet—be quiet, there's a good lad, don't excite yourself!"

"Let me go, you female hyena!" said Mr. Tuttle, struggling to release himself. "Come on, officers—come on, I see how the land lies! Run into that room—there he is! I dare say he has pocketed all my plate by this time."

Mr. Wriggles was beginning to get very much bewildered.

However, he understood that he was to run into that room which Mr. Tuttle indicated, and calling aloud for his men to follow him, he did so.

He entered, and of course found the room empty.

Mrs. Tuttle followed, dragging he husband after her.

"Why, there is nobody here," roared Mr. Wriggles—"nobody at all!"

Mr. Tuttle looked round and saw that Dick Turpin had disappeared.

His eyes wandered to the sideboard, upon which a profusion of plate was rather ostentatiously displayed, and found that it presented its usual appearance—nothing had been removed.

He clenched his fists and struck himself some very severe blows on the head, in order to make out whether he was awake, or whether he was the victim of some ridiculous dream.

"I told you it was no good to pay any attention to what he said," cried Mrs. Tuttle. "He is mad, and when the change of the moon comes, there is no doing any good with him, though at most other times he is quiet. "Now Tim—Tim," she said, "do be quiet, and don't make fools of these officers any more, or else you will get yourself into trouble!"

"Am I mad?" asked Mr. Tuttle, wildly—"am I mad?' Just tell me that? Am I mad, I say?"

"If we're to judge by appearances," said Mr. Wriggles, "you are about as clean off it as anybody well could be. If you were in your proper senses, do you think you would have said Dick Turpin was here, when you must have known very well all the while that the room was quite empty?"

"Empty?" said Mr. Tuttle, endeavouring to collect his scattered thoughts — "empty? It was not empty. Where's his lordship? — where's his lordship's sister? Oh, Sophia, Sophia! you are at the bottom of all this, but what it means I can't think. Tell me, I say again, where's his lordship?—where's his lordship's sister?"

"Yours is a hopeless case, old file, I should say," remarked Mr. Wriggles. "Why, anybody could tell you're as mad as a March hare, and you're not fit to be allowed your liberty!"

CHAPTER DXLIV.

MR. TUTTLE DOUBTS WHETHER HE IS IN HIS RIGHT SENSES OR NOT.

MR. WRIGGLES and his officers considered the very inquiries made by Mr. Tuttle as direct evidence of his insanity.

No words, however well chosen, could give the least idea of the state of his feelings, he was enraged beyond measure, and moreover mystified in no small degree.

"Will you all sit down," said Mrs. Tuttle, "and have a drop of something short? I am sorry Tim, poor fellow, should have given you so much trouble."

"Don't 'poor fellow' me," howled her husband.

"It's a great affliction," said Mrs. Tuttle, "and a great grief to me. It worrits all the flesh of my bones, that it does! 'Taint often he is so violent as what he has been this morning. Generally he is all right if you can but fix your eye upon him. Now, Tim," she added, "just look at me."

Mr. Tuttle howled again.

"Oh, you viper," he cried—"oh you viper, to treat your husband in this way! And you," he added, turning to Mr. Wriggles and his party—"you, who are you? You can't be officers; you must be idiots, or else you wouldn't let this woman make fools of you like she does!"

"Come, come, Tim," said Mr. Wriggles, endeavouring to fix his eye upon him, "don't be violent—pray don't, for your poor wife's sake—you must be a great grief and trouble to her, poor thing!"

Poor Tuttle gnashed his teeth, and, seizing hold of his wig, dashed it violently upon the ground, and stamped upon it.

All these actions, which resulted merely from the state of passion he had worked himself up to, were set down as positive proof that he was out of his senses.

Mrs. Tuttle went to the sideboard, and poured out glasses of brandy for the officers.

"There," she said, "drink that—it is a drop of good."

"Many thanks, mum," said Mr. Wriggles; "and 'eres hopin' you'll be as well and kind hearted as you are at this minute for the rest of your life, and that poor Tim will give you less trouble either by getting better, or else by kicking the bucket, which, though I am sorry for him, I can't help thinking is the best thing he can do."

"You wretch—you infamous villain! Would you come into a gentleman's house and insult him in the manner you have insulted me? I will let you know that such things are not to be done with impunity! You shall be reported! I will have this matter thoroughly sifted!"

"Now, Tim—Tim—calm yourself—do be calm!" said his wife. "You ought to know very well that you don't know what you are talking about!"

"But I do, you perfidious villain, and you know it, but you shall suffer for this, take my word for it—you shall remember this day, and remember it to your sorrow!"

"I say, mum," cried Mr. Wiggles, "'eres axin' your pardon, but we must be going, as we have got our duty to attend to; but don't you think that your life's in danger—don't you think you ought to keep him under some kind of restraint? He ought to have a strait jacket put on you know, and chained down on a bed in the regular style, and fed on cold water and hard blows, till he gets better! Lor' bless you, mum, you'd be surprised if you knew how quick the patients recover under that treatment! I can't abear mad people myself, making so bold, mum, and if I was in your place I shouldn't rest till he was locked up!"

"And I won't rest till you are locked up!" screamed Mr. Tuttle. "Do you hear that, you purple-faced villain? You shall suffer dearly for your conduct!"

The least allusion to the remarkable colour of his countenance put Mr. Wriggles in a towering passion, and it was with difficulty that he resisted the impulse of rushing forward and strangling Tim on the spot.

But he thought he was only a poor lunatic, and determined to spare him.

"Good morning, mum," said Mr. Wriggles, preparing to take his departure. "Then you have not seen the individual we are in search of?"

"No I have not," replied Mrs. Tuttle stoutly.

"False woman, you have," cried her husband—"you know you have—you know he sat here in this very identical chair—that is where his lordship sat, who anybody could see with half an eye was Dick Turpin, for hadn't he got a red coat on, and hadn't he got a sword by his side and pistols in his belt, and boots on that came up over his knees? You know he had, you hyena, and his sister was with him—that is his lordship's sister, or Dick Turpin's sister, or whoever else's sister she might be—and where are they gone? I know they were here!"

Mr Wriggles was staggered by the first part of the speech, and hardly knew what to make of it, but as unfortunate Tuttle proceeded, and became more and more excited and incoherent, he set down what he said as being nothing more than the ravings of a disordered brain.

Once more bidding Mrs. Tuttle good-bye, and having received from that lady the assurance that no one of the sort had been in the room, Mr. Wriggles took his departure, descended the steps in the front of the mansion, and walked slowly along the avenue leading to the gates.

As he proceeded, he quickly grew meditative.

"I'd have given a guinea," he muttered, "if Jim Lickfold had been with me. With all his faults, I will say he was a rare good one to see through a thing! I ain't satisfied over this 'ere job now. I can't help thinking there's something behind it. I must think—I must turn it all over in my mind from first to last. The question is, is he mad? He must be; for if he is in his senses, I'm out of mine. And yet what a many odd things he said! It could not have been madness that made him ask whether he'd got his sister with him. And how was he able to describe him so well? It puzzles my brain. I am half inclined to think he wasn't mad, after all. I must think it out—I must sit down quietly somewhere, and think it out!"

Leaving Mr. Wriggles to carry out his resolution, we will return to Dick Turpin and Maud.

Being placed in full possession of all the facts, can the reader form an idea of the state of mind they were in during the time they were shut up in the little recess at the side of the fireplace?

In this place of concealment they could hear perfectly all that was said in the room.

At first Dick was at a loss to understand what was meant, but by degrees he comprehended the case.

Once or twice, however, he gave himself up for lost, and when Mr. Tuttle described him so graphically at the last, Dick shut his teeth close together, and prepared for the worst.

As soon as the officers had departed, poor Mr. Tuttle sank down in a chair.

There can be little doubt that he was at this time really and truly mad, for his mind was in a state of utter confusion.

The look of his face alarmed his wife, and she came towards him with the intention, if possible, of soothing him.

But as soon as he saw her approaching, he started wildly to his feet, and shricked:

"Off—off, you perfidious woman! Don't come near me—don't touch me! Go away from me, I say! I am not mad, and you know it!"

"I don't know what is the matter with you, Tim," said Mrs. Tuttle; "but the manner in which you treat me is enough to draw tears out of pavia'-stones! It is cruel and unmanly of you to treat me in this way!"

Mrs. Tuttle sat down in a chair, and burst into tears.

Her poor husband's mystification increased.

"So confused was his mind, that he could not determine whether he was the injured party or whether his wife was.

There she sat, however, sobbing and crying bitterly.

"Oh, Sophia, Sophia!" he cried, with ludicrous pathos. "Do explain all this dreadful affair—pray do! I am going mad! I feel it. My head's going round and round like a coffee-mill. It is, Sophia. Do explain things to me!"

"I will not, Tim! I don't know what is the matter with you, but I hope you ain't going mad. Will you take my advice?"

"What is it?"

"Go upstairs and lie down on the bed, and go to sleep. That is the very best thing you can do, Tim; and when you wake up you will feel all right, and if you want any-

thing explained, why, then, I can explain it. I can't help thinking that you've been somewhere unbeknown to me, and got something to drink which don't agree with you."

Poor Tuttle didn't know, but he felt it would be a great relief to lie down on a bed in a quiet room, and go to sleep; he wanted to rest his brain, and free himself from the state of mystification he was in.

"I will go, Sophia," he said—"I will go: and I hope I shall be able to go to sleep."

"Ah, Tim, try; and, take my word for it, when you wake up you will find yourself all right."

"I am going—I am going."

With these words, Mr. Tuttle shuffled out of the room.

His wife sank down on the chair again, and cried in good earnest.

Dick Turpin was anxious to be released from his place of confinement, but he did not know how to open the secret door himself, and he thought his best plan would be to let Mrs. Tuttle shed her tears and grow calm.

After a while he ventured to tap gently with his knuckles upon the door.

The summons was at first taken no notice of, but presently she heard it, and, rising to her feet, pressed the spring and caused the little secret door to fly open.

Maud and Turpin both sprang forward and grasped her by the hand.

"How can I thank you?" said the latter. "It is to you and you alone that I owe my life and liberty on this occasion! Who knows, perhaps some day or other the time will come when I shall be able to do you a favour in return for the one you have done me to-day?"

"I shall never forget you," sobbed Maud, "never—never!"

As might be expected, Mrs. Tuttle was one of those persons who feel uncomfortable while being praised or thanked, and so she went on hastily:

"Don't say anything about it. It's all right! I have had my revenge upon the ossifers, and that's chiefly all I wanted! I have served them out—they are gone—and you are free to depart!"

"And we will leave you," said Turpin, "but it will be with much regret! I am afraid to ask any further favour at your hands, and yet——"

"Speak out—tell me what I can do!"

"Well, then, it is quite possible that the police officers are just a little suspicious, and are watching in the neighbourhood, and if such is the case, why, I should be discovered before I had gone many yards. What I was going to ask was that you would allow us to remain here until night?"

"You shall—you are quite welcome! You can remain here in this room. I will leave the secret door open, and if anything of an alarming character happens, all you will have to do will be to slip into the recess and close the door after you."

"Ten thousand thanks, dear madam!" said Dick Turpin—"ten thousand thanks! I wish I could repay you for this estimable service!"

Mrs. Tuttle withdrew, leaving both to themselves.

"Oh, Dick," said Maud, "this is truly dreadful! I wish that we were far away from this spot; I am terrified to death!"

"Calm yourself," said Turpin—"there is no immediate danger now. I would gladly leave this place behind myself, but at present it would be unwise to make the attempt to do so. We ought to be exceedingly glad that we have obtained permission to remain—I can assure you that it is much more than I expected. I hope and believe that we shall remain in safety until nightfall, and then, when the darkness comes, we shall stand a chance of getting away, even supposing that Mr. Wriggles's suspicions are excited, and that he is lurking somewhere in the neighbourhood."

"I wish night would come now," said Maud.

CHAPTER DXLV.

DICK TURPIN FINDS HIMSELF SURROUNDED BY MR. WRIGGLES AND HIS OFFICERS.

Most heartily did Dick Turpin reiterate his fair companion's wish.

It was now only about mid-day, and though it was that season of the year when the days are shortest, many hours would have to pass away before it would be dark enough for them to steal away from the mansion unperceived.

Dick occupied himself with the difficult task of lessening Maud's apprehensions, and when a short time had elapsed, without the occurrence of any incident, and without their privacy being disturbed, she grew calmer, and began to think that after all, things would turn out well.

What gave Turpin the most uneasiness was that Black Bess was placed somewhere, he could not tell where, so that, should he be compelled to beat a precipitate retreat, he would not know in what direction to run in order to find his gallant mare.

To have attempted to leave the house in order to obtain this important information would be running a very great risk—more risk, indeed, than he felt justified in running.

It was quite likely that some of the officers were lurking about, and if so he would be seen, and all the advantage which he had hitherto gained would be lost.

Nor was it possible to send Maud out upon this errand, for she would be recognised by the officers as quickly as himself.

Under these circumstances, then, he had no other resource than to remain perfectly still, and content himself in the best way he could.

Although they were busily occupied in conversing together upon the subject, yet the time hung very heavily upon their hands.

In the afternoon Mrs. Tuttle entered, and Dick was sorry to perceive that her countenance bore unmistakeable symptoms of distress and grief.

Hastily rising from his seat, he went towards her, and took hold of her hand.

"What has distressed you?" he asked, kindly. "Has anything amiss happened?"

"No, no—it's nothing now."

"Have you seen the officers?"

"No. I think the vagabons is gone, for which let us be joyful! I am glad I served them out; but poor Tim, he has been in a dreadful state!"

Dick, with difficulty, repressed a smile.

"It was too bad to serve him so," he said—"a great deal too bad! Where is he now? Did he take your advice—has he gone to bed?"

"Yes, and, I am happy to say, has at length dropped off to sleep; but he is so flustered and puzzled in his mind, that I was afraid he would go mad in earnest!"

"He will be all right when he wakes. Sleep is just the thing to put him right, and when he wakes I should advise you to try and persuade him that what he remembers of these events is nothing more than a dream."

"I am afraid I couldn't make him believe that."

"I think you could; or, if you like, after I am gone, you could explain matters to him from first to last. It will always be a source of regret to me, however, if what you have been kind enough to do for myself and my wife is a cause of any unhappiness between yourself and your husband."

"Many thanks, sir; but I don't think you need fear about that. I know how to manage Tim."

"No doubt you do; but I can't help repeating the hope that what has happened will not interfere in any way with your peace and happiness; if it does not, then I shall be glad that chance led me to this place. I can assure you it was my last resource. If I had not taken shelter here, I should by this time have been in the hands of my foes."

"And is it possible," said Mrs. Tuttle, "that you are the Dick Turpin I have heard so much about? I'll declare my poor brain is almost as much upset as Mr. Tuttle's!"

"I am Dick Turpin; but whether I am the Dick Turpin you have heard about is more than I can tell."

"Well, I have the *Flying Post*, and I have read some queer things in that about you—awful things, too, which, if you had done, I think I should feel sorry I had given you shelter."

"But surely," said Dick, "you don't believe what they put in the newspapers? You are quite wrong if you do. But tell me what it is you have read about Dick Turpin?"

"Why, I read once a horrid thing, which, however, I don't believe you ever done, and I judge that from the look of your face."

"I am much obliged to you. But now tell me. You have raised my curiosity to the utmost."

"Why, it said in the *Flying Post* that Dick Turpin and three or four other men dressed themselves like country labourers, and blackened their faces."

"Did it say that Dick Turpin blacked his nose?"

"Oh yes!"

"Then we'll say, if the rest of the tale is true, that that at least is a lie. But go on, I am full of curiosity to know what the newspapers say of me."

"I wish I could find you the paper; but it's a good while ago, and I don't suppose I could. However, I recollect it, and I dare say that will do quite as well."

"Well, then, Dick Turpin and these men that were with him, all with their faces blackened, broke open the door of a little cottage somewhere in Essex."

"Where?"

"I don't know where; but I think it said near Epping Forest."

"Well, what did Dick Turpin and these men do?"

"Why, in this cottage there lived a poor old woman, who was scarcely able to do anything. She was all alone, her husband was dead, and she kept no servants in the house with her."

Dick nodded, but did not speak, and by the expression of his face it could be seen that he was far from being pleased with the tale that was being told him.

"It said in the *Flying Post*," continued Mrs. Tuttle, "that Dick Turpin and the gang of villains that were with him knew very well that this poor old woman had got about three hundred pounds concealed in her cottage, which was all the money she had got to keep her up to the end of her life, for she was quite past work."

"But surely it didn't say in the paper that Dick Turpin or anybody else robbed an old woman in such circumstances?"

"Oh yes, it did though! They all rushed into the little cottage, and the poor old woman was much frightened when she saw their black faces. Dick Turpin put a pistol to her ear and said he would shoot her if she made the least noise, while the others set to work to search the cottage, but they failed to find what they sought."

"And what then?"

"Dick Turpin asked the old woman to confess where the money was hidden, and although he threatened dreadful things, she refused. At last, he said he would put her on the fire in the cottage, and keep her there either until she was burnt to death or until she confessed where the money was hidden."

Dick started angrily to his feet, and his eyes flashed.

"Did it say that?"

"It did," replied Mrs. Tuttle, "and more, for the old woman still refusing to say where the money was to be found, he caught hold of her by the arms and forced her on the fire. The poor creature bore the pain as long as she could, until at last she was forced to confess where the money was. Then, and not till then, was she taken off the fire, and the villains, having taken every penny of the money, left her in the hut by herself to do the best she could."

"It's a monstrous lie, though doubtless, as it is in print, it will be believed! To you, madam," he continued, "I give you my word that I never perpetrated any such atrocity as you have recounted to me. I could scarcely believe that anyone would be guilty of such an act, or that anyone could imagine it."

"I saw it in print," said Mrs. Tuttle; "but when I looked in your face I felt sure it was false, for you don't look as though you could do such a thing."

"I could not—I could not, but I will have some revenge for all this. Did you say it was the *Flying Post* that contained the account?"

"Yes."

"Then let the *Flying Post* and those who belong to it look out; I shall not forget, rest assured! I should be base indeed, had I been guilty of such a hellish piece of work!"

Dick was much exasperated to think that such an act should have been attributed to him.

"It is a lie," he said—"a base lie from beginning to end! Many a time I have rode up to a traveller on the highway and demanded from him that which he could well afford to spare, but never in all my life have I disgraced myself so far as to rob the poor, still less to take from an aged woman what little wealth she had to keep her from starvation."

At this moment the door was opened, and a head projected into the room.

Hearing the sound, Dick turned and saw that it was Mr. Tuttle who stood upon the threshold.

A look of blank amazement came over the poor fellow's face.

He clapped both hands to his head, and said:

"Oh, your lordship, there you are, and there's your lordship's sister! Are you there, or are you not? I'm mad—I'm mad—I'm quite sure I'm mad! I came downstairs thinking to myself that if I found the room empty, and Sophia all right, I should consider I was in my senses, but now I know I'm the victim of a delusion! I'm mad! I'm mad!"

Uttering these words, Mr. Tuttle abruptly withdrew from the room.

His wife looked alarmed.

"I am sadly afraid," said Dick, "that it will prove too much for his intellect. Luckily, it has grown darker rather earlier than usual this afternoon, and now the obscurity is great enough to make it safe for us to leave without much fear of being seen by Mr. Wriggles and the other police officers."

"I hope you will escape," said Mrs. Tuttle.

"I have one more favour to ask of you," said Dick, "which is that you will show us the way to the stable where my horse has been placed, and show me, too, the way where I am least likely to be seen."

"I will do that willingly," said Mrs. Tuttle. "I don't believe what I have read about you. I feel sorry for you! I should like to spite those interfering fellows. And it's quite certain you've done me no harm, and taken nothing from me, so follow me—I'll show you the stable."

Dick Turpin linked Maud's arm within his own, and followed Mrs. Tuttle into the hall and out to the back portion of the premises.

Although not dark, yet it was dusk enough to make objects but a short distance off appear confused and indistinct, and Dick felt almost sure that he should be able to escape unseen by his foes, even if they were lurking about, and of this he was doubtful,—it was quite as likely as not that they were some distance away.

The stable was reached and entered without the occurrence of any incident, or without their experiencing the least interruption.

Dick's heart beat with joy when he once more placed his hand on the neck of his gallant steed.

Her trappings were close at hand, and she was saddled and bridled with a speed that would have done credit to an experienced ostler.

Dick Turpin led Black Bess to the stable door.

"What shall you do with your companion?" asked Mrs. Tuttle—"how shall you take her?"

"I shall have to take her on the saddle before me," said Dick, "It won't be the first time she has had to do such a thing."

Dick Turpin mounted as he spoke, and then bending down, took hold of Maud's arm, and swung her up into the saddle before him.

He clasped her tightly round the waist with one hand and in the other held the reins.

"Farewell!" he cried, addressing Mrs. Tuttle—"a thousand thanks for the kindness you have displayed towards me, and the service you have rendered! I shall be rejoiced if I ever have the opportunity of repaying you."

"Is it his lordship? Is it his lordship's sister? Where is Dick Turpin? Which is Dick Turpin? Does he wear tall boots?" said a voice, which all three immediately recognised.

It was that of Mr. Tuttle, and immediately afterwards that individual, looking more excited and more insane than ever, made his appearance.

At the very same time another voice cried:

"Now we have him, my lads! Be quick! I told you how it would be! Take care this time that he doesn't make his escape!"

Those words were spoken by a familiar voice—at least, familiar to Dick Turpin and his companion.

Maud screamed, and a cold chill crept over Dick's heart.

The words were spoken by Mr. Wriggles, and were addressed to his followers, who now completely surrounded Black Bess and her double burden.

CHAPTER DXLVI

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN ARRIVE AT THE ROSE AND CROWN, AND ARE ALARMED WHILE COUNTING THE MISER'S GOLD.

Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack wended their way through the New Forest without meeting with any further interruption, and without the recurrence of any incident important enough to be placed on record.

While journeying on, however, they occupied themselves with talking over their late proceedings, for from the time they left the Golden Lion adventures had crowded so thickly upon them that they had had scarcely any opportunity for conversation or the exchange of thought.

Above all, they were surprised to find their old acquaintance, the Governor of Newgate, under such strange circumstances.

Mr. Tapner had made himself from the first a foe to Tom King, and without having any particular reason for doing so.

The highwayman's feelings towards him were not at all of a friendly nature, and yet, after what had occurred, Tom King could not help feeling sorry at seeing his old enemy in so sad a plight.

Whether they should ever encounter him again they knew not, nor was it probable they would ever learn by whom he had been attacked. Their suspicion pointed to the two turnkeys, Biggs and Wilson, but they had no proofs and scarcely any grounds for believing them guilty.

One subject, however, afforded them the greatest consolation.

They had run some risk and had much trouble, but they had succeeded in their attempt quite as well, or even better, than they had anticipated.

They had not the whole of the miser's treasure, but yet almost as much as they could carry about with them with any comfort to themselves.

By the time morning had dawned, the forest was left behind, and the highwaymen found themselves in a narrow cross-country road.

It was agreed that their future course should be left to Tom King, and so he spoke as follows:

"This adventure," he said, "has turned out in a manner quite contrary to my expectations. Of course I am glad that it has done so. The money we now carry between us, added to that we have already obtained, and which Dick Turpin has in keeping at the deserted mansion, will make more than sufficient for the carrying out of our purpose, therefore, I think we cannot do better than make our way back to the deserted mansion with all speed, taking the most unfrequented paths we can find, and using every means to elude observation."

"Agreed—agreed!" cried Claude and Jack at once, and then the latter added:

"It would be foolish of us to run any risk by molesting travellers. We have no necessity for stopping anyone."

"None whatever. We are now in a thinly-populated part of the country, and there is little fear that we shall be seen by anyone. About mid-day, however, I should advise a halt. It will be well for us to rest both ourselves and our horses."

"It will be much the best."

Having come to this determination, they trotted onwards at a rapid rate, whiling away the time by chatting gaily with each other, for now that their enterprise had been crowned with so much success, they were in most excellent spirits.

Noon came, and when it arrived, their horses showed signs of great distress.

They were fatigued, and the highwaymen looked eagerly before them, in the hope of being able to perceive some place where they could obtain shelter.

No habitation, however, was in sight—nothing but fields and trees were stretched out before them.

"Push on gently," said Tom King. "I can't take upon myself to say precisely where we are; but yet I am sure we can't go much further without coming to an inn. We will stop at the first one we come to."

To their vexation and annoyance, our friends had to travel very many miles before they reached an inn, and, when at length they saw one in the distance, darkness was deepening rapidly, for the brief winter's day was fast drawing to a close.

Just about dark, they reined-in their horses in front of an old-fashioned rambling building, which they would never have taken for an inn had it not been for a large swinging sign that was fixed on the top of a post at a little distance from the door.

"Here we are at last," said Tom King. "I don't much care about the appearance of the place, but I suppose we must put up with it, for the probability is, that we should have to travel much further before we come to another inn."

"It looks dirty and untidy enough," said Claude Duval, glancing at the exterior of the house; "but I think we can put up with it—at any rate, it is better than none."

"You are right."

Hearing or seeing the travellers stop before the door, an old man, with a dirty, repulsive-looking countenance, and bleary eyes, came forward and touched his hat in a surly way.

"Can we stay here for an hour or two?" said Tom King, addressing him.

"Dunno," was the growling response; "but here comes master, and you can ask him."

A short, thick-set looking man, whose personal appearance was no more prepossessing than that of the ostler, emerged from the front door of the inn.

Tom King repeated his request, and the landlord, after scrutinising them attentively for at least a minute said:

"Yes, gentlemen, yes—you are quite welcome to the Rose and Crown."

Upon this, the highwaymen alighted, and resigned their steeds to the care of the sinister-looking man, Sixteen-String Jack, as usual, keeping behind, in order to see them placed in the stable.

Tom King and Claud followed the landlord into the inn.

Upon entering, the two highwaymen felt less satisfied than ever with the place in which they were about to take up their quarters.

The atmosphere within seemed thick and sickly, and there was a disagreeable odour caused by they knew not what.

Within, all was silent as the grave.

They were evidently the only customers in the house at that moment.

Despite the disagreeable feeling which crept over them, our friends tried to content themselves with the reflection that if the inn was not so comfortable a place as it might be, yet in all probability they would be safe while they remained beneath its roof.

"Can we have a private room?" asked Tom King—"our horses are tired, and we wish to sit down somewhere while they rest themselves!"

"All right, gentlemen, you can have my own private parlour if you like it. As it is the best room in the house, of course I should have to charge extra for the accomodation."

"Don't trouble yourself about that: we will settle liberally with you—never fear."

The landlord bowed when he heard this gracious and welcome speech, and ushered the two highwaymen into a dirty, scantily-furnished room, which made the latter wonder what the common or worst rooms were like, if that was the best.

A roughly-made table of some dark-coloured wood stood in the centre of the room, and a few massive, old-fashioned chairs were ranged round the walls.

"This is my best room," said the landlord; "it is a poor place, I know, when compared with many others, but in this part of the country you must not expect to find superior accommodation."

"It will do very well for us," replied Tom King, "provided you can bring us something good to eat and drink."

"I can manage that, gentlemen," replied the landlord—"I can promise you every satisfaction!"

"That is all right. Our friend will be here directly—no doubt he is gone to look to the horses."



DICK TURPIN BIDS MAUD FAREWELL.

"I have a couple of the finest capons that ever were trussed," said the landlord, "and some excellent home-fed, home-cured ham!"

"That will suit us," said Tom King, who was by no means displeased at the prospect of partaking of such a savoury meal.

"If you happen," said Claude, "to have some home-brewed October ale in your house we shall be all right."

"I can serve you with that, gentlemen, and, if you will allow me to retire now, you shall be served in as short a space of time as possible."

Our friends gave the landlord permission to retire, and directly afterwards Sixteen-String Jack entered.

He closed the door carefully, and seated himself near his friends.

"Are the horses all right, Jack?" they asked.

"Yes, quite right; but I can assure you I don't half like the look or the feel of this place—I wish we were out of it."

"We are much in the same mind as yourself," said Tom King; "only we don't see how we can better ourselves, and so have determined to stay. Perhaps, after all, it is only our fancy, and the landlord has promised us that we shall have a tempting meal in a very short space of time."

"I hope this will not turn out a similar place to that hut which we visited on the heath."

"Pho—pho! Jack, there is no fear of anything of that kind—there are three of us, recollect, and we should be well able to defend ourselves if an attack was made."

"So we should—and yet somehow I feel uneasy; perhaps the blood which I have lost in consequence of my wound has made me feel weak and nervous."

"Very likely."

"There can come no harm from using caution," said Claude Duval. "We will be on our guard, for this is a lonesome, uncivilised part of the country; and, although there are three of us, yet, if there is any danger, it will be of a kind against which valour and strength will be of no service,—we should be attacked at a time, and in such a way, as to make us incapable of defence!"

"Let us quit the subject!" said Tom King—"there

can be no good in dwelling upon it! It is true, we are in a lonely part of the country, and that this inn seems a very cut-throat-looking place, but I don't think we need have any apprehension on that account."

"Above all," said Claude,—"and this is no more than a matter of just precaution—don't let any of the inmates of this dwelling be aware that we jointly possess so large a sum of money as we do—that would be imprudent in the extreme."

"You need not be afraid that we should do that. I propose, as soon as our meal is finished, and our horses rested, that we leave this place and set out afresh upon our journey."

"Agreed! I am sure that will be the best!"

In such conversation as this the time was passed away, until the meal which the landlord was preparing was ready.

When the repast was spread upon the table it looked very tempting, and our friends ate heartily, while they found the old October ale to be the most delicious they had ever tasted, and a welcome adjunct to the feast.

After the meal was over, and the things removed, the highwaymen ordered wine to be placed upon the table, and sat down with the intention of passing away the time as pleasantly as they could.

The refreshments they had taken appeared to have a beneficial effect upon all their spirits, and those gloomy forebodings which they had all to a certain extent experienced passed away and were forgotten.

The prospect before them was a cheering one; they had money enough to carry on the excellent plan which Dick Turpin had conceived and proposed, and for the future the highwaymen believed that they should be in what was, comparatively speaking, absolute safety.

"We don't know yet," said Tom King, "how much money we have got, and it might be as well to count it and ascertain. We should then be better able to speculate upon the future."

"That is a good thought, Tom. We will count up the spoil at once."

"But be careful. While we are counting it, we must not make a sound. You know very well when money is handled a peculiar chink is produced, which would be heard plainly in a place as silent as this, and which could not be mistaken for any other sound."

"We can count the money silently, never fear! I, for one, should be very sorry to make the landlord or anyone else who inhabits this gloomy building aware that we had so much money in our possession."

"So should I; for, even if he already has no evil intentions, no doubt that would suggest them. I will count my money first."

With these words, Tom King took carefully from his pocket that portion of the miser's treasure which he carried, and began to count it.

He was very particular not to make the least sound.

The operation took some time, and, when he had finished counting, he found that the total amount he possessed was four hundred and ten pounds and a few shillings.

It was now Claude's turn, and when he placed his upon the table, it was evident at a glance that he possessed much more than Tom King, which was accounted for by the fact of his having at the last moment deprived Richard Nares of his share.

While Claude was counting, Tom King fancied he heard a faint sound outside the door of the room.

He started to his feet in a moment, and held up his finger in an impressive manner for his companions to be silent.

Claude had laid a pistol upon the table, and he instantly took hold of it so as to be prepared to use it in a moment should it be necessary.

Tom listened for a minute good, but was unable to detect any repetition of the sound which had disturbed him.

Making a rapid sign to his companions, he strode on tiptoe towards the door, and flung it open suddenly.

On the outside all was dark, and he was unable to distinguish any object.

Just then he was startled by a loud peal of thunder, which seemed to shake both heaven and earth.

Then came a dazzling flash of lightning and another peal of thunder.

For an infinitesimal portion of time all objects were revealed by the glare of the lightning, and then the darkness seemed ten times greater than before.

The brilliant evanescent light had, however, failed to show Tom King anything of a suspicious character.

He closed the door and hastened towards his companions, who had started to their feet when they heard the storm break forth with so much suddenness and violence.

CHAPTER DXLVII.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN FALL INTO THE TRAP LAID FOR THEM BY THE LANDLORD OF THE ROSE AND CROWN.

THE three highwaymen were wholly engrossed by their occupation of counting up the miser's gold, and had failed to notice the change which had taken place in the weather.

The cloude had piled themselves up rapidly in the sky, and had they been abroad, they would have perceived all these elemental changes which proclaim the advent of a thunder storm.

But while seated at the table counting up the gold they noticed nothing, and so the first intimation they received was a startling one indeed.

All three advanced to the window, and looked out.

The darkness was most intense.

The rain was falling in torrents, and the peals of thunder were quickly alternated by flashes of vivid lightning.

"What a frightful storm!" said Tom King; "and how suddenly it has burst upon us! I am glad to think we are so lucky as to be under shelter. I should be sorry to be abroad."

"And I, too."

"And how dark it is! I fancy the storm will last for several hours at least, and, as you say, we have been lucky to find shelter."

"There is no need," said Tom King, "why we should not continue our occupation. We will summon the landlord, and call for a light and another bottle of wine."

"Do so by all means."

The table was cleared of the gold that was upon it, and the landlord summoned.

"It is a terrific storm, gentlemen," he said, "and, if I know anything about the weather, it will last a good way into the night. Of course you can't think of resuming your journey while it lasts?"

"No; we shall not start until it abates."

"A wise determination, gentlemen, though I say it; and if you choose to stop here for the night, you can command the best accommodation this poor inn can afford; which I can assure you, is not often visited by gentlemen like yourselves."

"We will see how long the storm continues," said Tom King, "before we decide upon staying here all night. In the meantime, bring us a light and another bottle of your wine."

"You shall be served in a moment, gentlemen."

"I don't quite like our host," said Claude Duval; "he is not a man who improves upon acquaintance."

"Decidedly not," said Tom King. "I consider he is about the most sinister-looking man I ever beheld!"

"Excepting the ostler," said Sixteen-String Jack. "I was enabled to have a good look at that individual when I went to the stable. I tried to make friends with him in the usual way, but didn't succeed very well."

"I don't like the place," said Tom King, "and I am vexed the storm should have broken out. I don't like the idea of staying here all night."

"Nor will we if we can help it. Besides, it is important that we should continue our journey without loss of time. We have already, in one way and another, been detained much longer than we expected."

At this moment, the landlord entered, carrying in one hand a miserable tallow candle, and in the other a bottle of wine.

He placed the candle on the table, and then officiously picked up a corkscrew, and drew the cork out of it.

"I don't like to praise my own goods, gentlemen, but I am sure you will find that such port wine as you have never tasted. I have been in this house a matter of eighteen years or more, and when I took it this wine was in the cellar, and had been for many a year. It isn't

often that we have customers who order wine, and so, of course, I have got many bottles left in the cellar."

"All right, landlord; the bottle looks as if it had been nursed up in some old cellar for half a century. I hope it will turn out good."

The landlord lingered and fidgeted about as though he would have been glad of an invitation to remain in the room with his guests, but as no such invitation was given him, he at length withdrew.

The highwaymen did not speak until several moments after his departure.

"You didn't tell us, Tom," said Claude Duval, "what it was that alarmed you. What sound did you hear?"

"A kind of rustle, as though someone was outside, listening at the keyhole."

"But you could not see anyone when you opened the door?"

"No; all seemed perfectly still and right. Perhaps it was only my fancy."

"Very likely; but we will be careful to keep our ears open in future. And now to go on with counting."

Claude Duval once more placed upon the table his portion of the booty.

"It is a good weight, I can assure you," he said, "and I am not sorry to get it out of my pocket for a little while."

The gold was counted silently, and while thus occupied all three drank somewhat freely of the wine.

It was found that Claude's share amounted to no less than five hundred and three pounds.

The storm still continued to rage with great violence, and showed no more signs of abatement than it did before.

"I feel very tired," said Jack, with a yawn, as he produced the gold from his pocket. "I should think it was this dark room and the silence that makes me feel so sleepy."

"I feel sleepy too," said Tom King.

"And I," added Claude; "but I don't wonder at it, for our rest lately has been none of the best. I cannot quite understand how it is that we do with such a little sleep."

"Let us count my share," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and then, when we have done that, if the storm shows no signs of giving over, I think we can't do better than call for a bed, and get a few hours' sound sleep."

"Well, we shall see," said Tom King, languidly. "I don't much like the idea of staying here."

Sixteen-String Jack's money was produced, and they commenced to count it.

Strangely enough, he and his two comrades felt their eyes closing in spite of their efforts to keep them open, and every now and then their heads would drop forward, and they would wake up with a sudden start.

Counting the money, too, confused them, and they made several ridiculous mistakes.

At last, when about half the money was counted, Jack said:

"Let us stop; I feel very strange; I can't imagine what's the matter with me! I'll get up and go to the window; I seem stifled for the want of a little fresh air!"

"So do I—so do I!" exclaimed his two comrades together, though they spoke feebly, and without energy.

All three attempted to rise.

To their astonishment and horror, however, they found their limbs refuse obedience to their will.

They could not rise, but seemed changed to stone.

They glared at each other with the utmost dismay upon their countenances.

Tom King tried hard to speak, but his tongue seemed to cling to the roof of his mouth; but after one or two efforts he found his voice to gasp out:

"The wine—the wine which we have drank has been drugged or poisoned; we are quite helpless!"

His two comrades heard his words, but scarcely understood them.

Tom's voice sounded as if it was far—far away, and they themselves seemed to be sinking down—down into depthless space.

After that they relapsed into utter unconsciousness.

Sixteen-String Jack slipped from his chair under the table.

The chair in which Claude Duval sat was an old and massive one, furnished with arms.

He leaned to one side, but the arm of the chair prevented him from falling to the floor, and so he remained in this strange attitude with his head and one arm hanging down.

Tom King fell forward upon the heap of gold, with his arms outstretched before him.

Tom King's last supposition was evidently correct, but whether they were dead or merely rendered insensible for a time was hard to say.

The only sign of life that remained was their loud and stentorious breathing, which always precedes dissolution when some narcotic poison has been taken.

There was no movement and no other sound in the room.

At the expiration of about a quarter of an hour, however, the door was slowly and stealthily opened.

The candle on the table, having remained so long without attention, had got a prodigious wick, and the light which it gave forth was very feeble and ghastly indeed.

Still it fell upon the countenance of the man who just projected his head into the room.

It was the landlord.

He glanced around him quickly, and then muttered:

"Oh, it's all right; I thought that would do the business for them! They never knew, I'll be bound. The wine would have no taste. That receipt is worth its weight in gold!"

He approached the table and snuffed the candle with his fingers.

It burned up with great brightness, and its beams were reflected by the glittering heap of gold close by.

The landlord chuckled when he saw so many gold pieces.

"I knew they had money—I thought I heard it chink. I shall be able to take it now, and without much trouble."

The landlord deliberately picked up the money from the table, and put it into his pocket, counting it while he did so.

"Three hundred and forty-seven pounds!" he said. "What a mine of wealth! I am a made man now. But who knows, perhaps they have even more about them!"

He determined to ascertain this point, and by chance stooped down over Sixteen-String Jack and searched his pockets first.

He found nothing valuable save his watch, for, as we know, Jack had emptied all the gold out of his pockets on to the table.

This was not much encouragement to go on with the search, but rising up, the landlord noticed that one of Claude Duval's pockets was gaping open, and he could see what looked like the top of a leather bag, such as would be used to hold money.

He took hold of it and found he was right.

"Here is as much money again," he said. "How rich they must be, and how fortunate it was for me, at least, that they should take it into their heads to stop here!"

The landlord consigned this bag to his pocket, and searched the rest of Claude's apparel.

He took every article that he could find that was of the least value.

Then he went to Tom King.

Our friend's pockets were quickly emptied, but Tom moved slightly, showing that either the drug had not taken so much effect upon him as his comrades, or else that he had not drank quite so freely of the wine.

The landlord was greatly terrified when Tom moved, and he instantly plunged his hand into his breast, where he seemed to clutch a concealed weapon, doubtless a knife.

But Tom made no further demonstration of life, but remained perfectly still.

The landlord was now the possessor of upwards of twelve hundred pounds, and the very fact that he possessed this large amount of money unnerved him, and made him feel quite alarmed.

He trembled in every limb.

The storm was now almost over.

At distant intervals the thunder could be heard in the sky, and every time the reverberating sound reached his ears, the guilty landlord would start violently.

At last he staggered from the room, closing the door carefully behind him.

"I am a rich man now," he muttered to himself, as though the reflection would calm his agitated soul—"I am rich—very rich! This will keep me for many a day!

I will get away from this part of the country, however; I can't do better. Let me see; would it not be better if I could conceal all traces of the deed I have committed? Yes—yes; surely that will be best; it will be easy too! And what care I? The place is not my own; it is built of wood and will burn bonnily! Yes, I'll set fire to the old inn before I leave it, and the ashes can tell what tale they like!"

The villainous landlord of the Rose and Crown now set about taking those steps which he imagined would make him perfectly secure.

Procuring an armful of dry sticks, he placed them against the wood partition, near the centre of the building, and set fire to them.

The sticks blazed and cracked, and the long flames quickly caught the thin, dry partition, and the fire spread with amazing rapidity.

In a few minutes the building would be completely wrapt in flames.

The landlord rubbed his hands with satisfaction when he perceived the progress of his work.

"There is no fear of the fire going out now," he murmured, and as he spoke the words he passed out of the back door of the inn, and ran as fast as his trembling limbs would allow him towards a plantation or wood that was no great distance off.

He reached it in the space of a few minutes; but before he plunged among the trees he paused, and looked back.

He could see the inn plainly enough, and from several windows and from the roof the smoke was escaping in prodigious quantities.

CHAPTER DXLVIII.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN HAVE A NARROW ESCAPE OF THEIR LIVES AT THE ROADSIDE INN.

NEVER before in the whole course of their adventurous career had the three highwaymen been in a position of so much peril as they were at this moment.

Even if the wine were not poisoned, but merely drugged, there seemed no possibility of escaping, for before they could recover themselves they would perish in the flames.

Knowing the vague fears which they had all expressed, and knowing, too, that their suspicions were aroused, it may seem strange to the reader that our friends should have fallen so easily into the trap laid for them by the landlord.

The fact was, that though they expected danger, they imagined it would assume a different aspect, and that if any attempt was made upon their lives and property, it would be during the night, provided they passed it in the inn.

The idea that the landlord had drugged or poisoned the wine never once entered their minds. Had either of them drawn the cork out of the bottle they would, in all probability, have noticed that it had been drawn before; but as we have already seen, the landlord took care to prevent them making this discovery.

Whatever the drug might be, it produced no perceptible alterations in the flavour or colour of the wine. Had there been the least peculiarity of taste, the highwaymen would have been on their guard immediately, but they had no such warning.

The narcotic was powerful and speedy in its effects, for Claude and Jack had only drank two glasses each of this second bottle of wine, and Tom King only one glass.

All three remained perfectly still, showing no signs of life whatever, while the flames every moment grew more and more powerful.

The smoke curled into the room in fantastic wreaths through invisible fissures, while the air grew hotter and hotter.

Still the highwaymen did not move.

Then, with a roaring sound, the flames burst through the door, and, spreading themselves in various directions, quickly ignited everything of a combustible character in the room.

Tom King at last moved slightly, for having taken a less quantity of wine, the drug had not produced so great an effect as it had upon his two companions.

Suddenly a long tongue of flame shot across the room; it passed over his hands as they lay spread out upon the table, and the pain which this occasioned restored him to life.

He raised his head languidly, and wondered what had happened, and where he was.

The drug had not yet lost all its subtle power over him; it was with difficulty that he kept his eyes open and his body upright.

His head throbbed and ached in a manner so painful as to be almost beyond his powers of endurance.

In a vague way he was conscious that something strange and perilous was going on, and he tried to rise to his feet.

But his lower limbs seemed paralysed.

Hotter and hotter grew the flames.

The room was one mass of fire, and the air within it was as hot as that of a furnace.

With every second that elapsed Tom King grew better.

By degrees the effects of the drug evaporated, and he became more and more master of his actions.

He made the greatest efforts to understand properly his exact position, and at last he realized the terrible fact that the inn was on fire, and that himself and his two comrades were under the influence of some narcotic drug.

When once he made this discovery he regained possession of his physical powers.

He struggled to his feet.

The fire blinded and scorched him.

In that dreadful moment, however, he recollected his two comrades, and instead of making a frantic rush for his own escape, he called loudly upon them.

But they were wholly insensible, and paid no attention to his cries.

Claude Duval had slipped from his chair on to the floor, and it is to the fact of their being in this position that the preservation of their lives were chiefly due.

Luckily they were on the ground floor of the inn.

The room in which they sat was paved with some kind of red tiles laid upon the earth, so that the resting-place they had was a cool one.

The roaring of the flames, and the floating mass of smoke prevented Tom King from immediately ascertaining whereabouts his companions were.

He advanced a step, and then his foot struck against something soft.

A disagreeable conviction of what this was came over him, and he stooped down.

It was the body of Sixteen-String Jack that he had come into contact with.

Tom's brain was dizzy and confused, and he felt weak and helpless.

He was sensible, and upon his efforts depended the lives of his friends, and of course he resolved to save them.

He turned round and gave one glance towards the window.

It was only a few feet distant, and the flames were rushing through it with the utmost fury.

Summoning all his strength to his aid, he seized hold of Sixteen-String Jack by the arms near the shoulders, and dragged him along the floor.

Then, upon reaching the window, he picked him up, and by a sudden exertion of strength flung him out into the open air.

No portion of the glass or lead work remained, and so Sixteen-String Jack had a clear passage.

He fell with considerable force into the road in front of the inn, but it so happened that where he fell he was out of danger.

At this moment Tom King felt as though he must sink down upon the floor and give up.

The remembrance of his insensible comrade's terrible position, endowed him with fresh strength, and he resolved to make one desperate effort to save him or else perish with him.

Sinking down on his hands and knees, he groped his way towards him.

Claude had a stronger constitution than Sixteen-String Jack, and the drug had not produced quite so much effect upon him, and when Tom King reached him he found he showed signs of life.

Tom seized him by the arms and dragged him along the floor to the window.

This rough treatment recovered Claude more and more, and by the time the window was reached, he was able to

understand that he was in imminent danger of being burnt to death.

"Rouse yourself, Claude!" cried Tom King in his ear, "rouse yourself if you wish to preserve your life—the inn is on fire! Here is the window; it is close to the ground. Try if you can scramble through it—I will assist you."

As yet, Claude had but little strength, yet the intelligence he received was enough to make him use his utmost efforts.

With Tom's assistance he rose to his feet. He was dismayed when he saw the window, for it was covered with a huge sheet of flame, and through this he would have to pass.

"Quick, Claude—quick," cried his comrade. "If you are quick you will be scarcely hurt, if you linger we shall both perish!"

Claude made a dash and disappeared; Tom King followed.

As soon as they reached the earth they felt they were right, and although much bruised and shaken rolled over and over so as to get as far from the blazing building as possible.

Directly afterwards they encountered the body of Sixteen-String Jack, and both seizing it, they dragged it to a distance where they were all safe from the scorching heat which came from the fire.

With a sullen crash, the roof of the inn fell, and for a moment the fierceness of the fire abated.

It was only for a moment, however, and then the flames shot up into the sky with redoubled fury.

The three highwaymen had escaped being burnt to death, but they were faint and sick, while Sixteen-String Jack exhibited no signs of life.

"Water—water," said Claude—"I must have water!"

"And so must I," added Tom King. "We must drag Jack with us, and endeavour to recover him—he seems quite lifeless."

It taxed their strength severely, but they dragged Sixteen-String Jack to the back part of the inn.

Here they were comparatively free from smoke and heat, for the wind blew the flames in the direction of the road.

The brilliant light enabled them to see all round with great distinctness, and with a cry of the utmost joy Tom King exclaimed:

"Look, Claude, there is a pump; we shall be all right now!"

They dragged Sixteen-String Jack along, and placed him underneath it.

Although their mouths were parched and their throats burning, they set to work to recover their comrade before they tasted a drop of water themselves.

The pump was over a well of great depth, and the water was intensely cold.

Two strokes with the handle sufficed to recover Sixteen-String Jack.

The cold water fell with great force upon his countenance and restored him.

Tom King and Claude then drank heartily, after which they felt scarcely any effects of the drug they had so unluckily taken.

Sixteen-String Jack looked about him with a puzzled and bewildered air—he could not imagine where he was or what had happened.

His companions explained matters to him in a very few words, and he shuddered violently when he learned how narrow an escape he had had from a painful and frightful death.

The fire still raged with considerable fury, though it was evident in a few minutes more at most the entire building would be consumed.

"I think we cannot do better than get away from this place as soon as we can," said Tom King; "the flames will be seen for many a mile, and people will hasten towards them. If we linger, we shall have some questions put to us which we shall not care about answering."

"The horses," said Claude—"where are they?"

Tom started, and all the blood in his body seemed to rush suddenly to his heart, for he feared that their steeds had perished in the flames.

"The horses are all right," said Sixteen-String Jack; "at least they are not burnt, for yonder is the stable in which I saw them placed."

Tom King gave a sigh of relief. Then almost immediately the reflection occurred to him that their horses might have been stolen as well.

The stable to which Sixteen-String Jack alluded was a rough wooden shed situated in the rear of the inn, and at a considerable distance from it.

As the wind blew the flames in the opposite direction it had escaped.

The highwaymen hurried towards this building fearing the worst.

To their joy, however, they found upon entering, that their horses were all right, though apparently much frightened at something.

With what speed they could, the highwaymen saddled their horses, for they were unanimously of opinion that the sooner they got away the better.

Some delay, however, took place in consequence of of their not being able to find the trappings, but at last their steeds were got ready for the road.

They led them out of the stable into the yard, and prepared to mount.

While they were in the act of doing this, they were startled by hearing a loud shout.

They turned like lightning and looked in the direction from which the sound came.

They saw a body of mounted men.

At first they were puzzled to imagine how it was that they had reached the inn without the sound of their horses' hoofs being heard.

The roaring of the flames were so loud as to make it inaudible.

Immediately after the shout, they heard a voice cry, in tones that were startlingly distinct:

"There they are—there they are! That's them! I am sure of it! I told you so, and you see I am right! Will you make one more rush and capture them?"

All three highwaymen recognised the voice instantly.

It was that of Richard Nares.

Those who were with him were doubtless the police officers from Southampton.

Without pausing, our friends sprang into their saddles, and, turning their horses' heads, galloped off.

A rattling discharge of firearms followed.

The volley was a straggling one, and produced no effect.

It was replied to by one shot only.

This was fired by Claude Duval.

Turning round in his saddle, he hastily aimed a pistol at the form of Richard Nares, and fired.

He could not wait to see whether it was effective, but galloped off after his companions, who were already a little in advance.

CHAPTER DXLIX.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN STOP THE HORSE-COPER ON THE LONDON ROAD.

Richard Nares had managed to induce the police officers to keep up the chase after the three highwaymen, and had kept very closely indeed upon the track.

They were seriously meditating giving up altogether, when they caught sight of the fire in the distance, and Richard Nares suggested that the highwaymen were in some way or other connected with it.

Not that he had any such belief in his own mind—all he desired was to induce the officers to follow him.

Singularly enough, as we have seen, his supposition was correct.

Our friends urged their horses forward at their utmost speed, and after having gone a considerable distance, looked back.

They were greatly surprised to find that the police officers had not commenced the pursuit, so they moderated their speed, and once more turned their horses' heads towards their destination.

The hasty gallop which they had taken had, however, one good effect.

It served to dissipate the effects of the drug they had taken, and recovered them more effectually than perhaps anything else could have done.

Sixteen-String Jack suffered most, and he was least able to understand what had happened.

As the pace they were going at rendered conversation possible, he made several inquiries of his comrades.

"The matter is clear enough," replied Tom King,

"and we have been unfortunate in the extreme. By some means or other, the landlord must have become aware that we had a large sum of money with us. That tempted him to drug the wine. When we were insensible, he entered the room, took the money, and then, in order to conceal his villany, s t fire to the inn, hoping that we should perish among the ruins, and so leave no trace behind of what he had done."

"And is it possible," said Sixteen-String Jack, searching in his pockets, "that we have been deprived of that money which we ran so many risks to obtain?"

"We have; not a penny remains. Not that I am much surprised, for from the first I never believed that the miser's gold would do us any good; and if Dick Turpin had taken my advice, he would never have troubled himself so far as to bury it."

"It is most vexatious!" said Claude Duval. "Only think, we had upwards of twelve hundred pounds between us, which, added to the money at the deserted mansion, would have been more than sufficient for the carrying out of our plans."

"I don't think you ought to grieve so much about the loss of the money," said Tom King, "as you ought to rejoice at having so narrowly escaped a frightful death. In all probability, if I had taken two glasses of wine, as you did, we should by this time have been reduced to ashes."

"We have indeed had a narrow escape," said Sixteen-String Jack, with a shudder; "but it will be a caution to us in future."

"It will. We are all to blame for having been so much off our guard. But what is done can't be helped. We know the extent of our misfortune; it might have been much greater. Let us think no more about it, but turn our attention to what we are to do in the future."

"This unfortunate occurrence," said Claude Duval, "has deranged all our plans. We imagined that we had nothing to do but to ride back with all speed to the deserted mansion."

"And if we do that now," said Tom King, "we shall get there empty-handed."

"Which I, for one, will never do," said Sixteen-String Jack. "We have failed in this, but then other courses are open to us."

"You are right. I feel no more inclined to return empty-handed than you do yourself. We have many miles to travel, and doubtless shall encounter many people, and have many adventures."

"There may be some delay," said Claude Duval, "but even yet we may recover our loss."

"I hope we shall be able to do so."

"I wish we could find that rascally landlord," said Claude. "If we could, we would soon ease him of the money, and punish him into the bargain."

"Let us think no more about that," said Tom King. "The money has been no good to us yet, and I don't believe it ever will be. For my part, I am willing to resign myself to the loss. I should very much prefer making up for the deficiency by crying 'Stand and deliver!' to everyone I met."

To this his companions agreed, but chiefly because they believed that the landlord was out of their reach, and that they stood no chance of recovering possession of the miser's treasure."

All three still felt the effects of the drug very severely, but they had no doubt in a little time the uncomfortable sensations which they experienced would wear off.

The cool night air blew gratefully upon their fevered brows, and they inhaled it with the greatest satisfaction.

A silence followed the last words which Tom King had spoken.

Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval now regretted exceedingly the loss of the money. They believed that their troubles were for a time over, but now they suddenly discovered that they were no better off than when they left the deserted mansion on this hazardous excursion.

"With your consent," said Tom King, at length breaking the silence, "we will make our way into some public road. At first we intended to take the most unfrequented route we could find; but the necessity for doing that no longer exists. We must now seek some place where we are likely to encounter travellers who will be worth the trouble of stopping."

"With all my heart!" said Claude Duval. "Though at the present moment I don't feel at all up to the mark for an adventure. My limbs seem as heavy as lead, and my brain throbs painfully."

"And mine; but I believe the best and surest means of recovering will be to take another rapid gallop. I am sure its effects were beneficial before."

"Lead the way, then, Tom. We will follow wherever you choose to lead."

"Come on, then," cried Tom King. "Once more we will cry 'Hurrah for the road!' And somehow I feel a conviction that before we rejoin Dick Turpin we shall have many a strange and stirring adventure."

His two comrades responded by a faint hurrah, and then, urging their horses forward, they set off at a rapid gallop.

From the knowledge of the locality he possessed, it was an easy matter for Tom King to lead the way to the high-road.

A gallop of about twenty minutes brought them to it, and then they reined-in their steeds.

"There is one precaution," said Tom King, "which I think it will be well for us to take."

"What is that?"

"To stop no travellers except such as are coming from London."

"I see; that will be a wise proceeding. We don't want the intelligence to travel on and reach London before us."

"Certainly not; and now it is agreed that the next travellers we meet, be they whom they may, we stop, and not allow to pass until they have paid toll."

"The night is almost too far advanced for many travellers to be abroad," said Claude, as he looked carefully to the primings of his pistols. "Still, we may be lucky enough to meet some one."

"Hark—hark!" said Sixteen-String Jack. 'I fancy I can hear something already."

Claude and Tom immediately became silent, and listened attentively.

They found Jack was right.

Some two-wheeled vehicle was approaching them at a rapid rate.

"It can't be a carriage," said Tom King. "It rattles too much for that, and it is only drawn by one horse."

"It sounds to me," said Jack, "more like a light cart, such as people use to drive to market."

"Then that doesn't promise anything worth our while."

"We will see. Let us make a rule not to allow a single traveller to pass us until we have ascertained for certain whether he carries with him anything worth our taking."

The approaching vehicle made a prodigious rattle, and came rapidly from the direction of London.

The three highwaymen formed themselves into a line across the road, and patiently waited its coming.

They had not long to wait.

In less than two minutes they were able to discern some dark, shadowy mass approaching them, and directly afterwards Tom King cried out "Halt!" in a loud and imperious tone of voice.

Sixteen-String Jack seized the horse by the bridle and forced him to come to a stand.

Tom King and Claude rode up, one on each side of the cart.

It contained only one man, and when he found himself stopped in this fashion, he took up a stout whip and lashed the horse severely, in the hope that he might escape.

But Sixteen-String Jack had got too firm a grasp upon the reins for the terrified animal to obey the impulse to gallop forward.

Claude Duval roughly thrust a pistol in the man's ear and cried:

"Hold!—be still at once, or you are a dead man! This is a loaded pistol which I am holding to your head!"

The man in the cart uttered a cry of fright and dropped his whip.

"Spare my money, gentlemen!" he exclaimed—"spare my money, and take my life! No—no—I don't mean that! I mean, spare my life and take my money!"

"Your request is granted," said Tom King; "we don't want your life, and if you will hand us your money you may ride on in safety."

The traveller appeared to be in a desperate fright, for he trembled from head to foot.

He was tall and stout, and from his burly appearance

one would have thought his courage would have been greater, and that he would have resisted any attack that was made upon him.

"We are in a hurry," said Claude, "so hand over your money quickly! Give it to us, and we will be content; if not, we shall take it from you, and then it is possible we may be a little violent."

The traveller groaned, and, putting his hand in his pocket, drew out a small leather purse, which at the most contained only a few sovereigns.

Tom King took it, and weighing it in his hand, said:

"This won't do—we must have more."

"More, gentlemen? You must be joking! I can spare no more. I am only a poor horse-coper on my way to Southampton Fair."

"A horse-coper?" repeated Tom King. "Then I find I shall have a much better booty than I expected."

"Why—why—what do you mean?"

"I never knew a horse-coper yet, and never heard of one, who was not an infernal rascal, and a rogue into the bargain! All rascals and rogues manage to get hold of plenty of money, especially when they are horse-copers. I feel no hesitation in robbing you, and taking every penny you have got, for you do nothing from one week's end to another, and rob people yourself; only I do it straightforwardly, while you pretend to be honest."

"Good!" said Claude—"I quite agree with you there. Now, Mr. Horse-coper, you are off to Southampton Fair to buy horses. Such people as you never get credit, so you must have plenty of money about you."

"I have not, gentlemen, indeed! I don't know what you mean—I am a poor man."

Claude made a signal to Tom King, and then, seizing hold of the traveller by the neckcloth, and pressing the muzzle of the pistol with still greater violence against his head, cried:

"If you resist—if you move—if you cry out—I shall pull the trigger instantly, and you will be a dead man. In the meantime, my friend will take the liberty of searching your pockets. If, as you say, you have got no more money about you, the operation need not give any trouble."

The traveller groaned, but made no resistance.

From the calm, stern manner in which Claude had uttered his threats, he fully believed that he would carry them out.

Tom King was rather dexterous in the matter of searching pockets, and in less than a moment he produced a good-sized leather bag, which he could tell, both by the feel and the weight, was filled with money.

"Here you are," he said. "I thought it would be a strange thing if a horse-coper told the truth about anything. Let go now, Claude."

Tom King put the bag of money in his pocket, and Claude let go his hold, while Sixteen-String Jack released the bridle.

The traveller seemed furious with rage.

"Curse you," he said, "you have robbed me of all, but you shall suffer dearly for this! I will offer a reward as soon as ever I reach Southampton!"

"You can do what you will," said Tom King, "only I should think it the most prudent if you uttered no threats. Be off! Think yourself lucky that we have not taken your life as well as your money."

The traveller did not seem to take the very good advice that was offered him, for he made no efforts to set his horse in motion.

Perceiving this, Sixteen-String Jack gave him a smart cut with his riding-whip, which caused the creature to start off at a gallop, for it seemed much alarmed by the whole transaction.

Apparently the traveller made no attempt to stop him, and, after the lapse of a few minutes was out of hearing.

CHAPTER DI.

THE HIGHWAYMEN PREVENT THE CONTINUATION OF THE BEADLE'S CRUELTY, AND WITNESS A CURIOUS CIRCUMSTANCE.

"I THINK we may congratulate ourselves so far," said Tom King. "If I may judge by the weight of this leather bag, I should say that it contains a good round sum."

"Yes," said Claude, "a few such adventures as that and we should be all right. I wonder what will fall in our way next."

"Where abouts are we?" asked Sixteen-String Jack.

"Very nearly half way between Southampton and London," replied Tom King. "There is a stage coach which runs between London and Southampton, and passes along this road."

"At what hour?"

"That I can't tell you. There is, however, just the bare possibility that we may meet it, and if we do——"

"Why, we will stop it," said Claude Duval. "There are three of us, and we could manage such a job easily."

"Then we will consider that as agreed upon."

Our friends walked their horses slowly along the road.

They did not wish to make haste back now, and they were vexed because night was so nearly over, and morning so close at hand.

In an hour more, at the most, the dawn would come.

At such a time as this, there was but little chance of meeting with anyone.

Presently they heard a rumbling sound, and Tom King cried:

"That is the stage coach, or I am much mistaken."

"But it is not coming from London," said Claude Duval, "it is coming from Southampton. Look, you can see the lights in the distance."

Claude was right—the stage coach was approaching, but it was coming from the direction of Southampton, and they had previously agreed that all travellers and vehicles on their way to London, should not be molested.

For a moment or two they were all silent, and looked earnestly in the direction of the stage coach.

It was coming on at a rapid rate.

"Shall we make this an exception?" said Sixteen-String Jack. "Probably this is the only chance we shall have to-night of getting any more booty."

"I think it will be unwise," said Tom King. "The most prudent course will be to let it pass by."

"Why not run the risk of stopping it?"

"I think the risk would be too great; the coach would soon reach London, and you know very well the consequence of that would be a troop of police officers or dragoons would be soon out, and our proceedings would be put a stop to."

"Then we will draw on one side, and let it pass."

The highwaymen backed their horses into the shadow of the hedgerow.

The stage coach came on at a dashing gallop, and in a few minutes swept by them with a flash and a rattle.

Little did the passengers who were seated in it imagine what a narrow escape they had had—that they were so near being stopped by the highwaymen.

The stage coach was soon out of sight, and then the highwaymen quitted their place of concealment.

"I am afraid these are the only travellers we shall see to-night," said Sixteen-String Jack; "and then what are we to do during daylight?"

"It will be madness to continue our journey. We must keep ourselves snug somewhere. Doubtless by sunrise we shall find some place that will suit our purpose."

While they were speaking, they were startled by hearing a succession of shrill cries, and from their tone it was evident the cries came from the lips of a child.

"What's that?" said Claude, suddenly. "I can't hear anyone coming."

"Nor I; but somebody is in trouble, that is quite certain. I suppose, however, that it's no business of ours."

"I don't know that. Suppose we find out?"

"Listen then!"

The sound of voices could now be distinctly heard, and they found that some persons were walking along the road on foot.

It was very dark, and so the highwaymen drew to one side, where the shadow was deepest, and waited for the coming of these persons.

The silence around them was very great, and they were soon able to hear what was said.

Two persons were approaching.

The gruff, surly voice of one was sufficient to show that it was a man.

"Come on, will you, you young hound?" the highwaymen heard this voice saying. "Come on, will you? Oh, you won't? Take that, then!"

Then followed the sound of blows, accompanied by the shrill cries which had first attracted the attention of our friends.

"Please, Mr. Wantlin, I can't—indeed I can't! I have walked so many miles, and I am so tired that I can scarcely stand!"

"And whose fault's that, I should like to know?" said the gruff voice. "Was it anyone else's besides your own? Get up, I say, or you shall have another taste of the strap!"

"No, no, have mercy upon me—pray have mercy upon me! I can't go a step further!"

"We will see—we will see! Take that! Will you get up now?"

There was again the sound of blows and screams.

"I can't stand this any longer!" said Tom King, in a whisper. "We will put a stop to this brutality!"

He slipped quickly off his horse as he spoke, and Claude followed his example.

After going a few steps up the road, they saw a man. In his hand he held a strap, and with this he was inflicting heavy blows upon the body of a boy not more than twelve years of age, who lay huddled up on the ground.

"Hold!" said Tom King, in a loud voice. "What are you doing?"

The man stopped in an instant, and turned round in great surprise.

"What's that to you?" he said, insolently and defiantly. "Mind your own business, and don't interfere!"

"This is my business!" said Tom King. "I demand to know the reason why you are illtreating this lad?"

"Help, gentlemen—help!" said the boy, who was writhing on the ground, as though suffering great agony. "Save me from that man! I am one mass of weals and bruises from head to foot! He is flogging me along the road!"

"Where to?"

The boy hesitated for a moment, and then, in a choking voice, he answered:

"To the workhouse!"

"Yes," said Mr. Wantlin, "the work'us—that's where I am taking the young scamp!"

"And what has he been doing, that you should treat him in this barbarous manner?"

Mr. Wantlin seemed inclined to return some defiant answer, but upon taking a second look at our two friends, he altered his mind.

"I will tell you all, gentlemen," he said, in a cringing voice. "This 'ere boy is the most horfullest scamp there is in the world!"

"What has he done?"

"Done? You mean what hasn't he done—he has done everything that is bad, and to-night he finished up by makin' his escape from the work'us."

"I don't wonder at that," said Claude Duval, "it seems to me only natural."

"He is a pauper, sir—a miserable pauper! His father and mother died paupers, and he has been nothing but an expense and a trouble since he was born."

"Then I should think you would be glad of his escape, and rejoice at being rid of him?"

"You know nothing about it, gentlemen. A nice example that would be to set! Must a pauper do just what he likes? Certainly not!"

"But what are you?"

"Me, sir?" returned Mr. Wantlin. "I am the beadle."

"And when this boy made his escape, did you run after him?"

"That's just it, sir. In course I did, and such a dance as he led me no one knows. At last I cotched him."

"But," said Tom King, indignantly, "do you mean to tell me that because he made his escape you beat him in this manner?"

"In course! He lay down in the road and pretended he could not walk any farther. Do you think the majesty of the law is to be set at defiance in this manner? I whacked him till he got up—and what if I did?—what does it matter?—isn't he a pauper?"

"It does matter, as I think you will find, my lad," continued Tom King, addressing the boy. "Does this man speak the truth?—have you escaped from the workhouse?"

"You won't take me back, shall you, sir?"

"No, don't be afraid of that!"

"Yes, sir, I escaped because Mr. Wantlin did nothing but beat and illuse me from morning to night. I am half starved too, and that's how it was I could not run fast enough to make my escape. I fell down on the ground and couldn't get up again, and then of course he caught me."

Mr. Wantlin did not like the manner in which our friends looked at him, and he fancied that he had made a mistake and been rather too humble, so he resolved to make the attempt to carry things off with a high hand.

"Now, gentlemen, you know all," he said. "I have satisfied your curiosity, so just go and mind your own business leaving me to mind mine!"

"And what is your business?"

"To take him back to the work'us, in course."

"No—no, gentlemen," screamed the boy—"save me, gentlemen! Don't let him take me back; I don't want to be a pauper."

"Of course you don't. Cheer up, we will not allow him to take you back."

"Oh, won't you," said Mr. Wantlin. "Perhaps you will allow me to say a word on that subject? I am an officer of the law, and beware how you interfere with me!"

"I don't care what you are! You are an infamous brute, and a disgrace to the name of man!"

Tom King darted forward and seized the beadle as he spoke.

"Off with his neckcloth, Claude!" he cried, "and tie his arms together with it."

"All right!"

Before he could resist in the least, Mr. Wantlin found his arms tied tightly behind his back

"Now, my lad," said Tom King, speaking in a kind voice, "we are going to help you to take your own part. Get up—don't be frightened."

The boy struggled painfully to his feet.

"Now pick up that strap," continued Tom. "I will hold the beadle tightly, and do you give him as good a thrashing as your strength will permit."

The boy hesitated.

"Don't be afraid," said Tom again. "Perhaps if he knows what the strap tastes like he won't feel so much inclined to beat other children with it, and I'll take care that he doesn't get you into his power again."

This encouraged the boy, and in spite of the horrible threats to which Mr. Wantlin gave utterance, he took hold of the strap as Tom King had directed, and laid about him with it in a manner that was surprising, considering his emaciated condition.

The beadle uttered frantic howls.

When the boy showed signs of flagging, our friends urged him to continue.

The strap was a thick, heavy one, and the blows it gave were very severe.

At last the boy could wield it no longer.

"I think that will do," said Tom King. "You have given him a lesson which he deserves! Now, Claude, take the strap, and we will fasten him to this young tree."

There was a tree growing close by the roadside, and to this they secured the beadle by passing it through his arms where they were pinioned, and buckling it round the trunk of the tree.

"Now, my boy," said Tom King, "I will do for you all that lies in my power. Here is some money. Take care of it; the beadle won't be able to run after you for a long while. You make use of the time to get as far off as possible."

"You shall suffer for all this!" howled Mr Wantlin—"you shall all suffer for it!"

"Be silent!" said Tom King "If you utter another word I will take up the strap myself, and I shan't put it down again in a hurry!"

After this speech the beadle held his tongue.

The boy was greatly terrified and exhausted, yet he was overjoyed at the prospect he had of deliverance from his foe.

With tears streaming down his cheeks, he thanked Tom King for his gift, and hastened off.

"That is an adventure which has not done us much



[TOM KING IS JUST IN TIME.]

good," said Tom King, "but yet we have done a good turn to one who could not help himself."

"We should have been cowards," said Claude Duval, "if we had stood by and allowed the continuation of such barbarity."

"We should."

Our friends trotted forward, but upon looking up they saw that day was breaking, and they gave up all hope of another adventure.

They turned their attention to looking out some place of concealment or shelter, where they could pass away the time until night again arrived.

The morning came on with great rapidity.

In a little while our friends could distinguish everything around them.

"We are not far from a town," said Tom King, "and I think our best plan will be to pass through it now, for at this early hour it is scarcely likely that anyone should be abroad."

"Forward, then! In all such matters we are quite willing to be guided by you."

The highwaymen set forward at a gallop, but ere they had gone far they perceived in the distance the form of a young man.

He was hurrying on at a rapid pace, and there was about him a general appearance of wildness and distraction.

In the clear morning air the highwaymen could see him with great distinctness, and somehow or other they felt strangely curious about him.

Leaping rapidly over a hedge, the young man ran on at the same rapid speed towards a clump of trees that was at no great distance.

Our friends pressed onward, wondering what he was about to do.

To their astonishment they saw him pause at the foot of one of the trees.

Then he made some furious and desperate gesticula-

tions, after which he began rapidly to climb one of them.

"Is that a mad man?" asked Tom King.

"I don't know," replied Claude Duval; "his behaviour is very extraordinary; let us find it out. People don't ascend trees in that manner for nothing."

CHAPTER DLI.

DICK TURPIN HAS ONE MORE NARROW ESCAPE OF HIS LIFE, AND IS INDEBTED TO BLACK BESS FOR HIS SAFETY.

THE more Mr. Wriggles pondered over the events which had taken place at Mr. Tuttle's mansion, the more mystified he felt.

The great point to be decided was the insanity of Mr. Tuttle. If he was mad, of course it would be folly to take notice of what he said; but if he was not, how then? Mr. Wriggles rubbed his head perplexedly.

In vain, however, did he try to come to any conclusion upon the subject.

At last he made up his mind what he would do.

"I will remain somewhere about here until nightfall," he said. "If Dick Turpin is in the mansion (and it is quite possible), he will not think of stirring out till after dark; and if he is there, so sure as night comes he will try to slip away. I can see nothing of him, I have no track whatever, and this is my only resource. I will stay here and rest, and see what turns up."

Mr. Wriggles concealed himself and men in various positions, and left with them instructions to the effect that if they caught sight of Dick Turpin they were at once to apprise him of the fact—if not, they were to remain until he came to them.

The day slowly passed away, and as soon as ever it began to grow dusk, the police officers redoubled their vigilance.

Eventually one of them had the supreme satisfaction of seeing Dick Turpin and Maud enter the stable.

No sooner had they crossed the threshold, than this officer hastened to where Mr. Wriggles lay concealed, and informed him of what he had seen.

The impurpled countenance of the chief police officer expanded into a smile of intense delight.

His watching and waiting had met with a full reward.

With anxious speed he collected his men around him and hastened to the stable door.

He was just in time to see Dick Turpin swing Maud into the saddle.

It was at this moment that he addressed his men in the manner recorded at the end of a previous chapter.

Rushing forward in obedience to his words, the officers surrounded the highwayman and his steed.

Turpin had half expected some demonstration of this sort, and therefore was not so much taken by surprise as he might have been.

He drew a pistol from his belt and touched Black Bess upon the flank in order to cause her to bound forward.

But Mr. Wriggles had determined to make a last and desperate attempt to capture the redoubtable highwayman.

Springing forward, he seized Black Bess by the bridle just in time to prevent her setting off at full gallop.

Mr. Wriggles pointed his pistol full at Dick Turpin and Maud, while he cried:

"Yield—yield this moment, or I fire!"

"Take that!" said Mrs. Tuttle, suddenly.

The worthy lady was much astonished with the suddenness of the last events, but understanding what was Mr. Wriggles' intention, she suddenly seized the stable broom, which lay convenient to her hand

Just as Mr. Wriggles called upon Dick Turpin to surrender, she made a sudden charge with this novel weapon, holding it much in the position that a soldier does when he has a bayonet fixed on the end of his musket.

It struck Mr. Wriggles full in the face, and his mouth was open. The hard bristles entered it, and effectually put a stop to what he was about to say.

So astonished was he at the unexpectedness of this assault, and so disconcerted by the peculiar nature of it, that he released his hold upon the bridle of Black Bess and staggered back several paces.

"Take that!" cried Mrs. Tuttle, who was much elated with the victory she had gained—"take that! It is my turn now! I owes you all a grudge!"

With these words she followed up her attack with the stable broom, only she used the weapon in a different manner.

Whirling it in the air like an Indian club, she brought it down with full force upon the head of the chief police officer.

Dick Turpin did not see this last portion of the encounter.

Black Bess was impatient to be free, and as soon as Mr. Wriggles released his hold upon the rein, she gave one tremendous bound forward and galloped off at a furious rate.

It was madness to follow her.

Under the impulse of the moment, several shots were fired, but not with sufficient accuracy of aim to do any damage.

Turpin directed the course of his steed straight across the grounds, quite heedless of the amount of damage he might do to the shrubs and flowers.

He passed by the gable end of the hall, and just as he did so a window was dashed violently open.

Poor Mr. Tuttle appeared at it.

It was evident he caught sight of the flying highwayman, for he uttered a cry of distress and clapped both his hands to his head.

That was all Dick saw, for, with a rush, the house was left behind.

"One more escape, dear Maud!" said Turpin, as he pressed his fair companion closer to him—"one more escape, for we are both unhurt."

Maud was weeping.

"Don't weep, dear one, the danger is over now."

"But this is dreadful," sobbed Maud. "Are we to have no rest?—will not the officers allow us even a little peace?"

"I fear not. They are too intent upon my capture, and the many defeats they have had so far from disheartening them seem, on the contrary, to make them more persevering."

There was a pause, which lasted several moments.

Dick was the first to break it.

"The officers are in pursuit of us," he said; "I can hear the sound of their horses on the road behind us. Don't be alarmed—they are at a great distance. I have no doubt, now that Black Bess has had rest and food, that we shall be able to distance them easily."

Maud endeavoured to look back.

"I can see nothing of them," she said at length.

"I hope you can't. I should be vexed indeed if they were within sight. They are at a great distance, and every moment the sound of their horses' feet grows more and more indistinct."

"I can hear nothing."

"Nor I now. But Maud, it will not do for this sort of thing to continue—it will wear you out entirely; you must have some rest and peace, even if I don't."

"No—no, with you—let me be with you!"

"We will talk this matter over, Maud. I have been thinking a great deal about it, and I will tell you what I have to propose."

"It must not involve a separation."

"Listen, we will push forward at the best speed we can make for the remainder of the night. When morning comes I will look out for some retired little cottage, and when I have found one I shall halt there."

"For what?"

"For rest for you, for myself, and for Black Bess. We shall all need it. I shall try if I cannot make some arrangement with the inmates of the cottage to allow you to stay with them."

"Not by myself?"

"Yes, dear one, but only for a few days. I will give you my reasons for wishing this course to be adopted. In the first place, you will be in peace and security, and will be able to recover yourself from the effects of what has lately happened."

"And you, what shall you do?"

"There are many things which I am compelled to do. You have not forgotten the plan which I proposed, and which was agreed to?"

"You mean with regard to taking an inn?"

"Yes, that is what I mean. Tom, Claude, and Jack, as you are already aware, have gone down to the New Forest in furtherance of that object. It was appointed that

we should meet at the deserted mansion, and by to-morrow at the furthest I should say they will return."

Maud clung closer to Dick. She guessed what was coming, and yet did not know what to say in opposition to it.

"It may be the cause of a great deal of mischief if they arrive and find no one there, they might even fall into some trap laid for them by the officers. Surely you would not wish such a calamity as that to happen?"

"No, no."

"I am sure you would not."

"You intend to leave me at this cottage while you repair to the deserted mansion and meet your companions?"

"Exactly. You will be in peace and security, and so I shall be relieved of one very great responsibility; and do not be offended, I shall be much safer alone and with no one to look after but myself, than I should be if I had to be answerable for your safety as well as my own."

"But will it not be very dangerous to return to the deserted mansion?"

"There will be danger, I admit, yet not so much as my three friends would run were they to go there in ignorance of the fact that we had been hunted out by the police officers."

"But could you not manage to meet them at some other place, and so avoid the necessity of going to the deserted mansion at all?"

"I fear not. I shall approach with great caution, for I shall know just what danger I may have to encounter, and there is another reason why I should return, and the sooner I do so the better. Do you not remember that we have a large sum of money concealed in the upper room? When we were surprised on the staircase by the entrance of the police officers, we had neither time nor opportunity to fetch this money and take it with us in our flight. It would, I think, be very foolish to allow that money to remain without making an effort to obtain possession of it again. A large amount of money must be obtained before we can carry out the plan that will ensure our safety, and you will admit that not only would it take a longer time, but the risk would be very much greater if we collected the money again on the highway."

"But the officers may have already taken it."

"I scarcely feel afraid of that. Mr. Wriggles and those of his men who were unwounded pursued us; the wounded only remained; these have, doubtless, taken their departure, and ten to one if the thought of searching the deserted mansion ever entered their heads; but I am sure the danger will be great, and I shall be in a state of perpetual dread while you are absent on this excursion."

"Nay, Maud, be brave! Surely you would not wish me to hold back, and be the means, probably, of causing the capture of my three comrades?"

"No, no—not that!"

"Well, then, reconcile yourself to my absence as well as you can. Will it not be better for you to remain at the cottage, as I proposed?"

"I should feel safer, and suffer less anxiety if I was with you."

"But you would not wish to increase my danger, which you infallibly would do if you accompany me."

"I will stay, then, though I feel most reluctant to do so."

"Cheer up, Maud—better days will soon arrive! If our three friends have succeeded in obtaining possession of the miser's chest of gold—and I don't see anything to prevent them—why, then, all will be well. I shall meet them, and then we shall have more than sufficient money to carry out our scheme, and bring it to the utmost perfection."

"Don't be offended at what I am about to say," exclaimed Maud. "I wish to ask you a question."

"Ask it freely."

"Then, are you not tired of this life of desperate danger and adventure? It cannot last for ever. Some day or other it must end—meet with a sudden if not ignominious termination. Why not quit this mode of life?"

Turpin was silent.

"It would be better for you—better for all of us," continued Maud, urgingly. "Think of what I have said, and answer me."

"I am a highwayman, Maud, and all the world knows it; and a highwayman I must remain. They would not suffer me to be anything else. No, no, I must not think of that—you must not think of it. It is out of the question. How, think you, could I obtain a livelihood? Who would employ me?"

"You forget," said Maud, "what a large sum of money you possess—surely sufficient to keep us from want for a long time."

"But it doesn't belong to me, Maud; only a fourth portion of it is mine. If I possessed the whole, then there would be some possibility of carrying out your plan. I might indeed feel induced to retire from this adventurous life. We should have sufficient to maintain us in a foreign land; but as things are, it is idle to think about it."

"Don't say that!"

"Why not? It is the truth. As I said before, one-fourth of the money would be of little use; and besides, I should have to gain the permission of my three comrades."

Maud sobbed and wept.

"Don't feel disappointed and sad. I will promise you this, when we all meet we will ascertain exactly what amount of money we have. The proposition you have made to-night shall then be considered, and we will decide whether that shall be acted upon, or whether the scheme originally proposed shall be adopted."

Maud made no reply; she felt it would be useless to speak.

Her only hope was, that events would take such a turn as to make Dick Turpin's comrades agree to her suggestion.

Dick Turpin was silent, and one glance into his countenance would have been sufficient to make anyone aware that he was thinking deeply over what had just been said to him.

A long time elapsed before any more words were exchanged.

From the starting, Dick Turpin had pursued one uniform direction, and he still followed it.

His attentive ear failed to catch any sound that indicated the officers were on his track.

All around was as silent as it was dark.

He slightly increased the speed Black Bess was going, for he was anxious to get still further off, and he wished to come to a halt soon after sunrise.

"Look, Maud," he said at length. "Do you see that faint line of light in the horizon yonder?—that shows the dawn to be close at hand. In a little time it will be quite light. Then the sun will rise, and after that I trust we shall find some place that will be suitable for our purpose."

CHAPTER DLII.

DICK TURPIN BIDS MAUD FAREWELL, AND DEPARTS ON HIS PERILOUS JOURNEY.

When at last the morning fairly broke, Maud raised her head from Turpin's shoulder, and looked around her.

She found they were in what appeared to be a very lonely part of the country, and a part, too, with which she was not at all familiar.

Nothing but trees and fields were around them; there was not a sign of a single habitation.

"I have been in this part of the country before," said Turpin, "and, if I recollect right, we shall, after mounting yonder hill, come in sight of a farm-house. It is there where I propose you shall stop."

As he spoke, Dick Turpin pointed to a long, steep hill, a considerable distance off, and beyond which, nothing could be seen save the clear morning sky.

Dick allowed Black Bess to ascend this hill at a walk. Carrying a double burden for so long had much fatigued the gallant creature.

During the time occupied by the ascent, Dick Turpin was revolving in his mind some scheme—some tale which he could tell to the inhabitants of the farm-house, in order to account in the first place for his coming there in so strange a fashion, and secondly, for leaving Maud behind him.

He was well aware that without he gave some palpable and sufficient reason, the people would not rest satisfied, but their curiosity would be roused, and this might lead to the worst possible results.

Dick had an inventive brain, and in a general way he

was never at a loss to think of something which would have the effect of completely deceiving those he addressed. As an instance, we may remind the reader of the clever manner in which he told his tale to Mr. Tuttle.

The present case, however, was somewhat more difficult.

By the time the top of the hill was reached, he had formed the bare outline of a plan, which he imagined, when matured, would be just the thing.

He allowed Black Bess to pause on the top of this hill, and recover herself a little from her exertions.

He took the opportunity of surveying the country around him.

His first thought was concerning the officers, and he looked in the direction he had come, in order to ascertain whether any of them were in sight.

He had an excellent opportunity for making his observations. The morning was a remarkably clear one. His face was turned towards the west, and the sun behind him shone with great power and beauty upon everything that lay in this direction.

The most searching gaze, however, failed to discern the least signs of the police officers, and he came to the conclusion that at last he had been lucky enough to shake them off entirely.

He turned round, with his countenance expressive of calmness and content.

Raising his riding-whip, he pointed with it to a large, old-fashioned farm-house, situate about half-way down the hill.

It was almost surrounded by trees, but the thatched roof and the red chimney-pots could be clearly seen.

"There, Maud," he said, "is a place where I hope to find shelter and refuge. What an air of calmness the whole place has! Is it not delightful? Surely here—if anywhere—you will be safe from all harm!"

Maud gazed upon the fair scene spread out before her with feelings of the greatest delight, and she looked forward with pleasure to the prospect of remaining for a time in this peaceful, secluded spot.

Her heart throbbed painfully as she thought how happy she should be if she could but pass the remainder of her life in as much quietude.

Dick Turpin gazed with unmingled pleasure at the fair scene before him; no one could help doing so, and the longer he gazed, the more did the desire for rest and peace come over him.

"Come," he said—"we will make our way at once towards this peaceful habitation; I have great hopes of being able to obtain shelter there. I think I shall be able to entirely remove even the shadow of a suspicion."

Rather more than half-way down the hill there was a small white gate, and before this Dick Turpin paused.

It was only latched, and he opened it easily by means of his riding-whip; it closed of itself.

A winding road led from the gate to the farm-house, and along this he took his way, to the intense astonishment of one or two farm labourers, who at that early hour were at work in the fields.

In a little more than five minutes, he reached the homestead, and paused before the rustic porch.

He slipped quickly from the saddle, and assisted Maud to dismount.

By the time this was done the door of the farm-house was opened, the inmates apparently having either seen or heard the arrival.

Quite a cluster of heads appeared in the doorway, but Dick fixed his attention upon the person of a little ruddy man with small, twinkling eyes, and a face of fiery redness.

From his manner, and jolly, contented look, Turpin came to the conclusion that this must be the owner of the farm-house.

Taking off his hat, he made a low bow.

"I have called here," he said, "to request your hospitality for myself and this lady. We are much fatigued, having travelled very many miles. Yours is the only house we have seen for several hours, and, not knowing how far we might have to go before we saw another, I thought I would come up to you and ask you if you would allow us to remain here for a little while?"

"You did quite right, sir!" said the farmer, in a hearty voice. "Come in—come in! You are heartily welcome to the best the house can afford! It was lucky you stopped, for, if you were going towards London, you would have to travel at least ten miles before you came to the next house, and that's only a farm-house, as this is."

While speaking these words, the farmer, with the greatest hospitality, ushered Dick Turpin and Maud into his humble dwelling.

A lad about ten years of age sprang forward and said:

"I will take the gentleman's horse round to the stable, father."

"Do so, my lad. And now, wife, lay the cloth."

This was a better reception than Dick had dared to hope for. He was glad, for, judging by what had already taken place, he fancied he should be able to carry out the remainder of his plan.

A substantial meal was placed upon the table, of which they partook with a heartiness that delighted the old farmer exceedingly.

During the meal they chatted upon indifferent subjects, and when it was over Dick rose, and, addressing the farmer, said:

"If you have no objection, I should like to take a walk with you round to the stable, and have a look at my horse."

"Certainly, sir—certainly! I am most willing! Here, dame, give me my hat and stick!"

Thus equipped, Turpin and the farmer sallied out into the open air.

"I am a straightforward man," said Turpin, "and one of few words. I want to say something to you—and so I shall say it at once, without any beating about the bush."

The farmer looked up into Dick's face with a puzzled expression on his countenance as he replied:

"I do like anybody that's upright and down straight. I try so to be as straightforward as I can myself."

"I know you do," said Dick—"I can see that at a glance."

"Can you now?" ejaculated the farmer.

"I can assure you I could; and, what's more, I could perceive that you were a man of discretion, and that has caused me to make up my mind to take you into my confidence."

"You are as plain-spoken a gentleman as ever I met with," replied the farmer, "and I shall be very glad to render you a service."

"Thanks—thanks! Well, then, you must know that I am an officer in the army, with nothing but my pay to depend upon."

"Which isn't much."

"It is very little," said Turpin, "but that didn't prevent me from falling in love with a very pretty girl, who also fell in love with me; but her parents were very, very rich, and had got great expectations. Of course they would not listen to me, a poor soldier of fortune, and when they discovered how matters stood they tried everything they could think of to break the match."

The farmer was deeply interested.

"A man of your experience," continued Turpin, "cannot have lived all these years without knowing very well what a soldier is like."

"Well, rather; and I should say I know 'em, and candidly speaking, I don't much like 'em, and I'll tell you why: There came a soger courtin' my wife, that is when she was a girl, and before she was my wife, and I very nearly lost her through him, for the women are devilish fond of a red coat. I gained the day though," added the farmer, with a chuckle, as though the recollection afforded him intense delight.

Doubtless he would have favoured the highwayman with a long tale, but Dick did not happen to be in the humour to listen to it, so he went on:

"I determined to have her in spite of all of them, and she was quite willing. They carried her off, but I discovered her place of retreat, communicated with her, and at last obtained a meeting. I didn't expect to succeed, but nevertheless, I pressed her to elope, and she consented. I had made no preparations for such an event, and had only one horse with me. I know if you want a girl you must take her while she is in the humour, so I proposed that she should ride on the saddle before me."

"Good—good!" said the farmer, rubbing his hands. "You soldiers have a strange way of wooing."

"Ha—ha! I believe you. I carried her off as you

see. We have been travelling all night in the fashion I described, but she became so fatigued I was obliged to stop, and that is just what has brought us here."

Dick looked piercingly into the farmer's countenance, and was rejoiced to find that so far the explanation he had given was considered perfectly satisfactory.

"Well, now," said Dick, "I have come to the most important part of the affair. As a matter of course, the girl will be missed, and close search will be made after her. I shall be suspected, and they know where my regiment is quartered. They will be sure to make a call there."

"I see."

"I have got leave of absence, but my time expires at six o'clock to-morrow morning, and I am bound to report myself at that time. If I don't, I shall get into serious trouble. I told you I had made no preparations for this event, because I did not expect it. And now to tell you what I want: You will confer a very great favour upon me if you will allow the young lady to stay at your house while I ride back to London, and report myself at the proper time and place, get a house ready, and a special licence. When I have done that I shall come back, and of course, all the rest will be all plain sailing; for, after we are married, her friends will have to grin, and bear and abide by it, and make the best of a bad job."

"Very true!" said the farmer.

"Well, now, would you mind taking care of the lady, under these circumstances? I shall only be absent for two or three days, and you will do us both a very great service, for she loves me to distraction, and she would break her heart if we were parted!"

"Here's my hand on it," replied the farmer. "You may consider it as settled and agreed."

"I am delighted to hear you say so, and I hope I shall live to see the day when I shall be able to make you some return for this kindness."

"Pho—pho! Don't speak about that! I am quite willing to assist you. Lead the way. Your talk makes me feel quite young again. But here's the stable. Come in, you will find your horse all right."

Dick followed the farmer into the stable, where he had the satisfaction of finding Black Bess very comfortable.

He repeated his thanks to the farmer again and again.

He congratulated himself upon the success he had met with, and so far as he could tell, there was every prospect that Maud would remain in safety and peace at the farm-house for a few days, while he rejoined his companions and gained possession of the money they had left in the deserted mansion.

He spent some time in strolling about the grounds, conversing with the farmer, and then returned to the house.

He had no opportunity of speaking to Maud during the remainder of the day.

At dusk, however, he announced his intention of departing, and requested that his horse should be got ready.

He had whispered to Maud and told her that he had made matters right with the farmer, but had not explained.

He bid the farmer and his family good-bye, and left the farm-house.

Maud followed him with a tearful countenance and a sinking heart.

The inmates of the homestead understood perfectly well that the lovers were about to part, and so they left them alone.

Upon reaching the outside of the farm-house, Maud clung to Dick and placed her head against his breast.

He reassured her, as well as he was able, and told how successful he had been with the farmer, and acquainted her with the details of the story he had told him to account for their presence there in such a fashion.

Maud could scarcely suppress a smile.

"And now," said Turpin, "remain here. Be calm—be content! I may be absent two or three days, but do not let that alarm you; I will take every possible care to keep out of danger, and will run no unnecessary risk. As soon as ever I can obtain the money and rejoin my comrades, I will return and take you from this place! I have much to do, but while I am engaged upon it I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that you are in perfect safety, for in this farm-house, surrounded by these kind people, what harm can happen to you?"

"None—none to me," sobbed Maud; "it is you who are running into danger."

"It is true; but don't let that alarm you. I have come safely out of more dangerous enterprises than this one! Do not betray me by any incautious word or act, and then all will be well."

"But when may I expect you?"

"On the third night from now, but not before; it will be towards morning, so until then make yourself as contented as you can, and after that expect me."

There was a pause, and then Dick Turpin, pressing her close to his heart, said:

"We must part. Farewell! Remember, I only leave you for a short time and shall soon return, and if you will consider all that I am going to do, you will come to the conclusion that it is not so very dangerous after all. I have only one caution, do not suffer your alarm to be so great as to be the means of arousing suspicion in the minds of these people. And now, farewell!"

Maud felt heart-broken, but she felt she could not ask him to stay or to take her with him.

The parting was necessary, and she endeavoured to reconcile herself to it.

Dick gently disengaged himself from her embrace.

Tears filled her eyes and she could see nothing.

When she dashed them aside, however, she perceived Dick Turpin riding slowly towards the gate opening into the high-road.

She waved her hand to him as the last farewell, and he returned the signal.

Then, in another moment, he was gone.

CHAPTER DLIII.

TOM KING IS JUST IN TIME TO PREVENT THE SUICIDE OF THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER.

THE curiosity of Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack was excited to the utmost degree by what they had just seen.

It may seem strange that they should be so deeply interested by the occurrence of the simple incident of a man climbing up a tree.

There was, however, something so peculiar and so striking, not only in the personal appearance of this young man, but in the distracted manner in which he ran towards the tree, that they could not but gaze with the greatest intentness.

As soon as his person was concealed amongst the branches our friends turned to each other.

"What do you think of that?" asked Tom King.

"Think!" replied Claude. "Why, I feel quite sure he has ascended the tree for some important purpose."

"But what?"

"That is just what I should like to know, and precisely what I intend to find out—that is, if you are both in the same mind as myself."

"I am quite willing!" said Sixteen-String Jack.

"And I!" added Tom King. "In all probability this occurrence does not concern us in any way whatever, and I don't think there is much chance of reaping any benefit from it in a pecuniary point of view. However, I consider that, situated as we are, it is our duty to take notice of everything we see which is at all out of the way, and which we cannot exactly understand."

"I fully agree with you," said Claude. "By adopting that plan, we should very likely avoid danger, and also become acquainted with many singular incidents of which we should otherwise remain in ignorance."

Our friends had trotted on towards the trees while they spoke thus, and, just as Claude had concluded, Sixteen-String Jack cried:

"Look—look! What do you think of that? What is he doing?"

The highwaymen fixed their eyes upon the tree the young man had ascended.

First the leaves were violently agitated, and then they perceived the form of the stranger.

He came out on to one of the largest and straightest branches, creeping along it with great care; nor did he pause until he had nearly reached its extremity.

At last he stopped, and the highwaymen could see the

bough upon which he sat bend considerably beneath his weight.

The stranger was apparently deeply and wholly absorbed by what he was about, for he never looked around him once, and consequently failed to observe the advance of our friends, who continued to watch his motions with rapidly-increasing interest.

Having seated himself on the extremity of the bough in the manner we have recorded, the stranger commenced feeling in his pockets, and finally produced a piece of stout rope about three or four feet in length.

One end of this he carefully and firmly tied to the branch of the tree.

He pulled it several times, in order to test its firmness, and then, being to all appearances quite satisfied with the result, formed the other end into a noose.

This he slipped over his head, and in the twinkling of an eye dropped from his seat.

There he hung at full length suspended by the rope round his neck.

He kicked and plunged violently for a few seconds, and then grew perfectly still.

The highwaymen—and Tom King especially—divined instantly that the rash young man intended to commit the crime of suicide.

Guessing at his purpose, Tom King spurred his horse into a gallop, and he was some distance off before his comrades could recover themselves sufficiently to follow him.

So suddenly did the young stranger drop from the branch after placing the noose round his neck, that Tom was not in time to frustrate his rash intention; and, though the horse galloped towards the tree at the top of his speed, yet he did not reach it until the young man had ceased to struggle.

As swift as lightning, however, Tom King drew his sword, and with one slash divided the rope.

The body fell to the ground with a dull, heavy crash, and lay on the grass a huddled-up heap.

By the time this had happened, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack arrived upon the scene of action.

Tom King alighted from his horse without the loss of a moment, and, stooping down, loosened the rope from round the stranger's neck.

When that was done no signs of life were given, and they began to think that they were too late.

Claude and Jack also dismounted, and the latter perceiving at a distance a pool of water, ran towards it, and brought back as much as his hat would hold.

He dashed all the lot at once into the stranger's face, who shuddered visibly, gasped for breath, and finally opened his eyes.

The highwaymen now left him to recover of himself, for they could tell by his general appearance that it would not be long before vitality was restored to him.

They stood by watching.

After the lapse of a few seconds, the stranger uttered a cry and started to his feet as though galvanized.

But his strength was not sufficient to sustain him in an upright position, and he sank down again.

Tom King spoke.

"Rash man," he said, "be thankful that you have been prevented from committing the crime you contemplated!"

The stranger looked up at him, and then, for the first time, Tom and his comrades had a good opportunity of noticing the appearance of the individual they had saved from death.

His age could not have been more than four-and-twenty, and was most likely much less.

His face was an extremely handsome one, but now it was clouded by the bitterest sadness, and he had altogether an air of the deepest melancholy.

He looked as though he was tired of life, and would willingly free himself from it.

He was dressed with richness and elegance, and he had about him that indescribable something which proclaims a member of the upper ranks of society.

He regarded the three highwaymen successively with fixed attention, and then at last, in a sad and hollow voice, he spoke:

"Gentlemen," he said, "it is clear that to one and all of you I owe my life! In some way or other you have saved me, but I cannot tell how!"

"It was I," replied Tom King, "who happened to be in time to snatch you from the jaws of death!"

"I wish I could thank you," said the stranger, "or that I could look upon what you have done in the light of a service rendered! But I cannot—it is impossible! On the contrary, in bringing me back to life, you have done me an incalculable injury, and will cause a double pang!"

"How so?"

"Because I am so thoroughly weary of my life that I am resolved to rid myself of it! I candidly tell you that I shall seize the next opportunity that presents itself to make the attempt, and I trust that I shall meet with better luck than I have this morning!"

As may be supposed, our friends listened to what the stranger said with great astonishment.

His determination surprised them beyond measure.

Up to that moment they had always believed that none had committed suicide who did not at the last moment, and when too late, regret that they had been so rash.

They judged by those who had been saved from self-murder, and they, without exception, manifested the greatest joy at their deliverance.

The stranger at their feet was, however, a being of quite a different character, for he was regretting what they had done.

These thoughts passed through their minds while he spoke. Tom King replied at once:

"I do not desire your thanks. When I saw what you were about, I considered it was my duty to try my best to save you, and I have succeeded. I desire nothing more."

"You are surprised, no doubt," said the stranger, in a melancholy voice, "to find one so young as I am so anxious to quit life! Your wonder would cease, however, if you knew my history. You would then think with me that my life was worthless and unbearable!"

"It does indeed seem strange that you should manifest so much determination as you do, and although I have not the least notion who you are, still I can affirm that you are wrong in coming to the conclusion that you ought to throw your life away."

"You speak in ignorance!" said the stranger, in the same impassioned tones he had from the first employed. "But I am not disposed to quarrel or dispute with anyone! I can't thank you for saving my life, and as soon as I am strong enough I shall rise to my feet! If you choose to wait till then I shall depart, and whichever way you are going, mine will be in the opposite direction!"

"You are not only thankless, but churlish!"

"Pray pardon me if I am! But if you will believe me, I am not in a state to study the difference between rudeness and politeness!"

"Your behaviour surprises me more and more each second—so much so that I cannot help coming to the conclusion that the force of circumstances which have produced this frame of mind are of a most singular nature."

"You are right, sir, they are! I might say, with perfect truth and safety, that they have no parallel!"

"You excite my curiosity more and more!"

"Alas, sir! had you seen me two days ago, you would now fail to recognise me—you would refuse to believe that I was the same person!"

"Are you so greatly changed?"

"I am—changed until in every way I am the opposite of what I was!"

"You will excuse me, sir, but your words inflame my curiosity more even than your actions!"

"Very likely!"

"And although you may not feel disposed to thank me for having saved your life, yet my intentions were good."

"No doubt."

"I say, then, as my intentions were good, perhaps you would not consider it too much if I was to ask you to do me a favour in return for the service I have rendered you, and which, unfortunately, is so entirely unappreciated."

"I don't see that it is in my power to do anything for anyone. You have indeed done me an injury. Think what additional pain you have caused me, and think what I shall have to go through again!"

"I trust that you will yet alter your determination, and rejoice that you were saved."

"Never, never! Do not have any such thought as that. If it had not been for your interference, I should by this

time have been beyond all pain—my troubles would have been over. Now I shall have to go through all those disagreeable preparations again!"

"I say, I hope you will change your mind."

"No—I must die—to live is impossible! Talking of granting favours, it is in your power to grant me one."

"I should rejoice."

The stranger smiled in a peculiar fashion.

"I am not so sure of that. The only service you could render me would be to rid me of the life you were at so much pains to save."

"Impossible!"

"So you refuse?"

"Decidedly! You must have been mad if you thought for one moment that I should consent."

"Then there is no help for it?"

"No help for what?"

"I must embrace the next opportunity I can find! I am resolved to quit this life and all its cares in some way or other long before yon climbing sun reaches the meridian."

"Your conversation is very extraordinary."

"No doubt it appears so to you, but then you must remember that you are ignorant of my history."

"I certainly am."

"You may think me insane?"

"No, I don't. You speak strange, but it is too rational and coherent for that. No—you are not insane, or if you are, your madness is of a different kind to any that I have seen or heard of."

"No, I am not insane! I wish I was, and then I would not be harassed with these terrible reflections, which will not allow me a moment's peace. No, no—I suffer too much to be mad!"

"I said I had a favour to ask you."

"Yes, what is it?"

"Not such an outrageous one as your own. All you have said, and the manner in which you have acted, have served to inflame my curiosity to a greater degree than I have ever before experienced! No doubt my companions feel much the same as I do."

"We do—we do!" exclaimed Claude and Jack together.

"Then, sir, would you mind recounting to us those circumstances which have brought you to your present state of mind, and caused you to be so determined to quit this world? The record cannot fail to be full of the deepest interest, and perhaps convey some useful and necessary lesson from your own experience."

"You may."

"Then, is it asking too much, if I make the request that you will recount the curious circumstances I have alluded to?"

"And that is your favour? The one you meant to ask?"

"Yes. Will you grant it?"

"I will."

"Many thanks."

"Do not fall into the error of supposing, however, that I do this out of any feeling of gratitude. It is quite the reverse. I look upon you almost as an enemy. However, we will let that pass. It will give me pain to relate my history, but I will do it in the hope that by being fully known, it may serve as a lesson to others who will take warning by my fate, and not act in the manner I have done, and which has been the means of bringing about the frame of mind I am now in, and which you so much deplore."

CHAPTER DLIV.

TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK ARE AUDITORS OF A MOST SINGULAR NARRATIVE.

EVERY word the mysterious stranger spoke seemed of additional interest, and our friends were much delighted to think that they were about to be made acquainted with those facts about which they felt so anxious, and which at first they had scarcely hoped to learn.

Now, however, the stranger had signified his willingness to relate to them the story of his life, and they prepared to listen to every word he said with the greatest possible amount of attention.

The stranger seated himself upon the grass in a more comfortable manner than he had done, and buried his head in his hands.

The highwaymen understood from this action that he was collecting his thoughts in order that he might begin his narration and tell it through to the end in a succinct and straightforward manner.

Being under this belief, they availed themselves of the opportunity to secure their horses.

They did it in a manner, which, while it effectually prevented them from straying away, yet allowed them to crop the short, sweet grass that grew near the trees.

They also took a careful observation of the surrounding scene.

Having done so, they felt there was little likelihood of being disturbed.

Not a single human being—not a single dwelling-place was in sight.

Directly afterwards the thought occurred to them that the place was a very lonely, unfrequented one, and had been chosen by the young man for the perpetration of his heinous crime upon that very account.

And now, unable to control their impatience any longer, they seated themselves together on the grass in front of the stranger, and at a little distance from him.

Having thus taken up their positions, they waited for the stranger to commence.

At last he raised his head, and, having looked at them with the greatest attention, said:

"Although I am ignorant of your names, for you are all three perfect strangers to me, yet, as a kind of guarantee as to the truth of what I am going to relate, I will tell you my own name, and the real names of the parties who have been joint actors with me in this affair."

"We do not wish to hear your name," said Tom King, "and you can substitute fictitious ones for the other persons, if you think proper."

"No—I will tell you the real names."

"As you please! Either way we shall be content."

Then the stranger paused, cleared his throat, and began.

"My name is Frederick Marchmont. My father is a clergyman in Scotland, and I am his only son.

"In order that my education should be thoroughly completed, I was sent to London to pursue a course of studies.

"For a long time I devoted myself ardently to my pursuits. I knew no one in London, and, being naturally of a solitary—even unsociable—disposition, I took no trouble to find acquaintances.

"This state of things, however, was not destined to continue, though I little thought that the forming of an acquaintanceship in London would lead to such deplorable results.

"It is not necessary I should tell you how it was that I became acquainted with a lady named Swayne, who lived in the outskirts of the city.

"Mrs. Swayne was a widow with three children. One was a young man about my own age, who, however, at the time I became acquainted with the family, was absent in Spain, whither he had been sent to transact some important business."

The stranger's voice failed him several times during this last sentence, and now he broke down altogether.

Our friends were silent.

In a little while he recovered himself from his emotion, and continued:

"The other two children were daughters—one Ellen, whose age was about eighteen, was——"

The stranger stopped suddenly.

His voice failed him entirely, and he burst into sobs and tears.

As before, however, he recovered himself with great rapidity.

"Mrs. Swayne had two daughters—one named Ellen, who was about eighteen, and the other named Florence, who was a mere child.

"Being alone in the great city, as I was with no other friends save those, it was no more than natural that an affection should spring up between Ellen and myself.

"Such was the case—the intimacy was approved of by our parents, and we were betrothed."

Again the stranger paused, and he buried his face in his hands, in order to conceal his emotion.

"When you hear further," he said, "you will understand the reason why the recapitulation of these simple incidents affects me so strongly.

"I was perfectly happy.

"All went well, and in a few months we were to be married.

"Time rolled round, and everything went smoothly until the third day before the one on which the wedding was appointed to take place arrived.

"I was walking through the streets, when, by chance, I perceived some kind of scuffle going on, and, prompted by a curiosity, the result of which has been unfortunate to a degree, I hastened forward to learn what it was.

"I found it was a young man, well dressed, but in a deplorable state of intoxication, who was struggling with a police officer, who was endeavouring to arrest him, and take him to the roundhouse for creating a disturbance in the streets.

"It would seem that a friend of the intoxicated man happened to be passing by, and seeing what the officer was about, stepped forward and endeavoured to prevent him from executing his duty.

"The intoxicated man was very violent, and he was rather more than a match for the police officer in height and strength; and when this new comer sided with his friend and attacked the constable, he stood but a poor chance indeed.

"Still the officer endeavoured to effect his purpose.

"The crowd of people stood idly by, and no one seemed inclined to take the part of the constable, who was fast becoming exhausted.

"Such being the aspect of affairs, I considered it my duty to interfere, and I did so, siding with the police officer.

"Amid the jeers and taunts of the crowd, I endeavoured to bring all three to reason; but I failed. Blows were exchanged, and I quickly found myself compelled to join in the fight, or else suffer myself to be beaten most unmercifully.

"I was angry at the non-success which I had met with, and took the part of the constable to the best of my ability.

"Then more police officers came up, the intoxicated man was secured, and his friend and myself were left confronting each other.

"We spoke fiercely and angrily, and the crowd applauded.

"'You have insulted me!' he cried. 'You had no business to interfere! Apologise instantly!'

"Several persons stepped forward, some placing themselves by my side, and some by the side of my antagonist.

"'This dispute must be settled in a proper manner!' they cried. 'There is only one way in which gentlemen settle their differences!'

"I knew what was meant; but I had always had the greatest horror of duelling, which I considered an atrocious crime, and so I resolved not to allow myself to be forced into one by my would-be supporters.

"Those who had ranked themselves with my antagonist succeeded better, for they persuaded the misguided young man to draw his sword.

"He came fiercely towards me, and tapped me on the breast.

"'You have insulted me,' he said, 'and the insult must be avenged! You have struck me! Draw and defend yourself!—we will settle this matter on the spot!'

"Anything in the shape of a contest was especially delightful to the disorderly crew who had assembled, and so they applauded vociferously when the young man spoke.

"I folded my arms, and assumed as much calmness as I could.

"'You are a stranger to me,' I said; 'I know not who you are. But of this I am quite certain—you are so much heated with wine, or passion, or perhaps with both, that you are not responsible for your actions, and so I decline to fight with you. Besides, I abhor duelling!'

"These words seemed to increase the resentment of my adversary, those around me crying out: 'Coward!—coward! He dare not fight! He carries a sword by his side, but dare not use it!' and other speeches of the like nature.

"I was very much exasperated at finding myself thus drawn into a brawl; but feeling that my passion was rising rapidly, I made every effort to subdue it.

"'Draw,' said the young man—'draw and defend yourself, or I will slay you where you stand!'

"I endeavoured to expostulate.

"'This is a foolish matter,' I said, 'to stake our lives upon!'

"I should have proceeded further, but the crowd interrupted me with hisses and yells, and then some one with a stentorian voice roared out:

"'Beat the coward with your scabbard!—drive him forth!'

"These words raised me to the utmost fury, and I drew my sword.

"It rang against that of my opponent with a clashing sound.

"While we stood thus with crossed blades, I cried:

"'Look out now! You have forced me into this, and you must reap the consequences!'

"'You are too full of words,' said the young man,—'let us see some of your deeds!'

"The crowd applauded to the utmost.

"In another second the combat commenced.

"I was greatly enraged, and felt that I had only two alternatives, and that I must choose one of them—either to slay or be slain.

"The contest was a brief one.

"From some cause or other, my antagonist's foot slipped and he stumbled forward.

"Just at that moment I was about to make a thrust, and was holding myself in readiness to do so.

"In stumbling forward he fell against the keen point of my sword, and, before I could properly understand what had happened, I felt the hilt of my sword strike with a dull thud against his breast.

"Horror-struck at this incident, I let go my hold upon the hilt of my sword, and, before any of the self-constituted seconds could step forward to save him, the young man, with a gasping, agonising cry, fell backwards into the street.

"Every person in the crowd suddenly became silent—all were appalled, and I stood as though turned to stone.

"The next sounds I heard were voices urging me to fly, and so escape the consequences of the deed.

"It was some time before I could comprehend them; but at last, overcome with horror, and dreading the consequences of what I had done, I turned round and hastened away.

"I gave one glance at my foe as he lay on his back in the roadway.

"In his fall he had partly driven out the sword, while the point had entered the earth, so that anyone seeing him in this position, and not knowing the facts of the case, would come to the conclusion that he had been ruthlessly pinned to the ground.

"His face was ghastly white, and contracted into an expression of the greatest anguish.

"It was impossible that he could survive such a wound, and, with the feelings of a murderer, I fled I scarcely knew where.

"During the whole of that night I roamed restlessly through the streets of London like a ghost, not knowing what to do and where to go, fearing to return to my lodgings lest I should be recognised.

"My mind was indeed in a state of the utmost confusion.

"Day broke before I was able to collect my senses sufficiently to decide upon what I should do.

"At last I resolved to call upon Mrs. Swayne to tell her what had taken place, to bid her and Ellen adieu, and leave England for ever.

"I knew not how my affianced would receive me,—I feared the worst, for many a time had I heard her express in the warmest terms her abhorrence of duelling.

"Mrs. Swayne, too, expressed her detestation of it, but they had good reason for doing so, for the father of one and the husband of the other had been slain in a duel in the streets.

"Yet, knowing all the circumstances, I resolved to make a full confession of my guilt.

"They would loathe and hate me.

"I prepared myself for that, but in some other land I fancied I might forget the occurrences of that dreadful night.



[DICK TURPIN SUDDENLY ENCOUNTERS THE DRAGOONS.]

"Weary, haggard, and staggering like a drunken man, I made my way to the residence of Mrs. Swayne.

"As I turned into the streets a strange, cold chill suddenly swept over me; it was a horrible sensation, and such an one as I had never felt before.

"I walked on, however, and ascended the steps leading to the front door.

"I raised the knocker, and while I was in the act of bringing it down I experienced the same cold, shuddering sensation, though much more intensely than before.

"I imagined it proceeded from the dread which I felt of the ordeal through which I was about to pass.

"My blood seemed to turn icy cold, and crept through my veins slowly and sluggishly, so much so that I was compelled to lean against the door post for support.

"The door was opened. A film was over my eyes, but yet I was able to see that it was Ellen who had opened the door.

"The strangeness of this circumstance seemed to rouse me from my stupor—my eyes brightened, and I saw clearly.

"Then again that horrible shudder crept over me. I had not expected any of the inmates of the house up and dressed at that early hour; but there stood Ellen. She had evidently never been to bed at all that night; her eyes were red with weeping—her whole appearance betokened the extremest care; she sobbed and could scarcely speak.

"She noticed my wild and haggard expression, and seized me by the arm.

"Her lips were white and trembling, and in an almost inarticulate murmur, she said:

"'Then you have come at last—you have heard the news!'

"'What news?' I said.

"She did not appear to hear me, but closing the front door, led me across the passage into the drawing-room.

"The shutters were closed, the blinds were drawn down, and a couple of wax candles standing in the centre of the

apartment seemed to increase rather than dissipate the obscurity.

"Sobs and moans of anguish, however, reached my ears.

"Ellen did not release her hold upon my arm.

"Going up to the table, she took hold of one of the candles, and then led me towards a couch at the other extreme of the apartment.

"A figure covered with a white sheet lay upon it.

"Beside the couch knelt Mrs. Swayne, so absorbed in her grief as to appear unconscious of my entrance

"At that moment a feeling more horrible than any I had yet experienced took firm hold of my heart.

"I trembled, my breath failed me, and all objects appeared to be swimming round in mad confusion.

But as though she was a long way off, I could hear Ellen speaking.

"Faint and low as the voice appeared to be, yet it went direct to my understanding—I had no difficulty in comprehending one word.

"'My brother,' she said, 'has been brought home thus! He has been set upon in the streets and murdered! Look!'

"At the same instant she removed a portion of the sheet, and disclosed the features of the being who lay there so still.

"A wild and awful shriek, such, I should think, as never came from the lips of a human being, burst from me. At the very first glance, I recognised that white, anguished countenance.

"I knew all. Before me, on that couch, lay the young man I had slain only a few hours before.

CHAPTER DLV.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN HAVE ANOTHER PERILOUS ADVENTURE.

"By what words, think you, shall I be able to convey to you a clear idea of what my feelings were at that moment?

"No language can describe them—all must be left to your imagination, which I am convinced, will fall far short of the reality.

"The young man I had casually encountered in the street was no other than Ellen's only brother, who had returned from abroad unexpectedly, and an unpropitious chance brought about that fatal meeting between us.

"The unfortunate young man was quite dead. That could be seen at a glance; besides, he was already cold.

"Mrs. Swayne was frantic and called down the bitterest maledictions upon the head of the murderer of her son. It was too much to lose both husband and child in a street brawl.

"I stood rooted to the spot—I strove to speak, but could not give utterance to a sound.

"Ellen perceived my horror and agitation, but never dreamt for one moment of the cause.

"'That is my brother's corpse,' she said, as she placed the sheet again over his cold features. 'We did not know he was coming back; he has been set upon and murdered in the street, and the first we knew of it was, when his body was brought here about two hours ago.'

"Still I could not speak, nor could I make up my mind as to how I should act.

"Should I confess all?—would it be better for me to tell the whole of my frightful tale?—or should I hold my peace?

"For a moment I felt inclined to adopt the latter course, but then I changed my mind.

"Detection, I thought, would, sooner or later ensue, and then I thought I should be more execrated than ever, if such a thing was possible.

"I do not know how I carried my resolve into execution—I cannot remember what words I uttered, nor could I fully or properly describe the effect which they produced upon my hearers.

"When I had finished my horrible account I rushed from the room; and the last thing I remember is, seeing Ellen lying insensible on the floor, and hearing Mrs Swayne invoking the bitterest curses upon my head.

"I rushed out into the street, and bounded onwards as if pursued by fiends.

"Beyond the fact that I found some relief in going at this rapid speed, I can remember nothing of what occurred

"I ran on all that day with but little intermission, and at last dropped down insensible on the highway.

"When I awoke and recovered my senses, I found that day was just beginning to break.

"The thought of suicide then rushed into my mind, and I determined to rid myself of that life which otherwise would be but an insufferable burden to me.

"I started up with the intention of effecting my purpose upon the spot.

"Instinctively I placed my hand to my side, and then I discovered that my sword was gone. I remembered what had become of it.

"I had no other weapon about me; but still I resolved to put my purpose into execution.

"Looking around, I saw in the next meadow a horse tethered by a rope.

"I pushed through the hedge, set the horse at liberty, and hurried off with the rope.

"In the distance I could perceive a clump of trees.

"To the branches of one of them I knew I should be able to secure the rope, and then my miserable life would be at an end.

"What followed you know.

"The bitterness of death was past when you rode up and by cutting the rope restored me to life.

"After having told you this, can you wonder that I should seek for death?—can you wonder that I should regret that you had saved me?

"No; had I been left alone, my miseries would have been over; now they begin afresh."

The stranger ceased, and for several moments there was an intense silence.

At last Tom King spoke.

"You are not so much to blame that I can see. The circumstances are distressing ones; but if yours is a correct version of the affair, you did no more than defend yourself against a man who would have slain you."

"Would he had done so—would he had done so!"

"I can understand that wish, because you were so soon about to make his sister your wife. Had he been a stranger, your feelings would have been very different to what they are now."

"True—true!"

"Then I think in a little while you will alter your mind and feel glad that I saved you from the commission of a cowardly crime. I repeat that you are not to blame. The death of your antagonist resulted chiefly from an accident, and you were in ignorance of who he was."

"Well, gentlemen, I have told you my tale, and now we will depart. As to what I shall do in the future, that is, I imagine, a matter for me to settle. We will part here, and if my sad experience furnishes you with a lesson, I shall rejoice that we have met."

With these words the stranger rose to his feet, and bowing distantly to our three friends, took his departure with a slow and stately step.

They made no attempt to hinder his departure, but watched his course across the meadow until he disappeared from their view.

It was Claude Duval then who said:

"This has been a night of strange adventures: but this one is, I think, the most extraordinary I have ever met with!"

"His tale is a very sad one," said Tom King.

"Very. I fancy from his manner and from the scared look about his eyes, that he was not in full possession of his senses; but in this it is possible I am mistaken."

"I don't know. Less things than that have driven a man into temporary madness."

"What will become of him?"

"That would indeed be hard to say. I don't think, however, that he will make another attempt upon his life. Few try when they have failed once."

"I suppose not; but now let us decide what we are to do and how we are to spend the day."

"I should be glad to rest."

"So should we all, I fancy, for I feel the effects of the drug which the landlord administered to us; it must have been a powerful one."

"It was, but that reminds me of something; let us see how much money is contained in the bag that we took from the horse-coper."

The leather bag was produced, and the contents poured out upon the ground.

A considerable portion of it was silver, which had deceived them when they first made an estimate of the amount the bag contained.

Upon counting all over, they found there were sixty-seven pounds.

"Not very bad," said Tom King, "though I fancied there was more; but even at this rate, we shall be a long while making up the amount that we had taken from us."

"I think our best plan will be not to revert to that again," said Sixteen-String Jack. "What is done cannot be helped, and I fancy there is no chance whatever of our recovering any of the money again."

"None—none!"

"And now," said Tom King, "let us decide what we are to do during the day. Where are we to go? It will not be right to continue on our journey by broad daylight; nor will it be wise to remain here, because we are very likely to be seen."

"What do you propose?" asked Claude Duval.

"I scarcely know what to say," returned Tom King. "It seems to me, the only thing we can do is to put up at some roadside inn; and after late experience, I don't feel inclined to do that."

"Nor do we," said Claude Duval and Jack together.

"But what else can be done—where else can we go? We shall not recover from the effect of the drug we have taken until we have had a sound, refreshing sleep; and if we do not obtain that at an inn, where else are we likely to gain it?"

Tom's two comrades found this an unanswerable question.

"I am afraid we shall be driven into this proceeding, much as we may dislike it, for as it is our intention to try our luck upon the road again to-night, it will be necessary that our horses be well fed and attended to, for it is upon their speed that we shall have to depend, probably, for our lives."

"You are quite right there!"

"Well, where can our horses be fed except at an inn?"

"Nowhere, I am afraid. All this reminds me very forcibly of the advantages which we shall have when Turpin's excellent scheme is fully carried out. We shall then be freed from all danger and difficulties on this account."

"Unquestionably we shall!" said Tom King, "and the prospect of this amount of safety ought to induce us to use every effort to obtain the requisite amount."

"It is all through that villain Richard Nares," said Claude Duval, "that we haven't got the amount at the present moment. I don't know whether my last shot at the rascal was an effectual one, but I sincerely hope it was."

"Let us think no more about that, Claude. Let us decide at once upon our plan of proceeding. It is yet very early in the morning, and there is little probability of finding many persons abroad; if we stay, however, we shall run a very serious risk in travelling to the next inn."

"So we shall," said Claude; "and, moreover, there is a village yonder through which we shall be obliged to pass."

"So there is," said Tom King, "I had forgotten there was a village so near; I think we had better make our way through it without delay; if we stay any longer, we shall lose the chance of doing so in safety."

"Let us mount, and as we journey we can talk the matter over and decide."

This was assented to, and the highwaymen once more mounted their steeds and emerged on to the high-road.

They looked before and behind them carefully, and, being unable to perceive anyone about, set forward at a sharp trot.

Five minutes brought them to the outskirts of the little village, the roofs and chimneys of which they had perceived from the distance.

The sun was only a little way above the horizon, yet the highwaymen noticed that the inmates of many of the houses were astir, though few persons were visible in the long, straggling street which formed the village.

These few looked up in dull and sleepy surprise when the travellers clattered past them, and wondered who they were and where they were going to at that hour.

The village was soon left behind, and, having gone a little distance, Tom King reined in his steed to a walk.

His comrades followed his example.

"That danger is over," he said. "I do not believe we have been seen by anyone who would recognise us, or would attach any importance to the fact of our trotting by."

"I don't think we have," said Sixteen-String Jack. "And now to decide upon our next halting-place. If some other place than an inn can be thought of, I shall be delighted, for I like the idea of stopping at one less and less each moment."

"I am afraid there is no help for it," said Tom King, "without you can think of some other place?"

"I can't."

"Nor I."

"And now, with regard to the probable amount of danger. If you think back, I fancy you will admit that we were very much to blame for falling so blindly into the snare laid for us by the landlord."

"We were, certainly; but who would suspect such a thing?"

"Well, we didn't; but now we have had a caution, and let it serve as such. I shall not be caught in the same way again, I promise you."

"No," said Claude Duval; "I have made up my mind that whenever we stop at an inn again, that I will not taste a drop of anything until I have seen the landlord taste it too."

"A good plan, Claude," said Tom King, "and one that can be easily carried out. By an affectation of good fellowship, we could easily induce him to join us in a glass; if he drank the bumper off without hesitation, why then we should be all right; if he hesitated, or seemed in the least confused, we should suspect him."

"Very good! Then we will agree that that shall be the plan adopted."

"It shall; and, if we only make use of the amount of caution that we really ought to do, I don't think there is much danger to be apprehended."

"Whether there is or not," said Sixteen-String Jack, "it seems we shall be obliged to run the risk."

"We shall," replied Tom King. "As I happen to know, we are in perhaps a more lonely part of the country than any we have yet visited; I mean, not so lonely as regards travellers and vehicles on the highway, but lonely as regards habitations;—these are very few and far between, and it is at least twenty miles to the next town."

"Then in such an out-of-the-way place surely we shall be safe?"

"One would think so. At any rate, we don't carry a large amount of money to tempt the cupidity of the landlord, as was the case on the last occasion."

"As we are to put up at an inn," said Jack, "do not let it be one on the high-road; try if you can't find one in some lane."

"Very good! We shall have to be quick, for as the day advances this road will become more and more filled with people. I should like, too, to get a little further from the village through which we have just passed. Let us try a gallop onwards for a few miles, and then we will look about us."

This was acceded to, and the highwaymen sped along the road at a hard gallop.

Coming at length to a rather steep hill, they were compelled to slacken speed.

Upon gaining the top, they paused and looked at the lovely scene spread out before them.

The early rays of the sun lighted up every object in the landscape with wonderful clearness.

"Look!" said Tom King, pointing with his riding-whip to a habitation at some distance from the high-road, —"there seems to be a place exactly suited to our purpose! How calm, and peaceful, and lovely it looks! Surely no danger lurks there! At that inn—if it is one—we shall be able to take up our quarters with the utmost confidence and security."

"One would think so," said Claude Duval.

"Let us hasten towards it and ascertain," said Tom King. "I am greatly deceived if that is not just the kind of place we require, and we shall have a better day's rest than ever we could have hoped for. Forward! When we have reached the bottom of this hill, a few minutes will take us to the dwelling."

CHAPTER DLVI.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN ARE DELIGHTED WITH THEIR NEW QUARTERS.

HAVING descended the hill, the highwaymen journeyed along the high-road until they came to the lane branching off at right angles from it, and which promised to lead in the direction of the inn they wished to reach.

They turned down it without hesitation, and, after going about half a mile, found their surmise was quite correct.

Before them was a primitive yet very picturesque-looking structure.

It was an inn, for a tall post with a swinging sign on the top of it, and a horse-trough at the base, were plainly visible.

A wisp of straw was also suspended from the sign-post by a rope, which indicated that there was good accommodation both for man and beast.

As was frequently the case in that part of the kingdom, the inn bore the appearance of having been at some time or other a farm-house, and indeed, from the spacious grounds which surrounded it, there was a probability that it was a farm-house now; only, by being thrown open to the public, it gained the name of inn.

In such an out-of-the-way place, it was only by the combination of two trades that they could hope to obtain a livelihood.

The most striking characteristic about this place was the air of peacefulness and content which it seemed to wear.

All three highwaymen were delighted with the appearance which the inn presented, and, after a very brief discussion, they agreed to stop there.

When they drew up before the door it was about six o'clock in the morning, yet the inn was open; and no sooner had the trampling of the horses ceased, than an old, benevolent-looking man, who was taken by the highwaymen for the landlord, made his appearance.

Shading his eyes from the sun with one hand, he came towards our friends, with a smile upon his face.

"Good morning, gentlemen!" he said. "Do you wish to stay here? If you do, you will find the best accommodation at the Wheatsheaf."

"We have travelled many miles," said Tom King, "and should be glad of a rest, not so much upon our own account as of our cattle."

"You ride three splendid nags, gentlemen!" said the landlord, admiringly—"I hope you will excuse me for speaking?"

"Oh, certainly!" said Tom King. "Then you have no objection to making us comfortable for a few hours?"

"None in the world, gentlemen—none in the world! You may depend I shall do the very best I can!"

Tom King slipped off his horse, and his two comrades followed his example.

While this brief conversation had taken place, a man came forward to take charge of the horses.

According to rule, Tom King and Claude Duval engaged the landlord in conversation and entered the inn while Sixteen-String Jack accompanied the ostler to the stables.

Our old friend saw the cattle carefully attended to, and insisted that the trappings belonging to each should be hung upon the end of the stall.

It was always an advantage for one of the highwaymen to see the horses fed, because then the ostler was more liberal with his master's corn than he would have been if left to himself.

"Have you ever been in the army?" said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Lawks—no, sir!" replied the ostler, a loutish-looking lad—"whatever made you ax I that? Does I look like a soger?"

"Not much. Do I?"

"Well, reether; though, I must say, you looks to me rather more like a hossifer!"

The ostler meant "officer," only he invariably persisted in his pronunciation of the word, from an opinion he held that they were so called because they rode on horseback, while the others walked on foot.

"Well, I have been in the army," said Jack, "and so have those gentlemen that you saw with me; and, as a matter of course, we've got many military ways, and we like them better than any other."

The ostler looked up with curiosity, and wondered what on earth was coming.

"Now, in the army," said Sixteen-String Jack, "we always have our horses saddled very quickly, and at the word of command. For instance—I have known officers, when they have been in want of their horses, come walking towards the stables, as I might from the house yonder, but before they reached it, they would whistle thus—do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," replied the other, "and a curious whistle it is!"

"It is a military whistle," said Jack. "Now, I was going to say that I have known an officer whistle like that when he has been a dozen yards from the stable, and by the time he reached the door, there would be his horse already saddled, and in readiness for him to mount."

"Lawks, sir! Now, that does surprise me! If it had not been a gentleman like you as had told me—a hossifer in the army—I should have said straight up and down—that's a lie!"

"But it is the truth," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Now, I can see that you are rather clever in the way of saddling and bridling horses, and I am much inclined to think that you could manage it if you tried. Now, look here—take that!"

Jack pressed a crown-piece in the ostler's hand as he spoke.

"My two friends are quite as fond of military ways as I am, so that when we come out of the house I will give a whistle—so——and if you can have the horses ready by the time we reach the stable door in true military style, why, I'll stand a guinea!"

The ostler's face expanded into a smile, and his eyes twinkled, as he said:

"I will practise it. I don't think as any o' them army chaps can get the better o' I in the matter of saddling a horse."

"Well, we shall see," said Sixteen-String Jack. "If the horses are ready by the time we reach the stable-door, there's a guinea for you."

"All right, sir! Shall you be staying long? I ax because of feeding the hosses."

"Oh! give them plenty to eat and drink. We shall probably stay here until evening."

"All right, sir!"

Sixteen-String Jack left the stable and went towards the inn.

As soon as his back was turned, the ostler rubbed his hands together, and his countenance assumed an expression of very great satisfaction.

"I shall earn the guinea to-day!" he said, with a chuckle. "Blest if I shan't do him! I wasn't born yesterday, and I do believe I am up to a thing or two! Why, it's as easy as can be! As soon as ever it begins to get dusk like, I shall saddle and bridle the horses already, and as soon as I hears him whistle, why, out I comes, and the guinea's mine!"

The ostler at the Wheatsheaf always had an idea that he was a very clever fellow, but he never was so assured of his cleverness and never so well satisfied with himself as he was upon that occasion.

He chuckled over it incessantly, and never dreamt that Sixteen-String Jack just meant him to get the horses saddled and bridled in readiness, and nothing more, though, if the highwayman had simply said so, the suspicions of the ostler might have been aroused.

When Sixteen-String Jack entered the house, he found his two comrades were seated in a very comfortable room, in which a young girl was laying the cloth for breakfast.

Some cold beef and ham were brought in, and a huge tankard of foaming ale.

This last was brought in by the landlord himself, and, in pursuance with the plan they had agreed upon, Tom King said:

"That looks splendid ale, landlord—brewed in October, I should think."

"You're right, sir! That was the very month it was brewed in, and though I say it myself, it is as good ale as ever was drawn out of a barrel."

"I have no doubt of it," said Tom King. "Pour some into the cups, and fill one for yourself."

"Well, gentlemen, since you are so kind, I really don't mind if I do take a cup. It's the only drink I am fond of. Here's good health to you all, gentlemen!"

"And here's prosperity to the Wheatsheaf!" said the three highwaymen, as they put the cups to their lips. But they did not begin to drink until they saw the landlord swallow the whole of his at one draught.

This gave them confidence, and they commenced their breakfast.

They were quite sure there was nothing of an injurious nature in that ale, so they drank freely and with pleasure, for the abominable drug they had taken had left a parching thirst behind.

When breakfast was over, the landlord was summoned, and Tom King said:

"We have travelled without taking scarcely any rest since sunrise yesterday morning, so you may easily suppose we are very tired; and now we have partaken of your good cheer, we never felt more inclined to rest in our lives. We are going on as far as London, and we shall be obliged to take a rest somewhere before we reach it."

"That's quite true," said the landlord, "and though I say it myself, you won't find many places where you can rest so well as at the Wheatsheaf."

"I have no doubt of that; so that, if you can accommodate us with a bed each we shall be much obliged."

"Well, gentlemen, it so happens that my wife is ill, and she is in the best room."

"We would not disturb her for the world!"

"Well, gentlemen, there is but one other room that is well enough furnished for such as you, but that room is a large one, and has two beds in it, so if you would not mind ——"

"Not at all—not at all—it will suit us very well—in fact, we should prefer a double-bedded room."

"Very good, gentlemen, and would you like to lie down and go to sleep at once?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go and have the room got ready. I shall only be a few moments."

The landlord left the room as he spoke, and then Tom King, turning to his two comrades, said:

"What do you think of the landlord, and our present quarters?"

"We think we have been very lucky."

"So do I," replied Tom King. "Anybody could see at a glance that this landlord is a well-meaning man; there is no treachery about him—none in the least—and we are as safe here as we possibly could be anywhere."

"I am inclined to think so myself," said Sixteen-String Jack, "though, as a matter of precaution, I have made an arrangement with the ostler by which I can have the horses ready saddled at the stable door the moment I give a whistle."

He then told his comrades the manner in which he had made this arrangement with the ostler, at which they laughed most heartily.

"It is a delightfully quiet place," said Claude Duval. "Surely peace and content will be found here if anywhere. Who could imagine officers making their appearance here?"

"I would much rather not imagine it," said Tom King; "but hush, here comes the landlord!"

He entered as Tom spoke.

"The room is all ready, gentlemen, if you would be kind enough to follow me. If it is not so luxurious as you are accustomed to find rooms, you must not blame me.

"Certainly not! It will suit us, never fear. There is no need for you to make any apologies."

The landlord seemed well pleased with the manner in which his guests spoke, and yet every now and then he glanced furtively at them, and whenever he had a chance of doing so, without exciting suspicion, he looked them full in the face.

The highwaymen noticed this, but thought nothing of it, for it seemed only right that a person, having such an open countenance as the landlord had, should look those he addressed straight in the face.

He led the way up a flight of stairs to the room that was on the first floor, and at the back of the house.

It was a large apartment with two windows in it, one of which looked into the yard at the back of the house, and the other, being placed in the gable end of the building, commanded a very extensive view of the country beyond

"Is there anything more that you require, gentlemen?" asked the landlord, as he stood on the threshold, holding the knob of the door in his hand.

"Nothing more," said Tom King.

"Then I hope you will rest well, gentlemen. Would you like to be called at any particular hour?"

"No, we will sleep on until we are refreshed. When we awake we will have something to eat and continue our journey to London."

"Very good—all preparations shall be made."

The landlord closed the door of the room after him and descended the stairs.

Our three friends only partially undressed themselves and then lay down on the outside of the bed.

After a brief conversation, they all fell off into a sound sleep, which the silence of the room, the effects of the drug, and the strong ale they had lately drank conspired to make as profound as possible.

CHAPTER DLVII.

THE LANDLORD OF THE WHEATSHEAF RECOGNISES THE HIGHWAYMEN, AND DISPATCHES THE OSTLER TO THE NEXT TOWN TO FETCH THE POLICE OFFICERS.

Tom King and his two comrades would not have slumbered so peacefully as they did, had they been able to understand the exact state of affairs in the old Wheatsheaf Inn.

The landlord had quite won their hearts by his affable, open-hearted way, but they would have changed their opinion had they been able to see him as he descended the stairs.

His face assumed a very frightful expression, and he kept continually muttering something between his teeth.

The highwaymen's uneasiness would have been still further increased had they perceived him enter the bar of the inn and go to an old-fashioned bureau, which was placed in a recess near the fire-place, and opening it, take therefrom a packet of miscellaneous papers. The landlord of the Wheatsheaf was able to read, an accomplishment which in those days was very much rarer than it is now.

In consequence of this, he carefully treasured up every printed piece of paper that came in his way, and the bundle he held in his hand formed a collection that he had been many years in making, for, in that remote region, printed documents of any kind were uncommon.

Anyone would have laughed had they been able to look over the landlord's shoulder at the incongruous mass of papers. Many of them were devoid of the slightest possible amount of value or of interest.

Deliberately setting his spectacles on his nose, the landlord turned over these precious papers until at length he came to one, which he selected from the heap and perused with great attention.

At every few words he would pause and consider it; with a satisfied nod he would then proceed.

In this manner he continued to read until he had read every word which was printed on the paper.

He then sat down upon a chair, gasping for breath.

At last he managed to utter his thoughts aloud.

"Ah!" he said, "they told me no good would come of hoarding up these papers; but time, that proves all things, proves that I am right and they are wrong. I am right! —I am sure of it! I am certain there is no mistake. However, to settle the matter, I will read the paper again."

The landlord did so.

As the reader may perhaps have surmised, the document which he held in his hand was one of those bills which had been so extensively circulated a short time back offering a reward, amounting to two thousand five hundred pounds, for the apprehension of the four highwaymen. It contained a minute and accurate description of their personal appearance, and the landlord read every word of this portion of the bill with great attention.

When he had done so, he was brought more irresistibly to the conclusion that the three travellers who were upstairs asleep were no other than the three notorious highwaymen, for whose capture no less than fifteen hundred pounds was offered.

He had looked at our friends carefully at various

times, and found that their appearance exactly corresponded with the descriptions set down.

"Now," he said to himself, "what shall I do? Would it be right for me to let fifteen hundred pounds go by when I might have it with very little trouble? Certainly not. Why, with such a sum as that I shall be able to make my fortune—I am sure of it. Fifteen hundred pounds is a large amount, and worth a little risk. The chance of earning such a sum does not occur every day!"

The landlord ruminated for some time, and puzzled his brains to think what was the best way to proceed.

At last he determined to call the ostler, and take him into his confidence.

He would then be able to dispatch him to the nearest town for a body of police officers, and if good speed was made they would be able to reach the inn before the highwaymen had left it, though, as Tom King had correctly stated, the nearest town was nearly twenty miles off.

"I will go to the stable," said the landlord. "Tom is sure to be there, and he shall start off at once."

Accordingly the landlord left the bar, and directed his steps towards the stable.

Upon crossing the threshold, what was his astonishment to perceive the ostler capering about as though completely overjoyed, and occasionally pausing to sing some fragment of a song.

The landlord was surprised to see the ostler behaving in this manner, and for a moment or two stood stock still with astonishment, gazing upon him.

"Tom," he roared, at length, "what on earth are you after now? Have you taken leave of your senses?"

Upon hearing his master's voice, the ostler suddenly ceased.

"Beg your pardon, master," he said. "I didn't see you were at the door. I was having a little bit of fun to myself like, that was all."

"You seem in wonderful spirits. But I can't stop to talk to you now. There is something very important for you to do, and if you do it properly, why, you will earn a good round sum."

The ostler broke out into another exultant dance.

"I am in luck's way to-day, master, and no mistake! What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to ride over to the town, and——"

"Can't, master!" said the ostler, interrupting. "Can't leave the stable on no account to-day! I have got something important to do, master!"

"Can't leave the stable! Why not? You must!"

The ostler shook his head.

"I say you must! You must saddle a horse, and gallop for your life to the police station, and bring back all the officers you can find as quickly as you can."

"Lawks, master! what for?"

"Why, there are highwaymen in the house! Fifteen hundred pounds—that's the reward, Tom! I have got 'em all safe! So jump on a horse, and make haste, and you will come in for a share of the reward!"

Tom staggered back until he came to the corn bin, upon which he sat down with too much suddenness to be at all pleasant.

"Highwaymen!" he said. "Those three gentlemen what belong to those horses?"

"Yes."

The ostler burst out into a loud laugh.

"Lawks, master! what's you at now? You're making a mistake!"

"What do you mean by laughing at me in that fashion? I am making no mistake!"

"Oh, yes you are, if you are thinking those three gentlemen are highwaymen! I know they ain't!"

"How do you?"

"Because I know what they are."

"What are they?"

"Hossifers," he said—"real millingtary hossifers!"

The positive, deliberate way in which Tom, the ostler, spoke rather staggered the landlord, and he began to wonder whether he had not been deceived by some accidental resemblance.

"Officers!" he said—"officers!"

"No, not officers!" said the ostler, dogmatically. "I said hossifers—that's what they are—sogers that ride on hosses! That's why they call 'em hossifers—millingtary hossifers, because ain't they always milling when they go to battle?"

"Hold your stupid tongue, and pay attention to what I say! How do you know that they are military officers?"

"I does know it."

"But how?"

"Because the gentleman told me so."

"You idiot!"

"Ha! mind what you are saying on, master. I'm no more idiot nor you!"

"Yes you are; they'd tell a fool like you anything, because you'd believe it! I tell you they are not officers, they are highwaymen, and there are fifteen hundred pounds offered for their capture!"

"Well, how do you know that, master?"

"I do know it."

"I said that to you, but you were not satisfied. I've told you how I know them to be millingtary hossifers. Now, tell me how you know them to be highwaymen?"

"I tell you I am sure of it."

"Now, look here, master. Did you get it out o' some o' them papers? Did some o' them papers tell you?"

"Yes."

"I thought so—blest if I didn't!" said the ostler, with a grin of contempt. "You must be a fool to take notice o' them papers! I always said so, and I'll stick to it!"

"You are the fool, Tom—papers are above your comprehension!"

"And a precious good thing too, master, I think; I wouldn't be led away by a lot o' black and white marks like you are."

"I tell you they are highwaymen, and you may either obey my orders and go and fetch the police officers or take notice and leave this day month!"

"But master, I can't leave."

"Why not?"

"Why, I am going to do things in the millingtery style and earn a guinea!"

"You're drunk, Tom—you've been having something to drink! Why don't you talk sense?"

"I am talking sense. Don't you think I know what the hossifer said to me?"

"What did he say?"

"Well, master, since you think I'm a fool, I'll tell you all about it, and when I've done that, you'll say I'm not such a fool as you think I am."

"Go on, then."

"Well, master, the gentleman told me he had been in the army, and liked to have things done in the millingtary style, and how all the hosses was saddled by the word of command. He said if the man in the stable heard his hossifer whistle when he was a dozen yards off, he would have the hoss saddled and bridled by the time he got to the stable door. So said he, 'If you'll do the same, as we're very fond of the millingtary style, you shall have a guinea."

"Why, you ——"

"Stop a bit, master! I know'd you'd say it's impossible for me to saddle three horses while anyone walked a dozen yards. It would be impossible for anyone not so clever as I am. Don't you see, master, I shall saddle the horses all ready, and when he whistles, why, out I shall go like a shot."

"You d—d fool, what a thick head you must have to be sure!"

"Ha, master! What do you mean?"

"Why, I mean if you did that you would be just putting a rope round your neck—you'd be assisting those highwaymen to escape, and that would be felony, and you'd get your neck stretched, and serve you well right!"

The ostler was silent for a moment, and by his manner one could tell that his intellects were confused.

At last he said:

"Master, I am surprised at you: I always have said that those papers would turn you mad, and I'm blest if they haven't done it!"

"Take notice," cried the landlord, in a furious passion—"take notice—you shall leave this day month! I would not have such a pig-headed fellow about my place!"

"All right, master, I can go; but I shall just appeal to you in this way, and ask you one question. Look here now! Which would you sooner do, believe a gentleman when he told you he was a millingtary hossifer, or would you sooner believe what it said on one o' them papers?"

"Why, I would sooner believe what was on the papers, of course! What can't speak can't lie!"

"Don't know about that, master—I believe the gentleman, and I am going to earn my guinea!"

"Now, Tom," said the landlord, "I should like to bring you to reason if I could. You took particular notice of that gentleman that told you he was a military officer, didn't you?"

"I did, master."

"Well, then, he is no other than Sixteen-String Jack the highwayman, and I can prove it."

The ostler was staggered at this; but resolved not to give way, he said:

"Go on, master. I will sit down the while; for that will take a good deal of proving, I rather think."

"Now, I will read what it says on this paper," said the landlord, producing the bill from his pocket.

The ostler uttered a groan of derision and contempt.

"This is the description of Sixteen-String Jack:—'Rather short, fair complexion, long light-coloured hair, a steeple-crowned hat, scarlet coat trimmed with gold lace, blue vest, white breeches, and top boots; to the top of the boots are tied sixteen ribbons.' Now, Tom, that's what it says on the paper, and does it agree with the appearance of the man you call a military officer?"

"Millingtary hossifer, I said," replied the ostler, scratching his head. "It do correspond—I do admit that."

"Oh, you do?"

"Yes. I wish I could read papers myself. I don't like to give in; but I am afraid you're right, after all."

"I am right. No one could help recognising him after such a description as that. Well, for that very man there is a reward of five hundred pounds offered, and five hundred pounds for each of the others."

"Now, Tom, I'll tell you what I'll do if you will gallop over to the next town, and come back here with the police officers before dark,—I'll give you a ten-pound note, and that whether they are the right persons or not. Will you agree to that?"

"I will, master! That's a clear profit of nine pounds, so of course I could not refuse, and I had sooner take the word of one that I know, than the word of one that I don't."

"Very well, then, Tom. If you will go and fetch the officers and be back before dark, you shall have the ten-pound note."

"Let's shake hands, master! I am agreed, and I'm off! But drat it all, I should like to know whether they intended to make a fool of I!"

"Of course they did, and when they had got their horses you might have whistled for your guinea, for you'd never have got it."

"Well, I'll go, master, for I can't be wrong, anyway. You're sure you'll give me ten pounds?"

"Certain."

Upon receiving this assurance, the ostler saddled and bridled a horse with a speed that would have elicited the admiration of the highwaymen,

He scrambled into his seat, gave the horse a cut with a short stick that he carried, and away he went at full gallop.

"If he kept up the speed he was going at, he would reach the next town in something considerably less than two hours.

CHAPTER DLVIII.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN INCUR MUCH DANGER AT THE WHEATSHEAF INN.

In the meanwhile, the three highwaymen slumbered on peacefully and calmly, dreaming many strange and fantastic dreams, but never suspecting that they were in such imminent danger

It was growing dusk, when Tom King suddenly awoke, and sat straight up in the bed.

He had heard something, and now listened intently

The murmuring of voices came plainly upon his ear, and without saying a word, he slipped off the bed and went to the window.

He looked out, but was not able to see anything, though the murmuring of voices still continued.

Of course the first thought that entered his mind was that he was threatened with some danger.

Rapidly but noiselessly, he turned the little button which secured the window, and opened it a little way.

By projecting his head a little, he was able to see below him a group of dark figures.

By straining his sense of hearing to the utmost, he heard some one say:

"Keep a sharp look-out on all the windows and doors, and as soon as you see them appear, rush forward and seize them. In the meanwhile, I will go upstairs with half a dozen more, and try to get into their room!"

Tom King did not wait to hear any more, but instantly awoke his two comrades, and in as few words as he could he explained the nature of the danger to them.

"Our landlord, then, is not quite such an amiable individual as we took him to be," said Claude Duval.

"What had we better do?"

"I don't know. You may depend the inn is thoroughly surrounded and well guarded, so that how we are to escape is more than I can tell."

"We must be quick," said Sixteen-String Jack. "I don't know whether my agreement with the ostler will hold good, or whether he has had a hand in summoning these police officers. That, however, we shall see."

"Come to the window," said Tom King, "and look out. Be careful that they do not see you."

Claude and Jack obeyed.

Peeping cautiously down into the yard, they managed to perceive the dusky forms of two men, who were stationed almost immediately underneath.

The others had disappeared.

To have attempted to escape by passing through the window would have been little short of madness, for it was quite certain they could not do so without being seen by the two men on the watch.

In the meantime Tom King had gone to the other window which looked on the back of the premises, and opened that as well.

He was rejoiced to find that there was outside this window a kind of rude balcony, or veranda, which extended right and left along the back of the inn.

He lost no time in communicating this discovery to his friends, and said:

"There are two men underneath this window, as well, I have no doubt, but yet I think we might manage to crawl out into the balcony without being seen or heard. If we do this quickly, the officers, when they open the door, will find this room empty."

"Try it, Tom. You creep out first, we will follow."

In order to avoid being seen, Tom King crouched down as low as he could, and crept on to the balcony.

Claude and Jack soon followed him, and then they closed the window.

It would have required a very keen eye to have detected them lying still on the floor of the balcony.

They looked right and left, in order to decide which would be the best way to take, and finally decided upon keeping to the left.

They crept along, and, after going a few yards, reached its extremity, and were unable to go any further.

Just then they heard a prodigious uproar in the room they had left, and then both windows were flung violently open by the police officers.

"Have you seen them?" they cried,—"they are not in the room. Have you seen them escape?"

As a matter of course, the attention of all the men below was at once concentrated upon these two windows.

Tom saw his opportunity, and, touching Claude upon the arm, he said:

"Now!"

He climbed over the railing of the balcony as he spoke with marvellous rapidity, and, hanging at the full length of his arms, dropped to the ground.

Claude and Jack speedily followed, but, unfortunately, they were seen by those officers who stood at the back window, and who had to some extent recovered from their first panic.

They all had pistols in their hands, and, without staying for instructions, rapidly brought them to the level, and fired

But they produced no effect, as the highwaymen changed their positions so quickly, and, before the smoke proceeding from the discharge had cleared away, they were all three standing upon the ground beneath.

The police officers all rushed on to the balcony, and hastened to that corner of it from which the highwaymen had descended.

These occurrences were quite sufficient to put those below on the alert.

"To the stable!" cried Tom King,—"be quick! If we can only get our horses, all will be well!"

Just at that moment a terrific crash came upon their ears, and, looking round, they saw that the balcony had given way and precipitated the whole of the officers into the yard

The woodwork of which the balcony was constructed was old and rotten, and quite inadequate to support the weight of so many persons, and so all at once it gave way before the officers were aware of it.

In the twinkling of an eye they were all lying in a confused heap upon the ground, struggling and fighting to regain their feet.

This proceeding diverted the attention of the other officers, and the three highwaymen took all the advantage they could of the opportunity.

The stable door was only a few yards distant, and they ran rapidly towards it.

Just as they reached the threshold, they were confronted by several police officers, who made their appearance from within, and who rushed forward, intent upon making a capture.

Our friends did not wait for an attack to be made upon them, but at once turned round and fled.

They had seen already that the officers were too numerous for them to stand the least chance of obtaining the victory in a contest, so they wisely resolved to retreat. It was a dark night, and they hoped that, under cover of the obscurity, they should be able to escape.

If they had had their horses with them, the matter would have been simple enough. It was necessary that they should obtain possession of them, but how they were to do this was more than they could tell.

At the present moment, all they had to think about was distancing those who were pursuing them.

By this time most of the others had recovered themselves and had joined in the pursuit.

Several who had been seriously injured by the fall of the balcony still lay upon the ground.

"We must run out of the yard gates!" said Sixteen-String Jack,—"there is no other outlet."

Accordingly, they ran in this direction; but, to their extreme annoyance, just as they were about to rush into the high-road, an officer closed the gates and planted his back against them.

Claude Duval made a rush forward and seized the officer by the throat.

With an effort of strength he drew him away from his position, and Tom King and Jack instantly opened the gates.

No sooner were they opened than Claude dragged the man out into the road, and Tom King slammed the gate shut just as the other officers reached it.

Could they but have secured it in some way they would have gained a considerable advantage, but on the outer side there were no fastenings whatever.

The officer Claude Duval had seized clung to him with desperate tightness, and it was evident that he was determined not to release his hold until assistance arrived.

But he was no match for Claude, who, doubling up his fist, struck him a heavy blow upon the head, which at once deprived him of his senses.

By the time this was done, however, the officers had opened the gates, and the position of the highwaymen seemed no better than before.

All three felt anxious in the extreme, but they resolved to run for their lives.

With great fleetness they speed onwards, but stopped before they had gone many yards.

Close to the front door of the inn was one police officer who had been left there in charge of the horses.

"Now we have a chance," said Tom King, breathlessly. "Let us take a horse each! We must not stop to mount, or the officers will be upon us; you must seize hold of the pummel of the saddle and let the horses gallop on, and then swing yourselves into the saddle while they are in motion."

This looked a most desperate feat to attempt, but it was the only chance of safety they possessed.

But it is wonderful what men can do when their lives

About fourteen horses were standing all together in perfect readiness for the road.

The highwaymen chose three at random, and seizing hold of the saddle with one hand, struck them several sharp blows upon the flank with the other hand, which caused the horses to set off at a swift gallop.

Clinging to the saddles, the highwaymen ran along by the side of them, until at last they were able, by a sudden spring, to seat themselves in the saddles.

This feat is by no means so difficult as it seems to be, as it is continually performed in all circuses.

The officers were not a little surprised when they saw the highwaymen escape in this manner.

They had almost made sure of capturing them, but now their chances of doing so had materially diminished.

Still, after having had so much trouble, they did not feel at all inclined to give up the chase. On the contrary, they felt stimulated to make even greater exertions.

Having run through the gate, they hastened to the horses, and some half dozen of them scrambled into the saddle and commenced an immediate pursuit.

They were not much behind the highwaymen, who had not been successful in obtaining much of a start.

They spurred their horses in a perfectly barbarous manner, and so managed to gain slightly upon our friends, who discovered that their horses were by no means of the best quality, and therefore deemed it unwise to exhaust them at once.

So long as their pursuers did not gain too much upon them, they were satisfied.

As usual, Tom King took the lead, for he was much better acquainted with that part of the country than either of his comrades.

In a very little while the wisdom of the course which they had adopted became apparent.

The officers' horses, thoroughly worn out, refused to pay the least obedience to the spur, and, although their riders gored them most cruelly, they could not accelerate their speed.

The highwaymen were much rejoiced to perceive this, for their own horses flagged considerably.

This is not to be wondered at when it is considered that the officers galloped them twenty miles at the top of their speed, and they had not stood long enough at the inn to recover their lost wind.

Our friends still pushed on in the open country, nor did they venture to come to a halt until they were quite certain that they stood in very little danger of being overtaken by their foes.

After congratulating themselves upon their escape from their perilous situation, a discussion was held as to what was to be done.

They were very loath to part with their own horses, which were valuable and excellent animals, while those belonging to the officers which they now bestrode would be quite useless to carry them out of danger.

It seemed, however, that they would have to resign themselves to their loss, for what possibility was there of their being able to regain them?

To return to the inn would be a hazardous thing to attempt, and then very likely the officers, upon being deprived of their cattle, would retaliate by taking possession of those which the highwaymen had left behind them.

CHAPTER DLIX.

DICK TURPIN FINDS DANGER ON THE WAY TO THE DESERTED MANSION.

As Tom King and his two comrades are, for the time being, tolerably safe, we feel that we can leave them while we turn to the proceedings of Dick Turpin.

After bidding Maud farewell, and passing through the gate which led into the high-road, Dick Turpin slackened the reins upon Black Bess's neck, and the gallant creature at once set off at a rapid gallop, which, however, she performed with the greatest ease.

She was in most excellent condition, and Dick felt that he could rely upon her powers to the utmost.

She had rested for an entire day, and had been supplied with as much good food as she could eat.

Her rider felt that, should any emergency arise, he



[DICK TURPIN HEARS AN ALARMING SOUND ON THE STAIRCASE IN THE DESERTED MANSION.]

should be able to rely upon her powers with the greatest confidence.

At an easy gallop, then, which did not distress his bonny mare in the least, and yet took him over the ground at a wonderful rate, Dick Turpin made his way in as direct a line as he could to the deserted mansion.

The enterprise he was about to go upon was one of very great danger, and he knew it; still he would have incurred the peril, great as it was, merely for the sake of obtaining possession of the money that had been left behind; but in addition to this he had to meet his three comrades, who, for aught he knew, had already arrived, and might have fallen unknowingly into some great danger, or at any rate were uneasy at his absence.

By calculating the time which it would take them to go to the New Forest and back, Dick fancied he should be there before them, and so be able to warn them of their danger.

As the reader knows full well, he had no reason to be apprehensive about the result of their return, for owing to the singular circumstances that had taken place, and the series of misfortunes they had met with, Tom King and his two companions had been very much longer on their journey than could have been calculated upon.

Dick was sad and somewhat anxious when he started, but he soon experienced great invigoration from his gallop along the country high-road, and in a little while his heart grew as light as ever it had been.

When mounted upon the back of Black Bess he seemed to forget everything else, and to give himself up entirely to the enjoyment which he felt.

Every now and then he would pat her caressingly upon the neck, and address her almost as he would have done a human being.

We will not go so far as to say that the gallant mare understood his words, but she comprehended the tone, and each time she would show her satisfaction by giving a faint neigh.

He journeyed on for a long distance without meeting with one single traveller. Notwithstanding the errand he was upon, he had made up his mind not to allow any travellers to pass him without first paying toll.

He had not come in sight of a habitation since he had left the farm-house; but suddenly, upon taking a bend in the lane, he saw before him the clean thatched roof of a cottage.

"There is a house," he murmured,—"I suppose now I shall not be long before I find some people. Hallo! What on earth is that?"

He uttered these last words with great abruptness, and brought Black Bess to a sudden stop.

The sound which had struck upon his ears was a loud and piercing shriek, evidently from female lips.

It lasted scarcely more than a second, but so shrill was it that it seemed to pierce through the highwayman's brain.

The silence that followed was something remarkable.

Dick looked around him in uncertainty and bewilderment, for he could not take upon himself precisely to say from what direction the sound had come.

"It must be from that cottage," he cried. "Some one is in distress—that is certain. It is no business of mine, and yet by interfering I may be able to help those who are unable to help themselves."

As he made this reflection, there came another shriek, but it seemed to be stifled, by some means or other, almost as soon as it was uttered.

This time Dick felt certain the scream came from the interior of the cottage.

It was close by, and half a dozen bounds forward that Black Bess gave when he loosened the rein brought him to the door.

The sound of some kind of struggle going on within came plainly to his ears, and, without a moment's hesitation he slipped from the saddle, and knowing that Black Bess would not stray away, did not secure her, but burst open the door.

The scene which he beheld was so surprising a one, that, for a moment at least, he remained rooted to the spot with surprise.

The interior of the cottage was brilliantly lighted up by a large fire that was burning on the hearthstone, and by the aid of this light, Dick Turpin was able to see with great distinctness.

Seated in a chair, to which she was evidently bound, was a young, simple-looking girl, apparently a servant.

Standing before her, with his hand pressed roughly and tightly over her mouth, and holding a pistol near her head, was a man, whose costume closely resembled that which Dick Turpin himself wore.

His back was turned towards the door, so Turpin could not see his face.

"Now, girl," said the man, in a rough voice, "I have told you who I am, and beware! I am Dick Turpin, and you know when I say a thing I always keep my word. Tell me this instant where it is that your master and mistress keep their money. If you do not, I will blow your brains out as surely as this is a pistol I hold in my hand!"

It would be difficult, we imagine, for the reader to form any idea of the astonishment which Dick Turpin experienced when he heard these words.

He almost doubted whether he was in his proper senses, and whether he had heard aright.

It was clear his intrusion had not been noticed by either of the persons before him, and, after the man who had styled himself "Dick Turpin" had spoken, the girl closed her eyes, and seemed about to swoon.

Perceiving this, the man removed his hand from her mouth in order to allow her to breathe more freely; but the moment he did so, the girl took advantage of the opportunity to utter another piercing shriek.

With a horrible oath, the ruffian thrust his hand violently into her face again, and would probably have renewed his threat, had not Dick Turpin at this moment bounded forward and seized him by the neck.

No sooner did the rascal feel this sudden grasp upon his neck than he dropped the pistol and uttered a yell of fear.

He would even have sunk down upon the ground, had not Dick by main force held him up.

"Mercy, mercy!" cried the false Dick Turpin. "Oh! dear, kind sir, have mercy upon me! It was only a little joke, I assure you—nothing but a joke! Spare me, good, kind sir,—have mercy upon me!"

"Silence!" said Dick, in a voice that made the villain's craven heart almost leap into his mouth. "Silence, I say! If you disobey my commands, you will be a dead man the next moment!"

He uttered a groan, and all the strength seemed suddenly to depart from his limbs; his whole body grew limp, and Dick Turpin having released his hold, he fell in a muddled-up heap upon the ground.

Dick coolly picked up the pistol the man had dropped, and put it into his pocket; at the same time he produced another from his belt.

"I don't know whether your pistol was loaded," he said, "but this one is. If you stir hand or foot, or utter a sound except when I bid you, I will fire!"

"No, no—good sir!—spare my life—have mercy! I'll be silent—I will be still—I will do anything if you will but spare my life!"

Dick Turpin made up his mind to investigate this matter thoroughly, and, glancing around him, he perceived, stretching from one beam of the cottage to another, a strong piece of rope.

He took possession of it in a moment, and, cutting it to a convenient length, bound the man's hands and feet securely with it.

The rascal groaned incessantly while this was going on, in spite of Dick's commands for silence.

There was another piece of rope close by, suspended from beam to beam in the same manner, and, wishing to make his captive quite secure, Dick seized this also.

By the side of the fireplace was an old-fashioned staircase.

There was no door at the foot of it, as is generally seen, but it ascended from the floor of the room.

It was defended by some old-fashioned bannisters, and to a stout one, at the foot, Dick resolved to tie his prisoner.

He did so, binding him in such a manner that he could not possibly have got free without pulling down the whole staircase and carrying it at his heels.

Feeling that his prisoner was safe, Dick turned his attention to the girl in the chair.

A few strokes with his knife soon set her free from the chair to which she had been bound, and no sooner had he done so, than he had the satisfaction of perceiving that she was recovering from the swoon into which she had fallen.

"You are safe," he said. "All is well—you have nothing to fear now, so be still and silent. Look, there is the rascal tied safe to the staircase. He cannot harm you."

While Dick Turpin uttered these assuring words, the young girl glanced in the direction of the stairs, and there, sure enough, she saw the man bound hand and foot.

"Now, my good girl," continued Dick, "just tell me what you can about this affair."

"Yes, sir—oh yes, sir, I will indeed! I am so glad you happened to come in! I was almost frightened to death, and I do believe that in another moment he would have murdered me."

The girl trembled and spoke hastily.

Dick tried to soothe her.

"Go on," he said, "you are in no danger now While I stand by, you need not be afraid that anyone will harm you in the least."

"Oh, thanks, sir—thanks! You have saved my life, for I would have allowed him to murder me rather than have told him what he wanted to know! I was all alone in this house by myself. My master and mistress have gone to the next town, which is a long way off. They left me to mind the house. I was expecting them to return every moment, when that man suddenly broke in, and tied me to the chair before I could resist, for he almost frightened me to death, and then he said he would shoot me if I did not tell him where my master kept his money. I shrieked for aid, but I little thought that help would so soon come."

"It was fortunate you did cry out," said Dick, "otherwise I should have passed by without knowing anything about it."

"I am glad, too, sir, for master placed me here in trust,

to take care of the house for him. He has gone to market, and ought to have been back before this."

"Don't be alarmed; some trifling thing has probably detained him. Calm yourself—I want to have a few words with this individual here."

"Be careful, sir—oh, be careful! He is Dick Turpin—he told me so—and there is no knowing what he may do."

Dick gave a peculiar smile as he said:

"I will be careful, depend upon it."

He turned round to his prisoner as he spoke.

The man uttered a groan.

"Now," said Dick, "tell me who you are at once. Hold up your head and look at me. Who are you, I say? Answer my question, or I fire! Who are you?"

"D—D—Dick Turpin—s—sir!"

"Liar! That is not your name, and you know it! You are a base, cowardly hound! Dick Turpin would never take advantage of a girl in the way that you have done."

The man was silent.

"Upon one condition," said Dick, fiercely, "and on one condition only, will I spare your life. Tell me truly, whether you did or did not some time back commit a robbery in a cottage on the borders of Epping Forest? Speak the truth, or you die!"

"Y—yes, sir, I did!"

"And on that occasion, did you and the rascals who were with you ruthlessly and barbarously put an old woman on the fire, and hold her there until she disclosed the place where her money was concealed?"

The man hesitated.

"Be careful how you reply—upon your answer depends your life! As soon as you speak, I shall know whether what you say is true. If it is false, you die instantly!"

"I did, sir!" was the reply.

Dick Turpin ground his teeth, and took one step forward in so menacing a manner that the villain uttered a yell of fright.

"I said I would spare your life," said Dick, suddenly checking himself, "and I will not go from my word; but such a monster—such a fiend in human shape as you are, should not be allowed to encumber the face of the earth. Whoever trampled the life out of your base carcass would be doing humanity a service."

Dick turned away in disgust.

The admission which the man had made was some slight satisfaction to him, but not much.

He saw clearly enough, however, that many deeds would be imputed to him of which he was perfectly innocent.

Rascals like the one who stood trembling before him, knowing the fear which was produced by the bare pronunciation of his name, would take advantage of that circumstance to commit robberies which otherwise they would not have the courage to attempt.

It was a matter in which he was quite powerless; he could not prevent people from doing this.

Now that he had given his word, he never thought of slaying this man for an instant, and yet he was reluctant in the extreme to allow him to escape without receiving due punishment.

"He shall not play the part of Dick Turpin with impunity," he muttered to himself; "he shall learn that there are pains and penalties connected with the assumption of the character. I can see now how to make him suffer. To fetch the officers myself would be impossible, but this girl will go."

He turned round as he made this reflection, and addressing the servant, he said:

"My good girl, I am on urgent business, and cannot afford to lose a single moment; the time I have already lost may be of serious consequence to me. If I could, I would hasten off, and not return until I brought the officers of justice with me, who should carry off this wretch, and bestow upon him the fate he so richly merits; but you see he is quite safe here—he cannot escape—he cannot do anyone an injury; therefore run out—obtain police officers yourself, if you can—if not, ask the first person you meet to go upon the errand for you."

By this time the girl had quite recovered from her fright, and having found that the man was perfectly helpless, she took courage and said:

"A thousand thanks, kind sir, for saving my life, and saving my master's property, and telling me what to do! I will go, sir, at once,—you have had trouble enough already."

"It is no trouble," said Dick. "Farewell! You may perhaps meet your master and mistress returning from market; if you do, tell them all, but rest not until that villain is in safe custody."

CHAPTER DLX.

DICK TURPIN SUDDENLY ENCOUNTERS A TROOP OF DRAGOONS ON THE HIGHWAY.

The servant girl repeated her assurances, and then hastily left the cottage in order to seek assistance.

Dick Turpin went up to his prisoner, and carefully examined his bonds.

He found them quite secure, and was certain that by his own exertions the rascal would not be able to get free.

It would have been a great consolation to Dick if he could have seen him in the custody of the police officers, but this was not to be thought of—it would be running rather too much risk; besides, he was anxious to reach the deserted mansion with as little delay as possible.

Accordingly he turned round and left the cottage, closing the door after him.

Black Bess had strayed off down the lane, cropping the sweet green grass that grew beneath the hedgerows.

A faint whistle, however, brought her in a moment to his side, and vaulting into the saddle, Dick Turpin pursued his interrupted journey

The lane was narrow and winding, so that it was impossible for him to see more than a few yards in advance.

Where it led to, he could not precisely take upon himself to say, though he knew he was going in a right direction for his destination.

Black Bess galloped on some little distance further, and then swept round what appeared to be another bend in the lane.

But such was not the case, it was where the lane formed a junction with the high-road.

Had Turpin been aware of this, he would have gone round the corner with greater caution. As it was, he most unexpectedly found himself in the highway.

Then he heard a trampling of horses' feet, and some one cried out in a loud voice:

"Halt!"

The command was not addressed to him, and yet Dick Turpin stopped; if he had not done so, he must have come into violent collision with a troop of dragoons that formed a compact body in the road before him.

The suddenness with which this meeting had taken place filled the highwayman with astonishment.

There he was, face to face with those who had for such a long time been vainly patrolling the roads in the hope of meeting with him.

What was to be done?

To attack so many well-mounted and well-armed men would be the extreme of folly, and to turn and fly would be equally futile, for before he could go many yards he would be riddled by a volley of bullets from their carbines.

It did not take Dick Turpin the thousandth part of a second to make this reflection.

He comprehended the full peril of his position instantly.

"Hallo!" said the voice which had previously given the command to halt. "Who are you? Stand forward at once!"

Dick felt that his only chance of escape was to hoodwink these dragoons in some way, but how it was to be accomplished he had not the remotest idea.

Still, he did not lose his presence of mind, and in order to have time for a moment's thought, he took off his hat and made a low bow to the person who had addressed him, and who beyond doubt was the officer in command of the troop.

"You are not very civil," said Dick, assuming as haughty a tone of voice as he could. "By what right do you stop me on this public road and demand to know who I am?"

The calm manner in which Turpin spoke, and the coolness with which he had brought his horse to a standstill, did more to throw the officer off his guard than anything else.

As they made it a rule to question every mounted man

they met while patrolling the roads, they had of course to speak with civility to those passengers they addressed.

Therefore this officer of dragoons, returning Dick Turpin's salute, said:

"We are here under special orders, and my instructions are to patrol this road and question anyone I may meet or think proper to challenge. We are in search of four highwaymen."

"But you did not take me for one, surely!" said Dick, with great show of indignation. "Do I look like one?"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I am instructed to take every precaution possible. However, I don't wish to detain you; still, it will be necessary that you go through the form of telling me who you are and where you reside."

"I have no objection to doing that, of course," said Dick, "though it is not very pleasant to be stopped on the road in this manner."

"It is not pleasant, I admit," replied the officer, "but, then, what is to be done? Of course you, like everyone else, desire that these highwaymen should be captured?"

"Oh, yes—yes, certainly—yes!" said Dick, who just at that moment was struck with a new and brilliant idea.

"Well, then," said the officer, "if you will just give me your name, you may pass on, and we will trouble you no further."

"I will tell you, and ask you a question at the same time. My name is Sir Dominic Gordon, and I reside at Ludlow, in Herefordshire. And now for the question—Is one of the highwaymen you are in search of called Dick Turpin?"

"Yes—yes!" cried the officer, quickly. "He is the one we are most anxious to capture. Have you seen anything of him?"

"I have," replied Dick. "I can give you some very important information concerning him."

"Indeed, sir!" said the officer, greatly interested, and not suspecting for a moment the identity of the person who was addressing him, for the darkness of the night effectually prevented a recognition. "I shall be most happy to receive any information you can give concerning this notorious offender."

"Well, then," said Dick, with admirable coolness, "I captured him about a quarter of an hour ago."

"Did what?" roared the officer at the top of his voice, as soon as ever he recovered his breath—"did what?"

"Captured him about a quarter of an hour ago; and if you will follow me, I will take you to where he is bound hand and foot, and unable to make a single movement."

"Sir," said the officer, "I hope you are not thinking of playing off any practical joke upon me. If you are, let me dissuade you from it."

"Practical joke?" said Dick. "You will find it a practical reality, if you will take the trouble to follow me!"

"You will excuse my doubts," said the officer, who was completely disconcerted by this startling intelligence, "but it does sound so extraordinary, and is so unexpected."

"Say no more," said Dick; "that is quite sufficient. Would you be kind enough, as we trot along, to inform me what is the exact amount of the reward offered for Dick Turpin?"

"Eh?"

"I asked what is the reward for capturing Dick Turpin, because I intend to lay claim to the whole of it, as I have captured him single-handed and unaided."

"Well," said the officer, "several rewards are offered by various parties; the total amount is fifteen hundred pounds."

"Exactly; I thought so."

"But if we convey the prisoner to Newgate—and the reward cannot be claimed until then,—we shall expect some share."

"All right!" said Dick. "Never fear, I will make that all right with you."

"That contents me a little more," said the officer. "I am heartily glad he is captured at last. I can assure you it is very disagreeable to the feelings of soldiers to find themselves turned into police officers; and the only thing which has ever reconciled me to this has been the prospect of earning the reward."

"I had not thought of that," said Turpin, "but it must be disagreeable to you to hunt about after highwaymen in this way."

"Excessively so. Well, then, as we have come to such a good understanding already, perhaps, as we go along, you would not mind telling me in what manner you managed to effect the capture of this daring individual. You have done that which no one has been able to do yet, though many have tried."

"I found the affair rather easy," said Dick. "I was riding along this lane, and, coming presently to a cottage, I heard a shrill scream from within, and knowing some one must be in distress, I alighted and opened the door, when I saw this redoubtable highwayman, Dick Turpin, holding a pistol to a girl's head, and threatening her with instant death if she did not tell him where her master kept his money."

"Oh! that was it?"

"Yes, just as I say. Seeing how matters stood, I sprang in, seized him by the neck, and bound him hand and foot, before he well knew where he was or what I was about."

"You quite surprise me!" said the officer. "I can't make out how it is you have so easily succeeded. Dick Turpin has kept a dozen men at bay before now, and resisted all their attempts to capture him. I am afraid there is some dreadful mistake. How do you know it was Dick Turpin?"

"I have only his own word for it," said Dick Turpin. "Just when I got to the door, I overheard him saying to the girl, 'My name is Dick Turpin, and when I make a threat I always execute it,' or something to that effect."

"Oh! you heard him say that?"

"Yes, I did—most distinctly."

"And when you had bound him hand and foot, what did you do?"

"Left him in the cottage so that he could not escape, and told the girl to run off for assistance, and not to rest until she had found some police officers. I do not wish to mix myself up any further in the affair. For one thing, the business I am upon is urgent, and delay would be of serious consequence to me; moreover, I felt it would be a disagreeable matter to be mixed up in."

"Well, it might for some persons," said the officer; "but if you will believe me, I should rather like being mixed up in it."

"Then you have your desire. Look, yonder is the cottage; a hundred steps will take us to it."

They passed round one of the bends in the lane as Dick spoke, and he pointed out the thatched roof of the cottage, which was plainly visible.

"And Dick Turpin is in there, is he?" said the officer.

"Yes, beyond all doubt; for, after I had secured him, I merely rode away from the cottage to the top of the lane where I happened to encounter you, so I have not left him very long."

"No—you have not!" said the officer, in quite a gleeful tone of voice, for he looked forward with absolute certainty to taking Dick Turpin to Newgate.

"Hark!" said Dick, "he is there safe enough! Can you hear him bellowing out? No doubt he is endeavouring to summon some of his companions to his assistance in order to escape."

"Let us make haste, then!" the officer said.

He pushed onward, and Dick smiled with satisfaction to think how completely he had succeeded in deceiving these dragoons.

Not only had he been able to get himself out of a very dangerous predicament, but, at the same time, he had managed to have his revenge upon the villain who had had the audacity to personate him.

Some most awful yells, proceeding from the interior of the cottage, now came upon their ears, and the motion of the whole troop was accelerated.

Just as they reached the cottage, however, three other persons arrived upon its threshold.

These were the owner of the cottage, his wife, and the servant girl.

The latter had met the former on their way home from market.

The girl recognised Turpin instantly, and she said, addressing her master and mistress:

"This is the gentleman who saved my life. He has come back, although he said he had particular business to attend to, and could not spare the time."

If any doubts had been lingering about the heart of the

officer of dragoons, these few simple words from the servant girl would have completely dispelled them.

Hastily dismounting, and bidding his troop follow him, he entered the cottage.

Dick Turpin kept close behind him, then came the cottager, his wife, and the servant, while the troop of dragoons brought up the rear.

The fire was not burning quite so brightly as it had been a little while before, and so they were not able to see about them distinctly; but Dick Turpin, advancing to the hearth, kicked the embers together with his foot, and soon a bright blaze sprang up, which revealed everything.

"There he is," said Dick, pointing to the man he had tied to the staircase,—"there he is—behold your prisoner!"

The man uttered another yell of fright, and seemed ready to faint with terror.

"Hurrah!" shouted the dragoons, who were perfectly satisfied when they caught sight of the figure.

The man had evidently been at some pains to make himself resemble the famous highwayman,—he was about the same height, was attired in a similar manner, and wore his hair in the same fashion.

It was a daring thing for Dick to stand in the full glare of the firelight as he did, but he felt confident he was safe; under such circumstances as the present, who would think of taking him for the highwayman?

"So, Dick Turpin, my fine fellow," said the officer of dragoons, addressing the captive, "we've caught you at last, have we? There'll soon be an end to your little games."

"Turpin?" cried the man—"I am not Dick Turpin! I give you my word—I assure you I am not Dick Turpin,—it is all a mistake!"

"Ho, ho!" said the officer, laughing loudly, "that's just exactly what I expected; I never thought you would own who you were. Would not you like to make us believe that you are not Dick Turpin, but somebody else, and set you at liberty? But we are not so green,—oh dear, no—not by any means! But—ha, ha!—it's a good joke!"

The other dragoons burst out into a loud guffaw, in which Dick Turpin heartily joined.

In fact, he laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks; and as for the officer of dragoons, he was fairly compelled to hold his sides.

"It's very funny," he said, "but shoot me if it isn't exactly what I thought he would say! Said I to myself, 'he will swear himself black in the face that he is not Dick Turpin, but somebody else,' and so he did as soon as ever he opened his mouth. It is a good joke, that it is!"

For the last moment or two, the prisoner had kept his eyes fixed upon Dick's countenance.

Then all of a sudden he screamed out:

"Gentlemen all, I am not Dick Turpin—I swear it! but, if you want him, he stands before you! There he is—that's Dick Turpin! I have seen him before, and I will take my oath that it is him any moment! I mean that man there—that one standing by the fire—the one that brought you here. I'll take any oath you think proper to propose that he is Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

CHAPTER DLXI.

DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN COMPLETELY DELUDING THE OFFICER IN COMMAND OF THE TROOP OF DRAGOONS.

ANY other person than Dick Turpin would have been disconcerted by the words to which the man had just given utterance; but, retaining his calmness in the most admirable manner, he slapped the officer of dragoons familiarly on the shoulder, as he said:

"Ha, ha! That's a better joke than the other! The idea of his impudence,—*me* Dick Turpin, indeed! Why, in a minute or two I should not wonder if he doesn't try to make out you are the redoutable highwayman, and not him!"

"Oh, it's too rich!" said the officer—"it's too good, that it is! I always did believe that this Dick Turpin was an extraordinary fellow—I have heard people say so; but after to-night I shall always be able to speak from my own knowledge."

"You will," said Dick, with a peculiar smile. "You rascal!" he added, turning to the prisoner. "How dare you insult me in such a manner? I suppose you wanted to have revenge upon me, if you could, for capturing you!"

"Yes, that's it," said the officer—"of course that's it! Never mind, sir, don't pay any attention to him. He must think us green if he imagined we should take notice of such a tale as that!"

"You are all fools and idiots!" roared the prisoner. "You are letting a reward of fifteen hundred pounds slip through your fingers! I pretended to be Dick Turpin—I don't deny that for a moment; but I am not the real Dick Turpin! I have pretended to be him so that I could rob all the more easily, and I have been found out; but I tell you that man standing beside you is Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

"Better and better!" said the officer of dragoons, who appeared to enjoy the scene mightily. "You are a clever fellow, Dick Turpin, and when anybody says you are not, I shall make bold to contradict them; but although you are clever, I know somebody else that is just a little bit cleverer. Your tale might do with some, but it won't do with me."

"As you say," replied Dick, "it is a most excellent joke. No doubt the rascal would feel exceedingly gratified if he could only have me taken a prisoner to London along with himself—that would be his revenge."

"Of course it would; but he needn't think that I shall do anything of the kind—it isn't very likely. I have read the printed description of Dick Turpin, and from that I have no hesitation in saying that is the man."

"He told me his name was Dick Turpin," said the servant girl, chiming in, "when he was threatening to shoot me because I would not say where the money was. He told me he was Dick Turpin."

"But I was only pretending—I tell you I was only pretending!"

"All right!" said the officer. "I'll take you to Newgate, and if they like to believe you and let you out, why, it will be no affair of mine. But you need not think you will impose upon me, if you are ever so clever."

"He must be a fool to make the attempt," said Dick Turpin. "If he had got the least common sense at all, he would be able to see at a glance that you are not the kind of man to be taken in by anybody."

"I believe you there," said the officer. "They would have to rise *very* early in the morning to get over me."

"That's precisely my opinion," said Dick, with great emphasis.

"Oh," said the man, "to think you should be such fools—to think you should allow yourselves to be so easily imposed upon! But look here—listen to me! I don't want you to let me go!"

"That's all right, then," said the officer. "I was under the impression you did."

"No—take me to Newgate, and welcome! I shan't resist or say a word against it, provided you take that gentleman with you, and when he gets there, if he can prove that he is not Dick Turpin, why then you can do anything with me you like."

"All right, my friend!" said the officer. "We'll take you to Newgate, never fear! But you make a great mistake if you think I shall aid you in your scheme of revenge upon this gentleman."

The man held down his head, and resolved to say no more.

"Now, my lads," said the officer, just untie him from that post, and get him across one of the horses. Be very careful—don't you hurt the poor fellow for the world. We'll soon have him safe inside Newgate."

From the tone in which the officer spoke, the men could tell that he was quite willing to let them play any little prank upon the prisoner if they felt disposed.

While this was going on, Dick Turpin drew the officer aside, and said to him, in a low voice:

"Those who are acquainted with me would tell you that I am the last man to be guilty of flattery in the slightest degree, therefore I hope you will excuse me, and believe me when I say that it is a very long time since anything gave me so much pleasure and satisfaction as I have experienced in making your acquaintance."

"My dear fellow," said the officer, "you do me too

much honour! Permit me to do the same thing. Let me shake hands!"

Thereupon the officer and Dick Turpin shook hands in such a brotherly, amiable way, that it was quite delightful to look upon.

"Now," said Dick, "I've told you who I am, and I am also on rather particular business. You may easily believe that a matter of a thousand pounds, more or less, is a mere trifle to me; I would not trouble myself about double the amount!"

"Ah!" said the officer, with a sigh, "I wish I was in the same position; but a thousand pounds would make a world of difference to me."

"Would it indeed? Then I'll tell you how you can have it without any trouble, and how you can render me a service at the same time."

"Command me," said the officer, shaking Dick's hand with greater heartiness than before,—"command me in any way you think proper!"

"Well, then, the fact is, I don't want to be brought into notoriety by having captured that highwayman rascal yonder. Why, if my friends heard about it, I should not have any more peace—I should be called a police officer, or a thief-taker, or something of that sort, to the end of my days."

"Ha, ha!" said the officer. "Good! You may depend upon it you would! If it was me, I should be one of the first."

"So should I," said Dick, "if it was anyone else; so you see I don't want to be bothered with this business any further. Besides, I have got urgent private affairs of my own to attend to, and I have already lost more time than I could afford to spare; and you are such a jolly good fellow that I feel inclined to make the following proposition to you."

"It concerns my getting a thousand pounds?"

"It does."

"Fire away, then—I am all attention!"

"I am glad to hear it. Well, then, I want to back out of this matter entirely; as I said before, it would not only be very disagreeable, but very inconvenient, for me to proceed to London. Now, you can easily make this matter all right. You will be able to give just what account may suit you best of capturing the highwayman. Make out that you did it yourself, then you can claim a thousand pounds of the reward, and divide the five hundred among your men. I don't want a penny of it."

"My dear sir!" said the officer, almost with tears in his eyes, "let me shake hands with you once more! I hope I shall always have the pleasure of enjoying your acquaintance. In this, my dear sir, as in everything else from this time forth, I am your most humble servant!"

"Then we'll say the matter is agreed upon?"

"Yes, sir, it is agreed on on my part. But you are really too generous—indeed you are—you are decidedly too generous! You quite overpower me!"

"Don't mention it," replied Turpin,—"I look upon you as conferring a favour on me, and if you will only say that the matter is settled, why, I'll be off! I shall have some difficulty in making up for the time I have lost, and any further delay may be productive of very serious consequences."

"Go, my dear sir!" said the officer,—"do not let me detain you on any account, though I hope I shall have the pleasure of meeting you again!"

"So do I," said Dick. "And now, perhaps, you would not take it amiss if I give you a word of advice?"

"To be sure not!"

"Well, then, I would recommend you to lose no time in getting that rascal highwayman safely inside Newgate; he is cunning as a fox, and you don't know what tricks he might play you. He may be deceiving you even at the present moment."

"Ha! what?" said the officer, in some alarm, turning round.

"I think it's all right!" said Dick, with a smile,—"they appear to have him safe, and you know when you have at last handed him over to the Governor of the prison, you need take no further trouble—the more will then be yours."

"A thousand pounds will be the saving of me—it will indeed! I find it hard work to make my pay supply my wants—I can't do it, in fact,—and I am in debt: but a thousand pounds will put me all right."

"Then I am rejoiced at being the means of putting the amount in your way. So, now, farewell!"

"Are you riding towards London?"

"No," replied Dick,—"I wish I was, because then I could have the pleasure of your company on the way."

During this brief conversation they had had together, the dragoons had unbound the pretended Dick Turpin from the staircase, and, according to the instructions of their chief, placed him across one of the horses, very much in the manner of a sack of grain.

He was quite silent—not even so much as a groan escaping him. He had found out that it was perfectly useless to speak, and experienced a savage sort of satisfaction in thinking how disappointed the dragoons would be when they got to Newgate and discovered their mistake.

All were in readiness to start; and, after one more shake of the hands, Dick Turpin and the officer of dragoons parted.

"Keep close round the prisoner," he said, as they were riding away, "and mind he don't escape. You cannot be too careful."

"All right!" said the officer,—"don't you fear that I shall let such a good chance go by me! Farewell!"

"Farewell!" replied Turpin.

He once more whistled, and again Black Bess came to his side.

He sprang into the saddle, and then waited until the troop of dragoons had gone round the bend in the lane.

As soon as they were out of sight, he walked Black Bess onwards for a few yards, until he came to a gap in the hedgerow.

Through this he leaped into the meadow beyond, and then set off at full gallop in a straight line across the country.

Dick was on excellent terms with himself, and every now and then he would shout again with glee as he thought of the manner in which he had tricked his foes, and had his revenge on the rascal who had done him such an injury.

"It would be worth something," he thought to himself, "if I could only have a peep at their proceedings when they arrive at Newgate. They will find out their mistake, no doubt. I would not mind running a little risk to notice the change that will come over that officer's countenance when he discovers he has taken all his trouble for nothing, and is no nearer obtaining the reward than he was before."

Dick had not felt so joyful and delighted for many a long day.

The rapidity, too, at which he was travelling had the effect of raising his spirits, until at last they reached to rather an extravagant height.

"It's glorious!" he cried. "Was there ever anyone so taken in before? I can scarcely believe it. I trembled for my own safety once or twice, when that rascal spoke with so much certainty as to my identity; but the officer was quite blinded. How I should like to be in the vestibule of Newgate when they arrive! Let me see! They will get there about three o'clock in the morning—they will call the Governor up, and there will be rare fun!"

Dick's thoughts ran very much upon the scene that would take place in the vestibule of the prison, and at last, after some time spent in reflection, he said

"I have succeeded so far, and I have a good mind to tempt my luck a little further. There is London!" he continued, pointing to a little black, cloud-like mass before him. "I'll do it—I'll follow the dragoons at a safe distance, and see how they get on."

This was a very hazardous trick, and the probability is that if Dick had been a little less excited than he was, he would never have thought of attempting it; but it so happened that he was just in the humour for an exciting adventure.

It was a dark, misty night, and he knew he should be able to get pretty close to the dragoons without being seen.

He stopped Black Bess, and, looking around him as well as he could, tried to make out where he was.

"There is the high-road," he said, at length. "Yes, that is the main road to London. I have come much faster than the dragoons, so they must be some distance behind. Good! I will cross yonder meadow, and conceal

myself behind that hedge, and wait there till they pass by.

Dick had no sooner resolved upon this course of action than he proceeded to carry it into effect.

Changing his course, he struck at right angles across the field in which he then was, and leaped over a low hedge which divided it from the meadow situated on the side of the high-road.

CHAPTER DLXII.

DICK TURPIN FOLLOWS THE DRAGOONS TO NEWGATE, AND TAKES A PEEP INTO THE VESTIBULE.

As we have previously stated, the hedgerow was all that divided this meadow from the high-road; but it was closely planted and of considerable height, so that it would be an easy enough matter for Dick Turpin to place himself behind it without fear of being seen by anyone who might pass by.

Upon a closer inspection, he found that he could not possibly have chosen a better place, for there was a kind of dry ditch about two feet in depth, which ran along the side of the meadow.

On the other side was a bank of earth, on which the hedge was planted.

He slipped from the saddle, but kept hold of the reins, so that Black Bess could not move away, for the hedge only afforded her concealment when she was standing close to it.

Dick laid down on the grass, and waited patiently for those sounds which would indicate the approach of the troop of dragoons.

His patience was put to a rather severe trial, but at length he started up with the exclamation:

"They are coming—I can hear them!"

The faint sound caused by the clatter of the horses' hoofs on the high-road soon grew louder and louder.

With intense excitement, Dick peered through the hedge.

Closely as it was planted, yet near the top of the bank there were plenty of interstices through which he could peep and command a tolerable view of the road just in front of him.

In a few minutes more the troop of dragoons arrived opposite to him.

They were going at a sharp trot, which would be anything but pleasant to the individual who was laid across the pommel of one of the saddles.

The soldiers formed a close guard round their prisoner, and Dick Turpin was unable to obtain the least glimpse of him.

The officer brought up the rear, and, dark as it was, Dick fancied he could see a smile of congratulation upon his lips.

Then they all swept by, and he could see them no longer.

But the view he had had, so far from satisfying him, only inflamed his curiosity.

"I must see it out to the end," he said. "I am determined to do so. It will be rare sport, and I should be a fool to miss it."

Remounting his bonny mare, he trotted along under the shadow of the hedgerow at about the same rate of speed that the dragoons had adopted.

In a little while, however, he could tell that he was gaining upon them, and therefore slackened his speed.

It would be fatal to his whole purpose if he was seen, for, however blind the officer might be, his suspicions could not fail to be aroused by seeing Dick, after he had so expressly stated that he was not going in the direction of London, and was in a hurry to resume his journey.

Without the occurrence of any incident, Dick Turpin managed to follow the troop into London.

The difficulty in keeping near them was now very much greater, but he had determined at all risks to have a peep, if he could, at what took place inside Newgate.

"I will gallop on before them," he said. "I can take a circuitous route and be there first easily. That will be by far the best plan."

He put this resolve into execution at once.

Galloping off apparently in an opposite direction to that which the dragoons were taking, he made a detour, and presently emerged into Fleet Market.

As he reached this place, he heard St. Paul's strike the hour of three.

At that hour there was little fear of his meeting with anyone. The whole city had a deserted appearance, and the silence was most profound.

Dick Turpin turned up a narrow thoroughfare called Fleet Lane, which is to this day in existence, and forms a connection between Farringdon Street and the Old Bailey.

Along this he slowly paced until he reached the top, and here he paused.

From this point a full view of the gloomy, dismal old prison could be obtained, as well as of the street in which it is built.

The black and frowning walls had no terrors for Dick Turpin. He glanced over them rapidly, and yet with a strange kind of interest. Then he gave all his attention to listening for the arrival of the dragoons.

The prison before him was perfectly dark, with the exception that over the top of the door through which prisoners are taken, and where a man sits on guard night and day, came a faint beam of light from the iron oil-lamp which at that time depended from the centre of the ceiling of the vestibule.

Through one of the upper windows of the Governor's house, too, there came a feeble glimmering, for the Governor was liable to be called up at any hour of the night.

Presently, with a tremendous clattering sound, the troop of dragoons came round the corner of Newgate Street into the Old Bailey.

They pulled up with a dash in front of the vestibule; and, fearful of being seen, Dick Turpin backed Black Bess a little way down Fleet Lane.

The officer in command sprang from his horse, and, running up the little flight of stone steps, knocked vigorously at the wicket.

There was not much delay in responding to his summons, for the noise made by the horses' feet was quite enough to rouse the man on the lock from the comfortable nap he was taking.

"Hallo!" he cried, in a gruff voice. "What the devil's the matter?"

"Open the door this instant!" cried the officer, in commanding tones, "and call up the Governor! I have brought a prisoner of great importance!"

"Hi! Joe!" cried the man on the lock, addressing a turnkey who was seated on a wooden bench, "just call up the Governor, will you?"

"Yes," added the officer, "and tell him I have brought Dick Turpin a prisoner."

"Oh, my eye!" cried the man on the lock, and as he uttered the ejaculation, he flung open the door

In the meantime, the dragoons had dismounted, and all of them managed, in some way or other, to take hold of the prisoner, who was thus carried into the vestibule.

He was perfectly helpless, and escape was quite out of the question.

The door was quickly closed behind them, and then Dick Turpin muttered:

"Now is the time! There is no one about, and, let the risk be what it will, I'll cross the road, and peep over the top of the door. The chances are, however, that I shall not be seen."

He slipped from the saddle as he spoke, and then for the first time wondered what he should do with Black Bess in the meanwhile.

"Hallo, there! Who are you?" said a voice, and at the same time a flash of light fell upon the forms of the highwayman and his steed.

Turning round, Dick found himself confronted by the watchman, who carried in one hand a lantern, and in the other a rattle which he was ready to spring at any moment.

"Ah!" said Dick—"I was just looking for you. This is your beat, I suppose?"

"It is, your honour," replied the watchman. "What might your worship want?"

"Why, I want you to hold my horse for a minute or two. I shall be back directly, and, if you'll take care of my horse till I come, you will have no room to find fault with my liberality."

"All right, your honour! I will mind your horse, with the greatest pleasure."

"Don't walk her about," said Dick, "but just stay where you are, and then I shall know where to find you."

"All right, your honour!"

"Fortune favours me," muttered Dick. "I have got out of that difficulty nicely, and if I can manage all the rest as well, I shall be quite satisfied."

He walked to the top of Fleet Lane as he spoke, but did not cross straight over the road.

He turned to the left and went on for some distance, then he crossed, and walked along under the shadow of the prison wall.

In less than a moment he reached the door through which the prisoner had been taken.

He paused at the bottom of the steps and listened.

The murmuring of many voices came upon his ear, and he said, mentally:

"They will be all too busily engaged to notice me; and if I am careful to make no sound, I shall not be discovered."

So saying, he stole silently and swiftly up the steps.

Upon reaching the top, he paused.

Before him was the strong iron-studded door.

In the centre of this door was an iron grating, which could be uncovered at pleasure by those within, by means of a concealed shutter.

It was through this grating that questions were asked by the man on the look before he opened the door.

Now the wicket was closed, and so Dick could not see through it.

But the upper portion of the door was formed of strong iron spikes placed close together, and the tops of which formed a kind of semicircle.

By standing on his toes on the top step, Dick Turpin was just able to see into the vestibule, or lobby, as it was indiscriminately called.

Of course, only the upper portion of his head was visible, and consequently there was still less danger of his being seen by anyone within.

It may not be out of place here to give a few words descriptive of this vestibule.

It was octagonal in shape, and had a pointed roof.

From it several doors opened—one leading into the room where the turnkeys were allowed to sit when not on duty, another to that portion of the prison in the occupation of the Governor, and two more conducting to the cells.

It was about ten or twelve feet in diameter.

Such, then, was the general appearance of the place into which Dick Turpin was peeping.

CHAPTER DLXIII.

DICK TURPIN WITNESSES AN AMUSING SCENE WHICH TAKES PLACE IN THE VESTIBULE OF NEWGATE.

Who would have believed that Dick Turpin would have had the audacity and daring to coolly ascend the steps of Newgate as he did, and peep into the interior?

It would seem utterly incredible, and yet there he was, standing as calmly and collectedly as anyone possibly could, and enjoying the scene to the utmost.

All were very busy inside in removing the bonds from the prisoner's hands and feet, while those officials connected with Newgate who happened to be about were all clustering forward eagerly to catch a sight of the celebrated highwayman.

By the time this unbinding process was over, the door we have mentioned as leading to the private part of the prison was opened, and Mr. Cawthorn, the Governor, followed by a turnkey, made his appearance.

He had evidently hurried on his clothes in a very reckless manner, for when the startling intelligence was brought to him, he was so impatient to catch sight of the prisoner that he was almost ready to run downstairs in his shirt.

However, he did control himself enough to slip on a few of his garments, and then he made his appearance upon the scene.

As soon as the door opened, the officer in command of the dragoons went up to him and said:

"You are the Governor, I presume?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Cawthorn.

"Then I have the pleasure of informing you that I have succeeded in capturing the notorious highwayman Dick Turpin. Here he is in safe custody, so please give me a receipt in due form, in order that I may obtain the reward!"

"All right, sir," said Mr. Cawthorn—"you shall have what you desire. I am really delighted to think that at last you have been successful. I congratulate you, sir—I congratulate you!"

"Thanks!"

"Bring the prisoner this way," said Mr. Cawthorn, "and trim the lamp, so that I can have a good look at him!"

The iron lamp was burning somewhat dimly; but one of the turnkeys poked the wicks about with the blade of a knife, and then there was a sudden increase in the illumination.

The glare of light fell full upon the person of the prisoner.

No sooner did Mr. Cawthorn behold him than he staggered back several paces, and trod on the toes of a turnkey who stood behind him, and who uttered a furious howl in consequence.

Thus brought to a stop, Mr. Cawthorn rubbed his eyes, then advanced.

The commanding officer beheld these movements with surprise, and somehow or other a conviction began to creep over him that all was not quite so right as he had fondly imagined it to be.

"Damnation!" roared Mr. Cawthorn. "You have made a mistake!"

"A what?" screamed the officer and all the dragoons in a chorus.

"A mistake! That is no more Dick Turpin than I am!"

The officer and his men were completely taken back.

"What is the meaning of this?" cried Mr. Cawthorn, in a rage. "Is this some nice little trick you thought of playing upon me, in order to get me into trouble, or make a laughing stock of me? If it is, you shall suffer for it!"

"You take my breath," gasped the officer, leaning for support against the wall. "Do you mean to tell me that that is not Dick Turpin? You must be mistaken—you must indeed!"

"There is no mistake," said Mr. Cawthorn, "except on your side. Do you think I am a fool?—do you think I have no eyes? I tell you that is not Dick Turpin!"

"I told them the same," said the prisoner, speaking for the first time. "I offered to take my oath of it, but they would not believe what I said. Dick Turpin himself was standing by humbugging them all the while!"

"You rascal!" cried the officer, shaking with passion. "If you dare to repeat that, I'll fell you to the ground! How dare you insult that gentleman who was with us!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed the prisoner. "'Gentleman!' Good that! I rather like the idea! But he was Dick Turpin as sure as I am not!"

"Then, Mr. Governor," said the officer, "am I to understand that you still cling to the notion that this is not Dick Turpin?"

"Of course! Do you think I should not know him? Wasn't he a prisoner some months ago for a long while, and didn't I see him every day? Of course I did! And after that, do you think I should be likely to fall into any mistake? Do you think I should not know him from a man who is no more like Dick Turpin than I am myself?"

The officer of dragoons uttered a frantic howl of rage.

Pushing forward, he seized hold of the prisoner by the neck, and shook him backwards and forwards with so much violence that it was a wonder it did not shake the life out of him.

"Villain!" he shrieked,—"tell me all—confess to the truth—explain, I say, or you shall suffer dearly!"

The prisoner struggled to speak, but could not, for the officer pressed his windpipe with so much tightness that speech was impossible.

Mr. Cawthorn saw this, so he in turn seized hold of the officer, and tried to drag him away.

"Let go!" he cried—"let go! I am master here, and will be obeyed! I should advise you to be careful, Mr Officer! I do not intend to be called up in the dead of the night and be made a fool of by such as you!"

The officer let go, and the prisoner gasped for breath in a dreadful manner.

In a broken voice, he said:

"I tell you I am not Dick Turpin. I pretended to be



[DICK TURPIN ESCAPING FROM THE DESERTED MANSION.]

so that I could rob with greater safety and ease. I could frighten the people into anything by simply telling them that I was Dick Turpin. That was why I assumed the character, and a damned fool I was for doing it!"

"Then that is how the mistake arose, is it?" cried Mr. Cawthorn.—"you passed yourself off for Dick Turpin, and the officer believed you?"

"That's partly it," said the prisoner. "I was threatening a girl when Dick Turpin himself came into the room at unawares, stole behind me, and hit me a crack on the head. I became insensible, and when I recovered I was tied hand and foot to the bannisters of the staircase."

"That's a lie!" said a voice.

Everybody started and looked around them in surprise, while the Governor of Newgate said:

"Who was that that had the audacity to speak?—who was it, I say?"

There was no answer, and each man in the vestibule looked with a curious, inquiring expression into the countenances of those who were nearest.

"Who was it that spoke?" cried the Governor again. "It was somebody, and whoever it was I give him warning, he had better not attempt to make a fool of me!"

"If you please, sir," said one of the turnkeys, "I think it must be somebody on the steps, who shouted over the door!"

"Go and look, then."

The turnkey pushed back the little wicket in the centre of the door and peeped through the grating.

"There is nobody here," he said; "they must have holloaed out and run away."

No further importance was attached to this incident, and Mr. Cawthorn continued his examination of the prisoner.

As the reader surmises, it was Dick Turpin who had spoken.

He uttered the words upon the impulse of the moment, and without reflecting upon what was likely to be the consequences.

As soon as ever the words had passed his lips he shrunk

back into the shadow of the doorway, where he was just out of sight of the turnkey who peeped through the grating.

As soon as the conversation was resumed he took up his former position, though he was more cautious now than ever, as he thought it not unlikely some person might have his eyes fixed upon the door.

But he was mistaken, the attention of everybody was fixed upon the prisoner.

"Now," said Mr. Cawthorn, "go on with your tale."

"I called out for help," said the prisoner, "but it was no good, and after a time the door was opened and in came that officer, these dragoons, and along with them Dick Turpin, though I did not recognise him at first."

"Oh! this is monstrous," cried the officer—"monstrous to a degree! Is it at all probable that a highwayman would have acted in such a manner? and is it not quite impossible that I could have been so grossly imposed upon?"

"I will swear to it any minute!" said the prisoner. "I said so to them, and wanted the officer to bring that gentleman with him, as he calls him, to Newgate, so that the doubt might be cleared up; but he refused to do so, so I shall leave you to judge to what extent he is an accomplice of Dick Turpin's. If all the other dragoons have behaved in the same manner as these, I don't wonder at his never having been captured. My belief is there is an understanding existing between them."

"You wretch!" cried the officer of dragoons—"you villain!"

He rushed forward as he spoke, with the intention of annihilating the prisoner there and then, and no doubt it would have gone hard with the individual in question, had not Mr. Cawthorn commanded the turnkeys to seize the officer.

"Hold him!" he said. "I intend to have this matter cleared up, and it strikes me very forcibly that I shall have to detain him a prisoner.

"Speak on, my man," he continued, addressing the prisoner; "tell us the rest, and do not be afraid of the consequences. I will see that no harm comes to you."

The prisoner was delighted at this opportunity, and determined to have his revenge upon the dragoons as well as he was able.

"I want to make a clean breast of it," he said, "and I have done so up to now; the rest is very simple. I wanted him to bring Dick Turpin to Newgate, but he refused, and they both went off into a corner, and began to whisper together, and in the end they let Dick Turpin ride off free as air, although I had told them over and over again who he was."

"That will do," said Mr. Cawthorn.

Then, turning to the officer, he added:

"Perhaps you will be kind enough to explain this little circumstance; it seems, from what I can hear, that you did not capture this prisoner at all?"

"No, I did not," said the officer, hesitatingly.

"Then who did?"

"A gentleman who happened to be passing by, and who heard a girl screaming for help."

"And how did you come to know anything about it?"

"After he had taken him prisoner, the gentleman happened to meet with me, and he told me all about it. I went back to the cottage with him, and there we found the prisoner, who was sworn to be Dick Turpin, not only by the gentleman I am speaking of, but by the girl herself."

"And where is this gentleman?" asked Mr. Cawthorn.

"Far enough off by this time, I'll be bound!" replied the prisoner.

"Why did you not bring him to Newgate with you?"

"Do you think it was likely I should insult him?"

"It would have been no insult; it was necessary for him to come if he made the capture, because he is entitled to the reward, and no one else."

"I tell you it is all fudge!" replied the officer. "That is Dick Turpin; I swear to it, and I maintain it, and if you liberate him, or refuse to believe my statement, it will be at your peril!"

"Fiddle-de-dee!" replied the Governor, snapping his fingers. "It is as plain as the nose on your face, you have been taken in and done for by Dick Turpin; you have been sold as brown as a hammer—you'll never hear the last of this business! I'll take care it gets pretty well known. How green you must be, to be sure!"

"I shall represent your conduct to the proper authorities," said the officer, "and you shall take the consequences. Give me a receipt and let me go. There's your prisoner. I tell you he is Dick Turpin! Take him, I say, and give me a receipt!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" said the Governor. "I shall lock him up, and keep him safe till morning; and I consider I have heard quite enough to warrant me in coming to the conclusion that you, so far from attempting to capture the highwayman, have been his accomplice, and aided and abetted his escape."

"Mind what you are saying!" said the officer, foaming with passion.

"All right!" said Mr. Cawthorn. "I tell you that is my belief; and such being the case, I shall take upon myself the responsibility of keeping you all here till morning, when you will have the opportunity of clearing yourself from the charge which this man makes against you."

"I tell you," cried the officer, who began to be afraid he had got himself into a very awkward scrape—"I tell you I am no accomplice of Dick Turpin's, and that man lies in the throat when he says so! I'll admit I may have done wrong in not bringing the gentleman with me, but then I did not think it would matter; but it seems I have got myself into a nice fix!"

"You have," said Mr. Cawthorn, grinning and rubbing his hands together. "It strikes me that you'll find it rather difficult to clear yourself of the charge!"

"I wish I had brought the gentleman with me," said the officer, "and then all would have been cleared up."

"You would have found it rather a difficult matter to have brought him, I fancy," said the prisoner, with a laugh. "I fancy I see it! You wouldn't have brought him so easily as you have brought me!"

"Very true," said a voice, "and so I have come by myself! Here I am, Mr. Cawthorn! How do you find yourself this morning? Pay no attention to what that prisoner says. He is a liar, for he tried hard to make me believe that he was myself. I am Dick Turpin, and I thought I would just look in, and make the remark that the officer of dragoons is no accomplice of mine. Good-bye, all! I am delighted to take my leave of you!"

CHAPTER DLXIV.

DICK TURPIN AT LENGTH SUCCEEDS IN REACHING THE DESERTED MANSION.

Feeling convinced that it is out of our power to describe the effects which were produced by this speech upon the persons who were assembled in the vestibule, we shall not make the attempt.

All we can say is, that if they had been by some mysterious process transformed into statues, they could not have stood more motionless than they did.

They were literally rooted to the ground with astonishment, and had their lives depended upon it they could not have moved hand or foot while Dick Turpin was making his extraordinary address.

The highwayman had seized hold of the spikes and drawn himself up so that his face was clearly visible above the top of the door.

When he had finished speaking he took off his hat and waved it in a defiant manner, then disappeared.

At that instant everyone seemed to start suddenly into life.

"Ten thousand devils!" cried Mr. Cawthorn. "Am I to be made a fool of after all? After him, I say! Open the door, Winch! Where are you?—where is the key? Why the devil don't you open the door? He will be off before we can get outside!"

A furious rush was made towards the door, each one striving to get nearest to it, so as to run out into the street first, so the consequence was, that they very much impeded each other, and caused at least a minute's delay.

At last the door was unlocked and dashed open.

Then, in a tumultuous throng, they rushed headlong down the steps, nor could they stop themselves until they reached the middle of the Old Bailey.

Then they panted and looked about them.

The faint clatter of a horse's hoofs on the stones alone reached their ears.

"Mount—mount!" cried Mr. Cawthorn. "Pursue him instantly! Quick, or he will be quite out of hearing!"

"Mount!" said the officer in charge of the dragoons—"mount at once!"

They obeyed promptly, and then a voice cried:

"Yah—ha! There, stop him—stop him! There he goes—after him—be quick or you will be too late."

These vociferations came from one of the turnkeys.

This was caused by Dick Turpin's personator having also made his escape.

He took advantage of the sudden rush to the door, and had descended the steps along with the rest unnoticed.

As a matter of course, as soon as ever he reached the street he took to his heels, and ran as he never had before.

"Stop whom?" roared Mr. Cawthorn—"who has escaped?"

"The prisoner!" roared the turnkey.

The Governor gave vent to some horrible oaths.

"After him!" he cried—"after him!—catch him! I would not have him escape on any account!"

"Which are we to go after?" inquired the officer.

"Why, both of them, you idiot! Run after both, or you will lose them!"

The dragoons attempted to carry out this order, but as individually they could not make up their minds which way to take, they ran their horses against each other in confusion.

Mr. Cawthorn was frantic with rage, and danced in the street like some infuriated red Indian, while every now and then he would seize hold of his hair, pluck a handful out by the roots, and dash it violently down upon the ground.

"You will lose them!" he screamed. "Half of you go that way and half this way! D—n you all for a parcel of idiots and cowards! You will be too late!"

Leaving the dragoons to pursue the fugitives, we will return to Dick Turpin.

Before he spoke in the extraordinary manner we have recorded, he had come to the conclusion that those within would be too much astonished to move for a moment or two, and then he should easily be able to make his escape.

The result fully proved that he was right.

It was a daring act to thus proclaim himself while standing on the very threshold of Newgate, and while so many were in readiness to pursue him in a moment.

It was done, however, and then, running down the steps, he crossed the road and turned down Fleet Lane.

Here he found the watchman holding his horse, and in happy ignorance of all that had been going on.

"Here's a crown-piece for you," said Dick, "but I should advise you to hold your tongue about it. If you say you have held my horse you will get into trouble, for this is Black Bess and I am Dick Turpin!"

The watchman opened his mouth to such a prodigious extent that the top of his head seemed in imminent danger of falling off. No sound, however, came from his throat, but he made a desperate attempt to raise an alarm by whirling his lantern round and round, labouring under the delusion that it was his rattle.

A word was enough to cause Black Bess to set forward at the top of her speed, and she flew through the streets with a rapidity that would have terrified any ordinary rider.

Dick turned her head in the direction of the Oxford Road, and in a little while afterwards reached it.

He paused and listened.

At first all was silent, but soon a faint, almost inaudible sound arose.

"They are after me," he said. "Well, no matter, let them come; I am not afraid that they will overtake me!"

He once more set his mare in motion, and in a little while the open country was gained.

Dick was now on familiar ground.

There was not a cross-country road or lane and scarcely a tree for miles round that he did not know. So he forsook the highway, and turned down a narrow lane, upon both sides of which trees grew so thickly that it seemed more like the entrance to a cavern than aught else.

"I have had enough of adventures for one night," Dick said, as he trotted swiftly along this lane. "I fancy there will be a little bit of a consternation to-morrow, when the facts become known. Ha, ha! It's a good joke, and I could never have believed that so daring a feat could have been carried out so easily!"

Dick was evidently very well satisfied with his achievement, and for some time he amused himself by laughing aloud.

At last, happening to look up, he saw in the east a faint grey light, which told of the rapid approach of morning.

"I must make good speed," he said, "or I shall scarcely reach the deserted mansion before daylight. It is quite clear I shall not do so if I meet with any interruption. No more adventures to-night! It's against my nature; but if one comes in my way I will avoid it."

As Dick Turpin took the most lonely road to his destination he could think of, it was scarcely likely that he would meet with anyone, for at that hour few people were stirring.

Black Bess seemed to know that she was returning to her old quarters, for Dick found it almost impossible to make her moderate her speed.

Trees, hedges, and meadows flitted quickly past them, but every moment the faint light in the east increased in brightness, and it was evident that day would fairly dawn before the highwayman reached the end of his journey.

At length he emerged into the Finchley Road, near the spot where the lane branched off that led to the deserted mansion.

As the misty light of morning was creeping all over the landscape and dimly revealing surrounding objects, it was necessary that he should be cautious in his movements, for the consequences of being seen near this spot would be serious, if not fatal.

Accordingly, Dick reined-in his steed, and took a long look about him.

But his piercing gaze failed to detect the presence of any human being.

The only living objects besides himself and his mare seemed to be the little birds that were already chirping in every tree.

Finding the coast was clear, Dick galloped along the road for about two hundred yards as rapidly as possible.

Then, coming to the narrow lane, he turned down it, and felt that, for the time being, he was safe.

Nevertheless, he approached the dilapidated gates with great caution, as it was just possible that some of Mr. Wriggles's men might be lingering and spying about the place.

Dick hardly thought this, but yet judged it best to omit no precaution, and to keep himself fully on his guard.

All was as silent around as when he had first approached that spot, and, encouraged by the stillness, he passed through the gates into the grass-grown avenue.

Here, however, he dismounted, and, leading Black Bess by the bridle, plunged at once among the trees, his intention being to get as near to the mansion as he could without being seen.

It was both difficult and troublesome to force a passage through the trees, for having been left uncultivated for so long, branches shot in all directions, many of them being near the ground.

Describing in his course a kind of semicircle, Dick Turpin at length arrived upon the margin of the lawn.

Again he looked closely and scrutinisingly around, and in doing this he was much assisted by the faint daylight.

So far as he could tell, the mansion looked just the same as it had ever done, presenting no signs whatever of habitation.

It was before the front that Dick paused, and having examined this, and feeling satisfied with the result, he made his way round to the side, still taking care to keep under the shadow of the trees.

When he paused again it was opposite the little window through which they had been wont to pass when entering or leaving the building.

Here also silence reigned, though on the ground there still remained traces of the furious struggle that had so lately taken place upon that spot.

The bodies of the officers, however, that had lain there had disappeared. In all probability, they had been carried away by their companions.

The more he looked about him the more certain did Dick feel that he had all the place to himself.

Yet he was not satisfied, nor would he venture to enter the building until his examination had been complete.

Accordingly, he passed completely round it, observing all with the greatest closeness.

And then, and not until then, did he feel thoroughly satisfied.

The next thing to be decided was what should be done with Black Bess.

After what had happened, he did not like the idea of placing her inside the stable—he wanted to have her in some place where he could rejoin her instantly.

There appeared to be only one thing that he could do, and that was to take her into the deserted mansion with him; but there were difficulties in the way of this; a previous examination made him aware that all the doors were so securely fastened that it would be a matter of time to get one open.

Then the little window was some height from the ground, and he doubted whether he should be able to get her through it.

If he could, why so much the better; and under this conviction he once more came round to that side of the mansion.

Looking at the window, he fancied she might be able to jump through it, provided he could only make her understand what he meant.

He determined to try.

He patted her fondly and caressingly upon the neck, speaking to her all the while.

The gallant creature fully understood him, and rubbed her head against his breast, and neighed with evident pleasure.

Then, releasing his hold upon the bridle, Dick climbed through the window.

Standing within, he uttered that chirping sound which he always made use of when he wished to call her to him.

She trotted up to the window in an instant and put her head in.

"Come, Bess," he said, patting her again—"come lass—this way!"

He stepped back as he spoke, and then it was evident his mare understood him.

Turning round, she walked some distance from the window—in fact, as far as she was able, for she did not stop until she came to the trees.

Then she turned round and faced her master.

Again Dick uttered the signal, and with a rush she galloped on and leaped through the casement.

She alighted in perfect safety.

"Bravo!" said Dick. "All's well now—I fear nothing. The money I shall get easily enough, and now my only wish is that my three comrades will not be long in returning."

CHAPTER DLXV.

DICK TURPIN ENDEAVOURS TO ELUCIDATE THE MYSTERY CONNECTED WITH THE HORRIBLE SOUNDS.

Having succeeded in getting Black Bess inside the mansion, Dick Turpin felt quite at his ease.

He was sure, from the care he had taken in reconnoitring, that no officers were about, and no one had noticed his arrival, so that his future proceedings seemed plain and simple enough.

His visit respecting his three comrades was not very likely to be fulfilled, for at that very moment they were many miles away, and many obstacles were in the way of their return.

Still Turpin was quite contented with what he had already done, and having patted and soothed Black Bess, he passed through the door we have so often mentioned which led into the passage.

The first thing that he had to do, was to find some chamber in the mansion where he could place Black Bess, so that should occasion require it, he should be able to rejoin her instantly.

This threatened to be difficult, for there were several doors near at hand, yet they were all well secured.

One in particular, that was situated at the extremity of the passage, attracted his attention, and he advanced towards it.

It was locked and bolted.

The latter securements were easily removed.

He then set to work upon the lock, and, after about half an hour's labour, he managed to get the door open.

The chamber beyond had a damp, earthy kind of smell, and was plunged into a state of partial obscurity.

The only light which made its way into the place was that which struggled through some small diamond-shaped holes that were cut in the window shutters.

In less than a moment, however, Dick Turpin was able to see about him with tolerable ease and distinctness, and, by degrees, every object which the room contained was revealed to him.

He then came to the conclusion that in former times this place had served as a kitchen, for all the fittings belonging to it and most of the utensils still remained.

He considered this would serve his purpose excellently, and determined that for a little while it should be a stable for his mare.

He loosened the girths of the saddle, but did not take it off.

He also removed the bit from her month, though he did not remove the bridle.

The next thing to be done was to obtain some provender.

There was nothing else to be had except the grass upon which she had formerly fed, and some of this he resolved to obtain at once, for, as he rightly enough imagined, there was less probability of his being seen at that early morning hour than if he was to remain till late in the day.

There were two windows in the kitchen, and, going to one, he opened it, and unbarred and unbolted the shutters.

He did not abate his caution, but opened them a little way and peeped out.

Failing to see or hear anything encouraged him to proceed.

Opening them still further, he sprang out into the garden.

Grass was growing in abundance all around him, and in a few moments, he had gathered a very large quantity—enough to last his mare a couple of days at least.

He did this in order to avoid as much as possible the risk which he ran while gathering it.

Having completed his task, he sprang through the window again and carefully closed the shutters after him.

"Now, Bess," he said, "you will do for a time—at least, you are all right; and now to look for the money!"

He was about to leave the kitchen, when his eye suddenly alighted upon an object which caused him to utter a cry of satisfaction.

This was an old-fashioned lamp standing upon a shelf.

He took hold of it instantly, and found that it was thickly covered with dust.

Whether it would burn, after having been disused so long as it evidently had been, was doubtful, and though feeling this, his satisfaction was scarcely, if at all, decreased.

Having secured this unexpected prize, he left the kitchen and closed the door carefully after him, and endeavoured to conceal, as well as he could, all traces of its having been broken open.

There was no necessity to light the lamp at present, for day had fairly begun, and the ample staircase and entrance hall were fully illuminated by the circular skylight in the roof.

Dick Turpin ascended the stairs quickly.

He was impatient to reach that little apartment at the top of the house in which he and his companions had spent so much of their time.

He was doubtful whether he should find the money where he had left it—there was a strong probability that the police officers had made off with the whole.

As he mounted, he looked keenly about him from right to left, but he failed to perceive any signs of the presence of the police officers.

At length he gained the top of the staircase, and entered the apartment with a beating heart.

He saw at a glance that nothing had been disturbed—the place presented exactly the same appearance as when he had last left it.

The money had all been placed in a drawer in the old-fashioned table.

He went up to it, opened the drawer, and then, to his joy, found that the money, which he and his comrades had run to so much risk to obtain, was still there.

His first impulse was to transfer it to his pockets; but as the weight would have been considerable and prove an impediment to motion, he determined, upon second thoughts, to leave it where it was.

"And now," said Dick, as he seated himself in the large arm-chair, "I have got nothing to do but wait for the approach of night, and when it comes I hope that my comrades will come also, for a lengthened stay here would in all probability be dangerous to a degree."

Dick was very weary, and unconsciously sank off into a deep sleep, which continued several hours, and had the effect of refreshing him in no small degree.

His slumbers were not disturbed or broken in upon in any way, and when he awoke he looked around him in some surprise, but he soon remembered where he was.

He felt quite a new man and in readiness to sustain any amount of fatigue.

He went to the window, and looking out, found by an inspection of the sky that it was long past noon.

The exact time he had no means of knowing.

"I have slept a long while," he murmured; "but no matter, I have been in safety, and it has done me good. I will go down now and see whether Black Bess is all right."

Just then his eyes fell upon the lamp on the table, and remembering its condition and the doubts he had had whether it would light, he resolved first of all to remove the dust with which it was covered, and then try the experiment of lighting it.

He trimmed the wick, and unscrewing the upper portion found that the reservoir beneath contained a considerable quantity of oil, which was, however, fast losing its fluid state and becoming solid.

Screwing the top on again, he next took out of his pocket a bottle of phosphorous and some matches.

Dick was too fully impressed with the importance of having the means of obtaining a light to his hand even to be without the little apparatus we have mentioned.

The task of lighting the lamp was a troublesome and tedious one, but eventually he was gratified by finding his efforts crowned with complete success.

Having thus satisfactorily proved that it was possible to light the lamp, he extinguished it, and then proceeded to carry out his original intention of visiting Black Bess.

He took the lamp with him, for he could not tell in what way it might be useful.

Upon reaching the kitchen, he found that Black Bess had made herself quite at home in her new quarters.

He patted and stroked her, and then went to the window.

He did not open it, but listened

The same silence continued, and so he came to the conclusion that the police officers had quite abandoned it.

While listening thus, Dick suddenly remembered the mysterious and awful sounds he had so often heard in the mansion, and the origin of which he had never been able to make out.

He recollected, too, that when the officers made their former attack upon the place, he was just then about to make an exploration of the building, in order to elucidate the mystery.

As the reader is aware, subsequent circumstances prevented him from carrying out his purpose.

"I will have one more trial," he said half aloud as he turned away from the window. "I should have preferred having some one with me when upon such an expedition, in order that I might have a witness to what I say, and so that I might make sure my fancy did not deceive me However, I have now nothing at all to do, and this exploring expedition will serve to pass away the time, that otherwise would hang very heavily upon my hands."

He left the kitchen as he spoke, and hastily ascended the staircase, nor did he pause until he reached the shattered door of the mysterious chamber.

That this was the source from which the horrible sounds had emanated he was quite certain—he had stood on the outside and heard them, therefore it was here where he should look to find the solution of the mystery.

All previous attempts had failed utterly, but he hoped on this occasion by the exercise of great patience and close scrutiny to be able to clear the matter up

He crossed the ante-room without bestowing much examination upon it, and hastened to enter the armoury

Although it was broad day, only a very dim light crept into this place, and though his eyes were accustomed to the obscurity, Dick made up his mind to light the lamp, and so have increased illumination to aid him in his search

He determined to conduct his search in a systematic manner, and so commenced with the wall on his right hand.

He walked on slowly, closely scrutinising it.

But he was unable to detect anything of a singular character more than the strange weapons with which the walls were covered.

Upon many of these, Dick could not help gazing with a great amount of interest.

The collection of arms had evidently been made at great expense and trouble, and specimens had been obtained from every quarter of the globe, and included not only those in use at the time of which we are writing, but those which had been in existence from the earliest periods.

But deeply interested as he was, Dick would not allow himself to be led away from his original purpose.

It took him nearly three hours to go completely round the room, and at the expiration of that time we have mentioned, he reached the door again.

Not a single square inch of the wall, from the floor up to as high as he could see, had escaped his careful observation, and yet he had not been able to discover anything at all calculated to explain the mysterious sounds.

Nor, indeed, did he make any discovery whatever, for the secret door forming an outlet from the armoury he was already aware of the existence of.

Whether that was connected with the mysterious sounds was more than he could tell.

Then he remembered the two figures they had found lying so strangely on the floor.

Thinking it possible that this might afford some clue, he walked towards the spot; but his astonishment may be imagined when he found scarcely a fragment remained.

This puzzled him beyond measure, for he was, of course, ignorant of the fact that Mr. Wriggles and his officers had stumbled and fell over them, thus reducing the two bodies to an almost impalpable powder.

He taxed his brain to the utmost, without being able to satisfy himself precisely as to the cause.

He had no difficulty, however, in coming to the conclusion that there was nothing to be learned in that quarter.

Then, as to the floor of the armoury, that had been examined with the greatest care by himself and his three friends, so it was hardly likely that he would discover anything in that quarter.

Only the secret door remained.

Through this he had already passed, though hastily, and he had made no discovery that would account in any way for the mysterious sounds.

Besides, when they had stood upon the staircase, the cries appeared to come from the ante-room, and this secret door opened from the furthest extremity of the armoury.

As there was nothing left to investigate, Dick was, in a manner of speaking, compelled to pursue his inquiries in this quarter.

Accordingly, he crossed the threshold of the secret door, and paused at the top of the flight of spiral steps.

He looked to see whether there were any steps leading upwards, but found there were none.

"I do not see that much good is to be obtained by descending these steps," he said; "the cries I heard cannot have come from these depths; yet there is something below that I would fain look upon once more, ghastly and horrible as it is."

Dick alluded to the skeleton which he had found chained to the wall of the dungeon.

He went down the steps with the greatest deliberation, looking keenly at the walls as he descended.

Nothing but the rough masonry, however, met his gaze, and once more he found himself in the subterraneous dungeon.

The skeleton was still there, presenting the same appearance as before; but nowhere around him could he find anything to explain who the unfortunate being was

or by whose orders he had been chained there, to meet so horrible a death.

Dissatisfied and disappointed at the want of success he had experienced, Dick Turpin set to work to explore the various passages.

But he learned nothing, except that where they branched off, in the manner we have elsewhere described, they proceeded for a short distance and then united.

The bodies of the police officers had all been removed.

In the distance Turpin perceived that faint speck of light which indicated the outlet of the passage; but he did not deem it worth while to go nearer towards it, for fear any police officers should be concealed in the vicinity.

Accordingly, he retraced his steps, and reached the armoury without having made any discovery.

"Is this to remain for ever an unrevealed mystery?" he asked, as he looked around him, at the curious objects on the wall. "Am I fated never to learn what caused those horrible sounds? It seems so; but yet I will make another attempt—not now, however; I will wait until my three companions return, and then, when we are all together, it will be strange indeed if we do not penetrate this mystery, insolvable as it now appears to be."

CHAPTER DLXVI.

DICK TURPIN IS ATTACKED BY POLICE OFFICERS ON THE STAIRCASE OF THE DESERTED MANSION.

ALTHOUGH Dick Turpin spoke these words with great energy and determination, yet there did not seem to be any reasonable prospect of his succeeding in making the discovery he so much wished.

It would be scarcely possible to imagine a closer and more rigid search than that which he had made by himself; nothing had escaped his observation.

The cause which had produced those sounds promised to remain involved in mystery.

The search had occupied several hours, and upon gaining the landing on the staircase, Turpin discovered that night had already set in.

The services of the lamp which he had so fortunately discovered were now absolutely called for, and he looked at its tiny flame with great solicitude, for fear it should not continue to burn long enough to answer his purpose.

On that night Dick felt almost sure his absent friends would return, and when he reached the landing, as we have described, he suddenly changed his mind.

His intention had been to wait in the mansion until they arrived; but considering that he should incur danger by so doing, made him resolve to take up his position somewhere outside.

He could not tell how many officers might be lurking about, and some of them might notice the arrival of the three highwaymen, who would once more find themselves in a perilous situation.

"I am sure that will be my best plan," said Dick. "I will go upstairs and take possession of the money, and then ascend again and hide myself somewhere near the entrance gates, for——"

He ceased suddenly and assumed a listening attitude.

Some trivial sound had broken in upon the intense silence which prevailed in that deserted habitation, and though its cause might be unimportant, yet placed as he was, Dick felt it necessary to take notice of everything.

Holding the lamp so that its light was not so likely to be seen, he bent over the massive balustrade of the staircase and stretched his sense of hearing to the utmost.

The sounds of footsteps and the murmuring of voices came upon his ear.

His first thought was, that they were his enemies endeavouring to steal stealthily upon him and take him by surprise; but the next moment he fancied it was probably his comrades who had returned.

He was the more inclined to think this from the manner in which the persons below were ascending the staircase.

They were neither endeavouring to be silent nor noisy, but were coming up in the most easy, matter-of-fact manner imaginable, and this made Turpin believe that they were not police officers.

Nevertheless, a doubt remained in his mind, and it was very important that this doubt should be completely set at rest.

How to do it appeared no easy matter, but after a moment's thought Turpin stepped noiselessly to one portion of the staircase, from which he could command a tolerable view of the stairs below, for, as we have previously stated, it was a well staircase.

He instantly perceived a faint glimmering light, which rapidly increased in brilliancy.

Still, it was not sufficient to disperse the darkness, and from the position Turpin occupied it looked more like a twinkling star than aught else.

Some of its beams, however, fell upon the apparel of the person who was carrying it, and after a scrutinising glance Dick came to the conclusion that it shone upon the uniform of a police officer.

If he had not been certain of this, his suspicions would quickly have been confirmed, for he heard a voice say:

"Make haste, will you, or it will be sunrise before we reach the top of this d—d staircase!"

As soon as Turpin heard these words he was quite convinced that they were not uttered by either of his three comrades.

They were police officers who were ascending, and he suddenly found himself in a position of great danger.

He could not conceal from himself that the probability was, they had tracked him, by some means or other, to where he now was, and very likely they had entered the kitchen and taken possession of Black Bess.

If this was so, his peril was extreme, for, single handed and deprived of his gallant mare, he could not cope with his foes, who doubtless had assembled in large numbers.

But even if they had not taken possession of Black Bess, how was he to rejoin her? It seemed absolutely impossible.

For a moment he stood there buried in thought.

He was aroused by the rapid ascent of the police officers, who by this time were very close indeed to where he stood.

Then suddenly he thought of the money in the drawer upstairs.

His first impulse was to fly and disregard it, but then, upon second thoughts, he considered it was his duty not to lose the opportunity of carrying off so much booty.

By ascending to the top of the mansion, however, he could not but increase his danger, for, in order to escape, it was necessary to go down.

But being unwilling to lose this large amount or to allow it to fall into the hands of his foes, he turned round, extinguished the lamp, and sped swiftly but noiselessly up the stairs.

In an incredibly short space of time he reached the topmost landing, and glided into the room.

He opened the drawer quickly, and commenced transferring its contents to his pockets.

Nimble as he was, it took him at least two minutes to empty the drawer.

He had his pistols all ready for immediate service, and, without loss of time, stepped out on to the landing again.

What he was to do now seemed a mystery.

To have attempted to descend the stairs, and cut a way through the officers, would have been little short of madness; and ever ready as he was to adopt, in the moment of danger, any desperate expedient, Dick shrunk from attempting this.

The officers, however, were very near the top of the stairs.

They had stopped, for some purpose or other, on one of the lower landings, but now they were ascending again.

Dick looked about him with increasing apprehensiveness, but he was unable to see any means by which he might escape.

On the landing was a huge oak chest.

For what purpose it had been used he knew not, but he had often noticed it, and now resolved to remove it to the top of the staircase, so as to form a barricade.

The chest was a great weight, but it was furnished with a handle at each end.

These Turpin seized alternately, and soon had the chest close to the top of the staircase.

The lumbering sound produced by the removal of this heavy object sounded strangely and alarming in that silent place, and when they first heard it, the officers paused and stood huddled up together.

Quickly recovering from their surprise, however, they hastily rushed up the stairs, but, before they could reach

the top, Dick Turpin succeeded in wedging the oak chest in between the banisters in such a manner as to make it a most formidable obstacle to surmount.

"Hold!" he cried, in a voice that made every officer pause—"hold, I say! If you ascend a step higher I will fire both these pistols among you!"

"Dick Turpin," said a voice—"surrender—we have got you this time and no mistake, so you had a damned sight better give in than make a fuss about it—we have you now as safe as a nut!"

"Beware!" said Dick. "I tell you I would rather die a thousand deaths than surrender once! If you attempt to capture me, it will be at your own peril!"

"Come on," said the police officer who had before spoken—"come on—never mind what he says! You will find it will be different when you get up!"

Dick Turpin again glanced about him, but he could see no means by which he could make his escape, and his face assumed a more anxious expression than it usually wore.

It was impossible that he could hold out against so many officers as were on the staircase.

He might prolong the contest, but they must succeed in the end, without assistance came to him, in the shape of his three absent comrades, and this hope was too frail a one to be depended upon for a moment.

"Dick Turpin," said the officer, "our orders are to take you dead or alive, so if you resist, your death will be upon your own head!"

Almost as soon as the words were uttered, a pistol was levelled at the highwayman.

Dick just saw the movement of the officer's hand, and then heard the report.

He stood perfectly still.

He was aware that, as he had heard the report, he was at the most, only wounded.

The treacherous manner in which the shot had been fired exasperated him greatly, and, acting upon the impulse of the moment, he pulled the triggers of the two pistols he held in his hands.

A loud report ensued, followed by cries of pain from below, and then the officers fired two more shots.

Turpin found that his position at the head of the staircase was untenable, and so taking advantage of the blue smoke that was curling about in every direction, he retreated, as he thought, in the direction of the room from which he had just emerged.

But in the excitement of the moment he made a mistake and found himself near one of the other doors opening from the landing, the threshold of which he had not yet crossed.

He turned the handle, but the door remained firm in its setting.

By dashing himself suddenly against it, however, he caused it to fly open.

This door opened upon a staircase, and it was a thousand wonders Dick did not lose his balance.

He saved himself by clutching the handle, and then he closed the door behind him.

At first he was at a loss to understand where he was.

Stairs were below him evidently, but to what part of the house they led, he was at a loss to imagine.

He commenced descending them, however, without pausing to consider where they might take him; he only knew he was getting further from his foes.

The fact was, as Dick soon found, that the staircase he was descending, was the one that had been used by the domestics at the time when the house was inhabited.

In all such mansions, it is usual to have two staircases, one the grand staircase, for the use of visitors and the occupiers of the building, and the other, a back staircase, by which the servants could ascend to the upper rooms.

The officers, observing Dick Turpin retreating, scrambled over the oak chest in the best way they were able, but they found it a rather awkward obstacle to surmount.

By chance they pushed open the door at the top of the staire, and, as they carried a light, they saw at once what kind of place it was.

They could hear Dick Turpin hastily descending, and fired a volley of bullets after him.

Fortunately our hero had turned an angle in the stairs, and the bullets were buried in the woodwork or flattened against the walls.

This report caused Dick to descend with still greater speed.

Directly they had fired, the officers rushed pell-mell down the staircase.

Dick, however, had a good start, and coming presently to a door, he closed it, and bolted it on the inner side.

This would prove some hindrance to the progress of his pursuers, and furnish him with at least one chance more of making his escape.

The time occupied in doing this was really insignificant, and Dick again flew down the staircase at his utmost speed.

He now began to grow very anxious to know where this staircase led, but scarcely dared to hope that it would bring him near the kitchen in which he had placed Black Bess.

All around him was profoundly dark, and the manner in which he descended the stairs was reckless to a degree.

Suddenly, however, he was brought to an abrupt stop.

He had reached the bottom of the staircase unexpectedly, and did not see the door that was placed at the foot of it.

The first intimation he received of its presence was by coming with full force against it.

He was bruised, and for the space of several seconds half stunned.

Recovering himself, and exactly comprehending his position, he dashed himself against the door.

It flew open instantly, for the fastenings had been, to some extent, deranged by the violence with which he had before come in contact with it.

He stood perfectly still, and strained his eyes, endeavouring to pierce the darkness with which he was surrounded.

The attempt was a vain one, however, and then suddenly he heard a sharp ringing sound, which he immediately recognised.

Then his ears were saluted by a low, but well-known neigh, and at that moment he felt something soft touch him upon the breast.

"Black Bess!" he exclaimed, in a tone of incredulous joy—"Black Bess! I have found her; she is safe—surely now I shall escape!"

He patted her on the neck, and then with nervous haste tightened the saddle-girths and placed the bit in her mouth.

While he was so occupied a tremendous crash came upon his ears, and was instantly followed by the sound of footsteps rapidly descending the staircase.

CHAPTER DLXVII.

DICK TURPIN'S POSITION IN THE DESERTED MANSION INCREASES IN PERIL AND INTEREST.

THE presence of the police officers at the deserted mansion at this juncture, and the peculiar manner in which they had entered the premises, may seem not a little strange to the reader.

A very few words, however, will serve to explain their presence on this occasion, and place the reader in possession of some facts necessary to be known.

It will be remembered that after Mr. Wriggles's attack upon Dick Turpin in the garden, he had galloped off in pursuit with several of his men, leaving Jim Lickfold lying on the ground in a desperate condition.

In common with the rest who were wounded and dead, he was carried away from the scene of conflict, and placed at a public-house on Finchley Road, where his hurts were properly attended to.

Most of the officers, himself included, had not been wounded very seriously, so, after their hurts were properly dressed, they very quickly recovered.

It was towards the close of that day, and about the time when Dick Turpin was engaged in exploring the armoury, that Jim Lickfold and several of his companions, feeling very much better—almost well, in fact—were seated in a room set aside for their use in the public-house we have just mentioned.

"Well!" said Jim Lickfold, addressing his companions, "I'm damned if we have not brought our pigs to a fine market, though we might have been worse off than

we are. Curse that Dick Turpin say I, and all his crew! and no one will rejoice more than I shall when the day comes for him to be scragged!"

The other officers murmured an assent, for the pain they had experienced from their wounds had produced in their breasts a very strong feeling against the highwayman.

"Well, mates!" said Jim Lickfold, "if you feel pretty well, I have got something to propose to you that I think you will like. I made a bungling mistake, and got a good many of you into trouble, and I am anxious to atone for it if I possibly can; so if you feel well enough to go out upon a little expedition this very night, I will tell you at once what I have to propose, and which you will find will turn very much to your advantage."

"Hear, hear!" cried the other police officers. "Go on, Jim! We are all attention!"

"But are you well enough for a little expedition, do you think?"

"Oh, yes—yes!"

"Well, I am myself, and so I thought you were. To begin, then. While I have been laid up, I have been thinking matters over a great deal, and I have come to the conclusion that the highwaymen had taken up their quarters in that blessed old mansion for some time before we happened to disturb them."

"But we only found Dick Turpin," said one. "Where do you think the others are?"

"That's more than I can tell. Of course they are off on an excursion somewhere. However, that's nothing to do with what I was going to say."

"Proceed, then."

"Now, I think you'll admit that we rather took Dick Turpin by surprise that night when we broke in and attacked him."

"Well, I should rather say we did, judging by what took place."

"Very well, then, if they have taken up their quarters there for any length of time—and I feel sure they have—you may depend upon it that somewhere or other in the old place they have a great deal of booty concealed. Now, as we took Dick Turpin by surprise, it's pretty certain that he did not carry it away with him, so I should say the probability is, that the booty is there still. I dare say you understand what I am going to propose—it's that we should wait till night comes, and then slip off to the deserted mansion, get in, and have a good hunt for this booty. If we find it, why we will divide it equally among ourselves, and nobody need be any the wiser."

By the manner of the police officers, it was easy to see that they highly relished the proposition which Jim Lickfold had made, and they, one and all, signified the utmost willingness to assist him to carry it out.

They were absolutely frantic to start, when Jim said:

"I should not feel a bit surprised if we were to find a thousand pounds there. Very likely we should find a great deal more, but suppose we find that amount—well, there are five of us—so that would be just a couple of hundred pounds a-piece, and all I can say is, that such a sum would be very acceptable to me."

All Jim's companions were of the same way of thinking, and they were delighted beyond measure at the prospect of obtaining so large a sum at one stroke.

Jim was determined to clench the matter, so he added:

"You see, mates, the best of it is that there is no danger and very little trouble. All we shall have to do, as I said before, will be to make our way to the deserted mansion, creep in through the window, and then we can spend the night in searching the place over."

"But," said one of the officers, whose valour had cooled considerably since the wound he had last received, "suppose we should find some of the highwaymen there—how then?"

"That is not in the least degree probable," said Jim Lickfold. "The other three, you may depend, have taken the alarm long before this, and would never think of coming near the place, for fear there should be some officers guarding it. Then, as for Dick Turpin, we all know very well that old Wriggles is on his track, and he will have quite enough to do to look after his own safety. No—no, mates, there will be no danger of that sort. We shall have the place all to ourselves."

"Then," said one of the others, "I consider that it is no more than right, as Jim has put us up to this, which we should never have thought of ourselves, that he should have the largest share when the money is divided."

"No—no!" said Jim. "Share and share alike is my motto! I might be inclined to accept something extra under any other circumstances than the present, but I want to make some atonement for my stupid blunder, which caused so many of you to be wounded."

Several of the officers had looked rather frowningly upon him since he made the mistake referred to, but now they quite changed their demeanour, and one of them said:

"We do not blame you, Jim—not a bit. It was more old Wriggles's fault than yours. I only wish that we were ordered out under your command instead of his; we should get on a damned sight better than we do!"

"We should," said Jim, sinking his voice to a whisper, "for between ourselves, my private opinion is that old Wriggles is a fool!"

"So he is—so he is!"

"Well, now, as this matter is agreed upon, just take my advice a little further—have something good to drink, and fortify yourselves against the cold, and I'll warrant to say that before the sun rises to-morrow, we shall be all a couple of hundred pounds richer than we are at this moment."

The enthusiasm of the officers now rose to its highest pitch, and they looked upon Jim Lickfold as being the very best fellow in existence.

More drink was brought in, and the time between then and nightfall was occupied in consuming it, and arranging their plan of proceeding.

"Now mates," said Jim, "of course we don't know no more than a stump whereabouts this booty is; but it is in the house somewhere, I feel convinced. Now, I have got one way of searching a house, and I shall always stick to it, without some one else can show me a better."

"What is it, Jim?"

"Why, when I get into the house, I go right away upstairs to the top of it, and then I begin my search, going carefully over the top floor first, then descending to the next floor, and so on, till I come to the cellars, or find what I am looking for. It may seem the longest way about, but if it is slow it is sure."

"So it is, Jim!" cried the rest. "There couldn't be a better plan! You shall have the direction of the affair from first to last!"

"All right, mates, and though I say it myself, as shouldn't, still it's my opinion you've acted very wisely. If anybody can carry out the affair successfully, I can!"

By the time night fairly came, the officers had all imbibed just enough to make them right for the undertaking they were about to set out upon.

They loaded and primed their pistols, and made every preparation.

With Jim Lickfold at their head they set out for the deserted mansion.

Their astute leader, who was familiar with every inch of the ground in the neighbourhood, took them straight across the fields to their destination, so that they reached it in a very short space of time indeed.

Jim remembered quite well where the little window was situated at which he had seen Maud make her appearance, so he did not pause until he stood before it.

"Now, then," he said, "this is the way! Scramble through after me! There is no particular hurry, you know; but still, we need not lose time; and take my word for it, we have got the place all to ourselves!"

This the officers all believed, and so they scrambled through the window into the little apartment, where Jim Lickfold lighted a wax taper.

They then passed out into the passage; and had their leader made up his mind to commence his search at the bottom of the house instead of the top, why then he would have discovered Black Bess in the kitchen.

But things were ordained otherwise.

He knew the way to the staircase, so, calling out to his men to follow him, he led the way towards it, and commenced to ascend.

The dreary, supernatural kind of silence which always filled the mansion, produced an effect upon the officers, who instinctively and unconsciously lowered their voices and walked with noiseless footfall.



[MR. WRUGGLES MAKES MAUD A PRISONER.]

It was while they were ascending in this manner that Dick Turpin first caught sight of them.

With what happened afterwards the reader has already been made acquainted.

Dick Turpin ascended the stairs, went into the room, pocketed the gold, and came out on the landing again without the officers having the remotest suspicion that there was any oneelse beneath the roof save themselves.

The lumbering of the chest as Dick dragged it from its place came upon their ears with startling suddenness, and several of the most timid felt inclined to beat an immediate retreat, for they imagined the sound had some supernatural origin.

There was very little superstition, however, about Jim Lickfold.

He generally saw through a thing at once, and his reflection was that Dick Turpin had come back for the money, and had managed to get there first.

This enraged him greatly.

It was Jim, then, who had spoken to Dick Turpin about taking him dead or alive, and then immediately fired a pistol point-blank at him.

Jim was in hopes that by this course he should put an end to the affair.

As previously related, they scrambled over the oak chest as soon as Dick Turpin beat a retreat, and followed him to the top of the stairs.

Down these they descended, until they were brought to a stop by the door which Dick Turpin had managed to close.

Now, my boys!" said Jim, "you promised to leave the direction of this affair in my hands, so don't hesitate to obey my commands, and we shall not only get the money I have spoken of, but the reward for Dick Turpin as well!"

"We will obey!"

"Good, then—as there are five of us, two shall remain here, and batter down this door; I will go with the other two down the great staircase and out into the garden. You drive him to one of the windows—we will be on

the look-out with our pistols in our hands and as soon as he makes his appearance we will fire at him, and pop-down he will go!"

Hastily calling two men to follow him, Jim Lickfold hastened down the grand staircase, while the others set to work to demolish the door.

Jim and his two companions jumped out of the window into the garden, and then, panting and excited, with their pistols clutched nervously in their hands, they watched for Dick Turpin to make his appearance.

The others in the meanwhile broke down the door, and descended the steps leading to the kitchen.

Before they could reach it, however, Dick Turpin had got Black Bess all ready.

The kitchen window was already open, and all he had to do was to withdraw the bolts of the shutters and push them back upon their hinges.

Then, at the word of command, he felt sure Black Bess would leap with him into the garden.

Holding her thus in readiness to mount, and not dreaming that the officers were watching outside, Dick with drew the bolt and flung open the shutters.

Jim Lickfold heard the slight sound which this produced, and saw the shutters fly open.

He guessed what was coming, and rushed towards the kitchen window.

Dick's movements were very rapid, and before the police officers on the staircase could reach the kitchen, he had sprang into the saddle, and, pressing his heels close against the flanks of his bonny mare, he bent low down upon her neck, and urged her forward by his usual cry

Black Bess responded willingly to the signal.

With a rush she flew onward, and leaped through the window with a bound.

Jim Lickfold and his companions had not expected quite such a sudden movement, nevertheless they quickly recovered from their surprise, and fired.

But their aim was hasty and unsteady, and failed to do the smallest amount of damage.

Then the other officers appeared at the window of the kitchen, and they, too, fired a volley at the flying forms of the highwayman and his steed

CHAPTER DLXVIII.

DICK TURPIN WAITS IN VAIN FOR THE APPEARANCE OF HIS ABSENT COMRADES.

THE police officers were all unprovided with horses, so that, to commence a pursuit after Dick Turpin, was quite out of the question.

Jim Lickfold was furious when he saw Dick Turpin disappear among the trees, apparently none the worse for the many shots that were fired after him.

Those officers who were in the kitchen, however, quickly scrambled through the window, and were rushing off in pursuit, when Jim called them back.

"Where are you going to, you damned fools?" he asked. "What good can you do, I wonder? He has again slipped through our hands! I made sure of the reward this time!"

The officers looked rather crestfallen at each other, and then one, assuming a philosophic air, said:

"Well, I suppose we must make the best we can of a bad job! You know, when we started, we never thought of finding Dick Turpin. We came to fetch the money. Let us go and get it, and return."

"Fool—idiot!" roared Jim Lickfold. "What chance do you think we have got of obtaining the money now he has been beforehand with us? We ought to have been here last night!"

"Then, do you think he has actually been and carried away the money with him?"

"I don't think anything at all about it," was the reply "I am quite sure. What else do you imagine would induce him to run the risk of returning to this place? Of course he's fetched the money, and we have lost that as well as the reward!"

"Then, what are we to do?"

"Don't ask me! for I'm damned if I know or care. I suppose we had better sneak back to the public-house, like so many dogs with burnt tails!"

"We might as well have a search through the mansion," said another police officer. "We may have disturbed him too soon—he may not have had time to get the money, although he intended to do so."

Jim shook his head.

"Don't fill yourself up with that idea," he replied. "However, we will have a hunt through the old place, and if we do not find the booty, we may light upon something that will pay us for our trouble better than nothing."

This was assented to, and the whole party once more passed into the mansion.

In the meanwhile, Dick Turpin had not gone far.

It would have been the easiest matter in the world for him to have placed a very considerable distance between himself and his enemies; but on the present occasion he could not do so.

He was compelled to remain hovering around that spot.

He reined-in Black Bess just under the shadow of the tall hedgerow which skirted the narrow lane leading from the high-road to the dilapidated gates.

It was necessary that he should warn his companions, and he most ardently wished that they would quickly make their return, for the longer he remained lingering around that spot, the more dangerous it would be to him and to them too.

Dick listened; but he could hear no sounds indicating the approach of mounted travellers, so, with something like a sigh, he turned his eyes in the direction of the deserted mansion.

From where he was he could see the upper portions of it distinctly.

He was rather surprised that he should hear nothing further of the police officers.

He made sure they would have commenced a pursuit, and did not know that the reason why they did not was because they were unprovided with horses.

During the darkness, he would not have much difficulty.

But how was he to watch for the return of his comrades during the daytime?

More than once he felt inclined to set out towards the New Forest himself, to endeavour to meet them; but a little reflection soon showed him that this would be perfectly useless.

He was unable to form any idea whether they were near or far away from London, and it was equally impossible for him to say by which road they might return.

In all probability it would be a devious, circuitous one, and if so, the chances of his meeting with them were slight indeed.

He was therefore compelled to abandon this intention.

The prospect of remaining behind the hedge on the watch during the remainder of the night was anything but a pleasant one, but that seemed the only thing that he could do

He did not remain all the time in one place, but allowed Black Bess to walk up and down the meadow, taking care to keep all the while close under the hedge, in order to guard as much as possible against fear of discovery.

He heard nothing of the officers for a long while.

At length the sound of footsteps came to his ears, and, pausing in his lonely walk up and down, he peered through the hedge, and saw them slowly walking along the road.

They appeared to be very much aggravated about something, and in an ill temper with everything in general, for they snapped and snarled at each other like so many wild animals.

The fact was, they had had a long and fatiguing search through the mansion, and had failed to find anything of value that was in any way portable.

Jim Lickfold was generally right in coming to his conclusions, but not always.

His belief was at this moment that Dick Turpin was many miles away, and he would have laughed outright in the person's face who told him the bold highwayman was lurking so close at hand.

Dick Turpin watched them pass by, and listened to their retreating footsteps with feelings of very great satisfaction.

The coast was now clear, and his friends would not run quite so much danger when they made their return.

Dick waited about this spot until sunrise without seeing or hearing a fellow-creature, and, at last, when the sun rose higher and higher in the heavens, he was

compelled to quit the position he had taken up, and look around him for some place where he could remain in secret during the day.

There was little probability that his three comrades would return during daylight, if they were ever so close at hand.

They would betake themselves to some shelter until night closed in.

Dick hesitated a great deal before he could decide upon a hiding-place.

The idea of returning to the deserted mansion was by no means pleasant, though, after what had happened it was less likely than ever that the police officers would return to it.

Still there was no coming to any certain conclusion, whether they would or not.

Of the two, he preferred not to take up his quarters under its roof.

Between the dilapidated gates and the mansion itself, the trees grew very thickly together, and between the trunks of the trees was a dense mass of underwood, which would serve to conceal very many persons

This was the best place he could think of, and towards it he accordingly made his way.

He plunged right in among the trees, and halted on a spot where they grew more closely together than elsewhere.

He had been compelled to dismount and lead Black Bess by the bridle; and having now decided upon his resting-place, he slipped the reins over her head and held them in his hand, by this means allowing her to graze, and, at the same time, prevent her from straying off.

Dick laid himself down at full length, stretching his sense of hearing to the utmost, so as to be aware at the earliest moment of the approach of his friends or foes.

The very intentness with which he listened had the effect of drawing him off into a sleep.

In less than half an hour he was insensible to all around him, and would have been an easy prey to the police officers, had they but been acquainted with his whereabouts.

The day passed away however, without anyone coming near to disturb him; and when he at length opened his eyes he was astonished to find that it was rapidly growing dusk.

He had had some disagreeable dreams, and was glad enough to shake off the slumber which had so unconsciously stole upon him.

But even when he was wide awake he could not altogether divest himself of the unpleasant sensation which his dreams occasioned.

His mind seemed to be filled with some vague kind of alarm, but of what character he could not tell

He was conscious that danger was impending, but whether it was over himself, or over his comrades, he failed to decide.

He rose to his feet and listened for some time, but, reassured by the profound silence, he ventured to draw still nearer to the dilapidated gates.

"This will be as good a place as any to remain on guard during the night," he said. "If I could but find the fallen trunk of a tree, or something of that sort, the time would pass more pleasantly."

Searching about, it was not many minutes before he found a fallen tree, and on this he seated himself.

On this occasion he was ten times more anxious and impatient for the arrival of his comrades than before, but there seemed no more signs of their coming.

His quarters this night were more gloomy than before; still, as it was a matter of duty, he stuck to his post bravely.

At last, just as the moon was beginning to show herself above the horizon, the welcome sound of horses' hoofs upon the roadway reached his ear.

He started up and listened with great delight, but soon the expression of his countenance changed.

It assumed an anxious look, for he could tell long before he caught sight of the approaching horsemen that they were not his friends.

There must have been six or eight horses coming.

He changed his position a little, and was then able to command a view of the gates.

He fixed his eyes upon them, and presently a troop of police officers trotted through them into the avenue leading up to the deserted mansion.

Little dreaming that Dick Turpin was so close at hand, they trotted past his place of concealment, and with great rapidity making their way direct towards the building.

As soon as they had all passed him by and got to a reasonable distance, Dick Turpin thought his most prudent course would be to change his quarters, and accordingly he did so.

Forcing a passage through the trees, he once more emerged into the meadow where he had stationed himself on the preceding night.

What the police intended to do, and why they had gone to the deserted mansion was more than he could conjecture, though he tried hard to come to a conclusion upon the subject.

It was, however, perfectly certain that the necessity of his remaining somewhere close by, in order to warn his companions of their danger, was more than ever necessary.

Without he communicated the intelligence to them they would never dream for a moment that the police had taken up their quarters in the deserted mansion, and so they would run blindly into their power.

To Dick's infinite annoyance and anxiety, hour after hour passed away without his three comrades making their appearance.

He was on the watch the whole of the time, and he kept making the reflection every moment, that in a little while longer they would surely come.

But he was destined to perpetual disappointment, and finally morning again dawned and the sun rose without either of them making their appearance.

Dick now became fearfully anxious.

The time required for the expedition was over, he made every calculation as to the probable interruptions they would meet with on their journey, and yet they ought to have been back at least three days before.

The disagreeable conviction stole on him that they must have fallen into the hands of their foes; and if so, where were they?—what had happened?—how was he to learn any intelligence concerning them?

Every moment made his alarm increase.

Once more he was compelled to seek a hiding-place among the trees, but this time the forgetfulness of sleep was denied him.

The officers had certainly not left the deserted mansion—at least, if they were not beneath its roof they were somewhere close at hand.

It may be said with perfect safety that this day seemed the longest that Dick had ever passed.

As time passed by his perplexity increased.

It will be remembered that he had promised to rejoin Maud before dawn on the morning which would follow the coming night; but if his companions failed to arrive, how was he to keep his word.

At one time he determined as soon as night came to leave the vicinity of the deserted mansion and make some inquiries respecting his three friends.

But supposing they should return during his absence—which was very probable—how then?

Some means must be adopted by which they could be made aware of the danger of going farther; but how was this to be done?

The question was a puzzling one, and Dick taxed his brain for many hours in the endeavour to find the answer to it.

Many things suggested themselves to his mind, but not one pleased him.

Of whatever the warning might consist, it would be necessary that it should be conspicuous, or his friends would pass it by; but then, on the other hand, if it was conspicuous it would be seen by the police officers, and they would doubtless take care to remove it.

When night came he was no nearer the solution of the difficulty than he was at first, and he determined to wait until midnight, and so give them one more chance of returning.

Slowly the hours passed away, until midnight came, still there were no signs of Dick's missing comrades.

"I can wait here no longer," he said, starting to his feet; "besides, I am sick and faint with anxiety and hunger. I must leave some notice or other to warn them, and then I will set out with the hope that I may succeed in meeting them."

Dick led Black Bess towards the dilapidated gates, and then, as he gazed upon them, he murmured:

"If I could but fix some notice on them—something that would attract their attention as they were passing by and warn them of the peril of going further, I should be content. I remember now, there is a board upon which many years ago some notice or other was painted. All three of my comrades are well aware of its existence; it is large, and they cannot fail to see it. I will cut something upon it with my knife. If the police officers see it they will understand the warning intended to be conveyed, and will probably remove it; if they do, surely my comrades will notice its removal, and perchance that might put them on their guard."

Dick was aware that this was but an inefficient warning, yet he could not think of a better one, and he felt that to remain there any longer was simply impossible.

CHAPTER DLXIX.

DICK TURPIN HEARS UNEXPECTED AND TERRIBLE INTELLIGENCE AT THE FARM-HOUSE.

After making sure that no one was about, Dick Turpin crept towards the gates and paused before the board to which he had alluded.

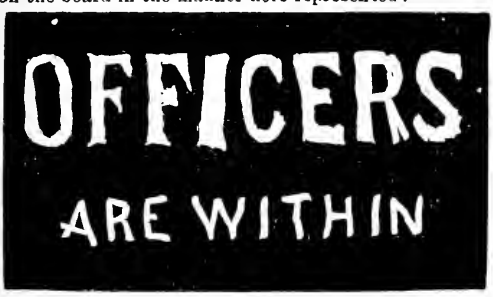
He continued to hold Black Bess by the bridle, so that if an interruption of any sort should ensue, it would be the easiest matter imaginable for him to spring into the saddle and gallop off, and so make his escape.

"I wish I could think of some better plan," he murmured as he took out his knife from his pocket. "I am afraid this warning will be insufficient, and yet as the board is black the letters I shall cut on it will appear white and will show out with great distinctness. I fancy, after all, they will see the notice, especially as they always draw rein before they pass through the gates."

Dick Turpin opened his knife and stood for a moment or so reflectively wondering what word he should cut upon the board that would convey his intended meaning.

He did not want his warning to be of too vague a character, lest it should be disregarded or improperly understood. What he wished was, if possible, to make his companions aware of the precise nature of the danger with which they were threatened.

After a little hesitation, he cut the following words on the board in the manner here represented:—



The word "officers" occupied nearly the whole of the board, and, as Dick had anticipated, the white letters showed out very conspicuously upon the black ground, so that they would meet the eye even on a dark night.

"If they catch sight of that word," he said, "they will stop, and by looking more closely they will easily see the others, and after such an intimation they will surely not venture to enter."

Having completed his work, Dick mounted, and going away for a few yards, returned to the gate, and was really surprised to notice how conspicuous the white letters looked.

"I can do no more," he said, "and I hope that the services of that board will not be required. I am in hopes that I shall meet them before daylight, and then we can all four push on to the farm-house where I have left Maud."

Although Dick believed that Maud was in absolute safety, yet, if the truth must be told, he felt quite as anxious to see her as his companions, for whenever he thought about her there was an uneasy feeling at his heart, for which he could not account.

A few minutes took him clear of the lane, and then he pushed onwards along the road which he imagined would most probably be selected by his friends.

He had to use the greatest caution in his progress, for he particularly wished to avoid being seen by anyone, and more than once he had to conceal himself behind the hedgerows, in order to avoid being discovered by one of the troops of dragoons who still continued their dreary task of patrolling the roads.

Dick went for some distance without halting, but at length he was compelled to pause, in consequence of the deathlike faintness that occasionally came over him, consequent upon his having gone so many hours without food.

He did not like the idea of stopping at one of the roadside inns, but no other place seemed likely to offer itself.

At last, however, he came in sight of a small cottage, from one of the windows of which, much to his surprise—for the hour was a late one—there came a feeble beam of light.

He made his way towards it, and after reconnoitring a little, went boldly up to the door and knocked.

Some moments elapsed before any notice was taken of his summons, and just when he was upon the point of repeating it, the door was opened.

A young woman, with a pale, sad-looking face, appeared upon the threshold.

She looked upon Dick with an inquiring, half-frightened expression.

Noticing this, he endeavoured to reassure her.

"My good woman," he said, "I have travelled many miles upon urgent business, and am now almost faint with hunger. Give me something to eat, and allow me to remain for a few moments, and I will reward you liberally for your trouble."

"Come in, sir," said the young woman—"you are quite welcome! The best I have in the cottage shall be placed before you, and I will charge you only its exact value. I would not do that, but I am very poor, and cannot afford to be as hospitable as I could wish."

Dick was well pleased with the answer he received, and dismounted from Black Bess, leaving her, according to his custom, to wander about wherever she thought proper.

There was a perceptible degree of sadness in the manner in which this young woman spoke and invited Dick to seat himself.

In a few moments a plain but wholesome repast was placed before him, of which he partook hastily and eagerly.

"You will excuse me, sir," said the young woman, "if I leave you here while I go upstairs? No doubt you are surprised to find me up at this late hour of the night; but my husband is very ill, and is in the room above. I am afraid he is dying; the doctor told me to-day that there was no hope."

The poor creature buried her face in her apron, and left the room weeping bitterly.

"Dick did not feel very comfortable in his present quarters. A weight seemed to hang upon his spirits, and the gloomy feeling which had entered his heart some hours ago rapidly increased.

Therefore, he dispatched his meal as rapidly as he could.

Dick glanced around the cottage walls with a heavy heart.

He could see that almost every article that could be spared had been removed, and he had no difficulty in coming to the conclusion that the furniture and other articles had been made away with, either to pay the surgeon, or else to obtain such luxuries for the sick man as might have been ordered.

Dick Turpin was ever ready to relieve distress, and especially such distress as he now beheld.

He had plenty of money, and so, plunging his hands into both his pockets, he took as many guineas as he could grasp, and placed them upon the table.

He pushed all the glittering coins close together, and then covered them over with his plate.

Just as he had finished doing so, the young woman entered the room again.

She was still weeping, though evidently she strove hard to restrain her sobs and tears.

"Is your husband better?" asked Dick, in a kind voice.

"I cannot tell, sir," was the reply. "I am afraid to think he is, lest my disappointment should be greater. He appears no worse, and slumbering quietly."

"Then there is room for hope," said Dick. "Do not be so downcast. Many thanks for your kind hospitality. Good night! Look under the plate, and you will see that I have shown my appreciation of your kindness in the best way I could think of. Good night!"

He left the cottage abruptly as he spoke, and, scrambling his mare, he once more sprang upon her back and rode away.

Surely that was one good deed done, and one that would redound to his credit.

On that occasion, Dick was more ready than ever to sympathise with the woman, for he fancied that her heart, heavy as it was, was scarce heavier than his own.

Already he had travelled many miles, for Black Bess had come quickly, and yet he had failed to discover any signs of those he had longed to see, and his suspicion that they had fallen into danger and been captured by their enemies strengthened, until it almost became a conviction.

In one hour more, or perhaps even less, the dawn would come, and he felt anxious beyond measure to keep his appointment with Maud; if he failed, not only would she suffer much from disappointment, and the thousand natural fears that would fill her heart, but he was unable to tell what mischief might result.

Finding he did not return, she might conclude that he had been captured, and leave her present place of security to go in search of him; then who could estimate the danger that would follow, and the many difficulties that would be in the way of their meeting again?

"I must trust to the efficiency of the warning I have set up," said Dick. "It is very possible that I have passed them, and that ere this they may have arrived at the deserted mansion. I may be altogether on the wrong track, and therefore it is foolish for me to continue. No, I must gallop across the country to the farm-house."

Anxious as he was to see Maud, yet he felt strangely reluctant to leave the high-road on which he had been travelling; and, after he had done so, he fancied, if he had kept on only a little longer, he should have met his friends and then all would have been well.

These were but fancies, however, and he was surprised to find how much he was affected by them.

He allowed the reins to fall loosely upon the neck of Black Bess, and she galloped along the lanes and across the country roads at such a speed as she very rarely put forth, and yet at every bound she took, Dick felt his uneasiness increase and his heart grow heavier and heavier.

It was in vain he made up his mind to shake off these feelings, and it was equally in vain that he attempted to carry his resolution into effect.

Gradually, a faint light appeared in the east; but yet, at the rate he was now travelling, he would almost be able to keep his promise; at any rate, if no accident occurred, he felt certain he should be able to reach the farm-house before sunrise.

Nor was he deceived.

Upon gaining the top of the hill, he looked down and saw it beneath him; and when he observed how peaceful all appeared, and what an air of repose was on the whole scene, he felt angry with himself for having given way as he had to what he now considered foolish fears.

He only paused on the top of the hill long enough to enable Black Bess to recover her wind, then he began the descent.

He paused at the little gate and looked around him.

As he had exceeded his time, he thought it very likely that Maud might be waiting somewhere near to join him, but, although he turned his eyes in every direction, he could not catch sight of her.

This gave him but slight uneasiness.

The gate was fastened, and, as it would have taken some time to open it in the ordinary manner, he resolved to take the nearest way, so, backing Black Bess a few yards, he made her leap over it.

The farm-house was as yet some distance off, and from some cause or other Dick approached slowly—he fancied it was because he expected to see Maud somewhere in the grounds.

Suddenly in the distance he caught sight of a female figure running hastily towards him.

In the uncertain morning light, and at that distance, it was not possible for him to see with certainty whether it was Maud who was approaching, but he jumped to the conclusion that it was no one else.

He reined-in his steed and alighted, for he wished that their first meeting and interchange of words should take place at a distance from the farm-house, and in a spot where there was no fear of being overheard.

But as the female figure came closer, Dick noted, with a surprise that quickly changed into apprehension, that it was not Maud who was approaching, but some one else.

At first he could scarcely believe himself, but, looking again, he found that he had made no mistake.

It was a young girl who was coming, and certainly in a straight line to him, as though she had something to communicate.

As she drew nearer, Dick recognised her as being the daughter of the farmer.

All those forebodings of coming ill which he had experienced throughout the night now came thronging back with redoubled violence, and he clutched Black Bess tightly by her flowing mane in order to support himself.

After the lapse of another moment the girl arrived.

Her whole appearance betokened the greatest fright and agitation.

Her face was white and rigid, and her hands clasped.

"Fly—fly!" she said, in a hysterical voice,—"fly while you have time—while there is yet a chance! Fly—fly at once!"

All objects seemed suddenly to swim before Turpin's eyes.

"What has happened?" he asked. "Speak out, I pray you—let me know at once the extent of my danger? Why should I fly?"

"There are officers in the farm-house!" cried the girl,—"I expect them to make their appearance every moment! If they see you, you are lost! Fly, then—fly, or they will kill you!"

"I cannot go," said Dick, "without my companion goes with me."

The girl burst out into tears.

"Alas—alas!" she said,—"that is impossible—she is gone!"

"Gone?" cried Dick, in a voice of the greatest dismay and consternation,—"impossible! Where can she have gone?"

A wild scream thrilled from the lips of the young girl, by way of reply, and then she said:

"I feared this—I feared this! It is too late—look! they are here!"

Dick Turpin looked in the direction in which the young girl pointed, and then he caught sight of a troop of mounted police officers, whose arms and accoutrements glittered brightly as the rays of the rising sun shone full upon them.

He gazed in a species of stupefaction, making no effort to mount his steed—making no effort to escape, and only murmuring to himself continually:

"Gone—gone!"

CHAPTER DLXX.

MR. WRIGGLES PLANS AN ELABORATE SCHEME FOR THE CAPTURE OF DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES.

In order that what follows may be properly understood, it is necessary that we should revert to the proceedings of Mr. Wriggles and his band.

It will be remembered that Dick Turpin distanced his pursuers soon after leaving Mr. Tuttle's residence; but although he had lost sight of the flying highwayman, Mr. Wriggles did not abandon the chase.

In spite of the apparent uselessness of doing so, he kept on at the best speed his horses could make.

It soon became evident that he had completely lost the track, but still at a venture he kept straight on, hoping ere long to discover something that could put him on the scent again.

Curiously enough, he followed almost in the footsteps of Dick Turpin.

It was on the morning following the night when Dick Turpin had taken his departure from the farm-house, that Mr. Wriggles and his officers halted at the top of the hill that was close by.

From this elevated spot he surveyed the scene around him, but though he looked closely at every object, he failed to perceive any signs of those he sought.

The farm-house was the only habitation in sight, and Mr. Wriggles thought it was just possible that Turpin had halted there.

At any rate, he resolved to make inquiries, so descended the hill.

Upon reaching the little wooden gate we have so often had occasion to mention, he saw coming towards it from the direction of the homestead, a man who was mounted on a strong, rough-looking cob.

This was no other than the farmer himself, who had been so cleverly imposed upon by Dick Turpin.

When he saw the body of mounted police officers clustering round the gate, he felt rather alarmed and wondered what was the matter.

He was somewhat reassured when he saw Mr. Wriggles take off his hat and make a bow.

But he stopped when within about a yard of the gate.

Mr. Wriggles took from his pocket a short ebony staff with a gilt crown at the top of it, which in those days was carried by police officers as an emblem of their authority.

"Good morning, Mr. Farmer," said Wriggles. "I want to ask you a few questions."

"What is it, Mr. Officer?"

"You see this staff," said Mr. Wriggles, waving it in the air. "We are here in special pursuit of Dick Turpin the highwayman."

"Lor! now you don't say so? He isn't in these parts, surely?"

"I fancy he is! Have you seen him?"

"Not I, and I don't want."

"Have you seen any strangers about within the last day or so?"

"Well, no particular strangers that I know of, except a soldier that rode to the door of my house just when I was sitting down to breakfast yesterday morning."

"A soldier!" cried Mr. Wriggles, quickly. "What sort of a one—describe him? Had he a woman with him?"

"Yes, he had."

"Then it's him!"

"Who?"

"Dick Turpin!"

"No—no, Mr. Officer, you're wrong there; he was a soldier, 'cause he told me all about it."

"What did he tell you?"

The farmer thereupon related the story which Dick had told him, adding, as he proceeded, a few little embellishments of his own, in order to increase the interest.

"It's him, I tell you!" said Mr. Wriggles—"it's him! Where is he?—which way did he go?"

"I didn't watch him; but he started last night and said he was going to London."

"And didn't he take the girl with him?"

"No; she is in the farm-house this very moment. I left her there; but, Mr. Officer, you don't mean for to say that that sweet-spoken young lady, that talks for all the world like a book, has anything to do with Dick Turpin?"

"I do though."

"Well, you ought to know best; but I can hardly believe it myself."

"And did he say he was coming back?"

"Yes; he said he should be back in three days: the time will be up to-morrow night."

"And the girl is in your house you say?"

"Yes, she is."

Mr. Wriggles stroked his chin with a meditative air, and then he said:

"Well, Mr. Farmer, you have given us some very important information, and if you will only hold your tongue for a little while you will be a hundred pounds more in pocket than you are now."

"That's a goodish lump of money," replied the farmer, "and would be very acceptable just now, for my last year's crops were so bad that I was well-nigh ruined."

"Well, then, this will give you a start for the next season. All you have to do is, to say not a word to anyone."

"Well, I shan't have the chance," said the farmer, "for I am going out on a journey, and I don't expect I shall return for a couple of days at least."

"All right then, pass on."

"You know," said the farmer, as he came through the gate, "that if so be as this soldier chap is really Dick Turpin, why, catch him I say, for he well deserves it, and I hope when you have got him you'll keep him!"

"We'll try!" said Wriggles, with a grin.

"But as for that young lady, I do hope you don't mean any harm against her. Somehow, I can't believe it's true; however, it's no business of mine."

"We have nothing to say against the girl, of course," said Mr. Wriggles, "nor shall we harm her. All we want is Dick Turpin, and we're bound to have him."

"Serve him right, too!" said the farmer.

And as he spoke, he struck his cob sharply with a stick he carried, and trotted off down the lane—glad, rather than otherwise, to get rid of the officers, who were no favourites of his.

After he had gone, Mr. Wriggles remained for some moments quite silent and motionless.

It was easy to see that he was pondering over some fresh thought.

Suddenly his eyes brightened, and he smacked his hand on his thigh, as he said:

"That will do. I shall have him now, let things turn out how they will. That's a brave thought—a good thought!"

What Mr. Wriggles intended to do will very quickly be seen.

In the first place, he instructed his men to conceal themselves somewhere in the neighbourhood, and keep close watch for the appearance of Dick Turpin, but on no account to let themselves be seen, or allow their presence to be suspected.

Having made these arrangements, and having also seen them to some extent carried out, he proceeded to take the next step in his plan, which was to gallop to London with as much speed as he could.

He did so, taking the nearest road, and leaving his men in ambush near the farm-house.

After rather more than three hours' hard riding, he reached London, and went direct to the Bow Street Police Court, where he asked for, and obtained, an interview with the chief magistrate.

"Your worship," he said, "is well aware what a many attempts have been made to capture Dick Turpin, all of which have failed. It is highly important that he should be made prisoner, and not allowed to set the laws at defiance any longer."

"But how is it to be done?" said the magistrate,—"it seems to me an impossibility."

"If your worship will render me your assistance, I think we shall be able to make sure of him and capture him with so little trouble that all the world will be surprised."

"Anything I can do to bring about such a desirable result, you may depend I shall do with great willingness," replied the magistrate.

"Well, then, as your worship is aware, this Dick Turpin is generally accompanied by a female, who, I have heard, is his wife, but I think it would suit us best not to believe the report."

"What do you mean, Mr. Wriggles?"

"Just this, your worship—I know where this young woman is at the present moment. I have left my men watching the house she is in. From what I have told you, don't you think we may reasonably come to the conclusion that she is an accomplice of the highwayman?"

"Certainly."

"You do think so, your worship?"

"I do."

"Well, then, if so, you will, of course, have no objection in giving me a warrant, authorising me to take this young woman a prisoner."

"I shall have no objection to order such a document to be issued," replied the magistrate. "There are good grounds for it, but how is that to assist you in capturing Dick Turpin?"

"Ah! that is it, your worship!" said Mr. Wriggles.

shaking his head wisely. "It is a good plan, and so you will say when you hear it."

"Go on, then!"

"Well, your worship, I have good grounds for saying that there is rather a remarkable attachment existing between Dick Turpin and this young woman I have mentioned, who is said to be his wife. She is with him nearly always, and he has incurred much extra peril, I might say, solely on her account. It is extraordinary to me that he should have left her, but he has done so, and it will be a fortunate thing for us."

"You are talking at random, Mr. Wriggles! I am impatient for you to come to the point!"

"I am coming to it as fast as I can, your worship. The reason why I want the warrant for the apprehension of the girl is that, if she is lodged in Newgate charged as being an accomplice, Dick Turpin will try at once to get her at liberty. Now, do you see my plan, your worship?"

"I think I do," said the magistrate, doubtfully, who was certainly no more clear-headed than police magistrates generally are.

"Of course you do!" returned Mr. Wriggles, in a triumphant voice. "I shall take her prisoner, place her in Newgate, and then keep my eyes open. Dick Turpin will come and try to release her; very likely he will bring his three notorious comrades with him; if so, I have only to take my measures properly, and then we shall have them all four, as sure as a gun."

The magistrate rubbed his hands slowly together as he said:

"That is a good plan. You are a clever man, Mr. Wriggles!"

"Your worship is too good," returned the officer, with a bow and a smirk. "I am glad you approve of my plan."

"It seems to me a very likely one to succeed. You shall have the warrant, never fear; I have excellent grounds for issuing it, for she is clearly, upon your testimony, an accomplice."

"Thanks, your worship! It doesn't matter a straw whether she is an accomplice, or whether she is not—or whether the charge can be proved against her, or not! The thing to be done, is to get her in Newgate! Ha, ha! She will be a decoy duck, your worship, and will draw them all four to destruction! Ha, ha! It is very good!"

Mr. Wriggles was evidently highly delighted with his plan, and well he might be, for who could doubt that it would probably be successful?

We fairly tremble for Dick Turpin's safety when we think upon it, for in his anxiety to set Maud at liberty he would rush into any peril.

The warrant authorising Mr. Wriggles to apprehend Maud and lodge her in the prison of Newgate was duly made out, and handed over to the astute police officer.

He folded the document up and put it into his pocket with a feeling of greater satisfaction than he had known for a long time.

He felt sure, in fact, that he should now be able to capture Dick Turpin, and so be recompensed for all his numerous defeats.

"I will leave you now, your worship, for I have more than three hours' ride before me, in order to reach the farm-house I spoke of. By that time it will be getting towards night. I am much obliged to you for issuing this warrant, and the next you hear of me will be the intelligence that this young woman is safely lodged in Newgate, and after that——"

"I hope the next thing I shall hear will be that you have captured the four daring offenders who have had such a long and unprecedented career!"

"I will try," said Mr. Wriggles, "and I think that I shall succeed!"

He left the court as he spoke, and, obtaining a fresh horse, galloped off towards the farm-house, for while influenced by his present excitement, he was insensible to fatigue.

As he had predicted, night was close at hand when he reached the spot where he had left his men in ambush.

His first question was whether they had seen anything of Dick Turpin.

He was replied to in the negative, and at last he had felt no one had left the farm-house.

"Then," said Mr. Wriggles, making great efforts to keep his triumphant feelings within bounds, "all will go well! Follow me, and we shall do the best night's work that we have done for many a long day."

The officers were rather curious to know what Mr. Wriggles intended to do, but they knew their irascible commander too well to think of putting a question to him upon the subject.

In a stealthy manner they all passed through the gate, and then they dismounted.

The horses were left in charge of one of the men, who was instructed to lead them slowly up towards the door of the farm house.

Mr. Wriggles and the rest preceded on foot, for he imagined, by adopting this course, he should be less likely to give the alarm.

No notice appeared to be taken of their arrival, and they reached the homestead without being seen or questioned by anyone.

Mr. Wriggles held up his hand and proceeded to reconnoitre.

He peeped through the various windows in succession, until at last he caught sight of that which he wished to see.

He could scarcely contain his joy.

Seated in a comfortable old-fashioned arm-chair, which was drawn up to a table before the fire, sat Maud.

The firelight flickered upon her countenance, revealing it distinctly.

Mr. Wriggles had no doubts whatever about her identity.

He glanced rapidly all round the room, but as far as he could tell, Maud was the sole occupant of it.

Having made out all this, Mr. Wriggles next noted the position of the room, and of the front door of the house, so that he might make his way towards it with the least possible delay.

"Now, my men," he said, "follow me silently. If we can get into that chamber unawares, without making an alarm, so much the better, because then we shall be able to do our work with all the more ease. Follow me, I say, and be silent."

With his constable's staff in one hand, and a pair of handcuffs in the other, Mr. Wriggles crept cautiously towards the front door of the farm-house, his men treading closely in his footsteps and wondering what was going to happen next.

CHAPTER DLXXI.

MAUD FALLS INTO THE TOILS.

Why could not some fairy whisper in Maud's ear, and warn her of the danger with which she was so closely threatened, and so give her the opportunity of escaping the grasp of Mr. Wriggles?

But no such warning came, and she sat by the fireside gazing into the flames, and wondering where Dick Turpin was at that moment.

The fear that he was in some kind of peril was always present to her imagination, but she never dreamt that she was in peril too.

So absorbed was she in her meditations, that she did not hear the door creak as Mr. Wriggles pushed it open; and if the faint sound made by the footsteps of the officers as they crossed the floor reached her ears, yet it did not penetrate her understanding.

The first intimation she had of the presence of anyone was a loud "Ahem!" which Mr. Wriggles gave on purpose to attract her attention.

She looked up, and the moment she caught sight of the police officers, she uttered a loud and piercing scream.

Mr. Wriggles made an ironical bow, and flourished his little gilt staff before her face, while he kept his right hand, with the handcuffs in it, behind his back.

"Make no disturbance!" he said. "Consider yourself in custody upon the charge of being the accomplice of Dick Turpin! Here is my staff—here is my warrant for your apprehension! Rise and prepare to accompany me! Resistance will be quite useless!"

Maud was so stunned and overpowered by these words that she was unable to move or to speak.

She instantly jumped to the conclusion that Dick was already in custody and that her apprehension was a secondary step.

The loud cry to which she had given utterance had the effect of attracting the attention of all the inmates of the farm-house, and they hastily rushed into the room by a door opposite the one at which the police officers stood.

They were thunderstruck when they beheld the scene before them.

The farmer's daughter, between Maud and whom a certain feeling of friendship had already sprung up, rushed towards the chair in which Maud sat, and breathlessly demanded to know the meaning of what she saw.

"Young woman," said Mr. Wriggles, "I would advise you not to attempt to interfere with me in the execution of my duty. If you do, you will find the consequences rather serious. I have a warrant here for the apprehension of this person on the charge of being an accomplice of Dick Turpin. Stand aside! and don't interrupt me, or you yourself will be liable to a charge of felony!"

The girl was amazed, and looked with a stupified kind of wonderment, first into Maud's face, and then into that of Mr. Wriggles.

"It's all right," said Mr. Wriggles, and then addressing Maud, he said:

"Do you intend to come with me quietly, or do you intend to make a resistance?"

Maud glanced around her, with her eyes full of tears.

How could she hope to resist so many strong, well-armed men?

She bent her head, and let her hands fall into her lap.

To tell the truth, she, as yet, scarcely realised her position.

"I am glad to see you behave like a sensible woman!" said Mr. Wriggles. "You might just as well have given in as not!"

Although he spoke thus, there was a certain amount of vexation perceptible in the tones of his voice; it would have been a satisfaction to him if he could have had a pretext for treating Maud roughly.

At the best, revenge is but the great effort of a little mind, but Mr. Wriggles could even be paltry and contemptible in his revenge.

He knew Dick Turpin well enough to be aware that the highwayman would feel an injury inflicted upon Maud with greater keenness than one inflicted upon himself.

"Now rise," he said, "and hold out your hands. I have a pair of bracelets here—extra small size—which will fit you exactly!"

He held up the handcuffs as he spoke.

Maud felt almost choked, but still she managed to gasp out:

"Surely—surely you would not fetter me! I have done nothing to deserve that! I am willing to go with you peaceably and quietly!"

"Very glad to hear it, but I must slip these on if it is only as a matter of form. Then, you know, it is making doubly sure. Don't be afraid, they won't hurt you! There, it's done!"

Mr. Wriggles was an adept at putting on a pair of handcuffs, and prided himself on the dexterity he had acquired by long practice.

Before she was aware of it, Maud found her wrists encircled with the manacles.

She felt the humiliation bitterly, but she could not help herself—she was forced to succumb.

She rose to her feet as she said:

"I hope your indignities are over now. I say again, I will follow you peaceably and quietly wherever you wish; I don't intend to make a resistance!"

"That's all right," said Mr. Wriggles "There you are—you are quite safe now. I shall want you to wait a moment or so; a hackney-coach will be here directly. You see, I have had more consideration for you than you expected or deserved. I might have made you trudge all the way to London on foot."

"And you would have used your power if it would have answered your purpose to do so!" said Maud, irritated by his manner. "It is out of no consideration for myself that you are going to allow me to ride to London."

"And that's all the thanks I get, is it?" said Wriggles, assuming an offended air. "Well, never mind; the coach is here by this time, I dare say. Come this way!"

He attempted to take hold of Maud by the arm, and lead her out of the farm-house; but she shrank back as she said, or rather shrieked:

"Don't touch me!—don't touch me! I say I will follow you wherever you may go; but don't put your hands upon me!"

"Ha, ha!" said Mr. Wriggles. "Mighty fine!—mighty fine, indeed! but I am not going to stand any of your foolery! Come along!"

He darted forward and grasped her roughly by the arm.

Maud did not resist, but allowed him to lead her quietly, being determined not to give him further pretext for ill-usage if she could help it.

With her voice almost choked by sobs, Maud bade the inmates of the farm-house farewell, and was then led out into the open air by Mr. Wriggles.

They went on down the path until the gate was reached, and then Mr. Wriggles said:

"Look up the road, Smithson, and tell me whether you can see the coach coming."

"There's something on the top of the hill, sir," was the reply.

"That is it, then,—it will not be long."

The coach to which Mr. Wriggles alluded was one that he had given instructions to be sent after him, in order to convey the prisoner to Newgate.

In a few minutes it arrived.

It was filled full of officers, about half of whom got out.

Maud was then placed inside the coach along with the remainder, and the other half climbed upon the roof.

"Be careful of your prisoner," shouted Mr. Wriggles to them. "You are answerable for her safe keeping, and you will get into trouble if she escapes. I shall follow you to London in the course of a few hours."

The hackney-coach was once more set in motion, and Mr. Wriggles watched it until it was out of sight.

Then turning to the officers who were with him, he said.

"That much is over, and well over too. Now, then, come back to the farm-house; we will take up our quarters there, and wait for Dick Turpin to arrive; he will walk up to the house unsuspectingly, and then we shall have him as sure as a gun."

The officers gave a shout of satisfaction, and followed their leader up the narrow winding path towards the farm-house.

Here, to the great terror of the inmates, they insisted upon taking up their quarters.

They were allowed to do so, for the farmer's wife could not tell what might be the consequence of a refusal.

Here Mr. Wriggles waited patiently, in the expectation that Dick Turpin would arrive.

He informed all the inmates of the homestead of his intentions, and laid the strictest injunction upon them not to utter a word that might get to the ears of the highwayman, and so put him upon his guard.

He knew it would be no easy task to capture Dick Turpin, no matter how favourable the circumstances were, and he wished to make sure of doing so; therefore, if he could keep himself in concealment, and allow Dick Turpin to enter the house without suspecting anything, he would then stand a much better chance, for it would be much easier to make him prisoner within the limits of a room, which would prevent him from struggling so desperately as he would if in the open air.

He took care to let them all know what the penalty would be if they assisted the highwayman to escape, or if they warned him of his danger.

Not content with this, however, he kept a sharp look-out upon them all.

As the time appointed for the arrival of Dick Turpin drew near, Mr. Wriggles's agitation became extreme.

In spite of all his threats as to the consequences, there was one who, in her own mind, resolved to let the highwayman know of the danger that threatened him.

This was the farmer's daughter, who had taken a sudden liking for Maud.

Now that she knew all, she determined for the latter's sake to try her best to get Dick out of his difficulty.

On the third night, then, she took up her station at the



[MAUD IS MADE THE TENANT OF A NEWGATE CELL.]

of the upper windows of the house, from which a view of the lane and the gate opening into it could be obtained, and here she sat and watched for his arrival.

At last she saw him near the gate, and no sooner did she catch sight of him than she hastily descended the stairs, and ran out into the garden in the manner we have described in a former chapter.

Mr. Wriggles, too, was on the look-out, but as he was on the ground floor, he did not see Dick Turpin at the gate, but he did see the farmer's daughter speaking to him.

He was aware, then, that promptitude of action was necessary, for, of course, the girl's object in meeting the highwayman was to apprise him of his peril.

Hastily shouting to his men, he ran to the door and out into the garden.

He pointed out two figures in the distance, which were plainly visible by the early morning light.

All saw them, and, compressing their lips, ran after Mr. Wriggles, who on this occasion was determined to die rather than fail to effect his purpose.

Dick Turpin was so overcome by the unexpected intelligence he had received, that although he saw the officers rapidly approaching him he made no effort to escape.

The farmer's daughter clutched him convulsively by the arm, and fairly shook him backwards and forwards as she said:

"Fly! Oh, fly!—fly, or it will be too late! Fly while you have the opportunity of doing so! Fly, and you may yet be in time to save her!"

"From whom?—from what?" said Dick, grasping the saddle. "Tell me where she is gone!"

"The police came and took her in a coach to Newgate."

"Newgate?"

"Yes, that's all I know. Fly—fly now, or all is lost!"

Dick Turpin's heart swelled with rage when he heard

what had befallen Maud, and he wondered why her capture had been made at the instigation of his old enemy, Mr. Wriggles.

By this time the momentary stupor that had come over him had quite disappeared.

To remain there he knew would be perfect madness, and although he burned to avenge the injury which had been done to her he loved so well, yet, when he saw the numbers of his foes, he was compelled to abandon the idea.

He might have avenged her, but it would have been at the sacrifice of his own life.

He resolved, therefore, to mount his steed and fly, and then to know no rest until he had freed Maud from her imprisonment.

This was exactly what Mr. Wriggles had foreseen, and was his sole motive for placing Maud in Newgate.

With his usual agility, Dick sprang into the saddle and galloped off.

He was only just in time, for the officers were very close behind him, the time occupied by his brief conversation with the farmer's daughter having been sufficient to enable them to traverse the distance between the farm-house and the spot where that conversation took place.

The officers came on at a gallop, all holding pistols in their right hands.

The narrowness of the path along which they had to go seriously impeded the movements of so dense a body of men.

There were several awkward collisions between their horses, but heedless of this, and of every other minor danger, they bent all their attention upon capturing the highwayman.

Mr. Wriggles had strong hopes of being able to come up with him before he had time to mount his steed, and he cried out to his men:

"Dead or alive!—mind, dead or alive! As soon as you are near enough, fire upon him!"

The officers all had their pistols ready for immediate use, and just as Dick galloped off they discharged a volley after him, the first shot having been fired by Mr. Wriggles.

Dick was quite maddened at the thought of the indignity that had been offered Maud, and when this volley was fired upon him he turned round in the saddle and fired a couple of pistols at his pursuers.

The compact body of officers was an object he could scarcely miss, and the two shots he fired did serious execution.

Directly afterwards he allowed the reins to fall upon the neck of Black Bess, and he uttered that peculiar cry which he always made use of when he wished her to put forth her utmost speed.

CHAPTER DLXXII.

MR. WRIGGLES CONTINUES TO FEEL THE GREATEST CONFIDENCE IN THE EXCELLENCE OF HIS SCHEME.

It was a five-barred gate of the usual height which formed a means of communication between the farm and the lane, and the upper portion of it was, as usual, garnished with a row of short iron spikes.

To Black Bess, however, such a gate was a barrier easily surmounted, and so she galloped towards it at full speed, and then, rising in the air, leaped over it and descended lightly enough in the road beyond.

But not one of the officers liked the idea of making the attempt to leap over this obstacle, and so as they approached the gate they gradually lessened their headlong speed, until finally, by dint of hard pulling, they managed to run up their horses close to it.

Mr. Wriggles then called out to one of his men to alight and unfasten the gate.

The man who dismounted set about his task in a very confident manner, but soon found it was more difficult to open the gate than he had imagined.

It was not secured by a padlock, but by an iron chain and a staple, very ingeniously fixed, and there was only one means by which this fastening could be undone.

Those who were in the secret could open the gate in a moment, but this officer was not, and he fumbled about with the chain in a manner that greatly exasperated Mr. Wriggles, for while this delay was taking place Dick Turpin was galloping swiftly up the hill in the direction of London.

"You fool!" roared the chief police officer. "How much longer do you intend to keep us waiting? Why don't you open the gate?"

"I can't, sir. Blest if I can understand how it is fastened; there is a piece of iron at the end of the chain, and I can't get it through the staple."

"Why not, you idiot?"

"Because it is too large, Mr. Wriggles; it won't come through at all."

With an angry yell, Mr. Wriggles sprang from his horse and went to the gate.

He was quite confident about being able to open it, although his follower had failed, and he said:

"Look here, you jackass, this way!—eh? d—n it!"

This last exclamation came from the lips of Mr. Wriggles as he found the chain resolutely refuse to pass through the staple, although when he first began to speak he had made quite sure that it would do so.

The other police officers grinned, and enjoyed the discomfiture of their chief immensely, but not so much as the man who had been trying to open the gate.

"Curse them all!" cried Mr. Wriggles. "What fools they must be to fasten a gate in this fashion! Here, tear it down—smash it, somebody—we must get through! Ah! I see how it can be managed; dismount all of you, and come to my assistance, and don't sit there like a parcel of fools!"

The officers dismounted, and by the direction of their chief took hold of the other end of the gate, and by dint of great exertion they managed to lift it from its hinges.

"Fling it down into the road!" cried Mr. Wriggles. "Serve them right for having such gates!"

There was a crash, and the heavy five-barred gate lay in the roadway in a manner that was calculated to be exceedingly dangerous to anyone who might happen to come along that way and not see it.

It is not to be supposed, however, that Mr. Wriggles would trouble himself about that.

He ordered his men to mount, and set the example of so doing.

Then, with his whole troop at his heels, he commenced the ascent of the hill.

Upon gaining the summit he looked all around him.

By this time it was broad daylight, and the sun was several degrees above the horizon, so he was enabled to see objects at a great distance.

But for all that, he failed to perceive the bold highwayman and his steed.

Both had completely disappeared, though in what manner he could not tell.

Mr. Wriggles put up with his disappointment with wonderful calmness.

Indeed, he quite chuckled with satisfaction as he said to himself:

"The woodcock is near the gin now; it is all right; my plan will succeed—I feel sure of it! What a glorious scheme. He will, like a fool, be hanging about Newgate in the hope of being able to effect the girl's escape. I shall have him—I'm sure I shall have him! A little care is all that will be necessary."

Mr. Wriggles was highly delighted at the prospect before him, and it might be said with perfect safety, that he was never in a better temper than he was at that moment.

All of a sudden a fresh thought occurred to him.

"I had almost forgotten that," he said, "and it is fortunate that I have remembered before it was too late. It will be necessary for me to be in London this morning some time before noon. I shall manage it by galloping straight to my destination. As for Dick Turpin, he can, for to-day, go just where he likes. I shall have him! Ha, ha! instead of my having the trouble to go to him, the fool will come to me!"

With these words, Mr. Wriggles set off at a gallop on the way to London, his whole troop following closely at his heels.

Whether Dick Turpin will be quite such a fool as Mr. Wriggles imagined remains to be seen.

The police officers did not draw rein until about half-past ten in the morning, when they stopped with a prodigious clatter in front of the vestibule of Newgate.

And now let us return to Dick Turpin.

After leaping over the gate he galloped up the hill, and when he reached the top looked back.

He saw the police officers standing before the gate endeavouring to open it.

"All is well so far," he said, patting Black Bess on the neck. "Thanks to you, my lass, we have got a good start of them."

It was, however, with a great amount of dissatisfaction that Dick Turpin perceived it was broad daylight.

He wished most fervently that it had been night, because then he would have made sure of effecting his escape, whereas now there was a certain amount of doubt about it.

Black Bess sped down the hill at a wonderful rate, and upon reaching the foot he once more looked behind him.

But the police officers were not in sight.

They had not reached the brow of the hill as yet.

"They cannot see me," said Dick. "I have now an excellent opportunity of hiding myself. I will do so; it will be much better than galloping on with them at my heels during the busy part of the day; it will suit me much better to have them on the road before me."

He raised himself in the stirrups as he spoke, and took a glance over the face of the country.

On each side of the road were some tall hedgerows, which promised to afford him the means of concealing himself; but he fortunately remembered that as the officers stood on the top of the hill they would, when they looked down, be able to see him on both sides of the hedge, so that if he was hiding there he would be discovered at once.

On his left hand, however, was one of those umbrageous lanes which are to be so often met with in England.

On both sides tall trees were growing, and their branches uniting and intermingling above formed a kind of leafy canopy.

As this lane ran at right angles to the highway, or nearly so, it follows that the trees upon one side of it would be quite sufficient to conceal Dick Turpin from the view of the officers when they reached the top of the hill.

As a matter of course, this lane was not straight—lanes seldom are—so that as the highwayman pursued its devious course he was completely hidden from observation.

It was not long before he made the discovery that the officers were not behind him, and as soon as he found such was the case he allowed Black Bess to go at an easier speed, for he never allowed her to distress herself by unnecessary exertion.

Believing himself in safety, he gave himself up to reflection. He felt there was great necessity for thought.

He was not able to entertain any doubt as to the truth of what the farmer's daughter had told him, and his first wild impulse had been to hasten to London and set Maud free.

But very little calm reflection served to show him the difficulties that would be in the way of his accomplishing anything of this kind, and he began to ask himself the important question of how he was to proceed in this matter.

The circumstance of Maud's capture was wholly unforeseen by him—he had never dreamed of taking such a thing into his calculations.

Moreover, he was considerably puzzled to make out how it was that Mr. Wriggles discovered she was at the farm-house.

It seemed impossible that he could have derived the information from any source, and he could scarcely bring himself to believe that the discovery was a purely accidental one.

His breast filled with rage and mortification at the thought that at that moment Maud was an inmate of a cell in Newgate.

"By what right have they taken her?" he asked himself, with excited voice and gesture. "What has she done? In what manner has she violated the laws? I have committed crimes, I know, but she has not, and surely they would not dream of punishing her for my misdeeds! It is a dastardly act, and if I can only discover who the persons are who have planned and executed it, they shall suffer dearly for their pains!"

Dick Turpin fully meant what he said, and if Mr. Wriggles could have believed it possible for his scheme to fail, he would have trembled at the thought of being the object of Dick Turpin's vengeance.

"She is a prisoner," said Dick, "and by some means or other she must be liberated, and, let the danger to myself be what it may, she shall, ere many hours are over, be at liberty! Oh! if I had my three faithful comrades with me, how much easier would this task be! Between us, I should make sure of accomplishing it!"

When Dick Turpin thought of his absent friends, a feeling of great uneasiness came into his mind, and he began to wonder what could have happened to detain them so much beyond their allotted time.

Speculation in this direction was, however, utterly useless.

"Surely," he thought, "they must by this time have come back! If they have not, I shall come to the conclusion that they have been slain, or met with their deaths in some accidental manner. If they had been captured, I fancy I should have heard of it."

Then, after a short pause, he continued:

"If they have returned, surely the warning words upon the board will have kept them from running blindly into that danger! What shall I do? To venture into London except when it is dark, would be running too great a risk. I must be doubly careful now of what I am about, because if I am captured there would be an end to setting Maud at liberty at once. I must be very careful! I will run into no unnecessary peril, and, although I long to set her free, I will control the impulse which I feel to hasten to Newgate, and in the meantime think over my proceedings. How much easier all would be if my three comrades were only with me!"

Dick Turpin was silent again, and by his manner it could be seen that he was pondering over the plan of action that would be best for him to follow.

"I will endeavour to make my way round by unfrequented paths to the deserted mansion. There will be little danger in that, for I feel pretty sure I can reach it unperceived; and if the officers are within, I shall take care not to go too close to them. If my friends have not arrived, I will make one more attempt to meet them."

Now that he had got something to do—something that he could set about at once,—Dick Turpin felt much better, and, without going at such a pace as would distress Black Bess, he made his way by a circuitous route to the deserted mansion.

By the exercise of unrelaxing caution, he managed to reach his destination unperceived.

He turned down the lane so well known by the reader, and pulled up when at a little distance from the dilapidated gates.

He looked at them, expecting to see his warning words still displayed upon them.

But he was disappointed.

The board had been carefully removed, and not a trace of it remained.

This discovery set him thinking.

"What conclusion am I to draw from this?" he asked himself. "Have my friends returned? and have they removed the board as a sign to me that they have seen my warning and acted upon it? It is probable enough; and yet, on the other hand, it is quite as likely—or, when I come to think of it, even more so—that some of the police officers have seen the board. If this is the case, it would clearly be to their interest to remove the caution, and then they would hide themselves somewhere in the grounds or in the mansion itself, and wait for the appearance of my comrades."

Both these suppositions seemed very likely ones, but which was correct was more than Dick Turpin could determine.

He remained for some moments buried in profound thought, and then he said, mentally:

"I will creep cautiously a little closer to the gates. I may be able to discover something. The ground there is soft and sticky. I may be enabled to come to a conclusion upon this perplexing point."

It must be understood that Dick Turpin had paused in the lane at a considerable distance from the gates themselves, but yet he was near enough to be able to perceive that the board had been removed.

Grass was growing on each side of the lane, and by walking Black Bess over this, he was able to advance almost noiselessly.

At last he came to the gates.

All around him was perfectly silent, and, having glanced hastily about him, he looked down upon the ground.

He saw the marks of many horses' feet; some seemed quite fresh, and others were almost obliterated—some showed that the horses had gone in the direction of the mansion, and others that they had left it.

He came a step nearer, and looked through the gates

Just at this moment, he heard a sudden rushing sound, and then a voice cried:

"Surrender, Dick Turpin, or we fire!"

Scarcely had the words been uttered, than the silence about that deserted spot was broken in upon by the discharge of many firearms.

CHAPTER DLXXIII.

MAUD IS COMMITTED FOR TRIAL UPON THE CHARGE OF COMPLICITY WITH DICK TURPIN.

We must now devote a few words to Maud, for her position fully deserves some amount of attention.

When she was placed in the coach along with the officers she felt completely broken-hearted, and sank down on the seat, and, concealing her face with her hands, wept bitterly.

Most keenly did she feel the humiliation of her present situation, but still it was not that nor the indignity of being fettered like a felon that told so heavily upon her spirits. It was the reflection that in a few hours Dick Turpin would arrive at the farm-house, unconscious of what his enemies had done, and, expecting to find her there, he would fall helplessly and hopelessly into their power.

It was this reflection that made her weep and sob.

Those officers who were seated with her in the interior of the vehicle amused themselves by jeering her and uttering coarse remarks; but, fortunately for herself, Maud was so entirely absorbed in her grief, that, although the words they spoke came upon her ears, yet it was as an incomprehensible sound—she did not understand a syllable.

Perceiving the total indifference with which she treated all their remarks, the officers grew tired of making them, and for a change occupied themselves in talking to each other.

It was a long and miserable ride in that hackney-coach from the farm-house to London.

The horses that were harnessed to the cumbrous equipage were miserable creatures, and already fatigued by the journey they had made from London, and their homeward progress was miserably slow.

Maud wept without ceasing all the way, and by degrees she lost all consciousness of the peril of her position as she contemplated the fearful danger into which Dick Turpin would run with his eyes blindfolded, for Maud was unaware that the farmer's daughter had generously determined to place him on his guard.

At last London was reached.

The appearance of the hackney-coach with a number of officers seated on the top of it and others within, at once made those who saw it aware that a prisoner of some importance had been taken and was on the way to Newgate.

Now that the end of the journey was almost reached, the progress of the hackney-coach was slower than ever, so that the people who were attracted to it were easily able to follow on foot.

This made the vehicle more conspicuous than ever, and others seeing people following it also joined in the throng, so that by the time Newgate was reached an immense crowd had assembled.

The stopping of the coach roused Maud from her abstraction, and looking out of the window she caught sight of the black and frowning walls of Newgate.

She shuddered, and her heart seemed to suddenly grow cold.

The officers got down off the roof of the coach and opened the door.

The others got out and assisted Maud to follow.

She was quite passive, because she felt that any resistance she might make, so far from being any benefit to her, would only be the means of calling forth harsh usage.

She caught one hasty glimpse of the immense crowd of people, and was terrified.

They were shouting and yelling after the fashion of English crowds, but when they saw what the prisoner was like they became suddenly silent, and then their opinions changed as suddenly as a weathercock turns round when the wind changes, and they began to groan and hiss at the police officers.

This, however, lasted but a moment.

The door of Newgate had been opened, and Maud was hurried up the steps into the vestibule.

She saw a confused mass of objects before her, but she was too agitated to make out what they were distinctly.

Then with a clang that seemed to thrill through her whole frame the door was closed.

She dashed the tears from her eyes as well as the handcuffs about her wrists would allow her, and made a great effort to be calm.

The turnkeys who were present looked on in considerable surprise, and wondered what one so young and beautiful could have done to bring her within the clutches of the law.

Mr. Cawthorn was summoned, and he too was astonished when he beheld the prisoner.

But his astonishment materially increased when one of the police officers stepped forward and placed the warrant in his hand.

He just glanced at it, and folding it up and putting it in his pocket, he said:

"Accomplice of Dick Turpin, eh? Oh, very good! I shall know what to do with you. This warrant is perfectly correct. There's your receipt," he added, addressing the officer. "I will be responsible for her safe keeping."

So far, then, the ceremony was over.

A couple of turnkeys came forward and took off the handcuffs, and having done so, they stood on each side of her, holding her by the arms.

She shrank instinctively from their touch, and perceiving it, the men with a malicious pleasure, finding how distasteful it was, pressed closer to her.

"Number fifteen," said Mr. Cawthorn. "Get the key, Winch, and lead the way; I will follow."

Winch went up to one side of the vestibule, where a number of keys were hanging on separate nails, and taking one of them, he proceeded to lead the way to the cells.

With the bunch of keys he carried about with him he opened the intervening doors.

Maud and the two other turnkeys followed, while Mr. Cawthorn, with a satisfied smile upon his face, brought up the rear.

His was a mean, grovelling, paltry spirit, and he determined to treat Maud in the same way as he would have treated Dick Turpin if he had only had the opportunity of doing so.

As the reader may be sure, the Governor of Newgate was terribly wroth to think that Dick should have played him such a prank as he had, and that the prisoner brought by the dragoons should have taken advantage of the confusion to escape.

He felt that he must have his revenge upon some one, and in his opinion Maud was a very proper object.

"Ahem!" he said. "Newgate is quite honoured—it is indeed! Be assured that every consideration shall be shown you—oh dear yes—every consideration,—you shall have no occasion to complain! Open the door, Winch,—that is number fifteen."

Winch paused before the door of a cell, and unlocking it, pushed it open.

A dark, gloomy-looking place appeared beyond.

"Now," said Mr. Cawthorn, assuming a very great deal of mock respect, which could not fail to be exceedingly offensive and disagreeable to the object of it, "walk in, if you please! This is your abode—not quite so comfortable as you have been used to, perhaps, but it is the best you will get here, I can tell you! Oh, pray walk in! Jones and Griffiths," addressing the two turnkeys, "let go of the lady's arm. Winch, show the lady into her apartment. Mind you don't stumble over the step my lady!"

This was a delusive caution.

One would have judged from his words that there was a step into the cell out of the corridor, whereas, on the contrary, there was a step down.

It was a wonder Maud did not fall into the trap thus laid for her by the Governor.

If in obedience to his words she had raised one foot, as though to place it upon a step, she would have had a rather awkward fall.

By the merest chance in the world, however, Maud happened to see, and only just in time, that the floor of the cell was below her.

Now that she was on her guard, all was well, for she stepped down lightly into the cell, to the infinite vexation of the Governor, who would have rejoiced if he could have played any practical joke upon her.

But he was defeated, and he was more angry than ever.

Then the turnkeys began to snicker when they saw how he had been outwitted by the prisoner.

Of this Mr. Cawthorn had the prudence and good sense to take no notice

He cried out:

"Close the door, Winch, and fasten it securely!—close it at once, and follow me! Mind that you leave all secure or you will find the consequences serious!"

The Governor turned round and led the way back to the vestibule, leaving the turnkeys to follow him.

It was a great relief to Maud when her dungeon door was shut. It was infinitely preferable to be alone

At first she could scarcely distinguish anything, so small a quantity of light was it that came through the little grated window into the cell, but in a few moments her eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and perceiving in one corner a kind of stone bench, she sat down upon it, and wept with so much violence that it seemed as if her heart was about to break.

Her mind was filled with the danger which Dick Turpin would incur when going to the farm-house, and as such was the case, she did not feel as she would have done the humiliation of being the tenant of one of the gloomy cells of Newgate, and exposed to the ribaldry of the Governor and his subordinates.

Wearily—most wearily—the time passed by.

At length, however, after what seemed to be an age, the darkness in the cell perceptibly increased, until at length she was unable to see anything save the grated aperture high up in the wall. And then she knew it was night.

Had she been in the lowest vault beneath some huge cathedral, the silence could not have been more profound; it was painful to the utmost degree.

Oh, what a wretched night that was for Maud!—wretched, not only because of the place in which she had to spend it, but because she knew full well, while she sat there helpless and a prisoner, Dick Turpin was riding on to his destruction.

She strained her sense of hearing to the utmost, thinking, perhaps, that if he was brought there a prisoner, as she fully expected he would be, she should hear some sounds indicative of his arrival.

But throughout the whole of that long and tedious night the silence remained unbroken, and at last the darkness seemed to grow less and less, and then day came.

Maud had not slept for a single moment.

But now that morning had come, her anxiety was even greater than it had been during the night, for she reflected that Dick Turpin had told her not to expect him until the dawn, and if he had been captured at that hour, there had not been time for him to have been brought to Newgate.

Maud did not know, as the reader does, that Dick Turpin had managed to make his escape from the farm-house.

She was, therefore, alarming herself unnecessarily.

But as the time passed on, and all continued silent, her hopes began to revive.

Breakfast was brought in, but she could not touch the coarse food and unclean water.

At about eleven o'clock the cell door was again opened, and two turnkeys entered.

They requested her to rise and follow, and she obeyed.

The gloomy passages were once more traversed, until presently she found herself in the vestibule.

Here the Governor and many others were assembled, including the under-sheriffs, and as the latter gentlemen were present Maud was saved any further indignity.

Had it not been for them, it is very probable that the Governor of Newgate would have insisted upon Maud walking to the Bow Street Police-court, for it was for the purpose of being taken before the magistrate that she had been removed from the cell.

The police van was in those days unknown, and most of the prisoners were dragged through the streets, chained together like so many slaves.

The sheriffs, however, happening to possess a little more feeling, ordered a hackney-coach to be called.

And in this Maud was placed, and driven off under a strong escort of police officers.

Mr. Wriggles arrived with his troop a few minutes after the hackney-coach had started, and he hastily rode after it, for his object in returning to London from the farm-house with all speed was that he might be present at the examination, in order to give his evidence before the magistrate of Maud's complicity with Dick Turpin.

He overtook the coach, and followed the prisoner into the court.

The same magistrate presided who had issued the warrant to Mr. Wriggles, and after the understanding they had come to, there was but little doubt that he would make out the order for Maud to be committed to Newgate to take her trial.

It was a painful moment for her when she found herself placed in the dock, but she experienced some consolation when she discovered that the people who had crowded into the court were unable to gaze into her face, as she stood with her back to them.

On her left hand stood several police officers, and just behind them was the witness-box.

Before her was a table, at which sat the magistrate's clerk, and just above him was seated the magistrate himself.

The charge against Maud was then read over.

It set forth that she was an accomplice of Dick Turpin's, and that she had aided and abetted him against the laws of these realms.

Maud was asked the usual question by the clerk of the court, as to whether she was guilty or not guilty.

After a moment's hesitation, she said in a choking voice:

"Not guilty."

Mr. Wriggles then came forward, and gave evidence that he had frequently seen the prisoner in company with Dick Turpin, and mentioned several instances, among others, those connected with the deserted mansion, the flight from thence, with Mr. Tuttle and the farm-house.

Several other officers were called, who fully corroborated all that Mr. Wriggles had said, and then the magistrate asked Maud what she had to say for her defence.

She comprehended, her situation better, perhaps, than anyone imagined; and she said in her defence only four words, and yet those words were better, and produced more effect, than if a counsel had addressed the Court for an hour.

In reply to the magistrate's question she said:

"I am his wife!"

There was a moment's pause, and then the magistrate said:

"We cannot believe that until your assertion is proved. If you are the wife of Dick Turpin, the charge against you falls to the ground, but your word is not sufficient proof. Your marriage certificate must be produced. Where is it?"

Maud had it not, and recollecting the circumstances under which the marriage ceremony had been performed, she felt there would be very great difficulty in proving herself to be Dick Turpin's wife.

The magistrate repeated his question.

"Can you produce the proof?" he asked.

"I cannot!" she replied. "I have it not."

"Then my duty is clear enough before me. It is to commit you to take your trial at the ensuing assizes, when, if you can prove that which you assert (though my own conviction is that you cannot), you will be acquitted."

This was but poor consolation for Maud.

As for Mr. Wriggles, he did not care very much whether she was acquitted or not; he had gained his object, which was to have her committed to Newgate, for he felt sure if he did, that his plan would go forward just as he wished it, and he should capture Dick Turpin long before the sessions commenced.

And so, the examination having been concluded, Maud was taken back to Newgate, there to await her trial.

CHAPTER DLXXIV.

DESCRIBES WHAT BEFEL DICK TURPIN AT THE GATES OF THE DESERTED MANSION.

When Black Bess enabled Dick Turpin to escape from the very dangerous position by leaping through the window into the garden, it will be remembered that Jim Lickfold and his officers did not attempt any pursuit, because none of them were provided with horses.

It will have been noticed ere this that Jim Lickfold was rather clever in coming to conclusions; and on the present occasion he was quite correct when he supposed that the chance of finding booty in the deserted mansion was at an end.

It was not, therefore, because he had any idea himself that he should be likely to find what he wanted that he made his way back into the deserted mansion, but simply because he was urged to do so by his comrades; and he knew quite well that they would be more content when they had satisfied themselves by a rigorous search that there was no money there.

Moreover, he felt constrained to allow them to have their own way, in a great measure because he had been the first to propose this expedition, and had spoken of it with a very great amount of confidence—indeed, assuring them that they could scarcely fail.

Now, however, they had lost the chance of capturing Dick Turpin and getting the booty as well.

It was such reflections as these, then, that induced him to listen to his companions when they expressed so strong a desire to search the building, and he accompanied them.

The task of following the police officers in their search would not be a very interesting one, because the reader knows full well that the money they were in search of was safe in Dick Turpin's pocket; so we will briefly say that, after spending some hours in poking about in every corner, they at last gave the job up in despair, and, thoroughly fatigued by their exertions, determined to return to the inn in order to refresh the inward man.

This was done; and when their appetites had been satisfied they felt very much better, and were inclined to put up with their defeat in a calm and philosophic manner.

Jim Lickfold, however, was not inclined to sit idly down when something might be done that would turn out to the advantage of all present, and so his companions found. He had something else to propose.

"Look here, mates," he said. "Here we are, as one might say, on the sick list; old Wriggles is off, and won't trouble his blessed head about us—he will think we are staying here in order to get better."

"So we are!—so we are!" cried the officers.

"Just so," coincided Jim; "but, then, I can't quite see why we should remain idle while there is the chance of doing some good for ourselves. Now, I have got the idea in my head somehow, that these highwaymen have not paid their last visit to the deserted mansion. They may have done so, of course; but still, I do not think they have."

"Why not?" asked one of his companions.

"Well, I can't tell you. You see, it's a sort of feeling I've got without knowing why. But this is my proposal: We might just as well be sitting in that there old mansion as sitting here—mightn't we?"

"It wouldn't be quite so comfortable," said another officer.

"Well, I grant that it mightn't be so comfortable; but still, it wouldn't be so very bad after all. There's many a worse crib than that, I can tell you!"

"I know that."

"Well, then, to-night, suppose we all got our horses and ride over there. I'll show you where we can put our horses for them to be all right; and we can each of us take something to eat and drink, and so we shall sit there, and be as jolly as you please!"

"And d you think the highwaymen will come, Jim?"

"I do! somehow, I feel almost sure of it; and if we are waiting—which we might be as well as not—we shall have a glorious chance of capturing them! And, you know, it's dead or alive now! We need not stand on no ceremony with them—dead or alive, and the reward is just the same! So, you see, mates, if so be they come—good! If they don't, why what does it matter? We might just as well be sitting—as I said before—in that old place as sitting here, where there ain't no chance of our doing good for ourselves!"

This proposal elicited a great deal of discussion.

The majority of the officers were by no means prepossessed with the deserted mansion, and did not altogether like the idea of staying. They would have preferred the inn.

But at last, through putting his arguments in a more forcible manner, Jim Lickfold induced them to accompany him and try their luck.

"There is no time like the present," he said, as soon as he had got their decision. "Let us order our horses at once, and we will be off!"

This was done; and in less than a quarter of an hour afterwards the little troop of police officers, with Jim Lickfold at their head, took their way towards the deserted mansion.

It will be remembered that while they were on their way to their destination they passed by the place where Dick Turpin was concealed.

Of course, they had no idea he was there, and he was too well hidden to be discovered by any chance glance that might be given, and so they passed on in happy ignorance.

The reader now knows why they had returned.

After seeing them, Dick had thought fit to shift his quarters, and, before he had gone, had cut the warning words on the board on the gate.

Jim Lickfold resolved to make himself as comfortable as he could in the deserted mansion; so they broke open one of the doors, and seated themselves in a spacious apartment with a bow window, where they made a glorious fire by breaking up some of the furniture, and passed away the time very agreeably by eating, drinking, smoking, and telling tales.

Before the day was out they had exhausted the supply of drink and provisions that they had brought with them, so one of their number was instructed to ride over to the inn and bring more.

The officer set off on this errand; and as he came back, his eyes, of course, fell on the words which Dick had cut on the board.

He was a thick-skulled fellow, was this officer, and could not tell great A from a bull's foot; but he knew the appearance of the board was altered, so when he got into the mansion he told Jim Lickfold what he had seen.

That individual's curiosity was immediately aroused, and, jumping up, he put down his pipe and hastened to the gates.

As soon as ever he saw the words newly cut into the wood he snapped his fingers and slapped his thighs, and altogether behaved himself in a manner expressive of the utmost delight.

His comrades crowded eagerly round him anxious to know what he meant.

"You see that board," said Jim. "It proves that I am right—that it does! I knew they were coming here, and that proves it!"

"How so?—how so?"

"Can't you see? Why, one of 'em—I don't know which—by some means, has found we were occupying the old crib. So, you see, he has cut thes words on the board, so that, when his companions come they will know that officers are within, and so will ride off."

"Is that it, Jim?"

"Yes; I am as sure of it as that is a nose that you have got stuck in the middle of your face! Not that it's any ornament—but that's neither here nor there."

The men all laughed at this, for the officer to whom Jim Lickfold alluded had a very small, turn-up nose, which bore a ludicrous resemblance to a lump of putty.

"But what are you going to do, Jim?" they asked. "How is all this to end?"

"I'll tell you, mates, and then you will see what it is to have a leader possessed of a little common sense. Now I'll make this perfectly clear to all of you. Just listen!"

All were silent, and Jim proceeded as follows:—

"I said a minute or two ago that one of these highwaymen—I don't know which—has found out that we are in the mansion, and, in order to let his companions know it, he cut those words on the board—not a bad dodge, I must say! Some might not have understood

what was meant by it; but I rather think I have hit the right nail on the head this time. Now, mates, I'll tell you in half a dozen words what I mean to do. I shall pull that board down, and throw it away among the trees, and so I shall do away with the warning. Then presently we shall see some of these gentlemen riding to the gates in an easy sort of a way, and then—pop!—bang!—we have them, for it's dead or alive, and we can hide ourselves close to the gates."

The officers now fully understood what was meant, and gave a faint hurrah to express their delight.

To Jim Lickfold must certainly be given the credit of having exactly hit upon what had occurred; but, as we have already said, he was rather clever in drawing conclusions from any fact that might be presented to his notice.

The board affixed to the gate was old and rotten, so they soon had it down.

They broke it to fragments in the process, but that did not matter, and they threw them in different directions as far as the strength of their arms would allow.

When all this was done, Jim Lickfold said:

"I can see we are in the way of earning money. We sha'n't be quite so comfortable as we have been for the last few hours, but, Lor' bless me! what does that matter when there is money in view? We sha'n't be able to go indoors. We must hide ourselves among this 'ere vegetation. Of course whoever comes will ride up to the gate, and we shall see them plain enough; but, mind, you are not to fire until I have spoken, because, you know, according to law, I am obliged to call upon them first to surrender. I shall do that, and you can fire as soon as ever you like after I have spoken; but mind you don't give them a chance of making their escape!"

Having made all these dispositions, Jim Lickfold and his men placed themselves in ambush among the trees close to the gates.

Here they waited patiently very many hours, but nobody came; there was not a sign of a living creature.

Their watch, therefore, was a terribly dull affair, but still Jim Lickfold had faith in its efficacy, and endeavoured to reconcile the others to remaining.

At last, when even he was beginning to grow tired and despairing, Dick Turpin made his appearance in the manner we have recorded at the end of a former chapter.

Owing to his having taken the precaution to approach at a walk, and in consequence of Black Bess having trod on the soft, springy turf which grew on both sides of the lane, his progress had been noiseless, and he halted a few paces off the dilapidated gates without the officers who were in hiding having the remotest notion that he was so close at hand.

Then, as we know, Dick hazardously rode forward to look for some signs of his companions having been near that spot, but failing to find any, had looked through the gates.

It was Jim Lickfold who, in a loud voice, uttered the words:

"Surrender, Dick Turpin, or we fire!"

Almost before the last words were out of his mouth, the officers, in accordance with the instructions he had given them, brought their pistols to a level, and fired point-blank at the highwayman.

It seemed as though it was inevitable that Dick Turpin and Black Bess should be swept from the face of the earth.

But it proved otherwise.

A rapid movement saved his life.

It must not be lost sight of that Dick Turpin was aware of the presence of the officers in and around that spot, and he had been from the first perpetually on the look-out for them.

Therefore, when he heard the rushing sound, he was not taken by surprise and rendered motionless with astonishment, because he knew full well what it meant.

The word "surrender" came upon his ears before he could turn Black Bess round, but ere Jim Lickfold had time to utter the remainder of his brief sentence, Black Bess had given one of those terrific bounds she always did when about to gallop at full speed.

Dick Turpin did not go up the lane towards the high-road, for a double reason.

In the first place, there might have been an ambush; and in the second it would have been disagreeable and dangerous in the extreme to have been hunted into the high-road with this pack of officers at his heels.

Therefore, he went down the lane in the opposite direction.

We have previously stated that it did not extend far in this direction, and its termination was formed by a high wooden paling.

It would have been a formidable obstacle to many horses, but to Black Bess it was nothing.

She cleared it with the utmost ease, and came down with a scarcely perceptible shake upon the soft turf meadow beyond.

Then away she went over the open country at a tremendous speed and both horse and rider were quickly lost to sight.

As before, Jim Lickfold was unable to institute an immediate pursuit.

He did not believe it possible for anyone to escape from such a discharge of firearms, or to move quickly enough to avoid the bullets, but Dick Turpin had done so and was gone.

His fury at this defeat, after he had made so sure of victory, is a thing we shrink from describing.

We are quite incompetent for the task, and can only say that Jim Lickfold behaved in so violent and eccentric a manner that the men who were with him, although mortified beyond measure, could not forbear a smile.

But his rage and disappointment became subdued by degrees.

Then, nothing daunted by his defeat, he said:

"Look here, mates; attend to me, and I hope you will be of the same mind as I am. We are licked this time, and I own it, but we will try again." That was Dick Turpin, and you see by the way we acted we gave him time to make his escape; now I firmly believe the others will come. I do—it's a fact; but if they do come they'll have to look pretty sharp. Will you agree to what I am going to say?"

"What is it?"

"It's illegal—its wrong; but nobody need know that if we don't split upon it ourselves, and you wouldn't be such d—d fools as to open your mouths and get your necks into trouble, would you?"

"Certainly not, Jim."

"Well, then, we will place ourselves so that we can fire the very moment anybody appears at the gates. That is what we will do; and whether Dick Turpin, or Claude Duval, or Sixteen-String Jack, we won't call out to them to give them warning—we won't give them the chance of surrendering. As soon as ever they show their noses, we will fire our pistols, and d—n the consequences!"

With one exception, the officers rather approved of this cold-blooded proposition, and that one, in a feeble, hesitating sort of way, said:

"It's all very well, Jim, and I don't say your plan won't succeed, but doesn't it look a great deal like murder?"

"I don't care a d—n what it looks like," returned Jim. "My orders are to take them dead or alive. I have tried to take 'em alive, and can't do it; so now I shall try to take them dead, and it's very odd to me if I don't succeed."

CHAPTER DLXXV.

DICK TURPIN IS MUCH PERPLEXED BY THE DIFFICULTIES OF HIS POSITION.

EVERYTHING which had lately happened, and every hour which had elapsed, only served to increase Dick Turpin's uneasiness with respect to the fate of his three comrades.

He could not help fancying that something terrible had happened to them, and he tortured his mind in many vain attempts to account for the long delay which had taken place.

He trembled, too, for their safety in case they should return unsuspectingly to the deserted mansion. Indeed, it seemed to him that their sole chance of safety rested upon his meeting with them on their return, for if they rode up to the gates unaware that the officers were in ambush, they would assuredly perish.

He could judge that by what had happened to himself, for he knew his life had been saved simply because he was on his guard and had the presence of mind to make a rapid movement.

That his three comrades had met with many difficulties

and dangers on their journey he felt certain, or so long a delay would not have taken place.

Upon reaching the deserted mansion, however, they would imagine that all their troubles were at an end, and would ride up to the gates unsuspectingly.

He shuddered when he thought what would be the result of this act.

He was anxious in the extreme to meet with them, and felt that he would gladly run into any peril—incur any danger—so long as he could manage to put them on their guard.

That was all he wanted to do, but it seemed impossible.

Then, as if his perplexities were not enough, there was the fact of Maud's imprisonment in Newgate.

Had it not been for this, it is quite certain Turpin would never have left the saddle until he had either been slain or succeeded in meeting with his three faithful comrades.

Now, however, he was divided, and knew not what to do.

There was Maud a prisoner in a noisome Newgate cell, and all for his sake.

Was it not clearly his duty to lose not a moment in getting her at liberty?

It was, and he was aware of it; but there were difficulties in the way at the best. Some time would have to elapse before his object was accomplished. Many would have shrunk altogether from such a task, believing it to be impossible.

But Dick did not; only he was harassed with the knowledge that while he was engaged in this important business his three comrades would be journeying on to their destruction.

Would it be well, then, for him to leave Maud where she was for a time, and turn, first of all, the whole of his attention to searching for his companions?

That seemed the wisest course to take; but Dick could not contemplate with any amount of patience the idea of leaving her he loved so well for such a length of time an inmate of a prison cell.

Moreover, he could not tell what charge would be brought against her—he could not comprehend even the ground or motive for her arrest; and while he was engaged in seeking his three friends she might be placed altogether beyond the reach of his succouring and protecting arm.

Continued reflection, so far from making Dick Turpin's position any clearer, only served to complicate it, and he felt that he was fast growing distracted.

"I cannot think this matter out myself," he said, at length, "I am incapable of it; I require some one I can consult—some one whose brain is clear and fertile in invention—some one who will show me the way out of this perplexing maze."

Evidently, this was what Dick Turpin did want; but where was he to find the counsel he required?

This perplexed Dick, and he rode on for some time in silence, until, at length, his face lighted up as a fresh thought occurred to him.

"Matthew!" he said—"old Matthew Gale—that is who I want; surely, if anyone can show me the way out of this difficulty—if any human being has the power to tell me what is best to do—he has! I have had proofs of his ability before now. Yes! I must consult old Matthew Gale; but how can I do that?"

A ready answer would have been "Ride to Drury Lane and see him;" but Dick Turpin had a lively recollection of the narrow escape he had had when he was there on the last occasion, and he did not doubt, although a long time had elapsed since then, that the same watch was still preserved around the premises, so that it would scarcely be possible for him to enter the old public-house unperceived.

How, then, was he to communicate with Matthew?

He was at a loss to think, and was obliged to come to the conclusion that so far from having got himself out of one difficulty, he had plunged himself into another.

Just at that time his life was more valuable than ever it had been, not with respect to himself, but with respect to his three comrades, for truly it was upon him and him alone, that they depended for their safety.

So he felt that he was not justified in rashly running into any danger, and the more he reflected, the more convinced did he feel that it would be hazardous in the extreme to attempt to visit Drury Lane.

At the same time, he knew that if he could only see Matthew—if he could only talk the matter over with him, he would be able to give sound and practical advice, and in all probability, say with precision what was the best thing to be done.

Dick passed his hand over his brow and strove to be calm, but he could not control his excitement, which had the effect of producing a most distracting throbbing in the brain, which was altogether destructive to clear thought.

In the consideration of the peril of others he almost forgot his own; in comparison, it now seemed nothing.

His brain throbbed and whirled, and minute after minute glided by without his being able to arrive at any definite conclusion; he was rendered more anxious than ever by the consciousness that time was passing while he was inactive, when he ought to be availing himself of every second.

"If I could but find a messenger," he said—"some one on whom I could rely, who would take a letter from me and deliver it to Matthew Gale, all would be well; but it seems a total impossibility to find anyone who would perform this service."

He still continued his course across the country, taking almost mechanically the direction that would lead him to the New Forest.

Suddenly he emerged upon a common of vast extent.

It was covered with gorse bushes, and seemed to stretch in every direction as far as his eye could reach.

The vast expanse looked an ocean of prickly plants.

The only thing that broke in upon their regularity was something white in the far distance.

This common was intersected by a narrow path, and along this Dick Turpin proceeded, paying but little attention to what was going on around him, but perplexing his brain in a vain attempt to arrive at a definite conclusion.

Presently, looking up, he saw that the white object which had attracted his attention consisted of the tents of a gipsy encampment, which had been pitched as nearly as possible in the centre of the common.

There was a yellow caravan and several canvas tents—There was every appearance of a large tribe having taken up their quarters in this situation.

Dick Turpin continued to gaze upon this scene without feeling any particular interest, when all at once he said to himself:

"I remember now that it was somewhere in this locality that I once encountered a tribe of gipsies. Tom King was with me then. We were weary, having been chased for a long distance by our foes. They granted us safe shelter, and allowed us to depart in peace. They were faithful, for they made no attempt to betray us This may be a similar tribe. I may be able to remain with them for a few hours, and it is possible that one of their number may be willing to be my messenger to Drury Lane. They could have no possible suspicion of who I am."

The more Dick thought over this idea, the more he was pleased with it, and he resolved at any rate to make the trial.

If he failed, he would have to think of something else

Accordingly, he quitted the narrow path which all along he had been pursuing, and made his way in a direct line for the encampment, which was about two hundred yards off on his right hand.

Before he had gone far, a man, who had been lying down on the grass, rose to his feet, and demanded his business.

There was something about the man's voice, manner, and appearance that was familiar to Dick, and he looked closely at him.

"I am an outcast from the house-dwellers, like yourself, and stand in need of a little rest and shelter. If you will accord it to me, I will pay you liberally."

"I have seen you before," said the man. "You are welcome!"

"Then," returned Turpin, "where have you seen me?"

"It is a long time ago now; but another was with you. It was not far from this spot."

"I remember now quite well," said Dick. "Is this the same tribe among the members of which I once before found a refuge from my foes?"



[THE GIPSY GIRL PROMISES TO DELIVER DICK TURPIN'S LETTER TO OLD MATTHEW.]

"It is. You have broken bread with us, and you are welcome. Follow me—I will lead you to the encampment."

Dick dismounted, and walked by the side of the gipsy, for he was anxious to conciliate him.

Upon reaching the encampment, the gipsy clapped his hands, and cried:

"Sebel—Sebel!"

In response to this call, a tall, vigorous lad came forward.

Turpin recognised him as the one who had before taken charge of the horses.

He was called for this purpose now, and he led Black Bess away to a little distance, and placed her along with the horses belonging to the tribe.

Dick Turpin was well remembered by most of those who were present, and, as on the former occasion, he was in a few moments quite at home, and, throwing off his perplexity, he laughed and chatted with them as though they had been friends for years and years.

At length he approached the subject that was so important to him.

"I want to send to London," he said. "Who is there among you who would undertake the task of delivering a letter? That is all I want done. Of course the letter is an important one."

A brief discussion took place after Turpin thus spoke, and a gipsy, who seemed to hold some authority over the rest, rose and said:

"There is not one here who would not gladly perform the service you require. All you have to do is to look around you and make your selection. Whoever you pick out will go."

"I would rather you find a messenger for me," said Dick. "I should much prefer that."

"Let me go," said some one, in a soft and musical

voice—"let me go! I will deliver your letter safely!"

Dick looked up, and saw that the words had been uttered by a girl who, but for the extreme swarthiness of her complexion, would have been singularly beautiful.

Her age could not have been more than sixteen, and as he gazed into her countenance, Dick saw that she was gifted with no ordinary intelligence, and the conviction came over him that, had he been enabled to select from thousands, he could not have picked one more suitable.

That the girl would be faithful he did not doubt—that she would be cautious and secret he was sure.

"You shall go," he said. "You will suit me admirably, and you shall be well rewarded for the task I wish you to perform."

A pleased smile lighted up the handsome countenance of the young girl as she murmured her thanks, and asked when she should depart.

"In a few moments," said Dick Turpin. "I have only the letter to write."

As he spoke, he rose from the side of those near whom he had been sitting, and, going to a little distance, felt in his pockets for writing materials.

He was fortunate enough to find a memorandum book.

He turned over the leaves until he came to one upon which there was no writing, and then, wetting the lead pencil with his lips, he pressed heavily upon the paper, so that there should be no fear of what he wrote becoming obliterated.

It took him but a few moments to write the following letter:

"*Dear Matthew,*

"*I am in serious trouble and perplexity, and am greatly in need of your advice. I am now staying with some friendly gipsies, one of whom has agreed to be the bearer of this letter.*

"*I cannot come to you, because I know your house is watched. Will you, then, add one more favour to those you have already conferred upon me, by meeting me at night-fall at the foot of the gibbet on the Finchley Road? You know the spot. I will be there at dusk, and wait till you arrive. Don't fail to come!*

"*DICK.*

"*P.S.—I have told the bearer that you will give her two guineas when you receive this letter. I adopt this precaution in order to ensure its delivery.*"

Dick folded the paper up, and secured it as well as he was able. Going to the young girl, he placed it in her hand, and gave her a guinea, saying:

"Deliver this letter with all speed to Matthew Gale, the landlord of the White Horse, in Drury Lane. Be sure you give it to no other person. If an attempt is made to wrest the paper from you, destroy it, but do not let it be seen by anyone save the person I have mentioned. When he gets it, he will give you two guineas for a reward."

The girl made a low curtsey, and seemed much delighted with the idea of obtaining so much money, and she started off upon her errand without delay.

It was a long journey that she had to perform; but Dick Turpin was well aware that the gipsies were fleet of foot, and were indifferent as to the distance they might have to travel.

As he watched her form gradually recede from his view, a feeling of calm content stole over Dick Turpin's heart, and he felt almost as though his perplexities were over.

"Such a girl as that," he murmured to himself, "will never be suspected of being a messenger of mine. With all their cleverness, the police officers would never think of that. I have the most implicit faith in her fidelity. Old Matthew will receive the letter safe enough, and I am indeed mistaken in my estimate of him if he is not on the spot I have named at the time I have appointed."

Dick Turpin remained for some time longer with the gipsies, but as time began to pass away, his anxiety returned.

A thousand fears crept into his heart, and at last unable to remain inactive any longer, he called for Black Bess, gave a liberal gratuity to every member of the tribe, and then, bidding them farewell, he sprang into the saddle, and rode away.

CHAPTER DLXXVI.

RELATES HOW TOM KING AND HIS TWO COMRADES OBTAIN POSSESSION OF THREE FRESH HORSES.

It is so long since we gave any attention to the proceedings of Tom King and his two comrades that, although Dick Turpin's proceedings are of a more than usually interesting character, we feel constrained to leave him for a time, while we return to those in whose fortunes, it is hoped, an almost equal amount of interest is felt.

It may be necessary to remind the reader that when we last saw the three highwaymen was when they had managed to effect a most daring escape from the road-side inn.

They had taken possession of three horses belonging to the police officers, and on these they had galloped off, until they quite got out of reach of their pursuers.

Then they paused, and congratulated each other upon their good fortune, and then they began to wonder how they were to manage to obtain possession of their own steeds.

The horses they had taken from the police officers were of a very indifferent quality, and not at all suited to them.

But it seemed little short of madness to make the attempt to return to the inn to take possession of them.

A long discussion was held upon this point, and eventually it was determined that it would be running too much risk to return to the inn, so at the same time they abandoned the idea of doing so, and the hope of recovering their steeds.

"And now we have come to this determination," said Tom King, "it will be necessary for us to make up our minds what we are to do. These horses will be worse than useless to us. It often happens that our lives depend upon the swiftness of our horses."

"How are we to get any better?" asked Claude Duval.

"We have money, and yet not enough to buy three horses of the kind we require, even if we should be lucky enough to meet with the opportunity of purchasing them."

"How far is it to the nearest post-town, Tom?" asked Sixteen-String Jack, suddenly.

"About twenty-three miles, I should think. But why do you ask?"

"Because I have thought of a plan."

"To obtain fresh horses?"

"Yes."

"Let us hear what it is."

"Willingly. It is but a rude, half-formed idea at present; but still, I think we shall be able, between us, to make something of it. Listen."

Sixteen-String Jack then communicated his idea to his friends, and they highly approved of it.

What this scheme was will be best seen by the manner in which it was worked out.

Tom King considered a moment, so as to make quite sure of the direction in which he ought to go, and then he led the way.

They trotted on pleasantly enough.

Had it been daylight, the probability is that they would scarcely have met with anyone; but as it was night, they had all the road to themselves.

The horses they bestrode were terribly knocked up, and neither whip nor spur had the least effect in accelerating their speed.

Luckily, the road was good, and so, at a shambling kind of trot, they went towards the next town.

On their way, the conversation turned upon the series of misfortunes they had met with from the time they had sought for the miser's gold.

It seemed as though their excursion would result in nothing but disappointment, for on every hand they met with nothing but reverses.

It was close upon ten o'clock when Tom King raised his riding-whip and, pointing in advance, said:

"Yonder, my friends, is Winchester."

"How far are we from it now?"

"Two miles at the most."

"Well, now," said Jack, "comes the consideration—shall we ride into the town upon these horses, or shall we abandon them and enter upon foot?"

"I should say it would be best to abandon them," replied Tom King; "they are not of the slightest service

to us, and they might be recognised by their trappings as belonging to the police force. I fancy we shall be avoiding a serious danger by getting rid of them."

"That is precisely my opinion," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and we shall do much better on foot than on horseback."

"So we shall," chimed in Claude Duval; "and, as we have such a little way to go, I think we had better dismount here, and drive the horses off over the fields. If we ride nearer, we may be seen; and then such an extraordinary proceeding would be sure to excite curiosity, if not suspicion."

His two comrades were of the same opinion as himself, and they all three dismounted.

Before they abandoned the horses, they took care to possess themselves of the pistols that were in the holsters.

Close at hand, there was a gate leading into a meadow.

This the highwaymen opened, and then they drove the horses into the field.

While thus engaged, they believed they had not been seen by any human being, and accordingly they took their way towards Winchester with very great confidence indeed.

The walls of the ancient city were quickly reached, and as they walked boldly along one of the streets, Sixteen-String Jack said:

"Now, do not forget the details of our scheme. Walk boldly and fearlessly, and assume, if you can, the air of one who belonged to the whole place."

His comrades laughed, and passed on, until at length they paused before a large and very pretentious clothier's shop.

It was the finest in all the city, and the three highwaymen walked in with an admirably-assumed carelessness.

Just as they entered the shop they were met by a boy, who was carrying the shutters, for the time for closing the premises had arrived.

A man who was behind the counter gave a smirking sort of a smile, and a low bow, as he desired to know his customers' pleasure.

"We want some ready-made garments," said Tom King. "Have you any?"

"Yes," was the reply. "We have plenty in stock of all kinds."

"Well, we wish to look at some officers' undress uniforms."

"We can suit you then, gentlemen, exactly. Please step this way."

Our friends were ushered into a large room behind the shop, which was piled with garments of every description.

"The quality must be first-rate," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"We have none but the best quality," said the shopman, producing the articles the highwaymen had mentioned.

They were looked over, and, finally, our friends chose three suits which they imagined would fit them exactly, and enable them to carry out the plan which Jack had conceived, and which they had moulded into form.

"Where can I send them for you, gentlemen?" asked the tailor.

"Nowhere," said Tom King; "but, if you would allow us, we should be glad to exchange our clothing here, as we have an important visit to pay to-night."

"Certainly, gentlemen, by all means! You can have this room to yourselves."

The highwaymen hastened to avail themselves of this permission, and in a few moments a very great improvement was visible in their appearance.

The costume set off their figures to great advantage, and they contemplated each other with much satisfaction.

"This will do bravely!" said Tom King,—"we shall be able to carry out our scheme now, never fear!"

Having completed their toilets, they paid for the clothing, and departed.

We fancy our readers will be somewhat surprised when we state that, after leaving the tailor's shop in their new attire, the highwaymen walked direct to the largest and best hotel in the city.

Their appearance was rather distinguished, and they were received with every possible mark of politeness.

They announced their intention of taking up their quarters there for several days.

Apartments were placed at their service, and, having partaken of a good supper, they slept peacefully all night in the chambers which had been allotted to them.

It was clear that no one had the least suspicion with regard to their identity.

They partook of breakfast in great style, and then, summoning the landlord, Tom said:

"We want to take a little journey between now and dinner-time,—can you recommend us to any place where we can hire three good horses for a few hours?"

The landlord was highly pleased with the appearance and manner of his guests; so, with a bland smile, he said:

"Certainly—I can give you the information you require. I will write down the address on the back of one of my cards, and then you will find that the best horses in his stable will be at your service."

While speaking these words, the landlord took a card from his pocket, and wrote an address on the back of it.

Our friends thanked him, and took their leave, having first ordered a sumptuous dinner.

Upon gaining the street, they walked boldly towards the livery stable-keeper's whose address had been given them, and on their way they could scarcely conceal the exultation which they felt.

Their plan had succeeded very much better than they had dared to anticipate.

Now that they had a species of recommendation from the landlord of the chief hotel in the city, there would be no difficulty in the way of hiring horses.

They found they had only about five hundred yards to go.

They found the keeper of the stables superintending the dressing of a horse, which apparently had been injured by a fall.

He came towards our friends the moment he caught sight of them, and Tom King, glancing at the card, said:

"We are staying at the Stork Hotel, and upon informing the landlord that we wished to hire three first-class horses for a few hours, he recommended us to come to you."

"Certainly, gentlemen. I am much obliged."

Tom handed the card to the keeper of the stables, who immediately recognised the handwriting of the landlord, who happened to be a particular friend of his, and he came to the conclusion that all was right, and hoped he had got hold of three good customers.

He treated our friends with an overwhelming amount of respect, and had all the horses brought out into the yard, in order that they might make their selection.

Our friends chose three magnificent creatures, worth at least a hundred pounds apiece.

"You know how to choose horses, gentlemen," said the livery stable-keeper; "these are the three best animals in my stables."

"They are very fine indeed!" said the highwaymen, with one voice.

"They are as good as they are handsome, as you will find as soon as you mount."

The horses were got ready, and the best saddles and bridles on the premises were put upon them, and then our friends mounted, and, with a slight inclination of their heads, trotted out of the stable-yard into the street.

The keeper of the livery stables came to the top of the yard, and, standing there, watched them ride off down the street.

"They are good riders," he said to the ostler, who was standing near him, "and will show the horses off to advantage. I fancy they will turn out good customers."

He was never more mistaken in all his life, and when, a moment afterwards, he saw them disappear round the corner, he little thought that he had seen his three horses for the last time.

As soon as they were out of sight of the stables, the highwaymen resolved to allow their horses to make speed, and off they flew at a gallop, which delighted them beyond measure.

At last they slackened their pace, and Tom King exclaimed:

"I fancy we have got far enough now to be out of

reach of any danger. It was a good plan of yours, Jack, and but for you it would never have succeeded."

"They are splendid creatures indeed," added Claude Duval. "I fancy they will suit us admirably. At any rate, we shall never have any room to complain of the high price we gave for them."

Jack laughed.

"If we lose our horses again, I shall not think so seriously of it. We shall be able to put this scheme into practice again."

"I hope we shall be spared the necessity," said Tom King, "for we shall never get finer cattle than we have now."

"And we are in every respect in capital condition for the road. All we want now is a good adventure."

"A profitable one," said Tom King.

"Yes," replied Claude, "for the state of the exchequer is rather low just at the present time. All the money we possess is that which we took from the horse-coper, and since making our purchases in Winchester its amount has sensibly diminished."

"I suppose so," said Tom King; "but I don't think it is very prudent of us to be riding along the road in this fashion by broad daylight. We may pass unnoticed, and yet we are running a great risk of being recognised."

"It is certain we can't commence business until after dark," said Sixteen-String Jack. "But what are we to do until then?"

"Don't stop at an inn, whatever you do!" cried Claude. "I have had quite enough of that!"

"There seems to be a wood of considerable extent yonder," exclaimed Tom King. "Among those trees we shall certainly find some retired spot where we can pass the time between now and nightfall."

"Agreed! Let us repair there at once. I might say that we want for nothing, and we can rest ourselves, so as to be prepared for the night's fatigue, and our horses will do very well in grazing round the trees."

The wood Tom King had spoken of was little more than half a mile distant, and was separated from the road along which they were travelling by a piece of waste ground, which was dotted here and there with various stunted shrubs.

Before they left the high-road the highwaymen were careful to look up and down it, in order to make sure that no one was near enough to observe them, and then, feeling satisfied upon this point, they turned their horses' heads towards the wood, and, despite the unevenness of the ground over which they had to take their way, pressed into a hard gallop.

A very few moments served to bring them under the shade of the trees, and, happening to find a broad leafy glade covered with green turf, they continued along it until they reached its termination.

Then, plunging amid the dense mass of foliage, they selected a suitable spot to halt in, and, slipping from their saddles, removed the bits from their horses' mouths, and made themselves as comfortable as the circumstances would allow.

CHAPTER DLXXVII

TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MEET WITH A PROFITABLE ADVENTURE.

The hours intervening between noon and nightfall slowly passed away, or appeared to do so to our friends, who were impatient in the highest degree.

At last, however, the welcome shades of evening began to fall around, and as soon as they found this to be the case, they began to make preparations for their excursion.

They had but little to do, and in a short time were quite ready.

As a simple matter of precaution, they took their way through the wood, and emerged from it at a different point to that by which they had entered.

Tom King was their guide, and an occasional glance up at the stars in the sky enabled him to proceed with great precision.

"Here is the high-road at last," he said, "and here are we in readiness for an adventure."

"I can speak for myself," said Claude; "but the adventures to-night, bear in mind, must all be of a profitable nature. We have already been absent from the deserted mansion for too lengthened a period, and I am anxious to get back."

"So am I," said Tom King—"exceedingly so; and I will endeavour to prevent any further delay. It is impossible for us to tell what may have taken place during our absence, and although Dick was evidently recovering, yet he was in a precarious state, and may have had a relapse."

"Let us hope not," said Sixteen-String Jack. "I am no less desirous of getting back than you are; but I don't at all relish the idea of returning without any money at all. It seems unfortunate, after running so many risks, and coming so near to success, that we should, after all, lose every guinea of the miser's gold."

"Perhaps it's all for the best," said Tom King.

"I should be inclined to think so, perhaps," said Claude, "if we had made up for our loss in some other way; but as it is, we are, I might almost say, empty-handed."

"One good night's adventures, however, will remedy all that," said Tom King, "and the only thing we have to make our minds up to is this, that we do not allow ourselves to be led away by any interesting adventure that may befall us."

"There's the difficulty," said Claude Duval; "but, in the first place, doesn't a stage-coach run to Winchester?"

"Yes."

"Shall we have any probability of meeting with it?"

"That I can't tell," replied Tom King. "I am tolerably familiar with this part, but yet, I could not say at what hour the coach arrives at and departs from the town."

"We will ride on, then, and trust to meeting it. Between the three of us, we shall not have much trouble in stopping it, and we are sure to obtain a large sum from so many passengers."

"Something is coming now," exclaimed Tom King, suddenly. "It may be the stage-coach, and it may not; at any rate, we will draw to one side, and await the result."

"With all my heart!" said Claude. "If it is the coach, we could not have found a spot better suited to our purpose."

This was true enough, for our friends had just arrived at a kind of hollow in the road, which, from various circumstances, was plunged in deeper darkness than the rest of the highway.

Before them, looking towards London, was a very steep hill, and it was quite evident that down this hill some vehicle was coming.

Listening a moment, the highwaymen unanimously came to the conclusion that it must be the stage-coach, and awaited its arrival with the greatest impatience.

"We are all right!" said Tom King. "That's the stage-coach, and in order to come down such a steep hill as that, they will be sure to skid one of the wheels. When they reach the bottom they will pull up for the purpose of removing the slipper, and then we shall have a glorious chance."

"Yes," said Claude, with a laugh; "there will be no necessity to cry 'stand!' We shall only have to say 'deliver,' for the coach will be stopped already."

"Hush! Be prepared! Now it's coming!"

Unconscious of the danger that was awaiting it, the stage-coach came rolling down the hill, and, as Tom had foretold, the driver pulled up at the bottom, and the guard got down from behind in order to release the wheel.

This was the moment the highwaymen chose for action.

It seemed to the driver as though Tom King became suddenly developed out of the darkness, as with one bound he reached the stage-coach, and, presenting a pistol, cried:

"Drop the reins and sit still, or you are a dead man!"

At the same time Claude Duval hastened towards the coach, and, seeing the guard in the act of unskidding the wheel, he seized him by the back of his neck, and before the guard knew what had happened, he found himself head-over-heels in a muddy ditch that ran by the side of the road.

A chorus of screams from the interior of the vehicle now ensued, and the passengers on the roof gave vent to sundry profane oaths.

Sixteen-String Jack made his way with all speed to one of the doors of the coach, and as the window had already been let down, he thrust his head into the interior.

"Don't be alarmed, ladies and gentlemen," he said, coolly; "there will be no harm done, and the delay will be trifling, providing you have the good sense to hand over without resistance whatever valuables you carry about with you!"

A complete silence followed this demand, and Sixteen-String Jack put his head still further into the coach, in order to ascertain what persons occupied it, for within all was dark.

Suddenly a sharp clicking sound came upon his ears, and he turned like lightning in the direction from which it came.

His eyes were now accustomed to the gloom, and he saw seated nearly in the centre of the vehicle a young man who, with a cry of rage, was cocking his pistol again, having missed fire the first time.

"Don't meddle with things you know nothing about!" said Sixteen-String Jack, calmly. "You are not used to firearms—I can see that plainly enough! I hope no one else will be foolish enough to follow your example. At any rate, they shall see how I will serve you!"

While speaking these words, Sixteen-String Jack leaned still further into the coach, and suddenly seized the man who held the pistol by the coat collar.

Then, placing his left hand against the side of the coach, Sixteen-String Jack put forth his utmost strength, and dragged the man completely through the window.

He released his hold, and then, with a cry of terror and pain, the traveller fell into the road.

"Would anyone else like similar treatment?" said Jack, as calmly as ever. "If not, just comply with my demands; if you refuse, the coach will be very much behind its time when it gets to the end of its journey!"

"Take that," said some one, in a gruff voice,—"there's my purse, and I hope you will buy a rope with the money!"

"There will be no necessity for me to do that," said Jack — "the country will find me one free of expense!"

"There's many a true word spoken in jest, as the old proverb says," replied the passenger who had given the purse. "Now, ladies and gentlemen," he added, turning to those who were with him, "follow my example! Take my word for it, it's the best thing you can do: it's the only way you can get rid of these gentry!"

"Attend to the words of the speaker of common sense!" said Sixteen-String Jack, with so much mock solemnity that the passengers could not forbear a smile, although they had the prospect of losing their money so close before them.

The words spoken by the traveller with the gruff voice evidently produced an effect upon the rest, for various articles of value were handed to Jack without his being put to the trouble of renewing his demand.

When he looked at the speaker, however, he did not wonder that his words should be so well attended to, for he was very tall and very stout—being, in fact, rather larger than human beings of the ordinary size.

The highwayman had seen enough to be aware that it is generally the biggest man who sways the opinions of his fellows. It would almost seem that people are under the impression that a colossal body and a colossal mind must go together.

Sixteen-String Jack rapidly placed the articles in his pocket as they were handed to him, and finding he had taken a very considerable booty, he made a bow and said:

"That will do, ladies and gentlemen—you will be molested no further. For what you have given me I am much obliged! Please to remember that I have only taken what you have offered!"

"A good joke that!" said the gigantic traveller—"a very good joke! Upon my word, the fellow deserves something; and after all, what does it matter if you do lose your purse on the highway?"

"I don't suppose it matters much to you, sir, who have plenty of money to spare," said a man, in a shrill, piping voice, whose personal appearance somehow or other seemed to resemble a weasel. "It don't much matter to you; but as for me, the loss of a purse is of very great moment indeed!"

The other passengers looked at the one who had last spoken, and then, when they saw what a little, shrivelled-up, insignificant being he was, they concluded that it was not worth while to take any notice of what such a one said.

Sixteen-String Jack did not wait to hear any more, but looked around him in order to ascertain whether either of his two comrades required his assistance.

All seemed to have gone well, however, for he caught sight of Tom King standing on guard over the coachman, while Claude Duval was taking watches and purses from the travellers on the roof.

Towards these Jack now turned his attention, and it was a very fortunate thing that he did so.

It will be remembered that Claude Duval had flung the guard into the ditch, from which he had made no attempt to extricate himself, being under the impression that while he remained there he was safe, and that if he tried to get away he should be murdered.

As is well known, it was the guard's duty to protect the passengers, and prevent them from being robbed on the highway.

For this purpose, he was always provided with that obsolete firearm, a blunderbuss, which was slung in a wicker case side by side with his long tin horn.

While he lay in the ditch, of course he could not make use of this weapon.

One of the outsiders, however, who happened to be close to the guard's seat, and who was much exasperated at the loss of his property, was suddenly seized with the idea that he might be able to obtain some revenge.

He saw how intently Claude Duval was occupied in taking the property away from the rest, and this prompted him to make the attempt to draw the blunderbuss out of its case.

He did this slowly and carefully, and placed it against his shoulder without Claude being in the least aware of what he was about.

Of course those who sat nearest to the adventurous traveller knew very well what he was about, but they kept perfectly still, and looked forward with a grim species of satisfaction to the moment when the trigger would be drawn, and the highwayman swept from the face of the earth.

When Sixteen-String Jack looked up, then, the passenger, with the butt-end of the blunderbuss against his shoulder, had risen up a little out of his seat in order to take a better aim at the highwayman, whose back was turned towards him, and in order to escape the risk of injuring his fellow-travellers.

To have called out to Claude, and warn him of his danger, Sixteen-String Jack well knew would be useless.

He comprehended instantly that his friend's life depended upon his quickness.

With a flash like lightning, his sword flew from its sheath, and with it he struck the barrel of the blunderbuss a heavy blow, causing the muzzle to be elevated many degrees higher in the air than it had been.

The passenger was in the very act of pulling the trigger, and could not arrest the movements of his muscles.

There was a tremendous report and a blinding sheet of flame.

A loud cry followed, and with a crash the adventurous traveller fell backwards over the hind part of the coach into the road.

The cause of his fall was simple enough.

The clumsy firearm had been too heavily loaded, and the propensity to recoil which all blunderbusses have is well known.

The recoil of this one was very great, and had the traveller been standing on the ground, it certainly would have caused him to stagger back two or three paces.

As it was, however, he was in a half-sitting posture, and the blunderbuss recoiling, threw him off his balance, and he tried in vain to recover himself.

He was also alarmed and very much taken by surprise by the suddenness of Sixteen-String Jack's attack.

As for Claude Duval, the unexpectedness of the loud report made him for several seconds feel quite doubtful as to whether his head had been blown from his shoulders or not.

CHAPTER DLXXVIII.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN CONTINUE TO MEET WITH EXTRAORDINARY SUCCESS ON THE HIGHWAY.

THE report was such a one as could only come from the bell mouth of a blunderbuss, and Sixteen-String Jack, although aware that the explosion would take place, was nevertheless half stunned by it.

The passengers on the roof, too, were not a little alarmed, and several wondered where the discharge had come from, for the report and the disappearance of the adventurous traveller were simultaneous occurrences.

As soon as he could recover himself a little. Jack said:

"It's all right, Claude—there is no danger! I was just in time!"

This was a fact; for had Jack been a second later, Claude's destruction must have been certain.

Tom King had not taken a very active part in the proceedings, and yet the duty which he fulfilled was a most important one.

The calm, steady manner in which he held the pistol was quite enough to cause the driver to sit perfectly still; while, as for the horses themselves, they were only too glad to avail themselves of the opportunity to rest and breathe a little.

In addition to this, Tom kept a sharp look-out both up and down the road, so as to be aware at the earliest moment of the approach of any of their enemies.

Like all the rest, Tom King was taken by surprise by the explosion of the blunderbuss, and moreover he felt very anxious and alarmed about his companions.

To his joy, however, as soon as the smoke had cleared away, he saw them sitting on their horses calmly and contentedly enough.

But almost immediately afterwards the dull, hard beat of many horses' hoofs on the road came to his ears, and, looking up, he saw a compact body of horsemen descending the hill.

Whether they were officers, or dragoons, or travellers, he did not stop to inquire, nor would it have been wise for them to wait and ascertain.

He at once gave the alarm to his comrades.

"Fly!" he said, "and quickly! Over the hedge with you! Off and away!"

Claude and Jack obeyed his command instantly, and with all the more alacrity, since they had quite finished their task of taking contributions from the travellers within and without.

The hedge had been broken down in one part, leaving a gap, and through this they made their horses leap in rapid succession.

A smooth piece of pasture ground was beyond, and they galloped over it at a speed which they felt certain the officers could never equal.

In a moment, the high-road, the coach, and the pursuing officers seemed to be left behind.

Away into the darkness they flew, nor did they draw rein until they were quite sure that the officers were out of sight and hearing.

At last they stopped, and Claude Duval exclaimed:

"Hurrah! This has been a brave and profitable adventure. There was not a single passenger from whom I did not receive a good booty. What success did you meet with, Jack?"

"Excellent, my friend! The travellers were all very civil, and handed over their purses without resistance, and some were heavy ones, I can assure you."

"So much the better," said Tom King, "and I trust that this will foreshow the success we are destined to meet with. Remember, our sole idea is to get together as much money as we can, in order to recompense us for our losses."

"Just so; and as we are out of all danger as far as our late pursuers are concerned, I am quite willing to take my stand on the highway again."

"I was about to propose that we should do so," said Tom King. "Follow me,—I fancy we are much nearer the high-road than you anticipate."

As he spoke, Tom King turned off at right angles from the direction he had been taking, and in a few moments afterwards the three highwaymen emerged into the high-road at a point not very distant from the scene of their late exploit.

"Let us stay here and wait," said Tom King; "the spot is a convenient one, and these trees behind us will throw such a shadow that we shall be quite concealed; besides, we have our pistols to see to, and we ought not to delay any longer."

To all this Claude and Jack fully agreed, and they took up their position beneath the shadow of the trees Tom had mentioned.

They were poplars, and about twenty in number, and shot up into the sky to a great height.

Convinced that the shadow would thoroughly conceal them, our friends carefully reloaded and primed their pistols.

When all was in readiness, Tom King held up his hand, and cried:

"Hush!"

All listened, and then Claude exclaimed:

"A single traveller is coming, and from the direction of London; who shall encounter him?"

"I think," said Jack, "we had better all three ride forward at once; the business will be over more quickly then. If he should happen to be a bold man, he will never be so rash as to resist all three of us."

"We will try your plan, Jack," said Tom King, "and see how it answers."

The traveller came on at a trot that showed his steed was of no common quality.

Little dreaming of the danger to which he was hastening, he rode on until he was suddenly startled by hearing a voice pronounce the word "Halt!"

The tones were abrupt and commanding, and, almost as if by instinct, the traveller checked his steed.

In another instant he was surrounded by the three highwaymen.

They spoke in succession.

"Surrender your purse and other valuables you have, and you may ride on in safety. If you refuse, the consequences will be on your own head."

The traveller looked from one to the other as they spoke, and as soon as the last finished, he replied:

"So, there are three of you, are there? Well, I hold my life at a higher price than what I may have about me. I will trust to your word. Here is my purse and my watch. I have nothing else worth your taking. Now let me ride on."

"You are perfectly free to do so," said Tom King, as he placed the articles the traveller handed to him in his pocket. "Ride on, sir—you will be molested no further."

The traveller touched his horse with the spurs, and was out of sight in a moment.

Doubtless he thought he had had a lucky escape.

"Fortune favours us," said Claude. "A few adventures like these, and by the morning we shall have enough to answer our purpose."

"Very true," replied Tom. "I like your scheme, Jack—it is a good one; we will try it again."

"Then you will soon have the opportunity of doing so," was the rejoinder, "for, if I am not mistaken, I can hear the grating of wheels upon the gravelly road. Listen!"

"You are quite right," said Tom King, after a moment's pause. "Some light vehicle, drawn by two horses, is approaching. It is probably a private carriage. It does not make lumbering enough to be a post-chaise."

"Look!" said Claude. "Can you see anything of the lamps?"

"No."

"That's strange, then."

"It is—very, for they are coming at a terrific speed, and it is certainly not safe to come along a dark road at such a pace without lights."

"Safe or not safe," said Claude Duval, "it will make no difference to us. You will stop the carriage, Tom, of course?"

"Certainly."

"Then, I hope it will be worth the trouble."

"We shall see."

"Stand aside, and when we command the driver to pull up, be in readiness to gallop after him, in case he should refuse. You know the old way of bringing a carriage to a standstill, by twirling it broadside across the road."

"Oh, yes! I know," replied Claude. "You leave that to me."

Not another word was said, and the highwaymen, fixing their eyes in the direction from which the carriage was coming, waited its approach impatiently.

They had not to wait long.

Upon Tom King devolved the task of calling out to the driver to stop.

Experience had taught him that the most effectual way to accomplish his purpose was to fire a pistol in the air beforehand, and then take advantage of the momentary confusion that the report was sure to occasion to call out "Halt!"

In nine cases out of ten the vehicle would be brought to a standstill at once.

But on this particular night Tom King wished to make no more noise than was absolutely necessary.

He was well aware that his enemies were on the road, and his impression was that the police officers had been attracted to the stage-coach by the discharge of the blunderbuss.

As soon as the carriage was near enough, he planted himself boldly in the centre of the highway, and cried out:

"Pull up your horses, coachman, or you are a dead man!"

The tones of Tom King's voice were quite sufficient, one would think, to convince anybody that he fully meant what he said.

But the driver of this particular carriage paid not the slightest attention to his command.

On the contrary, he lashed his horses fiercely with his whip, and had not Tom King moved promptly on one side, he would certainly have been ridden over.

With a rush, the carriage swept past, but Claude Duval was in readiness, and by a few bounds he soon had his horse on a level with those which were harnessed to the carriage.

We have frequently described the method they adopted when stopping a carriage.

Claude seized hold of the bridle of one of the horses, and pulled it towards him.

Of course the horse obeyed the impulse, and curved round, the one on the other side of the pole naturally following his example.

Before the driver was aware of it, the carriage was placed across the road.

He pulled the reins violently, but the horses only backed, and the consequence was that the hind wheels sank into the ditch with a crash.

Claude retained his hold upon the horse's bridle, for he knew his companions would be quite sufficient to attend to the occupants of the carriage.

The driver saw him, however, and knew what he was about, and, thrusting his hand into a sort of case by his side, drew out a pistol, which he rapidly brought to the level and fired.

The bullet in its course made a disagreeable furrow in Claude's cheek, and caused not a little acute pain.

"Confound you!" said Claude, whose passion for the moment got the better of him. "Take that!"

He fired as he spoke, and the driver rolled off his seat on to the road.

Whether he was killed, or whether he had altogether escaped injury, Claude could not tell.

At the same moment, a loud shriek reached his ears.

It came evidently from the interior of the carriage, and from female lips.

In the meanwhile, Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack had galloped after the carriage, and as soon as it was drawn across the road, they rode up to the windows.

Sixteen-String Jack went to the one on the further side, and narrowly escaped being hurled into the ditch when the horses backed so suddenly.

But he escaped, and that was sufficient.

The next moment he was at the door of the carriage, and he let down the window at the same moment that Tom King let down the one on the other side.

Both rested their pistols on the ledge of the window in a somewhat threatening manner, and then, bending their heads, looked in.

What they saw, however, considerably astonished them, and was totally unlike what they had anticipated.

On the back seat of the carriage three persons were seated, and two more occupied the front seat.

The two last were men, and attired in a grotesque and singular-looking style, which savoured more of the monastic than aught else.

At least, that was the impression of the two highwaymen at first sight.

And after a closer investigation, they were the more convinced.

The other three persons were females.

The one sitting next to Tom King, and the one next Sixteen-String Jack, were attired precisely alike.

They had on their heads white bonnets of a most peculiar fashion, which projected at least six inches from their faces, forming a kind of tube.

Their gowns were perfectly black.

All this the two highwaymen saw at a glance, and were satisfied by bestowing a glance upon them.

The whole of their attention was excited by another object—and they literally riveted their gaze upon the person who sat in between the two females we have just described.

CHAPTER DLXXIX.

OLD MATTHEW KEEPS HIS APPOINTMENT WITH DICK TURPIN AT THE GIBBET ON THE FINCHLEY ROAD.

THE sun had set, and confusing shadows were beginning to stretch themselves over the landscape, when Dick Turpin quitted the gipsy encampment.

Half an hour's gallop would take him to the gibbet on the Finchley Road, which was the spot appointed for the meeting, and so he was quite sure of reaching his destination in good time.

He took every precaution he could think of to avoid meeting with or being seen by anyone; and at last he crossed the little triangular-shaped piece of ground at the junction of the roads, and concealed himself among the trees, as he had done on the occasion when he waited there for the appearance of his three comrades.

Even at that early hour the dismal spot seemed lonely and deserted; but Dick Turpin was proof against all foolish fears, and so, dismounting from his steed, he flung himself at full length upon the ground, and longed for the moment to arrive when his old and well-tried friend should make his appearance.

He summoned up all the patience he could, for he knew that it was very probable old Matthew would be unable to reach the appointed spot before midnight.

His house might be watched, and he might have a difficulty in getting away unperceived; and Dick knew well enough that old Matthew would not be the one to get him into trouble by any careless or thoughtless act.

But his thoughts almost drove him distracted, for ever present before his mind was Maud seated in one of the gloomy cells of Newgate.

At last Dick Turpin's ears caught the sound of revolving wheels.

He listened for a moment, and then he murmured:

"The stage-coach is coming. Well, it will not be stopped by me to-night."

The peculiar beat of the horses' hoofs, as well as the rapidity with which the lumbering vehicle was drawn along the road, convinced Dick that he was right.

In a little while the coach, with its steaming horses and bright shining lights, came into view and swept past instantly.

He listened to it as it receded.

It was going from, not to, London.

Suddenly it stopped, and then, after a minute's delay, started again.

Dick rose to his feet and peered through the branches of the trees.

In a little while a dusky-looking figure came in sight, and he watched it with breathless suspense.

It crossed over and paused at the foot of the gibbet.

Then a faint whistle, like the cry of some night-bird disturbed upon its perch, broke the silence that reigned around, and Dick Turpin, with a half-suppressed cry of pleasure and satisfaction upon his lips, rushed forward.

In another minute he was tightly grasping old Matthew's hand.

"Come this way, Matthew," he said, hurriedly—"come this way! We will not remain here for fear we should

be seen. Black Bess is close at hand, and we can remain by her side with the certainty of being seen by no one."

"All right, Dick!" said Matthew, with emotion, as he seated himself by the highwayman's side. "I am delighted to see you, Dick! I am glad to find you are still in safety. Not having heard from you for so long, I wondered what had happened."

"No doubt you would, but I must postpone the relation of my adventures to another time. I have something very important to say to you. You got my letter, of course?"

"Oh, yes! That pretty gipsy girl brought it. By-the-way, Dick, is that a new sweetheart of yours? Where did you find her?"

"I met her by chance," was the reply, "and she offered to be the bearer of the letter, that's all I know about her. I entrusted her with it, because I could tell by her countenance that she would deliver it faithfully."

"So she did, Dick, and in a manner that won my heart completely. Since you paid me a visit last, my house has been more closely watched by the police than ever. They are continually coming in and out all the day long, and watching everything I do.

"Well, when this girl came in, a couple of police officers were standing at the bar counter.

"They looked sharply at her, I can assure you, and I suppose they came to the conclusion that it was not you in disguise.

"Well, she came up to the counter, and instead of making any fuss about the matter, or assuming any secret or mysterious aspect, she said:

"'Are you Mr. Gale?'

"'Yes,' I replied.

"'Then,' said she, 'here is a letter for you.

"She gave it to me in the most unconcerned manner you could imagine—in fact, I was quite taken in by it, for I didn't believe it was anything of importance. However, when I opened it, I found how much I had been mistaken."

"And you gave her the two guineas, Matthew?"

"Of course I did! Bless her heart, she ought to have had four! If she had come creeping in, and whispering, and making a great secret of it, I should have had the officers after me to-night watching every step I took, so that it would have been impossible for me to meet you."

"Are you sure that none have followed you as it is?"

"Oh yes—quite sure.

"I put the letter in my pocket, and said to the officers that I told you were standing at the counter:

"'I have had a bit of bad news, gentlemen.'

"'What is it, Matthew?' they asked.

"'Well,' said I, 'you know St. Albans?'

"'To be sure we do!'

"'Do you know the Bull's Head there?'

"'Is it that inn opposite the market-place?'

"'Yes,' I replied, 'that is it. Did you happen to know that that was kept by a brother-in-law of mine?'

"'No,' they said, 'we don't.'

"'Well, it is, and he's just sent his girl over to me with a letter to say that my sister has been taken suddenly ill, and is not expected to live. She wants to see me very much, so I shall be off this afternoon. Do you know what time the coach starts?'

"'Yes—at half-past four.'

"'Well, then,' said I, 'it's time I began to get ready.'

"Well, Dick, with that I made all my preparations, and walked off to the coach-office in Piccadilly.

"I looked behind me all the way I went, and just as I was getting on the top of the coach I saw one of the officers peeping round the corner.

"He did not know that I saw him, but I did, and I saw his countenance change, and I could tell by the expression of it that he had made up his mind all was right, and that for once in my life I had told him the truth."

"Do you feel sure, Matthew, that he had no suspicion? It will turn out very awkward for both of us if he had."

"Don't distress yourself on that score, Dick, my boy. Take my word for it that all is right. Would it not be proof enough in all conscience? I spoke off without any hesitation as soon as ever I read the letter, and then he would see me get into the St. Albans coach, and you must also know that my brother-in-law does keep the Bull's Head, which is the largest inn in the town.

"I stopped the coach a little while ago, got down, and here I am."

"I am much beholden to you, Matthew," replied Dick, "more so than I can express."

"Pho—pho! Don't talk about that. You said in your letter that something serious had happened, that you were in trouble, and wanted my advice. Let me have all the particulars at once."

For a moment Dick was undecided whether to tell Matthew first what had befallen Maud, or what had become of his three companions.

He resolved upon the latter, and, in as few words as he could, told the landlord how they had gone off to the New Forest in search of the treasure, and had not returned, although they ought to have done so several days back.

He ended by telling about the officers being in the deserted mansion, and asked him if he could suggest any means by which they could be warned of their danger.

Old Matthew was puzzled, and rubbed his bald head vigorously.

"Do you know which way they are coming back?"

"No, that I do not know."

"Then it is more awkward than I thought. I was going to propose that you should ride off in the direction of the forest, and endeavour to meet with them."

"I should do that, Matthew, but something else has occurred which prevents me."

Dick then communicated to old Matthew what particulars he could respecting Maud's capture.

Matthew heard him to the end, and expressed his indignation in no measured terms.

"I had heard about this," he said, "but I did not believe it, simply because so many false tales had been set afloat. However, it seems that this is perfectly true."

"It is true," said Dick, "though what object they could have in making her a prisoner, or what charge they could prefer against her, I am at a loss to conceive."

"Let me consider a moment," said old Matthew. "I did not pay so much attention to what I heard as I ought to have done; however, it amounted to this—I was told some young woman had been captured and taken before the magistrate at Bow Street, upon the charge of being an accomplice of yours."

"Taken before the magistrate?" exclaimed Dick.

"Yes, that's it! And I heard she was committed to take her trial upon the charge."

"What charge?"

"That of being your accomplice."

Dick was silent for a moment, and then he asked, in a trembling voice:

"Do you think this is really true, Matthew?"

"I feel pretty sure of it, after what you have told me, though at first, as I said, I took no notice of it."

"This vexes me greatly," said Dick, "and so you see the dilemma in which I am placed. Maud is a prisoner in Newgate. Do you think I could maintain my patience while she is within those gloomy walls? No, she must be set at liberty at once!"

"But how, Dick—how?"

"That I don't know, Matthew. My position is a difficult one. Pray give me your advice!"

"I must have a little time to think, Dick. There's one important question I want to ask."

"What?"

"Do you know whether Mr. Wriggles had any hand in making Maud prisoner?"

"I cannot speak from actual knowledge," said Turpin, "but I believe he had; at any rate, he was on the spot."

"That's quite sufficient," said old Matthew.

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this. Mr. Wriggles is rather a clever fellow—I mean he is cunning. He has had one or two pitched battles with me, but has always come off second best."

"He has."

"Well, then, you may make sure that if Mr. Wriggles took Maud prisoner, he had some particular motive—some end to serve by doing so."

"But what?"

"That I don't know, but by thinking the matter over from beginning to end, we might manage to hit upon the truth."



[OLD MATTHEW IS SEIZED AND RECOGNISED BY THE POLICE OFFICERS.]

"Did you not say that Maud was your wife?"

"Yes."

"Were you married in the regular way?"

"Well, not exactly, but as nearly as we could manage We had a real parson to read the service, though the remony wasn't performed in a church."

"Then you are married?"

"There can be no doubt about that!"

"Does Mr. Wriggles know it?"

"Yes. I am sure he knows she is my wife."

"Then that makes the matter a great deal clearer," said Matthew.

"I can't see that?"

"But I can. As she is your wife, of course she could be charged with being your accomplice. She uld be free from all punishment on that ground."

"Then why has she been made prisoner?"

"Why, I suppose Mr. Wriggles has often seen you both gether—has he not?"

"Many times."

"And would come to the conclusion that you were much attached to each other?"

"Very likely he would."

"Then I think I can put two and two together, and make four of it!"

"Speak out plainly, Matthew."

"I will; and if this isn't Mr. Wriggles's plan I am not half so clever as I have always believed myself to be!"

Dick Turpin waited impatiently for Matthew to continue.

"He would pretend to know nothing about the marriage—he would pretend to disbelieve she was your wife, and so get her taken up before the magistrate and committed for trial. I suppose Maud would be unable to produce any proof of her marriage?"

"Quite."

"Then Mr. Wriggles has gained his purpose by having her confined in Newgate! Can't you see that?"

"No; I cannot."

"Well, then, he thinks if she is there you will not rest until you have set her at liberty. He calculates that you will try some desperate scheme or other to assist her to escape. He will think that you will be hovering round Newgate like a moth round a candle. He will have lots of men about, and all of them very busy looking everywhere. When he caught sight of you near the prison, he would gradually close his forces round you; and then, when you had unsuspectingly gone into some place from which you could not make a retreat, he would bring all his men down upon you, and, as a matter of course, nabbed you would be!"

Old Matthew delivered his opinion with considerable emphasis.

Dick Turpin was silent—almost stunned, in fact,—it was quite a fresh revelation to him.

"And, Matthew," he asked at length, "do you really think that is his scheme?"

"I do, Dick. The more I ponder over it, the more convinced do I feel that I have hit the right nail on the head this time!"

CHAPTER DLXXX.

OLD MATTHEW GIVES DICK TURPIN SOME ADVICE, AND IS INTERRUPTED IN HIS CONFERENCE.

This time old Matthew spoke with more emphasis than before, for every second that elapsed only served to convince him that he was perfectly correct in his surmises.

As the reader knows full well, he had arrived very closely at the truth, and it may seem not a little strange that he should be enabled to do so.

But the fact was, the landlord of the White Horse Inn possessed, in a very great degree, that faculty which is called intuition.

He never could explain the process, but in some mysterious way he seemed to jump at conclusions.

On the present occasion, however, he had more to guide him than he usually had, for he had made the character of Mr. Wriggles a perfect study for some time past.

Besides, several little schemes which had been planned by the astute officer, and which from some cause or other had failed, had been brought under his notice, and, judging the man's disposition and the temperament of his mind, he came to a conclusion which was so much like the truth as to scarcely differ from it in any particular.

Dick Turpin was amazed, not so much at Matthew's having arrived at a solution of the affair in the way he had, but at the cunningness of the plan itself.

Some minutes elapsed before he spoke a word in reply, and then he said:

"Do you really think that Mr. Wriggles has planned such a deep-laid scheme as this? The villain shall rue the consequences of having put Maud to this indignity!"

"I feel pretty sure of it," said Matthew—"as sure as I could of anything that I do not positively know to be true. What you are to do in the matter I really have not the least idea."

"As to what is to be done," exclaimed Dick, "Maud must be set at liberty—that is perfectly clear. The thing to be considered is the manner in which it is to be done."

"Exactly!" replied Matthew. "And it strikes me that is just where you will find the difficulty."

Dick Turpin clasped his hands tightly over his forehead, as though by that means he could calm the turmoil of his thoughts.

There was again a silence, for old Matthew was thinking too.

"Matthew," said Turpin, removing his hands, "Maud must be set at liberty without delay! Can you tell me how it is to be done?"

"I can't, Dick. Mr. Wriggles quite anticipates that you will come to this decision. You can't set Maud free without going to Newgate. Mr. Wriggles and all the police officers in London will be surrounding it, so that it will be impossible for you to approach without being captured."

"It is most perplexing!" said Dick, 'and to add to my annoyance, my three comrades are far away. If they were with me, we might, by conferring together, manage to hit upon something."

"But how—how? What could you do? Maud is in Newgate, and it would be certain death for either of you to go near the place!—and you may depend no ordinary precautions will be omitted in order to make her quite secure.'

"But is it not impossible that she should remain a prisoner in one of those loathsome cells? I know from experience what it is to be confined in Newgate, and can imagine the indignities to which she will be subjected."

"Well, I confess I can't, for the life me, see how she is to be set at liberty. You are truly in an embarrassing situation, Dick. The position of your three comrades is certainly very critical. You say you expect them every hour?"

"I do. They ought to have been back days ago."

"Then perhaps at this very moment, while we are sitting here conversing together, they are riding, unsuspectingly, into a terrible danger. The thought that the police officers have taken up their quarters in the deserted mansion, and are on the watch for their return, will never occur to them."

"Don't picture anything so terrible," said Dick, "or you will drive me mad!"

"I have no wish to do that, or alarm you unnecessarily. All I want to do is to enable you to understand your position fully."

"I know you have the best intentions, Matthew. I fancy from your manner that you have something to propose?"

"Well, I have, Dick; and to me it seems that it is the only reasonable thing you can do. My advice, however, will not, I fancy, be very palatable to you, therefore, if you have thought of anything yourself—if you have anything to propose—let me hear it first; if not, then I will speak."

"Matthew, my friend, I am so bewildered and perplexed, and torn by so many conflicting emotions, that I am unable to come to any determination at all."

"I do not wonder at that; and although I am not quite so deeply interested as yourself, yet I am nearly so; it is, therefore, reasonable that I should be calmer of the two."

"Well, Matthew, let me hear what it is you have to propose. I can assure you I am quite baffled, and cannot think of anything myself."

"I suppose, then, that I am right in thinking that you have more affection for Maud, and that you have her welfare nearer to your heart, than that of your companions."

"You are right, Matthew! And can you wonder at it?"

"I don't; and I only mentioned it in order that I might feel sure I was correct as I proceeded."

"Go on, then! You are quite right so far."

"But, Dick, you would not be so selfish and unjust as to be heedless of their deadly peril simply because Maud is in a disagreeable position?"

Dick Turpin bent a searching gaze upon his companion, but said nothing.

"I may as well come to the point at once," continued old Matthew, "without beating about the bush."

"Do so—do so!"

"Well, then, to speak plainly, I should recommend you to allow Maud to remain where she is until you have rejoined your companions."

"Never—never! I cannot listen to such a proposition as that for a moment! It is my duty to see that she is set at liberty, and I will do it! That consideration rises above all others. No—no, Matthew, I cannot consent to that!"

Turpin spoke with great impetuosity, and the landlord made no attempt to interrupt him.

As soon as he had finished his excited speech, however, Matthew said:

"I was prepared for great and violent opposition on your part. I knew you would not relish my proposal, yet if you will give me your consideration for a little while, I think I shall be able to reconcile you to it."

Turpin shook his head doubtfully.

"At least," urged Matthew, "you will not refuse to hear what I have to say in favour of my proposal?"

"No, certainly not! You have every claim upon my attention."

"If you do not think my reasons good and sufficient ones, you have no need to do as I desire."

"I am impatient, Matthew, to hear what you have to say. If I don't accede to your proposition unconditionally, and as it now stands, yet something may be moulded out of it."

"Precisely! There is no need for me to speak of the perilous position of your three comrades. Destruction may come upon them at any moment."

"True—true!"

"Does not their case seem urgent in the extreme? Upon their part, any delay in receiving a warning from you would be fatal; and if they were made prisoners as well as Maud, then what kind of a position should you find yourself in?"

Dick was silent.

"Your hands would then be tied behind your back completely," continued Matthew. "You would not be able to do anything. I can judge how mortified you feel at the manner in which Maud has been treated; but the mischief has been done—the worst is over. To you it is repulsive in the highest degree that she should remain a prisoner a moment longer, yet as she is already there, can being detained a little longer make much difference?"

"I understand what you mean, Matthew," replied Dick, "and I am forced to admit that you have reason and common sense on your side."

"Good!" said Matthew, rubbing his hands together.

"But my brain burns when I think of Maud being a tenant of that gloomy abode, and I seem as though I could not resist the desire to make a bold and desperate effort to set her free!"

"That will never do, Dick—take my word for it—that will never do! I am certain that such measures have been adopted that you could not go within half a mile of Newgate without being surrounded by at least fifty police officers, and when you were in that position what could you do? You would either have to surrender, or else allow yourself to be slain; and, provided either of these things happened, what chance would Maud have of getting free then?"

Dick was silent, for he found himself unable to frame a reasonable reply to Matthew's last question.

"And," continued the landlord, perceiving that he had gained a point, "I really do not see why you should not resign yourself to Maud remaining a prisoner for a little while. If you could only do that, there would be no need of setting her at liberty at all."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this—things are very bad indeed, and you must make the best of them. I consider you would be making the best of them by allowing Maud to remain in Newgate a few days longer, and then she would be set at liberty by the authorities themselves."

"Set free?"

"Yes. Next Monday the sessions will begin at the Old Bailey, and, to put a great many words into a few, my advice is that you permit Maud to be brought to trial upon the charge against her. I will suggest a means to you by which you may almost make sure of her acquittal, and, under any circumstances, I shall appeal to you whether it would not be better to let things take their course than to run your neck into a halter just for the sake of three or four days' discomfort?"

"No—no, Matthew! I cannot and will not accede to anything of the kind! The idea of Maud being brought to the bar at the Old Bailey is most repugnant to my feelings! It must not—shall not be!"

"I can't help thinking you very foolish for pronouncing such words," said old Matthew; "and, if I am not mistaken, you will change your determination in a little while. Do you not think that, if the circumstances were explained to Maud, she would gladly and willingly consent to remain a prisoner for a few days, rather than you should attempt the hopeless, impossible task of setting her free?"

"She would consent to it!" replied Dick; "she would make any sacrifice for me! But I am determined that she shall not in this case!"

"Turpin, my friend, if I thought there was the ghost of a chance of your succeeding in setting her free, I would not make this proposal; but my deliberate conviction is that you might as well try to put the full moon into your waistcoat pocket—and that's about the most impossible thing I can think of," added the landlord.

"I am certainly most awkwardly placed," said Dick; "I can see the full force of all you have said, but yet I can't bring myself to think with any amount of patience upon the prospect of Maud remaining a prisoner."

"Well, as the sessions are to begin so soon, it does not appear a very dreadful matter. If it was determined that you should set her free, and you began to take the necessary steps to-day, say without any further delay, the probability is, that three days at least would elapse before your purpose could be accomplished. You could not do it in half-an-hour, could you?"

Dick Turpin was forced to admit that he could not.

"Remember your comrades, too," added old Matthew. "They have been faithful friends to you, and never hesitated to make any sacrifice, in order that your safety might be secured. While situated as they now are, journeying as I might say to certain death, don't you think it is your duty to use your best exertions to save them (and doubtless if you tried you would succeed) than to obstinately persist in doing that which can only result in your own capture or death.

CHAPTER DLXXXI.

DICK TURPIN'S CONFERENCE WITH OLD MATTHEW MEETS WITH A SUDDEN INTERRUPTION.

Matthew Gale pronounced these words with great impressiveness and emphasis. Every syllable he uttered seemed to strike upon Dick Turpin's heart with full force of conviction.

The worthy landlord warmed with his subject, and finding the highwayman made no effort to gainsay him, he determined to proceed.

"I know you have the greatest affection for Maud," he said; "and I can easily comprehend the state of your feelings; but in considering her, you must not overlook your companions. While in Newgate she is at least in safety—at the very worst, all that she can suffer is a little longer imprisonment and an appearance before the court. On the other hand, unless some active steps are immediately taken, the doom of your companions is sealed."

"Matthew," said Turpin, "I requested you to come here in order that I might obtain your advice, I felt that I was incompetent to reflect and to decide upon any course of action, therefore I do not close my ears to what you say, though I find it very hard indeed to agree with you."

"No doubt—no doubt; but then my mind is not so perturbed as yours, and on these grounds I think what I say should be entitled to your consideration."

"I know you would advise me for the best."

"I would, Dick—I would; and now I will ask you this: whether it would not be better for Maud to be honourably and legally acquitted of the charge preferred against her, and so set at liberty unconditionally, than for her to be taken out of prison by violent and illegal means. In the first case she could never be apprehended on this charge, and I imagine it is the only one that can be brought against her, while in the second case, all police officers would have an undisputed right to seize and make her a prisoner again."

Turpin saw the force of this, and began to waver.

"If," he said, hesitatingly, "I could feel sure she would be acquitted, and if I could make certain of saving the lives of my comrades, I don't think I should hesitate to do as you advise."

"I rejoice to hear you say that, Dick, because it makes me think that in a little while you will coincide with me entirely."

"You said you could suggest some means by which an acquittal could be obtained?"

"I did," replied Matthew.

"What is it?"

"Did you not tell me that a regular authorised parson performed the marriage ceremony between you?"

"Most certainly."

"But I suppose, owing to peculiar circumstances, you omitted to obtain from him a certificate that the ceremony had been performed?"

"I did omit it," replied Dick, "for I never thought that such a thing would be needed."

"I thought not; but, nevertheless, it is a great pity, for if you only happened to have that certificate, it could be put in as evidence at the trial, and would conclusively prove that Maud was your wife, and then, as you know very well, she would be set free."

"But I have no paper of the kind," said Turpin.

"But I should not think it impossible to obtain one. Do you know where this parson lives?"

"No, but my comrades do, for they went and fetched him."

"Then there's all the more reason why you should seek them out; and if you were to go to this parson's residence, don't you think that the four of you could *persuade* him into giving you the certificate you want?"

Old Matthew placed such a peculiar emphasis on the word "persuade" that Dick could not forbear a smile

"I might do such a thing, certainly," he said.

"Of course you might, and very easily, too. Now, I appeal to you whether this is not a reasonable proceeding for you to adopt? Maud only suffers a temporary inconvenience. No harm will befall her. You save the lives of your comrades, obtain proof of your marriage, have it handed into the court, and Maud is set free; but, independently of all that, I should rejoice if it was done!"

"Why?"

"Because old Wriggles would be defeated once more. I can picture to myself how he felicitates himself upon having hatched up such a scheme, and when he finds it so easily defeated, and that such a good chance of capturing you has been lost, he will be so enraged that I should not wonder if he was to run out and lay violent hands upon himself in his desperate disappointment."

Old Matthew chuckled over the prospective discomfiture of his old foe.

The more Dick Turpin reflected upon what the landlord had said, the more he became convinced of its likelihood to answer the end in view.

He could not deny that it would be much better for Maud to regain her freedom by proper and straightforward instead of illegal means; and then came the consideration of his companions, about whom he felt the greatest possible amount of dread.

It was not likely that so astute an individual as Matthew should be unaware of the effect he had already produced, and so he determined to clinch the matter.

"And," he cried, "supposing that Maud was not acquitted? She would be taken back to Newgate, and you would be no worse off than you are now—not so bad, indeed, because by that time you would have your three comrades with you, and you would stand a much better chance of setting her free; and, after all, it is not so dreadful that she should remain prisoner for such a little while."

"You must not think," said Turpin, "that I am reconciled to your plan; but I feel constrained to adopt it, because I can't see what else is to be done under the circumstances. I can't bear the idea of Maud being a prisoner, while you think of it with comparative unconcern."

"She is not in danger of her life," said old Matthew, "and your companions are, besides which, as I said before, and as you yourself know very well, it would be impossible for you to set her at liberty."

"Well, Matthew, I shall act upon your advice. We will part now. I am heartily obliged to you for the kind interest you have shown—you have cast a new light upon everything, and I will lose no time in riding off to meet my companions. Then we will obtain the certificate from the parson, and I hope all will be well."

"So do I," said Matthew; "but before I leave you, I should be glad to know how near you are to the accomplishment of your idea of obtaining an inn for yourselves?"

"I am glad you spoke of that, Matthew, for it reminds me of something. I can't stop now to tell you my adventures; but, however, it will be sufficient for me to say that I have about me a very large sum of money. It is an encumbrance to me, and I should be glad if you will take charge of it until it is required. Who knows where I shall have to go, and this money, so far from being any service, would be a hindrance to me."

"I have no objection to oblige you in such a pleasant affair as that!" said old Matthew. "Hand it over to me!"

Dick Turpin thereupon gave to old Matthew nearly the whole of the money he had been successful in taking from the deserted mansion, retaining only a few guineas for his immediate use.

This transaction did not occupy many minutes, and when it was concluded, Dick said:

"Now, where can we arrange to meet again? Let us appoint some place! Shall it be here? We have, then, only to fix the time."

Old Matthew suddenly took hold of Turpin by the arm, and clutched it tightly.

Bending forward until his mouth was close to the highwayman's ear, he said:

"Hush! Listen! I fancied I heard a dry twig snap, as though some one was endeavouring to approach us unperceived!"

Dick Turpin started, for during this interview he had, to a very great extent, forgot his usual caution, which is not to be wondered at considering the nature of the subjects under discussion.

The very next moment the sound which had attracted the attention of old Matthew was repeated.

"There's some one creeping up behind us!" he whispered. "Quick, Dick! Mount and ride away for your life—make haste! Leave me here—I can shift for myself, and am in no danger—quick, I say!"

Thus urged, Turpin sprang into the saddle. He had been holding Black Bess by the bridle, and was about to leave, so that this was all the more quickly accomplished.

Scarcely had he done so, however, than he heard the rush of footsteps behind him.

Convinced that there was danger, and that his best plan was to fly, he uttered that faint cry which Black Bess so well understood.

She gave one bound forward that took her clear of the vegetation around, and then the open, triangular space was gained.

Across this she flew at full gallop, and was instantly lost to view in the darkness of the night.

In the meanwhile, those persons who had rushed forward laid violent hands upon old Matthew, who, however, made no resistance at all.

Dick Turpin was so quickly out of sight that they knew it would be folly for them to attempt to overtake him, and so they all clustered round the landlord, resolved to make sure of one prisoner at least.

Despite his remonstrances, they dragged him through the trees in the direction they had come, and directly afterwards emerged upon the broad high-road.

"We've got one of them!" cried a voice, and Mathew, looking around, found the suspicions he had entertained to be confirmed.

He had been seized by a number of police officers who were on foot, while others on horseback were drawn up across the road.

"Bring him along, then!" cried out some one else, in reply.

In obedience to the command, the officers dragged the landlord forward.

It was a very dark night, and objects could not be distinguished with anything like plainness, and the officers and their prisoner only seemed a dusky, indistinct mass.

The officers paused when near to those on horseback, and one of them said:

"We've lost the right one, I fancy; but here's one of his accomplices at any rate!"

"A lantern!" said a voice,—"where's the lantern?—show a light here at once!"

A little confusion followed this order, and then a dark lantern was produced.

The slide which was over the lens was removed, and then a broad beam of light streamed forth.

This beam of light was directed upon the prisoner.

Old Matthew's countenance was fully revealed, and he looked at the lantern before him with an unwinking eye.

Then the voice which had ordered the production of the lantern uttered a bitter execration:

"We've done no good," he cried—"not a bit! I know that rascal well enough—he's the landlord of the White Horse in Drury Lane, and the deepest old file in London! Release him—let him go—he's a dangerous article to meddle with; we can get no good by detaining him; there's no

reward offered for his apprehension; we can prove nothing against him—let him go!"

"But we heard him talking, if you please sir!" said one of the officers, who had hold of old Mathew.

"Never mind—I am not going to run the risk of getting myself into trouble! He's a great deal too cunning to be meddled with! Let him go, I say!"

The officers let go their hold, and old Matthew took off his hat and made a low but ironical bow.

"I am much obliged to you, gentlemen," he said, "and I have the pleasure of wishing you a very good evening! You can take me prisoner if you like, I am indifferent about it!"

"I dare say you are; you'd like to get us all into trouble rather than otherwise; but you sha'n't do it with me, Mr. Gale—we know better, and you may find that there are others in London quite as cunning as yourself!"

CHAPTER DLXXXII.

OLD MATTHEW WORKS THE OFFICERS UP TO A HIGH PITCH OF AGGRAVATION.

THROUGHOUT the progress of this history it has been our aim to leave as few strange circumstances as possible unexplained; and as the sudden appearance of the officers, and the behaviour of the one in command may seem not a little mysterious, we will give some words of explanation which will have the effect of making all clear.

To do this, it will be necessary to remind the reader of what old Matthew had stated with respect to the arrival of the gipsy girl at the inn.

The offhanded, careless manner in which she delivered the letter, and the cleverness with which old Matthew so quickly hatched up a pretence for leaving home, had the effect of disarming the officers of their suspicions.

At the first flush the affair seemed straightforward and open enough, and the probability is, that if anyone else but old Matthew had told them such a thing they would have believed it without hesitation.

But after the lapse of a little while, when they began to think over what he had said, and to remember the character of the man himself, their suspicions sprang into existence very rapidly and very strongly indeed.

In anticipation of a visit being paid by some of the highwaymen, a very close watch had for a length of time been maintained by the officers in and about the old inn.

In addition to this, the landlord himself was generally followed wherever he went, for although they could not bring it home to him, yet the officers were quite certain that he maintained an intimacy with the knights of the road.

As time passed on the suspicions of the officers grew stronger and stronger, and when finally old Matthew took his departure, they reached the culminating point.

Then there was a long, whispered discussion upon the subject, and at last the one in command said:

"The tale he told was plausible enough, and surely ought to be believed; but I doubt the man, and I think you do so too?"

"We do—we do!" was the response.

"Very well, then; what shall we do?"

The officers unanimously proposed to follow old Mathew.

But their chief, when he heard the proposition, put his finger to the side of his nose, smiled, and shook his head in a very waggish, knowing manner.

"He's as cunning as a fox is old Matthew," he said, "and it may be that the very thing he wants to do is to draw us all out of the house and lead us off upon some false scent. What we have seen has very likely been devised by him, with the intention of throwing us off our guard."

This was a fresh view of the case to the remainder of the officers; but when they heard it, all considered it sounded very probable indeed.

"It won't do for us to leave this place; I feel more certain of that the more I think about it! No—no, old Matthew won't make a fool of me so easily!"

"But what do you propose?" one of the officers ventured to ask.

"Well, it may be that the whole affair is genuine, and that he is really going off to St. Albans for the purpose he mentioned: the thing is to find that out. Now, I'll mount, and take a circuitous route to some spot from which I can command a view of the coach office, and also see the coach start."

The officers nodded their heads and murmured their approbation.

"I shall keep a sharp look-out upon that coach, you may depend," continued the chief. "If old Matthew comes up in a proper business-like way, and books his place and enters the vehicle and it drives off with him, I shall think for once he has told us the truth, but if he dosen't come, and the coach starts without him I shall make the best of my way back here, and we can keep an uncommonly sharp look-out."

"And so we will while you're gone, sir," said the man.

"You can't do better, and as we understand each other quite well I'll be off, or else I shall hardly be in time to see the coach start."

With these words the officer took his departure, and the reader will remember that old Mathew told Turpin that just as he was getting on to the roof of the coach he caught sight of an officer peeping round the corner.

This was the officer of whom we have just been speaking, and who, as we are well aware, had the satisfaction, if such it was, of seeing the landlord in the most straightforward manner possible pay for his place and take his seat.

Then the coach drove off, and the officer, with something like disappointment on his features, turned his horse's head in the direction of Drury Lane.

But before he had gone very far the feeling of disappointment which he had experienced wore away, and fresh ideas began to rise up in his mind.

The tenor of his thoughts may be guessed by the following words which he muttered half aloud and half to himself as he drew rein:

"I have a good horse," he said—"a very good horse, one that can do a short journey at an amazing speed; I'll follow the coach—that's what I'll do, and see the matter out to the end!"

Accordingly, the officer at a sharp trot made his way towards Piccadilly, from which place the coach had started.

But his thoughts changed, and he said:

"No, I will not follow the coach, that won't do—old Matthew is too cunning; if he knew I was behind he would ride right on to St. Albans, and go to the public-house he spoke of. I think I shall be a match for old Matthew after all; I will take the nearest way across the country, and by using the spur I shall be able to reach St. Albans half-an-hour before the coach arrives! I shall see then what old Matthew does, and be guided by circumstances! If I want assistance I can easily have it, for there are plenty of police officers in the town!"

We cannot refrain from giving to this police officer the amount of credit which was his due, for it was certainly a very ingenious proceeding upon his part.

Away, then, he galloped across the country, urging his horse onwards by every means in his power, and finally pulled up in front of the Bull's Head, with his steed covered with foam.

He swung himself from the saddle in a moment, and, breathless with impatience and anxiety, he said to one of the stable helps:

"Has the coach come from London?"

"No," was the reply—"won't be here for half an hour."

The police officer was content, and walking into the inn, called for a glass of cold brandy-and-water at the bar-counter.

He was served by the landlord—old Matthew's brother-in-law.

"My respects," said the officer, as he raised the glass of brandy-and-water to his lips. "I am sorry to hear your wife is so ill. Here's hoping she may be better."

With an affectation of unconcern, the officer drank some brandy-and-water, but all the time he fixed his gaze upon the countenance of the landlord.

"Eh? — what?" stammered that individual in the greatest surprise. "Hope my wife is better? Is she ill?"

"I should think you ought to know!" said the officer, with a grin. "I was told that she was lying at the point of death."

"Oh, it's all nonsense, then! There's some mistake! My wife is well enough! Here she comes!"

As he spoke, the landlady entered the bar.

"I have been misinformed, then," said the officer, calmly. "Well, I'm glad of it. I hope, ma'am, you'll continue to enjoy good health for a length of time."

A few more words passed, and then the officer strolled away.

"Ha, ha!" he said, as soon as he was outside the inn. "That is it, is it, Mr. Matthew? I shall be a match for you yet! I have found him out for once, at all events! Now, then, to see if he will arrive by the coach. If he does, won't I keep my eye on him—that's all!"

With exemplary patience, the officer waited for the arrival of the coach, and at last, with a prodigious clatter, it stopped in front of the inn.

The officer was not much afraid of being seen in the darkness, so he came quite close to the coach, and carefully noted every passenger who descended.

But, as the reader knows full well, old Matthew was not one of the number.

"Confound him!" muttered the officer, in a rage. "He's given me the slip after all! I wonder where on earth he is? Ah, a good thought! I will speak to the guard—I shall be sure to find out something then!"

No sooner was this resolution made than it was carried out.

Going up to the guard, the police officer took out of his pocket the little ebony staff with the gilt crown on the top of it, which was in those days considered as the badge of an officer's authority.

He flourished it round his head once, and then held it within an inch of the guard's nose.

"Do you see that?" he asked.

"Not very well," was the reply, "for I don't squint!"

"I am a police officer! Just pay attention to what I have to say!"

"All right—crack along!"

"Do you remember a big fat man getting up on to the top of the coach at the booking office in Piccadilly?"

"Had he got a blue coat on with brass buttons?"

"Yes—yes! That's the man I mean!"

"Oh, yes! I saw him get up! Is he the chap you're after?"

"Yes."

"Well, who'd ha' thought it now?"

"I want you to tell me just where that man with the blue coat and brass buttons on it, got down?"

"Oh, do you?"

"Yes, I do; and if you are wise, you will tell me without delay—it will be better not to have any suspicions raised that you're an accomplice of his."

The guard seemed rather dismayed at this idea, and he said:

"I'll tell you where he got down with the greatest pleasure in life!"

"Where was it, then?"

"Do you know the gibbet on the Finchley road—I mean where old Hatfield is hung in chains?"

"Yes—yes, I know it!"

"Well, then, it was about a couple of hundred yards this side of that gibbet that he called out for me to stop the coach, and he got down, although he had booked his place, and paid his fare as far as St. Albans."

"Very good!" said the officer, who was highly delighted with the intelligence he had gained. "That will do! If your information turns out to be incorrect, it will be very serious for you!"

"It's quite true!" said the guard. "I'll take my oath any minute that the man in the blue coat and brass buttons got down about two hundred yards this side of the gibbet!"

"Now, what shall I do?" asked the officer to himself. "What's he doing there? What's it mean? I don't know; but I'll try to find out! I'll ride up to the police station and get as many officers as I can, and we will be off to the gibbet! I know the place well, and we shall be sure to find out something!"

This, then, is how it happened that the police officers reached the spot which Dick Turpin had appointed for his conference with old Matthew.

The officers came on with great secresy and caution, and the one from London, constituting himself their chief, commanded several to dismount and creep about in various directions, instructing them, if they found anything unusual, to raise an immediate alarm.

Of course a great deal of time had been consumed by all these proceedings.

After putting down old Matthew, the coach had gone on to St. Albans. Then the officers had collected together and rode back to the gibbet, so that, by the time they began to search about, the long conversation between Dick Turpin and the landlord was almost at an end.

The officers crept cautiously about, peeping and prying into every nook. Presently they fancied they heard the sound of voices, and, in order to ascertain whether they were right or not, pushed on as noiselessly as they could.

Luckily old Matthew heard them, and, as Dick Turpin was just on the point of riding away, he was able to spring into the saddle in a second, and he was off and out of sight in a moment, almost before the officers were aware of what had taken place.

As we have previously described, they seized old Matthew, and brought him into the presence of the officer, who on that night had taken so much pains to achieve so little good.

As a matter of course, he recognised old Matthew instantly, and thoroughly knowing the character of the man made him act in the manner we have already described.

Although circumstances were suspicious, yet there was nothing which could authorise him to take the landlord into custody, so he ordered those who held him to let him go.

It is quite certain that old Matthew would have taken every advantage in his power of any little excess of duty of which the officer might be guilty.

After wishing them good evening, the landlord, chuckling over the officers' defeat, walked at an easy pace along the high-road, in the direction of London.

He had not gone far before he made the discovery that the officers were following him.

"Perhaps they think to find something out," he muttered. "Well, if they are bent upon having a little amusement, I'm not the one to disappoint them!"

Just as old Matthew made this reflection, he noticed that by the side of the road was a broad milestone, and upon this he seated himself as comfortably as he could, and, taking a flask from his pocket, solaced himself with a little drop of the spirit it contained.

In the meanwhile the officers, ignorant of the fact of his having come to a standstill, trotted along the road, and, owing to the darkness of the night, did not perceive old Matthew sitting down until they were close to him.

The landlord was determined they should not pass him by unnoticed, and so he said:

"Good evening, gentlemen, you'll be at London before me."

The chief officer uttered a curse, but he went on down the road for a little while, and then, drawing his men on one side, determined to wait for old Matthew to make his appearance.

When he imagined that their patience was thoroughly exhausted, Matthew rose to his feet and walked a little further.

He passed the spot where the officers were on the watch, and, going a few hundred yards further, he sat down again.

This time he waited longer than before.

The idea now began to take root in the officer's mind that something was meant by all this, and that, if he only had patience and watched, something to their advantage would certainly turn up.

Old Matthew, however, had no other intention than that of making the return journey of the officers to the metropolis as tedious a one as he possibly could, so, to their infinite rage and disgust, he sat down at about every half mile, and waited for an unreasonable long time.

Every time the officers passed him, he repeated his salutation, ending by saying:

"Well, yours are either bad horses, or else mine are very good legs! I should have laid a wager with anybody that you would have got to London a long time before me, but it seems I keep overtaking you every now and then."

Then the officers would utter some very dreadful curses, which grew worse and worse. Every time Matthew repeated his trick their aggravation increased by geometrical

proportion; they were very reluctant to confess to themselves the strong probability there was that old Matthew was only playing off a hoax upon them, but every time they passed him the conviction that this was really the case grew stronger and stronger.

Of course old Matthew was immensely gratified when he saw what a furious state all the officers were in.

At last, when they were within about a mile of the coach office in Piccadilly, old Matthew seated himself upon the top rail of a low fence.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he cried, as soon as the officers came past, "I shall beat you yet. They are uncommon bad horses of yours. I could never have thought that I could have come this sort of thing at my time of life, and carrying such a weight as I do, but I do feel awfully tired now. I shall be obliged to take a long rest, and that makes me doubtful now whether you won't get to London first."

"Rest and be d—d!" roared the officer, foaming with passion. "You're a very clever man in your way, Mr. Gale, and you've played the fool to-night with us pretty well, but you shall suffer for it, rest assured of that. Sit there and be d—d!"

"I know it must be very aggravating to you," said old Matthew, "to think that I should be able to keep up with your horses in the way I do, but I can't help it. I shall lay two to one now that I'm in London first."

Nothing would have pleased the officers so much as to have had some revenge upon old Matthew there and then, but they shrank from the thought of meddling with the man; he was a ticklish customer to deal with, and if they did anything more than the law authorised, he would be down upon them like a hammer.

Old Matthew was rather tired, having walked so far, and just in Piccadilly he was so fortunate as to meet with a hackney-coach, which he hired, and in less than an hour afterwards he was seated in the bar parlour at the White Horse, chuckling to himself at the trick he had played the police, and the impotent rage which they had exhibited.

CHAPTER DLXXXIII.

TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK PERFORM A GOOD DEED ON THE HIGHWAY.

We now return to Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack, who, as the reader will remember, were left one at each side of the carriage they had stopped, looking into the interior.

Their attention was immediately concentrated upon the female who sat in between the two others.

It was a young girl, and, so far as they could judge by the dim light, fair and beautiful.

Some rude kind of hood had been flung over her head, which concealed a considerable portion of the countenance.

But what elicited the indignation and astonishment of the highwaymen was that a bandage had been tied round her face in such a manner as to gag her completely.

A piece of cloth had been twisted until it resembled a rope, and this had been forced in between the young girl's teeth, and tied tightly at the back of her head.

Consequently, she was unable to give utterance to any sound louder than a moan, which could not be heard at any great distance.

Her arms also were tied behind her back.

Of course the highwaymen were quite at a loss to comprehend the meaning of this outrage.

Tears were rolling down the prisoner's cheeks, while her features were convulsed with anguish.

It did not take the highwaymen more than a moment to thoroughly comprehend all that we have described.

Tom King was the first to speak.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" he asked in an imperious tone of voice. "Who are you? By what right have you made this young lady your prisoner?"

"Perhaps you will excuse me if I ask by what right you stop the carriage and propound these questions," said one of the men in the monastic-looking gowns, and speaking in a mocking tone of voice.

"Answer my question! Why have you made that lady your prisoner?"

"As the matter in nowise concerns you, I decline to answer."

"Very well—that is sufficient! Jack!"

"Yes, Tom!"

"Out with the old woman on your side! We will soon settle this business! And," he continued, addressing the two men, "if you venture to resist, you will find the consequences serious, and they will be on your head!"

No notice of this speech was taken by the persons to whom it was addressed.

While speaking, the two highwaymen had simultaneously opened both doors of the carriage, and each seizing hold of the woman nearest to him, dragged her into the road.

It was when the highwaymen thus proceeded to carry their threat into execution that the scream was uttered.

As they were women, our friends offered them no further violence after placing them in the roadway.

But while they were thus engaged, the two men, apparently undeterred by the highwaymen's threats, leaned forward and grasped the young prisoner tightly.

As soon as they saw what had been done, Tom and Jack uttered loud cries of rage.

"Release your hold!" they cried, presenting their pistols.

The sight of the firearms, and the determined manner of those who held them, produced a visible effect, for the two men let go at once.

Half fainting with terror and the rough treatment to which she had been subjected, the young girl was lifted out of the carriage by Tom King.

He swung her easily on to the saddle before him, and retained her in that position by clasping his left arm round her waist.

The two women set up a volley of shrieks, and they obstinately refused to be silent, in spite of the threats to which Claude Duval gave utterance, who, finding he was unable to perform any other service, made himself useful in this way.

The two men were furious with rage, but they evidently thought discretion the better part of valour.

They did not offer to make the least resistance.

"Claude and Jack!" cried Tom King, as soon as he had placed the young girl in the position described.

"Yes—yes?"

"Just see if you can find anything worth taking, and then we will be off."

"All right!" was the ready reply.

"While you are so engaged, I shall have plenty to do; but make haste, or we shall perhaps meet with an interruption!"

During the time he was issuing these instructions, Tom King was by no means idle.

The girl he had rescued from her abductors seemed to have fallen into a state of entire insensibility.

It was an awkward task he had to perform, for he set about removing the twisted piece of linen with which she had been gagged, and which was no doubt a serious impediment to free respiration.

As he was only able to make use of one hand, it was difficult, for the knots had been tied with extreme tightness.

At last, however, he was able to remove the bandage and he was rewarded by hearing a faint sigh issue from the young girl's lips.

What now remained was to untie the bonds by which her arms were secured.

This did not take so long as the former operation.

As soon as ever she felt herself so far free, the young girl, very much to Tom's surprise, commenced a desperate resistance, trying her utmost to get away.

There can be no doubt that she fancied she was still in the hands of her foes.

Tom tried to reassure her.

"All is well," he said, in a calm and soothing voice—"believe me, all is well! You are saved—you have been rescued from those who were evidently bearing you somewhere against your own free will and inclination!"

"Oh yes—yes!"

"Their power over you exists no longer—you are free!"

"And you," said the girl, faintly, and endeavouring to catch a glimpse of Tom's countenance—"who are you?"

"Never mind now—you will know more in a little while. For the present be content with the knowledge

All around him was perfectly silent, and, having glanced hastily about him, he looked down upon the ground.

He saw the marks of many horses' feet; some seemed quite fresh, and others were almost obliterated—some showed that the horses had gone in the direction of the mansion, and others that they had left it.

He came a step nearer, and looked through the gates

Just at this moment, he heard a sudden rushing sound, and then a voice cried:

"Surrender, Dick Turpin, or we fire!"

Scarcely had the words been uttered, than the silence about that deserted spot was broken in upon by the discharge of many firearms.

CHAPTER DLXXIII.

MAUD IS COMMITTED FOR TRIAL UPON THE CHARGE OF COMPLICITY WITH DICK TURPIN.

We must now devote a few words to Maud, for her position fully deserves some amount of attention.

When she was placed in the coach along with the officers she felt completely broken-hearted, and sank down on the seat, and, concealing her face with her hands, wept bitterly.

Most keenly did she feel the humiliation of her present situation, but still it was not that nor the indignity of being fettered like a felon that told so heavily upon her spirits. It was the reflection that in a few hours Dick Turpin would arrive at the farm-house, unconscious of what his enemies had done, and, expecting to find her there, he would fall helplessly and hopelessly into their power.

It was this reflection that made her weep and sob.

Those officers who were seated with her in the interior of the vehicle amused themselves by jeering her and uttering coarse remarks; but, fortunately for herself, Maud was so entirely absorbed in her grief, that, although the words they spoke came upon her ears, yet it was as an incomprehensible sound—she did not understand a syllable.

Perceiving the total indifference with which she treated all their remarks, the officers grew tired of making them, and for a change occupied themselves in talking to each other.

It was a long and miserable ride in that hackney-coach from the farm-house to London.

The horses that were harnessed to the cumbrous equipage were miserable creatures, and already fatigued by the journey they had made from London, and their homeward progress was miserably slow.

Maud wept without ceasing all the way, and by degrees she lost all consciousness of the peril of her position as she contemplated the fearful danger into which Dick Turpin would run with his eyes blindfolded, for Maud was unaware that the farmer's daughter had generously determined to place him on his guard.

At last London was reached.

The appearance of the hackney-coach with a number of officers seated on the top of it and others within, at once made those who saw it aware that a prisoner of some importance had been taken and was on the way to Newgate.

Now that the end of the journey was almost reached, the progress of the hackney-coach was slower than ever, so that the people who were attracted to it were easily able to follow on foot.

This made the vehicle more conspicuous than ever, and others seeing people following it also joined in the throng, so that by the time Newgate was reached an immense crowd had assembled.

The stopping of the coach roused Maud from her abstraction, and looking out of the window she caught sight of the black and frowning walls of Newgate.

She shuddered, and her heart seemed to suddenly grow cold.

The officers got down off the roof of the coach and opened the door.

The others got out and assisted Maud to follow.

She was quite passive, because she felt that any resistance she might make, so far from being any benefit to her, would only be the means of calling forth harsh usage.

She caught one hasty glimpse of the immense crowd of people, and was terrified.

They were shouting and yelling after the fashion of English crowds, but when they saw what the prisoner was like they became suddenly silent, and then their opinions changed as suddenly as a weathercock turns round when the wind changes, and they began to groan and hiss at the police officers.

This, however, lasted but a moment.

The door of Newgate had been opened, and Maud was hurried up the steps into the vestibule.

She saw a confused mass of objects before her, but she was too agitated to make out what they were distinctly.

Then with a clang that seemed to thrill through her whole frame the door was closed.

She dashed the tears from her eyes as well as the handcuffs about her wrists would allow her, and made a great effort to be calm.

The turnkeys who were present looked on in considerable surprise, and wondered what one so young and beautiful could have done to bring her within the clutches of the law.

Mr. Cawthorn was summoned, and he too was astonished when he beheld the prisoner.

But his astonishment materially increased when one of the police officers stepped forward and placed the warrant in his hand.

He just glanced at it, and folding it up and putting it in his pocket, he said:

"Accomplice of Dick Turpin, eh? Oh, very good! I shall know what to do with you. This warrant is perfectly correct. There's your receipt," he added, addressing the officer. "I will be responsible for her safe keeping."

So far, then, the ceremony was over.

A couple of turnkeys came forward and took off the handcuffs, and having done so, they stood on each side of her, holding her by the arms.

She shrank instinctively from their touch, and perceiving it, the men with a malicious pleasure, finding how distasteful it was, pressed closer to her.

"Number fifteen," said Mr. Cawthorn. "Get the key, Winch, and lead the way; I will follow."

Winch went up to one side of the vestibule, where a number of keys were hanging on separate nails, and taking one of them, he proceeded to lead the way to the cells.

With the bunch of keys he carried about with him he opened the intervening doors.

Maud and the two other turnkeys followed, while Mr. Cawthorn, with a satisfied smile upon his face, brought up the rear.

His was a mean, grovelling, paltry spirit, and he determined to treat Maud in the same way as he would have treated Dick Turpin if he had only had the opportunity of doing so.

As the reader may be sure, the Governor of Newgate was terribly wroth to think that Dick should have played him such a prank as he had, and that the prisoner brought by the dragoons should have taken advantage of the confusion to escape.

He felt that he must have his revenge upon some one, and in his opinion Maud was a very proper object.

"Ahem!" he said. "Newgate is quite honoured—it is indeed! Be assured that every consideration shall be shown you—oh dear yes—every consideration,—you shall have no occasion to complain! Open the door, Winch,—that is number fifteen."

Winch paused before the door of a cell, and unlocking it, pushed it open.

A dark, gloomy-looking place appeared beyond.

"Now," said Mr. Cawthorn, assuming a very great deal of mock respect, which could not fail to be exceedingly offensive and disagreeable to the object of it, "walk in, if you please! This is your abode—not quite so comfortable as you have been used to, perhaps, but it is the best you will get here, I can tell you! Oh, pray walk in! Jones and Griffiths," addressing the two turnkeys, "let go of the lady's arm. Winch, show the lady into her apartment. Mind you don't stumble over the step my lady!"

This was a delusive caution.

One would have judged from his words that there was a step into the cell out of the corridor, whereas, on the contrary, there was a step down.

It was a wonder Maud did not fall into the trap thus laid for her by the Governor.

If in obedience to his words she had raised one foot, as though to place it upon a step, she would have had a rather awkward fall.

By the merest chance in the world, however, Maud happened to see, and only just in time, that the floor of the cell was below her.

Now that she was on her guard, all was well, for she stepped down lightly into the cell, to the infinite vexation of the Governor, who would have rejoiced if he could have played any practical joke upon her.

But he was defeated, and he was more angry than ever.

Then the turnkeys began to snicker when they saw how he had been outwitted by the prisoner.

Of this Mr. Cawthorn had the prudence and good sense to take no notice

He cried out:

"Close the door, Winch, and fasten it securely!—close it at once, and follow me! Mind that you leave all secure or you will find the consequences serious!"

The Governor turned round and led the way back to the vestibule, leaving the turnkeys to follow him.

It was a great relief to Maud when her dungeon door was shut. It was infinitely preferable to be alone

At first she could scarcely distinguish anything, so small a quantity of light was it that came through the little grated window into the cell, but in a few moments her eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and perceiving in one corner a kind of stone bench, she sat down upon it, and wept with so much violence that it seemed as if her heart was about to break.

Her mind was filled with the danger which Dick Turpin would incur when going to the farm-house, and as such was the case, she did not feel as she would have done the humiliation of being the tenant of one of the gloomy cells of Newgate, and exposed to the ribaldry of the Governor and his subordinates.

Wearily—most wearily—the time passed by.

At length, however, after what seemed to be an age, the darkness in the cell perceptibly increased, until at length she was unable to see anything save the grated aperture high up in the wall. And then she knew it was night.

Had she been in the lowest vault beneath some huge cathedral, the silence could not have been more profound; it was painful to the utmost degree.

Oh, what a wretched night that was for Maud!—wretched, not only because of the place in which she had to spend it, but because she knew full well, while she sat there helpless and a prisoner, Dick Turpin was riding on to his destruction.

She strained her sense of hearing to the utmost, thinking, perhaps, that if he was brought there a prisoner, as she fully expected he would be, she should hear some sounds indicative of his arrival.

But throughout the whole of that long and tedious night the silence remained unbroken, and at last the darkness seemed to grow less and less, and then day came.

Maud had not slept for a single moment.

But now that morning had come, her anxiety was even greater than it had been during the night, for she reflected that Dick Turpin had told her not to expect him until the dawn, and if he had been captured at that hour, there had not been time for him to have been brought to Newgate.

Maud did not know, as the reader does, that Dick Turpin had managed to make his escape from the farm-house.

She was, therefore, alarming herself unnecessarily.

But as the time passed on, and all continued silent, her hopes began to revive.

Breakfast was brought in, but she could not touch the coarse food and unclean water.

At about eleven o'clock the cell door was again opened, and two turnkeys entered.

They requested her to rise and follow, and she obeyed.

The gloomy passages were once more traversed, until presently she found herself in the vestibule.

Here the Governor and many others were assembled, including the under-sheriffs, and as the latter gentlemen were present Maud was saved any further indignity.

Had it not been for them, it is very probable that the Governor of Newgate would have insisted upon Maud walking to the Bow Street Police-court, for it was for the purpose of being taken before the magistrate that she had been removed from the cell.

The police van was in those days unknown, and most of the prisoners were dragged through the streets, chained together like so many slaves.

The sheriffs, however, happening to possess a little more feeling, ordered a hackney-coach to be called.

And in this Maud was placed, and driven off under a strong escort of police officers.

Mr. Wriggler arrived with his troop a few minutes after the hackney-coach had started, and he hastily rode after it, for his object in returning to London from the farm-house with all speed was that he might be present at the examination, in order to give his evidence before the magistrate of Maud's complicity with Dick Turpin.

He overtook the coach, and followed the prisoner into the court.

The same magistrate presided who had issued the warrant to Mr. Wriggles, and after the understanding they had come to, there was but little doubt that he would make out the order for Maud to be committed to Newgate to take her trial.

It was a painful moment for her when she found herself placed in the dock, but she experienced some consolation when she discovered that the people who had crowded into the court were unable to gaze into her face, as she stood with her back to them.

On her left hand stood several police officers, and just behind them was the witness-box.

Before her was a table, at which sat the magistrate's clerk, and just above him was seated the magistrate himself.

The charge against Maud was then read over.

It set forth that she was an accomplice of Dick Turpin's, and that she had aided and abetted him against the laws of these realms.

Maud was asked the usual question by the clerk of the court, as to whether she was guilty or not guilty.

After a moment's hesitation, she said in a choking voice:

"Not guilty."

Mr. Wriggles then came forward, and gave evidence that he had frequently seen the prisoner in company with Dick Turpin, and mentioned several instances, among others, those connected with the deserted mansion, the flight from thence, with Mr. Tuttle and the farm-house.

Several other officers were called, who fully corroborated all that Mr. Wriggles had said, and then the magistrate asked Maud what she had to say for her defence.

She comprehended, her situation better, perhaps, than anyone imagined; and she said in her defence only four words, and yet those words were better, and produced more effect, than if a counsel had addressed the Court for an hour.

In reply to the magistrate's question she said:

"I am his wife!"

There was a moment's pause, and then the magistrate said:

"We cannot believe that until your assertion is proved. If you are the wife of Dick Turpin, the charge against you falls to the ground, but your word is not sufficient proof. Your marriage certificate must be produced. Where is it?"

Maud had it not, and recollecting the circumstances under which the marriage ceremony had been performed, she felt there would be very great difficulty in proving herself to be Dick Turpin's wife.

The magistrate repeated his question.

"Can you produce the proof?" he asked.

"I cannot!" she replied. "I have it not."

"Then my duty is clear enough before me. It is to commit you to take your trial at the ensuing assizes, when, if you can prove that which you assert (though my own conviction is that you cannot), you will be acquitted."

This was but poor consolation for Maud.

As for Mr. Wriggles, he did not care very much whether she was acquitted or not; he had gained his object, which was to have her committed to Newgate, for he felt sure if he did, that his plan would go forward just as he wished it, and he should capture Dick Turpin long before the sessions commenced.

And so, the examination having been concluded, Maud was taken back to Newgate, there to await her trial

money or valuables about their persons, but still it is better than nothing."

"Exactly!"

"We must manage to pocket some more money between this and London, or else we shall not be very well provided with the funds necessary to carry out our excellent plan!"

"You are right there, and I propose that to-night we stop everyone we meet, and try how much booty we can take!"

"Agreed!" said Tom King. "And I hope we shall be able to get sufficient to content us. In the event of doing so, we will gallop with all speed to the deserted mansion!"

"It is high time we were back!"

"It is; and I am anxious in the extreme to return. The time allotted for our journey has been long exceeded. Dick Turpin will be full of uneasiness and apprehension—he will conclude something serious has happened, and may run into great and unnecessary danger!"

"I am no less anxious to see the old place again than yourselves," said Sixteen-String Jack. "We have been an unreasonably long time over our expedition! I wish we could reach the gates to-night!"

"So do I!—so do I!" murmured Tom King and Claude.

It was strange that this desire to return to the deserted mansion should come so suddenly and so strongly upon them, but such was the fact.

Fortunate indeed was it for them that they were at such a distance as to make an immediate return impossible.

But for this, they would have ridden unhesitatingly and unsuspectingly into the very jaws of death.

"Mount and prepare, Tom!" cried Claude, a moment afterwards. "If we are to stop everyone, we must make haste, for I can hear there is a horse upon the road!"

Tom sprang into the saddle, and looked to the priming of his pistols.

The clear, sharp beat of a horse's hoofs could be plainly heard.

"It is a very heavy horse that is coming," said Jack. "I wonder who it can be riding upon such a brute?"

"It does sound like a cart horse, but I can hear no wheels."

"No. Some one is riding—sure enough. Be patient—in a few moments we shall know all!"

"Let me manage this little affair!" said Claude Duval. "I did not take a very active part in the last adventure; and if it is necessary, you will easily be able to come to my assistance!"

"As you will!"

Shading his eyes with one hand, Claude looked down the road, and, as his eyes were accustomed to the darkness, he presently made out the figure of a stout, bulky man, who was seated on a horse even more bulky than himself.

Beyond this, in consequence of the obscurity, Claude was able to make out little or nothing.

Just as the traveller was passing by the spot where the highwaymen were concealed Claude set his horse in motion, and was in a second abreast with the stout man and bulky horse.

"A fine night!" said Claude, in a pleasant voice—"rather dark, but it is none the worse for that,—in a general way, I am not very fond of Oliver myself!"

It would be hard to say what surprised the traveller most—the sudden appearance of Claude by his side, which looked like the effects of magic, or the strange words that had been addressed to him.

Apparently, however, the traveller did not like his companion, so he made a furious attack upon his horse in order to get away.

But although he cracked his whip in a most desperate manner, he failed altogether to get the lumbering horse which he bestrode to go at any faster pace than a shuffling trot, which Claude was able to keep up with easily enough.

"Are you riding far to-night?" continued Claude. "If you have a long journey before you, what a long while you will be upon the road, and it is dangerous, too, I can assure you!"

"What's dangerous?"

The words were spoken in a drawling voice, as words generally are spoken in rural districts.

Claude set the man down at once for a farmer, and his attire, as well as his horse, confirmed this supposition.

"Why, the roads are dangerous!" replied Claude—"there are a great many highwaymen about!"

"That for your highwaymen!" cried the farmer, snapping his fingers. "I only wish I could see one o' the varmint—that's all! I'd show him what was what, and no mistake! You look like a gentleman, but whether you are or not, I'll tell you this—I am not afraid of any highwayman living, although I have got a largish sum of money about with me! If one stopped me, it would be woe to him!"

"You look like a man capable of defending yourself!"

"Rather, sir! I can give a knock-down blow with any man going! I ain't afraid—not a bit of it!"

The farmer cracked his whip in a defiant manner as he spoke.

"But it is not everyone that has as much courage as yourself," said Claude Duval, "and so well able to defend himself. Now, if a highwayman stopped you, what do you think you should do?"

"I don't mind telling you, sir!" said the farmer, who began to like Claude rather than otherwise, and grow more communicative to him. "I should settle his hash in a very simple way!"

"As how—as how?"

"You see this whip, don't you?"

"I can just see it," said Claude, "but I don't perceive anything peculiar about it."

"Well, there is nothing very peculiar. The only thing is, it has got a strong lash, and the butt-end of it is loaded with a pound and a half of lead."

"Then it must be rather fatiguing to carry, I should think?"

"Not a bit of it! Bless you, sir, it is no more than a straw! Howsomever, to go back to what I was saying. There is no highwayman would face me, I am sure, and I'll tell you how I should serve him."

"How?"

"I should twist the thong of my whip round my hand like this, and then I should be able to take firm hold of the stock! You see, it don't take me a minute to do it!"

"I see it doesn't," replied Claude, for while he was speaking, the farmer had suited the action to the word.

"Now," said the farmer, waving his whip in the air, "you might not think it, but with one blow with this whip I could fell an ox! Perhaps you can guess now how I should manage with a highwayman."

"I think I can."

"No pistols for me, sir, and nothing of that sort! I wouldn't beg a cartload of 'em! They are always missing fire, or not going off when you want 'em! But as for my whip, it is always ready; and before a highwayman knew where he was, or the first words hardly out of his mouth, my whip would come down on the top of his head, and then he'd find himself lying down on the ground!"

"You quite surprise me!" said Claude, affecting a great deal of admiration. "Its really a most excellent scheme! I wonder it is not adopted by travellers generally."

"If it was," said the farmer, who was highly delighted to think that his plan was approved of, "these highwaymen would not be able to do such a good trade as they have been doing lately; it would be all up with them."

"I am inclined to think so," said Claude. "Would you mind letting me have a look at your whip?"

"Certainly not, sir! You can look at it with the greatest pleasure in life!"

"Thank you! I only wanted to see what kind of whip it was, in order that I might have one made for myself like it."

"You can't do better, sir!"

"I have always depended on pistols myself," continued Claude, "but I don't think I shall for the future."

"Here's the whip, sir!" said the farmer, who, while this little conversation had been going on, had untwisted the thong from round his hand.

Claude made a polite bow as he received it.

"Dear me! it is a very great weight! I should think there must be more than a pound and a half of lead in it!"

"No, sir, that's just the quantity; but perhaps you are not so strong in the wrist as I am; and if so, when you

make your whip made, I should recommend its being a little lighter."

"I think that would be best," said Claude. "I suppose your object in coiling the lash round your hand is to prevent you from losing your hold?"

"That's it!"

"A capital idea! This is the way you do it, is it not?"

Claude wound the thong of the whip round his hand as he spoke, and took firm hold of the stock.

"You do it capitally well!" said the farmer—"there's no mistake about that!"

When the whip was thus held it was certainly a most formidable bludgeon.

Claude felt that he could wield it with ease, and that one blow with it would be sufficient to deprive anyone of life.

"Well," said Claude, suddenly changing his tone, "it happens that I am a highwayman! Now I have got your whip, and thanks to you! I know well how to use it! Hand over, in an instant, all the money you have with you, or down the butt-end comes on the top of your head, and you are a dead man!"

"Oh lord!" said the farmer, with a groan.

"You had better make haste and hand over your money!" said Claude. "I would sooner receive it in that fashion than be at the trouble of searching your dead body!"

CHAPTER DLXXXV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN CONTINUE TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THEIR DESIGNS.

THE sudden change which had come over the farmer's countenance was really most amusing to look upon, and though Claude Duval was fully in earnest, he could scarcely forbear laughing aloud.

In his agitation, the farmer jerked the reins, and the heavy horse, only too glad to come to a stop, stood still at once.

His rider was too frightened and too bewildered to make the least attempt to urge him onward; not that it mattered, for all his efforts would have been of no avail—nothing but a liberal application of the whip would have set him in motion again.

Claude stopped his own horse, and held the whip in the air in such a manner that he could bring it down instantaneously.

The farmer shook all over like a huge jelly, and his face assumed a dusky yellow tint, while his eyes seemed starting from their sockets.

Claude grew impatient.

"Hand over!" he cried, in a loud voice—"hand over, or my patience will be exhausted! I can't stop here all night! I will count three, and when I have done so, if you don't hand over the money, down comes the whip!"

"Mercy—mercy, good Mr. Highwayman!" said the farmer. "Pray have mercy upon me! I am a poor man—I am indeed!"

"Don't believe it!" said Claude, "and whether you are or not, doesn't much matter to me! All farmers are poor by their own account! Now, look out—no more words! One—two——"

"Stop—stop!" cried the farmer, hurriedly thrusting his hands into his pockets—"stop—stop!"

"Hand over your money, then!"

"I am—I will! But oh, spare my life!"

"I have no wish to take it, without you force me to do so! If you hand over the money as I command you, you will meet with no harm!"

"But I shall be ruined!—oh, I shall be ruined! I wish I had taken my wife's advice, and not sold that drove of oxen till next week! Oh dear!—oh dear!"

"Then you've got the money that the sale of a drove of oxen fetched you, have you?" said Claude. "That must be a good round sum! Be quick and hand it over! As for your being ruined by the process, that's all stuff and rubbish!"

With a succession of the most dismal groans that it is possible to conceive, the farmer placed in Claude's hand a good-sized leather bag, which was filled to the very top with coins.

Its weight was considerable, and Claude dropped it into his coat pocket with a feeling of the greatest satisfaction.

"Quick!" said Claude. "I have not done with you yet! Hand over the rest of your money! Make haste, I say!"

"Good Mr. Highwayman, is not that enough?"

"No—I must have all! How do I know but what this bag is full of penny-pieces? I was served that trick once, but I don't intend to be served so again! I know the way you farmers have,—you generally keep bank-notes in your pocket-books, gold in one bag, silver in another, and copper in another. You must hand over two more bags! Be quick, or down comes the whip, as sure as you're a living man!"

In all probability, no weapon would have held the farmer in so much awe as his own whip.

Pistols he despised, because they missed fire, but a blow on the head with the butt-end of his whip would be fatal.

He knew this, and, like a wise man, preferred his life to his money.

If he lost the first, he could not replace it; but with respect to the other, it was another affair altogether.

Claude shook the whip threateningly, and the farmer handed over two more bags, both of which were smaller than the one which he had first delivered, which confirmed Claude's suspicion that it contained coppers and nothing more.

The three bags, however, he felt sure contained a large sum of money, and with it he resolved to be content.

"I don't know whether you have any bank-notes about you or not, Mr. Farmer. Whether you have or not doesn't matter—I don't want them; they are troublesome things, and the man deserved to be tarred and feathered who first invented such spurious kind of money as that. Ride on now—make the best speed you can—and good-night!"

"My whip," shouted the farmer—"give me my whip!"

"Certainly! Here it is—I don't want it!"

As he spoke, Claude unwound the lash from his hand, and gave the whip to the farmer.

No sooner did that individual catch hold of it than he aimed a desperate blow at the highwayman.

Claude easily avoided it by touching his horse with the spur.

"Ha, ha!" he said, "I am a match for you, never fear! Do you want your money back? If so, you had better come after me, and take it! I am just in the humour for a gallop myself!"

Now that he had regained possession of his whip, the farmer's courage seemed suddenly to return to him.

He lashed his horse in a most furious manner—with such good will, indeed, that the sluggish animal broke into a gallop, a feat he had not accomplished for many a year.

But the idea of his being able to overtake Claude was quite preposterous.

In less than a moment the highwayman was out of sight.

Claude galloped on until he came to the spot where he had left his companions.

"What luck?" they asked, eagerly, as soon as he rejoined them.

"Excellent!" was the reply—"better than I have had for many a day! That man was a farmer, and I take it he was just returning home after having sold a drove of oxen."

"And have you got the proceeds?"

"All but a few pounds, I think."

"Then we are so much nearer to the accomplishment of our purpose," said Tom King. "If we can only have a continuance of the good luck we have met with to-night, we shall not have done so badly by our journey to the New Forest."

"Decidedly not."

"Well," said Sixteen-String Jack, suddenly, "you, Tom, have had what I may call your adventure, and you, Claude, have had yours, so I think it nothing but fair that I should have my turn next."

"Then you won't have long to wait," said Tom King, "for I can hear something coming now."

"So can I—it sounds like a carriage."

"That's what it is, too, and drawn by a pair of horses. Look, yonder are the lamps!"

"I am ready," said Sixteen-String Jack. "You remain here, and I will ride forward and meet it; should it be necessary, you will come to my assistance!"

"Make your mind easy about that."

Matters being arranged, Sixteen-String Jack trotted gently in the direction of the carriage.

As they were both approaching each other, a meeting quickly took place.

One of Jack's pistols was loaded with powder only.

As soon as he was on a level with the carriage he fired it, for he was well aware of the beneficial effects of such a shot.

It made the coachman and travellers think that an attack was being made in good earnest.

Jack pointed the pistol in the air above the coachman's head, and as soon as he had pulled the trigger he cried:

"Halt!"

The carriage stopped as if by magic.

The smoke from the pistol cleared away, and then, to Sixteen-String Jack's unutterable surprise, the coachman had disappeared.

Had he not been quite certain that there was no bullet in his pistol, he would have concluded that he had been killed by a chance shot.

So long as the carriage was stopped, however, it mattered little to him what had become of the driver.

For the satisfaction of the reader, however, we may as well say that the driver fell down off his box into the roadway from sheer fright, and he lay there, opening and shutting his eyes in a bewildered sort of way, uncertain whether he was dead or alive.

Sixteen-String Jack hastened to the door of the carriage.

A shrill scream came from the interior as soon as ever he made his appearance.

The lamps were circular ones, and a portion of their light found its way into the vehicle, and it was by the aid of this that Sixteen-String Jack perceived a female form on one of the seats.

She seemed of great age, though every means had been resorted to to conceal the ravages of time.

On her head she wore a head-dress of a most singular description, such as was the fashion in the reign of Queen Anne.

Her face was powdered and rouged, and various pieces of plaster were stuck about it, in accordance with a fashion that still prevailed.

In her hand she carried a monstrous fan, which positively glittered with precious stones, as did her hands and her whole costume.

The old lady screamed violently, fanning herself all the while, and looking over the top of her fan with what seemed a coquettish air.

All this Sixteen-String Jack saw at a glance.

Removing his hat, he made a low and very respectful bow.

"Reassure yourself, madam, I beg!" he said. "No harm whatever is intended you—you are perfectly safe; but there's a toll on this road, and I am appointed to receive the money. The tax is levied on beauty and wealth. For the latter, in your own case, I cannot speak with so much certainty as the former—you cannot evade the tax upon beauty!"

Sixteen-String Jack made another low bow as he brought this speech to a conclusion.

The old lady fluttered her fan, and feigned a great deal of confusion.

"Oh, sir!" she said, with a simper, "you flatter!"

"Not at all," said Jack—"quite the reverse; it would be impossible for anyone to flatter you. I must appear presumptuous in the extreme, but your beauty has made an impression upon me," and Sixteen-String Jack accompanied the words by placing his hand upon his heart.

The old lady fluttered her fan, and smiled, and wriggled about in a manner that was highly amusing.

"Ah, sir!" she said, speaking with great agitation, "you do indeed remind me of the days of my youth, when gentlemen were gentlemen!"

"That cannot be so very long ago," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Excuse me, madam, for my plain speaking, but your form has scarcely yet arrived at maturity."

"My dear sir, you do indeed flatter me!"

"No, no, madam—I would not be guilty of flattery for the world; but I am fond of plain speaking."

"So am I," said the old lady, with a languishing look.

"And," continued the highwayman, "it deeply grieves me to put you to the slightest inconvenience or alarm; but as I am here to collect the tax, I must do my duty."

"Oh, charming!" said the old lady. "How delightfully romantic!"

The words were addressed more to herself than anyone else.

"What is the amount of the tax?" she added, in a louder tone, with an additional flutter of her fan.

"That depends entirely upon yourself."

"Myself?"

"Yes! Far be it from me to constitute myself a judge of the value of your beauty; let me rate it as high as I may, I am sure I shall fall beneath its true worth."

The old lady's vanity was evidently quite tickled by these fine speeches; no doubt very many years had elapsed since any such words had fallen upon her ears, for her age must have been something over seventy.

"Madam," said Sixteen-String Jack, "here's my hat; place in it whatever amount you may consider represents the extent of your beauty; I am aware there is a difficulty in the case, for I question whether any amount of money, however vast, would represent it."

Jack held his hat into the interior of the carriage, and waited patiently.

Some kind of struggle seemed to be going on within her breast.

At last she produced a small purse, and as she was in the act of placing it in the hat she said:

"Young man, whoever you are, I am sure you are worthy of a better calling than that which you appear to follow. Abandon it, and I will put you in the way of earning a livelihood by honest means!"

"I am a collector, madam," said Jack, "and I find my occupation an agreeable one. Many thanks for this purse, am I to consider it the estimate of your beauty? Remember, I have something more to demand—I have to collect the tax on wealth."

"Take all I have!" said the old lady, bursting into tears, and rapidly placing a number of valuable articles in the highwayman's hat as she spoke—"take all these—take what I have, to me they are nothing; I shall not miss them. I have been amused by your manner, and I reward you for my gratification, with the additional hope that you may put this money to good use and abandon your present course of life."

Sixteen-String Jack took the articles proffered, and the old lady, placing her handkerchief to her face, continued to weep.

To reply to what she had said was impossible, so Jack satisfied himself by adding:

"You shall suffer no further molestation, and you shall resume your journey without delay."

As soon as the last words left his lips, he withdrew from the carriage door.

He remembered, then, before the old lady could continue her journey it would be necessary for him to find the coachman.

He was guided in his search by a succession of faint, smothered groans.

Going in the direction from which the sounds proceeded, he came at length upon the body of a man lying in a huddled-up mass in the roadway.

Jack had a pistol in his hand, and he pressed it rather hard upon the man's cheek.

"Do you feel that?" he asked.

"Mercy—mercy!"

"Can you feel it?" repeated Jack, increasing the pressure.

"Y—yes, I feel it!"

"Do you know what it is?"

"S—something cold!"

"It's the muzzle of a loaded pistol, and——"

The coachman uttered a deep groan and let his head fall back.

"It's the muzzle of a pistol," continued Jack, "and if you don't get up into your seat and drive the carriage off before I can count ten, I will plaster the road with your brains!"

This idea was a horrible one, and the coachman groaned more dismally than ever.

"Now I am beginning to count," said Jack, "and rely upon it I will be as good as my word! One, two——"

"Stop—stop—have mercy!"

"Three—four——"

"I will be on the box in a moment—in less than a moment, but don't fire! I will drive off; I am getting up—I am up!"

"Five, six, seven, eight——"

Before Jack could say nine, ten, the coachman gave the horses two violent cuts with the whip, and off went the carriage at a furious and highly dangerous rate.

Jack hastened to rejoin his companions.

And when he had done so, they noticed that he looked more pensive than he usually did.

"You have had bad luck," said Claude Duval; "I can tell that by your face."

"You are mistaken, my friend," was the reply; "I have taken a very good booty indeed."

"What's the matter, then?"

"Oh, nothing; only I wish I had managed the matter in a different way. Confound her! what did she want to speak to me like that for?"

These words were highly enigmatical to his comrades.

CHAPTER DLXXXVI.

DICK TURPIN IS HOTLY PURSUED ACROSS THE COUNTRY BY A TROOP OF DRAGOONS.

WHEN Dick Turpin sprang on to the back of Black Bess and galloped away, he acted more on the impulse of the moment than reflection, and before he had gone far he suddenly drew rein.

"I have done wrong—I ought not to have deserted my old friend in such a fashion! It was his own fault; and it seemed an instinct to get as far away from the police officers as possible. Am I pursued, I wonder?"

He listened, and soon satisfied himself that he was not.

"I should be very sorry for old Matthew to get into any trouble on my account—and he shan't either! I'll make my way back stealthily, and if he is in any trouble I will get him out of it, let the risk be what it may!"

Having come to this determination, Dick rather foolishly turned his mare's head round, and as noiselessly as possible made his way back towards the spot where the meeting had taken place.

He quickly perceived that a number of horsemen had drawn themselves up across the high road, and so he cautiously directed his steps towards this place.

By making use of all possible caution, he managed to get near enough to see what was going on.

The brief dialogue between old Matthew and the chief officer was over, and Dick had the satisfaction of seeing his old friend walk off unmolested.

He imagined this to be sufficient, and indeed it was only natural that he should come to the conclusion that old Matthew was in safety.

To stay longer in the vicinity would only be tempting fortune, so he once more sped across the country at a gallop, going in a straight line to the deserted mansion.

As he approached it he was obliged to bring his caution into operation again.

It was not likely that he should forget the narrow escape he had had on the occasion of his last visit.

His intention was to get as near to the gates as he dared, and then to ride off towards the New Forest, trusting to his own luck, or rather judgment, to hit upon the road by which his three comrades would be most likely to return. His heart turned cold within his bosom as he made the reflection that it was just possible they had already returned, and unaware of their danger, had been slain or made prisoners.

In either case he imagined he should be able to learn something by the general appearance of the place.

To have gone close to the gates would have been an act of madness, so he was obliged to content himself by surveying them from afar.

All around was as silent and apparently as deserted as it had ever been, and after a little while he came to the conclusion that his comrades had not yet returned.

"The only hope," he said to himself, "is that I may be fortunate enough to encounter them before long; if I can meet them between this and daybreak I shall care little. Old Matthew's advice may be good, and this may be my best course of action, yet I can scarcely bring myself to think so, the idea of Maud being a prisoner in Newgate is so terrible that I cannot contemplate it."

He cantered on as he spoke.

"It's all chance," he said, "and if I can manage to meet with them, I shall esteem myself the favourite of fortune. There are a thousand ways, I might say, by which they could return. They will choose the most indirect and least frequented paths. How, then, am I to hope to meet with them?"

Turpin's errand did indeed seem to be a hopeless, useless one, for the probabilities were all against a meeting.

After a great deal of deliberation, Turpin finally decided upon the route he was to take.

It was that which he had followed on the occasion of his own visit to the New Forest, when he had made the journey in company with Tom King.

He rode along gently, in order that he might not attract too much observation.

Suddenly, however, as he was journeying slowly along, he was startled by hearing a voice close at hand pronouncing the word "Halt!"

To speak the truth, Dick's thoughts had been with Maud in Newgate, and on his way he had not been so careful as he should have been.

In his preoccupation, he failed to notice that a small troop of dragoons were drawn up on one side of the road.

It was from the officer in command of it that the injunction to halt had come.

Dick was alive to this danger instantly.

Under the circumstances, he scarcely knew what to do, and yet he had not a second allowed him for reflection.

Almost mechanically he had obeyed the order to stop, and the commanding officer exclaimed:

"Advance and show yourself, sir! Have no fear—we are the armed patrol."

To have attempted to gallop past the soldiers would have been absolute insanity, and to have fled in the direction of London would have been fraught with the greatest danger.

There was but one course open to him.

With the speed of thought he turned his mare's head towards the hedge, which fortunately was not a high one.

A word and a slight touch with his heel were sufficient.

With a bound she cleared the hedge and alighted in the meadow beyond; but this leap, effective as it was so far as the leap was concerned, was yet a very serious circumstance, inasmuch as it made the officer aware that the person he had challenged was afraid to undergo an examination.

"Halt, in the King's name!" he roared. "Stop, or I fire!"

Of course Turpin paid no attention.

"That's one of the men we seek, depend upon it!" exclaimed the chief officer, addressing his followers. "Hurrah! we have been fortunate enough to find one of the rascals at last! Quick—after him! We will give him a close pursuit! If we are resolute, we shall certainly hunt him down!"

This officer was by no means devoid of courage, and all his men pressed eagerly after him, not so much because they were equally courageous as himself, but because they were utterly weary of their work, and anything in the shape of a change from the dull monotony of riding up and down and challenging all passers by, was acceptable in the highest degree.

As the hedge was a low one, the dragoons did not hesitate to put their horses to it, and in a very short time indeed they were all within the meadow.

Just at this moment, the moon, which had been hidden behind the clouds for more than an hour, suddenly broke forth. As if by enchantment, her pale silvery beams lighted up the whole of the country for miles round, and the soldiers, who, from having been for some time upon their post had

grown familiar with the darkness, were now able to see with a degree of distinctness that was surprising.

"There he goes, my lads!" said the chief officer, pointing across the meadows. "Follow him! We shall have the rascal before we are an hour older!"

The flying forms of the highwayman and his steed were plainly revealed in the moonbeams.

Dick was annoyed when he saw the moon break forth, for he knew how much it diminished his chances of escape.

To be chased across the country just at this time was vexatious in the extreme, and if the moon continued to shine the officers might manage to keep on his trail till daybreak.

This was most unfortunate for he had a great deal to do.

For once in his life he felt inclined to press his mare to put forth her utmost speed.

Indeed, his only chance seemed to lie in his succeeding in quickly distancing his pursuers.

That Black Bess would be able to accomplish this feat in a very short space of time, he did not doubt, although he was well aware the dragoons were mounted upon horses of a superior description, and there was little fear that they would be sparing in the application of whip or spur.

He turned round and looked behind him.

Although he had made every allowance for the excellence of their horses, he was astonished to find they were so close behind him.

"I fear I shall have some trouble in shaking them off now," he said, "I fear it—I fear it. On, Bess, my lass! Let me see you put forth your utmost speed,—everything depends upon you!"

He patted her upon the neck as he spoke, and with a faint neighing sound the noble animal flew onward with increased velocity.

Away she went over the open country, leaping over every obstacle that presented itself.

Then Turpin looked back once more.

He had evidently gained upon his foes, yet for all that they were close behind.

By the excited manner in which they waved their arms, he could tell that they had him in full view, and that they were convinced in their own minds that they should succeed in capturing him.

Dick set his teeth hard.

"It grieves me, Bess," he said, "to push you like this, I would fain reserve your strength, for I may have many miles to travel. Confound those fellows, their horses must indeed be of the best quality or they would not be able to keep so close behind me as they do."

The ground now took an upward tendency, and, great as was the risk he ran by doing so, Dick slackened his mare's speed, for he knew how fearfully it would exhaust her if she galloped at full speed to the top of the hill.

The dragoons, however, had no such compunctions.

The horses to them were no more than machines, and after they had accomplished their purpose they would never trouble themselves in the least if they had fallen down dead.

So, although the hill was before them, they endeavoured to make them ascend it at the same speed as they had passed over the open ground.

All the whipping and spurring in the world, however, could not make the horses do this.

Consequently they did not gain much, if anything, upon the highwayman.

At length gaining the summit of the hill, Dick Turpin looked behind him.

He could not help experiencing a distressful feeling when he saw how close the dragoons were behind him.

"I shall have to try hard to shake them off—very hard, and how to do it is more than I could take upon myself to say."

He just pressed Black Bess upon the flanks with his heels as he spoke, and the gallant creature, obedient to the signal, flew down the hill at a speed that was absolutely terrific.

Careless of the consequences both to themselves and to their horses, the dragoons came thundering on with redoubled speed.

Dick glanced anxiously up into the sky.

A few fleecy clouds were scudding rapidly before the moon's disc, and there were others that appeared to be rising up from the north-west, but whether they would spread themselves before the moon in time to be of service to him seemed doubtful in the extreme.

Suddenly Dick came upon a ploughed field, and before he was fully aware of it Black Bess had galloped over it for some distance.

At every step, however, her feet seemed to sink deeper and deeper into the soft soil.

Anxiously the highwayman looked before him and saw that the ploughed field was of vast and unusual extent, stretching away in advance as far as he was able to see with distinctness.

What was he to do?

To turn back would be to run into the arms of his enemies.

To continue in his present course would be to exhaust and fatigue his mare more than a gallop of twenty miles upon the hard road.

There seemed to be nothing that he could do except to turn off at right angles to the course he was pursuing.

A few hundred yards to the right would take him to one of the hedges bounding the ploughed field, and once over that, all would be well.

This was what he did, but in the meanwhile his enemies had gained upon him in a fearful manner.

They saw him change his course before they entered upon the ploughed field, and so they were in time to pull up and avoid it.

They beheld the fugitive going at right angles, and with a shout of triumph the officer in command galloped off in a diagonal direction.

By the adoption of this manœuvre the distance between his own men and the fugitive was very much diminished, and he already felt certain in his own mind that ere many minutes were over he should succeed in making a capture.

His heart swelled with exultation, and he shouted in inspiriting accents to his men, calling upon them to follow him, and use every effort that lay in their power.

"Whip and spur," he cried—"whip and spur! Don't spare your cattle or your own trouble, and he is ours!"

CHAPTER DLXXXVII.

DICK TURPIN IS FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO FIND HIS WAY OUT OF A SERIOUS DILEMMA.

DICK TURPIN'S anxiety rapidly increased when, looking back, he saw how much the dragoons had gained upon him.

Black Bess was only able to make her way over the soft clayey soil at a comparatively slow speed, and, as the dragoons did not go upon the ploughed field at all, but cut off a large corner, a very great difference had taken place in their relative positions.

So near were they that the officer in command believed that the highwayman was within range of the carbines carried by his men, and acting upon this belief he shouted aloud:

"Surrender—surrender at once! Yield yourself a prisoner without further delay, or I give the word to fire, then the consequences will be on your own head!"

Turpin only waved his hand defiantly in response to this speech, and the commanding officer, enraged by the motion, turned quickly to his men and said:

"Make ready—present—fire!"

A rattling discharge followed the command, and Dick Turpin suddenly felt several smart shocks upon his back.

He was almost within the range of the carbines, but by the time the bullets reached him their force was nearly spent, so that, with the exception of being deprived of his breath for an instant, he received no injury whatever.

Still it was a very narrow escape indeed, for had the distance between himself and his foes been only a few yards less, his destruction must have been certain and immediate.

Luckily for him, he was in a smooth meadow of considerable size, and having the soft turf beneath her feet, Black Bess was again enabled to make use of her extraordinary powers of speed.

Away she went like the wind, and the dragoons were as much astonished as they were disappointed, for they had made up their minds that the highwayman was as good as in their hands.

Now, however he was distancing them with amazing rapidity.

"Spur your horses hard!" cried the officer—"don't spare them! We will not be beaten after such a close touch as this! Forward, I say!"

The soldiers spurred their horses in a truly barbarous manner, though very little effect was produced

Their steeds were all of excellent quality, but the accoutrements of the dragoons were heavy, and impeded their free motion.

As the moon continued to shine with undiminished brightness, they were still able to keep their eyes upon the fugitive, though he was fast vanishing from their view.

In fact, Dick Turpin was doing what he had never done before—he was urging Black Bess to make every effort.

The gallant creature obeyed willingly and freely, and every time he turned his head, he had the satisfaction of seeing that the dragoons were still further and further in the rear.

It was now that Black Bess's superiority over the other horses began to make itself manifest, for while they were so exhausted as to be insensible to the spur, Black Bess seemed no more distressed than at first; indeed, her velocity increased rather than diminished.

But a fresh source of danger now began to make itself apparent.

In the eastern horizon were unmistakable tokens of the rapid approach of morning.

The rays of the moon grew paler and paler, until at last her illumination was quite overpowered.

Day was dawning, and moment after moment different objects in the landscape were lighted up and brought clearly into view.

In a little while the sun would rise and the day begin.

The dragoons were still upon his track, and, aided by the broad eye of day, they would easily be able to keep in his rear.

A thin, whitish mist, however, began to float about in wavy masses.

Sometimes a large space of country would be entirely hidden from view, then a faint puff of wind would send the fleecy mist rolling onward to obscure some other spot.

Most fervently did Dick hope that this mist would continue to grow denser and denser.

There was not much likelihood of it, though, for the sun would entirely dissipate it as soon as he had climbed a few degrees above the horizon.

Leaping over a hedge, Turpin found himself in a smooth and rather broad road.

It could scarcely be called a lane, and yet it was not the high way.

Along this he determined to proceed, for as it was rather lower than the meadows, the space between the two hedges was completely filled up with mist.

Going a little way further, he looked back, but found himself unable to see more than a few feet.

Consequently he was out of sight of his pursuers.

Just as he was congratulating himself upon the occurrence, and racking his brain to think of some scheme by which he could throw them off his track altogether, a faint sound reached his ears which made his cheeks turn pale, and filled him with the utmost alarm.

Apparently it was a very trifling sound indeed to produce such an effect upon him.

It was not that he heard anything approaching him on the highway, or that he feared the rapid appearance of his foes.

The faint clattering sound was made by Black Bess as she sped along the high-road, and as soon as he heard it Dick knew well what it was.

One of her shoes had, by some accident or other, become loosened, and he knew well before he had gone far at his present speed the shoe would fly off altogether.

If this happened, it would, in fact, put an end to his flight, for even if he forced his mare to gallop with her hoof unprotected, she would fall totally lame before she had gone a mile.

It was only by going at a gentle rate that he could hope to keep the shoe upon her foot, even for a little while; but if he pulled up the dragoons would soon be upon him.

He could not hear the dull, heavy beat of their horses' hoofs on the road behind him, but he expected to do so every moment.

The shoe rapidly became looser, as was evidenced by the additional clatter it made every time Black Bess put her hoof to the ground.

This circumstance, so entirely unforeseen as it had been, threatened to overwhelm him with ruin.

"I will trust to my luck!" he said. "I would rather run a very great deal of risk than my mare should suffer any injury. It is fortunate this whitish mist envelopes all objects like it does. It is possible that even yet I may be able to elude my foes."

This was but a faint hope, though but for the defective state of his mare's shoe, his task of getting away would be comparatively easy.

He reduced the speed of Black Bess to a walk, and even at that pace the loose-shoe clattered most ominously, and finally, as it chanced to come in contact with a stone, it flew off altogether.

In vain Turpin endeavoured to look around him for some place where he could take up his quarters for a short time; but it was only on rare occasions that he could see the hedgerows on each side of him, for his wish had been granted—the mist had grown denser and denser.

Desperate as his position appeared to be, he was, nevertheless, able to find some degree of consolation in it.

Things might have been much worse.

The accident might have happened when the dragoons were so close behind him, or before the mist had made its appearance; but now, as he listened from time to time, he was still unable to hear any signs of their approach.

Not that he thought much of this, for in half an hour, at the most, the mist would surely clear away, and then, as the general character of the country was level, and as the dragoons were probably at no great distance, they would again catch sight of him.

"If I could only find some place where I could hide myself," he said—"some secure place of concealment—all would be well; but that, I fear, is quite impossible."

While he continued to walk his mare along the road, her hoof was not likely to suffer much injury.

He had already gone some distance; still, he could hear nothing of his foes.

But the mist showed unmistakable symptoms of rolling away.

Then, as if a curtain had suddenly been drawn up, he was enabled to see before him for many miles, as the whole country was brilliantly lighted up by the rising sun.

Like lightning, he turned his head to look back.

The mist was rolling away at great speed.

But as he looked back, he was not able to distinguish anything except those objects close at hand, and which were disclosed by the mist receding from them.

In this fog, then, his enemies were enveloped, and he still stood a chance of concealing himself somewhere unknown to them.

Once more he looked in advance, and in the distance saw a number of roofs and chimneys, indicating the proximity of a village or small town.

By the roadside, about half-way between the spot where he stood and the roofs that were visible among the trees, was a small, rudely-built shed, the roof of which was composed of bright red tiles, making it a conspicuous object.

"If that was but a blacksmith's forge, now!" Turpin thought, as soon as he beheld it. "But I can't hope to be so fortunate, yet I can see smoke curling out of the chimney and out of the door and window. It may be a blacksmith's forge, after all. If it is, I shall be able to laugh at my pursuers, for I can get a shoe put on in a few minutes!"

He ceased speaking to listen, in the hope that he might be able to hear something of the hammers

All was still.

He was beginning to despair, when the deep silence

that prevailed around was broken by a sharp, ringing, clanking sound, which could only be produced by the rapid blows of a hammer upon an anvil.

It was wonderful to see how the highwayman's face lighted up.

"All is well now," he murmured—"all is well! My troubles are completely over! Quick, Bess—a little quicker! We have not far to go!"

He slightly accelerated his mare's speed, so anxious was he to reach the forge.

Not a minute elapsed without his turning round to look behind him.

Each time that he did so, he found that the mist had retreated further and further, and a more extensive prospect was spread before his view, yet, to his joy, the dragoons remained invisible.

In a very short space of time the door of the blacksmith's forge was reached.

Although the hour was such an early one, the blacksmith was industriously at work, and the bright sparks flew rapidly from the piece of red-hot iron that lay upon the anvil, and which he was rapidly working into shape.

Dick felt as though a very heavy weight had been lifted off his heart.

In finding this unexpected way out of a serious difficulty, he almost forgot all his other cares and troubles.

Slipping off his saddle, he said to the blacksmith:

"My mare has just cast her shoe. Can you fasten another on for me in the space of a few minutes—for I am most anxious to continue on my journey? Every moment is of the greatest importance to me, for it is a matter of life or death!"

"I don't mind obliging you," said the blacksmith, coming forward, "if so be you make it worth my while to leave off the work that I am engaged upon."

"Don't fear for that!" said Turpin. "The matter is of the greatest urgency. I shall pay you liberally, rest assured—that is, if you are quick."

"This way, sir, then! Lead your horse in while I get my tools ready; and, though I say it myself, there's not a man on the whole countryside who can shoe a horse so quickly as I can."

"Then, I am glad that accident has brought you in my way."

While he was speaking, Dick led Black Bess into the forge.

As soon as the blacksmith had got his box of tools ready, he fastened Black Bess by the bridle, and then, lifting up her foot, surveyed the damage done, and also took the measure for the size of the shoe she would require.

"It's a good job you didn't have to go much further with her," he said. "If you had, she would have knocked her hoof to bits. Can you wait while I make a shoe, or shall I put one on?"

"If you have one by you that is anything near a fit, put that on, for, as I told you, every moment is of the greatest consequence."

"All right, sir! Here's a shoe that will do very well. I will have it on in less than two minutes. It's only a matter of knocking half a dozen nails in now."

Dick Turpin received this intelligence with very great satisfaction, for his ears, which had continually been on the stretch, caught that peculiar sound which he knew so well as indicating the rapid advance of the dragoons.

CHAPTER DLXXXVIII.

DICK TURPIN STILL FAILS IN HIS ENDEAVOUR TO SHAKE OFF HIS PURSUERS.

"THEY have kept well upon my track," he murmured to himself. "They are on the road, and cannot be very far off. I will see"

As he spoke, Dick went to the door of the forge, and peeping out, looked cautiously in the direction he had come.

One glance was sufficient to show him that his fears were fully realised.

By this time, the sun had attained a considerable elevation, and his beams poured with full force down the road, revealing everything with rare distinctness.

The glorious golden rays shone brightly on the glittering accoutrements of the dragoons as they came galloping onward at as rapid a speed as their horses were capable of making.

They were certainly not more than half a mile distant, and Dick Turpin again became a prey to great uneasiness.

Turning round to the blacksmith, he said:

"Have you almost done?"

"Yes, sir, I sha'n't be a moment longer."

"Pray be as quick as you can!"

"I will, depend upon it. What a splendid nag this is of yours, sir! She's a real beauty, and no mistake! I never saw her like. You have been riding her very hard, and yet she seems scarcely distressed. If you are going much further, and will condescend to take my advice, you will let me give her a little hay and water."

"I should be glad if I could properly attend to her wants," said Turpin. "She's a brave mare; her equal was never foaled."

"She is a real beauty, and no mistake! And, if you won't take offence, I think I can say who she is and who she belongs to."

Turpin started.

The words had been spoken in a peculiar tone, and, as he looked in the blacksmith's face, he saw it wore a peculiar expression.

The first feeling he experienced was that of alarm, but it soon abated, for the highwayman mentally asked himself the question:

"Shall I trust this man?"

The time for deliberation was very short indeed.

The dragoons were now frightfully close at hand, and in two minutes at the most they must inevitably reach the forge.

The blacksmith smiled and looked pleased, and, after a hesitation that was so slight as to be scarcely perceptible, Dick said:

"I shall take no offence—speak freely."

The last nail had been knocked into the shoe, and the blacksmith rose to his feet.

"Well, then, sir, I feel almost certain that this is no other than Black Bess."

He patted her as he spoke.

"You are quite right," was the reply, "and I am her owner, Dick Turpin."

The blacksmith nodded.

"You don't look like a man who would betray me," continued Dick. "I have quite a different opinion of you—in fact, it is my belief that you would rather do all that lay in your power to assist me to escape from my enemies."

"I would—I would!—there's no mistake about it! I should be very glad to do such a thing, if it was only for the sake of this bonny creature here."

"Then you have the opportunity!" cried Dick, quickly. "Hark! Can you hear that loud trampling of horses' feet upon the hard roadway? Listen!"

"My hearing is not so good as it used to be," replied the blacksmith; "but I can hear that plain enough."

"It is a troop of dragoons that are coming on at that furious speed. They have chased me through the night, and I have had great difficulty in eluding them so far. For what you have already done for me I will well reward you, and, if you can conceal me or assist me to escape, you shall receive for the service a larger amount of money than you could earn by a month's industry!"

"I'd do it for nothing," said the blacksmith, grasping the highwayman by the hand. "I have heard of you, Dick, and I have heard of Black Bess as well; and I have wished many a time that I might have the chance of doing you a service."

"Be quick, then, or it will be too late!"

The blacksmith scratched his head.

"My will is good," he said. "I am only at a loss to know in what way I can render you assistance."

Dick glanced rapidly around him.

"Is there no place where you can conceal me?" he said. If you can hide me all will be well. The dragoons may not stop here, and if they do, you would only have to say that you had not seen me, and then they would ride on and be content."

"But there's no hiding-place in this shed at all," said the blacksmith, "that's the worst of it!"



[THE MEETING OF DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES.]

"It is awkward. I hoped your reply would be different. Where does that door lead to?"

Dick pointed, as he spoke, to one that was almost opposite the door by which he had entered.

"Oh, that's no good," was the reply, "it only leads into the back shed. I've got two or three horses in there now. It's where I keep the horses that come here to be shod."

"I will go into that back shed," said Dick; "I have no resource but to do so. If the dragoons ride by, all will be well. If they halt, I shall be able to hear what they say, and if they are suspicious, and take it into their heads to search this place, I suppose I can get out at the back?"

"Oh yes; certainly you can!"

"That will do, then, and in case I should have to make a retreat without seeing you, take this as a reward!"

Dick Turpin pressed into the blacksmith's hands all the money he had about him.

The next moment he led Black Bess through the second door, and closed it after him.

Scarcely had he done so, than, with a great dash and confusion, the troop of dragoons drew up in front of the blacksmith's forge.

The one in command alighted and entered at once.

The first thing he saw was the blacksmith industriously at work at the bellows blowing the fire.

"Hallo there!" he cried. "Come here, Mr. Blacksmith—I want to speak to you!"

The blacksmith came forward, touching his forehead with his finger at every step.

"Just pay attention, will you?" cried the officer. "I want to know whether you have seen a man mounted on a jet-black horse anywhere about here!"

"Yes," was the unhesitating reply, "I seed him, that is, if the man wore a red coat!"

"Yes, yes—that's the chap I want!"

"Well, I did just see him," said the blacksmith, "and that's all. I happened to be standing at the door, you

see, and I saw him gallop past like a streak of lightning!"

"He went up the road, then, you say?"

"Yes—as straight as ever he could go."

"Then I don't believe you!"

"Don't believe me!—why not, sir?"

"I have good reasons for not doing so."

"What reasons?"

"Do you see this?"

"Yes."

"You know what it is, I suppose?"

"Well, rather—I've seen a great many o' 'em in my time! It looks to me as much like a horse's shoe as anything!"

"That's just what it is!" said the officer.

"Do you want it fastened on, then, sir? I didn't understand what you meant!"

"No, I don't want it fastened on! Now, we're after a highwayman, and one that has given us a great deal of trouble. We lost sight of him for a time in the mist, but we kept steadily on, and when the mist cleared away, he was nowhere in view."

"Lor', now, you don't say so?"

"But it so happened that as I was riding along, I saw a horse's shoe lying on the ground, and I picked it up."

"Is that it?"

"Yes—that's it."

"Well, now, how do you know it's a horse's shoe?"

"Of course it is—what else can it be?"

"Well, I don't know," said the blacksmith, with a grin, "but it seems to me to be very likely a mare's!"

The officer did not appreciate the joke, and in an angry tone of voice he added:

"Just pay attention to me, now, or you may find yourself in trouble! When I saw this shoe, I guessed, of course, that the highwayman's horse had lost it, and I thought to myself 'We shall have him before long;' then I caught sight of your shed here, and then I felt certain that the highwayman, at all risks, would stop and have a new shoe put on. I'd lay a wager of five pounds to a penny that he's done it! He's paid you well, I dare say, and told you to hold your tongue, or rather told you to say that he's gone off in a direction opposite to the one he has taken. I understand how all these things are managed! Now, Mr. Blacksmith, tell me at once, and truly, where that man with the red coat and the black horse went to—which way did he take?"

"I have told you!"

"You have told me a lie!" said the officer, "because if he had gone in that direction I should have seen him! Give me the information I want at once, or I will take you into custody!"

The blacksmith looked rather alarmed, and began to think it was not quite such a nice thing to befriend a highwayman as he had thought it.

He imagined he was about to get into serious trouble.

He was relieved from his embarrassment, however, in an unexpected manner.

The soldiers, who had remained in their saddles, grouped round the door of the forge, suddenly set up a shout.

"There he goes—there he goes!" they cried—"there he goes! Yonder—yonder! Look—there he goes! He's flying over the meadows like the wind!"

The commanding officer flung down the shoe, and made a rush out into the road.

There, sure enough, at a considerable distance, he could discern the flying forms of the highwayman and his steed.

He scrambled into the saddle in a very unmilitary manner, and, without stopping to put his feet in the stirrups or get his seat properly, he made his horse set off at a gallop, and shouted aloud to the dragoons to follow him.

They were able to keep the highwayman in sight with great ease, and would succeed in doing so for a considerable length of time, owing to the level nature of the country.

The blacksmith watched them ride off, and then, scarcely knowing whether to believe what they had said or not, he went to the inner door and opened it.

But Dick Turpin and Black Bess had disappeared.

How it was that he had managed to get so far off before they were seen by the officers is easily explained.

The shed that was built at the back of the others had no proper doorway, one side being quite open, and, as the blacksmith had stated, it was only used as a place where the horses could wait when they came to be shod.

Dick waited, with his ear pressed close against the door leading into the forge, and listened to what was said.

As soon as he heard the intelligence about the shoe, he was quite convinced in his own mind that the officer's suspicions would be strong enough to induce him to make a thorough search of the premises, and so he resolved to beat a retreat at once.

This he did, and leaping into the saddle, he set off across the field in the rear at a gallop, taking care to pursue such a direction that the shed would hide him from the view of the dragoons, who were clustered round the door of the forge.

Black Bess was much refreshed by the brief and insufficient rest she had had, and flew over the fields at a prodigious rate, and it was not until Turpin was more than a mile off that the dragoons managed to catch sight of him.

Dick Turpin looked back, and was soon aware that the dragoons were once more in full pursuit.

He could not avoid experiencing some uneasiness when he made this discovery.

A chase across the open country by daylight, when so many of his foes were on the watch, and when the chances of his being able to conceal himself anywhere were so much diminished, was no pleasant affair.

He could only push on, in the hope that ere long something or other would occur that would enable him to baffle them.

This would be a difficult task, for the fact of the officer observing the shoe lying in the road, and picking it up, and drawing such deductions from it as he did, shows plainly enough that he had all his wits about him, and that his perceptive faculties were unusually well developed.

Whether Dick Turpin was equal to deceiving such a one remains to be seen.

By the manner of the officer and the soldiers under his command, it was perfectly certain that they were by no means tired of the pursuit, although they had galloped so far without meeting with much success.

It may seem strange, but their repeated failures only made them more ardent in the chase.

CHAPTER DLXXXIX.

DICK TURPIN PUTS INTO EXECUTION A VERY CLEVER SCHEME TO BAFFLE HIS PURSUERS.

Black Bess still galloped on, and Dick Turpin occupied himself in looking from right to left, in the hope that somehow or other he should be able to get out of sight of his pursuers.

While he remained in their view it would be useless for him to attempt to carry out any manœuvre, no matter how excellent—not that anything had as yet occurred to him; but the first act would be to get out of their sight, and to doing this he directed all his energies and attention.

There were very few trees visible.

Had there been any shady lane in his passage, down which he would have been concealed by the overhanging bows, or had there been some little wood or plantation, by galloping round which he could have hidden himself from view, all would have been well, but as far as ever he could see nothing of the kind was visible.

Once more he quitted the meadows and took to the open road.

Along this he could make better speed, for there were few obstacles in his way.

Galloping on at the same headlong speed, he found that he was still getting further and further from the dragoons.

In a few moments afterwards he passed the mouth of a lane, which, although unshaded by trees, was bounded by hedgerows of unusual height.

Down this he turned without hesitation, bending his head well down on to his mare's neck, as by this means

he imagined he should render himself invisible to those behind.

To his extreme disappointment, this lane, so well suited to his purpose, was little more than a mile in length; and in consequence of the great speed he was going at, it seemed as though he had no sooner entered it than he reached its termination.

It led into the broad highway which leads from London to Guildford.

Finding this to be the case, he pulled up abruptly.

He was only just in time to avoid coming into collision with a waggon and a team of horses, which were coming round the corner out of the high-road into the lane.

Turpin drew aside to let them pass.

He was much annoyed, for he was seen, and could not avoid it; and doubtless the driver of the waggon would presently encounter the dragoons, and he would at once say exactly where he had seen him.

The waggon was a large one, covered with tarpaulin, and drawn by three horses.

The driver was perched up in his high seat, looking as though only half awake.

Nevertheless, he saw Dick Turpin by the roadside.

Without a word he passed on.

The horses were going at a sort of a jog trot, and this rate of speed, together with the lumbering noise which the waggon made as it rolled over the road, convinced Dick Turpin that it was empty, or nearly so.

It was strange that he should take notice of such a trifling thing, but then he was on the look-out to observe all circumstances, and do the best to turn events to his own advantage.

No sooner did this conviction come over him, than a wild, daring, desperate idea entered his brain.

And no sooner had it done so, than he resolved to carry it out.

The waggon passed him, and, as he looked after it, he could see that it was quite empty, with the exception of a quantity of loose straw that was littered over the bottom of it, for the two pieces of canvas that hung at the back had been drawn to one side and tied there.

With great rapidity Dick Turpin turned Black Bess's head round, and galloped after the waggon. Of course he reached it in a moment.

"Hi, hi!" he cried, "stop—stop—pull up: I have some particular to say."

The driver pulled up upon being thus called upon to do so, and looked down in the road at each side of him, expecting to see the person who had hailed him to make his appearance.

But he saw none.

The fact was, as soon as the waggon stopped, Dick, who was close behind, made Black Bess leap completely into it.

It was a feat which she had performed more than once before, and she seemed to understand in an instant what she was wanted to do.

The driver was greatly surprised upon finding no one appeared, so he stood up and looked over the top of the waggon.

By this means he could see the road behind him, but he failed to catch sight of a living creature.

"Dang me!" he said, as he sat down, "if this ain't a queer thing! I'll swear I heard a voice! I wonder who it was? Howsomever, it don't matter to me—I'll be off again!"

Accordingly he cracked his whip, and the horses set off at a trot once more; but, although he had affected to treat this matter in such an offhand way, he was, in reality, rather uneasy about it, and every moment that elapsed caused his uneasiness to increase.

"I'll swear I heard a voice—I didn't dream it! A wonder what it means? Is anything going to happen to me? I'll have another look."

The waggoner stood up again, and looked behind him along the road as well as he was able.

But not a single living thing was visible upon it.

"It's very strange, I'm certain, and it does put me about! 'Tain't nobody inside the waggon surely? I'll look!"

As soon as ever Black Bess had jumped into the waggon, Dick Turpin slipped out of the saddle, and took hold of her head in order to keep her quiet.

Then, placing his other hand against her shoulder, he applied a gentle pressure, which the gallant creature immediately understood, for she slowly and gently laid herself down upon the straw.

Patting her caressingly upon the head and neck, Dick Turpin bade her lie still, just as though he was speaking to a human being.

There was plenty of loose straw in the waggon, so, gathering it up in both arms, he covered his mare over, and anyone looking into the semi-darkness which prevailed in the interior of the vehicle would never have suspected for a moment the presence of a horse there.

By the time he had done this, the waggoner had made up his mind to have a look, in order to ascertain whether the mysterious voice had proceeded from inside the waggon.

For this purpose he drew aside the canvas in front just behind his seat, and put his head in.

This was just what Turpin wished the man would do, and as soon as ever his head appeared, the highwayman took hold of him by the collar of his coat with both hands, and forcibly and quickly drew him inside.

The man was so astonished and so terrified that he was deprived of his breath, and could not give utterance to a single sound.

"Silence!" said Dick, in a gruff voice—"keep silent! If you utter a word above a whisper, or make the least resistance, I will twist your head off!"

The horrible nature of this threat, and the uncertainty that the waggoner felt as to who his assailant might be, increased his terror.

He trembled violently from head to foot.

"Do just as I tell you," continued Dick, "and you will not be harmed in the least. Listen, and obey!"

"I will!" the waggoner managed to gasp out.

"Very well, then, be quick; off with your coat and off with your hat, and give them to me!"

The waggoner pulled off these articles of apparel more quickly than he had ever done in his life before.

"Very good!" said Dick; "and now the next thing I want is a nice piece of rope. Ah! I see; here's the very thing."

Hanging up against one side of the waggon was a coil of very thick and very strong rope, which was used for the purpose of loading and unloading.

Although he was almost frightened out of his wits, the waggoner wondered what in the world could be wanted with the rope; but his speculations upon this point were quickly set at rest.

The rope was several yards in length, and at one end of it Dick made a running noose, which he slipped over one of the waggoner's wrists.

Drawing the cord tight, he next coiled it round his other wrist, so that his hands were tied behind his back.

Satisfied that all was secure so far, Dick passed the rope under the elbows, and drew them so tightly together, that the waggoner uttered a roar of pain.

"Beware," cried Turpin, "or you're a dead man!"

While he spoke, he passed the rope across the lower part of the waggoner's face, then he cried:

"Open your mouth!"

The waggoner obeyed in an instant, but afterwards regretted his ready compliance with this order.

Dick pulled the rope in between his teeth, and, looping it at the back of his head, drew it so tight, that the man could neither open nor close his mouth, nor give utterance to a sound.

As he had yet plenty of rope to spare, he passed it round the waggoner's body, about half-way between his elbows and his shoulders, and there securing it, brought it down nearly to his knees, where he tied it again.

When this was done, there was just enough rope to reach down to the waggoner's ankles, so he tied them together as well.

"I rather think you are secure now!" said Dick, who could not help smiling at the manner in which the waggoner was bound. "I will defy you to move a muscle, or to utter a sound! You can see and hear, and that's quite enough for the present! Think yourself lucky that you have been let off so easily! You can feel as well, so that, if you get scuffling about the bottom of the waggon, or making any moaning sound, I shall run you through with my sword, and then there will be an end of you altogether!"

The waggoner closed his eyes and made the reflection that he was as good as a dead man.

Dick Turpin was highly satisfied with his progress so far, but time was rapidly slipping away, and he had yet much to do.

Gathering up more straw, he covered the waggoner over with it entirely, and placed a little more over Black Bess, who lay as still as death itself.

In case anyone should look inside the waggon, they would be unable to see anything of a suspicious character.

But not wishing to court observation, Dick went to the back and untied the strings which held back the canvas.

The back of the waggon was now completely covered over, so that no one could see into it without drawing the covering back, and even then they would not be able to see very well, for the interior was quite dark.

Quite certain now that he should be successful in outwitting the dragoons, Dick Turpin put on the long and ample overcoat which at his direction the waggoner had pulled off.

It had a very broad collar and came close up in the throat, and when he had buttoned it up the lower part of the highwayman's countenance was completely concealed.

The hat was of a slouching character, made of white felt, and furnished with a broad, flapping brim, so that when he had put this on and drawn it as far over his head as he could, the highwayman was so well disguised that there was little or no fear he would be able to pass a cursory examination without being recognised.

Of course if he was looked at with a suspicious eye the state of affairs would be completely altered, and the probability is that he would have been detected at once.

Patting and stroking Black Bess for the last time, Dick scrambled out of the waggon and placed himself in the driver's seat.

In front of this was a large piece of canvas which the waggoner used to wrap round his legs and so protect himself from the inclemency of the weather.

This was just the very thing that Turpin desired, since it would enable him to completely conceal the lower portion of his attire, which, of course, did not look much like a waggoner's.

He pulled the apron round him, so as to cover as great a portion of his body as possible, drew the collar of his coat round his face and before his mouth, for it was a chill morning, and no suspicion would be aroused at his muffling himself up.

By the time he had made all these preparations and taken the whip and reins in his hand he looked about as much like a waggoner as anyone possibly could.

He was in high spirits, for he did not doubt that he should be able to carry his plan to a successful termination.

He could imitate the broad Essex dialect to a niccty for he had heard it much in his youth, and he felt sure that the officers could not fail to be deceived by it.

It would have suited Dick's purpose best to have turned the waggon round and gone in the opposite direction.

This, however, would have been hazardous, and provocative of suspicion, because it was quite possible that the dragoons in the distance might have noticed the waggon creeping slowly along.

Therefore he had no resource but to drive straight to his foes.

It looked a most hazardous proceeding, but there was no help for it.

Dick smacked the heavy whip in true waggoner's style, and at a very tolerable rate of speed indeed the waggon lumbered along the lane.

"Now for it!" muttered Dick, presently. "Two more minutes will settle the matter either one way or the other. If they find me out I shall be in rather an awkward fix, I fancy!"

CHAPTER DXC.

DICK TURPIN ENACTS THE WAGGONER TO GREAT PERFECTION.

As Dick Turpin spoke these words the troop of dragoons came round a bend in the lane, about a quarter of a mile in advance, at full gallop.

They certainly kept upon the highwayman's track in a very clever and creditable manner, for, as the reader is aware, they were following in Dick's exact steps.

On they came at undiminished speed, and as they came closer and closer without showing the least signs of drawing rein, Dick really began to hope that they would gallop past the waggon, leaving him unquestioned.

This, however, was not realised.

It is scarcely to be expected that such a sharp and astute individual as the officer in command of the troop of dragoons unquestionably was should allow a vehicle of any kind to pass him without endeavouring to extract from the driver some information as to whether they were on the right track or not.

"Halt!" he cried, in a clear, ringing voice, which reached Dick's ears distinctly.

The dragoons drew up their horses with a sudden dash, and Dick Turpin immediately found the waggon surrounded by his pertinacious foes.

"Pull up your waggon," cried the officer, "I want to ask you a few questions! Pull up, in the King's name!"

Dick Turpin preserved his calmness in a most admirable manner, and pretended to make a desperate effort to stop the horses.

At last he brought the team to a standstill.

The officer did not give Turpin time to open his mouth, but asked, abrubtly:

"Where have you come from?"

"Eh, sir?" replied Turpin, assuming a countryman's language and manner to perfection. "I be reether hard o' heerin', so I mun ax you to speak again."

"Where do you come from?" bawled the officer, at the top of his lungs.

"Thaxted," replied Dick, giving the name of his native place. "I comes from Thaxted, and I be goin' to Suthton."

"Suthton?" said the officer. "I know no such place as that."

"Eh, sir?" said Dick again, who had determined to make the officer say everything twice over, without he bawled loud enough to be in danger of cracking his throat.

"I think he means Southampton," said one of the dragoons, addressing his officer. "I have heard it called Suthton before now."

"Where's Suthton?" roared the officer. "Do ye mean Southampton?"

Dick grinned and nodded as he replied:

"You can make a big mouthful of it by calling it 'Southampton,' if you like—I calls it 'Suthton!'"

"Well, that don't matter," said the officer. "I want to know whether you've passed a man on horseback lately?"

"Eh, sir?"

"Oh, d—n it!" cried the officer, beginning to lose his temper—"the fellow's as deaf as a post!"

"Eh, sir?" said Dick again, of course pretending not to know what was said to him.

"Have—you—passed—a—man—on—horseback?" roared the officer, giving a separate shout for each word.

Dick grinned again, and shook his head slowly backwards and forwards.

"Noa," he replied, "not with this waggon I ain't! I've got some good horses in my team, but they arn't very likely to pass anybody on horseback. Noa, noa—they arn't swift enough for that!"

"I don't mean that," said the officer—"I mean have you seen a man mounted on a black horse pass you?"

"A man sir?" said Dick, putting his hand to his ear.

"Why the devil don't you listen?"

Dick did not consider the words were spoken quite loud enough, so he cried again:

"A man, sir?"

"Oh, damn your man!"

"I think we had better push on, sir!" said the dragoon who had before spoken. "This fellow is as stupid as a pig, and if he saw our man pass by he'd hardly know it!"

The officer, however, was in doubt as to whether Dick had turned down this lane or not, and therefore he took so much pains in questioning the waggoner, as it was of vital importance that this should be ascertained.

"Have you seen a man on horseback?" roared the officer.

This time Dick was not content with grinning, but

burst out into loud laughter, which made the officer more furious than ever.

"Have I ever seed a man on hossback?" repeated Dick. "That be a question to ax to be sure! Now, sir, do you think as I've druv a team o' hosses all over the country for a matter of five an' twenty year wi'out seein' a man on hossback?"

"Oh, curse the fellow!" said the officer. "I wish I could make him understand! It strikes me that he's quite as much knave as fool!"

"A man, sir?" said Dick, in the same tone of voice.

"Have you seen a man on a black horse within the last half hour or so?"

"Was it summat such a looking chap as yourself, sir?" asked Dick. "Had he got a red coat on, with gold lace all over it, like yourn?"

"Yes,—yes!" cried the officer, eagerly—"that's him! Where did you see him? How long ago?"

"A man, sir?"

"Where did you see him?" said the officer again, as loud as he could, but not so loud as before, for he found he was fast getting hoarse.

"Well, dang me, if I didn't loik to a run over him, hoss and all! I were a comin' round the corner o' the lane just below, out of the Lunnun road! I never seed him!—he was going at full gallop. 'Dang me,' thinks I as soon as I seed him, 'there's a go!' But I won't tell you any more—if I do you'll call me a liar, though what I've seed I've seed!"

"Which way did he go?" asked the officer, not forgetting to raise his voice to the required pitch. "Did he go towards London or Guildford?"

"Well, sir, he was a comin' down the lane full split. 'Dang me,' thinks I to myself, 'here's a go! He'll run into me, for sure it's a case with Captain!' But dang me, sir! up went the black hoss in the air, and jumped over Captain's back as clear as anything!"

"What horrible rubbish is the fellow talking now?" said the officer, who found himself at a loss to thoroughly understand what was meant.

"I think I can explain," said the dragoon again. "You see he's got three horses in his waggon, and one is in front. He calls that leading horse Captain, and he means that, as Dick Turpin came galloping on, in order to save himself from a collision, he made his mare leap over this horse's back. We are on the right track—there can be no doubt about that!"

The officer nodded his head.

"Ah!" he said, "I thought that was it," when in reality he had not thought anything of the kind, only he did not like to confess as much to his subordinate.

"Which way did he go?" he roared.

"Why, Guildford way, of course! How could he help it? Didn't I tell you I was a comin' round the corner from Lunnun, and he was galloping down the lane, that as he jumped over Captain's back! How could he go to Lunnun? Noa, he went Guildford way! I watched him myself!"

"That will do, then," said the officer, "we will lose no more time. You may depend we have got the truth out of this fool at last!"

"Eh, sir?" cried Dick.

The officer shook his fist.

"Drive on," he cried—"drive on, and be d—d!"

"All right, sir," replied Dick, flourishing his whip, and making it crack like the report of a pistol.

Before, however, he had done much more than set the horses in motion, the dragoons were far off down the lane.

After what they had been told, they did not entertain the shadow of a doubt that Turpin was on the way to Guildford.

After they had gone, Dick amused himself for some time by laughing over the whole occurrence, for, by assuming so much stupidity, and needlessly causing the officer to say everything twice over, he had had a little revenge upon him, which was sweet indeed.

"They will go to Guildford now, sure enough, and I think I may safely calculate that I have got rid of them at last. Bravo, this is a capital scheme! I won't go much further like this though! As soon as I take the next turning I will mount my mare again and be off! While I have been occupied in this manner, my comrades have had a thousand chances of passing me; I can do no more than keep a sharp look-out."

After going rather less than half a mile, Dick Turpin came to the corner.

From his elevated position on the top of the waggon, he was able to command a very extensive view of the country around him, and, to his great satisfaction, he discovered that there was not a sign of his enemies to be seen.

Accordingly he stopped the horses, and scrambled inside the waggon again.

Black Bess had laid perfectly still, which is not so much to be wondered at, for, after all her exertions she necessarily felt considerable fatigue, and the rest was very grateful indeed.

The waggoner lay just where he had been placed, and seemed half dead with fright.

Turpin rapidly unbound him, and, having done so pulled off the coat and hat which had done him such good service, and resumed his own apparel.

"I have used you rather roughly," he said, "but never mind. Here's a guinea for you. I wish it was more, but it's all I have. I didn't know I'd got that, for I fancied I'd cleared my pockets."

The waggoner took the guinea with a very sullen air.

"You're not much the worse off," said Dick, "and I am a great deal better. You can get up in your seat and drive on without fear. I sha'n't trouble you again."

"Then it was you that cried out 'stop!' when I was in the lane?" said the waggoner.

"It was."

"Well, I wish I'd ha' known, and you'd ha' seen whether I'd ha' pulled up! You won't play me the same trick again—I'll take good care o' that—not if you shout till you're black in the face!"

"All right," said Dick, "it's a thousand to one if we ever meet again; if we do you will find I shall reward you rather substantially for the service you have done me."

With these words, Dick slipped out of the back of the waggon and called to Black Bess to follow him.

She did so as obediently as a dog.

"Bravo, my lass," said Turpin, with pride and satisfaction in the tones of his voice, "there are few horses who could do what you have done to-day! If any harm should happen to you, or if I were to lose you, things would go very hard with me, that is certain."

Dick could not contemplate with any calmness the prospect of one day losing his gallant steed.

He banished the thought as he always did whenever it occurred to him, and sprang lightly and quickly into the saddle.

"Now then to perform my task," he said. "I must find my three comrades—I wonder in what direction I shall look?"

He paused for an instant to consider, and then having made up his mind, he allowed the reins to fall loosely on to the neck of Black Bess, and away she bounded like an arrow from a bow, and very soon the lumbering old waggon was lost to view.

The waggoner cracked his whip, and as his team once more set itself in motion, he said, with an air of the greatest determination:

"If I stop again when anybody calls out, I hope I may be rammed into a cannon and drawn out through the touch-hole!"

CHAPTER DXCI.

THE OFFICER OF DRAGOONS AT LENGTH DISCOVERS WHAT A DREADFUL MISTAKE HE HAS MADE, AND LEARNS HOW NEAR HE WAS TO CAPTURING DICK TURPIN.

It is necessary that we should give a little attention to the further proceedings of the dragoons, who were so cleverly deceived by Dick Turpin when he played the part of waggoner.

Not doubting that the information was perfectly correct in every particular, they galloped off along the high-road towards Guildford at as great a rate of speed as their horses were capable of achieving.

But as they looked in advance—and, the road being straight, they could see for a great distance—as they looked in advance, we say, and failed to see any signs of the highwayman, doubts for the first time began to flit before their minds.

At last they saw the Guildford stage-coach approaching, and the officer determined to ask the guard whether he had seen anyone answering Dick Turpin's description.

He had not long to wait, and in obedience to his command the coach was brought to a standstill.

The driver, upon being appealed to, stoutly declared that no one answering in the least degree to the description given had passed him on the road.

"And," he added, "I could not have missed seeing such a person—I should have noticed him at once! I have had my eye, too, on the country on both sides of the road. As I dare say you know, you can see for many a mile, but I saw no redcoated man on a black horse."

Having thus, as he considered, settled the matter, the coachman whipped up the horses and away rolled the coach, leaving the dragoons standing stock-still in the road, and looking with a puzzled, half-angry expression into each other's countenances.

"What's the meaning of this?" cried the officer. "D—n me if this fellow is not more trouble than the reward's worth!"

"What's your opinion, Hackett?"

Hackett was the name of the dragoon who had ventured to make a few very sensible remarks when his superior officer was questioning the supposed waggoner.

Of course he felt rather flattered to think the officer should ask him for his opinion, and he at once assumed an air of preternatural sagaciousness.

"Ahem, sir! I am much obliged, I am sure, and I hope you'll excuse me for speaking plainly."

"Oh, speak out, Hackett—don't be afraid!"

"Well, then, sir, taking all things into consideration—I mean weighing them separately and then collectively—I am forced to come to the conclusion that the waggoner gave us false information."

"But what could be his motive?"

"That's not for me to say, sir. I could not pretend to answer that question."

"Perhaps you will allow me to make a remark?" said another of the dragoons.

The officer looked at him rather sharply, and said:

"Well, what have you got to say?"

"Well, sir, it may be important, or not, just according to the view you take of the matter; but as we were all standing round the waggon I looked at the driver and fancied he had got a murstarche."

"A what?"

"A murstarche—hair on the lip—you know what I mean."

"Of course, you idiot! I was only surprised at such a thing! Are you sure he had a moustache?"

"Well, I wouldn't like to take my bible oath of that same; but I feel pretty sure of it nevertheless."

"I noticed that he had got the lower part of his face muffled up very much," said Hackett; "and, now I come to think of it, I do believe I saw something very much like a moustache."

"I said from the first," responded the officer, "that that fellow was more knave than fool. He has been playing with us! I'd lay a ten-pound note to a brass farthing that it was no waggoner at all, but Dick Turpin dressed up in the waggoner's clothes!"

This was a fresh idea to all the dragoons, and they looked at each other in doubt and perplexity.

"But if it was him," said Hackett, "what's he done with his horse?"

"How the devil should I know?" retorted the officer. "What's the horse got to do with it, I should like to know!"

"Oh, nothing, sir, only I——"

"Silence! If you can't speak sense, hold your tongue!"

Thus rebuked, Hackett drew back, muttering many and divers oaths as he did so.

"There's a mystery connected with that waggon, any way," cried the officer. "To make the least of it, the waggoner told a lie. Now, he must have had some motive for doing so. We are clearly quite off the scent, so we will be off after the waggon. It can't have gone far, and we shall overtake it in a very little while!"

As a matter of course, it did not lie in the power of the dragoons to gainsay anything their officer might propose, and so, with that readiness which was the result of discipline alone, they turned round their horses' heads and galloped after him along the road, until they came to the lane, round the corner of which they swept at rather a dangerous speed.

Something less than five minutes brought them to its extremity, and, looking about him, the officer presently espied the waggon in the distance.

"There it is," he cried, pointing with his sword towards it! "Come along, my men—we shall soon get to the bottom of this!"

At quite a fast gallop, considering the state of the cattle, the dragoons swept along the road, and as their rate of speed was about four times greater than that of the waggon, it follows that they overtook it in a very short time.

As soon as he was within hailing distance, the officer put his hand to his mouth and cried out:

"Hi!—hi!—stop—stop!"

It will be remembered that these were the words that Dick Turpin had made use of just before he made Black Bess jump into the waggon.

The driver heard them plainly enough, but so far from paying the least attention to the command, he cracked his whip violently, and made his horses go faster.

"Stop, is it," he cried,—"I rather think I see it! I don't stop if I know it! You may take an old bird in once, but you can't do it twice—the burnt dog always dreads the fire! Come up, will you!" and he favoured his horses with another cut, and the waggon rolled on faster than ever.

"Stop, you villain!" roared the officer of dragoons—"stop, I say, or I will order my men to fire, and they will blow you and your waggon to bits!"

As may have been guessed, by the readiness with which he submitted to Dick Turpin, the waggoner was by no means the most courageous individual in the world, and this threat was of such a dreadful character that it almost frightened him out of his life.

Rather than run the risk of such an awful catastrophe, he thought it would be better to endure again what he had previously put up with.

Accordingly he brought his horses to a standstill directly.

"Surround the waggon," cried the officer, "and two of you cover that man with your carbines! If he attempts to move, or if he refuses to answer my questions, don't wait for me to give the word to fire, but shoot him at once!"

To the intense alarm of the waggoner, a dragoon posted himself on each side of him and pointed his carbine full at his head.

"Unbutton your coat!" was the officer's first command.

Wonderingly, the waggoner obeyed.

It then became abundantly manifest that he wore no moustache—his face was as clean shaven as anyone's could be.

Seeing this, the officer considered his suppositions about the identity of the waggoner blown to the winds, and so he went on a fresh track.

"You rascally villain!" he cried, "what made you give us that false information? The man on the black horse didn't go Guildford way!"

"I never said he did!" retorted the waggoner.

"Do you mean to sit there and call me a liar to my face?" screamed the officer, shaking with passion,—"I say—do you mean to sit there and call me a liar?"

"I am ready to do just what you desire."

"I shall take you into custody! I have abundant grounds for doing so. You can hear now plainly enough every word that I say, and before you pretended that you were deaf, and made me shout every word at the top of my breath! You are an accomplice of Dick Turpin's, and you shall be punished accordingly."

"I am no accomplice of Dick Turpin's," replied the waggoner, "and you can take me into custody if you like—I don't care!"

"Search the waggon," cried the officer, suddenly struck with a fresh thought—"search the waggon: very likely the man we want is hidden in it!"

This supposition produced an immense amount of excitement.

But boldly enough the dragoons made their way to the hind part of the waggon, and, drawing aside the canvas flaps, looked in it.

"There's nothing here," said one—"the waggon's empty, with the exception of some straw that is scattered about the bottom of it."

"Of course it's empty," replied the waggoner. "Why the devil didn't you have sense enough to look in the waggon before, and then you'd ha' found something worth having."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I mean if you'd looked in the waggon when it was down the lane, you'd ha' found it all out!"

"Speak out, you wretch! and don't you attempt to deceive me again!"

"I haven't deceived you at all!" said the waggoner; "and if you'd only patiently listen to reason, you'd very soon learn the ins and outs of the affair from beginning to end!"

"Go on, then—speak! But first of all I caution you, and bid you beware!"

"Well, then, if you'd ha' looked into the waggon, you'd ha' seen me lying down on the straw bound neck and heels with one of my own wain ropes, and by the side of me you'd ha' seen a black horse lying down on the straw too, and sitting here on this damned identical seat, where I am sitting now, you'd ha' seen the man you were after!"

"Damn me if I didn't think that was it!" cried the officer, slapping his thigh, and pleased rather than otherwise to find that he had not been mistaken after all.

"That's the truth of the matter, sir!" said the waggoner "and I'd take my bible oath to it any minute!"

"Explain it all, will you?"

"I can in a very few words, for betwixt seeing and hearing, I know all about it!"

"Go on, then! It is possible you may clear yourself, and remove all the suspicions I have in my own mind against you; but, at the same time, I hardly think you will. Why didn't you stop when I called after you?"

"I can tell you that," was the reply, 'if you'll only give me a little time."

"Go on! Take as much time as you like!"

In a very circumstantial manner, the waggoner, after receiving this permission, gave a full, true and particular account of all that had happened, and concluded by giving his reason for continuing to drive on when the officer called after him to stop.

There could be no such thing as doubting the truth of what the waggoner had said.

It was not possible that such a tale could be concocted by him.

The furious rage and intense mortification of the officers and dragoons are things which it is possible the reader may be able to imagine, but which are entirely out of our power to describe.

They were compelled, however, to recover their equanimity in the best manner they could.

It was clear that they had been "done brown"—"sold," and after such a delay, it would be worse than useless for them to attempt to recommence the pursuit after the highwayman.

They were quite aware that he had had plenty of time to get miles and miles off, and it was an additional source of aggravation to them when they made the reflection that in all probability at that very moment Dick Turpin was resting himself somewhere, and exulting over his victory.

"Let me once catch sight of him again!" cried the officer of dragoons—and the tone of his voice showed how fully he meant what he said—"let me catch sight of him again, and damn me if I rest a minute till I have caught him!"

"Come, my lads, we must put up with our disappointment in the best way we can! We will stop at the next inn we come to to rest ourselves and our cattle, and then perhaps something may come to our knowledge."

After their long and fatiguing ride, the dragoons were quite delighted at the idea of having a rest, and so they rode after their leader without experiencing so much disappointment as might have been expected.

The prospect of a sojourn at a country inn was a consolation to them.

CHAPTER DXCII.

DICK TURPIN AT LENGTH HAS THE PLEASURE OF REJOINING HIS THREE COMPANIONS.

When the officer of dragoons said that Dick Turpin was in all probability exulting over their discomfiture he was not very far wrong, but was in error when supposing that the highwayman was safe in some secure hiding-place.

So far from this being the case, Dick Turpin was busy looking anxiously around him in the hope that he might see something of those three persons he so much desired to meet.

It was in vain, he could see nothing of them, and he bitterly regretted the series of mischances he had met with, which had driven him so far out of the course he had made up his mind to take.

But very often we repine when we ought to rejoice, and Dick Turpin soon found that it was really a fortunate circumstance that he should have been chased by the dragoons in the way he had been.

At the very time when the incidents we have just described were happening, Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack were in the vicinity of Guildford.

Dick Turpin little thought it, but there was indeed every probability that before many hours had elapsed he should rejoin his old and faithful comrades.

Fearing to put up at an inn lest he should be recognised, Dick Turpin pushed on during the remainder of the day, only halting once in a green meadow and removing the bit from Black Bess's mouth in order that she might feed upon the sweet green herbage.

By repeated examinations he had satisfied himself that his enemies were nowhere in sight, and he rightly enough imagined that they had for the present abandoned the pursuit.

Dick Turpin was very awkwardly situated, for he could not do as others would.

It was impossible for him to pause every now and then and inquire of various people whether they had chanced to see three individuals answering to the description which he could give of his companions.

Such a course as that was not to be thought of—he must trust to himself, and to himself alone.

Gradually the day passed away, and the dim shadows of evening began slowly to creep over the whole landscape.

It was during the night that his companions were most likely to be travelling, and consequently then that he stood the best chance of meeting with them.

Although quite ignorant of the circumstance, he was at this time within three miles of those he so much wished to see, for it was upon this night of which we are writing that the three highwaymen had their adventure with the young lady, with the clever farmer, and with the old lady in the carriage.

The words which this old lady had spoken, it will be remembered, made a deeper impression upon Sixteen-String Jack than he cared to show or to own, and his comrades ineffectually endeavoured to draw from him an account of what had taken place.

They were obliged to content themselves with the assurance he gave that he had been successful in obtaining a tolerable amount of booty.

After this all three rode forward towards London.

Tom King was exceedingly anxious to return to the deserted mansion, and he had resolved to do so provided they met with anything like success in their attacks upon travellers.

They rode on then rather swiftly towards the metropolis, determined not to allow anyone to pass them unchallenged between then and daybreak

Ere they had gone far, the clatter of a horse's feet came upon their ears, and it was Tom King who said:

"A single traveller is approaching, mounted on horseback; we will stop him and take what he has!"

This was agreed to, and the three highwaymen drew themselves up in a line across the road, and waited for the horseman to approach.

He was coming along in capital style.

As soon as he was near enough, Tom King, who was a little in advance of his two comrades, exclaimed:

"Stand and deliver! Hand over your purse without resistance, and no harm will happen to you!"

"I should know that voice," replied the traveller, "and you must also recognise mine; I am rejoiced that we should have met at last."

It was indeed Dick Turpin who had thus encountered his companions, and the next moment his hand was tightly clasped in that of his old friend and ally Tom King.

Claude and Jack both pressed forward eagerly, for they were equally rejoiced that a meeting should at last have taken place.

When the joy and excitement which their meeting occasioned had somewhat subsided, the three highwaymen quickly noticed the dejected state of Turpin's spirits.

"What ails you, captain?" they asked—"what has happened since we parted that has distressed you so much?—how come it that we should have met you on this road to-night? The understanding was that you should have remained at the deserted mansion until our arrival."

"That was the understanding," returned Turpin; "but I have much to tell you that will both astonish and grieve you. I might, myself, ask you how it is that you have been so much longer on your journey than we had calculated upon? I have been full of alarm on your account."

"No doubt—no doubt!"

"The fact is," said Claude Duval, "that an explanation is necessary on both sides. Since we parted we have had some rare adventures."

"We have," added Tom King; "and a great deal of time will necessarily be consumed in recounting them; we shall not be able to do it on the high-road."

"However surprising and remarkable you may consider your own adventures to be," said Turpin, "you will find that what I have to tell you will far transcend them."

This announcement made the highwaymen impatient and anxious in the utmost degree to learn what had befallen their captain during their separation from him.

"The chief thing we have to tell you," said Tom King, "may be summed up in a very few words indeed We have failed to bring away any of the miser's gold."

"That is but a minor evil," replied Turpin, with a sigh.

"But cannot you inform us of the utmost extent of your calamity in the course of a few words without going into details?" asked Tom King, "If you can you will greatly relieve our hearts."

"I can only briefly make the announcement, then, that Maud is a prisoner in Newgate!"

Ejaculations of astonishment and indignation burst from the lips of the three highwaymen upon the receipt of this unexpected intelligence.

Indeed, so extraordinary was it, that at first they were quite incredulous.

"I cannot enter into particulars now," continued Dick Turpin. "We must come to a halt as soon as we conveniently can; I will then begin my narrative from the beginning, and acquaint you with all that has happened up to our present meeting."

"It will take some time, I fancy?"

"It will indeed, for I have more to tell you than you can possibly dream of."

"Our meeting was strangely brought about, was it not?" remarked Sixteen-String Jack.

"Very—very, though I have been stopped on the highway before."

"The fact is," added Tom King, "we had resolved to stop everybody on the road to-night, and to take all the booty we could possibly lay our hands on."

"Why did you make such a determination as that?" asked Turpin.

"Because hitherto we have had such bad luck; it was, as we may say, the only chance of improving our position."

"And what luck have you had?"

"Very good up to stopping you."

"And was not that good?" inquired Turpin, with a smile,

"The best," was the reply.

"Well, day will not dawn for some hours at least," said Dick Turpin; "and I don't wish to be the means of balking your intentions. Let us do the best we can between now and daylight."

"Agreed—agreed!"

"Afterwards we will take up our quarters at some inn, and spend the day there. We shall have plenty to do for the recital of our adventures will occupy many hours."

"Rest assured of that!"

"I am glad you're determined to join us, captain," said Claude Duval; "and, as we are all four together, I propose that we attempt something out of the way."

"What do you think we shall have a chance of doing? Shall we stop the mail-coach?"

"That is about the extent of what we can accomplish. But we managed to do it between us a short time back."

"A stage-coach is always worth the stopping," said Tom King. "If we mind what we are about, we can get as much booty from it as we should derive from half a dozen more trifling adventures."

"The stage-coach be it, then," said Turpin. "I don't think our patience will be put to a very severe trial, for the coach that leaves London in the evening ought to be here by this time."

"By Jove, yes!" cried Claude Duval. "And it carries with it the mail bags, doesn't it?"

"You are quite right—it does."

"Then I foresee a glorious and profitable adventure!"

"Get all your weapons in readiness," cried Turpin. "This is the last adventure we shall have for some time to come, and, moreover, we require a good supply of cash."

"Do you mean to carry out your original plan?"

"I intend to do so: but the money will be required for a far different purpose."

"Tell us now."

"I cannot; you must wait until I can explain all to you from the first to last. Hark! Isn't that the guard's horn?"

Turpin was silent instantly, and then all four of the highwaymen listened with the utmost intentness.

The shrieking, unmusical notes that issued from the long tin horn carried by the guard came distinctly though faintly to their ears.

"She's a long way off yet," exclaimed Turpin. "So much the better! We shall have all the more time to make our preparations."

While this conversation had been going on, our friends had been trotting gently along the road, but now they paused.

On one side of the highway, just where they came to a halt there was a huge mass of something black, that resembled a haystack as much as anything.

It was not this, however, and Sixteen-String Jack, whose curiosity was strongly roused, made his way towards it to ascertain what it really was.

"I thought so," he muttered, as he put out his hand and touched it. "Captain," he cried, in a louder tone of voice, "I think I have hit upon a capital idea!"

"What is it?"

"Do you see this?" asked Jack, pointing to the black-looking mass.

"Not very well—what is it?"

"It's a great block of loose faggots," was the reply. "I suppose they have been lately cut down, and left here in order to be carted away."

"Well, what's your idea?"

"Why, that this stack of faggots will enable us to bring the mail-coach to a stop very suddenly, and without any trouble on our part."

"How—how?" asked all three of his comrades anxiously, for as yet they failed to grasp at his meaning.

"Why, I propose that we all four set to work to place these faggots loosely across the road, and pile up as high as we are able. As the coach is at some distance, we shall have plenty of time to do it The leading horses will entangle their feet among the twigs and branches, down they will go, they will pull the other pair after them, and then, of course, the coach will be brought to a complete stop."

The highwaymen now fully comprehended their comrade's intention, and set about carrying it into effect with right good will.

The word "faggot" scarcely describes what the stack consisted of.

They were not straight pieces of wood, but cuttings from the trees and hedgerows, and they ranged from the longest twig up to a branch several inches in diameter, and six or eight feet in length, with numberless little branches shooting out from them in every direction.



[CLARD RECEIVES A VISITOR IN NEWGATE.]

The celerity with which the highwaymen pulled the stack to pieces and placed the faggots across the road was truly amazing.

In less than three minutes they had completed their task.

The faggots reached from one side of the road to the other, and were quite two feet from the ground, while the width was more than a yard.

Truly was it a barrier of a most formidable character, and it would be impossible, we fancy, to devise anything so well calculated to bring the coach to a stop.

Quick as they had been in all their movements, the highwaymen were only just in time.

By the time they had remounted their steeds and got their pistols in readiness, the mail-coach was clearly in sight, and not more than a hundred yards off at the most.

With great anxiousness they now awaited the result of this new experiment.

On came the horses in slashing style, little dreaming of the impediment that lay in their path.

The two leading horses were going at full gallop, and raising their fore-feet high in the air.

At length the barrier was reached, and then, instead of finding their feet come down upon the roadway, they got entangled among the twigs.

They could not stop themselves, and so, with a rare instinct, they gave a tremendous bound forward, anticipating, no doubt, that they should by this means get clear of the obstacle. But they were mistaken.

All four of their feet became hopelessly entangled, and after a few gallant struggles, down they both went with a crash.

As Sixteen-String Jack had foreseen, they pulled the other two horses down after them, and something else which he did not foresee.

This was the coachman.

When he felt his leading horses stumble, he gathered

the reins up very tightly with both hands, in order to keep them upon their legs.

When they fell down with such suddenness, as a matter of course they gave the reins a tremendous jerk, and before he had time to wink his eye, the coachman found himself making a frantic endeavour to stand on his head upon the faggots.

This feat, however, he failed to accomplish, and the next moment he and his four horses were rolling, struggling, and kicking in the most furious manner conceivable, as they all frantically endeavoured to scramble to their feet.

The confusion was immense.

Such a chorus of shrieking and swearing as came from the inside and outside of the coach had surely never been heard before.

About the success of Sixteen-String Jack's manœuvre there could be no possible doubt.

The mail-coach was completely at a standstill, and the passengers wholly at the mercy of the highwaymen.

CHAPTER DXCIII.

DICK TURPIN FINDS THE OFFICER IN COMMAND OF THE TROOP OF DRAGOONS A VERY TROUBLESOME CUSTOMER.

As our friends were four in number, they were able, in a manner of speaking, to take the coach completely by storm, by surrounding it at all points.

Dick Turpin and Claude Duval repaired to the doors of the coach with the intention of looking after the inside passengers, while Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack attended to those on the roof.

When the former took up their positions, they found that the windows had been already let down by the terrified passengers.

Those who had been valorous enough to put out their heads and look around, precipitately withdrew as soon as ever the two highwaymen approached.

The shouting and screaming which had up to that moment rent the air now suddenly ceased.

The close proximity of the danger seemed to have the effect of chaining their tongues.

All knew that the coach had been stopped by highwaymen and they would not be allowed to proceed on their journey until they had delivered up whatever money and valuables they had about them.

It was rather terrifying to see Claude Duval and Dick Turpin both appear at the two windows of the stage-coach at the same moment.

The passengers glanced from one to the other in dismay.

"Make haste!" said Dick. "The worst harm that will befall you will amount to no more than the loss of a few pounds,—that is, if you are prudent enough not to resist!"

"If you do resist," said Claude Duval, rattling the barrel of his pistol on the ledge of the coach window, in what seemed to be a highly dangerous manner—"if you do resist, the consequences will be upon your own heads!"

"D—n me if I stand this!" said a voice from the interior of the coach. "There are four men among us,—let us all unite! If we make a bold stand we shall lose nothing!"

"You will lose both your money and your lives if you don't submit quietly and at once!" exclaimed Turpin. "Now, sir, I'll begin with you!" he continued, addressing the passenger who sat next the door.

"You're all d—d cowards!" said the voice which had previously spoken, "and you deserve to lose your money if you have not the courage to take care of it!"

"All in good time!" said Claude, who could dimly make out the figure of the man who spoke. "Your time will come directly, and we shall see!"

The passengers in the mail-coach on this occasion were six in number.

Four were males and two females.

With the exception of the one individual we have mentioned, they were inclined to part with what they had peaceably enough, and the two highwaymen both found their pockets rapidly getting heavier.

At last Claude addressed the man who had spoken in such a valorous manner.

"Hand over!" he cried, briefly—"it's your turn now!"

"You're a d—d cowardly set to suffer yourselves to be robbed in this manner by two men! Of course I must submit myself, because you have refused to join me. It would be madness for me to encounter two men!"

"Don't have any fears on that account!" cried Turpin. "I will not interfere,—you can settle matters with my friend entirely!"

"But I stand no chance," was the reply—"I carry no firearms!"

"But you carry weapons of some kind, I suppose?" said Claude.

"Oh yes," chimed in one of the passengers—"he has a sword by his side."

"Oh, indeed!" said Claude, "so have I; and if you will step out of the coach I will give you a chance of keeping your money!"

"No," was the reply, "I am not going to get out in order to be butchered by a lot of ruffians—I have more sense than that!"

"Hand over your purse then!" said Claude, impatiently. "It is not likely that we are going to allow you to remain an exception!"

The passenger seemed quite as unwilling to part with his gold as to get out of the coach.

"You have been very fast to call your fellow-travellers cowards," said Claude, "but the emptiest vessel always makes the most sound!"

"What do you mean by that?" asked the passenger, fiercely.

"Why, that you, making the greatest outcry about your courage, are the biggest coward of the lot!"

"Do you call me a coward, sir?"

"I do—and take that! We will see now whether you have courage or not!"

While speaking, Claude had drawn his sword, and he struck the pugnacious passenger a smart blow with the flat side of it.

"I can't allow this insult to remain unpunished! Let me get up, will you! I see I must fight him after all!"

"There's nobody hindering you from getting up," said the man who sat next to him. "Why don't you get up?"

The person thus addressed rose to his feet.

Yet he did not make very great haste to reach the coach door, and it almost seemed by his manner as though he wished some traveller would seize hold of him and prevent him from carrying his design into execution.

So far from doing this, however, they shrank back, in order to allow him as much space as possible to get out.

In the meanwhile, Claude Duval opened the door of the coach and slipped off his horse.

The passenger now made his appearance, and Duval saw that he was attired as a soldier.

He was a tall, strapping fellow, though of very dandified appearance.

By his side he carried a sword.

So far as he could tell by a glance, he had no other weapons about him.

"Now, sir," said Claude, "I am waiting for you, and I will give you a chance of keeping your money. If you can vanquish me at the sword's point—good—you shall keep your purse; if you cannot, why, I shall force you to surrender it!"

It was evident that the soldier by no means relished this proposition, and although he heartily wished that he could withdraw, shame compelled him to put on an air of resolution which he was far indeed from feeling.

He stepped lightly to the ground, and, drawing his sword, placed himself in an attitude of defence.

Claude approached; but before they could cross swords the soldier, imagining he saw a loophole by which he could creep out of his position without compromising his courage, said:

"This is not fair! When they find you are getting the worst of the fight, your companions will come to your assistance!"

"Nothing of the kind!" said Dick Turpin, who had come round to that side of the coach. "I will be one to see fair play, and I will promise not to interfere—that is,

if the passengers in the inside of the coach will give their word not to interfere also."

"We won't interfere!—we won't interfere!" cried a chorus of voices from within. "We want to see some of the courage he has been talking about so much during the whole of the journey!"

The soldier looked highly indignant, and the passengers on the roof gazed in surprise on this scene, which they could not very well comprehend.

"Now, sir," said Claude, "be quick, for time is very precious with me, I can assure you! Defend yourself!"

As he spoke, Claude commenced the attack.

There are some animals that will avoid an encounter of every kind as long as they are able, when they think they cannot make certain of success, but which, when forced to the combat, will, by sheer desperation, make a formidable resistance.

There are men who resemble these animals, and the soldier was one of them.

When he saw that by no means whatever, save that of absolutely confessing his cowardice, could he avoid the encounter he worked himself up to the necessary pitch.

He returned Claude's attack with great impetuosity.

But the highwayman, calm and cool, behaved in a manner strikingly different to his antagonist.

There were very few in all England who could handle a sword with greater skill and effect than Claude Duval.

He had been much accustomed to the use of the weapon in his youth, and he parried all the wild blows the soldier struck with an ease and gracefulness that was delightful to look upon.

Then suddenly watching his opportunity, Claude entangled his own sword in that of his adversary and twisted it out of his hand.

The soldier had fought in the desperate manner we have described because he fully believed that Claude would take advantage of the first opportunity to kill him—that indeed the contest was one of life or death.

But Duval had no such intentions, and when he had disarmed his opponent he was content.

Advancing a few steps, he placed his sword against the soldier's breast, and said:

"Now, sir, I will give you one more chance of your life! Surrender what you have about you, and you shall remain unhurt!"

The soldier was greatly enraged at his defeat, and he had a very good reason for being so.

All the way he had come in the coach he had been vapouring about his skill in the use of the sword, and to have listened to his own account of the various exploits he had performed, one would have come to the conclusion that he was invincible single handed.

Claude, however, had conquered him in the space of a couple of minutes, and with an ease that looked like magic.

Burning with rage, the soldier did not say a word in reply to Claude's demand, but carried his hand to the pocket of his coat.

From this movement it seemed he was about to surrender his purse.

With the quickness of thought, however, he drew forth his hand, and as he raised it rapidly there was a bright flash and a sharp report.

It was a great wonder that Claude was not slain on this occasion.

He would never have attributed to his adversary such a treacherous act—in fact, he believed him incapable of anything of the kind.

By a mere chance, however, he saw something glittering in the soldier's hand when he drew it from his pocket, and warned, too, by the expression of his face that he was about to attempt something desperate, Claude stepped rapidly on one side.

Beyond all question, that movement saved his life, for the soldier's aim was a true one.

The bullet in its course passed exactly through the space he had just occupied.

A cry of rage burst from Dick Turpin's lips when he beheld this treacherous deed.

"Villain!" he cried, "you have been treated with misplaced clemency!"

No sooner did the soldier hear these words and discover that he had failed in achieving his object than he turned quickly round and ran off at full speed.

Dick and Claude were both so enraged at this conduct that each, without being aware of the other's intention, brought a pistol rapidly to a level and fired after his retreating form.

A series of yells rent the air, mingling strangely with the sharp reports of the pistols, and then, as they looked down the road, they saw the soldier clap both his hands to the hind part of his person, and, after a few spasmodic bounds, spring over a hedge and disappear.

Ere another word could be spoken, a low, chirping whistle came to their ears.

It proceeded from the lips of Tom King.

As soon as ever he heard the sound, Claude Duval sprang into the saddle, and in about another second the four highwaymen were together.

"Fly!" said Tom—"fly at once! By great good fortune I looked down the road and saw a troop of horsemen approaching. They are either police officers or dragoons; but I fear the latter."

"They most likely are the latter," said Dick. "I have had some trouble in eluding them during the night—for I have no doubt this is the same party that I told you of; they are commanded by a resolute fellow. Off, and away!"

The highwaymen put spurs to their steeds, and the stage-coach was rapidly left behind.

Tom King was allowed to take the lead, in consequence of the intimate knowledge he possessed of the nature of the country.

This knowledge made a wonderful difference to our friends, since the task of eluding their foes was made much easier by it.

He led the way across the open country; but not at random, for the road he took was smooth, and the horses met with very few impediments.

At last they came to the high-road, and as soon as they gained it Tom said:

"We will halt here and listen; I think there is no need for us to try our horses any further."

They stopped and listened.

All was very silent, and they came, without hesitation, to the conclusion that their pursuers were nowhere near at hand.

"It will still be necessary for us to push on," said Dick Turpin, "though we will not exert our horses too much."

"But we can't possibly reach London before daybreak," said Tom King.

"I know that quite well; still, we must get as far away from the dragoons as we can, and at the same time it will be necessary for us to find a place of shelter before morning breaks."

"I don't know where we are to look for it," said Tom King.

"Do you know of any inn?"

"Yes, several; but our experiences lately with regard to roadside inns have been so very disagreeable that I feel reluctant to take up my quarters at one again."

"But where else can we look for shelter," asked Dick, "if not there?"

"I don't know. It's very hard to think the landlords will show us such little favour."

"I am impatient to hear your adventures, Tom; I know they have been singular."

"You're right! But come, let us go at a swifter rate, we must trust to chance for a place of refuge. As we ride on it is quite possible we shall see something that will answer our purpose."

"I hope so," said Dick Turpin, "for Black Bess has been sorely tried to-night."

"Our cattle all want rest."

"No doubt; but Black Bess expressly stands in need of it. She has galloped more miles since I set out upon this expedition than I should like to count; and what's more—she has done it without having either proper rest or proper food."

"That's just where the difficulty is," said Sixteen-String Jack—"it's the food that does it. If it wasn't for that we could find a score of places where we could shelter ourselves; but, then, we have to look out for proper food for our horses."

"Of course we have," said Dick; "and I fancy as this is the only place where we can hope to find it."

"That's my opinion," returned Jack. "Here, Claude—perhaps you wouldn't mind lightening me of my load a little?"

CHAPTER DXCIV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE GOT INTO GOOD QUARTERS AT THE HEDGEHOG INN

CLAUDE DUVAL looked rather surprised when Sixteen-String Jack spoke these words, for he did not know to what he alluded.

The next moment, however, he perceived that his comrade carried before him on the saddle some very bulky-looking object.

What this was he could not conceive, for during the attack upon the mail-coach he had been too much occupied in attending to his own affairs to give much attention to the proceedings of his companions.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Well," returned Jack, "I rather think they are the mail bags."

"The mail bags?"

"Yes—the letters you know."

"How did you get them?"

"They were under the coachman's seat, and so I took charge of them. From their weight I fancy we shall find something else in them besides paper."

Hearing these words, Dick Turpin turned round, for he, too, was unaware of what Sixteen-String Jack had done."

"Do you mean to say," he exclaimed, "that you have really taken possession of the letter bags?"

"Yes—here they are, and they contain money as well—I am convinced of that."

"But I don't know what we are to do with them; anyone who sees them will know what they are at a glance, and suspicions will be instantly excited."

"And it may happen," added Tom King, "that they contain nothing of particular value."

"I propose we set that matter at rest," said Sixteen-String Jack, "by riding over to those trees yonder. We can sit down there, open the bags, and take out the money."

This was consented to, and the four highwaymen made their way to the place that had been mentioned.

The countenances both of Dick Turpin and Tom King were clouded by vexation.

Still, they said nothing with regard to their feelings.

Upon reaching the trees, which grew so thickly together as to form an effectual screen, all four dismounted, and the bags were opened.

Their contents were shot out upon the ground, and when he saw the pile of letters, Dick Turpin could not refrain from saying:

"I wish you had left them alone, Jack."

"Why, captain?"

"I have always made it a rule never to interfere with the mails."

"I don't care about it myself," said Sixteen-String Jack, "but I was tempted to carry off the bags on this occasion, because I felt certain that they contained gold; and look—here is a proof that I am right! Now, tell me whether I did wrong to carry them away?"

As he spoke, Sixteen-String Jack picked up from the ground, from among the heap of letters, a small leathern bag, which, from its size, appearance and weight, evidently contained coin.

"This is gold," he cried, "I'll warrant! and there's a good sum of it too! It would have been foolish to have let this booty pass—it will go far towards recompensing us for our previous losses."

"He cut the bag open with his sword as he spoke, and showed that it really and truly was crammed full of gold pieces.

Seeing this, Dick Turpin said no more, and Sixteen-String Jack rapidly transfered the gold into his pockets.

But there was more than he could carry, and he handed the remainder to Claude Duval.

"But what's to be done with these letters, now?" said Tom King.

"Leave them where they are—they will be found by some one."

"I am quite agreeable," said Sixteen-String Jack, "as soon as I have satisfied myself that there is not another bag of gold among them."

In order to ascertain whether there was or not, he rapidly turned all the correspondence over.

"No," he cried, "there's no more—only the letters!"

"I think we had better be off; it's a long time since we have met with such good luck."

"If we are not quick we shall have the daylight upon us."

"Forward, then!" said Tom King. "I will lead the way! I suppose there is no other resource but to stay for a few hours at an inn?"

"Our horses require rest," said Dick Turpin, "and it is upon their fleetness and powers of endurance that our lives depend; therefore, that ought to reconcile us to running a great deal of risk."

"I know one inn," said Tom King, "about seven miles from this spot; it is in a lonely, retired situation. I have no doubt the landlord will treat us well."

"Let us try, at any rate. We shall have to perform the distance at a gallop, or else we shall scarcely be there before it is daylight."

"It is daybreak now," said Claude—"look in the east."

In this quarter of the heavens the clouds looked somewhat lighter than they did elsewhere, but the difference was very slight, and this indication of the approach of morning would have escaped any but a well-practiced eye.

Tom King gave one glance, and then, touching his horse with the spur, set off at a hard gallop.

He knew in what a little time the whole landscape would be illuminated.

In something less than three-quarters of an hour he reached the vicinity of the inn of which he had spoken.

The trees and fields, and indeed all objects not very remote, could be seen with perfect distinctness, though the sun had not yet risen.

Suddenly turning round the corner, they came in sight of a picturesque old building.

The three highwaymen who had never seen it before were quite taken by surprise, for the inn was so surrounded by trees as to be invisible until they were within a few yards of the front door.

The inhabitants of this rustic dwelling had not yet risen, for on the upper floor the blinds were all drawn closely down, and below the shutters were all up.

"We are a little bit too early, it seems," said Tom King; "but never mind, I know these people are early risers, and it won't be long before the inn is opened."

"There's not much fear of our being seen while we wait, I think," said Dick Turpin, glancing around him.

"Very little. But if you like to follow me, I can almost put our discovery out of the question."

"How so?"

"Follow me, and you shall see."

There was a gateway at the side of the inn, and underneath this Tom King passed with his comrade close behind him.

The gateway communicated with the stables, which were built in the rear of the public-house.

"Now," said Tom, as they drew rein in the inn yard, "don't you think we are pretty secure here?"

"There is not much danger of our being seen, at any rate. Hush!—who's that?"

As the inn yard was paved with stones the horses' feet made a loud, clattering sound, sufficient to awake a sound sleeper.

Directly they had halted a voice cried:

"Good morning, gentlemen! This is an early visit! Never mind, I'll be down directly."

All four looked in the direction from which this voice proceeded, and saw a man's head projected from a small window of a room that was built over one of the stables.

"That's the ostler," said Tom; "he will be down directly."

These words were verified; for, in less time than one could have believed possible, the man who had spoken made his appearance in the yard.

"You are here uncommon early, gentlemen," he said, touching his forehead repeatedly. "You've come a good way, I should think. Your horses look very tired."

"They are," replied Tom; "and it's chiefly on their account that we want to stop here."

"You couldn't have come to a better place, though I say it."

"If you treat the horses well, it will be nothing out of your pocket, I can tell you that!"

"Well, sir, I have been stable boy for a matter of five-and-twenty years or more, and I've seen a good many things in my time. For instance, I'm able to tell by sight whether gentlemen is gentlemen or not."

"Very likely," said Tom, as he slipped half a crown into his hand. "There's something to drink our healths."

The ostler was profuse in his acknowledgments.

The highwaymen all dismounted rapidly, and the ostler led the horses towards the stables.

"I'm main sorry the master isn't up. This is his usual time, though, and we shall see him directly, I'll be bound."

"Oh, it doesn't matter" said Tom; "we are in no hurry."

The highwaymen were rather pleased than otherwise, in thus having an opportunity of seeing that their horses were attended to.

Dick Turpin in particular was most solicitous about Black Bess, who had exerted herself in a wonderful manner during the whole of the past night.

While the ostler was engaged with the other steeds, he rubbed her down with his own hands in a manner that elicited the ostler's admiration.

By the time Dick had finished this task, the inn was opened.

Nevertheless, the highwaymen refused to quit the stable until they had seen all the horses amply supplied with provender.

The ostler went on in advance to the inn, and, finding the landlord in the passage, he said to him, in a hurried whisper:

"Run out, master! There's four gentlemen come to stop, and jolly good customers they'll be!"

"How do you know it?"

"Oh, they're real, right-down gentlemen, and no gammon! One gave me half a crown to drink his health the very first thing after they came in."

Good customers at this little, out-of-the-way inn were quite looked upon as "black swans," and the landlord manifested accordingly an intense desire to pay them every respect.

By the time these few words had been communicated to him, our three friends arrived.

The landlord bowed to the very ground, and, in a most humble voice, desired to be made acquainted with their pleasure.

"We have travelled far," said Tom King, "and our horses are very tired, and so we have brought them here for food and rest."

"Very good, gentlemen! I will see that they meet with every attention."

"Thank you! We will stay here in the meanwhile."

"Yes, gentlemen. Would you like a private room? I have one that I shall be very happy to place at you disposal."

The landlord could easily say this; for the matter of trade that was done, they might all have been considered private rooms.

The four highwaymen followed him along the passage, and he ushered them into a room that was really comfortable, simply because it was clean.

The articles of furniture in it were of the rudest and commonest description, but they were substantial, and well scoured and polished.

"We want some breakfast," said Tom King. "What can you bring us nice and tempting?"

"Well, gentlemen, the fact is you've ratner taken me nonplush. I don't happen to have anything ready at the present moment, but I have some fine fowl, which can be cooked for you in a very little while."

"That will do, then. I think we might manage for once in a way to make a breakfast off roast fowl. In the meanwhile, let us have a bottle of the best wine you've got in your cellar."

The landlord of this inn was so exceedingly delighted at having such good customers, that he could scarcely contain himself within reasonable bounds.

It was many a day since the old Hedgehog Inn had had four such customers beneath its roof at the same time.

Tom King closed the door, and then the four friends seated themselves as close as they could to the window, and conversed with each other in a rapid and low tone of voice.

"Now, Turpin," Tom said, "let us know without any more delay all that's happened to you since we parted last—I am burning with curiosity to know it. Afterwards, I will satisfy whatever curiosity you may feel, by narrating all that has befallen us."

"It will take some time," said Dick Turpin, "to acquaint you with every particular; but perhaps it will be the best and shortest way, and so I'll begin at the beginning."

Dick Turpin then proceeded to relate all those events so well known to the reader.

He began from the time when he had been left in the deserted mansion by his three comrades, when they set out on their expedition to the New Forest, and concluded by describing the means by which he had at length got rid of the troop of dragoons, that had kept with so much pertinacity upon his track.

Long before this narrative was at an end, however, breakfast was laid upon the table.

The four highwaymen did ample justice to the good cheer laid before them, and those apprehensions which they at first felt at entering a public-house again disappeared.

They believed that this, at least, would prove an exception to the rest.

Afterwards Tom King in his turn related the exploits of himself and comrades.

Claude and Jack took advantage of this interval to lie down on a large sofa that was in the room, and have a couple of hours' slumber.

At the end of that time they were awoke, and Dick Turpin and Tom King took their places.

While they slept, Claude bade Jack keep guard.

There seemed to be but little need for such a precaution as this.

Still, it was as well to be careful, for their enemies on so many occasions had made their appearance when least of all expected, that the highwaymen fully understood the necessity of being constantly on the alert.

When Tom King and Dick awoke, the short winter's day had almost gone.

The atmosphere looked thick and heavy, and there seemed every prospect of the night being dark and obscure.

It was indeed such a night as would be favourable to Knights of the Road when carrying on their exploits.

Another meal had been prepared for them by the landlord, to which they did even better justice than to the preceding one, and after the table had been cleared Dick Turpin said:

"Now that we are all aware of what has taken place, the next thing to be done is to consider over our future proceedings."

CHAPTER DXCV.

NOTWITHSTANDING SIXTEEN-STRING JACK'S PRECAUTION, THE DRAGOONS ARRIVE VERY SUDDENLY AT THE HEDGEHOG INN.

"Before we begin to interchange any confidence," remarked Claude Duval, "I think we had better seat ourselves as far away from the door as we possibly can; the landlord is amazingly civil, and consequently he may feel curious to find out all he can concerning us. I don't say he would stand at the door listening to us, but such a thing might be."

"Your caution is a good one," said Dick Turpin, "and in speaking to each other we will raise our voices no higher than we are positively compelled."

"So long as we can just catch the sense of what is uttered, that is all that is necessary."

"Of course it is!"

It happened that the window of the room was farthest from the door, and here the highwaymen seated themselves.

The position had advantages in other respects, inasmuch as they were enabled to command a view of the front of the inn.

Sixteen-String Jack looked out of the window, but owing to the immense quantity of trees that grew all

around, he was only able to see for a distance of a few yards.

"Before we begin to discuss our plans," he exclaimed, "I should like to consider our position a little. Doesn't it strike you that we should be in rather an awkward predicament if the dragoons were to ride up to the door?"

"We should; but I am in hopes they will not discover our retreat," replied Tom King.

"I know you are, but they might do so for all that!"

"I know the commanding officer is a resolute, determined man," said Dick Turpin, "and we ought not to omit any safeguard!"

"That was what I thought," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and the reason why I spoke. Now, if we sit here at this window, we can see out in the front of the inn, to be sure, but then I don't see what advantage that is; it would be a different thing if we could place ourselves at a window which commanded a view of the country."

"So it would," said Tom King, "but there's no window in this house from which a view can be obtained—it is so completely surrounded by high trees."

"Night is approaching," said Claude Duval, "and I must confess I don't like the idea of sitting here and not being able to discover the approach of our enemies until they are absolutely upon us."

"It would not be safe to leave," said Tom King. "It is too light."

"I think I can get you out of the difficulty," said Sixteen-String Jack, "if you will only be content to leave it to me."

"We will do so with every confidence," said Turpin.

"Well, then, I will go and make a little arrangement with the ostler that I feel sure will produce the most satisfactory result."

"Be careful!"

"Oh, never fear; I have had some experience with these gentlemen, and know just how to deal with them."

"You have managed very cleverly up to the present," said Dick, with a smile, "and I don't see why you should fail now!"

"I am not at all afraid of doing so," replied Jack. "for I have got a good scheme in my head."

"What is it?"

"Wait till I come back, and then I will tell you, for the sooner I put it into execution the better."

"Be off, then!"

Sixteen-String Jack left the room and immediately made his way to the stables.

First of all he took a good look at all the horses, and certainly what he saw was satisfactory in the highest degree.

All were well supplied with food, and looked already very much better for their brief rest.

Sixteen-String Jack expressed his approval in very warm terms, and then he added:

"I suppose you wouldn't mind performing a little extra service for me, if I paid you well for it?"

"Certainly not, sir!" replied the ostler, with a grin. "I shall be delighted to serve you in any way that lies in my power."

"I thought as much," said Jack. "I formed a favourable opinion of you as soon as I saw you this morning."

"Thank you, sir! What is it you might want me to do?"

"Something very important, and therefore I trust you will pay particular attention to my instructions."

"I will, sir; and though I don't like to boast of myself, yet I could promise you that your orders will be carried out entirely to your satisfaction."

"I have just the same opinion of you myself," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Now listen."

"I will."

"I suppose, then, that you have heard talk of Dick Turpin, and all his gang—have you?"

"Oh, yes; I rather believe you, I have! Stop a minute—I've got a paper up in the loft all about them!"

"Well, never mind—don't trouble yourself to fetch it!" said Jack, hastily, as the ostler was about to run off.

"Very well, sir!"

"I know all about that paper. You must know that not very long ago, I happened to be robbed by this Dick Turpin and his gang."

"Did you, sir, really?"

"Yes, I was all alone, and there were so many that I didn't dare make any resistance, so I gave up my money and thought myself lucky in getting off without injury."

The ostler nodded, and was deeply interested.

"However, I vowed to have revenge upon the rascal, and to try my utmost to capture him."

"Now did you though?"

"I did, and I spoke about it to three gentlemen friends of mine."

"Those that I saw arrive with you this morning?"

"The same. Out of their friendship for me they resolved not to spare their trouble, but to try their best to help me to capture the rascal."

"But what is it you want me to do, sir?"

"That's just what I'm coming to. You must understand that I have made some arrangements with a troop of dragoons and a troop of police officers."

"To help you in capturing them, I suppose?"

"Exactly. You have hit the right nail on the head, and you must know further that we had arranged to meet these police and dragoons at a place some distance from here; but during last night, happening to catch sight of the villains, we had a long chase after them, which knocked our horses up, and reduced them to the condition they were in this morning. We are so comfortable indoors, my friends and myself, that we should very much like to stop to the last moment, but we can't see far out of the window."

The ostler was at a loss to comprehend what obstacle their not being able to see out of the window should be to their stopping at the inn, so he stared at Jack with a puzzled, inquiring air.

"I would not miss this appointment for the world!" said Jack. "I don't know which will arrive first, the officers or the dragoons, and what I want you to do is simply this—to take up your position at some place where you are able to command a good view of the high-road."

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to stop and keep a capital look-out. The moment you see any police officers or any mounted soldiers approaching, lose not a moment in coming back to the inn and tell us of it, in order that we can mount our horses and meet them, so as to keep our appointment."

"I'll do it, sir—I'll do it with all the pleasure in life!"

"Perform your duty faithfully, and you shall be well rewarded, never fear!"

"Many thanks to you, sir, for you're a real gentleman and no mistake! I'll go up on to the top of the hill yonder, and as soon as I see any officers or soldiers coming, I will let you know, or I'll run and tell them you're here, if you like!"

"No, no!" said Sixteen-String Jack—"I don't want you to do that! We will ride to the appointed spot and meet them there."

"Very well, sir! You can depend upon me."

The ostler at once took his departure, and Sixteen-String Jack, believing he had arranged matters in a very satisfactory way, returned to the inn.

He was eagerly questioned by his comrades, who could not help laughing at the audacity of his scheme.

"Do you think you have thoroughly deceived him?" asked Dick. "If he happens to grow suspicious we shall be in an awkward fix."

"Not very, I think. But if you will take my advice, we will make all our arrangements as regards our future conduct between now and nightfall, and as soon as ever it is dark enough we will be off."

"That's precisely what I was going to propose," said Dick Turpin.

"And now, Dick," said Tom, "what is it you wish to do?"

Turpin was silent for a moment, and then he said:

"I have told you that Maud is confined in Newgate. While she is in one of those dismal cells I can know no rest. She must be set at liberty!"

"Well, Dick, let the risk be what it may, we will aid you in any scheme you like to propose. We are all ready and willing to lay down our lives, if that will save you."

"Many thanks, my friend! I don't wish to exact any such sacrifice from you; but at the same time I do desire that Maud should be set at liberty."

"And she shall be," said Claude Duval, "if we pull Newgate down stone by stone!"

"Dick Turpin was well pleased to hear his companions

talk thus, but the thought that at that very moment Maud was in a dungeon was perfect torture to him.

"But," said Tom King, "I don't think old Matthew's suggestions and advice should be altogether lost sight of."

"Nor I," said Dick, quickly.

"When did he tell you the sessions would begin?"

"On Wednesday."

"And to-day is Monday, so you see we have but little time before us. It will be Tuesday morning before we can reach London, and it will be Wednesday morning, at the very least, before the escape can be accomplished."

"If not achieved by that time," said Dick, "she will be placed at the bar at the Old Bailey to take her trial."

"And the probability is," said Claude Duval, emphatically, "that she will be acquitted."

The reader must understand that Dick Turpin had made his three companions fully acquainted with all that old Matthew had said to him.

They one and all grasped at the idea that the plan had been concocted and carried into effect by Mr. Wriggles, in the hope of being enabled to capture them easily by drawing them into a trap.

"Dick," said Tom, at length, "if you say the word, I am ready to set out this minute, and gallop straight to Newgate and try my best to get Maud out by main force; at the same time I must ask you to consider what I have to say."

"I will do so willingly."

"Then I, like old Matthew, think that it could make but little difference to Maud if she remains prisoner a day or two longer, and that it will be an immense advantage if she is acquitted of the crime imputed to her, because then she would be free from any further persecution."

"But," said Dick, "if she undergoes the ordeal of a public examination, do you think there is a probability of obtaining her discharge?"

"Certainly I do! What can be easier for us than to gallop to-night as far as Parson Martext's, and force him to write and sign a regular certificate of the marriage?"

"I am sure it could be done," said Claude and Jack

"I am inclined to think so too," responded Turpin.

"Then," added Tom King, "let that be our plan. If it fails no one will be the loser, because then we should stand just as good a chance of effecting a rescue as we do at the present time."

"Better!" observed Claude.

"And think," continued Tom King, "how bitter would be the disappointment of Mr. Wriggles should Maud happen to be acquitted, as I feel almost sure she will be! The scheme that he has elaborated with so much pains will be completely blown to the winds, and he will be filled with mortification and despair."

"I am content to act upon your advice," said Turpin, "and to do as you desire."

"Then," added Tom, "as it is a long way to Parson Martext's, and as it is already quite dark, I propose that we set out at once."

"Unfortunately we cannot just at present," said Sixteen-String Jack, "for the ostler is away."

"Oh, we can get over that difficulty. Let us call the landlord, pay our reckoning, and depart."

Just as these words were spoken, they heard footsteps outside.

It was already quite dark; still, by looking through the window, they managed to perceive the outline of a human form, which, in a moment afterwards, they recognised as being that of the ostler.

Jack jumped up and tapped at the window.

The ostler heard the sound and came towards it.

Turning the little button, Jack opened the casement, and before he could address a single question to the new comer, the ostler said:

"I have just seen 'em, although it is dark, and they are very close too!"

"Seen whom?" asked Sixteen-String Jack.

"Oh, a troop of—of—mounted sogers! They do look fine! I was obliged to stop watching 'em for a little time, they did look so unkimmon well!"

"They were riding along the road, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; and it seemed to me they were coming here—leastways, we shall know for certain whether they are not in a couple of minutes—for, as I said before they very close at hand."

"Make haste!" said Jack. "Saddle our horses with all speed! I don't want them to find us here! I would not miss the appointment at the proper place for the world! Run—and if you saddle the horses quickly you shall have a good reward!"

"I am off, gentlemen—I am off!" cried the ostler, and as he spoke the words he darted round to the back of the inn.

Considering it was high time to be gone, the highwaymen left the room in which they had been sitting, and slid out into the passage.

At the bar counter the landlord was standing, and here they stopped.

"We are obliged to leave rather abruptly," said Tom King, "and I am sorry to do it, for we have been made so very comfortable. However, if you will name your reckoning, we will pay you."

"Shall I order your horses to be got ready?"

"No, thank you—they are already saddled."

"You've seen the ostler, then?"

"Yes. Make haste—what's the amount of the bill?"

"Never mind the amount!" said Sixteen-String Jack, putting his hand in his pocket and taking out three guineas. "Here—this will cover the damage, I know!"

Just as he placed the coins on the bar counter, the dragoons drew up with a prodigious clatter at the front door of the inn.

CHAPTER DXOVI.

OLD MATTHEW RESOLVES TO COMMUNICATE TO MAUD THE RESULT OF HIS CONFERENCE WITH DICK TURPIN.

THE night was well-nigh spent by the time old Matthew reached his house in Drury Lane.

We have stated that he sat for some time in his little back parlour, chuckling to himself over the trick he had played the officers, and the state of exasperation he had got them into.

By degrees he calmed himself down, and as he was very tired, retired to rest, although some tinge of daylight could be seen over the contiguous house-tops.

In the morning he enjoyed another good laugh at the officers' expense, and thought what a delight he should feel if he could only communicate to somebody the particulars of all that had taken place.

Presently, however, his thoughts reverted to his old friend Dick Turpin, and then to Maud in Newgate.

"Poor thing!" he said. "I am very sorry for her, and yet she ought not to grumble, for as she made her own bed, so she must lie in it. I never could make out what Dick wanted to die himself to a woman for. He might have been sure some trouble would have come of it."

The entrance of an early customer at this juncture put an end to Matthew's further reflections.

"How dreadfully lonely and sad she must be, poor thing; I feel really sorry for her, and if I could do anything for her, I'm sure I would! Of course, she's not heard a word from a soul since she has been confined in prison, and she will begin to think she is deserted. What a consolation it would be, now, if I could manage to let her know the result of my conversation with her husband! It would lighten her heart of a heavy load, I feel quite sure of that; but the worst of it is, I can't see how it is to be managed—they won't allow me to pay her a visit, that's certain!"

Old Matthew rubbed his head—a common habit with him whenever he was perplexed about anything.

But it is hoped that by this time the reader is too well acquainted with the landlord's character to imagine that he would be baffled by such a circumstance as the present.

"I know very well," he resumed, "if she was only aware of what I could tell her she would put up with her fate, hard as it is, without a sigh; but if not a word is said to her, and if she finds she is allowed to be brought up for trial, I wonder what she will think of Dick and his comrades? No, no—it must not be; she must be communicated with somehow or other, that's quite clear!"

But if this was clear, the means by which she could be communicated with was not.

"It's a confounded nuisance to think that I should be so closely watched as I am—it's a thousand pities the officers have not something else to do! I know that so sure as I attempt to go out there will be a whole host of the rascals sneaking after my heels; but as it is quite certain

that they would not admit me into Newgate, I must try to think of some one else that they would!"

Many individuals suggested themselves to old Matthew, but a the name of each he shook his head, as though to say, "He won't do."

Suddenly, a bright thought entered his mind, and quite a change took place in his whole deportment.

"Of course," he cried, "that's the very ticket! I wonder, now, how I could have forgotten it; I might just as well have forgotten the nose on my face! Ah, well, it don't matter; I think I can see my way straightforward at last."

Old Matthew was but a indifferent writer; nevertheless, after speaking these words he went into his private room, and on a sheet of paper scrawled the following words:—

"My dear Nell,
"Come here at once—I want to see you.
"From MATTHEW."

This laconic epistle Matthew folded up, and superscribed it—

"Mr. Charles Clark,
"No. 4, Cain's Place,
"Camden Town.
"For Nell."

Of course this letter was intended for no other than the poor apprentice girl, Ellen, who had been so kindly taken under the protection of Tom Davis and his wife in the time of their prosperity, and who had since so well requited them for their kindness.

In order to avoid discovery, and in order to conceal his identity, Tom Davis had adopted the name of Charles Clark when he took up his residence at the address above given.

And now, had old Matthew lived in the present day, the difficulties attending upon the delivery of the letter would have vanished in a moment.

He would only have had to walk out and drop the missive in the first pillar letter-box he came to.

But in those days the delivery of letters was expensive and uncertain, even when the distance they had to go was short.

Besides, the people at the post-office might be communicated with by the police officers, or the secret discovered in some way; but most of all, old Matthew desired that not a moment should be lost in the delivery of the letter.

Therefore he was forced to cast about him for some means by which he could achieve this object.

There was a young woman who lived in the house, and who, in the landlord's absence, took charge of the bar, but she was as well known to the police officers as Matthew himself, and therefore it would be useless to have despatched her upon the errand.

Yet if he left his own house suspicion would be aroused,—he had latterly had convincing proof of it; and so, quite bewildered, he resolved to call this barmaid, on whom he knew he could rely, and ask her advice about the matter.

"Come here, Lizzie," he said, "and shut the door."

He was obeyed.

"I want this letter taken immediately to Camden Town. You must not go, but do you know anyone who could?"

"There's my sister, sir, that works for a spangle-maker in Bow Street,—she might be able, perhaps."

"Of course—commend me to a woman for finding a way out of a difficulty. You often go to see your sister, do you not?"

"When I can."

"Take this letter, then, but be sure when you give it her that no one observes you, and ask her to deliver it at once. In the meanwhile, you will come back. Here's a crown piece, which you can give to your sister for her trouble."

Lizzie departed, and returned in something less than a quarter of an hour.

Old Matthew could tell by the look of her face that she had succeeded in her attempt.

"Will she go?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Did you see anyone following you after you got out into the street?"

"Yes—one of the police officers."

"I expected as much. Did you see him when you came out of your sister's?"

"Yes; and he followed me back here again."

"All right! That will do. I won't forget you for this, Lizzie!"

Having succeeded to this extent, old Matthew waited with very great impatience for the arrival of Ellen.

Considering all circumstances, it was perhaps quite as well that darkness had set in before the young girl made her appearance.

She was so much altered that there was little fear the police officers would recognise her.

Old Matthew called her on one side, and explained what it was he wished her to do.

When Ellen learned that she would have an opportunity of rendering Turpin a service, she was anxious in the extreme to set about doing it at once.

Matthew took care to inform her of all the circumstances so far as he was acquainted with them, in order that when she gained access to Maud she might be able to answer any questions that might be put to her.

"In the first place," he said, "it will be necessary for you to obtain an order to visit the prisoner."

"How shall I obtain one?"

"I don't think you will have any trouble if you wait upon one of the magistrates and state that you are sister, or cousin, or something of that sort, to the prisoner."

"And when shall I get the order?"

"It will be useless for you to try until to-morrow morning, so what you must do now is to go straight back to Camden Town, and in the morning set out in good time, but, above all things, don't call here; and as soon as you have got the order, go straight on to Newgate."

"You may depend I will do everything you desire," said Ellen, gently. "When I show the order at the door of the prison, I suppose they will admit me?"

"They dare not refuse; and when you succeed in gaining admission to the prisoner, I shall leave it to your tact to manage the rest."

This understanding having been come to, Ellen withdrew, and old Matthew was obliged to wait with what patience he could to learn the success of his scheme.

In the meanwnile Ellen reached her residence without accident, and in the morning set out upon her highly-important errand.

She had more trouble in getting an order for admission to see Maud than old Matthew had led her to anticipate; but at length, chiefly owing to the sweetness and gentleness of her manner, she received the paper she desired.

Armed with this, she made all speed to Newgate.

The sight of the gloomy, dismal-looking prison sent a thrill of horror through her blood.

She knocked in a resolute manner, and when, in response, the turnkey removed the shutter that covered the iron grating in the centre of the door, she immediately displayed her order for admission.

The fastenings were then removed, and the ponderous door swung open.

"I must send this paper to the Governor," said the turnkey, gruffly, "and while that is being done, you can step into that chamber, where you will be searched by the prison matron."

Ellen knew that she had this ordeal to go through, but cared nothing at all about it, for it was no part of her purpose to convey any forbidden article to the prisoner.

Mr. Cawthorn looked at the order with a suspicious eye.

It must be borne in mind that he knew perfectly well who Maud was, and, more than that, Mr. Wriggles had taken him entirely into his confidence.

He was told that the order had been brought by a female, and, remembering how on a former occasion he had detected Tom King in his disguise, the Governor with great importance, made his way to the vestibule.

One glance, however, at the feminine form and features of Ellen was enough to convince anyone of her true sex, so that whatever hopes the Governor might have had in this quarter were disappointed.

"Want to see the prisoner, do you?" he said, clasping his hands behind his back, and swaying backwards and forwards upon his toes and heels, as was his wont. "Pray, what's your business with her?"



[DICK TURPIN PERSUADING PARSON MARTEXT TO SIGN THE CERTIFICATE.]

"I do want to see the prisoner," said Ellen in reply, taking no notice of the last part of the Governor's speech. "When the magistrate gave me the order, he said that I might do so."

"Oh! very well—very well! Of course I know all about that. Mrs. Snoffle!"

"Yes, sir."

Mrs. Snoffle was the matron who attended to the female prisoners.

"Have you searched this young woman?" asked Mr. Cawthorn

"Humbly, yes, sir, I has."

"Anything suspicious?"

"No, nothink at all."

"Ahem! Mrs. Snoffle!"

"Sir?"

"You're sure it's a female?"

"Oh, sir!"

"I mean, Mrs. Snoffle, you're sure it isn't a man i disguise?"

"Oh, sir, how could you suppose such a thing, and I'v been shut up in the searching-room with her? Oh n Mr. Cawthorn—I am sure she's a female!"

Mrs. Snoffle simpered and giggled, and tried to mak herself as amiable as she could, for be it known that th lady in question entertained matrimonial designs again the Governor.

Mr. Cawthorn knew he could rely upon the truth what the matron said, and finding he was altogether upo a wrong scent on this occasion, he did not attempt raise any more obstacles to the visit.

"Winch," he exclaimed, "get the key of No. 15, an follow me!"

Winch obeyed, and under the escort of the turnkey an the Governor, Ellen was led through the gloomy corrido and down the steep stone staircases to Maud's cell.

The door was at length thrown open, and the Governor, stepping down into the cell, held out his hand to assist Ellen to follow him.

But disdaining to make use of it, she sprang down lightly and easily.

Coming out of the light into the darkness of the cell, she was at first unable to see around her with proper distinctness, for, in order to be revenged upon Dick, Mr. Cawthorn had chosen one of the darkest and most dismal dungeons in the whole prison for the reception of his wife.

Oh, if Turpin had only known the nature of the place in which Maud was confined, no entreaties—no considerations of safety would have induced him to lose a moment in making a frantic effort to set her at liberty!

For his own safety, for the safety of his three comrades, and for the welfare of Maud herself, it was a fortunate thing that he did not possess this knowledge.

A faint ejaculation that came from Maud's lips struck upon Ellen's ears as soon as she entered.

Hastening forward, she, in another moment and not without a strange sensation in her breast, found herself face to face with Dick Turpin's wife.

Mr. Cawthorn stood close by, with the intention of being an attentive auditor of all that was said by the visitor to the prisoner.

CHAPTER DXCVII.

MR. CAWTHORN FINDS ELLEN QUITE A MATCH FOR HIM.

Maud had suffered much during her sojourn in the prison of Newgate, and traces of all that she had gone through were legibly impressed upon her countenance.

She was borne down by an accumulation of distressful thoughts and feelings.

First, there was Dick himself, about whose safety she felt the greatest alarm.

Then there was her own unpleasant and degrading position, for such a one as Maud could not help feeling her humiliation keenly.

Deprived of light—of wholesome food and drink, and distracted by terrible reflections, she was worn almost to a shadow.

Sleep, too, was almost a stranger to her eyelids, for in that noisome place slumber seemed impossible.

Then, at intervals she was subjected to the jeers of the Governor and the turnkeys, the former of whom flattered himself that by treating Maud in this manner he was having some kind of a revenge upon his old foe, Dick Turpin.

His conduct was just what might have been expected from anyone having so mean and base a spirit as he possessed.

The time passed most wearily to her, and yet her sense of listening was ever on the stretch, for she dreaded continually to hear that Turpin had been made prisoner.

That he would endeavour to rescue her she felt assured, and trembled with horror at the bare thought, for she believed that any such attempt would only result in his own destruction.

When she heard the fastenings of her door removed, in order to admit Ellen, her heart beat so painfully that she could scarcely draw her breath.

She knew that it was an unusual hour for a visit to be paid to her by the officials of the prison, and therefore something of an extraordinary character had occured.

Her worst forebodings she imagined were about to be realised.

What was her surprise and satisfaction, then, to find, instead, that it was some one whose face beamed with kindliness and sympathy towards her who had entered.

She did not recognise her face; indeed, Maud had only heard of Ellen, not seen her.

But she was a friend—she was quite sure of that, and so miserable in her solitude as she had been, she felt that she could have clasped this stranger to her breast.

Ellen was scarcely less affected at the meeting, though from different reasons.

The gratitude which such a nature as hers was sure to feel for the benefit Turpin had rendered her had by degrees warmed into a deeper feeling, and it was not until she had learned the bold highwayman was married that she realised she loved him.

It was, therefore, only natural that she should be overpowered with emotion at the meeting.

Mr. Cawthorn stood unpleasantly close, screwing up one eye and looking inquisitively and mockingly into their faces, while he swayed himself slowly backwards and forwards.

Ellen did not know how to commence the conversation.

Had they been alone, she would have experienced some difficulty; but the unexpected presence of the Governor seemed to seal her lips.

Maud was burning with anxiety to ask after her husband's welfare, yet she feared to utter his name.

She only gazed speechlessly and inquiringly into Ellen's eyes.

"Half an hour is the time allowed for a visit," said Mr. Cawthorn, "so I advise you to make the most of the minutes that remain. What odd women you are! Why don't you talk to one another?"

"I did not know," said Ellen, "that anyone would be present during our interview."

"Oh, didn't you indeed, my chuck? Well, perhaps you might have been left alone, only I didn't consider it advisable, and in this place I rather reign supreme, you know, and do what I like."

"Would you not grant me the favour," asked Ellen, with beseeching earnestness, "to leave the cell while we interchange a few remarks?"

"It breaks my heart to refuse you—it does indeed!"

The Governor uttered the words in a laughing, bantering tone.

"You will have to say everything before me!" he at length exclaimed, getting irritated at their continued silence; "so I should advise you to begin at once. There's a quarter of an hour gone already."

"It's something for her ear alone that I have to say," replied Ellen.

"I quite expected so," rejoined the Governor, with a complacent smile at his own cleverness. "You might just as well speak as keep silent—I know very well what the subject of your speech will be."

Ellen looked at him half terrified.

"You want to concert some nice little plan of escape with the prisoner—to tell her what to do at a certain time, and such like; but you won't manage it while I am Governor of Newgate. I have had one daring escape, but I mean to guard against another."

From the manner in which the Governor spoke, it was quite clear that he fully meant every word he said.

Ellen's embarrassment increased.

"At all risks," exclaimed Maud, unable to bear the suspense any longer—"at all risks, although he may overhear your communication, tell me what you have come here to say!"

Ellen looked much distressed, and hesitated to reply as she had been bidden.

Maud repeated her entreaty with more vehemence than before, so that Ellen was constrained to say:

"The chief thing I have to tell you is that all you know and hold dear are quite well and in perfect safety at the present moment. You will be brought to trial on the charge that has been brought against you; but such evidence will be produced as will lead to your acquittal. You will then be set at liberty."

"Is that indeed the case?" asked Maud, clasping her hands together. "You are not deceiving me?—you are sure of what you say?"

"I am sure that I repeat that which has been told to me."

"Oh, it's quite correct, I should say," said Mr. Cawthorn, with a sneer; "I should think that's how it would end myself."

Of this speech neither took any notice.

"I am in a position," continued Ellen, "to answer almost any question that you like to ask me; but you must be on your guard, for you might let fall a word which would get your friends into serious trouble."

"Quite a young lawyer, I declare!" said the Governor, attempting to chuck Ellen under the chin.

This familiarity she had the spirit to resist by giving him such a slap on the cheek with her open hand, that it made it tingle again.

"You d—d little vixen!" he exclaimed, rubbing the part ruefully. "Do you know what you're about? I will

have you locked up on the charge of being an accomplice!"

"You dare not!" said Ellen, resolutely, though while she spoke the words her heart quaked, for she had no means of knowing how far the Governor's power might extend.

Maud pondered over the last words spoken by her visitor, and finally asked:

"Are you sure that my husband is well and in safety?"

"Quite sure."

"Do you speak from your own knowledge? Have you seen him recently?"

"No, but the person who gave me the information is one upon whose word I am sure you would rely."

"And it was this person who sent the message?"

"Yes, and it is to the effect that you are to summon up all the fortitude and courage you possess, in order to undergo the ordeal of a public trial. The result is almost certain—you will be set at liberty."

"I shall, if my marriage can be proved," said Maud. "Will the proof be forthcoming?"

"That I have not been told," was the reply, "but I should not hesitate to say yes, because I was so expressly told that the trial would result in your discharge."

"Then I will forbear to ask any more questions, or inquire further into particulars," said Maud, stifling a sob.

It was hard indeed to think that a friend should stand before her who by her disclosures would probably be able to lift a great weight from her heart, or at any rate would be able to soothe the anguish which she suffered.

It was very hard that, in consequence of the presence of the Governor, she did not dare ask her to make a full disclosure of all the facts she knew.

"I have told you the main part of the message," continued Ellen, anxious to cheer the fair prisoner's drooping spirits. "I have only to add that you are earnestly desired to keep up your spirits as well as you are able, and then all will be well."

"And my trial?" asked Maud, "when will that take place?—will it be soon?"

"I think three days at the most."

"That intelligence is indeed welcome, for if I knew I had to stay much longer in this horrible place I should die?"

"No you wouldn't," said Mr. Cawthorn, once more joining in the conversation. "Prisoners don't die quite so easy. It would be a good job if they did, and then the country would be saved some expense."

Of this speech, like the last, no notice was taken by the persons to whom it was addressed.

This enraged the Governor more than words can describe.

"A thousand thanks," said Maud, once more taking Ellen's hands within her own—"a thousand thanks for your kindness in coming here, and for bringing me such joyful information. Before you go, tell me who you are?"

"I dare not do that at present," said Ellen. "I have been expressly cautioned against it—you must wait until after your liberation."

"I will—I will," said Maud, with the tears trickling down her cheeks. "Oh, how I wish that the day of my trial would arrive!"

"It will soon be here," said Ellen, and you must bear in mind that the time which has to elapse between now and then will be a busy one for your friends, who are obtaining the necessary evidence."

"I can already fancy myself at liberty," said Maud. "Now that I have only three more weary nights to pass, I feel content."

"Time's up now, you vicious jade!" interrupted the Governor once more. "Troop off, and think yourself lucky that you have not got into trouble! It's all owing to my kindness; if I liked, I could have locked you up!"

Maud was greatly alarmed at this threat, and was about to intercede, but Ellen prevented her.

"You have no power to touch me!" she said, boldly. "I came here under the protection of an order from a magistrate!"

"I know you did; and if you had not brought that piece of paper with you, the present interview would not have taken place. But, come, the half-hour has expired. Be off!—leave the cell! If you don't do so of your own accord, I shall use force!"

"I am going," cried Ellen. "Pray don't touch me!"

"Once more, a thousand thanks!" said Maud, still weeping. "I shall never forget you for this kindness. When you return, tell them that I am happy, and that I am waiting with resignation for my hour of trial to come!"

The two girls embraced each other, and then, rather than suffer the Governor to lay a finger upon her, Ellen darted quickly through the door of the cell, which had been opened by the turnkey.

The Governor noticed her aversion, and most fervently wished he was able to punish her in some way, but he was absolutely powerless.

The door of the cell was closed, and the fastenings put up, and then the little party returned to the vestibule.

The Governor resolved to make one more trial before Ellen left, and so, just as the man on the lock was about to open the door and allow her to go forth, Mr. Cawthorn made a sudden sign, and said:

"Wait a minute, my charmer—not so fast! You can't leave here until you tell me who you are! I insist upon it! Here is the book; you must write your name and address in it!"

Ellen trembled when she heard these words, for she knew not how to get out of the difficulty.

The Governor noticed her agitation, and rejoiced.

"Come along," he said, attempting to take hold of her arm. "No resistance—no foolery! Write your name down in plain black and white, and also where you live!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" Ellen managed to say at length.

"Oh, won't you! Then we will try if you can be made! You have your choice—you can either give me the information I want, or remain and be locked up a prisoner!"

"Then I will remain!" said Ellen.

This decision took Mr. Cawthorn by surprise.

He made sure that, in her terror, she would have disclosed who she was.

Resolved not to abandon the attempt until he had made one more effort, he said:

"Then, if you are so obstinate, you must consider yourself in custody. Winch, lock her up in one of the cells!"

Winch came towards Ellen at once with a large bunch of keys in his hand.

The poor girl trembled, and was so frightened that she was afraid she would fall into a swoon.

At last, by a powerful effort, she managed to ask:

"Upon what charge am I made prisoner? By what right do you lock me up?"

"It will be sufficient for me if I choose to do so," replied the Governor, "but, if it will be any satisfaction, I'll tell you."

"Why?"

"I have very good grounds for suspecting you to be an accomplice of Dick Turpin's, and, if such is my belief, I can keep you locked up."

"Then do so!" said Ellen, firmly. "I will rather die than give you the information you require!"

Mr. Cawthorn was surprised at the boldness of her behaviour, but thought that her courage in a short time would evaporate.

So he carried his threat into execution, and Ellen was locked up in a cell.

She suffered extreme terror during her incarceration, and, after the lapse of about a couple of hours—which seemed to her like a whole day—the fastenings of the cell door were removed.

The Governor appeared upon the threshold, and he said:

"I have come to ask you for the last time whether you will tell me who you are? If you refuse, I shall make the charge against you, and then you will be examined before the magistrate!"

"I will not tell you!" said Ellen. "You can do your worst!"

The Governor bit his lip.

It was more than he dared do to keep Ellen a prisoner, and he knew it, notwithstanding all he had said to the contrary.

"Well," he exclaimed, "you need not make such a fuss about it—it's only a matter of form; if you won't tell me you won't! You can depart."

Ellen had not expected to hear anything half so pleasant

come from the Governor's lips, and at first she could scarcely believe that her ears had not deceived her.

"Come—be off," he said, "and don't stop here!"

Trembling all over like a leaf, the poor girl left the cell, and without further opposition offered to her she reached the street.

As soon as ever she was down the steps, Mr. Cawthorn beckoned a man to his side.

He was a shabby, repulsive-looking fellow, who performed various odd duties about the prison, such as assisting the turnkeys in the most disagreeable part of the work, and running out to fetch whatever they required.

"You saw that girl, Tates," cried the Governor, "that left me just this minute?"

"Yes, Mr. Cawthorn—I had a good long look at her."

"Then be off, follow closely in her footsteps, watch where she goes, and when you have housed her let me know; but, above all things, don't let her suspect that you are dogging her footsteps."

"All right, Mr. Cawthorn, sir! You leave it to me; I rather think I can manage a job of this sort as well as here and there one!"

CHAPTER DXCVIII.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS THREE COMPANIONS AT LENGTH ARRIVE AT PARSON MARTEXT'S.

THE landlord of the Hedgehog Inn was really and truly astonished to behold the suddenness with which the four highwaymen rushed down the passage and out of the back door into the yard after they had placed the money on the bar counter.

He was also surprised to hear the trampling of so many horses' feet outside.

Leaving him, however, to recover himself in the best way he could, we will follow the four highwaymen.

To close the back door of the inn after them, and to rush across the yard took them less that a moment.

Upon entering the stable, they saw that the ostler had made good use of his time, and that all four horses were almost ready for the road.

He was a little bewildered when they all rushed in pell-mell, and began fixing the trappings as if for their lives.

Almost before the girths were properly buckled and the bits fairly in the horses' mouths, they led them into the yard and mounted.

"Here, my fine fellow," said Sixteen-String Jack, "this will reward you for the trouble you have had! I suppose there's no way out of this yard except the gateway? Good-bye to you!"

While he spoke, Jack threw the ostler a guinea, fixed his feet in the stirrups, gathered the reins in his hand, and turned his horse's head towards the gateway.

"One quick rush through the gateway will do it!" said Dick Turpin. "They will be taken by surprise by the suddenness of our flight! Off, and away!"

The highwaymen urged their horses onwards by every means in their power.

As all four steeds had had plenty to eat and drink during the day, they rushed onwards with the utmost impetuosity.

They were through the gateway, and across the road, and over a meadow in the twinkling of an eye.

They met with not the slightest resistance, for the dragoons were all clustered round the front door of the inn.

The sudden rush caused them all to turn round, and when they caught a glimpse of the fugitives going at such a terrific speed, they burst out into frantic ejaculations of rage, and spurred their horses barbarously.

A hot pursuit was instantly instituted, and before they had gone half a mile, the highwaymen found that the dragoons were very close indeed upon their heels.

"It is fortunate our horses are so well rested," cried Dick Turpin. "On, my comrades—on! We must not be captured now!"

"Who talks of capture?" said Tom King. "All follow where I lead, and all will be well!"

The confident tone in which he pronounced these words was not without an effect upon his comrades.

When in a few minutes they turned their heads to look back, they found that they had gained materially upon the dragoons.

Tom King's knowledge of that part of the country was of immense benefit.

Although he took his course in an almost straight line across the face of the country, yet he managed to avoid any obstacles of a more formidable character than a hedge and a ditch.

"We have the necessity to take a long ride to-night," cried Dick Turpin, addressing his comrades, "and as the dragoons are inclined for a gallop, they may as well have it! Long before we reach our destination, I expect they will get tired, and give up the chase in despair."

Tom King did not reply, but reserved his breath.

In his own mind, he was wishing that they might be fortunate enough to avoid coming into collision with any other troop.

Should this unfortunately occur, their position would grow ticklish, as their horses would be tired, while those of their pursuers would be fresh.

He did not think it worth while to communicate these fears to his companions, but bending the whole of his attention instead to looking before him and choosing the road which he thought would take them clear of their enemies.

The speed which the horses maintained was terrific.

This was not so surprising, because they had every advantage.

The soft turf, over which, for the most part, they took their way, suited much better than the hard high-road possibly could have done, and they were able to avoid any sudden curves and turns.

The general tendency of the ground, too, was downward—another highly favourable event.

The excellent mettle displayed by their steeds, the rapidity of the motion, and the desire they felt to reach the vicinity of Enfield Chase without delay, made all four highwaymen feel in capital spirits.

The troop of dragoons, which had driven them from the inn rather more precipitately than they intended to have left it, were by this time so far behind that they had little apprehensions concerning them.

"On—on, my friends!" shouted Turpin, patting Black Bless upon the neck the while. "We are going two feet to their one; and if we persevere, they will soon be out of sight altogether!"

This prediction was verified in much less time than either Dick or his companions expected.

When they looked back again the dragoons were out of sight.

"I suppose they have abandoned the chase," said Claude Duval, "as they found that we are so much better mounted than they are! But we must keep on while the ground is good, for it's many a mile yet to Enfield!"

"You're right there!" said Tom King. "But now that our horses have been so well fed and dressed, I make no doubt they will accomplish the journey some time before midnight."

No more was said, for it was difficult to keep up a conversation while they were galloping at such a tremendous speed.

"There's a piece of water about a mile and a half in a straight line from where we now are," said Tom King, some minutes afterwards. "What do you say—are you for swimming across it, or will you go round?"

"We can afford to slacken speed to deliberate upon that point, I think," said Dick Turpin, setting the example of drawing rein.

They did not stop, but only went at a gentler pace than before, which allowed their horses to recover their wind, while at the same time made conversation easier.

"Is the water deep?" asked Claude Duval

"It must be in the centre."

"And what's the distance across?"

"More than a quarter of a mile."

"The horses would swim, no doubt," said Dick Turpin "But as we have got so far, and left our pursuers in the rear, I don't think there is any necessity for wetting ourselves to the skin, as we should have to do."

"As you like," said Tom King "As we are not hard

pressed, the fact of it being a mile or two further round will not much matter."

"But it will!" shouted Sixteen-String Jack suddenly. "Look there—is that magic?'

The three highwaymen, hearing these words, immediately turned their heads and saw, within a very short distance of them indeed, a troop of dragoons very similar to those that had been pursuing them.

"That is not the same troop," said Dick; 'but they see us evidently. We must cross the water after all."

Once more the horses were urged onwards by the highwaymen, for this second troop of dragoons was too close behind to be at all pleasant.

A few minutes brought them to the margin of a large sheet of water, which was as smooth and unruffled as a mill-pond.

The horses entered the water without hesitation, and as soon as they had sufficient depth to swim, the highwaymen slipped from their saddles and swam also, by which means they relieved their horses of much fatigue.

Of course they made for the nearest point on the opposite shore.

Upon coming suddenly upon the edge of the lake, the dragoons drew up with great abruptness

Some kind of council then took place—doubtless it was as to whether they should take to the water or not.

At last they were determined to do so, but by the time they were fairly immersed, the highwaymen were shaking the water from their apparel on the opposite bank.

So far from being in the least degree exhausted by the exertion of swimming, their horses were, on the contrary, greatly refreshed, and when their riders regained the saddles, they were astonished to feel with what readiness they obeyed the spur.

How long it took the dragoons to swim across the pond, or whether they ever got across at all, our friends never knew.

Certain it is that they were troubled no more with them during their ride.

As they came nearer and nearer to their destination, Dick Turpin took the lead.

Finding after a while that no pursuers were either in sight or hearing, he proposed that they should stop for a moment at the next roadside inn they came to.

This was agreed to unanimously, though they resolved not to dismount.

It was shortly after this that they pulled up before one of those inns which are scattered all over England.

They called, in a loud tone, for the ostler, and had their horses supplied with a little hay and water.

The highwaymen also took a reviver after their cold bath in the shape of brandy.

This stoppage altogether did not consume more than five minutes, and at the end of that time they were again on the road to Parson Martext's.

"I've not the least idea where this parson lives," said Dick Turpin, "so I shall have to place myself once more under your guidance. You recollect, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, quite well, although I've only paid the place that one visit during the whole course of my life. I don't even know the name of the village."

"That doesn't matter a jot, so long as you can find where the parson lives!"

"Have you determined upon your proceedings?"

"I have in the main, but I have not gone into details, nor would it be worth while until we see the place."

"It would be easier then, of course."

"Can you guess how much longer we shall be?"

"An hour, at the very least."

"Then it will be hard upon midnight before we arrive."

Although the highwaymen went at a gallop, yet they did not push their horses so as to distress them, though they got over the ground in amazing style.

Without the occurrence of any other incident, they managed to reach the little village near to which Mr. Martext dwelt.

The old square tower of the church was quite a prominent object, so it was quite easy to make direct towards it.

In order to avoid creating any alarm, they reduced their horses' pace to a walk.

In this manner they approached the vicarage as close as they could, and then dismounted.

"Who will keep charge of the horses?" asked Dick. "Some one must remain here with them. It will not do for them to be left."

"Certainly not!" said Sixteen-String Jack. "I will stop if you like."

"Pray do! I shall esteem it a great favour."

As Sixteen-String Jack was left in charge of the four horses, the highwaymen did not feel the slightest concern with respect to them.

Their minds were left quite free to accomplish the purpose they had in view.

By taking care to keep in the shadow of various objects, they managed to get quite close to the walls of the parson's house without being discovered by anyone.

The precautions they took did indeed seem rather excessive, for there was only one window in the dwelling from which a light proceeded.

"Now, Dick," said Tom King, "we are here at last, and I am exceedingly anxious to know how you are going to proceed."

"I shall ask your advice upon that point," replied Dick, "and be greatly guided by what you say, simply because you know the place better than I do."

"The amount of our knowledge only extends to the exterior of the premises, and I suppose, for you to gain your object, it will be necessary for you to go inside."

"Certainly."

"Then, with respect to that, we know no more than yourself."

Dick Turpin looked up at the white stone edifice, and then said:

"I fancy that light must proceed from some room where the parson is sitting. What do you think?"

"It is very likely."

"Well, then, what we must do is to get inside of the house unperceived, and without creating the least alarm, and after we have done that, we must make our way to the room where he sits."

"Just so," said Claude Duval, "and then he will have the choice offered him of having his brains blown out, or writing the paper you require!"

"And, judging by what I know of the man," added Tom King, "I can form a pretty good idea of which evil of the two he will prefer."

"I think our first step should be to ascertain for certain whether he is really an inmate of yonder room," said Dick Turpin.

"It would be best if we could manage it, but the curtains seem to be drawn across very closely. I wonder what he is at?"

"I will endeavour to find out," said Dick Turpin. "Remain here a moment, and I will creep forward."

Tom King and Claude obeyed, and Dick crept silently along the outside of the house towards the window from which the light proceeded.

It was but a dull, faint gleam, in consequence of the light having to shine through some rather thick substance that was drawn before the window.

Upon reaching it, Dick Turpin made several attempts to get a peep at the interior.

But he failed, in consequence of the curtains being closely drawn.

At the upper part of the window, however, they were separated an inch or two, and if he could only climb so high, there would be a chance of taking a peep in.

He had to be extremely careful in all his movements, lest some slight sound should attract the attention of the person within, and so cause an alarm to be raised.

With great care and silence, Dick got up on the window-sill, and then, by standing on tiptoe, he was able to reach the required height.

The first glance he obtained showed he was quite right as regards his conjecture.

Parson Martext was the inmate of the apartment, but he was not sitting down at the table, busily engaged either in perusing some work on divinity or preparing his next Sunday's sermon.

On the contrary, he was standing close to the book case that faced the window.

In his hands he held a very large decanter, the mouth of which was placed to his lips.

Turpin watched this drinking operation for a minute or two, and then, springing lightly from the win-

dow-sill into the garden, hastened to join his two comrades, who were standing together at a little distance.

CHAPTER DXCIX.

DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN OBTAINING THE CERTIFICATE OF HIS MARRIAGE FROM PARSON MARTEXT.

"Is he there?" asked Tom King.

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Well, yes, I suppose he is, for when I looked he was paying his respects to a bottle of something that I'll be sworn tastes better than water."

Tom King and Claude laughed, but Dick, becoming serious, said:

"Let us get this business over without delay; besides, Sixteen-String Jack will grow impatient."

How they were to enter the parson's house without being seen or heard seemed a mystery.

The first step they took towards the accomplishment of their design was to walk round the house, and try the various windows in succession.

At last they were so lucky as to find one which, though it had been fastened, yet in so negligent a manner that they were able to push the casement open without making the least noise.

To step over the window-sill into the room was easy enough.

All three stood close together for a few seconds, in order that their eyes might get accustomed to the darkness.

By doing this, they were enabled to perceive the door, towards which they stole on tiptoe.

They were lucky enough to avoid coming into contact with any articles of furniture.

The door was closed, but the latch was on the inside, so that they were able to lift it noiselessly.

They opened the door only a little way at first, when, finding that the darkness on the other side was profound, they ventured to cross the threshold.

They then found themselves in the entrance-hall, not far from the bottom of a flight of stairs.

Before entering, the highwaymen had taken particular notice of the position of the window from which the light came, and the one through which they had entered.

By this means, Turpin was able to decide with tolerable certainty as to the precise door that would lead into the apartment occupied by the parson.

As a mistake might be productive of serious consequences, he was exceedingly careful, but finally he made his choice.

"I will enter alone," he whispered, faintly. "If he sees all three of us, he may become outrageous. If I cannot succeed without your assistance, however, I will call you."

This being agreed upon, Turpin opened the door with great suddenness, and glided into the room.

His companions closed the door after him, so that, should the parson utter any sound, it would not penetrate into the building.

Whether Parson Martext had not stopped drinking since Turpin looked in at the window and saw him so engaged, or whether he had just got up again to have another refresher, is hard to say.

Certain it is that the decanter was again at his lips.

With three strides Dick crossed the apartment, and then, in a suppressed but emphatic tone, he said:

"Silence, on your life! If you utter a sound, you are a dead man!"

The sudden change which came over the parson's face upon hearing these words, and upon finding himself suddenly confronted by Turpin, when he firmly believed he was alone, was really most ludicrous to witness.

His fingers relaxed their hold upon the decanter, and the fragile vessel would certainly have reached the ground with a terrific crash, had not Turpin had the presence of mind and the promptitude of action to dart forward and catch it as it fell.

The parson opened and shut his mouth a great many times in succession, like some huge fish gasping desperately for breath.

But he uttered no sound.

"Silence!" cried Dick again, as he placed the decanter on the ledge in front of the book-case and presented a pistol to the parson's head. "This is loaded to the muzzle, and, if you utter a sound above a whisper, I will scatter your brains on the floor!"

The parson had by no means got over the terror which the sudden appearance of Turpin had caused, and this last horrible threat, uttered as it was in a most deliberate and cold-blooded tone, made him still more alarmed.

His legs shook about under him as though they were hung on wires, and he appeared to be in imminent danger of falling to the ground.

"Sit down!" said Turpin, pointing to the arm-chair—"sit down this instant!—refuse at your peril!"

Mr. Martext made many efforts to gasp out a reply, but failed entirely.

By clutching hold of the table with his hands, he managed to reach the chair, into which he sank as though suddenly deprived of life.

Content with the success he had already met with, Turpin lowered his pistol.

This caused the parson to revive, and, being fearful that he would utter a cry, Turpin hastily raised it again, and renewed his threats.

"Now," he added, "do not give way so much to alarm. I don't intend to inflict any injury upon you. On the contrary, I want you to do me a service. Do you understand fully what I am saying?"

The parson's teeth chattered together like castanets, and he nodded his head and kept time to them.

Turpin took this for an affirmative sign, and continued:

"The service I want you to perform will do you no particular harm, but will render me a very great deal of good; and I come to offer you the alternative of doing just what I desire, or sitting there and having your brains blown out!"

Evidently the parson prized his brains as being a very valuable article, for the least mention of doing them any injury put him in a terrible fright.

He nodded his head, and chattered his teeth more violently than before.

While he was in this abject state of fear, he would hardly be able to do what was required, so Turpin endeavoured to reassure him.

This, however, was by no means an easy task.

"Mr. Martext," said Dick, in a gentler voice, "I have been obliged to present myself before you in a very rough way, which I can't help. Don't think for a moment that I wish to do you an injury,—I have too much respect for you! You are quite safe, and in no danger, provided you are silent and comply with my demand."

"Who are you?—what do you want?" the parson at last managed to get out.

"That you shall know in good time. I want first of all to be sure that you perfectly understand what I am saying."

"I do—I do!"

"Very well then. Perhaps you may remember my face, for you have seen me before. Do you recognise me?"

Mr. Martext slowly shook his head.

"You don't?"

"No."

"Then your memory is defective. I must remind you of something. Do you remember performing the marriage ceremony once in Enfield Chase?"

This was anything but an agreeable reminiscence. A greenish tinge seemed to creep over the parson's yellow, wrinkled countenance.

He trembled excessively, and leaned back in his chair as though he was about to faint.

"Beware!" said Turpin. "Do you, or do you not, remember the circumstance I have just mentioned? Answer me at once!"

"I—I—I do."

"Well, then, answer me this truthfully. Do you consider that marriage, as performed by you, lawful and binding?"

This was a question that the parson did not relish.

He remained silent.

Dick repeated his question, but this time in a fiercer tone of voice.

"I would rather not give my opinion upon the point," Mr. Martext at length said.

"But I insist upon it!" said Turpin. "And if you don't answer me, say the shortest prayer you know—you will be a dead man!"

"My opinion is not worth much when it is given," he said, rather more quickly.

"I am the best judge of that!" rejoined Turpin. "Is it lawful and binding, or not?"

"I am obliged to confess that it is."

"And a very good confession it is, too, [illegible] you may not think it."

"I should be ruined," exclaimed the parson, "if it once got to the ears of the bishop that I had performed the marriage in such an irregular way!"

"But I will take care he knows nothing about it!" said Turpin. "I am very glad you have made the admission you have, because now you can have no reason for refusing to comply with my request."

The parson looked uneasy.

"You say the ceremony was irregular," said Turpin, "and so does the lady. You omitted to furnish us with any certificate, and now I require one."

The look of uneasiness on the parson's countenance changed to one of the blackest horror.

Turpin noticed the change, but went on nevertheless.

"Now, Mr. Martext, I give you your choice of two evils. Here is a loaded pistol before you! On the table is paper and writing materials! Write out this moment the certificate of the marriage you performed in Enfield Chase—or, if you refuse, I will blow your brains out, so sure as you are a living, breathing man at this instant!"

"But what you ask me to do is neither more nor less than perfect ruin to myself!" moaned Mr. Martext.

"Nonsense! You will never get into any trouble about it! Write the certificate!"

"I can't—I can't write a certificate so long after the ceremony! It ought to have been done at the time."

"Beware!" said Dick. "I will not be trifled with! You know the consequences of a refusal! Comply, or make up your mind to immediate death!"

The parson looked into the highwayman's countenance, and noticed its fixed and resolute expression.

The decisive way in which the last words had been uttered could not be overlooked.

Then his eyes rested upon the dreadful pistol.

He imagined he could see into the barrel of it.

Literally, death was staring him in the face.

"To save my life," he groaned at last, "I would do anything! I will write the paper you want!"

"You have come to a wise determination," responded Dick. "Beware how you attempt to deceive me, for so sure as you do, your fate shall be such that all men will shudder when they hear it mentioned!"

Mr. Martext broke out into a cold sweat, and made several ineffectual efforts to pick a quill pen up from the table.

For a long time his hand trembled so excessively that he could not.

Succeeding at last, he took it up, and Dick spread out a large sheet of paper before him.

"Now," he said, "write on this the particulars I require."

"It will be no good if I do," was the reply; "we must have the proper book."

"Where is it?"

"At the church."

"Come, then, we must go there and fetch it!"

"It is impossible—the sexton has the keys!"

"Well, then, write upon that piece of blank paper what I require; it will answer my purpose, I have no doubt! What I want you to express is, that you performed the marriage ceremony according to proper form, and that the parties are really and truly man and wife; and that paper you must sign!"

The parson finally, though not until he had been threatened with the pistol, wrote out the document the highwayman required, and placed his signature at the foot of it.

Dick picked it up in triumph, and hastily ran his eye over it.

All was perfectly correct, though the parson's handwriting looked very shaky and uncertain in places.

"Now," said Turpin, "I have a few words to add before I go. This little piece of paper which I have forced you to write is of more importance to me than you can possibly imagine; now I have got it I am very thankful, and disposed to show my gratitude towards you; this I am willing to do in a substantial manner if you will give me your word that you will raise no alarm, and will say nothing about what has taken place to-night. I will leave you, and when I have been gone five minutes open your window, and on the ledge outside you will find something that will atone for the terror you have had to-night, and the trouble you had some time ago."

Turpin did not wait to hear the reply the parson seemed inclined to make, but backed out of the room, and closed the door after him.

"I have got the paper!" he said, in a tone of triumph, to his two companions. "I have managed capitally; but the sooner we are out of the house the better! You, Tom, lead the way—I am too excited to do so myself!"

Tom obeyed, and in less than a moment they were standing on the outside of the building.

In as few words as possible Dick explained to his comrades the nature of the promise he had made to the parson.

They thought he had done perfectly right, and they hurried off to where Sixteen-String Jack was waiting.

From him they obtained quite a large sum of money in gold, which they carried and placed upon the window sill.

This done, they mounted their steeds with all possible expedition and galloped off.

"We have a great deal to do yet," Turpin exclaimed, "although we have been lucky enough to succeed so far! Now we have got this certificate we must make use of it in the best possible manner!"

"What do you intend to do with it?"

"We must make our way to London, and engage some solicitor to appear on Maud's behalf; to him we will give this certificate, and explain all the facts of the case! Luckily we have money enough left to give him a handsome fee."

"But will it not be highly dangerous to return to London to-night," asked Tom King, "or I should say this morning—for morning it really is?"

"It would not take us long."

"True; but then there would be the difficulty as to how we should dispose of ourselves during the day; if you will take my advice you will spend a few hours in Enfield Chase, which will enable us to thoroughly mature our plans before we attempt to carry them into execution."

"But I don't like the delay," said Dick: "I am all impatience now to bring this matter to a termination."

"I know you are; but nothing will be gained by being rash; allow yourself to be swayed by me on this occasion—I am not so likely to be led astray by my feelings as yourself."

"And you think our visit to London had better be postponed?"

"Yes, until nightfall, or rather until dark. We will set off then, and we shall have the advantage of arranging our business with the solicitor at a time when few people will be abroad, and when we shall be in little danger of recognition."

"As you will," replied Turpin. "Perhaps it would be best, though I confess I find myself unable to see it."

CHAPTER DC.

DESPITE HIS RESOLUTION, DICK TURPIN ACHIEVES A RATHER LUDICROUS ADVENTURE ON THE ROAD TO LONDON.

These words were considered sufficient to settle the matter, and Dick Turpin and his comrades turned their horses' heads in the direction of Enfield Chase.

They reached the friendly shadow of the trees without meeting with an interruption of any kind.

"Safe at last!" said Tom King. "Some time will have to elapse before daylight comes. But never mind—we can rest! Perhaps we may as well avail ourselves of the opportunity we have got. Who can tell what circumstances may arise, making rest or sleep a matter of total impossibility?"

The three highwaymen fully felt the remark.

"We must find some place of shelter," said Claude.

"I propose we remain beneath the trees. It is not so very cold, and we shall be safer in case of an attack than we should be in a cavern or any similar place," said Tom King.

"No cavern," exclaimed Turpin—"no cavern for me! I cannot rest if there is anything more above me than the tree tops! We shall be able then to keep near our steeds."

Turpin could not bear the idea of entering a cavern but for other reasons than the one he gave his comrades.

There was not a single object around him that did not serve to bring Maud vividly before his mind.

He thought of the happy hours he had passed in old Enfield Chase, with Maud for a companion.

Now she was lingering and pining in a Newgate cell.

This was a thought which almost drove the gallant highwayman into madness.

His blood bounded within his veins, and every nerve throbbed like an artery.

In the meanwhile, the four friends penetrated rather deeply into the wood, and finally paused upon the bank of one of those beautiful, picturesque little dells with which the place abounded.

After a brief deliberation, they resolved to take up their quarters here, and descended accordingly.

The bottom of the dell was covered with soft, green grass, which was particularly grateful to the horses, and there was also a tiny stream, which fell down one side in a kind of mimic cascade.

That they would be able to make themselves comfortable here there could be little doubt.

They occupied the time partly in considering over their future arrangements, and partly in sleep—each one taking his turn to keep watch and ward.

This was a precaution it afterwards appeared that could have been easily dispensed with.

The deep, delightful silence remained unbroken, save by those natural sounds which are ever to be heard in such a place.

It seemed pretty evident that the police officers had quite forsaken the spot.

This was the case.

All those who had been set to perform the duty of searching for and capturing Dick Turpin and his companions were, by Mr. Wriggles's instructions, concentrated around the prison of Newgate.

Consequently, only the dragoons remained, and too long a time had elapsed since the highwaymen had been seen or heard of in the vicinity of Enfield for the soldiers to be particularly on the look-out.

All promised to go well.

Dick's impatience increased as night approached, and almost before it was dark enough to be prudent he insisted upon setting out for London.

"Understand," he said, as they emerged from the trees, "the object we have in view—it is to make our way with all speed to London. Every precaution must be taken to guard against any hindrance. No matter what adventure lies before us—no matter what we see—we must pass by unheedingly, with our eyes closed to everything, save our immediate purpose."

His comrades agreed unhesitatingly, for they were scarcely less interested in the matter than their captain himself.

Whether they would be able to proceed so far without meeting with some kind of interruption was open to very grave doubts indeed.

Fortune favoured them, however.

By avoiding all the principal roads, and taking their way for the most part over the open country, they at last drew rein upon an eminence—then a little way out of London, but now completely surrounded by bricks and mortar.

It was comparatively early in the evening, being little more than seven o'clock.

But it was as dark as Dick Turpin could have wished.

"I think we had better make some fresh arrangement," said Tom King, thoughtfully.

"In what way?"

"It is only necessary for one to visit the lawyer."

"True."

"One might pass undetected, while four would be discovered."

"I have been thinking the same thing myself," replied Dick.

"In my judgment," replied Tom King, "it would be infinitely better for us to remain here while you go on alone, and I say this more out of consideration for your safety than my own."

"I know it—I know it! And I too have a regard for your safety."

"You ever had, captain.'

"I can see now that what we originally intended is not feasible. For all four of us to go to Lincoln's Inn, so far from being of the least benefit, would only serve to quadruple the danger."

"And the probability of detection.

"Just so."

"How shall we act, then, captain?"

"I think you had better remain here, if you possibly can, until I return. If you are compelled to relinquish your position, fall back upon the Chase, and conceal yourselves among its recesses."

"And so, when you return, if you do not find us here. you will make your way to Enfield Chase."

"I will."

"Then, we thoroughly understand."

"Farewell, then!"

"But your disguise? It will be necessary for you to assume one."

'I fear it is impossible."

"It will never do to enter London in that attire."

"How can I disguise myself? Where can I procure the necessary articles?"

"In the night time an elaborate disguise is scarcely needed."

"Right! Darkness makes all the difference."

"A long cloak, such as some horsemen wear, which will cover up the whole of your person, is, in reality, all you need. You can clasp it round your throat, and so conceal your features."

"That does not get me out of the difficulty. I have no such cloak."

"But you might obtain one."

"How?"

"Easily. You will not ride far along the high-road without meeting some one carrying this article of apparel."

"Of course!—that will be the best and simplest plan."

"Decidedly!"

"Once more, then, I say farewell!"

With these words Dick Turpin trotted off, leaving his companions to await his return.

His form was soon lost to sight in the darkness.

He made his way direct to the nearest high-road, resolved to put his plan into execution as soon as possible.

Before he had gone half a mile after reaching it, his ear caught the sound of horses' footsteps.

Some one was travelling rapidly in the same direction as himself—namely, towards London.

Dick stopped at once, in order to allow whoever was coming to overtake him.

But as soon as he was satisfied that only one horseman was coming, he allowed Black Bess to proceed at a half-walk—half-trot, just keeping her in motion, but no more.

The night was cold and rather frosty, so that Turpin fully expected to find nearly every horseman provided with a cloak.

The traveller quickly came up.

At a glance Dick saw he wore a cloak, and that he was a stout-built, apparently middle-aged man.

As the traveller passed by, Dick took off his hat, and, making a slight bow, said:

"Good morning, sir!"

The traveller did not deign to take any further notice of this salutation than by turning rapidly towards him.

Then, to signify his disinclination to getting into conversation, he struck his horse with the spur and went on at a more rapid pace.

Dick loosened the rein upon Black Bess's neck.

In half a dozen bounds he overtook the uncivil traveller, and, without the slightest exertion, kept pace with him.



[DICK TURPIN SEEKS ADMITTANCE TO LINCOLN'S INN.]

"Excuse me, sir," he exclaimed, "but I think you have acted somewhat discourteously towards me!"

"Well, perhaps I have," was the reply, given in a growling voice, "but it does not do in these days of ours to fall into the company of every person you pass on the highway."

"Very true," said Dick, "and the circumstance is much to be regretted."

Hearing Turpin speak thus, the alarm which the traveller had at first felt subsided.

"I do not wish, however, to intrude myself upon you," continued Dick. "In fact, I will at once fall back into the rear if you will grant me the slight favour I was about to ask when I first saluted you."

"As you are evidently a gentleman," said the traveller, "your company will be agreeable rather than otherwise. Pray be good enough to name the favour which you require at my hands?"

"Willingly! You wear a cloak."

"Eh?"

"I say you wear a cloak."

"Well, sir, and what if I do?"

"Oh, nothing particular, except that——"

"That what, sir?"

"I want you to lend it me."

"Well, that's cool, I'm d—d if it isn't!"

"Do you allude to the weather?"

"No—I don't! I allude to your impudence!"

"Sir!"

"I say what I mean!"

"So do I! I say I am in urgent need of your cloak, and fully mean it!"

"Oh, indeed!"

"And will you lend it me?"

"No—I'll see you d—d first!"

"Then," added Turpin, "I must insist upon having it!"

"Insist?"

"Yes. You see this?"

Dick presented a pistol as he spoke.

The traveller trembled.

"Then you are a highwayman after all?"

"What I am matters little! I want your cloak."

"But it's cold, and I cannot spare it."

"I cannot help that!"

"D—n!"

"I stand more in need of it than you do yourself!"

"Yes—but d—n it, sir, is it right or reasonable that a man should give up his cloak on a bitter cold night, simply because he happens to meet with an impudent rascal who says he has more urgent need for it?"

"Well, sir, you can either hand it to me, as I requested, or you can force me to take it from you; but, one way or the other, I am determined to have it!"

"D—n me if it isn't cool!"

"If you speak with regard to the weather, I fully agree with you! I quite shiver with the cold!"

"And what the devil am I to do when I have given up my cloak?"

Dick shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"The best you can!"

"I'll be d—d if this isn't a good joke!"

"I am glad to find you are inclined to make light of the transaction!" replied Dick, as imperturbably as ever.

"Curse me!" cried the traveller. "I don't know which to admire most, your calmness or your impudence!"

"I will leave you to debate over it. In the meanwhile I'll trouble you for your cloak!"

"Trouble is the word!"

"I won't insult you by saying it's a pleasure!"

The traveller laughed, in spite of himself.

"You have a villanous wit!" he said.

"Come, sir," exclaimed Turpin, "we are on good terms with each other at last, and, such being the case, I hope such a trifle as the surrender of your cloak will not upset it!"

"Oh, d—n you for a knave! Take the cloak, and don't let me be troubled with your company any longer! You are a great deal too much like a highwayman for me to care about your society."

"It is not always wise to be candid. I might resent your insinuation," said Turpin, catching the cloak the traveller threw to him. "If I am a highwayman, I must be an eccentric one!"

"Why?"

"Because I shall let you pass on without troubling you for your purse, watch, or other valuables! Good night, sir, I am much obliged to you! If ever it lies in my power I will return the favour! Anyhow, when I see you again you shall have your cloak back."

With these words, Dick Turpin—having obtained what he desired—galloped off, leaving the traveller to think what he might of the whole transaction, and to get home without his cloak in the best way he could.

CHAPTER DOI.

DICK TURPIN HAS AN INTERVIEW WITH LAWYER LAZENBY, IN LINCOLN'S INN.

HAVING thus obtained the article of attire of which he stood so much in need, Dick Turpin pushed on in a tolerably straight line for his destination.

But not for long could he allow Black Bess to continue her course at a gallop.

He drew in the reins by degrees, for, above all things, he wished to pass through the streets without attracting attention.

With the darkness had come a sharp frost, which seemed every moment to increase in intensity.

The cold was extreme, and there was a strong northerly wind blowing, which made travelling unpleasant to a degree.

This, however, was all the better for the highwayman, since, on such a night as the present, no one would be likely to be abroad who could possibly remain within doors.

On his way he met with very few people.

Not one of them gave a single glance towards him; they were all too much occupied in protecting themselves from the cold.

Nor was there anything about Dick Turpin's appearance to attract notice.

The long cloak was of that description usually worn by horsemen.

More with the view of disguising himself than obtaining protection from the cold, Dick had drawn the cloak close up to his neck, and secured it in front.

When the broad, fur-lined collar was turned up, all the lower part of his face was completely covered.

Then the cloak, which was of very ample dimensions, fell in heavy folds, completely concealing his person down to the knees.

The back part rested gracefully upon the crupper of Black Bess.

Dick's intention was to visit Mr. Lazenby, the lawyer who resided at No. 8, in the Old Square, Lincoln's Inn, and who has already been introduced to the reader.

Although he had failed to do any good in Tom King's behalf when entrusted with his defence, yet the fault was none of his own.

Dick knew this well, and therefore he resolved to let him engage a counsel, and generally arrange for Maud's defence.

One very great recommendation was, that Dick felt perfectly certain that he could trust him.

No matter how large was the reward offered for his apprehension, and no matter how good was the chance of earning it, Mr. Lazenby would not be tempted to stir an inch.

As he drew nearer and nearer to Lincoln's Inn, the streets became much busier, and more thronged with people; still, as it was dusk, and as his form was so well concealed, Dick believed that he stood a much better chance of remaining unnoticed than he would have done had there been but few travellers besides himself.

Without meeting with the least interruption, and without, as he firmly believed, having excited the suspicions of anyone, Dick Turpin trotted gently down Chancery Lane, and stopped before that large and ancient-looking gateway which forms the chief entrance to the lawyers' stronghold.

The gates were closed, and the whole place appeared to be deserted.

Dick knew very well, however, that this was not the case.

At a certain hour, when a bell was rung, all the gates leading into Lincoln's Inn were closed, and no one allowed to pass either in or out without the knowledge of the gatekeepers.

Aware of this, Dick rapped loudly upon the huge wooden door, and waited patiently for a response.

His patience was not put to a very severe trial, for the man who attended to the gate had frequently to let people in and out.

Suddenly the little door let into the large gate, and contrived for the convenience of persons on foot, was opened, and the figure of an old man bearing a lantern in his hand appeared at the aperture.

He evidently expected to see some one standing close at hand, and for a moment failed to perceive Dick on horseback.

"Hallo!" said Dick. "Open the gates—I have business inside!"

The old man raised his lantern, so that the light fell upon the forms of the highwayman and his steed.

"A nice time o' night this," he grumbled, "to have to open the big gates! Why, it a'most breaks my back every time I do it!"

Dick glanced at the ponderous iron-studded wooden doors, and could easily believe the old man's assertion.

Feeling certain that some time would elapse before the gates could be opened, and by no means desiring to remain in the street in the meanwhile, he said:

"I won't put you to any more trouble than I can help, but I have important business with a lawyer, whom I must see to-night. I shall not be long; and I fancy that I shall be able to lead my horse through that little door if you're agreeable to let me try."

"Oh yes, sir—oh yes! Try by all manner of means—I'm perfectly agreeable!" replied the gatekeeper, in quite a changed tone of voice.

He was glad enough to be saved the labour of turning the huge key, and removing the ponderous bolts, and bars, and chains.

So, in an attitude of the greatest imaginable respect, he stood aside, so as to hold the door open, and prevent it from swinging shut, which it had a tendency to do.

Dick slipped quickly from the saddle.

That Black Bess would make her way through the small aperture he did not doubt.

He patted her upon the neck, and passed through before her.

It was difficult for the mare to follow, for the bottom of this little door was not on a level with the ground, but about six or eight inches above it, so that it was necessary she should raise her feet to step over it.

This, however, she succeeded in doing, and as soon as she was fairly through the door, the old man released it, and it closed.

A sensation of tolerable security now came over Dick Turpin's heart.

While he was in this ancient building, where no persons were allowed to intrude, the danger of Black Bess being recognised was very slight indeed.

"Ah, sir!" said the gatekeeper, admiringly, "that's what I do call a horse, now! Only think what a world of trouble she has saved my poor old bones! There's not many that could be made to do it!"

"I know that!" said Dick, with a smile, and with a slight touch of pride in his tone.

The rare docility and sagacity of Black Bess was certainly one of the bold highwayman's weak points.

When anyone expressed admiration at her matchless qualities, he was sure to add some words of praise of his own, and, as the reader will be able to remember, on more than one occasion he spoke with so much enthusiasm as to give rise to suspicion.

"She's a beautiful-looking creature, too!" continued the gatekeeper, as he allowed the light of the lantern to play upon her glossy skin. "I don't pretend to be much of a judge in horseflesh, but my opinion is she's a real beauty!"

"She is!" exclaimed Dick, with sparkling eyes. "She has no flaw—no blemish, and her speed and endurance have never had an equal, and, when she has gone, never will!"

"... you're going on business, sir, to any of the chambers in the Inn, I'll take care of her the while, if you wish."

Dick hesitated a moment, and felt more than half inclined to accept this proposal, but a second glance into the old man's countenance, which was now more plainly revealed to him than it had been hitherto, induced him to change his half-formed determination.

"No," he said—"it is not necessary. She is quiet. I shall not wait long."

"Very good, sir!" said the old man, humbly. "I hope you'll excuse me for speaking!"

"There's no harm done," said Dick. "Just be in readiness to let me out when I return. I sha'n't be long."

"Very good, sir—but it's a tremendous cold night!"

"True, and when I leave you shall drink my health in something that will warm your old blood for this night at least!"

With these words Dick Turpin led his mare by the bridle to that paved area which is called the Old Square.

The old gatekeeper stood in such a position as to be able to command a view of the direction Turpin took.

His face wore a strange expression, and muttered words came from his lips.

"I wonder who the deuce he is?" he said, presently, in a louder tone. "He's some one uncommon, I'm quite sure of that. And there's that horse, too. I could never have believed that any four-legged animal, except a dog or a cat, could have passed through that door in such a sensible way. I have my suspicions. Suppose now that that should be Dick Turpin?"

This was a startling supposition, and the old man stroked his chin in deep reflection.

"Such a thing is more than likely," he said. "He is bold and daring enough to make his way even into Lincoln's Inn! And that's a black horse, and I have heard tell of some extraordinary things done by a mare—Black Bess—that they say Dick Turpin rides on. Perhaps that's her. I wish I knew for certain. If I did, what a good thing it would be for me!"

For the present, however, we will leave the old gatekeeper to his speculations and suspicions, while we follow in the footsteps of Dick Turpin.

Although the square was very dark, the only illumination being that which came from some few windows, he made his way with readiness and certainty to No. 8, which was the house where Mr. Lazenby's chambers were situated.

The front door was wide open, as is always the case.

Dick patted his mare upon the neck, and in a suppressed voice, he said, addressing her:

"Wait here Bess, my lass, till I return!"

Whether the highwayman's mare really understood this injunction we cannot say. Evidently, however, if she did not comprehend the purport of the words, she did the tone in which they were spoken.

She understood, too, the caress, and rubbed her head gently against her master's breast, as was her wont.

Patting her once more, Turpin hastily passed through the doorway of No. 8, and ascended the staircase which was just opposite to him.

Black Bess remained perfectly still, in the same attitude as when her master let go his hold upon the reins.

She watched him until the angle of the staircase hid him from her sight.

Never dreaming for a moment that the old man at the gate had any suspicions of his identity, and being under the impression that few people would enter the Inn at that hour, Dick Turpin felt quite secure in leaving Black Bess in the manner we have described, for he knew that he could trust her to remain in one spot and not stray away.

With great nimbleness and alacrity he ascended the stairs, and, upon reaching the top of the flight, he paused before that door upon which the lawyer's name was painted.

He rapped smartly with his knuckles, and, as he listened for the approach of some one to respond to his summons, he heard a confused noise within.

Of what character it was, he was unable to form an opinion, nor was he allowed much time for speculating upon the matter.

The door was opened, and the shrivelled-up form of the avaricious old lawyer appeared upon the threshold.

"It's all right, Tho!" said Dick, making use of the very same words as Claude did on the occasion of his former visit.

The lawyer started, and holding up the candle somewhat higher, peered inquisitively into the countenance of the highwayman.

Dick turned back the collar of his coat and lifted his hat, in order that he might be seen all the more easily, and, as he did so, he said:

"You remember me, do you not?"

"I do," ejaculated Mr. Lazenby. "You are——"

Never mind who," added Dick, hastily, fearful lest his name should be overheard. "I have particular business for you, and I can pay you well."

"No doubt—no doubt!" said the lawyer. "You always do pay well, and so you ought for such service as you get. Come in, by all means."

Dick Turpin followed Mr. Lazenby into his inner or private room, where his important consultations were held.

"Now," he said, seating himself in a chair, "I am at your service. Explain what you want."

Dick knew very well the old man's avaricious nature, and so, without further preface, he took from his pocket a bag of gold, which he had taken care to provide himself with, and tossing it on to the table, so that its golden contents should make a pleasant jingling sound, he said:

"There's a trifle as an earnest towards the money I am going to pay you for the service I require."

The sordid heart of the miserly lawyer quickened its action, and sent a faint flush of colour into his cheeks.

His eyes brightened; but, as if by magic, this expression of satisfaction disappeared, and the hand which he had held out, as if to clutch the bag of gold, he let fall by his side.

"What ails you?" said Dick, quickly—"what's the matter?"

"You offer to pay largely if that is but an earnest of what you intend to give. The service may be too dangerous at any price!"

"Have no fears on that head!" said Dick, endeavouring to reassure him. "My wife has been made prisoner and confined in Newgate on the charge of being my accomplice."

"But that's impossible!" said the lawyer, quickly. "By English law, a wife is bound to succour her husband, and therefore cannot be his accomplice."

"I know that full well," replied Turpin, "but she's a prisoner nevertheless!"

"Then it is upon a groundless charge."

"I am glad to hear you say as much—it makes me feel more sanguine respecting her acquittal."

"But if she is your wife," said Mr. Lazenby, "why suffer her to remain in confinement?"

"There is the difficulty!" was the reply. "They will not take either my word or hers. They say she is not my wife, and demand a proof that she is."

"Oh! I see! Then that may be awkward."

"It may be. Yet here is a certificate from the parson who performed the ceremony. I believe she will be brought up for trial the day after to-morrow. You must engage a counsel to defend her and obtain her acquittal!"

"I will do it," said the lawyer, at once pocketing the bag of gold—"I will do it. Don't be afraid of that!"

"You cannot tell how much my heart is lightened by that simple observation on your part!"

"The service is a simple one, and the marriage can be easily proved."

"And when that is done she will be set at liberty?"

"Of course! But what price do you intend to pay for this?"

"You shall name your own terms," said the highwayman, "let them be what they will! Obtain her liberation at the earliest possible moment—prove to all the world that she is my wife, and make it an impossibility for her to be again brought up on the same charge, and your demands, however great they may be, shall be——"

The remainder of this speech was never uttered.

Dick paused suddenly, with half-opened lips, and then started to his feet.

The lawyer, too, seemed to collapse and sink into the antique chair on which he sat, while his face became expressive of the utmost consternation.

For a sound such as neither had heard in the whole course of their lives before came upon their ears, and some moments elapsed before Dick Turpin could recover himself sufficiently to decide as to what this sound really was.

CHAPTER DCII.

BOTH DICK TURPIN AND BLACK BESS ARE MENACED BY A TERRIBLE DANGER.

To explain, it is necessary that we should return to the old gatekeeper.

The notion that the steed whose outlines he could just dimly see was no other than Black Bess having once entered his mind, took up a firm position there and would not be dislodged.

For a long time he argued with himself upon the probability of his speculations being correct, but without being able to arrive at any definite conclusion.

"I will call in old Mike, the watchman," he said at length, "and take him into my confidence in the matter. He's rather a clever chap, is Mike, and the reward is large enough to stand a division between two persons. Oh! if it should really be Dick Turpin, what an excellent thing it will be for me!"

While speaking these words, the old man bent his steps to the little door, which he opened.

He projected his head through the aperture, and looked up and down the silent street.

A little lower down, on the opposite side, could be seen the outlines of one of those wooden boxes with which the watchmen in the last century were provided.

A flickering oil lamp shed a dim and dubious light upon it.

"I'd wager my head to a brass farthing that old Mike is sitting down asleep. I know he does take a nap generally about this time. I must run across and wake him."

So saying, the old man stepped out.

In order to guard against the possibility of the horse and rider making their exit before his return, he carefully locked the door on the outer side.

With nimble steps he crossed the road, and upon reaching the wooden box, directed the light of his lantern into it.

Seated in as comfortable a manner as the nature of the place would permit, was the so-called guardian of the night.

He used to make his rounds every hour, and proclaim the time, but as soon as this duty was over he regularly settled himself down for a nap, waking always, from long habit, at just the right moment.

Mike, the watchman, had buttoned his coat very tight across his chest, and round his mouth and nose he had wound a thick woollen comforter.

In one hand he held his rattle, and with the other he supported the side of his head.

His lantern was suspended from the roof.

"How he does snore!" said the old gatekeeper, as the light of the lantern fell on the watchman's face. "He's as sound asleep as a church; but I'll wake him pretty quick."

From the manner in which the gatekeeper grinned, it was evident that he intended to play the watchman some practical joke.

With a chuckle, he opened his lantern and took out the little piece of candle it contained.

Holding it between his finger and thumb, he placed the flame in very close proximity to the end of the watchman's nose.

The experiment succeeded to admiration.

Mike awoke up in a moment and sneezed awfully.

"Hallo! murder!" he cried. "What's that?"

"'Tisn't murder," said the gatekeeper, "it's fire."

"Oh, d—n it! it's you, is it?" said Mike, who was by this time wide awake and in full possession of all the senses he had—"it's you, is it? Now what the devil did yer want to come and play me that trick for?"

"Hush, Mike! I wanted to wake you without making any noise. I've got something *very* important to say—it may be a matter of five hundred pound in your pocket!"

"Oh! be aisy now!" exclaimed Mike. "Five hundred pound? Only think o' that!"

"There's not a moment to be lost," said the gatekeeper. "Come across with me to the Inn, and I'll tell you all about it."

Without any ado, the watchman left his post and accompanied the gatekeeper across the street.

A very few words served to place him in possession of all the facts the gatekeeper was able to communicate.

"Dick Tarpin, is it? Oh, we'll have him, niver fear for that!"

"But, Mike, do you feel sure that it's Turpin?" asked the gatekeeper. "It would be a very awkward thing if we were to make a mistake."

"Let me have a look at the horse, and I'll tell you for certain."

"Come on—here she is!"

"I saw her once, and I should know her again from a thousand. Oh! she's a beautiful creeter, anyway—much too good for a blackguard highwayman."

Both men carried their lanterns, and with rather stealthy steps they made their way across the Old Square, and paused close to where Black Bess was still standing.

They were able to cast a tolerable amount of light upon the highwayman's steed, and the watchman, after an attentive observation, said:

"Och! by the powers, it's him! I could swear to that horse bein' a mare better than I could swear to my own father!"

"Could you now?"

"Oh, divil a doubt about that it's him!"

"Dick Turpin?"

"Yes, Dick Tarpin, an' that's his mare Black Bess!"

"Then," said the gatekeeper, sinking his voice to a solemn and impressive whisper, "we must nab him!"

"We must!" was the equally emphatic rejoinder.

"But how?"

"That's to be considered, my jewel!"

"Do you think we can manage it, or shall we get some assistance?"

"No, no!—no assistance, my bhoy! The more fingers there is in this pie, the less we shall get! Just leave me to consider, will you?"

"Yes, but you must not take up much time about it, for the gentleman told me he should be back in a minute."

"Och! bad cess to the blackguard if he comes before I have made up my mind! Whisht, now! I've got it at last!"

"Where—where—where?"

"Hold your row, now, and I'll be afther telling you! Shure, it's as aisy as winking!"

The gatekeeper rubbed his hands in gleeful anticipation.

"Shure now, isn't it that brute of a baste yonder as makes the highwayman what he is! Now, where would this famous Dick Tarpin be if his horse was took away from him?"

"What do you mean, Mike?"

"Don't you understand?"

"No, not quite."

"Well, then, can't you see that if he hadn't got Black Bess he'd be nabbed aisy enough?"

"Yes, but he has got Black Bess."

"Shure enough, but we'll take it off him, my bhoy!"

The gatekeeper slapped him on the shoulder.

"You ought to be the Lord Chancellor, or something of that sort! That's a good plan! Suppose, now, you go and catch the horse?"

"No, by the powers! If we're to share the reward, we must share all the risk and danger, without you'll agree to divide it this way—I'll catch the horse, and you'll catch the man."

"No, no, Mike, that wouldn't be fair! You must recollect that it was a favour for me to think of you, and not go to anybody else."

"Oh, be aisy now! Where is there a man, within a mile of the place anyway, that could have been of so much service?"

"Well, I know all about that; but how shall we catch the horse?"

"Shure, now, my brains is as full of new ideas as a piece of old cheese is of maggots!"

"What have you thought of now, Mike?"

"Och, by St. Patrick, I won't catch the horse—I'll do something else!"

"What?"

Mike did not reply, but thrusting his hand into one of the huge pockets in his coat, produced an immense clasp knife, which he opened by means of a spring in the back.

"Shure now, an' isn't that illegant!" he exclaimed, as he flourished the brightly-polished blade.

The gatekeeper retreated a few steps as he asked, with evident trepidation:

"But what is it you're going to do with that, Mike?"

"Why, shure now, we'll creep forward, and you shall take hold of the baste by the bridle, and I'll creep round behind her, and with this beautiful little toothpick I'll cut some of the sinews in her hind legs. What do you think of that for a scheme, my honey? Dick Tarpin will get on the back of Black Bess, but it's divilish little use she'll be to him!"

The gatekeeper was not a man who, in a general way, stuck at trifles, and yet he shrank from the atrocious proposition of his companion.

"Oh, Mike!" he said, "that's an awful thing to do, and such a splendid horse as it is, too!"

"Oh! bad luck to yer white heart! What's a horse but a horse? An' is a nate little job like that to stand in the way of our getting five hundred pound? Come on, ye coward, or, be jabers, I'll do it myself!"

Much as he disliked the idea of maiming the beautiful creature whose graciousness and docility had elicited his utmost admiration, still, the prospect of obtaining five hundred pounds enabled him to banish his scruples.

"I'm no coward, Mike," he said, "and you're a liar if you say so! Come on—I'm ready!"

"That's right, me bhoy! I see you've got some pluck, afther all! When you once get hold of the reins, cling tight! Niver mind if she kicks—don't let go till I've crippled her!"

With these words, the two men placed their lanterns on the ground and stealthily drew near to Black Bess.

Little did Turpin dream of the imminent peril with which his gallant steed was menaced.

Black Bess did not attempt to move as the two men, with such diabolical intentions towards her, crept nearer and nearer.

"Now, then," cried Mike, the watchman, "I'm all ready! Just lay hold o' the rein, and I'm right! This knife is as sharp as a razor, for I ground it myself a few hours back! Just one stroke with it 'll do the business, and the thousand pounds reward will be ours!"

The two villains were obliged to keep the idea of the reward before them, or surely their better natures would have revolted at the barbarity they were about to practise.

The severance of some of the tendons in the hocks of Black Bess, which, as the watchman had said, could be done with one stroke of the knife, would effectually cripple her for the remainder of her existence.

The mischief once done could not by any possibility be repaired.

Surely some accidental circumstance will take place that will frustrate the diabolical intentions of these two men.

But the Old Square was dark and silent, and there were no signs of any other living beings in it save the gatekeeper and the watchman, who had succeeded in their design so far as to get side by side with the steed.

The gatekeeper stretched out his hand suddenly, and took firm hold of the reins.

CHAPTER DCIII.

DICK TURPIN FINDS DANGER RAPIDLY THICKENING AROUND HIM.

"HAVE you got the reins?" said the watchman.

"Yes."

"Hold tight, then, and I'll soon do the rest!"

He crept along towards the mare's hind legs as he spoke.

Black Bess had allowed the gatekeeper to take hold of the bridle without offering the least opposition to such a proceeding.

This was strange, for in a general way she would not suffer anyone to touch her save her master, or the person into whose charge for the time being he had given her.

When a stranger approached she was generally so restive, and put on such an aspect of viciousness, that any thought of taking hold of her would be abandoned by a prudent man who knew anything bout horses.

The old gatekeeper grasped the reins with all the strength he could call forth.

He was determined that the plan should not fail through him.

But Black Bess turned her head.

She either saw or felt the skulking figure creeping round behind her.

The watchman was highly delighted when he found how quietly Black Bess stood, and made sure of accomplishing his purpose with much less trouble than he had looked forward to.

One more step brought him near enough.

Raising his huge knife, he was about to effect his purpose, when Black Bess, disapproving of anyone being so close, suddenly lifted up her feet and kicked out with terrific force.

There was a dull crash, a hideous cry—half a yell half a groan—another crash, and then the watchman could be seen lying on the stones in the square in a confused, huddled-up heap.

The kick had been a most effective one, and both of the heavy iron-bound hoofs had struck him.

It was a just and fitting punishment.

As for the gatekeeper, he was so terrified by the sudden movement of Black Bess that he let go the reins in a moment, dropped to the ground, and rolled over and over like a ball, until he was brought to a stop with great suddenness by a brick wall.

There he lay, more dead than alive, trembling from head to foot.

Dolorous groans came from the watchman's lips as he writhed upon the ground like some reptile in its death agony.

Black Bess, now greatly excited, and perhaps to some extent comprehending her danger, no longer stood still, as she had done until interfered with, but walked slowly and deliberately to the door of No. 8, where she had seen her master enter.

She passed through the doorway, and, strange to relate, began to ascend the stairs, which were broad and straight.

But the noise which her feet produced upon the wood

work was something terrific, more especially as the whole place was so silent.

The sound apparently alarmed her, for she paused at the angle of the staircase where she had seen Dick Turpin disappear.

These were the sounds which had come upon the ears of Dick Turpin and Mr. Lazenby, and so abruptly put an end to their conference.

And truly they were alarming enough and sufficient to arouse everybody in No. 8.

Dick soon recognised the footsteps of Black Bess, and before she had stopped he had sprung to his feet and commenced the descent of the topmost flight of stairs.

"Remember all that I have said!" he cried to the lawyer, as he descended. "Obtain her acquittal and liberation, and you shall name your own reward!"

He did not stop while speaking these words, and by the time the last had left his lips he had reached the landing on the third floor.

The uproar below had alarmed an elderly lawyer who slept in one of the rooms opening from it.

Dick just caught sight of him.

He was holding a candle in one hand, and the other was employed in holding a curious-looking dressing-gown which he had partly thrown over him.

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated. "What's that?"

"The *devil!*" said Dick, in a sepulchral voice, passing him while he spoke, and at the same time dashing the candle from the old man's trembling fingers with his felt hat.

What might be the result of this, Dick could not wait to see, because of the terrific tumult that was taking place below.

On the second landing, no less than three doors stood wide open, and upon the threshold of each was a member of some branch of the legal profession.

All looked scared and anxious.

Dick Turpin dashed by them at full speed.

"Who's that?" cried one. "There's robbery, or murder, or something going on! Let us follow him!"

"Follow be d—d!" said another. "It's no business of mine, and I'm not going to get my head into trouble by poking it into matters that don't concern me!"

"So say I," said another voice, and two doors were immediately closed.

The one who had proposed following the flying figure in the cloak, finding himself thus deserted by his companions, altered his mind, and very prudently entered his own room again.

On the first landing was Turpin's greatest danger.

Here everyone was aroused, and, what was more, they had discovered the cause of the terrific, because unusual, noise they had heard.

Black Bess could be seen standing just in the angle of the staircase.

"Why, shoot me if it isn't a horse!" Dick heard some one cry just as he reached this spot.

The man who spoke was near the top of the stairs.

"You're wrong!" cried Dick, as, giving a sudden bound, he alighted just behind him—"you're wrong, my friend! It isn't a horse—it's a mare!"

He accompanied these words with such a hard smack between the shoulders of the discoverer, that he fell down at once as though shot.

Dick was surprised to see Black Bess standing there, and was certain that something of a most extraordinary nature had taken place.

He was quickly by her side, however, and, taking hold of the bridle, easily led her down the stairs again.

Those above looked down curiously, but made no aggressive demonstration.

In another moment Dick reached the front door of No. 8, and was about to emerge into the square, when he heard the hasty rushing of many feet, and shouts from excited persons

"Confusion!" he exclaimed. "The whole place has been alarmed! What in the world has happened?"

He looked out of the door as he spoke.

"That's him!—there he is! I see him!" cried a voice. "This way! He's caught at last!"

"Is he?" said Dick, and as he spoke, he slammed shut the door of No. 8 and turned the key in the lock in a moment.

At the same time, his hand came in contact with a chain, which he placed across it, and then he shot the bolts at the top and bottom of the door.

By the time he had done this, the footsteps paused on the outside, and some heavy blows were rained upon the door.

"Open in the King's name!" cried a loud voice. "Dick Turpin, you are known, and we call upon you to surrender! If you resist, your death will be on your own head!"

To this formula the highwayman paid no sort of attention.

He looked around him anxiously

His heart fluttered strangely within his breast.

Had he been alone, the case would have been desperate; still, he would have stood a better chance of making his escape.

Now that he was hampered with Black Bess, however, his capture seemed certain, without he chose to abandon her, and that was what Dick would not be likely to do under any circumstances.

But, imprisoned in that narrow space, and with many persons in the house besides, what was he to do?

A little oil lamp placed upon a bracket near the foot of the staircase gave forth a slight amount of illumination—sufficient, however, to show Dick that there were two doors close at hand.

By the time he had made this discovery, the officers, finding no notice was taken of their summons to surrender, sent a couple of bullets crashing through the front door.

Both whistled close by Turpin's head, but he was lucky enough to escape injury from either.

They buried themselves in the woodwork of the staircase, and made a couple of lawyers' clerks, who had partially descended, run up the staircase again, with more activity than they had ever used in their lives before.

It was clearly certain death to remain for another moment where he now stood, and Turpin knew it.

The next bullet might put an end to his career; or if a volley was fired, he could not escape.

With a feeling of greater desperation in his mind than he had ever before experienced, he dashed open one of the inner doors of which we have spoken.

He led Black Bess in quickly after him, and closed it.

With nimble fingers, he secured it in every way he was able.

He could only guess what kind of place he was in, for he was surrounded now by the profoundest darkness.

This lasted, however, but a second.

A door was suddenly flung open.

A brilliant light—for such, by comparison with the darkness, it seemed to be—streamed in, and Turpin beheld the figure of a man within a few paces of him.

He was rather stout in the body, but his legs were ridiculously thin.

His face was so puffed out with fat that it seemed an almost flat surface.

His mouth was wide open, and as he gazed upon the extraordinary apparition of a man and a horse so close to him, his eyes goggled in a manner that was fearful to behold.

A tremendous crash making Turpin aware that the outer door had been broken in, reminded him that he had not an instant to lose, and that his life and liberty hung upon the events of the next five minutes.

CHAPTER DCIV.

DICK TURPIN GROWS APPREHENSIVE CONCERNING THE FATE OF HIS THREE COMRADES.

STRIDING forward, and leading Black Bess by the bridle, Dick Turpin advanced towards the inner room.

The fat lawyer, who somehow with his thin arms and thin legs looked like some huge spider, gradually retreated.

Entering this inner room, Turpin, with the rapidity of lightning, closed the door and secured it.

"Sit still," he exclaimed, addressing the lawyer, "and you are safe—no harm shall come to you! But I am a desperate man, and if you interfere in the least degree with my movements, the consequences will be serious, for, rather than be taken, I would blow your brains out on the spot!"

Alarmed by this threatening speech, which was uttered

with menacing tones and gestures, the lawyer staggered back till he came to the chair, which he sank into with such suddenness that it almost knocked the breath out of his body, and made the chair creak ominously.

"Sit there," cried Dick, "and you will be unhurt."

The uproar outside was now perfectly prodigious.

Heavy blows were struck upon the second door, which, being only of an ordinary character, was quickly demolished.

The dense throng intent upon the capture of the bold highwayman pressed on, and, flushed with the success they had already met with in overcoming the various obstacles in their way, they commenced an attack upon the door opening into the room in which Dick Turpin then was.

With great rapidity, and yet without an exhibition of any great agitation, the highwayman, after having satisfied himself by one glance that there was no door leading out of the chamber he had now entered, made his way towards the window, which was protected on the inside by wooden shutters.

He removed the fastenings with as much ease as he would have done had he been accustomed to the task.

Flinging them open, the window was disclosed.

A cry of joy then came from Turpin's lips.

As he had hoped, and yet hardly dared to expect, the window was one of those which looked into Chancery Lane.

The street was before him, and he was divided from it only by a few panes of glass.

The window was one of a kind that was common enough in those days, though seldom seen now.

It did not slide up and down in a groove as windows now generally do, nor open like folding doors, but one half could be pushed back.

This was a favourable event indeed.

Without the slightest hesitation, Dick pushed open the window in the manner we have described.

Then, to the astonishment of the lawyer, Dick gave one bound, and seated himself in the saddle.

He backed Black Bess as close against the wall opposite the window as he possibly could, and then uttered that low, chirping cry which the noble creature knew so well.

It was while that sound was issuing from Turpin's lips that the door was dashed down by the police officers.

They heard a clatter and a terrific rush; but before they could recover themselves sufficiently to look round them and make out what it was, Black Bess, at one bound, had leaped through the window, and alighted in the street.

She stumbled slightly as she descended, but did not fall.

With cries of rage and anger, the police officers clustered round the open window.

All those who happened to have firearms in their hands fired at the dusky forms of the highwayman and his steed.

But the movements of Black Bess were too quick for any danger to result from these.

Dick now flattered himself that all was well.

But a clattering sound in the rear made him aware that he should have some trouble yet.

Looking back, he saw another party of police officers, all mounted, coming at a rapid pace round the corner of Carey Street.

They were not more than two hundred yards behind him.

The loud shout they all set up let him know at once that he was seen.

But Black Bess, who had been much excited, and, indeed, terrified by the strange nature of the events which had lately taken place, required no urging to make good speed.

No sooner did she feel that she was in the open street, and that the reins were hanging loosely upon her neck, than she sped onwards at a speed that would have terrified a less desperate rider than was on her back.

Shooting across Holborn, Dick quickly gained the open country.

He made his way in a straight line for the little eminence upon which he had left his three comrades with such strict injunctions to wait there until his return.

He was not long in reaching this place; and when he gained it, so extraordinary had been the speed put forth by Black Bess on this occasion, that the police officers were completely out of sight.

Dick reined her in with some difficulty

Having brought her to a standstill, he looked round anxiously, but he failed to catch a glimpse of his three friends.

He whistled shrilly, but no response came to the signal.

"What can be the meaning of this?" muttered Turpin. "What can have occurred? Although so much has taken place, I have not been away so long as I expected; and the country seems quiet enough all round. Surely they cannot have been disturbed! Where are they?"

He whistled again, but with no better result than before.

"They must have considered it best to return to the Chase," he said, at length; but the tone in which he spoke showed how doubtful he felt about the matter.

"We have had one more escape, Bess!" he exclaimed, patting his mare upon the neck. "You have saved me on this occasion, for without you I should by this time have been a prisoner."

He paused.

Very faintly there came upon his ears a far-off sound, which he knew well enough foretold the approach of his enemies.

"They come, my lass!" he cried, "but they will not overtake us! There is a long gallop before you, old girl, but it must be taken. No doubt I shall find them all in Enfield Chase."

So saying, Dick once more allowed Black Bess to proceed.

She seemed glad enough to avail herself of the permission, and galloped on as rapidly as before.

Very soon that faint sound which Dick had heard became inaudible.

At such a pace, the distance intervening between there and his destination was quickly passed over.

As nearly as he could recollect, he went back by the same route that Tom King had taken.

He met no one in his furious gallop—saw no one—nor was he able to find any trace of his three companions.

It was strange. But although he had made the arrangement with them to retire if needful, and although there was every probability that they were safely beneath the trees, he nevertheless experienced a great amount of uneasiness.

At last the borders were reached.

But all was silent. There was not one of them here on the watch for his return.

"If they are in the Chase at all," he muttered, "they will be in the little dell where we stayed last, but my mind misgives me."

It was not possible to proceed to the place he had mentioned while seated in the saddle, in consequence of the low, straggling branches that extended horizontally from some of the trees.

Therefore he dismounted, and led Black Bess after him.

A little more than a quarter of an hour's walk brought him to the brink of the little excavation.

All was dark and silent here as well.

He whistled again, but, as before, there was no response to his friendly call.

Finding his forebodings realised so far, he became filled with apprehension.

Still, he resolved to satisfy himself whether they were there or not, and so rapidly descended.

He reached the bottom, and though the place was so dark, yet he could see about with tolerable distinctness.

It was quite certain that his three companions were not there.

"What can have happened?" he asked. "Where can they be? After such strict injunctions as I gave, surely they would not remove without good cause! This is worst of all. Not only am I filled with apprehension, but valuable time is being lost, when we ought to be occupied in arranging our proceedings for the future."

He remained for a few moments in deep thought, and then bent his steps towards the border of the Chase.

To attempt any kind of search among the trees for his companions would, he knew, be perfectly useless; and, moreover, he was tolerably certain that, unless com-

pelled, they would not take up their quarters anywhere save in the little dell.

What to do now, in order to rejoin them, he knew not.

He fancied that something of a most disastrous character had taken place. Perhaps they had all been captured.

"I didn't think to look," he muttered, "when I was on the hill, or I might have satisfied myself as to whether an encounter had taken place upon that spot. I will return there. Perhaps their absence was only temporary. I may find them waiting for me if I go back."

This was certainly what might be considered a forlorn hope, yet it was the only one that suggested itself to the highwayman's mind, and so he seized upon it with the avidity with which a drowning man would clutch at a straw.

Once more springing into the saddle, he directed his mare's steps toward the meeting place.

These rides were attended with no trifling amount of risk, and he knew it.

Some prying eye might perceive him going backwards and forwards, and their retreat would be discovered.

But for the fact of all the officers being concentrated around the prison of Newgate, it is quite certain he would not have met with so little interruption.

Once more, then, he was fortunate in reaching the little hill.

He was disappointed in his hope of seeing his companions there awaiting him.

The place was quite deserted.

He dismounted, and searched all around upon the ground in order to ascertain whether a struggle had taken place there, and after some time he was forced to the conclusion that a struggle had taken place.

There were evident marks of it upon the ground, for the turf was torn up, particularly in one spot, as though by the hoofs of horses.

"I fear one has been captured," said Dick, with a sigh. "I will try to hope not all. One surely has escaped! What shall I do?"

No answer to this question presented itself to his mind.

"Deprived of their assistance," he continued, "what shall I do? This is a misfortune I did not apprehend. It would have been better if the original arrangement had been carried out."

He paced up and down with uneasy strides.

"If my enemies will let me," he said at length, "I will stay here for some time longer yet, for there may be some slight chance of their return. They will rejoin me if possible. Yes, I will wait!"

Finding that all round him was perfectly still, and that there were no signs of his foes in the vicinity, Dick loosened the saddle girths, and removed the bit from Black Bess's mouth.

Then he flung himself down at full length upon the grass to wait.

He did not seat himself in the saddle, because he did not wish to fatigue his mare needlessly.

Slowly and drearily the night passed away.

The colour of the sky gradually changed to a dull, leaden tint, and then at last morning broke.

By slow and almost imperceptible degrees the different objects all around were brought into view.

Anxiously did Dick Turpin turn his eyes in every direction, but they were not gladdened by perceiving the approach of those he so wished to see.

He remained thus until the manifest danger of staying longer in that spot compelled him to remove, and again he galloped in the direction of Enfield Chase, this time without daring to indulge in the hope that he should meet his companions there.

CHAPTER DCV.

ELUCIDATES THE MYSTERY OF THE DISAPPEARANCE OF DICK TURPIN'S THREE COMPANIONS.

LEAVING Dick Turpin to make his way to Enfield Chase, we will return to the little eminence upon which it had been arranged Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack should remain until the return of their captain.

All three remained quite immovable, and watched Dick until the darkness hid him from their view.

Some moments were passed in silence, and then, with a slight shiver, Claude Duval said:

"It's confoundedly cold here, comrades! If we have to stop here very long, we shall be frozen to death."

"You may depend you will have to remain here some time," replied Tom King. "A journey from here to London and back will not be performed in five minutes."

"True enough!" said Sixteen-String Jack, with a laugh.

"Now," said Claude, "let us try whether we can reckon how long Dick will be away. Supposing he should meet with no interruption, how long do you think it would take him to get to Lincoln's Inn?"

"Quite half an hour."

"So I should say; and then we must allow another half hour to obtain a cloak, then an hour for his interview with the lawyer, and half an hour back, making altogether two hours and a half."

"It is not a very pleasant prospect to look forward to."

"By no means! It is certain that we must remain here for two hours and a half, at the very least—most likely more."

"It is cold," remarked Tom King. "Quite a sharp frost seems to have set in."

"That's it!" exclaimed Claude. "Now, I suppose you can guess tolerably well to what point my remarks are tending?"

"I can give a guess," replied Tom.

"And so could Jack. What I propose is, that we ride off to a little distance, and try to fall in with an adventure."

"But that is direct disobedience to orders."

"I know that."

"Then let us stay here."

"To what good?" asked Claude. "We are not mere machines, are we? We have some discretion allowed us!"

"Certainly."

"Then no harm can result from the carrying out of my suggestion. You admit that at least two hours and a half must elapse before Dick can possibly return. Wherever we go, we will take care to be here before that time has expired."

"If we could make sure of doing that, I would not mind giving my consent to the expedition," said Tom King, "for I can assure you I relish the idea of remaining here no better that you do yourself."

"We will make up our minds to that effect," said Claude. "We can do it if we like."

"I should not like Dick to return first."

"Nor I. It would be very disagreeable."

"Very."

"But that is a needless apprehension."

"There is the danger to be considered," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"It is no more than remaining here, that I can see," returned Claude, "and perhaps not quite so much! But come, it is no good wasting time by standing here talking the matter over! In a word—will you go or not?"

"I will go, for one!" answered Tom.

"And so will I!" added Jack.

"Hurrah, then! We shall be able to pass the time in a much more pleasant manner than I expected. An adventure will be useful as well, for I suppose the affair of Maud's will run away with some of the money we had agreed to use for our original purpose."

"You may depend upon that!"

"Then there is all the more reason why we should look out for something extra."

"There is."

"Come, then—forward! We will agree to be back here in precisely two hours' time, and then all will be well!"

The three highwaymen, having first taken a long look about them, left the little eminence, and struck off across the country in a north-easterly direction.

In a little while they came to one of the principal roads leading from the metropolis.

Here they did not doubt they should be successful in meeting with a good booty, because travellers are always entering and leaving London at all points.

Having gained the high-road, the three highwaymen proceeded along it at a walk, in order to be in readiness as soon as they appeared, and also in order that the sounds made by their own horses' steps should not inter-



[THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN SUSPEND THE LANDLORD AND THE JEW FROM THE CEILING.]

fere with the faint clatter on the highway which would indicate the approach of a traveller.

All their weapons were in good order and perfect readiness.

They had looked to them while on the little eminence so often mentioned.

Now, however, to make assurance doubly sure, they examined them.

By the time this was done, Tom King cried out;

"Halt! Listen! I thought I heard a horse!"

He was instantly obeyed, and then it was found that the well-practiced ears of the highwayman had not deceived him.

"A single traveller is coming!" exclaimed Claude Duval—"there can be no doubt about that!"

"None," said Sixteen-String Jack; "nor can there be any doubt that all he carries with him will be ours. He would be mad to resist such an overwhelming force!"

No. 129.—Black Bess.

Our friends waited patiently for the traveller to draw nearer.

Whoever it was that was coming, he appeared to be in no hurry.

Sometimes his horse would go for a few moments at a trot, then the pace would subside into a walk, but only to break out into a trot again.

This was strange and out of the usual way, so, as a matter of course, our friends became doubly attentive.

A few more minutes elapsed, and then, by straining their eyes, they were able to make out a dusky-looking mass, which presently resolved itself into a horse and rider.

"Claude," said Tom, in a whisper, "just look at him! Is not that very odd?"

"Very."

"What can be the cause or meaning of it?"

"I am quite at a loss to say. Ha, by Jove, he's off!"

"No he isn't!" said Jack. "He's all right once more!"

These remarks were made in allusion to the movements of the traveller, which were certainly very eccentric and dangerous too.

He swayed about in the saddle from side to side and backwards and forwards in such a manner, that it seemed for a moment as though he must fall to the ground.

On each occasion, however, he recovered his balance.

As he came still closer, the highwaymen noticed that the traveller's horse looked angry and impatient.

At every opportunity he would break into a trot, and then his rider would sink suddenly backwards, thus drawing the reins tight, and reducing the horse's speed to a walk.

This was so extraordinary a sight, that in the curiosity they felt in gazing upon it, the highwaymen well-nigh forgot their original intention, and almost allowed the traveller to pass by.

"Now," said Tom—"forward! We will cry 'Stand and deliver!' to him, at any rate."

With these words, Tom King touched his horse slightly with the spur, so that he gave a sudden bound forward.

"Halt!" he cried. "Pull up at once! Your money or your life!"

Either by accident or design, the eccentric traveller leaned back in the saddle, and his horse, feeling the sudden check, stopped at once.

At the same instant Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack placed themselves on either side of him.

"Now," they cried, presenting their pistols to him, "hand over to us every article of value you possess! Make haste, for we have no time to lose!"

"Yes, make haste!" repeated Sixteen-String Jack.

The traveller looked at his assailants with a vacant, puzzled expression.

"Hic!" he said—"take it easy! We're all right, you know—here's one more cup before we part, my friends—one last bumper!"

"Why, he's drunk!" said Tom King.

"Drunk!" repeated the traveller, with another hiccup as he caught the word. "I'm not drunk—I'm sober enough! Who says I'm drunk? Show me the man that says it, and I'll call him a liar!"

Claude Duval replaced his pistol in his belt, and drew his sword.

He flourished the glittering blade in a threatening manner before the traveller's eyes.

Then he presented the point to his neck, and pressed with just sufficient force upon the hilt to cause the weapon to pierce the skin.

"Do you feel that?" asked Claude. "It's a sword, and if you don't hand over everything you've got at once, you're a dead man!"

These words produced an effect quite different to what the highwayman expected.

With a gurgling kind of cry, the traveller, jerking himself back to escape the point of his sword, lost his balance, and fell with a crash into the roadway.

Luckily, Tom King had taken hold of the horse by the bridle, so that he kept him quite still.

With a light laugh, Claude sheathed his sword and dismounted.

Stooping down over the now insensible traveller, he quickly transferred to his own pockets every article of value he carried about with him.

Then, taking hold of the body, he dragged it across the highway, and placed it in a half-sitting posture against the bank upon which the hedge was planted.

"Tie his horse up, Tom!" he cried. "We don't want that!"

"No; it would be an incumbrance rather than otherwise at the present moment. I will fasten the rein to a branch of this tree, and leave the animal to take his luck."

"That will be decidedly the best. Make haste! This adventure has been so easy, and at the same time so profitable, that it makes me exceedingly anxious to have another."

In a few minutes they had all remounted, and were trotting along the road again, still keeping in the direction of the country.

No more sounds came upon their ears, but, after having gone a considerable distance, they suddenly caught sight of something dim and dusky on the high-road before them.

It almost looked like some dense, black cloud.

"What's that?" said Tom King, slackening his speed.

Neither of his comrades could form any idea; but, as if by a kind of instinct, they slackened their pace also.

While speculating upon what this strange object on the highway before them could be, a slight jingling sound struck upon their ears.

"Dragoons!" exclaimed Tom King. "I am sure of it!"

"Yes," said Sixteen-String Jack, "there can be no doubt about it! Shall we turn and fly?"

"Yes."

"Be quick! it will be madness to linger here or to advance! Quick—quick, I say! they are already in motion!"

It was indeed a troop of dragoons, drawn up in the road a little way beyond.

The night being cold, they had enveloped themselves as closely as possible in thick cloaks they carried, and this is the reason the highwaymen failed to perceive the glitter of their accoutrements.

But for the accidental jingling sound caused by one of the horses moving, they would probably have remained ignorant of their danger until too late.

As for the dragoons, they had, of course, heard the three horsemen approaching.

Of this they took no very particular notice, for the probability was, that they were ordinary travellers, in which case they would simply have challenged them, and allowed them to ride on.

But when they found that the approaching riders, instead of continuing their pace, gradually slackened it, and finally came to a standstill altogether, their suspicions began to be aroused.

They were quite confirmed when, immediately afterwards, they heard our friends turn round and fly.

"There's some one afraid to meet us—that's certain," cried the officer in command. "Forward, my lads! we will give chase! It will be an agreeable diversion after our lonely watch; it will warm our blood a little too. Forward! I doubt whether they are better mounted than ourselves. Push on! whip and spur! we shall overtake them!"

At a furious gallop, the troop of dragoons flew along the highway after our friends.

They found in a little while that it would be necessary for them to urge their horses to make their best speed; the dragoons were much too close to be pleasant.

"On—on!" cried Tom King; "they are well mounted, and they are frightfully close behind!"

Just as he spoke, the discharge of a number of firearms reached their ears.

The volley had been fired by the order of the captain of dragoons, not that he thought any particular effects would follow it, except that the highwaymen might be intimidated.

In spite of the difficulty of taking aim, and although our friends were almost out of range, yet Tom King, who happened to be a little in the rear of his two friends, felt a bullet whistle past him in most unpleasant proximity.

A few bounds of his horse, however, took him out of danger.

By voice and spur, the highwaymen urged their horses to the utmost, and they flew onwards with terrific speed.

But it would not do to continue their present course for any great length of time, for they were going direct for London.

Suddenly, to their astonishment, the sounds which came from their pursuers ceased.

They wondered what could be the cause of it, but were unable to form any idea.

That from some cause or other the dragoons had stopped was, however, quite certain, and they resolved to make the most they could of the opportunity of increasing still more the distance there was between them.

Coming to a cross-road, they turned down it, and then took every lane or road they met with on their left hand; so that, by the time they had gone some little distance, their course had been so erratic, that it would be a matter of the utmost difficulty for their pursuers to follow them.

Just as they were congratulating themselves upon

having got out of reach of their enemies, Tom King felt his horse trembling under him, and with so much violence that he seemed in danger of sinking to the ground.

CHAPTER DCVI.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN BECOME SPECTATORS OF A SINGULAR SCENE.

BEFORE we go any further, it will be best to explain how and why it was the troop of dragoons so suddenly abandoned the chase.

It was caused by a serious yet simple accident.

Anxious in the extreme to overtake the highwaymen, the officer in command kept some few yards in advance of his men, not only because he was anxious to be the first to come up with the fugitives, but because he knew very well his presence in front would be an incentive to his men to try their best to endeavour to keep up with him.

But his horse, in consequence of some obstruction or other in the road, suddenly stumbled, and then fell to the ground with a terrific crash, carrying his rider with him.

For a moment, the captain lay stunned upon the ground, and then, recovering himself, he attempted to rise.

His horse made an effort at the same time.

Then the dragoons, who were only a few yards behind their commander, perceiving the accident which had taken place, endeavoured to rein-in their horses.

But the animals had got their speed up to such a pitch, that they could not stop themselves instantaneously, although their riders tried their best.

The consequence of this was, that the captain was struck down by the foremost horse's hoofs, just as he was rising from the ground.

With a heavy groan, he fell at full length, and lay in a bruised and mangled mass at the feet of the horses.

The greatest consternation and dismay of course took place, and all thoughts of continuing the pursuit were abandoned.

The condition of their leader required the whole of their attention.

Hastily dismounting, his men crowded eagerly around him, anxious to render all the assistance that lay in their power.

The captain was not dead; but the injuries he had received about the head were of such a frightful character that it was not possible he could survive more than a few minutes longer.

He groaned heavily.

One of his men raised him up a little, and this change of position apparently eased him somewhat.

"Now—now, my lads!" he gasped, catching his breath painfully between every word—"don't stop here looking after me. Follow the rascals! Don't let them escape! Oh, mercy, my head!—my poor head! This pain is more than I can bear!"

With these words the captain lapsed into a state of insensibility, which really was a mercy, for it made him oblivious of his frightful agony.

His men at first thought he was dead.

"This is a sad affair!" said one. "What had we better do?"

"It is not much good our thinking of pursuing those rascals now. This interruption, trifling as it is, will enable them to get far away, and they would take so many turnings and windings in their course, that it would be next to impossibility for us to get upon their track."

"Well, then, it is agreed that we abandon the chase altogether, and turn the whole of our attention to the captain?"

"Yes; I think we shall be more applauded if we do that."

We have mentioned this incident simply that the reader should understand how and why it was the chase came so abruptly to a conclusion.

With the dragoons and their dying captain we have, of course, no more to do; our duty is to follow the highwaymen.

Tom King noticed the trembling of his steed with much alarm.

"I fear my horse has been wounded," he exclaimed. "Wait a moment; I will see."

Tom King sprang from the saddle as he uttered these words, and anxiously commenced an examination of his steed.

He passed his hand rapidly over the whole of his coat, and presently felt something wet and sticky.

"It is as I feared!" he exclaimed; "he is wounded! Perhaps it was that shot that I heard whistle past me that did the mischief."

"Is the hurt serious?" asked Claude Duval.

"I can't tell yet."

"I should think it cannot be," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, "or we should not have come so far without discovering it. You may depend it's a mere scratch, and nothing more."

"I hope it will prove so."

A closer examination showed that Sixteen-String Jack's supposition was perfectly correct.

The wound was a slight one.

The bullet had done little more than graze the skin, and yet it had penetrated deeply enough into the flesh to cause the blood to flow freely.

"It is quite insignificant," said Claude—"a little cold water and a small bandage is all that we require."

"But how shall we get them?"

"That we must consider. Look around. What can you see?"

"There appears to be no habitation in sight," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but doubtless, if we went a little further along the road, we should come to some cottage where they will gladly give us the things we need."

"That seems to me to be our only course," said Tom King, "and I see no difficulties in the way of adopting it; for we may safely say that the dragoons have abandoned the pursuit."

"It is certain we can hear nothing of them."

"Come, then, my friends, mount, and I will lead my steed by the bridle until we come to a suitable habitation."

"Nay—nay!" exclaimed Claude and Jack, "we will give our cattle a rest as well; we will all three walk together."

To this Tom King made no kind of opposition.

In this manner they walked along the highway—or, rather, the broad country road—until, presently, passing round a bend in it, they came in sight of a small cottage.

It was one of those pretty little dwellings scattered all over England, and which are mostly to be met with on the outskirts of some small town or village.

It was situated in a very lonely spot, for no other dwelling-place appeared in sight.

"This will suit us nicely!" exclaimed Tom King, as they drew near. "We need not fear any interruption; and surely no one would refuse to give us the simple articles we require."

"We will ask them, at any rate."

The little cottage stood several paces back from the road, and was surrounded by a pretty little garden that was divided from the roadside by a picturesque wooden paling.

There was a little gate in this paling, and a narrow path leading up to the cottage door.

Our friends opened the gate, and led their horses through it.

Their impression was, from the silence that had reigned all around, that this cottage was the abode of peace and happiness.

But, as they drew near, they found they were deceived in their expectation.

Loud and angry voices reached their ears.

"Halt!" said Tom King, in a whisper. "We had better creep forward and reconnoitre a little, I think."

"The horses may remain where they are," said Claude; "they won't move. All three of us then will be able to approach, and find out what is going on. My curiosity is thoroughly roused."

"And mine."

With stealthy steps, the three highwaymen took their way along the remainder of the path, and at length paused at the cottage window.

The caution they had made use of was superfluous, for, had they led their horses to the door, the sounds would have been unheeded by the inmates of the cottage, so intently were they occupied.

Peeping through, the first thing that presented itself to their view was the form of a tall, stout, burly man, with a harsh, forbidding countenance.

He was speaking in loud tones.

"Once more," he cried, "I ask you what you will do? Give me your answer, and quickly, for I can't stay dallying here!"

These words were addressed to a woman, who looked about sixty years of age; but the probability was she was much younger, for grief and privation had wrought the effects which time produces.

She had on a widow's cap, and her plain black dress, though old and patched, nevertheless preserved an air of neatness and cleanness.

She was weeping bitterly.

"A little more time!" she exclaimed, in reply to the man who had addressed her,—"only give me a little more time, and I will pay you all I owe!"

"Time!" responded the other, angrily. "I have already been too forbearing! I have listened to your entreaties times out of number! What has been the result? Every week you have got deeper and deeper into my debt, and I can't afford to let you live in a house of mine rent-free!"

"I don't wish any such favour at your hands, Mr. Grimes; but you know as well as I do all the circumstances of the past, and understand quite well my unfortunate position. Still, I repeat, if you will only give me time, you shall have all!"

"But I will wait no longer! You see, in anticipation of your inability to pay the rent, I have brought the broker with me. Come forward, Samuels!"

In obedience to these words, a third person presented himself to the view of the highwaymen.

He had been either standing or sitting near the door, and in consequence of his having occupied this position, they had been unable to see him earlier.

Now, with a crouching, submissive air, he crept behind the landlord.

By his name he was evidently a Jew, though in personal appearance he presented little of the peculiar features generally possessed by his race.

But his voice as well as his name proclaimed his nationality.

"Yesh, Mishter Grimes—I'sh here!"

"Very good! Make an inventory of this furniture, and put down what you consider to be its value."

"Yesh, sir, I will."

There was a momentary silence after the issue of this mandate, which was only broken by the sobs and tears of the poor widow.

"You see, Mrs. Russell," said the landlord, Mr. Grimes, —"you see, I am quite in earnest this time. I have let you off before, but I can do so no longer. The various things you have in this house will, if I take them all and sell them, produce just about enough to pay the amount of rent you owe me, but not the expenses. They will have to be defrayed by me."

'Surely you will not be so hard?" moaned the widow. "If you take from us what few things I have, let me ask you what can I do?"

"The fault is all your own," said the landlord, with a peculiar glance. "You understand me?"

The widow shuddered.

"Where is Mary?"

"Thank Heaven, she is away," was the reply—"she has gone over to the village."

"Indeed! Rather a late hour for her to be out, I should think! But that is no business of mine. Now, still to show I meant what I said, I will renew my offer. Consent to it, and you shall be troubled for rent no more!"

"Never!" cried the widow, firmly—"never! Not if I knew that the immediate consequence of my refusal would be my being driven forth into the streets!"

"And that will be the consequence!" replied Mr. Grimes, angrily. "But I have threatened you so long, and have not carried out my threats, that you don't believe I am in earnest. You will discover your error very quickly. Samuels!"

"Yesh, sir?"

"Go on with your inventory, and come in the morning with your cart to take the things away."

"I am, Mishter Grimes; but, s'help me, Moses, the tings are hardly worth a penny."

"Go on. When you have put them all down, let me know the amount."

The widow still wept and wrung her hands.

Mr. Grimes, with his hands clasped behind him, paced up and down the little room.

Pausing suddenly before the widow, he bent forward, and said something in such a low tone that it did not reach the ears of the highwaymen outside.

But the widow shrunk back in evident disgust.

"Never!" she exclaimed. "You may take my answer—I shall give no other! I would rather starve by the wayside than live by my daughter's shame!"

The landlord turned away with anger gleaming from his eyes.

"Enough, woman—enough!" he exclaimed. "You shall know no mercy now! I have put up with you so long, you despise my threats, but I will show I am in earnest! Samuels, curse you, have you made that inventory yet?"

"Very nearly, Mishter Grimes—very nearly. I have jusht got to take a peep into this little back room."

There were no upstairs rooms in the cottage, but only two on the ground floor.

One was where the scene we have just described took place; the other was rudely and scantily furnished as a bed-room.

It did not take Mr. Samuels more than a moment to make an inventory of all the bed-room contained.

"Now, then, what's the amount?" asked the landlord, sharply.

"Oh! s'help me, Moses! such a lot of tings I never did see: they are worth just noting at all: howshumever, I will reckon 'em up."

The Jew made his calculation, and then said:

"Three poundsh five ish the utmosht, Mishter Grimes; that'sh putting everyting down at the utmosht value."

"Three pounds five!" repeated the landlord. "And you," he continued, addressing the widow, "owe me three pounds ten. I am almost too late, it seems, Mr Samuels."

"Yesh, Mishter Grimes."

"I intended, first of all, to let these things remain here till morning; indeed, I did not know that she would carry her obstinacy so far; but since she has defied me, I will show no mercy. Bundle the things out into the garden at once. I'll watch them while they are there, and you can go and fetch a horse and cart to take them away."

"Certingly, Mishter Grimes; I will do sho at once."

The Jew shuffled about, and quickly gathered several of the articles of furniture close together.

Oh! how the poor widow wept when she saw every household requisite thus relentlessly swept away.

Surely her sufferings were enough to have made an impression on a heart of stone.

Mr. Grimes stood by unmoved.

"Now, Samuels," he cried, "open the door, and bundle them out! Stay a minute, I'll give her one more chance."

"Yesh, Mishter Grimes. You ish too good, you ish—mush too good; you vill get imposhed on."

"Now, then," cried the landlord, addressing the widow, "for the last time I repeat the offer I made you some time back, and which you have since so foolishly refused. You don't deserve such a chance, still I give it. Will you consent to my terms? If so, this debt shall be cancelled. You shall live in this cottage rent free. I will even go further—I will allow you something towards your support."

Although reduced to this last extremity, the widow never wavered or hesitated in the least.

In the same firm tones that she had hitherto empolyed, and with scorn and abhorrence perceptible in her voice, she cried:

"No!—again, ten thousand times no! Not if I had to suffer more than any human being has suffered yet!"

"Very good!" said Mr. Grimes, as he turned upon his heels. "Bundle the things out, Samuels!"

"Yesh, Mishter Grimes."

As he spoke, the Jew caught up a couple of chairs and went towards the door.

He was saved the trouble of opening it.

It was dashed back upon its hinges with considerable violence, and the three highwaymen appeared on the threshold.

"Put those chairs down, Samuels!" cried Tom King, "or you will be better acquainted with Moses in one minute than you have been all your life!"

CHAPTER DCVII.

IN WHICH THE LANDLORD AND THE JEW MEET WITH THEIR DESERTS.

The Jew uttered a loud cry, and, staggering back several paces, dropped the chairs to the ground.

It was only natural that he should be alarmed.

There could be no mistaking the meaning of what Tom King had said, and, moreover, he was terrified by the sight of their pistols, which were presented full in his face.

He did not cease his retreat until he had managed to get behind Mr. Grimes, the landlord.

That individual, however, was no less terrified than the Jew, and a struggle took place between them as to who should face the highwaymen.

Our friends entered the cottage without hesitation, and closed the door behind them.

By an effort, Mr. Grimes summoned up courage enough to speak.

"Who are you?" he cried. "What do you want? Be off—this house is mine, and you have no right in it!"

"Never mind about rights!" said Claude Duval. "We are here! We have overheard the whole of your conversation, and are aware of your business!"

"Business?"

"Yes; it is no good for you to attempt to put on a bold demeanour, or to deny anything! I tell you again we have heard all!"

"And if you have, what business is it of yours? Begone, I say, or I will call for assistance!"

"You had better not speak any louder than I am speaking now!" said Tom King. "If you do, you will find the consequences most unpleasant!"

"But why should you interfere?" asked Mr. Grimes. "I am here doing that which the law allows me! This woman owes me my rent and cannot pay, so, of course, I take her things!"

"I am determined that you shall do nothing of the sort! You shall go down on your knees before her, and ask her pardon for the insult you have offered her!"

"Me?" said Mr. Grimes—"me kneel down? It is not likely!"

"You will alter your opinion before long, and you will write out a receipt in full discharge of all the rent owing to you up to the present moment!"

"I will do that, provided I get the money, but not without!"

"You will do it without!"

Mr. Grimes buttoned up his pockets as he said:

"I'll see you and all the rest of the world d—d first!"

While this angry dialogue was taking place, Sixteen-String Jack approached the widow and spoke to her.

"My good woman," he said, "is it true that you owe this man the amount of rent he says you do?"

"Yes," was the reply. "But who are you? Why do you interest yourself in the matter?"

"Never mind! We will befriend you from those two men! Let that be sufficient! What prospects have you of paying the money you owe?"

"Alas—none!"

"And have you any friends who will assist you?"

"None, sir, in this part of the country! They are many miles off! If I could rejoin them, perhaps all would be well!"

"Then, why not do so?"

"Why, being in his debt, Mr. Grimes would not allow me to leave the place?"

"I see—I see! And you have a daughter?"

"Yes—Mary."

"Just so! I have heard all about it, and quite comprehend! If you had a sum of money given to you, could you not make your way to the friends you have mentioned?"

"If Mr. Grimes was satisfied."

"You leave him to me. Dry your tears—be no longer under any alarm respecting yourself or your daughter either. I will consult with my companions as to what shall be done."

Wonderingly and half terrified, the widow looked at the three new comers, and marvelled why they should interest themselves so much in her affairs.

Going up to his two comrades, Sixteen-String Jack heard Mr. Grimes say:

"Curse you all! I don't care a fig for any one of you! The rent belongs to me, and, d—n me, I'll have it too! Or if I can't have the money, I'll take the goods! Samuels!"

"Y—y—yesh, Mishter Grimes!"

"Why the devil don't you obey my orders? Bundle all the things out into the garden at once!"

"Samuels," said Tom King, "without you are in a particular hurry to join your friend Moses, you had better stand quite still where you are now and say nothing!"

The Jew nodded his head, and did not offer to move.

Neither the landlord nor his agent possessed courage enough to attack the three well-armed men who stood before them.

They had a wholesome dread of firearms, and with their pistols, the highwaymen easily kept them in check.

In a rapid whisper, Sixteen-String Jack communicated the particulars he had learned from the widow, and added, in so low a tone that neither Grimes nor Samuels could hear what he said:

"I have thought of a plan by which we can serve these two rascals as they ought to be served, and by which we can render this widow and her daughter a very great service."

"How—how?"

Jack communicated his plan, but what it was need not be specified here;—it will be seen as the events take place.

"Excellent!" exclaimed both of his companions, as soon as he had done—"most excellent! That's what we will do to them!"

The alarm of the two men rapidly increased upon seeing the highwaymen in whispered consultation.

Sixteen-String Jack, turning to the widow, said:

"Have you any strong rope close at hand?"

"I have some rope, sir," was the reply, "but it is not particularly strong."

"Never mind! Bring it—let us see what it is like!"

The rope was brought, and the highwaymen found that it was neither thick nor strong—in fact, it was that kind generally used for domestic purposes.

But it was of considerable length—much longer indeed than they required, so that they were able to twist four pieces of rope together.

It was then quite as strong as they desired.

Mr. Grimes and Samuels, the Jew, grew more and more alarmed when a rope was mentioned and produced.

They did not know what the highwaymen intended to do, but apprehended the worst.

The rope was divided into necessary quantities, and then Tom King and Claude Duval, both with pistols in their hands, went up to the two trembling men.

Tom posted himself in front of the Jew, and Claude in front of the landlord.

"If you move or resist in the least, we will fire, so that your lives depend entirely upon your own actions!"

"But this is outrageous!" cried the landlord. "What is it you intend to do? By what right, I ask again, do you interfere in this matter at all?"

"Never mind troubling your head about such matters! Place your back against that of your friend the Jew! Do you hear? Jack, place them in the position you desire! We shall know what to do if they attempt to be unmanageable!"

Samuels, the Jew, was in such a terrible state of fright, that he scarcely knew what he was about.

The landlord was scarcely less terrified, though he endeavoured to assume the appearance of a courage that he had not.

Sixteen-String Jack placed both back to back, and then, with a piece of rope which he had provided and prepared expressly for that purpose, he bound their elbows tightly together.

So skilfully was this done, that no amount of wriggling or twisting would have enabled either men thus bound to set themselves at liberty.

They were so well joined together that a third party alone could separate them.

"You shall suffer for this!" cried the landlord. "Luckily, there is a law in the land, and I will have the law upon you!"

"You are quite welcome to do so," said Jack. "But we have not done with you yet!"

This speech excited fresh apprehensions in the breast of the two men, and they looked with the greatest anxiety, in order to see what it was that Jack intended to do next.

In the ceiling of the cottage were fixed several strong hooks, as is the custom in many country places.

One was near the centre, and upon this hook Sixteen-String Jack fixed his eye.

Taking up the other piece of rope, he swung it in his hands once or twice, and then threw it upwards.

The middle part fell just over the hook, and the two ends then reached almost to the floor.

Having found by trial that the rope would run over this hook almost as easily as it would over a pulley, Jack proceeded to carry out the latter part of his design.

At a word from him, his two comrades forced the landlord and the Jew to leave the spot where they had been standing, and place themselves immediately beneath the hook.

"Is it murder you intend to commit?" asked the landlord. "Help—murder!"

"Silence!" cried Claude. "Another such cry as that, and you are a dead man!"

Taking hold of one end of the rope which was hanging down from the ceiling, Sixteen-String Jack nimbly and firmly lashed it round and round the arms of the two men, and also round the rope by which they were tied together.

He finished by making a very strong knot, which he was quite sure would not give way, even if it had to support double the weight of the two men.

"Now," said Tom King, "you infernal rascals, we mean to let you off a great deal easier than you deserve; but yet, you will not like it very well after all. Now then, comrades, lay hold, and up they go!"

The three friends took hold of the end of the rope, and, with one sudden and united pull, drew the landlord and the Jew close up to the hook in the ceiling.

The manner in which the two villains kicked about and struggled was laughable in the extreme to witness.

The highwaymen burst out into a hearty roar, to the great danger of the objects of their mirth, for the rope slipped through their fingers, and they only caught it just in time to prevent Grimes and Samuels reaching the floor again.

The sudden jerk with which they were stopped made both utter a howl of pain.

Once more they were pulled up, until they reached their former elevation.

"Let me down!" cried the landlord—"let me down! I will go on my knees and ask her pardon, and write out a receipt, or do anything else you wish!"

"You speak too late!" said Tom King; "the chance we offered you has gone by. You must now take the consequences of your barbarity!"

Finding this appeal unheeded, Mr. Grimes broke out into a series of yells, in which he was ably seconded by the Jew.

It was in vain the highwaymen threatened to shoot them if they did not desist.

The next thing our friends had to do was to secure the rope in such a manner that the two rascals would be suspended with their heads about a foot from the ceiling.

They managed this very ingeniously by twisting the end of the rope they had got hold of round the arms of their two prisoners.

The knot was drawn tight, and then the highwaymen drew back several paces, in order to contemplate the strange spectacle before them.

Howling, kicking, and screaming, fruitlessly endeavouring to free themselves from their position, and inflicting upon each other really serious injuries, Messrs. Grimes and Samuels presented to our friends a sight which they enjoyed immensely.

The only effect which their violent struggles seemed to produce was that of tightening their bonds.

The poor widow gazed upon this extraordinary scene with the utmost amazement.

She was also rather terrified.

Then suddenly the door was thrown open, and a young girl, panting, and breathless, and exhausted, made her appearance on the threshold.

The widow sprang forward, and clasped her in her arms.

It was her daughter Mary, about whose safety she had begun to grow terribly apprehensive.

Having amused themselves sufficiently by watching the curious struggles of the landlord and his agent, the highwaymen went towards the widow.

"Oh! gentlemen," she exclaimed, "I am terrified to death!"

"Why?"

"Mr. Grimes is such a revengeful man, and when you are gone I tremble to think what will become of me!"

"Have no fears upon that head," said Tom King, in an assuring voice; "I will see to all that, provided you will attend to my instructions."

Mary looked from one to the other with the greatest surprise.

She could not comprehend the meaning of the scene at all.

"You said," exclaimed Jack, "that you were desirous of joining your friends. Look, here is money that will enable you to perform the journey. Take it: it is given freely. Set out at once. Leave this place for ever. We will take care that Mr. Grimes does not pursue you."

"And the furniture in the cottage?" said the widow.

"That you must leave, except such portable articles that you may be able to carry away with you. Let Mr. Grimes have the rest in discharge of the rent you owe him."

"I understand you, sir," said the widow, bursting into tears. "I am grateful—deeply grateful! Without some such means as you have given me, I could never have left this place, and the consequences of remaining while such a man as that had so much power over me are terrible to think of!"

"You will escape all that," said Tom King. "With the money you now have you can rejoin your friends easily. This is all the advice I have to give you. Get away from this place as soon as ever you possibly can."

"I cannot thank you as I should do!" said the widow.

"Nor do we wish to hear the expression of your gratitude. You have not a moment to spare. Leave this place, I say again, as quickly as you can, and do not pause to rest until you are far away."

"I will not—I will not! Farewell, gentlemen! the thanks and blessings of a poor widow and her helpless daughter are yours."

Sixteen-String Jack almost had to push the widow out of the cottage door, for she still continued her protestations of gratitude.

At last she departed.

By this time Grimes and the Jew had to some extent come to their senses, inasmuch as they no longer kicked and plunged in the manner they had done to their own personal discomfort.

The landlord burst forth into a torrent of curses.

"Let me down!" he cried—"let me down! if you don't, you shall suffer for this!"

"We defy you!" said Tom King. "You cannot get down without some one helps you, and we will take care that no one comes near to interfere!"

Another volley of curses.

"What do you mean to do with us, then?" he asked, at length.

"I will tell you. With my own ears I heard you say that your claim upon the widow amounted to three pounds ten. The Jew told you the value of the goods was three pounds five, from which, of course, it follows, as a matter of necessity, that the things are worth at least six pounds ten."

"Oh, s'help me Moses——" began the Jew.

"Silence!" cried Tom King. "Your turn will come presently."

"I don't agree with you," said Claude Duval, "about the value of these articles."

"Why not?"

"I shall make an inventory of them myself, and a valuation—I can judge very well what they are worth."

"What foolery is this?" asked the landlord.

"I fancy you will call it by another name in a little while," replied Tom King. "Our intentions can be summed up in a very few words, and I see no particular reason why you should not know them, so, if you will just pay attention for a minute or two, I will explain."

CHAPTER DCVIII

MOSES THE JEW FINDS LITTLE PROFIT IN TRADING ON THE PROPHETS.

Both the landlord and the Jew were exceedingly anxious to know what it was that Tom King had to say.

They could only conjecture their fate, and consequently they strongly desired to be relieved from their suspense.

"In the first place," said Tom King, "you must not think for a moment that I wish to interfere with you or trespass upon your rights. You are a landlord, and of course you ought to have your rent; but it seems to me you have allowed the widow to fall into arrears with her payments in order to obtain power over her which you would turn to the basest of uses!"

"And you see," said Sixteen-String Jack, chiming in, "we have given her the means of getting out of your reach; and in order that your anger may cool and your resentment also, we are going to leave you both tied up as you now are!"

Another volley of curses came from the landlord, and supplications for mercy from the Jew.

"It seems to me," said Claude, "that this cottage is situated in a very lonely spot. So far as I can see, there are no other habitations within sight of it, and the road does not seem to be at all a well-frequented one. You are therefore at liberty to make as much noise as you like, and call for assistance as loudly as you can bawl. I don't think anyone will be passing by during the night, and if so, they would be scared away by hearing such a terrible noise. In daylight, however, no doubt some one will approach, and you will then be cut down and set at liberty."

"But, curses!" cried the landlord, "am I to remain here strung up for nobody knows how many hours? My arms are almost off already!"

"Serve you right!" said Tom King. "You will get no pity from us, I can assure you. We most heartily detest you!"

"And," cried Claude Duval, "I intend, as I told you, to make a valuation of all the articles contained in this cottage! You will be at liberty to sell them, and whatever balance there is over and above the three pounds ten, which is owing to you, you must pay to the widow!"

The landlord muttered something which Claude could not catch.

"However, upon second thoughts, in order to put it out of your power to cheat the widow after we have gone, we will arrange matters thus:—I will estimate the value of the furniture—I will deduct from the amount three pounds ten, and the balance you must hand over to me."

"I call on Moses to witness," exclaimed the Jew, "that all the lot ish not worth more than three poundsh five!"

"We shall see!" said Claude. "I have a notebook somewhere! Ah, that will do!"

He produced a pocket-book as he spoke, and commenced making an inventory in due form.

If ever a valuer favoured a client by putting a high price upon all the articles, Claude Duval did.

We do not intend to specify all the items; but one or two will suffice.

"One deal table!" he cried, pretending to write down the words. "How much for that, comrades? That must be worth at least ten pounds!"

"Ten pounds!" cried Tom King—"that's the lowest penny of course! It would fetch that at any auction, I am certain!"

"Oh, Moses, hark at that!" exclaimed the Jew. "S'help me, Abraham, it wouldn't fesh five shillingsh!"

"Hold your row," said Claude, "and don't interfere with my business! Two chairs—two pounds ten!"

"Oh, holy Moses!" cried the Jew; "the manish mad!"

"This is a fine amusement for you, no doubt," cried Mr. Grimes, "but I don't see the fun of it!"

"I hardly expected you would!" said Claude Duval; "but you will in a little while, when I have done!"

In this way he went on enumerating every article there was in the place, and putting against it an amount that represented at least ten times its actual value.

Not a single article, however trifling and worthless, escaped his notice, and he came at last to two things which the Jew would never have thought of putting down.

"One iron hook fixed in ceiling," he cried—"ten shillings! Sundry yards of rope to ditto—one pound!"

Claude's two companions laughed lustily, but neither the landlord nor the Jew could see the joke.

"Now for the total amount," exclaimed Claude, who thereupon made a great show of adding up the various items.

"Sixty-five pounds ten shillings and sixpence!" he cried, at last; "that's the amount of my valuation, and I declare the articles to be thoroughly worth it."

"S'help me, Moses!" cried the Jew, "if ever I heard the like! Shixty-five poundsh ten shillingsh and shixpence! Oh, murder!"

"I suppose you will get to the end of your foolery in time!" said the landlord. "Let me warn you, however, that after the sweet comes the sour; and I will make you suffer severely for the manner in which you have treated me."

"All right!" said Tom King; "you can do just what you like."

"First of all, however," interrupted Claude Duval, "I shall require your attention to what I am going to say. I hope you clearly understand that you are left in full possession of all the goods and chattels in this cottage to sell the same, in order to realise the amount of your debt? We detain you in that pleasant and comfortable manner in order that you may not interfere with the motions of your late tenant and her daughter."

The landlord gnashed his teeth savagely.

"By your own showing," continued Claude Duval, "the amount owing to you is three pounds ten shillings, which is all that you can legally claim. That amount you will have; but, according to my valuation, the sale of all these things will produce sixty-five pounds ten shillings and sixpence. From this, deduct three pounds ten, and sixpence for expenses and costs, and you will find that the sum of sixty-two pounds remains, which you will be good enough to hand over to me at once."

"Oh, Jacob!" exclaimed the Jew. "Did anybody hear the like?"

"D—n your jokes!" said the landlord, "I have had enough of them! I have listened patiently to your rubbish because I could not help it. Now I hope you have reached the end of your foolery!"

"Not a bit of it!" said Claude. "It is no joke, as you will quickly find out! The balance of sixty-two pounds I must and will have! I collect it on behalf of the widow, to whom an advance has already been made."

"Take it, Claude—take it!" cried his two companions. "Get one of those five-and-twenty-shilling chairs! If you stand on one, you will be able to reach his pockets. Don't you see, the gentleman can't conveniently put his hands in his pockets himself, and so you will kindly save him the trouble!"

Claude laughed, for he enjoyed this scene, if anything, more heartily than his companions.

Placing the chair close to the suspended men, he sprang on to it, and with nimble fingers commenced an examination of the landlord's pockets.

In vain Mr. Grimes shouted, and screamed, and swore, and kicked—Claude was unmoved by all.

He discovered at last a pocket-book and a leathern bag, and in the same pocket from which he took the latter, he also found some loose silver.

"Here we are," he said. "I knew when it was represented to Mr. Grimes in a proper manner he would not object to pay the money, so here it is!"

The leathern bag contained a few guineas, and the pocket-book some bank-notes.

Claude counted all up, and said:

"Here is not sufficient; I must have the remainder. Here is only forty-two pounds; I want just twenty more."

"Thank goodness," said Mr. Grimes, "I have no more money about me to be plundered of!"

"Plundered, do you call it?" cried Claude, with an indignant air. "You don't wish to make me believe that you would retain possession of money to which you are not entitled? By no means! Just be good enough to tell me where I am to obtain the twenty pounds from!"

The Jew began by this time to realise that his life was in no particular danger, and consequently he enjoyed to some extent the mortification felt by Mr. Grimes at having to part with his money.

It would almost seem that the landlord was aware of this improper exhibition of feeling on the part of his agent, for he said:

"I have no more money, and I don't know how you are to get the balance, without you persuade Samuels to advance you the twenty pounds on the remainder of the goods."

"Twenty poundsh!" said the Jew, in a shrill, screaming voice, and commencing to kick and plunge most violently. "Oh, by the mother of Moses, what shall I do? Twenty poundsh! Why, Mishter Grimes, you knows' all the tings wouldn't fesh a five-pound note!"

"A very good thought," said Claude Duval. "The idea did not occur to me. Of course, an upright and conscientious Israelite like Mr. Samuels would not object a moment to do justice to a widow, nor to advance the money upon good security. Now, then, Samuels, hand over twenty pounds!"

"I call all the prophetsh to witnessh that I have not twenty ha'pence about me!" screamed the Jew, despairingly. "I haven't—I'll go down on my kneesh and swear it!"

"All right, Samuels! I make it a rule never to take a Jew's word, so I will just feel in your pockets."

Contrary to his expectations, Samuels allowed Claude Duval to feel in his pockets without offering the least resistance to his doing so.

Sure enough, a few coppers was all the highwayman was able to find.

"There you are, shentlemen—I hope you are shatishfied. How could a poor wretch like me have twenty poundsh? Whoever heard of sush a ting?"

"I have not done yet, my hook-nosed friend," said Claude. "All Jews are cunning, and I don't suppose you would keep your money in your pocket. Let me feel—it must be hidden somewhere."

"Oh! I call Aaron and all the rest of the prophetsh to witnessh that you have taken all my monish!"

"What's this, then?" exclaimed Claude, as he passed his hand over the Jew's waistcoat. "I feel something here. Oh yes, they are guineas, sure enough!"

The Jew uttered a horrible howl when he found his treasure was discovered, and began to kick and struggle at a great rate.

He gave the landlord a sharp kick, who, furious with pain, kicked back again, and a savage struggle took place between them, and continued until both were compelled to stop through absolute exhaustion.

In the meanwhile, Claude took a sharp knife from his pocket and approached the Jew with it, very much to that individual's alarm.

"Help!—help!—murder!" he shrieked. "What ish it you're going to do?"

He was soon enlightened, for with a few rapid strokes of the blade, Claude cut away all the front part of his waistcoat.

The lining was then ripped off, and a number of guineas was then disclosed.

The highwayman counted them up, and found them to be no less than twenty-seven.

"Ah, Samuels!" said Claude, "what a terrible liar you must be, to be sure! Only twenty pounds of this money is my due, but I shall take the remainder, and apply it to a useful purpose—to a purpose that will be of immense benefit to you. I shall give it to some parson to pray for you for telling such lies. You will be d—d else—take my word for it!"

The Jew howled and screamed with rage, but all to no purpose.

Claude Duval consigned the money to his pockets.

"Now, then," he cried, "we're off, and we will leave you to yourselves! I hope you will enjoy each other's company!"

"Oh, curses!" cried the landlord. "After robbing and ill-treating us, surely you would not leave us here!"

"Sha'n't we though!" cried Tom King. "You will see that! I see there is a good lock on the door! I shall fasten you in, and I hope no one will come within a mile of the place for the next thirty-six hours!"

The Jew and the landlord uttered dolorous cries, but the highwaymen heeded them not in the least.

They closed the door behind them, and, not content with that, securely locked it.

Tom threw out the key, and wondered for a moment where he should conceal it.

His eyes happened to fall upon a large water-butt.

This, he thought, would suit him admirably, provided there was plenty of water in it, so he picked up a stone and threw it in to try.

The splash which followed was quite enough to convince him, so, without the least hesitation, he threw the key in also.

"There," he cried, "I doubt very much whether that key will be found in a hurry."

"Oh, it's a good joke!" cried Claude Duval, laughing. "I shall never forget it to the longest day I live!"

"A most excellent joke!" cried Sixteen-String Jack. "I never heard of a neater or better plan to make anybody give up their money! Oh, it is too good, that it is—too good!"

"We have done some good," said Claude, "and had no little amusement as well; we are not losers by the transaction either."

"I hope the widow will have the prudence to get out of Grimes's way," replied Sixteen-String Jack. "If ever he comes across her again, you may depend he will vent upon her all the anger which, as a matter of course, he must feel."

"Let us hope they will never meet," said Tom King. "And, now, do you know that the time has already expired; we ought to be back on the spot where we promised to meet Dick, and we shall have a long gallop to reach it."

"And your horse?" cried Claude Duval. "I had forgotten all about that!"

"So had I," said Jack.

"And I too," replied Tom King, in a changed voice; "but from the first moment when I looked in at the window my attention has been so much enchained, and so many curious things have taken place that the remembrance of all else has been quite driven out of my head."

"The same here," said Claude. "But we must not waste any more time in conversation. First of all, we must ascertain to what extent your horse is injured."

CHAPTER DCIX.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS THREE COMRADES DETERMINE TO BE PRESENT AT MAUD'S TRIAL AT THE OLD BAILEY.

Tom King bitterly reproached himself for his thoughtlessness and negligence with respect to his steed, though there was certainly some excuse for it.

Anxiously, all three made their way to the spot where the animals had been left.

They were standing perfectly still.

After such a gallop as they had had, it was scarcely likely that they would feel much inclination to stray.

An examination was hastily made as to the state of Tom's steed.

The result of it was more satisfactory than they had imagined possible.

They found the wound was of a very superficial character.

A great deal of blood had flowed from it, but this was owing to the exertion it had been compelled to make.

While standing in the garden it had cooled, and the blood had coagulated over the surface of the wound.

Consequently, the hemorrhage had entirely ceased.

"It's all right!" said Claude Duval, after a careful inspection of the hurt,—"it's all right! You have no cause for apprehension whatever."

"Are you sure?" asked Tom.

"Yes, quite! It is a mere scratch—nothing more, and not worthy to be called a wound. I should recommend you to look now and then, in order to see whether the bleeding has recommenced. I don't think there is much fear of it."

"Still, the exercise may bring it on."

"Just so; and we shall be compelled to make tolerable speed."

"True, for the time has already gone by when we promised to be upon the eminence to meet the captain."

"I should not like to keep him waiting, for fear he should gallop off."

"He will allow us a few minutes' grace, and when he learns the profitable return we have met with, I am sure will not regret our trifling disobedience."

While this conversation was in progress, the highwaymen were engaged in mounting their steeds, and without further delay they set off in the direction of the spot appointed for the meeting.



"DICK TURPIN, DISGUISED, SPEAKS TO THE OFFICER ON THE STAIRS IN THE OLD BAILEY."

Of course, as our readers are already aware, they failed to find Dick Turpin waiting for them.

They grew uneasy and alarmed.

They all regretted that they had been tempted to disobey his injunctions.

Of course they could not tell whether Dick Turpin had returned or not.

For a long time, then, they were in doubt as to what they should do, and the more they pondered over the subject the greater did their perplexity become.

It was considered quite possible that Dick Turpin had already returned, and made his way to Enfield Chase.

But, then, he might not have done so, and if they took their departure he might arrive shortly afterwards, and be full of apprehensions on their account.

Quite half an hour was consumed in fruitless deliberations, and at the end of that time Tom King said:

"All things considered, I am sure our best plan is to return to the Chase, and wait there until Dick comes."

"I think so, too," said Claude. "If Turpin is in danger we cannot help him, because we have no idea where he is."

"And you must remember," said Sixteen-String Jack, "that it was agreed upon if he came and found we had left this spot that he was to ride off to the Chase."

"Perhaps he is already there!" exclaimed Tom King.

"I hope he may be," said Claude.

"Don't let us stay here any longer," said Sixteen-String Jack, "but depart at once."

This was agreed to.

Tom King inspected the wound which his horse had received, and found that it was still in the same condition.

That is to say, the bleeding had entirely ceased.

There was now no reason why they should not make good speed, and they flew along the level country in the direction of the Chase as swiftly as spectres

It so happened that just when they arrived upon the little eminence, Dick Turpin plunged among the trees composing Enfield Chase.

It will be remembered that, failing to find his companions here, he galloped back again to the appointed spot.

From this it follows that they must have passed each other on the journey.

This would be done easily enough, for they did not keep to the high-road but took their own course across the meadows.

Tom King and his two friends arrived at the Chase without accident, in something less than half an hour after Turpin had quitted it.

As they did not find their captain here as they expected their alarm speedily augmented, and more than ever they repented having left the eminence in search of adventures.

After much conversation, it was agreed that it would be unwise in the extreme to leave the Chase again, at any rate, for some time to come.

A prey to a thousand terrors, they remained standing beneath the trees, keeping a keen look-out in the direction of London.

As the night slowly passed away and morning dawned, their fears began to take a definite shape.

They could scarcely doubt that Dick Turpin had fallen into the hands of his enemies, and was by this time a prisoner.

And when the sun rose without his making his appearance, this idea strengthened until it became an absolute conviction.

Earnestly they began to discuss what steps should be taken in the present emergency, for, if the captain was a prisoner, the next step they ought to take should be to set about his rescue.

Tom King at length announced his intention of setting out for London without delay, in spite of the manifest peril to himself attendant upon such a proceeding.

Just as he was about to start, Claude Duval uttered a loud cry:

"Hurrah!" he said. "There he is! Look, he is coming at full speed! He's safe and sound! What a comfort, to be sure!"

Tom King had so fully made up his mind that his old comrade had been made prisoner that some seconds elapsed before he could believe in the reality of what he saw.

Then, with a glad shout, springing into the saddle, he galloped off.

Sixteen-String Jack seemed half inclined to follow his example, but Claude Duval restrained him.

"Stay where you are!" he said. "It was a thoughtless and incautious act upon Tom's part to dart out in that manner! We ought to take some precautions against being seen!"

That was quite enough for Jack, and indeed, by the time his companion had spoken these words, Turpin and King both arrived.

The satisfaction felt at this meeting was truly mutual.

Eagerly the three highwaymen pressed their leader to give them, without delay, a full account of all that had happened to him.

He complied, and then called upon Tom to do likewise.

"I have not much to tell you, captain," was the reply. "We left the eminence, had an adventure—a profitable one in two senses—and when we returned we failed to find you, and so came straight on to the Chase, thinking that the best thing to do."

This was all the explanation Dick Turpin could get.

At any other time than the present he would probably have pressed for more particulars, but as it was, his mind was too fully engrossed by other and more important matters.

Once more they repaired to that little dell in which they had found such comfortable quarters.

All were greatly fatigued, the horses included, and so the remainder of that day was passed for the most part in sleep, the highwaymen taking it in turns to watch.

No molestation was offered them, and just about sunset they all collected round a small fire they had kindled for the purpose of cooking some birds they had shot.

"Time is getting very short," said Dick Turpin, "and we have much to do. To-morrow morning the trial will begin."

"Have you ascertained that for certain?"

"No, I only suspect it; it may not take place until the day following; but we must not trust to that—we must be prepared at once."

"Certainly."

"And the lawyer gives you hopes of obtaining an acquittal?"

"Oh, yes—he seemed almost sure of it! Unfortunately, I was not able to stop to finish my conversation with him; he was about to say something when we heard that tremendous noise, as I told you."

"Yes—yes," said Tom King; "and now, Dick, just tell us plainly and clearly how you intend to act in this affair, and what you wish us to do."

"Do?"

"Yes. How do you intend to learn the result of the trial?"

Dick smiled as he said:

"I am determined to know the verdict as soon as anyone."

"You mean you will be present at the trial?"

"Yes."

Tom King shook his head.

"It's folly—absolute madness," he cried, "to think of any such thing!"

"Why so?"

"They will be on the look-out,—they will suspect that you will try to gain admittance to the court."

"I don't quite see that; and even if they do, why need I care? I am certain I could disguse myself so well, and assume a character so entirely different to my own with such perfection that I could safely bid defiance to detection."

"You have a talent that way, Dick, I know, and have succeeded better than either of us."

"I have succeeded," said Dick, "and I shall do again."

"And what are we to do?" asked Tom.

"You can remain here in waiting. Some time before nightfall I hope you will see me returning."

"No—no, captain, that will never do!"

"Why not?"

"Do you think we could rest here while we know that you were in so much danger, and while events of so much interest were taking place?"

"But if you attempt to accompany me, we shall make the danger so much greater for all of us."

"That might be arranged," said Tom King. "You must give way, captain, and allow us to accompany you. If you can disguise yourself we can; and surely we stand as good a chance of escaping the vigilance of the police officers as you do yourself."

"Well—well, it may be so," said Dick; "and I don't scruple to say that I would much rather have you with me than not."

"I knew it."

"Still, as the matter so particularly concerned myself, I made up my mind not to ask you to participate in the danger."

"That was wrong, captain. Where shall you obtain your disguise?"

"I have to think of that yet, and also what character I shall take."

"There's the old costumier," suggested Tom King; "he has done us good service before, and might do so again."

"I had not overlooked him," replied Dick; "but there's the disadvantage of having to go to his house, you may depend it will be closely watched."

"We might obviate that difficulty," said Tom King. "If we went to some obscure place and despatched a messenger for him, all would be well."

"So it will. Then I think we will say that our plans are so far settled."

"And now," said Claude Duval, "what are we to do with all the money we have got?"

"Do with it?"

"Yes. We are going upon an expedition, the result of which is doubtful. At any rate, it would not be wise for us to go encumbered with money, as we now are."

"Oh, I understand you!"

"I should propose," said Tom King, "that we select

some suitable spot and bury it, reserving only a small amount, which we can carry about with us."

"Just sufficient in case of emergency," said Dick Turpin.

"Precisely so."

"I fancy that will be our best course."

"Let us set about the task at once," said Dick Turpin, "and get it over. The sooner we dispose of all these details the better, for this night will be a busy one."

Search was made for a spot that seemed likely to answer the purpose they had in view.

In the same little dell where they had passed so much of their time they dug a small hole, and poured into it the whole of their wealth, with the exception of a few guineas which they had agreed to retain about their persons.

Then the hole was filled up, and the ground carefully flattened down.

A large stone was rolled over the buried treasure, so as to mark its whereabouts.

The stone was one of very peculiar shape and colour, and after having had a good look at it, all four highwaymen felt sure that, even after a considerable time had elapsed, they would be able to recognise it again.

"That will do, comrades," said Dick Turpin. "And now for the rest. How shall we manage about disguising ourselves?"

CHAPTER DCX.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HITS UPON A NOVEL AND ORIGINAL IDEA.

"We will leave that for you to arrange, captain," was the reply.

"Nay, nay—on the present occasion I stand more than ever in need of your counsel and advice, for while I am suffering all this anxiety on Maud's account it is impossible for me to think clearly."

"Then, if you will leave it to me," said Tom King, "this is what I should advise:—Let us get somewhere near to London, and then despatch a messenger for the old costumier. He will disguise us, and then all will be settled."

"If you think that is the best," said Dick, "I agree. Let us start at once."

Turpin was anxious and impatient in the extreme to be gone.

"Stay a moment," said Claude. "I think your suggestion might be improved upon."

"In what manner?"

"Does it not seem to you that there would be less risk if we divided, and went two by two?"

"Do you mean to the court-house?"

"Yes, certainly. If all four of us go to the Old Bailey together, don't you think that will be likely to provoke suspicion?"

"It might so."

"It would—you can make sure of that, and therefore I say, let us separate on this spot."

"But," said Turpin, "when we are together, are we not stronger and better able to overcome any opposition that might be offered to us?"

"Yes, certainly we are; but then, when we are all four together, we should be more likely to encounter opposition."

"It may be so."

"However, captain, I wish to have no voice in the matter. If it is your desire that we should accompany you, that is sufficient."

"No," said Turpin. "This is not an ordinary affair. I have no right to drag you into it at all."

"You have—you have!"

"Well, you enter it willingly—you run the risk of danger freely, and for my sake; therefore, I shall leave you to adopt what measures and precautions you think proper."

While this conversation had been going on, Sixteen-String Jack appeared to be paying great attention to it.

But as soon as they had ceased speaking, his face lighted up with a peculiar expression, and, rubbing his hands together, he said:

"I rather think I have hit upon a good plan at last—a very good plan!"

"What is it?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I am rather afraid."

"Why?"

"Because it is so very outrageous."

"Outrageous?"

"Yes."

"But it may be all the better on that account," said Turpin.

"I can assure you I think so!"

"Well, then, out with it—let us hear your plan!"

"It involves our separation in the manner Claude proposed."

"Then that is one thing in its favour," said Duval.

"Go on, Jack."

"And simply, my plan is neither more nor less than that you and Tom King should carry out the plan proposed, and that Claude and myself should disguise ourselves as police officers."

"Police officers?"

"Yes—why not?"

"It is an outrageous idea," said Dick Turpin, with a laugh, in which all his companions joined.

"But I like the notion uncommonly," said Claude Duval. "Ah, Jack, you've got a rare invention!"

"I am glad you like the scheme so far proposed," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"But go on," said Turpin—"tell us further."

"Well, really there is not much more to tell, nor had I arranged much more in my own mind. I thought it would be useless to do so, because, when we set out with the intention of accomplishing our purpose, we cannot tell what turn events may take, or what consequences they may produce."

"True—true!"

"And in all probability, if we laid down one particular plan it would be impracticable."

"But," said Tom King, seriously, "do you really think that you and Claude could succeed in disguising yourselves as police officers so well as to be undetected by the other members of the fraternity?"

"I do feel sure of it!"

"Well, I know you can do some wonderful things at times. Now, the way you have imposed upon the ostlers is really extraordinary."

"And he has always succeeded," said Claude. "And I have no doubt he will now. The more I think of the scheme the better I like it. It would be glorious to feel one's self transformed into a police officer!"

In spite of the cares that were about his heart, Dick Turpin could not help laughing at his comrade's plan—it was not only a bold one, but there was something very droll about it.

"Captain," said Jack, after a short pause, "I hope that you have by this time got more reconciled to my proposition. Have you?"

"I have in truth!"

"I am glad of that, and, after such an admission, I suppose you will be quite willing to give your consent?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"Then, captain, as we have a long night's work before us and an important day coming to-morrow, I think the sooner we part the better."

"And I. I don't like the separation, but I agree with you in thinking it will be much safer."

"And that's what we are to consider," said Claude Duval. "The enterprise altogether is a most perilous one."

"About that there can be no doubt," said Tom King. "But, with proper care and caution, I don't think we shall be in danger of getting into much trouble."

"I hope not. I am curious to know," cried Turpin, "where and by what means you expect to find the disguises you require!"

"And to tell you the truth," said Sixteen-String Jack, with a laugh, "I am quite as much at a loss as yourself. But still, in comparison with other things, that is a mere trifle; and I doubt not before long, when I have put my head by the side of my comrade's, that we shall overcome the obstacle."

"Then," said Turpin, "if we part here, I suppose we may look forward to meeting each other again in the court at the Old Bailey to-morrow morning?"

"We shall be there without fail."

"But," said Claude Duval, "if we are so careful in

disguising ourselves, how shall we manage to recognise each other?"

"Well thought of!" said Dick Turpin. "We might not be together in the court, yet it would be a satisfaction if we could see each other."

"How can it be managed?"

"Nay, I know not."

"Jack," said Tom King, "your invention seems active to-night: can you get us out of this difficulty?"

"I think I can," was the reply, "and by a very simple means, too!"

"Bravo!"

It is by no means certain that Claude and myself will be disguised as police officers. Something may occur to render it impossible, or other circumstances may induce us to adopt some other costume. Then as to yourselves, I have no idea what dress you will assume."

"Nor I," said Dick Turpin.

"Then we cannot recognise each other by the dress, that's certain; nor by our features, because in various ways, we shall make our faces look as different as possible."

"But we know all that, Jack, very well. What's your plan?"

"This:—When you get into the court, look all around you until you see two persons sitting, each with the left eye closed."

"Good," said Turpin—"I understand. That will be an easy means of recognition."

"It will—especially if you and Tom adopt the same expedient."

"When we have thus recognised each other we can open both our eyes."

"Excellent!" said Turpin. "Such a signal as that will not be conspicuous enough to attract the attention of anyone, no matter how vigilant our foes may be!"

"Then I suppose we may consider that matter settled like the rest," continued Jack. "And, now, is there anything more for us to arrange before we part?"

"Nothing that I can think of," replied Turpin. "Farewell, my friends, for a few hours. When we meet again, it will be in the court at the Old Bailey."

"A strange spot!" said Claude.

"Very!" added Turpin. "For myself and Tom, we shall take all the care we can of each other; because, at the present time, our liberty is of unusual value."

"And we will pledge ourselves to do the same," said Sixteen-String Jack. "We will promise not to run into any unnecessary danger."

"That is enough. Now, farewell! We had better leave the Chase at different points."

"Much better."

"Then we part here."

The highwaymen shook hands, and then separated.

Dick Turpin was mounted on Black Bess, and Tom King on his own horse.

The injury the animal had sustained was but trifling, and the wound was already partially healed over.

Claude and Jack watched them until they could see them no longer.

Then they mounted, and made their way out of the Chase by a different route.

They conversed earnestly together as they went, for the expedition they were upon was one of no ordinary character.

We must, however, defer, until another opportunity, the account of their proceedings.

It is necessary that we should, first of all, follow Dick Turpin and Tom King.

For a considerable part of the distance very few words passed between them, for they allowed their horses to go at the very top of their speed.

At last, when in a particularly lonely spot, they slackened their pace, in order that they might have an opportunity of regaining their breath.

"Have you been thinking, Tom, on the way?" asked Dick Turpin.

"I have."

"And are you still of opinion that it will be best for us to carry out the arrangement we have come to?"

"Do you mean as regards communicating with the old costumier?"

"Yes."

"I don't know what else can be better."

"Nor I. But can you call to mind any particular place that will do for us to stay at?"

Tom paused a moment to consider.

"There's Tom Davis's."

"It would not do to go there," said Dick, quickly and decisively. "Above all things, we must take care to avert suspicion from that place."

"Yes; now I reflect, we shall be best away."

"Is there any little inn near to London—some place where not much trade is done, and where we could stop for a few hours?"

"Now I come to recollect, said Tom King, "I do believe I know the very house that will suit us."

"I am glad of that. Where is it?"

"It's a curious, rambling, old wooden building, which I am sure you must have noticed times out of number. The sign is the Eight Bells."

"Is it near to Kensington?"

"Yes; close to the gravel-pits."

"I know the place you speak of, but have never stopped there."

"Nor I, which is all the better, since there will be less danger of our being recognised."

"Just so."

"I thought of the house because of its lonely and retired situation. If you remember, it stands a good way back from the road."

"I know the house quite well. No doubt we shall be able to obtain there all the accommodation we require."

"Forward, then! The sooner we reach it the better."

"It is a long gallop."

"I know that; but I think our horses are equal to it. And you must remember that some time will necessarily be consumed in sending for the old costumier."

"I don't expect that we shall do more than disguise ourselves and get to London by the time the court opens."

"That is all I desire. Now, then, forward!"

Once more, at a swift gallop, the highwaymen sped towards their destination.

They altered their course slightly, and by going straight across the country, heedless of such obstructions as hedges and ditches, they saved a great deal of ground, for all the roads had a roundabout tendency.

At length, without meeting with any accident, the two friends reached the high-road.

"The inn is very close hereabouts," said Tom King. "Yonder lies London; and if we go in that direction, I think we shall come to it in the space of a few minutes."

This supposition was quickly verified.

Suddenly they came in sight of the inn.

It would certainly have been passed by in the night-time by all travellers, for it was too far back from the road to be visible in the darkness.

But just at the side of the highway was a tall wooden post, which was always kept painted white; and as its thickness was considerable, it could not fail to attract attention, let the obscurity be ever so deep.

On the top of this post was a frame of iron-work, of complicated pattern; and in this frame was hung a board, upon which eight bells were painted.

"There's the house, then," said Tom King, reining-in his steed, and pointing to the inn with his riding-whip. "It seems very quiet—does it not?"

"Yes; quite uninhabited. I can only see a light at one window."

"And yet the place may be well illuminated inside, for it is built in a most extraordinary fashion."

"Is there accommodation for horses as well as travellers?" asked Dick Turpin.

"Oh, yes. If you look up you will see a truss of straw suspended from the bottom part of the framework that supports the sign."

"Oh yes; there it is, sure enough. We're all right."

In those days it was customary to show that stabling was attached to the inn by hanging up a truss of straw in the way we have mentioned, and the same thing is done in some parts of the country to this day.

"Going to stay here, gentlemen?" said a voice, at this moment. "Every accommodation, sir, and the best eatables and drinkables you can wish for."

"I am glad to hear that," said Turpin, "for we do not want to ride any further to-night. We have come so far in safety, but we have heard how the road further on is

infested by highwaymen, and we don't want to fall in with such rascals!"

"Certainly not, sir—certainly not," said the ostler, as he held the off stirrup, in order that Turpin might alight all the more easily. "This is a most howdashus road for highwaymen—it is, indeed, gentlemen, I assure you!"

"So we have heard."

"But in the house yonder," continued the ostler, waving his arm, "you will find every kind of accommodation you can wish for; and you need not feel afraid that you will be troubled by highwaymen there."

"Then we will stay," said Turpin; "that is quite decided. And if you attend well to the horses, you will find it will be nothing out of your pocket."

"All right, sir! I'll give you my word you shall have nothing to complain of. I rather fancy I have lived long enough to tell a real gentleman when I see him!"

Of this speech the two highwaymen took no notice, but having dismounted and surrendered their horses into the charge of the ostler, they followed him towards the inn.

CHAPTER DCXI.

DICK TURPIN IS INFORMED THAT ALL HIGHWAYMEN ARE COWARDS, AND THAT HE IS THE GREATEST COWARD OF THE LOT.

"THERE is the front door, gentlemen," said the ostler, pointing while he spoke. "Pass through that, and go straight on, and you will come to the bar. There you will find the landlord, who will show you every attention."

"All right!" said Turpin. "We are in no hurry. We will go with you and have a look at the stable, if you have no objection."

"Certainly not, gentlemen—certainly not. Come with me, by all means. This is the way."

The ostler was very civil and attentive; and he was fully impressed with the idea that the highwaymen were a couple of real gentlemen, and that when they left they would give him a substantial reward.

The stable was reached, and the highwaymen saw their cattle properly attended to, and then Dick Turpin said:

"I don't know whether you could be spared from your place, or not, but I want some one to deliver a letter for me in London with all possible speed."

"Very sorry to disoblige you, gentlemen, but, as you say, I can't possibly leave. Master's very strict."

"But do you know anyone who could be trusted with a letter?"

"Well, sir, there's my brother. I think he's somewhere about the premises. You see, he hasn't been quite so lucky as I have in getting into a good place; in fact, he's very bad off, and lately I have had him to help me just a little bit."

"Then he would be glad of having something to do for which he would be well paid."

"I should rather think he would, sir."

"I suppose I can get writing materials inside?" said Turpin.

"Oh, yes. How long shall you be before you have the letter ready, sir?"

"A few minutes only."

"Then, in the meantime, I will look for my brother."

"Do so—do so; and as soon as you have found him, send him indoors."

"I will, sir, you may depend upon it."

The two highwaymen, having taken as good an observation of the whole of the premises as the darkness would permit, made their way into the inn.

At the bar they found the landlord.

He was a short man, rather old, and shabbily dressed.

His face was covered with wrinkles, and of a dirty, coppery hue.

He looked as though he drank just a little too much of the good things in his cellar.

He made a very low bow as soon as he caught sight of our two friends, and, in a cringing, deferential tone of voice, he said:

"Good evening, gentlemen—good evening! I am delighted to see you! You are heartily welcome to the Eight Bells!"

"Can we have a private room?" said Turpin, abruptly, for he did not like either the landlord's looks, or his obsequious behaviour. "I am rather in a hurry."

"I ask ten thousand pardons," said the landlord, "and I offer ten thousand apologies; but, really, at the present moment I have not a private room that I can place at your disposal."

Turpin looked vexed.

"However, sir, there's the parlour, which, in a manner of speaking, is as good as a private room. There's just a few sitting down; but they won't interfere with you, sir, not by no manner of means."

Turpin hesitated a moment, and then, fearful of awakening the suspicions of the landlord, he said:

"Very well, show us into the room you speak of."

"I will, gentlemen—I will. I deeply and profoundly regret that I have no other accommodation to offer you!"

Bowing and cringing, the landlord led the highwaymen along a passage, and paused before a low oak door, upon which, near the top, was painted the word "Parlour."

The landlord opened it and ushered in his guests.

Turpin and King darted hasty glances around them.

They caught sight of several persons seated round a large table that occupied the centre of the apartment, but over the whole party there hung such a thick cloud of tobacco smoke that they could not distinguish anything with any degree of distinctness.

"Here is a side table," said the landlord, "and here are a couple of chairs. If you wish to keep yourselves select from the general company, you can make yourselves comfortable enough here."

"This will suit very well," said Turpin. "Bring us a couple of glasses of brandy-and-water, and then get us something nice to eat in the meanwhile. First of all, bring me pens, ink, and paper—I want to write a letter."

"Certainly, sir—certainly! I am your most obedient, humble servant!" said the landlord, who was quite overcome at receiving such a liberal order.

It was not every day that two such guests as these stopped at the Eight Bells.

A general silence among the guests took place when the highwaymen entered, and all present turned round and bent inquisitive glances upon them.

Turpin and King affected to be engaged in earnest conversation, and by this means they managed to keep their countenances concealed from the view of those at the table.

Finding so little attention was paid to them by the strangers, the conversation which had so suddenly ceased began again.

Turpin then took a few stealthy, observing glances, and noticed that about eight persons were present, all busily engaged in smoking, drinking, and talking.

By their appearance they seemed to be small tradesmen, probably living in the vicinity, in fact, just that class of persons who are generally to be found of an evening in the parlour of the nearest public-house.

Paper, pens, and ink were brought, and then Turpin said:

"Now, Tom, you write the letter—you will do it quicker and better than I shall."

"All right; what shall I put in it?"

"Why, merely say that we are stopping here at the Eight Bells, and shall be glad if he will come to us here, in order to disguise us."

"But it will not be safe to put our names, will it?"

"Well, hardly, but can you make him understand without?"

"I think so."

"That, then, is all that is necessary."

Tom King hastily wrote a few lines to the old costumier to the effect stated, but he was careful not to put in any names—indeed, the whole letter was most carefully worded.

Just as he had finished, the landlord entered with the brandy-and-water, and said:

"There's some one outside waiting to take your letter."

"Send him in here," said Turpin. "It's ready."

"Very good, sir."

The landlord withdrew, and the next moment the ostler's brother appeared.

"Do you know London?" said Turpin.

"Reether, sir."

"Well, then, I want you to take this letter with all

speed, and leave it at a shop in Bow Street at the corner of Hart Street."

"I know the shop well, sir—unkimmon well, I might say—it's a sort of old clo'se shop, I might call it—where they sells things for the people at the theaytres."

"That's the place," said Tom King. "Deliver the letter there."

"Must I wait for an answer?"

"No, there will be no necessity."

"And now, how shall you get to London?" said Turpin. "I want you to be as quick as you possibly can."

"It's a goodish walk, sir, and no mistake about that"

"But shall you be obliged to walk?"

"Not if you likes to pay for me to ride, sir."

"I'll do that willingly."

"Well, then I expects the stage-coach to pass the door every minute."

"Here is half-a-guinea, then," said Turpin. "Jump up, and deliver the letter as soon as you possibly can. You can take your own time coming back."

"All right, sir—you may depend I'll do my best."

The ostler's brother was much surprised and delighted at the liberality of his patrons.

With a low bow he retired.

Just as he reached the front door of the inn the stage-coach rolled by.

It did not stop; but he ran across the road and sprang up while the vehicle was in motion, with an agility and ease that would have done credit to the guard himself.

Turpin and King had now nothing more to do than to sit in the room and wait for the arrival of the costumier.

Some time would necessarily have to elapse before he could come.

In the meanwhile, however, they would be able to occupy themselves with a substantial meal, and listening to the conversation of those present.

They found this rather amusing.

There was a tall, thin man, apparently about thirty years of age, who monopolized nearly all the talk.

They quickly learned that this individual was a commercial traveller, or, as they were often called, "A bagman."

"Highwaymen!" he exclaimed. "Bah—bah! I don't care that for the whole tribe!"

He snapped his fingers in a defiant and contemptuous manner as he spoke.

The company generally looked on him with admiring eyes.

"Yes, gentlemen, I've seen a little bit of the highroads of England in my short lifetime; there is not a lane or a cross-country road that I am not acquainted with!"

"And have you ever seen any highwaymen?" said a little, stout, red-faced man, in a trembling, excited voice—"did you ever see one?"

"See one?" repeated the bagman contemptuously—"I should just think I have—I have met with 'em often, but—" and here he spoke with great emphasis—"*when I have met with any highwaymen they have remembered it!*"

"Have they though?" said one who sat next to the stout man with the red face.

"Yes, gentlemen, I can assure you it's a fact that these highwaymen that we hear such a deal about are the rankest cowards in all creation!"

His auditors shook their heads.

"You may have heard some tales told about 'em," continued the bagman; "but they're lies, gentlemen—lies—lies got up by the people who have been robbed, and who were just a shade more cowardly than the robbers! Don't you see, they wouldn't like to confess that they had parted with their money in fright, and so, on their way home, they invent some monstrous tale or other!"

"Well, Mr. Bagman," said another, "that may or may not be true, but, for the benefit of the public generally, just let us know how you proceed when you meet with a highwayman."

"Well, I'll tell you. Now, I've met with most of the rascals at some time or other, and they're all alike—every one of them!"

"What, Dick Turpin as well?" said the red-faced man.

"Yes, Dick Turpin as well; and it's my opinion that he's the rankest coward of the whole lot!"

Upon hearing these words, Turpin felt an almost unconquerable inclination to get up and pull the bagman's nose, but prudence restrained him, and he remained still.

"But," cried another, "do you really mean to say, Mr. Bagman, that you've encountered the great Dick Turpin himself?"

"The great Dick Turpin!" cried the commercial traveller, with withering contempt, "he is no greater than anyone else! Now, I'll tell you how I dealt with him once."

The greatest attention was now manifested, and after a slight pause the bagman began as follows:—

CHAPTER DCXII.

THE BAGMAN RELATES THE PARTICULARS OF HIS ADVENTURE WITH DICK TURPIN.

"It was one night last winter, when it was bitter cold, that I was coming along the Oxford Road in the direction of London. I was mounted on a capital nag, and I had a good bit of money about me, for I had been round to collect some accounts, and with the exception of this money, my samples were the only things I had in the shape of luggage.

"Well, gentlemen, I was going along at a swiftish trot when, all of a sudden, I caught sight of a horse that was standing by the side of the road.

"On this horse a man was seated.

"He was leaning forward on to the horse's neck, and just as I passed him, he uttered a dismal groan.

"I stopped at once, for somehow, although the night was dark—I was only able to catch a little bit of a glimpse—I fancied I recognised this man as being one of the same trade as myself.

"I went towards him, and I said:

"'Is that you, Tom Newton? Why, what in the world is the matter with you?'

"A dismal groan was the only reply I got, and I said:

"'Look up, Tom! It's all right! I'm by! What's happened?—are you hurt?'

"The man on the horse raised his head a little, and I caught sight of his face.

"I knew then for certain that it was Tommy Newton, and nobody else.

"We had been great friends in years gone by.

"'Oh, dear—dear!' he said—'is that really you?'

"'Yes, it is,' said I. 'But what in the world is the matter?'

"'Oh, I have been robbed—I have been robbed!' he replied, in a mournful voice—'I have been plundered of all my money, and hurt besides!'

"'Have you, though?' I said, much interested. 'When did it happen?'

"'Only a few minutes since! If you had come up a little sooner, you might have saved me!'

"'I should have saved you,' said I, because, gentlemen, I knew very well that I should.

These words were uttered with great self-complacency and as though they were logical in the extreme.

Everyone listened with breathless interest.

"'How did it happen?' said I. 'What did he rob you of, Tommy?'

"'Three hundred and fifty odd pounds!' he replied, 'and all in gold!'

"'Good gracious!' said I, 'surely you have never allowed a cowardly highwayman to take all that money away? It will be the ruin of you!'

"'I know it—I know it!' he replied; and he groaned in the same dismal fashion as before.

"'Why didn't you make a bold stand and a vigorous resistance?' said I. 'If you'd only have showed fight the highwayman would have been off at once!'

"'I did—I did!' said Tommy. 'But he was a desperate character! It was no good! He took my money, and here I am, you see!'

"'Why, I tell you, you ought to have shown fight!'

"'So I did!'

'Well, at that I said no more, because, whenever a person is robbed, he always declares he's made a valorous resistance, and I know very well its always the reverse.

"'But,' continued I, 'Tommy, you're a friend of mine, and I don't mind doing you a service.'

"'Oh, you're a good fellow, you are!' said Tommy,—'always the same—ever ready to help a friend in distress.'

"Well, gentlemen, Tommy might have been right, and

he might have been wrong; but I do try to help a friend whenever I have the opportunity."

This sentiment elicited a round of applause and some cheers, while the bagman was unanimously requested to go on.

"'Now,' said I, 'Tommy, which way did this highwayman go? By-the-bye, didn't you say it was Dick Turpin?'

"'Yes, I did,' said he

"'How did you know that?' said I.

"'Because he said so,' said he.

"'Very well,' said I, 'that's sufficient. Now just tell me which way he went.'

"'Why, on the road towards London.'

"'Come along, then, Tommy! Make good speed, and we will soon overtake him!'

"'Overtake him?' said Tommy Newton, quite aghast at the idea.

"'Yes,' said I, 'I mean to make him deliver up the money he has taken from you!'

"'But you can't!' said Tommy,—'you can't!'

"'Well, you come with me, old boy, and I'll try.'

"Then Tommy said to me:

"'I say, though, but do you happen to have any money about you? Because, if you have, I should recommend you not to go near him!'

"'Pooh—pooh!' I replied. 'I don't care for all the highwaymen breathing; and, do you know, I've got a matter of seven or eight hundred pounds with me at the present minute!'

"'Then,' said Tommy, imploringly, 'take warning by me! Don't go near him!'

"'Well, I'll run the risk, Tommy! You come along! I only hope we shall be able to see him, that's all; but I'm afraid there'll be no such luck.'

"Well, after a little more persuading, Tommy seemed to get better. Then he whipped his horse up, and so did I, and we tore along the road in capital style.

"Well, when we had gone some distance, our horses slackened their speed a little, then all of a sudden a man rode out into the centre of the road, and stopped there.

"'Hold!' he cried, in as bold a voice as he could—'hold!—stand and deliver!—your money or your life!'

"Well, of course, gentlemen, as part of my plan, I pulled up at once."

"But," said the red-faced man, "I don't quite understand."

"Sir!" said the bagman, turning towards him almost fiercely.

"Why, didn't you say there were two of you riding along the road?"

"Yes."

"And you were stopped by one man?"

"Yes."

"Well, mustn't that one man have had some courage to attempt to stop two of you?"

The commercial traveller was slightly taken aback, but very slightly.

He recovered himself, and said:

"Not at all—not at all! These highwaymen know that people ride along the road with their hearts in their mouths, and that they have only to say, 'Hand over!' and the money changes hands at once.

"As I said before, the people on the roads are cowards as a rule, and the highwaymen would never attempt what they do if they didn't know it."

This explanation was considered satisfactory, and the bagman was desired to proceed.

"Well, gentlemen, that interruption slightly put me out. However, when the man in the road told me to stop, I pulled up, and so did Tommy Newton.

"'Now,' said the highwayman, 'hand over to me all the valuables you've got at once! My name is Dick Turpin, and if you refuse I'll blow your brains out!'

"'You be d—d!' said I.

"What," cried the red-faced man again, in mingled doubts and wonder—"did you tell Dick Turpin to be d—d?"

"I *did!*" said the bagman, with terrific emphasis—"I did! However, these interruptions make me a long time getting over the tale, and they spoil it as well. I have not much more to tell now, than Dick Turpin seemed rather frightened when he saw me behave so bold, and I improved the opportunity by laying hold of him by the front part of his coat, and presented a pistol full in his face. Ah, gentlemen, I wish you could have seen the great Dick Turpin then!"

"When you presented the pistol at him?" said the red-faced man, interrogatively.

"Yes!"

"How did he look?"

"Why, frightened to death, to be sure! He turned as white as a sheet! His very hair stood on end, and he trembled to such a degree that I quite expected that he would fall off his horse!"

"Did he really?" said all his auditors in chorus.

"He did—it's a fact, I can assure you!"

"And what did you say to him?"

"'Why,' said I, 'you cowardly sneak; you've been robbing my friend Tommy Newton of his master's money! Give it back to me this moment, or I'll scatter your brains on the highway!'"

"That was a bold speech!" said Redface.

"It was, and it produced an impression, I can tell you!"

"What, did Dick Turpin actually give you the money back?"

"He did—every penny of it,—not only what he had taken from Tommy Newton, but ever so much more besides; and he begged so hard for his life that I let the poor devil go."

Ejaculations of wonder followed the conclusion of this extraordinary narrative.

The bagman looked around him with a triumphant air.

"And what did Dick Turpin do?" was asked by some one.

"Do? Why, he struck spurs into his horse, and was out of sight in no time. And, gentlemen, take my word for it, when you are out on the road, all you have to do is to pluck up a little spirit. If a highwayman sees you have ever so little courage, rely upon it he will let you alone."

"Well, it's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of," said one.

"And I'm of the same opinion," said Turpin, quietly, joining in the conversation for the first time.

He had with difficulty kept calm and silent while the mendacious bagman was proceeding with his tale, which, of course, as the reader knows very well, was a lie from beginning to end.

Tom King gave a meaning glance at his companion when he spoke, as though to warn him of the danger of joining in the conversation, but Dick Turpin paid no attention to it. He was greatly enraged, which is not to be wondered at.

"Sir!" said the bagman, turning round rather fiercely—"sir!"

"Excuse me," said Dick, assuming as humble tone of voice as he could. "I hope I have not said anything to displease you. You are such a valiant individual, that anyone with sense would think twice before they interfered with you."

The bagman drew himself up in his chair, and it was evident to all that he assumed an additional importance of manner.

"No offence, sir—no offence—none in the world!" he cried, with a patronising air.

"Well, then," said Dick, "I only ventured, in a manner of speaking, to remark that your story was the most extraordinary I had ever heard."

There was a peculiar tone in Turpin's voice while he spoke these last words, which did not escape the attention of the most obtuse person present.

"Sir," said the bagman, staring him hard in the face, "do you mean to impugn my veracity?"

"Impugn your *what?*" said Dick, in such a comical way, that all the company laughed heartily.

The bagman began to get very red in the face.

"I don't understand you, sir!" he said. "I don't understand you at all! Do you mean to cast a doubt upon the truth of my narrative?"

"No, no—not at all! I would not for all the world!" said Dick. "Of course, I have my own opinion about it; but that's nothing to nobody!"

The tone and gesture with which these words were accompanied, were noticed and comprehended by everyone.

"Sir," cried the bagman, in a still louder voice, and getting redder in the face than ever, "you say you have a private opinion about my story?"

"I have!"

"Then, sir, I demand and insist that you tell me at once what your private opinion is!"

"W — w — well," said Turpin, affecting to stammer.

"No hesitation, sir!" thundered the bagman, hoping to intimidate our hero—"no subterfuge—out with it—speak at once! What is your opinion?"

"Well, then," said Dick, "if you insist upon it and if I must give it——"

"You *must!*"

Well, then, sir, and gentlemen all, I beg most respectfully to say that my private opinion is, that the whole story is *a confounded lie from beginning to end!*"

CHAPTER DCXIII.

DICK TURPIN FAVOURS THE COMPANY IN THE INN PARLOUR WITH AN EXTRAORDINARY NARRATIVE.

This declaration took everyone by surprise.

It would be hard indeed to conceive anything that would have astonished them more.

For the most part, the occupants of the parlour were only small tradesmen in the vicinity, as we have oefore remarked, and this bagman, from his knowledge of the country, his assurance, and his boasting ways, was looked up to with a great degree of awe and respect.

Not one of the company present would have thought of saying the words that Turpin had just uttered.

They could scarcely believe their own ears.

The little fat man with the red face opened his mouth and eyes to such a preternatural extent, and assumed an expression of so much blank amazement that he was quite ludicrous to behold.

But the greatest treat was, to notice the effect of the words upon the bagman himself.

He was so completely taken aback that for a minute good he could not articulate a single word.

At the end of that time, however, he recovered himself.

He was conscious that the eyes of the whole company were fixed upon him, and after what he had said it would never do for him to allow the real state of his feelings to be perceived.

Therefore, he started to his feet, and with a well-assured anger, and with an air of one who had been grossly insulted, he said:

"Sir—sir, I don't know who you are, nor what you mean! It's disgraceful! It's abominable! Do—do—do you mean, in the face of all these gentlemen, and in my own face, to—to call me a liar?"

"Nothing of the kind, sir!" said Dick.

"Oh, I see! But I'll make you eat your own words yet, my fine fellow! Apologise, sir, at once!"

"I will do nothing of the kind!" said Dick. "I have nothing to apologise for!"

"But I say you have, sir!" said the bagman, valiantly. "You must either apologise, or give me satisfaction!"

"What have I to apologise for?"

"For calling me a liar in public!"

"I beg to state that I never did anything of the kind!"

"But you did, sir!"

"I merely gave you my private opinion," said Dick. "You insisted upon having it, and it was to the effect that I did not believe a single word of all you have said, and that you have been abusing us all for the last half hour with a monstrous lie of your own invention!"

"Oh, this is too much!" cried the bagman, striking his breast. "Gentlemen all, I appeal to you!"

But very little notice was taken of his appeal—the gentlemen all, without exception, sat with their pipes in their hands, and their mouths and eyes struggling desperately as to which should open widest.

"Now, sir," said Dick, "I don't intend to be drawn into a quarrel with you!"

"Oh, don't you?" interrupted the bagman, taking courage immediately.

"No, I don't!" said Dick, perceiving it; "but I'll tell you what—if you are not civil, you'll find yourself in trouble!"

"But I'll have you to know, sir, that I am not a man to be insulted and intimidated by such as you!"

"I have offered neither insult nor intimidation," said Dick. "But sit down—sit down! Pray don't make a fool of yourself any more!"

"Any more!" screamed the bagman. "Do you mean to insult me still further? Do you mean to imply by that that I have been making a fool of myself?"

"Oh, just as you like!" said Dick. "It doesn't matter to me in the least; but I have got something to tell you that's of very great importance, and which I should advise you to hear!"

"Ha—what?" said the bagman, glad enough to take advantage of this loophole of escape.

"I have something to tell you of the greatest importance, and which intimately concerns yourself!"

"Indeed, sir! Then I am very sorry I have treated you so rudely, and I hope there will be an end of the matter!"

"Just so," said Dick. "I don't want to cause any differences; I should never have ventured upon giving my opinion unasked for, and it is but an opinion after all!"

"Nothing else!" murmured the guests.

"But what have you to tell me?" asked the bagman, anxiously.

"Something highly important!"

"Is it private?"

"No—no, not at all, because I am not quite certain—but almost—that the matter I am going to speak about concerns you; I should like to state it before all the company!"

"Hear—hear!" said everybody, and the tables were rapped in approval.

"But as talking and listening are both hard work, I propose that the landlord shall be called."

The bell was rung, and the landlord appeared.

"Here," said Turpin, "let the gentlemen all round have just what they like to drink, and I will pay for it!"

The applause which followed this announcement was prodigious.

Somehow, they all seemed to like Turpin a little from the first, but now he had risen to such a height of popularity, as none else in that parlour had ever attained.

The guests all round were served with just what they thought proper to order, and then Dick Turpin, taking a guinea from his pocket, said:

"Here, landlord, this coin will settle it; don't bother yourself to give me any change. Put a couple of pounds of the best tobacco you have in your house on the table for the benefit of the company."

Another tremendous round of applause followed this command, in which the commercial traveller himself joined.

As a matter of course, all this produced a very great impression, and all the company present prepared themselves to listen with the most profound interest to ever word that Turpin might utter.

Dick had a design in this, as will quickly be seen.

As soon as all had comfortably seated themselves, stirred their glasses, and lighted their pipes, Dick Turpin began:

"Well, gentlemen all, and you sir," indicating the bagman in particular; "what I have to do is to give you the particulars of an adventure that I once had with Dick Turpin himself."

"Hear, hear—bravo!" cried everybody.

"And," continued Dick indicating the bagman again, "I have also to convey a serious warning to yourself."

"Go on, sir—pray go on!" said the bagman, nervously

"With all the pleasure in life," replied Turpin. "Now to begin."

There was a profound silence at once, and Dick Turpin, very much to the amazement of Tom King, then spoke as follows:

"You must understand, gentlemen, that I am now on my way to London, where I have a little business to trans-



[SIXTEEN-STRING JACK BAMBOOZLES THE OFFICERS.]

act. I did not finish my journey to-night because I was afraid of the highwaymen."

"Pooh—pooh!" said the bagman.

"Order!" cried a voice.

"It is about two months ago since I paid my last visit. On that occasion I had no friend with me as I have now, but was alone.

"Well, I stopped at a public-house in a not very good part of London, but yet a part that suited me very well for the business I had to do. It was a public-house where I had stopped many a time. I sha'n't mention the name of it, nor the name of the landlord, nor the street, because what I have to say compromises the landlord; and it is not my intention to get him or anybody else into trouble, if I can help it."

This sentiment was received with universal applause.

"Well, that night I had been asleep about an hour, or perhaps not quite so much, and then I awoke. I don't know what it was that aroused me; but I found my eyes wide open, and then the sound of voices came upon my ears. Two persons were evidently talking, as I quickly found by the tones of their voices; and so close did the sound appear to be, that, for a time, I could hardly believe the speakers were not in the same room as I was myself.

"However, after listening for a moment or two, and recovering my senses properly, I discovered that the head of my bedstead was placed against a wooden partition.

"It was from the other side of this partition that the sound of voices came.

"Even if I had wished, I could not have helped listening to every word; but the conversation was of so extraordinary a character, that I stretched my ears to the utmost.

"One voice I recognised as being that of the landlord, but the other was quite strange to me.

"'Don't be alarmed, my boy—don't be alarmed!' I heard the landlord say; 'the runners have not been here for ever so long, and can't suspect your presence!'

"'Well, be that as it may,' said the strange voice in reply, 'I don't intend to stay here. I'm off to-night!'

"'Ah, Dick, my lad!' said the landlord, 'you will never rest in safety! You are always ready for the road, and so is your mare!'

"'Right!' said the stranger, 'Black Bess, like her rider, is always ready for the road!'"

"Did you hear that, though?" said the little fat man with the red face.

"Order—order!" cried a chorus of voices. "Pray proceed!"

Everyone listened for the continuation of the story with redoubled interest.

"Here was a revelation! I was astounded! The strange voice I had heard belonged to no other than the redoubtable highwayman, Dick Turpin!

"The landlord, I saw plain enough, had been hiding the daring offender in his house.

"Perhaps you can imagine, gentlemen, how I stretched my ears to listen to every word."

"After Dick Turpin, then, had spoken, the landlord said:

"'But where are you going to-night?'

"'Well, that I scarcely know,' was the reply. 'Wherever chance may take me, I suppose. Have you heard any particular news lately?'

"'No—nothing particular,' said the landlord; 'only the other night there was a bagman here—a commercial traveller, you know—that was talking a great deal about you!'"

At these words everyone present started.

All directed their eyes upon the bagman, who could not control himself sufficiently to prevent the blood from leaving his face and turning it deathly white, nor from keeping his limbs from trembling. He was evidently greatly agitated.

"A—a—a commercial traveller?" he gasped.

"Yes," said Dick—and there was something ominous in the tone with which he pronounced the simple word "Yes—that's what the landlord said!"

"Wh—wh—what? Go on—pray go on!"

"'And what had this bagman to say about me?' Dick Turpin asked, and rather fiercely, too, I thought."

"Rather fiercely?" repeated the little fat man with the red face.

"Yes," said Dick, solemnly, "*rather fiercely*, and then the landlord replied:

"'Well, he said some very extraordinary things, Dick, lad—whether they're true or not I won't go for to say. However, I'll tell you what he did say, and he was ready to lie down on his back and swear every word was the truth.'

"'Go on,' I heard Dick Turpin say, as fiercely as before.

"'Well, this bagman began by saying how he didn't care a snap of his fingers for all the highwaymen on the road between London and York, and that he'd never been robbed by any of 'em, though they had often tried, but he always gave them better than they sent, and that once upon a time he was stopped by you, Dick!'

"'Stopped by me?' I heard Dick Turpin say. 'What account did he give of the meeting?'

"'Why, a most extraordinary one. He said that you stopped him and told him to hand over; but so far from obeying, the bagman declared he pulled out a pistol and held it in your face!'

"'Held a pistol in my face?' said Dick Turpin.

"'Yes,' continued the landlord, 'and that you were almost frightened out of your life!'

"'Oh, monstrous!' exclaimed Dick Turpin—'it seems monstrous!'

"'However, the bagman declared that you humbly begged his pardon—was very sorry you stopped him, and offered to give him all the money you had, if he would only let you off!'

"Well, gentlemen, Dick Turpin seemed rather astonished when he heard that, for he jumped up all of a sudden, and I heard him walking up and down the room—oh, such a peculiar walk it was—his boots seemed to make all the house shake again! Gentlemen, I only heard Dick Turpin walk on that one occasion, but I can solemnly declare, that if ever I heard him walk again *I should know his footsteps in an instant!*"

The announcement was received with ejaculations of wonder.

As for the bagman, he sat like one confounded.

Dick drank a little to moisten his throat, and resumed:

"Well, gentlemen, I don't want to occupy too much of your time, and go over the same ground twice. Perhaps it will do, if I say at once, that the account the landlord gave to Dick Turpin of what the bagman had said was just the very same tale, almost word for word, as that gentleman over there told you a little while ago!"

"Was it though?" said the man with the red face.

"It was!" said Dick, solemnly.

A cold perspiration started out all over the body of the commercial traveller.

He had told the same tale about his own prowess and the way he had dealt with Dick Turpin on such a many occasions, and with such a many variations, that he could not then and there take upon himself to say that he had not related the story in the inn that was alluded to.

"Yes, gentlemen," said Dick; "the substance of the bagman's story, as told by the landlord, was, that he made Dick Turpin hand over all the money he had got; beg humbly for his pardon, and then, afterwards, he let him go, and was never troubled with Dick Turpin or any of his gang any more!"

"And what did Dick Turpin say to that?" asked several voices in a breath.

"Ah!" said Dick, speaking more impressively than ever, "now comes the most wonderful and the most terrible part of all my story!"

CHAPTER DCXIV.

TURPIN FRIGHTENS THE BAGMAN UP THE CHIMNEY.

Upon hearing this announcement, every person present drew a long breath and fixed his eyes on the countenance of the highwayman.

All were eager and anxious to know what was coming next.

Dick finished his glass at one draught, and then he exclaimed;

"Tale-telling is dry work—very dry work indeed. I must have my glass filled again before I can go any further."

The landlord was summoned, and every one wished to have the honour of treating Dick with a glass, but he would not permit it; he insisted upon paying for glasses round once more.

This produced a trifling delay.

Few cared much about it, except the bagman, and he was burning with anxiety to know what Dick Turpin had been overheard to say concerning himself.

He really was as uneasy as though he had been sitting on thorns.

At last all was arranged, and Dick continued:

"Gentlemen," he said; "partly by the words he uttered, partly by the tones of his voice, and partly from the manner in which Dick Turpin paced up and down the room, I could tell as well as if I had seen him, that he was in a terrible passion about something."

The bagman's heart began to beat faster than ever.

"'Curses on it!' I heard Dick Turpin say at length, 'that cowardly soap-and-sugar selling rascal is for ever telling the same tale! It has come to my ears once or twice before, and I can tell, by the description I have had on each occasion, that it is the same man, and moreover, he has been so carefully described, that I should recognise him in a minute if I saw him."

These words caused the eyes of all present to be removed from Dick's countenance, and to be fixed upon the bagman's, whose uneasiness increased every moment.

"Well, gentlemen, the landlord finding Dick Turpin was in such a furious rage, got rather alarmed about the consequences, and tried to soothe him down, and make him quiet, but it was all to no purpose.

"'I'll be revenged upon him!' I heard Dick Turpin say, more fiercely than ever—'I'll be revenged upon him! He will not tell the tale many times more! For all his boasting and lying, I know he's the rankest coward that ever drank ale from a cup!'"

The bagman endeavoured to raise some protest against these remarks, but his voice was drowned by the remainder of those who were in the room, who insisted upon hearing all.

"'But, Dick,' I heard the landlord say, 'it's all false, isn't it?'

"'Of course it is!' was the reply.

"'Very well, then, why trouble yourself at all about it?'

"'Trouble be d—d!' said Dick Turpin—'it's no trouble; it'll be a pleasure! Wait till I once catch sight of the rascal, that's all; I only want to see him once, and then, I wager my head to a tenpenny nail, that he'd always remember me afterwards!'

"'But what shall you do, Dick?' asked the landlord.

"'I don't know!' was the savage rejoinder—'the most horrible thing I can think of! I should like *to boil him in oil!*'

"Did Dick Turpin say that?" asked the little red-faced man, in tones of the greatest wonder.

"Do you presume to impugn my *veracity?*" said Dick, imitating the bagman's manner to such a nicety, that all burst out into a roar of laughter, except the bagman himself, who, of course, failed to see the joke, though, as he was in a decided minority, that did not much matter.

"Oh, no—no—no!" said the red-faced man, with great rapidity—"nothing of the kind, sir, only it seemed such an extraordinary speech!"

"Well, it did, I admit, but it's true all the same, and from what I have heard of Dick Turpin, I should not feel at all surprised if he was to carry that particular threat into execution!"

"What, boil a man in oil?"

"Yes, that he certainly would if he had the opportunity!"

It was a great temptation to proceed in this strain, because, as he sat there speaking, he was able to note how much the agitation of the unfortunate commercial traveller increased.

It was only natural that Dick should feel a great deal of resentment, and quite as natural that he should avail himself of this easy means of making the bagman uncomfortable.

The intense terror under which he was evidently labouring was a tolerably good punishment, though not so severe a one as he deserved, but Dick hoped to make his alarm still greater.

Voices on all sides called upon him to continue, and, nothing loath, he resumed.

"Well, gentlemen, the landlord, finding that Dick Turpin had firmly made up his mind to have revenge in some way or other, said no more, and did not attempt to turn him from his purpose, but began to ask him how and by what means he hoped to find out the object of his rage.

"'I don't know,' he said. 'I have not thought about that yet; but, stop a minute, wouldn't a man like this be likely to stop at a good many inns on the roadside?'

"'Oh yes,' replied the landlord.

"'Very well, then, all is easy enough. Do you know which roads he travels?'

"'Sometimes the York Road, and sometimes the Oxford Road.'

"'I sha'n't forget,' said Dick Turpin; 'and now I think of it, I have laid hold of a plan. I shall be able to describe the sort of man I am on the look-out for, and at every public-house I stop at, I'll ask whether such a person has been seen or is in the house.'

The bagman's chair now fairly creaked, he trembled to such a degree.

"'But,' said the landlord to Dick Turpin, 'such a course will be dangerous; and, after all, what does it matter? Such a paltry wretch is surely quite beneath your notice!'

"'D—n the danger!' Dick Turpin replied in a minute. 'I have said I'll make him remember it, and I'll be as good as my word!'

"Well, gentlemen, that's the sum and substance of what I overheard, for, though they went on talking for some time longer, nothing fresh was mentioned. This, however, is quite certain: when they parted, Dick Turpin repeated his threats of vengeance, and declared that if it took him the rest of his life, he would call at public-houses by the roadside until he found the rascal who had been telling such infernal lies about him.

"That's all, gentlemen. And now, sir," Dick added, indicating the bagman, "you see that I had some grounds for my private opinion, and I was also right in saying that I had something to relate that concerned you very seriously!"

The bagman was not only in a most horrible state of fright, but he also found himself in the very uncomfortable position of having been proved to be no more than an idle boaster and unblushing liar—at least, that would be it if he remained silent and allowed things to take their course.

The most timid animal will often fight desperately when forced at bay, and so, being thus, in a manner of speaking, driven up in a corner, the bagman summoned up what courage he could, and resolved to make a bold stand.

"Sir," he exclaimed, fixing his eyes upon Dick, "I don't know who you are, and damme if I care, but I'll let you know that if you were the king himself you should not come here and tell your cock-and-bull stories about highwaymen! You've told your tale, sir, and, d—n it, you shall have my opinion of it! I say it is a lie, sir—a confounded lie from beginning to end!"

Dick Turpin started to his feet as though in a furious passion.

The guests rubbed their hands cheerfully, for they anticipated some kind of personal contest between the two strangers, and this they were quite willing should take place, so long as they were not hurt by any of the blows exchanged.

"Then," said Dick Turpin, in tones of assumed anger, "do you mean to say, Mr. Brown-paper-parcel, that you call me a liar?"

"Yes, I do, sir, and you shall either confess that all you have told is untrue, or else you shall prove it, sir—yes, prove it!"

"But how am I to prove it?" said Dick. 'The only way I could do that would be to call in Dick Turpin, which is impossible!"

"Ha, ha, my fine fellow!—very good!" said the traveller, growing more and more valorous as he went on, and assuming quite a swaggering air. "I know how to deal with such as you are! I believe that you're no better than a highwayman yourself!"

"The same to you," said Dick. "But hark! oh, what can I hear?"

Dick changed his voice very suddenly, and assumed an attitude of intense listening.

"What—what?" cried everybody, while the bagman looked rather alarmed.

"Luck favours me," said Dick, "I shall be able to prove my words—to prove them beyond all doubt!"

"How—how?" asked a chorus of voices.

"Listen! Do you hear that footstep? I can hear *him* coming!"

The bagman sprang to his feet.

"Who—who?" asked the guests.

"*Dick Turpin!* He's coming—he's in the passage—he's coming to the door,—can't you hear his footstep? I told you, gentlemen, before, that I only heard his footstep on that occasion, and that I should always be able to recognise it afterwards. He's coming! Now, Mr. Bagman, it will soon be known which of us has told the lie."

The sound of a heavy footstep in the passage could be distinctly heard by everyone present.

Fully believing that Dick's tale was true, and that the footstep outside announced the coming of the highwayman, about whom he had told so many lies, the bagman, with a yell of fear, made a frantic dash across the room.

His courage evaporated in an instant.

With his teeth chattering, and his knees knocking together, he looked round him for some place of concealment—some place where he could hide himself from the view of the notorious highwayman.

He saw the chimney, and the insane idea at once occurred to him that he would climb up it.

He rushed in that direction, making a terrific rattle among the fireirons.

Before he had time to recollect himself or remember what would be the consequences of what he was doing, the bagman got his head and shoulders up the chimney, but, as there happened to be a large fire roaring in the grate, the heat to his knees was by far too great to be pleasant—in fact, more than he could bear, so he had no alternative but to quit his place of concealment, or stop there and be roasted.

He was not so terrified as to be ignorant that the first was the best course for him to pursue, and so, with yells and shrieks and groans, caused partly by terror and

partly by the pain of the burns he had received, he got down into the fender again.

Then, indeed, did he present a truly ludicrous but pitiable spectacle to all the guests.

His head, and face, and hands, and the upper part of his clothing were completely covered with soot, and he brought with him a very disagreeable odour of burnt clothes and singed flesh.

Just as he reached the fender, and attempted to dash the soot from his eyes so as to get them open, the door was flung back upon its hinges.

He half saw it—half heard it.

Maddened with terror, rage, and pain—blinded by the soot—and with the horrible idea that the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin, was at hand, ready to wreak his vengeance upon him—the unfortunate bagman made a terrific rush for the third time.

A scene of the utmost confusion and dismay immediately ensued.

CHAPTER DCXV.

THE POLICE OFFICER OPENS THE DOOR IN THE CLOCK-CASE, AND MEETS WITH A SURPRISE.

THE mere fact of the bagman having attempted to perform the impracticable feat of hiding himself in the chimney is quite sufficient to prove that he had altogether lost control over his senses.

Therefore, failing in this first endeavour to escape, he looked around him for some other hiding-place, and then made a rush in the way we have already mentioned.

He made a frantic and ridiculous attempt to conceal himself underneath a chair.

This chair was the one in which the little red-faced man was sitting, who had interrupted Dick Turpin in his narrative so often by his ejaculations of wonder.

So violently and desperately did the bagman endeavour to crawl underneath the front rail of the heavy oaken chair that he overturned it.

The crash was prodigious.

The little man with the red face was so astonished that he believed an earthquake had certainly taken place.

He struggled desperately—so did the bagman; and the pair rolled underneath the table.

Here their struggles became fiercer than ever, and then, with a crash, that made the overturning of the chair insignificant, the table was suddenly raised in the air and upset.

Down it came on its side, carrying with it the lights, and all the glasses, and jugs of hot water that were on the table.

Scarcely one in the company escaped a scald or a contusion of some kind or other, and the noise and racket which ensued, together with the terrified cries uttered by the bagman, and the oaths and curses that came from those who had been scalded or bruised, altogether defies description.

It is quite certain that such a confusion had never been known before in the parlour of the Eight Bells Inn.

Of course, Dick Turpin and Tom King were highly amused by this scene, and the former was quite content with the vengeance he had had upon the man who had so misrepresented his character.

The room was plunged in darkness, for the bagman had caused at least a bushel of soot to fall down the chimney into the grate.

This had the effect of deadening the flame, so that a dull red glare was all that came from between the bars.

The scuffling and struggles to get up were at their highest, when Turpin, taking hold of his companion by the arm, drew him out of the parlour and shut the door.

In taking hold of the knob outside, in order to do this, his hand encountered the key, and almost without a thought he turned it, so that all within were prisoners.

"I think," said Dick, "that after this little breeze, the sooner we are off the better."

"Yes, decidedly. It was altogether rash on your part. But how are we to leave until the costumier comes?"

"Ah, I had forgotten that. Well, we will not remain in the house at any rate. Let's go out to the back, and find the ostler."

"Which is the way?"

"I'll be hanged if I can tell you!—the place is so confoundedly dark!"

What might be termed the entrance-hall of the inn, which was, in fact, a narrow passage running from front to back, was in a state of great obscurity.

There was one miserable oil lamp depending from the ceiling.

The light it gave forth was never very brilliant, even when all circumstances were favourable; but now, from the flickering nature of the flame that played around the long wick, it seemed as though it had remained a long while without being attended to.

Almost at random, then—for they were not certain whether they were going towards the front or the back of the inn—the two highwaymen groped their way along the passage; but before they had gone many paces Tom King cried:

"Hush—hark! I hear some one coming!"

Dick paused at once, and then the sound of footsteps smote upon his ear.

It so happened that they halted very near to the oil lamp of which we have spoken, and, of course, in the lightest part of the passage.

Directly afterwards, they saw some one advancing.

Not believing that they were in any particular danger, our friends stood close to the wall, in order to ascertain who this new-comer was.

To their surprise and satisfaction, they found that it was the old costumier.

"We are here, and waiting for you," said Dick, immediately.

The old costumier bowed low, as he always did, and in a low tone of voice he replied:

"Munificent sir, I am glad we have met here."

"That's right!" said Turpin. "Where are the disguises?"

"I have them outside in the hackney-coach; but I fear they will be of no service. Hark!—do you hear that?"

Turpin and Tom King both listened intently.

Then, very faintly but yet very distinctly, they heard horses' feet upon the road, though not coming at a rapid pace.

"Who are they?" said Dick.

"Your foes, munificent sir!"

"Are you sure of it?"

"Quite. Since our meeting with each other, they have been suspicious of me, and have placed a close watch around my house, particularly during the last two or three days. Wherever I have gone I have been followed, and to-night, when I set out from my house in a hackney-coach, I was followed by a troop of officers."

"Can this be possible?"

"It is true. They have suspected me for a long time."

"Hark!" said Tom King. "We must be speedy—they have just arrived."

With a sudden dash, a troop of horsemen pulled up in the open space in front of the inn.

"We must be off at once!" said Turpin, "The way you came was from the front, was it not?"

"It was," replied the costumier.

"Then our way lies in the opposite direction."

"Can I do anything to serve you, munificent sir?"

"I fear not. On this occasion the police have defeated my plans. Good night?"

Turpin and King, feeling sure that they had not a second to lose, turned round and made their way with all possible speed to the back door of the inn.

They dashed through it and got into the yard at the back just as the police officers entered the front.

Before following the highwaymen any further, we will just say a word or two about the latter.

As the costumier had correctly stated, the officers were suspicious of him, and maintained a vigilant guard around his house.

Although they had never been able to prove, yet they had good grounds for believing, that he was acquainted with the highwaymen and in the habit of communicating with them; therefore they not unreasonably judged, by following him wherever he went, they should eventually make a discovery which would repay them well for all their trouble.

The costumier was aware of this, and shook his head when he received Dick Turpin's note.

Nevertheless, he resolved to comply with his wishes as far as he was able.

At any rate, he hoped it would be in his power to warn the highwaymen of their danger, and make them aware of the extreme danger they would be in if they ventured to approach his house.

When the costumier had got a little way on his journey, he heard the trampling of horses' feet in the rear, and, putting his head out of the coach window, he saw that a large troop of officers was following, but they continued to keep some few yards in the rear.

When they suddenly halted in front of the Eight Bells, all sprang as quickly as possible from their saddles, and with the exception of one who remained to take care of the horses, they made their way into the inn.

In the passage they found the old costumier.

They pretended to take no notice of him, but quickly spread themselves all over the passage.

Then they heard a furious noise going on in one of the rooms.

This was the parlour.

Heavy blows were rained upon the door, and there were cries for help and cries of pain, as well as shouts and swearing.

A struggle, too, was evidently going on.

The police officers were on the alert immediately, and, with their usual acuteness, jumped to the conclusion that the highwaymen they wanted were in the room, and that some one was then making an attempt to capture them; hence all the riot.

Collecting themselves in one body, they opened the door and walked in.

The place was still in profound darkness.

No soner was the door opened than of course all the guests made a terrific rush to escape, but as they did so they were, in spite of all resistance and protestations on their part, made prisoners by the police officers.

Then one of the most active and enterprising of them went to the fireplace, and, taking up the poker, stirred the fire.

A bright blaze immediately shot up into the chimney, and then the interior of that apartment was fully revealed.

Such a scene of havoc and confusion as met their gaze could hardly be imagined.

But as the officers mustered about a dozen in number altogether, they managed to take prisoners all the people in the parlour, the landlord himself included.

A rapid examination was then made of each in succession.

The officers were well acquainted with the appearance of the highwaymen, and these tradespeople and the landlord differed so from the description, that they had no hesitation in liberating them at once.

But when we said they made all the people in the parlour prisoners we were not quite right.

There was one exception.

This was the bagman.

His fright had not subsided yet, and, in the same delirious state as before, he had got inside a large clock that stood opposite the fireplace.

The clock was one of that old-fashioned make with a large case coming right down to the floor, and with a large door in front.

The space inside was quite sufficient to enable the bagman to stand upright in it.

He would have crouched down to the very bottom had such a thing been possible.

But there was not space enough for this, and so, trembling all over like a jelly, he stood bolt upright in the clock-case.

One of the police officers went round the room, prying into all the nooks and corners, and presently he came to the clock.

It did not occur to him for a moment that anyone might be concealed in so unlikely a place, but he opened the door just as a mere matter of duty.

As the clock stood just opposite the blazing fire, it was of course brought out into very vivid relief.

The officer was not at all prepared for the extraordinary sight which met his eyes so soon as ever he opened the door.

There stood the bagman, with his face, and hair, and hands completely covered with soot.

He was as black as a negro, and here and there his face and clothes were streaked with blood.

"The *devil!*" shouted the officer, in the utmost alarm, as he slammed the door shut and locked it in a moment.

CHAPTER DCXVI.

THE CHIEF POLICE OFFICER FINDS HE HAS MADE A DEPLORABLE MISTAKE.

THE loud shout given by the officer, upon making this astounding and horrible discovery, had of course the immediate effect of attracting universal attention to him.

"The what?" said the one who had the command. "What is it, Jenkins?"

Jenkins looked very white, his teeth chattered, and his eyes rolled wildly.

"The devil!" he replied, solemnly.

"You're drunk, I think," said his chief.

"No, I'm not, sir—no, I'm not. There's the devil inside the clock!"

"Inside the clock? Pooh—nonsense! It's no devil, I know. I'll soon show you what it is!"

With these words, the commanding-officer, in a very valorous way, strode across the room to the clock.

His finger was on the key, when suddenly such a horrible, dismal, groaning shriek, from the inside of the clock-case reached his ears, that he stood still as though changed to stone.

All the other officers looked alarmed and half inclined to bolt out of the room.

The poor bagman inside was now beginning to recover his composure.

He understood that those outside were police officers, and he concluded from that fact that they would be friends of his, not enemies, and would make any attempt that Dick Turpin might make upon him quite abortive.

So, after the door of the clock was slammed shut, he made up his mind to get out.

The door was fast, as he found by putting his hand against it, and then he cried out to be released.

Of course his voice had a very strange and muffled sound in that confined space.

His mouth, too, was filled with soot, so that it was no articulate sound which reached the ears of the officer outside.

Then suddenly the bagman, growing desperate again, resolved to open the door of the clock-case.

Like everything else that was done in the good old times, the lock was a substantial one.

He pushed against it with all his might, and in doing so, caused the clock to lean forward in a very remarkable and highly dangerous manner.

All present looked upon it with amazement and alarm.

The oscillations of the clock backwards and forwards grew greater every time, until all at once with a tremendous crash the clock fell forward on its face.

The smash was tremendous.

Jenkins' assertion that the devil was in the clock was now considered to be confirmed, and there was not one who did not think it high time to quit the parlour.

They ran as far as the passage, and then the costumier said to the officers:

"I should not wonder now if that is not Dick Turpin who has hidden himself in the clock."

This was a suggestion that the officers grasped at at once, and they all thought what fools they were not to have come to that conclusion from the first.

Their courage returned instantly, and the one in command, muttering something about Jenkins being a d—d fool, led the way into the room.

He and his men soon made a circle round the clock, inside of which some very active movements were being made.

The clock was not furnished with any bottom, since it was unnecessary, for the clock-case stood on the floor, which formed all the bottom that was required.

It was towards this extremity, then, that the police officers directed their attention, and there they saw two feet kicking up and down in a frantic manner.

"Oh, it's Dick Turpin, sure enough!" said the one in command. "Talk about the devil! Lay hold of his feet, Jenkins, and don't make a d—d fool of yourself!"

The kicking feet were seized by a couple of police

officers, who, exerting their strength, pulled and pulled until at last the body of a man was disclosed.

They pounced upon him like so many tigers, and held him up to the light.

The poor commercial traveller was now more bewildered than ever, and such was the condition he was in, that it would have been hard indeed for anyone to say that he was not Dick Turpin.

The interior of the clock-case had not been cleaned out for many a day, and consequently it was thickly lined with dust and cobwebs, which had transferred themselves to his apparel.

The bagman received some rather severe injuries by the fall of the clock, and his nose was bleeding at an alarming rate.

The officers had no pity.

The prisoner tried to speak.

At last, by dint of spitting out some soot and swallowing the remainde , he managed to gasp out:

"Oh, Mr. Officers—oh, gentlemen, help me—save me—protect me from Dick Turpin He has sworn to be the death of me!"

"Ha, ha!—very good that—a good joke too, Mr. Dick! Your end is come: you've played your jokes upon a good many, but it's all up now!"

The bagman groaned.

"Ah, give up," said the officer—"give up! A pretty figure you cut, to be sure. Why, Jenkins, I'm not at all surprised that you should take him for the devil. I'm sure he's quite as black!"

The landlord and the other guests having now recovered themselves from their excitement, ventured to enter the parlour again, and candles were brought and placed upon the mantelpiece, so that once more the apartment was tolerably well illuminated.

The landlord was like a man in a dream.

"Bless me!" he said, regarding the prisoner. "Do you mean to say that's Dick Turpin?"

"Of course it is, and you'll have to answer for harbouring him in your house!"

"Well, I could never have believed it! I have known him for a matter of ten years off and on, but I always thought his name was Keating, and that he was a bagman."

"Yes—yes," cried the unfortunate prisoner, speaking with more distinctness than before, "my name is Keating, and I am a bagman, and I call upon all here present to prove my identity!"

"It won't do!" said the chief officer. "You've been let off a great many times by your tricks; but you'll have to try a cunning one before I lose you! I happened to learn that you were at this inn, so, you see, I have caught you!"

The bagman groaned again in despair.

"Ah, groan away!" continued the chief officer. "I hope it'll do you good! You're safe now, at any rate."

"But, I say," exclaimed the little red-faced man, trying to stanch the blood that was flowing from his nose—"I say, what's gone with those two gentlemen that were sitting over there?"

The landlord looked around.

"Oh, they've gone," he said, "somehow or other!"

"Two gentlemen?" exclaimed the officer, pricking up his ears. "Who were they?"

As well as they could, those present described the appearance of the two highwaymen.

The chief officer let out an oath.

"I'll de d—d," he said, "if I don't believe we've been sold, after all! Here, somebody fetch a bucket of water! We'll soon have this mystery cleared up; but as I said before, I believe we've been sold—I do! D—n it!"

The bucket of water was quickly procured.

"Hold him tight!" said the one in command, referring to the bagman, who was in the grasp of a couple of police officers—"hold him tight! I'll soon settle it!"

With these words, he picked up the bucket, and discharged its contents full in the face of the unfortunate bagman.

On that night probably he met with more misfortunes in a couple of hours than he had done in all his life before.

This vigorous application of a quantity of water was very effectual so far as the removal of the soot was concerned, and that was all the officers cared about.

The black covering disappeared from the bagman's face as if by magic.

"D—n it all!" cried the chief officer, as he dashed the bucket violently on the ground. "Just as I expected—we're sold, after all! Let the fool go! He's no more Dick Turpin than he's the Lord Mayor of London!"

The officers looked from one to the other in surprise, and obeyed.

"Now, then, Mr. Landlord," said the chief officer "your conduct is suspicious—I might go so far as to say damnably suspicious! Where are the two gentlemen that have been spoken of? D—d odd to me if they don't turn out to be the two highwaymen!"

"I know nothing at all about them," said the landlord; "no more than anyone else here present."

"Well, we shall see about that. Jenkins, you stop here in charge. Come on, my boys, we will try what we can find out at the back!"

The police officers sallied out into the inn yard.

They saw the stables before them, and entered them at once.

"What is it, gentlemen?" said the ostler, coming forward.

"Have you seen two highwaymen lately?"

"Lor, sir, no, not as I knowes on!"

"Have you seen anyone leave the inn lately?"

"Yes," said the ostler, with great emphasis, "I have."

"Who?"

"Well, that, Mr. Hofficer, I can't go so far as to say. Howsomever, they're not highwaymen. I'm certain."

"How do you know that?"

"I'm quite certain of it!"

"What were they, then?"

"Two *gentlemen*!"

"Two devils!"

"No," said the ostler, very positively, "not two devils, two *real* gentlemen, and I rather think that I've lived quite long enough in this 'ere world to know a gentleman as is a gentleman when I sees him!"

"Oh, do you? And where are these two gentlemen you speak of? Which way did they go? Tell us, and if you attempt any deceit, you'll be transported for aiding and abetting criminals! Think of that!"

The ostler scratched his head, and looked puzzled.

"I don't want no deceit," he said, "but them two real gentlemen, they mounted their horses, and they remembered me—real gentlemen allis does remember the ostler, and that's how I tells 'em—and then they rode off!"

"And which way did they go?"

"Why, out into the high-road, of course!"

"And which way then?"

"Don't know no more than you, Mr. Hofficer, for I went back into the stables at once."

"Oh, did you? Well, you'll consider yourself in custody!"

"What for?"

"That you'll find out by-and-by! Phillpot!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Just take charge of the ostler here, and see he don't escape."

The officer who rejoiced in the name of Phillpot obeyed.

The chief officer, followed by his men, then made his way round to the front of the inn.

Here the one officer still remained who had charge of the horses.

"Have you seen anyone go by on horseback?" he asked.

"No," was the reply; "and yet, as I stood here sometime back, I fancied I saw two shadowy-looking objects out there creeping along, and presently afterwards I heard the clatter of horses' feet."

"Oh, d—n all highwaymen, I say, if they're such trouble as this! We must make one more effort! Mount, my lads! We will try whether any good can be done by a long gallop! When we do catch them, the reward will pay us for all our trouble!"

CHAPTER DCXVII.

DICK TURPIN, WITHOUT KNOWING IT, FINDS HIMSELF IN A FAIR WAY OF OBTAINING THE MUCH-WISHED FOR DISGUISES.

The reader must, of course, be aware that the delay on the part of the officers, in consequence of their entering the parlour and making such a mistake, was highly favourable to the highwaymen.

When they reached the inn yard, they ran towards the stables as quickly as they could.

The ostler was hard at work inside.

Dick shut the door, and went up to him, saying:

"We are in a particular hurry! Make haste, and put the saddles and bridles on!"

"All right!" said the ostler, with the deepest respect.

And he instantly left what he was about, in order to comply with the highwayman's command.

As he brought the trappings for the horses, Dick and Tom put them on, so that they were ready for the road in an inconceivably short space of time.

There was no need for so much hurry on their part; but then they did not know it, and, after all, it was best that they should get far away from the inn as quickly as they could.

Dick Turpin gave the ostler a five-shilling piece, which confirmed that individual in his opinion that he had been attending to two gentlemen who *were* gentlemen.

Turpin and King mounted just outside the stable-door, and walked their horses quietly across the yard in the direction of the highway.

"What a confounded nuisance it is," said Tom King, in a suppressed voice, "that the officers should have made their appearance here just at this moment!"

"It is vexatious!"

"It's more than that, Dick—it's more than that!—it's d—d annoying!"

"I quite agree with you. But be cautious—no doubt some of the police-officers are lurking about."

It was now close upon morning, and in half an hour or so the new day would certainly dawn.

Proverbially, the darkest hour is said to be that before the dawn, and if this is not always the case, it certainly was on that occasion.

The obscurity was very great indeed, and, accustomed as the highwaymen were to use their eyes in the darkness, they found a difficulty in looking around them, in order to ascertain whether any police-officers were skulking about.

So far as they could tell, however, none were at hand, and they pushed on towards the archway under which they would have to pass.

"What vexes me most," said Dick Turpin, "is that we have actually and truly lost the whole night!"

"We have," said Tom King. "It will be daylight soon, and we are no nearer obtaining our disguises now than we were three hours ago."

"Not so near, for then there was a chance, and now there is not."

"Stop a minute," said Tom King. "We are under the archway, and cannot be seen, and our foes don't appear to be on the alert. Let us consider a moment."

Dick stopped by his companion's request, and then Tom King went on:

"Did not the costumier say that he had brought some disguises with him, and that he had left them in the hackney-coach?"

"Yes, he did, and that the hackney-coach was in front of the inn."

"Ah, I thought so! Well, it appears to me that we must manage to get possession of the bundle somehow, and then all will be well."

Dick shook his head.

"I'm afraid that won't do, Tom!"

"Why not?"

"The risk is too great. We must look for our disguises in some other quarter."

"Where?"

"That I cannot tell at present, but I am of opinion that the best thing we can do is to show our enemies a clean pair of heels. Perhaps while we are lingering here they are concocting some plan against us, which we shall defeat if we hasten off."

"I agree in all that you say," said Tom King, "and am most anxious to be gone; but how we are to get our disguises without we take the bundle out of the hackney coach is more than I can tell."

"We must trust to chance and good luck," said Dick Turpin.

"I would sooner trust to making the attempt to get the bundle out of the coach. Come forward a little and let us reconnoitre."

Turpin willingly obeyed, and then, when they reached the front part of the archway, where they could command a view of the open space in front of the inn, Tom King was induced, after one glance, to give up his idea.

There was the hackney-coach sure enough, but round it stood the horses belonging to the police-officers, and near these stood the one man who had been left on guard.

"It won't do, Tom," said Dick; "give up the idea. If you attempt to creep forward you will be seen—the alarm will be raised, and it will be all over! The thing is quite impossible!"

"I fear so."

"Come along, then, we will go as noiselessly as we can for a little way, and then make what speed we think proper."

"I wonder what on earth has happened to keep them inside the inn so long?"

"Never mind, so long as they're there," said Turpin, "I can see some chance of our getting far away without having them at our heels for an hour or two; but if we attempt to approach the hackney-coach we shall have them all at our backs."

Tom King said no more, for he fully coincided with his companion's remarks.

The police-officer outside was quite right when he fancied he saw two dim, shadowy objects in the distance.

They were the two highwaymen.

When they imagined they were almost out of hearing, they put spure to their horses' sides and set off at a gallop; but before they had gone far, Dick Turpin pulled up.

"What is it now?" said Tom King.

"Why, it's no good for us to continue to gallop along the road away from London. Look over there! Do you see that long streak of grey light?"

"I do."

"And I suppose you know what it means?"

"Yes; I know that before long it will be broad daylight; but I don't know which way you're going, or what you intend to do."

"Nor I myself at present. We will leave the highroad, and take our course across the country, so as to approach London in another direction."

"Very well, as you will. All I hope is, that Maud won't be called up to take her trial to-day."

"Why?"

"Because I think there is but slight prospect of our being there to witness it."

"We shall see," said Turpin; and as he spoke he turned Black Bess's head towards a low hedge which divided the high-road from the meadows.

She leaped over gallantly, and Tom followed in capital style.

As is often the case just before sunrise, a dense white mist was floating about over the meadows.

Sometimes the vapour would collect in one spot, and leave a large open space; and sometimes it would lie only a few inches above the ground, and sometimes extend many feet above their heads.

As it grew lighter, however, the mist began to dissipate.

The highwaymen galloped across the country for some time, until, at length, just as the first beams of the sun were gilding the tree-tops, they paused, and in a rather peculiar place.

They were close to a low, prickly hedge, which was planted on the top of an embankment.

About twelve or fifteen feet below they saw a cross-country road.

By the appearance of the place, it would seem that there had originally been a very steep hill in this part, and that, in order to obviate the difficulty of drawing heavy loads up to the summit of it, a level road had been cut.

Just where the highwaymen had halted there was an

embankment on the other side, of a precisely similar character.

But the appearance of this spot will be best understood when we say that it resembled a railway cutting.

"That will be a steep place to get down, Dick," said Tom King. "What a lucky thing it was we stopped!"

"True," was the reply. "We should have looked awkward if we had tried to take a leap!"

"We should, indeed! However, I knew there was some such place hereabouts, and that's why I paused."

"But you are not going to stay here?"

"Oh, no; only for a moment."

"Then we will descend. But hark! I fancy I can hear a footstep on the road below."

"I don't suppose it concerns us."

"Well, never mind. Let us look and see who it is; at any rate, there can be no harm in that," said Dick. "Slip off your horse, Tom—we don't want to be seen."

"Not by any means," said Tom, as he complied with his comrade's suggestion.

Leaving the horses to themselves, our two friends crept on foot closer to the edge of the embankment, and, concealing themselves from the view of whoever might be below by the thick hedge, they peeped down.

Looking down they saw, walking along the road, a man—or rather a gentleman, for his attire entitled him to this designation.

He appeared to be a young man, though the early rays of the sun shining upon his countenance showed that it had a worn, dissipated, and aged look.

His cheeks were puffed and swollen, and, in a word, he presented the appearance of one accustomed to live freely.

He was attired in sportsman's costume, and in his hand he carried a small gun.

A slight rustling in the hedge at the top of the embankment reached his ears, and, without pausing a moment, he placed his gun to his shoulder, and, taking aim at the exact spot where our friends were concealed, pulled the trigger.

A sharp report followed.

Dick had only just time to save himself by sinking down and dragging his companion with him.

A storm of small shot then went crashing through the branches above them.

"Nothing there, it seems," they heard the sportsman below say. "I thought I heard something, too."

The two highwaymen remained profoundly quiet, and then they distinctly heard another footstep in the road below.

Then some words were exchanged, and their curiosity rose to such a degree that, in spite of the risk, they crept nearer to the edge of the embankment in order to peep down.

They then saw the sportsman, with his discharged gun resting negligently on the ground, addressing a man, who, in all outward appearance, differed greatly from himself.

This man, who was attired as a well-to-do farmer, was probably about fifty years of age, though he looked many years younger.

He was a stout, florid, hale, and hearty-looking man, with broad shoulders and broad palms, and with the hue of health upon his cheeks.

His countenance usually wore a smiling, jovial expression, but now a frown had settled upon it as he spoke angrily yet respectfully to the sportsman.

CHAPTER DCXVIII.

DICK TURPIN UNEXPECTEDLY OBTAINS A DISGUISE, AND FINDS A MEANS TO REACH LONDON WITHOUT EXCITING SUSPICION.

THERE was something in the attitude of these two men that proclaimed their relation to each other to be master and dependant.

In the sportsman there was a degree of supercilious-ness and haughtiness visible; while the farmer, though firm and manly, like one who would stand up for his own rights, yet preserved towards the other a deference both in his deeds and gestures.

"Now, John Adams," the highwaymen heard the sportsman say, "you had better think twice before you make an enemy of me."

"I should be very sorry, my lord," replied the farmer, John Adams, "to gain the ill-will of anyone, much less my landlord's son."

"Well, then, why persist in your obstinate and ridiculous refusal of my wishes? Consider the matter again. I am willing to give you time for reflection."

"I want no reflection," was the farmer's reply—"the subject does not need it. Reflect yourself. You are the only son of the Lord of the Manor, and I am certainly not the richest of your father's dependants."

"Very true," said the young man, playing carelessly with his gun. "That is all quite correct, and I know it as well as you do. Some day I shall in all probability be the Lord of the Manor, and your master myself."

"I hope you may be," said the farmer, still respectfully; "but, for your father's sake, I hope it will be long first."

"Such speeches as these are all very fine, John Adams—all very fine—they are very good! But we have had enough of a good thing! Now let us turn to this question once more! I tell you you have acted foolishly in removing your daughter, and placing her I know not where!"

The farmer shook his head.

"I tell you you have!" said the young lord, with increasing impatience and anger—"I tell you you have—you have gone far towards incurring my resentment."

"I hope not," said John Adams; "or, if I have, I hope the feeling will soon wear away. Upon reflection, you will come to the conclusion that I have acted wisely and well. You will rejoice both for your sake and for hers too."

"Bah!"

"I still hold to my opinion—it will be for the best!"

"Hark ye, Farmer Adams! I am in earnest now! Tell me at once where you have secreted your daughter or you will make me your enemy for life."

"Never!"

"Beware, I say! Tell me at once!"

"Never!" said the farmer again, and with increased firmness; "and now that I have given you your answer, allow me to pass on!"

"Nay, stand where you are!"

"Do not tempt me too far," said the farmer, clenching his hands. "If you will let me pass, I will promise you to say no more about this matter—not a soul shall know of it!"

"I care not what you may say! Who will be credited most readily think you, the farmer, or the Lord of the Manor?"

"No one can accuse me of lying!"

"Bah!—be silent! You will find it to your interest to do what I require! Where is she?"

"My lord, tempt me no further! I tell you, once for all, you have your answer!"

"Stand, I say! Do not presume to stir from this spot until I give you permission to do so!"

"This high-road is as much my property as it is yours, my lord, and you have no power over my actions! I am going!"

"Stand still, I say!"

"I will not!"

"Do you dare to refuse?"

"I do, my lord, most firmly and respectfully refuse to remain here any longer!"

"I tell you to stay!" said the young lord, fiercely.

The farmer made no reply, but walked on.

"Stay!" cried the young lord—"stay, or I will make you!"

The farmer still walked on, determined to put an end to the interview.

A storm of rage arose in the young man's breast upon perceiving this disregard of his orders.

He was evidently beside himself with anger.

He held the gun by the barrel, and then, whirling it round his head, brought it down with full force upon the farmer's head, who little anticipated such an act of treachery.

The angry cry which came from the nobleman's lips made him turn half round.

He saw the butt of the gun descending, and put up his hands to save himself from the effects of the blow.

But he was too late.

There was a crashing sound, and then he laid insensible in the roadway.

The young nobleman was insane with anger.



[MAUD TAKES HER TRIAL AT THE OLD BAILEY.]

"Dog!" he cried. "Things have come to a pretty pass indeed, if a lord is to be braved thus by a peasant, and with impunity. Take that, you scoundrel!—and mind how you behave to your superiors in future!"

He raised the gun as he spoke, and evidently intended to deal the prostrate farmer another blow.

But his intention was frustrated in a remarkable and unexpected manner.

"Hold!" a voice cried, in loud and startling tones—"hold, you coward, or I fire!"

These words rang out with great effect in the silent early morning air.

The young nobleman—by courtesy, not nature—could not stop the gun from descending, but allowed it to fall gently to the earth.

In the utmost surprise he looked up—for he fancied the voice came from above—and then he saw the figures of two men standing on the brink of the embankment above.

They were no others than our old friends Dick Turpin and Tom King.

Both had listened with the deepest interest to the strange conversation which had passed between the farmer and the Lord of the Manor's son.

The allusions to the past were somewhat vague, and yet they were sufficient to enable our two friends to draw tolerably correct conclusions from them.

While feeling the greatest disgust at the manner in which the young nobleman behaved and spoke, they could not, on the other hand, help admiring the firm and respectful demeanour of the farmer, which showed out all the more conspicuously by the contrast.

The highwaymen fully sympathised with all he said, but, bad as they believed the young nobleman to be, yet they did not for one moment imagine he would be so base as to act in the treacherous manner he had done.

When he raised his gun and brought it down upon the farmer's head, which he did with lightning-like rapidity,

our friends were so astonished that they were incapable of speech or motion.

They recovered themselves, however, just as the gun was raised a second time, and then they cried out in the manner we have described.

Nor did they remain standing still, but commenced at once to descend the embankment.

The young nobleman saw that both carried pistols in their hands, and as they came nearer, and he could see their faces with more distinctness, he could tell by their determined expression that they would bear no trifling.

Yet his eyes absolutely sparkled with rage, and, in a hoarse voice, he cried:

"Begone, fellows—begone! What business have you to interfere?"

"That you will soon see!" cried Turpin, increasing his rate of descent.

With an angry cry, the young nobleman placed his gun to his shoulder, forgetting at the moment that he had discharged it and not loaded it again.

He flung it down upon the ground impatiently, and then, probably from fear and from a dislike to face the two new-comers, he turned round, and ran off at full speed along the road.

"Stop!" cried Dick, as he reached the bottom of the embankment—"stop—stop I say! If you refuse, I will fire!"

Of this threat the young nobleman took not the slightest notice, for, such was the deference with which he was always treated by all persons on his father's estate, that he did not for a moment believe it possible that anyone would have the presumption to fire at him.

He was quickly undeceived, however, for Dick Turpin, finding his injunction disobeyed, took aim hastily, and pulled the trigger.

This was done upon the mere impulse of the moment, and directly he had pulled the trigger he repented of what he had done.

But his indignation at the conduct of the young man was so great that he could not control himself.

A loud scream mingled with the report of the pistol, and the young nobleman, clapping both his hands to the hind part of his person, ran on with redoubled speed.

Both highwaymen laughed when they observed the action, and Tom King said:

"You've hit him, Dick."

"I suppose I have; and yet he may be only frightened, for the fellow is evidently a rank coward at heart."

"If he is wounded there, it won't much matter," said Tom King. "The place is tender, but a bullet there would not be likely to prove fatal."

A deep groan at this moment struck upon their ears, and, looking in the direction from which the sound came, they saw the honest old farmer endeavouring to raise himself on one arm.

The young nobleman was by this time out of sight, and, as our friends did not feel inclined to pursue him, they immediately turned their attention to a more worthy object.

The blood was trickling down the farmer's countenance, for the skin on the top of his head had been broken.

It was evident he was fast recovering his consciousness.

It seemed strange that his skull should have withstood so well such a heavy blow, but then the thickness of an English farmer's skull is proverbial.

Turpin and King at once stooped down over him, and Dick said:

"Are you much hurt?"

"I don't know, gentlemen, I am sure. My head feels very queer, and spins round like a top."

"I am glad to find you are not so severely injured as I thought you would be. I feared the blow would be mortal."

The farmer was every moment recovering his composure.

He sat up in the road, and, though his face wore a rueful expression, he nevertheless said, in a cheerful voice:

"It was a hardish crack, I admit. Confound him! I should never have believed him capable of such conduct! He has tried me sorely, and I have had to struggle hard to retain my forbearance."

"He was going to repeat the blow," said Tom King.

"Yes, I know it. I saw him raise the gun, and I heard you say something in a loud tone. Gentlemen," he added, "I don't know who you are, but it seems to me pretty certain that I owe my life to you."

"I am glad," said Turpin, "that chance brought us to this spot in time to render you this service. Can you rise, think you?"

"With your assistance, no doubt I can."

"Then you shall have it freely."

Between them, Turpin and King raised the farmer to his feet.

A feeling of faintness and giddiness then came over him, and he would have fallen, but for the support his two new friends afforded him; but he was a remarkably strong man, and this feeling quickly passed away.

"My head is bad," he said. "That was a harder blow than I thought. I think I had better get home at once."

"By all means," said Turpin. "Have you far to go?"

"No, not far. The ground on either side of you I hold from the Lord of the Manor, the father of that young scapegrace."

"And is your home close by?"

"About half a mile off—no more. If you will assist me along the road a little way, I shall feel deeply grateful. In a few minutes, I have no doubt, I shall be stronger."

"I will see you to your own door with the greatest pleasure," said Turpin, who saw at once that he might be able to turn this accidental encounter to great advantage.

"No; that would be troubling you too much."

"Not at all—not at all! Do you think you can manage to walk by leaning upon my arm alone?"

"Oh, yes! I am quite sure of it."

"Then my friend will follow us with the horses."

"Horses?" said the farmer. "I can see none."

"No, they are at the top of the embankment. We left them there to come to your assistance."

"Gentlemen, I shall be grateful—always deeply grateful to you for the service you have rendered me to-day. You have saved my life, and, though I value it myself, yet there are others who prize it still more, and who would grieve deeply if I was to die."

"I don't doubt that," said Turpin, "for I say in perfect sincerity that, although I have known you for so short a time, I have learned to respect you. You are an honest, true-hearted Englishman!"

CHAPTER DCXIX.

DICK TURPIN FINDS HIS MEETING WITH THE FARMER LEADS TO VERY IMPORTANT RESULTS.

THE honest heart of John Adams, the farmer, swelled with pride and joy as Dick Turpin spoke, for the tone in which the words were uttered proved conclusively that Turpin was sincere.

"I try to do my duty to the best of my ability," said the farmer, "and I can safely say that I never made an enemy wilfully in the whole course of my life."

"But you have a foe now."

"Yes," said the farmer—"one who has a bad heart, and who would not scruple to commit any wickedness. All my doubts concerning him have been confirmed to-day."

"He is a treacherous rascal," said Dick, "and it will be a thousand pities if such a one ever becomes the Lord of the Manor."

"He does not deserve it—he does not deserve it! And yet his father is as good and as just a man as ever lived."

While this conversation was proceeding, Tom King scrambled up the side of the embankment, and secured the two horses.

He then led them gradually down the hill, and joined his comrade and the farmer after they had gone about a couple of hundred yards.

"I was deeply interested in the strange conversation that took place between you and this young man" continued Turpin.

"No doubt you were, sir; and there is much you could not understand, though you might be able to hazard a tolerably good guess. However, I will tell you in a few words what it is all about, and then you shall judge whether I have acted right or not."

"I already know sufficient to decide that," said Turpin. "Still, I am curious."

"Then I will tell you. I have held Riverside Farm ever since the death of my father, who had held possession just in the same way as myself. In fact, the farm has been rented by our family for many generations."

"I know that often happens," said Dick.

"It does. But that has little to do with my story. I have two children—a boy and a girl. They are all that have been spared to me out of a large family; and so, you see, I love them with something more than an ordinary love—I dote upon them!"

The farmer's voice trembled slightly, but he proceeded:

"My son now is about twenty years of age. He is my right hand in all matters connected with the farm. My daughter is three years younger, or nearly so, for she has just commenced her seventeenth year.

"Although I am her father, I say, candidly, that she possesses more than an ordinary share of beauty. She is too beautiful, I fear, and her beauty has already been the cause of bringing trouble to our house."

"I guessed it from your conversation."

"Very likely. This young spark, the lord's son, came home from college a few months back. We had seen little of him for several years, for his vacations were usually spent abroad.

"One day, however, not long since, he unfortunately caught sight of my dear daughter, and was smitten with her loveliness; but she shrank back from him with a dread which she could not comprehend.

"Of this he took no notice, and seized every opportunity he could to declare his affection for her."

The farmer ground his teeth.

"I surprised him one day talking to my daughter. He turned angrily upon me.

"'John Adams!' he said, 'you had better not thwart me or stand in my path! I love your daughter, for she is beautiful! I have no evil intentions; I am willing to marry her!'

"Then I spoke out at once, and told him it was impossible—that I would never consent to the match; and foaming with rage, he left me.

"But I could not rid myself of his importunities; and at length, I found that my daughter's safety, and my own peace of mind, demanded her removal to some place far away, where he would be unable to discover her.

"The separation was bitter, and cost me many a pang. It was the first time we had ever been parted.

"However, I nerved my heart for the trial; and I left her in charge of a relation of mine, who lives some fifty miles from here."

"Then I can understand all the rest," said Turpin. "His conversation now is perfectly intelligible. He was angry with you because you refused to let him know what had become of your daughter!"

"Just so—just so!" said the farmer, sadly. "I fear that, in my old age, I am going to learn trouble. I have been a happy man up to the present time, but I fear my happiness is over!"

"You will have but little peace when the time comes for him to succeed to the estates," said Turpin.

"I fear it!"

"Why not leave the farm at once, and remove to some other part of the country?"

"It is hard that I should be forced to do that from such a cause, without reference to the affection which I feel for every inch of ground, and for the old house itself. There is yet another consideration. While I hold the farm at my present rent, I am a prosperous, well-to-do man; but should I leave it, then my worldly condition would be very much reduced."

"Is that the house yonder?" said Turpin, pointing straight before him to a mass of white buildings covered with thatch.

"Yes, that's the place," said John Adams. "We shall soon be there. Perhaps you would not mind accepting some trifling hospitality, as a recognition of the service you have done me? I wish it was in my power to repay the obligation I am under to you."

Turpin looked the farmer full in the face.

He bore the scrutiny unflinchingly.

Truth, candour, and sincerity were expressed in every lineament.

Sinking his voice slightly, Turpin said:

"It lies in your power to render me a service which will far outweigh the one that I have done for you."

"Is it possible?" said the farmer, his face beaming with joy. "Let me know what it is, and I will do it gladly!"

Turpin paused a moment before he spoke.

He was considering with himself to what extent it would be advisable to trust the farmer.

He fully and truly believed that at last he had discovered an honest man—one to whom he could confide everything in confidence, and who would not object to grant his request.

After a momentary hesitation, Dick resolved to tell him all.

"John Adams!" he cried, at length, "I believe you are a man in whom implicit trust might be placed; and in proof of my belief, I am going to make a revelation to you which will take you by surprise."

The farmer looked into his face inquiringly.

"I suppose," Dick began, "that you have not the remotest idea of who I am—I mean, you have never seen me before?"

"Not that I can remember," said the farmer.

"Well, then," continued Dick, "before I declare myself, I will just make you acquainted with a few facts. In the first place, then, I am an offender against the law. I might plead something in extenuation of myself; but this is not the time to do it, nor is it necessary. Let it be sufficient to say that many things are laid to my charge, to some of which I plead guilty, but of the majority I am innocent. The officers of justice are in pursuit of me!"

"Go on," said the farmer, quietly.

Dick paused for a moment.

"John Adams," he continued, "you have an affectionate heart. I know it—it has manifested itself in the few words you have spoken to me. You are married, of course? You love your wife next to your own life?"

"I did love her," said the farmer, tears springing into his eyes—"I did love her, but she was not spared to me for long!"

"She is dead, then?"

"Yes."

"But still you can remember what your own feelings were towards her, and what you would have done for her sake?"

"I can; but I am at a loss to think——"

"Wait a moment, and all will be explained. Although a fugitive from justice, I have a wife—one whom I love as you loved yours, and whose affection for me equals mine. I have proof of it day by day, for she has clung to me through all my varying fortunes."

"As a true woman should do," said the farmer.

"Well, then," said Dick, "in one word, she has been made a prisoner."

"For what?—what crime has she committed?"

"She has performed a wife's duty to me," said Dick. "That is the crime. She has succoured, aided, and abetted me, as the lawyers term it, and for doing so they made her prisoner, and lodged her in Newgate."

"But!" exclaimed the farmer, "such a thing is impossible! A wife cannot be punished for screening her husband from the officers of justice, or assisting him to escape."

"I know that."

"Then how comes it she is a prisoner?"

"Because, for purposes of their own, the officers refuse to believe that she is my wife."

"Ah, I see!" said the farmer. "That makes all the difference."

"As you say, it makes all the difference. But she is my wife, and the reason they have made her a prisoner is because they calculated that, as soon as the intelligence reached my ears, I should endeavour to rescue her—to assist her to escape. They fancied she would be a kind of decoy that would lure me to destruction. They would keep such a close watch round the prison that it would be impossible for me to gain it at any point unseen."

"Well," said the farmer, "and what else? Why have you told this to me?"

"That you shall know presently. To-day my wife will be placed in the dock to answer the charge brought against her. I have every hope that she will be acquitted, but I could not bear the suspense of waiting outside the court until I heard the verdict. I have made up my

mind, let the risk be what it may, I will enter the court, and be a spectator of the whole trial."

"That will be running a dreadful risk."

"It will; but I hope to elude my enemies by disguising myself carefully. And now I come to the point I wished to reach. In return for the service I rendered you—though, understand me, I did it freely, and without a thought of receiving any return—still, I should feel deeply grateful if you would furnish my companion and myself with disguises. For instance, I think if we dressed as your farm labourers do, we should be likely to escape recognition by the officers."

"It is a strange thing that you ask me to do," said the farmer.

"It is. I acknowledge that, and do not wish to press the point. If you have any objection—if you would rather not grant my request, say so at once—my opinion of you will remain unchanged."

"But," said the farmer, in a peculiar and significant tone, "you have not told me who you are."

"True, but then you should understand that my identity is a secret, and if it was known who I really am, I should be in extreme peril."

"But," said the farmer, "if I lend you the disguises, you will at least let me know who you are?"

"I will if you wish it, and yet——"

"I suppose you would rather not? Well, I will press the subject no further. You shall retain your secret, but I have a particular reason for asking you this question. Don't be afraid to reply in the affirmative."

"Speak," said Dick. "I will answer you at all risks."

"Well, then," said the farmer, in a strange and hesitating voice, "tell me whether your name is not Dick Turpin? If it is, I am under another and still greater obligation to you than you may know of, and I will do all that you may ask me, and more too. Tell me, then, whether you are Dick Turpin."

CHAPTER DCXX.

THE FARMER FURNISHES DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING WITH DISGUISES, AND PROMISES TO TAKE CHARGE OF BLACK BESS.

THE highwaymen looked inquisitively and wonderingly into the countenance of the old farmer.

His speech took him so entirely by surprise, that for some moments he found himself unable to reply in any way.

He wanted to decide in his own mind whether it would be advisable for him to disclose his identity or not.

John Adams perceived his hesitation, and did not wonder at it, though he attributed it to another cause.

Wishing to reassure his companion, he said:

"Don't be afraid to make the disclosure to me. I don't ask it in order that I may have the opportunity of delivering you to your foes. I have, indeed, a reason of quite another kind. It is gratitude that prompts me to ask this question."

"Gratitude for what?"

"That I will tell you as soon as I receive your reply. I merely wish you to say whether you are Dick Turpin or not. If not, I care not who you are—you may keep the secret to yourself."

"I am Dick Turpin, then," was the reply, for the highwayman's curiosity was raised to the highest pitch, so peculiar was the farmer's manner.

"Give me your hand, then!" said John Adams. "I am glad to do so! I wish I could express my thanks!"

"For what?"

"Not for a service done to me, but to one whom I hold dear. Do you remember, a long while ago, that, when pursued by your foes, you took refuge in a house near Smithfield Market?"

Dick passed his hand over his brow, as if trying to recollect.

"You must give me some further clue," he said. "In my lifetime, I have taken shelter in so many houses, that it is necessary some particular fact should be mentioned to call it before my mind."

"Well, then," said the farmer, "I can do that, and, at the same time, make you sensible of the nature of the obligation I am under to you."

"I am all attention."

"Then do you recollect entering a room where there was a poor woman in great poverty? She concealed you in a cupboard, and you narrowly escaped being wounded by the cutlasses of the police officers."

"I remember all now," said Turpin, "clearly and plainly enough—indeed, as though the events had only happened yesterday. The name of the man was Robert, and his wife's Mary."

"Yes, Mary—God bless her!" said the farmer, fervently—"that was her name. Oh, what had been her sufferings up to that night!"

"I pressed him to accept the sum of forty pounds for what he had done; but he refused the gift and took the money as a loan instead. But I have no doubt you know all this."

"Yes; I have been made acquainted with every particular."

"But," said Turpin, "how is it?—what are they to you?—why should you feel interested in this matter?"

"Mary is my sister."

"Your sister?"

"Yes, my youngest sister. Years ago she married without the consent or approval of her parents or relations. I, for one, was strongly against the match."

"Indeed!"

"But when they were married the mischief was done and so we contented ourselves as well as we could. But Mary had a high and independent spirit, and so had her husband. They went to London, and, from the time of their departure, we heard nothing of them for a long, long time."

"Then in all their poverty," said Turpin, "they made no application to you?"

"No, nor to anyone," said the farmer. "I know Mary would be too proud to do it. She would think that she had chosen her own path in life, and would boldly and cheerfully put up with all its disagreeables and inconveniences."

"I can easily believe that," said Turpin, "from what little I saw of her."

"After a time," continued the farmer, "we did hear from them. It was about six months ago. They were then in highly-prosperous circumstances, having taken a shop, which quickly gained a good custom, and at the present time their position and prospects in life are all that they could expect."

"I rejoice to hear it," said Dick, "for I was deeply interested in them both."

"No doubt you rejoice," said the farmer, "for had it not been for you, they would at the present moment be sunk in the lowest depths of degradation. It was the loan of that money at that particular moment that did them the benefit. Had it been one day later, they would have been the inmates of a workhouse."

"And so," said Turpin, who felt strangely uncomfortable on witnessing the farmer's grateful behaviour towards him—"and so, I suppose, when Robert and Mary came to see you about six months ago, they told you all the particulars?"

"They did—every word. I can assure you that not a day passes without their thinking of you with kindness and respect. Robert is anxious in the extreme to do you a service. The money you lent him he has paid with interest in the manner you directed, yet he feels that he is still under an obligation to you."

"Nothing of the kind—nothing of the kind! I would have given him the money, if he would have accepted it. The service they rendered me was worth ten times the amount."

"Well," said the farmer, "when I heard what Mary had suffered, my heart smote me, for I knew that I had behaved unkindly towards her, and that, had it not been for my unkindness, she would never have endured those privations, but would have applied to me for aid."

"Things happen strangely sometimes," said Turpin. "Who would have thought that I should have become acquainted with Mary's brother?"

"And to think that you should have saved my life too!"

"I don't think so much of that," said Turpin. "I should have acted in precisely the same manner, no matter who had been in your position."

"You are a brave, generous man! And now, see, we are already at the farmhouse. You are welcome to it, and

all that it contains—welcome to stay as long as you think proper. You need not fear that we shall betray you."

"I never dreamed of such a thing!" said Dick, who was deeply affected. "But now remember the request I made to you. Will you furnish me with the disguises I require?"

"Certainly, and everything else that I have! I will share all with you, and I trust you will be successful in escaping the detection of your enemies."

"I have but little fear of that," said Dick. "My chief concern is that I shall not be able to reach London in time."

"You have not very far to go," said the farmer, "and I will not detain you, though I should have been glad if you would have accepted my hospitality for a short time."

Just as these words were uttered, the door of the farm-house was reached.

A young man came forward.

It was the farmer's son.

With a cry of alarm, he sprang forward when he observed the blood upon his father's face.

"It's nothing," said John Adams—"it's nothing I have quite recovered from the effects of the blow. When I have had a good wash, I shall be all right. Thomas, attend to me—this is Dick Turpin."

The farmer's son, who knew all the particulars of Dick's kindness to Mary, shook hands with him cordially.

During the conversation, Tom King had kept in the rear.

He was leading the two horses by their bridles, and he wondered much what it was that Turpin and the farmer were in such close conversation about.

He did not press forward to satisfy his curiosity, for he knew his comrade well enough to be aware that it was a subject of uncommon importance that occupied his attention so exclusively.

At a word from John Adams, his son took charge of the two steeds, and led them into the stables, while the two highwaymen entered the farm-house, along with the farmer himself.

He insisted that they should seat themselves and partake of a light meal, and he brought up a huge flagon of home-brewed ale.

"My son will be back directly," he said, "and then I will tell him just what articles of clothing you require. He will fetch them in a few moments."

"A thousand thanks!"

"Don't mention it! I would do ten times as much willingly and gladly!"

"It is only necessary," said Dick, "to procure the outer garments. We will put them on over our own so that, if necessary, we can strip them off at a moment's notice."

Just then the farmer's son returned, and he was instructed to fetch the articles of clothing required.

As John Adams had said, he returned in a few moments.

"Come this way," said the farmer, addressing his two guests. "There's a room that you can have to yourselves, and while you are engaged in disguising yourselves, I will set to work to make myself look a little more presentable."

The two highwaymen took very great pains to disguise themselves effectually, and, while they were doing so, Dick Turpin hastily explained to Tom King the whole of the peculiar circumstances that had occurred.

"You see," he said at last, "that there is some good to be obtained by trusting to luck."

"There has been on this occasion, I admit," said Tom King. "How lucky it is, however, that we should at such a moment have fallen in with such a friend!"

"It is most fortunate. I think, Tom, that you will be able to sustain your part. Do you think you could act the rustic?"

"Oh, don't doubt it!"

"Pray be careful, for you may depend the officers will closely scrutinise the persons who enter the court. Mr. Wriggles may fancy that we shall be present in disguise."

The highwaymen cut their hair close to the head, and shaved their faces clean; and these two operations, simple as they may seem, altered their personal appearance in a wonderful manner.

Then the huge smock-frock which they each put on, and the huge boots—which fitted easily over those they already wore—and the large slouched hats with broad brims and high crowns, completely metamorphosed them.

"I think," said Turpin, looking at himself in the glass, "that if we are only careful to act and speak like country clowns, we shall be proof against all the vigilance of the police officers."

"I am of the same opinion."

As soon as their disguises were complete, the two highwaymen entered the large kitchen in the farm-house, where John Adams was waiting for them to make their appearance.

The farmer looked all the better for the good washing he had had; but the blow on his head produced more effect than he imagined, so that now he found it necessary to wear a bandage round it, which gave him an odd enough aspect.

"You will excuse me," he said; "but I can't help feeling a deep interest in what you are going to do; and while you have been in that room yonder I have been thinking over the whole matter."

"What is the result of your reflections?"

"Well, if you would not take it amiss, I should like to mention something."

"Speak freely, then—speak out by all means. What is it you wish to say?"

"Well, I was wondering how you were going to manage with your horses. It won't do for you, dressed as you are, to ride up to London on two such beautiful creatures as those—that's quite certain."

"Perfectly so," said Turpin, "It's strange, but I had altogether overlooked our horses, and until you mentioned it I never gave it a thought what we were to do with them."

"Well, that will be no difficulty," said the farmer, "provided you like to trust them with me. I will put them in a stable, and will take care that every attention is paid to them. When you want them, you will find them here."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you!" said Dick. "This is indeed a service!"

"No—no. As I told you before, if there is anything I can do for you, I will; but I beg you will think nothing of such a trifling favour as that."

"Still, we must thank you," said Turpin, "and especially myself, for without Black Bess I should be nothing. It is to her that I owe my life upon a hundred different occasions; and I would not for the world that any harm should happen to her, or that she should fall into the hands of my foes!"

"She shall not while she's in my stable," said the farmer. "You can make your mind easy about that."

CHAPTER DCXXI.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN ARRIVE IN LONDON, AND DICK TURPIN HAS A SHORT CONVERSATION WITH JIM LICKFOLD AT THE CORNER OF CHANCERY LANE.

"I shall go to London with a lighter heart," said Dick Turpin, "than I had dared to hope for. It will indeed be a great relief to know that Black Bess is in perfect safety!"

"And she will be, in my stables," said the farmer. "for who would expect to find her here? But I have not done yet — there's something else that I have thought of besides."

"I am anxious in the extreme to hear it," said Turpin. "I hope it will be as good as the last."

"You shall judge," said the farmer, pointing to a large eight-day clock in the chimney corner. "Do you see the time? It now wants ten minutes to seven, and I'll wager my life that's the correct time!"

"It is very late," said Turpin. "We must be off!"

"Of course you must. What time will the court open?"

"At about ten o'clock. But, then, it will be necessary for us to be there some time before that—there is always a crowd waiting round the doors anxious to get in."

"Then it seems that there's three hours good," said the farmer. "But there's your journey to London. It is not very many miles, to be sure, but it would be a long and tiresome walk if you leave your horses behind you as you have agreed. How do you intend to get to London?"

"That I had not thought about," said Turpin.

"Well," continued the farmer, "I don't want to make any more words about it than's necessary, because time's precious, though I shall be sorry when you have gone. However, what I have to say amounts to this: I have a waggon going to Covent Garden Market, loaded with vegetables of one kind or another. It won't travel very fast, but yet, if you like to ride on that, you are quite welcome."

"Excellent," said Dick—"excellent! This is indeed a lucky thought! By going into London, as it would appear, in charge of a waggon of vegetables, no one could possibly have the least suspicion."

"Just what I thought," said the farmer. "It would look so natural-like; and Covent Garden, as you know very well, is not such a long way from Newgate."

"No, it is not; and we will ride on the top of your waggon with the greatest pleasure in the world!"

"Well, then, gentlemen, that's all, and you may safely reckon upon being in London by nine o'clock, at the latest."

"I wish it was earlier," said Dick. "But no matter—we cannot do any better."

"Decidedly not."

"Well, then, farmer, we are sorry to leave you; but if you will excuse us, we shall be glad to start immediately."

"I know you would; and the waggon is waiting in the fold-yard. Come with me!"

John Adams rose, and the two highwaymen followed him.

In the fold-yard they found a huge waggon, piled up to a terrific height with various vegetables.

Harnessed to it was a team of strong horses, though not swift ones.

"Now, then," said the farmer, "up you get!"

"But," said Dick, looking about him, "how shall we climb to the top of that?"

"Well, I'll put a ladder for you if you wish it, and then it will be easy enough, but I should recommend you to climb up in the regular way, and then you will know how to get down, by which means you will avoid suspicion."

"Certainly,—that's well thought of!"

The farmer then pointed out to the two highwaymen the means by which they could climb up to the top of the waggon.

They shook hands with him, wished him good-bye, promising to return as early as they could, and then, with considerable dexterity, considering that they performed the feat for the first time, they climbed up by the aid of the ropes.

As soon as ever they were seated on the top, the waggoner also mounted, and, cracking his whip, the team immediately set itself in motion.

The bells on the horses' heads jingled pleasantly.

The two highwaymen lay down on the top of some cabbages, just in the same way as they had seen men do many a time when they had met such waggons as they were now upon coming into London.

In this situation it was all but an impossibllity for anyone to detect them, or even to catch a glimpse of their countenances.

During the ride, the two friends had, of course, plenty to talk about; but most of the conversation was mere speculation, and so it is not worth while to place it at full before the reader.

Without the occurrence of any more important incidents than the stoppage of the waggon at several roadside inns, in order to allow the waggoner to refresh himself, they reached London.

For some time our two friends had been debating whether it would be best to walk together to Newgate, or whether it would be wisest to separate.

Dick was in favour of the latter course, for, as he truly said:

"The officers will be upon the alert, and will look for us not singly but in couples, and I am inclined to think that one would be passed unnoticed where a couple would be challenged and questioned."

"Well, let it be so," said Tom King, at length—"I only wish for the best."

"So do I. Therefore, as soon as we arrive at Covent Garden we will alight and separate."

"And meet at the court-house?"

"Yes. You'll easily be able to see me. If possible, get by my side."

By the time they had made this and a few other minor arrangements, the waggon reached its destination.

Less time had been occupied by the journey than the farmer had led them to expect, for it was only just turned half-past eight.

The two highwaymen got down from their elevated position somewhat clumsily.

As soon as their feet touched the ground, Tom King said:

"Wait a minute, Dick! Look over there—under the piazza. Don't appear to be observing. Do you see that police officer standing there?"

"Yes, I see him, and—and——"

"What?"

"It's Wriggles!"

Tom gave a hasty glance, and then he said:

"How attentively he seems to be observing us!"

"Yes," said Turpin. "Let us separate at once. After all, it may be nothing more than our own fancy. Surely he cannot have guessed our proceedings?"

"No—no—that's too much to be expected! Rely upon it, it is mere chance!"

"Well, then, if I was inclined to be superstitious, I should look upon our seeing him at the instant of our arrival as an evil omen."

"You had better not give way to any such gloomy thoughts! Farewell! I'll make my way to the Old Bailey in one direction, you take another. Above all, remember what you are, and be careful to act your part well."

With these words the highwaymen separated.

Dick Turpin walked straight up James Street into Long Acre, and from thence he made his way into Holborn.

No one who saw him would doubt for a moment that he was other than he seemed to be.

He performed his part to great admiration, staring about him with that vacant, wondering expression which is often visible upon the countenance of a rustic when in London.

With a lounging, shuffling gait, as though he was walking over a ploughed field, instead of along a level street, Dick Turpin walked along Holborn.

"I have a great mind," he thought, "to test the excellence of my disguise. There could be no harm in it, and, if there is any danger, I may as well be made aware of it at once as not. If I succeed, then I shall have all the more confidence in myself."

Just as these words were passing through his mind, Dick saw a police officer standing at the corner of Chancery Lane.

He knew the man by sight exceedingly well, though he could not, of course, remember his name.

It was, however, no other than that rather extraordinary and acute individual, Jim Lickfold.

Had Dick been as well acquainted with the character of this police officer as the reader is, the probability is that he would have passed him by, and selected some other member of the fraternity to try his experiment upon. Still, if Jim Lickfold was deceived and had no suspicions, Dick would stand a very fair chance of escaping the notice of all the rest.

From having been reared in Essex during his youth, Dick was able to assume the peculiar dialect of that county with great ease and perfection.

Lounging up to Jim Lickfold, he said:

"I say, measter, can yow tell me the way to Noogate?"

Jim looked at Dick for a moment, coolly surveying him from top to toe, then, with great deliberation he replied:

"Yes, Mr. Clodhopping Chawbacon, I can show you the way to Newgate."

"I be much obleeged!" said Dick. "Which be the way?"

"I'll take you and show you, if you like," said Jim.

"Yow be very koind! I wish yow would."

"Well, then," said Jim, "do you see that old gentleman standing there with the silk handkerchief hanging half out of his pocket?"

"Yaas, I do."

"Then go and pull it out," said Jim, "and I'll d—n

soon show you the way to Newgate, and charge you nothing for my trouble!"

"Naay—naay!" said Dick, shaking his head, and grinning from ear to ear. "I be not so green! Yow doan't kitch me so easy! I 'ouldn't do it! Doan't yow play yowr jokes on me! I'm oaf!"

With these words upon his lips, and with well assumed indignation, Dick turned round, and continued on his way.

Jim Lickfold continued to chuckle for several minutes at having made a fool of the yokel, for such he considered the disguised highwayman to be.

Little did he dream that he had been so egregiously duped.

It was really amusing to see the comical expression on his face as he stood watching the countryman's retreating form.

"I shall do," said Dick Turpin, to himself. "There's no fear now! That little adventure has done me good. I would not have missed it for a trifle. If that police officer does not recognise me, I need not fear even Mr. Wriggles himself!"

Dick Turpin walked on steadily enough, gaping about him all the while, until at length he arrived at the prison of Newgate.

It required no small amount of nerve to walk up to that gloomy dismal building in the way he did; and, to have observed his motions, no one would have believed that the place had such terrors for him.

With the same vacant look, his eyes wandered over every part of it, and while thus appearing to satisfy nothing more than a listless curiosity, he was in reality taking particular notice of all that was going on, and calculating within his mind his chances of success.

Loitering on, he came at length to the Sessions House, as that part of the prison was called where the trials were held.

Round the wide door and on the steps, rather a dense crowd had assembled.

Dick mingled with them, jostling against their shoulders in the most unconcerned manner possible.

Just as some country bumpkin would do, he mounted the steps, and entered the vestibule of the Session House, his nose all the while elevated in the air.

Just on his left hand was a flight of stone steps which he knew well enough led to the court where the trials would take place.

After gazing around, he ascended these steps as though he neither knew nor cared where they led, and as though his object was nothing in particular.

On the staircase were several other persons.

Dick went blundering on until he came to a little wooden gate, which had been placed across the stairs in order to bar the way.

On the other side of this little gate stood a police officer on guard.

"What do you want?" said this official, as Dick put his head on the top of the woodwork, as though to push his way through at any rate.

Upon hearing himself thus addressed by so imposing a person as a police officer, Dick Turpin took off his hat with great respect, and made a half bow, while he seemed to be greatly confused.

"What do you want?" said the officer again.

"Beg yowr pardon, sir," said Dick, "but be this the way to the coort?"

"Yes," said the officer, with a grin.

"What, through this gaate, and up them steps yander?"

"Yes," said the officer, pointing over his shoulder with his thumb.

"Then," said Dick, "axin' yowr pardon, ... can't yow let me goo by? I wants to goo to the coort, I do."

"Oh, do you?" said the officer, who judged that Dick might probably be a witness in some turnip-stealing case.

"Where do you come from? What case is it that you are to appear in?"

"Dang me if I know. I've got to appear in any caase," replied Dick. "But, Mr. Officer, I heerd saay as how Dick Tarpin's wife had been kitched, and were agooin' to take her trial. Now, I woundily want to see her, I do, so I'se walked up to Lunnun this mornin' o' purpose; so, axin yowr pardon, Mr. Officer, I'd be glad if yow'd open that little gaate, and let me goo through."

CHAPTER DCXXII.

RETURNS TO SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL AND DESCRIBES HOW THEY SET ABOUT DISGUISING THEMSELVES AS POLICE OFFICERS.

It is now necessary that we should return to Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

It will be recollected that they were about setting out from the Chase, in order to obtain such disguise as would enable them to assume the part of police officers.

As Jack had truly said, at present he had no idea where the disguises were to be procured, and so he rode out into the highway along with his companion quite at random.

Claude Duval liked the plan exceedingly, and just as they got clear of the trees, he said:

"Yes, it's all very well, Jack—very well indeed, but just tell me which way you think of going!"

"What's your idea?"

"I confess I have none. I would rather trust this matter to you altogether."

"In the first place, then," said Jack, "I think we may safely conclude that it will be useless to look for the disguises in the direction of London."

"Yes, that's quite evident."

"Then, it follows that we must make our way into the country. We must pitch upon some quiet little town as the scene of operations. There I have no doubt we shall succeed in deluding two officers, but with Bow Street runners we should not stand the ghost of a chance!"

"What is the nearest town that you think likely to suit our purpose?"

"I can only think of Hertford."

"That's a long way off."

"I know that, and yet I think you will find it the nearest. As you are aware, most of these little towns are only furnished with one parish constable, who would be no use at all."

"None."

"At Hertford, however, I happen to know very well there's a regular police-station, with officers belonging to it."

"And do you think you will be able to impose upon them?"

"Yes, they are a good way off London, and can only have heard of us by report, for you must remember that we have never visited that quarter."

"Very true."

"A little more than half an hour's gallop along the highway will take us there, and then we must do the best we can."

"But stay a moment," said Claude. "Would it be safe, do you think, to keep to the high-road?"

"Well, that's a question; it would be much the best if we could, because we should make better speed, and our horses would not be so exhausted as they would be if we went across the country. The only risk is the dragoons."

"Just so, and yet I think we shall be too far from London—the patrols would not reach so far."

"Then, if you are agreeable, we will try it."

"I am willing! Forward!"

The two highwaymen just touched the flanks of their horses with their spurs, and away they went at a gallop, which, if continued, would take them to Hertford in considerably less than half an hour.

The cattle were fresh and in excellent condition.

On their way Claude and Jack kept as keen a look-out as they possibly could, listening too, in order that they might ascertain at the earliest moment whether any of their enemies were on the road.

But it seemed that the supposition that the troop of dragoons did not extend so far into the country was a correct one.

Certain is it, however, that they met with no opposition on their way.

The road was well-nigh deserted, though they met with a few travellers.

In fact, the roads became less used after dark than ever, in consequence of the great risk there was in travelling.

At last Sixteen-String Jack raised his riding-whip, and pointing forwards, said:

"Look there: do you see those small twinkling lights yonder?"

"Yes, quite plainly."

"Well, that's Hertford. A few minutes will take us there; and now how shall we proceed?"

"That requires some consideration. What do you propose?"

"Let us trot along the road gently for the remainder of the distance, and then we can talk the matter over; besides, if we enter the town at a steady, quiet pace, we shall not be so likely to attract the attention of the inhabitants."

"Very good! And now, Jack, I am waiting to hear what you have to say. Do you know anything of the town?"

"Yes; though it is many years since I visited it."

"Then you have the advantage of me, for I have never been in it at all to my knowledge."

"Well, then, the police-station is in the High Street."

"Then, I fancy it will be a little too daring for the pair of us to ride up to the door of it."

"Now I come to recollect," said Jack, "there used to be a public-house called the King's Arms very nearly opposite the station, and I dare say it is there at the present moment. Years ago the police officers used to be very fond of visiting it whenever they were off duty."

"Then that's the place for us, Jack. We will go to that inn and put up there, and watch our opportunity."

"We can do nothing better, I'm sure."

This point being settled, the two highwaymen rode leisurely along the High Street, until at length they came to a large straggling building in front of which was a huge sign, upon which the words King's Arms were painted.

"That's the place!" said Jack.

"Which is the way to the stables?"

"Down that side street yonder."

"Capital! Why, the place suits us admirably—as well as if it had been built for our especial accommodation."

"Now then, this way."

Although the hour was by no means a late one, but few of the inhabitants of the town were abroad.

Lights were shining, however, from many windows.

Going round the corner, the highwaymen came presently to some large folding gates leading into the yard at the rear of the inn.

The gates were closed; but a vigorous pull at the bell quickly caused the ostler to make his appearance.

"Can we put up here for an hour or so?" asked Jack.

"Certainly, gentlemen—all night if you wish it; there's plenty of accommodation for your horses, and for yourselves as well."

"That's right. I don't know how long we shall stay."

The gates were opened, and the horses placed in the stable, and then Sixteen-String Jack called Claude aside, and said:

"I fancy it will be best for you to remain in the yard or the stable while I enter the house."

"Is it necessary? said Claude. "I should prefer being indoors."

"No doubt; but the fact is, I have thought of a scheme which is more likely to succeed if I enter the inn alone; besides, if you remain here there will be less danger of detection, and there's another thing far more important to be borne in mind."

"What's that?"

"Why, as you know, it is running no trifling amount of risk to get face to face with a couple of police officers who, for aught I know, might be acquainted with my personal appearance. In that case my only chance would be immediate escape, and how could I do that without you were here ready with the horses?"

"That's quite enough," said Claude; "say not another word upon the subject; I'll wait here with all the pleasure imaginable, and if the emergency does arise, depend upon it I shall be here with both horses in perfect readiness."

Matters being thus settled, Sixteen-String Jack entered the public-house.

The hall or passage was very dark, for, as gas was unknown to our forefathers, they had to rely entirely upon oil lamps, and those of the most miserable and insufficient description. There was a light burning, to be sure, but its illumination was so feeble, and it cast so many flickering shadows, that it was little better than useless.

Jack went up to the bar window, where he saw the landlady.

She wore a widow's cap, so from that fact he concluded she was the sole mistress of the place.

"Can I have a private room for a little while?" he said.

"Oh yes, sir, certainly! Please to step this way."

With the greatest imaginable respect, Sixteen-String Jack was ushered into a large and somewhat comfortably furnished room. No doubt it was the best in the inn.

It was in profound darkness, save the light which came from the fire.

"I will light the lamp, sir, in one minute," said the landlady, who at once set about doing so.

"And when you have done that," said Jack, "bring me a bottle of wine. I want a few minutes' reflection."

The landlady stared in surprise, and placed the lamp down on the table and retired.

By the side of the lamp there was a screw, by turning which the wick could be either raised or lowered, and the amount of light regulated.

Jack turned it down until the light was only just sufficient to dispel the darkness over the table.

The landlady now appeared, bringing with her a bottle of wine.

"Shall I draw the cork for you, sir?" she asked.

"Oh, you are too kind," said Jack—"much too kind! If there's one thing in the world more delightful than another, it is to be waited upon and attended to by charming woman!"

The widow simpered and looked quite pleased.

Evidently she considered Jack was rather a nice man than otherwise.

"My dear madam," he continued, "I love—I adore the sex! I would do anything in the world for them; and often I say to myself: 'Jack Narn, how in the world is it that you, loving the charming fair sex as you do, don't get married?'"

"Lor, sir," said the widow, becoming deeply interested, "you don't mean to say that you are not married?"

"I do though," said Jack, with a sigh; "but I hope the happy day will come at last. I don't know how it is, but I can't make up my mind. The fact is, I am rather hard to please. For a long while I always paid attention to young unmarried girls, till I got disgusted with their silly ways, so I said to myself: 'If ever I do wed, I'll marry a widow!'"

After this declaration, the landlady was ready to do anything that her guest might require. She would also maintain that he was a gentleman with common sense.

Jack's motive was to blind her eyes to what he really was, and he succeeded admirably, for had anyone whispered to the landlady that her pleasant guest was a highwayman, she would have laughed the idea to scorn.

"And," continued Jack, "I have a little affair on hand; and if I can only carry it to a successful termination, as I hope I shall be able—I am determined to get married!"

"Might I make so bold," asked the widow, "as to enquire what your plan is?"

"Well, it is a secret," said Jack. "But as I see you are a woman of discretion, I don't mind confiding it to you."

"Oh, sir," said the widow, giving herself a thousand airs, "I'm much obliged to you for your good opinion of poor me!"

"Tut—tut!" said Jack. "If I began to pay you compliments I don't know to what extent I should go. However, to return to what I was saying. I dare say you have heard of that celebrated highwayman Dick Turpin, and the three other rascals he has with him?"

"Oh, yes!" said the landlady. "And whenever I hear their names mentioned I feel just as if a stream of cold water was running all the way down my back!"

"Quite a remarkable sensation," said Jack. "However, it so happens that myself and a friend of mine discovered a secret place where these highwaymen hid themselves, and we resolved to capture them."

"Ah, sir!" sighed the widow. "If you could only do that you would render society at large a service."

"I trust we shall succeed. The reward is something great for the capture of all of them. I have no doubt I shall succeed, and if so, why, my share of the reward will be at least six hundred pounds!"

"That's a power of money!" said the landlady.

"It is," said Jack; "and when I have got it I shall look round me for some snug little business in which I can invest it, and where I can live jolly and happy for the rest



[MR. WRIGGLES MAKES AN IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION TO THE JUDGE.]

of my days, and I do think that if there could be one calling more delightful than another, it is that of being the landlord of a country inn!"

The widow was delighted.

"It has its disagreeables of course," she said; "but to a comfortable couple it's a very pleasant life indeed. I find it very lonely here," she concluded, with a sigh.

"No doubt!" said Jack. "I can easily believe that no one can be happy alone!"

"That's just what I think, sir."

"However," said Jack, pretending to recollect himself, "I am counting all my chickens before they're hatched. You must understand that this must be kept a profound secret, at any rate, until to-morrow! Don't you mention it to a soul, for I have very good reasons for believing that these highwaymen have spies all over the country; and if you mention it, it may get to their ears, and then, of course, it would be all up with the reward!"

"Do you think that Dick Turpin has spies about?"

"I do," said Jack—"I firmly believe it; and it is more likely than not that he has an agent in this very house at this very moment!"

CHAPTER DCXXIII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK BAMBOOZLES THE POLICE OFFICERS, AND THE LANDLADY OF THE KING'S ARMS AS WELL.

"Oh, sir!—oh dear me!—oh—oh!" cried the landlady. "Do hold me!—I'm sure I shall faint! Oh yes, I'm going—I feel myself going!"

"Oh, d—n it!" muttered Jack. "I didn't bargain for this!"

Nevertheless, he sprang to his feet, and placed his arms round the landlady's rotund figure.

She seemed in a very bad faint indeed, for her head rested quite lovingly upon Jack's shoulder.

He knew very well it was only a sham; but, with great

care, he placed her in a chair and took steps to restore her to consciousness.

She was a plump, good-looking woman, just in the prime of life, and so, as she was shamming, Jack thought he might as well have a little fun as not.

Accordingly, he pretended to hesitate, and then, with great suddenness, he planted a kiss upon her lips.

The landlady showed not the least sign of consciousness.

Then Jack pretended to get alarmed, and said:

"I must ring the bell for assistance!"

He left the chair as he spoke, and went towards the bell-rope, but before he could take hold of it the landlady heaved a deep sigh and opened her eyes.

Jack then poured out a glass of wine, which, after much pressing, she at length ventured to sip.

"Oh!" she said, with a shudder—"the bare idea of such a thing! Oh, it's dreadful! Do you really think it's true?"

"I am sorry to find I have alarmed you so much, madam," said Jack; "and as I always make it a rule never to depart from the truth, I am obliged to repeat that I think it very likely that there is some agent of Dick Turpin's in the inn at this moment."

"Oh, it's dreadful! I shall faint again—I know I shall!"

"D—n it! I hope not!" muttered Jack.

"What did you say, sir?"

"I said, I trusted you would not."

"Oh, sir, it's dreadful to faint! You don't know what it is, sir; it makes you feel so very languid afterwards!"

"My dear madam," said Jack, "do let me persuade you to drink one glass of this wine; it is really capital stuff. It will do you a world of good."

"And there's about a hundred dozen down in the cellar," sighed the widow. "My poor defunct husband was such a man for wine, and the last thing he did almost was to stock the cellars with wine."

"Very kind of him," said Jack.

"Oh yes," said the widow, pretending to wipe away a tear; "he was the kindest man that ever breathed—he was indeed!"

"Well," said Jack, "I must have some conversation with you, I hope, to-morrow. However, valuable time is now slipping away. You are somewhere near the police-station, are you not?"

"Oh yes, sir, it's just across the way."

"How fortunate! Well, as I told you, my friend and myself thought it would be running too great a risk if we should attempt to capture four highwaymen ourselves. It would be two to one; so we thought the best plan would be to take two active and intelligent police officers into our confidence, and, by their assistance, effect our purpose."

"I understand, sir."

"Of course, our share of the reward would be less; but, then, the risk would be much less, and the chance of capturing the outlaws much greater."

"So it would, sir—so it would!"

"Well, then, do you happen to know two intelligent, enterprising police officers who would like to join us in this undertaking? It would be six hundred pounds a-piece for them, and that's a sum not to be sneezed at. And think of the renown they would gain! Why, they would be made inspectors on the spot!"

"Ah, sir!" sighed the widow, "I do know two police officers that will just suit you—in fact, I might say I know half a dozen."

"But I only want two," said Jack.

"Of course, sir! I understand—only two. I am acquainted with a couple of highly respectable police officers, and I should not be at all surprised if they were in the house at this very moment."

"If that is the case," said Jack, "why, so much the better. I should be glad if you would see whether they are here or not!"

"If they are, shall I send them in?"

"Yes, by all means, Mrs. ——. I have not the pleasure of knowing your name."

"Lamb, sir, if you please," said the widow, with a simper and a half-curtsey—"Lamb, sir, if you please!"

"It pleases me very well indeed, Mrs. Lamb; but I suppose there are other names that would please you quite as well?"

"For, sir, what a man you are!"

"Well, the fact is," said Jack, "when I once get into the company of charming woman, I never know when to stop talking! But it is necessary to turn to business now! Above all, do not breathe a single word of what I have said to you to-night to a living soul; if you do, you will be the means of depriving me of my six hundred pounds!"

"I wouldn't speak about it for all the wide world! I'll go now and see whether Mr. Gubbins and Mr. Kibble are in the house."

"Who are they?"

"The two very respectable police officers I spoke to you about."

"Oh, yes! If they are here, show them in at once!"

"Well, leastways, it won't be long before you see them," said the landlady; "for if they are not here they are at the station across, and I can send over with a message."

"You are placing me under a deal of obligation, my dear madam," said Jack. "Will you add to it by sending the officers to me at once, for I am afraid the night will be gone before we start."

The landlady withdrew, and then Jack, glancing up at the old-fashioned clock in the corner, said, in very different tones to those which he had recently employed:

"Confound the old twattler, what a while she has kept me chatting here! However, I hope it will prove time well spent, though Claude must be getting impatient."

Just then, there was a knocking at the door of the room.

"Come in!" cried Jack.

The door was then opened cautiously, and, as it seemed, timidly.

Then a couple of men made their appearance, dressed as police officers.

"Walk in, gentlemen—pray walk in," cried Jack, "and sit down! We have important things to talk about, I can assure you!"

While speaking, Jack looked keenly at the new-comers, and saw they were a couple of tall, ungainly, ignorant-looking fellows, and after he had given one glance into their countenances he felt tolerably certain that he should be able to succeed in his design.

The two police officers, although they had been asked to sit down, fidgeted about in a very awkward manner, and Jack was obliged to repeat his invitation before they thought fit to comply with it.

Jack poured out some wine, and invited them to partake of it.

After this, a good deal of their clownishness wore off.

"Of course, two enterprising police officers like yourselves," began Jack, "must have heard of those four highwaymen, who, by banding together, have become the terror of all the roads in and about the metropolis?"

"You alludes, I suppose, to Dick Turpin and his gang?" said the police officer who rejoiced in the name of Gubbins.

"Yes, I do; and you must be aware that all attempts that have been made to capture them have signally failed."

"Very true!" said the officers in chorus.

"Now," said Jack, "has it ever fallen to your lot to have any thing to do with them? Have you ever pursued them, or tried to capture them?"

"No, never; we've not had a chance."

"Then I suppose you have never seen them?"

"No, not exactly seen them," said Mr. Kibble, "but we've as good as seen 'em, if you know what that means."

He fumbled in the breast pocket of his coat as he spoke.

"Oh yes, I know!" said Jack, hastily, for he wished to proceed with the conversation, having learned the important fact that these two officers had never seen himself or his comrades.

But Mr. Kibble, probably with a view to display his own efficiency, took from his pocket a folded paper.

"You see, 'ere is an accurate description of them in every particular, sent down from Bow Street." So saying, he unfolded the document.

"Is there indeed!" said Jack. "Just lend it me for a moment; that's the very thing I wanted!"

The bill was immediately and unsuspiciously handed to Jack, who gave a sigh of relief as he took hold of it, for although the two police officers were unquestionably

blundering fellows, yet, by reading the description over again, they might detect some point of resemblance.

Jack pretended to peruse the bill with very great attention, and while he was doing so he said:

"The reason why I have sent for you is because myself and a friend of mine have ascertained for certain where these highwaymen conceal themselves."

"Have you, indeed?" said the two officers, starting from their chairs.

"Yes, I have; but pray sit down and let me explain the matter to you more thoroughly from first to last; it will be a great deal the best, because all misunderstanding in the future will be prevented!"

The officers sat down again, and prepared themselves to listen with the greatest attention to what Jack had to say.

He went on as follows:

"You must understand that, during the day, I happened to be along with a friend quite by accident in Enfield Chase. You know the place?"

"Oh, yes, of course we do—as well as we know Hertford."

"Just so! You will also recollect that some time back these very highwaymen were known for certain to be in the Chase, but they were rooted out. Now, it seems, they've gone there again, and I'll tell you how it was we found out all about it."

"Pray do, sir! Why, have you any idea what the reward amounts to for capturing these four villains?"

"I have," said Jack. "Here it is on this very bill. Why, altogether, it is two thousand five hundred pounds."

"Yes, that's the figger," said Gubbins, gaspingly.

"A nice round sum, is it not?" said Jack. "And when there are only four for it to be divided among, it's a decent thing."

"Yes, I should rather think so! Why, it's how much apiece?"

"Six hundred and twenty-five pounds," said Jack.

"Good gracious.

"And gentlemen," continued Jack, in a very impressive voice, and folding up the bill and putting it in his pocket while he spoke, "I can assure you that we stand the best possible chance of gaining the sum I have mentioned, for myself and a friend having found out their hiding-place, can take you two there, and then we shall secure them all four beyond a doubt."

"It almost takes my breath away to think about it!" exclaimed Gubbins.

"And mine too!" cried Kibble. "Only think—six hundred and twenty-five pounds!"

CHAPTER DCXXIV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL RIDE OFF TO ENFIELD CHASE WITH THE TWO POLICE OFFICERS.

"And well it might," said Jack, "for six hundred and twenty-five pounds is a large sum of money. It is enough to make us all independent for the rest of our lives, if we turn the money to good use. Why, you might be a farmer with it, or buy a public-house, or a row of houses—I don't know what?"

"Go on, sir—pray go on!" said the two police-officers. "We're anxious to hear all the rest!"

"Well, then, of course you will let this go no further? As I said, I was in the Chase along with a friend of mine, when all of a sudden we heard a strange noise. Not knowing what it might mean, we crouched down behind a bush, and kept as quiet as death. Then we heard the noise again, and, looking up, we saw a man standing close to the trunk of a large tree. Where he came from, we could not exactly tell; but presently he was joined by another, and another, and another, until four men were standing together. We looked well at them, I can assure you, and they, never dreaming we were hid so close at hand, spoke freely to one another, and, even if we had not recognised their persons, their conversation would at once have let us know who they actually were!"

"And they were really Dick Turpin and his companions?"

"Yes," said Jack—"there could not be the shadow of a doubt about it. I won't stop now to tell you all I heard them say—it was nothing very important; but, after a time, they walked off among the trees, while we thought we stood a good chance of being discovered, and knew if we were, we should be either put to death or imprisoned, so we moved off, but not until we had marked the spot well. Then after a time we returned, and, going up to the tree, found there was a trap-door close to the roots of it, and this was where the highwaymen had come from, and the opening and shutting of this trap-door caused the noise we had heard."

"Good gracious!" cried Gubbins. "Why, we shall have them like mice in a trap, and be able to catch them one by one as they come out."

"That's a capital thought!" cried Jack, enthusiastically. "To be sure we should! Now, I wonder how it was I did not think of that excellent plan myself?"

"Ah, sir," said Gubbins, with a complacent air, "the fact is, business is business! Now, you're not in the profession, so I don't wonder at your not thinking of it, because it isn't your business. Now, I have been in the profession for a great many years, though I think of leaving it."

"How's that?"

"Why, I'm getting tired of remaining a common police officer, and of seeing younger and less qualified men than myself made sergeants and inspectors of, and such like."

"It's disgusting!" said Kibble. "I feels the same thing myself!"

"Hold your row!" said Gubbins. "You know you haven't half the claim that I have, nor half the ability."

"Well, gentlemen," said Jack, "we will leave that part of the subject, because, let me tell you this, if we capture these four highwaymen—and, mind you, I have no doubt about it—you will not only receive your six hundred and twenty-five pounds apiece, but be made inspectors there and then."

"If we weren't," said Gubbins, "I'd leave the service that minute!"

"Have no fear," said Jack. "They would not part with so valuable a member as you are. And now, what I have to say is just this: In a case of this sort, the fewer there are in it the better."

"Decidedly!"

"Still, it is necessary to have a sufficient number, and that's why, after a long consultation, my friend and myself determined to engage two police officers to assist us, because our numbers would then be equal."

"A very wise determination indeed," said Gubbins—"very wise!"

"So I thought. My friend is outside along with the horses."

"Why didn't he come in?" asked Gubbins, as Jack thought, half suspiciously.

"There's a reason for most things," he replied, hastily, "and there happens to be a good reason for that. My friend is all very well, but he's got a weakness, and that weakness is, that when he goes into a public-house he doesn't think it right to come out again until everything he sees looks double."

The officers laughed.

"Well, on this occasion he was afraid to trust himself inside the house for fear of the consequences. He knew the necessity of being sober, and that's the reason why he's stopping outside."

The officers seemed to think this quite a plausible excuse.

"Now, then," cried Jack, "are you willing to join with us and run the risk?"

"I rather think we are!" said Gubbins; "and if isn't every day that such a chance comes in our road!"

"Scarcely," said Jack. "Have you horses?"

"Yes, we can get a couple in a minute or two."

"Then do so at once. I will go to my friend, and we will join you in the street. But not a word more about our expedition to a soul. You understand me, I don't intend to have the reward divided among five."

"Nor do we!" said Gubbins, rising and putting his finger by the side of his nose, and shaking his head slowly backwards and forwards.

"Rather not!" said Kibble following his companion's example.

"Six hundred and twenty-five pounds!" said Jack, also putting his finger to his nose, and shaking his head with a profoundly sagacious air. "That's the little amount a-piece for us, and no less!"

"I'm mum," said Gubbins—"not a word passes these 'ere lips!"

"Nor these," said Kibble; "and won't all the other fellows stare when they hear all about it and see us again!"

"I rather think they will," said Jack, in a peculiar voice, for he was wondering how these two very clever officers would look when stripped of their habiliments.

"But," said Mr. Gubbins, impressively, "let us tell you, sir, that you have done a very wise thing in taking two experienced officers into your confidence in this matter. Without us, you may depend, you would have done nothing—perhaps got your brains knocked out for your pains; but with us—ah, you'll see—you'll see!"

"So we shall," said Jack, again putting his finger to his nose, and wagging his head to and fro.

"I feel myself an independent man," cried Gubbins; "and when I come back I shall be able to say that I don't care a d—n for the whole force, and they can either make an inspector of me or not, just as they please—it will be perfectly indifferent to me!"

"Of course it will!" said Jack. "It's a glorious prospect! Come, let us start at once, or else, perhaps, when we get there we shall find that the birds have flown!"

This was a terrible thought to the two police officers, and the expression of their countenances changed immediately.

"We're off, sir—we're off, and in less than five minutes we will join you outside the inn!"

With these words, Gubbins and Kibble, highly delighted with themselves and the world in general, went to the stables attached to the police station and saddled their horses with their own hands.

Both looked upon the reward as already their own.

As soon as the door of the parlour had closed behind them, Jack summoned the landlady and paid her liberally for all he had had.

"My dear Mrs. Lamb, I deeply regret having to leave you so soon! I can hardly tear myself away, although I go to obtain six hundred pounds. Never mind, I shall be back with that amount in my pocket before many hours are over, and I am sure you will be no less pleased to see me then than now. Farewell!"

"Oh, you dear, delightful man!" exclaimed the widow as Jack passed through the door. "Don't you fail to return! But," she added, with a sigh, "I fear you are a gay deceiver!"

Sixteen-String Jack considered her fears were very well grounded, but he did not say so, for of course it would never do for him to show his face in that inn again after he had carried out his intentions.

He made his way to the stables, and found Claude walking impatiently up and down the yard.

"What a confoundedly long time you have been, Jack!" he cried. "What ever have you been about? I'm afraid you've been coming it too strong!"

"No, no—not a bit; it's all right—as right as a bank! Jump on your horse—we must start at once."

"Have they fallen into the trap?"

"Yes, blindly, and yet they had their eyes wide open all the while. Oh, Claude, they are a couple of uncommon fools, and the two officers I have met with could not suit us better if we had searched all England over. It will be a joke—a rare joke!"

"Where are they, then?"

"I'm going to meet them in the road. They are in a state of great excitement, and fully believe every word I have said."

Claude and Jack mounted their steeds, and having given a liberal gratuity to the ostler, trotted off to meet the two police officers.

They went past the inn a little way, and pulled the High Street.

Before they had occupied this position a moment, they heard the clatter of horses' feet, and directly afterwards they were joined by Gubbins and Kibble.

"Allow me to introduce you to my friend, Mr. Jones!" said Sixteen-String Jack. "Jones, old boy," he continued, "these are the two police officers I spoke of—Mr. Gubbins and Mr. Kibble."

Claude and the two police officers took off their hats, and bowed after the fashion of the times, and then Sixteen-String Jack exclaimed.

"Let us make the most of the time we have before us. Forward—forward! Our horses are in good condition and the road is firm and level."

"Yes, forward!" cried Gubbins. "We go to cover ourselves with renown!"

"We do," said Jack, "and to fill our pockets with good bank-notes, which, to my way of thinking, is a great deal better."

"So I say," exclaimed Gubbins. "Give me the cash and I don't care a d—n whether they make me an inspector, or whether I leave the service. There now!"

With these words, Gubbins dug his spurs rather viciously into his horse's flanks, and away the whole party went along the road at a smart gallop.

Presently Jack perceived in the distance the swinging sign of a public-house; so, reining-in his steed, he said:

"Bravely done—bravely done! Another such a gallop as that will take us to our journey's end; but I propose now that we give our horses a rest by stopping a minute or two in front of that inn yonder, and have a drop of something good to drink."

This was unanimously agreed to; and the moment afterwards the whole party stopped in the large open space in front of the roadside inn.

CHAPTER DCXXV.

THE TWO POLICE OFFICERS CONTINUE UNSUSPICIOUS OF THE FATE IN STORE FOR THEM.

THE halt did not last many minutes; for the officers, as well as the highwaymen, were extremely anxious that the journey should be continued.

A little hay and water was given to the horses, while their riders partook of a more stimulating kind of refreshment, in the shape of hot brandy-and-water.

This draught was far from unacceptable, for the night was a very cold one.

Away they went, at a rattling speed, and very soon the inn was left behind.

No more was said, until at length Sixteen-String Jack slightly slackened the speed of his horse, and cried out:

"There—look! Yonder is Enfield Chase!"

"Yes—there it is!" said Gubbins. "I've seen it from this road many and many a time; but I've never been under its trees in the whole course of my life."

"Then you'll gain some advantage to-night by doing so. Come, let us get on, for fear that we should arrive and find we have had all our trouble for nothing."

"That would be vexatious."

"Vexatious to a degree!" said Sixteen-String Jack.

"But," asked Gubbins, "are you sure that you noted the spot so well that you could make your way through the forest until you came to one particular tree, and then say, 'Down among the roots you will find the trap-door?'"

"I can," said Jack; "for I took particular notice, and so did my friend; and by trusting to each other, we shall be sure to go right."

"Well, you will excuse me for asking you, gentlemen; only I feel so very anxious about the matter."

"No doubt you do; any man may be very reasonably expected to feel anxious about six hundred and twenty-five pounds."

"Rather!"

"Well, here we are at last," said Jack; "a few more steps will take us to the trees."

The little party had now gained that piece of waste shrubby ground which is generally found encircling woods and forests like a belt.

As Jack had truly said, another moment took them under the trees, and then indeed they were fairly in Enfield Chase.

Sixteen-String Jack led the way for some distance with great confidence.

From time to time, however, he looked from right to left, and then he would nod his head, and consult Claude, and then keep on in the same direction as before, all of which movements fully impressed the police officers with the idea that they had very carefully noted the situation of the trap-door.

Of course this was all a farce upon Jack's part, for it

was a matter of perfect indifference to him which way he went so long as it led to the centre of the Chase.

He was desirous of getting to some quiet and secluded spot.

As they penetrated still deeper into the recesses of the Chase, the trees grew closer and closer together, and their branches shooting out in all directions, in many places interlaced each other so that progress on horseback became very difficult.

But the two highwaymen were used to this sort of thing, and managed to bend their heads so low down as to escape any obstructions.

But the two police officers were by no means so fortunate, and every now and then one or the other of them would get a formidable crack on his headpiece from some low-lying branch.

They stood this for some time to the infinite amusement of the highwaymen; but at last they could stand it no longer.

"We had better dismount, I think!" said Gubbins, rubbing his head ruefully.

"Just as you please, gentlemen!" said Jack. "We are very close indeed to the place I spoke of, and so we must advance with the greatest caution!"

"Perhaps we had better leave our horses behind us here," suggested Gubbins.

"No, not yet. We can push on some distance further without any fear that we shall be overheard I will tell you when to stop."

The darkness of the Chase now became very profound, and it required not a little skill to proceed even on foot, for there were many projections from the ground quite large enough to be stumbled over.

The two officers did not notice the manner in which the two friends disposed themselves, or if they did observe it, they evidently suspected nothing.

Claude, while leading his horse, managed to walk by the side of Mr. Kibble, and in the same way Sixteen-String Jack managed to walk by the side of Mr. Gubbins.

While they were thus walking along under the shadow of the trees, Sixteen-String Jack made the first step towards the accomplishment of his purpose.

"This is a very strange adventure that we are on—do you know that?"

"What do you mean?" asked Gubbins.

"Why, to think we should be about to accomplish that which so many have attempted and failed to do."

"It is strange, of course," said Gubbins

"Decidedly!" added Kibble. "And I sha'n't care how soon it's all over!"

"No, nor I," said Sixteen-String Jack, "though the reward would not be half so sweet if there was not a little difficulty in obtaining it. By the way, this Dick Turpin is quite a wonderful fellow!"

"I've heard some strange stories of him," said Gubbins. "Who is there that has not?"

"Now, I remember a very singular circumstance, which our expedition to-night brings quite vividly before my mind"

"What is it—what is it?" asked Gubbins, eagerly

"I can tell you in a few minutes if you don't mind listening," said Jack, "and I may as well do that as we are walking along in silence, for we are some hundreds of yards distant from the trap-door yet."

"Oh, go on—go on!" said Gubbins. "I always do like to hear all about Dick Turpin and such-like chaps, because, you see, it very often happens that you learn something that turns to your own advantage."

"Very likely," said Jack, "and I should not be surprised if you learn something to your advantage from the story I am going to tell

"Well, begin at once," said Claude—"that's quite enough preface!"

"Well, then, the tale I have to tell is this: Some time back Dick Turpin was staying at an old deserted mansion, not far from Finchley, where he had taken up his quarters."

"Yes—I heard some particulars of that," interrupted Gubbins "Mr. Wriggles and his officers rooted the rascals out—didn't they?"

"You're quite right," said Jack, "they did. Well, Dick Turpin thought he was living very snugly and unsuspected in this deserted mansion, but presently he had his suspicions aroused."

"How was that?" asked Gubbins.

"Why, one day, as he was standing at one of the upper windows of the mansion, he saw a couple of men skulking about in the grounds, peeping and prying here and there, and at last off they went."

"Two officers, I suppose?"

"A good guess, Mr. Gubbins—they were officers! Well, then, Dick Turpin imagined that danger was at hand, so he took particular notice which way these two officers went, and, having done so, left the window. In this deserted mansion, you must know, he had several capital disguises, so he put one of them on, and saying to his three companions that there was game afloat, and they were to keep a sharp look-out, he made his way across the grounds, reading pretty nearly in the footsteps of the two officers he had seen.

"That was a bold course for him to adopt.

"Very. But if you will listen, you will hear that he did something much bolder than that."

"Oh! I shouldn't wonder! Go on!"

"Well, Dick Turpin went at a much more rapid rate than the two police officers, and after a time he managed to get them in view. He then hung back, and particularly watched which way they were going; he crept after them slowly and cautiously."

"And didn't the officers see him?" asked Gubbins.

"No, that they certainly did not!" replied Sixteen-String Jack.

"Ah! then, gentlemen, it is pretty clear that I was not one of the police officers! But there it is—there's some members of the force that I do believe go walking about with their eyes in their pockets, while, as for those like myself—active, and enterprising, and vigilant, and all that sort of thing, keeping an eye upon everything—are taken no notice of, and are snubbed by sergeants and inspectors that ain't fit to hold a candle to us!"

"That's just so!" said Kibble.

"I can easily believe it!" said Jack. "But, now, to go on with my tale about Dick Turpin; I have only a word or two more to say."

"Ah! yes, let us hear the rest!"

"Well, then, without being seen by the two officers, Dick Turpin tracked them to a public-house somewhere on the Finchley Road. He saw them go in, and then, after waiting for some time, Dick Turpin went in too."

"What, while two officers were there?"

"Yes—while two officers were there!"

"Then don't I wish I had been one of them!"

"No doubt you do," said Jack; "and yet, if you had, you might have been deprived of the glorious opportunity you have to-night."

"But I never heard of such a thing!" exclaimed Gubbins. "To have the audacity to walk into a public-house where two representatives of his Majesty were!"

"Well, anyhow, Dick Turpin did it; but then you must remember he was disguised."

"Oh, yes—that makes a difference, of course!"

"You must not overlook that fact. I don't suppose, with all his daring, that Dick Turpin would have been bold enough to enter the public-house if he had not been disguised!"

"Well, what took place then?" asked Gubbins, whose curiosity was greatly increased.

"Dick Turpin went up to the bar where the landlord was standing, and asked him which was the nearest town where he could find any police officers, for he had important information to give."

"Well, I've never heard that tale before;" said Gubbins, "and I rather think the world is coming to something if highwaymen are to go into public-houses and talk to the landlords about giving information to police officers!"

"I give you the facts," said Jack, "precisely as they were given to me, and you can draw from them just what conclusions you think proper—so now to go on. The landlord told Dick Turpin—who, being dressed like any ordinary traveller, he didn't suspect for a moment—that the nearest place would be London, and that it was a matter of ten or eleven miles to Bow Street."

"What then?"

"Why, the landlord added that it so happened that there were two London police officers in the inn at that moment, and suggested that they might do as well."

"And what did Dick Turpin say to that?"

"Why, he declared that nothing could be better, since it would save him a great deal of trouble and time, which he could ill afford to spare, and requested the landlord to show him to the room where the two officers were."

"Oh, that's too much!" said Gubbins—"that's too much!—that's too audacious by far!"

"Oh, yes, certingly; it's too howdashus!" cried Kibble.

"I can only say," exclaimed Claude, "that I happened to hear the tale myself, and I can assure you that my friend is telling it you word for word just as I heard it."

"Oh, no doubt—no doubt," said Mr. Gubbins. "I wouldn't think for a moment that he was trying to deceive me—I know he would be incapable of such a thing!"

"I should indeed!" said Jack. "In fact, it would be madness upon my part, or anyone else's, to attempt to deceive so active, enterprising, and vigilant a police officer as yourself!"

CHAPTER DCXXVI.

THE TWO POLICE OFFICERS ARE INDUCED BY THE FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCES TO ACT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE DICTATES OF PRUDENCE.

"I DON'T like to say too much of myself!" exclaimed Gubbins, "but perhaps you will allow me to remark that I quite agree with what you just said."

"Then that's settled," said Jack. "And now to go on, for we are getting very close to the spot now."

"Make haste, then, by all means," said Gubbins, "though I confess I'm curious to know how far Turpin's impudence took him."

"Why, right into the room where the two officers were sitting drinking their grog!" replied Jack.

"Impossible!"

"I can assure you I heard it. And when he got in he introduced himself as a gentleman from Oxford, and he said he had very important intelligence to give to the police officers."

"And what did the police officers say to that? Didn't they recognise him?"

"No; they never dreamt who he was for a moment! They asked him what the intelligence was about, and he told them that it was concerning Dick Turpin."

"Worse and worse!"

"More daring, I admit—but he did it! The officers then told him it was fortunate he had come to them, for they happened to be on the look-out for Dick Turpin and his companions."

"And what did Dick Turpin say to that?"

"He informed them that as he happened to be in the neighbourhood of a place which he described, and which the officers recognised as the deserted mansion, he had seen a man pass through the gates, mounted on a splendid black mare."

"But I can't understand," said Mr. Gubbins, "why Dick Turpin should have done such an absurd thing as that!"

"Wait a little while, and you will comprehend his drift. He was leading the officers into a trap, though they little thought it at the time."

"I should like to see 'em try to lead me into a trap!" exclaimed Gubbins, with a confident air.

"He would be a lost mutton," said Jack, "if he tried anything of the sort; and the officers were sorry afterwards that they had not been more wide-awake!"

"I am full of curiosity," said Gubbins, "for I can't make out why Dick Turpin should tell the officers where he was, and lead them on to the scent at once."

"Well, you will soon hear it now—and your wondering will cease. He told the officers that he had watched this man on the black horse go up the avenue to a certain place, where he disappeared through a concealed door, and offered to take the police officers to this very concealed door through which the horse and rider had passed."

"Ha—what?" said Kibble. "Secret door?—that sounds odd, don't it?"

"Hold your row!" said Gubbins, "and don't interfere! Pray go on, sir."

"Well, the officers rushed headlong into the trap in a moment, and agreed to accompany this traveller from Oxford to the deserted mansion, for he promised to show them just where the concealed door was."

"Concealed door?" muttered Kibble—"blest if that don't sound very odd!"

"Don't make a fool of yourself!" said Gubbins. "Pay attention to what the gentleman is saying. No doubt we shall learn a wise lesson of practical experience from him."

"Very likely!" said Claude, drily.

"Well, these two officers," continued Jack, "never said a word to anybody, for they believed that, with the assistance of the traveller from Oxford, they should be able to capture all the highwaymen without any extra aid, and then they would have all the more money to divide amongst them. You understand that?"

"Oh, yes—quite plainly!" said Gubbins.

Kibble was about to make some remark, but Sixteen-String Jack rapidly continued.

Evidently Kibble was getting suspicious.

"Well, they all three went to the deserted mansion, and Dick Turpin showed the officers the secret door, and took them inside the building; and when he had got them there, what do you think he did?"

"I don't know!" gasped Gubbins.

"What should you think?"

"Oh, I feel too excited to think! Pray tell me at once!"

"Well, then, Dick Turpin closed the door, and uttered a whistle, and three more persons immediately came into the room. Perhaps you can guess who these persons were? if not, I will tell you. They were Dick Turpin's companions!"

"Oh, lawks!" said Mr. Gubbins. "It almost takes my breath away to think of it! What did the two officers do?"

"What, when they found themselves face to face with Dick Turpin and his companions?"

"Yes."

"Well, now, before I answer you that question," said Sixteen-String Jack, "suppose you answer me another."

"Very well; what is it?"

"If you had been in the position of these two officers, or supposing these two officers that I have been telling you about had been yourself and Mr. Kibble, now, what do you think you should have done under the circumstances?"

"I am sure I don't know," replied Gubbins, "and I can't give you any better answer."

"Well, then," said Jack, "I'll tell you what these two officers did, and then you can form your own opinion as to whether they acted wisely or not."

"What was it they did, then?"

"Why, when they found they were trapped—when they found the highwaymen had got them completely in their power, and that they were in a place far away from all other habitations, and where no cries for succour could possibly avail them, they acted with *common sense*."

"How—how?"

"Instead of struggling and fighting with the highwaymen, and getting killed or hurt, they gave in quietly at once, and confessed themselves beaten. In return for that, the highwaymen faithfully promised not to injure them in any way, and they faithfully kept their word."

Sixteen-String Jack now paused, and so did Claude.

The two police officers by this time comprehended that something was wrong.

A horrible foreboding sprang up in their minds, and very quickly gathered force.

The dismal conviction seized upon them that they too had suffered themselves to be led into a trap with their eyes wide open.

"Now," said Jack, "if you found yourselves by chance in such an awkward position, don't you think it would be much wiser to submit and put up with a little inconvenience than to stand still and have your brains knocked out?"

"I—I—I don't much like your story, Mr. Whoever-you-are!" cried Gubbins—"I tell you I don't much like it; and the more I think about it, the less I do like it! What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you," said Sixteen-String Jack, releasing his hold upon the bridle of his horse, while Claude did the same—"I'll tell you, if you will just bend your head this way!"

It was rather dark, and Mr. Gubbins could not see exactly what Jack was about.

He did not bend his head, but remained standing still.

In one hand, Sixteen-String Jack held a pistol, and with the other he seized hold of Gubbins by the collar of his coat.

Claude Duval served Kibble in a precisely similar manner.

Neither of the officers attempted the least resistance—they were too much astounded at the strange turn events were taking.

As quick as thought, Jack thrust his pistol into Gubbins's ear, and cried:

"It means just this: *You and your companion have been trapped, just like the two officers I have been telling you about!* If you raise your hand—struggle in the least, or resist in any way, I will as surely blow your brains out as I now threaten to do it! You understand me; I am fully in earnest! I had an object in getting you here to this place away from all other human beings, and, so far, I have succeeded! Now, then, do you submit?"

During this dreadful address, the eyes of the active, intelligent, and enterprising police officer glared wildly around him, but the long, leafless trees seemed to point threateningly at him.

"Your answer!" said Jack—"be quick about it!"

"What has Kibble done?" asked Gubbins, in a subdued voice.

"He has acted like a sensible man!" cried Jack. "Finding resistance useless, he has submitted! Behold, he is now a prisoner!"

Jack was right.

Kibble had given in quietly enough, and suffered his arms to be bound.

"Well, it is no good for me to think of resisting two like you," said Gubbins, making a great show of valour. "As Kibble has thought proper to show the white feather and give in, I am of necessity obliged to surrender."

"Certainly!" said Jack. "Here, Claude," he added, "just oblige Mr. Gubbins with a little bit of that strong cord."

Claude obeyed willingly enough, and so far the two police officers found themselves prisoners.

Claude Duval then left Sixteen-String Jack to keep guard over the pair, while he produced a large quantity of strong rope, which the police officers had brought with them, thinking it would be required to secure the four highwaymen they were so sure of capturing.

"We will deal with you one at a time," said Jack; "and we will begin, Mr. Gubbins, with you. I am going to release your hands, but for a purpose of my own. Of course I shall disarm you first, and if you attempt to run away, we will both fire after you. We don't threaten in vain; and you had better let us do as we like without forcing us to extremes. We don't mean to take your lives, but you may compel us to do it."

While Jack was uttering these words, Claude Duval rapidly deprived Mr. Gubbins of every offensive and defensive weapon he had about him, and when he had done that, he severed the bonds by which his arms were confined.

Then the highwaymen took up their positions close to him, with a pistol in each hand.

Mr. Gubbins was very angry, and his lips were quivering with rage, but at the same time he was very frightened too.

"Now attend to me!" cried Sixteen-String Jack. "We want your clothes, and must have them!"

"My—my clothes?" stammered Gubbins.

"Yes—every garment you wear, and we not only want, but will have! You can take your choice—you either pull them off your live body, or we will strip them from your dead carcass—so which will you do? There is no time to spare—be quick with your decision!"

Mr. Gubbins reflected for a few moments, and then came to the conclusion that one evil was greater than the other.

It would, he thought—although very disagreeable—be much better to take off his own clothes, than be killed and allow the highwaymen to take them off him.

One way or the other, he saw his clothes must be had.

"What's your decision?" asked Jack, in an impatient voice.

Gubbins did not reply in words.

He gave one despairing glance right and left of him, and then, with a deeply-muttered curse at his own folly and blindness in allowing himself to be led into this snare, he unbuttoned his coat, and slipping it off, flung it on to the ground.

CHAPTER DXXVII.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK RE ACCOSTED BY MR. WRIGGLES IN THE OLD BAILEY, AND EVENTS ROUND NEWGATE BEGIN TO ASSUME A VERY COMPLICATED ASPECT.

"VERY good!" said Jack. "I am glad you have come to such a sensible determination! Thank you!"

He took up the coat as he spoke.

"Now, off with your vest," he said, "and those wrappers you wear round your neck, and your hat!"

These articles were one by one handed to the highwayman, who said "Thank you," as he took each with ironical politeness.

"Ah!" cried Jack, "I see you wear a wig! I must trouble you for that also."

Off came the article named.

Gubbins looked very rueful and very angry, and when sometimes he thought of resisting and declaring that he would not pull off another article of his apparel, his purpose would change, for his eyes would rest upon the pistols which the two highwaymen continued to level at him.

"Now then," said Jack, "be quick!"

"What do you want next?"

"Your breeches."

"M-m-my breeches?"

"Yes—don't hesitate, or you know the consequences! Off with them, and your boots as well!"

"But consider, gentlemen!" expostulated the police officer.

"I can consider nothing!" shouted Jack. "Off with them!"

"But it's a windy night!" said Gubbins, "and freezing like the very devil! Surely you would not make me take my breeches off on such a night as this!"

"Surely I would!" replied Jack. "Dead or alive, I must have them! So take your choice between standing the cold, and being sent to a place where you'll complain of the heat!"

With a hideous groan, Gubbins divested himself of his boots and breeches, and then stood with the tails of his shirt fluttering in the icy wind, and looking a very ludicrous and miserable object indeed.

Claude and Jack both laughed immoderately.

They could not help it.

Gubbins was inclined to be desperate.

"It's all d—d fine for you to laugh!" he said. "But I can't see the joke! What is it you mean to do? What do you intend to do with us?"

"Wait a little while, and you will see!" said Jack. "It won't do to tell you too much at once!"

Mr. Gubbins shivered and shook, while his teeth chattered together in quite an alarming way.

"This way!" said Claude. "Be good enough to stand against that tree! And now for a rope!"

He placed the pistols in his pocket, and picked up the piece of strong rope.

This he threw over the body of the police officer, and, almost before that individual could comprehend what he was about, bound him tightly to the tree close to which he was standing.

The feelings of the other officer at this, seeing the fate that was intended to be his, may perhaps be imagined.

As soon as ever Gubbins was done with, the highwaymen turned to him, and he was served in precisely the same manner.

He did not submit quite so readily, and made one or two efforts to escape, but they were frustrated.

He might just as well have given in quietly, for the only good he got by his struggles were some sharp knocks from the highwaymen's fists, and from the barrels of their pistols.

When he stood in his shirt, he knew that the next thing to be done was for him to be tied to a tree.

There was no taking him by surprise, so that in this case the highwaymen had a more difficult task to perform.

But they accomplished it by sheer force

They tied him tightly to a tree that stood very near to the one to which Gubbins was secured.

Upon finding themselves perfectly helpless—for our friends had taken care to secure their hands so that they could not possibly release themselves—they broke forth into a succession of the most awful oaths and execrations.

"Bravo!" said Claude—"go it! I should advise you to keep up that sort of fun, because it will tend to circulate your blood a little, and keep you from getting cold. It's the only exercise you will have for some time, I promise you!"

"Yes," said Sixteen-String Jack, as he gathered up all the clothes—"yes, I should certainly advise you to continue your efforts. Take a parting word from me—keep up your shouts—scream well—the sounds may reach the ears of somebody or other, and you will be liberated! If you stay here very long you will stand a very good chance of being frozen to death!"

With this very consoling remark, the two highwaymen departed, taking all the clothes and all four horses with them.

They laughed immoderately at the trick they had played their foes.

At length they paused in the dell we have so often mentioned, and when they gained this spot their laughter somewhat subsided.

It was then that Claude said to his companion:

"This is a capital joke, Jack, and no mistake; but yet for all that it's an awfully cold night!"

"Yes—it freezes!"

"Well, tell me what you intend to do with these two wretches?"

"Why, leave them where they are, of course!"

"But in that part of the Chase the chances are a thousand to one if they are found before they are starved to death!"

"Oh—I don't mean to keep them there so long as that," said Jack. "You must remember now that it is nearly morning, and I hope to be back here under the trees in good time to-night. Then we will set those fellows at liberty—it will not be safe to do so before!"

"No, that it decidedly would not! We should have a lot of their companions after us in no time!"

"They must put up with the inconvenience of remaining in the cold! I daresay they will resign themselves to their fate in time; but come, Claude, we must not waste any more time in talking about them; begin your disguise!"

Claude obeyed

Both Gubbins and Kibble were much bigger men than our two friends.

But this was a convenience rather than otherwise, for the two highwaymen put on their clothes over those which they already wore.

Then, by the aid of a little dry grass, they managed to pad themselves out as occasion required, and by the time they had donned the whole of the officers' apparel they were completely metamorphosed.

They laboured under the disadvantage of having no looking-glass, by which to arrange themselves, and they had to put up with a little brook as a substitute.

This answered their purpose tolerably well.

Then the new day came, and the sun rose.

It was yet full early for them to start, so they agreed to remain in their present position for some time longer yet.

The sun quickly mounted, and as soon as the darkness was dispelled by his cheering rays they were able to make several important improvements in their disguises.

"You will do now, Claude," said Sixteen-String Jack. "I should scarcely know you myself, you are so much changed. To be sure, if I had the least suspicion that you were not a police officer, I should recognise you at once."

"Of course, and so would anybody, let them be disguised as well as they could. In a case of this sort, what you have to do is to guard against the possibility of anyone suspecting you to be other than you seem to be."

"Just so. And now, about reaching London? Which will be the best way to do it?"

"I have been thinking of that; and as we have assumed their clothes, I see no reason why we should not make use of their horses."

"Very good! And as our own?"

"We will leave them in the Chase. They will be safe enough, no doubt, and as we are disguised in this way, supposing that for the future you address me as Gibbs and I will call you Gubbins."

"Agreed!"

"And we shall be able to say with perfect truth that we come from Hertford; and if we are questioned by anyone, and it is known that there are two officers bearing those names in the town, why, we shall be quite free from all suspicion."

"That is certain."

It was shortly after this that our two friends mounted the horses belonging to the police officers, and rode leisurely out of the Chase.

It was very wise of them to decide to go to London on horseback, because the steeds wore a kind of uniform, so that they could be recognised at once as belonging to the police force.

"Which way shall we go, Jack?" asked Claude, as they emerged from the trees.

"Oh, we must take the high-road, and ride boldly along it. We had better not go too fast, either."

"It's a ticklish adventure," said Claude, "and I wish I could see to the end of it. However, it doesn't matter—we have begun, and there's no retreating."

"True enough. Forward!"

At a rapid trot, the highwaymen took their way along the high-road in the direction of London.

Before they had gone very far, they perceived before them, in the distance, a troop of dragoons.

The soldiers were drawn up in a straggling kind of line across the road, and it became evident that our friends would have to ride through them.

As Claude truly said, let the difficulties of the enterprise be what they might, there was no turning back.

"Don't hesitate," said Jack, to his companion—"ride on at just the same pace as before. The chances are a thousand to one against our being spoken to."

Both pressed their hats very hard upon their heads.

A few minutes soon decreased the distance between them and the dragoons.

At last they reached them, and then a loud, clear voice cried out:

"Halt!"

The two highwaymen pulled up instantly, and, perceiving the individual who had uttered the order, they touched their hats respectfully.

"Oh, police officers, I see!" said the captain of the troop coming forward. "What the devil is the reason you did not pull up as soon as you saw us, as you were ordered to do?"

Our friends were in perfect ignorance of this little arrangement, but Sixteen-String Jack did not lose his presence of mind.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, "but we are behind, and I said to Kibble a moment ago, 'We must stop,' but he said, 'Oh, no, just salute as you pass—that will do, because our time is precious.'"

"Where are you from?" asked the captain, who never for an instant imagined that the police officers were other than they seemed to be. He would just as soon thought of wondering whether the sun, which was then shining upon them, was the same that he had seen set the night before.

"We are from Hertford," said Jack, in reply, "and are on our way to Newgate, as it is expected that the trial of the woman who calls herself Dick Turpin's wife will come off to-day!"

"Oh, yes, to be sure—of course! Well, pass on, and when you come to the next troop of dragoons, don't attempt to pass them by without stopping!"

Sixteen-String Jack readily promised that he would not, and rode off.

They were fortunate enough to escape detection during the whole of their journey, and this fact may be attributed to the boldness of their plan more than to anything else.

The outrageous idea that two highwaymen would have the audacity to disguise themselves as police officers, and ride along the high-road by broad daylight never once entered the minds of those they passed, and no wonder.

In perfect safety, then, our two friends reached the



[DICK TURPIN ANNOUNCES HIS DETERMINATION TO HIS COMRADES.]

Old Bailey just as the clock of St. Sepulchre's Church was chiming the half-hour past nine.

The success which had attended them so far inspired both with a great amount of confidence, which, in itself, would go a long way towards keeping up the deception.

"We will put up at the stables opposite the Governor's house," said Jack. "You know the place I mean?"

"Yes, yes—quite well."

"Our horses will be handy there in case we shall want them."

"Right! You had better say no more, for fear we should be overheard."

In another moment they reached the archway leading to the stables, which we have already had occasion to describe.

Several police officers had come up from various country towns that were not many miles distant from the metropolis, and had even put up their horses in these very stables, so that the arrival of our two friends was taken quite as a matter of course.

Some time would yet elapse before the court would open, and how to spend that time they scarcely knew.

With an assumption of great carelessness, however, they both strolled out into the Old Bailey.

Just as they emerged from the archway, however, they caught sight of a man in the uniform of a Bow Street runner.

He was short and stout, and his face was of a strange, purple colour.

The two highwaymen recognised him at once, and their hearts began to beat strangely.

"Hallo, mates!" he cried—for Mr. Wriggles happened to be uncommonly good-tempered that morning—"hallo, mates, where are you from? I know your faces quite well! What town do you come from?"

CHAPTER DCXXVIII.

MR. WRIGGLES TAKES SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL TO NEWGATE.

SPEAKING these words, Mr. Wriggles looked inquisitively into the countenances of the two disguised highwaymen.

They bore the scrutiny unflinchingly, and Sixteen-String Jack, taking a constable's staff from his pocket, with a little gilt crown at the top of it, as a testimony of his authority, he replied:

"Hertford we comes from. My name is Gubbins, and my mate here is Kibble."

"Oh! indeed!" said Wriggles, stroking his chin. "Hertford—Gubbins—Kibble! Well, I don't recollect you at all, except by your faces! I suppose I must have seen you, some time or other!"

"Very likely," said Claude, carefully speaking in a disguised voice. "I seem to remember your face very well; but I can't think of your name."

"Indeed!" said the chief officer, buttoning up his coat. "You don't recollect my name—ha! Well, it's Wriggles! Perhaps you know me now!"

He said this with a very pompous and imposing air.

As for Sixteen-String Jack and Claude, they pretended to be quite overcome with awe as soon as the announcement was made.

They retreated a step or two, and both bowed very low.

"Excuse us, sir!" said Sixteen-String Jack humbly; "pray excuse us! It was decidedly wrong upon our part to forget so active and enterprising an officer as yourself. Pray excuse us!"

"Oh, all right—all right!" said Wriggles, who was always delighted by any great show of respect. "There is no harm done that I see. But what brings you from Hertford this morning?"

"We have come to see the trial!" said Jack.

"Yes!" said Claude, "that's it; but I'm most awfully dry, riding so far. It would not be presuming too much to ask the great Mr. Wriggles if he would be kind enough to join us in a glass?"

"Oh, certainly—certainly!" said Mr. Wriggles. "There's a capital place just at the corner; and there's twenty minutes good before the court opens."

"You do us too much honour!" said Sixteen-String Jack. "I should not have dreamt of daring to ask you; but then Kibble, he always was darin', and that's why I makes a kind of pal of him."

Quite delighted with these two police officers, whom he set down as being capital fellows, Mr. Wriggles led the way to a public-house close at hand.

He was so blinded by his vanity, and the deference with which they had treated him, that he never suspected them for a moment, as surely he ought to have done.

Rum was called for, and while they were imbibing it, Wriggles said:

"Now, look here, my lads. If you pay attention to what I have to say, there will probably be money earned by the pair of you."

"Mr. Wriggles," said Jack, with great emphasis, "you may depend that I shall pay the *greatest* possible attention to every word you say. I don't look for reward, no more does Kibble, I know. Do you, Kibble?"

"Not a bit of it! We only look, Mr. Wriggles, to you; and we're delighted to be honoured by your confidence."

Thereupon, the glasses were emptied, and when they were filled again, Mr. Wriggles said:

"Well, now to business! I want as many men as I can conveniently get hold of, both inside the court and out."

Jack nodded.

"You see," continued Wriggles, sinking his voice to an impressive whisper, "I've got the idea in my head that we shall see those four highwaymen attempt to enter the court to-day. If they appear, I shall let them go in right enough, but quietly nab them as they're coming out."

"Good—good!" said Jack, pretending to be excessively delighted, and yet not feeling very comfortable. "Good — good! that's a capital idea, and one well worthy of you, Mr. Wriggles!"

"Well, that's my notion. I thought, however, that that girl being a prisoner would have drawn better."

"What do you mean, Mr. Wriggles?"

"My words are rather mysterious to you, no doubt; but there's nothing like making you understand just how things are. I captured Maud, and put her into Newgate, because I thought Dick Turpin and his gang would attempt to get her out again; but they have not come yet—they have not made the least attempt. I have watched round Newgate, night and day, ever since she has been a prisoner, and have had lots of men to assist me, but not a sign of them have we seen."

"I understand now," said Sixteen-String Jack, "what you meant by saying she did not draw as well as you expected."

"I begin to think sometimes that I have made a mistake, and that Dick Turpin doesn't care so much for her after all, and is rather glad than otherwise, and that I have taken a trouble off his hands."

"It may be so," said Jack—"it may be so, or it may not!"

"Very true. Still, as matters have gone so far, she will take her trial, and I can't help thinking that these four highwaymen will steal into the court somehow or other."

"But what did you want us to do?" asked Jack.

"Why, you must go in and stand among the people during the trial. I can take you through a private door, and you can mingle with the crowd and move about, and all the while you are doing so keep your eyes wide open; scrutinize everybody's face; observe everybody's motions. If you see anything suspicious, take care!"

"Mr. Wriggles," said Jack, "I am delighted to think you should honour me so far; I am truly delighted—I am more than delighted, Mr. Wriggles; ain't you, Kibble?"

"Oh, I am—I am!" said Claude, placing his hand on his stomach and making a bow.

"Very good, then!" said Mr. Wriggles. "Now come along with me."

The two highwaymen dared not refuse; but yet, in their hearts they felt very uncomfortable indeed, and wished Mr. Wriggles had been at the devil before he had chanced to address them.

It would have been a great satisfaction to our friends if they could have exchanged a whisper with each other, but that course would have been a very imprudent one to adopt, for, to a certainty, it would excite Mr. Wriggles's suspicions.

Nor could they with any safety exchange meaning glances with each other.

Reluctantly, then, they followed him into the street.

For the life of them, they could not decide whether he suspected them or whether he did not.

They knew full well that he was exceedingly artful and clever, and that he would play any trick in order to get them into his power.

The breasts of Claude and Jack were filled with very similar thoughts and misgivings; indeed, as they crossed the road they asked themselves:

"Suppose, now, that old Wriggles has recognised us, and pretended not to do so, how shall we do then? Is this an elaborate little scheme of his to throw us off our guard, and decoy us into Newgate? If he does suspect us—if he has recognised us, how easy it will be as soon as we get inside for him to shut the door and cry: 'Now I have you both!'"

They had not time to ask themselves any more questions, for the street—by no means a wide one—by this time was crossed, and Mr. Wriggles ascended the steps leading to the vestibule of the prison.

The two highwaymen followed closely behind him; but when they reached those steps, and fairly stood beneath the shadow of the dismal prison, their hearts sank lower and lower. They were now in a truly desperate fix.

It is true they were not yet inside the prison; but then, if they had turned and fled, such close pursuit would have been made after them that capture would have been certain.

The only chance they had—and that seemed slighter and slighter the more they thought of it—was that Mr. Wriggles had not recognised them, and was acting in perfect good faith.

In answer to the furious summons upon the knocker, the little wicket in the door was opened, and as soon as

the janitor caught sight of Mr. Wriggles, he opened the door with magical celerity.

And now at this last moment the disguised highwaymen lingered.

"Come on!" cried Mr. Wriggles—"come on; you'll find we shall only be just in time after all!"

Our friends did not dare refuse obedience, and so slowly and reluctantly they ascended the steps.

In another moment they stood within the vaulted roof of the vestibule.

A loud clang came upon their ears.

They turned round.

The door was shut, and the man on the look had consigned the key to his pocket.

Now was the crisis of their fate.

They did not dare to look at each other, or to glance at Mr. Wriggles.

That individual, however, had addressed one of the turnkeys who was sitting on a bench.

"Winch," he cried, "where's Mr. Cawthorn? Has he gone into the court yet?"

"I believe he has, sir," replied the turnkey. "He went through awhile back; but whether he's preparing his book, or whether he's in the court I can't exactly tell."

"Well, never mind, get your keys."

"Yes, sir; but which do you want?"

"Those," said Mr. Wriggles, pointing to a small bunch, hanging up against the wall.

The turnkey took them down without hesitation. Selecting one, he applied it to the lock of a strong door.

With a squeak, the door receded upon its hinges, and then a long vaulted passage was presented to view.

"Follow me!" cried Mr. Wriggles; "this is the way!"

Our friends liked their situation less and less, and were fast resigning themselves to their fate.

They really believed that Mr. Wriggles had got the best of them.

To attempt to retreat would have been ridiculous.

They had no resource but to walk straight on.

Other doors were opened, corridors traversed, flights of steps ascended and descended.

"We're on the high road to the cells, that's quite clear!" thought Jack to himself. "We've brought our pigs to a nice market at last! I could never have believed that I should have been such a d—d fool to be drawn into Newgate in this way!"

Just as this thought passed through his mind he turned his eyes towards his companion.

Claude's face wore a peculiar expression; but it was one that Sixteen-String Jack was quite able to comprehend.

"He's thinking the same as I am," was Jack's reflection; "but no matter, we're in—and let the affair end how it may, we can't be worse off than we are now."

"Here we are at last!" cried Wriggles, as Winch paused before a door. "It's rather a roundabout way, isn't it? but it avoids the crush."

How the highwaymen strained their eyes and fixed them upon that door.

No words could convey the least idea of the revulsion of feeling which came over them when, upon the door being opened, a loud murmuring sound reached their ears, and they saw in front of them the heads of the lawyers, and the dock on the opposite side.

Mr. Wriggles, then, had kept good faith.

He had not suspected them, and they had suffered all that torturing suspense for nothing.

"Now, my lads," he said, "you know what you have to do. I have business elsewhere. Without seeming to do so, look carefully at everybody, and make yourselves acquainted—so far as you can—with the features of every one in the court."

"Mr. Wriggles," said Jack, "you may depend upon us. If these highwaymen are here, depend upon it we'll find 'em out."

"If you do, the reward will be glorious," said Wriggles.

Winch closed the door, and Mr. Wriggles crossed over to the opposite side of the court.

"What an escape!" whispered Jack faintly, into his companion's ear—"what an escape!"

"Rather," said Claude; "but pray don't speak of it until we are safely outside this confounded place. I don't feel as if I could breathe in it; besides, we had better not whisper too much, for fear Wriggles should see us and suspect something."

"All right," said Jack; "we'll carry out his orders."

So saying, both looked about them with curiosity and interest.

The proceedings had not commenced, and so they were able to observe everything accurately.

Of course their principal object was to discover their two companions, Dick Turpin and Tom King.

CHAPTER DCXXIX.

TOM KING IS SUSPECTED AND FOLLOWED BY A POLICE OFFICER.

It will be remembered that we left Tom King in Covent Garden Market, where he parted with his comrade Dick Turpin.

He loitered about the waggon for a minute or two, in order to appear quite at his ease, and then entering the market, strolled on, gaping about him until he reached Lincoln's Inn Fields.

By observing the direction he was taking he knew quite well that he should get to Newgate in a straight line.

Just as he was passing under the archway at the top of Duke Street, he saw a police officer leaning idly against a stone post at the corner.

Tom strolled on, pretending to take no particular notice, and without he chose to cross over, he would have to pass very close to this idle police officer.

He hesitated as to which would be the most polite course, and finally determined to keep straight on.

The officer stared him very hard in the face as he passed, and Tom fancied that his suspicions were aroused.

Nevertheless he walked on along the south side of the open space, and then entered Lincoln's Inn.

Once, and only once, Tom ventured to glance behind him, and then he saw the police officer following in his footsteps.

"I was right," he murmured. "The fellow suspects me. Now what is to be done?"

This was a troublesome question.

It was quite clear, however, that it would never answer to continue on his way to Newgate with a police officer at his heels, and so Tom was obliged to tax his inventive powers to the utmost, in order to find a means of getting out of his present difficulty.

He looked all around him, glancing in turn at every object; but he saw nothing suggestive of a new idea.

A few steps would take him into Chancery Lane; but Tom determined not to enter that busy thoroughfare until by some means or other he had put an end to the officer's meddlesome interference.

Accordingly he walked about, looking up at the tall houses with their dirt-begrimed windows, and finally leaning against the wall in the Old Square, looked up at the clock, which was just then striking the hour.

The police officer in the most vexatious manner possible stopped also, and he also glanced up at the clock.

"He's got his eye on me!" said Tom, "that's certain. Confound the fellow—how am I to elude him?"

The Old Square, Lincoln's Inn, presented a very busy appearance that morning.

Thin, hungry-looking lawyers were bustling about with blue bags under their arms, and barristers with their long gowns and wigs were flitting hither and thither.

"I'd better not stop here any longer," thought Tom. "I'll take another walk round."

He did so; and passing under a kind of archway, turned the corner.

For a moment he was out of sight of the inquisitive police officer.

Close by a number of doors stood invitingly open.

Tom looked at them, and then, growing desperate, he bolted quickly into one of the houses.

He was so fortunate as to cross the threshold and commence the ascent of the stairs before the police officer had time to emerge from the archway and notice which way he had gone.

He would have to unravel the mystery of Tom's disappearance by his own acuteness.

Leaving him to that difficult task, we will follow the highwayman, who, when he entered that house had

really no idea whatever as to the next step he ought to take.

Fearful lest the officer should enter that house, Tom continued to ascend the stairs.

He went up as quietly as foot could fall, and upon reaching the third-floor landing he stopped.

"I am out of his sight!" he muttered to himself, "and that's not much after all. He will know very well that I have disappeared somewhere close at hand, and consequently will keep a watch on all the houses. How can I emerge without being seen?—he may stop there for hours!"

Tom's position was embarrassing.

It was particularly necessary that he should avoid detection, and that he should reach Newgate in a short space of time.

It seemed doubtful whether he would accomplish either of these objects.

"I have it!" he said at length. "There's only that way. Aha, Mr. Officer, with all your 'outeness, I think you're done for now!"

Tom was in high spirits again, for he believed that the plan he had thought of would be effectual in baffling his foe.

What his scheme was his acts will quickly show.

Just before him was a small, dirty door, on the upper portion of which was painted in white letters, "MR. LAWSON."

Who Mr. Lawson was Tom had not the remotest idea.

Nevertheless, he knocked boldly with his knuckles upon the panel of the door.

The summons was answered by an individual clothed in a barrister's robe and with a white powdered wig on his head.

It seemed as though he was about going out when Tom knocked.

"Beg pardon, zur," said Tom, assuming a behaviour and mode of speech suitable to his attire. "Be you Mr. Lawson?"

"No," was the reply. "You will find Mr. Lawson inside."

With these words, the barrister walked out and descended the stairs, while Tom King passed through the door and entered a small room fitted up like an office.

At a table near the window a man was sitting with a pile of papers before him.

He was thin and pale, and had a nervous, irritable look.

When Tom entered, he glanced up from his writing, and jerked out:

"Well—well, who are you? What do you want?"

Tom adroitly closed the door, and, observing a little brass bolt close to the handle, he shot it in an instant into its socket.

Had there been the least colour in his face, Mr. Lawson would have turned pale, but his countenance was habitually so white that no emotion could make it whiter.

Nevertheless, his fingers shook to such an extent that the pen fell from them.

"What do you want?" he ventured to ask again, as Tom King, with one stride, reached the table.

"First," cried the highwayman in a stern tone, and producing a pistol as he spoke—"first, I require profound silence; and, second, that you at once obey my commands!"

Mr. Lawson was a timid, nervous man, and he had, above all things, the greatest dread of firearms.

He shrank back in his chair, and, holding his hands before his face, as though they would be a shield, he cried:

"Don't—don't! Oh! murder! Turn it the other way—it might go off, or something!"

"It will go off, you may make sure," said Tom, "without you are silent!"

"I am silent—I will do anything if you won't point that pistol at me—I can't bear firearms!"

"All right!" said Tom, lowering the point of his weapon. "Are you open to listen to reason?"

The lawyer smiled feebly.

"If you are," continued Tom, just listen to what I say: I want assistance of a certain kind of you, and I will have it! If you consent I will make you a present of ten guineas; if you refuse, I shall shoot you first, and help myself to what I require afterwards!"

"State your wishes," said Mr. Lawson, holding out his hand; "if possible I will comply with them!"

"I was not mistaken," said Tom. "I thought when I first glanced into your countenance that you would be open to conviction. Am I to understand that all is comfortably settled?"

"Yes," said the lawyer, holding out his hand, and moving the fingers as though anxious to clutch the ten guineas Tom had offered. "Any professional assistance I can render shall be yours; there is no need of any violent demonstration!"

"The assistance I require is strictly professional!" said Tom. "There's a case coming on at the Old Bailey to-day in which I feel deeply interested; I want a lawyer to accompany me in order to watch the case."

"My dear sir, is that all?" said Mr. Lawson, who had sat in the office for many a day longing for a client, and he was overjoyed to think he had found one at last—"is that all you require?"

"Very nearly."

"Then why threaten me with a pistol, or behave in the violent, eccentric manner you did?"

"Oh! think nothing of it," said Tom, "it's only an eccentric, pleasant way I've got—that's all!"

"I grant it's eccentric," said the lawyer, pretending to take it as a joke; "but I can't say it's very pleasant. However, let us attend to business. What's the nature of the case you want me to watch?"

"I'll explain all the particulars to you as we walk along," said Tom King.

"Very well, my dear sir. I am delighted, of course, to attend to any of your suggestions. Pray command me!"

"I intend to do so. Have you a barrister's gown and wig?"

"Yes, I have!" said the lawyer, looking much surprised at the strangeness of the request.

"Well, produce them, now, at once!"

Mr. Lawson was in such a state of nervous excitement that he scarcely knew what he was doing.

Nevertheless, he retained sufficient self-possession to enable him to rise from his seat, and go to a box upon which had been painted: "Sir John Scott's estate."

He raised the lid of this box, and Tom then perceived that instead of containing any papers relative to an estate it held nothing but a black silk gown and a horsehair wig.

"There they are, sir," said Mr. Lawson. "I suppose you wish me to put them on?"

"Oh, not at all," said Tom—"not at all; quite the reverse! I intend to put them on myself!"

"You?"

"Yes!"

"For what reason?"

"I don't like my present attire; it's inconvenient—doesn't suit me at all! So look—off it comes, and I mean to turn lawyer!"

Mr. Lawson glared in amazement at his eccentric visitor.

Tom King rapidly threw off the clothes he had obtained from the farmer, and commenced wrapping the voluminous black silk gown around him.

"But, sir—sir," cried the lawyer, "this cannot be permitted—it must not be—it is most irregular!"

"Not in the least," said Tom—"it fits me to a T, and it comes quite down to my toes! The robe must be rather long for you, Mr. Lawson."

"Sir, I tell you I cannot permit this—I will not permit it—I will shout for help!"

"No you won't," said Tom, quietly taking the pistol from his pocket again, and cocking it—"no, you won't; you will think better of your intention! Take a second thought!"

The lawyer did, and remained silent.

"Now," cried Tom, "I will give you a few words of explanation! Pay attention! I am a desperate man, reduced to desperate straits! I am in danger, but don't intend to remain so if I can help it; I will tell you what I require, and you can take your choice! That dress which I have just cast off is a mere disguise; I have been suspected and followed! You understand it was necessary I should obtain a change of apparel, and I have done so!"

Tom settled the wig on his head as he spoke, and then looked very much like a barrister indeed.

"I have no doubt," continued Tom, "that the person who suspects me is watching down below in the square. He will expect to see someone dressed in those clothes. Being attired thus, I shall escape his notice. If I could trust you, I would leave you here; but as I can't, you must come with me! Put on your hat; I will take hold of your arm, and we will go to Newgate together."

"I won't!" said Mr. Lawson, assuming as much determination as he could. "I won't—I refuse, and there's an end of it."

"Very good," said Tom. "If you won't go with me I shall be forced to leave you here! Only one kind of men keep secrets—you're not one of them; but I intend to make you."

The lawyer looked at the highwayman with unfeigned dismay.

"The only kind of men who keep a secret," continued Tom, "are *dead men;* so, if I leave you behind, I shall leave you a dead man; I shall shut your body up in that cupboard; I shall lock the door and put the key in my pocket; I shall stick a piece of paper on one of the panels, and write on it: 'Return next week.' By that time I shall be far enough off and safe, so that when they find your body it won't signify to me in the least!"

CHAPTER DCXXX.

RELATES HOW TOM KING AND DICK TURPIN GAINED ADMISSION TO THE COURT.

The perspiration of intense fear started out in large beads upon the countenance of Mr. Lawson.

It made him feel cold and clammy all over to hear Tom speak in the awful manner he did about the concealment or discovery of his body.

His knees shook under him, and he would certainly have lost the power of supporting himself had he not sank down in an undignified manner upon the top of one of the boxes.

"You see," said Tom, "I am generous—I give you the opportunity of making your choice—it is quite indifferent to me which way you decide, though, to be precise, I would rather not have the trouble of putting you out of the world!"

Mr. Lawson groaned.

"Now, then," said Tom, "I have no time to spare! Will you accompany me to Newgate, keep my secret, and receive ten guineas for your trouble? Or will you refuse, and be shot through the head, and locked up in that cupboard?"

"I—I consent!" gasped the lawyer—"I consent! I have the law on my side! I consent through bodily fear!"

"Very good," said Tom; "I don't want to irritate your nerves by the sight of this pistol, so I shall hold it under the gown, just so. Now arise, put on your hat, and follow me!"

Mr. Lawson rose, and going to another box which professed to contain the documents pertaining to some one else's estate, he produced a hat and a coat.

He threw off the jacket he had been wearing, and put these articles on.

"That's right," said Tom. "As an earnest, take these five guineas—you shall have the remainder before the day is over."

Mr. Lawson was very poor.

He had sat in his chamber waiting for clients for many a long weary day, and how it was he continued to exist without any visible means of support would have been a mystery in any other place than Lincoln's Inn.

His thin, wasted form, however, clearly showed that he took but little nourishment, and it was this that had reduced him to his present pitiable state of nervousness and terror.

Tom King put his hand under the lawyer's arm in quite a loving way.

"Now, Mr. Lawson, the case is very plain; here's the pistol handy in my grasp—I could raise it in an instant. You understand that?"

Mr. Lawson nodded.

"Now, I want you to descend the stairs with me, with my hand on your arm, just as it is now. In the same way I want you to walk through the square out into Chancery Lane; then we will get a hackney-coach and drive to Newgate. I sha'n't let you quit my side during the whole of the day; but, above all things, bear this in mind: You may think that you will be able to find some opportunity of crying out that I am some desperate character in disguise, and that I am holding you in thrall. I grant that such an opportunity may occur, and that you would be able to avail yourself of it; but do you know what would be the consequences?"

Mr. Lawson made no reply.

"I will tell you," said Tom—"you might ensure my detection—you might get me into serious trouble; but mark this: Before you could finish your speech, or before anyone could lay hands on me, I should have time to raise this pistol and blow your head off—so you see that although you may draw attention to me and get me captured, still it will be at the price of your life. Do you understand that?"

"I—I do!" gasped Mr. Lawson. "Your words freeze my blood. However, I've got the five guineas; I am a poor and needy man and shall be glad of the five guineas more, so you may put up your pistol and treat me with perfect confidence!"

Tom shook his head.

"No," he cried, "I sha'n't do anything of the kind—I shall trust you just as far as I am obliged, but not a bit further. As collateral security, I shall hold this pistol as you see it now. Observe it's on full-cock, and carefully primed. Now, then, are you ready to descend the stairs?"

"Quite!" gasped Mr. Lawson—"quite!"

The door was opened, and the strangely-assorted pair emerged on to the landing.

Then the lawyer closed the door again, locked it, and placed the key in his pocket.

Arm-in-arm they descended the old wooden staircase, and in a few minutes found themselves at the top of the place leading from the front door into the square.

Tom gave a rapid glance around him, and, there, sure enough, a few paces off, stood the suspicious police-officer.

He just gave a glance at the two figures and no more.

He was on the look-out for someone in the dress of a farm labourer, and it never entered his active and intelligent brain that the suspected person might obtain a change of apparel.

Accordingly Tom King turned the corner, and walked under the archway unsuspected, while the police-officer still remained in the old position, keeping a preternaturally sharp look-out.

Either Mr. Lawson was anxious to obtain the ten guineas, or else Tom King had obtained a complete ascendancy over him, for he never ventured to make the least resistance, or to behave in a manner calculated to attract the attention of passers-by.

True to his promise, Tom hailed a hackney-coach as soon as they reached Chancery Lane.

In this they seated themselves, and Mr. Lawson gave the order to the coachman to drive to Newgate.

Believing all lawyers to be treacherous by disposition, Tom King kept a wary eye upon his new companion.

In a few moments the coach stopped in front of that door down the court-yard attached to the Sessions House through which the lawyers gain admittance to the court.

How much Tom gave the coachman Mr. Lawson did not know, but conjectured that it must have been a liberal sum, for the driver touched his hat, and said: "Thank you, sir!" in quite a respectful tone of voice.

Mr. Lawson appeared to be known to the officials, and the dress which Tom King had on was quite sufficient to ensure his admission.

Arm-in-arm as before, they walked along the corridor, up a staircase, and then through a door into the court.

Business had not commenced, and Tom King, after glancing round him for a moment, said:

"We'll sit down here, Mr. Lawson—this is a place that will suit me admirably."

"But it will look strange," said the lawyer, "for you to stay here—you ought to go and take your seat at the table."

"No," said Tom; "I would rather stop where I am. I fancy I am in less danger of discovery. Now then, all you have got to do is to sit here quietly, and as soon as the trial is over you shall have your other five guineas."

This point being settled, the lawyer and the highwayman sat down side by side upon a wooden bench.

Tom King leaned back, crossed his legs, and then, with

an air of easy assurance, allowed his eyes to travel all over the court.

Having thus brought Tom King into the court, we will leave him there.

How Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval gained admittance we have already described, and nothing more remains for us to do than to take up the thread of the narrative at that point when Dick Turpin was stopped half-way up the staircase by the police officer at the little wicket gate.

Dick played his part to perfection, and no one suspected for a single moment that he was other than he seemed to be.

His awkward, clumsy movements, and his broad country dialect amused the little group standing round him amazingly.

"Then you're not a witness?" said the police officer.

"Oh, hain't I!" said Dick. "Well—here's of course axin' yer pardon, for it isn't for the loiks of me to know better nor you, sir,—but I ha' witnessed many things in my time, I have."

The officer and people laughed, and the one at the gate said:

"But have you come here as a witness?—that's what I want to know."

"In coorse I have."

"Then, why didn't you say so at first?" said the officer. "Now, tell me what you are going to witness?"

"Why, I be agoin' to witness the trial o' Dick Tarpin's wife—that be, sir, of coorse, if you'll let me through this here little wooden gaate."

There was another laugh at this, and then the police officer, who was quite in a good humour, said:

"Well, I understand what you mean; and as you have walked such a many miles, it would be a pity to disappoint you. Go on up the steps—you'll find another officer above, but you will have to tickle his ear, or he won't let you go any further."

"Here's many thanks to yow, sir," said Dick, bowing and scraping—"many thanks; I do woundily want to hear this trial."

"Go on, then," said the officer, who had opened the gate to allow Dick to pass through, "and mind, when you get to the top, that you tickle his ear."

"Oh, all right!" said Dick. "I know very well what that means. I'll tickle him when I get up!"

Thereupon, with an awkward, clumsy movement of all his limbs, and with his hobnail boots clattering on the stone steps, Dick made his way up to the landing above.

Upon gaining it he saw an officer before him, standing as a kind of sentinel at the door.

The officer had heard the conversation that had gone on down below, and had communicated with the officer at the wicket by means of dumb motions.

"Here's axin' yer pardon, sir," said Dick, taking off his hat and bowing after every word—"here's axin' yer pardon, sir, and I hopes as how yow'll let a poor body goo in."

The officer shook his head.

"Oh, t'other chap below told me as how yow'd let me goo in if I'd tickle yer ear. Now, how would yer like yer ear tickling, sir."

The police-officer looked right up at the ceiling.

Turpin followed the direction of his eyes and gazed upwards also.

The officer extended his hand in a peculiar way, and moved his fingers rapidly up and down.

But Dick pretended not to see him for a moment or two, and then, happening to look down, he pretended to catch sight for the first time of the officer's outstretched hand.

Dick placed both his hands on his thighs and laughed.

"He, he! that be a good joke now. Tickle yer ear! Oh, I'll tickle him! Now, if yow'd ha' said, 'Tickle yer mouth,' I should ha' known what yow meant."

Dick fumbled in his pockets for a long while, and at last produced a shilling.

"There," he said, "taake tha that be a whole day's earnin's, that be. Howsumiver, taake it, for I do woundily want to hear the trial."

"Go on, then," said the officer, pocketing the shilling, "through that door, and mind you don't make a noise when you get inside, or else they'll turn you out."

"Oh, I'll be as dumb as th' parson's pig," said Dick.

"How dumb is that?"

"Why, just bein' as dumb as dumb can be, and never openin' yer mouth."

The officer laughed, and Dick, turning round, passed through the door into the court.

He found himself in a kind of semi-darkness, and then, with a suddenness which was magical, a most remarkable change swept over his countenance.

It became grave and sad, and full of care and anxiety.

His heart beat, and his eyes were dim, as he endeavoured to take a good look at the scene that was spread out before him.

CHAPTER DCXXXI.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN RECOGNIZE EACH OTHER, AND THE COUNSEL FOR THE PROSECUTION DELIVERS HIS OPENING SPEECH.

THE interior of the court-house in the Old Bailey was familiar enough to Dick Turpin, and so, with a kind of instinct, he turned his head in the direction of the felon's dock.

A sigh of relief came from his lips.

Mand was not there, though doubtless she would soon make her appearance, for there was that bustle in the place which is always noticeable just before the commencement of the proceedings.

Dick's eyes were dim, and he dashed his hand impatiently across them.

Now that he fairly stood within the court a deep shadow seemed to have fallen upon his soul, and strive as he would he could not dissipate it.

A heavy gloom—a kind of presentiment that something of a dreadful character was about to happen—oppressed his spirits.

He was anxious, too, with respect to his companions, and he began to look around him in the hope of finding them.

For a long time he was unsuccessful.

In the darkness caused by the shadow of a projecting gallery, Dick determined to seat himself.

He had the advantage of being near the door, and also of being able to command a view of every part of the court.

As an occupation for his thoughts, he allowed his eyes to rest upon the countenance of every person visible.

Just as he had finished this task, and come to the conclusion that his comrades had not arrived, he perceived a door open, and then Mr. Wriggles and two other police officers appeared upon the threshold.

He never for a moment dreamt that these two officers were his disguised companions.

Presently, however, Mr. Wriggles moved away, and then Dick saw them each close one eye.

His heart gave one sudden bound.

"How rash!" he muttered. "But no matter, it seems all is well!"

He closed his own eye, according to arrangement, and soon had the satisfaction of perceiving that he had been recognized.

It was only necessary to discover Tom King, and then his anxieties upon that score would be at an end.

Looking round, he at length perceived a barrister who had one eye closed.

This, he thought at first, could not be his companion, because he had left him in another disguise.

But, upon looking more closely into his features, Dick at last found that the supposed barrister was indeed Tom King.

He tried in vain to account for the metamorphosis.

Then, turning his head, he saw the two police officers standing near him.

They were only able to exchange a few words.

He pointed out Tom King.

In return they told him that Mr. Wriggles was under the impression that they would all visit the court, and that he had announced his intention of subjitting everyone to a close scrutiny as they departed.

They were now silent, and moved away.

Further conversation would have been dangerous and provocative of suspicion.

At this moment the court was opened in due and imposing form by the chief usher.

The judge was seated in his accustomed place.

The jury were packed into the jury-box.

The usual preliminaries were then gone through.

Dick's heart beat loud and fast.

At length, after such a long separation, his eyes were about to be gladdened with the sight of the being he loved a thousand times better than his own life.

But under what circumstances was the meeting about to take place?

He was going to see her standing in the felon's dock, overcome by confusion and shame.

And this was his own doing—his own fault.

He had much to reproach himself with.

He longed to get nearer to the bar—he wished to stand near her in the hour of trial.

But he feared to move.

He knew full well that the eyes of true love are not easily blinded.

Maud would recognize him where a thousand others would fail to do so.

Upon gaining the bar, her eyes would undoubtedly wander around her.

If she caught sight of Dick, some change would surely sweep over her features.

It might be trifling, but Mr. Wriggles, with his lynx eyes, would be watching her.

Not the movement of a muscle would escape his notice, and if her countenance changed ever so little, he would look upon it as confirmatory of his suspicions—he would jump to the conclusion that the highwaymen were present among the crowd.

Wisely, therefore, Dick retained his position, and watched for her coming.

His suspense was soon ended.

There was an uneasy movement among the persons in the court.

Then was heard the rustle of female garments, and the next moment Maud made her appearance in the court.

The judge carefully adjusted his spring spectacles.

The counsel and barristers fixed their eye-glasses.

The jury stared, nudged each other, and made remarks. All saw her but Turpin.

From his gaze she was hidden by a haze of tears.

Soon, however, his eyes cleared, and then he saw her looking more beautiful than ever he had seen her in his life before.

He could scarcely control the inclination to hold out his arms towards her.

At first her face was pale.

Then finding so many eyes riveted upon her, she turned scarlet, and hung down her head in confusion.

Mastering her emotions, and endeavouring to prepare herself for the ordeal through which she was about to pass, Maud raised her head once more.

She was now as pale as death.

We must pause here for a moment to describe the interior of the court-house, which was different to the one in use at the present time.

It was then the custom to strew the front of the dock with various kinds of herbs.

In order, too, that the prisoner's face might be seen with the greatest possible amount of distinctness, a large mirror or reflector was fixed upon two supports, and inclined to a certain angle, so as to cause the light to fall upon the person at the bar.

Every change of countenance—every expression of the features or movement of the muscles could be seen with a plainness absolutely astounding, and by this means the judge and jury were often able to come to a tolerably correct conclusion as to the guilt or innocence of the prisoner.

This pale, white, spectral light caused Maud to appear to the greatest possible advantage, and a murmur of admiration arose from the lips of the persons present in the court

Her delicately-chiselled features looked lovely in the extreme, though at the same time the mirror displayed to the eyes of Turpin the change in her appearance which her imprisonment had caused.

She was much thinner—her cheeks had lost their roundness, and her hands looked thin and wasted.

Her eyes glittered with unnatural brightness, and under them were dark, livid marks, caused by suffering and tears.

She looked around at the many faces, but failed to see one that she recognized.

Sadly, she bent her head.

The Clerk of the Arraigns then rose.

He read over the indictment rapidly.

All that Maud could comprehend was that she was charged with aiding, abetting, and succouring a desperate offender against the laws, to wit, Dick Turpin, the highwayman.

Then, turning over the documents, the clerk said, in a business-like tone:

"Maud Gouldman, do you plead guilty or not guilty to this indictment?"

The poor girl gasped painfully for breath.

Her colour came and went.

At last, with great difficulty, she managed to articulate the words:

"Not guilty!"

The plea was duly recorded, and the trial commenced.

Had the four highwaymen been standing up to take their trial, they could not have listened with greater suspense or eagerness to all that was said.

The counsel for the prosecution then rose.

There was an immediate silence.

Even the officials of the prison prepared to attend to every syllable.

The counsel for the prosecution settled his gown, and began:—

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury,—

"You will admit that to-day I am called upon by duty to perform a somewhat unpleasant task. But I will not shrink from it. It is hard to see youth and beauty arraigned at the bar of this criminal court; but these personal advantages must be no excuse for guilt.

"The prisoner at the bar stands charged with a very serious offence. It is that of aiding and abetting a felon—a felon, too, of no ordinary character—no other, indeed, than that desperate villain, Dick Turpin, the highwayman."

A slight hiss arose from the spectators.

The crier bawled for silence until he was quite red in the face.

At length order was restored, and the counsel continued:

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury,—I conceive it is scarcely necessary that I should expatiate upon the many depredations committed by this notorious highwayman. With his gang, they set the law at defiance, and have almost put a stop to travelling after dark. Not a single road round the metropolis is safe. Considering all that has been done—the measures taken—the precautions adopted—this does, indeed, seem most extraordinary? It seems impossible—incredible!—yet, nevertheless, it is the case, as almost every person in this court at the present moment can testify.

"Now, does it not strike you, gentlemen of the jury, that it is very singular that these highwaymen are able to set his Majesty's officers at defiance? It brings the whole police force into disgrace, and well it might—but the officers are powerless to help themselves.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury,—It may not strike you what is the cause of this deplorable state of things. The explanation, however, is most simple. The fact is, the highwaymen have numerous confederates, aiders, abettors, people who are wholly devoted to them, and whose special duty is to screen them from the officers of justice.

"This is the actual state of things, and now you will be at no loss to comprehend the inefficiency of the measures which have been taken.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury,—As administrators of the law, and as private, peaceful, hard-working citizens I ask you whether this state of things can be allowed to continue? You will say 'certainly not—this state of things must be altered'—but how, gentlemen—how?

"It seems to me that there is but one course, and that is a simple one. I have no doubt as to its efficacy. Let the officers of justice busy themselves by looking around and apprehending every person who has been known to assist this gang of highwaymen. Let them be brought before this court—let them receive the full penalty which the law allows in such a case.

"Not only will the highwaymen be deprived of their assistants by the adoption of this course, but their other

confederates—with the fate of their companions before their eyes—will refuse to aid them any longer. When once this state of affairs is brought about, rely upon it, gentlemen of the jury, the reign of these highwaymen will be over and at an end.

"I have made these explanatory remarks because I consider it my duty to press for a conviction in this case, in spite of the youth and beauty of the prisoner which might lead your judgments astray. These qualifications must not be admitted as indemnificatory. Justice should be blind. I shall call witnesses before you, gentlemen of the jury, who will prove most incontestably that on many occasions the prisoner at the bar has screened Dick Turpin and his companions from justice.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury,—Before I conclude I ought to mention that the defence set up by the prisoner, when brought up before the magistrate at Bow Street, was that she was wedded to Dick Turpin.

"If this can be proved, the case, so far as he is concerned, will fall to the ground; but I think I shall be in a position to prove that she extended the same succour and assistance to the other members of the gang as she did to Dick Turpin himself.

"If so, you will see at once that she still continues obnoxious to the charge. This, my lord and gentlemen of the jury, is all that I intend to trouble you with.

"I now propose to call witnesses before you, who will depose to the facts I have laid before you. My last words being an earnest entreaty that you will not allow the youth, the beauty — the feminine beauty—or the tears of the prisoner at the bar to operate unduly upon your minds to the subversion of justice!"

With these words, the counsel for the prosecution sat down.

His face wore an expression which seemed to say, "I rather think I have said something decidedly clever; let the counsel for the defence get over that if he can!"

There was a slight pause in the proceedings. Maud wiped away the tears that thronged into her eyes.

She was growing terrified; and well she might, for the speech made by the counsel for the prosecution was in every way calculated to alarm her.

CHAPTER DCXXXII.

IN WHICH MR. WRIGGLES IS EXAMINED AND CROSS-EXAMINED, AND IN WHICH THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE MAKES AN ABLE SPEECH ON BEHALF OF THE PRISONER AT THE BAR.

The junior counsel, to whom was entrusted the task of questioning the witnesses, now rose.

He was evidently impressed with the importance of the duties he had to perform.

"Call Mr. Wriggles!" he cried.

There was a slight bustle near the door of the court, and then the chief officer made his appearance.

He walked rapidly towards the witness-box, deposited his hat on the table, shut the little door in front of him, and took the oath to speak the whole truth and nothing but the truth, in a very matter-of-fact, business-like way indeed.

"Your name is Wriggles, I presume?" said the junior counsel.

"It is?"

"What are you?"

"Chief of police, at Bow Street."

"Very good. Now look at the prisoner at the bar!"

Mr. Wriggles did so.

"Do you know her?"

"Yes."

"What is her name?"

"Maud, I believe; though I could not swear to it.'

"Why not?"

"Because I have only a recollection of having heard her called by that name, and shouldn't like to swear to anything I was not quite certain of!"

"Very good, Mr. Wriggles; your caution does you great credit."

Mr. Wriggles made a low bow, and waited for the next question to be put.

"Will you be good enough," said the junior counsel, "to give us all the information you can respecting the prisoner at the bar?"

"Perhaps if I tell all," said Mr. Wriggles, "I should take up too much valuable time."

"You have had some experience," said the junior counsel; "we will leave it to you. Do not say anything you consider superfluous."

"Very good, sir. Then I will just say that I happened to become acquainted with the prisoner a long time ago. The circumstances I will not mention. After Dick Turpin's daring escape from Newgate, he went to a house where the prisoner then resided, and galloped off with her. Since then they have nearly always been in company with each other, and the prisoner on many occasions has enabled Dick Turpin to escape, either by giving him information of the approach of the police-officers, or by concealing him."

"Very well, Mr. Wriggles—that's explicit enough, I suppose you are prepared to swear to the truth of what you have said?"

"I have just sworn to it," said Wriggles. "It's perfectly true, and, if necessary, I might enter much deeper into the details."

"And so you thought yourself justified in applying for a warrant for the apprehension of the prisoner?"

"I did. It was granted to me, and I captured her at a farm-house some distance from London, since which time she has been a prisoner in Newgate!"

"That will do, Mr. Wriggles—I have no more questions to ask you!"

Mr. Wriggles did not attempt to descend from the witness-box, for he guessed he would be submitted to a cross-examination.

He was not deceived.

A barrister rose who had been retained for the defence by Mr. Lazenby, who intended to act honestly by the highwaymen, and to procure the acquittal of Maud if it was possible.

"Now, Mr. Wriggles," said the counsel for the defence, "I wish to ask you a few questions in connection with this matter. Do you speak according to your own personal knowledge, when you say that the prisoner has aided and abetted Dick Turpin?"

"I do."

"Then, such being the case, I shall require you to give me the particulars. Can you mention any one occasion on which she committed the offence laid to her charge?"

"I can," said Mr. Wriggles; "I can mention a very palpable case indeed, which was witnessed not only by myself but by several men who were with me."

"Describe it to the court, then!"

"From information I received, I went to an old, deserted mansion on the Finchley Road, where I believed the highwaymen had taken up their quarters. I found there only Dick Turpin and the prisoner at the bar. Several of my men were slain, but we failed to capture either. Both rode off upon Dick Turpin's horse, better known as Black Bess."

"And what did you do then, Mr. Wriggles?"

"As quickly as I could I set forward in pursuit, and at length, after going many miles, discovered them, not long after sunrise, on the high-road."

"Pray go on, and put your narrative into as few words as you can."

"Very well, then. Well, I saw Dick Turpin—who, refusing to surrender, had been fired at—I say I saw Dick Turpin lying on the ground in the middle of the highway. Near him stood Black Bess and the prisoner at the bar."

"You saw all this yourself, I presume?"

"I did, and there were several police officers with me who saw it too. We plied both whip and spur, and made the best speed we possibly could, for we believed that the capture of Dick Turpin was now quite certain."

"Well, well—go on!"

"To our astonishment, however, the prisoner at the bar raised up the body of Dick Turpin, and, somehow or other, managed to place him on to the back of his steed. She then mounted afterwards; and although we made every exertion, they set off at such a furious gallop as to outdistance us, for our horses were jaded. Still, if she had not achieved this feat we should certainly have made Dick Turpin prisoner, for he was unconscious owing to the quantity of blood he had lost."

"So that's your case, is it, Mr. Wriggles? You're quite sure you would have captured him had not the



[MAUD'S DESPAIR AND GRIEF.]

prisoner at the bar performed the very easy feat of lifting an insensible man on to the back of a horse?"

"You speak doubtfully," said Mr. Wriggles, "and I don't wonder at it—it seems very strange. Luckily, however, at least half a dozen police-officers saw it as well as myself!"

"And I suppose that will be the best authenticated case you can call to your recollection?" said the counsel for the defence.

"I could recollect more if necessary—but I hope that will be sufficient for the Court. Half a dozen men will at once step into this witness-box and swear to the truth of all I have just said!"

"Very good—that will do! You may stand down so far as I am concerned. I don't want to trouble you any further."

The counsel for the defence resumed his seat, and Mr. Wriggles stepped out of the witness-box.

Six other police-officers were then called who had been in company with Mr. Wriggles on the morning in question.

They all corroborated every particular of his evidence.

The account they gave of the transaction was unvarying.

The counsel for the defence thought it needless to ask them any questions, so they were one by one by the prosecutor's counsel allowed to stand down.

"Have you any more witnesses to call?" asked the judge.

"None, my lord! I imagine that is quite sufficient. To my mind, the case is clearly proved. Here is the prisoner. They swear to her identity, and, if seven men are to be believed, I think she certainly conspired to effect the escape of Dick Turpin."

The counsel for the prosecution then sat down and arranged his papers.

He leaned back in his seat with a satisfied air, as though he thought it was quite impossible to shake the evidence which had just been given.

The counsel for the defence, however, now rose, and there was not one present in the court who did not prepare to listen with redoubled attention to every word he said.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury," he commenced, in a deep and earnest voice, "I can assure you it gives me unfeigned pleasure to stand here as I do to-day, the champion of beauty, youth, and innocence. Yes, innocence, for I shall be able to prove in a very few minutes that the prisoner at the bar is quite guiltless of the crime laid to her charge.

"First of all, however, I wish to call your attention to the case as it stands against her.

"Here you have seven police officers, who stand up in the witness-box one after the other and repeat exactly the same tale without any variations whatever. They tell you that when Dick Turpin lay insensible upon the roadway, she lifted him up in her arms and placed him on the back of his steed.

"Now, gentlemen of the jury, I should consider I was offering you an insult if I attempted to prove by any other means than a glance at the prisoner at the bar that the act with which she is charged is a physical impossibility. You will observe, my lord and gentlemen of the jury, that the prisoner at the bar is neither more nor less than a delicate girl. It is impossible for anyone to find there the least indications of uncommon strength but even of that average amount of it which is found in females generally. There is nothing masculine in her appearance.

"Now, then, with regard to Dick Turpin. We have him not here to-day to ascertain his weight, or to look upon him to see his size; but I have no doubt many present have, at some period or other, beheld him. Let us suppose, however, that no one has done so, in which case, as he is a man, we will assume that he is only of the average height and weight. This would not be correct, I know, because from the accounts given of personal conflicts by the officers, it is evident that he must be possessed of an uncommon amount of strength, from which it is only fair to infer that he must be of rather large proportions and of considerable weight.

"So much for the rider. Now we come to the horse. Who is Black Bess? Who has seen her? Not I, certainly; perhaps, gentlemen of the jury, none of you. For argument's sake, however, let us suppose that this horse is of an average height. I believe this to be about fifteen hands. Do you know the height of fifteen hands? As I stand erect, it is about level with my shoulder; but I am many inches taller than the prisoner at the bar, therefore we will assume the height of the prisoner is fifteen hands—it certainly is not much more.

"You perceive, gentlemen of the jury, the point to which my remarks are tending. Taking the prisoner at the bar as you see her, taking Dick Turpin to be a man of average height and weight, taking his horse to be of average height also, let me ask you whether it is physically possible for a weak, frail woman to do that which nine men out of ten would fail to do if they tried?

"The probability is that Dick Turpin would weigh a hundredweight and a half, I should like to know whether you consider the prisoner at the bar strong enough to lift half a hundredweight from the floor on to the front of the dock? That, gentlemen of the jury, is only one-third of the weight, and it would be a very much easier task to lift a mass of iron provided with a handle than it would be to raise the body of a man, which, it is evident, must be a difficult thing to do.

"So much, gentlemen, for the case that has been brought before you.

"The police officers have, one after another, taken an oath that they have seen done what they described; but, gentlemen of the jury, surely you would not take the oath of those police officers in defiance of your own reason and common sense? Had they sworn they had seen two suns shining in the sky at one time, you would not have credited their evidence, because you know full well that what they stated was impossible; but no more impossible, gentlemen of the jury, to my thinking, than it would be for a girl to place the insensible body of a man upon a horse's back."

CHAPTER DOXXXIII.

MAUD'S TRIAL CONTINUES, AND SOME FRESH AND INTERESTING FACTS ARE BROUGHT OUT.

THE counsel for the defence quite warmed with his subject. He had uttered the last few sentences with great excitement and volubility, so that he was compelled to pause a moment to regain breath in order to proceed.

This opportunity was seized upon by nearly all the spectators to give vent to their own feelings in the matter, and to use a theatrical phrase, there was quite a "round of applause."

It was in vain the usher waved his hand and roared "Silence!" until he was black in the face; not the least notice was taken of him, and his cries only seemed to increase the general clamour.

It was not until the judge rose to his feet, and declared that he would immediately clear the court if the interruption continued, that silence was obtained.

The counsel's logic had come upon all with irresistible force, and the jury looked at each other, and whispered, and nodded, as though they were quite convinced that what the officers had sworn to was untrue.

And Dick. How his eyes glistened, and his breath came short and thick, as he listened to this powerful speech!

He was indeed delighted to think that Mr. Lazenby had chosen so fit a person to defend the prisoner at the bar.

Such was the impression produced upon his own mind, and upon the minds of his companions also, that they felt quite certain Maud would be decreed not guilty, even if the defence of her marriage was not put forward.

And Maud herself listened with wonder and interest to every word that fell from her defender's lips.

During the confusion, the young counsellor had rapidly turned his papers over, and by the time the applause had subsided he was standing calm and erect, ready to continue the subject he had shown himself so competent of handling.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury," he resumed, "believe me, I consider that what I have already said and proved is sufficient to ensure the acquittal of the prisoner at the bar.

"That which I have just said, however, is not the defence I have to offer in her behalf. I merely wished to show you that there was evidently an animus against the prisoner, the cause of which concerns neither you nor me. But it was too monstrous to suppose that, because seven police officers choose to swear to it, all the world must of necessity believe that my client performed the impossible feat of lifting the body of a man on to a horse.

"Gentlemen of the jury,—I presume that this was the best and the only case which they could bring before you of the prisoner's guilt. That was the only time when they saw her aidin and abetting the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin.

"Well, gentlemen of the jury, it would make no difference in my case if she really did do what these officers swear to having seen. It would not matter if she had aided and abetted or assisted Dick Turpin a thousand times to make his escape from justice; it would not matter if a thousand witnesses could come forward and swear that she had done so, simply because, gentlemen of the jury, the prisoner at the bar happens to be the lawful wedded wife of Dick Turpin!"

Another hum of applause arose in the court, but it was soon stifled, partly because they wished to hear what more was said, and partly because all had anticipated that this announcement would be made.

The judge expected it, and the jury too, because, it will be remembered, Maud, when brought before the magistrate at Bow Street, had made her defence by declaring that she was legally married.

"Yes, my lord and gentlemen of the jury, I can conclusively prove that the prisoner at the bar is the wife of the notorious Dick Turpin.

"It may be urged that the ceremony was performed in an irregular manner. I am ready to admit that the banns were never openly asked in any church; still, they were married, and by a clergyman of the Church of England, whose certificate I now hold in my hand."

The counsel held a slip of paper in the air and waved it in a triumphant manner.

The judge bent forward and signified, by a slight gesture, that he wished to inspect the document.

It was accordingly handed to him.

"This seems a very strange, irregular certificate!" he exclaimed, as he turned it over. "This should be on a printed form and properly witnessed. It is nothing but a few words scrawled by some one, and signed."

He held out the paper and passed it to the jurymen, who examined it one after the other with looks of profound wisdom, and at last it was handed back to the counsel for the defence, and then he said:

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury,—I told you that the ceremony, though perfectly legal, was performed irregularly, and, such being the case, it is no more than reasonable to look for an irregular certificate.

"This paper I now hold was written by Mr. Martext, the clergyman who performed the ceremony. Had everything been strictly in accordance with the regulations of the Church, he would, of course, have furnished a proper certificate; but he could not do this, and, rather than my client should suffer for that of which she is innocent, he wrote this paper, believing that his simple declaration of the marriage would be held sufficient for the purpose of obtaining an acquittal.

"That, my lord and gentlemen of the jury, remains for you to decide.

"In conclusion, I have only to say that I have demonstrated clearly enough that what the officers have sworn they saw is an absolute impossibility, and I now declare that the prisoner at the bar had a right to aid and abet Dick Turpin, for he is her husband, in proof of which I bring forward the declaration of a clergyman of the Church of England to that effect.

"On these grounds, then, I confidently ask you, gentlemen of the jury, to return a verdict of not guilty. On no occasion has my client performed more than the duty which every wife owes to her husband. She has suffered a long and painful imprisonment in Newgate. If, then, you consider she deserved some slight punishment, let that answer for it.

"Gentlemen of the jury, weigh over all that I have said, and if your consciences will permit you to do so, return a verdict in favour of my client."

The counsel for the defence sat down, and again loud applause broke forth in the court; but silence was soon regained, for there was not one present who wished to run the risk of being deprived of hearing the remainder of the trial.

The counsel for the prosecution now rose.

It was evident he intended to exercise his right of reply—a right which was more often enforced than at the present day.

During the earlier part of the speech made by the counsel for the defence, Mr. Wriggles had been busily engaged in writing something upon a slip of paper.

As soon as he had finished it, he folded the paper up, and handed it to the counsel for the prosecution, who read it, and nodded.

Very few observed this little transaction, but those who did felt that it meant something.

There was an ease and confidence visible in the bearing of the counsel for the prosecution when he rose to reply.

He glanced round the court, at the prisoner, at the jury, at the judge, at the witnesses with an expression on his face that said, plainly enough: "Just mark how easily, by a few words, I shall be able to put down the tale that has been told by the counsel for the defence."

Dick's suspense was extreme, and he waited breathlessly for the counsel to commence.

Maud, too, with a beating heart, clutched the front of the dock tightly, and fixed her eyes upon his countenance; but in this direction she found nothing to inspire confidence or hope.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury," he began—"Probably you have heard with the same feelings as myself the extraordinary defence offered by my learned friend. I will admit that what he has said seems upon the face of it to be logical and conclusive; but I need scarcely remind you how often appearances are deceptive, and surely they were never more so than they are in the present instance. His deductions will not bear the least criticism or examination, as I will shortly prove to you.

"All that my learned friend said with respect to the possibility or impossibility of the prisoner at the bar lifting a man on to the back of a horse, and the comparisons and estimates of weight and strength, I admit to be very ingenious, but in a case like this something more than ingenuity is required.

"You must not overlook the fact, gentlemen of the jury—though my learned friend appears to attach but little importance to it—that the feat described was witnessed by seven police officers, who have deposed on oath to what they have seen. One fact well testified to is, in my opinion, worth a thousand suppositions or hypotheses.

"It seems incredible that such a thing could be done, but, as we are all aware, under certain conditions, and when there is an extraordinary degree of excitement, things are performed by persons, of which they would be totally incapable in their calmer moments.

"That there is an attachment or connection between the prisoner at the bar and that desperate offender, Dick Turpin, I do not pretend to dispute.

"According to the account given by the police officers, Dick Turpin was wounded, yet he had sufficient strength to mount his steed, taking the prisoner on to the saddle before him, and to gallop off. But when he had gone some distance, the weakness produced by loss of blood caused him to lose his balance, and he fell down into the roadway. At this time the police officers were within sight. They were coming on at full gallop. The prisoner at the bar must have seen them—must have been aware of their approach. She must also have been conscious that her companion was in imminent danger. He was lying insensible on the roadway, and, in such a state, would fall easily into the hands of the police, in spite of the resistance which she might offer. Under these circumstances, then, it is only reasonable to suppose that a feeling of desperation must have entered into her heart. She must have been powerfully—tremendously excited, and, under the influence of that excitement, finding herself endowed with thrice her usual amount of strength, she performed the apparently impossible feat, which was witnessed by the seven police officers. In connection with this, there is another thing which must not be overlooked. We have no evidence to prove that Dick Turpin was totally insensible. He might have been incapable of keeping his balance on the back of his steed, but for all that he may have been able, with the assistance of the prisoner, to rise to his feet, and then the task of placing him on the horse's back would become much easier.

"But there is another and by far more important circumstance that I have to bring under your notice. It is a detail—a particular which should have been stated by the police officers at the time they gave their evidence, but from some cause or other—forgetfulness, most probably—it was not mentioned.

"Now, I hold in my hand a piece of paper, upon which certain words have been written and signed by Mr. Wriggles, the chief police officer, who, you will remember, witnessed the whole transaction. Some degree of confidence ought to be placed in any statements he may make. He now occupies, and has occupied for a long series of years, a high official capacity; but in this instance there is another reason why extra importance should be attached to what he says.

"In his zeal to capture the notorious highwayman, Mr. Wriggles declared that he whipped and spurred his steed continually, and by this means he managed to shoot ahead of his men to the extent of between one and two hundred yards. Therefore, it follows that he must have beheld all that took place with more distinctness than any of the rest.

"On this paper Mr. Wriggles states that he saw Dick Turpin lying helpless on the roadway. He saw the prisoner at the bar attempt to restore him to consciousness, and so he redoubled his efforts in order to reach the spot in the shortest space of time; but before he could accomplish this, he saw the prisoner at the bar place the insensible or nearly insensible body of the highwayman upon the back of the steed. She was assisted in doing this by the horse itself. We have all heard marvellous stories recounted of the sagacity and docility of the highwayman's steed, Black Bess. By her rightful owner she had no doubt been carefully trained, and a visit to any circus or equestrian performance will show to what an extent the training and teaching of horses may be carried, since in these places they are frequently seen to perform many tricks by word

of command. It might be that this Black Bess had undergone a similar course of treatment to the horses to which I am now referring. At any rate, Mr. Wriggles positively swears that the horse knelt down, and thus the prisoner at the bar was enabled to perform that feat which my learned brother for the defence has been so careful to prove to you was an impossibility."

The rules of the court forbade the counsel for the defence to take any notice of this remark.

He could not in any way interrupt the proceedings.

Nevertheless, he managed to let the counsel for the prosecution and the judge and jury see what he thought of this statement.

As soon as the opposing counsel had finished, he threw down his quill pen on the table with a gesture of disgust and incredulity; then, leaning back in his chair, he said, quite audibly: "Pish!"

The counsel for the prosecution must have heard this, but he took no notice of it.

"That, gentlemen of the jury, is the statement made by Mr. Wriggles. It clears up the whole mystery at once, and makes the impossible feat comparatively easy.

"We have no evidence, as I before remarked, to show that Turpin was quite insensible, and if he had a little use of his limbs, and if the horse had knelt down in the way Mr. Wriggles swears he did kneel down, why, then, it would be very easy for the prisoner at the bar to place the highwayman's body on the back of Black Bess."

CHAPTER DCXXXIV.

MR. WRIGGLES MAKES AN IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION TO THE JUDGE.

"AND now, my lord and gentlemen of the jury," continued the counsel for the prosecution, "I have another and far different point to touch upon.

"This concerns the question—is the prisoner at the bar the wife of Dick Turpin or not?

"If that question can be answered in the affirmative, why, then, my case immediately falls to the ground. But, gentlemen of the jury, I think you will be inclined to feel doubtful whether the question can be answered in the affirmative.

"My learned friend for the defence produces a certificate, it is true. That certificate you have all of you seen. What is your opinion of it? I need not ask it. About such a certificate there can be but one opinion; indeed, I am not right in applying such a term to it, for it is not a certificate at all. Gentlemen of the jury, it's impossible that such a document as that can be accepted as evidence, and I marvel greatly that my learned brother should have presumed to waste valuable time by bringing it forward at all. What is it? A mere scrap of dirty, crumpled paper which may have been written upon by anybody. Who is Mr. Martext? Where is he? To what church does he belong? How is it that those entrusted with the defence have not secured this person, and brought him forward to swear that he performed this marriage ceremony?

"These are questions, gentlemen of the jury, which I shall not pretend to answer. I leave them to my learned brother.

"If such a document as this can be produced in a court of justice, and accepted as evidence, and a verdict given in accordance with it, why, then there would be an end to justice altogether. We should have everybody coming into court with a certificate of some kind or other.

"No, gentlemen, that piece of paper is not sufficient; it requires to be substantiated by the clergyman and by the persons who witnessed the solemnization of the marriage. I believe I am justified in stating that none of the parties I have just referred to are in attendance, therefore that certificate must be disregarded altogether—it is of no value, no weight; and what you have to decide between, gentlemen of the jury, are the facts sworn to by seven witnesses and the logical inferences of my learned friend; indeed, you have to decide between facts and hypotheses.

"This, gentlemen of the jury, concludes the case.

"Both sides of the question have been heard; witnesses have been called. I now leave the whole of the facts in your hands for your impartial consideration and just decision, but I trust that all of you have minds sufficiently well balanced to prevent the subversion of justice by feelings elicited by the sex, by the youth, by the personal attractions of the prisoner at the bar."

The counsel for the prosecution sat down in his seat with a bang, and pushed his papers away from him.

There was now a slight bustle and stir all over the court.

The jurymen were whispering; the barristers, according to their wont, were laughing over feeble jokes; the judge was turning over the pages of his note-book; and the spectators were busily asking themselves which way the case would be decided.

Then the usher called for silence, and for once in his life he was instantly attended to.

As if by magic, everyone became still, for all were anxious to know what the judge had to say upon this subject.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he began, in a low mumbling tone, which increased in loudness and distinctness as he proceeded,—"I cannot refrain from making the remark that this is the most extraordinary case that has ever been brought before me since I have occupied my seat upon this bench. It is in every way a most exceptional affair, and I trust we shall be able to arrive at a proper and just decision.

"In my judgment, the whole case turns upon one point, and that point is, whether the prisoner at the bar is the wife of the person she is accused of aiding and abetting or not. If she is the wife, gentlemen of the jury, it is almost unnecessary for me to say you will be compelled to return a verdict of not guilty, even if you should feel satisfied in your own minds that she had assisted in the escape of a desperate character from the hands of the police, because the English law holds it to be the duty of a wife to succour her husband in every way she can, and that such is a wife's duty, few would, I fancy, venture to dispute.

"And now, gentlemen of the jury, how are we to decide this point? We are handed a paper which purports to be a clergyman's certificate, but which it clearly is not—that is, not in the ordinary acceptation of the term. But it was stated by the counsel for the defence that the ceremony was performed in an irregular manner. That I can credit easily, for I think it would be difficult indeed to find a clergyman who would be willing to perform the marriage ceremony for a desperate highwayman; yet, if we are to believe the counsel for the defence, the ceremony has been performed, and this document is a proof of it.

"To my thinking, supposing the prisoner at the bar to be married, the only means by which a clergyman could be induced to give his consent would be by placing him in extreme bodily fear. From what I have heard of this Dick Turpin, one can easily imagine that he would not scruple to terrify a minister of the Church of England. But suppose, through fear of his life, a clergyman did read the marriage service over them, the ceremony would then be valid enough to ensure the acquittal of the prisoner. Then, through the ceremony being thus performed, the clergyman would not dare to write a proper certificate, but he might, in order to escape ill-usage, write such a document as has been produced, and which would to all intents and purposes prove the marriage.

"This is a serious matter for our consideration, and I regret that we have not more evidence to enable us to come to a decision.

"If we search out this Mr. Martext and place him in the witness-box, it would be doing him an irreparable injury; in fact, I question whether it would be possible to find him after the occurrences of this trial have been brought to light. As a measure of safety he would take to flight, and so the case would remain just where it is now. Therefore, gentlemen of the jury, I must ask you to take the statements made by the counsel for the defence, and to take the certificate, produced, for just what they are worth, and no more, and I trust you will not refuse to listen to the pleadings of mercy which should always be tempered with justice."

The judge stopped suddenly and looked down.

Standing close to him, holding a folded paper in his hand, was the chief police officer, Mr. Wriggles.

The judge frowned slightly, and said, in a sharp voice:

"Eh—what—a paper? What do you want?"

"Would you be good enough to take it and look at it, my lord?" said Mr. Wriggles, with a bow.

The judge took the paper as requested, and then all noticed that when his eye ran over its contents his brows knit angrily together, and that he bit his upper lip.

Curiosity to know what that paper was about now rose to the highest pitch.

Dick Turpin was beginning to feel more at ease, and Maud's heart began to grow lighter, for from the manner in which the judge had represented the case to the jury, it was evident he was inclined in her favour.

The most obtuse-minded juryman must have been aware that the judge desired that a verdict of not guilty should be returned against the prisoner.

What was in the paper?

That was just what everybody wished to know.

They could only guess at its contents by the appearance of the judge's countenance.

Mr. Wriggles having delivered it, returned on tiptoe to his seat, smiling and nodding, and looking very self-satisfied indeed.

His looks seemed to express: "I rather think I've settled that business now!"

Except the judge and Mr. Wriggles, no one in the court knew what the paper was about, and the secret was confined to them, for the judge folded it in half, tore it up into tiny pieces, and threw the fragments beneath his desk.

But there is no reason why this should be kept a secret from the reader.

It was simply a note from the magistrate who had colluded with Mr. Wriggles in his scheme for placing Maud in Newgate as a means of getting the highwaymen into their power.

It simply stated that the ends of justice would be furthered by causing her to be kept a prisoner in Newgate for some time longer, because they had every hope, if this was done, of capturing the gang who had made all travellers afraid to venture on the high-road after dark.

The magistrate concluded by saying that he had communicated with the Secretary of State on the subject, who fully approved of the course suggested, and recommended its adoption.

After receiving such a letter as this, the judge could not refuse to recommend the postponement of the trial.

He was very sorry—very reluctant to do this, for Maud had made a favourable impression upon his heart; but he had no resource, however; and so he concluded his address to the jury in a very different manner to what he had intended, and to what everybody in the court expected.

"At first, gentlemen of the jury, I had intended to recommend the acquittal of the prisoner; but upon second thoughts on the matter I have resolved, in order that the ends of justice may be fully met, to postpone this trial until the next sessions. The whole matter will then be cleared up. Mr. Martext shall be sought for and brought up to give his evidence. By this means, and this means alone, we shall be able to decide whether the prisoner is married or not. If it should prove that she is, she will be set at liberty; and if not, I shall be compelled to pass upon her the sentence decreed to those who abet and assist felons. Therefore, gentlemen of the jury, you will understand that the case stands adjourned until the next sessions, when I hope we shall have the opportunity of fully investigating it."

With these words, the judge rose from his seat and abruptly left the bench by drawing aside the curtain which covered the entrance of the refreshment-room.

The jury looked in surprise at each other, and exchanged remarks.

After the judge had spoken, there was for a moment, or, perhaps, less, a profound silence all over the court.

This was caused by absolute amazement.

No one could credit that he had heard aright; but as the conviction gradually settled upon them that the prisoner was indeed to remain in custody until the next sessions, the indignation they felt expressed itself in loud hisses and groans.

Then there was such a tumult and uproar as probably had never before taken place within those walls.

As for our friends, they were stunned—bewildered—overwhelmed!

They had not failed to perceive the partiality the judge showed to the prisoner, and felt certain that he would act as leniently as possible; and unquestionably, had it not been for the note produced by Mr. Wriggles, Maud would have received a triumphant acquittal.

The rage, vexation, and disappointment which filled their breasts we cannot possibly describe.

At first Dick Turpin felt heart-broken to think that Maud was again to be consigned to a clammy cell in the prison of Newgate; but directly afterwards he clenched his hands and pressed his teeth closely together with determination.

"Not for long," he murmured to himself—"not for long! Before the next sessions she shall be at liberty!"

As for Maud, she covered her face with her hands and burst forth into a passion of sobs and tears.

Up to that moment she had retained her calmness and self-possession in a really wonderful manner; and as the case proceeded, hope had grown stronger and stronger in her heart.

Her face had been very pale, but her eyes were bright; her breast heaved with suspenseful excitement, for she, too, shared in the belief that a verdict of not guilty would be returned against her.

But when she saw the dark form of Mr. Wriggles creeping towards the judge, a kind of shadow crept over her heart.

She knew him to be no friend of hers, and she observed with pain the change which took place in the judge's countenance.

But when he announced, contrary to the tenor of the preceding portion of his speech, that he had determined to postpone the trial until the next sessions, she could maintain her composure no longer.

Her heart swelled—the tears sprang to her eyes, and she wept loudly and bitterly.

Then she felt a hand upon her shoulder, and a voice in her ear said:

"Come!"

She recoiled and shuddered at the contact.

Dashing aside the tears that continually filled her eyes, she looked painfully all round the court.

But owing to the position Dick occupied, she could not see him; and this, perhaps, was fortunate in the extreme.

Again the hand was placed upon her shoulder.

Again the stern monosyllable was spoken in her ear.

The next moment she found herself descending the winding staircase which leads from the floor of the dock into the strong chamber beneath.

CHAPTER DCXXXV.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS TWO COMRADES PLAY THE VERY DEVIL WITH THE POLICE OFFICERS.

The tumult and uproar in the court still continued; indeed, each moment it seemed to increase in violence rather than to abate, and this, too, in spite of all the efforts made by the officers to restore silence.

Then the judge, looking stern and white, and with his lips closely compressed together, drew aside the curtain and appeared.

He was saluted instantly by a chorus of groans.

Of these apparently he took no notice.

He held up his hand, as if to implore a moment's silence.

The uproar ceased as if by magic.

"If this disorder continues," he cried, "I will have the court cleared, no matter at what risk! Did you hear? I say I will have the court cleared, no matter what it may cost to accomplish it!"

Again the assemblage burst out into howls and cries.

"Clear the court!" cried the judge, in a voice that could be heard above every other sound. "Mr. Cawthorn, instruct your officers to clear the court!"

With these words he again retired.

Mr. Cawthorn quickly marshalled a body of police officers, who were headed by Mr. Wriggles.

They drew their cutlasses and prepared to force the people out by the points of their weapons.

This was a state of things that was highly advantageous to our friends.

They paused a moment, in order to think in what way they could best avail themselves of it.

Sixteen-string Jack and Claude stood close together, and the former whispered:

"Remember what we seem to be! We are police officers. Let us perform our duty!"

"What do your mean?" asked Claude.

"You see Dick, over there?"

"Yes, but don't mention his name, even in a whisper."

"Right—we must be cautious. Do you see he's hissing and groaning and clapping his hands together like the rest? Let us seize him—let us pretend to make him prisoner, as one of the ringleaders in the riot; by this means we may drift out into the Old Bailey, and if so, when we once get among the crowd all will be well."

"That's a bold scheme, Jack, and rather dangerous."

"Not at all—not at all! I feel convinced that it will answer!"

"Well, then, let us try it. I can propose nothing better myself."

Vigorous efforts at this moment were made by the police-officers to clear the court.

Those under the direction of Mr. Wriggles continued to press steadily onwards, with their cutlasses before them, and the people, naturally enough, shrank back as soon as they found the steel in contact with their bodies.

Then the other police officers who were about the court assisted their comrades by dragging the people out into the corridors, while others made prisoners here and there of those persons who had been most active in creating the disturbance.

Suddenly, then, to his surprise and to his alarm as well, Dick Turpin found himself seized roughly by a couple of police officers.

He made a furious struggle to get free, and no doubt would have released himself from their hold—for, in the excitement of his feelings, he forgot all about his two comrades being so disguised—but a whispered word from Claude set him right.

He continued his struggles, but not so violently as before.

He comprehended their plan in a moment, and though he struggled, and they endeavoured to hold him, he worked his way gradually towards the door.

He had only a yard or two to go, for the reader will remember he had seated himself close to the door, and before any of the others could notice or understand what they were about, Dick Turpin and his two comrades were standing on the stone landing at the top of the staircase.

Dick continued his struggles, and his two comrades made a great show of dragging him down the steps.

Below them was the little wicket-gate, and there stood the police officer on guard at it.

"Now, Dick," said Claude, "when we get a little lower down, give a sudden struggle to get loose; we will let you go. Jump over that wicket, and make your way into the street. We will follow you with all speed. Mingle with the mob, and we will run in the opposite direction to that which you may take."

Dick nodded, and immediately afterwards they came near enough to the wicket on the stairs to execute their purpose.

The police officer on guard there looked very much surprised at what he saw, though he was aware that a commotion of no ordinary character was going on above.

He knew that Dick had been made prisoner for something, and was endeavouring to get free.

He determined to resist his further progress, so he fastened the wicket-gate, and stood there to keep guard at it.

Then, with a sudden effort, Dick broke loose.

He hurried down three or four steps, with his companions following at his heels.

"Hallo, Chawbacon!" said the officer, as soon as he saw Dick. "Whatever have you been up to! Come, not so fast, my fine fellow—I have you! What do you think of that?"

"What do you think of it?" said Dick, clenching his fist and giving the officer such a blow on the head that it incapacitated him from thinking altogether.

With extraordinary agility, considering the clumsiness of his appearance, the seeming countryman leaped over the little gate.

Another police officer, who was standing down below in that portion of the Sessions House set apart for the convenience of witnesses, perceiving what was going on above, very imprudently ran up three or four steps and extended his arms, intending to catch Dick as he came down. And so he did catch him, but regretted it afterwards.

On came Dick at full speed.

He could not stop, and he tried to dodge past this meddlesome officer.

But to no purpose.

Perceiving that a meeting was inevitable, Dick slightly increased his speed, and struck against the officer with such force that he lost his balance instantly.

He clasped his arms round Dick, and the pair rolled with astonishing celerity to the bottom of the staircase, where they stopped with a bump that sounded distinctly all over the place.

The officer was undermost, and as his very hard head happened to come in contact with the edge of the bottom step, he very naturally let go his hold of Dick, for his muscles relaxed, and he was unable to hold him any longer.

In another second Dick made a dash into the street.

Here quite a large crowd of people had assembled, and he mingled with them in an instant.

Then, looking breathless and excited, Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval appeared upon the steps of the Sessions House.

"Which way did he go?" roared Claude—"which way did he go?"

A chorus of voices replied, and some one asked:

"What's he done?"

"Insulted the judge and knocked down a police officer from the top of the stairs to the bottom!" roared Claude, as though it were some very dreadful crime indeed.

The idea of a judge having been insulted and an officer knocked downstairs was such a gratifying one to the mob outside that they immediately set up a loud shout of laughter, clapped their hands, and cried "Bravo!"

The countryman in the smock-frock became at once in their minds a great hero.

"Where is he?" roared Claude and Jack together, and pretending to be in a desperate state of excitement—"which way did he go?"

No one spoke.

"It must be that way," cried Jack. "Come on, mate—we'll have him yet!"

He ran in the direction of Newgate Street, and his companion followed close at his heels.

The mob saluted them with jeers and cries of disdain, encouraging them to proceed by crying:

"Go it—go it, red weskits! That's the way! Jump over the churchyard wall, and then you'll have him!"

Claude and Jack continued to run, to the immense delight of the mob, who were aware that the countryman had run in the opposite direction.

Then they began to look round for him, but he was nowhere to be seen.

In the meanwhile, Claude and Jack ran to the top of the Old Bailey and turned round the corner into Skinner Street.

Their existence was quickly forgotten by the crowd in consequence of the scene of excitement that ensued consequent upon turning out all the people who had been seated in the court.

"That's what I call well done!" cried Jack, laughing till the tears ran down his cheeks—"that's what I call well done! This has been a day of rare adventures!"

"And it isn't over yet, Jack!" replied Claude.

"No, it isn't; but you may depend the best fun is. I only hope Dick will get off all right."

"What's the next move?"

"We will take the first narrow turning to the left, and manage to work our way round to the inn-yard in the Old Bailey where we left our horses. We will mount them and then ride off."

"Where?"

"To the Chase, and wait until Dick and Tom arrive!"

"Very good. Will you take this turning?"

"Yes, this one will do."

The disguised highwaymen abruptly plunged down a narrow passage branching off from the south side of Skinner Street, which conducted by a devious route to the very yard at the back of the public-house where they had stabled their horses.

As soon as they entered it they looked under the archway, and saw that there was an unusual commotion in the Old Bailey.

The ostler was there, and quickly brought out their horses.

As soon as they were saddled, the two highwaymen mounted.

They rather astonished the ostler by presenting him with a crown-piece.

"Now, Claude," cried Jack, "turn your horse's head round and we'll be off!"

Claude was about to obey, for he fully believed that all the difficulties of their dangerous enterprise had been overcome, and that it would be the easiest matter in the world to trot back in the direction of Hertford and enter Enfield Chase.

But he was doomed to disappointment.

Before he could obey his companion's injunction, the nasty trampling of feet reached their ears.

"Stop—stop!" cried a voice, in loud, authoritative accents. "Stop—stop, I say! Curse you both, where are you going?"

The voice proceeded from the direction of the archway.

Both highwaymen recognized it.

They turned their heads, and found themselves face to face with their old and pertinacious foe, Mr. Wriggles, the chief police officer.

CHAPTER DCXXXVI.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL RIDE OFF WITH MR. WRIGGLES IN PURSUIT OF DICK TURPIN.

THE first and most natural impulse of the two highwaymen upon making this discovery was to turn and fly.

Fortunately, however, they preserved sufficient of their presence of mind to control this impulse.

Flight they knew would be worse than useless.

A chase through the crowded streets of London in the afternoon, with a troop of police officers at their back, would be no pleasant thing.

They preferred standing still and facing the matter out.

Mr. Wriggles was really a sight to see.

He had lost his hat, and in his struggles with the mob the whole of his apparel had been more or less torn and disarranged.

He had almost lost his wig once—it had been knocked off his head.

Fortunately he had seized it before it fell.

He clapped it on again, and in his excitement did not notice that he turned the hind-part foremost, so that he presented quite a ludicrous appearance about the headpiece.

His coat was torn right up the back, and streamed behind him in two gigantic tails.

Perspiration was pouring in streams down his purple face, and after having called on our friends to stop, he was so breathless and exhausted that for nearly a moment he could not gasp out a single syllable.

But he seized hold of the bridle of Jack's horse and made furious and energetic gestures, which, however, our friends were unable to comprehend.

At length he found his voice.

"Are—are," he gasped—"are you the two officers who seized that countryman in the smock-frock and dragged him out of the court?"

"We are—we are!" cried Claude and Jack, together. "You remember us—from Hertford, you know—Gubbins and Kibble!"

"Yes—yes, I took you into the court and told you to watch."

"You did, and we obeyed."

"Then you know who that countryman was, or? You penetrated his disguise?"

"Yes, yes—did you?"

"I did," roared Mr. Wriggles, with an oath—"I did."

"And who did you make him out to be?"

"Why, Dick Turpin—Dick Turpin, of course! I knew he would be there, disguised somehow or other, and I know d—d well his three companions have been in the court with him!"

"That may be," said Sixteen-String Jack, "but we haven't seen 'em. We kept an eye on that countryman. We suspected him, and I said to Kibble, says I——"

"Stop—stop!" screamed Mr. Wriggles, "Never mind telling me that! We're wasting valuable time! He's off! I tell you he's running clear away!"

"We know that," said Jack; "and if you hadn't stopped us as you did, we should have been a good way on our road after him."

"Then you were going off in pursuit?"

"Of course we were! We ran as far as we could on foot, but we had lost sight of him; and we were puffing and blowing, so I says to Kibble, says I——"

"Oh! d—n what you said!" cried Wriggles. "Be off after him!"

"Do you know which way he went?" asked Jack. "The crowd told us he jumped over the wall of St. Sepulchre's Churchyard."

"No—no! He ran across the street, and down Fleet Lane—that's where he's gone! After him!—be quick! If you capture him, this will be the best day's work you have done in your lives!"

"I know that, Mr. Wriggles," said Jack—"I know that! We're off, and many thanks to you for the information you have given us."

Claud and Jack had hoped to get off, for they considered the sooner they left their present dangerous situation the better, but, as before, just when they believed they were about to start, Mr. Wriggles cried:

"Stop—stop! I'll go with you!"

This proposal was by no means relished by the highwaymen, for they foresaw that it would lead to all sorts of complications.

Accordingly, Jack said:

"No, no—Mr. Wriggles—you had better not! You are not ready. We shall have to lose valuable time while waiting for you."

"Stop—stop!" screamed the chief officer, quite blue with rage. "Do you dare to dispute my orders? Stop! I will go with you. Something tells me that I am at last about to accomplish the great object of my life. I feel that I shall capture Dick Turpin to-day! Ostler, bring out my horse!"

He was promptly obeyed, and in a marvellously short space of time indeed Mr. Wriggles was mounted on a capital steed.

When seated in the saddle, his torn and disordered habiliments—his reversed wig—made him appear a more ludicrous object than ever.

"You, then—you, Gubble and Kibbins, follow me. Keep close at my heels! We shall have him yet!"

Mr. Wriggles dashed his spurs into his horse's flanks, and away he went down the inn yard with the two highwaymen at his heels.

It was a most extraordinary combination of circumstances; and although they were quite at a loss to tell how it would end Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval could not forbear from glancing at each other and shaking with suppressed laughter.

The idea that they should be riding along in company with Mr. Wriggles in pursuit of Dick Turpin was really too rich, and it was a wonder they did not shake themselves out of their saddles in their efforts to suppress their laughter.

Sixteen-String Jack had truly said that this had been a day of adventures, but the most remarkable seemed about to come.

Mr. Wriggles was evidently well acquainted with the locality, for he turned down various narrow places, where no one had ever been seen on horseback before.

In a very short space of time all three emerged into Fleet Market, very close to the old Fleet Prison, and just where Farringdon Street now is.

At the corner of the turning from which Mr. Wriggles and our friends emerged, and which to this day is known as Fleet Lane, there was an old woman, the keeper of a stall, on which some peculiar-looking fried fish was exposed for sale.

To this woman Mr. Wriggles addressed himself:

"Have you seen a man with a smock-frock and heavy boots come down this turning lately?"

"Yes, I have," said the old woman, "and if you will tip me a bob I'll tell you which way he went."

Mr. Wriggles threw a shilling on to the stall immediately, and then the old woman said:

"When I first saw him, he was running very fast down the lane, but he stopped at the corner and looked back, and then he didn't run any more."

"What did he do?"

"He walked straight across the market, and, as I believe, went right up the court opposite."

"Then I'm afraid it's a case," said Mr. Wriggles. "Never mind, we'll see."

Not without difficulty, they picked their way across the market, having to thread in and out between the various stalls.

In a moment or two, however, they came to the corner of the court on the opposite side, and here again an old woman was seated—a vendor of apples.

Again Mr. Wriggles stopped, and inquired whether she had seen the country man he had described, and whether he had turned up the court.

"I have seen the man you speak of," replied the old woman. "He seemed all of a fluster like, and I wondered what he had been doing, but he didn't go up the court."

"Which way did he go, then?"

"Why, straight up the market towards Holborn Hill."

This was enough for Mr. Wriggles, who at once proceeded in the direction named.

While he had stopped to exchange these few words with the old woman, Sixteen-String Jack embraced the opportunity to speak to each other.

"It's no good for us to think of getting away, Claude," said Jack—"not a bit! And what this is to come to and how it is to end is more than I know."

"We must be careful," said Claude. "It won't do for us to be running about in and out London at the heels of Mr. Wriggles, searching for Dick. So sure as we try it, we shall be nabbed. Mark that!"

"It will be no good. But what are we to do? What a fix we're in!"

"Confound him!" cried Claude. "I wish I could think of some plan by which we could get rid of him. It's too bad! If he had not made his appearance just when he did, we should have been clear off."

There was no time to say any more, for Mr Wriggles pushed off towards Holborn Hill.

"There's but one chance," said Sixteen-String Jack, in a suppressed voice.

"What's that?"

"We must endeavour to draw him out into the open country, and when once we get him there, and we're all by ourselves, why, as we're two to one, I fancy we can do what we like with him."

Just so," said Claude. "That's the thing, provided you can only manage it."

"If we once do get him out into the open country, I'll not part with him till I've settled off a few old scores."

The foot of Holborn Hill was now reached, and Mr. Wriggles paused in doubt as to which way he should go.

Three ways lay open before him.

He made his inquiries here, but failed to obtain any accurate or important information, and so, for a wonder, he turned round, and asked the opinion of the two police officers.

"Which way should you think he has gone?" he asked.

"Well, Mr. Wriggles," said Jack, "I would rather leave that for you to decide. You ought to be able to judge better than me or Kibble either."

Mr. Wriggles smiled, for he appreciated the compliment.

So he said, with a patronising air:

"No, no—I want your opinion!"

"Well," said Jack, "such as it is, you shall have it. Now, I looks at the case in this wise: Here's three roads—or I might say four roads, counting the one we've just come."

"Well, never mind all that," said Wriggles—"come to the point."

"I am coming to it at a gallop, Mr. Wriggles," replied Jack. "Well, now, I think we can safely say that he didn't go back the way we've just come."

"I should think not."

"And we may safely say that he's not gone up Snow Hill, because that would take him back to Newgate again, and he wouldn't fancy venturing close to that."

"No, he would not. That's very good, Gibbins—very good! That reduces the roads to two!"

"It do, Mr. Wriggles—it do!" said Jack, emphatically. "And now the question is, which way shall we decide upon?"

"Ah, that's it!"

"Suppose," said Claude, "that we were to divide, and me and Gubbins to take one road, and you, Mr. Wriggles, take the other?"

"No, no—I won't have that! We will all stick together. I am resolved upon that point. However, not to stop here too long, I will say at once that it is my belief and opinion that he's pushed straight, because that's the nearest and most direct road to the open country."

"It's a singular thing," said Jack, "and I hope you'll excuse me for saying it, but that was just what I thought—humbly thought—myself."

"Did you?"

"Yes, I did."

"And which way do you think, Gubbins?" asked Wriggles.

"I think straight on, sir, for the reason you name—it's the high-road to the country."

"Come on, then. Forward! We shall soon know, before we have gone very far, whether we're on the right track or not."

All three touched their horses with their spurs, and away they went clattering over the Fleet Bridge at a tremendous rate.

London then was very different to what it is now, and Islington and Pentonville were two outlying villages separated from the metropolis and from each other by a large space of open country, consequently it took but a few minutes for the party to get clear of the houses.

They galloped on until, suddenly, being unable to discover any trace of the fugitive, Mr. Wriggles came to a halt.

"I don't believe he's gone this way," he cried: "if he had we should have heard or seen something. We've made a mistake."

"I hope not, Mr. Wriggles," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"But I'm afraid we have."

"What's to be done, Mr. Wriggles?"

"I'll be d—d if I know," was the angry reply, for the chief police officer was fast losing his temper. "Curse Dick Turpin, I say! What trouble I've had with him, to be sure."

"It's an aggravating thing!" said Jack. "How perverse of him! Now I could have declared that he would have made the best of his way out into the country."

"And I believe he has," said Wriggles! "He may be miles off by this time."

"Mr. Wriggles!" said Jack.

"Well!" was the fierce rejoinder.

"Would you excuse me——"

"What are you going to say. If you've got anything to propose, out with it."

"Well, Mr. Wriggles, I was only goin' to suggest that we hold a sort of a consultation, and endeavour to make out which is the likeliest place Dick Turpin would go to."

"Very well—very well; but I say."

"What?"

"Why, it strikes me you're two uncommonly sharp chaps to be country police officers—two uncommonly sharp chaps. I can't make it out at all," and Mr. Wriggles, as he spoke, glanced inquisitively, and not to say suspiciously into the countenances of the two disguised highwaymen.

The hearts of Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval gave quite a sudden bound as Mr. Wriggles thus spoke.

He was evidently getting suspicious, or at all events in such a state of mind that the least thing in the world would make him so.

As usual, Sixteen-String Jack was the first to speak, because he was the first to recover his presence of mind.

"Mr. Wriggles," he said, "I hope now that you have found how efficient we are, you will try what you can do to have us removed to Bow Street. I often say to Kibble what a burnin' shame it is that we should be in a place like Hertford."

"Ah! that he does," said Claude; "but it's the way of the world—some is lucky and some's t'other!"

"Humph!—ah!" said Wriggles. "Well, you are sharp—uncommonly sharp, that's certain!"

"It gives me great pleasure to hear you say as much, Mr. Wriggles," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and if so be we



(DICK TURPIN'S HEADLONG FLIGHT TO ESCAPE FROM HIS PURSUERS.)

could manage to capture Dick Turpin, I suppose you'll see your interest to get us removed to London. We should be very grateful to you, Mr. Wriggles, we should indeed; and if ever you wanted two persons to perform any little private business, why, you'd only look out for us, and you'd be all right."

It seemed that Mr. Wriggles paid very little attention to what the two seeming police officers said.

He was stroking his chin, and his eyes were fixed steadfastly upon his horse's mane, as though he was taxing his memory and endeavouring to find out where he had seen those familiar countenances before.

Our friends perceived this, and felt that a crisis had now arrived.

CHAPTER DCXXXVII

TOM KING FINDS MANY OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF HIS RETURN TO THE FARM-HOUSE.

We now return to Tom King, the only one of the highwaymen we have left in the court.

It will have been observed that no words were exchanged between him and his comrades.

Had he been free to speak, to attempt would have excited suspicion; but happening to be seated in that portion of the court set aside for the use of the lawyers, he was unable to mingle with the spectators.

It was highly necessary for his own safety that he should keep close by the side of Mr. Lawson, for by the restlessness of that individual it seemed as though he was more than half inclined to declare who his companion was.

It is hardly necessary to say that Tom King listened to all the proceedings with quite as great a degree of interest as either of his three friends.

When the uproar commenced, after the judge had concluded his summing up, he felt strongly tempted to join in it.

Prudence, however, counselled him to remain where he was.

Mr. Lawson turned to him and said:

"Well, now the case is over, do you want to stay here any longer?"

"A little while."

"Then I shall have to leave you, for I don't intend to run the risk of getting my head broke!"

Tom King merely tightened his hold upon the lawyer's arm, and continued gazing upon the scene of confusion around him.

"What do you want to stay here for?" asked Mr. Lawson. "What are you looking at? Can't you see all the other lawyers and barristers have quitted the court by that little door? If we don't make haste and pass through it, it will be closed upon us, and then we shall be mixed up with these rioters!"

"All right," said Tom—"I am ready."

He accompanied Mr. Lawson to the little door just mentioned; but not until he had seen Sixteen-String Jack, Claude Duval, and Dick Turpin quit the court together, in the manner we have already described.

He understood the whole plan instantly.

The boldness of the idea pleased him, and he had every hope that it would turn out successful.

As soon as ever they had quitted the court-house, all anxiety with respect to the people who were making such a disturbance was at an end, and Mr. Lawson turning to Tom, said:

"Now perform your promise."

"Eh—what?"

"Perform your promise!"

"What do you mean?"

"Mean?—why, give me that other five guineas you promised."

"In a little while," said Tom. "Don't be impatient—I have not quite done with you yet."

The lawyer uttered a suppressed groan.

"What do you want more?" he inquired.

"To ride back to Lincoln's Inn. Come on—we shall get a hackney-coach outside, and we shall not be very long."

"I don't mind that," said Mr. Lawson; "though why you wish to go with me I can't imagine."

"Never mind that."

"But," continued the lawyer, "did you notice that police officer standing watching there? Very likely he's looking out for you."

"Very likely indeed!"

"Then why be so foolish as to go anywhere near the spot?"

"You leave me alone to arrange my own affairs!" returned Tom. "As for that police officer, I'll settle with him if I find him in the way!"

Mr. Lawson said no more, but led Tom to the court-yard, where they obtained a hackney-coach.

They had a good deal of difficulty in forcing their way through the crowd, but at length succeeded in doing so, and then the vehicle rolled on at a rate of at least four miles an hour towards Lincoln's Inn.

While on his way to the lawyer's chambers, Tom King had an opportunity of thinking over his position, and considering what was the best thing he could do.

His immediate purpose was to proceed to the farm-house where they had found so stanch a friend, and wait there until Dick Turpin arrived.

But the question was, how should he get there?

To make the attempt while attired in a barrister's gown and wig was absurd, and that was why he had decided to return to Lincoln's Inn, in order that he might divest himself of this apparel.

He had not forgotten the police officer who had remained on watch; but he concluded that, as so many hours had elapsed, the man's patience must have been exhausted.

The hackney-coach at length passed beneath the ancient gateway in Chancery Lane, and presently stopped in front of the house in which the lawyer's chambers were situated.

Tom King gave a hasty glance around, and breathed a sigh of relief.

The police officer was nowhere in sight.

He paid the driver a liberal fare, and then the strange couple ascended the stairs.

"Now, Mr. Lawson," cried Tom King, as soon as they entered the room, "you have acted fairly and kept your word to me, and I will do the same by you—you shall have the five guineas I promised."

"And I think they are well earned," said the lawyer.

"Well, perhaps you may; and yet it strikes me that if you could obtain the same amount every day you would be quite willing to work quite as hard as you have for the last few hours from week's end to week's end."

The prospect of obtaining sixty pounds in one week was too much for the lawyer to bear, so he held out his hand and said:

"Give me the five guineas, and I will be content."

"All right! Reach me those clothes that I stripped off, and take this gown and wig of yours—here they are."

So saying, Tom flung the articles he had mentioned on the floor.

The lawyer produced the suit of farm labourer's clothes in which Tom had disguised himself.

These garments were soon put on.

"Now, Mr. Lawson," said Tom, "we are going to part. You know how I am disguised, and could easily raise a hue and cry after me if you liked. I don't believe you would do such a thing. Here, take the money, and let me advise you to sit down quietly and attend to any business you may have to do for the next hour or two, while I make my way out of London."

"I will," said the lawyer, pocketing the five guineas. "I am quite content with what I have received—quite content! So you are really going now?"

"Yes, I'm off! Good-bye!"

Tom left the chambers as he spoke.

He perceived, as he closed the door, that the lawyer had left the key sticking in the lock on the outside.

As a measure of precaution, he immediately turned the key, making Mr. Lawson a prisoner.

He then ran hastily down the stairs and out into the square, with the determination in his own mind, to get as far away from Lincoln's Inn as he possibly could.

Before he had gone ten paces, however, he saw, to his infinite annoyance, the same police officer standing close by, who had given him so much trouble in the morning.

"Aha!" cried that functionary. "So you've come out at last, have you? What on earth have you been doing all day here? Come this way, Mr. What's-yer-name, I want to speak to you."

To this speech Tom King paid no sort of notice, but walked on, pretending to be unconscious that the words were intended for him.

Then the noise of an opening window came upon his ears.

He turned his head round quickly and looked up.

He caught sight of the countenance of Mr. Lawson.

"Stop him—stop him!" he cried. "Hold him fast! He's a highwayman! Stop him, I say!"

It was really too bad of Mr. Lawson to behave in such a treacherous manner to our friend.

He had been well treated, and had received all that he had been promised.

After Tom King descended the staircase, however, he pulled out the ten guineas and counted them one by one

Then he began to think that he had given his services by far too cheaply, and regretted that he had not demanded more.

"I'll run after him!" he exclaimed, starting to his feet—"I'll run after him and catch him; then I shall get a share of the reward—fifty pounds at least, no doubt."

So saying, he rushed to the door, and found it fast.

This exasperated him greatly, and fearing that Tom would get out of sight altogether before he could force the door, the lawyer rushed to the window and flung it open.

It was then that he called out in the manner we have described.

The police officer, hearing the outcry, immediately placed a whistle to his lips and blew it shrilly.

It was a signal for those of his companions who were within hearing to hasten to his assistance.

We have only to explain how it happened that this police officer remained so long upon the same spot.

After Tom's departure in the morning, he waited for a long time, of course without seeing the farm-labourer emerge.

Then the time came for him to be relieved from his duty, and his place was filled by another.

He returned to duty again about two minutes before Tom King descended the staircase, and when our friend appeared the officer had just walked to the spot, wondering

what had become of the man he was suspicious of, and whether he should see him again.

How his speculations were interrupted we already know.

When Tom King heard the lawyer cry out, a feeling of great indignation took possession of his mind.

He felt an irresistible desire to get level with the lawyer, but at the present moment this was not to be thought of.

He must bend all his energies to the difficult task of making his own escape.

His first impulse was flight.

He did not stay a moment to reflect, but bounded on at full speed, and rapidly turned round a couple of corners.

Although the day was on the wane, yet it was still quite light, and Tom King by no means relished the idea of being chased through the streets of London on foot

After running another hundred yards, he passed under an archway which led him into Lincoln's Inn Fields.

A tremendous hubbub behind him reached his ears, showing that many people had joined in the chase and were hastening to capture him.

Turning the angle of the archway, he found himself for a moment at least out of the sight of those who were in the rear.

This, then, was the opportunity to seize upon to get clear altogether, and so he gave a hasty glance around him in the hope of making a discovery.

But he saw nothing that was calculated to aid him in his flight except a hackney-coach.

This was drawn up close to the footpath, and the driver appeared to be asleep.

Hackney-coachmen generally stopped here for a length of time in the hope of picking up a fare, for then, as now, people were continually passing in and out of the lawyers' domain.

"I'll try it," muttered Tom between his teeth "It's my only chance. I must either do that or run for it. I'll try this first; I can but run afterwards if it fails."

He sprang quickly into the hackney-coach as he spoke, and cried to the coachman:

"Drive me down Portsmouth Street and Sheffield Street into Clare Market. Be quick, and you shall have a crown-piece for your trouble!"

It was astonishing to notice how quickly these words enabled the coachman to shake off his slumber

He gave his horses a couple of sharp cuts with his whip, and away they went at a perfectly reckless pace

Tom thought he had gained the interior of this vehicle unperceived by any of his foes; but in this expectation he was disappointed.

A police officer, who had heard the shrill whistle of his companion, was hastening along Serle Street when he saw the country-looking clown jump into the hackney-coach.

Before the ponderous vehicle had got half-way along the south side of Lincoln's Inn Fields, quite a crowd of persons emerged from the gateway, meeting the officer we have mentioned as having seen Tom King get into the coach.

"Where is he?" they cried—"where is he? Which way has he gone?"

"Who—who?"

"The highwayman!"

"How was he dressed?"

"Like a farm-labourer!"

"All right!" cried the officer. "I seed him—he's in that hackney-coach yonder. Make haste,—don't let it get out of your sight!"

The whole party set up a terrific shout.

It was composed of several police officers and a great number of lawyers' clerks who had eagerly seized upon this pretext for deserting their usual business.

The excitement of hunting a fellow-creature through the streets was something delightful, as a variety to the general run of their monotonous existence.

They shouted and screamed, and ran with all their might, encouraging the police officers to the utmost.

They bawled aloud to the driver to stop, but no notice was taken of their commands, and to their infinite chagrin they saw the vehicle vanish from their sight round the corner of Portsmouth Street.

CHAPTER DCXXXVIII.

TOM KING FINDS HIMSELF IN A VERY PECULIAR AND CRITICAL POSITION.

Tom King had a plan of operations already arranged in his mind, and as soon as ever the hackney-coach started he set to work to carry it out.

He commenced by rapidly divesting himself of his disguise.

This occupied but a moment, and very soon he had all the garments rolled up into a small compact bundle.

This he placed underneath the seat in such a way that it could not be seen without it was searched for.

By this time the coach had turned the corner, and although he could hear his pursuers in the rear, he could no longer see them.

He took out of his pocket a five-shilling-piece and laid it upon the front seat.

Then going to the door, he placed his hand upon the handle, and turned it so that he could push the door open in an instant.

Having made these preparations, he looked out for some narrow court or turning.

There happened to be one close by, and just as he was opposite the entrance to it he pushed open the door and jumped out.

In sublime ignorance of what had happened, the coachman drove on, and then turned another corner.

Having leaped into the street in the manner just described, Tom King did not pause a second, but darted down the narrow turning.

Loud shouts and the trampling of footsteps came upon his ears, and told him how necessary it was that he should seek some hiding-place immediately.

A few yards down this narrow turning was a house considerably larger than those surrounding it.

It had a curious, old-fashioned, projecting doorway; and no sooner did he catch sight of it than Tom King concealed himself there.

He began to breathe more freely, but he was by no means out of danger yet.

The hackney-coachman did not go far before he observed the people he passed were shouting to him and pointing to his vehicle.

Turning his eyes round, he then saw that one door was swinging open, and a suspicion of the truth at once entered his mind.

He pulled up, with a jerk, scarcely fifty yards from the spot where Tom King had leaped out.

"Bilked!" he cried, with an angry oath. "Well, it's only this once, and they won't catch me so again!"

He got down off his seat with the intention of closing the door.

As he was in the act of doing this he perceived, lying on the seat, the bright silver coin which the highwayman had deposited there.

"It's all right after all!" he exclaimed, as he picked it up and placed it in his pocket. "I thought I was done for, but it seems it's all right!"

Just then, the foremost of the crowd in pursuit of Tom King reached the hackney-coach.

A police officer seized the coachman by the throat, and asked him where the man was that had got in.

The coachman then explained, and, having told the truth, the officer cried:

"He's hiding somewhere about here! Disperse in search of him! He's jumped out between this spot and the corner of Lincoln's Inn Fields!"

This was a considerable distance, however, and in that locality the houses are built closely together, and intersected by numberless courts and alleys.

To think of looking for the highwayman there forcibly reminded one of the proverb about searching for a needle in a bottle of hay.

But they were all very anxious to capture the highwayman if they possibly could.

Away, then, they ran, retracing their footsteps.

Tom King was just thinking of quitting his temporary hiding-place when he heard his enemies returning.

The chance of slipping out from under the shadow of that old doorway was past, and he had now to devise something else.

Danger quickened and stimulated his invention.

Turning round, he looked at the door of the house itself.

There was a huge brass knob at one side, just over the keyhole.

He seized it and turned it round.

He had scarcely dared to expect that the door would yield so easily, but it did.

Without a moment's hesitation, he slipped into the passage beyond, and closed the door behind him.

He was only just in time, for many of the crowd ran down this narrow turning.

Tom heard their voices and footsteps.

They swept past, however, and all became comparatively silent.

Then, for the first time, he endeavoured to look around him and ascertain what kind of a place he was in.

This was difficult, for the passage was very dark, and although he strained his eyes to the utmost, all that he could make out was that several paces off was a flight of stairs.

Just as he had made this discovery he was startled by hearing the clear, sharp tinkling of a bell.

Then he heard a footstep just outside the front door.

Evidently, some one was desirous of gaining admittance to the house.

It might or might not be some of his enemies.

In either case he was in great danger, for even if the person ringing for admittance was an inmate of the house he would recognise Tom King as an intruder.

An alarm would then be raised, and beyond a doubt it would reach the ears of those officers who had so recently passed by.

To remain where he was was simply impossible; but then the question was, what place of safety could he seek?

If he ascended the stairs he would be in danger of meeting some one who might be descending in order to answer the door.

Then, on the other hand, if he ventured to open any of the doors on the ground floor there would be a strong probability of his being seen by some one.

To ascend the stairs seemed the least dangerous mode of proceeding, and so, after a brief hesitation, this was the course he determined upon pursuing.

With light and nimble steps he sprang up, nor did he pause until he reached the first landing.

Here he believed he was tolerably safe.

But he was destined not to retain this belief for any length of time.

He heard a door opening in the passage below, and he heard the sound of footsteps going towards the front door, and he congratulated himself upon having been so fortunate as to decide in the way he had done.

But just then, to his consternation, a slight rustling sound reached his ears from above.

For a second he could not think what it was, and then the conviction burst suddenly upon him that some one was descending from the upper portion of the house.

It was a female, evidently.

He could tell that by the lightness of the tread and the rustle of the garments.

Now Tom found himself in a peculiar predicament.

If he remained standing where he was, he could not fail to be discovered by the person coming down the stairs.

To descend to the ground floor was out of the question, for he could hear voices in conversation.

The only resource left to him was to choose at random one of the three doors opening from the landing.

Into what rooms they might lead he could not possibly conjecture; nor was there anything to enable him to decide whether those apartments were occupied or no.

He could not have decided had he debated within himself for half an hour; but it so happened that he was not allowed the opportunity of debating half a minute.

The female, whoever she might be, was coming down the stairs at a rapid speed, and, with a feeling of desperation about his heart, Tom King hastily opened the door nearest to him, and slipped with equal haste into the room beyond

He closed the door behind him, and placed himself in an attitude of defence, for he could not possibly tell what would happen next.

A sigh of infinite relief came from his lips when he discovered that the room was vacant.

There were many traces, however, of its having recently been occupied.

A chair was drawn up near the fire, and close to the chair was a small table, on which was heaped a quantity of sewing materials.

This was about all Tom was able to take notice of.

He had hastily crossed from the door in the direction of the window.

Now a slight noise attracted his attention.

As if by instinct, his eyes fixed themselves upon the door through which he had so lately passed.

Then, to his horror, he saw the knob was turning round.

Evidently some one was on the point of entering.

He glanced wildly around him for some place of concealment.

With joy he noted that the window was furnished with dingy, faded curtains, and with a rapidity of motion that was truly marvellous, he managed to hide himself behind one of them before the door was fairly open.

He was not quite sure that the whole of his body was properly concealed by the folds of the drapery, but he did not dare to make the attempt to adjust them in any way, for the movement would have been perceived by the person who had just entered the room.

It was some relief to the highwayman—but not much—when he heard the door close.

He had only one to deal with, he thought, and this was better than two or three.

The new-comer moved uneasily about the room, but finally all became still—so still that Tom could scarcely believe there was another person in the room besides himself.

As this remarkable silence continued, his curiosity became more and more inflamed.

At present, he had no idea what the new-comer was like, or whether it was a male or a female who had entered.

Reassured by the stillness, and moreover impelled by a powerful curiosity, Tom very slightly moved the curtain in such a manner that he could take a peep into the room without much danger of being seen himself.

At the first glance, he saw that he had not much need for apprehension.

Seated in the chair near the fire, which he had noticed, and with her back turned towards him, was a girl.

He could tell that she was young, although her face was turned away from him; the outlines of her figure were quite sufficient to show that.

She was very busily engaged in sewing, and sat upon the chair in a perfectly motionless attitude.

Tom looked all round the room, and saw that, although every article it contained was very plain, yet there was over the whole a comfortable aspect.

The young girl seemed happy enough, and to be engaged upon her sewing more as an amusement than as a labour.

Tom wondered very much who she could be.

He came to the conclusion, certainly, that this was the female he had heard descending the stairs, and congratulated himself upon having been so fortunate as to choose the room he had.

It was evident that the girl did not for a moment suspect that the apartment was invaded by any other person save herself, for she continued at her work placidly and calmly.

Then, in a low, sweet voice, she began to hum some portion of a ballad.

Tom listened in rapture, for her voice sounded like the notes of a bird.

"Surely," the highwayman murmured to himself, "this girl is kind-hearted, for she is young. She would have compassion upon me if I disclosed myself. Shall I speak, or shall I remain here?"

This was a serious question, and Tom was a good while making up his mind; for, of course, he could not fail to be aware that while he remained concealed behind the curtain he was in no danger.

Suddenly, however, the sound of a tremendous uproar in the street below reached his ears, and he felt a strong, nay, an almost invincible, desire to look from the casement and endeavour to ascertain what was the cause of it.

Fortunately, he had the prudence to draw the curtain

around him in such a manner as to conceal him completely.

The noise reached the ears of the young girl, and, with a cry, she threw down her work, and, springing to her feet, ran to the window and looked out.

She was then very close to the hidden highwayman—so close, that her garments touched against the curtain

Tom King absolutely held his breath.

"What a crowd of people!" exclaimed the girl. "And police officers, too! What can have happened? Why, I declare they are coming to this house! Yes, they have all stopped round the front door! What can it mean?"

There was a tone of alarm perceptible in the young girl's voice, as she spoke these words, half aloud, half to herself.

Then she gave a start of alarm.

A loud knocking and ringing at the door below came with painful and unpleasant distinctness to her ears.

Clasping her hands together, she left the window, and seating herself in the chair, fixed her eyes upon the door of the apartment.

She was evidently much agitated about something, but why the knocking at the door should alarm her or have any effect upon her mind, Tom King was unable to determine.

Nor was he exactly in a condition to speculate upon the subject, for he was wondering in what manner it would be possible for him to secure his own safety.

CHAPTER DCXXXIX.

TOM KING FINDS A REAL FRIEND IN THE HOUR OF NEED.

SHOUTS and cries, and a perfect Babel of sounds came from the entrance-hall of the house. Tom King strained his ears in a vain attempt to make out some of the words that were uttered.

But in this he failed.

Presently there came a lull, and then some words were spoken by a voice which rose clear and distinct above every other sound.

After that comparative silence ensued.

What to make of this Tom King scarcely knew, yet he remained concealed by the curtain in a state of very great excitement and suspense.

After the lapse of a few moments, he heard heavy footsteps ascending the staircase.

He heard them pause at the top of the landing, and he heard some one knock at one of the doors.

A few minutes' delay took place, and then a knock was given at another door.

There was again a delay, which was succeeded by a sharp succession of knocks upon the door of the room in which he was concealed.

The young girl seemed greatly terrified, and in a faint, tremulous tone of voice she cried out:

"Come in!"

In obedience to this permission the door was slowly opened, and a party of four police officers appeared upon the threshold.

They strode into the room, and one, touching his hat, said:

"Beg pardon, miss, but you neeedn't look so scared. We mean you no harm—no, not the least in the world!"

"What do you want?" asked the girl, pressing her hands upon her heart. "Why do you come here?"

"We're in search of a supposed highwayman," replied the officer.

"But why do you seek him here?" said the girl in tones of great surprise.

"We're seekin' him everywhere, for we can't make out where he has gone to. We took this room along with the rest, though it appears to me pretty certain he isn't here!"

"No, that I am sure he is not!" said the girl, earnestly and truthfully. "For ever since this morning I have been seated in this room, and have scarcely left it for a moment!"

"Well, it dosen't look as if he was here—that's true enough," said the officer, "and there's been no alarm in the house, though one man will have it that he saw a suspicious-looking character hide himself in the doorway, and so, miss, you see that's the reason why we're searching here."

The girl inclined her head, and answered:

"You are welcome to search this room as much as ever you like, though I will give you my word there is no stranger here, nor have I seen one."

"Well, we can easily believe you, my lass," said the police officer, "for there's nowhere here for him to hide."

With these words, the police officers, very much to Tom King's surprise, withdrew from the room and closed the door after them.

He could scarcely believe that he had had such a narrow escape.

He imagined that they would not be content with taking the girl's word alone, but that they would have satisfied themselves by a hurried search in the room.

If they had done this, his discovery would have been inevitable.

He was rejoiced at his escape, not only for his own sake but for the sake of the young girl, who, had he been found after what she had said, would have found herself in serious trouble.

The noise made by the police officers ascending the next flight of stairs somewhat reassured him.

Then he heard their heavy footsteps in the rooms overhead, where they appeared to be searching for him.

The young girl sat silent for a moment or two, and then she exclaimed:

"How very strange! I wonder who it is they are in search of, and whether he has really made his way into this house? Now I recollect, I was absent from my room for a few minutes while I went upstairs; perhaps he availed himself of the opportunity to slip in when my back was turned? Dear me, how strange I feel! I do wish the police officers had looked all round—I should feel so much better satisfied, and I am sure I dare not look myself!"

The young girl was working herself up into a state of nervous alarm.

This threatened to be a serious matter for Tom, who had prematurely congratulated himself upon having made his escape.

"I feel very uneasy and frightened," said the girl, glancing timidly around the room as she spoke, "and it's getting blind-man's holiday, too! I will light the lamp; but I'm sure I dare not stop in the room while I am in this state of doubt! Never mind, I will light the lamp and wait till the officers come downstairs again; then, if they have not found him, I will ask them to step in here and ease my mind by having a thorough search!"

Evening was now beginning to close in, and strange shadows were creeping about the room.

The girl stirred the fire, and, going to a shelf, took up a lamp and placed it on the table.

This lamp she lighted with a trembling hand.

All the time she was thus engaged she continued to talk to herself, as though by that means she should be able to keep up her courage better.

"There," she said, "that's better—a great deal better! I feel ever so much braver now! What a while the officers are upstairs, to be sure! Perhaps they have found him, and then I shall have no cause to be frightened! I am foolish to feel terrified as it is—very foolish!"

She placed the globe over the lamp, and as by this time the wick had fairly ignited, the whole of the apartment was tolerably well lighted up.

"Well," she continued, "a light is cheerful, certainly Now I'll just draw the curtains before the window, and wait patiently till I hear the officers ascend."

These words were full of danger to Tom King.

He could tell what an excited, agitated condition the girl's mind was in, and he was certain that when she drew back the curtains and discovered him—as she could not fail to do—she would immediately utter such a cry as would infallibly bring the officers to the spot.

But the highwayman had no means of averting the danger.

He was able to do no more than to stand perfectly still, and trust to some chance circumstance arising which, perhaps, at the last moment, would prevent the girl from carrying out her intention of drawing aside the curtains.

That was a frail hope, indeed; for, although much frightened, the girl tripped across the room.

Chance made her seize the curtain on the other side of the window to that behind which Tom was concealed.

She drew it easily and quickly.

Then she seized the other.

No sooner did she lift it, however, than she caught sight of the form of a man.

Her eyes dilated with terror.

She trembled, and a scream was evidently just about to issue from her lips; but Tom King, with great promptitude and presence of mind, placed one hand before her mouth and the other around her waist.

In spite of her struggles, he drew her closely towards him; and then, in those low, sweet gentle tones, which he could always employ whenever there was a necessity, he said:

"Fear nothing, my dear girl; you are in no danger. I would die rather than offer the least harm! Don't struggle—don't scream, but listen patiently to what I have to say. I shall not occupy you many minutes, and then, when I have done, you can call out if you like."

There must have been something exceedingly reassuring in Tom's voice, for the girl ceased her struggles at once, and turned her eyes curiously upon him.

"It is true that those officers who entered this room a few moments ago are in search of me," continued Tom King. "You see, I took advantage of your absence to secure myself behind the curtain. Up to the present moment I have escaped. The officers firmly believe that I am not in the room, and they will have no suspicion of my presence here unless you call out and inform them of it. Now I ask you: Are you so cruel—so hard-hearted—so stern, as to be willing to doom me to death? For, if the officers capture me, that, I assure you, will be my fate!"

As he spoke these words Tom King released his hand from the girl's mouth, and his arm from about her waist.

She trembled, and clutched the curtain tightly with both hands in order to support herself.

"Now," said Tom, "you know I am here—you know who I am. Now then, if you wish to doom me to death, raise your voice—the officers will hear you, and will come—they will capture me before your eyes!"

But she made no effort to cry aloud.

Then Tom King stepped back a few paces, and said: "Do I understand that you are unwilling to call around me those who are thirsting for my life?"

The girl glanced at him for a moment, and then slightly inclined her head.

"Enough," said Tom—"that is sufficient."

"But," she exclaimed, "what are you to do?—what would be said if it was known that I had you alone in this room unknown to anyone?"

"I will get over that difficulty easily," said Tom, "for I will leave the room at once."

So saying, he stepped towards the door.

"No—no," she said, springing forward, "you will not leave now, because, if you do, your capture is certain! I can hear people murmuring in the hall now."

"So can I." said Tom, "and therefore I ask you to allow me to remain here. I will depart as soon as ever I am allowed the opportunity. I will not breathe a single word respecting my presence here."

"I believe you," said the girl. "Stand behind the curtains—then, if anyone should open the door suddenly, there will be no danger of discovery. Stand there until the officers have left."

"Every command of yours will be immediately and implicitly obeyed," said Tom, with a bow. "I cannot forget the deep debt of obligation I am under to you; indeed, I shall always remember that you have saved my life."

"Hush!—hush! It's dangerous to speak—you cannot tell who may be outside. They might hear the murmuring of voices, and be surprised to find me here alone."

There was so much good sense in what this girl said, that Tom resolved to follow her wishes exactly, and therefore he concealed himself behind the curtains.

He only took up his position just in time, for immediately afterwards he heard the heavy footsteps of the officers as they descended.

His heart beat furiously when he heard the steps stop outside the door, and then a loud knock was given.

It was very difficult indeed for the girl to utter a permission to enter, but, remembering that the life of a fellow-creature was at stake, she summoned all her fortitude to her aid, and said:

"Come in!"

The door was opened, and the officers appeared at it.

"Well, miss," said the one who had first of all spoken, "we have searched the house—leastways the top part of it."

"And have you found him?"

"No, nor the least trace of his presence. If he entered this house he must have left it. You are sure he is not in this room?"

"Oh, quite—quite!" said the girl, glancing around her.

"Oh, very well, then, that will do. We must look for him elsewhere."

With these words the officers withdrew.

They descended the staircase.

Some kind of discussion took place in the passage below, but eventually all became silent, and there was every reason to believe that the police and the rest of the crowd had taken their departure.

The girl listened intently.

All was still.

Then rising from her seat, she exclaimed:

"The danger is over now—they have gone now. Then let me entreat you to leave this room, for I cannot tell how soon my father may return!"

"I will go instantly," said Tom King. "Accept my heartfelt thanks for the kindness you have done me. I wish it was in my power to repay you—but I can't."

"Go—go!" said the girl; "your absence is all that I desire."

"Farewell, then," said Tom King; "but let me tell you that it is my solemn conviction that the police officers have not left the house, and that the second visit they paid a few moments since to this chamber had some more particular purpose than is visible at first sight."

CHAPTER DCXL.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING SET OUT TO REJOIN THEIR COMPANIONS AT ENFIELD CHASE.

THE young girl received this intimation with surprise and terror.

Springing forward suddenly, she took hold of Tom King by the arm and prevented him from placing his hand upon the knob of the door as he was about to do.

"What purpose?" she asked—"tell me, what are your suspicions!"

"They are only vague," said Tom; "but that the officers meant something by their strange conduct I feel assured. What, we may perhaps discover."

"Do you think that they suspect you are here?"

"It is very possible; and, if so, I shall regret it exceedingly, and for your sake."

"Why for my sake?"

"Because, if the officers should discover that I am here, they would know that you had screened me from them—that you had endeavoured to conceal me. Do you know the consequence of such an act as that?"

The girl shook her head.

"Then I will tell you," said Tom, in whose mind all that had taken place at the trial was quite fresh—"I will tell you. If they found you had concealed me here, or attempted to conceal me, they would take you into custody, drag you to prison, and doom you to a long imprisonment in a foreign land."

The girl turned very pale.

"I would not have brought this danger upon you," continued Tom, bravely, "if I could have helped it; but when I entered this room it was vacant, though I had scarcely concealed myself behind the curtains before you came in."

"And what shall you do?"

"I will go now. There's a risk, of course, but perhaps no more risk than there will be in two hours to come. I will do my best to escape; if I fail, it will be no fault of mine."

"No—no!" said the girl, whose heart seemed suddenly to have been impressed in favour of the highwayman—"you shall not go at present. The risk to me is not so great as you represent. Stay at least a few minutes longer."

"I will, since you wish it, for it would be foolish for me to deny the peril with which I am threatened. Yet stay, I think, if it is known that I have sought shelter here, I can make you harmless for your share in the transaction."

"How so?"

"I will make it appear as though you had consented unwillingly to befriend me—that you had done it merely to save yourself from ill-usage, because I had placed you in bodily fear."

"Explain," said the girl, wonderingly.

"Seat yourself in that chair," replied Tom, "and I will bind you in it. Then, when you are found, you may say that I had overpowered you and bound you in order to cover my escape. Do you consent?"

"I will if you think it would be of benefit. But could it not be avoided?"

"Perhaps so; all depends whether the officers have really departed. Look from the window, and tell me whether there are any men yet lingering in the street?"

The girl obeyed.

"No," she said, "the street is clear; they seem to have departed to seek for you in some other quarter."

"Then," said Tom, "I trust that the secret of my presence here will be known to no one but ourselves; if so, then no danger will come to you. It would grieve me more—far more than the loss of my liberty—if you got into any trouble on my account!"

The earnest tones in which Tom King spoke could not be mistaken, and it was certain that they made their way to the young girl's heart at once.

"Now," he said, "once more farewell! Believe me, I shall never forget you!"

"Who are you?" said the girl—"tell me your name, so that I can preserve the remembrance of this incident."

A peculiar smile wreathed the highwayman's lips as he replied:

"As for my name, that does not matter, for I am not known by it. When I tell you that I am called Tom King, you will know best who I am!"

The highwaymam did not trust himself to hear more; but as he spoke the words, he abruptly opened the door and passed out.

The young girl, for a moment or two, was rendered immovable by astonishment.

When she recovered herself, and was able to open the door of the room, she found that her strange visitor had gone.

Tom had listened on the landing, after he closed the door, and, finding that the interior of the house appeared to be perfectly quiet, he glided on tiptoe to the head of the staircase, and began to descend.

Soon he reached the passage in which he had first taken up his quarters, and which had so recently been inhabited by his foes.

Now it was deserted.

A few rapid steps took him to the door.

In order to prevent himself from coming into violent contact with anybody—for the passage was perfectly dark—he had held out his hands before him.

Suddenly, they encountered something soft, but what it was he could not at first make out.

It seemed drapery of some description.

A closer examination showed him that it was a cloak, such as was usually worn at that period.

He took it from the hook on which it had been hanging, his heart glowing with satisfaction.

He wrapped it around him, listened for a moment, then opened the door and passed out.

The narrow street was perfectly silent, so he did not linger beneath the shadow of the old doorway.

He wrapped the cloak in such a manner as to conceal his apparel, and walked along hastily, yet without any appearance of undue hurry.

He was now intent upon reaching the farm-house with the least possible delay.

He doubted not that Turpin had already arrived; and if such was the case, he knew his old comrade would be full of a thousand anxieties on his account.

He might attribute his absence to a serious cause and even be rash enough to set out in search of him.

This Tom was resolved to prevent if he possibly could.

On his way he saw nothing of his foes, and had the satisfaction of perceiving that very little attention was bestowed upon him by the passers-by.

He knew quite well the exact situation of the farm-house where they had had so warm a welcome, and accordingly he made his way towards it in a straight line.

He had a long walk before him, but he did not mind that, for he was well aware that suspicion was less likely to be excited by his proceeding to his destination on foot than if he had gone on horseback.

By keeping out of the way of all people, he avoided an adventure, but by the time he arrived at the farm-house the night was well advanced.

Upon his entrance, he found Turpin waiting for him.

There was a cloud of anxiety on Dick's countenance, which disappeared when he had the satisfaction of seeing his companion return.

"I must have been more fortunate than you," he said, "for I have been here a long time."

"How did you perform the journey?"

"On a waggon. I was lucky enough to get through the crowd that was assembled round the Old Bailey without being seen by any of the police officers, and then, as I reached Holborn, I saw the waggon, and the driver, belonging to our friend here, and which had brought us to London. I got into it, and, remembering that you were disguised as a lawyer, I instructed the man to drive off at once, for your presence, attired as I had seen you, would have caused suspicion, and I should have been in great danger had I waited."

"Certainly you would; you were quite right, Dick, to secure your own safety. You see I have done the like. Then you managed to reach here without interruption?"

"I did," replied Dick. "And now I am anxious that we should set out once more. I want to rejoin Claude and Jack, for, after what has happened to-day, I can know neither peace nor rest."

Some refreshments were brought out by the farmer and placed upon the table.

The two highwaymen did ample justice to the meal, for they could not tell how long would elapse before they would be able to partake of such a one again.

The farmer continued his kind behaviour towards them, and our two friends both felt that they had secured an important and true friend, one who at any time would render them every assistance that lay in his power.

Had they listened to or regarded the farmer's wishes they would have stayed there for a much longer period of time, but Turpin was restless, impatient, and anxious, and insisted upon leaving and rejoining his other comrades with the least possible delay.

He felt the result of the trial keenly, and a feeling of great resentment against all his foes took possession of his heart.

"If they had been content to persecute me," he said, "all would have been well; but they have punished Maud for my sake. Well, well—they shall repent it. They shall not have her in their hands much longer!"

At length the horses were brought out, and friendly good-byes were exchanged between John Adams and the highwaymen.

Black Bess was in splendid condition for the road.

The long rest she had had, and the excellent food which had been placed before her, had produced remarkable and beneficial effects.

Dick's eye lighted up with joy and triumph when he beheld her.

"While Black Bess remains mine," he exclaimed, in a tone of enthusiasm, "I care not for all the police officers in the world! Bonny Black Bess! she has saved my life many and many a time; and I have heard to-day the account of a fresh instance of her sagacity!"

He sprang into the saddle, and his example was immediately followed by Tom King.

They waved their hands to their friends and trotted off, being lost to sight in the darkness almost in a moment.

"Enfield Chase is the place, Dick!" said Tom King. "Depend upon it, Claude and Jack are there waiting for us!"

"Then the sooner we arrive the better," said Dick. "My blood seems on fire!"

"Maintain your calmness, if you can," said Tom. "Let the subject of what has happened to-day remain until we are all four together, then we can discuss it. In the meanwhile, as we ride along, we will while away the tediousness of the journey by relating to each other what has occurred."

"It will, perhaps, be best," said Turpin, with an effort.

"I should be glad if, for a few minutes only, I could forget the events of to-day!"

"Don't let them press too heavily upon your spirits, as they appear to do. As I said before, let us postpone all conversation on that subject until we rejoin Claude and Jack."

To this Dick gave his consent, and Tom's proposition was carried out.

They of course knew nothing of what had happened to each other since they parted, except while in the court.

They had much to tell, for many adventures had befallen both.

Whenever they wished to reach the Chase in the shortest possible space of time, they always galloped across the country, avoiding all cross-roads and lanes, and human habitations.

By this means they secured themselves to some extent from delay and interruption; and, moreover, they were able to save a very great deal of ground.

It was about one hour after midnight when they arrived upon the borders of Enfield Chase.

So soon as ever they were beneath the trees, Tom King uttered the signal which had been agreed upon to be used on such occasions.

The clear whistling sound sounded very shrill in that silent spot.

As the echoes raised by the sound died away, the two highwaymen listened eagerly and impatiently for the answering signal.

CHAPTER DCXLI.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL HAVE A SETTLEMENT IN FULL WITH MR. WRIGGLES.

While Mr. Wriggles was so profoundly occupied in meditating, and wondering where he had seen the two seeming police officers before, our friends exchanged significant glances.

This was the only means by which they could communicate with each other.

Suddenly Mr. Wriggles looked up again.

He fixed his eyes piercingly and scrutinisingly upon their countenances.

Suspicion had been growing stronger and stronger, and taking deeper root in his mind.

The conviction upon the minds of the two highwaymen was, that this time Mr. Wriggles had recognised them—that he knew full well who and what they were.

But if this was the case, Mr. Wriggles apparently took no notice.

He again stroked his chin with his hand, for a moment or two, and at last ejaculated:

"Ah, well, Gubble and Kibbins, I have been thinking this matter over, and in spite of what you say, I am convinced that Dick Turpin has not gone this way."

"It's only a matter of opinion, Mr. Wriggles," Jack ventured to observe.

"Which way do you propose we should take?" asked Claude.

"Why, back to London," said Mr. Wriggles, glancing furtively into their countenances,—"back to London. Come along; follow me!"

And as he spoke, the chief police officer turned his horse's head round in the direction of the metropolis, and struck him in the flanks with his heels.

"Mr. Wriggles!" bawled Jack, "stop—stop a minute, if you please! I have something to say!"

Mr. Wriggles pulled up, and, in the twinkling of an eye, our friends had placed themselves one on each side of him.

"Stand off!" cried the chief police officer, suddenly, and drawing a couple of pistols as he spoke. "I know you both! Now I recognise you!"

"Then you will be sorry for it, and wish your memory had not served you quite so well!"

Uttering these words, Jack suddenly grasped the pistol which was pointed at him, while Claude imitated the action.

A sudden twist wrenched the weapons from the hands of Mr. Wriggles, and he gave vent to a yell of fury when he saw the pistols flung over the hedge into the meadows.

At the same time, our two friends tightened their hold upon him.

"Now, Wriggles!" cried Jack, "you know us! I am Sixteen-String Jack, am I not?"

The police officer uttered an angry growl, and made a furious attempt to get his arm free.

But he failed entirely.

"And you recognise me! I am Claude Duval."

"Curses!"

"Give in, Wriggles—give in!" said Jack. "We're two to one! You don't stand the ghost of a chance! Give in!"

"Give in to what?" cried the police officer. "What do you intend to do?"

"That you will see presently," said Jack. "Let me advise you to make no resistance! If you do, you will only bring ill-usage on yourself!"

"But, d—n it all, has it come to this? Is the chief police officer to be taken prisoner by a couple of highwaymen? Is the world turned upside down?"

"We intend to make you a prisoner, that's certain!" said Jack. "And now we have you secure enough!"

Mr. Wriggles struggled again; but although he was gifted with no ordinary strength, yet he was no match for Claude and Jack.

In a very short time, he was overpowered.

Then Sixteen-String Jack hastily thrust one hand into a pocket in the skirt of Mr Wriggles's coat, and drew out a pair of handcuffs.

As soon as he saw them, Claude Duval comprehended what his comrade intended to do.

And despite the resistance the police officer made, he found the manacles were slipped over his wrists with quite as much ease and dexterity as he himself could have displayed.

He was now in a very poor condition to make any resistance to the highwaymen; and he knew it, for he hung his head with quite a dejected air.

Then Sixteen-String Jack whispered a few words to Claude Duval.

Mr. Wriggles tried hard to make out what those words were.

No sooner had Jack done speaking, however, than Claude burst out into a loud and uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"Hold him, Jack!" he cried—"hold him! Oh, that's too good—it's rich! Oh, Jack, what an invention you have got!"

Mr. Wriggles was quite at a loss to understand the meaning of this outbreak of mirth, and he glanced into Claude's countenance, and then at Sixteen-String Jack.

The latter was only smiling faintly.

"I'll hold him!" he cried. "You, Claude, look in his pockets, and feel in your own."

A few yards of rope were required.

"All right," said Claude. "I have some left, and no doubt Mr. Wriggles never travels without it."

Claude was right.

Mr. Wriggles always carried with him a large quantity of rope, which, although very fine, and capable of being rolled up into a small compass, was nevertheless very strong.

This bundle of rope Claude quickly found.

"Now, Mr. Wriggles," said Jack, "perhaps you will listen to me! We're two to one, and you know our characters. We have many old scores to settle off, and we mean to take this opportunity. You can resist as much as ever you like—only, I warn you that the more you resist and the more trouble you give us, the more ill-usage you will receive!"

Then, turning to his companion, Jack said:

"Now, Claude, I will hold him tight! Make haste, and secure the rope!"

Mr. Wriggles looked very uneasy, for the word "rope" sounded very ominously in his ears, and he wondered whether the highwaymen were about to avenge themselves upon him by hanging him up to a tree.

He was soon convinced that they had some other and more elaborate intention, for Claude began busily to tie the rope around his ankles.

He also tied it tightly round his arms, just above the elbow.

The rope then hung down in four long ends.

Having carried his proceedings so far, Claude stood up,



[DICK TURPIN ASSISTS BLACK BESS OUT OF THE RIVER.]

front of the horse, and took hold of those ropes which were secured to his ankles, and at the same time Sixteen-String Jack suddenly pulled Mr. Wriggles backwards on his horse, so that, instead of sitting in the saddle, he was lying nearly at full length on his steed's back.

Claude pulled the ropes with all his might, so that the consequence was Mr. Wriggles found himself drawn out of the saddle.

His two legs encircled the neck of the horse.

In this position Claude bound them tightly, and then, despite his frantic struggles, secured the other ropes attached to his arms in such a way that he was forced to remain lying at full length with his face upwards on the horse's back.

The chief police officer, bound thus Mazeppa-like upon his steed, presented such a very ludicrous aspect that the two highwaymen could not refrain from laughing aloud.

This seemed to aggravate Wriggles more than anything else, and the manner in which he managed to curse and swear at them and at himself was astonishing.

But the more furious he got the more did the laughter of the highwaymen increase.

"Oh, Jack—Jack!" cried Claude, who was compelled to hold his sides. "You will be the death of me some day—I know you will! The idea of such a thing! Oh, it's grand!"

A volley of curses came from Mr. Wriggles.

"Oh!" said Claude. "I suppose you are not of the same opinion! Well, it doesn't matter—you are in the minority, the vote is carried by one. I tell you it's grand, so it doesn't signify in the least what your opinion may be!"

Mr. Wriggles was now in such a furious state of mind that he was scarcely conscious of what he was doing.

Once or twice they feared that he would get free.

But the cords were all securely knotted, and Claude be-

lieved that they would not be likely to give way for some time to come.

"Now, then, Jack," he said, "what's to be done next?"

"Well, that requires consideration, Claude. Let me see, didn't Mr. Wriggles say he thought Dick Turpin had not come down this road?"

"Yes, he did—I recollect hearing him say so."

"Very well, and he wanted to go back to London, didn't he?"

"He did."

"Then so he shall," said Jack; "we'll send him back straightway."

"Hark you, my fine fellows," said Wriggles, "you will find it your wisest plan not to carry this joke too far."

"Well, you will not consider London too far, shall you?"

"Oh, curses! If you send me into London in this ridiculous condition I will have such a vengeance for it as will make you bitterly regret this piece of folly! You will see the joke from another point of view then."

"All right," said Jack, "we'll wait till that time comes. At present, then, we have you bound fast to your horse, and you cannot resist or escape."

Wriggles tugged violently at his cords with no better result than hurting his wrists and causing his horse to prance and rear in a very uncomfortable way.

"Release me," he cried—"set me down—cut these cords, and I will ride back to London without looking at you. I tell you what I'll do: I will promise to leave you and all the lot alone for the future, and not trouble my head about you. There, what do you think of that? Is it a bargain? and if so, let me free."

"Don't you wish you may get it?" said Sixteen-String Jack. "I know the value of your promises. As I said before, there was an old score between us, and now the time has come for settling it off. After to-day we shall be able to begin again level."

Claude now drew closer to Sixteen-String Jack, and said, in a faint whisper:

"Do you really intend to start him on the way to London?"

"Yes, certainly I do."

"But he might get killed.

"Oh, never fear!"

"Well, then, start him at once, for if we linger much longer the chances are we shall meet with some one on the road, and then we shall find ourselves in an awkward fix."

"Very good!" said Jack. "But wait a moment first; I am considering whether, if we start the horse, he will gallop all the way to London; he might stop by the roadside, and that would be far from pleasant."

"You must take your chance of that."

"I don't know that!" said Jack.

"Mr. Wriggles," he added, turning to that functionary, "I wish that the horse should gallop all the way to London with you. Do you think you could manage to give him a dig with the spurs now and then?"

Mr. Wriggles's countenance assumed a dark tint.

But he made no reply.

"Well, I suppose by that you mean you won't. Never mind, I have a little apparatus here that will answer the end in view capitally. Perhaps you would like to see how it is I intend to make your horse spur himself?"

Mr. Wriggles glared at Jack, but did not speak.

He was growing apprehensive of what was about to come. The conviction settled upon him that something very disagreeable was in store.

Jack having spoken, cast his eyes to one side of the road, and there growing on the little bank upon which the hedge was planted he saw a tall thistle, which was furnished with an infinite number of sharp, prickly leaves. This he cut down close to the ground with one blow of his sword.

Then, taking a portion of the unused cord, he tied it firmly round the stalk of the thistle; and then, making a loop in the cord close to the knot, he slipped it over the horse's tail.

Then drawing the rope tight, he tied it again.

It seemed that the horse, who had not been consulted in the matter, had serious objections to this proceeding, for he kicked up his heels in a furious way, and Sixteen-String Jack narrowly escaped sustaining severe injury.

Under certain conditions horses are very stupid creatures, and the one upon which Mr. Wriggles lay proved no exception to the rule.

Having flung its heels high in the air, to the great discomfiture of the police officer, it whisked its tail round in a furious way.

It was with great difficulty Claude had up to this moment managed to keep the creature still by holding the bit very tightly.

When, however, he brought down the thistle with full force upon his hinder parts, to hold him any longer became an impossibility.

Uttering a wild snort of rage, fear, and pain, the animal wrenched its head loose and darted off along the road towards London at such a speed as it had never accomplished before; and at almost every bound it lashed its tail, being unable to comprehend that under the peculiar circumstances the best thing he could have done was to keep his tail still.

Sometimes the prickly bush descended upon the horse's hind quarters, and sometimes upon Mr. Wriggles's face.

As his hands were tied, and drawn under the horse's flanks, he could do nothing in the shape of warding off these occasional blows.

When the thistle bush descended, he would utter such an angry shout and pour out such a quantity of oaths that the horse became doubly terrified, and resembled in all respects a wild animal.

Mr. Wriggles could turn his head from side to side, and when he did so he found that the hedges and trees were slipping past him at a prodigious rate.

Then, as he drew nearer to London he encountered many people on the road.

When these people were standing still, the horse passed them so quickly that he was a mile off at least before they could recover from their surprise or make out what was amiss.

Of course all those who had vehicles, when they saw the horse tearing along at such a furious speed, drew up as close to the side of the road as they could, in order to allow him free passage.

Thus it happened, without coming into collision with any object, the horse at last managed to reach London. It was not likely that it would continue its career much longer.

Its fury increased rather than abated; while, as for poor Wriggles, he was more dead than alive.

He grew incapable even of levelling curses at those who had played him this trick.

People now began to join in the chase, and followed in the hope of being able to see the end of this extraordinary adventure. But the horse flew along at a speed which no other animal could accomplish.

It so happened until London was gained that the road was almost in a straight line, and the horse had kept along the middle of it, as straight as an arrow from a bow. But just within the metropolis, the road branched off in two different directions.

At the angle formed by this division of the roads, a church had been built.

A stone wall projected from the road.

Towards this stone wall Mr. Wriggles's horse flew in a direct line.

It was perfectly blind to all surrounding it, and perhaps was even unconscious that it was flying along in the way it was.

Those in the rear who observed his headlong course, and saw the stone wall in front, at once concluded that the race was at an end. And so it was.

Utterly heedless of the obstacle, the horse dashed up to it and struck with a crash that was awful to hear.

Such was the force of the concussion that the creature's body was hurled back several paces.

When the people came up, there lay the horse perfectly still.

His head struck with full force against the stone, and death was instantaneous.

But what was their surprise upon finding a man dressed in the garb of a police officer bound in such a strange manner to the steed?

He exhibited no signs of life, though they could not perceive that he had sustained any injury

They hastily severed the bonds and carried him into a public-house.

Mr. Wriggles was only stunned, and he quickly recovered his consciousness.

His face was smeared all over with blood, and so swelled in consequence of the repeated blows with the thistle that it was perfectly impossible for anyone to recognise him.

He refused to give any account of himself, or to say who he was.

He insisted upon being placed in a hackney-coach.

He instructed the driver to take him to Bow Street, and on his way thither he occupied himself in vowing vengeance upon the highwaymen.

What he had already done he declared should be as naught compared with that which he intended to achieve in the future.

CHAPTER DOLII.

DICK TURPIN ANNOUNCES HIS DETERMINATION TO HIS COMRADES.

Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval stood perfectly still, and watched with straining eyes the hasty and involuntary flight of their old enemy, Mr. Wriggles, until nothing but a cloud of dust could be distinguished in the dim distance.

Not until even this disappeared did they turn their heads and speak.

Claude was the first to break the silence.

"All's done so far, Jack!" he said. "But it's very odd to me if we don't hear something more about it before long!"

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this! After this indignity Wriggles will be perfectly furious. He will strain every nerve to capture us!"

"Ban!"

"The matter is somewhat serious!"

"But not very."

"I don't know that. At the first blush it seemed a capital notion, but now that I have had time to think about it——"

"Well, what then?"

"I can see many disastrous results arising from this practical joke. I repent now it is too late!"

"That is nearly always the case. But really, Claude, you view this matter much too seriously!"

"I think not."

"But you should bear in mind that no man can do more than his worst!"

"Well, well—the job's done now, and cannot be undone; so, of course, the wisest thing is to make as little trouble about it as possible!"

"So say I. I am of opinion, considering all things, that we have let him off very easily indeed; and you know when we set out, you expressed yourself quite willing to settle off old scores with him."

"True; but it's no good talking any further about it, Jack. If we wished it ever so, we could not recall him!"

"Very true; and it strikes me as being an excellent thing that we can't!"

"But, Jack!"

"What?"

"The horse might be stopped by some one or other before it has gone many miles, and in all probability, Mr. Wriggles will have consciousness enough left to declare what has happened to him, and people will make their way here after us without delay."

"I don't dispute that it's very likely indeed; so that, under the circumstances, we cannot do better than ride off to the Chase while we have the opportunity of doing so."

"With all my heart; and I hope it will not be long before we rejoin our two comrades. I feel slightly uneasy about them, I confess; yet Dick had a good start, and I fancy he would get off all right!"

"But how came Tom King to be dressed in a barrister's gown, and to be on such friendly terms with that lawyer?"

"That baffles me altogether, and we shall have to wait until we see Tom before that mystery can be cleared up."

With these words, the highwaymen mounted their horses.

The animals had, during the last few moments, been busily engaged in nibbling the grass that grew by the side of the country road.

As it was broad daylight, it was necessary that more than common circumspection should be used in making their way to their destination.

They took every possible pains to avoid chance travellers on the road, and took care to keep at a good distance from every habitation.

By this means they managed, as they believed, to reach the Chase without being observed by a single person.

They made their way at once to the old familiar spot, close to the little dell.

"They have not come yet," said Jack, glancing around him.

"No. I scarcely expected them. It is early yet; we must wait. In all probability, it will be midnight before they arrive."

"Most likely. Let us retire, then, at once, to the little dell. I confess I am quite worn out. We might sleep and watch by turns; and then whoever was watching would hear the signal that Dick and Tom will be sure to give as soon as they come."

"I was about to propose the very same thing myself, for I am dreadfully fatigued."

Without any further hesitation, the two highwaymen made their way to the spot we have so frequently described.

There they released their horses, after having removed their trappings.

Without the occurrence of any single incident of the least importance, Claude and Jack slept and watched by turns until their comrades arrive at the borders of the Chase in the manner we have described at the close of a preceding chapter.

Sixteen-String Jack was watching, and he instantly aroused his companion.

"Come!" he said, "Dick has arrived, and given the signal! Ah, there it is again!"

A faint, chirping whistle came quite distinctly to their ears, and Sixteen-String Jack, at once responding to it, hastened to the meeting-place.

Great satisfaction was felt on all sides as soon as they became assured of their mutual safety.

Tom King conversed readily and freely with his comrades, and answered their questions without reserve.

But Turpin was sullen and silent, and strode rapidly through the trees to the little dell.

Sixteen-String Jack was full of impatience to make Tom King acquainted with the capital trick he had played Mr. Wriggles; and, taking no notice whatever of Turpin's reserve, he commenced his narrative.

At first Turpin took no notice, being apparently entirely absorbed in his own reflections, which, if the expression of his countenance went for anything, were dark and bitter enough.

Very soon, however, his attention was aroused, as Jack's words unconsciously penetrated to his understanding.

"What," he exclaimed suddenly—"what is it you are telling me?"

"Did you not hear, captain?"

"Only the last few words. I have been wrapped up in meditation."

Sixteen-String Jack then, with the greatest pleasure imaginable, recommenced his narrative.

As he proceeded, however, Turpin's brow continued to contract, and his countenance to assume a darker expression.

Tom King, on the contrary, was so excessively delighted, and laughed so boisterously, that he was fairly compelled to hold his sides.

As soon as Jack had finished, Turpin said:

"This is unfortunate—most unfortunate; and I would have given anything rather than it should have occurred!"

"Why so, captain?" asked Jack. "I had no idea that you were so particularly fond of Mr. Wriggles!"

"No more I am," replied Dick, grinding his teeth. "But it is likely to interfere with my future plans; at any

rate it will render the execution of them extremely difficult."

"I am sorry to hear that!" said Jack; "and, to tell you the truth, I never once thought of it. After it was done, though, Claude wished it had been left undone, because he feared it would make Mr. Wriggles so extremely bitter against us."

"There can be no doubt about it having that effect," said Turpin; "and that's what I so much deplore."

"But I maintain," said Sixteen-String Jack, "that Mr. Wriggles has done his worst already—that he cannot possibly do more than he has already done."

Turpin shook his head.

"You don't agree with me, captain?"

"Indeed, I do not."

"Why?"

"I think I can explain to you. Mr. Wriggles has no doubt done his worst up to the present time, just as some wild animal might have done its worst in prowling about and seizing its prey. Take the most ferocious animal you can think of, and, under usual circumstances, what it might do would be very serious, and might be called its worst; but take that animal, wound it, torment it, and inflict some very serious injury upon it, and then its actions will be thrice as ferocious as before—no matter what they are at first."

"There is sound sense in that, captain," said Claude, "and a wild animal, in my opinion, is just what Wriggles ought to be compared to."

"I could forgive him all," said Turpin—"think nothing of it, had it not been for the manner in which he has treated Maud,—that I can never overlook; and, some day or other, I will certainly punish him in the way that he deserves!"

"Whenever that may be," said Sixteen-String Jack, "you will find me ready to assist you. So I should be glad if you would look upon what I have done to-day as a trifling payment on account."

"It is not worth while to have any ill-feeling about such a wretch," said Tom King.

"Certainly not," replied Turpin. "And although I was much vexed at first, we will pass it over, and say no more about it."

"It will, perhaps, turn out eventually to our advantage," replied Jack.

"I don't quite see that."

"But you spoke of some plans which you had formed, captain. Let us hear what they are, and you will find me ready to assist you to the utmost, no matter what they may be."

"It is a very serious matter," said Turpin,—"a very dangerous one, too; and, therefore, I should like to place my designs before you in the clearest possible way."

"We are all attention," said the three comrades, as if with one voice.

"Well, then," exclaimed Turpin, "as you may easily guess, my plans concern Maud."

His companions nodded, for they fully expected it.

"There is little need," continued Dick, "for me to say a word to you about the trial, since you all three witnessed it, from beginning to end, like myself."

"You may depend," said Tom King, "if it had not been for Mr. Wriggles interfering, and placing that paper in the hands of the judge, Maud would have been declared not guilty, and would by this time have been with us."

"The judge was summing up entirely in her favour," said Turpin, "and there can be no question that the jury would have acquitted her unhesitatingly; but you see the result, which convinces me more than ever that my original idea was correct."

"Of what idea do you speak?"

"Why, that Maud was simply made a prisoner in order to decoy us to our destruction."

"I consider that is now perfectly plain," said Claude.

"Well, then, my comrades," said Dick, "is she to remain a prisoner in the gloomy cells of Newgate? Are we to give her up altogether, and abandon her to her fate?"

"No—no!" murmured the three highwaymen together.

"I am glad to hear you say that," said Turpin, "for, of course, neither of you can feel the same amount of interest that I do myself. So I suppose I shall be right in reckoning upon your assistance?"

"Quite right; have no fear that you will be disappointed."

"Well, then," said Dick, "I am resolved that she shall not remain a prisoner in Newgate many hours longer."

"But how shall you obtain her freedom?"

"That is what I want you to consider. I shall be glad of any suggestions."

"But," said Claude, "does it not strike you that, if we attempt to liberate Maud, we shall be doing just what Mr. Wriggles fully expects?"

"It does, certainly."

"His object will then be achieved. Rely upon my assurance, that it will not be half a watch that he will keep round about the whole prison."

"I admit that; and now, perhaps, you can understand why I so much regretted you had treated Wriggles in the way you have. If he escapes with his life, he will be doubly exasperated."

"And if some accident should happen to him?" murmured Claude, biting his nails.

"Why, then there will be more uproar still."

"No doubt of it."

"But," exclaimed Turpin, "it is quite useless for us to stand here wasting time by making such remarks as these. In spite of everything, Maud must be set at liberty. If you like to join with me and run the risk of the expedition, good; if not, say so without loss of time, and I will accomplish my purpose as best I can single-handed and alone."

These words were uttered in firm, decided tones, and, as soon as he had spoken them, Dick glanced successively into the countenances of his companions.

As he half expected, he found them clouded with doubt and irresolution.

They were silent, too.

After a pause several moments in length had endured between them, Dick said:

"Come, my friends, speak—and speak freely. Do not shrink or hesitate to make me acquainted with your feelings."

"Do you think," asked Claude, "that if we all set out to Newgate, and take every precaution, we shall gain our object, or, rather, shall we all four be taken prisoners?"

"I understand you," said Turpin. "That is sufficient—quite sufficient! Say not another word! I will dare this enterprise alone!"

So saying he turned round on his heel.

"Stay, Dick!" Sixteen-String Jack exclaimed. "Do not be so hasty! Wait a moment, and let us discuss this subject fairly."

"No, no!—no discussion is needed! I have heard enough—quite enough!"

"Then if you will not talk the matter over, will you allow us to consult together?"

"I—I—I don't know. I wish to start at once."

"But that would be sheer madness."

"Why so?"

"Look up. The colour of the sky will show you that the night is changing into morning. And what can you do by daylight anywhere near the prison of Newgate?"

"Pardon me, my friends, but when I think of Maud's position, and the indignities to which she has already been exposed, my brain reels, and calm, rational thought is impossible."

"Under these circumstances, then," said Tom King, in impressive tones, and joining for the first time in the conversation, "take counsel with us. We will not advise you rashly or wrongly."

"I know you will not!" cried Dick, pressing his hand.

"There is plenty of time between now and sunset to talk the matter over fully and weigh every consideration in the balance. Let us agree to do this."

"As you will."

"Then, first of all, let me recommend that we take what rest we can. I am worn out. You must all be worn out too. We shall then be also able to turn the matter over in our own minds first, which would be a great advantage when the time for deliberation came."

"I think you have good sense on your side," said Dick, in calmer tones then he had yet spoken, "and therefore I will give way to you."

"That's right. Now let us to rest."

"We are already somewhat rested," said Claude and Jack, "so we will take the task of keeping guard upon ourselves."

Tom King and Turpin were glad enough to assent to this proposition.

"Remember," cried the latter, as he stretched himself at full length upon the turf—"remember, you have much to ponder over!"

"All right, captain!"

After this response, all was perfectly still, the silence being only broken by Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack relieving each other.

CHAPTER DCXLIII.

A SERIOUS DIFFERENCE ARISES BETWEEN DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMPANIONS.

THIS interval of rest made a wonderful difference to our friends in every respect.

Just before sunset they arose, soothed, refreshed, and in a much better condition for the business they had before them.

Dick Turpin, as might be expected, was the first to spring to his feet, and his companions, being unwilling to tax his patience too severely, rose also.

"Now, my comrades," exclaimed the captain, as soon as his followers were gathered round him, "let me receive your advice. I confess I am burning with impatience——"

"No doubt—no doubt."

"And although you do not know from actual experience what it is to be in my position, yet you can form some conception of my feelings. It is worse than madness to feel that Maud is exposed to every insult and indignity Mr. Wriggles or the Governor might choose to offer her!"

"Calm yourself, captain; no good will be done in this matter if we do not preserve our calmness."

"As for old Wriggles," said Sixteen-String Jack, "it strikes me you need not trouble yourself very much about him."

"Why not?"

"Because I'll warrant his bones are so sore, after his enforced ride, that he will be quite incapable of moving hand or limb for some time to come."

"Now," exclaimed Turpin, "which of you will offer his advice first?"

"I will," said Tom King. "I have thought deeply and carefully over the whole subject from beginning to end."

"Proceed, then."

"Well, my opinion is that, if we adopt ever so clever a scheme, we shall not stand the ghost of a chance even of effecting our purpose. Stay!" he added, as Dick was turning impatiently away. "As you asked for my advice, hear me to the end."

"I will—go on!" muttered Turpin, frowning deeply as he spoke.

"After the little adventure with Mr. Wriggles yesterday, there will not only be such close guard kept round about Newgate, but there will be such a thorough search commenced that we should have much difficulty, if we had nothing else, to occupy us in preserving our own safety."

"And that's your opinion, Tom?"

"It is. I know you don't like it, and I am sorry for it, but the idea is such a thoroughly hopeless one as not to exhibit the faintest gleam of success. If I thought that anything else than our certain death or capture would follow this enterprise, I would join with you in it and not shrink in the least."

"Good—good!" said Turpin. "Then I have no other choice left me than to perform the task single-handed, for I suppose you, Claude, and you, Jack, are of the same way of thinking as Tom. Well, well, I don't feel surprised; I don't wonder at it in the least; I admit to the full that the idea is full of peril, and you have not the same inducements to urge you forward that I have. Well, let us say no more about it; it need not mar our friendship. I don't wish you to join me against your inclination in any enterprise, no matter of what character, and more especially in one of such a private nature as this."

"I have only a word or two to say," said Claude Duval. "I confess that my opinion is the same as Tom's. Like him, I believe that we stand not the least chance, but that our capture or death will follow the attempt as naturally as night follows day."

"Very good, then; you will wait here until I return."

"Stay a moment, Dick. I should like you to reflect upon this; Maud is only remanded. At the most, that remand will not be of more than a month's duration. We all know how near she was to being found not guilty yesterday, and the probability is, that at the second trial she will be set free, because there will be no excuse to make in order to detain her."

"But," cried Dick, "do you think that I would consent to her remaining in prison a whole month longer? Never—never! She shall be set free, and in a few hours, too. A month! I cannot bear the thought of such a thing. I wish now that I had acted according to the dictates of my own judgment in the first instance. Then, if I had done so, Maud would have been with us here to-day."

"Perhaps," said Tom.

"Well, perhaps I might have failed, I know; but, still, I generally succeed in that which I resolutely take under hand. Farewell, my friends! It is, perhaps, all for the best that I should start upon this mission alone. Perhaps success will be all the more certain for it. At least, I will try to look upon it in that light. Farewell!"

"But, Dick!" they exclaimed.

Turpin paid no attention, but, plunging among the trees, was immediately lost to their view.

They called again, and then the three highwaymen were about to rush after him, fearing, in his present state of mind, he would do some rash and fatal act, when Tom King asked them to pause.

"Let us consult a moment," he said. "Do you think he seriously contemplates attempting Maud's rescue himself?"

"I do. I feel sure that such is his intention," said Claude.

"Well, then, let us after him at once, and at all hazards prevent him from leaving the Chase; we must not scruple to employ violence. If he ride to London in his present excited state, his death is certain."

With these words the three highwaymen rushed with full speed in the direction Dick Turpin had taken.

They were immediately conscious that he had gone in a direct line for the spot where the horses had been left.

Suddenly emerging into a small open space, they saw him some little distance off.

He was doing something to the trappings of Black Bess, which he had managed to get ready for the road in such a marvellously short space of time.

"Hold—hold, Dick!" they cried. "Stop—stop!"

He just turned his head, but that was all.

Springing lightly and easily into the saddle, he turned Black Bess's head towards the borders of the Chase, and uttering that low, chirping sound which she so well understood as requiring her to put forth her best energies, Black Bess darted off and was out of sight instantly.

It was in vain that the three highwaymen strove to check her career.

Although the sun had not long set, there was a kind of mist or haze hanging over the whole face of the country rendering near objects confused and indistinct.

"Now what is to be done?" said Tom. "He is lost—I feel sure of it!"

"And I. It's a thousand pities!" exclaimed Claude.

"I wish I had agreed to have gone with him," said Sixteen-String Jack. "I should then have felt much easier in my mind than I do now."

"There's no help for it," said Tom. "We must mount and follow him with all speed. It would ill become us to allow him to ride thus headlong to destruction. Saddle your horses quickly—we must be off!"

"I fear we shall stand but little chance of overtaking him," exclaimed Claude Duval—"Black Bess was going at a wonderful pace."

"Well, let us try. Don't lose another moment. Forward—forward!"

With scarcely less celerity than Dick Turpin himself had used, the three highwaymen saddled their horses, mounted, and rode out from the Chase.

They looked around them and listened.

But they could neither see nor hear anything of their comrade.

"Don't linger!" said Tom. "Forward—forward! Every second takes him further away from us!"

"But which way has he gone?"

"This would be the way, for certain—it's the nearest to London."

Not another word was said, but all three plunged the spurs deeply into their horses' flanks and flew like the wind after Dick Turpin.

But although they stimulated their horses to the utmost to make every exertion, they found themselves, after a long, hard gallop, in just about the same position as at first.

That is to say, when they paused and listened, they were unable either to see or hear anything of the captain or his steed.

Filled with alarm at this result, they once more made their horses start off at full gallop, for they felt that was the only chance they had of success.

But to think of chasing Black Bess after she had had such a start as that, was almost as useless as chasing the wind.

Nevertheless, they would not admit of this conviction to their minds.

Suddenly Claude Duval reined-up.

And his companions no sooner observed the movement than they imitated his example.

"What's the matter?" they asked. "What has happened?"

"Hark!" said Claude. "I heard distinctly the clatter of many horses' feet upon the roadway! Hark! Did you hear it then?"

"Oh, yes, plainly enough! There can be not the least doubt about it!"

"They are dragoons," said Sixteen-String Jack. "I can tell that by the sound. Depend upon it, you were right, Tom, when you said they would be out in double force to-night."

"I quite expected such would be the case. And, now, my friends, what are we to do? We cannot continue our chase of Dick."

"That's certain!" cried Claude; "for, if we do, we shall run full tilt against these dragoons who are approaching. We had better make our way over the hedge, and cross the meadows.

"I think that's our best chance of avoiding them," said Tom King. "Come, and come quickly, or they may, perhaps, hear our movements."

The two highwaymen did not require much urging; for, not only were they solicitous of their own safety for their own sakes, but they felt that Dick's case would be hopeless indeed if they were not at hand to render him assistance.

Even should he be captured, they at least must retain their liberty, or there would be an end to all of them.

Fortunately. the hedge was of such a height that the horses could leap it with ease.

They alighted easily upon the soft turf of a meadow beyond.

The highwaymen pressed onwards, and owing to the foggy state of the atmosphere, they were convinced they should quickly get quite out of sight of their foes; and as for hearing, they had nothing to fear on that account, for the hoofs of the horses as they struck upon the turf produced scarcely an audible sound.

"And now," exclaimed Tom, pausing when he believed they were at a sufficient distance from the dragoons to make it safe for them to do so—"now, my friends, which direction shall we take next? How do you think we shall manage to intercept the captain?"

Both were silent.

"I can only think of one thing" continued Tom, "and that is to ride on towards London at full speed, and yet that's like nothing else but courting danger and death. I wish now that we had consented to go with him at all hazards."

"And I—and I!" murmured Claude and Jack.

"But it was such a hopeless excursion, and I never thought his determination was so strong. Forward, then, to London, my friends, let the risk be what it may! Forward—forward!"

With these words, the highwaymen, again clapping spurs to their steeds, dashed forward at a speed that would very soon bring them to their destination.

CHAPTER DCXLIV.

DICK TURPIN TAKES A TERRIFIC LEAP FROM THE BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER, TO AVOID HIS PURSUERS.

When Dick Turpin turned round and precipitately left his companions, there was a feeling of bitterness and anger about his heart, such as he had never before experienced.

He could not understand how they could talk and reason so calmly about Maud remaining a prisoner in Newgate for another month longer before anything else was done.

In his own mind he must have known that he did not stand the least chance of effecting his purpose if he went alone, and yet, as we have seen, acting upon the impulse of the moment, he had saddled Black Bess and darted off into the darkness of the night.

The excitement about his brain still continued.

Indeed, it seemed rather to increase than abate.

Unconscious of what he was about, he continued, at short intervals, to give utterance to the chirping cry; and every time it struck upon her ears, Black Bess would bound forward with additional speed.

He paid very little attention to the road he was taking.

He could feel that the hard highway was beneath the hoofs of Black Bess, and he knew that he was going in the direction of the metropolis. That was all the information he wished, or desired to possess.

By degrees, however, this fever and tumult of his thoughts calmed down, and then he became conscious that he had acted rashly and foolishly, as well as treated his comrades with injustice.

As he thought more and more upon this, he gradually reduced his mare's speed, and the gallant creature was glad enough to obey the rein, for the long gallop at the top of her speed had tried per powers.

Whereabouts he was, Dick Turpin could not clearly tell. He looked about him.

But the fog, which appeared to be drifting about in large masses, so altered the appearance of the landscape that every object seemed strange to him.

"No matter!" he muttered, at last. "It would be greater folly still for me to ride back to the Chase, and confess what my feelings now are! No—no; that will never do—never! I have started, and I must carry out my purpose. And, even now, the thought comes over me that I may, perhaps, be more likely to succeed by myself than if I had the aid of my three comrades."

He ceased suddenly.

For, all at once, there broke upon his ears a sound which arrested the whole of his attention.

It was a familiar sound to the horse, as well as the rider, and Black Bess turned her ears backwards in the direction from which it came.

"Horsemen at full gallop!" exclaimed Turpin, "and a large party of them, too! The speed is terrific! Then Tom was right, after all, when he said the dragoons would be out to-night, for they are dragoons, I am certain!"

It was easy for Dick to distinguish the difference between the sounds made by the horses used by the police officers and those used by the light dragoons.

"They are close behind me," he murmured. "Well, no matter—no matter! I am anxious to reach London in the shortest possible space of time, and I shall have a little excitement to urge me onwards. Now, Bess, on—on!"

Again Black Bess put forth all her marvellous powers of speed.

Suddenly, however, as he passed a spot where the highway was intersected by two cross-country roads, there suddenly emerged from the trees another troop of dragoons.

These set up a loud shout as Dick passed by, and immediately a hot pursuit commenced.

Dick waved his hat defiantly, and pressed onwards.

But the dragoons were frightfully close behind.

Indeed, he was within range of their carbines.

The sudden appearance of this second troop of dragoons is thus accounted for:—

They were making their way along one of the cross-country roads we have mentioned, and it was just as they were about to emerge on to the highway that Dick Turpin swept past at such a furious speed.

Then, never doubting that he was one of whom they

were in pursuit, they pressed after him with all the speed they could induce their horses to make.

In spite of all her exertions, Black Bess could not gain much upon the horses behind her.

Several causes combined to produce this result.

For one, there was the trifling space between them at the first, and though this was made greater, yet it would be some time before she would be able to increase upon them so much as to fairly get out of their sight.

Ther, Black Bess was to some extent exhausted by her first gallop, which she had taken while Dick Turpin was in such a state of mental excitement.

Had he been in his sober senses he would never have dreamed of allowing her to make so much exertion unnecessarily.

Then, thirdly, tne horses possessed by this troop of dragoons were of very superior quality—indeed, they had all been picked, and were remarkable for their fleetness and endurance.

Every few seconds Dick glanced over his shoulder at his pursuers, and noted with no slight degree of alarm that they kept so close upon his track, and that in spite of all her efforts, Black Bess could not gain upon them to any great extent.

With low, cheering words, however, he endeavoured to urge her onwards.

Luckily the road was level, and in good condition, so that there was little fear that she would make a false step, or stumble.

Should she do such a thing his enemies would be upon him before he could recover her.

All at once the fog drifted away over the meadows, as it was impelled along by a fresh breeze which had sprung up.

Looking before him, Dick at once became familiar with his whereabouts.

At no great distance in advance was an old wooden bridge crossing a river.

Over this bridge he would have to pass in order to reach London.

This old-fashioned structure was strangely planned, for it spanned the river in a diagonal direction.

Seeing the bridge, Dick Turpin gave a cry of satisfaction, for he was surprised to find himself so much nearer to London than he could possibly have believed.

Glancing behind him, he saw that he was beginning to make the distance between himself and his pursuers greater and greater.

In another moment the bridge was gained.

It was a narrow, tottering fabric, and was composed of unhewn logs of wood.

Common safety made it necessary for all persons crossing the bridge on horseback to do so at reduced speed.

Dreading the consequences of a fall more than his enemies gaining upon him slightly, Dick Turpin pulled up Black Bess with the intention of allowing her to pass over it at a steady trot.

When once the other side of the bridge was reached, he knew all would be well, for there was a rapid yet gradual descent, in flying down which he would quickly make up for the time he had lost.

Just about as he reached the centre of the bridge, however, he suddenly perceived the figures of a large body of police officers coming towards him.

In consequence of the slope of the road from the other side of the bridge, Dick Turpin had not been able to see these police officers until they were actually upon the structure.

He had not heard them, for, as the ascent was steep, the police officers had allowed their horses to walk up.

Dick pulled up instantly and mechanically, while his brain spun round and round.

At the same time, one among the body of police officers uttered a terrific shout.

In spite of his mental confusion, caused by so suddenly finding himself in a situation of so much peril, Dick recognised the voice.

It was that of Mr. Wriggles.

The police officers then, with their chief at their head, pushed on to the bridge at full speed.

Then there came a cry from the dragoons.

They were close enough to see and comprehend the whole state of affairs, and one of them, in a powerful voice, cried out:

"Stop him—stop him! We have him now sure enough—caught like a rat in a trap! Make a firm stand! Don't permit him to break through your ranks!"

Just as these words were spoken, the troop of dragoons dashed on to the bridge.

Dick's capture now seemed certain.

There was apparently no loophole for retreat, nor the least opportunity for reflection,

In a few more seconds, at the most, he would be hemmed in and surrounded by these two bodies of his foes.

He was standing there, and they were rapidly closing upon him.

Dick knew that if his enemies once got around him on the bridge there would be an end to all possibility of escape.

He could not by any means break loose from them.

But he thought of Maud and the wretched existence she was leading in a cell in Newgate, and determined, no matter at what risk, to make the attempt to preserve his own liberty

All that we have just, at some length recorded, took place in an inconceivably short space of time.

Indeed, Dick Turpin's pause on the centre of the bridge and the appearance of his foes at both ends of it might be said to be instantaneous events.

Far down below, Dick could hear the rushing and roaring of the river, as it made its way through the constructed channel among the rocks.

He knew the water was far—very far beneath him, and that the bottom was composed of hard, jagged rocks.

Yet he made up his mind instantly to run the awful risk of leaping down.

It seemed like leaping to certain death.

But it was the only means by which he could avoid his enemies.

Therefore, without appearing to his enemies to pause or hesitate a moment, Dick Turpin backed Black Bess as far against one side of the bridge as he could.

Then, bending low down in the saddle, and disregarding the shouts of triumph and calls for surrender that came from his foes, he murmured close to the ears of his gallant mare:

"Over, Bess—over!—over, my lass—over!"

Black Bess drew herself back slightly, and a half snort escaped her nostrils.

Then she gave one terrific bound, clearing with ease the wooden parapet of the bridge.

So astonished were both the dragoons and the police officers upon witnessing this feat, that, as if by one impulse, they all stopped their horses upon seeing Black Bess thus suddenly and wonderfully rise into the air.

She disappeared instantly.

As soon as they recovered themselves sufficiently to do so, the whole of the party hastened to the side of the bridge to look down and ascertain the result of the terrific leap.

But over the surface of the water there hung so dense a vapour that they could not see down distinctly.

A splash, however, came upon their ears.

Then they fancied they could see something like a struggle going on down below.

They strained their eyes, and endeavoured to make it out.

But they failed.

Spellbound, however, they maintained the same attitude for several moments.

Then Mr. Wriggles roared out:

"Down—down all of you! This is the way. Be quick—we shall have him now! That leap has placed him entirely in our power! If he is not dead, his horse must be crippled, and probably both are lying insensible at the bottom of the stream! Quick—quick! Recollect the reward is just the same whether he is alive or dead!"

A faint kind of hurrah followed these words, and at a reckless speed the police officers and dragoons galloped pell-mell down the steep bit of roadway that led up to the bridge.

Upon reaching the bottom, they stopped, and then, not without a great deal of difficulty, they managed to pick their way over the rough, jagged rocks towards the edge of the stream.

But impelled as much by curiosity as the desire to capture the notorious highwayman several police officers and

dragoons quickly succeeded in placing themselves upon the margin of the hasty current.

Then they endeavoured as well as they could to pierce the vapoury cloud that seemed to rise from the surface of the water and extend almost as far above into the air as the bridge above them.

But, although they used their best endeavours, and strained their eyesight to the utmost, they were unable to catch a glimpse of the highwayman or his steed.

At last, Mr. Wriggles arrived upon the bank of the stream.

He shaded his eyes carefully with both his hands, and looked steadily across the river.

"Can you see him—can you see him?" asked many eager voices.

"No," was the reply, given in a half-triumphant voice. "He must have been stunned or killed by the fall, and has been carried away by the current. Follow me! If we go further down the stream, we shall find him, to a certainty."

CHAPTER DCXLV.

RELATES WHAT BEFEL DICK TURPIN AND BLACK BESS AFTER THE LEAP FROM THE WOODEN BRIDGE.

When Dick Turpin felt Black Bess plunge down the terrific abyss, the bottom of which could not be distinguished, a strange, sickening chill crept over his heart.

That was about all he was conscious of, until, suddenly, he experienced a smart, severe shock. Then he was conscious of a struggle taking place on the part of Black Bess and himself.

He was aware that he was grasping the reins with extreme tightness, and that he was floundering in the water.

The current was very strong, and quickly carried both himself and his steed many yards below the bridge.

Then Dick began to recover himself.

The consciousness came over him that the injuries he had received, if any, were very slight.

This inspired him with hope, for if he had escaped so well, might not Black Bess have done so likewise?

She was still struggling with the stream—still being carried along by it.

He made an effort to stop himself.

The first time he failed, but the second was successful.

Planting his foot firmly against a piece of rock that jutted up from the bottom of the shallow river, he held to the reins with all his strength.

Feeling the restraint, Black Bess at once renewed her struggles to obtain a footing.

At length she partially succeeded, and then Dick, watching his opportunity, left the spot he then occupied and gained the bank.

This was by no means a very difficult task, for the stream itself, where it ran between the rocks, was of inconsiderable width.

Black Bess followed him with difficulty.

But whether this proceeded from some injury she had received, or whether it was only the action of the current, he could not at present tell.

The sides of the river were rugged and precipitous.

Clasping the huge masses of rock with one arm, Dick gradually drew himself out of the water, and then assisted Black Bess to follow him.

At length, after much difficulty, he managed to get her fairly on dry level ground.

Then, with a beating heart, and without thinking of himself for a moment, Dick proceeded to make a careful examination of his steed.

He feared to find some limb broken, or that she had received some serious injury.

That she should have altogether escaped injury seemed hardly possible.

Still, as he passed his hand rapidly, yet skilfully over every part of her body, he found that, beyond a few bruises and scratches, she had not received any serious damage.

"This is more than I could have hoped for," he ejaculated. "My heart is light, Bess, now that I know you are uninjured. You will be none the worse for that frightful leap, but I shall be sorry indeed for you to risk such another one. Surely the next time the result would be different!"

Then, after a pause, he said:

"I wonder whether I am hurt? Well, no matter; I would not care how many joints I had broken so that Black Bess was whole and sound. Let me try; I think that I have been lucky enough to escape with bruises and scratches, too."

While speaking these words, the highwayman rapidly made an examination of his person.

He was not long in discovering that he had received several alarming contusions, the effects and pains of which would be more perceptible in a few hours than they were then.

One ankle seemed badly sprained.

But to this mishap he attached but slight importance.

Then the sound of the voices of his enemies, as they made their way along the banks of the stream, reached his ears.

"They will search for me in the river's bed," he ejaculated; "that's where they'll expect to find me, so I'll steal off as silently as I can, and leave them there to look to their hearts' content."

Dick did not mount.

But merely holding by the bridle, led Black Bess over the masses of rock until at length he entered the high-road.

He then began to feel severe pains in many parts of his body, and their violence seemed to increase each moment.

But as for Black Bess, she seemed much better.

"I'll mount," exclaimed Dick, "and will soon be far away from this spot."

Dick never knew till then how difficult the simple act of mounting a steed might be made.

In vain he endeavoured to lift his left foot and place it in the stirrup.

Every time a cry of intolerable bodily pain would be wrung from his lips, and his foot would sink to the ground again.

At last, finding it impossible to mount in the ordinary method, he looked about him to find something that would aid him.

There was nothing but a five-barred gate.

Time was precious, and so he resolved to make use of this.

He led Black Bess close up to it, and then, with great pain and difficulty, climbed up the wooden bars one by one.

At length the top was reached, and then, by clinging tightly to the saddle, he managed to drag himself into it.

When once he was seated there, however, the chief part of the difficulty was over.

At a gentle rate Black Bess moved off down the lane.

She seemed to be in pain, and appeared to move her joints stiffly, and with difficulty.

Dick himself found his own pains grow worse and worse.

In spite of himself, an exclamation of pain would be wrung, at frequent intervals, from his lips.

Still he continued on his course, but gently; for although he listened with the greatest intentness, he failed to hear the least sound indicating the approach of his enemies.

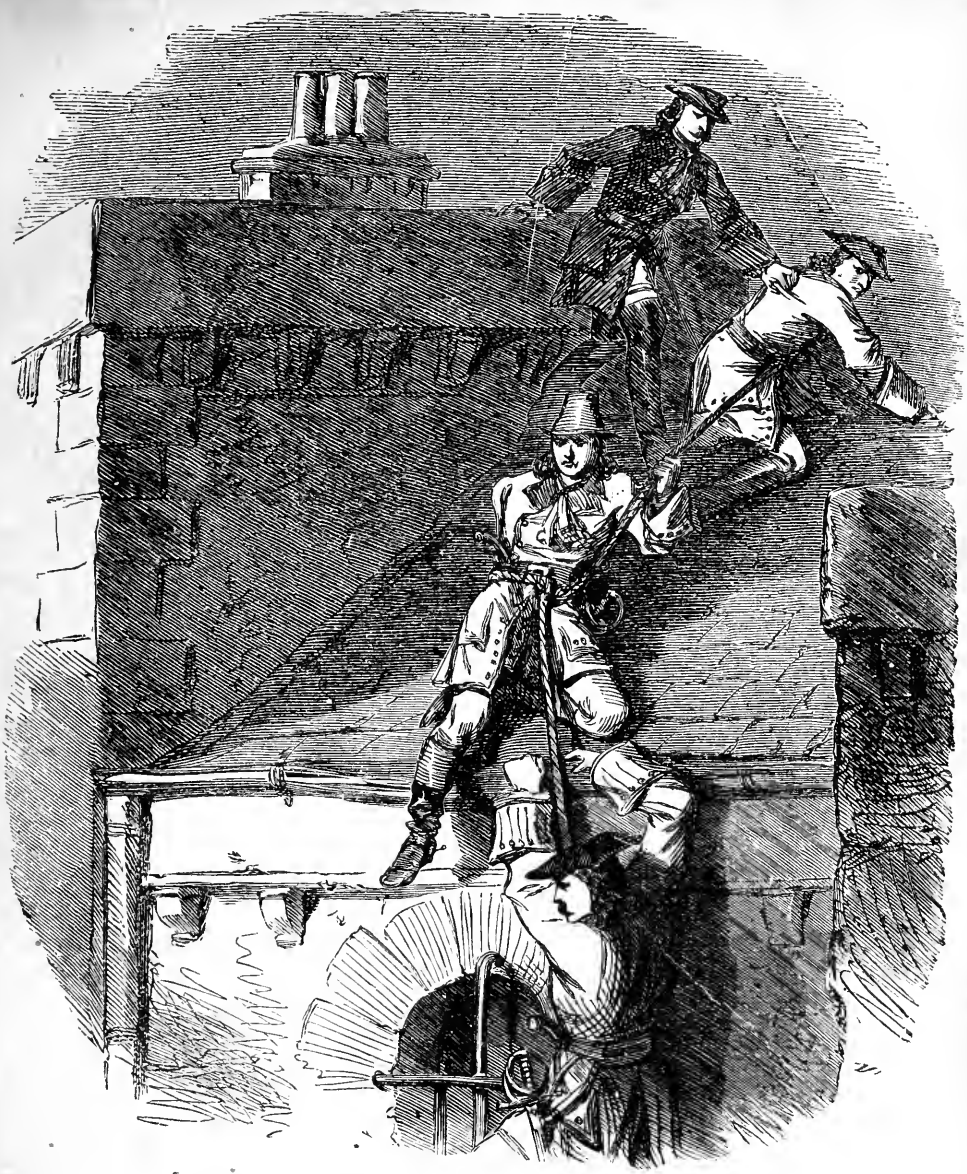
The fact was, after viewing the bed of the river, and looking up at the height of the bridge above, all had come to the conclusion that the leap must have resulted in death, and that the two bodies had been carried away by the current.

Such being the universal belief, both upon the part of the police officers and the dragoons, they all busied themselves in looking along the banks of the river, and behind jutting fragments of rocks for Dick Turpin and Black Bess, who at that very moment were riding along in comparative safety.

"The risk will be great," said Dick to himself, "but I feel that I cannot travel much farther in my present condition. At all hazards I must stop at the next inn I come to, and have my own wants and those of Black Bess carefully attended to."

Another cry of pain came from his lips, and then he heard suddenly a beating of horses' hoofs.

The riders were evidently a long way off and not by any means in strong numbers



[DICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS ON THE ROOFS OF NEWGATE.]

They were coming towards him, however, that was quite evident, and coming also at a speed at least four times greater than that which he was then making.

"They'll soon overtake me," he muttered, "and I don't care to increase Black Bess's speed. I'll draw aside, and let them pass."

Having come to this determination, Dick drew up close underneath the shadow of a large tree which had many wide-spreading branches.

On came the horsemen with unabated speed.

Gradually, however, as they approached, he fancied their speed relaxed, until at length, to his extreme vexation and alarm, they stopped in the roadway exactly opposite the tree beneath the shadow of which he stood concealed.

This was as awkward an event as could well have been imagined.

That Dick might have escaped the notice of these horsemen had they continued to gallop on, was quite within the bounds of possibility.

Now that they had paused so close, they could scarcely fail to see him, notwithstanding the darkness of the night and the wide-spreading shadow cast by the old tree.

And Dick was not only unable to see any means by which he could extricate himself from his present difficult position, but his pains were so violent that they seemed more than he could bear without giving vent to a cry.

The horses were three in number, and as Dick gazed at them from the shadow, he fancied the forms of the riders were familiar to him.

Their faces he could not see.

He waited anxiously to hear them speak.

But all three of the travellers seemed very much exhausted and out of breath, as though they had ridden hard for a great distance without stopping.

The horses also showed symptoms of distress, and

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appeared to be quite agreeable to taking a few minute's rest.

"It's quite time we——" said one of the travellers, but he was interrupted before he could get any further.

Dick Turpin no sooner heard the first word uttered, than he recognised the voice.

It was Tom King's.

With a cry, in which surprise, pleasure, and pain were strangely commingled, Dick Turpin rode forward.

"My comrades!" he exclaimed. "Is it possible? How came you here?"

"The captain, by all that's wonderful!" exclaimed the three highwaymen, who were not a little startled by Dick's sudden appearance upon a spot which they perfectly believed was occupied only by themselves.

Their first surprise quickly wore away, however, and, pressing closely round him, they exclaimed:

"This is indeed a lucky chance, Dick! We had almost lost all hope."

"But what has happened that you are here? Why were you in pursuit of me?"

"Because," said Tom, "when you hurried off in that insane sort of way, we felt sure you would not go far without meeting with serious danger."

"I admit," said Turpin, "that I had worked myself up to such a pitch of excitement, that I was scarcely conscious of what I was about."

"We all saw that, and so we resolved to pursue and overtake you if possible; but we lost sight of you in the fog, and were afraid we stood no chance."

"Then how came you here, and why did you stop just opposite that particular tree?"

"I will tell you. Hearing a troop of dragoons on the road behind us, we for safety's sake left the highway and took to the meadows. By this means we eluded them. Then, upon reaching the highway, we judged that you would make your way to London, and therefore resolved to gallop there too."

"Well?"

"We rode hard, and a few minutes ago resolved to pull up for a few moments, as the roadway is dark here, and allow our horses to regain their wind."

"Then our meeting has been brought about by the merest chance?"

"The merest!"

"If you had galloped by I should never have suspected your identity."

"It seems most extraordinary to me," said Claude Duval, "that you should happen to be under that tree just at that particular time!"

"And that you should pause just opposite to it instead of stopping further along the road!"

"It is a chance we must all rejoice at," said Tom King. "But now, Dick, give us your adventures."

In as few words as he could, consistent with being properly understood, Dick Turpin acquainted his comrades with all that had befallen him since their parting, a short time before.

They listened to his account of his dreadful leap from the wooden bridge with breathless wonder.

"We must be doubly cautious!" said Tom King, as soon as the captain had concluded. "Our danger increases! Dragoons and police officers are both abroad to-night, and evidently in quest of us!"

"There is no doubt about that."

"And you may depend that they are in strong numbers, and these are not the only roads they are patrolling!"

"It is through that unfortunate affair of yours, Jack!" said Dick Turpin. "Rest assured Mr. Wriggles has made a tremendous hubbub, and been the means of bringing all these troops out!"

"He is not dead, then?"

"No; I have heard his voice."

"I thought he would survive that ride."

"I have just been thinking," said Dick Turpin, "that all these strange events which have lately fallen out have happened for a wise purpose. In the end, all will be well!"

"What do you mean, captain?"

"I will explain to you as well as I can. But——"

"What?"

"We must repair to some inn close at hand."

"Will it be safe?"

"When I heard you in my rear, I had just made up my mind to do so, and run the risk. I am all bruises and scratches, and very anxious to have my own hurts seen to, as well as those of Black Bess."

"Both are very serious," said Tom King "and must not be neglected. I believe there is a rude place—half cottage, half inn—not far from here, where, doubtless, you will get all that you require, and there will be no necessity for us to stay long; so that there is not much danger after all."

CHAPTER DCXLVI.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES HAVE A LONG AND SERIOUS DISCUSSION, WHICH LEADS TO IMPORTANT AND EXCITING RESULTS.

WHILE speaking these words, Tom King put his horse in motion.

The others followed his example.

A few minutes' ride brought them to the dwelling of which he had spoken, and which answered very well to the description he had given of it.

The inhabitants were not a little surprised to see such a large party ride up to the door, for it was a little frequented spot.

They took charge of the horses gladly, and invited the visitors to enter.

The highwaymen were well enough pleased with the look of the place, for it certainly did not seem likely to be visited or found by their foes.

Although in such acute bodily pain Dick Turpin would insist upon proceeding to the stable and examining his mare.

It was a great relief to his mind to find that her hurts were so trifling as scarcely to be worthy of mention.

A little skin was rubbed off here and there, and one fetlock was badly swelled, but those things would easily be got right in time.

Leaving her at last, with many strict injunctions to the lout who performed the duties of ostler, Dick Turpin retired to the inn.

Although bruised and knocked in many places, none of the hurts were serious enough to require the application of anything more than sticking-plaster, which the landlady of the inn supplied them with.

Dick then dried his clothes, and by this time began to feel tolerably comfortable.

"Now, my friends," he exclaimed, "let us seat ourselves, and I will give you the explanation I mentioned."

They obeyed, and while sipping their glasses, Turpin spoke as follows:

"My comrades," he began, "first of all let me inform you that it is my unalterable determination to set Maud at liberty to-night—at least, to make an attempt at it. Do not shake your heads or say put it off to another time. That will be useless. I go to-night, and I leave you free to accompany me or not."

"But——" said Tom.

"Wait till I have done," said Turpin, interrupting him. "I can't go into the long question about Maud further than this. She is in Newgate, but, if I am alive, she will not be to-morrow morning."

The highwaymen remained silent and made no sign.

"Now, my comrades, I will ask you in one word whether you will accompany me in this enterprise or not? I need not say that I shall be best pleased if you will. You think it is a reckless exposure of life and liberty. If you will listen to me a moment or two longer, however, I shall be able to show you that the expedition is not nearly so dangerous as you imagine it."

"I don't know how you can make that out."

"Shall I try?"

"Yes, by all means."

"Then I will. I must be brief, for the night is going on apace. Well, then, it struck me that your trick upon Wriggles, which at first I thought so adverse to us, would in reality be a great safeguard."

"How so?" asked Jack, in the utmost astonishment.

"In his rage at the manner in which he had been treated, he would raise a great clamour and get all the men out he possibly could, being determined, no doubt, to annihilate us all to-night. He is out himself, I know that, because I heard his unmistakable voice quite distinctly. Now, then, from all this, does it not strike you

that the impression among our foes is that Newgate will receive no share of our attention to-night, and, consequently, that it will be less closely guarded than on any succeeding night?"

Some moments elapsed before any reply was made to this speech.

The three highwaymen looked into each other's countenances successively.

It seemed as though they were all ready to say something, but neither liked to speak first.

At length Claude and Sixteen-String Jack looked Tom King in the face and nodded.

"You wish me to speak first?" he said, interrogatively.

"Yes—yes."

"Then I will do so."

"Now, Tom," said Dick Turpin, "bear in mind all that I have said, and let me have your opinion."

Turpin waited anxiously for Tom to speak, for he knew full well that his words would have great weight with his two companions.

"What you say is not altogether without reason," commenced Tom King.

"Bravo!"

"Indeed, the more I consider upon the subject the more does the danger wear off. Whether we are likely to succeed or not I can't say, but of this I am quite certain, that no better night than this could possibly be found if we waited a whole month for it."

Dick sprang forward, and grasped Tom's hand, and shook it warmly.

"You are with me, Tom!" he cried, "and I am glad of it! Now Claude and Jack, what say you?"

"Why, we are with you too, of course!" was the immediate reply. "We only wanted to hear what Tom thought to decide us."

"Well, then, my friends," cried Dick Turpin, "I am heartily glad to think we are once more united. Come on! Do not let us lose any more time, for every moment is precious. On our way to London we can talk over our plans. We are four in number, and it will not be a trifle, I feel assured, that will turn us back."

"You are right. What is the time?"

"Half-past ten."

"It's later than I thought."

"Still the night is young," cried Dick, "and we are in plenty of time to achieve our object. We can get from here to London in something less than half an hour."

"Then we had better start at once."

"Yes; finish up your glasses, and we will be off."

The glasses were emptied, the landlady called in, the reckoning paid, and then the highwaymen went out into the yard to see after their horses.

In a few minutes more they were fairly on the road to London, riding at a swift pace, but yet not so fast as to prevent them from conversing easily with each other.

As they all four bent their attention upon one point, it was not likely that any long time should elapse before one of them would have something to propose that was likely to answer the end in view.

Then an idea, when once started, quickly received suggestions from one and the other, until, in a marvellously short space of time, it grew up to a perfect plan of operations.

What the highwaymen's plans were we will not trouble the reader with.

So much depended upon circumstances over which they had not the slightest control, that it was impossible for all that they proposed to be carried out.

It will be sufficient for us to state that they formed a plan, and what that plan was will be best developed by a description of their actions.

Without meeting with any impediment by the way they managed to get as far as Smithfield Market.

They might now be said to be within sight of their destination.

The night was one exactly suited to their purpose.

The fog, of which we have spoken as being perceptible in the open country, was very much thicker and denser in London.

In Smithfield Market it had settled in one huge, heavy mass.

Few persons were abroad, and the enclosure, with its posts and rails, looked strange and ghost-like.

The highwaymen stopped near the north end of the market, and, standing together as close as their horses would allow them, Dick said, in a low voice:

"Now, my friends, we meet with difficulty the first. What are we to do with our horses?"

"It won't do to proceed any nearer to Newgate with them—that's certain," said Tom King.

"No, we must not venture to take them any nearer, I'm sure. And, now, the question is what are we to do with them?"

"I can think of nothing," said Sixteen-String Jack, "save the plan that I proposed to you some time ago, that one of us should remain in charge of the horses while the other three went to the prison."

"And who would be the one that would like to be left behind? Not you, Jack, I am sure."

"No, I should not; but it strikes me some one will be obliged to stay."

Just at that moment, the figure of a man came creeping towards them through the fog.

Owing to the darkness, and to being closely occupied in conversation, the highwaymen did not observe the approach of this man until he was close to them.

Then, suddenly, to their great surprise, he bounded forward, and cried, in delighted yet suppressed tones:

"Come at last, captain—come at last! I knew you would come, if I only had the patience to wait for you! Come at last!"

These words were addressed to Dick Turpin, and took him by surprise, as well as his companions.

The man seemed to be a friend, and yet Turpin did not recognise him.

This was strange, for the highwayman's memory was not overburdened with the recollection of friends.

Yet there was something familiar in the man's voice which seemed to carry him a long way back to the scene of early adventures.

"Who are you?" said Dick, speaking rather sternly. "Be careful! Who are you, I say?"

"Why, captain, don't you know me? Have you forgotten all about—about Jabez?"

"Jabez?"

"Yes; from Tom Davis's, at the Hand and Keys. You know all about it."

"And I know you," said Dick; "and am heartily glad to see you. You could not have presented yourself at a more welcome moment. Why you should expect me to appear anywhere about this spot I can't imagine!"

"I'll explain that to you directly, captain. You see, the other day I happened to meet with my old master. He looked a deal more cheerful than he had done for many a day, and I pretty soon found out what was the reason. It was because you had found him out, and taken him in hand—bless you for it!"

"Well—well."

"And I heard who was in the Stone Jug yonder; so I thought to myself that one of these nights you would be coming here and taking her out, in spite of the police; so ever since that night I have been watching about, first in one part, and then in another, hoping to catch sight of you, thinking I might be useful."

"You are a faithful fellow, Jabez; and you shall be well rewarded for to-night's work!"

"Thank you, captain! I shall be glad to receive something from you, for I have been very badly off lately; in fact, I seemed to go down along with the old inn."

"That will all be altered very soon," said Dick. "You have come just at the right moment; we want you to take charge of our horses for a couple of hours, or, maybe, longer."

"I'll do that for you, never fear. I've done it before, and you need not feel frightened in the least, or trouble your head about them at all while they're in my charge."

"I know that, Jabez—I have every confidence in you; so I sha'n't ask you what you are going to do with them, or where you are going to take them, but shall dismount and leave them in your hands."

"Very good, captain."

"But have you any information that you can give us about the police officers? Perhaps you can furnish us with a hint or two that will turn out of value?"

"I don't know that I can, captain. I can only say that you have got a very difficult and dangerous job before you, and you must take very great care, for, since I have

been here, the officers have been in very strong numbers keeping guard all round about the prison."

"And are they here to-night?"

"Oh, no doubt of it."

"As many as usual?"

"I should think so."

"Have you seen them?"

"No, captain, I have not seen any to-night, and that's what makes me think that things are just in the same position as they have been for more than a week."

"Well, good-bye, Jabez!" said Dick Turpin, handing the reins of Black Bess into the faithful fellow's hand. "We shall be back here in not less than two hours; how much longer I cannot possibly tell; but be sure that you are here when we do come back."

"Oh, never fear!"

"And take care of the horses."

"I say again don't trouble yourself in the least about 'em—don't think about 'em!"

"I will not," said Turpin, and as he spoke he gave Jabez several silver coins.

Then, drawing their cloaks closely around them, the four highwaymen stole swiftly across Smithfield Market, and quickly disappeared in the maze of courts and alleys that lay near St. Bartholomew's Hospital.

CHAPTER DCXLVII.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMPANIONS MEET WITH STILL FURTHER SUCCESS IN THE PROSECUTION OF THEIR ENTERPRISE.

Dick Turpin and his companions strode onwards in silence, until suddenly the former paused.

They were standing just within the mouth of a court branching off from the north side of Newgate Street.

But before they ventured to emerge, Dick looked carefully up and down, but seeing nothing to excite his alarm, he left the court, and walked up the street in the direction of St. Paul's.

His comrades followed.

Presently he crossed over to the south side of the street, and, keeping the houses on his left hand, stepped forward slowly.

He was reconnoitring.

Where the police officers had disposed themselves, he could not tell.

Certain it is not one of them was visible in Newgate Street.

At length, when very near to the old prison, Dick turned down a very narrow, unsavoury court.

This led, by a devious and circuitous route, to Newgate Market.

It also worked its way round to the back of the prison.

"We shall find either watchmen or police officers here, you may depend," said Dick, in a whisper, to his comrades. "Wait here a minute where you are. I'll step forward and reconnoitre. It will not be so dangerous as for all four of us to go at once."

This was assented to.

Dick looked about him rapidly and cautiously.

At last he found what he sought.

Then, having satisfied himself by glancing round that no one was watching, he beckoned his companions to approach.

They obeyed.

"Do you see that house?" he said, pointing out one from the rest—"I mean that which is built quite against the prison wall, and has a white stone coping?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Well, then, it seems to me that is the house to suit our purpose."

"Very likely. But it's a long way from the top of that house to the top of the wall."

"How far?"

"Twenty feet."

"Yes, it's quite that, perhaps a trifle more."

"And shall we be able to climb up that wall like so many flies?"

"Well, not exactly; but I think, if we can manage to obtain a good strong rope with a hook at the end of it, and then get on the top of that house, we should be able to throw the hook upwards until it caught upon the revolving spikes at the top of the wall; then, by the aid of the rope, we could draw ourselves up without much difficulty."

"But the rope—where shall we get that?"

"I ought to have thought of that before. I can't imagine how I happened to forget it."

"It seems it cannot be dispensed with."

"No—without you can devise some other means of getting within the boundary of the prison."

"I think there cannot be an easier."

"Then if we only knew where to find Jabez, he would get us out of the difficulty pretty quick. Suppose you three conceal yourselves among some of these old sheds, while I, as cautiously as I can, go over to Smithfield Market again, and try to find Jabez?"

"There's no need for you to go, captain."

"I think I had better. I look upon this excursion as entirely one of my own; and besides, I fancy I should succeed with Jabez better than either of you. He would know me in an instant."

"Good! Return as quickly as you can—you will find us somewhere near this place."

With these words, Turpin departed.

His heart was filled with much greater confidence than it had been up to the present time, and he stepped along the street quite boldly.

It did not take him many minutes to reach Smithfield, and to his agreeable surprise as soon as he reached the old spot he was greeted by Jabez.

"Why, captain," he cried, "what brings you back so soon?"

"I want your assistance, Jabez."

"That's right, I thought you did—blest if I didn't! But after I took the horses to a place where I knew they would be taken care of I came back here to watch, for I thought you might come for something or other."

"It turns out a very lucky thing as it happens," said Dick. "I want you to go somewhere and purchase a long, strong, thick rope."

"As strong and as thick as I can get, I suppose?"

"Yes, it may have to bear a good weight to-night, and it would be awkward if it gave way."

"I'll see to it, captain—I'll see to it. Only give me the money, and I'll be back with the rope directly."

"Stay, I want something more."

"What?"

"A strong iron hook to fix at the end of the rope—a kind of grapnel, so that when I throw it upwards it may lay right hold of anything—you understand?"

"I know all about it, captain. Is there anything more you want?"

Dick paused, and then recollecting in the course of the expedition he might require various other articles, and that the present was a capital opportunity of obtaining them, he gave Jabez several other commissions.

"Now, captain, you sit down there on that rail and don't say a word to anybody while I am gone; I sha'n't be very long away, and I'll bring you the things wrapped up in a neat little parcel."

With these words he hurried off, and was almost instantly lost in the fog, which appeared to increase in density every hour.

Dick seated himself upon a damp and crumbling wooden rail and looked about him.

But the night was too unpleasant a one for people to be abroad, and he believed that he should escape all interruption.

Then he heard the bell of St. Paul's chime the half-hour.

"That's half-past eleven," he said. "Time flies quickly—I must make haste, for there's yet a great deal to do."

Jabez was only absent for a very few minutes, and yet the time seemed endless to Dick.

At last he had the pleasure of seeing him returning, carrying a stout parcel.

"There are the things, captain, put them under your cloak, and I hope you will make good use of them. I have ventured to add one or two things myself that I thought of."

"I shall find a use for all of them, no doubt," said Turpin.

"Are you sure, captain," asked Jabez, "that I can't come with you and help you?"

"Yes—you will render me service ten times as valuable

by having the horses on this spot just when we come here for them, and want to ride off."

"They shall be here, captain—I pledge you my life they shall be here!"

Dick was quite satisfied with this assurance, and so, with all the necessary implements for his enterprise in his possession, turned round and hurried off again towards Newgate Market.

He reached the wooden shed in which his three companions were concealed, without raising the least alarm.

"Is that you, captain?" they asked.

"Yes. Is all well?"

"Quite well; there has not been a mouse stirring since your departure."

So saying, Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack came forward.

"Here is this parcel," said Turpin, "that contains the rope and some other articles. I fancy we had better divide it amongst us here, and then, afterwards pay a visit to yonder house."

"Agreed. But, Dick——"

"What?"

"Have you thought of how we are to gain admission to that house without creating an alarm?"

"No, I have not; but it must be done somehow. It is to be hoped that the inmates are few in number."

"But that's all chance."

"So is our whole adventure. Come on—follow me! The only thing that I can tell you is: observe my movements narrowly, and follow me up closely in all I do."

His three comrades promised compliance.

Dick then led the way towards the house he had pointed out.

As the first step it was necessary he should get on the roof of it without creating any alarm; but how he was to do this seemed a mystery.

With various thoughts chasing each other through his brain, he strode on until the door of the house was reached.

Then, raising the knocker, he allowed it to fall again, producing a dull, heavy dab.

"Stand aside," he said, in a whisper, to his companions, "so that your forms are concealed in the shade. When the door opens and I enter, follow me closely in and shut the door after you."

Dick had scarcely time to speak these words before the door opened.

An untidy-looking little girl, carrying a guttering candle in her hand, made her appearance at the door.

In an instant Dick Turpin darted in, and his companions kept just behind him.

With one sudden movement of his hand, he extinguished the light, and, before the frightened girl had time to recover from her astonishment, he put one hand before her mouth in such an effectual way as to stop all possibility of outcry, and the other round her waist.

"Now," said Dick, in a whisper, "be quiet, and pray to yourself for your life to be saved, for it is in greater danger than ever it was before!"

The girl made several convulsive movements with her arms and legs in reply to this speech.

No doubt, could she have succeeded in getting her mouth at liberty, she would have uttered a good loud scream.

But that was impossible.

"Stand still!" cried Dick—"stand still! or it will be the worse for you!"

In the meanwhile, the other highwaymen having entered closed the door, and hastily shot a couple of bolts into their sockets.

"Now, Tom," cried Turpin, "be quick! Bind this girl! Don't hurt her, but we must for our own sakes, keep her prisoner for a little while."

This command was executed with great speed.

But before they had time to arrange their proceedings any further, a voice came from the basement of the house.

"Maria—Maria!" it said, in shrill, piping tones. "What is the matter, you jade? Who is it? Why don't you speak, you little wretch?"

Maria was silent for the best of reasons.

Then a footstep was heard upon the stairs, and the next moment, although the place was dark, the highwaymen managed to make out a dusky-looking form some little distance off down the passage.

"Maria," said the shrill voice again, "where are you?—what are you doing? I know you brought a candle with you, but where is it? Oh, you young hussy, wait till I catch you!"

So saying, the speaker came on until she was close to the spot where our friends were standing.

They then seized her immediately, bound her securely, and placed a gag in her mouth.

All this was done silently, speedily and well; nevertheless, not without some slight noise being made—quite sufficient to attract the attention of the other inmates of the dwelling, or, at anyrate to reach their ears, if they were trying to make out what was going on.

"Wait," said Dick—"wait a moment! We shall have some one else here directly. Silence!"

The three highwaymen stood profoundly still, then another voice from the depths below exclaimed:

"Jane—Jane! Oh, you villainous old wretch! where are you? What's the meaning of all this? Oh, you won't answer, won't you? Well, then, I'll come upstairs, if I have got the lumbago in my back, and see if I don't pretty soon make you!"

After the utterance of this threat, a slow and heavy footstep could be heard ascending the wooden stairs.

And then another form appeared in the passage.

It was that of an old man, doubtless the husband of the woman who had made her appearance a short time before.

"Oh, dear! Oh, curse this lumbago—it almost pulls me to the ground! Never mind, you old wretch, you shall have it, for all that! Where are you? You had better speak!"

All remained profoundly silent.

The old man thereupon appeared to grow very frightened—to think it strange that the girl and his wife should both be gone upstairs and never come down again.

He was just about thinking of making his retreat, when he felt himself suddenly seized by someone.

A cry rose to his lips.

But he could not utter it, for a hand was at that very instant thrust roughly before his lips.

Then, in the twinkling of an eye almost, he was securely bound, and placed along with the other two.

CHAPTER DCXLVIII.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES MEET WITH AN ALARM.

"WAIT a moment," said Dick Turpin. "I question whether we have caught them all yet; perhaps some one else will come if we only have patience, and then our task will be all the easier."

The highwaymen waited.

But the silence that prevailed in the house remained unbroken.

No other sound of footsteps reached their ears, and at length they came to the conclusion that no others were below.

How many inhabitants the house might contain they had no means whatever of knowing.

Let them be ever so many, they certainly had not been alarmed by the slight scuffling that had taken place.

By the directions of the captain, Sixteen-String Jack cautiously displayed a lantern, the light of which flashed quickly all round about him, in order that they might as much as possible make themselves familiar with the kind of place they were in.

Doors opened from both sides of the passage, and selecting one of these, Dick turned the handle, pushed it open, and entered.

The apartment beyond was in profound darkness.

Sixteen-String Jack followed, however; and by the aid of the dark lantern they saw that the chamber was rudely furnished as a kind of parlour or sitting-room.

The three tightly-bound forms were dragged in and placed upon the floor.

Then the door was closed, and Dick, turning the key in the lock, withdrew it and placed it in his pocket.

The other rooms on the ground floor they judged to be unoccupied, for the doors were all secure.

"Now, then," said Dick—"now is the time to reach the top of this house! Yet stay—this is the only door that is left, and we may as well secure that like the rest."

The door to which Dick Turpin alluded was the one communicating with the lower portion of the house.

This he quickly bolted, and then the whole party ascended the staircase with great swiftness and silence.

As soon as they reached the first-floor landing they paused

But here all was silent as the very grave itself.

Whether there were people occupying the rooms which opened from it they could not tell.

If so, they must be asleep, or, at any rate, unconscious of the struggle that had taken place in the passage.

Dick Turpin did not speak, but contented himself with simply pointing up the next flight.

The movement was understood, and they followed him with alacrity.

The third storey of the house consisted of a couple of large attics, which occupied a space immediately beneath the tiles.

The first attic door, before which they paused, was fast.

Dick ascertained it by raising the latch.

The noise he made was slight in the extreme, and yet evidently it sufficed to attract the attention of some one within, for a voice cried out, in tremulous accents:

"Who—who is there? Who are you? What do you want?"

"Now," said Dick, turning to his comrades, "here we are, as I might say, on the very roof of the house. We have managed to get so far without much trouble, and we must not now turn back because there's some one in this room."

"No, no—certainly not."

"Then I'll force the door. You follow me into the room, and bind whoever it is instantly. When we depart we will set them at liberty."

The attic door was old and frail, so that Turpin had really very little difficulty in forcing it.

He just placed his thumb on the latch and his shoulder against one of the panels, and it gave way at once.

"Aha!" said a voice loudly, exultingly—"you are foiled—foiled again! You shall never take me while I have life! Follow me, and try it on if you will!"

As soon as the door opened, the highwaymen all rushed into the room; and the first object that met their gaze was the form of a man in the act of scrambling through the attic window on to the tiles.

He turned and spoke just as he got outside, and, with the last words upon his lips, he disappeared.

The highwaymen exchanged glances.

"I wonder who he can be?" said Claude.

"That doesn't matter," returned Dick. "My only concern is whether he will be the means of raising an alarm, and attracting attention, not only to himself, but to us. He evidently takes us for officers of justice."

"Something like it."

"Well, he's gone, and I hope that's the last we shall hear of him."

As rapidly as possible, all four made their way to the window, and looked out.

A perfect mass of roofs and chimney-pots, of all sorts, sizes, and colours, met their view.

They looked long and anxiously in the direction the man had taken, but were unable to see the least signs of him.

"I believe he has gone," said Dick. "And, now, if it happens that there is no one in the adjoining attic, why, then we are all right!"

"Is it worth while to go and see?"

"Yes, I think so. It would be a great satisfaction to know that we had nothing to dread on that score. Come!"

Dick Turpin, as he spoke, led the way to the other attic.

To the relief of all, they found it was untenanted.

"Now," asked Tom King, "what is it we are to do next? Get out upon the roofs?"

"Yes; and from thence make our way on to the top of Newgate."

"And this house—shall you leave any guard in it, or let it guard itself?"

"Let it guard itself, I think, for I cannot spare one of you. Wait a moment, however. Before we leave it altogether, let us go to the foot of the stairs, and listen."

His proposal was at once adopted.

No sooner, however, did they lean over the banisters, than the sharp tinkling of a bell somewhere far down below reached their ears.

Then there came some loud and heavy knocks upon the front door.

The highwaymen looked at each other with some degree of apprehension.

"Who is that?" they asked.

Tinkle—tinkle went the bell again, with redoubled violence.

Then again ensued the tremendous knocking.

"What is to be done?" asked Tom King. "This is a difficulty I never once thought of taking into account."

"No; nor I," said Dick, stroking his chin. "It's awkward!"

"Very."

"Do you think——"

"What?"

"That those who are knocking and ringing in that furious style——Dear me, hark at that, they'll break the bell-wire if they try such a pull as that again!"

Tom was interrupted in what he was about to say by a great increase in the loudness of the sound of the bell.

"I wish they would break it," cried Dick, "or go away and leave us! Confound it, what did they want to come interrupting us in this fashion for?"

"I am sadly afraid," said Claude Duval, "that although we have been so uncommonly careful, we have been observed by some of the police officers and tracked to this spot. They have mustered their forces outside, and are now insisting upon admission."

Dick Turpin knew full well that this was far from being unlikely, yet he did not like to discourage his comrades by saying that he thought Claude's supposition was in all probability a correct one.

"Something must be done," said Dick, "there is no doubt about that!"

"But what?"

"Why, these people outside, whoever they may be, must be admitted or got rid of somehow, otherwise general attention will be directed to this house, the result of which will be that we shall be discovered."

"Exactly so, and I only wish that the matter could be adjusted as easily as it can be talked about."

"Wait a moment," said Dick. "I think I can at least ascertain what kind of people they are outside, and how many."

"Do you mean whether they are police officers or not?"

"Yes."

"Well, it will be something to know that. Hark, there goes the bell again—they are getting desperately impatient."

In the meanwhile Dick Turpin hurried into one of the attics which had its window situated in the front of the house.

He opened it instantly, and, scrambling out on to the roof, stood in the gutter and looked over the parapet.

The darkness was most intense, but notwithstanding he managed to make out the forms of two or three people standing near the front door of the house.

From the position they occupied it would seem that they had stepped into the roadway a few yards in order to look up at the front of the habitation, thinking, perhaps, to understand from its appearance why it was no attention was paid to their appeal.

Having seen this, Dick waited for no more, but hastily withdrew himself and returned to the attic.

"I think we can manage it," he said, addressing his companions. "Follow me downstairs again."

They obeyed.

But not very willingly.

Reaching the ground-floor, Dick took the key out of his pocket and opened the door of the room in which he had placed his three prisoners.

He went up to the girl, and, in a stern, terrific voice, said:

"Now, then, which do you prefer to do—to obey every word of my commands or to die this instant? Take your choice—it is quite indifferent to me!"

As the girl was gagged, she could not speak, but, never-

theless, she looked imploringly into the highwayman's countenance, and her eyes expressed as well as they could that she infinitely preferred obeying him to losing her life.

This was no more than Dick expected, and he at once made a sign to his companions to release her.

He then led her out into the passage, and whispered in her ear.

"Did you hear that knocking and ringing at the door?"

"Yes—yes, sir."

"Do you know who it is?"

"No, sir, I don't; I'm sure—I'm sure I don't! I suppose, though, it's somebody wants to see master."

"Very well, then. Now I am going to let you open the door and speak to whoever is there; but mind how you attempt to play me false!"

"Yes, sir. Oh dear, I wouldn't think of doing anything of the kind!"

"Mind you don't! I see there's a chain to the front door, and you can place it so that the door can only be pushed open a certain distance and no further. Now, if those outside inquire for anybody, no matter who, say they are not at home, and your master and mistress either, and that you have been left in the house with strict orders not to admit anybody until they return!"

"I will, sir—I will! But what will they say to me for not answering the door before?"

"Why, pretend to be very frightened; say that the noise terrified you. Now, then, go to the door and ask who is there!"

From the manner in which the girl placed herself under Dick's direction, it was pretty certain that she would obey all his commands.

With a great amount of confidence, therefore, he stood close to her, and in low, trembling tones, which were just the thing for the occasion, she asked:

"Who is there?"

"Then there is someone at home after all, it seems!" said a voice outside. "Why on earth didn't you come before?"

"What do you want?" asked the girl.

"Open the door, will you?" was the reply, "and don't keep us chattering here!"

The girl withdrew the bolts, and no sooner had she done so than the door was thrust violently open.

But the chain which Dick had seen, and which he had properly placed, would not permit the door to open to any great extent.

"You thought of coming in in a hurry, didn't you?" said the girl.

"You young jade!" said the voice outside. "Where's your master? Wait till I see him again, and I'll give you your character! Where is he, I say?"

"Master's out," said the girl.

"Out? Well, that's odd—confoundedly odd, after asking all three of us to come here and see him this blessed evening! Gone out, is he?"

"Yes, and missus has gone out too, and everybody else in the house except me, and they have left me here to take care of it, and told me I wasn't to let anyone in till they came back."

A hurried kind of consultation went on outside for a minute or two, and then the same voice which had hitherto spoken, exclaimed:

"Well, my girl, I don't know what you were doing, but you were not paying attention to the door when we rang, that's certain. However, tell your master that we called according to appointment. And thought it very strange to find him away from home."

These words closed the conversation.

The disappointed visitors walked away, and Dick Turpin, rapidly closing the door, shot the bolts into their sockets again.

CHAPTER DCXLIX.

DICK TURPIN, TOM KING, AND CLAUDE DUVAL SUCCEED IN GAINING THE ROOFS OF NEWGATE.

"That danger is over, and I breathe more freely now," said Dick Turpin, as he joined his companions. "Come on, my friends, I don't think we shall have anything else to fear in the shape of an interruption."

"We hope not, captain."

"So do I."

"But what are you going to do with that girl?"

"We won't leave her down here," said Dick, after a minute's pause. "I will take her up into one of the attics."

The old man and the old woman were therefore left to their own company in the room into which they had been so unceremoniously thrust, and the girl was made to accompany the highwaymen to the top of the house.

Upon reaching the attic, they again bound her and placed her in a chair.

Then going to the window, they one by one got out upon the tiles.

The roof was steep and slippery, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that they managed to maintain their footholds.

As soon as ever they got out into the gutter close to the parapet, they were all right.

The four quickly stood together, and then, following the direction of Turpin's finger, they saw close before them, and, reaching to a great height above their heads, the black, gloomy, frowning walls of the prison of Newgate.

"It will be no easy task to scale that," said Tom King, looking up at it.

"Yet it must be done," said Turpin. "Here is the rope, and now the only question is, are we strong enough to throw it over the wall? If so, it will catch in those iron spikes as we draw it back, and remain secure. Then to climb up the rope will be tolerably easy."

"We can but try, Dick," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"I will try myself first," said Dick. As he spoke, he arranged the rope in a convenient coil in his left hand, while in his right he held the hook.

He swung his arm backwards and forwards several moments, until he imagined he had gained sufficient impetus.

Then, fixing his eyes upon the summit of the wall, he let go.

The hook flew up in the air, and such was the force with which it was thrown that it drew the rope after it easily.

But instead of falling completely over the wall, as Dick had hoped, the iron hook only struck against the outer edge of it.

The stonework afforded no hold, and so down it fell with even greater rapidity than it had ascended.

The strong iron hook falling upon the tiles made a prodigious clatter, which alarmed the highwaymen not a little.

They all started violently, looked about them, and listened, as though they expected that an alarm would be the immediate result.

But as minute after minute passed away, they grew more assured and comforted.

"It won't do to have that happen often, Dick," said Tom King, "and yet it was a first-rate throw; the least bit more, and the thing would have been done."

"You try, Tom, this time," said Dick, handing him the rope.

"Nay, I would prefer letting Claude try first. Here, Claude, you are strong and have performed such a feat as this before to-day—up with it!"

"I don't know whether I can manage that, Tom," was the reply, "but I'll try my best."

Claude seized the hook, and, not without a great deal of trouble, managed to place himself in a position that exactly suited him.

Then, much in the same manner as Dick had done, he hurled the hook upwards.

But all saw that the piece of iron had been thrown with much greater skill and strength than before.

Up into the air it went, rising at least a foot above the iron spikes that garnished the top of the wall, and then falling clearly down on the inner side.

His comrades could scarcely refrain giving utterance to a faint hurrah.

The hook struck, with an audible clink, against the inner side of the wall.

They waited a moment or two in silence, so that any alarm which might have been raised by the slight sound should pass away.

And then, with beating hearts and trembling fingers, they began to draw the rope.

Suddenly, when it reached the top, their suspense arrived at a climax.

It was by no means certain that the hook would be turned in such a manner as to take firm hold of any one of the spikes.

It might slip completely through them, or it might in only a partial hold, and fall once more heavily upon the tiles.

This fear was soon put an end to.

The rope was drawn tighter and tighter still, until at last it was as strong as if it had been secured to an anchor.

"All's well!" cried Dick. "We have conquered one great difficulty. Now, however, don't pause, my comrades. Up—up with you; the sooner we are on the other side of this wall the better it will be for us!"

As he spoke, Turpin commenced to ascend.

"You had better allow me to reach the top first," he said, "for fear the rope should not bear our united weight, and 'tis best not to strain it too much at first."

This was assented to, and, with great nimbleness, Dick Turpin, assisted in some slight degree by the stone wall, climbed up the rope, and at length seated himself by the side of the iron spikes.

His three comrades then ascended in succession.

The top of this wall was an excellent place so far as obtaining an extensive view of the prison was concerned, and for quite a minute our friends did nothing but gaze intently around them.

Then Dick Turpin began to haul up the rope.

"It won't do for us to sit here on this wall a moment longer," he said, "because of the great danger of being seen. Our forms would show out clearly and distinctly against the light sky to anyone who happened to be below."

"Which way do you want to go? Do you know whereabouts Maud's cell is situated?"

"Yes, I do; I can point it out easily. That is to say, without they have made any exception in her favour, which I don't suppose they have done. Look down yonder to the right. Do you see that piece of building with a number of small windows all looking out into that open yard?"

"Yes—yes."

"Well, those are the windows of the condemned cells, and I suppose we may safely take it that she is in one of them."

"It will be very difficult to get at them, Dick," said Claude.

"It will; and yet I think, if you will call the details of my plan to mind, there is a strong probability of our being able to do it."

Claude said no more, and Dick Turpin secured the rope to the iron spikes.

He had to do this in a peculiar manner, for, after he and his comrades had descended by its aid on to the roofs below, it would be necessary for him to shake the rope and thus disengage the hook at the top of the wall.

He allowed his friends to slip down first, and then followed them.

He was pleased to find that the first shake of the rope was quite sufficient to displace the hook.

They expected it to fall, so that Sixteen-String Jack was lucky enough to catch the piece of iron in his hat.

By this means any alarm was prevented.

They were now upon a portion of the roof of the prison which rose up and down in sharp angles, and which consequently made it very difficult for them to creep over and retain their footing.

For the most part the roof was composed of lead, and the smooth, metal surface afforded neither hand nor foothold.

Then the consequences of a slip or a false step were something terrible to think of.

The mischief would not end with the death of the person who was so unfortunate as to lose his hold, but the falling of his body on the stones in the court-yard would immediately create an alarm that would probably cause the destruction of the others.

In the face of these circumstances a discussion was held.

At last it was proposed that the long rope, which had already done them such good service, should be again brought into requisition.

For the convenience of climbing, it had been knotted in many places; and now the highwaymen proceeded to tie it round their waists in such a manner that they were all connected by it.

This made their difficult task much easier, because if one should happen to slip he could be recovered by his companions.

At length they came to the last piece of sloping roof.

A few feet below them was the top of another part of the building.

This roof was flat.

"We must drop," said Dick Turpin, who was first. "I don't think there will be much danger."

"Still," said Tom King, who was next to him, "if there should happen to be anyone in a chamber just underneath that part of the roof upon which you are going to fall, they will hear the noise, and suspect something is amiss."

"That's true enough."

"I fancy you will be able to lower yourself by the aid of the rope until your feet touch the roof. Then I will follow, then Claude; Sixteen-String Jack will be last; but then we might catch him, and so prevent the slightest noise."

This was a good suggestion, and immediately carried into execution.

Scarcely, however, had they reached this lower roof, than Dick Turpin, who had crawled to the edge and looked down into the yard below, said, in a whisper:

"Silence—silence! Don't speak again above your breath!"

"What is it?"

"Come here and look!"

Cautiously and silently his companions obeyed.

Looking down, they found they commanded a view of one of the court-yards in the prison.

The ground was no very great depth, and, in spite of the darkness, to which their eyes were well accustomed, they could see distinctly.

Some half-dozen men, marching in order like soldiers, headed by one who carried a lighted lantern, were the first objects that met the view of our friends, and upon which they riveted their attention.

Evidently these men were warders or turnkeys, engaged upon the double duty of making a round of the prison to see that all was well, and to relieve those other officers whose term of duty had expired.

The highwaymen drew their heads back, so that only just the upper portion of them appeared above the top of the parapet; for they were fearful that the men below might raise their heads and look up, when they would be in serious danger of being seen.

That danger, however, passed away.

The party of men, having in a careless way walked across the yard and looked about them, being satisfied that all was well, passed through a little doorway, and immediately disappeared.

There was a moment's silence among the highwaymen after their departure, and then Tom King inquired:

"Well, Dick, what is it we are to do next?"

"Hush! I think we had better remain just as we are for a few minutes longer. It strikes me we shall see those men returning in a little while."

"Then, if you have any idea of that sort," said Claude, "we are certainly much better where we are."

Several minutes anxiously passed, during which our friends busied themselves by looking at every object that surrounded them.

The silence was unbroken, and there seemed no signs of the return of the guard of men.

"I think we might risk it," said Dick—"they don't seem to be coming"

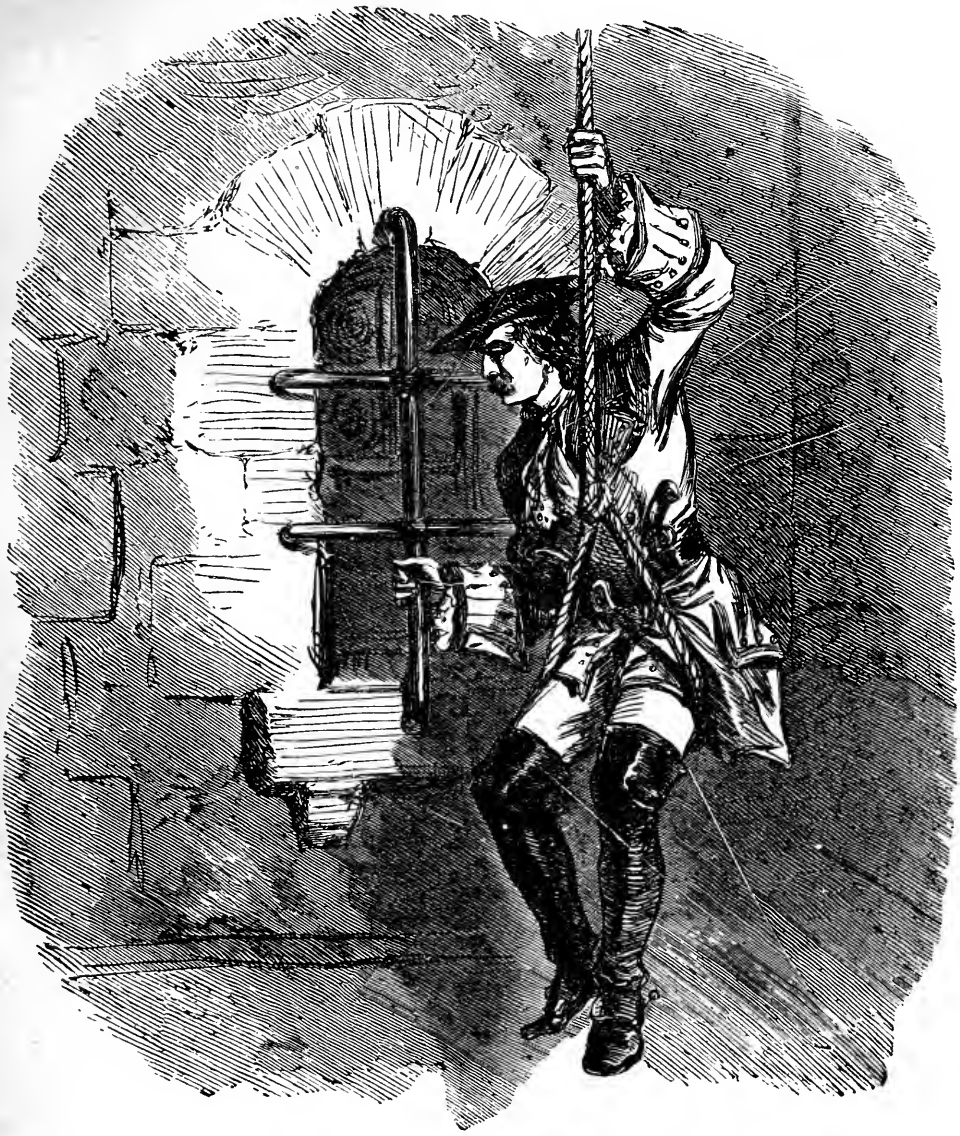
"As you will; I am inclined to think myself that they would go back by some other route instead of passing over the same ground twice. Now, Dick, what is it we have next to do?"

"Why, my comrades, as I can explain to you, this portion of the building contains the condemned cells; they are beneath this roof, and the windows are below us."

"Yes, we understand all that."

"Well, then, remove the rope from your waists and hand it to me. I will then show you the next thing to be done."

The highwaymen hastened to obey this command, and then, when Dick Turpin received the rope, they watched his movements with great curiosity and interest.



[DICK TURPIN AT THE WINDOW OF MAUD'S CELL.]

CHAPTER DCL.

RELATES THE EVENTS WHICH TOOK PLACE UPON THE ROOFS OF NEWGATE.

THE position of the gallant little band upon the roofs of the prison of Newgate was no less peculiar than it was perilous.

Who would have believed that they would have had the temerity to thrust themselves, as one might say, into the very jaws of danger?

Yet there they were, all four of them—four men, the aggregate reward for whose apprehension verged closely upon the enormous sum of three thousand pounds!

And they were there, hemmed in on all sides by their enemies, and for what?

Simply because they would not allow their captain to incur the whole danger of this expedition himself.

Terrible as the danger was, they had preferred to share it to allowing him to go alone.

And the captain's object was—as the reader knows full well—to rescue Maud from that gloomy cell in which she had been so unjustly immured.

Truly was this a powerful incentive to do all—to dare all. At least, it was with Dick, for he could not forget who Maud was, and what she had sacrificed for his sake.

Surely, if she had done so much for him, and so willingly, he ought at least to free her from that disagreeable position which she would never have known but for her connection with him.

This was the way in which Dick looked at the matter.

Viewing the case as calmly and dispassionately as he could, he was not able to perceive that there was the slightest probability of the occurrence of a more favourable opportunity than the present.

True, his enemies expected that this was what he was most likely to do.

True, that they were on the watch for him at every point.

Not only was the exterior of the prison so well watched and guarded, but within additional precautions were taken.

Under the directions of Mr. Cawthorn—whose faith in the excellence of Mr. Wriggles's clever scheme was only slightly shaken—the round of the prison was made at much more frequent intervals than had ever been known before.

But more especially was a watch kept upon Maud's cell.

Still, all their trouble had up to this night resulted in nothing.

At first, when the matter was partially explained to the men, they were all eagerness and anxiety.

Everyone was preternaturally vigilant, and, although several nights elapsed without the occurrence of any unusual incident, they relaxed none of their watchfulness.

Unquestionably, had Dick Turpin made an attempt to free Maud within a week after the time when she was taken prisoner, he would have failed utterly, and the capture of his comrades and himself would have followed as a matter of course.

It may be considered fortunate, therefore, that circumstances presented the aspect they did, and also that Turpin should have submitted to the calm judgment of his friends.

Had he done otherwise, his doom would have been sealed, his destruction certain.

But, as may easily be understood, this preternatural and unremitting vigilance on the part of the turnkeys and warders rapidly wore itself out.

When they began to find that all their trouble went for nothing, they insensibly but surely relapsed into their old careless state.

That is to say, they did their duty as a mere matter of duty, and no more.

In a mechanical way they went their rounds, glancing round them all the time, but principally intent upon getting the business over as soon as possible, in order that they might rejoin their companions in the room specially set aside for their accommodation.

The same thing might also be said of those without.

Moreover, the story of the manner in which Mr. Wriggles had been treated had got abroad already, with many exaggerations, as a matter of course.

Very little sympathy was felt for him.

His domineering, violent ways had not made him many friends among his subordinates, and, to speak plain truth, they were rather pleased than otherwise with his discomfiture.

The general impression, however, that was produced by the event was, that upon that night at least the highwaymen would make no attempt upon the prison.

It was judged that they would be too much alarmed at their own actions.

This belief was much strengthened by the proceedings that had been taken.

Mr. Wriggles—whose rage was really and truly ungovernable—had for once made the utmost use of the power he possessed.

Every police officer who could possibly be spared was ordered to mount and ride off in hot pursuit.

Mr. Wriggles obtained permission from the proper authorities to call out the military, and the troops of light horse quartered in the metropolis were made good use of.

Considering that such energetic steps as these were taken, it was no more than reasonable to suppose that the four highwaymen would have rather more than they could do to look after their own safety, and certainly no opportunity of entering Newgate.

Anyone acquainted with the particulars would have been just of the same opinion.

We have seen that our friends, and Turpin especially, had a very narrow escape indeed.

We have been thus explicit—even at the risk of being tedious—in order that the reader should not be so far carried away by the whirl of events as not thoroughly to understand the aspect of affairs.

But, from what we have just stated, the conclusion may be drawn that Dick's foes, on this particular and eventful night, so far from being keenly on the look-out, were lulled into a state of false security.

Disbelieving that any attack would be made or attempted, they made themselves as comfortable as they could, for, after the extra duty of the last few days, it was positively a great relief to enjoy a little rest.

Therefore all conspired to favour the highwaymen's enterprise.

Those within and without the prison walls were only performing their duty in a perfunctory manner, to which indeed may be ascribed the success which had so far attended upon our friends, enabling them to scale the wall and gain the roofs.

It must be borne in mind that they had approached the prison in a very circuitous fashion, and had chosen what appeared to be the most difficult point for their attack.

Still, if the officers and others on guard had not been so impressed with the notion that nothing would be done that night, and if they had done their duty as they ought to have done, some one of them would have seen Dick Turpin and his comrades while they were in the act of scaling the wall.

For it will be recollected that, although they were concealed from view while on the roof of the house adjoining Newgate, yet they were visible when they began to climb the wall by the aid of the rope.

Dark as the night was, a keen eye might have detected them crawling up the face of the stonework.

Or, if not, they would at least have been seen during those few minutes that they sat upon the edge of the wall while waiting for the others to ascend, and while securing the rope for their descent.

On that occasion, their forms were clearly and sharply defined against the night sky.

Whether they had really been seen by any prying eye, or not, time alone can determine.

This, however, is quite certain:

Up to the moment when, as we described at the end of the last chapter, the piece of thick rope was handed to Dick Turpin by his followers, no alarm of any kind whatever had been raised.

And now, having, as it is hoped, made all clear, and explained everything, we will, in the succeeding chapter, take up again the thread of the narrative at the point just mentioned, and relate the events that immediately succeeded.

CHAPTER DCLI.

DICK TURPIN ENDEAVOURS TO DISCOVER MAUD'S CELL, AND IS ALARMED BY THE RETURNING PATROL.

"The more silent we are," said Dick Turpin, in a suppressed voice, and tying a firm knot in the rope as he spoke in such a manner as to form a large loop at one extremity,—"I mean he less we talk—the better it will be. The sound of our voices may be carried I know not where. Therefore, while I am preparing this rope, listen to my directions; and when you hear my signal, be sure you obey it instantly."

Dick Turpin then, while adjusting the rope, issued a number of directions to his companions in a low tone of voice, to which they heedfully attended, and promised implicit obedience.

What those instructions were it is not necessary now to state. It will be sufficient to describe what was done.

The rope was held by the three highwaymen, while Dick, taking hold of the end which he had prepared, slipped the loop over his head, and allowed it to fall down below his waist.

Then he clasped one hand tightly near the knot.

"Have you the rope firm?" he whispered.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Then be sure you keep it secure, for upon that my life and your discovery depends."

With these words, Dick Turpin hastily climbed up on to the parapet defending the roof, and then cautiously proceeded to lower himself over the abyss, his friends above holding the rope secure.

It must be understood that Turpin seated himself in the loop in the rope, much after the fashion of those men who gain a perilous livelihood by being lowered from the summit of a rock to plunder the nests of sea birds.

His left hand enabled him to balance himself upon the rope, and to sit easily; his right he employed to keep

himself clear of the masonry, against which he would otherwise have been severely bruised.

Gradually and carefully, so as not to permit the rope to slip suddenly through their fingers, the three highwaymen above paid out the rope to let the captain down.

Dick's mode of operation now becomes clear.

He knew that one of the grated windows in the wall, to the face of which he clung, looked into the cell where Maud was confined.

There were at least a dozen of these barred apertures, and which was the right one yet remained to be ascertained.

But Dick had arranged a code of signals with his friends, so that he should be able to make them understand whether he wished to be lowered or raised—to be stopped, or to be moved either left or right.

When once he found the right window, he believed that, provided with tools as he was, he should have but little difficulty in removing the iron bars.

When this task was accomplished, Maud would be able to make her escape through the aperture.

His friends above would draw them up, and then all that would remain would be to make their way back as they had come.

It will be seen how many obstacles were in the way of carrying out this scheme; yet great as was their number and magnitude, they sank into positive insignificance when compared with any other means of achieving the same object.

How much easier it seemed to be than by some pretext to enter the prison itself, to make their way through the long stone corridors guarded by turnkeys, and break open the doors that interposed between them and Maud's cell.

In fact, it would have been impossible to effect Maud's escape by any such means.

The present plan was the only one which offered the least chance of success.

But it was absolutely bristling with danger, and no one was better aware of that fact than Dick himself, although he endeavoured to blind himself to it.

As he makes the perilous descent, holding himself away from the wall with his right hand, he employs his eyes in looking all round about him, and stretches his ears in order to catch the slightest sound.

It was well for him and for all that he was thus cautious.

Suddenly a faint sound down below attracted his attention.

In an instant he shook the rope.

This was the signal agreed upon to be given when he wished to stop.

The highwaymen held the rope still instantly.

Scarcely had Dick paused in his descent than a door beneath him, but a little on his right hand, was quickly opened.

Dick pressed himself as closely as he could against the stone wall.

That was the only chance he had of escaping the observation of those below.

No other means of concealing himself presented themselves.

But his body showed out dark and well defined against the lighter-coloured stonework.

From the door which had just been opened there issued a number of men.

Turning his eyes towards them, Dick saw they were the same who a little while back had crossed the yard.

"They return this way, then, after all," he murmured to himself. "So surely as they look upwards I shall be seen."

It was indeed a source of much regret to Dick that he did not wait a little while longer in order to satisfy himself that the patrol was not returning.

Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack above were not less alarmed by the sudden appearance of these men than was Dick himself.

When the signal to stop had been given they were not acquainted with the cause, but, having fastened the rope, they were impelled by curiosity to bend over the parapet and look down.

When they saw the turnkeys emerge with one man at their head carrying a lantern, their faces turned very white and their hearts fluttered.

The conviction instantly seized upon them, and pressed like an icy hand upon their hearts, that all was now discovered.

It was next to an impossibility that these men could perform their duty so negligently and carelessly as to fail to perceive Dick Turpin hanging suspended against the wall.

Yet they had the presence of mind to remain perfectly still, and to make no attempt to draw Dick up again.

This was partly because they had agreed implicitly to obey the signals he might give—they had placed themselves entirely under his command.

It was an anxious moment.

"Halt!" cried a voice below, which they believed proceeded from the man carrying the light.

The men stopped instantly and stood in a throng near the open doorway.

There was a momentary pause, during which one of the turnkeys fastened the door through which they had just passed.

At this time they were actually within twenty feet of the spot where Dick was hanging.

He even held his breath, fearful lest that slight sound should be carried to their ears.

But, by the most wonderful chance in the world, not one of those men raised his eyes to look upward.

The door having been fastened, the little troop was once more set in motion.

Dick ventured to breathe.

"It's a dark night," said one of the turnkeys, glancing up at the sky, which was covered all over with dense, heavy clouds, that looked as though they would shortly discharge their watery contents.

"D—n the night!" growled a voice in reply. "What an infernal nuisance it is that we should have to do double duty in this fashion! Bah—I am sick of it! Don't talk to me about the night!"

Some more words were exchanged, but the speakers were too far off for the highwaymen to catch what was said.

Again they paused before the doorway on the opposite side of the court-yard, and after a brief delay passed through it.

The coast was then clear.

Once more silence reigned about that portion of Newgate

Still it was several minutes after the turnkeys had disappeared before Dick Turpin could recover himself sufficiently to give the required signal to those above.

He continued to press himself against the wall, and could scarcely bring himself to believe that he had indeed had such a narrow escape from detection.

Soon, however, the consciousness came over him that the danger was past.

With that consciousness also came the knowledge that as yet he had a great deal to do before his enterprise was achieved, and that consequently there was not a moment to lose.

Then, with a solemn, clanging sound the clock in St. Paul's Cathedral began to chime.

Dick remained motionless listening to the sound.

"Two o'clock," he said to himself, as the ringing sounds were taken up by one church after another in the vicinity—"two o'clock! If I am speedy, there will yet be time; and surely this is the best part of the night for that which I have to do!"

As these words passed through his thoughts rather than escaped his lips, Dick gave the signal to his friends to be lowered a little more—he had not yet reached the level of the cell windows, though he did so in another moment.

Then again he gave the signal to stop.

He now looked anxiously right and left of him.

He wondered which of those windows looked into the cell that was occupied by Maud.

Looking to the right, he could count seven of those grated apertures, and to the left five.

He happened to be suspended about half-way between the fifth and sixth windows.

"Now then for Maud," he said to himself. "How shall I discover her cell? If I could but let her know that I am here all would be well! How can I do that? Surely, if I called upon her in faint, low tones, the sound would reach her ears—she would recognise my voice, and then, coming to the window of the cell, I should then learn in which one she was confined."

This was the best plan that Dick could think of.

It is true there was the disadvantage attached to it that the sound of his voice might reach unfriendly ears, and there was also the chance that Maud might not hear him.

Still, as it seemed his only chance, Dick determined to try the experiment, let the hazard be what it might.

He hesitated a moment as to which window he should select first.

Should he take the one on his left or the one on his right hand?

"Chance alone can guide me," he thought—"it is quite a chance. I will try the one on my right first, and I hope that it will prove the right one."

Accordingly, having come to this decision, he signalled to his friends.

In another instant he was close to the barred window he wished to reach—that is to say, the sixth one counting from his left hand.

Clinging closely to the stonework, and yet taking care that no portion of his body should hang before the window, and so obscure the light, Dick placed his lips close to the iron bars.

In a faint yet clear voice, he said:

"Maud—Maud!—are you there? Maud—Maud!"

His heart beat with unusual violence while he uttered these words, and then its pulsation almost stopped while he waited with painful anxiousness the answer to his summons.

CHAPTER DCLII.

MAUD MAKES A RESPONSE TO DICK TURPIN'S APPEAL.

Was it a dream?

Was it some fleeting illusion of the senses?

Had her fancy played her false? or could it indeed be that it was Dick Turpin who had uttered those words?

These were the questions that sprang suddenly into Maud's mind.

By one of those rare and fortunate chances which do sometimes occur, and which would puzzle anyone to account for, Dick had chanced to pitch upon the very window of Maud's cell.

It could only be a graceful fancy to suppose that some unfelt yet irresistible sympathy drew him to that spot, and influenced his decision when he was hesitating which window he should choose.

Faintly spoken as the words were, nevertheless they reached the ears of Maud with great distinctness.

She started up suddenly from a half-reclining posture, which she had assumed through sheer weariness and grief, and with parted lips and panting breath she listened for a repetition of the sound.

The belief in her own mind was that unconsciously she had fallen off into a light sleep, and that in her dream she had heard her husband call upon her name.

That seemed, indeed, a very probable conclusion to arrive at, for how unlikely it was that his voice could reach her there in that Newgate cell!

Therefore, beyond the first movement we have described, she did not stir, but sat there on the stone bench, as motionless as a statue.

Poor girl! Since we saw her last, on the day of trial, she had suffered much.

Broken in health as well as in spirits—worn out by a continual dread of hearing intelligence of Turpin's capture—she was now almost prostrated, and lacked the energy to make any sudden movement.

The trial had been a severe shock to her, and had been a trial in more senses than one.

She could not forget who she once was, and therefore she felt the degradation of her position keenly.

Then, naturally enough, during the course of the trial she had suffered herself to be buoyed up by hopes which at the last were shattered.

Unresistingly, then, she had been led from the dock into the stone chamber beneath it, and from thence to the cell which she now occupied.

Here, of course, she had remained ever since.

But that was not the extent of her misfortunes.

Mr. Cawthorn, the Governor of the prison, had fallen into sad disgrace and trouble with the authorities in consequence of Dick's escape: and as we know, he was a man spirited enough to revenge himself upon Maud, who had certainly done him no injury.

But the Governor was cunning enough to know that any indignity or insult he might offer to Maud would be felt more keenly by Dick than anything he could do to the highwayman himself.

On the evening of the day upon which the trial had taken place, Mr. Cawthorn made his way to the cell in which Maud was confined in order to satisfy himself by personal inspection that the prisoner was quite secure.

This visit was an opportunity which he could not afford to lose.

Upon entering the cell, he found Maud seated upon the stone bench with her hands clasped over her face, and looking the picture of absolute grief.

She was weeping, for he could see the tears trickling between her fingers, and every now and then a choking sob would reach his ears.

As soon as she became aware of the presence of some one in the cell, however, Maud removed her hands from her face and brushed away the tears from her eyes.

As she did this she saw the Governor standing before her.

"Soho!" he exclaimed, in a bantering tone, which was infinitely more disagreeable than violence or threats, "you thought to get off to-day, no doubt, but you didn't! Aha, it's not often that these stone walls are graced with anyone who has been gifted by nature with more than a usual share of loveliness!"

As the Governor repeated these last words, which it will be remembered had been made use of by the counsel for the defence, he made an ironical bow, while his lips curled with a sneering, sarcastic smile.

"If you have one spark of manliness in your bosom," returned Maud, "you will leave me here so that I can indulge in my grief alone, and not make a sport of my wretchedness! But I know," she added, "from experience that you are deaf to all such appeals! Rest assured, however, that when the opportunity arrives I will acquaint one of the sheriffs with your behaviour towards me!"

Mr. Cawthorn shook a little as Maud spoke these words, for he could not conceal from himself the knowledge that she was beautiful, and it was only reasonable to suppose that anything she might say to one of the sheriffs would be listened to with a greater amount of attention than was usually bestowed upon what prisoners generally said.

At the same time, he was aware that it would never do to let his prisoner see this, and so he attempted to carry things off with a high hand.

"Speak to one of the sheriffs, will you?" he repeated. "Ah, well, I would if I were you; and I hope every attention will be paid to your complaints. While you are about it I would request him to change your quartere—ask him to let you have the two best apartments in my house; this cell is quite unworthy of you, as indeed is my poor abode, still, the latter is preferable to this; so, when you are complaining, add that request, or if you like I will make it in your behalf."

Maud turned away her head, determined not to speak another word.

She conceived that that was the best thing she could do.

The Governor understood the movement, and hastened to say something disagreeable.

"I have some consolation to offer you," he said. "I have certain knowledge that Dick Turpin has been somewhere near the prison to-day, and I will stake my life that he will be nearer to it still before night. Such a watch is kept all round the building, that he could not possibly escape; and, take my word for it, before the hour of midnight will have sounded, he will be a prisoner, loaded with chains, in the deepest and strongest cell in Newgate."

For one moment Maud turned a wild, despairing glance upon the Governor; but when she caught sight of his mocking, sinister countenance, she turned away her head hastily again, and resolved not to hear anything more that he might say to distress her.

She placed both her fingers in her ears, and pressed them hard until she shut out the sound of his voice.

Finding that all his words were in vain, the Governor became silent, and, after a brief pause, left the cell.

But when the door closed behind him, Maud gave full and free vent to her great grief.

"Captive—a prisoner!" she moaned. "Oh, yes; I have no doubt of it! I know he would come near the prison—I know he would try to be present! But now his destruction is certain!"

Had the Governor known how deep an impression his words had made, he would have been satisfied with what he had done; but ignorance baulked him of more than half his revenge, for he did not know with what speechless agony and straining ears Maud listened through the hours of that night to every slight sound in the prison.

She was allowed but little rest, for the cell was visited at very frequent intervals by a turnkey.

It was his duty to walk into the cell, to look round it, and look at the prisoner, and satisfy himself that all was well.

Being thus constantly upon the stretch, and dreading every sound, had completely worn Maud out, and no wonder.

She was almost reduced to a complete state of stupor.

Then her solitude and peace were next broken in upon in a terrifying manner

Not many hours before she heard the voice of Dick Turpin calling upon her from the window, an unusual tumult in the corridor without had reached her ears.

All the blood in her body seemed to rush at once and with full force to her heart, and to settle there.

What could the commotion she heard portend, except that the worst had happened—that Dick Turpin was a prisoner?

As she heard the sounds without, her imagination pictured him surrounded by his enemies, and struggling fiercely as they dragged him on towards the dungeon.

But the noise came nearer and nearer to her cell, and then, to her surprise, the door was thrust open, and a figure entered which it was difficult indeed to recognise.

He was followed by another, who she saw was the Governor, and the rear was brought up by several police officers and turnkeys.

Inarticulate howls came from the lips of this man, and he rushed forward across the cell towards Maud as though he intended to inflict some personal violence upon her.

But if such was his intention—and no doubt it was—it was frustrated by the Governor, who seized him by the coat, and held him with a strength which none would have given him credit for possessing.

He knew the consequences would be very serious to himself if his prisoner received any ill-treatment while under his care

Therefore, in an agitated voice, he exclaimed.

"Mr. Wriggles—Mr. Wriggles, are you quite mad? Have you quite lost your senses? Do you wish to ruin me?"

"Curses!" roared Mr. Wriggles, for it was no other than that personage,—"curses! Let me go, I say! Revenge—revenge! I will be revenged!"

Maud drew back to the farthest corner of the cell, trembling in every limb.

The countenance of Mr. Wriggles was indeed something dreadful to look upon.

Smarting and aching with the injuries he had received during his ride upon the back of his horse, Mr. Wriggles, blinded with rage and pain, sought Maud's cell.

He had been severely punished about the head and face by the huge thistle which Dick had fastened to the horse's tail.

Indeed, his countenance presented a more hideous appearance than it did at first, for after it had been washed it began to swell all over, so that by this time his features were almost undistinguishable, while his head was at least double its usual size.

"Hark you!" he cried, hoarsely and fiercely, and addressing himself to Maud. "I will not lay a finger on you! No, no, I will not do that!"

"Quite right," murmured the Governor.

"But listen!" he continued. "Look at me! You see the condition I am in? You can guess who has done this, and what I have suffered? But I will be revenged! I will move Heaven and earth, and not know a moment's rest until I have captured Dick Turpin and his villanous associates! I swear it, and I will keep my oath! Every injury and pain I have suffered shall be returned with tenfold violence upon their heads! They cannot escape! I shall have them secure! Death and destruction! the pain I suffer now would be far beyond endurance if it was not for the thought that I shall capture them all before the sun rises again!"

"Well, come," said the Governor, who was anxious to get Wriggles away. "Don't waste any more time here. Come, you have much to do, if you intend to keep your word.

"Intend to keep my word?" said Wriggles. "Don't fear about that! I am going," he continued, fixing his eyes upon Maud's terrified countenance—"I am going, and Dick Turpin's destruction will follow! But do not think I shall quietly bring him a prisoner to this place! No, no! he shall have some foretaste of my vengeance before he is placed in his cell, and I warrant his condition will be such that there will be no fear of his making an attempt to escape!"

There could be no mistaking the tone in which these words were spoken.

Maud felt that Mr. Wriggles was fully in earnest.

She was terrified to death.

Impelled by an impulse she could not control, she sprang forward a few paces, and then, sinking on her knees, she clasped her hands together, and outstretched them towards Mr. Wriggles, who was still held in the Governor's detaining grasp.

"Mercy!" she shrieked—"have mercy upon him!—mercy! Do your duty if you will, but no more! I implore—I entreat your mercy! If you make him your prisoner, do not injure him! Spare him—spare him!"

"Aha!" cried Mr. Wriggles. "Good, that—I like it! Spare him? Look at me! Do you see the state I am in? Well, then, I will spare him as much as I have been spared! I have a grudge against you, too. I had thought of one way of revenging myself upon you, but I have thought better of it. I know that you will feel all that I do against Dick Turpin a thousand times more than all I can do against yourself. Oh yes, I will have mercy, depend upon it—lots of mercy—lots!"

Then, with another wild and hideous yell, caused in part by the terrible pain he was enduring in every joint of his body, and in part by the exultation he felt at the prospect of obtaining his revenge, Mr. Wriggles suffered himself to be led from the cell by the Governor.

Then the door was closed, and once more Maud was left alone.

But in what a terrible state of mind was she now left!

Who can form an adequate conception of what her feelings were after their departure?

She wept and sobbed until tears would no longer come to her relief, and then, utterly exhausted, she had sunk down in a half-senseless state upon the stone bench, and she was in this condition when she heard Dick Turpin call her by her name.

CHAPTER DCLIII.

DICK TURPIN SAWS THROUGH THE IRON BARS, AND MEETS WITH A MISHAP IN MAUD'S CELL.

"Dick—Dick!" she murmured, half unconsciously, and in a voice little above a whisper. "Was it indeed your voice I heard, or did my fancy mislead me? Dick, speak to me again!"

Faintly uttered as the words were, nevertheless they made their way to the attentive ears without.

Dick heard them.

His heart leaped up with joy

The revulsion of feeling that took place in his breast was so great that he almost let go his hold.

So many minutes had elapsed after he had spoken before he heard Maud's answering words, that he had come to the conclusion that his first attempt had been a failure, and that he must look for her in some other cell.

He was just about to give the signal for removal, when her faint, whispered tones reached his ears.

In the intense silence of that place, it was no wonder that they should do so.

The falling of a pin might almost have been heard, for at that hour the silence of the very tomb itself prevailed in every part of Newgate.

No sounds from without interrupted the stillness, and it would have been easier for anyone to believe that the prison was built in some lonely spot, far away from every habitation, than that it was situated in the heart of a great city, which scarcely knows peace night or day

Dick Turpin clung tightly to the iron bars of the cell to support himself, and then incredulity seized upon him.

It seemed that fortune could not have favoured him so much as to have taken him to the right cell at first, and so he exclaimed:

"Maud—Maud, was it you who spoke? Maud—Maud, answer me again! I am here, and in safety! Maud—Maud, reply to me at once!"

A half-suppressed shriek responded to this appeal.

This time there could be no doubt, and so Maud exclaimed:

"I am here—I am here!"

She looked around her half in terror, for she was unable to make out from what direction Dick Turpin's voice proceeded.

Upon this point, however, she was not long left in doubt and uncertainty.

Seizing hold of the iron bars that crossed each other over the window, Dick Turpin pressed his face against them.

The interior of the cell was pitchy dark, and he was unable to make out a single object.

But at that moment Maud happened to turn her eyes towards the window, and then she perceived the dark outline of a human form.

Her heart told her at once who it was, though she was quite at a loss to conceive by what means he could possibly have gained his present situation.

In a moment her exhaustion vanished.

She sprang to her feet, and by that action seemed to cast off the heaviness that weighed her down.

The only movable article the cell contained was a rude, strongly-made wooden chair.

With the speed of lightning she placed this just beneath the window

She mounted into it at once, and held up her arms towards the grating.

But she was not yet raised sufficiently to reach it.

Although he could not see her, yet Dick could hear and understand her movements.

Therefore he thrust his arm completely through the bars.

He felt it instantly seized by two soft, cold hands.

Then, by the aid which this support afforded her, Maud stepped up lightly on to the back of the chair.

She was in danger of falling each moment, but she did not heed that.

She clung tightly to Turpin's hand, and covered it with kisses.

"You are here," she said—"you are here! My heart told me you would come!"

"Yes, I am here," was the reply, "and with the intention of taking you away with me."

Maud could not suppress a cry of joy.

"Hush—hush!" he cried, "there must be no alarm. I have much to do in order to liberate you, and we will postpone our greeting to another occasion. I am expecting each moment the appearance of the patrol."

Maud trembled.

"How came you here?" she said—"how came you here? And tell me how it is that you intend to get away."

"I will," replied Turpin. "I know it would ease your mind, and I can work at the same time if you will release my hand. I have indeed much to do."

Maud was unwilling to unclasp her fingers and still more unwilling to descend into the cell.

The first, however, she was compelled to do, but not the latter.

Raising herself up still higher on the back of the chair, she shifted her grasp to the iron bars.

Here she could hold securely.

No sooner was his hand at liberty, than Dick plunged it into his pocket and drew out a small object.

It was a small steel saw, of exquisite temper and keenness, which he had been provided with by the foresight of Jabez.

"Now to remove the grating!" he exclaimed. "It will not take me long, for I have a rare tool here."

"But how is it you are at the outside of the window, and at such a distance from the ground?"

"I am fastened to a rope," was the reply, "and Tom, and Claude, and Jack are above on the roofs holding it. So soon as I can saw through these bars and get the window clear, I shall draw you through, and then, by the aid of the rope, we shall easily gain the roof above. Now do you comprehend?"

Maud did comprehend, but to her the task appeared of such a difficult nature that its accomplishment seemed very doubtful.

But Dick was not of this opinion.

Without further loss of time, he set to work upon the iron bar with his steel saw.

Near the spot where they had been soldered into the stonework the iron bars had worn away by the galvanic action of the two metals, so that their thickness was more than half reduced.

They were thickly covered with rust, too, and when he brushed that aside Dick discovered that the task he had to perform would not occupy him near so much time as he at first imagined.

With a lightened heart, he commenced his operations.

The fine steel saw seemed to cut through the soft and rusty iron with almost as much ease and rapidity as if it had been wood.

Soon one was sawn completely through.

It was the top horizontal bar.

Two more remained, and after the lapse of a short time those two were also severed.

It was unnecessary to saw them at the other end.

Dick Turpin believed he should be strong enough to seize hold of one end and bend them, if not completely back, at least far enough to answer his purpose.

Three perpendicular bars now remained.

Stimulated and encouraged by the success which had so far attended his endeavours, Dick commenced his operations upon them with renewed vigour and spirit.

Every now and then he would pause to listen, for he was in momentary dread that the men would again appear going the round of the prison.

His three comrades peeped over the parapet.

By his having remained so long stationary, they guessed he had been lucky enough to discover Maud's cell, and when, by listening, they could hear the faint grating sound produced by the saw as it was drawn rapidly backwards and forwards, their conjecture was confirmed.

Suddenly a half-uttered ejaculation came from Maud's lips.

Even as she uttered it she released her hold upon the grating and sprang as lightly as she could to the floor of the cell.

Then, with breathless rapidity, she removed the chair, and threw herself down upon the stone bench in the same way she was when Dick Turpin's voice first reached her ears.

For a moment Dick was startled, and even bewildered, by these sudden movements.

Maud had no time to utter a word by way of caution—nor, indeed, was it really requisite.

Of course Dick was on the alert, for he knew some cause had produced this action.

Before he had time to speculate upon it, he heard a sound which he recognised instantly, for it was familiar enough to his ears.

That sound was the removal of the fastenings upon the outside of the cell door.

Some one was about to pay the prisoner a visit.

Dick marvelled greatly who it could be.

He was tolerably well acquainted with the routine observed in the prison, and knew that it was most unusual for a visit to be paid at such an hour as that.

The sound of the bolt of the lock flying back warned him to be speedy in his motions.

Swinging himself to one side, he seized hold of the stonework, and preserved himself in that position.

No part of his body then hung before the cell window, and no one inside looking out would be able to perceive him.

With a heavy, grating, creaking noise, the door of the cell was flung open, and then what seemed to be a brilliant flash of light illuminated the cell.

So great was the curiosity and desire that Dick Turpin felt to ascertain who it could be that had entered Maud's cell at that hour, that, in spite of the obvious danger of such a proceeding, he bent his head slightly forward in such a manner, that he was able to peep through the bars.

He took the precaution to remove his hat, so that a

very small portion of his head was projected beyond the ravel of the window.

Still he was unable to command a view of the whole of the interior of the cell.

The open door disclosed the form of one of the turnkeys of the prison.

The flash of light which, when contrasted with the previous darkness, seemed so brilliant, came only from the lantern he carried in his hand.

He flashed it all around him, so that, in succession, various portions of the wall were lighted up; and, at last, he allowed the beams to fall upon the recumbent form of the prisoner.

"Oh, all right, I see!" he exclaimed. "I thought I heard a noise; but you're all right, eh?"

He advanced a few steps into the cell.

Then Maud, pretending to awaken, looked at him for a second, and then immediately averted her head.

"Oh, you needn't be so sulky!" said the man. "Only while I am on juty, I'll keep good watch and ward, as the sayin' is—no fear of that!"

Maud was too agitated to make any reply to the turnkey's words, who, on his part, imagined that she disdained to do so.

Grumbling and growling, he withdrew, and closed the door, satisfied that all was well, and that he had alarmed himself without reason.

Again the fastenings were all put up, and then Maud started to her feet.

"Hush!" said Dick, in a whisper so faint that it could not possibly have reached the ears of anyone else besides the person he addressed. "We must be cautious! Wait a few moments; the man is suspicious. We will begin again presently."

Maud was only too glad to be silent, for the whole adventure filled her with dread.

She anticipated all the time that her own escape would be frustrated, and Turpin captured.

After the lapse of a short time, which he considered sufficient, Dick renewed his operations upon the iron bars.

These perpendicular ones were by no means so much rusted as the others, and, consequently, it took him much longer to saw them through.

Just as he was finishing the last one, he heard the hour of three pealed forth from St. Paul's Cathedral.

This warned him to make haste.

The night was speeding fast away, and if there was much more delay, the chances of ultimate escape would be much diminished.

At length, to his joy, the last bar was severed, and then, with speed and strength, he proceeded to finish his undertaking.

One by one he seized the iron bars at the end where he had severed them.

Then, placing his foot against the wall, he exerted his utmost strength, and bent them back; so that, in a few minutes, there was an opening quite large enough to allow Maud to pass through.

But now a fresh difficulty presented itself, which, hitherto, Dick had scarcely taken into consideration.

This was how he should get Maud through the window, supposing he should succeed in drawing her into his arms, and give the signal to ascend. There was the question whether the rope was strong enough to sustain their united weight.

The consequences of a fall were so very serious, that he felt he could not afford to run the risk.

"No—no!" he murmured. "Somehow or other, Maud must ascend alone, and I will follow!"

At this moment he looked up, and over the edge of the parapet above, he could perceive the head of one of his comrades.

"Hist!" he said, in a faint voice. "Look out! Is all well?"

"Yes!" was the reply.

"Then Maud will ascend first! I have removed the grating, and can enter the cell easily! When you have drawn her up let down the rope for me!"

"All right!" replied Sixteen-String Jack, for he it was who happened to be looking over the parapet.

Having arranged matters so far, Dick climbed in at the opening, and released himself from the rope.

To descend into the cell took him but a moment.

Then followed a warm greeting.

But it was a brief one.

It was too perilous for Dick Turpin to linger in a Newgate cell.

"Come, Maud," he said, "the most difficult part of our enterprise is over. All is well! Cheer up!—be of good heart! I will assist you to reach the window; and when you are there, you will see the rope hanging down. There is a loop in it; seat yourself, and hold the rope tightly with both hands. Our three friends will then draw you to the top, and all will be well."

Maud trembled greatly at this prospect.

But she summoned all her courage to her aid at once.

She was well aware how dangerous it was for Turpin to remain standing in that cell, and so she seconded his efforts to the best of her power.

The chair was again called into requisition.

Dick raised Maud in his arms until she was able to grasp the iron bars at the point where they had been bent back.

Then, by his further assistance, she drew herself up through the window; and as the wall was of considerable thickness she was able to seat herself upon it easily.

She saw the rope hanging down, and though the very thought of trusting herself to it made her feel faint and giddy, yet, nevertheless, she seized it boldly and quickly in the manner Dick had directed.

Slipping it underneath her, she seized the rope above with both her hands.

Sixteen-String Jack was watching, and no sooner did he see her seated than he said:

"Is all right?"

"Yes," she replied.

In an instant she felt herself drawn up.

Dick now proceeded to climb up to the window himself so as to be in readiness to seize the rope the moment it was lowered.

But his fingers would not reach the edge of the window-sill without he stood on the back rail of the chair.

He stepped upon it, and, as he supposed, somewhat clumsily, for his foot slipped and he fell with a heavy crash to the ground.

CHAPTER DCLIV.

DICK TURPIN DISPOSES OF THE TURNKEY, BUT MR. CAWTHORN DISCOVERS THE ESCAPE.

A CRY came from Dick Turpin's lips.

It was caused in part by the pain his fall occasioned him, and in part by the anger he felt at his own clumsiness.

Such a clatter as the fall of himself and the heavy wooden chair upon the floor of the cell produced could not fail to attract the notice of the man on guard outside.

The man's suspicions were already partially excited, for, as he paced up and down the silent corridor, he fancied he heard strange sounds in Maud's cell.

That was the reason why he so abruptly entered in the manner previously described.

"My eyes!" he ejaculated—"what's that?"

He took the readiest means of answering his question, for, with greater speed and dexterity than he had ever used in his life before, he undid the various fastenings and flung open the door.

Again he flashed the lantern around him.

What, then, was his consternation and surprise to behold, instead of his prisoner, Dick Turpin standing in the centre of the cell.

The man doubted his own eyesight, and believed he was dreaming.

His mouth opened, and he staggered back a pace or two in amazement.

When he unfortunately fell down, Dick did not lose his presence of mind.

That the noise would bring the turnkey into the cell he felt confident.

It was true that, before the door could be unfastened and thrown open, Dick might have climbed out of the window; but if he had done this and got off clear, the man would perceive in a moment that his prisoner was gone, would raise an immediate alarm, and then their chance of making an escape would be very much imperilled.

It only took a second for Dick Turpin to remember all this, and therefore he rose to his feet and stood calmly in the centre of the cell in the manner we have described.

But he did not for long remain motionless.

Long before the man could recover from his dismay sufficiently to emit a sound from his wide-open mouth, Dick sprang forward and grasped him by the throat.

"Silence!" he cried, sternly—"silence, on your life! Stir or speak at your peril!"

The lantern dropped from the strengthless fingers of the turnkey.

Crash it went on the stone flooring of the cell, smashing itself to atoms in the fall.

"Confusion!" exclaimed Dick, "everything is going wrong. I shall have the whole prison about my ears!"

He dragged the man roughly into the cell as he spoke.

Then closed the door.

He was only able to shut it; he could not secure it in any way, for, as a matter of course, all the fastenings were on the outer side.

Still, now that the door was closed, the sound would be cut off, and there would not be so much likelihood of an alarm being given.

The turnkey was terribly frightened, not so much at Dick's stern manner and his threats as at his extraordinary appearance in the cell.

It looked to him like the work of magic, for the idea of the window never once entered his imagination.

Dick was angry and vexed at this incident, because it could not fail to cause delay at a time when every second was too precious to be lost.

He was not long making up his mind what he should do with this turnkey; in fact, only one course of action seemed to be open to him.

Among the various things contained in the parcel Jabez had given him was a quantity of rope very much thinner than that which had been used to such advantage in their operations.

This Dick took from his pocket.

With great dexterity he made a running noose in one end of it, and, before the turnkey was well aware of what he was about, he found the rope rather tightly encircling his neck.

Dick drew the knot just tight enough to make the man's neck feel disagreeable and to induce disagecable sensations and reflections.

Then, in a rapid tone of voice, he said:

"I don't intend to strangle you—I would not take your life at a gift—but I am going to bind you securely; and while I am doing it, if you struggle—if you resist—if you utter a cry for help, or attempt to do so, I will, so surely as you are a living man, at that very instant draw the rope tight with all my strength, and there will be an end of you!"

Dick spoke these words in a very impressive way, and they derived additional force from the painful feeling of tightness that the turnkey already experienced about the throat.

He was thoroughly cowed.

Taking care to hold the rope in such a manner that he could, if necessary, give it a sudden jerk, Dick proceeded, with the other end of it, to tie the man's ankles tightly together.

Having done this, he wound the rope round and round his legs, knotting it here and there in various places, until he reached his waist.

He then secured the turnkey's wrists, and bound them tightly to his body.

Dick continued to wind the rope round and round until he had reached the man's neck, round which he again coiled the rope.

"You do not like that, I suppose?" was his remark.

The turnkey opened his mouth to make some reply.

What he was going to say would puzzle us to tell.

Dick's sole object was to cause him to open his mouth, and the moment he did so he thrust the rope between his teeth, having held it in readiness to do so.

He drew it until the man's jaws were wide apart, and until his countenance was much distorted.

Then, with a feeling of great satisfaction in his breast, Dick tied a strong farewell knot at the back of the turnkey's head.

It was now as impossible for the man to utter an intelligible sound as it was for him to move.

Had he been buried up to the chin in earth he could scarcely have been more deprived of the use of his limbs.

By an effort of strength, Dick lifted him off the floor of the cell and placed him upon the stone bench.

He laid him upon it at full length, and covered him over with the rude coverlet or blanket which was placed there for the accommodation of the prisoners.

While in this position, it would have been difficult for anyone to tell who and what he was.

Having succeeded so far, Dick's heart felt lighter.

He was anxious to be gone.

Still, he felt it was of paramount importance to ascertain whether all was quiet within the prison, or whether an alarm had been given.

With this view, he opened the door to the extent of about half an inch, and listened.

All was perfectly silent.

He closed the door again quickly, much relieved, and with a light step crossed the cell.

Looking out at the window, he saw the rope hanging down, and oscillating violently backwards and forwards.

"Jack is impatient!" he murmured. "They imagine some accident has befallen me! I must be quick, or else out of their kindness they will be getting me into a fresh difficulty!"

With these words on his lips, Dick once more placed the wooden chair beneath the window, and prepared to mount it.

This time he was more careful in his movements than before, and succeeded in grasping the window-sill with his fingers.

To draw himself up was a task he could perform easily.

And then he was further assisted by the iron bars.

With great rapidity he scrambled through the opening, hastily seated himself in the rope, and gave the signal for those above to draw him up.

This was at once obeyed, and in another moment, to the great relief and joy of all the rest, he was standing safe and unharmed upon the roof.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed. "I am fated to receive hard knocks! That fall from the chair on to the stone floor has hurt me not a little. We must use double speed, my friends. The turnkey cannot do any mischief, it is true; but the first time one of his companions walks down the passage, he will observe that the cell door is not secured—will enter to ascertain the cause, and then an alarm will be raised."

"We must manage to get away before that happens," said Tom King, "or else it will be a case with us."

"I am ready," said Dick. "You, my friends, lead the way; I will attend to Maud, and follow."

"We cannot do better than retrace our steps," said Tom King.

"That's my opinion," said Turpin. "Quick! I am in hopes that we shall reach the street unobserved by means of the house next door."

Tom King made no reply, but busily set to work to commence a retreat.

The iron hook was thrown up to the roof just above them, and Tom King was the first to climb up.

He assisted his companions to follow him, and Turpin and Maud came last.

The angular portion of the roof which had given them so much trouble before now lay in front of them.

Still, they did not shrink from facing this obstacle, but made good use of the experience they had gained.

Without the occurrence of an accident, they at length arrived at the outer wall of the prison.

Once more Claude Duval's services were called into requisition to throw up the rope.

The feat was cleverly performed, for, at the very first trial, the hook attached itself to the *chevaux-de-frise*, as the iron spikes on the top of the wall were called.

But the exultation they felt at this success quickly vanished.

A sound came from below which filled them top-full with alarm.

That sound was the roaring of voices, the hasty trampling of many feet, and the springing of rattles.

An impulse which they could not restrain compelled them to look down; and there from the low, arched doorway through which the patrol had passed not so



[CLAUDE DUVAL'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE POLICE OFFICERS IN NEWGATE MARKET.]

very long before, there issued a tumultuous throng of persons.

"Quick—quick!" cried Dick—"quick! Alarm has been given—all is discovered—they have found the turnkey in the cell!"

"They see us, too!" said Claude.

"Haste—haste! Are you right, Tom?"

"Right!" was the reply given by Tom King, who at this moment reached the top of the wall.

Sixteen-String Jack, and then Claude, quickly followed.

Then the rope was fastened securely round Maud's waist.

Dick hastily ascended.

Thus it happened that Maud was last upon the roof of the prison.

But the reason of this was, that time would be saved by the adoption of this course, inasmuch as the rope would be drawn up and there would be no necessity for lowering it again.

She reached the top in safety, and then the ascent on to the roof of the house was hastily commenced.

Those who were down in the court-yard below, however, looking up, caught sight of the dusky figures of our friends as they were revealed by the lighter-coloured clouds behind them.

"Fire—fire! I say! They are on the wall—down with them!"

A sudden movement took place among the highwaymen, and Turpin quickly shielded Maud with his own body.

Scarcely had he done this, than a terrific explosion, which raised a thousand reverberations far and near, took place.

There was a dazzling sheet of flame, a yell and a shout from those below, then darkness and silence.

"Are you hurt?—is anyone wounded?" cried Dick, anxiously. "Speak—speak!—are you all safe?"

"Quite safe!" was the response.

And as it was given, Claude, and Jack, and Turpin slid with amazing rapidity down the rope.

For once Dick resolved to run the risk whether the rope would bear a double weight or not.

Clasping his arm round Maud's waist, he seized hold of the rope, but twisting it in a peculiar way round his arm.

Then he slipped swiftly down to the roof of the house.

Maud was terrified almost to death, and could scarcely believe that Turpin had not been injured by the discharge of the blunderbuss, for such, judging from the loudness of the report, the weapon must be.

CHAPTER DCLV.

THE ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE IS ACCOMPLISHED, BUT AT A FEARFUL COST.

Being well aware, however, of the necessity of calming herself, she subdued her agitation as well as she was able.

The great terror she felt on Dick Turpin's account had the effect of making her almost insensible to the danger to which she was exposed by the passage over the roof of the house adjoining Newgate.

Convinced that nothing but speed could save them, and that their sole chance depended upon reaching the ground in the shortest possible space of time before the alarm raised should become universal, the highwaymen hastened towards the garret window, which to them appeared a haven of safety.

Nevertheless, Sixteen-String Jack was not forgetful of the rope.

It had already done them good service, and he could not tell whether circumstances might not arise to make it useful once more.

But his principal reason for delaying a moment to shake the hook from the top of the wall was, that he was fearful their pursuers might avail themselves of it.

Another moment saw them all standing in the attic.

Dick could tell how alarmed Maud was by the manner in which she clung to him.

In hurried words, he endeavoured to inspire her with courage, and placed his arm around her waist in order to support her steps.

Addressing his companions, he said:

"You go first, my friends, and I will follow. Quick—to the staircase!"

Ere leaving the attic, Claude Duval closed the window, so that there would not be any palpable indication of the route they had taken.

He also closed the door behind him.

Without pausing as they should have done, the highwaymen commenced the descent of the staircase.

Ere they had gone far, however, a terrific uproar from the lower part of the dwelling reached their ears.

They could hear loud and angry voices, the trampling of many feet, and all those other noises which result from the sudden irruption of a large body of men.

"Halt!" cried Dick, in a moment. "We must retreat! Escape in that direction is entirely cut off!"

He sprang lightly up the stairs again, almost carrying Maud with him, who, upon discovering this failure, believed that the end would be the capture not only of herself but of her four friends as well

This was not unlikely.

Dick dashed open the door of the attic in front of the house, and no sooner did he cast a glance into the interior than a shout escaped his lips.

His friends, who were close behind, saw in a moment what had caused this ejaculation.

The girl they had left securely bound to the chair had disappeared, and on the ground lay fragments of the rope with which she had been secured.

"This explains all," said Turpin. "The jade has got loose somehow or other, and has let in the officers—she will tell them all! This is truly awkward!"

"Never mind," said Tom King, "follow to the roofs. We must seek some other means of reaching the ground, and that at once, or it will be too late!"

This was true.

"Luckily," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, "I have the rope; it is of good length, and may enable us to get down in safety."

"A good thought!" said Dick. "I wish that had occurred to me at first, we would not then have attempted to re-enter this house—it would have been much the best."

"It is not too late," said Claude Duval. "Haste—haste!"

Although in a situation of so much peril, the highwaymen preserved their calmness admirably

They were, of course, exceedingly anxious, for they were filled with the dread that it would be impossible to gain Smithfield Market without being captured.

Not a word of these doubts and fears escaped their lips

All their energies were bent to getting once more upon the roofs.

This occupied but a brief space of time.

Before they crept out of the window, however, they had heard police officers hastily ascending the stairs, so that the pursuit after them would be very close and hot indeed.

As Dick was last, he filled up the time by barricading the attic door with all the heavy articles of furniture the place contained.

It was not likely that it would prove anything more than a temporary barrier to the police officers, still, it would cause a brief delay, and every moment was of the utmost importance to them.

Tom King went first and led the way.

Fortunately, the houses in the narrow court we have mentioned were all about the same height from the ground.

They were all defended with a stone parapet about three feet in height, so that it was an easy matter not only to pass rapidly from one roof to another, but also, by stooping down, to hide themselves from the gaze of any people below.

The court terminated in a ruined and, apparently, little-used portion of old Newgate Market.

The distance to the ground was very great, and when, on reaching the end building Tom King looked down, he shook his head, for he knew well enough the rope was nothing like long enough.

Creeping a little further along the angle of the building, he saw, many feet below him, a wall, which, apparently divided the market from some contiguous property.

"That is our only chance," he said, addressing his companions, "and it is a desperate one. We have no time to hesitate—we must adopt it! Secure the hook to the parapet! We must then slip down the rope and stand upon the wall; then, when we have all reached it, the rope must be removed, secured to the wall, and then I doubt not we shall be able to reach the ground."

This was a very desperate undertaking, and the highwaymen by no means relished the idea of making such a perilous descent.

But just at that moment the police officers, having, with more difficulty than Dick imagined, broke open the attic door, appeared upon the roof.

The sight of their foes so close to them, and their cries of exultation, instantly put an end to the hesitation they had felt.

Without saying a word, Sixteen-String Jack lowered the rope, and almost before it was secured Tom King slipped down it, and in an instant was standing safely on the top of the wall.

"Come," he said, "be speedy! I fear, now, we shall find our foes waiting for us so soon as our feet touch the earth."

Tom King sat astride the wall and held the rope.

By doing this he rendered the descent much easier to his companions.

So great was the expedition used that before the police officers had time to get half-way over the housetops the little party were standing in safety on the wall.

Finding that their prey had disappeared, however, the police officers cried aloud, and made every noise they could think of to alarm their companions who were below

By the same means as before our friends slipped down the rope.

It was a rapid process, and to their infinite satisfaction they quickly found themselves standing on the firm earth.

But just at that moment a shrill whistle reached their ears, and Claude Duval found himself suddenly grasped by some one

To wrench his head round, and to deal two terrific blows at his adversary were simultaneous motions, and the next thing of which the others were conscious was the officer who had attacked him lying insensible on the ground.

"That whistle will bring all the rest upon us!" cried Claude. "Forward—forward!"

Half fainting with terror and fatigue, Maud was scarcely able to move.

Turpin, too, felt severely the effects of the hurts he had received, although he was partially rendered insensible to them by his excitement.

Nevertheless, he drew his sword and supported Maud's steps.

A considerable distance had yet to be gone over before they could reach the spot where Jabez was waiting with the horses.

This, it will be remembered, was in the open space of Smithfield Market.

To gain this, it was necessary that they should run out of Newgate Market, across Newgate Street, and through several courts and alleys.

Such a large party as five persons could not by any possibility make their way through the streets without attracting attention.

Then, all the police officers around the prison were on the look-out in all directions.

Luckily, as we have explained, these were by no means so numerous as they had been, and this proved very greatly in the favour of the highwaymen.

"Let me lead the way!" said Tom King, darting forward. "You, Dick, follow next, and let Claude and Jack bring up the rear, and cover your retreat."

He did not wait for any reply to be given to this command, but hastened onward at a rapid rate, closely followed by Turpin, who was almost compelled to carry Maud—she was so terrified and exhausted.

Without accident they reached Newgate Street.

"Now comes our danger!" exclaimed Tom King, pausing for a second. "Speed alone can save us! Follow me quickly!"

He darted across the thoroughfare as he spoke.

The remainder of the party pressed closely after him; but immediately a loud shout was set up, showing that they had been seen and the alarm given.

They could hear the hasty rush of footsteps; but the sound only increased the speed of the highwaymen.

Panting and breathless, they raced through the numerous courts that lay between them and their destination.

The police officers, however, were hard upon their track.

The blowing of whistles and the springing of rattles came continually upon their ears, and it seemed that they were spreading round them in a circle, so that they justly feared they would be surrounded on every side by their foes.

"On—on!" cried Tom King. "Do not falter. We have not much further to go now! On—on!"

His words, and the manner in which he bounded forward, cheered and inspired the rest.

They followed him swiftly, and at length, to their infinite satisfaction, the large, open space of Smithfield was reached.

Luckily for their safety, the fog still hung in heavy masses about this damp, unwholesome spot.

Under cover of this murky vapour, they would stand a much better chance of getting clear away.

Only one drawback was attached to it, and that was the difficulty they experienced in deciding upon the exact spot where Jabez was waiting with the horses.

Any mistake on this point would be attended with fatal results.

"Straight on!" said Dick, who noticed Tom's hesitation—"don't pause! Go straight on—our foes are gaining rapidly upon us!"

This was the case.

The officers, stimulated by the hope that on the present occasion they should be able to secure the whole of the immense reward, pressed forward with great speed.

In a fair race, there could be no doubt that the highwaymen would have distanced the police officers easily, for they were much more lightly clad, and were not so encumbered with accoutrements.

As it was, however, Maud's condition much impeded their progress.

It was only at this moment that the thought struck Claude that he might make himself more useful than he had yet done.

With a bound, he placed himself abreast with Dick Turpin, and then he said:

"Resign Maud to my care for a few moments. I have not gone through quite so much exertion as you have. I can carry her easily. You know best where the horses are. Do not hesitate—every moment is of infinite value! Let me take her, and do you lead the way!"

Turpin did hesitate for a moment, but only for a moment.

The desire he felt to keep Maud continually under his protection subsided when he thought of the dangerous condition of his comrades, and that Claude was in a much better state to assist her than he was himself.

Therefore he resigned her to his charge.

With an exertion of the great strength he possessed, Claude Duval raised Maude fairly in his arms, and then, notwithstanding his burden, ran forward with great speed.

The delay caused by this change was very slight, and no doubt it would quickly be made up, for Turpin now went first.

He knew exactly the spot where he had left Jabez, and felt sure that he might reach it blindfold.

But a pang of alarm shot through his heart when, at the same moment, the thought occurred to him that the officers might have seen the horses and secured them.

And when he observed how fearfully close his pursuers were behind, even if they reached the horses, he doubted whether they would have time to mount before they were surrounded.

He felt how much depended upon himself, and so he bounded forward with a rapidity that was surprising, considering the exertion he had already undergone.

"Thank Heaven!" he ejaculated, after running a few paces, "the horses are there, and Jabez is with them! On—on, my friends—safety lies before us! Rest assured that all will yet be well!"

CHAPTER DCLVI.

THE POLICE OFFICERS ATTACK THE HIGHWAYMEN, AND MAUD AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK ARE WOUNDED.

A MOMENT afterwards, and Dick Turpin perceived some dusky object looming before him through the fog.

"Hist!" he cried. "Jabez, are you there?"

"Is that you, captain?"

"Yes. All's well

"Then here are the horses, and in first-rate condition for the road."

Dick Turpin did not stand still while these words were uttered.

With that speed and agility which long and continual practice alone could have given him, he sprang on to the back of Black Bess.

"Now, Claude," he cried, "give Maud to me, and then mount and away!"

Claude raised Maud up, and Dick, taking her in his arms, placed her before him in the saddle.

At that very instant, however, there was a terrific discharge of firearms.

Maud uttered a loud and piercing shriek, while an ejaculation, either of pain or astonishment, escaped the lips of Sixteen-String Jack.

The slight delay that had taken place in mounting their horses had enabled the officers to come up with them.

But they were on foot, and no sooner did they perceive that the highwaymen were engaged in mounting their horses, than a feeling of rage and desperation took possession of them.

At the command of their leader, every one drew a pistol, and fired at the dark, shadowy figures just in front.

Then, rapidly passing the discharged pistols from their right hand to their left, they drew their swords, and rushed impetuously forward, so as to be able to secure and overpower anyone who might have been injured by the volley.

Before our friends fairly started, the foremost officer reached them.

He saw one figure on foot, and, raising his sword, he made a slashing cut at it.

With a smothered groan, Jabez sank to the earth, for he it was the officer had attacked.

Dick Turpin just perceived this incident, and that was all.

Already had he given Black Bess the impulse forward, and, even had he attempted it, he could not have drawn her in immediately, and certainly not in time to help his faithful ally.

The officer dropped his sword, and sprang upon the prostrate form.

"Here's one of 'em!" he cried—"here's one of 'em! Hurrah!"

His voice mingled strangely with the clatter of the horses' feet as they sped along St. John's Road in the direction of the open country.

"Who is it?" said one of the officer's companions.

"I don't know—it's one of 'em! A lantern!" cried the leader of the party. "Let us find out, if we can, who it is. If it should prove Dick Turpin, the others may escape, and welcome!"

A lantern was now immediately produced.

The officer who held it pressed forward, and, removing the dark slide, allowed a bright beam of light to fall upon the countenance of the prostrate man.

A loud shout of anger and disappointment came from their lips when they discovered who it was.

"Curses!" said the officer, who thought he had made such a clever capture—"curses!"

"Who on earth can the fellow be?" said another. "I fancy he's dead."

"He was evidently assisting the highwaymen to escape," said the chief officer, "even if he was not one of them, so he deserves all he has got. But don't stand chattering here! Forward! Just on the other side of the market we can obtain horses. We will mount in pursuit!"

Leaving Jabez on the stones of Smithfield Market weltering in his blood, the officers, sheathing their swords, hastened across the open space in the direction of the stables of which their leader had spoken.

Here, with very little loss of time, they obtained horses.

In a few minutes, all were mounted and galloping along at full speed.

"They have got the start of us," said the chief officer; "but no matter, it doesn't signify; let us stick close to their heels—they can't go far without being interrupted. All the roads are well watched by the dragoons!"

A disorderly shout followed this speech, and then all was silent.

The officers bent the whole of their energies to urging their horses to make their utmost speed.

Leaving them in hot pursuit, we will return to our friends.

The speed at which they flew onwards quickly left Smithfield Market far behind.

Despite her double load, Black Bess kept the lead apparently without the slightest effort.

Maud clung tightly to Dick Turpin—so tightly, that there was scarcely any necessity for him to hold her on the saddle.

As soon as he could recover his breath sufficiently to speak, he said:

"Maud—Maud, why did you shriek like that? Were you hurt? Did that bullet reach you, or were you only terrified at the sudden report?"

She made no reply to this speech, but clung still more convulsively to Dick.

From this he concluded she was unhurt, but overcome with terror and exhaustion.

He was satisfied that he had escaped injury on his own person, and he did not believe that Black Bess had suffered.

Turning round, he cried out at the top of his voice.

"My friends, speak—tell me, is all well? Are you all unhurt?"

"All except myself!" exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack.

"And you?" said Turpin, anxiously.

"A mere nothing, captain—a trifle not worth speaking about."

"But it was very near being serious," said Claude Duval. "A difference of half an inch would have cost you your life."

"Where are you injured?" cried Turpin.

"The bullet has carried away the lower part of his ear, and ploughed the skin on his cheek!" replied Claude Duval, who at that moment happened to be nearest to Dick Turpin.

The highwaymen had made good use of their time, and had managed to get a considerable distance from Smithfield.

"Hark!" cried Tom King, suddenly—"hark! I fancy the officers have obtained horses and are in pursuit!"

Upon hearing these words, all listened.

The clear, ringing sound produced by horses' hoofs beating upon the high-road reached their ears with more distinctness than they desired.

"Yes, they are after us," cried Dick, "and we must push onwards at full speed."

Although the pace at which the horses were going was something terrific, the highwaymen endeavoured to accellerate it.

They succeeded, and had the satisfaction of finding that the sounds of pursuit grew fainter and fainter, until at length they ceased altogether.

Nevertheless, they did not suffer their horses to relax their speed.

Presently, however, when the country was fairly reached, and when there was nothing around them save green trees and fields, Dick again addressed himself to Maud and endeavoured to arouse her.

"Speak—speak!" he exclaimed. "Do not keep so silent—speak, if it is only one word to assure me you are uninjured!"

An inarticulate sound, which seemed more like a stifled groan than aught else, was the sole reply.

Alarmed at this cry, Dick placed his hand upon her shoulder and endeavoured to raise her to a more upright position.

A cry unmistakably of pain issued from Maud's lips.

Simultaneously, Dick uttered an ejaculation.

The hand which he placed upon her shoulder encountered something cold and sticky.

His sense of touch alone told him what this was.

But it was too terrible to believe upon such testimony.

Therefore, he held up his hand, and as well as the darkness of the night would permit, looked at it.

He saw plainly enough that it was stained with blood.

"Help—help!" he cried. "Maud is wounded—badly wounded—perhaps to the death, and I knew it not—I knew it not!"

Acting upon the impulse of the moment, he caused Black Bess to come to a standstill.

His comrades hastened to surround him, and when they learned the discovery he had made, their solicitude seemed almost equal to his own.

Maud was not dead, for he could feel her breath upon his hand, while at short intervals low cries of pain escaped her.

But she was certainly unable to reply to any of the questions they addressed to her respecting the nature and situation of the wound.

Although she was not yet dead, Dick feared that the wound might prove a fatal one, and so, with painfully-breathless anxiety, he endeavoured to ascertain its position.

"It's in her shoulder!" he exclaimed—"her left shoulder. Alas, alas! I fear——"

"Don't anticipate the worst," interrupted Tom King. "The wound after all may be nothing serious, although it has bled so profusely. Forward—forward, or the little advantage over our enemies which we have gained will be lost!"

"Listen!" said Dick. "Hear my commands and obey them. Maud's state is such as to call for immediate attention; therefore, let the risk and danger be what it may, I shall stop at the next roadside inn I come to, and have her hurt attended to as well as circumstances will permit."

"But, Dick——"

"Not a word, Tom—not a word! You follow after me with what speed you will. For once I will urge Black Bess to the utmost, and see what she can accomplish. You follow close after—keep behind as well as you can."

Without waiting for another word to be spoken, and without uttering one himself, Dick Turpin, by every means in his power, made his gallant mare understand that a time had arrived when it was necessary that she should put forth all her energies.

With a neighing sound, Black Bess appeared to respond.

She bounded forward like a dart, and although the speed she had previously made was wonderful, yet it was as nothing in comparison with the manner in which she now flew along the high-road.

In spite of all the efforts the three highwaymen made to keep up with their captain, Black Bess shot ahead, and left them far behind.

"If she keeps up that pace," said Claude Duval, "he will not be long reaching a roadside inn."

"That's true enough," said Tom King, "for I happen to know there is one, called The Bell."

"About how far is it from this spot?"

"Two miles, at the most. It is just at the commencement of a straggling little village."

"And you think Dick will stop there?"

"Yes, I am certain."

"Well, then," said Claude, "as soon as we are within half a mile of it, let me know."

"Why?"

"I will pull up and take my station on the road, while you and Jack push onward with all speed to the inn. Jack's wound wants attending to."

"But why should you stay behind?"

"Do you not comprehend my motive? It is in order to increase your safety. I shall wait there, listening intently; and the moment I hear the hoof-beats of our pursuers on the road, I shall gallop on to the inn, and give you timely warning."

"Excellent!" said Tom King. "That's a capital thought! I feel much easier now. As you say, Jack's wound, though far from serious, requires attention; and when we arrive, I can take charge of the horses, so that there will be no delay in that respect."

"Good!" said Claude. "So that, after all, this halt will not be half so dangerous as I thought at first."

Nothing more was said until the three highwaymen were about half a mile from the Bell Inn.

All three drew up the moment Tom King spoke.

"Dick is there by this time, rest assured. Perhaps Maud's wound is already being attended to."

"Forward, then," said Claude. "Do not waste a minute, for who can say how soon I shall hear our pursuers approaching?"

"Keep good guard, Claude!"

"Never fear for that. I will be vigilant, depend upon it, and you shall have timely notice of their coming. So farewell!"

"Farewell," said Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack, who once again put their horses in motion.

Claude backed his horse as close to the hedge-row as he possibly could, so that there was little fear of his being seen by any chance passer-by; and then, bending forward, he placed his hand to his ear, and listened with the greatest intentness.

In the meanwhile, his two comrades, after a few minutes' gallop, reached The Bell.

They pulled up in front of the inn with a dash.

"Now, Jack," said Tom King, "enter the house. Leave the horses to me; I will go round to the stables with them, and will take care they are in readiness."

Sixteen-String Jack obeyed.

He made light of his wound, for he thought it a trifle.

Nevertheless, in his long and rapid gallop a great quantity of blood had escaped from it; so much to his surprise, the moment his feet touched the ground his head spun round, and he would have fallen had he not grasped the saddle.

He recovered himself almost instantly, and, with slow, staggering steps, he made his way to the front door of the inn.

He felt strangely giddy, and had extreme difficulty in preventing himself from fainting.

CHAPTER DCLVII.

DICK TURPIN IS DRIVEN FROM THE INN BY HIS FOES, AND FINDS A REFUGE BENEATH THE TREES IN EPPING FOREST.

It took Dick Turpin only a few minutes to reach The Bell inn.

Upon arriving, he dismounted hastily, and, calling aloud for the ostler, left Black Bess, and ran, with Maud in his arms, towards the front door.

In the anxiety he felt, he forgot all about Black Bess, and omitted to bestow upon her his usual amount of care and attention.

Although the hour was such a late, or, rather, such an early one—for morning was approaching—The Bell Inn was open.

The reason for this was that a coach stopped there; and but for the chance custom derived from this source, they would have done but a poor trade.

The ostler was on the look-out, so he responded immediately to Dick's call, and taking Black Bess by the bridle, led her into the stable without another thought.

The front door of the public-house was latched.

Dick dashed it open with a loud noise, and strode along the passage.

Aroused by the tumult, the landlady ran out of the bar.

"A private room!" said Dick Turpin. "Five guineas for your best room!"

The landlady stared in astonishment, but she understood that an unusually large amount of money was to be earned, and so, dropping a curtsey, she exclaimed:

"This way, sir—this way, if you please! There's the parlour, and it's quite private, I assure you!"

She flung a door open as she spoke, and Dick, hastily passing through it, deposited Maud upon a couch.

"Have you any skill in surgery?" said Dick to the landlady. "This is my wife, and she has been accidentally wounded."

"I can dress a simple hurt," said the woman; "but if it's a serious wound I would rather not meddle with it."

"Let us see," said Dick. "Remove her dress."

The landlady obeyed.

An ugly-looking wound, situated near the shoulder joint, was then brought to view.

The landlady shook her head.

"I dare not meddle with that," she said. "The bullet is there, beyond a doubt, and must be extracted."

"Fetch a surgeon, then, instantly! I will pay any amount for the services of a medical man! Call in the nearest surgeon!"

"Dear me," said the landlady, "I am all in a flutter, and quite forgot! Why, there's a doctor in the house now—Doctor Thrales. He's waiting for the coach; he often comes."

"Ask him to step in," said Dick, interrupting her. "I will pay him any fee! Call him—call him!"

Dick was full of impatience, and the landlady, perceiving it, hurriedly departed.

Dick bent down over the couch, and saw that Maud was quite insensible.

Her hands and face were very cold, and Dick's dread that she had been fatally injured grew greater and greater.

Then the landlady returned, ushering in a tall, dark sallow-faced man.

He inclined his head slightly to Dick, who immediately said:

"Here, sir, is my wife. She has been wounded in the shoulder. Look—look, and tell me whether the shot will prove fatal!"

"It is a very serious hurt," said the doctor, after an examination. "Luckily, I have my case of instruments with me. I will extract the bullet and dress the wound. She must then be kept perfectly quiet for several days at least."

The word "Impossible!" rose to Dick's lips, but he did not utter it.

He became instantly absorbed in watching the proceedings of the surgeon.

The bullet was skilfully extracted, the wound bound up and skilfully bandaged, and, after a bottle of some pungent essence had been uncorked and applied to her nostrils, Maud regained her consciousness.

"Dick!" she exclaimed, in a moment—"Dick, where are you?"

"Hush!" he replied, hastily, fearful that she might utter his name. "Do not speak yet—pray do not! I am here, and all is well!"

Perceiving that the surgeon was restoring his instruments to the case from which he had taken them, Dick said:

"Here, take this as your fee. I am infinitely obliged to you."

Then, in a whisper, he added:

"Do you think the consequences will be serious?"

"Not if she remains here, and is kept perfectly quiet," was the reply. "But if she is moved, I would not answer for the result."

The surgeon left the room, and in the passage encountered Sixteen-String Jack.

He was leaning against a wooden petition, and in a faint tone of voice, was asking for assistance.

"Another wound to dress?" said the surgeon, in surprise. "How came you by that hurt?"

"We were travelling along the highway," said Jack, "and were attacked by highwaymen. I have been wounded, and my friend's wife."

Jack's hurt was insignificant, and the surgeon simply placed a bandage over it to check the flow of blood.

Just at that moment, however, there was the sound of horses' feet outside.

Then the door of the inn was flung open, and Claude appeared.

In his excitement and haste, he did not notice the presence of the surgeon.

"Quick—quick!" he cried. "They are close behind us now! Where is the captain?"

"In another room."

"Tell him, then, at once! There is not a moment to be lost!"

So saying, Claude departed, in order to give the warning to Tom King.

The surgeon was so bewildered by the suddenness of Claude's appearance, and so surprised by the words he had uttered, that for a moment or two he could do nothing but stare vacantly about him.

Sixteen-String Jack hastened along the passage, and opened at random one of the doors.

He looked in, but the apartment was empty.

He went to the next, and here he found Dick.

"The officers are close behind us on the road," he said, in a whisper. "Fly! Haste—haste! The horses are outside, and we are all waiting for you!"

Dick was in a dilemma.

He pressed his hands to his temples, and strove to think.

If either Maud or himself remained there, they would to a certainty be taken prisoners by the officers, and carried back to Newgate.

Then the surgeon had told him that if Maud was moved the worst might be anticipated.

But seeing that either way she would be moved, he saw clearly enough it was best that he should take her.

"Lead the way, Jack," he said, suddenly. "I will follow, though the risk is fearful."

"Not so great as remaining behind," said Jack.

"True!" was the reply.

And as he spoke, Dick raised Maud in his arms, and followed Jack to the front of the inn.

The horses were there, all in readiness.

"What can all this mean?" said the surgeon, grasping the landlady by the arm. "What is it all about? I can't understand it!"

Before she had time to make any reply the highwaymen sprang upon the backs of their horses, and started off with a prodigious clatter.

An impulse, which they could not resist, compelled the doctor and the landlady to stand at the door and listen until the sounds made by the horses' hoofs had died away.

Then they were about to close the door, when the same sound reached their ears, but from the opposite direction.

They stood still and waited.

In a short time the police officers, who had been reinforced on the road, made their appearance on the scene.

Finding the inn was open, and that people were standing about, they resolved to pull up, in order to ask whether anything had been seen of the highwaymen.

Accordingly, the leader rode up close to the front door, and said:

"We are officers in pursuit of the notorious highwaymen, Dick Turpin and his gang. Have you seen anything of them? They are mounted on four horses, and one is carrying a woman—a prisoner they have rescued from Newgate!"

"Why—why," exclaimed the doctor and the landlady in a breath, "they've been here for ever so long!"

"Been here! Do you mean they stopped?"

"Yes, certainly!"

"Then why did you not detain them?"

"We did not know who they were!"

"And where are they now?"

"They set off at a gallop along the road!" replied the landlady.

"How long is it since they left this inn?"

"Only a few minutes; the sound of their horses' feet has only just died away!"

"Then forward, my lads!" cried the chief officer. "This is better news than I expected to receive! Forward—forward! Whip and spur, and we shall have them yet!"

Meanwhile the highwaymen had galloped on, and coming to the foot of a steep hill, they allowed their horses to ascend it at a gentle pace, believing that in the end they should gain time by doing so.

"Maud," said Dick, bending down over her, "are you better?"

"Yes, much better—much better! But——"

"But what?"

"I feel very, very faint."

"No doubt. Wait a moment—I will consult with my comrades."

Turning round in the saddle, in order to address his companions, he said:

"I don't want to gallop a yard further than is absolutely necessary. Let us try to throw them off the scent. And then the question comes, Where shall we go to? What place is there that will afford us secure safety for a time? Maud's life imperatively demands it."

"I am afraid it will never do to return to the Chase," said Tom King. "I should not be at all surprised if it is not well watched at every point."

"But what other place is there?" said Turpin. "I am too excited to think. Is there no other place you can suggest?"

"There is Epping Forest," said Claude Duval; "that's at no great distance from here. It's a huge place, and, if we once gained its inmost recesses, I think we might bid our foes defiance. What say you?"

"Nothing could please me better," replied Turpin. "It is the very place. To Epping Forest, my friends. That shall be our residence for a time. As you say, I believe when there, we can set the police officers at defiance."

"Onward, then!" said Tom King. "We have breasted the hill now, and I know every inch of ground between this and Epping. Follow me, and I will lead you there straight."

There was a long, gently-sloping descent from the top of the hill, and the rate at which the highwaymen flew down it was truly amazing.

At length Tom King cried:

"Halt!"

They all pulled up.

"That has given us the start, I rather think," he said. "Now, then, to ascertain whether we are within hearing of our foes, or not."

So speaking, he slipped off his horse, and lay at full length upon the road, pressing his ear close to the earth.

He listened intently for several moments.

Then, rising and knocking the dust from his apparel, he said:

"All's well; I can hear nothing whatever of them. They must be a long way off. Now follow me down this lane. It is so narrow, that they will never think we have turned down it."

He sprang into the saddle as he spoke.

It was on the tip of Turpin's tongue to say: 'What lane?" for he could see none, when Tom King turned his horse's head and passed between two tall trees.

The others followed, and to their surprise they saw an exceedingly narrow lane—scarcely wide enough to allow the passage of one vehicle—which wound through a kind of preserve or plantation.

The darkness was intense, and the trees grew in such a manner that anyone in the roadway at night would never notice the narrow gap between them, they seemed one solid mass.

Trusting more to the sagacity of their horse than to their own powers of vision, the highwaymen pressed onwards at good speed, of course not so rapidly as upon the broad high-road.

"This is a private road," said Tom King "and one which we have no right to be upon; it leads to the back

of a large mansion, which is surrounded by spacious grounds."

"No matter," said Claude, "it has answered our purpose admirably."

"You are right, for it is the nearest way to the place we want to reach. There's a gate beyond, and then, if we keep steadily across the meadows, we shall reach the forest in something less than half an hour."

Tom King's words were proved to be perfectly correct.

By taking the course he had mentioned, they came in sight of Epping Forest in little more than twenty minutes.

Dick welcomed the sight of the huge trees gladly, and he increased his speed.

Maud was again unconscious and icy cold.

He was full of terror on her account, and it was a positive relief to him when, at length, he found himself galloping rapidly along a wide, open glade in the old forest.

They had heard nothing whatever of the police officers since they quitted the high-road, and, therefore, not without reason, flattered themselves with the hope that they had been entirely successful in throwing them off their track.

CHAPTER DCLVIII

THE HIGHWAYMEN DETERMINE TO TAKE UP THEIR QUARTERS IN THE CAVE IN EPPING FOREST.

"HALT," cried Dick Turpin, when they had penetrated some distance into the forest—"halt! Now, my friends, we are safe, and I am full of alarm on Maud's account."

"No—no," said Tom King, "let us not pause—a few minutes more can surely make no difference, and you will admit that the further we get into the forest the better it will be!"

"We are safe enough here, I think."

"Perhaps so—perhaps not. We can't make sure that we have entirely baffled our enemies. For once, be guided by me. Now that we are in the saddle, let us push on, and get, if possible, into the very heart of the forest."

"Agreed!" said Turpin. "Lead on, and make good speed—it will at least obviate the necessity of another removal."

"It is the best in every respect!" responded Tom; and after one glance upwards at the stars, he led the way along another open glade.

In this manner they continued for nearly half an hour.

At the end of that time the trees grew so closely together and the undergrowth was so dense and luxuriant that it became impossible to proceed further on horseback.

In consequence of the branches of the trees commingling above, dense darkness prevailed all round the spot, making their progress still more difficult.

Dismounting, however, Tom said:

"This is by no means a comfortable place to stay in; there are many better in the old forest. Look, here seems to be what at some distant date was a narrow footpath—doubtless it will lead us somewhere. Follow me!"

With all his anxiety, not even Dick Turpin was desirous to remain where they had halted on this occasion.

The ground beneath their feet was soft and swampy, and a peculiar odour hung about that was particularly disagreeable to the senses.

Tom King went first, leading his horse by the bridle.

Dick surrendered Black Bess to the care of Claude Duval, and, raising Maud in his arms, followed his old friend.

After following the devious windings of the footpath among the trees for a distance of about two hundred yards, the highwaymen suddenly emerged into an open space about ten feet in diameter.

From the time they entered the pathway the ground had had an upward tendency, so that the open space we have just mentioned was of considerable elevation.

After giving one glance around them, ejaculations of surprise and pleasure burst simultaneously from the lips of all.

Half hidden by the trees was a large piece of rock, which jutted up abruptly from the surface of the ground.

In one side of this rock was a kind of recess, which, to judge by appearances, was evidently the entrance to a cave.

"We are in luck," said Tom King. "Chance has guided us to the very spot we wished to reach."

"It seems so," said Turpin. "Hasten forward, and explore that place while I endeavour to restore Maud to consciousness.

He placed her gently down upon the soft turf as he spoke.

Not the least signs of animation could he behold, and but for the faint fluttering he felt beneath his fingers when he placed his hand upon her breast, he would have believed that she was dead.

The feeble pulsation of her heart, however, inspired him with hope.

He chafed her cold hands between his own, and called upon her by name.

But without result.

At this moment the three highwaymen returned with satisfaction legibly imprinted on their countenances.

"Here is an excellent cave," they exclaimed—"a kind of natural hollow in the rock! It will screen us from observation, and protect us from the weather; nothing could be better!"

"I rejoice to hear it," said Dick, "for Maud's sake especially; at the least, she will require careful attention for a long time to come."

"Stay," said Tom King. "You require water—that will recover her from her swoon."

"I do want water," said Turpin: "but where is it to be obtained?"

"If I mistake not, I heard a trickling sound when near the opening of the cave. Wait a moment—I will see."

Tom hastened off, and found that he had not been mistaken.

From the side of the rock a tiny jet of water issued, which fell into a hollow in the rock beneath, where there was a considerable quantity of the clear, cold fluid.

Tom glanced around him for some object which would serve to carry the water, and perceived, at no great distance, a large and curiously-shaped shell.

To pick it up, fill it with water, and to carry it to Dick Turpin took him but a moment.

The cold water quickly revived Maud, and, opening her eyes, she pronounced herself already better.

"Let me lie still, if you can," she said. "That is all I desire, and then I doubt not I shall soon recover. But the officers—where are they?"

The sudden remembrance of her foes caused her to start and look anxiously around her.

"Fear nothing," said Turpin; "they have lost sight of us altogether. We are now in Epping Forest."

"Yes," said Tom King; "and, as I take it, in the very heart of it. Yonder is a cave, which will serve as a place of refuge. I don't believe anyone saw us enter the forest. It is a huge place, as you know full well, and, even if the officers knew we were concealed in it, it would be a work of weeks and months to discover us."

This was probably true, for at the time of which we write, Epping Forest was at least four times the size that it is now.

Every year, indeed, the noble mass of trees diminishes, and in a short time Epping Forest will become a thing of the past, unless vigorous steps are taken to prevent its demolition.

Strong wooden fences cross and recross it in every direction. Not a day passes but some spot is railed-in from the rest, so that even now only a few places remain where the public are allowed to wander through the glades and among the trees.

Yet the cave we have just spoken of still remains, and still is known as "Turpin's Cave."

Even now it is almost in the centre of the forest, measuring from Epping to Lea Bridge, and is situated about a mile north-west from the village of Loughton.

It served Dick Turpin well on an after occasion, as will be described.

We have seen that his first discovery of it was most fortunate.

Claude Duval attended to the horses, and Dick Turpin was pleased to find that Maud was much better than he had dared to hope.

A marked change was visible so soon as ever she was assured that her husband, his friends, and herself were all in safety.

After the lapse of a short time, she was carried to the

cave, where a rude kind of couch had been prepared with such materials as came to hand.

A fire was lighted, and some game killed.

A hearty breakfast was then made by the four highwaymen, which was very welcome after the fatigues of the night.

Leaving one to watch while the others slept, the day was passed away, and by nightfall they had to a great extent recuperated themselves.

Maud slept heavily, and Dick at frequent intervals cured a quantity of cold spring water over the bandages.

He knew, by experience, that this simple means was about as efficacious as any for preventing inflammation—that, indeed, was the only thing to fear.

The hemorrhage had entirely ceased, and the healing process would doubtless go on rapidly and well, provided there was no inflammatory action.

During the whole of the time, they had not heard a single sound to inspire them with alarm, so, with good reason, our friends indulged in the belief that they had completely baffled their foes, and that they were in entire ignorance of their whereabouts.

While seated around the fire after the evening meal, the highwaymen held a consultation as to the nature of their future proceedings.

"For the present," said Dick Turpin, "having reached what I believe to be a secure hiding-place, it is manifestly our best course to keep perfectly quiet for some length of time to come."

Tom King nodded, to show that this was just his own opinion.

"What we have done," continued Dick, "will raise no slight commotion, rest assured of that; and, although we have been so fortunate hitherto, it is my belief that if either or all of us ventured out upon any one of the roads within twenty miles of London, we should inevitably be captured."

"It is quite possible," said Claude.

"But we have many strong reasons for remaining," continued Dick. "First, there is Maud; then Jack is wounded, and if he keeps quiet so much the better; we are all exhausted and completely worn out. I propose, therefore, that we stay here for some time to come, until, in fact, our enemies have got tired of watching for us and despair of making a capture."

There was too much sound sense about this advice for it to be disregarded.

Dick's proposal, therefore, was unanimously adopted, and for several days was carefully carried out.

Each morning showed a perceptible improvement in Maud's condition.

As for the highwaymen, they lived peaceably and pleasantly enough, occupying their time chiefly with shooting birds, which supplied them with food.

After the excitements they had lately gone through, this rest was pleasant enough, and all enjoyed it.

As may be imagined, however, on many occasions conferences were held about the future.

They knew that they could not always exist in that place.

On one of these occasions, Tom King said:

"The proposition you made, captain, some long time ago must not be overlooked. Even putting a life in the forest at the best, the other would be far preferable."

"I quite agree with you," said Turpin. "I had not forgotten it. It is strange what difficulties we have had in the way of the accomplishment of that design."

"But I think they are all overcome now," said Claude.

"I cannot think of any. If we wait here until the country is quiet, we can then communicate with either Tom Davis or old Mathew, and place in their hands the money we have buried."

"True," answered Turpin: "that will be quite sufficient for our purpose."

"In my opinion," said Tom King, "some steps ought to be taken in this matter at once."

"Not yet, Tom—not yet."

"But consider a moment. We have already been here for a length of time, Sixteen-String Jack is well, and Maud is in a fair way of recovery. Surely the alarm must, to a great degree, have subsided."

"Notwithstanding all that," said Turpin, "it is too soon."

"I think not; for, when Tom Davis receives the money, some time will certainly elapse before he is able to find a suitable place; and before all the preliminaries are arranged, during that time we must perforce remain where we are. So I think, if the business is commenced immediately, we shall find everything arranged by about the time when we shall desire to quit this place."

This proposition of Tom King's was provocative of much discussion.

Long into the hours of that night the highwaymen sat weighing the matter over and considering it in every possible aspect.

To follow them would be tedious; let it suffice to say that eventually it was decided that Tom King was right.

It was still further arranged that to Tom King should be entrusted the task of proceeding to Enfield Chase, unburying the gold, and placing it in the hands of Tom Davis.

The succeeding night, if it proved to be a dark one, was decided upon for the enterprise.

Such being the case, Tom lay down, and took all the rest he possibly could, in order to prepare himself for his undertaking.

He was fully conscious that it was attended with a considerable amount of danger, but, under any circumstances, it would certainly be better that he should be in full possession of all his physical energies.

CHAPTER DCLIX.

TOM KING SETS OUT UPON HIS DANGEROUS ENTERPRISE

NIGHT at length closed in.

It was dark and cold.

Large masses of clouds piled themselves upon the horizon, and, before the sun had set, had spread themselves over the entire firmament.

But the huge mass was in rapid motion, although it required a keen eye to detect it, for it was only at rare intervals that any break was seen.

A piercing wind, that came in short and fitful gusts moaned among the tree-tops, which clashed together as they were shaken to and fro.

Then the wind would cease, and drops of rain would fall.

In fact, there was every indication of a squally, tempestuous night.

All these elemental signs, which would have dismayed an ordinary traveller, were observed by Tom King with pleasure and delight.

Nothing could be better calculated to suit his purpose than such a night as that promised to be.

He felt assured no persons would be abroad if they could possibly get indoors.

He had some difficulty in curbing his impatience so as to wait until the night was tolerably well advanced before he set out.

At last, however, the wished-for hour came.

Bidding Turpin farewell, for the captain remained in the cave with Maud, Tom King, leading his horse by the bridle, and followed by Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, left the enclosure, and directed his course towards the outskirts of the forest.

His two comrades accompanied him until he was able to mount his horse.

They then bade him farewell, and Tom King rode on alone.

He pushed on at good speed to get clear of the trees.

He had been in the forest quite long enough to be tired of it, and his heart beat high with pleasure at the prospect of an adventure.

Scarcely a thought of danger entered his mind.

He had the prudence, however, to emerge from the forest stealthily, and to reconnoitre well, before he ventured to leave the cover of the trees.

It was not possible to see to any great distance, but he found all around him still and quiet.

His horse, after such an unusually long rest, was full of spirits, and the moment the highwayman relaxed the reins, bounded off at a swift gallop.

Tom's breast was filled with exultation, and he could have shouted, so much were his spirits elated.

"I will not only do all that I have promised to-night"



[TOM KING'S SINGULAR ADVENTURE IN THE LANE.]

he said, mentally, "but I will have an adventure, and find out what has been going on while we have been in the forest."

Tom did not hesitate about his course.

He made his way in a direct line across the country to Enfield Chase, his intention being, first of all, to obtain possession of the money that was buried there.

Great caution would be necessary, for his enemies might be suspicious that he was lurking in the vicinity.

Among the trees, however, it was easy to baffle pursuit, and Tom King was so thoroughly well acquainted with every inch of ground that he was quite confident he should be able to reach the little dell by the nearest course.

According to his favourite plan, he avoided all beaten roads, and took his way over the meadows, heedless of all the obstacles he met with.

At that time the distance from the borders of Epping Forest to the borders of Enfield Chase was very trifling.

But between the two places ran the great north road leading from London to York.

This Tom would have to cross; and when he found he was approaching it, he slackened his pace and advanced with caution.

That road probably, above all others, would be closely watched and guarded by his foes.

Nevertheless, if ever so good a look-out was kept, it would be quite possible for him to cross over unperceived, provided he took the precaution to reconnoitre carefully.

A tall hedgerow, dividing two meadows, running at right angles to the highway, afforded him an excellent cover.

Keeping close under the shadow which it cast, he bent his head well down on his horse's neck and crept slowly forward.

At length he reached its extremity, and found that he was only separated from the high-road by another hedge.

Dismounting and holding the reins in his hand, he crept

up the little embankment forming the side of a watercourse, and peered through the twigs.

The road beyond he could see dimly and indistinctly.

No person was upon it, certainly.

He listened.

He started, but instantly recovering himself, he muttered:

"It was fortunate I stopped and did not continue my headlong course—the patrol is coming."

The steady tramp of horses' feet, proceeding at a walking pace, could be distinctly heard.

For a time Tom was puzzled to decide from which direction the sound came.

At one moment it would seem to come from the south, and then from the north.

It was odd that Tom should be thus puzzled, for he was well practised in such matters.

At least a moment elapsed before he came to a correct conclusion on the matter.

"Two troops are approaching this spot," he said to himself—"that's the secret. I will wait and see what happens next."

Louder and louder came the tramp of the horses' hoofs, and then the jingling of accoutrements rose on the night air.

"Dragoons, as I expected," said Tom.

On they came, steadily and slowly.

Tom's opinion was, judging from the position of the two troops, that they would meet somewhere near to the spot where he was concealed.

This expectation was fully realised.

Almost at the same moment, two stern voices cried out: "Halt!"—and then, as he continued to gaze between the interstices of the hedgerow, Tom perceived two small troops of light dragoons, each numbering about a dozen.

"Is all well?" said one of the voices that had cried halt.

"Yes, all is well," was the reply given by the other.

"Curse this work!" said the first speaker. "I wish my friends had thrown their money into the street, instead of buying me a commission. Bah!"

"It's a d—d shame," returned the other, "that soldiers and gentlemen should be called upon to do the work of dirty police officers! I'm sick of it. I'll sell out!"

During this speech, several murmurs arose from the men in both troops of a character that showed they disliked their extra duty quite as much as their superiors.

No more was said, however, by the officers in command. Discipline exerted itself over them, so they cried out:

"Silence in the ranks! Right about face! Quick march!"

The two troops faced about and retraced their steps.

Tom paused until they were almost out of hearing.

Then he exclaimed:

"Now is my opportunity. I shall get clear across and over the meadows long before they can reach this spot again."

He had found, while leaning against the hedge to observe the movements of the soldiers, that there would not be much difficulty in forcing a passage wide enough to allow himself and his steed to pass through.

Accordingly, he set about this at once, and soon had a gap large enough for his purpose.

He led his horse through and walked him gently across the road.

Fortunately for him, there was on the other side, and almost opposite, a wooden gate leading into the meadows.

Tom hastened towards it, but found it was locked.

A piece of rusty iron chain and a little padlock he felt determined should not turn him from his purpose.

Perceiving a large round stone close by, he lifted it up with both hands and dashed it with full force against the lock, which was demolished at once.

The gate creaked a little way open.

Tom entered the meadow hastily, and closed the gate behind him, for already he could hear sounds that indicated the return of the patrol.

Springing into the saddle, his horse darted across the meadow, and in a moment he was lost to sight in the darkness that prevailed everywhere around.

The country through which he had now to pass, in order to reach his destination, was rough and rugged.

There were few habitations in the vicinity, and no broad roads, so Tom felt that he could proceed with confidence and safety.

When, however, he perceived looming before him in the distance the huge trees which then stood proudly and nobly in Enfield Chase, he paused, for he felt the time had come when it was necessary for him to proceed with circumspection.

He considered that in all probability it was known they had of late been taking up their quarters in the Chase.

He had held long conversations with Claude and Jack upon the subject, who had told him how they had left Gubbins and Kibble secured to two trees.

It will be remembered by the reader that, in the hurry and confusion which took place upon their return to the Chase, the highwaymen quite forgot all about the two unfortunate police officers.

It was their intention, upon returning from the Old Bailey, to proceed at once to the trees and ascertain whether the officers were still bound to them; but Turpin's strange manner, and his sudden departure, and then equally sudden pursuit, not only prevented them from carrying out their resolve, but drove it completely from their minds.

Therefore, whether Gubbins and Kibble were still tied to the tree—whether they had managed to release themselves—or whether, by their shouts and cries for aid, they had attracted attention, the highwaymen knew not.

The only means of putting an end to that difficulty was by going direct to the trees.

Tom pondered a great deal over this, and, considering the length of time that had elapsed, he eventually came to the conclusion that the officers had managed to regain their freedom.

In the latter case, the Chase would, beyond a doubt, be carefully and closely watched, from the belief that the highwaymen were secreted somewhere in it.

"I will enter the Chase at the most difficult part," muttered Tom King, "that part which, above all others, they would expect me to avoid; then, as soon as I am fairly under the trees, I will make my way direct to the place which Claude and Jack described."

At the north-eastern extremity of the Chase stood a spacious and substantially-built mansion, surrounded by large grounds, which were carefully screened from the vulgar gaze by high brick walls.

These grounds, Tom knew, opened upon the Chase, and this was the route he had determined upon taking, despite the risk he ran of being seen by some of the inhabitants of the mansion.

Believing this to be a trifling danger, Tom King crept close along beneath one of the high walls of which we have spoken, until presently he came to a stout oak fence, between four and five feet in height.

Over this he made his horse leap, and then he found himself in the Chase, though at a great distance from the spot he wished to reach, which was situated in the southern portion.

However, he set off at a gentle trot, taking his way through the numerous glades, and passing round all the thickets and dense masses of undergrowth, instead of forcing his passage through them.

At length he paused.

"This must be somewhere near the spot," he exclaimed—"yes, surely this is it."

Tom looked carefully around him as well as the darkness would permit, and, from the minute description he had received from his two comrades, he felt quite convinced that he had arrived at the identical spot.

All around, however, was perfectly silent, nor could his eyes detect anything but the trunks of the old trees.

Alighting from his horse, he examined them one after another, and at last an ejaculation escaped his lips.

Lying near the two trees were several fragments of the rope by which Gubbins and Kibble had been bound.

But of the two officers themselves not the least trace remained.

They had completely disappeared.

"It is as I expected," said Tom King, "they are at liberty. Whether they freed themselves or were freed by others matters not in the least, in either case they would spread the information that we were here."

Taking every care and precaution he could think of, Tom King crept through the trees towards the little dell.

He reached it in safety.

He listened; but save the clashing of the branches of the trees, all was profoundly still.

The wind had dropped, and now rain descended with great violence.

"That will drive all to take shelter. I rather fancy," said Tom, drawing his cloak around him. "Now for the treasure."

He knew perfectly well where the money had been buried, and, removing the heap of stones which marked the spot, he began to dig hastily with his sword.

The ground was soon turned up, and then the treasure was revealed.

Altogether it represented a very considerable amount—more than sufficient, Tom felt convinced, to fulfil all their requirements.

He bestowed as much of the gold about his own person as he conveniently could, and the remainder he placed in the pockets underneath the flaps of his saddle.

Having removed the whole amount, he carefully filled in the earth and replaced the stones, so that there should be as little signs of the earth having been disturbed as possible.

By the time these preparations were completed the night was considerably advanced.

The rain, which had descended so violently, was but a shower, and now showed signs of rapid abatement.

But the wind rose again, and blew with unpleasant force, so that the weather was scarcely less disagreeable than it had been.

There would be little more than sufficient time to proceed to Tom, hand him the money, and return to the cave in Epping Forest, even supposing that he met with no interruptions on his way.

But Tom's heart was light enough, and the spirit of adventure strong within him.

He was delighted to think he had succeeded so far and so well.

Up to the present moment he considered his enemies had given him no trouble whatever.

Once again he mounted his steed, and, after having carefully reconnoitred, he ventured to emerge from the trees into the open country.

An hour's gallop across the country would take him to the house where Tom resided in Camden Town, then a small village lying quite away from London.

This, however, would doubtless prove a more dangerous route than that which he had previously taken, for the closer he drew to the metropolis the more vigilantly were all the roads guarded by police officers and dragoons.

CHAPTER DCLX.

TOM KING MEETS WITH AN INTERRUPTION ON HIS WAY TO PAY A VISIT TO TOM DAVIS.

SATISFIED that the coast was clear, Tom just grazed his steed's flank with his spur, and set forward at a greater speed than was exactly safe, considering the nature of the ground.

Ere going far, however, Tom found his further progress barred by another high-road.

He paused, just as he had done on a former occasion.

It was possible that he might have galloped clear over it without danger, but then there was a risk.

It would not do to go to Tom Davis's house with a troop of officers at his heels; and, in order to reach there, he would have to cross several high-roads.

For aught he knew, if the alarm was once given, it would be rapidly transmitted from one troop to the other; and, if they amalgamated their forces, he would stand but a very slight chance of escape.

Slightly parting the hedge, he listened as before for the tramp of horses' feet.

But all was still.

Suddenly, however, the silence was broken in upon, not by the sound he had expected to hear, but by another of a very similar character.

This was the grating, grinding sound produced by the rapid revolution of wheels over the miry road.

Tom listened.

"A travelling-carriage and four horses," he murmured. "What a speed they are making! Is not this a chance for a glorious adventure? Of course it is. Shall I embrace it? No, I think the danger is just a little too great. For myself I don't care, but I am entrusted with that which belongs to my comrades, and I should do wrong to wilfully run any risk of losing it. No, whatever this carriage may contain, it shall pass on unmolested so far as I am concerned. I will have an adventure, though, to-night, in spite of all circumstances, but it shall be on my return to the forest, after I have surrendered the treasure to the keeping of Tom Davis."

At the precise moment when Tom arrived at this determination the travelling-carriage came in sight.

He caught a glimpse through the hedge of a couple of flashing lights.

Then with a whirling rush, the vehicle swept by.

Just as it passed the spot where he was concealed, one of the windows was suddenly broken by some person within.

The crash made by breaking the glass was quite audible and Tom caught, or fancied he caught, a dim and indistinct glimpse of a female face at the carriage window, and also of a man's arm.

A low, smothered shriek, which seemed to have been stopped by the sudden placing of a hand before the mouth, next reached his ears, and then the carriage was gone.

For a second or two Tom King was so astonished at this strange and unexpected incident, that he stood perfectly still.

Then, with a sudden determination, he broke through the hedge, and dragged his horse after him.

Springing into the saddle, he said, half aloud:

"There's some poor defenceless girl in danger or distress, and, let the risk be what it may, I will do my best to be her protector. I should never forgive myself if I abandoned her to her fate."

With these words, and without any further consideration whatever, Tom King hastily clapped spurs to his horse and galloped off along the highway as though he was not running the slightest risk by doing so.

But Tom was always the champion and defender of beauty and innocence.

On the present occasion he was so firmly convinced that the female of whom he had caught such a transient glimpse was detained in the carriage against her will, that he lost sight of every other consideration.

Luckily for his safety, the travelling-carriage, after continuing along the high-road for a few hundred yards, suddenly turned down a narrow lane leading in the very direction Tom wished to go.

He knew the lane well, and was aware that it was one but little used by travellers.

That there should be any dragoons or police officers patrolling it was extremely unlikely, so, dismissing all anxiety from his mind, he renewed his efforts to overtake the carriage.

But, travelling at the speed it did, this was no easy matter, and a considerable time elapsed before he succeeded in placing himself abreast with the horses.

"Pull up, coachman!" he roared—"pull up! Or, as sure as you hold the reins in your hand I'll send a bullet through your carcass!"

The coachman paid no other attention to this threat than to give his horses a smart cut with the whip.

Then Tom hastily drew a pistol from his pocket, and fired in the air about a couple of feet above the coachman's head.

He was quite sure that the bullet could not have struck him, yet, nevertheless, wonderful to relate, the coachman uttered a howl, and fell off his seat.

He came down with quite a bang upon the hard road.

Then he rolled over and over with a rapidity that would have done credit to a professional tumbler, and finally fell with a loud splash into a deep and broad, but stagnant ditch by the roadside.

To stop the horses was now an easy enough task for Tom King to accomplish, and, in an incredibly short space of time, the vehicle was brought to a standstill.

One window of the carriage was then let down with a loud, rattling sound.

"Villain!—rascal!" cried a voice, hoarse with rage. "Who are you? By what right do you stop my carriage?"

Whether Tom intended to make any reply to this speech is doubtful.

At any rate, before he could do so, he heard a faint and stifled voice exclaim:

"Help—help!—oh, pray help me! Protect me from this man!"

"Ah, you will not be silent?" said the male occupant of the carriage. "Take that, then, for your obstinacy!"

The sound of a blow followed.

This exasperated Tom King to the utmost degree.

Slipping from the back of his horse, he drew his sword, and ran to the door of the post-chaise.

He turned the handle, and then the door was violently dashed open, and a young man, richly and fashionably dressed, sprang into the roadway.

There was an air of distinction about him—a haughtiness in his attitude, which, combined with the elegance of his apparel, convinced Tom King that he was of rank.

The young nobleman—if such he was by title—stopped as soon as he reached the ground, and turned his back to the door of the post-chaise.

At the same moment he drew his sword.

Holding it before him in an attitude of defence, he cried, in tones of the greatest rage:

"Who are you?—by what right do you bar my passage? Begone, and be thankful I have spared your life!"

Tom could not forbear giving utterance to a light laugh, which seemed to change the nobleman's rage into positive madness.

"You hold a lady prisoner in that carriage against her will," said Tom King, crossing his sword over that of the impetuous young man. "I demand her instantaneous release!"

"I have no words to waste on such as you!" cried the young nobleman, with unabated rage. "I hold myself accountable to no man for my actions, and no one shall interfere with me, except at the peril of their life! You will soon see how I shall dispose of your interference!"

So saying, the young man commenced a desperate attack upon Tom King, and our friend quickly found he should have some difficulty in parrying all the thrusts that were made at him.

In an instant he discovered that his unknown antagonist was a more accomplished swordsman than he had ever encountered in the whole course of his life before.

But, a sudden thought striking him, Tom King gave ground, and slowly retreated from his opponent.

To continue the conflict, it was necessary that the young nobleman should follow him up; and in doing this, he, as a matter of course, was compelled to remove from the position he had taken up at the door of the vehicle.

Tom wanted to draw him altogether away from it, and so he continued to retreat.

Step by step the young nobleman followed him up with great vigour, and by the look of his face it could be seen that his firm determination was to put an end to the conflict at once.

As soon as he imagined he had gone far enough, Tom stopped, and, after parrying a few thrusts, began to move round in a kind of circle.

He continued this manœuvre until his back was turned towards the door of the carriage, which was some few yards behind him.

No sooner had he gained this position than Tom King revealed his motive.

His voice was full of exultation as he cried:

"Now, lady, whoever you are, alight and escape. Fear nothing. Your abductor shall not reach you, except over my dead body!"

Tom almost paid for this with his life.

While speaking he had ceased to keep that close and vigilant watch upon all the movements of his adversary which was necessary to his own safety.

He slightly changed his attitude, and by good fortune received in his left arm the thrust which had been aimed at his heart.

"Beware!" cried the young nobleman with increasing furiousness, as he recovered and placed himself in an attitude of defence—"beware, I say!"

It would seem as though these words were addressed to the lady in the carriage.

If so, however, she paid no attention to them, for a slight girlish figure sprang into the roadway.

A loud growl immediately followed, and then a large, vicious-looking dog also jumped out of the carriage.

The young girl—for she was nothing more—after running for a few paces, stopped abruptly, when she found the savage brute was in pursuit of her.

"Beware!" cried the young nobleman again, his voice rising high above the clashing of the steel. "If you go a step forward that dog shall tear you down! Mind her, Venom—mind her!"

These words were spoken to the dog.

It was evident the animal understood them, for it crouched down as though in readiness to take a spring, and showed its white, glittering teeth.

Terrified beyond measure, the girl paused in her flight.

But for the presence of this animal she would before have shrieked aloud, or attempted to escape from the carriage, but her abductor, with many threats, placed the dog on the opposite seat, and assured her, if she either moved or spoke, it would spring at her throat.

When Tom called out to her, however, she believed she had a protector near, and so disregarded the threat.

But now she was afraid to move.

It took Tom out a second to comprehend the whole state of affairs.

"Unmanly brute!" he exclaimed, addressing his antagonist. "I could not find words to express my disgust!"

The young nobleman did not reply.

He made a feint and then a thrust.

With great difficulty Tom parried it.

For the tenth of a second, maybe, the young nobleman was off his guard.

Brief as was the time, Tom took advantage of it.

His arm was already shortened, and so he gave a sudden lunge forward.

Before the young man could step aside, or interpose his own blade, Tom's sword entered his chest; and such was the force of the blow, that the hilt of the weapon struck violently against him.

With a yell of agony, he sprang back, and then sank down upon the ground.

Seeing his master fall, the dog turned, in an instant, towards Tom.

He sprang at him like some wild beast.

But, watching for an opportunity, our friend, by one blow, clove the animal's skull in two.

Having wiped his sword on the brute's shaggy coat, he sheathed it, and then hastened towards the young girl, who, he could see, was ready to faint with alarm.

"Save me—save me!" she cried, as he approached; and had not Tom darted forward suddenly, and placed his arm round her waist, she would have fallen to the ground.

"Be under no apprehension now," he said. "Your abductor—for such I take him to be—cannot harm you now."

"Is he dead?" she asked, with a shudder.

"That I know not. If he is, he richly deserves his fate. However, that has nothing to do with you. Seek your own safety."

"Yes—oh, yes; I must return at once. My friends will be full of alarm on my account. With a specious tale, the villain allured me from my home; and I began to fear that I was lost, when the carriage stopped."

"Come, then!" said Tom; "recover yourself as well as you can. We must leave this spot. I shall be in considerable danger if I linger."

"But where shall I go?"

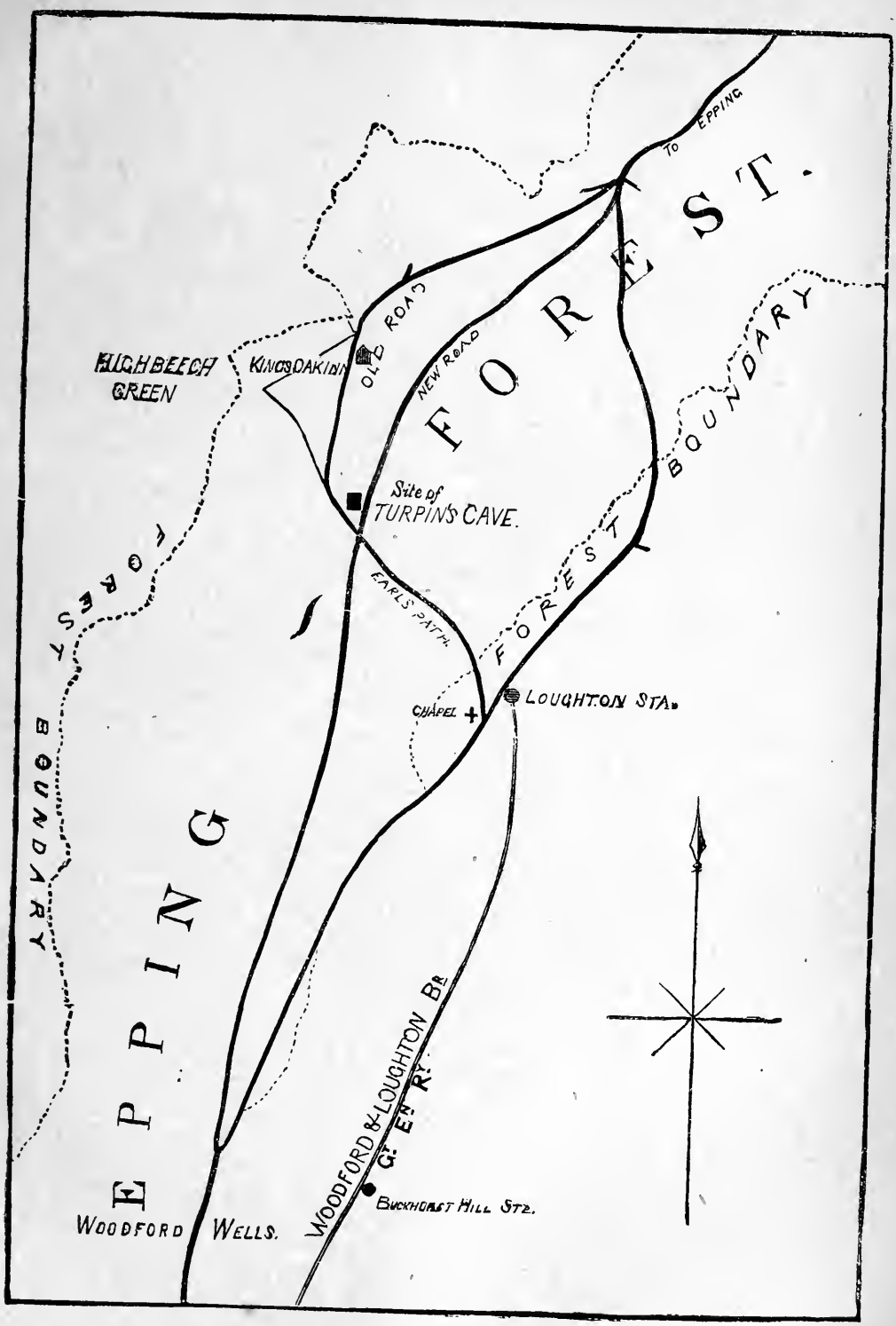
"I wish I could accompany you home," said Tom, "but that, I fear, is impossible. Come with me, however, to the top of this lane; you will then be in the high-road. That high-road is now patrolled by troops of light dragoons, and the officer in command will see that you incur no further danger."

"Thanks—thanks!" said the young girl. "I will follow your advice. You have saved me from a fate I shudder to think of. Accept this trifling gift as a remembrancer of our meeting; and although I cannot now express my thanks, yet tell me your name, so that I may know to whom I am indebted for my preservation."

CHAPTER DCLXI.

TOM KING RECEIVES SOME IMPORTANT INTELLIGENCE, AND HANDS OVER THE MONEY TO TOM DAVIS.

WHILE speaking these words, the young girl drew a ring from her finger, and held it out at arm's-length towards the highwayman



PLAN SHOWING THE EXACT SITUATION OF DICK TURPIN'S CAVE IN EPPING FOREST.
Distance of Cave from Loughton Station, one mile and a quarter.

"I accept your gift with great pleasure," he said, making a bow, "and I will always wear it in remembrance of you. As to my name, never mind what it is; I can't tell you my real one, nor the one by which I am known. Therefore, if you desire to remember me, do so by any name which your fancy may suggest."

This speech evidently was not what the young girl expected, for she drew back from Tom, and regarded him with slight distrust.

He noticed it, but affected not to do so.

"Come!" he cried. "The distance to the high-road is but trifling, and when once you reach it, you will be in safety."

The girl walked on beside Tom King in silence.

Not another word was exchanged until the end of the lane was reached.

Tom King had led his horse by the bridle.

He paused, and, having listened for an instant, said:

"Hark! Can you hear that faint, far-off sound? One of the troops I spoke of is approaching, so you will be safe—quite safe. And now, farewell!"

"Whoever you are," said the young girl, impressively, "accept my best thanks for the service you have rendered me."

"But my last speech was not so candid as you expected," said Tom King, interrupting her. "Well, no matter! I have interfered and prevented the consummation of a great wrong. For me, that is sufficient. And now, farewell!"

"Farewell!" said the young girl, pressing his hand tightly, for to her there was something charming in the mystery that appeared to hang over her preserver,—"farewell! And although you have chosen to keep your indentity a secret, and although I could almost guess who you are, believe me, I am not the less grateful on that account. Farewell!"

Tom did not speak again. but, springing into the saddle, waved his hand, and the next moment had trotted off down the lane.

The troop of dragoons, whose approach he had announced, was much too near at hand to be either safe or pleasant.

Tom did not go far down the lane, however. He felt an invincible repugnance to looking upon the scene of his adventure once more; so he leaped his horse over a hedge, and continued his course over the meadows.

Without the occurrence of any special incident which deserves our notice, he at length managed to reach the village of Camden Town without being seen by any of his foes.

The house in which Tom Davis resided was one of a small row of cottages lying some little distance north of the village.

It was a retired, out-of-the-way spot, and when Tom reached it the hour was such a late one that all the inhabitants appeared to have retired to rest.

Alighting from his steed, he opened the little gate leading into the garden in front of the house, and passed through it, his horse following him.

On the soft mould the horse's hoofs raised no sound, though they made sad havoc with the flowers, which Ellen had been at some pains to cultivate.

No light shone from any of the windows, and from this Tom concluded that the inmates had all retired to rest.

It was necessary that he should wake them, and without making any noise that would arouse the neighbours.

After hesitating a moment, he stooped down and picked up a handful of gravel-stones from the garden-path, and threw them gently against one of the upper windows.

He waited a moment, and then he saw some white, moving object through the glass.

Immediately afterwards the window was opened.

"Hist!" said a voice, which our friend recognised at once as belonging to Tom Davis—"who's that?"

Tom did not trust himself to speak for fear his voice should reach other ears, so he stepped back a couple of paces and raised his hat.

Dark as it was, Davis recognised him instantly.

"All right," he said; "wait five minutes, and I will be with you."

Tom nodded in token of assent, and then began to look around him for some place where he could dispose of his steed.

There was an arched passage or entry which divided the house in which Davis lived from the one adjoining.

This entry led to the back premises.

"I can't do better than put my horse in the back garden," thought Tom; "there will be much less danger of its being seen there."

Tom adopted this plan without further consideration, and, by the time he had secured the reins to a railing and returned to the front of the house, Tom Davis had opened the door.

Tom entered quickly, and the former landlord of the "Hand and Keys" produced a light.

"Ah!" he said—"is it you, Tom? I thought at first it was the captain."

"No, I have come from him with a message."

"I have been expecting one for a long time," said Davis. "I began to fear that the project had been abandoned."

"Not by any means. I have brought you to-night more money than you can possibly require for the purpose."

"I rejoice to hear that," said Davis, his face beaming with satisfaction. "I long once more to have an inn of my own."

"No doubt you do."

"Sit down—sit down," continued Davis. "I have some home-brewed in the cellar, and we will drink some of it before we part."

"I must not stay long," said Tom. "When I leave here, I have an hour's ride before me, and the road is literally beset with my foes."

"And no wonder. There has been a pretty commotion over your late exploits. It's a mystery to me how you have all escaped the close search that has been made after you."

At this moment the door opened, and Ellen entered.

Tom King was much struck by the change in her appearance.

The reader will remember that a long time had elapsed since he saw her last.

The greeting was a warm one, and Tom King was deluged with questions.

To these he answered briefly, and, as the reader is acquainted with everything that has occurred, there can be no necessity for giving his replies.

Ellen was sent down into the cellar for the home-brewed, and then Tom King emptied his pockets of the gold he had crammed into them.

Davis's eyes sparkled when he beheld so much wealth.

"Here is enough," he said—"quite enough."

"I have much more in the pockets under the flaps of the saddle," continued Tom King—"much more. You must understand it is the captain's wish that you should, if possible, purchase the inn out and out, and then we shall not be interfered with by any meddlesome landlord."

"I understand all about that. Still, there is more than will be required."

"That is my impression," returned Tom King; "if so, you can easily return it. And now I am anxious to learn what has taken place while we have been in hiding."

"Have you not heard?"

"Not a word. You are the first person I have addressed on the subject since we rode out of London."

"Taking Maud with you," said Davis. "Ah, well—there's one thing I much regret, and that's poor Jabez."

"Claude said he believed he had been wounded by the police officers."

"He was killed," said Davis. "It's a pity; we should have found him an excellent servant and a faithful ally."

"I have not the least doubt of that. What more?"

"Mr. Wriggles returned to London about an hour after you succeeded in getting clear off. He came back asserting most positively that Dick was dead—that he had been drowned in a stream, though, owing to the darkness, he had not been able to find his body."

"And what did he say when he found out his mistake?"

"I can't exactly say, but I believe he was uncommonly furious At first he could not believe it, but the whole of the circumstances were pretty soon proved to him, and he had no room left to doubt."

"And what has he been doing ever since?"

"Oh, he vowed vengeance against all of you, after his

on fashion, and I believe he has been almost unceasingly employed in galloping over the country."

"And have you any more news?"

"Oh yes!" said Tom Davis, his eyes sparkling with satisfaction. "There has been a jolly row at Newgate; the authorities were in a desperate rage to think all their extra precautions should go for nothing. Also Mr. Cawthorn has been suspended," continued Tom Davis, "notwithstanding the powerful friends he has, who have more than once interposed to save him."

"A new governor has been put in his place, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, for the time being; but all the other men employed in the prison have been discharged, and a fresh lot employed."

"'Tis the old tale—eh, Davis?" said Tom King.

"Yes—yes; people are generally very careful to look the stable door after the steed has been stolen."

"That's just it, Davis; and the only thing we have to do is to avoid Newgate for the future."

"By all means. There's such a look-out kept now as was never dreamt of before, and your certain destruction would be the result of any attempt to get near it."

"And that's all?"

"Pretty nearly all, if not quite. The police officers are set to patrol in all directions, and so are numerous troops of dragoons. In fact, every road round the metropolis is closely watched."

"I can easily believe that, for I have had no little trouble in making my way here; still, I have come in safety. They have tried patrolling before, and it didn't answer; but I suppose they have faith in it?"

"Yes—that's just it," returned Davis, "and, for my part, I don't believe that the patrolling ever will do any good."

"You think the soldiers are disgusted at being set to such employment?"

"I do—in fact, I am quite sure of it. I don't say they would not capture you if they could, because the reward would be some little compensation to them for their trouble; and yet I don't know—they might like to set their faces against being turned into police officers."

"At any rate," returned Tom King, "I will keep clear of them. I shall not trust to that. And now, Davis, farewell! To you and old Matthew we leave the choice of the spot and the dwelling. All you have to do is to find us a safe place of refuge from our foes—some place to which we can go, and where we can remain just as long as we think proper."

"I perfectly understand you," said Davis; "and, all this time having been tramping all over the country, I believe I know just the place that will suit us; whether I shall be able to purchase it or not I don't know; however, I will try."

"Do so," said Tom King, rising to depart. "But, before I go, one word more."

"What is it?"

"We are in no particular hurry to quit our present hiding-place. I believe we should be secure there as long as we like to remain, only it is not very comfortable, you understand."

"I should think not."

"But don't on that, or any other account, hurry over what you have to do. Mind you choose a place that is in every respect well adapted to our purpose."

"Leave that to me," said Tom Davis. "I'll see to it; and now, as I suppose you are anxious to be off, farewell!"

"Farewell!" said Tom, "Yet stay, I have left my horse in your back garden. You must come with me, and I will give you the gold out of the saddle."

"All right."

Tom King bade Ellen adieu, and followed Davis into the garden.

Here he surrendered the money.

"There is no occasion for you to go round to the front without you wish to do so," said Davis. "At the bottom of the garden is a wall, not more than four feet high, beyond that is a bit of waste land."

"Thanks," said Tom, as he sprang into the saddle. "That will suit me much better. I wish I had thought of it before; however, no matter. Farewell, Tom, and be sure you give your attention to every word I have

Tom King bent low down in the saddle, and his horse, after three good bounds, cleared the wall at the bottom of the garden easily.

The piece of waste ground was quickly passed over, and then Tom muttered:

"I wonder, now, whether I shall be as fortunate on my return journey? At any risk, however, I must enter the forest unperceived."

CHAPTER DCLXII.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT DICK TURPIN'S CAVE IN EPPING FOREST.—TOM KING FINDS HIS RETURN JOURNEY FULL OF PERIL.

On a preceding page is given a plan drawn and engraved expressly for this work, showing the exact position of Dick Turpin's cave in Epping Forest.

Before going any further, the author wishes to correct a rather serious error which occurs in a former chapter.

It is there stated that the cave in which the highwaymen took up their quarters is still in existence.

Recent inquiries made upon the spot prove this to be a mistake.

In the chapter alluded to, the reader will remember mention was made of the various alterations which are being made in Epping Forest.

Upon such a large scale are they carried on that some change can be noted nearly every day, and before the face of some of these improvements Dick Turpin's cave has fallen.

The dense thicket with which it was surrounded has quite disappeared; but the large oak tree that grew by the side of it, and whose branches sheltered it, still remains, and serves to point out its exact locality.

This oak tree, then, it must be understood, stands within about thirty yards of the road leading to the King's Oak Inn, and is shown on the map by a black mark.

It stands just in the hollow of a hill, and in the next number an engraving of this tree will be given, taken from a sketch made on the spot during the present week.

The plan shows the various roads leading to the cave, so that by its aid the precise spot can be found with little difficulty.

The forest is easily reached by rail from London

The station at Loughton is shown upon the plan, and the distance is little more than a mile from it to Turpin's cave.

The drawing given in our next will enable those readers who feel sufficiently interested in the characters in this story to make a journey to Epping Forest, to recognise this one particular tree from all the rest.

It is much to be regretted that the cave has been demolished, but it is so.

It is a thing of the past, as the whole forest will be ere long.

But the oak tree still stands, and strange feelings must of necessity come over the hearts of those who, bearing in mind his long and eventful career, stand upon the same ground as Dick Turpin once did.

Most forcibly are we carried back to those old times when locomotion was tedious and difficult—to the days when a journey from London to York took almost as long as it does now to go from London to New York—when communication between distant places was well-nigh impossible, and when no scheme had been organised for the safe transmission of money, making it compulsory for all to carry their wealth from place to place about their own persons.

But this is a digression.

Few, if any, of our readers require to be reminded that we are not writing of the present day, but of a hundred and thirty years ago, when the whole framework of society was entirely different to what it is now.

Events which were considered every-day matters then would be deemed impossible now, and, indeed, would be.

But to resume our narrative.

We return to Tom King.

He had just given vent to an aspiration which was scarcely likely to be realised.

Nevertheless, he set forward carefully. He had had one adventure, and was satisfied.

Moreover, time was short, and it was in the highest de-

agree important that he should enter Epping Forest before daybreak.

Much time had already been consumed. It was late when he started, and it behoved him to avoid, as far as he could, hindrances of all kinds.

After a little consideration, he came to the conclusion that he could not do better than to return as nearly as possible by the way he came. It certainly seemed to offer him a better chance of escaping his enemies than an unknown route.

In this way, then, he reached without accident the high-road into which the lane led in which he had achieved so terrible an adventure.

The same repugnance which he had felt before prevented him from entering it at all, or even crossing it.

He left it on his left hand, intending to cross the high-road at a point a little nearer London than where he had crossed before.

Upon arriving at the hedgerow, he waited as usual to ascertain whether any of the patrols were within hearing.

All was still.

Reassured by the silence, Tom made his horse leap into the road.

Scarcely was this done, however, before he heard a voice cry:

"Here he is—that's him! It must be him! Forward, my lads! This description quite agrees! I thought, if we waited, we should see him return!"

What more was said, Tom did not wait to hear.

He took the meadows again—changing his direction, however, for, finding he was about to be pursued, he did not attempt to make towards the forest, but took a northerly direction.

Turning his head to see who his pursuers were, he was much surprised to see a troop of dragoons emerge from the top of the narrow lane down which he had turned in pursuit of the carriage.

From their manner and appearance, as well as from the words he had overheard, it was evident they had been waiting there expecting his appearance.

But why was this?

Tom gave a second glance, and then his surprise ceased.

The girl he had rescued was among them.

Had she betrayed him to his enemies?

It seemed scarcely possible that she could be guilty of such black ingratitude to one to whom she had professed herself so deeply indebted.

But the present was no time for such conjectures as these.

The dragoons had taken to the meadows with great spirit, as though they intended to strain every nerve to effect his capture.

Tom pressed his horse hard, and soon had the satisfaction of perceiving that he was gaining upon his pursuers.

Still, it would take some time before he could get out of their sight and hearing.

He was exceedingly careful to keep to the open country, and to avoid crossing all high-roads, while, at the same time, he did not go in the direction of Epping Forest.

Although Tom King was so puzzled to account for the presence of the dragoons and the girl he had rescued at the corner of the lane, there is no reason why the reader should be left in a state of uncertainty and doubt upon the matter.

According to Tom's advice, the young girl besought protection at the hands of the officer in command of the approaching troop of dragoons.

He questioned her closely, and very soon elicited a full account of all that had happened.

Half terrified, and wholly unnerved, the young girl said things which otherwise she would not have thought of saying.

The upshot of this was, that the dragoons went first down the lane to the scene of conflict; and after what they saw there, they considered themselves justified in taking the girl prisoner.

The idea then occurred to the officer in command that Tom King would probably return by the same way he came.

Accordingly, he took up his position in the manner we have described.

His expectations were fulfilled, and he commenced a vigorous pursuit. But he made one mistake, and a very serious one.

"Now, my lads!" he exclaimed, "there's your game! After him, and bring him down! If you will take my advice, you will try to do it among you. We have had a good deal of trouble, and we ought to be recompensed for it in some way or other."

The men murmured an assent.

"Very well, then! Let us manage this affair ourselves. If you call in the aid of others, there will be so many to divide the reward amongst that your share will be just nothing at all. Do you understand that?"

"We do, captain—we do! Forward! We'll have him!"

There is a certain amount of avarice, more or less, in every breast, and so it caused the dragoons to fall into the same error as their leader.

Away, then, they went, at full speed; but strive as they would, Tom King continued to gain upon them.

Still they would not abandon the pursuit, but galloped on even after the highwaymen had got out of both sight and hearing.

Tom King continued on his onward course, taking every care to keep away from Epping Forest.

At length, however, he deemed it safe to pull up.

His steed was terribly exhausted, and unless it had some few minutes' rest it would be unable to proceed much further.

Tom listened, but could hear nothing of his pursuers.

Now, then, was the time to rest, and he looked about him for some convenient spot where he could remain secure—at least, from chance observation.

Almost immediately his eye rested upon a mass of brickwork.

It was a house in course of erection.

The carcass, as it is technically called, had been run up, and the roof put on.

This place, then, would serve admirably to shelter him and his steed from the cold, and no one passing by would suspect that he had chosen it for his hiding-place.

Accordingly he bent his steps towards it.

But when he came closer he was surprised to find what a general air of desolation and ruin hung about the place.

It seemed as though the workmen had discontinued their labours for a length of time—as though, indeed, the building of the house had been commenced, and, for some cause or other, never finished.

This did not trouble Tom King in the least.

On the contrary, he was rather pleased than otherwise to note the aspect of the building.

He dismounted, and led his horse through the half-formed doorway.

The interior was profoundly dark, or appeared to be so, but Tom King paused a few moments, and then, as he fully expected, he found himself able to make out the different objects by which he was surrounded.

One by one they appeared to grow out of the darkness.

Feeling sure he should be able to avoid any obstacles, he led his horse forward into the interior of the building.

The creature was much exhausted and covered with foam.

It seemed glad enough to stand still.

Tom trod upon something soft, and, stooping down, found it was wood shavings.

He took up a handful of them and rubbed his horse down.

As soon as he finished this task, he made his way to the front door and listened.

He was still unable to hear anything of his pursuers.

"They have missed me!" he said, exultingly. "I will wait a little longer, and then, if all is still, will gallop off to the forest. Surely I shall be able to venture upon doing so. How silent this place is. Ah!"

Tom King uttered this ejaculation suddenly, for, just while he made this reflection, the unmistakable sound of voices reached his ears.

Footsteps, produced by persons walking rapidly along, were also audible.

"Some one comes," he said. "Well, there is nothing wonderful in that, I suppose, for a kind of road seems to lead past this place. I will retire again, and wait till they have passed by; their presence cannot concern me."

Tom King placed himself by the side of his horse.

Even while he spoke these words, in his own mind,



[VIEW OF THE OAK TREE IN EPPING FOREST WHICH MARKS THE SITUATION OF DICK TURPIN'S CAVE.]

(From a sketch recently made upon the spot.)

was not so sure that the coming of these men did not concern him.

Although he had changed his position, he continued to listen, and presently was able to make out that two men were approaching, and that they were in earnest conversation with each other.

One appeared inclined to hesitate and draw back, the other to go forward.

"Come," said the latter, "don't hang back in that fashion—you act like a fool!"

"But I'd rather be out of this business, and that's the truth," said the other voice; "so you may as well let me go as have an unwilling hand at the work."

"Bah! I am ashamed of you! Think of the money we are going to handle. We have had part of it, you know, and, what's more, we spent it. The remainder must be had. Why should you be so squeamish? The job will be all over in less than no time."

"I don't know that."

"But you ought, so come on; whether or not, you must perform what you agreed to do—it is too late to retreat."

"Well, then, tell me how you intend to manage it?" said the other. "I shall be more content then, but, as it is, I don't relish the idea at all; he is an officer, and knows what fighting means."

"That does not signify in the least. You leave the arrangement of the affair to me, and you will find all will turn out right, and it will be the easiest-earned money you ever put in your pocket in your life."

CHAPTER DCLXIII.

TOM KING FRUSTRATES A PLOT AND SAVES THE STRANGER'S LIFE.

Tom King heard these words distinctly, and, as may be imagined, they awakened a strong interest in his breast.

He listened eagerly, so as to catch every word if possible.

Nearer and nearer came the two men, and he fancied they were about to pass by, when he heard one of them exclaim:

"This is the place, Joe. If it was made for us it could n't be better."

"What, this old house?"

"Yes, though it isn't old, for that matter; I rather call it a new one; at least, it's never been finished."

"Well, never mind that, I think it will suit myself."

"Of course it will, so follow me and don't be an idiot."

The two men entered the strange-looking building, and Tom King was in a great state of anxiety lest his horse should make some movement or sound which would attract the attention of the new-comers.

But the creature was so thoroughly tired out that it was only too glad to stand perfectly still.

The two men did not penetrate near so far into the dwelling as Tom did.

They remained in what was intended for the front room of the house, which was separated from the one at the back by means of folding doors.

They went close up to the window, and when they assumed this position, Tom King was able to catch a glimpse of them.

He could see their heads and the upper part of their bodies looking dark and dim as they were revealed against the sky.

"Are you ready?" cried the one who seemed to take the lead in the affair—"are you ready, Joe?"

"Yes, very nearly."

"Then rest it on here, like me—it will be steady then, and don't you see we can scarcely fail, for we have two chances."

"Yes, yes—I quite understand that, but I'll tell you what, it's the first time I have engaged in a job of this sort, and it will be the last."

"I shouldn't wonder," said the other, in a peculiar tone. "I think that is very likely indeed."

The words were uttered in a peculiar tone—so peculiar, that the man to whom they were addressed noticed them.

"I say!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean by speaking like that—I don't understand you?"

"Hush! don't bother. Listen, will you!"

Both men were silent, but, save the moaning of the wind, no sound came to their ears.

Tom King was rather in doubt as to their precise intentions.

They had said a good deal, but yet not sufficient to enlighten him.

That they were after no good was quite evident, and if they contemplated the perpetration of any act of villany he determined to interpose himself and thwart it.

He waited patiently, however, in the hope of hearing more.

It was too dark for him to observe all their motions, and he could only guess what they meant when they spoke of something as "it."

From time to time the men muttered to each other in an undertone, but their remarks were nothing more than a repetition of what they had said before.

At length the silence was broken in upon by a sound very familiar to Tom King.

The two men simultaneously exclaimed:

"That's him!"

The clear, ringing sound of a horse's hoofs became audible.

Some one was coming at a very rapid trot along the narrow road which led past the half-finished house.

Tom King came to the conclusion that these men were lying in wait for the approaching horseman.

This could only be for two purposes, either robbery or murder, perhaps both; either, however, should be frustrated.

"Mind all that I have said, Joe," one whispered to the other—"mind all that I have said!"

"Never fear for me," was the reply, in a growling tone. "I will do my share now I have gone so far."

"That's right. Now don't say another word until it's all over. He's close at hand now."

This was the truth; and the time was close at hand for Tom King to interfere, if he intended his interference to be of any service.

Stroking his horse on the neck, Tom crept on tiptoe noiselessly towards the window, or rather the opening intended for one, at which the two men had stationed themselves.

They were so intent on what they were about and in listening to the sounds of the horse's feet, that they never heard Tom King approach, or even dreamt that anyone was in the building besides themselves.

Noiselessly, Tom had drawn his sword, and with the glittering blade in his hand he crept forward.

His impression was, that the two men intended to fire upon the horseman as he rode by, and he was anxious to know with what kind of weapons they were provided.

A pistol he thought would scarcely answer their purpose.

Drawing nearer and nearer, he believed he could see resting on the brickwork the barrels of two guns.

A moment's reflection told Tom King that the best course to be pursued was to cause the men to discharge their weapons before the traveller arrived.

When the guns were discharged there would be no longer any danger to be apprehended.

He trusted to the effect the shock his sudden appearance would give them; therefore, in a loud voice, he cried out:

"Villains—rascals! Surrender—you are discovered!"

He accompanied these words by dealing a blow at the gun barrels with his sword, so as to cause their muzzles to be elevated in the air.

A yell of astonishment and fear burst from the lips of both men.

The strength suddenly appeared to forsake their limbs, and they sank backwards on the rough flooring.

But their fingers encircled the triggers, and, in the act of falling, the weapons were discharged.

Tom King was only just in time, for even as the men fell backward the traveller appeared.

The report caused by the discharge of the firearms was terrific, and shook the whole building to its foundations; indeed, the sound convinced him that they were blunderbusses the men had held.

The numerous missiles with which they had been charged expended themselves harmlessly among the brickwork and timber above.

"Help—help!" cried Tom to the stranger. "This is something that concerns you deeply!"

This cry was almost unnecessary, for the new-comer no sooner heard the report than he checked his horse abruptly, and alighted.

"What is it?" he cried, in a clear, firm voice. "What's amiss?—what does it all mean?"

"That question you will be able to answer better than myself. Help me to secure these men, who intended to assassinate you as you rode by."

The two villains by this time recovered from their surprise, and finding that their adversary was only a human being like themselves, they rose to their feet and made a rush to escape; but both were caught, nor could they release themselves, although they struggled hard to do so.

"Come on, you lubberly pirate," cried the stranger. "This way—let's have a look at you."

He dragged his prisoner out into the roadway as he spoke, and endeavoured to look into his countenance.

But the man averted his head.

The stranger was not to be baulked, however, and catching a glimpse of the other's countenance, he said:

"Why, is it you, Dick Roper? I always thought you were a crawling, cowardly hound, but I never thought you would attempt my life."

"You know him, then?" said Tom King, who succeeded in dragging the other into the road.

"I do," replied the stranger. "I can remember him from my boyhood. But who are you, sir, that have saved me from this cruel fate? I have only just reached the land, after a long and perilous voyage; it is hard to find oneself in danger afterwards on the shore."

"No matter for me," said Tom King; "chance made me acquainted with their designs. What do you intend to do with them?"

"That is more than I can tell."

"Have you any idea why they made this attempt upon your life?"

"None whatever."

"Tell me," cried Tom King, shaking the one he held

by the throat—"tell me the meaning of this. If you refuse, you are a dead man this moment!"

"I will tell all, sir—I will, indeed—every word of it; but spare my life—do spare my life!"

"If you tell them anything," cried the one who had been named Dick Roper—"I say, if you tell them one word, I will murder you afterwards."

"I don't care," was the reply. "I didn't want to have anything to do with it; but I gave my word, and I was not allowed to go back. We were to have shot Mr. Fleming there as he rode past. We knew he would arrive to-night."

"A nice plot, truly; but you have something more to tell before I can spare your life."

"What is that, good sir?"

"The name of your employer. Who was it set you on to do this deed?"

The man hesitated a moment, but when he perceived Tom King bringing his pistol to a level, he said, quickly:

"It was Mr. Fleming's brother that set us on."

An ejaculation, expressive more of grief than anger, came from the sailor's lips.

"What say you to this information, sir?" asked Tom King. "What will you do with these two men now?"

"Release them," was the sad reply—"let them go. I can do nothing against them, although they richly merit punishment. But my brother——"

"True," said Tom King, understanding what was meant. "You could not fail to implicate him in the affair—and you don't wish to do that."

"No, that I don't."

The young sailor—for he was not more than five-and twenty at the most—was deeply affected.

He let go his hold upon the throat of Dick Roper, and said:

"Begone, miserable wretch—begone! But beware how you attempt anything against me another time. You know why I have spared you—go!"

Dick Roper did not rise, although he was free to do so.

"Mr. Fleming," he said, "this is generous behaviour on your part. I did not expect it. It has a good effect. It was gold that tempted me to undertake this job—nothing but gold. I was tempted, and I wanted money badly, but no sum, however great, shall ever induce me to raise my finger against you after this."

"I trust you will keep your word. I forgive you. Now go."

As though heartily ashamed of himself and overcome by the manner in which the sailor had acted, Dick Roper crawled away, and was quickly lost to sight in the darkness.

"Shall I release this fellow?" said Tom King. "He appears to have been an unwilling agent in the business."

"Yes—yes, let him go—let him go."

Mr. Fleming spoke sadly and regretfully.

Tom King did not hesitate about obeying these instructions, but immediately released his prisoner, who, overjoyed to escape so easily, darted away, and was lost to sight in a moment.

CHAPTER DCLXIV.

DESCRIBES THE MANNER IN WHICH TOM KING CONTRIVED TO PASS THROUGH THE TROOP OF DRAGOONS.

After this, a pause ensued.

Tom looked at the young stranger and saw that he was standing in an attitude of profound meditation.

He did not like to be the first to break upon the silence, nor did he desire to do so.

Although the exciting nature of the incidents that had just occurred were sufficient to drive all other thoughts from his mind, he nevertheless remembered that his pursuers were somewhere in the rear.

Whether they had abandoned the chase or not, or whether they had lost his track, he could not tell, and so he bent forward in a listening attitude, straining his ears to catch the slightest sound.

No heavy, dull shocks, such as would indicate the approach of a troop of horsemen, were audible, and therefore he began to breathe more freely.

How he was to reach Epping Forest without being perceived by any of the numerous troops of dragoons who were patrolling the high-roads he could not tell.

He must trust himself, as he had always done, to chance and to his own invention.

It was necessary, though, that he should set off at once, or he would be overtaken by the daylight.

Dawn was close at hand, though not so close as he feared.

These thoughts were running through his mind when the young sailor started.

He stepped forward suddenly, and with the cordiality of a seaman extended his hand, saying:

"Sir, I crave your forgiveness. It was negligent and wrong of me to forget your presence, but——"

"I have nothing to forgive," interrupted Tom, returning the friendly pressure; "I can understand your feelings full well."

"Perhaps you can, sir—perhaps you can. What I have learned to-night troubles me sorely, so much so that all that joy I felt at returning home has vanished, and I shall dread to take another step towards it. But why do I intrude these remarks upon you? You know nothing of my history. Pray tell me, sir, to whom it is that I am indebted for my life?"

"Surely that does not matter much," said Tom, with affected joviality. "I am what I am, and nothing more."

"A strange answer."

"You think so, no doubt. As I told you, chance made me acquainted with the designs of those two villains, and it was my duty as a man to thwart them."

"It was; and nobly you have performed it, though there are not many who would peril their lives in order to render assistance to some one they did not know."

"I have often done it," said Tom—"in fact, it's a custom with me. I sometimes think that by such deeds I atone for——but what am I talking of? Something that cannot interest you, and which, without further explanation, would be incomprehensible."

"There you mistake," said the stranger. "I feel the deepest, strongest interest in you. Don't imagine, however, that I shall allow such a service as this to pass unrequited."

"I need no reward," replied Tom, "and shall accept none."

"I do not wish to offer you any; but, so far as my experience goes, there is scarcely anyone who doesn't stand in need of a service of some kind. Is there anything that I can do for you in return for what you have done for me?"

Tom was silent.

He was considering, when all at once his keen sense of hearing enabled him to detect the approach of the patrol.

From the speed they were making, he did not believe them to be those who had given him chase. He concluded they must be others engaged in the regular duty of patrolling.

"Are you considering," said the stranger, "whether there is some service I can render you?"

"I am," said Tom, quickly, inspired by a sudden thought. "I always make it a rule to take no reward for such deeds as these; however, you can do me an important service."

"Name it—name it, then, at once!" cried the seaman, eagerly. "What is it? If it is in the power of man, I will do it."

"No doubt you will consider my request a very simple one; but it is not so in reality."

"Indeed? Go on; I am impatient to know what it is."

"Well, then, for the present, at any rate, you know not who I am; yet, I will say this much: I am a fugitive pursued by the officers of justice—no matter for what. The roads are patrolled by troops of dragoons, all anxious to capture or slay me. Hark! Do you hear that sound?"

Tom paused, for the trampling of horses' feet made itself audible with considerable distinctness.

"Yes," replied the stranger. "Horsemen are coming."

"They are my enemies!" returned Tom. "In order to reach a place of shelter I shall have to pass through many such troops. However, never mind that just yet. Our present business is with the one approaching."

"But I am considerably puzzled to know how I can aid you."

"A few words more will make all clear."

"Speak, then, for they are close at hand!"

"They are. When they see us upon the road together

they will pause and question us. You, of course, will be in no danger—they will know they do not require you."

"Yes, I suppose that's true enough," was the reply, "for during the last five miles or so of my journey I have been perpetually interrupted by these fellows, who, after being made acquainted with my name, have allowed me to pass on."

"Just so. That is the way they treat all travellers in the hope of coming to the person they want at last."

"I understand. And you are that person?"

"I am one of them; for they seek others besides myself. Now, when these dragoons approach, if you will give them your name and vouch for me, saying that I am a particular friend of yours and on my way with you to your house, they will allow me free passage, and no suspicion will be aroused."

"Is that all?" cried the sailor in a loud voice. "Tip us your fin again! Why, damme, I'd do as much for anyone I met, let alone a friend who has shown himself to be such by saving my life. You're on the weakest side, ain't you, and isn't it natural for me to stand by you?"

"Then you will grant my request."

"I will. Didn't I say so? I'll pitch it pretty strong into those shore-going marines as soon as they reach us."

"Ten thousand thanks!" said Tom King. "We are now quite equal, for by doing this you will save my life."

"Look upon it as done."

"I will, for I know I can trust you. Mount your horse; I will do the like; it will then seem as if we are journeying onward."

"Agreed."

The freehearted, generous young man mounted his steed at once. Tom King led his own out of the half-built house and mounted too.

"Which is the way to the place of shelter you spoke of?" inquired Mr. Fleming. "That's the way we'll take."

"Nay, I cannot quite consent to that," said Tom. "Which is the way to your own home?"

"Never mind that!" was the reply, and Tom fancied that the words were followed by a sob. Mr. Fleming hastily continued, however: "I don't wish to return home now. My feelings have undergone a total change—all ways are the same to me; so, of course, I will take that which leads you to a shelter."

"You are too generous," said Tom, who could scarcely believe that he had found such a staunch, warm-hearted friend. "That's my way," he added, pointing towards Epping Forest.

"Forward, then," was the immediate response, and at a gentle trot the horses made their way along the road.

The dragoons were approaching, and, therefore, not many minutes elapsed before a meeting took place.

To say that Tom King wholly relied upon this expedient, or that he felt entirely at his ease, would be untrue. His breast was filled with anxiety, not only on his own account but on account of his new friend, for in the event of failure he could not escape punishment.

"Halt!" cried a voice, a moment afterwards, and, in obedience to the command, the troop of dragoons and the two riders stopped simultaneously.

"Another stoppage!" cried Mr. Fleming, with well-assumed anger. "Curse me!—but this is too bad, setting sail and anchoring every few minutes. This makes about ten times I have been stopped altogether."

"I am very sorry for it," said the chief dragoon, riding forward. "I cannot help it; our orders are not to let anyone pass unquestioned."

"Then you are bound to obey them!" said the sailor. "Give me obedience before all things!"

"So say I," replied the dragoon; "but it's d—d hard to find myself turned into a scurvy police officer."

"No doubt—no doubt! I suppose you want just what the other troops did—a declaration of my name, and some proof that I am the person I represent myself to be?"

"Just so."

"Then pray make haste! Tell one of your fellows to bring a lantern here to look at my papers; you will find 'em all right! My name's Fleming — Lieutenant Fleming, of his Majesty's Ship Aurora."

"I am very happy to make your acquaintance, sir," said the dragoon, with a bow, "although under such disagreeable circumstances. If you are desirous of making any speed, these perpetual interruptions must be very annoying to you."

"They are annoying—d—d annoying!"

"Well, I will not hinder you. Your papers have evidently been examined by the other troops, and all is well, or you would not have been allowed to proceed so far. So, to save you time, ride forward: I will consider the mention of your name sufficient."

"Many thanks, sir," returned Lieutenant Fleming, "and you will complete my obligation if you will extend the same favour to my particular friend, Mr. Roberts."

The name was uttered with a readiness that surprised even Tom King.

The reason, however, was simple enough; the lieutenant had a friend whose name was Roberts, and his presence of mind enabled him to utter it glibly.

"Certainly—certainly!" said the dragoon. "I would take your word for a great deal more than that. So far as I am concerned you and your friend may pass on, and I hope you will meet with the same courtesy from the other troops on the road; I warn you there are many of them between here and London."

This dragoon was evidently a gentleman—his civil mode of speech at once proclaimed it.

Moreover, in an indirect manner, it had so happened that he had heard of one Admiral Fleming, and he jumped to the conclusion that the young man before him must be the admiral's son.

"One word, however," said the lieutenant, "before we part."

"A hundred if you wish it. It is a pleasure to encounter a gentleman."

"Permit me to echo your remark. Your men are cold no doubt—pray accept this trifle, and allow them to spend it in grog at the next public-house they come to. And now, lastly, what's all this about?"

"Is it possible you don't know?"

"It is a fact, I assure you. Indeed, you will not think that wonderful when I tell you I did not land until yesterday. I have heard you were anxious to capture somebody or other, but I do not know who."

"Well, then, the fact is," answered the dragoon, "we are sent out to capture or slay four desperate, daring highwaymen."

"Highwaymen?"

"Yes. From all that I have heard, they are gallant enough fellows, and it's a pity, in my opinion, they did not take the King's money instead of going on the road. That, however, is neither here nor there. There are four of them—one known as Dick Turpin, another Tom King, another Claude Duval, and the other Sixteen-String Jack."

"I have heard of them all," replied the lieutenant. "There was no slight excitement about them when I set sail last."

"And there's more excitement than ever now," was the answer; "but, rely upon it, their race is over—their hours are numbered. They have been playing hell's diversion among the officers at Newgate, and such a storm is raised that nothing in the world but their deaths will quell it!"

CHAPTER DCLXV.

LIEUTENANT FLEMING TAKES TOM KING INTO HIS CONFIDENCE.

"WELL, I only hope you will make haste and catch them," said Lieutenant Fleming, "and so be rid of your disagreeable duty. Good night."

"Good night!" returned the officer of dragoons, and as he spoke the words, he drew aside and allowed the travellers to pass onward.

"You understand that you've saved my life," said Tom, when they had got out of earshot, "for, as you may easily guess, I am one of the four they mentioned."

"But which one? Surely, after knowing so much, you may as well tell me that."

"I will. I am known as Tom King."

"Known?"

"Yes."

"Then it is not your real name?"

"No—and excuse me if I keep that to myself."

"Well—well, you have a perfect right to do so, and I don't wish to pry into your confidence. And now tell me where it is you want to go?"

"To the town of Epping."

"Indeed! That happens strangely."

"How so?"

"It is there that my father lives."

"It is fortunate, then, that we can journey on together so pleasantly," said Tom. "I shall have the knowledge that I am not taking you out of your way."

"That would not matter in the least," said the lieutenant, his voice again becoming sad; "home will not see me this time—I shall be off to sea again at the first opportunity."

"You may know best," said Tom King, "what to do; but, so far as I can see at present, I fancy that would be a rash proceeding on your part."

"Why so?"

"If your brother is so unfriendly to you, it does not follow that the remainder of the family are so."

"You do not understand," was the reply. "Ours is a strange household."

"You have roused my curiosity strongly," said Tom—"very strongly, and your open, candid manner emboldens me to ask you a favour."

"What is it?"

"Before I ask it, let me assure you that I do not wish you to grant it unless you feel a desire to do so."

"I can guess your request, I think," said the sailor. "It is that I should give you a few words of explanation respecting what you have seen to-night."

"You have guessed rightly."

"Then, if you do feel such a desire, I am very glad. My friends are not near me, and at the present moment I feel badly in want of some one's advice. If you will listen to my story, perhaps you may give me a hint as to the best way for me to proceed."

"I will try my best," said Tom. "Understand, however, that before I took to the highway I was a gentleman. As to the occurrences which forced me to such a course, never mind. I am what you see, and can be no other; but my feelings have not altered, and any confidence you may place in me will be held sacred."

"Of that I have no doubt. I could tell before you spoke that you had at some time or other moved in a very different sphere to what you do now."

"Never mind the past," said Tom, bitterly. "Allay my curiosity."

"I will. My name, as you are already aware, is Fleming, and I am a lieutenant in his Majesty's service. My father still holds the rank of admiral.

"When a young man, my father married, and afterwards I was born. My mother died. Years passed, then my father married again.

"You see from this, that it is an old story I am going to tell you, and that it will possess little of interest."

"I am by no means sure of that," said Tom. "Pray proceed."

"My father's second wife had a son also, who was christened Edgar."

"Was that the brother of whom that rascal spoke?"

"It was."

"Then he is your half-brother?"

"Just so; and I thank Heaven there is no closer relationship between us."

"But the cause of this enmity which evidently exists?" said Tom. "What was it?"

"That is almost more than I can say, except that it was my father's second wife. You can easily guess which of the two was her favourite—I was not, certainly.

"She was a proud, defiant, domineering woman, and soon found means to make my father subservient to her will."

"Go on," said Tom, as the lieutenant paused. "I am anxious to hear the rest. To me, your story possesses an uncommon interest."

"Well, then, my brother Edgar was represented to everyone to be all that was good, noble, and exemplary—I, with what truth you may guess, was represented the contrary. Not only was this the case, but he was carefully taught by his mother to look upon me with an eye of hatred, to consider that but for me he would be heir to all the admiral possessed.

"You can comprehend no doubt the effect this would have upon a lad, and so you see I blame his mother more than I blame him."

"And no doubt you are right," said Tom. "Go on—don't let me interrupt you."

"By her subtlety, then, I received an evil name, and was considered to be no good by everybody; and when I was young, I frequently heard people remark, 'What a pity it is Frank is not more like Edgar.' These remarks rankled deeply in my heart.

"And so time passed on, and in succeeding years came another event, which caused the coal of envy that was smouldering between us to burst into a flame.

"Among the visitors who came to our house was a young girl, some three or four years younger than myself. In a word, she was beautiful, and I loved her. I had good cause to believe my affection was returned, and almost for the first time in my life I knew what it was to be happy.

"But my brother, who seems from the first to have been destined to be a blight upon my brightest prospects, looked with an eye of love upon our fair visitor as well, and so I was tortured with a thousand jealous pangs.

"I chafed bitterly under this, and one day spoke to her fiercely and impetuously. A coolness immediately arose between us, of which my brother availed himself to the utmost."

"And I suppose," said Tom King, with a bitter, mocking laugh, "that this girl returned, or affected to return his love?"

"I don't know that—jealousy answers 'yes,' love answers 'no.'

"In the midst of these perplexities I was shipped off to sea. It was my stepmother's doings. She had gained absolute command over my father, and he dared not disobey her commands.

"It was in vain that I expressed my disinclination to go. I was compelled."

"And is this the first time you have returned?"

"No—I have made my second voyage."

"I recollect now," said Tom, "you mentioned something of the kind to the officer of dragoons."

"I believe I did."

"And when you returned the first time—what then?"

"It was a miserable home to go to, and a poor welcome I received. My brother scowled and turned away, my stepmother frowned; my father, so long subjected to her influences, looked upon me coldly. The sum of my wretchedness was complete, when on the succeeding day I encountered Bessie."

"The girl you loved?"

"Yes—that was her name. She received me as coldly as the rest, and I turned away broken-hearted. By chance, however, I heard soon after that Edgar had been persecuting her with his addresses, and that he had not been received with any favour. She had assured me over and over again that she could not love him. I took heart from this, and visited her again.

"Not to linger over this, I will just say that, to the best of my belief, the misunderstanding between us was cleared away. She treated me kindly—sometimes, as I thought, affectionately.

"At length the time for my departure came; but for her, I should have been glad enough to go. Before I left I poured into her ears the confession of my love. She told me the evil reports and the scandalous rumours that were whispered about me. I ground my teeth to suppress my passion, and said to her:

"'Bessie, I will not contradict those rumours; I will not ask you for your answer now; I will go to sea. Let my actions prove me—judge me by them, and by them alone. When I return, I will ask you for your reply.'

"It was in this way that we separated—and now you know all.

"The hatred of my brother Edgar has increased rather than abated—it has become absolute insanity. By bribes he has won over that man to make an attempt upon my life. Can you form an idea of the disheartening crushing effect this has had upon my spirits?"

"I can, indeed."

"Now, however, believe me, I feel very different to what I did only a short time ago. So you see, making you my confidant has done me good, for it has raised my spirit. I will resist these wretches to the last!"

"And you are right," said Tom King—"perfectly

right! And if you feel that I can be of any service to you in the matter, here is my hand; and though I risk my life a thousand times, I would back you up and do my utmost to assist you in gaining the victory. You cannot guess my reasons for this course, but I will tell you this: I feel as strongly upon the point as you do, for it was from a similar course of circumstances that I lost all, my affianced bride included, and was forced to seek my living on the King's highway."

CHAPTER DCLXVI.

TOM KING AND LIEUTENANT FLEMING HOLD A CONSULTATION AND ARRANGE THEIR FUTURE PROCEEDINGS.

Tom King pronounced these words with so much excitement, energy, and impassionment, that Lieutenant Fleming regarded him with the greatest surprise.

"You speak strongly," he said—"very strongly."

"I speak as I feel; and so, sir, if you are willing, I will in all ways aid you, either in council or by a strong arm and a sharp sword."

"You are generous," said the lieutenant—"generous to a fault, when I think that——"

He paused in some confusion.

"I know what you would say," added Tom King, hastily. "Never mind. Tell me—do you accept my services?"

"I would gladly do so, but that I feel I ought not to call upon you to place your life in so much jeopardy."

"Pho—pho! that's not worth a thought; I am so used to danger that I think nothing of it. In being with you I should probably run no more risk than if we parted."

"If such be the case, then, I embrace your offer gladly. Ten thousand thanks for your good-nature."

"Let us pass over the compliments and come to business. What do you imagine will be your first step?"

"I leave that for your decision."

Tom considered for a few moments.

"You are your father's eldest son," he exclaimed, thoughtfully, "therefore, in the event of his death, should that take place without his having made a will, you will be heir to all."

"Just so."

"It is impossible to say what may be the result of your visit to your home. Rely upon it, things are in a curious condition, or Edgar would not have adopted such a dangerous means of putting you out of the way."

"I understand," said the lieutenant. "You think, if there was a will in his favour, he would not trouble himself about me?"

"I think he would not run the risk of being found guilty of a murder."

"Then do you advise that I should return home at once?"

"No, upon second thoughts, you had better not."

"What then?"

"Where does this girl live—the Bessie of whom you spoke? Is it near your home?"

"About ten miles from it."

"Well, then," replied Tom, with the same bitter, mocking laugh that had grated so harshly on the ears of the seaman once or twice before, "as I have no faith in woman's constancy, I would recommend that you see her first."

"For what reason?"

"Why, you see that she might care most for whatever you possess. If she found you were cut off from the greatest part of your father's property, she would probably have nothing to say to you. On the contrary, if you went to the hall first and asserted your position, she might then be of a different way of thinking."

"No—no!" said the lieutenant, enthusiastically, "you wrong her!—believe me, you wrong her! You don't know her as I do. She would be incapable of such conduct."

Tom laughed again.

There was nothing mirthful in the sound, and it grated disagreeably on the lieutenant's ears.

"Take my advice," cried Tom—"go to her first, make her believe that you have nothing and expect nothing. If she accepts you, then she is worthy of you; if she hesitates, you will know what to do."

"I am not afraid to put her to the test," said the lieutenant, "and I will do as you desire. I am quite confident as to the result."

"There was a time," replied Tom, "when I would have said the same. For your own sake, I trust you will not be deceived as I was."

"You have met with bitter disappointment in early life?"

"I have, and in more respects than one. In your case, you may learn a lesson from my experience. You have taken me into your confidence—in return, I will tell you something of myself."

Briefly, then, Tom related the events of his early life—events with which the reader has been already made acquainted, so we will not set down his words.

"You see," he added, "that my faith was as strong as yours, yet it was broken. All women are alike, and it may be that the hesitation she has displayed has arisen solely from the fact that she was uncertain which would be better in a mercenary point of view."

The story Tom told made a very deep impression upon the heart of the lieutenant.

"I will test her affection," he said. "After all that you have told me, I should be filled with doubts, and it is better to have them set at rest, either one way or the other."

"Much the best," said Tom; "the pang may be sharp at first, but bear it."

"Still I have confidence in the result."

"I trust with all my heart that you will not be deceived."

"Now that I know all," murmured the lieutenant, "I do not wonder at your actions."

"Look," said Tom, breaking the thread of conversation, "the day is breaking, and yonder is Epping. I have something to propose."

"I am all attention."

"In your visit to this girl I can be of no service whatever—in fact, I shall be only in the way. Go there alone."

"Willingly, if you wish it. And you?"

"My three comrades are in a safe place of concealment. I promised them faithfully I would return by daybreak; if I fail to do so, they will imagine I have been captured, and in their anxiety to save me, they may bring destruction upon themselves; therefore, while you are absent upon this errand I will rejoin them, and snatch a few hours' repose; to-night at dusk I will meet you under that tree."

As he spoke, Tom pointed to a huge oak tree evidently many centuries old, that stood upon the borders of the north side of Epping Forest.

They were close to Epping, then a small village, consisting only of a few labourers' cottages.

"I am content to form any arrangement you wish," said the lieutenant. "It is kind and generous of you in the extreme to take this interest in my fortunes."

"Say no more about that. You may fill up the time between now and nightfall by making what inquiries you can about the neighbourhood; all information will be useful. I would meet you earlier, but the danger is so much greater if I venture out by daylight."

"Of course it is."

"And now before we part, one question more," said Tom King. "Whereabouts is your home?—is it far from here?"

"No, there it is, yonder."

The lieutenant extended his arm, and pointed to a handsome though antiquated-looking building, a little more than half a mile distant.

It had an air of great grandeur about it, and was surrounded by beautiful domains.

"That's my father's residence!" he exclaimed.

"Enough," said Tom, "I asked because I did not know whether it would be necessary to bring my horse; as it is so near he would only be an incumbrance. So I will meet you on this spot at nightfall."

"Agreed. Before we part, however, once more accept my thanks."

"All that I have done," said Tom, "has been done freely, and believe me, I even yet consider I am under an obligation to you; however, that point will not signify between us. Remember this is the spot to-night."

"Do not fear that I shall mistake it," said the lieutenant. "I know it well; I can remember it from my boyhood."

"We will then go straight to your father, and no doubt a little promptitude of action will set all right."

Again exchanging farewells, the two new but firm friends parted.

The lieutenant watched Tom disappear among the trees, and muttered:

"A noble fellow—a noble fellow! he should have been a sailor, not a highwayman!"

A shade of great anxiety then crossed his countenance.

Urging his weary horse onward, he took his way along the road in a westerly direction.

As soon as ever he found himself beneath the trees, a sense of great security came over Tom King, and without the slightest hesitation he made his way towards the cave.

He knew how anxiously his comrades would be waiting his return.

His strange adventure with the lieutenant furnished him with ample food for reflection.

At length, shortly before sunrise, he reached the appointed spot.

"Who's there?" said a voice, as he approached the enclosure—"who's there?"

"Tom," was the reply.

There was a crash of branches, and then Sixteen-String Jack stood before him.

"I am heartily glad you have returned," he said, "and so will be all the others; we were getting terribly apprehensive."

"All's well. I have succeeded much better than I could possibly have hoped for."

In another moment, Tom was surrounded by his friends.

They insisted at once upon having a full account of all that had happened to him; and while he was engaged in relating his adventures, Claude and Jack prepared the morning meal.

But the adventure with the lieutenant created the greatest interest in their breasts.

"I have promised to meet him at nightfall," he said. "So in the meanwhile I will get as much rest as I can, not that I anticipate any particular danger."

"Let us accompany you," cried Claude and Jack—"it is very possible we may be of service."

"It will not be necessary, I fancy," returned Tom, "and I should not like to displease my friend, and he might look upon your presence as an intrusion."

The point was urged no further.

Maud was much better, though not out of danger, and was with the greatest satisfaction that Dick Turpin learned the money had been placed in the care of Tom Davis, and that his scheme was in a fair way of being consummated.

He was growing tired already of a forest life, for there were many inconveniences attached to it, and he felt that nothing but stern necessity should induce him to adopt such a mode of life.

As for Tom, having related everything, and partaken of a good breakfast, he lay down to sleep and to ponder over the nature of the events that were likely to take place that night.

We take this opportunity to add a few words upon a subject which we believe to be a deeply-interesting one to our readers—the precise situation of Dick Turpin's cave.

The engraving on page 1129 is a correct and faithful representation of the oak tree marking the exact spot.

It has been sketched upon the spot—the view being taken from the north-west, and looking towards Earl's Path.

It is a massive, noble tree, and can easily be distinguished from the dwarfs around it.

About its root can still be traced some indications of the existence of the cave, for the ground is broken and uneven.

In order that there should not be the possibility even of anyone being disappointed after making the journey, by failing to find the tree, the writer—while the artist was engaged in making his sketch—occupied himself in cutting upon the bark of the tree the letter T.

He did this as well as the only tool he possessed—a small penknife—would let him. Still, however rude may be the carving, it will answer the purpose intended.

The tree may now be positively identified, and no one can be in doubt as to which is right, as might have been the case but for this precaution.

The spot where the tree stands is now comparatively bare, the trees having been cut down and the thickets removed.

In the year 1737, however, the period of our story, the cave was literally buried in vegetation.

One thing more remains to be stated.

The broad road near the oak tree known as the "New Road," has only been made recently. At the time of which we write the road to Epping lay past the King's Oak Inn. This is mentioned because at the present time the cave appears to have been situated in a very open, public place. This is only in appearance, however—every allowance must be made for the alterations wrought by time in the space of nearly a century and a half.

After this digression—if anything so germane to the story can be so called—we resume the regular thread of the narrative.

CHAPTER DCLXVII.

TOM KING KEEPS HIS APPOINTMENT, AND SETS OUT FOR THE ADMIRAL'S RESIDENCE IN COMPANY WITH LIEUTENANT FLEMING.

Tom's impatience was very great indeed, and no sooner had the sun set than he bade adieu to his comrades, and set out on foot through the forest to the appointed spot.

When he arrived there, the twilight had almost gone, and the shades of evening were deepening into night.

He did not take up his position beneath the tree, but paused in a thicket hard by, in a position that enabled him to command a view all round him.

Before the lieutenant could reach the tree he should see him, for, as we have said, he satisfied himself by a glance that he had not yet arrived.

Scarcely, however, had he made these preparations, and settled himself in this situation, than he perceived a dusky form wrapped in a cloak approaching.

It walked straight to the tree, and paused there.

Tom hastened forward at once.

A hand was extended to him, which he grasped cordially.

"I have been hiding myself for some time," said the lieutenant. "I did not like to linger near the tree, lest it should give rise to suspicion."

"You speak firmly and happily," said Tom King. "She has stood the test?"

"She has indeed," said the lieutenant, warmly—"bravely, nobly stood it! After leaving you, I put up at an inn not far from where she lives, and, having remained there some time, set out on foot to meet her. I was so fortunate as to encounter her alone. She started when she saw me, and a flush of colour came to her cheeks.

"'Bessie,' I exclaimed, 'I have returned. You remember the circumstances under which I left you. Judge me, then, by my actions, and answer the question I ask of you.'

Gently and timidly, she placed her hand within mine. That answer was sufficient.

"Don't think, however, that in the midst of the happiness I then felt I forgot the warnings I received from you.

"I thought to myself: 'Perhaps she has learned that my father has made a will in my favour, and that is the reason of the change in her sentiments.'

"'Bessie,' I said, 'before I ask you to confirm your answer, I have a confession to make. My father——'

"Then she interrupted me.

"'I know all,' she said—'I know all! Do not pain yourself by relating the particulars! Believe me, I know all!'

'I was thunderstruck when she spoke these words, and for the life of me could scarcely resist asking her what it was she did know. I found it necessary to proceed with caution.

"'Then, if you are in full possession of the facts, answer me—tell me, do you indeed love me?—are you willing to share my lot?'

"'I am,' she answered. 'No sooner did the intelligence reach me, than my mind was made up.'

"I was more puzzled than ever. I knew her naughty spirit, and if she once guessed my object was to test her affection, she would have discarded me at once, no matter at how great a cost to herself. However, I ventured to observe:

"'I am afraid you have not been correctly informed

"'I have—I have, indeed! The villany of Edgar—the baseness of your stepmother has been made known to me. I have learned that they invented all those charges that were whispered against you—I have found out the extent of their unnatural hatred!'

"'Indeed!' I said, breathing more freely. 'I find you are right, after all.'

"'I knew,' she said—'but, so far as your own interests and position are concerned, I am afraid you have returned too late.'

"'Not too late,' I said, 'if by tarrying I have come in time to receive the assurance of your love.'

"'I am almost certain,' she continued, presently, 'that your stepmother has taken the utmost advantage of your absence.'

"'How mean you?'

"'Your father has grown weaker, and got more under her control than ever. I have heard from the very best authority that he has made a will.'

"'A will?'

"'Yes; one made out through the importunities and under the supervision of your stepmother. You may guess it contains nothing favourable to you. The whole of the landed property and the whole of your father's wealth, with the exception of a small sum, has been bequeathed to your younger brother and your stepmother. You have been cut off through your unworthy and unnatural conduct.'

"'It seems, then,' I exclaimed, 'that you do indeed know all. I am a beggar! That was the confession I wished to make.'

"'And I wished to spare you the pain of doing so,' was her reply. 'Had it been otherwise, you might have doubted my motives. Rumour has been busy with my name. I have heard it said that I have been trying only for the position which a marriage with your father's heir would give me, and that was the imputation which kept me silent. As for Edgar, I have never loved him, though you once so wrongly and bitterly accused me of doing so. When I found that he was the heir, then my mind was made up.'

"Can you guess—can you form any idea of my happiness?" concluded the lieutenant, addressing Tom King. "Even though I am conscious that I have lost all, I am truly happy. It proves that her love for me is pure and disinterested."

"It is indeed," said Tom, "and, for your sake, I am heartily glad of it."

"You see," continued the lieutenant, "there will be no need to carry out our expedition to-night. Home is no longer a place for me. I am an alien, but I am content."

"What!" exclaimed Tom King, in surprise. "Have you decided not to visit your home?"

"I have. What good purpose could it serve?"

"I know not precisely. You may be intoxicated with joy at finding your love is so truly and so well returned, but do not on that account suffer me unjust to triumph. Your love should be rewarded."

"What, then, do you propose?"

"Simply that we carry out our original intention. Obtain an interview with your father—see him—speak to him. Do not suffer him any longer to be the dupe of a base, designing woman and her villanous son. It would be a crime on your part, were you to allow him to expire with such a film before his eyes as there evidently is. Do not hesitate, but come with me."

"You are right," said the lieutenant—"I feel that you are right. It would indeed be a crime upon my part! If my father proves himself deaf to the voice of nature, why, so be it; if he is really and truly content that things should remain as they are, I shall bow to his decision.'

"Certainly," said Tom; "but make the effort first to right yourself. By every law the property is yours and you should have it. You would turn it to a good purpose—he would only make an ignoble use of it."

"Come, then," said the lieutenant, "I am ready. Follow me."

"With all my heart," said Tom; "and it will not be my fault if this matter is not set right."

With rapid steps, the pair walked in the direction of the admiral's mansion.

"How shall you obtain an entrance?" asked Tom King, in a whisper. "For my own part, I fancy it would scarcely be advisable for you to go to the front entrance. You might be denied admission, or, at any rate, you might find it impossible to obtain a private interview with your father, which is essential."

"True; I did not think of that difficulty."

"Is there no means by which you could enter the house secretly? You know, of course, where your father's room, is situated. If he is alone in it, enter, and I will keep guard at the door and take good care that no one interrupts your conference."

"I remember now," returned the lieutenant, "that there is a window through which, no doubt, we can pass easily; and then, I fancy, there will be but little difficulty in reaching my father's chamber."

"That's the plan, then," said Tom King. "Keep under the shadow of these trees, it is important that we should enter unperceived. Show me the way to the window you speak of."

The lieutenant led the way, and Tom King followed closely in his footsteps.

They reached the house in a few moments.

Passing round one end of the building, the lieutenant paused before a window on the ground floor, that appeared to open upon a kind of lawn.

"Hush!" he said. "Be silent—be careful. This room, I fear, is occupied—there is a light in it."

"Creep forward cautiously," whispered Tom King, "and let us listen; it may be we shall hear something to our interest."

They approached the window as closely as they dared, and then peeped in carefully to ascertain whether it was occupied.

It was well for the success of their plans that they had taken these precautions.

Looking through the glass, Tom saw, upon the centre table, a large lamp burning, the wick of which had been turned down, so that only a dim light was diffused over the apartment.

His eyes instantly became fixed upon the two persons who were in it.

One was a stout, florid-looking woman, with light, flaxen hair, an ordinary countenance, and an ungainly figure.

Nevertheless, there was in her features and in her whole deportment an expression of haughty, domineering authority.

She was just the woman who, by artful cajolery would first attract the attention of a man, and afterwards convert him into a slave.

The other was a young man who bore so great a resemblance to the female just described, that Tom King had no difficulty in deciding that the pair were no other than Edgar and his mother.

Mrs. Fleming was standing up, gesticulating fiercely, while Edgar seemed irresolute and half terrified.

He was sitting in a dejected attitude upon a chair.

Tom concluded that his mother was endeavouring to instil into him some portion of her own confidence.

This, however, was nothing more than a surmise, but the point was one he determined to ascertain; therefore, he placed his ear close against the window, and listened intently, hoping to be able to make out the words that were said.

Anyone with less acute powers of hearing than he possessed would probably have failed.

At first Tom only heard indistinct murmurings, but this soon developed itself into articulate sounds.

CHAPTER DCLXVIII.

EVENTS OF AN UNUSUALLY INTERESTING CHARACTER TAKE PLACE AT ADMIRAL FLEMING'S RESIDENCE.

"FOOLISH boy!" cried Mrs. Fleming; "you have ruined all by your precipitation! Not only have you involved me, but yourself as well!"

"I can't help it now, mother!" growled Edgar in response. "It's done; I judged it would be for the best!"

"But you are not competent to judge, boy," said his mother, imperiously, and addressing him as though he was a child. "You should always consult me!"

"Well, what's the good of bothering about it! The plot failed, and he escaped! But where is he? Why has he not returned? What can his absence



[TOM KING AND LIEUTENANT FLEMING ENTERING THE ADMIRAL'S MANSION.]

mean? How is it that he has not yet made his appearance at the Hall?"

"It is that which troubles me!" replied his mother, biting her lips. "I feel convinced that through your folly he knows all, and is now engaged, beyond a doubt, in devising means to destroy us!"

"It's your fault—there's some consolation in that!"

"What?"

"Your fault! If you had chosen to tell me that the old man had made a will in my favour, I should have been content, and not have taken such extreme measures."

"You are an idiot, and unworthy to be my son!"

"Come, come, mother—don't you call me any names, or you will find I shall give you back as good as you send. I am in a fix, but it is a great comfort to think you are in it as well as myself."

"Is it, indeed? But you shall repent of this in the long run. The will is made, and you will find I shall have considerable authority over you."

"Till I am twenty-one, mother, and no longer."

"We shall see. As for this unfortunate affair, perhaps we may hear no more of it. At any rate, it is no good grieving—we must make the best of it."

"I am glad to hear it," replied Edgar. "I thought you were going to cry about the spilt milk."

"No, fool—I was not. One thing, however, remains that must be done."

"Pray, what's that?"

"Your father has made a will."

"You told me that before."

"Its precise terms I shall not make you acquainted with, though I will say that your brother will find he comes off second best."

Edgar rubbed his hands with glee,

But yet——"

"There's something else wrong," interrupted Edgar.

"There is."

"What?"

"Your father has made the will——"

"Don't call him my father—say 'the old man,' or anything of that sort."

Mrs. Fleming frowned, and went on as though she had not heard her son's remark.

"But he insists upon keeping it himself, and obstinately refuses to give it up. Thank goodness! it is signed, and if we keep good guard, I don't know that there will be much to fear."

"Get it out of him, mother—get it out of him. You know you can always twist and turn him as you wish."

"I have tried and failed."

"Then you are losing your power—be careful!"

"We shall see," cried this bad woman, scornfully. "Thank goodness! the instrument is properly witnessed—there can be no cavilling about it hereafter."

"Then the sooner he drops off the hooks the better!" was Edgar's rejoinder.

"Come," said his mother—"let us go to him. You have almost as much power as I have—if we both entreat him at the same time we may get it."

"Does it matter so much as that?"

"It does. I can never rest until I have the will secure in my own possession. Now come and assist me to obtain it."

Sullenly Edgar rose from his seat and prepared to follow his mother.

"Confound you!" he muttered. "Why did you not tell me about this will before, then I should be free from all perplexity?—now I am all uneasiness."

The precious pair then left the room, and as soon as Tom King saw the door close behind them, he turned round to his new friend.

"Now, lieutenant," he said—"now is your chance. Come here!"

The young man looked very sad.

His noble, high-souled nature was evidently much pained by the preceding scene.

"To think," he murmured, "that I should have such a mother and such a brother!"

"Don't apply such sacred words to such unworthy wretches. But come—cheer up! The information we have learned is most important, and has amply repaid us for our delay.'"

"How so?"

"If you do not understand me I will explain presently—now is the moment for action. Come here!"

"What is it you want me to do?"

"You are more familiar with these premises than I am, therefore open the window noiselessly and enter—I will follow—then lead the way to your father's room."

The lieutenant made no reply further than going to the casement and opening it.

He stepped through into the room, and Tom King followed.

He closed the window behind him.

"Quick—quick," he said—"or we may be too late! In a moment of weakness your father may surrender the will to them, and then our task will be all the more difficult. Quick—quick!"

"Follow me noiselessly."

"I will," replied Tom King; "but take the most circuitous and least-used way to your father's chamber."

"I can do that," he said. "There is a little door opening from the library where he always sits that is but little used. There is a narrow staircase leading to it."

"That will be the place, then," said Tom, promptly. "Let us go there; we shall be able to see and hear all that goes forward."

This being agreed upon, the lieutenant left the room and crept noiselessly onward.

It was very dark; but he was so familiar with every turn in the old building that he could have made his way to any part of it blindfold.

Tom took hold of his cloak, and was thus enabled to follow him easily.

Otherwise this would have been difficult, for, in places, the darkness was extreme.

"Steps," said the young lieutenant, suddenly—"here are steps."

"That lead to the door you spoke of?"

"Yes."

"All right! Ascend them,—I am ready."

The lieutenant pushed open a door, and commenced the ascent of a narrow spiral staircase.

The top was quickly reached, and then the murmur of voices immediately reached their ears.

Both were extremely careful not to make the least noise.

From the plainness with which they could hear those within, they believed that even the rustling of their garments would betray them.

As silent and motionless as statues, they stood upon the little square space at the top of the steps, with their ears close to the panels of the door.

There was no difficulty in hearing every word that was said.

Just before taking up this position, Tom King had whispered to his friend:

"Let us listen. If your father is weak enough to surrender the will, we must interfere; if he does not, and they retire, you must enter. Rely upon it, if you can only have a few minutes' conversation with him, all will be well—he cannot forget the feelings of a parent."

The lieutenant did not reply, and in the darkness Tom King did not perceive that he shook his head sadly.

It was with considerable interest therefore that they strained their ears to catch every syllable.

A voice, which both immediately recognised as the admiral's wife's, exclaimed:

"But why persist in such a ridiculous determination? Let me have the will. Believe me, I will take care of it!"

"Or give it me, father," said the voice of Edgar.

"What is your motive for wishing to keep it yourself?"

"I *do* wish it, and so for once I am determined to have my own way!" said a voice, in tremulous accents, which Tom at once correctly concluded was that of Admiral Fleming.

"But I can see no reason in it,—it's absurd! Tell me, now, where have you put it?"

"It is safe."

"But I am not content with that assertion, nor is Edgar. It is of the utmost importance—as you ought to know full well—that we have possession of that most important document. Your unworthy son, in his rage and disappointment, may attempt I know not what!"

"Never mind," said the old man, doggedly. "I tell you the will is safe; and if you don't like to be content with that, you must remain discontent!"

"But, father," interrupted Edgar, "you will not refuse to give it me; or, I will tell you what I should like to propose."

"Listen to Edgar," said Mrs. Fleming—"listen to him. He is a sensible boy, and is full of affection for you!"

"Well—well," muttered the old man—"what is it?"

"You have drawn the deed up yourself, have you not?"

"Yes, I have. Your mother told you so, I suppose?"

"No, she did not. I only thought it because you have had no lawyer."

"Well, what then?"

"It may not be quite correct—you may unintentionally have omitted something of importance—something that may cause trouble and confusion in the future. Submit the will to a solicitor, and let him keep it in his charge."

"Well, well, I will see about that, my boy. I will think of it to-night, but not now—not now. Come to me in the morning—then I shall have made up my mind."

"Why not decide now?"

"No, I do not choose. I have been told that I have no will of my own—that you and your mother rule me completely; so now I am going to prove that such is not the case."

"Who told you that, sir?" asked Mrs. Fleming, angrily.

"That does not matter," said the old man. "Now leave me. I am busy, and do not want to be disturbed. Leave me—leave me, I say! Go at once; if you refuse, I will put the will into the fire!"

This threat appeared to sink deeply into the hearts of Mrs. Fleming and her son.

The former knew what extreme difficulty she had had in obtaining the document at all, and once destroyed, she feared she could never succeed again.

"We will go," she said. "Now, as always, your slightest wish is law to both of us. Foolish man, to

trouble yourself with what envious people say! I trust you will think over Edgar's reasonable proposal."

With these words the pair left the room.

The listeners heard the door closed, and after that all was silence.

The lieutenant was deeply affected by this scene.

Tom pressed him on the shoulder.

"Come!" he said. "Now be firm—be a man! Enter—appeal to your father, and induce him to treat you with more justice—tell him all! Do not, from false notions of delicacy, shrink from it; it is your duty to tear aside the veil that obscures his vision!"

The lieutenant pressed Tom's hand, and then softly opened the door.

Noiselessly he glided into the apartment, leaving the door ajar so that Tom, as he stood upon the threshold, was able to command a view of the entire room.

Seated at an antique writing-table was an old man, who was closely muffled up as though the cold affected him.

At the moment the lieutenant entered, the admiral's elbows were resting on the table, and his hands pressed tightly against both sides of his face in such a manner as to cover his ears.

His eyes were fixed vacantly upon the book before him.

Owing to these circumstances he neither saw nor heard the lieutenant enter.

With an expression of profound melancholy on his countenance the elder-born approached the table and then stood still, gazing upon the form of the father who had treated him so harshly and unjustly.

CHAPTER DCLXIX.

MRS. FLEMING IS ENRAGED BY HER DEFEAT, AND SUMMONS THE POLICE OFFICERS TO HER ASSISTANCE.

A SLIGHT shudder came over the admiral's form, as though he was made aware by some sympathetic magnetic influence that he was not alone.

He suddenly raised his head.

An ejaculation seemed to rise to his lips and to die away there.

He sank back in the chair, gasping for breath, and with his face pale as ashes.

At length his lips moved, and in a low, faint voice he murmured:

"Frank—Frank, is it indeed you I see, or—or——"

"It is no spectre," said the lieutenant, coldly; "I am, or ought to be, your son."

"But—but——"

"Father," said Frank, "I have come here to ask you one question, and only one. Give me your reply to it. First of all, however, remember that I am your elder-born; remember I was forced away to sea; yet, nevertheless, I have won the good opinions of all. You see I have been promoted. I am now lieutenant."

Tom King, looking narrowly into the admiral's countenance, saw his eyes glitter.

"The question I am about to ask is this: I have heard that you have made a will—a most unjust, iniquitous will—one that will do me a lasting injury. You have cut me off from your possessions, and bestowed all upon your second wife and her son. Is this true?"

The admiral did not speak.

"I will take your silence as consent. And now, father, tell me whether it is by your own free will that you have made this disposition of your property, and, if you have disinherited me, what have I done to deserve it?"

Still the old man was silent.

"Enough," said the lieutenant. "I do not wonder that you are unable to reply. However, I do not intend to level reproaches at you, it is not a filial act, and I do not come here for that purpose. Ere I leave you, and for ever, I will tell you this—you can believe it if you think proper. Last night, your son Edgar, my half-brother, having planned and decided upon my assassination, employed two men—Dick Roper was one of them—to shoot me as I rode along towards this house. By the merest chance in the world, the project failed; I escaped, and they are now full of alarm on that account."

"Is—is this true?" said the admiral, finding his voice at last.

"Did you ever know me to tell you a lie, father?" was the response.

"But—but——"

"It seems incredible, you would say. It is true, nevertheless. I can produce a witness, or you can send for Dick Roper, if you consider my testimony insufficient."

"And does your mother know of this?"

"My mother?"

"Yes, boy, your mother."

"If you mean Mrs. Fleming, I say she did know of it, though, in justice to her, I must state that she did not obtain the information until afterwards. Edgar's own heart prompted him to the deed."

"And you are a lieutenant you say, my boy?"

"I am. Here are my papers."

"Then I believe you—I believe every word!" exclaimed the admiral, as he glanced at a packet his son handed him "Your character has been unjustly represented to me. Had you been what they have made me believe you to be you could never have been promoted so quickly."

"I am glad to obtain that acknowledgment from you, father. And you know, at the same time, it is through no influence of yours that I have been advanced."

"So much the better. I can see now I have been made a fool and a dupe of. What I heard to-day was no more than the truth, and I am thankful that I had the strength to make a stand against them."

"Give me your hand, father, for I feel that I am once more your son."

The admiral's emotion was very great, and his face was so ghastly white that the lieutenant grew alarmed.

"You are ill, father," he said; "this excitement is too much for you. Let me ring, and summon attendants."

"No, no—no, no—do nothing of the kind. I am all right. A little shock—but nothing. I can stand more than that. I have made a will, my boy. I had intended to do you a never-ending injury. Thank Heaven, it is not too late!"

Hastily the old man opened a drawer and took from it a folded paper.

"Look, here is the will, planned, devised, and only written by me at the dictation of—of—my second wife," he added, after a pause.

"And what shall you do with it?" asked Frank.

"You shall see. Behold, it perishes! As soon as the last scrap is consumed, all that I have is yours, as heir-at-law, with those exceptions that you know of."

While speaking, the admiral with nervous, trembling hands, held the will over the flame of the lamp on the table before him.

The paper caught light in an instant, and burst into a blaze.

"You see," he muttered, with a smile, "the flame is eager to devour it——"

The remaining words of his sentence were drowned by a shrill shriek.

Like some demented creature, Mrs. Fleming dashed into the room.

"Hold, foolish man!" she screamed, almost inarticulately. "What would you do?"

"It *is* done," said the admiral, in a loud voice—"it is done?"

With these words upon his lips, he sank back in his chair.

Mrs. Fleming clutched him by the arm.

Then, turning angrily towards Frank, she exclaimed:

"So, sir, you have improved! You steal into the house like some midnight robber! You have imposed upon your weak and foolish father. Don't think, however, that you will receive any benefit from this act! Look up!" she added, turning to her husband. "Tell him that you have made a will in favour of his brother."

The admiral did not speak, and so she shook him violently.

Then she released her hold, and, with a dull, heavy sound, the old man's head fell forward on the table.

Mrs. Fleming screamed.

"He is dead," cried Frank—"he is dead! Monster in female form, you have killed him!"

"Nay, it is you, unworthy son! But he is not dead. He cannot, must not, shall not die until a fresh will is signed!"

With rude violence she lifted up the admiral's head.

One glance into his countenance sufficed to show her

that life had indeed fled for ever, and earthly matters would trouble him no more.

"Help!" she exclaimed—"help, help! You shall rue this deed! Frank Fleming, I accuse you of this! You have summed up your iniquity by murdering your father! I accuse you of the crime!"

"Woman," said Frank, angrily, and drawing himself up to his full height, "quit this house—and quit it instantly! I would have you know that I am master here!"

Mrs. Fleming laughed scornfully.

"That has to be tried," she said. "I know your father's intentions—he never meant that you should be his heir. I shall not leave, nor shall you, except in the custody of the police."

"Don't try me too far, woman!" cried Frank. "Do not drive me to the extremity of using force! But I solemnly declare, by all that is sacred, if you do not quit this house of your own will, I will eject you from it!"

"I will go, sir—I will go."

"Depart, then, at once!"

"Yet do not think that you have triumphed!" cried Mrs. Fleming, maliciously, as she moved towards the door. "You have yet to learn that I am not the woman to stand calmly and be trampled upon by you! I am going, not because of your threats and because I am vanquished, but to fetch the officers of police, into whose custody I repeat I shall give you for the murder of your father!"

"Begone, woman!" cried Frank, with great difficulty keeping his anger within moderation—"begone, I say, or I may be tempted to do that which I should afterwards regret!"

With a loud, mocking, derisive laugh, Mrs. Fleming left the room.

As soon as she had departed, Frank turned towards his father's corpse.

He called upon him by name, and raised his head, as if scarcely convinced that life had indeed fled.

This second inspection, however, removed all lingering doubts, and, harshly as he had been treated by his parent, Frank could not help feeling deeply affected.

It was at this moment that Tom King pushed open the door at the top of the stairs a little further, and entered the chamber.

He had forborne from doing so earlier, because there had been no necessity for his interference.

He judged, indeed, that his presence would have been looked upon by his new friend as an intrusion.

After the words he had heard Mrs. Fleming utter, he believed his best plan was to leave.

Therefore, he touched Frank upon the shoulder, and, when the lieutenant looked up, he clasped him by the hand.

"I congratulate you," said Tom, "on the success that has attended your visit! Your father did you justice at the last minute, and no more. As all is plain and straightforward, I must beg of you to allow me to depart."

"Why so? State your reasons."

"You remember the insane threats Mrs. Fleming made use of when she left the room?"

"About fetching the officers?"

"Yes. Whether she will execute her purpose or not, I cannot tell. She will act altogether from impulse, and there is no knowing what an angry, disappointed woman may not do. You must not think that I wish to leave you, or that I consider you are in any danger from the ridiculous charge she has made against you, but——"

"I understand you quite well," said the lieutenant. "You are quite right. The police officers and you would not agree in the same house together. I commend you for looking after your safety."

"Then, if it pleases you," said Tom King, "I will leave you now, and repair to my companions in the forest."

"You are at perfect liberty to do as you think proper, and yet——"

"What?"

"It may sound selfish and ungenerous to say so, but I wish you could remain and see the end of this affair."

"I will do so if you wish it."

"No, no—that is asking you to run too great a risk and making you a poor return for all you have already done. No, no—I am deeply enough your debtor already. Accept my best thanks, and I can say no more than that. When you stand in need of a friend, apply to me."

"That is quite enough," said Tom—"nay, too much! And now, farewell!"

"We will not part here—I must show you the way out of the building. Come, follow me!"

Lieutenant Fleming led the way out of the library by the principal door, which opened upon a large landing on the grand staircase.

Tom was about to address to him some remark, when suddenly a loud knocking at the front door below reached their ears.

Both started, so suddenly did the sound come upon them.

Tom stood still, and as soon as the heavy knocking ceased, he whispered:

"She has carried out her threat; depend upon it, they are officers who are at the door! Hark—hark!"

"Open, in the King's name!" cried a voice. "In the name of the King, I call upon every good man and true to allow his Majesty's officers to enter this house!"

Then followed another tremendous knocking.

"I must leave the premises in some other manner," said Tom, "and at once!"

"Stay an instant" said the lieutenant. "From this portion of the staircase we can command a view of the front door without fear of being seen. The servants will throw open the portal, beyond a doubt, and then we shall know for certain whether they are really police officers, or whether we have been alarming ourselves unnecessarily."

To this Tom assented, and they took up their positions accordingly

They were only just in time.

The front door was unfastened and flung open by a sleepy servant.

In a moment a throng of police officers poured into the hall, and in the midst of them Tom King and the lieutenant perceived the form of Mrs. Fleming.

CHAPTER DCLXX.

EVENTS AT THE HALL GROW MORE AND MORE COMPLICATED, AND A POLICE OFFICER DETERMINES TO TAKE A PEEP BEHIND THE SCREEN.

PERCEIVING this, Frank took hold of Tom King by the arm and led him back into the library.

But before they could cross the threshold they heard the voice of Mrs. Fleming below.

"Upstairs," she said—"upstairs! That is the door—the one facing you when you reach the first landing. Do not hesitate!"

"All right, marm," said a voice, with a strong nasal twang. "You've no call to be so wiolent and to excite yourself so much. Just allow me a minute to make my perperations."

The officer in command of this troop of police was quite a strategic general in his way; and so, before he attempted to ascend the staircase, he left several of his men posted about in various parts of the hall and lower portion of the mansion.

"It was in vain that Mrs. Fleming impatiently stormed, and bade him follow her up the staircase; he would not until all his preparations were complete.

In point of fact, this occupied only a moment, though it seemed much longer to the angry woman.

The young lieutenant closed the door of the library quietly behind him, and then, addressing Tom, said:

"What do you intend to do?"

"I scarcely know what to attempt," was the reply "Have you no means by which I could leave the mansion without fear of being seen by the officers?"

"I fear not."

"Then I will take the risk of concealing myself in this room; in all probability the presence of the police here has nothing to do with me, they have merely come in obedience to Mrs. Fleming's demands."

"You may depend that is it."

"Well, then," said Tom, "add still further to the obligation I am under to you."

"I will willingly do all I can to assist you."

"Then I will hide behind yonder screen. If it is you they seek, they will not think of searching behind there; if so, why, I must take my chance

You must do the best you can to remove their suspicions."

"I will. I don't think you have any cause to fear, for no one in the house has seen you but myself."

"Very true."

Just then there was a sound of footsteps without, and Tom King had only just time to step behind a large folding screen that was placed in one corner, when the door was violently flung open, and Mrs. Fleming and the officers appeared.

"There he is," she shrieked—"there he is! Look at him. There he stands, and there is his murdered father! Take him into custody this instant! I charge him with murder!"

It is a false, malicious charge," said Frank, "and one I am sure no men with common sense would listen to! I have just returned home," he added, addressing the officer, "and paid a visit to my father. He looked pale and worn, and, either from decay of nature or else from the shock of my sudden appearance, he has just expired, to that woman's intense mortification."

"Listen to me," cried Mrs. Fleming, "while I state the case. You see before you the profligate, outcast son of the admiral; he disowned him, and made a will cutting him off entirely from all his possessions. To-night the villain steals into the house, seizes upon the will by main force, destroys it, and then puts an end to his father's life."

Frank absolutely staggered back as he heard these words.

"It is false," he repeated—"utterly false!"

The police officer, however, seemed to pay great attention to the charge.

With a professional air, he walked up to the table, upon which the admiral's head still lay.

He raised it somewhat roughly.

The moment he gazed into the face of the corpse, he exclaimed:

"Ah, this looks like proof, indeed! Come forward, several of you and swear to what you see."

The men advanced, and the police officer, pointing to the forehead of the dead man, said:

"Look. Do you see that large, livid bruise? It was there when I raised him up."

"But it had nothing to do with his death," asserted Frank; "his body fell forward after he expired, and his head, striking upon the table, received that bruise."

"Be cautious, young sir, in what you say," cried the officer; "I am bound to caution you that all you say will be taken down and used against you in evidence."

"I do not fear my words," was the reply. "I speak the truth, and the truth only."

"Drag him away," cried Mrs. Fleming—"drag him away! I will not allow him to remain beneath this roof a moment longer!"

"Remember," cried Frank, "that I am still my father's heir. This house is mine, and I command you to leave it. As for you, sir," he added, addressing the police officer, "I am ready to surrender myself to you at any moment. For my own sake, I must insist upon having this affair thoroughly cleared up. The charge is, at the same time, malicious and false. I had no hand whatever in my father's death, unless, indeed, as I said before, the shock of my appearance has killed him."

"Then, if I understand rightly," said the chief officer, with some respect, "you are heir-at-law to all the admiral's possessions?"

"I am. And now," he added, as a fresh thought struck him, "I will turn accuser. I command you to take that woman into custody, and also her son Edgar; the first charged with using undue influence with my father to induce him to write a will disinheriting me; and the other, charged with attempting my assassination. Now look to it."

The officer was rather bewildered, and he looked first from one and then to the other.

At last he exclaimed:

"My duty, then, in this case, is clear and plain enough. Without taking you into custody and removing you from this house, I will remain and keep guard over you. In the morning, the magistrates shall be assembled, and the case inquired into."

"I am quite willing to consent to such a course," said Frank. "I do not fear the result."

His manner formed a marked contrast to that of Mrs. Fleming.

She turned ashy pale, and trembled.

She was well aware that the charge of assassination preferred against her darling son could be substantiated in every particular, and the result of that she could see plainly enough.

In those days the attempt at murder was punished by death, and the thought of her favourite boy ascending the scaffold was too much for her to bear.

"Now, marm," said the officer, "have you any objections?"

"Yes, I have," she answered. "Frank—Mr. Fleming, will you listen to me?"

"Speak on, woman."

"If you will withdraw the charge you have just made against me and my son, and suffer us both to leave this house in peace, I will withdraw that which I made against you. Reflect."

"Are you in earnest?"

"I am."

"Then I consent, provided you sit down at the table and write a document to that effect."

The wretched woman was only too glad to comply with this demand.

Advancing to the table, she wrote a few lines hastily to the effect mentioned.

"Now, sir," said Frank, addressing the police officer, "take up that paper and read it."

He was obeyed.

The officer read as follows:

"I, Matilda Fleming, most solemnly declare that the charge of murder made by me against Mr. Frank Fleming is altogether groundless and without foundation, the said charge being prompted only by malice and disappointment.

(Signed) "Matilda Fleming."

"Do you mean this, marm?" said the officer.

"I do."

"Then," he added, "it is my duty to take you into custody for making a false charge."

"Do nothing of the kind," said Frank. "Madam, leave this house at once, take your son with you, and never let me see or hear anything of you again. Now begone, or I shall change my determination."

"But I can't let them go," the officer blurted out.

"You must," said Frank, "for I positively decline to make any charge whatever."

"But you have made it."

"Then I recall it. No notice must be taken of those hasty words."

Mrs. Fleming hurried out of the room, went up to her son, and poured in his ears such a narrative of Frank's intentions as frightened him almost to death.

He was only too glad to fly with her.

The officer scratched his head, much puzzled.

"D—n me, sir," he said, "if I can understand all this! I perceive you're left in possession. There'll have to be a coroner's inquest, and all that sort of thing, which I have nothing to do with. There's no good to be done by me in the matter. Now, Mr. Fleming, I have a communication to make to you."

"Say on, sir. But, first of all, just listen to a brief explanation of all that you have seen."

In a few words, Frank made the officer understand the state of affairs; and when the young man had finished, he professed himself extremely satisfied.

"It will be all right," he said—"all right; there will be an inquiry, which I said before—but you have nothing to fear from that."

"And now what is your communication to me. Be brief, and then you and your men are free to share the hospitality of the mansion."

"Many thanks, sir, but we have certain information that Tom King and another of his associates have been lurking round this building. Then they disappeared; so we infer they have entered it, of course for the purpose of committing a felony. Well, sir, we were coming here to search for them when we were met by Mrs. Fleming."

"And what do you wish to do in the matter?" said Frank. "I fear your suspicions are groundless."

"Not quite so. However, that, with your per-

mission, I shall quickly ascertain. I have posted my men all round this house, and in various parts of the grounds, so that no one can leave without being seen; my men are also stationed in the lower parts of the building. I can now begin my search with the certainty of doing some good by it."

"You are heartily welcome," said Frank, biting his lips, "to search this house in any way you think proper. I believe you are mistaken, but that point had better be cleared up."

"Certainly, sir; and after the search, whether successful or not, I trust you will renew the offer you kindly made respecting the hospitality."

"Depend upon that," said Frank; "I will give orders at once for a substantial meal to be prepared."

The officers were all profuse in their acknowledgments.

"You can begin your search now," said Frank, not without a little uneasiness in his breast. "Here is this room where my father was sitting when I entered. He had occupied it for some time. I have never quitted it since I first came in, so it is pretty clear those you seek are not in this apartment."

"Quite clear," said the officer, glancing keenly all round him. "But they are remarkably clever chaps, I can assure you. Many have tried their hands upon them without result. Well, they are certainly not here, without they happen to be behind that screen; and, in case they may be, I will, with your permission, take a peep."

CHAPTER DCLXXI.

THE POLICE OFFICERS ARE ALARMED BY A MYSTERIOUS SOUND, AND DISCOVER THE SECRET PANEL IN THE WALL, BEHIND WHICH TOM KING IS CONCEALED.

THE lieutenant's heart fairly ceased to beat when he heard these words pronounced.

He looked upon the destruction of his friend, to whom he owed so much, as certain.

He was powerless to afford the least assistance.

If he placed any obstacles in the way of the officers, or raised any objection to their proceedings, the only effect would be to involve himself in a web of difficulties without rendering Tom King the least amount of assistance.

As for the highwayman himself, he set his teeth hard, and determined not to surrender without a desperate resistance.

Beckoning to his men to follow, the chief police officer walked towards the screen.

The lieutenant grew desperate.

How should he hinder him?

At the very last moment a sudden and excellent thought darted into his mind.

The library was illuminated by a large lamp standing in the centre of the table.

When the officers had their backs turned towards him, the lieutenant suddenly upset it.

There was a terrific crash of broken glass.

In an instant the whole apartment was plunged in the profoundest darkness.

"Help—help!" cried the lieutenant, as though he was injured. "Help—help! Oh, what is this? Mercy—mercy!"

The crash—the sudden extinguishment of the lamp, and the lieutenant's cries, were all sufficient to fill the officers with alarm and confusion.

The darkness was profound, and, by a mutual impulse, they all stood perfectly still.

Some time elapsed before the chief officer could recover himself sufficiently to speak.

At last he managed to say, in trembling accents:

"What—what's the matter? What has happened?"

There was no response.

The alarm increased.

All remembered that a dead man was in the chair at the table.

Had he anything to do with the fall of the lamp?

That was the question they asked themselves.

Accustomed as they all were to look upon death in almost every shape, they were on that occasion, in the darkness, paralysed by fear.

Tom King was not a little astonished at this event, but he had the presence of mind to stand perfectly still, for he guessed at once it was part of some plan of his friend to rescue him from his perilous situation.

Immediately afterwards he felt himself grasped by some one.

It was the lieutenant.

Having upset the lamp, and having, as he believed, succeeded in thoroughly alarming the police officers, he slipped on tiptoe across the carpet in the direction of the screen.

Being familiar with that room, he had no difficulty in making his way across it noiselessly in the darkness.

He seized Tom by the hand, and gently drew him out from behind the screen before the police had in the least degree recovered from their panic.

Knowing the necessity there was for silence, Tom followed his conductor on tiptoe.

He had not many steps to go.

The lieutenant paused.

He felt with his hand against a panelled wall.

Suddenly and silently a tall, narrow door opened.

He thrust Tom through the aperture, and whispered faintly:

"Remain here till you hear further from me. Believe me, you are safe."

The door the lieutenant had opened was a secret one, and secured by a spring.

He knew that whenever it was closed there was a loud snap, and he endeavoured to shut it as gently as possible.

Still, a slight sound was produced, which he endeavoured to conceal by crying out:

"What does all this mean? Where are you all? A light—a light, I say!"

This reached the ears of those without, and the door of the library was thrown open.

Those who came brought lights, and, when they entered the apartment, a singular-looking scene was presented to their view.

The lieutenant was standing near the table.

The large lamp was lying in fragments on the floor.

The policemen, with an expression half of alarm and half of bewilderment upon their countenances, were huddled together in a throng near the screen.

"Bring the lights this way!" cried the lieutenant.

"What is it—what is it?" cried all the police, who no longer felt apprehensive now that the darkness was removed.

"I can scarcely tell you," said Frank, "further than just as you were about looking behind the screen the lamp was dashed aside, and I felt myself grasped tightly by some one."

"Who—who?" they all cried.

"That I have no idea," he said. "It startled me, and, therefore, I cried out."

"It's all right," said the chief officer—"I can understand it."

"Can you indeed?"

"Yes; Tom King is somewhere about these premises—I am convinced of that! Now, my boys, let us search—let us look behind this screen!"

The officers did so, but, of course, were unrewarded for their trouble.

They searched eagerly all round the apartment, and when they came to the little door, through which the lieutenant and Tom King had gained admission, they flung it open.

"Aha!" they cried. "This explains the mystery—he is down here!"

It was a very natural conclusion for them to arrive at, and so, without another thought upon the matter, they darted pell-mell after their leader.

In their excitement, they forgot all about the lieutenant, who took care to maintain his position near the table.

When he was satisfied that all were some distance down the staircase, he crossed over to one portion of the wall and tapped against it.

He placed his lips close to the wood-work, and said:

"All is well so far; but the danger is not over yet! Don't make a movement until I come to you!"

He did not wait for a reply, but returned to his former position.

After a moment's reflection, he decided to accompany the officers in their search.

Therefore, he sped swiftly down the staircase.

At the bottom, he found them standing all together, holding a consultation, which, by the expression of their countenances, seemed to be a serious one.

"I tell you I have been standing here all the while," said a voice, "and nobody's come down those steps excepting you—that I'll swear to!"

"Well, he's in the house somewhere, rely upon it! Keep a good watch! Still, we will continue our search! If he is anywhere on the premises he must eventually fall into our hands!"

With great vigour, the officers continued their search.

For upwards of an hour, they ransacked, as they believed, every hole and corner in the building.

But without result.

At the end of the time mentioned, they all met in the entrance-hall, and looked at one another with disappointment on their countenances.

"He don't seem to be here," said one, "and, besides, what has become of his companion?"

This was a question they were not likely to answer satisfactorily.

It was just at that moment that Frank appeared, and he said:

"The refreshment I spoke of is now quite ready. You will find the table laid and everything waiting for you—you can partake of the meal or not, just as you please; you may either have a snack now and renew your search, or finish, and have something to eat and drink afterwards."

"Many thanks to you, sir," said the chief officer; "but we are quite faint and tired, and—that is if you will let us rest for a little while—we should with your permission be very glad to begin the search afresh, for we are by no means certain that he is not on the premises."

"You are heartily welcome to search as much as you think proper; in fact, I shall not be satisfied myself until you have gone carefully over every part of the house; they may be cunning enough to conceal themselves while you are here, but as soon as you have departed they will show themselves."

"Depend upon that, sir," said the officer—"depend upon that."

The prospect of a good meal quite revived their spirits.

Frank led the way into one of the lower rooms, where a very substantial meal had been spread upon the table.

They were pleased to see that there were several flagons of foaming ale as well as bottles of spirits on a side table.

The owner of the house evidently intended to regale them in first-class style.

They sat down, and in a very little while all were most busily occupied in satisfying their appetites, which, to judge by the quantity of food consumed, must have been voracious indeed.

The more they eat, and the more they drank, the more good-tempered they got, until after a time they forgot almost all about Tom King—that is to say, those did who were seated at the table doing justice to the good things upon it.

It must be understood that the commanding officer had taken the precaution to divide his men, one half being on the watch while the other half sat down.

At length those who were on guard were relieved from their duty, and those who had satisfied their hunger were put in their place.

It was now growing towards morning, and a slight drizzling rain was falling, which made it very uncomfortable for those whose duty it was to remain outside.

It was many a day since they had had such a glorious feast, and they felt more inclined to lie down and sleep off the effects of it than they did to act the part of sentinels.

No alarm was given, and the second portion of the troop was regaled in safety.

Suddenly, however, a terrific uproar was heard upstairs.

It sounded as though ten thousand hammers were at work all at once.

The chief officer had occupied a seat at the table during the whole of the time, so that now his intellects were in rather a confused state.

Nevertheless he started to his feet upon hearing the knocking, and called to his men to follow him.

They did so with unsteady steps.

"The library," he said—"the library; that's where the noise comes from! Hurrah!—perhaps we shall have them yet!"

Tumultuously they dashed into the room.

It was vacant, for the corpse of the admiral had by Frank's orders been removed to another chamber.

The whole place was filled with the hammering noise, and the officers looked round about them in stupid surprise, unable to tell from what particular spot the noise proceeded.

The blows were so continuous that they filled the whole apartment.

Suddenly the chief officer, who had been listening intently, cried:

"Here it is—this is the way! I know the spot where the knocking is—this is it!"

Uttering these words somewhat incoherently, he rushed across the room towards the secret door behind which Tom King had been concealed by Lieutenant Fleming.

CHAPTER DCLXXII.

TOM KING ENDEAVOURS TO MAKE HIS ESCAPE FROM THE ADMIRAL'S MANSION.

In order to explain the cause of the mysterious knocking, it will be necessary to advert to the proceedings of Lieutenant Fleming.

Having seen the officers all seated at the table, and busily at work devouring the comestibles upon it, he took an opportunity to withdraw.

Summoning the servants, he ascended the staircase and entered the library.

By his directions, the body of the admiral was, as we have already hinted, removed to another chamber.

This being done, he closed the door, and, satisfied that he should be free from interruption, tapped gently against the panel.

Tom knocked in reply.

Then, pressing upon the spring, the secret door flew open.

"I think I may congratulate you," said Frank; "the danger, I believe, is over."

"Is it so?"

"I think I may venture to say it is. I have induced the officers to sit down and regale themselves after their long search; they are now busily engaged in devouring the good things before them."

"But they are still suspicious?" said Tom.

"They are; and you must use great circumspection."

"And what about those who were spoken of being outside? Do you remember the chief said that he had posted his men all around, so that no one could leave the premises unobserved?"

"I recollect that perfectly well."

"Then how have they arranged matters?"

"Thus: those who conducted the search are now sitting down to the meal. As soon as they have finished they will be sent outside, and those who have been guarding before will come in for their share of eatables."

Tom nodded.

"I should recommend you to wait where you are until the guards change; believe me, I have taken every pains to let them have unlimited quantities of ale, and wine, and spirits—they are fond of them, I know, and therefore——"

"You think I shall stand a better chance of eluding them?" said Tom, interrupting him. "Well, so do I. Let me again say how heartily and entirely I am obliged to you."

"Don't mention it—don't mention it, if you please; we'll look upon it as a mutual obligation; I do all this freely and spontaneously."

"I believe it," said Tom; "and I regret that the time has come when we must part. I assure you it is a long time since I found so agreeable a companion."

"We had better not begin to compliment each other," said Frank; "we should rather keep more serious matters before our minds. Now, listen! I have an important communication to make to you!"

"What is it?"

"At the back of the recess in which you have been standing is another secret door more cunningly conceived than the first."

"Indeed! I had no suspicion of such a thing."

"No one would; but in old mansions of this kind, you know, there are always such things as these. The construction of this strikes me as being most admirable."

"Admirable indeed!" said Tom.

"Should by any chance the first secret door be dis-

covered, and the recess revealed, you, I fancy, would think of looking for another secret door leading elsewhere."

"Exactly."

"And, in your case, you will find that second door leads to safety."

"I am glad to hear that. Believe me, I have been exceedingly anxious to know in what manner I should leave the mansion."

"All may be easy—at least, I hope so."

"What, then, is this communication that you have to make?"

"This: on the other side of the second secret door is a long flight of steep stone steps; they descend quite to the foundation of the building. You must descend them."

"And, I presume, at the bottom I shall find a subterranean passage?"

"Yes; I could tell you, if I had time, a strange tale about that very subterranean passage. It was used by an ancestor of mine during the reign—if I may so call it—of the usurper Cromwell, but it is now out of the question."

"I understand how you mean to serve me," said Tom. "This subterranean passage has an opening at some distance from this spot?"

"It has. When you reach the bottom of the steps, you will find a low door. It will yield to a touch. You will then be in a long, narrow, but straight passage. Follow it fearlessly until you reach its extremity."

"I understand perfectly."

"Now, then, for the means of egress. This is a most important point indeed. For many reasons I should be very sorry if the existence of this passage was suspected."

"Rely upon my caution," said Tom. "I will pay the utmost attention to all your directions."

"I have no doubt of it. At the end of the passage, then, you will find its height decrease so much that you will scarcely be able to stand upright. Over your head is an iron trap-door, and now for the means of raising it."

The lieutenant stepped into the little secret recess, and, pressing another spring, caused a little door about six inches wide to fly open.

"This," he said, "was intended as a repository for wealth. Large sums have from time to time been concealed in it. Now it is used only to keep this."

As he spoke, the lieutenant held a singular-looking instrument, shaped somewhat like the key of a large clock.

"Take this," he said, "and at the extremity of the passage, in the wall which bars your further progress, you will find, a little way from the ground, a small hole. Fix this key into it, and then, putting forth your strength, turn the handle round and round in the same way as you would use a windlass."

"Go on," said Tom, perceiving that the lieutenant paused. "Believe me, I am all attention."

"I do not doubt it. I was only anxious to know whether you entirely comprehended my meaning. We have time now for conversation, because the guard has not been changed. But you must remember when once you are down in that subterranean passage it will be too late for you to make any inquiries."

"All is simple and clear enough at present. What will be the effect of turning the key round in the manner you have described?"

"It sets in motion some simple yet ingenious machinery which raises the iron trap-door above. At each revolution you will hear a clicking sound. You may then let go of the handle with safety, and the door above will not descend into its place, being kept there by a ratchet attached to one of the wheels."

"And how many revolutions must it perform?"

"That depends in a great measure on yourself. As you turn the handle round you will see the trap-door above rise rapidly; when you find there is space enough to crawl out, do so."

"And," asked Tom, "is the trap-door level with the ground? or by what means is it concealed?"

"It is level with the ground, and on the top of the iron door is a good thickness of turf, and the closest scrutiny would scarcely discover its existence. The turf is cut all round to the shape of the door, so that when you raise it the turf rises also, and when the door falls the turf falls also, and the ground presents a level, undisturbed appearance."

"A most excellent contrivance."

"It is indeed, and you must understand that the piece of turf that I have mentioned is near the centre of a kind of thicket or shrubbery, some little distance from the mansion."

"I understand all now," said Tom. "A thousand thanks for your kindness! My safety I now look upon as assured—the officers will never find me there."

"I think not; but you must be on your guard. You are mistaken, however, in thinking you know all—there is one thing more to which I must request your particular attention."

"And what is that?"

"When you emerge, you will find that the trap-door has been raised, and is held in its position by a notched bar of iron. This bar you must give a smart stroke to the effect of which will be to remove one of the notches from the iron point on which it rests, and the great weight of the door will cause it to fall into its place."

"Rely upon it, I will carry out your instructions in every particular," said Tom.

"All that will then remain," added the lieutenant, "will be to take care how you emerge from the thicket; and when you have done so, and have no fear of being seen, make your way back to your own place of refuge."

"I will," said Tom. "But hark!—what's that?"

Some kind of commotion was going on in the large hall, and the lieutenant hastily stepped on to the landing to ascertain the cause of it.

"It's all right!" he said. "Those men who have finished their feast are about to leave the house and relieve their comrades. Those who are outside will be anxious enough to come in, I'll warrant; so that you may reckon upon the guard being changed in a very few minutes."

"I will wait," said Tom, "until the other men come in."

"It would be better, no doubt."

The police officers took their departure, and a pause of several minutes ensued.

Then those who had been on duty in the grounds made their appearance.

The lieutenant informed Tom of their arrival, and told him that they were all seated at the table, without a thought of anything except of making a hearty meal.

"The time, then, has come," said Tom, "for me to say farewell. Good-bye! In all probability we shall never meet again. Yet I shall always remember the great service you have done me. Good-bye."

"Farewell," said the lieutenant. "I regret the parting quite as much as you do, but it is inevitable."

Again uttering the word "farewell," the lieutenant opened the secret door, and allowed Tom to pass through.

He furnished him with a small wax taper; and with this in one hand and the singular-looking implement in the other, Tom King descended the spiral staircase.

The door above was closed upon him with a sharp snap.

He experienced much regret at this parting, but the feeling soon wore off as his curiosity was excited by the different objects around him.

The darkness in that place was so thick and palpable, that the wax taper signally failed to disperse it.

It seemed more like a tiny twinkling star shining through a huge black cloud than aught else. Feeling his way more than seeing it, Tom King cautiously descended, for the steps were slippery with moisture, and in some places overgrown by a kind of moss, which was very treacherous to tread upon.

Without any accident, however, Tom King traversed the whole of the secret passage until he came to its extremity.

"I would give much," he muttered, "to know whether there is an officer above; if so, an alarm will be made."

There was no help for it, however—the risk must be run.

He had no means whatever of ascertaining what was going on above.

Stooping down, he quickly found the hole of which the lieutenant had spoken.

The handle fitted into it easily, and he commenced turning it.



[CLAUDE DUVAL RELATES HIS EARLY HISTORY TO HIS COMPANIONS.]

He found it required a considerable exertion of strength, but each revolution of the handle caused the trap-door above to rise about an inch, so that he very soon found the fresh air blowing on his face.

CHAPTER DCLXXIII.

EXPLAINS THE MEANING OF THE VIOLENT HAMMERING UPON THE SECRET DOOR IN THE LIBRARY OF THE ADMIRAL'S MANSION.

As soon as this happened, Tom suspended his operations.

As the young lieutenant told him, the trap-door remained raised, and looking up, he caught sight of the faint, dim light surrounding it.

Before going any farther, he resolved to make the attempt to ascertain whether any of his foes were near at hand.

With this view, he took hold of the edge of the trap-door with his fingers, and drew himself up until his eyes were on a level with the ground.

All around was very dark and misty-looking, and, after several seconds' observation, he concluded that no one was at hand, and that it would be perfectly safe for him to emerge.

Again, therefore, he turned the handle, and in a few moments had the pleasure of finding the trap-door raised to a height sufficient to enable him to crawl out.

He extinguished the taper, and then, with little trouble drew himself up and scrambled out.

Before he could rise to his feet, however, some one sprang upon him.

Although taken so by surprise, Tom King did not lose his presence of mind in the least.

He knew that his first effort must be to prevent his assailant from giving the alarm to his comrades.

With great suddenness, then, he seized his aggressor by the throat, and with such tightness that the police officer was unable to articulate a sound.

But he was a determined man, and possessed a tolerable amount of courage.

He was resolved his prisoner should not easily escape him, and, had the officer been perfectly sober, Tom King would have stood rather a poor chance.

That one circumstance made a very great difference, and Tom King's superiority soon manifested itself.

All at once, a new thought darted into the highwayman's mind.

There was one effectual means of disposing of his antagonist.

Summoning up all his energies, he flung the officer to the ground, and, before he was aware of what he was about, Tom thrust him between the ground and the edge of the trap-door.

The officer's disappearance seemed almost magical, it was so sudden.

Tom heard him fall with a dull, heavy thud upon the ground beneath.

Then all was still.

Bearing in mind the instructions he had received, Tom King kicked the piece of iron that supported the trap-door.

Down it went with a rush, and then the ground presented quite an ordinary appearance to look at, especially by the dim light there was around.

No one would imagine the existence of any such place.

The officer had been almost strangled, and the fall through the trap-door into the passage beneath deprived him of what little consciousness he had remaining.

In a short time, however, he recovered his consciousness.

At first all was a blank, and then, with the suddenness of lightning, he remembered everything.

Some horrible curses broke from his lips.

"I am down in this rat-hole a prisoner, I suppose!" he exclaimed. "Of course it will be no good for me to try to reach the open air! He has made all secure in that quarter, I'll be bound! But he must have come from somewhere, that's quite evident."

And uttering these words, half aloud and half to himself, the officer groped his way along the passage, which he was easily able to do, for, by extending his arms, he was able to touch the earth on both sides.

On he went, meeting with no accidents, for really there were no obstructions in the way.

Had not his intellects been quite so confused, that officer, courageous as he was, would scarcely have ventured to walk so boldly and rapidly in the darkness along a passage that he knew nothing about.

Besides which, his excitement was so great that he quite forgot he carried with him a dark lantern, and had the means of procuring a light in his pocket.

Suddenly he encountered the door that we have mentioned as being situated at the bottom of the steps.

He was rather awkward in opening this, but at length he succeeded, and groped his way up the secret staircase until he reached the top.

He was convinced that the other extremity of the passage was now reached, for in front of him was evidently a panel of wood.

He was well aware that just beyond must be one of the apartments in the mansion.

He passed his hands rapidly all over the piece of woodwork in front of him, but failed to find anything resembling a fastening.

All was perfectly smooth.

A deep silence, too, prevailed around, and the darkness seemed to grow more and more intense.

Then the terrible thought occurred to this officer that, after all, his position might be far more dangerous than he at first imagined.

"In all probability," he told himself, "the passage terminated in some little-used portion of the mansion."

He was aware from experience that all such places were very strongly constructed, and he might have great difficulty in forcing his way out.

The more he thought about this, the more uneasy and troubled he became

"My comrades are in the house now," he said. "I will attract their attention if I can. When they leave, the people who live here may refuse to hear me."

Growing more and more alarmed each moment, the police officer drew a large pistol from his belt.

It had a solid, formidable butt, mounted and inlaid with brass.

Seizing hold of the barrel of this weapon, he hammered away with great force and vigour upon the piece of wood in front of him.

But so strong and substantial was that inner secret door, that it did not even shake beneath his blows.

As he found no notice appeared to be taken of this summons, a cold sweat started out upon his brow, and, feeling perfectly desperate, he drew forth another pistol, and renewed his hammering with both.

He shouted aloud for help, but even in his own ears his voice sounded hushed and muffled, and it certainly was not heard by those in the library.

This, then, is the explanation of the mysterious knocking that caused so much consternation to the police officers.

We have stated that they at length discovered the exact spot from which the blows appeared to come, and, as the reader knows, they were right.

The reason they were so puzzled upon this point, is because of the peculiar position of the inner door.

Had it been upon the panelling of the room, they would have understood it at once.

"Here it is!" cried the commanding officer. "We have found him at last!"

In his beery condition, he did not reflect upon the unlikelihood of Tom King creating such a disturbance in order that his hiding-place should be discovered.

"Down with this panel!" he cried—"down with it—we'll have him!"

"Had not we better call in the young gentleman and speak to him about it?" said one of the officers, who was rather more sober than his leader. "I should not like to do anything that he might consider uncivil."

"No, nor I—nor I," said the chief officer. "Send for him."

Frank was accordingly sent for, and on his arrival he professed to be as much astonished as any of them, and declared that he knew nothing about it.

"Then, what had we better do?" asked the chief officer, with a hiccough.

"That I leave entirely to you," replied Frank. "I am only anxious that the rascals should be captured. How they can be there I cannot imagine."

"Nor I—nor I," said the chief officer; "but they're wonderful fellows."

"Are they, indeed?"

"Yes, and there's no knowing what they might do."

"Then," said Frank, "it may be some desperate plan of theirs—who can tell?"

The lieutenant hazarded this supposition, not because he thought it was at all likely, but because he feared something had happened to Tom King, and that he had adopted this means of entreating assistance.

"Well, I am going to do my duty," said the chief officer, with the dogged obstinacy of a drunken man—"I am going to do my duty, and let those who prevent me do so at their peril!"

"No one wants to prevent you," said Frank, "or, at least, I don't. If they are here I am anxious they should be taken prisoners."

"Very good!" said the chief officer. "Don't interfere with me! I know they are there—I am sure of it, and I will pretty soon have a hole in this wall and drag them out."

So saying, he stooped down and picked up the poker from the hearth, close to which he was standing.

It was no flimsy, modern article, but a heavy, substantial bar of iron.

Beyond all doubt, the officer could demolish the panel with that.

Before Frank could say a word or interpose, he struck the secret door such a terrific blow somewhere near the spot where the spring was situated, that it flew open at once, disclosing the small square recess beyond.

"Hurrah!" he cried—"here we are—got them at last! Forward!"

So saying, he flourished the poker round his head and rushed in.

To his disappointment the recess was empty.

But the hammering and knocking continued with unabated vigour.

"There's another door here!" cried the officer. "I will soon have that down; and mind you, as soon as ever I do, rush forward and seize them—don't give them time to make any resistance!"

This second door was not demolished quite so readily as the former.

The officer at the top of the staircase found his alarm subsiding.

Evidently his friends had heard his summons for assistance, and were making vigorous efforts to liberate him.

The chief officer was not able to wield the poker in that little recess with so much effect as he had done in the room beyond.

Determined, however, to make one effort, he struck the door a terrific blow, and flung himself against it at the same time.

Unluckily, he put forth about ten times the amount of force that was required.

He dashed the whole weight of his body against the door, which opened as easily and quickly as though some one had been at great pains to oil the hinges.

Some rather curious effects followed.

The first was, that the officer on the top of the steps received such a sudden blow on his nose by the violent opening of the door, that he turned head-over-heels, and in that fashion revolved to the bottom of the flight.

The chief officer, having given himself so much impetus, could not stop, consequently, he shot down the stairs after his subordinate head-first.

The other officers in obedience to his orders rushed forward also.

The idea that there might be a staircase commencing at the very threshold of that inner secret door never once entered their minds, and it was not until some half dozen of them had rolled down the steps after their leader that the discovery was made.

The remainder then stopped, looking in each other's faces with blank dismay.

Then evidences that a great commotion was going on apparently in the bowels of the earth reached their ears.

"Lights—lights!" said the officer, who had suggested that Frank should be sent for—"lights! We must descend these stairs, and ascertain what has happened."

Lights were rapidly procured, and the remainder of the force descended slowly and carefully.

With much difficulty they raised their comrades, who lay in a confused and struggling mass at the bottom.

All were very much the worse for their tumble, especially the chief officer, who was quite insensible.

The other officer who had been the cause of all this disturbance was just returning to consciousness.

After some delay all were carried up into the library.

In the meanwhile the officer once or twice mentioned as having his senses more about him than the rest, hastily made an examination of the passage, but failed to discover either any mode of exit from it, or any traces of the highwayman

When he returned to the library he found his commander had opened his eyes and was beginning to realise what had taken place.

He was in a very damaged condition, and so was the officer who had preceded him in his fall.

"Who was it made all that hammering?" gasped the chief. "What did it mean?"

"It was Wilcox, sir," said one of them—"he did it"

"Was it you, Wilcox?" asked the chief officer, angrily.

"It was, sir, but——"

"Take that, you idiot—take that!" interrupted the chief, "and don't you play such a fool's game as that again, or it will be worse for you! Take that, and that as well, and tell me how you like it!"

CHAPTER DCLXXIV.

TOM KING MANAGES TO REACH THE CAVE IN SAFETY, AND CLAUDE DUVAL IS CALLED UPON TO RELATE THE PARTICULARS OF HIS EARLY LIFE.

As he spoke these words, the chief officer broke away from those who held him, or rather who had placed themselves so as to support him, and rushed towards Wilcox.

Every time he cried "Take that!" he administered a sharp crack with his clenched fist.

Evidently, Wilcox did not like it at all, but that was of no consequence, for the chief officer continued just the same until compelled to pause through sheer exhaustion.

"Now, you villain," he cried, "explain yourself—explain yourself, I say! What is the meaning of all this?"

Wilcox at this juncture presented a truly deplorable spectacle.

His nose had been severely injured by the blow it received from the door, and was swelled up to something like three times its natural size when his chief commenced the attack upon him.

Now all his countenance was puffed up round it, while a ruby stream trickled down his chin on to his neckcloth.

He made an odd snuffling sound when he was spoken to, and endeavoured to reply.

Fearing to receive fresh violence made him try his best to give an account of what had happened.

Accordingly he did so, though his narrative was somewhat confused.

When it was found that he had actually had one of the highwaymen in his grasp, all the other officers gave vent to a perfect howl, and seemed more than half-inclined to rush forward in a body and inflict summary punishment upon him.

They were restrained more by the voice of their leader than aught else.

"Come," he said—"make haste! We must not trouble ourselves any further with that fool! Follow me!"

So saying, he staggered from the room, for he had not yet recovered from the effects of his fall, though recent events had gone far towards sobering him.

His men of course followed in his footsteps, not even excepting Wilcox.

Planting his hat firmly on his head, the chief officer led the way out of the house, and hastened towards the thicket that had been described to him.

He reached it in a few moments, and trampling down the shrubs, finally stood on the little open space we have mentioned.

He called then for lanterns, and when the light of about half a dozen of them was directed upon the ground they were able to make out not only the position of the trap-door but also evident indications of a sharp struggle having taken place.

Of the highwayman, however, not a single trace remained.

He summoned those he had posted in various positions, and inquired from them whether they had seen anything suspicious.

He was answered in the negative.

There was no trace left of the highwayman beyond the thicket.

They could see where he had forced his way out, but nothing further.

From this, it is evident that Tom King succeeded in getting away from the admiral's mansion unseen.

Such being the case, there can be little interest in describing the doings of the police officers.

We will return, then, to the highwayman.

As soon as he had disposed of Wilcox, Tom stood perfectly still and listened.

Then he cautiously crept away, keeping his body close to the ground, and passing about midway between two of the sentinels.

When he had once passed them, the remainder of his journey was simple enough.

He made for Epping Forest, and entered it at the nearest point.

When he found himself beneath the trees, a feeling of complete safety came over him.

But the night was almost over, and he was well aware his comrades would be looking and waiting for him.

It was just before daybreak when he reached the cave, where he found his friends secure and safe enough.

Nothing whatever had occurred during his absence to disturb their tranquility.

The same words will apply to several days that followed.

It was plain to be seen, however, that the highwaymen

were chafing under the restraint this placed upon them—they were all desirous to be up and doing.

On his return, Tom King, as a matter of course, related all that had befallen him.

At first he was apprehensive that the officers would discover their whereabouts.

He imagined that after they became aware of his actual presence at the admiral's mansion they would jump to the conclusion that it was in Epping Forest where they had taken refuge; and, indeed, such might have been the case even then, although they had remained undisturbed, for at that time the forest was of such great extent that it would have required a long time to search over every part of it provided they had no clue to guide them.

Every precaution was taken to guard against discovery, and no one ventured to go far away from the open space in front of the cave.

Maud was progressing slowly but favourably towards recovery—it might be said indeed that she was out of danger, and Dick experienced a feeling of great relief on that account.

Yet, the time hung heavily upon their hands, and every day it became more and more difficult to find something with which they could occupy themselves.

On the fourth day after Tom's adventure, the friends were all assembled in the little open space.

It was a glorious, bright, sunshiny day, and the atmosphere was warm and genial, not at all in accordance with the season of the year.

"Claude," said Jack, breaking in upon the silence which had lasted several minutes, "do you recollect our sojourn in Enfield Chase?"

"Yes, very well. What of it?"

"One night, while we were there, you promised to relate your history—you even began it."

"Yes, I remember, and we were interrupted by hearing that strange cry that came from the lips of the wounded poacher."

"Exactly; and since then we have not heard another word of it."

"It's a good thought," said Dick, "it will serve to while away the time, and make the day pass more pleasantly if you, Claude, will finish what you then begun, and relate your adventures up to the time of your meeting with Sixteen-String Jack."

"I don't mind," said Claude, who was seated upon the trunk of a fallen tree—"I will gladly do anything to amuse you, though, for my own part, I am not very fond of raking up the past."

"Never mind that—let us hear your story—your life from the commencement, recollect, up to the time of your meeting with Jack."

"And after that," said Tom King, "we will call upon Sixteen-String Jack for his story."

This proposal was at once eagerly assented to by all parties.

"Give me five minutes to think," said Claude Duval, covering his face with his hands, so as to shut out external objects, "and then I shall be able to tell you my tale plainly and straightforwardly, without omitting anything, or having to go back."

"Agreed—agreed!"

While Claude was thus engaged in refreshing his memory and calling up recollections of the past, his companions ranged themselves around in convenient positions, and prepared to listen to every word he was about to say.

All fancied that some kind of mystery hung over Duval's early life, and they were curious to know whether their speculations were well founded.

About his adventures previous to his meeting with Tom King, the highwaymen knew nothing, or very little.

It is true, from time to time hints had been dropped respecting it, but even Sixteen-String Jack, Claude's oldest associate, knew so little of his story that he waited with quite as much eagerness for the first words as did any of the others.

At length Claude moved his hands from his face, and looked around him.

Perceiving that they were all waiting for him to commence, he cleared his voice and spoke as follows:

CHAPTER DCLXXV.

CLAUDE COMMENCES HIS HISTORY, AND RELATES AN ANECDOTE OF HIS UNCLE, THE GREAT CLAUDE DUVAL, AND OF HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES THE SECOND.

"If I recollect right, when you wanted me to relate my history on a previous occasion, you requested me to begin at the very beginning, and I suppose that is just what you desire at the present time?"

"Decidedly."

"Well, then, I will commence with saying that I feel myself rather in doubt as to whether I am a Frenchman or an Englishman. I prefer to think the latter; and it seems to me, I have about as much claim to one as to the other—I suppose I can please myself.

"My father and mother were both born in England, as were their parents before them; but originally, the family was a French one, as the name alone will show. My parents, nevertheless, always considered themselves English, but, from particular reasons, they left England and crossed over to Normandy, where I was born. It is an indifferent, unimportant matter, and those who like may dispute about it; however, I maintain I am English, and have spent the greater part of my life in this land.

"The circumstances I mentioned as causing my parents to go over to Normandy are worth more than passing mention.

"Of course you have every one heard of the great Claude Duval, who ran such a remarkable career in the reign of King Charles the Second?"

"Of course we have," was the reply—"and it is not likely he will ever be forgotten."

"Well, then, it was through this great Claude Duval, who was my uncle, that my parents left England. He created such a commotion throughout the whole land that everyone bearing his name was looked upon if not with suspicion at least with curiosity, and in order to escape the impertinent questions of numerous people, my parents crossed the channel.

"I happened to be the youngest child of a very large family, and my father was also a younger son, so that when I was born my uncle had been dead something like thirty years."

"Stay a moment," said Dick, "I have no doubt you have in your remembrance some anecdotes relative to this uncle of yours; if so, let us hear them first, and then go on with your own history afterwards."

This proposal was greeted with acclamation, and Claude replied:

"I daresay I could remember three adventures of his, and if you like I will tell them at once."

"Then do so—pray do so!"

"One day, then, Claude Duval set out upon a highway expedition—I say one day, for such was his daring and contempt for the authorities that he frequently stopped people by daylight.

"He was also very fond of high life, and adopted numerous schemes to get introduced to the mansions of the nobility.

"In this he frequently succeeded, and more than once he gained admission to the Court, and one day he was seen walking arm-in-arm with the King.

"However, that is not the adventure I spoke of; but it was brought into my mind because the place he selected for his adventure was at Windsor, where the King was then staying.

"On that very morning there was to be a grand hunt, but Claude interfered and spoiled much of the sport.

"Passing through a portion of the forest, he saw a person on horseback advancing towards him whom he recognised in a moment. This was Sir Thomas Roper, the Master of the King's hounds, and the individual who had the direction of the whole affair.

"Although within a very short distance of Windsor Castle, and although Sir Thomas Roper's men might be close in the rear, yet Claude Duval rode up to him, and, putting a pistol to his breast, called upon him to deliver.

"It was in vain Sir Thomas cursed and swore, and refused to deliver up any of his wealth. Claude, who possessed great strength, seized him, dragged him from his horse, and tied him neck and heels together, and took fifty pounds out of his pocket. He then secured the knight's horse to a neighbouring tree, and while doing so, exclaimed:

"'Now, Sir Thomas, you see what you have got by your obstinacy; if you had given me this bag of gold at first I should have let you ride on unmolested; as it is, you will have to remain where you are for the present, and it strikes me, that instead of leading the hunt for his Majesty, his Majesty will have to hunt for you!'

"With these words, Claude Duval rode off, and, making some change in his apparel, presently had the audacity to join in the King's train as it was setting out from the castle.

"Great was the outcry for Sir Thomas Roper, but he was nowhere to be found. The King was furious with rage, and declared that without the keeper of the hounds was discovered the hunt could not take place.

"Claude then whispered to a gentleman near him, that he believed Sir Thomas was in a certain part of the forest at some distance off, and offered to show them the spot.

"This whisper was passed from one to another until it reached the ears of royalty itself. Then the King, turning round, requested this stranger—for so Claude was looked upon—to lead the way to the place he had mentioned."

"He must have had a rare audacity to have ventured upon that," said Turpin. "I question whether he could succeed in doing such a thing now."

"It would be quite impossible," was the reply; "but you must not forget that the time I am speaking of was just after the Restoration. Everyone was filled with joy, and numberless people flocked around the King. You know, or have heard, of the riotous, extravagant manner in which he treated them, and a great deal of Court ceremony was at that time set aside. More especially were the French people welcome to the King, for he could not forget what friends they had been to him in his long exile.

"I should have mentioned that Claude whispered to the gentleman near him in French, for he understood the language perfectly well, and could speak it as readily as English.

"Well, then, he led the King and his courtiers a fine dance through Windsor Forest. He picked out the muddiest, dirtiest parts he could find. He was careless as to the consequences to himself, and as he led the way all the others followed, not wishing to hold back when another went so boldly forward lest unworthy imputations should be cast upon them.

"For several hours the hunting party did nothing but force their way through tangled thickets and thorny brushwood until there was not one whose dress was not torn to shreds, and whose skin was not scored all over like a joint of pork.

"When he had carried on this diversion long enough, he brought them round to the identical thicket where he had left the unfortunate master of the hounds. He did this because the King was growing angry and tired. He was aware if it was discovered that he had been playing a practical joke upon his Majesty and his nobles the consequences would be serious.

"Great was the astonishment of all parties when they saw Sir Thomas lying down close to his horse's feet in such a ridiculous position. The King fairly laughed aloud, and demanded to know the reason why he was in such a predicament.

"'Unbind me first, your Majesty,' was the reply. 'My neck and heels were never so close together before, and I am afraid I shall never be able to straighten my body out again!'

"The King ordered the rope to be cut, and then Sir Thomas was profuse in his excuses and regrets. He concluded by saying:

"'I trust your Majesty, although deprived of my presence, has nevertheless had some sport.'

"'Yes,' was the reply, as his Majesty looked at his own tattered garments and those of the nobles around him, 'we have had rare sport to-day. Have you?'

"'Yes, d—n it, I have! Pray excuse me, your Majesty,' he added, immediately, 'it was quite a slip of the tongue.'

"'Well, what sport have you had?'

"Sir Thomas remembered how much the adventure had cost him, so, for the life of him, he could not help replying:

"'All I have had I have paid d—d dear for, your Majesty.'

"The King was not averse to an oath now and then, as doubtless you are aware, and the rueful appearance of Sir Thomas Roper put him quite in a good temper.

"'Come, now,' he added, still laughing, 'what has happened?'

"'Why, your Majesty, I was encountered by a—pardon me again if I say a d—d scoundrel, for I don't know what else to call him! Quite against my desire, he bound me neck and heels, as you saw, and then had the impudence to charge me fifty pounds for doing it, although I would gladly enough have spared him the trouble.'

"The King laughed immoderately, and so did all the train, Claude Duval himself included.

"With many grimaces and contortions, Sir Thomas straightened his body, and then, mounting his horse, joined the King's train, which now moved off towards the castle.

"It so chanced that Claude had no opportunity to withdraw, and before he had gone many yards, he found Sir Thomas looking at him very intently, for it happened that they were riding close together.

"The worthy knight believed he recognised Claude, and yet could scarcely believe such a thing. The conviction settled upon him, however, before he had gone many yards, and so he cried out:

"'Your Majesty—your Majesty, the scoundrel who robbed me is now riding in your train!'

"The cavalcade stopped in a moment, and a scene of great confusion ensued. The King's curiosity was roused, and he commanded Sir Thomas to point out his assailant.

"'There he is!' he said, pointing to Claude Duval—'that's him! I will swear to him out of a thousand!'

"Public attention being thus fixed upon Claude, everyone suddenly remembered that this was the first time Claude had been seen in their company.

"'Who are you, sir?' said the King, addressing him.

"Claude knew how to reply, and quite unabashed, he answered:

"'A Frenchman, your Majesty.'

"'I know that; but who are you? State your name and condition!'

"'Every word your Majesty utters is to me a command,' replied Claude, with a bow, 'and therefore I throw myself upon your Majesty's clemency, and say that I am Claude Duval!'

"The commotion increased tenfold at this announcement, and Claude Duval took advantage of a general movement to shrink back. He touched his horse sharply with the spur, and placed himself quite clear of the throng.

"'Your Majesty,' he cried, 'I trust will forgive me! It was nothing more than a frolic, after all, and I believe it has caused every one some amusement!'

"'You have been playing what you think a devilish good joke, Claude Duval!' said the King. 'But let me give you a caution!'

"Claude bowed.

"'Don't try anything of this sort again. As you say it was a frolic, I forgive you, but upon one condition only!'

"'A thousand thanks, your Majesty!' he replied 'Let me know the nature of your commands!'

"'Why, you must return the bag of gold you took from Sir Thomas, and make him that reparation. It's not fair that he should lose so much by the transaction, and that you should gain all the profit.'

"'Pardon me, your Majesty—would you allow me to say a few words? I am a highwayman, and what I take I am bound by the laws of my fraternity never to return; but I have heard you owe Sir Thomas some long arrears of salary, amounting to about ten times the sum I have taken! If you will pay him that on your return to the castle he will not begrudge me a trifling commission such as I have taken!'

"While he was speaking, Claude Duval saw the King's countenance change. He did not at all relish being told of his debts in this manner, and no doubt, if Claude had been foolish enough to linger, the adventure would have ended disagreeably enough for him.

"No sooner had he spoken, however, than, with a smile and a bow, he turned his horse's head, and before the King could recover his composure he was quite lost to sight among the trees. A pursuit was commenced, but it had no effect. The adventure got wind, and I can assure you that Claude Duval was quite the talk of the kingdom."

CHAPTER DCLXXVI.

A SECOND ANECDOTE OF CLAUDE DUVAL, SHOWING HOW HE DANCED A CORANTO WITH A LADY ON HOUNSLOW HEATH.

WHILE relating this anecdote, Claude Duval was frequently interrupted by bursts of laughter from his companions.

"Capital—capital!" they cried, with tears in their eyes. "That's a capital joke! I never heard of that adventure before!"

"I believe it's quite correct," said Claude. "I have heard it told many and many a time; but, however, I will make haste and give you the two others, and then go on with my own history."

"If the others are as good as the first," said Dick, "pray don't hurry! You can put your own history off till to-morrow, if you think proper."

"Well, just as you like; I am quite willing to do my best to make the time pass pleasantly. With regard to this next anecdote, however, I fancy you must have heard of it before; but many incorrect versions are current; this, however, is the right one:

"A certain nobleman, whose name I don't remember—in fact, I have never heard it—was once riding over Hounslow Heath in his carriage. He had his wife with him, a sprightly, charming young girl, and quite young enough to be his daughter—in fact, he was a middle-aged man, and she was but little more than a child.

"This nobleman had also in the carriage along with him the sum of four hundred pounds, and of this Claude was aware, and he resolved to take possession of it.

"This nobleman's wife, young as she was, knew the value of money very well, and was exceedingly fond of it. Her husband either could not or would not support all her extravagancies, and frequently refused her demands for money.

"But this lady possessed the strange accomplishment of playing most exquisitely upon a kind of miniature flageolet that was composed of the most valuable materials, and worth a very large sum. The sounds that came from it were extremely sweet and beautiful, and would have enthralled the ear of anyone who was at all sensible to the influence of music.

"The nobleman was an ardent votary of the Terpsichorean art, but above all he delighted in listening to the sweet strains of his wife's flageolet. She soon became aware of this, and turned the circumstance to her own advantage.

"Whenever she wished to cajole him into complying with her wishes or demands, she produced this instrument, and played upon it until she gained his consent to what she required.

"On the present occasion, she knew that he had this large sum of money in the carriage, and begged for half of it; but her husband was inexorable, and refused to listen to her appeal. She then demanded a hundred pounds, one-fourth of the whole sum, but this he also refused, stating the whole amount was due, and that he must pay it to a certain creditor in London.

"The lady used every artifice she was mistress of, and, failing in all of them, she at last resorted to the flageolet. Never had she played so sweetly and beautifully as on that night, while leaning back in the carriage. The interior of the vehicle was quite dark, or nearly so, and the music was of that character which sounds best when heard in the darkness.

"When she imagined a requisite effect had been produced upon her husband, she paused in her playing, with the intention of renewing her demands. But she paused, for, to her intense astonishment, she heard somewhere close at hand strains exactly similar to those which had just been breathed from her own instrument. The only difference, indeed, was that the notes were louder and more powerful in tone.

"I should have told you that Claude Duval was fond of music, and that his favourite instrument was a flageolet. He could play upon it with great grace and skill, and, so fond of it was he, that he rarely travelled without carrying this instrument in one of his pockets.

"He intended to stop the nobleman's coach, and rode across the heath close to the door of the vehicle with that intention, when all at once he heard the sweet notes I have mentioned. He was as much charmed as the nobleman himself, although the sound was very faint. But he followed the carriage, and, as soon as the lady paused, began to play himself.

"The lady listened for some time in surprise, and then pulled the checkstring. The coachman stopped in a moment, and as soon as he did so, Claude rode up to the door with the flageolet in one hand and his hat in the other. He bowed profoundly to both inmates of the carriage.

"But the light of one of the lamps shone into his countenance, and, as Claude Duval was at that time quite a noted character, the nobleman and his wife recognised him instantly.

"The lady's heart fluttered with delight, for Claude had a reputation for gallantry such as no other man had ever possessed. But the nobleman muttered several oaths between his teeth, for he looked upon the four hundred pounds as no longer his own.

"Claude was not only charmed by the lady's music, but by her extreme loveliness, and, therefore, making another bow, he said:

"'I trust, my lord, that you will not refuse me a trifling favour. It will do you no harm, and will afford me very great delight.'

"Claude paused for the nobleman to reply, but, as he said nothing, he continued:

"'Fair lady, would you do me the favour to alight for a moment, and dance a coranto with me on the heath?'

"'Now, d——' began the nobleman, in an angry voice, but the second word died away in a whisper on his lips.

"All at once he thought of the four hundred pounds which he had had no little trouble to obtain, and he thought to himself that he would rather allow his wife to dance on the heath with Claude Duval than he would lose his gold.

"The lady simpered, and held out her hand without the slightest hesitation. The adventure presented itself to her in a charming aspect.

"She knew it would get talked about, and it would be a great gratification to her to boast of it.

"Claude wanted no other reply, but handed the lady out of the carriage in a second. The nobleman made a movement as though to detain her, but then he thought again of his money, and changed his mind.

"Claude led his partner to a smooth place on the heath, and then bowed to her profoundly, according to the fashion of the times.

"It was a strange, stately kind of dance, very different to those in vogue at the present day. The partners stood opposite to each other at some distance, and the closest contact that was permitted was an occasional touch of the very tips of the fingers, when the arms were extended at full length.

"Claude accompanied the dance by playing on his flageolet, which he did very cleverly, and danced so lightly and so well in his heavy riding boots, that it would have filled a London dancing-master with envy to have seen him.

"When the dance was over, Claude led his fair partner back to the carriage with all possible ceremony and respect.

"During its continuance the nobleman had remained seated, amusing himself by biting his lips fiercely, and now and then rapping out an oath, by way of varying this amusement whenever he saw his wife look smilingly and lovingly at the highwayman. More than once he was on the point of springing out, and it was nothing but his gold that restrained him.

"The lady took her seat in the carriage again, and Claude thanked her once more for her condescension. Then he lingered by the carriage door.

"'What do you require now, sir?' said the nobleman, gruffly.

"'My lord,' returned Claude, 'you have four hundred pounds with you in the carriage, done up in four leather bags.'

"'And what of that, sir—what of that?'

"'Nothing,' said Claude, 'only with so large a sum of money by you, it seems strange that your lordship should have forgotten to pay the musician.'

"'Well, d—n——' but the nobleman paused.

"'I had not forgotten,' he added, and while he pronounced the words he stooped down and produced from

beneath one of the seats a bag of gold. He placed it in Claude Duval's hands, who bowed profoundly.

"'Many thanks, my lord, for your liberality; it shall not be without benefit to you. I am well aware that you have three hundred pounds more, and when I set out to-night I determined to possess myself of the whole amount, but I will be content with what your lordship has so freely given me. You may retain the remainder.'

"'Thanks for your generosity! I know full well, if you chose, you could take it, for I should not think of risking my life in an encounter with you.'

"Claude bowed to the implied compliment, and answered:

"'I will even go still further. Between this and London you may possibly be stopped by others of my profession. Should this be the case, say to them: "Hawks fly by night!" and they will allow you to pass on unmolested.'

"'Thanks—thanks again! You are indeed a generous fellow, Claude, and what I have heard of you is fully proved by your conduct to-night.'

"'Accept my best thanks,' said Claude, placing his hand upon his breast and bowing to the lady. 'Believe me, your fair image is indelibly impressed upon my heart, and will always remain there. I shall never forget you. I trust, however, we may meet again and under as pleasing circumstances. Farewell!'

"'Farewell, sir!" she replied. 'You have been more fortunate with his lordship than I have!'

"'I do not understand you, my lady!'

"'Why, he was deaf to my appeal when I asked him for one of those bags of gold you are about to carry away!'

"'Can it be possible?'

"'It is true, sir!'

"'I am astonished!—I should have imagined anyone would be delighted to be your slave?'

"'Ah, sir!—you speak like all other gay deceivers!'

"'How so?'

"'The promises are fair enough; but when it comes to the performance it is another matter!'

"'My lady! I trust you do not include me in that imputation!'

"The lady shrugged her shoulders.

"'Put me to the test!'

"'You know my necessities!'

"'For money?'

"'Yes!'

"'Then, lady, on my knees I make you an offer of the whole. Take it—pray take it!'

"'Ah, sir!' said the lady, with a sigh, 'you are indeed different to——'

"'No comparisons, lady. Here, take this gold—I give it freely, and this is all I will take by way of return!'

"As he spoke, Claude Duval sprang up, placed the gold in the lady's lap, bent forward and imprinted a passionate kiss upon her lips!

"Then leaping down before either the nobleman or his wife could recover from their astonishment, he galloped off in the darkness, leaving the pair to ride home to London—the husband in anything but an amiable frame of mind!"

CHAPTER DCLXXVII.

A THIRD ADVENTURE OF CLAUDE DUVAL'S, SHOWING HOW HE PLAYED THE DEVIL AT A ROADSIDE INN.

"And that was the end of that adventure, I suppose?" said Dick Turpin, perceiving his companion pause.

"Yes; I have never heard any more!"

"Nor whether he ever saw the lady again?"

"No."

"Well, it was as cool and daring as the other!"

"Quite so; but I presume you have heard this before?"

"Something like it!"

"Well, this is the correct version of the affair."

"Then let us have the third adventure."

"With all my heart! After that I think we will let him rest in peace!"

"As you will!"

"This third anecdote, then, is little known—though I believe it is perfectly true! In fact, I may say I am sure of it!"

"Proceed, then!"

"Early one evening, some time after his adventure with the lady on the heath, Claude Duval found himself near the village of Beaconsfield.

"Looking along the high-road, he perceived in the distance the sign of a public-house, or roadside inn.

"Riding on a little farther, he saw the sign was the Crown.

"At length arriving opposite the building, he observed a great number of people, while inside some extraordinary festivity was going on.

"Lights were gleaming from all the windows, and the strains of music could be plainly heard.

"From the manner in which the shadows swept past the windows it was evident that dancing was going on within.

"Believing himself to be little if at all known in that part of the country, Claude Duval determined to go inside and ascertain what was going on.

"The fact was he ran rather short of cash, and was anxious to replenish his purse as soon as he conveniently could.

"The ostler came forward and Claude surrendered his horse, at the same time giving the ostler strict injunctions as to what he was to do, accompanying them with a crown-piece, to prevent any of the details from slipping his memory.

"The ostler was unused to such fees, and prepared to treat Duval with every imaginable respect, for he was under the impression that he must be a nobleman at the very least.

"This done, Claude entered the house, and sat down in the public room, in which several persons were seated.

"So unpretending was Claude's demeanour, that he attracted but little attention.

"He soon singled out a person who seemed likely to answer his purpose.

"This was an old man who seemed half-farmer, half-grazier.

"He was talking to an acquaintance, and Claude heard him say that he had agreed to stay all night at the inn, because he was afraid to travel in the darkness, as he had over a hundred pounds in his pocket.

"His acquaintance applauded his prudent determination.

"Claude nodded, though none took notice of the movement.

"He had resolved, in spite of all precautions that might be taken, that the money should be his.

"Not long afterwards, the old farmer—for such I will call him—asked the landlord what was going on upstairs.

"He was informed that it was a rejoicing held annually in the village, and that the sports terminated by a kind of ball in the evening.

"'As I am going to pass the night here,' said the farmer, 'perhaps you would not mind allowing me and my acquaintance to go up and join the merrymakers?'

"'Certainly not!' said the landlord. 'I can assure you the company will be very glad to see you. You are heartily welcome!'

"Having gained this permission, the farmer and his friend left the room, and ascended the stairs.

"But it was necessary that Claude should follow them, and this, to speak the truth, he was nothing loth to do.

"He called the landlord aside, and made the same request to him that the others had done, and it was granted with the same readiness.

"Mounting a flight of rude stairs, Claude pushed open a door, and found himself in a large room, which, judging by appearances, had to a great extent been extemporised for the occasion.

"A kind of wall or partition had been knocked down, so that the malt-room was taken in and rendered available for dancing.

"Claude apologised for his intrusion, and spoke in the manner for which he became famous, and captivated all the female hearts in the room at once, while the others looked on in envy.

"He was assured that it was no intrusion, and that he was heartily welcome to share in their amusements.

"Claude returned thanks in an appropriate speech, but he looked after the old farmer who possessed the bag of gold more than he did after anyone else.

"He soon discovered that the old man was well known to many present.

'Not one would speak civilly to him, for he had the reputation of being a covetous, avaricious old rascal, who would stop at no villany to obtain gold, which he kept hoarded up from all eyes but his own.

"When Claude heard this, what little compunction he might have felt about easing the old man of his coin vanished entirely.

"He cast about him for some means by which his purpose could be accomplished, but without success, until at length his eyes rested upon the chimney.

"That furnished him with an idea.

"It was a very large chimney—the bottom was of unusual width, and of a funnel-like shape.

"What Claude had thought of, you will quickly see.

"Watching his opportunity, he left the room.

"Descending the stairs, he made his way to the stables, and called the ostler.

"'Here I be, sir,' said that individual, as he descended a ladder that led to the loft.

"He made a number of bows as he spoke, and touched his forelock repeatedly.

"Claude drew him aside.

"'My good fellow,' he said, 'I want to speak to you.'

"'Yes, your honourable honour. I'm a listening.'

"'Have you got a big dog?'

"'A big dog?'

"'Yes!'

"'I rather believe we have, your honourable honour! Haven't you seen old Towzer?'

"'No.'

"'He is a big 'un!'

"'Where is he?'

"'Here!'

"The ostler led the way into the yard, and showed Claude a mastiff of unusual size, which was chained to a large kennel.

"'He will do first-rate!' said Claude. 'I suppose there is such a thing as a butcher in the village?'

"'Of course there is—old Wheeler.'

"'Well, I want you to go to him and fetch a cow's hide.'

"'A what?'

"'A cow's hide!'

"The ostler looked at Claude in amazement.

"'A cow's——!' he began, and then stopped, looking quite puzzled and bewildered.

"'Just come along with me, and I will explain! Here, some inside the stable again!'

"The ostler hardly knew whether he was standing on his head or his heels.

"But he followed Claude nevertheless.

"'Now,' said the latter, as he seated himself on the top of a cornbin—'look here!'

"He took a couple of guineas from his pocket while he spoke, and held them out towards the ostler.

"'Do you know what these are?' he asked.

"'Guineas, I reckon.'

"'Of course they are. Take them—they are yours. They are genuine. Put them between your teeth and try!'

"The ostler did so.

"'Oh, they are good!'

"'I told you so. Well, they are yours. Put them in your pocket, and then I will tell you what you are to do for them.'

"'Work for a month, I reckon!'

"'Oh, no—nothing of the kind; for about half an hour—no more!'

"'How long?'

"'Half an hour.'

"'What, for two guineas?'

"'Yes.'

"'I say, master,' said the ostler, 'lookee here! I don't know who you are, or what you want, so just take your money back till you have told me what you want me to do!'

"'Very good! I like you all the better for that! I am going to play a bit of a joke upon an old man who is upstairs!'

"'Two guineas is a good deal for a joke!'

"'I know that; but I should not begrudge twice the sum to have a good bit of fun.'

"'What sort of a joke do you want to play him?'

"'I want to give him a good fright. You know a covetous, miserly old rascal he is?'

"'Who?'

"'Why, the old man.

"'Is it old Hobbs?'

"'Yes.'

"'And you are going to play him a joke?'

"'If you will assist me.'

"'All right, then! Why, I would run a mile to have my revenge upon him! Curse him!—he once served my poor old mother a scaly trick, though she is dead and gone now—rest her soul!'

"'You will be even with him to-night then, for if I can only carry out my plan he will be frightened out of his life, which will be a rare piece of diversion for me!'

"'I will serve you in everything!'

"'That's right.'

"'How shall you frighten him?'

"'I shall try to persuade him that the devil has come to fetch him.'

"'He will some day, never fear.'

"'He will be in a desperate way.'

"'But how shall you play the devil?'

"'With Towzer and the cowhide.'

"'How?'

"'I will tell you plainly, and then return to the inn, leaving you to carry out the remainder of the affair.'

"'I'll pay attention, sir.'

"'Put the two guineas in your pocket then.'

"'But I don't want to be paid for this job.'

"'But I insist upon it!'

"'Very well, then, since you are so pressing, I don't mind.'

"'Now, then, in the first place, you must go to the butcher's in the village and obtain a cow's hide.'

"'All right.'

"'And when you have got it you will put it on old Towzer.'

"'Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! Put the cow's hide on old Towzer?'

"'Certainly—fasten it on him securely, and take care that the horns are exactly over his ears. Get a cowhide with two good horns—mind that!'

"'Oh, you leave that to me, your honourable honour!'

"'I will. When you have done that, tie a rope round old Towzer, and get a ladder and carry him up to the top of the house.'

"The ostler nodded.

"'You know the chimney in the malt-room?'

"'Oh yes!'

"'Then climb over the roofs till you come to the top of it, and let Towzer down. I will be in the room and see to the rest!'

"'Very good, sir! Won't I be level with the miserly old rascal!'

"'I hope you will,' said Claude, 'for, from the top of the chimney, owing to its great width, you will be able to see very well all that is going on, and hear too.'

"With a few more injunctions, Claude Duval left the ostler and returned to the inn.

CHAPTER DCLXXVIII.

CONTAINS THE CONCLUSION OF CLAUDE DUVAL'S ADVENTURE AT THE CROWN INN.

"Upon returning to the room, Claude Duval found the amusements going on much in the same way as when he left.

"He believed that his absence had not been noticed, or if it had, no notice was taken of it.

"He appeared to be enjoying himself along with the rest, but yet he kept an eye upon the old farmer, and waited impatiently for the fun to begin.

"At length, when the mirth and jollity were at their height, a most awful and hideous yell was heard, which rose high above all other sounds.

"Then a rumbling noise followed, and the next moment a horrible form appeared in the fire-place.

"Even Claude was startled, and if this effect was produced upon the one who had planned the whole affair, you may perhaps be able to understand what were the feelings of the guests.



[CLAUDE DUVAL'S ADVENTURE WITH MAZZAROTH THE ASTROLOGER.]

"The dog enveloped in the cow's hide presented a most singular and horrifying spectacle.

"The fire was hot, and, therefore, the animal with a howl of pain made a frantic dash among the dancers.

"The confusion was then at its height.

"Such shrieks and cries, and trampling, and, in a word, such a Babel had never been known in the Crown Inn before.

"Everyone hastened towards the door, but such was the general alarm that not one was able to find it. The task was rendered more difficult by Claude, who, having the whole of his plan arranged beforehand, knew precisely what to do.

"Like a flash of light he drew his sword, and gave a slashing blow at the rude kind of chandelier depending from the centre of the room. It was a rough affair, consisting only of some wooden laths slightly nailed together, upon which were stuck a great many tallow candles.

"The blow Claude gave sufficed to demolish it entirely, and down it came with a crash, materially increasing the terror that all felt.

"The apartment was then plunged in profound darkness, if we may except the dim light that came from the smouldering fire.

"As soon as he had sheathed his sword Claude hastened towards the miser, who had crawled into a distant corner. He pounced upon him, and held him with a firm grip.

"'Mercy—mercy!—oh, mercy!' gasped the trembling and terrified wretch—'have mercy upon me!'

"'Prepare to meet your doom!' said Claude, in a hollow voice.

"The miser trembled as though in the midst of an ague fit.

"'I have come for you!' continued Claude, in the same sepulchral tones. 'Your life is over—your course is run. Come with me!'

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"'Oh, Mr. Devil, let me off this once—for just a little while longer!'

"'No,' said Claude—'your appeal is vain! You must come with me!'

"He shifted his grasp upon the miser as he spoke, and, putting forth his strength, lifted him off the ground.

"A most hideous yell burst from the old man's lips—so loud and horrible as to startle even Claude himself. After the utterance of that shriek, however, the miser became perfectly silent, and Claude guessed in a moment that he was insensible.

"To let go his hold was Claude's next act, and then, thrusting his hand into the miser's pocket, he drew forth the bag of gold, and rapidly placed it in his own.

"In the meanwhile, the dog in his strange disguise, after scouring round and round the room, leaping over the bodies of the prostrate dancers, and after frightening them to death, succeeded in making his escape through the doorway.

"The creature was by this time worked up to almost a state of madness, so, giving a sudden leap, he alighted on the shoulders of those who crowded the threshold, and, scrambling over the heads of the remainder, finally pitched head-foremost down the staircase.

"Old Towzer lay for a moment or two at the bottom of the stairs with his back on the ground and his feet in the air, then, recovering his equilibrium, he darted out from the open doorway into the yard.

"Here he was received by the ostler, who was waiting for him. With great dexterity he pulled off the cow's hide and secreted it, and ended by chaining old Towzer up as before.

"All this was done by the time Claude had succeeded in obtaining the bag of gold.

"The alarm began to subside, and those who had managed to reach the ground floor now had the courage to provide themselves with candles and ascend again.

"Claude joined the throng near the door, and behaved himself exactly like them. He pretended to be as frightened as any of them.

"Finally, amid much confusion, the apartment was again lighted up.

"Everyone began to wonder then what could be the meaning of this disturbance and what it was that had caused it.

"'It must have been the devil!' said one.

"'That's just what I thought,' said Claude, 'and once he almost laid hold of me.'

"'Did he, though?'

"'Yes; but I escaped him, and he rushed on, crying out: "Hobbs—Hobbs—Hobbs!"'

"'Hobbs?' echoed everyone. 'Why, that's the old miser! I shouldn't wonder, now, if the devil didn't make a purposed journey to fetch him.'

"'Where is he?' cried another—'who has seen him?'

"The guests looked from one to another, and very quickly ascertained that Hobbs was not among them.

"They stared blankly at each other, and then shook their heads mysteriously.

"'Hobbs,' cried one, in a loud voice, 'where are you?'

"There was no response. At that moment Hobbs was lying doubled up in a distant corner to which the light did not penetrate.

"'He's gone, for certain,' was the conclusion of several.

"'And a good job too!' added others. 'He was a rascally, pilfering, miserly old hunks—that's what he was!'

"'Well, I suppose it's all right now,' said Claude. 'I never was so close to Old Nick in my life before, and don't want to be again, so, if he's going to pay the room a second visit, I'd rather leave.'

"'No, no—it's all right now, depend upon it! He's got old Hobbs, and that will satisfy him for awhile.'

"At this moment a silence ensued—one of those sudden pauses in conversation which frequently take place, which was broken in upon by a faint, smothered groan.

"'What's that?' said Claude, pretending to be greatly alarmed.

"'Mercy—mercy!' cried a voice. 'Oh, good Mr. Devil, have mercy upon me, and let me go!'

"'Why, that's old Hobbs!' said some one.

"'Yes, I'd swear to his squeaking voice,' added another.

"'Forward!' cried Claude. 'He's up in this corner. Perhaps the devil has not flown away with him after all.'

"Rather reluctantly the guests followed in Claude's footsteps, two or three of them carrying candles.

"'Here he is,' said Claude, 'sure enough and there no one with him that I can see.'

"Old Hobbs, whose intellects were in a very confused condition, continued his supplications for mercy.

"'Get up!' roared half a dozen with one voice—'get up, you old fool! There's nothing the matter!'

"Hearing himself thus addressed, Hobbs ventured to raise his head from the ground.

"He glared fearfully around, and then he murmured:

"'Where is he?—has he gone?'

"'Who—who?'

"'The—the——'

"'What?'

"'Devil!'

"The guests drew back several steps.

"'Save me, my good friends!' whined the miser—'save me!'

"'Save you from what?'

"'The devil!' cried Hobbs again.

"'There's no one there that I can see, except yourself,' cried Claude.

"'Is there not, good sir? Thanks—thanks for that assurance! You are sure there is no one else?'

"'Quite sure! Raise you head a little, and you will see.'

"After many efforts, Hobbs at length succeeded in raising his courage sufficiently to do this.

"He then saw that he was indeed alone. He gathered himself up, and sat down on the floor in a very undignified manner.

"'Oh!' he said, 'I will repent—I will reform! I have had a narrow escape—a narrow escape!'

"'Who from?'

"'The devil!' cried Hobbs again.

"There was something so amusing in this reiterated reply that none of the guests could forbear from laughing.

"'What did he say to you, then?' asked Claude.

"'Oh, I can't tell you—I can't tell you! I saw his great horns, and his gleaming eyes, and his long tail. He laid hold of me with his cloven hoofs, and declared he would carry me away, but he must have dropped me.'

"'And what then?'

"'I don't know anything more,' added the miser, gradually recovering himself—'I don't know anything more.'

"He rose to his feet.

"'Let me go,' he said—'let me go!'

"'We are all willing,' said the guests. 'We don't want to have the devil's own among us.'

"'Oh, but this is a warning to me! I will alter—I will repent from this hour! I will pay back all the money I have so unjustly gained. There's you, friend Styles—you will permit me to call you friend, will you not?'

"'Oh, bother!' said Styles, who was the man Claude had overheard talking to the miser.

"'Well, then, friend Styles, there's you. I have cheated you out of ten pounds to-night. Here, here—come to me. You shall have it back—you shall have it back.'

"Anxious to receive some of his money back again, Styles stepped forward.

"The miser put his hand into his pocket, where he knew the bag of gold had been, and then uttered a yell of dismay.

"Styles drew back.

"'What's the matter?' he asked—'has the devil got you again?'

"'No, no—my money! Oh! my money—my money's gone! There's thieves—I have been robbed! I am a ruined man—my money has been stolen!'

"'Stolen?'

"'Yes—yes!' said the miser, crying bitterly. 'My money is all gone, and I am beggared!'

"'But who has stolen it?' asked Styles, doubtfully.

"'Some of you in the room!' cried the miser. 'I will have you all searched! Call the police! Oh, my money—my money!'

"'Stop a minute!' said Claude Duval; 'I rather think I can explain all this!'

"'My money—my money?' screamed the miser.

"'Yes — that's it! Do you mean to say,' asked Claude Duval, 'that you had your ill-gotten gains about you when the devil came?'

"'Yes—a hundred guineas, and all in gold—all in g old!'

"'And the devil picked you up, you said, didn't you?'

"'Yes—he did!'

"'And let you go again?'

"'Y—yes!'

"'Then,' added Claude, solemnly, 'you may depend upon it that the reason why he let you go was because he took your ill-gotten money instead. Reform and repent, and you may cheat him at last!'

"'But why didn't he take me?' moaned the miser—'why didn't he take me? He might as well have taken me as my money!'

"'You had better not say that again,' said Claude, 'for fear he should appear. As for me, I have had enough of this place. I am not fond of a house that the devil pays visits to; so good night, friends all—I will be off!'

"With these words, Claude Duval stalked out of the room and down the staircase.

"A warm discussion then followed, which in a moment or two afterwards was interrupted by a loud crash of breaking glass.

"Everyone turned round and saw that one of the front windows had been broken.

"They hastened towards it, and clustered round it in a throng.

"Looking down, they saw in the open space in front of the inn, which was fully lighted up by the moon, the figure of a man seated on a magnificent steed.

"'Good night, friends!' he cried. 'And if anyone should ask you who played the devil at the Crown Inn at Beaconsfield, tell them it was Claude Duval, the dashing highwayman!'"

CHAPTER DCLXXIX.

CLAUDE DUVAL BEGINS TO RELATE HIS OWN HISTORY, AND DESCRIBES HOW HE PAID A VISIT TO MAZZAROTH, THE ASTROLOGER.

"You kept the best adventure till the last, Claude," cried Dick Turpin. "That's a capital joke—and, what's more, I have never heard of it before."

"Nor I—nor I," said Sixteen-String Jack and Tom King.

"But it's perfectly true, for all that," replied Claude. "I know for certain the incidents took place just as I have described them; and to this day you will find people living in and about Beaconsfield who will give you just the same account of the proceedings of that eventful night."

"They are three good anecdotes," said Dick, "and display his character in its true light. There's no mistake about them: I could have said at once who was the hero of those adventures."

"Well, now," said Tom King, "suppose you leave your uncle in peace and begin your own history. It really seems as though something or other was always going to interpose to prevent us from hearing it."

"Well, it shall not be my fault this time," said Claude, "for if you will listen I will begin without delay."

"Do so, then—do so, by all means!"

"I have told you already," Claude began, "that I was the youngest son of a large family. My brothers and sisters were all grown up and married before I was more than a child. They left home, and I was left alone with my father, my only surviving parent, and who was of very great age.

"I continued to live with him in the little village in Normandy until I was about twenty years of age.

"At that time my father was nearly seventy, and beginning to grow quite childish. He would often say to me:

"'Claude, you must go out in the world and push your way forward; but not yet—not yet! You must stay with me till I die, which won't be long first.'

"He spoke truly enough, for just about the time of which I am speaking he took to his bed, and never rose from it again.

"It was one dark, rainy, miserable night, and I was all alone in the cottage, when my father called to me from the adjoining room and said:

"'Claude—Claude, come here! Let me feel your hand! I am dying—dying fast!'

"I went to him, and found a great change had taken place in him. I was nervous and terrified, for I had never seen death before, and I wished to send out for assistance.

"'No, no, Claude,' he answered, 'I will not consent to such a thing! No one on earth can do me the least good. I am past the doctor's skill—I feel sure of that!'

"I suggested a priest.

"'No—no!' he answered. 'I have never had one of those meddlesome rascals in my house yet, and I will not while I have breath and strength to prevent it. Take my word for it, Claude, that when you are quitting this life, you may as well do it on your own responsibility, for there is no fellow-creature like yourself who can do the least good, though they will profess it, and endeavour to extort money.'

"'Just as you will,' I replied; 'only I thought you might wish to see one'

"'No, no—Claude, I will die after my own fashion. I can feel that I am going.'

"His face continued to change very much, and by this time presented quite a corpse-like appearance, so that my alarm grew greater and greater.

"'Claude,' he managed to say to me at length, 'listen attentively to the last words I shall ever speak to you—treasure them up in your mind, and be sure you pay attention to them!'

"'I will,' I answered—'I will—you may depend upon it!'

"'Very good. I have no doubt you would like to know what is to be your destiny in life. You would like to know what is going to happen to you in the future, and then shape your course accordingly, and reap much advantage; whereas, if you were ignorant of it, you might go blundering on in the wrong path.'

"I was at a loss to understand what he meant, and told him so.

"'I wish I had known of it earlier myself,' he answered—'I should have been much better off; but it is no good grieving about that. I am glad to think you have the opportunity of profiting by it.'

"'By what?' I asked.

"'By a knowledge of the future.'

"'And how can I obtain that knowledge?'

"'That is what I am about to tell you. As soon as I am dead and have been buried, you must go to Paris, and in a certain street you will find a house—I cannot remember the number, but in my pocket-book you will see a card containing the full directions.'

"'And what am I to do there?'

"'Go in, and you will be shown into the presence of a man who can reveal to you your future destiny. Comply with all his injunctions, or the consequences will be serious, and, in return, he will show you the principal events in your life. You will know then what you are intended to become.'

"'And do you really wish this?'

"'Yes, I command it! Can you fail to see the immense benefit you will derive from it? Do not fail—it is my last dying wish!'

"'I will regard it, never fear!' I answered, and no sooner had I given the assurance than he expired.

"Of course you think it strange, now—and so do I, though I did not then—that my father should be of such an opposite disposition. You see he would not believe in the benefit of a priest, but yet he was credulous enough to think there was a man who possessed the key to the future.

"The little village where we had lived was always a hateful place to me, and I had longed to see the world; so, after the funeral, I sold up everything, and very gladly set out towards Paris, to fulfil my father's dying wish.

"'Yes,' I thought, as I trudged along, 'I will never return to this part of the country again—I have had enough of it; Paris is the place for me!'

"In due time I accomplished my journey, and, referring to the pocket-book, found the card of which my father had spoken.

"'The very first thing I did was to repair to the address that was upon it. I inquired my way of many people, and at length I began to grow somewhat uneasy, for I found I was approaching a very disagreeable portion of the city. Indeed, the houses were all wretchedly dirty, and the inhabitants, many of whom were standing at the front doors, were the most repulsive creatures I had then seen.

"'At last I came to the house.

"'It was in a narrow, filthy court, and was perhaps a trifle more dirty and dilapidated than the tenements adjoining it.

"'I found a small door, upon which a number was painted, and, after some search, discovered the handle of a bell; I pulled it, and, waiting for some time, the door was opened.

"'A miserable-looking old hag appeared upon the threshold.

"'"I want to see Mazzaroth!" I exclaimed.

"'"Enter,' was the reply, 'and ascend those stairs until you can mount no higher—then knock.'

"'She pointed to a dark and dirty flight of stairs as she spoke. I didn't half relish this adventure, but I determined to carry it out, for I was prompted, not only by a wish to perform my promise, but also by a great degree of curiosity, which I may be excused for feeling.

"'Groping my way in the dark, I mounted the staircase; but before I reached the top, I had to pause several times to recover my breath.

"'At length, according to the old woman's words, I came to a place where I was prevented from going any further. I knocked, and a sepulchral voice bade me enter.

"'I obeyed, and found myself in profound darkness.

"'"What want you?" said the voice again.

"'"Mazzaroth.'

"'"I am here. What do you seek?'

"'"To know the future.'

"'"Are you a believer?'

"'"I am.'

"'"Then your wish shall be granted.'

"'The darkness was then dispelled as if by magic. I could not exactly understand how it was done, but I fancy a large piece of black cloth was hung across near the door, and that this was suddenly drawn aside.

"'Be that as it may, I found myself standing in a rather spacious apartment, the atmosphere of which was insufferably hot and stifling.

"'In the centre stood a tall, gaunt figure, attired in flowing robes. It was a man of advanced age. His hair was white and scanty, and on the top of his head he wore a tight-fitting skull-cap of black velvet. His hands were bony, like those of a skeleton. One of his fleshless fingers rested on the edge of a small table. On this was a large globe of glass or crystal, which afterwards seemed to be composed of looking-glass, for it gave a distorted reflection of the different objects around.

"'In one corner was a furnace, which was the source of heat, and from which ascended a thin blue vapour. From the ceiling were suspended several strange animals, all stuffed, so as to represent life itself.

"'Ranged all round the walls were numerous glass-cases and other things, which displayed to view the most horrible and loathsome objects that can be conceived.

"'In one would be seen the skeleton of a man, and in the next an object presenting the appearance of an Egyptian mummy. Then in another would be seen the body of some hideous, misshapen monstrosity, the skin of which was puckered and shrivelled by the liquid in which it was immersed.

"'All these and many more things were around that I could not perceive at first, but which I had afterwards ample opportunities of beholding.

"'At first, I was principally interested in the figure of the astrologer himself, for so he was styled.

"'"Young man,' he said, addressing me, as soon as I appeared before him, and fixing a scrutinising gaze upon my countenance, 'you wish to see the future?'

"'"I do,' I answered. 'I have come here expressly by my father's wish, in order to know what line of life I shall be most likely to adopt.'

"'"I will endeavour to show you,' was the reply.

"'"Endeavour?' I echoed. 'I thought you had the power!'

"'"I have great power,' he said, with a frown—'great power; but I can tell you nothing without invoking a subtle spirit!'

"'"Invoke him, then!' for I was not in the least alarmed either by his words or manner.

"'Evidently he did not like my mode of speaking; but he went on:

"'"I must go through an incantation, and the articles required for it are expensive; if you are inclined to pay for them, then I will do my best to bring the spirit into this globe.'

"'He touched the crystal ball as he spoke.

"'"Will he be there?' I asked, with great curiosity.

"'"He will.'

"'"And is he there now?'

"'"No.'

"'I took a step forward.

"'"You doubt,' said the astrologer. 'Now behold!'

"'He touched the crystal globe with the end of his wand, and immediately its character changed. From being opaque, like looking-glass, it suddenly grew transparent, and I could see through it distinctly. It was evidently empty, or if the subtle spirit was there he was at that moment as invisible as the air itself.

CHAPTER DCLXXX.

CLAUDE DUVAL CONTINUES TO RELATE HIS ADVENTURE WITH THE ASTROLOGER.

"'I must say that this produced a deeper effect upon me than anything I had yet seen.

"'By a simple touch, a great alteration was wrought, which certainly bore the appearance of being the work of magic.

"'"Now,' said the astrologer, 'do you doubt?'

"'"I do not,' I said. 'I am anxious that you should invoke this spirit.'

"'"But the incantation?'

"'"How much will it cost?' I asked.

"'"You do not seem very rich,' said the astrologer, 'and I should not like you to leave this room disappointed; you might spread injurious reports, and say that I was an impostor.'

"'"How much?' asked I again, impatiently.

"'"I will charge you the merest price for the various drugs I shall have to use.'

"'"But how much?'

"'"Do not be impatient. I am considering.'

"'Then, after a pause, he added:

"'"Two hundred francs.'

"'"Then I must bid you good-day, I answered; 'I have no such sum about me.'

"'"Indeed?'

"'"I can assure you I have not. All I possess is one hundred francs.'

"'"I can assure you,' returned the astrologer, 'that the incantation will cost double that amount; but still, rather than allow you the opportunity of saying I cannot perform what I promise, I will undertake to show you your future for that amount.'

"'I did not know how to refuse, but yet I felt disinclined to part with all my wealth, for I spoke the truth—one hundred francs was then all that I possessed.

"'I put down the money on the table, and, as soon as the last coin was deposited, the astrologer touched it with his wand, and the whole vanished.

"'I confess this startled me not a little; but when I saw my money gone, I deeply regretted my foolishness, and wished I had kept the money in my own pocket and left the future to itself.

"'However, there was no hope for it, and I resolved to keep an eye upon all his proceedings, and watch him narrowly.

"'I could not get rid of the idea that he was a rank impostor, though certainly what I had seen would have convinced many of his supernatural powers.

"'"Advance,' he said to me. 'There—stand quite still—that will do.'

"'He placed me just in front of the crystal globe, and about a foot away from the table.

"'Don't move,' he said, 'or speak—mind that. Whatever you hear or see, do not move or speak; if you do, your death will be the result!'

"He then took hold of his wand and made a circle on the floor with it just round about where I stood. I watched him closely, and my scepticism received another shock, for wherever he moved the point of the wand along the floor, a line of fire followed it.

"There I stood, then, surrounded by this fiery circle, and not daring to move or speak; but I was permitted the use of my eyes, and I employed them to good advantage.

"I saw the astrologer go up to the furnace, and wave his wand in a strange manner, and go through several strange motions, all of which were well calculated to inspire awe and terror.

"Then he took up a large iron pan and placed it over the furnace. Into this, after again going through his posturings, he threw a small object about the size of a bullet. No sooner did it touch the bottom than a terrific report followed.

"'Ras Algethi!' cried the astrologer—'Ras Algethi, come hither!'

"I concluded Ras Algethi was the spirit he was about to summon, and would unfold my destiny.

"'I must try a stronger spell,' he muttered; 'I had hoped that would be sufficient. I must try again.'

"This time he threw what appeared to be another bullet into the pan. Where he obtained them from I know not—I only saw them suddenly appear in his hand just when he was about to throw them down.

"This time there was no report, but a bright green flame shot up; it extended itself all over the bottom of the pan, and reached up into the air about eighteen inches.

"The astrologer continued to wave his wand and to make many gesticulations, while at frequent intervals he would pronounce the name 'Ras Algethi.'

"Then slowly the green flame died away, and, after so vivid a light, the apartment seemed to be in darkness

"'Is he there?' asked the astrologer.

"'I can see nothing.'

"'Then I have only one resource. If he refuses to obey my call, you must depart unsatisfied.'

"Again the astrologer cast a bullet into the pan, and this time with a different result. A dense black smoke ascended in incredible quantities from the pan. It quickly spread itself over the whole of the apartment, and a moment afterwards the astrologer was completely covered up by the vapour and lost to my sight, though I could still hear him pronouncing the words 'Ras Algethi' with great energy.

"But still the smoke continued to ascend from the pan and to spread itself over the apartment, until presently after I was not able to distinguish anything—the darkness was indeed most profound.

"I held up my hand before my eyes, but could not see it. Then followed a terrific, crashing, roaring noise.

"'Behold!' cried the astrologer—'behold, he is here at last!'

"I strained my eyes, and then the smoke slowly rolled away. Once more I was able to discern the crystal globe, and standing by it, much in the same attitude as when I entered, was the astrologer.

"But the interior of the globe was no longer vacant. In it was a small, strange-looking figure, whose appearance would certainly have struck terror to the heart of a bold man. I shuddered when I saw him first, but believing that the whole was susceptible of easy explanation, I recovered my courage.

"'Now then,' said the astrologer, 'speak, and he will answer you—not by words, but by means of those letters.

"I should have told you that Ras Algethi—for such I suppose was the spirit's name—held in his hand a wand similar to that held by the astrologer.

"In front of the globe were the letters of the alphabet, from A to Z, and the figure held the wand in such a way that, although the letters were on the outside of the glass, it could point to them easily.

"'Now then,' said the astrologer, 'what is your first question?'

"'I want to know my future. What is the next thing that will happen to me?'

"The astrologer raised his wand and waved it several times. I bent all my attention upon the figure, being anxious to observe its movements.

"'Look closely,' said the astrologer, 'and observe the letters before which the wand stops. You will find words and sentences will be formed.'

"I did watch, and the first sentence was certainly calculated to reassure me and make me feel happy.

"The figure moved round, pausing every now and then before certain letters. I took accurate note of them, and found the sentence to be:

"'You will shortly come into possession of a large sum of money.'

"I was about to express myself well satisfied with this reply, when the astrologer checked me by a gesture.

"'You must only demand the questions,' he said; 'if you utter any other words, the spirit will disappear, and I shall be powerless to summon him again.'

"'Well, then,' I said, 'I wish to know what event will follow the last?'

"Again the same manœuvres were gone through, and I made the next sentence out to be:

"'You will have a narrow escape of your life.'

"This was almost as satisfactory as the first; it was certainly much better to have a narrow escape than perish.

"'What will happen next?'

"Again I watched the letters closely, and the following sentence was produced:

"'You will then go over to England, in which country you will play the part of a highwayman.'

"Now I should tell you that during this last sentence I noticed a circumstance which had escaped my observation before. This was, that the astrologer while waving his wand about constantly contrived to do so in a peculiar manner.

"Strangely enough, there was some kind of connection or sympathy between the wand in the hand of Ras Algethi and the one in the hand of Mazzaroth, the astrologer.

"I noticed that whenever the latter allowed the point of his wand to remain opposite to a letter the figure swung round, and the point of the wand it carried stopped exactly opposite to it.

"I was sure I was right, and the discovery exasperated me greatly. It was the astrologer who was giving me the answers, and not the subtle spirit Ras Algethi.

"Although he told me I risked my life by any attempt to speak or move, I darted forward and seized him by the throat.

"He was quite taken by surprise by the movement, and therefore I gained an advantage over him which he never recovered and which I never lost.

"'You rascally old cheat!' I exclaimed—'I see through the whole of your scheme. You must have taken me for a fool if you thought I should be gulled by it! I will turn prophet for once, and, mark my words, you will have the narrow escape of your life, and not me.'

"He struggled in vain to speak. Not only was my grasp upon his throat a tight one, but he was also confounded at the discovery of his trickery.

"'Now,' I said, 'confess—confess all! On that condition only can I spare your life. Confess, I say!'

"'I will,' he contrived to gurgle out—'I will! But you must release my throat a little, or I cannot.'

"I did relax my grasp a little, but only a little, for I guessed he would prove a slippery customer, and would be prompt to avail himself of any chance of getting the upper hand.

"'Now,' I said, 'is not all this an infamous imposture? Answer me at once, or I strangle you upon the spot!'

"'It is!' he gasped.

"'And that Ras Algethi, as you call him, is no more than a puppet that moves everywhere you may direct by your wand?'

"'It is so.'

"'And you contrived to put him in the glass while the chamber was filled with smoke?'

"'That was done easily. There is a spring in the table.'

"'I don't want to know any more,' I exclaimed, 'I can see through it all easily enough. I quite understand it, but I am in the mind to make one of your prophecies come true.'

"He glared at me in dismay.

"'Now,' I said, 'be quick and make up your mind. Tell me which you prefer. Will you hand over to me the whole of your wealth? If you refuse, you die upon the spot!'

"'I have no money,' he said—'only your hundred francs.'

"'You lie!' I exclaimed. 'And as I suppose I shall never get the truth out of you, I will adopt a more summary method of ascertaining how much money you have concealed in this apartment. It is in vain for you to refuse or resist—you must understand that I am master here!'

CHAPTER DCLXXXI.

CLAUDE DUVAL PLAYS THE PART OF AN ASTROLOGER TO GREAT PERFECTION.

"STRANGELY enough, these words only made him more violent, and he tried more desperately to escape from my hold; but it was quite in vain, for I had the advantage of youth and great muscular strength on my side.

"In a few minutes afterwards, the old astrologer found himself gagged, bound hand and foot, and lying in one corner of his apartment.

"I had divested him of his long flowing robe and his skull-cap. To the edge of the latter I found that a small quantity of silver-white hair had been attached like a fringe, so that, now he was denuded of his garb, Mazzaroth—as he called himself—looked very much younger than he did before.

"I had made up my mind to two things. One was, to make every effort to elucidate the mystery attached to all that I had seen. The other was, to obtain my hundred francs. And, as he had not scrupled to defraud or rob me of those, neither did I scruple to determine to take all the other cash I could lay my hands on.

"The adventure promised to be a profitable one to me. But you shall see how it turned out.

"I first of all examined the wand, and found that one end was tipped with loadstone. I held it towards the glass globe, and was able to make the figure within revolve with perfect ease.

"The other end of the wand was hollow, and smelt strongly of sulphur, so I concluded that this had contained some liquid that, when allowed to fall on the floor, caught light.

"The mystery of the magic circle was now cleared up. I could not understand, however, how it was Ras Algethi appeared in the globe, nor how it was my hundred francs had disappeared the moment I placed them on the table.

"Of this last-named piece of furniture I commenced a close examination. At one end I saw a knob which seemed to have been pulled out of its proper position, for part of the shank was visible. I tried to pull it out completely, but, failing in doing this, I pushed it in. It fitted into its place perfectly, and when I looked up I saw that Ras Algethi had vanished.

"I repeated the experiment several times, though it was perfectly plain that there was some kind of machinery connected with the knob which caused the figure to appear or disappear.

"Perceiving a knob of similar construction close to it, but presenting an ordinary appearance, I pulled that, when lo! a small place in the table opened like a trap-door. I hastened towards it, and, putting in my hand, drew out my hundred francs, and perhaps a few more.

"I was fast becoming initiated into the mysteries of an astrologer's business. In seven minutes I had learned as much as some people do when they have been apprenticed to a trade seven years.

"The device of the bullets I thought nothing of. The first was a detonating bullet, and the second some chemical substance which emitted a green flame. The same might be said of the last, though what these substances were I don't know, nor did I care.

"Just when I had reached so far in my investigations, I was startled by a sharp knocking on the door. Some one was without, and I began to wonder what in the world I should do.

"My course of action was decided upon in a second. I had no time to deliberate upon its results.

"Seizing hold of Mazzaroth, I rolled him up into a corner where he was completely out of sight. Then, with all the speed I could, I put on the large robe, which covered all my dress completely. Then I donned the skull-cap, and, as the light in the apartment was very dim, I believed I should be able to pass muster with anyone who did not happen to be intimately acquainted with the astrologer.

"By the time I had done this, there came another knock at the door, showing that the person outside was becoming impatient.

"Then all at once I thought of the black curtains that had hung before the door on my entrance, and glancing towards that end of the chamber, I perceived them.

"I stepped forward quickly, and saw a cord so combined with pulleys and rings as to cause the curtains to fly back immediately it was pulled. This cord passed under the flooring, leaving no trace of the direction it took; but remembering that when I entered Mazzaroth was standing near the table, I went there to look for it, and near one of the table legs, there, sure enough, I saw one end of the cord.

"It was furnished with a loop, and this loop was secured to a hook screwed into the under part of the table. I released this loop. Instantly the cord rushed through the hole in the flooring, and, looking up, I saw that the curtains had fallen, as they were constructed to do, by their mere weight alone.

"Just then the knocking was repeated for the third time. Remembering how Mazzaroth had addressed me, I cried out:

"'Enter!' imitating his voice as well as I could.

"While I pronounced the word, the door opened, and some one came in.

"'What seek you?' I inquired.

"'Private business of Mazzaroth,' was the reply.

"'Enter!' I cried again; and while I spoke I pulled the cord suddenly, and with great dexterity, considering it was the first time I had performed the feat. I placed the loop over the hook.

"I then saw standing near the threshold of the apartment a little, wrinkled old man, who, by his dress, was evidently well off in the world, if not possessing some rank and title. His age was perceptible at a glance, as well as the fact that he tried all he could to conceal the ravages of time.

"'Advance!' I cried, as sepulchrally as I could—'advance!'

"He obeyed.

"'Now,' I exclaimed, 'state what you wish.'

"'Two things.'

"'What are they?'

"'The first, a proof of your art; the second, your aid and assistance in a secret matter, for which I will pay you largely and liberally.'

"At this moment there came from the corner of the room where Mazzaroth was lying a dismal sound, half a howl, half a groan.

"The new-comer started back several paces, and at length ejaculated, with chattering teeth:

"'Wh—what's that?'

"For a moment I lost my presence of mind, but, remembering how the sound was produced, I replied, calmly:

"'One of my familiar spirits.'

"The groaning noise was repeated.

"'Silence, Ras Algethi!' I cried, turning towards the corner. 'Be silent, I command you!'

"'I—is there a spirit here?' asked the old man, somewhat alarmed.

"'There are many spirits,' said I, boldly, 'but the one you heard is the most subtle and rebellious of them all. With great difficulty I succeeded in summoning him to this apartment, and I was in the act of giving him his release when you knocked and interrupted me. He is now chafing under the restraint.'

"This speech was followed by another groan.

"'Pray let him go—let him go!' said the new-comer.

"'I cannot while any of the uninitiated are present. Moreover, if you require a proof of my art, I cannot give it you without his assistance.'

"'Let me have it, then, and then suffer him to depart.'

"'You must pay for the incantation,' I exclaimed,

waving my wand grotesquely. 'Two hundred francs is the smallest sum.'

"Without a murmur, the stranger pulled out the amount I mentioned in gold pieces.

"'Place them on the table,' I said.

"While I spoke, I took good care to stand in such a position that I had hold of the little knob.

"He did so, and as soon as the last coin was dropped I pulled the knob suddenly and the whole disappeared.

"I was startled myself at the rapidity of this movement, and could not help admiring the ingenious and skilful manner in which the machinery had been constructed.

"The new-comer was evidently startled.

"I much regretted that I was not able to draw around him the magic circle of fire, but the charge that had been placed in the wand was exhausted, so this was out of the question.

"I nevertheless made an imaginary circle by drawing the end of the wand along the floor, and as I did so I said:

"'Your life depends upon your paying strict attention to the words I am about to utter. If, until I give you leave, you either move from your position a single step, or speak one word, your death will be immediate!'

"So impressively did I pronounce these words, that the stranger turned pale and his knees knocked together. I had great difficulty in subduing the smile that curled my lips.

"'Now,' I said, 'tell me what proof of my art you desire.'

"'A little—a mere trifle will suffice.'

"'Name it, then.'

"'Tell me, then, in a few words, the state of my mind or feelings.'

"This was a poser, but I did not lose my confident air.

"'Enough,' said I—'you shall be obeyed.'

"While I spoke, I looked attentively at the old man, in order to read his character as well as I could.

"From many little things I beheld, all trifling and unimportant in themselves, yet saying much when taken collectively, I came to the conclusion that salacity was the most prominent trait in his disposition.

"This furnished me with the key to my proceedings.

"I had taken particular notice of all the astrologer's movements, of which my perfect recollection of them now is a sufficient proof, and so I imitated him as closely as I was able.

"I was in a little difficulty with regard to the bullets that he threw into the pan. Passing my hand down the side of his robe, I found there were three little pockets or pouches, each of which contained about a dozen of these little bullets.

"Which was the one that would produce the explosion I did not know, nor did I see that it much mattered so long as the smoke did not come first.

"The pockets were placed all under one another, so it was only natural that I should put my hand into the top one.

"I took out one of the bullets between my finger and thumb, and then waved my wand about for some time, and finally disclosed what I had in my hand, so that it appeared as though I had obtained possession of it by magic.

"I cast it into the pan, and an explosion followed. This startled and confused the old man not a little, and of course I took advantage of his confusion to take up the second bullet; and so I went on to the last, and when the room was well obscured by the smoke I cautiously felt my way towards the table and pulled the knob. Then, when the smoke rolled away, there stood the little figure with the wand in its hand.

"The old man was astonished at this, for he had satisfied himself previously that the globe was quite empty when I began my incantations.

"'Now,' I said, 'watch the figure closely; the wand will pause a second before these letters. You will find they will make a complete sentence. Now observe.'

"I waved my wand so skilfully that he did not suspect anything. His own attention indeed, as was very natural, was concentrated upon the little figure.

"The words I produced were these:

"'You are ardently devoted to the fair sex, because, although old, you are younger than many men.'

"This answer pleased him very well, and I asked:

"'Do you wish to know more?'

"To my great relief, he answered:

"'No, that is sufficient.'

"This was lucky, as I might not have been so fortunate a second time. But I saw that he was full of impatience to communicate something to me.

CHAPTER DCLXXXII.

DESCRIBES THE SUCCESS CLAUDE DUVAL MET WITH IN PERSONATING MAZZAROTH, AND HOW MAZZAROTH GOT HIM INTO A VERY SERIOUS FIX.

"'MAZZAROTH,' he said, 'you are a man of great power.'

"I bowed profoundly, but started suddenly upright, for my ears were assailed by a lumbering sound, and then a sharp snap, as though something had been suddenly secured.

"However, I took no notice of this, passing it off as the doings of one of my familiar spirits.

"'For what sum, Mazzaroth,' asked the old man, 'will you consent to aid me in my designs?'

"'That entirely depends upon the nature of them,' was my reply.

"'Then I wish you to assist me by gaining the affections of a young and beautiful girl, who at present treats me with the utmost indifference.'

"I bowed again, and wondered whether this sort of thing was at all in Mazzaroth's line of business. If it was, it would seem strange for me to refuse, and also I should be quite at a loss how to proceed. The only thing I could do was to wait patiently for the old man to continue.

"'Mazzaroth,' he said, 'if, for two thousand francs, you will consent to aid me, I will tell you a scheme by which it may be done.'

"This large sum tickled my fancy immensely, and I thought it would be a pity to allow the chance of earning it to slip by. I therefore replied:

"'I am willing to listen to all you have to say. Let me know the nature of your scheme, and then I will deliberate upon it.'

"'Well, then, this young girl, who, as I have told you, is very beautiful, is also poor and credulous. The fame of your great skill has reached her, and anything you said would have great weight.'

"I bowed again.

"'Now, Mazzaroth, you understand what you have to do?'

"'Perfectly,' I answered, boldly, though I had but a dim idea. To save myself from getting into a dilemma, I added: 'Perhaps it would be better for you to put your proposal in an exact form, and then there would be no danger of a mistake being made.'

"'If you wish it, I will do so,' was the reply. 'I will induce this girl to come to you to have her fortune told, to know what will happen to her in the future.'

"'Yes,' said I, 'that's what I understood.'

"'Well, when she comes, I wish you for once to set aside all your magic art, to use no real incantations, and to call in no familiar spirits, but simply to answer her according to my directions, and that answer must be this: Describe me, and tell her how she is loved by such a one; tell her, too, that the stars and planetary bodies have ordained that she shall be mine; that it will be useless for her to attempt to contend against the decrees of Fate, and that the remainder of her life will be passed in the utmost wretchedness and woe if she continues to turn a deaf ear to my proposal.'

"'And you think that if I tell her this it will succeed—that your purpose will be answered?'

"'I do,' replied the old man, rubbing his hands gleefully and mumbling his jaws together. 'I am sure of it, so great is the veneration in which you are held by her. She knows so many of your prophecies that have come true, that she will not doubt you speak correctly in her case.'

"I reflected a moment before I answered, and I will give you the result of my reflections presently.

"Then I turned to the old man, and said:

"'And this is the service you wish me to perform for two thousand francs? Then I must decline.'

"'Decline?'

"'Yes.'

"'Why?'

"'The sum is too little.'

"'Two thousand francs too little?'

"'Yes—much too little! I must have at least five thousand francs to recompense me for thus violating the noble science of astrology.'

"The old man considered for a few moments, and then his passion for the young girl triumphed over every other consideration.

"'Enough,' he said—'I consent. The five thousand francs shall be yours.'

"'That is quite sufficient,' I answered. 'Place them upon the table, and I will undertake to do all that you require, though you must not blame me if my predictions do not have upon the young girl the effect that you anticipate.'

"'I am not afraid of that,' was the answer. 'I will take the risk of it.'

"'Very good, then. Put down the money.'

"'Not the whole of it,' he answered. 'I will pay you half now, and half when the girl has paid her visit.'

"I tried hard to obtain the whole amount, but could not succeed, so I was obliged to content myself with two thousand five hundred francs, which, you will confess, was not at all bad, considering this was my first attempt at the science.

"Soon after this the old man took his leave, assuring me as he departed that he was quite certain the young girl would shortly pay me a visit. She was more than half inclined to do so already, and the trifling influence which he could bring to bear would cause her to quite make up her mind.

"I shook my fist after him as soon as the door closed.

"'You hoary-headed old monster!' I thought. 'But I will be even with you yet! Some good will come of my turning astrologer, I fancy! And now for my reflections.'

"You must not imagine for a moment that I intended to further the old villain's plans in any way—on the contrary, I had resolved to thwart them.

"The easiest manner of doing this was to pretend to fall in with his views, as I had done. When the girl came, I intended to inform her of all that had passed, and so put her on her guard against his insidious advances.

"This was a very praiseworthy resolve, and I waited impatiently for the girl to make her appearance.

"But all was perfectly still outside. I heard no indications of the approach of anyone.

"My next proceeding was to commence a search all over the apartment, in order to load myself with all the wealth I could find.

"The impression was strong upon my mind that I should be well rewarded for my trouble.

"In this I was not mistaken.

"In many out-of-the-way places, where no one would have thought scarcely of looking for money, I found small bags of gold and silver, and little packets of bank-notes.

"Mazzaroth, as he called himself, had evidently been doing a roaring trade.

"He had taken care of his money, too. Perhaps he was aware that he was playing a dangerous game, and that it might end all at once some day, in the event of which he would be tolerably well prepared to abide by the result.

"This task quite absorbed all my thoughts and attention.

"No interruption came, however; and, all at once, on reaching that corner of the room where I had left the astrologer, I started and paused.

"I remembered that some time had elapsed since he had uttered one of his groans, and I wondered what could be the cause of it.

"Had the gag produced suffocation? or had he in his struggles to get free broken a blood-vessel, or in some other way brought about his death?

"Then I remembered the sharp, snapping sound which had startled not only me but my dupe, and, with a sensation I cannot describe, I drew aside the piece of arras or tapestry that concealed the corner of the room where I had rolled the body of the astrologer.

"To my intense astonishment, he had gone—vanished—disappeared as completely and entirely as though he had been transformed into air.

"For a minute or two I stood in a state of perfect bewilderment, looking at the spot where I was quite certain I had left him.

"He had gone—there was no doubt of that; and I began to wonder whether, after all, there was not something mysterious and supernatural connected with him and with his doings.

"'Perhaps,' I thought, 'he has managed to crawl or roll along the floor to some distance.'

"Directly the thought occurred to me, I commenced a re-examination of the apartment.

"It was large, and I was occupied several minutes.

"At the end of that time I sank down upon a rude seat quite bewildered.

"Mazzaroth was gone—where, I could not for the life of me imagine.

"This sudden and complete disappearance was well calculated to strike awe into my mind, notwithstanding I had penetrated so many of his secrets, and found them to be of a very material and mechanical character.

"But this—how was I to account for it?

"While plunged into deep thought upon this subject, and indulging in many speculations, I suddenly heard upon the staircase the heavy trampling of many feet, and the murmuring of voices.

"I began to wonder whether it could concern me.

"Nearer and nearer came the sounds, and it was quite evident that a large throng of people were, for some purpose or the other, ascending the stairs.

"Would they pause before the door of the apartment I was in? was the question; and I started to my feet anxiously as I asked it.

"I was not long kept in a state of suspense.

"The footsteps ceased at the threshold of the door, but the murmuring of voices still continued.

"Then some one, in a loud, hoarse voice, bawled out in French the word, 'Silence!'

"After this there was comparative stillness, and then the same voice, still speaking in French, said:

"'In the name of the King, open!'

"I made no reply. I concluded in a moment that I was in some sort of danger, and my feelings were anything but pleasant, I can assure you.

"'Confound it all!' I thought. 'That rascally Mazzaroth has been up to something or other, and has got found out. Where in the world can he be? They're officers of police outside, I'll lay any amount. They will break in, take me to be Mazzaroth, and I shall be carried off to the Bastile, or somewhere, to answer for his doings!'

"This, you may depend, was anything but an agreeable reflection for me to make.

"That it was correct there could be little doubt.

"Some very heavy blows now resounded upon the door.

"Finding their demands for admittance disregarded, the officers of police—for such they proved to be—had resolved to batter down the door.

"'Stop!' I thought. 'Is there no way out of this difficulty? Yes—to be sure there is! I will pull off these things I took from Mazzaroth, and hide them somewhere—they surely will not take me for the astrologer then. Hurrah!—that's a good thought!'

"I now made quite sure of getting off clear; and with more speed even than I had assumed them, I threw off the apparel belonging to Mazzaroth, and appeared in my own proper person.

"I made the clothing up into a bundle and threw it into a corner.

"Scarcely had I done so, than the door fell in with a crash, and a number of police officers appeared.

"But I staggered back in consternation and confusion, for there, standing at the head of them, making many gesticulations and pointing to me, was no other than Mazzaroth, the astrologer, himself.



[CLAUDE DUVAL ESCAPING FROM THE FRENCH PRISON.]

CHAPTER DCLXXXIII.

CLAUDE DUVAL IS CAPTURED BY THE POLICE OFFICERS, AND FINDS HIMSELF IN A FAIR WAY OF BECOMING A GALLEY SLAVE.

'This event gave me a sudden shock, I can assure you.

"I was deprived of all motion, and stood like one petrified. Certainly, it seemed as though Mazzaroth did possess supernatural powers; if he had not, how could he —bound hand and foot as he was—have left the room, summoned the police, and then led them to the apartment?

"While I was thinking about this, and feeling rather uncomfortable in consequence, several of the police officers closed round me and seized me tightly.

"'That's the villain!' shrieked Mazzaroth—'that's the villain! Hold him!—keep him tight! Don't let him escape on any account! He has come here, ill-treated me plundered me of my wealth, and ruined my reputation for ever!'

"'All right,' said the officer in command over the remainder, 'we've got him secure enough, never fear!'

"'Then search him!' cried Mazzaroth—'search him at once! You will find, then, my words are confirmed! He has about him a large sum of money belonging to me!

"The officers accordingly began their search; the result of it, of course, you must know.

"They found upon me all the money I had been at such pains to obtain, and all of which Mazzaroth positively swore belonged to him.

"'Why, you impudent scoundrel!' said the principal officer. 'Bring him along, comrades—bring him along! We'll soon settle his business for him!'

"It was no good for me to attempt to resist so many men, and therefore I did not make the attempt. Some

over, I was stunned and bewildered by the events which had taken place.

"I suffered myself, then, to be led into the presence of the prefect, as the individual is called who performs the functions of a police magistrate.

"I was very anxious to hear what Mazzaroth had to say against me.

"He made a thousand apologies to the prefect of police, and bowed so very often and so profoundly that he must have had the backache for a week afterwards.

"The substance of his declaration was, however, that I had gained admittance to his room, had brutally ill-used him, bound him hand and foot, and flung him into a corner, and then deliberately set to work to rifle the apartment of its contents.

"The prefect, who was a little man with a little face and huge spectacles, frowned at me severely.

"'It so happened,' said Mazzaroth, 'that he flung me into one particular corner of my apartment where there happened to be a secret door.'

"This made all clear to me. However, I may as well let you have Mazzaroth's account of the proceedings.

"'I knew the secret door was there,' he said—'that is to say, it was three or four feet from the spot where I lay. Although I had been so severely handled, and although I was bound hand and foot, I managed to writhe along the floor till I reached it. I knew the exact position of the spring, and pressed against it with the back of my head; the door flew open; I crawled through and closed it after me. In doing this, I unluckily lost my balance and fell to the bottom of a steep flight of stairs, and with such violence as to burst open the door at the bottom of them. I was then seen by an officer of police, who released me from my bonds, and to whom I gave an account of all that had taken place.'

"I had no particular defence to offer to what Mazzaroth brought against me—in fact, I was quite overcome by the novelty of my situation.

"'This is coming to Paris with a vengeance,' I thought, 'and it's all through my father's silly whim.'

"There was no use in regretting what was past.

"The prefect of police dwelt at great length on the enormity of my offence, committed me to prison, and said that when brought up for my trial I should surely be sentenced for fourteen years to work as a galley slave.

"This was to me anything but a pleasant prospect.

"I was led away, however, from the presence of the prefect, taken to a prison, and there confined in a room that was situated in a kind of turret, and which was a considerable distance from the ground.

"Here I was left to my own reflections, and I must say that it was not until I found myself here that I fully realized my position.

"I began to see that the consequences would be very serious to myself.

"*A galley slave:* there was something horrible in the very idea and the bare pronunciation of the words.

"'I will escape,' I said. 'Yes—yes, I will escape! I will not submit to my fate without a struggle. I do not believe that I was destined for a galley slave!'

"No sooner did I make up my mind to attempt to escape than I began to look carefully all round me; there was only one window to my cell, and that was so high up in the wall that I could only just reach its lower edge with the tips of my fingers.

"Outside it was furnished with a sloping shutter, so constructed as to make it impossible for anyone to obtain a view of surrounding objects—nothing could be seen but a small patch of blue sky above.

"I should not have known that I was at a distance from the ground but for the fact that I was conducted up several flights of stairs before the cell was reached.

"I was not fettered, which was a great advantage to me.

"The flooring of the cell was composed of red tiles.

"There was a small iron bed in one corner, and in the other a grate, though there was no fire burning in it.

"That was everything the place contained.

"'I will wait awhile,' I thought, 'before I make an attempt to get free.'

"I was hungry, for since my arrival in Paris I had scarcely tasted anything. I knew that weakness would ensue from want of food, and that in my undertaking I should require all my strength. So one of the reasons why I waited was in order to partake of some food, which I felt sure would be brought me.

"In this expectation I was not deceived.

"A jailer presently appeared, bringing with him a pitcher and a loaf, which he set down on the floor in a surly way, without venturing to say one word.

"As soon as the door closed behind him, and was fastened, I sprang forward and took hold of the pitcher first, for my throat was parched.

"But the water was so foul and brackish, that when I had swallowed a mouthful I was glad to put the pitcher down again.

"Then I looked at the bread, and found it black and mouldy.

"Starvation was preferable to eating such food, so I allowed what they brought me to remain untouched.

"Anxiously I waited for night to come, and I watched the gradual darkening of the little bit of sky I could perceive with the utmost impatience.

"I soon found, however, that every three hours visits were paid to the cell, in order to ascertain that all was right, and the prisoners secure.

"That is indeed an excellent plan, and is safer by far than bolts, and bars, and locks.

"Only three hours! And so, if I made my escape, I should have to commence operations immediately after the departure of the guard, and get clear of the prison within three hours.

"I fancied this was to be done, and as night came on I grew more and more hopeful and daring.

"I waited until the hour of midnight was sounded from some church or cathedral in the vicinity.

"In a few minutes after, the door was thrown open, and the guard, carrying torches, entered.

"They found me sitting down upon the edge of my bed in quite a disconsolate attitude.

"They looked at me, looked all round, and, finding everything as usual, departed.

"I listened to their retreating footsteps for a moment, and then sprang to my feet.

"'Now,' I muttered—'now is the time to make my attempt!

"I had only been able to think of one means by which I might perchance effect my escape.

"This was by means of the chimney. Narrow as it looked, I thought I might be able to climb up it and emerge upon the roofs.

"To descend, something like a rope would be necessary, and where was I to look for that?

"There was nothing of the kind in my dungeon. The bed was simply a bag of straw, and I was furnished with a couple of rugs or blankets to draw over me.

"I did not fancy trusting my weight to a rope formed of those articles. But there was no hope for it—there was nothing else.

"With great dexterity, then, I tore up my blankets into long strips, and tied them securely together.

"Then I tore open the canvas covering of my bed, and tore that up also.

"I was now in possession of a rope several yards in length.

"One end I tied tightly round one of my feet, and, going to the fireplace, began to ascend.

"I had taken all this trouble before I found out whether the chimney was wide enough to allow me passage up it.

"It was scarcely likely, as I might have known had I given the subject a proper amount of thought.

"The opening at the bottom, however, was so large as to inspire me with the liveliest hopes.

"Disregarding the soot, which fell down in clouds, I began to ascend, and was just felicitating myself upon the certainty of making my escape, when my head suddenly came into violent contact with some hard object.

"Putting up my hand, I found this was an iron bar, cemented into the wall, and crossing the chimney in a transverse direction.

"This obstacle it was impossible to pass.

"With furious rage I seized hold of the bar and shook it, while I gnashed my teeth together in vexation.

"Suddenly my feelings underwent a change.

"The bar was loose! I shook it again and again, and every time I found it moved more freely in its setting.

"Hope again revived in my breast, and I tugged away manfully, in the hope of releasing it altogether.

"After incredible exertions, I succeeded, and I found myself armed with a truly formidable weapon.

"I was now quite elate.

"The chimney was narrow, and yet wide enough to allow me to ascend easily.

"I accelerated my speed, when again I was stopped by a similar obstacle.

"At this my spirits quite sank.

"I tugged at the bar, but in vain, it was as firm as a rock—there was no hope of releasing it.

"I turned my face upwards, but I could not catch a glimpse of the sky above.

"To what height I might have to ascend I had not the least idea.

"Perchance, if I succeeded in removing this bar, and should a few yards farther on find another and another, and then, last of all, there might be something fixed on the top of the chimney, making it impossible for me to emerge.

CHAPTER DCLXXXIV.

CLAUDE DUVAL RELATES THE ATTEMPTS HE MADE TO AVOID HIS FATE.

"This reflection, probable as it was, quite abated my courage.

"'I will try some other means,' I said—'the chimney is impracticable.'

"Accordingly I lowered myself down, and in one hundredth part of the time it took me to ascend I found myself on the floor of the cell, presenting a truly deplorable appearance.

"My clothing was torn against the rough stonework, I was covered with soot from head to foot and I was bleeding in various places from several abrasions of the skin.

"All that I had gained was the iron bar. This was about three feet in length and an inch and a half in thickness.

"I glanced up at the window.

"It was strongly barred on the inner side, and on the outer was the wooden affair I have spoken of.

"This, no doubt, was firmly fixed, and yet the removal of it and the iron bars did not present nearly so many difficulties as ascending the chimney.

"I deeply regretted having spent so much of my strength so fruitlessly—moreover, what was more precious still, I had lost much time.

"Raising the iron bar in my hands, I used it like a lever.

"I inserted one end underneath one of the perpendicular bars, and, exerting my strength as well as my awkward position would allow me, endeavoured to wrench it from its place.

"Evidently, when those bars were put there, it was never imagined that a prisoner would have in his possession such a powerful weapon as I had.

"Then, to be sure, nothing of the kind could by any possibility be smuggled into the prison.

"But the circumstances under which I had obtained it were exceptional.

"I was really quite surprised at the ease with which the iron bar broke away from its setting. I bent it upwards as well as I could, and then, with the blood literally dancing in my veins, attacked the second one.

"This did not yield so easily as the first, but eventually I conquered it, for I had now more room to use the lever, and could work better.

"An opening was now made almost large enough for me to creep through. The removal of one bar more would suffice.

"After a few minutes' exertion I succeeded in my design; but the obstacles I had yet to encounter and overcome were very numerous, and yet I thought nothing of them—I felt so inspirited by the success I had gained.

"I felt quite an affection for the iron bar, which had done me such good service, and I resolved that we would not part company.

"I have already told you that the sill of the window was almost out of my reach, so I had yet to overcome the difficulty of reaching it.

"The torn blankets were still attached to my ankle.

"About two yards, or rather more, below my foot, I tied the iron bar securely to my rope, which I wrapped round and round many times and finally tied tightly.

"Then, giving myself a spring upwards, I caught hold of the sill of the window, and easily raised my body until my breast was on a level with it.

"I then seized hold of the grating and pulled myself up completely. In another moment I was seated on the window-sill.

"I then, by means of the rope, drew up my iron bar.

"I had all along been under the impression that the opening left at the top of the shutter was wide enough to allow me to squeeze my body through it. It is difficult, however, to estimate distances correctly, and, to my great chagrin, I found that this was impossible.

"Yet I had my iron bar, and though awkwardly situated for using it, yet I might be able, with several smart blows, to demolish the wood-work; but then I reflected if I did this it would fall, an alarm would then be created, and my escape cut off.

"I was not to be stopped by such an obstruction, however; the opening only required a little enlargement, and presently, by using care and caution, I broke off a portion of the wood-work large enough to allow me to creep forth.

"Rising up, I peeped over the edge of the sloping board. It was lucky that I could not fall, for just then I was seized with a sudden vertigo, caused by finding myself at such a height from the ground as I was. This feeling soon passed away.

"From my elevated position I commanded a splendid view of the city of Paris, the roofs of the highest buildings in which seemed far below me.

"Looking down perpendicularly, I saw, about twenty feet below me, a kind of rampart or gallery, surrounding the turret in which my cell was situated.

"The gallery was furnished with a low stone parapet, and along it an officer was pacing with monotonous steps.

"The sentinel did not look up, or he might have seen me.

"Taking the precaution to expose as little of my head as possible, I watched his movements.

"I saw him disappear, and after a length of time come in sight at the opposite portion of the gallery.

"It was by this means that I became aware that the gallery encircled the turret, and the sentinel's duty was to keep walking round and round it.

"Unluckily for my enterprise, the night was what I might call a light and a dark one. At times the clouds would be so dense as to cause a deep darkness; at other times they would open, and through the rift the moon would pour down her silvery radiance.

"My first step must be to descend to the gallery beneath me.

"This, I doubted not, the rope would easily enable me to do; but I must watch for two circumstances; I must choose a time when the sky was covered with clouds, and begin my descent as soon as the sentinel was out of sight—I must also reach the ground and conceal myself before he came in sight again.

"In the first place I secured my rope—if I may so call it—to one of the iron bars belonging to my cell window which I had not yet disturbed.

"I untied the end from my ankle, and secured to it instead the iron bar. I held this in my hand.

"At length the clouds again covered the sky, and all was dark.

"I had discovered by observation that I was able to count a hundred rapidly between the time when the officer disappeared from my gaze and came in sight again.

"To be safe, I must do all that I had to do in the shape of making my descent in something less than that brief period of time.

"I watched him disappear, and almost before he was lost to view I began to lower the iron bar.

"The rope was nearly long enough to reach the floor of the gallery, and in paying it out I counted twenty.

"This was good work, and it could not have been done in less.

"Without pausing, I climbed over the edge of the shutter and slipped down the rope, continuing to count all the while.

"When my hands encountered the iron bar I had reached up to sixty-five.

"I glanced down, and saw that my feet were within an inch or two of the stone gallery.

"I let go without hesitation; then I untied the iron bar and clutched it tightly.

"I looked about me for a hiding-place, but could only find one, and that of a very inefficient character.

"This was a slight indentation in the wall or the turret, like the embrasure of a loophole.

"This was in deep shadow, and I squeezed myself back into it as far as ever I could, hoping by this means to escape the attention of the sentinel when he passed by.

"Scarcely had I taken up this position than I heard him coming, for, while standing in my hiding-place I could not see him.

"Tramp—tramp—tramp he came, and I counted every one of his regular steps.

"I clutched the bar of iron convulsively. I had escaped so far, and did not intend to be thwarted or turned back for a trifle.

"All that I had done would, I knew, add to my offence, and cause a sentence of greater severity to be passed upon me in the event of my being brought up for trial.

"I had just one chance, and only one. The sentinel, in walking round the gallery—as he must have done some hundreds of times that night—his eyes might on this occasion be turned from the wall of the turret towards the parapet. In that case he would pass me unseen, and I should have another hundred seconds to renew my efforts to escape.

"There was my rope still fluttering backwards and forwards a little way above his head, but I trusted he would not raise his eyes and perceive it.

"I fancied, too, that in the deep darkness it would be almost invisible.

"But circumstances combined in my disfavour.

"Almost with the suddenness of lightning, the moon broke out from behind the clouds. As if by magic, everything was revealed with a distinctness that was positively startling, owing to the contrast it afforded to the deep darkness that had previously reigned.

"Just then the sentinel arrived opposite to my hiding-place. His face was turned upwards, and a slight ejaculation escaped his lips.

"I guessed he had seen the rope.

"He stopped in his walk, and then suddenly his eyes rested upon me.

"The moon shone with full force into my hiding-place, so that I was revealed to him with greater plainness than even he was revealed to me.

"The man looked as astounded as he would have done had he found himself face to face with some dreadful apparition.

"But I saw him raise his musket in the air. I knew he was going to fire. I was aware that the shot would arouse the whole fortress, and that I should be recaptured.

"Without pausing to think of the consequences, and animated only by the instinct of self-preservation, I raised the heavy iron bar, and brought it down with full force upon the sentinel's head.

"There was an alarming crack, and then, with a jingling sound caused by his accoutrements, he lay prostrate on the stone pavement.

"He was disposed of. I had one enemy the less to contend with. I sincerely trusted, however, that he was not dead. I hoped my blow was only severe enough to stun him. This was quite possible, for he was furnished with a strong cap purposely constructed to break the force of a blow.

"Crouching down, for fear of being seen, I crept towards the parapet I have mentioned.

"I peeped over the edge. There was a sheer descent of a hundred feet at least. At the bottom was a broad kind of moat or ditch, which, however, was called by the inhabitants of the prison a fosse.

CHAPTER DCLXXXV.

CLAUDE DUVAL FINDS DANGER THICKENING AROUND HIM.

"This fosse completely surrounded the prison, and was filled to the brim with water, upon which the moon's rays shone with great brilliancy.

"But how was the descent to be made? Even if I could have made use of my rope—which was impossible—it would not have been half long enough.

"I was deliberating as to my next proceeding, when I was suddenly startled by an alarming sound.

"I believed that so little noise had been made by my attack upon the sentinel, that no alarm had been given.

"Judge of my surprise, then, when I heard a gun discharged at no great distance.

"I crouched down lower still, believing that I had been seen.

"The report of the gun was followed by the roll of a drum, and this was followed by another and another, until all the prison resounded with the noise.

"'They have gone into my cell and discovered my absence,' I thought, 'that's the secret; and yet three hours have not elapsed.'

"I was now in such a state of confusion that I scarcely knew what to do.

"I was roused into action by hearing a door open. Then followed the sound of heavy footsteps.

"The door was the one opening upon the gallery on which I stood—a door communicating with the interior of the prison.

"A party of soldiers were approaching.

"Only one thing remained for me to do. It offered but a slight chance of escape, but yet I was forced to adopt it, though at the same time I perilled my life.

"With extreme agility I climbed over the edge of the parapet, and hung to it at the full length of my arms, held only by the grasp of my fingers upon the edge of the stonework.

"But my feet encountered something—at first I could not tell what. Directly afterwards I discovered it was ivy. This parasitic plant flourished here in great luxuriance. It twined itself all round the fortress, and had been in existence probably for upwards of a century.

"Its branches were of uncommon thickness, and clung tightly to the wall.

"I ventured to bear a little weight with my feet, and found that the ivy supported them perfectly.

"The party of soldiers passed round the gallery until they reached the spot where their companion was lying.

"I heard them distinctly—not only their footsteps, but their voices.

"'Hullo!' cried one. 'I thought something was amiss when I found the sentinel did not walk round and round the gallery as usual.'

"'Behold!' said another, 'a prisoner has escaped! Look! 'here's the rope by which he has descended!'

"'Very good!' said another. 'Make your mind easy upon that point. He has not gone—he cannot escape!'

"'How do you know he has not gone far?'

"'Because the sentinel is quite warm. Beat the drums again.'

"This command was obeyed.

"'Now search narrowly everywhere around. It's my belief he's hiding close to us.'

"That the soldiers would look over the edge of the parapet was perfectly certain, and if they did so they could not fail to see me.

"I was in a desperate position, and therefore inclined to do desperate things in order to better myself.

"The wild resolve entered into my mind to commit the whole of my weight to the ivy, and to descend by it.

"No sooner did I make this determination than I proceeded to carry it into effect.

"But I closed my eyes and held my breath the while, for I did not know but what I might be precipitated instantly into the fosse beneath.

"I released my hold upon the edge of the stonework, and seized the ivy.

"It did not give way, and then I ventured to open my eyes and draw a long breath of relief.

"It furnished many a hand-hold, and I descended with a speed and recklessness which certainly was warranted by the circumstances.

"I was careful, however, to make no noise, and when I believed I was low enough to be out of sight of the soldiers above, I paused in my descent.

"Then the weather favoured me.

"Clouds again closed over the moon, and all became profoundly dark.

"I breathed a sigh of thankfulness.

"So far, all was well. I clung as close to the wall as I possibly could, so that the large dark leaves of the ivy should cover and conceal my form.

"Then, turning my face upwards, I was able to see though very dimly, the edge of the parapet above.

"Continuing to gaze, I then saw several of the soldiers bending over.

"'He is not on the gallery,' said one, 'and so he must have descended.'

"'But it is impossible,' said another voice. 'Where has he gone?'

"'I tell you again he has descended.'

"'But how can he have done so?'

"'That I don't know. If you fancy still that he is lurking about here, leave some of the men on guard, let the remainder descend, and cause a close watch to be kept round the walls; he may be hidden in the ivy, and if so we shall discover him, even if we have to wait till morning.'

"These words literally chilled my blood, and I wished most fervently that I had given that meddlesome fellow a tap on the head instead of the sentinel, who I looked upon now as quite a decent kind of fellow.

"'There can be no harm in that,' said another voice. 'Divide the men; I will remain here with half and keep the closest watch. You descend with the remainder, and get some more to your assistance with torches. We shall discover him, never fear.'

"I began to be of this way of thinking myself, but kept my courage up as well as I could.

"The soldiers above separated, and the other half continued to search narrowly round and round the gallery; but I thought to myself:

"'If I am to escape, now is the time. At all hazards, I must descend the ivy and cross the fosse before those fellows get down; if I do not, my chance is over!'

"Accordingly, using every care not to make the least disturbance, I recommenced my descent, but, in spite of all my efforts, the ivy rustled, and I feared the sound would reach the ears of those above, who, now that their suspicions were excited, would be listening eagerly to every trifling sound.

"My fears caused me to exaggerate this danger—the rustling was so slight as to be inaudible to them.

"The lower I got the less chance there was that they would hear me.

"The sky still continued covered with clouds.

"I ventured to look down. About fifteen feet below me, or perhaps rather more, was the fosse.

"My heart beat fast.

"'I shall be in time,' I thought. 'I shall cross it before they can arrive.'

"But just then a sound smote upon my ears which caused me to stop, and made me once more cling tightly to the wall.

"It was the regular tramp, tramp of a troop of men.

"'Too late,' I gasped—'too late!'

"My arms now ached terribly, owing to their having supported the weight of my body so long, and I feared their strength would presently depart.

"An invincible curiosity made me look in the direction from which the sounds came.

"I expected to see the gleam of many torches, but in this I was deceived.

"I saw, instead, only a number of small flashing lights, which I made out directly afterwards to be lanterns carried by the soldiers.

"'Curses on this mischance!' I murmured. 'An accident has cut off my escape. This is the regular guard making a round of the prison. Before they have gone, the others will be upon me. But for them I should have been free!'

"This was a vexatious circumstance; but all I could do was to continue to press myself closely against the wall, and hope that the ivy leaves would cover me over and prevent me from being seen.

"On came the patrol, about a dozen in number I saw them with their helmets, and long cloaks wrapped around them, each man carrying on his shoulder a musket furnished with a bayonet, and holding in his other hand a lantern.

"Tramp—tramp—tramp! On they came, and hope once more revived, for I fancied they would pass by, and I should yet have time.

"It was just as I was permitting my spirits to be buoyed up with this idea that I heard a voice from above bellow out in French:

"'Hallo, there!—guard—guard!'

"'Halt!' said a voice, and then, with a clatter, the patrol stopped on the outer edge of the fosse, and just beneath me. The man above then added:

"'Have you seen anything of the prisoner who has just escaped?'

"'No.'

"Then keep a sharp look-out all round the walls, for we believe he is hidden somewhere in the ivy.'

"'All right,' was the reply, and then the same voice immediately added, addressing the patrol: 'Raise your lanterns—flash them well about, and see if you can discover anything.'

"This order was obeyed, but the light emitted by the lanterns was so insufficient that it only cast a faint gleam upon the waters of the fosse.

"As for the lanterns revealing anybody fifteen feet in the air, that was quite out of the question.

"The troop, using unusual vigilance, passed on.

"As soon as I believed they had gone a safe distance, I once more began my descent.

"Down—down I went, my heart beating high with expectation, for I believed that after all I should yet be able to swim across the fosse and escape.

"At length my feet touched the water, and just then there came round an angle of the building a ruddy gleam of light.

"I heard, too, the tramp of feet, the murmur of voices, and the jingling of weapons.

"This was the patrol expressly sent out to discover me, and who had furnished themselves with torches.

"They were almost upon me before I was aware of their presence.

"What to do now I scarcely knew. To swim across the fosse in time was now impossible—it was at least thirty feet wide, and the opposite bank rugged and precipitous.

"On they came, and, glancing to the left, I saw their torches waving in the air.

"Rendered desperate, and resolving not to give in without a struggle, I lowered myself gradually into the water.

"Presently the whole of my body up to my chin was immersed. I kept my head above water by clinging with one hand to one of the ivy roots.

"The patrol was now almost opposite to me.

"The light given forth by the torches was a very different kind of illumination to that afforded by the lanterns; there were twenty of them at least, and everyone was burning brightly, so that, despite the smoke, they revealed not only the surface of the water, but also the ivy against the wall.

"As they approached I sank down lower and lower.

"Then I heard a voice from above—the same voice which had so startled me a little while before:

"'Hallo, there!—guard—guard!'

"'Halt!' cried the one in command, and I recognised the voice as belonging to the man who had first suggested to the others the idea that I might be hiding in the ivy. 'What is it above, there?'

"'Search narrowly round about the spot where you now stand,' cried the voice above; 'we can see marks upon the parapet where I now am, showing that he climbed over it at this point. He must be in the ivy, so search closely!'

"'All right!' was the reply.

CHAPTER DCLXXXVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL ESCAPES FROM THE PRISON AND HAS A SINGULAR ADVENTURE IN THE FOREST.

"Those were the last words I heard.

"I released my hold upon the ivy-root, and body to sink completely into the water.

"I conceived that was the only chance

maining undetected. I should be able, I knew, to remain under water for several seconds, and then, by simply raising my head and taking a breath, for several seconds more.

"In my desperate condition I then thought that it was just possible I might manage to remain in the water until the examination was over, yet the least splash would betray me.

"The soldiers formed themselves into a line along the bank of the fosse, and raised their torches high into the air.

"The ruddy gleam fell upon the water and the ivy, but although they strained their eyes they were unable to see anything alarming.

"I should have told you (interrupted Claude) that my chief boyish sport and the one in which I most delighted was swimming; I had practised many odd feats, and one of them—though common enough—stood me in good stead then; it was that of swimming under water for a considerable distance, then rising for breath and swimming farther.

"As soon as I was fairly below the surface I thought of this, and placing my body in a peculiar position, I struck out slowly and gently with both hands. I kept as close to the bottom of the fosse as I could while executing this feat, because there was less danger then of being seen.

"When I imagined I had gone a sufficient distance, I suffered myself to rise slowly to the surface.

"I found instantly that I was just beyond the circle of light that was thrown by the torches, consequently I was invisible to the soldiers, though I could see them plainly enough, and even hear them, for I had not gone very many feet.

"I drew in several long, deep breaths, and while I was doing so I heard the officer say:

"'He must be in the ivy still, and if he is I will fetch him down, I'll warrant!'

"He then commanded a dozen of his men to step forward with their muskets.

"'Now,' he said, 'fire a volley at that part of the wall which is just opposite to you. Do not scatter your shots much, and if he is there we must find him.'

"This order was obeyed; but of course, as I was under the water, it produced no result further than cutting off a great number of leaves.

"'Now again,' said the officer; 'a little higher up this time, and so on, till you get towards the top.'

"Had I been in the ivy when this was tried I must have perished, or else, to save my life, have surrendered myself.

"It was an excellent scheme, and I could not help admiring the officer's invention for thinking of it.

"Of course, being, as I was, in comparative safety, I could look upon his proceedings and those of his men with a very different eye.

"'Now,' I thought to myself—'now is the time to escape while they are firing away in that fashion—a slight noise might not be heard—now is the time.'

"Using great caution, I began to swim again, and this time in the ordinary fashion, because I was able to proceed with so much more rapidity.

"While getting to a greater distance from the soldiers who were firing, I also directed my course in a slanting direction to the opposite bank.

"This at length I reached in safety, and climbed up.

"The plunge into the cold water seemed to refresh me wonderfully. All my energies were completely braced up by it, and I felt as though I could go through as much exertion again as I had already undergone.

"I was aware that other troops were patrolling round the prison—that, if I was not speedy, I might fall foul of one of them.

"Had they formed a complete line round the fosse as they did soon afterwards, my escape would have been out of the question.

"Luckily, I was just in time.

"Crouching down upon the ground, I crept forward on my hands and knees, and, considering the mode of progression, the rate of speed I made was surprising.

"I soon got over a large piece of ground, and then, leaving myself at a safe distance, I sprang to my feet, and ran for my life.

"Away I went, at a furious rate, in a perfectly straight line, and without meeting with any obstacle.

"The last I saw of the soldiers and of the prison was that the whole of them, as I have hinted, had formed a circle round the outer bank of the moat, and were firing at the ivy. The impression upon their minds was that I was still hiding there; but I had escaped—I was free, and, after running much farther, my limbs at length failed me, and I sank down, utterly exhausted, to the earth.

"It so happened that chance had guided my footsteps to a large wood or forest that was situated at no great distance from the prison.

"I had penetrated into its recesses for a considerable distance before my strength failed me, and therefore there appeared to be every probability of my being in safety.

"I remained for a long time in this prostrate condition.

"At length, however, my strength returned to me, and I arose.

"During the remainder of that night, I continued to make my way through the forest as well as I could in a straight line, though whether I did this or not I know not.

"Of my enemies I heard nothing.

"As morning approached, I grew very cold and very hungry, yet where to obtain food or shelter I knew not.

"As for money, I had not a farthing; for when I was taken prisoner, the officers deprived me not only of the wealth belonging to the astrologer, but of my own as well.

"I was, too, in a most miserable condition as regards apparel, though I was somewhat cleansed by my bath in the fosse.

"Towards daybreak I sank down at the foot of a tree, feeling quite spent.

"Before I had remained very long in this position, however, I heard a slight—a very slight—sound. It was no more than the snapping of a twig, and might have been done by the wind, yet it terrified me exceedingly. It might have been done by some one treading upon it—my foes might be at hand.

"This was a thought that served to rouse up what little energy I had left.

"I must conceal myself. I could think of only one mode of doing this, namely, by climbing up into a tree.

"The one beneath which I had seated myself was large, and had many outspreading branches, among which I might certainly remain undetected.

"I had great difficulty, though, in climbing up, for I was very weak, and the trunk of the tree too large for me to grasp, but at length I got hold of a small branch, and drew myself up by its aid.

"After that, farther progress was easy.

"I now heard a footstep approaching distinctly enough, and, fearful of being heard, I resolved to stop where I then was, although I would fain have climbed higher into the tree, where I should have stood a better chance of remaining unseen.

"I paused, and lucky it was that I did so, for the rustling of the branches might have betrayed me.

"It was now gradually growing light, and my eyes were so accustomed to the darkness that I was able to see with tolerable ease into the obscurity around.

"Looking down, I saw a man emerge from a kind of thicket.

"He was all alone, and, as soon as I saw him, my apprehensions vanished.

"He was not one of my enemies. He was dressed as a simple citizen, but there was something so odd in all his motions that, though his presence did not concern me in the least degree, I could not help watching everything he did with the keenest interest and curiosity.

"He seemed to shrink every now and then close to the earth, as though he feared something, and tried to cower down and hide himself.

"With trembling, apprehensive steps he would advance a little way, then pause and listen.

"I was convinced by his manner that he would do me no harm, so I felt quite easy and content.

"Directly afterwards, I perceived that he carried under his coat some bulky and heavy object, which I fancied seemed to pull him down towards the earth.

"'I am all alone,' I heard him mutter to himself, as though the sound of his own voice in that dreary soli-

tude would have a cheering effect and inspire him with courage—'yes, I am surely all alone! I have reached this spot unseen! No eye is upon me—no one will guess my secret!'

"He stopped, and I saw him wipe the perspiration from his face.

"'It is very heavy,' he added, 'and my strength is sorely tried with carrying it so far. Shall I go farther, or stay here? Would it be safe about this spot? Perhaps so—perhaps safer than in many other places. It's getting daylight, too, and I must be careful to depart unseen.'

"You may imagine that these words strongly roused my curiosity.

"What was he speaking about?—what did he intend to do?

"I felt quite excited and anxious, for I feared that he might take it into his head to go somewhere else in the wood, and then I should never know what the secret was.

"But, continuing to observe him, I saw that he was coming gradually to a determination.

"'Yes,' he said again, 'this spot will do well—none could be better. I shall know it again—I shall not confound it with any other place in the forest. That is a large and singular old tree. I could tell that tree from any other—I could not mistake it. Yes, that tree will answer my purpose admirably.'

"Hearing these words, I grew rather uneasy again, and the more so as I found that the tree to which he alluded was certainly the one in which I was concealed, for, with the same shrinking, trembling steps, he crept towards it.

"Was he going to ascend?—was he, for some purpose or other, about to climb into the tree as I had done?

"If so, he could not fail to discover me. Not that I cared particularly for the man himself, for I was more than a match for him, but he could have spread the alarm.

"It was, then, with something that deserves a stronger name than curiosity that I riveted my gaze upon him, and watched his actions, wondering what in the world it was he was about to do, and what effect it would have upon my fortunes.

CHAPTER DCLXXXVII.

CLAUDE DUVAL RELATES HOW HE MADE A MOST FORTUNATE DISCOVERY WHILE CONCEALED AMONG THE BRANCHES OF THE HUGE TREE.

"It kept getting lighter and lighter every moment, and as the faint grey daylight found its way down through the tree-tops on the ground, I was able to see the singular being with much greater distinctness.

"As he came closer, the conviction crept over me that I had seen him somewhere before—that his form was familiar to me.

"As yet, I had not been able to catch a glimpse of his face.

"When he reached the foot of the tree in which I was hidden, he placed the heavy object he was carrying in his arms upon the ground.

"Then again he glanced timidly and apprehensively around him and listened.

"As he did this, he happened to turn his countenance upwards. The view I obtained of it was transient and fleeting, yet nevertheless I started with astonishment, for I recognised him. He was my old friend, Mazzaroth, the astrologer.

"Two things puzzled me much—one was how he came to be there? and the other, how on earth it was I had not recognised him earlier?

"I was not so soon satisfied upon the former point, but, as to the latter, a little reflection soon served to set me right.

"The astrologer had evidently been to great pains to disguise himself, for he was dressed in a very different manner to what I had seen him before.

"Then his voice was rendered so tremulous and shrill by excitement and the dread of being seen by some one, that the tones bore no resemblance to those which he employed when I first entered his mystical apartment.

"Then he addressed himself to me in a heavy, monotonous, sepulchral voice which I knew full well could be easily assumed, and which I felt tolerably certain was not his genuine one.

"The start I gave on making this extraordinary discovery caused the branches of the tree to clash together, and the sound, trifling as it was, caught the attentive ears of Mazzaroth.

"He looked up scrutinizingly into the tree at once, and I began to fear I should be found.

"Luckily, the foliage was very dense, and concealed me completely.

"My good fortune favoured me so far that at this moment a rather large-sized bird flew with a screaming cry out of the tree, and alighted on another.

"'It was only a bird,' I heard the astrologer mutter to himself—'only a bird! And yet how it terrified me! I am getting foolish. Let me make haste with what I have to do.'

"While speaking, he took out of his pocket a clasp-knife with a huge blade.

"With this he carefully marked out and cut a piece of turf rather more than a foot square.

"He used the utmost caution in this operation, and in a minute or two raised up the turf whole and entire, so that when he replaced it no one could tell that the ground had been meddled with.

"He then began, by the aid of the knife and his hands, to make a deep hole.

"While he was thus engaged he kept continually muttering to himself, sometimes so indistinctly that I could not catch a syllable, and at other times loud enough for me to overhear him.

"I strained my eyes and moved about as much as I dared, in the hope of being able to catch sight of the object he carried.

"He had placed it on the ground in such a position that a thick branch of the tree intercepted my view of it.

"Had I changed my position ever so little I could have seen it; but this I was afraid to do, so I remained still.

"'Ten thousand curses!' I heard him say—'ten thousand curses on the meddlesome rascal who has driven me to adopt this course, and who, in all probability, has ruined my business in the future! Thank goodness, he is a prisoner, and if my utmost efforts will go for anything, he will only exchange his present cell for a place in the galleys!'

"I felt very much obliged to old Mazzaroth, of course, and waited, in the hope of hearing a little more of his delightful conversation.

"It was some time before I heard anything again, but at last he said:

"'Yes—yes, depend upon it, this is the wisest and best course I could pursue! Now, if any disturbance is made about me I shall be able to fly easily, for I shall have nothing to encumber myself with. Here, in this leather valise, I have stowed away the greater part of my property. No one will find it here, and when I am driven to it, what so easy as for me to come here and dig it up again?'

"He now rose up, having, as I supposed, made the hole deep enough to answer his purpose.

"He took hold of the object I was so anxious to behold, and then I saw that it was indeed a strong leather portmanteau, such as people frequently carry with them.

"The hole was just large enough, and so he dropped it in, pressing it down close to the bottom.

"Then he filled in the earth over it, taking care to flatten it down as tightly as he could with his hands.

"Then, finally, he replaced the turf he had so carefully cut, and with such skill did he perform this part of his task that it would indeed have required a keen eye to have detected any difference between that one spot and the rest of the grass surrounding it.

"When he had done this there still remained a quantity of earth upon the ground, in consequence of the valise having taken up the greater part of the cavity, and I watched to see how he would dispose of this.

"It seemed to be a point requiring deliberation, for he paused a moment, and then finally struck his breast, as though at last he had hit upon the very thing.

"He took up two handfuls and walked away to a little distance, then flung them in the air, scattering the particles as much as possible.

"In this way he proceeded until he had picked up every grain of earth.

"Then he rubbed his hands slowly one over the other with satisfaction, and no doubt he firmly believed that his treasure was quite safe, and there was not the slightest fear that anyone would discover it; and, probably, it would have been perfectly secure but for the singular accident which placed me in my present position.

"Little did the astrologer think that there was one keeping such a keen watch upon all his movements as I was, and certainly it did not speak well as a proof of his skill in reading the stars.

"Of that, what I had seen had been enough to convince me before that he was an arrant impostor and humbug.

"It was out of fear of being some day discovered in his mummeries that he had removed all his wealth and buried it in the earth.

"Although his task was over, he lingered for a long while around the spot, as though loath to depart.

"No doubt it would have been pleasant for him to have remained there on guard, but the increasing light that was shed around warned him that it was time to take his departure.

"'I must be careful,' he said, 'and speedy, or I shall be observed leaving the wood! One more glance around—one more glance to fix indelibly upon my mind the features of this place, and I will be gone!'

"For at least a moment he stood perfectly still, gazing attentively upon the tree, and noting every little peculiarity there was about it, so as to be able to identify it again.

"Then, with slow, shrinking steps, he took his departure.

"He soon disappeared from my view among the dense vegetation; but I heard him forcing his way through the shrubs for some time after he was lost to sight.

"I remained in the tree for a long time after this, so as to give Mazzaroth an ample opportunity of getting away before I showed myself.

"At length, believing I had waited long enough, I began slowly to descend.

"Just as I was about to drop to the ground, however, I heard again that crashing noise among the trees and underwood which betokened the approach of some one.

"It was marvellous to behold with what speed I drew myself up, and ensconced myself in my former situation.

"Then, to my surprise—I might say consternation—two soldiers made their appearance in the little space beneath.

"Here they stopped and glanced around them, holding their firelocks in such a way as to be able to discharge them in an instant if they saw anything.

"They spoke in French; but, as I was as familiar with that language as with English, I could easily tell every word they said.

"'I don't believe a word about this fellow having got into the wood. How could he do so when we were keeping such a watch all along the edge of the fosse?'

"'How indeed?' rejoined the other. 'But I have my own opinion on the subject, comrade.'

"'What is it?'

"'Why, he must have been drowned.'

"'I shouldn't wonder!'

"'You may depend that's it, comrade. He might manage to descend by the ivy into the water, and there he would be drowned.'

"'You are a clever fellow, Pierre. Have you mentioned that idea to our captain?'

"'I have; but he won't listen to it—he declares he must be in this wood.'

"'Well, we have tramped through a good lot of it, and we have seen nothing suspicious, have we?'

"'Nothing at all; and I don't believe any of our companions have, or we should have heard the signal.'

"'Of course we should, and——'

"'But hark!—what's that?'

"The clear musical notes of a bugle rose distinctly upon the morning air.

"'They have caught him—they have caught him! Ha! So you see you were wrong, Pierre, and the captain's right! He was in the wood, and they have caught him!'

"'So much the better, then!' cried the other. 'Forward, comrade! You know that when we heard the bugle sound we were to hasten towards the spot where it was blown!'

"'All right!—come on!'

"With these words, the two soldiers departed.

"I did not think of descending after that.

"'They have caught Mazzaroth!' I thought. 'They will quickly find out their mistake though, and renew their search.'

"It was well that I had the prudence to remain where I was, for, after this, several soldiers crossed the little open space hastily.

"They were evidently making full speed to the spot where the capture had taken place.

"After this a most remarkable silence ensued.

"I sat perfectly still, making myself as comfortable as I could.

"I was very weak and faint for want of food, for a long time had elapsed since I had partaken of any.

"It was no good thinking about it, however, for there was nothing to be had wherewith I could satisfy my hunger.

"Not long afterwards, however, I discovered that the tree which had found me such an excellent hiding-place was chesnut.

"I noticed it first by the peculiar shape of the leaves, then, afterwards, I saw several nuts hanging to the different boughs.

"I possessed myself of a great many, and ate them heartily.

"They were sweet and agreeable to taste, and although not a very nutritious meal, still it served to deaden the pangs of hunger, and infused fresh strength into my exhausted frame.

"And so the day passed on; but I met with no fresh interruption from the soldiers.

CHAPTER DCLXXXVIII.

CLAUDE DUVAL HITS UPON AN INGENIOUS PLAN FOR GETTING OUT OF FRANCE.

"I WAITED with great impatience and anxiety for night to come, and as soon as darkness began to spread itself over the earth I again commenced to descend from my place of refuge.

"I did so with tolerable confidence, for many hours had elapsed since I had seen anything of my foes.

"Whether they had made such an egregious mistake as to imagine Mazzaroth was the prisoner who had escaped I cannot tell; but from the long silence that had prevailed, I began to think that they must have marched him off to Paris.

"If so, then, I ought to have quitted the wood earlier.

"It was no good speculating upon anything of that kind, however; I believed I should be much safer, and that I stood a much better chance while under the cover of night.

"I dropped to the ground easily, and, with as much ease, fixed upon the exact spot where Mazzaroth had buried his treasure.

"I had no knife or instrument of that kind in my possession, for the officials of the prison had taken care to empty my pockets of every article they contained; but by the aid of my hands alone I managed to raise the turf and to remove the soil that was underneath it.

"Then I seized hold of the portmanteau by the handle and drew it up.

"It was small and very weighty, and this made me conclude that Mazzaroth must have exchanged the greater part of his wealth from bank-notes into gold, as the latter would be less likely to suffer injury by remaining in the ground.

"The valise was an ordinary-looking one, so that no suspicion would be raised in the breast of anyone who saw it, without, indeed, they observed its weight.

"Not without some trouble, I picked up a large number of stones and other objects, with which I filled up the space that had been occupied with the portmanteau.

"Then I covered the whole with the soil, patted it down, and finally placed on the square piece of turf.

"'There,' I said. 'And now, when Mazzaroth comes to find his gold, what a surprise will be in store for him. He may not believe in the transmutation of stones to gold



[THE ATTEMPTED MURDER.]

—but he will be forced to believe that his gold has changed into stones!'

"With this reflection, I carefully removed all the dirt from the outside of the portmanteau, and, taking it up by the handle, cautiously stepped forward.

"I was very much in doubt whether I should be able to emerge from the wood unseen.

"From what I had overheard the soldiers say, it was quite evident their leader suspected my presence somewhere in the vicinity, in which case he might have adopted the expedient of placing his men at short distances all round the borders.

"For greater safety's sake, I resolved to assume that such was the case—no harm could come of a little extra precaution, but most likely a great deal of good.

"At every few steps I stopped and listened; and although I did not on any occasion hear one alarming sound, I did not abate my caution.

"In a very little while I perceived the trees grow thinner and smaller, which told me that I was approaching the edge of the wood.

"Upon the events of the next few moments everything depended.

"I crept forward for some distance, and then halted underneath the shadow of a tree.

"From this point I took a good view all around me, as well as the darkness would permit.

"I saw nothing of my foes, however, nor did I hear a sound to indicate that they were keeping guard.

"I advanced to another tree and remained beneath that, and so on in succession, until the open country was gained.

"It seemed pretty clear that my fears were groundless.

"After going for some distance farther, and still in safety, I came to the high-road.

"I did not venture to travel along this, but followed its course, concealing myself as well as I could by the trees and fences.

"All that night I continued to walk.

"I had, as I imagined, many narrow escapes of detection—but I was lucky enough to avoid them all; and every mile I went increased my courage in a very great degree.

"One fixed purpose had settled itself in my mind—that was to get out of France as quickly as possible.

"How this was to be achieved I had really then no idea, but trusted to the current of events, hoping that in a while something would turn up to my advantage.

"I knew how rigidly all the regulations with respect to passports were enforced, and how difficult it was to pass from one place to another, or leave the country either by land or water without this necessary document, and where was I to obtain one?

"After a lengthened attempt to come to some conclusion upon this point, I was forced to give up the attempt in sheer despair.

"I came at length upon a small inn, or *auberge*, as they are called.

"'Surely,' thought I, 'after the lapse of such a little time the people in this out-of-the-way place cannot have heard anything about me, nor is there the least fear that I shall be recognised. At any rate, I'll run the risk.'

"I was moved to do this in consequence of my fatigue and exhaustion for want of proper food.

"In this place I could beyond a doubt procure both rest and refreshment.

"Whether I should be safe or not was another matter.

"I was surprised, upon a nearer approach, to see the inn open so early; but I walked boldly up to the front door, and entering, asked whether I could have a private room and a meal.

"I was answered in the affirmative; and not to dwell too much upon these details, I will merely tell you that my appearance excited no suspicion, but I ate heartily, and defrayed all expenses from the portmanteau.

"I paid so liberally that the landlord was obsequiousness itself.

"I told him I desired to rest, and was forthwith shown into a bed-room.

"Here I slept for several hours—in fact, until just about sunset.

"I was then awoke by hearing an unusual kind of commotion in front of the inn.

"Everything that occurred of this kind I considered important to myself, therefore I hastened to the window and peeped out, taking care to conceal myself as much as possible.

"I then saw that a very handsome travelling carriage had stopped in front of the inn.

"The inmates were treated in the most distinguished manner by the landlord, and ushered into the best room he had with a thousand bows and servile gesticulations.

"Looking farther, I perceived the cause of the stoppage.

"It was in order that the horses attached to the carriage might be changed.

"The travellers availed themselves of this opportunity to partake of some refreshment.

"While I was gazing upon this scene, and wondering how I could turn it to my advantage, I heard the clattering of a horse's hoofs upon the road.

"I watched to see who this new-comer could be, and presently saw a man—booted and spurred, and carrying a kind of large wallet by a belt strapped over his shoulder—come in sight.

"He stopped in front of the inn, and in a loud voice called for something to drink.

"He then took from the wallet I have mentioned a brush and some bills, which with great industry and expedition he proceeded to paste up about various parts of the premises where they would be most conspicuous.

"I watched every one of his movements with eager interest; and though I was too far off too make out a single letter, yet I felt certain that those bills referred to my escape.

"'I must make haste and get over to England,' I thought, 'or I shall be too late. What stratagem can I adopt, and how can it be done?'

"I was diverted from these questions by a reflection that crossed my mind.

"'How very odd!' I said, 'that Mazzaroth's prophecies should come so near the truth. Why, here am I, in possession of a large sum of money, as he said I should be; I have had a narrow enough escape of my life, goodness knows! I am now puzzling my brains and endeavouring to find a means by which I can reach England. I suppose when I get there, the only thing to remain to be accomplished will be my taking to the highway!'

"It was not wonderful that I should think of this, for I never forgot my uncle and namesake, and the many achievements I had heard related of him.

"At last, all in a moment, a lucky thought occurred to me.

"I believe that is how the best things are thought of—certainly it was so in my case.

"I brushed my clothes, and made myself look as decent as I could, then left my chamber and made my way to the front of the inn.

"I felt impelled by a resistless curiosity to read one of the bills. I felt I could not set about any plan until I had done so.

"There were several about, so it did not give me much trouble to select one.

"I walked to the entrance of the stables, on the gate-post of which one of the bills had been stuck.

"As I expected, it offered a reward of two thousand five hundred francs to anyone who would capture me and hand me over to the authorities.

"This was followed by a very good description of my personal appearance.

"At the foot, a further reward of one thousand francs was offered to anyone who would give such information to the officers of police as would lead to my apprehension.

"While I was engaged in reading this very interesting document, some one walked towards me.

"I turned my head to see who it was, and to my very great satisfaction perceived it was one of the servants attached to the carriage.

"He was the footman. He spoke to me in French.

"'Can you read that?' he asked.

"'I can,' was the reply.

"'Well, I wish I could,' he answered; 'but I never learned reading, more's the pity. That man told me it was something about a fellow that had escaped from prison.'

"'Yes,' I said, 'so it is, and the Government offers two thousand five hundred francs for his capture.'

"The footman drew a long breath.

"'What a heap of money!' he said.

"'Very true,' I answered; 'it would be worth having if it only had to be divided among two.'

"'What do you mean?'

"'Should you like to have half a share in it?'

"'Me?'

"'Yes, you.'

"'Half a share in two thousand five hundred francs?'

"'Exactly so.'

"'Don't ask me! The pity is it can't be done.'

"'But I believe it can,' I answered.

"'Do you?'

"'Yes; for, as I was coming along towards the inn, I saw a man whose appearance exactly corresponded with the description that is given here.'

"'Did you though?'

"'Yes I did, I can assure you. I thought he looked rather strange and frightened, and he seemed very anxious to get out of my way. I watched where he went to. He walked into that little wood yonder.'

"'Why didn't you follow him?'

"'I had no reason to do so then,' I replied; 'but as it is only a short time ago, no doubt he is there still. I should not like to grapple with him single-handed, for he seemed a powerful fellow; but if you like to assist, we will go into the wood together, make him prisoner, and share the reward between us.'

"'I have half a mind to try.'

"'Have a whole mind,' said I, 'for I am most anxious for your assistance, you look so strong and so well able to cope with him. How long is the carriage going to stay here?'

"'Probably an hour longer.

"'That will be plenty of time for us, then,' I said; we could tramp through every bit of that little coppice in the time, and if he is there we cannot fail to find him. Will you come?'

"'I will,' answered the footman; 'but I'll just speak to Jaques, the coachman, first.'

CHAPTER DCLXXXIX.

SOME CONSTERNATION IS EXCITED BY THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JOSEPH, THE DUC'S FOOTMAN.

"'Stop a moment,' said I. 'Don't you breathe a single word to him about the expedition we are going upon.'

"'Oh, trust me for that!' was the reply. 'I don't want to have the reward divided into three portions.'

"'Nor I either.'

"'I'll just tell him I shall be absent for a little while, and that I shall soon return.'

"'Oh, do that by all means.'

"The footman did so, and, very much to the surprise of the coachman, off we both started towards the wood.

"'What's that you're carrying in your hand?' said the footman, when we had gone a little way.

"'Only a travelling valise,' I answered.

"'Why didn't you leave it at the inn?'

"'Oh, I don't know. I am so much in the habit of carrying it about with me, that I did not give it a thought; it's not very heavy, for I'm not troubled with much wardrobe.'

"Shortly after this we entered the little wood.

"'Now,' said I, 'keep a sharp look-out on all sides, and I will do the same. The moment you catch sight of anything suspicious let me know. We must make a bold rush upon him, and overpower him at once; that will give us the best chance of effecting his capture.'

"'All right; you may depend upon me. I will back you up in everything; but half of two thousand five hundred francs is not to be earned every day.'

"To this I assented.

"I led the way right into the centre of the wood.

"No doubt you can guess what was my object in thus decoying the footman away.

"I was surprised that he should have fallen so easily into the trap, or have been such a numbskull to think that a couple of unarmed men like we were should be able to capture such a desperate character as I was represented to be.

"'I don't see anything of him,' he said, at length, in a somewhat disappointed tone.

"'Oh, don't despair yet,' I replied. 'I'll give you my word you shall see him before you leave the wood.'

"'How can you give me such an assurance as that?'

"'Easily enough, for I am Claude Duval myself, and I have brought you here into this wood in order to compel you to assist me to escape.'

"The look of blank astonishment and terror that came over the footman's countenance upon hearing this announcement was really quite a sight to see, and I was half inclined to laugh aloud, and I only restrained myself because I thought he might jump to the conclusion that I was only jesting.

"'Now,' I said, seizing him by the collar, 'I am a desperate man, and don't care a straw what I do in order to escape, so you had better not resist, but give in quietly. You can't help yourself.'

"'Spare my life!' he gasped out, at length—'spare my life, and do anything else with me that you like!'

"'I will spare your life,' I said, 'never fear for that; I am not the kind of man to murder anyone in cold blood. Just obey me, and you will find that you will come to little harm.'

"'What must I do?'

"'Strip off your clothes. Quick—every one of them—and give me your papers!'

"'Oh, mercy—mercy! What shall I do?'

"'Why, do as I tell you,' I responded, 'or it will be the worse for you!'

"The footman could not make out what my intentions were, but he stripped off his apparel, leaving everything in the pockets undisturbed.

"There,' I said, as I also stripped off my clothes, 'you can put those on if you like. I give you your choice.'

"'No, I would rather not,' he said; 'they will get me into trouble.'

"'Very likely,' I replied, as I hastily assumed his attire. 'And now I must make sure of your silence and non-interference.'

"With these words, I tore up my coat into two pieces, and bound his arms and legs with them.

"'Now,' I said, 'there you are, and you will come to no further harm through me. I am sorry to treat you so, but necessity drove me to it. You will lose a good place, I have no doubt; but, you see, I am not ungenerous, I will make you some return for it. You see that large stone, do you not.'

"He nodded.

"'Well, then, look here.'

"I opened my portmanteau, and, putting in my hand, drew out a great many gold pieces, which I placed upon the ground, and then rolled the stone over them.

"'There,' I said, 'that will be some recompense for the inconvenience you have suffered. It will be your own fault if you say a word about it when you are released from your present position. If you are released, you can take the first opportunity to roll the stone away and take the money. You are heartily welcome to it.'

"With these words, I strode away, leaving him to make the best he could of the adventure.

"I was now completely transformed, and I flattered myself that no one would recognise me.

"My disguise I considered, nevertheless, was not quite complete, and, as I had yet some time before me, I resolved to perfect it as much as possible.

"Presently I came to a little pool in the wood, which I had previously noticed.

"Its surface was as smooth as a sheet of glass, and possessed a great degree of reflecting power.

"Using this as a looking-glass, I proceeded to make still further changes in my dress, endeavouring to put on as every respect the appearance of the footman.

"It was lucky it was dark, for, on my return, the change might have been discovered.

"I walked to the inn when all my preparations were complete, and saw that I was only just in time.

"The people were wondering what had become of the footman. The travellers had taken their places in the carriage, the driver was seated on the box, and they were only waiting for me.

"I ran hastily forward, and with great agility sprang up on to the footboard.

"'You'll get into a row, Joseph,' said the coachman to me, as he whipped his horses and set the carriage in motion. 'The duc has been waiting quite five minutes.'

"'All right, Jaques,' I responded, imitating the voice of the real footman as well as I could—'all right.'

"He said no more, and I began to speculate as to the result of this adventure.

"I had now entered on quite a new line of life.

"I noticed that to the back of the carriage a quantity of luggage had been strapped, so, along with this I placed my portmanteau, imagining it would therefore escape notice.

"I wondered what duc it could be in the carriage, and regretted very much that I had left Joseph so precipitately as not to make such important inquiries of him.

"There was no help for this now, however, and I had nothing left to do but to make the best of my position, and rely on my wits.

"We continued to travel on at great speed during the remainder of the night.

"I felt in the various pockets, and in one of them found a folded paper.

"This I opened, and tried to read, but could not in consequence of the darkness.

"I imagined it was a passport.

"As soon as it was daylight I set myself to work upon this task, and found my conjectures verified.

"It was made out in the name of Joseph Lagardère, servant to the Duc de Ledrolles.

"This was important knowledge indeed.

"We stopped once or twice to change horses, but this was done with great rapidity, and the travellers did not alight.

"Early on the next day we reached Boulogne, from which port they intended to embark for England.

"It is wonderful how the nobility manage to have everything arranged for them, and so spare themselves trouble.

"Had they been less important individuals about to make the journey, there would have been no end of trouble with custom-house officials and the like; but the intelligence of their arrival reached there beforehand, and every pains had been taken to avoid delay.

"I wondered greatly at the rapid rate of speed that had been made use of, but soon discovered that they must have got behind time, for the vessel was waiting only to take them on board.

"A scene of indescribable confusion and bustle then ensued.

"I seized hold of my portmanteau and another huge box of luggage, and by merely shouting out the duc's name I was allowed to hasten on board.

"Great promptitude of action could now alone save me.

"The discovery of the change that had been effected would soon be made by the duc and duchess, or some of the servants, so that it was no longer possible for me to retain my disguise.

"I saw an opening in the deck of the ship, through which many people were hurrying, carrying various kinds of luggage, so I followed their example and descended a steep flight of steps.

"Not without a slight misgiving I placed my valise containing my fortune along with the luggage.

"I then crept to a dark part of the hold of the vessel and secreted myself.

"I was wondering in what way I could change my appearance.

"The livery I wore was a very plain one, and I thought by the exercise of a little ingenuity that I might be able to modify its appearance considerably.

"In one of the pockets I found a knife, and with this I cut off several ornaments from the livery, and also about four inches of the skirt of the coat.

"I then discovered that it looked quite another garment.

"The movement of the vessel now told me that she was fairly underweigh.

"I felt very uneasy, and not a little alarmed at my position. Very reasonably, I dreaded detection, but I experienced a feeling of great security, for I was on board an English ship.

"I walked up on the deck, and seated myself in an out-of-the-way corner.

"I found a great bustle going on, and was not long before I learned the cause of it.

"The greatest consternation was excited by the mysterious disappearance of Joseph, the footman, who was nowhere to be found.

"I saw the coachman surrounded by several others, declaring that he had seen Joseph come on board, and yet he could not be seen anywhere.

"'Rely upon it,' said several, 'he must by some chance or other have been left behind.'

"But the coachman persisted in his statement, and declared he could not have been mistaken.

"And now fortune favoured me in a most unexampled manner.

"It so happened that an Englishman was about to return to his native land by this vessel, and had actually booked and paid for his place. Something or other, however, had occurred to detain him, and he did not come on board; therefore, the steward found the number of passengers quite correct. Coming up to me, he said:

"'Mr. Brice, I presume?'

"'Yes,' I returned, boldly, speaking in English, 'that is my name.'

"'I thought so,' he said, with a bow and a smile, 'because you see your name happens to be the very last on my list. I have been round to all the other passengers, so it followed almost as a matter of course that your name must be Brice.'

"'Just so,' I answered, drawing a very long breath at the occurrence of this most providential accident. 'Take that,' I added, 'and get something to drink my health.'

CHAPTER DCXC.

CLAUDE DUVAL HAS SOME EXPERIENCE IN LONDON LIFE.

"I GAVE him some money as I spoke, and he left me.

"Not to linger over this part of my story, however, I will just say that by the exercise of a little address I managed to pass the inspection of the custom-house officials, and shortly afterwards found myself in London.

"I had heard a great deal of the English metropolis; and as I looked upon the astrologer's treasure as inexhaustible, I set to work to enjoy myself thoroughly.

"I took handsome furnished apartments in a fashionable quarter of the city, and engaged a valet to attend upon me.

"I then commenced to lead the life of a man of fashion, and repaired to the most frequented places, and as I seemed to possess unlimited supplies of money, I quickly found myself surrounded by a circle of butterfly friends.

"I was young, and excessively fond of all kinds of amusement.

"I plunged into every species of dissipation, and soon became quite a noted character about the West End.

"But my expenses were prodigious, and day by day my stock of money diminished, not slowly, but with alarming rapidity.

"The end of it must soon come I felt quite sure, and what to do when it was gone I really had no notion.

"Sometimes the prophecies that old Mazzaroth had made occurred to me.

"Was I really fated to follow in the steps of my uncle?

"There were many things more unlikely, and it seemed as though I should shortly have to make up my mind.

"It was not an unusual thing for young men like myself to replenish their purses in such a fashion.

"At many a convivial meeting I have heard even the sons of peers boasting of their successes on the highway.

"At times, however, we found ourselves at a loss for some new diversion—we seemed to exhaust every source of pleasure, and one who thought of anything fresh was looked upon as a benefactor.

"One night, as my stock of money was all but exhausted—when, indeed, another day's extravagance and riot would quite clear my purse—a party of about twenty of us were seated in a coffee-house that was our great resort.

"'Come!' said one, 'the night is only just beginning—what are we to do with ourselves? Who can devise a fresh pastime?'

"'I have a thought!' said one, somewhat hesitatingly.

"'Then speak out, my Lord Mouldon! It is wonderful for you to have an original idea—let us know what it is.'

"'Nothing very original,' lisped the young nobleman, 'but a very good notion nevertheless.'

"'Well, what is it?'

"'Of course you all recollect the Mohocks who played such pranks in Queen Anne's time, making the whole city ring with their exploits?'

"'Yes, yes—of course we know all about them! What capital fun they had with Dean Swift.'

"'Well, then,' said young Lord Mouldon, 'let us to-night turn Mohocks—let us scour the city round, and by to-morrow there will be such a commotion as was never known before.'

"This proposal was received with vociferous acclamation—it jumped entirely with their inclinations, and there was not one who did not feel anxious to emulate or even exceed the acts of daring and barbarity ascribed to that band of young bloods, who, in the preceding reign, made themselves the terror of all the inhabitants of the metropolis.

"'Come!' they cried—'one more glass of wine, and then we will begin our expedition!'

"I was willing enough to fall in with the scheme for a night's diversion. I was as careless and as reckless as the best of them, so, having drained our glasses, we placed our swords in readiness for immediate use, and, in a dense throng, sallied out into the silent streets.

"By common consent, Lord Mouldon was allowed to be the leader of the expedition, since he had been the first to suggest it.

"'Come on!' he said, waving his rapier in the air—'come on, Mohocks!—shout! Now then, all together!'

"We obeyed, and such a wild, discordant yell as came from our united lips had certainly never startled the streets of London since the time of the veritable Mohocks.

"'Come on!' shouted the leader—'come on. I see a man yonder—we'll begin our sport with him! Aha! we'll treat him in true Mohock fashion!'

"I should explain to you, my comrades," said Claude Duval, "that I had only heard of the Mohocks incidentally, and scarcely knew what deeds they performed. I imagined they were similar to those we had often played before—such as obliterating signboards, changing them, or taking them down and carrying them away to distant parts of the city.

"All these feats we had performed over and over again, and with great relish.

"I imagined though, that I was the only one that did not perfectly understand Lord Mouldon when he spoke about treating the stranger in Mohock fashion.

"With a wild whoop, they all rushed forward, and before the late-wayfarer could understand what was amiss, he found himself surrounded by a dense throng.

"I looked on with curiosity and interest, and, to some extent, imitated the actions of my companions.

"They drew their swords then with marvellous rapidity and stood round the man in a perfect circle, in such a way that the points of the rapiers formed a circle also, and that circle was only a trifle larger than the circumference of the man's body.

"'Now, then,' cried Lord Mouldon, with a boisterous laugh, 'whoever finds his back against the point of his rapier, prick it!'

"The points of some half-dozen rapiers instantly penetrated the man's back.

"With a yell of pain and rage, and by a natural impulse, he turned himself round to escape the points of the swords, but in doing this, he only exposed his back to others, who did not scruple to serve him in the same way.

"Bewildered and terrified, and endeavouring to protect his back from the numerous incisions that were made in it, the man spun round and round like a top, vainly entreating mercy and forbearance of his tormentors.

"It was capital fun, however, and they all enjoyed it mightily, nor did they cease until the man sank, giddy and fainting, upon the ground.

"But not content with what they had done, some called out:

"'Truss him—truss him! We can't leave him in the road like he is!'

"'Hurrah!' was the response, and then, with marvellous dexterity, the stranger's cloak was torn into long strips, with which he was bandaged in a very peculiar manner, or, I should say, trussed, for in a very singular way the steel scabbard of his sword was passed through his elbows and under one knee in such a manner that, while lying tied up in an inconceivably small space, he could be raised and carried by means of the scabbard, just as a fowl might be carried by a skewer passed through it when about to be put down to roast.

"'Now, then, where shall we put him?' asked several voices, and upon this a pause ensued, which was followed by a debate.

"I must confess I did not much relish this adventure, though I did not like to interfere. My dissent would have been nothing against their unanimity, and events would have proceeded just the same.

"I deeply commiserated the stranger, although I was powerless to assist him.

"'Let us hang him up where that signboard now swings,' was the proposal of some one.

"The words were followed by a scream of delight.

"Just opposite to where we stood was a public-house from which an arm of wood was extended in a horizontal position, and from this swung a ponderous sign.

"There was a little difficulty in reaching this object, but the most nimble of the party succeeded in doing so.

"He unhooked the signboard, and, in order not to make too much noise prematurely and so spoil the effect of their plan, it was lowered gently, and taken hold of by those who stood below.

"Then a piece of rope was produced. Where it came from I know not, but suddenly I saw one with it.

"This was passed through one of the staples in the bar of wood that supported the sign, and one end was then tied very securely round the scabbard of the sword.

"With a cry of delight, the young men drew the miserable wretch up until he could go no higher.

"Then the rope was secured, and there he hung, bawling and crying out for mercy and assistance.

"The Mohocks, as they styled themselves, responded to his supplications only by derisive cries, and, when they had amused themselves sufficiently with this, they turned off to seek some other diversion.

"At the corner of the next street, they came upon a watchman's box.

"'Coffin the Charley!' said one of them. 'Don't make a noise! I'll bet a hundred he's fast asleep inside!'

"By coffining a Charley, I found they meant rushing suddenly upon the watchman's box and overturning it, so that it should fall with violence on its face.

"They were usually heavy, cumbersome affairs, so that when the watchman was thus laid prostrate, he had very little chance of recovering himself again without assistance.

"About half a dozen dashed with full force against the back of the watchman's box, and down it went on its face with a terrific crash.

"A dismal, smothered yell came from within, and, as soon as they heard it, the Mohocks burst into a fit of loud laughter, which awakened many an echo in the deserted streets.

"'Now, then,' they cried, 'on again—on!'

"'Yes—yes!' said Lord Mouldon. 'Forward, Mohocks—forward! Yonder goes a girl. She is flying from us in alarm. Be speedy, and we shall overtake her; then we shall have rare fun indeed!'

"With another wild whoop, which was sufficient to strike terror into any breast, the Mohocks sped forward.

"I ran as eagerly and as swiftly as any of them—not that I was anxious to participate in this last exploit, but because I was resolved to prevent it.

"I was growing less and less pleased with their amusement, and, whatever might be the cost, I determined to interpose myself, and show my dislike for them.

"That they meditated some scoundrelly outrage upon the girl I could see flitting along in the darkness I made quite sure, but I resolved that, if I had stood by and seen a man ill-treated, I would not do so when a female was in the case, for I held it to be my duty to defend the fair sex.

"No one seemed to notice that I ran with such increased rapidity, and that I managed to keep on a level with Lord Moulton himself, who had hitherto led the throng, the others following a few paces in the rear.

"Screaming and shrieking for aid, the young girl flew with the speed of a fawn along the street, until suddenly, in her blind haste, her foot struck against some obstruction, and she fell heavily to the ground.

"Once—twice—thrice she essayed to rise, but each time she failed.

"After her last attempt, with a cry of despair, she sank quite down upon the ground, and at that very moment the troop of Mohocks reached her.

CHAPTER DCXCI.

CLAUDE DUVAL FINDS IT EXPEDIENT AND NECESSARY TO RUN THE RISK OF RETURNING TO FRANCE.

"Now was the time for me to interfere.

"I must either make a bold stand at once, or else allow that girl to be the victim of their barbarity.

"With a tremendous bound, I sprang forward, and alighted just in front of the girl, but with my face turned towards Lord Mouldon.

"I had my sword drawn, and held it before me in a threatening manner, in readiness either for attack or defence.

"The young nobleman looked upon my aggressive action with surprise, and so did the others.

"All stopped.

"'What's the meaning of this?' asked the leader of the Mohocks. 'Are you mad?'

"'No, my lord, I am not; and it would be more reasonable for me to ask you that question than for you to do so.'

"'Insolent dog!'

"'Mind what you say, my lord!' I cried, angrily. 'I

am no respecter of persons! You have feasted at my table many a time, and I have shaken hands with you in token of friendship, but now I place myself in opposition to you.'

"'But why—for what?'

"'That is the cause,' I answered, pointing to the girl, who was summoning up courage to rise. 'I have witnessed what you have done to-night in imitation of the Mohocks with the greatest disapprobation. Hitherto I have shrunk from interfering; now, however, as you intend to ill-use this girl, I place myself before her to protect her, and those who stand behind who have any spark of manly feeling yet remaining in their breasts, will at once place themselves on my side and defend the right.'

"They listened to my speech so far in silence.

"The fact was, they were astounded at hearing me give utterance to such sentiments.

"But, with a cry of rage, they rushed forward, saying:

"'Down with him—down with him! He is a traitor and a coward!'

"'Hold!' said Lord Mouldon, raising his hand. 'I am your leader by general consent, and you must obey me. Be still!'

"They paused irresolutely.

"'I alone will finish this matter,' he said. 'It concerns me, and me alone. I will teach you how to behave should you ever find yourselves in my position.'

"Then, turning to me, the leader of the Mohocks said:

"'You are a cowardly traitor—a fool—a dog, and not fit to be the associate of gentlemen!'

"'You shall either retract those words,' I answered, 'or pay for them with your life's blood!'

"He laughed.

"'Come on,' he said—'come on! I will soon dispose of you! Form a ring round us, my companions, and watch the fight! We will soon decide this matter!'

"Anything in the shape of a duel or personal conflict of any kind was very grateful and acceptable to the feelings of the band of dissolute young men.

"They were also pleased with any exhibition of bravery, and they considered that Lord Mouldon displaye uncommon courage.

"For my own part, I confess, I stood upon my guard, but not without serious misgiving.

"I was comparatively unused to the sword, having only recently taken lessons from a fencing-master; but I practised assiduously.

"Lord Mouldon had the reputation of being an accomplished swordsman. With him, perhaps, I should stand but a poor chance; nevertheless, I felt bold and confident, for I knew that I was on the side of right.

"The next moment our swords crossed and rang together with a clashing sound.

"Then a furious combat commenced between us.

"I will do Lord Mouldon the justice to say that he conducted the fight in a fair and honourable manner.

"It was pretty evident that we were tolerably well matched as regarded our skill in the use of our weapons, and therefore, with eager and breathless interest, the Mohocks standing round watched the progress of the conflict, and wondered who would be the victor.

"Sometimes I was forced to give ground a little, and then, when they saw their leader obtain this temporary advantage, they would clap their hands and shout in delight.

"Then I would make a stand, and also force him to retreat.

"A dead silence would then ensue, which was only broken by our hard breathing, the clashing of our swords, and the trampling of our footsteps.

"At length, when my arm was perfectly weary, I saw an opportunity for giving a thrust.

"For a brief space of time, Lord Mouldon left his breast unguarded.

"I lunged at it instantly, and with great force.

"I did not pause to reflect, I only thought that I was putting an end to the contest, and so I was, though I did not anticipate that its result would be so fatal.

"Such was the violence of my thrust that the sword passed completely through his body, and the hilt struck with a dull thud against his chest.

"I drew back my sword, and then, after swaying to and fro upon his feet, Lord Mouldon fell down in a huddled up mass upon the roadway.

"He was dead. The sword had passed completely through his heart, so that death must have been instantaneous.

"This event sobered the roysterers not a little.

"Their demeanour changed at once, and several sprang forward with anxious countenances to the assistance of his lordship.

"When they raised him, however, one glance into his countenance was sufficient to show that he was quite dead.

"Bewildered by the suddenness and strangeness of these events, I looked on like one stupified.

"Then, as in a struggle, there will always be two opposing parties. I now found that I had some who were friendly to me, or, at any rate, professed to have an interest in my welfare—perhaps it was because of the manner in which I had behaved myself during the fight.

"'There will be a desperate row about this,' said one. 'It is a most unfortunate affair indeed!'

"'I am sorry for it,' I answered.

"'No doubt you are, but the mischief is done now, and sorrow will not undo it.'

"'That is true.'

"'Take my advice,' said another. 'Sheath your sword and fly—hasten away—if possible get out of England. I give you friendly and good advice. This young nobleman is thought much of. He is an only son of aged parents, and now that he is dead the family becomes extinct. It is a most powerful one, and can accomplish much.'

"'Yes,' chimed in another, 'and depend upon it, if you are in London you will be arrested, and condemned for his murder.'

"'Gentlemen,' I said, 'you are all witnesses that he fell in a fair and honourable fight?'

"'We are—we are, but that fact you will find will go for very little. Fly—depart at once: if you linger you will lose the opportunity. Those who are now so officiously bending over his lordship are his bosom friends, and they may perhaps make an effort to detain you.'

"I shook my sword significantly, for, contrary to their advice, I had not sheathed it.

"'Brave as you are,' said the first speaker, 'what could you do against a large number? you would be overpowered, and then you might choose between being captured or slain.'

"I began to see that I had got myself into a fix, and that the sooner I got out of London and England too, the better it would be for my safety.

"'Many thanks to you, gentlemen all,' I said. 'I will bid you all farewell. I had hoped that we should pass many another jovial night together, and doubtless we should have done but for this unfortunate occurrence; believe me, no one regrets it so much as I do; but I stood here upon the side of right.'

"With these words, I turned round and hastily departed, but not a moment too soon.

"The friends of Lord Mouldon, perceiving my departure, set up a cry of rage, and commenced a pursuit after me.

"But I ran along swiftly, taking every turning I came to.

"Where I was going to, I was not familiar enough with the city to know, but I was satisfied when, after a time, I found that I had outdistanced all my pursuers.

"I paused then for breath, for I was quite exhausted.

"I wondered what had become of the girl who had caused this rupture. I left her still lying upon the stones, and from that day to this I have never seen or heard anything of her, so that I can't even guess what was her ultimate fate.

"I was just about to set forward on my wild flight, when I heard the rumbling of wheels.

"Some ponderous vehicle was approaching, and I drew aside to observe what it was.

"Soon afterwards I perceived it was a stage-coach.

"I called aloud to the coachman to stop, and he drew up with a dash, for there was one place left vacant for a traveller outside.

"'Where are you going to?' I asked of the guard.

"He stared at me in astonishment for a moment, and then replied:

"'Why, to Dover, of course.'

"'All right, then,' I said; 'I was not quite sure I

want to go to Dover. Here, take my fare in advance.'

"I pressed some money into his hand, mounted on the top of the vehicle, which was directly afterwards put in motion again, and away we rolled at as rapid a rate as four capital horses could draw us.

"Somehow or other, I felt glad enough to leave London behind, for I could not see how I was to maintain the character I had hitherto borne, but I was so carried away by the tide of events as to have but little time for reflection.

"On reaching Dover I found there was a vessel waiting at the pier to take passengers over to France.

"I found it was the only chance I had of quitting English shores speedily, and so I went on board.

"Then, and not till then, did I recollect the circumstances under which I had quitted Paris.

"In my life of wild excitement and dissipation, it is no wonder that I should have forgotten my escape from the prison.

"The officials at the police office would not, however, be likely to be so forgetful.

"When I landed, I might be at once carried off to prison once more, effectual means taken to prevent my escape, and then, what I dreaded most of all, sent off to the galleys.

"My agitation increased as the vessel reached the shores of France.

"There was no means of retreating from my position. I was obliged to look danger in the face, and abide by the current of events.

"It was no longer in my power to control or direct them in any degree.

"At length I landed.

"Then I found my terrors groundless. I was not recognised by the authorities, and was allowed to go, like the other passengers, unmolested.

"Some kind of fascination drew me to Paris. I could not resist the desire to go there.

"A considerable time had elapsed since I left it, and I began to think that I had changed so much in appearance, and I had been in the custody of the police for so short a time, that I should escape detection.

"What little stock of money I had was, however, very soon expended, and when I parted with the last coin I asked myself seriously, 'What am I to do?'

"It was a question to which I could frame no suitable reply, and so, in rather a melancholy manner, I sat one afternoon in a cabaret.

"Suddenly I was surprised by hearing a voice say:

"'Why, Claude, is that you? How you have altered, to be sure! Diable! why do you look so melancholy?'

"Hearing these words, I glanced up, and saw, seated on the opposite side of the table, a tall, well-built young man, attired in the uniform of a cuirassier.

"I looked scrutinisingly into his countenance, but failed to recognise him.

CHAPTER DCXCII.

CLAUDE DUVAL CONTINUES THE STORY OF HIS LIFE, AND RELATES HOW HE JOINED THE FRENCH ARMY, AND HOW HE WAS LEFT WOUNDED ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE.

"'I CAN see you do not remember me, Claude," said the soldier. 'Well, I don't wonder at it, it's a long time since we saw each other, and this dress alters me greatly, no doubt. But do you remember Herault?'

"I started, for this was the name of the little village where my father had died.

"'I see you remember that,' added the stranger; 'and now, if I mention my own name, perhaps you will remember that also.'

"'What is it?'

"'Leon Malines.'

"'What!' I exclaimed—'is it possible? I remember you now, though I could not call your features to mind at first.'

"I shook hands with him warmly, for Leon was my boyhood's companion and friend. We were always together, and much attached to each other.

"'Now, Claude,' he exclaimed, after our greetings were over, 'tell me what it is that makes you look so confoundedly dull?'

"'I am out of luck,' I answered. 'I have reached the end of my purse, and don't know how to fill it.'

"'Well, then,' said Leon, 'I will act the part of a true friend, for I will tell you.'

"'Indeed!' I exclaimed. 'How?'

"'Why, enter the army, become a cuirassier, like myself. Men of your build are much wanted. You will receive a round sum for bounty, and a splendid uniform will be found you. In times of peace you lead the life of a gentleman, and in war you have the opportunity of fighting for the glory of la belle France and of obtaining the rank of a general.'

"The idea of entering the army had never before occurred to me, but now that it was proposed by my friend Leon I grasped at it eagerly.

"'I have half a mind to say yes to your proposal at once,' I answered; 'but give me a little time. I will reflect.

"'All right.'

"The result of my reflection was that on the following day I joined the regiment to which my friend belonged.

While attired as a soldier, I had little fear of being discovered by the police authorities.

"I found the life was one that suited me very well. I bent all my energies to accomplish my duties, and succeeded in winning the admiration of the commanding officers, and the respect of them.

"This was a feeling, however, that wore off by degrees. I found that there were many unpleasant things connected with the life of a private soldier; but the deed was done, there was no drawing back, so I made the best I could of my situation.

"I led a jolly enough life in Paris for some months, and then, as France was at that time engaged in a war with Spain, my regiment was ordered to the scene of battle.

"I was glad enough to find that we were at last going into action. I resolved to signalise myself by some daring deed, and so obtain promotion.

"Once an officer, I should be content, and the disagreeables connected with my position removed.

"In due time the seat of war was reached.

"A strongly-fortified town had resisted every effort that had been made to capture it.

"The siege had been long and tedious, and every now and then the besiegers were harassed by the besieged making sudden and unexpected sorties.

"This was the state of affairs when I arrived.

"On the next day the signal for an attack was given, for the officer in command was anxious to bring his reinforcements into speedy use.

"I formed one in an advance storming party.

"As we advanced we were attacked by the enemy, who had taken to the field, but had gradually retreated before us until they reached the walls of their town; then, passing through them, the gates were closed, and they were in safety.

"Quite heedless of the many death-dealing missiles that were flying through the air in every direction, I pressed onwards.

"I was the first to scale the walls. I was repulsed, but again and again I renewed the attack, and at last planted my foot on one of the bastions.

"I stood there for a moment, with my sword drawn in my hand, waving it about me.

"I was confronted by many Spaniards, and then suddenly I became unconscious of everything.

"I found out afterwards that a ball had struck me in the chest, inflicting an almost fatal wound.

"I fell backwards off the wall of the bastion to the ground beneath, and there lay like one dead.

"The battle continued to rage until dark without either side gaining the advantage.

"With common consent, hostilities were suspended, and then each army was occupied in picking up the bodies of the wounded from the field of battle.

"At length I recovered my consciousness, and the first thing of which I was sensible was that I was cold—icy cold; and for a long time I lay wondering why this should be the case.

"Then my ears were assailed by surely the most dismal sound that ever yet was heard.

"It was the groaning of thousands of wounded men.

"I found I could not rise, but I was able to move my head from one side to the other.

"Then, all over the extensive plain, I perceived nothing but bodies lying in every conceivable position.

"Most were dead, but many, like myself, were only wounded.

"I was not sensible of any particular pain, nor did I know how I had been wounded, but I was so icy cold that my heart scarcely beat, and in a faint voice I cried for help, but no help came.

"There were many who had stronger lungs than myself, and whose voices quite drowned mine, so that there was little chance that I should be heard.

"If I could only have warmed myself a little I should not have cared so much; but, as it was, the numbness seized upon me to such a degree that I feared I should die.

"After awhile, however, this dread wore off, and I came to the conclusion that my wound was not so serious as I imagined.

"This conviction growing every moment stronger and stronger, warmed the blood in my veins, and in a short time I felt wonderfully better—so much so, that I was able to raise myself on one arm and look about me.

"But I saw nothing whatever to raise any hopes in my breast.

"In the distance I could see several people flitting about the field of battle—some solitary, some in pairs, and sometimes three together.

"In a dreamy kind of way, I wondered who they were, and in what they were engaged.

"I came to a conclusion that was in part correct, but not wholly, as I found afterwards.

"'They are people searching for friends and relatives among the slain and wounded,' I thought, and this conjecture was verified when I saw sometimes a wounded man lifted up and carried away.

"But the horrors of the battle-field, terrible as they were, had not yet reached their climax.

"Suddenly there arose a wild, awful, unearthly cry, such a one as I had never heard before—such a one as I trust I may never hear again.

"Were I to try for a month, I could not by words convey to you any idea of what that sound was like.

"It certainly came from no human throat.

"I started up to a half-sitting posture, and a cold perspiration broke out upon my face.

"Then the sound came again—evidently it was nearer than before.

"One character in the cry could not be mistaken.

"Pain—or, rather, intense agony—must have produced it.

"'What's that?' I asked, little dreaming that I should receive any reply to my question, and, indeed, being unconscious that I had spoken aloud.

"'Don't you know what that is?' growled a voice.

"I turned round suddenly, and saw that I had been addressed by one of the men of my own regiment, who was lying, fearfully wounded, close to me.

"'No,' I said, 'I don't know. What is it? But it fills me with fear.'

"'And well it might—well it might! Say your prayers now—that is, if you know any—and make your peace with the world!'

"'What do you mean?' I asked, and as the question issued from my lips the terrible sound came again.

"'I thought you would have guessed what the sound was.'

"'I cannot; nor do I understand the meaning of what you say.

"'Well, then, that cry comes from a horse!'

"'A horse?' I repeated, incredulously.

"'Yes, one that has been wounded in some sensitive part, the pain of which has driven the creature into a state of raging madness—I tell you it is a mad horse!'

"'A mad horse?' I repeated after him. 'Who ever heard of such a thing?—a mad horse!'

"'You will find it is true, comrade, and it will be all the worse for you too!'

"'How so?'

"'Until that creature is either shot or falls down exhausted, it will continue to gallop wildly and furiously over the battle-field, trampling the dead and the dying alike beneath its hoofs, and caring for neither.'

"'Have you ever known this before?' I asked.

"'Oh yes; I have been a soldier many years, and have seen much service. The first time, when I lay helpless on the ground, I was as much alarmed by the cry as you are—perhaps more so. Like you, I was told of the cause, and could scarce believe it; then, suddenly, there came in sight a huge black horse—I saw it, although the darkness was intense. Its eyes were gleaming like balls of fire, its mane stood erect, and its sides were flecked with foam. On it came with frenzied bounds, every now and then uttering that snorting cry. Hark!—do you hear it?'

"Again the dreadful sound echoed far and wide over the battle-field.

"Chilled with horror at the words the dying soldier had spoken, I turned my eyes, and then beheld the same object that he had seen.

"It presented just the appearance he had described, and had I been superstitious, I might have fancied it was some demon who in this guise tore wildly over the battle-field, and trampled the life out of those who yet existed.

"But it was a horse, and nothing more—a splendid war charger, probably belonging to one of the officers.

"I saw the glaring eyes, the erected mane, and the foam-covered flanks.

"On it came, making towards the spot where I lay in a perfectly straight line.

"To be beaten to death beneath the iron-bound hoofs of this creature was certainly a fate I had never anticipated.

"Now that it stared me in the face, I was paralysed with alarm.

"Any death would be preferable to such a one.

What was I to do? In what manner could I act so as to avert the frightful destiny that was impending over me?

"I knew not, for my wound was too painful to allow me to move much.

"As a last hope, I addressed myself to the soldier who had spoken.

"'Comrade,' I said—'comrade.'

"All was still.

"'He is dead,' I thought, but, urged to desperation, I cried in a louder voice:

"'Comrade, tell me—tell me, what was it you did when that mad horse came galloping to you?'

"There was a gurgling noise, for the dying man was endeavouring to speak.

"'Quick—quick,' I said, 'or it will be too late.'

"'Shot him,' he gasped—'shot him—my hand grasped a pistol, and I shot him!'

"That was all, the voice ceased, but the advice came too late.

"I sank down.

"With a rush like that of some whirlwind, the horse came tearing on.

"I closed my eyes and held my breath, and gave myself up to the fate which I saw was inevitable.

CHAPTER DCXCIII.

CLAUDE DUVAL CONTINUES TO RELATE HIS EXPERIENCE OF THE HORRORS OF A NIGHT ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE.

"My ears were filled with that dreadful cry once more.

"Apparently it was ten times louder than it had been.

"Then I was conscious that something passed over me, and immediately I opened my eyes.

"I was saved. The horse had proceeded by a series of tremendous bounds, and luckily I happened to be lying so as to come between them.

"His feet struck the ground a few paces on my left hand, and again on my right.

"Then I heard a crashing sound.

"The frantic creature, paying no heed to the obstacles in its course, had reached the edge of the dry moat or ditch that surrounded the fortress, and, missing its footing, had rolled headlong to the bottom.

"But this dry ditch was literally choked with the dead and dying belonging to both armies, and therefore great was the havoc wrought by the mad horse.

"I have said that I was lying on the very edge of this



[SIXTEEN-STRING JACK TAKES A LEAP TO AVOID HIS PURSUERS.]

moat, and turning over on one side, I looked down, but, after one glance, was glad enough to turn my eyes away.

"Wild screams and cries for help reached my ears—cries that maddened me, for I could afford no assistance.

"The horse was not killed, but only injured by the fall; the additional pain he thus suffered increased, and he made perpetual but ineffectual efforts to gain his feet, and once more start off upon his headlong course.

"Each time, however, when by dint of hard struggling, he had partly raised himself, his legs would give way, and down he would fall with a crash, upon the bodies of those unfortunate wretches who happened to lie around. A spectacle so terrible as this was one that no one could remain a mute spectator of, and therefore it was with a sense of relief that I turned my eyes away and looked across the plain in another direction, indulging in the vain hope that I might perchance see some one coming to my assistance.

"In this, however, I was disappointed, but soon afterwards I saw at no great distance one of those small parties I have already mentioned.

"It consisted of three persons, two men and one woman.

"They were approaching; I could perceive their motions easily, for they carried a lantern.

"Suddenly they paused, and while the woman held the light, I saw the two men stoop down for a moment.

"I was in doubt as to their purpose, but soon guessed it; they were robbing the slain.

"I had often heard that miscreants, such as I then beheld, prowled over the battle-field, depriving the dead of whatever articles of value they might have about them. Presently afterwards they moved still nearer to me, and again the plundering process was commenced. The man they attacked, however, was not quite dead, and, rising up, he called for help, and seized upon one of the robbers.

"'Settle him!' I heard a voice say—'down with him!'

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"A heavy blow followed, and the soldier who had escaped death at the hands of his foes was stricken down by these miscreants in human shape.

"'He ought to know better than interfere!' said the woman, in a croaking voice, and accompanying her words with a horrible laugh.

"I now began to grow seriously uneasy.

"The three wretches were close to me, and I had several articles of value in my pocket with which I would not willingly have parted.

"It was not in my nature to lie tamely down and suffer myself to be robbed without resistance; yet, if I struggled, the consequences would be the same as I had just witnessed.

"My hand began to wander about in search of some weapon with which I could protect myself, and finally I was successful in drawing a brace of pistols from my belt, though whether they were loaded or whether the primings were in proper order was more than I could tell.

"By the time I had done this, the robbers of the slain were close to me.

"'Here,' said one—'here's a prize, I'll warrant!'

"'Yes,' said the old woman, as she flashed the light of the lantern around, 'he looks a strong one, and I don't think he's quite dead. Mind you're ready with the iron bar!'

"'All right,' responded one of the men, and as he spoke he raised his arm.

"I saw then that he carried a kind of crowbar; this was the weapon with which the wounded soldier had been despatched.

"They advanced.

"'Villains!' I cried, as they stooped over me, 'begone, and leave me in peace! Touch me at your peril!'

"The old woman laughed.

"'Down with him!' she cried—'down with him!'

"The man with the iron bar scarcely needed telling.

"I had my eyes fixed upon him, and saw he was about to strike.

"Raising my arm with great suddenness, I took aim as well as I could, and pulled the trigger.

"A loud report followed, and when the smoke had cleared away I saw that only two of my assailants were left standing.

"They seemed half inclined to fly.

"'Begone!' I cried, 'or you shall share the fate of your rascally companion! Begone, I say!'

"I raised my other pistol and pulled the trigger.

"But the lock only snapped—the weapon was useless.

"With an angry cry I hurled it with full force at the old woman.

"What followed I scarcely know

"I have an idea that the one man left rushed upon me, and trampled me violently to the earth with his heavy boots.

"About this I cannot speak with certainty, but these scars on my face seem as though produced by some such means."

Claude pointed to some ugly scars as he spoke.

"After this, I should tell you that a complete blank followed.

"What happened, or what went on I have not the least idea, until, suddenly returning to consciousness, I found myself the inmate of a dark and noisome cell.

"It was a long while before I could recover my scattered thoughts.

"My first impression was that all recent events had been no more than a dream, and that I was still lying a prisoner in my dungeon waiting to be brought up for trial on the charge of robbing Mazzaroth.

"It must have been early morning when I awoke, for by degrees I found the light increasing, until at length I was able to see tolerably well about me.

"Then I discovered that the dungeon I was in by no means resembled that which I had previously occupied.

"That, as I have told you, was at a considerable altitude; this was evidently deep in the earth, and judging by the thickness of the pillars that supported the roof at the foundation of some huge building.

"Not to keep you in uncertainty and suspense, I may as well tell you in this place what happened to me while I was unconscious. I did not know it then, but the facts afterwards came to my knowledge.

"I had been picked up while in an insensible state by some of the troops defending the town. In common with many others, I had been made prisoner for a particular purpose they had in view.

"When I regained possession of my faculties, I was in a very bad way indeed.

"My wound had not been dressed, and my body was in a terribly bruised and injured state.

"Some time afterwards a little wicket in the dungeon door was opened and some food thrust in.

"I appealed for help, and asked them whether they intended to leave me to die from the effects of my wounds.

"To this no response was given, and for a long time I was left in solitude.

"The surgeon and his assistant entered and carefully bound up my wound, and attended to my other hurts.

"In this manner a long and weary time passed—how long, I can scarcely tell you, but I know it must have been for a considerable period, for I quite recovered from all my hurts.

"At length, one night, I was startled by a very singular event.

"I was lying sleeping the sleep of exhaustion upon a miserable stone bench in my cell which did duty for a bed; something, I know not what, aroused me, and I opened my eyes.

"What I then beheld was so strange that I could scarcely believe it was not a vision; therefore I closed my eyes again and opened them quickly.

"This convinced me that it was reality and not a dream.

"Standing close to the bench was the surly jailer who guarded my cell.

"In his hand he held a lantern in such a position that the principal rays fell upon and illuminated my person.

"Standing beside him was a young and beautiful girl.

"When I opened my eyes the first time, I caught a glimpse of her countenance, and this more than anything else made me fancy I was dreaming, for it was one of those sweet countenances that we rarely see except in our dreams; but the second time when I looked she had drawn her veil closely over her features, and I could only distinguish two black eyes sparkling through the gauze covering.

"'Quick!' she said, addressing the jailer, 'he awakes—quick—away!'

"She spoke in Spanish, and this, together with her excitement, told me that she was a Spaniard.

"With this language I was only imperfectly acquainted, yet I could understand quite well any simple sentence such as she had just uttered.

"Then, before I could recover from my astonishment sufficiently to do anything to prevent their departure, the strange pair left the cell, closing and securing the door.

CHAPTER DCXCIV.

CLAUDE DUVAL RELATES THE STRANGE MEANS BY WHICH HE MANAGED TO RECOVER HIS FREEDOM.

"You may easily imagine that such a circumstance as this breaking in upon the monotony of life in a dungeon was well calculated to make a most profound impression on my mind.

"My rest was effectually disturbed, and during the remainder of that night I strove in vain to sleep; I lay torturing and perplexing my brain in a vain attempt to account for so singular an occurrence.

"I waited with extreme impatience for morning to come, when, as I knew full well, the jailer would, in accordance with his usual custom, make his appearance.

"At length he came, but I derived no satisfaction from his visit.

"Mustering up what little Spanish I could recollect, I addressed him in that language, and besought him to give me some explanation of what had occurred, but he only shook his head, as I fancied, in a mysterious way, and resolutely refused to answer one word.

"At length night came again, and I felt feverish and excited.

"As on the occasion of his last visit, I again made application to my jailer.

"As before, he refused to answer, but he asked me a question instead. It was a startling one.

"'Do you want to escape?'

"I glared at him in astonishment.

"'Of course I do!' I said. 'Did you ever know a prisoner who preferred his dungeon to liberty?'

"'I have known some prefer to remain,' said the jailer, 'but that's all,' and, uttering these last words, he backed hastily out of the cell, and closed the door.

"Here was fresh food for reflection. You must not think, however, that the idea of making my escape had not occurred to me—it had done so very many times indeed; but I was so weak and exhausted in consequence of my wound, that I knew it was nothing short of madness to make the attempt.

"What on earth could the jailer mean, however, by asking such a question?

"Fatigued as I was, I resolved to keep awake during the whole of that night, so as to be aware at the earliest moment of the visit of the young and beautiful girl.

"I remained for a long time watching; but at length, completely exhausted, sank off into a slumber, nor did I awake until my jailer paid his accustomed visit in the morning.

"Whether I had had any visitation I could not tell.

"I inquired, but only received a shake of the head for a reply, and so, tormented by a thousand wild and vague surmises, the day passed by.

"About midnight, however, as nearly as I could calculate, I heard a slight noise outside the door of my dungeon. Then the fastenings were cautiously removed, evidently in such a manner as to avoid making any unnecessary noise.

"Then the door was flung open, and the same young girl entered.

"She approached me with a strange air of diffidence and timidity.

"'Stranger,' she said, in low, sweet, gentle tones, 'I have come to ask you whether you will escape?'

"'Escape?' I ejaculated.

"'Yes,' she continued; 'if you wish to do so, the way lies open before you; but you must take me along with you.'

"I stared in great surprise and astonishment.

"She was quite young, and in years a mere child, though in person she seemed a woman.

"'I wish to fly!' she said, observing my look of amazement. 'It is necessary that I should quit this gloomy place at once—it is hateful to me! Will you take me with you?'

"It was not likely that I could refuse, and yet it seemed strange to give my consent.

"You are surprised,' she added, 'no doubt, and at a loss to know why I am anxious that you should escape as well as myself. This, then, is the reason: My father is the governor of this prison, and, in spite of all my tears and entreaties, has insisted that I should become the bride of a hateful old man—one indeed, older than himself, while I am but just fourteen!'

"'And you wish to avoid such a fate?' I said.

"'I do. It is worse than death, and anything would be preferable to it! I cannot go alone—there is no one in the prison who will accompany me! That jailer is my friend, and I owe him much, but yet he cannot make up his mind to accompany me in my flight!'

"'Believe me,' I said, 'I am now and ever at your service, fair lady, and whatever you ask of me I will perform. You cannot demand too much, for what could repay such an obligation as I shall be under to you—namely, my restoration to liberty?'

"'I want a stout defender,' she said, 'for there may be many difficulties to overcome. We must fly, and to-night!'

"'To-night?' I ejaculated.

"'Yes, or it will be too late! I have waited until the last moment, hoping that my parents would relent; but to-morrow is the day fixed for the marriage ceremony, and if I am here, so surely as the sun will rise, I shall be forced into this horrible alliance!'

"'You shall not be if I can save you,' was my answer. 'You need not occupy precious time by giving me any further explanations; only say by what means you hope to effect your escape?'

"'He can tell you more than I can,' she answered, pointing to the jailer.

"'Follow me,' said that individual, 'and I will show you! Be firm, bold, and resolute, and you will be free!'

"'Do not have any fears on that account—I will be bold and brave. But you must furnish me with weapons.'

"'I will see to that,' said the young girl. 'You will have an opportunity of arming yourself before you quit the prison!'

"'Then,' said I, 'fair lady, take my hand. From this moment you are under my protection, and no harm shall come to you except over my dead body.'

"She pressed my hand tightly within her own, and, looking down into her countenance, I saw, by the light of the lantern, that her bosom rose and fell tumultuously, and that her eyes were filled with tears.

"It was hard and painful no doubt to be thus compelled to fly from those who ought to cherish and defend her, and be constrained to rely upon the kindness of a stranger.

"But there was something in her trusting confidence that would be sufficient to disarm treachery, and, so far as I was concerned, I determined that I would take no advantage of her forlorn and unprotected situation.

"'Lead on,' I said, addressing the jailer, 'I will follow!'

"'This way, then, senor,' he said—'this way!'

"The fair Spaniard still clasped my hand, and so, side by side, we followed in his footsteps.

"A long, gloomy subterraneous passage was traversed, a flight of steps ascended, a door passed through, and then we found ourselves on a level with the ground.

"Still pressing onwards, however, we came at length to a gallery, or corridor, that was fitted up as an armoury.

"Here were hundreds of weapons of every description, and I was told to select what I chose.

"I did so, arming myself with a splendid sword and a brace of richly-mounted pistols.

"Then the jailer advanced to a kind of window or loophole in the wall.

"'Outside of that,' he said, 'is a rope-ladder of a sufficient length to reach the ground. Near it, you will find a horse secured to an iron ring in the wall—mount him and ride onward. You will have some palisades to overleap, the moat to swim across, then you will be in safety.'

"Although every means had been taken to make the escape as easy as possible, it nevertheless presented numerous difficulties.

"It was not likely, however, that I should shrink back or hesitate, so I expressed my thanks to the jailer, and assured him I had fully comprehended his instructions.

Then the young girl bade the rough soldier a tender and tearful farewell, and I thought once that, rather than part, the jailer would accompany us; but in this expectation I was deceived.

"The young girl, coming to me, said:

"'Now, stranger, from this moment I place in you the utmost confidence, and I trust that you will not forget that while you are befriending me I have nevertheless rendered you a great service.'

"'I shall ever remember it,' I answered, 'and you shall have no cause to complain.'

"'Alas!' she sighed, again bursting into tears—'alas! that my parents should be so stern and harsh and force me into such a step as this; but I know they will not relent—nothing will move their hearts! But I cannot make such a sacrifice—I cannot—I cannot!'

"And probably, as at that moment she thought of the bridegroom intended for her, a shudder swept over her whole frame, and once more pressing my hand, she said:

"'Come—come, let us depart now, or it may be too late!'

CHAPTER DCXCV.

CLAUDE DUVAL'S HISTORY APPROACHES ITS COMPLETION.

"To this proposal I was glad enough to consent.

"The night was already far advanced, and I was anxious that no more time should be spent in these leave-takings and explanations.

"Had I been strong, the escape would have been accom-

plished much more easily than it was; however, we managed to descend the rope-ladder in safety, and as soon as our feet touched the ground it was drawn up by the jailer above, so that there should be no trace left behind of the route by which we had gone.

"As he had told me, I found a horse a few paces off, who was chafing impatiently, and tugging at the rein by which he was secured, as though anxious to be off.

"He was full of fire and spirit, and certainly the most magnificent creature I had ever beheld.

"His size was immense, and in his limbs could be traced indications of great strength.

"That he would carry his double burden easily I did not doubt.

"With all convenient speed we mounted, then, turning his head towards the palisades, I pressed my heels against his sides to urge him forward.

"That was quite enough; had he felt a spur he could not have given a more sudden bound forward.

"I kept his head well up, and on coming to the palisades, he cleared them with perfect ease; but in falling into the water of the moat, he made a loud splash, which, to me, sounded alarming in the extreme.

"Whether any notice would be taken of it from the battlements of the prison I could not tell, nor indeed had I any opportunity to speculate upon this point.

"With perfect ease, the horse swam across the moat, and ascended the opposite bank.

"A large, level piece of ground was now before us.

"I paused a second, and inquired whether my fair companion was safe and unhurt.

"She answered in the affirmative; then, giving the horse the rein, he again dashed forward.

"Just at that moment, however, I heard a bugle blown with great clearness and distinctness; then a drum was beat, and a gun fired.

"The shot passed close by us—so close that my fair companion uttered a scream.

"The horse, too, seemed aware of it, for he uttered a snorting cry, and galloped onwards with redoubled speed.

"I should have mentioned to you earlier that not long after my capture, the French abandoned the siege of the fortified town.

"The prison in which I was confined was also used as a fortress, and it was so constructed as to have command over a large piece of open country.

"From the summit of this building we could be seen easily enough, and our course traced for miles for, to my vexation, the moon was shining in the heavens with a brightness of which you could form no idea in England.

"I was well aware that this was the time to make the utmost exertions, and therefore I urged the horse to put forth his swiftest rate of speed.

"The gloomy fortress soon became indistinct in the distance, and I was congratulating myself upon the success which had attended my escape, when I perceived the drawbridge lowered, and a troop of armed men ride forth.

"Very prompt measures had been taken upon the discovery of my escape, and beyond doubt a very hot pursuit would be made after us.

"I wondered very much, and have often wondered since, how the jailer got on, and how he contrived to explain his share in the transaction.

"Whether he escaped scot-free, or whether he paid for what he had done with his life, I have never found out.

"When my fair companion perceived these armed men in the rear she clung to me closely, and showed every symptom of extreme terror.

"I tried my best to re-assure her, and the confident way in which I spoke produced its full effect.

"My great object was to get out of the country as quickly as I could, and cross the frontiers.

"When once on French ground I felt sure the Spaniards would not dare to pursue me.

"The distance, however, was great, and the chances were very much against me.

"During the whole of that night the chase continued.

"My steed behaved himself most gallantly; but, by dint of whip and spur, my pursuers managed to keep about the same distance in the rear.

"They had pressed their horses very much more than I had, and therefore I quite expected to find that their strength would give out soonest.

"In this expectation I was not disappointed, for during the ensuing day, on looking back from time to time, I saw that their numbers greatly decreased.

"One by one the soldiers fell off, as their tired and exhausted horses refused to proceed farther.

"The next night was as moonlight as the one that had preceded it.

"I was growing very anxious as to the result of this long chase, for during the whole of the time I had barely had an opportunity of pulling my horse up to allow him to recover his wind.

"Few animals, I knew, could maintain such a rate of speed for such a length of time.

"About midnight I looked back, and then saw that only one of my pursuers remained.

"For this I felt thankful.

"My horse, worn out by his tremendous exertions, flagged every now and then, and his speed abated, as was proved by the one pursuer in the rear gaining rapidly upon us.

"For one man I did not care, so by degrees I drew rein, resolved to bring matters to a crisis.

"I did not dread an encounter in the least, and I should probably gain much by it

"The rider behind me had by some means or other procured a fresh steed, which was one reason why he had gained upon me so rapidly.

"I determined not only to vanquish him but to seize his horse.

"At length I came to a full stop, and wheeled my horse round, so that I faced my adversary.

"He came on with undiminished speed, and it was clear that he was as eager for the encounter as myself.

"'Rascal!' he cried in Spanish, halting a few paces from me, 'deliver up the girl you have carried off, or your life shall be the forfeit!'

"While he spoke I noticed that my companion clung to me convulsively.

"'What is it?' I asked in a whisper—'what is it?'

"'Save me—save me! do not desert me now!'

"'I will not; but wherefore this fresh alarm?'

"'That man who has pursued us so far is the one to whom my parents promised me in marriage.'

"This announcement increased my animosity, and I determined at all risks to have my full revenge upon him.

"I felt a spirit of rivalry and jealousy within me. Although I had known the fair Spaniard so short a time, yet the romantic manner in which our meeting had been brought about, and the trusting confidence she had placed in me, all won my heart, and I felt that I loved her.

"All this of course took place in a moment, and, without scarcely allowing a pause between his speech and my own reply, I exclaimed:

"'I refuse to accede to your demand. We are man to man, and both are armed. Meet me face to face, and let the question be decided by our swords.'

"These words seemed to put him in a tremendous rage, and he levelled a great many opprobrious epithets at me.

"Nevertheless, he could not refuse such a challenge, so, with the alacrity of passion, he dismounted from his steed and drew his sword.

"I did the same, trying my best to calm my companion, and induce her to believe that all would be well—that victory would be on my side.

"'Should I fall,' I said, in a whisper, 'and should he come towards you for the purpose of seizing you, urge your horse forward, and trust to his fleetness to make your escape.'

"I disengaged myself from her detaining grasp, and, drawing my sword, advanced to meet my adversary.

"Our weapons rang together with a clashing sound.

"I could see that my opponent was in a state of the utmost excitement, and I at first stood calmly on the defensive, so as to ward off any of his fierce and random blows, and give him an opportunity of tiring himself.

"In the agitated state of his mind, he did not divine my purpose.

"Encouraged by the manner in which I met his attack, and by the way in which I retreated step by step before

his furious onslaught, he redoubled the vigour of his blows, hoping thereby speedily to put an end to the contest.

CHAPTER DCXCVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL RELATES HOW HE RETURNED TO PARIS, AND HOW HE WAS COMPELLED TO BEAT A PRECIPITATE RETREAT.

"I WAITED until his energy showed signs of being almost expended, and then, putting forth all my strength, I made an attack upon him.

"All this time the young girl remained seated on the horse ready to swoon with terror, and watching all my movements with affright.

"My mode of fighting astonished the old Spaniard, and such was the rapidity with which I dealt my blows that I quite bewildered him and beat down his guard.

"But he was very skilful in the use of his weapon, and recovered before I could inflict a wound upon him.

"The next time, however, I entangled my blade in his, and whirled his sword out of his grasp.

"He was now completely at my mercy, and I lunged forward with all my might.

"But he dropped down suddenly on one knee, and bowed his head, so that the blow intended to be dealt at his heart merely ripped up the clothing on his shoulder.

"At the same time, while gnashing his teeth with rage at his defeat, the Spaniard drew a long-barrelled pistol from his belt, and, raising it with extreme rapidity, aimed hastily and fired.

"There was a loud report; I heard it, and so I knew that I was safe and unhurt.

"But mingled with the sound was a loud shriek.

"It came from the lips of the young girl, and whether she had been wounded or only terrified I could not tell, nor could I then pause to ascertain.

"Exasperated beyond measure at this exhibition of treachery on my antagonist's part, I raised my sword in the air and dealt him one heavy crashing blow as he still knelt on one knee.

"I mentioned about what sort of a sword it was—not a rapier, you understand, but a keen Damascus sabre.

"It clove his skull in two in an instant, and with a gasping cry he fell forwards on the sod dead.

"Sheathing my sword, I hastened towards my fair companion, and was alarmed when I saw how pale she had become.

"'Speak—speak!' I cried, hastily; 'are you injured?'

"She tried to answer me, but in vain.

"I noticed then that she was pressing one hand upon her breast, and that the blood was slowly trickling between her fingers.

"When I saw this I wished my antagonist lived again in order that I might wreak revenge upon him for what he had done.

"How to act now I scarcely knew.

"I was aroused from a kind of stupor by hearing the girl say in a voice little above a whisper:

"'Fly—fly—be quick—oh, be quick! Perhaps you may reach some inn or place where we can stay, and where my wound can be attended to!'

"I seized upon this as the only practical thing to do, and as my only hope.

"According to my intention, however, I exchanged horses.

"Speed now was more than ever necessary, and the animal ridden by the Spaniard was quite fresh. Once more, then, was my headlong flight continued, nor did I pause until at length I halted at the door of a Posada.

"By this time my alarm for my fair companion's safety was much increased.

"For more than two hours she had remained perfectly insensible, not speaking a word nor moving a muscle.

"She was, too, growing cold—icy cold.

"To some extent I succeeded in stanching the blood that flowed from her wound by pressing a handkerchief tightly over the orifice.

"Like all other inns in Spain, this Posada was indeed a wretched place, and destitute of every kind of accommodation.

"I at once engaged the best rooms, ordered a surgeon to be sent for, and, in a word, did all that I could to bring about the recovery of this young girl, whom I found I had learned to love with a deep and intense affection.

"The man who in that remote region styled himself a surgeon was almost destitute of chirurgical skill—he was able to bind the wound up, but nothing more.

"When he had done this he called me aside.

"'Young man,' he said 'do not buoy yourself up with any false hopes; the wound is mortal—she cannot possibly recover.'

"My grief at this announcement was great indeed, and I made extravagant offers to him provided he would only restore her to life; but he again assured me it was impossible, that, in fact, she had not an hour to live.

"Saddened and broken-hearted, I placed myself by the side of the bed on which she had been laid.

"On my approach she opened her eyes and greeted me with a mournful smile.

"She must have gathered something from the mournful expression of my countenance, for she said:

"'My wound is mortal—I am sure of it! I am dying; I can feel that I am dying! Alas! it is hard to quit this world so soon; yet, should you ever see my parents, tell them I would rather perish thus—yes, ten thousand times rather—than be the bride of that old man!'

"I could not deceive her with respect to her condition, and informed her that the surgeon had declared there was no hope for her recovery.

"She was neither alarmed nor shocked by this intelligence, because she had fully anticipated it.

"She earnestly requested that a priest might be sent for, in order to witness her dissolution.

"Then she placed in my hand a small packet, but one of great weight.

"'Take this!' she said. 'I bequeath it to you, and I hope you will find it of service. I am sorry I am not able to reward you better for all that you have done in my behalf, yet take it—take it, and remember me!'

"'I want no reward,' I said; 'I would gladly part with everything I had if I could but insure your recovery.'

"'But that, alas! is impossible,' she said, 'so think of it no more. Accept my parting gift!'

"It was a long, sad interview, and exhausted her much.

"I feared she would expire before the priest arrived.

"At length he came, however, and she only survived long enough to allow the last rites of religion to be administered.

"At her death I was inconsolable, and wished over and over again that I had received the bullet.

"On the following day, however, I opened the packet she handed to me.

"On removing the outer covering I found a richly-inlaid casket. It opened with a spring, the secret of which I easily discovered. The lid flew open, and I found that the little box was literally crammed with gold, and jewels, and valuables of every description.

"The treasure was great, and I should think in actual value quite equal to that which I had obtained from Mazzaroth.

"With a portion of this money I defrayed the expenses incurred by our stay at the Posada, and saw her interred in the nearest graveyard.

"Then, melancholy and alone, I mounted my horse and rode away, neither knowing nor caring where I was going.

"One thing, however, I speedily determined upon, and that was to get out of Spain as quickly as I could—the country was hateful to me.

"After a number of adventures, all of them to a certain degree interesting, and yet not particularly so, I crossed the frontiers and entered France.

"After a little deliberation I resolved to go to Paris.

"It was very strange, but I never once thought of the singular manner in which I had quitted the French army; in fact, I may say that my mind was so occupied with the remembrance of the Spanish girl, whose name even I did not know, that for awhile I quite forgot that I had ever been a soldier.

"From this circumstance alone I incurred no little danger in returning to Paris, where I might be apprehended as a deserter.

"As for the charge against me on account of Mazzaroth, that did not trouble me in the least, for I imagined such a long time had elapsed that the circumstance had been for-

gotten and I had so greatly altered in appearance there was no danger of being recognised.

"But I was mistaken, for, upon entering Paris, almost the first person I saw was Mazzaroth, the astrologer.

"He appeared to be carrying on his old trade, if I might judge from his appearance.

"I recognised him at the first glance, and so did he recognise me.

"It was not wonderful that I should live in his brains.

"He immediately set up a loud cry for the police, and no sooner did I hear it than, without pausing to reflect, I turned my horse's head round, clapped spurs to his sides and galloped away.

"Where was I to go? was my next question.

"Certainly somewhere out of France, which was much too hot to hold me.

"Belgium I thought would be the easiest to reach, and therefore I proceeded thither.

"I was hotly pursued by the police officers; but, owing to the excellence of my steed, was able to elude them; and without tiring you by dwelling so much upon details, I will just say that I was successful in reaching Belgium, though I can assure you the journey made very great inroads upon my wealth."

CHAPTER DCXCVII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SETS OUT TO PAY A VISIT TO TOM DAVIS.

"For some time I did nothing but travel about from place to place, and though I met with many adventures, yet none of them is sufficiently interesting to deserve being repeated now.

"But I grew tired of this dull life, and longed for the excitement that is to be found only in the cities of London and Paris.

"The latter was quite out of the question, and, indeed, so might the former be said to be, but I resolved to run the risk of paying it a visit.

"I did so, and had the satisfaction of finding that my affair with the dissolute young nobleman had died away.

"Once again, then, I entered upon that extravagant career that I have already described to you.

"As before, I reached the end of my purse, and when I had only about a couple of guineas left I began to wonder what I should do.

"Again the idea of turning highwayman obtruded itself upon me.

"I thought of my uncle, and I thought of the prophecy made by Mazzaroth.

"Although I knew it was such a rank imposture, I suffered myself to be influenced by it, fancying that many a true word might be spoken in jest.

"At anyrate, one dark night I resolved to try my fortunes on the King's highway.

"It should be, I resolved, no common exploit, but something worthy of the name I bore.

"Without having any fixed purpose in my mind, I rode out of London, taking my way along the Oxford Road.

"Several people passed me, but I did not molest them; I meant to fly at higher game.

"Then, presently, the Oxford mail-coach came rolling by.

"I suffered it to pass me, and then I thought to stop that coach singled-handed would be a feat indeed.

"I did not think of the danger there was of making the attempt; but as soon as ever the idea occurred to me I galloped with tremendous speed after the retreating vehicle.

"I soon came up with it, and in a loud voice, commanded the driver to pull up, and then a strange accident happened, but one that turned out in my favour.

"One of the leaders stumbled over some obstruction on the roadway, and after a vain attempt to recover his feet, fell heavily on to the ground.

"The other leader fell also.

"The animals plunged and fought desperately to regain their feet.

"Of course the coach came to a standstill.

"Before the driver knew what I was about, I cut the traces, then, by a vigorous effort, the two leading horses regained their feet, and started off at full speed.

"Although I cut the traces, you must understand I did not cut the reins, to which the coachman continued to hold tightly.

"He was not aware that the traces had been severed, so the moment the horses started, they dragged him head foremost off his seat.

"The coach was now completely at my mercy, if I may except the guard who was, as usual, armed with a blunderbuss; but you know very well, comrades, what sort of a weapon it is.

"He levelled it at me, and pulled the trigger, but it only flashed in the pan.

"I snatched the cumbrous weapon from him, and flung it over the hedge.

"I then levied my contributions upon the passengers in turn, showing favour to none except the ladies.

"When I had finished, I made a deep bow, as I said:

"'Ladies and gentlemen, Claude Duval has the pleasure of wishing you a good-night and a speedy journey!'

"I saw the name produced no slight astonishment, and the passengers looked from one to the other in surprise.

"My uncle had not been forgotten, and by many his very features were remembered, and as there is a strong family likeness between us, they fancied the dead had come to life.

"After that I had many and many an adventure on the highway, until at length I met, for the first time, with my old friend and companion, Sixteen-String Jack.

"As I have now occupied your attention for a long time, and as night is already at hand, I will bring my narrative to a conclusion at this point. I shall leave it for Sixteen-String Jack to relate under what circumstances our meeting took place, and then he will continue our joint adventures up to the time of our meeting with Tom King. You will then have the story quite complete, but it will take much too long to tell now."

With these words, Claude Duval ceased.

There was not one of his auditors, with the single exception of Sixteen-String Jack, who did not long earnestly for the continuation.

But nearly an entire day had been occupied by the relation, and there were many things pressing upon them that required their immediate attention.

First of all, a rude meal was prepared, and, after they had despatched it, a consultation was held as to their future proceedings.

"You all agree with me in thinking," said Tom King, "that our old friend Tom Davis has had plenty of time to mature all his plans."

"Yes, certainly!"

"But when I paid him my last visit," continued Tom, "I quite forgot one very important thing!"

"What was that?"

"I have only just recollected it. I never made any appointment with him as to our next meeting. Of course, if he is at home where he has been living lately, we shall find him easily enough. But if he has removed to the inn, how then?"

"Why, it will be very awkward," said Dick Turpin. "I never thought of it. For my own part, however, I should think that if Tom Davis is not there himself he will have left some one who will give you the information we need."

"It's very certain," said Claude Duval, "that he has had time to complete his arrangements with respect to the inn, and equally certain that one of us ought to go and have an interview with him. Now, then, who is that one to be?"

All agreed with the first part of Claude's speech, but as to the latter, they were in doubt, and all were silent.

Maud placed her hand upon Turpin's arm.

"Grant me this favour," she whispered, imploringly—"do not refuse it!"

"I can guess what you are about to ask."

"No doubt. It is that you will let one of your companions go upon this errand, and not yourself. I wish you to remain here with me—I shall feel safer then."

Then Tom King spoke aloud, saying:

"I can see we are all anxious to undertake this duty. We can't all go, that's quite clear."

"And you ought not to think of it," said Claude Duval, addressing him, "for you went last time."

"I know that; but the best way, and the easiest, of

settling the affair is to draw lots; chance alone can decide the point then, and there can be no dispute."

This proposition was at once assented to.

In spite of Maud's request, Turpin determined to join in the lottery with his companions.

Four little pieces of wood were selected—three of one length, and one much shorter.

They were drawn one at a time, and whoever possessed the shortest would set out.

The lot fell upon Sixteen-String Jack, and when he discovered it he uttered a cry of satisfaction.

"This is just what I hoped for," he said. "I am delighted. I have been so long in this old forest, doing nothing but shooting birds, that my blood has grown quite cold and stagnant. I will be off at once."

"There is no time to lose," said Dick Turpin. "If you set out now, you will have the whole of the night before you."

"Very true," replied Jack; "and neither I nor anyone else could say what interruptions and hindrances I may meet with on the way."

"Be careful of your own safety."

"Never fear for that. I will return here as soon as I can."

Sixteen-String Jack hastily prepared his weapons, mounted his horse, and rode out of the forest.

"I wonder, now," he said, when he gained the open country, "whether those dragoons are still patrolling the high-roads. I fancy not. They must have had their patience tired out long before this."

It was a very important point to settle.

If the dragoons were no longer patrolling the road, Jack's course would be easy enough.

On the other hand, if they had not ceased that unpleasant duty, he would have to make use of the greatest circumspection.

The only means by which he could find this out was to ride on until he heard something of them.

The position of the house in which Tom Davis lived was tolerably well known to him, and after a while he paused before a hedge that was of rather unusual height.

On the other side of this hedge was a broad high-road, and this was the one which, if followed, would take him right past Tom Davis's door.

Sixteen-String Jack paused here, and hesitated whether he should run the risk of continuing his course along it.

While deliberating this point in his mind, he was startled from his reflections by the occurrence of a familiar sound.

This was no other than the grating of carriage-wheels on the roadway.

He listened, and soon ascertained that some four-wheeled vehicle was approaching at a rapid rate, and coming from the direction of London.

The temptation to stop this vehicle and levy a contribution upon its occupants came very strongly over Sixteen-String Jack.

But reflection assured him that such a course would be injudicious in the extreme.

Should the road still be patrolled, the intelligence would be quickly communicated to the dragoons.

The troops were all in connection with each other, and then such a pursuit would be commenced after him as he felt certain he could not escape.

While he was thus thinking, and standing secure from observation behind the tall hedgerow, the vehicle came on at the same rapid rate.

CHAPTER DCXCVIII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK IS THE SPECTATOR OF A SINGULAR SCENE, AND PREVENTS THE COMMISSION OF A DIABOLICAL CRIME.

"No," said Sixteen-String Jack at length, shaking his head, "I won't stop the carriage—at least, that is, I think I won't. I will see what it is as it goes by."

So saying, he dismounted from his steed, and standing close to the hedge, drew aside the twigs, and peeped through. He found that he commanded a view of a very lonely and very dark part of the highway.

Not only, as we have stated, was the hedgerow unusually high, but it was planted on the top of an embankment, so that the level of the roadway was several feet below that of the meadow in which Jack stood.

This was enough to give the place a desolate appearance, but in addition, large trees of great height and luxuriant foliage grew on both sides of the way, casting a deep black shadow.

We said that Jack commanded a view of this bit of roadway, but this is scarcely correct.

It was not until he had strained his eyes for several moments that he was able to make out different objects with anything like distinctness.

By the time he was able to do this, the approaching vehicle was very close at hand indeed.

Jack was yet undecided as to what he should do.

His inclination prompted him to run the risk of stopping the carriage, but prudence restrained him from doing so.

Then his curiosity was excited by the fact that as the vehicle approached this dark and desolate bit of roadway, its speed was much diminished.

To his further astonishment, the horses were drawn up with a dash almost in front of the spot where he was standing.

A dim halo of light now illuminated the roadway, and Jack saw it proceeded from two large lamps.

They were fixed on either side of a large old-fashioned travelling carriage, such as in those days was used when families of distinction were travelling from one distant place to another.

On the coachman's seat there was plenty of room for another to ride beside himself, and at the back was a large clumsy seat, called a rumble, in which the other servants sat while the family was travelling.

This rumble, however, on the present occasion was unoccupied.

Two horses were harnessed to the vehicle, and beautiful creatures they were.

They had been driven hard, however, and now that they had stopped, clouds of steam began to rise from their panting sides.

Looking still closer, Jack perceived by the aid of the lamps we have mentioned that the coachman's box was occupied by two persons, one a man and the other a woman.

Both, from their attire, were evidently servants, and the man wore a coachman's wig and a large livery cloak.

All this that has necessarily taken us some time to describe, Sixteen-String Jack saw at a glance, and he was content to bestow only a glance upon them, for the two persons we have described were talking to each other.

As they were so very close at hand, and moreover, the place was so very silent, Sixteen-String Jack was able to hear every syllable that fell from their lips.

The first voice was the female one.

"Why, Robert," she cried—"why have you stopped all at once in this dark and lonely place?"

"Hold your row!" said the coachman, gruffly—"hold your row, I say, and don't be bothering me with questions!"

Something in the gruff tones alarmed his fellow-servant, and she said:

"Drive on—drive on at once! I will shriek and call out if you stay here!"

"Oh, will you?" said the coachman, in even a gruffer voice than before; "we'll see about that. Now squall if you can, and much good may it do you!"

The light was dim and uncertain, and for the life of him, Sixteen-String Jack could not make out what the coachman was about.

He was standing up in the seat, and held something in his hand which Jack fancied was the whip.

There was something very suspicious in his having stopped the carriage in this deserted spot.

Evidently, he was alone with the girl, for had any persons been inside the vehicle he would not have ventured to bring it to so abrupt a standstill.

A half-smothered shriek came from the girl's lips, and then she struggled desperately.

The coachman's hands seemed busy about her neck.

"Help—help!" she gasped. "Murder—murder!"

Then the voice ceased.

While these words were being pronounced, Sixteen-String Jack made out what the coachman was about.

He had taken hold of his long whip and tied the lash into a circular knot.

This he had slipped over the girl's head before she was aware of it, and was tugging with all his might at the two ends, using it after the fashion that a Turk uses the bowstring.

A more effective mode of strangling anyone could not be devised.

"This is fortunate for the girl!" said Jack, as he dashed through the hedge.

He no longer hesitated about what he should do.

It was impossible he could remain there a spectator while a cruel and barbarous murder was perpetrated.

The crashing noise he made by forcing his way through the twigs reached the ears of the coachman, and he paused in his murderous work.

"Hold!" said Sixteen-String Jack—"hold, or you are a dead man!"

He sprang on to the step of the carriage as he spoke, with a pistol in one hand.

The girl was half-lying half-sitting on the seat.

All murderers are cowards, and the coachman was no exception to the rule.

When he found he was discovered, such an abject terror took possession of him that he was unable to move hand or foot.

Trembling and shaking like an aspen-leaf, he sat in his accustomed seat.

With great speed, Jack released the thong of the whip, and found that he had only interfered just in time.

The hard, strong, leather thong was literally embedded in the flesh, and if the pressure had continued only a moment or two longer, death must inevitably have been the result.

But he found, when the knot was slackened, that the girl began to breathe, at first with difficulty, but afterwards with greater ease.

She had never lost her consciousness, and now made vigorous efforts to speak.

"Save me—save me," she cried "from that man! He tried to murder me!"

"I know," said Jack; "but I was just in time! Don't be afraid—he shall not harm you again!"

This assurance did not satisfy the girl.

"Let me get down," she said—"let me feel that I am far away from him! I could not bear to be near him again!"

Sixteen-String Jack made no opposition to her descending from the vehicle.

The coachman crouched down lower and lower in his seat, being exceedingly anxious to escape observation if he could.

"Thanks—thanks, sir," she said, addressing Jack, "you have saved my life; but I must fly now—fly with all possible speed, or he will overtake me, and murder me when you are gone!"

"But his motive for the crime—what is it?"

"I can hardly tell you, sir, except that I know he has been dishonest."

"And does anyone else possess that knowledge?"

"No; when I discovered what he had done he entreated me never to speak, and I have not; but he has always persecuted me with his hateful love, but I have never listened to it."

"And so to-night he tried to murder you?"

"He did. He had repeated his offers over and over again while riding along."

"And where are you going back to?"

"My master and mistress to tell them all that has happened. I must and will get out of his reach."

"Have you far to go?"

"Not many miles, sir; but I shall be on foot, and he will have the horses."

"Never mind about that. I can't go with you to protect you, but I will take care that your would-be murderer does not follow."

The girl pressed Jack's hand in thankfulness, and then, quivering with fright, ran nastily away, disappearing almost immediately in the darkness.

She could not bear the thought of being so near to the man who had attempted her life.

"Now, you rascal," said Jack, turning to the coachman, "I will square accounts with you!"

"Mercy—mercy!"

"Oh yes, plenty of mercy. I would put a bullet through your rascally carcass at once only that would be doing you too great a kindness. No—no, you shall be reserved for the hangman's rope—that's the death you deserve to die!"

CHAPTER DCXCIX.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK FAILS TO FIND TOM DAVIS, AND MAKES UP HIS MIND TO PAY A VISIT TO OLD MATTHEW INSTEAD.

Upon hearing Sixteen-String Jack speak these threatening words, the coachman sank completely down, and tried to get out of sight behind the dash-board of the carriage.

"Remain where you are," cried Jack, in a loud voice—"move at your peril! If you attempt it, you are a dead man—for, rather than you should escape, I would cheat the hangman!"

No sooner had he uttered the words than Jack turned round and dashed through the hedge, in order to obtain possession of his horse.

The gap through which he had made his way, though large enough to admit his body, yet was much too small to allow his horse to pass through it.

The hedge was too high to overleap, so, after springing upon the creature's back, he had no other resource than to ride for some little distance and then take the leap at some more convenient place.

He did this.

But in the meanwhile, the coachman, having witnessed the departure of his assailant, recovered his courage and his seat at the same time.

He grasped the reins and lashed the horses furiously with the whip; turning them round, however, so that their heads were in the direction of London.

He did this in order to avoid Sixteen-String Jack, who, hearing the vehicle rolling away at such a rapid rate, clapped spurs to his horse's sides, and speedily overtook it.

"Pull up," he shouted, keeping himself exactly abreast of the coachman—"pull up, or you are a dead man!"

There was something in the highwayman's tones that made the coachman quite aware that he would be as good as his word if disobeyed, and therefore he tightened the reins and reduced the speed of the horses to a gentle trot.

"Now then," thought Jack to himself, as an idea entered his mind, "I will find out for certain whether the dragoons are still patrolling the road."

"Look you," he said, addressing himself to the coachman, "I will compel you to go to London with me. You shall answer for your crime—I am resolved upon that point. Resist if you dare!"

The coachman made a whining appeal to be let off, but Jack entirely disregarded it.

In this manner the greater part of the journey to Tom Davis's was accomplished without having seen or heard anything of the dragoons, so that Sixteen-String Jack rightly enough concluded that the authorities had withdrawn them in consequence of the non-success attending the movement.

But in a short time the sound of horses' feet upon the road before him reached his ears.

A large body of horsemen were approaching at a rapid rate, and, by the heaviness with which the horses' hoofs came to the ground, the highwayman concluded they must be police officers.

This made him rather undecided as to what he should do.

If he gave the man into their custody, he would run great risk of being recognised; and even if he was fortunate enough to avoid them, the man, on being brought up before the magistrate, would be let off for want of evidence.

Upon one point, however, Jack congratulated himself, for his purpose was achieved so far as getting this man out of the way of the girl was concerned.

She was certainly by this time safe from all pursuit that he might undertake after her.

"Faster—faster!" he said to the coachman—"drive faster! We shall be all night getting to London at this rate!"



[OLD MATTHEW AND THE POLICE OFFICERS IN THE CELLARS OF THE WHITE HORSE INN.]

Much surprised at this order, the coachman whipped his horses, and again the carriage rolled along the road at a furious rate.

Then, watching his opportunity, Sixteen-String Jack stopped his horse somewhat abruptly.

The coachman was scarcely aware of it, or, if so, believed that the stoppage was caused by an accident, in which case his best plan was to drive on with all his might.

Before Sixteen-String Jack had time to turn his horse's head round, the carriage was almost out of sight.

But he was more convinced than ever that the troop of horsemen he heard approaching consisted of police officers.

In order to avoid a meeting, he determined to once more take to the fields, and accordingly jumped his horse over a hedge into a meadow.

Over the smooth, soft turf his horse made wonderful speed, and presently, reaching an elevated spot, Jack again drew rein.

Looking back, and shading his eyes with his hand as he did so, he could just make out in the distance the dusky and indistinct figures of the police officers sweeping along the road.

"I wonder what they are after?" he muttered. "Perhaps on the look-out for some of us. Well, luckily, I have escaped them, and every moment that now elapses will serve to put a greater distance between us."

This was quite true, but Jack little thought how near he was to the truth in part of his conjecture.

The police officers he had seen were indeed in search of the highwaymen.

It did not occur to Jack that they were making their way by the most direct route to Epping Forest.

And yet such was the case.

He watched them however, until he could see them no longer

Then, again setting his steed in motion, made his way towards the house where Tom Davis dwelt.

Without the occurrence of a single accident, he arrived there.

He rode boldly up to the front door, and, dismounting at the gate of the little garden we have mentioned, walked up to the cottage door.

All was darkness, however, and he knocked several times, but without meeting with any response.

Could it be possible that Tom Davis had gone away, forgetting that the highwaymen were not acquainted with the position of the inn?

It seemed hardly likely, and yet the more he looked at the exterior of the house the more Sixteen-String Jack felt assured that it was uninhabited.

'He must be gone," he said. "This is most vexatious and extraordinary. What's to be done?"

Sixteen-String Jack stood for some moments in an attitude of deep reflection.

The only way in which he could account for Tom's departure was by supposing that his residence had by some means or other become known to or suspected by the police.

Still, if any events had arisen to necessitate a hasty departure, it seemed probable that Tom would leave behind him some message or sign by which he could be followed.

In the hope of discovering something of this kind, Sixteen-String Jack searched about for a long time.

But without result.

A closer inspection of the house showed him that it was quite deserted.

To have aroused any of the neighbours, or to have put questions to them, would have been injudicious in the extreme.

The situation of the inn was to be preserved a profound secret, and that was what Sixteen-String Jack wanted to know, and no more.

'This is all Tom King's fault," he muttered. "When he was here last he ought to have arranged about the future meeting. I can't imagine how it was that such a thing was overlooked. It is extraordinary—inexplicable! I must think of it a little while."

And, as he spoke, the highwayman paced up and down in front of the house.

"It won't be wise to wait here," he said, at length. "I must not be connected with this house in any way, or suspicion may be directed to us. What on earth shall I do?"

Sixteen-String Jack was strongly inclined to turn back at once to Epping Forest and acquaint his comrades with the aspect of affairs.

Would that he had done so.

Better by far would it have been for him and all his companions.

Much trouble, and danger, and sorrow would have been spared by such a course.

But it was not to be.

Little dreaming of the urgent necessity there was for his presence at the cave, Sixteen-String Jack at length arrived at a very dangerous conclusion.

"I will ride over to Drury Lane," he said, "and see old Matthew. There is a risk in it, I know, but then it must be run, for he of course will be able to tell me just what I want to know. A long time has elapsed since any of us were there, and surely the officers must by this time have relaxed their vigilance. Yes, my mind is made up—I'll go to old Matthew. I long to look upon his jovial countenance once more. Perhaps, too, I may obtain important information. At any rate, I will go—though I will be cautious."

So saying, Sixteen-String Jack passed out of the garden and remounted his steed.

After casting one look upon the dwelling that had been inhabited by Tom Davis, he turned his horse's head in the direction of London, and set forward at a rapid rate.

There was a certain degree of confidence in his breast, for, as he had seen nothing of the dragoons since he started, he came to the conclusion that they were no longer employed in patrolling the roads.

CHAPTER DCC.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK FINDS A GOOD DEAL OF DIFFICULTY IN DECIDING UPON THE MANNER IN WHICH HE SHOULD GAIN ADMITTANCE TO THE WHITE HORSE INN.

WHETHER Sixteen-String Jack was right or wrong in this conclusion subsequent events alone can prove.

Keeping a careful look-out on both sides of him, so as to be prepared for any danger, he took his way in almost a straight line for his destination.

The closer he got to the metropolis, however, the more careful did he become.

On the way he met and overtook several pedestrians and vehicles, and at length he gained Bloomsbury Fields.

At this lonely spot he reined-in his steed and sat for several moments in deep thought.

He was deliberating the question in his mind whether he should proceed to old Matthew's on horseback or on foot.

The distance was little more than half a mile.

But then, if he walked, what was he to do in the meanwhile with his horse?

There was at no great distance, going towards St. Giles's, a public-house of rather bad repute.

Jack had never paid a visit to it, though he had often heard the place spoken of, and he fancied he should be able to leave his steed there in perfect security

Being unable to think of anything better, he finally determined to run the risk.

The public-house was only about a hundred yards from the spot where he had paused, so he hastened towards it.

He found it was a small, low, straggling building, of quite a forbidding appearance.

At the side were the usual folding gates leading to the stables, for in those days when horses were used for travelling purposes so much more than they are now it was quite a rarity to find an inn that was not provided with stable accommodation for many horses.

As soon as the ostler appeared, Jack took a five-shilling piece out of his pocket and pressed it into his hand.

"There," he said—"there is a crown for you; drink my health with it! I want you to take care of my horse for a couple of hours or so; I am going a short distance off, if you will be at hand when I call."

"Oh yes, sir, never fear for that!" was the ostler's reply, as he consigned the coin to his pocket with an air of great satisfaction—"I will be here, you may depend upon it!"

Upon receipt of this assurance, Sixteen-String Jack surrendered his steed to the ostler's care, and, after giving particular injunctions as to how he should treat it, and promising him an excellent reward for his services, he wrapped his cloak closely round him and walked in the direction of Drury Lane.

He pulled his hat low down over his brow, and turned up the collar of his coat, so that very little of his face was visible.

"Surely," he thought, "I shall be safe among so many people! Why should I be singled out and noticed? If I can once enter old Matthew's house unperceived I shall not care!"

Assuming an air of carlessness, Sixteen-String Jack walked rapidly through the dark, deserted streets.

Nevertheless, his eyes were continually on the watch for every unusual circumstance.

He saw nothing of a more alarming character, however than a few watchmen, who were comfortably ensconced in their boxes, and snoring away as if for a wager.

But as he drew nearer to old Matthew's house he began to reflect as to what would be the best means of entering it.

Some police officers might be lurking about the spot, and if he was once seen he considered his capture would be certain.

There was the little secret door in the passage called White Horse Yard; but then, as he knew full well, the police officers had had their suspicions much excited by that mysterious thoroughfare.

A particularly close watch might be kept at both ends of it.

"No," he said, after much deliberation, "I won't

venture into the passage—it is too much like a trap. I should find it awkward if the police officers should fill it up at both ends."

Jack shook his head again.

"I don't like the idea of going in at the front door either," he said. "I might be seen doing that, or, what's more likely, some police officers might be at the bar. What on earth shall I do?"

Sixteen-String Jack paused in perplexity.

He was more than usually careful on that night, not only for his own sake, but for his companions'.

He knew they were depending upon him, and if he failed to bring to them the necessary intelligence, very disastrous consequences might result to all of them.

To stand motionless in the streets, however, was only to court danger in another form.

He looked around him.

But he could see nothing to suggest any particular plan of operations, and his own invention was at fault.

Moreover, his attention was distracted by the movements of a man.

He observed him at no great distance come staggering along Drury Lane, as if much under the influence of liquor.

Although his course was devious and erratic in the extreme, yet he evidently made his way towards the spot where Sixteen-String Jack was standing.

As the man came closer, the highwayman could hear that he was singing, or endeavouring to sing some bacchanalian ditty, which was every now and then interrupted by a loud hiccup.

Jack looked at this man, as well he might, with an air of suspicion.

To assume inebriation was an easy enough task, and this man, who might be a police officer in disguise, might have had the cunning to adopt this means of approaching Sixteen-String Jack unsuspected.

What the words were he was attempting to sing would have puzzled anyone to have found out.

At last it seemed as though the man could no longer trust to his own feet, they carried him about in such an uncertain way, therefore he seized hold of the shutters and doors with his hands, in order to assist his progress.

"I don't like his looks at all!" Jack thought. "I'll watch his motions."

Swiftly, then, the highwayman sped across the narrow street.

On the opposite side was the arched entrance to a court, and in the deep shadow of this he knew he could stand concealed.

The intoxicated man apparently took no notice of Sixteen-String Jack's movements, but continued to struggle on by the means we have mentioned, until at length he paused at the door of a house that adjoined the White Horse Inn.

It was no longer possible for Sixteen-String Jack to see him so plainly as he had done before, but his curiosity as to what he intended to do very much increased.

He fancied by his movements that the man was fumbling in his pocket for a key, and this supposition was soon after verified.

There was a rattling, shaking noise, as the intoxicated man endeavoured to fit the key into the keyhole.

After many fruitless attempts, he succeeded.

The door opened, and he disappeared from Jack's view.

Then the highwayman ventured to quit his place of concealment, and again crossed the road.

"What can be the meaning of it?" he asked himself. "Is there anything suspicious in it? Is there anything that bodes evil to me?"

With the view of settling this point if he possibly could, Sixteen-String Jack went to the door where the man had entered.

To his surprise he saw that the key was still sticking in the lock.

Here was fresh food for thought.

What had been his object for such a proceeding?

"I have been alarming myself needlessly," Sixteen-String Jack at length concluded; "he is evidently so drunk that he hardly knows what he is about. He has found his way home and entered, but has forgotten to shut the door after him. But what is it all to me? I only wish it would suggest some means by which I could get into old Matthew's parlour. Ah! of course!—a good plan! I ought to have thought of it before—a very good plan! Exactly—that will do first-rate!"

Uttering these disjointed expressions, Sixteen-String Jack glided into the house silently, removed the key from the door, and with equal caution locked it on the inner side.

CHAPTER DCCI.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK CREATES A COMMOTION IN THE LODGING-HOUSE, BUT GAINS THE ROOF OF THE WHITE HORSE.

He now found himself standing in profound darkness, and merely as a matter of instinct he paused before venturing to take another step.

"I wonder," he thought, "what has become of my intoxicated friend? I must mind I do not run over him."

Jack listened, and then heard the same voice still chanting the same burden of a song.

It was followed by a lumbering, crashing sound.

"That will awake all the inmates of the house at once, I'll wager!" was Jack's thought.

It was pretty clear, however, that the staircase was close at hand, and that the drunken man in ascending had lost his footing and fell.

Jack came to the conclusion that if this was a regular inmate of the house, and that the other inhabitants were accustomed to his coming home so late at night and making so much clatter, what little extra noise he himself would make would count for nothing.

Groping his way forward, then, as well as he could, he, after taking about a dozen steps found himself at the bottom of the staircase.

He began to ascend, making scarcely a sound.

He mounted quickly, but when he gained the first landing, paused.

His guide, for such he could call him, was groping about. Then a door was suddenly opened, and a voice exclaimed:

"What the devil's that?"

"Itsh not the devil at all," said the drunken lodger, for such he was, "it's me."

"Mr. Brown?"

"Yes, I think I've heard that name somewhere before."

"I know it's you, you drunken, idle vagabond!" said the voice that issued from the half open door, "but I give you notice, mind that—I give you notice, you quit my house this day week!"

"Night week," corrected the lodger, with a hiccup.

"Yes, this night week!" was the angry reiteration. "I won't be disturbed, and have my lodgers disturbed by such a one as you! Do you think my respectable first and second floors are to be annoyed by an attic like you?"

Mr. Brown made no response.

"Do you hear?" cried the landlord of the house. "I give you notice—a week's notice—to quit!"

"Well—well, don't put yourself out about it. What does the song say?"

"Oh! d—n the song! Go up to bed!"

With these words, the landlord slammed the door in a great passion, and Mr. Brown contrived to grope and stumble upstairs.

"The attic," thought Jack—"that's the place I want to reach, but it's rather awkward for him to be the occupant of it, and yet no—not so; I can manage to deal with him, whereas I might open a door incautiously, not knowing who was in the chamber beyond, and cause an immediate alarm!"

After this, Jack followed closer than ever in the steps of Mr. Brown, though he was not unmindful of the risk he ran of being hurled to the bottom should the worthy above him slip.

"I will go first," thought Jack. "I will pass him."

Noiselessly as he could, he crept up the stairs at about double the speed he had been going before.

By this time his eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness, and he could see before him the black, shadowy figure of Mr. Brown.

To pass him was not a very difficult matter, for, in order to facilitate his ascent, the lodger clung very tightly to the balustrades.

Jack pressed himself as close against the wall as he

could, and without meeting with any accident at length arrived at the top of the tall house.

Now if Jack had only possessed the knowledge which attic was occupied by Mr. Brown, his future proceedings would have been easy enough.

But that knowledge he did not possess, and so, having gained the landing, he was obliged to wait for the lodger to make his appearance.

His patience was put to rather a severe test; but at length Mr. Brown arrived.

"I wonder which is my door?" he muttered. "How dark it is! That must be my door—I'm sure it must!"

So saying, the drunken man staggered across the landing and raised a latch.

The action was accompanied by a scream.

"Who is that?" said a female voice. "Thieves!—murder!"

"Oh! it's nothing, my dear," hiccuped Mr. Brown—"nothing at all! I made a mistake! This is the wrong door! Good night!"

The person addressed appeared to recognise Mr. Brown's voice, for no more was said and the door was closed.

Only one other door opened from the landing, and while this little conversation was going on, Sixteen-String Jack availed himself of the opportunity to open it and slip inside.

He fancied he should have time enough to open the window and scramble out on the roof before Mr. Brown entered.

In this, however, he was disappointed.

Before he could step on to the rude table under the window, the door opened.

Jack crouched down, so that his dark figure should not be seen against the light window.

"It's dark to-night, and no mistake," muttered Mr. Brown. "I must get a candle."

"No, you must not," thought Jack—"that is, if I can prevent you."

Ever fertile in expedients, the highwayman immediately thought of a means by which he could bring about the discomfiture of the lodger.

When he crouched down he found he was close to a bed.

Rising up gently, he took hold of all the clothes and drew them off gently, holding them by the upper edge, in both hands.

Mr. Brown was groping about, doubtless with the intention of finding the means of obtaining a light.

Jack got behind him, and approached him on tiptoe, unperceived.

He held up the bedclothes as high as he could, and then flung them right over the lodger's head.

"Oh, murder!" cried Mr. Brown, in a muffled voice. "What's that?"

He was greatly startled by finding something clinging closely round his head and shoulders, and could not make out what in the world it was.

He struggled and fought most desperately to get free from the bedclothes, and Jack, to complete his discomfiture, held out his foot in such a way that Mr. Brown tumbled over it, and fell to the floor with a crash.

He then rolled over and over, striving in vain to disentangle himself from the objects with which he was covered, and all the while saying something in a muffled voice.

"Good gracious!" said some one outside. "Mr. Brown, what's the matter?"

The voice was that of the girl who had been startled by Mr. Brown opening the wrong door.

Her only reply was some muffled sounds, which were really quite alarming and terrifying.

"There is no time to be lost," said Jack. "I will be off, and I fancy there will be some little difficulty in arriving at a correct explanation of all these occurrences."

So saying, he mounted lightly on to the table, opened the window, and passed out.

Like most attic windows, it opened outwardly like a door, and as soon as he gained the tiles Jack closed it after him.

He could not fasten it; but it happened to fit very tightly into its frame, so that it remained close shut and apparently fast.

In order to avoid being seen, Sixteen-String Jack now, as rapidly as he could, crawled along the roof until he came to a ridge of brickwork, which divided the lodging-house from the White Horse Inn.

Over this he climbed, and when he found that the tiles of old Matthew's house were beneath him, a feeling of great security and satisfaction came over him.

"All is well now," he said—"quite well, and the only thing I have to do is to make my way quietly downstairs. How surprised old Matthew will be, to be sure!"

CHAPTER DCCII.

AFTER MUCH TROUBLE SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SUCCEEDS IN ATTRACTING THE ATTENTION OF OLD MATTHEW.

About this there could be not the shadow of a doubt, for certainly nothing could be further from old Matthew's thoughts than to expect to see Sixteen-String Jack in his house.

For more reasons than one the highwayman was anxious to gain admittance, yet how he was to manage it he scarcely knew.

He crawled along cautiously until he came to a trap-door in the roof.

This he tried to raise.

But tried in vain.

It was firmly secured on the inner side.

Old Matthew was not the individual to leave open such a means of entering his house.

He would have been entirely at the mercy of the police officers, who would have been continually popping in upon him at unawares.

Something like this crossed Jack's mind, and he desisted from any further attempts upon the trap-door.

"No," he said, "it will be quite in vain for me to tug away at the door—it would require thrice my strength even if I had suitable instrument."

Just at this moment Sixteen-String Jack remembered something that had been told him by Dick Turpin.

It was the adventure that was described in an early chapter of this history, and as soon as he remembered it quite a change took place in Jack's manner.

He no longer doubted being able to effect an entrance.

Scrambling to one part of the roof, he came to the square well-like place already described, which was in reality the small yard at the back of the inn.

Down the side of the building, as the reader will remember, a number of iron bars had been fixed in a horizontal position into the brickwork so as to form a rude semblance of a ladder.

Down this it was a very easy matter to descend.

The only difficulty was in slipping over the parapet.

This Sixteen-String Jack contrived to do.

The pieces of iron were firm and well adapted to afford support to both hands and feet.

In a few moments he had reached the little yard.

He drew a breath of relief when he found himself once more standing on firm earth, and then glanced round him to decide upon the means by which he should enter the house, for as yet he was only on the exterior of it.

But he congratulated himself exceedingly upon the address he had displayed in having gained the premises unperceived.

He felt sure that not one of the police officers could have the remotest suspicion of his presence there.

So far then, all was well.

But yet it behoved him to be cautious in his future movements.

It would be a thousand pities to allow any incaution or indiscretion to mar that which had been so well begun.

There was only one window that looked into this little yard—that is, he only saw one on the ground-floor, and towards this Jack crept stealthily.

He endeavoured to peep through and ascertain what was beyond.

But the glass was so thickly begrimed with dirt and dust that he found it impossible.

Then he tried to force the window open.

But in vain.

It was quite secure.

Old Matthew—especially of late—had been most particular about his fastenings.

There was a little secret door communicating with this yard, and also one leading to some stables, but they were so cleverly concealed, that Jack was unable to decide exactly where they were.

As a last resource, he took a coin from his pocket and rapped sharply with it against one of the panes.

Then he waited in silence.

No notice was taken of the summons, and therefore he repeated it, but with no better result.

Jack was growing desperate.

It was then that he recollected Dick had told him about a little bell that could be rung by means of a handle on the doorpost in White Horse Yard.

A wire must communicate with the handle and the bell, and if he could only manage to find this the familiar signal would certainly reach the landlord's ear.

Some pains had been taken to conceal this wire.

But at length, by perseverance, Jack found it.

He pulled it, and though no sound of the tinkling of a bell reached his ears, yet he waited with great confidence for the result.

His patience was not put to a severe trial, for scarcely a moment elapsed before a door opened, and old Matthew appeared.

In his hand he carried a lantern.

The rays from this fell immediately upon the form of Sixteen-String Jack, and old Matthew directed the light so that it fell upon his visitor's countenance.

Then he staggered back several paces in astonishment.

"Don't be alarmed, Matthew!" said Jack.

"Is it really you?"

"I can assure you it's no other."

"I am astonished!"

"No doubt you are."

"But come in—come in; it's dangerous to stay here! Who can tell what ears are listening even now? Come in—come in!"

Jack followed the landlord through the concealed door, which was immediately closed.

Then old Matthew, rubbing his head with an air of great perplexity, inquired:

"But how on earth did you manage to make your way into the yard? I fancied no one could do it without my knowledge."

"Well, you see I have," said Sixteen-String Jack, with a laugh, for now that old Matthew was with him he felt quite secure. "I have heard a great deal about your cleverness in unravelling any mystery or difficulty; now set your brains to work and try if you can find out how I have managed to get here."

"I am afraid——"

"Of what?"

"That you have been seen."

"No—no!"

"You are sure you have not?"

"Quite sure!"

"If you have it's all over with you—I tell you that I can't save you."

"Well, I am content to run the risk," said Jack. "Show me into that little parlour of yours; I want to have a good deal of talk with you; it's a long time since we met."

"It is, indeed," said old Matthew, as he led the way along a dark passage. "And the captain and all the rest of them, are they well?"

"Quite well, and out of all danger. I left them perfectly content."

"I am glad to hear it. But what on earth brought you here?"

"I came to see Tom Davis to know the position of the inn he has taken; but when I got to his house I found no one there, so I thought the best plan would be to come to you at once."

Old Matthew shook his head.

"Ah, Jack, you have no idea what I have gone through since I last saw you!"

"In what way?"

"Oh! it's not that I mind it much, or that it's so very serious, but I allude to the officers."

"The old complaint, I suppose?"

"Yes, just the old style of thing. I have been rather amused than otherwise, for when none of you are here I don't care how much they poke and pry about. I let them search until they are tired, and then laugh at them for their pains."

"And what effect does this defeat after defeat have upon them?"

"No effect at all that I can see, they are as troublesome as ever—nay, scarcely a couple of hours pass but what I am visited by one of those gentry in some shape or other—either a disguised police officer or else a spy."

"It must be very uncomfortable for you, Matthew."

"Very; but yet, as I told you, I don't much mind it, and it furnishes me with a little amusement. I only hope and trust that while you stay here I shall be free from a visit."

"So do I."

This little conversation took place while old Matthew and the highwayman were proceeding along the passage, and just at this moment they emerged into the regular yard belonging to the inn, for the one of which we have been speaking was a kind of supplementary or secret one.

"Now, then," said old Matthew, "to reconnoitre. Just keep quiet, will you, and I will take a peep."

While he spoke, he stepped across the yard, and, leaving the lantern in Jack's hands, he made his way to the little bar window that must be so well known to the reader.

He looked attentively through the panes.

"I fancy it's all right," he said, rejoining the highwayman. "I don't see anyone about, except the girl I leave to mind the bar, and who I know can be fully trusted."

"And how shall we gain that snug parlour of yours, Matthew?"

"Oh, by the old means!"

"But the officers discovered the secret door, did they not?"

"Yes, they did; but I have made a few alterations, and restored the place somewhat to its original appearance. I make no secret about the door now, and use it as an ordinary means of communicating with this yard. You will find," added the landlord, with a peculiar chuckle, "that I have made some other alterations and improvements."

CHAPTER DCCIII.

THE CLOCK SHOWS THE HOUR OF HALF-PAST SIX, AND BREAKS UP THE CONFERENCE BETWEEN SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND OLD MATTHEW.

Old Matthew led Jack into the private parlour, taking the precaution, however, to enter first himself and ascertain that the coast was clear.

Finding that all was right, he beckoned to Jack to come forth.

The highwayman obeyed, and closed the door behind him.

He then observed that where the secret door had been, and which had been demolished by Mr. Wriggles, an ordinary oak door had been fixed, so that there was no sort of secret about it.

Then the door communicating with the bar which formerly had the upper half fitted with glass panes had been removed, and an ordinary door substituted.

He pointed out this change to Sixteen-String Jack, saying:

"You see, I did that after that rascally spy peeped in and interrupted my conversation with the captain. They'd have sharp eyes now to see through that bit of wood."

"Very true," said Jack; "but it strikes me there's one disadvantage connected with it."

"And what is that?"

"Why, formerly, you were able to command a view of the bar, and could tell when danger was approaching."

"So I could," replied the landlord; "but I have not been unmindful of that. The girl who attends to the customers at the bar counter is a distant relation of mine, and, as I said before, can be fully trusted."

Jack nodded.

"Now, do you see that clock up there?"

"I do."

Old Matthew pointed to a small dial fixed against the wall at a considerable height from the floor—in fact, close to the ceiling.

"Now," he said, "I look at that clock, and I can tell by it whether there is danger or not."

"Then it's a capital one," said Jack, "and I should like to have a watch of the same description to carry about with me."

"I daresay you would," said the landlord. "But the clock is only a sham. The works inside are of a peculiar

nature, and devised by myself. Now, you see, the hands show the time to be six o'clock."

"Yes," said Jack, "they are straight up and down exactly; but that is not the right time."

"Now, there is a little piece of mechanism that connects the clock with a handle in the bar, which is under the control of my niece, and she perfectly understands how to work the signals."

"You have a rare invention, Matthew, and no mistake."

"Well, I can't help thinking so myself," said old Matthew, in a satisfied tone, and stroking his chin as he spoke. "But as you seem interested, I will, if you like, explain the signals."

"I am deeply interested."

"Very well, then. When the long hand falls to the quarter past six, that shows that there is some one standing at the bar. Not very important, you may think; but, then, the police-officers and men in their employ are very fond of dropping in for a drain, and, whenever they do, I am made aware of it. There—look! there's one just come in. I know it as well as if I was standing there to see him!"

While old Matthew spoke, the minute hand described a quarter of a circle, and showed the time to be a quarter past six.

"Now, if he goes," continued the landlord, "that hand will go back to its original position. If there's anything suspicious about him, it will drop to the half past; if there is immediate danger, it will rise to a quarter to seven."

Sixteen-String Jack, as the reader may suppose, was deeply interested in this arrangement, and complimented old Matthew again upon the ingenuity he had displayed.

"You see!" he exclaimed, "I always have warning, my calculation being that, if any of you were in here, I could conceal you before the officers could enter."

"It's all right now, I perceive," said Jack, whose eyes remained fixed upon the dial.

"Yes, the man has drunk up his glass and departed."

The clock again showed the hour of six.

"Well now," said Jack, "before we proceed to business, just try if you can solve the mystery of my appearance."

"I will try," said Matthew, "and while doing so I won't be idle. Aha! what a deal of trouble and expense Mr. Wriggles has put me to. He thought he had made a wonderful discovery when, with that spiky hammer of his, he found out this cupboard that I had papered over. Now, you see, I have fitted in an ordinary door, and make use of it. I will tell you what I keep here—everything that may be wanted in the shape of eatables and drinkables, so that they can be had without the trouble of going into the bar to fetch them."

"You're a capital schemer, Matthew—I must say it, again and again."

For several minutes the landlord was silent.

He was occupying himself in placing upon the table a very substantial and tempting repast, with other good things to wash it down.

"Now," he said, "I trust we shall have a few minutes' peace."

"I don't know," said Jack; "there goes the finger again."

"Only to the quarter past," said Matthew, coolly. "It's all right—plenty of time. Take no notice until it falls to the half hour, and then I will soon place you in safety."

Whether old Matthew had had his supper or not is more than we can tell, but certain it is he sat down and did full justice to the meal.

Conversation was now somewhat restricted, for Jack had lived long enough in a state of semi-barbarism in Epping Forest to appreciate the comforts of civilisation.

"I can only think of one way," exclaimed old Matthew, suddenly. "You must have got in one of the other houses, climbed over the roofs, and got down by the iron bars into the yard."

"You have hit it," said Jack, slapping the table; "you are cleverer than I took you to be."

He then related in full the whole of his proceedings.

"Ah! I feel more satisfied and content!" said Matthew, leaning back in his chair with the air of one who has had a good meal. I should scarcely think your presence here can be known to anyone, though that there is a grand commotion next door you may safely calculate."

"Yes, I have left no trace behind me," said Jack. "I am sure of it, so perhaps they will put it all down as a drunken freak of Mr. Brown's."

"Very likely. And now, before you go any further, I must insist upon hearing a full account of what the captain and the rest of you have been doing lately."

Sixteen-String Jack knew that the best thing he could do was to comply with this request; moreover, old Matthew had a perfect right to make it.

Therefore, while his narrative was very brief, yet it did not lack completeness.

In fact, it was a summary of all those events of which the reader is already acquainted.

"Well," said old Matthew, when he had concluded, "I am glad to hear things have gone on so well. As for myself, I have little further to tell you than you already know. I have made the improvements I have told you of, and have gone to the expense of putting down a hearth-rug in front of the fire. Perhaps I shall have occasion to tell you the meaning of it."

This was rather mysterious.

Old Matthew evidently meant something by the remark, but before Sixteen-String Jack could ask any questions on the subject, he went on:

"Mr. Wriggles has not given up the hope of getting me into trouble. I must say, that if any of you happened to be captured here it would be almost as bad for me as for you, so I shall take care to prevent it—that's why I am always scheming these little contrivances. Old Wriggles has sworn to have his revenge upon me, and I have sworn to disappoint him if I can."

"And quite right too," said Jack. "I hope you may do it. But now, for fear the opportunity should be lost, describe to me the position of the inn, and tell me why Tom Davis left his house without giving us the information."

"I can promise the first, but not the second."

"Well, then, whereabouts is the inn situated?"

"In a capital place, I assure you. Of course you know——"

Old Matthew stopped suddenly in what he was about to say, and gave utterance to a low whistle.

Sixteen-String Jack glanced up at the clock, and then started to his feet.

"Danger!" he said.

"The dial shows the hour of half-past six."

"Yes," said old Matthew, "I shall be obliged to take the hearth-rug up after all."

CHAPTER DCCIV.

EXPLAINS WHAT OLD MATTHEW MEANT BY SAYING HE SHOULD HAVE TO TAKE UP THE HEARTH-RUG.

WHAT old Matthew could mean by this singular expression Sixteen-String Jack could not think.

But he was all alive to the fact that he was in peril.

It might be, in spite of his precautions, he had been tracked to where he now was.

But while watching the clock, and expecting every second to see the hand rise to a quarter to seven, he nevertheless felt a calm and easy confidence in the power of old Matthew to assist him.

The landlord hastened across the room and quickly slipped a couple of bolts into their sockets.

"Get the lantern," he said to Jack, "and light it. Be quick—everything depends upon speed."

Jack obeyed, and while he was doing so, old Matthew rolled up the hearth-rug.

Then taking a kind of key from his pocket, he inserted it in a crevice in the flooring.

A circular piece was then raised large enough to allow his body to pass easily through.

"Now, Jack," he said—"quick, follow me!"

While speaking, old Matthew rapidly lowered himself through the aperture until he hung the full length of his arms.

Then he let go, for his feet touched the floor of the cellar.

Jack handed down the lantern and followed with all speed.

"Are you going to hide me here?" he asked.

"Yes."

"In the cellar?"

"Yes."

Jack was silent.

"You don't seem to like the idea at present," said old Matthew, "I can tell it by your way. But wait a little. Follow me."

"I don't like being underground," said Jack—"and that's the truth. If you are found out, there is such a poor chance of getting off."

"Don't be afraid," said Matthew—"don't be afraid. You will not be found out."

With this assurance Jack was obliged to rest content.

The cellars underneath the White Horse Inn were of a very extensive description.

They were rather puzzling and confusing, too, to a one unacquainted with them.

There was nothing but a perpetual series of vaults, lined and piled up with barrels of every size and description.

Old Matthew led the way to a kind of sill or raised platform of brickwork, upon which stood a row of very large casks.

In each of these, near the bottom, a tap was fixed, showing that they were in regular use.

In those days, it must be remembered, continual journeys had to be made down in the cellar, for there was no contrivance by which various liquors could be drawn up by a machine into the bar.

"Now, Jack," said old Matthew, "pray make haste. Don't ask me any questions or make any objections. Leave it all to me."

He placed the lantern on the floor as he spoke, and then, with an agility no one would have given him credit for possessing, he stepped upon the sill, for there was space enough between the casks to allow him to place his feet.

Then, raising his arm, he, to Jack's surprise, lifted off the head of a cask.

"Now then," he said, "up with you, and get into the cask. In doing so, mind you do not overturn it."

"But is there no ale in it?"

"No—no, never mind; get in, I tell you. Be quick, or all will be lost! Leave the rest to me."

Thus adjured, Jack obeyed.

It is true he had great confidence in old Matthew, but this was putting his confidence to a very severe test.

Nevertheless he scrambled up, and with some difficulty got into the cask.

He then found that the bottom was dry, and that there was almost room for him to stand upright.

"Now," said Matthew "here's the head of the cask—it fits in in a peculiar manner, and can be removed easily by anyone who is in the secret, but by no one else. There now. I must leave you! Keep your courage up! Let the danger be ever so great, and the search ever so strict, you are safe! Mind that!"

As he spoke, old Matthew fitted the head into the cask, and Jack was left in darkness, and in anything but a comfortable position.

We have no time now, however, to describe his feelings and sensations upon being in such a hiding-place.

We must leave them to the imagination of the reader.

The agility old Matthew displayed was really wonderful considering his age and obesity.

He ran through the cellars to the spot where the opening was above him, and, throwing the lantern up first, climbed up afterwards himself.

Then, with all speed, he replaced the trap-door, and put the hearth-rug straight and tidy.

He extinguished the lamp, placed it in the cupboard, and then, hearing a faint click, he looked up and saw the clock pointed to the quarter to seven.

"Just in time!" he said, with a sigh of relief. "I don't care now not a straw. I must unbolt the door, though, then there will be no suspicion!"

The bolts were well oiled, and they were capable of being drawn back with as much ease as noiselessness.

Then, although rather out of breath by his exertions, old Matthew plumped down in a chair and commenced smoking a pipe most vigorously.

Then the door was suddenly opened, and turning his head he caught sight of his niece.

She was pushed aside, however, by a police officer who strode into the parlour.

He was followed by five of his companions.

They all glanced keenly and suspiciously around them.

Old Matthew noticed with extreme satisfaction the look of vexation and disappointment that afterwards settled upon their features.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said, with an affectation of good humour. "I hope I see you quite well, and all that sort of thing."

"Oh, d—n your palaver!" was the chief officer's polite rejoinder.

"Well, Mr. Lickfold," said Matthew, pretending to be very respectful, "perhaps you'd have no objections to say what's your errand here to-night?"

It was no other than Mr. Wriggles's deputy, Jim Lickfold, who, at the head of these five other police officers, had entered the parlour.

He had recovered from his wound, but his temper had not improved in consequence.

He swore most horribly to be revenged upon the highwaymen one and all.

Now that he had been injured it was quite a personal feeling that he had against our friends, and he no longer cared for obtaining his share of the reward.

He had been commissioned by Mr. Wriggles to keep a sharp eye on old Matthew and the White Horse Inn.

He had done so, and had been a source of infinite annoyance to old Matthew.

Mr. Wriggles—about whom we shall presently have something to say—was otherwise engaged.

At present, however, in spite of all his cleverness—and it must not be forgotten that this man was very clear-headed and cunning in his way—he had not succeeded in making any discovery.

He had poked and pryed into many a corner, and spent hours in fruitlessly searching about the White Horse, but always with the same result.

Old Matthew was more than a match for him—he was too wide-awake to be caught napping even by Jim Lickfold.

A very cordial antipathy had sprung up between them, which was, however, more malignant in Jim Lickfold's breast than in old Matthew's.

The one was content in defeating his adversary, in fact, by over-matching him.

But as for the other, he longed for the time when he should be able to take the landlord into custody on the charge of having aided, abetted, and concealed a felon, the punishment for doing which was very severe.

CHAPTER DCCV.

JIM LICKFOLD IS CLEVER ENOUGH TO DISCOVER THAT OLD MATTHEW HAD RECENTLY PAID A VISIT TO THE CELLARS.

With these few words of explanation, we will resume.

"You can ask what the devil you like, and be d—d to you!" was Jim Lickfold's reply to old Matthew's question; and then, blowing out his cheeks, he again scrutinised everything there was in the room.

"Been having your supper, have you, Matthew?" he said, at length. "And a d—d good supper too, I should think!"

"Yes," replied Matthew—"I feel rather comfortable."

"So I should think. What a glutton you must be to eat off two plates at once, and with two knives and forks."

"Eh?" said old Matthew, pretending not to understand.

"You know what I mean," said Lickfold. "I was certain there was some one in this room along with you, though where that some one can be is more than I can tell. There's proof of it, for you have not been taking your supper alone."

"I don't remember saying that I had," said old Matthew.

"No, of course not—you left that for me to find out."

"Ah! and some people are so clever!"

"They are," returned Jim, "and it strikes me that some one will find he has been a d—d sight too clever one of these days!"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Old Matthew. "But I confess I have not been taking my supper alone."

"I don't see how you can deny it."

"I never thought of such a thing. But, then, you must know as well as I do, that I am not the only person in this house; I have my niece, who minds the bar."

"Yes—yes," said Jim Lickfold, shaking his head in a

very knowing way; "but it won't do, Matthew—it won't do! I have made it my business to get acquainted with your domestic arrangements, and I know you and your niece never sit down to a meal together."

"Not in a general way," said old Matthew; "but with all deference to your knowledge, we make an exception in favour of supper."

"Bah! I don't believe a word of it!"

"I never thought you would. But I don't mind talking, especially after supper—it's agreeable then to have a little chat."

"We know you, old Matthew, and are not to be taken in by your cunning ways—oh! dear no, not at all. I am going to have a thorough search."

"I thought so."

"Oh, did you!"

"Yes, I certainly did. I can always tell by the look of your face when you intend wasting your time by poking your nose into all sorts of holes and corners."

"You be d—d!"

"The same to you Mr. Lickfold; but I have only one favour to ask."

"I sha'n't grant it, then!"

"I didn't think you would, so that's why I am going to tell you what it is. When you search, I wish you'd confine yourself to this room, then I could sit here in my old arm-chair and watch your proceedings. It would be quite a cheerful amusement—it would, I can assure you!"

Jim Lickfold gnashed his teeth with rage as he said:

"Now, my lads, just look round this place! Don't think you will have your labour for nothing—you will be rewarded this time!"

"So you shall!" interrupted old Matthew—"you shall every one of you have a quart of ale apiece when you have done! There now!"

"Mr. Gale!"

"That's my name," said old Matthew, "though I am not often called by it. I have no objection, if it's the same to you."

"Understand, then," continued Jim Lickfold, wrothly, "that you will not presume to interfere with my men!"

"Me interfere?" asked old Matthew, in a tone of amazement.

"Yes!"

"I'd scorn to do such a thing!"

Jim Lickfold made no distinct reply.

The men in the meanwhile, at the command of their leader, rapidly opened and shut the various doors, peeped into all the corners, and otherwise searched the parlour.

"Are you going to join in the search yourself, Mr. Lickfold?" asked Matthew.

"What's that to you?"

"Oh, nothing particular; but if you mean to look on, as I do, you're welcome to accommodate yourself with an arm-chair. Will you take a drop of October, Mr. Lickfold?"

"Look here," said Jim, "you're a clever fellow, Matthew, and I own it."

"I am much obliged to you," said Matthew; "don't think it flattery if I return the compliment."

"Bah! Not so many words! But, clever as you are, I can tell that you are acting a part."

"Can you, though?" said Matthew, as though he had heard something very wonderful indeed.

"Yes," continued Jim Lickfold, raising his voice, "you are acting a part. I am certain of it. I always beware of a dog when he growls, and of a horse when he puts back his ears and looks ugly, and I always beware of you, Matthew, when you're so d—bly polite and hospitable as you are to-night."

"Mr. Lickfold?"

"What?"

"Will you excuse me?"

"For what?"

"Will you believe it when I say it?"

"Believe what?"

"Will you believe that I am in earnest?"

"Oh, d—n it, how many questions do you intend to put?"

"Well, will you believe that I am in earnest when I say it? Come, yes or no?"

"Yes."

"Well then, Mr. Lickfold, you are a clever fellow. I say it, and I believe it, and I give you full credit for it. I will defy anybody to prove the contrary, and all I can say is this—that though whoever got over me would have to rise very early in the morning indeed, yet whoever got over you would have to sit up the whole of the previous night to do it!"

Another string of curses came from Jim Lickfold's lips, for, from the manner in which old Matthew spoke, he had expected something quite different.

At this moment, however, one of the men approached him, and touched his hat respectfully.

"We have searched this room thoroughly," he said, "and can find nothing at all suspicious."

"And so," cried old Matthew, without giving Jim Lickfold time to reply, "you have come to say that you feel entitled to the quart of ale I have promised you?"

"Mind your own business!" said Jim, turning round angrily, and looking old Matthew full in the face.

The landlord did not quail in the least.

But Jim Lickfold suddenly saw something that attracted his attention.

His gaze became fixed, and Matthew wondered much what he was looking at.

That he was gazing at some part of his (Matthew's) person was evident.

"Ahem!" said Jim at length, pretending to cough.

"What now?"

"Excuse me."

"Oh! I suppose I must beware."

"Of what?"

"Of you, for it appears you are putting down your ears and looking ugly."

Matthew laughed boisterously at his own wit, and the other police officers could not forbear from smiling, at which Jim's anger was much increased.

"There," he said, touching Matthew on the sleeve of his coat—"perhaps you'd be kind enough to tell me what that is?"

He pointed to a large stain of reddish-brown colour.

"Don't know," said old Matthew—"never saw it before."

"Strange—very!" exclaimed Jim, rubbing it with his finger. "Now, if I might presume to give a guess——"

"Oh! you may," interrupted Matthew—"just as much as you like—you're very good at that."

"Then I give it as my opinion," said Lickfold, pretending not to notice Matthew's last observation, "that this is rust, and rust of a particular kind—a *very* particular kind. I should say it was rust off a beer barrel."

"Very likely," said old Matthew, quietly.

Jim Lickfold looked down at old Matthew's feet.

"Ah!" he said—"just as I thought—that confirms it. You have been down in the cellar lately—I know it, because the sawdust is clinging round your boots."

"Now, if you were not such a clever man," said Matthew, "I should think there was nothing wonderful in that, because I make about a hundred journeys into the cellar every day. I am obliged to do it, for I don't like to trust anyone else among the barrels; but of course, Mr. Lickfold, you know best. I humbly give into you entirely in that respect; and therefore, although it did not occur to me myself, I am quite prepared to look upon my having lately gone down into the cellar as quite a wonderful circumstance, provided you say or think it is."

CHAPTER DCCVI.

OLD MATTHEW PROVES HIMSELF A MATCH FOR JIM LICKFOLD, WHOSE SUSPICIONS GROW STRONGER AND STRONGER.

"MATTHEW GALE."

"Sir to you, Mr. Lickfold, being a gentleman."

"None of your nonsence! Understand me, it won't do with me at all! I won't put up with it—that's flat! You have humbugged some others I could name pretty well, but don't attempt to humbug me, for if you do you will find yourself in the wrong box!"

"Me do what?" asked old Matthew, putting on an air of ludicrous astonishment.

"Try to humbug me!"

"The very idea, Mr. Lickfold! Surely you don't think that I should be guilty of anything of the kind?"

"None of your gammon! I tell you it won't do! You



[TOM KING WARNS HIS COMRADES OF THE APPROACH OF THE POLICE OFFICERS.]

had better be particularly careful! I caution you as a friend!"

"Thank you," said Matthew, drily.

"If I find anything sufficiently suspicious in my search through these premises to warrant me in taking you a prisoner, rest assured that I shall do it. It would be a most excellent thing if this den of yours was shut up!"

"Well, I don't agree with you there," said old Matthew; "and if you are willing, we will argue the point."

"No, no—nothing of the kind. You would doubtless like to divert my attention; but it won't do, Matthew. Oh, dear no—not at all!"

And Jim Lickfold put his finger by the side of his nose, and shook his head to and fro very slowly, as though to imply how difficult the task would be to impose upon him.

"Oh, just as you please, Mr. Lickfold. I will do whatever you require."

"Then don't be so d—d civil! I always distrust you when you are so damnably polite. I know you mean something by it!"

"It's very hard to be suspected in this way, and to have everything turned against one—very hard indeed. I am a much-injured man!"

"You look like it," said Jim, "I'm blest if you don't! You don't grieve much, or you would not carry so much fat as you do."

"Don't be personal, Mr. Lickfold—don't be personal."

"Fiddle-de-dee! I am going to search your house, and I call upon you, as a good man and true, to give me every facility you can."

"Search away," said Matthew; "you have my consent. You never can say that I once withheld it! Search away, and I hope you will be rewarded for your trouble!"

"Well, we shall see. Come along with me—I want you to lead the way down into the cellars."

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"Are you going to search there?" asked Matthew.

"Yes, I am!" said Jim Lickfold, in a triumphant tone of voice. "What do you think of it?"

"Oh! nothing—nothing. I only inquired."

"Now then, lead the way!"

"All right, gentlemen. Pray follow me."

"Here—stop!"

"What's the matter now?"

"Do you go down into the cellar without a light?"

"Oh, no!" replied Matthew. "Dear me, I quite forgot!"

He stepped across the room to the cupboard, into which he had so hastily thrust the lantern.

Jim Lickfold kept close at his heels, determined to watch his every movement.

"Hullo!" he said, as soon as Matthew opened the cupboard door. "D—n me if you ain't a rum 'un! The idea of pitching the lantern into the cupboard in that fashion, and all over those good things too! Why, Matthew, you must have been in a damnable hurry when you did it!"

"Well, it does look like it, I confess," replied old Matthew, quietly, as he took up the lantern. "I can't make it out, the lantern must have fallen off the other shelf!"

"Oh, gammon—gammon, Matthew—that sort of thing won't do with me, I tell you—you won't take me in! I am pretty near certain you have one of those highwaymen in your house, and if you have I don't care a pin what you say or do, I will search till I find him!"

"Very good," said old Matthew. "You will get these crotchets into your head and I can't help it! I say again, search away as much as ever you like!"

Old Matthew opened the door of the lantern, and, as only a few minutes had elapsed since he blew out the light of the piece of candle inside it, the interior was filled with smoke that had come from the smouldering wick.

On the door being opened the smoke poured forth.

Jim Lickfold looked at it critically.

"Aha! Matthew," he said, "you must have been down in the cellar lately—much more recently than I imagined! Why, the candle looks as if it had only just been put out!"

"So it does!" said old Matthew, pretending to be quite surprised. "Would you believe it, the wick is quite warm, as though it had been burning only a minute ago!"

As he spoke, Matthew, in the most off-handed manner in the world, lighted the candle again, and closed the door of the lantern.

"Which is the way to the cellars, Matthew?"

"Follow me and I will show you," replied the landlord, as he went towards the door leading into the bar.

But that is not the way, is it?" asked Jim.

"Of course it is!"

"And is there no other way down into the cellar out of this room?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Aha! I thought so—I was pretty near sure of it! Now, be good enough to show me that way, will you?"

Jim Lickfold's face was at that moment quite a picture. His eyes sparkled, and he rubbed his hands with glee. He thought he had caught old Matthew very nicely.

But that individual did not seem in the least perturbed.

"I was going to show you," he replied. "This is the way!" and again he moved towards the door, and this time he opened it.

"Stop—stop!" cried Jim. "You told me there was a way down into the cellar out of this room."

"So there is," said Matthew—"through this door, across the passage, and down the steps."

"You are very clever, Matthew—very clever! But I tell you I am convinced there is some ready means of getting into the cellar out of this room, and without going through the bar, too! Now, what do you think of it?"

"Well, I can't say I think much of it," returned old Matthew, after a pause, during which he appeared to be considering. "You see, you get such a many odd notions into your head, and there's no accounting for half of them."

"Matthew, you'd better not try me too far! You'll get me into a rage, and then you'll repent it! I shall do something rash—I know I shall; but I want to keep cool."

"I have some magnesia in the cupboard," said Matthew, hastening towards it; "if that will be of any assistance to you, you shall have it with pleasure."

"Once for all—will you cease this foolery? My lads, just look round this place once more, and see if you can find any means of getting down into the cellar."

The men who had enjoyed this scene mightily, hastily dispersed themselves about the room, and began to search.

Old Matthew sat down in his arm-chair to wait the result.

To tell the truth, he had every confidence in the little trap-door under the hearth-rug escaping the officers' attention.

It had been especially constructed by himself, and fitted so closely into its place that, when down, it would defy the keenest eyes to detect it.

But he remembered that he had very hastily shut down this trap-door when he emerged from the cellar, and he was wondering whether it was so closely fitted into its place as it ought to be.

The officers first of all examined the wall, and then, finding nothing suspicious in that quarter, they turned their attention to the flooring.

They did not believe there was much likelihood of finding a trap-door in the flooring.

They believed old Matthew was too cunning a fox to have anything of the kind.

According to the fashion of the times, the boards were covered all over with sand, which served very well as a substitute for carpet in such a place.

They swept this sand aside with their hands in many places.

But the flooring presented quite an ordinary appearance.

They tapped upon it with the butts of their pistols.

But the boards returned in every part a uniformly hollow sound, showing that the cellar was under every part of it.

Then Jim Lickfold went to the fireplace, and, stooping down, pulled up the hearth-rug.

CHAPTER DCCVII.

JIM LICKFOLD DISCOVERS THE TRAP-DOOR IN THE FLOORING, VERY MUCH TO THE CONSTERNATION OF OLD MATTHEW.

JIM LICKFOLD took hold of the hearth-rug at one end and drew it away, rather than lifted it up.

The consequence was that he scraped the sand equally over all parts of the flooring; and old Matthew, as he observed him, gave a sigh of relief.

The round trap-door was fitting closely in its place, and not the least signs of anything unusual could be seen. Jim Lickfold brushed the sand aside as well as he could, but in doing this he only filled up the crack in the floor, making it still more difficult for him to observe the little circle which marked the spot where the trap-door was situated.

But he took out a pistol and began knocking away with it.

As before, he found that everywhere just the same sound was produced, the sound which can always be heard by striking a wooden flooring sharply with a heavy object when there happens to be a cellar underneath.

But old Matthew viewed this proceeding with alarm, and not needlessly.

It so happened that one of the many blows Jim Lickfold dealt happened to fall just on the edge of the trap-door.

So well was the blow delivered, that it caused that portion of the trap-door nearest to him to sink a little way and the opposite side to rise.

He uttered a loud yell of exultation.

Another and another blow followed, and each time the little trap-door rose higher and higher.

At length he was enabled to insert his fingers underneath it.

Then, putting forth all his strength, he attempted to raise it.

But he found his strength unequal to the task.

The circular trap-door fitted into its place and was secured by a spring.

The first blow he had dealt had injured the mechanism, but the spring still held.

"Now we have it," he cried, exultingly—"now we have it! Ah, Matthew, you feel bad now, I should think!"

"Upon my word, I am quite astonished!" said Matthew, who had risen to his feet. "What in the world are you doing there?"

"It's very fine for you to pretend ignorance, old fellow, but it won't do. There—there! What do you think of that?"

As he spoke, Jim Lickfold took up the poker that was standing at the side of the fire.

We have before had occasion to mention this poker.

It was a ponderous instrument indeed, and required no ordinary amount of strength to use it.

But to Jim Lickfold, in his state of excitement, it seemed no heavier than a feather.

While he spoke, he struck the trap-door several heavy blows with the end of the poker, the result of which was that the piece of wood split into two parts and fell into the cellar, leaving a round aperture in the floor.

"There, my fine fellow," said Jim Lickfold, triumphantly, "what do you think of that? You made a mistake if you thought you had a fool to deal with! I ask you again—What do you think of it?"

"Why, I think it a sin and a shame you should come into a man's house and knock it about just as you please. You shall make the damage good. What do you think of that, Mr. Lickfold?"

"Why, I think it makes you look very foolish, Mr. Gale."

"Why so? Here, you get down on the floor and bang away with your pistol till you split one of the boards. Then, not content with that, you must pick up my poker, and bang away again until you have knocked a way clean through the cellar."

"Now, Matthew, do you really think I am such a fool as to be imposed upon in that way? No, you can't think it. I'm sure the idea is absurd. Don't try to bamboozle me any longer. That place in the flooring has been made by you, and carefully fitted with the round trap-door. Luckily, I discovered it. That's the actual state of affairs, is it not?"

"I suppose it's no good for me to say different to you?" replied old Matthew. "It seems, though, that you know a great deal more about my house than I do myself."

"No, Matthew. Just look at the little circumstances. I will put them into a chain if you like."

"I wish you could put them into a rope."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing— nothing. Go on."

"Well, then, I trace a highwayman—either Tom King or Sixteen-String Jack—to your house. I find you looking flustered. I see signs of your having been down in the cellar. I find a lantern only just extinguished, and here is a convenient little trap-door through which you could descend."

"You're a clever man, Mr. Lickfold—you are, indeed, but you ought to have been a lawyer, or something of the sort. It's a shame you should waste your talents as you do."

"Well, but what do you say to this?" and Jim pointed to the hole in the floor as he spoke.

"Say to it? What's the good of my saying anything to it? It's there."

"Yes, it's there—and *what is there down below*?"

This question was asked in a very meaning tone.

But old Matthew only replied:

"Why, the cellar, of course."

"Yes, and the highwayman I want. Come, confess I have found him. Save me the trouble of poking about among your barrels, and give him up to me at once. You might just as well do so, I shall be sure to find him."

"That's another crotchet of yours," said old Matthew. "I can't deliver any highwayman up, and that's a fact. I would if I could—but I can't."

"Oh, gammon!"

"I tell you I can't. You have come into my house and disturbed me, and you have broken a hole through the flooring into the cellar. Now, if you're fool enough to go down through it, and poke about all night in my cellar, why do so. I give you my consent—freely give you my consent."

"Oh, thank you for nothing," said Jim. "I should search, whether I had your consent or not."

"Well, you have my consent; but you asked me to save you the trouble of poking about among my barrels. Now, it would grieve me very much to refuse any request you may make; in fact, I could hardly do it, so I will tell you how to save yourself the trouble."

"How?"

"Why, just call your men together."

"Yes—yes."

"And I will give them a quart of ale apiece; then you can all walk out into Drury Lane, and take my word for it, your suspicions are all wrong, and that you wouldn't find the highwayman if you tried."

"Oh, damnation! Do you think I should be such an ass as to act in that fashion. Here, come on, we have stopped jabbering long enough! Now, then, to business. Come on, my lads! One of you stay in here, with a loaded pistol in your hand. You, Smithson, go to the top of the cellar stairs, and if anyone attempts to escape fire on him! I should not have stood so long as I have, only I knew my prey was quite safe. He is down in the cellar, and can't get out. He will have to wait there until I quietly nab him."

"Well don't forget my offer," said old Matthew, "that is all. Remember I undertook to save you all this trouble, but you would not agree."

"Certainly not. Now then—lead the way."

"Which way?"

"Why, down into the cellar, to be sure."

"But you don't expect me to go down through that little round hole, do you?"

"Of course I do. Don't pretend you can't do it; I know you have been down many a time."

"That's a very rash assertion, Mr. Lickfold. Just have the kindness to take the diameter of that little hole, and then—well, you can't take my diameter, but you can measure my circumference, and I have got a sum-book in the cupboard, so that when you have done it you can work it out and find what my diameter is, and then you will see well enough that I could no more go through that little hole than I could walk on the ceiling."

"Oh, you be d—d!" said Jim Lickfold. "You are like some blessed old woman; when your tongue begins to go, there's no knowing when it will stop!"

CHAPTER DCCVIII.

JIM LICKFOLD COMMENCES A VERY RIGID AND SYSTEMATIC SEARCH IN THE CELLARS.

"WELL, I positively declare that I could not squeeze myself through that hole, so let these words put an end to the matter."

And as he spoke old Matthew drew himself up to his full height, and expanded his lungs, so as to make himself look as big as possible.

"Well, you shall try," said Jim Lickfold.

"Well, excuse me—I'd rather not."

"But I say you shall. If you refuse, I will take you into custody at once!"

Matthew knew that this was no idle threat, but he did not alter his demeanour.

"But suppose," he said, "I was to get stuck halfway, how then? What should you do?"

"Oh, never mind, we'd get you down, sure enough."

Old Matthew made many remonstrances, but all to no effect.

Jim Lickfold was inexorable, and determined he should go down into the cellar by that means and no other.

With a heavy sigh, old Matthew prepared to comply.

He seated himself on the floor, and deliberately placed his legs, one after the other, down the hole.

"Make haste!" said Jim Lickfold, and, as he spoke, he put the poker into the fire.

But old Matthew would not hurry.

It had been a long time since he had enjoyed himself so thoroughly, or had so much fun, as on that occasion. He was determined to prolong the scene as much as possible.

Very gently, then, and very carefully, he lowered himself down until only a little more than half of his body remained above.

He then expanded his lungs to the utmost, and held his breath.

It was manifest then that the hole was too small, and that he could not by any possibility pass through it.

He struggled about in a most furious and ridiculous way.

The officers laughed at the joke, and they all believed that the landlord had stuck half-way, and could neither get up nor go down.

"Now then," said Jim Lickfold, turning round to him, "are you going down or not?"

"I can't!" gasped the landlord.

"Well, I shall ask you twice more, and if you don't go then I shall make you. Are you going down?"

Old Matthew puffed himself out more than ever.

Jim Lickfold took the poker out of the fire.

The top of it was just red-hot, and he raised it in a threatening manner.

"Now then," he cried, "for the second and last time—are you going?"

Old Matthew saw the red-hot poker approaching.

He knew nothing would delight Jim Lickfold so much as to inflict some pain upon him, therefore he reduced his size in an instant, and slipped through the hole with a rapidity that would have done credit to a harlequin.

"Gone!" said Jim Lickfold, as he flung the poker under the grate and jumped down after him.

"Murder?" said old Matthew. "What do you mean by acting like that? Oh my toe—my toe! Murder—murder!"

"What's the matter now?"

"Matter?" said Matthew, limping about. "I have got one particular soft corn, and you dropped on it with those d—d heavy riding-boots of yours!"

Jim Lickfold was quite delighted.

"You should not have played the fool, then, in the way that you did, and then you would not have got it. I knew well enough you could slip through that hole if you only liked."

Old Matthew continued to groan out about his toe, but it was all pretence, though it answered his purpose.

Jim Lickfold believed he had done him an injury, and therefore felt content.

"Now then," he cried, "we can't wait while you go hobbling about in that fashion, there has been time enough lost already. Now let us search the cellars."

According to Jim's instructions, one of the police officers remained in the parlour.

He seated himself in old Matthew's easy-chair, and held a pistol in his hand, cocked and loaded, and ready for immediate use.

There was a flagon of ale on the table, which had been placed there for old Matthew and Sixteen-String Jack.

The officer looked at it longingly for awhile, and then, as all remained still, he proceeded to taste its contents.

The other officer, who had been called Smithson, was not in such comfortable quarters.

He was standing at the top of the cellar steps, also with a pistol in his hand, and feeling quite determined to shoot anyone he saw attempting to escape.

Jim Lickfold believed that by adopting these measures he had made sure that no one could leave the cellars unseen.

He waited just underneath the trap-door until he was rejoined by the other police officers, one of whom carried the lantern.

"Give me the light, said Jim.

The lantern was handed to him at once.

He held it above his head, so as to diffuse its light, and then he looked carefully all round him.

The first thing that struck him was that the cellars were of very great extent.

This would make the task of searching all the more difficult.

On the other hand, however, he could only see two places in which the highwayman could be concealed.

It must be remembered that Jim started with the conviction in his mind that either Sixteen-String Jack or Tom King was hidden somewhere in the cellar.

"He is either lurking behind some of those barrels," he muttered, "or else he is in one of them; in either case we shall find him sooner or later."

He took up his position in the middle of this cellar.

"I will begin to search here," he said. "Now, my lads, look all about you. Pry into every corner; look behind all the barrels; and, if you find any that are empty, pull them down and shake them about well to make sure he is not in one of them."

The men responded willingly enough.

They had a great opinion of Jim Lickfold, and shared in his belief that the highwayman was in the cellar, and that he would be found if well looked for.

They commenced their work, then, with great spirit and energy.

Old Matthew appeared to be intent upon one thing only, and that was rubbing his corn, which he pretended was very bad indeed.

The police officers drew their cutlasses, and poked about behind the barrels in a manner that would have been highly dangerous to anyone who might have been concealed there.

But no cry of pain rewarded them for their trouble.

"There's no one behind the casks in this cellar, sir," they said at length, addressing Jim Lickfold.

"Well, then," rejoined that worthy, "try the barrels of the next. Tap against them with your pistols. You will soon find by the sound whether they are empty or full. If the latter, you can let them be; but if they are empty, pull them down, and roll them about well. If he is in one we shall be sure to find him."

The men set about this with greater alacrity than ever.

Of the two they thought it far more likely that the highwayman would be concealed in a cask than behind one.

They were all aware that such would be an excellent hiding-place, and Jim Lickfold was raised in their estimation for having been clever enough to think of it.

They pulled down the casks that were empty in such a rough manner as to bring forth a torrent of remonstrances from old Matthew.

The officers finding barrel after barrel perfectly empty began to grow enraged, and consequently they threw them down with great violence.

"Stop—stop!" cried the landlord. "I protest against this—I protest against it! I won't stand it, and that's flat! You will knock all these casks to pieces. They don't belong to me, but to the brewer, though I shall have to make good the damage, and it will cost me no end of money to have men in to put the barrels in their proper places!"

CHAPTER DCCIX

JIM LICKFOLD AND HIS OFFICERS PAUSE BEFORE THE BARREL IN WHICH SIXTEEN-STRING JACK IS CONCEALED.

It is now quite time that we made some mention of Sixteen-String Jack.

That he was not at all comfortable in the hiding-place old Matthew had found for him the reader need scarcely be told.

Everything had happened with such suddenness, that until he found himself fairly left alone in the cellar with the head of the cask fastened down upon him, he had had no time to deliberate.

If he had, he would certainly have remonstrated with Matthew, and probably refused to get into the cask altogether.

He remained in the darkness and silence for some time waiting [illegible]ly to be released.

Although the head of the cask was fastened down, he found that he was able to breathe with perfect ease and freedom.

In such a condition as this, a little thing will distract the attention, so Jack could not rest until he discovered how this was.

He at length found there was a small hole near the top of the cask, through which he was just able to thrust his little finger.

The mystery was now explained.

There was no fear that he should be suffocated if he remained in that cask ever so long a time.

"I don't half like it," he said to himself for about the hundredth time—"that's a fact! I wish I had said so to old Matthew at first. If the officers come down into the cellar I shall give myself up for lost! The first thing

they think of will be to look in the empty casks, and then found I shall be!"

Just as Sixteen-String Jack came to this conclusion he heard the loud knocking on the parlour floor which was caused by the officers while searching for the trap-door.

He wondered greatly what it could be.

Then, afterwards, he heard the trap-door demolished.

Then the murmur of voices, and finally the entrance of the police officers into the cellar.

Then how he chafed in his place of concealment.

He would have given the world to have been in the open air and at liberty to go in what direction he chose.

Without old Matthew's assistance, he knew very well he could not get out of the cask, and to have made any noise would have been to procure his own discovery.

So, very wisely, he kept still.

He heard the barrels as they were rolled about by the police officers, and he thought:

"It will come to my turn soon, and then they will be sure to find me."

We will now describe the proceedings of the officers, leaving the reader to understand that Sixteen-String Jack could hear perfectly every word that was spoken.

That his alarm increased instead of abated may be guessed.

The officers rapidly searched every cask in the first cellar.

They could find nothing, and they announced the fact to their leader.

"All right," he said. "Don't despair because you haven't found him here. I scarcely thought you would, but judged it best that this cellar should be searched before the rest. Now pass on to the next, and we may be more fortunate there."

The officers obeyed.

But it was no longer with the same amount of alacrity that they had formerly displayed.

Still they did their duty well, and made a thorough search.

The result was still more discouraging.

Nothing whatever was found.

In the first cellar all the casks had been empty.

In the next several were full, not having yet been tapped.

Only one more cellar now remained to be examined.

This was the one where Jack was hid.

Jim Lickfold lost part of his confidence, and old Matthew kept up a perpetual string of remonstrances and grumbling.

Sixteen-String Jack resigned himself to his fate.

"Don't be down-hearted, my lads!" cried Jim Lickfold. "The third time is always lucky, you know that. He must be here somewhere; I am convinced of that, and as we have searched two cellars, and without result, and this is the only one that remains, why he must be here, of course."

The officers could not see the force of this reasoning quite so clearly.

They went to work, however, in the same fashion as before.

They poked about behind the barrels with their cutlasses, and Sixteen-String Jack heard the sharp steel weapons scraping against the edge of the cask in which he was concealed, and only separated from him by the woodwork.

"The next," he said, "will be to pull down the barrels."

This was true enough

But it so happened that in this cellar there were only very few empty casks. The others were in use—that is to say, they had a tap fixed in the lower part

We have before mentioned that in those days there was no contrivance by which the various liquors could be drawn up into the bar, and the journey had to be made down to the cask in each case.

"Now you've seen the whole of my stock-in-trade," said old Matthew, "quite as well as if you were excise officers. These casks are in use, but you are welcome to search them all, empty or full; though, mind you, if you don't find him, I shall make you responsible for all the damage."

Sixteen-String Jack thought this a very daring speech.

The officers went first to those casks which were unprovided with taps.

There were four of them.

They knocked against them with their pistols, and the hollow sound returned proclaimed that they were empty.

One after another they were pulled down off the sill on which they stood, and shaken to and fro.

But they were empty—it was perfectly certain no one was concealed in any of them.

Jim looked puzzled.

There were only those casks that had taps in them left, and it was ridiculous to suppose that Sixteen-String Jack could be hidden in one of those.

But, unwilling to confess himself beaten, Jim stepped forward himself, with a pistol, and knocked against the first of the barrels.

It returned a dull, sullen sound.

'Ah!" said Matthew, "you may knock away at that. I only tapped that barrel the day before yesterday. I don't suppose there has been three gallons drawn out of it That's my very best mild."

Jim took no notice, but knocked at the rest.

"That's not quite so full," said Matthew. 'Let me see," he added, knocking against the barrel with his knuckles, "this is about where the ale is, you see. This one is rather more than three-parts full."

Jim Lickfold passed on to the next.

This was the one in which Sixteen-String Jack was hidden.

The highwayman's feelings may perhaps be imagined, but certainly cannot be described.

"Ah, now!" continued old Matthew, heaving a heavy sigh, "knock against that, Mr. Lickfold. It's as hollow as a drum. Ah! there, I told you so! You'd think it was empty, wouldn't you? It is very nearly, I am sorry to say."

Jim Lickfold looked at him suspiciously.

"Now, I could tell a little history about that very cask. You must know that it has been in these cellars ever since I have been landlord of the White Horse, and that's more years than you can remember, I know. That ale was brewed on the day when George the First was crowned. I was a young man then, and there was great rejoicings everywhere, I can assure you. I said to myself, 'I'll keep this cask of ale on purpose for old ale,' and so I did, and I didn't tap it till his present Majesty ascended the throne."

The police officers, who were very tired and glad of a rest, and whose mouths, moreover, were very dry, listened with considerable interest to old Matthew's narrative.

Jim Lickfold regarded the landlord out of the corners of his eyes in a suspicious manner, but said nothing.

Old Matthew tapped the cask again, and gave another sigh.

CHAPTER DCCX.

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE OFFICERS IN THE CELLARS OF THE WHITE HORSE GROW MORE AND MORE INTERESTING.

"Such ale this was," he continued, "the like has never been brewed. Yet I have not tasted it many times myself, for I have been nursing it up; but, although it's getting down so low, it is as good as ever it was. It draws out as clear as a bell, and the froth on the top is really a sight to look at. It's a little bit hard through being kept so long. I will tell you how hard it is. If I was to give you some in a jug, you would not be able to bite it off, you would have to empty the jug at a draught before you could take it from your lips."

"You're making a great deal of fuss about it, Matthew!"

"Well, excuse me, Mr. Lickfold, I am; this is quite a pet of mine, this barrel is. I've got a weakness for it. It's only a favoured few I have allowed to taste of its contents. Let me see, about how much might I say was left? Certainly, not half of it—the cask isn't half-full, I'm sure."

Old Matthew stopped, and rapped his knuckles very sharply against the cask.

It returned a clear hollow sound until he got about three-parts down from the top.

Then the character of the sound changed

It was dull.

"Ah! you see, Mr. Lickfold, it's only a quarter full—

only a quarter of a barrel left of that fine old ale. I knew it must come to an end some day; but when you get it down you, you'll find it search through every vein you've got, and warm you from top to toe!"

"Then I think the best thing you can do, Matthew, is to give us a drop," said Lickfold; "for I'll be d—d if your cellars are not as cold as a church-yard vault!"

All the police-officers shivered immediately, and were surprised to find how exceedingly cold they had grown.

Old Matthew hesitated.

"It's rather a cool request," he said, at length, "I must say that about it! Here have you put me to all manner of inconveniences and trouble—done me a deliberate injury—destroyed my night's rest, and now, because you find your suspicions groundless, you have the conscience to ask me for a drop of my very best ale that I wouldn't sell for a shilling a pint!"

"Well, Matthew, you know how it is," said Jim Lickfold—"jooty is jooty!"

"Yes, to be sure it is," assented Matthew.

It was rather unfortunate for his cleverness, but it was a fact, notwithstanding—like most clever people, Jim Lickfold had a failing, and that failing was an intense love for a drop of strong old ale.

When he heard old Matthew begin to talk, his mouth began to water, and it was with great difficulty that he could resist the impulse of turning the tap on and having a draught there and then.

Moreover, he had talked a great deal, and his throat was dry.

The remainder of the officers were fond of ale of any sort, provided they could get it on the cheap; so they added their request to their leader's, reminding old Matthew that he had promised them a quart apiece.

"But not of this old stingo," he said—"not of this old stingo. I promised you a quart of ale I know, and I will be as good as my word!"

"Well, Matthew," said Jim Lickfold, whose desire to taste the wonderful ale had reached its highest pitch, "I can't help having my suspicions about you, and I would have laid a wager that the man I wanted was concealed in this cellar! But you are a cunning old fox, and it is hard indeed to get the better of you!"

"Now, if you begin to pay compliments," said old Matthew, "I really sha'n't be able to refuse you!"

"Well, I think you had better not!"

"Think I had better not?"

"Yes.

"Why not?"

"Because I should pull the cask down and roll it about, and that'll spoil your old ale!"

"That it would; and it would almost break my heart as well!" said Matthew. "It must have settled considerably all these years; and if it was once stirred up, the ale would be good for nothing!"

"Very well, let us have some."

"Not on compulsion," said Matthew—"not on compulsion; but I can't help being good-natured—it's a failing of mine—been a great loss and hindrance to me on my way through the world; it's quite a bad thing, that good-nature, and I have been quite a victim to it!"

While thus speaking, old Matthew produced a tankard.

Where he got it from not one of the officers knew, nor did they trouble themselves to inquire.

But old Matthew provided himself for this contingency.

Stooping down, he drew out a quantity of the ale; and certainly by the fragrance which it diffused over the cellar, and the manner in which it frothed up, his encominms upon it seemed quite justified.

"There," he said, handing it to Jim Lickfold; "this'll make sad inroads upon it, this will. But you shall taste it—you shall taste it, and I'll warrant you'll say you never tasted such stuff in your life!"

Jim Lickfold eagerly snatched the tankard out of the landlord's hand, and placing it to his lips, took a long pull at the contents—so long that it seemed as though it would never come to an end.

"I told you," said old Matthew, "how it would be. I'll defy anybody to bite that ale off—they can't do it; you must go on drinking to the last drop."

Jim Lickfold returned the empty tankard.

"Now, don't think I begrude it," said old Matthew, as he prepared to fill the tankard again, "for I don't; but I must give you one caution—don't you drink too much of this. It isn't ordinary ale, bear in mind, and the way in which it gets up into your head is quite surprising."

Jim Lickfold smacked his lips.

"Upon my life," he said, "I never did taste anything like it—it's grand!"

By this time another tankard was full, which old Matthew handed to the officer nearest to him.

Jim Lickfold looked at it with longing eyes.

But the man seized it with avidity, nor did he return the vessel to old Matthew until the last drop was drained.

"Isn't it good?" asked the landlord.

"Splendid! It's just like brandy."

"Yes, only ten times better!" said Jim Lickfold.

This made the other officers more impatient that ever.

Old Matthew drew another tankard full.

The ale ran out in a very fine, clear stream.

Whatever suspicions Jim Lickfold might have had concerning the cask when old Matthew first began to talk about it, they were now completely dispelled.

It was out of the question for any one to be hiding in a barrel of such ale.

Old Matthew's caution, however, was not an ungrounded one.

The manner in which the famous ale mounted to Jim Lickfold's brain was really astonishing.

All his cunning and subtlety were completely gone—in fact, he almost forgot the object that had brought him there.

The two other police-officers who had been left on guard were summoned to have their share.

They very gladly responded.

They were all so anxious about drinking the ale themselves that they failed to observe that old Matthew never tasted a drop of it.

Jim Lickfold was so elated that he endeavoured to sing:—

> "It's a very good world that we live in—
> To give, or to spend, or to lend in:
> But to beg, or to borrow, or to get a man's own,
> 'Tis the d—dest old world that ever was known."

Old Matthew put on an expression of affright.

"What's the matter?" asked Jim.

"Don't make that noise—pray don't! You alarm me—it was quite awful!"

"Well, never mind," said Jim Lickfold; "I am not in voice to-night, and that's a fact. But I say, Matthew, old fellow, d—n you, give us another tankard! Don't be stingy with that old stingo of yours! I say another tankard, d—n you, and here's good luck to everybody!"

"Now, you'd better not," said old Matthew, who had a tankard in his hand—"I tell you you had better not!"

"You be d—d!"

The other officers looked on.

"Now, I warn you," said Matthew, "this is very strong ale, and nobody can drink more than a tankard of it without it getting the better of them. I shouldn't like it to get the better of you, Mr. Lickfold—it would grieve me to the heart—it would indeed."

"Oh, d—n you, don't preach me a sermon, but give me the ale! There, that'll do. Now, once more, here's good luck to everybody!"

CHAPTER DCCXI.

JIM LICKFOLD AND THE POLICE OFFICERS FIND THE OLD STINGO RATHER TOO STRONG FOR THEM.

These last words sounded hollow, guttural, and indistinct, for, before he had finished the sentence, Jim Lickfold had dipped his nose into the tankard.

He sucked away at it, to the great admiration of his men, until not a drop remained.

Then he flung the tankard in the air.

"Hurrah!" he said, making an attempt to catch the tankard as it fell, and failing. "Here's three cheers, old Matthew! You're a brick!"

"How do you feel now?" said old Matthew. "Rather queer about the brain-box, and not very steady on your legs?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you may be able to carry two tankards of that ale, but I doubt it. I fancy the load will get too heavy for you before you get far."

"Oh, never mind," said Jim, who was now hopelessly intoxicated—"never mind. Come along, my boys—come along."

"Where are you going?" asked old Matthew.

"Well, it's no good stopping here, is it?"

"You are quite welcome to do so, if you like."

"I know that, Matthew—I know that!" said Jim Lickfold, seeming as though he was about to burst into tears, he was so deeply affected by old Matthew's hospitality. "You're a rare good fellow, you are; and we'll drink your health with musical honours—that's what we'll do, and will go afterwards."

"Oh, you are too good," said Matthew—"much too good."

"Not a bit of it! I tell you we'll do it! Won't we, my lads?"

"We will!" replied the officers, who had drank just enough to make them only partially conscious of what they were about.

"Now, Matthew, it's no good for you to refuse. We'll drink your health with musical honours."

"But not down in the cellar?"

"Yes, down in the cellar—here, on this d—d identical spot we'll drink your health with musical honours! It's no good, you can't turn me, we'll do it!"

There was a slight twinkle in old Matthew's eye which none of the officers observed.

"We want some more tankards," said Jim Lickfold—"we must have some more—we'll have a tankard apiece all round, and drink your health with musical honours!"

"Mr. Lickfold."

"What now?"

"Will you let me give you a caution? I tell you this old ale is very, very strong, and if you drink much more of it, it will make you all insensible. Now, I don't want this to happen!"

"Oh, you be d—d, Matthew, you're a clever old fox; but I can see through all your schemes; why, they are as clear as daylight to me. You don't want us to have any more of that jolly old ale; but I am determined! I have made my mind up. Here, Smithson."

"Yes, sir."

"Go up into the bar, and make haste and bring half a dozen tankards with you; we'll have one all round, and drink old Matthew's health with musical honours."

"Hurrah!" cried the men, excessively delighted with this proposition.

Smithson disappeared.

But he was rather surprised to find what an effect that one tankard of ale had had upon him.

He was a regular old soaker was Smithson, and could stand as much as here and there one.

But by the time he got to the bottom of the cellar steps he found his brains quite in confusion, and he wondered what in the world he had been sent for.

He ascended the steps slowly.

His legs almost failed him once or twice.

"That is strong ale," he said—"regular knock-me-down! I must not have any more of it."

He reached the bar window.

"What do you want?" said the girl.

Smithson was puzzled, and only looked at her vacantly.

"Mr. Lickfold," he gasped out at length.

"Well, what?"

"He sent me up here for—for——"

"For what?"

"Six—six——"

"Six what?"

"Six musical honours, of course! Didn't I tell you?"

The girl looked at him in surprise.

"Smithson!" howled a voice—"what the devil are you doing? Why don't you make haste—we are all waiting!"

It was another of the officers, who had walked as far as the hole in the flooring of the parlour.

"What do you want?" asked the girl again.

"Six tankards, and make haste!"

"Oh yes—six tankards," said Smithson, thickly. "Why don't you make haste, young woman?"

"Here they are, and mind how you carry them."

"All right."

With a great deal of difficulty, Smithson managed to pick up the six tankards, carrying three in each hand.

He found going down the cellar steps was much more difficult than going up had been.

All at once his knees gave way beneath him, and down he went to the bottom, tankards and all, with a grand crash.

Old Matthew came to see what was the matter.

There was not one of the others capable of going, for every moment that elapsed only served to increase their stupefaction.

The effects of the ale did not make themselves felt all at once, but the feeling increased by degrees.

Smithson gathered himself up by Matthew's assistance, and not without much trouble.

The pewter tankards were in a very bruised and battered condition, but still they would answer the purpose.

Leaning heavily upon Matthew's arm, Smithson returned to the cellar.

Then old Matthew, finding the officers were headstrong, and would have their own way, filled the six tankards one after another, and gave them to the men.

They stood there waiting for Lickfold to give the signal.

It was astonishing what oblivion that old ale produced.

In the short time that had elapsed, Jim Lickfold had almost forgotten what he had said about drinking Matthew's health with musical honours.

He was reminded, and then, like one starting up when just falling into a sleep, he said:

"Oh, yes! Here's to his jolly good health! Now, then, my lads, pipe up well, and do him honour!"

The usual drinking chorus was then sang with great gusto, and was followed by the usual three times three.

At the end of that time, the officers' lungs were quite exhausted, so they put the tankards to their lips, and drank away as if for their lives.

They did not stop until they had each seen the bottom of the tankard.

Some additional effect was already produced, even during the short time that had been occupied by imbibition.

Jim Lickfold was quite elate.

"Now then," he cried, "join hands, and round we go! Hurrah—hurrah! Keep the pot boiling!"

Any ridiculous proposition was certain to be assented to by the officers while in their present condition.

At Jim Lickfold's command, therefore, they all joined hands, and commenced going round in a circle, leaving old Matthew in the centre.

"Bravo for old Matthew!" cried Jim Lickfold. "Now, my lads, shout it out! Bravo—bravo—bravo for old Matthew!"

Such a din and racket had surely never been heard in those cellars before.

All at once, however, Smithson's unfortunate legs gave way again.

Down he went as suddenly as if he had been shot, and in his fall he dragged two of his companions with him, who, when down, found themselves quite incapable of getting up.

The others, continuing their mad gyration, fell over them, and in another moment the whole party of police officers were lying on the floor of the cellar in one indistinguishable and almost insensible heap.

CHAPTER DCCXII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK DISCOVERS THAT HE IS BY NO MEANS OUT OF PERIL.

"Well, upon my word, this is a nice state of things!" said old Matthew at length—"a very nice state of things indeed! So that is your way of doing business, is it, Mr. Lickfold? I wonder what you'll think of yourself when you wake up!"

"Matthew!" said a voice.

"Well now, what is it?"

"Let me out!"

"Oh! it's you, is it?"

"Yes, it is!"

"All right, Jack! One moment—only one moment! It was rather injudicious for you to speak just then as you did."

Old Matthew picked up the lantern off the floor, where

it had fallen, and by the aid of its light examined the countenances of the prostrate police-officers.

The scrutiny satisfied him.

"Oh, you are all done for, sure enough! Well, this is a nice night's work, and won't there be a jolly row about it, too!"

"Matthew!"

"Yes!"

"Will you let me out?"

"Of course I will! Just have patience for a moment, can't you!"

"I am."

Old Matthew got upon the sill, listened a moment, and then by a peculiar knack he knew of, lifted the lid of the cask.

Jack popped his head up immediately.

"You've been playing a nice little game, Matthew!"

"Hush!"

"What's amiss?"

"Be cautious!"

"All right."

"Step out now, at once. Don't make a noise on any account!"

There was really no need for this caution to be given.

Scarcely anything less than an earthquake would have disturbed the officers just then.

Sixteen-String Jack got carefully out of the cask.

He was exceedingly glad to do so.

"What is the meaning of all this, Matthew?"

"You have heard all, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then."

"But I don't understand."

"What?"

"Why, the magical means by which you were enabled to draw ale out of the cask in which I was hidden. How did you manage that?"

"And how was it the ale took effect so quickly?"

"Yes; clear those points up at once."

"I will. But don't make a noise."

"I'm quiet."

"Just hold the lantern, then. I have two or three things to do—slight preparations to make in readiness for the officers when they awake, and while I am so engaged I will tell you all about it."

"Do."

"Hold the light up, then."

Jack obeyed.

Matthew was very busy leaning over the top of the cask.

"Now," he said, "I must tell you, in the first place, that the barrel in which you have been hiding has a false bottom—about a couple of feet off the real one."

"I understand."

"And here the false bottom is," the landlord continued, producing a round piece of wood while he spoke.

"And there is ale underneath."

"Yes."

"Then I quite understand."

"And the ale is just drugged with the strongest stuff I could get at the chemist's. No one could stand against it—it's quite impossible! In fact, I am rather alarmed about the quantity Jim Lickfold has drunk!"

"Is it so very powerful?"

"It is indeed. And look—there he lies just like a log."

"But won't there be a row about this, Matthew?"

"No doubt there will."

"And sha'n't you get in for it?"

"No. I shall say they would drink the ale, whether I would let them or not. But come, I have made the cask all right, so that if by-and-by they should take it into their heads to examine it they will find nothing suspicious."

"You are a wonderful fellow, Matthew!"

"I have been told so several times to-night. But come on!"

"What's that?" said a voice.

Old Matthew started.

"What's that?" said the voice again.

It was one of the police-officers who had spoken.

He was sitting up, rubbing his head, with a lugubrious aspect.

The drugged ale had not taken so much effect upon him as his comrades.

"What's that?" he said again.

"Nothing," replied old Matthew.

As he spoke, he gave the officer a rap on the head with the lantern, which had the effect of rendering him insensible at once.

"Now," said old Matthew, seizing Jack by the skirt of his coat—"now!"

He leaned forward, Jack following.

In a few moments they reached the parlour.

"Wait here a little while," said Matthew. "I will shut up the shop for to-night, and then we shall at least be secure from further interruption.

He was gone before Jack could speak.

He soon returned.

"There are other officers lurking about in the lane, I fancy," he said; "but as they said nothing to me, I said nothing to them."

"I must be going."

"You must indeed, for it will soon be daylight."

"This has lost us a great deal of time."

"True, but don't grumble. Things might have been worse."

"I believe you! I almost gave myself up for lost once."

"But really, you see, you were in no danger. So, you see, this will be a lesson to you always to put trust in me for the future."

"Well, now, Matthew, tell me what I came here purposely to know—the situation of the public-house."

"You will be pleased with that, I can promise you, and you may look forward to a little quiet."

"We shall be glad of it."

"I can't make out why Tom Davis should have left in the way you mention. You must get the explanation of that from his own lips."

"But the inn—where is that?"

"I will tell you. You know Ealing Common?"

"Yes, well."

"On the south side of the common you will see a little narrow lane, with a singular-looking sign-post at the top of it."

"Yes, I think I know the very lane you mention."

"Very well. Go down that for about a mile, and then you will come to another narrow turning. Go down that, and about a quarter of a mile further on you will come to the inn."

"What an out-of-the-way place!"

"Very."

"What on earth could have induced anyone to build an inn in such a spot?"

"I will tell you. It is a very ancient building, and I find that a great many years ago the main road to Ealing ran past its very door. But some great changes have been made. The old road was stopped up, and a new one made. It was a wonder the inn was not pulled down. It would have been but for the fact that the owner lived in it. He was a perverse, obstinate man, and would not budge an inch. He had been born in the inn, he said, and he declared he would die in it. And so he did. Of course the trade dropped off; but he did not mind that, for he had made his fortune and had got enough to live upon. But after his death no one could be found who would take the house, so it was shut up, and soon gained the reputation of being haunted."

"It is quite a little romance."

"Yes. Tom Davis will tell you about it—he knows all the particulars."

"And what is the sign of the inn?"

"A very strange one."

"What is it?"

"The Three Spiders."

"How odd!"

"Very. Do you think you could find it?"

"I have no doubt upon the subject."

"That's a good thing."

"And will Tom Davis be there?"

"Yes. I saw him a day or two ago, and he told me he was going to move at once; but as I said before, you will get all the particulars from him."

"Yes; and now I will be off. Good-bye, Matthew! I am much obliged to you for what you have done to-night."



[SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MAKES A DARING ESCAPE.]

"Pho!—don't mention it!"

"But I shall. I want to be off now, though; but I hope I shall soon see you again. It's really quite a treat! I hope and trust, however, that you won't get into any trouble over those officers."

"Oh, don't be afraid! I will take care of myself, never fear!"

"I hope you will."

"And now, where are you going?"

"Back to the forest."

"Take care of yourself."

"I shall, depend upon it."

"Remember me to the captain and all of them."

"I will—I shall have a rare budget to tell them; and now, as time is precious, and as I have to go as far as St. Giles's for my horse, just tell me how I am to leave your house safely."

"You can't go back by the way you came."

"No—certainly not."

"Well, then, I fancy you can't do better than slip quietly out of the front door, and make the best of your way along the lane."

"I will. At the worst I have only a short distance to go to get my horse. Good-bye, and once more, many thanks!"

"Good-bye!"

As he spoke, old Matthew opened the front door of the White Horse quietly, and Jack glided out.

Matthew closed the door again instantly.

Jack looked right and left, but seeing no one, hastened onwards.

Scarcely had he gone ten steps, however, before he heard the sound of rapid footsteps behind him, and then a voice cried:

"That's him—that's him!"

CHAPTER DCCXIII.

GIVES SOME ACCOUNT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF WRIGGLES AND HIS OFFICERS.

In order that what follows may be properly understood, it will be necessary to leave Sixteen-String Jack for awhile and return to the proceedings of an individual of whom we have for a long time lost sight.

We allude to that enterprising and energetic police officer Mr. Wriggles.

It may, perhaps, be as well to remind the reader under what circumstances it was that we saw him last.

It was on that eventful night when Maud was rescued from Newgate by the four highwaymen.

On that occasion Mr. Wriggles was never more certain of anything in the whole course of his life than that Dick Turpin had come to his end.

He would have wagered any amount, however great, that the notorious highwayman had perished after taking that frightful leap off the wooden bridge.

What Davis told Tom King about his after proceedings was to a certain extent correct.

He waited, searching up and down the stream in the hope of finding Dick Turpin's body, until it was nearly daylight.

Thus it happened that he was out of the way at the very time when he ought to have been near Newgate.

At last, finding all attempts to recover the body unavailing, he reluctantly turned his horse's head towards London, being nevertheless brimful of the intelligence that Dick Turpin was no more.

His horror and astonishment may perhaps be guessed when he learned that all four of the highwaymen had been busy at work in Newgate, and that they had escaped, taking Maud with them.

At first he firmly refused to believe a word of it.

But by degrees he found that the facts were just as they had been represented, and that they could not possibly be gainsaid.

The first feeling that crept over him was one of despair.

"I will give up," he said—"I will give up! I'll try this no more. They are too clever for me! I made sure this time, and yet I have failed. I'll give up!"

This state of despair did not last very long.

Probably what contributed more than anything else to rouse him out of it was the manner in which he was jeered by everybody for having failed so lamentably.

"I will make one more attempt," he said, at length, "and if I fail this time I will really resign, and some one else shall take my post. I will begin at once."

Accordingly he did begin, and for a length of time was engaged in galloping about the country without, however, achieving any result.

About this time he was much chagrined in consequence of an order that was given to withdraw those soldiers who had been set to patrol the roads.

On more than one occasion we have shown pretty well what was the feeling among the military upon this subject.

Both officers and men alike hated the duty that had been imposed upon them, and, in order to check the spirit of disaffection that was rapidly growing, the order we have mentioned was given out.

Mr. Wriggles, then, had the place all to himself.

It was just about this time, however, that he heard of the occurrences that had taken place at the admiral's mansion.

The police officers who caused Tom King so much trouble on that occasion were not headed by Mr. Wriggles, but nevertheless they made a full report of their proceedings.

That Tom had escaped was quite certain, but as a matter of course Mr. Wriggles immediately surmised that those he sought were hiding themselves somewhere beneath the trees in Epping Forest.

If he had been sure of this it would have been only a vague direction in consequence of the immense extent of it.

Yet he hovered pretty closely all round about Epping Forest.

But he was baffled in consequence of the careful manner in which the highwaymen kept themselves concealed.

To follow the chief police officer in all his manifold attempts to obtain some clue to the highwaymen's hiding-place would be tedious.

Let it suffice to say that he at length learned they must be in a portion of the forest not far from the King's Oak public-house.

Accordingly, on the very night when Sixteen-String Jack set out upon his journey to Tom Davis's house, Mr. Wriggles, accompanied by an unusually large troop of police officers, started from London.

His destination was Epping Forest, and he determined to commence making an examination of one portion of it without delay.

It will be remembered that Sixteen-String Jack, when riding along by the side of the coachman, had heard the sound of horses' feet in considerable numbers on the road before him.

Believing them to be police officers, he had taken to the meadows, and at length pausing on an elevated spot, he saw the tops of their hats as they rode swiftly along the highway.

This was Mr. Wriggles and his party.

Without meeting with any accident or interruption, they arrived in due time at Epping Forest, reaching it, indeed, at about the same hour that Sixteen-String Jack paused before Tom Davis's house.

He did not stop until he reached that point in the road at which Earl's Path diverges at almost a right angle.

The masses of trees were everywhere around them, and there was nothing to be seen in any direction that would lead them to the belief that there was any of the inhabitants near.

But with great vigour and resolution, considering the numerous defeats he had had, Mr. Wriggles and his men commenced a rigid search among the under wood

After the departure of Sixteen-String Jack, it had fallen to Tom King's turn to keep watch round about the cave.

They had agreed from the first, for their own safety's sake, to adopt this precaution, taking the duty upon themselves by turns.

While so occupied, Tom King did not confine himself to any particular spot, nor did he keep all the time in the vicinity of the cavern.

On the contrary, he pushed his way through the bushes, peeping and prying about so as to be certain in his own mind that there was no prospect of immediate danger.

Ever since his adventure at the admiral's mansion he had been most particular in doing this, for he feared that the result of his doings there would be to direct the attention of the police officers to the forest.

On this night he had strayed in the direction of Earl's Path, and therefore he became aware of the presence of Mr. Wriggles and his officers very soon after their arrival.

He waited for some time watching their movements, and yet taking good care to keep out of their way.

He stood, in fact, until he judged it unsafe to remain any longer.

So, turning round, he made his way back with all speed to the cave.

The very manner in which he broke through the bushes and presented himself to his companions showed them that something unusual had taken place.

"What is it, Tom?" they inquired, anxiously—"what have you discovered?"

"The worst! Mr. Wriggles and his officers are now within a quarter of a mile of this spot."

Dick Turpin and Claude Duval started up in alarm, and a faint shriek came from Maud's lips.

"Hush!" said Tom—"hush! Pray be silent! I don't think my warning has come too late, although our foes are so close upon us. But do not utter a cry or speak in a loud tone of voice, for, in the silence that there always is here, who can say how far such sounds will travel?"

"Are you sure of what you say?" asked Dick Turpin, scarcely able to credit what he had just heard.

"I am perfectly sure of it, and, if I might give you my

opinion, I should say, from the manner in which the officers are making their way towards this spot, they have, in some manner that passes my comprehension, obtained a knowledge of our precise whereabouts."

"Are they coming direct to the cave, think you?"

"In my opinion they are, not hurriedly but carefully. They are searching every bush as they come along, so that they make sure of driving us before them."

"This is most alarming and vexatious," said Dick Turpin. "What is to be done?"

"In my opinion," said Claude, "there is but one thing we can do, and that is to get our horses and move off as quickly as possible. If they have begun to search in this quarter, they must of necessity discover the cave."

"Claude is right," said Turpin. "Wait here a moment, Maud—we will soon depart."

"It is a pity," said Tom, "that Sixteen-String Jack is not with us, and that we do not know the position of the inn."

"It is," replied Dick; "but there's no time to talk about that now."

As he spoke he uttered that faint whistling sound which we have more than once described, and which Black Bess understood so well.

In a moment afterwards there was a crashing of branches, and then Black Bess, full of fire and spirit and altogether refreshed by her long rest, made her appearance upon the spot.

CHAPTER DCCXIV.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMPANIONS MAKE A PRECIPITATE RETREAT FROM EPPING FOREST.

DICK TURPIN'S eyes glistened with pleasure, his breast swelled, when his bonny black mare—uttering a low cry which could not be interpreted as signifying anything else but pleasure and recognition—came towards him and rubbed her head against his breast.

"Bravo, Bess!" he exclaimed, patting her fondly on the neck as he spoke. "You are once more about to have some adventures on the road, and you are once more about to carry a double burden!"

Black Bess pranced and pawed the earth impatiently, as though anxious to start off at once.

She was now, in consequence of the attention she had received, in better condition for the road than she had been for many a month.

"Make haste, Dick," said Tom—"make haste! We have several things to do, and who can tell how soon the officers may make their appearance among the trees?"

This caution was not needed, for Dick was by no means unconscious of their extreme peril.

With a speed that would have done credit to an experienced ostler he placed the various trappings upon his steed, and Black Bess was saddled and bridled in complete readiness before either of the other two horses.

This being the case, Dick Turpin moved rapidly about, endeavouring to destroy all traces of that place having lately been occupied.

In an extremity of fear, Maud had seated herself upon the trunk of the fallen tree, and was weeping silently.

Well might she dread another pursuit by the police officers, for on the former occasion had she not had a very narrow escape indeed of her life?

The wound she had then received was far from well, though much better than it had been.

Yet it was with an unusual amount of depression that she looked forward to the events that would probably take place during the next few hours.

At last Claude Duval and Tom King were ready.

Although some time had elapsed since Tom King had warned them of their danger, yet in reality only a few moments had expired.

"Now, Dick," they cried, "quick—we must leave this place at once!"

"Which direction will be best to take?"

"Towards High Beech," replied Tom King, readily; "that is the nearest point at which we can emerge from the forest."

"Then you think of trying to escape by a rapid flight?"

"Yes, I believe that is our best, if not our only chance. Our horses have had a very long rest, and are now in excellent condition; those of the officers, however, are already somewhat tired by their journey from London, so that I consider we have every advantage on our side."

"I think you are right, Tom," replied Dick Turpin. "You lead the way, and I will follow, and Claude will bring up the rear."

This arrangement was fallen into instantly.

They were compelled to proceed on foot for some distance, leading their horses by their bridles in consequence of the extreme density of the forest.

But Tom King had by this time become exceedingly familiar with the locality, and so, without loss of time, he led them towards an open part where they would be able to mount.

It was a long, beautiful glade, looking scarcely as though it had been the work of nature alone.

It was many feet in width, presenting all the appearance af an avenue in a park.

The trees grew with extreme regularity on both sides of it, and the beautiful, smooth, green turf was beneath their feet stretching as far as they could see before and behind them.

"Mount," said Tom—"mount, and then follow me. I'll warrant I shall show you the quickest and the best way out of the forest."

"Make all speed, Tom!" was Dick Turpin's reply. "Rest assured that Black Bess will be able to keep up with you!"

At this moment there was a shout from the rear, and a pistol was fired.

One of the police officers, who had become somewhat separated from his companions, had either heard or seen the highwaymen.

According to the instructions that had been given him, he raised an immediate alarm.

The sharp, ringing report of the pistol sounded with alarming distinctness in that silent wood.

It reached the ears of Mr. Wriggles and his party instantly, and they rushed pell-mell in that direction.

But our friends had nothing left now but to mount.

This was very quickly done.

Dick placed Maud easily upon the saddle before him, so that, as he was flying from his foes, his body would at least form a shield for her.

Before they could fairly get their steeds in motion, however, the police officers came bursting through the trees like so many Indians.

"Fire—fire!" cried Mr. Wriggles, instantly—"fire!"

His men all had their pistols in readiness, and a straggling, irregular volley was immediately discharged.

Several bullets whistled around the highwaymen.

But the pistols had been fired without any accurate aim having being taken.

The consequence was that no harm was done, and Tom King, again crying to his companions to follow him, urged his horse forward at the top of its speed.

Away they went down the glade at a furious pace, the trees seeming to fly past them.

Upon reaching the termination of this glade they found that it connected with another, and that with another still, so that, although it was not by any means the nearest or most direct route out of the forest, yet it was the quickest, because the horses were able to maintain a rapid rate of speed.

Having once started the game, as Mr. Wriggles expressed it, the officers did not trouble themselves to continue their search.

They all eagerly scrambled into their saddles, and, as fast as they mounted, rode off in pursuit.

So that at first it was quite a straggling throng that followed the highwaymen.

Foremost among them, however, was Mr. Wriggles, for he believed if he once got the highwaymen out of the forest into the open country he should be able to keep in their rear until he had run them down.

He had very good reasons for indulging in this belief, and what those reasons were will presently become apparent.

At last, with a glad shout, Tom King announced that the boundary of the forest had been reached.

Had the dragoons still continued to patrol the roads as they had done up to so short a time before, the highwaymen could not possibly have escaped capture.

They were all that time filled with this dread, for they were not aware that the patrol had been withdrawn.

As they galloped on, however, without meeting with any interruption, their courage began to rise, though at first they were almost afraid to believe that fortune had favoured them to such an extent.

By degrees the throng of officers in the rear grew more and more compa..

Those stragglers who had before been in the rear gradually recovered their lost ground.

But the highwaymen never lost the advantage which the first start had given them, and when they were entirely clear of the forest there was a distance of considerably over half a mile between them.

And what cheered them and made them still more exultant was the fact that this space by almost rapid degrees grew greater and greater, although the officers made every effort to keep up.

"I told you this would be the best plan," shouted Tom. "Forward, my friends—forward!—we shall outdistance them easily!"

Had Dick Turpin been alone, there is no doubt that he could have accomplished this with scarcely any trouble at all.

So far from having to urge Black Bess onwards in the furious gallop he had to keep the rein somewhat tight, in order to prevent her from shooting before Tom King.

Claude Duval kept steadily in the rear, though he was not many paces behind his captain.

"Yonder is the high-road!" cried Tom King, as he pointed across a meadow. "Rely upon it, now the dragoons are removed, we cannot do better than take to it—it will be firm beneath the horses' feet, and we shall make wonderful speed! We shall be more likely to outdistance the officers then than if we continue a flight across the country."

"Be it so, then," cried Dick Turpin. "I am inclined to think you are right, though, if we should happen to fall foul of a troop of dragoons, our situation will be awkward indeed!"

"Don't think of that," said Tom King. "On—on! Look behind you and you will see how we have distanced the officers during the last ten minutes!"

CHAPTER DCCXV.

THE CHASE AFTER THE HIGHWAYMEN BECOMES MORE AND MORE EXCITING AND INTERESTING.

Dick Turpin turned his head, and so did Claude Duval.

Both felt reassured as they did so, and were encouraged to make still more strenuous efforts to get out of sight altogether.

The police officers were now at least a mile in the rear.

Many things conspired to cause this.

In the first place, the horses were all to some extent fatigued by their first journey, and Mr. Wriggles was anxious that all his men should keep up with him.

They could in consequence only proceed at an average rate.

Among the horses that the police officers rode, there were doubtless one or two that could easily have maintained the lead.

But these were checked so that the troop could keep together.

Mr. Wriggles continued to speak to his men, and what he said inspired them with a great deal of courage and confidence.

They did not seem in the least troubled about the manner in which the highwaymen gradually increased the distance, and they gave several loud cheers, as though they were quite sure of victory in the end, or as though they firmly believed that on this occasion at least the race would not be to the swift.

Directly after exchanging these few words, and looking back at their foes, the highwaymen jumped over the low hedge that divided them from the high-road.

Maud clung in the greatest terror to Dick Turpin, and when he pulled up Black Bess after her leap, he found that Maud was sobbing violently.

As well as he could, he soothed her agitation.

Yet the feeling of depression of which we have already spoken grew stronger and stronger, as though she anticipated some great misfortune in the future.

The high-road was smooth and level, and just moist enough to be agreeable to the horses' feet.

The gallop at which they went was truly alarming.

Suddenly they came upon a little village or town, the houses in which for the most part fronted the high-road.

But the village was left behind before they could take note of the buildings contained in it.

"Hurrah!" shouted Tom King, as, looking back, he discovered that the officers were out of sight altogether.

"Come, Maud," said Dick, "you see that so far all is well—our steeds have enabled us to give them the slip already. They are out of sight, and, after galloping a little further at this pace—which to you doubtless is an alarming one—all will be well."

"Come on!" cried Tom—"don't flag! Every moment now is of immense importance, since it takes us so much further from our foes. Our horses will stand a much longer gallop than this. On—on!"

Then, some time afterwards, Tom King once more turned his head.

As he did so, an exclamation escaped his lips.

But this time not one of satisfaction.

He was so astonished that he could scarcely believe that his own eyes had served him faithfully.

"Look—look!" he cried. "What can you see behind you?"

Guessing by his manner something was wrong, Dick and Claude looked hurriedly back.

What was their astonishment to perceive that the police officers they had imagined they were outdistancing were in reality actually gaining upon them?

From the distance, they could see that the officers were sparing neither whip nor spur to urge the animals onward at their utmost speed.

But how or in what manner they had managed to catch up with them they could not possibly conceive.

"There is something strange about that," said Tom King. "But no matter—we shall surely outrun them yet. Forward—forward!"

With unrelaxing speed, the highwaymen's horses galloped on.

For a considerable length of time, however, the officers, even if they did not gain upon them, contrived to keep quite as close behind them.

They could not be shaken off.

At last, however, some diminution in their speed was appreciable.

Gradually they dropped back into their former position.

The distance gradually and gradually increased, until they were lost to sight altogether.

Several towns and villages had been passed through by the highwaymen in their headlong flight.

But now a large tract of open country lay before them.

The road lay almost level, so that there was no time lost in ascending hills, nor were their horses so severely taxed as they would have been if the route they had taken had been of an undulating character.

But again, and just when a belief that they had got out of the officers' sight entirely had taken possession of them, another ejaculation of surprise broke from Tom King.

Could it be really possible that it was the same troop that had pursued them from the first?

Yes, there was no doubt about it.

By some means or other, they had recovered their lost ground, and had now got so close to the objects of their pursuit that Tom King could distinguish the form of Mr. Wriggles from the rest.

"I have it!" cried Tom, with something like a tinge of despair in his voice—"I understand how it is now!"

"What—what?"

"Look behind you, and see how close the officers are to us now, and yet we have not relaxed our speed. I will tell you how it is: Wriggles has made arrangements all along the high-road to have relays of fresh horses ready To what extent he may have carried this plan, we can not tell; but I am afraid—nay, certain—that he will run us down!"

A gloomy silence followed these words, during which Maud's sobs again broke forth.

The highwaymen could do nothing but urge their horses onward, and they began with alarm to perceive that they already showed some signs of exhaustion in consequence of such a long, hard gallop.

Those belonging to the police officers, however, seemed quite fresh, as they really were.

Tom had hit upon the right solution of the mystery that had puzzled them so much at first.

This was the reason why the police officers felt so much confidence in the ultimate success of their efforts.

Mr. Wriggles had been carefully laying his plans for many days past, and he had arranged at various inns that horses should be waiting, upon which they could mount instantly and ride off.

From this it will be seen that he calculated upon driving the highwaymen from their hiding-place.

He never for a moment imagined that they would stay, and endeavour to fight it out.

Such an attempt would have been neither more nor less than madness on their part.

A better scheme than this could never have been devised.

It seemed in every way calculated to answer the end in view.

However good the horses belonging to the highwaymen might be, they must of necessity be exhausted by the continual and never-resting gallop.

It was soon after the highwaymen lost sight of the police officers for the first time that the latter stopped in the village through which the highwaymen had passed a short time before at such a furious rate, at the principal inn.

Horses were waiting, and in an incredibly short space of time Mr. Wriggles and his party all dismounted and seated themselves on the steeds that were waiting for them.

Then, without allowing a moment's pause, they continued their pursuit.

The horses had every one been carefully chosen.

They were all above the average quality, and had had several days' rest, so that this will at once account for the officers being able to regain the ground they had lost.

"Keep on, my men!" cried Wriggles. "We must not flag for a single instant! The result I may say is certain. I have made all my arrangements for miles and miles to come, so that in the end their horses must fall beneath them from sheer exhaustion; then we shall be able to effect an easy capture."

This seemed probable in the extreme, and the officers were much elated by the prospect before them.

Again they found the highwaymen receding from their view, until at length they disappeared in the distance altogether.

"Whip and spur hard!" cried Wriggles. "Their horses are indeed of first-rate quality, or they would not make such speed as this. Don't spare the horseflesh, for I am sorry to say we have several miles to go yet before we can reach the public-house at which the next relay of horses is waiting."

These words rather damped the courage of the officers at first.

Expecting every moment, however, to reach the village where the fresh horses were, they slashed their horses with their whips until their arms ached, and gored them with the spurs in a manner that was terrible to witness, so that the poor, panting beasts flew along simply because they were maddened by intense pain.

CHAPTER DCCXVI.

DICK TURPIN DECIDES UPON TRYING A VERY HAZARDOUS SCHEME, IN THE HOPE OF BEING ABLE TO BAFFLE MR. WRIGGLES.

THE highwaymen, finding again that the police officers were out of sight, and that they continued so for rather a longer time than before, agreed to run the risk of pausing for a few moments, in order to allow their horses to recover their wind a little.

They availed themselves of the opportunity to hold a rapid and anxious consultation as to the best thing they could do

"It will be folly to keep along the high-road in this fashion," said Tom King. "It is pretty clear to me that every few miles Wriggles will be able to obtain fresh horses, so that we must of necessity be run down."

"But how are we to avoid it?" said Dick Turpin. "If we were to turn off now and gallop across the country, the brightness with which the moon is shining would render us visible for many a mile. Look across on both sides, and you will see that I am right."

A glance satisfied the highwaymen that Dick was correct.

The part of the country they were in was exceedingly flat, and it was really wonderful what a distance was commanded from the road, which was raised somewhat above the level of the meadows.

"Moreover," said Dick, "I know full well that there are large extents of marshy lands on both sides of us—ground that to all appearance looks smooth and firm to the horses' feet, but which in reality is so treacherous and soft that after awhile it would entirely carry us down."

"That is a danger not to be despised," said Claude; "and besides, you appear to me to overlook the fact that Mr. Wriggles would become aware directly that we had quitted the high-road. At the very next halting-place he would inquire how long a time had elapsed since we had passed by; and if he was told that we had not been seen, he would know immediately that we had quitted the high-road."

"It's a most unfortunate affair, take it how you will," said Tom King. "But come—forward, my friends—forward! Our horses have rested quite long enough. How in the world is it that the officers have not appeared?"

This was a question they could not answer.

Nevertheless, the fact inspired them with a great deal of confidence.

Their horses might be fleet and enduring enough to carry them past the furthest station at which Mr. Wriggles had provided change of horses.

If this should happen, they might then stand a good chance of getting clear altogether.

But Dick remained very silent and thoughtful.

He was more uneasy in his mind than he would have liked to confess to anyone.

He comprehended the full extent of the peril with which they were menaced.

Try as he would, he could not see a clear and practicable way out of this danger.

He racked his brain, but all to no effect.

His usual fruitful invention failed him in this his hour of need.

But while galloping along with almost unabated speed, he continued to ponder over the difficulties of their position.

At length an idea darted into his mind.

But it was so wild and so daring that at first he contemptuously dismissed it.

But it kept recurring to him again and again—each time it was with greater force, and each time the improbability of its success seemed to grow less and less.

He knew that in many cases during his career he had owed his safety to some very daring act, and why should he not make himself secure by the same means on the present occasion?

It was, however, risking all.

And this was what made him chiefly pause.

If the enterprise failed, the consequences of the failure were so terrible that he could not bear to think upon them.

The death or capture of himself and all who were with him must inevitably follow.

On the other hand, however, should the plan prove successful, such a degree of safety and immunity from danger would be gained as would amply compensate them for any amount of risk, no matter how great.

Notwithstanding the difficulty there was in maintaining a conversation while the horses were at full gallop, he was about to speak upon the subject to his companions, when all at once they perceived something on the road before them.

What it was they soon made out, for as they were hastening towards it, so it was hastening towards them.

It was a post-chaise—a large, cumbrous, yellow vehicle,

such as in those days were made use of by the affluent, as being the very quickest mode of passing from one place to another.

It was drawn by four powerful horses.

On one of the leaders rode a postilion, and on the front seat the coachman was sitting, and beside him was another servant in the garb of a footman.

This vehicle evidently did not interfere with Turpin's plan.

On the contrary, it seemed to strengthen it, for a look of increased confidence and determination appeared in his countenance, and he muttered to himself:

"Fortune is favouring me to the utmost! I should be mad indeed not to take advantage of so fortunate an event! It must be so—it must be so!"

Tom King, seeing this post-chaise approach, took care to get his horse close to one side of the road, so that there should be no danger of a collision while passing.

But what was his astonishment to hear Dick Turpin cry:

"Stop that chaise, Tom—on your life, stop it! You, Claude, assist him. Bring it to a standstill, and then I will tell you how we shall escape. Do not ask me a single question now, or wonder at my words; if you do, the chance will be lost. Have confidence in me, and obey me."

When they first heard Dick Turpin thus speak, Tom King and Claude both believed him mad, and not without some reason.

But what he said afterwards, and, more than that, the great confidence they both had in his ability to free them from a position of danger, made them obey almost without reflecting.

They both, however, glanced apprehensively in the rear.

Not a single sign of the police officers could they see, however.

And this is not to be wondered at, for the highwaymen were now only about a mile from the village at which Mr. Wriggles would obtain a change of horses.

A longer interval had elapsed between these two stations than between the others.

But it was unavoidable, that part of the country being so very thinly populated.

Some time would necessarily elapse before the tired horses could arrive at that spot, and had the highwaymen only have been sure of this, they would have felt a much greater degree of confidence in the plan they were about to attempt to carry out.

"Hold!" cried Tom King, as soon as he was near enough for his voice to be heard. "I say, pull up, postilion, or I fire!"

The postilion was evidently a great coward, or he would certainly have risked riding on.

As it was, he obeyed the highwayman's injunction immediately, and tightened the rein.

The horses gradually reduced their speed.

Claude Duval galloped on to the coachman and footman.

He first of all fired a pistol, and the bullet passed so close to their heads that they were in a mortal state of fright immediately.

Up to that moment, the coachman had felt inclined to whip the horses and chance it, but now quite a change came over his feelings, and he made every effort to stop the vehicle.

"After all," he said, to his fellow-servant, "it cannot matter a straw to us, can it? They'll find they have had all their trouble for nothing, and of course they'll let us ride on again. I know these highwaymen. I have been stopped before to-day, and I rather like 'em, because they never interfere with servants."

In less time than anyone could have believed possible, the post-chaise was brought to a standstill, and when this much had been accomplished, Tom King and Claude Duval paused, for they did not know what to do next.

They waited for Dick Turpin to give them their instructions.

"What can this mean?" asked Maud—"what is it you intend? I am terrified almost to death!"

"Be of good heart!" replied Turpin. "Leave all to me! Cheer up! Believe me that all this will end well for us—there is safety in what I am about to do!"

At this moment Dick stopped Black Bess close to where Tom King was standing.

"Now, captain," the latter said, "we have stopped the post-chaise, what in the world are we to do next?"

CHAPTER DCCXVII.

DESCRIBES THE DETAILS OF DICK TURPIN'S PERILOUS PLAN FOR DECEIVING THE POLICE OFFICERS.

"I will show you in a moment," replied Dick. Then, turning to Maud, he added: "I want you to alight here; you will know why presently. I can't stay to answer any questions. Watch what we are about."

While speaking, he assisted her to dismount.

Then, in a low tone of voice, he uttered several sentences only just loud enough for Tom King to catch their purport.

He stared with astonishment, as well he might.

"Surely, captain," he exclaimed, "you are not in earnest?"

"I am indeed! Quick! Don't lose time by discussing the matter; we must stand or fall by the result!"

"It is bold," mused Tom, "and may succeed on that very account. But the officers! We shall not have time to complete our preparations."

"Yes we shall, if we are speedy," was Dick's resolute reply.

"I will let Claude know what you intend," said Tom King.

"Do so, and I will assist."

So saying, Dick Turpin rode towards the postilion.

He presented a pistol at that individual's head, and cried:

"Now, then, dismount this instant, or I will save you the trouble by putting a bullet through your skull, when you will fall off of your own accord!"

"Certainly, good Mr. Highwayman—certainly! I am only too glad to do anything to oblige you!"

"Well, then, make haste," continued Dick, "and take off your coat, that cap, and waistcoat—I want them!"

The postilion began to expostulate, but Dick pointed the pistol at him in such a menacing manner that he quite forgot all he was about to say, and slipped off in a twinkling all the articles of apparel that had been mentioned.

The postilion expected nothing short of death, and he trembled excessively.

Without offering the least resistance, he suffered Dick to bind him hand and foot, and to thrust a rude gag into his mouth.

"There," he said, "now lie still, and think yourself lucky you have got off so well!"

In the meanwhile, Claude and Tom had not been idle.

The former grasped at Dick's idea at once, and spoke with the utmost confidence as to his belief in its success.

By threats alone they compelled the coachman and footman to dismount.

They had rather more trouble with them than Dick had with the postillion.

But in a few minutes they succeeded in stripping off their outside clothing and binding them securely.

Dick was done first, and so he rode to the door of the post-chaise.

As yet, no sound had come from the interior of it, and therefore he concluded that it was empty.

If so, all the better, for he would be saved much trouble, and time was precious.

In order to settle this point in his mind, however, he opened the door, and peeped in.

The interior was quite dark and empty, save and excepting a cloak, a rug, and some other articles of travel.

The reader must not overlook the fact that all this was done with great rapidity.

The three highwaymen were each busily employed.

"Now, Dick," asked Claude, "where will you place those fellows?—what shall we do with them?"

"Let us put them on the other side of the hedge," was the reply. "Suppose you two set about that work—I have plenty more to do. Above all things, be quick!"

Dick's comrade knew as well as himself how great a necessity there was for expedition, and by the manner in which they handled the servants it would seem that they were in a very great hurry indeed.

They lifted them up by the head and feet, and carried them into a meadow on one side of the road.

We have already said that the highway in this part was raised several feet above the level of the country, presenting in some respects the appearance of a railway embankment.

Upon reaching the other side of the hedge, Tom and Claude laid the servants down, and gave them a gentle push, yet sufficient to make them roll over.

The ground was sloping, and they could neither make use of their hands nor feet to stop themselves; and so away they rolled until they reached the bottom of the declivity.

They were then rather suddenly brought to a stop in a ditch, that was, however, only a shallow one, so that they were in no danger of drowning.

"I don't think they will raise an alarm," said Claude, coolly, as the last one went with a splash into the water; "and if we have only time, the officers, I am sure, will be deceived."

"But if they should not," said Tom King, "what an awkward position we should be in then!"

"True! I would rather not think about it—it would be best not."

Returning to the post-chaise, they found that Dick had been busy indeed.

During their late operations, he had unharnessed three of the horses in the post-chaise—namely, two of the leaders and one of the wheelers, as they were called by the coachmen in those days.

The three horses were standing together.

"Take them," said Dick; "lead them through the hedge, and start them off at a gallop—they will soon make themselves contented along with that grass, and will not appear upon the high-road again until they are forced to it, I'll warrant."

With equal dexterity and speed, Dick then took off the saddles and bridles from the other horses, and placed these articles inside the post-chaise, stuffing them with great difficulty under the seat.

He then placed their own horses in the traces.

Claude's next to the one wheeler that was left, Tom King's for one leader, and Black Bess for the other.

Maud, trembling with fright, had taken her seat inside the vehicle.

Over and over again, Turpin assured her that all would be well, and that nothing would occur to bring them into danger, save some act of her own, which might give rise to the officers' suspicions.

She determined to keep very silent indeed, and leave the arrangement of events entirely in the hands of her husband and his two comrades.

The latter soon returned after starting the horses, and as they did so Dick completed his harnessing operations.

"Now then," he said, "you have only to dress yourselves up in this clothing, and we shall be ready to renew our journey."

"What characters shall we take?"

"I will be the postilion," said Dick, "and will ride Black Bess. You, Tom, had better be the footman, and Claude the coachman."

This settled the matter at once, and, as may be imagined, it took a very short time indeed for them to assume the long, liveried coats, and wigs, and hats.

When they had thus attired themselves, Claude and Tom King were completely metamorphosed.

Dick Turpin, however, had changed in appearance the most.

He looked exactly like a postilion.

He had on a bright blue coat, and a small scarlet cap made of cloth.

In his hand he also held a postilion's whip.

"Are you all ready?" he asked of his comrades—"is every preparation made?"

"Yes, all is well."

"Then we will start. The officers, it seems, are not yet in sight. Rely upon it, their suspicions will not now be aroused—they will think we are far enough off by this time."

"Be careful how you reply if you are spoken to," cried Tom.

"All right!" replied Dick. "And bear the caution in mind yourselves. Now, forward!"

He smacked his whip, and the horses set themselves in motion.

They went at a tolerably smart rate.

But as they drew nearer and nearer to the officers, Dick began to see in stronger colours the fearful amount of risk they were running.

If they should unluckily happen to be detected, nothing in the world could save them.

But he calculated that Mr. Wriggles and his officers would have their attention quite fixed upon the objects of their pursuit, and if they saw the post-chaise coming towards them they would not dream for a moment of connecting it with their prey.

It seemed indeed beyond belief that the highwaymen, so far from attempting to get away from their enemies, should actually be driving at a rapid rate along the road, so that in a short time a meeting must inevitably take place.

Dick fully relied upon passing the officers unquestioned, though what would be their future proceedings should they succeed in passing them, he had not yet had time to decide.

He wondered greatly how it was that they continued for such a long time in the rear, and began to indulge in the supposition that they had abandoned the chase.

This idea was soon proved to be erroneous, for shortly afterwards, on looking along the road, he perceived the police officers coming towards him at a pretty good rate of speed.

CHAPTER DCCXVIII.

MR. WRIGGLES MAKES DICK TURPIN A PRESENT OF A FIVE-SHILLING PIECE.

SPEEDY as the highwaymen had been, yet some considerable time had elapsed since they first stopped the post-chaise up to the moment when they beheld the police officers.

It was astonishing how the latter could have got so far into the rear.

Nothing but an accident could have occasioned it.

Had Dick Turpin been aware of the actual state of the case, he might have been saved the trouble he had been at.

The reader must be informed that in the midst of the chase Mr. Wriggles's horse trod upon something in the road—a loose stone probably—then stumbled and fell.

Mr. Wriggles was a good horseman, but yet on the present occasion he was not quite quick enough in his movements to save himself.

When the horse fell down, he fell also, and it is a thousand wonders he was not ridden over by his followers.

But for the fact that he kept about fifty yards in advance of them, he must have been.

But they saw the accident in time to pull up.

At the occurrence of this accident, of course, a general stoppage took place.

Mr. Wriggles was found to be insensible.

But upon being raised up he quickly recovered his consciousness.

His first thought was the pursuit in which he had been engaged, and he remembered immediately the accident that had taken place.

"Put me on another horse," he said. "We must not wait. Let one of the others ride mine; and if he will not keep up, why, he must stay behind. Now, then, be quick, or the reward will slip through our fingers again, after all!"

The men were not at all pleased at the idea of having all their trouble for nothing, so one of them dismounted, and Mr. Wriggles took his horse.

The chief police officer's own steed had been somewhat severely injured, yet there was no doubt he might be made to travel at a tolerably good speed for a short distance.

"It's all right," Wriggles cried. "We have only a few miles further to go, and then we can get a change of horses again."

Mr. Wriggles was very much bruised and hurt, and he felt altogether in a very bad way indeed.

But he was still determined to proceed with his enterprise, and after having imbibed some brandy from a

bottle he carried in his pocket, he shouted to his men to follow him, and plunged the spurs deeply into his horse's flanks.

Away, then, they galloped, but not at a very rapid rate, for the horses were one and all knocked up.

This accident had been of the greatest utility to our friends.

Had it not occurred, it is questionable whether they would have succeeded in completing all their arrangements in time.

"It is strange," Mr. Wriggles muttered, "that we have come all this long way without meeting with a single vehicle. The next one I see, however, I will stop and make some inquiries of. I shall probably learn something of importance."

At this moment the post-chaise came in sight.

"Take care," cried Dick to his companions—"everything now depends upon our coolness. Yonder are the officers."

"Yes, I see them," was Tom's reply, "and there's old Wriggles riding a little in advance of the rest."

"Yes, I see him," returned Dick. "And now leave me to reply to him, in case he should ask any questions."

"But you do not apprehend a stoppage, do you?"

"No, not by any means; but still it is best to be prepared for any contingency."

"Oh, decidedly the best!"

"Well, then, let it be understood that I alone will be the spokesman!"

"But do you think he will recognise your voice?"

"No, I flatter myself I can disguise it well enough to deceive even him. It will not be the first time either," he added, with a smile.

"And do you think your disguise is tolerably perfect?"

"Yes—I am quite assured as to the result. Tom," he added, "if you can manage it, say a few words to Maud. Tell her that all will be well—that she has nothing to fear. After that we had better not speak again."

Tom obeyed.

Maud guessed, of course, what it was that Dick intended to do, and she was almost paralysed with terror.

After awhile, however, she became calm enough to be aware that she herself could do something towards furthering the deception that was about to be practised.

We have already spoken of the various articles of travel that were in the chaise.

One of these was a large grey cloak, in which she entirely enveloped herself.

It was furnished with a hood, and this she drew up over her head.

She wrapped the rug closely round her, and then sank back upon the seat as though half asleep, choosing the very darkest place she could find.

It must not be denied that on this occasion Dick Turpin's heart beat at a much more rapid rate than was usual.

He tried hard to control all manifestations of excitement.

But above everything he was anxious that no tremor in his voice should betray him.

Perceiving the post-chaise, Mr. Wriggles increased his pace, until at length coming within speaking distance, he bawled out:

"Stop—stop—in the name of the King I call upon you to stop!"

"Murder," said Dick, in a voice so unlike his usual tones that his two comrades were surprised—"murder—help! Here's a highwayman, and more of 'em down the road!"

These words were uttered entirely for the edification of Mr. Wriggles, and they were spoken just loud enough for him to hear.

"No nonsense!" he cried. "There's no danger from highwaymen. I am an officer of police, and these are my followers. Stop—stop, I tell you!"

Dick Turpin knew that it would be no good to refuse, and so, after a good deal of flourish and fuss, he brought the steaming, panting horses to a standstill.

He wished devoutly that the night had been a dark one, or that the meeting had not taken place in so exposed a part of the roadway.

Mr. Wriggles pulled up suddenly close to Black Bess.

"Whose carriage is this?" he asked, in a loud and authoritative voice.

"Master's, sir," was Dick's instantaneous reply.

"Don't be a fool!" cried Mr. Wriggles, angrily. "Take care how you answer an officer of police, or it may be the worse for you."

"I am very sorry if I have said anything to offend you, sir," said Dick, in a humble, apologetic voice; "but her ladyship's inside if you would like to speak to her."

"No—no—I don't want to trouble her ladyship, nor to interrupt you either. All I want to know is—have you observed anyone pass you on the road lately?"

Dick pretended to think.

"Do you mean," he said, at last, "three men mounted on three horses that looked as though they had travelled many a mile, and as though they would drop before they went many yards further?"

"Yes—yes!" said Wriggles, scarcely able to speak from excitement.

"And had one of 'em got a girl on the saddle with him, or, at least, something that looked like one?"

"Yes—yes, it was a girl, and the pair were riding on a black horse."

"So they were, sir," replied Dick. "How did you know that?"

"I did know it. And you saw them pass you?"

"Yes."

"How long ago?"

"Not more than ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour I should say at the outside, sir."

"And the horses looked tired, you say?"

"Yes, they did, poor brutes—they were quite knocked up. It was downright cruelty to ride them; but they were spurring away, and lashing them with their whips; but for all that, the poor creatures hardly moved, and, as I said at first, they seemed each moment as though they were about to fall down on the road."

Mr. Wriggles's followers came up in time to hear these last words.

The chief police officer himself uttered a cry of exultation.

"Hurrah!" he said, "it's not so bad after all. I thought it was odd if their horses could keep up that breakneck speed much longer. Sorry to interrupt you," he added, addressing the seeming postilion, "but here's a crown to drink to the capture of Dick Turpin and his associates! Tell her ladyship I am sorry I was obliged to interrupt her in her journey."

"Many thanks to you, sir!" said Dick, touching his forehead and pocketing the five-shilling piece. "Keep straight on along the road, and you can't help but overtake them."

CHAPTER DCCXIX.

DESCRIBES THE MANNER IN WHICH THE HIGHWAYMEN DISPOSE OF THE CHAISE.

With a sudden bound, Mr. Wriggles and his party started off upon what may be truly termed their "wild-goose chase."

Dick smacked his whip after the manner of postilions, and away rolled the post-chaise.

There was now every encouragement for the highwaymen to proceed, for they were increasing their distance from their foes at a prodigious rate.

"You did that well, Dick, I am bound to confess," cried Tom King, as soon as he believed it was safe for him to speak—"it was capital!"

"I can't help laughing myself," was the reply.

"I should think not. Have you really got the crown-piece?"

"Yes—here it is."

"Well, if old Wriggles should really find out that he has been so deceived—that he has actually put a coin into your hand—he will be almost mad; depend upon it he will never forgive you."

"I suppose not, though that does not trouble me. He would not have forgiven me as it was, so a little more cause for enmity cannot make much difference."



SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AT THE LONELY INN.]

"I suppose you are right."

"Yes. Tell Maud that all's well—that the danger is entirely past."

Tom leant back in the seat, and spoke to her.

But Maud heard him not.

When the danger was over, her strength completely gave way, and she fainted.

Of this, however, Tom was not aware.

He turned towards his leader, and said:

"Now Dick, how are we to act?"

"I can only think of one thing," was the reply, "and that is to drive on with this carriage with all our might."

"But where to?"

"Anywhere away from Wriggles—we can't make too much speed just at present."

"How long do you think it will be before he discovers the trick that has been played him?"

"That is hard to say; he will find out that we have not passed the next village where he will call for fresh horses."

"But he may suspect we have turned off across the meadows."

"Or," added Claude, "he may by some accident or other learn what has taken place."

"Yes, but that can only happen if he finds one of the servants."

"True, and from where I left them I think that is hardly likely."

"Any way," said Dick, "we must drive on—it will not do to pause."

"It will soon be daylight," said Tom,—"morning is coming fast, and do not forget Sixteen-String Jack will return to the forest, and, if he finds us absent, will wonder what has happened."

"So he will, and now you speak of it, I really think the

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best and safest place that we could go to would be the cave in the forest."

"Surely you are jesting?"

"No I am not, I am in sober earnest. The officers have driven us away, and the chances are a thousand to one if they think we should have the hardihood to go back again to the very same quarters."

"I like the idea," said Claude. "Boldness has done a great deal for us to-night, and may do more."

"At any rate," said Dick, "some one would have to go to the forest in order to meet with Jack. If he knows where the public-house is situated, and all preparations are made for our arrival there, we may perhaps be induced to start without delay."

"A bother will certainly be made about this post-chaise," said Tom King. "The more I think, the more certain I feel of it. I feel inclined to return to the forest again; but I should recommend that we drive this chaise in quite an opposite direction, then get out and ride away, leaving it there for anyone to find."

"That would certainly be destroying the clue," said Dick Turpin, "and if we left the chaise anywhere near the forest, it would of course direct old Wriggles's attention to it."

After some more discussion this plan was decided upon.

Coming at length to a road that branched off to the right, they turned down it and rattled away across the country at a pretty good pace.

The horses still kept up bravely, notwithstanding the distance they had already run.

While, however, driving in a westerly direction, Dick kept going further and further south, so that they should not have a very long gallop across the country to the forest.

At length, about an hour or rather more before daybreak, they stopped at a spot where two roads intersected each other.

They paused in the very centre of the square space thus formed.

It was a lonely, out-of-the-way place, and they took good care to satisfy themselves that no one was at hand to observe their proceedings.

Dick sprang hastily from the saddle, and went to the chaise door.

Opening it, he found Maud just recovering from her fainting fit.

"Safe!" she exclaimed—"you are safe!"

"Yes, and unhurt," was the reply; "so are the rest. We have thrown the officers off the scent entirely, and now we shall be safe for some time to come."

"Must I alight here?"

"Yes, descend at once. We will soon be in readiness to start again."

"And your destination?"

"The cave in Epping Forest."

Dick hastily assisted Maud to descend from the post-chaise.

Then he pulled off the clothing which had served so well to disguise him from his foes.

His two comrades did the same.

Their own coats and hats they had placed inside the post-chaise, and they assumed them without further loss of time.

Black Bess and the other two horses were released from the harness, and saddled in readiness for the road.

One horse then remained, and for a minute or so they were undecided as to what they should do with it.

Eventually, however, they determined to take this stood with them

In time to come it might prove useful.

"Well, now, Dick," exclaimed Claude Duval, "what are we to do with this clothing?"

He alluded to the garments that had been taken from the coachman and footman.

"I don't know—roll them up into a bundle and put them inside the chaise."

"But, before a couple of hours elapse, this chaise will be found, and the discovery of this apparel will give them the key to the mystery of the whole affair."

"What do you propose, then, Claude?"

"Why, simply this: Let us put them altogether into the chaise, lying them lightly one upon the other, and then set fire to the lot."

"But the chaise would be burned."

"Well, very likely; and if so, what matters it?"

"It seems odd to burn a vehicle."

"And you will find," said Claude, "that it will attract no slight amount of attention, and will very likely throw people off the scent altogether."

"Then let it be so. I am indifferent about it."

All these articles were thrown lightly into the post-chaise, at the bottom of which was a quantity of straw.

Claude set fire to the mass in several places.

It blazed up quickly.

He closed the doors of the post-chaise, but lowered the windows, so that there should be plenty of draught to fan the flame.

"Now, then," he cried, springing into his saddle, "the sooner we are away the better. That post-chaise seems to me like so much tinder—it will be all in a blaze in less than ten minutes."

His companions were all seated, and in readiness to start.

Tom King was leading the fresh horse by the bridle.

All the animals were greatly exhausted, yet some kind of instinct seemed to tell them what was their destination, for, as if by a sudden effort, they summoned up all their remaining strength and set forward at a rattling pace.

"Look back," said Claude, presently—"look back That will be a bewildering discovery for anyone to make I rather think."

His comrades did look back, and then they saw a great blaze ascending into the air.

Claude's words were verified, and there was every probability that before anyone could hasten to the spot to ascertain the cause of the conflagration the vehicle would be entirely consumed.

Anxious to arrive at the cave not only before daybreak but before Sixteen-String Jack, our friends continued to push onwards, meeting with no interruption by the way, and seeing nothing whatever of the police officers.

How far Mr. Wriggles went that night along the high-road before he discovered the trick that had been played him, or whether he did discover it, was more than they could tell.

At last the old trees of the forest met their welcome gaze.

"We shall be all right now," said Dick, "one thing only provided."

"And what is that?"

"I don't think it a likely event, but yet some police officers may be lingering in the vicinity."

"We must take the risk of that," replied Tom King "Anyhow, we must find Sixteen-String Jack—without him we can do nothing. I trust he has not fallen unexpectedly into any danger."

This was a serious affair, and unconsciously all quickened their pace.

The little open space in front of the cavern was at length reached.

There were no signs that the officers had penetrated to this spot at all.

By this time the dawn had fairly come, and even in the forest, objects could be distinguished easily.

But although they looked carefully around them, and although they uttered a signal-sound which Sixteen-String Jack well understood, they failed to perceive anything of their missing comrade.

CHAPTER DCCXX.

RELATES WHAT HAPPENED TO SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AFTER HIS DEPARTURE FROM THE WHITE HORSE INN.

We intend now, for a time, to follow the fortunes of Sixteen-String Jack, who we last left in a situation of considerable peril.

He believed, and so did Matthew, that if he slipped out quietly into Drury Lane, that he should be able to make his way quietly and unsuspectedly to the stable where he had left his horse

But that anticipation was not realised.

Several police officers, who, by Jim Lickfold's instructions, had been placed on the watch outside the White Horse Inn, perceived the dark figure of the highwayman as he glided swiftly along the street.

Then one of them had cried out in a loud voice:

"That's him—that's him!"

The cry reached to his nearest companion, and he communicated it to the next.

Whistles were blown and rattles sprung, so that in the space of a few seconds only after the first alarm had been given, there was a perfect uproar in the rear.

Sixteen-String Jack, when he heard the officer cry out, knew in a moment that he was recognised.

He did not wait for any further proceedings to be taken, but set off at a rapid run.

He knew that flight alone could save him, and that every second now was of immense importance.

He drew in his breath hard, and set off at a pace that promised soon to leave the officers in the rear.

It was now, however, growing towards morning and those people whose occupation compelled them to rise early were already abroad in the streets.

They heard the police officers crying out:

"A highwayman—a highwayman! A hundred pounds reward! Stop him—stop him! A highwayman!"

This was enough to make them forget the ordinary business in which they were engaged.

Actuated by one impulse, they all took up the cry and joined in the chase.

Altogether the police officers numbered about half a dozen.

They led the way, and behind them came a yelling, shouting troop of disorderly folks.

Sixteen-String Jack knew that the distance he had to run was not great.

This, and the fact that he was well acquainted with every court and alley in the neighbourhood, lent him a kind of confidence.

Despite of his exertions, the officers kept much closer behind him than he could have wished.

When near the top of Drury Lane, however, he found he had gained a tolerable advantage—an advantage, nevertheless, that he was destined to lose.

A watchman, who had been awakened by the tumult, suddenly stepped forward with outstretched arms.

"Aisy does it, me darlint! he cried. "Bedad now, there you are!"

Jack saw this man appear.

He knew that he could not possibly avoid a collision.

He knew as well, that even at the best, precious moments must be lost in struggling with him.

Luckily he had presence of mind enough to do the very best thing he could.

He accelerated his speed, and came with such force against the watchman that he could not withstand the shock.

Down he went backwards, as though he had been struck with a battering-ram.

But he strove hard to clasp Jack in his arms, and succeeded in taking a firm hold.

He might have held the highwayman there until the others came up but for one circumstance.

That was, in falling backwards with such force, his head had come into violent contact with the edge of the kerbstone, and, hard as his skull might be, it proved softer than the stone.

There was an ominous crash, a gasping sound, and then the watchman relaxed his hold, and his hands fell powerless by his side.

With the quickness of thought Jack was on his legs again, and rushing off at full speed.

But the officers had gained upon him considerably, and now they shouted one to the other in tones of triumph.

Jack nerved himself to greater and greater efforts.

He knew the stable was almost within sight, and doubted not that the ostler would have his horse all ready for him.

If such proved to be the case, and he could once gain the saddle, he felt he should not care.

He could laugh then at his foes.

Their chase would be an impotent one.

On—on he bounded, his legs every now and then trembling beneath him.

His heart beat so violently with the exertion that it seemed as though it would burst.

But his destination was in sight, and the efforts he made to reach it before his pursuers were incredible.

Panting and exhausted, he at length paused before the gateway.

It opened to a touch.

His breath was gone, but yet he managed to gasp out:

"Ostler—ostler, quick—quick!"

The man was there on the watch for his arrival.

"Here you are, sir," he cried, and never did tones sound more welcome in Jack's ears.

The ostler came across the yard leading the horse by the bridle.

It was already saddled and in perfect readiness for the road.

"Here," said Jack, as he sprang upon his horse's back, "take this—here's a guinea for you."

He tossed it to the ostler while he spoke.

By this time, however, the officers had reached the gate.

They imagined, no doubt, that they would find it secured against them.

But they were in error.

With full force they dashed themselves against it, and with great difficulty prevented themselves from falling to the ground.

Jack drew a couple of pistols from his holsters, and held them ready for immediate use.

As soon as he saw the gate open he touched his horse with the spur.

The gallant creature obeyed it well.

With one bound he dashed across the yard.

The officers were only just in time to draw aside and prevent themselves from being struck down by its hoofs

"Stop him!" they yelled—"shut the gate—stop him!"

But it was too late to give this order.

The gates were already wide open, and too many people were crowding at the entrance for them to be closed again.

But several shots were fired, one of which passed completely through Jack's hat.

He discharged both his pistols in return, and again urged his horse forward.

Some of the people made a vain and indecisive effort to stop the horse's furious career.

Most drew aside to escape from danger, and those who were foolhardy enough to try to carry out their intention were struck down to the earth and trampled underfoot.

"Safe!" said Sixteen-String Jack, patting his horse on the neck as he spoke. "On—on—quick—a few moments now will place me out of danger!"

The police officers were maddened at the defeat they had sustained.

But the boldest and most resolute of them immediately went into the stables and seized upon the horses that happened to be there.

Some little time was lost in saddling them, for they did not know where to find the necessary articles, and the ostler had disappeared.

When they rode out into Bloomsbury Fields they looked around them on all sides.

But not a vestige of the highwayman could be seen.

Sixteen-String Jack pushed his horse forward at the very top of its speed.

He knew that if for a few moments he continued at a rapid rate he should get quite out of the reach of his enemies.

At length he tightened the rein and allowed his horse to moderate his pace.

There was a hill before him, up which he allowed the animal to walk, and on gaining the top he paused.

Before him in the east he could detect those signs which indicated that the new day was close at hand.

Behind him there was a most extensive prospect.

He shaded his eyes with his hands, and looked long and scrutinisingly in the direction in which he had come.

But of his enemies he saw nothing, and therefore with a feeling of satisfaction he set his horse once more in motion, taking his way in a direct line across the country for Epping Forest.

"I shall reach it before daybreak," he muttered "I am sure I shall. It will not do to enter it afterwards Forward—forward!"

CHAPTER DCCXXI.

THE POLICE OFFICERS WILL NOT ALLOW SIXTEEN-STRING JACK TO REMAIN IN EPPING FOREST.

THE road to Epping was smooth, and so Jack's horse responded willingly to the impulse forward that he gave it.

Down the hill at a long, stretching gallop it went, and then away, with unabated speed, over the level country.

It was the hour, too, when people are least likely to be abroad; and so it is not wonderful that during the whole of his gallop the gallant highwayman did not meet with a single person.

At length, somewhat suddenly, he paused not far from the spot where Mr. Wriggles had ordered his men to come to a halt.

Just then it was beginning to get light.

Although darkness still prevailed, yet it was possible to see objects close at hand with a certain degree of distinctness.

Jack paused, for he had the road to cross before he could enter that part of the forest in which the cave was situated, and he never ventured to cross it until he had satisfied himself that there was no one in view.

On the present occasion he looked searchingly around him.

But all was still.

At a walking pace, he emerged from the trees on to the roadway.

And then, happening by chance to look down upon the ground, he saw something which caused him to check his steed abruptly.

A light rain had fallen several hours before, rendering the sandy ground just soft enough to receive and retain the impression of footprints.

All round about Jack could see the marks made by the iron-bound hoofs of many horses.

It almost seemed as though a troop had halted there, and that the horses had pranced about for some time before they could be brought to a complete standstill.

Sixteen-String Jack sat in the saddle watching these marks for several seconds.

He was wondering to himself what they could mean.

Some kind of presentiment came over his mind that during his absence from the forest the police officers had made an attack, and perhaps discovered his friends' hiding-place.

Then, all at once, there darted into his mind the recollection of what he had seen when on his way to London.

"I ought to have thought of that before," he said. "These officers I saw were certainly proceeding in this direction, though then I never imagined their destination was the forest."

Jack now felt some doubt and hesitation as to what he should do.

Certainly, the most reasonable thing appeared to repair at once to the cave.

But the officers might be in ambush among the trees—might follow in his footsteps, or perhaps the cave was already discovered, and his companions slain or captured

In this state of uncertainty he felt he could not possibly remain, and so, dismounting, he took hold of the bridle, and made his way on foot, in as direct a line as he could, for Turpin's Cave.

He reached it without seeing anything of his foes.

A deep, unbroken silence reigned all around him.

He paused in the centre of the little open space, and then the aspect of the spot showed him that something was amiss.

Not without some deliberation, he uttered the signal which was so well understood by his comrades, and waited for a response.

But none came.

"They have gone," he said—"fled! I hope no worse has happened to them than to be compelled to flee from the police officers."

Encouraged by the silence, he uttered the signal again.

But, as before, he failed to meet with a response.

Then, looking down upon the ground, he saw upon the turf the marks that had been left by the horses' feet.

He traced them in a certain direction, and was irresistibly led to the conclusion that his comrades had been compelled to beat a precipitate retreat.

He could see, however, no signs of strife or of slaughter.

He would not have been surprised had he seen upon the turf several dark-red spots of blood.

While pursuing these investigations a loud whistle suddenly assailed his ears.

He started, and, as if governed by a kind of instinct, sprang immediately into the saddle.

It was well that he changed his position so quickly as he did, for the whistle was almost instantly succeeded by the sharp explosion of a pistol.

A bullet whistled past him, but Sixteen-String Jack was unhurt.

He gave one glance behind him, and caught sight of the forms of several officers among the trees.

More than this he did not wait to see, but, clapping spurs to his horse, rode off at a headlong rate.

The cries in the rear grew fainter and fainter, until at length, when Sixteen-String Jack emerged from the forest, they had ceased altogether.

To pause now would be a most dangerous thing to do.

As to the number of the officers in the forest, he could form no idea.

There seemed only one course open to him, and that was flight.

But where?

Already in the east could be seen that faint, leaden-coloured gleam of light, showing that the day had begun.

To be pursued over the country during daylight would be perilous in the utmost degree, and yet there seemed no help for it.

Jack slackened his speed a little after he emerged from the forest, and while these reflections were passing through his mind he was looking around him as carefully as he could.

Nothing of an alarming character met his view, however.

But again he heard those sounds that indicated the approach of his foes.

Once more he galloped on, and then, when he looked back, once more he saw that three police officers had emerged from the forest, and were making every effort to overtake him.

But Jack had gained a considerable advantage, and it was not likely that it would be lost through any want of effort on his part.

Slowly and slowly the day broke.

The clouds rolled away from the east to the west, leaving the clear blue sky visible.

All around over the landscape, as far as the eye could reach was peacefulness and quiet.

All objects, animate and inanimate, seemed asleep, with the exception of the highwayman, who was riding for his life, and the police officers who were in search of him.

The leaden hue in the east gave place to a ruddy tinge, showing that the sun would ere long make his appearance.

"If I had only arrived at the forest a little earlier," Jack thought, "I might then, under cover of the darkness, have escaped; but this country is so flat and open that the officers will be able to see me for miles, and to hang on in the rear, getting reinforcements from time to time."

Up to the present moment Jack had galloped on at random, having no particular destination in view, and being actuated only by the desire to get out of the reach of his pursuers.

But now, all at once, he remembered the directions that had been given by old Matthew concerning the public-house that Tom Davis had taken.

"It will not do to go there with the officers at my heels," he muttered; "but, nevertheless, it will be a place of refuge for me. I can't gallop about all the day. I must shake those fellows off, and then, along with Tom Davis, I shall be able to find shelter until nightfall."

There was something assuring in this prospect, and

Sixteen-String Jack looked around him for some means of getting out of sight of his pursuers.

Could he only do that, and then change his course, his safety would be almost insured.

The distance to Ealing was not so very great, and, tired as his horse was, he was quite confident, if fortune favoured him, that he should be able to reach it long before the business of the day had begun.

Looking across the country towards Highgate and Hornsey, Jack perceived a plantation belonging to some gentleman's estate.

He knew the spot well, and was well aware that the trees were planted thickly enough together to screen him from observation could he succeed in plunging among them, while, at the same time, their growth was not so dense as to prevent him from making his way rapidly from one end to the other.

Towards this he directed his horse's head.

From time to time he looked back.

But although the officers were a long way in the rear, yet, nevertheless, they were in sight.

Jack knew these men would have the perseverance to keep at his heels as long as they saw him, in the hope of presently coming to a more thickly-populated part of the country where they would be able to obtain assistance.

It would be then that the chase would be in reality, and when the danger to Sixteen-String Jack would be greatest.

CHAPTER DCCXXII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK ARRIVES AT THE THREE SPIDERS.

At length Sixteen-String Jack reached the plantation, and plunged immediately among the trees.

During his gallop he had made up his mind to all his actions, and therefore, without delay, he turned his horse's head round and rode through the trees in the very direction in which the officers were coming.

He knew that they had seen him enter, and calculated they would mark the precise spot and enter there themselves.

In the meanwhile he would double upon his course, and emerge from that end of it that was nearest to the forest.

This manœuvre he carried into execution.

It was not, however, without a certain amount of anxiety that he pulled up his horse at the extremity of the plantation, and waited for the officers to come up.

Should they by any means guess his intentions, or should they take it into their heads to enter the plantation at that point, his predicament would be dangerous, and all the long start he had gained would be lost, even if his capture was not the immediate result.

Taking care to keep out of sight, yet, nevertheless, choosing a position that enabled him to command a view of the surrounding country, Sixteen-String Jack waited in suspense.

At no great distance he perceived the officers riding with redoubled speed towards the plantation.

Now that the highwayman was out of their sight they were beginning to apprehend they should lose him altogether.

Just as Jack had expected, the officers rode on until they reached that part of the plantation where he had made his entrance.

He waited a minute or two so as to allow them to get fairly under the shadow of the trees, and then he rode boldly out.

"A sharp push will do it now," he said. "Some time must elapse before the officers can force a way through the plantation either one way or the other, and before that time elapses, I trust I shall be out of sight."

Again he spurred his horse, this time without any disguise, making his way direct for his destination.

When the sun had gained a considerable altitude, he stopped and looked back.

The plantation was just visible in the distance, but that was all.

Of his enemies he could see nothing whatever.

"Safe at last!" he said. "Now, I trust, all will be well. Yet the sooner I reach the inn the better. I must get there before many people are abroad."

Few people were met by Jack during the remainder of his journey, and these consisted only of peasants who were setting out to their daily toil.

Many stared at him in surprise.

But no further notice was taken.

It was about an hour after this, and about seven o'clock in the morning, when Sixteen-String Jack fairly found himself upon Ealing Common.

This was at that time a place of very considerable extent, and not the small, continually-decreasing piece of ground that it is now.

In many places there were deep pits, and other rugged, dangerous excavations in the soil.

Dense furze bushes, too, covered it in many parts, while here and there would be a clump of trees.

Then would come a smooth piece of green turf, which looked all the more pleasant and delightful from the contrast with the other portions and with the broad, dusty high-road that completely intersected the common.

This was the road from London to Oxford, perhaps the one most travelled of any around the metropolis.

A dark, unfavourable, dismal, terrifying place was Ealing Common to all travellers.

It had been for upwards of a generation, for it was there, in Charles the Second's time, that Claude Duval was fondest of taking up his position.

On the morning when Jack reached it, he could not help noticing how pleasant, and peaceful, and beautiful it looked.

But at that time his mind was oppressed with too many subjects for anxious thought for him to bestow more than a passing glance upon any of the beauties of nature that were around him.

For his own part, he considered he was comparatively safe.

But about his companions he felt anxious in the extreme.

The more he thought of their sudden and mysterious disappearance the more alarmed he grew, and, by the time he had crossed the common, he had come to the conclusion that the worst had happened.

Bearing in mind the directions old Matthew had given him, Sixteen-String Jack at length found the narrow lane that had been described.

He proceeded along it for some distance, looking out on all sides for some indications of a dwelling.

But as he advanced, the place looked more and more lonely.

The trees grew more closely together, and the whole scene rapidly assumed a deserted aspect.

Then he paused, for on his right hand there was a narrow turning that was scarcely wide enough to be called a road.

Years seemed to have elapsed since any pedestrians or vehicles had travelled over it.

It was thickly overgrown with grass, and the deep ruts that had been left long ago by some heavy cart were now filled up by moss of a beautiful green colour.

At the corner of this lane or by-road there was something that looked like the ruins of a finger-post.

The upright part remained in tolerable preservation, though it seemed gradually nodding to the ground.

By some means or other it had lost its perpendicularity.

One of the projecting arms had been broken off, and the other was so weatherbeaten and so overgrown with that strange kind of vegetation which spreads itself over wood that remains in damp places, that it was impossible to tell what words might have been on it.

"This must be the place," said Jack, after gazing at it for a moment. "Well, I'm sure it's retired enough—rather too much so if anything; it might cause suspicion if anyone was found dwelling in such a place."

At present, however, no signs of the inn could be seen.

Sixteen-String Jack rode past the finger-post, and for a considerable distance along the grass-grown road.

Then suddenly coming to a bend in it, he all at once found himself in front of the inn.

A quaint, curious-looking, old-fashioned place it was—

one that would have made a rare study for an artist's pencil.

From a stout beam of wood that projected from the building was suspended a signboard of eccentric shape.

It was now black and moss-grown with age, and only a few marks could be seen here and there upon it, but not sufficient for anyone to ascertain whether originally there had been a representation of three spiders.

For the most part the building was composed of wood.

The pointed roofs were covered with red tiles, which showed out in excellent contrast with the mass of dark-coloured trees in which the building itself was literally embosomed.

All this, Sixteen-String Jack took in at a glance; he had no opportunity then for further examination, for, with a cry of welcome on his lips, Tom Davis sprang forward and placed his hand upon his horse's bridle.

"So you have found me out, Jack?" he said, in a hearty voice, and with a smile upon his lips. "Well, I am glad and pleased to see you! Where are the rest?"

Jack shook his head.

And then, for the first time, Tom Davis noted the look of deep gloom that had settled itself upon it.

"You have no bad news to tell me, surely?" he said.

"I have," was the reply—"nothing but bad news, and it seems to me that you are most to blame in the affair."

"I hope not!" said Davis, anxiously. "But come, Jack, pray don't keep me in suspense, but tell me what has happened?"

"Why, as you are aware, when Tom King paid you that visit he forgot to make any arrangement with you for a second meeting, and you did not tell him whereabouts this inn was situated."

"I know I did not," was the reply. "I forgot it at the time, and so did he."

"Very likely, and nothing could be said about that; but how came you to leave your house without letting us know where we were to find you?"

"I will tell you," said Tom Davis. "My neighbours began to grow exceedingly curious and suspicious about me; they found I was prospering, and could not exactly make out how it was. Then I believe some of them perceived Tom King when he paid his visit, and this circumstance, simple as it was, attracted the whole of their curiosity."

"No doubt it would, but still you ought to have adopted some means of letting us know."

"What means could I adopt? I knew you were in Epping Forest, it is true, but not in which part; and by going in the direction of it I might compromise myself and you; therefore I left my home as speedily as possible, and gave out that I should not return. This was only to remove suspicion, and every night since then I have made it my business to journey there and to keep a sharp look-out close by, so as to see if any of you came to my house."

CHAPTER DCCXXIII.

TOM DAVIS RESOLVES TO PAY A VISIT TO OLD MATTHEW.

"And did you go there last night?" asked Jack.

"I did. I have not long returned."

"Then how happens it that I did not see you, or, rather, that you did not see me?"

"That is a mystery. I can only account for it by supposing you arrived there first and hastened off; had you waited, you would certainly have seen me."

"But I knew nothing of that," said Jack—"and I was afraid to stay, lest suspicion should be excited. I did the only thing that lay in my power, and that was to ride over to Drury Lane."

"And did you really venture there?"

"I did."

"Then I am astonished beyond measure to find you have returned safely."

"I have had some fearfully narrow escapes," replied Jack—"such as I would not willingly run the risk of again. However, I saw Matthew, and he told me where the inn was situated."

"It's strange news, Jack. I thought I could not have failed to see you. I must have arrived a moment or two after you had taken your departure. Yes, that's the only explanation I can give of the affair."

"Well," continued Jack, "with good luck I escaped, and made my way back to Epping Forest to communicate the news to my comrades. On getting there, however, I found that during my absence the officers had, by some means or other, discovered their retreat, and made an attack upon them."

"And the result?" asked Tom Davis, anxiously—"the result?"

"That is more than I can tell you."

"Do you not know?"

"I do not—but I fear the worst!"

"Did you go right into the forest?"

"I did—to the cave where we had been staying. I found evident traces of their having left, and soon afterwards was chased away by four police officers."

"And where are they?"

"With much trouble I shook them off, and, as I firmly believe, succeeded in getting here without being noticed by anyone."

"Well, Jack, I am glad you are safe and unhurt. You have had some narrow escapes. Let us hope that the others have been equally fortunate with yourself."

"I am afraid of it," returned Jack. "Something seems to tell me that things have gone altogether wrong."

"And the blame, it seems, chiefly rests with me," said Tom Davis.

"Well, no—I can't say that it does. You acted for the best according to your belief, and for that you cannot be blamed."

"Well, Jack, what's your next proceeding?"

"That's what we must talk about during the remainder of the day."

"But not here, though," said Tom Davis. "Come with me, and I will show you the way to the stables—after that we can go indoors and sit down. If we talk the matter over, we shall, in all probability, come to some conclusion."

"I hope so. Lead the way."

This conversation had taken place in the little open space in front of the inn door.

Tom Davis now walked towards the corner of the building.

Jack followed.

Passing through some gates, they entered a large yard, round which were built many sheds, but all of them in a decaying, dilapidated condition.

Of these, some were used for stables, and others for placing vehicles, or anything else that required to be stowed away.

Tom Davis pushed open a door, and they entered one of the sheds.

Sixteen-String Jack was pleased to see how attentive and careful Davis had been during the few days that he had occupied the inn.

The stables had been got into perfect readiness, and the one into which he led Jack's horse was as comfortable as anyone could wish.

"You are not in the mood to examine this old place, and to hear an account of it now," said Tom Davis; "nor do I feel inclined to give it to you. I am anxious that we should talk over Dick's probable position."

"So am I."

Jack's horse was placed in the stable, and had all its wants attended to.

"I shall keep no ostler," said Davis, "but perform these duties myself; we shall then be better provided against detection."

"Of course we shall."

"It will much diminish the risk; and I know something about it, you will find."

"I will help," said Jack; "and that will save time."

The horse was well groomed, and had every attention paid to

Sixteen-String Jack being well aware of the importance of taking care of his steed, he could not tell what service he might require from it at night.

When all was done, they crossed the yard and entered the public-house by a back door.

They found Ellen busily engaged in preparing the breakfast.

"We must sit down and get something to eat," said Tom Davis.

"I have been out all night and have not tasted anything, and am sick and faint for want of food," replied Jack, "though I feel little inclination to touch any."

"Sit down—sit down and eat," said Tom Davis; "it strikes me that you will require all your energies; and it is a duty that you owe your friends to preserve them."

Though breakfast was, under these circumstances, not done very good justice to, still, after the meal, Jack felt disposed to look upon things from a less gloomy point of view.

"Where to look for them," he said, "I know not, nor in what direction to go; it may be that they have all been captured."

"It is within the bounds of possibility, I admit," said Davis; "and yet I scarcely think it."

"Yet it seems to me necessary to ascertain whether it is actually the case or not."

"If so, then, I will put you at your ease as regards that."

"By what means?"

"Why, I will immediately set out for London; the fact of my paying a visit to London will cause neither suspicion nor danger, while at the same time I shall easily be able to find out whether the capture has taken place."

"Yet you might be suspected."

"I think not. I believe the danger of such a thing to be trifling. Bear in mind, if the capture has really taken place, the news of it will be spread all over London in less than no time, so that I shall have no difficulty in finding it out."

"Well," said Jack, "I am inclined to think it would be best if you did go—we should then know the worst."

"We should, and if I find that your alarm was without ground, we could decide afterwards what would be the best step to take in order to rejoin your comrades."

"Yes—stay. When going to London, had you thought of paying a visit to Drury Lane?"

"I had thought of it, but had not made up my mind. I was wondering whether I should be suspected."

"I think it worth while to run the risk," said Jack. "If you would only put the case to old Matthew, and explain to him all that has occurred, rely upon it, he would show us some way out of our difficulty. I should have no hesitation in following his advice."

"That is a good thought, Jack—by far the best that we have had yet. Now you are exhausted and weary—you must be after the night you have passed through. While I am gone let me beg of you to lie down and get all the rest and sleep you can."

Jack shook his head.

"You must," he said, "for probably to-night you will require all your strength and energies. Who can tell what difficulties you may have to cope with?"

"I will try to do so, Davis, and you will make what speed you can to Drury Lane; and if you find that they have not been captured, then ask old Matthew what I had better do."

"I will. And now, in order that no time may be lost, I will say good-bye."

"How shall you reach London?"

"By the coach. It is not far from here to the London Road. In former days, before the new road was made, the coaches used to pass this very door. I shall be in time, and in less than an hour I shall be in London."

"Good!" said Jack. "May you be successful! Farewell!"

CHAPTER DCCXXIV.

JIM LICKFOLD, WITH HIS COMPANIONS, IS DISCOVERED IN THE CELLAR BY THE POLICE.

Leaving Tom Davis to make his journey by means of the stage-coach, we will precede him to the White Horse, and relate some rather singular and amusing events that took place there.

Of the search that was made after Sixteen-String Jack, so soon after he emerged from the door, old Matthew remained in happy ignorance.

He turned back to the bar, and, as all the customers had left and the house was shut up, he sat down by himself in the little back parlour, in order to have a little deliberation upon the events of the last three or four hours.

In order to assist him in his deliberations, he brewed himself a stiff glass of grog and lighted his pipe.

On the whole, Matthew felt extremely well satisfied with himself.

Sixteen-String Jack, he believed, was in safety, and he had had a nice little game at the expense of the police officers.

"Dear me," he said, "how mad Jim Lickfold will be when he wakes up and finds he has made such a fool of himself! Poor fellow, I really feel quite sorry for him—I pity him now!"

Old Matthew laughed at this idea; but at the time his mouth happened to be full of smoke, so a quantity got into his throat, and he was very nearly choked instead.

"Aha!" he exclaimed at length, with the tears standing in his eyes, "how they listened to all that tale about the ale being so old—it was capital! But, upon my word, I do think I managed matters pretty well; yet let me stop! Ah! it's well that thought occurred to me!"

Old Matthew laid down his pipe, and took a final sip at his grog.

"It is not too late to remedy it," he exclaimed, "that's one comfort! So here goes to do it!"

He hastily descended into the cellar as he spoke, availing himself of the hole in the flooring.

A most extraordinary noise assailed his ears as he advanced to the cellar in which the officers were lying.

It was a concert of snores, proceeding from the noses of Jim Lickford and his companions.

"Ah! they're sound enough asleep, that's certain!" was Matthew's remark as he held up the lantern and took a view of the prostrate forms. "It will be some time before they wake up; and when they do, how particularly good-tempered Jim Lickford will be! Aha! it's a good joke!"

Old Matthew had descended into the cellar with a particular purpose in view.

While smoking his pipe he had all at once remembered that the ale they had drunk was drugged.

Now, in the morning, it was not unlikely that some inquiry would be made—perhaps there would be some suspicion as to the actual state of affairs.

It was in order to prevent himself from getting into any trouble on this account that old Matthew descended into the cellar.

Going to the cask about which he had preached such an eloquent harangue, he turned on the tap, allowing the "splended old coronation stingo" to run wastefully on to the floor.

It was soaked up directly by the sawdust, which lay there rather thickly.

"That's the ticket," said Matthew. "In an hour or the most all the ale will run out, and when there is no more left in the barrel they will be rather puzzled, I fancy, to tell whether it was drugged or not.

"I didn't feel at all easy about Jim Lickfold," was Matthew's next remark—"he drank about twice as much ale as I intended. Well, I only hope he will wake up all right. He's got a strong constitution, so perhaps he will get over it. Now the only thing I can do is to leave him alone, and let him sleep it out.

With these words, Matthew made his way back to the bar again, and afterwards concluded he would retire for a few hours' rest before opening the house in the morning.

He slept rather later than usual, but at about eight o'clock he was aroused by a loud knocking at his front door.

Hastily dressing himself, he descended, and found that a party of officers had assembled outside.

They were those who had so unsuccessfully pursued Sixteen-String Jack.

They were part of Jim Lickfold's detachment, and had been left by that individual to keep guard outside the White Horse while he paid a visit to the interior.

They marvelled greatly that their leader and his men should have remained there for so many hours, especially after the house was shut up for the night.

They thought Jim Lickfold must have left during their absence, so they went to the police office to make inquiries.

But there, of course, nothing had been heard, so they were instructed to call at the White Horse and make inquiries without delay.

"And," said the inspector, "here is a copy of a warrant that has been issued against old Matthew for some time past. If you see any just cause, you may act upon it—it seems a very suspicious affair altogether!"

"Good morning, gentlemen," said old Matthew to the police officers, as soon as he had caught sight of them, and making a smile and a bow while he spoke, "For what am I to attribute the pleasure of this early and unlooked-for visit?"

"Oh, none of your gammon! We have come here to know what you have done with Jim Lickfold and the officers who were with him."

Old Matthew shook his head in a mysterious manner.

"Come," cried the officers, "stand aside and allow us to enter! We have authority to search for them!"

"If you will allow me," said old Matthew, coolly, "I will save you the trouble of searching entirely. I will take you direct to where they are."

"Where they are?"

"Yes—I spoke plainly, did I not?"

"You did. But we cannot, for the life of us, conceive what could induce Jim Lickfold to remain here for so long."

"It was a very powerful inducement indeed," said old Matthew. "But come, I will show you where he is."

With these words old Matthew walked to the bar, and there lighted a candle.

"Now, then," he said, "follow me. They're down in the cellar."

The officers looked at each other in wonder.

Old Matthew led the way to the regular flight of cellar steps, and descended.

The whole troop of police officers kept close at his heels.

He led them on until he came to the furthermost cellar.

Then, holding the light above his head, he allowed them to take a view of the scene.

"What the devil is the meaning of this?" asked one of the officers. "They are not asleep, surely—they must be dead?"

"No—they are asleep," said old Matthew—"just hark how they snore."

"But you must explain this! I insist upon your giving us an explanation immediately!"

Old Matthew shrugged his shoulders.

"I have no explanation to give," he said. "If you want to know what has happened, it strikes me the best you can do is to wait until they all wake up or else to put an end to their slumber."

"Now, Mr. Gale," said the officer, "you're treading on very dangerous ground."

"Am I?" said old Matthew, with a start, and looking down on to the sawdust.

"Yes, you are. So mind what you're about!"

"Well, really, you are most unreasonable men, you officers. You ask me a question, and I answer it in the best way I can. You want to know something else, and I tell you how to obtain your information. What more would you have?"

"It's suspicious—it is decidedly suspicious—and I'll take care that it is fully investigated."

The officer stooped down, and, seizing hold of one of the officers, endeavoured to wake him.

But the effort was a vain one.

He shook him, and pinched him, and tried more violent measures still.

But all to no purpose.

The effects of the drug were not overcome so readily.

"They've got their skins full," said Matthew. "It strikes me you won't awake them up like that. If I might presume to advise, I should recommend a little pump water."

The officer would not reply, but he directed two of his men to go up into the yard, and to return with some pails of water.

CHAPTER DCCXXV.

JIM LICKFOLD HAS SOME DIFFICULTY IN RECOVERING HIS SCATTERED SENSES.

Two men started off at once to obey this order, and were absent a few minutes only.

They returned with four pails of water that had been drawn from the pump in old Matthew's yard.

The well from which the water came was a deep one, so that by consequence it was only a few degrees above freezing point.

The men put down the pails, and looked inquiringly to the one who, by common consent, had taken the lead in the affair.

Now this man was one who all his life had been very jealous of Jim Lickfold.

The latter had been several times promoted, the former only once.

He was consequently highly gratified at finding his rival in such a condition as he was, though he was clever enough to conceal his feelings.

"Give me one of the pails," he said.

One was handed to him.

He had fixed his eyes upon Jim Lickfold, and had distinguished his form from the rest.

Raising the pail in both hands, he discharged all the water it contained full upon that individual's head.

It also splashed over the others.

The treatment was rough, but effectual.

With a kind of yell or scream, Jim Lickfold started up to a sitting posture.

"Murder!" he cried, with his eyes half shut. "D—n it all! what's that?"

"Wake up!" said the officer; "and, if you can, give us some explanation of your conduct!"

"You be d—d!" said Jim, half articulately.

And as the last words escaped his lips, his eyes closed entirely, and he fell back sound asleep.

"Well, d—n me if that isn't cool!" said the officer. "Here, Jenkins, hand me another pail!"

Jenkins obeyed, rather enjoying the joke than otherwise.

Splash went the water all over Jim Lickfold again.

And this time it woke him up entirely.

"Fuff! Murder!" he said, as he dashed the water off his face. "What the devil are you at? Is it the flood or what? Murder!"

"Lickfold," said the senior officer, "I am surprised at you! Is this the way you execute your duty?"

"Ask my elbow!" replied Lickfold. "Who are you, I should like to know?"

"I shall consider it my duty to make a report of these proceedings."

Jim Lickfold rubbed his head.

His intellects were in a very confused condition indeed, and it was not until this moment that he began to try to think what had last occurred.

"D—n it!" he said, "my head is working away like a watch with the mainspring broken! What has happened?"

"That is best known to yourself," said the officer. "I am waiting for an explanation to come from you."

"Oh, you be d—d!"

It was in vain that Jim Lickfold tried to recover his scattered senses—they entirely eluded him.

But he was conscious that he had been drenched with water from head to foot, and that Smithers—so the officer was named—had done it.

"You d—d ugly son of a gun!" he roared out, with electrical suddenness. "What have you been at?—what do you mean by it? I am as wet as if I had been dipped in a brook! Take that, d—n you—take that!"

Jim Lickfold accompanied the words with a couple of smart blows, one of which alighted with great force on his nose, and the other in his left eye.

"Murder!" cried Smithers. "Call him off—seize him, somebody, or he'll murder me!"

Jim Lickfold danced round his adversary, flourishing his fists.

"Time—time!" he cried. "Time, Smithers! Why don't you come up to the scratch. Oh! you're smiling there, are you?—then take that, and down you go!"

Another blow was administered that laid Smithers prostrate.



[TOM KING FORCES OPEN THE DOOR IN THE GARDEN WALL.]

But, somehow, just then Jim's brain cooled a little.

He had been almost maddened by the drug, of which he had partaken in such large quantities.

Now, from a variety of causes, the effect was wearing off.

As old Matthew had truly said, he had a strong constitution, and could stand what would have killed many a man.

"D—n it all!" he cried, as he sat down in the sawdust. "What in the world is the matter with my headpiece? Let me think."

While he was endeavouring to do this, some of the officers occupied themselves in assisting Smithers, while the others dashed pailful after pailful of water upon all their companions who yet slumbered.

Old Matthew pretended to be in a very bad way indeed, and sympathised deeply with Mr. Smithers.

That individual at last managed to check the flow of blood from his nose, and then he stood up, though his face had a decidedly damaged appearance.

One by one the officers were awakened, and they shook the water from their clothes like so many half-drowned rats.

Not one could understand the meaning of the proceedings, nor recollect what had happened the night before.

But by the time the waking process had been completed, Jim Lickfold had managed to bring his thoughts to something like clearness.

Never in all his life had he felt so thoroughly miserable as he did just then.

His head was aching ready to split—in fact, he was obliged to clasp it tightly with both hands, for he verily believed it would fall into two pieces.

He shivered from head to foot, while his mouth was so parched that he could scarcely speak a word.

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"Water!" he cried at last—"water!"

"I should have thought you'd had enough," said Matthew.

Jim Lickfold heard the words, and understood them.

He scowled fearfully at the landlord.

Perceiving a pail of water standing at no great distance, he crept towards it, and plunged his head completely into it.

The cold water bubbled most pleasantly around his neck, and he drank in huge draughts of it.

As if by magic, the pain inside completely ceased, and it was most reluctantly that he drew out his head, being compelled to do for want of breath.

He looked about him more calmly than ever.

Mr. Smithers perceived it, so he said:

"Well, perhaps, Mr. Lickfold, you will be kind enough to give some explanation for your extraordinary conduct, and tell me what's the reason of my finding you here fast asleep in the cellar with all your men around you?"

"I don't know," said Jim—"I can't recollect! Yes, now I remember! We came down into the cellar to look for Sixteen-String Jack and could not find him, and when we had searched everywhere, we had some ale—we must have drunk too much of it!"

"I cautioned you about it," chimed in old Matthew—"there's none of you can deny that! I cautioned you about it and told you how uncommonly strong that ale was, but you paid no attention! The very smell of it must have affected me, or else one of you must have woke up thirsty, for I find the tap is turned on, and that all the ale has run out!"

"Matthew," said Jim Lickfold, a sudden light breaking in upon him, "this is your work—I know it—I feel sure of it."

"What on earth do you mean? Are you mad?"

"No—I have been, but I am all right now. Matthew, I tell you this is your work—you must have drugged that ale and given it to us on purpose."

"Now, hark at that," said Matthew—"just hark at that. Now, I appeal to every one of you to say whether it was my fault or not. Didn't I tell you how valuable the ale was, and that I wouldn't sell it for a shilling a pint? Didn't you insist upon drinking it, although I kept telling you how strong it was, and wishing you wouldn't taste another drop? Now, isn't it true, I ask you—isn't it true?"

"I must confess it is right," said one of the officers who had not drunk so deeply as the rest, and who was not suspicious of old Matthew—"I must confess it; you warned us all against drinking it, but we would not listen to a word you said."

"What the devil business have you to speak?" inquired Jim Lickfold, angrily.

"When you are a little cooler," returned the officer, "you will be glad I have so spoken. If you will take my advice you will hush up the affair as quickly as you can, for we have only ourselves to blame, and the more we poke into the affair the worse it will seem. We had better keep this little secret among ourselves."

CHAPTER DCCXXVI.

JIM LICKFOLD GIVES OLD MATTHEW INTO CUSTODY, AND HAS HIM TAKEN BEFORE THE MAGISTRATE AT BOW STREET.

"Oh! we had, had we?" asked Jim Lickfold, ironically. "Perhaps you'd be so good, so kind, so damnably condescending as to tell me what business you have to think at all in the matter?—there now!"

Thus abashed, the officer was silent.

Jim's faculties were still in a confused state, so he immediately returned to the charge against old Matthew.

"I tell you," he said, "it's your work—your work every bit of it! You've done it on purpose to ruin me, but you sha'n't succeed. No, d—n me, you sha'n't! I'll bring it all home to you! I'll shut up this blessed old den of yours—I'll put a stopper on to you, never fear!"

"You are making yourself very ridiculous, I think," said old Matthew. "If you'd take my advice you'd go quietly home and have a nap, and when you wake up you will look at things with quite a different eye to what you do now."

"Oh, shall I? I am in command here, I believe, and I will be obeyed! I say the ale was drugged, and that it was given us on purpose! Take that fat old villain into custody! I will have him up before the magistrate this morning, and that'll make him laugh on the other side of his mouth!"

"Surely you're not in earnest?" said Matthew.

"Ain't I? Well, you'll see about that! Do you hear?" he added, addressing his men. "Seize him—handcuff him—drag him off at once!"

"But I protest against anything of the sort!" said Matthew. "Where's your warrant?"

"It's here," said Smithers, who did not like old Matthew any better than Jim Lickfold—"it's here, already prepared for your arrest, so you will have to answer for your little game!"

"I am ready to go," said Matthew. "You need not claw hold of me or put handcuffs on my wrists. I am not going to resist. I am an innocent man—a much-injured man! I don't care what you do!"

"Put the handcuffs on him!" roared Jim Lickfold. "D—n it all, am I to be obeyed or not? Put the handcuffs on him, I say! Now, where's a tankard? I will take a drop of this beautiful ale with me to the court, and we'll have it examined! Aha!"

"You're mad," said Matthew—"quite mad! I told you you had left the tap running, and by this time every drop has been drained out of the barrel."

Jim could hardly believe this.

But when he found old Matthew's words were indeed true, he uttered a howl of disappointment.

"Oh, you're a clever man, and I give you credit for it. But I'll be even with you—I'll be even with you! Bring him along now directly. I will have all this matter cleared up."

Accordingly, all turned to leave the cellar.

They ascended to the ground floor, and passed out into Drury Lane.

Their appearance attracted much attention, and they found themselves immediately surrounded by a huge crowd.

The officers certainly presented a most rueful appearance.

Not only were they dripping wet with water, but their clothes were all sticky and soaked with the ale that had run out of the barrel, and large patches of sawdust were clinging to their persons in various places.

"Hallo!" said somebody. "My eye, here's a precious lark! Just look at those redbreasts now! Boohoo!"

A disorderly, yelling laugh followed these words, and as the officers, one by one, emerged from the White Horse, they looked ludicrous in the extreme.

At last old Matthew appeared, with the handcuffs on his wrists, and with a police officer at each side of him.

Close behind him came Jim Lickfold, who was determined the landlord should not escape.

His appearance was infinitely more grotesque than any of the others, and he kept roaring and spluttering with rage.

Next came Mr. Smithers, with one eye closed up entirely, and his nose and lips so swelled that it was impossible to distinguish those features for the flesh surrounding them.

"They are dragging me off for just nothing," said old Matthew. "Here's a pretty pass the British land has come to for a respectable tradesman to be hauled off just because the officers choose to like it! But they shall smart for it—they shall smart for it!"

"Hold your row!" roared Jim Lickfold—"hold your row, I say!"

"Sha'n't!" said old Matthew. "Look at him!" he added, addressing the people. "There's a nice-looking object to have the care of your property! Is not he a beauty, now?"

There was another roar of laughter at Jim Lickfold's expense, and he fairly turned black in the face with passion.

But he contented himself with thinking that all would be right when he got his prisoner before the magistrate.

The distance to Bow Street was trifling.

The charge was made and entered in the usual form, and then the whole party taken into court.

It was a tangled affair altogether to unravel, and the

more they attempted to unravel it the more complicated it got

Jim Lickfold stalked into the witness-box, leaving a trail of moisture behind him on the floor all the way he went

The clerk then read over the charge, by which old Matthew was accused of having administered some noxious drug to his Majesty's officers of police, in order thereby to render them insensible, so as to enable a notorious criminal to escape.

"Now, prisoner at the bar," said the clerk, "do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

"Why, not guilty, your worship, of course — not guilty! Is it likely that a respectable tradesman like me would——"

"There, there,—stop—that will do! You were only asked to reply to the question."

Thus abashed, old Matthew became silent.

Jim Lickfold was then requested to state the charge.

"Your worship," he said, making a strong effort to keep calm, "from information I received, I went to the White Horse Inn last night, believing that a notorious highwayman named Sixteen-String Jack was being harboured there."

"Well, go on."

"I found many very suspicious circumstances," said Jim. "But I ought to say that when I entered I took half my men, and left the other half on the watch outside.

"At last I went down in the cellar, for I suspected the man I wanted was concealed among the barrels, and then Matthew Gale, yonder, pressed us all to have some ale. I am very sorry to confess it, your worship, but we were fools enough just to taste it. I did put the stuff to my lips, but that was about all. It knocked me down as if it had been a hammer, and all my men were served in the same way.

"And so we were found this morning by Smithers and the remainder of my men, who wondered how it was that I didn't come out."

"That's a very serious charge," said the magistrate. "What have you to say to it?" he asked, addressing old Matthew.

"Your worship, I am quite astounded at what the witness has just said and sworn to. It's quite false. I can bring no witnesses on my own behalf, except such of the police officers as happened to be there, and I don't expect they will speak a word in my favour."

"But have you any questions to ask the witness?"

"I have," said old Matthew, "but I don't know how to put them. If your worship would kindly listen to my version of the affair, I should feel much obliged."

"Well, speak out."

"Well, sir, without any cause at all, the officers have got a great spite for me, and are always breakiug into my house, so that I can do no sort of trade at all. They have regularly ruined my business."

"Well, last night the witness and some more burst in all at once, and declared they knew Sixteen-String Jack or somebody else was in the house, and that they meant to have him.

"I told them, your worship, that there was nobody of the kind on the premises; but they would not believe me, but began to search. They knocked my things about in the most reckless and dreadful manner you could think of, and would not listen to a word of expostulation from me.

"They did me no end of mischief down in the cellars by tossing the barrels about, for they got the idea into their heads that the highwayman must be hiding in one of the barrels. A most ridiculous idea, was it not, your worship?"

CHAPTER DCCXXVII.

OLD MATTHEW IS TRIUMPHANTLY ACQUITTED, AND JIM LICKFOLD MEETS WITH A COMPLETE DEFEAT.

"Go on with what you have to say," exclaimed the magistrate, "and make haste and get to the end of it."

"I will, your worship. When they had searched everywhere they could think of and could find nothing, they stopped before one of the casks in my cellar that contained a drop of very strong old ale, some that I had had in my cellar ever since George I. was crowned, and it wasn't tapped until his present gracious Majesty ascended the throne. I wouldn't have taken a shilling a pint for what little drop of that ale there was left."

"But what has this to do with it? Keep to your point."

"Your worship will find that it has everything to do with it," replied Matthew, "for, very much against my will, they insisted upon tasting some of this ale.

"Well, I thought at last that if I refused it would only make them more bitter against me than ever, so I gave my consent to draw a drop.

"I particularly requested them only just to taste it, it was so very strong, but they only laughed at me, and thought it was because I begrudged it, and so they drank all the more on that very account.

"I was foolish enough to have a little myself, but it did not take such an effect upon me as it did upon them.

"They drank away at the ale till they fell down insensible, and I managed to creep out of the cellar; but I was 'over the score,' as the saying is, for I forgot to turn the tap off, and when I went down this morning, all the beautiful old ale was gone, every drop of it—it had all been soaked up in the sawdust."

Some police were placed in rotation in the witness-box, and questioned by the magistrate.

They contradicted themselves in a very remarkable manner.

But still, from all that had been said, it could be gathered that old Matthew's account of the affair was much nearer the truth than that given by Jim Lickfold.

"I must dismiss the case," said the magistrate—"there is not evidence enough here for me to convict upon. I can form a pretty good idea in my own mind of the whole state of the case. Lickfold, I am surprised at you. An old officer, well tried like yourself, and so many years in the service, to get into this condition seems almost past belief. Is there any other charge against the prisoner?"

"Yes, your worship," said Smithers—"I have something to say."

Smithers was accordingly put into the witness-box and sworn.

"How is it your face is in that condition?" asked the magistrate.

"Jim Lickfold did it, your worship."

"Why?"

"He was mad, I think. I went down, your worship, into the cellars of the White Horse this morning, and there I found Lickfold, and all the other officers, snoring away dead drunk. I woke them up with cold water, and Jim Lickfold was in a rage because a few spots were sprinkled on to him; so, before I knew what he was about, he jumped up and gave me a couple of knock-down blows."

The magistrate looked with additional severity at Lickfold, who began to think that he let his pain get the better of him.

"There can be no doubt, your worship, that they all got drunk on this old ale; whether it was drugged or not I fancy we shall never be able to find out, because there is none of the ale left. But that Sixteen-String Jack was concealed in the house I feel pretty certain."

"Indeed? How do you know that?"

"I was watching outside the White Horse, by Jim Lickfold's instructions, and, presently, I saw some one slip out of the front door and run up the lane. I gave chase, but he escaped."

"How did you know it was Sixteen-String Jack?"

"Oh, I could swear to him, your worship!"

"And you saw him come out of the front door of the White Horse?"

"Well, no—I can't say that I saw him come out—but I saw him the very second afterwards."

"And he has got clear away, you say?"

"Yes, your worship."

The magistrate reflected for some moments.

"I feel strongly inclined to commit you to take your trial," he said, at length, addressing old Matthew—"but you may think yourself lucky that there is just a flaw or two in the evidence that makes it impossible for me to do so. I must dismiss you this once, and let it be a caution

to you. I tell you if you are ever brought before me again upon a similar charge, I shall most certainly commit you for trial, even if the evidence is not so clear as it is now."

"I am sorry to hear you say that, your worship," said old Matthew, as he prepared to leave the dock—"I am a poor, honest tradesman, much persecuted by the police. It is my great misfortune, that is. They allow me no rest night and day, and the worst of it is, your worship, it is quite undeserved."

"Well, get out of the court," said the magistrate; "I want to hear no more about this business—be off! As for you, Lickfold, I shall set to work and have you dismissed from the force!"

Under his breath, Jim Lickfold uttered the most awful curses that can be conceived.

He was enraged beyond measure that he had been defeated in every respect and on all hands.

Old Matthew, with an injured look upon his countenance, walked out of the court.

He found plenty of his neighbours standing round, all ready to sympathise with him.

He took care to pour out a tale about the manner in which he had been persecuted, and, as a matter of course, all who heard him sympathised with him.

"It is a burning shame, Matthew, that you should be so treated—it is—it is indeed!"

"You are right," replied the landlord. "But I consider I have had a lucky escape, for those officers have sworn black was white all the way through; so those of you that feel that I am in the right shall have a tankard of my best ale free of charge, if they will drop into my house this evening."

That was a clever stroke of old Matthew's, and it completely enlisted the sympathies of all who heard him.

Then, feeling tolerably well satisfied in his own mind about the manner in which the whole affair had ended, Matthew returned to his house.

During his compulsory absence, Tom Davis had arrived.

He had inquired of the girl at the bar when old Matthew would return.

She could only repeat the message that the landlord had left with her, which was to the effect that he should return in an hour or two at the most, for they could not prove the charge they had brought against him.

This girl knew Tom Davis perfectly well, and was aware how necessary it was he should not be seen by any of the police, so she told him to go upstairs, and wait there until Matthew returned.

He obeyed; and, notwithstanding the confident manner in which the girl had spoken about his return, Tom Davis felt not a little anxiety concerning his friend.

He was also impatient in the extreme to learn whether Dick Turpin had been captured.

He fancied not, for if an event of such importance had taken place, he would surely have heard of it long ere this.

In anxiousness and suspense, therefore, he waited for Matthew to make his appearance.

At length he heard him down below, and waited with impatience for him to ascend.

Soon afterwards he heard a firm, deliberate step upon the staircase, and the next moment old Matthew, with his face beaming with smiles, strode into the room.

"Done again!" he exclaimed, as he closed the door behind him. "They are done again, and this time browner than ever! I rather think, Tom, that it will be a long while before they trouble me again. But how is it you look so serious? What in the world has happened to bring you here at this time in the day—in broad daylight?"

In as few words as he could, Tom Davis explained the reason of his errand.

CHAPTER DCCXXVIII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SETS OUT IN ORDER TO MEET HIS COMPANIONS.

"I HAVE not heard a word about Dick Turpin this morning,' said the landlord, "and I have been to the right pl[illegible] for information. No; rely upon it he has managed to escape! I would wager any amount he is not captured!"

"Well, that is a great relief."

"And Jack?" added old Matthew—"you say he is quite safe?"

"Yes—he arrived all right this morning, and unharmed."

"Well, then, tell him the issue of this affair and say I am glad he baffled his foes so well."

"I will not fail to do so," said Davis. "And now that I have given you an account of all these proceedings, I want to ask your advice."

"My advice?"

"Yes. Jack said that if Dick Turpin was not captured you would most likely be able to tell me the best means to adopt by which he could rejoin them, and let them know where the inn was situated."

Old Matthew put on a look of deep thought.

"It is very hard," said Tom Davis, "to think that at the present time Dick Turpin and those who are with him should be wandering about from place to place harassed by the police officers, when there is so snug a refuge for them if they did but know where it was situated."

"It is," said old Matthew; "and you must allow me to be quiet a few moments before I can give you any answer."

"Oh, certainly!"

"My brain is a little off its balance this morning—I have had quite enough to excite me."

"You have indeed."

"But I shall calm myself down, never fear, and then I hope to hit upon some way of getting out of this difficulty—though, mind you, at present I don't see how it is to be done."

"Nor do I."

"I have had no breakfast yet," said Matthew, "so I will just take a snack; after that I shall be better, I know."

A substantial meal was brought upstairs, to which old Matthew paid his respects, and then, while he sat smoking a pipe and dipping his nose every now and then into a tankard of ale, began to think over the highwaymen's condition.

"I can't arrive at anything very satisfactory," he said, at length, "and what's more, I don't believe that anybody else could, it is such a peculiar thing."

"You are right."

"But they all know where you lived, Davis, do they not?"

"Yes, I think so; at least, I am sure Turpin and Tom King do."

"Well, then, I should think that, having been driven from the forest, they will be wondering whether Sixteen-String Jack has been captured, and will suffer no little anxiety upon that account. Then, finding he does not return, they will in all probability make their way in the direction of the house where you used to live, in the hope of being able to ascertain whereabouts the inn is situated."

"It seems quite plausible," said Tom Davis. "I only hope they will have the sense to think of such a proceeding; if they do, why, all will be well and straightforward enough."

"Yes; for my own part, the more I think it over the more I feel inclined to think that that is just exactly what they will do. However, we must leave that for time to prove."

"Then what should you recommend?"

"Why, the best thing Sixteen-String Jack can do tonight is to go quietly in the direction of Kentish Town Let him keep there, watching about; I am inclined to think that he will see something of his friends before daybreak."

"And if he does," said Tom Davis, "it will be easy enough for them to come to the inn, it is so very retired, more so even than I expected, and you may pass a long time about that spot without catching sight of a single person."

"So much the better, then—so much the better."

"And now, Matthew, I will say farewell. The sooner I am off the better, for I know Jack will be full of anxiety till I return. When he learns that his worst fears are not realised, he will be more inclined to rest and prepare him

self for the fatigues he must endure to-night. So good-bye, Matthew—good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Tom! Mind how you go out, and take care that none of those inquisitive police officers dog your footsteps."

"Leave me alone to deal with them," returned Tom Davis. "I have had business with them before to-day."

"That's true enough, and you have been tolerably successful, so I feel a certain amount of confidence. Once more, good-bye!"

The two old friends shook hands, and Tom Davis walked quietly out of the inn into Drury Lane.

He walked on quietly, stopping every now and then to look into various shop windows, as though he was in no hurry, and as though he had no particular destination in view.

In this way he continued to walk on until he reached the coach-office.

He took an outside seat for Ealing.

He did not take his place until just as the coach was starting.

Then he looked anxiously all round him.

But he saw nothing to occasion any apprehension.

Away rolled the coach, and in due time stopped to allow him to alight on Ealing Common.

He walked over the large open tract, and just before he entered the lane at the north end of it, he stopped and looked back.

He could see behind him for a long, long distance, but not a single human being was in view.

"It's all right," he said, pleasantly—"there's no danger as yet."

Soon afterwards he gained his new home.

He saw Sixteen-String Jack standing near the door, watching and waiting for him.

Sleep and rest had been equally impossible while in his present uneasy state of mind.

Tom's absence had been longer than he anticipated, and more than once he felt inclined to saddle his horse and ride off, in order to put his doubts at rest.

The first words Davis spoke had the effect of reassuring him, and he asked eagerly for Matthew's plan.

He was well satisfied with it, for he felt, from what he knew of his companions, that it would be the most likely course for them to adopt.

"I wish night had already come," he said—"I am so full of impatience to be off."

"Have you rested?"

"No."

"Slept?"

"Not a moment, nor shall I be able until my mind is more at ease."

"Then, if you like," said Tom Davis, "I will while away the time by telling you what happened at old Matthew's after your departure."

"Yes, do so—do so; I am full of anxiety to hear it."

Tom then entered into a very minute account of all that had taken place.

We need not repeat what he said, for the reader knows all already.

Slowly the hours dragged by until night came, and then Sixteen-String Jack hastened to the stable in order to prepare his horse for his journey.

"Don't be so hasty," said his friend; "there is time yet—plenty of time!"

"But I can't stop—I am all impatience to be off. I must leave you!"

The horse was saddled and carefully got ready for the road.

Jack mounted and rode round to the front of the inn.

Tom Davis had walked straight through the house, giving as he did so some instructions to Ellen.

"Wait a moment, Jack," he added, as he met the highwayman outside the inn—"wait a moment."

He patted Jack's horse on the neck while he spoke.

"What must I wait for?"

There was no need for Tom to reply to this question.

Looking up, Jack saw Ellen standing underneath the rustic porch.

On a little tray she carried two glasses of ale.

One she handed to the highwayman—the other was taken by Tom Davis.

"Here's to your good luck, Jack," said the latter; "may you be successful in what you are about to do!"

"And here's to re-echo your wish, Tom. I hope before the sun rises to-morrow that we shall all be here in safety and security."

"So do I. Now, before you leave, take one word of caution from me—be very careful of yourself, Jack; the officers will be out watching for you, I will wager any money—they are so very angry at the clever manner in which you slipped through their fingers last night; so, for your own sake, beware!"

"I will be careful, never fear; and now let me start. Good-bye, Ellen—good-bye, Tom! You will see me again before daybreak!"

As he spoke, Sixteen-String Jack touched his horse with the spur and trotted down the long-deserted by-road.

Soon afterwards he emerged upon Ealing Common.

In the darkness, the large piece of open ground looked to be double its real dimensions.

The night was one extremely favourable for Jack's purpose.

It was light and dark by turns.

Sometimes the clouds would be so heavy and so dense that it would be scarcely possible to see a dozen yards in advance.

Then they would roll away, the blue sky would be made visible, and the stars peeping forth would faintly illuminate the different features in the landscape.

CHAPTER DCCXXIX.

REVERTS TO THE PROCEEDINGS OF DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMPANIONS IN EPPING FOREST.

THE reader must understand that Dick Turpin and his comrades entered Epping Forest on one side of it just a few minutes after Sixteen-String Jack left it by the other.

His visit there was then certainly productive of great good.

Those police officers who had been left about the spot were drawn away by him in a fruitless pursuit, and Dick and his friends had the place entirely to themselves.

It was as well that things happened thus, for in the exhausted condition of the horses there is little question that the police officers would have succeeded in overcoming them.

But as the time passed by the little party grew extremely anxious concerning their missing comrade.

The possibility of his having entered the forest before them, and having been compelled to leave it again, scarcely occurred to them, for they were under the impression that they had been pursued by the whole troop of officers, and that none had been left behind.

They inclined rather to the belief that by some misfortune or other Jack had been captured or slain by his foes.

Yet it might be that he was unable to return before daylight, and that in consequence he was hiding himself somewhere and waiting for night to come.

It was a long, dreary day for them all at the forest.

They were all much exhausted by what they had gone through on the preceding night, and glad enough to rest.

But they could not sleep as they should have done, in consequence of the anxiety at their hearts.

When evening came, their hopes began to revive, for they fancied that under cover of the darkness Sixteen-String Jack would probably return.

A fire was lighted and a rude meal partaken of.

But time passed by, the evening deepened into night, and still there were no signs of Jack's approach.

"He is in some danger, rely upon it!" said Claude Duval.

"And yet he may not be," said Dick Turpin. "It is not impossible that he may have heard of the attack the officers have made upon the forest, and that, consequently, he dreads to enter it lest he should fall into their hands."

"I hope that is the true version," said Claude Duval; "but for my own part, I confess I have gloomier thoughts."

"It is most vexatious," said Tom King, "that we do

not know whether Tom Davis is settled at the inn, and whereabouts the building is situated."

"It is much to be regretted," said Dick Turpin. "To tell you the truth, I don't at all fancy remaining here in the forest; something seems to tell me that my best course will be to make an immediate flight!"

"I have the same feeling too" said Claude Duval

"And I," added Tom King.

"Well, then, we are unanimous. But if we decide to quit the forest, to what place can we bend our steps?"

That question was followed by a silence.

Not one of them was able to give a satisfactory reply.

Dick Turpin was the first to speak.

"It seems to me," he said, "that we must try to meet Sixteen-String Jack. Where he may be I have not the remotest notion; but if he is under the belief that the police officers are hanging about the forest, and that they have driven us out of it, he will not think of coming here. The thing to be considered, then, is, which is the most likely place to find him?"

"It will require a great deal of consideration, I fancy, captain," replied Claude Duval, "before that question can be answered. For my own part, I can only see one way of arriving at the knowledge we require."

"And how is that?"

"By riding over to the house where Tom Davis lives."

"But if Jack saw him last night he may have left."

"Well, we can but go and see. I fancy the danger of such a proceeding is not so great as it appears to be at first sight—certainly no more perilous than for us to remain where we are at present."

"What do you say, captain?—shall we ride off in that direction?"

"I can think of nothing better," replied Dick Turpin. But if we should fail to learn any intelligence in that quarter, what then?"

"Let us go there first," said Tom King, "before we consider the other. I am inclined to be of Claude's notion."

"At any rate, if we do not hear intelligence of Sixteen-String Jack, we may safely calculate upon learning where the inn is situated, and consequently of obtaining a place of refuge where we shall be secure from the police."

"Let us wait till midnight," said Dick Turpin, "and if Jack does not make his appearance then, and if in the meantime we can think of nothing better, we will carry out this proposal."

The much-wished-for hour came at length.

Sixteen-String Jack did not appear.

No better plan could be thought of, so the horses were led out and our friends mounted.

There was no need now for Black Bess to carry a double burden; the horse they had obtained possession of so strangely the night before would serve admirably for Maud.

To be sure, they looked rather a large party to be travelling by night, and it was scarcely possible for them to avoid attracting notice.

At the same time, however, they had to bear in mind that with them union was strength, and that they were able to cope better with any danger that might arise.

The principal anxiety was felt in quitting Epping Forest, so Dick Turpin was careful to leave it at a point at some distance from the cave.

"From what we saw last night," he said, "I think we may calculate that the patrols have been removed; that will much diminish our danger, and the house where Davis lives is in so lonely and retired a situation that I have strong hopes we shall be able to arrive there unperceived."

"Forward, then—forward!" said Tom King. "Let no more time be lost! Remember that at the most there are but a few hours between now and daybreak, and during these few hours we must find some place of refuge for the ensuing day."

"You are right, Tom—you are quite right!"

At a comparatively easy pace—for they did not want to distress their horses unnecessarily—the party made their way towards Kentish Town.

By making a detour they avoided Highgate Hill, and entered upon the broad high-road at a short distance from the foot of it.

Very lonely, and dark, and deserted did the broad high-road appear at that hour.

Up to the present moment they had seen scarcely any one during their long ride.

The distance to the house where Tom Davis lived was trifling, and so it was with increased confidence that they prepared themselves for the remainder of the journey.

Suddenly, however, a faint sound struck at the same instant upon the ears of all of them, and, actuated at the same instant by the same impulse, they all pulled up and listened.

"Officers!" said Tom King, breaking the silence. "I am sure I can hear officers on the road! Hark! again—there's some one else—they are in pursuit of some one!"

"Should it be Sixteen-String Jack!"

"What shall we do, captain, to avoid them?" said Tom King, glancing around. "We must be speedy in our movements, or, before we can gain any place of concealment, they will be upon us."

Dick Turpin looked about him.

On one side of the road there was a very tall brick wall, on the other side of which trees were growing, and the branches of which projected over into the road-way.

This wall was of great length, and evidently formed the boundary of some gentleman's estate.

It was so high that it was preposterous to think there was a possibility of climbing over it.

But Dick Turpin, with a keen eye, detected just opposite to where he stood a small wooden door in the wall that evidently communicated with the enclosure.

He pointed it out to his comrades.

"There," he said—"if we are quick, we may pass through there, and close the door after us. The officers will surely never suspect we have taken refuge there."

"Certainly not," said Tom King. "I did not see the door until you spoke, or I should have made the same proposition myself. Dismount, all of you. Be quick—the door is not high enough to allow you to pass under while sitting on your steeds."

Tom flung himself from his horse while he uttered these words, and the others speedily alighted.

Hastening to the door, Tom found, by pressing against it with his shoulder, that it was secured on the inner side.

He found, however, that he could shake it in its frame, thus showing that the fastening was not a very strong one.

He increased the pressure of his shoulder against it.

There was a sharp, cracking, splitting sound, and then the little door flew back suddenly upon its hinges.

CHAPTER DCCXXX.

THE HIGHWAYMEN SUDDENLY AND UNEXPECTEDLY FIND THEMSELVES INVOLVED IN A FRESH ADVENTURE.

"FORWARD!" said Tom King. "Make haste—follow me! We shall yet be in time!"

His companions quickly passed through the little wooden door in the wall—first Maud, then Turpin with her steed and Black Bess, and Claude Duval brought up the rear with the other two horses.

So soon as ever they had all passed through, Tom King closed the door again.

"Hist!" he said. "Don't speak in a loud voice, or make any more noise than you can help. We are somewhere close to a mansion. Look—there are the lights shining through the trees!"

"I see them," replied Dick Turpin. "We will keep close under the shadow of the wall. We only require this for a temporary refuge."

The clatter of horses' feet now came with very great distinctness upon the still night air.

"I should like to know what's going on," said Tom, "and if you will allow me, I will find out and let you know the result."

Taking it for granted that his comrades would have no objection, Tom King seized hold of a low-growing branch that projected horizontally from one of the trees we have mentioned as growing close to the wall, and by the aid of it drew himself up.

Then seizing another branch, he raised himself higher still, until finally he paused, being just able to look over the top of the wall.

That anyone would be likely to see him he did not for a moment think.

It was dark, and, moreover, the tree was covered with dark foliage, which served admirably to conceal his form.

A close scrutiny alone could have discovered him.

Therefore, with great confidence, he looked down the road, and in a moment afterwards caught sight of a single horseman.

He was flying at a terrific rate, and was scarcely in sight before he was out of it again.

But fleeting as this apparition was, Tom King recognised it.

The flying horseman he felt certain was no other than his companion, Sixteen-String Jack.

The impulse came strongly over him to utter a shout.

But he paused to consider whether it would be advisable, and while doing so the opportunity was lost.

Very close indeed at Jack's heels came a large troop of well-mounted police officers.

Tom saw them very plainly.

He could detect, even in the obscurity, the bright scabbards of their cutlasses dangling by their sides, and the red waistcoats which they invariably wore.

They were out of sight almost as soon as Sixteen-String Jack himself.

Until they had disappeared, Tom neither moved hand nor foot.

Then all at once he let go his hold and dropped into the garden.

He alighted softly upon the mould, making no sound.

"What was it, Tom?" his companions asked, breathlessly—"what was it?"

"Sixteen-String Jack!"

"Sixteen-String Jack?" they reiterated with astonishment.

"Yes. I thought I would shout out to him and let him know we were here, but I hesitated, and before I could make up my mind he was clear out of sight!"

"And a body of police officers were after him, I suppose?" said Claude Duval.

"Yes; and a strong, well-mounted body, too, they appeared to be. They went along at a slashing rate!"

"Let us be thankful," said Dick Turpin, "that we have escaped them; and as for Sixteen-String Jack, I doubt not he will be able to take care of himself."

"I hope so. And now, captain, what is to be done?"

"I can't think of anything better than to carry out our original intention. If we can ascertain the whereabouts of the inn and repair to it, we can afterwards set out in search of Jack."

"I suppose it is the best plan," said Claude Duval, "though I feel inclined to gallop after him now."

"No doubt you do; but I think that you would accomplish little good."

"Then shall we leave this place now, captain?" asked Tom King.

"Yes," was the reply. "I should think the officers are far enough off to make it safe for us to do so."

"So should I, so I will open the door."

"Be careful!"

"Never fear!"

Uttering these last words, Tom King opened the door cautiously and looked out.

The high-road was clear, and he was just about to give the signal to his friends to follow him, when his attentive ears caught a faint, far-off sound.

He listened more attentively, and then closed the door again.

"What's the matter?" all asked, eagerly.

"Nothing particular, only I can hear a carriage, or some such vehicle, on the road. It's a good way off at present—but then, as we are safe in hiding, we may as well wait a moment, and allow it to pass by."

"Yes, decidedly," said the captain—"decidedly!"

All now listened, and it was perfectly easy to detect the rumbling, grating noise produced by the wheels revolving rapidly over the road.

Plainer and plainer grew the sounds as the vehicle drew nearer.

"I have half a mind to get up and have a look at it!" said Tom King.

"No—no," said Turpin. "It is not worth while—besides, there is no time. Hark! What's that?"

A faint, muffled shriek at this moment reached their ears.

Two things were certain.

The first, that it proceeded from female lips; and secondly, from some place in their immediate vicinity.

Then with extreme suddenness the vehicle was brought to a standstill—so far as our friends could tell, just opposite the very door through which they had passed such a short time before.

"Back—back!" said Turpin. "We must conceal ourselves. Some one, doubtless, is about to approach. These trees will afford us shelter. Back—back!"

The little party hastily drew close to the wall, in order that they might be concealed by its shadow.

They were only just in time.

"Now," said Dick Turpin, "above all things be still. Let nothing betray you into either making a movement or uttering an exclamation. Silence! There must not be another whisper heard!"

A deep silence followed these words, for all knew that it was important to obey a command given at such a moment.

Their curiosity was very strongly roused, and with eager eyes they looked to see what was going to happen next.

Beyond all doubt the vehicle had stopped just on the other side of the wall.

They could hear the trampling of horses' feet as if they were restless and impatient to start off again upon their journey.

They heard the murmur of voices, and then another shriek, fainter and more muffled than the first.

While hearing such sounds as these, it was hard indeed for the highwaymen to keep still.

But they remembered their leader's words, and never once thought of disobeying them.

"I wonder whether the door's fastened?" growled a voice.

The words came distinctly upon the ears of the unexpected listeners.

"Give it a good kick and try," was the response.

This advice was immediately followed.

A good kick was given, and the door flew open at once.

Situated as our friends were, they could not see through the little door, and consequently were unable to form an estimate of the kind of vehicle that was waiting outside.

"Now, then," said the voice that had first spoken, "it's all right—the coast is quite clear—be quick!"

"Is she quiet now?"

"Oh yes—she's quiet!"

"Then pick her up in your arms and bring her along."

"But I must have a light, or I shall go blundering up against the trees or something."

"All right; you shall have a light. Look! this carriage lamp will suit our purpose admirably. I will take it and lead the way."

A rattling noise followed, which was caused by the man who spoke removing the carriage lamp from the socket in which it was placed.

"Now, then," he cried, "are you ready to follow me?"

"Yes, yes—I am all ready."

"Then, James," he added, evidently addressing another person, "we sha'n't want your services again to-night; so drive on—be quick out of the way!"

Some response was given, and the vehicle drove off.

By the aid of the light that issued from the carriage lamp, our friends first of all perceived the tall figure of a man wrapped in some kind of rough outer garment.

He carried the lamp in his hand, and raised it above his head.

Just as he passed through the door he paused, and it so happened that he stood with his back to our friends, who, but for this accidental circumstance, must certainly have been discovered.

"Come along," said the man with the lamp. "As soon as you are through the door I will close it, and then I will lead the way to the house."

CHAPTER DCCXXXI.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES COME TO A RIGHT DECISION.

In response to these words, the highwaymen first heard a slow and heavy footstep.

Then another dark figure made its appearance upon the scene.

For about a second the light of the lamp shone upon this figure with great distinctness.

Our friends saw another man wrapped in a riding cloak, and wearing a broad-brimmed felt hat, which was pulled down as low as possible over his brows.

In his arms he carried something which looked more like a mass of clothing than aught else.

A closer view, however, showed a small white hand, that could scarcely have belonged to any but a child, and some long, waving tresses of golden hair.

Only for a moment could this be seen.

The man with the lamp moved suddenly, and then all was darkness.

He went towards the door, with the intention of fastening it.

And now came the time for the highwaymen to be alarmed lest their presence should be discovered.

"Why, curse me," he said, "if this door has not been forced open! Who's done that, I wonder?"

He looked about him suspiciously.

"Oh, come on—come on! Never mind about that!"

"But it's curious!"

"Not a bit of it! Didn't you kick the door?"

"Of course I did!"

"Well, then, you must have broken the fastening by kicking it."

"Well, I might, but it was either a very good kick or a very bad fastening. However, here's a bolt, I see, up at the top. I will shoot that into the socket, and then we shall be all right."

"I wish you'd make haste!"

"I am making haste, only we cannot be too careful."

So saying, the man worked away vigorously at the bolt that was situated near the top of the little door.

Evidently a long time had elapsed since that bolt had been made use of, for it stuck so tightly in its setting that he could scarcely move it.

In his efforts he made a dismal, squeaking sound; but each time the bolt moved a little way, until at length he worked it about half-way into its socket.

"Are you going to be all night?" said the other, impatiently.

"No, I have just done. But what a hurry you are in! Now, then, follow me. I will show you the road. Bless you, I know every inch of this ground as well as you know every inch of the Old Chequers! Aha!"

"Hold your row, you idiot! What do you mean by making a row like that, and running the risk of attracting notice?"

"I forgot—I forgot!"

The man with the lamp hastened forward.

He held it above his head, so that the beams might stream through the glass behind him.

It gave out a very tolerable amount of illumination, and enabled the one who carried the girl to walk with confidence.

In the darkness he would probably have come into violent contact with some obstacle.

Several minutes elapsed, during which the sound of their footsteps and of their voices, and the glimmering of the lamp, grew fainter and fainter.

At length they all ceased, and, after a brief pause, Turpin said:

"Well, my comrades, what think you of that?"

There was no response.

But presently Tom King exclaimed:

"What do you think of it, captain?"

"It's quite clear that there's villany of some kind or other in progress—villany of the worst kind, for it is directed against the helpless and the innocent!"

"Beyond doubt you are right!"

"Well, then, my comrades, I want to know whether you think it would be right for us to pass on and take no further notice of this affair? We are in a peculiar position, and have enough to do in looking after our own affairs without mixing ourselves up with those of other people; but in this particular case——"

"I am of opinion," interrupted Tom King, "that we ought to interfere at once and save the poor girl from the danger with which she is threatened."

"Yes," said Claude Duval, heartily; "and if we do not do it, we should deserve to be deserted by everybody at the moment when we most required help!"

"Such are my feelings," said Dick Turpin, "only I wished to know what were your thoughts upon the matter."

"You have not asked for my opinion," added Maud. "I suppose you thought it was unnecessary; my opinion of you would indeed change if you had selfishly sought to secure your own safety and have left that poor girl in the power of those two ruffians."

"I knew that would be the view you would take of the case," returned Turpin, warmly, "and I knew that it would be unnecessary to speak."

"Besides," said Tom King, "the danger after all is not worth thinking about. Here we are in this enclosure snug enough, and certainly out of the way of all the police officers. Then, as for Sixteen-String Jack, whom we are most anxious to meet, he is galloping along the road at such a speed that no steed save Black Bess could overtake him."

"Then, while we are thus engaged," said Turpin, "we will hope he will soon return."

"Then all this being settled," said Tom King, "let us decide upon our operations; it may be that even now we are losing precious time."

"That is more than possible," returned Claude Duval. "I should think we cannot do better than creep cautiously towards the house."

"And our horses—what will you do with them? It is important that we should have them close at hand in a moment of emergency."

"I know it is, but think we cannot do better than secure them to some of the trees hereabouts; we can easily hasten to this spot, and we shall know that we are close to the door that will lead us out on to the high-road."

"Let it be done," said Turpin, "and done quickly. Now, then, follow me!"

The horses were well secured to various strong branches of the trees.

They seemed quite content with the arrangement, and commenced to nibble the short sweet grass that was growing everywhere around.

With slow, stealthy steps, the little party made its way towards the house.

The highwaymen had all been in the darkness long enough for their eyes to become accustomed to the obscurity, and although the enclosure was very dark, they were able to avoid running against anybody.

In a short time they found themselves upon the borders of a spacious lawn.

Before they ventured to emerge upon this they paused to make some observations, and to reconnoitre.

Their attention was first of all directed to a large and handsome mass of building that could be seen at no great distance.

The lower portion only was indistinctly visible; but the upper part, having no other background than the sky, was thrown into strong relief.

It was a quaint and handsome edifice, such as would probably be the residence of some wealthy or titled man.

What had struck them with surprise was, that the whole front of the house was completely plunged in darkness.

Many windows could be dimly seen, but not from one of them came forth a single ray of light



[DICK TURPIN LISTENING TO THE MURDERER'S APPROACH.]

A deep silence—like the silence of the grave-yard at midnight—reigned all around.

"Come!" said Dick Turpin, in a whisper; "all is well. We will not venture to cross the lawn, lest our dark shadows should be seen. This way we can skirt it easily, and that will bring us to one of the sides of the house."

His companions followed in his footsteps.

After a short time they managed to make a complete circuit of the lawn.

They paused, as Turpin said, before one of the ends of the house, though in reality it was what is called a side front.

And now it became necessary to act with caution, for, unlike the front of the building, two windows that were here were illuminated.

One was on the ground floor, and the other in an upper story.

From that one on the ground floor there came a tolerable amount of light, and, after regarding it for a few moments, Turpin said:

"All follow me as quietly as you can. Do not let the sound of a footfall be heard. When we reach the window, we will peep in; but while doing so, you must be careful not to allow your faces to be seen."

"All right, captain—lead the way!"

Turpin took hold of Maud's hand in order to assist her.

As he did so, he was surprised to find that she was trembling violently.

Not from fear, however, but from excitement only.

It was the very first time in her life that she had found herself engaged in an adventure of this kind, and therefore it is not wonderful that it should produce a considerable effect upon her.

She was all eagerness and agitation.

"Calm yourself, dear Maud," said Turpin, in a low voice. "There is no danger either to you or to me; but you feel strange, no doubt."

"I do—I do indeed!"

"Well, calm yourself as well as you are able. Hush!—not another word. Now we are close to the window; a moment more, and we shall be able to command a view of the interior."

Then the window having been gained, Turpin stopped.

For several moments the little party stood perfectly still, gazing with extreme curiosity and interest upon the scene which they beheld.

CHAPTER DCCXXXII.

THE HIGHWAYMEN BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH SOME OF THE DETAILS OF A MOST VILLANOUS PLOT.

SEATED at a table, with a bottle and glasses before them, were two men, in all probability the two men they had seen in the garden, but whether they were or not was impossible to tell, for owing to the darkness they had not been able to obtain a clear view of their countenances.

Now, however, their countenances were plainly revealed by a lamp that was burning on the table between them.

Two more villanous-looking men could scarcely have been seen.

One was younger and much better dressed than his companion.

By his attire, indeed, one would have judged him to be a person of considerable rank and importance.

But his face had upon it no traces of high or gentle birth.

It was bloated and repulsive-looking in the utmost degree, as if he had indulged in every species of vice and debauchery.

There was a deep frown upon his face, and a degree of agitation strongly visible, and he looked threateningly at his associate.

This was a man who evidently belonged to the very lowest depths of humanity.

His dress, composed of rich materials, fitted him badly, or as though he had not the grace to wear it properly, and in many places it was stained as though strong drink had been spilled upon it.

The two men were speaking.

At first the listeners were unable to detect a single word.

But in a moment afterwards they raised their voices to a higher pitch, and then they heard distinctly.

The younger man appeared to have control over the other, for he spoke in a haughty and commanding tone of voice.

"I tell you it shall be done, and what's more, you shall do the deed. I am determined upon it, and will stand no further trifling!"

He brought his hand down with considerable violence upon the table as he uttered the last words.

"Well, well," said the other, "don't make so much fuss about it! I haven't refused, have I?"

"No, you have not refused, because you know full well you dare not, but you have shown hesitation. I tell you again you shall do it at once!"

The other looked round the apartment anxiously, and then answered:

"Hush, hush—don't speak so loud! Who can tell what ears may be listening to us?"

"Do not be a fool—there's no one here but ourselves, at least, no one who will take any notice of a disturbance."

"But it's always best to be careful."

"I know that; but don't talk to me, but listen. You know my motives in the affair quite as well as I know them myself, so that there is no need for any reference to be made to them. I will have no further delay. Will you go at once?"

"I will—I am ready; but how shall it be done?"

"In this way; pay attention, and carry out all my instructions faithfully. I must have no clumsy work—all must be done neatly and cleanly."

While speaking, the man fumbled for a moment in the breast of his coat, and then produced a small, delicate, and singular instrument, upon which not only the highwaymen outside, but his companion, looked with an extraordinary amount of interest.

In shape, then, this instrument resembled a dagger, but it was only about one-fourth of the size that such weapons were usually made.

The blade—if such it may be termed—was very slender—not flat, as blades usually are, but round.

Near the hilt it was almost as large as the tip of a man's little finger, and from that it tapered until the point was as fine as the point of a needle.

This blade appeared to be highly polished—so highly as to look as though it was transparent.

The hilt also was formed of the same material as the blade.

All this our friends saw while the stranger held it in his hand, balancing it upon his fingers.

"Is that the weapon?" said his accomplice, at length.

"It is. You never saw the like, I am convinced of that—take it, and look at it; handle it gently, for it is very fragile."

The man obeyed, and looked at the singular dagger attentively.

"Why, 'tis glass!" he said.

"Yes, I know it is; blade, hilt, and all are formed of the same material."

"How strange—a glass dagger! I never heard of such a thing before!"

"They are by no means usual, but yet they have been known for many a century past. That, however, is nothing to do with us. Attend to me, I say!"

"But where did you get this from?" asked the man, who looked upon the weapon with a great amount of admiration.

So, too, did the unseen listeners outside, not one of whom had ever heard of or seen a weapon of this description.

They thought, at first sight, it was made of glass, but dismissed the idea as unlikely in the extreme.

"When you are ready," said the one who had produced the dagger, "I will show you how to use that little instrument."

He was replied to by a stare of inquiry.

"You will go upstairs; you will find her in the room above. Take this dagger; by one blow, drive it deep into her heart, then give the handle a sudden jerk, and the blade will break off, remaining deeply buried in her body; there will be a spot or two of blood, but no more."

The man to whom these words were addressed sat perfectly still for a moment, and then, with a slight shudder, said:

"It's a frightful instrument—take it back; I would rather make use of something else!"

"No, you shall not! I will be obeyed! Refuse at your peril!"

"But—but——" said the man, and he moved the glass dagger uneasily in his hands.

"No hesitation! I tell you I have made my mind up as to the exact course to be pursued; there will be no hitch or botch in the affair; no traces of violence will remain. You will strike the one blow, and then I in a few years shall succeed to the vast properties of which that child is the heiress, and I shall be enabled to pay off all the heavy mortgages I have upon this estate."

"Yes, yes," said the man—"I know all that. I first prompted you to the idea—one stroke, and all is won."

"Truly; but the stroke must be delivered by yourself!"

"And my reward?"

"As I have told you, your reward shall be most ample—far, far indeed beyond your utmost and most sanguine expectations."

Turpin was watching the speaker narrowly, and he fancied that at these last words his countenance assumed a curious expression—one that boded his accomplice no good.

"Are you ready now?" he asked, "or are you determined to lose the opportunity? The state of insensibility in which the girl now is will not for long continue; if she awakes we shall have no end of trouble and disturbance. If you strike the blow now, all will be done with scarcely any trouble!"

The man with the dagger rose slowly to his feet.

There was an air of resolution perceptible in his manner.

He was like one who had nerved himself to do some terrible deed—a deed from which his better nature revolted, but which, nevertheless, he was determined to perpetrate.

"Beware," said the other, rising also—"beware how you attempt to play me false! When you have struck the blow, and broken off the hilt of the dagger, let me know."

"And—and——" said the man, with chattering teeth.

"And what?"

"The body!"

"What of it?"

"What shall you do with it?"

"Do with it? Why, bury it, of course."

"Here?"

"Yes, here; that is, somewhere in the grounds. I have fixed my eye upon a spot that will answer our purpose admirably. The soil is soft, and it will be easy enough to dig a deep grave; we will place her in it, fill in the mould, and then we shall be rid of all this anxiety and trouble."

"It sounds feasible," said the other—"it sounds feasible, and you are already too deeply in my debt for me to hesitate—it must be done! This and this alone, is the only chance I have of recovering the large amount of money I have lent you!"

"It is," was the reply. "You have almost as deep an interest as I have, therefore do not delay; and when you strike home, let no nervous terror make your arm tremble—the deed must be done by one blow, and one blow only!"

CHAPTER DCCXXXIII.

DICK TURPIN ENDEAVOURS TO SAVE THE YOUNG GIRL FROM HER TERRIBLE FATE.

With these words, the man with the dagger advanced reluctantly towards the door.

No sooner did Turpin observe him make this movement than he drew his companions aside, and said, hastily:

"At all risks, this horrible crime must be prevented!"

"But how," said Tom King—"but how?"

"Leave it to me," said Turpin. "Do not on any account, without you hear my signal, presume to make any demonstration of your presence. I have a plan of operations already arranged in my brain; if there was the time I would explain the details to you, but there is not; while I was doing so the chance would be lost, so you must trust to me entirely."

"We are content, captain—we are quite content!"

"Then be still—pray be still!"

Dick grasped Maud's hand, and pressed it warmly.

He did not say another word, but crept stealthily forward.

They then observed what they had not previously noticed.

This was a large tree growing by the side of the house, and sending out branches in all directions.

Some boughs were only six or seven feet from the ground, so Turpin seized one easily, and with extreme agility and rapidity mounted the tree.

His companions stood below watching all his movements eagerly.

One large branch shot out almost horizontally from the trunk, and pointed in the direction of a verandah, or balcony, that ran in front of the windows on the first floor.

Along this branch Turpin crawled hastily.

It bent and creaked beneath his weight; but it was strong enough to sustain him without making any sound of an alarming character.

He dropped upon the balcony of which we have spoken.

Then, crouching down, he hastened along it to the window from which the light proceeded.

It was immediately over the one in which the two plotters had been sitting, and that fact, coupled with the light that streamed forth from its panes, made Dick nearly certain that it was the one in which the girl had been placed.

If it was, all would be well.

The plan he had thought of would enable him to save her, but if he had made any mistake in this particular it would be very doubtful whether he would be able to do so.

By this time he fully calculated the man would have been able to ascend the stairs and enter the room.

Such deeds he knew were always done quickly.

When they had worked themselves up to a certain point, the blow was struck with extreme suddenness.

Panting and anxious, then, he paused before the window, and before he ventured to enter, looked in.

The light which he had seen came only from a fire that was burning on the hearth.

When he first saw it the blaze was leaping up towards the chimney.

Now there was little more than a dull red glow of burning embers.

He pressed his face close against the glass, and placed his hands at both sides of his temples, so as to be able to obtain a better view of the interior.

He saw then a spacious, old-fashioned apartment.

It was well, and according to the fashion of the time luxuriously, furnished.

The most noticeable article of furniture was a bedstead, a huge affair with heavy curtains drawn closely all round it, and with huge nodding plumes of feathers at the top, giving to the whole a hearse-like aspect.

Of the girl he could see nothing.

But a kind of instinct seemed to tell him that she was lying on the bed.

He had heard that she was insensible, and therefore that would be the most likely place for her to be put.

Hastily, then, he opened the window, and stepped into the chamber.

He listened.

But all was still.

On tiptoe, he strode towards the bed, and drew aside the curtains.

A slight exclamation of satisfaction arose to his lips.

Lying there, as though she had simply been thrown down, was the same young girl he had seen carried through the garden.

He could tell she was the same by her small white hands, and by her long waving tresses of golden hair.

She was either in a deep slumber or else in a state of insensibility.

Dick wondered how it was that the man had not made his appearance before then.

The reason, however, was simple enough, as he afterwards learned.

His friends had looked through the window again, and saw that the murderer in intention had turned back from the door, and demanded another draught of brandy.

He was as yet scarcely qualified for the deed he had to do, and so brutalised himself by additional draughts of the fiery stimulant.

In spite of the impatience of the other, he continued to drink glass after glass, but no perceptible effect was produced.

Then he found himself in possession of sufficient courage, and again turned towards the door.

Dick Turpin heard his footsteps on the stairs, and, confident that now no time must be lost, he took hold of the girl, and lifted her off the bed.

It was his original intention to have rushed with her on to the balcony.

But now it was too late—in another moment the room would be entered.

He deposited her on the floor by the side of the bed instead, and then, with great rapidity, arranged the bedclothes in such a fashion that by the dim, uncertain light it would appear as though some one was really lying there.

He had only just time to do this and conceal himself behind the curtains when the door opened.

The man just put his head inside, and then withdrew it.

In a low voice, Turpin heard him calling to his companion.

"A light—a light!" he said. "I must have a light! It's dark—quite dark!"

"So much the better," was the reply—"you will not see her face. If you did, it might turn you from your purpose. She is lying on the bed. You cannot fail to find her. Strike one heavy blow, and all will be done. Remember your reward!"

Apparently convinced by what his companion had just said, the man, with trembling steps, walked across the room towards the bed.

On the side towards which he walked the curtains were closely drawn.

So intent was he on his task—so anxious to get it quickly over—that he did not notice the dark shadow of some one following in his footsteps.

But Turpin saw him, and recognised him as the man's accomplice.

Silently and swiftly he stepped across the room.

What might be his purpose could only be guessed.

Perhaps it was to see that his accomplice performed the deed effectually, and that no nervousness overtook him at the last moment.

The man with the dagger averted his head when he drew aside the curtains.

He put out his left hand.

He could feel a mass of something that felt like clothing.

Without stopping to make any further examination, he raised his arm, and brought it down with the rapidity of lightning.

As he had been bidden, he jerked his wrist, and the hilt of the dagger came away in his hand.

"Done!" he gasped—"it is done! All is over!"

Then a muffled shriek escaped his own lips.

He started upright, and turned round, with his countenance frightfully distorted.

He caught sight of his accomplice standing a pace or two off, with his arms folded, and with a mocking expression on his face.

He tried hard to shriek, but he could not.

He looked at his companion, and saw that he was holding the hilt of another glass dagger in his hand.

He knew by that that the blade had found a sheath in his own back.

He was dying—surely dying.

"You have received your reward!" said the other, with a scornful laugh. "As you said, truly enough, all is over! I am rid in the same moment of the two greatest obstacles of my prosperity."

CHAPTER DCCXXXIV.

THE YOUNG GIRL IS SAVED FROM HER FOES BY DICK TURPIN.

Gasping and staggering to and fro, the man remained glaring upon his accomplice.

Dick Turpin had seen this man following in the footsteps of the other, but yet it did not occur to him that it was his intention to commit an assassination.

So suddenly was it done that he was not in time to prevent it—indeed, considering the man's character, it would have been almost a pity if he had done so.

After one or two ineffectual attempts to speak, the murdered wretch turned half round, and then fell with a crash upon the floor.

"It *is* done!" said the other, with a mocking laugh. "Now, then, to see whether the blow was really an effectual one. If she has perished, all will be well. I can easily dispose of the two bodies."

He dashed aside the curtains of the bed as he spoke.

At the same moment a flash of light came from the smouldering fire, and this showed him everything with great distinctness.

The girl was not there, but only a heap of clothing.

A terrible cry of rage and fear burst from his lips.

"Villain!" said Dick, as he stepped from his place of concealment, and revealed himself to the guilty wretch. "Your plan has failed! The girl is saved!"

"And you have done it, I suppose?" was the reply, and, while the words were uttered, the young man drew his sword rapidly, and aimed a desperate blow at the highwayman.

But Dick Turpin's blade was ready, and the weapons rang together with a clashing sound.

Whatever might have been that man's failing and deficiencies in other respects, certainly cowardice was not one of them.

He attacked Dick Turpin with great fury and considerable skill, so that the highwayman had much ado to defend himself.

The trampling of their feet, the clashing of their weapons, and the cries of rage and vexation to which Turpin's antagonist gave vent, aroused the young girl from her state of insensibility.

She sprang up with a scream, for the recollection of what had happened to her was strongly before her mind, and when she saw these two men engaged in mortal strife, her terror became greater, and she uttered shriek upon shriek.

Seeing the girl roused the man into a state of perfect fury.

He redoubled the violence of his attack, for he hoped to be able to put an end to his antagonist, and to slay the girl as well.

But in this anticipation he was disappointed.

Seeing that it was a matter of life and death between them, Dick Turpin did not hesitate to strike a blow that should put an end to the contest.

He saw that his adversary left his head for a moment unguarded.

Down came his sword upon it with terrific force.

There was a faint, gurgling cry, a few staggering steps, and then the villain fell half on the floor and half on the body of his scarcely less villanous companion.

Hastily sheathing his sword, Dick Turpin hastened to place himself by the girl's side.

"Fear nothing now," he said, "for all is well. The danger that has menaced you is over. You know me not. I am an utter stranger to you, but, nevertheless, I am a friend—my actions will prove such to you. Look—there are the two men who would have murdered you!"

The girl shuddered, and her face turned even a shade paler than it had been before.

"And—and—you have killed them both?" she asked, tremblingly.

"No, not both. One of them kindly saved me the trouble. But these details are nothing to you—they are unfit for your ears."

The girl looked all around her, and, by her manner, Dick concluded that she recognised the apartment she was in.

"If I am not mistaken," he said, "you know where you are?"

"I do; and yet I can scarcely believe it."

"But it is true?"

"Yes, it must be true, because——" and her eyes wandered to the wretch who had fallen beneath Turpin's sword.

"Where are you, then?"

"This is a room in my uncle's house, and—and—that is my uncle."

She pointed to the prostrate form while she spoke.

"Then," said Turpin, with a smile, "you have to thank me for ridding you of a very disagreeable and disreputable relation. Do you know what his intentions were with regard to yourself?"

"I do; I can guess them. I have always feared him."

"And how came you in his power?"

"I received a letter that I believed to be from—from—some one that I know."

"And love dearly," interrupted Turpin, as he noticed her hesitation and the blushes that suffused her cheeks.

"As the letter requested, I slipped out without anyone at home being aware of my absence. Upon reaching the appointed spot, I was seized, hurried into a carriage, and then I became insensible."

"And you next remember finding yourself here?"

"Yes, that is almost the next. I have some recollection of feeling myself whirled along at a tremendous rate, and shrieking out aloud for aid; but whether I did that or not is almost more than I can now take upon myself to say."

"Beyond doubt you did," said Turpin, "for I heard

you. But hush! I will explain all presently. There are my friends."

At this moment Tom King and Claude Duval made their appearance on the balcony outside the window.

"Are you safe, captain?" they cried. "Is all well?"

"Yes, all's well!"

"We stayed away as long as we could, because we did not hear your signal; at last we grew alarmed."

"Both wretches I believe are dead," returned Turpin, "or if they are not it matters little. I am quite certain it is out of their power to do much more mischief."

"You foiled them in their plot, then?"

"Yes; but do not linger here, we will hasten away."

"Right, captain. Does the household seem alarmed in any way?"

"No; it seems as though the place was quite deserted."

"Good, then we need not hurry ourselves."

"Which way will you descend?"

"By the balcony again, I think; the distance to the ground is but trifling, and it would be better than running the risk of descending the staircase."

While speaking, Dick Turpin advanced towards the window.

He supported the young girl's steps with his arm.

She was weak, and trembled excessively.

But Dick had shown himself such a true friend and protector, that she clung to him with every confidence.

There was a little difficulty in lowering her from the balcony, but not much.

Turpin raised her in his arms, lifted her over the iron railing, and then bending over, held her down at the full length of his arms, so that she was able to drop to the ground.

In another moment he and his companions were standing by her side.

Maud was there anxiously expecting them.

She welcomed the young girl affectionately.

"Come," said Turpin, "follow me to the little door in the garden wall; we shall then be close to our horses in case there should be any necessity for instant flight; it would be much better to hold a consultation there than here."

Claude and Tom King were of the same opinion, and accordingly the whole party hastened to the spot that had been mentioned by their leader.

In a few words Dick then related to his comrades all that had taken place in the room above.

But what they heard only served to increase their curiosity and interest, for a thousand questions suggested themselves to their minds.

These questions no doubt could all be answered by the young girl whom they had befriended.

But they shrank from putting them.

She was growing calmer now, and was much rejoiced to meet with one of her own sex under such trying circumstances, and after waiting a moment or two, Dick Turpin ventured to address her.

CHAPTER DCCXXXV.

DICK TURPIN RESOLVES NOT TO DO HIS GOOD WORK BY HALVES.

"Who you are," he said, "I have no idea. Chance alone made me acquainted with the fact that you were in great personal danger, and that was sufficient to induce me to step forward and do what I could on your behalf."

"My best thanks are your due," replied the young girl. "I do thank you very, very much. I wish I could express the amount of gratitude that I feel!"

"I am not, however, disposed to do my work by halves," continued Turpin, without taking any notice of this last speech; "if, then, you will tell me where you want to go to be in safety, I will take you, for it is impossible that you should remain here."

"I wish to go home," was the reply. "This will be a bitter lesson for me. Never again will I quit my father's house in a clandestine manner!"

"Where is your home?"

"In London."

"In what portion of it?"

"In Piccadilly. My father, Colonel Walton, lives there—that is, when he is in town, as he happens to be at the present time."

"He is no doubt suffering great anxiety and suspense on account of your absence."

"Oh, sir, he is, no doubt—no doubt he is. I know he will be frantic with grief when he discovers my absence. Let me go to him—let me go!"

"But you must understand, miss, that it is not possible for you to go alone."

"Do not call me miss, it does not seem as though we were friends; call me Florence—my father calls me Floy."

"Then, Florence, I will see that you reach home safely and unhurt; but, first of all, I must hold some brief consultation with my companions here, and arrange our future proceedings."

Florence shrank back, for she could tell by Turpin's manner that he did not wish that she should overhear the conference.

Maud placed herself by her side.

"My comrades," said Dick, "I consider I have a plain and simple duty before me, and I shall perform it."

"What is it, captain?"

"To take that young girl home—to place her safely in her parent's arms. It will be a good deed done, and it will be one that I shall always be able to reflect upon with pleasure."

"But the danger, captain—the danger!"

"I don't think it will be great, no greater than I run every hour of my life, that is, if you will only pay attention to my directions."

"You may depend we shall do that. What is it you propose?"

"Simply this: I will leave you here in charge of Maud; wait about here somewhere as near this spot as you can. I ask this because I wish Sixteen-String Jack to rejoin us, and he is more likely to appear here than anywhere else."

"Very good, captain; but suppose he should not come?"

"Why, then, when you find it growing towards morning, you must seek out the best place of refuge you can find."

"We will do that, captain; there is no particular difficulty about it."

"I think not."

"But if you should not return yourself?"

"I think it hardly worth while to take that into your calculations. Depend upon it I shall be back here at this spot many hours before daybreak."

"But still, captain, should you not, how shall we find you then?"

Turpin reflected for a moment.

"It is best to make this arrangement in case of accidents," he said. "If I am not here in an hour before daybreak, do not wait for me; I will come here to-morrow night, and you must be here too."

"Very well, that understanding is quite sufficient."

"And you are quite willing that I should go?"

"Yes, quite; the young girl cannot possibly go alone, and as you have had the adventure all through, you may as well complete it."

Dick Turpin turned away, pleased enough to think that his companions approved of his intention.

But there was Maud—would she be content with this arrangement?

He drew her on one side, and spoke to her for a few moments earnestly and energetically.

If she did not accede to his request she did not refuse it.

"Now, Florence," said Dick, "in a very short time from the present moment you shall be safe beneath your father's roof."

"Oh, sir, thank you for those words—I shall indeed be under deep obligation to you!"

"No, no—all that I do is performed willingly and gladly. Come!"

He unfastened Black Bess from the tree to which she had been secured, and mounting, placed the young girl on the saddle before him.

"Can you ride?" he said.

"Oh yes!"

"Then you will have no difficulty whatever: cling tightly to me, and all will be well."

Dick waved his hat in token of farewell to his com-

panions, and then started off at a rapid rate along the road.

"That man with whom I fought," said Turpin, presently; "was he your uncle?"

"Yes, my uncle, George Walton, my father's youngest brother."

"I see; that's how it is that he appeared only such a few years older than yourself."

"My father has always told me that he was a very bad young man. He indulged in every vice, chose his companions among the worst and lowest in the land, and passed his days in riotous extravagance."

"He had that appearance," said Dick Turpin, who listened with great interest to all the young girl said, for he fully expected that he would be made acquainted with a little family history that would clear up many points about which he was in doubt, and which to him appeared mysterious.

"I have heard also that he squandered the whole of the large fortune that had been left him, and not only that, but got deeply in debt, so that every article that he possessed was mortgaged to its utmost value; he was consequently the poorest of the poor; he had nothing, and was so deeply in debt that it seemed impossible for him to extricate himself."

"And your father," said Dick—"is he wealthy?"

"I believe so—very. We have a large mansion here in London, and several residences in the country."

"And I suppose in the event of your father's death the whole of that property would be yours?"

"Yes," said the young girl, surprised and half alarmed at the question. "I have heard him say that everything he possessed belonged to me."

"Exactly; but if you were not in existence, who would be his heir then?"

"I can hardly tell you."

"Have you a brother?"

"No."

"Nor a sister, nor any close relation?"

"No, not one; my Uncle George is my nearest relative."

"Then to him would the property have belonged. I can understand his conduct now. You have indeed had a narrow escape of your life to-night, for your uncle had everything to gain by your destruction!"

"I always feared him—always dreaded him!" was the shuddering response. "It always seemed to me as though there was murder in his eyes when he looked upon me; I have said so to my father more than once, but he has always sternly reproved me for so doing."

"You will not be alarmed now," said Dick, "because you are in safety; but I ought to tell you that your uncle had you carried off and taken to that house in order that he might murder you: he had arranged everything, and but for my accidental presence you would have been thrown into a hole in his garden! Your disappearance would have been a total mystery. The chances were a thousand to one against it being discovered that your uncle was the murderer, for he took the precaution to slay the only accomplice he appeared to have in the affair."

"Horrible," said the girl, trembling—"horrible! Do not talk to me again about it—the thought is too dreadful for me to bear!"

"I have no doubt of that," said Dick. "But now you know the worst I will increase my speed, for I am sure you must be all impatience. Now, Bess—forward, lass! Quick—quick!"

Hearing these words, Black Bess changed her pace from a trot to a rapid gallop.

She bounded over the road at a surprising speed, and when Dick Turpin again drew rein it was in the western portion of Piccadilly—not then, as now, a busy, populous street, but a country road far out of the city, and only dotted here and there with gentlemen's residences.

CHAPTER DCCXXXVI.

DICK TURPIN ACCEPTS THE HOSPITALITY OF COLONEL WALTON.

"Now, Florence," said Dick, in a kind voice, "this is Piccadilly; can you tell me which is your father's house?"

She looked around her for a moment or two, as though unable to recognise the different buildings.

Then she answered:

"Oh! you are a long way from it—it lies much nearer to Leicester Fields."

"Good," said Turpin. "I will go gently, and when we come to the right house, tell me and I will stop."

Dick would have infinitely preferred to go farther to the westward—that is, into the open country.

But he could not give up after going so far with his enterprise, and so, although it was reluctantly, he turned Black Bess round, and proceeded in the direction of the city.

Florence looked upon both sides as they went, until presently she exclaimed:

"There, that is the house—the white one with the verandah in front."

"I see it," was Dick's reply.

"You must stop at the lodge gate; Thompson is there, and he will admit us."

Dick paused in front of the gate, and then he said:

"My dear young lady, I have brought you in safety to your father's door; you have only to ring the bell and you will be admitted, therefore you can be no longer in danger. I will say farewell to you on this spot, and you can enter alone."

"No, no," said the young girl, seizing his hand tightly—"I cannot indeed permit you to leave thus! You must come in, you must see my father, and receive his thanks for the service you have done me this night!"

"No, no," said Turpin—"I cannot!"

"But what is your reason?"

"Do not ask me for it; let it be sufficient if I plead buisness—urgent business—as my excuse. There, there—say no more. Ring the bell and I will depart."

"I regret very much that you should leave me thus, and I am sure my father will be angry with me for not detaining you; but if you must go, you must—I can't prevent you."

"What's all this—what's all this?" said a voice. "What's the meaning of it? Bless my life, is that you, Floy? And you, sir—who are you?"

These words were spoken by an elderly man, with white hair, who suddenly opened the lodge gates and made his appearance on the scene.

With a shriek of delight, Florence exclaimed:

"Yes—yes, dear father, I am here—your own daughter Floy! I have been in such peril and such danger, and this gentleman has saved me from all, and brought me here, and yet he refuses to enter to receive your thanks!"

"Danger—danger? Bless my heart, what can have happened? Here have I, a soldier, been terrified almost to death by your absence! But come in—come in at once! And you, sir," he added, addressing Turpin, "if you refuse my daughter's appeal you must not refuse mine."

"Sir," said Dick, "I have saved your daughter, as she says truly, from much peril—what that peril was she can tell you as well as I can; but I don't wish to remain, and you would confer an obligation upon me if you would say farewell, and allow me to depart."

But Florence maintained her hold upon his hand, and now she cried:

"Don't take his refusal, father—don't take his refusal! I can't tell you what has happened—no, not half so well as he can!"

Dick Turpin was most anxious to be gone, and yet he could not exactly tell how he could take his departure without appearing rude and churlish in the extreme.

But at this moment the beat of horses' feet upon the road some distance off, reached his attentive ears.

It induced him to change his determination.

They might be police officers who were approaching, and the old colonel might keep him there, pressing him to enter, until they rode up.

Then his position would be far from pleasant.

He appeared, therefore, to yield to their solicitations, and he said:

"I cannot find it in my heart to refuse such urgent requests. I will enter, but I cannot stay long."

"That's right!" said Florence. "Oh, father, I am so glad!"

Turpin dismounted, and led Black Bess through the gate.

Thompson, the lodge-keeper, was there, and closed it.

"Leave your horse, sir," said the colonel. Thompson will take charge of it. It will be quite safe in his hands."

Dick hesitated at first, and then, turning round, he said:

"Just walk her up and down for a few minutes. Don't place her in the stable. I shall soon return, and shall want to set off without delay."

The man touched his cap, and the colonel and his daughter hurried him towards the house.

As he drew near to it, he observed with pleasure its beautiful and tasteful appearance.

The servants, until they saw their young mistress, all looked anxious and alarmed.

But their countenances changed like magic as soon as they caught sight of her.

"This way," said the colonel—"this way! Come into this room, and have a glass of wine with me, and tell me all about it."

He entered a sumptuously-furnished apartment as he spoke.

Dick followed in his steps.

He was treated with the utmost politeness and condescension by the colonel.

At his request, he seated himself in a large arm-chair by the fire, while the colonel occupied another.

Florence sank down upon her knees on the hearth, and clasped her hands round her father's arm, looking up into his countenance with a trustful, hoping expression.

But tears were nevertheless visible in her eyes, and she was greatly agitated, for she could not forget the terrible events of the night.

Florence produced a letter, which she handed to her father.

"I received that," she said, "and, like a wilful, disobedient girl as I am, acceded to the request contained in it."

"Why—why," said the colonel, knitting his brows angrily, "this is from Frank!"

"No, no, dear father—not from Frank! It's a forgery—a base forgery! It purports only to come from him, and it was written in order to deceive me."

But the colonel did not seem at all convinced of this until Turpin began to speak.

Then he listened with mingled horror and wonder to the narrative that fell from his lips.

He drew his daughter closer and closer to him, and trembled like a leaf when made aware of the terrible position she had been in.

"And you have rescued her?" he said—"you—a stranger? How and in what way can I repay you for what you have done?"

"I don't wish it to be considered an obligation," returned Turpin, "nor do I wish to be repaid for it."

"Then, sir," said the colonel, rising to his feet, and shaking Dick warmly by the hand, "no matter who and what you are, take my word for it, you are a man! I feel that I cannot pay a higher compliment than to say that your conduct has indeed been noble in the extreme! I admire you, sir—I respect you!"

Turpin smiled strangely and somewhat sadly while the colonel thus spoke.

The reader can perhaps guess the nature of his thoughts.

"Your daughter," he said, "has never once inquired who or what I am, and I have not thrust the knowledge upon her. It is my wish that I should remain unknown; and, if you will allow me to depart quietly and in peace, I shall esteem it the greatest favour that you can grant."

"But this is most mysterious—most inexplicable! I will not press you too closely for an answer, and yet—yet I would fain know who you are."

"Hark!" said Turpin, his manner changing suddenly. "What was that?—did you hear it?"

A loud knocking and ringing at the outer door of the mansion made itself heard.

Dick Turpin crossed the room lightly to the window, and opened it.

It fell back before his touch, for it opened on to the verandah we have mentioned.

Breathless with surprise, and anticipating they knew not what, the colonel and his daughter followed him.

Dick held up his hand for silence.

"Listen," he said, in a whisper—"listen!"

"Open!" said a voice, in loud, gruff tones—"open—open, in the name of his Majesty the King!"

"Bless my heart!" ejaculated the colonel. "What does that mean?"

"It means," replied Turpin, "that they are officers of police."

"Officers of police?"

"Yes, and they are in search of me."

"Of you?"

"Yes."

"But who are you, then?—why should they seek you?"

"I will tell you now," said Turpin—"you shall have the knowledge I withheld until a moment back. You will shortly hear it under any circumstances, and I would sooner that you heard it from my lips than another's. You have judged me by my actions, so has your daughter. From what you personally know, you both have a good opinion of me—at least, you have said as much."

"We have—we have," was the reply, "and fully mean it!"

"Then let me ask you to dismiss from your minds all that you may have previously heard from any other source. Take no notice of it—judge me as you find me."

"We will; but who are you?—what is your name?"

"I am Dick Turpin," was the reply, "the highwayman!"

CHAPTER DCCXXXVII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS DRIVE DICK TURPIN FROM THE COLONEL'S MANSION.

FLORENCE uttered a slight scream, and the colonel staggered back several paces.

"Impossible," he said—"impossible!"

"I can assure you," returned Dick, "that it is possible, for it is the fact; and, as a return for the service I have rendered you to-night, I would wish you, when you speak of me, to speak of me as you have found me. Farewell!"

"Stop—stop—stop, I say!"

"I can't—my life depends upon my speed!"

"But—but," said the colonel, a little bewildered, "how on earth could the officers have discovered that you were in this house?"

"That is more than I care to know," was the reply. "My course is plain before me—I must escape!"

"Escape?"

"Yes, yes—that's it! Once more farewell—without, indeed, you can hide me securely somewhere. But no—I will not ask you to do that."

"But I will—I will!"

"It is too late," said Dick, as he sprang over the railing of the verandah.

It was at this moment that the door of the room was dashed violently open, and a party of police officers rushed in.

"Seize him!" they cried—"seize him!"

But they were too late—the highwayman had gone.

"Through the window!" cried one of the officers—"he has jumped through the window. Be quick—we shall have him yet! Confound it, what a pity it is there were not a few more of us!"

The officer rushed on to the balcony, and seeing that the ground was not far below, he jumped down without a moment's hesitation.

But Dick Turpin had got the start.

He ran down the gravel avenue as a man only can run when he knows that life and liberty depend on his exertions.

There was a terrible dread and oppression at his heart.

Would he be able to regain possession of his steed, or had the officers taken the precaution to capture his mare before attempting to capture him?

In another instant the lodge-gate was gained.

Dick stopped and looked about him despairingly.

No traces of the gatekeeper or Black Bess could be seen.

"Thompson—Thompson!" he cried, remembering the man's name—"Thompson!"

"Here, sir," said a voice, and immediately afterwards

the old man emerged from the trees, leading Black Bess by the bridle.

This unexpected event unnerved Turpin more than the greatest danger could have done.

He had made up his mind that his steed was lost to him for ever.

"Be quick!" he cried, recovering himself—"open the gate! Quick—quick—on your life, be quick!"

"All right, sir," was the reply. "I knew you at the gate, and that's why I kept your mare out of the way of the police officers."

"Is it possible?"

"I can assure you it is true," replied Thompson, as he hurried open the gate. "Now fly, captain, and good luck to you! I heard what a service you had rendered Miss Florence, and that was enough to make me willing to lay down my life to serve you."

"Take that, then," said Turpin, "as a reward for your trouble."

He flung a heavy purse upon the ground as he spoke, and then, giving Black Bess the rein, dashed through the gateway.

But he heard loud shouts and cries in the rear, but, so far from being alarmed he laughed lightly as he said:

"I have done one good deed to-night, and I feel all the happier for it. Surely that will be something in my favour, for if I had not been what I am the girl must have surely perished."

The pursuit of the police officers gave Dick Turpin no sort of concern whatever.

He just allowed the reins to fall loosely on the neck of Black Bess, and away the gallant creature flew at a speed he was quite sure no other horse could accomplish, and, therefore, he was in no danger of being overtaken.

Gradually, however, he slackened her pace, and having gained the open country, paused to listen.

From the rear not a sound reached him, however, and at a gentle trot he allowed Black Bess to perform the remainder of her journey.

Altogether, he had not been absent very long, and, therefore, he felt little doubt about being able to rejoin his companions.

It wanted considerably more than an hour before daybreak would come.

At last he reached the vicinity of the cottage in which Tom Davis had dwelt; and now he rode forward with even more caution than before, for he expected every instant to meet with his companions.

He could neither see nor hear anything of them, however, and at last reached the little gate in the garden wall.

Here he paused, and uttered a signal with which he knew his companions would be familiar.

It was responded to in a moment, and looking up he saw his companions approaching from the direction of Highgate.

"So you are safe back!" they exclaimed, joyfully. "You have made marvellous speed."

"And yet I have done much."

"Are you unhurt?" asked Maud—"are you sure you are unhurt?"

"Not even scratched," was the reply. "By some means or other, a few officers tracked me, but I escaped them with ease. Now tell me—have you seen or heard anything of Sixteen-String Jack?"

"Nothing at present, captain."

"We must not quit this road, then, at present; we must wait in patience until he returns."

"But supposing that he should not come?"

"Why, then we must depart, conceal ourselves, and then return to-morrow night."

"I hope we shall be spared the necessity of doing that."

"So do I—so do I!"

"Hark—hark! What is that coming?"

The sound of a horse's feet at this moment reached the ears of all.

Some one was approaching, though very slowly.

Dick listened to the sound for some time, and then he said:

"I wonder who is coming? Be he who he may, his horse is quite lame. Listen how he puts his feet to the ground."

"Yes, he is lame, sure enough," said Tom King. "I should not wonder if it is Sixteen-String Jack. It is very likely, considering the pace he was going at. I only hope that he has thrown the officers off his track!"

They all drew close to the shadow of the wall, so as to get out of sight as much as possible, and then waited anxiously and impatiently for the approaching horseman to come nearer.

At the slowest possible walk he came on.

A long time—it seemed to the highwaymen a full hour—elapsed, and then the rider came in sight.

They strained their eyes, endeavouring to recognise him, and presently Dick said:

"It is well. It is Jack—I am sure of it."

He uttered the signal as he spoke.

It was responded to at once, showing that he was quite right.

The whole of the party now emerged from their place of concealment, and hastened towards their companion.

"Is it really you, Jack?" said Dick Turpin. "How comes it you are here? I began to think we should never meet again!"

"Ah! captain," was the reply, given in a faint voice—"I have found you at last! I can give you the information you want, and I am content!"

"Why, Jack, my friend, what ails you?—what ails you?—are you wounded?"

"I am—I am!"

Sixteen-String Jack spoke with difficulty, and then, for the first time, his comrades noticed that he was pressing his hand upon his breast.

"Badly wounded?" they all asked, anxiously.

"Yes—I fear so. And my horse is lame—dead lame."

"We must have your hurt attended to at once," said Turpin. "Where is it?—we must bind it up."

"No, no," said Jack, more faintly than before, "we must not stay—there is not time! I have baffled the police officers, it is true, but it will only be for a time. They will understand how I have tricked them, and then they will be after me at a tremendous rate. Hark!" he added—"I feel almost sure that I can hear them now!"

"No, no," said Turpin, "you are mistaken, and they are not coming. Your wound must be attended to."

"Alight—alight!" said Jack. "Put your ear to the ground and listen! I am certain I can hear the sound of police officers approaching!"

CHAPTER DCCXXXVIII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS FOLLOW SIXTEEN-STRING JACK BY MEANS OF THE TRAIL OF BLOOD ON THE ROADWAY.

WITHOUT another word, Tom King slipped off the back of his steed, and laid himself down at full length on the roadway.

He pressed his ear closely against the ground, and as he did so he was able to detect a faint, far-off, jarring sound.

Sixteen-String Jack steadied himself in the saddle with difficulty, and continued to listen also.

"You are right, Jack," said Tom King, leaping to his feet; "the officers are coming, but they are a long way off yet."

"But what is to be done?" asked Sixteen-String Jack, in a lower tone of voice than before. "My horse is so lame, and I am so frightfully weak, that——"

"It's quite impossible for you to proceed any further," said Dick Turpin. "Listen for a few moments. By what means have you thrown the officers off the scent?"

Jack smiled.

"An old plan," he said. "I managed to get a good distance ahead, and then I saw a horse in a field. I entered it by the gate, caught the strange horse, and, leading him into the roadway, gave him some smart cuts with a stick, and away he went at wonderful speed."

"And the officers rode by, I suppose, and, hearing the sound of a horse's hoofs in the distance, made sure you were still flying before them?"

"Just so; and I quietly rode out into the highway again, and turned my back towards them. Then all at once I discovered that my horse had fallen dead lame."

"But how came you to be wounded, Jack?"

"That was done some time before. But if I may



[THE POLICE OFFICERS TRACKING SIXTEEN-STRING JACK BY THE TRAIL OF BLOOD.]

giving you these explanations we shall be too late to do anything when the officers arrive."

"It's all right," said Dick Turpin. "Alight all of you, and follow me. We will take refuge where we were in safety a little while back, and where, I have no doubt, we shall remain undisturbed."

Dick Turpin of course alluded to the little door in the garden wall.

Towards this he bent his steps, Sixteen-String Jack wondering very much where he was going.

"We have already had some adventures here," said Turpin, "and they shall be related to you when there is an opportunity. Come on! Believe me, you are in safety."

This was welcome news indeed for Sixteen-String Jack, who had already lost an immense quantity of blood.

It was only by the strongest effort of his mind that he could prevent himself from falling into a state of insensibility.

As soon as the little party had once more placed themselves on the other side of the wall, Tom King closed the door, and pushed the bolt into its socket.

"We will go no further than this," said Dick. "The officers, I am sure, will never dream that we have taken refuge in this place. They will ride past and then we shall be quite secure."

"All right," said Tom; "and if you have no objection I will climb up this tree, as I did before, and peep over the top of the wall, and see what is going on outside."

"Do so; but pray be careful!"

"They shall not see me, depend upon it. I am not the least alarmed about that."

Again Tom King climbed up the tree, and having seated himself as comfortably as the nature of the place

would permit, he rested his arms on the top of the wall and looked down.

The trees that were growing behind him would, he was quite certain, form such a dark background that it would be impossible to detect his figure.

Before he had occupied this position long, the sounds of approaching horses became more and more unequivocal.

Then, after a short time, he saw about half a dozen mounted police officers appear in sight.

They were proceeding at an irregular speed, and as though rather undecided what to do.

"Come on," said one, "he must be before us—there can be no doubt about that!"

They passed by in a straggling fashion.

Tom counted, and found they numbered six altogether.

"Have they gone by, Tom?" asked Dick, in a suppressed voice

"Yes—but do not speak at present. They hardly seem to know what to do. Keep still for awhile. I will watch their movements, and let you know the result."

This caution turned out to be a very good and necessary one.

The police officers paused abruptly before they had gone many yards further.

"I firmly believe he has doubled upon us," said one. "I can hear nothing of him in advance."

"Let us turn back," said another voice. "I am inclined to think, with you, that we have overshot the mark."

Accordingly the officers turned their horses' heads round, and rode back some distance the way they came.

Then they paused again.

Tom King bent over the wall in a somewhat dangerous manner, being anxious to make out what the officers were doing.

But as the road curved round slightly, he was unable to do this.

They had halted, and that was all he knew. He could neither see them nor hear their voices.

"Keep still!" he said to his companions. "By no means make a sound or movement. I am sadly afraid if the officers go on looking about they will discover our hiding-place."

"I hope not," said Sixteen-String Jack, faintly—"I hope not, for my strength is almost gone."

"You will be better soon," said Dick, who, as well as he was able, had bound up his comrade's wound. "The feeling of sickness and faintness that you now experience will pass away."

"Hush," said Tom King, again—"hush!—be silent!"

All were still immediately, and the highwayman resumed his watch.

The officers were most certainly in motion, only very slowly

However, soon afterwards they came in sight, and then Tom King perceived that some of them had dismounted from their steeds, and were leading them by the bridle.

One had a dark lantern in his hand, the light of which he directed upon the ground.

He was evidently searching in every direction for something, but what, Tom King could not, for the life of him, make out.

Suddenly, however, a shout reached his ears, and then a loud, exultant voice cried:

"I told you so! I knew he was wounded! Look—here is the proof!"

He allowed the beam of light that streamed through the lens of the dark lantern to rest upon one particular spot.

"Yes—that is blood, sure enough," said another voice.

"Then," added the first speaker, "it will be easy enough for us to follow him by such a trail as this. Hurrah! We have him now, beyond a doubt! He must bleed himself to death in a short time. Look here, and here."

The officers pushed forward, the one with the lantern leading the way

He continued to flash it about in various directions, and every time he saw a small spot of blood lying on the hard roadway.

Beyond a doubt it had flowed from Sixteen-String Jack's wound, and beyond a doubt it would enable his foes to follow him to his hiding-place.

"Look here," said the officer with the lantern—"look here He must have paused for some time on this spot, for, look, the blood is here in quite a pool, and these are the prints of other horses' hoofs as well. Depend upon it, he must have joined some of his companions about this spot."

Tom King did not wait to hear any more, but slipped down out of the tree.

"It's all up!" he said. "The officers have discovered that Sixteen-String Jack has left a trail of blood behind him. They are following it up step by step. They have also found, by marks upon the road, that we have joined him close at hand. Of course they will be able to follow us to this gate."

Tom King was interrupted by the sound of hasty footsteps, and then some heavy blows were struck upon the little wooden door in the wall.

CHAPTER DCCXXXIX.

THE HIGHWAYMEN TAKE REFUGE FROM THE POLICE OFFICERS IN THE MANSION.

MAUD clung tightly to Dick Turpin's arm in excess of terror.

She had to bite her lips to prevent herself from giving utterance to a shriek.

Surely now there would be no escaping—they would all fall into the hands of their enemies.

The intelligence came upon all with a suddenness that was very startling.

It was followed up so quickly by the knocking at the door that there was no time to recover from the shock.

Turpin, however, preserving his calmness by a great effort, said:

"Back—back, my friends! Follow me! It's our only chance!"

He turned round abruptly as he spoke, half carrying, half leading Maud with him.

The others had no resource but to obey.

Had Sixteen-String Jack been alone, he could never have followed.

Tom King and Claude were obliged to place themselves on either side of him, and thus assist his steps.

"Quick," said Turpin—"be quick! Everything depends now upon a little speed! Be quick!"

"But where are you going?" asked Maud, anxiously. "What is it you think of doing? How shall we escape?"

"That I know no more at present than yourself; but I am flying to the only place of refuge I can think of."

"And what is that?"

"That large house yonder, where we lately had so terrible an adventure."

"But is it not inhabited?"

"No doubt it is ordinarily, but to-night I believe it is not."

These words were spoken while Dick was continuing to hurry across the lawn in the direction of the house we have already described.

At the best it was but a poor and indifferent place of shelter from the police officers.

But still it was the only place that offered any chance at all.

A loud crash came at this moment upon their ears

The officers having knocked for a time upon the door, and meeting with no response, had burst it open.

But by the time they entered the grounds, Dick Turpin paused at the window through which they had stood looking a short time back.

"No doubt the house is secured," he said, in a hurried voice, to his companions, "but I know I can gain admittance by the window above. I will hasten down to the front door and open it, and you must be there in readiness to enter, so that I can close it again immediately."

Without waiting for his comrades to reply, Dick Turpin mounted upon the balcony, and entered the room with an agility that was produced by the imminence of his danger.

He dashed hastily across the room in which the two dead bodies lay and which was now plunged in profound darkness.

By accident more than anything else, he found the door, dashed it open, and then descended the long flight of steps that led into the entrance-hall.

Here he could see dimly about him, for over the door there was a window or fanlight.

He undid the fastenings rapidly.

Luckily, they consisted only of a chain and a lock.

The door was opened almost as soon as his companions had arrived at it.

They entered quickly, and then Dick Turpin exclaimed:

"You, Jack, cannot aid us, and so remain here for a few minutes with Maud. Claude and Tom, you will assist me to barricade all the doors and windows on the lower floor. If needs be, we will stand a siege in this place."

The front door was rapidly secured, and in a much better manner than it had been before.

Its panels were composed of stout oak, and Dick nodded his head complacently as he made the reflection that the officers would find it difficult indeed to force a passage in that direction.

They had with them the means of procuring a light, and in a few seconds each was provided with a small piece of wax taper, which, while it enabled them to see what they were about, would give out no great amount of illumination.

They were pleased to find that all the doors and windows that they came to were well secured; and although the mansion was of considerable size, it did not take them very long to make a complete circuit of it.

"Now, then, let us go back to the entrance-hall," said Dick Turpin, "and rejoin Jack. We will then ascend to the first floor; from some of the windows we shall be able to see what our enemies are about."

"And our horses?" said Tom King—"what about them?"

"To tell the truth, I had forgotten them," was Turpin's answer, "the intelligence came upon us so suddenly. I don't think there is any occasion for alarm, however, for they are well hidden among the trees, and unless the officers search in that particular direction they will not be found. Let us hope they will not, for if they are, our position will be terrible indeed."

The front door was now reached, and Maud sprang forward and clung to Turpin.

"The officers are outside!" she said, in an agitated voice—"I have heard them!"

"What are they doing?"

"That I cannot tell; but they seem to be holding some kind of consultation with each other."

"Well, we will soon see about that. Come, follow me, all of you, up the staircase. Be careful to conceal your lights."

This was done, and with rapid steps they all ascended the staircase.

They judged it to be expedient to conceal their lights in the most effective manner, so they extinguished them, for fear the faint beams should attract the attention of their enemies, and make them acquainted with their whereabouts.

Dick Turpin then led the way into one of the front rooms.

"Be cautious," he said—"pray be cautious while I am reconnoitring! Get all your arms and ammunition in readiness! Depend upon it we shall have to fight for our lives and liberties!"

Dick Turpin went to the window and looked out.

He could see nothing at all of the police officers, and wondered greatly at their silence.

He naturally expected that they would have made a demonstration long before this.

Their silence did not tend in any way to reassure him, for he concluded that the meaning of it was that they were arranging some skilful plan by which they could effect their purpose.

Just as he made this reflection, the loud reverberation of a heavy knock upon the front door reached their ears.

"Ah!" said Dick, "they are there. I could see nothing of them from the window."

By common consent all went to the head of the stairs, from which a view of the front door could be obtained.

"Have you any idea of their numbers," asked Dick.

"Yes," replied Tom King. "I counted them—there are six."

"Only six?"

"That is all, I believe."

"Then if it's so the odds are not so very unequal after all. There are four of us. Jack is wounded certainly, but still, in the event of a conflict, he would be of considerable service."

"And I am much better," was Jack's reply—"much better."

"I knew you would be as soon as the wound was staunched."

Bang! came another knock upon the door.

"Let them go on," said Turpin—"that will do us no harm."

"And cannot I be of service too?" asked Maud, faintly—"can I do nothing to assist you? Am I only to be an encumbrance?"

"No; on the contrary, you may be of great use. Hold yourself in perfect readiness, so that if I give you any directions you will be able to carry them out immediately."

Bang! came the knock again, and then followed the usual summons to open in the name of the King.

"I have a good mind to try a daring scheme," said Dick—"it may be of service, and certainly it can do us no harm. Yes, I will try it."

"What may it be?"

"To induce the officers to depart, leaving us here in security."

"If you can do that, captain, you are a cleverer man than I took you to be," said Tom King, with a smile.

"We shall see," said Dick. "I have no great hopes, but yet it shall be tried."

CHAPTER DCCXL.

THE POLICE OFFICERS MAKE A RESOLUTE ATTACK UPON THE MANSION IN WHICH THE HIGHWAYMEN ARE HIDDEN.

With these words, Dick Turpin entered the front room again, and quietly opened the window.

Few men were better gifted with the power of changing the intonation of the voice than he was.

Stepping out upon the balcony, he looked down, and a thick, pompous voice, exclaimed:

"Hullo, there—what is it? Is it fire, or thieves, what?"

The police officers hearing this voice, looked up.

All they could perceive was a dusky, indistinct-looking form.

They jumped at once to the conclusion that it was the owner of the mansion addressing them.

"Beg pardon, sir," said one, raising his hand to his hat, "but we have certain knowledge that some desperate highwaymen have sought refuge in this place."

"What, in this house?" said Dick, with well-feigned astonishment.

"Yes, we have traced them nearly all the way."

"Pooh—nonsense—it's absurd! It cannot be. I fastened all the doors myself before I retired to rest, and I know it is impossible for anyone to have entered without creating an alarm."

"We think you are mistaken, sir; and at any rate, as we are his Majesty's officers of police, you will allow us to enter and satisfy ourselves that the highwaymen are not here. If they are secreted in your house it will be no pleasant thing for you."

"I am not at all afraid about that," was Dick's reply. "If you want to know whether they are here, keep a good watch outside the house till morning, and then you can come in and search with pleasure; but I am not going to get up in the middle of the night to oblige you or anyone else."

"Fire—fire!" said a suppressed voice. "May I be d—d if that is not Dick Turpin! I will swear to him! Fire—fire!"

The officer had not a pistol ready, or he would certainly have discharged it.

Dick heard the words, and made a precipitate retreat.

"That is no good," he said to his companions. "I almost thought I should have succeeded once, but it all over now. We must look to ourselves. There will be an attack in a few moments."

A succession of heavy blows were at this moment rained upon the front door.

"Open—open!" cried a chorus of voices—"open in the name of the King, or we shall force a passage!"

Of course not the least notice was taken of this summons, and after waiting for a little while their blows upon the door were redoubled.

It was evident that, let the door be as strong as it might, it would not long be proof against such a violent attack as was now made upon it.

"Have you any idea what we can do for the best?" asked Tom King, anxiously.

"I have been thinking," said Dick. "It seems to me that this is a life-to-life matter; if we do not slay the officers they will slay us."

"You may depend upon that."

"Well, then, their numbers are somewhere near our own, and if we are only tolerably successful the odds will soon be lessened."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I think our only chance of escape is to make a kind of running fight through the mansion. Let us contest step by step every inch of the way. If in doing this we can reduce the numbers of the officers by one-half, why, we can rush out upon the remainder, and, by a personal struggle, put an end to the attack."

In this there seemed to be some show of reason.

The plan, however, was not without a very great deal of risk, but no one could think of a better scheme or one more likely to succeed.

It was most fortunate indeed for them that the officers were not present in more overpowering numbers.

Had their force been only strong enough to surround the mansion at all points, so as to make it an impossibility for any of them to leave, and if there had then remained a sufficient quantity to make an attack upon two or three different points at once, the highwaymen must have been either slain or captured.

This, however, was not the case—there were only six officers, and as their foes were four in number, it was necessary that they should all keep close together for their joint protection, and therefore confine their attack to one point alone.

The stout oaken door now began to creak and shake before the shower of blows that were dealt upon it.

"They will be in directly," said Claude Duval. "What can we do to prevent them making a sudden rush at first?"

"That is a good thought, Claude," said Turpin; "it ought to have occurred to us before; but if we are speedy there will yet be time! Drag out all the heavy furniture you can find, and let us make a barricade upon the staircase; then, if the officers attempt to climb over it, they will be entirely at our mercy."

This was indeed a good thought.

With great rapidity, a large number of heavy articles of furniture were dragged from the contiguous rooms, and piled up and wedged together on the staircase.

The landing itself furnished some materials for this purpose, for it was adorned with numerous statues, pillars, and stone vases.

All these articles were collected together into one heterogeneous mass and piled upon the staircase.

So tightly were they all wedged together that it would be a matter of the utmost difficulty either to remove or surmount them.

This much having been done, the highwaymen were more inclined to wait for the result with patience.

"Bear in mind this much," said Dick Turpin: "We will not be the aggressors; do not fire any of you, on any account, until the officers have fired upon us first."

Claude Duval murmured a little at this, but he gave way before the wishes of his captain.

Just then the door began to lose its perpendicularity.

The violence of the blows was redoubled, and then the stout piece of oak that had so well resisted the attack made upon it fell with a tremendous crash upon the stone flooring of the hall.

The officers made their appearance in a moment on the scene.

They rushed forward over the fallen door, and then, after going a few paces across the hall, they stopped.

The darkness around them was most intense; but by common consent they all raised their lanterns, which were already lighted, and having withdrawn the dark slides from before the lenses, flashed the light about in all directions.

They caught sight of the staircase, and they saw the barricade erected at the top.

More than this, however, they could not see, for the highwaymen took care to keep out of sight.

"Surrender," cried some one in a loud voice—"surrender in the name of his Majesty the King! If you do so you will not be injured, but if you refuse the consequences will be on your own heads!"

A profound and remarkable stillness followed these words.

"Forward, my lads," said the chief officer—"forward! Up the staircase, scramble over that heap of furniture, and then you have them!"

He was a bold man was that officer, as his actions showed, for instead of keeping behind and directing his men as many leaders do, he sprang forward himself, setting an example which the remainder of his troop immediately followed.

No notice whatever was taken of their ascent, and they began slowly to climb up over the barricade.

The chief officer was the first.

Peeping over the top, he saw, crouching down at no great distance, the dusky figures of the highwaymen.

"Surrender," he cried, boldly—"surrender!"

There was no answer.

"Take that!" he cried, and as he spoke he levelled a pistol and discharged it.

The report in that silent mansion was something prodigious.

Claude Duval was only waiting for this shot.

If he had had his own way he would have fired long before.

His pistol was ready in his grasp, and, taking as good an aim at the chief police officer as he could, he pulled the trigger.

There was another report that mingled with the echoes of the first, and then, with a wild shriek of agony, the police officer fell headlong backwards down the staircase into the hall below.

CHAPTER DCCXLI.

THE HIGHWAYMEN DEFEND THEMSELVES WITH TOLERABLE SUCCESS.

This caused a complete lull to take place in the attack.

The officers crowded round their fallen leader, and seemed quite in doubt what to do.

Could but our friends have made certain of quitting the mansion unperceived by their foes, and regaining possession of their horses, they would unquestionably have done so, and sought safety in rapid flight.

But this was too dangerous to be thought of.

They were much safer intrenched as they were then.

Should they reach the gardens and the officers discover they had left the mansion, the conflict would take place upon the level ground, and that, if it did not result in the total defeat of the highwaymen, would prove most disastrous to them.

Clearly, there was nothing for them to do but to wait.

They were at present unhurt, and they had reduced the number of their enemies by one.

The chief officer was only wounded, and not killed.

His spirit was indomitable, and, despite his fearful fall down the staircase, he raised himself on one arm, and, pressing his hand upon his wound, said, faintly,

"Forward again, altogether! Storm the barricade, and then you have them sure enough! One bold push, and you will be successful!"

Yet, in the meanwhile, the highwaymen had not been idle.

Dick foresaw that this barricade would inevitably be surmounted.

Therefore it was absolutely necessary that another should be erected.

This could be easily enough done on the upper flight of stairs.

And so, while he remained with Tom King to keep watch near the first barricade, the remainder of the party was sent up the other staircase, with instructions to construct another barricade similar to the first.

In spite of the command of their leader, the police officers rather shrank back from obedience.

But he called out to them again.

"The reward will more than pay you for your trouble," he said. "And think of the credit you will gain as well! You will every one have a promotion. Down with them, I say—down with them!"

With pistols ready in their grasp, the officers, forming themselves into a compact mass steadily commenced ascending the staircase.

But all naturally shrank from exposing any portion of their bodies above the top of the barricade.

"Altogether," they whispered—"altogether! A bold rush will surely do it!"

They made the attempt to climb all at once.

Dick Turpin had a pistol in each hand, and so had Tom King.

As soon as the foremost officers came in sight, all four weapons were discharged.

Then, without waiting to see what was the result, they turned round, and ran hastily up the second flight of stairs.

They found, to their satisfaction, that the second barricade was much stronger than the first

Some very heavy chests of drawers had been dragged out, and wedged into the staircase.

Not without much difficulty, the two highwaymen rejoined their companions.

Their last volley had not been so effective as the first.

Not one of the officers had been killed, though two had been rather severely wounded, and one slightly.

The officers paused again, evidently not relishing the idea of renewing the attack.

But the voice of their wounded leader urged them on.

They scrambled over the first barricade, and then, forming themselves into a compact body as before, ascended the next flight.

There was a large oaken chest upon the landing that had not been used to form the barricade, simply because they were not strong enough to make use of it.

But Dick saw directly how it might be turned to excellent use.

"Now," he cried, "all help me—every one! The least increase of strength will be most welcome!"

He seized hold of the chest as he spoke, and those who were with him—Sixteen-String Jack and Maud included—assisted him to raise it.

With much trouble, they got it up on top of the other articles that formed the barricade.

Then they continued to push it steadily until, by a united effort, they pushed it completely over the barricade.

It fell with a crash down the stairs, and lodged itself firmly in an angle.

"Hurrah!" said Dick. "We're safe now, beyond all doubt! It will be hard indeed for them to succeed any higher! Fire a volley, so as to make them think we are waiting here, and then follow me with all speed!"

This command was obeyed, and the officers again said back.

"Quick—quick!" said Turpin. "This way—this way!"

He dashed into one of the rooms as he spoke, and flung open the window.

Looking down, he saw, about ten or twelve feet below, the balcony which surrounded the mansion.

"Now," he said, "we must pass through this window and drop down. When once upon the balcony, it will be easy enough to reach the ground. Then we must rush forward and secure our horses."

"But there's Sixteen-String Jack," said Claude. "Do you think he could accomplish such a feat?"

"It's our only chance," said Turpin, "and every second is of the utmost value."

"With a little of your assistance I can do it," said Jack. "I see now what the captain means. We should never have a better chance of making our escape."

"Decidedly not!" said Turpin, and as he spoke he lowered Maud through the window.

First he grasped her firmly by the wrists and leant down for a considerable distance, then he released her, and, as she had only a trifling distance to fall, she reached the balcony unhurt.

The others quickly followed her example.

The descent from the balcony to the ground was accomplished in the same manner.

Dick Turpin drew a long breath of relief.

"We are all right now, I firmly believe," he said—"that is, if no untoward accident occurs. On—on!—don't pause for any consideration!"

They dashed across the garden towards the spot where they had left their horses while Turpin spoke.

But they were not fated to get clear of their enemies quite so easily.

The police officers, when they saw the manner in which the oak chest was wedged into the staircase, at once abandoned all hope of proceeding further in that direction.

In their efforts to dislodge this cumbrous piece of furniture, they could be picked off easily one by one by the highwaymen.

They had already suffered very severely, and therefore, with a crestfallen air, they descended the stairs, in order to make some inquiries of their leader.

He was furious at the want of success that had attended all their efforts.

"Curse them!" he said. "But we will have them yet! Get out into the grounds all of you, and take up your positions so that every portion of the building shall be watched. If you see anyone attempt to leave it, or if you see anyone appear at the windows, fire. In the meanwhile, if you will bandage my wound with this scarf, I will ride off to London for reinforcements. They are in the house undoubtedly, and all you have got to do is to keep them there."

Having adopted this course, it was fortunate indeed that our friends should have left the mansion just when they did—if they had lingered, they would have found it difficult, if not impossible.

This plan suited the police officers much better than making another attack, and so they willingly enough sallied forth into the garden.

As they did so, they caught sight of the retreating forms of the highwaymen.

"There they are!" shrieked the chief officer—"there they are! By some means, while we have been consulting, they have left the house! Quick—quick! If we can gain our horses first, we have them safe enough!"

Dick Turpin heard the voice and heard the trampling of feet behind him.

So far, however, from feeling any despair on this account, he bounded forward at redoubled speed, for he knew that Black Bess was close at hand, and that, if he could once seat himself upon her back, he could bid defiance to the whole troop.

CHAPTER DCCXLII.

DICK TURPIN, TOM KING, AND CLAUDE DUVAL DECIDE UPON AN EXPEDITION.

It was, indeed, nothing more than a matter of time.

If the highwaymen could succeed in reaching their horses and leading them out into the high-road before the police officers could intercept them, all would be well.

There was every probability that they would succeed in doing this.

They had got the start, and already they had obtained

some slight knowledge of the intricacies of the grounds, therefore they made their way to the door in the garden-wall with the utmost precision.

The police officers, however, strained every nerve to overtake them.

They were well aware that their only chance of capturing them was while the highwaymen were on foot.

In another moment the horses were reached, and Dick Turpin said, hurriedly

"Black Bess will carry double easily, as she has done many a time before. Do you think, Jack, that if you take Maud's horse you will be strong enough to ride?"

"Yes—yes! Do not feel apprehensive on that account!"

This point was soon decided, and with all speed the horses were led out into the road.

Our friends had many a time owed their lives to the rapidity with which they were able to seat themselves in the saddle, and surely never before were they so rapid in their movements as on this occasion.

Dick easily placed Maud on the saddle before him, and, crying out "Forward!" he led the way at a rattling pace.

The police officers gained the door just as they started, and a loud shout of disappointment came from their lips.

They raised their pistols, and fired a simultaneous volley.

But the highwaymen were in too rapid motion for any of the shots to be effective.

"On—on!" cried Dick. "Keep as close behind me as you can! Which way shall we bend our footsteps?"

This question was addressed to Sixteen-String Jack.

"We have a long way to go," he said, "and morning is close at hand. You will find Tom Davis near Ealing Common. Make your way in that direction, and then I will show you further."

This was all that Turpin required, and with great confidence he now led the way across the country, feeling sure that, after the start they had obtained, they should be able easily to outrun their enemies, and so find shelter with their old friends.

It will be remembered that Sixteen-String Jack was the only one who had seen this public-house, and therefore all the rest were exceedingly anxious to pay a visit to it, as they knew in the future it would many a time afford them a safe asylum from their foes.

Indeed, this was the use they were putting it to upon this occasion.

In spite of their speed, the morning broke long before they were anywhere near to their destination.

But Sixteen-String Jack urged them to proceed, assuring them of the extreme seclusion of the spot, and the unlikelihood of their seeing anyone.

Of the police officers they heard nothing, so it was evident they had given up the chase as a bad job.

One principal reason for their doing so was in consequence of their numbers being so much reduced.

Sixteen-String Jack did not say so, but he was extremely anxious to reach the public-house.

He felt himself at the point of swooning from loss of blood, and the violence of the exercise of riding at such a rate was almost too much for him.

But he sat in the saddle bravely, anxiously, and hopefully looking forward to the termination of their journey.

At length, just about sunrise, the edge of Ealing Common was reached.

There was now sufficient light to enable them to see for a considerable distance, though here and there the trees and meadows were enveloped in a white mist that would probably vanish as soon as the sun rose a little higher.

Nothing animate could be seen in advance, and, before going any further, they looked scrutinisingly behind them.

But though they shaded their eyes with their hands in order to cut off the rays of the sun, and carefully examined the whole face of the country, they saw nothing whatever of their foes.

"There is no need for such great speed now," said Sixteen-String Jack, faintly. "Let me lead the way, and I will show you where the inn is."

"Is it far from here?"

"No; when we have once crossed the common, the distance is trifling."

Taking the route we have already described, Sixteen-String Jack led his companions to the lonely inn.

Long before they could see the house, they perceived Tom Davis standing in the roadway.

No sooner did he catch sight of them than he ran hastily towards them.

"Is anything amiss?" asked Turpin, anxiously.

"No—all's well! I was only glad to see you, that's all! But, excuse me for saying it, captain, you must contrive to make your appearance here before daylight; otherwise, the risk of discovery will be very great."

"We will do so if possible."

In another moment the whole party halted in front of the inn.

A feeling of the greatest security came over all of them at the selfsame moment.

Whether that feeling of security was real or illusory time alone can show.

It often happens, however, that when we believe ourselves in the greatest safety, danger is close at hand.

With all convenient speed the horses were taken round to the stable and attended to, while Sixteen-String Jack, scarcely able to stand, was led into the inn by two of his comrades.

Here his wound was carefully dressed and attended to.

To the great satisfaction of all, it was found that it was not of a fatal or alarming character.

He suffered principally from loss of blood, and this a little rest would quickly enable him to recover from.

It was a tender and loving greeting between Maud and Ellen.

It will be remembered that they had met before.

The circumstances were so peculiar that they looked upon each other as old acquaintances.

There was much to be talked of and much to be seen that occupied the attention of our friends for a long time.

But with nearly all of it the reader is already acquainted, and therefore it is unnecessary to repeat it.

With the situation of the house all expressed themselves abundantly satisfied.

Dick believed that he had at last found a place where he could leave Maud in safety, and to which he could always fly in the hour of danger.

And in this manner, without the occurrence of a single incident of any striking character, upwards of a week passed away.

At first they had one and all enjoyed to the utmost the calmness and seclusion of the place.

But the feeling soon wore off, and they once again longed for the excitement of an adventure on the highway.

When we say all, we do not even exclude Sixteen-String Jack, though as yet he was not sufficiently recovered to be able to leave the house.

At rare intervals people called at the Three Spiders for refreshment, and whenever they did so, as a matter of course, our friends kept carefully out of sight.

This they were able to do without difficulty, for it was a large rambling building, containing many rooms.

But one evening, when sunset was approaching, and when every topic of conversation had been exhausted, Dick Turpin took out his weapons and began carefully to clean and load them.

Silently Claude Duval and Tom King followed his example.

"Are you preparing for an expedition, captain?" they asked, at length, as he stowed the pistols away.

"I am longing for a stirring adventure!" was the reply. —"something that will cause the blood to circulate more rapidly in my veins than it does at present."

"And so are we."

"But I thought of starting out alone—of having an adventure entirely to myself."

"And so did we. What's to prevent us from doing as we have done on more than one previous occasion? You could take one road, I another, and Claude another."

"I see no objection to it," replied Turpin after a pause.

"I need not caution you, and tell you to be careful, nor need I say that you ought, unhesitatingly, to engage yourselves in any adventure that you come across when you believe by so doing you will befriend the helpless and the innocent."

CHAPTER DCCXLIII.

DICK TURPIN SETS OUT UPON HIS EXPEDITION

A TEAR rose into Maud's eye when she heard of Dick's determination.

But although she looked reproachfully at him, she said not a single word to endeavour to turn him from his purpose.

Perhaps she was aware that it was altogether useless to make any such attempt, but she implored him, for her sake, to be extremely careful, and not to heedlessly run into any danger.

This he readily promised, and as soon as darkness set in he repaired to the stable and saddled Black Bess himself.

He found his two comrades, Tom King and Claude Duval, engaged in a similar manner.

"Don't start at present," said Dick. "I will go first, and allow some interval to take place before either of you leave. The caution may be superfluous, but yet think how important it is that the secret of this place should be kept."

"You shall be obeyed, captain, though we are exceedingly anxious to be off."

"I know you are, but you must curb your impatience for a short time."

"It will be a rough night, I rather think," said Claude, as he strolled to the stable door and looked up at the sky —"the clouds look heavy and black."

"They do; but the night is just such a one as will suit our purpose precisely, provided it only keeps fine."

"Oh, yes—it is not at all agreeable to have a ducking, and yet, if I am any judge of the weather, I think that more than likely. However, such a consideration will not induce me to hold back."

"Nor me either."

After such a long rest Black Bess was, as might be expected, full of fire and mettle.

Not only had she been well housed and well fed, but she had had Dick Turpin to look carefully after her, and to see that all her wants were supplied.

His eyes sparkled with pride and pleasure as he looked upon the noble creature as she stood pawing the ground and tossing her head restlessly up and down to show her impatience to start off.

"I shall fear no officers to-night," he said, as he patted the bonny mare upon her neck. "After such a rest as this, I could challenge the swiftest horse in England with the certainty of being the victor!"

He vaulted into the saddle as he spoke.

"Be careful, my comrades," he said, turning round and speaking to them, "and above all things, manage to get here before daybreak. If the officers are at your heels, on no account gallop in this direction, or they may be clever enough to scent us out."

Dick Turpin trotted Black Bess round to the front of the inn.

He had great difficulty in keeping her at all within bounds, and none but an accomplished rider could have retained a seat in the saddle while she was giving these capricious movements and bounds.

He paused a moment in front of the inn to say farewell to Maud, who was standing just outside the porch, with Tom Davis by her side.

"We shall have a rough and disagreeable night, captain!" he exclaimed. "If I were in your place I should put off the expedition."

Dick shook his head and laughed.

"A little squally weather or a few drops of rain will never keep me back," he said. "Farewell! Depend upon it I shall return here some time before daybreak!"

And again uttering the word "Farewell," he allowed Black Bess to bound rapidly forward along the road.

It had been a long, long time since Dick felt so light-hearted and so full of vigour as he did that night.

He was ready to engage in any adventure, however perilous, and having crossed the common, he looked anxiously about him on all sides, in the hope of making some discovery.

"I am too impatient," he at length muttered "it would be unwise in the extreme to do anything in this quarter. No, no—we must not give the officers room to suspect that we are in this quarter at all! Now, Bess, for a gallop!"

It really seemed as though the animal comprehended the words that were addressed to her, for, uttering a low snorting sound that seemed expressive of pride and delight, she flew onwards with the speed of a racehorse.

Going at such a rate as that, it took them over a large space of country in a very little time; and at length, having gained the broad high-road, Dick Turpin gradually drew rein, and reduced her pace to a walk.

During his ride he had more than once fancied he felt a few drops of rain upon his face.

Now that he paused he was convinced that he was not mistaken, for there came a sudden gust that made a curious sound among the tree-tops, and that bore upon it a small quantity of rain.

The cold drops dashed heavily upon and around him, and then all was still again.

But the sky looked more and more threatening.

The clouds were of a darker hue, and there was that peculiar feel in the atmosphere that generally precedes the outbreak of a violent storm.

"I am afraid there's little luck to be met with to-night," was the highwayman's reflection, and while he made it, he leaned forward in the saddle and listened intently.

Although the silence was most intense, yet he was unable to hear anything.

At the same gentle rate he trotted onwards, going further and further towards the open country.

But ere he had proceeded far, the storm that had been threatening so long burst forth with a suddenness and violence that was quite startling.

The first intimation was a loud, tremendous clap of thunder.

Then came a flash of lightning, and another peal much heavier than its predecessor.

So vivid was this lightning's flash, that all objects around were completely lighted up by it.

Its effect upon the eyes was almost blinding, yet Dick Turpin saw, or fancied he saw, some figures in the roadway at no great distance off.

Whether this was so or not, he did not take any further steps to discover.

The rain descended in such torrents that he was speedily drenched to the skin.

Nothing could be more unpleasant than to remain exposed to the pelting of such a shower as that, and therefore Dick's next thought was to find a shelter.

On his left hand was a large wood, resembling, indeed, in many respects, a large forest.

The trees were of great size, and grew very closely to each other, while the ground was covered all over with a dense undergrowth.

A flash of lightning showed him what seemed to be a narrow footpath, leading from the road into this wood, and accordingly he hastened towards it.

The wide-spreading branches of the trees would, he felt certain, afford him an almost effectual protection against the descending rain.

Black Bess, too, showed signs of great alarm whenever the thunder rolled and the lightning lit up the scene, so for her sake, he was anxious to get some where in the dark.

Turning down this narrow footpath, he found before he had gone many paces that it was impossible to proceed any further on horseback.

He alighted quickly, and led Black Bess at once into the midst of the trees.

Here he no longer felt the rain, and by patting his steed upon the neck and stroking her head, he managed to calm her apprehension in a very considerable degree.

The place where Dick Turpin had taken shelter was very close to the high-road he had just quitted, and between two peals of thunder he heard the sound of horses' feet upon the hard ground, thus convincing him that his fancy had not misled him, and that he had really seen some persons on the road before him.

CHAPTER DCCXLIV.

OF TURPIN IS A WITNESS TO SOME VERY SINGULAR AND INTERESTING PROCEEDINGS.

BETWEEN the peals of thunder that now grew more and more frequent, Dick Turpin continued to listen to the approach of these travellers.

He could detect the murmur of voices in conversation, and yet he could only hear the sound of one horse's feet.

He leaned forward as though he could pierce the dense obscurity.

But this was impossible.

The darkness seemed to grow more and more intense each moment.

Then a horse stopped, as Dick thought, at the very pathway down which he had turned.

Then again he heard the voices, and this time he was able to distinguish what was said.

"Be of good heart, dear Agnes," he heard some one say, in soothing accents—"be of good heart; for, believe me, all will yet be well. This storm is unfortunate, but don't—pray don't look upon it as an evil omen!"

"But I am terrified," replied a sweet girlish voice, "and this great forest only alarms me still more."

"Do not say that, dearest—have confidence and trust in me. You see, we are already beneath the shelter of the trees, and are no longer drenched by the rain. Lean upon me; do not fancy I am not strong enough to bear your weight. Courage—courage for a few moments longer!"

"But where are you leading me, Frederick? You seem as if you knew your way?"

"I do not; chance alone discovered to me the existence of this footpath. I have every hope that it will lead to a habitation of some kind, for by one of the flashes of lightning I saw some smoke rising up from between the trees—doubtless it proceeded from the chimney of a cottage."

"But you did not tell me that at the time."

"I know I did not, because you were so alarmed that I could do little else but endeavour to soothe your agitation. Let us take shelter in this hut if we find one, for however poor and humble it may be, it will protect us from the inclemency of the weather, and I am sure that you are too delicate to be exposed to it."

There was something in the tones in which these two people addressed each other that made Turpin aware that they were both young, and that they loved each other.

Immediately he felt a strong degree of interest in them, and he continued to bend still further forward, in order to obtain, if possible, a glimpse of their forms.

Chance favoured him, for when they were nearest to the spot where he was concealed the whole forest was lit up by a flash of lightning far more brilliant and long-lasting than any that had preceded it.

By the aid of this evanescent light Dick Turpin saw the form of a young man, who was neatly and plainly attired.

There were no evidences of wealth anywhere visible about his person, yet there was something exceedingly noble-looking and commanding in the expression of his face.

Clinging to him in order to support her steps, and encircled by her lover's arm, was a young girl, whose dress contrasted strongly with her companion's.

She was attired in the most expensive garments, and the lightning seemed to linger upon the many-jewelled ornaments upon her person.

Her form was graceful, and her countenance very beautiful.

But she trembled exceedingly with agitation.

Frederick—for so he had been called—was leading a horse by the bridle—a tall, powerful creature, that, beyond a doubt, had carried them both.

Why such a strangely-assorted pair—so far as worldly appearance went—should be journeying alone together on such a night was a matter involved in much doubt.

All this that we have been compelled to describe at some considerable length Dick Turpin saw during the second or so that the flash of lightning continued.

Then the darkness seemed doubly profound.

"Oh, what a dreadful flash!" Agnes exclaimed, in trembling accents—"it has almost blinded me!"

"I can scarcely see," was the response; "but our eyes will soon grow accustomed to the darkness again. Forward—forward, and keep up your courage! It will be a great relief to me when I know that you are safe beneath the shelter even of the humblest roof."

"But are you sure that it will be safe for us to remain here?"

"I think so," was the answer—"perhaps safer than if we continued our flight."

"You seem afraid of a pursuit!"

"If one is made, they will ride past this forest and miss us, for there could be nothing to make them aware we had sought shelter here."

"It may be so—I trust it is."

These were the last words that Turpin heard, for just then the thunder pealed out in deafening loudness, and when the muttering reverberations had died away the two speakers had got so far along the path that their voices were no longer audible.

His curiosity was most strongly excited by what he had heard.

He was about to follow stealthily in their steps, in the hope of hearing more, when he checked himself suddenly, for once more he heard the sound of horses' feet upon the road.

They were coming at a rapid pace, and all at once they checked themselves close to the end of the footpath.

The new-comers were two in number.

They were talking loudly, and in spite of the pattering of the rain upon the leaves of the trees, Dick Turpin could hear distinctly every word they uttered.

"My lord," said a harsh, disagreeable voice, "I tell you I feel convinced that I am right—this is the spot! Follow me along this footpath, and we shall secure them!"

"I think you must be mistaken, Jacob," was the reply. "I saw nothing; but, at any rate, I am not sorry. I am drenched through with this confounded rain, and the trees do serve to keep it off a little."

"But your lordship," persisted the man, "I tell you my eyes did not deceive me when we were near the summit of the hill when that terrific flash of lightning came. I happened to be looking steadily along the road, and although it only lasted for a second, yet I am sure I saw them both on foot entering the forest at this very spot."

"Well—well, it may be so. If it is, so much the better for me—so much the worse for *him*, Jacob!"

"Yes, my lord."

"Remember what I have told you. Give him no chance of his life, the villain—the scoundrel! He deserves to lose it!"

"But you will help me, my lord?"

"Why should I? Have I not promised you a good reward to rid me of him?"

"But his skill with every weapon is so great. I know he has practised incessantly. He seems aided by the devil, and I don't believe that any one single man could be a match for him."

"You are a coward, Jacob; but he must not live on that account! I will help you. I will tell you how he can be disposed of easily."

"How, my lord—how?"

"If, as you say, we shall find him here, I will first rush forward, sword in hand, and upbraid him for the baseness of his conduct. He will draw, and while we are exchanging the first blows you get behind him and run him through the back with your sword. If the blow is not mortal, I can deliver another at almost the same moment, and then we shall make sure."

"It's a good plan, my lord," replied Jacob—"a very good plan, and it does you great credit! I will assist you as you wish, but then what shall we do with the lady Agnes?"

The one who had been called my lord gnashed his teeth together with rage, and in a hoarse, angry voice he exclaimed:

"Leave her to me, Jacob—leave her to me! I shall require you to interfere with her in any way. Curses—curses!"

By this time the two speakers had reached that portion of the footpath opposite to the spot where Turpin was concealed.



[DICK TURPIN FOLLOWS LORD HERBERT AND JACOB THROUGH THE FOREST.]

Again the lightning flashed, and this time it revealed to him the form of a richly-dressed but dissipated-looking young man, who was gesticulating angrily, and another man who followed cringingly in his steps.

He looked the very personification of evil, and who, beyond a doubt, answered to the name of Jacob.

CHAPTER DCCXLV.

FREDERICK AND THE LADY AGNES MEET WITH AN UNEXPECTED FRIEND.

With rapid and yet cautious steps, the two men made their way along the narrow footpath in the forest along which the two fugitives—for such they evidently were—had lately passed.

The thunder pealed again, and this time the reverbera-

tions lasted much longer than they had yet done, and when, at length, something like comparative silence was produced, the two villains were out of earshot.

Not for a moment did Dick Turpin hesitate about the course he ought to pursue.

From the first he had been strongly interested in, and prepossessed by the young couple, and he also determined that they should neither come to any harm, provided it was in his power to prevent it.

Therefore, taking Black Bess by the bridle, he led her along the pathway.

The pattering of the heavy raindrops upon the leaves above produced such an incessant sound that he had little fear that his approach would be overheard by those who were going before.

Yet he was careful to preserve as much distance as he could between them consistently with keeping them in sight.

It was by no means a pleasant walk, for the trees that overhung the pathway had become by this time heavily laden with the rain, which now fell down in large, dashing drops.

The footpath continued its course in a very winding and circuitous manner.

But at length Dick Turpin paused, for he found himself in view of a small, rudely-built hut or cottage, probably the residence of some poor woodman.

He shrank back among the trees for fear that the next flash of lightning should reveal his presence, and while thus effectually concealed from observation he watched narrowly what the two men were about.

He saw them in the act of climbing over a low wooden palisading, by which a small portion of ground surrounding the cottage was fenced in from the rest.

Crouching down as though fearful of being perceived, they crossed the little garden, and presently paused at the little window of the building.

Through this there came a faint, subdued light.

While they were thus occupied, Turpin quickly hit upon his own course of action.

That Frederick and Agnes had sought shelter in that hut there could be little doubt.

There was no trace of their presence to be seen, however.

But the little conversation he had heard brought Dick irresistibly to this conclusion.

He released his hold upon the bridle of Black Bess, and placed the reins over her head.

Then he stroked her gently and fondly upon the neck for a second or two, and left her.

He made no attempt to secure her to any of the trees that were growing around, or to confine her in any way.

He was quite sure that she would remain somewhere about that spot until he returned, without he should utter that signal that she so well understood, when she would, without loss of time, and in spite of all obstacles, place herself by his side.

With great caution, he followed in the footsteps of the two men who had preceded him, Black Bess stretching out her head and watching him until the darkness hid him from her view.

Crouching down close to the ground, Dick stealthily advanced

Many shrubs and dwarf trees were growing in that half-cultivated garden, and behind these he was able effectually to conceal himself.

The two men had withdrawn from the window, and were conversing together in a low tone of voice—so low that although Dick strained his ears to the utmost, he could not detect a single word of their discourse.

From the energetic actions of the dissolute-looking young man, he came to the conclusion that he was endeavouring to persuade Jacob to do something from which, owing to some cause or other, he shrank back.

At length the point appeared to be settled, and the young nobleman—by name alone, and not by nature—advanced to the window of the cottage, and, cautiously placing his face close to the panes, looked in.

But just at that moment there came a flash of lightning so vivid, so brilliant, so intense, that for a brief space of time, during which a person might have counted rapidly four or five, every object seemed as though enveloped in a blue flame of a painful brightness.

The flash was followed almost instantaneously by the deep thunder; but before the crashing was heard overhead there came another cry, piercing and shrill but which was cut short by the louder rumblings.

It was a cry evidently of alarm, and evidently from a female's lips.

There could be but one explanation of the cause of it.

The young girl Agnes must have seen her enemy gazing in upon her.

Involuntarily Dick Turpin seized the hilt of his sword, and then silently drew the weapon from its sheath.

"D—nation!" roared his lordship, "we are discovered! Here, Jacob, follow me! Down with the door, I say! Follow me!"

Thus speaking, he rushed towards the cottage door.

But before he could gain it there was a hasty lumbering sound from within, as though some fastening—a heavy bar probably—had been placed across it

With full force, however, the two men dashed themselves against it, and so frail were the materials of which it was composed, that it gave way at once beneath the pressure.

As the door fell, the young man Frederick—with a long, slender sword in his hand, and with his arm encircling the waist of Agnes, was disclosed, standing in an attitude of calm defence.

"Villain!—dastard!" shrieked his lordship, "give back my sister, the Lady Agnes, or you perish on the spot! Villain, I say, surrender her to me!"

Agnes uttered a faint shriek when she heard her brother's voice, and then, almost insensible with terror, she clung to her lover's arm.

Frederick made no verbal reply to what had been said to him, but he shook his sword with a significant gesture.

"Since you will not deliver her fairly and honourably, I must wrest her from you!" cried his lordship. "Take that, villain! though I abase myself by thus consenting to cross blades with such a one as thou art!"

As the last word was pronounced the weapons clashed together.

Dick had heard what the man Jacob had said respecting the proficiency Frederick had gained in the use of his weapon, and therefore he did not feel much alarm on his account.

He turned his chief attention to Jacob's proceedings

Conformable with the plan that had been agreed upon, he came creeping up like some treacherous snake, watching the opportunity when he might step behind the valiant, bold-spirited young man, and, while he was engaged in the contest, give him a mortal stab in the back.

Dick judged it time to declare his presence and interfere.

He saw that Lady Agnes hung a terrible weight upon her lover's arm, and seriously hampered his movements, giving his adversary a great advantage.

"Hold!" he cried, as he stepped forward suddenly, his bright sword flashing in the semi-darkness—"hold! Let this be a fair fight—man to man—not two on to one! Mr Jacob, I will attend to you!"

As he spoke, he struck the worthy he had addressed a very sharp blow with the flat of his sword upon his knuckles.

With a yell of fright, Jacob dropped his sword and begged for mercy.

CHAPTER DCCXLVI.

A RIGHTEOUS RETRIBUTION OVERTAKES JACOB FOR HIS TREACHERY.

The sudden and unlooked-for appearance of the stranger made the young nobleman give a guilty start of alarm, for he fully and entirely believed that he was quite alone, and that there was no spy upon his actions.

Frederick might easily have availed himself of this confusion on the part of his adversary to give him a fatal thrust, but he scorned to take so unworthy an advantage, and kept quietly upon his guard.

But his heart beat high with hope, for the manner in which Dick had acted, and the few words he had spoken, convinced the young man, beyond all doubt, that the new-comer was a friend to him and not an enemy.

"Who you are I know not," said his lordship, foaming with rage, "but of this I am quite certain, you have no right to interfere in this conflict. Begone—leave us—it is nought to you!"

"Very likely," was the calm response. "I can assure you that nothing is further from my thoughts than to leave here, or to interfere with you, but I intend to remain where I now stand as a spectator of the duel, if such it is. I intend to look after Jacob, and see that he does not assist you in the manner you had arranged."

These words made the young nobleman furious, for it

showed him that the stranger was aware of what had passed between himself and his dependant.

Jacob, hearing this, uttered another appeal for mercy, and abandoned his intention of seizing the sword he had dropped.

"Remain there!" said Dick, sternly, to him. "Move at your peril! If you so much as raise your finger I will cop it off!"

Perceiving the combatants still pause, Dick added:

"Let me take charge of the lady. I will pledge my life for her safety, then you will be on more equal terms with each other."

He stepped forward quickly as he spoke, and removed the senseless girl from her lover's arm.

"Now, then," he said, "do your best, and may the one who is right obtain the victory!"

"Lord Herbert," said Frederick, "you know that with me your life is most sacred. For your sister's sake," he said, pointing to Agnes, "I would not harm one single hair of your head. But beware how you tempt me too far, for when my blood is roused I know not what I may do in self-defence!"

"Fewer words, beggarly upstart!" was the instantaneous answer. "I want no consideration from you, nor will I consent to receive any. Put up your sword—depart, and I will molest you no further, provided that you, sir," he added, addressing Turpin, "surrender the Lady Agnes to my charge."

Dick shook his head.

"Not until you have proved yourself to have a better right than you have at present!"

"That's well," replied Frederick. "The lady Agnes is mine, and mine only, and she has made her free choice, and who shall prevent her doing so? Let me say, my lord, with every imaginable respect, that it will be better far for you to leave her with me."

"Never—never! I disgrace myself and all my house by deigning to speak a single word to you! Henceforth I will say nothing."

With these words, entirely blinded and carried away by an ungovernable access of rage, Lord Herbert precipitated himself upon his adversary, and for the next few minutes the conflict between them was of a terrible character.

Over and over again Dick saw how Frederick refused to avail himself of the openings that this passionate attack displayed.

He could scarcely understand the exercise of such unusual forbearance.

So intently was he watching the combatants that for a moment or two he forgot all about that dastardly wretch Jacob.

Suddenly turning his eyes towards him, however, he saw that he held something in his hand that he was moving about in an undecided manner.

Dick guessed instantly what the object was, and raising his sword with great swiftness in the air, he brought it down with full force upon it.

A most hideous yell burst from Jacob's lips.

He screamed aloud for help and mercy.

The fingers that had encircled the butt of the pistol, which he intended to discharge at Frederick so soon as he was sure that he could do so without fear of missing his aim, were cut through to the very bone, while the weapon itself, falling on the ground, was discharged, and the contents lodged themselves in his own body.

This was indeed a fearful but well-merited retribution.

With a scream of pain and agony he fell down upon the floor of the cottage, and rolled there like some mortally-wounded reptile.

Almost at this moment Frederick succeeded in disarming his opponent, the two blades becoming locked together, and Lord Herbert found his wrenched suddenly from his grasp, and sent whirling to the further end of the cottage.

Frederick pressed the point of his sword against him.

"Now, my lord, are you content?—are you willing that this contest should be over? I tell you again I cannot harm you. Leave us together. Your interference will only cause further mischief than there is already."

His lordship gnashed his teeth with rage, and, without speaking a word, he turned his eyes in the direction where his sword was lying upon the floor.

He made a slight movement as though to reach it.

But in a stern, suppressed voice, Frederick uttered the word:

"Beware!"

"You have conquered," he said, bitterly, "and I must perforce leave you. The odds are all against me! Don't think, however, that the pursuit will be relinquished—no, no. The stain which you have placed upon our family shall and must be expunged by your blood—I have sworn it, and I will keep my oath! No matter where you go, I will follow you until the matter is ended either by my death or yours!"

"I regret to hear those words, my lord," said Frederick, sadly. "It is true that we have loved, but the circumstance was wholly out of our control. We could not help it—we are not to be blamed for it. I can only hope that time and reflection will bring you to a different conclusion."

Mortified and abashed, his lordship slunk out of the cottage.

But ere he quitted the enclosure, he shook his clenched fist in the air, and, while the foam of passion gathered upon his lips, he said;

"Yes, yes—I have made the oath, and I will keep it! No earthly circumstance shall turn me from it! My heart's blood or yours, Frederick Stuart! Nothing less shall suffice! Curses on that meddling intruder, and upon that dolt and idiot, Jacob! It is he who spoilt all! But no matter, I will yet obtain the victory. The distance I have to go to find assistance is not great, and when I once commence the pursuit after them, nothing shall stay me—nothing shall turn me aside! And Lady Agnes, too, who has disgraced me, disgraced herself, and all our race, shall not live in her ignominy!—she, too, shall perish!"

Again shaking his clenched fists at the cottage, Lord Herbert sprang over the palisades with the intention of carrying out his hastily-formed but terrible plan of vengeance.

Suddenly he stopped.

The storm had almost ceased.

The thunder no longer rattled in the sky.

The lightning no longer brought all objects into view.

But the clouds had parted slightly, and through a long, straggling rift the blue sky and twinkling stars could be discerned.

A soft, gentle, and beautiful light was over all things.

And it was by the aid of this scanty illumination that the young nobleman had perceived something among the trees, a slight movement on the part of which had first attracted his attention.

"A horse," he said—"a horse, and, by all that's d—nable, one of a rare quality! This is fortunate indeed! Now, Frederick Stuart, we shall see how long your triumph will continue! Aha! I shall be speedier in my vengeance than I had dared to hope!"

CHAPTER DCCXLVII.

BLACK BESS GETS RID OF HER STRANGE RIDER, AND RENDERS THE YOUNG COUPLE A SERVICE.

THE horse that Lord Herbert had seen standing so quietly among the trees was of course no other than Dick Turpin's bonny mare, Black Bess.

Even in the semi-obscurity he could not fail to be struck by her matchless form.

A glance told him that she was one steed out of a hundred thousand.

His eyes glistened with pleasure and he advanced gently and quietly towards her.

Black Bess projected her ears at his approach, and watched his movements narrowly

Her very appearance told the young nobleman that she had a spirit which might prove dangerous, and therefore he stretched out his hand and spoke to her coaxingly

Black Bess did not move.

She suffered the stranger to gain her side

A most accomplished and fearless horseman was young Lord Herbert.

His love for this noble quadruped was the one great redeeming trait in his character.

He knew that there were many horses of spirit who would never suffer a stranger to seat himself upon their backs.

He resolved not to run any risk on the present occasion from this cause, and so no sooner was he by the side of Black Bess than he gave a sudden and surprising spring, and, with great agility and dexterity, seated himself firmly in the saddle.

It was a feat that he had often practiced.

It was one with which Black Bess was unacquainted

The suddenness with which this stranger had placed himself upon her back startled and half-subdued her.

She shivered from head to foot

Lord Herbert thrust his feet into the stirrups, and then took the reins between his fingers.

It seemed as though this served to recover Black Bess from the state of astonishment into which she had undoubtedly been thrown.

She reared upright in the air with so much abruptness, and in such a manner, that it seemed impossible for any rider to retain his seat upon her back.

But Lord Herbert seemed as though he had suddenly grown to the saddle, and become part and parcel of the steed.

He patted her upon the neck, and spoke gently to her.

But to no avail.

Black Bess reared and plunged more violently than before, but without the slightest effect.

There his lordship remained, defying all her power to unseat him.

Finding all pacific measures fruitless, his lordship adopted what he considered would be a more effectual means

He had been mounted, and spurs were upon his heels.

With these he gored Black Bess in the flanks

This was treatment to which she had never before been subjected.

Uttering a snort of pain, she gave a violent bound forward.

That bound would in itself have unseated almost any rider, but his lordship still remained firm.

Finding all her attempts unsuccessful, Black Bess, prompted by a rare but not unparalleled sagacity, adopted another method.

Before her rider could divine her intention or prepare himself for it in the least, she dropped suddenly to the earth upon her side, as though she had been shot.

Then she rolled completely over, having her rider beneath her.

He did not even in this terrible moment lose his presence of mind.

Almost instinctively he released his feet from the stirrups.

At the same instant Black Bess, completely maddened by pain and terror, made a furious effort to regain her feet.

In springing up she brought one of her fore feet down with full force upon his lordship's skull.

There was a sickening crash, and then all was over.

Black Bess stood trembling and shaking in every limb.

Her mouth was filled with foam, that rested, also, in large flecks upon her breast and flanks.

The sound of hasty footsteps through the trees could now be heard, and she listened to their approach with unmistakable alarm.

Then she heard a low, gentle, chirping sound—a sound that she knew full well came always from her master's lips.

Her agitation greatly subsided.

The signal was again given, and slowly the gallant mare moved in the direction from which the sound proceeded.

By her manner she seemed to show that she had been guilty of some deed for which she deserved a severe punishment.

Then Dick Turpin sword in hand, followed by young Frederick and the Lady Agnes, made his appearance on the scene.

Consternation was impressed upon all their countenances.

"What is it?" cried Frederick Stuart—"what—oh, what is it?"

"Advance," said Dick, "and we shall ascertain. I have my thoughts. I could guess what has happened, but we shall see."

He strode forward, followed closely by the young couple.

Black Bess walked gently to him with her head hung down.

The highwayman noticed her unusual and agitated appearance.

Patting her upon the neck, he asked, in a tone of some anxiety:

"What is it, Bess, old lass—what is it?"

Just then the moon peeped down upon the earth through the long rift in the clouds above.

Her clear beams seemed to concentrate themselves upon one spot and upon one object.

A shriek came from the Lady Agnes, and shudderingly she averted her gaze.

There, lying stretched out at full length upon the turf, with his head beaten in, and presenting so truly horrible an appearance as to be beyond description, lay her brother, the Lord Herbert.

Even the highwayman, accustomed as he was to scenes of horror, violence, and bloodshed, felt a sickening sensation come over him that he had great difficulty in subduing.

Frederick looked sad and gloomy.

One glance sufficed for him, and then he turned the whole of his attention towards the Lady Agnes, who appeared to be completely overcome by the terrible and unexpected fate that had overtaken her brother.

When the ill-fated young man left the cottage in the manner we have described, Dick Turpin and the two lovers came to the conclusion that he would take his departure, and that for some time at least they would see and hear of him no more.

The Lady Agnes still remained in a state of insensibility.

Dick congratulated Frederick upon having escaped so well in the encounter, for he had not received so much as a single scratch.

By the aid of a little water the young girl was restored to consciousness, and her first act was to fling herself upon the breast of her lover, while she wept with joy to think he had escaped all harm.

The treacherous villain Jacob continued to utter supplication after supplication for water, and when the Lady Agnes had been attended to, a small quantity was given him.

He drank it with great pain and difficulty, and, as soon as he swallowed the last drop, uttered a loud scream of mortal agony, and then, closing his eyes, fell back either insensible or dead, which of the two they did not care to inquire.

Nor, indeed, were they allowed the opportunity, for it was just then that they heard the sounds of some scuffling or struggling taking place outside.

Hastily they hurried to the spot, with what result we have already seen.

From the impetuous, hot-headed young man the lovers had certainly no more to fear, though his sudden and violent death was a terrible shock to both of them.

Nerving himself to the task, Dick Turpin stepped forward, and, stooping down, looked closely at the prostrate form.

Upon rising to his feet, he found Frederick's eyes were fixed upon him.

"He is dead," he said, in reply to the question that was put to him by the other's glance—"he is quite dead. Life is utterly extinct. Death must have been instantaneous."

Although one might scarcely expect it, yet this intelligence proved an additional shock.

Up to that time they might have indulged in some faint hope that the injury he had received was not mortal, and that by care and attention he would recover.

Now, however, that hope could be entertained no longer.

He was dead

CHAPTER DCCXLVIII.

DICK TURPIN DISCLOSES HIS IDENTITY TO FREDERICK STUART.

"Generous stranger," said Frederick, addressing the highwayman, "let us quit this terrible scene—I can bear to look at it no longer. Who you are I know not, nor do I care. You have proved yourself to be a true friend of mine in the hour of need. At present I have had no opportunity of thanking you, and now I feel myself at a loss for words. Rest assured, however, I shall never forget your behaviour to-night."

"I do not desire your thanks," was Turpin's answer. "I am quite willing, however, to turn away. It seems to me that, having done so much, I can render you no further service, and therefore, if it pleases you, I will say farewell."

"No—no, I cannot suffer you to depart thus. I must thank you for what you have done, and besides, you have taken so active a part in these events, and have shown yourself so well qualified to take the direction or command, that I feel impelled to ask you your advice. Will you, then, add to the favours you have already conferred by telling me what steps you think I had better next take in this unfortunate affair?"

Turpin did not return an immediate reply, but, taking Black Bess by the bridle, retraced his steps to the little cottage.

Near the palisades he paused, and then, turning round to the young couple, he said:

"Of your history I actually know little, yet what has occurred enables me to guess much."

"But a few words from me," returned Frederick, "will make all clear to you. I was engaged as tutor to the Lady Agnes; that is more than a year ago. Since then, her mother, who gave me the appointment, has expired, therefore the young Lord Herbert, who has this night come to so untimely an end, was the sole inheritor and possessor of the estates and wealth. He was also appointed guardian to his sister, who, as you may guess from their appearance, is many years his junior."

"And," said Turpin, with a faint smile, "it was not long before you and the Lady Agnes discovered that you loved each other?"

"It was not long, and I may say that the passion was mutual from the first. I will not weary you by repeating the efforts I made to subdue this flame, or the resolves I made and never carried out. I was weak, and love was strong, and so I remained at my post until it was too late."

"And then," said Dick, "the Lady Agnes agreed to accompany you in a flight from her brother's home?"

"She did; but not until her brother had been made acquainted with the powerful love existing between us. He laughed at it scornfully, was furious with rage, and declared that he would never consent to the union of his sister with one like myself. You may guess his feelings by the manner in which he comported himself to-night."

Turpin nodded.

Finding that all entreaties, all persuasions were entirely useless, the Lady Agnes, as you see, agreed to fly with me. Ere we had gone far we were overtaken by that frightful storm, and in order to escape from it we took refuge in yonder cottage. The young Lord Herbert must have been made aware of our flight almost immediately, otherwise he could not have been so close behind, so doubtless the spy and villain Jacob, who has met with so well-merited a fate, watched us depart and then informed him of the fact."

"Very likely; for, as you say, they were very close indeed behind you—so close that they saw you turn down the narrow path leading from the highway into this forest."

"How do you know that?"

"I overheard a conversation to that effect. But no matter—proceed."

"I have no more to tell," was the reply—"the rest you already know. He followed me to the cottage, and although he is her brother, and it ill-becomes any one to speak evil of the dead, yet I must say that it is pretty clear that by fair means or foul he intended to put an end to my life."

"That is quite certain, and I rejoice for both your sakes that the attempt was unsuccessful."

"Well now, sir," said Frederick, "to trouble you still further, I would fain ask you what I had better do in this conjuncture of affairs—how shall I act? I confess that by myself I am quite at a loss to come to a decision."

"In the first place," replied Turpin, "it is quite clear that you had nothing to do with Lord Herbert's death. You may be puzzled to know in what manner it occurred, but I am sure I can give you the true explanation of it."

"Can you, indeed?"

"I can."

"Then I confess that in that I am at a loss. Tell me how it happened."

"He must have made up his mind to seize my horse, and hasten off for assistance, that he might drag the Lady Agnes from you. But this happens to be a particular favourite of mine, and though gentle as a lamb with me, and obedient as a dog to all I say, she is yet fierce and unmanageable with a stranger. In his attempts to seize her and mount upon her back a struggle must have taken place, and in that struggle his life must have been lost, for his head was battered by one of her iron hoofs."

"A terrible fate!"

"Most terrible! We can look upon it as scarcely anything else but an accident. And now I presume your chief anxiety is to know what steps to take now that the young nobleman is dead?"

"Yes, that is precisely it."

"Well, then, let me recommend in the first instance, as you wish for your own happiness, to have a marriage solemnised between you—don't let the death of Lord Herbert be a barrier. When you have secured her as your own, then give full information of all that has taken place to-night."

"But shall I be believed? May I not find myself involved in—in—some charge of——"

"I understand," said Turpin, "but I don't think you need fear anything on that account. The inmates of this cottage will bear evidence to the facts so far as lies in their power; but should you find that any harm or difficulties arise, send a message to me, and I will extricate you from them, no matter what they may be."

"But I cannot think of increasing the obligation I already owe you to so great an extent."

"Pho—pho! it is nothing—don't think of that, but bear in mind what I say: if you find yourself in any danger from the charge of having compassed Lord Herbert's death, send a message to that effect to the landlord of a public house known as the Three Spiders, and situated not far from Ealing Common—don't forget it. If that message is delivered all will be well."

"But you are not the landlord?" interrogated Frederick.

"No, certainly not," was the response, "but the landlord is a friend of mine, and will deliver the message to me. Let that amount of knowledge on your part suffice."

"But your name—surely you will tell me that, that I may remember the person who has rendered me such important services to-night?"

"No, let my name remain secret—don't seek to know it. And now, if you have no more questions to ask, let me say farewell, for, as you perceive, the night is going fast."

"You may think me impertinent—wrong—rude; but if you would only tell me who you are that I may remember you, I shall be glad; 'tis from no motive of curiosity that I ask, but only that I may be able to name my benefactor."

"It is a secret, but you shall know it. Come nearer to me, and I will whisper it in your ear."

With his countenance expressing the greatest curiosity, the young man obeyed.

"You have heard no doubt of a personage who has created for himself some notoriety in this land, who is known by the name of Dick Turpin?"

"I have—a cowardly, murderous, plundering scoundrel! But what has that to do with us?"

"You speak strongly, and warmly," said Dick, preserving his calmness.

"I do."

"Do you speak from actual knowledge on your own part, or do you speak from hearsay—from something some one else has repeated to you?"

"Well—well——"

"Give me an answer to my first question. Do you

speak from personal knowledge?—have you ever encountered this individual in your life, or had any personal dealings with him?"

"No."

"Then why presume to speak so strongly? What objection I may have felt to telling you who I am has now vanished—you shall know it. Henceforth I trust that you will judge of people by their actions, and by your own personal experience of them, and not by the word of others, for I solemnly declare that I am the person who is known throughout the length and breadth of this land as Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

CHAPTER DCCXLIX.

DICK TURPIN EXASPERATES THE POLICE OFFICERS TO NO COMMON DEGREE.

It would be hard to say which feeling most predominated in the breast of Frederick Stuart—astonishment or confusion.

He started back several paces, and looked at the highwayman with an expression of incredulity upon his countenance.

"Your looks express disbelief," said Dick; "but what I tell you is true. There is much in my past life that I would gladly forget or have blotted out, but it is impossible. All that I can do is never to shrink from doing a good action whenever the opportunity is afforded me."

"I regret that I spoke so hastily," Frederick said, at length, "yet I can assure you that I did no more than repeat what may be heard from the lips of almost anyone."

"I do not dispute that, but it is needless to prolong this conversation further. You have asked my advice, and I think you cannot do better than follow it. Henceforth we shall be strangers—in all probability we shall never meet again. Farewell!"

With these words Turpin turned away, leading Black Bess along the pathway by the bridle.

The young man was too much abashed to say anything further than the word farewell.

Dick walked rapidly, for he was both excited and angry, and in a very short time indeed he was completely lost to sight to the young couple.

The storm, as we have said, was over, and as soon as the branches of the trees would permit, Dick mounted Black Bess.

In another moment he emerged into the high-road, when, to his great surprise, he found himself face to face with a troop of horsemen, whom he recognised at a second glance as being police officers.

But for the excited condition of his mind, he certainly would have adopted due precautions in quitting the forest and entering upon the high-road again.

As it was, he thought nothing of it.

The result so far from paralysing him, however, only had the effect of restoring him to his usual state of mind.

He saw instantly that his appearance startled and astonished the police officers in no small degree.

He was the first to recover himself, and, bringing Black Bess's head sharply round, he gently touched her with the spur, and off she bounded at a tremendous rate.

"Fire," roared a voice—"fire! Ten thousand curses! That must be him! Fire—fire after him!"

A succession of straggling shots came from the officers. They were too flurried either to fire a volley or to take any accurate aim.

The bullets whistled past the highwayman, but did him no harm.

No sooner had they discharged their weapons than the officers urged their horses onward by every means in their power—certainly the speed they made was very great indeed.

"Now, if they are inclined for a ride," said Dick, to himself, "they shall have it. Black Bess is fresh and full of spirit, so a run of a few miles will do her no harm. I will take them to the loneliest part of the country I can find, and then, when their horses are thoroughly tired out, I will leave them there."

Just as he came to this determination, Dick turned half round in his saddle, and took off his hat.

He waved it above his head with an air of defiance, and by his actions showed that he invited the officers to pursue him.

So furious did this gesture make them, that they discharged the remainder of their firearms—of course without the slightest result, for by this time Dick was too far off to be injured by them.

They could not stop and re-load, nor could they perform that operation while their horses were galloping at the very top of their speed, so that in the respect of bullets Dick had nothing to fear from them.

Looking back, he saw that they were far enough behind him to answer his purpose, so he reduced the speed of Black Bess, so that she went at only about the same rate as his pursuers.

By this means, the same distance was preserved between them, and it made the officers indulge in the hope that if they perservered a little while their success would be certain.

Dick continued along the high-road until he came to a part where the hedgerow was no great height.

Here he paused, and made Black Bess leap over into the meadow beyond—a feat that she accomplished with perfect ease.

"They shall have a rough ride of it," he said to himself—"I am just in the humour to give them a dance."

On came the officers, and, turning their horses' heads, leaped over the hedgerow gallantly.

Dick had purposely selected a spot where he knew the horses of the officers would be easily able to follow him.

Across the meadow he went, still keeping just the same distance in advance, flitting before his foes like a will-o'-the-wisp, defying all efforts at capture.

The moon was now shining brightly, for there were no clouds to obstruct her light.

All objects were plainly visible, and the officers were able to keep their prey in sight with perfect ease, for now and then Dick would pause and wave his hat.

The officers then would redouble their exertions; and when they were almost within reach of him, Dick would let go the rein, and away Black Bess would bound, until in a few moments there was just the same distance between them as there was at first.

If one thing could be more aggravating to the police officers than another it was this.

They most bitterly regretted their precipitation in discharging all their weapons.

It is true they might have stopped to re-load, but while they were doing this the highwayman would probably get such a start as would put overtaking him out of the question.

And so in this unsatisfactory way—so far as the officers were concerned—the chase was continued.

Looking around him, Dick fancied by the look of the eastern horizon that daylight would not be long in making its appearance, and therefore it behoved him to shape his course somewhere in the direction of the Three Spiders, yet not so much as to lead his foes to suspect that that was his destination.

At the end of an hour the officers' horses were quite knocked up.

They became insensible to the urging both of whip and spur, and only moved onwards at a dogged, sullen pace.

Again, and for the last time, Dick took off his hat and waved it.

Then, giving Black Bess the rein, he galloped away, feeling sure that it was no longer in the power of his foes to pursue him.

They had had all that hard riding, and had knocked up their horses for nothing at all.

Moreover, they were several miles from any habitation.

They had the unpleasant prospect before them of having to perform the whole distance at a kind of shuffling trot.

Dick galloped off in a westerly direction; but as soon as he felt sure that he was out of sight he changed his course, turning Black Bess's head in the direction of the Three Spiders.

"This has been a most unprofitable night's adventures,"

he muttered—"and yet there's a feeling of satisfaction and content within my breast. My safety seems secured, and I will not jeopardise it by attacking any traveller now, but take care to be safe indoors before there is a glimmer of dawn in the east.

To this determination Dick adhered.

In a short time afterwards he trotted slowly along the lane leading up to the public-house

He was quite confident that there was no one following him—that no one had observed his movements.

The sound of his horse's hoofs was heard afar off, and two persons hastily made their appearance before he could reach the front of the inn.

These were Tom Davis and Maud.

The latter had been in a state of the most painful suspense during the whole night.

She had been listening continually for the sound of Black Bess's hoofs.

Now she was standing, anxious and excited, endeavouring to pierce the gloom, and to ascertain whether the approaching horseman really was Dick Turpin or not.

With a cry of joy she recognised him.

Dick slipped lightly and quickly from the saddle.

"I am safe—quite safe!" he said, anticipating the question Maud was about to put to him. "Safe and unhurt—be under no apprehension on my account."

Maud gave a sigh of relief.

"And Tom King and Claude," asked Turpin—"where are they? Have they returned yet?"

"No—I have seen nothing of them," was Tom Davis's reply, "and I was waiting anxiously when I heard you approaching."

"Let us hope they will not be long."

"Believe me, captain, it is most important that you should never arrive here or depart during daylight. If you only observe this precaution, I believe you will be perfectly safe."

"It is a simple precaution, and one that must be observed," said Dick. "I believe the necessity of it is firmly impressed upon the minds of both, and it will only be some unusual and unforeseen circumstance that will keep them absent many moments longer."

"It only wants half an hour of daybreak," said Tom Davis. "At present I can neither see nor hear anything of them."

CHAPTER DCCL.

FOLLOWS THE FORTUNES OF TOM KING, AND RELATES HOW HE HAD A NARROW ESCAPE AT THE TOLL-GATE.

It now becomes our duty to relate what happened to Dick Turpin's two comrades on the night in question.

How it was they had not made their appearance we shall quickly see.

First, however, we will confine ourselves to the doings of Tom King.

As had been agreed, they all three took different routes.

Tom took a northerly course, and with great boldness kept steadily along the high-road, making no attempt to conceal himself whatever.

We have before said that the night was dark, and showed indications of stormy weather.

But provided the storm did not break forth, it was just the night for an expedition on the highway.

Ere going far, however, Tom found his further progress barred by a toll-gate.

Although the hour was tolerably early, yet strange to say the gates were closed.

The height was considerable, and Tom was by no means certain that his horse could clear such an obstacle, nor was there now any necessity of running the risk of such a feat.

Moreover, Tom especially liked to be on good terms with all the toll-keepers he could find.

On that evening there was present in his mind a vivid remembrance of the service that a toll-keeper had once before rendered him.

Slackening his speed, he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew forth a guinea.

"Hallo!" he cried, as he came nearer. "Gate—gate! Open the gate, I say!"

Just as he spoke, he saw the toll-keeper standing near the door of his little wooden habitation.

Upon seeing Tom King, he made some extraordinary movements with his arms, though what those gestures could possibly mean, Tom could not for the life of him conceive.

He continued to advance, though the man showed no signs of attempting to open the gate, but, on the contrary, seemed to be waving him away.

"Here's a guinea for you, my fine fellow," cried Tom, as he tossed the coin towards him. "Now, be quick and open the gate, for I am in a hurry; and if ——"

While speaking, Tom had paused close to the toll-gate, and he was suddenly interrupted in what he was about to say by a body of men rushing out tumultuously from the toll-house.

It only needed a glance to show him that they were police officers, and he comprehended, now that it was too late, what the toll-keeper meant by his gesticulations.

The man had evidently recognised him, and had given him the only warning that lay in his power.

Quick as thought, Tom drew his sword and whirled it round him.

The movement was made only just in time.

The keen blade struck sharply against the arm of one of the police officers, who was about to grasp his horse by the bridle.

But, not to be thus intimidated, the police officers clustered round him, and before Tom could get free one of them seized him by the leg.

Again his sword flashed round him, and once more he was free.

"Shoot him!" cried a voice. "Our orders are to take him dead or alive! Shoot him! Shoot his horse, and then we shall have him sure enough!"

While these words were spoken, Tom had hastily decided upon the plan of action he should pursue.

The toll-gate was still fast, and if his horse could only leap over that, he should have a capital barrier between himself and his foes, and he should be enabled to get a good start along the high-road beyond.

Uttering a loud cry, and plunging the spurs deeply into the animal's flanks, he made it face the gate.

Gallantly were his wishes responded to.

Gathering itself up for one mighty effort, the horse leaped over the toll-gate, just clearing the top rail with its hind hoofs, and then alighted safely on the road beyond.

The officers, furious with rage, drew their pistols and fired.

Many of the bullets lodged themselves in the woodwork of the gate, and one Tom thought struck his horse, for the creature uttered a strange cry.

Whether he was hurt himself or not, the highwayman did not pause to inquire.

He bent all his energies to urging his horse onwards at its fullest speed.

By the time the officers could mount their horses, and by the time the toll-gate was unlocked, Tom got a considerable distance in advance; yet the start was not so great as to prevent the officers from indulging in the hope that they should be able ere long to overtake him.

"I have lamed his horse," said one—"I am sure of it! Come—he cannot go far, and he must fall into our hands at last!"

The intelligence that the highwayman's horse was lamed was very gratifying to the feelings of the officers, and they commenced the pursuit with considerable courage.

The one, however, who had planned the ambush was excessively mortified to think so good and so original a scheme should fail.

"I know my mistake now," he said, to his followers. "I shall not be guilty of such a thing again. I was too humane—a great deal too humane! Wait until I have another opportunity, and then I will shoot him first, and call upon him to surrender afterwards!"

Tom King's danger was indeed a fearful one.

Had the toll-keeper been disposed to be his enemy, his capture would have been almost certain, for Tom would have been altogether unsuspicious of the presence of officers at such a place.

But the man's peculiar behaviour had led him to sus-

pect something or other, though what he could not precisely make out.

But he was free—he had escaped; and if his horse was really wounded the creature showed no signs of flagging, for it kept on its way with undiminished speed.

And then the selfsame storm that had compelled Dick Turpin to seek shelter in the forest burst forth.

It came on with great suddenness, and in a few minutes Tom was thoroughly wet through to the skin.

"It will be no pleasant thing to ride through such a storm as this," he said to himself. "I should think, too, that it would very likely damp the ardour of the officers. I will see."

He gradually reined-in his horse as he spoke, and turned round, facing the way he had come.

He waited for another of the vivid flashes of lightning to illumine the landscape.

He was not kept waiting long.

A brilliant flash that took him by surprise, although he was expecting it, seemed to set everything ablaze.

He could see, as it seemed, miles and miles, but yet his keen eye failed to detect the least signs of his pursuers.

"They have given up the chase," he concluded. "It would be foolish indeed to attempt to follow me while there was such a confusion going on around as there is. I have escaped them, that is certain. Now, where can I obtain a shelter?"

Tom turned his horse round, and waited for another flash of lightning to take another look about him.

The long peal of thunder that had succeeded the former flash gradually died away, but almost before the reverberations had quite ceased, the lightning blazed forth again.

At some considerable distance over the hedgerow on his right hand, Tom perceived a kind of building that looked half in ruins.

In all probability it was a barn, or some such building, belonging to a farm-house.

"That will do," he said, as soon as he perceived it. "I shall be sheltered from the rain there, no doubt, and ten to one if I am troubled by the presence of anyone."

A wooden palisading alone divided the meadows from the high-road, and over this obstacle Tom's horse leaped easily.

Crossing over three fields, Tom found himself in front of this structure, which, as he imagined, was a barn.

As the rain continued to fall, if anything, with greater violence than before, he lost no time in slipping from his horse and pulling open the rudely-made door.

Passing inside, he led his horse in after him.

To his great joy, he discovered that, although the barn presented a very ruinous appearance, yet it was more in appearance than reality.

The roof was sound, and he was perfectly sheltered from the wet.

The barn, also, was evidently in use, for a large quantity of straw had been piled up in it.

Tom did not close the door, but stood just within the threshold looking out upon the rain.

He was by no means certain that he had altogether baffled his foes, though he believed he had.

Yet they might track him by some means to his present place of refuge.

Amid the conflict of the elements it was difficult indeed to distinguish any other sound, yet Tom listened.

After a time, however, when he found he could hear nothing, and when he discovered that the storm showed no signs of abatement, he penetrated still further into the barn,

In one corner a quantity of straw was on the ground.

It seemed as though originally there had been quite a stack of it, but which had been partially removed.

On this his horse lay down.

The creature was much fatigued.

Tom flung himself by his horse's side, and here he resolved to remain until the storm was over.

He fell into a half-waking, half-dreaming state, from which he was suddenly aroused by the unmistakable sound of footsteps and voices.

He started up to a sitting posture instantly

The voices and footsteps died away again, but Tom continued on the alert.

He was satisfied that some persons had made their way past the corner of the barn where he was hiding, and, as there were numerous crevices in the walls, he would be able to hear with extreme distinctness everything that took place outside.

While making this reflection he heard the footsteps again.

This time they were much plainer and came from another direction.

This was from the door of the barn.

Before retiring to the corner, Tom had closed the door after him.

But now it was flung open.

Just afterwards there came a flash of lightning, which showed him, standing on the threshold, two men.

Then all was darkness.

But Tom was reassured, for, transient as the glimpse had been that he had obtained of these new-comers, yet it satisfied him that they were not police officers, so he was content.

But a strong curiosity to know who these men were and what brought them to such a lonely place at such an hour sprang up in the highwayman's breast, so he laid himself down in the straw with the resolution of keeping perfectly still and listening to all that passed, keeping his presence there secret.

The men were talking, and he could hear all that they said with perfect distinctness.

CHAPTER DCCLI.

TOM KING OVERHEARS THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE TWO MEN IN THE BARN.

"Curse you!—come on, will you?" said a gruff voice.

"What a fool you are, to be sure!"

"Am I?" said another voice, still gruffer than the one that had spoken first.

"Yes, you are. It seems to me pretty certain that you only want some excuse to give up the job altogether; but I tell you I will not be thwarted, so, mark my words, I am determined that it shall be done to-night."

"Well, I think it had better be put off."

"I know you do; but it sha'n't be—it sha'n't be! To-night or never!"

"Well, don't make so much fuss, nor shout so loud. How can you tell whether anyone is listening to us or not?"

"Oh, you're a fool, I tell you! Who do you think would be anywhere near here at this time of the night? and on such a night as it is too? Bah!—it's ridiculous!"

"As you like; but I am glad to think that you had sense enough to come inside here while the rain lasted. I am wet through to the skin."

"Curse the rain! Of all nights in the year, why should it rain to-night, when I so particularly wanted it to be fine; but, however, neither the rain nor anything else shall change my intention, or turn me from my purpose—I am resolved."

"Well, well—you said that before. Why do you make such a fuss?—I believe you are obliged to keep talking like that to keep your courage up."

"Well, perhaps I am; and if so it's a good thing, for I can keep my courage up, and that's more than you can do—you are trembling now like a leaf."

"I know I am—I am shivering with the cold and wet."

"Oh, no doubt! Why don't you take a roll on some of this straw?—that will dry you. Curse the rain! again say I—I wonder when it intends to give over?"

"There doesn't seem much chance of it at present."

"No—curse it!"

The two men stumbled forward in the darkness, and Tom really believed that they were coming direct to the corner where he was lying so still.

But coming to the first heap of straw, they pulled a quantity on to the floor, and rolled themselves over and over in it.

For several minutes no more conversation took place.

All that he had heard did not enlighten Tom much.



[CLAUDE DUVAL'S HORSE REFUSES TO PASS THE GIBBET.]

But he jumped to the conclusion that they were certainly after no good, and that what they had determined to do, in spite of every obstacle, was beyond all doubt a desperate deed.

In the hope of hearing still more, Tom King did not venture to move from his position.

He kept his hand upon his horse's head, so as to prevent, as far as possible, the animal from making any sudden movement or any attempt to rise to his feet.

He had little difficulty in keeping it calm, owing to its state of extreme exhaustion.

Then the man who had first spoken, and who by his words appeared so very resolute, spoke again.

"Don't lie there, chattering your teeth together like that," he cried. "Sit up—the rain is passing over."

"But then, even if it is, just think how it has fallen. Why, it has been enough to soak through anything. You may depend upon it that it's spoiled our chance for to-night."

"No, no—not at all. The rain will make it all the better, if anything. Get up, I tell you, and be ready to follow me, for as soon as the drops have ceased to fall I mean to start."

A rustling of straw accompanied these words.

Then came the sound of a shuffling of footsteps as the man made his way to the door of the barn.

At present, however, there seemed little prospect of a cessation of the storm for some time to come.

There had been a kind of lull in the wind and a decrease in the quantity of rain that was falling, but it was only for a moment or so.

The wind again blew with its former violence, and the rain poured down in torrents.

Growling and swearing, the man once more laid himself down on the straw near to his companion.

Even Tom could hear how this fellow's teeth chattered together—so much so, that he could scarcely make himself understood.

The whole burden of his conversation, however, was an attempt to persuade his companion to forego his purpose for that night at all events, and to choose some other more suitable time.

But his words were mainly unheeded, or, if they produced any effect at all, they made the man adhere more obstinately to the resolution he had expressed.

The thunder kept up an incessant rattle, so that the slight movements that Tom King and his steed made from time to time were passed over unnoticed, for so loud was the thunder that it absorbed all other sounds.

After a long and weary interval, however, the tempest gradually subsided.

As soon as the rain fell at a slower rate, the two men again left the straw, and went to the door of the barn.

"Come, it will be all right directly," said the first. "The rain is leaving off nicely. Don't you see that break in the clouds yonder? I can see it growing wider and wider. We shall have a fine night yet."

"But our scheme is spoiled, I am sure," said the other, still with chattering teeth. "Consider with what steadiness the rain has come down. Everything will be soaked through and through."

"Well, we will see about that. Now you know what you have to do, don't you?"

"I do."

"Well, then, let us have no more foolery of this sort! Just summon up your courage for a little while, if you possibly can."

"Oh, I will do my part as it is to be done, never fear! I have given you my word, and I won't go from it!"

"That sounds better, Jack. I can understand your talk now. To-night we will be revenged on old Bailey! We will strike him such a blow as he will never recover from! He shall know that he cannot do just as he likes, and treat those who have to work for him just as he thinks proper! No—no, Jack, we will be revenged!"

"Yes," said the other; "this night will wipe off all old scores between us. Curse him, how I hate to hear his name mentioned!"

"Well—well, here's a drop of brandy. I haven't much left, but drink half of it, and let me have the rest. There, you feel better now, don't you?"

"Much better."

"And so do I now," added the other, after a brief pause, during which he had been employed in emptying the bottle. "I feel up to my work. Have you got everything about you in readiness?"

"Yes—everything."

"Well, then, we will part here. You know which way you have to go?"

"I do."

"Well, I will take the other course, and you know what my intentions are. Between us the old scoundrel shall be ruined!"

"Yes—when he treated me as he did, I told him that he should rue the day—that I would have my revenge; but he laughed at me, horsewhipped me, and hunted me off his farm, and now I have come back to be revenged!"

"So have I. But my wrongs, Jack, make yours sink into insignificance. However, if we both work together to one end we must succeed."

"Down with him, I say—down with him and all his hated race! This shall be a revenge that shall be talked of for many a long year to come, and it will help, no doubt, as a warning to many others."

"Come on, then. Look, the rain has ceased now, or almost ceased, at any rate."

"It has, and before we can go far it will be fine. Now, Jack, don't forget what it is you have to do. Don't falter—don't hesitate; but do the job effectually. As for me, you may depend I shall carry out the plan to the utmost."

CHAPTER DCCLII.

IN WHICH THE VILLANY OF THE TWO MEN IS MADE APPARENT.

As soon as these words were spoken, the two men shook hands with each other and moved away.

Tom waited an instant, and then sprang to his feet.

Two bounds took him to the door of the barn

He stood just within the threshold, and looked out

That soft and gentle light, of which we have already spoken, was over all things, and by the aid of it the highwayman saw the two men who had been plotting and consulting together.

By their dress they appeared to be farm-labourers, or rather poachers.

They must have parted just at the door of the barn, and they were hastening across the meadows in a diagonal direction, so that at each step they got further and further from each other.

"I should uncommonly like to know what it is they are after," muttered Tom. "It is no business of mine, however, that I can see; and yet, ought I, knowing what I do, to remain here, or gallop off in another direction and leave these two villains to wreak what mischief they think proper? No—no, I should always reproach myself for such a proceeding."

At this moment the two men jumped over a low hedge that separated the meadow in which the barn was situated from another.

"If I intend to follow them I must set about the task at once," was Tom's next thought, "or they will get out of sight. If I could divide myself into two portions I should like to follow both. I can only keep in the footsteps of one, however, and the question is, which shall that one be?"

Without deciding, Tom left the barn and closed the door behind him.

He left his horse inside—he knew the animal would be safe and in good quarters.

Then assuming a crouching, doubled-up attitude, Tom ran hastily across the field to the hedge, and there he paused.

"As I can only follow one and not both," he said, "I should like to follow the one who intends to do the most mischief. That surely must be the one who spoke so resolutely and boldly. I can see him," he added, looking over the top of the hedge. "There he goes; I will follow him and keep good watch on all his movements!"

Tom sprang over the hedge and followed in the footsteps of the man who had first spoken.

Leaping another hedge, Tom King looked up and saw before him a picturesque-looking farm-house with thatched roof and curious chimneys.

Around it were several other little habitations, or rather outhouses, in which cattle, horses, and other things were stored.

Round these could be seen numerous stacks of hay and straw.

It was towards this farm-house that the man appeared to be going.

Where the other was Tom King could not tell, for he had lost sight of him altogether.

This beyond all doubt was the residence of the man upon whom they had expressed their resolution to have their revenge.

A fair and beautiful place it seemed to be—so quiet, so peaceful, and bearing such an aspect of calmness and prosperity.

The man Tom King was following now seemed as though he was afraid of being seen, for he crouched down upon the ground, almost creeping along upon his hands and knees.

Suddenly gaining the shadow of a haystack, he paused and Tom paused also.

He flung himself flat upon the ground, and well was it for him that he did so, for the man looked warily all around him.

Then he stooped down by the side of the stack, and though Tom strained his eyes, he could not make out what he was doing.

Suddenly, however, the highwayman caught sight of a faint starlike light, and no sooner did he perceive it than the whole scheme of revenge that these men had planned flashed into his mind.

They had resolved to set fire to the farmer's property.

With the utmost speed Tom sprang to his feet and ran towards the man.

"Villain!" he cried. "Hold—hold—hold, I say!"

But Tom was too late.

Before he could gain the spot there was a sudden blaze of light, and it would really seem as though the rain had rendered the hay more easily ignitable, for the flames flashed up in an incredibly rapid manner.

Hearing a voice and the sound of hasty footsteps, the man uttered a yell of fear and ran away.

Tom did not pursue him, but, raising a pistol, aimed hastily at the retreating figure and pulled the trigger.

Mingled with the explosion came a hideous shriek, and the incendiary, after turning round strangely twice or thrice upon his heels, fell at full length upon the greensward.

Tom's whole attention was now concentrated upon undoing the mischief.

His efforts were vain, however.

The man had taken the precaution to soak a quantity of the hay with turpentine or some other inflammable substance, so that as soon as a light was applied to it it blazed up furiously, and in a second obtained such a hold as to defy all attempts to extinguish it.

Tom quickly found that the task was beyond his power, so he thought his best plan was to raise an alarm and hasten to the farm-house.

But just then, as he turned round, he saw a bright and ruddy glare before him.

Instantly his thoughts reverted to the other man.

"Curse the rascals!" he said, 'they have laid their plans well; there's fire now in another spot!"

Tom ran with all his speed to the farm-house, and then, to his horror, he discovered that the building itself was in flames.

The structure was composed of very slight materials, so that the flames quickly took hold upon it.

At the top of his voice he cried aloud:

"Fire—fire—fire—fire!"

The whole place seemed to ring with the sounds.

Yet no notice appeared to be taken.

The inmates surely were slumbering soundly.

As for the man who had perpetrated this portion of the villany, he was far enough off by this time, watching the progress of the conflagration from a distance.

The report of the pistol scared him away.

But before he heard it he had completed all his preparations.

Having been employed on the farm, they knew just which parts would catch light most readily, so he placed an armful of straw at the back part of the premises, poured over it a quantity of the inflammable spirit, and then set fire to it.

The rapidity with which the flames spread was truly incredible.

But everything in the way of the bright flames was highly combustible, and therefore the fire raged with great fury.

Tom King struck heavy blows upon the front door of the farm-house, but all to no avail

Then, seizing a large stone, he flung it at one of the upper windows.

As soon as the crash was over he cried out:

"Fire—fire! Be speedy, or you will perish! Fire—fire!"

Then the form of a hearty, good-looking, middle-aged man made its appearance at the broken window

When he looked out he uttered a shriek of despair.

The stack that had been fired and that Tom King had vainly sought to extinguish was now blazing away most furiously, and the light wind that had sprung up carried the flames several feet, and finally set fire to another stack.

All objects were illuminated as though by the noonday sun.

"Quick—quick!" said Tom; "don't be overcome by what you see! Now is the time for action! Quick—quick, I say! Rouse all the inmates of the place, and get them out, or they will perish! The back of the house is one mass of flames!"

A loud shriek followed, and then several other windows were dashed open and anxious faces appeared at them.

"Descend—descend!" cried Tom. "There is yet time, I think. I will try and break open the front door, and then you can escape easily."

Every member of the household seemed stricken with panic.

Until Tom spoke and told them what to do, they were only able to stare about them in mingled astonishment and dismay

These instructions, however, were all that was required.

A terrific scramble took place to see who should descend first.

Tom King had his eyes on a plank of wood, and, as soon as he had spoken, he seized it with both hands, and, nerved by the strength of excitement, he dealt furious blows upon the front door of the farm-house, until, with a crash, it flew back upon its hinges.

CHAPTER DCCLIII.

TOM KING IS THE MEANS OF SAVING THE FARMER'S DAUGHTER FROM A FEARFUL FATE.

A GUSH of hot and stifling air and smoke came through the open door.

Tom retreated before it, but, looking in, he saw that the interior was almost as red as a furnace.

The next moment, with loud shrieks and frantic cries, the inhabitants of the farm-house rushed out into the open air.

"Saved—saved!" they cried, and so overcome were they by their deliverance that, as if actuated by one impuse, they all sank down upon their knees.

"Rise—rise," said Tom. "Now is the time for you to put forth your utmost energies; this fire must be quenched by some means or other, or else everything upon this farm will be utterly destroyed! Do you hear me?"

The men—the farmer himself included—hearing these words, recalled their scattered thoughts.

"First of all," said Tom, "look all around you and see whether you are all here—whether anyone has been left behind."

There was a sudden movement, and then a shrill and piercing shriek.

A groan burst from the farmer's lips, and he cried:

"Sarah—Sarah, my daughter, where is she?"

There was no response.

"Sarah," he cried, in a louder voice, "surely you have not perished? Yes—yes, my own—my only one must still be in the house."

With these words he rushed impetuously to the door.

But a mass of flame burst forth and drove him back.

It was only for a moment that he retreated, however.

Nerved by a father's love, he dashed furiously through the flames; but just then the staircase leading to the rooms above fell down with a tremendous crash.

It was partially consumed when they had all descended, and their weight had tried it exceedingly.

Now it gave way utterly.

The intense heat again drove the farmer back into the open air.

He stood there with singed flesh and smoking clothes

He clasped his hands together and cried out:

"My daughter—my daughter, she is lost to me for ever!"

"No—no," cried Tom—"no—no! Look—there she is—there—there!"

He pointed to an upper window as he spoke.

It was one belonging to the attic at the top of the house.

No doubt the poor girl, aroused by the tumult and the names, had sought to descend, but, finding that impossible, had been driven upstairs by the heat, and was now looking down, helpless and imploring, upon the throng below.

A fair and beautiful child she looked—almost, as one might say, supernaturally beautiful, with the vivid flames playing upon her.

But her very lips were white with terror.

Her age appeared to be no more than ten or twelve as the most, and therefore she was almost precluded from helping herself.

"Hold!" said Tom King instantly. "Stand warn

you are, my good girl! Don't be alarmed! Wait a moment, and you will be saved!"

Then, turning to the others, who stood gazing in a kind of stupified astonishment, he added, in a lower voice:

"A ladder—a ladder! Quick—quick! You must find me a ladder somewhere, and I will save her! Quick—quick, I say!"

The men, comprehending the instructions that were given them, hastened off, and presently returned with the article they had been sent for.

"Too short," said Tom, as soon as he saw it—"it is much too short; find me another from somewhere. Have you a longer one?"

"No—no," was the hurried reply—"that is the only one there is upon the premises."

Tom was in despair.

He looked up again at the young girl, and saw that the smoke was pouring in dense volumes from the window at which she stood.

She stretched out her hands imploringly towards them, and then she seemed to be gasping and struggling with the smoke.

But the heat must have been terrible and sufficient to suffocate her.

Suddenly she threw up her arms wildly above her head, and sank backwards into the room insensible.

At this the farmer was frantic, and he could scarcely be withheld from rushing into the house.

"There is only one chance of saving her," said Tom King, "and if you will assist me I will do my part."

"What is it—what is it?" asked several eager voices.

"Take that ladder, place it against the side of the house, and then raise it up. You may hold it on your shoulders or in your arms—it will add five feet to the length of it. Do that, and stand from beneath, and I will ascend and bring her down."

The men responded with a faint hurrah.

They were strong, burly fellows, and half a dozen of them could doubtless sustain the united weight that would be put upon their shoulders.

All were anxious to save the farmer's young and lovely daughter.

As quick as thought the ladder was raised, and then Tom King, hastily throwing off his coat first, stood upon the shoulders of the men, and then commenced the ascent of the ladder as they held it.

Even then it was scarcely long enough to reach the window.

But yet Tom thought he could achieve the feat.

He ascended with great agility and speed, and a loud cheer came from those below as Tom disappeared through the window.

In a second afterwards he reappeared, with the young girl in his arms.

She was safe and unhurt, only insensible and half stupified by the smoke.

"Hold firm," cried Tom to those below—"hold firm, for your lives, while we descend!"

"Right!" was the reply. "Don't feel afraid—we will stand firm!"

It was a difficult task for Tom to lower himself, and the girl as well, through the window, and gain a foothold upon the ladder.

But, in spite of the stifling heat, the suffocating smoke, and the flames that now began to shoot like long tongues out of the window, he preserved his presence of mind.

The men below trembled a little beneath the weight, but Tom descended with great rapidity until he reached the last round of the ladder.

Then he placed the young girl in the farmer's arms, who wept with joy as he received her.

Tom sprang down, and, although he saw there was scarcely any chance of saving the homestead, he cried out:

"Now then, where's the water? Get buckets, or whatever other things you can! We will try and prevent the fire from going any further."

But, although they used their utmost efforts, they could make no visible impression on the flames.

The fire had got too firm a hold upon the woodwork of the farm-house; it had seized, indeed, upon the thatch, and, unprovided as they were with the necessary means of extinguishing such a conflagration, it burned on, seeming to laugh to scorn the efforts that were made to check it.

"It's useless," Tom was compelled to say, at length. "There's no hope of saving the building now. Be thankful that none of you have perished in the flames. We must leave the house to burn down as it is, but we must see that it sets light to nothing else, and we must prevent, if we can, the spread of the fire among the stacks."

This was indeed something that required looking to, for now four stacks were blazing fiercely, and threatening to ignite as many more that were standing near them.

But the men, having now recovered themselves, set to work upon this task with great energy and skill.

Stacks had taken fire before then, and they had learnt how to extinguish them.

With pitchforks and other implements they scattered the blazing straw, and let it burn itself out in safety.

As it was flung upon the ground, many of the others trampled upon it, and so trod out the blaze.

But it was not until daybreak that the fire was subdued, and then not only the farm-house, but four stacks were utterly consumed.

CHAPTER DCCLIV

TOM KING GAINS A TRUE AND SERVICEABLE FRIEND.

From smouldering heaps of ruin the thick smoke still ascended, but Tom King felt he had done all that lay in his power, and he was anxious to leave.

It was now daybreak, though as yet the light was so very dim and uncertain as to be scarcely more than darkness.

Yet, if he left without delay, he would be able to reach the lonely inn without being very much behind the appointed time.

Before he quitted the scene, however, he felt it to be his duty to make the farmer acquainted with the facts that he had overheard in the barn.

Accordingly, he made his way towards the spot where he was standing.

His daughter had been recovered from her swoon, though she still looked pale and disordered.

No sooner did the farmer catch sight of Tom King, than, recognising him in a moment as the saviour of his child, he sprang forward, and, seizing his hand, wrung it warmly.

So great was his emotion, that at first he could not speak.

At length, in a broken, husky voice, he said:

"Thanks, sir—many thanks for the service you have rendered me to-night—so great a service that I can scarcely estimate it! You have saved my daughter—my child—the life of my heart—my only one—Sarah! God bless you for it, for without you she would now be nothing but ashes!"

"I rejoice," said Tom King, "to think I should have had the opportunity of being of assistance to you; but time presses, and I am anxious to be gone. Before I leave, I wish to make you acquainted with some facts of which, as yet, I am sure you are in ignorance."

The farmer stared at him in surprise.

Tom King then gave a brief and clear account of how he had been forced by the storm to take refuge in the barn, and what he had overheard there and its results.

"Had I suspected earlier," he said, in conclusion, "what their intentions were, all this damage could have been spared; but they spoke so ambiguously that I could not even guess their purpose. They separated, and I followed one. Come this way, and you shall see him."

Tom strode off to the spot where he had seen the man fall.

He was not there, but Tom searched all around, and presently perceived some dark object lying at a distance.

"There he is," he said. "The wound was not a mortal one. He has crawled away, but he is helpless—he was unable to go any further. Come and see him."

The farmer followed.

As they drew closer to the prostrate man, heavy, dismal groans came upon their ears.

Tom King at length stood over him.

The man was lying on his face, and so, in no gentle manner, the highwayman turned him over with his foot on to his back.

"Now, then," he said—"speak!"

With an effort, the wounded wretch raised himself upon one arm.

"Why, it's Bill Scott!" ejaculated the farmer, recognising him.

"Yes, it's Bill Scott, Farmer Bailey!" was the reply, given in savage, snarling tones. "I have been shot—I have been brought down! I am lying here wounded to death! I know that I have only an hour or two's life in me at the most, but yet I die contented, for I have been revenged!"

"Revenged?" said the farmer, with surprise—"for what?"

"For your treatment of me. You know how you drove me from your farm, and how I have since been unable to obtain employment."

"I ought to have sent you to jail!" said the farmer. "I was too lenient with you, thief and scoundrel that you are!"

"Those were the words you used then, and I swore to be revenged! I die now content, for I can see that my purpose is accomplished, and you are a ruined man! You will no longer be able to hold your head up in the way you have done! You are ruined, and I rejoice in your downfall!"

A succession of deep groans followed these words, and Bill Scott fell back upon the grass, writhing with pain.

The exertion of speaking no doubt had been too much for him, and had caused him intolerable agony.

"Come away," said Tom King. "You see there the author of this mischief. He had another with him—some man that he called Jack. That rascal, I regret to say, has escaped—he was scared, no doubt, by the firing of my pistol."

"I must thank you again," said the farmer, "for had it not been for your interference we should all have perished."

"I wish I could have saved you something," said the highwayman. "Is what this man says true?—are you a ruined man?"

"The loss will be heavy and hard to bear," said the farmer; "but I seem to look upon it as nothing. My daughter is saved, and I am content to put up with any other misfortune; yet I shall be able to struggle through this. It will be many and many a year before I recover the effects of it, if ever I do; yet I will hope for the best."

"I am glad to find, then, that things are not so bad as they might have been. Now let me say farewell! I have been much detained, and it is necessary that I should make all speed on my homeward journey."

"I would not detain you, or put you to any inconvenience for worlds," was the reply. "Good-bye, sir! You will take a father's thanks and blessings with you, yet——"

"Yet what?"

"Before you leave me, come and see my little girl. Let her thank you."

"No, no," said Tom—"I want no thanks—at least, I have had enough of them already. What I did was done freely and willingly. I would have done the same for any fellow-creatures in distress. I regret that I did not divine those men's intentions earlier, as I ought to have done."

"Take no blame to yourself, sir, on that account. You are a perfect friend to me, yet I hope that you will allow me to be your friend. Whether you should ever stand in need of one or not I cannot tell; but if you do, come in the hour of need to me, and I will do anything I can to serve you."

"Thanks—thanks! The friends I have are few indeed, and I am by no means unwilling to add to their number. But I cannot stay now—you must permit me to depart."

"But should you find yourself again travelling in this direction," said the farmer, "you will call here? Will you not let us see you once more? Luckily, this land belongs to myself, and therefore I shall have no rent to pay while all to-night's mischief is repaired. It is a sad, heavy blow to me, sir, but I will not repine, for my daughter has not perished. I had saved up some money and placed it in the bank, thinking it should be for her use; but now I shall be obliged to take it and use it to rebuild this house."

While this conversation was proceeding, Tom King and the farmer were walking towards the barn in which the highwayman had left his steed.

Upon gaining it, they pushed the door open, and the animal gladly came forth.

Before springing to the saddle, Tom hastily examined her to see whether she had been injured, for he all at once recollected the manner in which the officers had fired.

He could not trace any injury, except that the tip of one of the ears had been cut away by a bullet.

A narrow escape indeed for both horse and rider.

The pain, no doubt, had been great, but now the bleeding had ceased, and the hurt would quickly get well.

The farmer again shook Tom warmly by the hand, and regretted that he could neither induce him to stay nor offer him any hospitality.

"You shall see me again ere long," said Tom. "When I next come this way I will certainly call. Now I cannot stay, and so once more farewell!"

With those words, Tom leaped into the saddle, and took his way towards Ealing at a furious rate.

He chose the loneliest route that he could think of, and all the while he was flying at this great speed he kept continually looking around him on all sides, so as to make sure that none of his enemies were near.

Not a person, however, appeared in view, and just about sunrise he arrived safely at his destination.

CHAPTER DCCLV.

CLAUDE DUVAL HAS TWO TERRIBLE AND STARTLING ADVENTURES.

And now we have to place on record the adventures that befel Claude Duval on this eventful night of storm.

As he took a totally different direction to that pursued either by Turpin or Tom King, he knew nothing whatever of what had happened to them.

He rode steadily along the highway, determined not to attempt anything until he had succeeded in getting a safe distance from Ealing.

All at once, however, he heard before him in the distance the clatter of horses' feet, mingled with the sound of wheels revolving rapidly over the road.

He stopped immediately, and, drawing to one side of the road, took out his pistols and examined them, so as to be sure that in his ride the primings had not been shaken out.

He found all right, and so, retaining one of the weapons in his hand, he sat patiently waiting for the vehicle to come in sight.

The wind was now beginning to get violent—the wind that was the precursor of the storm that afterwards broke forth.

The wind blew from the direction in which the vehicle was coming—towards the highwayman—so that he could hear with unusual distinctness.

In a little while he detected another sound mingled with the rolling of the wheels and the sharp strokes of the horses' hoofs.

Voices were in loud and angry conversation—some point or other was being most warmly debated.

As the travellers came closer still, Claude discovered that one was a man's voice and the other a woman's.

What were the precise words that passed between them he was not able to ascertain.

As soon as ever they were level with him he rode out, and, keeping pace easily with the vehicle, he said:

"Pull up—stop your horse, whoever you are, or I will put a bullet through your skull and stop him afterwards!"

The woman gave a loud shriek, and the man scarcely knowing what he was about, he was so taken by surprise, checked the rein, and the horse obediently came to a standstill at once.

"You are wise," said Claude, "to obey my commands, for to-night I am not in the humour to stand any trifling! Quick!—your money, watch, and valuables—hand them over; you will find it best to save me the trouble of taking them!"

"There, you dolt—you idiot!" said the woman, in a

shrill voice, "didn't I tell you how it would be?—didn't I say it would come to this? But it's a judgment on you for laughing at me, and paying no attention to my advice! I told you that it was as bad as madness to continue to travel all night with that large bag of gold in the gig, and now you have lost it!"

"Silence, you chattering fool!" roared the man. "But it's no good storming your jaw now the mischief is done, curse you!"

"Yes," said Claude, "you are right there. Now be wise for once—don't make a fuss about such a trifle as a bag of money, but hand it over quietly to me, and I will depart without doing you any further harm—I will be satisfied; if you refuse, you will find the consequences not so pleasant!"

"I wish I was armed," said the man, as he stooped down in the gig; "you would not find me such an easy prey if I was; but it's all my wife's fault!"

"My fault, you wretch?" screamed his better half. "You know very well that you are such a coward and so frightened of firearms that you dare not carry them with you, and you would not let me carry any either; I am ashamed of you! Oh, I wish I was a man!"

"So do I," said her husband, ruefully—"I wish that with all my heart!"

"Do you? I know what you mean; but you sha'n't insult me in that way! Take that, and that!"

"And I will take this," said Claude, as he adroitly possessed himself of a good-sized leather bag that the man had picked up from the bottom of the gig.

He tossed it in his hand, and then, with a nod of satisfaction at its weight, and the musical chink that it sent forth, he consigned it to his pocket, and trotted off, leaving the amiable pair to settle their matrimonial difficulties without interruption or interference.

Very well pleased with the success he had hitherto met with, the highwayman trotted on, hoping to meet with another adventure before going much further.

But in a short time his attention was called to the state of the weather.

The wind increased, and suddenly a heavy dash of rain-drops struck against his face.

"We shall have a storm, I fancy," he muttered. "No matter; if it is not very wet I shall get on all the easier very likely."

Before going a mile further, however, the storm burst forth with the utmost fury.

The rain that came down would have drenched him to the skin but for the partial shelter that some tall trees afforded him.

Near these, however, he was disinclined to linger, for he knew that in a thunder-storm a tree is best kept at a distance.

Then the road suddenly changed its character.

On either side was a high embankment.

From the appearance of the place it was evident that the road had been cut through the upper part of a hill, so as to obviate the difficulty of ascending it.

Here the darkness was something terrific.

The tall banks on either side, however, formed a partial shelter from the rain; but by the aspect of the elements Claude was aware the storm would be one of no ordinary severity, and that its duration would be considerable.

Therefore he pushed forward, being anxious to discover, if he possibly could, some place where he could shelter himself until the elemental strife was over.

The thunder had been muttering and grumbling in the distance for several minutes, and now, all at once, a vivid flash of lightning illuminated all objects with a ghastly brilliancy.

By the aid of that flash, although it lasted only a second, Claude saw many objects.

The end of the embankment was almost reached, yet on either side of him he could see nameless shrubs growing thickly.

In front the road descended rapidly, and there was a large expanse of country visible.

Although Claude saw these, they were not the objects upon which his eyes rested, nor the objects that enchained his attention.

With a cry upon his lips, that was rung from him partly by surprise and partly by the horror he experienced, Claude beheld, close on his left hand, a gibbet.

The wood of which it was composed was old and black, and seemed fast falling to decay.

From the cross-piece there still hung down a dark and shadowy mass.

This revolting object was seen not only by Claude but by his steed.

The frightened creature uttered a loud snorting cry, and then plunged about restively.

But for Claude's firm grasp upon the reins, the animal would have turned round and fled with all speed from the spot.

But the highwayman was anxious to advance, not to return.

In vain he tried to soothe the startled animal by caresses and gentle words.

Equally futile, too, was the use of the spur—obedience was refused altogether.

The crashing sound of the thunder increased in no inconsiderable degree the alarm under which the horse laboured.

When the peal had died away in muttering echoes, Claude succeeded in calming the creature a little.

He hoped to be able to ride past the gibbet before the lightning blazed forth again.

With trembling limbs, the horse advanced a few steps irresolutely, and then paused.

Again the lightning flashed more vividly and more continuously than before.

The horrible and loathsome object was revealed with even tenfold distinctness.

With a sickening sensation, Claude averted his eyes—the object was too horrible to be gazed upon, especially under such circumstances as these.

Furiously, Claude plunged his spurs into his horse's flanks, and, maddened by pain and terror, the terrified beast gave a convulsive bound forward, and then, having passed the gibbet, galloped at a tremendous and dangerous pace down the hill beyond.

Claude tried to recover the command over the reins, but in vain, for the horse for once was master, and would not be controlled.

CHAPTER DCCLVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL TAKES SHELTER FROM THE STORM AT THE ROSE AND CROWN INN.

Had not the rain continued to fall with so much violence, Claude Duval would have done on that night as he had often done before.

When his horse took it into its head to run away, he would just have kept the reins in hand, so as to steer him clear of any obstacle, and allow him to gallop on until he was weary.

Now this was by no means an agreeable prospect, and, moreover, the horse's terror was much increased every time the lightning flashed or the thunder rolled.

Claude was anxious in the extreme to gain some place of shelter, and accordingly he continued his efforts to regain the mastery that he had lost.

Then another vivid flash of lightning showed him in advance a little roadside public-house—a snug little dwelling, almost embosomed in trees, and from the windows of which a ruddy light was streaming.

The sight of this comfortable halting-place made him more than ever desirous to bring his horse to a standstill.

At all times a roadside inn is a pleasant place to halt at, but especially so in wet or inclement weather.

There would, of course, be considerable danger in stopping at or entering such a place.

But Claude Duval did not give that a moment's consideration, because he was quite of opinion that he was able to take his own part.

He tugged away with might and main without appearing to make much impression, when presently the front of the inn was reached.

The horse itself appeared to recognise the building, and to know that comfortable quarters for itself were close at hand.

Certain it is, however, that it stopped, and with considerable abruptness, and then, wheeling round, suddenly trotted through the gate at the side of the inn that communicated with the stables.

The yard was paved with large round stones, and on

these the horse's feet made a great clatter, which aroused the ostler, for the stable door was thrown open, and a man appeared standing at it with a lantern in one hand.

"Who is it?" he said, not offering to come out into the wet—"who is it, I say?"

'A traveller," said Claude, as he slipped from his steed. "I have been caught in the storm, and want shelter."

"All right, sir," said the man, with increased respect, as soon as he caught sight of Claude. "You could not have come to a better place than this is. Lead your horse this way, and I will hold the light."

The ostler raised the lantern above his head, and Claude, taking hold of the bridle, led his steed into the stable.

The animal followed him docilely enough, and, having got inside the stable, all its late terror and apprehension completely vanished.

"Look after him well," said Claude, giving the ostler a five-shilling piece. "You will find it nothing out of your pocket if you do."

"All right, sir! Many thanks to your honour! I will drink your health! I will rub him down in a twinkling, and he shall have a bit of the best in the stable."

"That's right," said Claude. "You need not remove the saddle; just loosen the girths, and take the bit out of his mouth, for as soon as ever the storm ceases I shall want to continue my journey."

"All right, sir; everything shall be exactly as you wish. Not that I think you need be in any particular hurry, for if I am any judge, this storm will last a good while longer yet."

"I hope not," said Claude. "However, I have managed to get wet through to the skin."

"So you have; but if you will cross the yard, you will see the back door; open it, and go in—they've some rare fires indoors, and you will be able to dry yourself first-rate."

"I will; but don't forget what I have said to you about my horse."

"I will not, you may depend; I will carry out all your orders."

Claude ran across the yard to the back door of the inn, and opened it as he had been directed.

He could not push it wide open at first, owing to a slight resistance.

Directly afterwards, however, it swung back, and then he saw standing near to it, in considerable confusion, a sheepish-looking young fellow, attired as a gamekeeper, and a rosy-cheeked, good-looking girl, whose face and neck were now covered with blushes.

"I took you by surprise, I suppose," said Claude, with a laugh. "I'd no idea that lovers were standing near the door. Don't look so ashamed, now," he added, addressing the gamekeeper; "she's a very pretty girl, and you ought to feel proud when you are seen with her."

Claude walked on until he came to a door that was standing partly open.

Inside this apartment there was a bright red light, proceeding from the fire.

Without further ceremony, he pushed the door wide open, and entered.

He then found himself in the spacious and comfortable kitchen of the inn.

A very large fire was burning on the hearth, and round this some ten or a dozen persons were seated, engaged in smoking and drinking.

One, wearing a white apron with pockets in front, rose up as soon as Claude entered.

"Welcome, sir," he said—"welcome to the Rose and Crown. I am glad to see you—very glad! Dear me, how very wet you are! Walk up to the fire, sir, and dry yourself."

Claude willingly accepted this invitation, and, making a bow and an apology to the remainder of the company for taking an undue share of the fire, he stood close to the hearth and dried himself.

The landlord was inclined to be very talkative.

"Now, sir," he said, "if you will excuse me, there's something else you want to make you all right, and that's a drop of something warm inside; that, combined with the fire, will make you as right as a trivit!"

"Very good," said Claude—"have you any hot water ready?"

"Oh yes—plenty."

"Then make me a large bowl of punch—as large a bowl as you can, mind—and let it be hot and strong! Perhaps these gentlemen would have no objection to drinking my health in a few glasses of it?"

Of course there was not one in the company who had the slightest objection in the world, and they applauded the proposition most vigorously.

When Claude had entered they looked at him curiously.

When he stood before the fire they were not very well pleased, and a trifling thing would have made them suspicious.

But when he ordered the punch for them all to drink, their feelings underwent a total change.

"Take this chair," said one—"it is a nice, large, comfortable one, with arms. Draw it up before the fire and sit down—you will be able to dry yourself comfortably then."

"Thanks," said Claude—"I don't mind if I do, for I am soaking wet, I can assure you."

"Yes," said the man who had surrendered the chair—"just before you came in we were talking about this storm, and saying that it had been many a year since there had been such a one. Dear me, hark at that!"

A rattling peal of thunder now seemed to shake the very house, and the guests looked at one another in dismay.

"Yes," said Claude—"it's a severe storm; and yet there is some benefit in them after all, for on such a night as this how doubly comfortable it makes the fire-side!"

"It does—that's true enough! Have you travelled far to-night, sir?"

"No—not very far; though I am anxious to continue my journey. I was overtaken by the storm just before I reached the top of the hill yonder."

At this moment the landlord entered, bringing with him a bowl and several ingredients necessary for making the punch.

The guests watched the process with the utmost interest.

Water was boiling upon the fire, and in a very short time the steaming beverage was all ready.

Of course Claude was the centre of attraction to all.

He felt no uneasiness on this account, however, for, at the first glance, he had satisfied himself that without exception the company consisted of country persons, not one of whom probably had seen him—perhaps scarcely heard his name mentioned.

He calculated that he had won the respect and good graces of all by his liberal order for punch.

One man, however, fixed his eyes upon Claude with more intentness than any of the rest.

He did it furtively, and the highwayman did not perceive that he was being subjected to such a close scrutiny.

This man, however, continued to watch during the whole time that the punch was being brewed.

Glasses were brought in, and they were all filled by the landlord and handed round.

"Here's wishing you very good health, sir!" they all cried, and then the glasses were drained to the bottom.

"Fill them again, landlord," cried Claude; "they hold no more than a thimbleful, and such a night as this you ought to set the cold and wet at defiance! Fill them up again, and mind you have some more water boiling on the hearth, so that when this bowl is empty we can have another."

The guests were highly delighted with Claude's liberality.

Hitherto they had been solacing themselves with nothing but some rather weak home-brewed ale, after which the punch seemed very good indeed.

The prospect of having several glasses was highly satisfactory, more especially as they knew they should not have to pay for the expensive beverage.

But the man we have noticed as watching Claude turned to the landlord after the second glass had been emptied, and said:

"I don't think I shall continue my journey to-night, Mr. Landlord."

"A very wise determination, though I say it."

Well, I think it will be best. I go no further to-night;

but I have a long journey before me, so I shall retire to rest early."

"Very good, sir. I have beds in waiting."

"I have not been out to look after my sorrel mare."

"Oh, she's all right," said the landlord, interrupting him—"you need not feel anxious on her account. I have got a capital ostler, who looks well after all the horses."

"Still for all that I should like to go out and have a look at her. I shall sleep all the better if I do."

"Oh, certainly—certainly; I will go with you."

"Oh, don't trouble yourself. Whenever I am out I always make it a rule to have a look at my horse before going to bed—I sleep all the more comfortable then."

"Very well, sir," said the landlord, who, though he proposed to accompany the traveller to the stable, showed no particular desire to do so. "You know the way, of course?"

"Oh, yes, I can find my way easy enough. And the bed is prepared, you say?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, then, gentlemen, if I don't come in again, I will say good night."

"Come in again," said Claude—"come in again by all means, and have another glass of punch; that will do more to make you sleep comfortably than looking at your horse, I'll warrant."

CHAPTER DCCLVII.

CLAUDE DUVAL IS MADE ACQUAINTED WITH SOME PARTICULARS OF THE LIFE OF THE FLYING HIGHWAYMAN.

THERE was a slight laugh at this, for all the guests were disposed to be on the best of terms with Claude.

The traveller laughed too, and said:

"If you don't mind, sir, I will have another glass before facing the cold air again."

"Oh, certainly—certainly—fill up, landlord, fill up all round!"

The traveller emptied his glass at one gulp, and then left the room.

"I think the storm has lulled a little," exclaimed the landlord, as he listened to the beating of the rain against the window; "not that I think it is passing off, for a storm of this kind generally lasts some time."

"Yes; you are right there," said the man sitting next to him. "I can only recollect one such storm as this, and that was a matter of thirty-six or thirty-seven years ago. I remember it because that was the night when the Flying Highwayman was captured."

Claude looked up in interest.

"Yes, so it was," said the landlord. "Now you come to call the circumstance to my mind, I recollect everything distinctly; "it's thirty-seven years ago, or rather will be thirty-seven years ago in next October."

"The Flying Highwayman?" said Claude Duval. "I have travelled the high-road pretty well in my time, and yet I do not recollect ever hearing anything of him."

"Is it possible, sir?" exclaimed the landlord. "I can assure you he was quite a noted character—a very noted character indeed."

"Perhaps I know him, or have heard of him by some other name," said Claude.

"That's very likely indeed, for I believe he had as many names as there are thorns in a bush. He was called sometimes one and sometimes the other, but about this part of the country he was invariably known as the Flying Highwayman."

"Then you remember all about him, landlord?"

"Well, a good deal, sir—a good deal. He used to come to this house pretty often; he came here time after time, and a very pleasant, agreeable, chatty fellow I always found him. Mind you, I had not the least idea that he was the Flying Highwayman that we had heard so much about, and I doubt whether I should have believed it if anyone had told me he was."

"And why was he called the Flying Highwayman?" asked Claude Duval.

"Well, some say for one reason, some for another; but I believe it was on account of his horse—a splendid creature it was too; I recollect it as well as if it was yesterday. After his capture, the police officers seized it, but when his master was no more, the horse ceased to be like the same animal."

"I feel very much interested," said Claude; "and if there is nothing else to talk about, and if none of you gentlemen have any objection, I should like to hear a few particulars about this said Flying Highwayman."

All were perfectly willing, for, though most of them knew the whole of the particulars by heart, yet there was such a degree of interest and fascination attached to the relation of them, that they could always sit quietly by the fireside and listen while that tale of the past was told.

Before commencing, however, the landlord handed the glasses round to the company, and then he spoke as follows:

"I may as well begin with the beginning of this history, sir, and tell you what I know to be true; I could tell you a very great deal that is said to be true, but I don't know it of my own knowledge; it is, however, very certain that about forty years ago a man made his appearance in this part of the country, who was called, as I told you, the Flying Highwayman.

"He was very bold and very daring, and scrupled very little about what he did, though, I think, no one could accuse him of any greater crime than stopping a traveller on the highway.

"He used to ride up with great boldness, and in an offhand way command them to surrender all the valuable articles they had about their persons, and such was the influence that his manner and bearing had upon all alike, that they invariably surrendered their property without more than a mere show of resistance.

"Of course he was not long in finding this out, and it made him much bolder than he otherwise would have been.

"The most extraordinary tales were told about him. One traveller would declare that at such and such an hour he was waylaid and robbed at a particular spot, and another traveller would come forward and say that he had been stopped at the same hour, but several miles off, by the same man.

"This was very likely, I think, why he was called the Flying Highwayman, without it was that he set all efforts to capture him at defiance.

"The officers tried in vain to run him down. His horse always carried him out of sight and out of danger. But this did not last for a very long while—it would have been a wonder if it had.

"A great fuss was made about his depredations; large rewards were offered, and every precaution used to make him prisoner.

"By some means or other the Flying Highwayman once learned that the Archbishop of Canterbury would arrive in London, bringing with him a very large amount of treasure in the shape of gold and jewels.

"Of course he would be well protected, and yet the Flying Highwayman determined to possess himself of this treasure, and he carried his resolution into effect.

"Some have been known to say that those who were with the Archbishop, and acting in the capacity of guards, were false to him, and sided with the highwayman.

"Whether this is true or not I can't tell. This, however, is certain: His Grace the Archbishop was travelling in a carriage drawn by four horses, and behind this there came a kind of waggon, drawn also by four horses, in which had been packed a quantity of clothing and other articles, and among them the treasure of which I have spoken.

"The journey was performed in safety until they got about half-way to London. One night, as they were travelling at full speed, by some inexplicable means or other, two of the wheels of the Archbishop's carriage came off, and down went the vehicle with a crash.

"Almost at the same time two of the wheels came off the baggage waggon as well, and that fell with a crash to the ground. The greatest confusion ensued. His Grace was picked up out of his carriage in an almost insensible state. What to do, his attendants could scarcely tell; but the moon broke out from behind a cloud, and by the aid of its light they saw at some distance the figure of a man, who looked like a farm-servant, for he was dressed in a large smock-frock, and had a round felt hat upon his head.

"They waved their hands to him, and called him, thinking to be able to extract some information from



[CLAUDE DUVAL HEARS THE POLICE OFFICERS APPROACHING.]

him as to the place where they could have the vehicles repaired.

"He appeared to hear them, and, in obedience to their signals, came running hastily across the meadows.

"He was, or pretended to be, very much surprised at what he saw. He was asked if he knew of a place where the wheels could be put on again, and he replied in the negative.

"But he told them there was a public-house not much farther down the road, and if they went there they might perchance obtain the assistance they needed.

"This was a difficulty, for the weight of the waggon was such that there was no hope of their being strong enough to drag it along the road.

"The Archbishop was rather severely injured by his fall, and when he heard of this public-house he declared at once that he would be led to it.

"He was attended by most of his servants, and four men were left to keep guard over the waggon.

"The farm-labourer showed them the way to the inn, which they found sure enough in the position he had described.

"From the inn several persons were sent out, armed with a few tools, with which they thought they might perhaps be able temporarily to repair the damage that had been done.

"But on their way to the spot where the waggon had been left they were met and passed by a man mounted on a powerful horse.

"He was riding at a furious rate. They drew back to the side of the road in order to let him pass, and as he went by he took off his hat and waved it.

"Still it was not until afterwards that they attached much importance to this meeting.

"On going to the waggon, however, they found a slight surprise in store for them.

"The four men who had been left on guard were found securely bound and gagged, lying under the hedge.

"The waggon itself had been broken open, and its contents strewed all over the road.

"It was then soon after discovered that the whole of the treasure had been extracted.

"The account given by the four men, as soon as they were unbound and ungagged, was that they were suddenly set upon by half a dozen men, who bound and gagged them before they were able to make any outcry or resistance; then the waggon had been broken open—as they saw—under the direction of a man on horseback.

"The treasure was abstracted, and this man on horseback took possession either of the whole or the greater portion of it, and galloped off at the top of his speed.

"The others remembered the horseman they had seen flying at such a prodigious rate, and when they described his appearance as well as they were able, the four men positively declared that he was the robber.

"When the case came to be inquired into, however, considerable suspicion fell upon these four men.

"It was thought they had been parties to the robbery, and that the account they had given was a fictitious one.

"Beyond doubt, it was the Flying Highwayman who had committed the robbery, for his appearance, as described in various bills, was that of the horseman they had seen.

"But, although the four men were suspected, yet their guilt could not be proved; they of course lost their situations.

"A tremendous outcry and uproar was of course made by the Archbishop, upon finding that he had been despoiled of so much wealth; and there was such a commotion in the land about this Flying Highwayman as there had never been before.

"Yet he set all their efforts to capture him at defiance, as he had done before, until one unlucky night the officers triumphed, and he was made prisoner, condemned to death, executed, and afterwards hung in chains, within a mile of this very house, and close to the spot where he had committed his robberies."

"Yes," broke in another, "'tis true enough, for his gibbet is to be seen to this day."

"Yes, and the remains of the Flying Highwayman himself," said the landlord, "though they would long since have disappeared but for the iron cage in which they are contained. He still remains a warning to others, who might be inclined to follow his example."

"And is the gibbet situated at the top of the hill and close to the place where the road is cut through the rock?" asked Claude.

"It is, sir," replied the landlord. "I suppose you have seen it?"

"I have."

"It is a sad sight!" said the landlord—"a hideous sight! But if you like, sir, I will tell you how it was the Flying Highwayman came to be captured."

CHAPTER DCCLVIII.

THE LANDLORD OF THE ROSE AND CROWN CONTINUES HIS INTERESTING NARRATIVE.

"Do so—do so," said Claude Duval, "for I am much interested in the story you are telling me. I think there is nothing that serves to pass an hour more pleasantly than to hear some tale of the past well told. But before you begin, landlord, I can see that several glasses are empty, and those that are not, ought to be by this time, so fill up again."

The landlord obeyed with alacrity; and as by this time a considerable quantity had been imbibed by every person present, they were consequently inclined to be very jolly and uproarious.

"I have often been asked about the gibbet," the landlord began; "travellers who have stopped at this house on their way from London have most invariably asked me about it."

"I should have done so," said Claude. "I came upon it very suddenly. A flash of lightning revealed it, and my horse was so terrified that I could scarcely manage it; however, I did manage to draw in when I reached the front of the inn."

"Yes," said the landlord. "I know very well that the gibbet must look awful on such a night as this, with the thunder rolling, and with the lightning playing all over the ironwork. It is bad enough to see it in the daytime, and with the sun shining upon it."

"It was terrible," said Claude, with a slight shudder. "But go on—I am anxious to know how such a bold and courageous man came to be captured."

"Well, it happened one night that I was sitting in the kitchen, or, as I may be now, with a few friends seated round me, as there is at the present time, that a stranger arrived and sat down, and had some brandy-and-water to drink. When I say a stranger I mean that he was a stranger to all present, except myself, and I only knew him from having seen him now and then. I had not the least notion who he was."

"But I suppose you afterwards found out he was the Flying Highwayman?"

"I did, sir. Well, he had not been sitting down very long, before there came a tremendous clatter at the door. It was burst violently open, and to my astonishment a large party of London police officers rushed into the kitchen.

"Well, I noticed this stranger, as soon as ever he heard the noise, spring up from his seat. He stood for a second as though scarcely knowing which way to turn. He seemed, I thought, half inclined to make a rush out by the door, but if such was his intention he altered his mind, because the officers were already in the passage.

"Instead of doing this he turned round, and to my amazement jumped up on to yonder table, and just as the officers rushed in he gave a tremendous spring and jumped clean through the window.

"There was a crashing of glass and a loud report that came from the pistols of the police officers, for they all fired when they saw that the man they wanted was making his escape.

"'Come on,' cried one, 'down the passage and out into the yard—that will be the quickest way! He's hurt himself ten to one, and if so we shall nab him all right!'

"Down the passage they rushed, and out of the back door, and out into the yard. I followed them, for I was full of curiosity and interest.

"But they made a miscalculation when they thought they should find the highwayman in the yard.

"It seems that after jumping from the window he must have alighted on his feet. Then he had rushed into the stable, mounted his horse, and galloped off in an incredibly short space of time.

"The officers heard the clatter of his horse's feet on the road, and they shook their heads, saying:

"'It is no good for us to attempt to pursue him; we've tried that often enough and have failed. Curse it!—this was a close touch, but it can't be long before his time will come. We shall have him sooner or later, depend upon it!'

"With these words, the officer in command of the rest turned back into the inn, and the men, getting over their disappointment as well as they could, sat down in the kitchen and had something to drink.

"No doubt you think it strange that the officers should take the matter so easy, but I soon found from their conversation that they had no longer heart to undertake a pursuit after the Flying Highwayman.

"They had chased him so often, and had always failed to overtake him, that they quite gave it up in despair.

"'Make your minds easy,' said the leader, 'it is only by a stratagem that we shall capture him, and therefore it will answer our purpose much better to sit down and decide upon what that stratagem is to be than it would to go galloping over the country.'

"In this matter all were of the same opinion; and when we come to consider the state of the weather, it is not at all wonderful that they should be

"It was a bitter, cold, bleak, wintry night, with a wind blowing that seemed as though it would cut you in two.

"As for the kitchen," added the landlord, as he glanced around him complacently, "that looked just as comfortable as it does to-night.

"Well, to make a long story short, the officers sat in the kitchen for a very long time talking and drinking.

"I found them very capital company, and I sat all the time listening to the strange stories they told of their adventures.

"I could not recollect now one-half that they said, but I know that most of the anecdotes they told related to this Flying Highwayman. Whether they were all true or all false, or whether some were true and not the rest, of course I don't know, and therefore it is not worth while for me to tell you any of them.

"Some time afterwards I heard a rumour that some very rich man was about to travel from London into the north.

"He was terribly afraid—so I was told—to undertake this expedition, because he would have to take the bulk of his money with him.

"He was frightened and suspicious of everybody—he was avaricious as well.

"I was told he was coming down in the stage-coach, and that he would probably stay all night at this inn.

"'Well,' I said to myself, 'if this tale gets much about, whether it is true or not, I warrant the Flying Highwayman stops the stage-coach before it reaches here.'

"My words were verified, for on the night when this rich man was expected, lo and behold! the coach was stopped.

"Now, when I say stopped, I don't exactly mean it, but I'll tell you just how it was done.

"You know the long, steep hill you have to climb before you can get here—the same hill, sir," added the landlord, addressing Claude, "that you spoke of a little while ago?"

Claude nodded.

"Well, it was a hard pull for the horses to get the coach up this hill, and the coachman always made it a rule to stop on the summit in order to let the horses breathe a little.

"The descent was very steep, as you know, and while they were stopping the guard used to get down from his seat and secure one of the hind wheels.

"All this the Flying Highwayman knew very well, so on the night I mention he stopped his horse at a convenient spot and waited.

"It was dark, and there was a deep shadow cast by the embankment on each side of the road, so that he was able to hide himself completely from sight.

"He heard the coach come rolling on, and prepared himself accordingly.

"As he fully expected, it stopped at the accustomed place.

"This was the opportunity he sought for. Uttering a loud cry and discharging a pistol, he rode out. He pretended that he had a great many men concealed among the bushes on each side of the road, for he called out to them to fire the moment any of his commands were disobeyed.

"He ordered the coachman to stop, and the man, fully believing that there were several men with their guns pointed at him, shrank down on the seat and never offered to stir.

"The guard, who was just putting the chain round the spoke of the wheel, crept under the coach and laid flat on his back.

"'Beware,' said the Flying Highwayman to those passengers on the roof, 'if any of you move or attempt anything against me, my men will fire a volley that will sweep you all off like so many sparrows!'

"This was a terrible threat, and all the passengers were much intimidated by it.

"Having thus completed his preparations, he rode up to the door of the coach, and, placing the barrel of a pistol on the ledge of the window, he commanded all to deliver their wealth upon pain of death.

"It was very dark inside the coach, and the highwayman could not see very well who was in it, or what they were about.

"Suddenly, however, he fel himself grasped tightly by the arms by two men, then one who was seated on the roof had the courage to disregard the threat of the men in ambush, and very dexterously slipped down and alighted on the highwayman's steed.

"He flung his arms tightly around him, and then he cried out:

"'Hold the horse—hold the horse! I've got him at last! Hurrah—hurrah!'

"The horse was seized, and more persons came to the assistance of those who had captured the highwayman.

"One of the lamps was taken down from the front of the stage-coach, and held in such a manner that it illuminated with tolerable distinctness the whole of the strange scene.

"The Flying Highwayman was in the first instance so taken by surprise that he could offer no resistance, and when he recovered himself he was too late.

"He struggled most furiously with his captors, and they had great difficulty in retaining their grasp upon him, but they held on like grim death, and after some more struggling the highwayman finally gave in.

"You may guess, perhaps, what was the meaning of all this. The police officers had set the tale afloat about the rich man making a journey.

"It was hinted at and told obscurely at first, but it soon spread from one mouth to another, and they calculated that it would finally reach the ears of the Flying Highwayman himself.

"You see it did so.

"On the night that they had mentioned, the officers entered the stage-coach like ordinary passengers. They sat down on the seats and waited impatiently for the attack of the highwayman to be made.

"I heard them say that they felt somewhat alarmed when they heard the highwayman call out as if addressing others who were concealed by the bushes, but they quickly discovered that this was a mere trick.

"It was a very ingenious stratagem, was it not, gentlemen? The Flying Highwayman was quite taken in by it.

"The officers of course exulted greatly.

"They bound their prisoner securely, and carried him to London.

"Well, after that, his career was short. He was brought up before the magistrate one day, had his trial two days afterwards, was found guilty, and had sentence pronounced upon him, and on the Monday morning was executed at Tyburn.

"After that his body was cut down and brought to the place where he had committed his last robbery.

"Here a gibbet—and a very strong one, too—was erected, the dead body was placed in that singular-looking iron cage, which of course you have all seen, and there he has remained ever since, a terror and a warning to all others who pass by.

"There is not much left of him now except bones, and as they are contained in the iron frame-work, they will remain for many a year to come, no doubt."

CHAPTER DCCLIX.

CLAUDE DUVAL FINDS HIMSELF IN A SITUATION OF EXTREME PERIL.

Claude Duval shuddered, for the landlord's words brought vividly back to his recollection the frightful sight that he had seen, and which so terrified his horse.

The movement was not noticed by any of the guests, and to recover his composure, he cried:

"More punch, landlord—more punch; it's a gloomy tale you've been telling us—enough to chill one's blood. Bring in more punch!"

This order was obeyed, and for some time the conversation turned upon subjects to which the landlord's narrative gave rise.

In the interest that had been felt ever since the Flying Highwayman had been mentioned, all forgot the traveller who had left the room ostensibly with the view of looking after his horse before retiring to rest.

It was strange he had not returned in order to bid the company good night, yet he might have retired without doing so.

Whether or not, no one bestowed a thought upon him—his existence was totally forgotten.

By this time the storm had almost passed over.

The rain was still falling, but only slowly, giving every indication of ceasing in the course of a few moments.

Perceiving this, Claude rose.

He did not feel altogether easy in his mind.

There was a slight degree of nervousness perceptible in his manner, as he said.

"I must leave you now, gentlemen all, to continue my journey; the storm is over and time is precious."

"Will you not stay all night?" said the landlord.

"No, no—that is impossible; I have a particular appointment that I should not like to break, and yet I fear I have almost stayed too long. However, my horse must make up for that."

"He has been well attended to, I'll warrant," said the landlord. "I have one of the best ostlers in the county, and he's as faithful as any human being can be."

"I'll reward him for his trouble," said Claude. "No doubt he has attended to my horse, so once more, good night, gentlemen."

Claude was just about to leave the room, when suddenly the outer door of the inn was burst open with a tremendous crash.

"Into the room," said a voice—"into the room! Be quick, and you will have him before he knows what's the matter. I saw him through the window sitting in front of the fire where I left him!"

There was a rapid rush of feet, and Claude perceived a small body of police officers, who looked as though they belonged to some country town.

They were not Bow Street officers, he was certain.

For a second Claude was uncertain what to do.

It might be that the story he had heard unnerved him somewhat.

The voice which had spoken, however, he recognised as being that of the man who had left the room on the pretext of looking after his steed.

This at once accounted for the presence of the officers, and made all clear to the highwayman.

This man had recognised Claude, and as soon as he could leave the room without exciting suspicion he had done so.

Then, greatly to the ostler's surprise, he mounted his horse and rode off.

His destination was a small town about five miles off, and where he knew constables were to be found.

He made a tremendous uproar at the station, and in a breathless, excited way, communicated the astounding intelligence that Claude Duval was at that moment seated quietly in a roadside inn.

The officers at first refused to believe him; but as he persisted in his story they at last consented to accompany him.

They had approached the house as noiselessly and carefully as they could.

The traveller had gone first as a kind of spy.

He peeped through the window, and there caught sight of Claude Duval sitting just in the same position he was when he left him.

"Now," he cried to the officers, "the front door is only on the latch—open it, and rush in as rapidly as you can! The door of the room where he is is the first on your left hand—you cannot fail to secure him!"

So the officers thought, especially as they numbered six altogether.

Claude comprehended the extent of his danger in an instant.

Then he recollected with particular distinctness the account the landlord had given him of the Flying Highwayman, and the means by which he had escaped from the police officers on one occasion.

That means he resolved to try himself.

Closing the door rapidly, he, to the great astonishment of the guests assembled, sprang on to the table close under the window, and sprang through the casement with the agility of a harlequin.

He disappeared just as the police officers opened the door and entered the room.

The confusion was so great that at first they could scarcely comprehend what had happened.

As soon as they learned beyond a doubt that the man they wanted had jumped through the window, they hastened off down the passage and out of the back door into the yard.

Claude, in taking his leap, had as well as he was able pulled his felt hat as low as he could over his face, so as to protect it from injury.

The window was one of those formed by numerous small diamond panes set in lead.

A casement of this description would offer scarce any resistance to the passage of a heavy body through it.

Claude fell on his hands and knees in the yard.

He was bruised and hurt severely; but he had no time to think of personal injuries.

He sprang to his feet, and ran to the door of the stable.

There, and there only, was his hope of escape.

Luckily, the door opened to his touch, and he found himself face to face with the ostler, who stared at him in astonishment.

He rubbed his eyes furiously, for he had been awoke out of a sound sleep by the crashing of glass.

Claude Duval was ready to despair.

A lantern was burning in the stable, and by the aid of that he saw his horse.

But, contrary to his instructions, he saw that the saddle and bridle had been removed.

To replace these articles before the officers entered the stable would be impossible.

What, then, was he to do?

How could he contend with such a large body of his foes? for he fully calculated that the officers would be reinforced by the people who had been sitting in the kitchen drinking punch at his expense.

His only hope lay with the ostler, and that hope was so frail a one as scarcely to be worthy of being called a hope at all.

Yet he clutched at it as drowning men will clutch at a straw, as being the only tangible thing to seize hold of, and be saved from destruction.

He recollected, too, what the landlord had said about the ostler's faithfulness.

"Hide me!" he cried, excitedly, as he closed the door of the stable, and placed his back against it—"hide me!—conceal me somewhere!"

"Hide you?"

"Yes, the officers are after me—they will be here in another second! No matter what reward they offer you to give me up, refuse to do so, and I will give you double the amount!"

The ostler rubbed his eyes again.

He was bewildered.

"Do you hear?" said Claude. "Hide me somewhere! Another moment, and it will be too late! Hark, the officers are coming now!"

"How can I hide you?"

"Will you do it?" asked Claude—"will you promise to be faithful—not to betray me? If you will, you shall name your own reward!"

"It's a bargain—I've passed my word! But now, where to hide you I don't know."

"I will show you," said Claude.

He could hear the trampling of the officers as they crossed the yard.

There was a wooden bar he had not previously seen, that was standing against the wall.

He comprehended its use instantly.

Placing it in the staples provided for it, he secured the door by its means.

"Now," he said, "if you will only hide me in some place or other and tell the officers that you have not seen me—that I have not entered the stable—all will be well."

"But what will they think of finding the door fastened?"

"Tell them," said Claude, reflectively—"say that you were asleep."

"All right, I'll do it now."

The light in the stable was dim indeed, but by the aid of it, Claude was looking around him on all sides for some hiding-place.

He saw that under each manger was a small heap of straw.

He thought he might hide himself here, and cover himself over with the straw.

He shrank from adopting such a very poor and easily-discovered hiding-place, yet there was no other.

His hesitation was put a stop to by the officers knocking at the door.

He explained his intention to the ostler, who slapped his thigh with exultation.

"I have it," he said—"I have it! I'll put you safe enough, I'll warrant! There's a horse here—the most

vicious brute that ever was known—but he doesn't mind me—I can do what I like with him; I'll put you under that manger, and cover you over with straw."

"Come on then—quick!"

'Be careful," said the ostler. "Let me go first, for he kicks furiously!"

It was in truth a vicious-looking creature that the ostler alluded to.

It put down its ears, and looked round as though it would afford it very great pleasure to have inflicted a very serious injury on some one

But seeing the ostler its behaviour altered.

From constant companionship, this man had obtained complete mastery over it, which was more than anyone else ever had.

He walked up to it, and, seizing hold of the halter, patted it on the neck.

"Now," he said, addressing Claude, "be quick!"

Claude did not need telling.

He pulled out the straw, and crept under the manger with amazing rapidity.

The ostler covered him up again, and certainly no one could have told, by outward inspection that anyone was concealed there.

All this that we have been compelled to describe at great length, took place with a rapidity truly marvellous.

But by this time the knocking at the door had grown very loud.

"Who's there?" growled the ostler, going towards it.

"Open—open!" said a voice—"open quickly!"

"All right," he replied, and as he spoke he removed the bar.

"Seize that man," said a voice—"keep him fast prisoner!"

The ostler was instantly seized by a couple of police officers.

He looked around him in great amazement.

"What be the matter?" he said—"what is it? What have I done?"

"Why didn't you open the door when we knocked?"

"I did."

"But when we knocked the first time?"

"I was asleep up in the loft, and as soon as I could I slipped on my things and came down."

The ostler was only partially dressed, so that his appearance agreed with what he said.

"It's all right," said the landlord—"you can trust him."

CHAPTER DCCLX.

THE OFFICERS ARE VERY NEAR DISCOVERING CLAUDE'S HIDING-PLACE.

THE officers looked at one another doubtfully and suspiciously.

Then the one in command, turning to the ostler, said:

"Do you mean to say that you have been asleep in the loft till now?"

"Yes, I do."

"And when you went up in the loft did you fasten the door?"

"I did—I put the bar across it."

"And how long ago is it since you went up to keep?"

"Oh, a goodish bit now; perhaps an hour, perhaps two—I don't know exactly But what have I done?—why am I made prisoner?"

"Release him," said the one in command; "but just keep an eye on his movements."

"It is a most singular thing," said one. "I could have sworn that he would have run to the stable the first thing; but he doesn't appear to have done so."

"You are right; and yet, where can he have gone?"

"That's the mystery. Let us look again."

The officers took down the lantern that was hanging in the stable, and went out into the yard again.

There was the broken window; but as the yard was paved all over with stones, they could not see where the highwayman fell, nor could they track him by his footsteps.

"He must be hiding somewhere close at hand—that's the fact o' the matter. Look all about, my lads—he can't be far off"

"Where's his horse?" said another voice—"where's his horse?"

"In the stable, I suppose; let's go and look."

To the stable they went accordingly.

The traveller who had been the means of creating all this disturbance went with them.

He was frantic almost to think that he should have missed the reward by such a hair's-breadth.

"There's his horse!" he cried, pointing it out—"there it is."

"How do you know that?"

"Why, I asked the ostler when I came out to get my horse to ride off for you. I saw that Claude Duval's had got the saddle and bridle on, and I asked the ostler what was the meaning of it."

"Yes, you did," said the ostler, "and I told you that I had been ordered not to take it off, but only to loosen the girths."

"And what did I say then?"

"Why, you told me as how the gentleman had altered his mind, and was going to stay all night, so I was to take the saddle and bridle off, and make the horse as comfortable as I could; that was why I went off to sleep, or else I should have been sitting up waiting."

This was true enough.

The traveller had given these instructions to the ostler because he thought by so doing he should be making sure of his prey.

All looked with great curiosity and interest at Claude's steed.

"I don't believe he's gone in the stable," said the chief officer; "so now, my lads, let us have a good look all round about; if we persevere, we shall find him."

The disappearance of Claude was indeed most perplexing to these officers.

Finding things as they did, however, it is only reasonable that they should suppose Claude had gone to the stable door, and finding himself unable to open it, had rushed off and secreted himself somewhere close at hand.

A very rigid search was made, but, of course, without any result, for all the time Claude Duval was lying in anything but a comfortable condition underneath the manger.

He was watching anxiously for some opportunity to escape unperceived.

But no such opportunity presented itself.

To have left without his horse would have been madness.

The officers, believing that they must at last meet with success, kept up the search with very great vigour, nor did they cease their exertions until daylight.

By that time they had searched all round the inn for a considerable distance, and had not met with the slightest trace that would guide them to a discovery.

"This passes my comprehension," said the chief officer—"how he can have got away I can't make out. I do believe that now, after all, he's only hiding somewhere about the premises. We'll have another good look, my lads, before we give up."

Some thought he might possibly have concealed himself in the yard, and then while they were in the stable, have entered the house.

There was a slight possibility of this, and therefore the officers searched the house from its roof to its foundation, but no signs of the highwayman could be seen.

All the out-buildings attached to the premises were also searched, and at last they came back to the stable.

This they had not searched—indeed, after what had been said, it appeared ridiculous to do so.

But, after a brief hesitation, the chief officer said:

"We may as well make a complete search, and then we can say so; it often happens when people are hidden that we find them in the place where we least thought of looking."

"But," said the landlord, "if the ostler fastened the door, and then went up to bed and did not open it again until he let you in, how can he be in the stable?"

"I don't know; but at any rate, we'll look."

"Oh, certainly!" said the landlord; "and, as you say, there will be a satisfaction in knowing that you have not

left any place unsearched, though there's a loft upstairs, and if he's got into that you'll have a rare job to find him, for it's stacked full of hay and straw."

"We shan't spare our trouble," said the officer; "if we can only find him the reward will pay us well!"

"Of course we all go shares?"

"Oh yes—equal shares—everyone alike, and the 5 shall all have a tidy sum apiece."

The officer directed that the loft should be searched first.

This took a long time, and they descended into the stable baffled and disappointed.

The reason why the loft had been chosen first was because it was thought it would be the most likely place of concealment.

As for the stable, there seemed no chance of hiding in that at all.

All the stalls, except one, were occupied by horses.

"There seems a good deal of litter in some of these stalls," said the chief officer.

"Yes," was the ostler's reply, "I like to make a good bed for the horses, I do—there's nothing like it."

"He may be concealed among the straw!" cried one, venturing the suggestion as a kind of forlorn hope.

"He might, certainly, though it is not very likely. We'll look and see."

The officer took his sword, and went into the first stall.

He poked about with it in all directions, and pretty soon satisfied himself that no one was there.

He entered another, and another, with the like result.

Then he came to the one where Claude was really concealed.

As he approached this horse, the officer noted its vicious look, and the landlord cried out, hastily:

"Take care—take care! Don't go near that brute—he's dangerous to approach!"

The officer thought so too, and retreated several steps.

As if to show that the warning was not in vain, the vicious horse planted his fore feet on the ground, and kicked out furiously with his hind legs."

"That's his playful way," said the ostler, with a grin—"that's what they call horse play! Rather rough, isn't it?"

"Curse the animal!" said the chief officer. "If I'd have taken another step forward he would have kicked my brains out!"

"Beyond a doubt he would."

"Why, how on earth can you keep such a wretch in your stable?"

"Well, you see, every horse has his fault, and that's his. If it wasn't for his viciousness, he'd be one of the best horses in the kingdom, and worth any amount of money; he can trot two-and-twenty miles in an hour with ease."

"Oh, gammon!" said the chief officer—"you mustn't expect me to believe that!"

"You can believe it or not—just as you think proper," replied the landlord. "You see what his temper is like—it's rather ugly, so I advise you to keep a respectful distance."

For a wonder, this piece of good advice was followed.

After the example he had had of the animal's behaviour, the chief officer did not feel inclined to peril life and limb by approaching it again.

But he searched all the other stalls in the stable, and satisfied himself that no one was hiding among the straw in them.

He went as close as he dared to the vicious horse, and looked in that stall as well.

Everything appeared just as it should do.

"I'll be d—d," he said, "if this is not the greatest mystery that ever I came across in the whole of my experience! Where on earth can he have gone to?"

"Not into the stable, certainly," said one.

"No; we might have known that from the first; however, we've searched it, and if we are asked, we shall be able to say so."

"It strikes me," said the landlord, "that as so long a time has elapsed, he has got clear off."

The officers did not like to admit this, and yet they could not help feeling that it was highly probable.

It was broad daylight now, therefore it became much easier to search than it had been.

They went further off, but, as we need hardly say, with no better success than before.

In spite of all this, however, the conviction was strong upon them that the highwayman must be hiding in some place close at hand, and therefore they lingered about the public-house during the entire day.

What were Claude's feelings during all these hours we cannot pretend to describe.

His hiding-place was miserable enough, but yet he was to some extent, reconciled to it, for it had proved a good one, and had saved him.

But as he lay in an uncomfortable position under the manger, he continued to mutter all manner of evil things about the police officers who were the means of keeping him in such undesirable quarters.

CHAPTER DCCLXI.

THE POLICE OFFICERS ARE JUST A LITTLE TOO CLEVER IN THEIR ARRANGEMENTS.

More than once while the officers were searching the stable, Claude gave himself up for lost, and it is certain that but for the viciousness of the horse he would have been discovered and dragged ignominiously forth.

But after the little exhibition of the animal's behaviour, the officers all kept, as the landlord had advised them, at a respectful distance.

Much consultation took place between them as to the course of action that they should adopt.

This discussion was very dry work, so the landlord of the inn profited considerably by it.

They were in doubt as to whether they should seize the highwayman's horse and make that their prize, or linger about the place on the watch, in order to see whether Claude would return and endeavour to repossess himself of the animal.

Some were inclined to take the horse and be off without more delay, but the majority was inclined to watch a little while longer, and see what course events would take.

"I should not wonder if he is not lurking about somewhere close at hand. He must know that he stands a poor chance without his horse, and it is possible he will come to-night and try and take it."

"Then we will be ready for him," said one. "We will sit down in the stable and keep a strict watch."

"No, no," said the chief officer—"that won't do at all,—I have a much better scheme in my head."

The men crowded about him, anxious to know what this scheme was.

"We will get our horses," he said, "and ride off—that is, we will pretend to do so. We will make a great fuss about departing, so that it should really seem as if we did not intend to come back again, but when we have got a little way we will turn back, and try to enter the inn unperceived."

The men were all highly delighted with this proposition.

They believed that its results would be thoroughly successful.

A highwayman without a horse they knew could do little, and as horses were not easily obtained, doubtless an effort would be made to recover possession of the one he had lost.

It was just about dusk when the officers had all their horses brought round to the front of the inn, and there they kept them waiting for some time.

At last they emerged and mounted, shouted out good-bye to the landlord as loud as they could bawl, and then started off in the direction of London at a sharp trot.

The ostler watched them until they began the ascent of the hill, and then he quietly and meditatively made his way back to the stable.

He carefully looked all round the yard, and all about the stable itself, and up in the loft, but finding that no one was lurking near, he took a currycomb and began to groom the vicious horse in an indefatigable manner.

While so occupied, it was an easy matter to keep up a conversation with Claude.

"All right!" the ostler cried, in a low voice. "You may speak now, but not loud—just so that I can hear you—that will do."

"But they have gone, haven't they?" said Claude, without uncovering himself at all.

"Yes, they have gone—that's true enough," replied the ostler; "but it's only a make-believe—a sham. They intend turning back in a little while, and then they will keep a very close watch, for they fancy you will come back for your horse."

"What's to be done?" said Claude.

"I don't know," replied the ostler—"leastways, I should recommend you to cut and run for it at once."

"I have a good mind to do so; but can I get away unperceived?"

"We must try. Of course I don't dispute but what you might be under the manger for a week without anyone being the wiser; but then, the officers, if they find you don't make your appearance, will go off and take your horse with them."

"And that won't do," said Claude—"he's too good a one to be spared."

"You are right enough there," said the ostler—"he's a real good 'un. I've paid great attention to him, and when he gets outside I know he'll go like the wind."

"But," said Claude, "if I ride away now and manage to get off unperceived, how shall you fare? The officers will naturally want to know what has become of my horse, and then what excuse shall you make to them?"

"Well, I haven't thought of that, to tell the truth," said the ostler, rubbing his head with a perplexed air; "but I should think that's a difficulty that might be got over."

"How long do you think those officers will be away?"

"Not long. I know for certain they will only go just far enough to make it appear as though they had really left the neighbourhood;—then they will come back quietly."

Claude remained for some time in thought.

So far as his own safety was concerned, he was certainly right enough.

He could have mounted his horse and galloped off, and bade defiance to the officers.

But in doing this he would bring the ostler, who had befriended him, into very serious danger—in fact, the man would be liable to transportation.

Claude was too generous to think of sacrificing one who had done him such a good turn, and for this reason he remained pondering over his position.

"I tell you what it is," said the ostler, after a pause—"if you don't start off now, you'll have no chance—you will certainly lose your horse, if no more; and then, you might be found out, although you have escaped so well at present."

"Yes, and I am tired of being here," said Claude, "and that's the truth. I have friends, too, who will be full of anxiety on my account."

"Well, look here," said the ostler—"you ride off and make sure of your own safety, and when the officers come back and ask me where your horse is, I will declare that he has run out of the stable, and that I could not overtake him."

"But I should think you will have great difficulty in making the officers believe that."

"I don't know," was the answer. "I rather think I can manage it. I will break the rope of the halter, and swear the horse did it, and I will throw the blame on to their shoulders for not having left one of the officers behind to be on the look-out while they went away."

"And have they not done so?"

"No, they have not—in their very great cleverness they overlooked it."

"Well, it's my only chance," said Claude. "You didn't promise to stay in the stable, or to take any particular charge of my horse, did you?"

"No—I never said a word about it.

"Well, then, if you were to go and ask the landlord if he would allow you to go somewhere—make some excuse—why, you could be out of the way when the officers return."

"I've got it at last!" cried the ostler. "I know how it can be managed beautifully!"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, quite sure."

"Then I will get up at once and saddle my horse."

"Wait a moment. I will just have a look outside, and if there's no one about I will call you. Between the two of us we can have him ready in a very few moments."

"Of course we can."

The ostler went to the door and looked out.

It was now nearly dark, and all objects began to look confused and indistinct.

"All right!" he said, returning—"the coast is clear. But wait a moment—I must stand by the horse while you come out."

This was done, and Claude reached the side of his own steed in safety.

"Now," he cried, patting the creature upon the neck, "tell me what this plan is."

"Why, you must know the governor has got a particular job that he wants doing down in the cellar. He's talked about it a great many times, but I've shirked it, making some excuse or other all the time. Now, I'll go to him and ask whether I shall make a commencement. I know he will say yes, for he is anxious that it should be done."

"Good—good—nothing could be better!" said Claude; "and when the officers come, of course he will say you are down in the cellar, and that you have been there for some time."

"Exactly; and when I come up, I will pretend to be as much surprised and astonished to find the horse gone as they are."

"Well, now," said Claude, "to show you that I was in earnest about the reward, take this—you will find in it money enough to enable you to set up a public-house of your own."

While speaking, he handed the ostler the bag of gold that he had taken on the preceding night.

It was very weighty, and contained a very large sum—so much that the ostler rather shrank from receiving it.

But Claude insisted.

"Now," he said, "be careful with this wealth—hide it somewhere for a time—don't let anyone know you have it; and when the opportunity comes, you can turn it to the best advantage you are able."

"Many thanks, sir! This will be the best bit of work that I have done for a very long time. Never you mind me now. I only hope you will get off safe."

"Just have a look round again," said Claude, "and see if the coast is clear."

The ostler went out into the yard, and presently returned, whistling.

"It's all right," he said—"all you've got to do is to be quiet."

"I know; but I shall wait here until you have gone into the house, and when I think you have had time enough to get down into the cellar, why, I'll ride away."

This being agreed to, the ostler again expressed his thanks for his good fortune, and left the stable.

"I shall hide this in the cellar," he said, as he departed, and alluding to the bag of gold.

Claude waited a few moments in great anxiety and suspense, but finding all was quiet, he ventured to lead his horse out into the yard.

It was impossible to prevent a slight noise, but yet it was questionable whether it would attract the attention of anyone in the inn.

Then suddenly springing on the creature's back, he touched it lightly with the spur, and then off they went at a hard gallop, the sharp clatter of the horse's hoofs ringing out with extreme distinctness on the silent air.

He looked behind him once or twice, until the inn was no longer in view, but on neither occasion did he see anything of the police officers, and so he made his way to his destination at a more leisurely rate.

CHAPTER DCCLXII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS FIND THAT THEIR PLAN DOES NOT TURN OUT AS THEY HAD ANTICIPATED.

THE police officers persuaded the traveller who had given the information to accompany them in riding away, and accordingly he had done so.

Some debate took place as to how far they should go; but finally they paused just beyond the gibbet where the remains of the Flying Highwayman were swaying to and fro.

Here they paused for a little while, and had some

further discussion with each other, and then, turning back, rode gently and quietly towards the inn.

They pulled up at some distance from the building.

Leaving their horses in charge of one of their number, the rest on foot crept stealthily to the inn.

They entered by the front door one after the other, and as soon as they had all assembled inside they asked anxiously whether any alarm had been given, or whether any unusual circumstance had taken place.

"No—nothing at all," said the landlord—"there hasn't been a mouse stirring since you left."

"All right," said the chief officer. "We will now go into the stable, and sit down, and watch till he comes."

"Would you like anything to drink, gentlemen?" said the landlord. "You will find it lonely sitting there."

"Yes, bring us some of your home-brewed; and we shall be glad of your company as well. If we had a few chairs, we could make ourselves comfortable enough, I'm sure."

"We could," said the landlord. "I'll call the ostler, and he shall do what you require. He's down in the cellar now at work for me."

The door at the top of the cellar steps was situated in the room where this conversation took place.

The landlord opened it, and bawled out aloud that the ostler was wanted.

"Coming, master," he said—"coming in a minute."

The sound of heavy blows being struck then reached all their ears, and directly afterwards the ostler appeared at the head of the cellar steps carrying a candle in his hand.

He was covered all over with sawdust and cobwebs, and had the appearance of having been very industrious indeed.

The fact was, however, that he had availed himself of the opportunity he had to conceal his bag of gold in the cellar.

"Here I be, master," he said. "What do you want?"

"Why, these gentlemen are going to sit out in the stable to-night, and watch for the highwayman coming back. You carry out some chairs, and then come back for the ale."

Not a muscle of the ostler's face quivered.

"All right, master," he said; "I will start at once."

He picked up two chairs while he spoke, and the chief officer said:

"We may as well make ourselves useful, and carry chairs, for aught I see. Come along."

He picked one up as he spoke, and so did the rest.

Out of the room they went, down the passage, and across the yard, looking a very singular procession indeed.

The ostler led the way.

No sooner did he enter the stable, however, than he set up a loud shout and dropped the chairs he was carrying.

The officers were much startled, and pressed forward to know what was the matter.

"Oh—oh!" he cried—"oh, murder—murder! Would anyone have thought of such a thing? Oh, murder!"

"What's the matter?" said the chief officer, who was next to him, and whom he had dexterously prevented from entering the stable by walking backwards and treading on his toes, so that he was forced to retreat.

"The matter?" said the ostler. "Why, the horse has gone!"

"Gone?" cried the officers in chorus, and then, flinging down their chairs, they rushed into the stable in a body.

The lantern that was burning showed them clearly enough that the stall in which Claude Duval's horse had been standing was vacant. Rage and disappointment for a moment or two made them immovable and dumb. At last, with a shrieking howl, the chief officer seized hold of the ostler.

"You villain!" he cried—"you wretch! But you shall suffer for this!"

"Suffer for what?" asked the ostler, struggling furiously to get free.

"Why, for what you have done! This is your work, it is plain enough to be seen!"

"My work?" said the ostler. "Well, I like that rather, I does! Why, you call master, and ax him—he'll tell you I've not been in the stable since you started."

The landlord, hearing the outcry, came running to the stable.

He was naturally very much surprised to find the highwayman's horse had gone, for he was quite in the dark as to all that had taken place.

"Here, master—master," cried the ostler, "just tell them, will you, what I've been doing. Have I been in the stable since they started?"

"I don't think you have," said the landlord; "you have been down in the cellar at work."

"Of course I have! I never knowed a bit about the hoss going at all till I came and seed the stall empty!"

"I don't believe you," said the chief officer; "and I shall keep you in custody!"

"But I can prove an *alibi*," said the ostler. "Master'll prove it; he knows I wasn't in the stable, so how could I have anything to do with it?"

"No, he was not in the stable—that's plain enough," said the landlord; "I'll answer for that! You know he was down in the cellar when you arrived."

"In course I was!"

The officer gradually relaxed his hold, and then turned round three times.

His next proceeding was to burst out into a torrent of oaths that were enough to have lifted the roof of the stable off.

"It's my own fault——" he began.

"I'm glad you know it," interrupted the ostler.

"I've been a d—d fool!" continued the officer, taking no notice of the interruption.

"Glad you think it as well as the rest!" said the ostler, again.

The officer half drew his cutlass, and looked very ferocious, and the ostler, dreading the consequences of what he had said, skipped nimbly behind the landlord.

"I might have known," he said, "how it would be! How was it none of you thought of stopping here and keeping watch while we went?"

"Well, you know I wanted to," said the traveller, who was more enraged than anybody else—"you know I wanted to stop, but you persuaded me to go with you."

"Well, and didn't I think it for the best?"

"Perhaps you did; but I'll tell you what I think of you—you are a lot of d—d blundering blockheads, and if I'd tried myself instead of riding five miles in the rain like a d—d fool, I should have been better off than I am now!"

The chief officer and the traveller soon got up to very high words, but one man a little more sensible than the rest, said:

"What's the use of squabbling like this? Hadn't we better ride off after him?"

"What's the good?" said the chief officer. "We may as well stop here!"

"Well, just as you like; but I can see pretty clear how things have been."

"Well, how? What's your opinion about it?"

"Why, I think there can only be one opinion, and that is that Claude Duval was hid somewhere close at hand, but in some place where we couldn't find him. He watched us off, and found that the ostler was not in the stable, and so saddled his horse, and rode quietly away, and I should not wonder if he is not half a dozen miles off by this time."

This was such a very probable supposition that all were at once struck by its truth.

It did not tend, however, to soothe the feelings of his companions in any way.

The traveller was loud in his abuse.

"I'll tell you what it is," said the chief officer, at length, "if you don't stop your jaw, I'll take you into custody on the charge of being an accomplice of Claude Duval's! And if I bring such a charge against you, you will have some difficulty in clearing yourself; so I should advise you to keep a still tongue in your head!"

"Me an accomplice?" said the traveller, furiously. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. I would advise you to be quiet—I won't stand any more of your jaw!"

The cursing, swearing, and wrangling continued for some time longer, to the infinite amusement and enjoyment of the ostler, who stood behind the landlord, drinking in every word.

At length the officers had a farewell glass, and, mount-



[DICK TURPIN'S MYSTERIOUS ADVENTURE WITH THE ECCENTRIC STRANGER.]

ing their steeds, rode off, leaving the traveller to continue his journey in a state of mind that may perhaps be imagined.

He had lost the whole of the day without receiving the least benefit in return for doing so.

In the meanwhile, Claude Duval made his way towards the Three Spiders.

He had been some time in doubt as to whether he should return direct, or whether he should seek out another adventure on his way.

He did not like to return empty-handed, for of course he had nothing, as what he had taken he had given to the ostler.

But when he remembered that an adventure might delay him for an uncertain length of time, he decided in his own mind that it would be better for him to return, not only on account of his own safety, but for the safety of his comrades.

Finding that he had not returned, they might jump to the conclusion that he had got into some serious danger, and perhaps set out in search of him.

They might even be rash enough to go as far as London, in order to make inquiries.

Of his absence during the day, they might not perhaps think much.

Knowing the instructions that had been given him about returning before daybreak, they might think that he had preferred to lie concealed somewhere when he found it impossible to get back by the appointed time.

But if they did not see him soon after darkness had set in, they would beyond doubt become greatly alarmed.

On his way, then, he was careful to avoid meeting with any person, and he turned neither to the right nor to the left.

The evening was quite young when he at length pulled up in front of the inn.

It was dark, and he was quite sure that he had not been followed or seen by any of his enemies.

His comrades, he discovered, were all growing very impatient concerning him, and they pressed around him, eagerly inquiring what had happened.

They were beyond measure glad to find that he was safe and unhurt, though of necessity he was much exhausted by all he had gone through.

But at the inn there was every comfort provided, and he sat down and made a hearty meal.

He then learned what had happened to his comrades during the preceding night, and when he had been told all his turn came to recite his adventures.

At the inn all had gone on well.

There had been not the least symptom of alarm or suspicion, consequently everyone was in excellent spirits.

Thanks to the rest and attention he had received, Sixteen-String Jack had recovered considerably from his wound.

He was much better than could possibly have been expected, judging from his condition when he arrived.

He was anxious once more to take his stand upon the road, but he had the prudence to listen to the advice of his comrades.

It was determined, after some hesitation, that they would all remain at the inn during that night.

It was already almost too late to start, and besides, the events that had already taken place were in a small degree calculated to excite a commotion.

CHAPTER DCCLXIII

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MAKES AN EXTRAORDINARY COMMUNICATION TO HIS COMRADES.

As the night grew more and more advanced, Sixteen-String Jack at frequent intervals glanced strangely and suspiciously about him.

They were all seated in a large room at the back of the inn.

The shutters of the windows were closed, and they were quite secure from interruption.

This made Jack's behaviour all the more extraordinary, and it was not long before it was noticed by his friends.

"What is it, Jack?" they asked, curiously. "Why do you look round you every now and then like that?"

"Who?—I?" said Jack, with a start.

"Yes, you—I have observed you several times," said Dick.

"It is nothing, then—nothing—nothing."

"You must not expect us to believe that, Jack. You have got something or other on your mind. Let us know what it is. Why keep it secret?"

"I don't know why, but I will tell you if you like."

"Yes, do so—do so."

"I shall only get laughed at for my pains, I know; and when I have told you, you will say that it is nothing."

"Well, let us hear it first, Jack, and then we can judge."

Again the highwayman gave that sudden look all round the room, and then he fixed his eyes upon the fire.

The strangeness of his demeanour produced a deep and immediate effect upon all.

There was not one whose imagination was not quickened into unusual activity, and they wondered what it was they were about to hear.

"I know you will laugh at me," said Jack. "I am quite prepared for it, so I will tell you in as few words as I can."

"Well, begin. You said that before, or something very like it."

"Well, you know the room in which I have slept is just over this. At night when I have been lying in my bed awake, and suffering great pain from my wound—when all around was perfectly and entirely silent, I have heard something that sounded like a long, deep-drawn breath."

"The wind," suggested Dick, quickly.

"No, it was not the wind," said Jack. "I thought it might be at first and so have said nothing, and endeavoured to pay no attention to it. The second time, however, the night was calm and still—there was no wind whatever, and yet I heard the long-drawn breath or sigh even plainer than I had the night before—in fact, it was no longer possible to mistake its character. I can imitate it, and then you can tell me whether you think the wind would produce such a sound."

Jack paused, and drew in his breath until his lungs were fully expanded, then he slowly exhaled it.

"There," he said—"that was the sound, as nearly as I can imitate it, but it was more deep-drawn, and lasted longer."

A momentary silence followed, during which they all looked curiously and inquiringly into each other's faces.

Maud and Ellen were both very pale, and even Dick himself felt his heart flutter strangely, for there was great impressiveness in the manner in which Jack spoke.

"But," said Tom King, "it seems to me that the wind could easily produce such a sound as that, or even a stranger one. Do you remember, Dick, when we were at Durley Chine what a strange noise we heard there, and how we discovered that it was caused by the wind alone?"

"I do," said Dick—"I perfectly recollect, and such must be the explanation of the sound Jack has heard."

"It may be so," was the reply. "I confess I thought so myself, and therefore said nothing. I wondered whether the sound could be produced by any animal or living creature, and I searched narrowly all round the room and looked outside the window, in order to ascertain."

"And did you find anything?"

"Nothing that explained it. The mystery left in greater darkness than before."

"And is that why you glanced around you so apprehensively? Did you expect to hear the sound again?"

"Partly so, but I have not told you all."

"What else is there, then?"

"Why, the part I have now to relate is that which you will not believe. You will say that I have been led away by my fancy—you will say that my brain is in a disordered state, in consequence of the state of weakness I am in from having lost so much blood."

"Well—well, what is it, Jack?"

"Why, last night, as you were all out, I sat here by the fireside for some time. Tom Davis stayed with me for awhile, and then he left the room. I was alone. I was scarcely conscious, however, for I must have dropped off into a kind of doze. Suddenly something awoke me—what I know not, but all at once I found myself with my eyes open, and in full possession of my faculties. While wondering as to the cause, I again heard the sigh—for so I must call it for want of a better word—that I had heard in the room above. It seemed to come from somewhere near my side, and I looked round. I saw nothing, however.

"The room was dark, for there was no light in it save that which came from the fire, and this was dim and uncertain; but I stirred the embers together, and a bright blaze shot up that revealed all but the distant corners.

"I leaned back again in my chair, but no sooner had I done so than I was startled by the sigh again. I turned quickly in the direction from which the sound came, and then I saw upon the wall a dim, obscure shadow. At first the outlines of it were so blurred and indistinct that I could make nothing of it; but after gazing for a moment I saw that the shadow strongly resembled that which would be cast by a human form. This amazed me not a little, as you may imagine, and I started up, and gazed scrutinisingly around; but I could see nothing by which the shadow could have been cast.

"Clearer and clearer it became; so much so that I could tell it was the shadow of a female—a tall, graceful figure, with flowing robes. I could even see the features, and in her arms the shadow appeared to be holding some bulky object.

"My impression was that some article of furniture in the room must have been in such a position that the fire-light cast a peculiar, distorted shadow of it on the wall, and that my heated fancy had made it resemble that of a female.

"But while I made this reflection, I heard the sigh again. The strange feeling of depression that had come over me now vanished. I resolved to ascertain what was the meaning of all this, and to solve the mystery. Accordingly I started forward with the intention of going close up to the wall, but before I could reach it I heard the sigh again, and I assure you, my friends, I do believe that it came from the shadow, and nowhere else."

"Nonsense—nonsense!" said Dick—"you must have been delirious!"

"No," said Jack, "I was not. That sigh arrested my steps, and then I saw the shadow move slowly and gently along the wall until it came to a dark corner—then I saw it no more."

Incredible as this narrative may have appeared, all those who heard it shivered slightly, and could not avoid casting hasty glances around them, as though they half expected to see the shadow of which Jack spoke.

There was a silence for several moments, and it might have continued longer had not Jack himself broke it.

"That was what I was looking for," he said—"that was why I glanced around—I wondered whether we should see the shadow again to-night. Whether we do or not, it was no fancy—no delusion upon my part—it was no exaggerated shadow of some object in the room, for how was it that it disappeared? I sat down in the chair again and looked at the wall steadfastly, but the shadow was no longer there."

"It is a most extraordinary tale," said Dick, "and, in spite of all you say, I am inclined to believe that you have fancied all this; your mind must, of course, be in a strange, diseased state in consequence of your wound, and that's how it is you have imagined you have seen all this."

Jack shook his head.

"I don't expect to gain belief," he said. "I intended to keep the matter a secret in my own breast and say nothing about it until I had made some further discovery; now, however, you know all, perhaps it will be for the best that you do.'

"It's very strange,' said Tom, "I know that you are the last to allow your fancy to mislead you, yet you must not forget that you are no longer in your usual health."

"I know that, and I admit it makes a great difference. If you think it unworthy of more thought let us dismiss the subject altogether, and talk about something else. If I glance around me again you will know what is the reason."

"But I should like to have it cleared up if possible," said Dick; "anything of this kind is disagreeable in the extreme."

"I know it is, and I am quite as anxious as you are that every pains should be taken to clear up the mystery."

"If we could only hear that sound now," said Claude Duval—"if we could all hear it, then there would be no mistake upon the point—perhaps we should be able to come to a correct conclusion respecting it."

"The worst of it is," said Tom King, "that these sounds are never heard except by one person——"

"Hush!" said Sixteen-String Jack—"stop! I heard it then!"

There was an instantaneous silence.

All was still, however, and the only sound that was audible was the monotonous ticking of a Dutch clock.

"Nonsense!" said Dick. "I am convinced now that it is a delusion of your senses! You say you heard it; but to your ears alone was it audible."

"Tom was speaking," said Sixteen-String Jack, "but I heard it for all that. Keep still for a few moments—let us all be silent; perchance it will come again."

Jack ceased speaking, and by common consent all maintained a profound silence.

Maud crept closer to Dick, and pressed his hand convulsively.

It was evident that she was greatly impressed by what she had heard.

So was Ellen.

Her face was very pale, and she clung to Tom as though she felt in need of a protector.

The others, with their sense of hearing stretched to its utmost extent, remained quite motionless.

In this manner, perhaps five minutes elapsed—it may have been more, but to those who were listening the interval seemed an hour.

Then, clearly, distinctly, and audibly, they heard a sound resembling in every respect a long, deep-drawn sigh—the same sound, beyond a doubt, that Sixteen-String Jack had described to them, and which he had imitated so well.

CHAPTER DCCLXIV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN ARE STARTLED BY THE REAPPEARANCE OF THE STRANGE SHADOW ON THE WALL.

For several moments a profound silence reigned—a silence that not one seemed capable of breaking.

At length, rousing himself suddenly, Sixteen-String Jack said:

"There, my comrades—you have heard it. Now tell me what you think."

These words seemed to have the effect of breaking the kind of spell that had come over all the rest.

Shaking off a certain mysterious, depressing influence which he could not help feeling, Dick Turpin answered:

"It is very strange—very strange, I admit; but yet such a thing as that can, I think, easily be accounted for by some natural or simple cause."

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"Have your own belief," he said. "I confess I feel in ordinary degree gratified."

"Gratified?—why?" asked Dick, in astonishment.

"Because now you can't say it was all fancy on my part, and that I imagined this sound. It is something real—something that has struck upon the senses of you all."

"Yes—that's true enough," said Dick; "for of course," he added, glancing around him, "all of you heard it as well as myself?"

"Yes—yes!" was the murmured reply, for, strangely enough, no one felt inclined to speak in a loud key.

"You have not seen the shadow," continued Jack. "Whether that will make itself manifest to you, I know not; but I saw it—surely saw it as I heard that sound."

"There is nothing visible now, is there?"

"Nothing."

"Where do you say you first saw this mysterious shadow, Jack?" asked Turpin.

"On yonder wall."

"Well, it's clear enough now."

"But wait a moment. I'll stir up the fire till it blazes brightly."

He did so, and the ruddy light that was produced illuminated the room tolerably well.

It cast strange, fantastic shadows here and there, but there was nothing resembling the figure Sixteen-String Jack had described.

Without exception, all glanced keenly around the room, and while they were thus engaged they were silent.

Then, as before, they heard the long, deep-breathing sound—this time, if possible, more distinctly than before.

"This is almost past belief!" said Dick, springing to his feet. "But, my friends, the mystery must be elucidated, or we shall always be in uneasiness and doubt."

"Sit down," said Jack—"sit down! If we are still, it may be we may see the shadow. I hope so, if only to convince you."

Dick Turpin sank down again upon his chair.

He was certainly not himself.

Either Sixteen-String Jack's narrative had strangely affected him, or else he was deeply influenced by something impalpable that hovered over him.

"Let me entreat you to be silent!" said Sixteen-String Jack. "Do not speak again. Turn your faces, all of you, to yonder wall, and watch it closely. If the shadow comes, we shall be able to note the precise moment and manner of its appearance."

Curiosity alone would have prompted them to adopt this course.

Even Maud and Ellen, although suffering greatly from a nameless terror, turned round and gazed with anxious eyes upon the wall.

How long they may have sat thus immovable and silent, not one could tell.

They seemed to fall into that dreamy, semi-conscious condition which is generally produced by concentrating the whole of one's faculties upon a single object.

Suddenly a kind of chill shudder seemed to sweep over all.

Again came the sigh, louder and more mournful than before, and this time most certainly a sigh such as might come from some heavily-laden and grief-stricken breast.

"It's there!" said Sixteen-String Jack, pointing to the wall. "Behold!"

All saw it—saw it clearly and plainly—dim, shadowy, half-defined at first, but gradually assuming a sharper and more distinct outline.

It seemed to come from the angle of the wall which was thrown into deep obscurity.

A mass of shadow seemed lying there, and from it this figure appeared to emerge, and while assuming this great distinctness of outline that we have mentioned, the shadow glided slowly, with a peculiar movement, in the direction of the door.

Coming at length to one part of the wall on which the fire shone with the greatest brightness, the shadow became entirely revealed.

Then they found that Sixteen-String Jack had described the extraordinary appearance rightly.

It was a tall, stately-looking form, and evidently that of a female.

There were the long, flowing robes of which Jack had spoken, and which could not be mistaken for anything else.

There were the same delicate, beautiful features and in its arms, and apparently pressed closely to its breast, was an indefinable something that could not be made out.

It might have been a bundle of some material—it might have been a small trunk or box, or, in fine, half a hundred things, but it was quite impossible to say what.

When near the centre of the wall—that is to say, about half-way between the corner from which it had emerged and the doorway—the figure ceased its odd, gliding movement, and remained perfectly stationary, as if to allow those who saw it to examine its appearance minutely.

Then, after a short pause, the room was filled with that deep, heavy sigh, and certainly the sound appeared to proceed from the direction of the shadow.

The movement recommenced, and this time it was more rapid than before.

At length the door was reached.

It was standing partly open, and through this space the shadow seemed to vanish.

Another sigh was heard as it disappeared.

While the shadow was visible, not one who beheld it could have moved hand or foot, even if their lives had depended upon their doing so; but as soon as ever the shadow was gone they recovered possession of their suspended faculties, and, as if actuated by one impulse, sprang simultaneously to their feet.

And there they paused, not making a step forward, but gazing with a strange, puzzled expression into each other's countenances.

As before, it was Sixteen-String Jack who first found his speech.

"Now, my friends," he said, "are you convinced?—are you satisfied? You saw there was the shadow there, and no object which could possibly have cast it. Then what can be the meaning of the figure that we saw? Where has it gone?"

These were unanswerable questions, and Dick said:

"Let us wait a moment, Jack, to know whether it really has gone or not, and whether we shall hear the sigh again."

They did listen, but vainly—a complete silence prevailed.

"This is something that we must speak of," said Dick—"something that requires our deepest consideration. Let us sit down."

It was easier, as they then felt, to obey any injunction than to adopt any independent course of action, so they all turned round and sank down into their seats.

Bold and daring as we know the four highwaymen to be, will it be wondered at when we say that now they were completely overcome?

Their hearts no longer continued their accustomed action, and the breath issued from their lips in short, irregular gasps.

"I regret to make the admission," said Dick, "but I must confess that what we have seen and heard to-night quite passes my comprehension. Had we only heard the sigh, I should have contended that the wind, forcing its way through some narrow place, must have produced the sound; but the shadow—the mysterious figure which we all saw—is something that cannot be explained by any natural cause."

"But what does it portend?" said Jack. "Although I have never before seen anything of a supernatural character, yet I have heard much, and especially that a visitation of this kind betokens evil to the one who witness it."

"But I, for one, am not inclined to adopt any such belief," said Tom King, "nor will I. It is true we stand in a perilous condition, yet not more dangerous than we have done for a long time past—in fact, I may say that now we are here we are much safer than we have ever been before."

"I am with you, Tom—I will not believe that the appearance of this shadow bodes any ill to us, and I am even loth to come to the conclusion that it is anything supernatural."

"But remember," said Maud, in a faint whisper—"remember what I—what you all heard in the deserted mansion."

"Yes," said Dick—"that added to what we have seen and heard to-night is almost enough to make people believe in supernatural visitations, but yet I will hold out until I am convinced beyond all possibility of doubt."

"But I have heard much in my lifetime about such things," said Tom Davis, speaking for the first time. "I could tell many mysterous stories—not certainly of things that I have been an eye-witness of myself, but which I have had from the lips of others."

"But in this case," said Dick, "what are we to do? Accepting for a moment the belief that it may be an apparition, it would certainly have some object in appearing to us; now, let me ask, what can that object be?"

"That's hard to say," said Tom Davis; "but I have always been told that the appearance of anything like this either foretokens some great misfortune that is to happen, or else that it is the unquiet spirit of some one who has left this world in some secret and terrible manner, or else some one who has died with a mystery or a secret locked up in his breast."

"Yes, Tom," replied Turpin, "you are right there—I have heard the self-same things myself, though I confess I have attached but slight importance to them; yet, if this really is an apparition we have seen, it must be from one of the three causes that you have mentioned."

"It seemed to me," said Claude Duval, "as though it glided out of the door, and then sighed, as if to entreat us to follow it. Let us get lights and go into the passage; perhaps it may present itself again."

This was a proposition from which they all shrank at first.

"This seems to have affected our spirits and our courage strangely," said Dick; "but come, let us have lights—we will try whether we can make anything further of it."

In a few moments lights were procured, and then, with fast-beating hearts and chilled blood, they crossed the room towards the doorway.

Maud was greatly terrified, and clung tightly to Dick's arm.

She tried to speak and to entreat him to forego this intention.

Claude, who was unencumbered by anything, and who had first proposed this course of action, considered it his duty and right to take the lead.

Accordingly, he flung open the door, and then stepped out into the passage beyond, where he paused.

The others all clustered closely round him in a dense throng.

Then they held up their lights, so that the beams should fall upon the walls.

For several moments they waited, looking with straining eyes around them on all sides.

But they saw nothing.

They listened for a repetition of the sigh.

But the sound no longer made itself heard.

They were reluctant to turn away, for now the mystery seemed deeper than ever.

But they were compelled to do so, for there was no farther knowledge to be gained by waiting there.

"Come," said Dick, "it is useless to linger here longer. There is no more to be seen. Come."

They all followed him into the kitchen.

CHAPTER DCCLXV

DICK TURPIN HAS A MOST SINGULAR AND MYSTERIOUS ADVENTURE ON THE HIGHWAY.

IT was long before our friends could make up their minds to retire to rest.

For a long time they sat round the fire, indulging in many speculations upon what they had seen.

In the end, however, they were no nearer coming to a conclusion than at first.

As the excitement under which they laboured slowly passed away, the fatigue that was the natural result of all they had gone through made itself manifest, and they at length retired.

The remainder of the night passed by in silence.

There were no more strange sounds heard—no more strange sights seen.

In the morning they were half inclined to laugh at their superstitious feelings of the previous night.

The corner from which the shadow had appeared to come, and the wall along which it had so slowly passed, were closely scrutinised, without, however, producing any result.

Nothing of an unusual or peculiar character could be detected during the day.

It of course happened that this was the chief subject of conversation.

It seemed to drive the remembrance of all other things from their minds.

"We are wrong to attach so much importance to something which probably arises from a simple cause," Dick Turpin said, at length, "and I am determined to take no further part in the discussion, for it will come to no good. I think the best thing to remove all these fancies from our minds will be an excursion on the highway."

This idea was warmly seconded by Jack.

His confinement to the inn had been terribly irksome to him, and now he had to a very great extent recovered from the effects of his wound, he was anxious for the time to come when he could once more sally forth in the pursuit of his old calling.

Tom King and Claude Duval also required but little pressing to accompany them.

In vain Maud persuaded Dick to forego his intention.

"Think of what we have seen," she said—"something which made itself manifest to all. May it not be a warning of some dreadful events, that will take place? Might it not be intended to warn you from setting out again upon such a dangerous mission?"

"I should want the warning to come in a more clear and definite shape than that," said Turpin, with a laugh. "Rely upon it that this figure, whatever may be the cause of it, does not concern us in the least."

Maud could tell that Dick was determined to carry out his project, and therefore withdrew all opposition.

But she thought with a shudder of the suspense she should be in during the long dark hours while he was away.

How fervently she longed that she might be able to accompany him. However great the danger might be, she should think but little of it if she was by his side to share it with him.

In that case she would at least know the worst, but while left alone she would be all the time a victim to her imagination.

As soon as ever darkness came, the highwaymen proceeded to the stables and got their horses in readiness for the road.

Their arms they had already seen to.

"Let us hope," said Claude Duval, "that our adventures to night will be somewhat more profitable than they were last time."

Tom King laughed as he said:

"Which is it to be to-night, captain? Shall we all four go together in a band, or two and two, or singly as before?"

"Singly, I think," said Turpin—"it seems to me that we then stand a better chance of getting clear in case of a pursuit. Run into no unnecessary danger, and at the same time, if you find it is in your power to render a service to those who cannot help themselves, do not scruple to turn out of your way to do so."

"We will not, captain, you may depend upon it."

"As there are four of us," said Claude, "I think we had better take the four points of the compass, and go north, south, east, and west. What do you say, captain?"

"Just as you like."

"Well, then, which direction will you take?"

Turpin considered for a moment, and then said:

"East."

"Be careful, captain," said Sixteen-String Jack—"don't venture too far; remember, the east leads to London."

"I know it does; but don't think I shall be so rash as to venture to enter London. I will keep clear of it, never fear."

"And is the same understanding to hold good respecting our return?"

"What is that?"

"To get back, if possible, before daybreak; and if not, to remain in hiding somewhere during the day, and to appear soon after dark."

"Yes," said Dick—"let that be clearly understood. If you do not return by daybreak, we shall not feel uneasy; but if you fail to make your appearance between sunset and midnight, we shall conclude that you are in real danger, and take steps to ascertain what that danger is."

"Yes, that will be a convenient arrangement for all of us."

"Then let it be understood."

Dick Turpin watched his comrades ride away one by one at short intervals after each other.

Then his own turn came.

"Do not be apprehensive, Maud," he said. "I will be most careful for your sake, and rely upon it I shall be back by daylight."

So saying, he sprang lightly into the saddle, and waving his hand as a last adieu, trotted swiftly away.

When, in answer to his comrades, Dick had chosen the east for his direction, it was done almost without a thought.

There was in his mind not the remotest intention of venturing into London, such a course being fraught with danger and unlikely to produce any profit.

As soon as he passed Ealing Common, Black Bess broke out into a canter, and in this style the highwayman made his way along the Uxbridge Road, as it was called, towards the metropolis.

This road now has houses on each side of it nearly all the way to Ealing, but at that time there were scarcely any dwellings further west than Hyde Park Corner.

A dark, lonely, ill-kept road it was—one that travellers avoided as much as possible, because it held out such advantages to highwaymen.

Yet, as it was the only means of communication between London and all other places on the west of it, it followed that, great as their disinclination might have been, people were compelled to journey along it.

Dick rode along, silent and thoughtful.

The fact was that he had proposed this excursion as much for a desire to have an opportunity of thinking quietly over what had taken place as anything else

He fancied that, when seated on the back of bonny Black Bess with the cold air blowing freshly upon his face, he should be able to think with more calmness and clearness upon the mysterious incidents of the preceding night, and so deeply was he occupied by these reflections that he took scarcely any notice of the various objects around him.

He knew very well that Black Bess would not fail to apprise him of the presence of any danger.

The more he pondered upon the appearance of the strange shadow, the more at a loss he became to account for it.

It was useless to imagine that some object similar in appearance had cast that shadow on the wall.

Moreover, there was one thing about it perhaps stranger than any other.

He remembered that as the blaze of the fire sprang up with a dancing motion it threw a tremulous light upon all objects.

The shadows that it cast were in continual and rapid motion, sometimes very clear and sometimes scarcely visible.

But the shadow of this female figure was all the time perfectly distinct and clear; it had not the waving motion the other shadows had; it seemed to be entirely independent of the firelight: and although he was by no means

certain of it, yet he could scarcely come to any other conclusion than that the deep, heartrending sighs he had heard came from this shadowy form.

And the more he thought and reflected, the more he felt superstitious influences creeping over him.

Suddenly he started

His ruminations were broken in upon by a kind of neighing sound produced by Black Bess.

As soon as he heard it, the highwayman became immediately attentive.

He knew full well what the sound meant.

Some stranger was close at hand.

Dick listened, expecting to hear the sound of horses approaching.

But all was still.

Impulsively he checked Black Bess, and reduced her speed to a walk.

It was a dark, misty night, so that it was difficult to distinguish objects at any distance.

Dick shaded his eyes with his hand, however, and looked scrutinisingly along the road before him.

Then he fancied he could perceive, some distance off, the figure of a man on horseback, but the horse itself was most certainly not in motion, and Dick wondered why any rider should be stopping thus in the middle of the road.

It was an attitude such as a highwayman would be likely to take up.

Was it possible that he was about to encounter one?

As he continued to gaze he was able to see with more distinctness, and he found that he had not been mistaken.

The horse was white, or nearly so.

Had it been any other colour, it is questionable whether he would have seen it.

Partially covering the crupper and the flank of this white horse was something dark, evidently a cloak or some portion of the rider's dress.

Dick felt immediately no small degree of curiosity and interest respecting this strange horseman, and therefore, almost without knowing it, he sat still in the saddle, straining his eyes and endeavouring to pierce the gloom.

He might continue to do this, however, for a length of time without being able to learn anything more than he then knew.

Clearly his best course of action was to ride forward and ascertain what his intentions were.

Holding a pistol in his right hand ready for immediate use, Dick gave Black Bess the rein again.

At a gentle trot she took her way along the road.

The horseman could now be seen much more plainly than before.

He was sitting quite immovable in the saddle, with his face turned towards Dick Turpin, and appearing as though he was waiting and expecting him to approach.

This was indeed most singular behaviour—behaviour for which the highwayman could not account.

Not one step did he move as Dick came nearer and nearer, and as he occupied the centre of the roadway Dick could only continue his journey by passing close to him.

That was not the time for people to wait on the highway for the approach of another without some particular motive, and Turpin felt more and more convinced that he was about to have an encounter with a highwayman.

Determined, however, that he would be the first to give the challenge, he drew up abruptly, and presenting his pistol, commanded the horseman to hand over whatever valuables he might have about his person.

CHAPTER DCCLXVI.

DICK TURPIN IS MUCH PUZZLED BY THE MYSTERIOUS BEHAVIOUR OF THE ECCENTRIC STRANGER

THE coolness of this horseman was as strange as it was imperturbable.

He took not the least notice of Dick Turpin's aggressive manner, nor did he seem disturbed in the least by the pistol that was levelled at him.

"It is useless to make any such demand of me," he said, calmly, "for I have no article of value anywhere about my person."

"I will not be trifled with!" said Dick—"give me what you have!"

"I tell you again, I have nothing. I set out to-night with the hope of being stopped, and therefore was careful to empty all my pockets."

Dick's astonishment increased.

He considered himself a sufficiently good judge of human nature to be able to feel satisfied that the man was speaking the truth.

"Your communication is a strange one," he said "Why should you hope to be stopped?"

"I have my reasons," was the reply, "and I don't feel inclined to impart them to you at present."

"Well," said Dick, "I have no time to waste with you. It appears to me that this is some extraordinary freak upon your part, though what end it may serve I am at a loss to think. However, I will take your word for what you say, and pass on."

"Stop!" bawled the horseman, as Dick slackened the rein—"stop! I have one question I want to ask of you!"

Dick wheeled round again, for there was something so extraordinary in this stranger's conduct.

"What question do you want to ask?" he said.

"Will you answer it?"

"That depends upon the nature of the question. I can't tell until you have made me acquainted with it."

"Well, then, I want to know simply and truly who you are."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, that is the question I want answered. Who are you?"

"A highwayman."

"I scarcely needed to be told that. That is not the answer I require. I want to know your name."

"Well, then, before I give it you I must know your motive for asking the question."

"I cannot tell you that. If you are the one I seek, and have business with, well and good; if not, ride on in peace, and don't trouble me any further."

"Why not say who it is you wish to meet?"

"Because then you might declare yourself to be the person, and I should have no means of disproving your assertion."

"Sir!"

"Oh, don't chafe, I beg! This is a matter that requires plain speaking."

"You have spoken pretty plainly, but the conversation, I assure you, is quite unprofitable to me, and therefore once more good night!"

"No, no," said the stranger—"don't depart without first declaring your name. Mention it to me, and I shall be satisfied."

Dick hesitated.

The request was altogether such a singular and unheard-of one, and the man's behaviour was so out of the common, that he scarcely knew whether to refuse or not.

He was exceedingly curious to hear something further—to obtain, if possible, a clue to the meaning of these mysterious proceedings.

The stranger, perceiving that he was deliberating, sat quite still and unconcerned upon his horse.

"You are a bold man," said Dick, at length.

The stranger took off his hat and bowed.

"Thank you for the compliment," he answered, "but I don't altogether deserve it. I admit I take things as coolly as I can, but then, you don't know the meaning of my presence here to-night, nor could you by any possibility guess it. Once more, however, will you tell me your name? If you refuse, say so, and pass on."

"It can make no difference that I know of if I do tell you my name, and you shall hear it on one condition."

"What is that?"

"Why, that if you find I am not the person you want that you will tell me who that person is."

It was now the stranger's turn to hesitate.

But apparently he soon made up his mind, for he said:

"Agreed. I don't know what harm that can do me."

"Well, then," said Dick, "my name is John Palmer."

"Is that indeed your name?"

"It is."

"Then I must tell you that it is not you I seek. I am sorry for it, for I may have to wait a long time. I fancied, from your manner, that I was right at last."

"Well, now then," said Dick, "as I have told you, I

claim the performance of the condition you agreed to. What is the name of the person you want?"

"As you are a highwayman, perhaps you can assist me. You may even know him."

"If I do, I will convey any message you may think proper to give."

"Then ask him to come here to this spot on any night that may suit him best, for I have a particular communication to make to him."

"Well, who is he?"

"Dick Turpin."

"Dick Turpin?" echoed the highwayman.

"Yes, that is who I seek. If you know him—if you can convey such a message to him—tell him that I am waiting here, and have been waiting for many a night in the hope of seeing him."

Dick was silent for a few moments.

The behaviour of this eccentric stranger grew more and more mysterious.

He was completely puzzled and bewildered.

"Will you deliver the message?" said the stranger, at length.

"There is no occasion," was the reply, "for I am Dick Turpin. Now tell me what it is you require of me."

The man shook his head.

"I can't believe you," he said. "You told me your name is John Palmer. Don't think you can pass yourself off upon me as anyone else."

"I have told you the truth. My name is Palmer, though I am not generally known by it. Most people call me Dick Turpin."

The stranger looked incredulous.

"What proof have you of what you state?" he asked.

"No proof at all, except that I maintain I am Dick Turpin, and this is my mare, Black Bess. Now tell me what business you have with me."

The stranger leaned forward in the saddle, and looked keenly and critically at Black Bess.

"Your steed is black, I perceive," he said, "and of matchless form. I begin to believe you."

"You can do so or not, as you like. You must make up your mind quickly, however, for I cannot and will not linger here."

The stranger seemed to be in doubt, but at last he exclaimed:

"Well, I can do no more than believe you, and if you are deceiving me, the consequences will be serious to yourself, for, sooner or later, your fraud will be discovered."

"Trouble yourself no further about that," said Dick. "Let me know what business it is that you can have with me that has caused you to wait here night after night in the expectation of encountering me."

"It was to request the aid of a strong hand and a bold heart in favour of one who possesses neither, but yet who is greatly in need of both."

"Be more explicit," said Dick—"say simply what you wish."

"It is not upon my own business that I seek your aid. I come here commissioned by another. I was told to answer all questions by delivering this letter, and requesting you to peruse it."

While speaking, the stranger took a folded paper from his pocket and handed it to the highwayman.

Dick took it with mingled feelings of surprise and curiosity.

He unfolded it, and endeavoured to make out what was written.

But this, owing to the darkness, he found impossible.

"This letter is of little use to me," he said—"without you wish me to read it at some future opportunity."

"No—no! I want you to read it now, if you are willing to do so, and to give me an answer to it."

"But I say it is impossible!"

"No, no—it is not! I have provided for the contingency. Wait a moment."

The stranger threw aside his cloak as he spoke, and then Turpin saw that he had got suspended to the belt he wore round his waist a small dark lantern.

This he took off and handed to Dick, who drew aside the dark slide over the lens.

By directing the beam of light upon the paper, he was able to read it.

It contained only a few lines, and these were written in a delicate and trembling manner.

The handwriting was evidently a lady's, and while writing she must have been considerably agitated.

Dick read as follows:—

"*The writer of these lines has heard from various sources that Dick Turpin the highwayman is always ready and willing to succour those who are helpless and to defend the innocent from the guilty.*

"*One in deep distress and trouble, knowing no other means by which she could obtain her end, ventures to ask for the assistance that has been so often given unasked to others.*

"*If Dick Turpin is willing, let him follow the bearer of this letter, and he will know more.*"

That was all.

A strange communication, truly, and as mysterious as the man who brought it.

Dick read it over several times before he could thoroughly comprehend its purport.

At length, looking up, he said interrogatively:

"The writer of this letter is so placed by circumstances that she believes I can render her assistance. Is that so?"

"I know not," was the reply. "I am unacquainted with the contents of the paper I have given you, for I cannot read."

"What were your instructions, then?"

"Simply to give the letter to Dick Turpin, if I could succeed in finding him, and then to ask him to follow me."

"But where?"

"That I was expressly forbidden to tell."

"But to what person—who is it that requires my aid?"

"That, also, I have sworn to keep secret."

"Then do you expect that I could run so great a risk as to accompany you I know not where—to see I know not who?"

The stranger shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose it is open to you to refuse or consent. You are asked a favour, and of course you can please yourself whether you grant it."

"I would grant it willingly if I was assured of my own safety; but what guarantee have I of your good faith?"

"My good faith?"

"Yes; do you not understand me?"

"Not quite."

"Then I will speak more plainly. What guarantee have I that this is not some elaborate plot on the part of my enemies to get me into their power? How do I know but what you may take me to some place where I should fall a helpless victim into the hands of the officers of police?"

"I didn't think of that," said the stranger. "But as I know there is no thought or intention of betraying you, I will give you a guarantee that I think will be satisfactory."

"If that is the case, then, I consent."

"Well, take either a sword or pistol—I care not which—and keep close by my side wherever I go; if you see anything in the least suspicious in my manner, or if you find I am contemplating any treachery towards you, don't hesitate to put an end to my life with whichever weapon you may happen to have in readiness."

CHAPTER DCCLXVII.

DICK TURPIN RESOLVES TO PROSECUTE TO ITS CLOSE HIS MYSTERIOUS ADVENTURE WITH THE ECCENTRIC STRANGER.

THE stranger spoke with an earnestness and resolution that could not be mistaken, and that evidently was not feigned.

But Dick still hesitated.

In spite of the man's apparent frankness and sincerity a doubt or suspicion haunted his mind.

He reflected that it would be easy indeed for his enemies to get up some case similar to the present in order to entrap him.

They might calculate upon the chivalric generosity he

had so often shown, and use it as a means to bring about his destruction.

Looking up after some moments' silence, he said:

"You can at least answer me this question. *Is* it to London that you intend to take me?"

"Yes, if you will come; the lady lives in London."

"Allow me a few moments for consideration," said Dick. "I will just walk quietly up and down for a little time, and then you shall have my final answer."

"As you please."

Dick carried out the intention he had expressed.

Caution whispered to him, and told him to beware.

But then that love of adventure which he possessed so strongly prompted him to run what risk there was, and follow out the incident to its end.

It would be base indeed to lure him into a place of danger on such a pretence, but he knew that the officers of police did not shrink from any stratagem.

He believed, however, that they were not clever enough to elaborate such a scheme as this, for none knew better than himself that there was always a degree of clumsiness perceptible in all their plans.

There was something romantic in the idea of some female, a stranger to himself, requesting his aid for some purpose, but for what he could not imagine, though a hundred things suggested themselves to his imagination.

The more he reflected and paced Black Bess up and down, the more undecided he felt.

He glanced at the stranger, and found that he was still sitting calmly and easily as before, treating the whole matter with an air of great indifference.

"I will go," said Dick, suddenly. "I will take you at your word. I will accompany you. Lead the way."

"I am glad you have come to that decision, because of the pleasure and happiness it will bring to the writer of that letter. It would indeed have been a deep and bitter disappointment if you had refused her summons.

"Lead the way, then," said Dick. "I have not much time to spare, and, at all risks, I must keep a certain appointment I have made at a place some distance off, before daybreak."

"Well, then, come on. But where is your sword or your pistol? Do you remember what I said to you?"

"Certainly. You told me that upon the least sign of treachery on your part I was to endeavour, by one well-directed blow, to deprive you of life."

"That was it. Why do you not make use of the guarantee you were so anxious to obtain?"

"Because," said Dick, "I am going to place trust in you—I believe that your intentions are honest and untreacherous."

"They are," said the stranger, warmly; "but I am amazed that you should omit to take so excellent a precaution—remember what a safeguard it would be to you."

"I would sooner put faith in your assurances."

"Come, then," said the stranger, "if that's your humour let us make good speed. I am chilled through to the bone," he added, with a shiver; "I have been waiting there for so many hours."

As he spoke, he put his horse in rapid motion, and Dick did the same.

Black Bess kept easily abreast with the stranger's horse.

As they drew nearer to London, Dick could not help feeling a slight degree of uneasiness.

He knew that the danger he was running by merely riding in that direction was extreme.

He could not tell how soon he might be seen and recognised by some of his foes.

It was too late now to retract, however. He had given his word, and at all risks he determined to adhere to it.

The stranger kept his horse's head in the direction of one of the most fashionable quarters of London.

But as they drew nearer and nearer to London, those doubts and suspicions of which we have spoken as lurking in Dick's breast grew stronger and stronger.

The man, after all, with all his seeming openness, might only be a creature in the pay of the police, and although he had offered such a guarantee, yet he would be led into a house, and, of course separated from Black Bess.

The subject was an uneasy one to think of, but Dick could not banish it from his mind.

Most certainly, however, he regretted his determination.

At length the stranger paused at the back of a large, noble-looking mansion, that formed one of a long terrace of such residences.

There was a long strip of garden in the rear, bounded by a wall, and it was at a door in this wall that the stranger paused.

He alighted quickly, and opened the door by means of a key that he took from his pocket.

"You had better dismount here," he said, addressing Dick. "Take your mare by the bridle and lead her in."

Dick obeyed, and the next moment the door was closed and secured behind him, so that in the event of danger there was one barrier in the way of his escape.

A groom came forward, who took charge of the two horses, and led them to the stable, while the man took hold of Turpin by the arm and conducted him along the broad gravel path.

Dick felt a strong inclination to shake off this grasp, but yet he judged it would be prudent not to do so.

A settled idea, however, now began to occupy his mind.

Some young men might have decided among themselves to accomplish something that the officers had failed to do.

One of their number had met Dick, and, by an excellent pretence, had contrived to lure him to this spot, and to separate him from his steed.

Perhaps as soon as he entered the house he should be suddenly pounced upon and overpowered by the force of numbers.

This was by no means an agreeable conviction to have in one's mind, and it was by no means an agreeable sensation to pass through the doorway.

The eccentric stranger altered not his manner in the least.

He was calm and indifferent as ever.

The door leading from the garden into the house yielded to his hand, and, having led Dick across the threshold, he closed it after him.

They were now in almost total darkness.

But there was a certain warmth, and, if we may so term it, luxuriousness in the very air they breathed, that told Dick he had entered the abode of some one who possessed a more than usually large share of this world's riches.

His feet sank deeply into a soft carpet that seemed almost like snow beneath them.

"Take my arm," said the stranger, "and follow me. It is not so dark as to prevent me from finding my way, for I am familiar with the place. Come, it will be lighter presently."

Dick followed unhesitatingly.

The first fear that had come over him had now worn away.

His immediate capture had not been meditated.

After going a few paces, the stranger pushed open another door, and then Dick found himself standing in the entrance-hall of the mansion.

One solitary lamp, held by a marble figure on a pedestal, alone lighted up the scene, yet the light seemed brilliant when contrasted with the previous darkness.

A spacious hall it was, well carpeted, and with magnificent paintings adorning the walls.

There were pedestals ranged along each side, on some of which stood vases, and on others marble figures similar to the one that held the light.

What struck Dick most, however, was the perfect and intense silence that reigned.

It was a silence that was truly oppressive.

No domestics were visible, but this might be because of the lateness of the hour.

The stranger did not pause when he entered this hall, though Dick saw what we have described as he crossed it.

"Ascend," said his guide, as they reached the foot of the broad staircase. "In a few moments you will find yourself in the presence of the writer of the letter."

Up the richly-carpeted stairs the highwayman



[DICK TURPIN'S INTRODUCTION TO THE MYSTERIOUS LADY.]

across a landing, until, finally, they paused before a door.

The stranger tapped gently, and, as Dick thought, deferentially, upon one of the panels.

There was no answer; but he opened the door, and, glancing within, said:

"She is not here, but enter."

Dick obeyed, and then found himself in an apartment that harmonised in every respect with all that he had previously seen within the building, but which, nevertheless, far surpassed any idea he might have formed of its grandeur.

At the further extremity of this room there was another door, and towards this the stranger walked.

Again he tapped upon the panel, and Dick fancied he caught the faint murmur of a voice.

The door was opened by the stranger, who stood aside to allow Dick to enter.

"Now go in," he said. "She is there."

With a strange, dizzy, confused feeling in both heart and brain, Dick crossed the threshold.

For a moment he was dazzled and half-blinded by the brilliancy with which it was illuminated, and to conceal this as much as possible he made a low bow.

"Approach," said a voice, in low and gentle accents—"approach, and listen to the favour that I would ask of you."

Dick raised his head, and saw, seated, or rather half reclining upon a couch, a lady, richly attired, and possessed of no ordinary beauty.

But her countenance, which would have looked much better in calm repose, was now distorted by some powerful feeling, but of what character Dick could not guess.

That she was strongly agitated from some cause or other was perfectly certain.

No 160.—Black Ress.

No. 160.

Price One Halfpenny.

Upon reaching the couch Dick bowed again, and waited for the lady to speak, his curiosity now being increased a hundredfold by all that he had witnessed.

"Be seated," were the next words that fell upon his ear, and Dick sat down upon the kind of ottoman to which the lady pointed.

CHAPTER DCCLXVIII.

IN WHICH DICK IS MADE ACQUAINTED WITH THE NATURE OF THE SERVICE THAT IS REQUIRED OF HIM.

A MOMENT'S pause ensued, and then the lady spoke.

"I scarcely know how to thank you for thus complying with my request," she began; "for days past I have been in a state of the greatest suspense, and doubt, and fear, and yet hoping that you would come, for it is you and you alone who can aid me in my present difficulty."

"Whatever I can do," said Dick, "it will be done willingly—make yourself quite easy upon that point."

"Thanks for that assurance! But you look tired and weary; you have doubtless ridden far—permit me to offer you some refreshment."

The lady rose immediately, and with her own hands brought several articles of refreshment from an adjacent sideboard.

"It is better for us to remain alone," she said. "I don't want to have servants here, nor do I suppose that you desire to be gazed at."

"By no means," said Dick. "I care not by how few people I am seen."

"Here is some wine," said the lady—"take it, help yourself, and we will proceed to business afterwards."

Dick complied, for, to tell the truth, he was greatly excited by the strange adventures of that night, and a glass of wine was about as welcome a thing as could be.

The lady reseated herself on the couch, and gazed attentively and admiringly at the highwayman.

When she noticed his broad shoulders, deep chest, and powerful frame, and the resolute air that was stamped upon his features, she nodded her head, as it seemed, approvingly.

Dick set down his wine-glass, and waited for her to speak.

"I scarcely know how to make this confession," she said—"I scarcely know how to begin. However, I must tell you that a short time since I possessed a certain document or paper. What was written upon it I must not tell you, nor must you seek to know: that must remain a secret."

Dick bowed, and the lady, now that she had initiated her subject, continued with great confidence and ease.

"This paper," she said, "which I ought to have destroyed or kept in a secure place, was taken from me by a cunning stratagem—so cunning, that almost anyone would be deceived by it; but that matters not—the paper is gone."

"Taken?"

"Yes."

"Then you want it recovered?"

The lady's eyes flashed.

"I do," she exclaimed, "and something more. But wait a moment and I will tell you all. Help yourself again to the wine—don't spare it; you are quite welcome to anything this house contains."

Dick poured out some wine, and the lady resumed:

"A gentleman—a nobleman, in fact—took that paper from me, and he now holds it in his possession. In his hands it has a terrible influence, for it gives him every power over me, and he does not scruple to put that power into force. It is to me a most vital secret—it is important that it should be known only to myself."

"But this nobleman," interposed Dick—"he is acquainted with it?"

"Yes, unfortunately he is; but at present I don't believe that he has confided the secret to any other breast save his own; he has had no occasion to do so; but, understand me, *means must be taken to prevent the secret spreading any further than it has done already!*"

These words were uttered in a peculiar tone, and accompanied by a significant look.

But Dick affected to take no notice of either.

"Can you guess now?" said the lady, after a pause, during which she watched the highwayman attentively "what it is that I require you to do?"

"I think I can," said Dick. "You wish me to recover that paper for you, though why you should have considered that I was a fitting agent I know not."

"My sole hope rested in you," was the response. "I have tried every means that I could devise to obtain that paper back again and insure his lordship's further silence, but I have failed utterly and completely, and it is in consequence of this failure that I have sent for you."

"And yet at present," said Dick, "I scarcely see how I am to aid you."

"Indeed! Is it possible? Why, I took you to be a man of daring and resolution."

"I think I am."

"A man who would accomplish any object upon which he had set his mind—a man who nightly perils his life to obtain a few guineas, and therefore a desperate man, and careless of what he did to obtain wealth."

"If such is your impression," said Dick, "let me tell you before we go any further that it is an incorrect one."

"How so?"

"It is true when I make up my mind to a thing I bend all my energies to accomplish it. It is also true that I have risked my life a thousand times to gain a sum of money that to you would seem insignificant and scarcely worth stooping to pick up."

"Just so; and does not that show that you must be badly in need of that wealth of which I possess an almost unlimited supply?"

"It does."

"Well, then, perform this service for me—perform it thoroughly and completely, and you shall name your own reward. Do not think that I am not in earnest, and do not be afraid to fix your price too high; no matter what the sum may be that you demand, be it ever so great, you have it, for, as I am now situated, my immense wealth is valueless to me."

To speak the truth, Dick was considerably dazzled by this last speech.

The idea of being able by one desperate service to obtain as large an amount of money as he might ask for was enough to tempt anyone, and it tempted him.

With it he should be able to quit his present perilous mode of life, and in another land live in peace and affluence.

The lady saw that he was reflecting, and remained silent, determined not to disturb his meditations.

At length Dick looked up and said:

"But the precise nature of this service—what is it that you require me to do for so large an amount of money?"

"First of all," said the lady, sinking her voice, and leaning forward eagerly, "you must obtain possession of that paper and hand it back to me."

"And what else?"

Her voice sank lower and lower still, and she bent forward yet more.

"You must prevent the nobleman from making the secret known to others!"

"But how?"

"Must I tell you? Does not your own mind suggest to you in a moment *the only means* by which this can be done?"

Dick glanced into the lady's face, and was astonished by the expression that it wore.

Surely if murder was ever legibly impressed upon the features of anyone it was upon hers.

There was no need for her to pronounce the words with her lips—her countenance said it so plainly as to be unmistakable.

Dick shook his head slowly.

"I thought you had mistaken my nature, and I find now that you have. You must seek elsewhere for an instrument for your purpose, though I hope you will never find one."

The lady sprang angrily to her feet.

Dick rose also, but slowly and calmly.

"Then you refuse?" she said, with pallid lips and a shrieking voice—"you refuse to do what I require?"

"If I understand you aright—if you mean that you want me not only to obtain possession of that paper but to murder the nobleman who owns it, I say at once plainly and peremptorily, I refuse! I am no brave or

assassin to be hired by anyone who may bid high enough for my services. I am guilty and crimestained, but yet not so villanous as you would make me."

These words seemed to render the lady frantic with rage, but by a powerful effort she mastered her emotions and kept down the expression of her anger.

"Beware!" she said, in a harsh, constrained voice, like one making unnatural struggles to be calm—"beware, I say—beware!"

"Of what?"

"You do not comprehend your danger—you do not know the peril in which you stand."

Dick looked slowly and steadfastly around him.

"I say beware how you refuse! Consider what will be the consequences of your refusal!"

"All threats are unavailing," said Dick—"perfectly unavailing; and, let the consequences of the refusal be what they may, I defy them!"

"You speak thus boldly because, as I told you, you do not know your danger."

"And I say that you threaten idly. It is useless to prolong this consultation further. Let me retire, but before I go I will promise faithfully never to disclose one word of what I have seen or heard in connection with you this night."

The lady laughed low and scornfully.

"You would like to retire, no doubt," she said; "but you will find that although it was easy enough to enter this house when I chose to permit you, you will discover that it is proportionately difficult to leave it without my permission."

"Indeed?" said Dick, as he drew his sword from its sheath and held it in an attitude of defence. "Do you mean, then, that I have been entrapped?"

"Entrapped you may call it if you like. But there is yet time to avert the danger that is impending over you. Wait a moment, and you shall know indubitably what that danger is."

She hurried across the room towards the fireplace, and rang a bell violently.

The summons was obeyed in a few moments by a low tapping at the door.

Then it was flung open upon its hinges, and then the man who had behaved in so eccentrical a manner appeared upon the threshold.

"Rupert," said the lady, sharply and quickly.

"Yes, my lady."

"Are those men below in waiting that I ordered you to fetch?"

"They are, my lady."

"What men are they—speak, tell me?"

"Police officers, my lady."

Dick started.

"How many?"

"Fourteen, my lady—the number you mentioned. I fetched them myself from Bow Street. They are picked, tried men, and are only waiting to receive your ladyship's further orders."

"Exactly. That is well. I wished to ascertain the point with clearness and certainty. Now listen."

"Yes, my lady."

"When I ring the bell again, let them hasten here with all speed. By the way, you had better bring them up into the adjoining room: they will then be in perfect readiness. Now go—be speedy, and remember my instructions."

CHAPTER DCCLXIX.

THE LADY FINDS THAT SHE IS BY NO MEANS A MATCH FOR DICK TURPIN

RUPERT bowed and retired.

To say that Dick was astonished at this scene would only weakly express the state of his feelings.

He was bewildered and astounded—so much so, that he was incapable either of rapid thought or rapid action.

So he stood with his drawn sword in his hand listening to the extraordinary colloquy.

"Now," said the lady, with an air of determination, as soon as ever the door had closed, "you understand that I will not be trifled with. Your life—your liberty—rests entirely with my breath! I can destroy both, or I can preserve them!"

Dick Turpin glanced at the window, as though he was half inclined to make a leap through it.

Divining his intention, the lady cried:

"Beware what you do. Look, I am holding the bell-rope in my hand, and I can give the signal in an instant. Let me caution you, too, not to attempt to make your escape in that direction!"

She pointed to the window.

"The depth to the ground is not considerable," she said; "but half-way down there is a large, deep tank full of water. It would receive you, and before you could scramble out the officers would be upon you."

Dick turned round.

"If you were a man," he said, "I should know how to deal with you; but as you are a woman I am at a loss to know how to act."

The lady smiled derisively.

"Come," she said, "follow me to this door, and then you will see whether the officers are really in the house, or whether it was only an empty boast upon my part."

Whether to follow her or not Dick scarcely knew, but she beckoned him, and he stepped towards the door.

The lady opened it a little way—perhaps wide enough to allow a couple of fingers to be placed between the edge of the door and the doorpost.

It was perfectly easy to see into the next apartment.

As soon as he had taken up his station here, the door at the farther end was flung open, and Rupert appeared.

"This way," he said—"this way. Her ladyship's instructions are that you should wait her pleasure in this room. Sit down, and be ready for immediate action in case you shall be called upon."

Like one rooted to the spot, Dick stood gazing at the singular scene.

Having spoken, Rupert stepped aside, holding the door wide open.

Then, two by two, the police officers marched into the room, and Dick, rapidly counting them, found that Rupert had stated their number correctly.

The officers sat down at the table, and the lady, judging that Dick had seen enough, gently closed the door, but she did not latch it.

"Now," she said, in a suppressed voice, "I suppose you have seen enough. You don't doubt now that the police officers are in the house waiting for my commands? You have seen them with your own eyes, so that there can be no mistake."

"But," said Dick, "you will learn that I am not to be trifled with, and, woman though you may be, yet I shall not permit any chivalric ideas to interfere with the preservation of my life."

The lady smiled.

"I am not at all afraid of what you may do. But come, this talk is idle and ridiculous. You see your position: you are wholly in my power, and therefore the best thing you can do is to submit. You have two evils to choose between, and assuredly you will be wise enough to choose the less."

"But what do you consider the least?" said Dick, smiling.

"To comply with my demands—obtain that paper back again, or witness its destruction, and rid me of the man who has penetrated my secret, and you shall be free and placed in possession of an amount that will represent to you an ample fortune."

"It is in vain to tempt me," said Dick. "I am firm—immovable—you will never induce me to change my determination—no, not even if the officers, instead of being in the next room, actually held me by the throat!"

"You are a bold man to speak thus."

"Perhaps I am too bold to commit a base and cowardly assassination, no matter how great may be the advantages to myself."

In spite of herself, the lady could not help admiring Dick Turpin's bold manner and his sentiments; but just then they did not coincide with her humour, and she did not altogether despair of bending him to her purpose.

But just when she was about to speak, Dick interrupted her.

"At present," he said, "you have had all the say. Now listen to me. For all your threats I feel the utmost contempt; and what greater proof can I give you that I despise the danger I am in than by standing here calmly and quietly as I now am?"

"But you know your own safety lies in the adoption of this course; if you ventured to move, or if I thought you had any intention of escaping, I should ring the bell."

"Ring it now, then," said Dick. "I am not appalled at the idea of fourteen officers sitting in the next room. I have escaped them too often to dread falling into their power now."

This coolness—this audacity staggered the lady completely.

She was at a loss to understand the highwayman's behaviour.

Her calculation had been, that no sooner was he made aware of the presence of the police officers in the mansion than he would have adopted her plan without hesitation.

Now she saw him calm and defiant, and utterly despising the danger with which she fully expected he would be overcome.

In this state of things she scarcely knew how to act, and her irresolution did not escape Turpin's notice.

She released her hold upon the bell-pull, but probably this was done unconsciously.

Clasping her hands together, she gazed wonderingly and incredulously into the highwayman's countenance.

"Let me tell you," continued Dick, "that you will never coerce me into doing a thing that I absolutely refuse. Moreover, any attempt of this kind upon your part seems to me ridiculous, and I will tell you why."

The lady looked more and more surprised.

"Supposing, in order to secure my own safety, I gave you my promise that I would do what you required, what guarantee would you have that I should fulfil my promise when I once left here? I should be at liberty to go wherever I chose, there would then be no compulsion, and, having an entire abhorrence of the crime, do you think I should commit it?"

This was a view of the case that had certainly not occurred to the lady before.

The truth was that she was half-frantic, half-maddened by the loss of a paper and the discovery of a secret so inimical to her interests.

What that secret was of course he did not know; but it must have been something of more than usual importance, or it would never have produced so profound an impression upon her, or reconciled her to the idea of committing an assassination.

"Listen to me," said Dick. "I can, in a great measure, comprehend your situation. You sent for me here to render you a service, and I think I shall not depart without doing you a much greater one than you have at present asked."

"How so?"

"If you like, I will explain, but first of all I want to know whether you see clearly and plainly that the police officers are of no service to you?"

"But if I liked I could have you instantly captured."

"You mean," corrected Dick, "that you could call in the officers to make the attempt to capture me. Whether they would succeed or not is another matter; but, putting that aside, as I said before, supposing I promised to do as you demand, what guarantee have you that I should keep my word? The officers would be of no use to you in that case, would they?"

The lady was silent, and Dick repeated the question.

She was then compelled to admit that they were not.

"Now then," he continued, "if you will follow all my instructions I believe I can show you the way out of your difficulty."

"Indeed?" said the lady, eagerly, taking a step towards him and looking beseechingly into his countenance.

"I think I can," said Dick; "but it will be necessary for you to obey me implicitly in all things."

"I will—I will," said the lady, "for I am distracted and maddened by my loss. I want the counsel of some clearer head and cooler brain than I possess. I begin to think now that calling in the police officers to my aid is not the only mistake that I have made."

"I am quite certain that it is not; and now do you consent to follow out my instructions?"

"I do. I will be guided by what you say, for the manner in which you have acted in this hour of extreme peril has proved to me that you are the man to conduct such an enterprise to a successful termination."

Dick smiled and bowed, and then, perceiving that the lady was looking inquiringly at him, he said:

"Call Rupert."

The lady at once advanced towards the bell-pull and laid her hand upon it.

"Don't ring the bell," said Dick. "Have you forgotten your instructions?"

"I had—believe me, indeed, I had."

"I do believe you. Go to the door and call him in."

"What shall I say to him?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Yes—except that you may say he is to take his instructions from me and obey them instantly."

"I will—I will."

"Then call him now, for there is no time to lose."

The lady advanced towards the door, and, opening it a little way, called Rupert and bade him enter.

Wondering greatly what could be the meaning of this order, he obeyed; but his wonder considerably increased when his mistress told him that he was to take his instructions from Dick Turpin, the highwayman.

CHAPTER DCCLXX.

DICK TURPIN GETS RID OF THE POLICE OFFICERS IN A VERY ADROIT MANNER.

THAT influence which a strong and powerful mind will always exert over a weaker one made itself particularly apparent in the present instance.

The lady could not help feeling that so far as vigour and acuteness of intellect were concerned she was far inferior to the man who stood before her, and who had shown himself totally unmoved by all her threats.

Now that she had once resigned herself to following out his instructions, their relative positions would be entirely changed.

After this, it was not to be expected that she would be able to regain her supremacy. Henceforth Dick Turpin would assume the rule—he would issue the directions, and she would obey them.

Fortunate indeed was it for her that she came across him at this juncture, for had she found some weak and willing tool, it is hard to say into what crimes, and dangers, and difficulties she might have been led.

But Dick meant sincerely, and truly, and honestly by her, and whatever he advised her to do would be from a strong conviction that it would result in her own good.

That peculiar indifference upon which the man Rupert so prided himself now entirely gave place to another feeling, and that was intense astonishment.

To a considerable extent he was in the confidence of his mistress, though he knew not what the business was that had brought them together, yet, from various things, he was able to give a tolerably shrewd guess.

Dick Turpin did not allow him time for his astonishment to subside.

In a short, sharp tone, that was calculated to command immediate attention, he said:

"Rupert, your mistress has placed herself under my commands. Now, attend to my instructions!"

Rupert bowed.

"Then, in the first place, I require you to tell me what arrangement you have made with the police officers in the next room?"

Rupert looked inquiringly at his mistress before he answered, but as she nodded her head, he replied:

"The arrangement I have made is this: I was told to fetch them here, as they might be wanted on a particular service—if they performed it, their reward would be ample."

"Well?"

"I suppose you understand what that is?"

"I think I do. You mean if they had captured me, the reward for my apprehension shared among them would have been all they would have wished for."

"Exactly; but of course I did not tell them that you were here. I merely said that in the event of their services not being required, they would be presented by my mistress with the sum of five guineas each."

"Oh indeed! and very good pay too. I suppose they

were quite willing to come and spend the night upon such terms?"

"Quite willing, especially as they were to have unlimited supplies in the shape of eating and drinking."

"And have you the seventy guineas in readiness in your pocket?" asked Dick.

"No, I have not—my mistress has not given them to me yet."

"Well, then, ask her for them, and go into the next room, pay the officers, and tell them, with as many thanks as you like, that they can return to Bow Street, and that to-night their services will not be called into requisition at all."

Rupert looked startled, but his mistress, having determined to place herself entirely under Dick's commands, said:

"Here is the money—take it, pay them, and be sure that you dispatch them. I particularly wish them to go."

"That's enough," said Rupert, as he took the money and vanished.

In a few moments afterwards there was a considerable commotion in the next room.

But it gradually subsided as the officers departed.

The lady sank down upon a chair breathless and exhausted.

"There," she exclaimed, "now that I have given you this proof of my confidence, now that you again stand in perfect safety, and are at liberty to remain in this house or quit it, as you may think proper, tell me by what means I am to prevent the publication of my secret."

"That is just what I propose to consider. The nature of the secret of course you will not disclose to me, nor do I wish you to do so; the chief thing is, as I take it from your explanation, to obtain possession of the paper that has been stolen from you."

"Exactly."

"Well, if you obtain that paper, in what position shall you be placed?"

"Do you mean as regards the nobleman I mentioned?"

"Certainly—and as regards your secret. You say he now holds you in his power?"

"Quite—I am perfectly helpless."

"Well, then, suppose by some means the paper was taken from him, how then—what would be the extent of his power?"

The lady considered.

"He could make known the contents of the paper," she said, at length.

"Well, and suppose he did, what would be the effect upon you?"

"Ruinous!"

"Indeed? But supposing that it was only an assertion on his part—that he had nothing to back up that assertion with—that, in fact, the proof of his statement was taken from him—would he be believed?"

The lady again reflected.

"He might, and he might not."

"Well, then," said Dick, "so far as I can tell, it seems to me that he would not be believed—he would have nothing to advance in corroboration of his statement; you could easily put it down as a calumny—a slander."

The lady looked as though she would have liked to say that the death of the nobleman would have settled the matter satisfactorily and speedily, but after what Dick had said, she shrank from doing so.

"Now," said Dick, "I will tell you exactly what I will do, and rely upon it, it will be the very best thing under these peculiar and awkward circumstances."

"I am all attention—pray let me hear it."

"Well, then, in the first place you must tell me the name of this nobleman, where he resides, or where I shall be likely to meet with him."

"Well, then, his name is Lord Spindelow, and he lives in a large, white house, situated on the north side of Fulham Green; you cannot mistake it, because the house stands by itself, and there is no other answering to its description. It is surrounded by a very high brick wall."

"That will do," said Dick. "I believe I know the very house you mention."

"Well, then, I have certain knowledge that he will be approaching his own home to-morrow night a little after ten o'clock. His equipage you cannot mistake,—it is a large yellow vehicle, of a very cumbersome description, and it is drawn by four handsome brown and white horses. A coachman and a footman will be with him, dressed in blue livery."

"That is quite sufficient," said Dick. "With a less particular direction than that I would guarantee to find him."

"And is that all you wish to know?"

"Not quite; you forget the paper. Describe to me its appearance."

"It is a large sheet of paper folded up into the shape of a letter—the seal, no doubt, is broken."

"And is there any address upon it?"

"No; the outer envelope has been torn off."

"But how am I to tell which is the right paper when I obtain it?"

"You must not look at the contents!" said the lady, hastily. "You must give me an undertaking to that effect! Promise faithfully that you will make no attempt to become master of my unhappy secret!"

"I swear solemnly that I will not!" said Dick. "But my sole desire is to have the means of identifying the document."

"Then you will find that in one place it has a dark, reddish-coloured stain—a very peculiar stain—one that you cannot mistake, though you may recognise it better if I tell you that it is the stain of blood."

"Of blood?"

"Yes; and now is this sufficient?"

"I think it is, and, in a word, you shall know my purpose. To-morrow night, at the appointed hour, I will stop his lordship's carriage, and obtain the paper from him. I will also compel him to take an oath to keep the whole transaction a profound secret."

The lady shook her head despondingly.

"You doubt my success?" said Dick. "Well, then, I will not enter into my plans more fully, but on the night after next I will be here with the document you want, and I will undertake that his lordship keeps the secret."

The lady gazed at him incredulously.

"Don't doubt me," said Dick. "Unless something cuts short my life in the meantime, I shall be here at the time I mentioned, and, rely upon it, I shall fulfil the whole of my engagements to the very letter."

"Then if you do," said the lady, "your reward shall indeed exceed your utmost expectations! I do not desire his death, but only my own safety. If you can secure that, I shall be perfectly content."

"I will undertake to do it. And now let me again ask you whether you are sure that you have told me all that is necessary for me to know."

The lady remained reflecting for some time.

"I believe I have told you all," she said. "I can think of nothing further."

"Then," said Dick, "I can take my leave. Farewell for a short time, and during my absence make your mind as easy as you can, and rest assured that I shall fulfil my promise. Allow no doubts to enter your mind."

"But it seems to me to be an impossible task that you have undertaken."

"Let me be the judge of that. Now call Rupert. Let him show me the way to my steed. I have a long ride before me, and a particular appointment at daybreak, which I fear I shall hardly keep, for the night is already far advanced."

The lady rang the bell, and Rupert entered.

"Take me to the stable," said Dick. "It is time for me to be gone."

Rupert did not say a word, but, shrugging his shoulders, obeyed.

Dick turned to bid the lady once more farewell, and then followed him.

When they reached the open air, Dick linked his arm familiarly in that of Rupert.

"I don't think you told me what share you reserved for yourself to-night for your trouble. Did you pay the officers all round?"

"I did."

"Then you had nothing left for yourself?"

"No. But I suppose, as this is secret service, I shall be well paid."

"Yes, you are quite right—for instance, I am going to ask you a question with just ten words in it, and if you

answer me faithfully and truly, you shall have ten guineas for your trouble."

Rupert held out his hand instantly.

CHAPTER DCCLXXI.

DICK TURPIN HAS AN AMUSING ADVENTURE WITH THE OXFORD MAIL COACH.

"THE question I am going to ask," said Dick, "is this: Are you sure that no police officers are lurking about?"

"Not to my knowledge," said Rupert, honestly. "I told them to go, but whether they thought fit to do so is more than I can exactly say."

"But what is your impression?"

"Why, that they have gone."

"You didn't give them any reason to suppose that I was in the house, did you?"

"Oh, no! I never breathed a word upon the subject! It was against the express orders that I had received."

"Then they would have no motive for lurking around, would they?"

None that I can think of—besides, I let them out at the front entrance, and you will ride away from the back."

"You think I shall be safe, then?"

"I feel pretty sure of it. But I will tell you what I will do, if you like, in order to earn the ten guineas."

"What is that?"

"Why, before you start, I will throw your cloak over my shoulders, and ride out a little way. If I am not molested, you may take it for granted that it will be safe for you to ride out also."

"It will. That's a good thought of yours, and I shall pay you the ten guineas willingly for such a piece of work."

Rupert was, of course, well enough content with this arrangement, or he would not have proposed it.

He went to the stable, and proceeded to saddle Black Bess himself, as the groom was nowhere about.

"I will do that," said Dick. "You saddle the other horse. I question whether Black Bess would permit you to seat yourself upon her back."

"Very well."

Rupert saddled the horse he had brought in a little time before, and having obtained Turpin's cloak, he muffled it around him, and rode out.

Dick watched the result of this experiment with much anxiety.

But all remained perfectly still, so, with a feeling of great security about his heart, he sprang into the saddle, and rode out also.

The police officers were certainly not watching for him, for they made no demonstration.

At a little distance off Dick overtook Rupert, who returned him his cloak, and Dick placed the ten guineas in his hand in exchange.

"Good night!" he said. "Be on the watch for me the night after next."

"At what time?"

"I cannot tell at what time, but certainly between midnight and daybreak."

"Very good. I will be here, depend upon it!"

Dick trotted off, and was quickly on his way back to Ealing.

He was at no loss for materials for thought, for all that had taken place deserved serious consideration.

He fell into a reverie, from which he was aroused by the rumbling of wheels and the sharp clatter of horses' feet.

Looking up, he saw approaching him a large vehicle with flashing lights, which at a second glance he recognised as the Oxford coach.

"The mail is late to-night," he muttered. "What can have happened to it? I've a good mind to make it later still!"

This thought no sooner occurred to him than he resolved to act upon it.

He believed he had yet time to carry out this little bit of business before daybreak, and although the peril of stopping the mail-coach single-handed was very great, yet the amount of booty he would obtain would be proportionately large.

Almost without considering what precise course he should adopt, he stopped Black Bess, and drew out a pistol.

"It is very close to London," he said. "I'll warrant the passengers are all congratulating themselves upon having made the journey in safety. Aha! It will be a good joke."

How to bring the coach to a standstill was the first question, and Dick soon made up his mind as to the course he would pursue in this instance.

When the vehicle was near enough, he raised the pistol in his left hand and fired.

The report was loud, and came with startling suddenness upon the previous silence.

"Hold!" said Dick. "Pull up, coachman, or as sure as you are there the next bullet will find a way into your brain!"

The horses reared and pranced, for they were terrified by the flash of the pistol before their eyes, and the coachman, giving a great start, checked the reins, and the horses stopped at once, trembling with fear.

The fact was, the coachman, believing that all danger was past, had dropped off into a kind of dozy slumber.

In this condition he could drive well enough, for the horses all knew every inch of the road, and but little more was required on the coachman's part than to hold the reins.

The discharge of the pistol cut short his slumbers very suddenly, and, without knowing what he was doing, he found he was pulling the reins with all his might.

Dick was very rapid with all his motions.

"Tom," he cried, in a loud voice, as though he was addressing some one who was with him, "if that coachman moves hand or foot bring him down with a bullet; I won't be bothered by him!"

Then, trotting up to the coach, he cried out:

"You, Claude, cover the guard well with your carbine, and don't hesitate to shoot him if you see occasion."

The name "Claude" of course suggested that of "Duval," and it put the guard into such a state of panic to think that the celebrated highwayman was aiming at him with a carbine that he made the most ridiculous efforts to squeeze himself out of sight into the little box in which he sat at the back of the vehicle.

Then Dick, making his way to the door of the coach, took off his hat and held it out at arm's length.

No sooner was the brim of his hat caught sight of by the people inside the coach than some one, making sure that the highwayman's head must be in it, banged away with a pistol.

The bullet tore a great hole in the felt, but did no other damage whatever.

"Hurrah!" cried a voice. "I had him then—I had him! He's dead for a thousand pounds!"

"No," said Dick, looking in, "you are wrong!"

"Murder!" cried the man who had fired. "Murder—murder! Save me, good people all! I tried to defend you, and now, if you don't stick by me, I shall be murdered!"

He slipped down on to the floor of the coach, and endeavoured to conceal himself beneath the voluminous garments of an elderly female with a very severe look on her countenance.

A shriek and a commotion was the result.

"Quick!" said Dick; "I'm in a great hurry to-night, and if you'll just contribute something all round I will let you off easy. If you refuse, why, I shall be driven to the necessity of taking all you have!"

"It's Dick Turpin," said some one inside—"I know it's Dick Turpin, so the best thing you can do is to spare him something all round, and then we shall come to no further damage."

"You are quite right," said Dick, "and I will give you my word that for once in a way I will rely upon your generosity. See, in my hat: it has a hole in it, but never mind that. Put what you like in it, and give it back to me. I will trouble you for no more than you like to give."

The hat was passed round, but a very small amount was placed in it.

"Is this all?" said Dick, when it was returned to him.

"Yes, all, and pretty well too!"

"I don't think so. But, however, I gave my word, and I will keep to it; but I'm sadly afraid of one thing."

"What's that?" asked everybody in a breath.

"Why, that you will be rather late before you arrive at your destination—that's all. Good night!"

And Dick vanished.

"The paltry wretches!" he said. "They don't deserve to be treated with consideration! However, they will wish before long that they had been a little more generous!"

As he spoke he stooped down, and, without an eye observing what he was about, he quickly and quietly drew the linch-pin out of one of the hind wheels.

"Now, coachman," he said, "you can drive on to London as fast as you like—such a coach as yours is not worth stopping!"

"Well, we shall see about that," was the answer, as the coachman gave his horses a smart cut with the whip. "Wait till I get to London, and if you don't have the officers after you pretty quick, it will be a very odd thing to me! Aha! I will—— Oh, murder!"

The coachman little dreamt of the sudden downfall that awaited him.

He whipped his horses into a gallop, and the wheels of the coach performed several revolutions in perfect safety.

But all of a sudden the wheel that Dick had tampered with went rolling away, and down came the whole equipage with a tremendous crash.

"Serves you right," said Dick, as he stood gazing after it—"serves you right! There goes the wheel, by Jove!"

There was rather a steep hill close to the place where the accident happened, and away the wheel went rolling down it, swaying first to one side and then to the other, but yet going at a tremendous rate.

Then the oaths, and shouts, and screams made up a chorus that was truly deafening.

The spectacle of a coach lying on its side was a very ludicrous one, and Dick laughed heartily.

The horses were plunging about in a furious manner, and it so happened that the coach itself fell broadside across the road, so as almost to block it up.

A sound in the rear caused Dick to look behind him, and well it was for him that he did so.

He caught sight of a body of mounted police officers, who instantly set up a shout.

They had been endeavouring to approach him unperceived.

But when they found out that they were seen, they cried:

"Quick—quick! Down with him if you can! He secs us now! Quick—quick!"

To ride along the road in the direction in which the officers were coming was of course an impossibility.

Then on each side of the highway a very tall hedgerow had been planted—so tall, that Dick hesitated to allow Black Bess the opportunity of attempting to leap it.

In front there was the stage-coach lying in a huge mass, with the four horses plunging, and kicking, and rolling about in every direction.

Such being the state of affairs, the officers thought they had got the highwayman tolerably secure, and so they pushed forward as fast as their horses would carry them.

They were already within pistol range, but Dick speedily made up his mind as to the course he should pursue.

"Forward, Bess—forward!" he cried. "Over it, lass! Now! Hurrah!"

Black Bess obeyed him gallantly, for she galloped swiftly along the road until she reached the stage-coach, then, giving a marvellous spring, she cleared the obstruction, and came down safely on the other side.

The people in the interior of the coach, who had been actively engaged in scrambling out of the window, now uttered doleful shrieks, for they were afraid of being caught by the hoofs of Black Bess.

The officers, seeing this astonishing leap and hesitating to take it themselves, at once brought their pistols to a level and fired a volley, which terrified the passengers still more.

The shouting and scrambling increased in vehemence, and such a Babel of sounds had surely never been heard on that highway before.

Dick knew he was tolerably safe as soon as he had reached the other side of the coach.

Accordingly he pulled up, and, wheeling round waved his hat derisively at his foes.

But he perceived by the look of the sky that morning was approaching, and he remembered the particular promise he had made to return before daybreak.

Therefore, replacing his hat, he again turned Black Bess's head towards London, and, giving her the impulse forward, swept down the hill at a furious rate.

Reaching the bottom, he observed a place where the hedge was of no great height, so he stopped and jumped over it.

Across the meadow, then, Black Bess stretched in gallant style, her bounds resembling those of a greyhound.

The speed was tremendous, and in an incredibly short space of time the scene of this last adventure was left behind.

Just as a faint, dull, leaden-coloured light was beginning to creep over all things, Dick Turpin trotted slowly up the lane leading to the Three Spiders.

CHAPTER DCCLXXII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HAS A RARE ADVENTURE WITH AN OLD FARMER ON THE NORTH ROAD.

While Dick Turpin was engaged in the manner we have just been describing, his three companions were also occupied with some dangerous and peculiar adventures.

In their expedition we can only follow them singly, and we think that Sixteen-String Jack is fairly entitled to priority of consideration.

It will be borne in mind that this was the first excursion he had had upon the highway by himself for a considerable length of time.

Remaining cooped up in the inn so long as he had done was quite contrary to his inclinations, and therefore he hailed this expedition with delight.

He chose the northerly direction, and at first did nothing but allow his horse to gallop along the highway at full speed.

The exercise was most delightful and inspiriting to him.

Once again he felt the life-blood grow warm in his veins.

"I shall look for some more than usually good adventure to-night," he said—"something that will amuse me and clear my mind of all the heaviness that encumbers it."

Having come to this conclusion, and not wishing to distress his horse any more than he could help, Sixteen-String Jack slackened his speed and began to look around him.

He had got a considerable distance from the inn, and therefore he did not fear to engage in an adventure.

But the high-road on that night appeared to be unusually deserted, and at a gentle trot he rode for some considerable distance without perceiving anyone.

Suddenly, however, a faint sound like that produced by a horse's feet reached his ears, and he listened attentively.

He found that he was not mistaken.

Some one was journeying along before him at a very shambling, jog-trot sort of pace.

"That's a farmer or a grazier on a good, stout cob, I'll be bound!" said Jack, after listening to the sound. "If so, I shall be all right, I'll warrant!"

He quickened his pace slightly, and very soon the sound he had heard became more and more audible.

Then through the darkness he perceived the black figure of a man seated upon a small but strong-looking horse.

Hearing Jack approach he looked round apprehensively, for in those days all meetings or encounters on the highway were shunned—they generally ended in a disastrous manner.

But Sixteen-String Jack put on a pacific demeanour.

Stratagem, he felt, was more likely to succeed in this case than force, for he came to the conclusion that being either farmer or grazier, the stout man was in the habit of travelling much about the country, and therefore he would be careful to secrete his money.

In a few moments, Jack managed to put himself abreast with the traveller.

He took off his hat and bowed, and then, in a gentle, persuasive voice, said:

"Good evening, sir! I see you are journeying my way, and, to be frank, I should be very glad of your society."

The stout man made no reply, but looked [illegible] inquisitively at Jack.

The highwayman continued:

"I think it so much better and safer for two to ride along the highway than one, especially in these times, when Dick Turpin and his band are so much abroad at night."

"Then you are frightened of these highwaymen, are you, sir?" said the stout man.

"Well, I can't exactly say that I'm frightened," returned Sixteen-String Jack, "but I don't like them, and that's the truth. When it comes to the parting either with your money or your life, you prefer saving the last and delivering up the first."

"Yes, that's right enough," said the stout man, "but I don't allow them to trouble me not a bit—I should think not indeed!"

"Then," said Sixteen-String Jack, "you must be one of those who can manage to travel about the country without much money."

"Well, perhaps that is it; but if a highwayman was to ride up to me to-night I should take it very coolly, I promise you."

"Then you are a bold man."

"Well, perhaps I am, perhaps I am not; but any way, I should say that I had no money to surrender—at least, none worth talking about, and I should tell them they could search my pockets if they liked, and if they found more than two or three shillings I would eat my head."

"Well," said Jack, "I don't mind confessing to you that it would very seriously disturb and put me about if I met with a highwayman, and I sincerely hope that we shall not be so unfortunate."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; and that was why I wished to avail myself of your company if you would not mind, for on this present occasion I have no less a sum than seven hundred and fifty pounds."

"That's a dangerous thing to tell any stranger on the highway," said the stout man.

"Well, so it would be, I grant, but then, I know you are not a highwayman—you look to me like a farmer."

"Well, yes, that's partly my profession—I may say that I am half a farmer, half a grazier. I combine the two, you see."

"I thought as much, and you being an honest man, I didn't mind telling you this. I can assure you, however, that it makes me very uncomfortable."

"Well, perhaps it does."

"I can assure you it does, because, although this money is all I possess, and if I lost it I should be utterly ruined, yet should a highwayman present his pistol to my breast I should prefer saving my life to my money."

"And if you threw away your life," said the farmer, "you would not save your money then."

"No, truly, and that's why I may say I have been in a perpetual tremble ever since I started from London, though I have come all this way in safety."

"Well, I'm going a matter of fifty miles further to a place called Dubbleton, if that lies in your way."

"Yes, I shall go past it, and if you will only permit me to ride so far in your company I shall esteem it a very great favour."

"Oh! you're welcome—you're welcome."

"Many thanks, for I think a single highwayman would hesitate to attack us if we were both riding together."

"Yes—I am inclined to think the same, and what's more, I am not afraid of them in the least—they can do their worst."

"But you are in a very different position to myself," said Jack—"you have nothing to lose."

"Well, perhaps I have—perhaps I haven't," was the reply. "But I'll tell you what."

"What?"

"Why, I have not quenched my thirst since I left London, and now I am uncommonly dry. There is a house just round the bend in the road yonder, 'ways make a point of calling The landlord is quite a decent fellow, and a friend of mine. Perhaps you would like to come in too?"

"Oh! certainly, certainly," said Jack. "I am very dry indeed, and my horse will be all the better for a mouthful of hay and water, though I suppose you are not going to stay very long?"

"No—a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes at the most."

"That's all right then, for I can assure you I am anxious to get to the end of my journey—in fact the sooner I do the better I shall be pleased."

"Well, then, there's the public-house," said the farmer—"The Horns, and yonder is the sign."

He pointed while he spoke to an old-fashioned-looking public-house a few paces farther off down the road.

Jack hardly knew what to do about entering it with his companion.

But to refuse would, he knew, provoke immediate suspicion, and if he entered he might be recognised by someone there.

This last, however, he looked upon as a remote contingency, and suffered it to trouble him but little.

Upon pulling up in front of the inn, the ostler came forward to take charge of the horses.

Jack slipped lightly from the saddle.

But with the farmer, dismounting was a very difficult process, and only accomplished after many grunts and groans.

At last he reached the ground in safety, and then walked, or rather waddled, to the inn door.

Jack could not help gazing at him, his mode of walking was so peculiar—but he attributed it to his obesity.

It rather seemed, however, as though the farmer had sat in the saddle so long as to have lost all use and feeling in his feet.

Fortunately the distance he had to walk was not very great, and he seated himself with a sigh of relief upon a bench that was drawn up near the fire.

The piece of furniture creaked beneath his weight, but did not give way.

Jack glanced around him, and was pleased to find that no other customers were present besides themselves.

From the manner in which the tables were littered over with jugs and pipes, it was pretty clear that people had been sitting there very lately.

But the fact was, it was past the usual hour for the country people to assemble, and the house was only kept open for the accommodation of such chance travellers who might happen to call in while passing.

Some home-brewed ale was called for, and the farmer and Jack sat down opposite each other near the fire and talked like old friends.

But the discourse ran chiefly upon highwaymen.

"Why, bless your life," said the farmer, "I have been stopped more than once or twice, and I have never had my money taken from me!"

"But perhaps you never had any for them to take," said Jack, with a laugh.

"Oh, yes—I don't mind telling you how I manage it: on all occasions when I have been stopped I have had some hundreds with me, but so cleverly hidden that the highwaymen have never found it."

"Indeed?" said Jack, growing much interested—"and where might that be?"

"Why, I always put the money in my boots—they are large, and no one ever thinks of looking for cash in such a curious place, and that, I can assure you, is the sole reason why I have escaped in safety so far."

"Is it indeed?" said Jack—"how very strange! You will scarcely believe me, however, when I tell you that my seven hundred and fifty pounds, which I have all in bank-notes, are actually hidden in the very place you mention."

"In your boots?"

"Yes—in my boots."

"How strange!"

"It's a fact, I can assure you."

The farmer looked rather incredulous, and much disappointed.

"I didn't think anyone had laid hold of that idea except myself," he said.

"Well, I have adopted it," said Jack, "and if you like I will pull off my boots and prove it."



[SIXTEEN-STRING JACK POURS THE MONEY OUT OF THE FARMER'S BOOT.]

CHAPTER DCCLXXIII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK EASES THE OLD FARMER OF HIS UNCOMFORTABLE RIDING BOOTS, BUT IS UNFORTUNATELY DEPRIVED OF HIS HORSE BY THE POLICE OFFICERS.

Jack stooped down, as though he fully intended to pull off his boots and convince the farmer that he spoke the truth.

But before venturing to do so he glanced behind him, and very fortunately a stranger came into the room and sat down.

Jack put his finger by the side of his nose.

"Hush!" he said—"we don't know who that may be You will have to take my word for it now, but it's a fact, I assure you."

It was very amusing to watch the farmer's disappointment, however.

It was quite evident that concealing his money in his boots was quite an original idea with him, and he was vexed to find that anyone else had thought of the same thing.

That such actually was the case he could now no longer doubt; but, strange as it may seem, he did not care half so much about Jack's society as he had done.

The man who had arrived called for some ale and sat down peaceably enough.

But Jack did not continue the conversation, nor was the farmer inclined to do so; and at length, having finished his jug, he rose.

"Come," he said—"it's time we started on again."

"Quite time," said Jack, preparing to follow him.

While doing so he watched the old farmer with a critical eye.

He observed that he walked with as much difficulty as ever, his feet being placed very slowly and gently upon the ground.

No. 161.—BLACK BESS.

"He has money in his boots," Jack mentally remarked. "I feel sure of it, by the way he treads. What a joke! I will have it, as sure as I'm a highwayman!"

Little dreaming of the danger he was in, or that he had disclosed his secret to one from whom he ought to have guarded it most zealously, the farmer waddled out to the front of the inn, and with very great trouble managed to seat himself on the back of his cob.

At last the mounting process was completed and Jack nimbly and lightly sprang into the saddle.

"Ah!" said the farmer, with a sigh of envy, "I wish I could do that! Why, you are as spry as a harlequin!"

"I don't carry quite so much flesh as you do," said Jack, with a laugh. "But then, you know, I am a young man, and have to work hard for my living."

"Well, I can't help thinking," said the farmer, as they rode away, "how very strange it is that you should have thought of hiding your money in your boots."

"Well, it is singular, but before I started I wondered where I could put my bank-notes for safety, and while I was wondering, in came the waiter, bringing in my boots. I was putting them on, when I thought how very easily I could fold up my notes and stuff them in so that they would be secure; and no sooner did the idea strike me than I carried it into effect."

"Well," said the farmer, "that's my secret, and when I have been searched by the highwaymen, they have found nothing in my pockets, but of course they never thought of pulling off my boots to find whether I had any money there or not."

"No, I should think not! The highwaymen would be cleverer fellows than I take them to be if they should think of such a thing!"

"Well, then, I don't see that you have any cause for alarm. If we are stopped you must treat the matter indifferently, and say you have no money; they will ask to search you, and you must submit without dread. They will then ride off, and your wealth will be secure."

"I sincerely hope it will!" said Jack.

In such-like conversation as this the time was whiled away as they journeyed onward.

Jack was only looking for some favourable spot in order to carry his design into execution.

At last, coming to a very dark and lonely place in the road, he said:

"Well, I should think, if there are any highwaymen about, they will attack us somewhere here. I don't half like riding through such a dark shadow."

"No; it is the most unpleasant bit of road there is, and it was here I was stopped on both occasions."

"Well, then," said Jack, "judging from that, I should not wonder if you are stopped here again."

"No, nor I. But I am indifferent about it."

Jack laughed to himself, and felt carefully for his pistol.

The farmer did not observe what he was about, so the highwayman was able to grasp his weapon securely.

When in the darkest part of the road, Jack turned round, and pressed the muzzle of his pistol against the farmer's cheek.

It sunk deeply into the soft fat.

"Do you feel that?" said Jack, in short, sharp, sudden tones, very different to those in which he had previously spoken.

"Yes, I feel it plain enough—what is it?"

"A pistol!" replied Jack. "And if you offer to call out, or speak above a whisper, and if you don't pull your horse up at this moment, I will fire; and the pistol is so well loaded that I know it will carry the top of your head off!"

The farmer was completely paralysed with fright.

As soon as he heard this dreadful threat, he pulled up his horse, and sat trembling and shaking like a huge lump of jelly, and quite unable to speak.

Jack nimbly dismounted from his steed.

"Now, then, my friend," he cried, "I am going to find out what you have got in your boots."

"Murder!"

"If you say that again I will fire, and your life will be at an end!"

The farmer groaned dismally.

"I told you," said Jack, "that I thought you would very likely be stopped here for the third time, and so you are. Now, then, off with your boot!"

The farmer made a faint resistance, but very faint, for he was overawed by Jack's pistol.

Some violent tugging was required to pull off the huge riding-boot that he wore.

But at last Jack fairly succeeded.

"Now for the prize!" he said, and while he spoke he turned the boot sole uppermost, and gave it a good shaking.

Quite a shower of gold was then poured forth, and it would seem that the farmer had actually placed as many guineas as he could at the bottom of his boots, and then filled some little bags that he had made in the lining.

He groaned when he heard his money fall with metallic chink on to the highway.

"Now for the other boot!" said Jack. "It's very odd to me if that hasn't got the most in it. Take care! You'd better not try any fun, or else I'll shoot you first and pull your boot off afterwards! But, in either case, off the boot must come, so I will leave you to take your choice."

After many more struggles Jack got this boot off, but no sooner was it in his hands than he said:

"Now, be off with you! I have done with you! Make haste!"

"But my boots?"

"Oh, bother your boots! What do you want with them if they have no money in them? Be quick, I say!"

Jack raised his pistol, and gave the farmer's cob a sharp blow with the butt-end of it.

He flung up his heels at once, and then away he went at a plunging gallop that must have inconvenienced the rider exceedingly, and which threatened every moment to dislodge him from the saddle, and pitch him to the earth.

Jack laughed so heartily over this adventure and the manner in which he had outwitted the farmer that he was fairly compelled to put down the boot and hold his sides.

But aware that it would be dangerous to linger in that spot very long, he quickly picked the boot up again, and emptied it.

Then, stooping down, he gathered all the money from the ground.

For the most it was in gold, though there were a few bank-notes.

While thus engaged, Jack heard distinctly the clatter of horses' hoofs, and by their regularity he concluded that police officers in rather strong numbers must be approaching.

"Confound them!" he said. "What a rate they are coming at! Why didn't they wait a moment longer? I shall hardly have time to pick up this gold."

Indeed, it did not seem as though he would have time, but Jack continued his task with very great composure, although the officers were frightfully close at hand.

But he knew that he would always be laughed at if he galloped off and left his booty on the highway behind him, so he made all speed to cram it into his pockets.

At length the last coin was picked up, and then he found that the officers were almost upon him.

"Surrender! You are our prisoner!"

"Shoot him!" added another voice.

"Down with his horse!" cried another. "Don't let him mount! If he does, he will be off!"

Several such cries as these were raised by the police, but Jack maintained his calmness admirably.

With one bound he seated himself firmly in the saddle, and then, turning his horse's head towards the hedgerow, he plunged the spurs deeply into its flanks.

"He'll be off—he'll be off!" cried the officers. "Fire—fire! Down with him! Shoot him—shoot him or his horse—it doesn't matter which!"

A volley was fired, and Jack's horse gave a tremendous bound forward.

But as for the highwayman himself, he did not believe that he had been struck by any of the bullets.

With loud shouts and cries, the officers commenced a pursuit.

They leaped over the hedge in capital style, and, from their manner, it was evident they intended to give the highwayman a hard run for his life.

But their courage and perseverance were kept up by the

belief that one of the bullets had wounded the highwayman's horse.

This belief, unfortunately, was but too well grounded.

Jack noticed that his horse bounded over the meadow in a strange, erratic, spasmodic fashion; and while he was wondering whether the creature was severely hurt, its legs gave way beneath it, and it fell, as if stricken by lightning, upon the soft turf in the meadow.

To disengage himself from the stirrups was to Jack the work of a moment.

His horse was dead, or nearly so, and it was useless to waste another thought upon him—he must bend his energies to making his own escape.

Accordingly, he ran off as fast as his legs would carry him across the meadows.

But he stood a poor chance of escape, for surely the officers' horses would gallop faster than he could run.

In a moment afterwards they came up to the spot where Jack's horse had fallen, and then they all gave vent to a simultaneous shout of exultation.

"Hurrah!" they said. "His horse is down—it's a case with him now! Be quick! Yonder he goes, across the meadow! There—there! Be quick! We are bound to have him—he cannot possibly escape now!"

CHAPTER DCCLXXIV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK ENDEAVOURS TO FIND A PLACE OF REFUGE FROM HIS PURSUERS.

Sixteen-String Jack heard the exultant shouts and cries of his foes, but so far from being disheartened thereby, he only compressed his teeth closer together, and prepared himself to make a yet greater effort to escape.

The manner in which he bounded over the fields was truly surprising.

Even the officers, although mounted, could not diminish the distance that was at first between them.

It was not likely, however, that Jack could maintain his start for any length of time.

His powers of endurance while running at such a furious rate would very quickly be exhausted.

He knew this well, and therefore looked all around him in the hope of being able to perceive some place of refuge.

Yet, what place could there be that would afford him a protection from his foes?

They were behind him in such overwhelming numbers that it would be folly to attempt to stand at bay and show them fight.

His only chance—and that was a very poor one indeed—was, if he should be able while favoured by the darkness and obscurity of the night, to secrete himself somewhere out of the sight of the officers.

It was in search of some such place that Sixteen-String Jack looked round.

But he saw nothing save one building that stood at no great distance.

This was the only object upon which his eyes rested, excepting trees, and meadows, and the like, none of which afforded him the slightest chance of concealment.

But, then, in this house it was doubtful whether he would be able to get out of the way of his foes; they would surely track him there, and the inhabitants would be most unlikely to secrete him and declare he was not there.

Panting for breath, with his heart beating painfully, and every vein in his body throbbing, Sixteen-String Jack made all these reflections as he bounded on.

But as there was no other place towards which to fly except the house that we have mentioned, of course he bent his steps towards it.

And yet, if the truth must be told, it was more on the impulse of the moment than upon reflection that he thus shaped his course.

He crouched down as low on the grass as he could, so as to render himself less conspicuous to his pursuers.

And this proceeding certainly bewildered his pursuers, for once or twice they got off his track, and galloped in a wrong direction.

This was very favourable to the highwayman—in fact, it was greater good fortune than he could have hoped for.

The house to which we have alluded stood by itself, and was surrounded by a small garden, that was bounded by a low palisade.

Upon reaching this, Sixteen-String Jack cleared it at a bound, and then ran hastily to the front of the house.

He was quite breathless when he reached it, and he grasped one of the stone pillars that formed a support to the portico with a sensation of great relief.

For a moment or so his brain spun round, but, mastering this feeling, he again looked attentively about him on all sides.

His first glance was given to the officers.

He could perceive their dusky forms some distance off across the meadows, but evidently galloping at full speed towards the house.

Jack thought if he could only enter somewhere and lie down out of sight he should escape notice.

In fact, this was his only chance, and therefore he began to wonder which would be the easiest and readiest way of entering the house without creating an alarm.

The front door was fast, so it was useless to attempt to think of entering in that direction.

But at the side of the portico some trelliswork had been placed, and up this various trailing plants were growing.

Over the portico was a window, and Jack thought if he could only manage to climb up by this trelliswork that the window would enable him to gain the house easily.

To make such a reflection as this and to set about carrying it into effect were simultaneous things.

With an agility of which he might have been justly proud, Jack climbed up, and then crouched down on the upper part of the portico.

From this window there came a very faint, subdued light, and in making this discovery, Jack's heart sank within him.

The blind was drawn down, so he could not see into the room; but upon closer examination, he luckily found that the blind was not drawn quite down to the bottom.

A little crevice was left, through which he could peep.

Gazing in, he beheld a large-sized room, that was dimly lighted by a small taper that was standing on a table.

Ranged along all sides of this room, however, were many small beds, somewhat resembling those that may be seen in a hospital or in barracks.

But these beds looked of a better quality, and they were all furnished with snow-white drapery, that gave the room a very chaste and elegant appearance.

This was about all that Jack saw.

But yet it enabled him to come to a tolerably correct conclusion.

"This is a boarding school," he said—"that must be it, and this is one of the sleeping chambers. Now, if I can enter here unheard, or if I can get the pupils to conceal me all will be well; at any rate, I will try."

It must be borne in mind that all this occurred very speedily indeed—in fact, with that rapidity of which thought alone is capable.

Yet, short as the time had been, it had enabled the police officers to get from the meadows close to the palisadings surrounding the garden of the school-house.

If Jack was to enter at all he must be speedy.

To his great joy, he discovered something that had previously escaped his notice.

This was, that the window had been opened a little way at the top, doubtless for the purpose of ventilation. Perhaps it was done unconsciously; at any rate, the window was open, and consequently unfastened.

To raise the lower sash took Jack only a second, though he was careful not to make any more noise than he could help.

Then he gently stepped on to the dressing-table that was placed close to the window, and drew the sash down again.

Scarcely had he done this than some one said, in a female voice:

"What's that?"

Jack crouched down at once.

"I am sure I saw something!" said the same voice. "Don't scream, anybody, because if you do, you know, we shall have the old gorgon at once!"

"But what did you see, Julia?" said another voice.

"Hush!—don't speak so loud, or else we shall be heard!"

"But what was it?" ran in a whisper all round the room, and it was evident that the light sleepers were all aroused.

"I don't know," said the first speaker, "but it looked to me like a man stepping down off the dressing-table into the room."

At this announcement there was an immediate commotion.

But it was subdued instantly.

If they had not dreaded the consequences, such startling intelligence as this would have brought a scream to some of their lips.

But the fact was, that, not long before, one of the girls had declared in the night that she saw a ghost, and all the others shrieked out accordingly, whereupon the schoolmistress chastised them so severely that they never thought of making such an uproar again.

Sixteen-String Jack no sooner found where he was and by whom he was surrounded than a sensation of thankfulness came over his heart.

He fully believed that he was safe.

In a low, whispering voice, he ventured to speak:

"Ladies—dear young ladies," he began, "don't scream or call out—pray don't. If you do, you will cause my death!"

The temptation to scream was, however, very strong indeed.

But they thought of their governess, and the inclination was subdued in an instant.

"I am here hiding from my foes, who are thirsting for my blood," said Jack. "I ought to tell you first that I am a young nobleman, but that, unfortunately, I was drawn into a duel, and, having slain my adversary, I have been forced to fly for my life."

It is impossible to describe the effect that this announcement made.

In their excitement, the young ladies one and all sat bolt upright in bed, and gazed at the intruder.

Their eyes were all accustomed to the semi-darkness that filled the room, and therefore they made out the form of Sixteen-String Jack with tolerable ease.

It is hard to say what turn events would have taken at this juncture but for a loud hammering and knocking at the front door of the house.

So alarming was the sound, and so suddenly did it come upon all their ears, that, forgetting all notions of precaution, they set up a succession of shrieks, and drew the bedclothes over their faces.

The calm, subdued voice in which Sixteen-String Jack spoke reached their ears notwithstanding.

"Now, my dear young ladies," he said, "it rests with you whether I escape or whether I am slain! These men are here, and their intention is, if they can find me, to drag me off to prison, and afterwards put me to an ignominious death. I know if I am captured I must be executed; and that is such a disgrace, that I have determined to resist to the last, so I shall be probably pierced with a bullet or cut down with a sword before your very eyes."

This idea was a dreadful one to the minds of the young school-girls, and they forgot all their alarm in the intense and breathless interest with which they listened to what Sixteen-String Jack said.

They were all filled with romantic notions, which they had derived from a five-volumed novel that one of the girls had smuggled into the school, and which contained a lively account of various young and handsome noblemen unjustly pursued and punished for things they were not guilty of, or which were altogether venial.

CHAPTER DCCLXXV

THE POLICE OFFICERS SEARCH THE SCHOOL-HOUSE, AND ASK FOR THE KEY OF THE CUPBOARD IN WHICH SIXTEEN-STRING JACK IS CONCEALED.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK was well aware that, if he could only excite in their breasts a feeling of romantic generosity, he should be quite safe.

Therefore he continued:

"You heard those sounds—that loud knocking at the door? Hark! there it is again! Can you guess the cause of it? It is the men of whom I have spoken—the officers of justice, who, having tracked me here, are clamouring for admission."

"Go away!" said a voice. "Why don't you go away? Make haste!"

"I am afraid," said Jack, "if I tried to do so, that I should only precipitate my fate. Now I feel that I have a chance of safety."

"What is it?" said some one, in a whisper, anxiously.

"Let me conceal myself somewhere in this room—no matter where—and if you are asked, say that you have not seen anything of me, and that you are quite certain I am not here. Promise to do that, my dear young ladies, and my life is saved, the generosity of a nobleman will always be yours, and I will promise you that I shall make you some day or other, a substantial recognition of your kindness. Say will you conceal me or not? You must make up your minds quickly, or it will be too late!"

The noise of the opening of the front door now came quite plainly to the ears of all, and there immediately ensued among the girls a very anxious and serious discussion.

"Let him hide in the large cupboard," said some one. "Do hide him! Think how dreadful it would be if he was killed here before our eyes. And besides, who can tell what his kindness may prompt him to do for us in return?"

"Yes," said Jack, overhearing this suggestion, "you can conceal me anywhere you like, and I will grant any favour that you may like to ask—I assure you I will upon my word of honour as a nobleman!"

"But what would be said," cried another, "if it was discovered we had hidden a man in our room? What a scandal it would be!"

This appealed to the feelings of all instantly.

"I didn't think about that," said Sixteen-String Jack. "It was selfish and foolish of me, but I forgot it. Don't trouble yourselves any further about me—I am not worthy another thought. Lie down quietly and close your eyes—my life will soon be over, for I will rush unarmed upon my foes!"

This was such a dreadful idea that the young ladies could not bear to entertain it at all, and Jack found that it was a point that told more in his favour than anything else.

"Get into the cupboard," cried several, "and hide yourself there! If you will close the door we will come and lock it and then they will never think that you are there."

"A thousand thanks, dear girls!" said Jack. "I wish I could requite you for your kindness!"

Time was now pressing, for a great confusion of voices and trampling of feet could be heard below.

Jack saw the cupboard to which they alluded, and, opening the door, concealed himself in it without difficulty.

Drawing the door close, he whispered:

"Now, then, if you will lock the door and take away the key, and declare that you have never heard or seen anything of me, I shall consider I am quite safe. I wish I could make an offer of my love and coronet to you all; but, unfortunately, that is impossible!"

This was another dazzling idea, and the young ladies were all so overpowered by it that several seconds elapsed before one of them could venture to slip out of the bed and turn the key in the lock.

But during those few seconds the idea occurred to all of them in a moment, as if communicated by an electric spark, that the one who performed this service for the fugitive nobleman would be the one for whom he would entertain the greatest regard, and to whom he would be most likely to offer his hand in marriage.

The result of this similarity of feeling was rather ludicrous, and well-nigh caused Jack's discovery.

As if actuated by one impulse, they all sprang from their beds together, and rushed towards the cupboard.

Of course, those who were nearest stood the best chance, and the one who had first of all made the proposition was fortunate enough to secure possession of the key.

"There," she said, "I have it, and who is better entitled to it, I should like to know? Oh, goodness, here they come!"

The sound of footsteps just outside the chamber door struck them all with a kind of panic, and such a scrambling to return to their beds had surely never been before witnessed.

They did not attempt to draw the clothes properly over

them before the door was flung open, and a voice said, in sharp tones of asperity:

"It is monstrous—it is disgraceful—it shall never be permitted! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, one and all! I shall be ruined—quite ruined, for who would send their girls to my school after such a night's work as this?"

"The gorgon," thought Jack, as he screwed himself down still closer in the cupboard.

"Well, ma'am," said a gruff voice, "how can we help it? Didn't I explicate to you as plain as anybody could explicate that we had traced the villain to this very house? We're quite sure he must be hidden in it somewhere; and if you obstruct us in the execution of our duty it will be at your own peril!"

"But it is impossible," said the schoolmistress, again. "How could anyone have got into the house without being heard? I am obliged to sleep light—very light—and if so much as a mouse had stirred I should have awoke, so I tell you again I am quite sure he is not here!"

"Well, ma'am," said the officer, doggedly, "we must satisfy ourselves upon that point by making a search."

"But don't you know, you profane man, that this is the room where all my pupils sleep? I dare say, if the truth was known, you would be very glad of the opportunity to search there."

"Well, ma'am, all I can say is, one place to me is just the same as another; so let us have no further words about it!"

"But," said the schoolmistress, "how many of you will be required to make this search? Wouldn't it do for one to come in and look round, because I am quite sure he is not in here?"

"Oh yes, that will do!" said the one in command. "I will go in with you and look round; but don't you be afraid, for if he is there and tries to escape I shall bring him down with a bullet!"

All this was distinctly heard, not only by Sixteen-String Jack, but by all the girls in the dormitory, and some slight, muffled screams escaped their lips.

It will be noticed that all that had been said by the police officers tended to confirm the story Sixteen-String Jack had told.

It was not once mentioned that they were in search of a highwayman.

The door was now opened, and the schoolmistress, with her garments huddled about her in a very singular fashion, and carrying a candle in her hand, entered the apartment.

She was followed by the officer of police, upon whose features was a broad grin, for the whole scene amused him vastly.

The girls pretended to be all in a very bad way indeed, and by common consent drew the clothes over their heads and trembled.

That is, there was one exception, and this was the bold young lady who had fastened Jack in the cupboard, and who still held the key in her hand.

She sat bolt upright in bed, staring about her, for which she was severely reprimanded by the gorgon.

The officer glanced around him.

All was peacefulness and quiet, and he did not believe for a moment that it would be possible for anyone to enter the room without attracting the attention of some one of the persons in it.

But seeing that this young lady was awake, he addressed himself to her.

"Beg pardon," he cried, "for disturbing your night's rest, miss; but would you be so kind as to say whether you have been alarmed by anyone coming into this room?"

"Oh yes, I have."

"You have?"

"Yes—I most certainly have."

The officer looked triumphantly and exultingly at the schoolmistress, as he said:

"Now, ma'am, we shall hear something about it, I rather think."

"You impertinent hussy!" cried the schoolmistress, "but I'll serve you out for this! How dare you scandalise my whole establishment by such unseemly conduct!"

Upon this rebuke, the young lady shrank down in bed again.

"Come, come," said the officer—"just please to tell me who has alarmed you by entering the room? I insist upon knowing, so speak at once!"

"Don't you know?"

"No, of course I don't, or I should hardly take the trouble to ask the question. Be quick, for every moment is of importance!"

"Well, then," was the reply, "I have been very much alarmed, and so have we all."

"Yes—yes"

"By your sudden entrance at this time of night along with our governess."

The police officer rapped out an oath.

The young lady squealed, and the gorgon sat down on the side of a bed, quite overcome with horror at such a desecration.

"You profane wretch!" she said, "why don't you search, and make haste out of this room? I believe it is only a pretext on your part, and I will take care to report you to your superior officers!"

The police officer muttered something that was not very polite, but it was too indistinct to be audible.

"What's in this cupboard?" he cried, suddenly pointing at it with his cutlass—"what's in it, I say?"

The young lady made no reply.

She could not, for terror made her completely dumb.

She concluded at once that the young nobleman's fate was sealed.

"Well, we'll soon see," said the officer, going towards it, and attempting to open the door.

But he found that it had been secured.

"What do you want there?" cried the governess, in shrill tones.

"Why, to look in, to be sure!"

"Well, then, why don't you?"

"Because it's locked."

"Of course it's locked," was the reply. "I should not wonder if the man you want has not come into this room without any of these eighteen young ladies seeing him, and then have slipped into the cupboard and locked himself inside! I shouldn't wonder at all—in fact, I consider it very likely indeed."

CHAPTER DCCLXXVI.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND THE PUPILS ARE ALARMED BY THE SUDDEN ENTRANCE OF THE GOVERNESS.

THE officer muttered something again, and this time rather louder, so that all could tell that it was nothing complimentary.

The scornful manner in which the schoolmistress spoke vexed him exceedingly, while, at the same time, it made him conscious of the folly of seeking there for the man he wanted.

He must be concealed upon some other part of the premises.

Sixteen-String Jack, however, felt very far from comfortable in his present position.

He knew that, to make the best of it, the chances were about equal whether the police officer insisted upon having the key or not.

If he had done so, of course his discovery and capture were certain.

But this danger passed away, Jack escaping by what may truly be termed a hair's-breadth.

In passing out of the room, however, the officer could not resist glancing all around him, and peeping into all the corners, as though there was in his mind some secret conviction, or as if some instinct had told him that the highwayman was there.

But he passed out of the room, and the door was closed behind him.

Now was the time, Sixteen-String Jack thought, for his greatest danger.

The young ladies might be incautious enough to commence a conversation, and of course he would be the subject of it.

If any portion of it was overheard either by the officers or the schoolmistress, they would rush in, and drag him from his hiding-place.

But the girl who had already shown herself to have a mind readier to act than any of her companions again made her superiority in this respect manifest.

"Hush!" she said, in a faint whisper, but which was

nevertheless audible all over the room—"hush! Pray don't speak a word, or else we shall be overheard! Perhaps they are only listening outside the door. Now, we must wait until we are quite certain that they have all gone."

Jack heard this whisper, and he felt a thrill of delight.

The danger he so much dreaded passed away like the former one.

The idea that their much-dreaded schoolmistress might be listening outside the door served to deter all from speaking a single word.

They well knew, from former experience, that their governess was quite capable of such an act as this and so they were silent accordingly.

But their hearts beat at a most alarming rate as they sat up in bed listening to what was going on below.

The officers were searching about everywhere, and poking into every nook and corner—of course without the slightest success.

There was just this danger, if the highwayman had but thought of it.

In making their investigations, they might be able to trace his footsteps up to the house, and in climbing up the pillar of the portico he may have made certain marks or scratches that would arouse their suspicions.

In that case, his position was very ticklish.

Indeed, the search continued for some time, and all the while the governess assailed them with a continual string of abuse.

She called them by almost all names, and uttered all manner of threats as to what she should do in consequence.

But the officers stood her abuse manfully enough, though it only enraged her the more to find that so little notice was taken of her words.

At last, however, there was not a room in the schoolhouse that the officers had not been in and searched thoroughly.

They were then forced to come to the uncomfortable conclusion that they had made a sad mistake.

The highwayman had certainly not taken refuge there, or else they would have found him beyond all doubt.

They thought they had missed him, and, in consequence, he was miles off by that time.

"We are done again!" said the leader of the troop, as he passed out into the garden and had the door of the schoolhouse banged behind him. "I made sure we should have him this time, but it's no go! It was you, Jenkins, that said you saw him leap over the palings!"

"It was, sir," said a voice, "and I verily believe I did see him! I might have been mistaken, though, but I don't think it!"

"If he did, all I can say is, he must have hidden himself somewhere else, and while we have been poking about the house he must have taken himself off, and is by this time in a place of security."

There was a strong degree of probability about this assertion, and the officers did not hesitate to believe it, although their disappointment was great in the extreme.

It did indeed seem extraordinary that, after depriving the highwayman of his horse, he should actually escape them.

Leaving them in the garden, however, to take whatever steps they might judge prudent, we will return to Sixteen-String Jack.

The front door was heard to be banged shut with great violence, and the girl with the key said:

"Oh, how thankful I am! What an escape! They are gone—positively gone! It is an escape indeed!"

"Be cautious!" said Jack, in a low voice, which sounded strange and muffled coming from the cupboard. "Wait until your governess and the remainder of the household have retired to rest. Then, and not till then, will it be safe for me to emerge and to thank you for your great kindness in having saved my life. You see that what I told you was perfectly true."

"Hush—hush!" said the young girl. "I believe I heard some one!"

All were silent immediately, and assumed listening attitudes.

But the silence that prevailed was not broken in upon by any sound, so they concluded that she must have been mistaken.

In this manner some time passed—not very long certainly, though to the pupils, owing to the state of suspense they were in, it seemed an age.

At last, however, Sixteen-String Jack believed that it would be prudent to emerge from his uncomfortable hiding-place.

Accordingly, he tapped slightly on the panel of the door, and said:

"Open—open! Let me out! It will be quite safe to do so now!"

The young lady with the key was now in a little bit of a difficulty.

But slipping out of bed, she tapped in return upon the cupboard door, and, placing her lips close to the keyhole, said:

"Promise me not to open the door as soon as I unlock it! Wait until I give you permission!"

"Certainly!" replied Jack. "I am entirely at your commands, and any command you may choose to give me I shall unhesitatingly obey."

Upon receipt of this assurance, the young lady without further hesitation unlocked the cupboard door, and then sprang quickly into bed.

"Now you can open!" she said.

Jack pushed open the door a little way, and listened.

But, reassured by the silence that continued to prevail, he ventured to emerge.

The very greatest degree of curiosity to gaze upon him took possession of all the young girls.

"You have saved my life," said Jack, in tones of unfeigned sincerity, "and I am thankful to you for it! I wish I could reward you in some suitable manner; but, as you find, I am a fugitive, and for some time to come I shall have much difficulty in keeping myself clear of the police officers, so what reward I can give you or what return I can make I know not."

"We don't want anything," said a chorus of voices, in suppressed tones—"we don't want anything, only to learn that you are safe. Make haste and fly while you have the opportunity!"

"I will," said Jack, "for there may be great danger in lingering here. I should like, however, to give you some token by which to remember me, but, alas! I have nothing."

There was a silence at this, from which it may be inferred that they would have been glad to receive a *souvenir* of some kind.

Jack turned, however, to the one who had been of so much assistance and service to him.

He approached near enough to take her hand, and then, bending forward suddenly, he kissed her.

"There," he said, "that's the only return I can make—that's the only thing I can leave behind me by which you can remember me."

The young lady screamed, for she was taken by surprise, and the cry was echoed by the others.

Then the door was suddenly burst open, and in rushed the schoolmistress, with her apparel in a still greater condition of disorder than before.

"Oh, mercy!" she shrieked—"have mercy upon us! The world is coming to an end! That ever I should have lived to see such a day as this! Ring the alarm bell! Murder—murder! Where are the police? Fetch them—here he is!"

Jack was so startled by this sudden apparition, and by its grotesque appearance, that he was not so quick in his action as he generally was.

But happening to be near the bed, he seized one of the pillows upon it, and flung it with full force at the governess, and with such accuracy of aim that it sent her backwards at once, and she fell with a crash to the floor.

In a moment he was by her side.

Over her head the governess wore a small shawl or handkerchief, and this Jack seized, rolled up rapidly in the shape of a rope, and tied over her mouth, so that making any further sound was quite out of the question.

She shook her fists defiantly and threateningly.

Jack stood over her, and said, in an impressive voice:

"Now mark me! I am a dangerous and desperate man! Beware how you trouble yourself or interfere with me again—the consequences will be serious if you do: as I don't attempt to punish anyone here for whatever share

they may have had in the proceedings of this night! If you do, I shall be certain to hear of it, and when the knowledge does come to my ears, I will have such a retribution upon you as shall serve to make all the world tremble!"

Jack's manner was so ferocious as he uttered these threatening words, that the schoolmistress turned very pale.

"Do you solemnly promise," he continued, "not to take any further notice of the proceedings of this night? Be quick, or it will be the worse for you!"

The governess nodded—that was the only way by which she could express her assent.

"Very good," said Jack.

Then turning round, he said, addressing the pupils:

"Once more, young ladies, accept my deep and heartfelt thanks for the service you have rendered me to-night; but for you I should most certainly have been killed, for, as you could tell by the manner of those men, they were thirsting for my blood! It must always be a satisfaction to remember that you have saved the life of a fellow-creature, and you may rest assured that up to the longest day of my life my heart will always be filled with gratitude to the whole of you. But I must hasten to make good my escape, and so once more I say farewell, though I sincerely hope that we shall some time meet again."

CHAPTER DCCLXXVII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK REPLACES THE HORSE THAT WAS SHOT UNDER HIM BY THE POLICE OFFICERS.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK hastily left the room.

But in passing out of the door he stumbled, and very nearly fell over some object that was lying in his way.

It would have been difficult for him to have discovered what this object was but for the fact that the candle was lying on the ground and burning in a very dangerous manner, for it had fallen out of the candlestick and the flame was in contact with the carpet.

Jack picked it up suddenly, for he knew that the light would aid him greatly in making his way through the house.

As he did so he looked at the obstacle, and then saw that it was a female—apparently a servant, who had been aroused by the tumult.

She was lying there in a faint, so it was pretty clear that she had fallen down in a swoon and dropped the candle.

From her Jack knew there was nothing to fear, and there really appeared to be no other inhabitants in the house.

The stairs were before him, so he ran down as quickly as he could, and made his way to the door at the bottom of the house.

Here he extinguished his light, and with great care and caution ventured to open the door a little way and peep out.

He saw nothing to alarm him.

The clouds that had covered the sky had now passed away, and the stars could be seen shining brightly, and diffusing a faint radiance over all things.

He looked keenly and scrutinisingly around, but failed to see anything of his foes, and, reassured by this and by the silence that prevailed, he ventured to step out.

Here he again reconnoitred, but with the same satisfactory result.

Notwithstanding all this apparent security, yet it might be that the officers were lurking and watching somewhere close at hand, and it especially behoved him to ascertain whether this was really the case, or else to creep away from the schoolhouse in such a manner that he would not be perceived.

Accordingly he assumed a crouching position, and by going a short distance at a time, and then pausing, he managed to get clear of the premises.

Then, turning round, he gave one more glance at the place he had incurred so much danger at, and saw standing in a group in the garden the figures of a number of men, evidently the police officers.

Jack drew a long breath when he saw them.

"I have had a narrow escape and no mistake," he cried, "and I am not yet free from all danger. However, my chances are better now than they have been—no doubt I shall give them the slip."

Still maintaining his cautious manner of proceeding, Jack hastened over the fields until he gained the high-road at some considerable distance off.

The night was now very far advanced, and he was well aware that he was a long way from Ealing Common.

Indeed, the distance was so great that without a horse it would be impossible to return there before daybreak, as he had agreed to do.

The idea of remaining somewhere during the day, especially when he knew the officers were making active search after him, was by no means an agreeable one to him, and he altogether refused to entertain it.

"No," he said to himself, as if reasoning the matter over, "a horse I must and will have, I am determined somehow or other! I will possess myself of one—how, I scarcely know."

Jack walked hastily and confidently along the high-way.

He was going in the direction he wished to take, and he was perfectly certain that he had thrown the officers off the scent entirely.

He kept a sharp look-out on each side of him over the hedges, thinking he might see a horse grazing in one of the meadows.

If he had seen one he would have endeavoured to capture it, and would have done as well as he could without the necessary trappings.

But he could not perceive the object he so wished to see.

It was that hour of the night, too, or rather morning when there are fewest people abroad.

It would be an unusual circumstance to meet with a traveller at such a time.

If he had met with one, Jack would certainly have relieved him of his horse.

Jack hurried forward on foot, until at length he was compelled to pause a few moments to recover his breath and strength.

"I must have a horse!" he said, again. "But where am I to get it? that is the question."

He sat down on a stile to rest, and looked over the fields in the hope of seeing the animal he so much wished to find.

But he saw instead, situated at no great distance off, a well-built, substantial-looking residence, doubtless the abode of some country squire.

It was an unpretending-looking place, and yet it seemed to carry along with it an impression of prosperity on the part of its occupiers.

"I'll warrant there are stables there," said Jack. "I'll go and see. If there is, I'll borrow one of the horses."

No sooner had he said this than he changed the direction of his steps, and made his way straight to the buildings at the rear of the house we have mentioned.

They were stables sure enough, as Jack found upon closer approach.

To get into the yard was easy enough, though he hesitated for some moments lest there should be a dog about, who, by his barking, might arouse the slumberers.

But no such animal appeared to be there, and so he advanced with a great degree of confidence

Going to the door of the stables, he raised the latch, and found it open readily to his hand.

"There are no horses here, I fear," he murmured, "or else they would be more particular in securing the doors."

In this he was mistaken, for he heard a faint rustling of straw.

The interior of the stable was very dark, so Jack had to procure a light.

As he carried the means of lighting a taper about his person this was rapidly done, and to his satisfaction he saw three horses standing in their separate stalls.

He fixed his eyes upon one immediately.

In colour it was a bright bay, and after one critical glance Jack pronounced it to be just the one suited to his purpose.

The harness-room he was aware would be somewhere close at hand, and, perceiving a door at one end of the stable, he opened it, and there found several saddles and bridles.

Selecting one of each, he returned, placed them on the horse with great rapidity, and then turned him round.

Hitherto there had not been the slightest token of an

alarm having been given, and Jack thought it would be truly a pity to arouse anyone now.

Accordingly, in order to make his escape as noiseless as possible, he took up a quantity of straw and littered it down in the yard, so that the horse should walk upon it without his iron hoofs producing a sound.

This having been done, he sprang into the saddle and walked the horse slowly and gently into the yard.

Jack's precautions all went for nothing, for the animal, surprised, no doubt, at this strange occurrence, uttered a loud neighing sound, which awoke the echoes far and near.

Jack was convinced that all hope of secrecy was at an end, so he turned the animal's head towards the low wall, over which he had climbed a short time before.

The horse leaped it gallantly.

But just as he was in the act of rising from the ground a loud voice cried out:

"Thieves — thieves! Murder — murder! Thieves! Fire!"

These outcries were succeeded by the loud report of a fowling-piece.

Glancing behind him, Jack saw the nightcapped head of a man protruding from a window over the stables.

In his hand he held a gun, which he had just discharged.

"All right!" shouted Jack. "Don't make yourself uneasy—you have done me no harm, nor the horse either! I have just borrowed him for a short time; you shall have him back as soon as I can spare him! Good night!"

He touched the beautiful creature slightly with the spur, and the manner in which he answered to it gratified Jack exceedingly, for it proved that his anticipations were correct.

Away it went at a prodigious speed, and very soon, not only the stable, but the house itself was lost to view.

But morning was now advancing with great rapidity, and Jack was aware that he would have a very hard ride in order to regain the appointed spot in time.

Yet, if he met with no interruptions, he had great hopes of being able to accomplish the distance.

The horse was either one of a very superior quality indeed, or else he had had a long rest in the stable, for he was full of fire and vigour, and dashed along as though fatigue was a thing that he knew nothing about.

Before there was even a streak of light in the eastern horizon, Sixteen-String Jack pulled up with a dash in the front of the inn.

The sound of horses' feet immediately brought two persons to the front door.

Jack flung himself from the back of his steed, and cried:

"Safe back again, Davis, you see! Ah, captain," he added, as he saw the other, "you have returned all right?"

"Yes," replied Turpin, "but only a few minutes since. Are you safe and unhurt?"

"Yes, and I have had capital luck; but I'll tell you all about it presently. Do you see my new horse?"

"Yes. Where is the other?"

"I will tell you as soon as we get indoors. But Tom King and Claude—where are they?"

"They have not come back yet," returned Dick. "I am expecting them every moment: it is quite time they were here."

"Yes," said Jack, turning round. "Look, captain—it is just about daybreak now; they will have to be here pretty quick if they intend to keep their appointment."

He pointed to the sky as he spoke.

That faint grey light which always precedes the dawn of a new day, and which resembles twilight, could now be seen, particularly in the east.

As they continued to gaze, it grew lighter and lighter every moment.

"If they are not close at hand," said Dick, as he accompanied Jack towards the stable, "I hope they will make themselves comfortable somewhere, for the risk of coming here by daylight is excessive."

"I can hear nothing of them yet," said Tom Davis, "and I can generally tell as soon as any of you turn up the lane."

CHAPTER DCCLXXVIII.

RELATES THE STRANGE ADVENTURES THAT BEFEL CLAUDE DUVAL AND TOM KING UPON THE WESTERN ROAD.

In order to bring the relation of the night's adventures to a conclusion, it is necessary that we should describe the proceedings of Claude Duval and Tom King, about whose return their comrades were beginning to grow so anxious.

We will start first with Claude Duval, who had agreed to take the Western Road, while Tom King rode off in a southerly direction.

Claude was well enough pleased with the direction that had fallen to his lot.

The Western Road was one always well frequented by passengers, and, as a rule, they generally carried good booties with them.

He was exceedingly anxious to make up for the losses of the preceding nights, and therefore he galloped off as far as he could in half an hour, and then pulled up, determined to wait the approach of any traveller who might chance either to be going to London or returning from it.

The spot he had chosen was one exactly suited for the purpose he required.

His weapons were all in readiness, and holding a pistol in his grasp, so as to be prepared to use it in a second, if necessary, he sat quite still and waited.

Some time passed by in perfect silence, and then the sound that he so desired to hear broke the stillness of the night.

Faint at first, but gradually becoming sharper and more distinct.

A traveller, mounted on horseback, was going from the direction of London.

His horse was going at a tremendous rate.

The manner in which his hoofs touched the ground told Claude that he was going at full gallop.

"I'll put a stop to your race," he thought. "I must be ready, though, or he will pass me."

The night was dim and obscure, owing to the quantity of clouds that had piled themselves up in the sky, and which made it very difficult to distinguish objects unless they were very close at hand indeed.

Nevertheless, the piercing gaze of the highwayman enabled him to perceive the figure of this traveller as he came along at such a wonderful rate.

"He goes as though he meant to break his neck," muttered Claude. "Perhaps he thinks that by adopting this course he shall avoid the danger of being stopped; he will discover his mistake, however."

As soon as the traveller came within earshot, Claude rode out into the road and uttered a loud shout.

"Hold!" he cried. "Pull up—pull up, I say!"

Not the slightest notice was taken of this injunction.

The horse swerved suddenly to one side of the highway, almost unseating his rider by the quickness of the movement.

Claude made an ineffectual attempt to grasp the rein.

Away at undiminished speed the horse flew, and the highwayman was disappointed of his prey.

"Balked!" he said; "but yet I will not be defeated thus."

He stuck the spurs into his own steed as he spoke, and shot off in pursuit.

The race was a most exciting one, and the longer it continued the more determined did Claude become that he would overtake the traveller.

At length, greatly to his surprise, upon reaching a lonely part of the road the traveller reined up suddenly, and turned round so as to face him.

Claude checked his horse also.

"He's a bold fellow," he muttered, "but yet he will have to succumb."

The traveller planted his horse exactly in the centre of the highway, and there waited for his pursuer to come up.

Claude by no means held back, and when he was within a few yards of him he cried:

"Resistance will be useless! Put up your weapons, and hand me your money and valuables! If you refuse, the consequences will be on your own head!"

To Claude's great astonishment, the only reply that



[CLAUDE DUVAL ENCOUNTERS TOM KING ON THE HIGHWAY.]

was made to this speech came in the shape of a clear, ringing laugh.

This surprised him beyond measure.

But his amazement quickly subsided, for the supposed traveller said:

"Why, Claude, what a strange meeting, and what a ridiculous mistake for both of us to make! Ha, ha!"

"Tom King?" ejaculated Claude Duval.

"Yes. Then you really did not recognise me?"

"No. And I suppose that you did not recognise me either?"

"No, I did not."

"But how comes it that you are on the Western Road? It is quite in opposition to our arrangements."

"I know that, Claude; but as I started off in the direction I intended to take, I didn't go far before I found myself confronted by a troop of police officers. I came upon them suddenly, and had only just time to pull up and turn back. They commenced an immediate pursuit, but luckily I got clear of them, though I had to turn on the Western Road to do so."

"And that was the reason you were going at such a furious rate, then?" said Claude.

"It was. I was excited by what had happened, and, by the speed I was going at, I did not recognise your voice—in fact, I jumped at once to the conclusion that you were a police officer."

"Ha, ha! it's a good joke! But if you did that, why did you pull up in the way you did?"

"Why, I found that whoever it was after me was almost as well mounted as I was, and certainly determined to capture me if possible, and as you were alone, I resolved to turn round and show fight."

"Well, I am very glad you came to that decision. Not knowing who you were, I began to lose all patience, and perhaps I should have tried to bring you up by a bullet,

and if I had injured you I should never have forgiven myself."

"All's well that ends well," said Tom King, coolly, "and I am heartily glad we have met."

"So am I, and as our meeting has taken place in so singular a manner, and under circumstances over which neither of us had any control, I propose that we pass the remainder of the night in each other's company. What do you say?"

"With all my heart," was the reply—"in fact, if you had allowed me the opportunity, I should have made the same proposition. It's a long while since we both took to the highway in company, and rely upon it some good adventures are waiting us to-night."

"Let us hope so, for although when going out before I had adventures enough in all conscience, yet they were not so profitable as I should have desired."

"Nor were mine; but if we possibly can, we will remedy that to-night."

"So we will—that is, if fortune will favour us."

"Let us take our stand here then. You could not wish for a better bit of road, and surely before long we shall hear a traveller approaching."

This was agreed to, and the two highwaymen backed their horses close against the hedge, and remained there as motionless as possible, waiting for an adventure to present itself.

But on that particular night it seemed as though they were to have the Western Road all to themselves.

Much frequented as it was generally, to-night appeared destined to prove an exception.

They waited until their patience was completely exhausted—they waited, indeed, until the character of the night entirely changed.

Hitherto it had been as favourable for their purpose as they could wish, but now the dense heavy clouds slowly rolled away to windward, leaving the blue sky fully revealed.

Then the moon appeared.

She was only a few degrees above the horizon, it is true, but yet her beams served to illuminate the landscape with considerable brightness, and each moment, as she rose higher and higher in the sky, the power of her rays increased.

"Everything goes against us," said Claude, half impatiently. "In an hour at the most the moon will be shining so bright that all objects far and near will be as plainly visible as at noonday."

"Unless some clouds come up," interposed Tom King.

"Yes; if that happens, of course, all will be well; but I have my doubts."

"So have I."

"With the moon shining like this we shall be seen a long way off, and rely upon it we shall gain little from travellers to-night."

"Don't be down-hearted just yet, Claude. Remember the night is young, and we cannot tell what is going to happen."

"Very true. But look over there—what do you think is the meaning of that?"

He pointed across the meadows as he spoke.

There could be seen plainly and easily enough the figures of two men standing by the side of a large sheet of water—either a very large pond or else a lake.

Upon this water the moon seemed to shine with much greater brilliancy than upon any other object.

The consequence was that these two men we have mentioned standing near the edge of the water could be seen with great distinctness, for their outlines were clearly defined.

To see two men standing in such a situation was by no means an extraordinary circumstance.

But it was the furious gestures they made that attracted the highwaymen's notice.

They were too far off to catch any of the sounds; but, from their actions, it was evident that some very stormy discussion or dispute was taking place between them.

Once or twice one raised his arm in such a threatening manner that Claude and Tom believed he was about to deal a heavy blow.

But if such had been his intention his purpose changed.

From having sat so long on their steeds, waiting patiently and seeing nothing, the highwaymen were just ready to look with the utmost degree of curiosity upon a scene of this kind, and as they continued to gaze, the curiosity that they felt increased each moment.

A strong desire to draw nearer and to ascertain if possible what these two men were disputing about took possession of them, and yet neither liked to mention it to the other, lest the proposition should not be agreeable.

But at last Claude Duval, finding there were no more signs of the approach of any traveller than there were at first, turned suddenly to Tom King, and said:

"I am strangely and powerfully interested in the proceedings of those two men. What, think you, are they doing?"

"I am at a loss to know, and I am to the full as anxious to learn as you are."

"Then, if it is agreeable to your wishes," said Claude, "we will leave the highway for a short time, and endeavour to approach close enough to them to overhear their conversation."

"With all my heart—anything would be better than waiting here in this fashion."

"So it would. But our horses—what shall we do with them?"

"We cannot take them with us," was the reply—"at least, not without being seen. I propose that we secure them among yonder clump of trees, and then creep along under the shadow of that hedgerow; you see we shall then be able to get very close to the margin of the water, and I doubt not we shall be within earshot."

"Agreed!" was the response. "Come on without further delay—I am impatient to have my curiosity gratified."

CHAPTER DCCLXXIX.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN OVERHEAR A SINGULAR CONFERENCE.

THE little clump of trees that was mentioned was situated on the opposite side of the road, and at no great distance from it.

From the nature of their position, they would be easily able to gain this without attracting the attention of the two men whose proceedings they desired to watch.

Indeed, it is questionable whether anything would have attracted their attention, they seemed so wholly engrossed by the topic they had under consideration.

Among these trees the horses could be concealed from anything but a search in that quarter, and for greater security they tied them by their bridles to low-lying branches of the trees in such a way as to allow them to crop the soft herbage at their feet.

Then acting upon the plan they had already agreed upon, the two highwaymen crept along under the shadow of the hedgerow, which was one that formed a line of separation between two large meadows.

At the bottom of both of these was the large sheet of water, and the two men were standing upon its brink on the opposite side of the hedge.

Taking care to tread gently, and not to make any more rustling among the grass than they could possibly help the two highwaymen at length approached as close as they thought was prudent or necessary.

They remained perfectly still, listening, and then they heard a voice say:

"All this discussion is useless, George. I tell you not a thousand times as much talk would move me from my purpose."

"But will you not listen to reason?" replied the other.

"I have listened long enough," angrily rejoined the first speaker, "and I am determined that I will listen no longer!"

"But you shall listen, John—it is important that you should!"

"Bah!"

"I say that before we part you shall relinquish all your claim! I say it, and I have sworn it!"

The other laughed scornfully.

"I dare say you would like to threaten me out of it; but you ought to know my character well enough by this time to feel certain that you will fail in any such attempt."

"But, brother John," said the other, and evidently the younger of the two speakers—"remember I call you brother."

"Well, what of that?"

"You are not my brother actually, and I have hitherto always refused to address you by such a title, but now for the first time I call you brother."

"Well, what difference will that make? Do you imagine I am so foolish and childish as to allow a name to make the slightest difference to me?"

"There is much in a name. There has been hitherto not sufficient affection between us; it may have been that there are faults on both sides, but I am anxious that it should be altered."

"Of course you are, in order that you may bring me to your purpose; but it is in vain—no argument, I tell you, will prevail. Is it likely that I should forego such a delight, and especially to you? I have never forgiven your mother for entering our family and endeavouring to take my mother's place!"

"But," said the young man, "you surely cannot blame me for that. How could I help it? what control could I possibly exercise over such events?"

"I care not, and that is not the point we came here to discuss. I met you on the border of this lake in order that another matter should be settled between us either one way or the other."

"I know you did."

"Well, then, now I call upon you to relinquish."

"Why should you expect me to give way any more than yourself?"

"Because I consider that you are the one who ought to give way."

"No doubt—no doubt."

"I think with good reason," returned the other.

"I fail to see it."

"I tell you I love her with a thousand times more affection than anyone else can bestow, and have loved her for years and years past; and do you think that such a passion as I feel could be lightly cast out from my breast? It has been growing there for years, and is stronger now than ever."

"But," said the other, "you seem entirely to overlook the fact that this love of yours is ill-bestowed in every way. I have told you, and Edith has told you over and over again, that she does not and cannot love you."

"But she will alter her mind," was the reply.

"I should not despair of gaining here affections if you were to give up your pretensions."

"But I tell you, great as you may imagine your love to be, mine far surpasses it, and, what is more, my passion is returned by Edith herself. Why, then, should you step in and blight the happiness of both of us? Is it not reasonable that you should give way? because by so doing you would insure the happiness of two persons; whereas, if I gave way, you alone would be happy."

"I tell you I will not listen to such words," said the other, angrily, "and now that we are here I command and will compel you to give up all your pretensions to her hand'"

"Then I may end the matter by saying that I firmly and distinctly refuse."

"The consequences be upon your own head then!" said the other. "You have tried my temper to the utmost! Take that as the reward of your folly and obstinacy!"

So saying, the elder brother raised his hand and struck the other a violent blow.

There was a shriek of agony, and the young man fell to the ground.

"Now you have your reward!" said the other. "I will be troubled with you no longer! You shall follow the instrument which has wrought your destruction!"

"So saying, he flung a large, dagger-like knife into the water, and stooped down to pick up the form that was lying so near to the edge of the lake

But seeing this, Claude and Tom both uttered a loud shout.

The wound had been given so quickly that they were not in time to prevent it.

But they resolved to prevent the mischief going any further.

Upon hearing the shout, the elder brother started to his feet with a cry of alarm.

He saw two men hastening towards him, and, thoroughly terrified at this sight, he turned and fled with the fleetness of a greyhound.

The highwaymen were half inclined to run after him and capture him.

But they considered that their time would be best bestowed upon the unfortunate young man, who was groaning heavily.

They knelt down beside him, and then found that the blood was pouring in torrents from a wound in his breast.

He made desperate efforts to speak, but could not.

At last, however, he managed to gasp out:

"Go—go—to Myrtle Cottage, and ask for Edith Grey—tell her that—that——"

Articulation failed him, for the blood seemed to rise up in his throat and choke him.

"No," said Claude, "we will take you to Myrtle Cottage; it is possible that if you have immediate and careful attention you will recover from this hurt."

The young man shook his head slowly.

"No—no," he said, "I am wounded to the death, I am sure of it. I am fully sensible of it—no one could mistake such a feeling as I have now, his knife has entered my heart."

He spoke these words by a strong effort, and slowly raised himself upon one arm.

But his strength left him with extreme suddenness, and he fell back upon the grass.

Then a spasm seemed to convulse his whole frame, after which he lay perfectly still.

"He is dead," said Tom King, a moment or so afterwards; "his forebodings were correct—the wound was mortal."

"Are you sure he is dead?" said Claude.

"Yes, I can say that I have no doubt about it. We were just too late to interfere," he said. "What shall we do now?"

"That rascal ought to be captured."

"He ought, but he's far enough off by this time."

"So he is; in my opinion we cannot do better than carry out the injunctions of this young man. Myrtle Cottage is doubtless close at hand; let us find it, and tell its inmates what we have witnessed. It will be an unpleasant errand, truly, and yet it will be merciful to let them know just how events occurred, and then they will be secure from the risk of all misrepresentation."

The highwaymen looked around them, and by the aid of the now brilliant rays of the moon, they saw, about half a mile off, the roof of a dwelling, which, from its size and general appearance, they conjectured must be Myrtle Cottage.

At any rate, they resolved to remount their steeds and ride towards it.

While walking back to the clump of trees where their horses had been left, Claude said:

"I knew that something of no common interest was going on when I sat watching them from the distance. How I wish that we had been in time to avert that fatal blow."

"So do I, though I am afraid it would have been impossible, it was so quickly done. What strikes me as strangest of all, is that we should have been there long enough to be able to comprehend from their conversation the exact conditions of all parties."

"Yes, the one who lies so cold and still in death was the brother-in-law of the one who has murdered him. It is but rarely that affection subsists in such cases as these."

"Very rarely, indeed; more frequently there is open enmity, and quite as often it happens that they both fall in love with the same person."

"Yes, as we have witnessed in this case. It will be sad tidings indeed that we have to communicate to Edith Grey."

By this time the horses were reached, and vaulting into their saddles, the highwaymen went at full speed towards the cottage.

The hour was so late that it was scarcely probable any of the inmates would be astir.

But as they drew closer, they perceived that a light was shining from one of the windows.

"This is the place, depend upon it," said Claude Duval

"Ring the bell then," replied his companion, "and we shall soon know for certain."

The bell was rung, and before the clanging ceased, the front door of the cottage was opened.

"Who is there?" said a low and gentle voice.

"Is this Myrtle Cottage?" asked Claude. "If it is, we have a message to deliver."

"Yes, yes, this is Myrtle Cottage," responded the same voice. "What is the nature of the message you have to give?"

The speaker advanced into the garden, and walked timidly towards the gate, close to which the highwaymen were standing.

"You are Miss Grey, I suppose," said Claude, in a mournful voice—"Miss Edith Grey, is not that your name?"

CHAPTER DCCLXXX.

TOM KING AND CLAUDE DUVAL FIND THEMSELVES INVOLVED IN A DEEP MYSTERY.

CLAUDE'S manner and the way in which he spoke were sufficient to convince anyone that he was the bearer of sad tidings.

The young girl had to clasp the bars of the little wooden gate very tightly before she could manage to reply to the question that had been addressed to her.

Then, in an agitated, hysterical voice, she said:

"Yes, yes—this is Myrtle Cottage, and my name is Edith Grey! What business is it that can have brought you here to-night?"

"The very worst that you can possibly imagine—the most unwelcome news that you could possibly hear! Prepare yourself to hear the direst intelligence—summon up all your fortitude for the shock."

Whiter and whiter grew the young girl, and her grasp upon the gate tightened.

Claude hardly knew how to proceed further, and she was in such a state that she could not ask him a question.

To his great relief, another person emerged from the cottage.

This was an old lady dressed in black, and wearing a widow's cap.

"What is it, Edith?" she asked. "What is the meaning of all this?"

Edith could not answer, but Claude spoke for her.

"I have been told to inform Miss Edith Grey that—hat——"

He paused, and could go no further.

"Something dreadful has happened," said the old lady, hastening forward.

"You are right in your surmise. Can you guess who it is that has met with a sad fate?"

A stifled shriek came from Edith's lips.

She guessed readily enough.

"I know not," said the old lady, "without it is George Shaw."

"I know not whether that is his name," replied Claude, "but if he is the brother-in-law of some one named John——"

"Yes, John Shaw—that's his elder brother's name."

"Well, then, it is of him I have to speak. Come nearer—let me whisper the tidings in your ear. I will leave you to break them to your daughter afterwards."

Dreading by his manner she knew not what, the old lady came forward.

Claude bent down in the saddle, and whispered a few words in her ear.

"Good heavens!" she ejaculated. "This will be a frightful shock! Are you sure that what you say is true?"

"It is quite true. I wish it was not. I wish, also, that we were permitted to stay and see the matter investigated. But that is impossible—we cannot linger longer. Farewell!"

He waved his hand as he spoke, and rode off.

"I could not stop," he said to Tom King, when they had got to a little distance. "The sight of that young girl's agony would have been more than I could bear."

"It would have been dreadful indeed—and besides, there was no need for us to witness it."

"So I thought. We performed the charge that had been given us, which would be sufficient."

"Quite. But did you notice how gentle, how good, and how beautiful that young girl appeared to be? Is it not hard to think that for the future her life will be overshadowed by a heavy cloud?"

"Very; it makes me wish more than ever that we had been in time to prevent the perpetration of that dastardly deed."

"Yet we have nothing to reproach ourselves for."

"Oh, nothing! The chances were a thousand to one against our going to listen there at all."

"My friend, let us try a gallop—that will do us the most good under these circumstances."

"It will. It will serve to dispel these gloomy ideas that now fill our minds."

This suggestion was at once put into practice.

The highwaymen pressed their horses into a gallop, and for some time they continued to fly at full speed across the country.

Suddenly, however, by one accord, Claude and Tom King stopped their horses.

As if they had only one impulse, they both sat upon their steeds in attitudes of intense listening.

But the sound, whatever it was, that had first attracted their attention was heard no more.

They listened in vain for its repetition.

"Claude," said Tom King at last, finding all was still, "did you hear it?"

"That shriek?"

"Yes; it sounded like a shriek, but a most unearthly one. It prompted me in a moment to pull up."

"And me the same, as you see. But all is still now."

"Very."

"How strange! It is impossible that our fancies have misled us, for both heard it at the same time."

"Oh, yes, a shrill, unnatural, shrieking cry that arose all at once, and died as suddenly. Yet where it came from I have no idea."

"Nor I. At any rate, it cannot concern us much. Let us ride on."

"Claude."

"What?"

"Do you recollect what the captain said to us?"

"When?"

"To-night, before we started."

"What was it?"

"He told us on no account to hesitate to turn out of our way if by so doing we could render assistance to those who require it."

"Oh, yes, he said that!"

"Well, then, I think no one would give a cry like that who was not in immediate need of succour. It was a cry full of heartrending agony."

"It was—you are right enough about that."

"But how silent it is now! Where can the cry come from?"

"That is what I propose to find out, Claude. Let us look around."

"We shall see better in a moment," said Claude, glancing up at the heavens. "There's a cloud now over the moon's disc, but it will soon pass away, and then we shall see distinctly."

Even as he spoke the moon burst out into its full flood of silvery lustre, and instantly everything was revealed with a clearness and beauty that was enchanting to look upon.

The meadows seemed as though coated over with silver, and the smooth, shining leaves upon the trees glistened as the wind blew them to and fro, making them look like so many diamonds.

To the surprise of the highwaymen, upon looking around, they could not at first detect either any signs of a human habitation or of human beings abroad.

But they noticed on their left hand that the lane they were traversing was bounded by some high, stout wooden palisades.

Behind these was planted a row of holly-bushes of unusual height and density—their sharp, prickly leaves formed, indeed, a perfect wall, and one that anyone would have hesitated before attempting to climb over.

From the appearance of this palisade, and the careful manner in which the holly trees were kept up in a regular line, Claude and Tom King came to the conclusion that it must be the boundary of an estate of some kind or other.

Perhaps in the centre was situated a house, and from this dwelling the cry might have come.

"Let us go a little further," said Tom King, as he pointed all this out to his comrade. "Doubtless we shall come presently to some point where we shall be able to tell whether there is a house here or not."

"With all my heart, my friend! Lead the way."

Tom King obeyed, and they trotted for nearly half a mile down the lane before they reached the point where the palisades turned off at a right angle.

They followed the direction of it, determined to make an entire circuit, if necessary.

But so high were the holly trees, and so dense their foliage, that they could not possibly obtain a glimpse of what there was to be seen on the other side.

The next corner was reached with the same result, and here began a brick wall, higher, if anything, than the holly trees, and equally efficacious, so far as keeping out a view went.

"It must be some one who is uncommonly fond of retirement and privacy," said Claude Duval. "I never met with a place so hemmed-in before."

"In this circumstance there is matter for conjecture," said Tom King.

"It is indeed most unusual to find a place so well barricaded, for I know not what other term to apply to it—I don't know a better word. But come on! We may as well see all round it now."

Going for some distance along this brick wall, the highwaymen came to a large pair of folding gates—their size, in fact, was immense, for, from private motives, they had been made of a great height, and, in order to look proportionate, they had been made much wider than was really necessary.

There was no such thing as obtaining a view in that quarter, however, and so the highwaymen continued on their way.

Upon reaching the termination of the wall, they found that another paling, similar to the one they had examined, joined up to it.

"I see how it is," said Tom King. "This is evidently the front portion of the inclosure, and those gates there constitute the entrance. The other three sides are composed of these palings and fence of holly bushes."

"That's just it."

"Well, then, my friend, does it not strike you as being singular that a place should be so well and thoroughly inclosed as to make it an impossiblity for anyone to obtain a view from any point?"

"It does seem strange, and I confess my curiosity is greatly excited by it."

"Yes, and I would wish you to couple that with the dreadful cry that we both heard. In my opinion, it came from somewhere over the palings."

"That was the conclusion I myself came to, and you may rely upon it no good end is served by so much secrecy as there is evidently here. Can you form any idea of what the nature of such a place as this might be?"

"No, that I can't," said Tom. "I don't intend to be baulked! At all risks I will have one peep."

"But how shall you accomplish it?"

"If you will lead my horse close to the wall, I will stand upon its back. By reaching up my arms, I think I shall then be able to touch the top of the wall."

"I see."

"And if I can once obtain a grasp with the end of my fingers, I know I can draw my body up sufficiently high to take a peep over, and see what there is beyond."

"Then do so," said Claude. "I will lead your horse with the greatest pleasure in life."

Tom King's horse was led close to the wall, and kept in that position by Claude Duval.

Tom King himself then disengaged his feet from the stirrups, and stood up on the saddle.

His height was by this means increased, and, as he had fully expected, he found that he was just able to take hold of the top of the wall with the ends of his fingers.

CHAPTER DCCLXXXI.

TOM KING AND CLAUDE DUVAL CLIMB OVER THE WALL, AND MAKE SOME SINGULAR DISCOVERIES.

As he had said, Tom King, having obtained this grasp, could pull himself up with ease.

His head was soon above the level of the wall, and then he made as accurate a survey as he possibly could.

He saw below him a large enclosure—not planted with shrubs and flowers, and tastefully laid out as one might imagine to find it, but simply composed of one flat, level piece of ground covered over with gravel.

In appearance, then, the enclosure resembled a desert on a small scale more than anything else.

In the centre of this arid plain was a house—a large, dull-red, rambling structure, with many small latticed windows.

From no one of these windows came forth a gleam of light.

All was uniformly dark, and seemed as cheerless as the ground upon which the residence was built.

What could be the nature of such a place Tom King could not imagine.

Surely no one would be eccentric enough in his tastes to prefer such a prison-like place for a dwelling.

Yet there were evidences that the house and the piece of ground around it were carefully kept in order.

An aspect of neatness and order could be seen on all sides.

While gazing on this scene, Tom King's attention was suddenly attracted by the opening of one of the latticed casements.

As it turned upon its hinges he saw, standing just within the room which it illuminated, a white, shadowy form, whose outlines he could not well make out, owing to the darkness.

But that it was a female he had not the slightest doubt.

Suddenly two long, white arms were thrust out of the window, and again the dreadful shrieking cry was uttered which he had heard once before, and which had sufficed to make him check the speed of his steed so abruptly.

But the shriek was suddenly cut short by the sound of heavy blows.

The cracking of a whip could be heard, accompanied by angry words uttered in a gruff, savage tone of voice.

Then faint, smothered cries for help and appeals for mercy next made themselves heard.

This was a scene that Tom King could no longer endure to remain a passive spectator of, and therefore he lowered himself down from the wall at once, in order to relate what he had seen to his companion.

Claude was all impatience to hear what his comrade had to impart.

But as soon as ever the intelligence was received by him, he cried:

"My friend, this is something that surely calls for our interference. Some dark, evil deeds are certainly going on in this place—we have abundant and ample evidence of it."

"We have," said Tom King, "and we will try and put an end to them."

"And it was a girl, you say, that uttered that cry?"

"It was, or else I make a great mistake."

"And it seemed to you, then, as though she was confined there as in a kind of prison, and that she was uttering that cry in the hope of the sound reaching the ears of some passers-by and attracting their attention?"

"Just so; and then it seemed to me that one of her jailers, aroused by the noise, had entered, and then had inflicted a frightful punishment upon her for so doing."

"Yes, it is impossible to come to any other conclusion; but let the wretches beware!"

"How shall we obtain admittance, though?"

"That, I fancy, is the most difficult point that we have to consider; it is a difficulty, but one that must be surmounted. Do you think this would aid us?"

As he spoke, Claude Duval unwound from round his waist a quantity of thin but strong rope.

"The very thing," said Tom. "There's a *chevaux de frise* on the top of the wall, and if I get up again I am sure I can tie the rope round the bar, we can then pull ourselves up easily, and lower ourselves down on the other side."

"And our horses—what shall we do with them?"

"They seem rather in the way of our adventures to-night, do they not?"

"They do."

"I suppose we cannot do better than secure them somewhere, as we did on the previous occasion—that is the only

thing I can think of, and look, yonder are some trees that will be just calculated to answer our purpose."

"The very thing, because in the event of our being compelled to beat a precipitate retreat, we shall not be long in regaining them."

"True."

The horses were accordingly disposed of in a similar fashion to that which had been adopted on the preceding occasion—of course, after Tom King had once more stood on the back of his steed and secured the rope in the way he had proposed.

With such an auxiliary as this, it was a very easy matter to climb over the wall.

Tom King was up to the top in a twinkling, and he was soon rejoined by Claude Duval.

The rope was then lowered on the other side, and they descended with speed and safety.

Owing to the brightness with which the moon was shining, some care would have to be taken in crossing the open space, in order to get to the house without being seen.

Tom King crouched down in the shadow of the wall, and remained for a moment watching.

All was still, however, and he was enabled to point out with precision and certainty the very identical window at which the white form had appeared.

"We will try and get towards it," said Tom King; "let us make one bold rush for it; we shall not be so likely to be seen then as we shall be if we go slowly."

"You are right."

"Now then—quick!"

With rapid and yet almost noiseless footsteps, the two highwaymen rushed across the gravelled enclosure, and paused close against the wall of the house.

But the window at which the white form had appeared was very far above them.

To reach it without more tools and appliances than they possessed appeared to be totally impossible.

The walls of the house were uniformly smooth.

There was not a projection of any kind that would have assisted them to mount.

They much wished they had the means of making their presence known to the unhappy prisoner, for such in their minds they fully believed her to be.

They might have called out, it is true, or whistled, or made use of some other ordinary sound, only there was this fear, that the sound might reach the ears of her captors.

"I wish she would come to the window again," said Tom King—"the matter would be easy enough then."

"I am afraid, however," said Claude, "from what you say, that it is hardly likely that she will make her appearance; the punishment she has received has doubtless been too severe."

"Yes," said Tom King, "it makes my blood boil to think of it."

"Our best plan, I think, will be to reconnoitre round the premises; perhaps we may be able to find some means of entrance."

"It may be so, but yet I am exceedingly doubtful whether we shall."

"You think the people, after walling in the place so well, would not be likely to omit the precaution of fastening up all the doors and windows?"

"I do."

"And yet it may not be so; the nature of the outward defences—if I may so term them—might beget in their minds a feeling of confidence, and they might relax in their vigilance in securing the inner doors."

"That is only to be tested by trying. Come along, let us begin, for time is flying fast."

This was true, for although at present they had done little else but gallop about the country to no profit, yet more than half the night was consumed, for in this manner time passes with exceeding quickness.

One by one, as the nearest doors and windows were come to, Tom King and Claude Duval tried them.

But they found them uniformly secure, and from the manner in which they resisted all attempts to shake them even, it was clear that considerable force would be required to effect an entrance.

But they had not the means of exerting that force, nor had they the tools requisite for such a purpose.

At length they came round to the very spot from which they had started, and then they looked rather blankly into each other's countenances.

"Now, Claude," said Tom King, "what are we to do?"

"There's no getting into this confounded place from the ground floor, that's quite clear, and it seems equally impossible to gain the upper stories."

"It does. The house is almost as impregnable as a fortress, yet we must not despair, my comrade. I have quite set my heart upon this adventure, and I shall not rest again until I have been able to discover what the nature of this place is, who the young girl may be, and why she is kept here such a close prisoner."

Claude laughed.

"I rather think you have set yourself some difficult things to find out, Tom; but, however, in all this I am most heartily with you, for I question whether the curiosity and interest I feel is less in amount than yours."

"Well, then, let us make a trial in some quarter."

"Wait a moment or two; I would prefer to hold a consultation, and while we are doing so let us take care not to speak above our breaths if we can help it—you don't know what ears may be listening to us."

"What is it you wish to consult about?"

"The best manner of proceeding. You see it will never do for us to fail. Before we begin our operations in any shape it will be necessary for us to feel perfectly assured and confident that we shall succeed."

"Of course. But then it is at all times difficult to make certain of a success."

"Certainly it is; and in this case the effects of failure would be disastrous, from this cause: even if we effected our retreat without gaining our end, we should not be allowed the opportunity of making a second attack, as they would so strongly protect the place by means of men and such-like that we should never be able to get near."

"Or they might move her away entirely."

"Just so. And in either of these cases our plan for delivering this girl would be at an end."

"So it would," said Tom King, thoughtfully—"so it would. I had not thought of that, Claude. What now do you advise?"

CHAPTER DCCLXXXII.

TOM KING AND CLAUDE DUVAL ARE BAFFLED IN THEIR EFFORTS TO OBTAIN A CLUE TO THE MYSTERIOUS THINGS THAT THEY HAVE WITNESSED.

"Well," said Claude Duval, "it seems to me, Tom, that there is about only one safe thing that we can do under the circumstances."

"Indeed! And what may that be?"

"Why, single-handed and unaided as we are by tools or anything, I don't see how it is possible for us to effect an entrance into this house, so I propose that we leave it as it is, and return to the inn. We can communicate all that we have witnessed to the captain and Sixteen-String Jack, and it is very odd to me if they don't deem it of sufficient importance to merit their attention."

"I see, Claude," said Tom—"you would have us all four make the attack together?"

"Certainly."

"Well, it would be more like ensuring success, I admit."

"It would indeed! I shall then have very little doubt, especially if we could contrive one thing."

"What's that?"

"To have a few minutes' conversation with the girl who screamed out; if we could let her know that friends were near she might be able to render us great assistance."

"So she might. She would be very likely to tell us at which point we should gain admittance with the most ease, and, in fact, enlighten us upon all those points upon which we are now in darkness."

"Yes, that is much to be wished for."

"Then my propositon is agreeable to you?"

"Yes."

"Then let us remain here beneath this window for some time longer, in the hope that this girl will presently appear; as soon as she does we will try to communicate to her in such a manner as not to raise an alarm."

"Very good. But if we can get into conversation with

get the information she will give will enable us to mature our plans for the succeeding night."

"You are perfectly right, Claude, and I quite agree with all that you have said—I am sure it will be the best course to adopt."

"Very well, then, that's all settled, and we need not trouble any further about it."

"How long will you wait?"

"Oh, as long as we possibly can. So long as we are back at the inn by daybreak, that will do."

"I know it will; but don't let us be a moment after it if we can possibly avoid it. We have already been made sensible of the advantages of having such a place where we can retire to, and it would be a world of pities if, by any act of carelessness on our parts, we made the police officers acquainted with our secret."

"We should be greatly to blame—there can be no doubt about that."

"But hush! If you will take my advice, we shall watch in silence."

"We will. It will be safer and better far."

Keeping just within the shadow cast by the house, the two highwaymen stood watching and waiting, hoping that the window above would again open, and that they should be allowed the opportunity of exchanging a few words with the prisoner.

But this opportunity was denied them.

Time passed away not very rapidly it is true; but all within the building remained as profoundly silent as if it had been uninhabited.

At length, with great disappointment perceptible in his tones, Tom King said:

"We had better not remain here any longer, Claude; let us start back. Recollect we have a long way to go, and it will be a hard ride to get there by the appointed time."

"So it will. I was waiting for you to speak; I did not like to suggest a move first; I have been thinking of it for some time, because I have got the disagreeable conviction in my mind that as soon as ever we shall get away to a little distance the window will be opened again."

"If such a thing should happen it will be vexatious in the extreme."

"But rely upon it, Tom, we had better move off and communicate what we have seen to the captain; we shall then be able to discuss the matter altogether, and finally start out in good time to-morrow night and ride here direct."

"Lead the way, then—I will follow you. A quick dash across to the wall must do it; it would never do to be seen now."

There was a good deal of risk in crossing this open space, because if anyone had happened to be at a window they could not have failed to be perceived.

But no alarm was given, and therefore they concluded that no one had seen them.

The rope was easily reached, and quickly mounted.

Claude descended first, leaving Tom King sitting astride upon the top.

"How shall I get down, Claude?" he said. "I can't descend by the rope."

"No, very true—I forgot that. But untie it, then hang down as low as you can, and let go. I will catch you. You will not be hurt, rely upon it."

Tom thought so, and he untied the rope as he had been requested, and afterwards lowered himself down, and let go.

He was caught in the arms of Claude Duval, and then the pair ran hastily to the spot where their horses had been left.

"I tell you what, Tom," said Claude—"we have stayed there rather longer than we ought to have done. We shall have hard work to get back by daybreak. Our horses will have to make use of their best speed."

"Come on, then! Let us put them to a gallop, and take our way straight across the country. The ride will do me good, I feel sure, and we have nothing to interrupt us."

"No, absolutely nothing, unless we are so unfortunate as to run full tilt against a body of police officers."

"We must try to guard against that. But come—are you ready?"

"Quite."

"Forward, then!"

At a rattling gallop the two highwaymen directed their course across the fields and meadows towards the public-house at Ealing.

Owing to the rapid rate at which they travelled, they could not keep up a conversation—besides, they were not particularly desirous of doing so, for each wished to think over the events of the night.

In spite of all their efforts, they found that the grey light of morning was fast stealing over all things, and they had yet a considerable distance to go.

They continued to urge their horses on, but nevertheless it was not until all objects were rendered tolerably distinct that they reached the end of the grass-grown lane.

This, however, we should explain, was not more than two minutes after Tom Davis had spoken in the manner we have recorded at the end of a preceding chapter.

They trotted up the lane swiftly, and, instead of pausing in front of the inn as usual, rode round to the stables, and got their horses under cover as quickly as they possibly could.

They found Dick Turpin, Sixteen-String Jack, and Tom Davis waiting anxiously for them.

"This is stretching it almost too far," said Dick. "We ought indeed to be most careful—it would be such a great misfortune if the officers penetrated our secret."

"I have been saying so, too," said Claude Duval; "but when you have heard all the strange adventures that have happened to us to-night, you will cease to wonder."

"I will undertake to say," exclaimed Dick, "that they fall far short of mine."

Claude and Tom smiled significantly, and said:

"Wait awhile, captain, and you will see. I rather think you will have occasion to change your opinion."

In the best of spirits, they all went back to the inn, where an excellent meal was prepared for them.

While seated at this, they all related their adventures.

It was Dick's turn first, and when they heard his account of the singular circumstances he had witnessed, they readily confessed that theirs were by no means so extraordinary.

However, at last all their confidences were exchanged, and, as Claude and Tom had fully anticipated, Dick considered the subject one of great importance.

"But I cannot possibly accompany you to-night," he said. "I am sorry it is out of the question, but I have made an engagement, and one for to-morrow night as well, so I shall leave you to take your choice, whether to wait until the night after next, in order for me to go with you, or whether you set out to-night, taking Sixteen-String Jack only."

"We will consider it, captain," said Tom King. "I confess I should have liked your company."

"Yes, nothing would have given me greater pleasure than to accompany you, for, rely upon it, there's some great wrong and evil being committed, and the girl you have seen is the victim of it."

"There can scarcely be any doubt as to that," said Claude.

"And now," said Dick, involuntarily sinking his voice, and assuming a greater solemnity of demeanour, "there's one question I wish particularly to ask, and which I have hesitated to put until now."

"What is that?"

"I want to ask you, Tom, and you, Maud and Ellen, and all of you who passed last night beneath this roof, whether you saw or heard anything resembling what took place the night before?"

All shook their heads.

"No," said Tom Davis. "I thought you would be anxious about that, and so I remained watching myself, but I neither heard the sigh nor saw the shadow on the wall."

"It's very strange," said Turpin. "I can scarcely think it bodes any ill to us, for we have succeeded marvellously well to-night."

"I only hope," said Tom King, "that we are allowed the opportunity of seeing it again."

"Yes, if so," said Dick Turpin, "I have firmly made up my mind that, let the risk be what it may, I will get close to it, and follow it. I am determined not to allow a mystery of this kind to remain in the house undiscovered."

"Quite right too, captain," said Tom Davis. "I can assure you I don't feel at all easy in my mind, and if it is

a ghost—and I don't know what else to call it—the sooner it is laid the better."

"Yes, decidedly, but we can do no more than watch and wait. As I have told you, to-night I cannot be here, nor the next night, and if the shadow appears in my absence I shall be vexed indeed. On the following night, however, I propose that we all remain here and keep watch; then, if any discovery is made, we shall all be cognisant of it at the same moment."

"So we shall," said Tom Davis, with a slight shiver, "and I only wish the time had come."

CHAPTER DCCLXXXIII.

A TROOP OF POLICE OFFICERS PAY A VISIT TO THE HIGHWAYMEN'S HAUNT, AND ASK ELLEN A GREAT MANY QUESTIONS.

This was a wish that all most fervently re-echoed for it was no pleasant thing to have such an inexplicable and terrible mystery hanging over them.

That it was no delusion they were all quite confident. But then, what was it? Were they at once to resign themselves to a belief in supernatural influences?

Not one was willing to do this.

"We must be content to let it wait," said Sixteen-String Jack, "until these important matters that we have in hand are quite disposed of."

"Yes," said Turpin. "Mine admits of no delay. I have pledged my word, and at all risks the engagement must be kept."

"And," said Tom King, "I feel that I could not rest another night without endeavouring to pierce the mystery that hangs about that prison-like-looking abode. What I have already witnessed makes my blood boil to remember!"

"And mine," said Claude.

"It is clear that we must wait until the time I mentioned. Come, my comrades, let us retire and get what rest we can, in order to be well fitted for our night of adventures."

All were, of course, thoroughly weary, for the amount of exertion they had gone through was something tremendous.

None felt the fatigue more than Sixteen-String Jack, and no wonder, for not only had his adventures been of a very tiring description, but he was yet weak from the effects of the wound he had so lately received.

In fact, this very over-exertion was near bringing a relapse.

Consequently, they were all ready and willing enough to mount to the upper story of the inn, and scarcely had they reached the top of the staircase than a sudden clatter of horses' hoofs announced the fact that some travellers had halted in front of the inn.

"Don't show yourselves at any of the upper windows on any account," said Tom Davis. "They might be officers, you know!"

"All right!" said Dick—"take care of yourself!"

"Oh, I won't be seen!"

At this moment Ellen came running towards them with a look of alarm upon her countenance.

"What is the matter?" asked Davis.

"Officers!"

"I thought so.

"What shall we do?"

"Don't be afraid, my girl—I will keep out of sight, and I must leave the rest to you."

Tom Davis hastily ascended the stairs.

Ellen was a little bewildered.

But she knew quite well that all depended upon herself, and therefore she summoned all her fortitude to her aid.

Her duty was to allay the suspicions of the officers—if they had any. It might turn out, however, that it was only a chance visit.

The information she had given Davis was quite correct. They were indeed officers who had just arrived so unexpectedly and so unwelcomely.

They numbered in all about a dozen.

"House—house!" they cried, in a loud voice—"house—house! Who is within?"

Ellen made her appearance at the front door.

"Well, my lass," said the one in command, "so you are here at last, are you? Where's your ostler? We want him to take charge of our horses."

"He is out, sir."

"Out, is he? Well, where's the landlord?"

"He is out, too, sir."

"Upon my word, a nice state of things! But really, my dear, you are quite a pretty girl."

"I know that.

"Do you indeed?"

"Yes—but don't begin paying compliments to me, for, of course, you will expect some of them back again, and I am the worst one in the world for saying things that are not true, and, without I told a barefaced lie, how could I say you were handsome or even good-looking?"

There was a general laugh at this, and the police officer began to look very red about the cheeks.

"Come, come, my girl," he said, "don't be too merry, but attend to our orders."

"Certainly, sir, with pleasure. What are they?"

"Why, fetch some hay, and we will give our horses something to eat at the door. You, Robins, stay and attend to them. The rest follow me."

"This way, sir, if you please!" said Ellen, ushering her unwelcome guests into one of the front rooms. "Pray make yourselves comfortable. What can I bring you!"

"A jug of ale apiece all round."

Ellen flew off first to supply the officer outside with the hay he wanted, for fear he should go round to the back and there make some disagreeble discovery or other.

This done, she carried in the jugs of ale.

"Have you given one to Robins outside?"

"No, sir."

"Then do so."

This command was also obeyed, and then she was called into the front room again.

"Tobacco," said the chief officer.

This was also brought, and he (the chief officer) continued:

"Have you lived here long, my lass?"

"Not very long, sir."

"It's a very lonely place, isn't it?"

"Very."

"So I thought. Can't possibly have much custom. Why, I should think no one passes your house once in a month."

"Oftener than that, sir."

"But how on earth can your master continue to make the place pay? It passes my comprehension."

"I don't think he cares about making it pay, sir," answered Ellen.

"Indeed! How is that?"

"Well, sir, it's more master's business than my own; but I have heard him say that he bought the house with money that he had been working hard all his life to save, and that he intended to live here till the end of his days."

"Then I suppose you mean that he has money enough to live independent of any business."

"Yes, that is it."

"Then, why on earth don't he retire?"

"He has, sir."

"I mean, why does he keep a public-house?"

"Oh, I think that is because of a fancy. He don't like to be too lonely. It is pleasant to him, people dropping in now and then, though I don't think he would care about too much of it."

"Oh, very likely," said the officer, looking around him. "It seems a pleasant enough place, and I don't wonder at people feeling inclined to spend their lives here. But, I say, what do you call that? What brings such a thing as that here, I wonder?"

Ellen felt her limbs tremble.

She almost fell to the floor with fright.

She was sure her face turned the colour of ashes.

"That—that?" was all she could stammer.

"Yes, that!" cried the officer, rising from his seat, and walking towards the door.

"It's a hat!" gasped Ellen.

"I see that," said the officer, reaching the article mentioned from the nail in the door on which it had been hung.

It was rather a singular-looking hat.



[DICK TURPIN FAILS IN HIS ATTEMPT TO STOP LORD SPINDELOW'S CARRIAGE.]

It was of black felt, with the brim so turned up as to give it a three-cornered shape.

The upper edge was trimmed with a border of gold lace—rather tarnished, it is true, but still retaining much of its original magnificence.

Then in front was placed a long scarlet, rakish-looking feather, that was kept in its place by means of a diamond brooch.

The officer turned this hat over and over, and examined it with a truly critical eye.

His companions crowded around him, and gazed at it with an equal amount of interest.

As soon as the scrutiny was finished, the chief officer turned his eyes towards Ellen.

So did all the rest.

But by this time Ellen had been able to recover herself.

She had quite regained her composure.

It was no wonder that at the first her mind should have been thrown off its balance.

The hat belonged to Tom King.

How it came to be hanging there she could not tell.

Certainly it was a very improper place for it.

And although she had schooled herself into quietude, and hoped to allay all suspicions, yet she could by no means make sure of doing so, nor could she tell how disastrous might be the results of this discovery.

We have said that the police officers all fixed their eyes upon her.

The chief said, while indicating the hat:

"This is a dainty article, truly! Pray tell me how it came to be in this place."

"Oh, such a beautiful young man!"

"What!"

"Oh, lovely!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, one day, ever so long ago, a young man came in here—here in this very room, and sat down and called for a bottle of wine. Oh, he was a perfect beauty, with such a fine moustache, such splendid eyes, and a delightful smile!"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Don't you understand me?"

"No, I'll be hanged if I do!"

"Well, then, he had on such a magnificent scarlet coat, trimmed all over with real gold lace, and large riding boots, and a beautiful amber waistcoat! Oh, he looked like a prince!"

"But what the devil has he to do with this hat?"

"Why, everything. Don't I keep telling you that it belonged to him."

"Belonged to him!"

"Yes. And he talked so nicely; but before he could finish his bottle of wine, a man rode up to the door of the inn and rushed into this room. Well, no sooner was that done than he cried, 'Surrender, will you! You are my prisoner!'"

"Who said that?"

"The one that rushed in."

"Was he a police officer?"

"Yes. Didn't I tell you he was? Well, the other—that was, the one with the bottle of wine, you know——"

"Yes—yes; go on."

"He said, 'You have got to take me yet, and I should advise you not to try it on!' Well, the police officer dashed at him, and then there was an awful struggle. I screamed and shrieked, but all to no purpose; when all at once the one with the scarlet coat rushed out into the front, mounted his horse, and rode off."

"What did the officer do?"

"He began the pursuit, and asked everyone to join in, offering all manner of sums for a reward, so that it made me wish I was a man."

"And who did he say the man in the scarlet coat was?"

"Tom King. And soon afterwards, what should I find but this hat, and I have kept it in remembrance ever since. I can never think of that day without trembling!"

"And have you ever seen Tom King since?"

"No, never."

"And this is his hat?"

"Yes. Isn't it a beauty?"

The officer did not reply.

He turned the hat over and over in his hands with a meditative air.

He was not a very fast-thinking man, and as he turned the hat over so did he turn over in his mind all that Ellen had said

"Humph!" he said, at last "Very strange, my girl!"

"Yes, sir."

"Here, take the reckoning out of this, and keep the change for yourself."

"Thank you, sir."

"Only I intend to keep the hat."

"I should like that, sir."

"But I insist upon having it! I seize it in the name of the King. Now, my lads," he added, "follow me! We must be getting on our road again."

"I wonder whether he believes what I have told him, or whether he suspects the truth?" asked Ellen of herself, as she watched the officers out of the front door. "How odd that he should make up his mind to leave so suddenly!"

CHAPTER DCCLXXXIV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN ARE CONSIDERABLY DISCONCERTED BY THE PRESENCE OF THE POLICE OFFICERS.

THERE was something very strange and peculiar about this police officer's conduct, and it is no wonder that Ellen should feel her suspicions and doubts concerning it.

Upon reaching the front door, however, she found that they all mounted their horses leisurely enough; and then the whole party trotted off at rather a swift pace down the lane.

She watched them for a moment, and then turned back. In the passage she met Tom Davis.

"So they are gone at last, are they?" he said.

"Yes," said Ellen; "but I am sadly afraid——"

"Yes—yes, so am I."

"Did you hear what took place between us, then?"

"Yes, I did; I overheard every word of it."

"Then it will spare me the trouble of telling you, and besides, will be a great deal better, for now you can form your own opinions from the manner of the police officer."

"Yes, it was confoundedly awkward to think Tom King's hat should be hanging up there."

"I was frightened at first, I confess."

"But you displayed admirable presence of mind. No one could have behaved better under the circumstances."

"I felt at first as though I should sink down to the floor in alarm!"

"I dare say you did. But just go to the front door again, and stand there, keeping watch. In the meanwhile, I will go upstairs and tell them what has happened."

Tom Davis's intelligence was received by the highwaymen with a good deal of consternation.

"In the first place," said Dick, "what could have brought them here at all?"

"I know no better than yourself, captain."

"I am afraid some of us have been seen either returning or departing."

"It may be so," said Davis, "or it may be that they called here just for a few minutes for refreshment as they often do at roadside inns."

"The fact is," said Turpin, "our apparent safety has made us all careless and blind to caution. How came it that Tom's hat should be hanging up in the public room?"

"I can't tell you that either, captain; but we have so few visitors, that, as you say, we have grown careless."

"Well, this sort of thing must be altered," said Dick, decisively, "because the consequences of discovery will be something fearful. If once the officers have an idea that we are in this place, they will put forth all the cunning they are the masters of, and so surround and attack this house, that it will be impossible for us to escape from it."

Tom Davis started as though struck with a sudden thought.

"Captain," he said, suddenly, after a momentary pause.

"Yes, Davis, what is it?"

"I have just thought of something."

"Something good, I can tell, by the look of your face," said Dick. "By all means let us know what it is."

"Why, it was your words that suggested the idea. Who knows but that some of these days, in spite of all our precautions, the officers might make the discovery you have just mentioned?"

"Such a thing is very far from improbable."

"Well, captain, they may do it, and we ought to be prepared beforehand for such a contingency. Perhaps now you guess at my idea. It is to construct a secret passage, leading somewhere from the foundations of this building out into some other place to be decided upon when we have made a careful survey around."

"A most admirable thought," said Dick. "Davis, I am glad you have made the suggestion. I can't understand how it is that we have never thought of it before."

Dick Turpin's companions were similarly surprised. It was palpably necessary.

"We must set about that at once," said Claude Duval, "and not allow ourselves any rest until we have completed it. I long to make a commencement."

Dick smiled.

"You must control your impulsiveness a little," he said. "You forget how we are situated just at the present time: those rascally officers!"

"Yes, I did forget them."

"They may have ridden off," said Tom Davis.

"Or, more likely, are lurking somewhere near," interrupted Turpin.

"Well, in either case, if they approach any closer Ellen will let us know; she is standing at the front door as a sentinel."

"Good!"

"It seems to me," said Tom King, "that the chief difficulty will be in leaving here to-night."

"How so?"

"Why, these officers may perhaps ride off to London, and there hold a consultation with some more respecting what they have seen; and as they cannot fail to think it

suspicious they will watch the place closely all night to see who goes out."

"I fear that is only too likely," said Turpin—"I thought so from the first."

"So did I. It happens at a most unfortunate time for us—for you, Dick, because of your disappointment, and for Claude, Jack and myself because of the excursion we have planned for to-night."

"Still," said Davis, "if the officers are lurking about, you would not think of running the frightful risk of leaving?"

"We must wait and see," replied Dick. "Perhaps the danger may not be so great as we imagine, and my appointment is one I have given my word to keep."

"Well," said Tom Davis, "that is a point you will have to settle among yourselves. But now, as I have made you acquainted with all the danger, I will just go down again and see Ellen."

"Be careful not to show yourself."

"Oh, I'll take care of that, never fear. I shall be most particular not to face any of the police, for fear my features should be recollected; besides, Ellen told them that I was out."

"Then, above all things, don't be seen. If you are, that will increase their suspicions tenfold."

Tom Davis assented, and, again promising to be careful, descended the stairs.

Contrary to their expectations, the remainder of the day passed off quietly and calmly enough.

Ellen was most careful to keep a strict and most observant watch around, but failed to detect any sign of the presence of the police.

"Depend upon it," said Tom Davis, "it is the night that we shall have to fear. I shall be greatly surprised if they are not back again at dark."

Finding all was peaceful, the highwaymen availed themselves of the opportunity to snatch a few hours' repose.

They were soon rested, and when they arose Tom King and his two comrades set to work to make a rope ladder.

The necessary articles were all at hand, and they worked away industriously.

They calculated that this article would prove a most valuable auxiliary to them, for they had hopes that they should be able to communicate in some manner with the prisoner Tom had caught sight of at the window.

By dusk the ladder was finished.

It was of great length, and, for greater convenience in carrying, was divided into three portions, but in such a manner that they could be easily joined again.

Dick Turpin explained to Maud the nature of his arrangement with the mysterious lady.

He had given his word to perform a certain service for her, and she knew full well that it would be perfectly useless to request him to break his promise.

Moreover, she fancied that if he was successful, the lady might give him a large enough reward to enable him to quit his present hazardous mode of life and to leave England.

This, more than anything else, reconciled her to allowing him to set out.

As it began to grow darker, the anxiety of the highwaymen considerably increased to know whether the police officers had really returned.

If they had, it would be difficult indeed to take their departure without being seen or captured.

The latter they might avoid, but the former seemed scarcely possible.

They were in earnest consultation upon this point, when Tom Davis suddenly entered the room.

"Our fears are confirmed," he said,—"fully confirmed. The police officers have come back."

"I guessed as much," said Turpin.

"Ellen saw them groping about in the darkness, and it is pretty evident they are posting themselves in various positions so as to command a view of the entire premises, and to make it impossible for anyone to leave unseen."

"But we must manage to leave somehow," said Turpin, "and therefore we must call stratagem to our aid."

"Leave me to think," said Tom Davis,—"leave me to think."

"I think we had better all occupy ourselves with this subject," said Turpin.

"Very good," said Davis. "The first difficulty to be got over is crossing the yard. I question whether you will be able to enter the stables unperceived."

"Then if so," said Maud, "how are you to leave the stables again with your horses?"

"It seems to me," said Tom Davis, "that there is only one course to be pursued, and that is, to throw the officers off the scent in some way."

"But is such a thing possible?"

"I think if we gave our attention to it we might manage to raise a false alarm. The officers would then run all in one direction, leaving the coast clear."

"Yes," said Turpin, "that would put an end to the difficulty at once, provided it could be managed, though for my own part I can scarcely see how you are to do it."

"Nor I, at present," said Davis; "but you had better be in readiness to act at any moment, to be quick to take the hint, and when you see the chance, slip off."

"Rely upon it we shall do that."

"Then are you all ready?"

"Yes, we have made every preparation except saddling our horses."

"Well, that you can do easily as soon as you gain the stable. And now I have something else to tell you that perhaps you are not aware of."

"What is it?"

"The other day, when in the stable, I noticed that there was a door that appeared to have been closed up and disused for many years."

"Where is this door situated?"

"At what I might call the back of the stable. With a good deal of trouble I managed to get it open, and then found it led direct into the little plantation of trees that you can see yonder."

He pointed through the window to the tops of some trees that could be seen behind the stable at the back of the inn.

"That sounds more like getting away," said Dick Turpin, with his face lighting up.

"Yes, provided none of the officers are there, and provided none see you cross the yard. But it is evident we must raise an alarm of some kind, so as to draw all the officers to one spot; and when it is done, you must take the opportunity of slipping off as quickly as possible."

"And," said Sixteen-String Jack, "while we are planning all this, there is something else that we shall have to bear in mind."

CHAPTER DCCLXXXV.

IN WHICH TOM DAVIS RATHER ASTONISHES JENKINS THE POLICE OFFICER.

"AND what may that be, Jack?" they all asked, with one voice.

"Why, just supposing for a moment that we all ride off in safety, and without being perceived by the officers, how are we to know whether it will be safe for us to return?"

Tom Davis rubbed his head.

"That certainly is a most important point," he remarked,—"as important as your departure."

"Yes, decidedly."

"But yet," he continued, "I think it is one that could be settled with much more ease."

"How so?"

"It only depends upon my giving you some kind of signal."

"True; but what kind could you give?"

"Why, in the first place, it would be necessary for you all to take up your positions about daybreak at some point from which you can command a view of the top of the inn."

"Well, and what then?"

"As soon as ever the least signs of dawn are in the sky I will let off three rockets—that is, provided I am certain the police officers have departed, and that it is safe for you to return."

"Very good," said Dick. "I don't know what better arrangement we can make than that."

"Nor I," said Davis.

"It is simple in the extreme. But suppose the officers are in the vicinity, what shall you do then?"

"Just nothing at all, so that when it is daybreak, if you don't see the rockets ascend, seek for safety in some other quarter, and don't attempt to come near until about twelve

o clock on the following night, at which time, if all is well, I will let off the rockets."

"A very good arrangement," said Dick, "and all we have to be careful in is to be somewhere so as to be able to see the rockets."

"Yes, and at the proper time," said Claude Duval.

"Well, as that is settled," said Sixteen-String Jack, "suppose we go back to the present. We have agreed all about returning, and now how are we to depart?"

"As a preliminary step," said Tom Davis, "will it not be better for you to descend to the ground floor? You will be more in readiness to act then, and you will be quite as secure from observation."

"Yes, it will be better."

"Come, then, follow me."

They all descended into a room at the back of the inn that had a large window looking into the yard.

"Well, now," said Davis, "I am going out to reconnoitre a little myself. If I make any disturbance or bother don't fail to be in readiness to avail yourself of it; I shall try to attract the attention of the officers all to one spot if I am able, and then, when I have done so, you must be off."

Tom Davis had no very clear idea how he was to effect this very desirable object.

Nevertheless, he left the room with considerable confidence, and walked to the back door of the inn.

Opening it, he passed out into the yard, and no sooner had he crossed the threshold than he perceived, close to the stables, the dark figure of a man.

That he was a police officer he did not for a moment doubt, and, seeing him in that situation suggested a thought to the landlord, which he acted upon in an instant.

"Thieves—thieves!" he yelled, at the top of his voice. "Murder! Thieves—thieves!"

He ran hastily across the yard while he spoke, and the officer, wondering what was the matter, stopped short, and looked about him in bewildered surprise.

Tom Davis ran at him with undiminished speed, and, to his unutterable astonishment, seized hold of him by the throat in a manner that threatened to strangle him.

"So I have caught you at last," he cried, "have I? Oh, you villain!—you rascal! Come on! I knew that I should have you sooner or later, and here you are sure enough! Thieves—thieves! It's no good calling them in this out-of-the-way place, for there are never any to be seen!"

The officer gurgled and struggled, and endeavoured to free himself from the landlord's grasp.

But all in vain. He was much inferior in size and stature to our friend, Tom Davis, who, by putting out the whole of his strength, dragged the officer rapidly across the yard towards the back door of the inn.

All the while he contrived to raise a tremendous outcry that could not fail to be heard for some distance around.

He was quickly rewarded for all this by hearing the rapid trampling of many feet.

Breathless and exhausted, he dragged the officer into the kitchen.

"Oh, you rascally thief!" he said. "Have not you robbed me often enough? But you have come once too often, and now I've caught you! I will make an example of you!"

The officer tried to explain.

But Tom Davis only grew more furious, and increased the pressure upon his throat.

In another moment a number of police officers rushed into the house.

They entered the kitchen pell-mell, and Tom Davis, though not appearing to do so, actually counted them, and found they numbered seven in all.

"What on earth's the matter?" cried one, who was no other than the chief over the rest—"what's the meaning of this tremendous disturbance?"

The officer kicked furiously.

That was the only means by which he could make any sort of reply.

"Oh!" said Tom Davis, "can I believe my own eyes—is it really true? Why, are you police officers?"

"Yes, yes—can't you see we are? But what are you doing there?"

"Take this wretch prisoner—handcuff him—load him with chains—drag him off to the gaol! Oh, the wretch—the villain! He's robbed my henroost night after night, but I resolved to keep watch this evening, and so, you see, I've caught him!"

"Why, you idiot!" said the chief officer.

"What?" cried Tom, indignantly.

"You idiot—you ninny—you fool! Can't you see who you've got there?"

"Yes, of course I can. And why don't you take him off me? I tell you I caught him skulking along by the stable, and I know he was after the last few fowls I have got left!"

"The man's mad!" said the chief officer. "Just take him off Jenkins, will you?"

The officers hastened forward and released their companion from the landlord's ferocious grip.

"Why, can't you see," said the one in command, "what a stupid mistake you have made? That's no thief you have caught, but a police officer—one of my men!"

Tom Davis rubbed his eyes, and looked like one in a dream.

"A police officer?" he said. "Well, so he is—I see it now, by his dress! But what in the world brought you creeping about in the dark?"

"That's nothing to you," said the chief officer; "you have made a great mistake, you can see that plain enough!"

"But why are you all here?" asked Tom Davis, pretending to be struck with surprise for the first time. "Why, I never saw so many police officers in this part since I opened the public-house."

"Very likely not," said the chief, with a peculiar smile.

"You have got some secret business on hand?" said Davis.

"Yes, we have; but at the same time, it is nothing to you. Confound you and your fowls as well, say I! You have seriously upset our arrangements."

Tom Davis pretended to get frightened.

"I am sure I am very sorry," he said, in a humble, apologetic voice—"very sorry indeed; but you can't be surprised at my making such a mistake: you would not believe how I have been robbed."

"Bother your hens!" cried Jenkins, who by this time managed to recover his voice. "You ought to know better than to seize hold of a police officer in that wild-animal sort of a way!"

"I am sure I humbly beg your pardon," said Tom, "but I never once thought of a police officer skulking about in such a way. However, as it was an unfortunate mistake—nothing more perhaps—you would not be above forgiving it by taking something to drink at my expense."

"Well, my throat don't feel exactly right," said Jenkins, glancing at his chief.

"Oh, yes," said the one in command, "you can have something at the landlord's expense, Jenkins, and I think he ought not to forget how he has interfered with our plan."

"Perhaps you would like a drop of something all round?" said Tom, delighted at the success he had met with.

"Well, it is a very cold night, and that's a fact," was the evasive but significant reply.

"Well, then," said Tom Davis, "if you'd all condescend to sit down for a moment or two I will go into the bar and fetch you a drop of the finest ale that, I'll be bound to say, you ever tasted in all your lives; I praise it myself, but I am not afraid to do so, because I know the quality of it."

The officers condescended to sit down willingly enough.

As soon as the landlord left the room they whispered together:

"We are on the wrong scent," said the chief officer—"I feel sure of it—this place is as quiet as the grave; however, a thought has just struck me, by which we can make sure whether we are right or wrong."

"What is it?" the others asked anxiously.

"Why, if the people we suspect are hidden anywhere about these premises their horses must be here as well. Now, under some pretence or other, I will get the landlord to allow us to search the stable at the back, and if we find the horses, why, we shall know what to do, but

if they are not there we may conclude that our suspicions are unjust."

He would probably have said more, but just at that moment Tom Davis re-entered the room, carrying with him a large brown earthenware pitcher full of ale.

The froth rose up above the top of it two or three inches, and looked very white, and creamy, and tempting.

"There," he said, putting it down on the table, and looking at it with proud admiration, "that's what I call first rate. What do you think of it, gentlemen?"

The officers' mouths all watered at the sight.

CHAPTER DCCLXXXVI.

TOM DAVIS COMPLETELY SUCCEEDS IN STULTIFYING THE POLICE OFFICERS.

"It looks well," said the chief officer, with a grin. "Now let us try the taste."

"With all my heart," said Tom Davis, as he poured some of the ale into a drinking cup and handed it to the one in command.

"Well," said the officer, looking at Davis, "here's hoping that the next time you catch anybody in your yard it will be the man who has robbed you of your fowls!"

"Yes, d—n it, and so do I!" muttered Jenkins.

The officer emptied the cup at a draught, and Davis quickly filled it.

In this way the ale was circulated all round.

It was indeed of excellent quality, and the officers were unanimous in their praises of it.

"Would any of you like a pipe?" said Tom Davis. "I have heard of that as being a kind of peace-offering, and I feel that in some way or other I have upset you a good deal."

"No, no—not particularly," said the chief officer; "but by all means let us have a pipe."

Pipes and tobacco were brought, and the officers and Tom Davis sat round the fire in the kitchen, just in the same manner as he had sat with the highwaymen such a short time before.

Everything about the inn was, however, particularly quiet and peaceful, and it went far towards banishing the officers of any suspicions that might have been lingering in their breasts.

Tom talked away upon a great variety of subjects, and endeavoured to ascertain what the officers' intentions really were

On this point, however, they remained quiet, and the one in command, looking him steadfastly in the face for some moments, said, all at once:

"By-the-way, my friend, your voice and face seem familiar to me—have I not seen you somewhere before?"

Tom winced a little, but preserved his composure pretty well.

There was no other light in the room except that which came from the fire, and under these circumstances he had hoped to escape the officers' recognition.

"It is quite possible you have seen me," he said, as calmly as he could, "but I don't recollect ever having seen you before."

"Well, I know your face," said the chief, "but I can't for the life of me remember where I have seen it; if you told me your name, though, perhaps I should remember."

"Yes," said Davis—"yes, I shouldn't wonder."

"What is your name, then?"

"Thomas."

"Thomas what?"

"Thomas."

"What do you mean by saying Thomas in that fashion—is that the only name you've got?"

"It is."

"How can that be? Who ever heard of a man with one name? That's your christian name, I suppose?"

"Yes, it is."

"What's your surname, then?"

"Thomas."

"Oh, bother. What do you mean by saying Thomas in that curious way for?"

"Well, don't you understand? I say my name is Thomas Thomas, christian and surname, and if you go outside and look at the sign, why there you will see it in good large letters."

"Oh! I understand now; but you told me in such a way that I'll be hanged if I could at first. Well, Mr. Thomas Thomas, I can't help thinking I've seen you before, and I shall recollect where in a while."

"I wish I could spare you the trouble," said Tom Davis, "but I hope you will believe me when I say that I can't recollect ever having seen you before in my life."

"Very likely not—very likely not," said the officer, abruptly.

He was evidently endeavouring to refresh his recollection.

This was what Tom Davis dreaded, so he endeavoured to turn the conversation.

Addressing himself to Jenkins, he said:

"I hope, sir, that you've quite overlooked that unfortunate little mistake of mine. I can assure you I meant no harm."

"Oh, it's all right," said Jenkins—"all right; don't name it! I wish we could catch the rascal for you."

"So do I. If I told you what he has stolen at one time or another you would scarcely believe me."

"Perhaps it's a weazel," said Jenkins.

"It's a two-legged one, then; it's a great disappointment to me, however, for I made sure I'd got hold of the right man at last."

The chief officer could not help taking note of this conversation, and it immediately suggested an idea to his mind by which his intention to search the stable might be carried out.

"I'll tell you what," he cried, suddenly: "perhaps this rascally thief is actually hiding about in the stable at the present moment, only waiting for an opportunity to carry off the few fowls that you have left!"

"I hope not," said Davis, with well-feigned alarm.

"Well, I'll tell you what we'll do, landlord: As one good turn deserves another, we'll go out and search your back premises, and if we can find the thief we'll capture him."

Tom Davis hardly knew how to reply, yet he felt that he could not refuse.

Surely, however, the highwaymen had taken advantage of the opportunity to leave the inn, and there would be no fear of discovery.

As no alarm had been raised, it was only reasonable to suppose that they had got clear off.

The officer did not wait for any reply, but rose to his feet, in which he was followed by the whole of his men.

"Now, landlord," he cried, "just lead the way, and you, my lads, unmask your lanterns."

The officers produced the dark lanterns they carried, and turned back the slides that were over the lenses.

In an irregular line this singular-looking procession left the kitchen, and passed out of the back door of the inn into the yard.

"Where do you keep your fowls?" said the chief officer. "We will search there first."

This was rather a poser, the truth being that Tom Davis had no fowls of any kind on the premises.

He was spared the trouble of replying by the chief officer, who continued:

"I suppose you keep them in the stable?—people generally do."

"Yes, yes," said Davis, somewhat nervously—"in the stable, of course!"

The officers walked briskly forward, and pushed open the stable door.

They flashed their lights around them in a moment.

No signs of any horses could be seen in the stalls.

Tom could scarcely repress a sigh of relief.

The officers exchanged glances with each other.

"You have plenty of accommodation here," said the chief officer. "I am surprised to find it in such an out-of-the-way place."

"Many people have made the same remark," said Davis, "for it is so long ago that it is almost forgotten, but at one time this public-house faced the high-road, and then there was a much better business done at it than there is at the present time."

"Well, where are the fowls?" said Jenkins. "I can't see any here."

"Then the very last has gone," said Davis. "Oh, confound the thief! There's not even one left now! I

suppose all hope of catching him will be at an end, for he has fetched them every one."

Having ascertained that the highwaymen's horses were not in the stable, the officers felt but little inclination to search after the man who was said to have stolen the lot.

They made a pretence of searching round the premises, but Tom Davis was very glad that they performed it in the incomplete manner they did, as they might have found some trifling article that would have given rise to their suspicions.

Once more they followed him back gladly enough into the kitchen of the public-house, for the night was indeed a bitter cold one, so that a seat by the fireside was more than usually pleasant.

More ale was brought, and after the second pitcher was emptied the officers began to grow rather uproarious.

They crowded round Tom Davis, shook him by the hand, swore he was a jolly good fellow, and that they would never interfere with him, let him do what he might.

Our old friend pretended to be quite overcome with these protestations, although he knew that they would disappear as quickly as they had arisen.

They insisted upon having a song from him, however, and, in order to humour them, he complied.

Then the chief officer sung, then Jenkins, and some more, so that the night was passed in a very jovial manner.

"It is time we got back," said the chief officer at last, rising somewhat unsteadily from his seat. "Come, my lads, we'll be off!"

"Where are your horses?" asked Tom.

"Oh, not here," was the reply, given with a hiccup. "We left them at a public-house on the common. Good night, old fellow! We'll call and see you again the next time we are this way."

"Do—do!" said Tom, though he wished from the bottom of his heart that he should never catch sight of them again.

After some further delay, the whole of the party reeled off, and the officer in command, on making his report the next morning, gave it to the effect that, having carefully watched the inn from all points, they had come to the conclusion that their suspicions were groundless.

It was a great satisfaction to Tom Davis to see them depart.

He watched them as long as he could, and then followed them at a safe distance on foot.

They had drunk too much strong ale to pay much attention to such a slight sound as Tom made in following them, and he had the satisfaction of watching them mount their horses at the inn they had mentioned, and ride off in the direction of London.

"That's one narrow escape," he said, drawing a long breath—"a very narrow escape! I hope I have seen the last of them, but that secret passage must be commenced without delay."

He turned back to the inn as he spoke, and, having reached it, he sat down in the kitchen to wait patiently for day to dawn.

CHAPTER DCCLXXXVII.

DICK TURPIN SETS OUT UPON HIS HIGHLY-DANGEROUS MISSION, AND MAKES AN ABORTIVE ATTEMPT TO STOP LORD SPINDELOW'S CARRIAGE.

As may be supposed, the highwaymen were by no means slow to avail themselves of the very excellent opportunity they had of leaving the public-house.

We know already that they did so successfully.

They ran hastily across the yard, saddled their steeds, and then, finding the little door of which Tom Davis had spoken, passed through it, and found themselves in the rather dense plantation behind.

The door was carefully closed, and then, for some distance, all four of the highwaymen rode in company.

Having gone some distance, however, they halted and separated.

Dick's last words to them were that on no account were they to fail to be somewhere in front of the inn at the appointed time, and to watch there for the appearance of the rockets.

He then turned away, and as he had started much later than he intended, he allowed Black Bess to go at rather a slashing pace towards Fulham Green.

He was rather fearful that he should not be in time to intercept his carriage.

He took the nearest possible route to his destination, however, and carefully avoided an encounter with every one.

At length he stopped at this pleasant, rural spot—in those days, being a portion of a village, it was entirely removed from London.

Around the green only a few residences were built, and these belonged chiefly to people of position.

One of these was a large, white stone edifice, very imposing, and yet very pleasant to look upon.

Various twining plants had been trained to grow up the side of it, and the contrast between the bright green leaves and the white walls was very striking to the eye.

"That's the place," said Dick, looking at it. "There can be no mistake, for it is the only white building to be seen."

Selecting a spot where he should be entirely out of sight of any chance passer-by, and yet where he could command a good view up and down the road, Dick stopped, and waited patiently for the carriage to approach.

It had been accurately described to him in all its details, so that he could scarcely make a mistake, and accordingly, as he sat thus still on the back of his steed, his thoughts reverted to his singular adventures on the preceding night.

As may be expected, it had occupied his thoughts a great deal, though the appearance of the officers so unexpectedly at the public-house had for a time driven it from his mind.

Above all things, his curiosity was roused with respect to the document which he was to obtain.

He was full of speculation as to what could be the contents of it.

What could it be that gave the nobleman in question such a terrible and tremendous power over the lady as to make her anxious and willing to compass his death?

This was something, however, that he would never know, for he had solemnly pledged his word to make no attempt to master the contents of the paper.

A thousand ideas started up into his mind, but there was not one of them that satisfied him.

He was aroused from these meditations by the sound of carriage wheels.

It was so faint and so far off that scarcely anyone but a highwayman could have detected it, and Dick's attention was attracted more by the behaviour of Black Bess.

He rode on at once from his place of concealment, and galloped at full speed in the direction from which the vehicle was coming.

It was not long before he caught sight of a couple of bright lights flashing through the darkness.

In another moment he could make out the forms of the horses, of the coachman, and of the bright yellow vehicle behind.

As soon as he was near enough, Dick called out:

"Hold—hold! Stop, coachman, or you are a dead man! Pull up, I say, without you want an ounce of lead in your brain!"

The coachman uttered a yell of fright, and would probably have stopped the carriage without further hesitation, but just at that moment a window in the carriage was violently let down, and a head was projected.

"Drive on, Joseph, you cowardly rascal!" said a voice—"drive on! If you don't lash your horses into a gallop, I will favour you with a bullet!"

The coachman was alarmed, and whipped his horses savagely.

Dick fired, thinking very likely that the sound of the pistol would terrify him into bringing the horses to a stop.

But it did not, and the occupant of the coach, who was doubtless Lord Spindelow, catching sight of Dick Turpin, raised a pistol suddenly, and fired.

He fired it with a laugh of exultation, and Dick pulled up Black Bess suddenly, for he believed he was shot.

In another instant he found that this was a groundless apprehension.

Therefore he once more gave her the rein.

From this little circumstance, Dick had no difficulty in coming to the conclusion that Lord Spindelow was a man of a violent and somewhat courageous disposition

Certainly he did not appear likely to be easily frightened out of the document that was of importance to him.

Although the horses in the carriage were going at a furious rate, yet, by urging Black Bess to the top of her speed, Dick easily got abreast with the carriage door.

"My lord," he cried, in a loud voice, "if you wish to save the shedding of blood, order your coachman to pull up! I have important business with you!"

"No doubt," was the reply—"very important! Take that!"

Another pistol was discharged, and Dick narrowly escaped being injured by it.

"Pull up!" he cried again, to the coachman—"pull up, I say!"

But no notice was taken of this command, and immediately afterwards the vehicle stopped in front of his lordship's residence.

Perceiving this, Dick turned Black Bess's head round and rode off, though he did so very reluctantly.

All hope of stopping the carriage was now at an end.

To have gone up to it while close to Lord Spindelow's residence would have been nothing short of madness, as the servants would have quickly made their appearance, and attacked him.

"Confound it," he said. "I must have managed matters very awkwardly, or I should not have bungled like this! What's to be done? This attempt will only serve to put him on his guard, and will increase my trouble tenfold!"

Finding himself at a safe distance, Dick pulled up, and allowed Black Bess to proceed only at a gentle trot.

For some time he remained perfectly silent, though his brain was very busy.

He was endeavouring to come to some conclusion as to which would be the best mode of endeavouring to obtain possession of the paper.

He could think of nothing satisfactory, however.

"I can only do one thing," he said, at last, "and that is, to enter the house, and endeavour to surprise him alone. It will be running a fearful amount of risk, for he is a resolute, determined man, I feel certain; but yet I will not go back from what I have promised without a hard struggle."

Having come to this determination, Dick Turpin once more slowly approached his lordship's residence.

This time, however, he made his way round to the rear of the premises, judging that this would be the point at which an entrance would be easiest gained.

At the back he found that Lord Spindelow's grounds were bounded by a high stone wall.

Over this he could doubtless climb himself, but it was out of the question that he should be able to take Black Bess along with him.

He knew, however, that it would be perfectly safe to leave her where she was—a signal from him that she perfectly understood would suffice to bring her to his side, and he had lately had good proof that she would not allow anyone to capture her except at the price of their lives.

Slipping from her back, he stroked and patted her upon the neck.

"Stay there, old lass," he cried—"stay there till I return."

Although it may be doubted whether the exact words were understood, yet it is certain that Black Bess rubbed her head carressingly against his hand, and then stood perfectly still.

Dick then went close to the wall, looking about for some place where he could scale it easily.

Coming to one portion where a kind of buttress had been built, as though to support it, he resolved to make the attempt there.

He had but little to seize hold of, yet, by the exercise of some agility and patience, he at length managed to reach the top of the wall.

Before he ventured to show much of his body above it, he took a peep over, to see what there was on the other side.

To his satisfaction, he perceived that it was a kind of garden or pleasure-ground, and that rather dense ornamental shrubs had been planted around on the inner side, so as to conceal it.

To drop down, then, would be the easiest matter in the world.

Judging from the silence that no one was near, Dick gradually raised his body, and lowered himself over on the other side

Soft soil was beneath his feet, so that he came down quite noiselessly.

Keeping in between these ornamental trees and the wall, he crept slowly and gently towards the house.

He could see it plainly enough before him, though not one of the windows appeared to be illuminated—if there was a light in any one of the rooms into which they looked, it was certain that either the shutters were closed or the curtains closely drawn, for no ray of light escaped.

Indeed, Dick was surprised to find everything so exceedingly quiet.

He fully expected to see several servants busy about.

But all was as still and as silent as it possibly could be if the house was deserted.

Whether to interpret this as favourable or unfavourable to his enterprise he knew not, but, at any rate, it did not make him abate any of the caution he used in drawing closer to the building.

At last one of the windows on the ground floor was reached.

"Fortune favours me," he muttered, as he paused before it. "Surely I may venture to look upon this as a good omen?"

CHAPTER DCCLXXXVIII.

DICK TURPIN FINDS HIS POSITION IN LORD SPINDELOW'S MANSION BECOMES CRITICAL.

Dick Turpin's satisfaction arose from the fact of his having discovered that the window before which he paused was partly open.

To step through into the room beyond took him but a moment, for he perceived at once that it was vacant and plunged in darkness.

He waited here for a little while before he ventured to proceed any further.

Then he groped his way across the dark apartment to the door.

In his progress he had to be particularly careful, for had he come into contact with any article of furniture, the noise produced would probably have reached the ears of the inmates of the dwelling.

Feeling along the wall, he came at length to the door.

Turning the handle slowly, he opened it to the extent of about half an inch, he then found that he commanded a view of a passage or entrance-hall, in which a large candelabra filled with wax lights was burning.

This also appeared to be deserted, and after some hesitation he resolved to emerge.

He had nothing whatever but chance to lead him to the room in which Lord Spindelow was seated.

Gaining the passage, however, he saw on his left hand a partially-open door, and at the same time he discovered that the apartment with which it communicated was brilliantly lighted up.

Towards this he stepped on tiptoe and peeped in.

It was vacant.

He was about to turn away, when all at once he heard the sound of an approaching footstep.

He paused irresolutely, not knowing what to do.

Quickly making up his mind, however, he crossed the threshold of this room, and then hastily glanced about in search of some place of concealment.

He could see nothing that afforded the chance of a hiding-place, except the long damask curtains that were closely drawn over the windows.

They reached completely to the soft carpet, and if he once got behind them he should doubtless be able to remain concealed until any person chanced to draw the curtains on one side.

The footstep which had startled him came nearer and

nearer, and in order to avoid being seen he had to dart rapidly across the spacious apartment.

On the soft, thick carpet, however, his footsteps were unheard.

In another second he drew the curtains back and ensconced himself behind them.

He found, as he fully expected, that he was standing in a kind of recess

He held the curtains close, but yet not so close as to prevent him from taking a peep into the apartment beyond.

He had only taken up his position just in time, for the door through which he had entered was flung open, and an individual, whom he recognised as Lord Spindelow, strode in.

The description he had had given him corresponded exactly with his appearance.

A servant appeared at the door.

"Do you want anything more, my lord?" he said, in the humblest, softest tones.

"Nothing at all, booby, and on no account come in again, or allow anyone to disturb me until you know who arrives!"

"Very well, my lord," said the servant, who seemed exceedingly glad of the permission to retire.

Dick wondered greatly who it could be that his lordship expected.

There was something strange that he should only allude to his visitor in such an indirect manner to his servant, when he could have no idea that anyone was at hand to overhear him.

After the door was closed his lordship paced up and down the room as though in great perturbation.

Then at length, as if exhausted, he flung himself into a chair near the table, and helped himself to some wine that was placed upon it.

He drank off several glasses in succession.

Then, shading his face with his hand, and resting his elbow upon the arm of the chair, he appeared to sink into a profound meditation.

Dick watched him a moment, and then resolved upon his course of action.

With the utmost caution he drew aside the curtains slowly, and stepped forth from his hiding-place.

Had he been some insubstantial ghost, his appearance could not have been more noiseless, and three long strides took him to the opposite side of the table at which Lord Spindelow sat.

Here there was another chair similar to the one in which his lordship was sitting, and placed so as to be exactly opposite to him.

Into this chair Dick noiselessly sank down, and so silent had been the whole of his proceedings, and so deep the reverie into which his lordship was plunged, that he remained perfectly unaware of what had happened.

Dick sat still for some time in the chair, looking intently at the nobleman.

He judged that when the time came for him to raise his head that he would experience no slight shock upon perceiving him there.

He preferred remaining silent to making any sound to attract his lordship's attention.

He wished, if he possibly could, to overcome him by the shock of sudden surprise.

With the same gentleness that characterised all his movements, Dick Turpin drew a pistol from his belt.

He knew it was carefully loaded and well primed, and in perfect readiness for instant use with the exception of cocking it.

This operation he did not venture to perform, for he knew it would be inevitably accompanied by a sharp clicking sound.

He contented himself by retaining the weapon in his grasp.

In this way some time—perhaps five minutes—elapsed, and Dick began to think that he should have to arouse his strange companion, for he began to grow apprehensive that the servant would return to make the expected announcement.

Luckily, he was spared the trouble of doing this.

A curiously-gilt and rather gaudy-looking timepiece that stood upon the mantelshelf began, in a tinkling way, to strike the hour.

Faint as the sound was, yet in that silent apartment it sounded very loud.

His lordship removed his hands suddenly and looked up.

Then turning round, doubtless with the intention of helping himself to some more wine, he perceived Dick Turpin sitting near him.

As the highwayman fully expected, he was for a moment quite aghast with astonishment.

Dick took advantage of this moment.

Rapidly cocking his pistol and bringing it to a level, he said, in a low, resolute voice:

"My lord, I am as desperate a man as yourself, and I solemnly swear if you venture to move or utter a cry, or attempt in any way to summon assistance, that I will there and then blow out your brains with this pistol, and make my escape by yonder window!"

What little colour there was in his lordship's face gradually left it, and, with protruding eyes, he glared at his strange and unwelcome visitor.

There was something so intense in the manner in which Dick spoke that it left no room for doubt that he would be as good as his word, and carry out his terrible threat.

"What do you want?" said his lordship, in a whisper, and glancing up apprehensively at the timepiece—"what is it you require? I know you have come for something; if it is gold, name the amount and go!"

"It is not gold that I require," said Turpin, firmly, "but something that you have in your possession wrongfully and unjustly, and which I am determined to compel you to relinquish."

Lord Spindelow smiled.

"I can guess now who has sent you," he said, "and what it is you want; but rest assured you shall never have it!"

"My lord, I will."

"Look here," was the reply. "We may as well understand each other without any further bother. Put up your pistol."

Dick shook his head.

"I prefer continuing the conversation in this manner," he said.

"Very well, but be careful how you keep your finger on the trigger—the weapon might go off when you least intend it. I feel pretty sure that we shall come to terms with each other."

"I am not so sure of that," said Dick; "and, believe me, I am too well accustomed to the use of firearms to have any fear of such an accident as you mention."

"Well, then," said his lordship, "of course you have been paid for undertaking this service, or perhaps will be paid when you have performed it; so to you it must be a mere consideration of money. Now, just tell me how much you have been offered to restore the paper, and I will give you double the amount upon the spot."

Dick shook his head.

"You mistake, my lord," he said; "it is no money consideration on my part: I am doing it because I have solemnly given my word."

His lordship smiled derisively.

"Do you know the danger you stand in?" he asked.

Dick replied by saying, very significantly:

"*Do you?*"

"I tell you," continued his lordship, half angrily, "that a word from me would bring my servants into this room, and then your capture would follow as a matter of course."

"Perhaps," said Dick,—"perhaps. That you might be able to utter the one word you speak of I don't doubt. I question very much whether I should be able to prevent you; but rest assured of this, that if you did pronounce it, it would be the very last that would ever pass your lips in this life, for I would shoot you down without hesitation, and trust to making my escape afterwards!"

Lord Spindelow shrank back.

He could not help feeling intimidated by Dick's manner.

"I imagine it would be very poor consolation to you," said Dick, "to know that you had procured my death by the sacrifice of your own; but now, as you understand the position in which you are, listen to me, and comply with my demands."

At this moment there came a faint tapping at the door.

His lordship started.

His face flushed.



[DICK TURPIN RELEASES HIMSELF FROM THE POLICE OFFICER'S GRASP.]

His eyes lighted up with an expression of triumph.

"My lord," said Dick, quickly, "beware what you say! Remember my words! And I solemnly swear that I will fulfil my purpose up to the very letter!"

His lordship shrank back into his former position.

Tap, tap, tap.

Whoever it was thus seeking for admittance into the apartment was growing impatient at permission being withheld from them.

CHAPTER DCCLXXXIX.

LORD SPINDELOW IS VERY RELUCTANT TO RELINQUISH THE IMPORTANT DOCUMENT.

"My lord," said Dick, "just raise your voice a little and reply to the man who is knocking at the door. Mind what you say—no treachery, or the consequences will fall heaviest on your own head! Tell him that you are busy, and can't be disturbed."

Lord Spindelow hesitated.

The servant, for such doubtless it was, wondering greatly that his summons upon the panel should be disregarded, knocked again.

"Francis!" cried his lordship, angrily, "I am busy and cannot be disturbed!"

Dick nodded approvingly.

"But, my lord——" said the servant outside.

"Silence, sirrah!" was the reply of Lord Spindelow, who was at all times short-tempered, and particularly so just then, and he was vexed that his order was not immediately obeyed.

The servant drew back, and all was silent

Dick was rather pleased at this little incident that otherwise.

He had been enabled to display an amount of command

over the nobleman, and this would doubtless be of great assistance to him in what was to follow.

It was only necessary that he should maintain the position that he had gained.

"My lord," he said, "let me explain to you clearly that I have made up my mind to have that paper. Have it I will, I am determined, and offer you two chances: you may either surrender it to me quietly, and I will go away, leaving you and your whole house unmolested and undisturbed; or, on the other hand, you may refuse, in which case I shall take your life, call in my comrades, who are outside, and we will rifle and ransack this house from top to bottom, leaving not one article of value in it, and never ceasing our search until we have found the paper I demand!"

There was something so cool—so calm about the manner in which Dick Turpin pronounced these words, that it was impossible for Lord Spindelow or anyone else to entertain the slightest doubt that he fully intended to carry his threat into execution.

His brows were knit with resolution, and the barrel of the pistol was still pointed and held perfectly steady in the direction of his lordship's head.

Further and further back his lordship shrank into his chair, as though he would gladly, if he could, have pushed himself right through the back of it.

"I don't wish to hurry you," said Dick. "Look up at the clock. You will see it is just five minutes past the hour. Wait five minutes longer, and at the end of that time you must give me your decision either one way or the other."

"You take things coolly," said the nobleman, endeavouring to smile and treat the matter as a joke. "You are a bold man, too, I give you credit for that; if you were not you would certainly never have trusted yourself in this house alone."

"You don't know that I am alone," said Dick, quietly.

"Well, well—it has often been said, and it's perfectly true, that every man has his price, and it does not seem at all likely that you would prove the exception. You are to be paid a high price for the performance of the service, but I will solemnly undertake, by any obligations you may think proper to impose, to double the price, no matter what it may be, if you will leave it undone."

"My lord," said Dick, glaring at the clock, "I should advise you not to trifle and to waste these few remaining minutes in idle talk, for it is idle—perfectly idle. Just think over your position, and let me know your decision."

Lord Spindelow bit his lip, and glanced around him with a look of despair.

Under such circumstances as these, how was he to act?

How could he avoid giving up the paper that he was so solicitous to retain?

The man who was sitting before him with levelled pistol was unquestionably one who at all hazards would keep his word, and would consider taking his life a thing of no consequence.

He dared not move—he dared not speak.

There was a silence, in which the faint ticking of the ornamental clock was distinctly audible.

"Now," said Dick, abruptly, "the time has expired, my lord; give me your answer."

The nobleman hesitated before he replied.

"Be quick!" said Dick. "All you have to say is, which you prize most, the possession of that paper or the loss of your life."

"I am helplessly in your power," was the answer, "or else I would never give it up; and now, in order to retain it, I would gladly part with half my wealth. Remember what it is I am offering you, and think again."

"It is quite useless, and I will wait no longer; give me your answer, one way or the other!"

"Well, then, since I cannot resist, I can do nothing more than give up the document."

The words were accompanied by a heavy sigh, that showed how much it went against his inclination so to do.

"You have come to a wise determination," said Dick; "but now beware how you attempt an act of treachery, for upon the least signs of it—even upon the least suspicion—I will scatter your brains against the wall!"

"But the paper is not here."

"Is it not about your person?"

"No."

"Nor in the room?"

"No."

"Where is it, then?"

"In my dressing-room."

"Then we will go there and fetch it," said Dick, rising. "My lord, give me your arm. There—that will do. I am now so close to you that if I discharge the pistol you could not fail to receive the whole contents of it, and rest assured that I will discharge it if there is anything at all suspicious in your behaviour. I am in a dangerous position, and I know it, and I shall omit no precaution necessary to my own safety."

Lord Spindelow ground his teeth.

"Now," said Dick, "forward—we will go upstairs together—come."

Almost foaming at the mouth with passion, his lordship obeyed this injunction, and walked arm-in-arm across the room with Dick Turpin.

The door was reached and opened, and at this moment Dick pressed the muzzle of his long-barrelled pistol against his lordship's cheek.

"Beware!" he said, in a significant tone—"beware!"

In the passage or hall outside there was no one to be seen, and the foot of the grand staircase was only a few steps off.

On the delightfully-soft carpet that was spread over every portion of the floor no sound was raised by their footsteps, and they ascended the stairs like a couple of ghosts.

Lord Spindelow looked around him as if in search of one of his domestics.

Perhaps he thought he might be able to make some slight sign to him that would cause his danger to be comprehended

But, as it happened, he had on that particular night, to serve his own purposes, given particular instructions that none of his servants should be at their accustomed posts.

The top of the staircase was therefore reached in safety, and having gone for a little distance along a passage, his lordship paused before a door.

"Open it," he said to Dick—"open it and enter.'

"No," was the reply; "my two hands are fully occupied just at present."

Lord Spindelow opened the door himself, and then stood on one side as if to allow Dick to enter.

At the same time he endeavoured to snatch his arm away, but Dick was fully on his guard, and held him firm.

"Beware, my lord," he said—"beware! If you attempt anything of that kind your life will pay the forfeit, as I told you. Come in, and let me advise you to make a virtue of necessity."

His lordship suffered himself to be led into the room, and Dick closed the door.

"Now," he said, "time is flying, and I am resolved to stand no more trifling. Where is the paper? Give it me at once."

But the nobleman grew more and more reluctant to part with this precious document, and Dick kept an eye upon all his movements and upon the expression of his face, for he had an idea that he would attempt to foist some spurious paper upon him.

This was rather a difficult thing to prevent, for it will be remembered that Dick himself had no idea of what this paper was about, and had no other means of recognising it except by its general outward appearance.

Certainly that was singular enough, and would serve to point it out from a thousand.

Yet his lordship might have had sufficient cunning to have prepared a counterfeit.

This risk would have to be run, but the highwayman thought he should be able to tell by his lordship's manner whether it was the original document that was given up.

It was well that he had his suspicions directed in this quarter, for Lord Spindelow, going to a drawer that opened with a secret spring, produced a folded piece of paper.

"Once more," he said, "before I part with it—and it is only because my life is at stake that I do it—let me assure you I will give up one-half my wealth to retain it."

"No," said Dick, "the paper, and nothing but the paper!"

"Take it, then."

His lordship's hand trembled a little as he surrendered it.

"There," he said, "be content; you have it, and I have no longer the means of exerting power over one of my bitterest enemies!"

Dick looked at the paper suspiciously.

He could not believe that it was the one he required.

To have taken it unquestioned, and then to have discovered that it was false, would have rendered any future attempt that he might make abortive.

At the risk, therefore, of breaking the oath he had taken not to attempt to make himself acquainted with the mysterious document, he unfolded it, for it was not sealed.

An exclamation of rage escaped his lips.

"A trick," he said—"this is a trick, my lord! You cannot comprehend that you are playing with your life. This paper is not the one, I see!"

About this there could be no doubt, for it was perfectly blank.

The discovery of this cheat affected his lordship more than anything else, and he trembled excessively.

Perceiving this, Dick again threatened him, and with such good effect, that the nobleman produced a small memorandum book from his pocket, and from one of the pockets in it drew out the real paper.

In his eagerness to obtain possession of it, Dick stretched out his hand and suddenly snatched it from him.

An effort was made to recover it, but it was a vain one.

"Now, my lord," said Dick, "I am content. I have what I require, and I will trouble you no further. Your money, your valuables, or whatever things there may be I will not touch, nor shall my comrades either. It is necessary that I should get some distance from this house before you are able to raise an alarm, and you must not object to the adoption of the means that will be best calculated to achieve that end."

CHAPTER DCCXC.

DICK TURPIN IS MENACED BY AN UNSEEN AND UNEXPECTED DANGER.

Upon hearing these words, Lord Spindelow started, and his face—if we may be allowed the use of the expression—assumed a kind of dusky-white tint: it might have been compared to some very old dried putty.

"You need be in no particular state of alarm," said Dick, as he observed the change—"that is, of course, if you are reasonable, and comply with my wishes. If you refuse or resist, I cannot tell what the consequences may be."

His lordship licked his lips nervously.

His first idea when Dick spoke was that he intended to take most effectual means to prevent him creating an alarm—namely, to put an end to his life at once.

Even now he could scarcely get over the terror which this idea inspired.

Dick placed the document safely in one of his inner pockets, and then, placing the pistol in his right hand, he seized hold of his lordship by the arm, just above his elbow, with his left hand.

"Now," he said, "I may as well tell you all I require you to do. These measures that I am taking for my safety are as simple as they will be efficacious. In this manner we will pass out of the room, down the stairs, along the hall, and out into the open air. When I have gone far enough I will release you, and you can return home, or do what you like."

Lord Spindelow glanced around him, but said nothing.

"Come!" said Dick, advancing towards the door.

His strange, unwilling companion was obliged to accompany him.

As they crossed the threshold, Turpin said, in a most emphatic and significant tone:

"Now, for the last time, my lord, I bid you beware of attempting any treachery against myself! It is very likely that we may meet with some of your domestics. They will naturally be astonished at finding a stranger in the house, but take no notice of their astonishment, for, as I have told you more than once before, I am a desperate man, and will not part with my own life and liberty until I have sacrificed yours! Now come, for the sooner this little affair is over now the better I shall be pleased!"

His lordship sighed, and seemed to think so too.

He followed Dick obediently and docilely enough along the corridor and down the spacious staircase.

In the hall below was a footman, in all the splendour of a most gorgeous livery.

"Begs parding, my lud——"

He got so far in what he had to say, and then stopped short.

His eyes expanded to an unusual size, and his mouth remained wide open, reminding one of some huge dead fish.

"Tell him to go," whispered Turpin, in the nobleman's ear—"tell him to be gone at once, or——"

The glance that he gave was quite sufficient.

He had no necessity to complete his sentence.

His lordship tried to speak.

But he opened his mouth several times, and failed to say anything.

"Thomas!" he gasped at last.

"Yas, my lud," was the reply.

"Go—go! I don't want you! Be off—be off, I say, at once!"

"But, my lud——" expostulated the footman.

"Thomas, you rascal," roared Dick, in a voice of thunder, "do you not hear what his lordship says? Obey this minute, or take a month and leave!"

Thomas started in bewildered surprise, and then vanished so suddenly into the servants' quarters that his disappearance almost looked like magic.

Dick could not forbear laughing at this ridiculous encounter.

"Don't drag me forth into the open air," said Lord Spindelow, as they neared the front door. "You see I am not properly appareled for walking; I have not even a hat upon my head. Go—depart in peace; I will do nothing towards creating an alarm."

"Really, my lord," said Dick, in a bantering tone, "I am much hurt to think you should be so desirous of quitting my company; but I assure you that I take so much pleasure and delight in your society that I could not on any account make up my mind to a parting yet—a little further, and all will be well. As for your hat, never mind; take mine—that will supply the deficiency."

Dick suited the action to the word by pulling off his three-cornered hat and clapping it suddenly on his lordship's head.

The hand with which he performed this service had the pistol in it, and, as it was done very hastily, his lordship—by accident, of course—felt a sharp rap, that made him cry aloud.

He cut a most ridiculous figure with Dick's hat on his head, for it in no way corresponded with the rest of his attire.

The front door was opened, and the strange-looking pair sallied forth.

Dick insisted upon walking down the winding avenue as far as the lodge gates.

As the hour was late, these were closed.

"Call up the gate-keeper," said Dick; "we must really walk a little further together. But never mind, I will save you the trouble."

Dick bawled out lustily for the gate to be opened, and presently the lodge-keeper's wife appeared.

She carried a candle in her hand, and when she saw Lord Spindelow standing near in such a trim she was so astonished that she almost dropped it.

"Quick!" said Dick. "His lordship is in a hurry, and going out on most particular business! Open the gate immediately!"

The good woman had been accustomed all her life to do nothing else but obey such commands as these, and so, without more ado, she turned round, thrust the key into the lock, and pushed open the gate.

"You need not lock it again without you like," said Dick, as he passed through, "his lordship will most likely be back in a few moments—he is not going far."

It will be seen that Lord Spindelow had completely resigned himself to the force of circumstances.

The paper was gone, and he felt pretty certain that the recovery of it was hopeless.

He was in company also with a desperate character, and surely it would be better not to lose the paper and his life as well.

He had the chance of saving the one, and it was his duty to avail himself of it.

Dick walked some distance along the high-road going in a direction quite contrary to that he would have to take in order to rejoin Black Bess.

But he had a motive for this proceeding.

At length, having gone, as he considered, far enough to answer his purpose, he stopped, and, releasing his hold upon the nobleman, he cried:

"Now, my lord, I shall have the honour and pleasure of wishing you good night—you are at perfect liberty to return. While you are walking along I shall take the liberty of standing here with my pistol pointed at you; if you turn back, or if you utter a cry, I shall fire! And now, once more, good night!"

Lord Spindelow scarcely waited to hear the conclusion of this speech, but started off with a very undignified rush, being anxious to escape while his skin was whole, and while he had an opportunity.

Dick felt pretty certain that he would neither cry out nor turn round, and so, instead of carrying out the threat he had expressed, he returned the pistol to his belt, and, forcing his way through a small gap in the hedgerow, ran as rapidly as he could towards the spot where he had left Black Bess.

Before describing how he reached this spot, it will be necessary to go back a little way, and narrate something that took place during his absence.

It was not long after he had effected an entrance into Lord Spindelow's mansion that a police officer came riding by.

To all appearance, he was engaged upon some most important duty, that required immense speed to be made, for although his horse was going at a rapid rate, he continued to spur and whip it without mercy.

All at once, however, the tormented creature, which had performed a long journey, without resting, at this breakneck speed, suddenly gave way.

It seemed as though it had kept up till the last moment, and then, its strength having given way, it fell down as though shot.

The police officer was bruised and stunned a little by his fall, but, luckily, he fell upon his head.

To anyone else but a police officer, probably, this would have been decidedly unlucky; but as his skull was the hardest and most invulnerable part of his body, he escaped with slight injury.

Nevertheless, the sudden concussion confused his intellects a little.

But rapidly recovering, he sat up in the middle of the road and gazed about him.

After that, his next proceeding was to burst forth into a continuous stream of the most horrible curses and imprecations imaginable, containing such choice expressions as the vocabulary of a police officer alone could furnish.

That he was greatly enraged and disappointed as well at the occurrence of this accident was, however, pretty clear.

When he had relieved himself by this outburst, he slowly rose to his feet, and proceeded to make an examination of his horse.

He kicked the poor brute savagely.

But all in vain.

The animal was thoroughly and entirely exhausted, and no doubt would speedily perish.

"I must have another horse from somewhere," growled the officer; "and I wonder where on earth I am to find one? Ah! what was that? There's one close at hand, I feel certain!"

A faint neighing sound, evidently made by a horse at no great distance, at this moment reached his ears.

"It's a horse loose in the fields, no doubt," he cried. "I will just have off the saddle and bridle, and go and catch it. No one can say anything against me for doing it, because it is only my duty."

The officer carried his intentions into effect.

With nimble fingers he unbuckled the girths, took off the saddle, and removed the bridle.

Then, guided by the sound that he had heard, he forced his way through the hedgerow, and crossed the meadow beyond.

CHAPTER DCCXCI

THE POLICE OFFICER'S RASHNESS MEETS WITH A NATURAL RESULT, AND DICK TURPIN LIES IN WAIT FOR AN ADVENTURE.

As fate would have it, this officer directed his footsteps towards the very spot where Black Bess had been left by her rider.

It was not Black Bess who had uttered the neigh that had attracted his attention, but another horse in an adjoining field.

But this was further on, and, consequently, the officer came to Black Bess first.

In the darkness, he had some difficulty in making out her dark form.

But his eyes were keen, and so he managed to catch sight of her.

"Oh, there you are, are you?" he cried, puffing from exhaustion. "Now, my beauty, let's see if I can catch you."

He placed down the saddle and bridle, and then, extending his hand, walked gently towards Black Bess, who stood perfectly still, waiting his approach with apparent composure.

"Why," ejaculated the officer, as he came closer, "he is saddled and bridled, and yet loose in a field! How odd! Never mind, it will save me some trouble, and certainly it will make catching him much easier."

Coming closer still, he endeavoured to seize hold of the reins.

But just then Black Bess threw up her hind legs, and kicked in a manner that made him pause at once.

"Oh, that's your temper, is it? Well, wait till I am on your back, my beauty, and you shall soon know you have a master!"

The police officer, nevertheless, was well enough acquainted with the habits of horses to know that he would not be able to succeed by violent measures, and, therefore, he began a soothing process.

When he judged he had produced an effect, he ventured a step or two closer.

The result was that Black Bess reared up suddenly on her hind legs, and then came down again, striking out with great force with her fore feet.

As she did so, the officer hastily retreated.

Black Bess remained just in the same position as she was at first, and, as nearly as possible, occupied the identical spot.

This behaviour on the part of the horse was altogether so extraordinary and eccentric that the police officer hardly knew what to make of it, and his attention was immediately aroused.

That it was no ordinary horse was tolerably certain.

While he stood gazing attentively upon her, a sudden thought entered his mind.

A kind of howl of satisfaction came from his lips.

"As I live," he cried, "it is Dick Turpin's mare, Black Bess! What an idiot I must have been not to have recognised her before! Whew! Why, this is a slice of good luck with a vengeance! Whoever would have dreamt of it? Let me think a minute. How shall I act?"

And the police officer rubbed his head slowly, as though the process had something to do with rubbing up and brightening his intellects.

"As for Black Bess, she's the very devil, so I sha'n't go near her! It's pretty certain, however, that Dick Turpin has left her here while he has gone off on some little expedition or other. She is waiting here for him, and I'll wait for him too! Ha, ha! Now, I call that a good joke!"

The officer looked around him, and felt rather disappointed upon discovering that this witticism was unheard.

"How shall I act?" he said. "Which will be my best method of proceeding? I know! I will crouch down here with a pistol, and keep my eye on Black Bess. As soon as ever he comes to mount her, I will fire; and then—pop!—down he goes! I will rush forward then, and seize him! That's the trick! Besides, if he only waits long enough, those other fellows will be up, and then we can make sure of capturing him!"

By "those other fellows" the officer probably meant some more police officers who might be on the road, following in his track.

With an air of cold-blooded deliberation, he withdrew the charge from one of his pistols, and then most carefully reloaded it.

He then threw open the pan, and shook the weapon well, for he was most anxious to guard against the mishap of a misfire.

Then he put in the priming, and all was ready.

In those days, firearms were by no means to be relied upon. They frequently failed to explode, from defects in the construction of the weapons; and, with the usual perversity that can be traced in all things, it was always on the most important occasions that they refused to go off.

The officer crouched down in the long grass in the meadow, and, in the obscurity of the night, it was scarcely possible that he would be seen.

This, then, was just the state of affairs when Dick Turpin, after he left Lord Spindelow, began to cross the meadows, in order to rejoin his steed.

Not for a moment did he anticipate that he was menaced by so great a danger. In fact, it is a question whether he ever felt more self-satisfied and secure than he did on that occasion.

It was only natural that he should feel a great degree of elation at having so well carried out his daring scheme.

The important paper was safe in his pocket. Indeed, he was, as we might say, quite intoxicated with success; and, consequently, he failed to make use of that amount of caution that ordinarily characterised all his proceedings.

If he had only been usually observant, he would most certainly have noticed something odd in the behaviour of Black Bess.

The noble animal could not by speech warn him of his danger, but she moved about restlessly, and presented every possible token of being ill at ease.

Dick did not notice this until he was close to her, and then he failed to understand it properly.

"What, old lass," he said, "are you impatient at having been left alone by yourself so long? Well, well, no matter; that sort of thing will soon be remedied, and——"

At this moment, the police officer, who had been watching for his opportunity, believing that the favourable time had come, raised the pistol, and took a most accurate aim.

He pulled the trigger.

The hammer descended.

There was a flash, succeeded by a puff of white smoke, and that was all.

The whole of his extraordinary pains had gone for nothing, for the pistol had missed fire.

With an angry yell of disappointment and vexation, he flung the pistol with full force in the direction of the highwayman; and having done so, he rushed forward with the intention of seizing him, and hoping to be successful in effecting his capture.

But this little mishap had served to make Dick aware that he was in danger, and he was on the alert accordingly.

He saw the heavy pistol come whizzing through the air towards him, and he stepped on one side, in order to avoid it.

It would have been better had he remained quite still, in which case it would have passed by him harmlessly.

As it was, he only put his head in the way, and had a sharp crack for his pains, that confused him for a few seconds, and allowed the police officer an opportunity of getting close up to him.

Although half bewildered, and scarcely conscious of what he was about, there was yet the idea in his brain that it was necessary for his safety that he should mount Black Bess, and therefore he made some rather extraordinary attempts to do so.

Each second, however, made the stunned feeling about his brain subside; but before he could seat himself, the officer was at his side.

With one hand he seized hold of Black Bess by the rein, and with the other he laid hold of Turpin's leg, hoping to be able to fling him from the saddle.

If he had succeeded in doing this, his chances of capturing him would have been very much increased.

Dick, however, maintained his hold well, and, pressing his knees firmly against the flaps of the saddle, in order to obtain a secure hold, he, with great rapidity, drew forth the pistol with which he had threatened Lord Spindelow, and, grasping it by the barrel, he struck the officer a tremendous blow with the heavy, brass-bound butt.

Its effects were instantaneous.

A sharp cracking sound was heard, followed by a deep groan.

The hold of the police officer upon the rein and the highwayman's leg relaxed at once, and he fell down on his back in the meadow, unable to move hand or foot.

Finding he had discomfited his adversary so far, Dick troubled himself no further concerning him.

Fearful that other police officers might be near, he turned Black Bess round and gave her the rein.

She was equally willing to leave that spot, and the pace at which she went was one that no other steed could hope to equal.

Very soon Lord Spindelow's mansion was left behind, and the police officer also.

By slow degrees he then tightened his hold upon the rein, and reduced Black Bess to a more gentle speed.

"Easy—easy," he said—"not quite so fast! I should like you to reserve your powers against a time of necessity. Woa—woa—gently now—gently!"

Dick Turpin was now upon the high-road, and he glanced quickly all around him.

"It is nowhere near daylight yet," he said—"that's quite certain; there won't be the least signs of dawn for an hour or two at least. It's no good going back, for I don't know whether the officers have left. The time must be filled up somehow. I will look for an adventure—a profitable one. I think it's about time, considering how long ago it is since the last."

While coming to this conclusion, he also brought Black Bess to a walk

He was now able to listen with tolerable precision, and fancied that he could hear some one on the road before him.

He stopped at once to ascertain, and found that he had not been mistaken.

"Good!" he said—"this is just in the nick of time. Back, Bess—back! I shall be in the shadow here capitally; and if he looks like a traveller carrying much booty, I will ride out and trouble him for it."

Close to where Dick Turpin had stopped, a very large tree, with a trunk of unusual circumference, was growing near the wayside.

Its branches were dense and wide-spreading, some of them projecting a considerable way into the road.

Of course, all round this trunk and under the branches was in very deep shadow, and a place better calculated for concealing the forms of himself and his steed could scarcely have been found.

Having taken up this position, Dick listened again.

CHAPTER DCCXCII.

DICK TURPIN WITNESSES THE OCCURRENCE OF SOME EXTRAORDINARY EVENTS ON THE HIGHWAY.

THE well-known sound of a horse's hoofs could now be most unmistakably heard.

The traveller, whoever he might be, was journeying at a rapid rate, and Dick began to think he should have some difficulty in stopping him in the midst of such a wild career.

To his equal surprise and satisfaction, however, the speed of the horse was very much diminished, and it kept slackening and slackening the nearer it came to where he was in ambush.

"Surely he must be going to stop," muttered Dick. "I wonder what he can be pulling up in that fashion for?"

The traveller did pull up, and brought his horse to a standstill some few yards below the spot where Dick was waiting.

The highwayman's first impulse was to avail himself of this opportunity to dart forward and demand his purse.

But before he could make up his mind he perceived the traveller slip swiftly and dexterously from his horse.

Dick, by straining his eyes a little, could make out what was going on, and so he muttered to himself:

"Something amiss with the trappings, I suppose—a girth loose, perhaps. Well, I will be on to him before he can mount. Yet no—what on earth is he doing?"

Dick leaned forward, in his eager anxiety to ascertain what the traveller was doing.

But not feeling satisfied with being at such a distance, he gently dismounted from Black Bess, and then, keeping close under the shadow of the hedgerow, he crept noiselessly and slowly towards the spot where the traveller had paused.

Dick might well be astonished, for, instead of troubling himself about any portion of his horse's trappings, the rider laid himself down on his back in the middle of the road.

The horse was left at liberty to do just what it liked, so it walked to the side of the road and began cropping the grass that was growing there.

This was a most peculiar and unaccountable proceeding.

What motive could a man have for behaving in so eccentric a fashion?

Dick was full of wonder and doubt, and was so undecided and surprised that he could not make up his mind what to do.

Having approached as near as he thought he could venture with safety, he stopped, and his bewilderment was still further increased by hearing the traveller chuckling to himself, as though he had just done something that was exceedingly clever.

He was very busy fumbling about with something as he lay on his back, but what this something was, Dick tried in vain to find out.

Perhaps if he had been allowed the opportunity he would have made the discovery.

But all at once the stranger raised his head about a foot from the ground, and, in a deep, hoarse voice, said:

"Ah, he comes! Now for it! Aha!"

Down he lay on his back again, and remained as perfectly still as he could have done had he been dead.

Dick's curiosity and interest increased.

With perfect plainness he could hear some one else approaching at full gallop.

"The man must be mad," he thought—"a lunatic, or he would never lie down in the middle of the road like that in order to be rode over, for rode over he will be if he remains where he is."

Yet, somehow, Dick shrank from meddling or interfering in any way.

Not from any feeling of fear, however, although he knew that madmen were by no means safe persons to have any encounter with.

"Aha!" said the stranger in the roadway—"how fast he comes! I wonder, now, what sort of a groan I could give, and whether he would hear it?"

The stranger uttered a deep groan

It was loud, deep, and prolonged; and but for the few occasional remarks he had overheard, Dick would have jumped to the conclusion that the man was seriously hurt.

"Upon my word," he said, "I did that well! I will practise it again."

He groaned once more, and then remained perfectly quiet.

No doubt, like Dick Turpin, he was listening to the approach of the second traveller, who was now very close at hand indeed.

More than once Dick rubbed his eyes and shook himself, in order to make quite sure that he was awake.

Certainly, what he saw going forward partook more of the character of some dream than of sober reality.

The traveller in the roadway now commenced a succession of deep groans, as though he was suffering almost mortal agony.

By a strange coincidence, the traveller who was approaching slightly reduced the speed of his horse, and, upon coming nearer, the animal, discovering that something was in its pathway, stopped and swerved aside so suddenly as almost to unseat his rider.

Then the first traveller—for so we must continue to call him, for distinction's sake—groaned frightfully.

No sooner did the sound reach the second traveller's ears than he uttered an ejaculation.

"Ha," he cried, "the villain has met with an accident! Then he has been overtaken by a just retribution. I was growing fearful that he had escaped me. Yes—there he lies, and there is his horse."

This second comer with great alacrity lowered himself from the saddle, and hastened to the spot where the first was lying.

As present Dick saw no cause for interference.

He contented himself by remaining a passive spectator.

The second traveller bent down over the first, and then he cried:

"Villain, rascal, destroyer of my peace and happiness, I have you at last—you shall never more escape me!"

Then this second traveller seemed absolutely paralysed by the first uttering a wild, demoniacal scream of laughter.

Before it ceased, there was a bright flash and a tremendous report.

With a cry of unmistakable pain, the second traveller staggered back several paces, and then, unable to keep his feet any longer, fell backwards to the ground.

At the same moment, the other, still laughing with the same diabolical discordance, rose to his feet.

"Aha!" he cried. "I had you then, did I? How sure you made of me! But you are deceived. How do you feel now, John Marchmont—eh?"

While he spoke, he advanced to the spot where the second traveller was lying.

He met with no other response but a groan.

When he heard it he laughed again.

"Aha! that's music in my ears! Groan away—the more the better! I had you nicely, and you little expected it! You fell into the snare well! Now at last I have had my revenge upon you, and you will die with the disagreeable conviction remaining in your mind that——"

At this moment Dick interfered.

Accustomed as he was to all kinds of surprises, yet it must be confessed that on the present occasion he was rendered powerless with astonishment.

But as soon as he recovered himself, he interrupted the first traveller in what he was saying by bounding forward, exclaiming:

"Rascal, don't think that your villany has been unwitnessed! I have seen all!"

A yell of the most abject terror burst from the lips of the first traveller, and before Dick could seize him or prevent him he bounded away.

"Hold—hold!" cried the highwayman. "Stop, I charge you—stop! Surrender to me, do you hear? Stop at once, or I will send a bullet after you!"

To these words the first traveller took not the least notice but continued to run as fast as his legs would carry him.

Turpin saw that he was in a fair way of making his escape, and, unwilling that he should remain unpunished for such an atrocious act, and vexed as well to find that his commands were taken no notice of, he carried his threat into execution, and fired.

The aim was taken well.

The first traveller gave a bound into the air, shrieked, staggered, tried to run, then, wheeling round like a drunken man, he fell at full length upon the dusty road.

Although he felt that the rascal deserved to be caught, yet Dick almost regretted this shot the moment after he had fired it.

The condition of the second traveller, who had been so basely and yet so ingeniously assassinated, called for his immediate attention.

Therefore, thrusting the pistol back into his pocket, he hastened towards him.

Kneeling down by his side, he took hold of his hand, and said:

"Sir—sir, whoever you may be, believe that I am a friend. Where are you hurt? Do you think you are injured seriously?"

It cost the second traveller a severe effort to reply, but he managed to utter:

"My breast—my breast! I fear the villain has murdered me. The bullet from his pistol seems to have entered my breast."

"Wait a moment," said Dick—"I will get a light, then we shall see the nature of the hurt."

Dick not only carried the means of procuring a light, but a small lantern as well.

He never knew when such things might be necessary.

The wind was blowing rather strongly, so that it was a somewhat difficult job to ignite the lantern.

But at length, having succeeded, he turned its rays upon the prostrate form.

He saw that the unfortunate man was clad in the attire of a gentleman.

Every article he had on was of the richest possible material and most expensive make.

It was elaborately trimmed and embroidered, and on his fingers several rings of rare value were glistening.

"It is your right breast," said Dick, stooping down again—"there's some consolation to be derived from that; the bullet has not touched your heart."

Dick was rather surprised to find that so little blood had escaped.

Hastily, however, he tore open the traveller's clothes, thinking and fearing that the wound was probably bleeding inwardly.

"Why, this is better than I could have believed," he said, a moment afterwards; "you are by no means seriously injured. The bullet must first of all have struck some hard resisting ornament on your apparel, and then struck against your ribs, not with sufficient force to penetrate, however. The bullet has glanced aside. It is a flesh wound, and will soon be well."

Upon hearing these words, it was really wonderful to notice what a marked change took place in the traveller's manner.

He had firmly believed himself to be at death's door, and it is by no means unlikely that if he had remained in possession of the idea that his wound was mortal, he would have died.

Hearing that it was a trifling hurt, however, he raised himself at once, and spoke in quite a different tone of voice:

"Thanks—thanks, good sir!" he said. "Those are indeed most welcome words that you have uttered. I cling to life, and yet I know not why I should, for all of earthly happiness I know has been for ever wrecked."

The last words were uttered dejectedly.

"Be of good heart," said Dick. "If you will have patience for a minute or so I will bandage you wound. There—that will do; I think the dressing will serve until you can obtain proper medical assistance."

"I feel already better," was the answer. "And that villain, Francis Cross, the ruthless destroyer of my happiness—where is he?"

"Do you mean the one who assassinated you in so treacherous a manner?"

"Yes—yes."

"Then he lies yonder on the road; I was determined that he should not escape the consequences of such a deed, for I believed you had been killed. I called upon him to stop, but he refused, and therefore I fired."

"Have you killed him?"

"No, no—at least, that is, I hope not. He seems to be lying very still, however."

"Let us go to him," said the second traveller, whose name, it will be remembered, was John Marchmont—"let us go to him, and hear what he has to say."

"Can you rise?"

"I think so—at least, that is if you give me your assistance."

"Come, then—there, that will do."

The traveller slowly stood upright.

But as soon as he assumed this position his brain swam round, and he would have fallen but for Dick's sustaining arm.

"You are weak," he said; "but you must expect that."

"I am right now," was the response—"the feeling was only a passing one. Let us hasten forward."

"Beware how you approach him," said Dick; "it is clear he is a man full of wiles and deceit—he may be only acting a part, and when we draw near to him he may try to be revenged upon us yet."

"That is well thought of—the caution is a good one; we will advance with care."

Francis Cross—as he had been called—had, in a short space of time, run a considerable distance, and as Mr. Marchmont only walked very slowly, they were some time in drawing near to him.

But as they got closer and closer, they heard him uttering many most dismal groans.

From the tone of them, they appeared to be wrung from his lips by extreme pain.

But then, as they both knew, the villain was capable of simulating a groan to great perfection.

CHAPTER DCCXCIII.

DICK TURPIN WAITS IN SOME ANXIETY AND SUSPENSE FOR THE APPEARANCE OF THE THREE SIGNAL ROCKETS.

"HELP—help! Mercy!" he cried, as they drew closer. "Oh, have mercy upon me—help me, or I die!"

"I would help you willingly if I could," said Turpin, "but how am I to know that this is not another treacherous design upon your part. Perhaps you hope to succeed, finding that you have failed."

"Failed?"

"Yes."

"Does John Marchmont live, then?"

"He does, and is scarcely hurt."

A heavy groan followed.

"Then," he said, "I shall die with one crime less upon my conscience. I rejoice. The hand of death is already on me. In a few moments I shall be no more. The bullet was a fatal one."

He writhed about as though in the direst agony.

Both Turpin and John Marchmont were inclined to believe that on this occasion he was not deceiving them, and therefore they drew closer.

Turpin, however, watched him with a wary eye.

He determined that he would not be taken by surprise by any sudden movement.

If he saw any signs of treachery, he should be quick enough to prevent them from being carried out.

"John Marchmont," said the first traveller, "I have something to confess to you—something to tell you in my last dying moments—something that I will swear to, if necessary, and which will remove a load of care and trouble from your heart, and make you as happy as you were a short time since."

The second traveller advanced several paces, and clasped his hands.

He looked eagerly and wistfully into the face of Francis Cross.

"I swear it is the truth," continued the wounded man,—"swear it by all that is solemn and secret! The reports I set abroad so injurious to your wife's fair fame are false—wholly and entirely false, and having a foundation nowhere else but in my own breast."

"Will you swear it?" said John Marchmont, in a broken voice.

"I will. Don't you remember that when you crossed my path, when I found that you were the favoured rival, and that Catherine preferred you to me, did I not swear then, in the presence of you both, that I would have a deep and deadly revenge for the injury I had suffered?"

"You did; but it was a fancied injury."

"It may be so, but I have not thought it. I have dwelt upon the one idea ever since, and have spared no pains to bring it to fruition. I had well-nigh accomplished my purpose. Now, however, I am dying, and I wish to make a clean breast."

"Say on, then!" cried John Marchmont. "Deep villain as thou art, had you no pity or remorse in your hard breast?"

"None—none! I swore to have my revenge! Until you came, Catherine had favoured me; she had led me to believe that I occupied the enviable position of her accepted lover. No doubt, if you had never intruded, she would at this time have been my wife; but you came, and you wrested her from me. Was not that cause enough for revenge?"

"No, certainly not, because intentionally I did you no harm."

"Well, well, intentionally or not, harm was done, and I felt it keenly here—here!"

He struck his breast sharply while he spoke.

"You married her," he continued, "and only a few months ago. But you grew tired of her—you neglected her. When you became a husband, you forgot to be a lover. I watched it all with eyes of jealousy and hate;

and I rejoiced within myself, for I felt that the opportunity for my revenge would shortly come. I determined to smite you both.

"At length, as you know well, I made my appearance at your house, on more than one occasion, while you were absent from it.

"I obtained interviews with your wife, whom I found sad and disappointed.

"I tried all my arts upon her, but in vain—in vain.

"At length, becoming plain and unmistakable in my proposals, she scorned me, and commanded me to quit her presence and never enter it again."

"Did she?" said John Marchmont, with a groan. "Then how I have wronged her!"

"You have—you have from first to last. I burned and smarted with mortification and disappointment, but it was not long before I saw the means by which I might still make sure of my revenge.

"Here and there, in this place and that, I dropped those hints respecting my connection with your wife that, as I calculated, shortly reached your ears and inflamed your breast with jealousy.

"You accused her of guilt, and accused her in such a manner that she could tell that you believed not in her innocence, and placed no trust in her fidelity.

"Her proud spirit was hurt, and she would not reply to your accusations.

"You took her silence as a proof of guilt, and ignominiously turned her forth."

"I did—I did," was the reply, given in a broken voice. "I feel now that she will never forgive me. Fiend, it is to you, and you alone that I am indebted for all this woe! What should hinder me from starting forward, as I do now, and trampling out your worthless life?"

"A second thought, I hope," said Dick, calmly, as he grasped him tightly by the arm, "will enable you to restrain yourself, sir, and listen."

The second traveller turned round half-angrily upon Dick.

But then he remembered all at once the service that had been rendered him, and he became to all outward appearances quite calm.

"I swear, then," continued Francis Cross, "that your wife is pure and innocent—as guiltless as she was on the day when you wedded her.

"Every day I was in dread that you would discover the falsity of my accusation, and then my revenge would be turned upon myself.

"Yet I rejoiced at the effects that had already been produced, for I saw you were a broken-hearted, miserable man, and that the remainder of your life would be a curse to you.

"Then you know how strangely we met to-night.

"Your violence terrified me, and I fled.

"You pursued.

"But ere long, as I was carried with such speed along the highway, a thought darted into my mind that, by a stratagem, I might procure your death, and then, perhaps I might be able to induce Catherine to become my wife."

John Marchmont's face was buried in his hands.

Deep sobs came from his breast, and Turpin fancied that tears were slowly forcing their way between his fingers.

He made no reply, but allowed the wounded man to continue his confession.

"Now you know all," continued Francis Cross, writhing about. "I have lived just long enough to tell you I am growing cold, and my heart only beats with slow and laboured pulsations. The last words I shall ever speak are hovering on my lips. Have mercy on me—forgive me! I swear again that the charges I have made are all without foundation! Surely that must be a great satisfaction to you? And when you hear it, let it induce you to forgive me!"

Still John Marchmont neither moved nor spoke, and Dick, after pausing for a little while, and ascertaining beyond all doubt that Francis Cross was really dying, touched him on the shoulder.

"Arouse yourself, sir," he exclaimed, "and utter the words this man, villain as he is, has asked for. The consolation to your heart must be great indeed. He has repented of his crimes. Forgive him!"

"I do forgive him," was the slowly-uttered answer. "He has made the only reparation in his power; but, alas! I feel sure that he will never be able to undo the mischief he has caused!"

Hearing these words, Francis Cross struggled to raise his head from the roadway.

By his manner, he doubtless had something more he wished to say.

But finding that he could not utter it, he had been seized with the idea that if he could raise himself he should be able to speak better.

It was a delusion.

After a few struggles, he gave vent to a gasping cry, and fell back.

For several moments after this there was a profound silence.

Dick was the first to break it.

By the appearance of the sky, he could tell the time was close at hand when it would be necessary for him to set out towards his destination.

On that night, above all others, it behoved him to return in good time.

Therefore, turning to the second traveller, he said:

"Sir, you are to me a perfect stranger, although, among other things to-night, I have learned that your name is John Marchmont. Business calls me away from here. I cannot linger any longer. I leave you with the dead."

"But, sir, you surely will not leave me until——"

"I cannot stay another moment," said Dick; "my business is urgent in the extreme. The chances are all against our meeting again. Farewell!"

"I cannot control you," was the answer, "yet I should be glad if you remained. Before I say farewell, let me thank you for your prompt interference this night, and for all that you have done. But for your courage and generous behaviour I should have been left entirely to the mercy of yonder wretch. He would then have triumphed in the consummation of his terrible revenge. What has passed between us is, no doubt, sufficient to enlighten you as to the cause of enmity between us; I leave you to judge whether he was justified in craving for such a deadly vengeance. I admit that I am much in fault; I confess that, after marriage, my wife was neglected; I confess, as well, that when the accusation was first made, I gave it implicit credence—I believed my wife to be guilty, and since then I have been the most wretched man alive."

"Be rejoiced, then," said Dick, "to find there is the prospect of happier days in store. Now that you feel convinced of your wife's faithfulness, go to her and entreat her pardon—tell her what has passed to-night, and let the whole occurrence be a lesson."

"I will—I will. Once more, farewell, and to the longest day I live I shall be your debtor."

Dick raised his hat and bowed.

Then, without speaking again, or waiting for a response, he hastened off down the road towards the spot where he had left Black Bess.

He uttered that chirping whistle that she so well understood, and a few bounds placed her by his side.

Springing nimbly to the saddle, he turned her head at once in the direction of Ealing Common.

"I seem fated not to have another profitable adventure," he muttered. "Well, no matter, by pausing as I did I have at least been able to render assistance where it was much needed, and to frustrate a scheme of villany. It has occupied much time—it is later than I believed."

Dick was exceedingly anxious to take up a position somewhere near to the Three Spiders some time before the dawn.

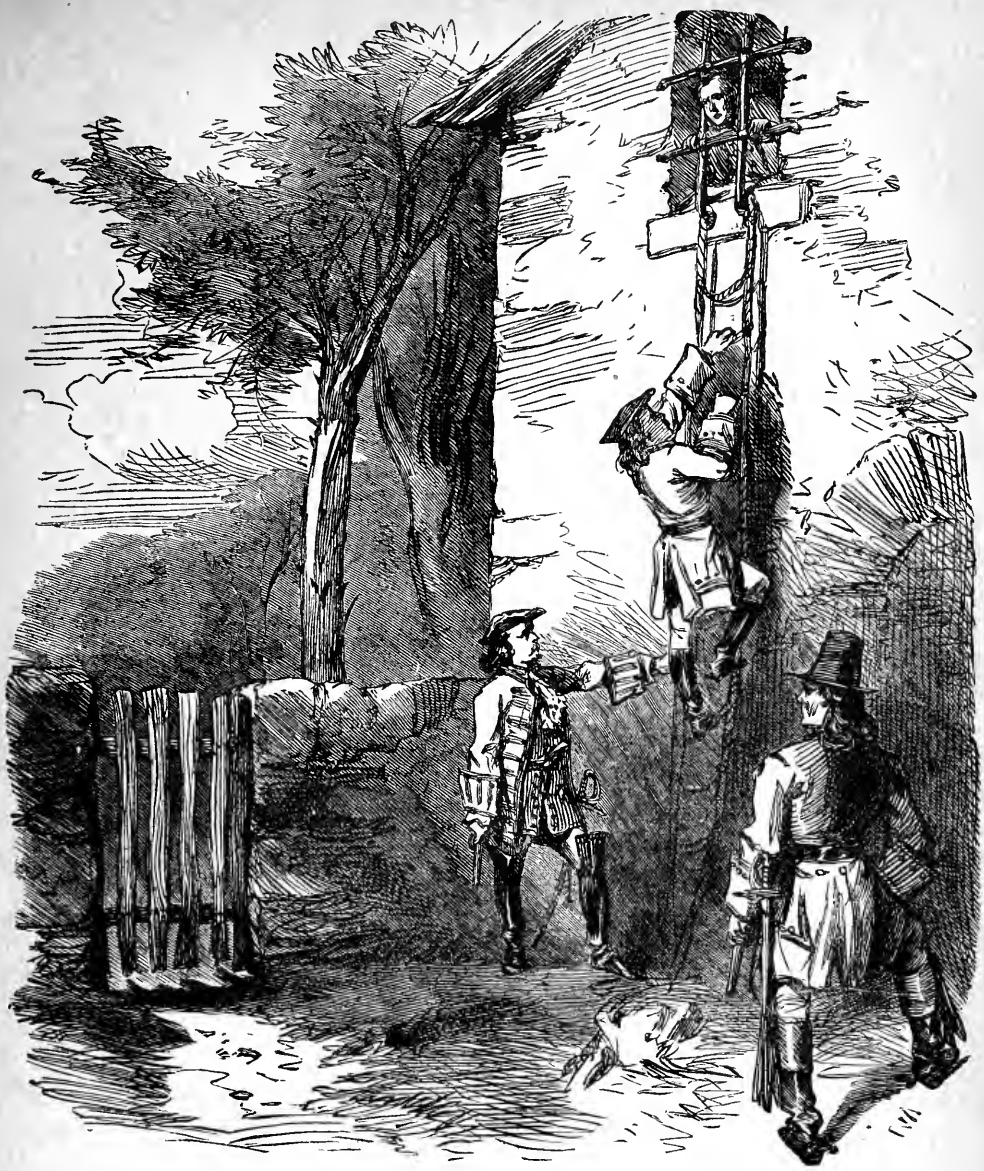
Until he saw the signal that had been agreed upon, he knew that it would be unsafe for him to enter, and if, unluckily, he did not arrive until after the signal had been shown, he would have to remain concealed in some uncomfortable place or other during the remainder of the day.

For one thing, however, Black Bess was easily able to make up for any little delay of this kind.

The gallant creature seemed to understand that she was galloping home, for she put forth her powers of speed in a manner that excited her rider's admiration.

The strange scene that he had last witnessed was provocative of much thought.

But his mind was divided, for the nearer he got to his destination the more anxious did he become to know



[TOM KING AND HIS COMRADES LIBERATING THE PRISONER.]

whether the officers had really left the inn and whether they had made any dangerous discovery.

It was indeed a serious business altogether.

Their suspicions were, beyond a doubt, strongly aroused, and he was in doubt whether Tom Davis would be skilful enough to thoroughly allay them.

At length he pulled up something less than a quarter of a mile from the old inn, and there he sat, patiently watching and waiting.

He looked around him, but neither saw nor heard anything of his companions.

Yet it was quite possible that they were in hiding somewhere close at hand, watching for the signal like himself.

As the time passed on, and he saw nothing, his apprehensions greatly increased, so much so that he almost felt inclined to ride forward at all hazards, and ascertain the worst.

Before he could quite make up his mind to the adoption of this course, however, the intense silence that prevailed was broken by a faint, far-off rushing sound, and at the same instant he saw a rocket ascend into the air, and burst into a thousand glittering fragments.

"All's well!" he ejaculated, with a cry of satisfaction, and he at once commenced to move towards the inn.

Before Black Bess had taken many steps another rocket shot up into the sky, followed shortly afterwards by another.

Feeling that his breast was relieved of a heavy weight, Dick Turpin made still better speed, so that in the space of a very few minutes he had reached the front of the inn, where he saw Tom Davis waiting for him.

"All right, captain!" he cried. "They're gone, and I don't think they will trouble us again!"

CHAPTER DCCXCIV.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN COMMENCE THEIR PERILOUS ENTERPRISE, AND HAVE A NARROW ESCAPE OF DISCOVERY.

It is now time that we turned our attention to the proceedings of the three highwaymen, Claude Duval, Sixteen-String Jack, and Tom King, upon the important errand that they set out

As soon as ever they got clear of the premises belonging to the public-house, they set spurs to their steeds, and made their way, at a rapid rate, towards the singular-looking building.

"Now," said Tom King, "let us agree to one thing, and bear it in mind. The mission we are about to undertake is a most important one. We shall have many difficulties to grapple with, and certainly it will require many hours to effect our purpose; therefore, no matter what occurs, let us agree not to turn aside from our path, but to bend all our energies upon the task we have to perform."

"Agreed—agreed!" cried his two companions. "We will not mix ourselves up with any other adventure to-night!"

"It would be better not," said Tom King, "if only because of our particular undertaking to be watching the front of the inn before daybreak."

This being consented to, they continued to travel at a rather faster pace than before.

Yet they did not go so rapidly as to attract the attention of those persons who saw them.

Nor did they go so fast as to prevent them from holding a conversation with each other, and agreeing to the plan of operations which they should endeavour to carry out.

This conversation, however, it will be quite unnecessary to repeat—it will be sufficient to describe their proceedings upon their arrival.

Both Tom King and Claude Duval had been careful on the preceding night to take accurate notes of the position of the building, and therefore they were able to make their way towards it in an almost direct line.

This was a great saving of time, and before the night was at all far advanced they drew up within a short distance of the entrance gates.

"Now," said Tom, "the first thing to do is to dispose of our horses."

"I think we cannot do better than leave them in the same place as we did last night," said Claude; "then, when they are disposed of, we will climb the wall."

The horses were placed in safety, and although they were allowed the liberty of grazing, yet they were secured to trees in such a manner that they could not stray away.

This was important, for it might be that circumstances would so turn out as to make it necessary for the highwaymen to beat a rapid retreat, in which case it would be imperative to be able to mount their horses quickly.

Of course, knowing what they had to do, they had provided themselves pretty well with tools.

Upon reaching the wall, they listened for a time, to make sure that all was quiet.

Then Claude Duval produced rather a long piece of rope.

At one end of it a piece of iron was secured.

This piece of iron had been rudely bent into the form of a hook.

"I think it will bear," he said—"at any rate, we will make the trial."

Holding the hook with his hand, he flung it upwards.

It went clear over the wall, and they heard it strike with a sharp clinking sound against the bricks on the other side.

Then gently he began to draw the rope towards him.

The hook scraped against the wall, and finally caught firmly in the *chevaux de frise*.

"There you are!" he cried. "Now then, who goes first?"

"I will," said Tom King, "and you follow me with all speed."

He ascended the rope rapidly as he spoke, holding it in his hands, and placing his feet against the wall.

The ascent was performed in this manner with great rapidity, and with but little strain upon the muscles.

His two comrades followed in the same manner.

Owing to the revolving, projecting spikes, it was a very difficult matter indeed to obtain a standing-place upon the top of the wall.

Yet the highwaymen managed pretty well.

Looking towards the mysterious building, they saw that it was plunged in entire darkness.

Either the windows were furnished with very closely-fitting shutters, or else no lights were burning within.

In either case, however, it seemed that the intruders were in little danger of being seen.

Of course, the sooner they quitted their elevated position the safer and better it would be.

Sixteen-String Jack ascended the rope last, and when he had gained the summit the rope was drawn up and lowered on the other side.

Tom King set the example of descending.

Somehow, he seemed to feel that the enterprise was particularly his own.

But it was principally the interest and curiosity he felt to arrive at an explanation of what he had seen that made him so impatient to take the lead.

The descent was accomplished with the greatest rapidity, and, having touched the ground, all three stood close under the shadow of the wall.

The hour was yet comparatively early.

It was doubtful, although the place looked so dark, whether the inmates had retired to rest.

Such being the case, it was the more important that they should use caution.

In a low whispering voice, Tom King said:

"Yonder is the window where I saw the figure of that girl appear; if we move our positions a little we shall be able to get exactly opposite to it, and yet remain in concealment. I propose that we remain there, and wait a reasonable time and see whether anything takes place to-night."

"Good," said Claude—"I like that plan much."

"But did you not say," asked Sixteen-String Jack, "that after the girl had uttered those shrieks you heard the sound of heavy blows, and of an angry voice?"

"Yes, yes—I did."

"Presuming, then, that she is a prisoner—and there can be no doubt of it—it is quite certain that they have discovered her attempt to solicit aid. Depend upon it, they have taken such measures as will prevent her from repeating the same thing."

There was a strong degree of probability about this assumption.

Certainly, those who had her in custody would endeavour to prevent the repetition of such alarming cries.

Nevertheless, our friends resolved to wait as had been first arranged.

At present it was too early to commence operations in any way, and by waiting they might learn something important.

For fear of their presence being known, they did not even converse in whispers, but remained perfectly silent, crouching down close against the wall.

For a long time the silence remained unbroken.

All at once, however, they heard a faint but sharp sound, like the opening of a door.

They were on the alert instantly, wondering what was going to take place next.

This noise was quickly followed by another, less unmistakable, and which the highwaymen could recognise easily.

It was a heavy, slouching footstep upon the gravel with which the house was surrounded.

"Some one comes!" whispered Tom King. "What can it mean? I am afraid, now, we are too soon, and that we shall be discovered."

"Hush, hush—not another word!" said Claude Duval. "Look there!"

He pointed to one angle of the building as he spoke, and his comrades, looking in that direction, perceived the faint reflection of a light.

In another second it had grown much stronger, and presented a star-like appearance.

It was waved to and fro, causing the light to flash with rather a pretty effect through the obscurity.

The highwaymen could make out that a man, carrying a lantern in his hand, was approaching.

No sooner did they perceive this than they jumped at once to the conclusion that it must be the person whose duty it was to make a round of the premises each night, and see that all was safe.

If the man performed his duty thoroughly and faithfully he would discover not only the intruders but the rope which they had left hanging from the top of the wall in order to facilitate their escape.

This discovery would, of course, produce an immediate alarm, and then they would be foiled completely.

It is true, as they were three to one, they might have pounced upon the man and taken him prisoner.

But then his non-return at the accustomed time would be productive of as much alarm as if he had called out for assistance.

Under these circumstances, there was nothing left for the highwaymen to do but to remain perfectly still in their hiding-place, and trust to good fortune to befriend them.

The man came walking on, flashing the lantern around him on all sides, with the air and manner of one who was going round to ascertain if all was secure and safe.

He came very close to the wall, and once the highwaymen felt sure they were discovered.

But the man passed on, and they breathed again, for so far they were in safety.

They saw that he was an elderly-looking man with round shoulders, and a stooping, slouching carriage, and he shuffled along with his feet like one too lazy to walk.

It may seem strange that he did not perceive the intruders, but the fact was that, night after night for years in succession, he had performed that same duty.

On no occasion had he found anything of the least suspicious or alarming nature, and therefore the vigilance and close scrutiny that he had at first exercised greatly relaxed, until he grew to perform it in a purely mechanical manner.

Therefore, although he flashed the light about him, he did not look in every direction where the beams of the lantern fell.

Nevertheless, although suspecting something of this kind, the highwaymen watched his progress with a very great amount of anxiety.

Some unlucky chance might enable him to see the pendant rope.

But, to their satisfaction, the spot was passed, and then, with easy minds, they watched the old man as he gradually walked all the way round the wall.

Having performed his duty so far, he went up to the house and examined the windows, to see that they were properly fastened.

This was not done negligently, but carefully.

Doubtless he felt that it was by far the most important part of his nightly work.

One by one, the windows and doors were tried, and at length, coming to the door from which he had emerged, he entered, and the sound made by the closing of it reached the ears of the highwaymen distinctly.

They heard even the sound produced by the putting up of the heavy bar that fitted across it, and the drawing of the massive bolts into their sockets.

After that the silence was unbroken.

For a long, long while they continued their silent watch.

Their eyes were chiefly directed upon the window that Tom King had pointed out.

It remained closed like the rest, and they saw no one appear at it.

"Rely upon it," said Claude Duval, "they have removed her to some other part of the building, or else bound her in such a way that she could not repeat the alarm."

"I am afraid it is so," replied Tom King; "but we had better wait a little longer yet; it is no good marring our whole enterprise by precipitation."

"True. I quite agree with you there."

"You will admit, then, that they have not retired long enough to get sound asleep—besides, we have no certain knowledge that they have retired at all."

"True."

The subject was then again dropped.

Nearly an hour elapsed before either spoke again.

It was Sixteen-String Jack who said:

"Time is passing, and I am certain if you mean to have any chance of success at all, you must commence your operations, otherwise we shall have the daylight here before we have half finished."

"That is quite true," said Tom King. "I was about to speak myself. The risk must be run now at all events."

"What shall be the first step?"

"Well, I have been trying to think. As you know, when considering it over, I calculated that we should see this girl again, and that by her means we should be able to get the rope ladder fastened to the window."

"I know that was the arrangement; but now there seems no chance of carrying it out, what is to be done?"

"Let us go closer and look; perhaps we may be able to see something that will aid us."

"Hush—hush! Look! What is that?"

"The girl!" said Tom King, in rather a louder tone of voice than was at all prudent—"she has come once more to the window. All will be well now."

A white figure could now be indistinctly seen through the panes.

"We must be careful to give her warning not to shriek," said Claude, "for if she does she will arouse the people within, and then our chance will be over for to-night."

"True, but leave that to me."

Tom King advanced into the open space between the wall and the house, and, despite the manifest danger of so doing, waved his hat as a signal.

He ran a great risk of being seen by others than the girl.

Almost immediately the window was dashed open, rather violently too, for as it was a latticed casement, the half that was opened went with a crash against the wall.

"Hush—hush!" cried Tom King, in a voice he imagined was just loud enough to reach the person above, and in as assuring a tone as he could. "Your cries for aid have been heard, and we have come to assist you; but, above all things, be silent; if you are not, we shall be sacrificed as well as yourself."

The girl clasped her hands together, and could not restrain a faint cry.

She leaned forward out of the window, and by her manner seemed overcome by joy, and yet much in doubt whether what she heard and saw was real.

This night, unlike the preceding one, was not moonlight.

The moon, however, was above the horizon, but she was hidden by thick clouds.

Through these, however, she shone with a dim, uncertain light.

Yet it served to give a dusky illumination, by the aid of which Tom King looked up and endeavoured to form some idea of the personal appearance of the prisoner.

CHAPTER DCCXCV.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN DISCOVER THE NATURE OF THE MYSTERIOUS BUILDING, AND DETERMINE TO LIBERATE ITS INMATES.

The distance, however, was too great for him to judge accurately, yet he fancied from the general outline that she must be young, and perhaps beautiful.

On the preceding night he had heard her voice, and though it was raised far above its usual pitch, yet he could detect much sweetness in its tones, and this went further towards convincing him that she was young.

Again addressing her, Tom said:

"By chance we heard your cries, and jumped to the conclusion that you were in need of help. Were we right? If so, we have come in order to effect your escape."

"Oh yes—yes," said the prisoner, in low and gentle accents—"help me to escape, free me from this dreadful place, and I shall ever remember you with gratitude. If you wish for wealth, I can promise it to you to almost any amount."

"But why are you here?" asked Tom—"what nature of place is this?"

"I am here by the villany of another," was the response. "Are you not aware that it is a madhouse?"

"A madhouse?"

"Yes, so they call it, though the poor unfortunates within its walls are as sane as I am."

Tom remained silent.

"You do not know what horrors, what barbarities are carried on beneath this roof. I have been a victim to such cruelties that I wonder it has not killed me. By some strange means, however, I have survived, and all the time I kept hoping for better things in the future."

"Wait a moment," said Tom King—"wait a moment in silence and peace, while I hold a conference with my companions."

He moved off as he spoke, and drawing close to Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, he said:

"You heard what she stated a moment ago?—this is a madhouse."

"I half guessed it," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Well, I did not, and therefore the announcement has taken me by surprise. There is one thing we must carefully take into consideration."

"What's that?"

"Whether the young girl above really is or is not mad, for aught we know she may be quite insane, and therefore necessarily confined. How great an injury we should do to her, and possibly to many others, if we allowed her her liberty under the circumstances."

"That is quite right," said Claude; "but when she addressed you, could you detect any signs of madness?"

"No, none; she spoke gently and sensibly enough, but then I don't profess to be a judge."

"Nor I."

"I have often heard," said Sixteen-String Jack, "that people when mad are cunning also, and that they can, when it so pleases them, put on an appearance of complete rationality, which is quickly thrown aside as soon as the end they wish to gain has been achieved."

"I know that also," said Tom King, "and that's what makes me hesitate."

"Look upon it from the other point of view," said Claude Duval. "Suppose that what she says is true, that, by the villany of some other, she has been confined in this place, being all the time in proper possession of her mental faculties?"

"Yes, that's the heaviest doubt of all; but let us decide what to do."

"I am for running the risk," said Claude Duval.

"And I also," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Well then, so am I, therefore be ready, because now we have decided, the more expeditious we are the better."

"Good, here is the twine; you throw it up."

"Yes."

Tom took hold of a ball of twine that was handed to him.

Then advancing to the spot which he had previously occupied, he looked up at the window, and said:

"We are willing to do our best to accomplish your escape, but yet we feel some doubt as to whether——"

"I understand you," interrupted the prisoner, in a voice of the deepest grief—"I understand well what you mean. You, too, are touched with the belief that I may be really mad, but, oh! do not—pray do not believe it! There are times when I have a strange sensation in my brain, and when I think surely my reason is departing, but then again all is calm, and I am well again. Nothing of that was ever felt by me until I came to this horrid place, and it is the terrible associations I have had that have been the cause."

Here she stopped and wept.

"Don't feel vexed that we should have had the doubt," said Tom King; "we doubt no longer, and you may rest content that if you preserve your calmness and summon up your courage you will to-night be perfectly free."

"Do not fill me with false hopes," she exclaimed; "the disappointment will surely drive me mad!"

"Hush—hush! be quiet and hope for the best. If an alarm is given all will be lost."

"I am calm. I will be very still."

"Well, then, our first step will be to mount up to your window. It is barred with iron, is it not?"

"It is; with strong iron bars that my strength will not even serve to shake."

"But a file will make an impression on them," said Tom King, "especially when used by skilful hands. Look, I am holding a ball of twine in my hand. I will throw it at the window, and do you try to catch it, then lower down one end of it, and when it reaches the ground I will secure it to a rope ladder. This you must draw up and fasten to your window in the best way you can."

"I understand—I understand perfectly," said the prisoner, clasping her hands in expectation.

"Stand aside then for an instant," said Tom King, "that I may have a better chance of throwing the ball in"

He was obeyed, and, with considerable accuracy of aim, Tom flung the ball of twine into the room.

A moment elapsed, and then the girl appeared at the window, and began to lower it as she had been directed.

"Stop," said Tom King, "that will do."

The rope ladder was then tied firmly to it.

"Pull up," he then cried—"pull up—all is well."

The ladder was quickly raised, and as soon as it reached the top, the poor girl with busy fingers began to fasten it to the iron bars.

"It is done," she said, at length—"it is done.'

"Are you certain it is secure?"

"Quite.

"Then I will ascend."

The highwaymen had provided themselves with a couple of small stakes that could be driven into the ground in such a manner as to hold the ladder tight, thus making the ascent much easier.

Tom King suited the action to the word, and began to ascend the ladder rapidly.

In less than a moment he had reached the top.

Then he saw that he had not been mistaken in the opinion he had formed respecting the appearance of the prisoner.

She was young and beautiful, and although he could not see her face quite plainly, yet he could tell that it had upon it no stamp or trace of madness.

It was as calm and gentle as an angel's.

"Are you sure you cannot force yourself between these bars?" he asked.

"Oh yes, quite sure, or I should have done it long ago I have tried hard, but failed."

"Yet the removal of one will surely suffice?"

"Oh yes."

"Well, then, I will set to work without delay."

Tom had a very fine steel saw, and with this implement he began to work away upon the bar.

The tool was expressly made for the use to which he was putting it, and, as he fully expected, the bar itself was made of soft iron, into which the saw sank almost as easily as if it had been wood.

"It will be only necessary to saw through in this one place," he said; "when it is divided there I shall be able to seize it and bend it back."

Although he worked with a will, and although he was very skilful in the use of the tool, yet it seemed an endless time before the bar was completely severed.

At last, with an exclamation of satisfaction, he announced that his task was completed.

Seizing the end of the bar, he then put forth the whole of his strength, and gradually bent it back sufficient to allow anyone to pass through.

"Now you are free," said Tom. "Come, I will assist you through the window; then descend, and in ten minutes more we shall be in safety."

But the young girl hesitated, and showed no eagerness to avail herself of this opportunity to escape.

Tom was surprised.

"Why do you pause?" he said—"do you doubt us?"

"No, no—not for one moment."

"What is it, then?"

"Why, I have certain knowledge that in this place there are others as unjustly confined as I am—persons who are no more mad than you and I are. Some have languished here for many and many a year, and might do until the end of their days. It would be extreme selfishness on my part to escape and leave them. Could you not free the others also?"

Nothing could have pleased Tom King so well as this speech.

Nothing could have gone so far towards raising the young girl in his estimation.

Nothing would have more firmly convinced him that she was perfectly sane.

The cunning of insanity, however elaborate, could never reach such a point as that.

It was a speech that came direct from a pure, unselfish heart.

But Tom thought he would try her still further.

"I regret to hear that there are others in this place besides yourself," he said; "yet how to free them I scarcely know. Your safety might certainly be secured, but if we attempted to liberate the others you would probably be prevented from leaving."

"But there is a chance of success," she answered. "Suppose you make the effort. I cannot control you, of course, but if you like to consent I should be glad. Let no thought of the consequences to myself keep you back. It would be base indeed to fly and not make the least attempt to do anything for their good."

"You are a brave, noble-minded girl," said Tom King, in an access of enthusiasm, and seizing her hand and wringing it while he spoke. "What you have just said proves you to be unselfish and generous to a degree that I had before no conception of, and the effect upon me is such, that, come what danger there may, I will save you, and the other unfortunates as well."

The fair prisoner withdrew her hand and burst into a flood of tears, but they were tears of hope and joy, and not of sorrow.

CHAPTER DCCXCVI.

THE HIGHWAYMEN MAKE MR. LARNER A PRISONER.

TOM KING'S two comrades, standing together at the foot of the ladder, could tell that some conversation was going on above.

But only a murmur of voices reached their ears, and indistinct words.

They were rather surprised, therefore, when they saw Tom suddenly draw himself up, and squeeze his body between the iron bars, and enter the chamber.

Up to that moment, they had no idea that he intended to make any such proceeding, and they were at a loss to understand the meaning of it.

But he did not leave them long in suspense, but, thrusting his head out of the window, he said, in a suppressed voice:

"Come up quickly; there's more to do!"

He was obeyed instantly, and in less than a moment all three highwaymen were standing in the room.

A few words from Tom sufficed to explain the whole state of the case to them.

Their resolve was taken immediately.

"By all means let us free them!" cried Claude Duval. "Don't you say so, Jack?"

"With all my heart! But don't you speak so loud, lest we should be overheard, and then our plans would all be upset."

"Good; we will be careful."

Then, turning to the young girl, Tom King said:

"Now, you must give us, as well as you can, all the particulars you are able concerning this place."

"Particulars?"

"Yes; how many persons are we likely to find that we shall have to encounter, and whereabouts are the patients situated?"

The young girl clasped her hands over her face in deep thought.

"There are two doctors," she said, at length,—"if doctors they are—who keep this place, Dr. Templeton and Dr. Wright."

"Well, and how many more?"

"There are their wives, and either two or three keepers. I have never seen more than two."

"And the other patients, where are they?"

"Confined in various rooms, like myself. I will be your guide, as well as my knowledge will permit me. Oh, sirs, do not hesitate to set them at liberty, for what is suffered here no tongue can tell!"

"Are you sure that they are all sane?" said Claude Duval.

"I might say I am quite sure, though the barbarities and indignities of this place are sufficient to produce madness in any brain. I myself have often felt that my reason was going."

"No wonder—no wonder," said Tom King, glancing around the apartment. "We were afraid we should not be able to hold communication with you, as last night I heard you shriek for aid, and was just in time to see you dragged back from the window."

The girl shuddered.

"Yes—yes; that was Larner"

"Who?"

"One of the keepers I told you of; his name is Larner—a villain—a brute—a fiend ten times worse than any of the others!"

"Then to-night," said Tom King, "if I come across him, he shall receive the punishment he deserves."

"Last night," continued the young girl, "he beat me most unmercifully with a whip, and secured me to yonder wretched bed. He believes that I am still lying there, fast bound; but I contrived to undo one of the knots in the rope, and, as you see, I am free."

"Yes," said Tom King. "Keep up your courage, and, in a short time, you will be in full possession of your liberty."

"It will be best not to stand talking here," said Claude Duval; "time is slipping away more quickly than you imagine. Let us commence proceedings at once."

"Yes—yes, by all means," added Sixteen-String Jack.

Tom King advanced towards the door.

He passed his hands rapidly down it, and then, in tones of some surprise, he ejaculated:

"Why, the door is perfectly smooth. I can find no signs of any fastenings upon it."

"They are all on the other side," replied the young girl. "The door itself is of unusual strength, and fits very closely indeed into its frame. On the other side you will find a bar, two bolts, and a heavy lock. I know it by listening."

"Then we have a tough job before us," said Tom, "but, at any rate, we must get the door open, somehow or other."

"Hush—hush!"

"What's the matter?"

The young girl clung tightly to Tom's arm.

"He comes," she said, in tones of terror,—"he comes!"

"Who?"

"Larner."

"You are mistaken. I can hear nothing."

"Yes—yes!" she continued, more excitedly than before. "My ears are sharp; I can always tell long before he comes. Hark! You can hear his footstep now?"

Tom tried to soothe the young girl's agitation, and then all three highwaymen listened intently.

The faint, far-off sound of a clumsy, shuffling footstep could now be heard.

"You hear him now?" said the young girl.

"Yes—yes, I hear him."

"Oh, do not let him touch me—do not—do not! If he finds out what has occurred, he will murder me!"

"Dismiss your fears, my poor girl—dismiss them, pray! While we are by he shall not harm you."

"Hush—hush!" said Claude Duval; "he is close at hand now."

"Yes, he is coming here, I am sure he is coming here!" said the young girl, in a whisper. "He has overheard us!"

"Nothing more likely," said Tom, calmly

"But what shall you do? How shall you act?"

"Be under no apprehension, my good girl; leave all to us. I look upon his approach as about the most convenient thing that could happen."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; he will open the door, and save us the trouble. My comrades," he added, "the moment he enters, seize him, and prevent him from uttering a sound"

"We will; we are in perfect readiness."

The footstep that they heard approaching now stopped in front of the door.

They could hear the jingling of keys, and some one grumbling and cursing in an undertone.

Then the key was turned, with a sharp sudden snap the bar lifted down, and the two bolts withdrawn.

The young girl clung to Tom King more tightly than ever, and trembled excessively. It was only natural that she should be greatly alarmed at the approach of a man who had treated her with so much barbarous cruelty.

Nor is it surprising that at first she should not be able

to realise that his power of harming her any longer was at an end.

The door was dashed open by a violent, impatient kick.

Then a stream of light came pouring into the room

"Curse you for a toad," said a harsh, disagreeable voice.—"curse you for a toad. I say! But I'll teach you better than to disturb me night after night in this fashion! I will murder you, you witch, I will! Come on! Where are you?"

The highwaymen then caught sight of a man, whose appearance fully corresponded with his discordant voice and threatening words.

His aspect was repulsive in the extreme, and chiefly so in consequence of the look of settled ferocity that there was upon his ill-favoured visage.

In one hand he carried a lantern, and in the other a long whip, or, rather, a portion of one.

The lash had either been broken or taken off, and only the flexible handle remained.

With it, however, most painful, stinging blows could be given; and whenever he used the weapon, he did not fail to put forth the full strength of his arm.

His eyes must have been rather puzzled by the darkness, for he did not perceive the forms of the highwaymen standing in the room.

They waited until he got fairly over the threshold.

Then Claude Duval, by an adroit movement, slipped behind him, and clasped him tightly round the throat.

So vigorous was the pressure, that the man was only able to gurgle forth an inarticulate sound.

Sixteen-String Jack placed himself in front of him, and thrust the muzzle of a pistol into his half-opened mouth.

"Villain!" he cried, rattling the barrel against his teeth, "your course of villany is run! Move or speak, and you are a dead man!"

In such a man as this, nothing but cowardice could be expected, and, therefore, he no sooner found himself in this position, than he became perfectly still, and if his foes had permitted him, would have whined and howled for mercy, without making the least attempt to release himself.

"Now," said Jack, "we have him secure, just bring the rope this way, and complete the job."

"All right," said Tom King, with some difficulty persuading the young girl to let go his arm, "I will manage it in a moment!"

Tom hastened to the rude-looking bed, on which was a quantity of very strong rope.

With this he first of all tied Mr. Larner very securely by the ankles, then he pinioned his arms tightly behind him, like a man who is going to execution.

Then the remainder he thrust into his mouth like a bit, and tied tightly at the back of his head—so tightly, that the rascal must have suffered extreme pain.

It was not to be expected, however, that the highwaymen would be actuated by any compassionate motives, and they were perfectly heedless as to whether they inflicted a little pain upon him. Indeed, if they did, so much the better; they knew that he fully deserved it.

While the rope was so tight, it was out of the question to utter a sound; in fact, Claude Duval had almost strangled him, and when he released his hold, the wretch fairly gasped for breath.

"That will do," said Claude Duval. "Pick up the lantern, Jack, and I will take his keys. If all the doors are fastened on the outside, they will be of the greatest use to us. We shall be able to enter anywhere without difficulty."

CHAPTER DCCXCVII.

THE HIGHWAYMEN HAVE SOME STARTLING AND PERILOUS ADVENTURES IN THE LUNATIC ASYLUM.

Sixteen-String Jack took up the lantern as he had been desired, and Claude Duval immediately possessed himself of the large bunch of keys that Larner had carried.

They were all as bright as silver, showing that they must have been in continual use.

The young girl still clung to Tom King, thus impeding his actions.

But he did not like to shake her off or use any harshness whatever towards her, for, for ought he knew, her intellect might have been so much on the balance that the least thing would serve to overturn it.

It was only natural that she should look upon Tom as her preserver and deliverer, and as the one who would save her from all future harm.

In his presence—by his side—she felt herself perfectly secure and fearless.

They passed out of the door, and, having crossed the threshold, found themselves in a large square landing-place, at the top of a flight of stairs.

"Wait a moment," said Claude; "we may as well make sure of this gentleman while we are about it; he will be one less to contend with, at any rate."

He closed the door as he spoke, and then, with great rapidity, bolted, barred, and locked it.

"There," he said, "he's safe now. What is to be done next?"

While Claude had been thus occupied, Sixteen-String Jack, by the aid of the lantern, had made a tolerably good examination of the objects that surrounded them.

They saw several doors around, all of them being secured in a manner similar to the one from which they had emerged

"No doubt there are other persons in these rooms," whispered the young girl, in reply to Tom King's question—"at any rate, open the doors and ascertain."

"That is what I quite intend to do," said Claude—"I can see it will be best to open them one after another."

He went towards the next one as he spoke.

Some time elapsed, however, before he found a key that would act upon the lock.

At last he took hold of the right one, and then the other fastenings were rapidly removed.

A faint moaning sound reached his ears the moment the door grated open.

It was as though some one was enduring great suffering and pain.

Claude entered the room at once, or, as it might more properly be called, the dungeon, for it served the purposes of one, although situated above the ground.

Sixteen-String Jack followed with the light, and then they saw, stretched upon a miserable bed, the form of an aged woman—at least, they took her to be aged at the first glance, for her countenance was thin and wrinkled, and her hair, which was long and flowing, as white as silver.

But a second glance was sufficient to show them that it was that kind of age which is produced by extreme suffering.

Upon seeing these strange intruders enter, the poor creature raised herself slowly on one arm.

"You come to torment me," she said—"I know you do! Try your worst—I care not: my miserable life is almost at an end!"

Then she sank back again.

"You mistake," said Claude, speaking as reassuringly as possible. "We are no foes or tormentors of yours, but friends, and have come to set you at liberty! Rise—rise! Be quick and come with us!"

"No, no," was the hysterical reply—"you don't mean this—it is impossible! Alas—alas! I understand it now! I am mad at last—I feared I should be! Oh, my poor brain—how it aches and throbs! Yes, yes—I am mad at last!"

And, uttering short shrieks and sobs of pain, the poor creature writhed about as though enduring great physical agony.

This was a spectacle that literally made the blood boil in the veins of the three highwaymen.

At that moment they felt in their arms the vigour of a hundred men, and longed for the opportunity of inflicting some castigation upon the authors of so foul a wrong.

That they would shortly be confronted with the keepers of the asylum there could be little doubt.

The shrieks uttered by this second patient resounded through the building.

A door was opened and closed suddenly and violently.

Then, above all other sounds, arose the sharp clanging of a bell.

"We are discovered!" said Tom King. "I feared as much!"

The young girl clung to Tom with still greater tightness.

"I am glad of it," said Claude—"I long to have an encounter with them! Let them come on!"

Then, turning round to the poor creature on the bed, he said:

"Discard these foolish fears from your mind; you are no more mad than I am; and understand me clearly: you are now quite safe, and in a short time will be at liberty! Rise, slip on a few articles of clothing as quickly as you can, and follow me; we shall remain just outside!"

The room was left while he thus spoke, and the next door was opened.

And so on with all the rest to the number of four.

In each room they found a female, and undoubtedly they were all perfectly sane, though their feelings had been so preyed upon they could scarcely believe in the reality of what was told them.

By this time hasty footsteps could be heard below.

"Come on," said Claude, "we must descend now! It seems to me there are no other rooms on this upper story. Follow me, all of you, and fear not!"

The first portion of his command was obeyed, but to comply with the latter was impossible.

All the poor patients—if so we may term them—were in a state of the greatest possible dread and agitation.

They had been so long subjected to brute force and violence that they could not in a moment shake off all their terrors and assume a partial boldness of demeanour.

The actions of their deliverers, however, did as much towards restoring their confidence as anything.

Their example had more influence than a thousand words.

It was not without due caution, however, that the highwaymen descended the staircase.

It was angular in construction, and so built that they could not see to the bottom, or form any idea of what was going on upon the landing-place below.

At length a turn brought them in view of the foot of the stairs, and then Claude, stepping back, exclaimed:

"Back—back, all of you, a moment!"

The command was almost given too late.

Scarcely had the words passed his lips than there was a tremendous report that seemed to shake the building to its foundation.

There was a crashing sound, too, which was caused by the bullets from the firearms that had been discharged lodging themselves in the woodwork of the staircase.

"Come on quickly, now," said Claude, "before they can reload!"

He ran down the remaining steps as he spoke, followed by Sixteen-String Jack and Tom King.

Such a cloud of smoke hovered over all things that they had some difficulty in making out by whom they were confronted.

They saw, however, two men, who, although hurriedly dressed, presented the outward semblance of persons in a respectable position of life.

Beyond a doubt they were the two doctors, and the keepers of this infamous place.

Two men—keepers, of course—were with them.

The sudden rush made by Claude and his friends entirely took them by surprise.

They had congratulated themselves that one volley would rid them at once and for ever of their impertinent intruders.

Under these circumstances it was not wonderful that they should, without hesitation, have recourse to such violent measures.

If anyone escaped they knew that their infamous trade would be at an end, and that they would be severely punished.

By the destruction of any intruders, then, they had everything to gain, for the building was so completely isolated that no sound occurring within its walls would be carried to the ears of others.

Finding, however, that they had failed in this attempt, a panic took possession of them, and, without waiting for a blow to be struck, they rushed precipitately down the staircase.

Claude's first impulse was to follow them.

But he restrained himself just in time.

"We must wait a moment," he said. "Doubtless on this floor we shall find other patients, and, let the consequences be what they may, we must not leave them behind us."

"Right," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and I don't think we have much to fear; they are a set of cowards, evidently, and will shrink from calling in the assistance of anyone, even supposing that could be done, but which I very much doubt."

While speaking these words, the two highwaymen had been by no means idle.

They opened the doors of several rooms and peeped within.

But the chambers were vacant.

"There are no more patients here," cried Claude Duval; "they are probably below! Before we venture to liberate them, however, we must make ourselves masters of the situation."

"Come on, then!"

They walked towards the top of the staircase while they spoke, the poor creatures they had liberated following in a dense throng.

Suddenly, to the surprise of all, Tom King uttered an ejaculation, and at the same time raised his pistol and discharged it.

Mingled with the report came a dismal, howling shriek, that was followed by a terrific lumbering, crashing noise.

"What's that?" said Sixteen-String Jack.

"One of the keepers, I fancy," said Tom King, calmly; "I just caught sight of the rascal in time!"

"Where was he?"

"Creeping up the staircase, and in one hand he held a pistol, and I verily believe was just about to pull the trigger; no doubt he thought he should be able to make sure of picking off one of us, but now he is picked off himself! Come, one sharp rush, and we shall be all right!"

"You forget," said Claude Duval, "that by this time they have reloaded their weapons, and the moment we make our appearance round the angle of the staircase they will discharge them."

"Very true; and what's more, this time they will not be so hasty as they were at the first volley; they will wait in order to make quite sure of destroying us."

"In that case, then," said Claude, "what are we to do?"

CHAPTER DCCXCVIII.

THE POSITION OF THE HIGHWAYMEN IN THE ASYLUM BECOMES EXTREMELY CRITICAL.

A very impressive silence for some moments followed these words, during which the poor creatures that had been liberated clasped each other as if for mutual protection, and looked apprehensively in the direction of the staircase.

"I wish I could see what they are about down there," said Tom King. "How uncommonly quiet they are."

"Right," said Sixteen-String Jack—"you may depend they are patiently waiting, knowing that we must make our appearance."

"And I'll tell you another thing," said Claude Duval: "if we linger here too long it will give them the opportunity of arranging their plans still further, and we may find ourselves in a more ticklish position than we are at present."

"If I could only take a peep now at what they were doing," said Tom King, "we should be better able to attack them."

"But don't attempt anything so foolish," said Sixteen-String Jack, restraining his comrade—"the attempt, if made, would be followed by certain death."

"Yet we must know what is going on," said Tom. "Just wait a moment, and I'll try an experiment."

He took off his hat while he spoke, and the significant movement he made at once let his comrades know what it was he intended to do.

Creeping stealthily and silently down a few more stairs, he suddenly projected his felt hat a little way round the angle of the staircase.

He took good care while doing this not to expose even the tips of his fingers, lest a bullet should be sent at what those below might presume to be his head

Not the least notice was taken, however, and, having succeeded so far, Tom gradually bent his head forward until he was able to take a peep down in the passage below.

The sight which met his eyes was rather an alarming one, and a single glance was quite sufficient to content him.

Standing very patiently a few paces from the foot of the stairs were the two doctors and the one remaining keeper.

The one who had been so opportunely shot was lying down unheeded upon the flagstones.

The other three were each provided with long fowling-pieces, the muzzles of which were directed towards the stairs, in order that their aim should be more effectual and accurate.

The ends of the barrels were rested on the backs of some old-fashioned chairs that were usually ranged along one side of the corridor.

A look of intense expectation was upon the countenances of all these three villains.

Doubtless they thought of making short work of those who had penetrated the precincts of the asylum.

They could see Tom's cap plainly enough, though they did not happen to catch sight of the upper part of his face, which was visible just above it.

Tom was at no loss to understand how it was that they did not favour him with a shot.

Their former volley was wasted by a little rashness, and on the present occasion they had resolved not to pull the trigger until all were standing in a dense mass upon the staircase, or in the act of coming down.

Tom King hastily joined his companions, and in a very few words contrived to let them know what was the aspect of affairs beneath.

Their countenances assumed a very serious expression.

But Tom said:

"We must set our brains at work, and devise an expedient."

"What expedient?" asked Claude.

"Why, it is certain that, by some stratagem or other, we must get them to discharge their weapons, and at such a time when they will do us no injury."

"But is not that an impossibility?"

"Well, it does appear so just at present; but can you think of nothing?"

"Yes," said Sixteen-String Jack, "I can. Just see me try, if I fail, things can be no worse than they are just at present."

"But what are you going to do?"

"Watch, and you will see."

Jack took a pistol from his belt, and, in a similar manner to Tom King, slipped down the staircase.

Then, upon coming near to the angle of it, he suddenly put his hand round, and, without aiming his pistol particularly, directed its barrel downwards, so that its contents might reach the hall.

Then he pulled the trigger, and a sharp report followed.

Whether it took effect or not was impossible to tell; but just then there came a stunning report.

"Now," cried Jack, in a voice that rose high above the din—"now, my comrades, quick, and we shall have them."

Sixteen-String Jack's hastily-conceived stratagem had answered much better than he had ever anticipated.

But the men below, tired, it may be, with waiting, imagined that this shot would be followed by a sudden dash down the staircase, and fired accordingly.

They were woefully disappointed.

But before they could recover themselves, or feel sure whether their shots had produced any effect or not, the three highwaymen rushed at full speed down the staircase.

The hall was full of light-blue smoke, making it difficult to see anything.

Yet guided as it seemed by a kind of instinct, they directed their steps towards the spot where the two doctors and the keeper were.

They seized them in a moment, and then a terrible struggle commenced.

The highwaymen knew how much importance was attached to this contest, and therefore they put all their soul and strength into it.

They were better practiced in such encounters than their antagonists, and the tussle was speedily over.

"Now then," said Tom, "some rope, and we shall be troubled with them no further."

"You will find some in my pocket," said Claude Duval.

Rope was produced, and the three prisoners kept perfectly quiet by means of pistols held close to their heads.

Knowing the value of speed, the highwaymen bound them rapidly, and then paused a moment to recover their breath.

The three rascals, finding themselves so thoroughly discomfited, burst out into furious curses.

"What shall we do with them?" said Tom.

"I think we cannot do better than serve them as we served Mr. Larner upstairs; we can do it easily—there's a door yonder."

"So there is."

As quickly as thought almost, the three villains were picked up and carried into the room.

They appeared to be in a great state of terror and alarm, for, of course, they had no precise idea of how Larner had been served upstairs.

That they dreaded something terrible was quite evident.

No sooner were they placed inside the room than the door was closed and fastened.

The highwaymen then looked complacently around them.

They might be said now to be quite masters of the situation.

They had no knowledge of any other persons being on the premises with whom they would be likely to come to a rupture.

"Now," said Tom King, "before we leave we will satisfy ourselves that there are no more unfortunate creatures upon the premises. For my own part I cannot believe that they are all rescued."

"Nor I," said Claude Duval. "You see, they are all females; if there are any males, you may depend upon it they are kept in some stronger place."

"And that would be downstairs underground," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Of course it would."

"Well then, my friends," said Tom King, "let us begin to search at once. I need scarcely remind you we have no time to lose—the quicker we are about it the better."

This was assented to.

In order to make quite sure, they first of all searched the rooms on the ground floor.

As they expected, they found nothing to reward them for their trouble.

The apartments were quite of an ordinary character, some of them being sumptuously furnished.

These appeared to be the more private portions of the dwelling, as other plainly-furnished rooms seemed to be used for the reception of visitors.

Had time been less important and circumstances less urgent, the highwaymen would have felt considerable interest in pausing to examine the different articles these rooms contained.

But they were obliged to content themselves with one hasty glance at the magnificent paintings, rare statuary, and other articles of value that were scattered profusely around.

"There's nothing here," said Claude, "so now we can begin our examination at once."

"But first of all," said Tom, "I have a word or two to say to those poor creatures that we have rescued from a fate surely worse than death."

They passed into the entrance-hall as he spoke.

Near the staircase the patients were all huddled together, not yet having recovered themselves from the effects of what they had seen.

Turning towards them, Tom King said:

"You see that you are all now at perfect liberty and quite free to depart. We have placed you in this condition because we believed that you were improperly confined here, and that you were by no means mad."

"No—no," came a chorus of sobbing voices—"we are not mad—certainly not mad."

"Well, then, perhaps you could tell us whether those



[DICK TURPIN DELIVERS THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.]

are any other persons, like yourselves, unjustly confined in this place?"

There was a pause for a moment, and then one said:

"I don't think we can answer that question positively, but I believe there are many others."

"That is enough," said Tom, "and now you are free to go wherever you choose. Be under no alarm. If there are any articles in this place belonging to you, go at once and fetch them; then take your departure, and with all speed rejoin your friends."

Loud and incoherent expressions of thanks came from all these poor creatures.

But Tom King cut them short.

It seemed, however, as if they had all left something behind, for by common consent they turned and began to ascend the staircase.

Probably it was in order that they might apparel themselves in a more becoming manner.

No. 166.—BLACK BESS.

CHAPTER DCCXCIX.

THE HIGHWAYMEN BECOME BETTER ACQUAINTED WITH THE SECRETS OF THE LUNATIC ASYLUM.

LEAVING them to follow out their own devices, the highwaymen in good earnest set about discovering the route to the lower regions.

A light was the first thing requisite.

But this was rapidly obtained.

A strong-looking door at the extremity of the entrance-hall attracted their notice, not only because of its appearance, but from the fact that it was the only one remaining that they had not opened.

Going towards it, they found that it was secured only by a latch.

Raising it, they passed through, and found themselves in a small square room, almost destitute of furniture.

PRICE ONE HALFPENNY.

Another door was on the opposite side, and this likewise they opened and passed through.

A flight of steps was then disclosed, and as soon as they reached the top of them a most dismal, terrible, shrieking sound came upon their ears.

Had it not been for the nature of the place, the highwaymen would scarcely have believed that the sound was produced by anything human.

"Quick!" said Tom. "Let us put an end to this state of things as speedily as possible; it is too bad that human beings should be made to suffer such torture."

He hastily descended the steps while he spoke, closely followed by his two comrades.

At the bottom of this staircase they found another strong-looking door, both barred and bolted.

But these fastenings were rapidly undone.

Yet the door did not yield.

It was locked.

But this was not much of an impediment.

Larner's keys were immediately thought of, and they were tried successively until one was found that fitted.

Then with a snap the bolt flew back, leaving the highwaymen at liberty to pass on.

Before them was a long, narrow stone passage, with a low, arched roof.

The atmosphere in it was literally pestiferous, and they had to pause a moment in order to allow the purer air upon the staircase to mingle with it.

While they thus stood, however, such a frightful chorus of shrieks, and groans, and hideous cries arose that they looked at each other with blanched faces.

"Some here must be mad," said Claude Duval. "Persons in their proper senses would never utter such cries as these."

"Well, we shall see in a moment or two," answered Tom; "but how is it possible for persons to exist in such an atmosphere as this at all?"

"That's more than I can tell."

"Here is the first door," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack. "We will open that, and see what is beyond."

The keys were again used, the proper one found, and then the door yielded.

"Mercy!" shrieked some one, in a frenzied voice—"help—help! Don't come to torment me any more! I—I will do anything you wish me, but leave me in peace, and take me somewhere where I cannot hear those dreadful shrieks—they are driving me frantic!"

Tom King held the light high above his head, and then, by the aid of it, he and his comrades saw in truth a piteous spectacle.

A man of middle age, whose powerful, robust form was bowed, and whose skin hung loosely about him, was seated on a rude stone bench, that seemed to be the only accommodation the room afforded.

Upon seeing strangers, he arose.

The movement was accompanied by the clanging of chains, and for the first time the highwaymen noticed that he was fettered to the wall.

In the look of this man there were no signs of insanity.

His manner now was calm, and cool, and reasonable.

Tears even glistened in his eyes, for although no words had been spoken, he seemed to comprehend that he was about to be set free from the wretched den he occupied.

Tom King was the first to speak.

"Chance," he said, "has brought us to this place, and chance has also made us acquainted with its character, and therefore we have set ourselves the task of freeing those who are improperly confined here."

At this realisation of his expectations, the poor prisoner sank down upon his knees and fairly wept aloud.

"Come, come," said Tom—"be calm, I pray you. We have no time to spare, for there are doubtless many others in the same position as yourself. Tell us by what means you are secured to the wall?"

The prisoner made several ineffectual attempts to reply, and at length said:

"I am chained."

"But is the chain riveted or locked?"

"Locked."

"That will do; the knowledge will spare us much trouble. Now, Claude, out with the keys again. No doubt they will answer for this purpose as well as all the rest."

This was quickly proved, and the falling of the clanking chains was followed by a shout of joy from the prisoner.

"At length," he said, "I am free! This day, alas! I feared would never come, but now it has arrived, and I triumph! Let me tell you that I have held out long against all manner of temptation and brutality. All means have been used to force me to sign a certain document, the effect of which would be to beggar me and mine, but I have refused—refused even up to now, though when you entered my mind was in such a state that, had I been asked, I verily believe I should have consented."

"Be glad, then," said Tom, "that we did not come too late. I need not tell you to make haste and leave this gloomy abode. Follow us. No doubt you will be able to tell us where other prisoners are to be found."

"I will try," was the response, "for I should wish all to be delivered. I firmly believe that there is not one confined here who is really mad, or rather, I should say, who was mad when confined here. I felt that my intellect was going."

"And no wonder."

"No, wonder, sir, as you say; and yet you cannot form the least idea of what I have undergone."

While speaking this, the whole party left the cell.

But ere they had gone many paces another door was reached.

No sooner did they pause before it than a succession of the most awful shrieks and groans burst upon their ears.

Evidently the cries proceeded from the other side of it.

With nervous haste, the key was sought for and found, and the door flung open.

The highwaymen pressed in, but rapidly retreated.

Standing in a frantic attitude, and at the full length of his chain was a wan and haggard object.

His condition was indeed horrible in the extreme, and in his eyes the fire of madness was surely burning.

Foam was upon his lips, and he was struggling violently to release himself from the chains that bound him.

But the fetters were strong and far beyond his power to break, and therefore all his raging was ineffectual; and all the while he thus cried and struggled, his behaviour in all respects resembling that of a wild beast, those awful cries the highwaymen had heard came pealing from his lips.

In vain they tried by gentle words to soothe him—he was deaf.

He was deaf to the sound of their voices, for his fury was already so ungovernable that nothing could increase it.

"We must leave him," said Sixteen-String Jack, in a sad tone of voice. "To set such a one at liberty would be to do no end of damage. Who can tell what acts he might commit in his present state of mind?"

"True—true!" said Tom King. "The risk would be by far too great, and yet it grieves me to leave him here thus."

"It cannot be helped," said Claude Duval. "Come on to the next cell!"

"Is not this a lamentable sight?" said the prisoner they had just freed, and who showed more signs of rationality every moment, as he began to fully realise the fact that he was no longer a prisoner—"is it not enough to draw pity from stones, to think that the wretches who owned this place have brought that poor man to such a state? for I feel certain that when he first came to this place he was no more mad than you are at the present moment."

"It is indeed most infamous," said Tom, "and it will be strange indeed if they escape a just retribution for such atrocity! We have all the principals securely bound prisoners, and we have not yet decided what to do with them."

"If you hand them over to the law little good can be done. What amount of punishment inflicted upon them would compensate for the injury they have done?"

Tom did not answer this question, but slowly left that cell and advanced towards the next.

The dreadful nature of the things he saw, and which no description can convey an adequate idea of, deprived him almost of the faculty of speech.

Upon reaching this third door, a deep silence prevailed, and from this fact they judged that the cell must be untenanted.

Still they resolved to ascertain whether this was so or not, and therefore the door was opened.

The cell into which it opened closely resembled the other two.

Before them was the rude stone bench, to which the prisoners were chained.

On this one a man was sitting.

His hands and arms were hanging idly by his sides, and his head was leaning back against the wall.

Of their entrance he took not the slightest notice, moving neither hand nor foot.

The highwaymen called aloud to him.

But without success.

"Perhaps he is asleep," said Tom King—"sleeping heavily. Bring the light a little closer, and then——"

He checked himself suddenly.

The light had been brought, and, the rays falling upon this third prisoner, showed that he was indeed sleeping; but it was the long sleep of death.

He had expired in that lonely, dismal place with no one near to cheer him and soothe him in his last moments.

Yet, judging by appearances, he had died easily, for his position was that of one who had fallen into a deep and sudden slumber.

Without uttering a single word, Tom King turned slowly round and left this cell.

Here, he felt sure, he could do nothing.

His comrades followed him in the same manner.

The next cell, and the next were empty.

In the two following ones were two men, who were evidently sane enough, although the joy they felt at being thus unexpectedly set free demonstrated itself in a very extravagant and violent manner.

But that they were not mad was perfectly certain.

CHAPTER DCCC.

TOM KING AND HIS COMPANIONS ARE MADE PRISONERS BY THE ESCAPED LUNATIC.

When the transports of the liberated prisoners had somewhat abated, the manner in which they crowded round their deliverers and wrung their hands was truly affecting to witness.

But the highwaymen deprecated all their thanks, and steadily kept in view the object they had before them.

"Show your joy and satisfaction," they said, "by aiding us in this good work. We want all the assistance that you are able to afford us."

They pressed forward willingly, and as door after door was opened, fresh persons were added to their number.

They came at length to one low, narrow door, at the extremity of the passage.

As they approached it they heard furious yells and shrieks, accompanied by a clashing sound.

One of those who had been liberated pressed forward and said:

"There is a dangerous prisoner in that cell. I believe for many and many a long year he has been an inmate of this dreadful place. His tale, although I have not heard much of it, is a mournful one; now, I fear, he is hopelessly—incurably insane."

Upon hearing these words, Tom King paused, and so did his companions.

They were rather in doubt as to whether they should run the risk of opening the door or not.

"He is chained," said the man who had before spoken. "The greatest care is taken to keep him secure. If he once got free he would be the death of the keepers of this asylum."

"Then if that's the case," said Tom, "we will open the door and look at him. I have heard that sudden shocks often restore people to their lost reason, and perhaps when he finds that he is about to be set at liberty at last, he will recover his senses."

"There can be no harm to try," said Claude Duval, and as he spoke he thrust a key into the lock.

No sooner had he done so than the sounds within completely ceased.

All seemed as still as death, and the contrast to the former uproar was really remarkable.

The silence indeed was most impressive, for of all the anxious group who stood around the doorway, not one spoke a word, or drew his breath loudly.

The key which Claude tried was proved to be the wrong one, and he tried several rapidly in succession, but without any result.

Then the one who had already given those few explanations spoke again:

"I believe," he said, "that the poor wretch lives only with one idea before his mind."

"What is that?"

"That the time will come some day when he will be able to revenge himself for all the dreadful injuries that have been inflicted upon him. He is waiting, hoping and looking forward for that day to come; and knowing what his intentions are, and dreading his ferocity, the greatest care is taken every time a visit is paid to him lest he should accomplish some violence then."

These accounts by no means reassured the highwaymen, and but for the hope that some benefit might arise from opening the door they would have left it closed.

In addition to this, a feeling of great curiosity sprang up in their bosoms respecting this man, and they longed to look upon him.

A moment afterwards the right key was found, and then the door was pushed slowly open.

No sooner did it recede upon its hinges than a terrific scream was heard, that seemed to pierce through all their brains.

It was followed by a bound and a rush.

So suddenly did this happen that, for a second or so, all were bewildered.

At last, however, they realised the fact that the insane prisoner had escaped.

"After him—after him!" said Tom King. "Who can say what he will do?"

"I fear it is too late!" said Claude Duval.

"No, no—never too late! Quick—quick!"

Tom King bounded hastily off along the passage in the direction the madman had taken.

The others followed him closely.

But before he could get half way along it a loud clanging noise was heard.

At first they did not think what this could be; but directly afterwards the end of the corridor was reached.

Then the strong door at the bottom of the staircase was discovered to be closed.

There was a rattling of chains on the other side, and then a harsh grating sound, showing that the two bolts had been rapidly thrust into their sockets.

Tap-tap came two faint blows from the other side, and then a triumphant voice asked:

"Are you there—are you there?"

"Yes—yes," cried Tom King, "we are here; but we are your friends!"

This announcement, which it was hoped would be received with calmness, was greeted only by a loud, howling, derisive laugh, after which all was still.

The highwaymen looked at each other for a moment in silence.

The accident—for such it truly was—that had just occurred was one that was likely to be most serious in its consequences.

In his blind rage, the madman would confound friends with foes, as he had already done, and the revenge that was burning in his bosom would be wreaked upon them.

But the one who showed the most alarm was the patient who had already communicated several particulars concerning the lunatic.

"How cunning he is!" he exclaimed. "Depend upon it, by some strange means or other, he has managed to get free from his chains. When he heard us opening the door he must have crouched down, and remained perfectly silent; then, watching his opportunity, sprang out."

"Yes, that's the state of affairs beyond a doubt."

"Well, then, gentlemen, let me entreat you to use what efforts you are able to force open this door. Make al'

speed to recapture him, or the mischief he may do in a short time will be incalculable."

"We will try," said Tom King. "But this is an obstacle we did not expect to have to contend against."

He endeavoured to shake the door as he spoke.

But it remained quite secure in its setting.

It was exceedingly strong in its construction, and the madman had, beyond a doubt, carefully secured it.

"Come," said Claude Duval, "we must get it open somehow or other, or else make up our minds to remain here and be starved to death. Let us all help, and surely between us something may be accomplished."

They were but ill-provided with tools for such a task as that which was now before them, yet they all bent their energies willingly to it.

They had a double inducement for exertion, and therefore they laboured in an almost incredible manner.

Yet upwards of twenty minutes elapsed before they could be said to have made the least impression upon the door, and that twenty minutes seemed to them at least four hours.

A slight breach in the masonry which formed the door-post having been made, they continued to work with fresh vigour, and soon considerable progress was made.

At last, to their great joy, the door was flung open.

They rushed up the steps pell-mell, but at the top were again brought to a stop, for that door was also closed.

With cries of vexation and disappointment, they hammered away at this, thinking the noise made would probably bring some of the others to their assistance.

In this hope, however, they were disappointed, and they had to batter it down by their own exertions.

Long before they succeeded in doing this they became aware that smoke was pouring in upon them through every chink or crevice that they made.

A roaring sound, like that which would be produced by flames, was also audible.

"The place is on fire," said Tom King; "and perhaps the flames have taken such a hold upon the building that we shall be unable to leave it alive!"

"Let us hope for better things," said Claude Duval. "There, now we are better off!"

The door at this instant gave way; but the smoke beyond was so dense that they had to recoil before it.

"Crouch down," said Tom, "close to the ground; you will find the air comparatively free from smoke. We had better all keep together; I will lead the way. Crawl after me!"

Tom, sinking on his hands and knees, began to crawl forward.

As he had expected, the air close to the floor was tolerably pure, though scorching hot.

Ere going far, however, an ejaculation escaped his lips.

He paused, and the others gathered quickly around him.

"Look!" he said. "Why, here is the young girl that we rescued! How comes it that she is here?"

"Is she dead?" asked Claude.

"No—no," was Tom's hurried reply—"at least, I hope not; her body is warm. She must have dropped down half suffocated with the smoke!"

"Push on, then!" said Claude. "We can manage to take her with us! Unless we are quick, we shall indeed be consumed!"

But Tom would not suffer anyone else to touch the young girl but himself, and, putting forth his utmost strength, he crawled along, half carrying, half dragging her by the side of him.

In this way the entrance-hall of the asylum was gained.

But here the smoke and heat were ten times greater.

How to escape they scarcely knew.

The smoke was so black and thick that it was an impossibility to see a foot before them, save in one place near the staircase, where the flames were raging furiously, and seeming to shoot up to the very top of the building.

"I will draw a little to one side," said Claude, presently. "If you remember, there were several doors leading into rooms; if we can find one we may be able to make our exit through the window."

This suggestion was too good and too valuable to be lost sight of, and Claude hastily moved in the direction of which he had spoken.

Coming to the door, he raised his arm and opened it; then entered.

Here the flames had not apparently made much progress.

The air was intolerably hot; but free from smoke.

The opening of the door, however, altered at once the appearance of the place.

Everything must have been on the point of breaking out into a blaze, and the current of air that came in was sufficient to cause it at once.

There was a sudden flash all round, and then a crackling of glass, as the panes in the window one by one broke and fell out on to the gravel outside.

The cool night air that came rushing in through these openings was, however, inexpressibly grateful to them, and they made all speed towards the window.

By a last effort of strength, Claude dashed it open, and then the whole party scrambled or rather rolled, on to the hard ground outside the building.

CHAPTER DCCCI.

DOCTOR TEMPLETON IS OVERTAKEN BY A JUST BUT TERRIBLE RETRIBUTION.

THE escape was made only just in time.

Not only were they scorched all over by the intense heat, but their lungs were so full of smoke that they were well-nigh suffocated.

It was wonderful how the cold night air served to restore them, and they drank it in with eager gasps, and seemed to swallow it as though it was some exquisite nectar.

The progress of the flames was so rapid, however, that to remain in that position was dangerous, and therefore, one by one, they rose to their feet.

The young girl Tom had taken special charge of still showed no signs of returning animation—a thing perhaps scarcely to be wondered at, but yet which filled him with apprehension.

His strength would scarcely enable him to raise her in his arms and walk away; but he performed the feat, for he felt a strange unwillingness to resign her to the care of another.

Long tongues of flame had now broke forth from all the windows of the asylum, and from the roof as well.

As the building was large, the blaze was tremendous, and lighted up every object around with startling brilliancy.

But, above the roaring noise which is always audible during a large conflagration, the highwaymen could detect something that sounded like distant shrieks.

The sound induced them all to pause, and Claude said:

"You heard those shrieks? Can any of you tell me where they came from?"

"Listen again," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Perhaps then we may make out."

This advice was followed, and then a cry, loud, clear, and piercing broke upon their ears.

At the same moment, one of the liberated prisoners ejaculated:

"Look there—look there! Oh, this is terrible!"

He pointed as he spoke towards the burning building, from which the screams evidently proceeded.

Then they saw the dusky figure of a man appear upon the blazing, almost red-hot roof.

Desperation was in his every movement, and he continued to shriek madly for aid.

"It's Dr. Templeton!" exclaimed another of the patients, and even as he spoke he shrunk back, for, even under these circumstances, he could not control the fear which the sight of the doctor produced.

Before anyone had time to make another remark, a fresh object of interest presented itself.

Bounding suddenly from somewhere, but from what point was impossible to tell, came another human form.

and this was instantly recognised as being that of the madman who had escaped.

It was not that they were so familiar with his countenance or general appearance—it was his insane, extraordinary actions that proclaimed his identity.

He laughed wildly and discordantly, clapping his hands with fiendish glee, and evidently straining every muscle to overtake Dr. Templeton.

Under the influence of terror, it was wonderful to see what speed the doctor made, and how he scrambled over the sloping roof, imploring aid continually.

But no aid was near.

Surely at that moment he must have felt that there was such a thing as retribution.

Was he not now receiving a due and proper punishment for the enormities and barbarities that had marked the whole of his career?

"Revenge!" shrieked the madman, in almost inarticulate tones—"revenge! I will be revenged upon you! I will tear your heart from your breast! I tell you I will have my revenge!"

And when he spoke these words, his efforts to catch the flying man were redoubled.

The roof of the asylum was irregular in shape, and in the centre there was a kind of belfry, in which hung the bell that had given forth the signal of alarm.

Oddly enough, it was towards this little belfry—if so it may be termed—that the terrified doctor made his way.

Why, no one could tell, for it was impossible that he could escape in that direction.

Probably enough, fear had deprived him of the proper use of his faculties.

It might have been that he was conscious only of one thing, and that was, that he was getting away from his mad pursuer.

All those below stood watching this strange spectacle with breathless interest.

They could do no more than be mere spectators.

Interference was altogether out of the question.

Yet so absorbed were they by what they saw, that it is questionable whether they would have been able to rush forward to the assistance of the doctor even if it had been possible.

At length one of the upright pieces of wood with which the belfry was supported was grasped by the terrified doctor.

Under the influence of intense terror, he pulled himself up higher and higher with a speed and agility that was wonderful to witness.

But when he got a certain height he was compelled to pause.

To climb higher up was impossible.

He made several frantic efforts, but failed.

Then, looking down below, he could see nothing but an immense pit of fire glowing white with intense heat.

At that time the interior of the asylum might have been compared to one huge, roaring furnace, and the belfry to the aperture at the top of it.

The heat that ascended was terrific.

But as yet no flames reached so high.

Despairingly, then, the doctor clung to the piece of timber, and then turned his haggard eyes towards his pursuer.

The exultation of the maniac now was wonderful to see, and manifested itself in a hundred different ways.

With great rapidity, as if he feared even then that his prey would escape him, he went climbing up towards the belfry, though destruction threatened him at every step.

Perceiving his assailant draw closer, the doctor, as a last hope, drew from his pocket a small knife, which he opened hastily, and held in a position to defend himself.

The sight of the knife seemed to infuriate the maniac still more, and with one sudden prodigious bound he reached the doctor.

He clung convulsively to him—so tightly that it was a thousand wonders the doctor was able to withstand the sudden strain.

But finding himself in the grasp of his foe, Dr. Templeton stabbed madly with his knife in all directions.

Yet it could not be perceived that the blows produced the least effect.

Higher and higher rose the maniac, and at last, with a yell of triumph, he seized his adversary by the throat.

Then commenced a furious struggle that was full of horror to look at.

For a moment or two the object of the maniac could not be understood.

But it was quickly perceived that his intention was to push the doctor over the edge of the belfry, and cause him to fall down into the midst of the fire that was raging below.

This was the fate that stared the doctor in the face, and he strove hard to escape from it.

His efforts, however, all went for nothing.

So far as physical strength went, the maniac was by far his superior.

Little by little he felt himself pushed closer and closer and further and further over the dreadful abyss.

He clung frantically to everything that presented the least opportunity for grasping.

But in spite of all he found that he was slowly and surely going.

His shrieks and cries for mercy could now only be indistinctly heard, owing to the tightness with which his foe compressed his neck.

Further and further he went back, so far that the dreadful consciousness was fully before his mind that he could not by any possibility recover his balance—that he must of necessity fall headlong backwards into the flames that were already scorching him with their fierce heat.

It was just then that, unable to maintain his grasp upon the woodwork any longer, the wretched man seized hold, instead, of his opponent.

It seemed as though at this last moment that the lost senses of the maniac returned to him.

At any rate, judging by appearances, he awoke to a sense of his own danger.

He endeavoured to retreat to save himself.

But the doctor, knowing that his own doom was certain, resolved to drag the cause of it down to destruction along with him.

There then ensued a momentary struggle.

It was over almost while one might draw a breath, and then, with a rush, the surgeon and the maniac disappeared, plunging like huge stones into the fire below.

After that the flames shot up with redoubled vigour.

The belfry was instantly set light to, and blazed brilliantly.

Only for a little while, however, for the weight of the bell inside dragged it down.

How long that little group of persons might have stood watching the progress of the flames is hard to say, had not the attention of Claude Duval been attracted by the approach of persons from a distance.

It was rather strange that such a huge conflagration had not brought people to the spot at an earlier moment.

But the fact was, the asylum stood far away from any other human habitations, and was in a lonely, retired portion of the country.

The red reflection in the sky had indeed been witnessed by persons many miles off, who, with what speed they could, had hastened to the scene of destruction.

These were they whom Claude heard, and almost immediately afterwards there came a loud clanging upon the bell.

They had arrived at the gate, and were giving that summons for admission.

It was not likely that any notice would be taken of it, so in a little while the ringing ceased, and a furious banging noise commenced.

The three highwaymen drew closer together, and then Claude exclaimed, in a whisper:

"I'm afraid now we've got ourselves into an awkward fix. How shall we account for our presence here, or how shall we manage to get away unseen?"

"That's more than I can tell you," replied Tom. "The brilliant light of this fire would discover us in a moment if we attempted to scale the wall."

"Yes, yes—I know that."

"Yet," said Sixteen-String Jack, "it is quite certain that we must escape somehow or other; how, I am at a loss to think."

Just then there was a loud and startling crash.

"They have broken down the gates," said Claude Duval. "I should not have thought such a feat possible. Now nothing can save us from discovery."

CHAPTER DUCCII.

THE HIGHWAYMEN SUCCEED IN MAKING GOOD THEIR ESCAPE FROM THE LUNATIC ASYLUM.

"PUT a bold face on the matter," exclaimed Tom King; "that, rely upon it, is the best and only thing we can do."

His words were succeeded by a nasty trampling of footsteps, and soon a large number of persons assembled.

They looked upon the highwaymen and the liberated prisoners with surprise.

"Can you tell us anything about this fire?" said one. "It seems we have come too late to be of service."

"Yes," said Claude Duval, stepping forward; "the fire has got such a hold upon the building that we can do nothing more than stand by and see it burn."

"But who are you, sir?"

"I, sir, and these others," replied Claude Duval, "have by great good luck succeeded in effecting our escape; we have saved our lives, but nothing else beyond."

The appearance of the party gave confirmation to Claude's words.

Their apparel was sadly singed, and their hands and faces blackened by smoke; in fact, so far as the highwaymen were concerned, a total change had taken place in their exterior appearance, and it was this that gave Claude the confidence to stand forward as he did.

"Are there any other persons within the building?" was the next inquiry.

"We fear so—nay, indeed, we may go so far as to say that we are sure of it. It is a melancholy circumstance, but by this time they must have perished, for we had great difficulty in escaping with our lives."

The crowd of persons kept continually augmenting, and the three highwaymen continued gradually to withdraw.

In doing this they had but little difficulty, for all the new-comers were anxious to push themselves into the front rank, and our friends allowed themselves to be thrust aside without offering the least resistance.

When they were nearer to the outskirts, Tom said:

"I think now, comrades, we cannot do better than avail ourselves of the opportunity to slip away."

"I think the same."

"The gates are standing invitingly open," he added, "and we shall be there in no time."

"But how about those persons we have liberated?" said Sixteen-String Jack.

"It does not matter for them," was the answer; "we have got separated from them."

"True, there are none here."

"Well, they will all doubtless be able to return to their friends."

"Of course they will; and therefore we need trouble ourselves no further about them."

"But this girl, what are we to do with her?"

"We can't leave her here, Tom," said Claude, "friendless and unprotected as she is."

"No, no—I could not think of it."

"She seems to me to be quite alone in the world."

"She does," said Tom; "and I would give much if I could learn her history. I feel certain it is full of circumstances of strange interest."

"No doubt—no doubt."

"Shall I tell you what I propose?"

"Yes, certainly."

"I think you will give your consent. It is that we take the girl along with us back to the inn."

Claude and Jack were silent.

"I don't know what the captain would think of it," said the former; "that place, you know, was to be kept quite secret."

"Very true," was the reply; "but then this girl has no idea who we are. I am quite certain she never guesses our profession; she looks upon us only as her liberators, and you may rely upon it that from her at least we have nothing to fear in the way of betrayal."

"Well, Tom, do as you will; at any rate, it is necessary that we should make up our minds quickly, for unless we are very speedy we shall not reach the inn by the time appointed."

"We must contrive to do that, somehow or other, Claude. Quick!—you lead the way, and I will carry this poor girl and follow you. Our horses have had a good rest, and will perform the journey home at a rapid rate"

"Very true, there's that to be said."

At a rapid pace the three highwaymen made their way to the place where their horses had been left.

They found them perfectly safe, and a few moments enabled them to make all preparations and to mount.

They seated themselves firmly in the saddle, Tom King supporting the young girl, in whom he felt a deep interest, in his arms.

One last look was then given at the asylum that had been the scene of so many strange adventures in such a short space of time.

The fury of the conflagration was now much abated; the fire was going out for lack of material to feed upon.

"That's the end," said Tom King. "We can say farewell to that place, I suppose. It seems pretty clear that the two doctors and keepers of that infamous place have perished in its ruins. If they have, I for one shall certainly not regret it."

"Nor I either."

"No more words," said Jack. "I feel certain we cannot make too much speed. Forward, comrades—forward!"

Remembering the particular engagement they had made, this suggestion was at once complied with.

After a hard gallop, they took their way in the direction of the public-house.

The journey, though a long one, was performed without accident, and without the occurrence of any event worthy of mention.

At last, according to preconcerted arrangement, they drew up at some distance from the inn.

Morning had not yet dawned, and they began to look with some impatience and anxiety for the expected signals.

More than once during the ride Tom had fancied that his companion showed signs of returning consciousness, and now he found that he had not been mistaken.

Slowly and heavily her eyes unclosed, and a shudder swept over her whole body.

She recoiled for a moment, feeling herself in the embrace of some one.

But she immediately afterwards grew quite calm again.

Tears sprang to her eyes, and she endeavoured to look around and ascertain what kind of place it was that she was in.

She was soon aware that danger was over.

"Oh, then, you are saved!" she said, in tones of great relief. "I feared you would be destroyed. I tried my best to save you, but my strength failed."

"Tried to save me?" said Tom, in some surprise. "How—in what manner?"

"I knew that you had gone down into the lower portions of the house in order to set the other prisoners at liberty. You, I could tell, did not want to have me with you; yet, after you were out of my sight, the feeling of security I had previously felt departed, and I was impelled to follow in your footsteps."

"And did you so?"

"I did; I reached the top of the flight of stairs, and remained there for some time listening; then I descended and remained at the foot, trembling, and too frightened to advance any further."

"I had no idea of this. What else has happened?"

"I saw that furious man approaching, and by instinct turned and fled. I was fleeter of foot than he, but, then, as you know, he stopped to fasten the doors, and I thought to myself I would draw aside and let him pass, and then undo the doors again and set you at liberty. But after he had closed the door at the top flight of steps he saw me. With an angry cry he rushed at me, and raised his arm in the air. After that I remembered nothing until I opened my eyes and found myself here."

"We are safe," said Tom, "and so are you, though

we had no idea that you had been in so much danger. Wait a little while, and all shall be explained."

Exclamations at this moment escaped the lips of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

The reason was that at this moment they perceived the rocket rise up into the air.

Its appearance in the intense darkness was very beautiful.

The young girl watched it with mingled surprise and delight.

Another and another followed, and then Tom King set his steed in motion.

"Whither are you taking me?" she asked, looking searchingly into his countenance.

"To the only place of refuge that I know of," was the answer. "Yet I feel sure you will be safe. You will find there others of your own sex, and you are welcome to remain until you can collect your thoughts sufficiently to know what should be the next step you should take."

"Alas—alas!" cried the young girl, in a plaintive voice, as though these words had brought back to her mind some very painful recollections—"alas—alas!"

Then she burst into a flood of tears of such violence that Tom was alarmed at it.

He judged the best thing he could do was to make all the speed he could, and give her into the charge of Maud and Ellen.

A few minutes served to bring them to the front of the inn, and there was rather a large party waiting them.

"Thank goodness, you are safe!" ejaculated Dick as soon as he perceived them. "I began to grow terribly apprehensive."

"Have you been waiting long, captain?"

"No; I have only just arrived."

"Well, then," said Claude, "I suppose the reason of it is that you took up a position much nearer to the inn than we did. However, you see that we are all quite safe, and have returned with an addition to our numbers."

There was a sudden movement, and Ellen appeared.

She looked keenly and wonderingly at Tom and his companions, and then, with many signs of confusion, drew back again.

"I will explain all about it, captain, in a few moments," said Tom; "but certainly to-night we have not only had some most extraordinary adventures, but we have performed a vast amount of good."

"I rejoice to hear it!"

"Come—come," cried Tom Davis, "indoors, all of you, as quickly as you like; it is not safe to be standing here in this manner. Why, bless us all," he ejaculated, as he caught sight of the three highwaymen, "you look as though you had been drawn through a furnace!"

CHAPTER DCCCIII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS PAY A THIRD VISIT TO THE INN, TO THE GREAT CONSTERNATION OF TOM DAVIS.

CLAUDE DUVAL uttered a few words of hasty explanation to Tom Davis to account for the sad plight they were all in, but the recital of their adventures was reserved for another opportunity.

Of course eager questions were asked respecting the police officers, and the intelligence given was gratifying in the extreme.

That weight seemed to be removed from their breasts altogether.

The young girl, who gave her name as Alice Whately was resigned to the charge of Maud and Ellen, while the highwaymen attended to their steeds.

When that duty was over, a hasty meal was partaken of, and then Dick said:

"We will just sit here and exchange accounts of our proceedings, and then to rest; we cannot do better than sleep while we have the opportunity."

"You speak as though you feared an interruption, Dick."

"No—not at all; but, then, as the officers have troubled us once, they may do so again, and in case of such a thing, let us be prepared."

"Sound policy!" exclaimed Tom King, who thereupon related to Dick the various events which have been set at full length before the reader.

It is unnecessary to give the comments upon this narrative nor upon the one given by Dick Turpin himself.

On all sides, however, the liveliest curiosity and interest were felt in the young girl, who was now thoroughly exhausted and worn down by the fatiguing nature of the scenes through which she had gone.

After such a long period of excitement it was only natural that a reaction should come.

The highwaymen then retired to rest, and the inn was, as usual, left in charge of Tom Davis.

The hours wore on calmly and serenely enough until about mid-day.

A commotion outside then took Ellen to the door of the inn.

A pang of alarm shot through her heart, for she saw a large throng of police officers.

There could be no mistaking their peculiar costume.

What could have brought them again so soon to the lonely inn was a mystery, and Ellen felt dizzy and faint as she asked herself the question.

Her face turned ashy pale, and she had to lean against the doorpost to support herself.

The officers rapidly dismounted, and one advancing, said:

"Well, my lass, you are surprised to see us back again, no doubt, but here we are, you see. Where's the landlord?"

Ellen scarcely knew what reply to make.

But just then, fortunately, Tom Davis appeared behind her.

"Good day to you," said the officer, with a grin—"good day!"

"You're back again early," said Tom Davis, pretending to be vastly pleased at this visit. "How is it?"

"Mum," said the officer, attempting to put on an intelligent look, but signally failing. "You shall know more about it presently."

"Shall all of you stop?" asked Davis. "Because if so——"

"Oh, I know—I know!" interrupted the officer. "You would say you would put the horses in the stable. There's no occasion for the trouble at all. I don't intend to stop, so if you will show my men where to find some hay, we shall do very well."

"All right," said Davis—"you shall have some at once. Will you walk in?"

"Yes, certainly!"

The officer stepped briskly enough into the inn, followed by the whole of his men except one, who was left in charge of the horses.

"Nell," cried Davis, "just attend to these gentlemen for a moment, will you, and I will go and fetch the hay. It will not take me a moment."

While speaking, he bolted out into the yard, and, having reached the stable containing the highwaymen's horses, he hastily turned the key in the lock, and put it in his pocket.

After that he felt easier, and presently returned, bringing with him a quantity of hay.

This was given to the horses, and then, feeling very ill at ease, Tom Davis made his way to the room where the officers were seated.

These continued visits, he felt certain, boded no good to him.

It was ridiculous to suppose that the officers would act in such a manner without they had some motive.

As he passed into the room, Ellen left it.

He had no need to make any sign to her—he was quite certain she would go at once and warn the highwaymen of their danger.

If they kept out of the way, all might be well.

This incident impressed Tom all the more with the importance of having some secret mode by which the inn could be rapidly left, and he mentally determined that this should be set about at the very first opportunity.

The officers, who were for the most part those who had called on the preceding evening, pretended to be quite overjoyed to see him.

The one in command asked him to be seated, and offered him a portion of the ale he was drinking

Tom sipped it, and then put the jug down.

"I can tell you are surprised to see us again," said the chief officer, rubbing his hands slowly together; "but we did enjoy ourselves here last night uncommon, and I won't say that that has nothing to do with our visit this morning."

"Well," said Davis, "I am always very glad to see you whenever you like to honour this inn with your presence, and particularly glad to see you on the present occasion."

"I know you are," said the chief officer—"you speak hearty, as if you meant it."

"I do; but surely you have some business that brings you this way?"

"Well, I have, and I don't mind giving you an inkling of what it is; you may be able to render us a service, and to put some money into your pocket as well."

"Those would be two very agreeable things to do," said Tom Davis. "How am I to proceed?"

"Well, listen."

"I am all attention."

"I needn't tell you then," said the chief officer, "that our chief duty now is to look after those four highwaymen who for so long have made the roads a terror to travellers, and who have thoroughly set at defiance the authority of the country."

Tom nodded, and looked very wise and very interested.

"I allude," said the chief officer sipping his ale, "to Dick Turpin, that's one—Tom King, that's two—Claude Duval, that's three—and Sixteen-String Jack, that's four."

He counted them off upon his fingers while he spoke.

"Yes, I have heard of them all," said Tom Davis.

"Well, you will soon hear no more."

"Indeed!" said Tom, misgivingly, for he fancied the words were uttered with a certain significance of tone and manner.

"Yes," said the chief officer, "*I* have taken this in hand, and there will soon be an end of them."

"I hope so," said Tom Davis, "with all my heart—it really is not safe to lie in one's bed!"

"Certainly not. But did you ever hear of a police officer named Wriggles?"

"Wriggles—Wriggles," repeated Davis, as if endeavouring to call the name to his memory.

"Yes, you must surely have heard of him—he was the chief officer—a stout man with a purple face."

"I think I can remember," said Tom, at length, "but yet I can't take upon myself to say for certain; but what of him?"

"Well, as I said, he was the chief officer a little while ago, and he tried many a scheme in the hopes of being able to capture these four highwaymen; he even succeeded but the success was only partial."

"How so?" said Davis.

"Why, he caught 'em, but couldn't keep 'em. Now you'll just see the difference between him and me."

"You say *was*," said Tom Davis. "Is he chief officer no longer?"

"No; he's resigned. When I say resigned, I hope you will understand me properly."

"As how?"

"Why, he had two chances—one was to resign, and the other was to be dismissed, and so he chose the former."

"Oh, indeed!"

"And furious he was, I can tell you. But he had set his mind upon capturing these highwaymen, and tried everything in his power to do it, and I don't believe it was his fault that he failed."

"And, then, perhaps, if I may make so bold as to guess such a thing," said Tom Davis, "you have been appointed in his place?"

"That's it, my Trojan—you've hit the right nail bang on the head this time! You know me now—Chief Police Officer Marshall—my name is Jack Marshall, *and let all highwaymen beware!*"

He kicked his hat, and looked very ferocious while he spoke.

"D—n me!" he exclaimed, "I'll make them all tremble at my very name, I will—the very *pronunciation* of my name shall make them all tremble, and their knees knock together so that they will be unable to stand!"

Tom Davis contemplated him with great admiration.

"You'll make your fortune!" he cried. "And if you should capture these highwaymen——"

"*If!*" shouted Jack Marshall—"if, do you say? Say, instead, *when* I have captured these highwaymen, for do it I shall, as certainly as I am here!"

"Well, well—it comes much to the same thing; but when it is done, you may depend you'll get a very handsome testimonial presented to you."

"Of course I shall, and be *sooperaniated* as well. That'll be the time, and it won't be long in coming either!"

"I hope not," said Tom Davis. "I took a liking to you the very first time I saw you. You have such a pleasant countenance and such very agreeable ways. I shall be downright glad to hear of your getting on."

"Give us your hand, Mr. Thomas!" said Marshall. "There, now we are friends, and I'll just put you in for a capital good thing."

"I am much obliged to you."

"Oh, don't mention it! But I may tell you that my express and sole instructions are that I am to devote the whole of my time to the capture of these highwaymen. You see, altogether, there is a reward of about three thousand pounds offered for them—a nice little lump that would be to pick up and divide amongst ten or a dozen, wouldn't it?"

"It would," said Tom Davis, leaning forward in his eager interest.

"I rather believe you! And we will have it, for I have certain information that there is a secret lurking-place where these highwaymen go to if ever they are pursued, and where they remain hidden in the daytime—a very singular secret place, but it's secret no longer, for I know of it. Now, what do you think of that?"

CHAPTER DCCCIV.

THE ECCENTRIC AND INEXPLICABLE BEHAVIOUR OF JACK MARSHALL, THE NEW CHIEF OFFICER, CAUSES TOM DAVIS A GREAT DEAL OF UNEASINESS.

JACK MARSHALL brought his hand down with great force upon the table, so as to give a due emphasis to his words, and as he spoke he looked keenly into the countenance of Tom Davis.

It might be that our old friend changed colour a little upon receipt of this astounding announcement.

If so, who could wonder at it?

But he stood the shock bravely, and when the first surprise was over, he pretended to be very much astonished and gratified at the same time.

"Really," he said, "I had no idea of any such thing."

Jack Marshall only grinned.

He stroked his chin with a complacent air.

"But — but," said Tom, hesitatingly, "perhaps you wouldn't mind giving me a little further information?"

"Oh, no—certainly not—not by any means!"

"Then whereabouts is the lurking-place situated?"

"Eh?"

"I say where is it situated?"

Jack Marshall wagged his head backwards and forwards in a very knowing way, and grinned again.

"That," he said, at length, with great deliberation, "is an important secret—a very important secret."

"I thought you said it was no secret at all?"

"Oh, yes, my friend, if you will permit me to call you my friend."

"Oh, by all means," said Tom Davis, growing more and more uneasy every moment. "I feel much flattered."

The chief officer cocked his hat, and drank some more of the ale.

"Wait a little, Mr. Thomas," he said, "and then you will see! I only ask you to wait a little—that's all!"

"But I say!"

"What?"

"I consider you are rather disappointing."

"Why so?"

"Did you not tell me that you were willing to put me in for a good thing by telling me something about these four highwaymen?"



[TOM KING ARRIVES WITH HIS CHARGE AT THE RESIDENCE OF THE YOUNG BARRISTER.]

"Yes, and I will be as good as my word!"

"Then what was it? I thought you were going to tell me whereabouts this suspected lurking-place was situated."

"Oh, no, no—not at all!" and Jack Marshall laughed heartily, as though he had said something very jocular indeed. "The fact is, my dear friend, becoming more confidential, I don't know myself yet where the lurking-place is situated."

"Oh!" interrupted Tom Davis, sinking back into his chair and uttering a sigh of relief.

"But I know there is one," continued the officer, "and that knowledge will be quickly followed up by my finding out where it is. Of course, the moment I know, I shall be there upon the spot—you might make certain of that!"

"Oh, yes, of course—of course!" said Tom Davis, now speaking quite freely.

"But I shall go about it in a peculiar way," continued the officer—"in my own peculiar way, you see. Now, if I was to go there, after having found it out, I should never be suspected, I am sure. But suppose, now, that it should be at some public-house?"

Tom Davis endeavoured to laugh, but failed.

"Not a very likely place," he managed to say, at length.

"Well, perhaps so—perhaps not—that all depends. But I say, supposing it was? Will you grant it for the sake of argument?"

"Most certainly!"

"Then I should walk in just as I might have walked in here this morning, and I'll be bound to say that no one would guess or suspect my errand."

"You are a very clever fellow!" said Tom Davis. "I don't go behind your back to say it, and I don't want to flatter you, but I utter it as my downright candid sentiment."

"There, now, I know it," said Jack Marshall. "I feel affected—deeply affected! But don't you want to know about this little affair between us?"

"I am most impatient."

"Well, then, in the first place, take this paper."

He fumbled in his pockets, and then produced a packet of folded papers.

One of these he spread out smooth on the table, and then began slowly to read it.

The heading of the bill was startling enough in all conscience, for in large type was displayed "Three thousand pounds reward!"

Then under that was set forth a number of particulars, showing by whom the reward had been offered.

Some by different private persons who had been robbed, and some by the Government, the whole representing the gross amount that was put in such large figures at the top.

Then came a very full and very accurate description of all four highwaymen.

The state of Tom's feelings while he listened to the reading of this bill may perhaps be imagined.

Having finished, Jack Marshall said:

"Now, then, all you have to do is to keep these particulars in your mind, and if any person or persons should enter this house whose appearance agrees with that description, seize upon them at once, and keep them prisoners. You shall then be entitled to the largest share of the reward, only, as I put you up to it, I shall expect you to remember me."

"Oh, of course—of course!" said Tom Davis. "I won't fail to do that!"

"Then, in case you should forget any of it," he added, "I'll stick this bill up—not only for your advantage, but for the advantage of everyone else."

"Oh, don't take the trouble," said Tom. "I'll stick it up when you've gone."

"Oh, it's no trouble—no trouble at all—in fact, it's a real pleasure! There, now! That's just the ticket, isn't it?"

The bill was stuck up over the mantelpiece in such a manner that the large black letters seemed to stare Tom in the face continually.

It made him quite uncomfortable and uneasy to look at it.

Yet what could he do?—how could he protest against what the officer had done without giving rise to suspicions?

"There, now," he said, "on no account suffer that to be removed. You see that several things are necessary before we can claim the whole amount. All four must not only be captured, but they must be lodged in Newgate. Then they must be convicted—not that I suppose there will be any difficulty about that—and then executed at Tyburn. After that the money will be ours."

"Hurrah!" said Tom. "If that's the case, you shall all have such a feast here some night as you never heard of in your lives before!"

"Well," said Jack Marshall, "we've stopped here long enough, I think, so now I am off to look out for the lurking-place. I am on the right scent, I know; and it won't be very long before I find it out!"

"I hope not," said Tom, "though, at the same time, if they would all four be so kind and obliging as to walk in here, I should feel much better satisfied, for I could take them prisoners myself."

"No doubt you would—no doubt! But I don't intend that you should have all the credit to yourself."

From the way in which the police officer now looked about him, Tom Davis began to be dreadfully apprehensive that he would ask to go over the premises and make an inspection of them.

Such a request was just as likely to be made as not, and, if made, he could not refuse it, and then discovery would follow.

He remained, therefore, in the most dreadful state of suspense conceivable.

At a sign from their leader, the police officers all emptied their cups and prepared to leave.

Seeing them inclined to go towards the door, Tom Davis led the way.

"I am very glad you've called," he said. "I can't help thinking a great deal about all you have told me, and as I know one of these highwaymen came here once, why they might take it into their heads to pay me another visit."

"Certainly they might! And I'll tell you another thing, friend Thomas," said the officer, seizing him by the button-hole, and sinking his voice, "it's my deliberate conviction that the highwaymen's lurking-place is not very far from this spot!"

These words were uttered in so peculiar a tone, and with such significance of manner, and were accompanied by such a strange, searching look that Tom Davis felt as uneasy as ever.

Nevertheless, he had presence of mind enough to affect to be astonished at what had just been told him.

The officer nodded, and smiled, and winked his eyes, and made several other manifestations of sagaciousness as he walked along the passage towards the front door of the inn.

Here they emerged, and then a scene of considerable bustle ensued.

In a short time, however, all the officers were mounted, and they, as well as their horses, seemed all the better for the hospitality they had received at the Three Spiders Inn.

"Good-bye, Mr. Thomas!" said Jack Marshall, waving his hand. "I shall call again upon you before long—perhaps when you least expect me; however, I feel sure of being always welcome. Good-bye—good-bye!"

So saying, he waved his hand and trotted off, followed by his troop.

Tom Davis stood near the horse-trough in front of the inn, and watched them down the road.

In a short time they completely disappeared in the cloud of dust that they kicked up behind them, and when he could see them no more our old friend retraced his steps to the inn with a very thoughtful expression upon his face.

"It means no good," he said—"it means no good! That Jack Marshall is by no means such a fool as he pretends to be. He's got something in his head, or he would not act in this singular fashion."

Entering the kitchen, he found the highwaymen and Ellen already there.

They were standing in front of the fireplace, all busily engaged in reading the bill that had just been left.

"There," said Tom Davis, as soon as he saw what they were about, "pull it down—pull it down, I beg, and put it behind the fire; I can't bear to look at it!"

Dick laughed.

"It can do no harm by being there," he said; "let it remain."

"Are you mad, captain?"

"Not at all; but if you remove the bill suspicion will be aroused at once, and therefore, rely upon it, the better policy will be to allow it to remain. There—there, say no more about it, and suffer it to trouble you no more."

Tom Davis flung himself into a chair in anything but a contented manner, and then he ejaculated:

"I tell you what it is, captain, you can take my word for it this kind of life won't last—there now!"

CHAPTER DCCCV.

SOME VERY INTERESTING EVENTS TAKE PLACE AT THE THREE SPIDERS INN.

"Don't be so despondent, Tom," said Dick Turpin. "After all, there may be nothing alarming in all that has taken place."

"Alarming!" echoed the landlord. "You don't know half about it, or you wouldn't say that!"

"Indeed!" said Dick, quickly. "I ought to have asked you before to have given me the particulars. I thought, as the officers had left so quietly, that all was well."

"You shall draw your own conclusions," said Tom Davis. "I will tell you as well as I am able what has passed between us."

Tom was as good as his word.

He exaggerated nothing, but gave a very faithful account of everything that had taken place.

It was not so much in the words themselves that had passed as in the peculiar way with which certain words were uttered, and the significant glances that accompanied them.

"This may be serious after all," said Dick Turpin, when he had concluded "but yet I am inclined to believe that there is no cause for immediate fear."

"I am inclined to think with you, captain," said Claude Duval. "Still, we had better take all this as a warning."

"Decidedly!" said Dick.

"And that brings me round again to my former suggestion," interrupted Tom Davis.

"What was that?"

"Have you forgotten?"

"I don't remember just for the moment to what you allude."

"Well, then, to the construction of some secret mode of leaving the inn."

"Oh, yes—good—very good! That's an excellent idea of yours, and it shall be carried out!"

"Without delay!" said Tom Davis, emphatically.

"Yes, without delay, most certainly. We will commence upon it as soon as ever we have had a little rest."

"We are all agreed to that," said the highwaymen, speaking together; "but we are all thoroughly worn out."

"Of course you are," said Tom Davis; "and I want a bit of a snooze myself."

"Well, then, take it, for, depend upon it, now is as safe a time as any, and Ellen can keep good watch."

"She can, and will apprize us in a moment if anything goes wrong."

"Well, then," cried Dick Turpin, "we may as well, all of us, keep this before our minds; if we do so we shall be all the better able to deliberate upon it. Of course, the first point to be decided is where the passage shall be constructed, and how."

"Just so," said Tom Davis. "I have been turning it over in my mind ever since the idea first occurred to me; I will let you know the result of my thoughts when we meet again."

"Do so—do so."

The highwaymen then, without further ado, separated, for the adventures they had had during the preceding night were of a most fatiguing description.

To this probably may be attributed the coolness with which they received Tom Davis's communication respecting the police officers.

For several hours, then, all remained very silent in the old inn.

Ellen busied herself with the domestic duties, and from time to time went to the front door of the inn and took a searching glance around.

But on all occasions the silence was as intense as any silence in such a place could be.

The trees were rustling, and the birds chirping, but that was all.

It was a most delightful day, and to look around up the beautiful scene—where not another human habitation or trace of man's presence could be seen—would be enough to imagine one's-self upon an uninhabited island.

As it grew towards dusk, the highwaymen, one by one, made their appearance in the old kitchen.

Tom King was the first to descend, and his first inquiry was with respect to Alice Whately, the young girl he had brought with him from the asylum.

He was told that she would descend shortly, her intentions being to thank those who had so generously liberated her.

Tom nodded his head, and then, addressing his companion, said:

"Let this be borne in mind: she at present has had no reason to suppose that we are what we are; she simply looks upon us as strangers, who, having by accident heard her cries for succour, have set her free."

"And you would like her to remain in that ignorance of our profession?" said Dick Turpin.

"Yes, certainly. Why should we acquaint her with it?"

"I see no reason why; do just as you think proper."

At this moment Maud entered, accompanied by the fair stranger.

Short as had been her sojourn at the inn, yet a great improvement had been wrought in her appearance.

Lovely, Tom had from the first thought her, but now she was, in good truth, surpassingly beautiful.

His heart throbbed strangely as she crossed the threshold, and when, upon catching sight of him, she, by a sudden impulse, bounded forward, clasped him by the hands, and poured out her thanks in broken words, he found himself unable to speak or move.

At length, however, he managed to murmur:

"I can speak for myself and my comrades, and say that all we have done has been in a most willing spirit, and now all that we desire is to know where we can take you to a place of safety."

Upon hearing these words, a troubled look came over the fair girl's countenance, and she fixed her eyes upon the ground.

Tom gazed upon her in surprise, and although she could not see this, yet she seemed by some means aware of it, for her agitation visibly increased.

"Sit down," he said—"sit down and regain your composure."

He handed her to a seat while he spoke, and she sat down gladly.

"She has told me a little of her history," said Maud, "and she is in great trouble, and quite undecided how to act, therefore I have persuaded her to tell you all, and be guided entirely by you."

"We will do our best," said Dick Turpin, warmly, and not without some surprise; "and if a strong arm and a willing heart can be of any service, let me assure you that both are at your disposal."

For this offer the young girl again expressed her thanks, and Tom King pressed her to confide her troubles without reserve, assuring her that the confidence should be kept sacred.

"I have persuaded her to this course," said Maud, "because I know that in her present state it will be a great relief to pour out all her heart, and to be guided by the calm judgment of others."

"It is troubling you very greatly," said the young girl, with tears in her eyes; "but you have been so very kind to me, that I know not how it is I hesitate still. If you would only tell me how you should act if in my place, then I should feel more satisfied; for my own part I am quite perplexed."

"Compose yourself," said Dick, "and then begin to tell us calmly. Tom," he added, addressing Davis, "close the door, and take care that we are not interrupted."

Tom King seated himself near the fair stranger—very near indeed, and she seemed by no means annoyed at his behaviour.

Ellen, standing in the background, watched him with a jealous eye.

Unknown almost to herself until that moment, she had looked upon Tom King with the eyes of love, though he had never yet taken a more particular notice of her than the rest.

Now, however, she felt full of anger and vexation.

It was clear that Tom King had neither eyes nor ears for anything else than this young girl, and he waited with the utmost expectation depicted in his features for her to commence her history.

In this respect it might be said that all were alike curious.

After the door was closed there was a complete silence, and the young girl, after one or two attempts, commenced to speak in a wavering, uncertain voice, which gradually grew stronger as she proceeded with her recital.

Every now and then, however, tears would spring up into her eyes, and her voice grow choked and indistinct.

"Until about twelve months ago," she began—"the length of time that I have been confined in that asylum—I have lived at Morton Park, the residence of my father and mother, and the place where I was born.

"Up to my fourteenth year, life to me was nothing but a round of joy and happiness; it was not marked by one extraordinary event—I had never known what sorrow was.

"But at that time I was made rudely and terribly familiar with it.

"My father—who always loved me, and who doated upon me with such rare affection that I have known my mother to be half jealous—was at that time thrown from his horse while riding homeward, and was killed.

"The first intelligence that I received of it was seeing a crowd of people standing round the spot where he had fallen.

"I had expected his return, and, according to my custom, had gone forth to meet him.

"Guessing something was amiss, yet not knowing what, I bounded quickly forward, pushed the throng aside, then looking down, beheld a dreadful sight.

"It was a wonder that I was not then and there deprived of all sensibility, for I had never looked upon death before; yet, stranger as I was to it, there was no mistaking the appearance of my poor father's face—it had upon it an expression that told you at once that he was dead.

"I remember that I cried out frantically with grief, and flung myself upon him.

"We were both carried to the hall, and I was restored to recollection.

"I cannot bear to think of that dreadful time—it was the beginning of all my future troubles.

"Let me say that after the lapse of the usual time my father was interred, and my mother and myself grew more resigned to our sad lot.

"My mother's grief was in good truth most terrible to witness. Its violence so alarmed and shocked me, that I almost forgot grief myself.

"It was long ere she could be soothed and calmed, for, as I had lost the best of fathers, so she had lost the best of husbands."

CHAPTER DCCCVI.

ALICE WHATELY TAKES OUR FRIENDS INTO HER CONFIDENCE.

THE emotions produced by this vivid recallment of the past at this moment completely overcame the young girl, and, burying her face in her hands, she wept bitterly.

But dashing her tears aside as quickly as possible, she resumed, for she could tell by the expression upon the countenances of her auditors that they were most anxious to hear more.

"After my father's death it was indeed a sad and weary life that we led at Morton Park.

"Before her widowhood I had often heard my mother say that no circumstances whatever should induce her to wed again, and after her bereavement she frequently repeated the same words.

"At that time I have no doubt she fully believed what she said.

"And so the time passed on for upwards of two years, we in the meantime dwelling in the strictest seclusion.

"So far, my mother kept her word. She went out nowhere, and those few visitors we had were not of those likely to be suitors for her hand.

"During the third year, however, I noticed several strange things in the behaviour of Mr. Lucas, who, I should have told you, was my father's steward, and had been almost as long as I could remember.

"He was a sleek, fat, oily little man, with a bald head, and small, insignificant features. His eyes, however, being always bright and twinkling, insensibly reminded the beholder of the eyes of a serpent.

"He was always most cringing and fawning—so much so, that he invariably excited my disgust, and I could never bear to accost him; if I saw him at a distance I always made a turn and avoided him.

"He could not have failed to notice my aversion, for his sharp eyes saw everything.

"He took no notice, however, without it was that he became more cringing and fawning than before.

"To my mother he was even more servile, and every time he moved or said 'Yes' it seemed as though he added, 'If you will tread upon me I am quite ready to lie down and let you.'

"But, as I told you, about three years after my poor father's death I began to see a great change in his deportment.

"He held himself more upright than he used to do, and spoke in louder and more commanding tones.

"On one occasion, for some trifling offence, he spoke to me somewhat sharply.

"I resented it, and soon there was a perfect quarrel between us—if so I may term it.

"Weeping with rage and mortification, I sought my mother, and made my complaint to her.

"To my surprise, she took no notice of it, but, on the contrary, reproved me, and told me to behave better to Mr. Lucas in future.

"I was not long in finding out what this meant.

"By some means or other, this steward had gained a great influence over my mother, and at last it was publicly announced that he was about to marry her.

"To me the bare idea of a second marriage was most detestable, and as soon as I heard of it I expressed my feelings with great warmth.

"With more anger in her manner than I had ever before seen her display, my mother ordered me from her room.

"I was all the time inclined to be rebellious, but my rebellion made no difference.

"Before the third year had expired my mother became Mrs. Lucas.

"Then, indeed, did I find that a change had taken place in my condition!

"Mine was no longer the happy life that it had been.

"Mr. Lucas, however, was some time before he could quite throw off the manners of the servant and assume those of the master.

"But as soon as ever he did so the whole household felt the change.

"To my mother he was, on all occasions that I saw, tender and respectful.

"Frequently, however, I observed them in close and earnest consultation, and, from the glances which they now and then cast upon me, I guessed I was the subject of their conferences.

"This gave me no uneasiness, for, since her marriage, my heart had quite turned against my only surviving parent.

"I could not help it—the feeling was one altogether beyond my own control, and she made no attempts to conciliate my affection.

"Moreover, I had other matters occupying my time and my thoughts.

"On one occasion, while visiting the cottage of a poor widow who I was in the habit of befriending, I met with a stranger, a young man, who was qualifying himself for the bar, but who had, by too close application to his studies, so much impaired his health that perfect rest in some quiet country place was stated to be indespensable to his recovery.

"I need not tell you how soon we began to feel an interest in each other, and for a long time the secret was kept from Mr. Lucas.

"I can scarcely tell you why it was, but somehow I always felt an instinctive dread of his becoming acquainted with Norman Spencer, for that was the young lawyer's name.

"Two unhappy events occurred close together.

"The time for his return to London came, and on the self-same day Mr. Lucas discovered our intimacy.

"He said nothing; but in the evening I was sharply reprimanded by my mother.

"I made no reply to what she said, and this incensed her greatly.

"By an easy means that we had arranged, Norman and myself frequently corresponded with each other.

"He was now full of health and vigour, and felt sure of being able in a short time to establish himself in his profession; then I had promised to become his bride."

Although the young girl confessed to all these details of love so freely, yet it was with a downcast look and a flushed cheek.

The expression of Tom King's countenance, however, had changed entirely.

He leaned back in his chair, looking vexed and disappointed.

Without any pause, however, Alice continued:

"My home was now made miserable in the extreme; and I thought the height of my wretchedness was reached when Mr. Lucas produced his nephew, or some one that he called by that title—a young man, pale, thin, and somewhat consumptive-looking, as one might say, with one foot in the grave, for all energy had gone, and his eyes only burned with a feverish light that was painful in the extreme to look upon.

'Against him, in himself, I have not much to say.

"He was weak-minded to a degree, and so wholly under the influence of Mr. Lucas, whose power over him was extraordinary.

"Poor young fellow, he had no will of his own, and scarcely any more brains than permitted him to do just exactly as he was told.

"To my extreme horror and astonishment, I was told that I was to regard this young man as my husband.

"I revolted at the idea, and expressed myself in the strongest terms that I would suffer anything rather than consent.

"Mr. Lucas was furious, but I was firm.

"How they would have acted in the face of my strong opposition and stern obstinacy I know not, but the current of events was altogether changed by the sudden illness of my mother.

"One day she took to her bed, complaining of some trifling indisposition, but she never rose from it again.

"In less than a week she died, and was buried.

"I ought to have told you earlier than this that my father left behind him considerable wealth, in the shape of money and landed property.

"The greater part was settled upon me—indeed, I might say all, with the exception of an annuity of five hundred pounds that was to be made payable to my mother during her life.

"Of course, as soon as she died the annuity died with her, she having no power to dispose of it to another person.

"This was an event which distressed me greatly, for, although of late my mother had treated me so unkindly, yet I could never forget who she was and what I owed her.

"Mr. Lucas, too, seemed quite as much distressed—rather more so, indeed—as I was, though from a totally different cause.

"Evidently things had not gone as he wished for and expected.

"I have never heard what was his exact plan of operations as laid down in his mind, but you may depend he had a deep motive in marrying my mother, for no love for anything but himself could have any hold in his breast.

"I have thought much upon this subject, and the conclusion I have come to is this: that he intended to wed me to this nephew of his, and then, by means best known to himself, get possession of as much of the property as he was able

"Subsequent events, I think, will prove that it was my father's wealth that he was seeking for and trying hard to gain.

"The death of my mother before my marriage, and the loss of the annuity he had with her, of course destroyed all his plans.

"I was then just turned seventeen years of age—in fact, in about ten months I should attain my eighteenth year.

"Then, by the terms of my father's will, I was to come into possession of everything.

"I looked forward to this time coming with genuine joy, because then I flattered myself I should be able to get rid of the odious Mr. Lucas at once and for ever.

"That, you may expect, was a most agreeable prospect for me; but after the funeral, when I had seen all that remained of my mother laid by the side of my father, the recollections of the past came crowding thickly upon me, and I contrasted my present life and that which was opening out before me with the happy one that I had previously known.

"My sorrow was sincere and profound. I gave full vent to it, and made no effort to restrain it, but shut myself up in my room, and refused to hold any converse with Mr. Lucas whatever, though he several times importuned me for an interview.

CHAPTER DCCCVII.

ALICE WHATELY FULLY FATHOMS THE VILLANY OF MR. LUCAS.

"ALAS—alas! could I but have known the consequences that would have followed this proceeding on my part, I should have acted in a very different manner.

"But I knew not—dreamt not—what was to come.

"I still persisted in my refusals to see Mr. Lucas, or, indeed, anyone.

"But on one occasion I omitted to secure my door, and this gave my enemy the opportunity he had so long been looking for.

"He came in accompanied by two staid, respectable-looking gentlemen, who, by their apparel, would be taken for physicians, though whether they had any right to such a title I had very serious doubts.

"However, they came, and Mr. Lucas introduced them to me as Doctors Templeton and Wright.

"I was surprised at their visit, and vehemently declared that nothing ailed me

"I was enraged to think that my father's steward—for such I always looked upon him—should have gained his point and dared to enter into my chamber, and therefore I did not speak with that degree of calmness that I ought to have assumed; but I never expected what was coming, and therefore I gave way to a little warmth of temper without restraint.

"The two doctors stood regarding me for some time.

"They asked me several questions, but I drummed my foot impatiently upon the floor, and refused to answer.

"The only words I would use were those which formed a command for them to quit the room at once.

"They shook their heads, and endeavoured to look afflicted and vexed.

"Muttered sentiments of sorrow and compassion fell from their lips—doubtless they were intended for my ear.

"I wondered what there was in my condition to provoke their sympathies, and smiled at the idea.

"They drew Mr. Lucas on one side, however, and whispered to him.

"Then all three left the room, but not until I heard Dr Templeton say:

"'My dear sir, you must disregard your feelings in this matter, and do that which is calculated to produce the most good.'

"I attached no importance to their words at the time, nor, indeed, to their visit, and it is only by repeatedly dwelling upon the past that I have been able to recall it so well to my remembrance.

"Since that time, however, I have had ample opportunities for reflection, and perhaps it has been well for me that I had so much to occupy my thoughts.

"The next thing I noticed was that my waiting-maid no longer appeared, but a dark, sour-faced-looking woman of middle age assumed her duties.

"I indignantly demanded the reason of this change, but she shook her head hypocritically, and in most disagreeable tones desired me to be calm—to compose myself, and on no account to get excited, as that would only make me worse.

"Make me worse!

"The very words set me thinking, and I wondered what on earth could be my complaint when I was not conscious of having anything the matter with me.

"The attendance of this woman became closer and closer, and, as you may imagine, this was most repulsive.

"She was a complete spy upon my actions, and thus I had no chance of keeping up my correspondence with Norman Spencer

"To my mingled astonishment and anger, I discovered that I was now to be kept close prisoner in my room and not allowed to go forth.

"I demanded to know the reason of this conduct, but no answer was vouchsafed to me.

"I demanded an interview with Mr. Lucas, but again no notice was taken.

"This was a state of things that could not last.

"I felt half crazy with anger and mortification, and one night determined to put an end to it.

"It is not my disposition to sit tamely down and submit to anything that may be thrust upon me. I have always rebelled against oppression, and generally with success.

"Watching my opportunity then, I escaped through the window and alighted in safety on the soft ground below.

"There, however, a man was waiting, and before I could properly regain my feet and start to run, he seized hold of me and made a great outcry.

"I struggled to release myself from his grasp, but vainly.

"Hearing his shouts, the servants and Mr. Lucas came to his assistance, and I was led into the house.

"Some time had elapsed since I had seen the domestics, and now I noticed that they all looked at me with pitying eyes, and some of them placed their handkerchiefs to their faces and wept.

"What there was in my appearance to be provocative of so much sorrow I could not for the life of me conceive.

"Their grief, I doubt not, was as sincere as it was demonstrative, though it should exist at all I could not, as I say, make out.

'The manner which Mr. Lucas assumed towards me also vexed me exceedingly.

"He professed to be soothing, and gentle, and kind, and I was forcibly reminded of the resemblance his manner bore to the purring of a cat when just about to take a death spring upon an unsuspecting victim.

"I was led back to my room, and again confined, and this time I allowed my temper entirely to get the better of me, and under its influence I committed a thousand extravagancies, throwing various articles of furniture about in my impotent rage.

"On the next day the two doctors again called, and their appearance so enraged me that I was more violent than I had been on any previous occasion.

The interview did not last long, and to my sincere gratification they soon departed.

"When the evening meal was brought up I felt no liking for food, yet I resolved to partake of it heartily, as I had made up my mind to attempt another escape before morning, although I had so signally failed before.

"You will see by that that my courage was by no means daunted—indeed, I felt something within me urging me to make every effort to escape.

"Greatly to my surprise, I found that, after sitting for a short time, I was unable to rise, and an unaccountable drowsiness spread itself over me, and I in vain endeavoured to resist its influence.

"In a little while my senses completely left me.

"What happened afterwards I can only conjecture.

"When I came to my senses, I found myself beneath the roof of that dreadful place from which you rescued me.

"At first no answer was made to my inquiries. I was told if I would keep quiet and remain peaceable, that no harshness or violence would be used towards me; and my spirits were so broken by what had occurred that, unintentionally, I did just exactly as they wished me.

"I had plenty to occupy my mind, and, although I had seen so little of life and had formed but a poor opinion of the baseness and villany of mankind, yet, ere long, I was able to find a key to the behaviour of Mr. Lucas.

"But this was not until after a little circumstance occurred that I will relate to you.

"One day I was told that Mr. Lucas had called to see me, and I was shown into his room.

"I was glad of this opportunity of seeing him, and upbraided him most bitterly for his conduct towards me.

"He, however, treated all my words with a smile, which was especially aggravating.

"He brought with him a small folded document, that seemed as though it had been written upon parchment.

"'You tell me you are tired of your present confinement,' he said, 'and wish to be released? If so, you have only to sign that paper, and the doors will be opened to you immediately.'

"In my intense desire to recover my liberty, I felt almost inclined to write my name at the foot of this document without glancing at its contents; but, casting my eyes upon it, I saw a few words that enabled me to catch its whole purport.

"It was neither more nor less than a deed of gift from me to Mr. Lucas, bestowing upon him all, or, at any rate, the greater part of, my property.

"Thus, as I tell you, I obtained the key to all his proceedings, and I resolutely refused to sign.

"He took my refusal very quietly, and, folding up the parchment, again placed it in his pocket.

"I was then led out of the room, and placed, not where I had formerly been, but in the chamber where you found me.

"Here the horrible cries that resounded through the building almost drove me distracted, and prevented me from thinking clearly upon my position.

"This, however, was certain: my father's steward had evidently made up his mind to become possessor of all my father's wealth.

'His first step had been to marry my mother; then, if he had succeeded in wedding me to his nephew, he would have had things all his own way, and I, to use a common expression, should have gone to the wall.

"About his precise intentions in this respect I can, however, form no distinct idea—they were foiled, as I told you, by my mother's death.

'Then another idea had entered his plotting brain.

He took advantage of my deep grief and the seclusion in which I kept myself to set abroad the report that my sorrow had been so great, and I had dwelt so much upon my loss, that my mind was affected—that, indeed, I was insane.

"Nothing more false than this could possibly be, yet, no doubt, he was artful enough to set the story afloat in such a manner as to cause it to be believed by all the servants and dependants.

"Unconsciously, I favoured him in all his designs by my anger and violence of manner.

"Then the two doctors—or pretended doctors, perhaps, I ought to say—were summoned, and they, being well paid for their work, would deliver their opinion that I was not in my right mind, and required to be carefully watched, and that if any further symptoms of violence presented themselves it would be necessary to keep me under proper restraint.

"I can easily imagine how they would impose upon all the servants, and how readily what they said would be believed.

"I have thought almost incessantly upon it, until at length I became able to judge in my own mind just how and why everything was done.

"And that, my friends," she said, "concludes my history—that is all I have to tell.

"It is not worth while to dwell upon all the indignities and cruelties I suffered while staying at that asylum: happily they are over, and I trust I shall never experience them again."

CHAPTER DCCCVIII.

OUR FRIENDS ADVISE ALICE WHATELY HOW TO SHAPE HER FUTURE PROCEEDINGS.

THE whole of this narrative was listened to with the greatest amount of interest.

The feeling was shared in by all.

Many strange episodes of human life had from time to time come under their notice, yet never one so full of strange incidents as this.

A silence of several minutes' duration took place after she had ceased speaking, during which, it may be supposed, her auditors were all thinking over the various points of the story.

It was Tom King who was the first to break that silence.

"Now," he said, "as we have heard all, we shall be able to advise; but first of all, you must tell us precisely the nature of your present condition."

"It is this," was the reply: "If I return to Morton Park, Mr. Lucas will, no doubt, devise some other means of getting me into his power, because so long as I am kept in confinement he can enjoy all the revenues proceeding from my estates; but then, if I don't go there, in what direction am I to turn in order to secure my own safety, and to recover possession of that which is lawfully my own?"

There was again a silence.

Something of this kind had been expected.

Tom King glanced at Dick as if asking him to speak.

Turpin took the hint, for he said:

"It unfortunately happens that we are not in a position to assist you in this matter as we ought, and if we were seen in your cause at all we should prejudice it rather than otherwise."

The young girl looked much surprised at this speech.

"Don't wonder at my words," continued Dick—"be content to take them as being simple truth and no more. Your best plan would be to think of your nearest and best friends, and go to them and get them to take up your cause."

The young girl shook her head.

"That's just my difficulty," she said. "Had I possessed any relatives or friends it would not have been necessary for me to trouble you with that long account of my life, but I have none—none."

Her voice failed her as she came to the end of this sentence.

It is, indeed, hard to feel that one is alone in the world—that there is no person to whom to turn for aid or protection.

"But," said Dick, "unless I make a great mistake, you told me something about an acquaintance you had formed with a young barrister. Why not go to him—he is just the one to take up your claims?"

A bright flush of colour came into the girl's cheeks as Turpin spoke, and then, hesitatingly and stammeringly, she rejoined:

"But what would he think of my boldness and forwardness? What would the world think? What would be said about my conduct?"

"I should not trouble myself about that," said Dick; "your object is to secure your own perfect happiness, and you ought not to allow any foolish scruples to prevent you."

"Decidedly not," said Tom King; "and since you have asked for our advice, I will, if you like, give you mine."

Alice raised her eyes to his, but did not speak.

"To-night," continued Tom, "if you will tell me where this young barrister resides, I will take you to him. I will go; he need not know who I am, yet I can accompany you and introduce you to him. I should then give you both another piece of advice."

"And so should I," said Turpin, with a smile. "I can guess easily what it is. Let your first step be to unite yourself in marriage to this young barrister—that is, if you feel inclined to do so. You have passed your eighteenth year, and you will succeed much better in your claims when you have a husband to fight for you. Mr. Lucas will then be completely powerless, because no one will be able to exert any control over you except him."

Lower and lower sank the girl's head while these words were uttered.

The advice that was given, it was plain to see, was far from disagreeable, and yet she seemed to shrink from giving it her cordial approbation.

"Let me, too, join in with that advice," said Maud. "It is of all things the best that you can do; and unless I am much deceived, he will not feel displeased that you should seek him out. I can understand the nature of your feelings," she added; "but do not allow those feelings to mar your future happiness."

"You have saved me," she said, raising her head, "from a fate that was far worse than death, and I have confidence in your powers, and surrender myself to you. I do not believe that you would advise me wrongly; and whatever you tell me is for the best, that I will do."

"Then," said Tom King, "we may look upon it as settled. In an hour or a little more we will start, and I will not leave you again until I know that you are in absolute safety."

This point having been decided, the highwaymen drew aside to consult their own plan.

Tom Davis kept continually fidgeting about, for the behaviour of Jack Marshall seemed more suspicious and dangerous the more he thought about it.

Yet, although he went to the front door a hundred times and looked carefully around, he saw nothing at all calculated to alarm him.

"Of course," said Dick, "you are well aware that I have a particular mission to fulfil to-night, and at all hazards and risks I will keep my appointment."

His companions nodded.

"I have the paper all safe in my possession, and the sooner I can place it in the hands of the mysterious lady the better I shall be pleased, for it will be removing a great temptation from me. Would you believe it, comrades, I can hardly resist unfolding that paper and making myself acquainted with its contents?"

The three other highwaymen and Maud did not say how much they wished he would yield to the temptation.

But they contrived to convey as much by the expression of their countenances.

But Dick had taken a solemn oath to preserve the secret, and those who knew him best felt certain that he would not break his word.

"Here it is," he said, producing it from his pocket. "I ran a great risk in obtaining it, and yet it came into my possession more easily than I had dared to hope. Now, at the earliest moment I will start, and surrender it, and then the whole affair will be over, and in a very short time entirely forgotten."

As to the last, this was rather doubtful.

Tom Davis then approached them, and asked:

"Could you not by any means consent to remain at the inn to-night?"

"It is impossible," said Turpin.

"I hope not," he added; "and perhaps you will change your minds when you have heard what I have to say."

"No, no," said Dick—"we cannot possibly remain!"

"Well, then, I think you will live to regret your departure. Jack Marshall and his officers are, I am convinced, on the watch. They have had their suspicions aroused, and, I believe, have formed a pretty good guess as to the exact state of affairs. Who can say where they are lurking now?"

"It is a pity," said Dick; "but yet our engagements cannot be broken. The risk, great or small, must be run."

Tom sighed heavily.

"This life won't last," he said—"I know it won't last! It's a great deal too pleasant and comfortable! Mark me if my words don't come true!"

"Why anticipate evil?" said Claude Duval. "It is quite enough to meet it when it comes. We will all ride forth to night. The captain and Tom have each their separate engagements to fulfil, and Jack and myself will try our hands on the highway together."

"It's no use reasoning with you, I am aware," said Tom Davis, "though one would have thought that by this time you would have estimated danger properly. At any rate," he concluded, "you will not think of leaving the inn by the ordinary mode?"

"No—no. We are willing enough to give in to you there, and we will take our departure in the same manner as we did last night, and the chances are ten to one that we shall get away unseen."

"Then I should recommend you to return in the same manner," he rejoined, "and not to venture to approach the inn until you have seen the signals."

"And touching those signals," said Dick. "I have been thinking that they are more likely to provoke suspicion than almost anything else; instead of that, I have something else to propose."

"What is it, captain?"

"Why, you know that small window in the roof of the house that looks over the plantation at the back?"

"Yes—yes."

"Well, then, just before daybreak, if all's well, let a light be burning at that window; if we see it we shall approach without fear; if it is not there we shall remain until it is prudent for us to show our faces again."

CHAPTER DCCCIX.

DICK TURPIN DELIVERS THE LETTER TO THE MYSTERIOUS LADY, AND RECEIVES A STRANGE, UNLOOKED-FOR REWARD.

VERY soon after this Tom Davis went to the front door of the inn, and, having carefully looked round about, he returned.

"Now, captain," he said, "above all things, be careful how you cross over to the stable."

"Did you see anyone lurking about?"

"No, captain, all seems quiet and safe enough; yet it is best to be careful."

"By all means. A mistake made on the right side never produces much mischief. I will go first, and the others can follow."

Dick opened the door leading into the yard at the back of the inn, and, having paused on the threshold a moment, crossed over quickly to the stables.

He had the key in his hand, and quickly unlocked the door.

He was greeted immediately by a low, faint neigh of recognition.

"Ah, Bess," he cried, "you are there! Come, lass we have business together to-night!"

A rustling among the straw followed these words, and then guided by his voice, Black Bess placed herself by her master's side.

The saddle and bridle were quickly put on, and then, opening the little door in the stable that we have already described, Dick led her out into the plantation.

As soon as it was practicable, he mounted, and then, turning her head in the direction he wished to go, rode boldly and straightly to his destination.

The night was dark and blusterous—just such a one as a highwayman would like when engaged on any particular expedition, and yet one when few people would care to be abroad.

With the aspect of the weather, then, Dick had nothing to say in the shape of a complaint.

The very boldness and steadiness with which he took his way to the house where he had had his previous interview with the mysterious lady was most striking.

Yet the boldness brought with it a great amount of success.

No one to have seen him then would have judged that a price was placed upon his head.

He was riding along with the greatest coolness and ease.

On the way, however, his thoughts reverted to those last strange adventures of his, from the details of which his attention had been diverted by other exciting incidents.

Greatly did he wonder what could be the nature of the unsealed letter he held in his hand.

Why should that lady be so anxious to recover it, and why should the possession of it by Lord Spindelow give him so great an amount of power over her?

These were questions that were not likely to be answered by speculation only, so Dick was fain to give up the attempt in despair.

On his former visit Dick had taken accurate note of the place, and therefore he felt certain of being able to make his way right without fear or mistake.

Indeed, it was necessary for him to go to a strange place only once, and then he was always able to remember it afterwards.

No sooner did he halt at the gate in the garden wall than it was opened by Rupert, who exclaimed:

"You are here early. I didn't expect you yet, but was on the watch notwithstanding."

"Is the coast clear?" asked Dick.

"Quite clear. Make haste through the gate—you have nothing to apprehend."

Dick obeyed with the utmost promptitude, and when the door was closed behind him he placed Black Bess in the stable with his own hands.

Then, guided by Rupert as before, he made his way to the house through the dark chamber in the entrance-hall, then up the spacious staircase to the door of the room where they had halted on the former occasion.

Rupert knocked gently, and in a moment the door was opened by the lady herself.

Her countenance bore upon it an expression of the utmost eagerness and anxiety, and Dick could tell that since he had seen her last she had suffered greatly from suspense.

"Come in," she said, in a hoarse whisper—"come in—be quick. Rupert," she added, "you may go."

Rupert turned on his heel and descended the staircase, and the lady, in her eagerness, clutched hold of Turpin by the coat-sleeve and drew him into the room.

"No more of this frightful suspense," she said, clasping her hands over her bosom—"it has almost killed me. In a word, tell me whether you have succeeded?"

"If I had not," said Dick, quietly, "I should not be here."

"Then you have the letter?" she ejaculated, with a half shriek.

Dick replied by drawing the document from his pocket.

No sooner did she catch sight of it than, springing forward, she snatched it from his grasp.

Then, with a shrill shriek, that was strangely mingled with hysterical laughter, she fell down at full length upon the carpet.

This was something for which Dick was not prepared, and for a moment or two he hesitated, scarcely knowing how to act.

So fully expected that the shrill cry would attract the attention of the other persons in the house, and he looked expectantly towards the door, thinking to see it open.

But all remained still, so, stooping down, he raised the lady and placed her in the arm-chair that was near.

Although she had thus fallen, she had not lost her consciousness.

The letter about which she had been so solicitous was clutched convulsively in her hands.

It seemed as though she almost pressed her nails through it.

It was the sudden relief from a most agonising state of mind—the abrupt cessation of suspense and dread—that caused her this loss of command over herself.

"Water," she said, faintly—give me some water! I shall be better then!"

She turned her eyes in the direction of a sideboard, upon which Dick saw a variety of decanters, mingled with glasses and silver plate.

He hastened forward to comply with this request.

A large water-bottle caught his eyes, and, pouring some of its contents into a goblet, he hastened again to the lady's side.

She drank the water eagerly, and then said:

"If you only knew—if you could only imagine what relief the possession of this letter is to me—how totally it changes all my prospects and position, you would not wonder at the violence of the emotion I have displayed."

Dick was silent.

"Of course," she said, half in hesitation, "you have kept your oath—you have not sought to become acquainted with the contents of it?"

"I have not," answered Dick, gravely. "It is there just as I received it."

"I believe you—I believe you, for there's truth in the expression of your face and the tones of your voice. Now, then, name your own reward for performing this service. Fear not to ask a large amount! You could not over-value the extent of your service."

"I shall make no demand whatever," was Dick Turpin's quiet answer. "I have performed my promise to the letter, but as for your gold, I want it not."

The lady looked at him in unfeigned surprise.

"Are you, then, so wedded to your dangerous mode of life that you do not wish to quit it? Reflect. I will willingly give you such a sum as will enable you to leave England, and to live in peace and comfort elsewhere."

Dick shook his head.

"I cannot enter into any arguments with you on the subject," he said; "you have heard my determination, and now, if you will permit me, I will say farewell."

"Your behaviour astonishes me beyond all measure," murmured the lady—"it is incomprehensible!"

"It may be so," said Dick. "But the only favour I shall ask of you is permission to begone."

"But I am determined that you shall not leave me without receiving some substantial proof of my gratitude. You tell me that gold is not what you want; then listen."

Dick bowed.

"All these events," she began, "must seem in the highest degree extraordinary and inexplicable to you. What you have learned, however, is but one small portion of a tremendous secret, that, if known, would produce greater consequences than ever you could imagine. But enough—I cannot tell you what could be performed by the bare production of the letter that you have given me so readily. Yet," she added, "the time may come when all this that seems so strange now will be rendered perfectly clear—when, if this adventure shall have slipped your memory, it shall be suddenly recalled with great force; but, at any rate, under all circumstances I will be your friend to the very utmost extent of my ability. I have more power even now than you may imagine—a power greater than is possessed by——"

She checked herself abruptly, and by the confusion she exhibited, it was evident that she had been betrayed into going too far in her remarks.

"Here," she said, "take this; it is a small locket, and I shall always know it again—keep it, preserve it some-



[THE HIGHWAYMEN WATCH THE SHADOW ON THE WALL.]

where; on no account part with it. When you are some time in the extremity of danger—when you are in fear of your very life—then take that locket, and press upon the spring; it will open, and then you will know what to do—your life will be saved, your liberty restored. Take it—take it; you are welcome to it, and I trust the time may come when you may prove its powers."

Despite a certain amount of unwillingness that Dick displayed, she pressed the trinket into his hand, and closed his fingers over it.

CHAPTER DCCCX.

RUPERT PLAYS A TREACHEROUS PART, AND DICK TURPIN DISCOVERS IN THE MYSTERIOUS LADY A REAL FRIEND.

PERCEIVING how much in earnest the mysterious lady was, and how anxious she appeared that he should accept from her some token in recognition of the great service he had performed, he resolved to change his behaviour, and to receive the gift without any show of churlishness.

"I take this willingly," he said; "and if it has such virtues as you state, it will indeed be the best and most serviceable thing that you can possibly bestow."

"Keep it, then—keep it; you will find that I have not exaggerated its power in the least. Keep it in some place of security, yet always about your person. On no account part with it; and, as I said before, when you find yourself in a position of the most imminent danger, draw it forth, and you will be saved."

Dick was not a little curious to know what it was that this locket contained, and it required a considerable amount of credulity in order to believe that what the lady said was true.

Yet her earnestness of manner almost enforced credence, and so again expressing his thanks, he placed it safely in an inner pocket.

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No. 169 will be Published next Monday.

"Now," she said, "if you are anxious to leave me, you are quite at liberty to do so. First of all, however, I would press you to partake of a glass of wine."

"One glass be it then," said Turpin, "for I don't wish to linger, and I have a particular appointment."

The lady poured out the wine herself, and then going to the bell, rang it sharply.

In obedience to the summons, Rupert appeared upon the threshold.

Dick glanced at him carelessly.

But yet in an instant his attention was awakened.

His keen eyes detected something strange in Rupert's manner.

He seemed flurried and out of breath, and as it making efforts to regain his ordinary composure.

To conceal these manifestations of agitation, probably, he bowed low three or four times, and stood in a semi-circular attitude, waiting for the commands of his mistress.

But it was Dick who spoke:

"Show me out, Rupert; I am anxious to leave with all speed."

"Very good! Oh, certainly!" he answered. "This way, if you please."

"Once more farewell," said the lady, gazing after Turpin with looks expressive of gratitude—"once more farewell! I wish that you had suffered me to recompense you for what you have done after my own inclination."

Dick merely made a gesture of dissent, and, murmuring the word "Farewell," he followed Rupert from the room.

Dick's suspicions were aroused, although they had but slight foundation.

He apprehended danger from some source, yet what he could not tell.

He drew a long breath of relief, however, upon finding himself free from the mansion in which he had had such strange adventures.

"Then you have performed this important service?" said Rupert.

"Unquestionably I have," was the laconic reply.

"And been rewarded?"

"Yes, too."

"I expected as much; the affair is more important than perhaps you imagine."

"Are you acquainted with the particulars of it?"

"Only partially—only partially."

"Does your mistress take you into her confidence?"

"Sometimes, and at others I find out what I can."

"Indeed!" said Dick. "You are very candid, and——"

Just at this moment there came a shrill whistle, and Turpin found his arm clutched tightly by Rupert, as though he was astonished at the sound.

The whistle was quickly followed by many footsteps, and in the twinkling of an eye Dick found himself surrounded by a large party of police officers.

He did not wait for them to make any aggressive demonstration, or for them to call upon him to surrender.

In an instant the whole truth flashed in upon his mind.

Rupert, finding that Turpin had performed the service his mistress required of him, had called together the police officers, intending to avail himself of the fact as far as he could.

It would be easy for them to say that he had no control over what was taking place—that the capture had been made without his knowledge.

He would then not only be well paid by his mistress, and have been bribed by the highwayman as well, but would also receive his share of the large reward.

The manner in which he clung to Turpin's arm conclusively showed this.

But Dick shook him off.

All this took place in one single instant.

The whistle was blown, the officers appeared, and then Dick, suddenly putting forth the whole of his strength, seized hold of Rupert and swung him fairly round and then let go.

He came with great violence against the forms of several police officers, some of whom fell, while others could not help staggering back a pace.

Rupert fell stunned and breathless to the ground.

Then Dick wondered what he should do.

He could not stop to think.

The moment he took for reflection might cost him his life.

He had noticed, however, that the officers had come from the direction of the stables, and therefore, without any reasoning upon the subject, he concluded that they had already taken prisoner his mare, Black Bess.

To run in that direction would only be to court fresh danger.

The gate leading from the yard was probably well secured.

There was then only one way that he could turn, and knowing this, he started off at the top of his speed towards the mansion he had just left.

Several pistols were fired at his retreating form, but all apparently without effect.

With a rapidity of motion that was wonderful, he passed through the door, closed it behind him, and then secured it by shooting a couple of bolts into their sockets and turning the key in the lock.

How to act further was the next consideration.

He knew the way to the front door, and might manage to pass through it and gain the street unknown to the officers.

But there was a great risk about this, for some, in anticipation of his resistance, might be watching for him in the street outside.

Dick's resolve was quickly taken.

It was to throw himself upon the protection of the lady, who was so anxious a short time since to display her gratitude.

Up the spacious staircase, then, he bounded, taking several steps at each stride.

Then hastening forward, he burst without any ceremony whatever into the room where she was sitting.

Noting his hurried manner and his pale face, she started to her feet, and asked eagerly what was amiss.

"Rupert," he ejaculated, almost breathlessly—"the villain has betrayed me to the police officers. Did you not hear their shots?"

"Betrayed you? Impossible!"

"It is true. The officers will appear in another moment to search for me. I have flown back to you in order that you may prove your gratitude. Conceal me somewhere—in some place where you can feel certain they will not find me."

The lady hesitated for a moment, and then, recovering her self-possession, she said:

"I will conceal you, and effectually, too."

"Be quick then, lady," said Dick, "for, hark! you can hear them now hammering at the door below."

"I can—I can. Follow me with all speed."

The lady led the way into the adjoining apartment, and passed from that into another.

This was a small, plainly-furnished room, containing for the most part curiosities from all parts of the globe.

On one side of this little room there was what appeared to be a very strong iron door.

Its size was rather less than ordinary.

It was high enough to allow a person of average height to pass through it not stooping.

But it was disproportionately narrow.

The only fastening visible consisted of a large brass knob.

Towards this door the lady walked with a resolute step, Dick Turpin following closely behind her.

From a richly ornamented purse she carried she drew forth a key.

Then touching a spring upon a portion of the door, a small piece of iron slipped aside, disclosing a key-hole.

One turn in the lock was sufficient to unfasten the door.

"Take hold of that knob," she said, "and pull it towards you. The door is heavy, and rather beyond my strength."

Dick obeyed, marvelling greatly why such a place as this should be constructed, and whether it would afford him an effectual hiding-place from his pursuers.

His speculations were cut short by the lady, who said:

"No doubt you are wondering at what you see. To

set your mind at rest, I will tell you that this is what we call the strong room. It contains all the most valuable things I possess—deeds, plate, jewels, and such-like. I trust to you not to remove any of them, and I will answer with my life that you are safe."

"You may depend upon me," said Dick. "I would on no account deprive you of anything."

"Be quick, then, and close the door. I can hear the officers have gained admittance."

Dick stepped into the strong room, as it was called, though it was nothing more than a recess in the wall, having no window to light it.

He pulled the door behind him, and the lady pressed it close.

There was a sharp clicking sound, and then Dick, to all intents and purposes, was a prisoner—a prisoner in a very close, confined, and disagreeable place, one from which he could not possibly escape.

He breathed with difficulty, for there seemed to be but little air within the place.

He leaned up against the door, feeling more uneasy and apprehensive every moment.

CHAPTER DCCCXI.

THE MYSTERIOUS LADY FINDS DICK TURPIN AN UNCOMFORTABLE BUT EFFECTUAL HIDING-PLACE.

Up to this time it had not occurred to Dick Turpin to question the good faith of the mysterious lady.

One reason was perhaps that he had had no opportunity for thought.

Now that he was still, his thoughts were beginning to grow active.

The more he reflected, the more uncomfortable he felt.

Indeed, he felt half inclined to make some desperate effort to free himself from his hiding-place.

Was it not likely in the extreme, he asked himself, that this lady should be acquainted with all Rupert's intentions?

He might even have acted by her orders.

This was supposing a great amount of ingratitude to exist.

But Dick knew that people readily forgot obligations that were conferred upon them.

In such a case as this, he had taken the worst step he possibly could.

He had, in fact, simply allowed himself to be confined in a place from which he could not liberate himself, while the lady who had made him secure would have no more to do but to summon the police officers and tell them so.

If he was right in these suspicions, Dick determined that he would sell his life dearly.

If the officers thought to make an easy prey when the door was opened, they would be much mistaken.

He would rush out and fight them all, and die rather than yield.

He listened, however, and all was very still.

Time enough had elapsed to have enabled the lady, if she had been so inclined, to bring the officers to that spot.

To all appearances she had not done so.

Dick pressed his ear close against the door, and endeavoured to make out if he could hear what was going on upon the other side of it.

In this he failed, for not even a murmur reached his ears.

Respiration continued to grow more and more difficult.

The fact had been overlooked that there was no means by which air could gain admittance to that room after the door was closed; and unless it was quickly opened again, the highwayman would surely die of suffocation.

Leaving Dick for a few moments in this most uncomfortable situation, we will revert to the proceedings of the police officers.

Turpin wronged the lady when he thought that she had acted treacherously towards him.

The betrayal was on Rupert's part alone.

Of course he was well aware of the highwayman's identity, and he was also fully cognizant of the large reward that was offered for his apprehension.

He had ascertained what night the service he had undertaken for his mistress would be performed, and, as usual, he would ride away.

What a fine opportunity was this to communicate with the police officers, and have him captured just as he was about leaving the premises.

Rupert thought it could be so managed that no one would be aware he had had a hand in it.

He resolved upon trying this experiment, and therefore called in the aid of those police officers who had come upon the previous occasion.

He secreted them near the door leading into the stables, and told them to watch there until he returned holding some one by the arm, adding that that some one would be Dick Turpin, the highwayman.

The officers gladly enough consented to wait, and remained in a state of the greatest suspense and excitement for upwards of an hour.

Then, in the manner we have described, Dick Turpin came forward.

Luckily, his suspicions had been roused; otherwise he would have fallen an easy prey.

Rupert had been so roughly handled by Dick Turpin that he lay upon the ground, never moving hand or foot.

The other officers, caring nothing for him, finding that their shots were ineffectual, commenced an immediate pursuit.

But the door was closed and fastened, and too strong to be beaten down easily.

The manner they hammered away upon it, however, was well calculated to attract the attention of all the domestics, and consequently in a short time several hurried to the door in a body, wondering what could be the matter.

"Be quick," said the chief officer—"take possession of all the means of exit from the house while we search it over! You needn't trouble yourselves about the front, because, as you know, that is well watched."

"And the stable," said one—"had not that better be watched also?"

"Yes, by all means. On no account let him gain possession of his mare."

The officers separated themselves rapidly according to the directions of their superior, and the remainder, forming themselves into a compact body, commenced a rigid search of the building.

They began at the bottom, and, having searched it thoroughly without success, ascended the staircase.

At the top they saw the mistress of the mansion, who regarded them with well-assumed surprise.

"What does all this mean?" she inquired, angrily. "Why are you here? Explain this violence and disturbance!"

"Very sorry, my lady," said the senior officer, who somehow seemed compelled to be respectful, "but Dick Turpin, the highwayman, has taken refuge in this house, and we must search it until we find him!"

"Dick Turpin? Ridiculous! You have made some absurd mistake!"

The officer shook his head.

"No, no, ma-am—nothing of the kind! There's not no mistake about it! I saw him with my very own eyes!"

The lady smiled incredulously.

"I see you are officers of police," she said, "and I know that I dare not refuse you permission to search all over this house, so you can begin at once; and the sooner your task is completed the better. I can assure you it will be without result."

"Oh, he's hiding somewhere," said the officer, "and he could easily do that without your knowledge at all."

"Well, it may be so; and if you will follow me I will take you into all the rooms in succession, and you can satisfy yourselves that he is not in any of them."

This was consented to, and the lady led them into the apartment from which she had just emerged.

This was ransacked with great rapidity, but of course without any result.

The same may be said of the next and the next.

The officers were beginning to grow doubtful and discouraged.

"He must be in the house somewhere," said the one in command, speaking as much with the view of reassuring himself as his men. "I saw him enter myself; and

if he had left by the front we should have heard of it immediately, so here he must be, that's clear."

At this moment they passed into the small room we have already described.

A glance was sufficient to enable them to come to the conclusion that the highwayman was not hiding there.

The chief officer walked up to the iron door, and knocked upon it with his knuckles.

"What's that?" he said—"what's that?"

"I suppose there is no harm in telling you," was the lady's response, "though I prefer such things should be kept a secret. Surely you do not imagine the man you speak of is hidden there. It is the strong room, where all the deeds relating to my family are kept, and also where the plate and jewels are stowed away. It is always kept securely locked as you see now, and, for protection's sake, the key is deposited in an iron safe at the banker's."

The officer ran his fingers rapidly over the door, and endeavoured to shake it.

In vain, however, for it fitted closely into its setting.

"It is a strong door," he said—"a very strong door; and yet, if you had possessed the key, I should have preferred looking inside it. However, as you have not, we must do without."

The officers certainly never for one moment thought it in the least degree probable that Dick Turpin had concealed himself in such a place as that—in fact, the feat was to all appearance impossible.

The search was then continued with great vigour.

Higher and higher the officers went until the top of the house was reached, and yet no signs of the highwayman could they see.

They even went out upon the roofs.

But here all was calm and quiet, and the men who were stationed outside declared that they had kept a careful watch, and that no one had left the premises in that direction.

The chief officer was puzzled.

How to act in such a case as this he knew not, for he was not able to find even the slightest trace that the highwayman had ever entered the building at all.

Nevertheless, he resolved to make a good search, and to leave no corner unexamined.

For this purpose he began in the attics, and searched them again, and continued to search until he reached the landing on the first floor again.

"Well," he cried, "this passes my comprehension. I have heard before a strange tale told of how a party of people saw a friend of theirs enter a house by the front door, but he never came out again, and the closest search even failed to discover where he had gone."

"Then," said the lady, "they must have been deceived, like yourself. I felt quite certain you were making a mistake when you said you had seen Dick Turpin enter here. Surely he would never have such audacity?"

"Oh, but he would," said the chief officer—"he would. He's hiding himself somewhere, though where it can be I am at a loss to think. However, I sha'n't be put off easily, as he will find!"

Muttering these and other indistinct threats, the officer finished his second search of the mansion, of course without achieving any better result than at first.

Going to the front door, he opened it, and found upon its threshold two of his men.

"You are sure he has not gone this way?"

"Quite sure."

"And you have heard no noise?"

"None."

"Well, then, keep a closer look-out than ever. He must be very close at hand, I feel convinced, so we will go to the back and watch there."

With these words the officer closed the front door again, and made his way back to the stables, cursing and foaming over the failure he had met with when he considered success to be quite certain.

Rupert was still lying on the ground

His head had been severely injured by his fall, and although not unconscious, he was yet unable either to speak or to rise.

CHAPTER DCCCXII.

DICK TURPIN IS RELEASED FROM THE STRONG ROOM JUST IN TIME, AND BLACK BESS SUCCEEDS IN GETTING THE BETTER OF THE POLICE OFFICERS.

No sooner had the mysterious lady made quite certain that the whole of the officers had left the mansion than she hastened with all speed to the strong room in which she had hid the highwayman.

All at once she had remembered that it was so constructed that no air could enter it, and she was justly afraid that he would die of suffocation if allowed to remain there for any length of time.

With trembling fingers, then—having first of all secured the door of communication—she pressed upon the spring and thrust the key into the iron door.

It turned with more than usual difficulty in its wards, taking, in fact, nearly all her strength.

Then, seizing hold of the brass knob, she pulled it towards her.

But in this respect she had no occasion to put forth her strength.

Suddenly the door was pushed open with great swiftness, and, with a rushing sound, the body of Dick Turpin fell forward with great violence on the floor.

A shriek of alarm issued from her lips.

Her worst forebodings, she feared, were fully realised.

And yet it seemed strange that after such a short time he should have perished.

A second thought told her that he was more likely in a fainting fit, owing to the want of air, and that, if left to himself, he would rapidly recover.

In this she found herself perfectly right.

Dick Turpin made several gasping efforts to breathe, then struggled as if with some antagonist, and finally opened his eyes.

His brain at first was in a perfect whirl, and he could not recollect what had happened, nor comprehend where he was.

But, with a rush, remembrance came back to him, and he sprang to his feet and looked around him anxiously.

"Fear nothing," said the lady, in tones of great relief, "all is well now—quite well; I was afraid I had left you there too long."

"I must have fainted," said Dick, "and yet I knew it not; my senses must have left me slowly and gradually. But the officers, where are they?"

"They have searched the house thoroughly from the bottom to the top—from top to bottom. They are, of course, much mystified by your extraordinary disappearance, as they saw you enter with their own eyes; however, they have now all left."

"But not for good, I suppose?"

"I fear not—in fact, I may say I know for certain that a great number are watching in the yard, and the remainder in the street outside."

Turpin looked anxious and undecided.

"How, then, am I to act?" he said, thoughtfully.

"Nay, that I leave for you to decide. But hush! what disturbance is that?—what has happened?"

A tremendous uproar could now be heard in the yard below, and, as if animated by one impulse, Dick and the lady hastened to the window that commanded a view of it.

"Keep back," she cried—"keep back—you may be seen! Ah, look there—what can be the meaning of that?"

The lady was considerably puzzled at what she saw.

But we may as well make the reader at once acquainted with the exact facts of the case.

The officers, having regained the back yard, held a consultation as to what they should do.

The prevalent opinion among them was that the highwayman was concealed somewhere in the house without the knowledge of its inmates, they thought, but yet in some place where he could set detection at defiance.

In this case it was clear that all they had to do was to remain patiently on the watch.

Some time or other he must come forth, and as soon as he appeared they would be able to pounce upon him and capture him.

After much disputing, this was the plan of proceedings agreed to.

"But," said one, "Black Bess is in the stable here: had we not better make sure of her while we have the chance?"

"How make sure of her?"

"Why, seize her, and take her away to some place where we know Dick Turpin could not possibly find her. Without Black Bess he would be nothing, and we should be able to make him our prisoner with all the ease in the world."

"I like the idea very much," said the chief officer, "for he might be able, by some means or other, to regain possession of her, in which case he would doubtless give us a great deal of trouble. But I have heard some curious tales about this Black Bess. I for one should not care about handling her."

"Pooh—pooh!" said the one who had spoken. "I have heard the tales you mention, and don't care that about 'em!"

He snapped his fingers contemptuously as he spoke

"I know a thing or two about horses," he said—"I rather believe I know what a horse can do, and what he can't, and if I don't lead this Black Bess out of the stable as quietly as a lamb, why, call me a Dutchman!"

"I should not wonder," said another officer, addressing the one in command. "Larkins is just the chap for a horse—he's a regular tamer!"

"Well, if you can get hold of her, all well and good," said the chief; "you have my full permission to make the attempt."

"Very good," was the reply, "that's all that I require."

With these words on his lips, the police officer entered the stable.

A dim light was burning there, and by its aid he could see several horses standing in the stalls.

Among them, however, there was only one that was black, and her jetty, glossy coat proclaimed at once that it was the highwayman's steed.

"There she is," cried Larkins, delightedly, "and she's a regular beauty, she is, and no mistake! Woa, now! Gently—gently!"

His comrades watched with the greatest anxiety.

Speaking soothingly all the time, this police officer managed to walk by the side of Black Bess up to the manger.

Then, placing his hand upon her neck, he patted and stroked it for some time.

Black Bess stood perfectly quiet, and apparently by no means displeased with these caresses.

By degrees, the officer moved his right hand, until he had hold of her forelock, while he still continued holding her with the other.

At last he determined to make the effort to lead her forth, for she was quieter than he had ever imagined.

This partial success that he had met with rendered him quite exultant, and in a very triumphant tone of voice he exclaimed:

"There, now, what did I tell you? Why, it's the easiest thing in the world! Come on, my beauty, this way!"

Black Bess suffered herself to be turned round, and, without offering the faintest show of resistance, in another moment Larkins had got her out into the yard.

"There," he said, "now, what did I tell you? Just fetch me a halter, one of you, and then we shall have her secure!"

"I should have put it on in the stable had I been you," said the chief officer.

"Oh, it's all right, bless you—do you think I don't know how to manage a horse? You see, a lamb could not be quieter than she is!"

One of the officers ran into the stable, and quickly returned with a halter.

"Now, then," cried Larkins, "slip it gently over her head! There, now——"

His speech was brought to an abrupt and unexpected termination.

Black Bess had allowed the officers to proceed so far, but would not allow them to go any further.

No sooner did she catch sight of the halter than a remarkable change took place in her manner.

With one sudden toss of her head, she forced herself from the grasp of Larkins, who the next moment found himself sprawling on the ground.

Black Bess flung out with her feet on all sides in the most desperate and dangerous manner, so that in the twinkling of an eye the crowd of officers around her was dispersed.

This was the noise that Turpin and the lady had heard, and which brought them to the window.

Dick Turpin's feelings may perhaps be imagined upon finding his bonny mare in such a dangerous position.

Yet, how could he help her?

He could do nothing, and could only hope that she would make the fullest use of the instinct which he knew she possessed so ample a share of.

Several of the officers had been very seriously injured by her feet, and she still continued to plunge about in the same fashion.

"It's a mad horse," cried Larkins, recovering himself so far as to be able to sit up—"it's a mad horse! Shoot it, somebody—shoot it, it's mad! Who's got a pistol?"

"I have," said the chief officer. "Here goes!"

Whether the excitement, or some other cause, had rendered his aim unsteady we know not.

Certain it is, however, the bullet with which his pistol was charged went far from the mark.

Black Bess heard the sound with fresh terror, and galloped furiously round and round the yard.

The walls apparently were much too high for her to overleap.

With a curse, the chief officer threw down his pistol, and immediately drew another.

This time he took a more careful aim at the flying horse.

But he was again doomed to disappointment, for the weapon only flashed in the pan without any report.

It was just at this moment that Black Bess, having galloped round the yard for about the dozenth time, stopped suddenly before that portion of the wall in which the door was situated.

The height was considerable—so great that it seemed impossible for any horse to clear such an obstacle.

But, crouching down almost like a greyhound would have done, she gave a sudden spring, and, to the astonishment of all, just cleared the wall, though she scraped the top slightly with her hind feet.

In another instant she had disappeared.

CHAPTER DCCCXIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS LADY INDUCES ONE OF THE POLICE OFFICERS TO FACILITATE DICK TURPIN'S ESCAPE.

Several shots were fired as Black Bess disappeared over the wall.

But it was not very likely that any of them would produce the least effect.

Turpin was so overcome at this unexpected incident that he fairly reeled with emotion.

Such a heavy load had been removed from his mind that he now felt as if he could regard his own danger with extreme indifference.

Black Bess was now gone, and, having once had such a start as that, would, as a matter of course, escape in safety.

Some accident might befall her; but the probability was that she would return direct to the inn.

"I have cause to be thankful for that," said Turpin. "Now my foes can do what they like—I care not."

The fury of the officers was something ludicrous to witness.

They raved, and stamped, and swore most fearfully.

"A swift horse," cried the one in command—"get a swift horse and ride off in pursuit!"

"It's no good," said one—"it's no good!"

"I tell you it is! Obey my commands this instant!"

"Why, the horse is not foaled yet that could outrun Black Bess."

"I know that, fool—dolt—idiot that you are! Can you not tell that you are wasting most precious moments? A swift horse, I say—quick—quick!"

"What is it you want?"

"Want? Why, what a numbskull you must be not to think of it yourself! Black Bess will now gallop straight off to that secret hiding-place of the highwaymen that we are so anxious to find. If you will follow her quickly

we shall find it out, and that will be worth a thousand pounds to us at least."

This was a thought that had not occurred to the police officers.

But no sooner was it suggested to them than there was a perfect rush to see who could be the first to seize a horse and mount.

The consequence was that they greatly impeded each other, and much time was lost before a horse was got ready to mount.

Then the gate was opened, and a couple of officers dashed out.

But they found, when they had gone a little way, that they could see no signs of the highwayman's steed, nor could they meet with anyone who had perceived which way she had gone.

They pulled up their horses, and listened.

But all around them was perfectly silent.

Her hoof-beats could not be distinguished.

"We're done," said one—"done as brown as a hammer! Was ever such luck known before!"

"What had we better do, mate?" said the other officer.

"Well that's just what I was wondering. If we ride back, we shall have no end of abuse heaped upon us. Let us gallop off. We can pretend then that we pursued Black Bess as far as we were able."

"I think we had better do that, for I don't think they will capture Dick Turpin any more than they captured Black Bess."

"Capture him? No, nothing of the kind, and if we keep on, why, chance may take us the way we wish to go."

This being settled, the two officers started off at a smart pace.

It was a ridiculous proceeding on their part, inasmuch as it weakened their own force considerably.

They might have known that the services of all would be wanted to assist in the capture of Turpin.

"Now," said Dick, addressing his preserver, "I must get out of this house somehow or other."

The lady shook her head.

"I fear it is impossible," she said. "You know how closely it is watched at the back, and there are many other officers in the street, while, I believe, another has been left upon the roofs to take care that you do not escape in that direction."

"But I cannot remain here," said Dick. "It is imperative that I escape by some means or other."

"It is; and a thought has just struck me as to the means by which that escape may be accomplished. Listen to me."

"I am all attention."

"It will require the exercise of some boldness and coolness upon your part, but I know that you possess both those qualities to perfection."

"But what is your plan?"

"It is, by means of some things that I have, to disguise you effectually, and, when so disguised, we will walk out of the front door into the street together."

"Excellent!" said Turpin. "But the officers—if they have searched this house so thoroughly as you say they have—will they not be suspicious at once upon seeing some one come forth who was invisible during the time the search continued?"

"No, I think not. I took particular notice of all that was going on, and I found that it was the officers from the back of the house who conducted the search. Those in front have never crossed the threshold at all, and therefore it is impossible for them to tell who is in the house and who is not."

"Then," said Turpin, "if that's the case, I feel certain I shall escape."

"It is very probable, especially if we can take advantage of the present moment, when their attention is so fixed upon the escape of Black Bess."

"It will be."

"Wait here, then, where you are for a moment, while I will hasten off and fetch the things that I require."

The lady was absent only a few moments, and when she returned a considerable alteration had been effected in her appearance.

She had put on a very large cloak of a kind then very much in vogue, and on her head she wore a very small, coquettish-looking hat.

Over her arm she carried a closely-fitting cloak, and in her hand something that Dick could not make out at first, but which almost immediately afterwards he saw was a wig of white hair.

The coat was of a very different cut and colour, and very differently ornamented to the one he was in the habit of wearing, and the merely putting it on would make a very great change in his appearance, for these were the times when differences in costume were much more marked than they are at the present day.

Dick hastily pulled off his own coat and flung it into a corner, and put on the one that had been brought to him.

The wig was rather a more difficult matter, but with a little trouble he managed to tuck all his own hair underneath it.

Then he put on a hat with a low crown and a broad brim, which had the effect of altering the expression of his countenance wonderfully.

"Cut off your moustache," said the lady. "It will be much better. The disguise will then be perfect."

She handed him a pair of scissors while she spoke, and Dick, after a moment's hesitation, complied with her request.

"There," she said, "that's much better! It would never have done to see you with your hair one colour and your moustache another. Now take this gold-headed cane, and, as you walk, lean heavily upon it. I, in turn, will lean upon your arm, and I believe the chances are a thousand to one that we shall pass out without exciting suspicion."

Dick thought so too, but determined to be prepared for any accident.

The lady soon drew over her face a very thick veil, which effectually concealed her features.

Then, taking hold of Turpin's arm, she leaned somewhat heavily upon it.

And thus they walked together to the door.

Passing through the suite of apartments and descending the staircase, they came to the front door.

Here a footman was waiting, who looked not a little astonished at what he saw.

"Open the door, Charles," said his mistress. "You may expect me back in about an hour."

The tones of her voice could not be mistaken, so, although his brain was full of many strange thoughts, the footman obeyed her commands, and opened the door.

On the threshold stood a couple of police officers, and instinctively Dick grasped his stick a little tighter.

"I shall be back in two hours at the most," said the lady, in a loud tone of voice, on purpose that the officers should hear her.

"Very well, my lady," said the footman, respectfully, and closed the door.

The officers looked at each other rather bewildered, and wondered how they should act.

The lady, upon reaching the pavement, seemed no less irresolute, and, beckoning at length to one of the officers, she said:

"I suppose you are watching there in case you should see anything of Dick Turpin?"

The police officer had heard the footman say "My lady," and he was accordingly respectful.

"We *air*," he said, with great emphasis—"them's our orders."

The lady laughed.

"It is really a strange thing," she said, "but I would willingly stake my life that he is not in the house. It's a mistake altogether. But I wish to go with this friend of mine for a little distance, and want a hackney-coach. Would you be kind enough to call one? Surely your comrade will be enough to watch?"

The officer hesitated.

But only for about half a moment.

While waiting at the door, he had seen many hackney-coaches pass by, and he thought it would be a pity to lose the opportunity of earning a reward, for, of course, he would not remain unpaid for his service.

Giving a nod to his companion, he ran hastily down the street until he came to the next corner.

Then he waved his arm in the air, and uttered a shout.

"Coach—coach!" he said. "Make haste!"

CHAPTER DCCCXIV.

DICK TURPIN FINDS THAT THE POLICE OFFICERS KEEP VERY PERTINACIOUSLY UPON HIS TRACK.

A LUMBERING sound succeeded, and then soon afterwards a hackney-coach came rolling round the corner.

Dick and the mysterious lady walked towards it, both of them scarcely able to control their laughter when they saw what the officer was doing.

When the coach stopped, the officer opened the door with great alacrity, and stood with the handle in his hand, waiting for them to enter.

Dick was almost afraid of this man's scrutiny.

But he played his part to great perfection, and with the utmost courtesy handed the lady into the coach.

He followed, and the officer, closing the door, said:

"Where to, my lady?"

This question had evidently been expected, for, in ready tones, she replied:

"To St. James's Palace—quickly!"

She placed a piece of silver in the officer's hand as she spoke, and he was so overcome by the directions that had been given him that he was scarcely able to stand upright, he bowed so repeatedly.

"To St. James's Palace," he said, to the jarvey—"quick!"

Off rolled the clumsy vehicle, and the officer stood in a reflective attitude.

"What's that you've just done!" said a voice, and, turning round, he saw the chief officer, who had made his way from the back to the front of the house.

"Oh, nothing, sir—nothing at all particular!"

"You're a fool!" was the angry reply. "Who got into the hackney-coach?"

"The lady of the mansion, sir."

"Was she alone?"

"No—an old gentleman was with her."

The officer swore fearfully.

"It was Dick Turpin, I'll swear!" he said. "There was no old gentleman in the house—I'll take my oath to that, for I searched in every corner! We're diddled again! No, no—not exactly! If I lose sight of the coach it's odd to me!"

So saying, he set off at a smart run.

The hackney-coach could be seen in the distance, for the street was a long and straight one.

The officer managed to diminish the distance between him and it very considerably, and, having done so, he slightly relaxed his endeavours.

He was afraid to go too near, lest he should excite the suspicions of those within.

"I will have him!" he muttered, in a determined voice—"I will have him, if it costs me my life! But I know I shall succeed, and then I shall pocket the whole of the reward for myself! The fools I have got with me will then look foolish, I'm thinking!"

A fresh idea at this moment occurred to the officer, for he ran onwards at a greatly-increased rate.

The fact was, he all at once thought that if he could manage to reach the back of the coach unseen he might hang on, and so ride with it without fatiguing himself by running, so that when the time came he should have plenty of strength and energy to accomplish his intentions.

This was a feat by no means difficult of accomplishment.

It was impossible to detect his footsteps while the lumbering, and whirling, and rattling of the hackney-coach was sounding in their ears, and therefore, panting, breathless, and excited, the officer at last clutched hold of the back of the vehicle.

To perch himself up then was a comparatively easy matter, and having done so, he wiped the perspiration from his brow.

The officer fondly flattered himself that he had not been seen by the occupants of the coach.

But in this particular he was greatly mistaken.

The vehicle happened to be furnished, like most of its class, with a small oval-shaped pane of glass at the back, which could at pleasure be covered by a cushion.

This cushion Dick anxiously removed as soon as the coach started, and looked down the street.

It was well he took this precaution, for before long he saw the officer running hastily along.

More than this he did not wait to see, but at once covered the cushion over the glass, lest he should himself be observed, and in a few words acquainted his companion with this fresh danger.

"I had thought of that," she said, "and I will tell you how you can deceive him easily."

Dick regarded her with admiration.

"In the first place," she said, "we must change a part of our dresses. You see I have on a dark-coloured dress; well, here, rolled up under my cloak, is another just like it. Take off your coat, and hat, and wig, and put on this dress, my cloak, and hat, and draw the veil down close over your countenance—you will then be taken for me."

Dick comprehended the plan instantly.

Yet he hesitated to avail himself of it.

"No—no," he said. "I cannot consent to letting you run into such peril—you know not what would be the consequences of discovery."

"Fear nothing on my account," said the lady, with a light laugh. "I care nothing for such consequences as those. I can afford to laugh at them. Do not hesitate or scruple to do as I tell you, and never doubt again that a woman can be grateful for an important service rendered her."

"You have proved your gratitude," said Dick—"in fact, the service you have done this night for me outweighs the one I have performed for you."

"Never mind that question—quickly slip on these things."

Dick hastily divested himself of his hat, coat, and wig, and, not without a little joking and laughing, assumed the feminine garment that was held out to him.

It was by no means a good fit, yet in the darkness it would no doubt do very well.

The lady's cloak was next thrown over his shoulders, then her hat put on, and the fall drawn down.

It was then impossible to distinguish his features, except that his eyes could be seen sparkling with more than usual brightness.

The lady then put on the tight-fitting coat that Dick had just discarded.

She put on the wig also, and the hat, and the disguise was really wonderful.

"Now," she said, "whenever you like I will stop the coach, and I must leave you to your own devices. The officer behind us will imagine that I have got out, and will fall into the natural mistake of supposing that I am you, and therefore will follow the coach, while you can discard this clothing at the first opportunity."

"But when this trick is discovered," said Dick—"that is what I tremble for."

"Then do not be alarmed; leave me to my resources as I shall leave you, and I'll warrant I succeed."

"I have not much fear, judging by what you have already done to-night."

"Will you have the coach stopped now?"

"Yes, when I have again expressed my thanks."

"No, I will not listen to them; it is from me the thanks are due; or, if it pleases you better, we will consider the obligation mutual. There, that will do."

She pulled the check-string as she spoke, and the coachman stopped at once.

They were in a quiet, ill-lighted street.

The lady placed her hand upon the handle of the coach door and turned it.

Then Dick stepped forth.

Neither ventured to speak, lest the tones of their voices should be recognised.

It now most unfortunately happened that this police officer behind the coach, finding it was about to stop, had alighted, and by the most wonderful chance in the world, met with one of his fraternity.

"Here," he said, "stand with me in this shadow, and be ready to assist me."

They watched, and then saw Dick Turpin alight.

"Why, it's the lady who has got down, eh?" the officer.

"So it is."

The faint sound of their voices reached Dick's ears.

He wondered what he should do to escape.

A bold thought then occurred to him, and without pausing to consider much about it, he advanced with an easy and confident step towards the front door of the house opposite which the hackney-coach had stopped.

In the meanwhile, the vehicle itself was set in motion The officer now was considerably puzzled.

But he believed he jumped to the correct conclusion.

That was, that the lady had so far aided Turpin in his escape, and had taken this the first opportunity of leaving him.

The idea that they had changed dresses did not occur to him, yet he felt some kind of a doubt upon his mind, for he said to the officer he had so unexpectedly met with:

"Just keep an eye on that lady there, and watch where she goes, and let me know all about it. You understand? I can't stay longer, for time is precious."

He darted off down the street as he spoke, and Dick had the satisfaction of seeing him go.

Dick knocked boldly at the door of this house, because he saw a red light burning, denoting that it was the residence of a surgeon.

His summons was quickly attended to, and he entered the house just as the officer ran by after the hackney-coach.

On the door was a brass plate, and Dick made out the name to be Markham.

The door was answered by a rather sleepy-looking female servant, who inquired what was wanted.

"Does Dr. Markham live here," Dick asked, stepping across the threshold.

"He does."

"Is he at home?"

"Yes."

"Then tell him I wish to speak to him for a moment. I will stay here for your reply."

The girl retired, leaving Turpin in the passage.

"Now," he said, "if it was not for that confounded officer outside I would make a bolt and be off at once; but there were two of them, I feel certain—I heard their voices. Confound it, what shall I do, and what shall I say to Dr. Markham when I meet him?"

CHAPTER DCCCXV.

DICK TURPIN CREATES NO SLIGHT AMOUNT OF CONSTERNATION IN TWO HOUSEHOLDS.

Just while Dick Turpin was asking himself these questions, his eye happened to fall upon some dusky objects that were revealed by the dim sputtering light of the candle that had been left by the servant girl upon the hall-table.

These dusky objects were hanging close to the wall, and upon examination they proved to be a coat and a three-cornered felt hat.

In a moment, Dick made up his mind what to do.

He listened.

But could hear nothing of the doctor approaching.

Then, as quick as thought, he tore off the feminine apparel he had on, exchanging it for the coat and hat.

He rolled all the lot up into a bundle.

A complete metamorphosis had now taken place, and the question now remained to him, should he stay where he was and enjoy the bewilderment of the servant, or should he endeavour to make his way out of the house unseen?

As there appeared to be yet time, he decided upon the latter course.

He was in hopes of finding that the house had a separate back entrance, and was about to seek it, when he was startled by the appearance of a light at no great distance.

There was only one way now in which he could retreat, and that was by ascending the staircase, and accordingly he availed himself of it, bounding up three or four steps at a time.

The stairs were well carpeted, so that in his ascent he made scarcely any noise.

He paused upon the first landing.

"Eh! what?" he heard a voice say in the passage below, which he conjectured must belong to Dr. Markham—"what, a patient—where has she gone? Here, Mary Ann, you hussy, what do you mean?"

Dick did not wait to listen to any more.

He left the doctor and the servant to explain the mystery as well as they were able.

He still carried the bundle of feminine apparel, his determination being to dispose of it as soon as he found a convenient opportunity of so doing.

Another flight of stairs commenced from the first landing, and Dick ascended these.

"I will make my way out on to the roof," he muttered. "That, after all, will be the easiest and most effectual plan. I shall then quite get rid of my pertinacious foes."

He was of necessity compelled to be very careful.

But the house was silent, and he could hear quite distinctly Dr. Markham and Mary Ann wrangling together in the passage.

His hope was that he should find one of the attics unoccupied.

He knew that very often the topmost room in a house was used only for the storage of lumber, and boxes, and such-like.

Pausing at length before a small, ruinely-fitting door, he stood hesitating whether to raise the latch or not.

This state of indecision quickly passed away, and with all the secrecy he was master of, he slowly raised the latch, then pushed the door open to the extent of about a couple of inches.

He found at once that the attic was plunged in darkness.

Placing his ear close to the edge of the door, he listened with great intentness.

But no sound resembling the regular breathing of a sleeper reached him, and therefore he concluded that the room was empty.

Boldly pushing open the door, he crossed the threshold.

Before him he could see distinctly enough the small latticed window.

He advanced towards it slowly, for although the place was dark, yet there came enough light through the window to enable him to see that it was piled up with a miscellaneous assortment of objects.

The window was reached without an alarm being given.

He opened it, and in another moment was on the tiles.

He crept forward with as much rapidity as the nature of the place would allow of; and having in this way passed over the roofs of about half a dozen houses, he paused, for he found himself at the corner of a street that branched off from the main one.

Further progress in that direction was impossible, and so he resolved to carry out his original intention of entering by one of the attic windows, and getting out.

The present, however, was a very favourable opportunity of disposing of the bundle of clothes, and he looked about him for a good place of concealment.

He could think of nothing better than a chimney.

So, crawling up the tiles, he stood upon the ridge of the roof, and was then able to place his hand upon the top of the chimney.

He had to use some degree of force to thrust the bundle down it, but he pushed it out of sight, and was content.

"There," he said; "it won't be long before that's found, but I shall be far enough away by that time. There'll be a smoke, too, in somebody's house when the fire is lighted in the morning, I shouldn't wonder."

Returning to the attic window, he remained for some time on the outside of it, listening, and wondering whether to attempt to effect an entrance or not.

While he was yet undecided, he suddenly caught sight of a flash of light.

He drew back at once, yet not so far as to prevent him from seeing that the door leading into the attic he was about to enter was thrown open, and a man carrying a candle crossed the threshold.

He was a thin, pale, sickly-looking fellow, and his countenance, now that the candle-light shone upon it, looked the colour of dirty white wax.

The candle was in his left hand, and in his right was a bundle loosely tied up.

He seemed in a great state of dread and alarm, and Dick noticed that his hand trembled excessively when he deposited the bundle on the wretched little bed in one corner.

Then, seating himself upon it, and placing the candle by his side, this man drew forth his handkerchief, and wiped his face.

A being looking more ill at ease it was scarcely possible to find.



[DISCOVERY OF THE SKELETON IN THE VAULT.]

No doubt he could have assumed a different demeanour had he liked to disguise his own feelings; but just then the man thought that no eye was upon him, and that there was no necessity for hypocrisy.

Dick continued to watch his movements with great interest, for although he had come up into the attic, which was furnished as a sleeping-chamber, yet he showed no signs of being about to retire to rest—in fact, judging by the look of the bed, it would seem as though this man had got up, dressed himself, and then descended the stairs for the purpose of fetching the bundle.

Having removed the perspiration from his face, he again put his hand into his pocket, and drew forth another object, which the next moment Dick perceived was a knife.

He opened it quickly, and then it could be seen that the blade was very bright, and of about six or eight inches in length.

This knife, open as it was, the man placed in the [illegible] of his apparel, and, as he did so, a look of great ferocity overspread his disagreeable-looking countenance.

His lips moved slightly, as though he was muttering something to himself.

Then slowly rising to his feet, he took the candle and walked towards the door again.

But he trembled so excessively in every limb that he could scarcely put one leg before the other.

He was evidently using the greatest of caution, treading all the time on tiptoe.

No sooner did he leave the attic than Dick Turpin approached the window.

He drew his own conclusions from what he had just seen, and as he opened the attic window he muttered

"It seems to me very probable that not only shall I make my escape by entering this house, but render one of its inmates a service as well."

Price One Halfpenny.

He stepped lightly on to the little dressing-table underneath the window as he spoke, and from thence on to the floor.

Half a dozen strides then took him to the door, and, looking down the staircase, he could perceive the glimmering of the light below him.

These stairs were not carpeted, however, and as he had his heavy riding-boots on, it was rather difficult for Dick to descend with any degree of silence, yet by treading on his toes he managed admirably.

On the next flight he found a carpet, and felt more reassured.

Leaning over the bannisters, he could now see the form of the man below him.

With one hand he was shading the light of the candle, while he made a long pause between every step.

His countenance now looked more diabolical than ever, although it could be seen that he was suffering much from the agonies of fear and suspense.

On the first floor he came to a halt, and Dick paused upon the staircase about half a dozen steps from the bottom.

His body was effectually hidden by the angle of the staircase, though by leaning forward he could watch all the man's movements with the greatest ease.

The silence that prevailed in that house was something terrible, and it seemed to oppress the man Dick was watching greatly.

But he moved towards one of the doors opening from the landing, and then, with trembling fingers, raised the latch.

The door opened slowly, yielding to his touch, and by the manner in which it was done, Dick came to the conclusion that this was not the first time he had gained admittance to that chamber.

Crossing the threshold, the man closed the door behind him, and was lost to view.

But Disk almost with one bound sprang down the remainder of the staircase.

Then hastily opening the door, he rushed into the room, and was just in time to hear a loud shriek and to see the man standing by the side of the bed with his arm uplifted and with the knife glittering in his hand.

CHAPTER DCCCXVI.

DICK TURPIN RETURNS TO THE INN, AND FAILS TO PERCEIVE THE SIGNAL-LIGHT.

THE would-be murderer's face was turned towards the door, which, to his horror, had been flung open.

The blow he was about to deliver was arrested—his arm was suspended in the air.

Without an instant's pause, Dick seized the man firmly by the back of his neck and his wrist.

"Wretch," he cried, "you are foiled, and only just in time!"

A loud shriek was again heard, and something white rolled out from the other side of the bed.

Dick turned his face in that direction, and caught sight of a very wonderful-looking night-cap.

"Murder," said a voice—"it's murder! Oh, police—police! Where's the police?"

She made a frantic dash into an adjoining room that appeared to be a dressing-room.

Then flinging the window open, she renewed her cries.

A little aged man raised himself in the bed, looking not a little confused and bewildered at these strange events.

"Here," said Dick—"here is the assassin! Seize him—hold him tightly while I go for assistance. He is harmless now."

He wrested the knife from the man's trembling fingers while he spoke, and the man whose life he had fully intended to take seized him with a clutch that it would be quite useless to think of shaking off.

Dick then hastily left the room and sped down the stairs.

"Confound that woman!" he ejaculated. "What a dreadful uproar she's creating! All the neighbourhood will be roused, and I shall be seized. However, I can't leave this house too quickly—that's certain."

He reached the front door in an inconceivable short space of time, and, unfastening it, flung it open and darted forth.

But quite unexpectedly he met with an obstacle.

No sooner had he crossed the threshold than he found himself clasped tightly by some one.

"Not so fast, my fine fellow!" said a voice. "So it's you, is it? It's no good struggling and kicking—I have you!"

Dick then found that he had been so unfortunate as to run plump into the arms of a police officer, doubtless the one who had been set to watch a little lower down the street, and he had come there in consequence of the woman's cries.

"Fool!" said Dick, struggling to release himself, "you make a mistake; the culprit is upstairs, and, if you are not quick, will escape!"

"Oh, d—n you!" said the officer, who only held Dick all the tighter.

Hasty footsteps could now be heard approaching from various directions, and Dick was justly apprehensive that he should be overpowered by numbers.

It is true he could easily have cleared himself from the charge that was now made against him, but then there was the fearful risk that he might be recognised.

Therefore, summoning up all his energies, he struggled with the officer, and with a sudden wrench succeeded in releasing himself.

So violent was the disengagement, that the officer went spinning round and round until, in some mysterious way, his legs got entangled with one another, and he fell headlong into the gutter.

Dick darted round the corner and was out of sight in an instant.

Some of those persons who were approaching gave him the chase, but they quickly abandoned it.

Dick had seen enough of that quarter of the town, and so he troubled himself no further to ascertain what complexion affairs would assume.

His thoughts in a moment reverted to the loss of his bonny mare Black Bess.

She had escaped, he felt quite certain, but whether she was wounded or not he was by no means so certain.

The question was, where should he find her?

Strangely enough the idea did not at first occur to him that the most natural and likely thing for her to do would be to make her way at full speed to the inn.

But after a moment's reflection he felt sure that this was what she had done.

"I hope none of the officers have followed her," he said, "or we shall find ourselves in a serious fix. I am most certain she has gone, however, and the best thing I can do is to make my way back with what speed I can."

Dick looked about him, and, by the aspect of the sky, began to be apprehensive that he could not possibly return at the appointed time.

"I will take a hackney-coach as far as I can," he muttered, "and then walk the remainder of the distance; but I fear there is no chance of my arriving there before daybreak; and yet if Black Bess returns riderless, who can tell what they may do—what danger may be incurred from anxiety on my account?"

Dick was thinking more of Maud than anyone else just then, and for her sake he was extremely anxious to get back, as he well knew what a dreadful state of alarm and dread she would be in until she saw him once again.

Luckily a hackney-coach happened to roll by at this moment, and Dick entered it without delay, telling the man to drive him as far along the Oxford Road as he thought proper.

It was really quite a wonder that this vehicle happened to have a couple of tolerably good horses harnessed to it, and the consequence was that Dick made much better progress than he anticipated.

Yet the darkness seemed gradually to be rolling away and before he had got half-way to his destination the new day had fairly dawned.

Seeing this, Dick was almost in despair.

But it was impossible to urge the horses faster.

He continued to ride until within quite a short distance of Ealing Common.

Then he alighted, and gave the coachman such a liberal fare as actually to extort words of thankfulness from his lips.

Striking off across the fields, Dick made his way by

the nearest possible route to the little plantation at the back of the inn.

Already it was fairly daylight, and from time to time he cast many anxious glances around him.

It was tolerably certain that Jack Marshall and his officers were somewhere in the neighbourhood, and therefore very necessary that he should use all circumspection.

By crossing the fields, however, and keeping close to the hedges, he managed to remain out of sight.

Without accident he reached at last the little plantation, and plunged into its depths with a feeling of great relief, for he felt confident no officers had watched his movements.

The plantation, though dense, was small, and therefore a walk that only lasted a few minutes served to take him to the back of the stable.

He approached with great cautiousness, stopping every few paces to listen.

Presently, reaching a place where he could just obtain a view of the inn, he looked very anxiously at the window at which the signal was to appear.

From that distance, and in the daylight, it was no easy matter to discover whether the candle was burning there or not.

He shaded his eyes with his hands, and looked long and earnestly.

He came at last to the conclusion that the signal had gone.

Not knowing what had happened, and fearing, from the events that had recently occurred, that some disaster had befallen his friends, Dick crept closer and closer to the little door at the back of the stable, feeling very undecided as to what he should do next.

A peaceful calm was all around him.

To this he attached but little significance, as it might be after all only a calmness of a deceptive character.

CHAPTER DCCCXVII.

TOM KING ARRIVES WITH HIS CHARGE AT THE RESIDENCE OF THE YOUNG BARRISTER.

"I AM ready now—quite ready," said Tom King, on the same evening, to Alice Whately. "You will come now, and I will in a short time place you under the care of one who, I hope, will always act the part of a true protector to you."

"I am ready, too," said the young girl, quickly, and in tones of gladness.

But immediately afterwards her feelings underwent a change, and tears sparkled in her eyes.

She had to bid farewell to those who had so greatly befriended her—to the only persons, indeed, who had turned a sympathising ear to her sad story.

She had been so long accustomed to the rigours and cruelties of people at the asylum that kindness now seemed to melt her heart at once.

After all, the lesson, though a very hard one, could not be without producing beneficial results.

Henceforth she would always know the value of happiness.

Like good health, those only can appreciate it who have lost it.

Some little delay therefore took place before she could tear herself away from these new acquaintances, and yet who, owing to the strange circumstances under which they had been brought together, seemed to have as much claim upon her as the oldest friends.

"You must excuse the mode of transit," said Tom King, apologising with a sickly smile; "but the fact is, it is the only one at our disposal; and there is this advantage connected with it, that you will quickly reach your destination."

"Make no excuses, pray," said the young girl, earnestly; "to you indeed, above all the rest, do I feel myself most indebted."

She clasped his hands tightly in her own while she spoke.

Tom King was too overcome by emotion to say anything further, and believing that the parting, if prolonged, would only be the more painful, he took the opportunity to lead her away from the inn.

Tom Davis was playing the part of scout. His watchful eyes fixed upon the proceedings of the officers, and they did not venture to go forth until he had assured them that the coast was clear, and that it was perfectly safe to do so.

Then, with as much rapidity as possible, they sought the stable, led out the horse, and mounted.

Tom King placed the young girl on the saddle behind him in such a manner that she could hold herself securely on by clasping him round the waist, while, at the same time, it left his hands free to guide the horse, or be prepared for any emergency that might arise.

He urged his horse at once into a gallop, and the rapid strokes of the animal's hoofs upon the road made conversation almost an impossibility.

And it was designedly that this was done, for Tom was in no humour to speak.

It was easy for anyone to see that his spirits were very much depressed—there was a weariness in all his tones and movements.

And so, almost in perfect silence, the journey to London was performed.

Tom King drew his hat down closely over his features, and, by great good fortune, escaped either an encounter with the officers or the attention of anyone.

Upon gaining London, Tom King, of course, began to look about him more warily.

But he saw nothing to excite his alarm.

He then asked something that he had hitherto forgotten, and that was the address of the young barrister.

"I cannot give it to you," said the young girl, "but I can direct you to it. It is one of those streets not far from the Temple, that leads from the Strand down to the river Thames. The house is old-fashioned and curiously built; it cannot be mistaken for any other—at least, I have been told so, and I have a sketch of it, so that I should not fail to know it again."

With this assurance Tom King was content, and once turned his horse's head towards the Strand—not then, as now, a busy, bustling thoroughfare, but one in which the houses lay few and far between.

"That's the street," said the young girl at length, and Tom King immediately turned down it.

"Go slowly," she said, "and I will point out the house."

It was reached in a few moments.

It was built at the lower end of the street—that is to say, nearest to the river.

Upon gazing upon it, the breast of the young girl was filled with emotion.

Slowly Tom descended from his steed, and assisted her also to alight.

But Alice clung to him, half in tears and half in sobs.

"I cannot go to him—indeed I cannot," she faltered—"it seems so very, very strange! Now that the last moment has come my courage fails me!"

It was no easy task for Tom to speak words of consolation and encouragement under these circumstances; but he tried his best.

"It is but natural that you should think thus," he replied; "I fully expected it. But I suppose Mr. Spencer does not live in this house by himself?"

"Oh, no, no," was the reply—"he only occupies two rooms here!"

"Then there must be a landlady—the woman of the house. Have you ever heard him speak of her?"

"Oh, yes, often—often! Mrs. Weaver. Norman told me of her, and always spoke in terms of the highest praise."

"That will do, then," said Tom King, quite suddenly; "we shall get over the difficulty now."

"In what way?" she asked, timidly. "What shall you do?"

"You will see. We will knock at the door, and ask for this Mrs. Weaver. You shall remain with her for a short time to recover your self-possession, while I——"

"Well, what will you do?"

"I will ascend to Mr. Spencer's room and prepare him for your unexpected arrival."

Even now the young girl trembled and shrank back.

But Tom overcame her diffidence by taking hold of her hand and drawing it beneath his arm.

In this way he led her close to the door of the house, and then knocked sharply for admission.

The hour was rather a late one, and therefore some moments elapsed before the summons was regarded.

Then the door was opened, and there appeared upon the threshold a tall, portly woman, with silvery hair and a pleasant countenance.

In tones which harmonised well with her appearance she inquired their business.

"I believe," said Tom, "that a young barrister named Spencer resides here?"

"Yes, sir, you are quite right—Mr. Norman Spencer. He——"

"This young lady," interrupted Tom, "is a particular and dear friend of his. He little expects her appearance now, and therefore I wish to prepare him for the visit. Will you, then, take charge of her while I make my way to Mr. Spencer's room?"

But tears started to the good woman's eyes, and she seemed scarcely less agitated than Norman himself might have been.

"Why, bless and save us, is it really so? Yes, it—you must be——"

"Yes," said Tom, "you will quickly come to an understanding with each other; and, as time is precious, in the meanwhile kindly inform me how I shall find my way to Mr. Spencer's room."

'Ascend the staircase," said Mrs. Weaver—"that lamp will enable you to see your way. Knock at the first door you come to on your right hand."

"On the first floor?"

"Yes."

This was enough.

Without another word, Tom strode hurriedly along the passage, and ascended the stairs.

Coming quickly to the door that had been described to him, he knocked softly at it with his knuckles.

A pleasant, cheery voice immediately cried:

"Come in!"

Tom opened the door and entered, as requested.

The apartment was only dimly lighted.

On the table a lamp was burning; but it was covered with a very large, conical-shaped shade, that cut off almost all the rays of light that would have been dispersed about the room, and reflected them upon the table.

Yet, although the room appeared to be in semi-obscurity, Tom was able to make out that its walls were lined with books, and that the table was loaded with papers.

He saw, too, the form of a young man of noble and commanding beauty, but whose stooping shoulders and pallid face showed too close an application to study.

Upon Tom's entrance, he rose to his feet, and looked inquiringly at his visitor.

"I am a stranger to you," said Tom, bowing stiffly and speaking in cold and measured accents, "yet I am not aware that that will matter. I am merely a messenger, and yet the bearer of most important tidings."

"Indeed, sir! You speak mysteriously."

"I do not wish to keep up any mystery, believe me, and yet I don't wish to come direct to my subject."

"Perhaps it would be better," said the barrister, who seemed either not pleased with the appearance of his visitor, or angry at having been disturbed from his studies.

"Well, then," Tom said, "tell me whether you remember the name of Whately? Oh, you start! It is of one who bears that name that I come to speak."

"What—oh, what is it?" said the young man, pressing his hands tightly over his heart—"what—oh, what is it? Do not keep me any longer in suspense! Tell me—do tell me! If——"

"Prepare yourself for a great shock," said Tom; "but the tidings I bear are those of joy and not sorrow."

"Is it—is it——" gasped the young man; but he was unable to finish his sentence.

"It is of Alice Whately that I am about to speak," said Tom.

He was interrupted with a sharp cry, and the young barrister sank back into his chair.

"Let me implore you," he cried, "to tell me all you have to communicate of Alice Whately in as few words as you can! She disappeared most mysteriously more than twelve months ago, and, although I have used every effort, I have never been able to find her since."

CHAPTER DCCCXVIII.

TOM KING HAS AN INTERESTING INTERVIEW WITH NORMAN SPENCER.

Tom King at this moment drew a chair up to the table and seated himself in it in such a position that he was able to look keenly into the countenance of the young man before him.

"Before I satisfy you," he continued, "let me know in what relation you stood to Miss Alice Whately?"

The pale cheek of the student flushed slightly as he answered:

"Chance threw us into each other's society. We learned to love each other, and she promised to be my wife. There you have in a few words everything."

Tom nodded.

"I had understood such was the case; but explain how it was when you learned that she had disappeared that you did not discover her whereabouts?"

"That's a long story to begin," he said. "Before I tell you, answer me one or two questions."

"Well, say on."

"Have you seen Miss Alice Whately?"

"Yes."

"Recently?"

"Yes."

"Don't be so laconic—have some pity; you see how dreadfully this agitates me. I did not know I was so weak."

He leaned his head upon his hands as he spoke.

"Is she well?" he continued.

"I can say yes to that also. And now tell me, if you will, how it was you learned of her disappearance?"

"Well, then," said the young man, hesitatingly, "you must know that the attachment between myself and Miss Alice Whately was, to call things by their right names, a clandestine one—neither her mother nor her father-in-law knew anything about it."

"So I believe," said Tom King.

"Well, then, we had agreed to keep it secret for some time longer yet, owing to my position, I was struggling hard for a livelihood; now I am literally overwhelmed with business, and I may, without egotism or vanity, confess that, by great good fortune, I now occupy a prominent position in my profession."

"I rejoice to hear it," said Tom King; "but I fear you have purchased it at a high price."

"How so?"

"By the loss of your health and bodily vigour."

"I have kept at it too closely, I am well aware of that; but I did it in order that I might drown thought. It is only by keeping myself constantly employed that I have been enabled to retain my calmness in the least."

"I don't wonder at it. And now to the point again."

"I see, you are determined to hear all. Well, then, when I parted with Miss Whately it was agreed upon between us that we should continue a correspondence with each other. After a time, however, all letters ceased, and, although I wrote repeatedly, I could get no reply.

"This was just about the time of Mrs. Whately's death, or, to speak more correctly, just after it.

"Wondering at such strange conduct, I went at last to Morton Park, which, as you may be aware, was a residence of the Whately's.

"I sent in my name, and was ushered into the presence of Mr. Lucas.

"I thought that he regarded me with an expression of mingled suspicion and hatred. I requested to see Miss Whately, and he inquired, in a calm voice, what was my business.

"I said that concerned her alone.

"'Well, then,' he replied, 'I have to inform you of something that I thought you knew already. Most unfortunately, Miss Whately has taken her mother's death very deeply to heart—in fact, her sorrow was beyond expression, and now, I grieve to say, her intellects are tottering under the shock.'

"This was dreadful news indeed. Mr. Lucas continued to speak in these calm, placid tones.

"'I thought it best to be explicit,' he said. 'Her condition has given me the greatest uneasiness, and I have

already called in the most celebrated physicians to see her. They all shook their heads, and fear the case is hopeless. They made many inquiries as to whether insanity had ever been known before in her family, but I was unable to give the information.'

"'Insanity!' I exclaimed. 'Surely you do not mean to tell me that Miss Whately is really mad?'

"'It grieves me deeply to say such is indeed the case,' he replied, 'and the physicians are unanimous in saying that the only chance she has of recovering lies in complete quiet and seclusion. As time wears on, she may then overcome this terrible malady—at any rate, it is the only thing that offers even the ghost of a chance. So you see that, let your business be what it may, it is impossible for you to see her.'

"I was so stunned and bewildered by this intelligence that I can scarcely remember the remainder of the interview.

"For once my usual presence of mind deserted me—I was overcome with anguish.

"Alice a maniac! The very thought was horrible in the extreme; but as I pondered over the whole affair, I began to think that it was not altogether unreasonable or unlikely that she should sorrow so deeply, and that it should have such an effect upon her delicate, sensitive frame.

"But then I considered that it was but temporary, and in a very short time all trace of the attack would disappear.

"In this hope I indulged for some time. Mr. Lucas informed me that it was necessary to confine her to her own chamber. She was only led forth at stated intervals, and then no one was allowed to see her.

"I contented myself with continually inquiring after her, and thought that, as the physicians had prescribed it, all was for the best, yet I clung to the hope that if she could but have seen me it would have gone far towards restoring her scattered senses.

"Would indeed that I had been resolute, but I allowed the chance to pass by.

"The accounts I continually received were favourable in the extreme, until, all at once, I was completely prostrated by the unanticipated intelligence that her madness had taken a most violent and dangerous form, and that it had become no longer practicable or safe to keep her at Morton Park, and that, under the advice of the physicians, she had been removed to a private lunatic asylum, where her disease had been well studied and was thoroughly understood, and where she would have a better chance of recovery than elsewhere.

"Can you, sir," said the young barrister, with deep feeling—"can you imagine what were my sensations upon receipt of this news?

"I was like a madman myself, and committed a thousand acts of extravagance.

"I remember Mr. Lucas saying to me:

"'I trust, sir, that as I have treated you confidentially you will keep this affair as great a secret as you can. It would indeed be most unfortunate for Alice should any report of her actual condition gain circulation. I shall give out that she is travelling on the Continent, and hope continually for her restoration to her senses, otherwise it might materially interfere with her prospects in life.'

"Reluctantly I promised to keep secret, and so we separated.

"Then it seems that Mr. Lucas had a quarrel with one of the servants—one who, to a certain extent, he had taken into his confidence.

"The fellow presumed upon his knowledge, and determined to try what power he had over his master.

"Mr. Lucas indignantly turned him forth.

"With this fact I was not made acquainted until afterwards.

"The man sought me out, and came to me, saying:

"'Mr. Spencer, you have been fearfully imposed upon by my master, Mr. Lucas. Oh, poor dear Miss Alice—poor dear Miss Alice!'

"'What is it?' I exclaimed, in great excitement—'what is it you are telling me?'

"'It is given out that she is mad,' continued the man, 'but it is nothing of the kind! I have certain knowledge that the whole is an infamous plot on Mr. Lucas's part, in order to get the whole of the property into his own hands! He has either had her made away with or shut up in some lonely, out-of-the-way place, where she cannot escape, and where no one can get to her!'

"'Impossible!' I exclaimed. 'You are traducing your master! What motive could he have had for such conduct?'

"'The love of gain, sir,' he replied. 'He married Mrs. Whately for her money, and then was bitterly disappointed to discover afterwards that everything belonged to Alice except an annuity, which died with her mother. Now, you see, as the heiress is out of the way, he comes in for everything. He pretends to hold it in trust, but he uses everything as though entirely his own; and if you try, you can easily obtain confirmation of my words.'

"I promised to inquire into so serious a matter, and the first thing I elucidated by my inquiries was that he had quarrelled with his master, and had been discharged, therefore I ceased to attach any importance to his communication, believing it to be made out of malice only.

"And from that time to this I have never been able to see Alice, and scarcely to hear of her.

"I have been to Mr. Lucas twice or thrice. He always has received me with the greatest urbanity, and always seemed deeply affected whenever the name of Alice was mentioned.

"One day I called and found he was engaged.

"To my surprise, however, he came out to see me, and said:

"'I am aware how deep an interest you feel in my daughter's unfortunate condition; and just at the present time a couple of physicians happen to be present who have just seen her, and who will give you their impartial opinion respecting her case.'

"I was anxious in the extreme to see these two physicians, and was introduced to a couple of plainly-dressed, gentlemanly-looking men.

"In a few words, Mr. Lucas made them acquainted with who I was, and requested them to speak respecting Alice before me as they would if I was not present.

CHAPTER DCCCXIX.

TOM KING BIDS NORMAN SPENCER AND ALICE FAREWELL.

"THE physicians smiled, and looked very serious. The senior one spoke:

"'We—that is, Dr. Templeton and myself—much regret what we have to say; but the fact is, Miss Whately's case has taken an unfavourable turn, and it may be requisite to keep her for a considerable time longer under restraint. She is in receipt of every care and attention, and, if recovery is possible, rest assured it will take place. By Mr. Lucas's request, we are giving the case almost our exclusive attention.'

"I bowed, but could not speak, for my throat swelled up and ached just then as it does now."

The young barrister was silent for a moment or two, and then he resumed:

"In short, however, the physicians gave me to understand that her lunacy was very serious, and probably would continue during her life.

"You can scarcely imagine what a shock this gave me; I verily believe that her death would not have caused me so great a pang.

"I had no more to say, and so I left, and that is all that has happened since.

"I have mourned for her as I should mourn for one who had departed this life.

"But now you say you have seen her, and that she is well."

"She is well," said Tom King; "but you must expect to see a great alteration in her appearance. Still, I believe her heart to be wholly and entirely yours, and one object of my visit was to ascertain whether your affections for her had undergone any change."

"Change?" echoed the young man, excitedly. "They can never change! Why do you find me at this midnight hour poring over these documents when, I assure you, there is not the least necessity for me to perform this labour myself? Why do you find me the shadow of what I once was? It is because my grief at her loss has been consuming me."

"Then, in that case," said Tom, cautiously, "with a

fortune, or without, you would be equally ready to make her your bride?"

"Without—without!" said the young man. "It is herself, not her wealth, that I love; and now there is no necessity, for, by my industry, I am in receipt of a very large income indeed!"

"Then," said Tom King, "prepare yourself for a surprise."

Mr. Spencer regarded him fixedly.

"The story," Tom began, "that was told you by that servant was the truth. Miss Whately was never mad—no more mad than you and I are at this present moment; the whole was a base and hideous plot upon Mr. Lucas's part, and his object was to obtain the whole of her estates. He paid the keepers of the so-called lunatic asylum very largely, and they, being won over to his interests, kept Miss Whately a wretched prisoner there, declaring, on their honour as physicians, that she was insane."

The young man bounded to his feet with a wild cry thrilling from his lips.

"What is this you tell me? A plot—a falsehood? Not insane? Oh, how egregiously I have been duped!"

"You have indeed," said Tom. "I wonder that, with a man of your penetration, Mr. Lucas could have succeeded so easily; but, then, with admirable skill, he chose the surest means of hoodwinking you."

"That's it—that's it! And yet I have been greatly to blame. I shall never forgive myself!"

"Sit down a little while," said Tom, "and recover your composure; there is no need whatever for this excitement. I am happy to say that Miss Whately's danger is over."

"Then she is free?"

"She is."

"How, then, has she recovered her liberty?"

"I, by the aid of two friends of mine, took the law into my own hands and liberated her."

"Then, sir, let me pour out my heartfelt thanks to you, and while I do so I cannot help envying you what you have done—it should have been performed by myself, and by no other."

"That's a natural feeling," said Tom; "but be content that she is at last restored to you."

"Restored to me?"

"Yes. I, having set her free, requested her to tell her history, in order that I might advise her how to act, for she was in dire perplexity, as to return to Mr. Lucas's would have been injudicious in the extreme, and, naturally, she shrank from seeking you out."

"But she should have come to me at once!" he cried, enthusiastically.

"But supposing in the meantime you had changed," said Tom—"and such things have been known ere now—what a pang it would have cost her had she visited you then."

"It would—it would."

"And," he continued, "except you, she has not a single relative in the wide world—she is wholly dependent upon you, and I trust that you will never betray her confidence."

"Never—never."

"As you are a lawyer," said Tom King, "it would be presumptuous on my part were I to attempt to advise you how to act in this matter. Of course you know what legal forms should be gone through; yet, as a friend, I would give you a little advice. Let your first step be to make Alice your wife; you will then have full control over her; and after that, commence your proceedings against Mr. Lucas, and have him well punished for his atrocious crime."

"I will—I will. But I can't think of him now—at least, not until I have seen Alice."

"You shall see her," said Tom King. "I will call her."

He went to the door as he spoke.

But Mr. Spencer followed closely in his steps.

Tom had not to raise his voice to a very high pitch to make Alice hear him.

She was standing on the landing outside.

In a moment she was clasped in her lover's arms.

Tom felt that it would be wrong for him to be the spectator of such a meeting as that was, and therefore, unperceived, he stole away, and silently crept down the staircase.

In the hall below he met Mrs. Weaver.

"You understand the position of that young couple upstairs," he said. "Take Miss Whately under your protection until to-morrow, and then, at the earliest hour, she will be married to Mr. Spencer."

At this moment Tom heard a voice calling upon him, but he made no reply.

Steps could be heard descending the staircase.

It was the young barrister descending. Perhaps Alice was coming too.

No doubt their intention was to pour out their thanks over again.

The parting, Tom felt, could not but be painful in the extreme—at least, to him, and therefore he wished to avoid it as far as possible.

Disregarding the young man's approach, and brushing past Mrs. Weaver, he reached the front door and opened it.

With one bound, he crossed the pavement, and placed himself by the side of his steed.

Ere he could mount, however, he was rapidly seized by a powerful hand, and a voice cried:

"Help—help—help, all of you! A highwayman—a highwayman! A hundred pounds reward!"

Tom wheeled round suddenly, and by an effort of strength endeavoured to free himself from the detaining grasp.

But the hold was too firmly taken.

His adversary was a tall and exceedingly muscular man.

It was just at this moment that Mr. Spencer appeared on the doorway.

Seeing Tom assaulted, and struggling in the hands of some one, he at once joined in the struggle, of course taking Tom's part, for then he knew not who he was.

With one well-planted and vigorously-dealt blow the young barrister laid the police officer prostrate.

Yet, in gasping tones, the man cried out:

"A highwayman—a highwayman! A hundred pounds reward! Seize him—seize him! It's Tom King, the highwayman!"

The loud cries that he had uttered had reached the ears of many persons.

The neighbourhood showed symptoms of being aroused.

The sound of hurrying footsteps could be heard.

Tom King turned round to the young man who had just rendered him this essential service.

"I must thank you for what you have done," he said, "and yet I bitterly regret it."

"Regret it?—why?"

"Because you have laid yourself open to a serious charge, if this man chooses to bring it against you, for what he says is true. I confess that I am Tom King, the highwayman."

The barrister fairly staggered back in his great surprise.

He could scarcely believe the words that had just fallen upon his ears.

"You—you," he said—"you a highwayman? Impossible!"

"It is true," said Tom, "and I say it without boasting; but, without me and my comrades, Alice would still be languishing a prisoner in the miserable cell at the asylum."

"Quick, then, my good friend," said the young barrister, "for so you have shown yourself to be to me. No matter what you may have been to anyone else, I know you not as a highwayman. You have never played a highwayman's part to me, and therefore I say look to your own safety, and I will assist you to the best of my power."

"No—no!" said Tom King. "I am against all the world, and all the world is against me. It's long odds, but the struggle has been a hard and a long one, and is not over yet. Leave me to fight out my own battle, and do not give me cause for regret by mixing yourself up with me—it might cause your ruin. Farewell!"

With these words, Tom King sprang upon his horse's back, and wheeled round suddenly.

Several people had collected, wondering what was the matter.

But before they could make up their minds how to act,

Tom plunged his spurs deeply into his horse's flanks, and set off at a furious gallop.

In a few moments he was out of sight.

But it was not until London was left behind that he drew rein.

Could anyone have gazed into his countenance, it would have been seen that its expression was unusually sad.

All his vivacity was gone.

He did not seem even to have energy enough left to control his steed.

Gradually it slackened its speed, and, guided by its own instinct alone, turned its head homewards.

Some time elapsed before Tom found this out, and when he made the discovery he murmured:

"Well—well, perhaps it's best so. To-night I don't feel in the humour for an adventure. I could not enter into one with the least spirit, therefore the consequences might be fatal to me. And yet what matters it? Well—well, I will cling to life yet."

So saying, he slightly accelerated his horse's motion, and, some hours before he was expected, arrived in the plantation at the back of the Three Spiders Inn.

CHAPTER DCCCXX.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL MEET WITH AN ECCENTRIC TRAVELLER ON THE WINDSOR ROAD.

It was on the same night that Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, according to arrangement, also left the inn with the intention of trying their fortunes on the high-road.

Turpin and Tom King, they knew, had both taken the road to London, so that it left them free to choose three others.

There was the road leading to Windsor, and which generally was pretty well travelled, and, after a short discussion, the two highwaymen agreed that they would take this direction.

Accordingly they made their way down to the river-side, and crossed over at the nearest point.

The road was then straight before them.

"It is such a long while," said Claude Duval, "since we have done anything on this road, and the chances are ten to one against our meeting with any of our old foes; they will think we are not sufficiently audacious to venture on this highway, which properly enough may be called the royal road."

"Well, I suppose it may," replied Jack, "for the King and the rest of them often travel along it. I hope we shall only be so lucky as to meet with a good booty."

"So do I. Adventures I have had in plenty, and now should be very glad to come across something of a more profitable description."

"I am just in the same humour, so it's likely we shall get on very well. How much further do you intend to go before you pull up?"

"Oh, some distance further yet! I think we cannot go too far away from Ealing."

"I am quite convinced of that," was the reply, "and if you had agreed to stop here, I should have urged you to proceed further."

A feeling of the greatest unanimity therefore prevailed between the two.

They trotted on rapidly, but Sixteen-String Jack seemed to take no pleasure in sustaining a conversation.

He would drop off into a surly, taciturn mood, and more than once Claude had to repeat his questions before he could obtain attention.

"What is it that troubles you, and makes you so absent-minded, Jack?" he said, at length. "If you continue in this humour, I am afraid that it will be but a light booty we shall carry back to-night."

"Very likely," said Jack, giving himself a good shake, as though he should thereby relieve himself of the fit of depression that had to all appearances come over him.

"But you have not told me what it is," said Claude. "Why not tell me the cause of your uneasiness?"

"Well, I don't mind if I do, Claude. We have been old pals for a long time, and ought to be able to confer together."

"Quite right. Now, then, as to the cause of your trouble. Is it about the police officers?"

"Oh, no—not at all, and I had not thought of them."

"What is it, then?"

"The shadow."

"Oh!"

After uttering this exclamation, Claude subsided into silence.

"It's that which baffles and bewilders me," continued Sixteen-String Jack. "Try as I will, I can come to no reasonable conjecture concerning it, and I am afraid that you cannot assist me."

"I cannot. The mystery is to me quite as inexplicable as to you."

"Yet surely some day it will be cleared up?"

"Possibly," said Claude. "I should be glad to know just a little more about it than I do. It is no pleasant thing to think about."

"You are right enough there, and, strive as I will, I cannot divert my thoughts from it long together. I wonder if there is any truth in the general belief that the appearance of anything of this kind forebodes misfortune."

"No, no—I should think not. For my own part, I should try to arrive at a rational solution of it."

"So should I."

"And I'll tell you what it is, Jack—to-morrow night, so far as I can see, we shall all be together at the inn. We can arrange to stop, and perchance the shadow may appear. If it does——"

"Well, if it does?"

"Why, Jack, we will follow it. We will try, first of all, to make out where it comes from; and, if we cannot do that, we will follow it, and endeavour to see where it goes to."

"Agreed!" said Jack. "It would have been tried before this but for the important affairs we have had in hand."

"I know that. Has it been seen again?"

"Not that I know of. Tom Davis has not mentioned the subject."

"It is indeed most singular," said Claude, musingly. "There was no object in the room which could throw a shadow at all resembling that, and if there was, how could it move along as it evidently did?"

"That is what passes my comprehension," said Sixteen-String Jack. "and——"

Claude suddenly interrupted him.

"Hark!" he said. "Some one comes."

Jack checked his steed in a moment, and listened.

They could then hear some one coming along the road towards them.

His horse was only going at an easy rate, and the rider was amusing himself by singing snatches of various popular ballads.

"We will try him," said Claude. "He seems to me as much like one of the court gallants as anybody. If he is, we will strip him of all his fine feathers."

"We will. Get your pistols ready, then, and as soon as he is abreast with us ride out."

The highwaymen took up their quarters, and remained motionless as statues.

The traveller, doubtless little suspecting that anyone was lying in wait for him, came trotting along in the same easy style, continuing to burst out every now and then into the fragments of a song.

He soon came near enough for the ambushed highwaymen to catch sight of him, and then they saw that he was attired in a very fashionable costume indeed.

Immediately after this they rode out, and, presenting their pistols at him, bade him deliver.

At the same time, Claude, by a skilful movement of the rein, stopped his horse.

The traveller seemed by no means disconcerted by the encounter—in fact, he must have been amused rather than otherwise, for he placed his hands to his side and laughed heartily.

"What do you say, gentlemen—deliver? Aha! that's good, upon my word—it's the best joke I've had to-night. Deliver! pray what shall I deliver to you?"

"Your money, jewels, watch—any valuables you may have about you," said Claude, sternly. "We are not in the humour to be trifled with, and if you are merry we are not."

"Good again," said the traveller. "You are welcome to all you can find about me. Aha! that's the joke. You

see, I've been in rather good company to-night—the best of company, and to prove it, why, you see, they have stripped me of everything I've got. Well, what's it matter? Hartshorn is a very good fellow, and I'll maintain it against everybody; but if I play cards in his house again, or rattle a dice box, may I be skinned!"

"All this is nothing to us," said Claude Duval. "Once more, will you give us what you have, or will you compel us to take it? We shall be rather rough about it, you may depend."

"Oh, take it—take it," said the stranger, good-humouredly; "you are heartily welcome to all you can find. I said that before, didn't I? If not, I meant it—that's all the same. Didn't you understand me? We've had a little play to-night, and, by gad! I kept losing and losing till they won everything I had got, and took some notes as well. Aha! But what does it signify to me? But I'm plucked this time.

"Oh, heedless youth, beware,
For gambling is a snare.
If you play——"

"Stop your singing," said Claude. "I've heard enough of it."

"You're complimentary!"

"Oh no, not at all; but will you give me your word of honour as a gentleman that what you say is true?"

"Of course I will."

"Then we are to understand that you have been playing and have emptied your pockets, and that is why you take your meeting with us so easy?"

"Precisely, my good fellow—you've hit the right nail on the head this time, if you never accomplished that feat in your life before. And after this little explanation, suppose we bid adieu to each other? Good-night! Aha! It's a joke!"

So saying, this rather eccentric individual touched his horse with the spur and set off at a canter.

Our two friends made no attempt whatever to hinder his departure.

"Well, I hope we are not to take that for a sample of the kind of luck we are going to meet with to-night," said Claude Duval.

"So do I," replied Jack, "though it's rather an odd affair. How coolly he took it, to be sure!"

"Very coolly indeed! It is pretty certain that what money he has lost will not inconvenience him in the least."

"Oh yes, that's tolerably certain, and I only feel sorry that he should have been deprived of it by a lot of gamblers. I daresay, if the truth was known, he was robbed of it."

"Likely enough. But never mind, he's passed; let us forget him. Forward, once more. Perhaps if we get farther on along the road we shall meet with something better worth our while."

"That's very likely," was the reply, "and I only hope we shall."

CHAPTER DCCCXXI.

THE HIGHWAYMEN TURN THE ACCIDENT TO THE STAGE-COACH TO SOME ADVANTAGE.

A MILE or so more of roadway was passed over at a swinging rate, and then the highwaymen once again slackened speed.

Yet on this particular night the high-road appeared to be unusually deserted.

One traveller was all they had yet met with.

It was clear that the highwaymen had chosen an unfortunate night for an expedition in this locality.

Time was wearing on apace, and they were already a long distance from Ealing, so that if they had an adventure at all it was necessary that it should come quickly.

Suddenly passing round a bend in the road, Sixteen-String Jack uttered an exclamation.

One came at the same time from the lips of his companion.

They stopped abruptly.

Some distance off down the road they could see a light flash about in a very singular manner.

It moved from side to side, up and down, in a fashion very much resembling a will-o'-the-wisp.

As they stood thus and listened, the highwaymen fancied that the sound of voices was borne to their ears as though some persons were in great distress or trouble about something.

In a moment afterwards this sound became less equivocal, and Claude Duval exclaimed:

"There's been an accident, Jack—that's what's the matter. Let us ride forward and render what assistance we can."

Sixteen-String Jack's only reply was to set his horse in motion.

As they drew nearer they perceived that they had arrived at the right conclusion.

But they paused and approached cautiously.

Lying in the roadway in one huge mass was some very large vehicle.

And now they could hear oaths, and shouts, and cries coming most likely from people who had been hurt.

The light which they had caught sight of, and which at first had puzzled them so much, came from one of the lamps that had been detached from the vehicle, and was held aloft in the air by a man, though why he was doing this they could not quite make out.

"Come on, Claude," said Jack, "all's well for us. I do believe it's the stage-coach that's fallen."

The highwaymen drew still closer, and the sound of their horses' hoofs evidently reached the scene of the disaster, for many voices were upraised for help.

"Let us put a bold face on the matter," said Claude, and then he replied to the call that was made upon him.

Directly afterwards the scene of the accident was reached.

Their conjecture was verified.

It was indeed the stage coach, with its heavy load of luggage and passengers, that had, owing to some mistake or other, got broadside upon the road.

"Render what assistance you can," said Jack—"do your best to be civil; we shall make a profit out of this adventure, I'll warrant."

Claude fully understood what his companion meant, and dismounted from his horse.

He was immediately greeted with loud vociferations.

"Oh! open the door—open the door—unfasten it! Be quick, I say! Oh, help—help, I am suffocated—I am dying! Don't fight and struggle so! Help—help!"

These and a hundred other similar cries proceeding from the interior of the vehicle saluted the ears of the highwaymen.

"We will do the best we can," Claude answered, in a cheerful voice. "Have a little patience, and all will be well."

He advanced to the coach door while he spoke.

Those passengers who had been seated on the roof had met with serious injuries.

For the most part they were lying down insensible upon the road.

Those who were not, had been so much bruised and shaken as to be incapable of motion just at present.

By far the greater number were in the coach, however, which was actually lying down on its side with two of its wheels elevated in the air.

The horses were fighting and struggling furiously, not only injuring themselves but threatening to inflict still further damage upon the coach and its occupants.

It was then that Claude made out what was the meaning of the waving light he had seen.

It was the guard, who had taken one of the lamps from the side of the coach, and was holding it aloft in various positions for the benefit of the coachman, who was attempting the very difficult task of unharnessing the horses.

He could not get the light to suit him, and kept bawling out for some fresh movement to be made.

Under these circumstances, the passengers inside were quite neglected.

One or two selfish wretches, desiring only to escape themselves, and careless of what became of others, struggled and fought furiously to get through the narrow aperture, instead of putting out their hands and opening the door wide, as they might have done had they retained a little coolness and presence of mind.

One of those fellows had got half-way through the window of the coach, and was unable to get further.

He was kicking most desperately with his feet and as



[THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN AND TOM DAVIS CONSTRUCTING A SECRET PASSAGE.]

the inside of the coach was crowded, he inflicted much injury every time.

Claude understood this at a glance, and with that promptitude of thought and action which his adventurous life had conferred on him, he seized hold of him by the collar of his coat, and with one sudden effort of strength dragged him completely out, then flung him into a stagnant ditch by the side of the road.

He uttered a dismal yell, which, however, was suddenly cut short, probably by some of the filthy green vegetation on the surface of the water getting into his mouth.

Being thus disposed of, Claude took no further notice of him, but, with a wrench, turned the handle, and flung open the door of the stage-coach.

"One at a time, if you please, and give the ladies the precedence!" he cried. "It's all right—the worst is over, and there is nothing to fear now, if you will only be quiet! Whatever damage is done, you alone will be to blame for! Now, ma'am, let me assist you."

Claude took hold of a female dressed in deep black, and lifted her easily out into the road.

Another and another followed, and then a couple of the opposite sex appeared.

Claude allowed them to scramble out for themselves. That was all the inside of the coach contained.

In the meanwhile, Sixteen-String Jack had turned his attention to those passengers who had been seated on the roof.

A little water dashed into their faces, quickly, had the effect of restoring them all to consciousness.

The coachman, too, had, with great skill and address, succeeded in his undertaking.

The harness was unentangled, and the horses were once more standing on their feet, though trembling in every limb from fright.

"Curse me," he growled, "if this isn't a pretty go! I wonder whoever heard of the like? Curse the man who made that off hind wheel, say I!"

"I hope," said Claude, addressing those he had rescued, "that you have not suffered any great injury from this accident! It might have been much worse than it is—much worse; but now, you see, all's well."

"Oh dear me!" said one of them. "Whatever shall we do? How will the journey be finished?"

"That I don't know," said Claude Duval. "I leave you to settle that among yourselves; but there's one little thing to which I beg to request your attention."

They all looked at him curiously.

"You must not forget the service I have just performed. Unluckily, I am not rich enough to work for nothing. Here is my hat—hand it round amongst you, and put into it your purses, watches, rings, or whatever you may have with you. Be quick, and save me the trouble of taking them from you."

"A highwayman!" they screamed, in dismayed chorus.

"Just so," was the reply; "and my name is Claude Duval, so you will know that I shall stand no trifling. Here, take my hat at once, one of you!"

The mention of his name produced a visible commotion among the travellers, and one cried out:

"Bradshaw—Bradshaw! Where's Mr. Bradshaw? What's become of him, I wonder?"

"Who's Bradshaw?" asked Claude. "Nobody that concerns me, I daresay. Go on, and make haste, and don't trouble yourselves any further about him."

"But," said another voice, "he said if any highwaymen stopped the coach, he'd show us what he would do. He had no money of his own, but undertook to protect that of everybody else. Where is he? Oh, there he is!"

It would seem that Bradshaw was the name of the individual that Claude had so unceremoniously cast into the ditch, and now, covered all over with green slime, and spitting and spluttering at a great rate, he crawled out of the ditch, and marched defiantly up to Claude.

"Then you're Bradshaw?" the highwayman said, coolly. "Quite fiery by night, I see. You want a little more of the cooling medicine. There, now! I hope you will be better next time."

Thereupon, much to the astonishment of everybody, and Mr. Bradshaw in particular, Claude seized him again, and, with what appeared to be an easy exercise of strength, flung him plump into the ditch again.

The splash he made was prodigious, and the odour arising from the disturbed water rather overpowering.

"Now," said Claude, "as he is disposed of, perhaps you will attend to my little application."

"I'll declare it's too bad!" said another. "First of all we are upset on the road, then a pretence is made of helping us, and we are robbed after all. It's what I call adding insult to injury!"

"So do I," said another voice. "And it's my firm belief that this was no accident. It was all done on purpose. Oh, you rascal! I only wish I had firearms with me, and then we should soon see the case altered, but, unfortunately, I am without them!"

"Don't let that be a source of inconvenience or regret to you," said Claude; "I should be sorry if such a trifle as that interfered with your intentions. Here, rather than you should go without, I will accommodate you. Take that pistol. Now, then, just let us see what it is you mean to do."

CHAPTER DCCCXXII.

CLAUDE DUVAL TAKES THE CONCEIT OUT OF THE SWAGGERING TRAVELLER.

The swaggering attitude and manner which the traveller had displayed suddenly disappeared, and instead of availing himself of the weapon that had just been offered, he shrank back and endeavoured to conceal himself behind the forms of his fellow-travellers.

There was of course a general laugh at his expense, in which Claude joined.

Raising the pistol slowly in the air, he pulled the trigger, and a stunning report followed.

The red flash caused by the explosion of the powder looked quite alarming, and all the female travellers uttered a loud shriek of dismay.

Claude returned the pistol to his pocket, and produced another, which he cocked with great deliberation.

"There," he said, "I just wanted to know whether my firearms were in proper order or not. Here's another—the twin brother of the one I have just put away. But I hope you will not be so foolish as to refuse to do as I ask you."

Something was put into his hat immediately.

As he had fully expected, the discharge of the pistol quite put an end to the irresolution of the travellers.

Many and various articles of value were quickly deposited in the hat, and as soon as he saw that it was full, and perceived that each person in the party had contributed something, Claude exclaimed:

"There, that will do. I will not trouble you for the other things that you may have. Thank you. I shall leave you now to continue your journey in the manner that may be most agreeable to yourselves."

He rapidly transferred the contents of his hat to his pockets.

During this time, Sixteen-String Jack had been similarly engaged.

The outside passengers who had received so much of his attention were in no small degree astonished upon finding that they were required to pay, and that very handsomely, for the civility that had been shown them.

But Jack was inexorable, and soon showed by his stern manner that he fully meant every word that he said.

Consequently they all hastily complied with his demands.

He bade them farewell with somewhat similar words to those that Claude Duval had made use of.

Then, going to the place where he had left his horse, he mounted him.

He was only just in time, for from the meadows on the west side of the road could be heard a confused noise of shouting.

The next moment there was a crashing sound, and a party of officers at once very unexpectedly made their appearance upon the scene of action.

They had been at some little distance off on a road that ran almost parallel with the highway, when, hearing the report of Claude's pistol and judging something to be amiss, they had made all speed they could in the direction from which the sound had come.

But they arrived just a little too late.

No sooner did they appear than Mr. Bradshaw, still dripping with water and covered with duckweed, which clung most pertinaciously to his apparel, screamed out, in an excited tone of voice:

"Claude Duval—it's Claude Duval; he's robbed us and thrown me in the ditch! There he goes—there, on that tall brown horse! Can't you see him? Make haste, or he will be out of sight!"

"See him?—where?" asked the officer, anxiously.

"There—over the hedge yonder; he has left the road, and is flying over the meadows at full gallop!"

"After him," said the chief—"after him! I can't see him yet, but no doubt we shall all in a minute or two!"

The people had to scramble out of the way of the officers' horses in the best way they were able.

In another instant they were left to themselves on the high-road.

With them, of course, we have no more to do.

Our attention must be given to the highwaymen.

Although the officers had appeared so quickly, yet our friends, by speediness of movement, had managed to obtain a pretty good start.

Although Mr. Bradshaw had said that he could see them flying over the meadows, it is very questionable whether he could, for the night was dark, and, having once cleared the hedge, they were quickly out of sight.

While flying at this headlong rate, Claude took care to bend in the direction of Ealing, although no one could possibly have guessed that that was his destination.

"We will get home, Jack," he cried, "as soon as we can."

"The sooner the better," was the reply.

"So I think. There will be a tremendous uproar over this affair, and we shall have to be quiet for a day or two at the least."

"We shall; and it will give us the opportunity for constructing the secret passage."

"It will; and it is highly necessary, I am sure, that that should be done."

Not for some time did they draw rein, and when they did, it was upon the summit of rather a steep hill.

From this they could obtain a tolerably extensive view of the country around them.

Of course, all objects looked confused and indistinct in the darkness.

Yet a deep silence reigned all around, for there was not even so much as a breath of wind to stir the topmost branches of the trees.

Sounds under such circumstances and in such a position could be audible when at a great distance, and although the highwaymen stretched their well-practiced ears to the utmost, yet they failed to hear anything like the clatter of their pursuers' horses' hoofs.

"All's well," said Claude; "and though it may be expedient to get back to the inn as quickly as possible, there is no need to go at this headlong speed."

"None whatever; go more gently; we shall be back in plenty of time."

"We shall. What sort of a booty have you obtained?"

"An excellent one."

"And so have I. To-night will make up for our recent disappointments. Aha! take it altogether, it has been a capital joke!"

"Capital!"

The highwaymen laughed, and altogether were in as good spirits and as light-hearted as though they were not in the least trouble or danger in the world.

At quite a comfortable, easy rate they took their way back to the Three Spiders Inn, and reached the plantation without difficulty.

Pressing through it, they halted not far from the back of the stable, and looked anxiously for the signal light.

It was not there, and while they were speculating upon this, and wondering what it could mean, they saw the candle suddenly placed in the window.

"It's all right," Claude cried. "I suppose Tom thought it was not worth while to display the signal earlier. I think we may congratulate ourselves upon being first back; it will give us an opportunity of counting over our booty."

"So it will. As everything is all right, let us advance."

The door at the back of the stable was quickly opened, and the highwaymen led their horses through.

Having first attended to their wants and made them perfectly comfortable, they ventured to make their way to the back of the inn.

They raised the latch, and Tom Davis appeared.

He was not a little surprised to see them back so early.

"What," he exclaimed, "is it possible—back already? Nothing has happened, I hope?"

"Nothing at all disagreeable," was the cheerful response, "but quite the reverse. We managed unexpectedly to lay hold of a good booty, and so resolved to come here with it without any delay."

"And a very wise determination too, that's all I can say about it. It is much better to return early than to wait almost till daybreak, as you have always done hitherto."

CHAPTER DCCCXXIII.

BLACK BESS ARRIVES RIDERLESS AT THE THREE SPIDERS INN.

"HARK," said Claude Duval—"hark! do you hear that? What can be the meaning of it? Who is approaching at such an hour as this?"

"It seems unusual," replied Tom Davis, his cheek paling with alarm. "And hark again—what a strange cry that was!"

Claude and Sixteen-String Jack scarcely stayed to listen, but, hastily rushing out of the kitchen, made their way to the front of the inn, for it was from there that the sounds that so startled them had come.

The door was rapidly unfastened, and as soon as it was flung open and they looked out, loud cries of dread came from their lips, alarming all who were in the building.

Everyone was on the alert instantly.

And then, above all other sounds, came a strange, whining, moaning cry.

By intuition, as it seemed, all felt that some dire calamity had occurred—some accident of more than usual fearfulness.

The impulse of all was to rush to the front of the inn and ascertain exactly what the evil was.

Maud and Ellen, however, were so overcome with sickening suspense that at first they could not move.

Then, summoning all their energies by a terrible effort, they followed in the footsteps of the rest.

The sight that had called forth those cries from the lips of Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, was well calculated to appal them.

Riderless, with her mane seeming to stand half erect, and with her flanks one mass of foam, with her eyeballs wildly glaring, and her nostrils widely dilated, they beheld Black Bess standing in the roadway.

As soon as she caught sight of them, that mournful sound was uttered—a cry that will at times escape the lips of a horse, when the animal is labouring under excessive alarm or pain.

It seemed most unmistakably a cry requesting aid and immediate succour—at least, so the highwaymen and Tom Davis interpreted it.

Their consternation cannot be described, and scarcely imagined.

So stunned and overcome were they at the first, that they could only gaze blankly into each other's countenance and murmur:

"The captain—where is he? What has happened?"

A piercing shriek at this moment awoke all the echoes of the night, and caused Black Bess to start, and she seemed, by her manner, half-inclined to rush off again.

It was from Maud's lips that that piercing shriek had come.

She had caught sight of Black Bess, and that was enough—it was a confirmation of her worst fears, and, without pausing to think more or make another movement to ascertain if possible the extent of the calamity, she threw up her arms and fainted.

She was assisted into the house by Ellen and Mrs. Davis, who were scarcely less terrified at what they saw.

"Good heavens!" said Tom Davis, at length. "Can what I see be really true, or am I in a dream?"

"It is no dream," said Claude, in a voice choked by grief—"it is no delusion."

"No," said Sixteen-String Jack, "we may at once make up our minds to the worst. Never in life would Dick part with Black Bess, and so you may depend he is no more."

"Oh, if she could but speak and tell us what had happened!" said Tom Davis. "As it is, we are filled with a thousand terrible conjectures. Woa, mare," he continued—"woa, lass—that's it—quietly now—quietly."

He placed his hand upon her neck, patting and stroking her.

Black Bess responded to the caress by another of those doleful cries.

"What is it then," said Davis, soothingly, and endeavouring to reassure her—"what is it? Ah, what! A light—a light!" he broke in, quickly—"bring me a light! Why, what's this?"

He held up his hand as he spoke.

"Blood?" said Sixteen-String Jack, interrogatively.

"Yes, it's blood, and sticky—yes, yes, that's blood."

"Then the worst has indeed happened. Who can say where his remains are now? He has been shot, probably while in pursuit, and Black Bess, like a faithful dog, has come to tell us the sad fate of her master."

After that, the highwaymen and Tom Davis seemed as though paralysed.

But after a time they recovered themselves sufficiently to procure a light.

Then, by the aid of it, they saw that there was blood upon the neck and mane of Black Bess.

There was blood also dyeing the flaps of the saddle, and the reins were broken and hanging loosely upon her neck.

"Yes, this is confirmation," said Tom Davis. "The best and truest friend is gone. What shall we do now without him? and who shall venture to console Maud for her loss?"

"It is dreadful," said Claude Duval—"by far too dreadful for speech. But come, we can do nothing here—in fact, we are only running a serious risk by remaining in

the road. Lead Black Bess round to the stable, and in the meanwhile we will carefully remove all spots of blood from the road, if there are any; otherwise we may be tracked."

"And then," said Tom Davis, scarcely able to speak—"then we must consider what is to be done, though I fear there is no chance of being able to render the captain any service now."

To these desponding words no response was given, but the suggestions made were carried out.

Black Bess was led back to the stable, and by the light they carried the ground where she stood was carefully examined.

But they failed to find a single spot of blood upon the road.

"No—no—all's well; there's nothing to excite suspicion," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Now, then, to enter the inn and confer with Davis. Under such circumstances what can be done? Would that Tom King had arrived."

"He will be here shortly, I have no doubt," was the reply. "Come—come, we are better and safer indoors than out."

"What matters now, for safety indoors and outdoors now is all the same. We've lost the captain, and we may as well have lost ourselves."

His comrade could think of no words of consolation to offer.

He could not ask him to look upon the brighter side of things.

Entering the inn, they found that Maud had recovered from her swoon, and was now in a state of excitement that was awful to witness.

She was, in fact, delirious.

In the wildest terms she demanded to be taken to Black Bess, and had this wish been acceded to, there is no knowing what turn her frenzy might have taken next.

Gently and firmly, however, she was restrained, and the best face was put upon matters that they could think of.

"Do not give way to despair all at once," said Sixteen-String Jack, with quivering lips; "he has met with many a mishap before now and got out of it gallantly. Very likely we shall see him shortly—wounded perhaps, but yet not dead."

"Yes, yes—dead!" shrieked Maud. "I am sure he is dead! I feel it—I know it! I am as certain as I should be if I saw him now! But where is Black Bess? Let me go to her! Why do you deny me that trifling favour?"

"It is best not," said Tom Davis, who was thinking of the stains of blood.

"You have some reason for your refusal!" she cried—"you know something that, by a mistaken kindness, you are keeping from me! Do so no longer, I implore you, but let me know what it is!"

It was indeed a difficult part that our friends had to play.

They had to control their own overwhelming grief, while they calmed Maud by uttering suppositions which they believed to be wholly without foundation.

And in this manner one miserable hour passed.

The senses of all were stretched to the utmost.

They were expecting to hear some other sound.

At last a footstep in the yard attracted their attention.

They turned round, and before they could make another movement the door was opened and Tom King appeared.

His face was ghastly white, and had upon it an expression of great grief and sadness.

But he started and uttered an ejaculation of amazement when he saw the attitudes of those around him.

"Dick—Dick!" shrieked Maud, imploringly, and rushing towards him while she spoke. "Where is he—have you seen him, Tom? Your friend—your true old friend—have you seen him? Do you know anything of him?"

"Know anything of him?" said Tom—"what do you mean? Speak quickly, one of you, and explain all this—speak, I say!"

The terrible confession had then to be made, and all could see how severe a blow this was to Tom.

At first he was incredulous, and then demanded a light.

"Let me go with you!" shrieked Maud—"do let me go with you—do let me go!"

"It's best not," said Tom Davis, and while he spoke he contrived to glance at Tom significantly, so that he understood there was some reason why it would not be well for Maud to pay a visit to Black Bess.

"No," he said, "we will wait a little while and see what happens. I do not, after all, despair of seeing him return safe and sound."

"You say those words with your lips, Tom," said Maud, "not with your heart; you think they will console me and lighten my grief, but you make a mistake—quite a mistake!"

Tom was silent, for he could not deny the allegation.

It then seemed as though they could do nothing but sit and gaze with speechless sorrow into each other's countenances, seeking in vain for some dim and distant ray of hope, yet seeing none.

CHAPTER DCCCXXIV

MAUD ELUDES THE VIGILANCE OF HER FRIENDS, AND SUCCEEDS IN ENTERING THE STABLE.

Tom King, of course, had entered the stable by the little door we have so often described, having first seen the signal in the window above.

The interior of the stable was profoundly dark, but yet he was familiar enough with it to be able to close the door after him, and to place his horse in one of the stalls.

Consequently he failed to notice that Black Bess was there as well as the horses belonging to Claude and Sixteen-String Jack.

This was how it was that he was anxious for a light, in order to go and satisfy some of his doubts by an inspection of her.

"I shall not despair," said Tom Davis, though the tone of his voice gave the lie to his words—"I shall not despair until day fairly dawns. I have great hopes we shall see him return before then, or receive some message from him. If we do not, it will then be time enough to give way to grief and anticipate the worst."

Another hour, more weary and wretched than the first, slowly dragged away, second after second, each one almost being counted by the anxious, pale-faced group.

Tom Davis took an opportunity of drawing Tom King on one side, and whispering to him his reasons for keeping Maud from the stable.

"It is only natural," he added, "that you should both want to go, and there is no reason why you should not; but you must watch an opportunity to slip away unperceived, and I will take care that Maud does not follow you."

Tom expressed his thanks by a nod.

"Now, Davis," he said, "have a good look all round the premises, and tell me whether you can see or hear anything of him."

By this time it was beginning to grow light.

In the east the faint grey light of early dawn could be distinctly seen.

The air was cold and damp.

Davis shivered when he got outside.

"I knew this life was too pleasant to last," he muttered. "I had a presentiment that something would happen, yet in my worst forebodings I never expected anything so bad as this."

He made a perfect circuit of the house.

But he saw no trace of Turpin's presence.

He walked down the lane as far as the moss-grown finger-post at the corner, and then looked out.

Still he saw no one.

Then, returning by another route, he entered the plantation, and made his way through it in a devious, zigzag manner, until the stable door was reached.

Here, too, he saw nothing of the captain, and he had every reason for coming to the conclusion that he had not arrived.

"It is as I feared," he murmured. "He is dead, or else lying at the point of death. If it was all over with him, I do believe that I should be more content; but if he is so far gone as only to have life enough left in him to comprehend the nature of his position, it will be terrible indeed."

He entered the stable while he spoke, and, going up to Black Bess, began to look at her.

By the daylight he saw something that he had not

noticed previously, so, hastening into the house, he obtained a large jug of hot water.

He was questioned eagerly upon his entrance.

But, as we know, he could impart no information.

Giving a glance to show that he wished to be left alone, he returned to the stable, and with the water begun to bathe Black Bess's neck and mane.

In doing this, he discovered that the blood that had caused him so much alarm had proceeded not, as he thought, from the veins of her rider, but from a slight scratch in her own neck.

It looked as though a bullet had just caught it, ploughing up the skin, and yet dividing the vein in its progress.

"You have had a dreadfully narrow escape, old lass," he said—"dreadfully narrow! A little bit lower down, and you would not have come back to tell the tale."

When she had been well washed and bathed, Black Bess no longer presented such a terrible appearance as she had done.

The wound was seen to be slight, and, with the exception of it, she was in her usual condition.

Tom then returned to the house.

He found only sad, grave-looking faces waiting for him.

Day had fairly come at last.

The sun had risen, and the only slender hope to which they had clung with the desperation that a drowning man clutches at a straw to save himself, was gone.

Dick Turpin had not made his appearance, so that the only inference was that he was dead or a prisoner.

The latter they scarcely judged likely, as they had over and over again heard him express his intention so positively to die rather than to yield to his foes.

Maud's grief now became less demonstrative than it had been.

She appeared to be settling down into the dreary stupor of blank despair—that fearful species of apathy which distresses the beholder more than the most violent demonstration of sorrow.

With her hands clasped over her knees, and with her head bent down, and her eyes fixed upon vacancy, she remained by the fireside, to all outward appearances paying no attention to what was said, and entirely oblivious of all that was going on around her.

Perceiving this, Tom Davis drew the highwaymen apart, bidding his wife and daughter to keep a strict eye upon Maud, and on no account to allow her to go towards the stable.

They, however, were by no means so observant in their watch as Tom himself had been.

An opportunity came when Maud was left alone, and she instantly availed herself of it.

The room was only left for a second, and they thought she might be altogether unconscious of their departure.

But instead of that, with a faint smile of triumph, she sprang to her feet, and darted through the back door and across the yard with the velocity of an arrow.

The stable door was fastened—not very securely, perhaps, and yet by means of a padlock and staples.

Desperation lent her a strength which she could never otherwise have possessed.

Seizing hold of the padlock, she, by one desperate effort, so far loosened one of the staples that she was able to pull it out afterwards.

Then, with a glow of satisfaction, she ran in, and sought the stall in which Black Bess was standing.

The sagacious creature knew her instantly, and uttered a faint cry of recognition

To Maud's ears it seemed as though there was something inexpressibly mournful in the sound.

She looked, but now the highwayman's steed presented quite her ordinary appearance, and the wound made by the bullet was such a mere scratch that even Maud thought nothing of it.

For one reason, it was concealed by her long, flowing mane.

Maud had fully brought her heart to believe that Dick was lost to her for ever—that she should never see him again, and therefore, under these circumstances, it was only natural that she should cling to Black Bess with a singular affection.

"If you could but speak," she said, unconsciously making use of Tom Davis's words—"if you could but give me some account of what has happened, the most dreadful knowledge could not be so bad as this uncertainty, when my imagination runs at full riot! Speak—speak! Can you not tell me where he is?"

Judging by the movements of Black Bess, it might almost have been believed that she comprehended the words that had been just addressed to her, and was making an effort to speak.

She raised her head, she arched her neck, and pawed the ground with one of her fore feet, while her eye assumed a brightness that was remarkable when compared with its former dulness.

Her ears were projected straight before her.

But the reason of this alteration was not ascribable to anything that Maud had said.

The noble creature's finer senses were cognisant of something of which Maud was ignorant.

Still, she looked at Black Bess with painful interest, wondering what such a sudden alteration could portend.

She had lived long enough near her to understand by her manner when it was she testified her joy.

And now the signs she made were evidently those of gladness.

She raised her head, and neighed loud, long, and shrilly.

But a widely different sound to that which she had made when she paused in front of the inn a few hours before.

It might be more compared to a joyful shout than to aught else.

Scarcely had the sound died away than there was the sound of a hasty footstep close at hand.

Then a voice said:

"Woa, Bess, my lass! Gently—gently! Woa, now—I'm here!"

As the last words were uttered, the stable door flew open, and Dick Turpin, hale and hearty, stepped across the threshold.

CHAPTER DCCCXXV.

DICK TURPIN, TO THE GREAT JOY OF HIS COMRADES, COMES BACK SAFE AND SOUND.

MAUD did not swoon now, nor faint, nor cry.

She did not move, but stood, clutching Black Bess by the mane, as still as though, by some magic process, she had been transformed to stone.

Yet those tones she heard—that voice—that form were those of Dick Turpin—unmistakably Dick Turpin.

Impossible as it seemed, he had come back safe and sound, and apparently unhurt.

Yet, had her life depended on it, Maud could not have stirred from that position, although she longed from the very bottom of her heart to spring forward and clasp him round the neck, and let her head fall upon his breast.

Yet she was unable to move a limb.

She could only gaze upon him in speechless surprise.

To Turpin her manner was most extraordinary.

The thought did not just then occur to him that, Black Bess having returned riderless, his friends would jump to the conclusion that he had been killed.

"Why, Maud—Maud," he exclaimed, springing forward, "what ails you?—what's the meaning of all this? Why, you are cold—cold as ice! Speak—speak! Don't look at me so strangely!"

Fortunately, at this moment a gush of tears came to Maud's relief.

She wept plentifully, and, in a voice broken by sobs, contrived to give him some idea of the real state of the case.

But before she could finish her incoherent narrative—before he could soothe and compose her somewhat, the stable was suddenly entered by Tom Davis and three more highwaymen.

The consternation exhibited on the landlord's countenance was really amusing in the extreme.

He first of all stopped short, and then staggered slowly back, with his arms outstretched, and with his eyes seeming to start out from his head.

"A ghost!" he cried—"a ghost! It is his ghost!

She has gone there, and now his ghost has appeared to her!"

The highwaymen behind scarcely knew what to think, they were so overcome by surprise.

Then, in those ringing, cheerful tones that were always so pleasant to listen to, and yet which never sounded so delightful as they did then, Dick Turpin exclaimed:

"A ghost—a ghost? Why, what are you talking of? I am no ghost, but here in flesh and blood! Are you bewitched?"

These words broke the spell, and all four rushed pell-mell into the stable, calling upon Ellen and Mrs. Davis as they did so.

But they were so firmly persuaded that Dick Turpin was dead—had so reconciled themselves to that dreadful idea, that they could scarcely believe him when he spoke, but crowded round him, and took hold of his hands and arms.

"Are you not hurt—not wounded in the least?" they asked, in great surprise.

"Unhurt?—yes. I don't think I have even a scratch; or, if I am, it is a scratch indeed, and I know not of it. But why is this alarm? Explain it to me, for at present, believe me, I am much bewildered."

But just then was not the time for explanations.

His comrades could do nothing but crowd around him, and testify in a thousand different ways how overjoyed they were to find that their dreadful fears were baseless.

"I have had some strange adventures," said Dick, "and some narrow escapes; yet none so narrow as Black Bess. I hope and trust that she is unhurt."

"Yes; don't alarm yourself about that, captain," said Tom Davis; "there's no necessity, I can assure you. She is just scratched, it is true; but so slightly that it is not worthy of a thought."

"Then all's well," said Turpin; "and now tell me what all this means."

"Into the house first," said Tom Davis—"into the house; we are better there than here, I think. Don't venture to cross the yard till I have seen all's well, for the police officers are lurking about perpetually, and if you are once seen, it will be a case."

"Right, Tom," said Turpin. "You cannot be too careful."

In a couple of minutes afterwards Davis returned to the stable door, telling them that the coast was clear.

They hastened across the yard into the inn.

Weeping, sobbing, and smiling through her tears, and clinging so tightly to him, that it seemed as though she would never let him go again, Maud accompanied her husband, who listened with great interest to the communication that his comrades had to make to him.

"I can understand now the cause of your alarm," he said. "It was natural enough; and yet, out of this circumstance I can derive some amount of pleasure; it serves to tell me how much I am thought of by all of you."

"You are," said Tom King; "and you ought to know it. When you are gone, we shall be gone too, you may rely upon that."

"Come, come, let us have no gloomy forebodings now; there ought to be nothing else but joy and happiness all through the day. I am glad to see you here all safe, and to learn that the officers have not been troubling you again."

"But much is owing to the perseverance of friend Davis here," said Tom King; "and I hope in a short time their suspicions will be allayed. If so, then this will be the safest place in all the world for us."

"It will indeed."

"But before we go further, Dick, we must have your adventures during the past night. We cannot rest until we hear them—so begin at once."

Turpin, knowing that it would be useless to refuse, complied at once, and all listened with the most breathless interest to his recital.

But Maud heard the whole narrative with terror.

She nestled closer and closer to him, and when he finished, whispered:

"When—oh, when, if for my sake only, will you give up all these terrible dangers? Even during this past night you have had a dozen escapes of your life."

"I know it," said Dick, "and, being so, what does it matter? I am safe still. It is in such dangers as these that I exult—I am in my element."

Maud shook her head.

"I tremble to think of what may come in the future," she said.

"Never fear it. Let us to-day be as happy as we can. First of all, we will try and get some rest, for I am sure that we all need it."

"I can speak for myself," said Tom, "but I shall just go into the bar and take a snooze in the easy-chair—that will put me as right as right can be; and don't forget that to-night we have something most important for discussion."

"What," asked Dick, his thoughts reverting to something else, "has it appeared again?"

"Appeared again?" echoed Tom Davis, rather mystified. "Oh! you mean the shadow. No, we have not seen that since."

"What were you speaking of, then?"

"The secret passage. Don't put off a consideration of that. Surely you can see that that is most important; and if we decide upon it, let it be begun at once, and completed before you venture forth again."

"We will talk about that," said Dick.

"I shall side with Tom Davis," cried Claude Duval. "I am fully impressed with the importance of his suggestions; and besides, the little adventure we have had to-night, and which I will relate to you this evening, will make it necessary for us to keep rather close, and, under such circumstances, why not turn the time to good account?"

"I see no reason why," said Turpin, "and I think we are all unanimous in our opinion that a secret mode of leaving this house is highly necessary."

"Yes, yes—quite unanimous."

"That's all right, then."

"And don't forget, too," said Sixteen-String Jack, "that there is another matter on hand—you have already alluded to it."

"The shadow?"

"Yes. You remember our arrangement—it was felt that we could not watch for it until to-night. Let us, then, all assemble in the kitchen, and watch for its appearance; then, wherever it may go—should it appear—we will follow it, and endeavour to unravel this dark mystery. If we can, it will be a great satisfaction to everyone, and will remove a great amount of uncertainty and uncomfortable feeling."

"With all my heart," said Dick Turpin—"let us have it cleared up if we can. I have been thinking much about it, and my inclination exactly suits with yours."

It was with this understanding that the highwaymen parted.

The remainder of the day was passed over in silence and in peace.

Jack Marshall and his officers must have been elsewhere, for Tom Davis could not see the ghost of one of them.

At this he felt rejoiced, for it made him hope he had got off upon a false scent.

It was not until just as it was beginning to grow dusk that the highwaymen one by one appeared in the huge, comfortable kitchen, and seated themselves round the blazing hearth.

Then the shutters were closed, the door fastened, and all made secure.

CHAPTER DCCCXXVI.

OUR FRIENDS ENDEAVOUR TO FOLLOW THE SHADOW ON THE WALL.

It would be difficult to imagine a more comfortable scene than this presented.

They fully believed that at that time they were as nearly as possible in a state of absolute security.

And yet, in spite of the feeling of satisfaction that this could not but impart, they one and all glanced continuously about them, with an uneasy sensation in their minds.

Such an appearance as they had already witnessed was one well calculated to annoy and oppress them.

To exist in a house with such a mystery hanging over it was almost impossible.

"You may depend," said Tom Davis, stirring up the fire, "that the reason why this house remained closed so long, and why we were able to purchase it so cheaply was simply in consequence of this visitation."

"It is very likely," said Dick, "though no hint was dropped to you at the time, I suppose?'

"No—not a word was said upon such a subject. Doubtless they thought that if half a word was spoken, they would lose their customer."

"And very likely too," said Sixteen-String Jack, "for it's quite the reverse of being pleasant to remain while something is going on around you which entirely baffles your comprehension."

"But," said Dick, "you forget."

"Forget what?"

"Why, our purpose. It is true we have been baffled as yet, but on the present occasion we have great hopes of being able to succeed in unravelling this mystery."

"So we have—so we have."

And Sixteen-String Jack glanced up at the clock while he spoke.

"It has caused us no harm at present," continued Dick, "and I don't think it reasonable that we should feel any apprehensions concerning it. What is it, after all, but a shadow on the wall? And even if we can't make out what causes it, we shall soon grow used to such an appearance."

"But that would be by no means satisfactory," said Tom King. "I have great hopes that if we are so lucky as to see it again to-night, we shall be able to follow wherever it goes."

"We will try to do so," said Dick; "and so that we may be prepared, let the lanterns be lighted, so that we shall be in perfect readiness in all respects."

This order was obeyed, and then quite a deep silence came over the whole group.

They sat still in the chairs, with their eyes for the most part fixed upon the fire.

Yet every now and then they would be turned towards the wall.

The night was rough and blusterous, and at frequent intervals they could hear the wind dash with extreme violence against the panes.

The gust would be succeeded by a heavy splash of rain.

It was certainly no night to be abroad, and it made them all draw closer up to the fire and appreciate more fully the comforts they then enjoyed.

As time passed on and the hour approached when the visitation had before been made, the silence was, if anything, more intense.

The wind lulled a little, and the rain fell gently against the window.

Suddenly all started.

That strange, deep sigh which, whenever they had heard it before, had sent such a peculiar thrill through every pulse of their bodies, again made itself heard, seeming, as before, to emanate from no particular spot, but to spread itself all over the apartment, and fill up every corner of it.

There was a sudden movement, and all their faces were turned with eager watchfulness towards the dark corner from which the shadow had on the previous occasion appeared to emerge.

Their watching was soon rewarded for, with a slow and gliding movement the shadow made its appearance, blurred and indistinct at first, but gradually settling down into a greater sharpness of outline than had been the case before.

Perhaps this was caused by the increased amount of illumination in the room; but, be the cause what it may, there could be no longer the least doubt that the shadow was that of a female.

The head could be seen, and even the delicately-formed features.

But the garments seemed long and flowing.

The little object, whatever it might be, was still pressed to her breast.

But of this no idea could be formed from its shape, for it was no more than an undistinguishable mass.

Gradually—gradually the shadow glided on; and so intently did all watch it, that they forgot to rise from their seats and be in readiness to follow it from the room.

Dick was the first to recover himself.

He started quickly to his feet, and grasped his lantern.

"Now, my friends," he exclaimed, "follow me—keep close behind me, and use your eyes to the best advantage to take notice where the shadow goes. It would be vexatious in the extreme if we lost sight of it as we did before."

The shadow now remained quite stationary, and again there came the heavy, deep-drawn sigh.

After that, the motion was resumed, and Dick walked slowly forward in the direction of the door.

"Draw your sword," said Claude Duval, in a whisper, perceiving that Dick had omitted to do so.

"For what reason?" was the answer. "Do you think it would avail me anything against a shadow? No—put up your weapons; there is, I am convinced, no necessity for a show of violence."

But although Dick spoke thus and chose to go unarmed, his comrades were of a different opinion.

It was better, they thought, to be prepared.

It will be recollected that on the preceding occasion the door had been left open a little way, and, upon reaching it, the shadow had appeared to glide out into the passage beyond.

Now, however, the door was shut close and fastened, and our friends all wondered what course the shadow would now take.

It did not pause again until getting quite opposite the door, so that the shadow actually fell upon the woodwork.

Then, while they gazed, it gradually became less and less distinct, appearing to lose its outlines by degrees and to diffuse itself all over the surface of the door.

Then, while they gazed, it vanished entirely.

The firelight shone clearly and distinctly on the curious old-fashioned panels, revealing every line.

No portion was obscured by the faintest shadow.

The appearance was exactly that of the singular apparition having vanished completely through the doorway.

Dick did not speak, but made a sign for all the rest to keep close behind him.

Maud clung tightly to his arm.

She felt she was in absolute safety, let him go where he might.

The door was quickly opened, and upon crossing the threshold the lanterns were raised, so that the light should be thrown around in every direction.

At first, nothing but the bare walls met their view.

But a moment afterwards, with a cry of satisfaction, Sixteen-String Jack said:

"Look—look—there it goes yender: very faint—very indistinct, but it's gliding towards the bar!"

Now that he pointed the shadow out there could be no doubt about its presence, nor about the course that it was taking.

Our friends all hastened onward.

They did not positively see the shadow enter the bar, yet they felt sure that it had done so, and did not hesitate to make their way into it themselves.

Then again they looked all around them.

But the walls were perfectly clear.

"I fear we've lost sight of it again," said Dick. "Ah! did you hear that?"

The sigh was again heard.

"It came from there!" cried Sixteen-String Jack.

And while he spoke he hastened towards the door, and attempted to open it.

But it was locked.

"The key, Davis," he cried—"where is the key?"

"Here it is," was the response.

The key was produced and hastily fitted into the lock, when Turpin asked:

"But where does that door lead to?"

"To the cellars," said Tom Davis; "and such cellars as they are, I'm sure you never saw; they are like so many vaults, and I have never yet been able to find the end of them."

By the time he had spoken, the door was thrown wide upon its hinges by Sixteen-String Jack, who cried:

"Now, then, a light, quickly—make haste!"

All hurried forward, and the united beams of all the lanterns were thrown down the dark, damp-looking flight of steps that was exposed to view.

"There," cried Sixteen-String Jack, again, excitedly —"there—there it goes! Can you not see it?"

"Yes," was the simultaneous answer—"yes; there it is, descending!"

Jack happened to be first, and so, of course, he kept the lead

The steps were only about twelve in number, so that the bottom was quickly reached.

They then found themselves in a large-sized vault or cellar, the walls of which were dark with damp and age, and therefore it was no easy matter to distinguish the shadow upon them.

But they did see it, and followed it easily from that vault to the next and into the next.

From this last, however, they could perceive no means of egress, so that they reasonably calculated upon making a discovery at last.

But to their disappointment the shadow only glided to a certain portion of the wall and then remained there stationary.

Our friends stopped too.

And then for the last time they heard the sigh, after which the apparition vanished entirely, leaving not the faintest trace behind it to show that such a thing had ever been.

CHAPTER DCCCXXVII.

THE HIGHWAYMEN FOLLOW THE SHADOW TO THE VAULTS, AND DISCOVER THE BRICKED-UP DOORWAY.

For some time they all looked rather blankly at each other at this unexpected termination of the adventure, and then Dick asked:

"Is this to be the end? Is this all we are to find out? It seems to me that there is no other mode of leaving this vault than that by which we entered it—is there Davis?"

"Not that I know of," was the reply.

"But the shadow appeared to dissolve into the wall as it did into the door above," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Perhaps it means that we are still to follow it. Bring the light closer and let us look."

The light was brought.

But Jack took it himself, and, holding it close to the brickwork, examined carefully all about the spot where the shadow had been seen last.

Then an exclamation escaped his lips.

"Yes," he cried. "I feel certain of it now. Look here, all of you, and tell me whether there is not the appearance of a door having been here at some time or other, and afterwards bricked up? Look at the arch in the brickwork—I think that is confirmation."

All pressed round him eagerly, and from the appearance which the wall presented it was tolerably certain that his conjecture was correct.

Many years must have elapsed since any of the bricks could have been laid, for there was no perceptible difference in their colour—at least, none that could be detected at first.

But afterwards, by a close scrutiny, they were able to make out that a portion about the size of a door was somewhat lighter than those around.

"Beyond a doubt," said Dick Turpin, "that's some exit from this cellar which, for some cause or other, has been bricked up, and now the question is, shall we endeavour to open the passage?"

"Yes, yes—by all means!" was the unanimous reply.

Dick smiled, for the answer was just what he had expected.

"Then tools must be fetched," he exclaimed; "and I don't know where we shall find any suitable."

"But I do," said Tom Davis. "I've been thinking a great deal about that proposition of mine"

"For the secret passage?"

"Yes; and to be in readiness for it, I have obtained the requisite implements; and now you see they will just come in useful. Wait a moment, and I will fetch them from the adjoining cellar."

He departed, and returned, bringing with him a pickaxe, and spade, and mattock.

"Those will do," cried Jack. "Lend me this, and you will quickly see a breach."

He took hold of the mattock and used it with hearty goodwill, so that before long he was able to dislodge a couple of bricks.

After that, further progress was easy enough, for, owing to the dampness of the place, the mortar had become very soft, or probably had never in the first instance hardened.

As soon as a small opening had been made, the light was called for, so as to see whether, after all, they were right or wrong.

It was then discovered that just beyond the brickwork was a wooden door, so that now there was no longer any room for doubt.

Under these circumstances, they worked with great vigour to remove all the bricks, and having done so, they then perceived a rather strong-looking door before them.

"There was some urgent reason for bricking up that opening in such a manner," cried Dick Turpin, "and what that reason was we shall very probably discover."

They tried the door, and found that it was fast.

Probably it was locked.

One blow with the pickaxe, however, caused it to recede upon its hinges, for the damp had long since made the fastenings insecure.

Jack rapidly crossed the threshold.

But almost immediately his lamp went out.

"Come back, Jack," cried the captain. "You must not enter yet—the vault is full of foul air."

Jack managed to stagger back again into the outer vault.

He was gasping painfully for breath.

"I was too precipitate," he exclaimed. "I ought to have known that—that——"

Here a violent fit of coughing seized him, which had the effect of dispelling the foul air from his lungs.

But so insufferable was the odour that came from the closed-up vault, that the whole party was compelled to retreat slowly before it.

And it was not until some considerable time had elapsed that they again ventured to approach.

By this time the comparatively pure air in the other vaults had rushed in and taken the place of that which would have been fatal to human life, and, beyond a certain oppressiveness and clamminess of the atmosphere, there was nothing to complain of.

As may be expected, it was with the very greatest amount of curiosity that our friends gazed about them, for they were exceedingly anxious to make themselves familiar with the appearance of the place that had been closed up from human view for so many years as this evidently had.

But beyond bare black walls, slippery with moisture and glittering in some parts from nitric exhalations, there was nothing of a singular character to be seen.

And although the lanterns were raised up on high, so that the light from them fell upon every portion of the walls, they no longer saw anything of the mysterious shadow.

It was pretty clear that from this inner vault there was no mode of exit; and this might be guessed by the bench or sill that had been built all around it.

The intense darkness and silence in this place made speech appear to be a matter of difficulty, and when Turpin addressed his comrades, he instinctively sank his voice to a whisper.

"There's nothing here," he said—"nothing whatever, that I can see."

"It appears not," said Jack. "Where can the shadow be now."

He was answered by a sigh, and he gave a quick start, for it almost seemed as though the sound had proceeded from the very spot on which he stood.

He turned round quickly, and almost stumbled.

"What's that?" he exclaimed; and even as he asked the question, he directed the beams of the lantern to the ground.

Then they all saw that it was a depression in the general level of the floor of the vault that caused him so nearly to miss his footing.

The flooring was composed of dark-coloured bricks, showing every sign of great age; and just in one part near the centre they seemed, from some cause or other, to have sunk into the soil.

This was the only unusual thing they could perceive



[DICK TURPIN AWAITS THE APPROACH OF THE SOLITARY TRAVELLER.]

in all the place, and, after a little hesitation, Sixteen-String Jack said:

"Perhaps now the solution of all that we have seen is to be found beneath the spot where I was standing; at any rate, let us try, it cannot much signify."

"But what would you do?"

"Dig," was the answer, "and hope for a discovery."

No word of dissent was raised, only an anxious look of expectation seemed to settle upon every countenance.

"The pickaxe!" cried Jack. "Hold my lantern, one of you, and we will soon see what lies under here."

The pickaxe was brought, and, throwing off his coat, Sixteen-String Jack began to work in good earnest.

The bricks were rapidly dug up, for they were so loosely embedded in the soil that they offered no resistance at all to the point of the pickaxe.

The ground beneath them was also soft, and Jack found that the task of digging it out with the spade was by no means so laborious as he had expected.

CHAPTER DCCCXXVIII.

THE HIGHWAYMEN MEET WITH A SUDDEN AND UNLOOKED-FOR INTERRUPTION.

In a little time the hole was quite knee-deep.

And then Jack suddenly felt his spade strike against some harder substance than earth.

He paused at once, and his companions, guessing that the discovery was now about to be made, directed the beams of the lantern into it.

Jack stooped, and, scraping away a small portion of the soil, unearthed a skull.

He picked it up instantly, and held it aloft in the view of his comrades.

A deep silence fell upon all.

There was not one who cared to make a remark.

It was Dick Turpin, however, who eventually broke the silence, for he said:

"Be careful now how you use the spade, Jack. There is no need that I can see of disturbing the poor remains that evidently lie there."

"None in the least," said Sixteen-String Jack, and, as he spoke, he stepped carefully on one side, and carried out the captain's instructions.

As they fully expected, the entire skeleton of a human being was disclosed.

Near it, however, was another, and a single glance was sufficient to show it was that of a young child.

"Here are the evidences of a frightful tragedy," said Sixteen-String Jack. "We can tell now what it was the shadow carried in its arms—we might have guessed it."

"True," answered Claude; "but the idea never once occurred to me. Now that we have made this discovery, however, in what way are we to act respecting it?"

"That question is more readily asked than answered," said Dick Turpin. "I must confess I am not in a position to reply. It is tolerably certain, I think, that we can do nothing but replace the skull, and fill in the earth again."

"Nothing more," said Tom King, slowly.

"But—but——" said Tom Davis, stammeringly.

"But what?" asked Turpin.

"Is it not probable that the reason we are troubled with this visitation is that the remains lie in such a grave as this? You know what is always said——"

"Yes, yes—I know!" said Dick. "But it seems to me that we can do nothing else but put up with the infliction. It is but a shadow, after all, and can have no connection with us; and should it continue to appear, beyond a doubt we shall quickly get used to it."

"It is an unsatisfactory termination to the whole adventure," said Sixteen-String Jack, as he slowly shovelled in the earth again. "I should like to have some further particulars of this double crime. Depend upon it, it was basely and treacherously performed."

"Enough," said Turpin. "Be quick and finish your task, for I confess I am heartily sick of this place. Let us get into the upper air."

"With all my heart," said Jack. "We can't find out any more, I firmly believe."

The remaining shovelfuls were hastily filled into the grave, the bricks replaced as well as they were able, and then the whole party took their way to the room above.

An unusual depression, however, was visible in the manner and appearance of all of them.

Strive as they would, they could not divest themselves of the superstitious idea that this strange, unaccountable appearance boded some great evil to them.

They had lived so long in a state of comparative peace and security, that they now began, very justly, to dread that stormier times were coming.

Neither of the four highwaymen, however, were of the right disposition to give way much to sensations of this kind.

They tried their best to combat successfully with them.

Tom Davis, however, was most despondent of all.

The fact was, he had the image of Jack Marshall and his officers continually before him.

He knew the man to be as great a blunderer as ever donned a red waistcoat, but yet, if he continued his visits, some discovery must eventually be made.

More with the view of turning the conversation and changing the current of their thoughts than for any other reason, Dick turned round, and, addressing his comrades, said:

"Well, now, as some hours are before us, let us take into consideration the project suggested by Davis—I mean the secret passage by which, if necessary, we could leave this building."

"I rather think," said Claude Duval, "that we are all of one way of thinking in this matter—we all believe in the necessity and importance of such a thing, and therefore the sooner it is set about and accomplished the better."

"Yes, decidedly the better," said Tom Davis. "You will all of you feel more content when the thing is actually done."

"Then, if that's the case," said Claude Duval, "the best thing we can do, I suppose, is to commence it at once."

"I wish you would," added Davis, earnestly.

"Not to-night," exclaimed Turpin, drawing a long breath. "I have had enough of these underground passages certainly! We will not begin to-night; but yet we will take an early opportunity."

"Say to-morrow," urged Claude. "We might get a few hours' sleep now during the remainder of the night, and in the morning commence our labours."

"Agreed," said Dick.

"And don't leave them," said Davis, "until you have finished them."

Turpin smiled.

"It will be best so," said Sixteen-String Jack, "for you may depend upon it our adventure on the Windsor Road will make a great commotion."

"And mine in London, too, I suppose," said Dick.

"Well, then," said Tom King, "are we all agreed? Because, if so——"

He was interrupted by a loud and furious knocking at the front door.

Davis started up from his chair, and then sank back into it again.

"There," he cried—"there—I told you the shadow had not appeared for nothing! The officers are at the door! Now what is to be done?"

"They may not be officers," said Dick; "but yet it will be best to act as if they were."

A scene of great excitement and commotion now ensued, for they were all in a state of great anxiety to know what steps could be taken.

As usual, however, Dick promptly came to a determination.

Taking hold of Maud, he exclaimed:

"Follow me to the stable, all of you!"

"No—no," said Tom Davis, quickly. "Surely you are mad! The officers are at the door, and of course others are posted round the building to watch it!"

"It may be so," said Turpin, "or they may not be officers at all—at any rate, I will run the risk of crossing the yard. We shall be better there along with our horses than we possibly could be anywhere beneath this roof."

The knocking was continued with great vehemence.

"How vexatious!" cried Tom Davis. "If now the secret passage was only made, how easy it would be to secrete you all and allow the officers to satisfy their scruples by searching all over the premises."

"If they are officers," Dick cried, "let them do so now; we shall not be in it, and they will find nothing of a suspicious character! Come—quickly; and you, Davis, open the door, and make what excuse you can for keeping them waiting."

Dick hastily opened the back door as he spoke, and darted across to the door of the stable.

His companions followed him, and in the briefest possible space of time they were all standing in safety in the stable.

In the meanwhile, Tom Davis, as he had been directed, went to the front door, and make a great show of unbarring and unbolting it.

In spite of what had been said to him, he could not help feeling great misgivings.

"Open—open!" cried a voice. "Open in the King's name!"

These words were enough to let Tom know that his conjectures were verified.

They were indeed officers who were clamouring for admission.

Just as the words were spoken, however, he flung the door wide open, and, in a tumultuous throng, a troop of officers rushed in.

"Good gracious!" said Tom Davis, in well-acted surprise. "What on earth is the matter? What has happened?"

"Oh, it's all right!" said a voice.

"Is that you, Mr. Marshall?" said Tom, with a great show of delight and respect—"is it indeed you? What an unexpected visit!"

"Yes, very unexpected, and very important, too," was

the reply. "Come inside, I have a few words to say to you."

Not knowing what to think, Davis ushered the officers into the room where the highwaymen had so lately been sitting.

He fancied they all looked about them with a suspicious air.

He had but little time left him for speculation, however, for Jack Marshall, edging up to him, placed his hand on his shoulder, and said:

"I must have a few words in private with you. Can you take me to another room?"

"Yes—certainly," was the response, though Tom could not control a slight tremor of his limbs—"yes, certainly!" he repeated. "But—but——"

"What?"

"Don't your men want something to drink? I don't mind making them welcome if you will allow me."

"Oh, certainly! My lads," he cried, turning to the officers, "our worthy friend, the landlord here, says he is anxious to find you something to drink all round!"

Loud applause followed this intimation, and Tom Davis, licking his lips nervously, said, as calmly as he could:

"What would you like to take, gentlemen?"

Ale was unanimously called for, so he gave orders for Ellen to supply it.

"Now then, as that is over," said Jack Marshall, "just come with me. I won't detain you long, for I have not many words to say, yet when you hear them you will allow that they are very important indeed."

"I am ready," said the landlord, with the air of one going to an execution. "Step this way, Mr. Marshall, if you please."

CHAPTER DCCCXXIX.

IN WHICH JACK MARSHALL ENDEAVOURS TO PERSUADE TOM DAVIS TO BETRAY THE HIGHWAYMEN.

Tom Davis led Jack Marshall into the bar, and then the chief police-officer, placing his hand familiarly upon his shoulder, said:

"As I told you before, I have something important to communicate, and I hope you will give the matter your entire consideration."

"I will," said Tom Davis—"you may depend upon that."

"I thought you would. Well, I confess I have taken a great liking to you—you have treated me in a very straightforward, comfortable way. If you will remember, I promised to do you a good turn, and now the time has come."

"I am very glad to hear that," was Tom's reply.

He made a very wry face as he spoke.

"Well, then," said the chief officer, drawing closer to him, and sinking his voice to an impressive whisper, "I have been informed by very creditable authority that the four highwaymen we were speaking about have been in this house, and, in fact, are at the present time concealed in it."

Tom gasped for breath, and then said:

"Impossible! Surely, Mr. Marshall, you do not place any belief in such a report? It must have been set going by some enemy of mine."

"Well, I won't say as to that," replied Jack Marshall; "but you see I am here, and I have got a good many of my men to back me up in all I do. I considered it was quite probable that these highwaymen might have shown their faces here, and that you had induced them to stay, intending to communicate with me, and so obtain the reward."

Tom shook his head.

"No," he replied, "you are quite on the wrong scent there, Mr. Marshall; I know nothing of the men you want. I give you my word of honour that they are nowhere in this building; if they are, you are welcome to make me a prisoner at once."

"I don't want to do anything of the kind; but, at the same time, don't you be over-reaching. If you have them here, or know where to find them, don't trust entirely to yourself to make them prisoners, and so obtain the whole reward—be content to allow me a share of it."

"I wish I had the chance of earning it," said Tom, over whose whole body a cold perspiration had started out.

He distrusted Jack Marshall excessively.

He could not bring himself to believe that the man was so stupid as by his actions he appeared to be.

He concluded rather that it was only a behaviour assumed to conceal his cunning.

"Look here, Thomas," he said, "be reasonable; if the men are in the house concealed, just say so, and we will take them prisoners at once. Don't be afraid of trusting me; you shall have your full share of the reward."

"You are altogether mistaken," said Tom Davis—"altogether mistaken. I tell you again, they are not here, and I know nothing whatever about them!"

"Refresh your memory a little," said the chief officer—"be quite sure before you speak."

"I am quite sure!" said Davis, feeling more and more uneasy.

What might have been the tactics of Jack Marshall we cannot determine.

It might have been that he had some hope of inducing Tom Davis to betray his friends.

If he had indulged in any such idea, the reader knows full well that he could not have entertained a more fallacious one.

It is quite certain, however, that he looked somewhat disappointed after Tom Davis had spoken.

And then, in a different tone of voice, he exclaimed:

"Well, such being the case, perhaps you will not refuse to allow me to search all over the place."

"You know very well," Tom replied, "that I have not the power to refuse you, even if I wished to do so. Search, and welcome; you will find nothing, I give you my word, so you may as well save yourself the trouble."

"I cannot save myself the trouble, even if I felt inclined after the information that has been given me. I must, if only as a matter of form, search this place thoroughly from roof-top to cellar."

"Then you had better begin at once," said Tom Davis, "and the sooner you get it over the better. I can tell you what will be the end of it, however."

"What?"

"I shall give up this mode of life altogether. Thank goodness, I am independent of it. I will not keep an inn to be continually suspected by the police of harbouring improper persons. No—no. I will give it up, and then, perhaps, you will discover that you have lost a good friend."

"Tut—tut!" said Jack Marshall. "What need is there for us to be bad friends? we ought to be on the very best of terms with each other, because we can be mutually useful—don't you see that?"

"No, I do not," said Tom Davis, sharply. "And just let me know whether you intend to search the house or not?"

"I do; I am compelled by duty."

"Very well, then; all I can say is that you have had the last morsel of information that I shall ever give you. If you can't take my word there had better be an end to all communication between us. Now I have done, and begin as soon as you like."

"Oh, that's your tone, is it?" said Jack Marshall. "Well, then, I don't scruple to say that I have my own suspicions of you, and very strong they are, too. I have tried fair means with you, and would have put you in the way of a good thing, but you refused, so you have only yourself to blame for the consequences. I shall look closely, and, depend upon it, if I find one suspicious thing, sufficient to warrant me in doing so, I will haul you off to Newgate at once!"

"You're welcome," said Tom, seating himself in a chair with an air of dogged resolution—"you are quite welcome! You can search from now to the middle of next week for aught I care!"

"Don't you obstruct us in our duty," said Jack Marshall, shaking his finger—"don't you obstruct us!"

"I don't intend."

"Well, then, I call upon you, as a good man and true, to assist us. Come along; you shall accompany me into every room I enter!"

"All right," said Tom, "don't put yourself about, I beg. I have got one comfort left still."

"And what is that?"

"Why, you won't have the opportunity of searching here again; I will leave at once! To think I should have lived to my age, and then to be suspected at the last!"

Tom Davis pretended to be very indignant indeed, and performed his part with tolerable credit.

How far Jack Marshall was deceived by it, who can say?

At any rate, he did not abandon his intentions of searching the house thoroughly.

Accordingly he called his men around him.

By this time they had finished their ale, so they obeyed his command with great promptitude.

With very good generalship, he stationed them in various positions on the ground floor, so as to be able to keep a good watch.

Then, attended by half a dozen, and accompanied by Tom Davis, he made his way to the top of the house.

"I like to begin at the beginning," he said, "and work my way downwards. We shall soon find out now who is right and who is wrong."

The reader need scarcely be told that all this time Tom Davis was in a state of very great trepidation.

It is true he felt quite relieved about the presence of the highwaymen themselves.

He knew they could not be found, no matter how rigid the search was.

But he recollected that the officers had made their appearance at a most unexpected moment, and he indulged in the very natural fear that some article of apparel might have been left about that would at once proclaim that the highwaymen had been there at some time or other.

Jack Marshall went up in the attic, and satisfied himself by a glance that there was no one hiding there.

He also looked up at the ceiling, and found that there were no means of communication with the roof.

"Jenkins," he said, addressing one of the men, "you stop here in this attic until I call you down. If you see anything of a suspicious character, create an immediate alarm."

"All right, sir," said the officer, and the remainder descended the steep flight of stairs.

The other rooms were next examined.

The house was old and straggling, and contained more apartments than anyone would have guessed by looking at its exterior.

It would be tedious to follow the officers into every room; let it suffice to say that all were searched, of course without finding a vestige of those they sought.

To Tom's great relief, he found that the highwaymen had been very careful not to leave anything about that would be likely to betray them.

The officers then again descended to the ground-floor.

But Jack Marshall did not look quite so much disappointed as Tom Davis fancied he would.

"Well," he said, "we've searched the house—that ceremony has been gone through, and I am bound to say there is nothing suspicious to be seen."

"You might have taken my word for that."

"So I might; but you must recollect we have not quite finished yet."

"Indeed! How so?"

"Why, there are the cellars, to be sure—let us look what you have down there."

Of course, Davis did not at all relish the idea of the officers paying a visit to this place.

But he knew full well he could not refuse, and any hesitation upon his part would very likely be productive of serious results.

He was thinking, however, of the skeleton that was lying there, and wondered whether the officers would be curious enough to unearth it.

If they did, then came the all important question, what influence would it have upon himself?

Would he not find himself in a very awkward and dangerous position indeed?

It seemed like it, and Tom Davis set his teeth hard, and determined to put the best face on the matter he could.

CHAPTER DCCCXXX.

THE POLICE OFFICERS DISCOVER THE SKELETON IN THE VAULT, AND EFFECT AN ENTRANCE INTO THE STABLE WHERE THE HIGHWAYMEN AND THEIR HORSES ARE CONCEALED.

STILL taking the precaution to leave plenty of men posted about, Jack Marshall descended into the cellar accompanied by the remainder.

Tom Davis's uneasiness did not escape his notice, and therefore it was only reasonable he should look forward to making some discovery down beneath the surface.

At any rate, he resolved to keep his eyes wide open to everything, and above all, to observe every movement that the landlord made.

Nothing of an unusual character, however, was met with in any of the cellars until the place was reached where the highwaymen had broken down the wall such a short time before.

How much Davis regretted that they had performed this act!

After all, it had resulted in nothing, and had the wall remained in its original condition he would have had nothing to apprehend.

It was useless to think thus about anything that was passed, and he knew it.

Jack Marshall looked at the pile of bricks and mortar on the floor with genuine surprise, and, turning to Tom Davis, said:

"I can see you have been making some alterations here—what is it you intend?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing," said Davis—"it is entirely my business, so continue your search."

"We will, you may depend upon it. Now then, this way with the lights."

The officers quickly spread themselves over the cellar, and as a matter of necessity, they perceived the spot where the flooring had been disturbed.

It was quite evident to a casual eye that this disturbance had been effected very recently, and Jack Marshall pressed his hat firmly on his head, believing that he was on the right scent at last.

"Hullo!" he cried; "what have we here—more alterations? Why, what on earth does this signify?"

"Nothing particular," said Tom Davis. "I intend—"

He stopped abruptly.

"Intend what?"

"I suppose I had better make a clean breast of it?" he continued.

"I should think so."

"Well, then, in half a dozen words, the fact is, I noticed first of all that that place yonder appeared as though it was a doorway bricked up, and out of sheer curiosity I resolved to try. You see the result. Then I noticed that the bricks were displaced here, and that the ground had sunk, so I dug it up, and what do you think I found?"

"A treasure?"

"No—a skeleton."

"A skeleton?" repeated Jack Marshall, in surprise.

"Yes; I scarcely ventured to move it, and having ascertained what was there, covered the earth over it again, for I scarcely knew how to proceed in the matter. It is evident it must have lain there many, many years; but, however, if you like to satisfy yourselves, here are the tools—set to work.

Jack Marshall reflected a moment, and then instructed his men to dig up the ground.

This was an easily-accomplished task, for the earth was very soft, and, in the space of a few minutes, the poor murdered remains were again exposed to view.

"Oh, yes, there's a skeleton, sure enough; and a very serious thing it is for you, I can assure you — very serious."

"Is it, indeed?"

"It is."

"But what am I to do in such an affair? The fact is, I intended to ask your advice on the subject, for I only made the discovery a few hours ago."

"Well," said Jack Marshall, "my duty is plain and clear before me."

"What is it?"

"Why, I must have this affair fully investigated. In the first place, the bones must be all dug up and put in proper order, then they must be examined by a medical

man, a jury called, and a verdict found. How that may affect you I don't know."

"It can't affect me very seriously, I should think," said Tom Davis, "for, as you are well aware, I have not lived in this house very long, and anyone could tell by a glance at these remains, that many years must have elapsed since they were buried."

"Well, I don't intend for to give an opinion in that matter," said Jack Marshall, "but I know my duty."

"Well," said Tom Davis, with a sigh, "if it is to be so, it must; but it is a very unpleasant thing for me, and I wish we could arrange it somehow."

"It is impossible. Why, bless you, we shall all get our expenses, and that will amount to a trifle, I'll warrant."

And Jack Marshall nodded his head in a very knowing way.

Tom Davis was in despair.

This was calamity upon calamity.

He might be able to clear himself of any suspicion of having had a hand in the murder; but then the bringing of a jury to that house would be disastrous in the extreme to the highwaymen; and if the officers continued to float about as they undoubtedly would, and if one or two were left in possession to watch the remains as the law required, how was he to act?

The prospect before him was so bewildering and disagreeable that Tom Davis could not bear to look upon it.

After a little time, the officers all returned to the bar again, and Jack Marshall securely fastened the door leading to the cellars, and placed a great seal upon it.

"There," he said, "it's more than anyone's life is worth to meddle with that now."

Tom was in hopes that this discovery would not be altogether evil.

He trusted that it might so change the current of the officers' thoughts as to prevent them from continuing their search any further.

If this was so, he felt that he could almost reconcile himself to all that had taken place.

He reckoned without his host, however, for Jack Marshall, with a pertinacity for which he was remarkable, said:

"We must not forget our original intentions—we must finish our search."

"I thought you had finished it?" said Tom.

"Well, so we have, as far as the house is concerned; but when I have been calling here, I have noticed what extensive outbuildings you have, and, in order that I may state positively that I have searched the premises thoroughly, I must have a look there as well."

Tom Davis was quite helpless.

He could not refuse—the officers would do just exactly what they thought proper.

He was in such a dreadful state of excitement, however, that it attracted the notice of all the officers, and it was lucky the skeleton had been discovered, as they would be able to attribute it to that.

Tom only hoped, however, that the highwaymen had left the stable, and taken their horses with them.

But he very much doubted whether they would do so.

He did not forget the little door at the back, through which they could easily gain the plantation, and he could only indulge in the hope—faint as it was—that they had passed through it already, in order to make themselves safe.

Without any delay Jack Marshall opened the back door of the inn, and, followed by his men, crossed the yard, and began to search it and the various sheds built around it in a very systematic fashion indeed.

He was quite right when he said what a many outbuildings belonged to the inn, for it really took them a considerable space of time to search them all.

Tom hoped that the highwaymen would hear them, and have time to make their escape.

At last all paused in front of the stable, and Jack Marshall, addressing Tom Davis, said:

"What place is that?"

"Why, the stable."

"Is it?"

"Yes; do you want to search there?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"Wait a moment, then, and I will find the key."

Tom pretended to search in his pocket for the key, as he knew that every moment that elapsed before the opening of the door was of the greatest importance.

"Key?" ejaculated Jack Marshall, almost immediately. "What are you talking about? Why, can't you see the door is unlocked already?"

"Why, so it is," said Tom, "and there's the key sticking in the lock! I wondered where on earth it could be! But I recollect now, I forgot to lock it. To tell you the truth, I have been so flustered about that discovery down in the cellar that I can hardly tell whether I am standing on my head or my heels."

Jack Marshall said nothing, but, advancing to the door, kicked it open with his foot, and entered suddenly.

In his hand he carried a dark lantern, and he flashed the light of it rapidly around him.

CHAPTER DCCCXXXI.

JACK MARSHALL AND HIS OFFICERS BRING THEIR SEARCH TO AN END, AND TOM DAVIS MAKES A PROPOSITION.

For a few moments we will revert to the proceedings of the highwaymen.

After the door of the stable was closed a feeling of the deepest thankfulness came over them.

Comparatively speaking they were safe.

"I am glad we ran the risk," said Dick. "Rely upon it, if the officers had seen us they would have made known their presence ere now."

"Yes, there can be no doubt about that. But, having accomplished so much, what are we to do next?"

"I should be able to decide," replied Turpin, "if I knew whether those who knocked for admission were police-officers or not.'

"What should you do?"

"Why, open the door and pass out into the plantation beyond, taking our horses with us; then, let what would happen, we should be prepared, and if it came to a push, a rapid flight would save us."

"But how are we to ascertain?"

"We can't; we must wait a minute or two and listen."

Wait they accordingly did.

But they were unable to learn anything that was taking place inside the inn.

From the length of time that elapsed, they afterwards concluded that the visit must be one from the police-officers, for had it been any chance stranger, either Tom Davis or Ellen would have come to the stable door, to let them know that all was well.

"It is best to be on the safe side," Dick said. "Get the door open, and lead the horses out; we will remain here until the last moment."

This was done, and, with beating hearts, they waited to see what would happen next.

The long stay of the officers in the inn puzzled them exceedingly.

In all their speculations, they never happened to think that they might have discovered the skeleton.

At length, however, the back door of the inn was opened, and they not only heard the police-officers, but caught sight of them also.

"Quick—quick!" cried Turpin. "Retreat—retreat! We have time yet, and all will be well!"

They passed through the door quickly; but Tom King said:

"Will it be wise to leave the place thus? The officers will come in here, and, seeing the door, will open it, and perhaps may discover us in the plantation."

"We must run that risk; we can't conceal the door. Quick, Tom—through the door as quickly as you can."

But Tom paused and listened, and quickly found that the officers were searching the other sheds.

"I have a few moments left," he said. "Wait where you are, and leave the rest to me."

There was no time to explain what he intended to do any further; but, to the surprise of his comrades, he closed the little door and then bolted it.

Close by, he was aware, was a quantity of new straw, and this he resolved to move from its present position, and so arrange it as to conceal the doorway.

The task was a tremendous one, but he set to work with wonderful energy, and accomplished it long before the officers reached the stable door.

It now became necessary for him either to find some excellent hiding place, or else to rejoin his comrades.

He determined to attempt to do the latter, and, having an idea of the inside, hastily ascended the steps leading to the loft above.

It was just as he did so that the brief conversation between Tom Davis and Jack Marshall took place respecting the key.

There was a faint, dim light in the loft coming from the circular opening looking into the yard, and by the aid of this illumination, feeble as it was, Tom was able to see around him.

Without hesitation, he stepped on tiptoe to one corner of the loft, going to that side of it which was next to the plantation.

Above his head, and within easy reach of his hands, was the roof, and this was composed only of rude tiles.

The building was old, and it did not seem that any pains had been taken to keep the roof in good repair, so that Tom was able to draw one or two tiles aside, and so leave an opening just about large enough for him to squeeze through.

By the time he had achieved this, however, the officers had fairly begun their search in the stable below.

Passing out quickly, he paused on the roof, and, as gently as he could, replaced the tiles he had disturbed.

Luckily the wind was blowing rather fiercely, and, as it dashed the trees in the plantation to and fro, caused such a rushing noise as to drown the slight sound he made in his operations.

This much done, he slipped down to the ground, which was only a few feet below him.

He now considered he was quite safe, and his comrades as well, and hastened to rejoin them.

He found them, as he considered, in rather dangerous proximity to the little door, and advised them to move further away.

They obeyed, and selected one of the densest parts of the plantation, determined to wait patiently there until disturbed by the officers.

It was certainly much better that the door should have been closed and bolted on the inner side, and the straw heaped up before it, because it would not then appear as if anyone had passed through it, and Tom, now that he had succeeded, considered that the achievement of such a feat was well worthy of the risk that it entailed.

When Jack Marshall flashed the light of his lantern around he saw nothing at all peculiar in the stable.

There was a rather powerful odour of horses, but nothing more.

It should be mentioned that besides the horses used by the highwaymen, there was another belonging to Tom Davis, which he used upon those occasions when he had to fetch different articles that were required.

"There doesn't appear to be anybody here," growled Jack Marshall; "but at any rate, we'll have a look! Hullo!" he ejaculated, upon seeing the straw, "what a heap you've got there, to be sure! Why, fifty men might be hidden behind it! Just poke about it a little, will you?"

This was the only place in the stable that offered the least chance of concealment.

So, with one accord, the officers rushed to the heap of straw, and began scattering it in all directions.

They found no highwaymen beneath it, but they discovered the little door.

"What's that?" cried Jack Marshall, immediately.

"A door!" was the response.

"What a singular place for one to be put. Where can it lead? Why, I never met with such a strange place as this in my life before!"

"It leads to nowhere in particular," replied Tom Davis, and speaking in a loud tone of voice, so that in case the highwaymen should be on the other side of it they would receive warning to remove. "It opens into a plantation or coppice, that lies at the back here; but I never found occasion to make use of it, and I am at a loss to think why it should have been put there."

"Well, we will see," said Jack Marshall. "Open it, will you?"

"It's bolted!" said the officer.

"Well, what if it is? Open it, can't you?"

The bolt was rusty and difficult to draw back; but, with a squeak, it yielded to the strength of the police-officer.

The door was then pulled open, and a rush of cold air came in.

"There's the plantation!" said Tom. "You see I have not deceived you in the least."

The officers all passed out, and, although they looked scrutinizingly around them, they failed to see any signs of the highwaymen.

Jack Marshall looked down upon the ground, thinking perhaps to discover footmarks.

But if such was his hope, he was disappointed, for the leaves had been blown off the trees in large quantities, and lay very thickly upon the ground.

These left no trace of any persons having passed that way, and Tom Davis noticed it with a sigh of the greatest relief.

Jack Marshall saw nothing to warrant him in searching the plantation, of the extent of which he was quite ignorant.

So he turned back into the stable, determined to finish his search of the premises.

But as to the result of this search he was by no means sanguine.

Nevertheless he persevered until his task was quite completed.

Then, with a very crest-fallen air, he re-entered the inn.

During these proceedings, Tom Davis had managed to find an opportunity for a little calm thought, and quickly made up his mind what he should do in the present juncture of affairs.

Therefore he had summoned Ellen to his side, and had whispered to her a few directions.

She nodded, and left him immediately.

When the search was over, Tom Davis invited the officers to enter the kitchen, and, as a matter of course, they willingly complied.

No sooner had they crossed the threshold, however, than a most savoury odour assailed their nostrils, and they one and all looked inquisitively towards the fire-place.

"I've had a little bit of a snack got ready," said Tom Davis, "if you don't mind partaking of it. I see no reason why we should not continue to be good friends. I am willing to forgive and forget. My great failing is, I never can bear anything to anyone."

The scent of the preparing viands had a very mollifying effect upon Jack Marshall and his followers.

So the former held out his hand and said:

"I bear no malice, not a bit, and you might have felt sure of as much by the manner in which I have behaved. I can assure you it is true that I was told to search in this place for the highwaymen, and duty compelled me to do it, however unpleasant it might be. Excuse me for saying that I thought for a moment you were not sincere, but now I find you told the truth, and I shall make my report accordingly."

This was a very great speech—rather too gracious, Tom thought.

He would have preferred that the officers should have shown rather more vexation at their disappointment.

However, the only thing he could do was, in a manner of speaking, to float with the tide, and do all he could to keep on good terms with his troublesome customers.

He ordered more ale to be brought, and they drank to one another's good healths with evident relish.

Then the supper was placed upon the table.

A very substantial supper it was too, and the officers paid full justice to it.

They vowed and declared that the landlord was a hearty good fellow, and a pattern to all the rest of his fraternity.

Tom plied them well with ale, and when he imagined they were ripe enough for the proposition he had to make, he rose to his feet and prepared to utter it.

The chief officer, seeing him in this position, at once called for order and silence.

But the officers by this time had drunk just enough ale to make them rather uproarious, and so, amidst a slight confusion, Tom began:

"I have a few words to say, gentlemen, and the subject

is very important. I should have preferred not to trouble you with it at all, but I am compelled to do so, and all I can request is that you will listen to me patiently for a few minutes."

"Hear, hear!" muttered Jack Marshall, and the officers all banged the table with their cups approvingly.

Thus encouraged, Tom Davis went on.

"I believe we are all good friends," he said. "I'm sure I have nothing but feelings of friendship and affection for all of you, and I hope the feeling is a mutual one."

"Hear! hear!—it is—it is!" said a chorus of voices.

"I rejoice to hear it," said Tom Davis, "for that gives me confidence to proceed. And now, gentlemen, if you please, I will come at once to the point and begin my communication."

CHAPTER DCCCXXXII.

JACK MARSHALL AND HIS OFFICERS APPEAR TO BE ON THE BEST OF TERMS WITH TOM DAVIS.

CONSIDERABLE curiosity was visible upon the countenances of all the police officers, and Jack Marshall, leaning his elbows on the end of the table, shut one eye and prepared to listen with great attention to what the landlord had to say.

"Gentlemen," commenced Tom, "as you may guess, the subject I am alluding to is that disagreeable discovery down below."

"The skeleton?"

"Just so. You were kind enough to tell me what it was you intended to do in the matter, and I have no doubt it was only what would be considered your proper duty; but while carrying it out I would have you to think a little about me. You can easily tell that it will have a very damaging effect upon me and my house. When it comes to be known that such a thing has been found in the cellar, in fact, I shall be obliged to shut up the place altogether and leave it."

"No—no!" murmured many voices.

"But I shall be compelled to do so," replied Tom, firmly. "Luckily, I have money enough of my own to be quite independent of the business, but this place just suits me—it is exactly the kind of life I like, and although I have only been here a short time, yet it is quite long enough for me to have fallen in love with it altogether, and it would grieve me very much if I was compelled to leave."

"But what are we to do?"

"That's what I'm coming to," said Tom Davis. "I would just have you put yourself in my place for a few moments, and consider how you would like things to be. I may say that if I left, you would all lose a very good friend, for let me repeat, I shall always be very glad to see you whenever you like to come."

Great applause interrupted Tom at this point, and, wiping the perspiration from his face, he endeavoured to continue, calmly.

This, however, as may be easily imagined, was a most difficult matter.

The point that he was urging now was a most vital one, and if the officers did not fall into his views, the consequences to himself and the highwaymen would be very disagreeable and disastrous indeed.

In fact, discovery could scarcely fail to take place, and altogether so much attention would be directed towards the inn, that it would be no longer a safe place of refuge.

Surely, then, it was worth an effort to attempt to avert such a calamity as this, and Tom Davis firmly believed that he had taken the right course.

He had got the officers into a very pleasant, complaisant mood.

He had supplied them well with eatables and drinkables, and, in spite of his difficult position, had won the good opinion of all of them.

Yet now that the crisis had come he hesitated.

All would depend upon just how his proposition was taken.

It cost him a great effort to continue.

"I have to ask this of you," he said, boldly—"it is to let the matter alone and say nothing more about it; behave just as you would if the discovery had never taken place. It does not need proof that I can have had nothing to do with the murder, if murder it is, and from the appearance of the remains it is equally certain that so many years have elapsed that there is but the very faintest hope of discovering the perpetrators of the crime. Let me ask you, then, to keep this a secret, and in return for it you will at all times be welcome to the best of everything my house affords, no matter what time you come or how often. I won't urge it any further, but just weigh that in your minds. If you determine to carry this matter forward you may get a little in the way of expenses, but I solemnly declare that I will shut up the inn and retire into private life. I might ask you to grant me this as a favour, but I will owe a favour to no man, so now I wait for your reply."

Tom Davis sat down, and a rather ominous silence followed his words.

He had, after all, but very slight hopes of success.

What, then, was his surprise when Jack Marshall, apparently after a brief deliberation with himself, rose to his feet and replied:

"I feel strongly inclined to say yes to your proposal, for I question, after all, whether it will turn out much good to any of us; but if we do agree you must promise secrecy as well."

"Oh, never fear for that," replied Tom.

"I mean you must never let it be known that we have hushed up such an affair; if you do we should be covered with disgrace."

"You may depend upon my silence," said Tom; "and let me take this opportunity of offering you my deepest and most heartfelt thanks for having so kindly consented to my proposition."

This was quite a bold stroke, for it will be perceived that Jack Marshall had not positively given his consent.

But Tom judged that his mind was just confused enough not to feel quite certain whether he had or not.

It was a great relief to him, however, when he heard the chief officer say:

"Well, then, my lads, you all hear this, and you know the terms? We say nothing about that disagreeable affair down below—we do not breathe a word of it to anyone, and, in return, our excellent friend the landlord here will make us welcome whenever we like to come."

"Yes, that's it!" said Tom Davis, emphatically.

"Agreed—agreed!" cried the officers, unanimously, for it had been many and many a day since they had fared so well as they had then, and they naturally looked forward to a perpetual succession of such feasts.

Altogether, the majority of them thought they had done a very good thing indeed.

Whether Jack Marshall thought so, or whether he had some other scheme in his cunning brain, time alone can unfold.

Tom Davis called for spirits of all descriptions, and plentiful supplies of hot water and sugar.

Very liberally, he requested the officers to help themselves, and they were by no means backward in doing so.

The manner in which the glasses were filled and emptied was something surprising to witness.

But Tom noticed with satisfaction that in this process the officers took hold of the bottle that came next to their hand, and consequently partook in succession of various kinds of spirits.

None knew better than the landlord that the effect of this would be speedy intoxication.

And such proved in a short time to be the case.

Before another half-hour was over, they were all sitting drunk and incapable in their chairs.

Tom Davis rose unperceived from the table, and, going up to Ellen, whispered in her ears, telling her to remain and keep a strict and most observant watch upon the movements of the officers, and if any of them moved or attempted to leave the room, she was to scream out as if frightened.

This having been arranged, Tom Davis hastily made his way to the stable, and, opening the door leading into the plantation, uttered a low whistle, to which the highwaymen immediately responded.

In a few moments they were all around him, and, as briefly as he could, he made them aware of all that had taken place, and the actual state of affairs.

They congratulated him warmly upon the cleverness he had displayed.

"Capital!" said Turpin. "Not only have you got us out of all this trouble, but you have also got the officers partly in your power as well; and the mere fact of their paying frequent visits to the inn will do more towards diverting the suspicion of others from it than anything else."

"Yes—yes!" said Tom. "No doubt it will all turn out for the best, though I like to keep those gentlemen at a safe distance."

"So do I. But make haste and return."

"I will. I am off now. You remain here until I come again and let you know that all is safe. I feel pretty certain that the officers, as soon as they wake up from their drunken slumber, will have a parting glass, and ride away."

"Be quick, then, and rejoin them, for fear your absence should be noted."

It was Dick Turpin who said this, and Tom Davis, without another word, retraced his steps to the inn.

Upon entering, however, he did not perceive that there was any cause for apprehension.

The officers were, to all appearances, slumbering profoundly.

Tom Davis seated himself in a chair, and closed his eyes.

He did not altogether go to sleep, but dozed, feeling sure that the least movement that was made would arouse him.

It was not, however, until day had fairly dawned that the officers showed any signs of recovering their consciousness, and it was Jack Marshall who was the first to awake.

He looked at his men half angrily.

But then recollecting what had occurred, set to work to wake them.

This was a difficult process.

But it was at last accomplished.

Tom Davis brought in another large supply of ale, to which the officers amply paid their respects, and prepared to leave.

But Tom again reverted to the understanding that was made between them, and, to his extreme satisfaction, it was ratified.

"All right, old boy!" said Jack Marshall, slapping him on the back—"it's an understood arrangement. Mum on all sides, and you will find that, after all, it won't be a very bad thing for you. Recollect that I am now chief, and, for the future, I will stand your friend."

Tom was delighted to find Jack Marshall in such a mood, and was profuse in his thanks.

Accordingly he gave them every attention, and it was just as the sun was beginning to warm the earth with his first rays, that they all slowly took their departure down the lane, feeling rather queer and confused about their head-pieces as yet.

Tom Davis watched them out of sight, and made sure that none had remained behind.

He was not inclined to trust Jack Marshall too far, although he had spoken and behaved in such a friendly way.

It would have been very awkward for an officer to have concealed himself upon the premises, so Tom made a thorough search.

The result was that no one was found, and, feeling tolerably sure that all would be well for the next few hours, he went out into the stable, and summoned the highwaymen.

They all gladly enough obeyed his signal, for the air was chill, and the plantation had proved a most disagreeable place to pass the night in.

CHAPTER DCCCXXXIII.

THE SECRET PASSAGE IS CONSTRUCTED, AND DICK TURPIN SETS OUT UPON A PARTICULAR EXPEDITION.

THE highwaymen could all perceive that, in spite of the success he had met with, Tom Davis yet looked anxious and alarmed.

His eyes roved about incessantly, and he seemed, by his manner, as though he half expected to catch sight of an officer every moment.

Dick and his comrades, however, were unfeignedly rejoiced at the turn affairs had taken, speaking in no measured terms of Jack Marshall's obtusity.

But Tom Davis shook his head.

"He is a cunning one," he answered—"a very cunning one! Depend upon it, he has a deeper motive than we are aware of for all his proceedings, although they seem so absurd."

"I am not of that opinion," said Dick. "I think him quite incapable to fulfil the office he holds."

"Well, time will show," was Tom Davis's answer. "There is no good in anticipating evil. All I hope is, that he will keep his word respecting the discovery of the skeleton in the vault."

"Yes, that is important."

"Very; but if you were to ask me what was the interpretation I place upon Jack Marshall's conduct, I should say that he has a suspicion you come here at times, and he is anxious to capture you all at one moment; it would then be an achievement for him to boast of."

Dick laughed at the idea.

"It would be more difficult than he thinks it is."

"No doubt," said Tom; "but let me entreat you all to be most careful in your movements. Rely upon it, he will keep the closest watch all round this inn; and unfortunately, now he is aware that there is a means of communication between the stable and the plantation at the back."

"Well, he does," said Turpin; "but, after all, I see no great cause for alarm. If we can manage to outwit him as we have done hitherto, these frequent visits of the police to this house, will do much towards removing the suspicion that we are here."

"That was my own view," said Davis. "But now, once more, and for the last time, let me ask you to set about constructing a secret passage. Let what has happened to-night be a warning."

"We shall," said Dick. "We will commence it now at once."

Upon hearing this determination, Tom Davis brightened up wonderfully, and set to work to collect the necessary materials.

"You have a long job before you," he said, "and a great deal of hard work; but if you persevere, you will accomplish it."

No more was said upon the subject.

But the highwaymen all descended to the cellar, and, with the aid of the implements that Tom Davis had already in readiness, commenced their very arduous labour.

It took them but a short time to decide as to the manner in which the secret passage should be constructed. It should first reach from the cellars to the stable, and from the stable to some point in the plantation.

Such being the case, of course the cellar was chosen that was nearest to the stable, and Tom Davis, marking out a small space on the brickwork, said:

"If you will make it there, I can always contrive to keep it covered over by this large cask."

This was agreed to immediately.

The spot selected by Tom Davis was in the brick sill surrounding the cellars upon which the barrels rested.

There was one large hogshead, and the space upon which this stood when placed on end was quite large enough to enable them to construct such a place as they required.

A kind of pit was sunk first, and the labour in excavation was much lighter than they had expected, for the ground was loose and soft.

When a sufficient depth had been obtained, a regular passage was commenced, somewhat rudely arched, it is true, but yet well enough to answer their purpose.

In order to keep the earth above from falling in, it was necessary to fix upright posts at short distances, across the tops of which flat pieces of wood were laid.

But of this kind of material there was an abundant supply at the back of the inn.

And so the work went on bravely.

After the first hour, they took the labour in turns, the others resting while two worked.

And in this manner they were able to keep at it incessantly.

Considering that they were inexperienced in the use of the tools, and in the construction of such places, the pro-



[DICK TURPIN IS HOTLY PURSUED BY THE HUNTSMEN.]

gress they made by nightfall was really surprising to witness.

Fatigued by their exertions, they lay down to rest, but renewed their work at an early hour on the succeeding day.

A means of communication was made with the stable, so constructed that the horses could be readily taken up and down.

The opening above was in a remote corner of the building, and could be covered over by straw or any other material.

Tom proposed that a large corn-bin should be placed at this spot.

The excavation of the passage itself was carried on with renewed zeal and activity, nor did they attempt to cease until they had burrowed about two hundred yards beneath the plantation.

They then found themselves at the side of a somewhat steep declivity that was so thickly overgrown with gorse and other prickly shrubs that it was quite impossible to perceive the ground.

As it was doubtful whether they would require to make frequent use of this passage, the greatest care was taken not to disturb these bushes any more than could be helped, so that the appearance of the place should not undergo any alteration.

This was easily managed, and the delight of the highwaymen and Tom Davis upon the completion of their scheme was intense in the highest degree.

They now considered that they could bid defiance to all the police-officers in the land.

It was impossible for them to enter the inn so quickly as to prevent them availing themselves of the secret passage.

Then the horses could be readily brought down, and almost before the inn was searched they would be making their way through the plantation.

But although they worked with the greatest diligence, not losing a single hour, the construction of the passage occupied them more than a week, during which interval they neither saw nor heard anything of Jack Marshall and his officers.

All were much exhausted, for the labour was such as they were unfamiliar with.

Now that the excitement that had actuated them had passed away they felt the reaction severely.

Nevertheless, it was only a few evenings afterwards that the highwaymen began to show by various signs that they were quite tired of staying in the inn.

They longed once more to have a daring, spirit-stirring adventure on the highway.

Tom King, Claude, and Sixteen-String Jack boldly announced their intention of setting out as soon as ever darkness really commenced, and Dick Turpin declared that he would not be left behind.

In vain Maud endeavoured to persuade him to remain—in vain Tom Davis urged him not to take Black Bess out of the stable at present, as the hurt she had received turned out of a more dangerous character than they had at first believed.

Dick, however, upon an inspection of it, declared that it was well enough, and that a good gallop would do his mare more good than remaining in the stable.

Finding they were quite bent upon their purpose, Tom Davis said:

"At least, you will wait a little while until I have gone on a reconnoitring expedition round the inn. If the officers see me, there will be nothing surprising in my taking an evening's stroll, and I will not return here until I have ascertained that there are none of them within half a mile of the place."

Maud and Ellen so begged that this precaution should be taken, that the highwaymen consented, and Tom Davis set out.

During his absence, however, they got their horses in readiness for the road.

The saddles were put on, and indeed every part of the trappings cleaned over and over again.

But still Tom Davis did not return.

Their patience at length became quite exhausted, and just as they were about to start and leave him to return when he liked, he made his appearance.

It only needed a glance at his countenance to let them know that the coast was clear.

With great haste they mounted their steeds and rode off one by one, allowing an interval to elapse between the departure of each.

Dick was the last to go, and Maud and Tom Davis kept close to him.

"It is quite uncertain," Turpin said, "whether I return to-night or not. I may be compelled by circumstances to go a long way from the inn, and it might be dangerous in the extreme for me to attempt to return by daybreak; so that if I am not here by the time you can see the first streak of light in the eastern horizon, don't expect me; it will be safer for me to remain where I am. Be under no apprehensions whatever on my account until I return, and I only mention this as an additional precaution for safety."

Maud clung closer to Dick, for she guessed by his words that he had some dangerous expedition in view with which he had not thought proper to make her acquainted.

Tom Davies also held a similar opinion, but after Dick's reasons—so excellent as they were—he could not urge him to return the same night.

The last farewell having been spoken, Dick tore himself away.

Then going slowly through the plantation, he emerged into a narrow lane.

The night was clear and calm, but piercing cold—just such a night as would brace up the nerves of anyone.

Dick drew in long breaths of the cool air.

He was so accustomed to remaining only beneath the sky, that the least confinement was irksome to him.

The blood circulated more quickly through his veins than it had done for several days past, and, humming a tune as though no care or trouble rested on his heart, he allowed the reins to fall gently on the neck of his bonny steed.

With a short neigh that sounded almost like a cry of gladness, Black Bess started off at a swift gallop.

The road was clear before them, and firm beneath her feet.

There was no obstacle to be in dread of, and Dick Turpin surrendered himself to the excitement of a wild and furious gallop.

Away they went, rushing onwards at a speed that would have dismayed any ordinary traveller, and accomplishing it without meeting with the slightest injury.

At length, when Dick considered he was far enough away from the inn, he gradually tightened the reins until he brought Black Bess to a standstill.

"Ah!" he said, after listening a moment, "some one comes! This is lucky indeed!"

He plunged his hand into his pocket as he spoke, and produced his pistols, the priming of which he carefully examined.

CHAPTER DCCCXXXIV.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN HAS TWO NARROW ESCAPES OF HIS LIFE.

THE sharp, rattling sound produced by some light vehicle rolling rapidly along the road came distinctly to Turpin's ears.

A brief inspection showed him that his pistols were in admirable order, and so, drawing close to the side of the road, he waited patiently for the traveller or travellers to make their appearance.

He was not long kept in suspense, though the night was so dark that he could not see the approaching vehicle until it was within a few yards of him.

Then he perceived that it was a light gig with huge yellow wheels, drawn by a powerful white horse.

In it was seated only one man, who appeared to be well wrapped up against the cold.

Dick started out suddenly, and, in those quick, sharp tones which he had always found so effective, he commanded the traveller to stand and deliver.

So unexpectedly did he make his appearance that the traveller was quite taken aback.

On the mere impulse of the moment, as it seemed, he jerked the reins, and the horse, like a well-trained animal, suddenly came to a standstill.

Dick presented his pistol.

"Now," he said, "be quick and choose: your money or your life! Don't force me to take both of them!"

The reins dropped from the traveller's fingers, and Dick, with great promptitude took hold of them himself, so that there was little fear the traveller would put his horse in motion.

"I have nothing," he said. "You don't think I am such a fool as to travel about with a lot of money in my pockets. No, no—I know a trick worth two of that!"

"Your money!" said Dick. "I must and will have it! But don't force me to search your pockets, or you will find the operation a most unpleasant one. Mind you, I am not to be trifled with!"

"Well, you shall have what little I carry with me," replied the traveller, and as he spoke he began slowly to unbutton his overcoat.

Dick kept a close eye upon every one of his movements.

Plunging his hand into his breast pocket, the traveller said:

"There, that's what I carry about me. How do you like it?"

With great suddenness he produced a pistol, and, aiming rapidly at the highwayman, he pulled the trigger.

But Dick's movements were rapid in the extreme.

The barrel of the pistol was all at once knocked upwards.

The finger of the traveller was on the trigger, and he could not prevent himself from pulling it.

There was a flash and a loud report.

"Now," said Dick, coolly, "if you have another firearm about you, just produce it, and let us have that fired off as well; then, perhaps, we can proceed to business."

The traveller evidently was not a little abashed at Dick Turpin's extraordinary coolness.

"I owe you a shot," Dick said; "and although I am inclined to be generous, yet I promise you I shall return it unless you quickly hand over your purse, whether it contains much or little!"

The traveller saw that he was completely at the highwayman's mercy, so, with a grin, he unbuttoned his undercoat and produced a tolerably-sized leather bag.

"There," he said—"take it. I haven't another pistol, or I wouldn't give it up without a struggle. I'm a d—d fool for carrying the money by night, yet how I am to help it I can't tell at all."

Dick Turpin almost snatched the bag out of the traveller's hand, and then chuckled as he found how heavy it was.

"If this is gold," he cried, "it will be a prize indeed; and if silver, the amount will not be despised!"

"Let me go," said the traveller. "I thought to have made a good day's work to-morrow with that money, but now you have prevented me. Let me go!"

"With all my heart!" said Dick. "Here are the reins. Drive on. Never grieve, man, over a little money. It will do me quite as much good as it would you."

"That's a poor consolation," the traveller growled, and, raising his whip, he dealt his horse a savage cut with it.

The animal started off at a wonderful rate.

Dick looked after him with a smile.

Then, placing the bag of gold securely in his pocket, he listened again.

But all was still.

"This looks like making a good night of it," he muttered, half aloud and half to himself. "We'll ride on gently, Bess, and wait for some one to overtake us."

This resolution Dick carried out.

But the speed at which he went, although a gentle one, was such that there was little likelihood of any-one overtaking him.

At frequent intervals he would pause and listen.

But on each occasion the silence was profound.

"It is almost too late now, I fear, to meet with anyone, yet there is no hurry—I have the whole of the night before me."

How far Dick might have gone along the road he had only a vague idea; but when it was growing towards morning he stopped once more.

No other traveller had presented himself.

"A bad road," he said—"a bad road. I've a good mind now that I will desert it."

He went on at a walk a little distance further until he came to a spot where a cross-country road intersected the highway.

In the centre of the open space formed by the junction of these roads was a tall finger-post, which, being freshly painted white, gleamed out a conspicuous object in the darkness.

"Surely," he thought, "if I remain here a little time I shall meet with some one. I have four roads now at my command."

Yet he listened in vain, until, suddenly, with a glad cry, he exclaimed:

"Yes, some one comes at last. Hurrah!"

He turned off down the cross-road on his right hand, for he knew full well the traveller was as yet at a considerable distance, and the spot where he had taken up his station near the finger-post was not at all adapted for waylaying him.

The traveller, whoever he might be, was approaching on horseback, and at an easy rate.

Dick journeyed on to meet him until he came to a spot where, on one side of the road, was a huge rock that had been half cut away when the road was made.

This mass of stone of course cast a deep shadow on the roadway, and in this shadow Dick concealed himself.

Tramp—tramp! he could hear the horseman slowly approaching him, and he wondered why he should be journeying at such an easy rate.

Dick had his pistols all in readiness, and as soon as the traveller entered the shadow of the rock, he rode forth.

"Hold!" he said. "Pull up for your life!"

The stranger obeyed, and, in the calmest possible tone of voice, asked:

"Well, what's the matter? Why do you stop me?"

"I must trouble you for your purse, watch, rings, and such-like," said Dick. "It's not worth while to make any fuss about them; they can be of no moment to you, for I see by your attire you are a gentleman."

"But if I am, that's no reason why I should submit to be robbed without raising a finger in my defence. I will see you d—d before I surrender one farthing!"

"You will alter your mind, I feel certain," said Dick, and he cocked his pistol while he spoke.

The sharp, clicking sound sent an uneasy thrill through the traveller's whole frame.

"I need scarcely tell you I am a desperate man," said Dick, "and that I am determined to obtain my ends. Save all further trouble, I beg; hand over your valuables, and you shall depart in peace."

"I will not," was the reply; "you shall not have on farthing without a struggle for it! Come on, I am ready!"

"You are mad."

"Not at all! Come on, I say! If you want any money you must take it!"

"Then," said Dick, "just hear my determination. You see this pistol? it's an excellent weapon and carefully loaded by myself. I will count three, and if, when I have done so, you refuse to hand your purse quietly, why, your death will be on your own head."

The traveller was silent, and after a slight pause, Dick said:

"One!"

Still the traveller sat motionless.

"Two!"

"Hark!" cried the traveller, so suddenly, that it made even Dick Turpin start—"what's that above us? Look—look!"

He raised his arm suddenly as he spoke, as if to point upwards.

The manner in which he spoke was well calculated to throw anyone off his guard.

Even Dick was deceived by it, and instinctively he glanced upwards.

But as he did so he heard a loud report, that was accompanied by a red flash lighting up the surrounding scenery.

Something whistled so closely past his head that for a moment he staggered and reeled, not quite certain whether he had been hit or not.

A triumphant laugh rung in his ears, and the stranger said:

"Now, I hope you are settled! Aha! it serves you right!"

There was a rush, a clatter of a horse's hoofs, and the stranger was gone.

Dick placed his hand to the side of his face and felt it carefully.

"No—no," he muttered, "I am not hurt. That must have been a close shave indeed! Confound the fellow's treachery—it was base in the extreme; it was as though I had fired after counting two! But he shall not escape," he added, in a louder voice—"he shall not escape! I will have every article of value that he carries with him. Perhaps he shall take away something from me as a memento of this adventure! Now, Bess, lass, forward!"

Dick was much incensed by this act of treachery, which was so near costing him his life.

It was indeed a wonder that, at such a short distance, the bullet could have missed him at all.

But the fact was, the traveller knew he was doing a base and dangerous action, and felt the necessity of being extra quick in all his movements.

Then it was only natural that he should be slightly agitated while making such an attempt as this, or some other cause had rendered his hand unsteady, his aim imperfect.

Luckily, however, Dick had escaped from the bullet.

He had sustained no injury whatever.

But when Black Bess, in obedience to his command, started off at full gallop along the cross road, the sound of horses' feet in advance had almost died away.

"Who would have thought that he could have made such speed?" Dick thought. "And if he had such a good horse as that under him, why was he coming along so quietly when I heard him first?"

CHAPTER DCCCXXXV.

THE HUNTSMEN MATCH WHITE STAR AGAINST BLACK BESS FOR FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS, AND DICK TURPIN FINDS HIMSELF IN A SITUATION OF GREAT PERIL.

The traveller's manner was certainly peculiar, and well calculated to give rise to perplexing speculations.

One thing, however, above all others was quite certain, and that was, the horse he rode was of no common quality.

The speed it now made was something truly prodigious.

Black Bess, however, with her long, stretching gallop, rapidly gained upon him, and each moment Dick could hear the sound of the traveller's horse's hoofs more and more distinctly.

Yet so good a start had he obtained, and so excellent was the speed he made, that a considerable time elapsed before Dick was anywhere near him.

The night was now almost gone, and it seemed to be struggling with the coming day.

Each moment, however, the light grew brighter and brighter, and distant objects came more clearly into view.

Turning round in the saddle, the traveller saw Dick coming on at a tremendous pace behind him, and, after one hasty glance, struck his horse savagely with the spurs.

The noble creature flew off at a vastly accellerated rate, and Dick had the mortification of finding that he would have to pursue him some distance further before he overtook him.

"Upon my life," he cried, "it's a rare steed — Black Bess has never been so well matched! But come what will, I will overtake him!"

Considering that morning was coming on with such rapid strides, it was a very perilous thing for Dick to be thus riding across the country.

But his blood was up, and, in the excitement, he forgot all caution.

Of one thing, however, he was well aware, and that was he was a considerable distance from London.

Every moment now the distance between Black Bess and the traveller's steed decreased.

Dick noticed it with delight, and continued to urge his mare forwards.

The road lay straight before them as far as the eye could reach.

It was a smooth, well-kept road, too, so that the horses were able to put forth their best powers.

Finding that his pursuer was so greatly gaining upon him, the traveller continued to spur his own steed.

With but slight effect, however, for the animal was now growing insensible to the pain.

The sun rose and saw the chase going on as vigorously as ever, except that Dick Turpin now was something less than half a mile behind the traveller.

Suddenly, to Dick's surprise, he unclasped the large cloak he wore, and that had hitherto concealed the greater part of his apparel.

Perhaps he fancied that it interfered with his movements, or else the rapid motion had rendered its heat unbearable.

At any rate, off the cloak came, and then Dick understood at a glance how it was that Black Bess had had such a hard ride.

The stranger was attired in full hunting costume, with velvet cap, a bright scarlet coat, leather trousers, and short black riding boots.

Beneath him was a capital hunter—one of the best racers in the country, in fact.

But the animal was now greatly distressed.

Dick could perceive that, although so far in the rear, while Black Bess was still galloping on, apparently without showing the least signs of fatigue, and yet Dick thought she did not on this occasion put forth her speed so well as she had done many times before.

But perhaps this was only a fancy, caused by his inability to overtake the stranger.

Nearer and nearer the horses drew together, and Dick, with an angry feeling in his heart, clutched the butt of a pistol tightly.

It was no wonder that he should be greatly exasperated by such a treacherous, cowardly attempt having been made upon his life, and at that moment he longed more for revenge than he ever had done in all his life before.

When he came up with the traveller the encounter would, beyond a doubt, be a formidable one.

All at once, though, the stranger disappeared round a bend in the road.

Dick was vexed that he should have got out of sight even for a moment, and urged Black Bess to still greater exertion.

To his intense wonder, however, upon sweeping round the curve in the road, he perceived that the traveller had stopped.

He was surrounded by a party of about a dozen gentlemen, all similarly attired to himself, and who, beyond a doubt, were out so early in the morning for a hunt.

The stranger was gesticulating violently, and doubtless saying something in a very loud tone of voice to his companions.

Dick was so surprised at what he saw that for about the space of a moment he was undecided how to act.

Then he began gently to rein in Black Bess.

The turn affairs had taken was quite an unexpected one, and while checking his mare, he continued to think how he should act.

He yet burned to avenge the injury he had received, yet while the traveller was surrounded by so many of those who were doubtless his own personal friends, it would be madness to attempt anything against him.

This was galling in the extreme.

Still watching their movements, Dick saw the stranger pointing towards him with his arm.

His companions looked in the direction to which he pointed.

Judging by their actions, Dick came to the conclusion that the stranger was urging them to begin an immediate pursuit.

But this proposal on his part did not seem to be very much relished.

The probability was, the gentlemen having come out for a settled purpose, did not wish to be turned aside from it.

But the traveller continued his exhortations.

When within a hundred yards of them, Dick Turpin pulled up, and remained quietly waiting in the middle of the road.

He could now hear them speaking quite plainly, though they were too far off for him to distinguish the words.

One uttered louder than the rest would occasionally float through the still morning air to his ears, but that was all.

The stranger must have been some person of distinction, for great attention was paid to all he said by his companions, and they seemed to hesitate about giving a positive refusal.

With a boldness that perhaps no one else would have displayed, Dick walked Black Bess still closer to those whom he felt justified in calling his foes.

He continued, indeed, until he was able to overhear their conversation.

And then he halted.

This action created a great deal of astonishment among the huntsmen.

But the stranger said:

"I tell you, Sir George, that it is Dick Turpin! Why, look at the animal under him—with half an eye you can recognise it as Black Bess, and if it had not been, I wonder what other horse in the world could have eclipsed Diamond here, and I assure you that, when I fortunately encountered you, she was almost knocked up!"

"I really do believe that it is Black Bess," said another voice—"I really do. I've heard all about her, and, 'pon honour, I do feel inclined to match my little White Star against her."

"Do—do, Sir George!" cried the stranger, emphatically. "I'll bet you five hundred pounds that you can't overtake Black Bess in a gallop!"

"Done!" said Sir George. "You are all here witnesses to the bet! Come on, I'll win the race first, and then we will oblige Sir Marmaduke by capturing the highwayman!"

"Well — well — agreed!" said a chorus of voices. "Now—now—start at once!"

"Wait a moment," said the stranger; "Diamond, here, is done for. Which of you does not feel much inclined to join in the race—who will change horses with me for a few minutes?"

"I will," said a voice. "I like hunting a fox, or anything else on four legs; but d—n me if I like turning police officer, and hunting a man! Here you are, Sir Marmaduke, take my horse and welcome."

An elderly gentleman with long white hair descended from his steed as he spoke.

The huntsman who had been named Sir Marmaduke alighted also from his foaming, panting horse, and speedily took possession of that belonging to his friend.

It was a noble creature, of more than ordinary height, and apparently possessing great powers of speed and endurance.

Sir Marmaduke's eyes quite flashed with joy and anticipated triumph.

"Now, Sir George," he cried, "I am ready. Five hundred pounds that you don't overtake her!"

Hearing these words, Turpin took off his hat and made a low bow.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you have not thought proper to ask me whether I was willing to join in this race or not. But no matter, I am in the humour to show you a little of my mare's mettle; so when you are ready say the word, and come on."

"Ready!" said Sir George, and he touched his horse lightly on the flank as he spoke.

Dick turned Black Bess sharply round, and made her overleap the rather stiff hedge at the side of the road.

He judged he should be safer going across the open country than by keeping to the high road.

With a loud shout Sir George followed him, and at his heels came the remaining huntsmen.

The old gentleman who had been left behind shook his head slowly to and fro.

Then, leisurely mounting the horse that had been left him in exchange, he rode gently off in an opposite direction.

It was plain that for him, at least, the race possessed neither charm nor interest.

The hedge by the side of the road was cleared by all the horses without difficulty, and as soon as the soft green turf was beneath their feet, the race might be said to have commenced.

CHAPTER DCCCXXXVI.

THE RACE BETWEEN BLACK BESS AND WHITE STAR MEETS WITH AN UNEXPECTED TERMINATION.

Dick Turpin as yet had no occasion to use either whip or spur to urge Black Bess forward.

When he slackened rein she bounded forward gallantly, and from the style in which she commenced it seemed pretty clear that she would win the race, and that Sir George would consequently lose his bet.

The superiority of White Star over the other horses was very speedily manifested.

Sir George kept the lead in admirable style.

The others came on in a straggling line behind him.

Only second, however, was Sir Marmaduke, who, full of bitterness and hatred, determined if possible to overtake the highwayman and capture him.

Dick on his part was by no means sorry to know his foe was following him; he was longing for vengeance, and hoped that the opportunity of satisfying it would speedily arrive.

A ploughed field was reached, and as the ground had only recently been turned up, this tried the horses severely.

Dick fancied with alarm that, while crossing it, Black Bess flagged a little as though from weakness.

Surely, however, this must have been fancy, he thought.

Although Black Bess had behaved so gallantly on that night, he knew well that the full extent of her powers had not been reached, and that she was competent to do much more.

Unfortunately, in the excitement of recent events he forgot all about the injury Black Bess had received, and from which she had not yet recovered.

The wound in the neck that had been produced by the pistol bullet was not quite so slight as had been at first imagined, for one of the small branching veins had been severed.

The place, nevertheless, had partially healed over, and being out of sight in consequence of her long silken mane falling over it, Dick forgot at the time all about it.

In those cheering, animated tones that he so generally employed when speaking to his matchless steed, and which he knew produced a more powerful effect upon her than could the sharpest application of the spur, he said:

"Come, Bess, my lass—come! Forward! On—on! For your credit as well as for mine, you must not lose this race. Cheerly, now—cheerly—the ground will be better soon! Bear up, old lass—bear up!"

It was really possible to see how the gallant creature summoned up all her energies in response to her master's urgings.

Like one who is determined to make one tremendous effort to succeed, she bounded on, and the next moment the ploughed field was left behind.

With prudent forethought, Sir Marmaduke checked his horse as soon as he found that a ploughed field was before him.

He knew that in a general way, there was a beaten path around, close under the hedges, and along this he proceeded.

The distance was great, yet the speed he was enabled to make in consequence of the firmer nature of the ground, more than made up for the loss of time occasioned.

When the next hedge was leaped, he came close to his friend, Sir George, indeed.

Raising his voice, he cried to him:

"Another five hundred on the race, if you are willing! I will bet now five hundred more that I obtain the lead, and will keep it!"

"Done!" cried Sir George, readily, as if the affair was not of the slightest moment, and while he uttered the word he loosened the reins still more.

He had been nursing his horse across the ploughed field, being unwilling to distress it too much.

Now that turf was again beneath its feet, it was enabled once more to put forth its prodigious power of speed.

The race was truly a most exciting one, and the huntsmen soon caught the enthusiasm of it.

They found indeed that, in comparison with hunting a fox, the excitement was tremendous.

It would have been a strange spectacle had there been any eye to behold it.

But the fact was, at that early hour, and in that sparsely-populated part of the country, there were no living beings abroad.

After leaving the ploughed field, Black Bess shot ahead of her pursuers in a manner that delighted her master beyond all measure, and she continued to increase the distance between them until a long stretch of rising ground was reached.

Here she again flagged.

This time so perceptibly that Dick could not avoid noticing it, and a sharp pang shot through his breast.

What could be the meaning of such an occurrence as this—an occurrence that had never before happened?

Hitherto she had distanced all pursuers with the greatest ease.

Could it be really possible that his mare, which he believed peerless, had at last met with her match?

It would seem so, and, half angry that such should be the case, he touched her for the first time with the spur.

She snorted, as if in great pain.

But again seeming to draw all her muscles together she set forward at full speed.

But the rising ground was trying in the extreme—almost as much so as the ploughed field; and long before she gained its summit, Dick found that, in spite of all his efforts and his urgings, the huntsmen were gaining upon him.

A cold perspiration started out upon his brow

What was to be done?

If he pressed Black Bess onward by means of the spur, she might carry him clear of all pursuit, but yet be so disabled as to be a long time in recovering; perhaps she would never again be the same.

A whirl of thoughts passed through his brain.

He placed his right hand to his forehead, and pressed it tightly.

He was endeavouring to think.

All at once he started, and a groan escaped his lips.

With great abruptness he pulled the rein and stopped Black Bess just before the summit of the hill was reached.

He dismounted with equal haste, and going towards her head, groaned again.

The reason may be guessed.

His eye had all at once fallen upon the stain of blood.

He recollected then the wound she had received, and felt sure that the violent exertion had caused it to break out afresh.

It was scarcely necessary for him to raise the mane in order to satisfy himself of this terrible fact.

The blood was pouring forth in alarming quantities, and it was no wonder that Black Bess should have flagged.

The wonder is indeed that she should have withstood the loss of blood for so long, and that Dick had not perceived it earlier.

He glanced behind him, and saw the huntsmen pushing forward with redoubled speed, especially Sir Marmaduke, who had now obtained the lead.

What to do in the present crisis of affairs Dick scarcely knew.

To ride Black Bess any further would have been cruelty in the extreme—such cruelty as he, above all others, could never be guilty of.

"Would I had known it earlier!" he said, in tones of bitter reproach. "But no matter—even if I save you at the price of my own life, you shall escape. Without you I should be nothing. You shall at least have a chance of making your escape, and I will shift for myself as best I can."

These words more passed through Turpin's mind than escaped his lips.

But at the same time he plunged his hand into his pocket and drew forth a pocket-book.

Hastily opening it at random, he saw a blank page.

His eye also caught sight of a pencil.

Drawing it out rapidly, he wrote, in a straggling hand, upon the blank page of the pocket-book the words:

"*All's well. Fear not for me. Back soon.*"

He had no time to write another word.

Folding down several leaves at that part, he closed the book, and, by means of a little strap that was used generally for carrying a riding-cloak, he strapped it to the saddle.

Then pulling off his long cravat, he placed it round the neck of his gallant steed, and tied it as tightly as his strength and hurry would permit.

All this that has taken us so many words to describe in reality occurred in the briefest conceivable space of time.

But by the time Dick had got so far the huntsmen were almost upon him.

Patting his mare upon the neck, and placing his mouth close to her ear, he cried:

"Home, Bess—home! Make haste back, old girl, and you will be attended to. Quick—quick, I say! Home—home!"

She tossed her head quickly and neighed.

Dick clapped his hands, and she bounded off at a swift gallop.

Having thus, as he believed, secured the safety of his steed, Dick turned his attention to his own very perilous position.

How was he to escape capture?

To attempt to fly would be ridiculous. The huntsmen would overtake him before he could get fifty yards.

He was compelled, then, by necessity to get a bold front on the matter.

Turning round, with an assumption of as much calmness as he could call up, he folded his arms over his breast, and stood quite still, waiting for his pursuers to come up.

Sir Marmaduke was first, and when he saw the highwayman upon the ground he uttered a loud shout of triumph.

Mercilessly he plunged his spurs into his horse's flanks, impatient to come up with him.

Sir George was not far behind, and the remaining huntsmen not above two hundred yards in the rear.

All of them were filled with surprise at what they witnessed, and marvelled greatly at the highwayman's conduct.

But Dick stood quite calmly, waiting for them to arrive.

As he noted their rich garb, and remembered that two of them, at least, were baronets, he began to think more hopefully upon his position.

"They are gentlemen," he muttered. "I have done no harm to any of them except Sir Marmaduke, and unless I mistake their natures very greatly, they will not take the office of police officer upon themselves. No—no; I feel that with them I shall be safe, and that all will be well."

CHAPTER DCCCXXXVII.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN SURRENDERS HIMSELF A PRISONER.

This was a very frail hope indeed, and Dick might have known that he would be making a mistake if he trusted anything to the generosity of others.

He forgot just then that his hand was raised against all men, and that all men, in consequence, had their hands raised towards him.

Even when he saw Sir Marmaduke coming on so hastily and with such a vindictive expression on his face, he felt less assured than he had done a moment previously.

"Villain," cried the baronet, "surrender at once! You have reached the end of your rope, my fine fellow! Sir George," he added, "help me to secure this man!"

"Not I," was the answer—"I am off in pursuit."

"Sir George," said Dick, calmly, addressing him, "pull up your horse a moment, I request you—do not continue the race. My mare I discovered to be badly wounded, and that's why I alighted. You have lost the wager, it is true; but if you like I will pay the forfeit."

There was a laugh at this, and Sir George, checking his steed, said:

"Upon my word, you take this very coolly and easily indeed—more easily than I could in such a ticklish position as yourself: but I suppose I must consider that I have won the race?"

"Yes, yes—by all means. Sir George, Black Bess, for the first time in her life, has met with her match; I acknowledge it freely!"

By this time the other huntsmen arrived, and Sir Marmaduke was just about to address them, when Sir George said:

"But can it be really true that you are Dick Turpin, the highwayman, and that you stand there so calmly and quietly as you do when you know that so heavy a price is set upon your head?"

Dick bowed.

"It is quite true, sir," he said—"true, every word of it. As for my calmness, perhaps that comes from an undue share of conrage, or perhaps it is because I have grown more careless about the officers, who have tried so often and yet failed to capture me."

"My friends," cried Sir Marmaduke, "I call upon you to assist me in securing this man. He is a highwayman, and has not only robbed me, but attempted my life."

"No," cried Dick, "that is wrong. It was you who, like a cowardly assassin, tried to throw me off my guard, and to shoot me down like a dog."

"Insolent villain!" cried Sir Marmaduke, furiously, and he half carried his hand to his sword by his side.

Dick perceived the movement, and at the same moment drew his own weapon.

"Sir Marmaduke," he cried, "in the presence of all these, your friends and acquaintances, I stigmatize you as a coward—a villain—a would-be assassin—and if you wish to disprove my words, you must do so at the sword's-point."

The baronet turned very white, and fairly shook with rage.

"The sword's-point indeed! Ridiculous!" he cried, as soon as he could command his voice. "Do you think I would debase myself by descending to be your equal?"

"The debasement would be on my side," returned Turpin, fiercely, "for I never was an assassin yet, either in thought or deed, and never shall be!"

"I have no more to say," cried Sir Marmaduke, controlling himself with a great effort. "I command you to surrender yourself to me; and if you refuse, the consequence of such refusal will be on your own head! Dead or alive, I will make you my prisoner!"

He descended from the saddle as he spoke.

"Come on, then," said Dick. "You are free to take me if you are willing. I shall not surrender, but shall resist to the utmost of my power!"

"But you forget," cried the baronet, "I am a justice of the peace, and for this county. You know it as well," he added, addressing the others; "and in the name of his Majesty the King I call upon you to assist me in capturing this notorious offender! By his own admission he is Dick Turpin, the highwayman, and you know that a reward has long been hanging over his head!"

"It has, we know," replied the huntsmen; "but we are not police officers."

"No; but you, I hope, are subjects of the King, like myself, and therefore I again call upon you for assistance. If you refuse to give it, rest assured that I will set aside all feelings of friendship and acquaintance, and denounce you to the authorities. You will then find yourselves in anything but a comfortable predicament!"

This, as they all knew, was no idle threat, and they were also well aware that when his passion was aroused, Sir Marmaduke was a most vindictive man, and would not hesitate to carry out his threats to the very letter.

When he perceived them whispering, and that they no longer firmly refused his demand as they had done, the baronet took heart and continued:

"I include you, Sir George," he said, "among the rest; and let me ask you to set these others a good example. Things have been carried to too great a pitch, and, as you must be aware, the law is no respector of persons, and you would be punished as severely for aiding and abetting a felon as anyone else."

Sir George was silent.

"Come," said Sir Marmaduke, "do you consent or refuse? In either case I shall then know what to do."

"The man has done me no harm," replied Sir George. "I don't know that he is Dick Turpin, and therefore cannot see why I should run the risk of capturing him."

"But I am a magistrate, sir," returned the other; "you know that—the chief magistrate in the county. Nor need I remind you that I am the representative of the King, and that you are bound to aid me to the utmost of your power in carrying out the law."

"Sir Marmaduke," said Dick, "if you want me, why not take me without troubling these gentlemen, who I can see, are unwilling to mix themselves up in the affair? Here I am, and there you stand. Here is my sword; draw yours, and let the conflict decide the point. I owe you one for your attempt upon my life. Now, then, let us square accounts and come to a settlement."

A murmur of applause came from the huntsmen.

They could not be blind to Turpin's boldness and great courage, nor could they avoid giving expression to their admiration.

"Bravo! Sir Marmaduke," cried Sir George, "you hear what he says—take him."

"Never," was the answer. "I will not peril my life in so unequal a contest. Again I call upon you for your aid, and I call upon you for the last time, for I solemnly swear by everything that we hold sacred if you refuse again I will forget friendship and prosecute you all to the utmost!"

Great irresolution could now be seen upon the countenances of all, even including that of Sir George.

The threat was one they could not afford to despise, for its consequences would not only be felt by themselves but by their families.

Yet the great admiration they had for Dick's courage made them hold back.

At length Sir George exclaimed, addressing himself to Turpin:

"You hear what has just been said, and comprehend our position. If we assist in making you a prisoner we shall all perform our parts unwillingly. You will have an undoubted right to struggle for your life; but, at the same time, if you injure any of us, you will be doing a great wrong. What is to be done?"

"I care not," said Dick. "Liberty I cannot and will not part with. I will give up my life first! Persuade Sir Marmaduke to encounter me alone."

"But he refuses."

"Yes, he does refuse," yelled the baronet; "and I want to know whether you refuse also?"

"You know full well we dare not refuse," said Sir George, "because, from your known character, we feel that we shall meet with no mercy at your hands, although you have called us individually your friends. If you force us to comply with this demand, bear this in mind—for we can threaten as well as you—henceforth we will not recognise you in any public or private assemblage, but wherever we meet you will treat you with the scorn and contempt you deserve!"

"Be it so; I care not so long as I carry my point, though I hope a little reflection will bring you to your senses. Now, then, upon him—seize him!"

"You see how we are situated," said Sir George, again addressing Turpin. "Let me give you a few words of advice, and be assured that they are dictated solely from a desire to promote your welfare."

Dick bowed.

"Surrender calmly and quietly; that is as unavoidable on your part as ours. The odds are so great that your capture must result in the end, and, moreover, you would inflict an injuiry upon those who wish you well, and who would get you out of this scrape if they could, and therefore let me again advise you to surrender quietly."

Sir George accompanied these words with a look so significant that Dick felt sure that he had some deep and particular motive for so speaking.

The question was—should he trust a perfect stranger so far as to take his advice in an affair of such vital interest as this?

A moment's consideration decided.

"Sir George," said Turpin, "I will take your advice, and, without any resistance, freely and willingly surrender myself to you a prisoner."

CHAPTER DCCCXXXVIII.

CLAUDE DUVAL IS PURSUED BY THE POLICE OFFICERS ON THE ST. ALBANS ROAD, AND HIS HORSE UNFORTUNATELY FALLS DEAD LAME.

In order to preserve something like a chronological order of events, it is necessary now that we leave Dick Turpin for awhile, although we do so reluctantly, since he is in a situation of so much peril.

But on that night when he had such a narrow escape of his life from the pistol of Sir Marmaduke, other events were occurring to his comrades full of interest and excitement.

Those events, however, will be passed over as rapidly as possible, in order that we may come back to Dick's proceedings.

It was not long, then, after his departure that, according to arrangement, his three comrades one by one departed from the inn, each taking different directions.

Claude Duval was so fortunate as to get away quite unperceived.

Tom Davis had been careful in reconnoitring, and Claude, although he looked vigilantly from right to left, saw nothing of Jack Marshall or any other police officers.

After what had taken place on the Windsor Road such a short time before, Claude judged it would be wise to select some other locality, and accordingly he turned his horse's head northwards, making his way in the direction of St. Albans.

While leisurely trotting along, however, he fancied he perceived something like a dusky figure flit across the roadway and disappear immediately in the hedge on the left-hand side of the way.

He could not be quite sure that this had actually taken place.

Yet, being in doubt, it behoved him to be careful, for such an occurrence as that ought not to be passed over.

Anything unusual or strange signified to him danger, and so he resolved to be upon his guard accordingly.

"The boldest way is best," he muttered, and as he spoke he touched his horse with the spur, and caused him to gallop forward at great speed.

On he went for a distance of about thirty yards.

Then he heard a wild, screaming voice exclaim:

"That's him—that's him! Shoot him! Shoot now, or you will be too late!"

Claude, at the first word, plunged the spurs deeply into his horse's flanks, causing him to make a tremendous leap forward, one that would have unhorsed any but a practised rider.

Claude, however, maintained his seat, and well it was he had the presence of mind to act as he did, for the silence of the night was broken in upon by a rattling discharge of firearms.

The bullets, however, were all behind him.

He had escaped without a scratch.

His breast burned with indignation upon finding that such an attack had been made upon him; and then, the next moment, he shuddered, for he thought how easily he might have fallen a victim to such a treacherous plan.

"I see how it is," he muttered, between his teeth; "the officers, finding that all chance of capturing us by what I may call fair means to be quite useless, have decided on this bloodthirsty course. This comes of offering a reward the same whether a prisoner is taken alive or dead."

As may be guessed, Claude was much agitated by this occurrence, for he could not help pondering upon the chance circumstance that had saved him, and thinking how near he had been to death.

Unconsciously he allowed his horse to decrease its speed, but all at once he was aroused by the shock of horses' hoofs on the road behind him.

Turning round, he glanced back, and in the dusky gloom perceived a dark, black mass of officers approaching him at the greatest speed their horses could accomplish.

"They are determined," he thought, "but yet it is strange to me if I fall into their power. On—on!"

He spurred his horse while he spoke, and the animal made gallant progress.

Soon the officers were distanced, but yet they kept hard upon the track.

Had it been a little lighter, they would have been in sight.

Now that he was getting further and further from his pursuers, however, Claude's apprehensions vanished, and he was just beginning to congratulate himself, when, with great suddenness, his horse fell dead lame, and proceeded only at a limping pace.

Full of dismay at this unexpected calamity, he pulled up abruptly, and sprang to the ground.

He lifted the horse's hoof, expecting that the lameness had been caused by picking up a stone.

But no, it was nothing of the sort—at least, there was no stone wedged into the hoof.

"A sprain," he said—"yes, it must be a sprain. How unfortunate! What am I to do now?"

He shaded his eyes with his hands, and looked with a piercing gaze all around him.

In the meanwhile, the officers came on with undiminished speed, and more than made up for the distance that Claude had managed to gain.

How he was to shake them off again seemed to be a mystery.

For once, he found himself entirely at fault.

Yet, with an air of determination, he cried:

"Come what will, they shall not capture me!"

He sprang into the saddle as he spoke.

Much as he might regret urging his horse forward while in such a condition, he was forced to it by circumstances.

Vigorously applying the spurs, therefore, he compelled the poor creature to break again into a gallop.

Still it was a very poor attempt, and Claude thought that if the officers were only listening with attentive ears they would be able to distinguish the difference in the sound and learn what had occurred.

Suddenly, in the distance, and apparently in the very middle of the road, he perceived something white and gleaming.

Another second and he discovered it was a huge finger-post set up at a spot where another road crossed the one which he was travelling.

"That gives me a little chance," he thought; "if I can get there in time to take a turn, they may be in doubt which way I have gone."

Before coming to the finger-post he had resolved to take the turn on his left, by which means he would be getting nearer to Ealing than he would had he turned in the opposite direction.

As he neared this point, Claude perceived that there was a high brick wall—so high that, although mounted on his steed, he could not see over it.

From its appearance, he guessed that it surrounded some gentleman's domain.

He noticed this, we might almost say, without being conscious that he did so.

It was afterwards that he recollected.

Coming to the corner, he turned round swiftly, and again spurring his poor steed, made better progress.

After going rather less than a quarter of a mile, however, his horse again stopped, and was scarcely able to proceed even at a slow walk.

This was worse than he had expected, and something very much like despair took possession of his breast.

How he was to shake off his pursuers now he had not the remotest idea.

Still his horse continued to walk on, almost, as it appeared, upon three legs, for the lame one it scarcely touched upon the ground at all.

It was at this juncture that the police officers arrived at the cross roads.

"I fear it is all over," murmured Claude, despondingly, half aloud and half to himself. "They are close here, and I have no escape—none. Ah!"

He uttered an ejaculation.

Just as he reached this point in his ruminations, he arrived opposite some large entrance-gates in the wall we have mentioned, and which, from their massive appearance, evidently formed the principal mode of entering the grounds.

What so surprised him, however, was, that no sooner did he arrive at the spot we have mentioned than a small wicket in the large gates was thrown open, and a man hastily emerged.

Dark as it was, Claude could perceive that he was of great age.

His form was shrunk and bowed, and his hair, long and white, fell flutteringly upon his shoulders.

In a weak, tremulous voice, he spoke, and, while speaking he drew close to Claude's horse and placed his hand upon the rein.

"Thank Heaven!" he exclaimed—"thank Heaven that you have returned now, Master Jack, although I am afraid it is too late. Yes, yes, too late. But do not despair—do not Follow me with all speed—every moment is of importance now. Don't ask me a question; I can't stay for explanation—I will tell you as we go towards the house. Come—come!"

So saying, this singular old man, grasping Claude's horse by the bridle, led him towards the door through which he had just passed.

As for Claude himself, he was so surprised and bewildered by the suddenness of the whole occurrence, that before he had time to decide how he should act he found that he had actually been led through the gates, and the little doorway was closed behind him.

That he was the victim of some mistake—that the old man—either through infirmity of age or some other cause—had taken him for another person, was quite evident.

That mistake had most unquestionably saved Claude's life.

The real point was now how far he should allow this deception to proceed.

Should he at once undeceive the old man and trust to his generosity, or should he endeavour to put off the moment of discovery as long as possible?

He decided upon the latter course.

Perhaps what led him to do so was the trampling of the officers' horses, which now reached his ears with great distinctness.

But he listened to the sounds with tolerable complacency, for he had noticed that the old man had well secured the gates behind him and he was perfectly certain that none of the officers had seen him enter.

The entrance gates of a mansion would be such an unlikely place for him to enter, that the officers in all probability would ride past, not thinking for a moment had sought refuge there.

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[CLAUDE DUVAL'S PECULIAR ADVENTURE.]

CHAPTER DCCCXXXIX.

CLAUDE DUVAL IS IN TIME TO PREVENT THE PERPETRATION OF A FOUL WRONG.

THAT such a mistake as the one we have just described should take place is not at all wonderful, for by the old man's manner it seemed as though he had been for hours expecting the approach of some one, and seeing Claude, as it appeared, about to stop at the gates, he jumped immediately to the conclusion that the person he expected had arrived.

This was the solution Claude himself put upon it, and as he did so, this difficulty arose in his mind:

The failing eyesight of the old man might have disabled him from distinguishing a stranger from the person he expected; but the voice would be another matter.

When Claude spoke, would not the deception be at once discovered?

"Oh, Master Jack," he continued, addressing him, and walking on by the side of his steed, "I have been watching and waiting for you so long—watching and waiting until I have grown quite weary, and when I heard you approach my joy was so great that at first I could not move! Oh, it is time that you came back to your own! If you only knew how much your father regrets his harsh treatment of you, you would forgive him. He, too, longs for you; but the dark spirit is at work, and——You understand, Master Jack?"

Claude made a murmuring sound, which he hoped would be significative of assent.

The old man took it so, and continued with the garrulity of old age:

"Your cousin is there; he is with him now in his bedroom, sitting at the side of his dying bed. He does not

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know that my eyes have been upon him, but they have—they have! He has been importuning your father to sign a will that will revoke the one he has already made, and alienate all this fine property from you and bequeath it to him. But your father has held out till now, though he is weak, very weak, and his ear is still poisoned by that false tale which your bad cousin fabricated."

Still Claude was silent, and the old man, turning to him, said:

"Why, how quiet you are, Master Jack! You don't say a single word. But I don't wonder at your silence—I can account for it. Your heart must be heavy indeed. In a day or two, though, you will be able to tell me all that has occurred, and to glad my poor heart. And how is Miss Ellen now, and the little one? You see I call her Miss Ellen still, although I ought not to do so; but the familiar name came to my tongue's-end before I was aware of it."

"They are well—very well," returned Claude, purposely speaking as huskily as he could, so that it should be hard to recognise the exact tones of his voice. "But my heart is indeed heavy," he continued, "and you must not ask me many questions to-night."

He waited with considerable anxiety to see what would be the result of this speech.

If he could pass muster on this first occasion, he would have good hopes of being able to sustain the deception sufficiently long for him to secure his own safety.

He noticed with some misgiving, however, that the old man started, and turned his eyes inquiringly upon him.

"Why, Master Jack," he cried, "how strangely you speak—how your voice has altered!"

"Has it?" returned Claude, with greater confidence. "Perhaps it has, and so have I changed in my appearance, if you could but see me. It is very many years now since we met, if you will recollect."

This was a bold assertion, but, fortunately, Claude's guess was tolerably correct.

"Yes," was the answer, "to you it may appear many years, yet to me, who have lived on this earth so much longer than you have, it seems a mere nothing. But parting is over now, I hope."

"I hope so too."

"It will be a glad day when you take possession here. The people will regret your father's death, but they will rejoice when they find your cousin is not heir, for he is universally detested."

Claude was again silent, for he could not tell exactly what to say, and, having been successful so far in his guesses, he was unwilling to run the risk of discovery.

"The sympathies of all are with you," continued the old man, "and with Miss Ellen. They are all sorry for Miss Ellen, and while they blame your father for his harshness, yet they cannot help pitying him for being so led away by Ralph Davids."

"I am glad of that," Claude ventured to remark.

"Well, now, dear Master Jack, just tell me what you intend to do. Will you not walk in boldly, and, in spite of all obstacles, make your way to your father's chamber? He will be glad indeed to see you, and your scheming cousin will be quite discomfited."

Claude reflected.

"No," he said, at length. "If you could get me into the house quietly, I should prefer it."

"Why so?"

"Because then you could lead me, perhaps, by some unfrequented route to the chamber where my cousin is. I should like to witness what takes place with my own eyes."

"Then you shall do so," was the answer; "and perhaps it will be better so. You know the way, Master Jack, as well as I do."

"Yes, yes; but I will leave my horse, and then you can accompany me. I am so agitated and troubled to-night that I feel as though I must have you with me."

The old man seemed very pleased and grateful for this speech.

"If you wish your arrival kept a secret, we will fasten your horse to this tree, and then creep slowly towards the house."

"Just so," returned Claude, and while he spoke he slipped from the saddle

His horse was secured to a tree, and then, with cautious footsteps, he followed his strange guide across the lawn.

On his way, he reflected a little on the singular position in which chance had placed him.

For the present he had no doubt that he was perfectly safe.

The officers might search for him as long as they liked—they would never find him.

It was impossible, however, for Claude not to feel grateful to the old man, who had so unintentionally befriended him, and, from what he had heard, he could easily surmise that without some active interference a great wrong would be perpetrated.

That active interference he resolved to make.

He had no longer to trouble himself about his own position. He should be able to direct all his energies to the one object before him.

These were the reflections that occupied his mind as he followed the old man to the house.

He was careful then to keep in the rear, for he had not the remotest notion of where he was going.

In a few minutes afterwards, the old man paused.

Claude wished that he could learn his name, so as to address him by it.

But it was scarcely likely that he should hear it pronounced, although the old man might consider it singular that he should never call him by it.

Opening a little side door in the mansion, he passed through, and stood aside for Claude to enter.

He crossed the threshold quickly.

The door was closed behind him, and he found himself in perfect darkness.

"Take my hand, Master Jack," cried the old man. "There, that will do—I can lead you now. I do believe that I am more familiar with this old place than you are, for I could find my way anywhere about it in the dark."

"Yes, yes—don't trust to me in the least," murmured Claude. "I feel so completely overcome that I am not capable of taking the lead in anything."

Slowly, so as to avoid making any sound that would discover their presence, the old man advanced.

A flight of stairs was descended, a long corridor traversed, and then there was a pause.

"This is the door of the dressing-room," exclaimed the old man. "If I could manage to open that quietly, and we entered, we should be able to see and hear almost everything, for the inner door is nearly always ajar."

"Good!" said Claude. "Listen first—then try."

The old man listened, and then gently opened the door.

A feeble light appeared beyond.

Every care had been taken to prevent any unpleasant sound reaching the ears of the rich invalid.

The hinges of the door had been oiled on this account, and therefore the old man was able to push it open in perfect silence.

A hasty glance showed him that the dressing-room was vacant.

Claude looked eagerly over his shoulder.

Just before them was another door, standing partly open—the door evidently that communicated with the bed-chamber.

In this a light was burning, and those rays that streamed through the doorway served to light up the dressing-room to some extent—sufficient, at any rate, to enable Claude and his guide to avoid coming in contact with any article of furniture.

Breathlessly, and on tiptoe, they stole to this door—then paused and peeped in.

A spacious, handsomely-furnished bed-chamber was disclosed, filled with rare and costly articles.

Upon these, however, Claude's eyes did not rest for a second.

All his attention was immediately concentrated upon the two sole occupants of the room.

CHAPTER DCCCXL.

IN WHICH IT TURNS OUT THAT THE MISTAKE WAS A MOST FORTUNATE OCCURRENCE FOR ALL PARTIES.

One was a man apparently about thirty years of age, though he might have been older.

His hair had a reddish tinge, and his face, which was flat and dull-looking, was disfigured by an immense number of freckles.

In his small, twinkling, ferret-looking eyes, however, was visible a peculiar expression—one of mingled rage and triumph.

He was standing by the side of the bed, on which, propped up into a sitting position by many pillows was the invalid.

This was a man old and emaciated.

His face wore already the hues of death, and on his forehead perspiration clustered in large drops.

Lying before him on the bed was a sheet of paper, upon which a few words were written.

The old man held a pen in his trembling fingers.

"Sign," said the young man, somewhat sternly—"sign, ere it is too late!"

"I cannot—I cannot!"

"But I say you must! Would you leave all that you have to one who has treated you with so much contumely, and has brought upon your honoured name nothing but the deepest disgrace? I say, would you, after all, reward him for his conduct?"

"No, no! Give me the pen—give me the pen! I will sign!"

"You have it in your hand."

"Oh, have I? Yes—I see—here it is—I had forgotten. Now, where is the paper?"

"Lying before you. Can you not see it? Be quick, or it will be too late!"

With a manifest effort, the old man put his pen upon the paper.

He made a few scratches, and then, with a long-drawn breath, fell back apparently dead.

A shout of rage burst from the young man's lips upon the occurrence of this accident.

"Curse him!" he cried, with savage vehemence. "Curse the old rascal—how I hate him! One moment more would have done the business, and now, after years of successful scheming, I find myself baffled at the last moment. But it shall not be so—it shall not be so!"

Quick as thought, this young man picked up the pen, and, after glancing hastily around him, wrote something on the paper.

"There," he said, "that's well done—much better than he could have done it himself. I have practised signing his name too often for anyone to be able to say this is a forgery. My story will be believed. He, I know, has publicly given it out that he would disinherit his son and make all over to me. I will say that, finding death coming upon him suddenly, he requested me to draw up this memorandum, and had then only just time to sign it before he expired. It will hold good—ten to one that it holds good."

"A nice article," was Claude's thought, and at the same time he determined that his villany should be baulked.

But just at that moment there came a loud uproar from the lower part of the house.

Voices could be heard raised to an angry pitch, which were followed by the trampling of footsteps and the sound of heavy blows.

Immediately after that, footsteps could be heard upon the staircase.

There was a crash—the door that led direct from the corridor into the bed-chamber was dashed open, and Claude perceived a young man enter, who at a first glance bore a somewhat remarkable resemblance to himself—so great, indeed, that he did not wonder at the mistake the old man had made.

Evidently this was the heir returned just at the right moment.

With a cry of amazement, the old man rushed forward.

As for the cousin, Ralph Davids, he stood like a transformed to stone.

Following closely in the footsteps of the heir came two elderly gentlemen, one of whom went direct to the bed.

With a great effort at self-control, Ralph Davids drew himself up to his full height, and determined to put a bold face on the matter.

"What means this insolent, unwarrantable intrusion?" he demanded. "Begone! I command you all to leave not only this room, but this building! I am master here now, and will be obeyed!"

"Villain!" cried the heir—"villain! I have heard the whole story of your detestable arts, and you shall not escape the punishment so justly your due!"

He rushed forward while he spoke, and no doubt would have inflicted some summary punishment upon his cousin, had not one of the gentlemen who accompanied him held him back, though it was with great difficulty that he restrained him.

Ralph Davids retreated to the other side of the bed, where he felt that, at any rate, he was at a safe distance from the intruders.

Then he held aloft the paper.

"Look here," he said. "Read this. You see his lordship now lies dead—he has just breathed his last—not until, however, he had performed what he considered was an act of justice and of duty. That bold, bad man," he continued, pointing to the heir, "you know has been a lifelong sorrow to his deceased parent. You know, as well, that his lordship has avowed over and over again his intention of disinheriting him, yet lacked the courage to take the necessary step. Finding himself suddenly grow worse—knowing, in fact, that the hand of death was resting on his head—he commanded me to write the few lines that you now see; then, seizing a pen, signed his name at the foot. Scarcely had he done so, than he expired. Look, here is the signature!"

He pointed to it triumphantly while he spoke.

"I will read this document," he continued, in tones of the utmost excitement—"I will read it! Listen

"'I, Lord John Robert Venners, finding myself on my deathbed, hereby revoke all other wills that I have made, and bequeath the whole of my possessions, personal and real, to Ralph Davids.

"'(Signed) VENNERS.'

"Now are you satisfied?" the cousin added. "You may say that this deed is without its witnesses, but I will try the law upon this point. I can bring a score of persons who know his lordship's firmly-expressed determination, and then we shall see who obtains the victory."

"We shall see," said the son of Lord Venners, speaking in sorrowful tones; "but I shall bring forward, as well, my witnesses, who will prove that you deluded my poor father by a tale that had no foundation whatever in fact, but which was hatched up entirely in your own villanous, scheming brain."

"I care not!" cried the other. "I am here, for the present, sole master, and I command you all to quit this dwelling! If you refuse, I will have you expelled by main force."

"The deed had witnesses, although they have not signed their names!" said a voice.

There was a universal start, and Ralph Davids uttered a yell of dismay.

At the same instant, Claude Duval stepped forward from the dressing-room.

"I am one of the witnesses," he cried, "and I can give a plain, straightforward account of all!"

"No, no, my good fellow," said Ralph Davids. "You mistake—you mistake! Say nothing—all will be well!"

He accompanied these words with significant gestures, all of which were employed for the purpose of informing Claude that if he kept silent he would be well rewarded.

But he did not know our old friend, or he would never have made any such attempt.

"What I saw," Claude continued, "was this: His lordship was pressed and threatened to sign that paper; but the natural feelings that he had for his own son had exercised their due force, and he hesitated. At last he changed his intention, and seized the pen. He made a few erratic scratches with it, and then fell back, convulsed by death."

The greatest astonishment followed this declaration, and the old man, raising his voice, said:

"Yes, I am witness too. Heaven be thanked that I made so great a mistake!"

"Go on!" said one of the gentlemen who had followed his lordship's son into the room.

"After that," said Claude, pointing to Ralph Davids, "I heard that man mutter something expressive of his determination not to lose this property. I saw him take a pen, and place that signature at the foot of the document, while, at the same time, he stated he had practised that signature many a time before."

"Seize him!" cried one of the gentlemen—"seize him! He shall be arrested on this charge!"

Ralph Davids turned round, and faced his opponents.

All traces of colour had vanished from his cheeks, and the numerous freckles on his countenance looked strangely hideous from their contrast to its ghastliness.

"Beware!" he said, producing a knife from his pocket—"beware, I say! I am a desperate man!"

"Secure him!" was the cry, and there was a general rush.

But Ralph Davids was too quick for them.

With one tremendous bound he reached the window, and dashed headlong through it.

Outside was a balcony, and on this he alighted in safety.

He turned for a moment to shake his clenched fist, then leaping over the parapet, disappeared in the darkness.

"Let him go," said a voice—"let him go—we can capture him at any time! The condition of his lordship here demands our entire attention. We shall soon know the truth of this matter."

One of those who had entered with his lordship's son was the physician, and ever since his entrance he had been bending down over the bed.

"His lordship is not dead," he said, in a voice of great excitement, "though I grieve to say life is only just fluttering at his heart. It is impossible to save him, but yet, I think he will be able to recover sufficiently to tell the truth of this affair."

He applied a small bottle to the nostrils of the dying nobleman, the effects of which seemed magical.

In a moment he reared himself upright in the bed, and glared around him with a haggard, frenzied expression.

"Father!" cried the young man—"father—father, they tell me you are dying, but oh, while you have breath left, tell me that you forgive me!"

CHAPTER DCCCXLI.

IN WHICH RALPH DAVIDS MEETS WITH A COMPLETE DISCOMFITURE.

THERE was a deep and touching silence as, while the young man spoke these words, he threw himself on his knees at the bedside of his father, who gasped for breath, and seemed as though he wished above all things to speak.

But utterance was denied him.

Receiving no answer to his appeal, the son continued:

"Father—father, say that you forgive me ere you die! Do not let me live with such a cloud resting upon my future life as your unforgiveness would be! Speak—speak! My cause of offence was slight, and many things, I know, have been misrepresented to you by interested persons. For all these things I have suffered most severely. Had time permitted it Ellen would have accompanied me, bringing her boy; but let me carry to them the assurance of your forgiveness and reconciliation."

"I do forgive you, my poor boy," the old man gasped forth at length—"I do forgive you! Oh, what I have suffered during the past few moments no tongue can tell! When I fell back upon the bed I was not dead, but all power of motion had abandoned me. Of everything that was going on around I was perfectly conscious. I saw the perfidious wretch in whom I so trusted forge my signature to that detestable document, and then indulge in the expression of his triumph. Thank Heaven I have recovered my speech again, so that I can set this matter right. That deed I proclaim nothing, and the will I long since made at the wish of Mr. Miller, there, I hereby decree to express my last wishes."

The young man was much overcome by this declaration, and poured forth his thanks ardently.

Gradually the hand which he pressed between his own grew senseless and chill, and at length the aged man closed his eyes in death, with a smile upon his lips.

Claude now endeavoured to withdraw, hoping to succeed in doing so without exciting observation.

In this, however, he was disappointed, for the young man, rising suddenly to his feet, grasped him by the hand, and inquired who he was and what had brought him there at that particular junoture.

"I am a perfect stranger to you all," was his answer, "and what I have done I have performed freely and willingly. As it happens, what I have witnessed now signifies nothing. Accident alone brought me here, and I am glad that I arrived at so opportune a moment. If you will permit me, I will now say farewell."

"No, no—we cannot suffer you to depart thus—I will not, indeed! You must oblige me by accepting some slight token in recognition of the service you have rendered."

Claude bowed.

"It would be churlish to refuse," he answered; "yet if you would allow me to depart, for I have pressing business that requires immediate attention."

"I will not keep you," was the answer. "This way—come with me!"

The young man led Claude from the apartment, and, as he did so, he requested to be made acquainted with more of the particulars of the extraordinary and fortunate mistake that had been made.

Claude readily complied, concealing nothing save his own identity.

As they descended the grand staircase, a succession of heavy blows came upon the front door.

Claude stopped abruptly, and involuntarily his companion followed his example.

The door was opened, and no sooner did it fall back upon its hinges, than a throng of police officers poured in.

Foremost amongst them was a man with disordered apparel and of frenzied air.

He waved his arms aloft, and the slight foam upon his lips showed how tremendous was the excitement under which he laboured.

"This way!" he cried—"this way!"

Then, with a yell, he continued:

"Look! There he is—there he is! You see him, all! Now judge whether I have told you truly or not! Is not that man yonder Claude Duval, the highwayman?"

"It is!" cried one of the police officers, stepping forward, and presenting a pistol. "Claude Duval, surrender yourself to me peaceably or I fire."

No words could possibly express the amount of surprise and consternation visible upon the countenance of the young man.

Never in his wildest dreams could he have imagined that the man who had been of such service to him was a highwayman.

Quick as thought, however, Claude turned round, and bounded up the staircase.

An angle quickly hid him from the view of the police officers.

The young man followed, and, with trembling lips, said:

"Can it be true—is it possible that you are the notorious Claude Duval?"

"It is not only possible but true. Farewell, my lord—if such be your title—leave me now to shift for myself."

"Never—never! Do you imagine I could be guilty of such an amount of ingratitude? No! Follow me! At all risks, I will secure your safety."

Before Claude could refuse, he felt himself seized by the arm, and dragged into a room, the door of which was quickly closed behind him.

"Now," said his guide, "follow me! Quick—quick!"

Claude needed no incentive to make speed.

He was aware that his position was critical in the extreme.

That the young man was perfectly ready and willing to befriend him there could, however, be no doubt, and Claude felt that he could not possibly do better than resign himself entirely to his care.

With great rapidity, many rooms were crossed, until a flight of stairs was reached, down which they hurried.

A corridor was traversed, and they paused before another door.

The young man placed his hand upon the knob and entered.

Claude then found himself in a spacious library, the walls of which in every part were lined with books,

which reached from the floor up to the lofty, carved oak ceiling.

A kind of studious gloom overspread the whole place, and there was an intense and peculiar silence also.

Without pausing, the young man advanced to one particular part of the room.

Then, seizing what appeared to be an upright support to the shelving, he drew it towards him, disclosing, to Claude's great surprise, a good-sized recess behind it.

"Now, in there!" he said. "Quick—quick! And don't move on any account, until I come to release you."

Claude darted in, and the shelves were pushed back.

Then all was silence and darkness.

So rapidly had all this taken place that he could not as yet precisely comprehend the nature of the hiding-place he was in, nor form any idea of its likelihood to escape discovery should search be made.

Encouraged by the profound silence, however, he stretched out his hands before him, expecting that they would encounter the front edges of the books.

Such, however, was not the case.

A smooth piece of woodwork was before him.

Then he comprehended at once the nature of his hiding-place, and felt a great amount of confidence in it, so cleverly was it constructed, and so likely to escape detection.

One portion of the shelves were fixed, not close up against the walls as the others, but fitted into a kind of box, so constructed that when the books were placed in, the whole had the appearance of a door.

It was opened easily, but by means of a secret spring, unlikely to be discovered.

The officers — supposing that they searched that particular apartment—might take down every book and scrutinise the shelving, and yet discover nothing.

A long time elapsed.

But Claude heard nothing whatever of the officers or anyone else.

The silence, indeed, was most oppressive.

How it was that a visit had not been paid to the library he could not conceive.

The explanation, however, was simple.

The woodwork at the back of the books was lined with many thicknesses of felt, which, in their turn, were covered with another panel, so that all sound was effectually shut out.

Nothing save the greatest uproar could have penetrated to Claude's ears while he remained there.

Slowly the time passed, and wearisomely too.

It seemed an age, indeed, before his friend returned.

At length the cleverly-constructed secret door was thrown open, and Claude once more was permitted to step forth.

"All's well," were the first words that fell upon his ears, "though I had much difficulty in getting rid of the officers."

"Have they really gone?"

"I think they have; but in a few words I will tell you what has happened. Ralph Davids—my cousin, as he calls himself, though I don't recognise the relationship—I have handed over to their custody on a charge of forgery, and, by a heavy bribe, I have induced the officers to give up their search for you."

"This is indeed generous," cried Claude—"it is indeed making an ample recompense for all that I have done! I only hope the officers will not play us false."

"I don't think it. However, if you will follow my advice you will remain here till nightfall. It is now quite light, and if the officers are anywhere at hand you will be seen. Under cover of the darkness you would stand a good chance of escaping."

Claude was profuse in his thanks, and his protector said:

"Here you are quite welcome to stay; no one will interrupt you. As for myself, I have some important affairs to attend to; but when night sets in you may depend upon seeing me again."

With these words, he took his departure, and Claude sank down in one of the huge chairs near the fireplace.

Here he remained until day was gone.

He watched, with great anxiety and pleasure, the gradual gloom that came stealing over the vast apartment, which at length deepened into the darkness of night.

Still the young man came not, nor did he make his appearance until the old-fashioned clock fixed upon one of the turrets of the building proclaimed the hour of twelve.

He entered hastily.

"Come," he said, "all's well—you will have no difficulty in making your escape! This way—this way! I find your own horse is lame, so I have had one of my own brought out; accept it as in some degree a recognition of the important service you have done me."

CHAPTER DCCCXLII.

CLAUDE DUVAL RETURNS TO THE INN, AND RECEIVES UNEXPECTED INTELLIGENCE.

"You are too generous—too good!" returned Claude. "The accident was quite as much to my own advantage as yours, and you may imagine my situation was a most perilous one."

"Well, now I think you may venture to consider that, for to-night, your perils are over. From all that I can learn, the officers have most certainly taken their departure."

Claude was led towards the back portion of the mansion, partly because this was the nearest to the stables, and partly because he was not so likely to be noticed while leaving at this point.

A matchless steed had been brought out, and Claude's eyes lighted up with genuine pleasure as soon as they fell upon it, and he renewed his thanks.

Springing quickly to the saddle, the last farewells were uttered, and, directed by his preserver, Claude left the premises.

The night was yet comparatively young, and when he found himself thus in safety and free from the officers, Claude began to debate within himself whether he should endeavour to find a profitable adventure.

His speculations on this subject were, however, suddenly cut short, for, from round a clump of trees, at no great distance off, a party of police officers appeared.

"There he is," cried one—"there he is! You can see him now quite plain! I told you if we waited it would turn out all right! Now, then, forward, and as soon as you get within range, shoot him down!"

Claude heard this inhuman order, and his bosom burned with bitterness.

But he could do nothing except disappoint the officers of their prey.

Accordingly, he gave his newly-acquired steed the impulse forward, and he observed with considerable anxiety and interest the speed he made.

The result was far beyond his utmost expectations, and caused his heart to bound with pleasure.

At a long, sweeping gallop, which seemed to be the creature's natural pace, and to be performed without the slightest exertion, the horse stretched over the soft turf, and quickly left the heavily-mounted police officers behind.

In vain they plied both whip and spur to their jaded horses.

In a very brief space of time indeed, they had the great mortification to discover that the highwayman had got out of sight, and that there was no chance of again overtaking him.

That little incident served to bring Claude to a decision.

He determined to make his way, in as direct a line as possible, to the inn.

It was with some difficulty that he calmed down his steed, for the animal, having once been put upon its mettle, was by no means easy to control.

At length, just about two hours before daylight, Claude entered the plantation.

Looking up, he perceived the signal that had been agreed upon, showing all was well.

Accordingly, he entered the stable without hesitation.

Crossing over, he entered the building, and was received with a cry of welcome.

Tom King was present, and so was Sixteen String Jack, and Tom Davis, with Maud and Ellen.

"You are both safe, I see," were Claude's first words. "But the captain—where is he?"

"Not back yet," was the reply, "though we are expecting him each moment. Had he returned, I should have tried my luck again to-night with Jack."

"But," exclaimed Claude, "morning is drawing on apace; it is strange he has not made his appearance before this!"

"We have heard from him," said Tom Davis.

"Heard from him? How?"

"Why, early yesterday morning, to our great consternation and alarm, Black Bess came galloping up to the front door."

"What, again?"

"Yes, and without the captain. I must say that it gave me such a turn that for a short time I was not able to move a limb. Darting forward, however, I first of all discovered that Black Bess was dripping wet from head to foot."

"And could you find nothing of the captain?"

"No, nothing but this pocket-book, which was strapped to the saddle; and here, look—on one of the leaves you can find scrawled these words:

"'All's well—fear not for me. Back soon.'"

The pocket-book was handed to Claude, who examined it with very great attention.

"Well," he ejaculated, at length, "this indeed passes my comprehension! What on earth could have induced him to send Black Bess in this manner? He must be aware that she is almost as well known as himself, and that it was almost, if not quite, as dangerous for her to arrive here by herself as it would be for him to ride up to the door by daylight."

"That was my thought," said Davis.

"But you spoke about her being wet—what was the meaning of that?"

"I can only guess," was the reply. "When I took her into the stable I found that the wound in her neck had been bleeding afresh, and I suppose that, in order to allay the pain, she had jumped into some stream."

"It is singular indeed," said Claude, musingly. "What construction do you put upon it?"

These last words were addressed, not to Tom Davis, but to the two highwaymen—Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack.

Claude observed in a moment that they fidgeted about and looked uneasy, as though they wished to say something, and yet, from some cause or other, held back.

Just then, while Claude was wondering more and more at the singular aspect affairs were assuming, his eye happened to rest upon Maud's countenance.

It was as white as ashes.

Even her very lips were white, and her eyes were burning with a strange, peculiar light.

Before he could speak again, Tom King said, with a manifest effort:

"Never mind the captain just now, Claude; suppose you make us acquainted with your adventures. Where have you passed the day?"

"That will do another time," said Claude. "I cannot trouble myself with thinking about that."

"Well," said Tom King, hurriedly, and with the same air of restraint, "since you will not speak, I must perforce give you an account of my adventures; ten to one, by the time I have concluded the captain will make his appearance."

"Do you really think that?" exclaimed Maud, in a trembling voice, and clasping her hands beseechingly together—"do you indeed think that?"

"I do, or else why should he have sent back that message? Rely upon it, wherever the captain may be he is well able to take care of himself."

Then, without pausing, Tom King began an account of his own adventures.

He seemed anxious to fill up the conversation, and to allow no one else the opportunity of speaking.

The fact was, he wished to prevent any discussion taking place upon the subject of the captain's non-appearance.

Yet all could tell by his manner that he was very ill at ease.

"I got safely away," he began, "though I confess I was rather troubled about Jack Marshall and his men."

"However, I saw nothing of them, and made my way with all speed to the Oxford Road, for I confess I have a greater fancy for that highway than any other.

"The reason is, I suppose, that I have never to look far for an adventure in that direction.

"And so it turned out in the present instance.

"Scarcely had I gone a hundred yards when I heard the sound of a vehicle approaching.

"By the sound I could tell in a moment that it was of a heavy description, though I was at a loss to make up my mind as to exactly what kind of vehicle it was.

"In the meanwhile I made all my preparations, and having carefully primed my pistols, I looked up and saw lights flashing close at hand.

"Then directly afterwards I made out the shape of a large, lumbering, old-fashioned carriage drawn by a couple of white horses.

"In spite of its heavy appearance and ponderous wheels, the vehicle rolled along at a very rapid rate, and, indeed, no wonder, for the coachman as he sat on the box flogged the horses incessantly in order to keep them up to the top of their speed.

"It was clear that whoever was inside was for some reason or other in a very great hurry indeed, and anxious to reach some point as quickly as possible.

"It was not likely, though, that I could allow that to interfere with me, so I at once rode out and commanded the coachman to stop.

"Whether he tried to rein-in the horses or not I can scarcely say; it would have been impossible to check them all at once.

"Under these circumstances I tried our old expedient of firing a pistol over his head.

"On the present occasion it was quite successful.

"With a cry of terror he pulled up.

"Threatening him with instant death if he moved, I made my way to the door of the carriage.

"No sooner did I reach it than the window was let down from within.

"I then caught sight of the form of a very old lady, and so much did her appearance impress me that I must give you a brief description of her.

"She was neatly yet richly and elegantly dressed; her face, though old and somewhat withered, yet was a most pleasing one, chiefly because of the unmistakable air of benevolence that it wore.

"One could tell that she was all kindness and affection—one of those good creatures that are occasionally met with.

"But her face was very pale, and her eyes filled with tears. Her voice was husky with emotion, and yet she endeavoured to assume an air of sternness, perhaps in the hope that she might conceal it.

"'Sir, sir—whoever you are,' she exclaimed, 'let me entreat you to depart—let me proceed! Do not hinder me a moment, for, alas! every second is most precious to me, or rather to one I hold far dearer than my life! Sir—sir, if you are not dead to every human kindly feeling, let me implore you to allow me to pass—do not detain me a moment longer! If you will, I will make you any promise you desire!'

"I confess, comrades, that I was deeply touched by her manner—so deeply, indeed, that at first I could not reply.

"Raising my hat, however, I said:

"'You are quite free to pass. I much regret that I have hindered you. I should be glad to render some atonement for it. My life is one of adventure—you know my calling—and I pursue it more for the love I have for adventure than any other cause. If you need a strong arm and a willing heart to assist you, speak—you have only to say the word, and you will find both at your service.'

CHAPTER DCCCXLIII.

IN WHICH TOM KING CONTINUES THE RECITAL OF HIS INTERESTING ADVENTURES.

"'The old lady looked at me wistfully, and, clasping her hands together, leaned forward eagerly.

"'You can trust me,' I said, guessing what was passing through her mind—'you can trust me in all things.'

"'Then I will put faith in you,' she exclaimed, with

sudden energy, 'and if you betray me or deceive me, I will never believe in anyone again.'

"'You have nothing to fear,' I said. 'I am always on the side of right against might, and unless I am greatly mistaken, you are suffering from the infliction of some great wrong.'

"'It is true, sir; but unfortunately it will take some time for me to tell you all, and every moment is so precious.'

"'It can easily be managed,' I said, 'and without any loss of time.'

"'How so?'

"'Why, with your permission I will secure my horse to the back part of this vehicle, and your man can continue to drive you to your destination; then, if you will permit me to share the carriage with you, the explanation can be given as we proceed.'

"'It is a good thought!' she exclaimed; 'be it so, and oh, be quick, though I feel better now already!'

"I hastily carried out the intention I had expressed

"My horse was securely fastened, and I entered the carriage, and the coachman was ordered to proceed.

"Away we went at a rattling pace, and the old lady commenced by saying:

"'I must first put you in possession of a few names, and then the narrative will be easier.

"'In the first place, my name is Charlotte Chadwick. I am a widow, and have been for many years, and in all the wide world I have only two relatives. One is my dear niece Lillian, my deceased brother's only child.

"'By his will I was appointed one of her guardians; her other guardian is my step-brother, William Aldis, a man I do not hesitate to stigmatise as a villain and a scoundrel.

"'But you shall hear,' she continued. 'My poor brother before his death placed every confidence in this William Aldis, and at that time none of us knew his real character, nor believed him guilty of so much baseness as he has since exhibited.

"'Such being the case, then, he was left chief guardian of Lillian, and up to the time of her majority he was to hold all her property, real and personal, as trustee.

"'For my own part, all I had to do was to bring up the deal girl and see to her education.

"'Without vanity, I may say that I have performed my task properly and conscientiously.

"'We were always together—Lillian and I—for we were mutually fond of each other.

"'We saw but little of William Aldis, who punctually at the proper intervals sent us the instalments of the money as directed by my brother's will.

"'And so matters went on peaceably enough until Lillian reached her nineteenth year.

"'For a long time past she had been beloved by and engaged to a young officer in the army, who is now at the present time most unfortunately absent from England, though I am every day in expectation of his return.

"'Long ere this, Lillian would have been his wife had not William Aldis most positively and emphatically refused to sanction any such alliance.

"'He would give no reason for his refusal, and he was firm and obstinate.

"'As guardian, he had this power over his ward until she should attain her majority, and Lillian, whose respect for her father's memory amounts to veneration, never once thought of acting in defiance of the man who had been left to watch over her.

"'And so Lieutenant Russell proceeded on the foreign service alone, though he had fondly hoped to take dear Lillian with him.

"'I believe it would have broken my heart to have parted with her, but yet I should never have sacrificed her happiness to my own.

"'It was not long after this that, for the first time in his life, William Aldis became a frequent visitor at our residence.

"'Day after day he was there, and at first I was pleased and flattered by his visits.

"'I soon discovered, however, that he had an ulterior object in view.

"'That was, to make Lillian his wife.

"'His first overtures were made to me.

"'I answered that I thought he had no chance in the prosecution of his suit, since Lillian had pledged herself to the lieutenant, and I knew her character too well to believe that she would prove false to her plighted word.

"'He scowled angrily, and asked me to use my influence.

"'But this I positively declined. I said:

"'"The field is open, and if you can induce her to be your wife, why, do so."

"'I regretted having said this much, for he then began a complete persecution of my niece.

"'It was in vain she assured him that her heart was irrevocably another's—that she could never listen to any other suit.

"'He tried kind words at first, then appealed to her feelings and revived her father's memory, and, failing, descended to common threats.

"'In my own mind I formed a pretty good idea of the exact state of affairs, and trembled for the future of my poor girl.

"'Had she shown any signs of weakness—had she not been so steadfastly true to her absent lover—I should have entreated her to turn a deaf ear to her guardian's suit.

"'It would then have been necessary for me to give her a reason for such a wish, and that reason would simply have been this:

"'"I believe that he has unjustly and improperly appropriated and made use of a great deal of your wealth—more than he can possibly replace; and so he seeks, by a union with you, to patch up his delinquencies."

"'That, I have no doubt, is the actual state of affairs; subsequent events have gone far to strengthen such an opinion.

"'But, as I said, there was no need for anything of this kind; Lillian was as firm as could be wished.

"'And so things have gone on up to the present time, or, more correctly speaking, up to the day before yesterday, when I received a letter from an old friend of mine, who lives in a distant county, requesting me to pay her a visit with all speed, on a matter of great importance.

"'I, of course, complied, and wished to take Lillian with me; but she was unwell, and, moreover, in constant expectation of hearing from or either seeing her affianced husband, and I could not persuade her to leave London.

"'Alas—alas that I left her!

"'When I arrived at my destination I found the greatest surprise was manifested at my arrival.

"'The letter was produced, and it was declared to be a forgery.

"'At first I knew not what to think, and wondered why anyone could have been so unfeeling as to play such a hoax on a person of my age, for travelling to me is a serious matter.

"'Then, all at once, I felt, like a flash, that it meant some danger to Lillian, and, in spite of my fatigue, I hastily commenced a return journey, though I was laughed at for doing so.

"'On my arrival, I found that my worst fears were confirmed.

"'Soon after my departure, William Aldis had requested to see me, and on learning I was absent, had obtained an interview with Lillian.

"'What passed between them I know not; but by some means he induced her to leave the house and enter his carriage, which was waiting at the door.

"'And from that time to this I have seen nothing of her.'

"'But,' I interrupted, 'I presume you have obtained some clue, or else why are you taking your present course?'

"'I have a clue—a very slight one. I am told that he is likely to be found at a place at no great distance, in a very secluded situation, which he has lately purchased, and had fitted up in a most expensive style.

"'It is there that I am going—it is there that I expect to find Lillian. So great has been my agitation that I have lost my usual coolness.

"'Trembling with dread of I know not what, I started off at once by myself, without bringing anyone with me, and feeling quite at a loss to know how I should act upon my arrival, supposing I should find my Lillian there.'

"'I may be excused,' I said, 'if I look upon our chance meeting as a fortunate one. Should your suspicions prove correct I will undertake, at all risks, to wrest this girl

from him, and I trust that our aid and interference will not come too late.'

"'And I too—and I too!' said the old lady, tears again rolling down her cheeks. 'Oh, he is a bad and desperate man! And, being in this extremity, who can say what baseness he may not be guilty of? Who can say what will be the end of this terrible affair?'

"'Let us hope for the best,' I said. 'Put some faith in the firmness which, you say, your niece has ever shown towards him—that is all we can do at present, and I do hope and trust that all will yet be well.'

CHAPTER DCCCXLIV.

IN WHICH TOM KING BRINGS THE NARRATIVE OF HIS ADVENTURES TO A CONCLUSION.

"At this moment the carriage stopped with quite a sudden jerk, and the old lady immediately put her head out of the window to ascertain the cause.

"'Here we are, mum,' said the coachman—'leastwise, as near as I can tell.'

"'Yes, yes,' was the reply—'this is the place, I feel certain'

"'Allow me,' I said, and looking forth, I perceived what was evidently the boundary-wall of a small, pretty-looking residence, the top of which I could just see.

"'Do you see the gates, Samuel?' she asked.

"'No, mum.'

"'Drive on, then.'

"'Stay!' I exclaimed. 'The circumstances under which we are paying our visit are peculiar. It will be better by far not to draw up to the main entrance. What we shall accomplish to-night will be done by stratagem and skill more than by main force. With your permission, we will alight just here.'

"'I am quite ready to resign myself into your hands,' she answered; then, smiling, she continued: 'This does indeed seem a strange night of adventure. Who would have believed that I should have taken you, a perfect stranger, into my confidence in this affair?'

"'I only trust,' I replied, 'that you will have no occasion to regret having done so.'

"With these words, I handed her from the carriage, and, going closer to the boundary-wall, began to make an inspection of it, with a view of finding a means of passing it.

"In a little while I came to a small door, that was, however, strongly fastened.

"I succeeded in climbing the wall; but as my companion could not follow me by that route, I dropped on the other side and unfastened the door, which was secured only by a couple of rusty bolts.

"This door I just closed behind us, without fastening it, and as I did so, I said:

"'We will now take particular notice of the position of this doorway, for, in case events should make it necessary, we shall then know which way to turn in order to make our escape speedily.'

"'But,' she inquired, 'how do you intend to act?'

"'That is a question I can hardly reply to,' I said; 'I shall suffer myself to be guided entirely by circumstances. Come with me. We will, first of all, look all round the premises.'

"She was quite willing, as she said, to resign herself into my hands and allow me to take the lead.

"Stealthily, then, I approached the house and gave a rapid glance at its exterior.

"In this there was nothing whatever remarkable, although it looked a very charming, beautiful place indeed.

"The windows next engaged my attention.

"I could see none that were illuminated until I turned the angle of one wing, and then I saw several.

"One was on the ground floor, and towards that I crept at once, a consciousness within me that if I could take a peep through it I should see something well worth looking at.

"In a moment or so the window was reached, and making a sign to my companion to preserve as much silence as she possibly could, I raised my head and ventured to peep in.

"Curtains were drawn across the window yet not so closely as to shut out all view of the interior of the apartment.

"Looking in, I perceived standing on the opposite side of the table a young girl, who by her appearance I immediately guessed to be Lillian.

"If any confirmation was required, I had it in the manner in which the old lady clasped her hands together as soon as she caught sight of her.

"Lillian, then—for so I may as well call her—was standing in an attitude of defiance; her eyes were flashing fire; her slim, lithe form was drawn up to its full height; and stern, angry words were issuing from her lips, though, owing to the closeness with which the casement fitted, I could not overhear a single word.

"In one hand she held a knife, that she had evidently hastily snatched up from the table.

"It was raised threateningly above her head.

"Standing on the other side of the table was a man.

"His face was hidden from me, and I could make out but little of his appearance.

"Yet I knew well enough that this was the guardian that had been described to me.

"I waited to see no more, but, grasping the old lady by the hand, led her away for a few steps.

"'You saw all that?' I said. 'I suppose I am correct in believing those two persons to be your niece Lillian and her guardian William Aldis?'

"'Yes—yes!' she exclaimed, in a voice tremulous with agitation. 'Save her—save my poor girl—save her while there is yet time!'

"'Be under no apprehension,' I answered, assuringly. 'I merely wished to appeal to you for a little advice.'

"'No, no—act entirely as you think proper.'

"'Unfortunately, I cannot. You know my position—I cannot interfere in a case of this kind as others would.'

"'I do not understand you.'

"'Frankly, then, I mean this: After what has occurred, it will be manifestly your best course to give this William Aldis into custody, to answer, first of all, for carrying off your niece—for forcibly detaining her against her will; and then, if necessary, you can prosecute him if he has made use of any of her wealth.'

"'Yes, yes—I understand; but yet I would rather be free from him altogether.'

"'No doubt you would; but you must consider your niece's interests in this affair. You can understand now—can you not?—that it will be impossible for me to call in the police officers; if I did, I also should be made a prisoner; but,' I continued, 'I will enter that room—I will overpower him and make him a prisoner—I will secure him as well as I am able, and after that you must find some means of communicating with the police.'

"The old lady seemed to hesitate; but just then a loud shriek arose.

"It was followed by a tremendous crash.

"I turned round, and saw instantly what had happened.

"Exasperated or terrified at something her villanous guardian had either said or done, Lillian had made one bold spring across the room, and dashed herself through the casement.

"A fierce and angry shout succeeded, and then William Aldis dashed through the broken window.

"But before he could approach the trembling, affrighted girl, I placed myself before him, sword in hand.

"'Back,' I exclaimed—'back! Your villany has been discovered and frustrated just in time!'

"Such a yell as William Aldis then gave utterance to, I think I have never heard in all my life before.

"With all the insensate fury of a madman, he drew his sword from its sheath, and commenced a wild attack upon me.

"I was not a moment in ascertaining that I was far superior to him in fence, and before he well knew what had happened, his sword was seat whirling across the garden.

"Meanwhile, Lillian had discovered her aunt, and was clasped tightly in her arms, sobbing and weeping now that the danger was over.

"I followed up the advantage I had gained, and seizing the rascal by the throat, flashed my sword before his eyes.

"'Yield,' I cried—'yield this moment! I am a desperate



[DICK TURPIN SURRENDERS HIMSELF A PRISONER.]

man, and if you refuse, will immediately put you to death!"

He trembled and shook with fear.

"The man was an arrant coward, as, indeed, anyone might have expected from his conduct.

"Most unquestionably he feared death, and so submitted to me completely, becoming as helpless as anyone well could.

"Accordingly I dragged him back through the window into the room, and forced him to sit down in a chair, and then, by means of the strong cord belonging to the curtains, I bound him there in such a manner that I felt sure he could not set himself at liberty.

"It struck me as being rather strange that I should have met with no opposition from any other persons about the place; but, as we afterwards discovered, there was only one domestic, and that was an old woman, deaf and nearly blind, so from her there was nothing to apprehend.

"'Now,' I said, addressing the old lady, 'your niece is restored to you safe and unhurt I hope. William Aldis is a prisoner, and it will be your own fault if he escapes. Farewell, then, for my service is over, and I have business of my own to attend to. As I pass through the gate I will tell the coachman to drive off at once for a body of police officers; the rest will then be perfectly easy. Farewell to you both!'

"'But, aunt,' I heard Lilian cry, 'who is this—who is it that has so befriended me, and why does he leave without giving me the opportunity of thanking him?'

"I turned at once, although I had gone several paces.

"'It may seem churlish on my part,' I exclaimed. 'but the fact is there may be great danger to me if I linger longer here. As to who I am, don't let it matter, suffice it to say I am your friend.'

"'But who—who?' she asked.

"'Yes, your name,' added her aunt. 'I am only a

woman, yet some day, if I know who you are, I may be able to render you a service.'

"I hesitated a moment, then exclaimed:

"'My name, since you must know it, is Tom King—Tom King, the highwayman!'

"With these words on my lips I turned round again, and, with rapid strides, made my way to the little door.

"According to my expressed intention, there I found the coachman waiting, and I immediately sent him off for the police officers.

"Mounting my own steed, I turned his face homewards.

"Somehow, whenever I have an adventure of this kind, it casts a singular gloom over me—a gloom that I cannot shake off.

"I was in no humour for another adventure, no matter of what kind, and therefore it so happened that I arrived here much earlier than Tom Davis expected.

"It was a profitless excursion altogether, but I think Sixteen-String Jack has a different account to give."

With these words Tom King ceased, and Claude Duval would very willingly have put off Sixteen-String Jack's narration till another time, and confined himself to a consideration of the captain's probable position.

But as for Sixteen-String Jack himself, he seemed to the full as desirous of preventing the conversation from dwelling on that topic as Tom King was.

Therefore, with an air of restraint, and yet with an affectation of joviality that could not but be noticed by all, he commenced as follows:—

CHAPTER DCCCXLV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN HEAR SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED TIDINGS OF THE CAPTAIN.

"It's a string of adventures I have had!" commenced Jack, "and so be prepared to listen. In the first place I made my way to the North Road, partly because we have not visited it for a long time, and partly because I was tired of adventures without any booty attached to them, and I knew very well that was the place to look for what I wanted.

"A good gallop across the country quickly brought me there, and I reined in my steed in order to rest him a little, and also that I might listen whether any traveller was approaching.

"Scarcely had I assumed this position than I heard some one coming on at a regular jog trot. The pace almost told me the character not only of the horse but his rider.

"'A grazier, I'll warrant!' I muttered to myself.

"My mind was made up at once as to how I should proceed. I drew back into the shadow of the hedge so as to allow him to pass me, while I ascertained how far my surmises were correct.

"I found them completely verified. He was a stout man mounted on a cob as stout as himself. His attire was old and greasy.

"He was so intent upon urging his horse forward that he did not perceive me, and I waited for him to get a little distance ahead.

"Then emerging from my place of concealment, I followed at a pace only a little faster than his own, but yet of course one that could not fail to enable me to overtake him.

"Ere long I caught sight of his bulky figure in advance, and in a few minutes afterwards placed myself beside him,

"I was intent upon having some fun at his expense, so I accosted him with the utmost respect.

"At the same time I plunged my hand into my pocket and drew out about a dozen guineas, and as I did so I said:

"'This proceeding no doubt fills you with surprise, for, to the best of my belief, we are perfect strangers to each other, but we appear to be journeying in the same direction, and therefore I should be eternally obliged if you would take charge of this gold.'

"He stared at me in blank amazement, as well he might.

"Perhaps he thought I was a little mad, but I continued:

"'The request seems a strange one, but let me inform you, a little way behind us are three or four very ill-favoured-looking rogues—highwaymen, I should say, if appearances are anything to go by. I was heartily glad to avoid them, but they are following, and I have no doubt they intend to rob me.'

"The grazier seemed rather alarmed, so I hastened to reassure him.

"'Mind you,' I said, 'I don't think for a moment that they will attempt to rob you—it is me they will look after, because, judging by my outward looks, they will conclude that I carry the most money about me. So therefore I beg you will take charge of this, the bulk of my wealth, so that if the rascals search me they will find nothing to reward them for their pains.'

"While thus speaking, I thrust my hand into my pocket and drew forth about a dozen guineas.

"I held them towards the grazier, and renewed my request that he would take charge of them.

"I can assure you he looked very much astonished indeed—in fact, his countenance was quite a picture.

"It was hardly likely, however, that he would distrust me on this account.

"I asked him to take charge of my money, which was a widely different thing to asking him to let me take care of his for him.

"Yet it was rather unwillingly that he took hold of the coin, and then he exclaimed:

"'Well, it's a very strange notion this indeed. I don't mind obliging you. I have passed these highwaymen before to-day, and have always got off well.'

"'I am glad to hear it,' I answered, 'and I hope if those rascals behind do ride up that you will keep the money safe.'

"'Oh, never fear—never fear! And I'll tell you why I seemed rather unwilling to grant your request; it was because I shall have to let you into a secret that I wished to keep locked up in my own breast.'

"'What may that secret be?' I asked.

"'Why, just this: you will have to know where I carry my money, and that's what no one else knows except myself.'

"'You may depend that, out of gratitude merely, I shall keep your secret,' I answered. 'Pray put my money where it will be safe, for unless I make a great mistake, I can hear some one on the road behind us.'

"The old fellow looked quite alarmed, and said, hastily:

"'Well, if I must tell you, I keep it tied up in the tail of my shirt. Let me ask you if a highwayman would ever think of looking for it there?'

"'Never,' I answered, emphatically—'it's the last place I should have thought of.'

"'Well,' he said, 'I shall make some large purchases to-day, and so I have got a good round sum with me, and mostly in bank-notes.'

"With much pulling and tugging, the old fellow got out the tail of his shirt, and I found that he had not been joking, for tied up in it very securely was something that looked very much like guineas and bank-notes.

"I could scarcely control my laughter, because I knew what was coming.

"He chuckled again and again about his cleverness.

"'I will put yours in a separate place,' he said, 'if you don't mind.'

"'Oh, I am quite agreeable,' was my reply; 'and if you like I will hold my money the while.'

"Still unsuspectingly enough, he gave me back my dozen guineas, and I slipped them instantly into my pocket.

"As quick as thought I drew out my sword.

"'Now, my good friend,' said I, 'as there is an end to all good things, so there is a conclusion to this joke. I have found out your secret, so just decide which I shall take, your money or your life, for I am determined to have one or the other!'

"The grazier seemed quite panic-struck, and his eyes and mouth opened to a most alarming extent.

"'Oh, sir,' he said, 'have mercy—have mercy!'

"'Oh, yes,' I replied, 'I am quite inclined to be merciful. I want nothing but that little supply of cash which you ought to have been robbed of long ago; and beware how you deceive a highwayman again!'

"The old fellow must have noticed that I was rather off my guard, for all at once, when I least expected it, he dug one of the spurs into his horse's flank, and made

the animal bound along at a rate I should never have believed him capable of accomplishing.

"I uttered a cry of rage, and then set forward in pursuit, thought my anger quickly changed to mirth when I saw the grazier making vain and frantic attempts to stuff the tail of his shirt in again.

"In a few moments I was level with him, and resolved to have no more delay.

"I seized hold of the booty, and with one stroke of the sword cut the tail of his shirt off completely, and here it is."

Despite the anxiety that all felt, it was impossible to repress a hearty laugh, and for several moments the roof of the old kitchen fairly rang again.

Jack held aloft his trophy with great glee.

Then, untying it, disclosed a good round sum in notes and gold, as the farmer had said.

"Bother these things," he cried, alluding to the bank-notes, "they are almost useless to me. I have a good mind to carry them about me, and should I ever meet him again I will give him a chance of buying them back at a reasonable rate."

There was another laugh at this, but Sixteen-String Jack took it quite seriously.

Then Claude, imagining the right moment had come, took advantage of a pause in the conversation to speak.

"Well now," he cried, "all the adventures have been told; there are no signs of the captain at present, and I think we ought not to put off any longer a discussion upon where he is likely to be."

Just then he saw Maud turn pale, and fall back half fainting in her chair.

"I think," said Tom Davis, rather gruffly, "that you are alarming yourself without due cause. Give the captain time, and I will be bound he appears. What do you think he sent that note for? He meant us to remain quite easy until he appeared. Just wait a moment and I will read it to you again."

"Oh, I know all about that." said Claude, impatiently, "only such a long time has elapsed I think it strange he has not appeared."

"Let us give him till daybreak, at any rate," said Tom Davis—"ten to one if he would think of coming back before then, if he had the opportunity."

"Then you have not long to give him," returned Claude, "for in an hour, or even less, it will be quite daylight; the dawn must be now almost here."

A deep silence followed these words—a pause that seemed to have something very ominous about it.

Maud was slowly recovering herself, and the others, with averted eyes, were each waiting for some one to speak first.

But the silence endured and remained like a spell.

Then Claude rose, and, going to the window, let down the shutter.

As he did so, a clear grey light came pouring into the kitchen.

"It is already daybreak," he said. "Behold! Where is he now?"

Again there was a silence.

But this time it was broken in upon by a most discordant, unmelodious sound—one that made them all start, and one that actually caused the blood to rush back to their hearts with a sickening sensation.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Tom Davis, as he sprang up from his chair and then sank down again—"goodness gracious, wha 's that?"

CHAPTER DCCCXLVI.

THE HIGHWAYMEN OBTAIN SOME UNEXPECTED INTELLIGENCE AS TO DICK TURPIN'S WHEREABOUTS FROM THE ITINERANT NEWSVENDOR.

THE hideous sound came again.

This time, however, they were more prepared for it than they were upon the previous occasion, and therefore were able to form a better idea of how it was produced.

"It's a horn," cried Tom Davis, as he rushed towards the front of the house—"it's a horn, or a trumpet, or something of that kind. What on earth does it mean?"

His movement was immediately followed by the rest, and in an incredibly short space of time the kitchen was vacated.

"Be careful how you show yourselves," cried Tom, who, even in this moment of excitement, had not forgotten his caution.

The highwaymen shrank back.

"You have a look first, Tom," they cried, "and let us know what it is."

Opening the door, he looked out.

But at this moment there came another blast, louder and more discordant than the former ones.

Then a cracked, wheezy voice was heard to say:

"Most important—important—important!"

Then followed another blast.

"It is a man," cried Tom Davis—"an old man with a long, battered tin horn. What on earth does he mean by kicking up all that uproar?"

"Here you have it, good people," continued the same strange voice—"here you have it; all the particulars from the beginning to the end, and most extraordinary they are. Here you have 'em—here you have 'em, and the price no more than a penny!"

He blew the horn again.

"I can't make it out," cried Tom Davis; "he is a most extraordinary-looking individual, and he is carrying a packet of papers in his hand; they must be about some important event that has just occurred."

"Get him inside," suggested Claude Duval, "and give him something to drink; that will stop his noise."

Before this advice could be acted upon, all heard distinctly the following words.

Strive as they would, not one could move until the man paused to blow his horn, which he made a point of doing at every full stop in his discourse.

"Here you have it," he cried, "the important and unparalleled details of the capture of the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin, who surrendered himself prisoner yesterday, and now lies in the prison of Newgate awaiting the order for his execution; and only one penny."

The sound of the tin horn drowned the stifled shriek that burst from the lips of Maud, and without another sound she sank perfectly insensible.

Mrs. Davis and Ellen at once gave her their whole attention, leaving the highwaymen to themselves.

"Just what I feared," was Claude Duval's comment.

"We all guessed it," said Tom King, "only we did not want to say a word about it before Maud. Let us get that rascal in and get all the details we can from him."

"All right," said Tom Davis. "Just step on one side and leave it to me. On no account permit yourselves to be seen, because it is very likely he has been furnished with a description of all."

Upon this caution the highwaymen all withdrew, and Tom Davis going to the front of the inn, saw that the man had moved a little way.

But he bawled after him, and the man, turning round, hastened towards the inn at full speed.

He detached a paper from his bundle, evidently expecting that Tom Davis was about to be a purchaser.

"What's that you are saying?" he asked.

"It's about Dick Turpin, the highwayman," was the reply, given in a more natural tone of voice; "he was captured yesterday and taken to Newgate."

"Was he indeed? Well, come in and have a draught of ale, and let us know all the particulars. I'll have one of your papers as well, for, though I'm no scholar myself, there may be others who would like to read it."

"All right my friend," said the itinerant newsvendor. "I'll tell you all the particulars, and that'll save you the trouble of reading."

"Come, then—come in."

The man willingly followed Davis into the kitchen, where he sat down.

A jug of ale that one would think would take him some time to drink was placed before him.

Then Tom eagerly questioned him for information.

"Well, you see," replied the man, "it happened in this wise: Dick Turpin was overtaken and captured by a party of huntsmen, and now, as I have told you, is a prisoner in Newgate."

"And so he ought to be," said Tom Davis. "I have been expecting to hear this for a long time, and I am only afraid the news is too good to be true."

"Well, and so am I, and that's a fact. You see, these printers they get hold of any lie or idle tale and print it;

they get an ounce of fact and plaster it over with a pound of lies at once."

"You have had some experience that way, then?"

"I have, I believe you; but that's neither here nor there."

Tom Davis began to breathe a little more freely.

"Well, then," he exclaimed, "you know positively of your own knowledge that Dick Turpin is really inside Newgate at the present time?"

"No, that I don't. All I can say is what is printed on this paper, which is just to the effect that I have told you. At any rate, it seems there was a thousand pounds reward offered for his apprehension, though I don't know who is to get it."

"Well, I only hope it's all true," said Tom Davis, bending his face down over the bill, "for ever since these highwaymen have been on the road we have done no trade at all; people are afraid to travel, and never go anywhere if they can help it."

"Not only that," returned the newsvendor, "but I have heard something else, though, of course, I don't know how true it may be."

"What is it?"

"Why, all the inn-keepers round the country are grumbling fearfully at the badness of trade. No one will stop there even for half an hour; they just have a drink at the door and are off again. And what should you think is the reason?"

"I have really no idea."

"Well, then, there's a report set abroad that Dick Turpin and his highwaymen have got a roadside public-house of their own, and that someone deep in their confidence keeps it. Where this inn is I believe no one can tell at present, but it is said if anyone should enter it they never are seen to come out again alive."

Tom Davis gave a great start, and exclaimed in well-simulated surprise, dashing his fist violently on the table while he spoke:

"That accounts for it—that accounts for it. I wondered what this dropping off in trade meant. Why, do you know it is the greatest rarity for me to catch sight of any one now-a-days? But it was not so—it was not so."

"That's the cause," said the newsvendor, as he drank the last drop of ale; "you know the reason now, and depend upon it there's some foundation, in fact, for what I have just told you."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Tom Davis.

"Well," said the man, "I will be off. I thought this would turn out a better job than it has at present; the papers don't move off at all briskly; somehow no one believes it."

"I can scarcely bring my mind to believe it," said Tom Davis; "but the day is young yet—you have plenty of time before you. Will you stop and have another jug of ale?"

"No, not now; many thanks to you—not now; but if I am by this way again you may depend I shall call."

"Do so—do so."

The man rose, carefully picking up his long tin horn and his bundle of papers, and then sallied forth.

Tom Davis accompanied him to the front door of the inn, where a few parting words were exchanged.

Then he stood upon the door-step watching him until he got out of sight.

Now that there was no one to observe it, Tom Davis's countenance underwent a very great and striking alteration.

It was easy to tell that the intelligence that had just been imparted to him filled him with very great anxiety.

"Dick in Newgate," he muttered as he turned away. "I fear there is no room left to doubt it. However, I will hear what the others say."

Returning to the kitchen, he found that the three highwaymen were fully as anxious as himself.

The bill that had been left upon the table had been carefully perused.

It gave very few details, and many of them, as the highwaymen were perfectly certain, were quite incorrect.

It stated that Dick Turpin's famous mare, Black Bess, was in the hands of the police officers.

This was palpably false, for Black Bess was at that moment in the stable.

Yet from this circumstance they managed to extract some amount of confidence and consolation.

"If they are wrong about Black Bess," said Tom, "why may they not be wrong about her rider? For my part I can scarcely believe that Dick is in Newgate, although I see it in print before my eyes, and although he has failed to return at the time appointed. The question is, how are we to ascertain it without incurring danger ourselves?"

"Yes, that's the point we have to discuss," cried Tom Davis, "and the sooner we begin it the better. And not only that—did you hear what the man said about the roadside-inn? The secret passage has not been constructed one hour too soon, for, as I dreaded, the police officers have got wind of our nice little scheme. I knew very well things were going on by far too pleasant and comfortable to last."

CHAPTER DCCCXLVII.

TOM DAVIS SETS OUT FOR LONDON IN ORDER TO ASCERTAIN WHETHER DICK TURPIN IS REALLY A PRISONER OR NOT.

"YES," said Sixteen-String Jack. "We all heard him, and, at any other time than the present, should feel a very great deal more uneasiness than we do now. As it is, however, a consideration of the captain's position outweighs everything."

"You are right there," rejoined Tom King. "If what we have heard is true, no exertions and sacrifices must be wanting on our part to effect his release. You all know very well that if any of us happened to be in his position, he would be the first one to attempt a rescue."

"He would—he would," said Claude Duval, "and I will willingly do all I can."

"It seems to me," said Tom Davis, "that almost the first thing to be done is to ascertain, somehow or other, whether the facts set down in this bill are true."

"Yes, that's it," said Sixteen-String Jack. "But how is it to be done?"

"If you will allow me," said Tom Davis, "to make a suggestion——"

"Oh, certainly!"

"It is, then, that you allow me to set off without delay to London. When there, I shall be able to ascertain for certain."

"A good suggestion," said Tom King, "only I can improve it."

"In what way?"

"By allowing me to go instead of yourself."

But Tom Davis only shook his head.

"No, no!" he exclaimed—"I am quite certain that would never answer at all! You would run a thousand risks of detection, whereas I should run none. If seen by anyone, it would only be thought that I was about my regular business."

"Yes, yes!" cried Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval. "Tom Davis is perfectly in the right. He ought to go, and let him start at once, and then he will be back the sooner."

"I am ready now."

"No doubt you are," said Claude. "And don't stay a moment longer than is absolutely necessary. When you have found out whether Dick is in Newgate or not, hasten back at the top of your speed."

"I will, depend upon it!"

"Very well, then—be off!"

"In a moment. Where's Maud?"

They looked around, and just at that moment Ellen entered.

The question was repeated.

"She is still senseless," was the answer. "We are quite alarmed."

"You must try to bring her to," said Davis, "and as soon as she is conscious let her know that I have gone to London, and say I hope to return with good intelligence."

"How long shall you be absent?" Ellen asked.

"That is impossible for me to say; but no longer than I can help. While I am away," he continued, addressing the highwaymen, "do you keep carefully out of sight, and if the officers pay a visit in my absence, don't hesitate to avail yourselves of the secret passage."

"We will not; but if Dick should unfortunately be the inmate of a Newgate cell, the officers will all be clustered round about there like so many bees."

"Yes; and that reminds me that I scarcely ought to start off to London without some arrangement being made."

"What kind of arrangement do you mean?"

"Why, suppose that it turns out that Dick is really a prisoner—mind, I say this only in case it turns out so—it is best to be prepared for the worst, is it not?"

"Quite. But what then?"

"Why, had we better not come to some determination as to our proceedings?"

"I don't see how it is possible."

"Nor I, exactly; but my present idea is to run the risk of calling upon old Matthew Gale, in Drury Lane."

"Oh, ah! That's a good thought!"

"He is a long-headed fellow, you know, and takes an especial delight in outwitting the police officers. Ten to one he could give us some valuable suggestions, and render us some still more valuable assistance."

"Beyond a doubt he could. I am glad you thought of it. Call there by all means."

"Well, then, I think that is about all that can be done at present. I will put one of the horses in the light cart, and drive off this moment."

The highwaymen urged him to leave.

But just as he was passing through the doorway, Maud descended the staircase.

There was an air of great wildness and frenzy in her manner, and, seizing Tom Davis by the breast of his coat, she exclaimed:

"Tell me—tell me—let it come from your lips, and I shall be satisfied—is what I hear the truth?—is Dick really a prisoner?"

"I have no means of answering," said Tom Davis, "I have heard as much, and am now about to set off to London to ascertain whether the report is true or false. I hope the latter, and, if possible, I will return in a few hours, bringing Turpin with me."

"No, no!" she exclaimed. "That hope is a vain one! If the officers have really captured him, such close watch and guard will be set upon all his movements that escape will be totally impossible. They are already exasperated beyond measure. Alas—alas! I feel that his doom is sealed."

She wept bitterly and violently—so violently that Tom Davis grew alarmed.

"Calm yourself," he exclaimed—"pray calm yourself for a little while until I return! Then will be the time to give way to grief, when you feel there is no longer room left for hope."

"I know it now," she said—"I have a presentiment in my mind which I cannot mistake! I feel as certain as I should do if I had witnessed all with my own eyes, that Dick is at this moment languishing a prisoner in one of those gloomy cells. He will be watched and guarded—no movement, however slight, will pass unnoticed—access will be denied to him. Tell me, then, how you can hope to effect his escape!"

"We cannot look forward to so much as that at present," was his answer. "We have first to satisfy ourselves he is a prisoner, and I can assure you I by no means feel sure of it, nor did the man who sold the paper."

Maud released him from her grasp, and, stepping back a pace or two, clasped her hands together.

Then, fixing her eyes upon his countenance, she said:

"Is that really and truly so, or do you simply say it out of some motive of mistaken kindness? If so, let me beg of you to recall your words; otherwise the disappointment will be bitter—more bitter than I can bear!"

"It is not a false hope," said Tom. "The man was not certain, and that's why I am setting out to ascertain."

"Then go," she exclaimed—"go at once! I will not detain you a moment longer, and while you are absent I will try to be as calm and hopeful as I can! I shall long for your return—I shall count every second, so, in pity to me, be no longer than you can help."

Tom Davis promised faithfully, and, glad to leave her in such a mood as this, hastened at once towards the stables.

His preparations were quickly made.

The horse was harnessed to the cart, and, after one more farewell and a reiteration of his injunctions, he rode off.

The time passed most wearily and anxiously.

The sun rose higher and higher in the sky, until the meridian was past.

Hours and hours elapsed, and yet there were no signs of Tom Davis's return.

What could have detained him, they were at a loss to imagine; but, from his long absence, they drew most unfavourable auguries.

Had the report been a false one, it could have been ascertained immediately, and he would have been back long and long ago.

Such being the case, the highwaymen resigned themselves to the worst, and already began to speculate in their own minds as to which would be the likeliest means by which they could obtain the captain's liberation.

Maud's calmness and hopefulness departed also, and so great did her agitation become, and so vehement was her grief, that the worst consequences were apprehended.

Still Tom Davis came not, and it was not until the long shadows of evening were beginning to creep over the landscape that the distant rattle of his light cart could be heard.

Burning with curiosity, the highwaymen watched its approach.

In a few moments it came in sight, and then Tom Davis drew up with a dash in front of the inn, with a look of unusual importance and seriousness upon his countenance.

CHAPTER DCCCXLVIII.

RETURNS TO DICK TURPIN AND THE HUNTSMEN.

HAVING now brought events up to this point, we feel that we shall be able to devote the whole of our attention to the very peculiar and critical position in which Dick Turpin is placed.

It will be remembered that his words were that he would surrender freely and without any resistance to Sir George.

No sooner were these words spoken than the baronet stretched out his hand and placed it on the highwayman's shoulder, and as he did so he exclaimed:

"Dick Turpin, you are my prisoner!"

Dick only bowed.

Sir Marmaduke, frantic with rage, seized Turpin also.

"Bind the villain," he cried; "secure him! Pinion him so that he cannot escape! I command you all to obey me in this matter!"

Dick Turpin shook off the grasp of Sir Marmaduke rather roughly.

"You forget," he said. "I did not yield myself a prisoner to you, but to this gentleman, and I warn you that if you interfere you will find that you have a very dangerous customer to meddle with."

Fairly white with passion, Sir Marmaduke again carried his hand to his sword.

"I wish you would cross weapons with me," shouted Dick, as he observed the movement; "but I know your nature too well to think for a moment that you would ever have the courage to do so."

This remark stung him to the quick—so much so that he half drew his sword from its sheath.

But dashing it back again, he said:

"I am a fool to bandy words thus with a robber, and I deserve all the abuse I get."

"Excuse me," said Sir George, "but my opinion is that the abuse is on your part."

"And my opinion is," retorted Sir Marmaduke, "that if you had the opportunity you would allow this man to regain his liberty."

"You may be right and you may be wrong," was the calm reply.

"Well, then," cried Sir Marmaduke, "let me ask you what it is you intend to do with your prisoner?"

"Do with him? I have not the least idea. I don't want him. I would much rather look after my own business."

"Then hand him over to me."

"But he objects."

"Yes, decidedly," said Dick.

"Well, then, you must take him to Newgate yourself, Sir George."

"I'll be d—d if I do."

"But I say you shall," shrieked Sir Marmaduke. "Don't think I am blind to the partiality you have all shown for him!—I take it as the greatest of all insults to myself. But you will repent of it ere long, mark my words if you don't!"

The huntsmen smiled rather derisively, and, to tell the truth, they were by no means sorry that a pretext had arisen for turning away altogether from their arrogant, pragmatical neighbour.

Now they had very good cause for refusing to meet him anywhere, and they resolved that whenever another meeting took place he should not be one of their number.

"Come on," cried Sir Marmaduke; "if you choose to take him prisoner you must hand him over to the officers of justice. Come on."

"No. I would much sooner remain here and simply keep guard over him. I am not so fond of police officers as to be ambitious of emulating their doings."

"It is such men as you who bring their authority into disrepute," retorted Sir Marmaduke; "but a proper representation of this affair shall be sent to the proper quarters, and you will then see what will be the result of it."

"So we shall if we live long enough," returned Sir George; "but if I knew there was anyone with such vindictive feelings as Dick Turpin has against you, I should feel doubtful about existing much longer."

It was easy to see that, in spite of his boast and swagger, this idea alarmed the baronet greatly, for he again turned very white.

"If you would keep guard over him," he said, at length, after a pause, "I would quickly put an end to the matter by riding off immediately, and returning with a body of police officers."

"Then why don't you do it?"

"Simply because I know that as soon as I turned my back you would allow that rascal an opportunity to escape, and he would avail himself of it in a moment. Ah!" he cried, in quite a changed voice, and throwing up his arms with great exultation. "Now we shall soon see the aspect of affairs altered. How fortunate, to be sure?"

Raising his voice to its highest pitch, he bawled:

"Robert—Robert! This way quick! D—n you—make haste!"

The others immediately turned their heads, and saw at no great distance the form of a man dressed in the attire of a gamekeeper.

He was evidently well known by Sir Marmaduke.

On hearing himself called thus, Robert came running forward, gun in hand, at great speed.

"Yes, your worship," he replied, as soon as he recognised Sir Marmaduke—"yes, your worship? What is it you might be pleased to want?"

The baronet smiled triumphantly.

"You will take this horse," he said, "mount it, and ride off with all speed to the nearest place where you can make sure of meeting with a body of police officers. Bring as many as you can, and tell them that we have Dick Turpin here a prisoner."

The gamekeeper looked round him in great surprise.

But Sir Marmaduke checked him abruptly.

"Here's the horse!" he cried, "Mount—ride off at full speed, if you break the horse's neck and your own as well! Every moment is of consequence!"

Robert dared not refuse—he knew that, in spite of the confusion of his intellects.

So, without another word, he scrambled into the saddle, and off he went.

Sir Marmaduke watched him depart with eager interest, and so did Dick Turpin.

Through the latter's brain many strange thoughts were passing with wonderful rapidity.

He took, in the first place, a rapid review of his position.

If he waited until this gamekeeper returned with a body of police officers, his chances of escape would be remote indeed.

On the other hand, among all the huntsmen he believed there was only one, and that was Sir Marmaduke, who would oppose his departure if he made a bold run to escape.

This course he would most certainly have adopted but for one consideration, and that was the effect it would be likely to have upon Sir George and the others, who had shown themselves inclined to be his friends.

He had a tolerable idea of the amount of power such a man as the chief magistrate of the county would possess, and he was also aware that the punishment for aiding and abetting a felon was severe, and would be inflicted upon Sir George and his companions just the same as upon anyone else.

Now Dick was far too generous in his nature to attempt, by running away, to make his escape, and so draw down upon the huntsmen the consequences of this act.

Moreover, he felt inclined to trust in Sir George, although he had not much faith in human nature generally.

Yet that gentleman, by his manner, seemed to imply that it would be wise for him to resign himself for awhile to his fate.

At last this was what Dick resolved to do—not only on this consideration, but because he all at once recollected a little circumstance that in the excitement of the moment had quite slipped his recollection.

This was the locket that had been given him by the lady who was surrounded by so many mysteries, not one of which Dick had been able to pierce.

From the moment he had received it until the present he had never attempted to make the least examination of it.

Yet as the recollection of all the circumstances came into his mind, a great degree of confidence sprang up in his breast.

"Surely," he thought, "she would never have been so anxious to make me this present if she had not been fully aware of its efficacy. Yes, yes—I feel that I can trust her, and that this locket will be the means of extricating me from my present perilous predicament. She told me not to make use of it until in the utmost extremity of danger. I will not, for if I can see any opportunity of escape without having resort to it, I shall most certainly avail myself of the chance. Yes, yes—that is my determination. And now for a little while I will content myself with being merely a calm spectator of events."

Having come to this conclusion, Dick grew quite calm, and again folding his arms, looked around him with an easy, self-satisfied air, which elicited the utmost admiration of the huntsmen.

Suddenly a loud and joyous cry burst from the lips of Sir Marmaduke, and all turned their eyes in the direction in which he was gazing.

They then perceived, at several fields' distance, a large body of police officers, whose large-buttoned scarlet waistcoats made them conspicuous objects.

They were all mounted on strong, powerful steeds.

Sir Marmaduke waved his hat, and they took off theirs in response, and accelerated their speed.

"Here they come," he cried, in the utmost exultation—"here they come! Now we shall see a little change in the posture of affairs! He looks very bold, and has carried things off with a high hand up to the present; but it has been because he has not been in danger. I have come face to face with criminals before to-day, and I'll warrant you that no sooner does he find himself surrounded by officers, than this loud-crowing cock will show the white feather! Aha!"

CHAPTER DCCCXLIX.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN IS HANDCUFFED BY THE POLICE OFFICERS, AND THE JOURNEY TO NEWGATE IS COMMENCED.

DICK TURPIN just glanced at the approaching police officers for a moment, then, turning round, addressed Sir George.

"Of course you are aware," he said, "that there is a reward of a thousand pounds offered for whoever shall apprehend me. I believe that is how the bills run—apprehend merely. It is not necessary that my conviction or execution should follow to entitle you to that amount. Now it would gall me exceedingly if I thought those

lubberly fellows who are coming galloping up yonder were to share among them such a nice little amount as this, and therefore, Sir George, I have to beg that you will claim it yourself—you are heartily welcome to it."

The huntsmen were in no small degree amazed to hear Turpin talking in this oivil fashion upon such a topic, and they exchanged glances with each other accordingly.

Sir George burst out into a laugh, as he said:

"Well, of course, a thousand pounds is an amount to any man, no matter how rich he may be, and as you say, I think it would be very unjust to allow those officers to share it, though, if it comes to that, you surrendered yourself to me—I did not capture you."

"It's all the same thing," returned Turpin, "if you like you can lay hands upon me and capture me now."

Sir George paused a moment as though some fresh thought had struck him.

Then, with a twinkle in his pleasant gray eyes, and a smile upon his lips, he advanced, and held Turpin firmly by the wrist and the back of his coat collar.

"Now," he said, "you are my prisoner."

Sir Marmaduke scarcely knew what to make of all this—he was still foaming and fretting with rage.

But he consoled himself with watching the approach of the police officers and with thinking that now they had arrived he should be able to turn the tables to some extent upon his companions.

The officers were some who had been fetched from the nearest market town to where they happened to be—strong, stout-built fellows, as ignorant as gateposts, and possessing none of those qualities of courage and skill necessary to the keeping of a man like Dick Turpin a prisoner.

Dick noted all this with an air of satisfaction.

"After all," he thought, "I shall not have to trouble myself about the locket—I shall have plenty of opportunities to get free from them."

On their arrival these officers greeted Sir Marmaduke with an immense amount of respect.

Indeed, it seemed as though they would never have left off bowing to him.

"Now, my men," he said, "that is Dick Turpin. Seize him, bind him securely, and convey him with all speed to Newgate! You know the reward that is offered for his apprehension."

"Yes," said Sir George. "But I wish to remind you all that he is my prisoner, and mine only, and I shall not relinquish the reward in favour of anyone! Officers, I call upon you, as a mere matter of duty, to escort this man to Newgate."

Hearing this, the officers looked greatly mortified and crestfallen.

However, they turned to Sir Marmaduke for consolation.

"We'll see all about that," he said. "Just hark at this, my men: It is true Sir George may claim the reward, as he says, though I don't think he will; at any rate, if he does, I will use my influence to have the reward paid to you as well; or, if I cannot do that, why, I will pay you the thousand pounds out of my own private pocket as soon as you assure me he is safe within the prison of Newgate."

"Done, sir," said the one in command—"done, sir, and many thanks to you! I'll warrant when we once take charge of him that he doesn't escape."

While he spoke, the officer produced a pair of handcuffs from his pocket.

"There," he said, "these are the little things I am going to treat you with. I have heard a great deal about your cleverness, Mr. Turpin, but I want to know whether you can wriggle yourself out of these?"

Dick looked at Sir George, as much as to say:

"Save me from the indignity and pain of having those handcuffs put on me."

But Sir George only nodded at him and smiled reassuringly.

The officer with the handcuffs made a great show of bluster and violence.

"You need not make so much fuss," cried Sir George. "Just set about your duty quickly, and remember that I am keeping an eye upon your proceedings; the man offers you no resistance, so perform your duty peaceably."

Thus rebuked, the officer checked himself in some very biting remark that he was going to make, and silently put on the handcuffs.

"As he is my prisoner," said Sir George, "I shall accompany you with him wherever you may go."

"And so shall I," cried Sir Marmaduke. "I can tell what you mean, well enough; but you will find I shall have an eye on all your movements—I shall not leave Dick Turpin until I find him safely a prisoner."

"Well, I can't prevent you from doing that, nor do I wish to do so," answered Sir George. "I only spoke for myself, because I can assure you, that the thousand pounds will come in particularly useful just at the present time."

No further remark was made, and Dick Turpin was requested to mount one of the officer's horses.

He complied, and had not the bridle been grasped by several of the officers, he would then, although his arms were secured behind him, have made a bold rush to escape.

This was at present impossible, and wisely he resolved not to expend his strength or run any risk in making an abortive attempt at escape.

When he did try, it should be when he could feel almost certain of success.

A rope was next produced, and tied round his leg just above the ankle.

This rope was then passed underneath the horse's belly, and secured tightly to his other leg.

"Now, then," cried the chief officer, "one of you mount behind him, and clasp him tightly round the waist with your arms. Two others shall hold the reins and lead the horse along."

Sir Marmaduke was highly delighted with this expedient, and complimented the officer upon his cleverness.

While Dick Turpin was so guarded he must of necessity be safe.

The other huntsmen seemed half inclined to join in the procession, for such it seemed when all was in readiness for a start, and a few of them actually followed for a short distance.

One by one, however, they dropped off, until only Sir Marmaduke and Sir George were left.

The distance to London was considerable.

But neither cared for that.

Sir Marmaduke was still burning with revenge, not only because of Turpin's attempt to rob him, but also because his conduct had been so exposed, and because so much ill feeling had been shown towards him.

There was no fear but that this feeling would carry him much further than to London.

On the other hand, Sir George was actuated by widely different feelings.

It was his intention, if possible, to enable Turpin to make his escape, for he was a man who always admired boldness, no matter where or with whom he found it.

Dick Turpin he had somehow taken a kind of liking to from the first moment that he saw him, and he was determined that no effort should be wanting on his part to procure his release.

Of course he would have to be exceedingly careful while Sir Marmaduke's eyes were upon him, for if that individual could bring the charge of aiding Dick to escape home to him, he would certainly do so, and press for a severe punishment.

Sir George, in his light-heartedness, did not care a whit.

Already in his own mind he had resolved what he should do with the thousand pounds' reward which, be it understood, he fully intended to claim.

The officers and Sir Marmaduke were all in high spirits, and they trotted along the high-road towards the metropolis at a very respectable rate.

Many persons they met turned to look at such a strange cavalcade.

But no explanation was given as to the meaning of it.

But it was noticed first of all by Dick Turpin that the clouds were beginning to gather up in a pack away upon the horizon.

He had not led an out-door life so long as to be ignorant of the portents of the weather, and from what he saw he felt perfectly certain that ere long there would be a terrific storm.

From having nothing else to occupy his thoughts and attention, he amused himself by watching the progress

of the clouds, and in a shorter space of time than he had expected he found that they had crept over the whole firmament, leaving not one single patch of blue to be seen.

The rain then began to fall—not gently at first, but it poured down at once with its full force, with such effect that everyone in the party was in an instant drenched to the skin.

Sir Marmaduke especially felt very uncomfortable for the rain was driven directly in his face, and struck against it with pelting force, each rain-drop seeming almost like a hailstone.

Then the hollow mutterings of thunder could be heard, followed shortly by a feeble flash of lightning.

All this only served to give an indication of what was to come, and the least experienced of the party knew well enough that a storm of unusual violence was going to break forth.

Sir Marmaduke, keeping the rain out of his eyes as well as he could, looked anxiously around him, hoping to perceive some place of shelter.

CHAPTER DCCCL.

THE OFFICERS STOP FOR SHELTER AT THE BAG OF NAILS INN, AND DICK TURPIN RESOLVES TO AVAIL HIMSELF OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO ESCAPE.

THE others looked around them too, with the same intent, but at present there was not a human habitation, or even a barn, within sight; and yet there might have been one at no great distance, for such was the velocity with which the rain reached the earth, that it caused a kind of mist to arise, which effectually prevented them from seeing any other objects than those which were close at hand.

The officers took their ducking rather complacently, for they were used to exposure to the weather. Not so Sir Marmaduke and Sir George, however. They gave vent to their annoyance in very audible terms.

As for Turpin, he said nothing.

His mind was occupied just then in devising some means by which he could release himself from his present unenviable position.

But as yet he could see no opening, and all he could do was to hold himself in readiness to take advantage of any accident that might take place.

All at once Sir Marmaduke, still peering through the mist and rain, perceived before him the dim outlines of a building of some kind.

"What place is that?" he asked, addressing himself to one of the police officers, and pointing in advance while he spoke.

"That, sir," was the answer, "is the Bag of Nails Inn, or I am much mistaken. It is kept by one Timothy Goodall—a rare fellow, I can assure your honour, and his house affords the best possible accommodation for man and beast."

"Then, in the devil's name, push on!" shouted Sir Marmaduke, impatiently, for he had tried in vain to stem the officer's loquacity.

"Will you stop there, sir?"

"Yes, certainly, till this storm be past. Besides, you cannot perform the journey to London without halting somewhere."

"True enough, sir. The horses will be glad of something to eat, and a rub down."

"Then just tell those fellows in front to push on at a little better speed, will you?"

The officer rode forward to obey this injunction, and Sir Marmaduke bent his head before the storm, the violence of which had now very much increased.

Dick Turpin overheard this conversation with secret pleasure.

He was quite delighted to think the storm had broken forth, although by it he had suffered some passing inconvenience.

A stoppage at an inn would be, he felt certain, an event that offered him a favourable chance of making his escape.

The distance to the Bag of Nails was only trifling, so that, as the officers increased their speed, it was quickly reached.

As they drew up in front of the horse-trough, they perceived the landlord standing at one of the low windows, looking out.

He witnessed the stopping of so many persons before his door with great surprise.

"This will be quite a windfall for old Timothy," said the loquacious officer. "He won't quarrel with the storm, I'll be bound, for, except by chance like this, he does no sort of trade at all."

This piece of gratuitous information was silently received, the fact being that each and all were anxiously endeavouring to get beneath the roof of the inn as quickly as possible.

The landlord appeared at the front door.

"Jim—Jim!" he cried. "Where on earth is the lazy rascal? Jim—Jim, I say!"

"Here I be, master. What's the row?"

A very peculiar-looking individual made his appearance from the rear of the inn. His hair was filled with bits of straw, as though he had just been lying down in the loft.

Without another word he ran forward and took charge of the horses.

"See to them well," said the commanding officer.

"And especially to this one of mine," added Sir George.

Sir Marmaduke said nothing. He was too busy occupied in watching Dick Turpin's every movement to think about anything else.

With great care and caution the officers dismounted their prisoner.

Dick was careful not to offer the least show of resistance, for he hoped, by submitting quietly to everything, to throw the officers off their guard.

While they continued to watch him as vigilantly as they had done up to the present moment, it was ridiculous to think of making an escape.

The officers seemed by their looks to be a good deal surprised at his demeanour.

They expected to have a vast deal of trouble, and when they found Dick submit so easily, they really felt quite injured and disappointed.

Densely surrounded by his foes, Turpin was hurried into the inn.

As they crossed the threshold, Dick's reflection was:

"Now, if old Matthew kept this inn, what a difference it would make to be sure! He would get me out of this scrape in no time. However, it is no good to think about that, I must rely upon my own resources."

From this it will be seen that Dick treated his present dangerous position very lightly.

The fact was, the more he thought upon the subject the more reliance he was disposed to place in the locket that had been presented to him.

It would have been an additional satisfaction to him if he could have opened it and just taken one peep, but that was quite impossible.

In fact, we may go the length of saying that, but for one circumstance, he would have felt more careless still.

But he thought of Maud and his comrades.

He knew how much grief and alarm the first would suffer when she had heard what had taken place; and with regard to his comrades, he feared, not unnaturally, in their strong desire to rescue him, that they would run themselves into great and unnecessary danger.

"No," he muttered, "I won't trust to the locket if I can possibly escape, if only for their sakes. The sooner I am back among them the better. Yes—yes, I will escape."

When Dick Turpin once made up his mind to a thing it was strange indeed if he did not accomplish it. Nothing short of absolute impossibility would have stayed him.

Upon entering the Bag of Nails Inn, the police officers at once betook themselves to the largest room in the place. They were pleased to find that it was vacant.

A huge fire, however, was burning on the spacious hearth, and they looked at it pleasantly, as it promised to dry their soaked apparel rapidly and effectually.

Before attending to this or anything else, their first care was to see that their prisoner was quite secure.

With this view a strong chair was called for, which was placed beside the fire.

In this Dick Turpin was seated, with his hands still secured behind him.

A rope was produced, and then wound round him in



THE ENTRY OF DICK TURPIN INTO NEWGATE.

such a way, that he could not possibly move without carrying it with him.

This made his hopes of escape sink down to zero.

If the officers chose to remain in the same room, and, beyond a doubt, this is what they intended to do, he could not by any possibility get away unseen.

Sir Marmaduke superintended all these arrangements, and when they were completed, the chief officer said:

"Beg pardon, your worship, but don't you think we had better order a bit of a snack while we are drying our clothes. We shall not be able to leave until the storm gives over a little, and it does not promise to do that yet awhile."

"Oh, yes—yes, anything you like; but mind your prisoner is safely kept, that's all."

"Oh, leave us to see to that, your worship."

A very substantial meal was then called for, and by the time it was ready, they had managed to dry their garments.

A very savoury odour arose from the various viands, and reminded Dick that a long time had elapsed since he had partaken of any food.

He waited a short time to see whether anything would be offered to him; but finding the officers began their feast without paying the slightest attention to him, he said:

"Don't you intend me to have anything until you get me to Newgate? Or if Sir Marmaduke grudges the expense, I will pay my own share, and yours as well!"

Sir Marmaduke frowned, and growled out an inarticulate reply.

"Certainly," said Sir George, "you shall have what you wish—I will see to that."

"But," said the chief officer, "how can he eat?"

"Just take off these handcuffs and I'll soon show you," replied Turpin.

The chief officer paused, and looked irresolutely at Sir Marmaduke, who, being a magistrate, was of course expected to have the supreme command.

"Yes," added Sir George, "take off his handcuffs: there will be no difficulty then."

"Don't you wish you may get it," replied Sir Marmaduke. "No, no, my fine fellow, I have heard too much of your narrow escapes and your cleverness to think of allowing you to be any less safe than you are now."

"But," added Sir George, "what difference can taking off the handcuffs make? You can sit here, all of you, with your eyes upon him, and could prevent him untying the ropes, and if he did not do that, wherever he went he would have to carry the chair with him."

There was a silence.

"I insist that this shall be done!" said Sir George. "You have no right, and duty does not permit you, to refuse this man something to eat."

The chief officer ventured to nudge Sir George, and he whispered:

"I think it might be as well, your worship, to let him have his own way; we can keep a good eye upon him and see he does not untie the ropes; it will be the way to avoid all bother."

Sir Marmaduke also thought so, and therefore Dick was for a time released.

But before removing the handcuffs they took good care to see that all the ropes were perfectly secure.

Now, the reader may imagine that it was not altogether from the want of food that Dick made this request, though a long time had elapsed since he had tasted anything, and he felt faint in consequence.

A good meal would, he knew, endow him with fresh strength, and place him in a better position to make an effort for freedom.

A plate was brought and placed upon his knees.

But it was a difficult matter to eat, owing to the manner in which the rope was bound round his body and secured to the back of the chair.

Dick Turpin fixed his attention so entirely upon what he was about, that the officers in a short time grew tired of watching him, and looked after what they had on their own plates.

CHAPTER DCCCLI.

IN WHICH THE POLICE OFFICERS CONTINUE THEIR JOURNEY TO LONDON WITH THEIR CAPTIVE.

As for Sir George, he was, to tell the truth, very much astonished to find a man in so perilous a position as Dick Turpin eating a meal with so much relish and coolness.

He certainly appeared to be more at ease than any other one of the party.

But although it could scarcely have been gathered from his countenance, Dick's thoughts were very busy indeed.

He began to see pretty plainly that for the present his attempt to escape must be abandoned.

The least movement of his towards untying one of the many knots by which he was secured to the chair could not fail to be seen by some of the officers, and then they would all be immediately upon him.

His ankles were also tied very tightly, and he moved his legs about a little in the hope of being able to loosen the cord.

But this he found was impossible.

Whether or not he would have another opportunity allowed him before he arrived at Newgate was a very doubtful matter.

He was inclined to think that when the storm cleared off, the officers would make a start, and by travelling gently, endeavour to reach London before nightfall, and without making another halt on the way.

If this was the case, what was the next best use he could make of his hands while they were at liberty? for he knew his captors well enough to feel certain that as soon as his meal was over the handcuffs would be replaced.

His thoughts were still running upon the locket which he knew he had secure in one of the pockets of his waistcoat.

It would have been a great source of confidence to him could he but have opened it and glanced at what it contained.

This was not to be thought of, for if the officers saw it they would seize it immediately, and as a matter of course he would never catch sight of it again.

This brought to his mind the fact that, should he be carried as far as Newgate, the officials, when searching in his pockets, would be sure to find it, and he would be deprived of it.

Then how and in what way could he conceal it so as to keep it safely?

This was a point upon which he bestowed a great amount of consideration.

The only plan that he could think of that seemed at all feasible was to watch an opportunity to take it secretly out of his pocket and convey it to his mouth, keeping it there until alone in his cell.

He had arrived at this conclusion by the time he had finished his breakfast, if so substantial a meal could be so called.

And without further hesitation he put his thumb and finger into his waistcoat pocket at a moment when he believed not one of the officers had his eyes fixed upon him.

The locket was there, and he drew it forth eagerly, holding it between the tips of his fingers.

Its size was small, and it was evidently composed of the purest gold.

The inclination then came over him to open it and take a glance at its contents, for had it not been for the possession of this, Dick would have tried harder for freedom, even if he lost his life in the attempt.

But he was putting great faith in the word of a stranger, and it might turn out after all that the trinket would not prove efficacious.

Just then, however, the storm passed over, and the sun broke forth, sending a few watery beams into the apartment.

As soon as he caught sight of the sun's rays, Sir Marmaduke rose to his feet, crying:

"Now, my lads, the weather is fair again, and we have stopped here quite long enough. Secure your prisoner again, and have the horses brought round to the front, for the sooner we reach London the better I shall be pleased."

His word was law, for it was to him, it must be recollected, that the officers looked for the thousand pounds' reward, provided the amount offered by Government should be obtained by Sir George.

The officers, however, were one and all in excellent humour. What with the capital repast they had had, and the pleasant prospect there was before them, who could wonder that their minds should be occupied by a feeling of great self-complacency?

In imagination they could see dancing before their eyes the tempting sum of one thousand pounds all ready for them, and only waiting for the moment when they should choose to put forth their hands and grasp their own share of it.

But Dick, perceiving this sudden movement on the part of the officers, took advantage of it to slip the locket into his mouth.

It was done neatly, for at the same time he pretended to wipe away a few crumbs from his lips.

Owing to the small size of the locket, he knew he should be able to retain it in his mouth and speak also without much difficulty.

The officers having despatched one of their number to see to the horses being brought round, clustered very closely round his chair, and had he deferred the execution of his project for another moment, he would unquestionably have failed.

The handcuffs were again placed upon his wrists, in spite of the objections that he raised to such a proceeding.

The police officer shut one eye knowingly, and, addressing the prisoner, said:

"Will you give me your word of honour, Dick, that if we leave you without the handcuffs you will go quietly with us to Newgate and make no attempt to escape?"

Dick's reply was of course in the negative, so the officer added:

"Then there is no help for it, my lad—the darbies must go on."

The handcuffs were fixed upon Turpin's wrists with professional dexterity.

Then the ropes were untied, and he was comparatively free.

He shook himself with an air of great satisfaction, for he was cramped from remaining so long in one position.

In a compact body the officers then moved to the front door of the inn.

Most of the horses had been brought round, so Dick was placed on one at once.

A man mounted behind him, and the same order of procession observed as before, except that, instead of two men walking by the side of the horse and holding the bridle, they cut the rein in two, so that it might be held by a mounted officer on either side, who could control the movements of the animal.

In a few moments all was ready, and Sir Marmaduke, addressing all the officers collectively, said:

"Now, my good fellows, just listen to me for a moment. You have all had a capital breakfast, your horses have every one been well taken care of; the distance to London is great, I know, but not so great as to prevent us from reaching it without another halt by the way. It won't be quite so pleasant, perhaps, but, take my word for it, it will be much better. I know there are plenty of public-houses, the landlords of which are friendly to highwaymen, and we might have the mortification of seeing our prisoner escape us. In order to guard against that, let me advise you to put up with the inconvenience of riding the whole distance without stopping."

"We will, your worship," said the chief officer—"we will; your advice is the very best that could be given, and I will see that it is followed."

"Then, as that is settled," said Sir Marmaduke, "let us set forward at once."

The order was given, and the journey was commenced.

After hearing this little conversation, Dick had good reason to congratulate himself upon the course he had adopted.

Had he neglected to avail himself of the opportunity, he would probably never have had another.

Now he felt that all depended upon whether the locket possessed the virtues that had been ascribed to it.

The journey was performed at a gentle speed, so as not to distress the horses too greatly.

There was sound policy in this, for the animals were not knocked up half so quickly as they would have been had another course been adopted.

As they drew nearer and nearer to London, Sir Marmaduke grew more and more exultant.

At last he thought the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin, would be safe within the walls of Newgate, and to him would be due the honour of having brought about such a desirable state of things.

Sir George, with every wish to save Dick Turpin if he could, had as yet seen no opportunity for interference.

Events had turned out differently to what he had expected, and he began to regret having taken upon himself the responsibility of advising Turpin to surrender, when perhaps he might by chance have made his escape.

Dick began to see that it was pretty certain his captors would carry him to Newgate, for instead of their vigilance abating in any degree, he believed that it increased.

But then, as we know, this was owing entirely to a personal cause.

Revenge was the dominant spirit in Sir Marmaduke's breast, and this it was that made him watch Turpin so closely, while the officers were anxious to do their best in order to obtain the reward.

A strange, gloomy feeling began to creep over Dick's heart as he got nearer and nearer to London.

He strove against the sensation, but could not banish it.

He kept thinking that there were many points on which he would like to feel more satisfied than he did at present.

And one of them was whether Black Bess had succeeded in reaching the inn in safety.

Could he but have felt perfectly certain that this was the case, it would indeed have removed a very considerable portion of the oppression at his heart.

CHAPTER DCCCLII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS AT LENGTH ARRIVE AT NEWGATE WITH THEIR PRISONER.

Dick Turpin knew, however, that there was no other means by which this could be ascertained than by waiting patiently.

Yet when the procession fairly entered London streets, his breathing grew laboured and difficult, and the gloom which had already begun to spread itself over his spirits grew darker and darker.

By no means did he give way to this feeling, but it was one entirely beyond his own control.

Sir George also looked anxious and vexed, and all could tell that he was in deep thought on some subject or other.

Sir Marmaduke presented a most remarkable contrast to these two.

His face was beaming with triumph, and such was his exultation that he could scarcely restrain himself within moderate bounds.

The officers, also, were greatly overjoyed, for, having once reached London, they considered that the danger and difficulty of their task was at an end.

Surely there could be no fear of his escaping now?

So good was the speed they made, that when they arrived in the metropolis the business of the day was in full swing, and the streets were unusually full of vehicles and pedestrians.

Quickly from mouth to mouth the intelligence spread that Dick Turpin was a prisoner, and in an incredibly short space of time the officers found themselves surrounded by a mob of uncommon magnitude, shouting, yelling, and otherwise violently behaving themselves, all being animated by one desire, which was to catch sight of the notorious prisoner.

But the officers closed still more closely around Dick.

They knew him to be a popular favourite, and dreaded that the mob would make an effort to set him at liberty again.

Very likely, had there been one master spirit to direct the movements of the crowd, this would have taken place.

The only person capable of it, however, was Sir George, and personal considerations prevented him from doing so.

Therefore the mob contented themselves with yelling as before, and running so as to keep pace with the horses.

By the time the Old Bailey was reached, the thoroughfare was completely blocked up.

The officers began to grow more anxious, and Sir Marmaduke scarcely dared confess to himself the fears he had that, after all, it would be difficult to gain the interior of Newgate.

Dick looked around him, as well as he was able, at the numberless faces.

But there was not one that he could recognise.

And now being in sight of the great prison of Newgate, that gloom which we have already mentioned reached its height.

He gave one glance up at the frowning walls, and only one.

How vividly was brought back to him the time when he had made so strange and daring an escape.

Now that the ravages of the fire had been repaired, the prison looked stronger and more dismal than ever.

At a slow walk the officers urged their steeds along past the Sessions House, past the residence of the Governor, until the small, well-known doorway was reached through which the prisoners were admitted.

The great commotion in the street outside had made the man on the lock aware that some unusual event was taking place, and he was on the look-out accordingly.

Little did he imagine, however, that he was about to open the door to give entrance to Dick Turpin.

Such proved to be the case, however.

Sir Marmaduke saw the man's face through the bars at the top of the door, and shouted loudly to him to admit them instantly.

While with one hand the man turned the key in the well-oiled lock, he with the other pulled a wire that communicated with a bell in the Governor's apartments, the

ringing of which betokened that his presence was inquired in the vestibule.

With greater caution than they had used when entering the Bag of Nails Inn, the officers dismounted, and then assisted their prisoner to the ground.

More than a dozen hands seized hold of Dick in various ways, and, as the handcuffs were already tightly secured behind his back, he stood but a poor chance of getting free—so poor a one, indeed, that he made not the slightest effort to liberate himself, but allowed his captors to lead him up the steps and across the threshold of Newgate.

When the heavy door closed with its peculiar clang, Dick felt indeed that he was a prisoner.

Strange enough, however, no sooner had he come to the realisation of this fact than all his heaviness suddenly departed, his usual coolness, courage, and vivacity came back to him.

Drawing himself up to his full height, he looked around him.

Even though they stood beneath the roof of the prison, the police officers did not yet venture to let go their hold.

"The Governor," said Sir Marmaduke, sharply—"where is he? Send for him at once!"

"He will be here directly, sir," said the man on the lock. "I have already rung the bell, so that he will know he is wanted urgently."

At that very moment, the door communicating with the Governor's apartments was thrown open, and that individual appeared upon the threshold.

Mr. Cawthorn's successor was an under-sized, shrivelled-up, middle-aged man, who, to those occupying positions above him, was most disgustingly humble—indeed, the way in which he fawned upon the sheriffs and other high officials was positively sickening.

But to all the men and the prisoners he was a perfect tyrant, always choosing some opportunity or other for displaying his power.

From his servility, however, to the ruling powers, he was likely to retain his situation for a long time.

"What is all this?" he cried, sharply—"what is it? Speak, some of you, and tell me! What do you mean by keeping me in suspense in this manner?"

"I will soon inform you," said Sir Marmaduke, stepping forward. "But, first of all, just allow me to remark that my name is Braham—Sir Marmaduke Braham, chief magistrate of the county of Surrey."

Dick really thought that the Governor of Newgate was about to fall on his knees at once; but he did not, though he bowed his head so low that it was the greatest wonder in the world how he regained his perpendicularity.

He did not stand upright, however, but, continually oscillating backwards and forwards, and waving his hands so as to keep time with the movement, he said:

"I beg ten thousand pardons, Sir Marmaduke! I was not aware that you were present! I am very sorry indeed that I spoke so sharply, only, you see——"

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried Sir Marmaduke, impatiently. "I see all about that! Just pay attention to me!"

"I am all attention, Sir Marmaduke."

"Well, then, I have brought you here a prisoner, no other than the notorious rascal——"

He stopped suddenly, and uttered a shout, and for a moment there were one or two who wondered what could be the cause.

It so happened that Sir Marmaduke, while speaking, was standing very near to Dick, and just in front of him.

No sooner did the word "rascal" escape his lips, than Dick, whose legs were at liberty, took one step forward, and, raising his right foot, subjected the baronet to the indignity of a kick upon his hinder quarters.

The Governor stood aghast.

Dick Turpin, with a smile on his lips, resumed his former attitude.

"I will have your life!" screamed Sir Marmaduke—"I will have your life, rascal, villain that you are! No, no!" he added, with a sudden change of manner—"no, no—I won't touch you—I'd scorn to do it! I'll wait my time, and, if it costs me half my fortune, I will have the best place to stand to see you hanged!"

"Just as you like," said Dick—"it's quite indifferent to me. Of course, you understand that my arms, being fastened behind me, prevented me from using my fists, as I should have done, but I think my foot made a very good substitute."

"You shall be punished for this insolence, rest assured!" cried the baronet, foaming with rage. "Take care of him, Mr. Governor! He is a dangerous man—a most dangerous man! Don't lose sight of him for one single moment!"

"All right!" said the Governor—"you may depend upon me! Why, can it be possible?" he continued, as he looked closer. "Yes, yes, it is—I recognise him now! Why, you have really captured Dick Turpin!"

"Yes, yes—I have!"

"Speak the truth," interrupted Dick. "I say you didn't!"

"Be silent!"

"I sha'n't, without you choose to gag me!"

"It is not true that you captured him, Sir Marmaduke," interrupted Sir George. "The man surrendered himself to me. I took him prisoner, and therefore I claim the reward of a thousand pounds that is offered for his apprehension."

"And who may you be, sir?" asked the Governor, sneeringly.

"My name is of no consequence to you, but perhaps I had better say I am Sir George Hazlitt, Sir Marmaduke's neighbour."

The Governor bowed again.

"Really," he said, "the villanous rascal has had too much honour. The idea, now, to be captured by a baronet!"

"Pay attention to what I say," continued Sir George. "He was my prisoner, and was quite willing to follow me to Newgate without resistance, provided I had felt inclined to bring him; but Sir Marmaduke, being present, thought fit to take upon himself the management of affairs, so sent for this troop of officers, to whom, of course, I handed over the prisoner, and they have done no more than perform the very simple duty of bringing him here."

"Yes," cried Dick, "that's it—that's quite correct every word of it."

"Who told you to speak?" roared the Governor.

"Seek information of my elbow!" replied Dick.

There was a general titter at this, though one and all endeavoured to conquer their propensity to laugh.

"Be silent, then," said the Governor. "I will not allow you to say a word!"

"And you shall not prevent me," said Dick, "so what do you think of that? Now, I don't mind telling you something for your own good. If you desire to have peace and quietness in the prison, just let me have my own way; if you do not, take my word for it I will convert it into a regular little hell upon earth!"

CHAPTER DCCCLIII.

DICK TURPIN ENRAGES SIR MARMADUKE, BUT MAKES FRIENDS WITH THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE.

THE Governor of Newgate stood perfectly aghast.

The idea that such words should be addressed to an august functionary like himself, and, above all, by a prisoner, was monstrous in the extreme.

So great was his amazement that he could only stare with wide-open mouth and eyes at Dick, who nodded his head as much as to say:

"I mean it, every word of it."

What the Governor would have said or done we really cannot tell, but Sir Marmaduke interposed, saying:

"Pay not the least attention to him—treat all he says with contempt, and just listen to me."

"Yes—yes, I will listen—I am all attention, of course, but if ever——"

"Never mind him, I say—keep that to yourself. I want to know how this case stands?"

"What case, Sir Marmaduke?"

"Why, as to who is entitled to the reward?"

There was a pause—an awkward one for the Governor, for he did not want to reply so as to give the least offence to the baronet.

"I cannot presume to decide," he replied, at length, "and really the matter has nothing whatever to do with me."

"But you will have to give a receipt for the prisoner!"

"Oh yes—that's according to form."

"Then give it to the officers."

"No, no," said Sir George. "I object to that. The receipt should be mine, since it will show that the capture was made by me."

The Governor looked from one to the other irresolutely.

He was quite in a fix.

"I can't give two receipts," he stammered—"that's quite impossible, and as to who ought to have it, I am in doubt, though, after all, I should think the officers are the most proper."

"Yes, certainly," broke in Turpin—"give it to the officers, Mr. Governor, but mind you write across it that I was captured by Sir George Hazlitt."

The Governor gave the prisoner an angry glance, but Sir Marmaduke restrained him.

"A good suggestion," said Sir George. "I will have it done so; that puts an end to the difficulty at once. Surely you have no objection to making that addition to the receipt?"

The Governor made a wry face as he answered:

"No—I don't know that I have. It is unusual, yet it might be done."

"Then do it."

The receipt was duly written out and examined by Sir George to see that it was entirely to his satisfaction.

It was then handed to the police, who took it rather unwillingly.

They had quickly come to a decision on the disputed point, and their opinion was that Sir George was fairly entitled to the whole of the reward, so that they would have to depend entirely upon Sir Marmaduke for anything for themselves.

The baronet must have noticed this, for he said:

"Never mind all this, my lads—it shall make no difference to you. I am well pleased with the manner in which you have performed your duty, and I shall recommend every one of you, and my recommendation ought to be worth something; besides, I will be as good as my word with respect to the reward."

The officers were most enthusiastic in their applause, and would insist upon treating Sir Marmaduke with three cheers.

After that, at the wish of the Governor, they departed.

Sir George, as he passed by where Dick was standing, just muttered:

"I like your bold spirit, and, if only for that, would do everything in my power to aid you; but I consider myself guilty of having brought you into your present scrape, and I will try my best to get you out of it."

Dick had only time to murmur a few words of thanks, and Sir George was gone.

As soon as all the visitors had departed and the door was closed again, the Governor of the prison strode up to Dick in a very aggressive, defiant manner.

Probably his reason for so doing was that he knew Dick's arms were perfectly safe behind his back.

As for Turpin himself, however, he had quickly come to a decision as to how he should in future treat the Governor of the prison.

His position was a very peculiar one, and if by any means he could obtain the forbearance or good feeling of the Governor, it would be a great thing gained.

Therefore, in a calm and pleasant voice, he spoke before the Governor had time to pronounce the angry words that were hovering upon his lips.

"Mr. Governor," he said, "pray do not think anything of what I have just said—it was only to exasperate Sir Marmaduke. I owed him a grudge, and that was the only way in which I could pay it. A little while ago I made you a threat, now, if you like, I will give you a promise."

The Governor was astonished that he should be addressed in this manner by the prisoner, and as his astonishment prevented him from making an immediate reply, Dick continued:

"The promise is this: If you will put me into comfortable quarters and see that things generally during my stay here are made tolerably pleasant, I will promise you faithfully—in fact, I will give you my word—that I will make no attempt whatever to escape from your custody."

The Governor's surprise increased

"If, now," he said, hesitatingly—"if I might believe what you are saying——"

"You may believe it," said Dick, "and place implicit faith in it. I respect my word more than I should an oath. I have spoken, and it is for you to decide whether you will believe me or not."

The Governor remained for some time silent.

Of course he was well aware of the causes that had led to the suspension and finally to the dismissal of Mr. Cawthorn, his predecessor, and he was therefore certain if Dick Turpin should make his escape that the consequence would be very disastrous to him.

A cunning thought entered his brain.

His eyes sparkled with pleasure, and he answered:

"Well, Dick, I will take your word—you shall have the most comfortable cell there is in the prison, and you shall have every indulgence short of being permitted to depart. Now, what do you say to that?"

"Why, that I shall be always obliged to you; and depend upon it, any man's good will is better than his hatred, and I will sacredly promise you not to make any effort at escape—at least, not while things go on to my satisfaction, and when they do not, I will give you timely notice."

For the life of him, the Governor could not help laughing at the cool, easy, business-like way in which Dick spoke of his imprisonment.

"Well," he said, "come on quietly, and I will take you to the cell."

"But remember your promise," said Dick.

"Oh, yes, I'll remember it."

"Very well, then."

Dick held out his hands behind him significantly.

"Oh! you want the handcuffs taken off?"

"Yes, I do—they hurt my wrists confoundedly."

This was putting the Governor to the test, and he hesitated for one moment. He thought:

"Suppose, now, this fellow, of whose daring I have heard so much, should make a sudden attack upon us and escape by the door, what a fool I should look, and how much I should be blamed for taking his word!"

But the next moment he decided to have Dick released, for he reasoned with himself in the following manner:

"I will keep myself well upon my guard, and if he keeps peaceable and quiet, and makes no attempt at resistance or escape, I shall begin to put faith in him, for he would never have a better opportunity than the present."

The order was given, and the handcuffs were removed.

Dick gave himself a good shake.

He fully meant every word he said, and, turning quietly to the Governor, he said:

"You will never repent of this. Believe me, I am much obliged to you."

"Oh, don't mention it. If things can be managed quietly and comfortably, they might as well be as not."

"So I thought," added Dick, "and that's why I mentioned the subject."

The turnkeys were all very much surprised to see the Governor on such familiar terms with the prisoner; but, then, Dick was a prisoner of no ordinary kind, and the Governor wisely held him in dread; and, as we have already stated, it was part of his creed always to bow down before authority.

"You must not expect to find anything at all luxurious," he continued, with a laugh. "The comforts here are scarce. However, come this way."

Dick followed the Governor along a corridor and up a flight of steps.

Pausing before a row of strong doors, the Governor made a sign for one to be opened.

The fastenings were removed, and then really a clean and comfortable cell was disclosed.

It had a window in it of a size larger than was usual, and this window looked into a kind of court-yard.

"Ah!" said Dick, "this is better. I had no idea that you had anything of this kind in Newgate."

"Nor had we until lately," was the reply. "This is part that has been lately built. Will this suit you?"

"Oh yes."

"Very well, then, walk in and take possession. You must know, by a recent regulation, my strict duty is to leave two men or more constantly in the cell with you to watch your every movement, but I suppose that will not be pleasant?"

"Not by any means," said Dick. "I should prefer to be alone."

"Well, then, I will run the risk of disobeying my instructions."

"Then I shall be infinitely obliged to you. And I tell you what it is, Mr. ——"

"Bradbury," said the Governor.

"Well, then, Mr. Bradbury, I can tell you that you will never have cause for regret if you continue to treat me as well as you do now—indeed, it will turn out one of the best things in the world for you, so mind that."

CHAPTER DCCCLIV.

DICK TURPIN OPENS THE LOCKET, AND MAKES A FRIEND IN NEWGATE.

THE Governor stared at Dick Turpin in the utmost surprise; but the highwayman's countenance underwent no change, and, for all he could tell, by the expression of it, Dick fully meant what he said.

"Well," replied Mr. Bradbury, at last, "I have not been Governor of Newgate very long, but if I continue in this post a hundred years I'll warraut I never have a prisoner talk to me in such an easy, off-handed way as you do."

"Very likely not," said Dick. "I don't hesitate to say you are a good fellow—a much better one than I expected to find."

The turnkeys, who stood on the threshold of the cell, were highly amused at this conversation, and afterwards it was repeated with all due exaggerations to their companions in the vestibule, the result of which was that, taking their cue from the Governor's conduct, they were prepared to treat Dick in the friendliest manner possible.

"Well—well," said the Governor, as he prepared to leave the cell, evidently by no means displeased with Dick's flattery, "I will make things as comfortable as I can for you, but you must be careful not to speak of any little extra indulgencies that I may allow you."

"Oh, certainly not!" said Dick. "Don't feel any fear on that score, I beg."

The Governor then withdrew, and, by his orders, the turnkeys closed the door after him.

While they were putting up the ponderous bar, and securing other fastenings, he said to them, in a whisper:

"You heard what I said just now? Of course I agreed that he should be left in the cell by himself."

The men nodded.

"But," he continued, "I don't care about trusting him too far, so—aha, it's a joke!—two of you shall remain constantly outside the door while he is here; then, if you hear or see anything unusual, the alarm can be instantly raised."

The Governor strode away without waiting for a reply, congratulating himself in his own mind upon the vast amount of cunning that he had shown in the transaction, and rubbing his hands quite gleefully as he went.

It was no small relief to his mind to have Turpin's word that he would not escape, as it would save him such a vast deal of trouble; and now this extra precaution, he felt, would make all things easy.

As for Dick himself, he was glad enough to get rid of the Governor, and as soon as ever the door was closed, took the locket out of his mouth, where he had managed to keep it concealed during the whole of the time.

His impatience with regard to it was very great, for he wanted to know how and by what means it could possibly get him out of his present strait.

He tried to open it.

But his haste and eagerness were so great as to defeat his object, and he had to pause and look more carefully at it.

He then noticed that it was secured by a small spring, which he pressed, and immediately the locket flew open.

What he saw within it by no means increased his confidence, for all he could perceive were too small portraits, one of a male and the other of a female.

They were, however, beautifully executed, and set round with small precious stones.

"The deuce!" he exclaimed—"how is this to help me? Have I been befooled after all?"

He looked more carefully still at the portraits, and then two cries of surprise rapidly escaped his lips.

In the portrait of the female he recognised the features of the mysterious lady

There was a great alteration in them, yet the likeness could not fail to be recognised.

Evidently the portrait had been painted when she was a very young girl; now she was, to say the least, middle-aged.

The other portrait was still more unmistakeable.

The features as well as the costume, were well known to Dick as soon as he scrutinised them.

It was a portrait of his Majesty the King.

But Dick was by no means satisfied that he had seen all the locket contained.

Surely there should be some direction in it as to how he should act, and some suggestion as to the means by which the portraits could be made useful to him.

But, although he spent nearly an hour in examining the locket in every part, he failed to find anything else, and finally came to the conclusion that the portraits were all that it contained.

He closed it sharply.

With a feeling of great disappointment, he thrust it into his pocket and began to think.

"I can't believe that she meant to play me false," he said, at length. "There's only one way I can think of by which this locket can be made useful, and yet, surely I should have had some hint about it, but I have not, though the idea must be tried if possible. I must find a means of conveying this locket to the King."

This certainly seemed about the only reasonable thing that could be done with the locket, and yet how great would be the difficulty for anyone confined in a cell in Newgate to communicate with the King—indeed, any other person than Dick Turpin would probably have considered it an impossibility, and have never even made the attempt.

But Dick never lost anything for the want of trying, and, having made up his mind that the locket should be handed to the King, he set to work to think by what means this purpose could be carried out.

The task was beset with innumerable obstacles, and he thought of fifty things without being able to decide on any.

He was interrupted in his ruminations by the removal of the fastenings upon his door.

Listlessly, he turned his eyes in that direction, and saw a turnkey enter.

To Dick's surprise, he closed the door behind him.

There was an expression on this man's face which Dick interpreted as being favourable to himself.

"Well," he asked, quickly, "what is it? Nothing disagreeable I hope?"

"No, captain—nothing disagreeable. I have come to know what there is you would like."

"What I should like?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, to speak the truth, that you would just take me up and pop me down somewhere outside of the prison."

The turnkey shook his head.

"I can't do that, captain—I can't indeed. If I could I would, mind you," he added, in a suppressed tone that seemed to be perfectly earnest.

"Would you indeed?" said Dick, grasping him by the hand. "For what reason is it that you are so willing to befriend me?"

"Well, I've got two reasons, captain."

"Quick, then—out with them!"

"Well, the first is owing to a little circumstance that, perhaps you may have forgotten, but which I shall always remember. You once saved my life."

"Saved your life?"

"Yes; you don't recollect me, very likely."

"I am certain I do not," replied Turpin, gazing more closely into his countenance, "and, as a rule, if I once see a person I can always recognise him again."

"Well, you never did see me—at least, not that I know of," replied the man.

"And yet I saved your life?"

"Yes."

"But how so?"

Do you not recollect that, one night, a long time ago now, you called in at a cottage and asked for something to eat? The woman who kept it said she was very poor, yet put the best meal she could before you, telling you at the same time that her husband was lying ill in bed, and

dying for want of nourishment, which she had not the means to procure?"

Dick reflected.

"Yes, yes—I have some faint recollection of it. But what then?"

"Why, you took your departure very suddenly, and after you had gone we found under the plate a large sum in gold. That money enabled my wife to purchase the things I stood in need of, and so saved my life. I rapidly grew better, and finally well, though when I recovered health and strength my stock of money was exhausted.'

"Well, you were quite welcome," said Dick. "It was no favour on my part; the service your wife rendered me was not overpaid by the one I rendered in return."

"Well, we may be of different opinions as regards that," said the man. "However, you saved my life, captain, and, to the longest day I live, I shall always feel grateful to you for it, and I will do anything in my power for you."

"I am heartily glad to hear it," was the reply, "more especially as there is a service which you can render me. But you spoke of another reason—what is that?"

"Why, it happened, strangely enough, but one of the gentlemen who came in with you when you were brought here—Sir George, I think you call him——"

"Yes—yes."

"He watched for me outside, and as soon as I appeared told me to follow him. I did so, and we entered a public-house. He approached the subject very cautiously, but finding how friendly disposed I was to you, was very glad.

"'Here,' he said, 'I know that in Newgate, as everywhere else, much can be done with money. Take this purse of gold, and see that Dick Turpin has everything which the regulations of the prision will permit. If you require any more, come to me as soon as your funds are exhausted, and take him word from me that I will use all my influence to procure his liberation.'"

"Did he say that?"

"Yes, he did, and here, captain, is the purse just as I received it."

"Well, but I don't want it, my good fellow. Keep it—keep it, I beg, and use it as occasion may require."

"I will, captain, the King shall not be more comfortable than you are, provided the Governor does not interfere, and I don't think he will, if we keep things snug."

"The King?" repeated Dick. "Yes, that reminds me of what I want."

"What, captain?"

"Why, paper, a pen, and ink—I must write a letter."

"I shall have to smuggle those in when I get a chance," was the reply, "for it is entirely against the rules to furnish those articles. However, you shall have them."

"And as soon as possible," said Dick—"every moment is of importance."

"All right, captain. Is there anything else?"

"No, no—nothing at present until that is done."

"Anything to eat and drink?"

"No. I tell you until this affair is off my mind I cannot attend to anything else."

CHAPTER DCCCLV

DICK TURPIN WRITES A LETTER TO OLD MATTHEW AND DESPATCHES IT BY THE FRIENDLY JAILER.

"I WILL go at once, captain—direct, and I will be back here again as quickly as is possible."

With these words the friendly jailer left.

After his departure, Dick more fully realised how fortunate this event had proved for him.

Nothing more unexpected than finding a friend beneath the roof of Newgate could he have thought of, and yet, in a most substantial way, he experienced the benefit that always follows the doing of a good action.

Unless the man was black and treacherous indeed, he would be entirely devoted to Turpin's interests.

From the fact of Dick asking for writing materials, it may be guessed that he had made up his mind how to proceed, and so he had, for the finding of this friend altered the aspect of affairs entirely.

His intention was to write a letter to his companions, and entrust it to his friend to deliver.

He had resolved not to send to the Three Spiders, however, because that would be too dangerous.

His connection with that place could not be too carefully kept secret.

He would send it in the first place to old Matthew, in Drury Lane, and trust to him to forward it to the proper quarter.

The turnkey was absent only a short time, and when he came in, the expression of his face showed that he had been successful.

"Here you are, captain," he said—"a drop of ink, there's a pen, and here's a piece of paper."

"Thanks—many thanks. It will take me some little time to write this letter, so come in again when you next have the opportunity; by that time it will doubtless be finished."

"Very good, captain—I will."

"But stay," said Dick, "you did not tell me how it was you came to be turnkey in Newgate."

"Well, the fact is, after I got well I was a long time trying to get fresh work, but I failed—why, I knew not. I tried many different occupations, and at length happened to hear by chance that turnkeys were wanted for Newgate. I applied, and succeeded in getting the situation, and here I have been ever since."

"That explanation is simple enough then."

"Yes, captain; but there's one thing more. Do you happen to know that two men are posted outside the door?"

"I fancied so."

"Well, then, it is the case; so that when we speak to each other we must sink our voices a little above a whisper; those other fellows may betray us."

"You were quite right to caution me," said Dick "For the moment, I had forgotten all about them."

The turnkey said no more, but departed, and as soon as he was alone, Dick set down, first to think and afterwards to write.

The latter was to him a very tedious operation.

Yet, after awhile, he succeeded in producing the following epistle:—

"DEAR MATTHEW,—

"I suppose by this time you have heard that I am a prisoner in Newgate. The circumstances of my arrest are very peculiar. No doubt you wonder that I should have surrendered at all, knowing how often I have declared that I would rather die. Circumstances alter cases, though, and when we meet again, which I hope will be soon, I will relate all the details to you; I have not time to write them.

"I want you, as soon as may be after the receipt of this letter, to send over to a certain place I need not mention, and let them know that I am safe. Tell them not to be alarmed, and for the following reason:—

"Along with this letter you will receive a small locket, take care of it, for on that depends my liberation. Strange, is it not? but I have faith in its power. I want it delivered to the King with all speed, wherever he may be at the present time. And here let me give you a particular caution: T. K. will be the proper person to deliver it, for, mark me, the locket must, by some means or other, be placed in the King's hand. It will not do for it to reach him through any official connected with the palace. At all risks, hazards, and difficulties, access must be had to the King in person, and the locket presented.

"There is no one I can think of better calculated to perform such a task than the person I have named. Let him go as soon as possible, and with all speed let me know the result.

"The bearer of this you can fully trust in every respect. I would pledge my life as to his fidelity.

"If you like to make inquiries you can soon learn how it was that I came into possession of this singular locket, and then you will not feel so surprised at my pinning my faith upon it.

"Above all, I should like you to endeavour to reassure Maud. I know she must feel greatly distressed at what has happened, but let her know from me that my position is by no means so perilous as she imagines, for should, by any unlucky accident, the locket fail, I have a friend here

by whose aid, I doubt not, I should be able to make my escape.

"Last of all, impress upon everyone the necessity of remaining quiet where they are, and making no effort to release me, as any such attempt on their part will only get them into trouble, and increase the difficulties of my position.

"If you like to send word back, you can do so. Do not be afraid of putting trust in the bearer.

"Yours,

"DICK."

Turpin took a great deal of pains over this letter, and he was occupied a long time in writing it.

Scarcely had he laid down the pen, however, when the friendly jailer entered.

"Here it is," Dick exclaimed, folding up the sheet of paper and addressing it. "I want you to take it to one Matthew Gale, the landlord of the White Horse, in Drury Lane. Do you know it?"

"I think so—a large, old-fashioned building, is it not, standing at the corner of White Horse Yard?"

"Yes, that's it. Here's the letter, and be sure that you deliver it into the hands of Matthew Gale himself. You will know him, for he is tall and stout, with a jolly, good-tempered-looking countenance, and usually wears a white apron. Try as well to slip the letter into his hand when there's no one by."

"All right."

"And this," said Dick, giving him the locket—"above all things be careful of that; do not lose it, for upon it all my hopes depend."

"You can trust me, captain," was the reply. "Such a service as this is a mere trifle, but yet I will perform it as well as if you had gone in person."

"I am satisfied to trust you; take it now and go at once."

"But, captain," said the man, "don't you want something to eat or drink? You have been here a good many hours now."

"I know that, but I am accustomed to go long without food, especially if I have anything important to do."

"But when I come back?"

"Why then, if you like, you can bring me the best dinner you can procure, for when I know the letter and locket have been delivered safely, and are in Old Matthew's hands, a great load will be lifted off my heart."

"Well, then, I will start, and make haste back."

"Do so—do so."

The turnkey carefully secreted the letter and locket about him—then left the cell.

It may easily be imagined that Dick Turpin suffered no small degree of impatience and anxiety after the jailer had departed.

In spite of everything, and try as he would, some doubts as to the fellow's honesty would obtrude themselves upon his mind.

It was a dreadful thing to think of, for should he be betrayed in this, his position would be dangerous indeed.

And so, as minute after minute passed away, his uneasiness increased, and, rising to his feet, he paced rapidly up and down his cell, pausing every now and then to look through the barred window, hoping that he should catch sight of the turnkey approaching.

Dick had no means whatever of ascertaining the time, for, of course, on his first introduction to the vestibule of Newgate, every article was removed from his pockets, and the locket would have gone as well had he not so cleverly concealed it.

Yet he fancied that a very long time indeed had elapsed since the man's departure—much more time than was needful for him to perform the journey to Drury Lane and back, and for Matthew to send a message in return.

Unless by imagination we could place ourselves exactly in his present situation, it would be difficult indeed to form a proper estimate of the anxious state of his mind, or guess what doubts, and fears, and hopes by turns assailed it.

That the jailer had been absent a very long time he was quite certain, although his state of suspense might have caused him to exaggerate it.

Now, however, there was no mistaking the fact that the day was fast closing in, and in a little while longer it would be dusk, if not dark.

But in that cell of Newgate the days were much shorter than they were outside the prison, for it was not until long after the sun had risen in the morning that any daylight found its way into it, and by sunset it was nearly dark.

At length, however, Dick heard a footstep in the passage.

He paused, and directly afterwards the fastenings were removed, the door opened, and the jailer entered.

"You have been absent a long time," said Dick, as soon as it was prudent to speak.

"Yes, captain, I have; but you will find that I shall be able to give you a very good explanation of it."

CHAPTER DCCCLVI.

TOM DAVIS GATHERS SOME INFORMATION RESPECTING OLD MATTHEW FROM THE LOQUACIOUS BARBER.

We revert now to the proceedings of Tom Davis.

It will be remembered that when he left the Three Spiders it was very early in the morning indeed.

The horse he had was a good one, and took him to London in capital style, so that he arrived before many of the inhabitants were astir.

He took the precaution, however, to leave his horse and trap at an inn about half a mile from Drury Lane, because he was anxious to arrive there without attracting any notice.

Walking quietly down on the side opposite to that upon which the White Horse stood, Tom Davis pretended to be gazing with interest at the shop windows, but in reality he did this only that he might be allowed a better opportunity of looking carefully on all sides of him.

But as he proceeded he saw nothing at all peculiar or unusual.

Arriving at length opposite the White Horse, he saw that the shutters were down and the door open.

But, more by chance than anything else, Tom Davis cast his eyes upwards, and, very greatly to his astonishment, he caught sight of a couple of police officers who were on the top of the house, looking down over the parapet.

They made some signs with their hands, but what they portended Tom could not guess.

But, looking before him, he saw two men dressed in plain clothes, who were replying to the signals given by those above.

"Oh, oh!" he muttered. "So Matthew is troubled with another visit of his old friends, is he? Well, if such is the case, the wisest thing I can do, perhaps, is to keep out of the way for a time. Where can I go?"

Tom looked around him again, for if by any chance he could remain somewhere within sight of the White Horse Inn, why then it would be so much the better.

Fortune favoured him.

It will be remembered that nearly opposite the front door of the White Horse Inn was a barber's shop.

The barber himself was an object of considerable aversion to Old Matthew, for the simple reason that he was very fond of prying into his neighbours' business.

Of course, we all know that Matthew had many secrets that he wished to keep carefully concealed from the eyes of those around him, and he had often been annoyed by this barber's inquisitiveness.

Tom Davis, however, no sooner saw the shop than he felt quite a sensation of pleasure.

Here he could enter and remain for some time, and probably learn what was going on at the White Horse.

Just as he reached the door of the shop, some person came hastily out, and following him, almost treading on his heels, was the barber himself.

He stopped on the doorstep, and looked attentively across the road.

What more he would have done is hard to say, for just then Tom Davis went up to him and entered the shop.

"Bless my heart," the barber exclaimed, in brisk tones, "I never knew such a thing in all my life!"

"As what?" asked Tom, as he seated himself in a chair.

"As business this morning."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, I have been uncommonly busy—most uncommonly busy, and just because I didn't want to be



[DICK TURPIN IS SUMPTUOUSLY REGALED IN HIS CELL BY THE FRIENDLY JAILER.]

scarcely believe it, sir," he continued, as he adjusted a cloth beneath Tom's chin—"you'll scarcely believe what a many useless, idle hours I pass here; but then, of course, there's nothing going on. But, mark me, I'll be bound if there's anything particular occurring, people keep dropping in one after another, and I don't get a moment to look about me."

"Dear me," said Tom Davis, "I'm quite sorry I entered."

"Oh, don't mention it, sir—don't mention it! I shall be done in a moment."

The barber took it for granted that Tom required shaving, and to this operation our friend submitted first, not that he intended to leave when that was over, for he meant to have his air trimmed, which would occupy some little length of time.

"May I venture to ask," said Tom, "What it is that is going on this morning that you are so anxious to witness?"

"Oh yes, certainly—I will tell you with the greatest of pleasure! It is no secret—no secret at all. Did you happen to notice that public-house opposite?"

"Yes, I think I did."

"Well, then, I may go so far as to say that it is one of the most notorious places in all London."

"In what way?"

"Why, all the highwaymen and flash coves of every kind go there if they are in trouble, and the landlord contrives to hide them somewhere, so that if the officers search ever so strictly they can't find them."

"Dear me—how extraordinary!" said Tom Davis, as if in the greatest astonishment.

"It's a fact, I can assure you," continued the barber, speaking with great rapidity. "I could fill a whole volume with things that I have witnessed myself, for, being rather curious about such matters, and living exactly opposite, of course I have had ample opportunities for observation."

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"So I should think."

"I have heard, though," he went on, "that Matthew Gale, or old Matthew, as we generally call him, although he will place a highwayman or almost anyone in safety, yet refuses to hold out his protection to anyone he knows to be a murderer; but that may or may not be true, and whether it is or not, after all, does not signify. There you are, sir—all done now. Good day, sir."

"Not quite," replied Tom. "I am sorry to hinder you, but now I am shaved I must have my hair dressed; it would be impossible to leave it, so you must make the job complete."

The barber gave a sigh, and began to get his implements ready.

"Do you know any of the particulars of what is going on to-day?" asked Tom.

"No," replied the barber, "scarcely any, and that's why I am so anxious to find out."

"Then, if you like," said Tom, "as I am in no particular hurry, and as I feel curious as well as yourself, perhaps you would not mind leaving me here for a few moments and ascertaining?"

"My dear sir, I shall have great pleasure, and while I am gone you can amuse yourself with looking at the newspaper—there it is. Now I'm off."

Glad enough, apparently, to get out of the shop, the barber darted through the door.

Tom was not likely to interest himself in the newspaper while things of so much importance to him were going on around, so, flinging it aside, he hastened also to the door, which he opened a very little way, so as to take a peep at the barber's proceedings.

That individual crossed the road rapidly, and entered the White Horse.

"He has gone to head quarters for his information certainly," was Tom Davis's mental observation. "What an extraordinary fellow; but what an intolerable nuisance he must be to old Matthew."

The barber was absent a long time—so long that Tom Davis's patience would have been put to a sore trial had it not been for the fact that the officers had not yet left, and he did not wish to enter the White Horse until they had.

At last, however, the barber, with his usual smirk upon his lips, came tripping across the road.

Tom no sooner saw him approaching than he resumed his seat, and pretended to be reading the paper very attentively.

"I've been a long time gone," the barber began, as soon as he appeared; "but, then, as you were kind enough to say you were in no hurry, I thought it would not matter."

"Oh, not in the least!" said Tom. "I have been very well interested during your absence."

"That's all right, then."

"But what have you learned?" inquired Tom, with some anxiety.

"Why, it seems the police are after a man who is suspected of being the author of several mysterious murders. The police got information that he was seen to enter the White Horse, and that he had not emerged again."

"But stay—did you not tell me that this landlord refused to hold out any protection to murderers?"

"Yes, certainly, and I made the remark as soon as I heard the particulars; but the officers are rather incredulous, so they have been all the morning searching from the cellar to the attic."

"And have they found him?"

"No, not even the ghost of a clue. Old Matthew takes it very coolly, declaring most positively that no one of the kind is in the house; but the officers take no notice of that, for they are well aware he would say just the same thing if the man they wanted was under their noses."

"He is really quite a remarkable character," said Tom Davis. "You interest me greatly; I really think I shall feel inclined to run across when I leave you just to have a peep at so extraordinary an individual."

"Oh, he is nothing much to look at," said the barber, "and I should not think so badly of him as I do but for one thing."

"And may I ask what that is?"

"Yes, he does not support his neighbours as he might. Instead of coming to me to be shaved he actually has the meanness to shave himself. Then, as for hair-dressing, he never requires it, for his head is about as bald as a head could be. He even does not patronise me by buying a wig," the barber added, in conclusion.

Tom Davis could not help feeling greatly amused at all he heard, and some more time still was spent in this kind of conversation.

The barber himself was never so happy as when he could get hold of some one who would listen patiently while he talked.

And so long after the operation of hair-dressing was over, Tom remained in the shop.

And yet it did not seem strange for him to do so, for his hand was on the knob of the door all the time, as if he was about to take his departure each moment.

At length, feeling anxious to see whether the officers had left, Tom passed out into the street again.

He glanced up and saw nothing of the officers, but he thought, after all, it would be more expedient if he allowed an hour or two to elapse before he paid his visit, so he walked briskly in the direction of the Strand, intending to while away his time somewhere else.

About an hour and a half afterwards he returned, and approached the White Horse as circumspectly as he could. He was rejoiced to find that the barber was not standing at his door, as he feared he would be, in which case he might have run across the road and entered at the same time, intending to take a friendly glass with him.

That, however, would by no means have answered Tom's purpose, so, with a feeling of great relief, he hastily crossed the threshold.

CHAPTER DCCCLVII.

IN WHICH TOM DAVIS AND OLD MATTHEW HOLD A CONSULTATION RESPECTING DICK TURPIN.

THERE was an air of quietude about the interior of the inn that seemed to tell Tom Davis at once that the officers had taken their departure.

With increasing confidence and ease, he made his way along the passage to the bar window.

Only a few people were sitting in the public-room, and they were conversing with each other in low tones, as if upon particular business of their own.

Tom Davis glanced all about him, but seeing no one who would observe his movements, he left the bar window and proceeded to the door, which he opened hastily, and as hastily closed after him.

Opposite was that door we have so frequently had occasion to mention, which communicated with old Matthew's private sitting-room.

Here Tom fully expected to find his old friend, so he opened this door also without ceremony.

His conjecture proved correct.

Seated at a table, on which was spread a repast of a very substantial character, was old Matthew.

The opening of the door caused him to look up, and no sooner did he see who had entered than he dropped his knife and fork and uttered an ejaculation.

"Why, bless and save us, Tom! is it you?"

"It is," was the answer, and, as he gave it, Tom closed the door quietly behind him.

"But what on earth brings you here to-day?" said old Matthew. "I'm glad to see you. Sit down, you are just in time for breakfast. I am rather late this morning; but those confounded officers have kept me hard at work."

"It is rather late," said Tom, seating himself as he had been desired, and thinking at the same time that the meal looked very much more like a dinner than a breakfast.

But old Matthew was a rare trencherman, as he knew very well.

"Now, Tom," he cried, "help yourself—don't be afraid; and then, while I finish, you can tell me what has brought you here to-day."

But Tom Davis only replied to this invitation by shaking his head.

"I can't eat, Matthew," he said, "or drink. Can it be possible that you do not know what has brought me here?"

"No. Why, what has happened—nothing serious, I hope?"

"My trust is that the report is without foundation," replied Tom Davis, "yet I can scarcely indulge in such a hope."

"What—what? Confound it, man, why don't you speak out?"

"Why, this morning, early, I heard that Dick Turpin had been captured and was confined in Newgate!"

This intelligence came upon old Matthew like a thunder clap, and in his astonishment he gave the chair on which he sat such a jerk that it went rolling along the floor on its castors until stopped by the wall.

"In Newgate?" he gasped, rising to his feet. "Ridiculous—impossible—nothing of the sort!"

Tom Davis drew a long breath.

"I am glad to hear it."

"Why, how on earth could such a report have reached your ears? If it was true, depend upon it I should have heard all about it long ago."

"So I should think," returned Tom Davis, who was beginning to feel more at ease. "However, Matthew, if you will have the patience to listen for a few minutes I will give you an account of the whole affair, from beginning to end."

"Proceed, then—I am all attention."

Thereupon, Tom described how Dick had taken his departure—how Black Bess had returned—how they had waited for him in vain, and at last, how the newsman had brought the intelligence.

"Well, it's very strange," said old Matthew, thoughtfully, and resting his head on his hand—"very singular indeed; but I have been away from home the last few days. Particular business, connected with a relative of mine, took me down to Dover. I started three days ago, and did not return until this morning, and when I did arrive I found my house all in the greatest confusion, for a party of police officers had taken it into their heads that I had secreted somebody or other. I was vexed, of course, to think the place should have been so overhauled during my absence; but yet my mind was easy, because I had no one concealed."

"Then," said Tom, beginning to look grave again, "it is quite possible that during your absence Dick's arrest may have been effected, and since you have returned home doubtless you have been in such a state of confusion and excitement that you have had no time to hear anything."

"Well, Tom, there may be something in that, and I am inclined to think there is; I should be more so but for one fact."

"What is that?"

"Why, I think it was only about the very last time he was here that Dick Turpin most positively assured me that he would die a thousand times rather than surrender."

"Yes—yes, I have heard him say the same thing often."

"Well, and Dick is invariably as good as his word, so therefore I think the intelligence, after all, must be untrue."

"I fervently hope so," said Tom Davis, "for I can assure you that his comrades are in the utmost consternation; and as for Maud, the shock was terrible, and when I left her she was only keeping herself up by the hope that I should bring back good news."

"Which I hope you will," said old Matthew. "But don't let us sit here any longer talking thus and remaining in suspense. If Dick is in Newgate, the fact will be easily ascertained, and quickly too; if he is not, you may depend he is well able to take care of himself."

"Yes, yes—I have no doubt about that; and I beg, Matthew, that you will, without any further delay, make the necessary inquiries."

"Will you go too?"

"No; if you have no objection, I would prefer to sit here until you return."

"It will perhaps be quite as well," replied Matthew, and as he spoke he took down his hat and changed his coat.

Just as he was about to quit the room the door was opened, and the girl who minded the bar in his absence said:

"You are wanted—now—in a moment."

Matthew just nodded to his old friend and passed into the bar.

At the window was the turnkey who had shown himself to be such a good friend to Turpin.

"You are Matthew Gale, I suppose?" he said.

"I am."

"Well, then, take this, and this, and I will wait here for your answer."

While speaking, the man handed over the letter and also the locket, both of which Matthew received with considerable surprise.

Hastily opening the letter, he glanced at its contents.

At the first word the expression of his countenance changed suddenly.

Turning round, he made his way into the inner room.

"It's true, Tom," he said, as he sank down into a chair—"true, Tom—every word of it. Just read that; I am so confused that I can't."

Tom Davis took the letter with a trembling hand, and, in a low, shaking voice, read what Turpin had written.

Until its perusal was finished, no word was spoken, and then, looking into Matthew's face, Tom said:

"Well, now, my friend, what do you think of that?"

"Think?" replied Matthew, wiping his forehead. "I hardly know what to think; it seems impossible. Just let me have a look at the letter, will you?"

Then, as if unable to believe his ears, he glanced rapidly over the sheet of paper.

"What can all this be about a locket?" he exclaimed. "Stay—here it is; let us look at it."

With some difficulty, he found out the means by which the locket was opened, and he gazed with great interest and attention upon the two portraits.

Tom Davis gazed also.

"I remember," he said—"I remember now. Dick told me all about it, and you will understand better if I make you acquainted with the facts."

In as few words as possible, Tom Davis then related to old Matthew Dick Turpin's peculiar adventure with the mysterious lady, to whom he had rendered such an important service, which she had requited him by the bestowal of the locket.

Old Matthew looked thoughtfully.

"That, then, accounts for Dick having surrendered himself. He must have great faith in it—more faith than I should like to put in anything."

"He has good reasons, rest assured," said Tom Davis. "I have every confidence in him. Now that I have read his letter, with all speed I shall hasten back to the Three Spiders, and to-night, in all probability, Tom King will seek his audience with the King."

Matthew shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems an impossibility to me!" he exclaimed. "How on earth can he hope to get an audience?"

"That I know not; I shall leave it to him. He is very cunning in all expedients; and if any person could succeed he would."

Old Matthew was silent.

"You may as well inform me, or ascertain, if you don't know, one fact that will save him some trouble, perhaps."

"What is that?"

"Why, whether the King is at St. James's or at Windsor."

"At Windsor, I believe. But before you go I will take care that there shall be no doubt upon this score."

"Who brought the letter? Where is he?"

"At the bar window," returned Matthew. "He looks to me like one of the warders of the prison."

"Then," suggested Tom Davis, "had we not better have him in here for a few moments, and get from him some personal information?"

"A good thought," replied old Matthew—"a very good thought; we'll have him in at once. It will be some satisfaction to know from some one who has seen him so lately just how Dick Turpin is."

CHAPTER DCCCLVIII.

DICK TURPIN CONTRIVES TO MAKE HIMSELF VERY UNCOMFORTABLE IN NEWGATE.

THE friendly jailer was at once called in, and a conversation of considerable length followed.

There was nothing in it, however, that deserves to be repeated, since the reader is already acquainted with such particulars as the turnkey was able to give.

Yet it was a very great satisfaction indeed both to Tom Davis and old Matthew Gale to hold conversation with a man who could tell them how Dick spoke and looked

"He is not very easy in his mind," the turnkey said; "but he will be all right when I return. You must understand this letter was written yesterday, soon after his arrival in Newgate. He gave it to me, and I promised to deliver it at once, but, unfortunately, was prevented from doing so until this morning."

"How so?"

"Why, quite unexpectedly, and at the last moment, the Governor set me on to some extra duty, which prevented me from leaving. I can assure you the captain's disappointment was very great when I took the first opportunity of returning to his cell and informing him of my failure. It was then just growing dark. He had been in the greatest suspense, fully expecting that I had taken the letter, and was wondering at my delay. However, I told him that he must wait until to-day."

"And I suppose you took the first opportunity to get away this morning?"

"I did."

"Well, then, when you return, tell him that no effort on our parts shall be wanting to secure his release, and if the locket fails, we shall adopt other means."

"I will be sure to tell him. Believe me," he added, earnestly, "you can fully trust me, and any further message you have to send you had better give to me verbally, and I will repeat it to him. There will then be no fear of the letter being lost or discovered."

"Good!" said old Matthew. "But at present that is all that I can think of to say."

"Except," added Tom Davis, "that we are all very anxious about him, Maud especially, and that I shall endeavour to calm her as well as I am able."

Soon after this the turnkey took his leave.

He was only allowed to be absent from the prison for a certain time, but, being a favourite of the Governor's, he was allowed indulgences of various kinds.

After he had gone, Tom Davis and old Matthew sat for some time in consultation.

At length the latter departed, in order to ascertain the whereabouts of the King.

This was information easy to be obtained.

In about half an hour old Matthew returned, saying:

"The King is at Windsor, though it is not known how soon he may leave the castle for London."

"That will do," said Tom. "It only shows what necessity there is for promptitude of action. I'll be off at once."

"It puzzles me exceedingly," said old Matthew, "and I shall be heartily glad to see him out of Newgate. That locket will have rare power indeed if it releases him, for I know how determined all the authorities are to secure him, if possible."

"Well, we shall see," added Tom Davis, who went on. "By-the-way, Matthew, there's one little circumstance I may as well mention to you, which is this: You have a neighbour opposite—a barber."

Matthew nodded.

"He is the most inquisitive fellow I ever met with, and his especial pleasure is to find out what is going on here."

"I know it," said old Matthew—"I know it very well. I have been waiting, hoping to catch him and put an end to his tricks. I shall do it some day, I know."

"Be careful, Matthew," continued Tom—"pray be careful! You don't know what mischief a man like that might do!"

"It is impossible to guess, and I am much obliged to you for the caution. I have had my eye upon him for a long time past."

"And now, Matthew," said Tom, "one word before I go. If anything particular occurs, you may rely upon seeing me here again very shortly, so don't be out of the way if you can possibly help it."

"I will not, you may depend. I feel quite as much concerned in this business as you do, and I shall keep my eyes open to pick up all the intelligence I can."

With this understanding the two friends parted.

Tom Davis would have left the inn by the front door, but old Matthew prevented him.

"No, no," he said—"you had better not go that way—the officers might see you. Come here—it will be better to pass through the stables."

Of the interior arrangements of the White Horse Tom Davis knew little except from hearsay, and his surprise was very great when Matthew took him out into the yard and led him into the secret stable that we have previously described.

From this, it will be recollected, there was a communication with the numberless streets lying between Drury Lane and Clare Market, and in which anyone might easily get out of sight.

Tom Davis glanced around as he emerged into the open air.

But, so far as he could tell, there were no police officers on the watch.

Taking a circuitous route, he made his way to the inn where he had left his horse.

As he hurried through the streets, he was surprised to find how late it was—the day was really drawing to a close.

Before he could reach Ealing, he felt tolerably certain night would be at hand, and, with the view of returning as hastily as possible, he made his horse put forth its best speed.

How he arrived the reader is already aware, and now the intelligence he carried is known also.

This leaves us at liberty to follow the turnkey back to Newgate.

As he had said, Dick's disappointment and vexation on the preceding night were very great indeed, and during the long hours of darkness he remained counting every minute as it passed, for his mind was in too feverish a state for sleep.

He was now awaiting, with the greatest impatience, the turnkey's return.

When he caught sight of him, one glance into his countenance was sufficient to assure him that the man had been successful.

"All's right, captain," said the turnkey, closing the door—"all's as right as you could wish!"

"That's a relief."

"No doubt."

"But begin at the beginning, and tell me, quietly and calmly, every little circumstance—do not spare one detail."

The turnkey complied, and, as he proceeded, Dick's composure and light-heartedness returned.

"Bravo!" he said. "I feel now like a free man! I have a presentiment that my longer stay in Newgate will be brief in the extreme!"

"I hope so, captain. And now, then, let me entreat you to partake of something. You have eaten nothing yet, and it may be necessary for you to keep up your strength."

"I am all right now," was the answer, "and can do justice to anything."

"That's the style, captain! You speak quite different now! Have patience for a short time only, and I will set such a dinner before you as would suit a prince!"

Dick smiled at him, and the man left.

A sensation of great faintness came over him immediately afterwards.

Now that relief was afforded to his mind, Nature asserted her supremacy.

Such a change as was perceptible in him would have astonished any beholder.

The turnkey was as good as his word.

In an incredibly short space of time, considering all the difficulties, a most excellent repast was brought in.

The fact must not be overlooked that in those days the discipline maintained inside a prison differed widely from that of the present day.

It is notorious that the greatest criminal, if he only had the means at command, could do almost what he liked, except to leave his cell.

It was a shame and disgrace that such a state of things should be permitted, but the abuse continued until long after the time of which we write.

Dick drew his chair up to the table eagerly.

"Now, captain," cried the turnkey, as he removed the covers, "if that does not tempt you, I'm a Dutchman! And here, look, are a couple of bottles of the best wine that can be obtained in London."

"We shall do rarely," said Dick. "I really think I never felt so hungry in my life."

"Lay on, then! I will wait upon you."

"No you won't!" said Dick. "You will sit down as

well. You are my friend, and shall be treated as such."

The turnkey was nothing loth.

With a pleased expression in his eyes, he drew a stool up to the table, and for some moments there was a perfect silence—both were too busily engaged in doing duty to the good things before them to speak.

The wine was tapped, and proved to be indeed of the most excellent quality.

A sensation of calmness and satisfaction crept over Dick.

Glass after glass was drained, and, could any person have taken a peep into that particular cell in Newgate at that moment, they would have been struck with the greatest amazement.

Dick leaned back in his chair, as though perfectly content and at home.

"Upon my word, now," he exclaimed, "life in Newgate is not so bad, after all!"

"Not so bad!" repeated the turnkey. "And yet I expect you will be glad enough to leave it."

"I shall; for, no matter if its comforts were ten thousand times greater than they are, I should still be deprived of the greatest blessing of life, and that is liberty."

"Hush!" said the turnkey. "I can hear somebody coming. Who is it, I wonder?"

Both listened.

A step was heard without, and then the sound of a voice came to their ears, though the words uttered could not be distinguished.

"It's the Governor," cried the turnkey, in some alarm. "Confound him! What in the world does he want here? Where can I hide, I wonder? Oh, nowhere, of course!"

CHAPTER DCCCLIX.

MR. BRADBURY, THE GOVERNOR, CONVEYS A DISAGREEABLE MESSAGE TO DICK TURPIN IN HIS CELL.

One rapid glance round the cell was quite enough to make the turnkey aware that all attempts to conceal himself in it would be futile.

The only hiding-place, if it may be so called, was underneath the table, and the turnkey rather shrank from availing himself of it.

Dick was by no means disconcerted—he was just in the humour to be pleased with everything.

The heavy fastenings were slowly undone, and the door thrown open.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Governor, sniffing the air as he entered—"dear me; what do I smell?"

"The good things of this earth," said Dick. "I am pleased to see you, Mr. Bradbury; had I known you were about to pay me a visit, I would have postponed my dinner so as to have had the pleasure of your company."

The Governor stared, as well he might.

The idea of his sitting down to dinner with a prisoner was a rich joke.

"You are making yourself comfortable, I see," he exclaimed; "but, then, I suppose, you think of your motto: A short life and a merry one."

"Yes, yes—begone dull care! Would you allow me the pleasure of taking wine with you, Mr Bradbury?"

"Bah! nonsense! Don't be a fool. If I wink at proceedings of this kind, it is only to show you how willing I am to do you any good turn for your promise not to make the attempt to escape."

"Yes, yes—I know that," replied Turpin. "I don't look as if I was breaking my word, do I?"

"You certainly do not, and I should not have looked in, only once a day I make it a practice of paying a visit to every cell, and I saw no reason why yours should be an exception."

"Certainly not, Mr. Bradbury—certainly not. I feel rather hurt to think you will not take wine with me. But, however, it don't matter, I won't bear you any grudge for it. Whenever you like to call I shall be proud and happy to see you."

Mr. Bradbury hardly knew whether to be amused or annoyed at this familiarity, and while in this state of hesitation his eye chanced to fall on the form of the turnkey.

"Oh, you are here, are you?" he cried. "What the devil do you mean by it? Is this attending to your duty?"

"Beg pardon, sir, if I've done wrong," said the turnkey, humbly, "but I'm off duty now, sir, so I thought there was no harm."

"Well, then, you thought wrong. Be off at once; I will not allow you to remain in any cell with the prisoner, mind that!"

The turnkey retired, glad enough to make his escape.

"Don't be hard on to him," cried Dick, "the fault is all my own. I tempted him with money first to get what he has brought, and then persuaded him to remain, for above all things in the world I do hate to dine alone."

The Governor drew a long breath.

"I have come across some strange characters in my time," he exclaimed—"very strange ones, but I'll be hanged if you don't beat them all! No one would believe that you were in the slightest bit of trouble."

"No more I am," was the reply, given with a smile. "I feel quite comfortable—never better in my life."

"Well, we shall see; but there's one thing I have invariably noticed."

"And what may that be, Mr. Governor?"

"Why, that those who carry things off with such a high hand and pretend to be so very game always show the white feather at the last."

"Then you will find I shall be an exception to your rule," said Turpin, with more earnestness than he had before made use of. "But something seems to tell me that we are destined to be much better friends than we are at present."

"Well, I don't know that. I have one piece of information to give you, which perhaps will make a change in your manner."

"May I inquire what it is?"

"Oh, certainly; I intended to tell you before I left. I suppose I need not remind you that, having once been tried and sentenced, that little formality will not have to be gone through again."

"Oh, indeed!" said Dick. "I was not certain. However, I am not sorry."

"Not sorry? Why, it would have given you a day or two longer to live. But the warrant that was sent here for your execution has been carefully preserved, and it has just been returned by the Secretary of State with a fresh endorsement upon it, thus saving a world of trouble."

Dick was silent.

"According to the instructions contained in it," continued the Governor, "your execution is appointed to take place on the third day from this at Tyburn. A very strong feeling is against you, and I have certain knowledge that the Secretary of State has determined at all risks and hazards the sentence shall be carried out. Newgate is watched in every part—not a mouse will leave it without being seen, so things look very awkward for you, though I must say you do well to make the best of what little time there is left."

"Yes," replied Dick, as calmly and unconcernedly as before. "If during the remainder of my stay here things go on as pleasantly as they have begun, I shall have nothing to grumble at. I shall be quite content."

The Governor shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, perhaps you are tired of your life; if you are not, I am at a loss to imagine why you should treat your coming death so coolly."

"That's not the reason, though perhaps you may know it ere long. On the third day from this, did you say?"

"Yes."

"Then that will be Friday."

"Exactly; and on Friday all the preparations at Tyburn will be made, and by this hour all will be over."

"So you think," answered Dick, significantly; "but time proves all things."

"A true proverb," said the Governor, "and it will prove that you are at the end of your career on that day, without you intend to break your word."

"I have no thoughts of doing so; but if I should resolve upon that course I will give you timely notice."

This seemed the best joke of all, and the Governor, after a few more words, left the cell.

When he had gone, Dick rose, and somewhat of a change came over his countenance.

"So soon," he said—"so soon. I have scarcely expected

they would be so prompt. Tom, indeed, will have to be expeditious to perform his task, and the locket must be of rare efficacy if it liberates me. Well, well—time alone will show."

He paced the cell somewhat uneasily, endeavouring to picture to himself as best he might how his comrades were engaged at that time.

"I wonder if they know the time is so short?" he muttered, pausing before the window; "if so, Tom would start to-night; if not, he might delay, and the delay would perhaps be fatal. But away with these gloomy forebodings, I will hope and trust for the best!"

So saying, he folded his arms and continued to gaze out at the little bit of sky visible through the grated window of his cell.

He continued to watch until it gradually darkened and darkened in colour, and until the faint glittering stars appeared.

Then he knew that night had come.

More anxiously than on the preceding night did he continue to watch.

His brain was all the time occupied in suggesting to him what his comrades might be doing.

He would have given much could he but have obtained one peep at their proceedings.

That, however, was impossible, and so, in uncertainty and suspense, the time passed away.

How long he sat there he knew not, but at last exhausted nature gave way, and he sank off into a deep and dreamless slumber, from which he did not awake until he heard some one removing the fastenings of his door.

He started hastily and opened his eyes.

To his astonishment he discovered it was daylight.

"Have I indeed slept so long?" he murmured. "Well, it is better, so the night is gone. I wonder now whether Tom King has been successful, and if he has, whether the locket will produce the desired effect?"

Just then the door was opened, and the friendly turnkey entered.

"I will not let them know I am so anxious," Dick thought. "I will assume a carelessness of demeanour, even though I feel it not; the only thing that I can do is to wait with patience, and in the meantime make myself as comfortable as I can."

"Breakfast, captain," said the turnkey, entering—"and a rare good breakfast it is. I hope you will do justice to it."

"Put it down," said Dick, "and help yourself."

"No, no, captain—I must not. The Governor is a strange man, and I know how to deal with him. It vexed him to see me here last night. I don't wish to get him at all angry, and so it will be best for me to comply with his wishes. Of course, if he liked he could prevent me from paying my visits altogether, which would be a bad thing for both of us, I think."

"You shall be the best judge," said Dick, "in that. I leave it entirely to you."

"Then I am off, captain; when I can leave the prison I will slip off to Drury Lane. I may be able to pick up something you would like to hear."

"Very likely" said Dick—"very likely."

With these words the turnkey left, and Dick sat down to the table.

But in reality he had but little appetite.

Now that the time grew closer he grew more and more doubtful respecting the virtues of the locket, and he was troubled as well by the statement the Governor had made respecting the vigilant manner in which the prison was guarded.

He was conscious that, should the locket fail, nothing could save him from an ignominious death on the morrow.

CHAPTER DCCCLX.

TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SET OUT FOR WINDSOR CASTLE.

Having taken such a calm survey of his own very perilous condition, Dick Turpin might indeed feel anxious in the extreme.

But there were others who fully shared that anxiety with him.

To make all clear, however, we must now go back to the moment when Tom Davis arrived at the Three Spiders Inn.

He was besieged at once with a multitude of questions; but, raising his hand, he said:

"If you will all be silent I will tell you everything, from beginning to end, and by this means much time will be saved."

It may perhaps be imagined with what amount of interest the highwaymen, and Maud, and Ellen listened to his recital.

Maud, learning for certain that Dick was in Newgate, gave vent to a passionate burst of grief; for, inspired by the words Tom Davis had uttered ere he left, she had hoped on to the last, and believed that he was free.

Davis, however, tried to make things look as bright as possible, and produced the locket.

Great as was the interest his narrative had excited, yet it was as nothing to that which they felt while gazing upon this little trinket.

The King's features were well known to them all, but not so those of the lady.

"It's a very strange business, truly," said Tom King, after Davis had informed him that it was Dick's wish he should deliver the locket—"a very strange business; but, yet I hope everything will turn out successfully."

"It is our only hope," said Tom Davis; "and before I left I took good care to inquire where the King was staying. He is at Windsor, though it is not known how soon he may leave."

"Then," replied Tom, "there can be no doubt that the best thing we can do is to start off at once; any delay might prove of the greatest consequence."

"Yes, although he did not mention it, Dick no doubt wishes the locket to be delivered immediately; and besides, the sooner we know the result the better prepared we shall be to act, and the more time we shall have in case of any emergency."

"Very true," said Tom King. "It is fortunate our horses are all so fresh as they are; the journey to Windsor will be performed easily and rapidly."

"You will let us accompany you?" said Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack. "You cannot tell what aid and assistance you may require."

"I cannot. If you had not spoken then I was just about to ask you to accompany me."

"But," said Tom Davis, with a little hesitation, "I don't like to raise up obstacles and to throw cold water on your plans, but yet I should very much like to know by what means you hope to gain access to the King?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"I shall be guided entirely by circumstances and my good luck. If they fail me I have no other guide."

With a great effort Maud wiped aside her tears, and, advancing towards Tom King, looked him earnestly in the face, as she said:

"In pity and mercy let me know your inmost thoughts. Do you really believe that this locket will procure Dick's liberation?"

Tom paused ere he replied.

Then, in a voice of great earnestness, he said:

"You must remember, that the service Dick rendered to the person who gave him this locket was a very important one indeed, and, thinking over all the circumstances, I don't believe that such a gift would have been proffered had it not been felt at the time that it was all powerful."

"You really think it, Tom?"

"I do, indeed."

"Then," she said, "I will master my grief and hope on."

"Do, do—perhaps ere another twenty-four hours elapse the captain will once more be amongst us."

"Hasten—hasten," said Tom Davis; "night is closing in, and you have a long ride before you; if you like, I will begin to get the horses ready."

He did not wait for any answer, but left the inn at once.

The three highwaymen looked carefully to their weapons, provided themselves with ammunition, and also took with them a few other articles which they fancied might be required in the course of the night's adventure.

This done, they said farewell to Maud and Ellen, and

hastened to the stables, where they found the horses nearly ready.

Tom Davis glanced around him, and finding only the highwaymen were near, said:

"I feel very, very uneasy, I can assure you."

"What about?"

"Why, that locket."

"In what respect?"

"Why, don't you happen to know that Windsor Castle is always well guarded by a strong force of military, and more especially when the King happens to be there? By what means do you hope to pass the sentinels?"

Tom drew a long breath.

"It will be an awkward job, I am afraid," he replied, at length; "but yet, if courage, coolness, and stratagem will effect our purpose, rely upon it we shall succeed."

"Well, I leave you to it," said Tom Davis. "You are more used to getting yourselves out of scrapes than I am, and perhaps you will be able to think of something that I should not."

"That is very likely indeed," said Tom King. "And now farewell! You may expect us at daybreak, if we meet with success; if not, we shall remain somewhere close at hand, on the watch for another opportunity."

With these words, Tom sprang into the saddle.

His companions had already mounted, and they stealthily took their departure through the plantation.

On the present occasion, Tom King was, to all intents and purposes, the leader of the expedition, so, without saying a word upon the subject, Claude and Jack placed themselves slightly in the rear, prepared to follow wherever he might lead.

Tom's brain was too busy to permit of speech; moreover, the rapid pace at which they were going would have made conversation very difficult.

He had resolved at once upon the route he intended to take, and, having crossed the Thames, he took off across the open country, thus materially diminishing the distance to his destination.

There was another reason for this course, which was that they were now scarcely likely to meet with an interruption of any kind, whereas, had they kept on the high-road, they might have encountered some of the numerous bodies of police that they knew were on the watch for them.

There was only once that the highwaymen paused, and that was at a small roadside inn situated about halfway.

They were attracted to it by a dim light that was shining from one of the windows.

The clatter of their horses' hoofs as they drew up in front caused the landlord and the ostler to make their appearance.

"Will you alight, gentlemen?" said the former. "There's every accommodation."

"No, no," returned Tom King, hurriedly—"we cannot stay! A little hay and water for our horses is all we want, and while they are eating it we will take a draught of your best October ale."

"Very good, gentlemen."

The stay here did not occupy many minutes, yet both horses and riders felt much refreshed by it, and in better tune for performing the remainder of the journey.

With undiminished speed they galloped on, until by the faint light of the new moon they perceived in the distance the massive tower of Windsor Castle and the vast expanse of forest all around it.

Great circumspection was now required in all their movements, but, with a boldness that was somewhat surprising, Tom kept on in a straight line for the castle.

"I wish we had had the opportunity of reconnoitring," he said, slackening his speed at the same time. "Our task would then have been so much easier. Now I can scarcely tell how we are to discover which is the weakest point of the defences."

"Let us draw a little closer," said Claude Duval—"we shall be better able to judge then."

In a few minutes afterwards, they found themselves in a position that afforded them a view of a considerable portion of the castle, and here, concealed by the shadow cast by some huge trees, they paused.

For some moments not a word was spoken—all had their gaze fixed upon the building before them.

"And so that is Windsor Castle?" muttered Tom King at length. "I have never been so near it before."

"Nor I," said Claude Duval. "But there's one thing that strikes me very forcibly."

"What's that?"

"Why, supposing you should get over the difficulty of effecting an entrance, how should you manage, in so vast a building, to find the King?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"There is time enough to think about that when I get inside," he said. "It's foolish to burden the mind with too much."

"Yes, I agree with you there. But then, suppose the King should be in some part of the castle remote from the point at which you may enter, and that you may be so fortunate as to guess the route, how far do you think you could proceed without being seen by some one who would know immediately that you were an intruder?"

"There are too many supposes, Claude," said Tom, with a light laugh, "but I know what you mean. The difficulty of getting inside the building is almost insurmountable, and you wished to remind me that when that was done much would still lie before me to be accomplished."

"That is precisely what I meant."

"Well," said Tom, "just let me get inside. If I can do that, I shall have great hopes of performing my mission. Let us draw a little closer."

"Be cautious," said Sixteen-String Jack, "or we may be seen."

"All right! Tread as silently as you can."

Slowly and with extreme caution the highwaymen drew somewhat closer to the royal residence, and this they were enabled to do unperceived, in consequence of the huge trees that were growing everywhere.

At last they saw before them a wall, the height of which might be twelve feet or rather more.

Beyond that appeared to be a garden, and further on still the walls of the castle itself.

As soon as he perceived it, Tom said:

"That looks a favourable point at which to make the attempt. What say you, comrades?"

"That wall might easily be surmounted, certainly," they said. "But then, that is not all. Look—what do you think of that?"

Tom looked, and then, round an angle in the wall, he saw a soldier come in sight.

The mechanical manner in which he walked a certain number of paces, and then turned round and walked back again, showed that he was a sentinel.

CHAPTER DCCCLXI.

TOM KING GETS ONE STEP NEARER TO THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF HIS PURPOSE.

BREATHLESSLY the highwaymen watched the dusky figure of the sentinel, until he disappeared round the angle of the wall.

Even after that they did not venture to move or speak.

At length, in a faint whisper, Tom said:

"Remain where you are, perfectly still. Let us notice how long a time will elapse before he comes in sight again."

They waited, and from the duration of his absence, they guessed that he had a tolerably long walk to perform.

When he had disappeared round the corner for the second time, Tom said:

"Follow me. We will see where he goes to, and what he does."

With greater caution than ever, they slowly made their way from the trees, until they performed the end they intended.

The wall was still before them, only in this place it seemed to be somewhat higher.

It required a piercing glance to make out the figure of the sentinel.

But at last they perceived him at some distance.

Then he paused, and he was seen to be joined by another.

A salutation of some kind was exchanged, and they turned again.

"Well, now," said Tom King, "the question is, would

there be time for me to climb over the wall while this sentinel is at the further end of his beat?"

"I think not," said Claude. "In my opinion, you would most certainly be seen."

"Then what is to be done?"

"Wait awhile, I think, and endeavour to comprehend our position a little better than we do at present; all around us is so very strange."

They were silent, for the sentinel now was very near to them.

Following his movements they perceived something which else would probably have escaped their notice.

This was a sentry-box placed against the wall, near the corner of it, and here the soldier stood for a short time, then resumed his monotonous duty.

"It seems to me," whispered Sixteen-String Jack, "that the best plan to adopt will be to seize the soldier and gag him, then get over the wall."

"But," objected Tom, "the other sentinels would notice that he did not perform his march as usual, and the alarm would be raised."

"I don't know that. Supposing that I put on some of his accoutrements and acted sentinel, how then?"

"That's a better idea, and it will be perhaps possible to carry it out successfully. But how about that relief of the guard—what should you do then?"

Jack was puzzled.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Claude, "I have hit upon it at last. No doubt the men are changed every two hours. We must wait until the change takes place, then one of us, whoever happens to be most like the soldier, will personate him, while you will know then that you have two hours clear before you to perform your task."

"I think that would be the best," said Tom King—"at any rate, we will think over it until the guard is changed, and then, should anything better be thought of, why, we will try to carry it into execution."

This being agreed upon, the highwaymen all became silent and still.

It was fortunate that they thought about the change of the guard, for in a few moments afterwards they were startled by hearing the rattling of a drum.

After that there was a silence, and then they perceived a small body of men advancing.

The sentinel stopped at once.

They came towards him. One of its number took his place; he fell in with the remainder, and they passed on.

The highwaymen watched all these proceedings with the greatest possible amount of attention.

The changing of the guard occupied but a very short space of time, and then Jack, touching Tom on the arm, said quietly:

"Now then, comrades, what say you? Shall we make the effort or not? Now is the time, or never."

"I can think of nothing else so likely to achieve success," was Tom King's reply.

"Then let it be done."

"Be cautious, then—we must pounce upon the sentinel, and seize him in a moment, taking care that he has not time to utter the faintest cry, otherwise there will be an immediate alarm."

"It is not so very difficult," said Jack. "We will leave our horses here, and as soon as the sentinel turns the corner we will dart across and stand in the shadow of the sentry-box; then, as soon as he appears, let one of us place a hand upon his mouth, and the others hold him tightly."

"Yes," said Claude Duval, "the whole thing must be accomplished with speed and silence."

Another moment elapsed, and then the sentinel again disappeared from view.

As they had arranged, the highwaymen started forward.

The distance they had to go was insignificant, and, to their great satisfaction, they reached the shadow of the sentry-box without having caused the slightest alarm.

They now stood in readiness to seize the soldier directly he turned the corner.

They listened, and could hear his regular heavy footstep as he marched on.

Little did that sentinel think that he was about to be dealt with in so summary a manner.

He had been long at his present duty, and had never met with anything to vary the dull routine of it.

He was therefore wholly and entirely unprepared for what took place.

The highwaymen took the opportunity.

While Claude, darting forth, placed one hand immediately before the soldier's mouth, Jack seized him from behind, and Tom King, standing in front, with his sword drawn, said, in a threatening whisper:

"Move hand or foot—struggle, or attempt to speak—and you die!"

The man was so thoroughly taken aback by what had occurred that he was unable to move a limb.

He only stared at Tom King with eyes stretched wide open by astonishment.

With great dexterity, Sixteen-String Jack stripped off the upper portion of the soldier's uniform, Tom King, by threats, compelling him to surrender each article quietly.

When this operation was over, Sixteen-String Jack bound him tightly, and then, by means of a piece of rope doubled and twisted, gagged him most effectually.

This was managed by introducing the rope into his mouth like a bit, and tying it tightly at the back of his head.

It was possible for him to make a very faint sound, but it was so faint that it was not worth troubling about.

Perfectly helpless, he was now carried by Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, and placed inside the sentry-box.

"I will take his place," said Claude—"it will be better, for you know I have had a little military training, and he appears to be about my height."

"Agreed!"

Claude hastily put on the soldier's uniform and picked up his musket.

"Hush!" he said, and before his companions could utter another word he marched off along the wall.

Some little time had of course been occupied by these proceedings, still it was not long—no longer, really, than a sentinel might have paused near his box had he chosen to do so.

But Claude was anxious not to be too long, and so he marched forward with a confident step.

Reaching the end of his beat, he found himself face to face with another soldier.

"All's well!" said the other sentinel, turning round.

"All's well!" replied Claude, supposing that to be the proper salutation.

He turned hastily round when he spoke, and marched off.

The other stopped abruptly.

"Well, that's odd," he said—"that sounds quite like a strange voice; and yet it can't be—it is my fancy."

These words just reached Claude's ears, and he thought to himself how necessary it would be to be careful when he returned to that point of his beat again.

Reaching the sentry-box, he said to his companions:

"Over with you, and be quick about it. Leave me here—I shall be all right!"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, yes—don't trouble yourselves on my account. I shall hold my position so long as it is tenable, and when it ceases to be so I shall make a run for my horse."

"Do so—do so. On no account suffer yourself to be made a prisoner."

"I will not. And now I must leave you—it will not do to halt too often, or perhaps suspicion may be aroused."

Claude marched on as before, imitating the movements of the real sentinel very well indeed.

Tom King looked up and wondered how the wall was to be surmounted.

The sentry-box at once suggested itself to him, but it was a difficult thing to mount upon it, as there was neither hand nor foothold, and a little thing would turn it over completely.

They waited until Claude came back again.

As soon as they explained their difficulty, he said:

"Well, I will stand on this side and press against it with all my might, then you mount as well as you are able; when once on the top of the sentry-box the remainder will be easy."

"I could mount with Jack's assistance," said Tom, "if



[CLAUDE DUVAL PERSONATES THE SENTINEL, AND TOM KING SCALES THE WALL.]

he would bend his back; but then I don't see how Jack is to accompany me, and really after all, I think there is no necessity for it. No, no; Jack, if you are willing, I will leave you here?"

"Just as you please, Tom; you have the command in this enterprise, though, of course, I should prefer to be with you."

"No, no—one is less likely to be seen than two. Come, Jack, bend your back and I will return with all possible speed."

Jack bent his back as desired.

Tom stepped upon it, and in this position was able to gain the top of the sentry-box.

Here he drew himself up carefully until he could look over the top of the wall, being careful not to raise his head any higher than he could avoid.

As he expected, some gardens, very beautifully laid out, were on the other side, and his eyes quickly roamed over the enclosure, in order to ascertain whether any persons were near or not.

All, however, was perfectly silent and dark, so, with a sudden spring, he swung himself clear over the wall. Then, hanging at arms'-length, dropt gently upon the soft earth below.

So rapidly and cleverly was the feat performed that, unless some person had been looking very carefully at that part of the wall at that precise moment, he could not have been seen.

Claude resumed his march, and Tom King remained standing just where he had dropped, and wondering what should be his next proceeding.

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PRICE ONE HALFPENNY.

No. 178 will be Published next Thursday.

CHAPTER DCCCLXII.

TOM KING FINDS HIS PERILS AND DIFFICULTIES INCREASE AT EVERY STEP.

Gazing through the trees, the first thing that attracted his attention was a blaze of light, proceeding from what appeared to be the range of windows on the ground floor of the castle.

Strains of music, too, came faintly upon his ears, and therefore it was easy to conjecture that some scene of festivity was going on within.

The point, however, upon which Tom felt the greatest amount of uneasiness and which made him hesitate to move was whether there existed an inner circle of sentinels.

If this should prove to be the case, how should he contrive to pass them?

The gardens themselves, however, were so very dark and silent, that Tom felt great hopes of being able to creep forward unperceived, even if anyone should be on the watch.

This, the more he reflected, seemed unlikely, for, judging by appearances, this was some private portion of the grounds into which no one would be permitted to intrude.

Using as much caution, however, as he would have done had he felt quite certain that sentinels were near, Tom King crept slowly in the direction of the lights.

In a short time he was able to see them distinctly.

The range of windows that was illuminated was a very long one.

The music had ceased, but now it burst forth again with a sudden crash, and even as it did so some doors were thrown wide open.

Tom glanced keenly through the portal, and as he did so he saw a crowd of persons of both sexes elegantly and brilliantly attired.

Some were in the spacious hall, and others descending a staircase; evidently they were all about to issue forth into the grounds.

Perceiving this, Tom crouched down as low as he could behind a huge tree, trusting that its shelter would conceal him.

From this position he watched the approach of the glittering throng.

The threshold was crossed, the broad flight of steps descended, and then, amid the silence that prevailed, he could hear the low murmur of courtly conversation, and occasionally the faint sound of laughter.

The number of guests who thus poured forth into the garden surprised Tom beyond measure.

They dispersed themselves over every part of it, and he began to feel very doubtful whether he would be able to remain concealed where he was without being discovered by some one.

Then a bold and fresh thought darted into his mind.

He felt surprised that this thought had not occurred to him before.

It was no other than to quit his place of concealment and mingle with the crowd.

Among so many his presence could scarcely be noticed.

Most certainly there would be many who were strangers to each other, and might not be pass for one of the strangers?

The only difficulty was about his costume, which was by no means in keeping with that of the gentlemen around.

Still, in the gardens it was dark, and even this might escape notice.

At any rate, it would be better, he thought, to stand up boldly than to remain so evidently in hiding.

Scarcely had the idea crossed his mind than, without reflecting much upon it, he proceeded to carry it into effect.

Lightly knocking from his clothes the dust that was upon them, he stepped forth with all the boldness in the world on to one of the well-kept footpaths.

The success he met with was something far beyond his expectations.

Several glances were cast upon him, it is true, but no one ventured to accost him, or, so far as he could tell to make any remark as to his appearance.

But time was passing rapidly on; there was the necessity for urgent speed, and, delightful as the gardens were, Tom by no means wished to linger in them.

"Surely," he thought, "this would be a favourable opportunity for gaining the interior of the castle."

At any rate, he resolved to try it, especially when he perceived that many of the guests, tired of their promenade in the open air, were rapidly returning.

Surely he might drift in with the crowd; and it seemed to him that, once beneath the roof of the royal building, the remainder would be easy.

Not without considerable trepidation—for he knew how much depended upon his actions—Tom King directed his steps towards the spacious doorway.

Several were before him, several behind him, laughing and chatting gaily.

He was now, however, in the full blaze of the light, and he could scarcely refrain from shrinking a little.

Assuming all the boldness and confidence he possibly could, however, he strode on.

Two domestics in gorgeous livery were standing at each side of the doorway, and when Tom fairly crossed the threshold and passed them he drew a long breath of relief—he considered it was such a good omen of future success.

Drifting with the tide of persons, he was carried along the corridor towards another door that stood wide open.

Congratulating himself mentally, Tom King walked on, every step increasing the amount of confidence he already felt.

Suddenly, however, he felt a light touch on his arm.

He affected to disregard it, but it was repeated, and this time more unmistakably.

Glancing round, he found himself face to face with an elderly gentleman, who was splendidly attired, and who carried in his hand a long white wand.

"Excuse me," he said, somewhat abruptly, and yet from sheer force of habit making a bow while he spoke—"excuse me, but I have not the honour of your acquaintance—your features are quite unfamiliar. May I trouble you to produce your card of invitation?"

Tom smiled and endeavoured to look indifferent.

"My card of invitation?" he said. "Well, that's amusing. I have not one."

"Indeed?" said his interrogator. "That is strange; but you treat this matter lightly. By what right do you intrude?"

"The best," said Tom King, boldly. "I come here on secret service, and my business is with the King himself."

"With his Majesty?" said the other, involuntarily taking two or three paces backwards.

"Even so," said Tom; "and if you will do me the favour of showing me into his presence at once I shall be obliged to you. I was looking everywhere for you when I felt you touch my arm."

An expression of perfect bewilderment now came over the old gentleman's countenance, as he ejaculated:

"Step this way—step this way."

Tom obeyed without hesitation, and soon found himself in a little ante-room.

"Now, sir," said his guide, "just let us come to an understanding. Who can you be, so ignorant of the usuages of the court? What do you mean by saying that you come here on secret service?"

"Simply what I say," returned Tom; "and let me assure you it is important that I should be immediately ushered into the presence of his Majesty."

"Is it upon business?"

"Certainly—urgent, pressing business."

"Then it is not his Majesty you wish to see, but his secretary. Come this way."

"No, you mistake," said Tom King; "my business is with the King only."

"Well, well, this way," said the other, impatiently—"this way, I say. I am wanted elsewhere. How on earth you came to be admitted to the castle I am at a loss to imagine."

To this speech Tom made no reply.

He considered that he was making much better progress than he could possibly have anticipated.

He followed willingly enough in the old gentleman's footsteps.

The little ante-room communicated with a larger apart-

ment, and beyond that there was another and another, until Tom began to grow tired of his long walk.

All at once his guide tapped at a door, which was immediately opened.

Admittance was allowed, and Tom found himself in the presence of a very plainly-dressed, middle-aged man, who was seated at a table.

Before him were a quantity of letters and other documents, with which he seemed to be busily engaged.

"This gentleman," said Tom's guide, "I found among the guests. He says he comes here upon secret service, and desires to see the King."

So saying, he abruptly left, and his Majesty's private secretary looked at him inquiringly.

"Secret service?" he said. "What secret service?"

"Excuse me," said Tom, bowing and speaking with the utmost respect, "but I assure you my business is with his Majesty, and his Majesty alone."

"But," said the secretary, half-angrily, "do you not know that nothing can reach the ears of his Majesty except through myself? Speak on, and let me know what your business is without any further delay. I have no time to waste."

"I regret very much to decline," said Tom King, "but I again most positively assure you that the business is of so private and personal a nature that I can only communicate it to his Majesty himself."

"Bah!—nonsense! I know all his Majesty's private business; and let me hear this—be quick! If you refuse, you will have to go as you came; it is quite impossible for you to see the King—you might know that."

Tom King hesitated.

He was puzzled how to act.

Should he indeed trust his message with this man? Should he confide the locket to him and await the result?

No. Tom made up his mind instantly.

Had not Dick Turpin positively enjoined him to place the locket in the hands of no one but the King himself?

There must be no circumlocution.

"It vexes me exceedingly," he said, addressing the secretary, "to appear so pertinacious; but believe me again when I say that not even to you can I confide my business."

"Then," said the secretary, "I will have you arrested! Ten to one it is some bold, audacious attempt to assassinate the King. Your story about secret service must be a mere subterfuge. Here, guard—guard!"

He shouted out the last words at the top of his voice, and even while he did so he struck his hand upon a bell that stood upon the table before him, and which no doubt was an additional summons for immediate assistance.

CHAPTER DCCCLXIII.

TOM KING BECOMES SOMEWHAT ALARMED AT HIS POSITION, BUT MEETS WITH AN UNEXPECTED SURPRISE.

THESE energetic proceedings on the part of the King's private secretary were so sudden and so unexpected that for a few seconds Tom King was half bewildered, and scarcely knew how to act.

The sound of hasty footsteps in the corridor served to arouse him from his state of indecision.

With one bound he reached the door.

It was his intention to secure it effectually.

But the only fastening he could perceive consisted of a small brass bolt.

This he slipped rapidly into its socket, and, when he turned again, he saw that the secretary had hastened to one of the windows, which he threw open, while he again cried:

"Guard—guard! Here—a spy—a traitor! Guard—guard!"

Tom King sprang towards him as he cried,

"Silence—silence, or your life! Once more I demand to see the King"

But the secretary only continued his vociferations in a louder key than ever.

Finding remonstrance of no avail, and hearing on the massive panels of the door a succession of heavy knocks, Tom King doubled up his fist, and the next thing of which the secretary was conscious was that he was lying in a decidedly damaged condition underneath one of the tables.

It so happened that this table was covered with a long crimson cloth, so that when he rolled under it he vanished completely from sight.

All hope of Tom King keeping his presence in the castle a secret was now at an end.

The first thing he had to do was to secure his own safety.

How this could be done was more than he could tell, yet he resolved to suffer anything rather than abandon the task of delivering the locket to the King.

The blows on the outside of the door now much increased in violence, and there could be no doubt that those without were endeavouring to force an entrance.

One glance round the chamber was given by Tom King.

Then, finding there was no other door save the one by which he had entered and at which the soldiers of the guard were doubtless now standing, he turned again towards the window.

It was very dark outside.

But below him he could just distinguish some of the shrubs and plants in the garden.

The distance to jump was somewhat alarming, but, then, Tom was aware that the soil was soft, and would serve most materially to break the force of his fall.

Without further delay, then, he jumped through the window, and, as he had fully anticipated, alighted on the soft mould in safety.

As soon as he had recovered his feet, however, and took a glance around him, he saw lights flashing through the gardens in various directions, and he could hear voices shouting to each other.

Almost at the same moment a party of soldiers made their appearance at the window through which he had just escaped, and in loud tones they called upon those who were in the garden to search narrowly for the intruder.

Tom felt very anxious and distressed.

If his own safety was all he had to care about, it would have been a very different matter.

The question was, would it be possible for him to find some place of hiding that would serve to conceal him from the close search that was about to be made?

He shook his head while asking himself the question.

Such a thing seemed very far from likely.

Close to where he stood, however, was one of the winding gravel-paths which spread like a net-work over the entire gardens.

On each side it was planted with some kind of prickly shrubs of a very ornamental character, and growing to a great height from the ground, but as impenetrable and as insurmountable as a high brick wall.

There was something of a very private and secluded character about this path.

It was plunged in total darkness, and it seemed to Tom that it offered him by far the best chance of concealing himself.

Without further consideration, he turned down it, and ran hastily forwards for some distance.

Despite the darkness, he was able to follow its windings and turnings tolerably well.

All at once he came to a sudden stop, and a cold perspiration began to break out upon his forehead, for he feared that he had taken a wrong step, and had fallen into a trap.

At the extremity of the path he had been pursuing was a conservatory, from the glass windows of which Tom could see rare plants growing in great luxuriance and beauty.

But in honour of the festival that had that night been celebrated, this conservatory had been prettily lighted up by a number of coloured lamps suspended either from the ceiling or from the branches of the ornamental trees.

The effect of these coloured lights was to shed an amount of illumination around resembling twilight.

To venture into this conservatory, Tom felt would be madness, for the probability was that such a place would be much resorted to by the guests.

He tried to turn either to the right or to the left, but found this impossible, owing to the density of the prickly vegetation.

"I will retreat," he muttered—"retreat while there is yet time. Perhaps I may manage to reach the end of this path again without encountering anyone; if so, I shall esteem myself fortunate."

He started to run, but quickly reduced his pace to a stealthy, cautious walk, for on the other side of the hedge—if we may so call it—he could hear the voices of those who were in search of him, and at times catch a glimpse of the lights they carried.

That every nook and corner in the castle gardens would be narrowly searched there could be no doubt, and if Tom King could only discover some place which had once been thoroughly examined, that would afford him the best chance of concealment.

This idea was passing through his mind, as, with long, stealthy, almost noiseless footsteps, he took his way towards the entrance of the path.

In a few moments he perceived it before him.

Impatient to extricate himself from so unpleasant a position, he increased his speed.

But the next moment, while scarcely able to repress a cry of vexation, he paused.

Round the corner came several persons.

Owing to the darkness, he could only perceive them indistinctly, and could not make out who and what they were.

Most probably, however, they formed part of the detachment of soldiers who were searching for him.

With rather rapid steps they came walking down the path, and now Tom found himself in a very critical position indeed.

If he remained where he was, or if he advanced, detection was quite certain, while, if he retreated and took refuge in the conservatory, it was very doubtful whether he would remain unfound.

This last course, however, was the only reasonable one that he could adopt, so, with all possible speed consistent with the requisite silence, he turned round, and retraced his steps.

"If I had only been a moment sooner," he murmured, "or if I had only known that I could not leave this pathway, how much better a chance I should have had of concealing myself! Now it seems almost impossible."

But the remembrance of the perilous position in which Dick Turpin stood, and that upon his exertions that night no doubt depended the captain's life, made a wonderful difference to his actions and to his daring also.

When he reached the door of the conservatory, he knew that speed was the principal thing required: therefore, with marvellous haste, he turned the knob and entered.

The door was furnished with a spring, and so closed of itself the moment he passed through it.

The atmosphere was warm and heavily laden with the perfume of a thousand rare and curious flowers, which had been brought there at great expense from every corner of the world.

He was much rejoiced to find that the conservatory was perfectly silent, and the peculiar stillness in the air told him that no human beings were at that moment beneath its roof.

Almost the first object on which his eyes rested was one that offered at least a chance of hiding himself.

It was a magnificent shrub, or, rather, a dwarf tree, for its height was a little under ten feet.

It was, however, from its tops to its roots one mass of long, shining leaves, much resembling blades of grass, only many hundred times as large.

Growing thus from the top, and falling quite down, they bore no slight resemblance to a fountain, and they were so thick and so close together, and overlapped one another to such a degree, that Tom felt confident they would hide him from the view of anyone unless the leaves were drawn aside.

There was little time for him to consider whether he should avail himself of this place of shelter, or whether he should seek for some other.

Already he fancied he could hear the approach of footsteps on the gravel-path without.

Hastily and yet carefully, so as not to disarrange anything, and so leave a trace of his presence, Tom pressed some of the long leaves apart, and, stepping up to the huge wooden flower-pot in which the singular tree was growing, was in a moment completely lost to sight.

He turned round, settling himself into as easy and comfortable an attitude as he possibly could, for he knew how necessary it would be for him to remain quite still and without feeling the inclination to shift his position.

Scarcely had this been done than the door of the conservatory was opened.

Tom's heart beat rapidly and painfully.

He could scarcely bring himself to think that he was in anything like a secure position.

If he was properly searched for he would beyond a doubt be found.

But hearing that the low murmur of voices followed the opening of the door, and that the persons, whoever they might be, entered quietly, and not as he anticipated the soldiers would, Tom very carefully parted the leaves just sufficiently to allow him to take a glimpse of what was going on outside.

His first sensation was that of astonishment, followed quickly by delight, succeeded, however, by one of vexation.

The reason for this was that his eyes rested upon the form of his Majesty King George II.

Tom recognised him in a moment, for in happier times he had seen him frequently.

He noticed that the King looked a trifle older, and thinner, and careworn than he did when last he saw him, but that was all.

CHAPTER DCCCLXIV.

IN WHICH TOM KING OVERHEARS A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THREE MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY.

Well might Tom King be both astonished and delighted at the occurrence of such a fortunate incident as this.

Who would have thought that one of the persons he heard approaching was the King himself?

What more favourable opportunity than the present could he hope for to start forward and place the locket in his hand?

But his feelings, as we have said, quickly changed to vexation, for, walking a little behind the King, or, rather, at the side of him, came her Majesty the Queen.

Next came a young-looking man, with by no means a prepossessing countenance.

This was the King's eldest son, Frederick, and consequently the Prince of Wales.

Such an occasion as this was not, therefore, what Tom wanted.

He recollected the circumstances under which Dick had obtained the locket, and felt sure that the adventure would be one that the King would desire the Queen to know nothing of.

Tom was rather surprised to see the Prince of Wales thus alone with his parents, for it was well known that a coolness, if not absolute enmity, existed between them.

Tom King, however, was not allowed much time for making reflections and speculations—he was too much engrossed by the events that were taking place before him.

As soon as his Majesty had fairly entered the conservatory, he turned round, and, in a high, squeaking voice, said:

"Willis, close the door. You will understand we all wish to be alone—quite private. Go!"

The distinguished individual called Willis made a low obeisance and retired, closing the door of the conservatory carefully behind him.

The King and Queen stood close to each other, and the Prince of Wales, with his arms folded, a few paces from them.

The Queen was the first to speak.

Evidently by her manner she had all a mother's affection for this her eldest son, and it was also tolerably certain that it was not her fault that the feeling of ill-will existed.

"Now, Frederick," she said, "your father is here and I am here. Good. He has promised to listen to what you have to say. Is it not so, George?" she added.

"Yes," said the King—"speak on!"

"Then, your Majesty," said the Prince of Wales, "I have to ask that we be once more friends. It is bad and

wrong of all of us, and it is a bad example to set the nation."

"Yes," interjected the Queen—"a very bad example indeed!"

"Frederick," said the King, sternly, "no one knows better than yourself that this is all your own doing and your own bringing on. I cannot close my eyes to the practices in which you have indulged—I will never close them; therefore, before we can be friends, you must consent to change your present mode of life."

"I am willing to obey you in all things reasonable," was the reply; "but I think you go too far—you pry too deeply into my concerns."

"No, no—I do not, Frederick," returned the King, with more tenderness of manner and tone than he had yet displayed. "But I remember what I was at your age, and now I am filled with regret and remorse for what I was. I see you treading the same downward, ruinous path, and I am anxious to save you the years of misery that I have passed."

The Prince was silent.

"You have around you," he continued, "a set of men whose names are loathed and execrated by the whole nation. While you continue to keep them, so to speak, as a body-guard around you, we cannot be friends, nor can you win the respect and good-will of the English nation."

The Prince was silent for a few moments, and the Queen added:

"Frederick, you hear the words just pronounced—you feel as well as I do that they are correct. Now comes the moment for you to decide. It is between us and the persons just alluded to that you have to choose, so which shall it be?"

At this moment there was an unusual disturbance just outside the conservatory.

The King uttered an ejaculation, and Tom King allowed the leaves to fall into their places, which he had held aside in order to watch the proceedings of the King.

He knew very well that the noise proceeded from the soldiers who were without, and who were desirous of searching in the conservatory for him.

Loud voices were heard, and then the door was gently opened.

The personage addressed as Willis just intruded his head.

"Your Majesty———" he began.

The King interrupted him with a snarling, impatient sound.

"Your Majesty, a detachment of the guard is without in search of——"

"Yah—bah! Shut the door! Begone! Did we not say we would not be disturbed?"

Thus admonished, Willis closed the door, and Tom heard him say:

"It's all very well for you to tell me that you have searched all through the gardens and can find no one, and that in consequence the man you are in search of is hidden here—I tell you it cannot be so! The King is there, and I have been watching ever since; but if you are not satisfied, wait till the King leaves; you can go in then and search to your hearts' content."

Some words were muttered by way of reply to this, but what they were Tom could not catch.

Turning his attention once more upon the royal party, he saw the Prince of Wales had stepped forward a pace or two, and was holding out his hand.

"Let there be a reconciliation!" he was saying. "My own folly I can see now only too plainly. Let us be good friends, as we should be, but do not seek to curb me too much; it is not my fault that I am impatient of the least control."

"Let it be so, Frederick," said the King, extending his hand—"let it be so, and let us rejoice that on this occasion you disobeyed me. When I heard you were in the saloon my anger was great; now, however, all has turned out well."

The Queen was quite overcome with joy at this result of the meeting; it was more—far more—than she had dared to expect.

"Come, George," she said, "let us return to the saloons, the sooner it is known that the misunderstanding between you and Frederick is cleared up the better it will be."

"No—no," said the King—"not this moment—not this moment! Leave me, both of you—I will follow soon—leave me, I say; I wish to be alone!"

The Queen knew her husband's nature too well to attempt to thwart him in any way, and therefore prepared to obey without another word.

The Prince drew her hand beneath his arm, and they left the conservatory together.

When they had gone, the King began to pace up and down with rapid strides.

There were signs of great vexation, remorse, and anguish on his countenance; but by what produced, who could tell?"

Perhaps it was this unexpected reconciliation with his son that had affected him so deeply, or perhaps it was that some memory of the past came back to him, bringing with it nothing but misery and sadness.

So strange was the King's whole manner, and so well did his face portray the uneasiness of his mind, that Tom could not avoid gazing upon him for some time in silence.

"Well," he thought, "who would believe that that miserable, dejected-looking, prematurely old man is the King of England?"

Rousing himself from these thoughts, however, Tom suddenly recollected the purpose he had to accomplish.

Chance had favoured him to a degree that he had not dared to hope for.

The King was now alone, and what would be so easy as to step forth and confront him.

In his present mood, would he not be more likely to listen to his application and to be inclined to an act of mercy?

Surely yes.

There was only one fear.

That was, as soon as he caught sight of the intruder he would utter such a cry as would have the effect of calling his attendant, Willis, into the conservatory, when the highwayman's discovery would be inevitable.

That risk had to be run, and Tom made up his mind to delay no longer, for he could not tell what moment the King might take it into his head to leave.

Such a chance as this once lost would probably never be regained.

Watching his opportunity, then, he slowly and gently left his verdant hiding-place.

The King's back was towards him.

Concealed by some of the shrubs, Tom waited until he turned round in his restless walk and came past.

Then, holding the locket open in his hand, he stepped forward.

"Your Majesty," he said, bowing deeply, and speaking in a low, respectful voice—"will your Majesty deign to look at this?"

The King started, as well he might, at this unexpected intrusion.

His lips parted, as though he was about to give vent to that cry, the consequences of which were so much feared by Tom.

But just then his eyes fell upon the open locket, and immediately a strange and wondrous alteration overspread his features.

He stepped back a pace.

His lips opened wider, his eyes dilated, and he pressed one hand upon his forehead.

He made several gasping attempts to speak.

"What—what," he said, at last, in a hoarse whisper—"what—what is it that you hold before me? Take it away—take it away! Is it real or some delusion? Have I pondered over this event in my past life until my fancy has conjured up this relic? What—what—what——"

"Your Majesty," said Tom, in the same respectful voice, "it is no fancy, but reality. I have been charged to deliver the locket into your hands, and, at the peril of my life, I have done so."

While he spoke, Tom let the open locket fall into the King's outstretched hand.

CHAPTER DCCCLXV.

TOM KING'S STRANGE INTERVIEW WITH HIS MAJESTY IN THE CONSERVATORY.

The King closed his hand convulsively, and then, in a changed voice, said:

"Who and what are you? How came you by this? Speak quickly- tell me all. Yet stay—follow me—this way—this way."

The King hastily strode towards the further end of the conservatory, and Tom wondered greatly at his motive for so doing.

But his wonder soon ceased when he perceived a very pretty rustic-looking seat placed there for the convenience of visitors.

On this the King sat, and, resting one of his elbows on the arm of it, supporting his head with his hand, he said:

"Now tell me, and as quickly as you can. Use no more words than you are absolutely compelled."

"Your Majesty," Tom began, "as you seem to know, that locket was sent as a token."

"Token—token of what? How came it in your possession?"

Tom reflected a moment; then decided that it would be best to let the King know the history of the locket, as this would be more likely to achieve his purpose.

"The lady," he said, "whose portrait is in that locket——"

Here the King started violently, and glanced all around, as if he expected some eavesdropper to be near.

"Hush—hush!" he cried. "Don't name that—don't name that—do not let any such words escape your lips."

His agitation was extreme.

"I will be careful, your Majesty. The lady, then, found herself in a situation of much difficulty and danger. Your Majesty may perhaps remember a certain letter, on the outside of which appears the stain of blood."

The King started again, and removed his hand from his face.

Tom was absolutely startled by the expression of it.

It was as white as marble.

Seeing that the King was struggling to speak, Tom remained silent, and at length his Majesty gasped forth:

"Who and what are you, knowing all these things, which I believed buried for ever in oblivion? Speak—explain yourself, I say!"

"I will do so if your Majesty will permit me," replied Tom, calmly. "But the letter of which I speak, and which, as you know full well, was highly prized by the lady, as it was necessary she should retain it in her possession—that letter, I say, was stolen from her, and was held by a certain nobleman, whose name perhaps I need not mention, who used it as a means of power over her, terrifying her into compliance with all his wishes."

The King groaned.

"Yes—yes," he said, "I know all that—all that! Proceed."

"Your Majesty, the lady felt that, at all risks and hazards, that letter must be re-obtained. How to perform such a difficult task as this she had not the remotest idea; but at last she thought of one who, by his daring deeds and open defiance of the law, seemed likely to suit her purpose. To this man she applied herself, and he undertook to obtain the missing document. That undertaking he fulfilled—the letter was returned, and he was told to name his own reward. He refused, however, to take anything, but at last the lady forced this locket into his hands, telling him to keep it carefully, and when in some great peril from which he could not extricate himself by other means, he was to send a faithful messenger to convey this locket and place it in your Majesty's own hand."

The King remained silent for some moments after Tom King had ceased speaking.

It was evident that he was deeply plunged in thought; but as to the nature of his reflections, Tom King could only give a guess.

Starting at length from his abstraction, as if only suddenly aware that Tom was present, he said:

"Then this man who obtained the letter is now in a position of danger?"

"He is, your Majesty. At this moment he lies in a cell in Newgate, upon a charge affecting his life, and if immediate measures are not taken he will be executed at Tyburn."

"Indeed!" said the King, musingly. "His name?"

"Dick Turpin."

Tom watched, with some anxiety, to observe the effect that the pronunciation of this name would have upon his Majesty.

He saw the King give a slight start of astonishment.

Then he mechanically repeated his name.

That was all.

Looking scrutinisingly into Tom's countenance, he said:

"But you have not yet told me who you are. In what way are you connected with this matter? Surely you are no companion or associate of a desperado like Dick Turpin? Your appearance and mode of speech are those of a man of education, and one accustomed to a higher sphere of life. There is something, too, in your countenance and in the tones of your voice that seems familiar. Where and when have I seen you before?"

These questions produced a most embarrassing feeling upon Tom King.

How to reply he scarcely knew.

But he saw the King was watching him closely, and he felt that it would be unwise and dangerous to tamper with him in any way, for upon his breath hung the captain's life.

"Circumstances," he said, "have made me what I am. It is scarcely possible, however, that your Majesty can have ever seen me before to-night; some accidental resemblance has misled you. But, to confess the truth, I am Dick Turpin's comrade and bosom friend, and ready at any moment to die, if by dying I could save him."

"You the comrade of a robber—a thief?"

"Your Majesty," replied Tom, "I have said it."

Little was it guessed how great was the amount of humiliation that Tom King felt at this moment.

Most forcibly was brought back to him the unhappy past, and the events which had conspired to make him what he then was.

The topic of conversation was painful, and could only become more so by being prolonged.

To Tom's great relief, the King's eyes happened just then to fall upon the locket, which still lay in his hand.

He started, as if he had suddenly recollected the business in hand.

"And this Dick Turpin is in Newgate, you say?" he resumed, in a different tone of voice. "Confound the fellow! there has been trouble enough to catch him, and now that he is safe in custody it seems the favour you require from me is a free pardon."

"That is it," said Tom, "if your Majesty will be so gracious. I leave it to you to decide whether the service of wresting that letter from Lord Spindelow is worthy of such a boon."

"It is—it is. But yet—yet I am so hampered and fettered by one and another, that I fear I cannot grant your request."

"Your Majesty?"

"It is so. I know how strong is the feeling of the ministers against this man—they would do all and everything to ensure his execution. Were I to interfere, such an outcry and bother would be made about it that I should know no further peace. No, no—it cannot be done."

"And must I take back that answer?" said Tom, in tones of the deepest disappointment and regret.

"Yes; and yet I do not ask you to abandon all hope—no, no, do not think so badly of me. I can be grateful, although it would not be prudent for me to grant a pardon; yet, by some other means, I may effect his liberation from Newgate—at any rate, his life shall be spared."

"Oh, your Majesty," said Tom, surprised beyond measure at this unexpected relief, "would that I could find words to express my gratitude!"

"Well, well—that will do—we will suppose them uttered. Now go—leave me. Rest assured your comrade is safe."

"I humbly take my leave," said Tom; "but yet, your Majesty's kindness emboldens me to make one more request."

"Say on."

"It is that you furnish me with some kind of passport or watchword, in order that I may leave the castle in safety. Your Majesty appears to have overlooked the fact that I have baffled the vigilance of all your officials,

sentinels, and domestics, and have found you alone. Had I been a conspirator and not so scrupulous as to whether I committed the crime of regicide, I should have had ample opportunity."

The King sprang to his feet.

Alarm was in his breast.

The very word "conspirator" had brought back to his mind all the attempts which had been made to hurl him from the throne.

His dread of the Jacobites was something most intense.

"I only mention these facts," said Tom, "in order to show you that it will be necessary for me to have some kind of passport when I leave. The soldiers, knowing an intruder is in the castle, have searched in all directions, and, no doubt, as soon as I leave this conservatory, I shall be pounced on."

"But suppose," said the King, "that I leave you to get away again by your own stratagem?"

"Then, your Majesty, I can do no more than try my best. You have given me your assurance that my comrade's life is safe. If I should perish in my endeavours to escape, I shall not care, because I shall know that I have purchased his safety with my life."

The King could not avoid gazing upon the highwayman with admiration.

Such devotion as this was rare indeed.

It made him sigh and wish that he had attached to his own person people who would be as staunch and true, instead of the hollow-hearted set by whom he was surrounded, and whose sole aim was their own aggrandisement.

But events had made the King suspicious.

He fancied that perhaps this was only bravado on Tom's part.

At any rate, he resolved to put him to the test.

"You presume too much," he said. "I have already granted one request—let that suffice. Be satisfied that you gained an audience of me in spite of all my retinue. Now let us see whether you will be equally successful in returning."

"Your Majesty," said Tom, "I take my leave. My best thanks are yours for having promised to save my comrade's life. As for myself, I shall do my best to gain my way to liberty. If I fall, it will matter little; existence has but few charms for me, and when I am gone there will not be many to regret my loss, and even by them I shall soon be forgotten."

While thus speaking, Tom King bowed low, and turning quickly round, strode towards the door of the conservatory.

CHAPTER DCCCLXVI.

TOM KING ENDEAVOURS TO REJOIN CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

Tom walked on with a steady and unfaltering step, wondering much at the sudden alteration in the King's manner.

It was not until his hand was actually on the fastening of the door of the conservatory that the King, in a sharp, commanding voice, cried:

"Halt!"

Tom stopped instantly, and turned round.

He saw the King standing at the further end, and beckoning him to approach.

"It was merely to make a trial of you," said the King, as soon as he neared him. "I can see now that you were fully in earnest, and know henceforth that the King of England can appreciate bravery and devotion wherever he may find it—if in the person of a highwayman. Here, Willis, I say!"

The door opened immediately in response to the call, and Willis appeared.

"You will escort this gentleman to the gates of the castle," said the King, "and after that return to me."

Willis looked surprised, as well he might, at finding someone in the conservatory in conversation with the King.

But he was too well-bred to utter a word.

Merely bowing, he made a sign to Tom to follow him.

The King in the meanwhile, sank down again upon the little rustic seat in an attitude of great dejection.

Recollections of the past came thronging thickly into his mind—recollections painful and unpleasant; but yet, strive as he would, he could not banish them.

With a very different kind of feeling, Tom King followed Willis from the conservatory.

His heart was elate with hope, and he stepped briskly forward.

Not only was his own escape from Windsor Castle ensured, but he had the King's word that the captain should be liberated.

Well might he rejoice then, and well might he felicitate himself upon the success that had attended him in his efforts.

Looking back, he could scarcely believe what had occurred.

It seemed impossible that fortune could have so favoured him.

When at a safe distance from the conservatory, Willis turned round towards Tom, and, with preparatory cough, said:

"Excuse me, sir, if I asked by what means you gained the conservatory."

"Secret service," said Tom King.

Willis stared.

"You do not understand me," he said, in a louder voice. "How did you gain the conservatory?"

"Secret service," said Tom, in the some calm, even tones as before.

Willis stamped his foot impatiently.

"I insist upon knowing, sir! My vigilance is at stake. Will you or will you not answer my question?"

"I have answered it."

"But I say that is no answer."

"Then," returned Tom, as coolly as ever, "I can give you no other, so obey his Majesty's command by showing me out with the least possible delay."

Willis bit his lip, and he looked at Tom with a revengeful scowl.

There is no doubt that if he had the opportunity he would certainly do him some serious injury.

In fact, Willis was never satisfied until he had pried into every domestic matter of the King's; and in this strange, unaccountable interview he sniffed out some family secret with the details of which he wished to make himself familiar.

But in Tom King he had the wrong person to deal with.

Threats and cajolery would be alike unavailing.

Of course, Willis was allowed to go wherever he chose unquestioned, and as it was seen that Tom was under his immediate guidance and protection, no effort was made to stop him.

Tom, however, was full of impatience once more to get beneath the open sky.

He had not forgotten the perilous position in which he had left his two companions, and he was well aware that, in their devotion to himself, they would go to any length—run any risk—in order to cover his retreat.

Therefore it was that he wished to make his way round to that particular part of the castle where he had left them, and to let them know that all was well.

Whether the two hours had elapsed, or whether a longer period had gone by, he could not tell.

He had omitted to take notice of the time.

To judge by events, his stay in the castle must altogether have been of considerable duration.

As he walked on, Tom rightly conjectured that there must be many exits from the castle, and therefore requested to be led out as near as possible to the garden.

Willis made no reply to this request, however, but marched on.

Some slight revenge, however, he felt was now within his reach.

Evidently Tom was unacquainted with the interior of the castle, and therefore Willis led him to the gateway furthest from the place he wished to reach.

Just as he passed beneath the portal, he said:

"Turn to your left, and walk on. In two minutes you will be there."

Not suspecting any deception, Tom followed these directions; but after walking for a long time, he could not come in sight of one of the objects that in his approach to the castle he had noted down as landmarks.

There was no resource, however, but to keep walking on and on, trusting to arrive in a short time.

But his patience was destined to be put to a severe trial, and before he had gone much further, he guessed the nature of the trick that had been played him.

But so delighted was he at the success he had met with, that he was inclined to laugh at any bit of spite of this sort, so walked steadily, knowing that if he made a complete circuit of the castle that he must inevitably come to the point he wished to reach.

His only uneasiness was on behalf of his companions.

He wondered how they would fare when the time came for a change of guard.

Windsor Castle, however, was greater in circumference than Tom had anticipated; and owing to occasional detours that he was compelled to make, it took him upwards of an hour to reach the garden wall.

Keeping under the shadow of the trees as before, he now approached with the utmost caution.

Sentinels were pacing up and down as before; and at last the front of the identical sentry-box, the top of which he had mounted, was reached.

Near to this he could perceive the figure of a man was standing.

He was clad in soldier's uniform; but whether it was Claude that he beheld, or a veritable sentinel, Tom King could not tell, the obscurity was so profound.

He resolved to wait a little while, and, if possible, to creep a little closer, in order to be able to form a better idea.

He watched the opportunity when the soldier, resuming his march, turned the angle of the wall, and was for a few moments, out of sight.

Anxiously he waited for the sentinel to reappear.

At length he came into sight.

Shielding his eyes with his hands, Tom looked at him earnestly and scrutinisingly; then, after a moment, shook his head, as he muttered:

"No—no; it's not Claude, nor Jack either. Where on earth can they be? What has happened during my absence?"

These were questions that Tom King could not answer.

But leaving him in doubt, we will revert for a few moments to the proceedings of his comrades.

CHAPTER DCCCLXVII.

SHOWS HOW CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK DISPOSE OF THE SENTINEL.

No sooner had Tom King leaped over the wall in the manner described than Sixteen-String Jack took hold of the sentinel as he lay helpless upon the ground, and dragged him towards the sentry-box.

With some difficulty he succeeded in forcing him into it, Claude Duval, in the meanwhile, performing the part of sentinel to great perfection.

It was clear that he had not yet forgotten his military training, and it would have required a keen eye indeed to detect the imposition.

Sixteen-String Jack contented himself with hiding in the shadow of the sentry-box.

Here he believed he should be quite out of sight, and also in such a position as to render immediate aid to Tom King should he require it.

And so, without the occurrence of any incident to break the dull monotony of his duty Claude Duval paced up and down outside the wall, pausing occasionally to exchange a few whispered words with his companion.

The time passed on but slowly, by no means so rapidly as with Tom, who was actively engaged during the whole time.

At length a tremendous uproar was heard, and they could only come to one conclusion respecting it, which was that Tom King had been discovered as an intruder in the castle, and that close search was being made after him.

Claude stopped a moment near the sentry-box, and, resting on his firearm, said:

"Tom is discovered, Jack, depend upon it. Now, then, what are we to do?"

"Why, nothing that I can see, except to remain here in readiness to assist him when he appears. Rely upon it he will make his way direct to this point, not only from his desire to rejoin us, but also because the horses are here."

"I wish I could see over the top of the wall, nevertheless," said Claude.

"Be persuaded by me," said Jack, "and don't attempt it. You would be seen almost to a certainty, while ten to one if you could make out what was going on."

To stay longer was imprudent, so Claude marched off again, feeling very uneasy, and yet being all the time on the alert.

Time passed, and Tom did not appear.

Then suddenly they heard the regular tapping of a drum, the same sound that they had heard a short time before.

"The time is up," said Claude, halting again; "the guard is about to be changed. Now what on earth shall we do?"

Jack was puzzled.

"I am afraid Tom is captured," he said; "and if he is, we shall only run our own necks into the noose by attempting to rescue him."

"I suppose so," was the answer; "and yet that does not reconcile one to abandoning him to his fate."

"It certainly does not; but be quick and decide before the soldiers appear in sight. It will not do to remain here."

"That is certain," said Claude, hastily stripping off the soldier's coat—"detection would be certain."

"And it will be now," said Jack, "for the soldiers, when they arrive here and find their comrade in this condition, will raise an immediate alarm."

"Let us look at him," said Claude, "and see what condition he is in by now."

He stepped out of the sentry-box and went close up to the soldier.

He was in a peculiarly uncomfortable position.

Claude shook him.

But he took no notice.

"I believe he is insensible," he whispered. "If he is, we can manage it."

"How—how?"

"I cannot stay to tell you. Watch my actions—that must suffice."

Quick as thought, Claude dragged the sentinel out of the box, and then found his conjecture to be verified.

The man was indeed insensible.

His next proceeding was with great rapidity to rid him of the ropes by which he was secured, and to take the gag out of his mouth.

As soon as Jack saw what his comrade was about he assisted him, and the fragments were thrown over the wall.

Then, with a great deal of difficulty, the sentinel's coat was put on, and his musket placed beside him.

In his pocket Claude carried a small case of brandy.

This he produced, and poured a quantity of it into the man's mouth, who made a convulsive attempt to swallow it.

"That will do," he cried. "Now, Jack, follow me with all speed. When they come, ten to one if the guard don't take him to be dead drunk."

As noiselessly as shadows the highwaymen departed, concealing themselves once more in the trees.

Here they remained to watch what would happen next.

On came the little troop of soldiers, just as they had seen them on the preceding occasion.

At length they stopped opposite the sentry-box, upon which the highwaymen's attention was fixed.

The sentinel, who was now beginning to recover his consciousness, was sitting on the ground, with his back against the sentry-box.

"Hullo!" the highwaymen heard a gruff voice say, and which doubtless proceeded from the officer in command—"hullo! what's this? Why, d—n me if he is not drunk! Wake him up there, will you, some of you?"

The soldiers gathered round their companion and shook him violently.

The odour of the brandy was very powerful, and made itself apparent to all.

"He is drunk," they cried. "Can't you smell the brandy! Well, who would have thought of this?"

"There'll be a row about it," said another voice.

"Silence!" cried the officer. "Get him up and make him a prisoner."



[TOM KING TAKES THE ROYAL LETTER-BAG TO NEWGATE.]

Not without a great deal of trouble the sentinel was got upon his feet.

His comrades, enjoying the sport, shook him about furiously.

Rough as these means were, yet the man began to recover his senses rapidly, and he gazed around him with a stupefied, bewildered expression.

"Aha, my fine fellow," said the officer, "you will pay dearly for this; it is no joke for one of the King's guard to be found dead drunk and asleep at his post."

"Dead drunk" ejaculated the sentinel; "who says I'm drunk?"

"Why, I do," answered the officer.

"I will take my oath," said the man, "I have not had a drop to drink to-night."

"You insolent rascal!" was the answer. "Do you mean to call me a liar? Why, you stink now of brandy to such a degree that it is scarcely possible to come near you!"

More bewildered than ever, the sentinel licked his lips, and as he did so he tasted the brandy, which, of course, increased his bewilderment considerably.

All at once, however, the recollection of what had taken place came over him.

"I will tell you all," he said—"I will confess all. I am not drunk, but——"

"Silence!" cried the officer. "If you say another word I will make it all the worse for you! Silence, I say, and don't palter with me any more!"

"But let me speak—it is most important!"

"Will you be silent?" said the officer. "Now, then,—attention—right about—quick march!"

The troop of soldiers marched on, and were quickly lost to sight.

During the occurrence of this scene, Claude and Jack remained profoundly silent, nor did they venture to speak until the sentinel, having commenced his duty of pacing up and down, had turned the angle of the wall.

"Now," said Claude, "if Tom will only quickly make his appearance all will be well."

"He must be quick," was the reply, "for although the soldier has been hustled off at present, yet, depend upon it, before long he will make his story known, and then a regular alarm will be raised."

"True," was the answer. "I would give much to know how Tom has succeeded in his attempt to obtain an audience of the King. I am afraid the chance is lost, and that if Dick is liberated it will be by his and our own exertions."

CHAPTER DCCCLXVIII.

THE HIGHWAYMEN HAVE SOME DOUBTS AS TO THE GOOD FAITH OF THE KING.

"I FEAR so too," replied Sixteen-String Jack; "but we will wait here till daybreak in the hope that Tom will return. Rely upon it, if he does come back, he will make direct for this point, because his horse is here."

"Yes, we will wait," said Claude; "it is not likely that we will abandon him."

And so the time passed on.

So firmly impressed were both the highwaymen with the notion that Tom King would make his appearance over the wall, that they paid but slight attention to any noises they might hear either to the left or right of them.

Consequently they were unaware of Tom's approach until he was almost upon them.

"Claude—Jack," he said, in a low tone—"speak—where are you?"

"Tom, is it you?"

"Yes, I am here, safe and sound."

His comrades pressed round him eagerly.

"Have you succeeded?" they asked, with breathless anxiety—"have you succeeded?"

"I have," said Tom, with a conscious triumph. "I have seen the King and had an interview with him, and he has given his word that Dick shall be set at liberty."

Claude and Jack threw their hats in the air, and in a faint whisper said

"Hurrah!"

But for the contiguity of the sentinels, the cheer would have been a lusty one; but prudence restrained them.

"Mount!" said Claude. "Let us mount and gallop back; such good tiding as these cannot be communicated too quickly. We had just resigned ourselves to despair when you appeared."

The highwaymen mounted their horses with all speed, and turned their faces homeward.

Tom found he should get no peace until he had told his two companions all that had happened to him after his daring jump over the wall.

They listened with breathless interest, and at last Claude said:

"And that, I suppose, is all we shall ever hear of this mysterious locket. What we know suggests a great deal more; and yet we may draw our own conclusions, and still be very far from the mark."

"Nothing more likely," said Tom; "but yet, after all, we may obtain some further intelligence. But, either way, it does not much matter, now that our end is obtained."

Taking the same route as before, the highwaymen galloped at full speed back to the Three Spiders Inn.

They paused only once on the journey, and yet, in spite of all their exertions, it was fairly daybreak before the plantation was reached.

They looked up anxiously at the little window, hoping to catch sight of the signal-light.

But it was not there.

Such being the case, they were afraid to make any further movement.

Chafing with impatience, more than half an hour elapsed, and then upon the hard road in front of the inn they heard the clatter of horses' feet.

Listening intently, they soon found that some persons or other were taking their departure, for the sound grew gradually less and less distinct.

Shortly afterwards the little door in the stable was opened, and Tom Davis crossed its threshold.

The highwaymen advanced towards him instantly.

"Is all well?" they asked.

"Yes, all's well now; but only a few moments ago the officers were here."

"What, again?"

"Yes, again. I really thought they were satisfied; however, on this occasion, as you were all absent, and as I knew there was nothing that could betray me, I allowed them to search everywhere, and a most rigid search it has been. Of course," he added, "they discovered nothing."

"Well, then," said Claude, "I hope this is the last we shall have of these visits. Surely they must have some strong suspicion, or they would not be so frequently repeated."

"That's my own fear," returned Tom. "I can't understand their pertinacity; but we have only to be cautious, and then all will be well."

Jack shook his head.

"I don't know that," he said; "they may pounce upon us in an unfortunate moment, and then there will be an end to our remaining here."

"Well, well—we will leave that. Tell me first how you have succeeded in your enterprise?"

"Better than we expected."

"Have you seen the King?"

"I have."

"Then," ejaculated Tom Davis, "I shall never consider anything impossible again. Had I been asked what there was that no one could perform, I should have said, obtain an audience of the King."

"Well, I have done it, and with less difficulty than you imagine. Not only that, he has given his word that Dick shall be set free."

Tom Davis gave a shout, and then he exclaimed:

"I am glad to hear it—heartily glad to hear it; for I have just received intelligence that has filled me with uneasiness."

"Indeed? Does it concern Dick?"

"It does. But come in; let us close the stable door, and while we are seeing to the horses we can talk it over."

This was done, and as soon as they were fairly beneath the roof of the stable, Tom Davis said:

"The officers brought me word that the authorities, fearing some rescue or escape, have determined to push things on to the utmost. No time has been lost anywhere, and, in order that they may make sure of the execution taking place without delay, the old warrant sent for Dick has been endorsed, and all preparations have been made, so that his execution is fixed to take place at noon to-morrow."

"No matter," said Tom King—"no matter. If any faith is to be placed in the King's word, Dick will be free long before then, and the authorities will be again disappointed."

"I trust so," said Tom Davis; "but you must tell me some more of the particulars. Do you think there is that dependence to be placed on the King's word? After you have gone, is there not the fear that he may be influenced by some of his ministers to break his word?"

"I trust not," returned Tom King—"I think not; but should he be weak enough to be persuaded, his conduct will be base in the extreme."

"There cannot be two opinions about that," returned Tom Davis; "but, then, I have often heard that the King is weak and vacillating. How much better it would have been could you have procured some document from him in confirmation of his promise."

"It would, truly," replied Tom King; "but, then, I was afraid to push him too far. I thought I had been extremely successful in obtaining his word."

"And that ought to be sufficient," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and don't let us meet trouble half-way."

"I am the last to do that," returned Davis, "only we ought not to lose sight of any consideration."

"You are right," said Tom King; "but let us go in now. Above all, attend to this—let no word of doubt reach Maud's ears."

"Certainly not—it would be unwise and cruel to a degree."

With these words, the horses having been made com-

fortable, the three highwaymen followed Tom Davis into the inn.

They found Maud pale and tearful, anxiously watching and wishing for their return.

She sprang forward as soon as they crossed the threshold, and in imploring accents said:

"Tell me—oh, tell me the result of your efforts! Tell it me in a word. Do not keep me longer in suspense—it has half killed me already."

"I will not," said Tom, cheerfully. "I have seen the King—the locket has had its expected effect, and he has given me his promise that Dick shall be liberated without delay."

With an hysterical cry, Maud burst into tears.

That intelligence was indeed a relief to her overfraught heart

Those tears, however, quickly passed away, and, turning a smiling countenance towards Tom King, she said:

"When—oh, when may we expect him?"

"Soon, I should think—very soon. The King no doubt would despatch a messenger at once, and Dick would be set free on his arrival. Surely we may expect to see him some time between this and nightfall."

This was encouraging indeed, and Maud, having learned all the particulars, hastened to the front of the inn, and took up her position at a window which commanded the best view of the lane.

Here she remained during the whole of the day, refusing to move.

This act of hers enabled the highwaymen and Tom Davis to speak freely on the subject that was uppermost in their minds.

And, as the day slowly wore on, it was strange to see how much the doubts felt by all increased.

"If the time was not so fearfully short," said Claude Duval, "it would not so much matter; but really, if anything should go wrong, it leaves us no chance whatever to use our own exertions. Are you sure, Davis," he asked, for about the twentieth time, "that the execution is appointed for to-morrow?"

"Perfectly certain," was the answer. "I have the best authority for the statement."

"Well, comrades," cried Sixteen-String Jack, "with your permission, I will tell you what we will do."

"What?"

"Remain here until nightfall; then, if Dick does not make his appearance, we will mount our horses and ride towards London. Should he be returning, we shall meet him; and should we ascertain that no messenger has been sent, we will try what we can do ourselves."

After some discussion, this course of action was resolved upon.

Never, perhaps, had a day gone by so tediously as that.

They all sat watching the little Dutch clock in the inn kitchen, as its hands moved slowly round the dial-plate.

It would have been better could they have slept; but in the excited condition of their minds slumber was impossible.

When it was getting towards sunset, they, all anxious to be doing something, rose from their seats and made their way to the stables.

Here they occupied themselves in attending to their horses, and just as twilight was deepening into night they put on the saddles and bridles.

Up to that moment, nothing whatever had been seen or heard of Dick, and therefore they might justly feel afraid that things were not going right.

"I can wait no longer," said Tom King. "Come on, comrades. We will ride slowly towards London, and I hope before we have gone far we shall be lucky enough to meet him."

"Most heartily do I echo that wish," said Tom Davis. "Take my advice, and be prepared at all points. Now that you are about to depart, I don't hesitate to say that from the first I had but slight faith in the King's word, and now I might go the length of telling you that I feel none at all. In a moment and under the circumstances you describe, he may have given you the promise, but after-reflection has caused him to alter his mind. It is my humble opinion that if Dick Turpin is to be liberated from Newgate to-night, it will be by your exertions, and yours only."

"Well, we shall see," said Tom King. "Come on, comrades. When once we are in motion we shall do away with the dreadful sensation of suspense that we have been suffering so long. Come on—come on!"

CHAPTER DCCCLXIX.

RELATES HOW DICK TURPIN PASSED THE DAY PREVIOUS TO THE ONE APPOINTED FOR HIS EXECUTION.

There was one to whom the minutes of that day lagged quite as slowly as to Tom Davis and the highwaymen, and that one, as may be guessed, was no other than Dick Turpin, in his comfortless cell in Newgate.

The tempting breakfast that had been brought him by the friendly jailer he left untouched; and when, shortly afterwards, the jailer came in, he exclaimed:

"Why, captain, you have had nothing at all. This looks bad. How is it?"

"I am sick at heart," said Turpin—"I am full of uneasiness and suspense. Can you not contrive to leave the prison soon, and slip off to Drury Lane? Ten to one you will learn something there that will give me ease."

"I will try my very best, captain—rest assured of that. I hope things are all going right with you, because——"

"Because what?"

"Why, I don't like to say it; but yet perhaps I had better tell you that they are making every preparation for turning you off to-morrow."

"Are they indeed?"

"Yes, they are, and it's talked of in the prison as a thing of course, for, having given your word not to make the attempt to escape, they feel certain that you must perish."

"Well, we shall see," said Dick, whose spirits were by no means raised by this intelligence—"we shall see shortly. In the meantime, go to Drury Lane. I shall know better how to act when you return."

"I will, captain; but though I am a bit of a favourite with the Governor, yet I cannot do exactly as I like. No doubt I shall slip off soon."

With these words, the jailer left, and Dick was once more in solitude.

He tried to keep himself calm.

But vainly. He would not have been human had he not felt the great peril of his situation.

His life, it might be said, hung merely upon a thread.

Had the day of his execution been appointed for that day week instead of the morrow, he would have felt perfectly indifferent, because if the King did not aid him he would then have a chance of using his own powers and profiting by the assistance of his comrades.

While at the height of his suspense, he heard the muttering of voices outside his cell.

Then the fastenings were withdrawn, and the door flung open upon its hinges.

Dick started forward with impatient anxiousness, for he fully expected it was the friendly jailer who had returned with welcome intelligence.

What was his disappointment, then, to perceive that it was a total stranger—a slim little man, wearing spectacles and a very dirty peruke?

To his intense astonishment, this man, with extended hand, ran forward and cried:

"My dear sir, this is really a pleasure—I am rejoiced to see you! Preserve that expression—pray preserve that expression, and it will be first-rate."

Dick instinctively shrank back from the stranger's advances, and put up his arm in a defensive attitude, as if to shield himself from the attack of a foe.

What on earth the dirty, untidy little man could mean he could not tell.

Casting his eyes towards the door, he saw that one of the men on guard outside had thrust in something square, carefully wrapped up in paper.

Along with it came a small oblong box, and what appeared to be three pieces of wood strapped together.

He was still in the dark as to the stranger's intentions.

But he was not long suffered to be so.

"My dear sir," he said again, "just look here. Wait a moment. It is a pleasure, I am sure—a very great pleasure. There!"

With nervous haste he picked up the three pieces of wood, unstrapped them, and placed them on the floor in a

triangular sition, and then Dick saw before him a painter's easel.

But before he could make any remark or recover from the state of surprise into which he had been thrown the stranger hastily stripped off the paper from the square parcel, and disclosed a piece of canvas stretched on a frame, all ready for painting upon.

This he placed upon the easel, and with the same rapidity of movement opened the box, and took therefrom a palette and some brushes.

"There, my dear sir, that's it—that's it! Only a few moments in that position, and I shall be done. I am wonderfully rapid, I assure you—not an R.A. as yet, but soon to be, I hope. There—there!"

While he spoke, the painter—for such he evidently was—made many flourishes with his brushes, but before he could make many lines Dick stepped forward.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "if I inquire the meaning of this extraordinary intrusion. If I have not asked this before, it is simply because I have been taken so utterly by surprise."

"Intrusion?" said the painter. "Oh, no intrusion, I assure you! Return to your former attitude—let me entreat you to return to it, and remain so; then, in the meanwhile, I will give you every information you wish."

"No," said Dick. "I wish to know distinctly, first of all, what it is that you intend to do."

"Why, my good sir, to immortalise you. I am going to paint your portrait."

"Indeed! At whose wish?"

"My own—my own, sir—my own entirely. The idea struck me, and then I said to myself, 'Septimus Gibbon, your fortune is made.'"

"But keep to the point," said Dick. "Believe me, I am not in the humour to-day for a long conversation."

"I am at the point now, my dear sir—I have just reached it. I thought to myself, I would paint your portrait. By that means, I should not only immortalise you but achieve never-ending fame myself. That's my idea. So I went to my uncle, the sheriff, and he, with his usual kindness, gave me permission to enter your cell. So here I am, you see, and all you have to do is to stand for half an hour or so, and everything will be done."

"But stop a moment," said Dick. "It seems to me that you have made one little omission."

"An omission? And pray, my dear sir, what may that be?"

"Why, this: You have asked leave of the sheriff, but you have forgotten to ask leave of me."

"Oh, a needless piece of ceremony altogether," said the painter; "but if you wish it, I will be quite formal."

"No, no," said Dick. "In a word, understand me that I firmly and most positively refuse to give my consent. You shall not paint my portrait."

"But, my dear sir, reflect."

"I have reflected already. Begone! Trouble me no more!"

The painter looked rather abashed, and then a bright thought struck him.

Getting one of his brushes ready prepared, and standing close to his easel, he said, with a slowness of utterance that contrasted remarkably with his former glibness of speech:

"My dear sir, I am exceedingly sorry that I should have offended you. I never dreamt for a moment but that you would willingly give your consent to my painting your portrait. However, I find you have an objection, and therefore, when I have tendered you my sincere apologies for the intrusion I trust you will accept them, and I will depart."

While slowly speaking these words, the painter glanced continually from Dick to his canvas, and worked busily with the brush.

Dick guessed what he was about, and just as he had finished his speech, stepped forward.

Mr. Septimus Gibbon, as he called himself, endeavoured to cover over what he had been doing with his palette.

But Dick knocked it impatiently aside with so much impatience, that it slipped from the painter's hand, and falling to the floor of the cell, was broken into a thousand pieces.

"Why, you deceitful rascal," said Dick, the moment his eye fell upon the canvas; "while pretending to talk to me as you did, and to offer your apologies, you have actually drawn the outlines of my face! You could have walked off, and would have finished the portrait at your leisure. What do you mean by it?"

"My dear sir," stammered the painter, "I—I——"

"I suppose you thought I should not see it?" said Dick, fiercely, and seizing hold of the canvas while he spoke.

"Now, my dear sir, don't—pray don't touch it! Let me entreat you not to touch it!"

But paying no attention whatever to his words, Dick lifted the frame from the easel, and commenced an immediate attack with it upon the painter.

He banged him most lustily over the head with it, until, at length, after one blow stronger than the rest, the canvas gave way, and the painter's head passed through it.

The effect was, that he stood with rather a ridiculous-looking collar round his neck.

His cries, however, had reached the ears of the turnkeys outside, and they had hastily thrown open the door.

When they saw what had occurred, however, they could not forbear from laughing.

"There," said Dick, "be off—be off, will you, at once! You will find this rather harder than the rest, so I advise you to begone!"

He seized hold of the easel as he spoke, and the painter, fearing a blow with it, made a rush to the door of the cell, pulling frantically at the frame round his neck, and endeavouring to free himself of his disagreeable encumbrance.

But his alarm and excitement prevented him from doing the very thing that he wished, so he tugged and tugged in vain.

Dick was just then in the humour to be angry with anybody or anything, and it was rather a relief to him than otherwise that the painter should have made his disappearance just then.

After his departure, he flung all his apparatus out into the corridor, and, addressing the turnkeys, said:

"Where is the Governor? Send for him; I want to see him at once!"

The turnkeys winked their eyes at each other.

It was a rare joke for a prisoner to demand an interview with the Governor of the prison.

"Do you hear what I say?" roared Turpin.

"Yes, we hears, captain," was the reply; "only we are afraid he will not come."

"Well, then," said Dick, "just tell him from me that if I have another intrusion of this kind I shall consider the compact between us at an end."

The turnkeys promised obedience, and withdrew, carefully fastening the door after them.

"Confound his impudence!" said Dick, still fuming. "I wish I had hit him a little harder, that's all!"

It was something, nevertheless, to be diverted from the contemplation of his position; and by the time he had succeeded in regaining his usual calmness the door was again opened, and the friendly jailer appeared.

Before he spoke, Dick could tell by the expression of his countenance that he had nothing particular to communicate.

"Well," he said, in a whisper, as soon as it was prudent to address him, "have you been?"

"I have, captain."

"And what is the result?"

"I have seen old Matthew."

"Well?"

"But he knows nothing. Since Davis took his departure yesterday, he has not seen or heard anything of him or his companions."

"That is strange," said Dick—"very strange; but perhaps he will hear shortly. When the day is further advanced, go again."

"All right, captain. And, now, what would you like for dinner?"

"Don't trouble me about dinner. I am in no humour to touch a mouthful."

"Well, captain, you may be right, but I don't think you are. You ought to make the best you can of matters, and eat heartily while you have the chance."

"But who could eat in such a place as this?" said Dick, glancing around him. "No, no; my appetite has gone, and I loathe the very sight of food."

"It is bad, captain," said the jailer, shaking his head—"very bad. I hope you will soon be better. You want some intelligence of your friends, and if it is to be procured, I will obtain it."

"I know you will," said Dick, shaking him by the hand. "I shall always be deeply indebted to you."

"No, no; quite the reverse."

"But I say yes."

A few more unimportant words were exchanged, and then the jailer again left, promising to pay another visit as soon as he should be successful in getting leave of absence.

He had not been absent more than five minutes before the door was again opened.

"Another intrusion!" thought Dick, this time growing angry in earnest.

He glanced towards the doorway.

He saw that it was the Ordinary, who was attired in full canonicals, and carried a couple of books under his arm.

"Unhappy man," he said, in a whining tone, and with his eyes so turned up to the ceiling of the cell that only the whites were visible—"unhappy man, I have come to pass a few hours with you in meditation and prayer!"

"Thank you," said Dick. "I am much obliged to you, but I prefer to be alone."

"A hardened sinner," said the Ordinary, with a grin—"a hardened sinner, yet he may be converted to the ways of grace."

"It strikes me," replied Dick, "that I am by no means so bad as you imagine; but I think that a man in my position should, at least, have a few little privileges accorded to him, and one of them should be that he should please himself whether he remained alone or whether he was intruded upon."

"Worse and worse!" said the chaplain. "Do you know, unhappy man, that in twelve hours from this you will be standing on the brink of eternity?"

"I do not know it," said Dick, firmly.

"Well, then, it is my unhappy duty to inform you of it. In twelve hours, at the most, you will be no more."

"It's a mistake," said Dick—"quite a mistake."

"No, I assure you it is not. Every preparation has been made by the officials connected with the prison. Your execution is appointed to take place at noon to-morrow, and, therefore, I have come to prepare you for your approaching inevitable fate."

"I am much obliged to you for your kindness," replied Dick, "but believe me when I say that it is quite unnecessary."

"Unnecessary?"

"Yes. Do not misunderstand me; you are labouring under a great mistake. I shall not be executed to-morrow, and therefore I stand in no need of your spiritual consolation and preparation."

"It is a vain hope," said the Ordinary—"a vain, delusive hope, and let me entreat you to cast it from you."

"It is a hope that will be realised," said Dick, "and therefore let me entreat you to grant me the poor favour of leaving me by myself for a short time."

"I will," said the chaplain, "but only for a short time. I trust reflection will soon assert its sway—then I will return. May your heart be softened, and may you be brought to a proper knowledge of your position!"

Dick was silent, for he wished the reverend gentleman to leave at once.

He did so.

The turnkeys opened the door, and Dick was once more left alone.

His uneasiness had now reached a fearful pitch.

He paced restlessly up and down his cell.

"Can it be," he muttered to himself—"can it be that everything has gone wrong, and that I am doomed at last to perish? No, no, I will not think that—not even when the cap is drawn over my face and the noose adjusted round my neck; even then I will not despair, but place faith in the exertions of my comrades."

In spite of this, however, Dick felt that it would be no trifling relief could he but be freed from his present state of suspense.

He could tell that the day was gradually drawing in and that night was approaching.

Yet he saw nothing of the friendly jailer; in fact, it was not until the interior of the cell was quite dark—just, indeed, about the same time when the highwaymen were setting out from the inn—that the door was once again opened, and Dick's eyes were gladdened by the sight of his friend.

But there was no hope or encouragement to be gleaned from the expression of his countenance.

"You have bad news," said Dick. "Come, speak out at once—the sooner it is over the better."

"Not bad news," said the man, "without you call no news bad news."

"Well, speak—do not keep me waiting."

"Well, captain, I have just come back from Drury Lane. I have seen old Matthew."

"And what does he say?"

"He says but little. He is in a state of great uneasiness. He is afraid something has gone wrong somewhere, and did not hesitate to say it."

"He has not seen or heard from Davis?"

"Not a word of any kind."

"How strange!"

"That is what he says. He calls it very strange—in fact, is unable to account for it. Had all gone well, you should by this time have been set at liberty."

"And what is his advice?"

"He said he was unable to offer any, except that, if he stood in your position, he should trust to no one but himself."

"He means, endeavour to escape?"

"Yes."

"But how short is the time!" said Dick. "What earthly chance have I?"

The jailer shrugged his shoulders.

"A very poor chance, I am afraid, captain, for I can assure you that never since this prison has been built has there been such close and observant guard kept all around it. The men are all on the alert, and it would be totally impossible for any person to leave Newgate at any point unseen. How you are to escape under these circumstances passes my comprehension."

"Well, well," said Dick, "leave me—I should like to be alone, and to think over my position as best I may."

"Then I will go, captain. Are you sure you want nothing?"

"Nothing whatever."

With a glance, plainly of pity and regret, the turnkey left the cell.

As soon as he had departed, Dick sank down upon the chair, and, clasping his hands over his face, began to think.

"What has gone wrong?" he murmured—"what can have happened? How unfortunate it is that I should be left thus in the dark, and Newgate so closely guarded, and the time so short! Well, well—at all events, it will be perfectly useless for me to attempt an escape. Had I the means and the time, it would be equally useless, for now I have heard how Newgate is watched, from such good authority, I cannot doubt it, nor could I hope to leave it unperceived."

He was silent, giving up himself to gloomy thought.

His mind was principally occupied in thinking of Maud.

It was by no means difficult for him to picture her friendless and forlorn situation, and the reflection that he had been the means of bringing her into it by no means increased his cheerfulness.

Then, with a slow and solemn note, he heard the clock of St. Paul's Cathedral give forth the hour of ten.

How fearfully close the time appointed for his execution seemed to be.

To one thing, however, he had quite made up his mind, which was that it was impossible for him to escape, therefore he made no effort, but continued to sit in the same attitude upon the chair.

Eleven o'clock sounded, and found him still in the same position.

Any one gazing upon him would have found some difficulty in saying for certain whether he was sleeping or waking—to all appearances, however, he was completely blind and deaf to all that was going on around him.

He did not even raise his head when the clock struck.

Another hour passed.

Then midnight came.

The twelve strokes were given forth by all the various

churches around, the stillness being so great that distant ones were plainly audible.

In every variety of intonation was the hour proclaimed, and when the strokes had died away, the sound was succeeded by another less audible and of a far different character.

It required a momentary attention before one could decide upon the nature of this sound.

It was that low, hearse murmur something like the sound produced by the waves, and which is ever the accompaniment of a large mass of people.

That hoarse murmur, then, came from the dense throng of people outside Newgate—from those who, with extraordinary patience, had taken up their positions in the Old Bailey, in order, by waiting there, to be the first to catch a glimpse of the doomed man when the folding doors were unclosed.

A drizzling rain began to fall from a dark, overhanging sky—a rain that threatened to become more violent ere long, and which showed every indication of continuing without intermission for many hours.

But the steadiest downpour would not have had the effect of dispersing those who had congregated without.

Suddenly the sound of a footstep breaks the deep silence which reigns through the prison of Newgate.

More and more distinct it becomes, until at length it pauses before the door of Dick Turpin's cell.

A bright ray of light comes streaming through the huge keyhole, and falls upon the prisoner.

But he heeds it not.

Some words were hurriedly exchanged, followed by retreating footsteps.

Then the door of the cell was flung open.

A brilliant light seemed at once to be shed all over it, yet this was only by contrast with the previous darkness, for the illumination proceeded only from a lantern.

"Asleep!" said a voice. "Can it be possible? Would a man sleep thus on the night before his execution? Turpin—Turpin, awake!"

These words entered Dick's ears, and penetrated to his understanding.

With a sudden start, he looked up, and then he saw Mr. Bradbury, the Governor of the prison, standing before him.

CHAPTER DCCCLXX.

THE DETERMINATION OF THE HIGHWAYMEN TURNS OUT TO BE A MOST FORTUNATE ONE.

In order to explain what follows, it is necessary to go back to the proceedings of Dick Turpin's comrades.

According to their stated intention, they quitted the Three Spiders, and made their way by the most direct route to the London Road.

There was no small amount of danger in so doing, but they reasonably concluded that, Dick being still in Newgate, the principal force of the police would be collected round that point.

At any rate, danger or not, that was the road they determined upon.

The very daring of the proceeding was likely to bring with it a certain amount of success.

"We cannot do much better," said Tom King, "than journey on to old Matthew's. Of all other men, he is the most likely to give us information respecting the captain."

"Yes, decidedly so," said Sixteen-String Jack; "and he is the man best calculated to help us in our present emergency. He is fertile in all expedients, and may perhaps give us advice well worthy of being followed."

"Not a doubt of it," joined in Claude Duval. "Come on, comrades—mend your pace a little! It is trying to one's patience to creep along like this!"

At a brisk trot the highwaymen now took their way along the hard, well-beaten road, nor did they pause or speak until the sharp clatter of a horse's hoofs upon the road behind them reached their ears.

"Hark!" said Tom, gently drawing in the rein, "some one is coming after us at full gallop. Who on earth can it be?"

"Some chance traveller perhaps," said Claude. "Push on—never mind!"

"But he will inevitably overtake us ere long," said Tom. "Let us pull up and draw to one side."

"No adventure, Tom," said Sixteen-String Jack—"no adventure! We have enough already on hand."

"I know that," was the answer. "Yet it will be better to allow this man, whoever he may be to pass, then we can follow on as we please."

"Well, just as you like," said Claude. "You have command of the expedition to-night, and you can do just as you like, provided that you don't embroil yourself in any other adventure."

"Don't fear that," said Tom King. "Look—yonder is a narrow lane. Let us go down that a little way; we shall then be unseen."

"But let us take a glance as he passes by, whoever he may be," said Jack.

"Oh, yes, certainly—I fully intended it."

Just on the left hand was a narrow lane, on both sides of which trees were growing very thickly, so that a deep shadow was cast all round about the spot.

Just at the mouth of this lane—if we may so call it—the highwaymen placed themselves in a line.

They knew they could depend upon their horses remaining motionless, and from their present position they would have no difficulty in glancing at the approaching traveller.

On he came, his speed accelerated, if anything.

It was a horse of rare quality, as the rate he was going at fully proved.

"He is no ordinary rider," said Tom King, "rest assured of that."

Scarcely had he spoken the words than the traveller, with a rush like an arrow, sped past the top of the lane, and was instantaneously lost to sight.

"One would think he was riding for his life," said Tom. "However, he is past, so we will jog on quietly behind him."

Just then the silence of the night was broken in upon by another sound.

This was the loud report of a firearm of some description, and scarcely had the report ceased before it was followed by another.

Then our friends fancied they heard a cry of pain.

"By Jove," said Tom, "he has stopped!"

He alluded to the traveller.

The next moment, however, the sound of a horse's hoofs could be heard as distinctly as ever.

"No, no," murmured his companions.

"But he is coming back now," said Tom. "What on earth is the meaning of this?"

There could be no doubt as to the truth of what Tom said.

The traveller was evidently galloping back at the same tremendous rate.

Tom King pressed forward a little nearer to the high-road, and this time caught sight of him.

The clouds, which up to then had covered the sky completely, parted in one spot, or, rather, the moon happened to shine through a portion of the clouds less dense than the remainder.

By the dim light thus shed upon the earth, Tom perceived, to his astonishment, that the traveller was seated in a most peculiar position on his steed.

His head was bent over towards the horse's neck, and his arms seemed to hang helpless by his sides.

Then, scarcely able to restrain a cry, Tom perceived him sway backward and forwards in such a manner as to place him in imminent danger of losing his balance.

Another roll to one side, and then, with a crash, the traveller fell into the roadway.

His foot was entangled in the stirrup, and the frightened horse galloped on.

Only for a few paces, however.

The gallant creature, with the rare instinct of its race, knowing that something was amiss with its rider, stood stone still.

Amazed at this occurrence, Tom was about to hasten to the stranger's assistance, when he heard another horseman approaching, so, acting upon the impulse of the moment, he stood still, and waited for him to approach.

This second horseman came on more carefully than the first, yet the speed he made was very great.

All at once, however, he appeared to catch sight of the prostrate form in the roadway and the horse standing

near it, for he uttered a faint cry, and slackened the pace of his own steed.

Less than a minute sufficed for him to reach the spot where the first traveller lay.

In a moment he flung himself from the saddle almost before his horse had stopped.

From his pocket he produced a lantern, and, drawing back the slide, turned the rays full upon the face of the fallen man.

"Right," he said—"I am right."

He stooped down as if about to pick up something.

At this moment the prostrate stranger groaned.

Seeing this, Tom considered he had remained a passive spectator long enough.

Dismounting with ease and rapidity from his steed, he ran on tiptoe towards the spot where these events were taking place.

The second traveller was stooping down over the first, so Tom had him decidedly at an advantage.

With a powerful grasp, he seized him by the back of the neck.

With a yell of fear, this man raised himself, and endeavoured to twist his head round so as to obtain a view of his assailant.

In vain, however.

In his sudden fright he let go the lantern, but luckily it chanced to fall in an almost upright position.

Some of the rays fell upon the dress of the first traveller, and no sooner did he perceive it, than Tom King uttered an ejaculation.

"A messenger," he cried—"a royal messenger! I know the livery well."

These words reached the ears of his two friends, as he fully intended they should, and they both hastened towards him.

"Yes," said Sixteen-String Jack, as soon as he arrived, "it's a King's messenger, sure enough. And look—what's this?"

He picked up the lantern, and turned its rays upon the second traveller, who held in his hands a little leathern bag, attached to which was a strap so that it could be slung across his shoulders.

"Why, that's his despatch," said Tom. "Seize it this moment!"

The second traveller resisted, holding tightly to the strap.

But Claude, with ready thought, drew his sword and severed it.

Finding himself thus foiled, the stranger, with a sudden cry of rage, made a tremendous effort to release himself from Tom's detaining grasp.

Luckily for him, it happened that our friend was not quite so vigilant as he should have been, his attention was being too much given to the proceedings of his comrades.

The consequence was that the effort was successful.

No sooner, however, did he break from his hold, than Tom drew forth a pistol.

"Hold!" he cried—"stop this moment, or I fire! Stop, I say! The consequences of refusal will be on your own head!"

But the flying man paid no attention to these words, and Tom, hastily levelling his pistol at the rapidly-retreating figure, pulled the trigger.

There was a loud report, followed by a screaming cry, then all was still.

If there had been any doubt as to the identity of the wounded man, it would have been set at rest by a glance at the leather bag Claude had obtained.

On one side it was mounted with the royal arms in silver, and over the lock on the other side were the same figures, only smaller.

Our friends looked at each other in bewildered surprise, as well they might, for so suddenly had all this occurred that they were scarcely able to come to any conclusion respecting it.

That the King's messenger had been shot down by the second traveller, who had been waiting in ambush for him, seemed pretty evident, and that he was anxious to obtain possession of the leather bag was equally clear—that, in fact, constituted the motive for the crime.

Whether the messenger was dead or only wounded our friends at present knew not.

Asking for the lantern, however, Tom King stooped down in the endeavour to ascertain.

The roadway all around was dyed with blood, which poured at an alarming rate from two wounds in the messenger's breast.

Tom King turned up the messenger's coat in such a manner as to cover them, and pressed his hand upon it.

By this means the flow of blood was temporarily checked.

"Speak," he said—"speak if you have the power. The man who shot you down is baffled, the letter-bag is safe. Have you any request to make?"

The man struggled painfully to speak.

He fought wildly with his hands, plucking at his throat as though there was some obstruction there impeding speech.

At last, in scarcely articulate accents, he pronounced the words:

"Newgate—Newgate—New——"

He stopped.

A gush of blood issued from his lips, and with a convulsive shuddering of the limbs he fell back dead.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXI.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN WITNESS ANOTHER STRANGE SIGHT ON THEIR WAY TO LONDON

When the first shock of horror and surprise was over, Tom King bent down over the body of the unfortunate messenger.

His object was to ascertain whether life was yet extinct.

He hoped that there might be some flutterings of existence that might be temporarily increased in strength.

The man had said too little.

It was necessary that many questions should be answered before the minds of the highwaymen could be completely set at rest.

One glance at the fallen jaw and the filmy eyes assured Tom that this hope was over.

The immortal essence had for ever gone.

"He is dead, comrades," he said, as he resumed an erect position. "This is a black piece of work, and as yet I can scarcely comprehend it."

"Nor I," said Claude and Jack.

There was a pause, for Tom wondered what should be the next step he should take.

He asked the opinion of his comrades upon it.

"My friends," he said, "what are we to do next? In what way shall we act, and what effect do you imagine this occurrence may have upon our future plans?"

"It will require time to think over these things," said Claude, "don't you think so, Jack?"

"I do indeed, and if, Tom, you would be guided by me, and——"

"What is it you advise?"

"Why, that without further delay we make the best of our way to the White Horse Inn, at the risk——"

"Never mind the risk."

"Let us go—let us lay all the facts before old Matthew, and let us hear what he has to say respecting them."

"I can think of nothing better," said Tom. "But are we to leave this poor fellow here?"

"No; and yet I do not see how we can be of any benefit to him."

"No, nor I either, only we may draw him on one side out of the way, so that he may escape further injury from any chance passenger."

"Yes, yes—by all means we will do that, and we will fasten his horse close by, leaving those who find him to place what construction they please upon the whole matter."

This suggestion was promptly carried out.

Despite the repugnance they could not help feeling at handling a dead body, the King's messenger was carefully raised and placed in a leaning position against a little embankment at one side of the highway.

His horse, which had stood perfectly still during the whole of the time, they secured to the low-lying branch of a tree, and so left him.

Just as they remounted their steeds and were about to turn away, Tom exclaimed:

"There's one point which I should like to have set at rest."

"What is that?"

"Why, to what extent my shot was effectual! I wonder where the assassin is, and who he can be?"

"It is easy to ride back a little way," said Claude; "and, precious as time is, I think it will be worth our while to do so."

"So do I," cried Tom. "Follow me—it will occupy scarcely a moment."

They rode off along the highway in the direction the assassin had taken until, having reached the spot where they believed Tom's bullet had struck him, they paused.

They still retained the lantern, and by its aid they perceived upon the ground a few dark red spots of blood.

Looking further, they saw that a hole had been forced in the hedge, and to one of the sharp, prickly boughs a shred of clothing was adhering.

This shred they took and carefully stowed away.

Beyond was a large field.

They looked at each other irresolutely.

Tom found that his companions were evidently waiting for him to speak, and so he said:

"I fancy the rascal is only slightly hurt, and by this time he may have got to some place of shelter, where he would, ten to one, remain and defy all our attempts at discovery. Unwillingly, then, I propose that we leave him to his fate."

"And so do we."

"Then forward, for, believe me, I am to the full as anxious to reach London as you possibly can be yourselves."

Again putting their horses to a sharp trot, they journeyed in the direction of the metropolis, exchanging but few words on the way.

Tom was wondering where horses could be bestowed in safety.

He had some dim recollection that there was a stable in the neighbourhood of Clare Market, the occupier of which was in league with old Matthew.

Vainly, however, did Tom try to remember any further particulars, and finally he was compelled to abandon the effort in despair.

Yet in his own mind he decided that they should make their way to the White Horse by the back way.

They would then be less likely to be observed by any of the officers.

So deeply absorbed was Tom by his reflections, that he paid no attention whatever to anything around him.

All at once he was aroused by ejaculations from his companions, who with one accord reined in their horses.

"What is it?" he asked, following their example instinctively—"what's amiss?"

"Look there!" said Claude, pointing with his whip. "Is it possible you did not notice it?"

Tom glanced quickly in the direction indicated, and then ceased to be surprised at his companions' astonishment.

They had now arrived within view of that ill-omened spot Tyburn.

In journeying to London they could not avoid passing by it.

Generally their gaze was half-averted as they passed by, and indeed on most occasions the darkness was so intense that it was more by imagination than actual vision that they saw the dismal-looking blackened beams.

But now Tyburn Tree presented a very different appearance.

It was lighted up by the fierce red glow of a fire, the light of which shone with picturesque and rembrandt-like effect upon the ancient timber.

The tree was cleared—that is to say, none of its horrible fruit was dependent from it.

For some time Tom and his companions remained quite still gazing upon this strange spectacle.

"What does it mean?" asked Tom King at last, in a subdued voice. "How strange!"

"Very," responded Claude; "but I am as much in the dark as you are."

"So am I," added Sixteen-String Jack, "but let us creep a little closer, and then, in all probability, we shall ascertain."

Without a dissentient word this suggestion was acted upon.

Allowing their horses to proceed at a walk only, the highwaymen gradually drew closer and closer to the ghastly spot.

At length they reached a point from which a distinct and perfect view could be obtained, and then they at once met with the solution to what had looked a short time before so incomprehensible.

Encamped round Tyburn Tree was a strong detachment of soldiers, and for their own comfort they had kindled two or three blazing fires.

The effect indeed was pleasant to behold, for the firelight flickered prettily upon the polished accoutrements of the soldiers.

Their arms were all piled, and the men stood about in clusters here and there quite at their ease.

Outside could be perceived the dark forms of many other persons, in all perhaps two hundred.

"It's clear enough now," said Tom King, as he set his horse in motion, "Tom Davis's information was correct. To-morrow is appointed for Dick's execution, and these preparations are being made for it."

"Yes, no doubt."

"And," continued Tom, "the authorities have evidently made up their minds that the law shall take effect. Those soldiers have been sent in anticipation of the gathering of a large crowd between now and morning. Whenever it becomes necessary they will form an impregnable square around Tyburn Tree, and so keep the mob from pressing too closely upon it."

"Yes, yes—that's it. Come on—we've seen enough."

"We have," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but if I live, the authorities shall be baulked, even though it be at the last moment, and in spite of all these extra precautions that they have taken."

"So say I," cried Claude, heartily, "and yet that sight yonder shows that they are terribly in earnest. It won't be a trifle that will stop them."

"True," said Tom King. "But forward now, and let us waste no more breath in conversation. I have already decided where to go and what to do, so follow me and all will be well in that respect."

His two companions complied without another syllable

Riding direct into Lincoln's Inn Fields, then a very lonely, unfrequented place after nightfall, he turned to the right, and the highwaymen soon found themselves in the midst of the narrow insalubrious streets in that locality.

In Vere Street, at the corner of a narrow turning, stood a large public-house, and, upon reaching it, Tom saw at a glance that there was accommodation for horses.

Turning up this narrow street, he quickly paused in front of some large gates, which were closed.

A ring at the bell brought the ostler forward.

Tom spoke in quick, authoritative tones.

"Here—be quick," he cried, "take charge of these three horses. We shall be back soon—perhaps in half an hour, or it may be less or more; but have the horses ready, and it will be something in your pocket."

Without waiting for any reply to these orders, the highwaymen all alighted from their steeds, and strode off in the direction of Drury Lane.

The ostler was quite surprised at the whole transaction, or rather at the suddenness of it.

But grumbling something or other, unintelligible to anyone but himself, he took hold of the horses by their bridles and led them through the gateway.

All three of our friends looked after their steeds wistfully.

Great indeed would have been their satisfaction could they have seen them safely housed, and known just where to find them.

The attempt at this, however, might prove an additional source of danger.

The ostler, or some other person, might see and recognise them.

The distance to White Horse Yard was now insignificant—a few hundred yards brought the highwaymen to the extremity of it.

On their way, without appearing to do so, they kept a vigilant look-out, but saw nothing whatever of a character to excite their suspicions.

Pausing at the little door in the wall that has been so often mentioned, Tom pressed upon the secret spring, and waited with anxiety for the result.



[THE GOVERNOR'S MIDNIGHT INTERVIEW WITH DICK TURPIN IN HIS CELL.]

Scarcely a moment elapsed before they heard the sound of a footstep.

The door was cautiously opened a little way, and old Matthew's form appeared.

He recognised our friends at a glance.

"Come in," he said. "Quick—quick! The sooner the better, or you may be seen! I have been watching for you for hours and hours. Come in!"

Wondering why he had been waiting, for they were not conscious of having made any appointment, and besides, never dreaming of repairing to the White Horse by daylight, the highwaymen obeyed him by stepping as rapidly as they could across the threshold.

"Why, Matthew," they asked, "what is it?"

"Don't speak now. This way. One more minute, and we shall be in comfort; not that there will be any time for talk; you must employ the next few hours in earnest action."

"We are quite ready, Matthew," was the reply. "But, first of all, there is an important matter which must be discussed by all of us, and to which I trust you will give your best attention, in order that you may advise us how to proceed."

"You may depend upon that," replied old Matthew, in a tone of seriousness that was indeed unusual with him. "There—there, now we are all right, and need fear no interruption. Say on. I am burning with curiosity to know what it is you wish to impart."

CHAPTER DCCCLXXII.

TOM KING ANNOUNCES HIS INFLEXIBLE DETERMINATION TO HIS COMRADES AND OLD MATTHEW.

WHILE this brief conversation was going on, old Matthew hurried his three visitors across the yard and into the

little private room behind the bar where he had so often held conferences with the highwaymen, and where, as we know, he had such an elaborate piece of mechanism to warn him of the entrance of any police officers or suspicious person into the house.

"Speak low," he said, as the highwaymen seated themselves around the fire, which they were glad to do, for the night was chilly—"not a soul knows of your arrival, I firmly believe, and, if you are only ordinarily careful, we shall settle everything with comfort."

"But, first of all," said Tom, "satisfy me on a point which puzzles me completely."

"Well, what is it?"

"Why, you said you had been waiting for us—what made you expect we should arrive? The resolution was only made, I might say, at the last moment."

"Why," said old Matthew, "simply because Dick has sent here several times to-day to know whether there was any intelligence for him or not. Of course there was none, and that made me in momentary expectation of some of you."

"Then he is still in Newgate?"

"Yes, he was less than an hour ago, and I daresay is now; and, speaking candidly, there I think he is likely to remain, unless you can contrive to get him out by main force or stratagem."

"Has there been any communication from the King?"

"None that I have heard of."

"Then Davis's forebodings are only too true. But stay, it will save time if I begin at the beginning and tell you all."

Old Matthew nodded, as though he fully believed this.

Accordingly, Tom commenced relating to Dick's old friend all those events with which the reader has already been made acquainted.

There is no necessity for repeating his brief summary of them.

To the account of the assassination old Matthew listened with the keenest interest, and asking many questions with the view of eliciting every detail.

"Now you know all," said Tom, in conclusion, "and, such being the case, think the whole over and give us your advice."

"I will. But hush!—wait an instant."

All this time old Matthew's eyes had been directed to one particular part of the wall, the spot indeed that was occupied by the supposititious clock.

As usual, the clock showed the hour of six, but just as Matthew spoke, the hand dropped to the quarter past.

The highwaymen had all been made familiar with this piece of mechanism, and they gazed upon it with mingled interest and admiration.

"Just keep quiet," said old Matthew. "There's some one standing at the bar to drink—I wonder who it is? Ah! look there."

The hand dropped to the half hour.

An anxious look settled upon all their countenances.

"Something suspicious," said old Matthew. "This is what I feared—I was afraid the coming and going of that jailer so frequently would be noticed. Depend upon it, some police officer has seen him, and now they are again on the alert. We may have some trouble—not that it would matter on any other night than the present, for I could baffle them easily; but now every moment is precious indeed."

So the highwaymen felt, and they remained with their eyes fixed upon the dial-plate with an intensity that can scarcely be imagined.

Suddenly there was a simultaneous cry of relief.

The long hand flew back to its original position, and the clock again showed the hour of six.

"All right so far," said Matthew, settling himself more comfortably in his chair. "A false alarm, I suppose—nothing more."

"But is the danger over, think you?"

"For the present, I can answer most certainly in the affirmative, and should anything fresh arise, fear not that we should receive timely intimation of it."

With this assurance, the highwaymen were satisfied, and now they remained waiting, with no small amount of anxiety, for old Matthew to communicate his views upon the subject laid before him.

Before he spoke, he took hold of the letter-bag, which, we need scarcely say, had been carefully taken care of by the highwaymen.

He turned it over and over several times, looking longingly at the lock, and making one or two feeble attempts to open it.

"If I could only peep inside," he said, "then our doubts would be at rest—we should know just what to do. The royal arms are on it. There's a letter inside evidently from the King to the Governor of Newgate, the question is, does it concern the captain? Is it the order for his release?"

Old Matthew twisted the letter-bag over and over again.

"That's just the question," said Tom King, leaning forward in his earnestness. "I wish with all my heart that we could ascertain that."

"It is impossible, I fear," returned Matthew. "To open this bag would be, in my opinion, in the highest degree dangerous; the Governor would know then that something was amiss."

"But what baffles me," said Claude Duval, "is the assassination of the messenger. By whom could that have been perpetrated, and what was the object? Certainly we know so far as this, that it was intended to prevent the delivery of the letter-bag."

"That, I fear, will remain an unexplained mystery we may conjecture something upon it, and yet be all the time far from the truth. The principal thing to me appears to be what shall we do with the letter-bag?"

"And to me also," said Tom King. "Let us fix our attention upon that."

There was a long pause.

It was broken by old Matthew.

"As it is unwise, if not impossible, to open this bag and glean the nature of its contents, the question is, shall we deliver it at the prison and wait a short time and ascertain the effect produced by it? If none at all, why, then we must make up our minds to some desperate proceeding."

"It seems so," answered Tom. "But I confess my own uneasiness increases rather than abates. In such a case the only thing that we could do would be to attempt a rescue at Tyburn, and I sadly fear that, however well that might be organised, it would fail; the authorities have been served that trick once, and what we saw to-night proves clearly that they will be prepared at all points for resistance."

An ominous silence followed this speech, from which it might be inferred that its truth could not be disputed by anyone present.

Again their attention was distracted by the dial-plate.

The hand fell rapidly to the quarter, and from the quarter to the half-hour, as before.

"Confound it!" said old Matthew, angrily. "There's some one lurking about, I am quite sure of it. However, keep still, there's no cause for immediate apprehension; perhaps the danger will pass away as before."

Had he expressed a wish to this effect its fulfilment would have been immediate, for even while he spoke the clock signalled "all well."

"It is best to be over cautious," he said. "I have given strict injunctions. Better a thousand false alarms than to be kept a moment too late."

"Oh, certainly," said Tom—"most certainly!" And while he spoke he rose to his feet.

There was an air of determination about him which all immediately noticed, and long before he spoke they knew that he had formed a settled resolution.

"My mind is made up," he said—"firmly made up. That letter-bag shall be delivered, and we will run the risk for an hour or two of the effect it produces. Give it here, Matthew, I will take it myself."

"You take it?" ejaculated Matthew. "Nonsense—you are mad! I will never suffer such a thing!"

"I am in earnest," said Tom, "and nothing in the world shall cause me to change my decision. Give it to me; I shall not be content until I know for certain that it is delivered safely. And how can I be so well assured of that as I shall be if I place it in the Governor's hands myself?"

"But it is outrageous—impossible!" cried old Matthew, excitedly. "Even if this bag contains the message we so earnestly wish for, you will only be thrusting your own neck into the noose."

"No matter," said Tom, if possible more firmly than before—"no matter, my mind is made up! I will go! Yes, I would not shrink even though I felt certain that my instant death followed the delivery of the bag. Now you know my determination, and words and entreaties will be alike powerless to turn me from it."

A dead silence followed the utterance of these words, and old Matthew suffered Tom King to take the letter-bag from his hands, not making a further show of resistance.

"This should be done alone," Tom went on; "and if I am successful, you will shortly be aware of it."

At this juncture, however, Claude and Jack warmly interposed.

"No, no, Tom," they said; "we are willing to give in to you to almost any extent, but we cannot allow you to have things entirely your own way. No, no; not by any means. We have heard your decision; now hear ours. If you persevere in your intention, we will accompany you on this the most perilous and rash adventure we have yet undertaken."

"Be it so, then," said Tom, and they could tell by his manner that he felt a secret pleasure at this manifestation of devotion—"be it so. I would allow no opposition myself, therefore I will offer none to you."

"Then it's settled," said Claude and Jack. "Now, Matthew, one glass, and we start. That will just allow us the opportunity to see that our weapons are in perfect order, for we may have to use them ere long."

"No remonstrances," broke in Tom King, sternly, fancying that Matthew was about to put in a protest—"no remonstrances. We will be deaf to all."

"I am sorry you are so headstrong," said Matthew, placing a glass before each—"very sorry; because, if I could only get you to see it, there would be very much more prudence and safety in my delivering this letter-bag than in your taking it, and I trust that the suggestion as I now make it will be acted upon."

"No, no, Matthew," said Tom King, "I must positively refuse you. I am Dick Turpin's best and nearest friend. We have been many a time in the utmost danger, and the one has never hesitated to sacrifice himself for the other. Dick's life is now at stake—literally, it is trembling in the balance. On such an occasion, then, I will yield the right of aiding him to no man, not even, Matthew, to you."

CHAPTER DCCCLXXIII.

GIVES A LONG, BUT NECESSARY, EXPLANATION RESPECTING THE ASSASSINATION OF THE KING'S MESSENGER.

In order not to leave any mystery unsolved, it may, perhaps, be as well in this place to interrupt the thread of the narrative, for a moment, to explain why, and by whom, the King's messenger had been assassinated.

It was not until afterwards, however, that the facts came to the knowledge of the highwaymen.

But still, it will be seen, their relation now will serve to make all perfectly clear.

The reader will remember Lord Spindelow, and with reference to whom it must be mentioned that he occupied a prominent position at court, and was indeed high in favour with the King.

Yet he was not satisfied; and hearing by chance of the existence of the mysterious letter, he, by a clever stratagem, gained possession of it, and then found himself in a position to exercise unlimited power, not only over the mysterious lady, but over the King himself.

It must be understood, though, that while he held unlawful possession of this letter, no opportunity arose for him to make use of it.

Willis was one of the King's personal attendants, and, by various means, Lord Spindelow had won him over entirely to his interests, employing him generally to act as spy upon his royal master.

On the evening that Tom King had his strange interview with royalty, Willis applied his ear to the keyhole of the conservatory door, and managed to glean something of the matters that were discussed between them.

Lord Spindelow was at the time absent from the castle, but on his return on the following day, he was at once made acquainted with everything.

In London his lordship had learned with unfeigned delight that Dick Turpin was at last a prisoner in Newgate, and that he would inevitably perish at Tyburn.

It may be guessed how revengeful and bitter would be his feelings towards him; and, indeed, it was with difficulty that he could restrain himself from paying a visit to Newgate, in order to exult over him.

No sooner did he hear that the King had promised to liberate Dick Turpin than he was frantic with rage.

But, in such a position, what was he to do to help himself?

Dark thoughts quickly rose in his mind, especially when he learned that a messenger had already been despatched.

He did not hesitate then to form a bloodthirsty resolution.

Obtaining a fleet horse, he started off in pursuit of the messenger; but owing to the latter having paused at a small inn lying a little way off the road—where, in fact, there was a pretty daughter to whom he paid his attentions at every opportunity—Lord Spindelow missed him, and did not discover the fact until, at a hard gallop, he performed nearly the whole of the journey to London.

Then he reined up and looked about him with the intention of riding back slowly in order to meet the man he wanted.

His calculation was that if he could assassinate this man, destroy the letter, and hide all traces of his crime, Dick Turpin's execution would take place before there would be time to communicate again with the King.

Then, as for the discovery of the murder, he hoped to avoid all the consequences resulting from the same.

This, then, gives us the necessary clue.

We have seen how the unfortunate messenger fell into the ambuscade laid for him, and how the bullet which Lord Spindelow despatched upon its deadly errand did its work.

When Tom fired, the bullet from his pistol struck his lordship near the shoulder, inflicting a painful and dangerous-looking wound. But aware of the consequences that would follow his discovery and recognition, he felt himself moved to double strength to make the effort to escape, and so he forced his way through the hedge, and staggered rather than walked across a field.

Here he came to another hedge, through which he made his way with still more difficulty.

Then another field, and afterwards he perceived a light gleaming in the darkness.

Doubting not that it proceeded from the window of some cottage, he struggled painfully on in the hope of reaching it at every step.

He felt, however, that his strength was rapidly leaving him.

Finding this to be the case, oaths and curses of the most horrible description issued from his lips.

What angered him more than all was the knowledge that, after having committed the crime of murder, he had been foiled at last.

His eyes grew dizzy, and it was with difficulty he made out the objects by which he was surrounded.

Suddenly he stumbled, and the shock this gave him seemed to revive him a little.

Greatly to his surprise, he found that he had reached the rude palisading with which the garden of the cottage was surrounded.

He could see the humble little habitation plainly enough now, and, still holding by the palisades, crept on slowly in the hope of finding the gate.

He was successful.

Pushing it open, and leaving a trail of blood behind him as he went, he staggered up to the door.

He tried to knock, but his strength failed him, and he fell with a dull, lumbering sound against the panel.

A faint scream came from the interior of the cottage.

Then the door was unbolted.

No sooner was the fastening removed than the weight of Lord Spindelow's body forced the door open with great violence, and he fell heavily upon the threshold.

The greatest consternation was created in the house by the occurrence of this event.

But when their first alarm was over, the inmates turned their attention to the wounded stranger.

Gently they raised him and carried him towards the fire.

They saw that blood was pouring from the wound, and tried in vain to check it.

They called upon him, and entreated him to speak, disclosing his name and place of abode.

But his lordship's tongue was silenced for ever; he could only move his lips in vain attempts at articulation.

By the shape of his lips, however, the people fancied that he asked for water, and so a small quantity was brought and placed to his lips.

He drank it eagerly, and no sooner had he done so than, as is frequently the case under such circumstances, he drew a deep breath and expired.

It was terrible and strange to think he should be overtaken by a retribution of this kind.

He had perished as nearly as possible as the man had perished he had so cowardly assassinated.

The poor inhabitants of the cottage were not a little alarmed at such an incident as this.

For aught they knew, they might be regarded with suspicion, and have some difficulty in clearing themselves.

Searching in the pockets of the deceased, they found papers which disclosed his name, and title, and all the information they required.

The knowledge that he was a nobleman only increased their terror, for they know there would be a great outcry respecting his death.

The particulars of the tragedy in the high-road, however, never came to their ears.

Lord Spindelow's relatives were communicated with, and the body removed.

Then it was that Willis, finding himself freed from his hard taskmaster, confessed all to the King.

Could the unscrupulous nobleman have succeeded in his design of intercepting the messenger's letter-bag, there is no doubt that Dick Turpin would have perished, for the King, having despatched the letter, would probably have thought no more upon the subject.

We have yet to describe how the letter-bag was delivered, and the effects produced by it.

As will be seen, it was the means of bringing upon the highwaymen no small amount of danger.

Not to anticipate, however, we will go back to the White Horse, and relate what followed Tom King's declaration as to his intentions regarding his comrade.

Having spoken as he did with great firmness and dignity, he glanced around upon the friends who stood near him, as if daring them to raise a word by way of objection.

Perhaps they felt this. At any rate, a silence of some moments ensued, which was at last broken by old Matthew himself.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXIV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN DELAY THEIR DEPARTURE FROM THE WHITE HORSE UNTIL TOO LATE.

"Well, Tom," he said, "a wilful man must have his own way, and so I suppose you will. As to duty or right, I say nothing at all, my only wish being to propose that which is most likely to secure the safety of all."

"I know that, Matthew. But I am so firmly bent upon this enterprise, and I am so fully possessed with the value of this leather bag that I cannot think of allowing it to be delivered by any other hand than my own."

"Well, then," said Matthew, "since that is the case, I can only wish you good luck. Let me recommend you to start at once, for the sooner Dick is out the better."

"Decidedly. Come, comrades, are you ready?"

"We are, quite."

"This way, then," said Matthew—"this way."

While he spoke, a faint clicking sound was heard

He started, and looked towards the clock.

The finger then stood at the quarter past, and just as he was raising his finger it described a complete semi-circle, stopping at a quarter to seven.

"There is danger—immediate danger," he said, in a tone of vexation. "Confound it! What a pity it is we have wasted so much time in discussion! But for that, you might have started ten minutes ago, and there would have been no trouble at all."

"But we must make the best of it."

"I know that. This way—this way. I wish I could stop to give you some instructions, but I can't. You must just be content to remain here."

With that rapidity which always characterised his movements whenever danger was pressing, old Matthew had crossed the parlour towards the fireplace.

Then, very much to the surprise of the highwaymen, who wondered what he was going to do, he seized hold of one end of the chimney-piece, and pulled with all his might.

A most singular result followed.

The whole of the fireplace, fire and all, came out bodily, turning on hinges fixed at the opposite side of the chimney-piece to that at which Matthew was pulling. The effect, indeed, was just the same as if the whole of the fireplace had been a door.

A dark, uncomfortable-looking cavity could be seen behind.

The highwaymen hung back a little.

"In there," said old Matthew—"in there—it is your only chance—and remain until I come to you again."

"But——" began Tom.

"No remonstrances—in with you! Hark! Can't you hear them now?"

Footsteps indeed could be plainly heard, mingled with voices.

Matthew thrust the highwaymen almost into the hiding-place, then, with one quick movement, restored the fireplace to its original condition.

It was done instantaneously, and no trace whatever was left to show that it had ever been disturbed.

Surely, if any hiding-place would escape the acuteness of the officers, that would.

All this, that has taken so many words to describe, actually took place in a briefer period of time than would perhaps be imagined; in fact, before anyone at a moderate speed could have counted twenty, the highwaymen were securely hidden.

Old Matthew, not losing his presence of mind in the least, nor becoming flurried, turned round to the table and picked up the glasses that had just been used.

He was in the act of doing this when the door of the parlour was dashed violently open, and several police officers appeared.

From the way in which they glanced around the room, and the disappointed look which settled upon their countenances, it was evident that they fully expected to find some one else there than the landlord.

Old Matthew affected to be taken completely by surprise.

He let one of the glasses slip from his fingers, and it fell to the floor with a crash.

Then, stepping back, he ejaculated:

"Goodness gracious, men, how you startled me, to be sure! I never expected such a thing. Why, what on earth is the matter?"

"Matter?" said the officer in command. "We know you are up to your old tricks again; but mark me, old fellow—you have been successful for a long time, but you will be caught at last."

"Not by you, though," said Matthew, calmly.

"I don't know that," said the officer. "At any rate, I command you, upon pain of immediate arrest, to remain where you are. Sit down in the chair, and don't leave it."

"But what for?" asked old Matthew. "Why should you take these proceedings against me?"

"Simply because we intend to search this house."

"What, again?"

"Yes, again. It is only by repeatedly doing it that we can hope to succeed at last, and I want you there, and I want to keep my eyes upon you, so that you do nothing towards hiding anybody."

"And who should I hide?"

"Oh, you know best how to answer that question, but on one point I am quite confident."

"May I inquire what that is?"

"Yes, certainly you may."

"Well, then, what is it?"

"Why, I know, by my own observation, that you have been in continual communication with Dick Turpin in Newgate. Don't deny it, because, if you do, it will be equivalent to calling me a liar. Now, I want to know what the communication was about."

Old Matthew shook his head slowly backwards and forwards.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, you see," said Matthew, "you have placed me in a very awkward position."

"Indeed!—how?"

Why, by not permitting me to deny it."

"Would you have the audacity?"

"Yes, certainly I would, and I assure you that you must have been deceived in some way—how, I can't pretend to tell. But why do you think I should have any communication with the prisoner?"

"Oh, it's all very fine, Matthew; but I've heard your character over and over again, and mark me this—you will have to be ten times more careful and clever than ever you have been to escape us. Let us once catch you, and see if we are not down on you."

"I don't doubt it," said Matthew; "but I take all such threats with composure—I am not at all afraid."

"Well, confound your impudence!" said the officer. "One would think, to hear you speak, that you were a much-injured man, and never credit that this house is known throughout London as being one of the chief resorts of all members of the 'Family,' and especially the flash ones."

"I have enemies," said Matthew, with a sigh—"men who will say anything against me. Will you allow me to ask you one question?"

"Oh yes, by all means."

"Well, then, have you or any other officer ever found anything to warrant your suspicions when making a search in my house?"

"Yes, plenty to make us suspicious," was the answer; "but, luckily for you, we have not been able to get at the proofs."

"Oh, that's the way with you," said Matthew. "But just tell me what you expect to find."

"Well, then, I don't mind if I do. We expect to find some of Dick Turpin's comrades here, and if they are beneath this roof—as we firmly believe them to be—we will have them."

"And why do you imagine such an unlikely thing as that?" said Matthew.

"Unlikely? What other conclusion could we come to upon finding that a turnkey was running backwards and forwards between here and Newgate all the time? You, I daresay, have not had a direct communication with the prisoner, but, then, does it not point to the fact that there is some one in this house, interested in his fate, who has?"

Old Matthew regarded the officer with admiration.

Then drawing a long breath and shaking his head, he said, emphatically:

"Oh! it's a pity—a great pity."

"What's a pity?"

"Why, that men should mistake their vocations. Now, what a mistake you must have made in becoming a police officer."

"Bah! nonsense!"

"I stick to it," said Matthew; "just think what a lawyer you would have made if you had only given your attention to it; I never heard anybody speak so much like one in my life, never—never."

The officer hardly knew whether to feel flattered or offended at these remarks.

Accordingly he passed them over without notice.

"To the point, Matthew," he said. "You are very likely surprised that I should be remaining here like this talking to you so quietly; but just let me alarm you a little."

"Alarm me?" repeated Matthew, with a start.

"Yes; while I am here keeping such good watch on all your movements, a lot of my men are round the building, some more are searching the cellars, some more are searching the rooms upstairs, and others are on the roof."

"Of course you have a warrant?"

"Oh yes, I have a warrant; don't think I should put myself in the power of such a dangerous customer as you are. No, no—I know better than that."

"Well," said Matthew, "I hope the search will soon be over, and that you will leave me in peace."

"The search will soon be over," said the officer—"that is, if we find those we are in search of, and in the event of so doing, why, off you go along with us, and your business may take care of itself as best it may."

Matthew smiled.

"I am content" he said—"quite content. And so I am to sit in this chair during your good will and pleasure?"

"Yes."

"Oh, it might be worse—much worse; perhaps you don't object to my drawing a little nearer to the fire?"

"Oh no."

"Well, that's a comfort; I am just going to finish my glass; perhaps you would all like a drop of something?"

The officers behind their chief in a moment looked as though they should very much.

"Well," said the one in command, stroking his chin, "just a little perhaps wouldn't be amiss."

"Very likely," said Matthew, changing his tone and speaking with resolution; "but I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Officers, I'll see you all jolly well d—d before you have a drop of anything that's in my house, except, mind you, when you succeed in capturing those you speak of, and then, why you shall be welcome to the best there is in the cellar, and to as much of it as you can drink."

"Yes, we know that," said the officer, pretending not to look disappointed; "you wouldn't be able to help yourself then, old fellow; we should have it all our own way—not that I wanted a drop, and I'm sure not one of my men does. But you will do yourself no good, so mark that. If ever I can once catch you, you shall pay dearly for it."

"Ah, I shouldn't wonder," said old Matthew, sipping his brandy-and-water with an air of satisfaction that was aggravating indeed to the officers, and especially when he smacked his lips as if to say "that's good." "They are a long while upstairs," he added; "perhaps they may be longer, so if you have no objections, gentlemen, I will have a quiet smoke and soothe my nerves."

CHAPTER DCCCLXXV.

THE POLICE OFFICER AND OLD MATTHEW HAVE RATHER A STRANGE CONVERSATION WITH EACH OTHER.

With the greatest possible composure, old Matthew filled his pipe, lighted it, and leaned back in his chair with the air of a man who was bent upon enjoying himself.

The police officers evidently looked upon his coolness with great misgivings.

"Surely," they thought, "if he has anyone concealed upon the premises he could not remain so indifferent as he appeared to be."

Had they not known old Matthew so well as they did, they would have been still more of this opinion.

But they were well aware that he was as cunning as a fox, and quite capable of acting in this manner on purpose to throw them off their guard.

The fact was, Matthew felt quite secure in the excellence of the hiding-place he had last devised.

He was perfectly certain that no one had the remotest idea of its existence except himself and those who were at that moment concealed.

Every now and then a lumbering sound would be heard above, followed by one below.

On such occasions Matthew would just glance up and down, but no more.

"You seem to take it d—d easy!" said the chief officer at length, for he was getting enraged.

So long a time had elapsed since his men begun to search, that he began to be terribly afraid that the chances of their finding anybody now were small indeed. No one's disappointment could be greater than his.

He had observed the friendly jailer going backwards and forwards, as he said, and had not unreasonably jumped to the conclusion that the reason was some of Dick Turpin's comrades were concealed at the White Horse.

Under this impression, he had succeeded in persuading his superiors to allow him to have the use of about twenty men to make a thorough search.

His request was granted with great reluctance, for the authorities were most anxious to keep the prisoner they had already secured, and to that end nearly the whole available force was occupied in watching Newgate; and the Governor had by no means exaggerated when he described how impossible it was for any living thing to leave the prison unseen.

At length the trampling of many feet could be heard upon the staircase.

Matthew looked up, and so did the officers.

Directly afterwards a knock was given at the door of the parlour, and several more police officers entered.

"Well, Jenkins," cried the chief, gruffly, "what is it—what's the result?"

"Beg pardon, sir," said Jenkins, touching his hat respectfully, "but I give you my word that we have searched every square inch upstairs, and can't find no traces of nobody."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. There is not a corner in which a cat could have crept which we have not rigidly examined."

"Have you left anyone up?"

"No, sir—I began at the top and cleared the way before me."

Before the officer had time to make any further remark, those who had been searching in the cellars also appeared, and they brought with them the same tale.

Then the chief, looking towards old Matthew, said:

"You hear?"

"I do hear perfectly well. It's just what I expected. You wouldn't believe that I had no one concealed. I hope you are satisfied at last."

"Well, I don't know, Mr. Gale—I don't know! Could I have a word or two with you in private?"

"Oh, certainly, if you wish!"

"Well, then, I hope you will be attentive."

Then, turning to his men, he bade them depart, saying he would rejoin them presently.

Old Matthew wondered what was coming next.

The officer took a chair, and brought it close to the fire, and seated himself.

Little did he think that those of whom he was in search were at that very instant at little more than arm's-length from him.

"Matthew," he said, "I hope you will have a little serious talk with me—it is on a serious subject."

"Well, I don't mind," said Matthew. "Speak up!"

"I will. Now, I hope, in the first place, you won't feel flattered when I say that I believe you to be a very clever fellow—more clever than people generally are inclined to admit."

Matthew made a deprecating gesture.

"Oh, it's true—it's true," said the officer, "but the unfortunate thing is that you should have allowed your cleverness to run in the wrong direction. If you had sided with us instead of the 'family' it would have been a much better thing for you, and even now it is not too late, which brings me to what I was going to talk about."

Old Matthew remained silent.

The officer cleared his throat, and went on:

"In spite of my close search," he said, "I am not satisfied that the men I want are not hidden in this house—they are in some secure, out-of-the-way place. Now, assuming such to be the case, I will tell you what I propose, and which I have the best of authority for proposing."

"Proceed," said old Matthew, "I am paying every attention."

"No doubt you are. Well, then, my proposition is that you deliver those highwaymen over to us. You need not appear to do so—the fact of your complicity need never be known. A wink or a sign will be enough to let us know where to search. Then, if we capture them, well and good—they cannot blame you. Stop—stop," he added, hurriedly, perceiving that old Matthew was trying to interrupt him—"hear me out to the end! In return for this, supposing you are willing, I am empowered to offer you one half of the total reward—that is to say, seven hundred pounds, and not only that, a perfect immunity from all that you have done in the past, and with the probability of doing the same bit of business over again."

"And so you advise me to betray them?" said Matthew.

"Yes, certainly! And I daresay it strikes you as a singular thing that we officers should all be agreed to give you one half the reward, when in reality you will have so small a share in earning it?"

"Well, I am rather surprised, I confess."

"Perhaps you feel doubtful, but if you do you are wrong. Our reason is that we wish above all things to secure those offenders, and we don't think we can do it without your aid—that's the reason, for our continual failures have got us into such sad disgrace that nothing but this capture can put us right. I wish with all my heart that Dick Turpin was at liberty, so that we could have the chance of capturing him. I wonder what business a lot of gentlemen had to interfere, and so take the credit out of our hands?"

"Seven hundred and fifty pounds?" repeated Matthew musingly. "That's a large sum."

"Yes, a very large sum," said the officer, with glittering eyes, and speaking with some excitement—"such a sum as you don't often handle, I'll warrant. It would be more than the amount of a year's profits, if you did ever so good a trade, and be very much more than you could hope to get from the highwaymen for defending them, besides the risk you run of your own liberty."

"It's worth thinking over," said Matthew—"it's worth thinking over."

"Do you indeed think so?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, then, so do I, and if you are wise you will think over it repeatedly. Perhaps you will be able to come to a decision at once?"

"Well, perhaps I should," was the answer, "only for one little difficulty that stands in the way."

"And what may that be?"

"Why, you ought to know perfectly well that the men you want are not here at the present moment, for if they were they could not escape the vigilant search of your men."

Upon receiving this reply, the officer looked at old Matthew keenly, as if doubtful as to his veracity.

"It is so," added our old friend, "and I don't mind saying that what you have just told me has made an impression. I didn't think of it before in that light, and I promise you to turn the matter over in my mind."

"Do so, and I am certain that reflection will bring you to the right decision. And now let us have a glass of something upon the good faith of what you say."

"I don't mind if I do."

Old Matthew rose from his seat and went into the bar, with the view of supplying his customer's wants.

When his back was turned, there was a peculiar smile upon his face—one which the officer probably would not have cared about seeing.

Having obtained what was requisite, Matthew stopped silently to the door of the parlour, and, just peeping in, saw that the officer had taken advantage of his absence to make a rigid search around.

Matthew darted into the room suddenly.

The officer, thus caught, looked rather confused.

"Ah!" said old Matthew—"doubtful still, I perceive. Well, one would think that, after having received so many proofs, you officers would be content to take my word."

"Oh, pooh! don't mention it," said the officer. "I could not resist the temptation of looking round me, and that's a fact."

"Well, don't let me interrupt you, then," said Matthew "Make no stranger of me. Search as long and as much as you are willing."

The confident, easy tone in which these words were spoken, and the coolness Matthew had displayed all along, brought the officer at last to the conviction that in one respect he had been mistaken.

If the highwaymen had been there, they were not at the inn now; but that a communication had been made with Dick in Newgate he was absolutely certain.

With cunning calculation, he made sure that more good was to be done by pretending to keep on a friendly footing with Matthew than by coming to an open rupture with him; and, indeed, the officer felt he had good cause to be satisfied with the impression he believed he had already made upon Matthew, for the temptation of handling seven hundred and fifty pounds was a very great one indeed.

It was not long after that the officer rose to take his departure.

Matthew rose also, determined to see him safely out of his house.

The officer, if he had any intentions of attempting to remain, abandoned them, for he walked out into Drury Lane and called his men around him.

Then, bidding farewell to Matthew, he marched off with them, our old friend standing on the steps of his house and watching them until the intervening houses hid them from his view.

Then, rubbing his hands briskly together, and with a smile of satisfaction on his lips, he turned round and hastened to the bar.

As he passed the girl who served the customers he said, in a hurried whisper:

"Are you quite sure all the officers have left the house?"

"I am not quite sure," was the response. "My belief is that one or more are in hiding somewhere."

"Well, well," said Matthew, "all you can do is to keep your eyes wide open. I will go back into the parlour, and if you see anything in the least degree suspicious, give the signal instantly. I shall be on the look-out. Don't be afraid of making a mistake. Better have a thousand false alarms than give the signal of danger too late."

CHAPTER DCCCLXXVI.

OLD MATTHEW RELEASES THE HIGHWAYMEN FROM THEIR PLACE OF CONCEALMENT, AND SHOWS THEM A NEW MODE OF LEAVING THE PREMISES.

KNOWING that he could place the fullest trust in his dependant, old Matthew turned at once into the parlour, closing the door carefully, and, for greater security, slipping a small bolt into its socket.

Before opening the secret hiding-place to conceal the highwaymen therein, he had taken care, by a rapid glance at the only window in the room, to ascertain that the shutters were close shut, so that there could be no overlooking him from that quarter.

He placed his hand upon the mantelpiece, and looked steadfastly at the little clock.

Finding the signal remained unchanged, he rapidly pulled the fireplace out, and liberated our friends, who were not a little rejoiced to make their escape.

"Are they gone, Matthew?" asked Tom, eagerly.

"I believe so. At any rate, all we have to do is to watch the dial."

"Yes, I know; but if you will tell me the best way to do it, I will leave the place at once. The night is wearing on, and there is no time to be lost."

"True," said Matthew; "and yet I should recommend you to wait for a few moments, in case any of the officers should yet be lurking about."

"We will stay, Matthew, if you think it best, of course."

"Well, do so, and tell me what you think of your hiding-place."

"Oh, excellent, so far as security goes; but decidedly unpleasant if you have to remain in it."

"And especially with such a roaring fire as you have now," said Claude. "It was decidedly uncomfortable."

"And hot as an oven," said Sixteen-String Jack, wiping the perspiration from his face.

"You must not mind such little drawbacks as those," said Matthew. "Is it not an excellent idea?"

"Most excellent; and I should think would have occurred to no other person than yourself."

"Oh, I don't know," said Matthew, modestly. "I was looking at the chimneypiece one day, and the notion came into my head: so I set to work, and accomplished it all with my own hands."

"Did you, indeed?"

"I did; and worked so well, that, in spite of the perpetual interruptions to which the officers subject me, I succeeded in completing it without the knowledge being shared in by anyone save myself."

"Well, it has done us a good turn," cried Tom, "there's no doubt about that."

"None; and it has amply repaid me for the trouble of constructing it. But," he added, "did you not overhear the conversation I had with the officer?"

"We did," said Tom, looking at him, searchingly; "every word of it."

"I thought you would," he answered, quietly. "You guessed my object in speaking as I did?"

"Well, scarcely."

"You did not think that I seriously intended to betray you?"

"No, no; I would never think that, Matthew, for if you played us false, we could never place dependence on any human being again."

"That's all right, then. It would have grieved me very much had you doubted me."

"But your object, Matthew, what was it?"

"Why, I thought if I pretended to fall in with their views that I should get on better than if I uttered a positive refusal. The officers, no doubt, will now hang off and on for a good while, expecting that, at the right moment, I shall deliver you into their hands. But there's no fear," he added; "I am only fooling them, as I have done many a time before."

"It was good policy to act in this manner," said Tom. "But now do you not think sufficient time has elapsed? I am growing uneasy, and anxious to leave."

"Yes, I think you may venture to go. But is there anything I can do for you during your absence?"

"Nothing that I know of," said Tom. "If I could only form some reasonable idea as to the contents of this letter, we should then be able to make a better arrangement. As it is, we must trust to chance, and leave things just as they are."

"Very well. But if there's any chance of my rendering you a service, don't fail to let me know."

"Rest assured of that. What time is it now?"

"Close upon half-past eleven."

"Is it indeed so late? Then it is really time we left, otherwise the Governor may not take it into his head to look at this letter till the morning."

"Come, then," said Matthew, taking down a key that was hanging on a nail, "you may as well go this way as any other."

While speaking, he advanced to the window, which he opened, and threw back the shutters.

"Now," he said "follow me through here and I will show you out by a fresh route."

With an agility and ease that, considering his size, were truly remarkable, old Matthew stepped on to a chair and passed through the window into the yard at the back.

The highwaymen followed immediately, and by his directions the window was closed again and the shutters put to.

"Now," he said, "there's a stable here, the existence of which is well enough known to the police, but the loft over it looks into a small yard at the back of a house in Blackmore Street. When you enter the stable, get up into the loft as quickly as possible, pass through the window I speak of, and drop into the yard just mentioned. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"Then take this key, and with it unlock the door at the back of this house. Hang the key on a nail driven into the doorpost, and, having crossed the threshold, shut the door behind you, but don't fasten it on the inside."

"But what house is this, Matthew?"

"An empty one," he replied; "one that, by a lucky accident, was placed in my hands to let as soon as I could find a suitable tenant; but," he added with a chuckle, "it will be a long time before I find one, I'll warrant."

"You're sure the house is empty?" said Tom, laughing.

"Yes, quite sure. Walk boldly along the passage; there's nothing in the way, and you will come to the front door. It is fastened only by a latch, but that latch cannot be raised from the outside. Open the door cautiously, watch your opportunity, and emerge. Pull the door shut, and the latch will fasten itself. Then the rest depends upon yourselves."

"Thanks, Matthew—thanks," said Tom King; "you are indeed a friend well worth the having. By taking this route, surely we shall baffle the officers."

"I hope so," said Matthew, "yet it is impossible for me to say where they may be hiding at the present moment. Your chief care will be to keep yourselves as much out of sight as possible."

With this caution they parted, the highwaymen wringing Matthew's hand.

Successfully following his instructions, they soon entered the stable, mounted into the loft, and paused a moment at the little window, or, rather, opening in the wall, that he had described.

About eight feet below them was a small, dirty yard, bounded on each side by high brick walls, over which it would be difficult indeed for anyone to look.

A most profound silence reigned in this locality, and the tall buildings all around caused a deep darkness to prevail.

"It will be all right," said Tom, in a whisper. "I will go first; you can follow."

He rapidly lowered himself feet foremost from the window while he spoke, and, having hung for a second at the full length of his arms, he let go and alighted in safety in the yard beneath.

Then placing himself close against the wall so as to keep out of sight, he waited for his comrades to follow his example.

As may be guessed, they were not very long in doing so.

By this time their eyes had become accustomed to the obscurity, and they were able to see what they had not perceived before, namely, the back door of which Matthew had spoken.

Towards this they crept silently, for they were fearful that a footfall might betray them.

They were able all the time to keep close under the wall.

The door was opened by the key, and the key hung upon the door-post, according to the directions they had received.

That peculiar, damp, earthy smell that always pervades a shut-up, uninhabited house assailed their nostrils as soon as they crossed the threshold, and when the door was closed behind them the darkness was intense indeed—so intense that they would have had great diffidence in proceeding without a light, had not old Matthew so particularly assured them that there was nothing to fear in the shape of an obstruction.

A few paces brought them to the front door, for the house was a small one.

Tom listened while he placed his hand upon the latch.

All was still, and so he slowly opened the door to the extent of about a quarter of an inch.

It was well that he was thus cautious, for a heavy footstep on the pavement without reached their ears.

There was a flash of light, and a hoarse, wheezy voice, exclaimed:

"Half-past eleven, and a cloudy night."

It was a watchman going by, and the light from his lantern quickly faded away.

"That's lucky," said Tom; "it would have been awkward had he passed while we were just emerging. I think we can venture now; at any rate, I will go first."

Opening the door no wider than was actually necessary to allow his body to slip through, Tom passed out.

He was pleased to find that the door was a projecting one, so that he did not step at once into the street, but remained concealed by its deep shadow.

In a whisper he informed his friends of this, and they slipped quickly out.

"It's all right, I believe," said Tom. "I don't think there's a single police officer lurking near."

"Quick, then," said Claude—"the sooner we are out of here the better. Should we be seen it would look suspicious at once."

Tom assented, and at the same time obeyed.

Yet, as was proved, this was an unlucky movement.

The watchman's beat extended only to the end of Blackmore Street, and having reached it, he was returning with all speed to his comfortable watch-box at the corner of Drury Lane, in which he meant to ensconce himself for the next half hour, leaving the street to look after itself.

Sauntering thus along, he was surprised by seeing the three highwaymen make their appearance so suddenly, as though they had sprung from the earth.

He knew there was no turning near, and was perfectly certain they had not walked down from the top of the street.

Advancing briskly to them, he held up his lantern, as he cried:

"Hullo—hullo! Where have you come from? Out of that empty house, I believe!"

"Be off!" said Claude. "What does it matter to you?"

"But I'll know who you are," said the watchman. "It's suspicious! Mind, or I'll spring my rattle! Who are you, I say?"

"Well, if you must know," answered Sixteen-String Jack, in a very hoarse, sepulchral voice, "it's the devil taking an evening walk with two of his friends. Good night to you!"

So saying, he struck the watchman's lantern from his shaking grasp, and passed quickly on, followed by his companions, and leaving the guardian of the night in a state of mingled bewilderment and dismay.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXVII.

THE HIGHWAYMEN PROCEED TO NEWGATE TO DELIVER THE KING'S MISSIVE.

TURNING the corner of the street, the three highwaymen were quickly out of sight.

They drew down their hats over their brows, so as to conceal their features as much as possible, and then, in as steady, unconcerned a manner as they could assume, made their way towards Newgate.

It was a bold and adventurous act—one, in fact, scarcely excusable, and yet, after all, very likely to be successful from its sheer audacity.

Knowing that the prison was surrounded, and so closely watched by the police officers, one would have thought that it would be the very last place they would venture to approach.

The streets of London were well known to Tom and his comrades, and after a very little reflection they were able to decide within themselves which was the best route by which their destination should be reached.

They were anxious to avoid the principal thoroughfares, and yet by no means wishful to enter such as were rarely used, and in which their appearance could not fail to attract attention.

Yet as they walked onward, for the most part in silence, they fancied more than once that persons who passed them looked back curiously.

But, after all, this might have been more their own fancy than aught else.

Strange as it may seem, it is nevertheless true, that they reached the Old Bailey in perfect safety, and without having been interrupted or questioned by anyone, and without having come into collision with any police officers.

At the corner of a narrow lane from which they emerged, and which was situated nearly opposite that part of the prison forming the residence of the Governor, they paused, and well they might, for an unexpected sight met their view.

Yet their surprise abated instantly, and they felt they might have known it had they given such a thing a moment's consideration.

The Old Bailey at this dark and lonely hour of the night presented a scene of unusual animation.

It was thronged by many persons, whose numbers increased every moment, for fresh spectators kept arriving from every street.

A noisy, dissolute crowd, it was composed of the worst specimens of humanity that the metropolis could then boast.

Some were wandering restlessly to and fro, others, with pipes in their mouths, were lounging in groups against the walls of the houses, and in every other place against which they could plant their backs.

Others, with wild cries and shouts, were amusing themselves by pushing violently through the throng, and whenever any accident occurred it was greeted by a roar of laughter.

Vendors of nearly all kinds of eatables and drinkables were there in considerable numbers, working their way backwards and forwards, and filling the air with their discordant shouts.

Some had torches, and others a brazier of blazing coals, the light from which shed a ruddy tint on all around.

Never before had the highwaymen beheld so strange a spectacle as this, and it was therefore almost unconsciously that they stood for some moments gazing at it.

Claude was the first to speak.

"Surely," he said, "this ought to be favourable to us. Can we not turn it to our advantage? Among all this confusion and noise, it is scarcely likely that



[OLD MATTHEW INTRODUCES A FRESH ALLY.]

we shall be noticed. Believe me, I think all things are favourable to the accomplishment of your design."

Tom nodded as he said:

"I think so too; the only thing is, that we should be careful in forcing our way through the throng."

"Yes," said Sixteen-String Jack, "there lies our danger. Some unexpected person may recognise us."

"We must run that risk," said Tom; "and the best way will be to put on as much indifference as we are able. Come, follow me—we will delay no longer."

Tom began slowly to push through the throng, and as if he had no particular object in doing so—as if he had no precise point he wished to reach, but seemed to be wandering listlessly about, like the majority of those present.

It was well that he had the presence of mind to act thus, for any injudicious haste would at once have had the effect of calling down special attention upon them.

Short as was the distance, yet, owing to this cause, some time elapsed before the highwaymen got fairly in front of the Governor's house.

But for this they cared not, for up to the present all had gone well.

Now, however, came their greatest danger.

Looking right and left, they could perceive many police officers, who were bent with exemplary closeness upon the duty that had been set them.

The fact was that there was not one of them who did not believe in his heart that the night would not pass over without Dick Turpin making some effort to liberate himself.

In such a case, they were animated by the hope they would be instrumental in recapturing him—not because of any reward, but merely for the credit of the whole body of police officers.

In ascending the steps of the Governor's hor

standing for a moment at the door, Tom felt there would be the utmost peril;—he could not fail to be noticed then by many.

For one thing, he was not aware that the officers had made up their minds to pay no attention whatever to anything that took place in the Old Bailey; nor, indeed, were they likely to trouble themselves about anyone who sought admission to the prison. Their chief solicitude would be to prevent any person from leaving it.

Slowly moving forward, as if he had no such design, Tom King suddenly turned round and ascended the flight of stone steps, his eyes fixed upon the brass handle of the bell, and he pulled it vigorously.

In Newgate, all doors were promptly answered, and scarcely had the tinkling of the bell died away than this front door was thrown open, and a man appeared upon the threshold.

"The Governor," said Tom, disguising his voice—"I want to see him immediately, upon important business."

"Then you can't."

"But I must," said Tom, placing his foot in such a position against the doorpost that the man could not close the door. "I must see him on most urgent business, and beware how you refuse me!"

"But I tell you you can't, and there's an end of it! Wait till to-morrow!"

"Never!" said Tom. "I don't move from here until the Governor comes!"

"What's all this?" said another voice at this moment—"what's all this, I say—what is it?"

The man at the door fell back immediately into an attitude of respect.

"I beg pardon, sir," he said—"humbly beg pardon!"

"But what is it—what is it?" said the same voice, in snappish, querulous tones.

"You are the Governor, I presume?" said Tom, making a profound bow while he spoke.

"Yes, yes!" replied Mr. Bradbury. "But, confound it all, why can't you say what it is!"

"Well, then," said Tom, "I have to deliver this bag, which, I believe, comes from the King?"

"The what?"

"The King. A short time ago one of the King's messengers met with an accident while riding here at full speed. I happened to be near, and asked if I could be of any assistance. He gave me this bag, and entreated me to deliver it to the Governor of Newgate with all speed, as it contained a missive from the King of a most important character."

The Governor looked rather amazed, and seemed to shrink from taking hold of the leather bag.

"That is all," said Tom; "and, not liking to refuse his request, especially as my own business was bringing me to London, I promised to deliver it according to his request; and here it is, and that's all I know about it."

The Governor took the bag.

"Will you walk in, sir," he said, "while I look at the contents?"

Tom felt strongly inclined to say yes, but, fearful of the consequences of such a mad proceeding, he restrained himself, and answered, in an indifferent tone:

"No thank you, Mr. Governor, I am much obliged to you for your hospitality all the same, but the delivery of this letter-bag has already brought me considerably out of my way, and as my time is short I cannot afford to spare any more from my own concerns."

"Good evening then," said the Governor, retiring.

"Good evening," said Tom, hastily descending the steps.

The door was closed, and the highway n mingled with the throng.

Luckily this little incident as scarcely noticed, for the popular attention was just then diverted by a pitched battle between two men who had rapidly changed from words to blows.

The police officers who were nearest looked on, but saw nothing peculiar or suspicious, and, as before, continued to give their best attention to the walls of the prison.

The idea that Tom King should be there delivering anything to the Governor was so monstrous a one that it was not likely to occur to the minds of any of them.

But, having been successful so far, the highwaymen now became a prey to the greatest anxiety.

Drifting with the throng of persons, they hastily exchanged a few cautious observations.

"What will be the result?" said Tom. "How is this to end? How fearfully short the time is now until the hour appointed for execution."

"Don't think of that, but pin your faith upon the King's honour; I don't think you will have occasion to repent it."

"I trust not."

"Above all things," said Sixteen-String Jack, "don't let us get far away. If, as I take it, that letter contains an order to the Governor to release Dick Turpin immediately he will do so, and when he appears he will doubtless require all the aid we shall be able to afford him."

"Yes, there is no doubt of that," said Tom: "let us turn back again and be on the look-out."

Accordingly they did so, and as minute after minute slowly passed away the suspense that they suffered increased to an alarming degree.

So absorbed were they by one thought that they became altogether unmindful of themselves, and forgot all about looking to see whether they were noticed.

At each instant, too, they kept creeping nearer and nearer to the door of the Governor's house, for somehow, without knowing exactly why, they fancied this would be the route by which Dick Turpin would leave the prison.

But from the length of time that elapsed, their hopes sank down to zero, and, without daring to confess it, each felt in his own mind a disagreeable conviction that the letter they had been at such pains to deliver did not concern Dick Turpin at all.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXVIII.

TOM KING AND HIS COMRADES WATCH IN VAIN FOR THE APPEARANCE OF DICK TURPIN.

It was at this moment that the huge clock of St. Paul's Cathedral proclaimed the hour of one.

The highwaymen started and looked uneasily at each other as they heard the sound, because then they knew that a full hour had elapsed since the delivery of the letter.

What, then, were they to think of so long an interval?

What other conclusion could they come to than that which had already fixed itself in their minds?

So far as they could tell, the gloomy prison bore its accustomed look, and there were no tokens that anything of an unusual character was taking place inside.

The people in the street grew, if anything, more turbulent, and the police officers more alert and watchful.

Tom drew a little on one side, as if to address his comrades, but at that moment Claude Duval said, in a hasty, impressive whisper:

"Tom—Tom, I am afraid we are seen and recognised!"

"How so?—how—how?" cried his two companions.

"Why, there's a police officer yonder—don't look at him—I have seen him staring at us for some time past, and now he has whispered to one of his comrades. They are suspicious."

"What is to be done?"

"We have no help that I can see but to mingle in the throng, which is fortunately growing more dense every moment."

"But we shall leave the door."

"That cannot be helped. Come—come, as you value your own safety and mine!"

With these words, Claude turned round and pushed his way among the mass of people.

Tom King and Jack kept him in view, and followed, for they were by no means desirous that a separation should ensue.

It was a fortunate thought of Claude's, and, under the circumstances, no better means could have been found of escaping the observation of the officers.

In less than a moment they were completely swallowed up and lost in the seething mass of human beings.

The highwaymen sought for the thickest of the crowd, and as they made no movements calculated to attract the attention of those around, and as there was nothing remarkable in their appearance, they escaped all comment and notice.

When near to the opposite side of the street, and being, as they believed, out of sight of all of the officers, they ventured to make a stand.

Looking across the dark thoroughfare, they could just perceive the Governor's front door, looking like a black patch, a little darker than the walls of the prison itself.

Yet while standing there, they felt assured that the door could not be opened unseen by them.

Moreover, there was an additional advantage accruing from this change of position, for they were now able to command a view of about the only other exit from Newgate—namely, the door at which the prisoners were admitted.

Over the upper portion of this door a light could, as usual, be seen burning, and that was about the only sign there was that the place was inhabited at all.

But another half hour elapsed, and no alteration in the aspect of affairs took place.

And now it may be said that the alarm and anxiety of the highwaymen had reached the highest point.

"The King has proved faithless," murmured Tom—"we can place no other construction upon it. Had it been an order for Dick's liberation he would have been free long ere now."

"That's my opinion," said Claude.

"And mine also," assented Jack.

"Then, such being the case, how are we to act? We must not remain here with our hands tied behind us, as it were, but take active measures, for on no account must the captain perish."

"On no account," said Claude. "Yet, how very weak and powerless we are against authority."

"True," said Tom, sadly. "If the worst comes to the worst we must make an effort; but, alas! I fear it will be a vain one."

"It must not be made with that spirit," said Sixteen-String Jack, "or failure is certain. Shall we remain waiting here any longer, or shall we endeavour to enlist the sympathies of the family in our behalf?"

"Let us think—let us think."

Again there was a silence, and although the highwaymen had expressed themselves so positively, yet they could not help feeling a faint hope that, after all, Dick would be released.

It was a hope to be clung to to the last, and in this state of hopeful indecision another half hour wore away.

It was now two o'clock, and the ringing sounds aroused them all from their abstraction.

"We must be quick," said Claude. "If we wait much longer I question whether we shall have a chance of meeting any of the family. They have twice done us good service, recollect," he added, "and perhaps they may again."

"Let it be so, then," said Tom; "and as I come to think upon it my opinion is, that the best course to pursue will be for one to go on this errand to the family, another to remain here, and the third to proceed to old Matthew's in Drury Lane, in whom I feel the utmost confidence."

"Good--that's a sensible suggestion! Now, without further delay, let us decide who is to remain and who is to go."

"Then," said Tom, "if you, Claude, will consent to visit the family I should like to remain here, watching for Dick, and Jack can go to Drury Lane."

"Agreed!" they both cried; and Claude added:

"It will be better for me to go to the ken, because I have already been on that business before."

With these words they separated.

Tom King, choosing the darkest place that he could find—a spot where one house, projecting beyond another, made a shadowy corner—took up his post, determined to watch with unremitting care.

But all his watching went for nought.

The crowd gradually increased in bulk, the clocks continued to chime forth at every quarter of an hour, but still no other alteration in the aspect of affairs took place.

No door was opened—no person emerged from Newgate.

Oh, how terribly uneasy Tom King felt, and, at the same time, how powerless!

Really it seemed to him as though his comrade was on this occasion destined to take his last look at life.

No words, however powerful and well chosen, could ever convey an adequate idea of the state of his feelings on that dreadful night.

Three—four—five—six o'clock sounded.

Still there was no change, nor did his companions return.

Then seven o'clock struck, and by that time a dusky kind of light filled all the street, and made the black prison opposite look gloomier and more soul-chilling than ever.

Then, glancing around, Tom perceived Sixteen-String Jack at no great distance, and, by his manner, he was evidently searching for him.

Moving from his place of concealment, Tom, watching an opportunity when Jack's gaze was turned in that direction, made a rapid sign.

A recognition instantly followed, and he fell back.

A moment afterwards, and he was rejoined by Jack.

"You are securely hid here," he said. "For the last two hours I have been vainly searching for you, and forcing my way through the mob. Such a crowd surely was never known in London before. Should you wish to leave it now you would find it would take you a full hour to do so."

"Indeed!" said Tom, wearily and sadly. "And what says Matthew?"

"He could say nothing—nothing, at least, of any value. But he is almost distracted by the imminence of the danger, yet I can tell by his manner that he is ready to abandon all hope."

"And so am I," said Tom. "Where is Claude—have you seen him?"

"No."

"Nor I."

"Let us hope, then, that he will bring us good intelligence."

"Yes, that's our only chance. But we stand too much in the shade for him to see us, should he work his way through the crowd to this point."

"Shall we shift to a more open part?"

"No, no—not now. It is growing lighter, and we should be careful how we show ourselves."

"True, Tom—true. But I am so excited, and Dick's danger appears so very great that all others sink at once into insignificance when compared with it."

"Yes, you are right. But look around you, can you see nothing of him?"

"Nothing whatever."

The hour of eight now pealed forth, and a man standing near the highwaymen, exclaimed to those near him:

"They're at breakfast now, I suppose! Well, I don't care how soon it's over."

"It isn't long to wait now," said another voice. "Ah, look! here come the sheriffs!"

A great commotion at this moment took place, and from the lower end of the Old Bailey there came loud shouts and cries.

Neither Tom nor Jack could resist the temptation of looking in this direction, and then they caught sight of the horses, the gorgeous carriages, and the servants in their gaudy liveries.

They paused for a moment near the Sessions House, then a gate was thrown open, and the carriages rolled into the court-yard.

"One more hour," said the man who had before spoken, "and we shall begin to see something; it generally takes about an hour."

Oh! how full of anxiety and alarm were Dick's two comrades then!

They felt as though impelled to dash themselves against the hard stone walls of Newgate.

With eyes bloodshot with gazing steadfastly so long, they continued to look upon the building before them.

It must not be lost sight of that in these days executions took place generally about noon, and not at an early hour, as is the custom at the present day.

At nine, or shortly afterwards, if the crowd was very dense, the procession usually started, and made its way, at

a slow, walking pace, towards Tyburn, which was rarely reached before the hour of twelve.

As nine o'clock approached, then, the highwaymen and all the crowd became more impatient and excited than ever.

By this time, too, the dimensions of the crowd were mething terrible to think of.

As far as ever the eye could reach, in all directions, people were jammed together as closely as was possible, and the windows and roofs of the contiguous houses presented nothing but one mass of faces.

Most of the spectators, too, grew more violent and demonstrative.

But the huge uproar ceased as if by magic.

The hour of nine was struck by St. Sepulchre's clock, and then, with breathless eagerness, all eyes were turned towards the huge folding doors, through which the procession would issue.

A few moments only must elapse, and then those gates would be thrown back.

Already in imagination they could see everything in readiness for the start.

"The moment has come," said Tom, turning his haggard face towards his companions. "Can nothing be done?"

An impatient murmur rose from the crowd, and increased in sound as they found minute after minute elapsed without the opening of the doors.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXIX.

IN WHICH THE HIGHWAYMEN AND OLD MATTHEW GIVE THEMSELVES UP TO DESPAIR.

CLAUDE DUVAL, on separating himself from his companions, made his way at once to the Jew's Harp, in Hanging Sword Alley, where, as will be remembered, he met the "Family" on a former occasion, when he enlisted their services on Dick's behalf.

But upon reaching this locality, he found, to his great disappointment, that immense alterations had taken place, and of the well-known thieves' ken not a trace remained.

The fact was, it had been broken up by the police officers some months before.

But of this fact Claude Duval was quite ignorant.

This disappointment was in truth most distressing, for the time was growing so fast towards morning.

He was beginning even to have some doubts whether this night was a meeting night at all; but remembering that the Three Tuns in Seven Dials was a well-known resort, he determined to hurry there, in the hope of success.

But here again he met with disappointment.

Making himself known to the landlord of the place, he was at once warmly received; but in answer to his inquiries, he was informed that no meeting of the family had taken place that night, or would, and that most of the members were scattered over the country.

Knowing that he could place the fullest trust in this man, Claude sought his advice.

But the landlord only shook his head by way of reply; but being pressed still further, he answered, at length:

"Well, then, if you must know, it is my deliberate opinion that the captain has reached the end of his race. I have nothing to say against him myself, except that he carried things off with rather too high a hand to please me; but that's neither here nor there."

"And can you offer no suggestion?"

"None whatever. The Government has made up its mind to hang him, and hang him they will. Mark my words—they will come true."

"I hope not," said Claude, and he once more sought the open air.

He paused irresolutely now, uncertain which should be his next step to take.

But after much reflection, he could think of nothing better than making his way to old Matthew's in Drury Lane.

He regretted now that he had not repaired there in the first instance.

The distance was not great, and he arrived just after Sixteen-String Jack had taken his departure.

He found old Matthew in a dreadful state of agitation.

Sixteen-String Jack had told him of his errand.

"No luck, then, Claude?" he said, as soon as he caught sight of his face. "The expression of it is enough—you need not tell me."

"But, Matthew," exclaimed Claude, with great earnestness and warmth, "you are a man of great resources, as I know full well. Is it possible that in this emergency you can find yourself quite aground?"

"It is," said Matthew, with a groan. "I don't believe any living human being could devise anything to save him from his fate. You see, those in power have made up their minds to his execution, and how is it possible for us to prevent it?"

"How I regret that we troubled ourselves about the locket at all—that has been nothing but lost time."

"And it has tied your hands behind your backs as well," said Matthew, "for you kept waiting and waiting for that when you ought to have been actively engaged."

"Yes—yes, I can see my mistake now plain enough; but yet it is terrible to think of Dick being led forth to execution and us being unable to aid him."

"It is indeed," said Matthew. "I have only just been told that a fresh detachment of troops has been sent down to Tyburn to reinforce those already there. From this," he added, "it would seem as though there was a suspicion a rescue would be attempted, and against well-armed, disciplined soldiers what chance would the populace have?"

Claude sank down in a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

Old Matthew tried to say something about never despair, but failing in the attempt, sat down also, in an attitude very similar to Claude's.

Thus they remained for some time, until the highwayman, suddenly starting to his feet, exclaimed:

"But this will never do, Matthew—never—never!"

"We may as well remain thus," said the landlord, in a broken voice—"we can do no good."

"I don't know that," said Claude. "If we cannot save him we can at least perish in making the attempt, desperate and fool-hardy as it may seem. I, for one, will endeavour to set him free, even if at the last moment."

"And so will I," said Matthew—"so will I. Just wait a moment—I will put on my coat, and we will be off to Newgate together."

Matthew quickly donned his coat and hat, and then, leaving the house to take care of itself, accompanied Claude towards the Old Bailey.

Long before they got anywhere near this thoroughfare, they found themselves surrounded by a vast crowd through which they with great difficulty forced themselves, for every step had to be vigorously contested.

The crowd was even denser and greater than Sixteen-String Jack had represented it to be.

All were anxious to get in such a position as would enable them to command a view of the procession when it started, and those who had got anywhere near resolutely refused to allow another to pass them.

It was only, then, by dint of the greatest exertions that Claude and Matthew managed to progress at all.

It was shortly after the hour of nine—about the time when the silence that had fallen on the multitude was succeeded by a hoarse murmur—that old Matthew and Claude found themselves at length on the spot they wished to reach.

Glancing keenly around, Matthew made out the form of Sixteen-String Jack, and at once pushed towards him.

In another moment they were all standing in a group.

Tom and Jack had ventured to indulge in the hope that these new-comers had brought with them welcome intelligence.

But they were quickly disappointed.

"The time has come," murmured Tom King. "Surely in another moment at the most the gates will be thrown open. We shall catch one sight of him then I hope."

"The delay is extraordinary," said Sixteen-String Jack. "And look how excited and tumultuous the people are becoming! Shall we look upon this delay as a good or a bad omen?"

No one ventured to reply, and with an ever-increasing interest they turned their eyes towards the gate.

The air was now rent by violent cries proceeding from lusty throats.

Their patience was quite tired out at having waited for so long.

All their vociferations, however, were not productive of any effect.

While they shouted and bawled, time went relentlessly on.

The finger of St. Sepulchre's Church clock, at which ever and anon rapid glances were cast, moved slowly and steadily onward until the half hour was once more reached.

No one could be more perplexed at this strange circumstance than were the highwaymen and their friend the landlord.

Strive as they would, they could come to no plausible solution of it.

Ten o'clock came, and yet there were no more signs of the gates opening than there had been hours before.

The behaviour of the populace now partook very much of the nature of a riot.

Cries were raised that the gates should be battered down and the prisoner brought forth.

All at once there was another sudden change in the behaviour of the mob.

A whisper was passed from mouth to mouth almost with the speed of electricity, and spreading like some huge wave, reached the uttermost verge of the crowd.

That whisper consisted of four words, and those four words were:

"*Dick Turpin has escaped.*"

The highwaymen started so violently upon receiving this intelligence, and showed so much surprise, that it is a wonder they escaped suspicion, and the fact can only be accounted for by the preoccupation of everyone.

"Escaped!" murmured Tom, between his lips, and looking as startled as though he had been told Newgate had been swallowed up by an earthquake—"escaped! How? Impossible!"

"So I fear," said Claude Duval. "How can such a thing be true?"

"Have you kept good watch, Tom?" asked old Matthew.

"The very best, and I will swear at any moment that since I delivered the letter last night no living person has left the prison."

"Well, well," said Matthew—"this is more than strange; but let me advise you to cast it from your minds, not to buoy yourselves up with hopes which are sure to be fallacious. It is some idle tale invented by some one to account for the delay. No, no—such news is too good to be true. Dick Turpin has not escaped."

But the remark was repeated again and again.

Another hour passed away, and the gates were not opened.

Then, indeed, it seemed as if there was some foundation for the report, for how would the execution take place at the appointed time?

Then such cries and groans of disappointment as arose from the vast mob had surely never been heard before.

They considered they were cheated, deceived, and were exasperated accordingly.

"Dare we believe it?" said Claude Duval, just after the clock struck. "Dare we place any faith in this assertion?"

"I don't know," said Matthew—"it seems very strange; and if I thought I could only force my way through the crowd I would endeavour to put the question to some of the officers or officials of the prison. At any rate, I will try," he added—"I can do no harm. Wait here, and I shall know where to find you."

The highwaymen made no opposition to his departure.

By gently insinuating himself in between the closely-packed people, old Matthew performed what seemed to be an impossibility, for he proved that there was room for yet one more among them.

But his dimensions were so great that people instinctively shrank back to allow him passage, hoping he would get further away, in order that they might be relieved from the extra pressure.

And in this manner—although it was a very tedious operation—Matthew actually succeeded in getting to the opposite side of the Old Bailey.

Upon arriving there he found a scene of great excitement and animation going forward.

The police officers had congregated into a huge group, and were conversing eagerly.

To most of them old Matthew was known, yet they were so absorbed in their conversation that they did not perceive him.

Venturing at last to touch one on the shoulder, Matthew said:

"What's this extraordinary tale I have just heard—is there any truth in it?"

The police officer eyed him suspiciously.

"I fancy you had a hand in it," he said. "It passes my comprehension."

"What?" asked Matthew, with a fast-beating heart.

"Why, how he could have escaped."

"Then he has escaped?"

"Oh, yes, certainly; I believe we can entertain no doubt upon that point, though how and by what means we cannot imagine."

"It seems to me incredible," said Matthew. "I can't believe it even now. I thought the prison was to be closely watched by the whole force of police officers."

"And so it has; we have formed a circle round the building, one man being almost within reach of the other. I am certain not one has been negligent in his duty; every part of the outside of Newgate has been watched, and how Dick Turpin has escaped I can't make out, for no person has left the prison. Yet I am told that when they opened his cell no trace of him could be seen."

CHAPTER DCCCLXXX.

DICK'S ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE CONTINUES TO BE A PROFOUND MYSTERY, AND OLD MATTHEW INTRODUCES A SINGULAR PERSONAGE.

THIS intelligence filled old Matthew with amazement, and, finding nothing more was to be gleaned, he turned round, and with infinite difficulty fought his way back to where he had left the highwaymen.

On the present occasion, however, his task was by no means so difficult as it had been, for the people were really beginning to believe that Dick Turpin had escaped, and accordingly were gradually separating.

Matthew's first words on rejoining the three friends were:

"Follow me—be quick; there's no good in remaining here any longer, and you had better retire before the crowd breaks up."

"But Dick," said Tom—"is it possible that he has escaped?"

"I believe it is true," said Matthew, with a smile, "and that's the same thing; but I am going to think about it."

They walked on rapidly through the streets.

Old Matthew led the way until, having got near to Drury Lane, Tom said:

"Had we not better go in here where we left our horses? Will it not be dangerous to go to your house?"

"No, I think not," was his answer. "If I can guard against your being seen, why, you know, I have a hiding-place that will baffle the closest search."

"I leave all to you," said Tom; "but be quick, for I am anxious to know the result of your cogitations."

Matthew walked boldly up White Horse Yard, and, finding no one was about to observe their movements, opened the little door in the wall.

"We're all right," he said; "but I should advise you to remain in the yard until I have seen that the coast is quite clear inside."

The highwaymen consented, standing so as to be out of sight of anyone who might look through the windows.

Matthew was absent only a moment, then he reappeared and beckoned them.

"All's right," he said, "there's not an officer in sight."

He conducted them straight to the parlour and made them acquainted with just what had passed between himself and the officers.

"Incomprehensible and increa[illegible] as it may appear," he concluded, "I suppose it is really true that Dick Turpin has escaped, though how he has managed to do so is positively marvellous. If he has gone, all will be well, and I should recommend you to stay here till nightfall; if he has not, we shall have quicker tidings of it here than elsewhere."

"But," said Tom, "can we not set it down as impossible—as some mistake? Closely watched as the prison has been, how can he have left it?"

Old Matthew put his finger by the side of his nose with a very wise expression.

Then glancing around and speaking in a suppressed tone, he said:

"I have an idea."

"An idea? but of what kind?"

"About this affair. I may be wrong, you know, but yet I have been putting two and two together."

"Go on, Matthew," said the others, feverish with impatience, for they knew how great were his powers in arriving at the solution of any difficulty.

"Well," he said, "I incline to the belief that the King acted in good faith after all, and that the letter you delivered was to the effect that Dick Turpin should be released. But didn't the King tell you," he added, turning to Tom, "that it was not in his power to grant a proper pardon because of the strong feeling his ministers had on the subject?"

"Yes, he certainly said that, or something to the same effect."

"Just so. Well, then, under the circumstances, what would be the most probable letter he would address to the Governor? If you observe, the messenger appeared to have been sent off with some secrecy; you might judge that by the time of night. Then the letter might command the Governor to let Dick out of Newgate somehow, secretly—stating that the Governor would be held free from the consequences of such an act."

Tom clapped his hands together.

"You have hit it, Matthew," he cried, enthusiastically—"you have hit it! Now you speak, all comes over me with the full force of conviction. That's it—we ought to have thought of it before."

Old Matthew shook his head.

"It's only an idea, understand," he said, "and it may be a very long way off the truth, yet to me there seems a very strong degree of probability about it."

"There seems something more than probability to me," said Tom.

"And to us also," added his two companions.

"Certainly," said Matthew, "it solves all our difficulties at once, and if I only knew for certain that Dick had escaped I should feel more confidence in it than ever."

"Well, we must try and ascertain that; but if Dick has escaped, surely he would make his way to Ealing."

"Yes, it may be that he is already there."

"Let us start off at once," cried Tom.

"No — no," replied Matthew; "restrain yourself; don't be blind to your own danger; it will be quite difficult enough for you to make your way here by dark, and as the day now is half gone I should recommend you to stay, besides, by nightfall, we shall have certain information."

With some difficulty the highwaymen allowed themselves to be persuaded by their old friend.

Matthew also entreated them to use their best endeavours to get a little repose.

He assured them that they would be in perfect safety, as he would watch over them personally, and give them timely warning of the approach of danger.

It was soon after this that he left them, and, by dint of making inquiries in various directions, received confirmation of the intelligence that had already been imparted to him.

The execution had not certainly taken place, and he felt tolerably sure that it would not be delayed except from some such cause as that named.

About dusk he again sought the parlour.

But looking in, he perceived that the three highwaymen were all sleeping soundly.

On making this discovery he closed the door softly.

"Let them stay," he murmured; "it is better thus; they will awake thoroughly refreshed, and equal to any emergency that may arise."

On that particular night old Matthew felt no very great apprehension of a visit from the police officers.

It was rarely indeed that they visited his premises two days running.

Some might be watching around, but yet, if such was the case, he had good hopes of getting the highwaymen out unseen.

Claude Duval was the first to awake.

He had fallen off to sleep unconsciously, and for a moment could scarcely make out where he was.

For one thing the darkness confused him, but in awaking he aroused his two comrades, and they, like himself, could scarcely believe that night had come.

Directly after this Matthew paid them another visit.

"You are awake now, I see," he said, with a smile.

"Yes, yes—but the news?"

"Good," was the answer. "The execution has not taken place to-day, and on every hand I receive nothing but confirmation of the news that Dick Turpin has been successful in making his escape, though how on earth he has managed it baffles everybody."

Simultaneously the three highwaymen drew long breaths of relief.

"It is at least a great comfort to know," said Tom King, "that there has been no execution at Tyburn to-day. I consider that points conclusively to the fact that Dick has escaped from Newgate; had he been safe in his prison the sentence of the law would most certainly have been carried out."

"I incline to that opinion too," said old Matthew; and it is my belief that if you will mount your horses and ride off to the Three Spiders, that you will find him there awaiting your arrival."

"Then let us go at once," said Claude, with great energy. "I am full of curiosity to know first whether this good news is really true, and if so, by what mysterious agency Dick got out of Newgate."

"That you will be sure to learn from his own lips," said Matthew, smiling; "and I suppose, as it is quite dark and altogether an uncomfortable night, I shall not be able to persuade you to stay with me any longer."

"No—no, Matthew," returned Tom, "not a moment longer, yet before we leave we must express to you how grateful we are for what you have done in our behalf."

"Pooh—pooh!"

"It's all very fine to say pooh, pooh, Matthew, but that doesn't alter the case in the least. Look at this last hiding-place of yours, for instance—it most assuredly saved us, and yet you could not have constructed it without great expense and trouble."

"And you think I mind either. No, no—not a bit."

"Well, Matthew," continued Tom, "I have made up my mind to this as soon as I see the captain; I shall relate everything to him, and then we shall decide upon a testimonial of some sort which we shall insist upon your acceptance of."

"Well," returned old Matthew, "if you put it in that light I don't mind. And now, then, where do you say you left your horses?"

The place was described.

"Did you thing of going for them yourselves?"

"What do you think?"

"Why, that it would be unwise."

"Who shall we send, then?"

"I have a little fellow here who will perform the task to your entire satisfaction."

"Can he be trusted?"

"Oh, yes, he ought to be. I knew his father well in years gone by, and befriended him on many occasions. This is his only child; he is an orphan, and unfortunately both deaf and dumb."

"Then he ought to be faithful."

"Yes; if he only takes after his father he will be faithful enough in all conscience, but I am not afraid."

"Well, then, will you send him?"

"I will."

"At once?"

"Yes. Should you like to see him?"

"If you have no objection."

"None in the least."

Old Matthew left the parlour, and shortly afterwards returned with a boy about fourteen years of age.

He was a very singular specimen of humanity indeed, with short legs, long arms, and a disproportionate head and body.

He was attired with that gaudiness which generally characterises deformed persons.

In his own opinion he was of great importance indeed, yet, as he followed old Matthew into the room something after the manner of an obedient dog, there was a peculiar shuffle in his gait, a bend in his shoulders, and a restless

expression about his eyes that by no means prepossessed the highwaymen with his appearance.

His wide mouth was parted in a grin, and with his fingers he played with the huge polished metal buttons upon his vest.

By way of greeting he made a general salaam to all assembled, and yet as he made it his eyes, so quick and restless, took in every peculiarity in the highwaymen's appearance at one single glance.

Then, folding his arms, he stood in an attitude as much as to say:

"I am here—what do you want with me?"

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXI.

TOM KING AND HIS COMRADES MEET WITH A DISAPPOINTMENT ON THEIR ARRIVAL AT THE THREE SPIDERS.

Old Matthew waited a moment in order that the highwaymen might look well at the messenger.

Then making a sign to attract his attention, Matthew rapidly, with his fingers, instructed the boy to go to the stable and fetch the horses, bringing them towards the bottom of White Horse Yard.

He made a low bow and retired, not, however, until he had taken another good look at the three highwaymen.

"Well," said Matthew, as soon as the door had closed behind him, "what do you think of him—he is a queer-looking customer, is he not?"

"Very queer," said Tom King, "and I don't mind saying, something very disagreeable and unpleasant indeed."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, very."

"Oh, that's only the first effect—it quickly wears off."

"Can he be trusted?" asked Tom, very earnestly.

"Certainly."

"Are you sure? Have you ever put him to the test?"

"Well, I can't say I have," returned Matthew, thoughtfully, "for, candidly speaking, I never trust anybody more than I can help, and since I have had Manuel I have never required his services particularly."

"Well," pursued Tom, "I may be mistaken, but if there is not treachery in him I am greatly deceived, so all that I can say is, be on your guard."

"I shall, you may depend."

"What, now, if he betrayed us?"

"Don't suppose such a thing!" exclaimed Matthew, with a start. "No—no," he added, "he would never be guilty of such baseness as that! He is a good boy, and he knows what I have done for his father, and is also aware that I am the only friend he has on earth."

"I may be doing him an injustice," said Tom King. "I hope I am, and yet I fear that you are allowing yourself to be led away by some feeling of attachment that you had for his parent."

Old Matthew was silent, as if these words had thrown him into a reverie.

Rousing himself, however, he said:

"It's a long story, and some day I may tell you all about it."

"About what?"

"About Manuel and his father, and how he came into my charge."

"We will not stop now, at any rate," said Claude Duval—"I am all impatience to be gone. Come, we may as well get outside and meet Manuel on the road."

"Yes, that's just what I intended," said Tom King, "and am quite ready."

"Farewell, then," cried old Matthew, as he led them into the back yard—"farewell! Remember me to the captain; tell him that I am glad he has got so nicely out of his difficulty, and say I shall be glad to see him whenever there is a chance."

"I will, Matthew," said Tom King, grasping his hand. "And now, once more, many thanks, and farewell for the present."

"Farewell!" said Matthew. "I am sorry you are going."

Claude and Jack also said good-bye, and the latter, as he parted from him at the little doorway, added:

"I hope we shall find our horses all right with your dumb friend; but I confess I fully share in Tom King's doubts, and, as a mere matter of caution, I only ask you to watch him carefully, and not to trust him with any secret until you have thoroughly tested him."

"Leave me alone for that!" exclaimed old Matthew. "I shall look upon this service to-night as some guarantee of his fidelity; it remains to be seen how he will perform it."

With these words the highwaymen departed, old Matthew closing the door in the wall quickly, lest any prying eyes should be abroad.

When he had said it was a rainy, disagreeable night he had only spoken the truth.

The sky was completely covered up by thick, heavy clouds, and the rain fell with the slow steadiness that seemed to promise a long continuance of it.

The wind blew bleakly down the narrow passage, and the highwaymen were glad enough to get out of it.

"We have a dirty night before us," said Claude, "yet it's all the better for that, as we are less likely to be pursued or interrupted, and I am anxious that we should make our way to Ealing with all speed."

"So am I," said Tom. "Hark!"

The faint clatter of horses' hoofs came upon his ears.

"There are our steeds!" he cried. "Follow me. The sooner we join them the better."

Hastening forward while he spoke, and trusting to his companions to follow his example, Tom crossed the street, and plunged down another.

The boy was only just leaving the stables.

He was leading out the horses.

They were at his side before he was aware of it.

Tom took a crown-piece from his pocket, and slipped it into his hand.

But the deaf and dumb boy seemed strangely absent and unobservant of what the highwaymen were doing.

Those keen dark eyes of his were peering through the darkness in all directions.

The highwaymen lost no time in mounting; but scarcely had they done so than a shrill whistle was blown, and the sound of horses' feet could be heard.

"The officers," said Tom—"the officers are upon us! Quick! Follow me, and I doubt not we shall outrun them."

Tom turned his horse's head in the direction of Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, that being the nearest route by which he could hope to gain the open country.

The officers, in strong force, made their appearance at the same moment.

Glancing back and seeing this, Tom exclaimed:

"It strikes me our suspicions were right after all! If that boy has not placed the officers on our track, it's odd to me!"

"It is very strange that they should appear so suddenly," said Claude; "and yet, had they been informed surely they would have taken better measures for our capture."

"I don't know that," was the reply. "It would be easy for him to give the news to one who would hurry off for assistance."

"True," said Jack. "And did you not notice that he had ample time to perform his errand and yet was only just leaving the stables? His calculation may have been that he would have to wait for us at the corner of White Horse Yard, and he would have loitered with the horses until he was sure the officers were there."

"It makes me feel quite uncomfortable to think of it," said Claude Duval, "and yet let us hope that we're mistaken."

"Hark!" said Tom King. "Now they are after us in good earnest! Urge your horses to the utmost, and let us out-distance them as quickly as we can."

Just while he spoke the officers came in view behind them in a dense throng.

Some little delay had somehow taken place in getting fairly in pursuit of the highwaymen, but at length they had succeeded in getting a fair start.

One cause of this delay was that all the officers knew well enough the resolute character of the men they were in hopes of capturing, and this made them desirous of all keeping close together in a body for protection.

There were some who could have joined in the pursuit before the rest, but this they shrank from doing out of personal considerations, and they trusted that, while keeping all together, they should yet be successful in running the highwaymen down.

Our friends' horses, however, had been well attended to during their absence, and the long rest they had had made them just ready for a good gallop.

Never before indeed did they appear to be possessed of so much vigour and mettle, and they tore along the silent streets at a speed that was positively alarming.

Yet, with a dogged perseverance, the police officers kept on their trail, and it was not until London was left behind and the country fairly gained that the three highwaymen succeeded in quite shaking off their pursuers.

Then Tom King, reining up suddenly, and wheeling his horse round, listened attentively.

The wind, rushing through the branches of the trees, made a rustling noise, enough to drown any faint sound.

But Tom's ears were sharp and well practiced, and after a moment's pause he exclaimed:

"I think all's well, Claude; I can hear nothing."

"Nor I."

"Then now is the time to change our route. Quick—forward!"

"You are more impatient to reach the Three Spiders than I am."

Turning off completely at right angles from the course they had been pursuing, they made their way in almost a straight line for their destination.

Even if the officers should be somewhere in the rear, and still keeping up the pursuit, this sudden change of direction would inevitably have the effect of baffling them.

For the rest of the distance not another word was exchanged, and although there was now no particular danger behind them, yet the horses were not suffered to relax their speed.

At length, entering the little plantation, they pushed on towards the stables, and when near them, stopped to look up.

The signal light was burning steadily but dimly in the little window, and, reassured by this, and drawing hopeful conclusions from it, they set about entering the stable without more delay.

The door was only shut to and not fastened.

It yielded to a touch.

The horses were just placed in their stalls, the door bolted, and, reserving the task of attending to them to a future time, the three highwaymen hastened across the yard, impatient in the highest degree to have their hopes verified.

Throwing open the door, they strode into the kitchen.

Their appearance was greeted by a general cry, that seemed like one of dismay.

"Good gracious," said Tom Davis, starting up from his seat, "you have come back at last!"

Stifling a shriek, Maud tottered forward.

"You have brought him," she said—"you have brought him! The danger is past."

The highwaymen staggered back as if shot, and could only gasp out:

"Brought him?"

"Yes," said Maud, "do not fear the shock of his appearance; nothing could be worse than this suspense."

"But we have not brought him," cried Tom King, in a loud voice—"we have not brought him, because we had every reason to believe that he was here already!"

It was now the turn of those present to be amazed, and after this last speech of Tom's, a strange silence fell upon them all.

Maud grasped the corner of a table for support, and seemed by her manner as though upon the point of swooning.

"But this must be explained," said Tom Davis. "Be quick—let us know all about it!"

"But are you sure," cried Claude Duval, "that Dick has not come back—are you quite certain of it?"

"Yes, quite certain. What a strange question to ask! If he was here, don't you think he would hasten to make his appearance manifest?"

"Yes, yes—of course!" said Tom King. "But, before going into any long explanations, just understand this important fact: Dick Turpin has escaped from Newgate without any of our assistance, and, as we came to the conclusion, had succeeded in reaching here."

"Escaped?" cried Maud, with a shriek. "Do you say he has escaped?"

"Yes, most certainly—we have conclusive evidence on that point."

She sank down with a sigh of relief, and began to weep.

Tom Davis was surprised beyond all measure, and he could only ask for a full account of what had happened.

This Tom set about giving as accurately as possible

When it was over, Tom Davis cried:

"Hurrah! It's all right! I don't feel afraid now—no, not a bit of it! If Dick has got out of Newgate, as it seems quite certain he has got out, he can be left to take care of himself wherever he may be! Yes—yes, it's all right! He's got out somehow or other, and is only waiting for the vigilance of the police to abate a little. Rest assured he will be here at the very earliest moment!"

"I hope so too," said Tom King, anxiously. "I can't take quite such a sanguine view of it as you do yet, if he is out of Newgate."

"But you told me you were sure of it."

"Well, so I am sure of it."

"Then," said Davis, again, "I tell you it's all right, and all you have got to do in the meantime is to wait here patiently, and trust to his making his appearance."

No one else present seemed inclined to look upon the matter in this hopeful light.

If, as had been suggested, Dick had managed to get somewhere just out of Newgate and no more, he might again fall into the hands of the officers, and then nothing could save him.

A gloomy silence followed, in which the ticking of the little Dutch clock became painfully audible.

Then Tom King, starting up, said:

"I don't know how you feel, comrades, but as for myself, I can only say I find it impossible to stop here a moment longer—I can't stay here inactive for the life of me! What do you say—will you accompany me back to London and endeavour to find out where the captain is?"

"Yes—yes!" cried his companions, eagerly. "We are ready now, and to the full as anxious as yourself."

"But——" began Tom Davis, in a tone of expostulation.

His words were suddenly interrupted by a terrific knocking at the front door—a knocking that seemed to cast quite a spell over everyone, leaving all immoveable.

"Jack Marshall," gasped Tom Davis—"it's Jack Marshall, for a thousand pounds! We're caught at last! No, no—hide—hide, quickly, all of you! Be sure and get out of sight! Leave nothing behind you, and I will delay opening the door as long as I am able!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before the knocking was renewed with redoubled vigour.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXII.

DESCRIBES THE EXTRAORDINARY INTERVIEW THAT TOOK PLACE BETWEEN DICK TURPIN AND THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE.

The Governor of Newgate was extremely surprised at receiving a communication from the King in so strange a fashion.

Since he had been called to his present office, such an event as a personal communication from royalty had never occurred, and he was in a state of flattering excitement accordingly.

Certainly documents with the King's signature had reached him many a time; but then they had always been forwarded through the medium of the Secretary of State.

This, however, was no doubt a veritable regal epistle, with the King's own autograph, and especially addressed to him.

Hastening to his own room, he unfastened the lock by means of a key on a small bunch that he always carried with him, and inside, as he expected, he found a letter bearing a large seal, on which was unmistakably impressed the royal arms of England.

In a straggling, foreign-looking hand the letter was superscribed:—

"To the Governor of the Prison of Newgate.
["Private and confidential."]



[THE HIGHWAYMEN AND TOM DAVIS ARE ALARMED AT THE KNOCKING AT THE DOOR.]

For some moments Mr. Bradbury could not summon up courage enough to break the seal.

He felt ready to bow himself down and pay homage to this representative of the King.

Never before had he felt so strongly that peculiarity in his nature which always made him ready to worship anyone who stood higher in a worldly sense than himself.

At length the letter was opened, and to his unmitigated surprise he read the following words—not without some difficulty, however, for they had the appearance of having been hastily scrawled:—

"*This is to certify that it is our royal pleasure that the Governor of our prison of Newgate shall at once set at large and release the prisoner he now has in custody, known by the name of Dick Turpin. And we still further command that this release be effected as privately and secretly as possible, so as to leave no clue behind; and as to the best means of doing this we leave entirely to the judgment of our faithful servant the Governor.*

"GEORGE, REX."

Such was the letter, and after having perused it the Governor was in such a state of bewilderment that he could do nothing but sit helpless, while the King's letter seemed to dance before his eyes.

Recovering himself, he looked more closely at it.

Some doubt as to its genuineness had crossed his mind.

He scrutinised the signature attentively, and the result was that he felt perfectly convinced it was the King's own handwriting. He had seen it too often to make any mistake.

Yet, to satisfy any lingering doubt that he might have, he unlocked a small iron box, and took from it several

documents to which the King's signature was appended.

These were one by one compared, and the result was to strengthen his conviction that the document was genuine.

Having come to this conclusion, he restored the papers, and, leaning his head upon his hands, he tried first to think what motives had induced the King to take so unusual a proceeding, and, secondly, by what means he could spirit Dick Turpin out of Newgate.

In both of these attempts he failed most signally, and as a last resource he took up the lamp and his master-key, muttering the while:

"My course is clear. This letter will shield me. I will go to Turpin—he is a clever fellow, and will give me some information, beyond all doubt. I can understand now why he gave me his word not to escape, and why he has taken things so coolly and comfortably ever since he has been here."

With these reflections the Governor made his way towards Turpin's cell.

The two men were there on the watch, as usual.

The door was unfastened, and he entered in the manner described at the close of a preceding chapter.

When Dick, thus suddenly aroused, perceived the paper in the Governor's hands, he felt a sensation of relief come over him

By instinct he seemed to know that the paper was the warrant for his liberation.

Accordingly, he sprang to his feet, and the door having been closed, the Governor said:

"Come here, and read this."

Dick advanced.

But his excitement was so great, and his eyes were so unaccustomed to the glare of the lamp, that he failed to make out a single word, although he tried his utmost.

"Thank you," he said, drawing back. "Would you oblige me by reading it? I cannot."

The Governor did oblige him, and Dick listened with sensations of the utmost pleasure.

At last he should be free.

All his anxieties and misgivings had passed away.

His comrade had succeeded, and the locket had proved its virtues.

"Now," said the Governor, sitting down upon a chair, "the authority of this paper is a thing that I cannot dispute, and of course I shall act in accordance with it; its production will shield me from all after consequences."

"There is no need to fear anything," said Dick; "but, at the same time, I should recommend you to preserve that letter faithfully."

The Governor smiled, for he had fully resolved never to part with it.

The position of Dick was now very much altered so far as the Governor was concerned—in fact, the latter was inclined to look up to him, as was his habit to almost everyone.

But the prominent idea in the Governor's mind was the very probable and reasonable one that Dick Turpin was the holder of some important State secret which, on the present occasion, had saved his life.

Wishing to understand as much of it as possible, Mr. Bradbury said:

"Now, Turpin, I have not found you to be altogether an unreasonable fellow, and I trust I have not gained your ill-will?"

"You certainly have not," said Dick. "I have got a few words to say upon that point."

"Well, reserve them for the present, and listen. I want you, if you will, to favour me with some account of the origin of this letter. How came the King to write it?"

"It is simple," said Dick. "Some time ago, chance threw me in the way of a lady connected in some manner or other—I don't pretend to know how—with the royal family. To her I rendered a most important service, and, in return, she forced me to accept a small locket, the deliverance of which to the King, she assured me, would suffice to get me out of the greatest danger."

"Oh!" said the Governor, drawing a long breath, "that's it, is it?" And you found some means of delivering this locket?"

"Yes, I did. A comrade of mine took it, I believe, and now you can understand why I gave you my word not to attempt to escape."

"I can understand it now very well," said the Governor, with another long breath; "and yet I question whether I should have placed so much faith upon the King's word as you have. I should have been full of doubts and fears."

Dick smiled.

"Not if you had lived in an atmosphere of danger so long as I have."

"Well, that may be," replied the Governor; "but what you have told me takes a great weight off my mind. And now, to consider the best means by which you can leave the prison unseen."

"Yes, that's important," said Dick; "and if the officers are watching so attentively as you stated, I don't know how it is to be done."

"I spoke the truth," said the Governor. "You can't imagine their vigilance."

"Wait a moment," said Dick. "We will, if you like, leave the discussion of that point for a little while longer. There is something I wish to say."

"What is it?"

"You spoke about my having no reasonable ground for complaint against you."

The Governor smiled.

"It is quite true," continued Dick, "and, in the event of things turning as they have, I had made up my mind just what I would do."

"Indeed!" said the Governor. "And what may that be?"

"Why, of course I might say a great many things expressive of my gratitude, and so forth, but then they would only be words, after all, leaving nothing substantial behind them. Now my desire is to give you some permanent mark of respect, if you will not mind accepting it."

"I want nothing," the Governor said, though the words were uttered in a tone that belied their import.

"Well," said Dick, "I am going to leave it to you in this way: I wish to make a substantial recognition, and this is how I propose it. Do you know Hampstead Heath?"

"I do—very well," answered the Governor, with a smile.

"Do you know the eastern end of it?"

"Yes, quite well."

"Do you happen to remember," pursued Dick, "seeing at the eastern extremity of the Heath an old tree that has been almost felled by time? The branches are all gone, and nothing but an old trunk remains, and that leans so far out of the perpendicular that it threatens to fall every moment."

"I cannot say I have observed it," replied the Governor, after a moment's consideration. "Surely I could have no difficulty in finding it."

"You will have no difficulty," said Turpin. "It is just in the position I describe, and so singular-looking a tree as that cannot be mistaken for another."

"Well," said the Governor, somewhat feverishly—"well?"

"It is well," said Turpin, with a smile, "for if, at any time you think proper, you will repair to that spot, and, going to the west side of the trunk of the tree, begin to dig close among the roots, you will find about eighteen inches from the surface the substantial recognition of which I spoke."

"But—but——" began the Governor, hesitatingly.

"You need have no scruples about appropriating it," returned Turpin—"in fact, I leave it entirely to you. If you like, you can go there and dig; and if not, I hope you will not be offended."

"By no means," said the Governor, before whose eyes there seemed to arise a most dazzling prospect—"by no means: not that I desire to have anything more than your thanks and the expression of your good will," he added, hypocritically.

"Well, then, you have them," said Turpin, "and you can have the other if you choose. And now, then, for a consideration of the other point."

"Your leaving Newgate secretly?"

"Yes—just so."

"Well, how is it to be done?"

"Can you think of no means?"

"No. I would rather leave it to you, and if you suggest anything reasonable I will consent to it."

"Wait a moment," said Dick.

Then, passing his hand over his forehead, he rapidly brought it down upon his thigh with an air of satisfaction.

"A good thought!" he said. "Yes, I have it—a good thought!"

"Well," said the Governor, anxiously, "out with it. Let me know what it is."

"Send the two men outside for a hackney-coach, and let it be brought round opposite the door leading from your own house. Then we will leave here together, and as soon as the coach arrives we will both pass through your front door, descend the steps, enter it together, and drive off. By that means the police officers will no doubt be thrown completely off their guard."

"Humph!" said the Governor, musingly. "Is there no other way?"

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXIII.

DICK TURPIN AND THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE HOLD A DEEPLY-INTERESTING CONFERENCE.

"NONE that I can think of," replied Dick. "But suppose you give the matter a few moments' consideration. You ought to be best able to judge what will be most successful."

The Governor rubbed his head with a puzzled air.

"I am sadly afraid——" he began.

"Of what?" interrupted Dick, anxiously.

"That your plan will never do."

"Indeed. Why not?"

"Simply because you have, as I might say, overlooked one very important fact—that of the prison being so closely surrounded by officers."

"Do you think they would notice us, then, if we left by your own private door?"

"Yes, I do; because when I said a short time ago that Newgate was so closely watched, and not a mouse could leave it unseen, I spoke literally. Depend upon it, the officers are so interested in what they are about that they will never for one moment remove their eyes."

Dick rested his chin in between his hands.

"That does indeed make it difficult: and so, Mr. Bradbury, I shall be obliged to leave it to you, after all."

The Governor was seriously puzzled by the task that was set before him.

For the life of him he could not tell by what means Dick was to be spirited out of prison.

Time was passing, too, and the crowd outside in the Old Bailey was something terrific, and even the presence of all those people increased the difficulty of quitting the prison.

At length, Dick, after some moments' thought, raised his head, and fixed his eyes with a peculiar expression upon the Governor.

"Mr. Bradbury," he said, "I fancy, after all, there is but one way."

"One way?" echoed the Governor, almost mechanically.

"Yes. As it is impossible for me to leave Newgate unseen, I must remain where I am."

The Governor stared at the prisoner for some moments in the most undisguised astonishment, and then he gasped rather than said:

"Remain where you are? Why—why——"

Dick only smiled at the puzzled expression of his countenance.

"I must make my meaning a little clearer," he said.

"Yes, do so, pray, for may I be hanged if I can understand you now at all!"

"Listen, then," said Dick. "I suppose when it is known I have escaped——"

The Governor interrupted him.

"You are beginning at the wrong end, my friend. It will be time enough to consider what will be done after your escape, when you have decided as to how you are to obtain your freedom."

"No, no," said Dick—"excuse me. Just allow me to finish."

"Very well. Go on, then."

"I say, after I have escaped, I suppose the vigilance of the police officers will materially abate, for there will then be no necessity for them to keep up their strict, observant watch."

"No—no, certainly not," said the Governor; "but what has that to do with it?"

"Everything," said Dick, "for, in half a dozen words, what I propose is that you should conceal me somewhere in the prison for the space of twenty-four hours or so; then, when it is given out and believed that I have escaped, and the officers, as you say, have relaxed their vigilance—then will be the time for me to slip off quietly."

"Good!" said Mr. Bradbury, clapping his hands together, with his eyes sparkling brightly—"good! You have hit the nail right on the head this time and no mistake! I wonder how it was we did not think of that before?"

"It is not yet too late," said Dick. "Am I to understand that you approve of this suggestion?"

"Yes—most decidedly I approve of it, for what better one could be made?"

Dick was silent, and then the Governor continued, almost immediately:

"There are a few obstacles in the way of carrying out this design."

Dick nodded, as he replied:

"I am quite aware of that; but still there is no doubt they can be overcome."

"Very likely," said the Governor; "and to begin with the first and greatest, we have the two men outside."

"Just so."

"Now, how are they to be managed? You cannot leave this cell without being seen by them; and so the question arises: shall we take them into our confidence?"

"Not by any means," said Dick; "and, if you will excuse me, I would suggest that we speak in rather a lower tone of voice."

"A good caution. But now, Turpin, if we don't take these men into our confidence, how shall you manage to get out of the cell?"

"We must consider," said Turpin. "There is time yet, and it seems to me you are the proper person to decide upon the best means of dealing with them."

"It has been many and many a day," exclaimed the Governor, "since I puzzled my brains to such an extent! If you'd give me the world I don't know how this is to be managed!"

"Stay a little," said Dick. "Could you not manage to send one of them to fetch something for you?"

"Yes—certainly," answered the Governor, abstractedly. "One could go; but how about the other?"

"Why, suppose, after a time, you send him too?"

"I comprehend you," cried the Governor, with a readiness of apprehension that rather surprised Dick—"I comprehend you, and, as there is no time to be lost, I will commence at once."

Dick did not venture to say no, for he was anxious to quit the cell in which he had passed so many lonely hours, though, had he followed his own inclinations, he would first of all have planned his proceedings from the beginning to the end.

The Governor, however, rose briskly to his feet, and, going to the door, tapped upon it with his knuckles.

The man outside understood the signal, and immediately opened it.

"Miller!" he cried.

"Yes, sir."

"You know my room—my office, I mean, where the papers are kept?"

"Yes, sir, I know it."

"Well, then, I want you to go there," continued the Governor, "and just inside the little drawer in the table, and lying quite on the top of the other papers, you will see a letter in a large envelope. Go and bring it to me."

"I will, sir,"

"You are sure you understand? Don't fail to bring the right one."

Miller shuffled off, and the Governor closed the door again.

"There's one gone," he said, in a whisper, to Dick,

"though we must be quick, for he will soon return."

"And the other?" Turpin exclaimed—"how about the other?"

"I will show you," said Mr. Bradbury. "But just wait a moment. I am not afraid that Miller will return just yet, for one thing, the distance is considerable, and for another, in the drawer to which I have sent him is a large flat bottle of hollands, and if he does not pay his respects to that before he returns, I am not Governor of Newgate."

Dick laughed, and then there was a pause of about half a minute's duration.

At the end of that time the Governor again went to the door and tapped at it as he had done on the previous occasion.

The other man opened it.

"Oh, I am very sorry," said the Governor, "but you heard what I said to Miller a moment ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now, I find I have just made a mistake. The letter I spoke of is not in the drawer, but under the inkstand in the centre of the table. He will perhaps turn all my papers topsy-turvy. Just run and tell him what I say. I can guard the prisoner in the meantime."

The man nodded, and made off at once, for in Newgate Mr. Bradbury reigned supreme, and not one of his subordinates ever dreamed of such an outrageous thing as questioning any command that might be issued.

"Now is your time, Dick," said the Governor, turning round, hastily. "The coast is clear, and will be for at least another moment."

"Capital!" said Dick. "Upon my word, you deserve much for your ingenuity! You have managed this cleverly indeed. What a pity you were not a diplomatist."

The Governor smiled, and felt pleased at the compliment.

"I flatter myself," he said, "that I should have succeeded in that line very well. But be quick—there's no knowing how soon those fellows may take it into their heads to return."

"But where shall I go?" said Dick, who, in spite of his self-command, felt his heart beating at a more than usual rate.

"When you get into the passage," whispered the Governor, hurriedly, "turn to the right, and hasten forward for a short distance. On both sides of you you will see doors similar to this sunk deeply in the wall. Conceal yourself in one of them. The passage is dark, and as the turnkeys will never think of looking for you you will be unseen."

"And then," said Dick, "what next?"

"Wait there until you see me pass along the passage, then step forth, and, as noiselessly as you can, follow in my footsteps."

"Good!" said Dick. "I trust all to you, and depend upon it this will not be the worst night's work that you have ever done."

With these words on his lips Dick slipped through the door of his cell, and as he did so he drew a long breath, and felt quite a joyous feeling come over him.

It seemed to him that he was already free.

Following the injunctions of the Governor, he turned to the right, and hastened for some distance along the corridor.

As he had been told, it was very dark, for although oil lamps were burning dimly here and there, yet the warders did not trust so much to them as to the lanterns they always carried with them, and which served to dissipate the darkness.

The doors, too, were sunk very deeply into the wall, and, as a matter of course, these recesses were in very dark shade indeed, and Dick felt that he could scarcely hope for a better hiding-place.

All at once, he heard a footstep, and then, immediately afterwards, perceived at some distance the flashing of a light.

Murmuring voices reached his ears, and although he had not gone so far along the corridor as he could have wished, yet he felt that his wisest course would be to conceal himself at once, and therefore slipping into one of the dark recesses we have described, he squeezed himself as closely as he could into the corner formed by the door and the wall, and remained there a prey to considerable anxiety, and listening to the voices and footsteps of the men who were approaching.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXIV.

DICK TURPIN MAKES HIMSELF COMFORTABLE IN THE PRIVATE APARTMENTS OF THE GOVERNOR.

Dick could not help reflecting how strange it was that he should feel so deep an interest in every movement made and word spoken by these two men, and yet such was the case, and he strained his sense of hearing to the utmost, in order to make out what they were saying to each other.

He gathered first, from the tones of their voices, that some dispute was going on between them.

Directly afterwards he distinguished the words:

"I tell you you are a fool, Dick Miller, and I don't go behind your back to say it!"

"Oh, bother!"

"Well, we shall see," returned the other turnkey. "Don't you think the Governor knows all about that bottle of hollands in his drawer?—don't you even think that he could have missed the smallest drop of it?"

"Oh, bother!" said Miller again.

"And yet when I came into the room," continued the other, "there you must be swigging at it, and not content with that, must be so frightened at hearing some one come in that you dropped it."

"Well, it was your fault!" growled Miller. "What the deuce did you want to come sneaking into the room like that for? Who expected you, I should like to know, scaring a fellow out of his blessed wits?"

"I didn't come sneaking in—I walked in because Mr. Bradbury sent me. What excuse shall you make about the hollands?—that's what I want to know."

"Well, how does it concern you?"

"Why, I know you of old. You would not scruple to put it on to my shoulders if you could!"

Dick Miller laughed.

"Well, stow it now," he said; "we can finish the subject another time. Do you want him to overhear us?"

"No—not I. But what will he say when we tell him that we can't find the letter he sent us for?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Dick Miller, with an air of satisfaction, "I am glad to say you are as deeply in for that as I am—he can't blame one without blaming both."

"Well," said the other turnkey, "he told me it was under the inkstand, and I'll take my oath any minute it wasn't—so there's an end."

By this time the two men got out of hearing.

Upon reaching the door of the cell so lately occupied by Dick Turpin, they tapped upon it with their knuckles.

The Governor opened it to the extent of about a couple of inches.

"Well," he said, "the letter?"

"If you please, sir," returned Miller, humbly, "we've looked everywhere, and can't find it."

"Can't find it? Was it not under the inkstand?"

"No, sir."

"Well, where can it have got to? However, never mind."

Then, turning round, as if Dick was still in the cell, and as if he was about to address him, the Governor said:

"I will go myself, Turpin, and fetch the warrant, since you profess to be so particular about it; or, if you don't mind waiting, you shall see it the first thing in the morning."

With these words, the Governor stepped nimbly out of the cell, drawing the door after him.

"Now, Miller," he said, "put the bar up, and fasten the door securely. Mind, you are responsible for your prisoner, and if he gets out between now and morning you will be punished severely."

"All right, sir!" said the turnkey. "You never knew Dick Miller make a failure of that kind yet. Now," he continued, as he finished putting up the fastenings, "get out of that, Mr. Dick, if you can."

Never for one moment did the idea occur to the turnkeys that Dick had been already liberated from his cell—indeed, it was not likely that so unreasonable a notion should enter their minds; therefore, drawing up the two three-legged stools with which they had provided them

selves, they sat down with their backs to the door, prepared to wait patiently till morning.

The Governor walked along the passage with a heavy tread, the echoes of his footsteps reverberating through the long, silent corridors.

Dick observed his coming, and as soon as the Governor passed his hiding-place, he stepped out on tiptoe.

Then, guessing why the Governor was treading with such unusual heaviness, Dick cleverly and quickly fell into step with him, keeping such exact time, and allowing his feet to fall so lightly, that it would have required a very sharp ear to distinguish that two persons were walking along the stone corridor instead of one.

At every step they took the necessity for this caution abated, yet they did not venture to change their positions.

To what part of the prison the Governor was now about to conduct him, Dick Turpin scarcely knew, but contented himself with thinking that it would be to some place where, at any rate, they could sit down and hold a further consultation as to his future proceedings.

In this he was not mistaken.

Pursuing certain passages rarely used by anyone except himself, and which led directly to his own private apartments, the Governor hurried forward, nor did he pause until the room was reached in which he sat down to transact his business.

Dick Turpin entered closely after him, and, in obedience with a sign from the Governor, closed the door and slipped a little bolt into its socket.

Then the first thing that met their gaze was the fragments of the broken bottle of hollands, which were strewn in all directions about the carpet, while the room was filled with the overpowering odour of that spirit.

Instead of manifesting any anger at making this discovery, as one might have expected, the Governor placed his hands slowly together, and began to rub them one over the other with an air of great apparent satisfaction.

"Capital," he said—"capital! Nothing could be better!"

"Indeed!" said Dick. "May I ask to what you refer?"

"Why, this," he replied, pointing to the broken glass upon the floor. "I told you they would not fail to pay their respects to this bottle of spirits, and by some accident or other, you see, they have broken it. They will now be frightened to death, lest I should expose what they have done, and cause them to be punished. They are now quite in my power, which, just at the present time, is quite a fortunate circumstance."

Again the Governor rubbed his hands, and Dick, leaving him to indulge in his felicitations, drew a chair close up to the fire and sat down.

He spread out his fingers to the blaze, for his cell was damp and chilly, and the sight of a little fire was now quite a pleasant thing.

Outside in the street the roaring and howling of the people could be heard with painful distinctness.

It was a sound that Dick hated to listen to, and yet he could not close his ears to it.

Little, however, did he think that his comrades formed a parcel of the disorderly route outside, nor did he guess how anxiously their eyes where fixed upon that portion of the prison occupied by the Governor.

"Now," said Mr. Bradbury at length, turning to the fire, "having accomplished our purpose so far, and having succeeded so well, let us have a little further consideration."

"With all my heart."

"Well, then, it seems to me the chief thing is to decide where you are to remain concealed until nightfall."

Dick nodded.

"Well, continued the Governor, "I must confess that is a matter that puzzles me. I should be glad to place one of my private rooms at your disposal, but," he concluded, with a sigh and a shake of his head, "that is impossible—quite impossible."

"Indeed!" said Dick. "I am very sorry to hear that."

"It is no fault of mine," continued Mr. Bradbury—"none at all, I assure you. It is Mrs. B.—a most inquisitive woman she is, I can assure you; and as for trusting her with a secret—— But there, that will do—least said soonest mended."

Dick laughed as he said:

"I don't want to cause you any trouble, Mr. Bradbury. I am much obliged to you for all you have done; but is there no cell into which you could slip me and keep me safe till the appointed time?"

Mr. Bradbury again shook his head.

"We are so uncommonly full," he said—"I scarcely ever knew such a thing, and, besides, you might be liable to discovery in a moment."

"Then what on earth is to be done?"

"That's just what I want to know, and I should be glad if you would think the matter over."

Dick continued to warm himself by the fire, and for several moments there was a profound silence, which was broken at length by the Governor, who asked:

"Well, Dick, have you yet thought of anything?"

"Nothing particular," was the answer. "To be sure there's one idea; but then——"

"Let us hear it, said the Governor—"let us hear it, by all means!"

"Well, then," began Dick, "although you have been Governor of this prison for so short a period, yet you must be aware that the present building is quite a modern structure."

"Yes," said the Governor—"that's true enough."

"Quite true," replied Dick. "Newgate was first built many hundreds of years ago, and from time to time the place has been pulled down, and rebuilt and altered."

"Well, what of all this?" said the Governor, growing interested, though he could not see what it had to do with finding a hiding-place for his prisoner.

"Simply this," was Dick's answer. "In the course of this pulling down, and rebuilding, and alteration, some portions of the ancient edifice have been left, and, to cut short my remarks, I have been told that underneath this present prison of Newgate there exists what one may term another prison, being the remains of the dungeons formerly constructed there."

"Yes," answered Mr. Bradbury. "I have heard something of the kind myself, though I never paid much attention to it. Still, even supposing such places as you mention to exist, they have not been opened for centuries at least, and it is very improbable that any communication exists between the old prison and the new."

"Yet such might be the case," said Dick—"indeed, I have heard it confidently asserted. Now you understand the drift of my remarks. If we can find out this communication, surely, if I conceal myself in underground Newgate, I shall never be discovered, not even if my presence in the building was guessed at, and a close search made."

The Governor shivered, and half unconsciously drew closer to the fire.

"But just consider," he said, "what an uncomfortable place to be in. Fancy the idea of remaining in vaults or dungeons that have been closed up so long—alone, too! Should you not feel afraid?"

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXV.

THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE DISCOVERS THAT HE HAS MADE A TREMENDOUS BLUNDER.

At these words, Dick Turpin's lips curled with a contemptuous smile.

"Afraid," he said—"I afraid? No, fear and Dick Turpin have never been acquainted yet, and they will always continue strangers—least of all should I be afraid of darkness."

"It is not the darkness," said the Governor, "but the associations. However, not to go into the subject any further, just tell me by what means you hope to discover a way of communication, supposing any to exist."

"Oh," said Dick, "that's just the point."

"I wish I could give you some information upon it, but I can't."

"Neither can I," continued Turpin, whose eyes had during the last few moments been resting upon a range of shelves. "Do you not think it possible that some of those volumes might give us the information we seek?"

"They might," said the Governor; "they are the annals of Newgate, though, to tell the truth, ever since I

have been here I have had enough to do in keeping a the records without looking back to the past."

"I suppose so," said Turpin, rising and going towards the books, in which, as may be imagined, he felt more than a common interest.

The Governor placed himself by his side, and, with a brush that he had picked up, removed a portion of the dust covering the books, so that the lettering could be seen.

"I am no book scholar," said Turpin. "Suppose you reach down one or two of them and glance over the pages; you may find something."

The Governor evidently thought the suggestion a good one, for he at once took down one of the dusty volumes and turned over its mouldering pages.

"If," said Dick, "you could only find a plan or map of some kind, that would be all we should require; but stay—what's that?"

Even as he spoke, the Governor paused in turning over the book, for in between two of the leaves a folded sheet of paper had been placed.

This he at once spread open, and he had to be particularly careful in the process.

The paper was so old, and so decayed by age, that it almost fell to pieces beneath his touch.

Upon it could be traced several indistinct lines, and in the lower right-hand corner in large letters was the word "Newgate."

"This must be the very thing," said Dick, bending forward eagerly.

The Governor bent down too, and managed to decipher the words:

"Plan of ye Prison of Newgate. Anno 1611."

"That's the thing," said Dick, as the Governor read these words aloud. "I think we are all right now."

Long and anxiously did that strange pair bend over the mouldering old map and follow out with their fingers the various lines upon it.

It was necessary that the examination should be a careful one, and it was some time indeed before they could exactly make out the bearings of it.

At last, having succeeded, the Governor said:

"Here, if anywhere, are the means of communication. Whether such may exist to this day is very doubtful, and yet I have a recollection of seeing an old door at the extremity of one of the underground passages, the cells leading out of which," he added, "have for a long time been disused in consequence of the damp."

"Then I have good hopes of it," said Turpin. "At any rate, we will go there and look."

"Agreed," said the Governor, folding up the map and restoring it to its place. "What a fortunate discovery!" he added, as he turned back.

"Most fortunate! And now, to set the point at rest."

"In a moment," said the Governor—"in a moment; but I feel fatigued, and exhausted, and chilly, this evening. Suppose we have one glass together; I should be better prepared to start then."

"As you will," said Dick, carelessly. "I hold you responsible for my safety. You know what the King has written, and he will look to you to carry out his commands."

"Yes," said the Governor, "there's no doubt about that. I will hide you somewhere, rest assured, and between now and morning there is time enough and to spare."

"Very true," said Dick; "and I would rather be seated here in your pleasant company than down below by myself."

The Governor went to a little cupboard, and produced a couple of glasses and a bottle.

A small kettle was simmering by the side of the fire, and with the water he made two glasses very hot and very strong.

Surely, of all the strange positions in which Dick had been placed, this was strangest of all.

Who in the whole world would credit that a notorious highwayman like himself, whose capture had been a source of so much trouble, should be seated quietly by the fireside drinking a glass with the Governor of Newgate?

Yet there he was, and could any of his comrades but have had a glance at him, they would have seen that he looked very comfortable indeed.

It was after a pause that had begun to grow irksome, that Dick said:

"Since we are to sit here a few moments together, Mr. Bradbury, there's a little subject I should like to talk over with you."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"Well, one that turns out to be of no importance now; but would you mind favouring me with a sight of the warrant that has been re-indorsed for my execution?"

"How strange!" thought the Governor, for just then he remembered the words he had made use of when leaving the cell.

Then aloud he added

"I am happy to oblige you in such a simple thing as that. Here it is."

He rose from his seat as he spoke, and placed a parchment in Turpin's hand.

"There," he added, pointing to some writing on the outside of it, "you see the secretary has just signed his name, and put the date."

"Yes, I see," said Dick; "but I am not quite satisfied."

"Indeed! In what way can I satisfy you?"

"I don't understand these documents myself," Dick answered. "Suppose you open it, and begin to read it."

"It'll take some time," said the Governor; "but, however, I can't refuse you."

Accordingly, he opened the warrant, and went through the preamble at the head of it; then uttered a shout of surprise.

Dick gazed at him quietly, and from his manner it was evident he expected some such manifestation from the Governor.

"What's the matter?" he inquired, seeing that the Governor looked more and more amazed.

Mr. Bradbury did not reply, but looked at the warrant again, as though in doubt whether his eyes had served him aright.

Then, with a look of consternation, and almost of horror, on his countenance, he dropped the paper, and stared at Dick, who simply said:

"Well?"

"Well?" exclaimed the Governor. "It is not at all well. But let me look again—I cannot even now believe it!"

He glanced again at the warrant, and then said:

"No, there can be no mistake—this is not the warrant for your execution."

Dick nodded as if he felt quite certain this was a fact.

"Indeed," continued the Governor, "it is a warrant for a companion of yours—to wit, Tom King."

"I don't doubt it," said Turpin; "but I am just a little curious to know by what means you could make that warrant serve for me. You told me I had been tried and sentence passed upon me, which was true, though not at Newgate."

"Ah!" cried the Governor, drawing a breath of relief; "you have been tried then?"

"Yes, certainly, but it was only for a boyish freak. I was taken up on a charge of deer stealing, and brought before a magistrate named Sir Thomas Deane, who found me guilty and pronounced sentence. But what has that to do with the present matter?"

"Nothing at all," said the Governor. "The blunder is mine—a most awful blunder, I must say, yet how it has remained undetected passes my comprehension."

"It is by no means clear to me," said Turpin, "though I could give a guess. But explain it."

"I will," said the Governor. "Candidly, then, I must tell you that the impression was quite strong and fixed in my mind that you had been confined in Newgate——"

"So I have," interrupted Dick.

"Tried and condemned."

"Which I have not," he interrupted, again.

"Well, I fully believed so, and I thought you only escaped when Newgate was attacked by the mob. That was during the time when Mr. Cawthorn was Governor."

Dick nodded.

"I was in Newgate then," he said, "but I was awaiting trial—not condemned. Tom King was here too, and the warrant was all in readiness for his execution, but, lucky, he escaped."

"That where the mistake is," said the Governor. "I

went to these papers under the impression I have just named, and, coming to this warrant, did not trouble myself to glance at it particularly, for, as you see, it runs thus: 'Of Tom King, the accomplice of Dick Turpin and others.' You see, there's your name on it," he continued, pointing it out to Dick, "and so, with this impression on my mind, I folded it up and sent it off, believing it was veritably the warrant for your execution."

"But would not such a mistake be discovered?"

"I should have thought so," said the Governor. "It is pretty clear the Secretary of State looked at it no more attentively than I did; the probability is, he just endorsed it, as you see, without ever unfolding it; or, if he was aware of the mistake, as he may be, his idea might have been that it would be best found out afterwards."

Dick drew a long breath.

"I wish I had understood this fully before," he said. "It would have altered my course of action; and yet, upon second thoughts, perhaps things are best as they are."

"Yes, rely upon it," said the Governor, who, every time he looked at the warrant, felt a pang of alarm.

"But just for curiosity's sake," exclaimed Dick, "tell me what would have been the effect of the discovery of this mistake in the warrant, supposing it had been made before my execution?"

"Why, it could not have taken place, that's all," said the Governor—"at least, not by the time appointed. You would have been seized, imprisoned again, and properly tried. Of course a verdict of guilty would have been found, and your position would be just the same as before."

Dick suddenly became lost in thought.

Rousing himself at length, he cried:

"Say no more about it, Mr. Bradbury. Depend upon it, I will not mention the subject, for fear that it should bring you into any trouble, and for the present you know I am safe—in fact, I always shall be, for no matter what the odds may be, I will never yield myself a prisoner again—I have had enough of it."

The Governor pushed the warrant out of the way, and drained his glass.

"I am afraid," he said, "though I thank you all the same, that this matter will creep out; some people must recollect all about it, and then there will be a regular row."

"Don't fear," said Dick, "for through me you have gained a powerful friend."

This remembrance appeased the Governor greatly.

Dick emptied his glass also, and then said:

"Come, Mr. Bradbury, we have sat here long enough; it is getting fast towards morning now, and if the communication with old Newgate is to be discovered, now is the time. Lead the way—I shall be glad to be relieved of my present state of suspense."

"No doubt," said the Governor, rather gloomily. "I wish from the very bottom of my heart that the day was over, and night come."

"And I wish," Dick added, "that I was safe out of Newgate, and a mile away from it at the least."

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXVI.

DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN GAINING ADMISSION TO A PORTION OF OLD NEWGATE.

"No doubt," said the Governor, smiling at the heartiness with which Dick Turpin spoke—"no doubt, but some time will have to elapse before that desirable state of things can possibly come to pass."

He took up the lamp as he spoke, and stepped towards the door.

"Excuse me for making myself so much at home," said Dick; "but if you have no objection I will appropriate this bottle of brandy to my own use; it strikes me that it will prove no bad companion to me when down there in the vaults."

"Take it—take it, by all means," said the Governor; "you will indeed want something to keep the damp out."

"And a light," said Turpin—"I must have a light of some description; not that I care so much about remaining in the dark, only if I have a lamp burning I shall know at once by the appearance of the flame whether the air I breathe is pure enough to support life."

The Governor nodded.

"A prudent thought," he said. "You must not be without a lamp, otherwise you might stray into some passage or other where the air is vitiated from having been closed up so long; no doubt the whole place is filled with a foul atmosphere."

"Then, if you like," said Dick, "I will take the lamp you have in your hand."

"Very good."

"But shall you not want some light in order to return?"

"No," replied the Governor, with a smile. "Short as has been my residence in Newgate, I have already learned every turn and corner in it. I can find my way back in the dark easily; and there will be this advantage attached to it, I shall be more likely to escape observation."

Dick nodded as he answered:

"Lead on, then, now—I am quite ready."

The Governor obeyed, and the next moment this strangely-assorted couple were traversing the long, silent corridors of Newgate.

Very still, very gloomy, and very oppressive were they, and a by no means comfortable sensation came over Dick, but he banished it as well as he could, and, in obedience to the injunctions of his companion, trod as lightly as was possible.

More like two ghosts, then, than two living human beings, they continued gliding along passages, which seemed interminable, especially to Dick, who was top-full of impatience.

Fearing to raise an alarm, scarcely a word had been exchanged between them since they started, but all at once the Governor, pausing slightly, said, in a whisper:

"Now, then, we shall soon know whether the entrance to old Newgate exists, for at the bottom of this flight of steps is the corridor of which I spoke."

Dick made no reply, but raised his finger and pointed down the slippery staircase at the top of which they stood.

Mr. Bradbury understood him, and commenced the descent.

Ever since they had quitted the Governor's apartments they had been gradually descending.

Each passage that they traversed was on a lower level than the one preceding it.

Never until now, however, had they reached a staircase so deep and well-like as this one.

The air, too, was bitter cold, and laden with an unwholesome moisture.

"There is not much fear of an interruption now," the Governor said, speaking as well as his chattering teeth would allow him; "this part of the prison is never visited, I believe, and you may almost make yourself safe here—the cells are all out of repair, and quite unfit for use."

Just as he finished speaking, the bottom of the staircase was reached, and then they found themselves standing in an arched passage, so narrow, that by standing in the centre of it, and stretching out the arms horizontally the sides could be touched, and so low that Dick's hat brushed away many of the dark fungi that depended from the ceiling.

The walls, too, in many places were covered with nitric exhalations, which had crystallised, and so sparkled brilliantly as the rays of the lamp fell upon them.

But there was a general clamminess in the air, and an unwholesome odour that irresistibly reminded them of the grave.

Mr. Bradbury seemed by no means anxious to linger in this passage.

He quickened his pace considerably, and then, having reached the extremity of the passage, paused.

Deeply set in the crumbling wall was a small door, apparently of great strength.

It was secured by means of massive iron bars, a huge lock, and a bolt of corresponding proportions at the top and bottom.

"There," said the Governor, with a shiver, "that's the door, and beyond all doubt there lies beyond it all that remains of old Newgate."

It was impossible for Dick to look upon the old doorway without a feeling of deep, strange interest.

"Will you hold the lamp," said the Governor, "while I try to remove the bars and bolts?"

"Nay," said Dick, placing the bottle on the gro

"allow me to do that, for I fancy I am stronger than you are. But how about the lock—how shall we undo that?"

"I know not," said the Governor. "The chances are a thousand to one whether the key belonging to it is in existence. To me, the door itself looks very old and rotten, and if the bars are taken down and the bolts withdrawn, we may be able to force it open."

Dick thought so too, and then, not without much trouble, and difficulty, and delay, managed to remove the fastenings spoken of.

The bolts gave him the greatest trouble, for it seemed as though they had completely rusted into their sockets.

"Now," said the Governor, when the last bolt was withdrawn, 'try if the door will open."

Dick pressed against it, and it gave way slightly.

"I think we shall manage it," he said. "Either the lock has rusted away or else the place into which the bolt fits has rotted."

He again renewed the pressure, though the Governor exclaimed:

"No violence, mind—no violence! This place, for all I know, may be visited to-morrow, and your destruction, or, at least, your discovery is certain if there are any appearances of this door having been forced."

"All right," said Dick. "There you are."

Just as he spoke the door creaked open a little way upon its hinges.

The lock had been forced, but it was the doorpost that had given way, and on the side where they now stood no traces of violence could be perceived.

No sooner was the door opened than a quantity of foul air rushed forth.

So powerful was it that both Dick and the Governor felt giddy and sick, and the light they carried was well-nigh extinguished.

But, mingling with the purer atmosphere in the damp passage, the foul air quickly lost its noxious qualities.

"That's not encouraging," said Dick, as soon as he was able to speak. "However, we will push the door wide open, so as to ventilate the place a little bit."

This he did, and remained for some time in order that the desired effect might be produced.

Then, warned by the flight of time, he picked up the bottle of brandy from the floor, and took the lamp from the hands of the Governor.

"Good-bye for the present," he said—"good-bye! Make the door secure after me, and when it is time for me to escape, come here again."

"You may depend upon that," said the Governor. "And, if a long time elapses, do not be either alarmed or uneasy, for circumstances may keep me away."

"You may depend upon that. I shall keep perfectly quiet until you return. I have no wish to be discovered."

"That is sufficient, then. Good-bye!"

Dick, with the lamp in his hand, crossed the gloomy threshold, and stood in a passage leading he knew not whither.

The Governor closed the door, and, in spite of the darkness, succeeded in replacing the whole of the fastenings, and so successfully that it was very doubtful that the fact of the door having been opened would be discovered.

Although in Newgate, and in that damp, cold passage, Dick Turpin had felt while the Governor was with him that he was an inmate of this world and that there was life around him; but as soon as the old door was closed this impression vanished, and was succeeded by a totally different one.

It seemed as though in crossing that threshold he had stepped from life to death.

The silence around was something terrible; even the retreating footsteps of the Governor could not be distinguished, and the darkness was so dense that it defied altogether the illuminating powers of the lamp, which seemed to shine only like a star from a dark cloud.

With a view of getting the better of these feelings, Dick applied himself to the bottle of brandy, and having drunk a small portion of the spirit, felt considerably relieved—he looked about him, indeed, with quite a different feeling, and he either imagined, or it was a reality, that the lamp now burned more clearly than before, and enabled him to see around him.

So far as he could tell, the passage in which he stood did not differ particularly from the one he had just left; yet he felt a strange sensation creep over him, as he reflected that probably he was the only human being who had stood there for more than a hundred years.

And now, as he remained quite still, listening, a faint sound that was before inaudible came upon his ears.

It was the dull drip, drip of water trickling down somewhere in the distance.

In such a place as that Dick felt that it would be some relief and consolation to hear even his own voice, and so, in default of having anyone to speak to, he uttered his thoughts aloud.

"I can't remain here all the time," he said—"I should be chilled through to the very bone. No, I will take advantage of this opportunity to explore the hidden mysteries of old Newgate. No doubt I shall find much to interest me and repay me for my trouble. But I must be careful in my wanderings. What means can I adopt to find my way back to this door with certainty?"

This was a question that required a good deal of deliberation.

Many means suggested themselves to him, only, unfortunately, he had not the necessary tools to carry them into effect.

A simple plan would have been to make chalk marks upon the floor, but even this was impossible, for he had no chalk.

Soon afterwards, however, it occurred to him that he might manage to pick out a piece of crumbling mortar from the wall, and make that answer his purpose; at any rate, he resolved to try.

He succeeded in obtaining a piece of mortar from between two of the stones, and, upon trying whether it would leave a mark behind it, was delighted to find that it answered the purpose almost as well as chalk itself, for, being soft with damp, it crumbled easily.

Feeling now great confidence in being able to find his way back, and having refreshed himself with another draught of brandy, Dick took up the lamp, and walked slowly and carefully along the passage, looking keenly at each side of him.

Having gone about twenty paces, he paused, and, stooping down, drew upon the flooring a rude representation of an arrow with the point turned in the direction of the door.

By the aid of this he could not possibly fail to find his way back, nor could he be in any doubt as to which way he should turn; and this precaution he resolved to adopt at every twenty paces or thereabouts.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXVII.

IN WHICH THE TWO SHERIFFS LOSE THEIR APPETITES FOR BREAKFAST.

It was in no very enviable frame of mind that the Governor of Newgate groped his way back through the dark passages to his own apartments.

However much confidence he might place in the King's letter, yet he knew there could not fail to be a tremendous row when Turpin's absence was discovered, and the consequences might be very disagreeable to himself, though he was sustained by the thought that in the end all would be well.

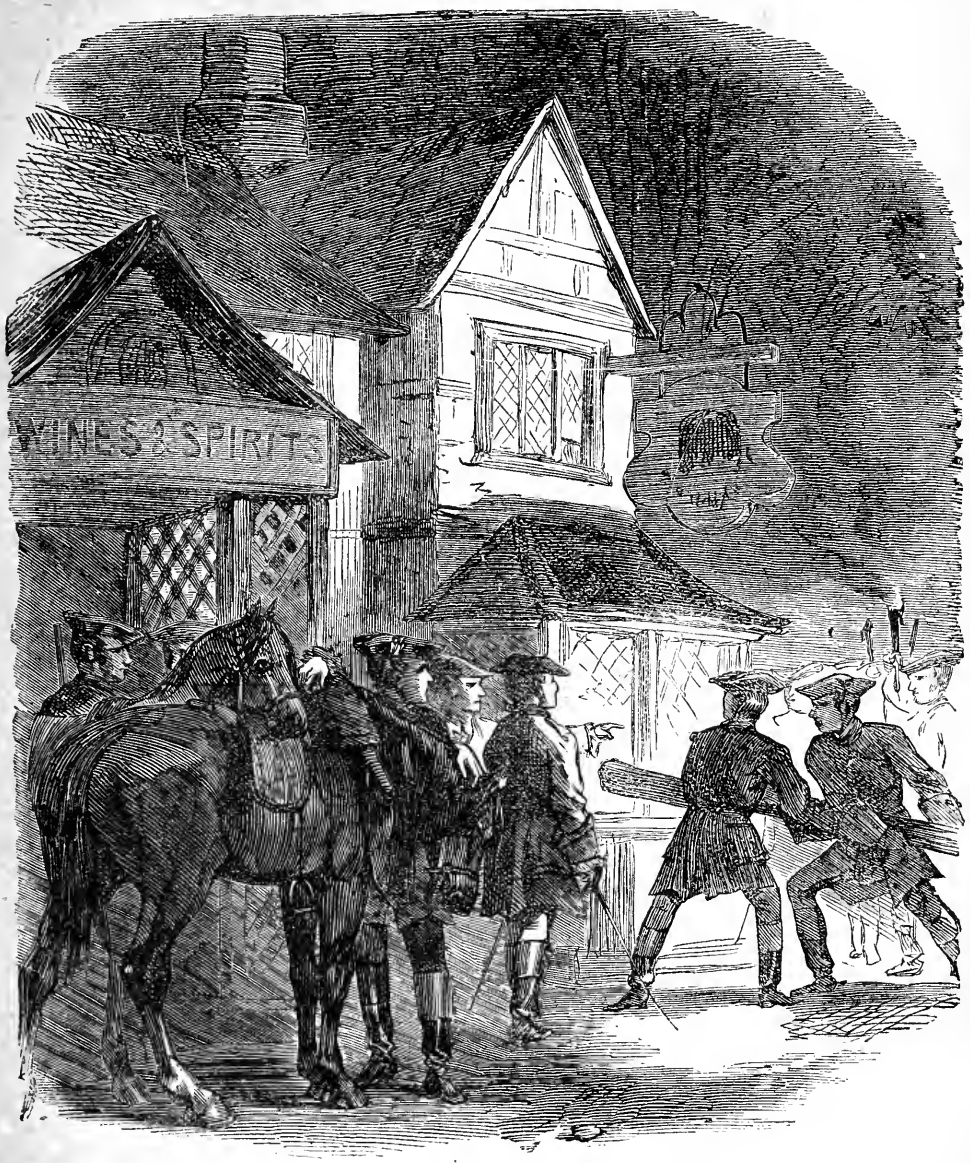
His mind was troubled, too, respecting the egregious blunder he had made with regard to the warrant.

He was afraid that mistake would somehow or other become known, or the sheriffs might take it into their heads to look at the document, and then a discovery would be certain.

This would bring up a fresh charge against him, for he would have to clear himself from his very culpable negligence.

When, therefore, he ascended to his bedroom to snatch an hour or so's sleep before the business of the day began, he was in no humour to listen to the railings of his wife; and in a short time such a storm of words arose that the Governor was obliged to retreat vanquished from the room—sleep there was quite out of the question.

Descending to his office, he sat there watching the daylight as it gradually stole into the room.



[THE ATTACK OF THE POLICE OFFICERS UPON THE THREE SPIDERS INN.]

He went once to the blind, and drew it slightly aside to peep out.

He drew back immediately, somewhat dismayed by the immense concourse without.

"They will be enraged beyond all measure," he muttered, "when they learn their disappointment. However, the walls of Newgate are strong, and while I am within them I shall be safe."

Breakfast was brought, but Mr. Bradbury was too excited to partake of anything.

He solaced himself with one more perusal of the King's letter, which he carefully consigned to an inner pocket of his coat.

It was shortly afterwards the intelligence was brought to him that the sheriffs had arrived.

It was his duty to receive them, and usher them into the prison, so he went forth accordingly.

Never before had the Governor appeared so full of urbanity.

He bowed so continually and so deeply, that it seemed as if he was unable to straighten his back.

"Very good—very good!" said one of the sheriffs, in a wheezy voice, and who, had he not rejoiced in the suggestive name of Moses Moses, would have been known by the cast of his countenance to be a descendant of Abraham.

His companion was a Mr. Lupin, a silk mercer in the City, whose premises having once been broken into and robbed, had caused him ever afterwards to be an implacable foe to robbers of all kinds, and nothing in the world afforded him so much genuine satisfaction as to see one of the race disposed of at Tyburn.

"Breakfast is ready, I suppose, Bradbury," said Mr. Lupin. "We will sit down to breakfast, and then we

shall be fortified against the heavy duties of this day. The prisoner is all right, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes!" said the Governor, licking his lips, and bowing again so as to conceal his countenance as much as possible. "I have been most particular in my charge of him, and paid him a visit in his cell at midnight, and left him there quite safe."

"And were two men outside the door?"

"Yes," responded the Governor, "they have kept a careful watch ever since."

"That's all right, then."

"Mr. Lupin," said Mr. Moses, "it strikes me it would be no very bad thing if we were to pay a visit to the cell the first thing—just a preliminary visit, you know."

"Good—so we will!" responded his companion. "I am sure the sight of the rascal will impart an extra relish to every mouthful I eat!"

The Governor began to tremble.

The moment of discovery had come.

"I'll warrant," said Moses Moses, "that, with all his bravado, this Turpin will not have so good an appetite for his breakfast as we shall—eh, Lupin?"

"No—no, decidedly not," responded that individual, passing his arm through that of his fellow-sheriff.

Mr. Bradbury, with a dreadful quaking at the heart, led the sheriffs to the vestibule of the prison.

Here they found the turnkey who had behaved in so friendly a manner to Dick, with a huge tray of eatables in his hands.

"Eh—eh?" said Moses Moses. "Who's that for?"

"What is it—what is it?" inquired the Governor, addressing the turnkey.

"The prisoner's breakfast, if you please, sir," he answered, respectfully. "I was just going to take it in."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Lupin. "The idea of a prisoner having such a breakfast as that! It's time this state of things was altered. Why, the rascals positively live in Newgate like kings—yes, like kings."

"You can follow us, then," said Mr. Bradbury; "we're going to the cell now."

To the cell accordingly he marched, and, reaching the door of it, he found the two turnkeys much in the same position as he had left them the night before.

They rose at once, seeing the Governor and sheriffs approach, and bowed very humbly.

"All right?" said Moses Moses, interrogatively—"prisoner all right, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes," returned Miller, with great politeness. "We've never stirred a blessed peg from this door since the Governor left us."

"Then he's sure to be safe—eh, Lupin?"

"Yes, decidedly safe, my dear sir."

"Then," cried Moses Moses, "just open the door, if you please."

The Governor made a sign to the two men to remove the fastenings, trying hard all the while to look unconscious of what was about to take place.

Little dreaming of the discovery they were about to make, the turnkeys pushed open the door.

Miller crossed the threshold with the intention of warning the prisoner that distinguished visitors were about to enter.

But no sooner had he gone far enough to enable him to command a view of the whole interior of the cell than he stood like a man suddenly transformed to ice, while all that escaped his lips was the remarkable exclamation:

"Well, blow my higgledy piggledy!"

The other turnkey, guessing at once something was wrong, jumped into the cell and placed himself beside his comrade.

Then, rolling his eyes around twice with a terrified expression, he uttered a fearful yell.

"Dear me!" said Moses Moses. "What is it?"

"An escape!" said Lupin, with a pang. "Oh, there's an escape—something tells me there's an escape!"

"An escape?" echoed the Governor. "Impossible! I assure you I left him here safe at midnight, as these two men will testify."

Unheeding his remarks, the two sheriffs pushed their way into the cell, where the Governor thought it prudent to follow them.

It needed only one glance to assure them all that the cell was untenanted.

The Governor pretended to look astounded.

"Well," he ejaculated, "this passes my comprehension altogether. I left him here safe not many hours ago. Miller, don't you recollect that I did?"

"Yes, sir, I do. I recollect it very well, and I will swear that since then we've never moved our backs from the door!"

"Then how has he got out?" cried Mr. Lupin, in such evident distress that it was plain his appetite for his breakfast had vanished. "By what means has he escaped?"

This led to a close investigation of the cell, which, of course, produced no result except that of convincing them that all was just as it should be, and that there was nothing whatever to show by what means the prisoner had departed

Had he vanished into air before their eyes, his disappearance could not have been more extraordinary or complete.

For some moments the sheriffs stood staring dumbly at each other, the Governor in the meantime looking at them furtively.

At length, in a very pompous voice, Mr. Moses Moses spoke.

"Bradbury," he said, "you will have to account for this, and it's a very odd thing to me if you don't find yourself in custody before the day is out—indeed, I have a good mind to give you in charge now."

"My dear sir," said the Governor, almost falling flat on his face—"my dear sir, don't utter any such words!"

"But he is gone," said Mr. Lupin, with a shriek—"he is gone, and he has taken my appetite with him!"

"At any rate," pursued Moses Moses, "these two men shall be carefully locked up. They shall answer for their neglect of duty."

Two men more utterly astounded than were these two turnkeys could not possibly be found.

The astonishment depicted upon their countenances was truly a sight to look at.

Had they been by some extraordinary means convinced that they were not in Newgate, but up in the moon, they could not have been more incredulous or overwhelmed.

Mr. Lupin all at once recollected that the Governor had mentioned paying the prisoner a visit at midnight, and so he made some inquiries on that point.

The Governor assured them that he had then left Dick Turpin quite safe in his cell, and that when he opened the door and went out, the men had carefully fastened it.

This, however, did not satisfy the sheriffs.

The more they thought the matter over, and the more they inquired into it, the more freely they became impressed with the conviction that the prisoner had made his escape at least by the connivance of the turnkeys, if not by that of the Governor himself.

At any rate, they determined that a searching investigation should be made.

Mr. Moses Moses started the idea that Dick Turpin might still be somewhere in the prison, and, unlikely as this idea was, it was seized upon gladly by the two turnkeys, who at once desired that the closest search should be made.

They hoped, with all their hearts, that Dick would be found.

They knew their own innocence, but they felt that it would avail them nothing at all.

We have overlooked the friendly turnkey, whose astonishment scarcely exceeded his joy upon finding that Dick Turpin had so mysteriously disappeared, yet when the sheriffs talked about searching the prison he felt fearfully uneasy.

He knew, from actual observation, how close was the watch which the officers had kept all around the prison, and therefore felt certain that by no possibility could Dick have left its precincts unseen.

Trembling, therefore, with dread, he waited with great anxiety the result of the search through the prison.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXVIII

DICK TURPIN MAKES AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY IN ONE OF THE CORRIDORS OF OLD NEWGATE.

THE rapidity with which the intelligence spread all over Newgate that Dick Turpin had mysteriously disappeared from his cell was something astonishing.

From mouth to mouth the strange story went, until in the huge pile of building there was not a single person unacquainted with it, the prisoners alone excepted.

The utmost consternation was the result, and many were the strange, ridiculous speculations indulged in, all of which were very far indeed from the mark.

Mr. Moses Moses had quite decided upon the necessity of a search, and he suggested to the Governor that until the building was thoroughly looked over the news of the escape should not be suffered to reach the ears of any persons outside.

The Governor, of course, readily fell into his views, for he had no reason to oppose them; consequently, the search having been agreed upon, means were taken to set about it without delay.

"If I might suggest, Mr. Moses," said the Governor.

"Oh, certainly, suggest what you like."

"Well, then, I would propose that we all go to the vestibule and begin our search from that point, because it is from there that all parts of Newgate can be reached."

This proposition seemed such a reasonable one that the sheriffs at once adopted it.

To the vestibule accordingly they went, and, the necessary keys having been provided, they began their difficult and tedious task.

Yet they persevered, for the sheriffs really felt quite a personal interest in the matter, and it would have vexed them exceedingly had the prisoner got out of their clutches.

But there is no necessity for us to accompany them in their search through the vaults and corridors, since we know very well that the search could only result in a failure.

Down to the lowermost vaults and up on to the top of the roof of the building went the sheriffs, the Governor, and a party of turnkeys.

But nowhere could they discover a single trace of the absent prisoner.

Without appearing to have any such design, the Governor carefully avoided going to those damp, underground cells communicating with old Newgate, and as the acquaintance of the sheriffs with the prison was very superficial indeed, they were none the wiser in this respect—in fact, the door at the top of the long flight of steps descending to the cells was always kept locked, and the key was never out of the Governor's possession.

After searching for upwards of an hour, the sheriffs, tired, vexed, and hot, were obliged to come to the conclusion that by some means, supernatural or otherwise, the prisoner had vanished.

It was then that the news was first suffered to go forth, and it was then the assembled crowds in the Old Bailey outside learned the cause of the delay.

It was then the whisper circulated—

"Dick Turpin has escaped!"

His position, however, notwithstanding the failure of the sheriffs to discover his retreat, was by no means a comfortable or enviable one.

For aught he could tell, still closer search would be made, or so close a watch might be kept upon all the outlets of the prison that he would be unable to get away.

All these thoughts pressed heavily upon him as he endeavoured to while away the time by thoroughly exploring the strange place he was in.

As we have already stated, he took the precaution of making the arrow mark at every few yards, so that he should be in no danger of losing his way.

For a long time he found nothing, however, to recompense him for his trouble.

All at once, however, he perceived before him something that looked like a bright, glittering star.

His first impression was that a huge diamond must be lying in his path, of such lustre that it caught the faint light from the lamp he carried and reflected it with redoubled brilliancy.

Not long, however, did he remain under this impression.

With great suddenness he understood the meaning of what he saw.

It was some opening or other looking out upon the day light—perhaps some opening by which he might escape.

To carry his lamp forward with him towards this aperture would have been unwise in the extreme, as he would be in great danger of discovery, nor could he extinguish it, for he had not the materials with him to relight it.

All he could do was to place it down upon the ground in a spot where it was sheltered somewhat from the draught, and then, with his eyes fixed upon the light in front, to grope slowly and cautiously towards it.

This proceeding he carried out, and found the distance he had to go much less than he had anticipated, for the opening was very small, and as he drew close he perceived that it was crossed and recrossed by bars of iron.

It was also high up in the wall above him, and although he could see through it, yet he did not, as he expected, catch a glimpse of the blue sky.

On the contrary, all he saw was something looking very much like the roof of some chamber in the prison.

All at once he arrested his steps, for the murmur of voices came most distinctly upon his ears.

Clearly, then, he was near some portion of the new prison.

As persons were so close at hand, there was a double reason for silence and caution.

On tiptoe, therefore, and pausing between every step, he crept nearer to the opening, hoping that he might overhear some of the conversation that was being carried on.

He was successful, for, without making any noise whatever, he managed to place himself close against the wall, just under the grated aperture we have mentioned.

One of the voices speaking he immediately recognised as being that of the turnkey who had turned out so true a friend to him.

In the conversation itself there was nothing important or interesting, chiefly because it did not concern him or his proceedings.

Yet Dick listened to it intently.

That dreadful feeling of loneliness which had settled at his heart now passed away—he once more felt as though he belonged to this world.

To him there was an inexpressible pleasure in listening to the rude voices and coarse jests of these turnkeys.

After some speculation, Dick decided that he must be close to the vestibule of the prison, for in no other part would the turnkeys be likely to assemble. As he afterwards found, he came to the correct conclusion.

In former times there had been a door close to where he stood, communicating with a portion of the old prison, but becoming disused, the door was taken down and the wall built up. In its stead the grated opening above for some reason or other was left.

Folding his arms and leaning against this wall, Dick remained for some time.

He was disappointed at the result of his explorations so far, and he felt, besides, that he would rather stay there close to human beings than he would remain in some dark lonesome portion of the vaults.

Here, then, he stood when the Governor and sheriffs entered the vestibule as we have just described.

It may be imagined, perhaps, with what interest Dick listened to all that passed between them.

He had expected that Newgate would be searched, and yet when he found they were setting about it in such a determined manner, he could not control a considerable amount of uneasiness that crept over him.

But at length he heard from the turnkeys the delightful intelligence that the search had been given up as altogether hopeless, though there was a probability that it would be renewed.

Having heard that much, Dick was content.

He found himself weary, too, of remaining so long in one place and in one position, and, therefore, creeping noiselessly away, went back to the spot where he had left his lamp.

It was burning steadily and clearly.

Near him was a passage branching off to the right, and

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this passage, for want of something better to do, he determined to explore.

But as he strode on he found that there was nothing at all remarkable in its appearance—nothing to repay him for his trouble.

He was about to turn back, when his eye happened to fall upon something glittering on the ground near his feet.

He stooped to pick it up, then examined it by the light of the lamp.

To his surprise he saw it was a small portion of a gold chain that had evidently been broken with a great amount of violence.

To one end of this chain depended a small locket of peculiar manufacture, and in which was the portrait of a young and beautiful girl.

Dick gazed upon this portrait with very strange feelings indeed, and no wonder.

He had every reason to believe that the portion of Newgate he was now in had remained closed up and unvisited for nearly a hundred years.

It would, then, be only natural for him to expect to find that this young girl was attired in the costume of days long gone by.

To his surprise, however—though the word is too weak to express the feeling he experienced—he perceived that her dress was in every way modern—such, indeed, as was then almost universally worn.

Well might such a discovery as this find food for Turpin's thoughts.

Indeed, simply to find a trinket of this description in such a place would be strange enough.

But how came it there?

One thing he could not possibly resist, and that was, that it had fallen there lately.

Who, then, he asked himself, had traversed those passages beside himself—those passages which he fancied had been untrodden for so long?

This was a question to which, of course, he could return no reply, and so, with a vacant, absent air, he continued to turn the locket and chain over and over, and every now and then would pause to gaze upon the sweet, innocent face that had been painted there.

Rousing himself at length from his reflections, Dick carefully consigned the locket to his pocket, then, trimming the lamp, he held it aloft so that its light should be well diffused, and looked around him in all directions with uncommon closeness and eagerness.

Nothing, however, met his gaze, but the strong, damp, stone walls and the little doorways which at frequent intervals broke in upon their evenness.

"This is strange indeed," he muttered, as he took a step forward, "but it will be an odd thing to me if I don't come to some definite conclusion respecting it."

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXIX.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN HAS SOME FURTHER ADVENTURES IN THE CORRIDORS OF OLD NEWGATE.

CONTINUING to look around him thus closely, Dick Turpin slightly advanced until, having gone about half-a-dozen paces, he found the character of the place he was in altogether changed.

The passage abruptly terminated in a large, peculiarly-shaped chamber, and which, after a brief examination, he concluded must at some time or other have served as a vestibule.

Doors could be seen opening from it, and passages branching off similar to the one from which he had just emerged.

The roof of this chamber gradually got higher towards the centre, and, having paused as nearly as he could tell in the middle, Dick held up the lamp and endeavoured to ascertain its height.

This, however, he was not able to do, for overhead he could see nothing but a huge black patch.

Looking down again upon the ground, thinking perhaps to find some other fragment of the broken chain, he suddenly started

A strange expression swept over his face, and he seemed inclined to turn aside.

But changing his disposition, he stooped down.

The rays of the lamp then fell upon an object well calculated to make the senses of the boldest sicken with horror.

On the ground was a large spot of blood scarcely dry yet in some places, but evidently fast soaking into and mingling with the damp earth.

Marvelling more and more at what he saw, and feeling now fearfully anxious to unravel the whole mystery, Dick, keeping the lamp close to the ground, tried to trace the blood close to another spot.

But in this he failed completely.

There was no clue to it whatever.

But before him was a passage which seemed to invite him to enter it—at any rate, he strode quickly forward and commenced an exploration of it.

Less than ten strides brought him to the termination of it.

His further progress was barred by a door.

This door was old, worm-eaten, and seemed as though it would only require a slight touch to push it from its frame.

On the side upon which Turpin stood, it was secured by bars and bolts, and these, after some deliberation with himself, and after listening for awhile and finding all silent, Dick ventured to remove.

Pressing gently against the door, he found it opened to his touch.

Beyond all was darkness.

He listened again. But, reassured by the silence, crossed the threshold.

How great was his wonder to find himself in what he firmly believed from its appearance to be the cellar of a house.

In this he might have been mistaken, but soon all his doubts and surmises were set at rest, for going to the foot of a flight of steps that led down into it, he stood and heard distinctly the sound of voices above.

The tones were quite unfamiliar to him, and he was quite certain that it was none of the turnkeys of Newgate he heard conversing, besides, a woman's voice mingled with the others.

The light he carried with him prevented him from observing earlier what now came under his notice, which was that there was a small grating in one portion of the wall, through which a few gleams of light made their way.

Placing the lamp aside, he went close up to this grating, and peered through it.

In front was a small square, recess-like-looking place, at the top of which he could distinguish another grating, lying in a horizontal position.

Now, however, that he had reached this place, he received additional confirmation of his idea, for he could hear the sound of many footsteps hurrying by above, as well as the rumbling of wheels and the trampling of horses' feet.

Clearly, then, he was somewhere near a street, and beyond all doubt he was in the cellar of a house which must mysteriously and strangely have a communication with Newgate.

Retracing his footsteps, Dick closed the door, and examined it.

The fastenings were all upon the prison side of the door, and he felt certain that very many years had elapsed since these fastenings had been removed.

This blew to the winds the hypothesis that he had already raised in his mind to account for the discoveries he had made.

If the fastenings had been removable by anyone in the cellar, the solution to the whole mystery would have been easy; but he felt perfectly confident that it would be utterly impossible for anyone to pass from the cellar into the prison without resorting to the violent means of breaking down the door.

This palpably had never been done, so he was now quite as much in the dark as ever.

Replacing the bars, and pushing the bolts into their rusty sockets, he retraced his steps into the large chamber.

Again he endeavoured to ascertain the height of the roof, but the lamp now burned much more dimly than before, so that he met with no success—indeed, the condition of the light alarmed him a little, and upon examination he found that only a small quantity of oil remained in the reservoir made to contain it.

Perhaps the flame would expire in a few minutes.

At any rate, it could not burn long, and, much as it vexed him to leave the spot, he felt constrained to do so, as to find his way back to the door where the Governor would expect to see him would be perfectly impossible in the darkness.

Accordingly he retraced his steps, and, owing to the excellent precautions he had taken in marking his route, he had not the least difficulty in doing this.

The door was reached, but scarcely had he arrived at it than the lamp, after flickering a moment or two expired.

He was now in the most absolute darkness, and altogether without the means of dispersing it.

Nothing remained for him to do but to stay just where he was, and count the seconds as they elapsed.

How earnestly he longed for night to come, in order that the Governor might make his appearance.

He could not dare to reflect upon the contingency that some circumstance might arise to make it impossible for Mr. Bradbury to pay his promised visit.

It would be bad enough to consider the evil when it presented itself.

Dick was very weary, and a long time had elapsed since he had slept.

A drowsy feeling now came over him—perhaps caused by the badness of the atmosphere.

He did not attempt to struggle against it, but, sinking down in a curious, uncomfortable-looking posture, dropped off into a profound slumber.

Strange dreams flitted before him, in which the curious and fearful discoveries he had made held a prominent place.

How long he would have slept if left to himself would be a problem difficult of solution, but all at once he was aroused by a slight noise, and, opening his eyes, he saw the door open immediately afterwards, and perceived the Governor standing on the threshold with a lamp in his hand, the brilliancy of which absolutely dazzled him.

That was only because he had been for such a long time in total darkness, and it was a feeling that quickly passed away.

There was a look of anxious care upon Mr. Bradbury's countenance, such as Dick had never seen upon it before.

"You are safe, I see," was his first remark.

"Yes, safe enough," returned Dick, shaking himself. "I have been asleep—I don't know how long, for the lamp burned out and left me in darkness."

The Governor stared in surprise.

He could scarcely conceive of sleeping in such a place.

But Dick was anxious to know what was going on in the world above, and questioned him accordingly.

The Governor had but little to tell, and nothing that he said was very satisfactory.

A tremendous outcry had been raised by the police and all the authorities, and the prevalent idea in the minds of all was that he was still concealed somewhere in the prison.

"I had hoped," the Governor said, "that I should be able to release you to-night, and, for all I know, it might be accomplished; yet there is such an amount of hazard connected with it that I cannot help shrinking back."

"Indeed!" said Dick. "You fear you will be seen?"

"I do; not exactly that I need care much for the consequences, but still, the letter expressly states that you were to be liberated secretly."

"Yes; and it must be secretly," said Dick, "or, rely upon it, I shall be pounced upon at once."

Dick began to reflect a little.

Perceiving him to be silent, the Governor took from his pocket a small package.

"I guessed you would be hungry," he said, "and so I have brought you something to eat. Here is another bottle of brandy to wash it down with, so you must make yourself as comfortable as you can, and wait until there is a chance of getting free."

"Mr. Bradbury," returned Dick, "I am much obliged to you for all that you have done in my behalf—very much obliged to you indeed, and rest assured I shall not forget it. I should be very sorry, too, to get you into any trouble on my account."

"Oh," said the Governor, "don't mention it!"

"Excuse me," continued Dick, "but I will. Now, I don't think you will be displeased to hear that I fancy I shall be able to make my escape from the prison without your connivance or assistance."

"Indeed! How so?"

"Why, in my explorations through these corridors, I have found a door that, strangely enough, communicates with the cellar of a house which, from the position of it, must be, I take it, somewhere near Newgate Market."

"Indeed!" said the Governor. "I never heard of such a thing. Have you not been dreaming?"

"No, I think not; but, however, if you will leave me the lamp you carry, and take away this one, which has burnt out, I will try what I can do towards effecting my own release. If I succeed, all well and good—you will soon hear of me; if I fail, you will find me close to the door here, and I shall then be obliged to look to you for my safety."

The Governor remained for some moments in reflection.

"If this is really the case," he exclaimed, at length, "I shall be heartily rejoiced, since I shall have nothing further to fear from those who may take it into their heads to watch my movements. I will leave you, then, since you wish it, to your own exertions, and to-morrow night about this time I will, if it lies in my power, creep down to this door, and, if I find you are not here, I shall come at once to the conclusion that you have managed to avail yourself of the mode of escape you speak of."

CHAPTER DCCCXC.

DICK TURPIN IS SURPRISED TO FIND THAT HE IS NOT ALONE IN OLD NEWGATE.

"Just so," said Turpin. "And in case I should be gone, as I hope I shall be, just let me remind you about that substantial recognition I was talking about."

"Oh," replied the Governor, briskly, "there's no need to remind me about that—none whatever, I can assure you!"

"Very likely not," said Dick, smiling, "but I only just mentioned it in order that I might give you a caution."

"A caution? Of what kind?" asked the Governor, his timorous nature being at once awoke to danger.

"Why, it is simply this: I would advise you not to take any active steps for finding what is hidden under the old tree for, say, a week at least."

"And may I ask why?" said the Governor, after a pause.

"You may—I have no objection to telling you."

"Why is it, then?"

"Because I think it highly probable that for some time to come your movements will be closely watched by the police officers—mind you, I don't say they will be: I only think it probable, for some of them are such dunderheaded fellows that they might get hold of the notion that you were an accomplice of mine, which would be a very good joke indeed."

The Governor laughed, but rather grimly.

"At any rate," added Turpin, quickly, "it would not be well for anyone to become acquainted with this secret besides yourself."

"No, no—I can quite see the force of that.

"Then," added Turpin, "may we conclude that it is agreed you will not pay your visit to Hampstead for the space of a week?"

"Yes," answered the Governor, with something like a sigh, for no doubt he was both anxious and curious to know what kind of substantial recognition he was about to receive.

Dick's real motive for making this bargain did not for a moment strike him.

It was, however, simply because he knew very well no such treasure was buried among the roots of the tree he described, though he intended to place a reward there for the Governor to find.

He could not tell what might happen to him in the course of the next day or two, and if the Governor got to the tree before him it would be vexing in more than one respect; at any rate, it would seem as though he had spoken falsely.

Now, however, this was arranged, and Dick felt quite contented and easy upon the point.

In conclusion, the Governor said:

"And now, if you will allow me to give you a little piece of advice, and ask you to follow it, don't think it is given from a wish to get out of any further trouble with you."

"I would never think such a thing," said Turpin. "Pray what is it? I am most anxious to hear anything you may have to communicate."

"Well, then, candidly speaking, if you can manage by your own adroitness to get clear of Newgate to-night do not fail to do so."

"I will not," was Dick's reply, spoken with even more earnestness than the Governor's instruction.

"The reason why I advise it," pursued Mr. Bradbury, "is that there is great talk of a thorough search through the prison. Hitherto I have been able to keep them from this part of it, but to-morrow some one may step forward who knows all the secrets of this edifice, and a thorough search, in the proper sense of the term, will be made, in which event, should you be lingering here, you would be in great danger of discovery."

"All right," said Dick—"I take the hint."

"And I will depart," concluded the Governor, "for I am desirous not to be absent from my post for any length of time together. My whole thoughts are given to avoid giving cause for suspicions, if I can."

"Very prudent indeed."

The Governor stooped, and, putting down the lamp he had brought with him, the reservoir of which he assured the highwayman contained a good supply of oil, he took up the extinguished one, and said:

"Good night!"

"Farewell!" responded Dick, shaking him by the hand. "I am much obliged to you for all you have done, and I hope I shall not have the pleasure of meeting you again within these walls."

The Governor smiled, and then, evidently wishful to take his departure, stepped out into the outer corridor, fastening up the door as before, and, in spite of the darkness, made his way back to his own apartments without accident.

Dick felt loath for the Governor to go, and, indeed, shortly afterwards wished he had the power to recall him, but it was too late.

Getting into as comfortable a position as he could, Dick partook of the refreshment the Governor had brought, and drank a small quantity of the brandy, after which he felt greatly revived, and ready to embark in any adventure that might present itself before him.

He remained for some moments after he had finished his meal resting his forehead on his hand, and giving himself up to deep thought.

Then, rousing himself, he took from his pocket the locket and chain he had so strangely found.

Once more this underwent a thorough inspection, but nothing more was seen than he had seen already.

He dwelt for a long time upon the pleasing features of the young girl, and, as he returned the trinket to his pocket, he mentally made a vow to use his best endeavours to discover how and by what means it had fallen where he had found it.

Rising, then, and carefully removing all traces of his presence there, Dick took up the lamp, and, with tolerable certainty and confidence, made his way towards the irregularly-shaped chamber, upon the floor of which appeared so terrible and ominous a sign.

Again he made a close examination of this place, without, however, making any fresh discovery except that the increased illumination of the lamp enabled him to obtain a view of the ceiling, a thing he had so anxiously desired.

Instead of finding that the roof continued to slope upwards to a point, as he fully expected it would, he saw that across the upper part of it was laid what looked like a wooden flooring supported on two joists or beams, which, blackened all over by time, were only just distinguishable from the darkness around them.

While thus gazing up, a faint sound from above reached his ears; yet it was a sound, and that it came from the wooden floor above he felt convinced.

Doubtless human beings were at hand, and, as he might consider that all men were at war with him, he was right in fearing detection.

His first impulse, therefore, was to extinguish the lamp, and this he would most certainly have done, only he recollected just in time that he had not the means with him of reigniting it.

Yet the light of that lamp might show itself through any small crevices that there might be between the boards, and thus his presence become known.

Accordingly, without pausing to reflect, but urged only by an instinct which he did not attempt to resist, Dick hastily retreated down one of the corridors, and, having gone far enough as he imagined, stooped down, and placed the lamp in one of the recessed doorways.

Its light was now almost entirely cut off.

But just at this moment Dick started and almost uttered a cry.

It was only by a great effort of self-command that he repressed it.

The profound silence around was suddenly broken in upon by a sound, the nature of which he could not precisely make out, followed by a rushing noise as of some heavy body falling through space.

Then succeeded a dull, heavy crash, and simultaneously a groan.

Dick's first thought was that his imagination had deceived him, but he was not allowed long to retain this impression, for another groan came fainter but more unmistakably than the first.

Wondering what could have occurred, and undecided how to act—for if he ventured forth with the lamp he might be seen—Dick remained for a moment or two a prey to the greatest suspense.

During that period he continued to hear the faint yet painful groans, and, unable to remain a passive listener any longer, he, in spite of the obscurity, crept gently along the passage.

The distance to the chamber was not great, and upon passing over it he stopped and looked upwards.

He almost expected to see something peculiar up in the roof, but he perceived nothing—at least, nothing but darkness.

The lamp behind him, however, cast a feeble gleam of light along the damp, moss-grown flooring, and Dick strained his eyes in the hope of being able to distinguish something.

While thus engaged, he heard a voice say, though in tones no louder than the faintest whisper:

"Help—help, for Heaven's sake, help me! Have mercy upon me—pray have mercy upon me!"

There was no mistaking the character of this appeal.

Some one was lying there dangerously hurt asking for assistance.

Dick hesitated a second, and then, in the same low tones, answered:

"Speak—speak again, that I may know where you are, and grope my way towards you! Speak again! Why do you not reply to me?"

The silence of the grave, however, reigned around.

Dick felt more and more uneasy every moment, but, shaking off these fears which he despised himself for giving way to, he sank down upon his hands and knees, and, with one arm outstretched before him, crept slowly along the flooring.

His motive for this proceeding was, that he considered it would be dangerous to produce the light, lest it should be seen by some unfriendly eye.

Some time elapsed before he was able to make out a dark, dusky-looking mass in front of him, and he would never have perceived it but for the faint gleam of the lamp which we have already referred to.

Again he spoke, but, as before, he met with no response.

Crawling forward a few more paces, he stretched out his arm and touched the dusky form.

It was evidently that of a human being.

The feel of the apparel also told him it was a man, and at the same time he discovered he was either dead or insensible.

Dick no longer hesitated how to act.

A fellow-creature was in difficulty and danger, and it was a natural instinct on his part to assist him.

Seizing him by the shoulders, then, he dragged him slowly along towards the entrance of the corridor where he had left the lamp.

He paused once or twice to rest and to listen.

But the deep silence reassured him, though at the same time it made him feel strangely uncomfortable.

Having entered the passage, however, he proceeded with greater confidence.

He was full of the most intense curiosity to know who this strange being could be, and by what means he had so suddenly and awfully made his appearance in that portion of Newgate which Dick had believed was never trodden by human foot.

CHAPTER DCCCXCI.

DICK TURPIN IS THE AUDITOR OF A MOST EXTRAORDINARY NARRATIVE.

Having dragged the stranger as far as the lamp, Dick Turpin laid him down upon his back, and by the aid of the light looked attentively at his countenance.

It was one pleasing enough to look upon, for if its aspect could be taken as an index for the stranger's character, then, surely, he was of a noble nature and of a most generous disposition.

But his handsome features now appeared quite rigid, as though frozen by death, and his eyes only half closed, and his partially-opened mouth seemed to make it still more certain that he had expired.

It might be, however, that he had only swooned in consequence of the fearful injuries he must have received from falling from so great a height.

Dick sincerely hoped that this would prove the case, for it would have been a bitter disappointment to have been debarred from learning the occasion of the stranger's presence.

Remembering the bottle of brandy he had in his pocket, he drew it forth and poured a small quantity in between the young man's lips.

At first no effect could be perceived, but soon there was a flutter, then a struggle and painful gasps for breath.

Dick half raised him into a sitting posture, and then, to his great satisfaction, he perceived a portion of the brandy had been swallowed.

He instantly applied more, which was drunk eagerly.

"Sir—sir," cried Dick, "whoever you may be, be of good heart! I will defend and assist you to the uttermost."

"Ah!" said the stranger, dreamily, and drawing his hand across his forehead while he spoke, "is it possible that I have found a friend?"

"It is not only possible but quite true," responded Turpin, as cheerfully as he was able. "Do you not feel much better? Would you like more brandy?"

"Yes, I feel better—very much better. But no brandy just at present—I want to think."

Dick remained silent, and the stranger closed his eyes.

It was tolerably certain that he was endeavouring to collect his scattered thoughts and to remember where he was and how he came there.

All at once he uttered an ejaculation, and in the same breath asked where he was.

"That I will tell you presently," said Dick, "when you have recovered yourself a little more. My presence here is one of the strangest things in the world, excepting, of course, your own, for I believed this place was never entered by human beings."

These words seemed to puzzle the stranger exceedingly.

He was clearly fast getting better, for he was now able to sit up without Dick's assistance.

He moved himself a little closer to the wall, however, and rested his back against it.

Then, in a dreamy, half-sleepy fashion, he fixed his eyes upon Turpin as though wondering who he could be.

"Rouse yourself, sir," said Dick, perceiving the state into which he was falling—"let me entreat you to rouse yourself, for this is no place in which to linger. I wish to leave as soon as possible, yet I am determined not to depart until you are able to accompany me."

"Who are you," asked the stranger, "that you should take so deep and great an interest in a person I believe you have never seen before?"

"No matter who I am," said Turpin—"I am ready to do all that lies in the power of a human being to assist and recover you."

"But from what motive?"

"Humanity and, I confess it, a deep curiosity to know by what means you reached this place."

The stranger glanced around him at the dark, dripping walls, and by his manner it seemed as though he was as much in the dark in this respect as Turpin himself.

"You have a right to my confidence," said the stranger after a pause, and speaking in a more mournful tone of voice than he had done hitherto, "besides, my story cannot be too often repeated, since I have all to gain by the publicity of it, and everything to lose by keeping it a secret."

"Indeed," said Dick. "You inflame my curiosity. If I can assist you further, believe me, I am at your commands, for I do not hesitate to say that, over and above all these peculiar circumstances, there is something in your appearance that has wonderfully interested me on your behalf."

The stranger inclined his head and smiled.

"The time will not be altogether lost," he said, "that I shall consume with my relation, for while I am speaking I trust I shall get stronger and better, and, by the time I have concluded, be able to leave this place."

"So do I," said Dick, "and I have no doubt we shall be successful."

"I will begin, then, by telling you," said the stranger, "that the strongest feeling or passion that I have yet known has been that of friendship—friendship for one I have known almost as long as I can recollect—one who has been to me more than a brother, who is far dearer to me than any brother could be, although I have none.

"In our youth our stations in life were much the same—that is to say, we were possessed of a little, but not enough to live upon without exercising our own industry

"The very first disagreement—if so I may term it—that took place between myself and my friend was when the time came for us to make choice of our professions.

"You must understand that there was no similarity of temperament between us, which, for aught I know, might have been the cause of our friendship.

"But from his birth—as I may say—my friend, Leonard Wilton, had had a passion for the sea, and he always maintained that, come what would, he would be a sailor.

"Now, on my part, I had the greatest possible aversion to a seafaring life—indeed, so great is my natural antipathy, that often now I cannot bear to look upon the waves, and the very murmur of the waters on the beach thrills me with a most uncomfortable sensation. In anything else I would have given way to my friend Leonard, but in this it was impossible.

"Greatly as I regretted the separation, yet I felt it must take place—there was nothing else that he would turn his thoughts to; he was bent upon becoming a seaman; and I do believe that, had I accompanied him, one voyage would have brought about my death.

"However, I am entering much too closely into details; I will hasten to satisfy your curiosity.

"You must know, then, that it is nearly a year ago since my friend Leonard returned from his last voyage.

"During his absence in foreign lands a great change has come over my own fortunes; a relative dying, has left me in possession of what is to me a large fortune, and I had resolved that when Leonard came back he should go to sea no more, and that I would share this fortune with him.

"It so happened that I was absent in the north when his vessel reached home. I have certain knowledge that on leaving the ship he proceeded to London, but beyond that I can learn nothing in this huge metropolis; he seems to have been swallowed up like a drop of water in the ocean, and to be irretrievably lost."

There was a tone of deep feeling and pathos in the young man's voice when he reached this part of his narration.

"Wondering at his silence," he continued, "I hastened to London and endeavoured to seek him out.

"In vain, however—he was nowhere to be found.

"I was frantic with grief, and so was Lucy.

"Ah! that reminds me that I had not previously mentioned her name. Well, then, she is, as you may guess, a young girl upon whom my friend has bestowed his affections, and to whom he was about to be married.

"She was to join her solicitations to mine that, or

there would be no longer any necessity for him to traverse the ocean, he would henceforth stay at home.

"I pass over without comment what her grief must be like upon learning her lover's mysterious disappearance.

"A thousand conjectures have occupied her mind and mine. I have devoted my wealth without stint, and given the whole of my time for a long time past in the hope of being able to learn something of his fate.

"I have been totally unsuccessful, however; not the slightest clue has rewarded me for my pains."

Again the young man paused and brushed his hand across his brow

His voice had grown husky while he spoke, and now he endeavoured to clear it.

As for Dick, he was so deeply interested in the narrative that was thus unexpectedly related to him that he really forgot where he was and the strange circumstances by which he was surrounded.

He did not like to urge the stranger to continue, and so for a short time there was a profound silence.

At last the young man resumed his story.

"I have had much dealings with the police," he said, "but they have failed to aid me any further than by uttering surmises.

"Their impression is that this young sailor, on reaching London, was decoyed into one of those places, so many of which are believed to exist, where, if a stranger enters with money about his person, he is never seen or heard of more.

"At last I came to this conclusion. I mourned my friend as one who is dead, but yet I felt impelled to discover if I could by what means he had reached his untimely end.

"I don't like to confess to you that there is still in my heart a faint, lingering hope that I may find him yet living, yet there is such a hope, and it is that which animates me to continue in my course, and that hope will never be extinct until I have proof positive that he is no more."

Dick regarded the young man with the greatest admiration and respect.

He had imagined much from his noble, intelligent-looking countenance, yet he scarcely thought that in the cause of friendship a man would risk and do so much.

In a more rapid voice the young man continued:

"Having, as I say, reluctantly come to the conclusion that my friend had been decoyed into some place and there murdered, as I told you, I devoted myself to the task of finding that place out. At least it would give me some satisfaction to bring such miscreants to justice.

"Adopting, then, almost all disguises, I have roamed London at all hours of the night.

"For some time I had the police with me keeping me in sight; but as I never met with any adventure, and as I came no nearer to my end, I guessed the reason was that the presence of the police officers was known, and therefore I resolved, in spite of the great personal risk, to proceed upon my dangerous adventures alone.

"I did so, but met with no more success than at first, yet I did not despair.

"To pass over all my failures, I will come to the adventures of to-night, though I ought to tell you that I had at last grown weary of my search—indeed, I had almost made the mental determination that if this night passed as the others had I would give up my quest altogether.

"Now, however, I come to the strangest and most fearful portion of my narrative, which I will render you in as few words as possible. The tale is terrible," he added, with a shudder of his whole body, "yet it shall be told."

CHAPTER DCCCXCI.

IN WHICH THE PRESENCE OF THE YOUNG STRANGER IN OLD NEWGATE IS ACCOUNTED FOR.

The stranger's eyes rolled so fearfully around while he spoke, that it seemed as though he could scarcely believe he had escaped from the great danger that had threatened him.

Dick, perceiving his agitation, proffered the bottle of brandy, which was gladly accepted; then, after a draught, he concluded his story.

"It was early this evening," he said, "as I was walking near St. Paul's Cathedral I saw a small crowd of people assembled.

"Everything unusual I had come to consider concerned me, so, quickening my steps, I hastened to see what was the matter.

"Arriving, I found that the cause of the assemblage was a young and beautiful girl, whose countenance looked innocence.

"She was singing in a voice which, for sweetness, I have never known to be equalled. I formed one of the crowd—indeed, the crowd gradually dispersed, though others continually came up.

"But at last this young girl ceased her song.

"Something, I know not what, attracted me towards her; perhaps it was her beauty perhaps the sweetness of her voice, or some mysterious influence beyond my own knowledge. Certainly I remained, and those who had been listening, fearing, I suppose, that the girl was about to solicit a few pence for her song, hastily moving off, I was left alone with her.

"She looked up in my face with a pleasant smile, and, in broken English, made some remark to me, but what the exact words were I cannot recollect.

"I replied by producing my purse, and giving her a piece of silver.

"She was profuse in her thanks upon receiving this gift, and then, placing her hand in a half-familiar, half-timid manner on my arm, requested me to accompany her.

"For a moment I hesitated, and then there came before my mind what I call 'the purpose of my life;' the recollection of it banished my hesitation, and I consented.

"The reason I did so was because I knew full well my friend's impressionable nature, and I thought that had he, upon his arrival in London, met with anyone like this young girl, he would without hesitation have consented to accompany her wherever she went, for he knew no fear.

"In a moment we turned out of the main thoroughfare. I quickly found myself led through a number of narrow passages, the existence of which I was scarcely aware of, although I had travelled London so much.

"I know, however, that these streets, or, rather, passages, exist between St. Paul's Cathedral and the prison of Newgate.

'Coming at length to a house having by no means a prepossessing aspect, I was invited to enter.

"Determined to prosecute the adventure to the uttermost, and hoping to find some trace of my lost friend, I again consented, and soon found myself seated in a room that was furnished strangely at variance with the exterior appearance of the house.

"All this I noted carefully, though my heart beat strangely, for I believed I was on the right track at last.

"Then this young girl poured out for me a glass of wine, and handed it to me. She poured out also one for herself, and I observed that the liquid came from the same decanter.

"The police had often cautioned me against partaking of any drink, lest it should be drugged.

"But this proceeding threw me partially off my guard. However, I raised the wine-glass to my lips, and uttered some silly compliment; but I did not drain the glass—I simply sipped it, perhaps swallowing a tea-spoonful, and I was immediately aware of a strangeness in its taste.

"Just then the girl, having drained her glass, turned half aside to place it on a small table, and at that instant, quick as thought, I inverted my glass.

"The wine that remained fell upon the carpet, the colour of which was dark, and the material soft and woolly; it was absorbed in a moment and no stain was left behind.

"Some more time elapsed, and I was conducted to an upper chamber.

"I had determined to keep all my wits about me, yet to refuse nothing.

"Having entered, the door was closed behind me, and I found myself alone.

"Something in the atmosphere of that room seemed to chill and oppress me, and I gasped painfully for breath.

"Then it occurred to me this was the effects of the drug I had partaken of, and I congratulated myself that



[THE HIGHWAYMEN SEEK SHELTER IN THE SECRET PASSAGE.]

I had not swallowed the whole, although the girl was evidently under the impression that I had done so.

"There was a strange cloudiness in my brain to which I had never been accustomed, which might be attributed either to the strength of the drug or else to the fact that it is rarely indeed that I partake of any intoxicating liquor, as the effects produced make this apparent.

"Rejoiced at this opportunity of finding myself alone, I determined to make a thorough search of the chamber, hoping I should make some discovery worth my while.

"On the table opposite to me I saw trinkets of various kinds, the appearance of some of which struck me as singular, and I advanced with the intention of examining them.

"All at once, however, as I passed over one portion of the flooring near the hearthstone, it suddenly gave way beneath my feet.

"The drug then was exerting its utmost power. I was dizzy and confused, yet, finding myself falling, I had the presence of mind to endeavour to drop upon my hands and feet.

"Whether I succeeded or not I cannot tell you, for from that moment, until the time when I opened my eyes and saw you bending over me, I remember nothing whatever."

"That, then," said Dick, drawing a long breath, for no words can describe the amount of interest with which he listened to this narrative—"is all?"

"Yes," was the reply—"all. And now I have to ask you, in return, who you are and where I now am?"

"I will answer your last question first," said Dick. "No doubt you will be taken greatly by surprise."

"Where am I, then?"

"In Newgate."

"Newgate?"

"You speak incredulously, and I don't wonder at it.

It is a fact, nevertheless. Not in the new, modern prison, but among the vaults remaining of the ancient edifice."

The stranger's countenance at first expressed great disbelief, but then he ejaculated:

"Yes, extraordinary as this may seem, I cannot doubt it. The position of the house—these strong, damp walls, all confirm your statement."

"Well may you be taken by surprise," said Dick, "for I believe the very existence of this place is guessed at and known by very few."

"I never heard of such a thing," he murmured.

"No," said Dick, sinking his voice and pointing upwards; "but those above evidently know all about it."

The young man shuddered; but then, his thoughts reverting to his fresh companion, he looked upon him with undisguised amazement as he said:

"But if this is a portion of old Newgate, how comes it that you are an inhabitant of it?"

"You can scarcely call me such," said Dick. "I am here for refuge. As for myself, I don't care to speak much. I am here. I have offended against the laws, and I am looking for some means of escape."

"Then," continued the young man, still gazing upon him, "am I right in conjecturing that you have escaped from the modern portion of the prison into this?"

"You can surmise what you please," was Turpin's answer. "But it will please me better if you will look upon me as one ready to do all in his power to serve you. Believe me, I am anxious to stand your friend. The adventure you have recounted deeply interests me. I should be glad indeed to bring it to a solution."

"The brandy," said the young man at this moment—"pass me the brandy! I feel once more sick and faint!"

"Very likely," said Turpin, as he complied with his demand. "Drink a little—not too much, and you will soon experience the benefits of it."

"I feel to have new life," answered the stranger. "And now tell me—what do you propose shall be our next proceeding?"

"That's a difficulty," returned Turpin. "It seems to me, however, tolerably clear that you are at last on the right track."

"Do you mean for discovering the fate of my friend?"

"Yes."

"It may be so—it may be so! How easily he would have fallen into such a trap as was laid for me! He would be totally unsuspecting—I was on my guard."

"It's a miracle to me," said Turpin, "how you could have escaped with such slight injuries."

"It is wonderful," returned the young man—"wonderful indeed!"

There was a silence, for Dick just then was thinking of the locket he had found, and was wondering whether by any chance it might belong to the young sailor of whom his companion spoke; if so, the coincidence would be remarkable in the extreme.

"You are silent," said the young man, at length. "Am I right in supposing that you are considering in your own mind which will be the best step for us to take next?"

"Scarcely that," said Dick; "and yet, to go back to a consideration of what you have related, it seems tolerably certain that the young girl who so interested you is regularly sent out in order to decoy people to this place."

The stranger nodded.

"Then, having arrived, they are drugged, and, falling through the treacherous trap-door on to the ground beneath, are killed."

"That's it—evidently it."

"And you," pursued Dick—"rery upon it, you are not the first who has fallen a victim to this snare. I may tell you that I found a spot of blood upon the ground, which looked as though it had fallen there recently."

The young man shuddered.

"I can't bear to reflect upon what would have been my fate!"

"Such a place as this," Dick went on, glancing around him, "would afford every facility for concealing the dead bodies of their victims. They would be plundered of every article of value about their persons, then flung into some of these cells."

This was a very probable supposition indeed, and the stranger felt it to be so.

He could tell, also, by Dick's manner what was uppermost in his thoughts.

"Suppose," said Turpin, "that we satisfy ourselves upon this point, and not remain contented by surmise. It will be easy to ascertain whether in any of these cells are such traces as we seek."

The stranger's face blanched as he said:

"If it is so—and I cannot doubt it—what an awful sight the opening of one of these doors will disclose!"

"Awful indeed," returned Dick Turpin, "yet I consider we ought to satisfy ourselves by one hasty glance."

"Be it so, then," returned the stranger. "I am content to leave that point for your decision."

CHAPTER DCCCXCIII.

IN WHICH THE YOUNG STRANGER DISCOVERS THE FATE OF HIS FRIEND.

Dick rose, and, taking the lamp in his hand, went towards the doorway nearest to him.

The fastenings were all upon the side on which he stood, and he could perceive no difficulty in removing them.

He lifted down the bar, drew back the bolts, and yet he hesitated to push the door open upon its hinges.

Fixing his gaze earnestly upon the young man, who was either too much injured by his fall or else lacked the courage to look into that disused cell, for he remained in the position he had all along occupied, Turpin said, earnestly—nay, with solemnity in his tones:

"Do you think you are prepared to receive the worst confirmation of your fears?"

"I am—I am! Something comes over my mind at this moment that tells me my friend was lured into that house of death, and that he met the fate designed for me!"

Dick bent his head, and then, in lower tones, responded:

"That, too, is my impression. And now, pardon me a moment if I ask you a question about your friend's affianced wife—Lucy, I think you said her name was Are you well acquainted with her features?"

"As well as with my own!"

"Would you recognise her, then?"

"Most certainly!"

In his anxiety, the stranger slowly rose to his feet, and stood looking at Dick wonderingly.

Dick said no more, but at once pushed the door open.

It was fortunate he stood aside, for such an overpowering effluvia came forth that, had he not done so, he would inevitably have been suffocated.

Sickening with horror, he waited a few moments; then, raising the lamp, went to the threshold of the cell.

"Come," he said, addressing his companion, "look in also. I don't wish a second glimpse."

Tremblingly, the young man obeyed.

The sight presented to their gaze was indeed a truly fearful one.

Lying in this cell, which was one of considerable extent were many human bodies—all dead, all bearing marks of great personal violence upon them; some looking as though they had only just been cast into that strange sepulchre, while of others nothing but glistening bones remained.

The appearance of the light caused a tremendous scuffling in the cell.

Dick knew well enough what it was

His friend, however, seemed much alarmed.

"It's the rats," he said. "No doubt they swarm in this place by myriads. Look—look! Over yonder in the gloom you can see their eyes shining like so many bright points. They are dangerous creatures," he added, "and may not hesitate to attack us. Have you seen enough?"

The stranger turned away, and, deeming that a sufficient answer, Dick, with very great satisfaction, closed the door and bolted it.

Turning round once more to his companion, who now was as pale as ashes, he said:

"How long, say you, is it since your friend reached London and mysteriously disappeared?"

"Twelve months."

"Indeed? so long? Then it is in vain to search among these poor relics of humanity hoping to discover something of him; by this time he must be unrecognisable."

"Yes," returned the young man, "and I am glad it is so."

"Glad?" repeated Turpin, in surprise

"Yes, because now I can still entertain myself with a doubt that he may not have perished in this foul manner. I have yet no confirmation of it, nor do I see what evidence is to be obtained."

"No," said Dick. "Yet, would it not be best to know the worst at once, and so resign yourself to it? If something was found clearly pointing to his presence in this place, would you not accept that as sufficient testimony that he has perished?"

"Yes," said the stranger, gloomily, "if that could be I should indeed give over my long search."

"And your dangerous one," said Dick, "for every day you are perilling your life. Think what a narrow escape you have had on this occasion."

"I do think of it: but I think more of the manner in which you speak; I could almost believe that you possess some such evidence as that you speak of."

"And if I do," said Dick, "would it not be best for me to produce it?"

"Perhaps so—perhaps so."

"Well, then, I confess, without further hesitation, that by chance I found upon the floor, close here to where we stand, a small trinket. It puzzled me beyond all measure to account for its presence in so strange a spot; now, however, I have the key to all."

"What kind of trinket?" asked the stranger.

"A locket."

"Let me see it—let me see it! Pray let me look upon it!"

"I will; but prepare yourself for confirmation of your friend's untimely fate, In the locket is the portrait of a girl, young and beautiful."

"Yes—yes! Lucy—Lucy!"

"Lucy no doubt; but satisfy yourself by a glance. It is there."

While he spoke, Dick dropped the locket into the young man's extended hand.

No sooner did his eyes fall upon it than he uttered a deep groan.

Some moments elapsed before he could recover himself sufficiently to gaze upon it a second time.

"Yes—yes!" he said, at length, in a broken voice. "I can doubt no longer. Well do I remember seeing this locket? The chain is broken now; but it is of gold, and was of rare workmanship. Before he went to sea, Lucy placed it round his neck with her own hands, and entreated him to wear it always for her sake."

"No doubt he did so," answered Turpin, "and his murderers in their haste let it fall upon the ground."

"That's it—that's it!"

Dick could see that the young man the more he thought about his friend's fate was the more overcome, and he endeavoured to change the subject of his thoughts.

"Bear with me a moment," replied the stranger. "I shall be better soon. Oh, Lucy! how will you withstand this awful blow? What will be your feelings when you hear the awful tale? Who could have thought that this gift of yours would prove the means of clearing up the mystery of his death?"

At that moment a peculiar rumbling noise attracted their attention.

Dick held up his hand for silence.

At the same time he placed the lamp as much out of sight as he could.

The rumbling continued, and, pressing his companion's arm, Dick stepped forward noiselessly.

The young man followed.

When near the end of the passage, Dick stopped, and looked upwards.

The trap-door in the ceiling was now thrown open, and in the edge of it was a lantern.

The light from this shone upon the top portion of a ladder which had been lowered into the abyss.

It was this ladder, then, which had produced the strange rumbling noise.

Voices were heard speaking in suppressed accents.

Then a man's head appeared above the edge of the trap-door.

He looked down for some time intently.

"I don't see him," he muttered—"I don't see him! Yet he must be there—of course he's there! Curse it! What makes me feel so nervous and terrified to-night—I feel half afraid to go down!"

"Afraid?" said another voice. "That's a good joke Here—take a drop of this; it will give you courage."

"And will you come down too mate?"

"Of course I will."

"Then here goes."

The man, having thus spoken, placed his foot upon the ladder and began to descend.

He took the lantern from the floor, and carried it in his hand.

"Now, mate," he cried to the other, "come along; we'll both descend the ladder together."

The other man obeyed, and, keeping as close together as they could, the two villains went slowly down, step by step.

Dick and the young man gazed upon them with the utmost abhorrence.

As for Turpin himself, he felt that it would be wrong to treat them as he would any other adversaries.

Clearly he was justified in taking them by surprise, and overpowering them without allowing them an opportunity to retaliate.

Accordingly, with a swift, noiseless footstep, he made his way to the centre of this circular apartment, if so we may term it.

The men were now about half-way down.

Dick stood close to the foot of the ladder.

He had already made up his mind what to do, and so with a sudden exertion of his whole strength, he seized hold of two of the bottom rounds in the ladder and pulled with all his might.

The effort succeeded.

With an awful crash the ladder fell, carrying the two men with it.

The lantern rolled far away into a corner, and was extinguished.

The men were so taken by surprise as to be thoroughly frightened.

An attack in that quarter surely could not be made by human beings—they had at last been encountered by the inhabitants of another world.

Dick hurried forward, calling out to his companion at the same time to bring the lamp.

He was obeyed.

The two villains, hearing his voice, recovered some of their composure.

Their greatest fear now was over—they had to encounter mortals, not beings of another world.

Accordingly, despite the fearful injuries they must have sustained in falling from so far so awkwardly, they struggled to their feet and commenced an immediate attack.

Dick, however, was prepared for them, and had every advantage, although he was unprovided with any weapons.

With his clenched fist he struck one such a violent blow that it put his rising again altogether out of the question—at least, for some time to come.

The other shared a similar fate, and by the time the young man arrived with the lamp, the two wretches were lying insensible on the ground.

At the sight of them the stranger could scarcely restrain his fury.

Insensible as they then were, he felt impelled to attack them with the utmost rage.

"Now," said Dick, "it strikes me we have the way before us to get out. Help me to raise the ladder once more."

With considerable difficulty the ladder was lifted up and placed in its original position, and no sooner was this done than Dick and his companion mounted.

On reaching the top, Turpin found himself in a bedchamber such as the young man had described

It was untenanted by anyone.

Looking at the trap-door, they saw it was so constructed that the least weight pressing on one end of it would cause it to give way, allowing the object, whatever it might be, to fall through.

As soon as this was accomplished, the spring at the other end restored the trap-door to its original appearance

"Have you a mind to linger here and make a further examination," asked Turpin, "or will you seek the way into the street with all speed?"

"I leave the conduct of affairs entirely to you," was the response—"it seems to me that you are better able to judge which is best."

"Then I advise that we gain the street with all speed. Who can tell how many accomplices those miscreants may have? And if we stay we may find ourselves opposed to a superior force, and so have to pay the penalty of our rashness with our lives."

"As you will," answered the young man; "the very air in this place seems to choke me."

There was indeed, either in fancy or reality, a sickening odour pervading that apartment.

Gladly enough, then, Turpin left it.

The door opened upon a large square landing-place.

Here he paused in order to look around him before he took any fresh step.

The staircase was broad, with massive, old-fashioned balusters.

It ascended to the upper floors, and descended into the hall, commanding a view of the front door of the house.

CHAPTER DCCCXCIV.

DICK TURPIN MAKES HIS WAY TO THE THREE SPIDERS INN AT EALING.

DICK TURPIN, having attracted the attention of his companion, raised one arm and pointed down the staircase.

"There," he said—"there is the way to escape; that's the front door which you see before you, and surely we shall have but little difficulty in descending the stairs and passing out of it unseen."

"Very little, I should think," replied the young man. "Let us try it without more delay."

Dick was glad enough to find that this young man was willing to leave the house.

As for himself, the reader need not be told he was anxious to depart.

Maud and his comrades would all be wondering what had become of him, and anxiously expecting his return.

Gently descending the staircase, then, for about half a dozen steps, they paused.

Some faint, sweet notes of music struck upon their ears.

After listening for a moment they felt sure they proceeded from a harpsichord.

The air was indeed a delightful one, and whoever it might be who was then playing was most certainly a perfect master of the instrument.

Merely raising his finger in token of silence, Dick continued the descent.

On gaining the foot of the stairs, however, his companion stopped, and, touching Dick upon the arm, he said, in a faint whisper:

"That is the door leading into the room where I drank the drugged wine; that's the room from which the music proceeds, for I remember seeing a harpsichord standing in one corner."

Dick nodded, and would have passed on, considering that had nothing to do with him.

But other thoughts were evidently in the mind of the stranger, for, in the same cautious whisper, he continued:

"Perhaps by this time some other victim may have been picked up, and that music is played in order to soothe him into a kind of repose, when he will fall all the more unsuspectingly into the snare."

Dick started and wondered how it was that this thought had not occurred to him at first.

"Closer," he whispered—"let us get closer, then we may overhear something."

The next moment they were standing on the threshold of this room, and then, for the first time, they noticed that the door was not properly closed—it was ajar, but only very slightly.

This indeed accounted for the fact of their having heard the low, sweet strains of the musical instrument.

All at once the music ceased, and then the two listeners distinctly heard a voice say, in thick, guttural accents:

"Very pretty, my love—very pretty; but I have had enough music—of this room too, for that matter. Come my way above the way."

"In a moment," said a female voice. "Excuse me just a moment, I will soon return, but I am not certain whether all is ready."

"All is ready?" repeated the other voice. "What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, nothing—don't trouble yourself about matters that do not concern you. There's wine on the table—don't spare it."

There was a rustling sound, and Dick whispered to the young stranger:

"Seize her when she comes forth—hold her fast."

He had scarcely time to pronounce the words before the door opened.

The girl—for the stranger recognised her instantly—was quitting the room precipitately, and was made a fast prisoner before she was aware of it.

Feeling herself firmly held, and seeing, too, the pallid countenance of one she had so recently betrayed, she uttered a piercing shriek and became insensible.

These strange occurrences had the effect of arousing the inmate of the room, and now, with a staggering and unsteady step, he came towards the door.

"Hullo!" he cried. "What the deuce does it all mean? What is it—what is it? Why, curse me, I feel quite drunk and stupid, and yet I've had nothing—only a glass or two of wine!"

"You have been drugged," shouted Dick, "and but for our accidental presence you would in a few more minutes have been murdered."

Certainly, if any words whatever would be calculated to enable a person to cast off the influences of a drug, such as those just uttered by Dick would have that effect.

He was a tall, stout man, expensively dressed, and with many ornaments of great value glittering about his person.

By his countenance, his guttural articulation, and his general appearance, it could be told at a glance he was a foreigner. Probably he had only just arrived in London.

Hearing these words spoken, and comprehending their purport, he clasped his hands over his forehead, doubtless with the endeavour to stop the swimming of his brain.

"Get into the open air," said Dick, "and raise what outcry you can, and return thanks that you have had so narrow an escape."

Like one in a dream, the foreigner found his way to the front door.

With difficulty he undid the fastenings and sallied forth.

While he was thus engaged, Dick spoke rapidly to his companion.

"From what you know," he said, "I cannot take any part in bringing the inmates of this house to justice. I myself should be immediately taken prisoner. I can, however, leave all to you. My immediate object now is to make my escape. That girl is now incapable of doing any mischief. Raise what alarm you can, and relate the whole to the police."

"I will—I will," replied the young stranger, with a slightly bewildered air. "And since we are to part, accept my thanks for the very valuable services you have rendered me."

"Not a word on that point—not a word. Farewell! Most likely we shall never meet again."

With these words on his lips, Dick turned round and quickly darted from the house.

The last he saw of the foreigner was as he stood near the front door endeavouring to save himself from falling.

It would have been no slight satisfaction to Dick could he have remained and witnessed the clearing up of this transaction, but regard for his own safety made him aware this was impossible.

Keeping a keen look-out on all sides of him, Dick hastily made his way through the streets of London in the direction of the Three Spiders Inn at Ealing.

The clocks gave forth the hour of eleven.

He was surprised, for he imagined it was much later. In the perpetual darkness, however, which prevailed in old Newgate, it was difficult indeed to keep any accurate note of the flight of time.

So far as he could tell, no police officers had observed his departure.

Either they had given up keeping such vigilant guard around the prison, or else it had never occurred to them to place a watch anywhere near the house from which Dick had emerged.

Although the hour was early, yet he felt no inclination for the long walk before him.

He was impatient in the highest degree to assure Maud of his safety, and also to ascertain what were the movements of his comrades.

He had no horse, however, and to attempt to hire one would be running a very considerable risk—a much greater risk than he felt himself justified in running.

At a rapid pace, then, he walked on towards his destination, for above all things he was anxious to leave London behind.

On his way he revolved in his mind what means he could adopt of performing his journey quickly.

His meditations were at length broken in upon by the sharp rattle of some vehicle that was being drawn with great rapidity along the high-road.

Dick drew aside, and looked back.

Then, through the darkness, he managed to make out that a light spring cart, drawn by one horse, was approaching him.

In it was seated a man, who, by various strands smacks of his whip, compelled the animal to keep up its speed.

"I'll ask him for a lift," muttered Dick. "There's a little danger in it, but not much; and, after all, he may refuse."

Just then the cart was within a yard or two of where he stood.

Raising his voice, he cried:

"Hoi—hoi!—stop! I am travelling your way, and would give something worth while for a ride!"

The man checked his horse somewhat abruptly, and, placing his hand before his eyes, strove to make out by whom he had been accosted.

"It's only a slight favour that I ask of you," said Dick. "But this road is terribly lonely, and I have a long journey before me."

"It ain't very safe to pick up acquaintances on the road," said the man. "But, though I can't see your face, yet I like the sound of your voice. Jump up, and, if you like to pay for something when we reach the Truss of Hay, I shall be glad of your company."

"Agreed!" said Dick. "I am much obliged to you!"

He scrambled up into the cart while he spoke, and the man, scarcely allowing him time to seat himself, cracked his whip, and set the horse in motion.

It was a great satisfaction to Dick upon thus finding himself unexpectedly carried so swiftly towards his destination.

But he found that his present position, advantageous as it seemed, had some drawbacks, for the man was of a most inquisitive disposition, and it was with difficulty that he replied to his many questions.

The great topic of the time was, of course, Dick Turpin's marvellous escape from Newgate.

He found his new companion had plenty to say upon it.

Dick professed to be ignorant of the particulars, and thereupon was favoured with a narrative of a most exaggerated description.

Sinking his voice as he concluded, he said:

"It's my firm belief, sir, that there's but one way of coming to a solution of this matter."

"Indeed!" said Dick. "And what may that be?"

"Why, we all know what a villanous wretch this Dick Turpin is—— But, bless me! what's the matter?"

Dick had started upon hearing this epithet applied to him, but he recovered himself most marvellously.

"Oh, it's nothing," he said—"nothing at all!"

"Then what was it made you give such a jump?"

"I don't know—it is not worth while to trouble about it. I am full of curiosity to know what you were going to say."

"Well, then, my belief is that Dick Turpin was such a wretch that the devil would not wait for him to be put out of the world in an ordinary manner, but has carried him off bodily. Rely upon it, we shall never see him again."

"Perhaps not," replied Dick. "But what are you pulling up for?"

"Why, this is the Truss of Hay—the inn of which I spoke. Recollect you have to pay for the refreshment."

"All right," said Dick—"order anything you like!"

The cart having stopped, the man jumped out, and requested Dick to follow his example.

At first he refused, but, being pressed by his new companion, and having no good reason to give why he should prefer remaining where he was, he at length reluctantly got down.

"Come in!" he said. "They keep the best of refreshments here, as you will say. They do a roaring trade, for there are plenty, like me, who make a regular point of calling."

He pushed open the inn door as he spoke.

Dick had no resource but to follow him, though he was exceedingly reluctant to do so.

He had no means of disguising himself further than by pulling his hat low down over his brows.

A couple of flaring oil-lamps depending from the ceiling lighted up the passage leading from the front to the back of the inn, and from rooms on each side came forth the sounds of boisterous merriment.

Dick's companion walked up to the bar window, and, after a brief hesitation, called for a tankard of old ale.

"I will share it with you," said Dick, "for I am in no humour for drinking to-night."

"Very good," was the reply. "I shall not stay more than a moment. I am very late to-night, and I have twenty miles further to go."

Dick did not reply to this, but, throwing down the only coin he possessed to pay for the ale, he drank a small quantity himself, and his companion quickly emptied the tankard.

But just as they were taking their departure, one of the doors leading into the passage opened, and a man's face appeared at it.

Behind him were several others, who, it seemed, were likewise just about to quit the inn.

The door being narrow, he stopped with the door in his hand to allow Dick and his companion to pass by.

The latter walked carelessly enough, but Dick, affecting to be seized with a sudden cough, placed his hand before his mouth, which served to conceal a great portion of his features.

Apparently no notice was taken of either of them, and in another moment they were mounted, as before, in the light cart, and rolling rapidly along the high-road.

The tankard of ale loosened the man's tongue considerably, and he ran on at a great length upon various subjects.

But Dick had too many things pressing on his mind to pay much attention to what he said.

Arriving at last pretty near to the Three Spiders Inn, he requested the man to allow him to alight.

"This is your journey's end, then?" he said.

"Well, nearly. I have a little further to go across the fields, but no distance to speak of. Many thanks to you for your civility. Good night!"

"Good night!" answered the man, smacking his whip.

Dick stood in the roadway a minute or so till the cart was almost out of sight, then, turning round abruptly, he made his way in a straight line for the inn.

He reached it without meeting with any accident, only once he thought he heard a footstep on the road behind him, and, glancing back at the same instant, he fancied he perceived a dark figure dart into the shadow of the hedge.

Of this he was by no means certain, but, occupied only with his anxiety to see his friends, he hurried on with redoubled speed, nor paused until the door was reached.

He knocked several times gently without receiving any answer, and, his patience being by no means great, he raised his foot and kicked with might and main upon the lower portion of the door.

CHAPTER DCCCXCV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN'S JOY AND SATISFACTION PROVE TO BE OF SHORT DURATION.

THE reader will now be at no loss to understand the meaning of the tremendous knocking that had struck

such terror into the hearts of Tom Davis and the highwaymen.

It was Dick who was thus clamouring for admission, not the officers, as they supposed.

After the words last spoken by Tom Davis, a scene of considerable confusion ensued.

There could be no doubt, however, that the right course to pursue was to avail themselves instantly of the hiding-place they had been at so much trouble to construct.

Seizing a lamp, Tom King cried:

"Follow me, all of you—follow me quickly, yet quietly! There is no cause for immediate alarm."

Maud, however, was so terrified that she could scarcely move.

Knowing perfectly well, however, that not only her own safety but the safety of those she held so dear, depended upon her summoning up sufficient resolution to accompany them to their hiding-place, she tried her best to shake off the dreadful feelings which oppressed her.

Passing hastily through the bar, Tom opened the door at the top of the steps leading into the cellar, and quickly descended.

Claude came last, and shut the door.

In the meanwhile, the knocking was continued with great fury.

Tom Davis, thinking that the highwaymen were now safe, and not wishing to give rise to fresh suspicion by keeping the officers waiting at the door, slowly walked along the passage, and presently cried out:

"Who is it?—who's there?"

"Open the door, Davis," cried Dick—"open the door! Why on earth have you kept me here waiting in this manner?"

Tom Davis recognised the tones of the voice instantly.

So great was his surprise—so sudden the revolution of feeling which took place in his breast upon finding the captain was without, and not Jack Marshall and his officers, that he was suddenly bereft of all motion.

Leaning against the wall, he could only gasp out the words:

"The captain—the captain!"

Ellen had heard Dick's voice, and uttered a shriek.

When that was over her surprise was over too, and accordingly, hastening past Tom Davis, she, with nimble fingers, removed the fastenings.

Dick pushed open the door hastily, and as hastily closed it behind him.

"What on earth," he said, "is the matter with you all? Why have you kept me hammering at the door in this fashion?"

Tom Davis did not reply, but recollecting all of a sudden that the highwaymen had gone done into the cellars, and were doubtless in the act of entering the secret passage, he turned round and ran into the bar.

Opening the door at the top of the steps, he cried out:

"Tom — Tom! Come back! It's all right! The captain's here!"

There was an immediate commotion down below after he had pronounced these words.

The fact was, so expeditious had the highwaymen been that the secret passage had been opened, and they were just about to close it after them.

Tom Davis's words arrested their purpose, and, with mingled joy and doubt, they rushed pell-mell towards the steps.

Dick could not for the life of him understand the extraordinary behaviour of Tom Davis; but Ellen, in a few words, explained the exact position of affairs.

Over the glad meeting which now took place we must pass in silence, since it was a scene no pen could possibly describe.

The most extravagant joy was, of course, the feeling uppermost in every breast.

No sooner, however, were their surprise and satisfaction over than a whole string of questions were poured forth.

Nothing would do but Dick must give an account of all his proceedings, for there was not one who could even guess at them.

Willingly enough, Dick complied, and amid a profound, breathless silence, he related to his friends those facts which are already in possession of the reader.

He concluded his narrative by stating that he fancied he had heard a footstep behind him in the lane, and that he had seen for a moment a dark figure resembling a human form.

"We cannot be too careful," said Tom Davis—"it is impossible that we can be. I will go now and see that all the fastenings are perfectly secure."

"And Black Bess," said Dick—"I must see her."

"She's all safe and sound, captain. But if you suspect any person is lurking near, don't run the risk of venturing forth just at present—wait for another opportunity."

This advice was warmly seconded by the highwaymen, and Dick gave way before their wishes, although his anxiety to see Black Bess was great indeed.

Tom Davis was not absent long, and when he came back he brought with him the satisfactory intelligence that the inn was firmly secured at all points—that it would be impossible to effect a sudden entrance.

It was now Dick's turn to question his comrades, for he was quite in the dark as to their proceedings, and was not a little anxious to receive from Tom King the account of his adventures at Windsor.

His request was complied with, and surely, to all appearances, a happier, more comfortable party than was assembled in the inn kitchen at that moment could scarcely have been found in England.

Had a stranger looked in upon them, the very last idea that would have suggested itself would have been that they were all in peril of their lives.

A feeling of remarkable ease and contentment pervaded every breast, and such a sensation of security came over all that they never remembered to have felt before.

These feelings, however, were very quickly put an end to by what next occurred.

In the midst of their laughing conversation there suddenly came a pause—such a pause as not unfrequently takes place in similar circumstances.

They glanced from one to another, and each waited for some one to speak first.

In the midst of this singular silence came the sound of three distinct heavy blows struck deliberately upon the front door.

This startled all into life.

Tom Davis turned perfectly white as he said:

"There's no mistake now—officers they are, and no one else—it cannot turn out to be any friend of ours this time! Be quick!" he added. "Seek the secret passage without delay!"

"Nay," cried Dick, "let us know first that there is reason for doing so."

The words had scarcely passed his lips when the knocking was renewed.

Then some words pronounced in a loud voice reached their ears.

What the words were they could not exactly make out, but Tom Davis exclaimed:

"Now are you satisfied? Did you hear them utter their usual summons for admission? Captain, your fancy did not mislead you, you have indeed been watched and followed to this house. What is to be done?"

"Enter the secret passage," was Dick's immediate answer. "I fear it is only too true that I have been followed. However, it strikes me if they should enter they will be unable to find anything of us."

The knocking was repeated for the third time, and the words again pronounced.

Tom Davis had crept a little closer to the front door.

Turning round, he said in a whisper:

"Did you hear them demand admittance in the King's name? If the door is not opened instantly they will break it down."

His words were prophetic, for just at that very instant a terrific blow was dealt upon the stout panels of the door

Had it not been so well secured, most certainly that blow was sufficient to have forced it from its hinges.

No longer now could the imminence of their danger be doubted.

Again snatching up the lamp, Tom King hastened to the bar.

He was followed by Dick, who had to half carry Maud with him.

Claude and Sixteen-String Jack brought up the rear.

Once more the steps were descended, the cellars crossed, and the entrance to the secret passage reached.

It turned out now that their false alarm had really done them good service.

The coverings over the passage had now been removed, and nothing remained for the highwaymen to do but to enter hastily and replace them.

This, by an admirable, yet simple contrivance that had nevertheless cost them many hours' thought, was quickly done.

"Forward," said Dick—"it will be useless to linger here! Let us take up such a position that, if necessary, we may make an immediate retreat."

"Good!" cried Tom King. "I was about to propose the self-same thing. Follow me with what speed you may."

As he spoke he walked hurriedly along the passage.

CHAPTER DCCCXCVI.

DESCRIBES THE ENERGETIC PROCEEDINGS OF JACK MARSHALL AND HIS OFFICERS.

It will be necessary now to go back a little in order to account for the events which next occurred.

It will be recollected that on the night when Dick Turpin so strangely made his escape from Newgate, his three comrades left the White Horse Inn in Drury Lane.

As they had correctly feared, the deaf and dumb boy whom Matthew had so befriended was a traitor.

He had recognised the highwaymen, and no sooner had he started upon his errand than he betrayed them to a police officer.

His scheme no doubt would have succeeded, and the highwaymen beyond all doubt have been captured, had not his long absence been too much for their impatience.

The simple fact of going to the stable instead of waiting at the corner of White Horse Yard unquestionably saved their lives.

With what followed the reader is already aware.

With more than usual ease, Tom and his comrades managed to out-distance the police officers.

Still, although the highwaymen had got out of sight and hearing, they were by no means inclined to abandon the chase, especially as, after going a short distance, they were met by a troop of their companions headed by Jack Marshall himself.

A few words served to explain matters to him, and no sooner had he comprehended all, than for about five minutes he did nothing but curse the officers in every conceivable way.

"They went westward, did they?" he cried. "Well, we'll go westward too. Come on, it's strange indeed if we don't see or hear something of them."

Accordingly, the two parties forming one, set their steeds in motion and galloped at a very furious rate along the western road.

From time to time they paused to make inquiries as to whether any persons resembling those of whom they were in search had passed that way.

But on every occasion they were replied to in the negative.

At last, reaching a roadside inn, Jack Marshall determined to pause.

He had been actively engaged for a long time and was so weary that he could scarcely sit in the saddle.

Moreover, most of the horses were completely blown, and, if pushed, might fail them altogether.

It so happened that this inn was no other than the Truss of Hay, at which, as fate would have it, Dick Turpin made a halt.

Having stayed long enough, as they believed, to rest their horses, the police officers were just about to depart when Dick and his companion passed down the passage in the manner we have previously related.

The officer standing at the door did not recognise Dick, yet he fancied that he was no other than the highwayman he beheld.

Had he seen him under any other circumstances than the present, probably he would have had no doubt whatever.

The very idea that Dick Turpin should quietly walk into the inn where they were staying, and walk out again, was really too preposterous to be entertained.

Still, he looked vacant, hesitating and confused

Perceiving it, Jack Marshall bawled out:

"What the devil are you standing shilly-shallying there like that for, Roberts? What's the matter with you? Are you moon-struck?"

"No, no, Mr. Marshall—no, no. I beg your pardon, sir."

"Well, what is it? You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"Well, sir, I'm afraid you will laugh at me, or think me drunk, or mad, or something of that sort, but I really do believe—and yet how can it be possible?"

"Go on!" roared the chief police officer. "What do you believe?"

"Why, that when I opened this door I saw Dick Turpin walk down the passage."

Jack Marshall leaped up from his chair with a yell.

He seized hold of Roberts, the police officer, and shook him violently.

"Fool!—dolt!—idiot!" he screamed. "If you had any doubt of that kind in your mind why did you not speak, and not stand there looking like a fool? Bah! Get out of the way!"

He flung the officer aside with great violence, then made his way to the bar window.

"Landlord," he cried, "who was it passed down the passage a minute or two ago—did you notice 'em?"

"Were there two of them, sir?"

"How the devil do I know?"

"Well, I only ventured to inquire," said the landlord, offended at Jack Marshall's manner.

"Well, supposing there were two, what were they like?"

"Why, one I know very well—he's an old friend of mine, and calls regularly here every time he passes."

"Yah!—bah! it can't be him then!"

"But," continued the landlord, "now you mention it, he had a stranger with him, and rather a strange-looking stranger, if I may be allowed to make that remark."

Jack Marshall pricked up his ears once more.

"Describe him," he cried, fiercely and excitedly—"describe him!"

"Well, sir, to tell you the truth, I can't very well, for he very carefully kept as much out of sight as he could; he had his hat drawn down on his face, and altogether I saw but little of him."

"Was that the man you meant?" roared Marshall, addressing himself to Roberts, who had ventured to emerge into the passage.

"Yes—yes!" he replied, nodding violently—"that's him!"

"Then, no doubt you are right. What a chance we've lost! But quick—quick, all of you! The horses are ready, no doubt! Mount at once!"

Probably never before had Jack Marshall been in such a state of tremendous excitement.

He dashed out of the inn more like a madman than a sane being.

In the same haste, he mounted his steed, and then plunged his spurs into its flanks.

"Come on," he roared—"come on, I say! Do you mean to be all night?"

As well as they could, the officers scrambled into the saddles, and followed their leader in a desultory throng.

Now, had the officers galloped straight off to the Three Spiders Inn they must inevitably have arrived there before Dick.

But such was fated not to be the case.

Jack Marshall, indeed, was very forcibly reminded of the truth of the old proverb which declares "more haste less speed."

Altogether letting passion get the better of prudence, he paid less attention to his horse than he should have done.

Consequently, the tired beast, making a false step, stumbled.

His rider was not ready to save him by checking at the bit, so down he went, and Jack Marshall involuntarily performed a very creditable somersault over his horse's head.

He reached the ground with great violence, and just as he fell, so did he lie, bereft apparently alike of life and motion.

The officers pulled up their horses as quickly as they could, and narrowly escaped riding over their chief.

The struggling horse was assisted to rise, and others bent over their leader.

"Mr. Marshall," said one—"Mr. Marshall! Speak! Are you very much hurt, sir—very much hurt?"

There was no response.

"He's stunned, if not dead!" said another.

"Is he?" cried Roberts, pushing his way forwards. "Then, d—n him, let him take that! I feel better now. Perhaps when he feels that slight pain in his side he'll think twice before he tries to throttle me again!"

Roberts was still smarting with rage at being treated in such a summary manner by his chief.

All the way along the road he had been cursing and swearing to himself, longing for some opportunity of revenging himself, and wishing that his tongue had dropped out before he had said a word about Dick Turpin at all.

Seeing his powerful foe helpless on the ground, he could not resist the opportunity of gratifying his vengeance, so while he spoke, and before any of the others could prevent him, he dealt Jack Marshall a furious kick in the ribs—so furious a one that it is a wonder it did not recover the police officer from his state of unconsciousness.

A consultation now ensued among the officers as to what they should do.

Would it be best for them to wait and endeavour to restore their leader to consciousness, or should a portion ride on in pursuit?

This matter was well argued, for the police officers were about equally divided on the point.

The discussion soon grew so warm that it was a thousand wonders they did not come to blows.

As it was, the confusion was something terrific, and in the midst of it Jack Marshall was altogether disregarded.

But what the furious kick could not do, Nature accomplished for herself.

Gradually the chief police officer came to himself.

As may be guessed, his intellects were at first in a state of utter confusion.

But by degrees he realised that he was lying on his back in a very dirty road, that every time he drew his breath he had an acute pain in his side as though some one was stabbing him, and that his men were all standing around, disputing at the top of their voices.

At least five minutes elapsed, however, before he could recollect just what had occurred.

No sooner did remembrance return to him than he uttered a yell.

Its effects were peculiar.

The police officers ceased their discussion at once, and became suddenly as silent as though they had been struck dumb.

Certainly the circumstances were well calculated to exasperate anyone, and so we cannot wonder that the first thing Jack Marshall did after giving vent to that yell was to pour out a whole string of curses directed at all things in general, and at his own men in particular.

"Help me up," he said—"help me up at once!"

The officers came officiously towards him.

On attempting to gain his feet, however, Jack Marshall suffered such intolerable pain that he alternately cursed, groaned and screamed.

Rage certainly had the better of him on that occasion.

Comprehending that it was his horse's fault that he had been thrown, he made a rush at the dumb, unconscious brute, and commenced a furious attack upon it—an attack that was in the highest degree ridiculous.

But Mr. Marshall was soon exhausted, and fell back again into the roadway.

"Take me back to the inn," he said—"oh, take me back to the inn!"

With great difficulty this command was obeyed, but, as the inn was only a few hundred yards in the rear, it was quickly gained.

A plentiful external application of cold water and some deep draughts of brandy went far towards restoring Jack Marshall to his former self.

So absorbed had he been by his own injuries that, up till that moment, he had forgotten all about his purpose.

Just then, recollecting Dick Turpin, he angrily demanded to know why the officers had not continued the pursuit.

This involved a long explanation, to which he would not listen.

"Hold your jaw!" he cried. "I've had enough of it! Another drop of brandy! There, I shall do now! Come on, will you! I will once more lead the way!"

By the joint exertions of about half a dozen officers, Jack Marshall was lifted into the saddle.

He suffered more from the pain in his side than aught else.

To draw a long breath was agony.

"Gently," he said—"we must do it gently, or I shall fall off! But there's time enough—time enough, for it's odd to me if I don't know where to find them all!"

CHAPTER DCCCXCVII.

JACK MARSHALL AND HIS OFFICERS SUCCEED IN EFFECTING AN ENTRANCE INTO THE THREE SPIDERS INN, AND MAKE THREE PRISONERS.

Although Jack Marshall may be said to have used the utmost expedition, yet, after all, a considerable delay took place in consequence of the unforeseen accident which befel him.

Indeed, before the officers started for the second time from the Truss of Hay, Dick Turpin had got comfortably back to the inn.

At every step the horse took Jack Marshall suffered extreme pain, but he bore all like a martyr.

He was encouraged to do so by the hope that on this occasion he should succeed in capturing the whole of the highwaymen.

He had an unusually large force, and, from the direction that Dick was taking, he had scarcely any doubt in his own mind that he was making direct for Ealing.

As fast as he possibly could, Jack Marshall followed in his footsteps, until, at length reaching the disused lane leading up to the inn, he paused.

"Jackson should be somewhere here," he muttered. "I wonder whether the rascal is at his post!"

While speaking, he took from his pocket a small whistle, which he placed to his lips.

A shrill, trilling sound was produced—not very loud, but yet such as would be carried to a great distance.

No sooner had the sound died away than hasty footsteps were heard, and then a man, attired as a police officer, made his appearance.

"Oh," he said, speaking with great excitement, "is that you, Mr. Marshall?"

"Yes, it is! What news, Jackson?"

"Oh, most important news. I've been cudgelling my brains to think of some means by which I could let you know, and here you are just in the nick of time!"

Jack Marshall smiled, and forgot the pain he was enduring.

"I've seen him," continued Jackson, sinking his voice—"I've seen him, and I was a good mind to put a bullet into him, and chance it."

"Seen who—seen who?" asked Marshall, impatiently.

"Why, Dick Turpin himself—I am quite sure of it. I would swear to him! He passed me."

"Why did you not seize him?"

"Because I was alone," was the reply, "and he was so close to his friends. Had they heard the least noise they would have come forth, and I should have been no better than mincemeat."

Marshall thought so too.

"Perhaps it is best as it is," he answered. "How fortunate it is I left you here."

"Very fortunate indeed, sir."

"You dogged his footsteps, of course?"

"Oh, yes."

"Where did he go, then?"

"To the inn."

Jack Marshall nodded.

"I thought as much."

Then, speaking to himself, he added:

"Oh, I have you on the hip now, Mr. Landlord. I knew that this day would come sooner or later."



[TOM DAVIS REFUSES TO BETRAY THE HIGHWAYMEN.]

Having made this reflection, he turned round and addressed his men.

"Follow me, all of you," he said, "as slowly and as silently as you can."

He was obeyed, and, making no sound that could be heard above the roaring of the wind, the police-officers crept like so many ghosts towards the Three Spiders Inn.

They reached the front of the building without having given the least alarm.

In a whisper Jack Marshall ordered his men to dismount.

Short as the time had been, yet it had sufficed for him to make up his mind as to the exact course of action he should adopt.

He placed his men like so many sentinels round the inn, and so closely together that they could communicate by whispers.

With the bulk of his men and the horses he remained close to the front door.

"Now the worst of it is," he said, addressing his men, "that we must go through a little legal form; but pay attention to what I say."

The men were all attention.

"It is quite certain," he began, "that Dick Turpin is within that building. You know what sort of a reward we shall get for him, and that's enough to make us try our best. And then I am almost equally certain that his comrades are with him, therefore understand this."

The men were profoundly attentive.

"We dare not break suddenly into the house and seize them, though that's what I should wish to do; we must call upon them three times to open in the King's name."

The men nodded, for they knew perfectly well.

"Provide yourselves, then, with a stout piece of wood and deal a couple of hard blows upon the door with the

end of it. I will then call upon them to surrender in the usual form. Directly the words have left my mouth strike the door again. I will repeat the summons, and, having done so, try to demolish the door at one blow. This will give them no opportunity of concealing themselves—they will not have time. If we make one grand rush we shall carry all before us."

The men fully comprehended all that he said to them, and were moreover highly pleased with the arrangement: it suited them exactly.

"To conclude," added Jack Marshall, "so anxious am I that you should make this capture that I will give up my share of the reward entirely, and the whole sum shall be divided equally among you all."

Certainly if anything could have urged the police officers to do their best this announcement on the part of their leader ought to have had the effect.

Had it been prudent they would have expressed their satisfaction by a cheer.

Such a proceeding as that was quite out of the question; they had everything to gain by silence.

Without much trouble, a piece of wood that exactly suited their purpose was found.

It was the trunk of a young tree that had been cut down recently, and the branches of which had been lopped off.

About half a dozen officers seized hold of this piece of wood, which thus became instantly a formidable battering-ram.

Retreating to a little distance, they ran at full speed towards the door.

The blow was a tremendous one.

It was followed by another, and then Jack Marshall, repeating the usual formula, called upon the inmates to open the door in the King's name.

Without waiting to see whether any attention would be paid to this demand, he stood aside to allow his men to renew their attack, which they did with a vigour that delighted him.

Again he called, and again the door was battered upon.

But it was stout, and strong, and well secured within, and calculated to stand a great deal of battering before it would give way.

Yet Jack Marshall fancied that it already shook upon its hinges.

The summons was given for the third time, and Jack Marshall said:

"Now, my lads, one blow! Give it with all your might, and the door is down."

The officers ran forward with a will.

This time they fully expected to carry the door before them, and so went at it with terrific force.

But they were deceived.

The stout oak withstood them, and so great was the shock, that they could not possibly recover themselves from it.

Their hold upon the trunk of the tree gave way, and the whole of them fell sprawling to the ground.

"Up again," cried Marshall—"up again! To it—to it! The door cannot hold against many blows like that!"

Hastily and angrily the officers scrambled to their feet.

The block of wood was again raised and once more battered against the door.

This time, however, they were careful for their own sakes to strike more gently.

"Harder — harder," cried Jack Marshall—"harder: There ought not to have been a quarter of this delay! You are giving them every opportunity for concealment."

Just as he spoke, one of the upper windows in the inn was flung open, and Tom Davis, with a huge, conical nightcap on his head, made his appearance.

This advent was greeted by a general yell, and there was an immediate suspension of hostilities.

"Oh, murder," he cried—"murder! Thieves—thieves! What shall I do all alone by myself? Thieves!"

"You blockhead!" roared Jack Marshall. "We are no thieves, as you are full well aware—we are his Majesty's officers."

Some of the men had provided themselves with links, and, having lighted them, they came closer beneath the window at which Tom Davis stood.

The ruddy light shed around by these torches revealed plainly enough the peculiar dress of the officers, and it was impossible to remain longer in any doubt concerning them.

"Why, is it you, Mr. Marshall?" cried Tom Davis, affecting the utmost astonishment.

"Yes, of course it is. Come down and open the door this second, or I'll break it from its hinges!"

"I'm coming, Mr. Marshall—I'm coming," said Davis, who had made his appearance in this manner solely with the view of gaining time.

"Make haste, then!" roared Jack Marshall. "None of your tricks! We know you!"

Tom Davis grinned, and pretended to be attiring himself with great speed.

About two minutes elapsed, but the patience of the police could extend no longer than that.

"You refuse, then!" cried Jack Marshall. "Now, my lads, to it again—we'll soon have the door down!"

Another blow was struck, and this time the stout oaken panels were split from top to bottom.

The men uttered a cheer at their success.

"Stop—stop!" roared Tom Davis. "Consider how you are destroying my property! I'm coming—indeed I am coming!"

He retreated from the window as he spoke, but Jack Marshall, resolved to wait no longer, gave the signal for a fresh attack.

This last blow effectually did the business.

With a tremendous crash the door parted in the centre, and the police poured in in a body.

Before they had gone half a dozen paces down the passage they met Tom Davis.

"Seize him," roared Jack Marshall—"seize him—make him your prisoner—bind him securely, and take care that he does not escape!"

Tom Davis protested vigorously, but to no purpose. He was seized by a dozen powerful hands, and, before he was aware of it, securely handcuffed.

Two men remained in charge of him.

"Now, my lads," said Jack Marshall, "don't be afraid! We have them—depend upon it we have them; no one could leave these premises unseen; and at the least attempt to do so, the sentinels will raise the alarm. The men we want may be hidden somewhere; but if so, we can take our time and search till we find them. Come on, this will be the best night's work you have ever done."

He dashed into the kitchen as he spoke, and here, in genuine terror, were Mrs. Davis and Ellen.

"Seize them both," roared Jack Marshall—"seize them—make them prisoners! I have sufficient evidence that they are all accomplices! Keep them secure, and if we don't quickly find out the highwaymen, we'll make them confess which is their hiding-place."

His commands were carried out with unnecessary roughness.

Mrs. Davis and Ellen were both prisoners and securely bound.

With great speed the police officers then spread themselves over the ground floor of the inn, but in none of the rooms did they find any trace of the highwaymen.

By no means discouraged at this, Jack Marshall sent a portion of his force upstairs to search the upper rooms, while with the remainder he proceeded to the cellars.

CHAPTER DCCCXCVIII.

JACK MARSHALL AND HIS OFFICERS DISCOVER THE DOOR IN THE STABLE.

As soon as ever the highwaymen had descended the cellar steps, Ellen, acting upon the instructions given her by Tom Davis, had locked the door and taken out the key, which, also by his directions, she threw into the fire.

The object for this proceeding is obvious enough. It was merely to delay the officers and so give the highwaymen more time to make their exit by the secret passage.

Jack Marshall knew his way to the cellars perfectly well; but when he arrived at the door, to his great anger and disgust, he discovered it was fast and the key gone.

The Three Spiders Inn was an old place, and every part of it was built in the most substantial manner.

Even this door, although only seeming to communicate

with the cellars, looked as strong as though intended for a prison.

It was perfectly possible to force it, but, from his experience at the front door, the chief officer felt sure it would take a considerable time.

Furious with rage, he returned to the kitchen, in which some of the officers remained on guard over the three prisoners.

Marching direct up to Tom Davis, Jack Marshall clenched his fist and shook it threateningly in his face.

"You rascal!" he said—"you villain! I have long had my suspicions of you, and now they are verified! Deliver up the key of the cellar door. I command you to do so in the name of the King."

"And I solemnly declare that the key is not in my possession, nor do I know where you will find it."

"This subterfuge will not avail you in the least!" roared the officer. "I ask you once, calmly, whether you will deliver up that key? You can refuse or not, just as you like, but if you do, I will take care that it is mentioned at the time of your trial, and you will find it will help to go against you."

"I cannot do so," said Tom Davis, affecting a contrite air. "If I could it would be a different matter, but I can't."

Jack Marshall uttered a curse.

He saw there was no hope for it—the door must be broken down.

As he turned away once more with the intention of returning to the bar, one of his men stepped up to him, and, after a preliminary cough, ventured to touch him gently on the arm.

"Mr. Marshall, sir," he said—"Mr. Marshall."

"Well, Saunders, what is it?"

"Would you mind, Mr. Marshall, if I made you just one suggestion? An idea has come into my head—really, sir, quite an idea."

"You don't mean it," said Marshall.

"I do indeed, sir."

"Well, then, what is it?"

"Why, sir, I think we have forgotten the stables. We ought to have gone there almost in the first instance, and taken possession of the horses; that would have cut off all hopes of their escape."

Jack Marshall gave quite a start.

This was really a fresh thought to him, though when it was suggested to him he wondered how on earth it was he had overlooked anything so obvious and important.

Far from his intention, however, was it to allow his subordinate to indulge in the belief that he had made so grave an omission.

Accordingly, turning to him, he said:

"It's quite a good thought of yours, Saunders, but you must not imagine for a moment that I had forgotten such a palpable thing as that."

"Oh no, sir, not for the world," returned Saunders, with a smirk and a bow.

"Indeed," continued Marshall, "when you spoke I was wondering whether we should go to the stable before we broke open this door or afterwards."

Saunders was silent.

"We'll go there at once," said Marshall, after a momentary pause.

Assembling his men round him, he instructed two to use their best efforts to break down the door.

With the remainder he sallied out into the yard at the back of the inn.

Although well aware it would have been the wisest and most prudent course to secure the horses in the stable first of all, yet Jack Marshall did not feel uneasy on this score, simply because he believed himself yet in good time.

His men had kept the closest possible watch all round the premises, and, had anyone attempted to leave, an alarm would have been given.

His first act upon gaining the yard was to accost an officer who was standing there.

"Is all well?" he asked. "Have you seen or heard anything?

"Nothing at all, Mr. Marshall—all's well."

"Then just pass the word round, will you, for all to keep an extra good look-out? We shall unearth them presently."

Scarcely raising his voice above the pitch in which this conversation had been carried on, this sentinel spoke.

His words were heard by two men standing on either side of him, and from mouth to mouth the orders flew, and in a moment of time the intelligence had made a complete circuit of the inn.

The lighted torches carried by some of the officers enabled them to see all around them, and this was fortunate, for the night was one of unusual gloom.

On arriving at the stable door all was found to be perfectly quiet.

The door was closed and securely padlocked.

If Jack Marshall had had any apprehensions—which he had not—they would have vanished then.

How could the highwaymen have entered the stable and locked the padlock on the outside?

That was manifestly an impossibility.

So his omission was of no importance at all.

In his own mind he felt certain he should not have committed so great an oversight but for the confusion of his faculties, caused partly by his heavy fall from his horse and partly by the excitement he felt at being in so fair a way to capture Dick Turpin.

One smashing blow with a heavy stone served to demolish the padlock at once.

The stable door flew open.

"Lights!" cried Marshall—"lights, I say! Be quick!"

The officers carrying the links pressed forward, and directly afterwards the whole interior of the stable was well lighted up.

The first thing Jack Marshall did was to utter a most fearful yell.

His men thought for a moment that he must have met with some sudden, severe accident.

"Done!" he said—"we're done—we're too late, after all!"

While he spoke, he glanced despairingly around him.

But the stable was empty.

Not a horse stood in one of the stalls, except the one kept by Tom Davis, though, by the signs of confusion around, it was evident the place had been very lately visited.

"Look about you," were the next words Jack Marshall spoke—"look about you! The scent is warm yet—they can't have got far away!"

At the same moment, recollecting the little door at the back of the stable, the existence of which he had on a former occasion discovered, he hastened towards it.

It was bolted on the inner side, but, regardless of that incontestable proof that the highwaymen had not passed that way, he opened the door, and immediately found himself confronted by one of his men.

"Have you seen them?" roared the chief officer at the top of his voice—"have they passed this way?"

"No, Mr. Marshall, that they certainly have not."

"Are you quite sure?—has not one left the stable?"

"I am positive of it—at least, not from this part. I am quite certain."

"Well, have you heard anything?"

"Nothing particular. I heard the horses kicking and prancing about, and I heard one neigh; but I thought nothing of that."

Upon hearing this, Jack Marshall poured out a torrent of imprecations—he seemed somewhat eased by this process; and, having settled it in his own mind that the blame was all attributable to this one man, he turned back with the view of discovering, if possible, by what mysterious means the highwaymen had got their horses out of the stable unseen.

With regard to this point, he was as much in the dark as ever.

Among his men the universal opinion was that the highwaymen had entered and left the stable by some secret, unknown door, and accordingly they set about looking for it, which was something particularly in their line.

For some moments they were baffled, but all at once, as they were scraping the loose straw from the flooring, one man uttered a loud shout.

"A trap-door!" he said—"a trap door! Look here now, who would have thought of that?"

The men all pressed eagerly around him, and then they saw by what means the trap-door had been discovered.

It was through a pure accident, but for which they might have remained in entire ignorance of it.

Evidently, however, the trap-door had been closed in haste, and care had not been taken to clear away the straw close around the edges, consequently, when it was let down, a portion of the straw was wedged in between the trap-door and its frame.

Jack Marshall saw it, and gnashed his teeth.

"I might have guessed it—I might have guessed it! They have been here all along, as I suspected, though I never could arrive at any proof. They have had plenty of time to construct secret passages and suchlike, in anticipation of the coming of a day like this. They did not calculate upon that, however," he concluded, pointing to the trap-door.

The men saw the gesture, though they did not exactly catch the import of the words he spoke.

They concluded, however, that his desire was the trap-door should be raised, and accordingly they bent all their energies to this task.

With much greater ease than they had dared to anticipate, the trap-door was raised. It was thrown back quite flat upon its hinges; then, to their astonishment and admiration, they saw a gently-sloping pathway, leading downwards into the earth—a pathway perfectly practicable for horses' feet; and indeed all doubt was set at rest as to the highwaymen having gone that way, for the ground of which the pathway was composed was damp and soft, and left very clearly the impression of the horses' footprints.

At this moment, however, a loud cry was simultaneously set up by the officers who formed the cordon round the inn.

This cry, coming suddenly upon the ears of those in the stabling, arrested their steps.

The noise becoming louder still, Jack Marshall dashed out of the stable into the yard again, being fully under the impression that the highwaymen had been seen while attempting to quit the premises.

In this he found himself deceived; but a great surprise was in store for him.

At the first glance, he saw that nearly the whole of the inn was one mass of flames.

How it had caught fire no one knew, and the flames had spread with such rapidity and so universally that the first alarm given to the officers was the whole simultaneously bursting out into a blaze.

The fact was, the inn had been built chiefly of wood, and this, through age, had become excessively dry—indeed, it was scarcely possible to find anything more inflammable.

The officers in the inn, keeping guard over the prisoners, were almost the last to know what had happened.

When, however, they came out into the yard, the roaring of the flames was something terrific.

It was scarcely possible for even an astute officer like Jack Marshall to remain altogether unmoved and unbewildered at so extraordinary an occurrence.

There is to all people a fascination in a fire on a grand scale.

For several moments, then, he, in common with his men, could do nothing but gaze upon the grand and awful sight before them.

Every moment the flames increased in volume and brilliancy, while showers of sparks flew about in every direction.

It was not until the roof of the old inn fell, with a tremendous crash, almost smothering the fire, that Jack Marshall recovered proper possession of his faculties, and remembered what ought to be done.

Raising his voice so that it was heard distinctly above the roaring of the flames, he cried:

"Keep an extra look-out, all of you—keep a good look-out! I am confident they are not far away!"

These orders were quickly transmitted from one to another, until all were made acquainted with them.

And now the fire, recovering from the effects on the fallen roof, broke out afresh with additional vigour.

Tom Davis, his wife, and Ellen gazed upon the destruction of their home with saddened feelings.

They felt there was an end to the careless, happy life they had led so long.

Short as had been their residence there, they had grown to like the place, and it would ever be endeared to them by its associations.

In a few hours from that moment nothing would be left of it save a heap of smouldering ruins.

They wondered also when they should gaze upon that spot again, more especially Tom Davis, for he better comprehended the dangers of the position in which he stood than of the rest.

Neither his wife nor Ellen had an exact idea of the peril of their position; but Tom himself knew that the punishment of aiding and abetting felons was most severe, and in his case he was well aware that the full rigour of the law would be enforced.

After particularly bidding his men to look sharply after their prisoners, and take care that they did not by any sudden movement escape, Jack Marshall, collecting his men around him, once more bade them follow him into the stable.

When he returned to it, he felt annoyed at the interruption that had ensued.

Most certainly it would have the effect of allowing the highwaymen to get further away, not that this gave any very great uneasiness, for the idea he had formed in his own mind was that the highwaymen had cleverly constructed some subterranean retreat to which they could betake themselves, and remain in security till all danger was over.

The discovery of the trap-door, he felt, was a thing they had not calculated upon, so, bidding his men to be as silent as possible, he commanded them to follow him.

Several carried lighted links, and by the aid of these the nature of the place they were in was disclosed.

In spite of his anger, and vexation, and hurry, Jack Marshall could not forbear from giving expression to the admiration he felt at what he saw.

CHAPTER DCCCXCIX.

RETURNS TO THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN.

We now return to the highwaymen and Maud, who, it will be remembered, we left in the secret passage.

Without any delay or accident, they reached the inclined plane leading up to the door of the stable.

As Tom King carried the light, he now stood aside and allowed Claude and Jack to pass him.

With nimble fingers, they undid the fastenings, and raised the trap-door.

"Courage—courage, dear Maud!" said Dick to his trembling companion. "Be of good heart, for while you are with me you are safe! Depend upon it, long before the officers can search the inn we shall be far away."

Maud was slightly reassured by these words, for she had too often been in situations of danger with Dick not to place some confidence in his powers.

Moreover, she saw that his comrades, though rapid in their movements, appeared by no means discomposed.

Dick pressed on eagerly, for he was anxious once more to place himself beside Black Bess.

A long time had elapsed since he had seen her last, and he had gone through many vicissitudes.

As soon, therefore, as the stable was gained, he released Maud's hand, then hurried to the stall where Black Bess was standing.

The intelligent animal recognised her master at once, as was evidenced by her actions.

She neighed and pawed the ground.

A keen sensation of pleasure shot through Dick Turpin's heart when he perceived this manifestation of pleasure and recognition.

"Woa, lass!" he cried. "Quietly—quietly! Then you managed to get home safely after all? Well—well, I suppose you are right by this time, and in readiness for a long gallop?"

Not forgetful of the injury his gallant mare had received, Dick now raised her mane in order to inspect it.

He was highly gratified to find that it had entirely healed, and there was little to fear in the future of the consequences arising from it.

In the meanwhile, the highwaymen had been busy caparisoning their steeds.

Dick, reminded of the flight of time and the necessity for immediate action, now followed their example.

The saddle and bridle were quickly placed on.

"Are you ready Dick?" said Tom King, in a suppressed voice.

"Yes, quite ready."

"Then come on, for the sooner we leave this stable the better."

Dick advanced, leading Maud by one hand and Black Bess by the other.

Tom King followed, leading his own horse and Claude's.

Sixteen-String Jack carried the light and led his own steed, Claude Duval being left to replace the trap-door.

This he did with every imaginable amount of caution.

He was anxious to leave the top of the trap-door covered with straw, and, as he believed, he had not left any sticking in the crevices in such a way as to betray them.

It is certain, however, that he must have done so.

All felt greatly relieved when this much was over.

The distance to the opening of the passage was still considerable, yet they did not apprehend any interruption to their progress, and they believed that, upon emerging from it, they would not be seen or molested by anyone.

Without waiting another moment, they pushed forward.

As they proceeded, they could not avoid casting glances of admiration upon their own work.

The difficulties in the way of excavation had been great, and, in order to keep the roof and sides of the passage from falling in, they had been obliged, with great care and labour, to prop them up by means of beams and planks of wood.

When close to the opening from the passage, and at a spot where, from the looseness of the soil, they had been compelled to put up more supports than elsewhere, Tom King suddenly cried:

"Halt! It is just possible," he said—"indeed, it is very likely that the officers will be clever enough to find out the entrance to this secret passage. Who can tell what has taken place since our departure?"

"Well, well, Tom," said Dick Turpin, "what of that?—why do you pause?"

"Because," he said, "I have an idea."

"Well, then, speak quickly."

"If the officers should find out this passage, and make their way along it, they will be very quickly indeed upon our track. It would be a good thing to put a stop to their progress, and that can be done by——"

Tom did not say any more, but explained what he meant by a gesture.

"You would let the passage fall in?"

He nodded.

"It might be worth our while," said Dick. "Who can say? But, then, we may involve ourselves in great danger by making the attempt."

"I think not," said Tom. "But you must decide quickly—shall it be done?"

"I will leave it with you to decide," returned Turpin.

Tom found that Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack heartily approved of the scheme.

Having constructed the place, of course they knew the best and easiest way for demolishing it.

Accordingly, certain of the posts were loosened, and planks removed.

The earth began to fall in very fast.

"If we had such a thing as a rope handy," said Tom King, "we could do it easily. One pull at the post, and then down the whole must come."

"Try it without, Tom," said his companions. "Give a smart pull, and then run back."

Despite the imminent danger of being crushed by some of the falling earth, Tom did not hesitate to adopt this course.

Before he had completed his purpose, however, he was warned of danger by a cry from his companions.

He turned, and hastily retreated.

Well was it for him that he was so hasty in his movements.

With a strange rushing, crashing sound, the roof of the passage fell in.

Tons upon tons of earth came down, and effectually stopped up the passage.

"There," cried Tom, rubbing his hands with great satisfaction, "I rather think the officers will find it difficult to follow us now! We shall be able to get a good start."

This little matter being over, they pushed on at increased speed, in order to make up for the time they had lost.

By the fresh, cool air that blew upon their faces, they could tell how near they were to the mouth of the passage.

In a few moments more it was reached, and, as there was no longer the necessity for a light, it was extinguished.

Slowly and cautiously they made their way out among the trees.

As soon as they had all assembled, they looked up, and were astonished to perceive that the sky was tinted with a brilliant red.

Clouds of smoke, too, could be seen rising up above the tree-tops.

For some moments this spectacle was gazed on in silence.

Dick Turpin was the first to speak.

"They have burnt our house down," he said. "It is perfectly certain that the inn is on fire. There's no other building hereabouts."

"I wish we could tell exactly what has happened since our departure," returned Tom King. "But no matter. Doubtless we shall have enough to do in looking after our own safety."

"Depend upon it we shall," said Turpin. "My own escape from Newgate—the fact of my being tracked to this place, as no doubt I have been, will create a tremendous commotion everywhere, and great efforts will be made to capture us."

"It appears to me," said Claude Duval, "that before we go any further it will be necessary for us to hold a kind of council of war and decide upon the nature of the proceedings we should next take."

"Exactly," returned Dick. "I was about to make the same remark myself. Suppose we all give our views upon the subject, and then decide? I don't think we are in much danger of molestation here."

"Nor I," returned Sixteen-String Jack, "though very likely as soon as we attempt to quit the cover of these trees we shall be seen. It is a desperate, well-organised attack that they have made. All their preparations are doubtless very complete."

"For my own part," said Tom King, after a short silence, "I am in favour of a separation—of course, a temporary one."

"And I—and I," cried Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack both together, so that it was evident the same idea had occurred to them

"There are many good reasons for adopting such a course," said Dick Turpin, to whom they all now looked for a decision; "but then, for my own part, I am sorry that we should separate. One would think that we should gain strength by union."

"No doubt we should," said Tom King, "but then, how much that would increase the chances of being seen. Here are five of us—quite a large party I may say—and wherever we go we must attract a good deal of notice."

"Certainly more than when alone," said Dick Turpin. "But how is it you intend to separate?"

Tom King questioned his two companions, and found that they, like himself, had decided upon going singly.

"It will be best, Dick," Tom continued—"much the best, for one can get out of the way and escape when two or a greater number could not possibly do so."

"You shall decide among yourselves," answered Turpin; "I will not attempt to control you in such a matter; I don't wish it. If you think our separation will conduce to our safety, let us part."

"But not until we have arranged for some meeting-place," said Tom King, quickly. "We must name a certain place and time, and we must be there by some means or other."

But where?

This was the point that set them all thinking.

It was hard to decide which place would be best suited

for such a purpose, and where they would be least likely to meet with an interruption.

It was at last resolved that the meeting-place should be on Hampstead Heath, near a tree in a lonely, desolate part of it, which was well known to all of them.

This had the advantage of being at no great distance from the metropolis, and yet it was lonely, for in those days, when the Heath was in the open country and more than double the size it is at present, few people ventured to turn aside from the badly-kept roads which intersected it.

"The hour," said Dick, "may as well be midnight; it is easily remembered, and by that time all will be quiet."

"Agreed. And now when shall the meeting be?"

"I should advise," replied Dick, "that we all seek out some place of concealment and endeavour to lie hidden until this disturbance blows over. Being thus apart, we shall probably be able to accomplish this very important object—what say you?"

"The advice is good—it could not possibly be better. How long shall we remain separated?"

"Let us say nine days," answered Turpin—"that's the time given for the endurance of a wonder; by then, very likely, the officers will have abated their vigilance; at any rate, it would be safe to meet then, and our future proceedings would be decided upon."

All this while Maud remained perfectly silent, listening attentively to all that was said, and gazing alternately into the countenances of the highwaymen as well as the obscurity of the place would permit.

Now, however, with considerable timidity she spoke.

"If you would take a suggestion from me," she said—"if you would listen to what I have to propose——"

All were silent.

"It is," she said, still more hesitatingly, "that you all endeavour to leave England. In another land you would be in safety."

"It is worth consideration," replied Dick; "but at present it is impracticable."

"Indeed!" said Maud, with a deeply-disappointed air. "Why impracticable?"

"Are you so selfish as to forget the danger in which Tom Davis and Ellen are now in? In their disappointment, who can say what the officers may do? I cannot think of leaving them to their fate. We must ascertain their condition, and do what we can to assist them."

This proposal met with universal assent.

"It would be base indeed," said Tom King, "to abandon them after having done so much for us."

"I did not think of their danger," said Maud—"it did not occur to me they would be in any. Do not imagine," she continued, earnestly, "that I would wish you to forsake such true and tried friends."

"Right," said Dick—"quite right! And now, my friends, are we all agreed? If so, the sooner we separate the better."

"Quite agreed," murmured the other three; for they were unable to think of any further arrangements.

Still they lingered for several moments.

After being for so long in company, the idea of parting was a most unpleasant one.

"As I was the first to speak," said Tom King, "let me be the first to go through the disagreeable ceremony. Farewell!"

"Farewell!" returned the others. "Don't forget the time and place of meeting."

"Depend upon it," said Tom King, "I shall not. If I am alive and uncaptured, you will see me there."

Taking his horse by the bridle, he walked slowly off among the trees.

The others gazed after him until he vanished from their sight.

Claude went next, taking an opposite direction.

Then Sixteen-String Jack started also by another route, and Dick Turpin and Maud were left alone.

From this it will be seen that the highwaymen would leave the plantation at four different points, which would make it all the more difficult for the police officers to observe them, or prevent their departure.

We must content ourselves with following their movements one at a time, and it seems only right to give the precedence to Dick Turpin himself.

He drew a long breath—which could almost be called a sigh—when the last of his comrades had left him; then suddenly remembering the danger in which he stood, he turned to Maud.

"It will not be possible to mount at present, because of the low-lying branches of the trees, but I will lead Black Bess out by the shortest path I know of; then, once more in her life she must carry a double burden."

"As you like," returned Maud. "While I am with you I am content. I ask no more. The danger seems diminished more than one half when I share it with you."

Dick did not reply, but at once set forward, for he was anxious to get upon the back of Black Bess.

He regarded her arching neck and proud, impatient step with feelings of the greatest admiration.

"She will carry us bravely!" he ejaculated, in a triumphant voice. "When once in the saddle I shall not fear all the officers in the kingdom."

He pushed on through the trees as quickly as the nature of the ground would permit, until, at length, by the thinness of the vegetation, he was warned that he was near the edge of the plantation.

"We cannot be too cautious," he said. "Remain here, Maud, and hold Black Bess by the bridle, so. That will do nicely. Now I will creep forward with what stealthfulness I am capable, and ascertain whether any officers are near. It may be that this wood is watched; at any rate, it is important that the point should be decided."

He waved his hand while he spoke, and glided swiftly and noiselessly over the soft turf between the trees.

CHAPTER CM.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD MAKE A HALT AT THE WOOD PIGEON INN.

THEY were anxious moments for Maud that elapsed while Dick was absent on this, as it seemed to her, most perilous errand.

Glad enough was she when she caught the sound of his returning footstep and perceived his form.

"All is well, Maud," he said. "I have looked around cautiously and can see no signs of the officers. Come, I think we may venture to mount now."

So saying, he vaulted into the saddle, and, stooping down, lifted Maud on to the back of Black Bess in front of him.

"Gently," he cried—"gently—gently, Bess!"

It was difficult, however, to curb the impatience of Black Bess at this time—she was full of fire and spirit.

With cautious steps, however, the wood was left, and the open country gained.

Firmly convinced now that all was well, and knowing that he was out of danger, Dick uttered a faint cheer.

No sooner did the sound reach the ears of Black Bess than she gave a bound forward that almost unseated Maud.

Then, at a long, swinging gallop, she took her course across the open country.

Soon the red tint in the sky, proceeding from the blazing inn, disappeared from view.

Still Dick did not offer to check the speed of Black Bess, though, by keeping the reins firmly in his hand, he prevented her from increasing it.

In this manner, they continued to gallop over the country until a tolerably wide cross-road was reached.

From its appearance, it did not seem as though it was much frequented, for in some places it was thickly overgrown with grass.

Believing himself perfectly safe and free from pursuit, Dick diminished his mare's speed to a walk.

He had long ago learned the necessity of restraining her, so that when the moment of danger came she would be able to put forth all her energies.

Taking advantage of this opportunity for conversation, Maud asked Dick what his intentions were.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I scarcely know. I have not made up my mind, but shall be guided by the chapter of events."

"But will it not be better to seek out some place of refuge?"

"It would be better if some place could be found where we could remain in quiet; the difficulty is the discovery of it."

Maud sighed.

"You are weary, no doubt," cried Turpin, overhearing it, "and, to speak the truth, so am I. I should be glad enough of a few days' quiet and peacefulness with you. Let us hope we may meet with such a place ere long."

Maud uttered the same hope with great fervency.

The silence that prevailed around them, and the utter solitude in which they seemed to be, gave them an assurance of safety which was perhaps more imaginary than real.

But the night was fast wearing away.

In the east, indications of the coming day could plainly be perceived, and before long daylight would be shed around them.

Dick still maintained his course along the cross-country road, for it continued to present the same signs of only being slightly used.

This, then, of all others, was the route for him to take.

He was especially desirous to avoid meeting with anyone, since a horse carrying a double burden could not fail to attract universal notice.

All at once, however, upon turning round a bend in the road, Dick came in sight of a small roadside public-house.

A little further on he could see where two other roads branched off, one running at right angles to the direction he was taking.

Now he paused altogether, and both Maud and himself looked with considerable curiosity and interest at the old-fashioned building before them.

In the faint, grey morning light it looked particularly pleasing, and around it and in its whole appearance there was an air of tranquillity and peace that especially recommended it to the fugitives.

At last, in a faint voice, Maud ventured to speak.

"Sure!" she said, "in this place we shall find the refuge of which you spoke. We are far away from Ealing, and who is there that could trace us here, and in so lonely and retired a spot?"

"No one, I should think," returned Dick, musingly, for even he felt the charm of this delightful spot.

"Well, then, let us stay now—I am fatigued, and should be glad to rest."

"We will, Maud, for although we have travelled thus far unseen, we cannot hope to go much further by broad daylight without meeting or overtaking somebody. Yes—yes, we will stay here."

He walked Black Bess slowly towards the inn as he spoke, and on drawing close enough to make out what was written on the swinging signboard, he saw that the house was called the Wood Pigeon, and was kept by Stephen Marshall.

"How strange!" he ejaculated, as his eye fell upon the name "We have only just escaped from Marshall, and here's Marshall again."

"But not the same."

"No, surely not the same," returned Dick; "but the coincidence is singular."

He felt half inclined to turn back even then, for he had grown to dislike the name.

But it was a common one, and it was scarcely likely that the keeper of this little roadside inn could be known to or by the chief police officer.

While thus engaged in thought, the front door of the inn was opened, and a burly, good-tempered-looking man made his appearance on the threshold.

"Morning," he said—"morning, sir. Would you like to stay here for a time—I have every accommodation?"

"I think so," said Dick, "for we have come some distance, and are weary."

"Then let me recommend you to stay here, for it is more than six miles to the next inn, where, although I say it, you will find the accommodation very inferior to what you will have here."

While speaking, the landlord, reading assent in the eyes of the travellers, came forward and assisted Maud to alight.

Dick sprang nimbly to the ground.

"You have a capital nag there, sir," said the landlord, looking at Black Bess with admiring eyes.

"Yes, very fair," said Dick, hastily. "Is the ostler about?"

"He is very likely not awake yet," said the landlord. "If you don't mind, I will take the lady into the house, and in the meanwhile you can go round to the stable; you will find him somewhere about; I will be with you in a minute or so."

"All right," said Dick, and, taking Black Bess by the bridle, he led her off in the direction that had been pointed out to him.

After much shouting and pulling at the handle of a cracked bell, he managed to arouse the attention of the ostler, who, by his appearance, had evidently been sleeping on the straw.

It was a rare thing for anyone to bring a horse to be put up at the Wood Pigeon, and so this lad was prepared to treat Dick with all imaginable deference.

The gift of half a crown, too, made a wonderful impression upon him.

He felt convinced that Dick must be a nobleman at the very least

Before he had finished giving his instructions about Black Bess, and before she had been thoroughly rubbed down, the landlord appeared.

"I think I will stay here all day," Dick said.

"Very good, sir; your good lady does seem tired, and I am sure you will have no fault to find with the accommodation; all that we have is of the very best quality."

Having seen to Black Bess, Dick returned with the landlord across the yard.

Entering the inn, the landlord led him to the room in which Maud was seated.

But before he could accost her the profound stillness which prevailed at that early morning hour was broken in upon by the hasty trampling of horses' feet and the rattle of rapidly-revolving wheels.

Dick reached the little projecting window at one stride

Scarcely had he done so than a post-chaise, drawn by four horses, drew up in front of the inn, with a suddenness that seemed as though it would overturn it.

The horses looked excessively fatigued, and their flanks were dripping with perspiration.

The postilion, too, took off his cap and wiped his forehead on the sleeve of his coat, while he vociferated loudly for the ostler.

The landlord was in a state of great confusion immediately.

Never before in all his long residence at the Wood Pigeon had he known a post-chaise to pass the house, let alone stop at his door.

In the midst of his confusion, he recollected his own duty, and so hastened to the front of the inn.

By the time he reached it, the door of the post-chaise was opened from within, and a young man of strikingly handsome appearance alighted.

Holding up his hands, he next assisted a lady to alight.

She was richly attired, and seemed to be in an early stage of girlhood.

Great traces of agitation could be seen upon her countenance, of which, however, Maud and Dick obtained only a momentary glimpse, for the young man half-led, half-carried her into the inn.

He spoke loudly, so that Dick could not avoid hearing what he said, though, to speak truth, the highwayman was so much interested with this young couple, and had so grown to consider it was necessary for him to make himself acquainted with all things that came under his notice, that he would without scruple have listened intently at the door.

At present there was no necessity for this course.

"A bottle of your best wine, landlord—and quickly!" he cried, in rich, full tones, "and a little cake, or something of that kind—whatever you can get most quickly!"

Then, by the sound of steps without, Dick could tell that the young man had led his companion into a room on the opposite side of the passage, which ran completely from the front to the back of the inn.

"An elopement," said Dick, to Maud, with a smile—"a runaway match, or something of that kind. Well, if they are fond of each other they ought to be happy, and I consider no one should interfere."

In the meanwhile, the postilion was busily engaged in rubbing down his horses, and supplying them with hay and water.

"We sha'n't stay many minutes," Dick heard him say, in a confidential voice, to the ostler. "The fact is, that

girl's father is close behind us in pursuit. We should not have stopped here," he added, "only the young lady was near to fainting from fatigue."

CHAPTER CMI.

DICK TURPIN FINDS DANGER EVEN IN THE WOOD PIGEON INN.

A FEW minutes elapsed, and the postilion, having finished attending to the horses, withdrew himself into the interior of the inn in order to refresh his inner man.

While he was thus engaged, a party, consisting of four mounted men, suddenly appeared in front of the inn.

At first it looked like a mystery for them to appear so suddenly and silently.

But the fact is they had made their way along the grass-grown country road, and consequently the hoofs of the horses had not made sufficient noise to attract notice.

No sooner did the first horseman catch sight of the post-chaise than he uttered an indignant cry, and flung himself off his horse in what appeared to be a very dangerous manner.

He was a stout, well-dressed, stern-looking man, apparently about forty years of age—perhaps he was younger.

A piercing shriek coming from the room in which the young couple were seated was next heard, and testified that she had witnessed this fresh arrival.

The other three horsemen appeared to be the servants of the stern-looking man, who, beyond a doubt, was the young girl's father.

With the same reckless precipitation which had characterised his descent from his horse, he dashed into the inn, and broke open the door communicating with the apartment in which his daughter sat.

Shouting aloud, the stern-looking man cried:

"Draw, wretch!—villain!—scoundrel, that you are!—draw, I say, and defend yourself, or I will cut you down as you stand!"

"No, no, father!" cried the young girl. "Spare him—spare him! Your resentment now comes too late—he is my husband."

A fearful oath escaped the father's lips.

Then came a stifled cry, followed quickly by a dull sound.

Dick could tell, as well as if he had been there to see, that the angry father had spurned his daughter from him, and that she had fallen insensible to the floor.

At present, however, he could not see any reason to interfere; yet he drew his sword, and crept closer to the door of the room.

The young man uttered an angry shout when he witnessed this cruel act on the part of the bride's father.

Under the impulse of that anger, he must have drawn his sword, for the clash of steel was heard.

Directly afterwards the door of Dick's room was thrown open, and the landlord, as white as a ghost, and trembling from head to foot, made his appearance.

"Oh, sir—sir," he said, "you wear a sword! Put a stop to that dreadful conflict in the other room! I shall have murder done in my house, and then I am a ruined man!"

Dick only needed some excuse for interference, and, unheeding a remonstrance from Maud, he hurriedly left the room.

But the three servants who had arrived with the stranger guarded the door of the room.

Dick did not hesitate in making the attempt to force his way past them.

Before, however, he had time to accomplish his purpose, he saw the young man's sword suddenly struck aside by that of his more skilful opponent.

With his face more like a demon's than a man's, the angry father shortened his arm and gave a sudden and fearful lunge.

The young man's weapon was not in readiness to parry the blow.

The point of the glittering rapier entered his left breast, and such was the violence of the blow that the progress of the weapon was not stopped until the hilt struck audibly against his breast.

Quick as thought, the weapon was withdrawn, and again passed through the young man's body, who now staggered backwards, dropped his sword, clasped his hands over his wound, made an effort to stand, and then fell lifeless to the floor.

"At last, villain!" said the stranger, flinging down his blood-stained sword.

Then, pointing to his daughter, and addressing his attendants, he said:

"Quick! Raise her and carry her away—the sooner the better!"

At the first touch of these men, however, the young girl recovered her consciousness.

She sprang to her feet with a wild, confused look in her eyes; then her glance fell upon the form of her newly-made husband lying still in death upon the floor, with the blood yet welling from his wounds.

The cry that then escaped her lips would surely have pierced a heart of stone.

Releasing herself suddenly from the grasp of the servants, she sprang forward, and, before she could be prevented, flung herself at full length upon the young man's body.

Her tears and cries were then something fearful to witness.

She tried a dozen different methods of recalling the beloved one to life, but, failing in them all, she started up again with a wild, hysterical cry, that ended in a deal of loud, prolonged, unmirthful laughter.

All who heard it were dismayed.

The father uttered a groan of anguish.

There could be no mistaking that fearful laugh or the strange glitter of the eyes—both proclaimed insanity.

"Seize her!" cried the young girl's father, addressing his servants—"seize her, or she will do herself a mischief! Make her secure and carry her to the post-chaise!"

The poor girl echoed the last words, and then again broke out into a peal of frenzied laughter.

The servants proceeded to carry out the instructions given them, but as soon as they touched the bride she uttered shriek upon shriek, calling all the while upon her husband to protect and save her, who, alas! no longer heard that voice which had ever been like music in his ears.

Without more force than was absolutely required, the young girl was carried out of the inn and placed in the post-chaise.

Her father regarded her with a stern, unpitying look. One would have thought that this terrible event would have caused him to relent and to repent, but so far from it, his anger was increased.

The landlord, whose dismay it is impossible to describe, hastened after him, and seized him by the coat.

"Sir—sir," he cried, "I am a ruined man—yes, a ruined man! And it is you who have wrought the evil! Murder is in my house! What is to be done?"

The stranger shook him off roughly.

"Do what you like," he said—"I care not. It is no business of mine."

He was about to step into the post-chaise, but Dick Turpin advanced.

What he would have said or done under the circumstances is hard to say, for just at that moment the landlord cried:

"If my brother was only here now I should be in a different position. He is the chief police officer in London, and will be here to-day. I can describe you to him. You shall, at any rate, reap the consequences of this deed!"

These words made Dick stagger back, and well they might.

His own safety rose instantly paramount to every other consideration.

Could it really be possible that he had journeyed so far, and had in the end taken up his quarters in a place where Jack Marshall would be most likely to find him?

The moment of irresolution and confusion sufficed to allow the stranger to escape.

One of his own servants sprang upon the back of one of the horses belonging to the post-chaise, and urged the whole onward at full gallop.

The others followed on the steeds upon which they had arrived.

In less than a couple of moments the whole party was out of sight, leaving the landlord dumbfoundered, per-



[DICK TURPIN ASTONISHES THE LANDLORD OF THE WOOD PIGEON INN]

plexed, confused, scarcely able to believe what had just taken place.

The postboy, too, witnessed with rage and fear the violent seizure of his vehicle. But one of the horses belonging to the stranger still remained, so, with a fierce shout, he sprang on to his back, and galloped off in pursuit.

"Did you not say that your brother is the chief police officer in London?"

"Yes—to be sure he is, and how thankful I am I have some one so powerful to aid me. Let me see? Why, is it possible? He promised, if he possibly could, to call upon me here to-day. Perhaps I may see him in the course of a few moments."

During the occurrence of these last events, Maud had left the inn and made her way to Turpin's side.

This last speech of the landlord, however, forced a scream of dismay from her lips, which had the immediate effect of attracting general attention towards her.

The result might have been awkward, but just then a diversion happened which told greatly in her favour.

The landlady had not risen when the post-chaise arrived—in fact, she did not make her appearance downstairs until after the newly-made bride was carried off by her father.

The first thing she did was to rush into the room where the encounter had taken place, and, having done so, her eyes were horrified by the frightful spectacle presented to them.

The young man was lying there cold and immovable in death, just in the same position as he had fallen, while the blood that had flowed from his wounds formed quite a pool around him.

Upon seeing this, the landlady threw up her arms and

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gurgled hysterically, and then fell down in a swoon, to all outward appearances as lifeless as the young stranger.

It was that which took place just after Maud had screamed, and the landlord, being made acquainted with it, rushed into the inn.

"Hush—hush!" said Dick, speaking to her as reassuringly as he could—"don't be alarmed! We know our danger in good time, and all will be well. Do you hear—do you understand? I tell you to be calm."

"Yes—yes."

"We are in no danger yet—most certainly in no danger. And now pay particular attention to my instructions."

She looked up into his face attentively.

"It will never do for us to remain here any longer," he continued, speaking in a hurried tone of voice; "we cannot tell one moment from another when Jack Marshall and his officers will arrive. I am resolved to depart at once. I will take advantage of this confusion that is reigning around, and hasten to the stables. In the meanwhile, you enter the inn and, without attracting any more notice than you can help, leave it by the back door; you will see me there, and after that Black Bess will do the rest."

Hastily as these instructions were given her, and great as was the confusion of her mind, Maud perfectly understood them.

Dick left her, hastily darting round the corner of the inn at full speed, for just then no one happened to be about.

He had no difficulty in entering the stables.

Black Bess was there, and according to his request all her trappings had been hung up on the stall in which she stood.

With nimble fingers he placed them upon her back, and he had her already for the road in a space of time so short that it would have made the ostler of the Wood Pigeon ready to die of vexation.

Rapid as all his movements had been, yet by the time he gained the door of the stable Maud had entered the yard.

She hastened towards him, and Dick without more ado mounted.

Swinging her into the saddle before him in the same way as before, he rode with rather dangerous swiftness to the front of the inn.

CHAPTER CMII.

DICK TURPIN LEAVES THE WOOD PIGEON INN, AND HAS AN ADVENTURE ON THE ROAD.

Either the ostler had been observing Dick's motions, or else the clatter of Black Bess's hoofs had attracted attention, for the landlord and all his household hastily made their appearance at the front door.

"Hi, hi!—stop!" he roared—"stop—stop! What does it all mean? Is everybody mad, or am I?"

The landlord might well ask this question, for the events that had so recently occurred in such rapid succession were quite calculated to disturb the equilibrium of one who had led such an even life as himself.

Dick made no reply, but he slackened his mare's speed somewhat.

Then, plunging his hand into his pocket, he drew forth a guinea.

"Here," he said, as he threw it among the group, "that will do for the reckoning."

No sooner had the words passed his lips than he again gave Black Bess the impulse forward.

As he did so, a loud, peculiar shout from the rear became audible, and he turned quickly to ascertain the cause.

To his extreme annoyance, for he hoped to leave the inn unseen, he perceived a throng of police officers approaching.

They were at too great a distance for their countenances to be distinguished, yet Dick fancied, from the general appearance of the one who rode a little in advance of the rest, that he was no other than his pertinacious foe, Jack Marshall.

Black Bess had had but a brief rest, yet that had sufficed to recruit her energies wonderfully.

Besides, although they had travelled so many miles, Dick had carefully husbanded her strength.

He had now the best of all reasons for congratulating himself upon having adopted so prudent a course.

He did not hesitate to urge her to put forth her utmost powers of speed.

As if by magic, then, the troop of police officers were left behind.

They tried indeed to keep up a pursuit, but found it impossible—their horses were thoroughly exhausted.

Dick continued his headlong course until he felt that he had gone far enough to be perfectly secure from all danger of pursuit.

Then, by slow degrees, he tightened the rein.

Maud was anxious and alarmed.

She looked apprehensively behind her, being scarcely able to believe that they were out of danger.

"I am vexed," Dick said, "and for more reasons than one. I fully intended that you should have plenty of rest before we journeyed further; as it is, we are in the open daylight without knowing where to look for shelter."

"Don't let that trouble you," said Maud—"it is not worth your consideration. You should remember your own life is at stake, and that you should do everything in your power to preserve it."

"Well, Maud, we will do our best. I should like to get some distance further from the officers than I am now; I am sorry, too, to put Black Bess to another gallop, yet it must be done."

He suited the action to the word, and for some time not another word was exchanged—in fact, it was not until the sun had attained a considerable altitude, and until the business of the day had fairly commenced, that Dick again drew rein.

He then found himself in a most beautiful and picturesque portion of the country—a place in which he would have been glad enough to linger for a time.

Not even the least observant person could have looked around without perceiving the many rare natural beauties of the place.

In the bright morning sunlight, too, all objects had a particularly fresh and pleasant appearance.

Indeed, it was scarcely possible to look upon that scene under a more favourable aspect.

Far away before them the road could be traced, stretching itself like a broad strip of white ribbon, and Dick's keen eye presently descried, at a great distance, the form of a mounted man, who was riding towards them.

Evidently the sight reminded him of something, for he brought Black Bess completely to a halt, and plunged his hands in quick succession into his different pockets.

"Maud," he said, at last, in answer to the inquiring look she gave while he was thus engaged, "it is as I fear."

"What?" she asked, with an expression of alarm.

"I have no money. That was the last guinea I flung to the landlord as he was standing at his door. We cannot go on thus; we must have money before we can proceed further."

"But," asked Maud, trembling with dread, "tell me where you can obtain it?"

Dick raised his arm and pointed over the low hedgerows.

"Do you see?" he asked.

The figure of the horseman was now much more distinctly visible than it had been before, for the simple reason that he had come much closer.

"I see that horseman," said Maud, more agitated than before; "but surely you do not mean——"

"Yes, Maud, I do. The only means by which I can obtain money is by taking it on the road. I will commit no act of violence, and, from the appearance of the stranger, I should fancy that the loss of such a trifle as I shall take from him will not inconvenience him much."

"But you forget."

"Forget what?"

"Your own danger."

Dick laughed lightly.

"But consider," persisted Maud, with great earnestness—"consider that the officers are close behind you, and that it is broad daylight. This act cannot fail to bring the officers upon your track."

"They will trace me easily enough as it is," was Turpin's rejoinder. "No—no, Maud, I see no reason to hold back; fortune has thrown this chance into my way, and I should be unwise in the extreme not to avail myself of it."

"For once," said Maud—"only for once let me request you to allow him to pass unmolested."

"Do not entreat that favour," replied Dick, "for it is one I cannot grant, though it pains me to refuse you. There's little or no danger, and, as I said before, money is more necessary to our safety than anything else."

Maud burst into tears, but Dick affected to take no notice of her emotion.

"Come, dear Maud," he said, "let me assist you to the ground. There, that will do nicely. Do not be in the least frightened. Sit down on that little grassy embankment, and remain there; in a few minutes I shall return. Do not be afraid; the adventure is a trifling one after all."

These words, however, did not reassure Maud in the least, for she wept bitterly.

She had learned from experience, however, that when Dick had once made up his mind to pursue any particular course it was quite vain to attempt to dissuade him from it."

At such times there was only one thing she could do, and that was to submit.

This course she adopted on the present occasion, but dreading the encounter that was about to ensue, she shut out the sight of everything around her by clasping her hands closely over her face.

In the meanwhile, with the easiest air imaginable, Dick Turpin trotted forward, and to have glanced at him, no one in the world would have believed that his position was really so perilous as it was.

But this little adventure, coming upon him so unexpectedly, seemed to have quite a reviving effect upon his spirits—indeed, as he walked Black Bess slowly forwards he lightly hummed a tune.

When hastily leaving the Three Spiders, he had only just time to buckle on a sword.

He was altogether unprovided with firearms or ammunition.

To all appearances, however, this circumstance did not trouble him in the least.

The stranger came on at rather a smart trot, and every step his horse took produced a jingling sound.

He was wrapped in a cloak, for the morning air was chill; but every now and then the wind would blow it partially aside and disclose his apparel, which was that of an officer of the guards in an undress uniform.

Apparently he took but little notice of Dick as he walked Black Bess deliberately along the road.

Nor did Dick seem particularly attentive, although his eyes were keenly fixed upon every movement the stranger made.

At length, when close enough for his purpose, Dick stopped Black Bess just in the centre of the road, and the stranger, perceiving it, had to check his steed somewhat abruptly to prevent a collision.

Dick took advantage of this event by taking off his hat and making a low bow.

The officer, who was evidently also a gentleman, with great politeness and grace returned the salutation.

He would have passed on, though, had not Dick's voice arrested his progress.

"One moment, sir," he said. "Excuse me if I interrupt you on your journey—one moment, if you please."

The officer looked at Dick closely, thinking perhaps that he might be some forgotten acquaintance.

Failing to recognise him, however, he said:

"I am at your commands, sir. What is your pleasure?"

"I can scarcely say," said Dick, with a laugh, "but just at the present moment I happen to be in a little difficulty, and I am sure you will rejoice when I tell you that, above all others, you are the very man who will get me out of it."

"Indeed!" said the stranger, with some show of surprise and interest, for Dick's manner of accosting him was such that he never for one moment guessed at his intention.

CHAPTER CIIII.

THE CONCLUSION OF DICK TURPIN'S ADVENTURE WITH THE OFFICER.

"INDEED and in fact," returned Dick, very gravely.

"I am at a loss to understand you," ejaculated the stranger

"No doubt you are," said Dick; "but I shall quickly make myself clear. It would be a shame to keep you in a state of ignorance upon such a point. The fact is, the difficulty I am in is the want of money."

The stranger repeated the words half unconsciously, and backed his horse several paces.

"Yes," said Dick, speaking now in a bolder and more determined tone of voice, "my last guinea is gone, and I look to you, sir, to replenish my purse."

"Well, d—n your impudence!" said the stranger. "Curse me if ever I heard of such a thing in my life! Be off with you!"

"Stay!" cried Dick, in a loud voice, as by one bound he caused Black Bess to plant herself exactly in front of the officer's steed—"stay! I intend to stand no nonsense! At the same time, I would gladly avoid violence; therefore, let me advise you to hand over your money quietly, without making the least fuss—indeed, it would not be becoming of you as a gentleman to do so."

"Wouldn't it? Then I beg leave to differ with you upon that point—to differ with you entirely! And now I tell you plainly, Mr. Highwayman, that no money of mine shall you have!"

"You will alter your mind," said Dick—"I feel sure you will alter your mind! How very unwise it would be of you to risk your valuable life for a trifling sum of money!"

"Well, I must say you are the coolest customer that ever I met with or heard of in the whole course of my life," said the stranger, forced against his will into admiration. "Do you always take these matters in so equable a manner?"

"Ahem!" said Dick, "it depends. But when I am with a gentleman like yourself, I endeavour to treat him as a gentleman."

The stranger laughed at this compliment.

"I don't intend to risk my life for what money I have about me," he said, "because it is a mere trifle. Still less, however, do I feel inclined to give it up without any show of resistance. You shall have my purse upon one condition."

"Name it."

"It is, then, that you draw your sword, alight, and cross blades with me, just in a friendly way. And if you can succeed in giving me three distinct hits before I have touched you twice, the purse is yours; on the other hand, if you fail, I retain my money."

"Agreed!" said Dick, as he sprang lightly from the saddle. "Nothing could be more congenial to my temper!"

"Nor to mine," said the stranger, "for I have a chance of keeping what I have, with the additional satisfaction that no one can taunt me with having tamely submitted to being robbed on the highway."

The stranger alighted also, and secured his horse to the branch of a tree.

Then, drawing a tolerably well-filled purse from his pocket, he threw it into the middle of the road.

"There," he said, "there's the money. The victor takes it!"

With the same nimbleness that had characterised all his movements, the stranger now pulled off his coat and rolled up his shirt-sleeves, disclosing an arm that, though slender, was evidently very muscular.

But Dick did not think it worth while to disapparel himself.

Perceiving that he advanced with his coat on, the stranger said:

"I don't want to take you at an unfair advantage—it is not in my nature to do so. I believe that without vanity I can say I am a good swordsman. I should like you to stand on equal ground with myself. Most certainly your coat will impede your movements."

"No matter," said Dick, in the same easy, careless manner in which he had all along spoken. "I am used to fighting with my coat on; and besides, we shall save time."

The stranger did not say another word, but immediately crossed his blade over Dick's.

His attitude and the manner in which he fixed his eyes made the highwayman aware that he was pitted against an antagonist of no ordinary description

The next moment this singular conflict began.

The blades of the swords rattled together as the two

combatants held themselves prepared for attack or defence.

The stranger was the first to make a thrust, and it was given so suddenly—so straightforwardly—that it seemed as though it must inevitably reach home.

But Dick parried it at once, then, quick as lightning changing the direction of his sword, struck the officer lightly on the shoulder.

"One!" he said, with a laugh.

The officer's face flushed, and it was perfectly certain that he had made up his mind he should obtain an easy victory over the highwayman, and the thrust that had been parried so skilfully was his favourite means of attack, and never before had he known it to fail him.

Yet, considering all things, he preserved his calmness admirably, and he again crossed his sword over that of Dick Turpin.

The stranger now waited to be attacked, and Dick did not leave him long in suspense.

Watching his opportunity, he suddenly lunged forward, and struck his adversary on the arm just above the elbow; at the same time, he felt a slight touch himself.

"Two and one!" he said. "Then the next stroke must decide it."

Some traces of excitement now began to manifest themselves in the stranger's manner.

Never before had he encountered an opponent so skilful as Dick Turpin.

He felt that his credit as a swordsman was now at stake, and this feeling went very far indeed towards unnerving him.

As for Dick himself, he was to all outward appearances as indifferent as ever; but that might have arisen from his consciousness of his own superior powers as a swordsman.

Again the weapons clanged together.

Rapid thrusts were interchanged and parried.

Then, by mutual consent, they paused.

At this moment a shriek came upon their ears.

It issued from Maud's lips.

From the distance she had witnessed this conflict, and, of course, she was unable to tell that it was one of a friendly character.

Thinking only of Dick's danger, she came hurrying on.

"That is some one with you?" said the stranger, interrogatively.

"It is," said Dick, "and this must be settled before she comes up. Now, then, to it again!"

There was more of earnestness in Dick's manner than there had been hitherto, and the stranger felt it.

Scarcely had the swords been crossed than Dick, with a rapid movement, disengaged his own sword, and tapped the officer lightly on the breast.

"Three!" he said. "Just in time!"

With another cry, Maud bounded forward, and reached his side.

She clasped her arms around him, and could scarcely believe at first that he was unhurt and safe.

"All's well, Maud," he said—"all's well! This gentleman and myself have had a friendly bout together—nothing more."

With an evident sense of chagrin the stranger sheathed his sword, drew down his shirt-sleeves, and resumed his coat; and Dick sheathed his own weapon likewise, and, with a careless, almost indifferent, step, walked to the spot where the purse was lying, and picked it up.

"Farewell," he said, perceiving that the stranger had already gained the saddle, and was about to gallop off—"farewell, sir! And should you ever hear Dick Turpin's name mentioned, you at least will be able to bear testimony that he did not behave himself like a common footpad!"

The officer bestowed a stare of intense and undisguised astonishment upon Dick, then, muttering:

"I might have guessed it," plunged his spurs into his horse's flanks and galloped away, for this disclosure of his adversary's name did not in the least degree reconcile him to his defeat.

"Are you sure you are unhurt," said Maud—"are you quite certain of it?"

"Quite; and was in no danger except from you. Yes, had that shriek of yours come upon my ears at a critical moment the consequences would have been serious; but no matter, I have gained my end; here is a purse, and if the stranger is satisfied I am."

He consigned it to his pocket as he spoke.

Then once more both resumed their places upon the back of Black Bess.

"I am not afraid that he will betray me," Dick said, in answer to a question from Maud, "nor do I think he would give the officers any information. However, I feel that to journey any further along this road by daylight would be unwise, so at the second turning we come to we will leave it."

"Why not the first?"

"Simply because the officers might take it into their heads to ride down it; it would be much safer to ride on to the second."

Maud felt that this reason was a good one, and said no more.

Dick again put Black Bess to the gallop, as he was anxious to leave the road he was now on, from the simple fact that a long, uninterrupted view could be obtained of it.

He did not reach a second turning, however, until he had gone considerably more than a mile.

At length he stopped suddenly.

"There's a lane," he said; "but we have passed it; the entrance is so dark and narrow that I could scarcely make out what it was at first."

Maud looked around her in some surprise, for although she had been on the look-out she had seen nothing of the lane Dick spoke of.

Black Bess's head was now turned round, and after they had retraced their steps for a short distance they found themselves opposite to the entrance of one of those narrow, winding, leafy lanes that are to be found in almost every part of England.

CHAPTER CMIV.

DICK TURPIN MEETS WITH ANOTHER SINGULAR ADVENTURE.

On either side trees had been planted very closely together, and they were of great antiquity, as was evidenced by the immense thickness of their trunks.

These trees were indeed so closely in contact that it would have been hard to squeeze any bulky object between them, and their branches shot out in such profusion above that they completely covered the lane, forming a kind of arched canopy to it.

Dick without hesitation made his way along it, and as soon as ever they had got beneath the shadow of the old trees, such an air of peacefulness and quiet came over all things that they felt themselves to be in perfect safety.

"We are not likely to meet with anyone here, Maud," said Dick, "so we can journey on without much fear. Still you are weary, and should any shelter present itself, rely upon it I shall not hesitate to avail myself of it."

"If it will be safe to do so," said Maud.

"Oh, it will be safe enough, never fear; leave all consideration of danger to me."

So great was the silence around, and such an impression did it produce upon Dick, that he could not prevail upon himself to disturb it.

The fact was he was terribly fatigued, though his constitution was so strong that he was only made sensible of it by a longing desire for repose.

It was therefore at a pace scarcely exceeding a walk that he allowed Black Bess to make her way along this lane.

Another reason which induced him to adopt this course was out of consideration for his steed.

Black Bess had been upon her legs for many hours, and had travelled many miles.

Comparatively speaking, it was rest for Dick to sit in the saddle while his mare was going so gently.

But although his bodily powers enjoyed this repose his mental ones did not.

He was very uneasy, not only on account of his comrades, but particularly on behalf of Tom Davis and Ellen, who he feared would find themselves in a very difficult, unpleasant position.

Maud glanced up at his face and saw by the expression of it that something was troubling him.

In a moment she asked what it was.

"I will tell you," he said. "It is as you may say a

matter of no very great moment, yet for the life of me I can't think it so. It concerns a promise that I made—a promise that I cannot see reasonable hopes of being able to perform."

"What promise was it?" asked Maud, wonderingly.

"The one I made to Mr. Bradbury, the Governor of Newgate. I told him that if he went within a week to Hampstead Heath he would find buried at the foot of a certain tree that I described to him, some recompense for what he did on my behalf."

"And is it not there?"

"No, certainly not; I only represented to him that there was, thinking I should have no difficulty whatever in riding there and concealing such a sum as I considered an adequate reward for all that he had done; but now how am I to hope to achieve it?"

Maud shook her head.

"I am afraid," she said, "that the Governor will meet with a disappointment."

"I should be vexed for such a thing as that to occur," said Dick. "I place great value on a promise, and I should not like the Governor of Newgate or anyone else to be able to say that Dick Turpin had gone from his word. No—no, Maud, that would never do; somehow or other, and in spite of all risks, the money must be put there before the week has expired."

"But under present circumstances," said Maud, "is it not a total impossibility? You have no money except what you carry with you, and how could you possibly venture on to Hampstead Heath for the purpose of burying it."

"The latter part would be easy enough," said Dick; "the worst of it is I have not enough; I should not like to insult the Governor by offering him such a trifling sum as this purse contains. I must set my wits to work, and doubtless ere long I shall see some means or other of fulfilling my project."

After speaking these words Dick relapsed into silence.

He was turning the matter over in his mind in every possible way.

Thus plunged in deep thought he rode on, he scarcely knew for how long a period.

The progress Black Bess made was very slow, for she found she was allowed to go just at her own pace.

All at once both Maud and Dick were startled by an unexpected but by no means alarming sound, yet it was one that made Black Bess prick up her ears and project them forwards.

The sound was repeated.

"That's a laugh," said Dick, in some amazement. "Who can it be in such a lonely, out-of-the-way place as this, giving way to laughter?"

Maud clung to him full of terror.

"Be not alarmed," he said; "surely we ought not to be terrified at hearing the sound of laughter."

"But who is it?"

"That we shall know in a very short time," said Dick, "for the sound came from somewhere very close at hand. We will look first if possible without revealing ourselves, then we can perfectly satisfy ourselves that there is no danger."

Creeping close under the shadow of the trees, Dick made his way along the lane to a point where it turned off at rather a sharp angle.

Reaching this spot, he paused and reconnoitred.

At a little distance off he perceived a sight that was at once picturesque and amusing.

A little way further on the character of the lane changed—in fact, it seemed as though it emerged upon a wild kind of common or heath.

Near the edge of the lane Dick saw a cart piled up with a miscellaneous assemblage of articles, and a yellow caravan.

Beside on the ground were in all about half a dozen persons, nearly all of whom were laughing heartily.

Dick looked in order to ascertain the cause of their laughter and soon found it to be the antics of a boy certainly not more than seven or eight years of age, who was executing some difficult feats of tumbling.

Maud looked upon this scene with great surprise and curiosity.

"They are strolling players," said Dick, in answer to an inquiring glance that she bent upon him. "Good, harmless people no doubt, who have sat down here to rest."

Certainly the utmost good feeling seemed to exist among the whole group; there was not one sorrowful, dejected-looking countenance.

"Shall we avoid them?" asked Maud.

"I think not," said Dick. "I feel sure that such wanderers as these would gladly extend a friendly hand to us. They are more comfortable than one would imagine at a first glance, and unless you have some strong objection I should recommend that we go to them and ask them for rest and shelter."

"If you think it would be safe to do so," said Maud, "I should be glad indeed, for I am utterly weary."

"So am I," said Dick, "so is Black Bess, and this sweet grass that grows hereabout will make for once an excellent substitute for a feed of corn."

Dick's resolution being thus taken he ventured to show himself.

Slightly increasing his speed, he rode towards the merry group.

The sound of a horse's hoofs attracted universal attention, and they all fixed their eyes curiously upon Maud and Dick.

The boy whose antics had amused the rest no sooner perceived the new-comers than he ran towards them, made a grotesque bow, then, turning a succession of somersaults along the road, stopped suddenly upon his feet.

He bowed again, and held out his hand to solicit a donation.

Dick stopped and threw him a piece of silver.

"Ask your friends," he said, "whether they will allow us to join them for a short time? We are hungry and weary?"

Astonished at the gift of so large a sum of money, the boy cut a fantastic caper and hurried off.

He quickly communicated his message.

In the meanwhile Dick continued to ride slowly towards them.

A man now rose from the grass on which he had been sitting, and advanced towards Dick half respectfully, half confidently.

"You are quite welcome to stop," he said, "and to share everything we have. You won't find us close hearted, though we are poor and cannot afford to be very generous."

"I will pay liberally for everything," said Dick. "Don't think I want to trespass upon you in that respect."

"Then you are heartily welcome," said the man, "and we will make you as comfortable as our rough means will permit."

Dick looked at this man with more than common interest.

In spite of the poor, ragged clothes he wore, there was an indefinable something in his manner that showed at once that he had occupied a tolerable position in life—indeed, his mode of speech at once displayed this fact.

Maud was assisted to alight.

Dick followed quickly, and removed the trappings from Black Bess with his own hands.

"I am known as Herr Smithini," said the man, addressing Maud, "and if you will come with me I will introduce you to my wife, who will do her best to make you comfortable."

The remainder of the troop looked somewhat surprised when Dick removed the bridle from Black Bess, thus allowing her perfect freedom; but then they were not aware that the highwayman could call his steed at any moment to his side by uttering that peculiar chirping signal whistle.

CHAPTER CMV.

DICK TURPIN BELIEVES THAT HE HAS FOUND A FIRM, TRUE FRIEND.

THE troop of strolling players, for such they were, consisted of Smithini, two other men, two females, and the boy.

The men, though clad in loose, ill-fitting garments, were evidently tumblers, as was shown by the flexibility of all their joints whenever they moved.

Without exception, they made Dick very welcome, inviting him to a share of their provisions.

Dick consented willingly enough, and renewed his offers of reward.

These men were all to a certain extent outcasts from society, like himself, and therefore very likely to befriend him—at any rate, he resolved to run the risk of placing confidence in them, if only for Maud's sake.

"We make ourselves as happy as we can," said Smithini, when Dick alluded to the laughter which his presence had interrupted, "but I can assure you, sir, we have little cause for mirth at the present time, having met with a great misfortune."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"The loss of our best horse—one that we had taught, with what trouble and patience you could not comprehend, to perform many tricks. What caused the creature's death we cannot guess; it may have been cold, exposure—I know not what. Certain it is that the most attractive feature in our exhibition is gone."

"Then your entertainment is a circus?"

The man nodded.

"Yes," he said. "And here you see my company, or rather the remains of it," he added, rather sadly, "for there was a time when my position was very different from what it is now. It is useless to repine—we must do the best we can, and hope for better times."

Dick would very willingly have questioned this man respecting his past life; he felt quite sure that he should obtain from him many details of a strange and interesting nature.

But after the rude meal was partaken of, such a feeling of drowsiness and heaviness came over him as he had never before experienced.

He tried in vain to struggle with it.

"I know not whether it is your intention to stay here long," he said, rousing himself with some difficulty, "but if you would let me sleep somewhere until sunset I would take it as the greatest favour you can grant."

"It shall be so. We are tired, and our horses also. Make yourself content."

By the directions of the leader of the troop, some canvas was pulled out of the waggon and fixed upon poles, so that a rude kind of tent was formed.

Here Dick threw himself down, and quickly fell asleep.

Maud was in the yellow caravan, also wrapped in slumber, for she was quite worn out with the anxieties and fatigues of the last few days.

Before retiring to rest, however, Dick had entreated Smithini to give him immediate warning if he perceived the approach of any police officers.

Nothing but extreme physical exhaustion would have made it possible for Dick to sleep under such circumstances as these.

But he did sleep, and soundly.

When he at length opened his eyes, it seemed as though not more than a moment had elapsed since he had closed them.

Looking around, however, he saw that it was fast growing dark.

For some time he remained perfectly still.

He was thinking over his position, and endeavouring to decide what should be his next step.

Among these friendly strollers there was no doubt he would be able to find a refuge, and Maud as well.

But then he recollected the promise he had made to the Governor of Newgate.

By what means he could possibly obtain the sum of money needed, and bury it in time at the foot of the tree on Hampstead Heath, seemed an absolute mystery

Suddenly, in the midst of his perplexities, he was struck by a bright thought.

He was all exultation in a moment.

Almost any other person, however, would have shrunk back in dismay at the bare idea of what Dick contemplated.

"Yes," he said to himself, "that's the course; it is simple and straightforward. I will go to Drury Lane; Matthew will willingly lend me the money I require; there will be no obstacle in that quarter, and, at the same time, I shall be able to learn intelligence of Tom Davis. Why, that alone would be worth the risk. Yes, my mind is made up; I'll go!"

This seemed, however, little short of madness; it was virtually courting danger for danger's sake.

Although he had arrived at this decision, Dick found many difficulties in the way of carrying it out

First and foremost came Maud.

What was he to do with her in the meanwhile, for it was impossible for her to accompany him to the White Horse?

"I must speak to her," he said—"I must persuade her to let me go. These players will doubtless take her under their charge; she will be safe with them, and if they keep faith with me, why, this man shall be so well rewarded that he will step at once into his lost position. All my difficulties are clearing themselves away. Now my course is clear and straightforward I must follow it."

With these words, Dick rose and emerged from the tent.

Close at hand, he saw the figure of Smithini.

"You have slept long," he said—"you must have been fatigued."

"I was."

"Come this way, then. You see they have made a fire yonder; we will, if you like, have one more meal together, and then I suppose we must part."

"Yes—I suppose so; but before I leave I have an offer to make to you."

Just as he spoke these words, the fire was reached, round which the whole party had assembled.

Maud was there, and Dick hastened to place himself by her side.

The scene was one that recommended itself to Dick from its very novelty, and he heartily joined in good-fellowship with these strangers among whom he had been so suddenly cast.

When the meal was over, he led Maud away to a little distance to speak to her.

"Black Bess is safe, you say?"

"Yes—quite safe, or was, only a short time back."

Dick whistled, then waited a moment.

The quick beat of hoofs over the heath was heard, and the next moment Black Bess was by her master's side caressing him.

"Yes, all's well," he said. "And now, Maud, I have something to propose to you which will be for the good of all. It will entail some sacrifice on your part, but you must not hesitate to make it."

She looked at him strangely, wondering what would come next.

In a few words, then, he announced his decision.

Maud recoiled with horror at the bare idea.

It needed all Dick's rhetoric only to partially reassure her; but at length he succeeded.

He hit upon the right course for inducing her to consent to allow him to visit the White Horse.

It was by representing how selfish his conduct and hers would appear if they left Tom Davis and Ellen to their fate.

The consent of Smithini to the arrangement alone was wanting, and Dick now hastened to seek him out.

"I would rather not tell you who I am," he said, bluntly, as soon as they had met; "but, as you may guess, I am an offender against the laws. The officers of justice are in pursuit of me. They are no friends of yours unless I make a great mistake."

"They are certainly not friends," said Smithini, with some bitterness. "Often and often, by a needless interference, they have deprived me of much money."

"I don't doubt it; but to return to what I was saying. You were telling me that your position was once very different."

"It was," answered the man. "I had a large stud of horses, and the best troup of equestrians and tumblers in the kingdom. Now you see to what I am reduced. I expect the next thing will be, we shall have to part with the waggon and tents for a subsistence, by picking up a few coppers by performing in the roadway."

"Not so," said Dick, laying his hand on his shoulder. "If you only consent to what I propose, you will have no need to take this gloomy view of things. I require a service at your hands; if you grant it, the recompense shall be such a reward as will enable you to resume your former position."

Smithini looked at Turpin incredulously for a moment.

"You speak fair," he said, "and there is a truthful

ring in your voice; but such good fortune is hard to believe. If you are in earnest, however, give me your hand."

"I am in earnest," said Dick, as he complied with his demand.

Smithini grasped his hand warmly, and then, with great solemnity, said:

"If you make good your promise, I swear there is no service in the power of man to perform that I would not render you. Now, then, let me hear it."

Dick was more pleased than ever with this man's manner.

He told him that he should wish to leave Maud with him for a day or two, during which time he was to take the greatest care of her—to shield her from all danger, and if, on his return, he found her safe, his promise should be kept.

"It seems a trifling service to perform for so great a reward. I scarcely like to accept your terms."

"I like you none the worse for that," said Dick, "and, in proof of it, I will take you entirely into my confidence, for you don't look like the man to betray the trust placed in you by another."

CHAPTER CMVI.

DICK TURPIN ASSUMES HIS DISGUISE AND SETS OUT FOR LONDON.

A LOOK of surprise came over Smithini's face as Dick thus spoke.

"You can trust me," he said. "Never fear that I will betray you."

"I don't fear," said Dick, sinking his voice to a lower tone, and glancing cautiously around, so as to make sure they were out of hearing of everybody, "and for that reason I shall tell you, without reserve, who I am. You must have heard of me in some way or other. I am known by the name of Dick Turpin."

"The highwayman?"

"The same."

The stroller held out his hand.

"I have heard much concerning you," he said, "and what's more, I like what I have heard, and will do my best to befriend you—indeed, almost from the first I guessed at your identity, but I waited to see whether you would disclose yourself."

"I have done so," said Dick. "That is my wife that I wish to leave in your care. She is sought for by the officers, as well as myself, and therefore it is necessary that she should keep herself in strict concealment."

The man nodded.

"As for myself, business of an urgent and of a dangerous nature compels me to make my way to London."

Smithini gave a start of surprise.

"To London?" he replied.

Dick nodded.

"Let me advise you not to go."

"Why?"

"Because, if you do go, capture is certain."

Dick laughed his old, quiet laugh.

"You must leave me to take care of myself," he said, "and to act as I may judge best. I thank you for your caution, but it is needless."

"No offence, I hope?"

"None in the least, and now, since all this is arranged, I will seek my wife, and let her know the result of this interview."

"Very good. There is only one thing, and that you appear to have forgotten."

"What is it?"

"To make some arrangement as to meeting again."

"Can you not remain hereabout?"

"It would interfere seriously with my plans, were I to do so," said the man, after a pause, though, of course, you can command me. For my own part, however, I think the safest and most prudent course would be to continue my movements just as though I had never seen you. Your wife will travel with us, and there will then be no ground for suspicion."

"You are quite right," said Dick. "Let it be so. Tell me to what place you thought of going next?"

"My next halt," said the stroller, "will be about a dozen miles from here, a small town called S——field. I may stay there a day, perhaps only a few hours. If I am not there when you arrive, push on to the next village. You will hear tidings of us all along on our route."

"It will be easy to trace you," said Dick, "and so I know quite sufficient."

With these words he turned away, and made Maud acquainted with the arrangements that had been agreed to by himself and Smithini.

To them she did not venture to offer any opposition. She knew how perfectly useless it would be to attempt to dissuade Dick from setting out upon this expedition, and she had sufficient good sense to know that the arrangement made was the very best possible under the circumstances.

Although matters had been settled so far, there was one point upon which Dick was seriously troubled.

He could not make up his mind as to the precise means he should take to reach London.

The question was, should he go with Black Bess or not?

Much was to be said on both sides.

If he took her it would double the chance of his discovery, for she would be more likely to be recognised than himself.

On the other hand, should he leave her behind, he would be cutting off his own escape.

While in this state of indecision, Dick's eyes rested mechanically on one of the vehicles belonging to the strollers.

It was a clumsey-looking covered cart, in which odds and ends of various descriptions had been stowed away.

While looking at it, Dick was reminded of an adventure he once had, which had met with a most successful termination.

It was when, upon the Guildford Road, he had assumed the disguise of a waggoner, and had played the part to such great perfection.

This recollection suggested to him the idea that, among his new friends, he would have plenty of opportunities of disguising himself, and he began to wonder whether it would not be possible to drive to London in absolute safety.

The more he thought upon this project the more he approved of it—especially, as he was unable to think of anything else.

At last he resolved that this should be his mode of action, and all that remained was to arrange with Smithini to have the horse and cart, and to leave Black Bess behind.

There was little difficulty about this—indeed, the stroller's eyes sparkled when the proposition to leave Black Bess in his charge was made to him.

"She's a beautiful-looking creature," he said, "and well known, so that it may prove not a little dangerous to travel with her; but if you make up your mind to leave her in my charge I will disguise her so effectually that even you would be in doubt as to her identity—at least, at first sight."

"Indeed?" said Dick, curiously. "How?"

"I will show you."

He hastened to the yellow caravan, and presently returned with a stone bottle, and brush.

"Catch her," he said, "and I will show you now."

"She wants little catching," answered Dick, and as soon as he spoke he gave the signal whistle.

There was a beat of hoofs, and in a moment Black Bess was by his side.

"There are few horses capable of learning such a trick as that," said the stroller—"very few, and I have had some experience in it. Why, she could be made to do anything."

"I believe it."

"Keep her quiet then, and you will see what an alteration can be made in the course of a few moments."

Dick possessed absolute control over his mare, so he had no difficulty in keeping her quiet while the stroller began his preparations.

Dick quickly guessed at his intention, and requested him to go on without stopping until the operation was completed.

The stone bottle contained a preparation they made use

of to keep the coat of a horse perfectly and dazzingly white.

He began with the head first and foremost.

With considerable skill he made a white star upon Black Bess's forehead just between her eyes which alone altered her appearance greatly.

So well too was this done, that it would have required a very close examination indeed to have discovered the deception.

More white was placed around the lower part of the head in such a manner as to look perfectly natural.

Then each of her feet was painted white likewise.

"There," said the stroller, as he drew back, "that's an alteration, is it not? and it will stand everything except a good wetting; but you see how simple the operation is, and how quickly it can be renewed."

Dick was delighted, and so much was his mare disguised that he felt half inclined to make his journey upon her back.

In this, however, he was overruled, for the stroller assured him that she should be perfectly safe.

The cart was now quite ready, and Dick, having taken a last look at his bonny mare, hastened to the spot where Maud was standing in order to bid her farewell.

At the prospect of parting and remaining for some time in the company of people who were perfect strangers to her, Maud could not restrain her tears.

She wept and sobbed as though her heart would break.

She clung to Dick tightly, convulsively, for she had in her heart the presentiment that he would again fall into the hands of his enemies.

But Dick endeavoured to make light of the whole matter, and finally managed to tear himself away.

An old fustian suit of clothes was brought forward by the stroller, and these were large enough to allow Dick to place them on over his ordinary apparel.

The effect of all this was to give him a much more bulky appearance than he usually wore.

A dirty-white felt hat with a large flapping brim was placed upon his head, and it served in no trifling degree to conceal his features.

Then round his neck he wore one of those huge woollen mufflers so frequently seen wrapped around the mouths of carters and waggoners.

Indeed, after a little trouble in disguising himself, Dick looked the character wonderfully, and when he cracked his whip and assumed a lounging, awkward gait, the impersonation was perfect.

"Do not fear for me," said Dick; "I feel quite assured all will be well; in such a disguise as this the cleverest police officer in London would fail to recognise me—even old Matthew himself will not know me. Depend upon it, Maud, I will be careful, and if possible I will be with you by daybreak in the morning, but if I don't come you must not infer from my absence that I am in any danger."

"Do come," said Maud, weeping still—"do come, for I shall suffer a thousand anxieties until I witness your return."

Dick laughed at her fears, then, scrambling up into the cart, he seated himself in front of it, wrapping himself up well in several old sacks and pieces of canvas, and when he had thus prepared himself in readiness to start, Maud could not help admitting that he looked as unlike himself as he possibly could do—indeed, the transformation was so complete that she could scarcely believe in it.

CHAPTER CMVII.

DICK TURPIN'S DISGUISE IS PUT TO A VERY SEVERE TEST.

Dick Turpin was not long in finding that the horse harnessed to the covered cart was of very indifferent quality indeed, and required no small amount of whipping to urge beyond a jog trot of about four miles an hour.

It was clear that he would have to rely altogether upon the excellence of his disguise and the unlikelihood that he should be suspected of playing such a part.

Should flight even become necessary it was quite out of the question.

As he rode on, however, a consideration presented itself to him, which, in the hurry and confusion of events, he had overlooked.

This was that, as he was journeying towards London, he would run a very great risk of meeting either with Jack Marshall or some of his officers.

They might allow him to ride by them unquestioned, but then again they might not, and Dick by no means relished the prospect of putting the existence of his disguise to so severe a proof.

Had the horse been capable of making a little better speed, Dick would certainly have made his way to London by a very circuitous route.

But time was of great importance, and he felt constrained to take the nearest and most direct road.

While jogging on thus and making these reflections, he suddenly perceived, upon looking up, a troop of officers at no great distance on the road before him.

At the first sight he thought they were advancing, but quickly found that this was an error.

For some reason or other they had come to a halt, and had collected into a dense throng.

What reason they could have for adopting this proceeding, Dick, of course, had no idea.

Yet he soon found by their gestures that a very animated discussion was going on among them.

It must be confessed that Dick by no means relished thus riding direct among his foes, yet how was he to avoid it?

In all probability his approach had been noticed, and if he slackened his speed or turned back, suspicion would be aroused.

Clearly he had no resource but to drive on, putting trust in the hope that they would allow him to pass through their midst unquestioned.

Dick felt uneasy, and to conceal his uneasiness he began to sing a song that he had learnt in his boyhood, and certainly the fact of his doing this was calculated to lead to the impression that he was quite at his ease.

He next perceived that the spot where the officers had assembled was just where two roads crossed each other.

Although he kept singing, Dick strained his ears in the hope of being able to catch some word or other uttered by his foes.

But in this he was unsuccessful.

At length, when very near to them, the whole body of officers, numbering altogether about thirteen, faced round and looked at him.

"Hullo you there!" said a voice, which he recognised immediately as being that of Jack Marshall. "Stop your confounded row a moment, and just pay attention to me!"

"Murder!" said Dick, as he abruptly reined in his horse.

The animal readily enough came to a standstill.

"How far have you come along this road?" asked Jack Marshall, in blustering tones.

"Be that your business now?" asked Dick.

"It *is* my business!" said Jack Marshall. "Do you see that?"

As he spoke he drew from his pocket a small constable's staff with a gilt crown on the top of it.

"Yes, I see it," said Dick, whose voice was as perfectly disguised as any voice could be, so that it is no wonder whatever that Jack Marshall should fail to recognise it.

"Well, then, you will understand that we are officers, and representatives of his Majesty the King. We are in pursuit of a highwayman."

"Oh, murder!"

"Hold your row, will you, and just tell me how far you have travelled?"

"Well, sir," said Dick, touching his hat, and suddenly assuming a very respectful demeanour, "may be a matter of thirty miles or thereabout."

"Thirty miles, eh? And I suppose you have not let anyone pass you on the road without just having a look at them, eh?"

"Well, I can't say that I have."

"Then just pay particular attention to what I am going to say, and, mind you, I give you this caution, that if you speak untruthfully you will be liable to arrest and imprisonment at any moment."

Dick pretended to be desperately frightened.

"Now, then, once more pay attention: Have you seen a man mounted on a black horse, carrying a female before him in the saddle?"



[DICK TURPIN'S DISGUISE IS PUT TO A SEVERE TEST.]

"Mounted on a black horse?" repeated Dick, as though endeavouring to tax his memory, but in reality he was debating within himself whether he should return an affirmative or negative reply.

If he said yes, the officers would doubtless ride along the road he had just traversed, and if so, would come up with the strollers, and so bring Maud into danger; whereas, if he said no, he might be troubled with them still further.

Yet this was the course which, in a brief and scarcely noticeable hesitation, he resolved to adopt.

"No, sir," he said. "I have been thinking carefully. I haven't seen nobody on a black horse."

"You are quite sure?"

"Quite."

"I said so, Mr. Marshall," interrupted an officer at this moment—"I said so. I feel quite convinced that he must have taken this turning to the left!"

"And I say he must have gone to the right," exclaimed another voice, "since that would take him quickest into the open country—he would have no town and villages in his way!"

"Hold your row, all of you," roared Jack Marshall, "and leave me to manage matters myself!"

Then turning to Dick, he said:

"I believe you are deceiving me."

"Me deceive you, sir?" said Dick. "Not on no account—I wouldn't be guilty of such a thing. There's nobody like what you have described passed me since I started."

There was no good reason for doubting Dick's word, and most certainly there was nothing in his manner in the least degree suspicious.

Perhaps, had it been day instead of night, he would not so easily have avoided recognition.

But darkness was greatly in his favour.

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Yet Jack Marshall was not satisfied, and for the simple reason that he had got the idea firmly fixed in his mind that Dick had taken the straightforward road.

He had maintained this very vigorously in spite of the general voice of his men, who were all inclined to think that the highwayman had turned either to the left or the right.

This, in fact, was the subject of discussion when Dick first caught sight of them.

It was mortifying, then, in the extreme for Mr. Marshall thus to find himself in the wrong.

"What have you in your cart?" he asked, at length.

"Nothing at all, sir—just nothing at all. I am going now to London to fetch my load."

Jack Marshall determined to have a peep at the interior of the vehicle, being moved to do so by the thought that if he found the waggoner speaking the truth in this instance it would be only fair to presume that the information he had just given was correct.

Accordingly, riding to the back of the cart, Jack Marshall lifted up the canvas, and, one of his men producing a light, took a peep at the interior.

The cart was evidently empty, save and except a very small quantity of dirty straw that was littered on the bottom of it.

Jack Marshall let go of the canvas with a feeling of disappointment.

He did not know why it was, but somehow there seemed to come over his mind a species of reluctance to part company with the supposed carter.

But he had no pretext for detaining him, and so, gruffly and angrily, bade him drive on. Dick gladly enough complied with the mandate, and left the officers to make up their minds whether to turn to the left or the right.

He drew a long breath when he found that he had fairly escaped from this danger, for once or twice he had felt particularly uneasy, especially when Jack Marshall had called for a light.

Now that all had passed off so well, he was able to find ample grounds for congratulation.

His disguise had successfully withstood a very severe test, and certainly this incident encouraged him not a little in the hope that he should carry out his mission successfully.

It must not be thought, however, that it had the effect of in any way abating his caution.

Suddenly, however, the sharp clatter of a horse's hoofs going at a furious gallop smote upon his ears.

There was a bend in the road, so that he was not able to see for any great distance before him.

But the clattering sound increased, and then, with great suddenness, the single horseman, going at the utmost speed of which his horse was capable, appeared in sight.

Despite the suddenness of the whole affair—for when Dick first caught sight of the rider he was only a few yards in advance of him—he recognised him.

It was his old, faithful, well-tried comrade, Tom King.

Beyond all doubt, he was being hotly pursued by police officers, though at present the clatter of their horses' feet could not be heard.

Involuntarily a shout came from Dick Turpin's lips.

It caused the flying horseman to turn his head, and if Dick had had up to that moment any doubt as to the identity of this horseman, all his doubt would have been set at rest, for Tom King's countenance was fully exposed to view.

In the excitement of the moment, Dick forgot he was disguised, and wondered how it was his comrade did not recognise him.

All Tom did, however, was to apply his spur more vigorously to his horse's already-bleeding flanks, and the next moment he was far away down the road.

The beat of his horse's feet soon became inaudible, and scarcely had this happened than Dick distinctly heard the approach of a large body of mounted men.

The speed they were coming at was something alarming.

"Confound it!" Dick muttered. "I am doomed to be unfortunate to-night! Ten to one I shall have to encounter this second troop of officers, and it's rather too much to expect that my disguise will stand a scrutiny a second time."

His resolve was, however, quickly taken.

He would push on at the best speed the miserable horse was capable of making, and he trusted, by keeping close to one side of the way, to be out of the way of the horsemen, who would thus gallop past without any obstruction.

To this end, then, he pulled the left rein rather sharply, for up to the present moment he had kept in the middle of the highway.

The horse, not expecting such a movement, or making a false step, or crossing its legs from some other cause, stumbled, and before Dick could save it, fell down upon its side, where it lay without making the slightest effort to rise again.

CHAPTER CMVIII.

DICK TURPIN RUNS A RISK TO RENDER HIS COMRADE, TOM KING, A SERVICE.

Dick's vexation and anger now reached their climax.

By the merest chance in the world, he had saved himself from being hurled from his seat when the horse suddenly fell down.

Descending carefully, he went to the creature's help, and endeavoured to force it to rise.

Before he had time to do anything further than this the troop of officers came in sight.

The cart was now drawn most awkwardly across the road, occupying nearly the whole of it.

The police officers evidently caught sight of the obstruction, for a loud shout came upon Dick's ears.

His position now was about as awkward and perilous as could well be imagined.

Should he be recognised, nothing in the world could save him either from capture or death—no other alternative would be offered to him.

That presence of mind and coolness which had on so many occasions stood him in such good stead did not desert him on the present occasion, and almost mechanically he made up his mind as to what would be the best thing to do. It was thoroughly to assume the character he had taken up, and to bend all his energies towards assisting his horse to regain his feet.

This could only be done by removing a portion of the harness.

While he was engaged in unfastening the traces, the officers, who had slackened pace when they first caught sight of the horse lying across their path, now came up with him, and, as he half expected, stopped.

"Hullo, fellow!" said a voice.

Dick placed his knee upon his horse's head and looked up.

"Have you travelled far along this road?" was the first question.

"Yes, a good way. But don't bother—don't you see my horse is down!"

"You had better be civil," said the same voice. "We are officers. You must have seen a man gallop past at full speed a few minutes ago. Now, tell me truly, which way did he go?"

Dick had expected this answer, and had wondered whether he should really do his comrade a service by sending the officers on a wrong track.

It could scarcely make Tom's position worse than it was, but then, should the officers discover they had been trifled with, most unquestionably they would take him into custody the next time they encountered him.

But Dick was not likely to hesitate long between considering his own safety and the safety of a companion, so without the least hesitation whatever he answered the officer's question by saying:

"Yes, I seed him sure enough, and a fine rate he was going at for sartain."

"But which way did he go—straight on?" cried the officer, impatiently.

"No—no," said Dick, "he didn't go straight on, leastways, he did too, but not straight along the road."

"You mean he took to the fields?"

"Yes, that's what I mean," said Dick, with a grin and while he spoke he raised his arm and pointed across the meadows. "He jumped his horse clear over that hedge."

he said. "I never saw such a leap in my life, and then down went the Captain, and that's all about it."

"Down went the Captain?" said the officer. "What do you mean by that?"

Dick grinned again so as to show all his teeth, then pointed to his horse.

The officer uttered an impatient exclamation, then, turning round he addressed himself to his companions, and said:

"No doubt this fellow here speaks the truth; he would be sure to leave the highway at the first opportunity; he would suspect that another party was a little in advance."

"He has, ten to one, got under cover of that wood," said another officer, who had been standing up in his stirrups and looking around at the face of the country as well as the darkness would permit.

"No doubt. Ride on a little way; before going far we must come to a gate which we can pass through, and that would be much better than risking a leap."

The officers were unanimous on this point, and set their horses in motion.

Dick bawled after them.

"Here—here," he said—"stop a minute."

They stopped of course.

"I've done what you wanted," he said, "and one good turn—I've heard say—always deserves another, so perhaps some of you will help me to get Captain up, for I can't do it myself."

The officer uttered an oath, which was the only reply he condescended to make to Dick's request.

Like his followers, he was quite indignant at the idea of such a thing.

Dick smiled quietly to himself, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the officers push open a gate and pass through it into the meadows.

"I hope it will do Tom a good turn," he said—"I do with all my heart! I hope too that he has left the high-road and taken to the fields, otherwise he will stand a good chance of falling foul with Jack Marshall and his troop."

Indeed, Dick was more uneasy on this point than he cared to confess even to himself.

He did not for a moment believe that Tom would be likely to continue galloping along the high-road, and there was a strong probability that upon coming to the spot where Dick had met with Jack Marshall he would turn either to the right or the left.

When a choice is to be made between a right road and a wrong, the latter is almost sure to be chosen, and it was this that made Dick uneasy.

"I can't help him any further," he said, as he applied the whip vigorously to his horse; "he must do as I am doing—shift for himself in the best way he can."

At length, after bestowing many lashes, the unwilling beast struggled to his feet.

Dick harnessed him as rapidly as he could, then, remounting to his seat, continued his interrupted journey.

"If things are to go on at this rate," he muttered, "it will be daybreak before I reach Drury Lane. At the best I shall have a good deal of trouble in leaving London before the day has fairly begun."

This seemed very probable, for the night was growing much advanced, and even if he was so lucky as to meet with no other interruption, a long time must necessarily elapse before he could reach Drury Lane.

At length Dick managed to whip his horse into a shambling, cantering kind of gallop, which, although it threatened every moment to break some portion of the harness, and made the cart jolt most fearfully, yet got over the ground in something like tolerable style.

It was a speed, however, that could not be maintained.

Gradually the animal's pace became slower and slower, until the highwayman was seriously afraid that he would come to a dead stop.

It was just at this crisis that he perceived before him in the distance a faint, twinkling light, and as soon as he perceived it he began to wonder whereabouts he was.

"That surely must be the Boar's Head Inn. Yes," he continued, as he glanced quickly around him, "that's evidently it. Well, I trust no one will be staying there, in which case I will run the risk of making a halt myself."

With this determination he pushed on, but the horse was fearfully exhausted, and he trembled at every step, and could scarcely put one foot before another.

About ten minutes later the front of the roadside inn was reached.

The light he had seen came from a candle fixed in one of the windows, and this was the only sign of inhabitability that the house displayed.

The stoppage of the clumsy vehicle, however, attracted the attention of those within, for the landlord came bustling out and immediately began bawling for the ostler at the very top of his voice.

CHAPTER CMIX.

DICK TURPIN FINDS HIMSELF BESET BY DIFFICULTIES AT THE WHITE HORSE.

These cries at length had the effect of causing a dwarfed, ill-shapen man to make his appearance.

He came hobbling forward, and grumbling in no measured terms at having been disturbed, especially by a man of Dick Turpin's appearance.

The landlord contented himself with turning back into the inn, for he knew that, as a rule, drivers of covered carts were not very profitable customers, and it certainly was a waste of time to bestow any extra civility upon them.

Dick dismounted with great agility, and, going close up to the ostler, he said:

"Just do as I want you, and say nothing, and it will be a good job for you."

The only reply Dick received was a stare of wonderment.

"Fetch me first," he said, "a quarter of a peck of oats in a bucket, and half a gallon of new ale—be quick."

The ostler hurried off to obey this command.

It may have been that he guessed something good for himself was about to result.

At length, appearing with the articles ordered, Dick took the bucket containing the corn from him, and then, very much to the ostler's amazement, emptied the whole of the ale into it, and stirred the oats well up with his hand.

The corn was then put before the horse, who at once made a vigorous attack upon it.

"Well," ejaculated the ostler, "that's a rum trick for you to be up to, any way."

"Very likely," said Dick; "but you need say nothing about it, need you?"

"Oh no, I can keep my mouth shut as well as anybody else."

"I thought so. Then just go into the house and fetch another half gallon of ale."

"Another half gallon?"

"Yes, I've said it; there's the money to pay for what I've had."

Dick placed half a guinea in the man's palm.

He soon returned, and Dick took one draught from the foaming tankard, then, giving it back to the ostler, he said:

"You can drink the rest and keep the change for yourself."

The ostler nodded, and winked, and grinned, and went through several strange antics, by all of which he intended to imply that he should maintain an inviolable secrecy.

The horse devoured the oats eagerly, yet some time elapsed before he had finished his meal.

A draught of water was next given him, and Dick prepared to resume his journey.

The effects produced by this stimulating food were really wonderful.

The horse no longer seemed like the same animal.

No sooner did Dick apply the whip to him for the first time than he started off at a rate that must have astonished himself.

The rest of the journey was accomplished without the occurrence of any other incident worthy of record.

Towards the last the horse got terribly knocked up, but then Dick knew he could be well attended to at the White Horse.

More from mere bravado than aught else, Dick made his way to Drury Lane by driving up Long Acre, and ing down Bow Street.

This course took him directly past the principal police station in the metropolis.

At that late hour, however, the place looked dismal and quiet enough.

A miserable oil lamp was flickering over the door, and in front an officer was pacing up and down.

Upon Dick he did not bestow a second glance, and the highwayman, taking the next turning to the left, drove straight up to old Matthew's door, where he paused.

Descending from his seat in as clumsy a manner as he possibly could, and endeavouring to keep up the character he had assumed in the minutest details, he pushed open the door and entered the inn.

The house was almost empty, though from one room came sounds as though some dispute or other were going on.

Taking no notice of this, Dick walked straight up to the bar.

At first he saw no one, but after knocking sharply on the counter the little Jewish boy that old Matthew had taken under his protection made his appearance.

From the description given by his three comrades, Dick was able to recognise this boy easily enough.

His vexation at seeing him was great, and he was sorry that Matthew, generally so acute, should in this instance permit himself to be so grossly imposed upon.

Before he left, Dick determined that the landlord should be no longer in ignorance of the traitor he had got under his roof.

For the moment Dick forgot that this boy was both deaf and dumb, so he called out for brandy-and-water.

The sign which the boy made was so expressive that even had he known nothing about it previously it would have sufficed to let Dick know that he was deficient of the faculties of hearing and speaking.

As is often the case, what this boy lacked in one sense he made up for in another.

He was uncommonly acute, and could tell pretty accurately by the mere movement of the lips what was said to him, especially when any kind of liquor was called for.

Therefore, as soon as Dick spoke he placed his hand upon a small barrel on which the word "Brandy" was painted.

Dick nodded, and the boy immediately proceeded to serve him.

The brandy-and-water was put down on the counter and paid for.

Dick thought the boy looked keenly at him, but he took no notice of that, for by this time he had grown to feel quite confident in his disguise.

He sipped at his brandy-and-water, and the boy retired to the inner room.

Dick now found himself in a position of unexpected difficulty.

In his calculations he had altogether omitted the present contingency.

How to gain access to old Matthew was a mystery.

Had the girl been there as usual the matter would have been easy enough, but with this traitorous boy the case was altogether different.

Reflectively, then, Dick continued to sip at his brandy-and-water, and while he was so engaged he heard the door in front of the inn pushed open and slammed shut.

He turned round at once and saw a man approach whose appearance seemed strangely familiar to him, yet, though he tried his best, Dick could not remember when and where he had seen him before.

This man, with a peculiar gait, lounged up to the bar, and, placing his arms upon the counter, looked closely in Dick's face.

Turpin stood the scrutiny bravely, and he felt pretty certain that this man had not penetrated his disguise.

Dick, however, had recognised him.

When his countenance was revealed by the light in the bar he knew it at once, and remembered where he had seen it before.

He was the man who on a former occasion crept into the inn and concealed himself in the cupboard underneath the counter.

The full particulars of the manner in which this spy had been scalded by old Matthew had of course been related to Dick, and the man had also been pointed out to him.

Apparently he was no longer a member of the police force, for he was dressed in shabby, ragged garments.

The fact was, he had been dismissed some time before for a gross breach of duty, and since that time had led a precarious life in the streets.

The boy again came forward, for he had witnessed this new arrival.

He recognised the man also, and Dick fancied that a significant glance of recognition was exchanged between them.

The man did not speak, but put down some coppers on the counter.

The boy knew what he wanted, for he produced a small glass of neat gin.

"Going far to-night, governor?" he said, addressing Dick.

"Yes," was the reply, "I have a considerable journey to make."

The man drank his gin very slowly, but continued all the while to gaze into Dick's countenance in a manner that made the highwayman begin to grow uneasy.

Difficulties were increasing around him, nor could he for his life see a clear way out of them.

His glass being by this time finished, he pushed it forward for replenishment, and exactly at this moment a footstep was heard upon the stairs, the foot of which was close to the bar window.

The footstep was a heavy one, and this man no sooner heard it than he tilted up his glass and made a precipitate retreat.

Directly afterwards a door was opened, and old Matthew made his appearance.

"What's the meaning of that confounded row?" he said—"who is it quarrelling there?"

He turned up the passage towards the door of the room from which the angry sounds proceeded.

Dick left the bar counter, and, stepping quickly after the landlord, touched him on the arm and whispered in his ear:

"It is I, Matthew—Dick. Don't be frightened, or speak, or recognise me—that deaf and dumb boy is a traitor and will betray me."

Old Matthew tried to answer, but could not.

He staggered back several paces, nor did he stop until his back, coming in contact with the wall of the passage, brought him to a sudden halt.

His eyes rolled fearfully, and his mouth opened to its fullest extent, while over his whole countenance was spread an expression of utter incredulity.

Dick then did on the spur of the moment the very best thing he possibly could, even had he determined to do so after spending several hours in reflection upon it.

He turned abruptly round, and retraced his steps to the bar counter, where, taking up his glass, he began again to sip his brandy-and-water.

CHAPTER CMX.

DICK TURPIN MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN TO OLD MATTHEW, AND GIVES HIM A CAUTION.

THUS left to himself, old Matthew recovered from his astonishment more rapidly than he would have done under any other circumstances.

Dick now felt perfectly secure.

He had the utmost faith in old Matthew's resources.

He had learned by experience how fertile he was in expedients of every kind, and therefore did not doubt that he would devise the best means of obtaining an interview without drawing down any suspicion by so doing.

Matthew gave a great start and then became calm, though a close observer could have detected the great amount of agitation under which he laboured.

Carrying out his original intention, he entered the room from which the sounds of quarrel continued to come.

He bestirred himself vigorously, and soon quelled the disturbance.

Having done so, he returned to the bar.

He took no notice whatever of Dick, but, having passed through the door, closed it behind him.

From a shelf he took down a book and carried it into

the little parlour beyond where the deaf and dumb boy was sitting.

By signs he instructed him to copy out some accounts of money owing, as entered in the book, and having thus secured an employment for the young Judas, he returned to the bar.

"Speak to me in a whisper," he said, leaning forward over the counter. "Be careful not to raise your voice."

"All right, Matthew; but don't look so scared."

"Scared?"

"Yes. One would think, to look at you that you had just seen a ghost."

"Worse and worse!"

"How worse?"

"I have seen you!"

Dick laughed lightly.

"Never mind me," he said, "I can look after myself. I don't wish to bring you into any trouble either, so, as soon as I have carried out my intentions, I will depart."

"But, oh! captain," said Matthew, "what could have induced you to be so thoughtless—so insane as to venture here to-night?"

"Pshaw! It's nothing! Am I not well disguised?"

"You are, indeed!"

"Should you have recognised me?"

"I think not. I never knew a change to be so complete."

"Then," said Dick, "I may think myself tolerably safe, I presume?"

"Well—well," cried Matthew, "since you are here, speak quickly, and tell me all you can."

"I intend to do so."

"I don't ask you to come in," said the landlord, "simply because I think you will be safer standing where you are. You need not feel afraid that the police officers will recognise you, and we can carry on a conversation undisturbed."

"I quite approve of the notion," said Dick. "In the first place, then, I have bad news to communicate. Our pleasant life at Ealing has come to an end."

"I knew that," said Matthew, sharply.

"You knew it—how?"

"Why, simply because Ellen, Tom Davis, and his wife were brought prisoners to Bow Street late last night, or rather early this morning."

"Yes, yes—of course. What has been done with them?"

"They were carried before the magistrate, of course."

"Well—well, and the result?"

"What result could you expect? The whole case was made perfectly clear and straightforward. The magistrate said he had never known such an outrageous case in his life."

"Were you present at the trial, then?"

"Of course I was; though it was not exactly a trial, but an examination."

"Well—well, it's much the same thing. You know what I mean."

"I do, and, as you might expect, the magistrate has committed them all three to take their trial next week at the assizes."

"Will their case come on so soon?"

"It will, indeed. Not that I expect it will be on the first day; but perhaps towards the end of the session. At the most they will be brought to trial in eight or nine days."

"Something must be done for them," said Dick, "that's quite clear."

"What can you do?" asked Matthew.

"That I don't know, my friend; but I shall think it over, and, rely upon it, we shall make an effort."

"But, good Heavens!" said Matthew, "if you were so fortunate as to make your escape from the Three Spiders in the way you did, why did you tempt your fate by returning here to-night?"

"Simply because it was a necessity. I have come, Matthew, on purpose to ask you to grant me a favour."

"Name it, and you shall have it."

"Well, then," said Dick, "it will be necessary for me to enter into some kind of explanation."

"Go on; you are perfectly secure. The only thing is, you are in an uncomfortable position to carry on a conversation. I should like you in the parlour yonder, and to pass a comfortable hour; but that is out of the question."

"So I suppose. Well, this will do for me, so listen."

Dick then, as rapidly as he possibly could, gave old Matthew a brief outline of all the strange adventures that had befallen him in Newgate.

To every syllable Matthew listened with the utmost intentness.

He concluded by saying:

"Well, now, you see, Matthew, I feel, and I think you will feel with me, that the Governor of Newgate, having so far befriended me, deserves some kind of reward for it, and that's why I mentioned about the money buried beneath the tree."

"And you have no money?"

"No, Matthew—not a fraction, and for that reason I asked him not to attempt to visit the place until a week had expired."

"I see. And you want me to let you have such a sum of money as you require?"

"That's it, Matthew. I am sorry to trouble you, but it will be all right in the end. You see, but for this unfortunate attack being made so suddenly upon the inn, I should have been able to carry out my intention with the greatest of ease."

"Of course you would! But what a pity, captain, for you to run the risk of your life upon such a trifling matter as that!"

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"How could I help it?" he said. "Would you have me break my word?"

"You might have sent a messenger."

"Where do you think I could obtain one? No—no, my friend, I consider that I have managed things very well indeed. I am quite contented with all that I have done so far."

"Well, perhaps you ought to be," said Matthew, reflectively, "for with so sharp a look-out as to my certain knowledge is kept for you, it seems marvellous that you should have reached here unseen."

"Stop a minute," said Dick, "and I will tell you something that will give you still more confidence in my disguise. It is a capital joke, too."

Matthew prepared to listen, and Dick accordingly favoured him with an account of his adventures on the road.

Old Matthew listened to the recital with the most uncomfortable feelings.

But Dick tried to make as light of all the incidents as he possibly could.

"But it's running too great a risk," he said—"it's carrying matters too far. For your own sake and for others you ought to be more careful."

"But what better result could I hope for or obtain?" said Dick. "Careful or not, here I am, you see, in safety."

"Yes, so you are—I can't deny that: but still, don't be too bold—don't boast of what you have done. The sooner you start from here, the better; so I will fetch you the money you want at once."

"Don't be in too much hurry, Matthew. I have one or two important things to talk over before I can take my departure."

"Well—well, but be quick."

"I will. In the first place, you must contrive by some means or other to get rid of that rascally boy of yours."

"Yes," said Matthew, with a sudden start, and glancing towards the inner room. "You said something about his betraying you."

"Yes, and he will do it. When Tom, Claude, and Jack were here last, if you remember, you sent him for their horses. He put the officers upon the scent, and, had not my three comrades started off themselves, their capture must have been certain, and it would have happened, too, at your very door."

"Is this really true?" exclaimed Matthew, scarcely able to believe what he heard.

"Perfectly true," said Dick; "and therefore I say don't hesitate any longer about getting rid of him. If you keep him, he will some day or other bring about your destruction."

"He shall go, captain—he shall go at once. I will have no traitors beneath my roof! I confess there are

many things which I have discovered which I have not liked, yet I have looked upon all his delinquencies with a lenient eye, for, Dick, I knew his father. He was one of my best friends, and a truer, better man never breathed."

"Then it's a pity he is so unworthy a son."

"He is dead now, Dick, and his mother too. She was a Jewess, and it is from her no doubt, that he inherits his treacherous disposition."

There was a tone of deep regret perceptible in old Matthew's voice as he thus spoke, and it was quite certain that it would cost him a pang thus to get rid of the son of his old friend.

CHAPTER CMXI.

AFFAIRS AT THE WHITE HORSE INN ASSUME A CRITICAL ASPECT.

"Say no more upon the point, Dick," were the landlord's next words. "You have nothing more to fear of him; I will take effectual means to get rid of him."

"And now, then, before you go, tell me in a few words about Maud. And the rest—where are they?"

Dick complied, and then added:

"Tom King was in great peril I know; how he has fared, of course I can tell no better than yourself; and as for Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, I have not seen them since we parted."

"Well, well, and I suppose you hope to meet all together some time before Tom Davis is brought to trial?"

"Yes, I hope so."

"But, then, if you do, in what way are you to help him?"

"I am not prepared to say, Matthew; but between now and then you can think it over as well as myself, and no doubt something will suggest itself."

"I will try," said Matthew, "for after all that he has done, it would be a world of pities for Tom Davis to be sentenced to transportation for life, and you may depend that is the lightest penalty they will inflict upon him."

"It must not be—it shall not be!" said Dick, vehemently, and bringing his hand down with great force upon the counter.

"Hush—hush!" said Matthew. "Be careful; you forget your caution."

"I did for the moment; but Tom Davis must be saved or rescued, no matter at what sacrifice. If you have means of communicating with him, don't fail to let him know what I have said."

"I shall be able to communicate with him, no doubt; but now, Dick, whether you have anything more to say or not, let me entreat you to depart. I will go upstairs and fetch the money you require; I will not be a moment longer than I can help."

Dick assented, and the landlord at once hastened upstairs.

No sooner had old Matthew departed than the treacherous boy issued from the inner room.

He glanced stealthily and quickly around him for a second, then, with an assumption of boldness, walked towards the door, opened it, and passed into the passage.

Under the circumstances, Dick wondered how far he should be justified in interfering with the movements of this lad.

It might be that his deafness was only simulated, and if so, he could easily have overheard sufficient of the conversation to let him know that it was only a seeming carter who stood at the bar.

In this case he would, beyond a doubt, communicate with those outside.

Should he run the risk of allowing him to pass by?

That was the question uppermost in Dick's mind, and he had very little time to make up his mind concerning it.

The boy marched on, pretending to look very indifferent indeed, but only partially succeeding.

He had to pass quite close to where Dick was standing, and just as he reached this spot the highwayman suddenly stepped out his foot.

The boy did not see it, or, at any rate, it was until too late, for he was tripped up as cleverly as it was possible for anyone to be.

He fell with a tremendous crash on his face in the passage, and lay for a moment as though half stunned.

Then, springing rapidly to his feet, he plunged one hand into the breast of his coat, as though he had a weapon concealed there.

His whole face then looked like a demon's.

His eyes flashed, and his teeth were closely clenched together.

Blood was streaming from his face, but Dick pitied him not in the least—indeed, he was glad to think the opportunity had been afforded him of giving the rascal a taste of what he deserved.

If his first intention had been to draw any concealed weapon, a second thought made him change his mind.

Stamping and scowling with rage, he continued his course along the passage.

Just then, however, old Matthew could be heard descending the staircase, and immediately afterwards the door at the foot of the stairs was flung open.

The boy saw him, and stopped irresolutely.

Dick said, in a suppressed voice:

"Look, Matthew, there he goes! I stopped him a little, but he wants to give the alarm!"

Old Matthew deposited a heavy bag of money on the counter with a dab, and then, with a rapidity of movement that no one could have expected from a man of his years and bulk, he darted along the passage, and seized the boy by the back of the neck.

"You rascal!" he said—"you infernal scamp! But I will pay you out for this! Oh, confound it," he added, "I forgot he can't hear a word I say!"

"Secure him somewhere," said Dick.

"Never fear," answered old Matthew. "Look to yourself—leave him to me. There's the money."

"All right, I have it."

"Then now depart."

"No, no—not so hurriedly! Place that boy securely somewhere, and then come to me."

Reluctantly Matthew consented.

The boy kicked, and plunged, and struggled, but all was in vain.

In Matthew's hands he was powerless to do anything at all in the shape of resistance that was worthy of the name.

As soon as he had dragged him into the inner room, old Matthew flung the boy into the large easy-chair beside the fire.

At the same moment, with great dexterity, he whipped off his huge apron, and twisted it up like a rope.

This he passed under the boy's chin, and round the back of the chair, where he tied it so tightly that the boy was obliged to cease struggling at once, otherwise he would have been in imminent danger of strangulation.

To fasten his hands was now an easy task, and as he was dumb the necessity for gagging him was done away with.

"He is all right now," Matthew said, as he came out of the parlour and quietly shut the door behind him. "I could never have believed that he was such a little villain."

"He is a dangerous creature indeed," said Dick, "and I should advise you to be very careful how you deal with him. His disposition is malicious—nay, even fiendish, and he would not care to what length he went in order to obtain his revenge."

"I don't fear him," said Matthew, "and just at the present moment you will admit that we have something more important to talk about."

"We have."

"Well, then, captain, as you have got the money safe, let me once more entreat you to depart. Don't think I am anxious to get rid of you. I am only concerned for your safety."

"I know that, old friend. Don't think I misunderstand your notions."

"Consider for a moment," continued the landlord, "how awkward a fix you would be in should you unfortunately be recognised. You have no Black Bess now to carry you clear of your pursuers, only that miserable horse at the door."

"Have you seen it?"

"Yes. I peeped at it through one of the windows upstairs."

"It is a miserable wretch; but then I think I am tolerably safe."

"Well, will you go?"

"I will, Matthew, and many thanks to you for the favour you have done me to-night."

"Pooh—pooh! Don't mention it"

"I shall not forget it, rest assured of that. And now I must ask you to lay me under one more obligation."

"And what is that?"

"Just go to the door, and have a look up and down the street. Tell me whether you see anyone hanging about who looks suspicious—in a word, see whether the coast is clear."

"I will, Dick. That is well thought of."

The landlord hastily made his way to the front of the inn.

He was absent about five minutes; then he returned with a very serious look upon his face.

"What's the matter?" asked Dick, eagerly.

"Why, the coast is not clear."

"Indeed! Who's about?"

"Why, a man who owes me a bitter grudge. He has sworn over and over again to have his revenge. You remember, I daresay, that an officer concealed himself in this cupboard here, and I scalded him well with a kettleful of boiling water?"

"Yes, I remember. He was at the bar, drinking, a moment before you came downstairs."

"To-night?"

"Yes—most certainly to-night—a little while ago."

Old Matthew gave a long, low whistle.

"That's awkward," he said—"very awkward!"

"And what's more," continued Dick, "it's very odd to me if a secret sign or glance of intelligence did not pass between him and that nice little boy of yours."

Old Matthew gave a low groan.

"If that's it, captain, depend upon it it's all's over! You're nabbed—nabbed as sure as you are a living man!"

"How so, Matthew?" said Turpin, feeling fearfully uneasy. "What do you mean?"

"Why, I must tell you that this man was sometime ago dismissed from the police force; but ever since then he has acted as a spy for the rest. His old companions give him a trifle now and then, and he sniffs out information for them."

"A regular spy, in fact?"

"Yes, nothing less, and in consequence of that little trick I served him, he cherishes the most violent hatred against me. I have been told he has frequently declared he will never rest until he has brought about my ruin, and for that reason he is always hanging about in the street."

"You make me very uncomfortable, Matthew," said Dick Turpin. "I hope things are not quite so bad as you make out. He looked keenly at me as I stood beside him at the counter; but I feel pretty sure there was no recognition on his part."

"Well, there may not be," said old Matthew, seeming rather relieved upon receiving this assurance.

"But," continued Dick, "if I had not stopped that boy as I did, you may depend he would not have been in ignorance of my identity by this time."

CHAPTER CMXII.

DICK TURPIN HAS HIS REVENGE UPON THE SPY.

Old Matthew rubbed his head most vigorously, as was his habit when anything occurred of a troublesome nature.

"I wish I knew how to solve the point," he ejaculated, after a brief pause, "but how on earth to discover whether any police officers are lurking outside I know not."

"Is it not possible," said Dick, "that you magnify the danger?"

"In what manner?"

"May it not be that this man is only skulking about outside in his usual fashion?"

"There is a possibility of it."

"You have not seen anything else suspicious, have you?"

"No, nothing more, I saw no trace of officers, and yet, whenever I see him I think they are never far distant."

"And what was he doing?" asked Dick.

"Why, when I first went to the door, I saw nothing, but I stood perfectly still looking about me, then I fancied I heard a slight movement in the cart, and so drew back into the shadow of the doorway as well as I could."

"A noise in the cart?"

"Yes, and immediately afterwards that fellow lowered himself out of it."

"That's very strange," said Dick.

"So I think," returned Matthew. "He must have had some suspicions, or why should he have adopted such a proceeding as that?"

"Curse him!" said Dick, clenching his fists. "I wish I could lay hold of him somehow; I'd put an end to his speaking for some time to come. But for him, no doubt I could have driven off quietly, without anyone being the wiser."

"Very likely indeed," said Matthew; "but I am afraid there's little chance of it now, though I don't wish to say anything to discourage you."

Dick drew a long breath.

"How had I better act, Matthew?" he said, at length.

The landlord shrugged his shoulders.

"I wish I could advise you," he said; "but this is a matter that baffles me altogether. You see, he may have told the officers that he suspected you were only an assumed carter, and if so, they would arrest you on bare suspicion."

"And I suppose," continued Dick, "they would take care not to show themselves until I emerged into the street."

"Decidedly not; and, for aught I know, a dozen of them may be hidden somewhere."

"It bothers me," said Dick—"it bothers me entirely."

Old Matthew began to think.

"Look here," he said, at length, "this is the best thing I can think of."

"Out with it, then."

"I will put on my hat and go outside, take hold of the horse's head, and lead him round the corner, into Clare Market."

"And what good would that do?" said Dick, in some amazement.

"Why, this much: I should have my eyes about me, and if any police officers were concealed I should at once become aware of it, for, don't you see, they would either attempt to prevent me from moving the cart, or else I should see them quit their place of concealment and follow it."

"So you would, Matthew—so you would; that didn't occur to me. But what shall I do in the meanwhile?"

"I will tell you; there will be no difficulty about it."

"I am glad to hear it."

"As soon as I go to the front of the house, listen. If you hear no contention or disturbance—if, in fact, you do not hear me raise my voice—conclude all is well, and just hasten down the passage, and through that door. You will then be in that little yard that is well known to you. Open the other door, and you will find yourself in White Horse Yard. Make your way along it into Clare Market, and look about for me. If you see me, and all is well, I shall be patting the neck of the horse, and stroking it; but if I am not doing so do not show you self, but clear off in the best way you are able."

Dick Turpin was highly delighted with this plan, and congratulated old Matthew upon his ingenuity.

"I can't stop to listen to anything of that sort," he said, as he took his broad-brimmed hat down from a peg. "I will be off, and be sure you listen whether there is a noise outside."

The next moment old Matthew passed through the front door, and Dick listened eagerly.

But the silence was not broken by old Matthew's voice, and almost immediately he heard the wheels begin to revolve.

"All right," he muttered. "What a capital old chap Matthew is, to be sure! That's one thing more that I owe him."

While he was speaking he secured the bag of gold about

his person, then, following the instructions he had received, he entered the yard and hastened towards Clare Market as quickly as his legs would carry him.

He felt rather nervous when he first stepped out into White Horse Yard, but that feeling immediately vanished when he found no notice was taken of his appearance.

From this it was only fair to assume that no officers were concealed in that quarter, for if so they would unquestionably pounced upon him.

Feeling much more easy in his mind, he continued on his way, and having reached a dark, obscure corner, paused to look about him.

A moment or two elapsed before he could catch sight of old Matthew. But at length he perceived him, and to his great joy he saw he was patting the horse upon the neck.

"All right," ejaculated Dick, with a sigh of great relief—"all's going well—I have nothing to fear."

With these words on his lips he hastened to the spot where the horse was standing.

"Look out for the spy," said Matthew, as soon as Dick was close to the vehicle; "there's no one besides him about; he has followed me so far at a distance, and I should not be surprised at his following you."

"Shouldn't you?" said Dick. "Then I should. Where is he—can you see him?"

"Yes, there he is, on the other side of the way, standing near that shop; he is pretending to look at the things in the window."

Old Matthew pointed, and Dick immediately perceived the spy standing at no great distance.

"He won't follow me, I'll warrant!" he exclaimed. "Just bring the horse quietly after me, and see how I will dispose of him."

"Captain—captain," said Matthew, "don't be rash—pray don't be rash! Go quietly away, and leave him to me."

But Dick was quite deaf to these words.

He strode rapidly along the street, then crossed directly over to the shop at the window of which the spy was standing.

Late as was the hour, the shops in the neighbourhood were for the most part unclosed, though apparently little business was being done in any of them.

The spy was evidently taken by surprise by these movements on the part of Dick Turpin.

He was conscious of the highwayman's approach, yet knew not exactly whether to stand still or to fly.

He hesitated until it was too late to make a retreat.

Dick clapped his hand upon his shoulder.

The man faced round at once.

"Don't be so fond of prying into my business," said Dick, in a menacing voice, "or it will be the worse for you, and, just to prove that this is no idle threat, I will give you a taste of what you may expect."

It so happened that the shop before which this man was standing was one belonging to a general dealer in provisions.

Not only in the shop and in the window were his articles exposed for sale, but out upon the pavement as well.

Among other things, cheese was piled up, and there was also an enormous box filled to the brim with eggs, beside which one of the shopmen was standing observing the movements of Dick and the spy with great attention.

No sooner were the last words out of Dick Turpin's mouth than, quick as thought, he seized the spy by the nape of his neck and the seat of his breeches.

With an exertion of his utmost strength, Dick lifted him fairly from the ground, and flung him with full force into the box of eggs.

There was a loud cry, an oath, and a fearful crash.

Then the body of the spy almost completely disappeared, for the eggs gave way immediately beneath his weight.

Dick did not stop to see any more—he knew the sooner he beat a retreat the better.

By this time Matthew had brought the horse close to the shop, and Dick, with extraordinary speed, ascended to his seat and set the horse in motion.

The shopman, who had witnessed the whole transaction, ran forward with the intention of stopping the cart, but old Matthew placed himself full before him.

"Ten pounds," he said—"ten pounds, Tom, if you keep quiet! You know me. Just make it as hot for the fellow as you can—I owe him a grudge."

The man thus addressed looked rather amazed for a moment, but he knew old Matthew perfectly well, and felt certain he would be as good as his word.

Accordingly, he turned round, and, addressing the poor wretch who was struggling vainly in the box to release himself, said:

"You rascal! What do you mean by this? You shall suffer for it! Here—here! police—police!"

A crowd immediately assembled, though where the people came from so suddenly seemed a mystery.

Just as the cart turned round the corner of the street, Dick looked back, and then he had the satisfaction of beholding the spy still kicking and struggling in his efforts to liberate himself from his unpleasant position.

CHAPTER CM:XIII

IN WHICH THE SPY ACQUAINTS THE POLICE OFFICERS WITH HIS SUSPICIONS.

Old Matthew, perceiving how ready the shopman was to take the hint that had been given him, drew aside.

He wished most particularly to watch the ensuing proceedings, yet he did not desire to appear to be mixed up in any of them.

A hundred voices began to ask at once what was the matter, but no one seemed in a position to reply.

Rattles were sprung, watchmen came hurrying forward, and lusty throats bawled out for the police.

"Pull me out," roared the man in the box—"pull me out, I say! Won't one of you lend me a hand?"

"Let him alone," said the shopman, as several hastened forward in answer to the appeal—"let him alone, can't you? He's safe prisoner where he is, that's one comfort."

The crowd drew back, and so the spy was thrown upon his own resources.

His furious struggles, however, only served to break more of the eggs, and the consequence was, that instead of getting out of the box at all, he kept gradually sinking lower and lower down into it.

At last, when the confusion had reached its height, a couple of police officers came hastily round the corner.

The people made way for them, and no sooner did they pause in front of the shop than they immediately recognised the spy.

"Seize him," cried the shopman—"seize him! He's a desperate character! Don't let go of him on any account!"

"Why," said one police officer, stopping suddenly short, and gazing with surprise into the countenance of his companion—"why, it's Jackson!"

"Yes, d—n it, it is Jackson, sure enough!" roared the spy. "Help me out, can't you? Don't stand there like a couple of idiots!"

"Come—come, you had better not be abusive. What does it all mean?"

"Pull me out, and I'll tell you pretty quickly."

The officers thought fit to comply with this demand, and by their joint exertions the spy was released from his uncomfortable position.

"Now, then," cried one of the officers, addressing the shopman, "what's this all about? Just explain it!"

"Bah!" said the spy. "Don't be a fool, Brown—don't be a fool!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I speak plain enough! Here, come closer—I want to whisper something. There—there, what do you think of that?"

The spy whispered something in the ear of Brown, the police officer, which caused that worthy emissary of the law fairly to stagger back.

Then a loud shout of laughter came from the crowd as they perceived the plight Jackson was in.

He had truly taken a most uncomfortable bath, and as the eggs exposed for sale were none of the freshest, a by no means pleasant odour exhaled from him.

"What did he say, Brown?" gasped the other police officer.

"Why, he says that a few minutes ago either Dick Turpin or one of his comrades was here disguised as a carter, and it was in consequence of his recognition that



[DICK TURPIN HURLS THE SPY INTO THE EGG-CHEST.]

he was pushed back into the egg-chest as we found him."

Nothing would content the shopman but having Jackson hauled off to the police station, and there charged with doing wilful damage to his property.

The officers in vain protested that it was all nonsense; the shopman was obstinate, and so they accordingly went.

The matter was hurried over as quickly as possible, and then the spy was questioned more closely as to the intelligence he had given.

When he set forth the details, he was met with general disbelief; and when asked pointedly by what means he had recognised Dick Turpin he was forced to admit that he was not quite confident, but he merely suspected that the carter was the highwayman in disguise, and for this suspicion he could give no other reason than that he had seen him in conversation with old Matthew, the landlord of the White Horse.

Still, that was deemed sufficiently important to warrant them in setting out in pursuit of the driver of the cart, and arresting him, if only on the charge of committing an assault upon Jackson.

By the time they had arrived at this resolution, however, a considerable period had elapsed.

The cart had vanished, and no one was in a position to say which way it had gone.

To look for it in any of the myriad streets of London seemed an idle task.

And so the officers felt, although they set about it.

But let it be clearly understood that, if they had known for certain that the carter really was Dick in disguise, their measures would have been of a much more energetic character, and it is quite possible that by making close inquiries and sending out in all directions they might have got upon his track.

This was not done, however.

Only one party of officers went out in pursuit, and these

made little progress, for although they inquired in every direction, they were unable to meet with a single person who could recollect seeing a cart such as they described.

The fact was, Dick, with a boldness to which he certainly owed his safety, had gone straight in the direction of Bow Street, which carried him past the front of old Drury Lane Theatre.

Here the scene was one of tremendous commotion.

The King had gone that night to see the play, and the house was consequently crowded by a highly-fashionable audience.

The street was literally choked up with vehicles.

Amid the general confusion and excitement, Dick was unnoticed as he steadily wound his way in and out through the throng until he got into a clearer street.

Then, lashing his horse, he made him put forth his utmost rate of speed.

Now, if Dick had obeyed the very natural impulse to turn down any one of the quiet streets in the neighbourhood the officers would, in all probability, have got upon his track, as the passage of the vehicle through any one of them must have been seen by some person or other.

He made his way directly westward, but while he journeyed on his thoughts were busy.

He had more causes than one for gratification.

Maud and Black Bess he knew to be in perfect safety, he had performed his errand without accident, and had in his possession a sufficient sum of money to satisfy the Governor of Newgate.

He had also made old Matthew aware of the fact that he had a traitor beneath his roof.

Another consideration, however, now presented itself to Dick's mind, and while he reflected upon it he allowed his horse to proceed very slowly.

Morning, he saw, was yet some hours distant, and the question occurred to him whether he should not avail himself of the present opportunity and secure the bag of gold.

He had fully intended to hasten back to Maud; but then, on his return journey, he might meet with danger, and the bag of money might be lost.

Now he was at no great distance from Hampstead Heath, and by turning off to the right he could reach there in little more than half an hour.

To bury the gold would be the work of a few moments only; then from that point he would be able to make his way to Somefield, where he had appointed to overtake Maud.

"Yes," he said, at length, "that shall be it. My mind is made up. Who can tell how long a time may elapse before I have so good a chance of burying this money as I have now?"

While he spoke the words, he turned abruptly down a dark narrow lane with which he was not very well acquainted, but which, nevertheless, he believed would take him near the point he wished to reach.

This lane was quite deserted, and no wonder, for its condition was disgraceful.

So deep was the mire that the tired horse could hardly struggle through it.

In consequence of this the journey to Hampstead Heath occupied a much longer period than Dick had calculated upon.

At length he paused upon the verge of the vast open space.

It was now necessary to take an observation before proceeding further.

The heath itself appeared to stretch for miles before him in the darkness, and although he turned his eyes in every direction he failed to perceive the glimmering of a single light.

Having formed a tolerably correct idea of his position, Dick turned to the right, and when he paused again it was close to the tree he had described so particularly to the Governor.

And, indeed, the appearance of this tree was so singular that it could not fail to be recognised by anyone who took the trouble to look for it.

Through a low opaque portion of the cloud which covered the sky, the moon sent forth a subdued, misty light, which Dick hailed with pleasure, as it would be of great assistance to him in carrying out his proceedings.

First of all, he stood for several moments in a listening attitude.

The silence was profound, and, without any great stretch of imagination, he could have believed that he was thousands of miles away from any of his fellow-creatures.

The horse seemed quite content to stop, for, bending down his head, he commenced eating with great voraciousness the grass that was growing everywhere around.

CHAPTER CMXIV.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN RECEIVES SOME DISINTERESTED ADVICE.

Finding all around him so very still, Dick Turpin determined not to lose any more time, but to commence digging a hole in the ground forthwith.

He was but ill provided with tools for this purpose; yet, by using his hands and a knife, he managed in a short space of time to scrape out a considerable quantity of earth.

This being done, he carefully placed the bag in the hole, filled it up with dirt, and carefully pressed down the surface so as to restore it to its original condition.

Once, when he paused in the midst of his labours, he fancied he heard a slight sound close at hand.

He listened immediately; but as it was not repeated he concluded his fancy had misled him.

At last, when all was finished, he rose from his knees, and, as he did so, he felt certain that he caught sight of a dim, shadowy figure in the distance.

A cry of vexation and anger escaped his lips.

There could be no doubt all his proceedings had been watched by some one, and that some one, whoever he might be, would beyond doubt take the first opportunity, after Dick's departure, to try and ascertain what had been buried so carefully among the roots of the old tree.

For a wonder, Dick was at a loss what to do on the spur of the moment, and this hesitation, brief as it was, deprived him of the chance he had of rushing forward and suddenly seizing the intruder.

Now, when he looked all around, nothing but the broad expanse of heath met his view.

"Confound it!" he said to himself. "What shall I do now? To attempt to find him would be perfectly idle. He could dodge me till daybreak. I must think a little while."

By way of assisting himself in this operation, he took hold of the reins, and forced his horse to quit his meal, and while he was doing so a bright idea entered his brain.

"I will drive off," he muttered, "and pretend to take no notice, and when I have gone a little way I will descend from the cart, and creep stealthily here on foot. Then, no doubt, he will be thrown off his guard, and I shall be able to seize him."

This resolve was no sooner made than it was carried out, though, at present, Dick had no very clear idea of what he was to do after he had succeeded in capturing the man who, he imagined, had watched his movements.

Despite the danger of such a course, Dick drove across the heath, preferring to do so to trusting to any of the bad roads that intercepted it.

On the soft turf the progress of the cart made scarcely a sound—at any rate, he felt certain that no one could hear it at a distance of a few yards.

Having gone far enough as he imagined to answer his purpose, he stopped the horse and descended.

He was not afraid that the animal would stray far—it would be only too glad of the opportunity to renew its feast.

Shrinking low down to the ground, Dick then swiftly, yet noiselessly, made his way back again to the old tree.

As he neared it his speed abated, and his caution increased.

When only a few yards distant, he stopped altogether, and, placing his hands up to his eyes in order to see more distinctly, he strove to pierce the gloom.

Then he saw, or fancied he saw, close to the trunk of

the old tree, the figure of a man kneeling down as he had knelt, and busily engaged in digging up the earth.

The longer he gazed the more confident he felt that he had not made any mistake, so, creeping still closer, and watching for a favourable opportunity, he made a sudden bound upon the stranger, who little suspected his return.

A yell of fear broke the silence that had for so long reigned around the spot.

The man, finding himself in the grasp of some one, trembled from head to foot, and would have fallen to the ground had not Dick held him up.

"Who are you?" he roared. "Let me see your face? Why are you here?"

"Oh, mercy!" said a voice, in humble tones. "Do have mercy upon me—pray do!"

"I know that voice," said Dick, peering intently into the stranger's face, "and yet surely it must be a mistake."

"No, no—not any mistake," was the reply, "for I knew your voice now, captain. It's all right. Mr. Bradbury, at your service."

Dick released his hold instantly.

"You have cause to be thankful that you have escaped so well. I am generally hasty in my movements, and not very particular as to what I do. However, I'm glad it's all right."

The Governor grunted and rubbed himself very vigorously with both his hands at the back of his neck, for Dick's grasp had been by no means a tender one.

"Oh!" he said, "you gave me a dreadful fright—an awful fright!"

"Indeed! How so?"

"I will tell you. I don't mind confessing that this tree has haunted my imagination ever since you spoke to me about it, and it has only been by the exercise of great self-command that I have kept myself from paying a visit to this spot for so long, but to-night I felt impelled to make my way here. I could not resist the temptation."

"And you saw me digging here, I suppose?" said Dick.

"I fancied so," said the Governor, "but could not make sure. I didn't know whether to advance and make myself known, or remain in concealment, and while I was debating this point in my mind you got up into the cart and drove away."

"Well, and then?"

"Why, I thought the best thing I could do was to possess myself of the treasure, and make haste back to London, so I began to dig, as you see."

"And did you not guess that I had returned?"

"No," said the Governor—"not for a moment. I believed some other person had been watching, and, having seen all that had been done, had come forward with the intention of appropriating the money himself."

"I see, and hence your alarm. Well, you have good cause for gratification. The money you will find perfectly safe, tied up in a leather bag, and I hope the amount will satisfy your expectations."

"You have just placed it there, of course?" said the Governor, inquiringly.

"You had better not trouble yourself to make any inquiries upon that point," said Dick. "Let it suffice that you find the money where I told you you would. I may have come to-night merely to make sure that the money was safe, you understand."

The Governor said "Yes," but it is questionable whether he really understood what Dick meant or not

"Well, captain," he added, after a short pause, "there's been a tremendous commotion in Newgate, I can assure you!"

"No doubt."

"I confess that I have been in a perpetual state of fever ever since your departure. I have trembled for your safety."

Dick smiled.

"I am all right, you see, and well able to take care of myself. I was by Bow Street police station a little while ago, but things seemed quiet enough there."

The Governor repeated the words in a tone of incredulous amazement.

"It's quite true," said Dick, carelessly, "and I daresay you will hear something of it when you get back to London."

"You are too rash," said the Governor—"much too rash! You tempt your fate. I am much obliged to you for your behaviour to me, for a little extra money will be of the greatest utility to me at the present moment. I like you, captain—indeed I do!"

"I am glad to hear it."

"And in proof of it," added the Governor, coming a step closer, "I will give you a word of advice, and I only hope you will have sufficient good sense to act in accordance with it."

"Well," said Dick, "I am prepared to listen to any suggestion you like to make, but I cannot pledge myself to act in accordance with it."

"Well, then, my advice is not only to you, but to all your companions, to take the very first opportunity you can find of leaving England. It is truly too hot to hold you, and so you will find to your cost."

Dick uttered a half-impatient exclamation.

"You receive my advice with disdain," said the Governor, with a slightly-mortified air. "But, then, I know very well good advice is generally thrown away. This is good advice, as anyone would tell you who had considered your position. If you were only a little careful, you could manage to get down somewhere on the south coast, and there engage a fisherman at some quiet spot or other to take you across the channel. He could run you ashore on some lonely part of the coast of France, and there you would be perfectly safe."

"Well—well," said Dick, thoughtfully, "I am ready to admit that the advice you have given is well worthy of consideration, and rest assured that when I meet my comrades the next time I will suggest it to them. For the present we must say farewell, and I hope, without meaning any offence to you, that we shall never meet again."

"Farewell, captain!" said the Governor. "I do not echo your wish, for, as I said before, I rather like you; but if we do meet, I really hope it will be in some place where you are in safety."

"Thanks for the wish," said Dick. "And now again good-bye! Dig a little deeper, and you will find the reward I promised you. In spite of obstacles from which most men would have shrunk back with alarm, Dick Turpin has been as good as his word."

He turned abruptly upon his heel as he spoke, and vanished almost immediately from the sight of the Governor, who, without further delay, dropped down upon his knees again, and resumed his task of digging beneath the tree.

CHAPTER CMXV.

DESCRIBES THE STRANGE ADVENTURE THAT DICK MET WITH ON HIS WAY TO SOMEFIELD.

Dick had some little difficulty in finding the cart, but not much; and, having succeeded, he once more climbed into his seat, and set the horse in motion.

The night had been an unusually dark one, and now, strangely enough, although daybreak was approaching, it positively grew darker, so that Dick had to make his way with the greatest caution—in fact, he trusted more to the instinct of his horse to keep him clear of any obstructions in the path than he did to his own eyesight. Consequently the heath was crossed in safety, and when once he emerged upon the road, Dick felt in a position to resume the command.

Applying the whip unsparingly, he induced the wretched animal to make something like tolerable progress along the road.

It was still necessary to keep a sharp look-out, although Dick was perfectly familiar with every object around—in fact, there were few parts round London that he was better acquainted with than with this.

In order to reach Somefield, it was necessary to travel by the Oxford Road, without a considerable circuit was made.

Now Dick felt by no means inclined to adopt this course.

There was danger, to be sure, in venturing along such a well-frequented high-road; but then, on the other hand, the hour was one when few people were likely to be travelling, and he hoped, by making an effort, to get so far by daybreak as to be able to make the rest of his way through the narrow, winding lanes.

This, then, was the course he adopted, and, as he had correctly anticipated, he journeyed on and on for miles without so much as catching a glimpse of a human being.

When the Oxford Road was fairly reached, his rate of progress became much accelerated, for the ground was firm and smooth beneath the horse's feet.

In this manner he continued without meeting with the slightest interruption until day began to dawn.

Huge masses of white mist hung over all the meadows, and so obstructed the view that it was not possible to see for any great distance.

By degrees the morning broke clearer and brighter.

Dick plied the whip with renewed energy, for he had not got so far upon his journey by this time as he hoped.

The sun rose, and found him descending into a hollow, very disagreeable piece of roadway, and one that was detested by every traveller.

The road was formed down the declivious sides of two long, high hills, which formed indeed a most delightful valley.

Owing to the deep shadows cast by the trees that grew luxuriantly near the foot of these hills, the bottom or lowest part of the road was almost plunged in gloom, and it was here that many an ambush had been laid for passing travellers.

Now the valley was almost filled with the white, fleecy mist of which we have spoken.

But the sun, rising higher and higher, gradually dispelled it.

It rolled away in huge, undulating masses, until at length the sun, appearing above the summit of the hill, poured down a full flood of golden light.

The scene then was one of real beauty, and there were few indeed who could look upon it without sensations of admiration.

Dick was not one of them, and as, after reaching the bottom of the descent, he commenced to urge his horse up the precipitous hill before him, he looked around him with feelings of real delight.

By chance, when about three-parts up this hill, he glanced upwards, and then beheld a sight which filled him with the greatest astonishment—so much so that he unconsciously pulled the rein, and the horse, feeling the check, stopped at once.

Of this circumstance he also remained in ignorance, for all his faculties were bound up in watching what he saw on the brow of the hill above.

First he saw, with extraordinary distinctness, the figure of a man on horseback.

It needed not a second glance to enable Dick to recognise this horseman; it was his old comrade, Sixteen-String Jack.

Suddenly another horseman appeared in sight, and a greeting of the warmest description then took place between them.

This other horseman was Claude Duval; Dick recognised him perfectly.

He sat where he was like a man in a dream.

Dick saw Claude raise his riding-whip and point in a certain direction.

Sixteen-String Jack turned his head to look, and some laughing remark appeared to be exchanged.

But what filled Dick with the greatest surprise was that there seemed a kind of mistiness and unreality about the figures which he thus beheld.

He thought it strange that, being on the brow of the hill as they were then, and with their horses' heads turned towards him, that they did not observe his presence.

Dick resolved to make himself known, and shouted.

His voice, clear and loud, rang out with great distinctness in the valley, and most certainly the sound must have reached the ears of any persons above.

To Dick's amazement, however, not the slightest notice was taken by Claude and Jack.

He shouted again and again, but with no better effect than before.

Wondering at so strange a circumstance, and feeling a kind of awe in his breast, he gazed again in silence, in order to make sure that his senses were not deceiving him.

No, there could be no mistake—Claude and Jack were surely there.

Having come to this conclusion, he once more raised his whip and started his horse.

At a clumsy half-canter, half-gallop, the tired beast struggled up the remainder of the hill.

When within about a hundred yards or more of the top, Dick shouted again, and at the precise moment when the sound escaped his lips the two figures instantly vanished, so suddenly that it was impossible to say in what direction they had gone.

They seemed to be annihilated in the twinkling of an eye.

More puzzled still, Dick continued his course upward.

"They have gone down the hill on the other side," he said—"yes, that must be it. But how suddenly they went—they seemed to dissolve into the air; and their horses' heads were turned in this direction. It's very strange!"

The more Dick thought about it the more uncomfortable he felt.

A kind of nameless fear came creeping slowly over him, until it obtained entire possession of his faculties.

It was then that he reached the summit of the hill.

A glorious sight indeed lay before him.

For miles and miles a most beautiful landscape could be beheld—a landscape only dotted here and there with trees, and for the most part composed of meadows, which displayed every shade of green.

But this prospect, although so magnificent, was unheeded by the highwayman, upon whose countenance an expression of amazement—not to say horror—gradually settled.

And no wonder, for neither down the broad high-road which he could see extending far below the bottom of the hill, nor in the meadows on either side of it, could he perceive the least trace of his comrades.

He rubbed his eyes, and began to wonder whether he was really in his right senses.

But, so far as he could judge, everything around bore an accustomed and natural aspect.

Where, then, had his comrades gone?

Most certainly not down the high-road. Upon that point there could not possibly be two opinions, for such was its length that they had not had sufficient time to reach the bottom even if they had urged their horses to the utmost gallop, which was an unlikely thing for them to do, in consequence of the precipitous character of the descent.

Neither had they leaped over any of the hedges, for the smooth meadows offered no concealment whatever, and had they done so Dick must infallibly have perceived them.

The longer he stood on the brow of the hill, and the more he comprehended all these circumstances, the more did his wonder increase.

He was not more certain of his own existence than he was that he had seen Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack only a few fleeting moments ago occupying the very space of ground on which he now stood.

Now the keenest and most piercing eye would altogether have failed in descrying them anywhere.

There were no hiding-places anywhere near.

The smooth, velvet-like pasture-land was not broken anywhere by so much as a furrow.

They were not concealed behind any hedgerow, for these were all unusually low and bare of leaves, so that it was easy to see completely through them.

As the mystery of his friends' disappearance increased, a cold, uncomfortable feeling spread itself all over Dick's frame, and he felt as though some icy object had been placed in contact with his heart.

There was only one conclusion that he could adopt that offered anything approaching to a solution of this mysterious affair, and that conclusion Dick was most reluctant to adopt, though, in a manner of speaking, he was driven to it.

The beings he had seen upon the summit of the hill were not of this earth, they were not living creatures at

flesh and blood like himself, but unsubstantial phantoms.

Had they not been, how could they possibly have so completely disappeared in such a brief space of time?

CHAPTER CMXVI.

IN WHICH DICK FINDS HIS PERILS AND PERPLEXITIES INCREASING.

DICK TURPIN pulled off his hat and wiped away the cold, death-like drops of perspiration that had gathered there upon his brow.

He looked around him, but he saw nothing but what served to make him feel more conclusively than ever that he had met with a supernatural adventure.

And what could so strange, so unparalleled an event portend?

Was it the precursor of danger to himself, or of peril to his comrades?

He doubted not there was some good reason why he had thus so suddenly and strangely been brought face to face with two of his companions.

But what the reason was baffled him entirely.

If he had chosen to interpret it as the harbinger of peril to himself he would have appeared to be correct, for now, as his eyes wandered along the broad level highroad, he caught sight of a body of police officers, who evidently were riding forward at the best speed they could make.

Dick quitted his exposed situation at once, and with all his faculties aroused by this fresh danger he debated within himself which would be the best course for him now to adopt.

In the space of a few minutes the officers would arrive at the top of the hill. What, then, should he do in the meantime?

Flight was out of the question; he felt that so conclusively that he abandoned the idea almost as soon as it was formed.

With such a miserable horse as he now possessed, the police officers would have no trouble in overtaking him, nor would he have the least chance if he trusted to his own fleetness of foot.

He could think of no other course that offered the slightest chance of safety save that of endeavouring to assume with what perfection he could the character he had undertaken to play.

Accordingly, carefully placing his hat once more upon his head, he took his seat in front of the cart.

Then he urged his horse onward, hoping that he might pass through the ranks of the officers without danger.

This, however, was a hope scarcely to be indulged in.

The disguise had already served him well on many occasions, but then that was during the night, and many things which pass muster in an artificial light would be instantly detected by day.

The question was, then, would the officers look so particularly at him or take so much notice of him as he drove quietly past as to penetrate his disguise.

He could only trust not, and drive quietly on.

This course he carried out, hanging his head down upon his breast and appearing as if half asleep.

Furtively, however, from time to time he glanced at the officers, who were now very close at hand indeed, but not so close as he had anticipated, for they had reduced their speed.

They were permitting their exhausted horses to ascend the hill at a walking pace.

The officers were talking. Dick could hear their voices floating distinctly on the still, calm morning air.

Another moment and he was able to tell the precise words they made use of.

"As I live," said one of them, "it's the same rascal! I'll swear to him and his brute on four legs at any minute."

"And I'll swear to the cart," said another.

"Curse his impudence," added a third. "I firmly believe he sent us out of our way on purpose. If I only felt sure of it he should pay dearly for the act."

"Rely upon it it was done on purpose," said another. "Tom King would very likely throw him a guinea and bid him be silent—at any rate, let us take him in custody."

"Agreed—seize him at once—we'll have a prisoner of some sort. I am determined not to have all my night's work for nothing!"

It was the police officer in command who spoke these last words

Can anyone form a remote idea of the state of Dick Turpin's mind as he overheard this conversation?

There was no time left for him to act or even to think; the officers were now close upon him, and several of them, spurring their horses, dashed forward, and in a moment surrounded the cart.

One and all drew their pistols, presenting them full at Dick's head, while another saved him the trouble of stopping the horse by seizing hold of its bridle.

The cart came to a standstill.

Dick looked up in well-affected amazement.

It was a bold thing for him to do, but he did it, for he had a reason.

The officers saw his face, but they failed to recognise him.

"Surrender," they cried—"you are our prisoner!"

"P—p—p—prisoner?" said Dick, stammeringly, and pretending to tremble with fright.

"Yes; and now surrender! If you resist, you are a dead man!"

Resistance indeed was vain, and Dick did not attempt it; but with a wonderful coolness and presence of mind he continued to act in accordance with his assumed character.

"B—but, gentlemen," he said, touching his hat at every word—"gentlemen all, what have I done? I haven't been stealing."

"No, you have not been stealing," was the answer; "but you recollect us, don't you—you remember when you saw us before?"

"Yes—yes; Captain was down."

"Yes; and you gave us false information as to the road the highwayman took. That's felony, and you shall be punished for it! Come down off your perch; we'll have the darbies on you in a jiffey!"

Dick hesitated, and pretended to do so from fright; but it was in order to decide upon his next actions.

Clearly he could not better his situation by remaining where he was; and therefore, slowly and reluctantly, and with many expressions of terror and shakes of the head, he clumsily got up, and as clumsily began to descend from his vehicle.

But the officers were impatient, and seizing him rudely, pulled him down into the road. Then, with great expertness, one of them clapped the handcuffs over his wrists.

So suddenly was this done, that even Dick was taken at unawares.

He had not quite made up his mind whether he should submit to being handcuffed or not.

Now it was too late; his wrists were fast.

The officer evidently thought he had performed a very clever, dexterous feat, for he laughed exultingly as he said:

"There, now, my fine fellow, what do you think of that? How do you feel now?"

Dick pretended to cry.

"Let me off," he said—"oh, do let me off, and I will do anything you like! I did tell you wrong, I know I did; but, then, I was afraid I should have my braine blown out!"

"Eh? What?" said the chief officer, at this moment. "Why were you afraid of that?"

"Why—why, sir, if you please," said Dick, "if you will only let me off, I will tell you the whole truth."

"Well, well, tell it."

"But will you let me off afterwards?"

"Silence!" said the officer who stood next to him, accompanying the words with such a thump, that Dick felt as though all the breath was suddenly jerked out of his body—"silence! What do you mean by speaking like that? Mind your manners."

Dick pretended to be still more humble and contrite.

"I am very sorry, sir," he said—"very sorry, but I was mortally frightened!"

"Who by? Why don't you tell all, as you promised?"

"Well, so I will, your worship. You must understand when that fellow came galloping along, he saw me in the cart, and he pulled up all of a sudden like."

"Yes, yes."

"Then he swore an awful oath, and he said that the grabs was behind, and swore again that if I so much as opened my mouth to say which way he had gone, he would certainly find it out, and blow my brains out, if it was a year to come. He looked at me, and said he should know me again."

"And so, on those grounds, you gave us false information, eh?" said the police officer.

"Yes, yes, I have."

"Well, then, my fine fellow, you have been clever enough to admit your guilt; and let me tell you all you have just said will be used against you in evidence. You heard me give the caution, of course?"

"Oh, yes, yes," said the officers, in chorus, though not a word in the shape of caution had been spoken.

"But won't you let me off?" said Dick, more ruefully than ever. "I have told you the truth. Why don't you let me off?"

"We'll let you off this far," said the officer, with a wink: "We'll carry you straight before Squire Bartlett, who lives near at hand, and he will take charge of you. We would take you with us to London, only we have more important matters on hand."

Dick Turpin put in a wild, incoherent, terrified appeal.

It produced no effect whatever upon the officers.

They were, indeed, without exception, quite rejoiced to think that they had succeeded in making a prisoner of some sort or other. It consoled them, in a very great measure, for the disappointment they had experienced throughout the night.

CHAPTER CMXVII.

DICK TURPIN IS CARRIED BEFORE SQUIRE BARTLETT, AND COMMITTED.

Even in such a perilous and trying position as this, Dick was able to find some slight amount of consolation, although it was so slight that probably anyone else would have passed it over altogether.

But he had heard the officers express their intention of not taking him to London, but simply of conducting him before some country justice of the peace.

He was very careful, however, not to allow any signs of the satisfaction this afforded him to appear in his countenance, lest this should arouse the now dormant suspicions of his captors.

Indeed, he was not a little amazed himself to discover that his disguise stood such close scrutiny.

He had not dared to hope that the result would prove so favourable. On the contrary, he had made up his mind that his detection would follow as a matter of course.

The chief reason, however, why he was not recognised consisted in the fact that the officers' minds were fully impressed with the idea that he was a carter and nothing else.

They had seen him on a preceding occasion going towards London, and now they met him returning, and to all appearance quite unconcerned.

That this could be Dick Turpin was an idea so monstrous and extravagant that it never for one moment crossed their minds; indeed, it may be safely said it would be the very last thing they would think of.

And so, as it never occurred to them to suspect that the carter was not what he professed to be, Dick stood in slight danger of discovery now.

The only thing that would betray him would be any forgetfulness or oversight on his part.

If for one moment he spoke in his own natural voice, detection would follow.

In a matter of this kind, however, Dick was not likely to be careless; and, moreover, the character he was playing was the one of all others which he could sustain with the best ability, for during his early life he had lived far in the country, and had had daily opportunities of noting the peculiarities of the labouring man.

Accordingly, although the eyes of so many of his enemies were directed upon him, Dick Turpin was unknown.

The residence of the squire they had mentioned was very close at hand—indeed, almost in sight of where they stood, and towards it they now made their way.

The horse and cart were also valiantly taken prisoners and led along towards the justice's.

Many were the jokes made and laughs raised at Dick's expense, but he showed no signs of merriment or resentment on his countenance.

He kept up a perpetual appeal to be let off, alleging various reasons for not being brought before the squire.

To all of these the officers turned a deaf ear, though they served them as materials for sport.

At length, breasting the hill, Dick looked around, and perceived a large, substantially-built white mansion, situated very pleasantly upon the declivity of the hill.

This he doubted not was the residence of Squire Bartlett, and he shortly after found that his conjecture was quite correct.

Although the hour was such an early one, thin wreaths of smoke could be seen curling from some of the chimneys, and the officers noted this with great satisfaction.

As the distance was not great, and all the way downhill, it was soon performed.

They clamoured loudly at the lodge gates, and were admitted.

While the little procession made its way up the winding avenue leading to the house, Dick's reflections were by no means of a pleasant character.

He was as yet not very far from London, and it was quite possible that this country justice might by his inquiries find out that he was only disguised, or he might be clever enough to recognise him.

At any rate, Dick felt that he had an ordeal of no trifling kind to pass through.

But he endeavoured to nerve himself for it as best he could.

The officers made their way round to the back of the house, and, after much knocking, were admitted into a kind of court-yard.

Here they alighted from their steeds, and a few servants, who were up at that early hour, issued from various doors, all filled with curiosity to know the meaning of this strange arrival.

"Is his worship here?" asked the officer in command.

"Yes," replied the servant he addressed.

"Then tell him he's wanted immediately."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"He's in bed."

"Well, wake him."

"It's more than my head's worth, or yours either."

"Pooh, pooh—nonsense—nothing of the kind!" said the officer. "We have a prisoner of great importance, and it is necessary that he should be examined without delay, so call his worship up at once! Say I am here—Davis, the police officer from London."

At this moment one of the upper windows was thrown open with great violence, and a nightcapped head appeared.

"Oh, law!" exclaimed the servant—"there's his worship! Now there'll be a row!"

"Hallo—hallo!" said the justice, in very gruff, choleric tones—"what's the meaning of this infernal row at this hour in the morning? I'll have you all committed to prison! Be off—be off at once!"

"Your worship," said the officer in command, taking off his hat, and speaking with great respect, "I am very sorry to disturb you, but I have a prisoner here of very great importance indeed, and I want you to order him into safe custody."

"Can't, then! You must wait till twelve o'clock!"

"But it's impossible, your worship!" said the police officer. "We are in pursuit of Tom King, and we charge this man here with being his accomplice, for he gave us false information during the night."

"Tom King, did you say?" said the justice.

"Yes, the notorious highwayman!"

"Catch him, then—catch him! I'll add fifty pounds to the reward myself! O—n the fellow's impudence—he robbed a sister of mine in a stage-coach some time ago! Wait a minute, and I will be with you. Go into the justicing-room."

The squire, now all afire, withdrew himself from the window, and the servants, having heard his words, no longer scrupled to show the officers the way to the justicing-room.

This was a large empty apartment on the ground floor of the mansion, that had about as cheerless a look as any room well could.

A rude table was placed on a raised platform at one end, and above that was a large arm-chair.

Some little delay took place; but by the time the officers had settled themselves in this apartment, the magistrate, with his nightcap on, and wrapped up in a dressing-gown of an alarming pattern, stalked in, and took his seat in the arm-chair already mentioned.

"Where is this fellow?" he said. "Oh, there he is! Why, I can see what he's capable of with half an eye. Where's my clerk? Not here, of course. I'll discharge him. Mr. Officer!"

"Yes, your worship."

"I'll commit him—I'll commit him at once. I'll write out the committal now, and you can have him locked up in the cage and kept safe."

"But—but," said Dick, playing his part still with admiration—"but—but, your worship, I told him the truth, all about it, and he said——"

"Silence, you ruffian!" bawled the justice. "How dare you interrupt the proceedings in the court? What's your villanous name? Speak the truth, now!"

"What's your name?" said the officer who stood nearest to Dick, and who, while he spoke, gave him a tremendous smack on his back. "Why don't you speak when his worship speaks to you?"

Dick's fingers instinctively curled up, and he felt the greatest disposition in the world to knock the officer down.

But with a great effort he controlled this impulse, and after much stammering and stuttering, said:

"John."

"John—John," said the magistrate—"of course his name's John, and Smith's his other name, or if it isn't it'd do as well as any. There you are. Lock him up; d—n him, it's like his impudence to fetch a justice out of bed at this hour in the morning, when there are no fires alight, and disturbing his rest. But wait till the rascal comes before me again—I'll let him know what's what!"

And with this vague threat the magistrate put a paper into the officer's hand, upon which was scrawled some words that would have puzzled a lawyer to decipher, and having done so, he made his retreat in a very hasty and undignified manner.

Dick was perfectly amazed at the manner in which the proceedings were carried on, and wondered whether that was the way in which the squire generally meted out justice.

He was not allowed much opportunity for speculating on this or any other topic, for the officers proceeded to hustle him off.

"What are you going to do? Where are you going to take me? Didn't I promise to tell you the truth, and haven't I done so?"

"Oh, stop your row!" said the chief officer—"we have wasted too much time already. Come on—you will soon know what we intend to do with you."

CHAPTER CMXVIII.

DICK TURPIN IS HANDED OVER TO THE CUSTODY OF THE PARISH CONSTABLE AND HIS ASSISTANT.

With these words, the police officer very unceremoniously bundled Dick out of the justicing-room, and, after traversing several other apartments and a corridor, reached at length the yard, where the horses were waiting.

By the directions of their chief, the officers mounted—all save two, who placed themselves on each side of the prisoner.

In this manner they commenced their march, Dick wondering to what sort of a place of confinement they would consign him.

He was not kept very long in doubt, for, going down a narrow, winding lane that skirted a large and dense preserve, they came all at once upon a sleepy-looking little village that was entirely shut in from observation on one side by the sloping hill, and on the other by the preserve just mentioned.

On that clear, sunshiny morning, however, almost every place looked beautiful, and in particular this little village looked charming.

Early as was the hour, the inhabitants were or the most part astir, and the unusual fact of the approach of a body of horsemen quickly became known, so that by the time the first house in the village was reached quite a large crowd had assembled to greet them.

All looked inquiringly upon the officers and their prisoner, but did not venture to make any remark.

The chief officer, however, in a loud voice called out for the parish constable, and as soon as the words were pronounced a little fat man came bustling through the crowd, and rummaging with his hand in one of his coat pockets as he did so.

The reason for this quickly became apparent, for, withdrawing his hand, he produced a little black staff about eight inches in length, with a gilt crown on the top of it, which was the badge of his authority and office.

"Here I am," he said—"here I am, at your service."

"We have a prisoner here," said the chief officer, "who has been duly committed by the squire, and he must be looked after with particular care and attention. We give him into your charge."

"All right," said the constable, with a pompous air—"all right! I will take care of him, never fear. But what a desperate-looking character he is!"

"Yes—you had better be careful. Shall you take him single-handed?"

"No, no—not if I know it!" cried the constable, and, as he spoke, he faced round and continued: "Simon—Simon, you rascal, where have you got to this blessed morning? Simon, I say! Curse you, you are always out of the way when you're wanted!"

These words caused a rather singular-looking individual to thrust himself prominently forward.

It was no other than the parish constable's factotum and general assistant—a tall, loose-jointed fellow, neither a man nor a boy, with a vacant, silly expression on his face, and a tremendous shock of uncombed hair.

But although his appearance did not give him credit for it, yet he was, nevertheless, possessed of a very unusual amount of strength, and therefore the parish constable was always anxious to have him at hand when it was necessary to make any capture.

Dick was now pushed forward by the police officers, and given into the charge of the constable and Simon.

Little did they think, as they performed this act, how great a prize they were allowing to slip out of their fingers.

"Now," said the one in command, "Mr. Constable, bear in mind that we have delivered him to you safe and sound, and you will be answerable for his re-appearance at the proper moment. Forward, my lads!" he added—"we are not yet too late to continue our pursuit."

With these words, the officers departed, in order to continue their search for Tom King, leaving a much more valuable prize behind, and, as one might almost say, unguarded.

Dick watched the departure of the police officers with anxious eyes.

He could scarcely bring himself to believe in the occurrences of the last hour.

Indeed, from the time when he had seen his two comrades so suddenly and mysteriously appear upon the summit of the hill, he had appeared to be in a dream.

"Now then, you low-lived, ill-brought-up-looking wretch," said the constable, addressing his prisoner "what are you staring for like that? Come along, can't you? Oh, you won't? Then take that!"

Now, it must not be understood, from any portion of this speech, that Dick in any way refused to comply with the constable's injunctions; but that functionary wished to make some display of his power; so, when he bade Dick take that, he struck him a sharp blow with the crown of his staff.

Dick felt the greatest inclination to knock the fellow down, but it was not his policy to maintain too aggressive an attitude against this man, for already the highwayman had decided upon the course of action he should adopt.

But he could not resist suddenly snatching the little staff out of the constable's hand and throwing it to some distance, although the feat was rendered difficult from

the fact that the handcuffs were still about his wrists.

The constable stood white and shaking with rage at the commission of so dreadful an act.

To his mind, it was little short of sacrilege.

The staff, after describing many eccentric curves in the air, fell at last in the middle of a huge, slime-covered pond, and was immediately lost to view.

"Murder!" gasped the constable. "Seize him, Simon! Hold him—hold him tight! The world is coming to an end! He has insulted the King through me, his Majesty's unworthy representative!"

"Yes, decidedly unworthy," said Dick, at which words there was a general laugh among the villagers assembled.

"Bring him along, Simon!" roared the constable, as soon as he could make himself heard—"bring him along—I will not dally another moment!"

"Now, look here, Simon," said Dick—"just say which way you want me to go, and I will obey; but don't you try to haul me along, or you will find you have an ugly customer to deal with."

Simon fully appreciated the force of these remarks, so he made a sign for Dick to follow.

The trio then marched along up the village street, the people following and pressing round, and the constable giving vent to such vague threats as—

"I'll make it hot for you, my fine fellow—I'll let you know the consequences of insulting me! The institutions of this country are not to be overturned by a scoundrel like you! But you shall suffer for it; you shall know what it is to be a day and a night in my charge!"

To these speeches Dick paid not the least attention.

He heard them, it is true, but his mind was busy with other matters.

Chiefly he was curious to know where his captors were going to lead him, and he looked piercingly in advance, hoping to catch an early sight of his destination.

From the constable and the other people of the village Dick felt he had little to fear in the way of recognition, although he made up his mind not to relax his caution to too great an extent.

To his surprise, the long, straggling street of the village was quite passed through; and as he looked along the road before him, he could perceive only one building, and that looked more like a huge summer-house than aught else.

About a hundred yards or so beyond this was a toll-bar.

It quickly became apparent that this summer-house-looking building was the destination of the constable; and on drawing closer to it, Dick perceived it was the village cage, or round-house, where offenders against the laws were temporarily confined.

Dick's lips curled in derision when he found he was about to be committed to such a place.

Although handcuffed, he felt there would be little difficulty in forcing his way out of it.

By the instructions of the constable, Simon drew forth a huge bunch of keys, and, selecting one key larger than the rest, he opened the door of the round-house.

"The blunderbuss," he said—"bring out the blunderbuss!"

At these words there was a general retrogressive movement on the part of the crowd.

Simon entered the little building, and quickly appeared with the weapon in question.

It was a huge, clumsy looking affair, and seemed as though it had been manufactured ages ago by some inmate of the village.

The barrel was, as usual, of brass, but the bore was suggestive of that of a cannon, while the bell-shaped mouth was as large as an ordinary basin.

Dick looked with alarm at this instrument of destruction—not that he feared much from being fired at with it, but from his idea of the awful consequences that must ensue to the person who was foolhardy enough to pull the trigger.

"Is it loaded, Simon?" said the constable.

"Yes, sir, it is loaded. I loaded it yesterday."

"Well, then, just put these in additional, will you?"

And as he spoke, the constable pulled out of his pocket a handful of nails, which he poured at once into the capacious mouth of the blunderbuss.

They were then rammed tightly down, and the constable, continuing his instructions, said:

"Push him inside, Simon, and shut the door. Then sit down here on the edge of the stocks, and keep watch. If he attempts to escape—mark you, if he only attempts—don't wait for orders to blaze away!"

CHAPTER CMXIX.

DICK TURPIN IS SECURELY LODGED IN THE VILLAGE CAGE, AND SIMON KEEPS GOOD GUARD WITH THE BLUNDERBUSS.

SIMON handled the blunderbuss very carefully, and before venturing to carry into execution that portion of the constable's command which related to pushing the prisoner into the round-house and locking the door, he lodged the clumsy, awe-inspiring firearm against one of the upright posts of the stocks which were placed facing the road and a little on one side of the cage.

"Understand," said Dick again, when Simon came towards him, "I will not suffer myself to be handled by anyone! If you want me to go inside, just say so."

Simon stood aside, and waved his hand.

"In with him," shouted the constable—"in with him! Why don't you bundle him in, you lazy varlet? Do you think I want to stand here all the morning?"

"I am going, Mr. Constable," said Dick—"I am going. But surely you are not in earnest in telling Simon to fire off that blunderbuss?"

"In earnest?" repeated the constable. "Of course I'm in earnest! What else should I be, let me ask you?"

"Well, then, if Simon has any respect for his life he won't do it. I'd lay a wager that the moment the trigger is pulled it will burst, and be blown into a thousand pieces."

"Pooh, pooh—that's no business of yours! In with him, Simon—in with him, I say!"

Dick walked quietly to the door of the round-house, for he did not want to draw down upon himself any more of the public attention than he could possibly avoid.

It was plain, however, to see that his words had produced some impression upon Simon, for that individual eyed the blunderbuss apparently with anything but comfortable feelings.

No sooner had Dick crossed the threshold than the door was slammed shut and the key turned in the lock.

At first he could scarcely make out what kind of place he was in, owing to the semi-darkness.

But his nose was assailed by a most powerful and disagreeable odour, showing that the constable and his assistant were by no means careful to keep the cage as clean as it might be.

Indeed Dick's whole attention when he first entered this place was occupied in listening to what was said outside.

"Don't you mind what that fellow says about the blunderbuss," cried the constable; "it's all right. He only said that to frighten you. He's a desperate character. There's only half an ounce of powder in it, and a quarter of a pound of duck shot. And, mark you, if he tries to get out, you pull the trigger, and never mind the consequences; but if he does escape, I'll have you taken up before his worship, and you shall be transported."

This threat appeared to produce a considerable effect upon Simon.

There were some chinks in the woodwork of which the cage was composed, and Dick had found one of them, to which he applied his eye.

He could obtain a partial view of what was going on outside.

He saw Simon walk slowly towards the stocks, with something of the air of a man who is walking to his execution.

Then he beheld him pick up the blunderbuss, seat himself on a portion of the wooden frame, and there remain on guard.

"Don't you move," said the constable—"don't you move, on any account, until I come back to you and give you leave."



[DICK TURPIN LOOKS SIMON AND THE BEADLE IN THE CAGE.]

Simon did not make any verbal reply, but sat still, looking very stupid and foolish.

"Do you hear what I say?" roared the constable, for his temper had been greatly tried that morning.

"Yes, I can hear right enough."

"Well, then, why don't you say so?"

Simon was again silent.

"Understand distinctly," continued the constable, purposely raising his voice that it might reach the ears of the prisoner within the cage, "if he so much as show the tip of his nose in the attempt to escape, shoot him down like you would a crow."

"But—but——" said Simon, hesitatingly.

"But what?"

"Suppose I killed him?"

"Well, then he will be a good riddance—that's all I can say."

"But sha'n't I be had up for it?"

"No—certainly not. You have my authority. He's been duly warned of the consequences, and if he attempts to escape, why, the consequences will be on his own head. I'm off now," the constable added; "and mind that you keep a good guard during my absence."

With these words, the constable turned round and marched away.

Several of the villagers accompanied him, of course anxious to draw him into conversation respecting the events of the morning.

Others less anxious in this respect, but more so in another, lingered around the cage, looking at Simon with admiring eyes, but keeping a safe distance from the blunderbuss, the effects of an explosion of which they justly dreaded.

At last, however, these villagers, one by one, dispersed; there did not seem to be one thorough idler among the group—all had their work to do.

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And so in a short time they took their departure, and Simon was left alone.

He watched the last until he had disappeared from sight; then, with an audible sigh, h placed the blunderbuss carefully against the upright post of the stocks, and assumed a very hopeless, dejected attitude.

It was clear that he was by no means pleased with his duty; but he had no means of escape from it.

Dick continued to watch him through the crevice for several moments, and then, turning round, he gazed about him, anxious to make himself acquainted with his prison.

The interior of the round-house was now much more clearly discernible than when he first entered it, for his eyes had accustomed themselves to the very small amount of light which crept in.

Nothing more cheerless, desolate, and disgusting could be imagined.

The village pound was not in a worse condition, and that was saying a good deal.

There was no seat in the place, and nothing that would serve as one.

The walls, though not very stout and strong, were, nevertheless, smooth.

The top was formed merely of thatch, so that, but for the presence of Simon and the blunderbuss outside, it would have been no difficult matter to escape.

This last word was continually before his mind, and, having made himself as familiar as he wished to be with the inside of the round-house, he turned his back to the wall. Selecting the cleanest place he could find, and leaning against it, he supported himself by driving his heels into the thick clayey mud which formed the flooring.

Here he gave himself up to thought, wondering which would b the best means of achieving his freedom.

After all, he thought Simon was not a man to be particularly dreaded.

There would be a risk in attempting to break forth, but et Dick Turpin thought it might be run successfully. Ten to one if the fellow would have the courage or presence of mind to discharge the blunderbuss at the right moment, or, if he did, it would be without an aim.

But another consideration suggested itself, which made Dick quite unwilling to run this risk.

The blunderbuss would certainly be fired, and if he should be so fortunate as to escape any injury from the various missiles it contained, the explosion, nevertheless, would resound far and wide through the still, quiet air, and spread an immediate alarm.

Before he should be able to get to any great distance there was a strong probability of his being overtaken and recaptured.

"No," said Dick, after debating the subject at great length—"no, I will not run the risk just at present. I will wait. Perhaps fortune will favour me — who knows?"

Dick's resolution was to stay till nightfall, which certainly would afford him a better chance of making his escape, though there was the fear that he might not be allowed to remain so long in his present quarters.

That was a chance, and a chance he resolved it should remain.

And now, in the silence and solitude of this place, he began for the first time to give himself up to a little calm reflection.

Instantaneously his thoughts travelled back to the time when that singular incident had befallen him at the summit of the hill.

The more he pondered upon this, the more at a loss he felt to comprehend it.

The most reasonable conclusion he could come to was what he had seen was a delusion of the senses merely; but, then, the forms of his two comrades looked so palpable and plain that he could scarcely reconcile himself to this belief.

And so, with his mind in a state of great uneasiness and alarm, Dick slowly passed the day.

About noon the constable made his appearance, bringing with him some dinner for Simon.

Then Dick learned that Squire Bartlett was unable to attend to his magisterial functions that day, in consequence of a hunting appointment he had with several gentlemen in the neighbourhood

Dick heard this intelligence with the greatest satisfaction.

"Are you sure he's all right?" asked the constable.

"Well, I think he is," said Simon. "But since the door was closed, I have not heard him move."

"That's only his artfulness," said the constable. "I've had some experience with men of his stamp, and know how to deal with them. He wants taming a little, and I calculate hunger will do it."

After a few more words, the constable took his departure, and Simon was once more left alone.

Dick had now decided upon the pursuit of a definite course of action, which he hoped would result in his perfect freedom.

Whether it would do so or not depended upon various contingencies; but he had great hopes.

His first task was to rid himself of the handcuffs, which galled and chafed him exceedingly.

He had made many and continual efforts to accomplish this, but to no purpose.

Now, however, with stern, angry determination, he set about it, resolved to endure any amount of pain in order to get his hands at liberty.

Squeezing his left hand, which was rather less than his right, into the smallest possible dimensions, he began to tug with might and main in order to get it through the strong steel hoop.

In the effort, the skin was torn from the back of his hand in long strips.

The pain was intense; but, clenching his teeth together, he persevered, for he felt each time his hand was drawn further and further through the rigg.

At last he was free, so far as ridding his left hand of the handcuff was concerned.

He had not time to liberate his right, for he knew that for a time the manacle hooped about it would offer him but slight inconvenience.

Now that he had done so much towards the accomplishment of his design, he became exceedingly impatient for night to close in.

It was some comfort for him to think that it was that season of the year when darkness sets in early.

By slow degrees, the interior of his prison could be less and less distinctly perceived; but when darkness fairly settled around, Dick made no immediate attempt at liberation.

He was waiting for the chance to present itself of leav the round-house quietly and speedily.

It required a great effort of self-control to remain thus idle when he might be taking steps to quit the cage.

But his long and weary waiting was rewarded at last.

The sound of a voice from the distance, and then the heavy tread of some one approaching, roused all his faculties.

Again applying his eyes to the crevice in the woodwork, he looked forth, and saw, at some distance, a small, flickering light.

It grew brighter and clearer, for it was coming closer.

Then he perceived the bulky figure of the constable approaching.

He was carrying a lantern in his hand, and it was from this the light proceeded.

Simon gave utterance to a responsive shout.

He was glad enough to see his master approaching, for the solitude in which he had so long remained had become almost insupportable.

"All's well, Simon, eh?" said the constable, when he got a little nearer.

"Yes, all's well," was the answer, very sulkily given—"at least, I suppose all's well."

"Why suppose?"

"Because I've not heard a single sound since I saw you last, and I can hardly bring myself to believe that he is in the cage at all."

"Why—why—what you don't mean to say that—that——"

"That what?"

"That he's escaped?"

"No, no—I don't believe he has," said Simon. "I have never took my eyes off the building for a blessed minute."

The account given by his factotum by no means pleased or reassured the constable.

He was very anxious to make certain that his prisoner was safe.

He had received a message from the squire, bidding him bring the prisoner before him and two other magistrates at noon on the morrow, and he had heard quite enough to be aware that the magistrate had a personal feeling in the matter.

In these parts the squire was absolute, and knowing his power made the constable exceedingly anxious that all should go well with the prisoner, of whom, it need scarcely be stated, he stood in great dread.

Some time elapsed, during which he remained in deep reflection.

Dick's breath came short and fast.

He wondered whether the chance he had hoped for and calculated upon was really about to present itself.

"Ain't you going to let me go home?" said Simon, at last, breaking in upon his superior's meditation. "I am cold through to the bone, and if I stop here much longer I shall go to sleep!"

"You had better not!" said the constable. "But I'll tell you what you shall do. You shall take my lantern, and I will take the blunderbuss, and you shall open the door of the cage, and peep in to see whether the prisoner is all right."

But Simon did not relish this proposal.

"And where shall you be?" he ventured to ask.

"Why, keeping guard outside here, you idiot!" was the reply. "If he attempts to escape, why, pop! and down he goes!"

"I don't like to go in by myself in the dark," said Simon. "I am frightened."

"It won't be in the dark."

"Yes it will!"

"How can it be, if you take the lantern with you?"

"Well, that makes no difference. And I'll tell you what it is," said Simon, with sudden boldness, "I ain't going in by myself, and that's a fact!"

The constable seemed about to break forth into some ebullition of rage; but, if so, he controlled the impulse.

"Don't be a fool, Simon," he said—"don't be a fool! You have nothing whatever to fear. Take the lantern, and walk in boldly."

"Not first," said Simon, more doggedly than before—"not first. After you, if you please."

CHAPTER CMXX.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN, THE PARISH CONSTABLE, AND SIMON CHANGE PLACES.

The constable hesitated a moment or two, and it was about an even chance whether the door of the cage would be opened at all that night or not.

The desire to ascertain whether his prisoner was safe, however, overcame every other consideration in his breast, especially when he remembered how serious the consequences would be to him should an escape take place.

Sinking his voice, he continued:

"I really think he is a dangerous fellow, Simon; but two of us needn't be afraid of him. Look here, we'll both go together, and take one peep to ascertain that he is all safe, and then we'll lock the door again."

"That's more reasonable," said Simon—"a good deal more reasonable, and I don't mind it."

The matter being thus arranged, the constable took up the blunderbuss, and Simon took the lantern.

The pair of them, advancing a few steps, stopped before the door.

The key was thrust into the lock, and turned.

At this moment a faint, smothered cry, sounding like a groan, came to their ears.

It made both of them start with affright.

The constable trembled from head to foot, and even his very lips turned white as he ejaculated:

"Why, what was that, Simon—what was that?"

"Blest if I know! Have you got the blunderbuss?"

"Yes—yes."

"On full cock?"

"Yes—yes."

"Mercy!" said a faint voice. "Have pity upon me! If you have any feelings of compassion, don't allow me to perish here in this manner!"

"Why—why, Simon——"

"Yes, master?"

"It sounds as if he was uncommonly bad—don't it?"

"Oh, very!"

"Just push the door open a little further, and poke the lantern in. Don't be frightened. I'll stand behind you with the blunderbuss. I'll keep him back, I'll warrant!"

Simon was rather curious to know what was the matter with the prisoner, and his curiosity enabled him to some extent to overget his fears.

Thrusting in the lantern as he had been directed, he bent forward and glanced around the interior of the cage.

"Well—well," said the constable, anxiously, vainly endeavouring, by standing on tip-toe, to peep over his factotum's shoulder, "can you see him?"

"Yes, master. I can see him plain enough."

"Where is he?"

"He do seem uncommonly bad, to be sure."

"But where is he, I say?"

"Lying on his blessed back, master—flat on his back, and he looks to me as if he was about to kick the bucket."

"But he mustn't," said the constable—"but he mustn't!"

"Have pity," said Dick, again, in a weak voice—"do have pity upon me! Help me, or I shall surely die!"

"But you mustn't!" roared the constable.

Dick responded with a groan.

"I wonder what's the matter with him, master?" asked Simon.

"I don't know. What's to be done?"

Simon scratched his head, but did not reply.

"He's handcuffed—yes, he's handcuffed, and there are two of us, and we've got the blunderbuss," pursued the constable, with more determination in his voice and manner. "We oughtn't to be afraid, eh, Simon?"

"No—no"

"We ought to be a match for him. The only thing I wish is, that it was a little lighter—I don't like the dark."

At this moment, Dick renewed his appeal for assistance, and, judging by the tone of his voice and the manner in which he was lying on the ground, it would appear that he was very bad indeed.

The motionless manner in which he continued to remain served to inspire the constable and Simon with courage.

They began to think there would surely not be so much danger after all in venturing into the round-house in order to see what really was the matter with the prisoner.

Accordingly, after much hesitation, and taking their steps in such a manner that they seemed half inclined to turn round and run away again, they approached the spot where Dick was lying.

"What's the matter?" said the constable, more boldly, and grasping the blunderbuss while he spoke—"what's the matter? What do you want?"

"Oh dear—oh dear!"

"Don't speak and look like that. Why don't you say what's the matter?"

Dick groaned.

"Oh!" he said—"oh, if I could only get up just a very little! I fancy I should be better then!"

"And why don't you get up?"

"I—I can't; but I will try."

Apparently with great pain and difficulty, Dick slowly raised himself from the ground.

Simon, holding the lantern in his hand, looked on with the deepest interest, and the constable—who, prudently or otherwise, had got behind Simon—peeped furtively first from one side, then from the other.

All at once, however, with the suddenness of a lightning's flash, Dick started up.

No movement could possibly have been made more rapid; but the fact was, he had been careful to get in such a position first that he could spring to his feet without difficulty.

In doing so, he gave Simon a tremendous push, which

he could scarcely have withstood even had he been on his guard and prepared for it.

But, taking him unawares as it did, he went back as though shot.

The constable was behind him, and was, if possible, still more taken by surprise—in fact, before he knew what had happened, or how it had come to pass, he found himself lying on his back on the muddy floor of the cage, with Simon struggling on the top of him.

Neither did he know how or by what means the trigger of the blunderbuss was pulled; certainly the weapon exploded with tremendous violence, lighting up for a moment the whole interior of the cage with a vivid glare, and then, with a crashing sound, the various missiles with which it had been loaded went hurtling through the thatch-covered roof.

After that there was silence and darkness.

With the same quick movement, Dick, finding his *ruse* so successful, had darted to the door, which the constable had left ajar.

The key was sticking in the lock.

Quick as thought, he closed the door and turned the key.

The tables were then turned; he was no longer the prisoner, but the jailer.

The noise made by the report of the blunderbuss could not fail, he felt sure, to reach the ears of the inmates of the village, and set them all on the alert.

It was necessary, then, for him to make his escape with all speed.

Yet, though aware of this, Dick could not resist the temptation of waiting to ascertain what had been the effects of the explosion of the blunderbuss.

Accordingly he tapped sharply with his knuckles upon the door of the round-house as he cried:

"Mr. Constable—Mr. Constable! Simon—Simon!"

Hateful groans alone responded to him.

'Speak—speak!" said Dick. "Has the old thing burst? If so, don't blame me—I gave you a caution."

There was no reply, and just then Dick, glancing towards the village, saw lights moving about in all directions, while simultaneously the shouting of voices and trampling of footsteps came upon his ears.

"It would be madness to stay longer," he muttered—"perfect madness; so I must leave the matter in doubt. Where shall I find the horse and cart, I wonder? I suppose I must not trouble my head about them. Well, well, it doesn't matter."

As he spoke, he made his way with great rapidity from the cage, striking right across the country in the direction of his destination.

Before going far, however, he paused, for he found himself on the verge of a large sheet of water.

He had made up his mind what to do.

As quickly as possible he tore off his disguise, which, it will be remembered, he had put on over his ordinary apparel.

He rolled it up into the smallest compass he possibly could, making it into a bundle, in the centre of which he placed a large, heavy stone.

Then, with all his might, he flung the parcel away from him, and it fell with a loud splash into the water, and was immediately lost to sight.

Dick shook himself, and then gave a long-drawn sigh of relief.

"Ah!" he said, "I must not despise my disguise, but yet I feel now far more comfortable and like myself. They will be puzzled to track me now, that's certain, and the sooner I get to Somefield the better."

As he spoke, he again set himself in motion, and as he walked rapidly along there was one subject upon which he did not fail to congratulate himself most heartily.

This was, that he had decided when he did to part with the gold he had received from old Matthew, otherwise, when taken prisoner by the police, this money would have been found about him, and consequently have awakened all their suspicions.

Indeed, when he looked back upon what he had gone through, he could not avoid a slight shivering feeling, which increased when his thoughts reverted to the strange manner in which he had witnessed Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack vanish from the summit of the hill.

CHAPTER CMXXI.

DICK MEETS WITH ANOTHER ADVENTURE ON HIS WAY TO SOMEFIELD

No amount of reflection, however, could make his ideas any clearer on this point.

The whole affair was a complete mystery, unless he chose to ascribe it to supernatural agency, and this Dick was loath indeed to do.

Vainly, however, as he strode hastily along, did he endeavour to come to some reasonable conjecture until, at length, he was obliged to give up in utter despair.

By this time he had once more reached the high-road.

Before he ventured to set his foot upon it he paused, and reconnoitred carefully around him.

On all sides was an intense and perfect silence, and at length, reassured by this, he ventured to spring over the low hedgerow that alone divided him from the highway.

The night was cold, with the moon shining at times with great brilliancy in the sky, but a brisk wind from the south-west drove innumerable clouds across the face of the firmament, so that at intervals all was darkness and obscurity.

But when the moon broke forth, her light seemed all the more vivid and silvery by the contrast.

All at once Dick became aware, in spite of the profound silence, he was not alone on the high-road.

On one occasion, when the moon peeped forth, he saw before him, but only for an instant, a faint, flitting figure.

He fancied it was a female; but the glimpse he had was too momentary for him to feel certain on this point.

He walked on at a slightly reduced rate, for he wished to have no spy upon any of his movements.

A more profound darkness than usual now overspread the scene.

When at length the moon once more broke forth, Dick saw, at no great distance before him, a rude, clumsily-constructed wooden bridge.

Beneath this, water was running with considerable velocity, for he could hear it where he then stood.

The moonlight, too, enabled him to trace its course in a long, irregular line.

His attention was diverted from a contemplation of this by again catching sight of the fleeting figure.

It was now near the centre of the bridge, where it paused and looked upward.

Then Dick saw clearly, and beyond doubt, that it was a female, by her form and general appearance certainly young, and most likely beautiful.

Dick wondered what could have brought her at so late an hour to so desolate a spot, and while half hesitating whether to stay and watch her further movements, or to advance, he uttered a cry of horror.

To his great surprise the young girl, after remaining motionless a moment, sprang suddenly on to the low parapet of the bridge, and from thence dashed herself headforemost into the river below.

A faint, smothered kind of shriek and then a splash were the next sounds that reached Dick's ears.

Not for one moment did he hesitate as to the course he should adopt.

At full speed he ran along until he reached the banks of the river, close to the rude archway of the bridge.

Then, placing his hands before his eyes, he looked keenly and scrutinisingly over the surface of the water.

To his vexation, another cloud at this moment swept over the moon's disc, yet not before he fancied he saw something white floating in the water close to where he stood.

To plunge into the rushing, foaming tide was his next act.

Dick was an excellent swimmer, and struck out boldly for the object he wished to reach.

The force of the current was so great that it carried him a long way down the stream in the course of a few seconds.

But he was inspired to make every exertion to accelerate his progress, for, despite the obscurity, he perceived the form of the young girl before him.

At last, with a glad cry, he seized hold of a portion of her apparel, and, having done so, turned his face without delay towards the land.

The shore was quickly and easily reached; and, kneeling down, he supported the head of the young girl, and tried to re-awaken her to consciousness.

To all appearances, however, life was gone.

Her face was ashy pale, and as cold as death itself.

Dick had no means at hand for restoring her, and so, anxiously, he rose to his feet and looked around, trusting to find some place of shelter to which he could take her.

In doing so, his keen eye detected a faint, twinkling light.

But it was on the other side of the river, and to reach it it would be necessary to cross over the bridge.

But Dick did not hesitate to pick the young girl up in his arms.

She was a burden light to carry, for she was thin even to emaciation.

And now, as the moon broke forth again more clearly, and Dick looked down into the young girl's countenance, he saw, despite the reposeful expression upon it, that there were many traces of grief and sorrow visible.

Forgetting all his own danger in the concern he felt for this young girl, Dick hurried on.

The bridge was quickly crossed and the light neared.

It was not long before he discovered that it proceeded from a roadside inn, the inmates of which had caused a bright light to be placed in one of the windows.

The door was closed when Dick reached the building, but by one sudden blow with his foot he dashed it open and hurried at full speed along a passage and into a large kitchen, in which a bright fire was briskly burning, and where many people were assembled.

His sudden and strange appearance caused a universal start of dismay.

"Help her!" said Dick. "I believe life is not yet extinct. I have saved her from the river."

A portly, good-tempered female—doubtless the landlady—came hurrying into the kitchen, and no sooner did she catch sight of the young girl than she uttered a loud cry.

"Mercy on us, and save us!" she cried. "Why, as I live, it's Miss Danville!"

The words produced an immediate consternation upon all around, and it was evident by their manner that the name was familiar enough to every one of them.

In particular, one, a young man poorly clad, yet having a noble, ingenuous countenance, sprang forward from the rest and, with a cry of anguish, threw himself down beside the senseless girl.

"Lizzy—Lizzy," he cried—"dear Lizzy, awake—awake! I have returned!"

But his words and the no doubt well-known tones of his voice failed to produce the least effect, and he uttered another anguished cry.

The landlady, however, by this time had recovered her presence of mind, and, calling her domestics around her, the young girl was carried from the room, and means taken to restore her if possible to consciousness.

No sooner had Dick placed the young girl down in safety than the reaction came upon him.

His strength suddenly departed, and he sank down upon a seat almost fainting.

This can scarcely be wondered at considering the amount of exertion he had gone through, and the length of time that had elapsed since he had partaken of any food.

One of the persons seated in the kitchen placed a glass of hot spirits to Dick's lips, who drank almost unconsciously.

The result, however, was soon apparent.

He again opened his eyes to their usual extent, and recovered from the death-like feeling that had assailed him.

The young man who had called upon Miss Danville by her Christian name bent over Dick, full of concern for his condition.

"May Heaven bless you, sir," he said, "for the act you have done to-night! I cannot thank you as I should—my voice fails me!"

"That's enough," said Dick. "If you wish to show your appreciation of it, get me something substantial in the shape of food, for I am almost dead from hunger."

This was a demand instantly and easily complied with, and soon Dick had a most tempting and appetising repast spread before him.

The young man quitted the room, anxious to learn with what success the effort had been met to reanimate the young girl.

No sooner had the door closed behind him than Dick was besieged with many eager questions, and finding that the curiosity of all was greatly excited, he took the wisest and quickest means of satisfying it, which was to relate what had occurred in as few words as he possibly could.

In return, he asked whether anyone could furnish him with any further particulars.

"Yes," said the landlord, drawing a long whiff of smoke from his pipe, "I fancy you are about the only one beneath this roof who could not give all her history. Poor girl! we are all sorry for her, and wonder how her own flesh and blood could treat her as they have."

"If it would not take you long," said Dick, "could you give me a brief account of what you know, for I confess my curiosity is fully roused?"

"With pleasure," said the landlord. "You must know, then, sir, that this young girl is the only daughter of the richest man in this part of the country. He is generally called Squire Danville. He is a justice of the peace, and I know not what else beside.

"It is pretty generally whispered—and I daresay with good truth—that he never was very fond either of his wife or his daughter, and for this reason:

"His whole hopes were fixed upon a son, to whom he believed he should be able to leave his vast wealth and ancient possessions; but this daughter came into the world, and, with an unnatural feeling difficult to comprehend, he looked upon her as an object which had defeated his happiness.

"He visited his wrath, too, upon his wife, as if she could help what had occurred; but, being of a weak and patient spirit, she bore all in silence until she died.

"This girl, Miss Danville, grew up almost unrecognised and unthought of by her father, but her gentle, winning ways made her a favourite with all who knew her.

"She was loved, while her father was feared and hated.

"When very young, an attachment sprung up between her and the nephew of the housekeeper, a young, true-hearted, courageous, good-looking fellow, who, I believe, loves the very ground she treads on."

"The same that has just quitted the room, I suppose?" interrupted Dick.

"Yes, the same.

"Well, how long this attachment went on, or how long it would have continued, is very hard to say; but a certain fact recalled to the squire's brain that he had a child—a daughter.

"This fact was, that Squire Bartlett——"

At the mention of this name, Dick could not help giving a slight start, it came upon him so unexpectedly.

The landlord did not fail to notice it, for he said:

"You know this squire, then?"

"Scarcely," said Dick. "I have seen him once, that's all. But the name sounded familiar, and surprised me."

"Well, then, as I was saying, this Squire Bartlett, who is also very rich, possesses a large estate, which joins that belonging to Squire Danville.

"He has an only son—a dissolute, mean-spirited, cowardly hound, who, thank goodness, has not been much in this part of the country; and, if all I have heard about him is the truth, he is a wretch not fit to live.

"The two squires, as you may guess, were great friends, and it was nothing more than natural, I suppose, that they should talk upon the subject of their properties adjoining each other in the way they did.

"In brief, a kind of compact or agreement was made between them that their children should marry, so that, in the future, the whole possessions would become one.

"They never thought of consulting the young folks in any way, but the blow came upon Miss Danville like a thunderbolt.

"Her father ordered her into his presence, and, tremblingly, she obeyed, feeling as though she had committed

some great crime, and was about to be led into the presence of her judge.

"She heard her father express his intentions with feelings which I cannot describe.

"He took scarcely any notice of her, but bade her prepare to receive her future husband at once.

"Great difference was now made in the manner in which she was treated.

"She was now dressed in a manner suitable to her father's rank, and allowed to sit at the dinner-table with him.

"She was quickly brought face to face with young Bartlett, and I don't wonder that she should immediately conceive an utter aversion for him.

"She loathed the very sight of him, and took so little care to disguise her feelings, that all noted the change in her aspect, particularly the young man, who ground his teeth, and turned livid with rage; while he determined, no matter at what odds, to have his revenge upon her.

"She refused most positively to become his wife, and her father broke out into a storm of passion the like of which she had never before known.

"He was furious to think that, not content with having caused him one great disappointment in life, she was now endeavouring to cause him another.

"Such conduct he considered ungrateful and base in the extreme, but he determined not to be baulked this time.

"You may guess some one who was soon at hand whispered in his ears some particulars of the behaviour of his daughter and the housekeeper's nephew towards each other.

"Inquiry served to show that the whisper was correct, and he drove the young man ignominiously forth.

"Since then he has been reduced to great straits, for the housekeeper was dismissed also.

"The two squires, and young Bartlett as well, were all eager in the extreme that the marriage should take place; but Miss Danville showed a firmness and a spirit of resistance which had never been expected, and which filled them with surprise.

"But her father determined to carry things with a high hand.

"I know he had her confined like an ordinary prisoner, and scarcely allowed her enough to eat and drink.

"The poor girl pined and sorrowed, but all in vain; nothing would turn him from his purpose.

"To-morrow is the day fixed for the solemnisation of the marriage, and I can only suppose that, driven to extremities, she somehow managed to escape; and, feeling utterly wretched—perhaps in a delirium—threw herself into the water as you saw, in order to put an end to that existence which ought to be to her a blessing, and not a curse."

CHAPTER CMXXII.

DICK TURPIN FINDS HIS PATH STILL BESET WITH DIFFICULTIES.

"It is a sad enough story," said Dick Turpin, "and I for one am very sorry for the lovers. I cannot consider them in any way to blame."

"Neither can I," assented the landlord; "and although I am a tenant under the squire, yet I hold this place under a lease which, I fancy, will not expire before his death."

"So you feel yourself independent of him?"

"Yes, quite; and if I could do anything to make these two young folks happy, I would do it gladly."

"So would I."

A murmur of assent went round the room.

Clearly they were all of one way of thinking.

Dick Turpin had been accommodated with a very comfortable seat nearest to the fire, and while he had partaken of his meal, which he washed down with some of the very best ale in the landlord's cellar, he had got quite dry.

He was now anxious to continue his journey, for midnight was rapidly approaching.

It was just as he had made up his mind to rise and take his departure that the door of the kitchen was opened again, and the housekeeper's nephew made his appearance.

There was a great degree of bashfulness, not to say awkwardness, in his manner, and he glanced with some timidity into the faces of all present.

He evidently wished to say something, yet lacked the courage; and the opportunity to speak was quickly lost, for he was immediately questioned as to the state of Miss Danville.

"She has quite recovered," he said, in a sad tone, "but seems quite delirious. She could not have been in her right mind when she attempted to destroy herself, nor is she now."

"But she will soon be better, I trust," said the landlord.

"I hope so. But, then, that brings me to what I wished to say. I believe that all here present know my story, and are my friends?"

"We are—we are!" was the response that came from every lip.

"Well, then, my friends, since you admit yourselves to be such, give me your advice. I am young, and have had but little experience in the world. In what way shall I act for the best?"

This was a point open to a great deal of debate, and Dick Turpin was not slow to perceive it.

Nor was he any slower in making up his mind as to what he should say.

"I have saved the lady," he began, "and therefore consider that I have a good right to some voice in the matter."

"Yes, yes, certainly," murmured several.

"Well, then, my advice is simple, short, plain, and easy to follow. It is, young sir, that you go at once to Miss Danville, and persuade her to fly with you. Do not hesitate or scruple; you have a right to consult your own happiness, and so has she. Her father, by his conduct, has forfeited all right and title to the name; think nothing of him. I wish I could help you further than I can, but, unfortunately, it is impossible. However, take my advice, which is all that I can give. Place as great a distance between yourself and this inn as you can, in the shortest possible space of time."

Dick Turpin spoke warmly, and his words found an echo in the breasts of all present.

Probably they would have hesitated to give such clear and straightforward advice, yet when it was thus given by another they could not withhold their approbation of it.

A flush of colour mounted into the young man's cheeks, as he said:

"You fill me with joy, but I feel that such conduct on my part would be wrong—reprehensible in the highest degree."

"No, no—not a bit," said Turpin. "Procure Miss Danville's consent—and if I understand the case at all it will not be wanting—and then, as soon as you have it, off and away. When you are married, you will be master of the situation."

After a few more hesitating remarks, the young man withdrew, and as soon as he had gone Dick rose up from his seat.

"Are you going?" said the landlord.

"Yes, pressing business calls me, and I cannot linger. I have already stayed too long."

"And I must go too," said another voice.

A man whom Dick had scarcely noticed rose from an obscure corner near the fireplace.

He was a stout, well-built, burly-looking fellow, with closely-cropped hair, a thick, red, bull-like neck, and an altogether animal expression, if we may be allowed to use such a term.

Yet Dick looked at his well-developed form with some admiration.

The man's appearance, joined to his peculiar costume, enabled Dick to decide positively as to his calling.

He was a regular trained boxer or prize-fighter.

As soon as he had spoken, the landlord said:

"Very well, Mr. Reynalds—I will give orders for your pony to be put in at once."

"Do, and ask that lazy fellow of yours to be quick for once in his life, if such a thing is possible."

With this, Dick conceived he had nothing to do; but being, in a manner of speaking, interrupted by this stranger, he had paused.

Now, however, he began to take his leave.

But Mr. Reynalds came forward again.

"Beg your pardon, sir," he said, bluntly, and with genuine John Bull freedom, "but I like your pluck and your ways, though you are a stranger to me I am going some miles to-night, and if you happen to be travelling my way, why, I shall be glad of your company."

Dick Turpin said a few words expressive of his thanks for this kind offer, and while he was uttering them he was debating in his own mind whether he should accept of the invitation or not.

Certainly, as time had been lost, it would be an advantage, should Mr. Reynalds be travelling wards Somefield, to share his vehicle with him.

But, somehow or other, a presentiment of danger came over Dick, and he felt impelled to decline.

The feeling, however, was one of which he felt ashamed, and so he banished it.

"I am journeying north from here," he said.

"So am I," returned the prize-fighter. "May I ask how far you are going?"

"To Somefield."

"Somefield?" he repeated. "Ah! I am not going quite so far as that, but within a couple of miles or so of it. Did you come here on foot?"

"Yes."

"Then you had a long walk before you—that's all I can say. However, if you are willing to take half my gig, and ride with me as far as I am going, you are heartily welcome to do so."

"I am much obliged," said Dick; "and accept the offer with great pleasure. I am much obliged to you for it."

"Nay, nay, don't mention it; it isn't worth a word of thanks; and perhaps you would oblige me still further by taking one more glass before we part; we shall have time, for I know what a long-winded rascal the ostler is."

This offer, after some little pressing, Dick Turpin accepted.

Two farewell glasses were brought, and disposed of, and by that time word was brought that the horse and gig were ready at the door.

Once more bidding adieu, Dick and the prize-fighter departed.

On going out of the front door of the inn, Dick perceived a small, well-built pony harnessed to a light little gig, with large wheels that seemed built expressly for speed.

"There's a turn out, sir," said the prize-fighter, with perhaps pardonable pride—"there's a turn out, sir! Fit for any prince in the world! The lightest, best-made gig, and the fastest pony to be found within a hundred miles!"

"Very likely," said Dick, as he followed his companion's example, and climbed into the vehicle—"very likely."

Scarcely had he taken his seat than the prize-fighter, snatching hold of the reins, uttered a peculiar shout.

It was clearly one which the pony perfectly understood, for it started off at a most tremendous pace, and in a few moments the inn was left far behind.

"Don't she go rarely?" said Mr. Reynalds, addressing Dick, and breaking the silence. "Did you ever ride behind such a one?"

"I can't say I ever did. You travel a good deal, I suppose?"

"Yes. I am mostly knocking about the country—first in one place, then in another. Perhaps you know me, sir, though you are a stranger to me?"

"No—I can't say that I do."

"Well, then, my name is Reynalds—you heard the landlord say so—Reynalds, the prize-fighter, I am generally called."

"I have heard of you," said Dick, "though I little thought I should make acquaintance with you so strangely."

"Curious things do come about, and this is one of them But I am tired of this life; I have made up my mind not to fight any more."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I think I can manage tolerably well without it"

"You have been fortunate, then—made money?"

"Well, yes, fairish; but I have a little speculation under hand at the present moment which I have an idea will cause me but little trouble, and the net gain will be immense."

"I hope you will be successful," said Dick—"I hope so with all my heart."

"Do you indeed?"

"Yes. But why did you speak in that strange tone?"

"Oh, did I? Then I meant nothing—nothing at all, of course. But we are rolling along rarely, are we not?"

"Yes, we are."

"You see those twinkling lights yonder? That's where I shall stop? Somefield, as I told you, lies between two and three miles beyond."

"Then we shall soon part company?"

"Yes, I think that very likely."

"But," exclaimed Dick, "you are pulling up; what's that for?"

"This," was the prize-fighter's reply, as he let fall the reins and clutched Dick tightly by the throat—"this! I know you! Give in—it's no use to struggle, Dick Turpin, you are my prisoner, and I will have the whole of the reward!"

CHAPTER CMXXIII.

DICK TURPIN HAS A LIFE-AND-DEATH STRUGGLE WITH THE PRIZE-FIGHTER.

This attack was so sudden and unexpected that the highwayman had been thrown completely off his guard, and before he could well make out what had happened he was overpowered.

"Now I have you," said Mr. Reynolds. "And perhaps you understand the little speculation to which I referred. In two more minutes we shall be in the next town, and all will bear witness how I bring you in a prisoner, captured by my own unaided exertions!"

Pressing Dick's throat still tighter with one hand, the prize-fighter removed the other, and placed it in his pocket, doubtless with the intention of drawing forth something with which he would be able to secure his prisoner.

Dick Turpin seized that moment to make an effort of resistance.

He had been gradually summoning up all his powers, for he knew the struggle would be no trifling one.

The prize-fighter swore most fearfully, for he imagined his object had been accomplished.

But he found each moment that Dick appeared to grow stronger, and, adept as he was at wrestling and feats of strength, he felt that, for once in his life, he had encountered some one worthy of being called his match.

A struggle of the most furious character now took place in the narrow precincts of the gig.

Both had obtained a good hold, and it would have been difficult for anyone to have decided as to which would prove the victor.

No one was near, however, to note the different phases of the conflict.

But the two men fought none the less desperately on that account.

Suddenly, the prize-fighter, urged to desperation by disappointment and the peril of his position—for he felt Dick was obtaining the mastery over him—uttered again that peculiar cry which was the signal for the pony to set itself in motion.

Nor on this occasion was the signal disregarded.

With a bound that almost threw them both out of the vehicle into the road, the pony started off, terrified by the noise behind it.

Dick guessed at once the purpose of the prize-fighter, and it made him fully conscious of the desperate character of the man with whom he had to deal.

His object was to run the risk of the danger, and make his horse enter the town just before them, when doubtless he would easily obtain assistance.

It is true this would not enable him to lay claim to the whole of this reward, but he felt he would rather forego the whole of it than that Dick should escape him.

The highwayman dared not turn his attention to the horse in the least, nor put one hand to seize the reins, as such a course would have given his opponent the advantage.

Altogether heedless, then, of where the terrified beast was going, or what obstructions lay in his path, Dick

bent the whole of his energies to overcoming his antagonist.

The prize-fighter felt himself getting gradually wasted, but he still held on tenaciously.

He knew the town was now within a few yards of them, and he trusted in being able to retain his prisoner until then.

Dick knew this well, and guessed why he continued to struggle so fiercely.

Cold drops of perspiration started out upon his forehead, for he could not close his eyes to the fact that he was in very imminent danger indeed of being captured.

On went the horse at a more furious speed than ever, striking sparks from the hard ground with his hoofs as he went.

Hitherto he had kept directly in the middle of the road, and, providing he continued to do this, and did not abate his speed, there was just the possibility that he would get through the town almost before anyone was aware of what was the matter.

This was a frail hope to cling to, but it was better than none at all.

Dick did not dare to think of what a trifle would bring their headlong course to a stop.

The sudden turning of a corner, the approach of any other vehicle, or, indeed, the slightest obstruction in their way, and then most surely they would go down with a crash.

The next moment the lights of the town flashed before Dick's eyes.

The prize-fighter saw them, and tried to shout for succour.

But Dick's pressure on his windpipe was so great that he could only give vent to a gurgling sound.

The street was clear.

Several people, though, were standing about here and there, gazing with amazement at the strange sight that flitted past them almost before they knew what it was.

The market-place was reached, and passed, and Dick began to think that he should be fortunate enough to ride completely into the open country once more.

The prize-fighter also had this fear, for he changed his tactics.

In his rage, he felt altogether indifferent as to the amount of danger which might befall himself, and so he struggled furiously to fall over one side of the gig into the roadway, endeavouring, of course, to drag Dick Turpin with him.

The consequence of such a fall might perhaps have been death to both of them, but for this the prize-fighter did not care—death was preferable to being vanquished.

And now, indeed, the hardest portion of the struggle had arrived, for hitherto the prize-fighter had endeavoured to consult his own safety as far as possible, and his struggle had been more to overcome the highwayman and bind him.

Now it was almost more than Dick could do to prevent him from throwing himself into the road.

Could he have done so, and remained in the vehicle himself, all would have been well, comparatively speaking, though his danger then would have been considered appalling by most persons.

Dick felt that he was being drawn slowly but surely nearer to the edge of the gig.

He felt that in another moment nothing could save them from falling over.

Rendered desperate by his position, he took a desperate course to save himself.

With great suddenness he released his hold upon his antagonist, and at the same instant clenched both his fists and struck him two hard blows.

The man's grasp perceptibly relaxed.

But Dick followed up the blows by others.

The prize-fighter tried, but in vain, to obtain another grasp of his adversary.

But Dick eluded him, then dealt one more blow of so decisive a character that it put a complete termination to the contest.

With a rush and a hideous crash the prize-fighter fell over the wheel of the gig into the roadway.

To what extent he was injured Dick had no means of guessing, for such was the prodigious rate at which the pony was going, that his foe was in a moment out of sight.

Dick drew a long breath of thankfulness for this escape, and then had to settle down to face a danger scarcely less alarming.

The pony was now completely maddened, and Dick questioned whether any means could be adopted for checking his career.

The reins had dropped, and how to regain them was a mystery.

While going so swiftly, it seemed the height of madness to attempt to leap out of the vehicle, and allow the creature to take its own course.

Yet Dick felt this was what he would be compelled to do.

Just then his foot touched against something, and he stooped down to examine it more closely.

To his joy he found it was the rein, which had fallen over both ends of the dash-board of the gig, and so had remained secure.

Seizing hold of it, Dick began slowly but firmly to pull it tight.

But the horse seemed altogether heedless of the pressure of the bit.

Dick knew that his tremendous pace could not be checked all at once, but he hoped to do so by degrees.

His chief concern was to keep in the middle of the highway.

Tighter and tighter he pulled the reins, and yet tighter still, and he had at length the satisfaction of perceiving that the horse's speed perceptibly diminished.

He bent forward, and pulled again with his whole strength, which proved, unfortunately, too great for the strength of the reins themselves.

With a sudden snap the leather parted, and the frantic animal, again feeling his head at liberty, and chafing under the restraint he had just endured, flew onwards again, if possible at greater speed.

Dick now had clearly no resource but to run the risk of descending from the vehicle, and, after a moment's consideration, he determined to do so by lowering himself over the back.

Climbing over the seat, and clinging tightly to the scroll iron-work at the back, he lowered himself down until his feet almost touched the ground.

It required, even then, a great effort of courage to let go.

But Dick did so, and though he strove to save himself from falling, he failed to do so, and reached the ground with most unpleasant violence.

For a few seconds all the breath was knocked out of his body, but he seemed to be recovered by hearing a tremendous crash.

Raising himself up a little, he looked in advance, and then saw that one wheel of the gig had come in contact with a post, after which the vehicle seemed to vanish as though by magic, while the pony, with portions of the wreck clinging to his harness, continued his mad career.

CHAPTER CMXXIV.

DICK TURPIN TAKES REFUGE IN A TREE, BUT FINDS HE IS BY NO MEANS OUT OF DANGER.

Dick Turpin struggled to his feet, and wiped his face, which had not escaped injury by his fall.

He had good cause indeed for congratulating himself upon having made up his mind to quit the gig when he did.

Had he remained only a few moments longer the chance would have been lost, and he could scarcely have escaped with life had he been seated in the vehicle when it came into such violent contact with the post.

Dick's brain was still confused, and he stood for some time in the road in a strange, dreamy condition.

He was startled, however, by hearing behind the sounds of horses' hoofs beating rapidly on the hard road, and at the very same moment he also perceived in the distance before him two faint, glimmering lights, which, from their distance apart, evidently proceeded from a stage-coach, or some other vehicle carrying lamps.

Dick started at once into life and energy.

"The prize-fighter has given the alarm," he muttered



[THE OFFICERS TAKE EFFECTUAL MEASURES TO DISLODGE DICK TURPIN FROM THE TREES.]

—"that's quite certain. Perhaps, after all, he was not much injured by his frightful fall—at any rate, they are coming, and it must be after me!"

He paused and wondered what step he should take to secure his own safety.

He remembered that he was on foot, while his pursuers were tolerably well mounted.

Therefore flight seemed a thing altogether out of the question.

No matter how fleet of foot he might be, in the end he must inevitably be overtaken.

Moreover, he felt in no condition for making use of his running powers, for he began to feel now more acutely than he had at first how much he had been bruised and shaken by falling.

On both sides of the road tall trees were growing, most of them with trunks many feet in circumference, and with branches stretching far and wide in every direction.

"I may be able to conceal myself in one of those trees," he thought—"at any rate, I will try. They cannot see me, I feel assured, and it would take them a long time to examine these trees, one by one in succession, supposing they had a suspicion that I had taken refuge in one of them.

While speaking these words, Dick had fixed his eyes upon one particular tree, which he determined to select as his hiding-place.

It was one that afforded several facilities for climbing.

Scrambling up the bank at the side of the road, on which the hedge was planted, he managed, by reaching up his arms to their full extent, to grasp a stout horizontal bough.

To raise himself by the aid of his hands and feet was now quite easy, and in less than a moment he had ascended half-way up the tree, and had ensconced himself

as a spot where the branches and twigs seemed to grow thickest.

Here he remained sitting perfectly still, and waiting, not without great anxiety, to ascertain what would happen next.

The trampling of the horses' feet in one direction, and the rattling of wheels in another now grew much plainer than before, and, glancing down through the interstices of the trees, Dick again perceived the shining lights.

Directly afterwards a body of mounted men galloped past.

But upon reaching the spot where the gig had crashed against the post they came to a halt.

"Hullo!" said a voice, "he's reached the end of his race, that's certain! My eyes, what a smash!"

He pointed as he spoke to the different fragments of the gig that were strewn in all directions over the roadway.

"I wonder where the horse is?" said a voice. "Do you think he has managed to get on to the back of it and galloped off? He's a desperate character, you know, and might have done such a thing."

"Well, we shall soon know that, I think, for here comes something or other."

"What is it—the stage-coach?"

"No, no," said another voice—"not the stage-coach; it is no doubt the mail-cart."

"Yes—yes, to be sure! And if it is, the driver and the guard will be able to tell us whether a man has galloped past them."

"So they will."

A moment's silence took place.

Although this conversation took place at some distance down the road below the spot where Dick was hidden, yet he was able to hear distinctly every word of it, for the night air was very still, and what little wind there was wafted the sounds towards him.

"Hoi—hoi!" cried one of the mounted police officers. "Stop—stop, will you? Pull up!"

The driver of the mail-cart stopped his panting horses somewhat suddenly, and, in a gruff voice, demanded:

"What's the matter?"

"Why, there's a smash here—do you see? And just tell us whether you have seen a man mounted on a pony gallop past you?"

"No, no," answered the driver—"we've not seen that! But we have seen a pony, with a couple of shafts dangling at its sides, gallop down the road yonder as though it was mad."

"And there was no one on its back?"

"No, not exactly," said the driver, with a grin. "I should like to see the man that would attempt such a thing."

"Well, we're after Dick Turpin!" said the officer who had before spoken.

"What?" cried the driver of the mail-cart, in some alarm. "You don't mean to say he's on this road, do you?"

"Yes, he is, or was a short time since. Why, do you know, he got up into a gentleman's gig and, after having robbed him, bundled him out neck and crop into the road. It's a thousand wonders that he escaped with his life, and even now the gentleman lies in a very dangerous state."

"You don't mean it?"

"It's a fact."

"But when did it happen?"

"Only a few minutes ago."

The driver rolled his eyes fearfully as he asked:

"But what did Turpin do?"

"Why, drove off in the gentleman's gig, to be sure, as if the very devil was behind him. We came on in pursuit, and here, you see, it seems he met with a little mishap while going at such a furious rate."

"Yes, it certainly looks like it. But where is he?"

"That's just what I want to know. I fancied he might have got on the horse's back and galloped down the road; but, as it appears he has not done that, why, I think if we look about here we shall find him."

"Yes," said the guard, "depend upon it he could not be in the gig while it went all to smash like this without being hurt a bit. He won't get far away, take my word for that!"

"Jim's right," said the driver. "You may depend upon it he's hiding somewhere close at hand; I shouldn't wonder if the rascal isn't listening to every word we say."

At these words the officers faced about and ran against each other, producing great confusion.

"We'll search!" said the one in command. "Now, my lads, let us look about us. It's ten to one, hiding in some ditch or other."

"No," said the guard, emphatically, "it's my belief that he'd scramble up into one of those trees; it could be managed easily enough. When once there, who could see him?"

The officers looked up and shook their heads wisely as they beheld the dense foliage of the trees.

"Now," said the guard, "I'll tell you what—I've an idea—a grand idea."

"What is it?"

"Why, if he's up in one o' them trees it will be very hard to find out which one it is, won't it?"

"Yes, very," said the chief officer. "We might fire a bullet into one of them; but I'll warrant he'd have the good sense to remain quite still—I'll warrant he would stand fire."

"Yes, from a pistol," said the guard, "because he would think there was a good chance of one bullet missing him. But how about this little weapon, eh?—what do you think of this?"

From the leather case beside the mail-cart he produced a large-sized carbine of the kind then made use of by the military.

"Yes," continued the guard, as he jumped down off the steps of the mail-cart, "I rather think this will be the ticket. And, mark me, if Dick Turpin is up in one of those trees I'll show him something he has never thought of in all his life."

"Is it loaded?" said the chief officer.

"Yes, of course it's loaded. The priming mayn't be just the thing; but, however, I'll soon put that right."

As he spoke, the guard threw up the pan, shook out the grains of powder in it, and placed in some fresh.

"Now," he said, "I am ready, and this gun has in it a rattling good charge, I can assure you."

"Stop a bit," said the chief officer. "Are you going to fire up in the trees with it?"

"Of course I am!"

"But how do you know which one he is in?"

"I will soon find that out," said the guard, as he put the carbine up to his shoulder. "I will begin with this one."

"Stop—stop!"

"What for?"

"Why, you know," said the officer, "that I must call him first to surrender."

"Oh, yes—certainly; I forgot."

The police officer then stepped a little more into the middle of the roadway, and, pitching his voice in a higher key, exclaimed:

"Dick Turpin, we, his Majesty's officers of police, have good reason for believing that you have concealed yourself in one of these trees, and in the King's name we call upon you to surrender, and if, after having called upon you three times——"

"Blow it!" said the guard, impatiently, "be quick! Don't you know I am in a hurry?"

"You be d—d!" said the officer, angrily. "Who told you to interfere? Don't you think I know my duty better than you do?"

"Oh yes, that's right enough," said the guard, in a more mollified tone: "but you are so awfully long-winded."

The chief officer evidently thought something of the guard's carbine, or he would not have smothered his resentment so easily.

Once more looking up into the trees, he said:

"Dick Turpin, I call upon you to surrender, and warn you if you do not that we shall fire, and the consequences will then be on your own head!"

A profound silence followed this speech, that would have been perfect save for the incessant rustling of the trees.

"Dick Turpin, for the second time I call upon you to surrender!"

Again there was a deep silence.

"For the third time," said the chief officer, in a louder voice than before—"for the third time, I call upon you to surrender!"

Again a deep silence.

"Have you done?" said the guard.

"Yes."

"And time too," he muttered, as he placed the butt of the carbine to his shoulder.

The chief officer pretended not to overhear this remark.

"If he's there," said the guard, "it will be a case with him, and no mistake! I loaded the carbine myself, and know just how many bullets are in it."

"Blaze away, then!"

The guard pointed the carbine full at the tree, and then pulled the trigger.

A slight flash and a tremendous report then followed, and the next thing the officers perceived was the guard lying at full length on his back in the middle of the road, with the muzzle of the carbine pointed skywards.

The bullets went crashing among the boughs of the tree in truly an alarming fashion.

Most effectually had all doubt been set at rest respecting the presence of the highwayman in that tree at least.

Had he been there he must have fallen to the earth, riddled with bullets.

The guard scrambled up to his feet again, and looked very ferocious when he saw all the officers were laughing at his expense.

"Oh, grin away," he said—"grin away, and be d—d to you! It only shows what an uncommon good charge I'd got in the carbine! If you'll wait half a minute, we'll have a try at the next tree."

The officers showed no signs of dissent.

The carbine accordingly was loaded, and one of the officers produced from a little bag a number of pistol bullets, quite a handful of which was poured in, and tightly rammed down.

Again the weapon was raised and discharged.

But with no more result than before.

The guard staggered back after he had pulled the trigger, and tried hard to keep his balance, but he failed, and sat down with such force that all the breath was jerked out of his body.

He looked upon all these failures and mishaps with great complacency, however, for he said to the officers:

"We may make sure he isn't in either of those trees, mayn't we? But he might be hiding in the next, or the next, and if he is in any one of them I'll find him, for I won't stop until I have fired into every tree."

While speaking, he recommenced the task of loading the carbine.

It was an operation that did not require many minutes, and for the third time he stood facing the trees. Now, up to the present moment Dick had looked upon these proceedings with a tolerable amount of composure, simply because the muzzle of the carbine was not pointed at the tree in which he had so snugly ensconced himself, and he clung to the hope that after a few trials they would get disgusted with wasting so much powder and shot.

But their proceedings were more energetic and persevering than he had at all calculated upon, and he began to feel extremely uneasy, for the tree at which the carbine was now directed stood next to the one where he was hidden.

He fixed his eyes upon the guard, and then involuntarily closed them.

When he pulled the trigger the report and crashing of the bullets among the branches was alarming in the extreme; but he quickly recovered himself, for he found he was as yet unhurt.

He had been labouring under great apprehension, however, for it was quite possible that one of the many bullets crammed into the carbine might go so far wide of its mark as to reach him.

Now, however, he held his breath, while his heart beat hard and fast.

The guard, still undaunted, was as actively engaged as ever in reloading his formidable weapon.

CHAPTER CMXXV.

THE GUARD OF THE MAIL-CART PERSEVERES IN THE PROSECUTION OF HIS PLAN.

DICK TURPIN was now truly in a most critical position.

What step to take he knew not.

He was decidedly unwilling to cry out, and so ignominiously surrender himself to the police; but for all that, he could not make up his mind to sit there and remain an animated target.

In fact, he felt sure, should the guard fire the carbine into the tree, his destruction would be immediate and certain.

It was quite impossible for him to escape at least one of the bullets, and he knew well that any one of them would be sufficient to cause death.

No words can possibly describe the amount of intentness with which he regarded the proceedings of his foes below.

Oh, how he hated that officious, troublesome guard of the mail-cart.

Without him the officers could never have carried out their present plan of operations.

Dick sat and watched the reloading of the carbine.

He waited until the whole operation was completed, and then, with a start, remembered that he had not yet made up his mind how he should act.

"I'll tell you what," said the chief officer, "I am tired of this sort of thing, for I don't believe he is in the trees at all; however, you shall have this one fire, and if it produces no results we'll part company."

"Oh, just as you like," said the guard—"just as you like! I don't mind it—I look upon it as a capital bit of sport."

But the officers clearly did not do so, for they were conscious that if they were now on the wrong scent they were giving the highwayman every opportunity of completing his escape.

"Are you ready?" said the officer, gruffly.

"Yes, quite ready."

"Then bang away; and make haste about it!"

For the fourth time the carbine was raised and pointed at the trees.

Dick sat perfectly still, and as he did so he fancied he could see right down the barrel of the murderous fire-arm.

Only a second elapsed, and yet to Dick it seemed a whole age.

A thousand thoughts passed through his mind.

He felt that he was on the brink of destruction.

He gave a thought to Maud, to his friends, to all he had any occasion to remember with kindness, and then closed his eyes and compressed his lips with the resolution to die calmly.

Nothing short of a miracle could save him.

But his conviction was that if his time had come it would be much better to perish by one of the bullets from the guard's carbine than descend to be taken prisoner by the police.

In either case his death would be certain.

But a loud cry at this moment made him open his eyes and start so violently that the branches of the trees clashed together.

It was the driver of the mail-cart who had given utterance to the shout.

The guard had turned round quick as lightning, wondering what had happened—an alarming character.

"Look—look!" said the driver, standing upon his seat, and pointing across the meadows with one hand. "May I never hold the reins again if the rascal is not taking his way quite coolly over the fields yonder!"

"What—what?" exclaimed the officers.

"Jump up—jump up, all of you, and you will see! Look—look! Yonder he goes, just by that tall poplar tree!"

The officers scrambled up into the cart, and gazed eagerly in the direction to which the driver's finger pointed.

We have already described the nature of the night as being one when the moon broke forth at times in revals.

A large rift of blue could now be seen between the clouds, and in this the moon was shining with a lustre unsurpassable.

Far and wide all objects could be distinctly seen, and the police, as they gazed over the fair, silvery-looking country, uttered ejaculations of surprise and astonishment.

At first they could not credit their vision, but a second glance assured them that they saw aright.

Dick Turpin, in his well-known scarlet coat, his large white cravat, and his three-cornered hat, was making his way at a sharp trot across the level expanse of meadow-land.

"Curse it all!" said the chief officer, as he pulled off his hat and in his rage smacked it down into the roadway. "Something told me that we were wasting our time on a wrong scent! But never mind! He is not far off my lads! Come on—we shall have him yet!"

The police left the mail-cart even more precipitately than they had climbed into it, and then ran with might and main to their horses.

"Jenkins," roared the chief, "run to that gate yonder, and open it, then we can make haste through."

One of the men hastened off to obey this command, while the others scrambled with the best speed they could into their saddles.

It was wonderful to see in what an incredibly short space of time they were all in the saddle and in motion.

The gate was held open, and they dashed through it in a dense throng, quite heedless of the injuries they received by coming in contact with each other and with the gate-posts.

Once in the meadow, they separated, and away they went at the utmost speed of which their horses were capable.

No person had been more surprised or astounded at this sudden turn of affairs than Dick Turpin himself.

He sat up in the tree with a dim, vague consciousness about him that he had escaped by a hair's breadth from a dreadful death.

He peered as well as he could through the branches of the trees, and presently made out the form of the horseman that the officers had mistaken for him.

Dick did not wonder at the error.

The figure did in many respects resemble himself.

Nor was he at any loss to recognise the rider.

It was Tom King.

After the officers had entered the meadow, Dick remained in the same position, watching vigilantly and full of anxiety to learn the result of the chase.

To his great disappointment, however, Tom King became suddenly lost to view behind a large clump of trees.

He watched to see him reappear from them.

But in vain.

Then did his concern for his old comrade redouble.

He felt pretty certain that Tom King had no idea the officers were so close behind him.

On the soft sward their horses' feet would not make noise enough to reach his ears.

"He has been well hunted about the country, that's certain," Dick muttered to himself, "and now he believes himself in safety. Ten to one he will stop among those trees for rest and shelter; and if he does his position will be an awkward one, for the officers will absolutely be upon him before he is aware that they are at hand."

Dick watched the officers until they, too, could be seen no longer.

Then he turned to a consideration of his own position.

The guard and driver of the mail-cart had also stood watching intently until there was nothing more to be seen.

Then Dick heard the latter exclaim:

"Well, some, old fellow, I think we have loitered on our journey long enough. The horses must make up for it, though—it will not do for us to arrive late."

"No, certainly not."

"Well, then, we'll be off."

"In one moment," said the guard, as, with the carbine in his hand, he jumped out of the cart—"one moment! I'll just have this one bang for the say-so of the thing, and after that I shall be ready to go with you."

These last words fairly took away Dick's breath when he heard them, they came upon him so unexpectedly when now he suddenly found himself in the same imminent peril as before.

The only question that now arose in his mind was whether he should at once reveal his presence in the tree.

It would be a very different thing to deal with these two men, only he fancied indeed he should be able successfully to cope with them.

He gave one keen, rapid glance in the direction the officers had taken.

To his great joy, he found they were still out of sight.

"Jim," said the driver of the mail-cart, as soon as the guard had ceased speaking, "don't make a fool of yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, not exactly what I said. But don't try to be a bigger fool than you are, for that's quite needless."

"You be blowed!"

"Very well; but I just tell you this much: I am going, and if you like to come with me, well and good; if not, stay where you are, and you can fire up those trees till doomsday, if you like!"

With these words the driver gave his horses a smart cut with the whip, and the animals, who had been chafing under their restraint all the while, now started off at a capital speed.

"Hi—hi!" roared the guard—"stop—stop!"

The driver slackened his speed.

"Are you coming?"

"Just this one shot!"

"No, I'm off."

But the guard was determined not to be baulked in his whim, so, hastily raising his piece, he pulled the trigger.

He did not wait to see the result of the explosion, but ran off down the road as fast as his legs could carry him, bawling lustily to his comrade to pull up.

He was out of sight in a few moments, and then there was a slight rustling in the tree.

It was caused by Dick Turpin taking off his hat.

He looked at it, and through the broad brim he saw a large jagged hole, which would admit his finger easily.

"A close shave," he muttered. "But a miss is as good as a mile, I've heard say. Confound the fellow, he's been the cause of half my troubles!"

Dick felt himself carefully all over to ascertain that he had received no other hurt, and, having satisfied himself on this particular point, he paused to look around him on all sides before he ventured to make his descent.

No human being was in sight, nor did any sound break the silence, save that which the wind produced.

The moon was again hidden by clouds, and Dick felt rejoiced at it, because he knew how much it would favour his escape.

Rapidly, then, he descended from bough to bough until he once more stood on the firm earth.

Then he shook himself thoroughly, as though by that means he could rid himself of all the disagreeable circumstances through which he had just passed.

"I have had some close touches," was his muttered remark. "But no matter! There's much before me that I must attend to—besides, the hour is much later than I could wish. As all is so quiet I will set forward at once."

He carried out this intention without delay.

He knew perfectly well that he could be at no very great distance from his destination, but yet he had to consider for some moments before he was able to say positively in which direction Somefield lay.

Having at last decided upon the point, he took his course in a straight line, disregarding the obstacles that continually placed themselves in his path.

In this way he had not proceeded long, before he perceived before him a bright, ruddy gleam of light.

It increased in brilliancy with a rapidity truly marvellous, and soon the whole horizon was lighted up.

The dense clouds lost their former sombre look, and glowed with crimson.

"A fire," said Dick, after he had gazed in silence for some moments at this spectacle—"yes, surely a fire! And how fiercely and rapidly it rages!"

In a few more minutes he was so close to the scene of conflagration as to behold the huge columns of smoke as-

cending, and the thousands of brilliant sparks that rushed upwards.

As he continued to gaze, a strange feeling of uneasiness sprang up in his breast—a feeling that was indefinable, but yet which increased in power every moment.

A vague consciousness that something was wrong—that something was about to happen which would be to him a greater misfortune than anything that had yet happened to him—took full possession of his heart.

For a brief space of time it unnerved him, but, obtaining command over himself, he redoubled his speed, changing his course slightly and making his way direct to the scene of conflagration.

CHAPTER CMXXVI.

IN WHICH BLACK BESS MAKES HER APPEARANCE BEFORE THE PUBLIC IN A FRESH CHARACTER.

HAVING brought the narrative up to this point, we will take our leave of Dick Turpin for awhile, and revert to the proceedings of two others, in whom it is presumed scarcely a secondary interest is felt.

The others we allude to are Maud and Black Bess, who, the readers will recollect, had been left in the charge of the friendly proprietor of the circus.

It was shortly after Dick's departure that a man, travel-stained, dusty, and weary, came walking slowly over the common on which the strollers may be said to have encamped.

His eyes were fixed upon the bright, ruddy fire they had lighted, and which looked like a beacon of hope in the gloom.

As he drew nearer the sound of footsteps was heard, and Smithini himself, starting up, strained his eyes in the endeavour to make out the form and features of the intruder.

It was not long before he succeeded, for this new-comer advanced boldly until the ruddy light from the fire fell full upon his haggard countenance.

"Why, Joe," said Smithini, extending his hand, "can it be possible—is it you?"

"Yes, there is no doubt about it," replied the other, sadly. "I have managed to get thus far."

"But I thought you were laid up, unable to move, after that terrible fall of yours."

"Well, I was, and I am not right now, but better; I am starving, though," he added, "and so am not likely to improve. I recollected you, and from the past felt certain that you would do all you could to help me."

"So I will," said Smithini. "We'll talk about that more at length to-morrow. Here, sit down and have something to eat."

The man gladly complied, and, sitting down, he removed his hat and the wrapper from the lower portion of his face.

The firelight then disclosed the countenance of a middle-aged man, with many deep lines furrowed upon it, and the whiteness of which was brought into strong relief by the black moustache he wore upon his upper lip.

To many he was known, and as soon as their greeting was over, Smithini, turning to him, said:

"Have you any news, Joe? Is there anything fresh?"

"No," he returned, "nothing at all, except a rather odd thing that happened to me on my way here."

"What was that?"

"Why, I was suddenly encountered and surrounded by a troop of police officers. I was much frightened—I could not help it. I was rigidly examined and closely questioned, and it would seem that I had been mistaken for another."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. These officers are in pursuit of a highwayman and a female he has with him. They have been tracked to somewhere near this place, but the clue has been lost. However, they are resolved to find it."

These words gave Smithini more uneasiness than he thought proper to express.

Maud, too, overheard the words, and it cost her a great effort to preserve anything resembling calmness.

Her anxiety to hear more, however, overcame every other consideration.

"They are on their way to this place even now," continued the man. "No doubt you will see them shortly, and they will make the same inquiries of you."

"What makes you think that?"

"Simply because I left them coming in this direction, and because I heard them say that they were resolved to question everyone they met."

Smithini lapsed into silence.

At length, however, he spoke.

"I don't like the grabs," he said; "I never did; I had half made up my mind to stay here till to-morrow, but now my determination is changed—we'll start at once"

"And to what place are you bound?"

"Somefield."

"Oh, not far from here—I know the place."

"Yes, we shall reach it in a short time easily."

He rose from his seat as he spoke these last words, and issued rapid injunctions to the others to get all ready for a start.

The injunctions did not require much time to carry out—indeed, sooner than could have been expected they were all in motion.

"Fear nothing," said Smithini, whispering in Maud's ear, "I will protect you; while with me you are safe. I am doing this merely in the way of precaution."

"And Dick," she said—"will he find us?"

"Oh yes, I arranged all about that. Do not be apprehensive on that score. All I wish is to avoid a meeting with the officers."

The journey to Somefield was performed in safety and in secrecy.

Day was just beginning to dawn when they halted on a piece of waste ground just outside the little town.

A short time was allowed for repose, then the men began busily to work at erecting their large canvas tent.

It was not long before their arrival became known to the inhabitants, and there was soon a crowd of idle spectators, who stood and watched all their preparations.

It was announced that one grand performance in the circus would be given at mid-day, and by that time everything was in readiness.

To the deep disappointment of all, and Smithini in particular, for he had met with much ill-luck of late, they met with very little encouragement.

So few people, indeed, sat down upon the seats that none of the performers felt the heart to go through their performance properly.

When the audience had been dismissed, Maud found her new but kind-hearted and trusty friend seated in an attitude of deep dejection.

Anxiously she inquired into the cause.

"My usual luck," he said; "I don't know what it is to do well now. There was a time, however, when all was different, but it is no good thinking about that. You see, the people will not come, and my stock of money is now exhausted!"

Maud was not in a position to suggest any means by which Smithini could be helped out of his difficulty, yet she longed for the power to do so.

She valued his friendship, for there were few indeed who would hold out to herself and Dick a protecting hand.

"I don't know what to bring forward to attract the public," Smithini continued. "I am completely at fault!"

"And I," said Maud, "cannot help you. If I could I would with all my heart. There is nothing I would not do to assist you."

Smithini raised his eyes and fixed them keenly upon her countenance.

"Are you sure of what you say?" he asked.

"Quite sure," she answered, earnestly. "Now tell me why?"

"I was thinking—— But no—no," he broke off, "I will not give utterance to that thought; it is wrong—madness!"

"Let me know it," said Maud—"let me form my judgment of it."

Smithini resisted, but she was so pressing that he at last complied.

"Well, then," he said, "the wild idea just for a moment crossed my mind that Black Bess might be the means of saving me."

"Of saving you? How so?"

"Why," he continued, "I have been told that her master has trained her with uncommon care, and that she

is possessed of rare intelligence. It would take too long to repeat one half of the stories I have heard, but doubtless there is only a slight foundation for them."

"Not so slight as you imagine," said Maud, with a glow of joy, for she was delighted at seeing this prospect opened out before her of testifying her gratitude to her new friend—"not so slight as you imagine," she repeated. "At various times I have seen strange things done. She would obey his every word, but I fancy will attend to no one else."

"It is very likely."

"Still," she continued, with fresh animation, "if you will allow me to try I shall gladly do so. You must not forget she is so disguised that even I should not recognise her, and it might be that this would prove sufficient to attract the people."

Smithini evidently thought so.

The proposal was one that recommended itself to him in every way, but yet he hesitated.

Maud, however, insisted upon carrying out the course she had suggested.

Black Bess was brought, and she endeavoured by imitating Dick's manner to induce her to perform several tricks which she had seen.

The experiment met with a success that exceeded their most sanguine expectations.

But having succeeded so far, an obstacle now obtruded itself which threatened to be insurmountable.

To perform these tricks it would be necessary that Maud herself should appear before the audience, a thing from which under any circumstances she would have shrunk.

But now it would have been dangerous in the highest degree for her to do so.

Among the many eyes that might be upon her, there would be a strong probability of her recognition.

"I have it," said Smithini, in a voice of exultation—"I have it; our fortunes are made. 'The Masked Lady,' that sounds well, does it not? It will make a good line, too: 'The Masked Lady and her Matchless Steed, White Diamond, will give their unrivalled performance.'"

"Yes," said Maud, "I could wear a mask, and then there would be almost an end to danger. At any rate, I will run the risk."

Even then Smithini hesitated.

He thought of Dick, and wondered in what light the highwayman would look upon the affair.

He was no stranger to the fact that Turpin placed a priceless value on his mare, and should any accident befall her—should she be recognised, what could he say then?

But for Maud's determination, he would at the last moment have abandoned the idea; but she was firm, and resolved that it should be carried out.

The next step was to make the inhabitants of the town aware of what was going to be performed, and this task was executed as well as the shortness of the time at their disposal would admit.

"I don't care," said Smithini. "Let only half a dozen come the first time, and I shall be satisfied. When they have seen this performance they will pour a glowing account of it into the ears of everyone."

Rather late in the afternoon a second performance was given.

It was rather better attended than the first; but it was evident they had been induced to come by the representations that had been put forth respecting the Masked Lady and White Diamond.

The moment for Maud's appearance at length came, and, dizzy and confused, she rode into the ring.

She was received with a loud burst of applause, and all looked on with the greatest excitement and eagerness at the strange spectacle of a masked performer.

Trembling for the result, Maud then uttered the words of command that Dick Turpin himself had used.

It would really seem that Black Bess understood the nature of her position, for never before had she appeared so docile—so intelligent.

Every command that Maud gave was obeyed with a promptitude that produced unbounded applause.

The experiment was a complete success.

When all was over, Black Bess was led round the ring, and all admired her matchless shape and proportions.

Never had their eyes rested on such a steed,

But little did they dream what steed it was.

Smithini, in the character of manager, announced that a repetition of the performance would be given that evening, and then the audience departed.

The words he had made use of were prophetic.

Those who had witnessed the performance of White Diamond gave so glowing an account of it that all who heard determined to attend, especially when those who had paid the visit on the first occasion declared their intention of going a second time.

To the joy of Smithini and his troop, long before the announced hour of opening, a great crowd besieged the entrance to the tent.

In they rushed, in one continuous stream, packing themselves into the closest possible compass.

The canvas erection was crammed to its fullest extent—it would not have been possible for another person to have found standing-room.

Thus the time passed on until the hour for Maud's second appearance.

Her success was even greater than on the previous occasion.

Still, there remained outside a crowd of persons sufficiently large to fill the tent again, and, by the generally-expressed wish of all, a third performance was announced, although the hour was then so late a one.

Fortune was at last smiling upon Smithini.

The money rolled in so fast that he could scarcely find places in which to stow it.

It happened thus, that the hour was long past midnight when Maud again appeared.

Again was the performance a complete success.

But before it was half over, a loud, appalling shriek was heard.

It was followed by another, and then from the throats of all issued the one word "Fire!"

There was an instantaneous rush, and then, as though to make the calamity complete, the seats, which had never been designed for the accommodation of so many people, suddenly gave way on one side.

There was a hideous crash, and the next moment the people were lying on the ground in a confused and bleeding mass.

As the seats all depended upon each other for support, those on the other side fell also before those seated on them could succeed in making an escape.

Then followed a scene of such appalling horror that no tongue could describe it, and the fearful nature of the scene was enhanced by the rapid progress of the flames.

They spread with a rapidity truly alarming.

Something might have been done to check them, it is true, but there was no one who could take that direction of affairs upon themselves at the right moment, and so the fire raged on.

By twos and threes, the bruised and burned people rolled out on to the open ground.

Selfishness reigned paramount.

No thought was given by anyone to the sufferings of another.

In the midst of the confusion a man appeared, whose arrival was unnoticed in the general excitement.

It was Dick Turpin, who had seen from afar the conflagration, and who, on coming close enough, had found that it proceeded from Smithini's circus.

He did not know at that moment that Maud was in the very centre of the building, hemmed in by maddened, furious people.

But he dashed on at a venture, looking everywhere for her.

He saw her not—he saw no one of whom he could ask a single question.

He felt certain, however, that if he raised his voice she would recognise it, and give vent to an answering cry, which would enable him to proceed to her rescue.

There was danger about this course; but at such a moment as that such danger was not to be thought of.

"Maud," he cried—"Maud—Maud! Where are you? Speak, that I may hear your voice!"

He fancied that the roaring of the flames and the shrieks and cries of the populace beat down and drowned his words.

He thought just then too, of Black Bess, and wondered she was in the midst of the scene of riot.

Just then his eyes fell upon a man, begrimed with smoke, and with his clothing badly torn.

Nevertheless, he recognised him.

It was Smithini.

"Maud—Maud!" Dick exclaimed, as he seized hold of him. "Where is she—where is she?"

Smithini answered only by a groan.

Alarmed beyond expression, Dick repeated his inquiry, and so furiously that Smithini was terrified into a reply.

"She's there," he said, pointing to the remains of the circus—"she's there, in the very midst of the wreck, and Black Bess is with her!"

CHAPTER CMXXVII.

DICK TURPIN IS MUCH HARASSED BY THE POLICE OFFICERS.

Upon receipt of this intelligence Dick Turpin clasped both his hands over his face, and uttered a deep groan.

But he banished the emotion quickly, for he felt that it was the moment for deeds, not for grief.

How he was to make his way through the fighting, struggling throng, and gain the centre of the circus he had no idea, and it was fortunate indeed even at that dire moment that he should maintain sufficient presence of mind to be aware that any attempt to mix himself up with the throng would prove fatal.

His mind at the same instant grasped another idea.

Smithini had said that Black Bess was with Maud, and that reminded him that he had the power of calling Black Bess to his side.

There was a possibility—just a remote possibility—that Maud might come with Black Bess if he gave utterance to the signal.

The experiment was worth trying, and almost without reflection he whistled shrilly.

There was an answering neigh, and then the confusion on the spot where the circus had stood was redoubled.

With a furious rush and frantic, terrified bounds, Black Bess came galloping over those people who chanced to be in her way.

Dick could scarcely summon up his courage to look and see whether Maud was with her.

Tremblingly and in great fear he raised his eyes, and then, with a cry of joy, sprang forward.

Maud was there, seated upon Black Bess, and to all appearance quite unhurt.

In another second she was in his arms, and pressed tightly to his breast.

"Safe," she said—"I am quite safe and unhurt! And you, too, have escaped?"

"Yes—yes!" said Dick, whose heart was now lightened of a terrible load—"yes, all is well. And Bess—what about her?"

"She, too, I think, is quite unharmed, or if she is hurt it is only in a very trifling degree."

At this moment Smithini came hurrying towards them, and by the expression of his face it could be seen that some fresh calamity had befallen him.

"All is lost!" he said, when he came nearer. "My bad luck clings to me! I thought I had got the better of it for once, but no, I have not. I am now a ruined man in the fullest sense of the word!"

Dick thought he referred to the fire, but in this he was quickly undeceived.

"The receipts have been stolen," continued Smithini—"all the money taken at the doors has been carried off by the mob. I had no means of placing it in safety, and it is gone. I have not now a shilling in the world!"

"No matter," said Dick; "you remember my promise. I will be as good as my word."

"Hush—hush!" said Smithini, suddenly—"look there, Dick—look there!"

He pointed to a spot close to the scene of conflagration—a spot that was only a few yards distant.

"Officers," ejaculated Dick—"officers, as I live! I must retreat at once; perhaps I shall be lucky enough to escape unseen. Come, Maud, up quickly—quickly!"

Maud was trembling violently, and weeping, for she had not yet overcome her last excitement.

Dick, however, in this moment of fresh danger was calm and steady enough.

Keeping his eyes fixed upon the officers so as not for a moment to lose sight of their actions, he placed his hand upon the saddle and swung himself easily into his seat.

It was just then that a voice cried out in loud, shrill tones:

"Here he is—here he is; I have him now, and no mistake."

While these words were uttered, Dick felt his leg suddenly seized by some one, and the jerk given was such that it almost unhorsed him.

Luckily, he kept his seat.

The officers answered the cry with a loud shout, and came hastening towards them.

With a sudden shake Dick managed to get his foot partially free, and before the man who had seized it could save himself he received a tremendous blow in the mouth from the tip of Dick's heavy riding boot.

He relaxed his hold and fell back with a strange cry.

"On, Bess," Dick cried—"on, my lass—your best speed is wanted now!"

While he spoke the words a dropping, irregular volley came from the pistols of the officers.

But the bullets sped past him harmlessly, for the short stumpy pistols that were at that time carried by the police officers were more for show than use, and if they struck an object aimed at it was by accident merely.

But Maud uttered a loud cry, and at first Dick thought she had been injured.

She quickly assured him, however, that all was well, the cry had been wrung from her lips by terror.

There was something truly alarming in the furious rate at which Black Bess took her way across the rough, uneven piece of waste ground on which the circus had been erected.

It was of considerable extent, and some time elapsed before its further boundary was reached.

At length they reached this point in perfect safety.

But Dick had left all to the sagacity of his mare; he had made not the slightest attempt to guide her, for he knew well enough she would be better able by this means to avoid any obstacles that might be in her path.

The officers, however, were not so fortunate.

The horses of the two foremost stepped suddenly into a hole only a few inches deep, but yet such was the jar produced that they stumbled and fell, carrying their riders with them.

The others were so close behind that they could not stop themselves immediately, and thus a scene of the utmost confusion took place, a confusion which lasted for several moments.

This was an opportunity that Dick improved to the utmost.

"All is well, Maud," he cried, in a reassuring voice—"all is well! Fear nothing! If the officers are in the humour for a good gallop to-night they shall have it; but I promise them they will get nothing for their pains."

Black Bess seemed in excellent condition, and, so far as could be judged, quite overjoyed at thus again meeting with her master.

A broad, tolerably-straight and well-kept cross-road was before them, and along this Dick allowed her to proceed at full gallop.

Coming, then, to a spot where the road was intersected by another, he paused.

He had not listened more than a few seconds before he heard distinctly behind him the sharp clatter produced by the hoofs of the officers' horses striking the hard road.

"They're after us at full speed, Maud," said Dick; "but you have no cause to fear. We have the advantage of them now. When they reach this place they will have great difficulty in determining which way we have gone."

"And which way shall you take?"

Dick paused a moment before he replied, then said:

"This one to the left."

He turned Black Bess's head down it while he spoke, and again urged her to put forth her utmost powers of

speed, for he wished to get so far before the officers reached the cross roads that they would not be able by listening to detect the scuad of his horse's hoofs.

Suddenly, however, while going at full gallop, he perceived something unusual in Bess's manner.

Her neck was outstretched, and her ears were projected forwards.

At the same instant, Maud said:

"Hark—hark! Dick, I can hear the officers now! How is it they have come upon us so quickly?"

Quite puzzled by this circumstance, and scarcely able to credit it, Dick brought Black Bess to a halt, and then listened.

Horsemen were approaching—there could be no doubt about that.

But he quickly found they were proceeding from a direction opposite to that which he had first expected.

"It is, ten to one, another troop," he said, in answer to Maud's query, "and it's lucky we heard them when we did, otherwise we should have dashed at full speed into their midst. They are frightfully close at hand, and I fear they must have heard us."

Maud clung to Dick in alarm.

"We are in danger," said the highwayman; "but we are not lost, for all that. Cheer up! This will be my best course now. Cling tightly."

He turned Black Bess so that she faced a low hedgerow growing on one side of the road.

She comprehended his wish, and with one bound cleared the obstruction easily.

Soft green turf was now beneath the hoofs of Black Bess, and it made a wonderful difference to her.

She flew onward as if she had suddenly received a fresh accession of strength.

The night was still cloudy, with the moon breaking forth at intervals, and now, at this moment, to Dick's vexation, a cloud parted, and the moon peeped forth.

The silvery light stole in an instant over the whole landscape.

"I fear we shall be seen," said Dick. "But the same light which enables them to see me will enable me to see them. Ah! look—there they are!"

The piece of ground on which they now were was of greater elevation than the road itself, and as Dick looked back he perceived the second troop of police officers, whose approach he had so opportunely heard, standing in a dense throng close to the spot where he had overleaped the hedge.

Then, looking a little way to the left, he saw the other troop coming on at full speed.

In less than a moment the two forces would unite

"They see me," he exclaimed. "But no matter! fear them not! Forward, Bess," he added—"forward, my lass! All depends upon your speed! Let us see what you can do!"

It really seemed as though the gallant creature comprehended the purport of the words that had just been uttered, for, without any further incentive for exertion, she all at once broke out into that long, stretching gallop which seemed to require no particular amount of exertion on her part, but yet which got over the ground in a style truly marvellous.

A succession of broad, undulating meadows was quickly passed over, and when Dick drew rein again it was not until he had placed many miles between himself and the spot where he had last stopped.

He was now nearly at the brow of a steep hill, and he looked back from this advantageous position, in order to ascertain whether the officers were still upon his track.

But the moon was once again covered by clouds, and it was impossible for him to see to any great distance.

He listened; but no sound resembling the clatter of horses' hoofs reached his ears

The silence was alone broken by the whistling of the wind among the tree tops.

"Do you really think that you have distanced them?" asked Maud, beginning to recover herself from the state of fright in which she had been for so long a time.

"I trust so," answered Dick; "but at present it is impossible to say. I will let Bess go gently to the summit of this hill, and then we will pause again."

"And," pursued Maud, "supposing that you should find yourself quite clear of the officers, what will be your next step?"

Dick paused a moment before he replied.

"I can hardly answer you," he said, "except by saying that I should push on at a gentle rate and look around me for some place of shelter where we could remain concealed until the time comes for me to meet my companions."

Maud sighed

"Where," she said—"where is this place of concealment and safety to be found?"

"We must wait and see," returned Dick, lightly and carelessly. "We have found places ere now, and doubtless we shall find them again; we shall have to place ourselves entirely at the mercy of circumstances."

During this brief conversation Black Bess had been making her way at a slow walk up the steep declivity of the hill.

Now the brow was reached, and Dick brought her to a standstill.

At the same moment the darkness was dispersed, for the moon broke out once more into her full lustre.

The thick obscurity seemed to roll away like mists before the rising sun.

And so Dick looked back in the direction he had just come.

Distant and more distant objects were by degrees brought into view.

An ejaculation broke suddenly from his lips, which was echoed by one from Maud.

Dick looked again, for he could scarcely believe in the reality of what he saw.

"Confusion!" he muttered. "They have managed somehow to steal a march upon us; but how—how?" Surely by some means or other they must have possessed themselves of fresh horses."

Coming swiftly along, and at no great distance beneath him, Dick saw the full troop of police officers.

They were making good speed, he could tell that, but whether they had really obtained a change of horses was more than he could determine.

As the moon was shining full upon Dick on the top of the hill, he could doubtless be seen very plainly by the officers below, for the forms of himself, Maud, and Black Bess would be thrown into full relief by the sky behind them.

Indeed, something like a shout, sounding faint and far off, came upon Dick's ears, as though the officers had really recognised him.

It was only for a moment that Dick allowed this to give him any concern.

He saw that Maud was alarmed, and endeavoured to act in such a manner as would lead her to believe the danger was not so great as it actually was.

Accordingly, with the resumption of that reckless, daring spirit that would peep forth at times, he dropped the reins on the neck of Black Bess, and pulling off his hat, made a kind of mocking bow with it.

It was rather a gesture, to be understood by the officers as a challenge to follow him.

"Dear Maud," he said, "fear nothing. If they are in the humour for a good ride to-night, I will not disappoint them. Cling tightly to me, and then all will be well."

This injunction was scarcely necessary, for Maud held to Dick as though she felt that here only safety she could know.

At the same moment, Dick gathered up the reins, and gave Black Bess the impulse forward.

She willingly responded to it, for the brief halt they had had was sufficient to enable her to recover to some extent her spent breath.

Away, then, at a terrific pace she sped.

Their way lay all down hill, so that comparatively little exertion was required to carry her over the ground.

Away—away they went, with a speed that was absolutely terrific and alarming—a speed that no one would have thought of making in the darkness except from the conviction that by that means was their only chance of escape from death.

And it was in darkness, for the clouds, driven before the strong breeze, had again completely hidden the moon's disc.

How long that fearful gallop lasted, Maud never knew.

To her it seemed a long and endless time



[DICK TURPIN'S DESCENT INTO THE OLD QUARRY.]

She did not speak, neither did Dick, for the air rushed past them with such swiftness as to make breathing a matter of difficulty.

CHAPTER CMXXVIII.

DICK TURPIN ESCAPES A FRIGHTFUL PERIL, BUT FINDS A STRANGE PLACE OF REFUGE.

It must be understood that the course taken by Dick Turpin in his headlong flight was not along any road or beaten path, but simply across the extensive meadows with which the sides of this hill were clothed.

At times some other kind of land would intervene, but so quickly were these places passed over that they were scarcely noticed.

Great as was the distance that had been passed over since Dick saw the officers from the summit of the hill, yet he did not attempt in any way to restrain his mare's progress.

On the contrary, indeed, he from time to time urged her to keep up the tremendous speed at which they had been going.

Nothing but flight could save them, and he knew full well that it was better to place as great a distance between himself and the officers as he could in the shortest space of time.

Yet that headlong progress through the darkness, with trees suddenly starting into view, and rushing past them like swiftly-flitting shadows, was something fearful to contemplate.

But, as before, Dick trusted to the sagaciousness of his mare, whose perceptive faculties, he knew from experience, were much keener than his own.

Suddenly, while in the midst of this furious gallop, Black Bess came to a stop with so much abruptness that

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it is a thousand wonders her riders were not flung violently from the saddle.

Dick was taken completely at unawares, and he partially lost his seat, and a less accomplished horseman than himself could never have regained it.

Dick was puzzled beyond measure by this sudden stoppage.

What could have been the cause?

He strained his eyes, but the obscurity appeared to thicken.

He could distinguish nothing beyond his mare's head.

Black Bess had her neck stretched out and her ears projected forward, while she trembled from head to foo as though enduring the utmost fright.

"What is it, Dick?" asked Maud, fearfully—"what is it?"

"It must be something in the way," Dick answered—"some obstruction or other, though I can see nothing."

He patted Black Bess on the neck while he spoke, then strove to reassure her.

"Gently, old lass," he said—"all is well! Forward—forward—slowly! There—that's it!"

With very great difficulty, the highwayman succeeded in persuading his mare to take a few hesitating steps in advance.

She did not take more than a dozen before she again stopped, and this time she planted both her fore feet together firmly on the ground, as though expressive of a determination not to allow anything to urge her beyond that point.

"Oh for a gleam of light!" said Dick. "If the moon would only shine now as it did a short time ago, we should be able to comprehend the meaning of this mysterious circumstance."

"But there seems no hope of it," said Maud, as she glanced upwards and saw that the whole sky was covered by one huge, dense cloud.

"It will not do to pause here," were Dick's next words; "it is impossible to say where the officers may be, and on this soft turf-land the hoof-strokes of their horses would be inaudible."

"What is to be done?"

"Don't be alarmed, Maud—there is as yet no cause for fear. I will descend and grope carefully forward, when doubtless I shall discover what this obstruction is."

But this course seemed to Maud to be fraught with a thousand terrors, and so she clung so tightly to Dick that he was unable to alight.

"Turn her aside a little," she said—"then perhaps she will go on as before."

Dick thought it worth the trial, and pulled the rein.

To no purpose, however.

Black Bess would move neither to the right nor the left; in fact, she seemed to be growing more restive every moment.

"There is no danger," said Dick, "and if I attempt to force her she might turn round and gallop in the way we have just come, and that would be death."

Maud felt this, and reluctantly removed her arms.

Without another word, Dick slipped from the saddle to the ground.

Retaining his hold upon the reins, he stooped down, and, with one hand outstretched before him, groped forward.

He was startled by a slight exclamation from Maud, and paused.

Just then, a faint, misty light began to creep over all things.

He knew then what had produced Maud's exclamation

Glancing up, he found that the moon had reached one portion of the dense cloud less opaque than the rest, and through this partially-transparent medium she shone with a dim and sickly lustre, yet her light increased as the clouds drifted onward.

Dick looked down again, and then he staggered back, uttering a loud cry of alarm, which almost had the effect of causing Black Bess to break from his hold.

The shout was echoed by a shriek from Maud, for both had looked down on the ground at the same moment.

What words can express the horror they felt upon making the discovery that they had paused upon the very verge of a huge excavation, so wide and so deep that the misty, uncertain light was insufficient to reveal the other side or its lowest depths.

Black Bess, when she placed her feet so determinedly upon the earth, was little more than a foot from the brink of the abyss.

Dick himself, when groping forward, had been so close to it, and so near falling down, that the bare recollection of it made his brain spin round and round.

It was only for a moment that they were allowed the opportunity of taking a glance at the excavation.

The moonlight again faded away, and all was obscurity as before.

Maud trembled so excessively with fright that she could scarcely retain her seat.

By an effort, Dick recovered himself from his consternation.

"A fortunate escape," he said—"a most fortunate escape. Black Bess," he added, patting his mare upon the neck while he spoke, "once again I owe you my life, for without you I should surely have perished."

"I am terrified to death!" said Maud. "Back—back! Come further back—I cannot remain so close to the verge!"

"You are safe," said Dick—"quite safe. The danger is over, now that we know it. We have had a frightfully narrow escape from an awful death, and it will be long indeed before I can forget it."

In spite of his efforts to speak calmly, it was easy to see that Dick was much overcome.

Probably he would have given way still more to the feelings that would naturally be called forth by such an event, but for the recollection that he still stood in great danger.

The officers were still behind him—how close he could not say.

It was rather difficult now for Dick to determine what course to take.

The transient view he had obtained of his surroundings sufficed to show him that the excavation was of vast extent and very irregular in shape; thus to attempt to skirt it in the darkness would be attended by no little difficulty.

Yet he felt that this was what must be done.

He could not advance, and to retreat would be only to diminish the distance he had been at such pains to place between himself and the police officers.

"I will not mount at present," he said at length. "Remain where you are, Maud, and I will lead Bess by the bridle, then you may be sure that all will be well. I will not put my foot down until I know that there is firm earth to place it on."

Maud remained silent, and Dick took her silence for consent; but it was more because she felt her emotions so great as to obstruct her utterance.

Stepping lightly and carefully, as he had promised, Dick advanced, taking care to keep as far away from the brink of the abyss as he was able.

From time to time he looked up anxiously towards the sky above.

The wind was increasing in force and steadiness each moment, and drove the clouds along at a tremendous rate, so that he indulged in the hope that ere long the moon might break forth again and light him on his way.

As well as the rushing of the wind would let him, he listened, but he could hear nothing of his foes.

Yet they might be close behind him, though, when he took into consideration the length of time Black Bess had been going at full gallop, he scarcely thought it possible.

There was a consolation to be found even in the darkness.

If it concealed his pursuers from him, it also concealed him from them, and it also multiplied the chances of missing him.

In so [illegible] an obscurity as that it would be hard indeed to keep upon his track.

Once more the sky began gradually to grow lighter, and far away on the horizon could be seen a long bright streak, which appeared rapidly to widen as the clouds came driving on.

He soon found that this was a rift of considerable extent, and when the moon entered it again, every object around him was brought into full view, as though by the magic stroke of some enchanter's wand.

On this occasion he was able to see the general configuration, but not the depth, of the place into which he had so narrowly escaped falling.

Hitherto he could only guess at the character of the excavation.

Now he saw that it was a huge stone quarry.

From various signs that he saw around he concluded that it had remained for many years disused.

The strata of soft earth that lay above the stone had given birth to vegetation of all kinds, in most places growing in luxuriance, so as to give the quarry an aspect of rare picturesque beauty.

The sides were rugged, irregular, and steep.

The quantity of stone removed must have been immense, for although he drew close to the verge and strained his eyes to the utmost, Dick was unable to perceive the bottom.

At various places on the sides, however, trees were growing out in oblique, fantastic fashions, while the splashing and rushing of water came distinctly to his ears.

The thought that entered Dick's mind while gazing at this place was a very natural one, considering his position.

Turning round first, so as to avail himself of the light of the moon while it lasted, he looked keenly in the way he had just come.

But to his great satisfaction no signs of the police officers could be perceived.

"See here, Maud," he exclaimed, when he had satisfied himself upon this point; "have we not been fortunate in reaching this strange place?"

"Fortunate?" she repeated, in accents of surprise.

"Yes, surely so; we have outrun the officers, of that I am certain. You were asking me where I should find a place of refuge. Behold, it is there. Chance has thrown it in our way."

But Maud shrank back in some dismay at the prospect of taking shelter in so wild and desolate a place.

"Yes," continued Dick; "it is only in some such place as this that we can hope to remain in safety; we shall be dependent upon no one save ourselves, and therefore shall have nothing to fear in the shape of treachery in the depths of this huge excavation. No one would think of looking for us; or if the place was visited, we should, ten to one, escape observation. Believe me, we cannot hope to find a better place than this."

"But how shall we descend?" said Maud, becoming more reconciled to the idea of remaining in so gloomy a place, by the considerations of its safety. "The sides seem to me like walls."

"In all probability," returned Dick, "there is a path somewhere leading down into its lowest depths. That path we must find, and carefully pursue."

"I see no signs of it."

"Nor I at present. You can guide Black Bess, and while you are doing so I will creep close to the edge of the abyss and make good use of the moonlight while it lasts."

Dick did not wait for Maud to make any reply, but going as close to the edge of the quarry as was consistent with safety, he walked rapidly along, looking keenly all the time, in the hope of discovering the path of which he had spoken.

For a long time he saw nothing bearing any resemblance to it.

In one place he saw what looked like steps roughly hewn in the stone, but these were impracticable.

It was necessary to find some sloping path, down which he could lead Black Bess.

After much searching, he was at length rewarded.

A narrow path was found, but it was so much overhung by the stone that it required a very quick eye indeed to detect it.

The descent was very rapid, and must at all times have been attended with a great amount of danger, but now that danger was much increased by the presence of a quantity of green moss, which seemed to rest upon the surface of the stone, and which changed to a watery moisture beneath the feet.

In all probability, however, there was no other mode of descent into the quarry save this, and accordingly Dick hastened to Maud's side.

"You will have to summon up all your courage," he said, "for the task before you is a difficult one; but you must endeavour to gather confidence by thinking what safety we shall gain by adopting this course. Once fairly at the bottom of that quarry, we can bid defiance to all the officers in the kingdom. I am convinced they would never dream of looking for us there."

Certainly nothing would have inspired Maud with more courage than the thought that she was about in some way to contribute to Dick's safety.

She had always been in a state of perpetual alarm on his account, and thought how grateful would be the change could she but feel certain that for a time he was in no danger.

Nevertheless, although she steeled her heart well, her courage for a moment failed her when she saw the narrow, precipitous path down which she would have to make her way.

But, recovering herself with great difficulty, she said:

"Lead the way, Dick—lead the way, and I will follow. It is necessary that you should take Black Bess by the bridle, and when I see you both before me I shall have confidence to follow in your footsteps."

"As you will," said Dick. "It will, I expect, be no easy task to lead Black Bess; but yet, with care, it may be accomplished."

Accordingly, he took hold of Black Bess by the bridle, and led her towards the brink of the precipice.

She shrank back in natural terror, yet did not hesitate to follow where her master led.

Taking each step slowly and carefully, Dick began to descend.

Black Bess slipped more than once, and every time a pang of alarm shot through his breast.

He knew how easy it would be for her to fall over the side of the narrow pathway into the depths below.

Maud, too, occasioned him much anxiety, and at every moment he would look back, in order to make sure that she was safe.

But Maud, wisely making the resolution not to turn her eyes in the direction of the quarry itself, steadily stepped onwards, for the most part keeping her hands close against the side of the precipice, acquiring additional confidence by this intangible handhold.

After going down some distance, they found themselves upon a small flat piece of rock, or what the French would call a plateau, and here Dick paused a little while, in order to take a glance at that portion of the pathway which led down from this place.

He endeavoured also to make out how much further he would have to descend, and as the moon just then was shining brightly, he perceived, or fancied he perceived, among the many shadows down below, the tops of a few stunted trees, and the sparkle of running water.

The pathway presented much the same appearance as before, and it was entered upon with additional confidence.

It conducted to a second plateau, from which they similarly descended to a third, and from the third to the rough and rugged bottom of the quarry.

Huge stones were lying about here and there promiscuously, and in some places grass and trees were growing.

Save and except the rushing of the water, a profound silence prevailed in this place.

A cold chill was in the air, and the darkness was such as to have a most depressing influence upon the spirits, for although the moon shone down into the quarry, yet she was not near enough to the zenith to illumine this its lowest depth.

Oppressed and half terrified, Maud crept closer to Dick's side, who, however, was impressed very differently by his surroundings.

"Safe now, Maud," he said, and his voice sounded unearthly and strange as it reverberated among the recesses in the stonework—"quite safe now. The officers will not find us here."

"But," said Maud, with a shiver and a sigh, "should they by any chance learn of your whereabouts, would you not then be completely at their mercy?—would they not hold you as if in a trap?"

CHAPTER CMXXIX.

RETURNS TO TOM KING, AND SHOWS HOW HE ADOPTED A CLEVER STRATAGEM TO GET RID OF THE POLICE OFFICERS, AND WHAT WAS ITS RESULT.

When Tom King parted from Dick Turpin in the little plantation at the back of the Three Spiders Inn, he made his way with as much speed as he could towards the open country, which he trusted to reach unperceived.

But this expectation was doomed to disappointment.

Despite all the elaborate precautions that he took, an officer stationed near the spot whence he emerged uttered a loud shout, and immediately followed it up by discharging his pistol.

These two acts served at once to raise an alarm, which was just what the officer intended, and in a few minutes he found himself surrounded by four or five of his companions.

He answered the questions they poured in upon him by pointing across the fields, where, at some distance, the flying forms of Tom King and his steed could be distinguished.

"Make all speed!" he said, addressing the others. "A sharp touch is most likely to do it; but a stern chase, I have heard say, is a long one, and, if you are all of my mind, we will keep on his track, and never quit it until we have slain or captured him. If this goes on much longer we shall get so much disgrace that we shall be dismissed in a whole body."

"We are with you!" said the others, and while they uttered the words, they lashed and spurred their horses savagely.

The animals were tolerably fresh, and as the officers by this time had learned from experience that they could have no chance of success whatever unless mounted upon cattle of superior quality, they had not on this occasion neglected to provide themselves with the best steeds they could procure.

With scarcely any delay, then, the chase was commenced, and Tom King had the mortification of knowing that the officers were close behind him—so close that he could scarcely be said to have had a start worth speaking of.

But Tom knew to what extent he could rely upon his horse; it had served him well on many previous occasions, and, moreover, it had lately had good rest and food, and therefore would be capable of putting forth its best exertions.

Away, then, at full speed he went, until the turnpike-road was gained, and along this he resolved to make his way, chiefly because on the opposite side of it he saw nothing but ploughed fields, over which he knew it would be madness to attempt to ride.

With a prodigious clatter, then, he sped along the highway in the direction of the country.

People and vehicles were passed so quickly that only a transient glimpse was obtained of the flying horseman.

Perceiving presently before him the white, gleaming bars of a toll-gate, and knowing full well that at that hour of the night the gate would be closed, Tom again took to the fields.

His horse leaped over a low hedge easily, and then he found himself once more with turf beneath his feet.

Another ploughed field forced Tom King upon the high-road again.

In passing the toll-gate he had made a considerable detour, and this had told greatly against him, for the officers, having kept direct along the road without relaxing their speed, were now clustered together in a dense throng around the toll-gate, which a man was in the act of unlocking.

But Tom still had the start, and as the road had a gradual downward tendency, his horse was able to keep up the headlong gallop without much distress.

Further and further into the country Tom went.

He was incited to urge his horse on to the uttermost, for slowly but surely he saw that the space between himself and the officers was gradually getting wider and wider.

But his horse now began to cause him much apprehension.

More than once it had staggered and limped as though fearfully exhausted, but yet as if so full of mettle that it would gallop on until it fell down dead rather than relax its speed.

Such being the case, and as the officers were now quite out of sight, and almost out of hearing, Tom began to look about him for some means of throwing his pursuers off his track.

Glancing to his right, he saw nothing before him but a smooth expanse of country, which offered him not the remotest chance of concealment.

On the left the highway was bounded by a very high stone wall, so high that, though on horseback, he could not see fairly over it.

This wall was of immense length.

It stretched as far as he could see behind and before him.

By the trees which he perceived growing in great luxuriance over this wall, and indeed by the general appearance of the place, he readily enough concluded that this was the boundary wall of some large estate, such as can be met with in many parts of England.

This, then, offered him no chance at all.

It was quite in vain to look for shelter in this direction.

Nothing remained for him to do but to goad the already bleeding flanks of his horse, and so force him to keep up his gallop.

Fainter and fainter, however, grew the sounds of the horses in his rear, until at length they became so indistinct that it was only at intervals they floated to his ears.

Suddenly, while flying onward at this rate, he perceived that this long stone wall, that seemed as though it had no termination, was broken in upon by a gateway.

The sight of it caused a sudden thought to dart into his mind, a thought which was instantly matured.

He felt that he should be able to put into execution a stratagem that promised well to baffle the acuteness of his foes.

Accordingly he brought his horse gradually to a standstill, then turned his head round and took him gently towards the gateway he had passed.

Reaching it, he saw that it was an ordinary five-barred gate, and that it opened upon a broad, well-kept road that appeared to lead in a direct line across the park.

Hurriedly descending, he examined the fastenings of this gate, and saw that they consisted only of a kind of spring latch which allowed him to make ingress easily.

Passing quickly through the gate, he closed it after him, then, placing his ear upon the ground, listened.

Faintly—very faintly, but yet so audibly as not to be mistaken, he could hear the dull thud, thud produced by the beating of the hoofs of the six horses on the road.

"They may have heard me stop," Tom muttered, "but I doubt it. If they have, they will be in some doubt as to which way I have taken. It's a good thought—a lucky thought; I will imitate the hare by doubling directly on my course."

He sprang into the saddle in a moment, and with an amount of audacity truly wonderful, and yet which promised well for the success of his scheme, he turned his horse's head in the direction from which the officers were coming, and so rode on as it were to meet them, only the high stone wall of which we have spoken lay between.

On this side of the wall, too, the ground was soft, and as Tom allowed his horse to go at a moderate speed, his footfalls scarcely made a sound.

It was only occasionally that there was a slight crackling of twigs to betray his progress.

As he thus went on, the sounds of the officers approaching grew more distinct with marvellous rapidity, and at length Tom deemed it prudent to pause.

The stone wall was quite sufficient to screen him from their view, and it would be a pity if any accidental sound he might make in forcing his way onwards should attract their notice, and so lead them to suspect his whereabouts.

Getting as close as he possibly could to the wall, he remained quite still, busying himself, however, by stroking and caressing his horse's neck, by which means he trusted to keep the creature quiet.

There was little fear, however, that it would either move or make any sound.

It was so fatigued as to be only too rejoiced at an opportunity of recovering its lost breath.

The officers were now close at hand, and Tom could not hear them approaching so closely without a sensation of uneasiness creeping over him, though he had the greatest confidence in the stratagem he had adopted.

He was pleased to find that there were no signs of the officers abating their speed in the least degree.

He could hear them urge their horses onward both by voice and by the smacking of their riding-whips.

With a sudden rush the whole troop swept past him, and no sooner had they done so than he was irresistibly impelled to raise his head above the wall a little, and peep at them.

They did not remain long in view, being hidden from his sight by the thick, interposing branches of hundreds of trees.

Nevertheless, he could hear them, and this sufficed to let him know they were still galloping along the highway.

"Now," said Tom, to himself, "forward once more—forward! And every step I take will indeed increase the distance between the officers and myself! If I am careful, in a little while I shall be rid of them, for no one has seen me enter this place, and there will be nothing to serve them as a clue to the way I have taken."

Imagining, however, that little advantage was to be gained by keeping close under the shadow of the wall, Tom gradually increased his distance from it, being induced to do so by the fact that the vegetation was more scanty further from it, and consequently he was thus enabled to make better speed.

And now he came to a portion of the park—for park it was—consisting only of turf, and being entirely destitute of trees.

Over this he went at full gallop, then stopped, for before him was a dense preserve.

He hesitated a moment as to whether he should endeavour to force his way among the thickly-growing trees.

But he resolved not to turn aside; he was going now in the right direction, and the chances were that this plantation would not be of any great extent.

Just as he was about to enter it, he perceived a board nailed up to one of the largest trees.

Some words were painted on it in white letters, but this was all he could make out—there was not light enough to read by.

"A caution against trespassing, I suppose," muttered Tom, with a light laugh. "Well, I need not trouble about that. If anyone attempts to interrupt my progress, they will find they have an ugly customer to deal with!"

With this reflection he pushed his way through the trees, hoping in a little time that they would become less dense.

For the most part, they were saplings, with thin, supple boughs, which were easily displaced.

Every now and then the faint cry of some night bird would reach his ears, and then there would be a whirring and fluttering of wings as some large bird or other would be disturbed from his perch.

Tom's mind was now comparatively easy, for he fully indulged in the belief that he had got rid of the police officers entirely.

All around him was so very still and quiet, and so unsuggestive of the presence of his fellow-creatures, that it is no wonder such a feeling should occupy his breast.

That confidence, nevertheless, was suddenly shaken.

His horse stopped abruptly, and uttered a loud cry, unmistakably of pain.

It struggled and kicked furiously; but one foot was fast.

It plunged again, and then Tom was conscious that one of the horse's hoofs had struck against some other obstacle.

The action was instantaneously followed by a flash and a loud report.

At the same time the horse plunged again, snorted, and then fell down all at once as if struck by lightning.

Tom with difficulty disengaged his feet from the stirrups in time enough to prevent himself from receiving any injury by this fall, but he did so.

These last events had occurred so suddenly and so unexpectedly that for a few minutes he was stunned and completely bewildered; not being able to comprehend what had happened, he was surprised that the report of the gun should not have been followed up by any attack upon him.

He stooped down to look more closely about him.

Examination served to banish his bewilderment. It was plain enough to see what had happened.

The owner of the preserve, in order to prevent others from poaching on his domain, had placed man-traps and spring-guns in various places.

In one of the former Tom's horse had placed his fore foot.

It was this which had brought him so suddenly to a stop, and which elicited the cry of fright and pain.

The horse was now lying quite still, either dead or dying, and so artfully had the deadly weapon been contrived that its contents had proved mortal.

Tom congratulated himself upon his own narrow escape from sudden death, the recollection of which served to make the calamity of the loss of his horse sink into comparative unimportance.

Any attempt to recover his horse he saw was fruitless, and how to repair his loss he knew not.

Yet a moment's thought told him that probably in the grounds some other horse would be found which he might be able to capture.

The trappings would be necessary, and these he hastened to divest his horse of.

The saddle had been removed. He was in the act of pulling off the bridle, when there came suddenly upon him the flash of many lights, the sound of voices, the trampling of footsteps, and the crackling of the underwood.

"Stand still!" roared a loud voice—"stand still! If you move one step we will all fire, and your death will be certain! Surrender—you are our prisoner!"

Confused by this sudden and unexpected turn of affairs, and dazzled by the lights which proceeded from the lanterns carried by the men, Tom stood still, as he had been commanded.

He gazed anxiously around, and saw that he was surrounded by several men—one-half bearing lanterns, the light of which was turned full upon him; the other half with guns pressed against their shoulders, and with the muzzles pointed at his breast.

CHAPTER CMXXX.

IN WHICH THE GAMEKEEPERS MAKE TOM KING A FAST PRISONER.

In that brief, rapid, but comprehensive glance, Tom King saw something more, which served, to some extent, to allay the alarm that was rising in his breast. The men by whom he was confronted and called upon to surrender were not attired either in the costume of police officers or of dragoons.

They were, indeed, as their dress plainly showed, neither more nor less than gamekeepers, who, hearing the explosion of the spring-gun, had hastened to that part of the preserve.

"I surrender," said Tom King. "I have no intention of attempting to make my escape. You see I have met with an accident."

The word was repeated by the gamekeepers in tones of surprise and derision.

But three of them stepping nimbly forward, placed themselves one on each side and the other behind him.

"What are you about to do?" he asked. "Why do you make me your prisoner?"

"For poaching."

Tom laughed loudly.

"Poaching?" he said. "The idea of such a joke! I should like to know who ever heard of a man going poaching on horseback."

"Well, if not poaching, it's trespassing," said one of the gamekeepers, in a gruff voice, "and that's all the same to us—Sir Thomas does not allow either the one or the other; so come along!"

"Pooh, pooh!" said Tom—"there's no necessity whatever to trouble Sir Thomas in the matter—I am sure it can be settled easily between us. Look here—you can see what kind of an accident I have met with. In my ignorance of where I was, having lost my way, I blundered into this preserve. My horse put his foot into the trap, touched the wire connected with the spring-gun, and so has met with his death."

"That may be all right enough," said the gamekeeper who had last spoken, "but it is trespass, and we have strict orders to take all trespassers into custody."

"Yes, I know all about that," said Tom, "but there are exceptions to every case, and I suppose a little consideration from me will put matters quite straight."

There was a silence, and Tom said:

"Let me see. Why, there are six of you. Now I suppose a couple of guineas each, or something like that, would be very acceptable to all of you, and no one would be the wiser."

"Well," said the gamekeeper, "of course, if you are prepared to treat us liberally, that's another thing, and your business might be urgent enough to make it worth while to pay something to be let off."

"Decidedly," said Tom—"decidedly."

He plunged his hand first into one pocket and then into another, but, to his consternation, discovered he had not about him anything more than some loose silver.

The gamekeepers began once more to look distrustfully and suspiciously upon him.

Tom was greatly mortified, for he saw that if he had only happened to possess a few guineas he would easily have got out of his present situation.

Not that it was particularly an alarming one, but, then if he did not extricate himself from it at once, there was no knowing what complications it might lead to.

"My good friends," he said, "I have not about me the amount I promised, but I give you my word of honour you shall have it at any time that you think proper to appoint—say to-morrow night. I will meet one of you, or all of you, anywhere you choose, and will give you the amount."

"Oh, gammon!" said the one who, by the common consent of his fellows, took the lead in the affair—"gammon! I thought how much you were going to give us in money. You will take notice," he added, addressing the others, "that we are all witnesses to his having offered to bribe us with money to get off."

"Yes—yes."

"Now, take care!" said Tom. "I give you my word, and you may depend that I shall not go back from it; but if you refuse, why, then you will find that I shall turn out a rough customer to deal with."

"Oh, all right," said the gamekeepers—"we will take the risk of all that. Now, then, just march along, will you, or it will be the worse for you!"

While these words were spoken, those three gamekeepers who had already taken hold of Tom King tightened their grasp upon him, while the three others immediately placed themselves in the rear, and pressed the muzzles of their guns against his back."

In this position he was commanded to proceed, and threatened, in case of his refusal, that the guns should be discharged, the men alleging that Sir Thomas would take care to hold them blameless.

There was an amount of rough, savage earnestness about the manner in which these men spoke that could not by any possibility be mistaken.

Tom King instinctively felt that they would not hesitate to carry their threat into execution.

He most bitterly regretted now that he had allowed himself to be taken captive at all, since by so doing he had shut himself out from all chance of regaining his liberty.

Disagreeable and repugnant as it was to him, he had no other resource than to comply with the demands of these men, and to march ignominiously forward.

They pushed him on, indeed, at a much greater speed, and with much more violence, than was at all necessary.

Tom King disdained to say another word to those fellows, but he kept himself particularly on the alert, so as to be able to take advantage of any trifling circumstance that might arise that was capable of being turned to his benefit.

The men knew every inch of the ground, and consequently took the shortest way out of the preserve.

Tom then found himself in a large meadow, beyond which over the tree tops he could dimly distinguish the chimneys of a habitation.

This he expected was the residence of the Sir Thomas who had been mentioned by the gamekeepers.

In the same manner as before Tom was hurried across this meadow, and so by a rather circuitous route to the back part of a large, old-fashioned building—one of those comfortable residences of dull red brick which the great landed proprietors were so fond of building two or three centuries ago.

As the hour was late, this mansion—for such it might be termed—was plunged in darkness, save and except that from one solitary window came forth a beam of light.

Manifestly their destination was this building, and Tom began to wonder whether it would not be better to run the risk of receiving a wound from the gun rather than suffer himself to be carried beneath any roof.

But before he had time to make up his mind on this point a door was opened, through which he was quickly hustled.

Then he found himself in a small chamber on the ground floor, wherein a huge fire was burning.

This chamber, he imagined, was chiefly for the use of the gamekeepers while engaged on night duty.

An old man, with a stern-looking face, to whom the gamekeepers showed some degree of deference, was the only inmate of this apartment, and he rose slowly to his feet when the throng entered.

"A prisoner, Ambrose," said one of the gamekeepers. "We caught him trespassing in the north plantation. Just open the door, will you, and we will make him right till morning."

The man addressed as Ambrose took a huge key from his pocket, which he fitted into a small, strong-looking door, which Tom did not notice until he thus went towards it.

The gamekeepers pushed him on, so that he was compelled to follow in the footsteps of this man.

Passing through this door, however, he found himself at the foot of a winding flight of stairs, and then he was made to ascend them, very much against his will.

The ascent was long and trying, and Tom felt certain that he must be at the very top of the building.

Suddenly Ambrose stopped, and pushed open another door that grated harshly upon its hinges.

Across the threshold of the room into which it led Tom was thrust, and then, as quick as lightning, the door was closed, locked, and bolted.

The man descended the stairs again, after which all was still.

As Tom had comprehended, the room in which he now stood was at the very top of the mansion.

It was always used for the reception of those prisoners who might be made by the gamekeepers during the night, and it was rarely indeed that it was without an occupant, for Sir Thomas was one of those strict preservers of game who looked upon the unlawful slaughtering of a bird or hare as a crime almost worthy of being punished by death.

As often happens, however, the very severity of the punishment did not deter the people from continually poaching upon his domains, and it was supposed that he lost more game in this manner than any other resident in the county.

The chamber was very dark, but Tom King managed after awhile to see dimly about him.

Articles of furniture there were none—not even a bench on which to sit.

There was only one window, and that was scarcely deserving of the name, being merely a square opening in the wall, placed so high up as to be considered out of reach of everyone.

Upon that window Tom's eyes at once fixed themselves.

From what the reader knows already of his character, it may be guessed that he did not for one moment intend to submit quietly to any fate Sir Thomas or his myrmidons might design for him.

His immediate object was to escape, and that object he determined to effect somehow or other.

Walking close up to the wall beneath the window, he reached up with his hands as high as he could, and found that the tips of his fingers were a few inches from the sill of the window.

A slight spring from the ground, however, enabled him to hook his fingers over it, and the grasp thus obtained was sufficient to enable him to draw himself up until his breast was level with his hands.

Then he saw, somewhat to his surprise, that the win-

dow was defended only by one perpendicular iron bar, which looked to be far enough away from the wall on either side to allow his body to pass through.

Clinging tightly with his left hand, Tom reached out with his right, and took hold of this iron bar just mentioned.

By the aid of this he was able to draw himself up a.d higher and higher.

As he expected, there was just room to allow hi head and shoulders to pass between the wall on one side and the bar on the other.

He looked down, and for a moment felt rather giddy.

He saw, at a great height from the ground beneath him, at all manner of angles and at varying depths, the roof of the building, and from his position he made out that he was in a kind of circular turret that rose up from the centre.

For what purpose this tower was designed he knew not, but just then he was startled by hearing a clock strike the hour.

The sounds were sonorous to a degree, and Tom then found that above him was a large turret clock.

He looked down, and wondered how he should escape.

He was no longer surprised that the window should have been left comparatively so unguarded.

Few, indeed, would be able to climb up to it at all—those who did would naturally hesitate and shrink before they attempted to lower themselves from such a height.

Indeed had not Tom King had a price upon his head, and knew that so many were thirsty for his blood, he would have banished all further contemplation of making his escape.

The remembrance of these facts, however, nerved him to such deeds as would make others not similarly situated shrink back appalled.

The distance to the roof immediately beneath the window was considerable, and, moreover, this roof slanted at a very sharp angle, so that in dropping upon it it would not be possible to retain any hold.

Seeing, however, that rolling down the tiles he should only fall into a gutter formed by another portion of the roof sloping from an opposite direction, Tom King resolved to run the risk.

It was a matter of some difficulty to turn round in such a confined space as he was now in, but this feat was accomplished, and he began slowly to lower himself through the window feet foremost.

He continued to do so until he held only by his hands, with his body remaining stretched at the full length of his arms.

He did not dare to look below, to hesitate, or to think upon the consequences of his fall.

He shut his eyes and released his grasp.

He came with a sharp shock upon the tiles, several of which were loosened by the violence of his fall.

Half sliding, half rolling, he continued to descend until brought up by the gutter of which we have made mention.

Here he remained for some minutes, only partially in possession of his consciousness.

But what sense that remained to him was fully occupied in listening, in order to ascertain whether any alarm had been given by the noise he had made.

So far as he could tell, however, all was well, and at length he scrambled to his feet.

He found that he was badly bruised, but as yet did not suffer much pain—that would come in time, no doubt.

Judging by what he had already accomplished, Tom King had little more to do, and yet it was no easy task to look forward to having to reach the ground from the top of that lofty habitation.

But Tom scrambled over the roof tops until he reached the outer parapet.

Along the inside of this he crept until he had almost made a circuit of the building.

Then he came to a spot where there was another roof below him, apparently belonging to some outbuilding.

Straining his eyes, he could make out beneath him something that looked like a large yard, with stables on one side of it, and coach-houses on the other.

"Ah!" he said, "this is the place to descend. Confound Sir Thomas and his gamekeepers! they have given me some trouble, but they shall pay for it! I've lost one horse, but I'll take good care not to quit these premises until I have supplied his place with the very best animal to be found in his stables. And here goes, for the sooner I am off the better."

Tom then, with great daring and apparent recklessness, climbed over the parapet, and by the aid of an iron pipe fixed against the wall, slid rapidly down until his feet rested on the roof beneath.

CHAPTER CMXXXI

TOM KING ESCAPES FROM HIS TEMPORARY PRISON, AND PROVIDES HIMSELF WITH ANOTHER HORSE.

THE further progress of Tom King was, comparatively speaking, easy enough.

From this roof he descended to another not far beneath it.

From that to another outbuilding, and then to the ground.

Scarcely, however, had his feet touched the ground than, with a suppressed, savage growl, a dog sprang at him.

It was one of those sly, treacherous animals which give no warning of their presence until within reach of their victim.

Tom King, however, partly in surprise, and partly in dread of receiving a bite from this savage creature, gave such a bound that he escaped his fangs.

At the same moment his hands came in contact with a pitchfork that was resting against the wall.

To seize hold of this, and use it as a weapon of defence, was the work of a second.

The dog came rushing on, and then received such a blow as sent him back howling.

With desperate courage he renewed the attack, and Tom King, being more self-possessed than before, raised his weapon, and waited patiently.

When the moment came, he dealt the animal a blow that stretched it senseless, if not lifeless, upon the ground.

But all this had not been done without creating a great deal of noise.

Indeed, there seemed every probability that the alarm would in a moment be raised.

Had he been so minded, however, it would have been perfectly easy for Tom King to have made his escape from the yard at that moment, but he determined to carry out the intention he had originally expressed, and accordingly darted at full speed towards the door leading to the stables.

The door was not locked, but merely latched, that being considered quite sufficient protection, for the grooms and stable-helpers all slept close at hand.

Fully impressed with the necessity of making the utmost speed, Tom King seized hold of one of the horses—the first one he came to—and led it out.

On the end of the stall had been hung a saddle and bridle, and these Tom flung on rather than properly placed them.

One bound placed him in the saddle; then, bending his head low down upon the horse's neck, he urged him forward, and darted through the door into the yard.

This was a proceeding that took greatly by surprise, and much disconcerted, a man who, having been aroused by the barking of the dog, and yet not knowing what had caused it, had descended to ascertain what was the matter.

Seeing the stable door open, he had hastened towards it, and he had just reached the threshold when Tom darted forth in the manner we have described.

The man was thrown down at once, and with a prodigious clatter the highwayman reached the yard.

By this time, however, the alarm had been given generally.

The gate leading into this yard had been left open by the gamekeepers, and Tom saw a man hurrying to close it.

But spurring his horse savagely, he caused the animal to start off at full gallop.

The gate was passed before anyone had time to close it, and the next moment Tom King was making his way at a tremendous rate across a large piece of smooth, level turf.

He felt now that he had nothing to fear, yet was never-

theless desirous of getting off Sir Thomas's estate as quickly as he could.

Takings things altogether, he had much to congratulate himself upon, though now, as he began to grow somewhat cooler, the effect of the different bruises he had received made themselves painfully apparent.

At length, to his disappointment, he found himself again opposite that high wall that had been erected upon the boundaries of Sir Thomas's property—a wall of such a height that it was quite out of the question to think of getting a horse over it.

The only thing that remained in Tom's power was to follow its course until he met with a gateway similar to the one through which he had previously passed.

This, however, might cause him some little additional difficulty, for probably there would be time to allow of men being posted at the various exits from the estate.

Time was clearly of importance, and so he again spurred his horse.

He was pleased to find that the animal of which he had so recently possessed himself was of tolerable quality.

His stamp was good, though it would seem by his manner that he had lately performed a long journey, and had not yet recovered from the fatigue occasioned by it.

After going about a quarter of a mile further to the left, Tom found another gate, and just as he reached it he happened to look back towards the mansion.

Then he saw in the darkness lights flashing about, from which it was evident close search and pursuit were being made after him.

However, he was now quite clear and free from danger.

He opened the gate and rode through on to the broad, well-beaten highway.

At first he fancied he had emerged upon the very same road he had so lately quitted, but upon looking more carefully around he soon became convinced that this was an error.

The road he was now upon ran almost parallel to the other, but it was at a considerable distance from it.

Turning the horse's head in the direction of the country, he allowed the animal to proceed at an easy rate, as there was now no immediate hurry, and he wished to reserve its strength as much as possible.

After going for some distance without accident, he reached a point where the road divided, forming what is called a fork.

The triangular piece of ground formed by the junction of the roads consisted of a field well defended by high, thick hedges.

Tom King as he approached gradually slackened his speed, for he was somewhat in doubt as to which of these two roads he should take.

While in this state of uncertainty, a man suddenly started up from behind the hedge just at the sharp angle of the road.

Tom uttered an exclamation as soon as he saw him.

The man raised his hand, though for what purpose Tom did not guess.

The next moment there was a flash and a report, and, with a whistling sound, something sped past the highwayman, which he knew at once to be a bullet.

The occurrence was so strange a one that he could scarcely make it out.

This man had evidently been lying in wait for him to make his appearance, and yet how should he know that he was about to reach that point?

Again, it seemed as though the man had purposely missed him—it was either that or else he was a terribly bad marksman, for Tom was only a few yards distant.

The most probable thing was, that this man had been placed there to watch for the appearance of some one else, for whom Tom King had been mistaken.

The highwayman's first impulse was to start in pursuit of this man, who appeared to be at an immediate retreat upon discovering his mistake.

But a second thought induced Tom to alter his mind.

"It seems to me," he said, "that I know the means of rendering some one or other a valuable service. That rascal beyond doubt has been posted here by some one to assassinate some gentleman who is expected to be riding this way about this time. I will save him—or, at any rate, I will put him on his guard."

Accordingly, although he was running no small personal risk by so doing, Tom King turned his horse again, and rode slowly in the direction he had just been coming.

But he did not go much more than a quarter of a mile.

He pulled up then, for he by no means relished getting too near to Sir Thomas's estate.

Scarcely had he come to a halt than the clear, unmistakable sound of a horse's hoofs upon the road reached his ears.

"The intended victim comes," he muttered. "But, whoever he may be, he shall be saved from the fate that awaits him! That rascal shall be disappointed!"

Upon a second thought, Tom King thought it would be better to ride forward slowly to meet this approaching horseman than to remain in waiting, and he accordingly restrained his horse, allowing it to go simply at a walk.

In a few moments he perceived before him in the distance the dusky figure of a man on horseback.

To protect himself from the cold night air he had wrapped around him a thick travelling cloak.

As soon as ever he was near enough, Tom King raised his voice, and said:

"Hold, sir! let me entreat you to stay—let me warn you that your life is in danger."

The horseman checked his speed irresolutely, and seemed half inclined to gallop past our friend.

It was by no means strange that he should have his doubts as to the advisability of allowing a stranger to come close to him at a time when the roads were so unsafe for all travellers as they were then.

Tom guessed what was passing in his mind, and endeavoured to reassure him.

"You need be under no apprehension," he said; "you will receive no harm from me—in fact, I have turned altogether out of my way in order that I might be able to give you this necessary warning. Bethink yourself, sir; have you an enemy?"

The stranger hesitated for some moments before he replied.

Then, in a constrained voice, he said:

"I think not."

"I differ with you," said Tom. "Chance entirely has brought me upon this road to-night, and while riding a little distance further on a man suddenly started up from behind the hedge at the junction of the high-road, and fired a pistol at me. The shot could not have been intended for myself, but he was evidently placed there to assassinate some one who was expected to be passing by about this time."

The stranger received this intelligence with considerable coolness—in fact, his misgivings as to the character of the man who had accosted him had increased.

Perceiving that he paused, Tom continued:

"If it was known to anyone that it was your intention to be upon this road at about this time to-night, let me entreat you to turn aside and travel by some other way; if not I fear your life may be the forfeit."

The stranger walked his horse slowly forwards, and as he did so he addressed Tom King in a sneering, sarcastic tone of voice.

"My good sir," he said, "I am obliged to you—infinitely obliged to you! But no doubt I shall stand as good a chance of escaping from the bullet as you did yourself."

"Stay!" said Tom, perceiving that he continued to ride on—"stay—stay! for I am convinced the man saw that I was not the person he was on the look-out for, though he did not discover his mistake in time to check himself in discharging the pistol."

"I again repeat that I am obliged to you," answered the stranger, as sneeringly as before. "My way lies in this direction, and I shall take it. You will excuse me, but I never like to form acquaintances on the road, so oblige me by keeping your distance."

As he spoke he spurred his horse, and the animal started onward at a kind of cantering gallop.

"Well," said Tom, to himself "this is a specimen of ingratitude surely, and yet, after all, the man is not to be blamed. At any rate, I will try to save him even now."

Accordingly, Tom rode after the stranger, who had nevertheless in this short space of time obtained a tolerably good start.



[TOM KING TAKES A DESPERATE LEAP FOR LIFE.]

Tom rode on swiftly, keeping his horse not upon the highway, but upon the strip of turf that lay upon one side of it, so that his approach was almost noiseless.

Still he was afraid he should not be in time to render the stranger the assistance he expected he would need, for already he could see before him the spot where the roads converged.

There was just a question whether the man, after having made this failure, would remain at his post and make a second attempt.

Tom's mind was occupied upon this point, when suddenly he saw a bright flash of light.

He uttered an ejaculation that was drowned by the report of the firearm, and then, with a loud cry, the stranger fell headlong from his horse.

"I will catch the assassin, at all risks!" was Tom's next determination, and he urged his horse to his utmost speed in order to carry it out.

No. 191.—BLACK BESS.

He could not fail to give some indications of his approach, and these must have been overheard by the assassin, for he beat an immediate retreat.

Tom was not to be baffled, however, but kept up his pursuit.

On reaching the triangular meadow, however, and looking around him, not a trace of a human being could be seen.

For a long time he searched rigidly in every direction, but in vain—no trace of the assassin could be found.

He had evidently secreted himself in some well-contrived hiding-place.

The failure in his purpose filled Tom King with no small degree of chagrin.

But finding his efforts here were useless, he turned them to another quarter, where he hoped his aid would be welcome.

Accordingly, he hastened to place himself by the side of

the stranger, who now lay immovable in the centre of the high-road.

Fortunately, his feet had become disengaged from the stirrups as he fell.

The horse had vanished. But had the stranger's feet remained entangled, he must have been dragged, a bruised and bleeding mass, at the heels of the terrified animal.

Alighting, and stooping over him, Tom raised him gently from the ground.

"Speak, sir," he said—"speak if you can, and tell me what I can do in your behalf."

After a deep sigh, or rather groan, the prostrate traveller spoke.

"Ah! it's you, is it? You have come now to exult, I suppose, and to reproach me for having despised your warning. Go—go! I desire nothing but to be left to myself."

"I am sorry to find you in this mood," said Tom King. "I am prompted by motives of humanity only, and I assure you if there is anything I can do, any service I can render, you have but to speak, and it shall cheerfully be performed."

CHAPTER CMXXXII.

TOM KING REACHES, AS HE BELIEVES, VERY COMFORTABLE QUARTERS.

The stranger groaned again, and pressed his hand tightly upon his left breast, on the spot where the bullet had struck him.

"If you live near this place," continued Tom, "tell me so, and direct me to it. I will lead you thither; or, if you are too much hurt to allow of that, I will hasten off and summon assistance."

That deep-seated feeling of mistrust or suspicion which was so prominent in the stranger now somewhat broke down, and when he spoke again it was in a tone of voice totally different to that which he had previously employed.

"Forgive me," he said, "for my rough, suspicious manner! If you knew all, you would not wonder at my behaviour. I do not live far from here. My house is almost within sight, but whether I shall ever reach it again alive, I know not."

"Let us hope so!" said Tom. "Do you think, if I bound up your hurt to the best of my ability, and raised you to your feet, that you could manage to seat yourself upon my horse? If so, I would lead him gently to your home."

"You are very kind and considerate," said the stranger, in accents of amazement. "I cannot understand why you should take all this trouble with one who is a perfect stranger to you."

Tom King thought fit to disregard this speech—at any rate, he did not make any reply to it, but busied himself in rudely bandaging up the ugly-looking wound the stranger had received.

Then, as suggested, he raised him to his feet, and after that, with much difficulty, the stranger was assisted into the saddle.

By his directions, Tom led the animal forward.

On the way but few words were exchanged.

Tom endeavoured to keep up a conversation, but the stranger remained silent, and therefore Tom desisted.

The truth was, the stranger was much more severely hurt than either himself or the highwayman imagined, and it was as much as ever he could do to retain his seat in the saddle.

His brain swam, and at every step he felt as though he must fall sideways to the ground.

A deadly feeling of faintness also came stealing over him, but the house was now within sight.

It stood quite alone, surrounded by its own spacious grounds, and was situated almost at the summit of a gently-rising piece of ground.

On reaching the lodge gates, which were closed, Tom seized the bell handle, and gave it a hearty pull.

But scarcely had he done so than, with a sudden rush, the stranger fell heavily to the ground.

Tom darted forward as he saw him falling, but was not in time to save him.

Some little delay took place before the lodgekeeper appeared, and when the door was opened, Tom cried:

"A light—a light! Be quick—fetch a light!"

An old man came forth, carrying in his hands a candle, which he had quickly placed inside a battered lantern.

He uttered an exclamation of grief and surprise at what he saw.

"Quick!" said Tom. "Give me the light! Let me look at him!"

"My poor master!" said the lodgekeeper. "Oh, help—help! Who will ride off for the doctor?"

"I sadly fear no human aid would be availing," replied Tom King, who by this time had inspected the stranger's countenance. "There can be no mistaking its expression," he added. "Your master, if such he be, is dead."

"Dead?" said the old man. "Oh, what shall I do—what shall I do?"

"Help me to carry him inside the lodge," said Tom, "and as soon as you have done that, send some one for a doctor—I will remain here."

Tom's suggestion was promptly carried out.

The lifeless body of the stranger was placed gently on a rude kind of bench, near the fire, on the ground floor of the lodge.

The old man then took his departure, hastening off at a speed that one would scarcely have expected from a man of his years.

Tom King looked again into the stranger's countenance.

There could be no doubt that life had fled for ever.

The interior of the lodge was most oppressive to Tom, and he sallied forth to keep watch outside.

He had secured his horse to the gate, and now he went up to it, and patted it gently.

While so engaged, he fancied he heard a well-known sound.

He listened again, and was convinced that his ears had not deceived him.

Persons on horseback were approaching the spot, and, from the direction they were coming, most probably would be the party of police officers he had been at so much pains to elude.

He hesitated a moment as to what course he should adopt.

If he went inside the lodge the officers might ride past without suspecting his presence.

But then, on the other hand, their aid might be called for by some of the servants, in which case Tom would be recognised, and in all probability the death of the unfortunate gentleman laid to his charge.

This consideration, and also the reflection that he could not possibly do any good by remaining, made Tom resolve to seek safety in flight.

Accordingly, untying his horse, he sprang into the saddle, and, again taking to the open country, galloped off across the fields at the best speed of which his horse was capable.

From time to time he glanced back, but he saw nothing of the police officers.

This was not so very surprising, considering trees were growing in clusters here and there, which prevented a clear or uninterrupted view being taken.

Arriving at the summit of a hill, Tom King drew rein to look about him.

Already in the east, he could perceive unmistakable indications of the approach of the coming day.

"It is time I found some place of shelter," he thought; "and yet where shall I find it? As yet to-night I have not had the opportunity of remaining more than a few moments in any place without being molested. Where, then, can I hope to conceal myself for a long period?"

While these thoughts were passing through Tom's mind, his eyes rested successively upon the various objects of which the landscape was composed.

But although he saw many things, he shook his head at every one of them, for none promised him any chance of the shelter he sought.

"I must ride on," he said, "and trust to the chapter of events. I cannot do wrong by getting away from London, so this is clearly the course I ought to take."

Turning his back to the faint grey flush of light in the east, Tom King took his course steadily forward into the open country.

He looked about him incessantly with great wariness,

but he saw nothing whatever of a character to excite his apprehensions.

A feeling of great fatigue, however, began to creep over him, a feeling which at first he tried hard to banish, but failed. It would assert itself in spite of all his efforts.

This made him all the more desirous of finding some place whereat to rest.

He was also forcibly reminded that a long time had elapsed since he had partaken of any food.

The district he was in, however, seemed very thinly populated, for not so much as a rudely-built, thatched cottage met his gaze.

Still he rode on, until the darkness of night rolled away and daylight fairly came.

The sun rose and climbing high up in the sky found him still pursuing his lonely course, growing at each step more and more exhausted.

The sight of a thin wreath of blue smoke curling up from among some trees a little distance in advance roused him into fresh life and animation.

Quickening his horse's steps, he shortly found himself in front of one of those old-fashioned places, half farm-house and half inn, which a hundred years ago were commonly found all over the country.

As was usually the case, there was an air of peaceful serenity dwelling around this place, and Tom immediately became susceptible to its influence.

"If I only dared to run the risk of staying here," he muttered, "how comfortable I could make myself for a short time, but I fear it is not to be thought of. No, no; it would be unsafe in the highest degree. I had better not be seen even."

Tom was about to ride on, when just at that moment the front door of the inn was thrown open and an elderly man with round, stooping shoulders made his appearance.

"Good morning, sir," he said, in a civil, offhanded tone of voice. "Do you wish to stay here? I have the best of entertainment for man and beast."

Tom hesitated.

"Think twice before you decide to go on," said the landlord; "for, judging from your appearance, you have made a very long journey, and must be fatigued. Don't ride on with the expectation of finding some other place, for you will have to go twelve miles at the least before you meet with a chance of halting again; and then the accommodation you get there is not for a moment to be compared to what you will have here."

"You are not troubled with many visitors, I suppose?" said Tom, thoughtfully.

"No, not many, I am sorry to say. The sight of a traveller is quite a treat. If I depended only upon what the inn produced I should have been in the workhouse long ago."

Tom was pleased to find that the house was of so lonely a character, and he imagined as well that at the present moment there was no other traveller resting beneath its roof, or the landlord would have mentioned the fact.

Then Tom began to consider that it was unlikely indeed that his foes would find him out at this place.

"I will stay," he said, suddenly, unable to resist the temptation—"I will stay, landlord, and I shall look to you to make me comfortable."

With quite a radiant smile upon his face, the landlord came forward, and was profuse in his expressions of welcome.

"You keep no groom or ostler, I suppose?" was Tom's next remark.

"No, I should have nothing for him to do. I will attend to your horse, sir, if you please; don't be afraid to entrust him to my care."

"Not by any means," said Tom; "but as he is a particular favourite of mine I will walk with you to the stable, if you have no objection."

"None whatever," said the landlord—"none whatever; you are welcome to go wherever you please about the place."

"That's the way, then, I suppose?" said Tom, noticing his horse by the bridle and pointing to a wooden shed.

"Yes, that's the stable, and when you are inside it you will find that it is more comfortable than it appears."

Tom advanced, and in a few moments he had the satisfaction of seeing that his horse was properly attended to.

This being done, he returned with the landlord to the inn.

"There's no one up at present," he said to Tom, "excepting myself, but the missis and my daughter will be down directly. What would you like for breakfast?"

"Anything that you have in the house that you can get readily," was Tom's response. "Can you let me have a private room?"

The landlord smiled.

"They're all private enough for that matter," he said; "for while you are staying here I very much question whether I shall be so fortunate as to see another strange face. Two travellers stopping here in one day would indeed be an extraordinary occurrence."

Tom laughed as he said:

"But I should like a private room for all that; I should then be able to guard against any intrusion."

"Your wishes shall be attended to, sir. Step this way."

Then throwing open a door, the landlord added:

"This is our best parlour, sir, and you are heartily welcome to make use of it while you stay."

"And what about the breakfast?"

"Would ham and eggs suit you?"

"Excellently," said Tom; "and make haste!"

He seated himself in what the landlord called the best parlour.

It was indeed a very decent apartment, and Tom was by no means inclined to quarrel with it in any particular.

A feeling of great drowsiness came over him while he sat waiting for his breakfast, and to overcome it he was obliged to get up and walk round and round the room.

He paused several times to look through the window, which commanded a view of an extensive piece of country.

But all as far as he could see was perfectly quiet.

"I believe I shall be safe here," he muttered to himself for about the hundredth time. "I think I might venture to go to sleep."

The meal was brought in and done ample justice to, and when the landlord came to remove the cloth he said:

"I don't know how long you may be wishing to stay, sir, but don't hurry off on any account, only——"

He paused.

"What?" asked Tom.

"Only I have some particular business to do in the next town, and I shall be obliged to go to-day. It only happens once in a year, and I have to make the journey, and it is especially aggravating that it should come now."

"Not at all," said Tom—"not at all! I am inclined to rest more on my horse's account than my own, and perhaps I may remain here the greater part of the day; most likely you will find me here upon your return."

Upon hearing this, the countenance of the landlord brightened.

"You will be well attended to," he said. "I will give particular instructions about that."

"Thanks," returned Tom; "but I don't think I shall give much trouble."

"Very good, sir, just as you like, but if you want anything just touch the bell, and it will be answered at once."

"I shall take a nap if I can," replied Tom, "for I have a long ride before me as yet. However, you leave me to make myself comfortable."

The landlord withdrew, and Tom, still fighting against the irresistible inclination he felt to fall asleep, walked about until he had seen the landlord take his departure.

After that the silence of the inn grew more and more oppressive, and Tom, unable any longer to keep his eyes open, laid himself down at full length upon the comfortable sofa placed against the wall on one side of the parlour, and had no sooner assumed a recumbent position than he fell fast asleep—so fast that he was altogether dead to all external noises—so fast that not even the approach of a body of horsemen in the front of the inn would arouse him, as was proved by the fact of such an arrival taking place several hours after he had first closed his eyes in slumber.

CHAPTER CMXXXIII.

IN WHICH TOM KING MEETS WITH A VERY GREAT SURPRISE.

It seemed to Tom that he had only closed his eyes for the space of a moment when he opened them again.

To his surprise and confusion, however, he saw around him nothing but darkness.

He sat up on the sofa and rubbed his eyes doubtful whether he was really awake

A second glance around him assured him that there was no mistake upon this point.

His eyes rested upon the window, through which he could obtain a glimpse of the night sky.

"Can it really be," he muttered, "that I have slept away the whole of this day. I can hardly believe it, and yet——"

He stopped suddenly, for he heard voices somewhere very close to him; indeed, at first, he could not make out from whence the sounds proceeded.

But he soon discovered that one side of the best parlour was composed only of a wooden partition, which divided it from another apartment, and it was in this last-named place that several persons were seated engaged in conversation.

Something had just been said, and caused a general laugh.

"We'll have more to drink," said a rough voice. "It's not worth while to go yet, our horses are so much exhausted; besides, I don't like leaving such a snug place as this."

"No—no!" came from several lips, and then another voice cried:

"Ring the bell."

The command was immediately followed by a sharp tinkling sound.

There could be no doubt whatever that during Tom King's long and deep sleep some visitors had actually arrived at the roadside public-house, and what was more, that they had arrived in tolerably strong numbers.

An immediate curiosity respecting them sprang up in Tom's breast.

He considered it was highly imperative that he should make himself acquainted with everything that was going on around him.

The next sound which reached his ears was the opening of a door, then a feminine voice asked what was wanted.

Rum punch was unanimously ordered, and the girl withdrew to prepare the steaming beverage.

By this time Tom's eyes had grown tolerably familiar to the semi-obscurity which filled the best parlour of the inn.

He was now able to see with a certain amount of distinctness even in the darkest and remotest corners.

His principal attention, however, was directed to the wooden partition.

He was wondering whether he could find any small chink or opening through which he could take a peep at the inmates of the next room.

Something that looked like a shutter or movable panel at the top of the partition at length rewarded his search, but it was far up out of his reach.

Before lying down, Tom had taken the precaution to lock the door; and now, on tiptoe, he crossed the room, picked up a table, and carried it with him, and placed it against that part of the partition.

By standing on this, however, Tom was scarce tall enough, for the panel was placed just where the partition joined the ceiling.

By placing a chair on the table, however, all difficulties were overcome.

Tom took care to mount as quietly as possible.

He found he had made no mistake—there really was a small door about a foot square in one of the upper panels.

Why it should have been placed in such a position he could not conceive, nor did he much trouble himself about the circumstance—he was content to find that it was there, and so convenient.

Care would have to be taken in opening it, so that while doing so the attention of those in the next room should not be attracted.

But this Tom accomplished by opening the door a very little way, and then pausing until, by degrees, it was opened sufficiently for him to look through.

Before this was the case, however, the girl had returned with the bowl of punch.

As she placed it on the table, one of the guests said:

"I think you told us, my dear, that you had no one staying in the house at the present time?"

"I don't remember that I said anything of the sort!" was the reply, given in a pert tone of voice.

"Oh yes, you did; or if you did not it don't matter. There is no one, I suppose?"

"Well, no one that I've seen," replied the girl; "but father said a gentleman arrived early this morning, and took the best parlour, but I have not seen or heard anything of him."

"Oh!" said the voice. "And pray where may your father be?"

"Why, he went over to Mapleton this morning, and has not come back, though I expect him every minute."

"Oh, very well!" was the reply. "Then, when he comes in, just tell him we want to speak to him."

"Very well, sir!"

"And also, should that gentleman you have not seen make any movement just let us know, will you? I have a curiosity to peep at him."

It was just at this moment that Tom King, who also had a curiosity to take a peep, looked through the panel he had so carefully opened.

What, then, was his amazement, not to say alarm, to perceive that quite a large party of police officers were seated most comfortably in the adjoining room, and separated from him by nothing more than a thin wooden partition.

He looked into their countenances one by one, but without recognising any.

In doing this he also counted them, and found the number to be fourteen.

How on earth they could have arrived there, and sat down to make merry, without his being aware of it, Tom could not imagine.

It seemed to him incredible that he could have slept so soundly.

By keeping his face at a little distance from the opening there was not much fear that any of the officers would see him, so Tom did not quit his exalted position, but remained with the determination of watching the course of events.

There was just a bare possibility that the officers might depart without seeing him at all; for, from the manner in which they were enjoying themselves it was evident they had no suspicion of his presence there.

"Are you sure," said another officer, who sat close to the fire—"are you sure, my dear, that you can't give us some sort of description of the gentleman who came so early this morning?"

"Why, now, how can I do any such thing? Didn't I say I hadn't seen him?"

"Yes, yes—to be sure you did!" was the answer. "But, then, your father might have mentioned what sort of a looking gentleman he was, or something of that sort."

"No, no—I hardly saw father this morning, he was off so soon, and he said nothing whatever on the subject."

"But you expect him back very soon, you say?"

"Yes, every minute. Hark! Do you hear that?"

"What?"

"The sound of wheels! It is father—I'll warrant it is father! People rarely pass here after dark."

The girl was proved to be correct, for the revolution of the wheels suddenly ceased.

"Then, my dear," said the officer seated at the fire, "if that's your father, just go quietly to him, and say that we are here, and want to ask him an important question."

The girl withdrew, and immediately afterwards returned. She had met her father in the passage.

Never did man look so astounded as he did upon finding the room so full of company.

Upon his entrance there was a momentary silence, so accordingly he made a kind of circular sidelong bow, in which he included every person present.

"Glad to see you, gentlemen," he said—"very glad indeed to see you! It's a coldish night outside, and the fire must be acceptable."

"Yes, yes, landlord," said the officer who had before spoken—"but come here; I want to speak to you quietly about something."

With wonder in his looks, the landlord complied.

"Your daughter tells me," said the officer, with great emphasis, and bringing the forefinger of his right hand into the palm of his left hand at every word he spoke, "that early this morning a traveller arrived here and took a private room."

"Yes, that's quite true, but he has gone by this time, surely?"

"No, he has not—at least, your daughter says so. Well, now, stop—don't run away; just listen to me!"

"I am listening."

"Well, then, in as few words as you can, and as quietly as you can, give me a description of that gentleman's appearance."

The landlord endeavoured to comply.

But he made a sad bungle of it.

"Hush!" said the officer, sinking his voice to a still lower tone. "Keep quiet—I don't want to raise an alarm. Just say whether he agrees or not with this description."

The officer pulled a bill out of his pocket, and folding it in the middle, began to read.

Scarcely had the first words passed his lips, however, than he was interrupted by a prodigious clatter—a noise that drowned every other sound.

"Goodness gracious alive!" ejaculated the landlord, staggering back—"what on earth is that?"

The officers, all startled by the noise, looked around, for it seemed to them it had actually been made in the very room in which they sat.

"What's on the other side of that partition?" roared the officer, thrusting the bill back into his pocket.

"Why, the best parlour."

"The best parlour?" he yelled. "Ten thousand devils! That's where the gentleman was, I suppose? Of course it is, and now he is escaping. But quietly, my lads—let us take it quietly! We have him—there's no occasion to trouble! Briggson is outside, and he will be after him, depend upon it!"

Just as he uttered these words, the loud report of a pistol made itself distinctly heard.

CHAPTER CMXXXIV.

IN WHICH TOM KING FINDS HE IS UNABLE TO SHAKE OFF HIS PURSUERS.

It was indeed from the best parlour in the inn that the tremendous clattering noise had come, and the cause of it was this.

When our old friend saw the police officer produce the bill and unfold it, he judged it was high time to be off; in fact, he believed that the very best thing for him to do under the circumstances was to beat as hasty a retreat as possible.

But there is such a thing as making too much haste, as Tom found to his cost, for in stepping from the chair on to the table he placed his foot much too near the edge of the latter, the consequence of which was that before he knew what was the matter the whole affair had overbalanced, and he was lying on the ground with the furniture upon him.

A cry of vexation escaped his lips at this untoward accident.

It would at once let the police officers know that he was on his guard and preparing to escape.

Scrambling to his feet, he scarcely knew how, he made a rush to the window.

From mere habit more than anything else, he had previously made himself acquainted with the nature of its fastenings, so that now he was able to fling it open quickly and easily.

To spring into the roadway was but the work of a second; and then, knowing perfectly well where his horse had been posted, he ran off in that direction.

Before he had gone many steps, however, he was challenged, and a voice commanded him to stop.

It was not likely that he would pay any attention to any such command as this, and so continued his course, if anything, with slightly-increased speed.

Then the man who had challenged him—being no other than Briggson, the officer, who had been put there on the look-out—deemed himself justified in producing his pistol and discharging it at the flying figure.

Tom felt the bullet whistle past him, or fancied he did; but he heard the report of the firearm, and so he knew he was safe

At that very moment he gained the stable door.

Never, probably, had a horse been got ready and mounted in so short a space of time as Tom's was now.

But the fact was, however, in the morning, when attending his steed, he had requested that the saddle might be left upon his back, doing no more than loosening the girths.

The bridle had been hung upon a hook close by.

Tom seized this bridle, and, without waiting to put it on, and without pausing either to tighten the saddle-girths, he vaulted into the saddle, providing himself with no other means of guiding his horse than the halter by which he had been secured to the manger.

Owing to these rapid and energetic proceedings, Tom was enabled to get outside the stable almost before Briggson had made up his mind whether he had hit the fugitive or not.

Still, the police officers had poured out from the inn, and were hastening as fast as their legs could carry them to another large shed, lying more at the rear of the inn, which had been rapidly turned into a stable on their arrival, for, as may be supposed, in a place of so little trade there was not accommodation for so many horses.

They saw him take his departure, and gave vent to a loud cry, as though to express their determination to give him full chase.

Tom, however, paid no attention to them, but hurried off.

He quickly found, though, that, practised as he was in the art of riding, it was by no means easy to keep the saddle in its proper place.

Having, then, gained a trifling start, he thought he might venture to pause while he made himself and his steed more comfortable.

Accordingly, he alighted, tightened the girths, pulled off the halter, and substituted the bridle.

These operations occupied only a few fleeting moments, yet the police officers were enabled in the meanwhile to mount and to commence the chase in good earnest.

Tom, however, now felt but little apprehension.

He was convinced that his new horse was a good one, and now that he had had so long a rest and been well provided with food, he would be in excellent condition for the road, and capable of making any amount of exertion that might be required of him.

In accordance with his usual habit, Tom King took to the fields. He had found by experience that riding across the country afforded him a much better chance of shaking off his pursuers than confining himself to the high-roads and lanes.

But from time to time he turned in the saddle and looked behind him, and each time that he did so he saw that the officers were unpleasantly close behind him.

He put his horse to increased speed, and coming to a very high hedge, made him leap over it.

The animal seemed nervous, for it shied and swerved, but Tom was resolute, and forced him to rise.

It was unfortunate, however, for the animal barely cleared the obstruction, and coming down awkwardly, slipped and fell upon its side, carrying Tom with it.

But the highwayman, though he released his feet from the stirrups, kept firm hold of the bridle, and was on his feet as soon as the horse was.

The noble creature trembled and shook all over.

Whether it was injured or not by the fall Tom could not tell, nor dare he pause to ascertain.

Once more springing into the saddle, he plunged the spurs deeply into his flanks.

The horse staggered at first, and then broke out into full gallop, showing pretty clearly that whatever injury he might have received was not of a very serious character.

"I rather think," said Tom, as he noted the length and uniform height of the hedge, "that that will be a slight obstruction in the way of my friends behind. But for my fall, I should have got clear of them easily."

As may be imagined, however, the delay this sudden fall occasioned enabled the officers to get much nearer.

Upon arriving at the hedge they pulled up by common consent. Not one felt inclined to run the risk of leaping over it.

"Quick!" said the one in command. "Speed will do it now, after all. Get your cutlasses and cut away these branches. It won't take a moment to make a gap large enough for us to pass through one at a time. Now, then, set to work!"

Long before he had finished giving his directions, one of the men had alighted, drawn his cutlass, and commenced an attack upon the hedge.

His weapon was sharp and his arm strong, and it was surprising to find what havoc he made among the closely-growing twigs.

A gap was soon made—not exactly large enough for the horses to walk through, but still such a one as they could leap over easily; and as soon as this was the case, the one in command cried:

"That will do, Parker—that will do now; up into the saddle, and all of you follow me."

He set the example of making his way through the gap, and the others followed without loss of time.

Tom King was not a little disconcerted when, on turning round again, he found that the officers had so easily overcome the obstruction.

He had hoped that they would be obliged to ride along the hedge until they came to a part low enough to allow them to leap over.

Still he did not despair, for he had a pleasant piece of country before him, and he did not doubt that in the long run he should tire out his pursuers.

Nevertheless, he wished to get the chase over as quickly as was possible, and so urged his horse to the utmost, for he was fearful that the animal would in a short time begin to feel the effects of his fall.

Yet it was vexatious, and in spite of all his exertions and efforts, the police officers kept about the same distance in the rear.

They did not gain on him in the least, nor did they lose ground.

There was a dogged obstinacy about this chase which made Tom King feel rather uncomfortable.

It was so palpable that the officers were determined to hold on in pursuit until they effected his capture.

For nearly as far as he could see the country round was as smooth and level as a bowling green, not affording him any chance of doubling upon them, or to put into execution any manœuvre whatever.

He was thus compelled to resort to his original expedient, namely, that of making the best speed in his power.

It was while things were in this unsatisfactory state that Tom King suddenly found on the other side of a hedge before which he halted the broad turnpike road.

Looking to the left, and seeing a white gate only a few yards off, he walked his horse towards it, preferring to do this rather than run the risk of another leap.

The difference in time was really not very great.

He closed the gate behind him, remounted, and then looked up and down on the opposite side, hoping to find a similar means of entering the next field.

Nothing of the kind presented itself, however, and as it would not do to linger, he turned in the direction that would lead him away from London, and continued his hasty flight, resolved, however, that the moment he caught sight of a gate that he would pull up and pass through it.

To his annoyance, however, he failed to see any gate whatever.

The officers finding that the object of their pursuit was hurrying along the high road, changed their course slightly.

Instead of riding direct for the gate through which Tom had passed, they took a diagonal direction, which would serve to cut off a very large corner indeed.

It did so; and Tom shortly afterwards had the additional mortification of discovering that the officers had gained very much upon him.

He saw a gate, but he felt it would be madness to stop now and attempt to pass through.

There was no resource save that of continuing his wild flight along the highway.

All at once, passing round a bend in the road, he perceived before him a small covered cart, the driver of which carefully drew out of his way.

Little did Tom suspect that in this cart was seated his old companion Dick.

Had any immortal being whispered such a thing in his ears he would have received the intimation with incredulity.

Amid the clattering sound produced by his horse's feet on the hard road, Tom fancied he distinguished another sound like a cry of startled surprise.

But he had no time to think about this, but bent all his energies to urging forward his horse at his utmost speed.

But as he was now out of sight of his pursuers, and as he could perceive before him a gate, Tom gradually relaxed his speed, and then dismounted.

The gate was locked, but a couple of good, smashing blows with a heavy stone that lay close at hand, demolished the padlock, and allowed him to pass through.

Tom crossed this field, and then the next, then paused.

He looked behind him.

To his surprise, he no longer saw his foes, and at this circumstance he wondered greatly.

He little knew the service Dick had rendered him by sending the officers across the country in the wrong direction.

But although the officers were not within sight, Tom did not feel satisfied to remain so close to them, and continued on his way until he was again brought to a stop by a tall hedgerow.

He paused when near it, and at the same moment he heard a voice exclaim:

"There he is—there he is, over in the meadow! Quick—quick! Run on and open the gate! We are close upon him!"

Now, these sounds were not a little bewildering to Tom King, for, of course, he imagined that these words were uttered by one of the officers who had given him such a long and persistent chase.

But the fact was, as the reader no doubt surmises, that these police officers were those under the immediate command of Jack Marshall himself, and whom Dick had left disputing with each other at the junction of the four cross roads.

At the first sight the officer who had called out had taken Tom King for Dick Turpin, which was a thing not unfrequently done, owing to the general resemblance there was between them.

Tom caught the alarm, and, turning his horse's head another way, began his flight afresh.

He was now growing terribly alarmed; he could not conceal the fact from himself.

Already his horse had had a long and wearying gallop, added to which he had met with a severe fall.

Now he was close to his foes again, all his previous exertions had gone for nothing.

It did indeed seem a disheartening state of things.

But Tom only gave way to this depression of spirits for about a moment.

Drawing a long breath and giving himself a good shake, he braced himself up, so to speak, and prepared to meet this fresh danger with which he was assailed.

The only thing which troubled him was the strangeness of the fact that the officers should be so close behind him when he believed them to be at a distance, for, strangely enough, the thought did not strike him that it was another party altogether.

Fortunately for him, the meadow he was now crossing was of unusual extent.

It was very level, and divided from another almost as large by a narrow, winding stream, or rather brook.

His horse leaped over this without any perceptible exertion, and Tom—by means of his voice, by doubling up the reins and using them as a whip, by spurring vigorously with both heels—endeavoured to stimulate his horse into making still greater speed, although the gallop he was then going at was of truly an alarming character.

CHAPTER CMXXXV.

TOM KING UNEXPECTEDLY BUT OPPORTUNELY ENCOUNTERS AN OLD FRIEND.

Once again, while going at this headlong gallop, Tom King turned his head over his shoulder and looked behind him.

He was then in no small degree rejoiced to find that he

had succeeded in placing a much greater distance between himself and his foes than he had dared to anticipate. Surely if anything was calculated to encourage him this was.

And so, with quite a feeling of exultation, he redoubled his efforts.

It really seemed, however, as though all things should on that night turn out vexatiously.

The ground suddenly began to rise, so that his horse not only went more slowly, but underwent much more fatigue.

There was no other resource, however, than to keep on, and the highwayman endeavoured to console himself with the thought that when the summit of the hill was reached he would be able to make up for loss of time by the rapidity with which he should perform the descent.

And here in this case fortune favoured him, for the descent was much greater than he had been led to imagine.

Allowing the reins to fall unrestrainedly upon his horse's neck, he again goaded him to the utmost.

The danger of such a course as this must be apparent, but, then, all ordinary dangers were lost sight of under such exciting circumstances as these.

One false step, Tom was well enough aware, and down his horse and himself would go, and with such violence as would probably occasion insensibility, if not instant death.

But the false step was not made, and at the bottom Tom found a rather dense cluster of trees, through which he did not attempt to penetrate, however, but contented himself by simply skirting them—his object being to get out of the sight of his foes.

On the opposite side of these trees Tom King suddenly perceived a light.

It came into view so quickly that he was upon it almost instantly.

At the same time a man started up, as it appeared, from the earth, and raised his arms above his head.

Tom's horse stopped and reared with so much suddenness that the highwayman was unhorsed.

The man, however, who had started up seized the frightened animal, and Tom King scrambled quickly to his feet.

"You were riding fast, stranger," said the man who had started up. "I was lying here, and did but move to save myself from being trampled upon by your horse's hoofs."

Tom King, breathless and exhausted, could not reply, but he endeavoured to climb into the saddle.

"You are spent and weary, stranger," continued the man. "You seem like one flying for his life. Your form looks familiar to me, too. Hi! Sebel!"—in a different tone of voice—"a light here—quickly!"

"Curse your light!" said Tom. "I want it not! Let go the reins!"

Before he had finished speaking, a light suddenly appeared in the darkness, and Tom could tell it was turned full upon his countenance.

"I knew it, stranger," said the man—"I felt certain we had met before! I do not break bread with so many strange faces as to be unable to remember them. I recollect you well."

"And there is something familiar in your voice," said Tom King, recovering his composure, and with the thought flashing upon him that this man might possibly be able to befriend him in no ordinary degree.

"Yes," continued the man, "it is long—very long since we met. You had then a companion with you, who rode a black steed of matchless quality. Do you remember now?"

"Yes, yes," said Tom—"quite well! You gave us both shelter and food at a time when we were sorely in need of both."

"And it seems that you are in fresh danger now?"

"I am," said Tom. "The officers of police are close behind me. They have given me a hard—a very hard chase, and every moment I expect to see them come into view."

At the very name of officers the gipsy ground his teeth savagely, and uttered an angry exclamation.

"No matter, stranger," he said. "The poor Zingari will again befriend you! Come with me, and fear not—you're safe! Let the officers do what they may, they cannot find you!"

There was something so sincere in the tones of this man's voice, that Tom did not hesitate to trust and to believe him.

Moreover, on the former occasion, that he so well recollected, this man had been to them a most faithful ally.

He had nothing to fear from him in the shape of treachery, and just then his position was so bad that it could not possibly be worse, and consequently there was all the more chance of making it better.

These reflections did not take Tom King a moment to make, and he suffered him to lead him onwards in the darkness, for the boy Sebel had extinguished or hidden the light.

Tom soon found that he was descending into a kind of dell, at the bottom of which a fire was blazing.

It was, indeed, the light that he had first perceived.

Round this were grouped, in various picturesque attitudes, some ten or a dozen gipsies, male and female.

They were all anxiously on the look-out, and wondering what had happened.

"A friend," said Tom's conductor, briefly. "He requires shelter and concealment. Draw out the waggon quickly! There, that will do well. Stranger, come this way."

A large covered waggon, or rather cart, that had been backed close up against one side of the dell, was drawn away from its position, and the gipsy, leading Tom forward, showed him an indentation in the soil, looking like the entrance to a cavern.

"Enter," he said—"enter quickly; it is a small chamber, yet large enough to conceal you and your horse. Be quick; we will push the waggon back, and assume careless attitudes; then, if the officers appear, they will behold nothing suspicious."

"But should they search?" said Tom, who by no means relished shutting himself up in such a place.

"It is not likely," said the gipsy. "You leave that to us. If you are in any danger of discovery we will arm ourselves, and stand up in your defence. If we can do no more we will cover your retreat; but believe me, when I say again you have nothing to fear. In—in quickly!"

Almost against his will Tom was pushed into the little indentation we have mentioned, and his horse also.

Then, with great nimbleness and dexterity, the gipsies pushed the covered cart back in such a manner that his hiding-place was altogether concealed.

The gipsy calculated that the existence of such a place would never be suspected, consequently that Tom would be quite safe.

Whether he was right or not would be quickly put to the test, for his quick ears detected the dull thud produced by the concussion of many horses' feet upon the turf.

"Now, then, round the fire, all of you. Sit quietly, and remember if we are questioned, that we have seen nothing—heard nothing."

Scarcely had these instructions been carried out than the police officers arrived at the brink of the dell.

They came upon the place very unexpectedly, and were very near galloping into it.

They reined up their horses in good time, however, and seeing the lights, called out in loud tones.

The gipsies gave a responsive cry, and then the police officers, finding that the descent was practicable, began to make their way down one side of the dell.

In a few minutes they halted near the fire.

"Hullo!" cried one of the gipsies.

The appearance of the police officers caused considerable consternation among the gipsies, part of which was feigned, and part real.

"Have you been here long?" asked the officer.

"Since sunset."

"And have you seen anyone or heard anyone pass by—a man mounted on a horse, and going at full gallop?"

He was responded to by a general negative; and the gipsy who had hidden Tom King said:

"The silence of this place has not been disturbed, but there is something in the air of it which proclaims that it is no place for us. When you arrived, we were consulting as to whether we should strike our tents and now or wait till daylight."

These answers were given with so much calmness and presence of mind that the officers were quite deceived.

To Tom's inexpressible satisfaction, they rode away; but before the summit of the dell was reached one of the officers who rode nearest to Jack Marshall said:

"I hope, sir, you do not pay any particular attention to what those fellows said; they will tell more lies in a minute than a hawker could in a day."

"I don't believe them, as a general thing," said Jack Marshall, thoughtfully, "but yet they would know better than deceive us in such a case as this. Rely upon it, he has galloped past."

"But where has he gone?" said the officer, glancing around him, for by this time they had reached the level of the meadows. "I can see for a long, long distance, but there's not a trace of him."

Jack Marshall was silent for a moment or two, and then he said:

"These people are cunning."

"Very," assented the officer.

"Then we will meet cunning with cunning. Half of our number, headed by yourself, shall remain here. Search well. In the meantime I and the rest will keep up the pursuit."

"Agreed!" was the reply. "And if he is hidden anywhere about here, Mr. Marshall, rely upon it I shall be the one to unkennel him."

As Jack Marshall elected which men should accompany him, there was no difficulty nor delay in making a separation, and really without any particular loss of time one-half were going at full gallop across the meadow.

Now, had not these remarks been overheard by the gipsy who had so befriended Tom, our friend's position might have become critical.

Yet even now he was in a very dangerous predicament.

The gipsy was aware that only half the officers had taken their departure; but then he doubted much whether the highwayman was in possession of that knowledge, and he remembered also that he had forgotten to give Tom a caution not to move until he came to tell him all was well.

Thoughtfully and silently the gipsy made his way down into the dell again, and having reached the bottom, he began to give orders that the whole troop should get ready to depart.

He gave the command in a loud voice, then told his companions in an undertone to make as much flourish or display as they could over their preparations, but by no means to depart hastily.

This, of course, was done for the purpose of misleading the officers, and it produced a very tolerable effect, for the one who had remained in charge of this second party began to fancy, after all, he was mistaken, and that Jack Marshall and the rest would have the credit of a capture.

Accompanied by much shouting and talking, the horses were caught and harnessed to the different vehicles.

The tents were pulled up, the canvas folded, and, in a word, every preparation made for an immediate start.

This had been going on for more than half-an-hour, during which the officers had been looking keenly around them, when the one in command said:

"I am not satisfied about these gipsies yet. Come with me; let us go down. We will make a thorough search all through the dell."

His orders were obeyed immediately.

Some muttered discontented grumblings, for the fact was the officers who had to remain were very much annoyed at the event; they would have much preferred following Jack Marshall and the rest.

The gipsies affected to be surprised when the officers returned.

"Look here," said the one in command, "we are determined to stand no nonsense! We tracked our man close to this spot, and he has here most mysteriously disappeared. Now, we believe you to be in the secret; if so, and if you are wise, you will tell us at once, otherwise the consequences will be more serious than you think of."

"The Zingari has spoken," said the gipsy, "and you are welcome to search. In a few more moments we shall all have left the dell."

The officers began to search about in all directions, yet, as they did not come near the waggon, they found nothing of a suspicious character

But Tom King began to feel decidedly uncomfortable.

That confidence which he had felt in the gipsy had altogether departed, and most unquestionably, had there been any means whatever of making a dash from his hiding-place Tom would have done so.

But as the heavy waggon was backed up against him this was an impossibility, and so he had to remain quite still, and prepare himself for what was about to happen.

No place was left unsearched by the police, and at length they came to the covered waggon.

They looked around it; one even climbed up and stood on the shafts while he pulled aside the canvas flap in front and looked within.

The light of his lantern, however, rested only on the water-proof covering, for the opening at the back was concealed by the two flaps of canvas at the tail of the waggon, which were drawn closely across and tied together.

If the officer had entered the vehicle and pulled aside these flaps, Tom King must to a certainty have been discovered.

But he did not do so.

The thought that Tom King might be concealed behind never once occurred to him, nor was it likely that it should.

They moved off to a little distance, and then the gipsy, seizing Sebel by the arm, whispered in his ear:

"Crawl into the cavern and ask the stranger whether he thinks he should be able to creep into the waggon and to drag his horse in after him. If so, tell him all will be well. By that means we shall get him clear of the police officers, who, if I mistake not, intend to linger about this spot till daybreak."

The boy gave a nod to show that he understood thoroughly the purport of the hastily-uttered words, and gliding noiselessly away in the darkness, hastened to deliver his message.

CHAPTER CMXXXVI.

THE POLICE OFFICERS KEEP A SHARP LOOK-OUT UPON THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIPSIES.

The gipsy who had so well befriended Tom King continued to stand watching the movements of the police officers.

After a brief whispered conference together, they quitted the dell; but did not go far away from it.

"You may say what you like," exclaimed one, "but I am more than ever of opinion that the man we want is not very far from here."

"Well, but where is he?"

The officer who had just spoken shook his head sagaciously, while at the same moment he pointed towards the gipsy encampment.

"It's my settled belief that those fellows yonder could answer that question if they liked, and if you would take my advice——"

"Well!"

"It would be not to leave off searching around, but at the same time to watch with all closely the movements of those *varmint* yonder."

"That is precisely what I had already made up my mind to do, so you will have the satisfaction of knowing that your advice for once in a way has been taken. Now, my lads," he added, "search around, and I will watch the gipsies."

The officers, however, set about their work very coldly.

Their failure to find any clue at all up to the present moment made them feel doubtful whether the highwayman was there at all. At any rate, they considered that those who had galloped off with Jack Marshall stood by far the best chance of making a capture.

In the meantime the boy Sebel had crept under the waggon and delivered his message to the highwayman, who said:

"I suppose, Sebel, he means to carry me away in the waggon?"

"Just so."

"Well, it is a plan as likely to serve me as any that I can think of, so I will make the attempt. Do you know whether the officers are far enough off to make it safe for me to try?"



[TOM KING LOSES HIS SECOND HORSE.]

"I think not; but when I creep under the waggon again I can soon tell."

"Then, if they are far enough off," whispered Tom, "just give a faint, low whistle. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Make haste, then!"

Sebel disappeared.

Tom King listened intently, and almost immediately the wished-for signal reached his ears.

Now on his own account he was not at all doubtful of his ability to get into the waggon, but as for his steed, that was another affair altogether.

He was quite a stranger to it, and knew not what its disposition might be.

But Tom relied to a very great extent upon the amount of sagacity which he knew all horses to possess.

He patted and stroked the creature for some minutes, and was pleased to find that it perfectly appreciated his caresses.

Then, mounting into the waggon, Tom tied back the canvas flaps so as to leave the way clear.

Fortunately, the vehicle stood on low wheels.

Stooping down, the highwayman took hold of the bridle, and endeavoured to draw the horse up into the waggon.

But this was a failure, so he descended again; but though he tried in a variety of ways, he could not succeed—the horse would not or could not understand him.

At this moment Tom became conscious that some one was near him, then a voice, which he recognised as belonging to the friendly gipsy, said:

"Is it too difficult?"

"I fear so."

"Then I'll tell you what you must do: You must make a bolt for it, and trust to the fleetness of your steed."

"I like that plan best. Where are the officers?"

"Not far off; and yet so far that I think you have a reasonable chance of stealing away."

"Then I will try at all hazards."

"Good! You cannot have a better chance than you have now."

"But, my friend," said Tom, "I must make you some recompense for what you have done. Now it is impossible, but we shall meet again, and then you will find I shall not be empty-handed."

"What I have done," interrupted the gipsy, "has been done willingly, and without desire for reward. The officers are my enemies, and I have treated them as such."

"Yes, yes," responded Tom, hastily—"I know very well all about that. Still, at the same time, it is my wish and intention to reward you for what you have done."

The gipsy bent his head submissively.

"At some future time," said Tom—"and I hope it will not be long distant—we shall meet again; then you will find that this will be about the best night's work that you have ever done."

"As you will," was the answer. "But there is no time to lose now upon matters of this kind. Are you all ready?"

"Quite."

"Then mount, and bend low down in the saddle, so as to prevent yourself as much as possible from being seen."

"Right!" said Tom, as he complied with this demand.

"If all is well," the gipsy added, in conclusion, "I will have the cart drawn a little on one side, in such a manner, understand, as to screen you from the observation of the police officers as much as I can. The rest I leave to you."

"You can do so safely," said Tom. "This brief rest will make all the difference to my steed. Besides, I have only half the number of foes to contend with."

Almost before Tom finished speaking the gipsy glided away.

A silence of some moments' duration then ensued, which was broken by the noise made in harnessing to the waggon.

At length the heavy vehicle was slowly drawn aside, and no sooner was there sufficient room to permit him to emerge than Tom did so.

The officers, however, were more on the alert than either the highwayman or the gipsies had given them credit for.

There was a sudden report from a pistol, and Tom felt his left arm suddenly fall nerveless to his side.

The reins fell upon his horse's neck.

He grasped them instantly with his right hand, and then used his spurs vigorously.

Away the horse went at full speed; but Tom heard loud shouts and cries in his rear, and, without looking back, he could tell that the officers were close behind him.

Keeping his horse's head still turned in the direction of the open country, Tom urged him onwards until, having got him to the very top of his speed, he let the reins fall upon his neck in order to ascertain the amount of injury the pistol bullet had inflicted.

The pain in his left arm was intolerable, and from the feel of it he came to the conclusion that the bone was broken.

Blood was flowing freely—so freely that if it was not checked at once its effects would soon be weakening to such a degree as to deprive him of all power to remain in the saddle.

As well as he could—for it was a difficult operation while going at so great a speed—Tom bound his handkerchief tightly round his arm.

The pain was by this proceeding much increased, yet, in his excitement, he scarcely heeded it.

It was some time before he could summon up sufficient courage to turn his head and look behind him.

He fancied that his pursuers were very close indeed upon his heels, so at last, with feelings of the greatest uneasiness, he gave one backward glance.

What was his satisfaction and intense surprise to find that his foes were far, far behind!

His steed had distanced them gallantly.

It was just at this time that he again came to a rather broad cross-country road, and as it was only divided from the meadows by a low hedge about twelve inches in height, he had no difficulty in gaining it.

This road he suddenly resolved to follow, with the intention of again taking to the fields at the first opportunity.

Then, suddenly, a faint cry reached his ears.

No doubt it had been a loud and lusty call, but distance had softened it down until it was little more than a murmur.

The moon was shining with tolerable brightness, and by its aid, on looking back, Tom saw the officers waving their arms in a most furious manner, and from time to time uttering a loud shout.

What could be the meaning of this proceeding, Tom, for the life of him, could not guess.

By their manner it would almost seem as though they were calling upon him to stop, yet such a thing as this was unlikely in the extreme.

It was not long, however, before this mystery was revealed.

The officers, not yet having reached the road, were at a rather higher elevation than the highwayman, and they were enabled to command a much greater extent of country.

They had perceived in the cross-road, at no great distance, a man engaged in driving one of those long, lumbering waggons used for the conveyance of huge pieces of timber.

Although he was so far off, the officers hoped that the stillness of the night would carry the sound of their voices to his ears, and they hoped as well to make him understand by sign what they meant.

There was just a chance that they might be successful, and no more, yet it was a chance well worth the trying, for since if they lost it they would be no worse off than before.

To their extreme satisfaction the man, who was trudging along by the side of the horses, stopped, and looked behind him.

Seeing this, the officers shouted and waved their arms again.

Evidently, however, the waggoner did not comprehend their gesticulations, nor would have done so had he not all at once heard the sound of horses' hoofs approaching at a rapid rate, and then immediately afterwards caught sight of Tom.

A being with an intellect more obtuse than this waggoner possessed could then have come readily enough to the conclusion that the officers wished him to intercept the fugitive.

Running with all speed to the head of his team, the waggoner caught hold of the bridles, and exerting his utmost strength, pulled the horses round in such a manner that the timber waggon was quickly turned broadside across the road.

Such was its length that the ends of the long poles brushed against the hedgerow on one side, while the points of the shafts came almost into contact with the trunk of a tree that grew opposite.

Tom saw this obstruction in his path, and instinctively slackened his horse's speed, though at first he did not guess what the waggoner was about to do.

All at once, however, he perceived how formidable a barrier there was to his further progress.

A loud cry, unmistakably one of exultation, next reached his ears.

It proceeded from the officers, who now made quite sure of their captive.

A high embankment was on each side of the road. The timber waggon was drawn across it, and so they felt that they had the highwayman in a trap.

Tom King quickly saw, however, that he had one chance—only one, and that a most desperate one—of escaping from his enemies.

It was to spur his horse onward again with all speed, and force him to overleap the barricade.

Had it been his own horse, which he had so unfortunately lost, Tom would not have felt so much hesitation about making the attempt, but of the animal he now bestrode he knew scarcely anything.

It might be that such a desperate leap as that was far beyond its powers.

At the time, however, it can scarcely be said that these considerations presented themselves to Tom's mind.

On the contrary, rather, no sooner did he conceive this idea than he proceeded to put it into execution.

Uttering encouraging cries, and doing everything that lay in his power to incite his horse to put forth his utmost powers, Tom came on at full gallop to the waggon.

When within a short distance of it, however, the animal stopped suddenly, then swerved aside.

The highwayman's heart sank within him, but the mocking laughter that came from the lips of the waggoner and the police officers in their too-soon exultation at the success of his scheme made him furious, so, angrily tugging at the rein, he made his horse draw back again, and once more he put it to its utmost powers.

He used the spurs with a barbarity that no other circumstances could have excused.

One would have thought, however, to witness the behaviour of the horse, that the animal had gone for the first time merely in order to ascertain the nature of the leap it had to take, for on this second trial it rose gallantly in the air and just cleared the formidable barricade; its hind hoofs just scraped one of the upper poles, but that was all.

The ground was reached in safety.

Such a discordant yell of disappointment and rage as came simultaneously from the lips of all the police officers was surely never heard before.

It was now Tom's turn to exult, so, wheeling his horse round, he took off his hat and returned their mocking laugh.

So exasperated were the officers by this proceeding, that by common consent they pulled out their short, stumpy pistols, and discharged them.

A ridiculous proceeding, for they must have known full well Tom King was far out of their range.

And now this clever stratagem that they had caused to be put into execution told much against them.

Not one of the officers dreamed for a moment of attempting to overleap the waggon, so they pulled up and called to the waggoner to allow them to pass.

To turn the waggon round again, however, into its original position proved to be no easy task, for one of the wheels got fixed in some way, and for a few moments the vehicle was quite immovable.

The officers cursed, and swore, and behaved themselves more like madmen than sane beings.

But, as one might expect, that did not mend matters in the least.

In the meanwhile, Tom profited by this delay to the very utmost.

He knew the time was a most favourable one for him to make an effort, and he made it accordingly.

Before his foes were enabled to get once more fairly upon his track, he was not only out of sight but out of hearing also.

To come so near achieving their object, and then to miss it, was indeed aggravating in the highest degree, and it is scarcely to be wondered at that the police officers should lose their tempers under such circumstances.

But with dogged determination they kept steadily along the road, trusting to run down their prey in time.

Tom King no sooner found that he had fairly shaken them off than he reined in his steed to allow it a little rest after its recent exertions.

The pause thus made, too, enabled him to take a review of his position, and allowed him the opportunity of considering the nature of his future movements.

First, then, as to his position.

After an attentive contemplation of the objects around, the highwayman came to the conclusion that he was by no means so many miles away from London as he had imagined.

When he thought back upon his late adventures he could not wonder at his having been so hunted up and down the country.

Tracing back events, he could tell that very many times he had doubled upon his course, and altogether had taken a rather semicircular direction, the course of which tended towards the metropolis.

This settled, his chief consideration was where to remain during the time that had been agreed upon by himself and his companions.

So far the officers had been so vigilant and pertinacious that they had not allowed him to remain for any length of time anywhere, and even now, as the moon shone forth with great brilliancy and power, and revealed to him objects at a very great distance, he failed to perceive a place which held out the slightest promise of affording him the shelter he so much required.

Moreover, he remembered how ill-provided he was with funds, owing to the suddenness with which he had taken his departure from the inn.

There was no resource but to remedy this somehow or other, as it was impossible to say how soon circumstances might arise rendering it necessary that he should have command of money in order to purchase his safety.

Having reached this point, Tom listened again, but as yet no sound of his pursuers was audible.

His horse by this time had recovered his wind, and so, at a very gentle trot, Tom continued his course for a little way along the cross-road.

He did not pause, indeed, until he reached a spot where a narrow winding lane branched off.

To what place it led he knew not; but, by its appearance, it was evident that few travellers ever used it.

This would have made many turn aside, but Tom liked it all the better on that account.

So, turning his horse's head, he once more put the animal in rapid motion.

The course of this lane was most devious and uncertain, and, having journeyed along it for some little time, Tom lost his reckoning, and could not for the life of him tell whether he was proceeding north, south, east, or west.

Once, and only once, he caught sight of a human habitation, and that appeared to be a farm-house, lying back at some distance, and being almost buried by a dense mass of trees.

After more than half an hour's hard riding, Tom found himself at the end of the lane.

As he quite expected, it debouched upon the high-road.

At this spot trees were growing densely, and the shadows which they cast amply sufficed to screen him and his steed from all observation.

Therefore he paused once more to consider upon his proceedings, and also to listen for the approach of his foes.

The latter, however, proved a vain attempt, and the highwayman muttered:

"I have tired them out, that's certain, and I suppose I may look now for a few moments' peace. What shall be my next step?"

He checked himself abruptly, and listened again.

Very faintly, yet quite distinctly, came a dull, murmuring sound.

Tom knew it well.

A vehicle was coming along the high-road from the left hand at a very rapid rate, and, by the noise produced, it must be one of tolerable dimensions.

Almost at the same moment, he caught sight of two faint, star-like lights, creeping rapidly along, at no great distance from the ground.

"Shall I try my luck?" he muttered.

As he spoke, he drew forth one of his pistols, and examined it attentively.

"One would call it a piece of foolhardiness to attempt to stop any vehicle while the officers are thus at my back, but money is requisite, and who knows whether I shall have a better chance of obtaining any than I have now?"

He ceased, for by this time the vehicle was very close at hand, so close that Tom, by straining his eyes, was able to make out that it was a carriage drawn by four beautiful grey horses.

"After all," he said, as he rode quickly forward "it will be but the work of a few moments, and I shall be on my way again, without any interruption worth naming."

Just then, Tom pointed his pistol in the direction of the coachman, who was seated, half dozing, on the box, yet taking care to incline the barrel upwards to such a degree that the bullet would pass harmlessly above his head.

CHAPTER CMXXXVII.

IN WHICH TOM KING'S MISFORTUNES CONTINUE TO INCREASE.

"HALT!" cried Tom King, in a loud voice—"halt, I say! Stop—stop, if you value your life! Pull up this moment!"

Tom accompanied these words by seizing the bridle of one of the leading horses and pulling it vigorously, thus materially assisting the coachman in bringing the carriage to a standstill.

Tom King perceived, for the first time, that behind the carriage a footman was seated, and he began to think if there were many inside he should have rather long odds to deal with single-handed.

Therefore, almost without reflection, he put into execution a stratagem which had well served himself and his companions on many occasions.

The coachman, thoroughly terrified by Tom's words, and hearing the explosion of the pistol, sat trembling on his box, hardly certain whether he was alive or not.

Tom heard the window of the carriage let down with a sharp, crashing sound, but he paid no heed to the circumstance.

Turning his head round, as though addressing some one at the side of the road, he cried, in a loud voice:

"Understand me, my friends, I intend to manage this little affair single-handed. Do not fire, Claude, nor you, Jack, on any account, until I give you the signal—do not interfere until I call for your aid."

Having thus apparently settled this matter, Tom turned his horse's head round, and trotted easily and carelessly up to the door of the carriage.

He saw a slight movement within, and the faint light given from the cloud-obscured moon rested upon something glittering.

What it was he knew not, but he abruptly changed his course, and the next moment a pistol was discharged.

Not the slightest injury resulted from it, however, and, without perceptibly changing his course, Tom made his way to the door of the carriage.

He still held a pistol in his hand, which must have been seen, for the inmates of the vehicle shrank back.

At the same moment, a faint, half-smothered scream came upon his ears.

"I know not to whom I am indebted for that shot," said Tom King, coolly, "but let me state at once that I shall not forget the favour. Now, then, quick—you have money, and I want it! Surrender it to me quietly, and you may proceed upon your journey without any further danger or delay. If you refuse, you will only have yourselves to thank for the unpleasant consequences."

The interior of the carriage was quite dark, so that Tom was unable to see who it contained.

But he heard a sweet, pleasant voice say:

"Oh, papa, give him money—do not deny it—and let us ride on! Do not provoke him to violence."

"Hush—silence!" said another voice. "You know not what you ask. Any concession that I might make may be the signal for greater extortion; we should not be left with one article of value."

"Make the trial," said Tom. "Gold is all that I require. Time is pressing, and I am anxious to depart."

"Then," said the same voice, in firm tones, "I am determined to defend what I have with my life; so now beware!"

"I regret to hear you say as much," said Tom

"Regret it?"

"Yes, because it will force me to extremities."

Just then Tom looked up, and found himself menaced by a danger which he had never for a moment taken into account.

In fact, he had believed that the words he had uttered would be quite sufficient to deter the coachman and footman from making any movement whatever

But in this he was mistaken.

The footman, with a surprising amount of boldness, considering that he had no weapon of defence but a long wand or staff, had climbed slowly from his seat behind on to the roof of the carriage.

Then, suddenly drawing himself up to his full height, he raised the staff above his head, with the intention of bringing it down with his utmost force upon the head of the highwayman.

But Tom saw his danger, though only just in time to save himself.

Quick as thought, he pulled the rein so suddenly and violently that the horse, in turning round, rose up for an instant on its hind legs.

At this same instant of time, another pistol was discharged from the interior of the carriage.

The footman, being in the act of delivering the blow, could not save himself.

He had put forth his utmost strength, intending that the one blow should be effectual.

Therefore, the staff passing through the air with great swiftness, and not meeting with the impediment he had calculated upon, overbalanced him, so that he fell with great violence into the roadway.

This event was scarcely noticed by Tom, for, to his surprise and consternation, his horse staggered for a second or so, and then fell down as though struck by an invisible hand.

He had barely time to disengage himself from the stirrups, and so save himself from an awkward fall.

The fact was, the bullet from this second pistol had lodged itself somewhere in the horse's head at the moment when the animal raised itself upon its hind legs in turning round.

For the second time, then, Tom King found himself deprived of a steed.

The gentleman in the carriage, seeing what had happened, though greatly bewildered by the rapidity with which these events had taken place, now called out:

"Drive on, coachman—drive on with all speed! Don't spare the lash, and we shall outstrip the rascal easily!"

"But John," said the coachman, who thought more of his fellow-servant than the gentleman appeared to do. "Don't you see that John, sir, has fallen headforemost into the road? Can you leave him where he is?"

"Confound you, yes!" was the reply. "He can shift for himself! Drive on, I say—drive on!"

"No, coachman!" said Tom, who had by this time recovered himself. "You had better not attempt to move—that is, if you have the least regard for your life!"

While speaking, Tom King advanced, and the coachman, seeing him, shrank down, and covered his face up with his hands.

He could not bear to look upon the death-dealing weapon that was pointed so menacingly at him.

Tom had a purpose in all his movements, and it was quickly carried out.

Thrusting his pistol into his belt, he drew his sword, and with the sharp, glittering weapon, instantly severed that portion of the harness that connected the leading horse nearest him to the others.

It was a magnificent creature, though it showed signs of being greatly terrified.

Quickly sheathing his sword, Tom hastened to pat it upon the neck, and so quiet it.

Again producing his pistol, he laid it upon the ground, first having satisfied himself that it was in readiness for immediate use.

"Now, sir," he said, addressing the occupant of the carriage, "whoever you may be, let me bid you to beware! You have had two shots at me, but, for your own life's sake, do not try a third, or try in any way to interrupt me in what I am about."

Tom did not wait to see whether due attention was given to his words or not, but with remarkable dexterity stripped off the trappings belonging to the grey horse.

Having done so, he stooped down, and in the course of a few moments transferred the saddle and bridle from the dead steed to this new one.

Then, vaulting into the saddle, he again placed himself beside the carriage door.

"Do not say I have not treated you with forbearance were Tom's first words. "But perhaps you know scarcely any act will tempt me to offer violence? Understand me, however, that I will be trifled with no longer! Your money I must and will have! Better give it to me thus than compel me to take it from you!"

"Why, curse your impudence!" said the gentleman, "are you not content with what you have already? This is too good a joke! Have I lived to see a rascal mount one of my horses, and then demand my purse?"

"That was your act," said Tom. "My own horse you destroyed. But come, I have no time for talk!"

"Oh, papa," said the other voice, though this time Tom could tell that the young girl was struggling with her tears, "do give him the money—it can make little difference to you!"

"It does not," was the reply. "Here, fellow, take this, and be content! I have resisted you as well as I could. I would have done more, but, like a fool, I trusted myself with one brace of pistols only, though, if I had ammunition with me, rely upon it you would not have got off so easily."

While these words were spoken, a purse was tossed with a disdainful action out of the carriage.

Tom dexterously caught it.

"Thanks," he said—"thanks! I have what I require! I daresay you will find it rather awkward with three horses, but you have only yourself to blame for that. Had you complied with my demand at first, all this would have been saved!"

"Oh, look—look!" cried another voice, which Tom King had not yet heard—"oh, look—look! Here are officers close at hand! Help—help—oh, help!"

The last word was pronounced with a shrill, sharp intonation.

Tom was quite surprised to hear it, for he had fancied that the carriage was tenanted by two persons only.

The fact was, a lady was present, the mother of the young girl who had spoken, but at the first approach of danger she had either fainted or pretended to do so, recovering only just at the moment when she saw succour at hand.

The officers she had seen were those who had been so long in pursuit of Tom.

They had kept resolutely upon his track, and just then emerged from the shady entrance to the lane.

They had approached very gently, having made their minds up only a moment before to give up all further thoughts of making Tom a prisoner.

The lady's voice aroused them, and one glance enabled them to comprehend the position of affairs.

Tom King knew well enough what had occurred, though he could not see the officers, the carriage being between himself and them; and, not waiting another moment, he wheeled suddenly round, and tested the quality of his new horse by putting him to overleap a rather high wooden fence.

The obstacle was cleared in beautiful style.

"Over the palings yonder!" shouted the gentleman, leaning out of the carriage window, and addressing the officers. "There he goes at full speed over the meadow!"

"All right!" cried a voice, in reply. "We'll have him—we're bound to have him!"

"Nothing of the sort," ejaculated the gentleman, with a rattling oath—"nothing of the sort! The rascal is mounted on the very best and fleetest horse in my stables, and will defy such animals as you have underneath you!"

The officers paid but little attention to his words, though, with surprising boldness, they one and all attempted to clear the fence.

Only about half their number succeeded—the remainder fell ignominiously on the other side.

The manner in which the grey horse had cleared the fence let Tom King know what he might expect from such a creature, and, taking all things into account, he had really matter for congratulation, since he had been greatly the gainer by the exchange that had been made.

On looking back, he saw to what a small number his pursuers had been reduced, and so, with a loud, defiant cry, he waved his hat, and the next moment was hurrying along at the utmost speed his new horse was capable of making.

For the officers to attempt to keep up the chase was quite ridiculous.

Success could not be hoped for.

Their horses were much jaded by the long journey they had performed, while Tom's was comparatively fresh.

In a much shorter space of time than he had dared to believe possible, Tom King found himself once again clear of his troublesome foes, and this time he trusted to remain so.

"Bravo!" he said, as he patted the magnificent steed upon the neck—"bravo! If you only turn out according to my expectations, I shall consider you not far inferior to Black Bess herself!"

Tom King had been speaking in a light-hearted, joyous tone, but as he proceeded the accents of his voice changed entirely, and when he ceased speaking a cry of pain escaped his lips.

The way in which he carried his hand to his left arm told eloquently what was the cause of it.

"I had forgotten my arm," he said—"quite forgotten it until now! Well, that must be a sign that the injury is by no means so great as I thought at first. But, oh! this pain! It is more than I can bear!"

The bandage still remained in its place, though it had become deeply tinged with blood.

"I should have attended to it earlier," he continued. "But no matter! I seem to be quite alone."

He raised himself in the saddle while he spoke these words, and took a comprehensive glance around him.

He was enabled to do so tolerably well, for, mingled with the faint, sickly-looking moonlight, came the first beams of a new day.

So far as he could see, no living creature of any description met his gaze.

His eyes rested at length upon a large, smooth sheet of water, the surface of which was not broken by the tiniest ripple.

Towards this he bent his way, and, having reached its margin, dismounted.

His horse drank eagerly at the pool, and Tom then slowly and carefully removed his temporary bandage.

As he did so, a dreadful feeling of faintness and giddiness came over him.

He tried to struggle against it and overcome it, but in vain—he felt that all things were sliding from him.

The ground slipped suddenly from beneath his feet—he felt himself falling, but he knew not where.

Just then came a blank, for, ere he fell at full length beside the water, he was quite insensible.

How easy a prey the highwayman would have been just then had the police officers been a little closer!

He could not have offered the slightest resistance to them.

But Tom was oblivious of all things, and so, of course, being in danger was one of them, and he lay there calmly and peacefully enough until the first rays of the rising sun shone upon his face.

CHAPTER CMXXXVIII.

TOM KING UNEXPECTEDLY MEETS WITH A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

With a hurried start, and with a sensation of great pain, Tom King recovered possession of his faculties.

Slowly, and with much difficulty, he raised himself slightly, and looked around.

A kind of misty film was before his eyes and before his memory, so that some time elapsed before he could make out by what objects he was surrounded, or by what train of events he had reached that spot.

At length all became clear, and, creeping forward, he stooped down, and drank heartily of the clear water.

Its beneficial effects were immediately apparent.

New life and vigour filled his frame, while the fever of delirium that had gathered partially about his brain was dissipated also.

He gave another and clearer look around.

No human being could be seen—nor, indeed, any living creature whatever, save his new horse, which was grazing peacefully enough at a little distance.

Taking off his coat, Tom next proceeded to ascertain as well as he could the precise amount of injury he had received.

He was terribly afraid a bone had been fractured, but he was not long in coming to the conclusion that this fear was unfounded.

There was a very ugly wound, however, in the fleshy part of his arm, which from his wrist to his shoulder presented a very red and inflamed appearance.

But the bleeding had almost ceased.

And now he set to work to bathe it well in the clear cold water.

He soon felt the benefit of this treatment, and having remained as long as he thought prudent for his safety in that place, he bound up his arm as skilfully as he was able, and resumed his coat.

When he tried to stand, however, he became more fully aware of the extent to which he had been weakened.

He staggered, and could scarcely save himself from falling.

By one of those powerful efforts of the mind which will at times entirely control the corporeal functions, he succeeded in banishing this deathlike sensation.

He hastened to his horse, but the animal hearing his approach looked up and then moved off.

Evidently it had no desire to be caught.

Tom's heart sank again when he noted the vast extent of the meadow.

He knew it would require far more strength and endurance than he possessed to recapture his horse.

For a little while he was almost inclined to give up in despair, which circumstance will show better than anything else how much loss of blood had reduced him.

Advancing slowly and with caution, and using such soothing expressions as he was able to think of, he again crept nearer to his horse, and at length succeeded in taking hold of the bridle.

To mount was a difficult process, but he accomplished it, and then hesitated as to the way he should take.

Shelter and rest somewhere he felt were more than ever needed.

Surgical assistance also was required, though where he could obtain any of these he had not the slightest idea.

"I must trust to chance to guide me," he muttered. "I have no better counsellor at the present time. I must congratulate myself upon having so well got rid of the police officers."

As he uttered these last words he set his steed in motion, following the course which he had taken in flying from his pursuers.

A ride of rather more than a quarter of an hour brought him to the summit of a hill, from which a tolerably extensive prospect could be obtained.

One habitation, and one only, was in sight.

This was a large, substantially-built mansion, whose very antiquity gave it an air of the greatest picturesqueness.

Ivy and other parasitic plants had taken possession of nearly every wall, and around it were many stately trees, every one no doubt many hundreds of years old.

The loud cawing of some lazy-winged rooks alone disturbed the silence, but this sound only served to make the general air of peace and quiet that reigned around the more apparent.

Tom King stopped his horse in order to gaze upon this structure, and as he gazed he sighed.

It may be that the sight of it brought back to his recollection some memory of the past, or it might be that he thought how welcome a shelter would those substantial walls afford.

Be this as it may, however, it is certain an intense longing came over him to make his way towards that dwelling.

Strangely enough, he felt a presentiment that he had only to present himself at its portal to be made welcome.

This and other fancies came crowding thickly upon him, but he shook them off as one might shake off the recollection of some dream, and prepared himself to look the difficulties of his situation fairly in the face.

Not for another moment did he contemplate the idea of making his way anywhere in the direction of that mansion.

He turned his horse's head, indeed, in such a direction that it was quickly lost to view.

After a brief space he found himself close to the side of a narrow but well-kept road.

A thickly-planted hedge alone divided him from it.

Before venturing to pass this obstruction, Tom thought it would be no more than prudent to listen.

In his present position he could not be over cautious, for he was now unfitted for a long, fatiguing ride.

Pausing, then, he listened with great intentness, and soon had good cause to congratulate himself upon the course he had adopted.

Scarcely a second elapsed before the faint but perfectly clear and distinct sound of horses' feet reached him.

He continued to listen, and as the sound grew louder he could tell that a single horseman was approaching.

From a single horseman surely he had nothing to fear, and so he might have continued on his way.

But, then, it was important he should keep out of sight, and so he resolved to wait until this traveller had passed by.

His patience was not put to a very severe trial, for the approaching horseman came on at a sharp pace until he got within a few yards of where Tom was concealed, and then he gradually checked his horse.

The hedge of which we have spoken was so high and grew so thickly that Tom felt perfectly certain he had but to remain stooping down in the saddle in order to be perfectly invisible to any person who might pass by.

This, then, was the position that he took up, though, nevertheless, he was able to obtain a tolerably good view of the road beyond.

Peering through the interstices of the hedge, he quickly saw a man dressed in a kind of livery make his appearance.

He was mounted on a splendid horse, and over one shoulder was a strap, to which was attached a large leather bag.

There was an expression of cunning and villany in this man's face that Tom perceived at once, and, in consequence, he felt a deep and immediate interest in all this man's proceedings.

He continued to rein-in his steed until he brought it to a standstill at a spot not many yards distant from where Tom was hidden.

This done, his next proceeding was to draw the sleeve of his corduroy coat across his face.

"It seems all quiet enough," he muttered, half to himself and half aloud, "and yet I heard something, too; but it must have been my fancy—yes, yes, my fancy. I wonder what there is I could hear to be afraid of?"

He looked around him with a half-defiant expression, which was strange enough to see, and which greatly increased the amount of curiosity and interest the highwayman already felt.

Nor did the man's succeeding actions serve in any degree to diminish these feelings.

Allowing the reins to fall upon the neck of his horse, he carried one hand to the leather bag that has been mentioned, and brought it round until it rested on the pommel of the saddle.

When it was in this position, Tom could see it plainly, and had no doubt whatever as to its character.

It was such a leather bag as would be used for the purpose of carrying letters to and from a post-office.

The man hesitated, and seemed to tremble.

Then, with a quick movement, he thrust his fingers into his waistcoat pocket and produced a small key.

He gave another suspicious glance about him before he ventured to introduce it into the lock.

A sharp click followed, for the key turned with difficulty, as though it was a false one, and then the bag was opened.

Eagerly and rapidly, the man drew forth a handful of letters.

He glanced at them quickly, and selecting one, placed the others back again in their receptacle.

"That's it!" he muttered, glancing at the superscription of the one he held—"I would swear to the handwriting, although so many years have passed away since I saw him last. Curses on him! He shall rue the day when he first made up his mind to interfere with my designs."

He placed his fingers near the seal, then listened once more and glanced about him.

The silence that prevailed reassured him, and the next moment the letter was torn open.

His eyes glanced rapidly over its contents, and as they did so such an expression of evil came over his forbidding countenance as made Tom King shudder to gaze upon.

With the same evil, threatening look, he thrust the

letter into one of his pockets; then closing the bag, he locked it again, and restored it to its former place.

This done, he dug his heels viciously into his horse's flanks, and in a moment was lost to Tom's view.

This sudden departure was something that Tom King had scarcely anticipated, or it is possible he might have tried to prevent it, though had he reflected upon his own weak condition he would scarcely have made so rash an attempt, for the man was of a powerful, muscular build.

But the incident was one which set Tom thinking, though all his thought did not enable him to arrive at any definite conclusion respecting it.

"It cannot be any concern of mine," he muttered, "and I am not in fit condition now to follow up the adventure, especially as it is broad daylight. No, no—I must push on, and find some place where I can lie down and rest."

He drew back a little way from the hedge as he spoke, and, glancing first to the right, then to the left, perceived a little gate that had hitherto escaped his notice.

Towards this he directed his horse's footsteps, and then, passing through it, gained the road.

Without a thought—indeed, quite unconsciously—he gazed in the direction the man had taken, and as he did so his attention was immediately arrested by the appearance of a small white object lying near the verdant bank on the summit of which the hedgerow had been planted.

A second glance showed him that this white object greatly resembled a letter, and, impelled by curiosity, he walked his horse slowly towards it.

He soon found this conjecture verified—a letter most certainly it was.

There was little difficulty in guessing by what means it had reached there.

The man, in pulling the others out of the bag, had allowed this one to fall.

It was small, and had fluttered to the ground unnoticed.

Tom dismounted, and, picking up the missive, glanced at the address.

He had some little difficulty in making it out, for the handwriting was a straggling one, and the paper had become soiled by cantact with the road.

The following words, however, he managed to decipher:

"Sir Ralph Cromer, Wilfirs Cross."

"Wilfirs Cross?" he muttered, repeating the last words. "I wonder where that may be? Surely close at hand. No doubt the house I saw a little while ago."

This was a probable enough conjecture, seeing that there was no other habitation visible for miles.

Tom lapsed into an attitude of deep reflection, during which his eyes were fixed upon the letter, though in reality he saw it not.

"It may be," he murmured at last, "that this is a favourable chance thrown in my way. Who can tell? The question is, shall I avail myself of it?"

He glanced down at his disordered dress while he spoke; then set to work to improve its appearance as well as he could, from which it may be inferred that he had come to a decision.

The letter he had placed carefully and securely in his breast pocket, and, when all his preparations were completed, he remounted his steed.

Following the route already taken by the dishonest servant, he made his way along the road, which he was not long in finding was a private one, leading only to the mansion he had seen, and towards which he had felt so mysteriously attracted.

"Surely," he thought, as he rode slowly onwards, "the service I shall render them is of some importance. The chances are that they will never recognise me, then surely it would not be too much to ask for a little aid and shelter. Could they possibly refuse such an appeal?"

A few moments afterwards, Tom found himself in front of some massive wooden gates, so high that he could not see over the top of them.

His approach evidently had been heard, for one half was slowly thrown open, and the form of a good-looking, middle-aged female made its appearance.

She curtsied respectfully to Tom, who, in answer to her inquiring gaze, said:

"I suppose this is Wilfirs Cross, is it not?"

"It is, sir," was the reply.

"The residence of Sir Ralph Cromer?" continued Tom.

"You are quite right—it is."

"Then I have business with him."

"Pray come in, sir," was the reply. "Follow this path, it will bring you to the front door of the hall. Sir Ralph is an early riser; you will no doubt find him at breakfast."

Tom tossed a guinea to the woman, and rode through the gates.

She was accustomed to receiving presents from the different visitors who passed by, but this was a greater amount than she had ever had before, and when Tom reached a bend in the avenue and looked back, he saw that she had not recovered from the effects of his munificence, for she was curtseying still.

The next turning brought Tom in view of the hall, which was a much more imposing structure than it had appeared to be from the distance.

A momentary hesitation came over him, for he began to think that it was really carrying the force of impudence too far to intrude himself into such an abode.

A sharp twinge of pain making itself felt at this moment changed the whole current of his thoughts, and so, with renewed confidence, he continued his course towards the mansion.

CHAPTER CMXXXIX.

TOM KING INTRUDES INTO A STRANGE HOUSEHOLD.

As Tom King drew nearer and nearer to the hall, the thought uppermost in his mind was how happy, peaceful and contented all its inhabitants must be.

To him, the quiet serenity of the scene around him struck him all the more forcibly when contrasted with his own violent, turbulent career.

A glimpse which he had through one of the large windows on the ground floor served to strengthen this impression.

He caught sight of a large fire burning briskly in the grate, and its bright rays were reflected with great brilliancy from the massive silver ornaments upon the table, and from the gold frames of the pictures against the walls.

He saw, too, that the table was spread for the morning meal, and that around it several persons were seated.

Once again he hesitated, but now hesitation came too late.

He had gone too far to retract, for his advent had been noticed by the occupants of the breakfast-room.

Half a dozen steps more brought him to the portico, where he dismounted.

Scarcely had his feet touched the ground than a servant approached, who took charge of his horse, and then the front door was thrown open, and an invitation given to enter.

Tom complied, and then said:

"I have particular and important business with your master. Tell him so. It is useless for me to give my name, as I am as great a stranger to him as he is to me."

The servant seemed rather unwilling to convey this message; but when Tom presented him with a gratuity his reluctance vanished at once.

"Sir Ralph is at breakfast," said the servant, "and as he is almost an invalid, he wishes you to enter at once, and make known your business to him."

Tom bowed acquiescence.

The hall was crossed, a door thrown open, and he found himself upon the threshold of the apartment of which he had caught so transient a glimpse.

At the first glance, he saw an elderly man, rather thin, with a slight fringe of short white hair around his head, seated in a capacious easy chair, engaged in looking at a letter.

At the head of the table sat a lady, much younger than Sir Ralph—young enough, indeed, to be one of his daughters.

But there was something in her confident, authoritative manner that made Tom immediately aware that she was mistress of the hall.

One other person alone was present.

This was a young girl of such rare beauty that Tom King bent before it in respectful admiration.

Naturally, Tom expected that the baronet would address him, and, indeed, the feeble old man seemed about to do so, but the lady at the head of the table, gazing somewhat scornfully at Tom, inquired:

"Well, sir, what may be your business? Be good enough to explain the meaning of your intrusion."

The words were uttered in sharp, cutting accents. Nothing certainly could be further from a welcome.

Tom bowed again, for he was not ready with his reply.

He had noticed several things which struck him as being strange.

In the first place, the lady who had spoken to him had her hand resting upon the letter-bag, from which, it appeared, that she drew forth the letters, opened them, read them first, then handed them to the baronet.

The second was, that this lady's countenance reminded him of a face that he had somewhere seen before.

Where, for a moment puzzled him.

But he quickly recollected.

In the contracted brow, the cunning expression of the eyes, the cruel lines about the mouth, he recognised a close resemblance to the man whose movements he had watched in the lane.

That man, however, evidently was a servant, and this lady was the mistress of the mansion.

Was the resemblance between them accidental, or were they really related?

It was easy enough for Tom to ask himself these questions and speculate upon them, but he had no means of arriving at any satisfactory reply.

"I trust," he said, after his brief and scarcely-noticeable hesitation—"I trust you will excuse this most unseasonable intrusion on my part; but, as I stated, I have called because I have particular business with Sir Ralph Cromer."

"Sir Ralph is here," said the lady, indicating the old man in the chair.

"Yes, I see it," said Tom, "but what I have to say is private—it concerns him alone."

"Ellen, my dear," said the lady, addressing the young girl, "you may leave the room."

"Pardon me," said Tom, "I fear you do not understand me. What I have to say is solely for Sir Ralph's ears."

The lady started angrily to her feet, and drew herself up erect.

"You make a great mistake," she said, in shrill, querulous tones, "if you think Sir Ralph has any secrets from me! No matter how private your communication may be, you must speak it in my presence. I am quite in the baronet's confidence, so hesitate no longer—speak at once."

Now, if Tom had been unwilling in the first place to speak in the presence of this lady, he was now ten thousand times more so.

His perceptions were all sharp and keen, and especially so on that morning.

An insensible something came over him that made him feel things were not going on as they should—that some evil influence was at work—an influence which he might be able to counteract.

He saw that the young girl looked pale, and sad and suffering.

He saw that the baronet was wholly, both for good or for evil, under the dominion of his wife.

"You must really excuse me," said Tom, "if I beg to differ from your ladyship. It is not indeed a matter for me to judge. When I have made my communication to Sir Ralph, it will be for him to decide whether he acquaints you with it or not."

The lady's eyes flashed, and she stamped her foot angrily upon the ground.

"Speak out, sir," she said—"speak out and begone! We want no intruders here!"

Tom King bowed and then, in faint, trembling accents, the old man said:

"My dear—my dear, pray don't be so violent, there is no occasion for it—none indeed! But when you get so fierce and angry you terrify me—with such weak nerves as I have you terrify me to a degree."

"Then," was the quick, stern answer, "if such is the case, bid this stranger disclose his errand—that is all that is required."

"But, sir," said Tom with great respect, "I should prefer acquainting you with it alone."

"Well, well, so you shall. Why should he not, my dear? Let him have his own way, and I will tell you what he has said afterwards."

"No, sir," said the lady—"I demand that this subject be spoken out before me."

"Well, well, let it be so—let it be so."

Tom King looked with the greatest pity and distress at the poor old man who spoke these words.

It was dreadful indeed to think that any human being's mind should be so shattered—vacillating.

"I regret this," Tom said, breaking the silence—"I regret this very much indeed; but I can assure you my instructions are so peremptory, that if I do not deliver my message to Sir Ralph in private I must depart with my errand undisclosed."

This was a threat that made the lady hesitate a little.

She began to feel that Tom King was not one to bend and bow before her authority, and so, with quite a sudden change of demeanour, as though she had been struck by a fresh and sudden thought, she said:

"Very well, sir—very well! Since you choose to create dissension in a household by your obstinacy, and since you choose to act with so much discourtesy, I will oppose you no longer—you shall have your own way. You can remain here with Sir Ralph."

The young girl called Ellen had already left the breakfast-room, and now the baronet's wife, with a haughty, angry mien, walked hurriedly to the door, passed out, and closed it.

Poor Sir Ralph witnessed this act with the greatest surprise.

It was to him something unparalleled, and he began to look upon Tom with feelings very closely approaching awe.

"I trust you will pardon me, sir," Tom said, advancing more closely to him. "Perhaps when I come to tell you my errand you will think that I have made a needless fuss about it; if so I must entreat your forgiveness. Rest assured that all I have done has been with the best intent."

"Well, well, young man," exclaimed the baronet—"sit down there in that chair, and make yourself comfortable. Now, what have you to say?"

Tom sank his voice to a whisper.

"I am sadly afraid," he said, "that we shall be overheard."

"Oh, no, no—there is not any fear of that!"

"Excuse me, but I should like to satisfy myself upon that point," and, while he spoke, Tom King, with a light and rapid tread, crossed the room.

There was a look of great satisfaction on his countenance as he did so, for the fact was, he believed that he had come to the right conclusion as to the cause which had induced her ladyship so suddenly to alter her demeanour.

He paused a moment near the door, then, placing his finger on his lip, turned the handle softly.

At the same moment he pulled the door open with great suddenness, and closed it again with equal quickness.

A blundering sound, a sharp crack, and a stifled cry resulted.

"Ah!" said Tom, with a smile, "I am afraid some one has been hurt! Let us see."

He opened the door again as he spoke.

But the hall was clear—no trace of anyone could be seen.

"I rather think that will do," he added, closing the door. "I really thought some one was there!"

The baronet looked greatly astonished, but on all occasions he was so accustomed to yield to others that he never even in this instance thought of asserting his authority.

But he knew perfectly well that her ladyship must have received a very sharp blow from the panel of the door, and he trembled for the consequences.

"Young man," he said, in trembling tones, as Tom approached him, "do you know what you have done?"

"Yes," said Tom, quietly, "some one has had rather



[THE ASSASSINATION IN THE WOOD AT WILFIRS CROSS.]

a sharp crack on the head, which will not be forgotten very easily."

"Yes," said the old man, sinking his voice still lower, "but that some one is my wife. Oh," he added, glancing wildly around him, "she is a dreadful woman—oh, a dreadful woman, and so you will find out!"

"I thought so," said Tom; "but I don't care that for her!"

He snapped his fingers contemptuously as he pronounced the words.

"And," he continued, "if I might make so bold as to give you my advice——"

"Well, young man, speak out—I like you."

"Why, you will set a bold front on as I do, and say the same thing."

The baronet half started up, as though some glimmering thought had crossed his mind that he should be able, by making one sudden effort, to place himself in his true position as head of the mansion.

But the feeling lasted only for a second.

He sank back again into the chair in a condition of hopeless senility.

"And now," said Tom, "we have wandered all this while from my original purpose. Listen, sir, and I will tell you something that I witnessed a short time ago."

Tom King then very circumstantially and minutely made the baronet acquainted with those circumstances with which the reader is already familiar.

He was listened to in the utmost surprise—almost in disbelief

"Well, sir, concluded Tom, "you may say, and truly, that it was no concern of mine; yet I thought it my duty to make you acquainted with the facts, and have done so simply because of my firm conviction that something was

going on which should not. Now, sir, here is a letter which will give some confirmation of my story. That rascally servant of yours dropped it in the road unconsciously, and I picked it up. It may be of importance or it may not."

The old man's hand shook to such an extent that he could scarcely take the letter from Tom King.

When he did so, he looked attentively at the seal.

"Why—why," he said "it has not been opened!"

Tom was amazed at such a remark.

"Opened? No, I should not be capable of such a deed."

"I—I mean," added the baronet, hastily, and in some confusion, "my wife has not seen this letter!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Tom; then he added: "And if you will be guided by me you will never let her see it. Open it now and read it while you have the opportunity."

It was really wonderful to see what an ascendancy Tom had already obtained over this old man. It was the power of a strong will over a weak one.

But the highwayman did not know and could not guess what means had been taken and what time expended to reduce this old man to his present pitiable plight.

It was not without a great deal of timidity that he ventured to tear open the letter.

Then adjusting his spectacles, he began to read.

Whilst he was so employed, Tom sat looking intently at him.

His countenance began to be a perfect study.

It lighted up all at once with an expression that was new to Tom.

The dim eyes began to brighten, a smile seemed on the point of breaking forth, and altogether quite a look of happiness overspread his visage.

No sooner had he finished reading the letter, however, than a sudden recollection seemed to come across him.

His head drooped, and once again he became the poor imbecile creature who elicited so much of Tom's commiseration.

"My boy," he murmured, while tears trickled slowly down his withered cheeks—"my poor boy, Roderic, would indeed that you were here! And yet, no—no! What am I saying? I forget myself! Young man," he added, looking up, "I am much obliged for this service you have done me. Is there any recompense that I can make you for it?"

"None whatever," replied Tom, "except—"

"Except what?"

"Why, sir, you see I have met with an accident. My horse fell, and I have broken my arm. It causes me great pain and inconvenience; I am weak from escape of blood, so that if you would afford me the shelter of your roof for a few hours I should ever remain under the deepest obligation to you."

CHAPTER CMXL.

IN WHICH TOM KING BEGINS TO COMPREHEND THE TRUE CONDITION OF AFFAIRS AT WILFIRS CROSS.

"I AM sorry," stammered the baronet—"very sorry; but you have asked me almost the only favour which I cannot grant. My wife, I am sure, will never allow you to remain beneath this roof."

"Then," said Tom, "I take my leave; but at the same time you must allow me to express my regret that a gentleman like yourself should permit a woman thus to rule you, and to make your whole life unhappy. Let me entreat you for the sake of your own happiness to cast off these trammels and once more appear in your own proper character, which, if I read aright, is one incapable of doing any mean or sordid action unless at the powerful suggestions of another."

"You speak truly, young man," was the reply, given with a little extra firmness of tone—"you speak very truly. I should have proffered resistance long ago; now I fear it is too late."

"Believe me," exclaimed Tom, impressively, "it is never too late to do right."

"If I could only think so," continued the baronet "if I could only feel that I had the slightest chance of success."

"Try," said Tom—"try."

For some moments there was a profound silence, during which it would appear that the baronet was thinking deeply.

After a time, however, he raised his head and looked Tom King full in the face.

"Who you are," he said, "I know not, nor do I care, but you have done me a disinterested kindness, and something, I know not what, draws you towards me—I feel impelled to ask your advice in another matter—to request you to give me your assistance."

"You do me too much honour," said Tom, with a bow. "You have but to speak, and I will do all I can. Believe me, I shall feel more content if, when I quit this place, I know that I have left you happier."

"Well, well—listen. I have not much to say, but every word is of importance. You must believe, then, that I have not always been the weak, miserable object you now see. No, I was once robust, strong, and possessed of a powerful will. In a word, I was happy.

"My first sorrow was when my wife died, leaving two children to my care. You saw one—Ellen—the other, my eldest, is Roderic."

"Then," exclaimed Tom, "I presume that the lady I have seen is your second wife."

"Yes, yes—she is, and I have ever since regretted the day on which I made her mistress of the hall. My boy, Roderic, was with me then, but very soon his impatient spirit chafed under the restraint that was continually laid upon him.

"I heard all kinds of complaints concerning him, and, like a weak fool, listened to them and reproved him.

"The end of this you already guess. He left me years and years ago. He ran away, and from that time to this I have not heard from or seen him.

"Indirectly I have been told of his doings, and they have always been such as to make my whole blood boil with sorrow and indignation.

"Now, however, I for the first time learn something different. Read this—you have a right to do so—and it will save me much explanation. It is from my oldest boyhood's friend."

With very great surprise, Tom took the letter that was extended towards him, and with still greater astonishment read as follows:—

"MY OLD, OLD FRIEND,—

"*Years—many years have passed away since we met or communicated in any way with each other. You remember our parting, do you not? It was an angry one. I blamed you for the part you were taking against your son, under the instigation of the woman you raised to your high position. You resented what I said, we quarrelled and parted, and I smarted to such a degree under the injustice that I made a firm determination never to be the first to extend the hand of friendship to you again.*

"*Circumstances have made me alter that decision.*

"*A few days ago, in a manner I will not stop now to relate, I met your only son Roderic. He has grown a fine, broad-shouldered man, now greatly resembling you when you were young. But he has suffered more—far more than I can tell. He went forth to fight the battle of life, and he has come off second best in the encounter.*

"*His heart, I soon found, yearned towards you, towards his early home, and towards his sister, and so, with much difficulty, I have persuaded him to write to you to the effect that he is very, very sorry for the past, that he asks your pardon for all that he has done to offend you, and wishes to see you once again.*

"*He will follow hard upon his letter—do not feel surprised if you see him within twelve hours after you receive it.*

"*And now, my old friend, before I close this letter let me ask you to remember all the past, to welcome your son back, and to place him where he should be, at the head of your household.*

"*From your faithful friend,*

"RICHARD."

Tom read this letter hastily, and then looked inquiringly at the baronet.

"You have read that letter?" he said, interrogatively.

"I have."

"And what do you make of it?"

"It opens up to me a long and painful story," replied Tom. "I can see the noble, high-spirited son thrust on one side for a worthless second wife. I can see her

hatred of the heir, and I can guess the means by which she contrived to poison your mind against him, and to make home so uncomfortable that he was forced to leave it, and to leave it under your displeasure."

"You are right," said the old man, in a broken voice —"quite right. Heaven help me—I have done very wrong! I do believe," he added, "that at one time I hated him. Poor Roderic!"

"And," continued Tom, "I imagine that there is a tie or link of some sort between her ladyship and the man I saw this morning carrying the letter-bag. Can you tell me why he should utter those vindictive words when he singled out that one particular letter? Can you tell me why he intercepted it?"

"I dare not think of it," was the response. "My poor boy's letter has never reached me, and but for you I should have remained in ignorance of it, for my wife would have carefully kept this one from my sight."

"I am rejoiced," said Tom, with great earnestness, "to find that you are so rapidly assuming your own character. You are throwing off all that abjectness which pained me so to witness."

He was responded to by a feeble smile.

"I have great cause for self-reproach," he said—"great cause. Not only did I drive my boy forth a beggar, but have disowned him, cast him off, disinherited him!"

"But if you feel that you are wrong," said Tom, "surely it is not too late to make the needful change. Have you committed your intentions to paper?"

"I have—I have. Do not blame me," he added, hastily, as he observed Tom's reproachful look. "You cannot guess how much I have suffered or how my poor weak nerves have been played upon."

"But again I say it is not too late, provided that you are willing to welcome back your son."

"Willing?" ejaculated the old man. "I would give all I am possessed of if I could but see him stand before me at this moment; but I fear—I sadly fear—there is a dreadful presentiment in my mind that I shall never—never see him again, and that such will be my punishment for having acted as I have."

"Do not give way to such fears as those," said Tom, kindly; "but, if you really feel inclined to do your son justice, destroy the paper of which you spoke. Then all is well, for, of course, no one could gainsay his right to everything as the eldest born."

"Would that I could!" said the baronet, wringing his hands, and with fresh tears coursing down his cheeks—"would that I could! It is impossible—quite impossible—quite—quite!"

"How?" said Tom—"tell me in what way?"

"My wife has it!"

"Your will?"

"Yes."

Tom paused in deep thought.

"How will all this end?" murmured the old man. "I tremble and grow weak again! I feel—I feel that she is coming!"

"Then," said Tom, "if that is the case, put on what show of boldness you can. Announce your intentions, and abide by them. You will find all you have to do is to maintain the appearance of resolution. It will be difficult at first, but try."

At this instant the door was thrown violently open, and her ladyship appeared upon the threshold.

"Well," she said, in her sharp, commanding tones—"well, may I ask if you intend to remain here all day with this fellow? Ah! I see by your nod that your conference is over."

Then, turning to Tom King, she said, imperiously:

"Go, sir—go—quit the hall at once! You see Sir Ralph desires it."

Tom King looked appealingly at the baronet.

He was sorry—truly sorry—to perceive what an effect the mere presence of this woman had upon him.

He had shrunk up in his chair into the smallest possible compass—he had held up his hands as though he would protect himself from the attack of some assailant, while he trembled from head to foot.

He had given no sign indicating that he wished for Tom's departure, but his wife chose to consider that he had, and trusted to his weakness and imbecility not to dispute her words.

She had resolved to make a bold effort to recover her former position.

Tom waited in vain for the baronet to contradict the words his wife had uttered.

But he was resolved that this infamous woman should not perfect her shameful plans, and so, with a bow of mock respect, he answered:

"I am very sorry indeed to intrude upon your ladyship, but, at the same time, I must beg most emphatically to assure you that just before you entered the room Sir Ralph was pleased to request me to stay here for some time, and I have accepted his invitation."

"Yes, yes," stammered the old man, brightening a little, for he seemed to feel that while Tom was by he had a protector who was able and willing to aid him.

"What," shrieked her ladyship—"what do I hear? Would you speak thus to my face? Sir," she continued, turning to Tom, "you are a scoundrel—an infamous scoundrel! You see the condition of my lamented husband's mind, and you have taken advantage of my absence to play upon it for your unworthy ends! Begone, sir, or I will summon assistance, and have you forcibly expelled!"

"I regret," said Tom, "that I should be the cause of any discord, but I beg to assure you that I shall remain here until Sir Ralph tells me to leave, and let me caution you against attempting to use any force!"

Her ladyship shook again with rage, and, advancing to her husband, she took hold of him by the shoulder, and shook him roughly.

"Ralph—Ralph," she shrieked, "do you hear what that fellow says, or are you insensible to his words? Command him to leave—order him to quit this roof at once!"

"Sir Ralph," said Tom, solemnly, "now is the time—now is the opportunity to do justice to yourself and to those you love! Assert your authority in this case, and you will be the better able to assert it in another. Do not fear any consequence. I will stand by and shield you from all harm. Is it your wish that I should remain here or not?"

"That you should remain," said the old man, with a sudden effort, and speaking in a tone of voice so unlike his own that it made her ladyship fairly stagger back several paces—"that you remain! And you, madam," he added, "quit this room, and do not enter it until I give you permission! Mark me—I will be obeyed!"

Thunderstruck, stupified, amazed beyond measure, her ladyship, unable to articulate a word, suffered herself to be half bowed, half pushed out of the apartment.

Then Tom closed the door, and locked it.

Tom was only just in time.

When he turned round, the sudden accession of courage which had enabled the baronet to speak as he had done departed, and he again sank helpless and inert into his chair.

Tom perceived it with regret; but banishing that expression from his countenance, he spoke as cheerfully and kindly as he could:

"Do you see the result of a little firmness?" he exclaimed. "Take my advice, and in a short time all will be well."

"I—I am amazed."

"No doubt you are—it is only natural that you should be. Let me tell you, however, that you have only to continue to present the same resolute front, and your object is gained—your wife will sink down into her true position, and justice will be done."

"It shall be done!" murmured the old man. "Do not leave me—do not leave me—remain at my side! While you do so I can be bold and resolute."

"I will with joy," said Tom, "if you will give me your word that when Roderic comes he will have your welcome and your blessing."

"He will—he will!" was the reply. "Would that I could see him now!"

"Most fervently do I re-echo that wish! And now, sir, as you were kind enough to grant me the favour of allowing me to remain here for a short time, I think I shall be able to requite you it."

"You have done so already."

"No—no. You forget the will. By some means or other that must be obtained and destroyed, otherwise it will be the source of endless unhappiness."

"But how is it to be obtained?" said the baronet, again in the deepest dejection—"how can it be done?"

"Leave it to me," said Tom. "If I have your permission to remain beneath this roof I will do my best to recover possession of it, and as I have set my mind upon this matter, it will be strange indeed if I do not succeed."

The old man gazed upon him in unqualified surprise.

Such vigour and resolution were strange to him.

But he looked childishly pleased and happy as he said:

"Do that, young sir—do that, and you will ever be entitled to my gratitude!"

CHAPTER CMXLI.

EVENTS AT WILFIRS CROSS BEGIN TO ASSUME A DEEPLY-INTERESTING ASPECT.

THE deep interest which Tom King could not help feeling in these strange events with which he had been so singularly identified and mixed up, caused him to forget all about the wound in his arm, and probably he would have continued to do so had he not been most disagreeably reminded of it by feeling a sharp twinge of pain, which he could not prevent showing itself on his countenance.

The baronet looked at him in surprise.

"My good sir," he exclaimed, "what is it ails you?—what is the meaning of that strange expression?"

"You will pardon me," said Tom, "but the fact is, I met with an accident while riding a short time ago—nothing very serious I believe; but just then I felt a sudden return of pain; even now it has not subsided."

"You must have a rare amount of fortitude," was the reply, "to behave as you have, and all the time suffering from a recent injury. But what can I do to assist you?"

"I am afraid nothing," said Tom, "for, of course, you have no surgical assistance in the house?"

"I am sorry to say none."

"Well, then, I will just bear with the pain a little time longer while we talk over our position. You must pardon me for this extra trouble, but I have lost some blood, and it seems to have had a confusing effect upon my mental faculties, so that I am not quite sure I fully understand the proper aspect of affairs."

"Of what is it, then, that you are in doubt?"

"I cannot say that I am in doubt about anything—at all events, we may come to several conclusions. The first is, that the letter taken from the bag by your servant was the one written to you by your son Roderic."

"Yes, no doubt of it—no doubt of it. And yet, after all, Roderic's letter may be upon the table, for, you see, her ladyship, in hastily quitting the room, has forgotten that she has left all the letters on the table."

"But that point can soon be ascertained, can it not?"

"Oh, yes! My old eyes are dim, but yet they seem brighter than they did a short time ago. I feel sure that I could recognise my poor boy's writing at the first glance."

He rose, apparently by a painful effort, from his chair, and stooping over the table, sorted the letters over quickly.

He gave one glance to each, then shook his head.

"No, Roderic's letter is not there," he said. "There can be no doubt that is the one you saw intercepted."

"I am perfectly certain. But you have not told me what situation this man holds in your household."

"That would be hard to say," was the strange answer. "He was engaged some years ago by my wife, and since then has occupied himself I scarcely know how, chiefly as an assistant to my steward."

Tom nodded.

"I was certain some tie existed," he exclaimed—"I felt a conviction of it, and it is easy now for me to comprehend why he broke forth into such vindictive expressions when he caught sight of your son's letter."

The baronet looked at Tom in some surprise.

"I am not certain," continued Tom, "whether you fully realise your exact position; but I am perfectly assured that a plot is now on foot, and has been for some time, to wrest from you all your possessions. One great step has been gained by the disinheritance of your son, another in the will you have been persuaded to make. Justly, then, they must fear any return of your son as likely to undo all that they have accomplished."

"I understand you."

"I am glad you do. And now I can assure you that the pain in my arm so much increases that I shall not be able to endure it much longer. Can you tell me where I shall be likely to meet with surgical aid?"

"In the next village," was the answer; "it is not more than a mile and a half away, and one apothecary lives there who has quite a reputation for his skill in broken limbs and such matters."

"Then, with your leave," said Tom, "I will ride over to him."

"Do so—do so."

"And that," continued Tom, reflectively, "suggests to me another plan—an amendment in my course of operations. I will leave here as though I intended to depart for good, especially we will try to make your wife and her accomplice believe that I am going and shall not return again."

"But why?" inquired the old man—"why?"

"Simply because while I am here they will watch my movements very closely, and be circumspect in all they do; when I am gone it will be different."

"I see."

"You may depend upon it," continued Tom, "that I shall return here as quickly as possible; but I shall do it secretly—no one shall be aware of my presence if I can help it; but I will keep the closest watch upon everything, and if I see cause to interfere will do so."

"But you are putting yourself to much trouble on my account."

"No, no," said Tom—"believe me, none at all. You can more than repay me for anything I do by finding me a shelter for the space of a few days, until, in fact, my arm is well."

"It is a simple request, but I grant it readily."

"Thanks! And now let me ask you to try your best to remain as you now are—that is, something like yourself. The change which has taken place during the last half hour is surprising; let me hope that it will continue."

"I will try to be firm—I will try to assert my own independence."

"Hush—hush!"

"What is it?"

"I fancy I can hear some one approaching. Wait, and I will unfasten the door."

With a noiseless step, Tom crossed the room, and as noiselessly turned the key; then, sinking his voice to the lowest whisper, he said:

"I am now going to take a farewell of you—I mean a farewell in appearance. You do what you can to persuade me to stay, and I will declare how impossible it is. Act your part well, and your wife will be quite deceived."

The old baronet nodded, and scarcely had this understanding been arrived at than the door was flung rudely open, and her ladyship, looking very flushed, made her appearance.

Tom was standing with his back to the door, and took not the least notice of her entrance.

The first words that reached her ears were:

"No, sir, believe me, it causes very great regret on my part to refuse your kind offer, but the business I have is so pressing and immediate that I cannot remain with you. At some other time I shall be proud and glad to avail myself of your hospitality."

A slight change came over the baronet when he was conscious of the presence of his wife; but he studiously strove to prevent his eyes from meeting hers.

With a deep sigh, which told how much sincerity there was in the words, he replied:

"I wish I could persuade you to remain, but since I cannot, let me know when you will be this way again—when I shall have the pleasure of seeing you?"

"Not for a month at least," said Tom. "And now, as I have lingered too long already, perhaps you will permit me to take my departure. I am glad you do not think ill of me, though my errand was an unwelcome one. Until I heard your view of the case I believed your son Roderic to be deeply injured, and that's why I ventured to become his intercessor. What you have told me has, however, changed my opinion."

These words for a moment or two mystified the old man greatly; but her ladyship, for whose ear they were especially intended, looked intensely surprised.

"It is hard," added Tom, "for a father and a son to be parted, and so I hope the time will come when you will be reunited. Now, sir, farewell!"

He made his bow, and turned round.

Her ladyship looked at him scrutinly.

"Farewell, my lady!" said Tom, with another bow. "I am sorry I behaved with so much rudeness to you; but, then, it seems I have been altogether led astray."

The baronet's wife could scarcely understand all this; it was so entirely different to what she had expected.

She had made up her mind to rave and storm and by main force to have Tom King driven forth.

Now she found him in the act of leaving.

As he quitted the room, however, Tom King gave one parting glance at her countenance, and surely if any face ever spoke, hers did then.

The thought that occupied her mind was plainly to be read.

It was:

"Go—go! I am glad to be rid of you! And when you are once outside these walls I will take care that you do not re-enter them!"

Quitting the room, Tom King found himself in the spacious hall, which reached from the front to the back of the mansion.

In the centre was a broad flight of stone steps, leading to the upper story.

Tom turned at once in the direction of the door that opened in the rear of the mansion, as his object was to go as quickly as he could to the stables, obtain his horse, and ride off.

The pain he felt was something terrific, yet he bore it like a martyr.

He was rather surprised to find no servants about, and not desiring to create any stir, for he felt that the fewer persons by whom he was seen the better, Tom strode quickly along the passage.

On his way, he passed one door that was a little way open, and as he did so, some sweet, girlish tones reached his ears.

"Not now, Ernest," said the voice—"not now! I dare not remain here. To-night, at the old spot near the plantation, I will meet you."

Tom did not wait to hear the response, but hurried on.

He attached no particular importance to what he had overheard. It was not until afterwards, indeed, that the circumstance was brought back to his memory.

Crossing a lawn which extended itself at the rear of the hall, Tom bent his steps towards the outbuildings.

Reaching them, he was still surprised to notice the absence of any servants.

The first door he came to evidently led into the stables.

It was standing partly open, and Tom paused upon the threshold.

Looking in, he saw seated on a corn-bin, with his back towards him, the man whom he had witnessed opening the letter-bag.

He was so intent upon something he was doing that evidently he had not heard Tom King's approach.

Everything this man might do had a special interest in Tom's eyes, and therefore the highwayman waited and watched his movements with great attention.

Not at first, however, was he able to make out what the object was that the man held.

It looked almost like a slender steel rod, and this he appeared to be polishing vigorously.

Suddenly, however, the other end was raised, and when Tom King caught a glimpse of it he perceived at once that it was some singular kind of firearm, the like of which he had never before seen

It was just at this time that the man, turning round for the purpose of obtaining some more oil, caught sight of Tom standing in the doorway.

He uttered a cry of surprise, and he exhibited great signs of consternation.

He recovered his presence of mind sufficiently, however, to raise the lid of the corn-bin, drop the singular weapon into it, and then turn the key in the padlock.

Then, with great servility, he took off his cap, and spoke to Tom in fawning tones.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" he said. "I did not see you! May I ask what you want?"

"Merely my horse," said Tom, who, wishing to throw this man as much off his guard as possible, thought the best thing he could do was to pretend to be unaware of what the man was about.

"Very good, sir," was the answer. "I will call the groom. Yours is the grey horse, I believe?"

"Yes, that is right. But as the groom is not here, do not trouble yourself to call him. If you will assist me, I will soon have the saddle and bridle on. I stayed with your master rather longer than I intended, and I am now anxious to make up for the time I have lost."

Tom did not wait for the man to consent or refuse, but going at once to the grey horse, he began to saddle him.

The under-steward, if such he may be termed, assisted him, and while he was doing so he was cunning enough to ask, in a pretended, offhand way, as though it did not concern him in the least:

"Shall you be back again soon, sir?"

"No," replied Tom. "I should if I could, but business calls me. I trust to call again in about a month, or it may be more."

"A month?" said the under-steward, with a cough, and stroking his chin with his hand—"a month? That's a long time! Many changes take place in a month sometimes!"

"Yes," said Tom, who could not help thinking there was a deeper meaning in what the man said than appeared at first sight.

By this time the horse was saddled and brought out into the yard.

Tom drew his hat closely over his face, buttoned up his coat, which he had a good excuse for doing, for the air was very cold, then vaulted into the saddle.

"If I follow that lane," said Tom, pointing over a stone wall, "it will take me to Wilfirs Cross, will it not?"

"To the village, sir? Oh, yes! Wait a moment! I will open the gate for you. Then turn to the left, and you will find it rather more than a mile and a half away."

"Yes, yes," said Tom, "I know perfectly well. Accept that as a recompense for your civility."

He dropped a crown-piece into the man's hand as he spoke, then turning his head in the requisite direction, rode rapidly away.

"Confound the rascal!" muttered Tom, between his teeth. "It went sorely against the grain of me to give him anything, and yet it is important he should be thrown off his guard, and I believe I have well succeeded.

"Events will grow interesting ere long, I feel certain. What an evil-looking scamp he is, to be sure!" he added, a moment afterwards. "'Villain' is stamped upon his face. And what could he want with that strange firearm, I wonder, for firearm I am sure it is? No good! Anyone could tell that by the confusion of his manner, and by his great anxiety to conceal it. Well, well—we shall see! Perhaps by nightfall we shall witness a perfect revolution in this household!"

CHAPTER CMXLII.

TOM KING HAS A RARE ADVENTURE WITH A PIOUS APOTHECARY.

WHILE indulging in these reflections, Tom King trotted his horse rapidly in the direction he wished to take—partly in order that not even the faintest breath of suspicion should cloud the under-steward's mind, and partly because he was exceedingly anxious to have his arm looked to, for the anguish it occasioned him was almost more than he could bear.

Under any other circumstances than the present it is possible that Tom might have hesitated a little before he made up his mind to visit the village.

But the peculiar nature of the events by which he was surrounded, and the pain of his wound, made him forgetful of all ordinary caution.

Certainly, as he journeyed on he saw nothing to create the least amount of uneasiness in his mind.

Around him all that he could see was a wide

expanse of well-cultivated land, forming part of the domain of Sir Ralph Cromer.

The village, as he suspected, he found scarcely worthy of the name, and was inhabited only by those people employed directly or indirectly by the baronet.

There was an ale-house, with a large swinging sign; and just beyond that, lying rather back from the road, was a small house, on the front of which was painted: "Elisha Coles, apothecary."

The appearance of Tom King in this remote and little-frequented place caused an immense amount of excitement—an excitement that would have been greater still had he arrived at any other portion of the day.

But just then it happened that the majority of the inhabitants were absent pursuing their daily occupations.

Tom was just beginning to think that surely this quiet little retreat was one in which nothing of him or his comrades could be known—some place where the police officers would never penetrate—when he discovered that it was quite a delusion.

He absolutely started indeed when he saw posted upon a wall a bill similar in appearance to many he had seen before.

It was some distance off, but he did not desire to approach it any closer.

He could tell very well that the figures at the top represented the amount of the reward offered for the apprehension of himself and his companions, and that below was a full description of the personal appearance of each.

After seeing this, Tom might naturally hesitate before he ventured to trust himself in the apothecary's abode.

But pain quickly banished that hesitation, and he looked around him with a somewhat pleasant smile, feeling that he could if necessary, vanquish the whole village.

Perceiving that a stranger had stopped before his gate a small, thin man, with scanty grey hair, opened the front door of the house, and advanced with a stooping gait.

"Good morning, sir!" he said, in a voice between a whine and a drawl. "Heaven be praised, I can say it—good morning, sir! May I ask what you want with me!"

Tom King thought this a very singular address, and stared at the speaker with surprise.

His amazement lasted only for a moment, and then he inquired:

"Am I addressing Mr. Coles?"

"Yes—praise the Lord, for all His mercies—such is my name."

"Then," said Tom, "I have been sent down from the hall, by Sir Ralph; he tells me that you are clever in surgery, and you see I have met with a slight accident to my arm."

"Oh, Sir Ralph is too good—much too good, and yet not good either, if I may contradict myself—he is an evil-minded man, quite dead to all true piety and religion. May I hope, sir, that you are a believer—that you have been saved?"

"Oh, decidedly!" said Tom.

"If not," continued the pious apothecary, "either allow me to convert you, or else depart—I will give no assistance to the ungodly."

"I need no conversion," said Tom, "none at all, I can assure you."

"I rejoice to hear it," was the reply—"greatly rejoice! Please to enter, my good sir, and while I am attending to your hurt we can have a little edifying conversation upon grace."

Luckily, just then, Tom turned round, for he could not suppress a smile at the idea of one of his profession having any such conversation.

Somehow or other he had taken an invincible dislike to Mr. Coles, in spite of all his professions of piety.

Tom's own opinion was that, like many others he assumed religion only as a cloak.

Whether this was so or not really did not much signify to the highwayman, provided he was really expert in dressing wounds.

"I am a poor, weak, trembling worm," he said, as he ushered Tom King into a small parlour at the back of his little shop—"a poor, trembling worm, weak in body, but I trust strong in grace."

Tom gave a sympathetic sigh and shook his head, which he thought were the best things he could do by way of reply.

"Sit down my dear sir—take this chair, and allow me to examine the nature of the injury."

Tom gladly complied, for just then he really felt quite ill and faint, and instead of one apothecary he saw fifty at least spinning round before him.

"Why, gracious powers, is it possible?" ejaculated Mr. Coles. "Why, this is a wound you have received from some kind of firearm!"

"Yes—yes, you are quite right."

A look of surprise and curiosity appeared on the apothecary's face as he said:

"How strange for you to speak of it as an accident; I never saw anything look less accidental in my life."

"No matter," said Tom, very faintly—"see to it, I beg I feel now as though all the life had ebbed out of my veins."

One glance into Tom's countenance was ample confirmation of the truth of what he had just said.

His eyes were half closed and his face deathly pale.

Mr. Coles now bestirred himself in good earnest, and, by the way in which he went about his work, justified the opinion Sir Ralph had expressed concerning him.

Tom grew fainter and fainter—he became insensible of all pain.

He knew that the apothecary was busy with his arm, and had some dim idea that a bullet had been extracted, for he fancied that a voice miles and miles off had whispered something to that effect in his ear.

When he recovered himself, he found his arm carefully bound up, and Mr. Coles standing over him, gazing very attentively into his countenance.

Tom opened his eyes suddenly—so suddenly, indeed, that the apothecary gave a start and uttered an ejaculation that did not sound particularly pious.

At the same time, Tom saw him cram something rather hastily into one of his pockets, but what it was he could not make out.

"Ahem!" he said, in some confusion. "You feel better now, sir, I hope?"

"Yes, decidedly better," said Tom, in a very faint voice, and pretending to be much weaker than he really was, for he thought by this means he should be able to understand the meaning of the apothecary's confusion.

He had his eyes all the time fixed upon the coat-pocket into which that something had been thrust so hurriedly.

"Have you nothing to revive me—something in the shape of a stimulant?"

Mr. Coles had been watching Tom with half-closed eyes, in an attitude and manner strongly resembling the way in which a cat will regard the movements of a mouse.

"Yes," he said, "I have something that will do you good, and after that we will return thanks for your narrow escape and complete restoration."

The apothecary turned round and opened a drawer.

While he was so engaged his back was turned towards Tom, who leaning quickly forward, dipped his fingers into the gaping coat pocket and drew forth a crumpled up piece of paper.

Before he had time to look at it the apothecary turned round and said:

"Here, my dear sir, is the stimulant I spoke of."

Then, in a tone of voice strikingly at variance to that which he had all along employed, he exclaimed:

"Tom King, I know you, and I claim the reward! Do you feel that pressing against your forehead? Do you know what it is? It is the muzzle of a pistol—a pistol carefully loaded, and if you stir or offer the least resistance I will blow your brains out and say I did it in self-defence!"

It cost Tom a great effort, but nevertheless he sat perfectly still, except that he partially unfolded the crumpled up paper, and saw that it was one of the bills containing a description of himself.

"You are weak," said the apothecary, excitedly—"you have not the strength of a mouse; and remember, this pistol is at your head. Show your good sense, then, by immediate surrender."

Tom closed his eyes, and seemed as though he had quite swooned away for the second time.

The action threw the apothecary partially off his

guard, and Tom took the utmost advantage of this circumstance.

With a sudden movement, he wrested the pistol from the apothecary's hand, while at the same time he seized him by the throat with a powerful grasp.

The pain he endured was something fearful, but he did not care for it now.

"You rascal!" sa om "this is your piety, is it? Keep still! D n't move or speak, or " will be the worse for you!"

The apothecary's limbs trembled to such an extent that he could not stand.

Tom did not possess the strength requisite to hold him up, so he slipped down and sat on the floor in a very ignominious manner indeed.

"Go!" he said to Tom. "Go away, and leave me here—I will not try to molest you any further!"

"I cannot believe you," said Tom, "or place the least trust in your words. I am going to take such measures as make my safety certain."

Tom glanced around him, in search of something by which he could secure his prisoner.

He saw nothing, however, save some cloths, or rather towels, some of which had been used in the dressing of his arm.

Taking up one, he twisted it rapidly into the shape of a rope; then, when Mr. Coles opened his mouth to speak again, he thrust it between his teeth, and with nimble fingers tied it tightly at the back of his head, so that he was most effectually gagged.

A dismal, moaning sound, inaudible at any distance, was all the noise that he could make.

Two more towels served excellently well to confine his arms and ankles.

Then came the consideration, where should he be disposed of until such time as Tom could get safely away?

This was rather a puzzling question, for some of the people belonging to his household might enter the room the moment he left it, and raise an alarm.

This above all things Tom was anxious to prevent and at last he believed he had hit upon the means of doing so.

By the side of the fireplace he perceived the door of a large cupboard.

The key was sticking in the lock, so Tom unhesitatingly turned it and pulled open the door

An ejaculation of astonishment—almost of terror—escaped his lips, for he suddenly found himself face to face with a most unexpected object.

This was the skeleton of a man, so placed as to appear to be standing upright in the closet.

The white, polished bones, and the glittering pieces of wire by which they were fixed together, had an awfully ghastly look.

Tom turned round and looked at the apothecary, and he could tell by the expression of his face that he rather enjoyed Tom's discomfiture.

But the highwayman did not allow it to be manifest, for, pointing to the skeleton and addressing Mr. Coles, he exclaimed:

"A friend of yours, I suppose? Well, I think there is room for both. You shall go in there and keep him company."

The apothecary shook his head violently.

"No, you sha'n't," said Tom. "I have an idea—a very good idea."

What it was will quickly be seen.

The apothecary, with glaring eyes, watched every one of Tom's movements, all the while feeling a most uncomfortable sensation in his breast.

First of all, Tom found that the skeleton was suspended in the cupboard by means of a piece of wire hooked over a nail.

To take the framework of bones down was therefore an easy matter.

Having done so, he dragged it with him a short distance, and placed it in the old-fashioned arm-chair in which the apothecary usually sat.

A cloak was hanging up behind the door, and in this, with a little trouble, Tom carefully enveloped the skeleton.

Then pulling off the apothecary's wig and spectacles, he placed them on the skeleton's head, surmounting the whole by a three-cornered hat that he had found hanging up along with the cloak.

The appearance produced by this object was horrifying in the extreme, and would surely be sufficient almost to terrify to death anyone who came upon it at unawares.

The white, polished, long face had truly a horrible appearance, which was heightened by the incongruous objects placed about it. Most especially did the huge horn spectacles add to this appearance.

Tom had a little trouble in forcing the skeleton to sit sufficiently upright, but even this difficulty was overcome, and then he carefully arranged the folds of the cloak in such a manner that one of the white, ghastly skeleton hands was plainly shown upon the black cloth, which made its whiteness appear all the more striking.

This done, Tom stepped back a pace or two, and regarded his work with an eye of admiration.

Not so the apothecary.

He gazed on all with the greatest wonder and apprehension.

"Now," said Tom, addressing him, "I have a great mind to hang you up in the cupboard in the same way that you hung up the skeleton. I will not do so, however, but I will place you there, and take good care you do not get out."

It required all Tom's present strength to drag the body of the apothecary across the floor of the little parlour and prop him up in the closet.

But, as has been stated, he was a thin, diminutive man, and his weight was a mere trifle.

Having got him upon his feet, Tom pushed him close against the wall at the back of the cupboard.

The apothecary was inclined to resist—he did not like the idea of being locked up in that confined space.

And so, being perfectly helpless, he fell forward much in the same manner as a corpse might have done.

But Tom pushed him back with some vigour, and the next moment the door of the closet was closed.

Then came a dull, heavy thump.

The apothecary had tumbled up against it.

The highwayman turned the key, took it out of the lock, and consigned it to his pocket.

Then, tapping on the woodwork, he said:

"Good morning, Mr. Coles! I hope you will make yourself as comfortable as circumstances will admit! I rather think you will remain there for some time. Whoever comes into the room next will be rather startled."

Just then Tom heard a footstep approaching, so he considered it was high time to be off.

He gave one parting glance at the skeleton, whose aspect appeared to be even more horrible than at first, and then opened the door.

On the threshold he met some one that he took to be a maid-of-all-work.

She started on seeing Tom, and then said:

"Oh, if you please, sir, is Mr. Coles in his room?"

"Yes," said Tom, "and I don't think he wishes to be disturbed."

"Oh, never mind his wishes!" was the reply. "Missis wants him, so he must come!"

With these words the girl brushed past Tom King, pushed open the door of the room abruptly, and advanced about half a dozen steps before she noticed the figure seated in the arm-chair.

The cloak—which, oddly enough, the apothecary sometimes wore indoors, because he complained so of the cold—the three-cornered hat, and the wig were quite familiar to the girl's eyes, but she caught a glimpse of the skeleton's face and the bony hand.

She stopped short, and uttered a dismal shriek.

At the same moment a horrible, rumbling, thumping noise assailed her ears, accompanied by a muffled groan.

The girl responded by another shriek, and fell down face foremost on the floor.

Tom heard more footsteps approaching, and so beat a precipitate retreat.

"I should like to know how it all goes on," he murmured, "but can't stay. I rather fancy there will be a slight commotion in the village before many hours pass away. Well, so much the better—they will be all the less likely to think about me."

With this philosophical remark, Tom mounted his horse and rode off.

Just as he did so, he saw a window in the apothecary's

house was dashed open, and a female voice shrieked out:

"Oh, murder—murder! Help—help! Murder!"

Tom King took no further notice, but, trotting round a corner of the lane, was in a moment lost to sight.

CHAPTER CMXLIII.

DESCRIBES HOW A TROOP OF POLICE OFFICERS ARRIVED RATHER UNEXPECTEDLY AT THE VILLAGE.

BEFORE following Tom King and relating the further adventures which befel him at the hall, it is necessary that we should take a brief glance at the proceedings in the village—proceedings that resulted in very serious consequences, for Tom was quite wrong in thinking that he had heard the last of the joke.

The violent outcry, then, was made by the wife of the apothecary, who was almost beside herself with terror.

She had caught one glimpse of her servant girl lying, as it appeared to her, dead upon the parlour floor, and of the skeleton seated in the arm-chair.

In the deep, sleepy silence which invariably prevailed in the village, her outcries were distinctly heard, and soon several neighbours came hurrying forwards to learn what was the matter

"Murder!" shrieked Mrs. Coles. "Oh, murder—murder! There's a double murder in the house!"

On receipt of this intimation, those who had drawn near the apothecary's house drew back, uttering dismal shrieks.

Soon, however, men were seen running hastily towards them.

Some came from the alehouse, others from the places where they had been engaged in working.

Strangely enough, the first man who passed through the garden gate was the landlord of the alehouse, and he was so short and so stout, so scant of breath, and so chronically red in the face, that it was quite a wonder now he could have contrived to move himself so quickly.

The unusual exertion deprived him of the power of speech, and after his arrival all he could do was to goggle his eyes fearfully, and gasp like some huge fish suddenly thrown upon the shore.

Then came the smith, and after him the cooper, who also filled the office of parish constable, and behind him again came his assistant.

"Come in!" shrieked Mrs. Coles, weeping and wringing her hands. "Oh, do come in—somebody come in and see the awful sight!"

"What's the matter?" asked the blacksmith, hoarsely.

"Matter? murder is the matter!" was the answer. "Why don't you come in and look? I can see you there, Mr. Peters; why don't you set the example of coming forward?"

This was addressed to the parish constable.

"I am coming ma'am," he answered—"I am coming; but perhaps you'd be kind enough to run downstairs and open the door, or shall we break it in?"

"No, no—I will come down," was the reply. "Wait a minute, I'll come down."

She disappeared at once from the window, and then the constable, facing round and addressing the men, said:

"I call upon you all, as good men and true, to assist me in this matter! If it is murder, the guilty man may be in the house, and if so, you must assist me to capture him."

Just then the front door was thrown open, and Mrs. Coles made a dash to get outside.

The constable stepped out of the way immediately, and addressing the others, he cried after the manner of some gallant generals:

"Forward—forward! Enter! I will follow!"

But the villagers by no means saw the force of this arrangement; they resolutely refused to stir, while they cried:

"No—no, Mr. Peters, it's your place to go first. Come now, no shirking, we'll back you up!"

Mr. Peters looked as though he should prefer backing out of the whole affair, but he was afraid to say as much

At length the villagers fairly clustered round him, and drove him to the front door of the house.

In spite of all his struggles and resistance, the shop was entered and crossed, and the door leading into the little parlour reached.

They stopped a moment on the threshold.

"Th—th—there's nobody here!" said Mr. Peters, speaking as well as his chattering teeth would allow him—"th—th—there's nobody here!"

Just then an awful cry came upon their ears, yet it was not a cry either, nor a groan, nor a moan, nor, in fact, any specific sound for which there is a name.

It was something compounded of all these, yet seeming dull and muffled, and mingled with it was an odd, lumbering, thumping noise.

"Murder!" roared the constable—"murder! Let me out—let me out! I can't stay here!"

But by this time the apothecary's shop was filled with people, and so densely packed were they that it was impossible for those who had already entered to pass out again.

Not one who heard the horrible sounds could control their consternation.

Faces dirty and begrimed by labour turned ghastly white, and, what was the greatest phenomenon of all, the ruby countenance of the alehouse landlord blanched also.

The fearful sound was repeated again and again, or it would be more correct to say it never ceased.

"It—it comes from that room," remarked the constable, presently. "What can it be?"

"Push the door open a little wider," was the reply. "There can be no harm in doing that. Then perhaps we shall see."

Fortunately for the constable, one of the villagers had entered armed with a pitchfork, and this he passed over the heads of the rest as he said:

"Here, Muster Peters, just gi'e the door a poke wi that!"

The constable complied with this demand, and slowly and creakingly the door was pushed open upon its hinges.

Then truly was an awful sight presented to their notice.

The servant girl still lay stretched insensible upon the floor, and there sat the skeleton in the apothecary's arm-chair, looking, if possible, more hideous than ever, for the slight wind coming through the open window, which had blown the door to again, had also disarranged the bony framework so that the head was inclined to one side, after the manner of the attitude some people are apt to assume when they wish to appear particularly knowing or cunning.

Such a sight as this was one for which the villagers were not prepared.

They stood as if suddenly turned to stone; literally they were rooted to the spot—not one could have stirred, had his life depended upon it—it became, indeed, a difficult matter even to breathe.

Then the horrible noise came again, this time somewhat louder than before.

The lumbering was more unmistakable, and, as if by a common instinct, all turned their eyes in the direction of the cupboard behind which the apothecary was standing.

That, beyond all doubt, was the source from which the noise proceeded, but who was there among them bold enough to enter that awful chamber, and, opening the cupboard, ascertain the cause of the disturbance?

Who would venture to approach the fearful object sitting in the chair?

Certainly no one of those present.

Then the girl began to show signs of returning consciousness.

She moved slightly and uttered a moaning sound, both of which increased the terror of the villagers, if such a thing could possibly be.

"Oh!" she groaned, "what have I seen? Murder—murder!"

"Take notice of that," said the constable, in a deep and warning voice—"take notice of that! Her first words were—'Murder—murder!'"

Those whom he addressed nodded, and looked as wise as they were able.

Then the girl, raising her head, once more caught sight of the ghastly figure in the chair.

This time, however, she did not faint, but, in some in-



[THE STRANGE MEETING OF CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AT THE TURNPIKE GATE.]

comprehensible fashion, rolled, crawled, and tumbled over the floor until she reached the threshold; then, gaining her feet, she turned round and endeavoured to fly.

But the constable, with a sudden accession of valour, seized her and held her tightly.

"No," he said, "not so fast! You are my prisoner, and must explain the meaning of all this!"

This completed the girl's terror, and she found herself unable to speak at all.

Meanwhile, the bumping inside the cupboard continued at a prodigious rate.

"Speak, wretched girl!" said the constable, with surprising boldness—"speak, I say, and explain all this!"

Just then there was a louder bump than usual against the cupboard door—so loud a one, and given with such force, that the woodwork could not withstand it.

Suddenly the door flew open, and out rolled the apothecary.

Then such a fighting and scrambling to get out of the shop when they beheld this strange, singular apparition—for no one recognised the apothecary—was something fearful.

Shrieks and cries of every description rent the air.

The apothecary knew that help was near—it will be remembered that Tom King had not deprived him of his sense of hearing—he knew all that had taken place, and so, most exasperated at the turn of affairs, he wondered how his neighbours could be so stupid.

The roll of cloth in his mouth effectually prevented speech; but in his struggles, he had got one hand partially at liberty, and now, after having rolled over a few times on the floor, he disengaged it entirely.

When this was done, it was by no means so difficult to untie the towel that bound his feet, and also the one that gagged him.

No. 195 will be Published next Monday.

By the time he had accomplished these operations not a soul was left in the shop, which presented a scene of terrible ruin and disorder.

Heedless of all this, and heedless of his own appearance, and intent only upon vengeance, Mr. Coles rushed forth.

He saw the villagers flying before him like a pack of sheep.

He shouted to them at the top of his voice—he waved his arms, and called to them to come back.

But the more he shouted the faster they ran, and eventually, tired and breathless, he stopped at the extreme end of the village, while his neighbours continued their headlong flight.

The apothecary wiped the blood and perspiration from his face, while he gave utterance to some very impious exclamations.

He was now quite alone in his native village—it was deserted by every human being.

He was engaged in speculating upon the means he should adopt of rejoining his companions, or calling them to his side, when he perceived, approaching from an opposite direction, a small troop of horsemen.

The apothecary cleared his clouded eyes, and gazed upon them.

"Officers!" he cried, with a shriek—"they are officers! Now—now I shall be repaid for all that I have suffered—now, indeed, will the tables be turned!"

Without another word, he scampered off in this fresh direction.

The officers saw the singular figure bounding towards them at such a rapid rate, and viewed it with surprise, for every now and then the excited apothecary would miss his footing and fall heavily to the ground.

Then he would not stay to rise again, but continued rolling over and over in a most inexplicable way, until finally he rolled up on to his feet, and continued at full speed again.

When he at last reached the officers, he found himself unable to articulate a word; wisely, therefore, he forebore from making the attempt; he knew if he waited a moment he would soon recover command of his breath.

Having done so, he exclaimed:

"The reward—the reward! Mark you, I claim the reward! I am fully and fairly entitled to it, so don't try to cheat me out of it!"

"What reward?" asked one of the officers. "Speak out, and tell us what you mean."

"Why, for the apprehension of Tom King!"

"Tom King?" they ejaculated, in surprise. "What, have you seen him? Do you know where he is?"

"I have seen him! Curses on him!" was the reply. "He has left me in this awful plight! Can you not see?"

"We do—we do; but are unable to comprehend it!"

"Then I will explain. But come on, follow me the while; I can tell you while we are walking!"

Accordingly, the apothecary did so; but there is no reason why we should follow his version of the affair, since the facts are well known already.

The officers listened with surprise, and, very much to the little man's indignation, roared heartily at the concluding portion of his narrative.

"But," said the officer in command, "do you mean to say this has just happened?"

"Well, only a short time ago."

"And you tell us that Tom King actually rode away?"

"Well, I have every reason to believe he did. He came on horseback, and it is fair to suppose he would depart in the same way."

"Then it's very odd we have not seen him," continued the officer, "for we have been closely on the look-out for some hours past. We knew well enough that he must be in this part of the country, but could not tell exactly where."

While he was speaking, the officer raised himself in his stirrups and looked keenly around him.

He was not able, however, to catch a single glimpse of the highwayman.

"Which is your house?" was the next question.

The apothecary pointed to it.

"Then we'll pay a visit there," was the reply.

"Perhaps by looking around us we shall be able to obtain some clue as to the direction he has taken."

This was a very reasonable idea indeed, and all felt it to be so, especially the apothecary, who stepped forward with greater briskness than before.

"There's many a slip betwixt the cup and the lip, is there not, old fellow?" said the chief officer, with a grin. "You thought you had Tom King all safe and sure; but he turned the tables upon you."

"He did. But he cannot have got far away; remember, it is broad daylight—he must be close at hand."

"I am surprised that he should venture out during the day; but, of course, it would be the pain of his wound that would force him to adopt this course. The rascal is well mounted, and unless we can get a change of horses I fear we shall stand but a poor chance of capturing him, for ours are completely knocked up; we are looking about indeed for some place where we can give them an hour or two's rest."

"Well, then, no fresh horses are to be had in the village," answered the apothecary. "What is to be done?"

"I don't know yet," was the answer; "but if he is badly hurt, as you say, he can't have got far off; we must come up with him ere long."

By the time these explanations had been completed the village was reached, and the officer in command, with a ready thought, dismounted, ordering his companions to do the same, save one, in whose charge the horses were left.

"Now ride down to the inn yonder with them, and let them have some hay and water and a rub down; that will be better than nothing: in the meantime we will look about."

They pushed through the gate in front of the apothecary's house, and as soon as they had done so, the villagers, having recovered a little from their absurd alarm, came creeping slowly back again, their courage reviving in a very great degree as they caught sight of the police officers.

The first visit was to the parlour, where the grim skeleton still sat.

The officers no sooner saw it than they roared with laughter.

"It's a good joke!" said the one in command, wiping the tears from his eyes—"it's a capital joke, and no mistake! Why, old fellow, you will never have such another chance of laying hold of five hundred pounds in your life!"

"But I claim the reward!"

"Claim away," was the response. "Don't you wish you may get it? Now, my lads, we've seen enough here; just let us look round outside."

To the outside accordingly they went.

The apothecary pointed out the place where Tom's horse had been tied.

Marks of his hoofs were distinctly visible, but only just on the spot where he had been standing.

The road was hard elsewhere, and showed no trace whatever.

But the officers considered themselves to be well on the scent.

The apothecary's cottage was a centre from which they could strike out in all directions, and their hypothesis was that Tom King would seek the nearest place of shelter he was able to find, in the hope of being able to lie there concealed until the friendly shades of night should gather around him.

CHAPTER CMXLIV.

RELATES THE STRANGE ADVENTURES TOM KING MET WITH IN THE WOOD AT WILFIRS CROSS.

Leaving the police officers to follow out as best they may the clue they had already found to Tom's whereabouts, we will return to the highwayman himself.

When he trotted away so composedly from the apothecary's cottage, he little thought that the police officers were so near at hand.

And yet, perhaps the very boldness and confidence which this want of knowledge gave him added considerably to his success in reaching unperceived the grounds belonging to the hall.

At one side of this building was a long, peculiar stretch of woodland.

In some places the trees grew so densely that it was almost impossible to force a passage between their trunks, in others the trees were wide apart.

Nevertheless, the line of what might almost be called forest was unbroken.

It stretched away for a distance of upwards of two miles—one end far in the open country, the other close to the eastern wing of the hall.

So conspicuous an object as this could not fail to be perceived, and Tom King immediately made his way towards it at the nearest point, feeling sure that beneath its umbrageous shades he should be better secured from observation than elsewhere.

Just then, before the officers reached the summit of a hill commanding this portion of the country, Tom King trotted his horse gently beneath the overhanging boughs.

He was in a moment lost to sight.

He glanced around him with considerable curiosity and interest.

The wood was one of great antiquity, as was evidenced by the gigantic size of some of the trees, and he could also tell that human footsteps rarely pressed the ground over which he was then passing.

Under cover of this dense foliage, it was the easiest matter in the world for Tom King to draw quite close to the hall without being seen by anyone, and this was the first thing he set about attempting.

He came at last to one portion which had evidently been set aside as a plantation.

Game was abundant, and at every step he disturbed so much that Tom began to feel apprehensive that the unusual commotion among the inmates of this place would betray his presence.

For this reason, he turned off to the right, intending to skirt the plantation as much as possible.

In doing so, he found that its width was not great, and that one side of it bordered the road leading from the village up to the hall.

From the plantation a full view could be had of the road for a considerable distance; but as no one seemed near, and as no sound broke the silence, Tom pushed steadily on.

Passing the plantation, he came to what was probably, many years ago, a shrubbery.

But now the dwarfed trees of which it was composed had been suffered to grow wild.

The winding paths were choked up with weeds and brambles, and the whole place had that aspect of neglect and desolation which so soon shows itself when any cultivated piece of land is allowed to return to a primitive wildness.

This was as near to the hall as Tom thought it would be prudent to venture.

Accordingly, he seeked a retired spot, which he only reached by forcing a passage for himself and steed through what was almost an impenetrable thicket.

Here removing some of the trappings of his horse, he unbuckled the rein on one side of the bit and used the thong of leather as a means to prevent his horse from straying too far away.

He secured him with it to the branch of a tree in such a manner, however, as not to prevent the horse from feeding at pleasure on the tall, luxuriant grass that was everywhere around.

The steed being thus disposed of, Tom began to look about him for some place where he might seek repose himself.

A long time had elapsed since he had taken any rest, and he was fully conscious that if he could only lie down somewhere and go to sleep, he should awake greatly refreshed, and that it would do his wound more good than aught else.

But for the pain he felt in his arm he would have climbed one of the trees and concealed himself among its dense foliage.

This, however, he felt to be quite out of the question.

It is certain that if the highwayman had had the least suspicion that the police officers were so near at hand—that, in fact, they were absolutely upon his track and searching for him in every direction—the thought of going to sleep would never have entered his mind.

Pushing his way through another part of the thicket, Tom suddenly found himself in view of a strange, ruinous, yet picturesque-looking building.

He did not need a second glance to show him that at some time or other it had been a summer-house, and there were indications that it had been most tastefully built and decorated.

Now the woodwork, of which it was chiefly composed, was thickly overgrown with green moss, the growth of which was not a little promoted by a large pool of stagnant water that partially surrounded it.

Although so close to Wilfir Hall, it would have been easy for anyone to believe this ruined summer-house to be miles and miles from any human dwelling.

Profound silence was around—such a silence as is found only in the depths of a huge wood.

"It seems to me," murmured Tom, to himself, "that no one has trodden these neglected, moss-grown paths for ages, and I should think few people would visit that rotten old summer-house from choice. I think I might venture to enter it, and lie down there to sleep—at any rate, let the risk be what it may, I will do so."

Without another moment's hesitation, then, Tom King stepped quickly across the little open space before the door of the summer-house, and entered the building.

A strong, disagreeable odour of dead leaves and decaying vegetation saluted his nostrils, and the atmosphere within was so damp that it sent a shiver through his entire being.

"Not over comfortable quarters," muttered Tom, his teeth chattering slightly as he spoke. "Yet still I may be safe, and, after all, that is the principal consideration, even though I do catch an ague by sleeping here."

A dim, dusky kind of twilight prevailed in the interior of the summer-house, and so he had to grope his way forward until he reached the side opposite to the doorway.

Then, selecting what seemed to him the darkest corner of all, he gathered together a number of dry leaves that had been blown in by the wind, and, having arranged them something in the shape of a couch, lay down to sleep.

So entirely was he overcome by long want of rest, fatigue, and the exhaustion consequent on the loss of blood he had sustained, that scarcely had he settled himself in a tolerably comfortable posture than his eyes closed, and in a few moments he was in a deep slumber, from which it would have required some very unusual noise to have awakened him.

How long he might have remained in this position he knew not, and had no means of ascertaining.

He fancied, however, at last, that he began to dream, and his dream was that two persons were at no great distance from him, conversing together in low but earnest tones.

He strained his ears and listened, but, to his surprise, could not make out a syllable of what was said.

Then shortly afterwards he became aware that he was not in reality dreaming, but that he had just woke up from his deep sleep.

He almost started with surprise when, on opening his eyes and looking around him, he found that the interior of the summer-house was much darker than it was when he closed his eyes.

Then it was only dusky and obscure—now it was profoundly dark, save and except that he could perceive through the open doorway a small patch of night sky.

But the voices continued, and the next thing Tom made out was that two persons were standing near the door of the summer-house conversing with each other.

"Do not think of leaving yet, Ernest," said a voice, the tones of which sounded strangely familiar to Tom's ears—"do not think of leaving yet. Who can say what changes may take place when Roderic returns?"

By the time the voice had finished speaking, Tom was able to make out where he had heard it before.

It was as he was leaving the hall early in the morning.

"I will stay, Ellen, if you wish it," said a male voice—"I will stay, because I can refuse nothing which you ask."

"I care not for the reason," was the faint reply, "so

that you promise to remain. I have a kind of presentiment that Roderic will smooth over all matters and make your absence at all unnecessary."

"You speak like one ignorant of the world," was the reply. "Your brother cannot but be fully aware of his true position—he must know that, once again recognised as Sir Ralph's son, he will be entitled to rank with the first gentlemen in the county. He will naturally expect that you will do something to extend, or, at any rate, keep up his influence, and when he learns that you have been so unwise as to bestow your affections on a humble dependant like myself——"

"No, no—not unwise—surely not unwise!" she interrupted.

But her companion, without heeding the interruption, continued:

"And above all, when he learns that I have been so forgetful of myself—so base, so ungenerous as to make known my own affection, his breast will be filled with anger, he will forget the happy days we spent together years ago—he will have me driven ignominiously forth."

"Oh, Ernest," answered the young girl, speaking with difficulty through her tears, "you fill my heart with sorrow, and yet I trust that in all you say you may be mistaken. I know my brother better than you do; besides, there is my father, and if he could once be relieved from my stepmother's influence, I am sure he would gladly give his consent and approval, for you are a favourite of his, and he so much values my happiness that he would refuse me nothing."

"Well, well—it may be so," said the young man, soothingly, "but I am afraid to flatter myself with such hopes, lest my disappointment should be greater than I can bear."

"At any rate, promise not to be hasty; do not leave here until I have seen Roderic, and until you have seen him, too."

"I promise readily; and now, although I would gladly linger, let us leave this place; the air is cold and damp, and cannot but injuriously affect you. A few more moments of happiness, then we must part."

With a slow, lingering step, the lovers left the doorway of the summer-house.

As soon as they had departed, Tom King rose to his feet.

"Oh," he ejaculated, "that's how the land lies, is it? Well, I comprehend the situation of affairs at the hall much better than I did. And as for you," he continued, glancing in the direction the lovers had taken, "I will try what my intercession can do on your behalf. Now, then, for action."

When Tom emerged from the summer-house he glanced around him, but found no one in sight or hearing.

Accordingly, he gave himself another hearty shake, endeavouring by this means to promote the circulation of his blood, for his sleep on the damp leaves had chilled him to the bone.

This done, he looked to his weapons, and having seen them in proper order, moved off in the direction of the spot where he had left his horse.

When just about to break through the thicket, however, he heard a slow and heavy footstep somewhere close at hand.

He became motionless instantly, and bent all his energies to the faculty of listening.

The footstep became more and more distinct, and Tom fixed his eyes in the direction from which the sound came.

Then emerging and growing as it were out of the surrounding gloom, he perceived the bulky figure of a man.

Tom did not venture to breathe.

He trusted that the trees close against which he stood would render him invisible.

Nearer and nearer came this man, and on a closer approach Tom recognised him.

It was the man he had seen tampering with the letter-bag—the under-steward, in fact, for such was the post he was supposed to fill.

Tom began to be afraid that his intention was to penetrate the very thicket close to which he stood; but his alarm on this point was quickly dissipated, for the under-steward turned sharply to the left, walking on at the same sharp pace, and taking a course that was comparatively speaking free from trees.

Tom watched him until he was almost out of sight, and then he thought to himself:

"Surely the chief thing I have to do in this affair is to keep the closest possible watch upon this man and his proceedings. What can I do better than dog his footsteps and see where he is going at this lonely hour with so much secrecy and caution?"

Almost before he had finished these reflections, Tom King was treading stealthily and noiselessly in the steps of the under-steward, following him like his shadow, and screening himself from observation by means of the thick trunks of the old trees.

He was not long in finding that the direction the under-steward was taking led to the plantation.

He did not penetrate into its recesses, however, but kept upon its outer edge until he again turned to the right, and was almost lost to sight among the underwood.

Tom followed closely, but with redoubled caution, for not only was the nature of the ground such as to render noiseless progress almost impossible, but just then the full moon rose up clear and bright from behind a low bank of clouds on the horizon.

All at once the under-steward paused, and so did Tom.

The two men were then something more than a hundred yards apart.

Tom crouched down among the luxurious undergrowth, and fortunate it was that he did so, for the under-steward, turning round, and shading his eyes with his hand, looked peeringly and scrutinisingly in every direction.

Then, apparently satisfied that he was alone, he himself crouched down behind the massive trunk of a huge tree, that probably had been blown down by the wind.

So great was the thickness of this fallen trunk, that, when the under-steward crouched down behind it, he was almost hidden from observation.

Tom wondered what he could want there.

But for the rustling and sighing of the wind among the tree-tops, a profound silence prevailed.

Time passed on.

The under-steward made no movement, but Tom King, little by little, decreased the distance between them.

Higher and higher rose the moon, and presently Tom found, on getting nearer to the under-steward, that the position the latter had taken up was such as commanded a full view of the lane leading from the village to the hall, along which Tom King had himself so lately passed.

Just as he made this discovery, Tom King remembered the strange-looking firearm which he had caught the under-steward so sedulously polishing, and then it flashed into his mind with great suddenness and with the full force of a conviction, that this man was lying in wait there for some one, who would be favoured with the contents of the weapon.

Tom determined to creep closer still, so as to baulk him in his purpose, but just then he heard a faint sound, and directly afterwards the dusky-looking figure of a man, wrapped in a large riding-cloak, came into view.

As he advanced, the moonlight shining upon him displayed his form with great distinctness.

CHAPTER CXLV.

THE ASSASSINATION IN THE WOOD AT WILFIRS CROSS.

As quick as thought the under-steward raised his gun.

He rested the barrel upon a projecting branch of the old trunk, and took a rapid yet steady aim.

Tom guessed his fatal purpose, and sprang forward.

But his interference came too late.

There was no sound, no report, or puff of smoke, but the stranger in the cloak uttered an odd, gasping cry, clasped his hands over his breast, and fell heavily to the ground.

It was at this moment that Tom pounced upon the under-steward from behind.

A yell of fear and rage broke from his lips when he found himself roughly grasped.

"Villain—murderer!" cried Tom, closing with him, and putting forth his best strength; "you have been seen, and shall at least reap the reward of your villany!"

The sudden surprise bereft the murderer of all his strength and presence of mind.

He became immediately as helpless as a child in the highwayman's hands.

Tom picked up the gun, in which he felt strangely interested, and with the other hand twisted tightly into the thick neckcloth of the under-steward, he dragged him forcibly in the direction of the spot where the wounded stranger lay.

How bitterly Tom regretted not being in time, for his heart told him who this stranger was.

Most certainly it was the baronet's eldest, disowned son, making his way back to entreat his father's forgiveness.

Now he had been cut short by death, or, at least, Tom feared so, for the distance was so short, and the steward's facility for taking aim so great, that it was scarcely possible for him to have escaped a fatal injury.

Yet this was a point he resolved to ascertain without delay, and so, as we have said, he dragged his prisoner after him.

The plantation was only separated from the lane by a hedge so low that Tom had not the least difficulty in stepping over it.

The steward tried to step over it too, but he failed, and was scratched rather unpleasantly by the thorns.

"Down on your knees," said Tom, as soon as he reached the middle of the lane—"down on your knees, villain, and if you make a single movement it shall be your last! Mind that!"

Tom produced his pistol as he spoke, then bent down over the cloaked figure.

Tom did not perceive it just then, but a remarkable change now came over the under-steward's countenance.

Absolutely it seemed to stiffen with horror. His jaw dropped, and his eyes assumed a strange, glaring stare, his fingers worked convulsively, and he seemed as though he was struggling to gasp out some word.

He bent forward, too, as far as he was able, and in his anxiety to catch a glimpse of the stranger's countenance he evidently forgot his own peril—forgot everything.

But the stranger having fallen to the ground upon his face, Tom was under the necessity of rolling him over.

This was quickly done, and then his features were clearly revealed by the light of the clear, shining full moon.

The countenance disclosed was that of a young man, probably not more than five-and-twenty years of age, but upon whose face there was the mark left by long days and nights of dissipation, and although all the features were now in calm repose, the face was a most unpleasant one to look at.

An awful wringing cry coming at this moment from the under-steward's lips made Tom start up, then, looking at him, he noted the change we have described.

The murderer fought madly with his hands; he struggled and tugged at his throat as though there was something there that impeded his utterance—something that he could tear away.

At last, after many ineffectual efforts, he dragged himself forward on his knees for a few paces, and flung himself upon the inanimate body.

"Alfred—Alfred," he cried, in tones that were truly awful to listen to—"my boy, my son, look up! Do not remain so still! Surely you are not dead—you must not, cannot be! Awake—awake! Oh, what wild, foolish folly was it that brought you to this spot to-night? Speak—make some slight movement—show me that you are yet alive!"

But no movement followed, nor could the anxious man detect a breath.

With trembling, unsteady fingers he undid his son's apparel, and endeavoured to place his hand above the region of the heart.

This revelation, so awful, and made so unexpectedly, had for a moment or so the effect of paralysing Tom King completely.

He could only stand quite still, gazing on without sound or motion.

"Then this is not Roderic?" he managed to exclaim at last. "You are sure it is not the baronet's son?"

The under-steward looked up at him wildly, and with his face convulsed with anguish.

He seemed as though about to speak.

Whether such was his intention cannot be known, but just then they were interrupted by the sharp clatter of a horse's feet.

Tom King was on the alert instantly, and an ejaculation of annoyance escaped his lips.

The last thing he wanted was an interruption.

But the sound rapidly increased in loudness, and then, looking up, Tom perceived a single horseman come into sight.

At the same time it was evident this new-comer saw something unusual was taking place in the lane, for he checked the speed of his steed somewhat abruptly, as he called out:

"Hullo there! What's the meaning of all this?"

While speaking he did not discontinue his progress, but came on at a more gentle rate.

The under-steward crouched down and endeavoured to conceal himself from observation.

"Surely," thought Tom to himself, "this is the baronet's son. Had he arrived a little sooner that would have been his fate."

He glanced at the body of the under-steward's son while he spoke, then looking up and raising his voice, he exclaimed:

"Am I right, sir, in taking you to be Mr. Roderic Cromer, the eldest son of the baronet up at the hall yonder?"

"Yes," was the answer, given in pleasant, cheerful tones, "that is my name. How came you to know it?"

"I merely guessed it," was the answer. "Congratulate yourself upon your narrow escape from death."

"Death?" ejaculated Roderic.

"Yes," said Tom. "Give me your attention for a moment, and I will endeavour to explain all."

Then Tom, in as few words as he possibly could, made Roderic acquainted with all those particulars which the reader knows already.

His revelations were listened to in mingled anger, surprise, and incredulity.

While speaking, Tom had a good opportunity of gazing at the young man's face and figure with attention, and he could not help remarking to himself how great a contrast he afforded to him who now lay so motionless on the dusty roadway.

Roderic's countenance was open, manly, and had such a cheerful expression upon it as won all hearts, and attracted everyone towards him.

No traces of cunning, villany, or debauchery could be seen there.

"And it is you, Peterson," Roderic ejaculated at length, dismounting from his steed as he spoke—"it is you who have contemplated this dreadful deed! Well, the retribution that has overtaken you, though terrible, is no more than just."

"I am in doubt," said Tom, "whether the young man is really dead or not; it may be that he is only wounded."

Peterson looked up, and shook his head slowly and sadly.

In so doing his face was revealed, and Tom King started with surprise when he perceived how great a change had been wrought in it.

It seemed, indeed, as though in the space of those few minutes he had grown at least twenty years older, and such an aspect of suffering was visible that the heart would have been hard indeed that did not melt at the sight of it.

"He is dead!" he moaned, wringing his hands—"quite dead—dead by my hand! Let me go! I am a miserable, wretched man now, and this sorrow, which I shall carry to my grave, is surely punishment enough for what I have done! Let me go, and I will confess all—I will tell you everything!"

Tom King did not offer to speak, but left the decision with Roderic.

He, on his side, hesitated, for he scarcely knew as yet in what relation Tom stood to the whole affair.

"Do not refuse me!" pleaded Peterson—"grant my request, and I will tell you something well worth your knowing—will confide in you a secret which otherwise shall never pass my lips. Let me go, and let me take the body of my poor boy with me! That is all I ask, and you shall never see me again in life."

"Be it so," said Roderic—"I give you my consent. Go—depart freely."

"Then I will tell you the secret of which I spoke. To commence, I need scarcely inform you that it was through your stepmother's influence that the baronet's heart was steeled against you—that he at last drove you forth from the hall."

Roderic smiled bitterly.

"I do know it," he said—"I know it full well."

"Ah! then, but you cannot guess what is coming," continued Peterson. "Your stepmother is an artful, wily woman, full of all kinds of stratagems, and possessing an imperious will, which makes all things bend before it.

"I need not describe now how it was that she became Sir Ralph's second wife; let the fact be sufficient. But when she married she was already a wife, though she knew not where her husband was, or whether alive or dead.

"I was her husband," continued the repentant man. "I married her long years ago. I could not brook her evil, overbearing temper, and so we parted.

"We had one son—you see now all that remains of him; and yet I loved him with an intensity you cannot imagine.

"At last, after a rough life, I learned by accident what had become of my wife. I came here intending to expose her and have her driven forth, but she saw me; we had some conversation together.

"She asserted her old influence, and I fell passively into her plans. They were to deprive you of your birthright, and to obtain possession of all Sir Ralph's wealth and estates; and to do this all the more surely, our son Alfred was to be brought forward at a convenient time, and to be married to Sir Ralph's only daughter."

At these words, Roderic started and frowned, while an angry exclamation escaped his lips.

"Forgive me all this!" said Peterson, more humbly than before. "If I have sinned deeply my repentance is proportionally great. Our schemes have come to nought.

"At her suggestion, I posted myself in this place. I consented to become a murderer. I had intercepted your letter, and I knew that you would pass by this spot on your way to the hall. But that my boy Alfred should be anywhere in this neighbourhood at the present time I never for one moment guessed, and, in my haste and excitement, mistook him for you.

"My plans were all well laid. The assassination was performed with this air-gun, which, deadly as a musket, could be discharged without a sound. The place is lonely, and you would have had a grave beneath these bushes."

The young man shuddered from head to foot, and well he might, for few, if any, could hear such an avowal as this unmoved.

"Now, then," Peterson added, after a brief pause, "I have told you all—everything! You have but, on your return to the hall, to proclaim who and what your stepmother is—to call her by her real name—to cover her with confusion and discomfiture. What you will do with her I know not. I dare not intercede on her behalf, and yet I trust you will be merciful."

With these words, the under-steward again turned round, and, with a heavy, gasping sob, threw himself at full length upon the dead body of his son, where he remained convulsed by bitter anguish.

Roderic and Tom remained for a few moments gazing upon him; then the latter, by a rapid sign, beckoned for the other to leave the spot.

His wish was gladly enough complied with.

"Let him go," said Roderic—"let him go. I would not pursue him for the world. Truly enough has his own crime brought its own bitter consequences with it."

"It has," said Tom; "and I rejoice to find that you have acted in such a spirit!"

"And you," Roderic exclaimed, gazing at Tom, "I know not who you are. But give me your hand, for I am certain you are a friend to me and mine, and that is all I wish to know; henceforth we are brothers in friendship!"

The words were spoken in an access of generous enthusiasm, and Tom felt his liking for this young stranger momentarily increase, while he rejoiced to think he had been so instrumental in restoring him to his true position.

"Come," said Tom, "accompany me to the hall, where your father is anxiously awaiting you."

"Does he forgive me?"

"Freely—entirely! Ask him, and observe the result."

"My brain whirls," said Roderic. "I had anticipated nothing of this—I had no idea that such a conspiracy was afoot."

"Calm yourself," said Tom. "Say no more until we reach the hall; by that time you will be able to recover your composure. And as for myself, I have enough to do in thinking over my own future proceedings."

This seemed so strange a remark that Roderic fixed his eyes upon Tom's face with undisguised amazement.

Tom pretended to be oblivious of it.

Silently, then, and rather slowly, this strange pair made their way along the winding lane towards the hall, the picturesque roof of which quickly came in sight above the trees.

"There is the old place!" cried Roderic, pausing to gaze upon it. "I seem carried back years and years to the time when I was a happy boy. It glads my heart to see the old place once again, and to know that I return with the prospect of forgiveness before me."

"It is something more than a prospect," said Tom King; "you may look upon it as a certainty. Nothing will ever give your father so much joy as his reunion with you."

CHAPTER CMXLVI.

IN WHICH TOM KING FINDS THE DIFFERENT EVENTS AT THE HALL COME TO A CLIMAX.

It was easy to see that young Roderic Cromer was deeply affected by his return after his long absence, and though Tom's last speech was such as would naturally call forth some remark, he passed it over in silence.

Nor was another word exchanged between the pair until the entrance of the hall was gained.

Tom King knocked loudly at the portal, and at the same time rang the bell vigorously, when, addressing his companion, he exclaimed:

"You must be prepared to make a sudden rush as soon as the door is opened, otherwise, when it is known who we are, we shall be refused admission."

"Right!"

Just as he pronounced the words, the door was opened, and Tom King did indeed make a sudden rush, and a much more violent one than was at all necessary.

The hall porter, not at all expecting such an attack, was thrown completely backwards and jammed with great force against the wall.

"There," said Tom, as he stepped across the threshold—"I rather think that will do as a commencement!"

Roderic smiled sadly.

Then a door was abruptly flung open, and upon the threshold stood the baronet's wife.

Her face was crimson with rage.

"Villain—wretch!" she shrieked—"begone! You shall not stay beneath this roof another moment! Already you have caused more than enough unhappiness. Begone!"

Just then she caught sight of Roderic.

Although many years had passed since she had seen him last, she recollected his features well—recognition was immediate, and it caused her no little confusion.

She knew well enough what it was the under-steward had set out to do, and could not understand how it was he had failed in his mission.

"Ahem!" said Tom, placing one hand upon his breast, while with his other he took off his hat and bowed profoundly. "I can assure you we are very sorry to intrude thus upon you, Mrs. Peterson."

Tom King watched carefully to see the result produced by the pronunciation of this word.

He found it all that he had expected.

The woman's face turned to a ghastly paleness, and she staggered back as though about to fall.

"False—false!" she said—"it is all false! I deny it!"

"Deny what?" said Tom. "I have accused you of nothing."

"But why did you call me by that name?"

"Simply because I know no other by which to address

you. You have no sort of claim whatever to that of Cromer."

"Indeed, insolent!" she faltered. "But——"

No doubt she was going to give utterance to some threat, but Tom King interrupted her.

"All your plans are known," he said, "and if you are wise you will beat an immediate retreat, and be thankful to us for having allowed you the opportunity of doing so. Yes, I repeat, we know every detail of your scheme; we had it from your first and real husband's lips not many moments since. He has confessed all. Among other things, that you prompted him to take up a position in the wood and assassinate Mr. Roderic here as he passed by. Some one approached, and the dreadful deed was done, the stranger fell; but it was a mistake, and the wretched man discovered afterwards that he had shot down his own son."

A piercing shriek came from the woman's lips, and it was palpable that only a tremendous effort of her powerful will saved her from swooning.

"Alfred?" she gasped, half in a whisper.

"Yes, such is his name; and if you are speedy you will catch sight of him lying in the lane, near the plantation, and your husband with him. Go—quit this roof now while you are able, otherwise you will be expelled!"

Abashed, mortified, and humbled, Mrs. Peterson began to retreat, step by step, backwards towards the door opening at the rear of the hall.

Sobs and groans came from her lips; tears, too, rose in her obdurate eyes; but she struggled with all her might against these manifestations of emotion.

Tom pointed with his finger towards the door, and unable any longer to meet the gaze of the two young men, she turned round, and, opening the door, hastily disappeared.

"Now she is gone," said Tom King, "and this roof is rid of a most unwelcome tenant. Now for your father. Let me break the news of your arrival to him. Do not enter hastily, the shock will be too great."

Remembering the apartment in which he had formerly seen the baronet, Tom King made his way there once more, and found him seated in the same position in the easy-chair.

But he took not the slightest notice of Tom's entrance, and it seemed by his attitude as though he had expired.

The cry that this unexpected sight wrung from Tom King's lips reached the ears of Roderic, who was listening outside.

With a few sudden bounds, he reached the apartment; then, comprehending all, he sank down on his knees at his father's feet.

The first shock over, Tom approached, and as he did so he fancied the old man slightly breathed.

Finding quickly that he was not mistaken, he exclaimed:

"Look up, young sir—look up! He has only fainted."

Such was the case.

The old man had borne up well enough until he heard his son enter.

He had tried to rise from his chair and bid him welcome, but he was seized by a deathly faintness, and sank back, unconscious of the rest.

Knowing the scene that would ensue, Tom King, as soon as Sir Ralph was restored to consciousness, retired to another room, where he sat pondering deeply over this succession of strange events.

There he remained for some time; but at length he was aroused by the entrance of Roderic, who, extending his hand, said:

"Come with me, young sir—come with me. I can never thank you sufficiently for all you have done in my and my father's behalf; but at present we are strangers to your name. Who is it that we have to thank for this good service?"

"Never mind my name," said Tom. "It is one, I trust, unknown to you, and let it remain so. But if you feel yourself under any obligation to me, it will be more than cancelled if you will allow me to remain beneath this roof for a few days—until, in fact, my arm is somewhat better."

"Are you wounded?"

"Yes—only slightly, in the left arm; yet it occasions me great anguish and inconvenience. Rest is all that I require."

"Then you shall have it," said the impulsive young man, "and the best of surgical assistance that we can procure. But come—hasten with me to Sir Ralph, and let him hear again from your lips the narrative of all these strange occurrences."

Tom King complied.

But, of course, there is no need to repeat what was said on this occasion.

He availed himself of the opportunity, however, to speak of Roderic's sister and her lover Ernest.

By the cloud that gathered on the old man's brow, Tom fancied that at any other time than this his intercession would have availed little.

Now, however, he was unable to refuse any request.

The young couple were summoned speedily to the room, and when they entered they were surprised to see how great a change was wrought in Sir Ralph.

From the moment that he knew his second wife had left the hall—that there was no fear of her return, and that she had not the shadow of a claim upon him, he seemed to become a new man—twenty years at the least seemed to be taken off his age.

Before the mutual congratulations were over, the unexpected sound of the revolution of carriage wheels made itself heard, and directly afterwards a carriage was drawn up at the chief entrance.

"Who can this be at so late an hour?" exclaimed the baronet, in great surprise.

"I can give you an answer, I think," said Roderic. "It is your old friend Richard Grant."

"But at what an extraordinary hour to pay a visit!" ejaculated Sir Ralph. "What can be the meaning of it?"

"There I am quite as much at a loss as yourself," replied Roderic. "At my earnest solicitations he set out from his own residence, in order to see you personally in the matter of my return. He was to have made his visit first—in fact, he intended to arrive soon after his letter. What can have delayed him until now I cannot think."

At that moment a voice was heard outside in the entrance-hall, and no sooner did the tones strike upon Tom King's ears than he gave a sudden start.

There was something familiar in them—he was quite confident he had heard that voice before.

When, where, or under what circumstances, however, he could not possibly call to mind.

Nor was he left much time for speculation.

The door was thrown open, and a stout, florid, good-looking, yet rather aged man entered, accompanied by a lady.

Tom King shrank back slowly, and endeavoured to get out of sight.

He had recognised the old man at the first glance, and, what was more, remembered under what circumstances he had met him.

It was the very gentleman he had met and stopped the night before, and whose grey horse was even then in Tom's possession.

Whether this Mr. Grant would recognise him was another matter; but at any rate, the highwayman resolved to give him no more chance than he could help, so accordingly he stooped down over a side table and pretended to be busily engaged in looking at some magnificent coloured pictures in a book.

He listened eagerly, nevertheless, to the conversation that ensued.

The meeting between them was most cordial, and the two old men, who had been parted in friendship for so long, were quite overcome by their feelings.

Mrs. Grant, who was with him, was a tall, thin lady, with pinched features, and a general slenderness of outline.

She was of a restless, ever-moving disposition, and quickly engrossed the conversation to herself.

To such a degree did she rattle on, that scarcely anyone else had a chance of putting in a word.

"And would you believe it, my dear Sir Ralph—and yet, of course, you will believe it when I tell you—but how surprised you must have been at a visit at such an hour as this. Well—well, quite a long history is connected with our delay."

"Yes—yes," said Mr. Grant, interrupting her, trusting

to be able to relate the whole of the circumstances in about one-half as many words as his good lady occupied. "I ought to have spoken of that sooner, and to have made you an apology."

"Oh, no apology is necessary from you."

"Well, but, d—n it!" exclaimed Mr. Grant. "Excuse me, I beg, but I have reasonable grounds for swearing. I was fairly on the road for this place last night—in fact, I was about fifteen miles off—perhaps more or less—when we were stopped by an audacious villain, in the shape of a red-coated highwayman."

"Highwayman?" ejaculated all present.

"Yes. It would seem that he had a great many of his companions concealed behind the hedge, or, at least, he said he had, but I scarcely think he spoke the truth. However, to make a long story short, he robbed me of my purse. I defended myself as well as I could, but the pistol I discharged, and the contents of which I hoped to lodge in the villain's skull, took effect upon his horse, and the animal fell down at once quite dead. Strange as it may seem," added Mr. Grant, "that fall saved the rascal's life, for my man, Thomas, with more valour than discretion, had, unknown to anyone, climbed up on to the top of the coach, where he stood with his long, heavy wand in his hand, with which he was in the act of dealing the highwayman a terrific blow, when the horse fell. The consequence was, the wand swinging through the air encountering nothing, and such was the force of it that it threw Thomas off his balance, and down he fell head foremost into the road."

Ejaculations of astonishment greeted this extraordinary narrative.

Mrs. Grant made a great many attempts to join in, but her husband held his ground manfully.

"Not content with robbing me of my purse," he continued, "the villain declared that, as I had deprived him of one horse, I should furnish him with another, and so he had the consummate impudence to cut one of my leaders out of the harness, saddle and bridle him before my eyes, and then ride off.

"But Mrs. Grant," said Sir Ralph—"was not she frightened to death?"

"Literally to death," replied the lady, seizing upon the opportunity to speak—"in fact, when I saw the odious ruffian, and learned his errand, I fainted clean away."

"And consequently know nothing of what happened," interrupted her husband.

"Until I saw the officers arrive," she put in.

"Just so—just so. The officers came up very opportunely; they saw the highwayman mounted on my steed, and gave him good chase. I don't think they had the ghost of a chance of success, for their own horses were miserable things and dreadfully jaded, while the one he had got was the best grey in my stable, and quite as fresh as a daisy."

"But yet," said Roderic, with a smile, "if this happened last night—or, rather, I should say, the night before last, for it is already morning now—it, I fancy, scarcely accounts for so much delay as this."

"True, my young friend," was the answer—"true! But after the officers had disappeared from view, we had to turn our attention to Thomas. He was dreadfully hurt, and no sooner did my wife see him than she went off into another fainting fit. There was I, with only three horses to the carriage, and fifteen miles from your house. Luckily, I remembered that a friend of ours—you may know him: Mr. White—lived at hand, so we managed to get there as well as we could. After our arrival, my wife became much worse, but Thomas got better. However, in a short time everything was arranged, friend White lent me one of his horses, and away we started once more. But fate was surely against us, for in the middle of a narrow lane the hind wheel came off the carriage, and brought us unpleasantly to a dead stop. However, I pass over that to say that we got it repaired with much difficulty, and at last reached here."

"And all this trouble has been on my account," said Roderic. "How can I express my thanks?—how can I show my obligation?"

"Why, by saying nothing about it, to be sure."

In a hasty, fragmentary fashion, Mr. Grant had been made acquainted with what had occurred at the hall.

Tom listened with great uneasiness, and wished himself out of the room, but he saw no chance of retiring unperceived.

All at once, Roderic exclaimed:

"What we should have done but for the aid of this generous stranger, I know not. In all probability, I should not be living at the present moment. Let me make him acquainted with you. Ah! he is there!" Roderic continued, as, looking round and not seeing Tom at first, he afterwards caught sight of him near the table.

Our old friend was now in a rare fix, but he could only hope that Mr. Grant would not recognise him; and certainly nothing could be further from his thoughts than to imagine that the man who had robbed him should be standing beneath his old friend's roof.

"Here he is," said Roderic, leading Tom King forward. "I have much pleasure in owning that he is henceforth my bosom friend."

"Oh! just so. Glad to—to see you, sir. But God bless my life and times! Eh?—what? Is it so?"

Mr. Grant rubbed his eyes vigorously before he could recover himself from his state of bewilderment.

His wife, who had been scanning Tom's appearance, uttered a shriek.

"That's the villain!" she exclaimed—"that's the villain! There's the rascal who robbed us, and rode off on our horse. Seize him—seize him! He's a highway man!"

"Surely," said Roderic, laughing, "you are both the victims of some extraordinary delusion."

"No, no!" said Mrs. Grant, with great excitement. "No delusion at all; or if I am, these gentlemen will quickly set me right. Look—look! As I live, yonder police officers are coming. Well, who would have thought of meeting with them twice running, just at the very moment you wanted them?"

These words produced more effect upon Tom King than upon anyone else in the room.

This may easily be imagined.

He turned quickly to ascertain the truth or falsity of what the lady said, and then, to his intense astonishment and surprise, beheld rather a large troop of police officers, and among them was the familiar form of Elisha Coles, the apothecary.

"The game's up!" murmured Tom, to himself. "I'm done! That villanous old druggist has somehow contrived to get the police officers upon my track. However, I'll make one bold rush to escape."

CHAPTER CMXLVII.

TOM KING FINDS HIMSELF PURSUED BY NOTHING BUT ILL LUCK.

It would require many pages to describe minutely the different feelings which occupied the minds of those persons assembled in the breakfast-parlour at Wilfirs Cress, and even then it is doubtful whether anything like a clear conception of them could be conveyed.

It will be best to leave it to the imagination of the reader, and to proceed with an account of the incidents that so rapidly followed.

Roderic still held Tom King's hand within his own.

He was speechless with surprise; but certainly most incredulous respecting all that Mr. Grant had said.

He believed him the victim of an extraordinary delusion.

Tom King saw this, and determined to turn it to his advantage.

"I have done you good service," he said—"you admit that, and therefore you ought not to care who I am. Let me confess I did stop your friend last night on the highway, and I am known generally as Tom King. You start, and with surprise; perhaps something like anger finds a place in your breast, yet I feel it is not asking too much of you to assist me to escape."

"I will defend you with my life," was the impetuous reply. "Who or what you are I care not—it does not alter in any degree the service you have rendered."

"Well spoken," said Tom, moving swiftly to the door. "But I shall not require any such sacrifice at your hands."

Just then a tremendous hammering came upon the front door of the hall.



[CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HOLD A CONSULTATION.]

Mrs. Grant, with another shriek, sprang across the breakfast-parlour, and dashed the window open.

"Officers—officers!" she cried. "This way—this way! He is here! The villain has robbed us all this way!"

Tom King waited to hear no more, but shut the door behind him, and turned the key in the lock.

"Now I am all right!" he exclaimed, addressing himself to Roderic. "Farewell! It is doubtful whether we shall ever meet again—farewell!"

He wrung his hand as he spoke.

"But," said Roderic, "where are you going? How can you hope to escape these men?"

"I know where I have left my horse," was the reply, "and can gain him easily. Leave me to myself; do not get into trouble by appearing to aid me. Rest assured that all is well, and that I am now tolerably safe. Again farewell!"

"Farewell!" said Roderic, sadly, at the same time releasing his grasp.

With rapid bounds, Tom King hastened to the door, the position of which he was so well acquainted with.

Then, having passed through it, he took his course in a direct line for that portion of the plantation where the ruined summer-house was situated, and close to which it will be recollected he had left his horse.

In the exciting events which had occurred, all remembrance of the gallant creature had been driven from his mind, otherwise he would have seen that it had been better taken care of.

And yet it is questionable whether Tom King did not owe a great deal of his safety to this forgetfulness, for had the horse been placed in the stable it would have been unsaddled and unbridled, in which case much delay must have taken place in getting it ready for the road.

Now the horse had all his trappings on him, and Tom had nothing to do, after gaining his steed, save to vault into the saddle

Just as he plunged among the trees in the shrubbery, he looked back, and saw the officers coming round the angle of the hall at full speed.

They raised a loud shout, and from this he judged correctly that he had been seen.

With flying steps he made his way to the summer-house.

On gaining it, he paused a second for breath, and then dashed through the thicket, heedless of the injuries he received in doing so.

His heart bounded with joy when he saw his horse was there just as he had left it.

Seizing it by the bridle, he again pushed through the thicket at the least densest part, then wound rapidly among the trees until he reached an open space, when he sprang into the saddle.

He made his way now towards the lane.

He reached it easily and quickly, yet not before the officers had seen him and given another loud, thrilling cry.

That they were fully in earnest Tom did not for a moment doubt, and so he gave his steed the rein, and determined to trust the rest to its fleetness.

The officers came on in rare style, and here we may take occasion to remark upon what may at first sight seem rather strange, namely, that they did not make their appearance at the hall sooner.

But the fact was, Elisha Coles himself and all the officers looked upon Tom's assertion that he had been sent down to the village by Sir Ralph as an impudent, false assertion made for the purpose of gaining his ends.

Therefore, all the time they had been searching about high and low, though it was pretty clear they did not penetrate the thicket where Tom had left his horse.

At length, however, they had made their way to the hall.

This movement was owing chiefly to the police officers, who believed they were once more baulked, though they had an excellent excuse for going to the hall and making a few inquiries, trusting in the event of doing this that some refreshment and hospitality would be offered to them.

The result is known to the reader, and so need not be dwelt upon any further.

One more fact remains to be stated, and that is, in their search during the day they had managed to get so far as the next town, where the closest inquiries satisfied them that no one resembling Tom King in appearance had passed that way.

Here they were so fortunate as to be able to secure fresh horses in exchange for those they had ridden so far. Moreover, these steeds were of rather more than average quality, therefore the police officers were delighted accordingly.

It will thus be seen that they had every advantage in their favour on the present occasion.

They had got a clear view of the highwayman, and all they had to do was to hang persistently upon his trail until they ran him down.

Tom King, however, by no means despaired.

Not only had he a most excellent opinion of the merits of the grey horse he had so singularly come into possession of, but he had received from the owner of the animal a very flattering testimonial, for it will be remembered Mr. Grant called it the best there was in his stable.

By this time, however, the eventful night had almost passed away.

Morning had not yet come, but it was cold, chill, and miserable.

Without the occurrence of any particular incident, the chase was continued for a long time across the level open country, Tom King keeping a tolerably straight line, choosing his course where the land seemed best adapted for speed.

He pushed his horse to the utmost, for he knew morning was coming on, therefore he was anxious while it was yet dark to find some place of concealment or some means of baffling his foes

The aspect of the sky had altered greatly.

Numberless clouds had made their appearance, and it was only at occasional intervals that the moon poured forth her light.

This was in the highest degree favourable to Tom, and he noted it with the utmost satisfaction.

Still, as time passed on, he began to grow anxious.

His chances of finding some hiding-place before morning had much diminished.

All that remained for him to do was to continue urging his horse onward, and this he did until the speed attained was dangerous in the extreme.

So rapid was it that Tom noticed with great joy that the officers kept dropping further and further in the rear of him, until at length, when the moon broke out clear and bright from among the clouds, he looked back and failed to perceive any sign of them.

But the country was level and open about that part, affording him no chance of concealment, and therefore, although it appeared that urgent speed was not quite so pressing as it had been, he did not draw rein in the least.

Suddenly, however, the faint report of a gun reached his ears.

The sound came from so far off that he was unable to determine its precise direction.

Yet he glanced all round him keenly, and shortly afterwards another discharge reached his ears.

While galloping on at this fearful rate he came suddenly upon a hedge dividing the meadows from the high-road.

He could not check the progress of his steed, so the obstacle was cleared, and the hedge on the other side of the road as well.

Then he heard a loud and, as it seemed to him, an angry shout.

He turned in the direction of it, and to his intense astonishment found himself close to another troop of officers, so close that it was the greatest wonder in the world he had not ridden over them.

"Twice," he muttered, "I have had this ill-luck. Why, the whole country must be up in arms. Well, no matter, I have escaped hitherto, and my horse is good for another long gallop."

So saying, he applied the spurs with great vigour, and before the officers had time fairly to get in pursuit of him he had succeeded in obtaining a tolerable start.

The reader will well understand this incident, and remember how Dick Turpin was at that time concealed in one of the trees, though this was an idea that never once entered Tom's imagination.

The report he had heard proceeded from the carbine which it will be recollected the guard of the mail-cart fired so many times into the trees in the hope of dislodging Dick Turpin.

While the officers continued the pursuit they were not a little mystified at the incident which had occurred.

They could not for the life of them make out by what means Dick Turpin could have obtained a horse so quickly, and marvelled how he should come riding back in that direction.

That it was Tom King who was before them, and not Dick himself, they never guessed, and even had they known it, no alteration would have been made in their actions.

One highwayman was to them almost as good as another.

They were anxious to obtain the reward offered for their apprehension, and nothing further.

It was the first chance too that these country constables had had of pursuing the redoubtable highwayman whose name was so familiar to their ears, and they continued on their way, running a hundred risks of their lives, intent on effecting a capture, and quite undaunted by the many failures that had attended others.

Tom King's horse, however, was now beginning to show signs of great exhaustion.

It was with difficulty only that he kept him going at the same pace, and every now and then he could feel the gallant animal tremble and stagger beneath him.

On such occasions as these Tom King would contemplate pulling up, and he would glance back at his pursuers.

On each occasion, however, he saw them distinctly, for the officers flogged and spurred their own cattle most unmercifully

And all this time Tom had been looking for a hiding-place.

Dimmer and dimmer became the moon as she sank still lower in the western sky, and every moment he expected to see her light succeeded by the grey dawn of early morning.

If during the darkness he was unable to shake off his foes and to conceal himself, how could he hope to do so when morning was pouring its full rays upon him?

As he asked himself this question an anxious, distressed look came over his countenance.

He wiped away the perspiration that gathered in large bead-like drops upon his forehead, and again looked back.

The officers were in sight, though he fancied the distance between himself and them had slightly increased.

He tried to improve this advantage by accelerating his horse's speed.

But in this attempt he failed most signally, and began to grow apprehensive that ere long the horse would founder altogether

Struggling on, he again reached the high-road.

With a last, despairing, convulsive effort of strength, the horse leaped over the low hedge which divided the meadows from it.

It came down heavily and almost fell, but Tom, by a sudden jerk upon the reins, saved it.

Then he felt that whatever his horse might be able to accomplish now, certainly it would never be able to take such another leap.

Under these circumstances, then, he had no resource save that of continuing his way along the high-road, and this, as will be remembered, was a thing Tom always shrank from doing even under the best of circumstances.

A disagreeable conviction that ere long he would be overtaken began to creep over him.

He tried to shake it off, yet vainly.

Soon afterwards the police officers reached the high-road as well—in time, indeed, to perceive Tom King making his way at some distance.

They noticed with exultation the exhausted condition of his horse, though the animals they bestrode were scarcely in better condition.

Yet they shouted and waved their arms, and encouraged each other to keep up the chase with unabated speed.

Tom King at length coming to a narrow lane which branched off from the high-road he was pursuing, pulled up abruptly and turned down it.

It was dark, and so thickly overshadowed with the branches of huge trees planted on each side of it that it seemed almost like riding into a tunnel.

Again a disagreeable feeling came over him like a shudder, and after he had turned down this lane he regretted having taken the step, though without knowing wherefore.

Once more making the effort to shake off this nervousness, as he termed it, he bent all his energies towards urging his horse onward.

It was just possible that the officers might not notice he had taken this narrow turning.

The lane was very serpentine in character, and underneath the horse's feet was nothing but soft, springy turf, showing how very rarely travellers passed that way.

It was fortunate for Tom, for his horse's hoofs made scarcely any sound.

Suddenly, however, the aspect of this lane changed.

The trees were succeeded by high stone walls in no place less than ten feet in height.

Tom glanced from side to side of him with apprehension.

But there was no such thing as turning back, even had he wished it, for already he could tell by the faint sounds that floated to his ears that the officers were making their way along the lonely lane.

A few yards further on was another abrupt bend.

Turning round it, Tom King uttered an ejaculation of vexation and despair.

The end of the lane was before him.

It was composed like the sides of a high stone wall, which in the centre was pierced by a massive iron door large enough to allow any vehicle passing down the lane to go through it.

But this door was closed, and, by the manner in which it was overgrown with moss and ivy, had not been opened for very many years.

"Trapped," said Tom, as he wiped the perspiration from his face once more—"trapped at last: there's no escape; here they come!"

He had paused, and having looked at the high stone walls and massive gates, feeling sure that it was impossible to proceed further in that direction, he had turned his horse's head round, so that now he faced his pursuers.

He could hear them coming on at great speed, and from the cries and shouts to which they gave utterance, he fancied they were well acquainted with the nature of the place in which he had taken refuge, and that they were full of joy at having trapped him so securely.

A dark, angry look, expressive in the utmost degree of determination, settled upon Tom King's countenance.

He allowed the reins to fall on to the neck of his panting, exhausted steed, then deliberately produced his pistols, and having examined their primings, waited, with one in each hand, for the officers to approach.

In another moment at the most they would turn the last bend in the lane and be upon him.

CHAPTER CMXLVIII.

FOLLOWS FOR A BRIEF SPACE THE SINGULAR FORTUNES OF SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

The pale, grey morning light that, creeping over the whole face of the earth, making all things more distinctly visible than they had been before, and which found Tom King in a position of so much peril, was the same that reached Dick Turpin and Maud in the recesses of the old stone quarry.

Gladly would we return to them, or relate what further happened to Tom King, but having brought the narrative up to this point, it is necessary to go back and relate the adventures that befel Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack during the three days and nights when their comrades underwent so many strange vicissitudes.

This done, all will once more flow on smoothly.

It will be remembered, then, that when the highwaymen parted in the wood at the rear of the Three Spiders Inn, they each chose different directions, and in doing so it happened that Tom King and Dick Turpin emerged from the western side, so that the open country lay immediately before them.

Sixteen-String Jack, with whom we will deal first in choosing an opposite course, of necessity emerged on the eastern side, or that which was nearest to London, and though he made use of all the circumspection in his power he was not able to leave the shelter of the trees unseen.

A loud voice, coming from he knew not where, it reached his ears so suddenly, cried:

"Surrender!" and scarcely had the word been pronounced than a pistol was discharged.

The bullet was a harmless, useless one, for Jack, by a rapid movement, had altered his position—this rapid movement being consequent upon the start of surprise he gave when he heard some one call out so near to him.

Yet that movement most unquestionably saved his life.

Knowing his danger, he at once set spurs to his horse's flanks, and the next moment was flying off at full gallop.

So rapidly did all this take place that Jack had no time to consider which direction he should take; all his thoughts, indeed, were centred upon getting away from his pursuers as soon as possible.

It was not until he had gone for some considerable distance that he turned his thoughts in this direction, and having done so, he looked around to ascertain where he was.

He found himself upon the Oxford Road, with his horse's head in the direction of London, to which place he was galloping at full speed.

"It won't do to keep this course," thought Jack; but although he was fully aware of it, he did not just then see any chance of making a change.

He paused soon afterwards and listened, and, though faintly, yet he could hear distinctly in the distance the clatter of horses' hoofs—a greater clatter than could be produced by a single pursuer, and therefore he imagined that the officer who had made so treacherous an attack

upon him had met with some of his companions, who had agreed to join him in the chase.

"Forward yet!" said Jack. "There's nothing better, I am convinced. In a little while something to my advantage will probably turn up."

He galloped on again, nor did he draw rein until he perceived dimly in the distance before him the dusky-white outline of a turnpike gate.

He gazed at it for a few seconds, then listened

This time, however, although he stretched his sense of hearing to the utmost, no sound of his pursuers was audible.

Then he dismounted rapidly and placed his ear upon the ground.

This made a great difference, for he was now able to detect a succession of rapid shocks.

"They come," he said—"they are still upon the road, and, if I linger, will be soon upon me."

So saying, he vaulted again into the saddle.

"Now which way shall I take," he murmured. "Why, that must be Tyburn toll-gate, yonder. Let me see—Tyburn—Tyburn? Surely that was the gate where Tom King found so warm a friend; it may be that the man is still there, and if so, the stratagem that served Tom so well may serve me also."

Jack was half inclined to make the trial, for he knew nothing would be of so much advantage to him as getting the officers on the road before him, so that he could turn back and retrace his course, in which case he would have the extreme satisfaction of knowing that every step he advanced took him two steps away from his foes.

Debating this point in his mind, he rode slowly up to the toll-gate, unable to decide whether he should try to make a friend of the keeper or not.

As the hour was late—or more strictly speaking, early—the gates were closed and fastened, so upon reaching them Jack had no other resource than to call out to have them opened.

In a few moments a man appeared, whose appearance corresponded tolerably well with the description Tom King had given.

"Open the gate," said Jack, "and be quick about it!"

"All right, governer; but don't be in such a blessed hurry! Blowed if I haven't left the key indoors!"

"Then," said Jack, as he pulled a guinea from his pocket and tossed it to the man, "perhaps that may enable you to move with a little extra speed."

The tollkeeper looked searchingly into Jack's face, and then putting his finger by the side of his nose in a very waggish, knowing manner, he said:

"Many thanks to you, captain! I know you are one of the right sort; you have no need to say another word to convince me of it. Perhaps you may have heard something of me before; but at any rate, if you want a service done, just say the word, and pay me well, and I'm the man to do it."

These words, and the manner in which they were muttered, enabled Sixteen-String Jack to come to a decision.

"Good!" he said. "I have heard of you; and you once rendered a service to a particular friend of mine and I should be glad if you would render one to me as well Do you know what I mean?"

"Well," said the tollkeeper, removing his pipe, "I think I do. Your friend was the one that I shut up in the house here, along with his horse. Aha! that was a good joke! Whenever I think of it I begin to laugh, and when I begin I never know when to leave off It was a very rich—so very rich indeed!"

"I can reward you well for this service," said Jack; "and you will believe me when I say that the officers are in full chase of me, and not very far in the rear. Listen, and you will hear the hoofbeats of their horses."

"I can hear 'em, captain; I heard 'em from the first. Lor' bless you, you don't think I've been tollkeeper here all these years without being able to tell what was coming a long distance off? I'm quite used to it."

"No doubt," said Jack. But if you intend to conceal me, be quick about it; there cannot be much time to lose."

"There is not," said the man. "Wait half a second; I will fetch the key."

He vanished into the toll-house, and appeared again almost immediately, carrying the key in his hand.

With this he unlocked the gate, and allowed Jack to pass through.

Then, carefully fastening it again, he said:

"Now dismount, and lead your horse in by the bridle. I hope it is a quiet animal."

"Pretty well," said Jack. "I think I can control it."

"Well, you'd better. You will remember, of course, how much depends upon silence. If your horse neighs, or snorts, or tramples about with her feet while the officers are outside they will know what's o'clock at once; then you'd find yourself in rather an awkward fix."

"I should indeed!" said Jack, slowly, and with a certain amount of misgiving. "I have scarcely dwelt upon that; it is truly running a great risk."

"Why, so it is; you speak truly."

"As great a risk as it would be to gallop on," continued Jack, speaking more to himself than to the tollkeeper.

"Well, there I can't agree with you," was the answer, "so, if you are going inside, make up your mind at once; it will never do to stand dallying thus."

"I will risk it," said Jack, suddenly. "Tom King managed safely—why should not I?"

"I see no reason why not. Come on, captain, I'm sure you've chosen rightly."

Jack slipped off his horse, and, taking the animal by the bridle, he patted it for some time upon the neck, so as to quiet it into as composed a state as possible.

The tollkeeper then held open the door of his little house, and Jack led his horse over the threshold.

As soon as the animal was fairly inside, the door was closed again.

"Now, captain," said the tollkeeper, "I just recollect that somewhere or other I've got a handful of oats and a little bit of hay; if we put this down it will, ten to one, do more towards keeping your horse quiet than anything else."

"Very likely," said Jack. "But you must be speedy in your movements, for I can hear the officers now quite plainly."

"Oh, all right, captain! You leave them to me," said the tollman, in a very confident tone.. "I know how to manage them, I rather think."

The oats and hay were produced and given to the horse, who began to nibble away at the provender with very great satisfaction, seeming quite inclined to remain perfectly quiet.

Directly afterwards there was a prodigious clattering of hoofs outside, and a loud shout coming from many throats.

"Gate—gate!" they cried. "House—house! Open quickly! Do you hear?"

"Oh, go at it!" said the tollkeeper, quite composedly, and never offering to move an inch. "Go it, my ancient cripples! You will have to call again before I come out!"

Sixteen-String Jack did not feel any easier than he had done—in fact, we may safely say that his uneasiness increased as every moment elapsed.

The officers bawled out again, and this time they accompanied their words with shaking violently at the gate, and hammering away upon it with the butt ends of their heavy riding whips.

"Had you not better go?" said Jack. "You will exasperate them—perhaps awaken their suspicions by this delay."

"No, captain, not a bit. You leave this 'ere job to me; I know how to work it You look after your horse, and don't interfere; if he gets frisky the game's spoilt for both of us."

Jack knew this well enough, but was in a fever of impatience for the tollkeeper to go out and let the officers through.

His anxiety was soon at an end, for the man, having considered that the officers had waited long enough, opened the door and stepped out.

No sooner did he make his appearance than he was greeted by a whole volley of imprecations.

"Oh, then," ejaculated the tollkeeper, apparently taking no notice of the state of rage the officers were in, "so the gentleman was right, after all?"

This was a very enigmatical remark as much for Jack as the officers, who stared at him in surprise.

"Why, you skulking idiot!" cried one, "what do you mean by that?—what are you talking about?"

"Oh, he's right—he's right!" said the tollkeeper, and as he pronounced the words he advanced with the key in his hand, and undid the padlock.

"Here—here, my fine fellow," said the chief officer, as they passed through, "what do you mean by keeping us waiting like you did?"

"Why, because I thought it was all gammon."

"What was 'gammon?"

"Why, what an inquisitive man you are! Would you stop on your business, and keep me here in the cold, just for the sake of answering few questions?"

There was a silence among the officers at this, and they waited for the one who had command of the party to speak.

This officer advanced a little from the rest, and, sinking his voice to what he intended to be a very solemn and warning tone, he cried:

"Look here, Mr. Tollkeeper: I've had my suspicions of you for some time, and I shall keep an eye upon you—mind that! You know who we are—we are officers of police."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the tollkeeper, pretending to be convulsed with mirth—"ha, ha, ha! Why, so you are! Well—well, now, that's what I call an excellent joke—oh, it's capital! I never guessed it would be half so rich as this!"

These words put the finishing touch to the officer's patience.

"You grinning fool!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean by talking such d—d nonsense? What is there to laugh at, I should like to know?"

"Well, wait," said the tollkeeper—"wait, and in about two words I will tell you all about it. Are you all listening?"

"Of course we are!"

"Well, then, about five minutes ago, or it might be ten, or perhaps even more than that."

"Oh, d—n you! Never mind being so particular about the time!" roared the officer, in his impatience. "Can't you see we're in a hurry?"

"Well, I thought you were," said the tollkeeper, composedly, "but why do you stop here?"

"To know what you have to tell us," was the answer. "In one word say have you seen a man mounted on a first-rate bay horse?"

"Oh, yes," said the tollkeeper—"many a time!"

"But I mean to-night, you fool—I mean within the last few minutes!"

"Well, yes, I have," was the reply. "That was just exactly what I was going to say."

"Oh, was it? Well, go on, then—why don't you speak out?"

"I thought I was," answered the tollkeeper, with great gravity. "But, however, I should think it must now be nearly a quarter of an hour ago since I heard some one ride up and bawl out 'Gate—gate—open the gate!' So I jumped up in a minute, and ran out to see who was there."

"Well—well, what did you see?"

"Why, a man in a tall hat seated on the back of a first-rate bay horse."

"That's him," cried the officer—"that's him—that's him!"

"I know that."

"Oh, you know it, do you? It strikes me you are too knowing by half, and I shouldn't wonder if some day your knowledge doesn't bring you into trouble."

"Well, there's some consolation in thinking," replied the tollkeeper, "that *you* will never have to fear anything on that score—I'd warrant that for a thousand pounds!"

At this there was a roar of laughter among the officers—a roar of laughter at the expense of their chief, who was so furious with rage that he swayed to and fro in the saddle like a drunken man, and seemed in imminent danger of pitching to the ground.

"As I said," continued the tollkeeper, not wishing, perhaps, to push matters too far—"as I said I saw this chap on a bay horse, so says he to me:

"'Open the gate quickly—I'm in a hurry.'

"So I did, and I said:

"'Tuppence—tuppence!' And what do you think he gave me?"

"A guinea, perhaps?" guessed one of the officers.

"Yes," said the tollkeeper, with pretended admiration. "You must be a conjuror! That was exactly the amount. So I said, 'Wait a moment, sir—wait a moment, and I will fetch you the change.'

"And then says he:

"'Oh, no, my good fellow—keep it for yourself. I'm in a hurry; but a party of friends of mine are on the road behind me. I have outstripped them, my horse is such a good one. But they will be coming on at full pelt, so, when you hear them, let them through the gate, and take the money for doing so out of that guinea. The change you can keep yourself.'"

"Why, d—n his impudence!" roared the chief officer, recovering himself. "Do you mean to tell me that he said that?"

"Do you mean to call me a liar?"

"Oh, stuff—stuff! Why don't you answer my question?"

"Well, of course he said it! Didn't I tell you as plainly as ever I could speak that he said it? And no sooner had he spoken the words than he was off towards London like the wind. But I was only half awake, you know," continued the tollkeeper, "and didn't notice him particularly, and I thought he was quite in earnest in what he said. I never dreamed he was a highwayman, and that officers were in pursuit of him. But, oho! what a rich joke it is. Why, I shall never forget it to the last day of my life! It's grand!"

But the officers did not seem to appreciate the joke half so well, and the one in command, riding back to his fellows, said, in a low voice:

"I've got my suspicions of this fellow, but we'll serve him out another time. I can see through the scheme quite well—perfectly well!"

"Oh, can you?" was the whispered question coming from the lips of many officers.

"Yes; no doubt Sixteen-String Jack bribed him to delay us all he could, and he has managed it very cleverly—I must say that. He counted upon getting a good start, and now he's got it, and no mistake! We cannot do better than ride on. We must learn news of him before we go much further. Are you agreed to that?"

"Oh, quite—quite!"

"Then follow me," was the answer, and then the chief officer, turning round to the tollkeeper, who had strained his ears in a vain attempt to catch what had been said, he exclaimed: "Good night to you, my clever friend—good night! But it's d—d odd to me if I don't interfere with your pleasant little occupation one of these days, and put a stop to it."

"You be blowed!" said the tollkeeper, sulkily, and as he uttered the words he turned round, walked into his little wooden house, and slammed the door shut behind him.

CHAPTER CMXLIX.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MEETS RATHER SUDDENLY AND UNEXPECTEDLY WITH HIS OLD COMRADE CLAUDE DUVAL.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, as the reader will readily believe, felt by no means comfortable while this humorous scene was taking place between the police officers and the tollkeeper—in fact, it may be affirmed that he saw nothing humorous in it, and bitterly repented having trusted himself with this man.

He considered that to behave as he was behaving was like playing with a lighted match close to a barrel of gunpowder.

However, the highwayman was at last released from the tender hooks of suspense on which he had remained so long, by the tollkeeper returning to his house.

Just as the door was slammed the police officers, with a parting curse, struck spurs into their horses' flanks and galloped off.

The idea that had taken possession of their minds was a very reasonable one indeed. What could be more probable than that this tollkeeper should undertake to keep them waiting at the gate as long as he was able?

Convinced that nothing else would help them but speed, they continued at a rapid rate, and soon the sound of their horses' feet completely died away.

Not till then did Sixteen-String Jack venture to speak.

He first drew a long breath of relief, then he ejaculated:

"Thank goodness, they have gone at last!"

"Yes, at last," said the tollkeeper, wiping the tears from his eyes, which laughter had brought there. "Oh, I shall never forget this night! It's a glorious joke!—a magnificent joke! I would not have missed it for a thousand pounds!"

"Well," said Jack, "whatever I may have felt a short time ago, I am by no means disposed to quarrel with you now, because I cannot help admitting that you have brought affairs to a very happy conclusion. I am much beholden to you, and you will find that I am the last man in the world to allow any favour to go unrequited."

"I am glad to hear you say that," said the tollkeeper, "as I shall not be above receiving whatever you in your generosity may feel disposed to give, simply because there is no knowing what charge the officers may bring against me, or how soon they may get me turned out of my present situation; then I should want some kind of recompense."

"You shall have it," said Jack, "and have it freely. I will give you my word that before many nights are over you shall receive much more in return for this service than ever you could expect."

"Right!" said the tollkeeper. "You come by your money easy enough, and therefore you ought to part with it freely. Upon my word, it's a jolly life, and I've a good mind to turn highwayman myself."

"Just as you like," said Jack. "But I think now, with your permission, I will make myself scarce."

"Yes, yes," said the tollkeeper, "by all means. I ought to have told you that myself. There's a probability that they will stop somebody and make inquiries before they go much further. It is impossible to say, indeed, how soon they may learn that no one answering your description has passed along the road."

"That's precisely what I thought myself," was the reply; "and so, as they are riding so comfortably on to London, I shall take just the opposite direction, and very soon there will be a good distance interposed between us."

"So there will," said the tollkeeper; "and though I am sorry to part with you, yet I cannot ask you to stay."

"Open the gate then," said Jack, "and I will be off. I needn't tell you who I am. Perhaps you may guess it."

"Yes—Sixteen-String Jack, or I am much mistaken."

"The same," was the answer. "And if you know anything of me you must be aware that when once I pass my word for a thing I never go back from it. I have spoken to you about the reward: depend upon it it shall be yours ere long."

"That's quite sufficient. And now just wait a moment or so while I open the gate."

With these words the tollkeeper passed out into the open air again, his object being not merely to open the gate, as he stated, but also to ascertain that there was no one loitering about.

He glanced around him as well as he could in the darkness which prevailed, but saw no one, and he was just about to insert the key in the padlock when the faint but unmistakable sound of a horse's feet reached his ears.

He listened attentively for a few seconds, then hastened back to Jack.

"There's some one coming!" he exclaimed.

"On horseback?"

"Yes, listen, and you will hear the sound."

Jack listened, and then cried:

"Yes, I hear it plainly, but it is only one horseman who is approaching."

"Right," replied the tollkeeper—"it is probably only some chance traveller; still, if so, let him ride by without seeing you, otherwise the officers will soon get on your track."

"You are perfectly right," said Jack. "I will wait until he passes."

"He is coming along in good style," was the tollkeeper's next remark, "and he is going towards London. It may be one of the police officers who has been left behind by his companions."

"If such is the case," said the highwayman, "the closer I keep myself the better. However, our suspense will soon be over."

"True," responded the tollkeeper, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe and refilled it. "Here he is now, close enough."

By the time he had completed the operation of igniting the tobacco, the horseman arrived at the toll-gate.

He struck sharply upon it with his riding-whip, and called out:

"Gate—gate! Open!"

When Sixteen-String Jack heard those words, he uttered an ejaculation.

"Hush—hush!" whispered the tollman. "What on earth is the matter? Why, you will be heard to a certainty!"

"No matter," said Jack—"that's a friend of mine: I know his voice well enough! I would swear to it from a thousand! What in the world can bring him in this direction?"

"Are you sure it is a friend?" said the tollkeeper, anxiously.

"Yes—yes!"

The hammering on the gate was repeated, and another loud outcry made to be allowed to pass through.

But the tollkeeper seemed to think that part of his duties consisted in making everyone wait who happened to arrive when the turnpike gate was closed.

He sallied forth at last, striving all the time to keep Sixteen-String Jack back.

But the highwayman followed him closely, and took the first opportunity of peeping over his shoulder at the horseman so as to make sure there was no mistake.

The oil lamp that was burning dimly on one of the posts shone on Claude's countenance with sufficient distinctness to enable Jack to recognise it at once.

He darted forward with a cry of satisfaction, but Claude, never suspecting such a meeting as this, stood immediately on his guard, for he could not tell but what this meant a sudden attack upon him.

"Claude—Claude!" cried Jack. "Is it possible you do not know me? It is your old comrade Sixteen-String Jack!"

"Impossible!"

"Look at me and see! I have by the merest chance in the world escaped from the police."

"I am glad to hear it," replied Claude, shaking his comrade warmly by the hand; "I was full of alarm on your account."

"It would have gone hard with me," said Jack, "but for our friend, the tollman, here. He is the same who did Tom King such a good turn some time ago. Do you recollect?"

"Yes, perfectly well. Is your horse inside?"

"Yes, I will bring him forth."

"I should never have suspected it," said Claude. "I should think it is a trick that might be played upon the officers over and over again."

"I should never like to try it another time," said Sixteen-String Jack. "You cannot imagine how I felt standing there inside while they were surrounding the place, and, as I might say, within reach of me."

"Not very pleasant either, I expect; but come, the sooner we make a move the better."

Jack was entirely of this opinion, so while the tollkeeper unlocked the gate, he led his horse out and mounted.

"Remember," he said, as he trotted through, and placed himself by the side of Claude Duval—"remember what I have promised you. I shall not be able to keep my word to-night, nor could I say for certain I shall be here to-morrow; but wait a reasonable time with patience, and you will find there will be no room for complaint."

"Right, captain—that's quite enough. Good night to you both!"

"Good night!" was the answer, and as the words were pronounced the highwaymen put their steeds in motion and trotted off.

"Well," exclaimed the tollman, rubbing his hands briskly together and shutting himself up in his house, "if the officers don't come back here before long and kick up a jolly row it's odd to me!"

This reflection, however, did not deter him from very

deliberately making every preparation for retiring to rest.

Here we will leave him, and follow our two friends who had met thus unexpectedly.

They trotted on at a rapid rate for some distance without exchanging a word, and then Sixteen-String Jack, unable any longer to restrain his curiosity, tightened the rein a little, and exclaimed:

"Come, Claude, tell me how it is I find you here? What can have happened to bring you to Tyburn Gate?"

"You will laugh at me, no doubt," was Claude's rejoinder, "but after we had made up our minds to separate I felt far from comfortable. We have been so much in the habit of going together everywhere that I felt lost without you. While giving way to these thoughts, I gradually rode out of the wood, and emerged just in time to see that treacherous attack made upon you, and to witness the officer start off in pursuit."

"Indeed!" said Jack, "I never guessed that. But what followed?"

"Why, the officer soon got others to join him, and away they went after you like so many hounds after a fox. I stood considering for a little while, wondering which way I should go, then took it into my head the best thing I could do was to pursue the officers."

"Pursue the officers?" exclaimed Jack.

"Yes, I knew you would laugh at so droll an idea, but mark you, I intend to keep a safe distance from them. I thought while I was riding—and I was quite certain they were on the road before me—there was little to fear from them."

"True enough," said Jack. "And that's what brought you here?"

"Well, partly. But you must also know that I indulged in the hope of being able to come up with you before long. I made quite certain that you would adopt some stratagem or other to throw your pursuers off the scent, and so I had resolved to make inquiries—of course with caution—all along the road until I learned something of you."

"But fortunately," said Jack, "there was no occasion. You don't know how rejoiced I felt when I heard your voice."

"No doubt," said Claude, "and it is agreeable that now we have met we should continue together during the time that has been fixed?"

"Yes, with all my heart! I should like it above all things."

"That, then, is comfortably settled; and now, Jack, for an account of your adventures."

"You know all, or nearly all; however, I will give you the details."

Jack did so, and concluded by saying:

"Now you see, Claude, we left the Three Spiders in such a hurry that I neglected to provide myself with any money at all, and I suppose you are in the same predicament?"

"Precisely."

"Well, then, I have promised the tollkeeper he shall be rewarded."

"He deserves to be."

"I feel it so, and therefore I propose that we take advantage of the first adventure that presents itself and turn it to good account."

"With all my heart once more!" said Claude. "And it is so long since I had a little sport on the highway that I look forward to it with real pleasure."

The two highwaymen being thus of one mind, got on quite capitally together.

Having made their arrangements so far, and listened for any sounds that might betoken the presence of police officers, they carefully set to work to examine the condition of their weapons.

Claude's pistols were unloaded, but luckily both himself and comrade were well provided with ammunition—in fact, they took good care never to travel anywhere unless thus provided.

"We shall miss the comforts of the old inn," said Claude, as he rammed a bullet into his pistol. "We have had no difficulty in getting ammunition lately, or whatever else we required—now we shall find it very different."

"Very different indeed!" said Jack. "If we had only had a little notice we might have provided ourselves with a supply that would have lasted some time."

"Make the best of it—make the best of it! We have managed well hitherto, and I see no reason why we should not continue to do so."

"Yes," was the answer. "But I would give much to know what took place at the inn after our departure from it. For that, however, we must wait—it will not do for us to venture near."

"Not on any account. But hark! something is coming."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite. Listen!"

Both highwaymen stopped, and then, distinctly enough, they heard a horse approaching, the clatter of his feet being accompanied by the rattle of wheels.

"It's a gig," said Claude, "or something of that kind. Very likely we shall get our little business over at once. At any rate, be the approaching traveller who he may, he shall be stopped."

"Yes," said Jack, "I am quite determined upon that point. Remain where you are. I will take up a position on the opposite side of the road."

Sixteen-String Jack carried out his intention while he spoke.

Having crossed the road carefully, he backed his horse as close under the hedgerow as he could, so as to remain concealed in the shadow.

Claude Duval did the same thing, and certainly it would have required a very piercing vision to have made out their figures as they stood there.

A profound silence was now maintained.

The highwaymen had got their weapons in readiness for instant use, and they listened with a slight degree of impatience to the ever-increasing noise made by the rapidly-approaching vehicle.

CHAPTER CMI.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL HAVE AN ADVENTURE ON THE HIGHWAY.

"CLAUDE," said Sixteen-String Jack, in a low tone of voice, "keep where you are; I will manage this little affair, which I consider as being peculiarly my own."

"As you like," returned Duval, carelessly. "I will remain a looker-on, unless I see something which may make my interference necessary."

"Good; no more. Silence, or we shall be overheard."

Not another word was spoken, and the highwaymen, as they looked along the road, perceived with a tolerable amount of distinctness that it was a kind of gig that was nearing them, drawn by a large light-coloured horse, and seated in it could be perceived the dusky forms of two persons.

In a few seconds afterwards the gig was near enough for Jack's purpose, so he rode out with great suddenness from his place of concealment into the middle of the road.

"Hold!" he said. "If you value your lives, pull up! Hold, I say!"

His sudden and unexpected appearance evidently took both travellers by surprise, and perhaps it was more the astonishment into which they were thrown than a desire to comply with this strange demand that made the one who was driving tighten the reins.

Sixteen-String Jack easily kept up by the side of the gig.

He had his eyes wide open, and keenly on the watch for everything.

Yet he was taken by surprise by the rapidity with which one of the travellers drew a pistol from his belt, and, quickly cocking it, pulled the trigger.

There was a snap and a flash, but no report.

"Don't try another," said Sixteen-String Jack, "otherwise I shall feel bound to try a shot. As it is, I am willing to let you both go uninjured provided you will only allow me something you can well spare."

"Our money, watches, and so forth," said the one who was driving, in an angry voice—"that's what you consider we can spare, is it not?"

"Just so."

"Then, Jim," he added, in a different tone of voice, and addressing his companion, "may I be d—d if I am

here by your side and submit to be robbed by one man! We'll make an effort to keep what we have got!"

"You are playing with your safety," said Jack. "It would have been easy for me to have returned the shot that was aimed at me, and rely upon it there's no fear that my pistol would miss fire. Quick! Hand over what I require, and you may continue your journey as if nothing had happened."

"That's cool!" said the traveller. "Nothing happened, indeed! No, no, my spark—you will have no money or valuables from either of us without fighting for them!"

"If that's your humour," said Jack, "I will accommodate you. But two to one is rather long odds, so I must have assistance."

Jack purposely raised his voice while uttering these words, in order that Claude Duval should hear them.

Scarcely had the last word left his lips than, with a sudden bound, Claude Duval placed himself on the opposite side of the gig

So swiftly did he make his appearance, that it really seemed as though he had either sprung up from the earth or else been dropped from the clouds.

The appearance of another highwayman altered the feelings of the travellers altogether.

The one who had proposed to fight it out, quietly took down his whip, and began to rummage in his pockets.

"I give in," he said—"I give in. I have not sufficient value about me to make it worth while to risk my life to retain it. Take this—it's what ready money I have. I have bank-notes in my pocket-book, but they will be no good to you, for the numbers are all taken."

Claude took from the traveller a considerably weighty purse, and, as he dropped it into his pocket, he exclaimed:

"Hand over your watch, and you may keep your bank-notes. Do not say that I have not treated you fairly."

The traveller laughed, but in a most unmusical manner.

With great reluctance he pulled his large watch from his fob, and dropped it into the highwayman's outstretched palm.

In the meanwhile, Sixteen-String Jack had been similarly occupied.

The man who had endeavoured to shoot Jack had lost much of his self-possession by the failure of his attempt, and certainly he never for a moment dreamt of contesting with two men.

"There you are," he said, giving Jack his watch and purse—"take them, and let us drive on. But hark you, my fine fellow, I've had a good look at you, and sha'n't forget your appearance for some time, and if I can put the officers on your track, depend upon it I shall do so!"

"Thanks—thanks!" said Jack, in an indifferent tone, as he made an ironical bow. "You are now quite free to drive on."

The travellers did not wait to be told twice but the one who was driving took up his whip again, and gave his horse a smart cut with it, and away they went with a rush.

"This is luck!" said Jack. "Between us, surely we have enough to satisfy the tollkeeper. I have half a mind to ride back to him, and so get the matter over at once."

"I think it would be best not," said Claude. "Morning is close at hand, and we ought to be on the look-out for a good place of shelter. Rely upon it, the country will be up in arms in a very short time."

"It will be best. The more we keep out of sight in the daytime the better. Where do you propose that we should bend our steps?"

"I hardly know. But hark! I fancied just then that I heard the sound of approaching horsemen."

Jack assumed a listening attitude immediately, but just then a slight squall of wind had sprung up, which made an odd whistling noise among the tree-tops, effectually drowning all slight sounds.

"I hear nothing," said Jack, at length—"at least nothing but the wind."

"Nor I now, but still we will push onward as fast as we can; we are as yet much too near to London to be safe."

Just then the wind dropped, and, to the astonishment and no slight alarm of the highwaymen, they heard with great distinctness the approach of a large body of mounted men.

Looking back in the direction of London, they could perceive a troop of officers galloping towards them, and a little in the rear could be seen the gig with the two travellers seated in it.

They were waving their arms in an excited manner, and pointing along the road.

"Confound it, Jack," said Claude, "they have got close upon us, and quite unawares. We shall have to look sharp now, you may make up your mind to that."

"I should only like to know," said Jack, "whether the officers are the same who passed me at the toll-gate: if so, they will be so enraged at the trick that has been played them that they will strain every muscle to capture us."

While these few words were exchanged, the highwaymen had been making their way onwards at a rapid speed.

Still, despite their efforts, the officers were much too close to them to be pleasant.

At length Claude spoke.

"Jack," he said, "I have an idea, and I hope you will fall in with it at once."

"What is it?"

"Part us separate."

"Separate? Why, I thought you said a little while ago——"

"Yes, yes—I know that! But separate only for a short time. Don't you see, if we do so, the effect will be that our pursuers will be divided. In that case, shall we not have a much better chance of effecting an escape? Recollect how close it is to daylight."

"It's a good plan, Claude, and we will adopt it. But where shall we meet, and when?"

"To-morrow night," said Claude. "Suppose, now, that you turn to the left and I to the right? We will make our way in a kind of semicircle—do you understand?—and to-morrow night we will meet somewhere on this road. I will wait for you till daybreak."

"Agreed! Let us part now, for the officers are disagreeably close."

"No matter," said Claude—"our manœuvre will discompose them in no slight degree, or else I am altogether mistaken."

The officers were quite overjoyed to think they had managed to approach the highwaymen so closely, and they did all in their power to decrease the distance which now intervened between them.

Suddenly, however, to their great consternation, they saw the highwaymen divide, one taking to the meadows on one side, the other on the opposite one.

"Curse them!" said the one in command. "That's double trouble! Still, we have no resource but to divide also. I will go after that villain yonder, and you, Hopkins, take charge of half the men and follow the other one."

The police certainly deserved some credit for the rapid manner in which they divided themselves into two parties; and having done so, they each took to the meadows, so that in a much shorter time than Claude had believed, he found they were again upon his track.

The two travellers, however, were compelled to pause in the middle of the road.

It was impossible for them to continue the chase any further, though they would have liked above all things to do so.

They remained watching the officers until they disappeared from sight; then, with a most crestfallen air, they turned their horse's head once more towards London.

But quick as the officers were, the highwaymen had managed to obtain a very excellent start, and Claude, having only himself to look after, beat the whole of his efforts to the task of urging his horse onwards at its utmost speed.

Preserving the course he had mentioned, he galloped rapidly on.

The ground favoured him exceedingly, being composed of little else but smooth pasture land.

But whenever he looked behind him to observe how near his pursuers were, he perceived the faint grey tinge of light in the east growing brighter and brighter.



[DICK AND MAUD, IN THE OLD QUARRY, LISTEN TO THE APPROACH OF THE OFFICERS.]

He did not draw rein until he had succeeded in reaching the summit of a piece of rapidly-rising ground.

Then from this elevated position he took a careful view around him.

The light had gradually increased, and by its aid he was enabled to see for a considerable distance, yet, though he scanned every tree and every hedgerow, he was unable to catch sight of his foes.

But although they were invisible to him, he might be plainly seen by them, so he resolved without delay to quit his exposed position.

The descent of the hill was quickly made, and then Claude perceived at no very great distance a dark, dense mass of trees, either a park or else, what was more likely, a small wood or coppice.

"That's the place," he ejaculated; "if I can once get beneath the trees unseen all will be well, they may look for me afterwards as long as they think proper."

He at once made his best speed towards this place, and gained it just as a bright red flash in the eastern sky showed the sun was about to rise.

Just before he passed beneath the shadow of the dense mass of trees he looked long and scrutinisingly in the direction he had just come.

Yet, as before, he was unable to see anything of the officers.

"I only trust," he muttered, "that Jack has been as fortunate and has met with as little trouble as I have. If I am not disturbed, this wood will serve most excellently well as a place of concealment till nightfall.

With these words Claude faced about, and rode as far as he could into the little wood.

When, at length, the density of the vegetation prevented any further progress of this kind, he dismounted and led his horse slowly forward.

Having at length penetrated to a sufficient distance, he paused, secured his horse, and sat down to rest.

By instinct he assumed a position of listening, but though he stretched his hearing to the utmost, no alarming sound reached him

He congratulated himself again and again upon his good luck, and afterwards, feeling oppressed by the intense silence which prevailed in this place, he found himself insensibly sinking off into a slumber.

Fully aware of the great danger there would be of sleeping in such a spot as this, he tried his best to keep himself awake.

With much difficulty he succeeded, but again and again the heavy slumbering feeling would come over him, and in the end, unable to struggle any longer against it, he sank off into a sleep so deep and dreamless as might have been envied by many.

At length, with a shiver and a start, he awoke, and then the first thing he noticed was that the day was rapidly drawing to a close.

When he remembered the length of time he had remained in so helpless a condition he fairly shuddered.

But the next moment his good spirits returned, and he thought only of his good fortune in having escaped so well.

But he now began to be very keenly sensible to the pangs of hunger, and wondered in what way he should be able to satisfy the craving for food.

"I will creep to the edge of this wood," he muttered, "and before night quite closes in will have another good look around me. Then if I see nothing of my foes I will run the risk of making a brief halt at the first inn I can find."

Having come to this decision, Claude lost no time in carrying it out.

He retraced his steps as well as he was able to the very spot where he had first gained entrance to the wood, and stood there for a long time watching earnestly.

In the distance he saw a few farming men walking slowly across the meadows, evidently making their way homeward at the close of their day's labor.

But except these, he was unable to make out any other human beings.

Encouraged by this result, which was almost more than he had dared to hope for, Claude sprang upon the back of his steed and trotted off.

Coming at length to a cross-country road, he determined to pursue its windings, feeling tolerably certain that before he had proceeded any great distance he should arrive at a roadside inn.

Fortune seemed inclined to favor him again, for before he had gone more than a mile he perceived before him just the kind of habitation he wished to gain.

It was a small, rustic, peaceful-looking dwelling, and seemed to have all around it an aspect of shelter and safety.

Perceiving it, Claude quickened his speed, and riding up to the front door he drew rein near the large moss-grown horse-trough, out of which his steed commenced drinking greedily.

"House—house!" he cried. "Now, ostler—quick!"

The words had scarcely passed his lips before he was startled by a tremendous uproar, though coming from within this peaceful building.

He heard loud voices in contention, and the rush of hasty footsteps.

Wondering, but never guessing at the cause of this commotion, Claude sat perfectly still upon his horse.

The front door of the inn was closed, but now it was suddenly dashed open, and, to Claude's intense surprise, out rushed several police officers.

Pistols were in their hands, and they no sooner gained the open air than they discharged them.

But such was their state of excitement and flurry, that not one paused to take aim.

The whole of the weapons were discharged at random.

With a shout of astonishment, Claude Duval put spurs to his horse and galloped off, leaving the police officers in a frantic, excited throng in the middle of the cross-road.

The landlord, and ostler, and other persons who happened to be in the inn at this time were beyond all measure amazed.

"The horses," roared the one in command—"the horses—bring them out! Why, d—n the fellow's impudence! The idea of riding up to the inn in that fashion! Quick—quick, bring the horses, I say!"

Not finding his requests attended to with sufficient alacrity, he set the example of darting off to the stable and saddling his own steed himself.

CHAPTER CMLI.

CLAUDE DUVAL FINDS HIMSELF ENVIRONED BY MANY DIFFICULTIES.

SPEEDY as the officers were in entering the stables and getting their horses ready for the road, yet of necessity some time elapsed, and so by the time they were fairly on the road, Claude Duval had got so good a start that it seemed quite hopeless to attempt the task of overtaking him.

Yet, enraged beyond measure to think that they had missed their man by so narrow a chance, the officers, without pausing to use any reflection whatever, whipped and spurred their already-exhausted animals in a most unmerciful manner.

The fact was, as the reader may surmise, these officers were those who had given chase to Claude Duval at the time when the two highwaymen separated from each other.

They had spent very many hours fruitlessly searching around, and at length, feeling completely tired out themselves, they had determined to rest for a short time at this roadside inn, the only dwelling they had come in sight of for a long time.

Scarcely, however, had they done so than, by a strange fatality, Claude Duval drew up to the front door in the manner we have described.

It was now fairly night, and, though the moon occasionally broke forth from the many clouds that were constantly drifting across the sky, it was very dark, these occasional glimpses of light only serving to make the darkness greater by contrast.

Claude Duval did not gallop far before he felt quite sure that he had nothing particular to fear from those who had so hastily set out in his pursuit.

Their horses were no match in point of speed for his own.

Accordingly, then, in a very short time, he gradually decreased his rate of progress, and began once more to look around him for a place where he could obtain a small supply of food, for the pangs of hunger increased in severity.

He came at length to a small cottage, built near the corner of a lane, and apparently the abode of some poor laboring man.

The stoppage of the horse's feet outside this humble tenement caused those within immediately to approach the door.

It was thrown open, and on the threshold Claude perceived the form of a man and woman, the former carrying a candle, and the countenances of both expressive of a great amount of curiosity.

"I am weary and faint for want of food," said Claude Duval, in a low tone of voice. "Bring me anything you have—no matter how rude the fare may be, it will be welcome; and rest assured you shall be well rewarded for it."

So great was the astonishment and surprise of the cottagers that at first they were unable to reply; but after the lapse of a moment the woman recovered her presence of mind sufficiently to say:

"Well, we are just sitting down to our poor supper, and if you like to dismount and join us——"

"Yes—yes!" said the man, advancing, "and I will take care of your horse."

"Thanks—thanks!" said Claude. "But I cannot dismount, nor can I linger. Bring me something, and I will eat it here."

This request was complied with at once.

The food was rude indeed, and roughly prepared, yet Claude thought that never in all his life had he eaten anything with so much relish.

A draught of weak home-brewed ale washed down this frugal repast.

As he handed back the jug, Claude Duval heard behind him the clatter of horses' feet.

"They have kept well upon my track," he muttered;

"but no matter, I feel more than a match for them now. Hark ye, my friends," he added, in a louder tone, turning to the cottager and his wife, "take my advice: Enter your cottage, shut the door, and if any question is asked of you, say nothing about my presence here to-night. I ask this more for your sake than my own. Can you hear that sound? Hark!"

Filled with amazement, the couple listened, and then replied:

"We do."

"You know what it is?" said Claude, interrogatively.

"Yes, horses' feet."

"Well, then, they are police officers. I am a highwayman! Without knowing who I am, you have given me succour, yet should it be known to these men, that would not make any difference in your favor—you would be liable to imprisonment for having aided and abetted me, therefore say nothing about it, and take that as your reward."

He tossed them a guinea as he spoke, and before the woman had time to stoop down to take up the glittering coin he had disappeared round the corner of the narrow lane which we have mentioned was near the cottage.

Whether these people were prudent enough to take his well-meant advice Claude had no means of knowing, and in a short time, engrossed with his own thoughts, he forgot all about the circumstance.

With low, encouraging cries, he now urged his horse on by the use of the spur.

The end of the lane was quickly reached, and the highwayman found himself once again upon the high-road.

He hesitated a moment as to which way he should turn; but having made up his mind as to whereabouts he was, he turned round sharply to the right, and galloped on.

Soon, however, he heard other sounds mingling with those produced by the beating of his own horse's hoofs upon the hard roadway.

He stopped at once and listened.

Just then the moon again made her appearance between the interstices of a cloud, and, although the light was misty and obscure, yet Claude was able to make out a dark body some distance before him, which he knew well enough to be a troop of police officers.

To turn round and retrace his steps would probably be only to come in contact with those officers who had hung so steadily upon his heels.

He had, therefore, no other resource than to leap the low hedgerow, and take to the open country.

This he did so quickly after having caught sight of the officers in advance, that one would scarcely have thought he had time to hesitate as to his mode of action.

His horse, once more feeling the soft turf beneath his feet, put forth his best powers of speed.

"Confound it!" said Claude, tightening the rein at last, "the whole country seems to be up in arms! Every road appears to have a troop of officers upon it! I must seek shelter somewhere, that's very clear! But Jack? I am forgetting him! How shall we manage to meet again?"

Claude reduced his horse's speed to a walk, for the animal was greatly distressed by the exertion it had been compelled to make.

Claude observed this with regret—he knew how much his own safety depended upon the condition of his steed.

Wishing to give it an opportunity of recovering its wind, he determined to make a halt, being perhaps moved to do so by feeling that rain was beginning to fall, and seeing at no great distance in advance a rude, rambling kind of building that seemed almost like a barn belonging to some farm-house, only this building stood completely by itself, and out of sight of any other.

Towards this Claude Duval directed his horse's steps.

Being at no great distance, it was quickly reached.

The door was swinging half open, so he had no difficulty whatever about making an entrance.

He dismounted and tried to look around him at the interior of this barn, but found it to be well-nigh impossible, owing to the darkness that prevailed.

Through many chinks in the roof, however, the moonbeams found their way, and after a time Claude's eyes became accustomed to the obscurity.

Straw was at hand in abundance, and with some of this he rubbed his horse down, nor did he pause in this labor until compelled to do so by sheer fatigue.

Going then to the doorway of the barn, he endeavoured to take a good look around him.

He believed, and with good reason, that he had entirely shaken off his pursuers, and now he began to wonder which way he should turn in order to meet with his old comrade.

"Comfortable as these quarters may be," he muttered, at length, "I shall have to leave them, though I would fain remain Jack may wait about in expectation of meeting me, and so uselessly expose himself to great danger. At all risks, I must endeavour to find him."

With these words he turned back into the barn, and took his steed by the bridle.

He was about to lead him forth and mount, when he fancied a low, murmuring, distant sound reached his ears.

He was all attention immediately, and, once more looking out, he was astonished to perceive quite a dense throng of people approaching.

They were all on foot, and most certainly not police officers, though what they were Claude could not guess.

He observed with some surprise that as they came along they indulged in many wild and furious gestures, and every now and then a cry like one of deep anguish would arise, making itself heard above the humming, murmuring noise which at first attracted the highwayman's notice.

Concealed by the deep shadow of the barn, Claude stood watching them intently as they made their way across the vast meadow.

He could not make up his mind whether to remain where he was until they had passed, or gallop off without taking any notice of them.

Well aware, however, of the importance of keeping unseen as much as possible, he paused, though afterwards he deeply regretted having done so.

To his surprise, the approaching crowd of persons suddenly changed their course, and, from the manner in which they now advanced, no doubt could be entertained that their intention was to make their way direct into the barn.

Discovery now was imminent, for Claude had so many enemies that he could not look upon these now-comers as friends.

To ride forth now unseen by them would be impossible, but yet he thought he might well be able to remain concealed within the building.

A certain amount of curiosity to know who these people were and what was their errand to so strange and lonely a place at that late hour may in no slight degree have influenced Claude in coming to this decision.

At any rate, grasping the reins tightly, he led his horse as silently as possible to the most distant corner of the barn.

Pausing here, he was surprised to find before him a small door leading into another part of the barn which, for some reason or other, had been divided from the rest.

Considering now that he had every chance of remaining securely hidden, Claude congratulated himself upon the decision he had arrived at.

He crossed the threshold quickly, and closed the door

Fastening it had none, but he groped about until he found a stone lying on the damp flooring, and by means of this he was able to keep the door closed.

By the time he had done this, the murmuring sound had much increased in loudness, for the approaching crowd, quickening their steps, had almost reached the barn.

Claude's only fear was that some movement or noise made by his horse might betray his presence.

In this respect, however, he would have to trust to his good fortune.

Overhead a large patch of the roof had been removed—probably had been blown away by some furious gust of wind, and through the laths by which it was crossed and recrossed there came down a very tolerable amount of light, sufficient to enable him to look around him.

For the present, however, he confined himself to listening.

He had before been struck with the idea that the sounds given forth by these approaching persons were those of

woe, and this idea was confirmed, for sobs and lamentations of sorrow could now plainly be distinguished.

Then suddenly the trampling of footsteps ceased, the outer door of the barn was closed and secured as well as the means at hand would permit.

Then some one uttered a singular word, though what it was Claude could not make out; evidently it was a word belonging to some language of which he was in utter ignorance.

He guessed afterwards that it was a call for light, for in a few moments the other half of the barn where the strangers stood was illuminated.

Claude then noticed for the first time that the wall which divided the barn into two compartments reached up to only a few feet above his head.

Between the top and the roof were many huge time-blackened beams.

However great the highwayman's curiosity might in the first instance have been, it was now very much increased, and upon making this discovery his first idea was that by climbing up he should be enabled to assume such a position that, while being unseen himself, and his presence unsuspected, he should be able to take an accurate observation of everything that took place.

The chief difficulty was to climb up without making any sound that might attract attention.

But, by feeling with his hands, Claude discovered that the wall was rough and crumbling, and presented many places into which he could insert the ends of his fingers and toes.

Drawing himself up at length, he seated himself upon one of the cross-beams, and from this elevated position he found, as he expected, that he commanded a perfect view of the other half of the barn.

He waited a second or two, in order to make sure that the slight noise he could not avoid making had remained unnoticed.

He soon found this was the case, which was not at all surprising, for the whole of these strangers seemed quite intent upon their own affairs.

It was in truth a singular scene of which the highwayman thus unexpectedly found himself a spectator.

By means of several torches, consisting only, so far as he could perceive, of pieces of wood of a resinous quality, all around was plainly revealed.

The garb of these new-comers was without exception, miserably poor, and torn, and ragged.

Members of both sexes were present, some with skins dark and swarthy, others comparatively fair.

But the object that immediately riveted Claude's attention was the bowed, bent form of a very aged man, whose white beard and hair were of so great a length as to conceal a great part of the upper portion of his body.

This old man had been propped up into a tolerably comfortable position upon the straw.

The others all stood around him in various attitudes, all of which, however, were expressive of the utmost grief.

The old man showed little signs of life, except that now and then a kind of shudder seemed to convulse him.

At length he looked up, and the light, falling upon his countenance, enabled Claude to perceive that his features were pinched and shrunken, and carried upon them the impression of extreme age, and beyond all doubt this old man had long outlived the average duration of human life.

Claude began to think that these people were members of a large family of gipsies, and yet, by their attire, they did not seem to be so.

They looked rather like a band of mendicants.

Having raised his head, the old man made several ineffectual attempts to speak.

In a moment a profound silence overspread the group—scarcely a breath could be heard.

"Remember—remember," the old man gasped—"do not forget that I have now no descendant—that it remains for you before my departure to elect my successor. Be—re——"

He strove hard to continue; but after a brief and useless struggle, his gaze fell, and he sank back upon the straw quite dead.

CHAPTER CMLII.

CLAUDE DUVAL AT LENGTH DISCOVERS THE OBJECT OF HIS SEARCH.

In a moment the air was filled with sounds of sorrow coming from the throats of every one of the strange people there present, and the various cries by which grief was expressed were continued for some time without intermission.

Then one advanced from the rest, and going to the old man, placed his hand upon his breast.

There was a deep silence for several seconds.

Then this man, removing his hand, exclaimed:

"There is no longer hope—life has fled!"

Again came the wild burst of sorrow; but this man interrupted it by raising his hand.

He was a young man, tall, well formed, and muscular, and was attired in the garb of a sailor, though Claude's practiced eye detected at once that this dress was nothing more than a disguise.

"You heard his last words," said this young man—"you know what you have to do, and you know what relation I bore to him, and what were his wishes; the rest is left to you."

"We know—we know," was the answer. "You, Bamfylde, shall fill his place—no one is more fitting than you."

At the mention of this name, Claude Duval gave a start of surprise, for it sounded familiarly in his ears.

"Is it agreed," said the young man, who had been called by the strange name Bamfylde—"do you all consent?"

"We do."

There was a flush of triumph in his eyes.

"That is," added one, "as far as we can decide until the full meeting takes place."

"Precisely so"

All present were now quite prepared to look upon this young man as their leader and ruler, and he assumed his position immediately.

Glancing round him with a keen eye, he detected the small door in the partition wall, through which Claude had passed.

"This is no place for him," said Bamfylde, pointing to the inanimate form of the old man. "Let him be carried in yonder, and left alone for the present, until all necessary things are arranged."

Without the slightest hesitation, this command was obeyed.

The words of an absolute, despotic monarch could not have received a prompter attention.

Claude now saw that his discovery was certain; but the knowledge of this fact did not discompose him in the least.

He had good reasons for believing that this strange and altogether unlooked-for adventure would turn out well for him in the end.

Accordingly, while they were advancing to the door, he dropped down from the beam, and, grasping his horse by the bridle, calmly waited for the new-comers to appear.

When they dashed open the door, and raised their rude torches above their heads in order to look around, they uttered an ejaculation of dismay, not unmingled with rage.

The young man Bamfylde came forward with hurried strides.

"There is no occasion for anger or fear," said Claude. "With your permission, I am willing to become your friend."

Bamfylde advanced, and seizing a torch, held it so that the ruddy light fell full upon Claude's face and form.

He gazed at him for a little while in silence, then he ejaculated:

"I believe you, for your name is——"

Claude raised his hand and checked him.

Bamfylde advanced a few more paces, then placing his mouth close to the highwayman's ear, whispered in faint tones:

"Your name is Claude Duval."

"It is."

"I knew it. Give me your hand. Under all circumstances I will be your friend"

The other persons present looked at this little incident with wondering eyes.

Bamfylde observing this, turned round and addressed a few words to them in that strange language which they had once before employed.

Then bending again towards Claude, he whispered:

"Do you know that poor old man we brought hither just in time to die?'

"Know him?" ejaculated Claude, in astonishment

"Yes; do you not recognise his features?"

"I did not."

"Well—well, he may have been greatly changed by age and other causes, but his name you will recollect at once. That poor wasted body is all that remains of the once famous Bamfylde Moore Carew."

"Can it be possible?" ejaculated Claude, in the utmost amazement. "I thought that he had been dead many, many years ago."

"No," was the answer; "his age is extreme, but he has survived till now."

"And you," said Claude—"you bear the name of Bamfylde—you are a descendant?"

"Yes, his grandson," was the answer. "Many, many times have I heard him speak about the Claude Duval he knew in his young days."

"I have heard," said Claude, "that they had many strange adventures together."

"Yes, many—very many, and the closest friendship and good feeling subsisted between them. As we are their descendants, let the bond of union be preserved."

"With all my heart!"

"It must some day stand you in good stead," returned Bamfylde, "for our fraternity grows every day more powerful, and I will make you acquainted with a sign known only to the initiated, which will enable you at all times to claim the aid and protection of any of the band."

"That would be a useful service, truly," said Claude, "for I have few friends."

"Look!" and, as the young man spoke, he made a strange sign upon his breast, which Claude, after several attempts, succeeded in imitating.

"There," he said, "that will do. You have only to remember and make that sign, and you may command them to the death!"

A loud shout of welcome arose from those assembled, then one and all pressed round, offering assurances of their friendship.

Bamfylde was eager for the highwayman to remain with them for some time; but Claude declined, alleging as his reason for doing so the necessity he was under of looking for his comrade.

Tossing his purse to this strange people, he said farewell to their leader, and departed.

"It may be," he muttered, as he rode away, "that some time or other I shall have occasion to feel rejoiced at this chance incident. It may turn out to the benefit of us all."

Although immersed in these reflections, Claude did not forget his caution, and continually looked around him, to make sure that no officers were near.

At length, gaining an elevated piece of ground, he paused to take as accurate a survey of his position as was possible.

At last he determined upon the direction to take that would be most likely to enable him to meet his companion, and, having chosen his course, he set forward at a much more rapid pace than he had hitherto made use of.

After more than half an hour's riding, the high-road was gained.

Here he waited for some time, listening; but, hearing no sound, he rode gently along it, looking out on every side for some indication of the presence of Sixteen-String Jack.

He looked in vain, however, and continued to look for a long while, for when morning dawned it found him still at his task.

The most serious fears now began to press upon his mind.

He knew there would be some difficulty in meeting with each other, as no precise place was agreed upon; but yet he could not help feeling the conviction that, had his comrade escaped as well as himself, he should ere this have seen something of him.

The morning broke cold and chill, and over all the meadows hung a dense white vapour, thus making it impossible to see for any great distance.

When the sun rose, however, this vapour was by degrees chased away.

So soon as ever the atmosphere was clear, Claude once more paused to look around him.

Just then he heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and turning sharply round, saw his comrade approaching him.

The next moment their hands were firmly grasped, for Sixteen-String Jack had been not less full of anxiety than his comrade.

"You wonder doubtless where it was I sprang from so suddenly," said Sixteen-String Jack, with a laugh, "but the fact is, I heard some one approaching, and not knowing that it was you, took the precaution to conceal myself behind yonder bushes. As soon as I recognised you I rode forth."

"And how have you fared?" said Claude.

"Oh, excellently! I have had scarcely any trouble. Over yonder is a little inn far removed from all other dwellings, and around which there is always a perpetual calmness. There I remained the greater portion of the time, and there, if you are willing, we will conceal ourselves during the day."

Sixteen-String Jack pointed across the country with his whip while he spoke, in order to indicate the position of the inn he had just mentioned.

"Are you sure it will be safe?" said Claude.

"Well, as safe as anywhere," was the reply. "But come; at all events, we will ride in that direction, and while doing so I will tell you all that has happened to me; it will be comprised in a few words."

"Do so," said Claude; "I am full of curiosity."

"And afterwards," said Jack, "you shall tell me your adventures, for I fancy by your way you have something of far more importance to communicate."

"Well, that may be; but begin."

"Well, then," said Jack, "by pressing my horse hard I got away from the police officers without much trouble; nevertheless, I did not bate my speed, but kept pushing on in the direction that we had agreed upon."

Claude nodded.

"It was soon after sunrise that I found myself in front of the inn I have already spoken of. The aspect of the place took my fancy at once, and as my horse was exhausted, I was certain I could not do better than halt there, if only for a short time, and while doing so keep a good look-out for the officers."

"And is it possible," said Claude, "that you were so fortunate as to remain there unmolested?"

"Not only possible," said Jack, "but true. My horse was comfortably placed in the stable, and as the hours slipped by without bringing me a sight of the officers, I came to the conclusion they had abandoned the pursuit altogether."

"And the landlord of this place?" said Claude.

"There is none."

"Landlady, then?"

"Yes, she's a widow, and lives there a solitary life. I suppose you were about to ask me whether I thought she had any suspicions?"

"Just so."

"Well, I don't believe for a moment that she has. Customers are so rare at that out-of-the-way-place that she scarcely knows how to show them enough attention."

"I like your description of the place well enough," said Claude, "and I believe that the best thing we can do is to take refuge there."

"Decidedly."

"Let me tell you," continued Claude, "that all the roads that I have been upon to-night have been patrolled by officers. I have scarcely been able to ride a mile without seeing them."

"I have found much the same thing," said Jack, "while watching for you, and I began to fear that they had succeeded in capturing you."

No—no, I was safe enough."

"Well, then," said Jack, "push on at a more rapid rate; the sun is rising, and soon many people will be abroad.

We cannot do better than keep out of sight as much as possible."

"How far is this inn?"

"A quarter of an hour's gallop will take us there with ease."

"Lead the way, then," was the response. "Rest assured I shall not be far behind you."

Sixteen-String Jack needed no second bidding—he was, in truth, most anxious to return to the place of concealment which had served him so well.

In something less than the time he had mentioned, the front of the inn was reached, and on observing the situation, Claude exclaimed:

"This is, in truth, the most out-of-the-way nook I have seen for many a day! I am glad you persuaded me to come, for I am almost worn out with fatigue."

Sixteen-String Jack had prepared the landlady of the inn for the appearance of a companion, and she now came forth in a most obsequious manner.

"No ostler is kept here," said Jack. "We must see to our own horses—that is something you will not mind any more than myself."

"Certainly not," said Claude, as he dismounted—"in fact, I rather prefer it than otherwise."

The landlady stared a little at this remark, and Claude felt that he had been rather imprudent in making it.

However, he trusted that it would pass off unnoticed.

Jack led the way to the shed, which, for his own convenience, had been turned into a stable.

Here they attended to their horses, making them as comfortable as possible, and at the same time merely removing the bits from their mouths, and loosening the girths of the saddles, so that they might be got ready for the road at a moment's notice.

Claude Duval, however, could not make himself quite at ease in his new quarters, though Jack set him the example of doing so.

Some time was whiled away by the relation of the events which had happened since their parting.

Then, with anxious faces, they began to speak of the probable position of their companions.

As the hours passed on without anything occurring to disturb the intense quiet that prevailed around the inn, Claude gave way to its influence and slept, Sixteen-String Jack in the meanwhile promising to keep guard.

In this way, alternately watching and sleeping, the time passed, until once more the welcome shades of evening began to creep over the earth.

"So soon as ever it is fairly dusk," said Claude, "we will depart. I cannot make myself content to remain here any longer; the chances of detection are too great."

"I differ from you," said Jack. "I consider we are lucky in having fallen into such comfortable quarters. You know how closely all the roads are watched; if we venture forth to-night we must of necessity encounter the police officers."

"It may be so," said Claude, "but I have an idea that we shall be best abroad."

"Well, then, I am willing to fall in with your views. It is dark enough now, if you are so anxious to depart."

"I am then," said Claude, "though why I can scarcely tell you."

With these words, he rose from his seat and made his way to the stables.

Jack remained behind to settle with the landlady, and his pay was so liberal and so far beyond her expectations that the good woman could not express her thanks, but only stared with astonishment.

In five minutes afterwards the highwaymen had left the premises.

Crossing an open piece of land in front of the inn, they immediately plunged among some bushes, which offered them partial concealment.

Before going many paces, Claude exclaimed:

"Down—down, Jack! If you stoop down we shall, ten to one, remain unseen! I can hear horsemen approaching!"

Jack heard them too, and so dismounted without another word.

The bushes then tolerably well concealed their forms and those of their horses.

Raising their heads a little, they were able to command a view of the inn and of much of the flat country around it.

All at once, Jack uttered a faint ejaculation:

"See," he said, "yonder are officers!"

"Yes," returned Claude, in a whisper, "I see them; and I think we have taken our departure just in time."

"So think I. It is in truth a narrow escape. Let us be moving."

"No," said Claude; "wait a moment—we will watch their movements."

A rather large body of police officers now came fully into sight, and it seemed that as soon as they perceived the inn they turned their horses' heads towards it.

The highwaymen continued to watch them until they pulled up in front of the door.

"Now, then," said Claude, "let us be off. Our friend, the landlady, will be able to tell them enough to put them on our track; and Jack, my friend, just congratulate yourself on my uneasiness. If we had remained, as you proposed, we should by this time be in a most awkward fix."

"You are right," said Jack, as he sprung into the saddle—"quite right. And unless great good fortune attends us, you will find that we shall have some trouble yet."

CHAPTER CMLIII.

IN WHICH SOME CONFIRMATION IS GIVEN TO CLAUDE'S STORY.

Almost before a dozen words had been exchanged between the police officers and the landlady of the inn, the former discovered that they had by great good fortune got upon the right scent at last.

Trembling with fear, for she knew not how serious the consequences might be to herself—and the officers did not forget to threaten—the landlady pointed across the piece of waste land, in the direction the two highwaymen had so lately taken.

The officers eagerly followed the direction of her finger, and the next moment a cry burst simultaneously from their lips.

"There they are," they shouted—"there they go! Now, my lads, spur hard, we have but to keep them in sight until we are joined by the rest of our party!"

The officers gave a loud cheer, for they were one and all inspirited by the prospect of overtaking the fugitives.

At this time the moon was shining, and with some amount of distinctness, and at no great distance, flitting over the fields like shadows, they could perceive the forms of the flying highwaymen.

"Push on, Claude," said Jack—"a sharp touch is the best; it will be useless to think of tiring them out; let us get out of sight as quickly as we can."

Claude made no other reply save that of burying his spurs deeply in his horse's flanks, thus accelerating the already frightful pace at which they were going.

"Keep to it, Claude," said Jack, after they had gone a considerable distance, "we get further and further from them every moment. Try to keep up your present rate, and we shall soon be out of all danger."

Claude wanted no urging upon this point; he was to the full as anxious as his companion, and moreover, he was filled with the apprehension that ere long they would come full tilt against some other party.

This, indeed, was their chief danger, but they knew it, and kept a sharp look out in advance accordingly.

By gradual, yet perceptible degrees, the police officers dropped still further and further in the rear.

Their mortification was excessive, but there was no help for it, their horses could not compete in speed with those possessed by the highwaymen, and what was more, not one had fully mastered the art of riding.

It was this which so very often gave the highwaymen the advantage over their pursuers.

"I think we may venture to take it easy now," said Claude; "to gallop up this hill will only distress our horses needlessly."

"You are right," said Jack; "we have little to fear from our foes at the present time, and when we gain the

summit of yonder hill, I should not be surprised to find them out of sight."

"Let us hope so, at all events."

At a gentle walk the two highwaymen permitted their horses to ascend the steep hill that lay before them.

The poor beasts panted for breath, and the violence of their exertions had covered them with foam from head to foot.

"Jack," said Claude, after a brief pause, "it seems to me quite certain that it will never do for us to continue riding over the country in this manner."

"But how is it to be avoided?"

"Why, by finding some remote or inaccessible place where we can remain quiet until the nine days have expired. While we are thus hunted from place to place, and occasionally kept in sight, the officers will indulge in the hope of eventually capturing us."

"That's true enough," said Jack, "and if we can only hide somewhere, they will soon grow tired of riding about to no object."

"Precisely; and that is why I think we ought to turn our attention to discovering some place that will answer our purpose."

"Yes, that's all very well," said Jack, "but the difficulty is where to find it."

"Can you suggest anywhere?"

"Not at the moment, I can't. You see the worst of it is, the officers pop up everywhere, and in places where you least expect them—at that inn, for example."

Claude laughed.

"You were over confident of your safety there, Jack. But let us keep our object steadily before us. I have been thinking during the past few moments that there is, or was years ago, some miles from here, an old castle, or rather the ruins of one."

"Indeed!" said Jack. "Where?"

"Not far from a small village called Nealham."

"Nealham—Nealham?" repeated Jack. "I fancy I have heard the name before, yet cannot recollect it."

"It is very likely," said Claude. "Many, many years have elapsed since I saw the place, but I remember thinking at the time how well-suited it was for the purpose which we now require."

"How far should you think it is?"

"Not more than an hour's good ride, and I believe that if we could only be so fortunate as to gain the shelter of its crumbling walls unseen, we might make certain of remaining there in safety and unsuspected for a much longer period than that which we have to look forward to."

"I like the idea," said Jack, "and certainly cannot suggest anything better. But stay—as the summit of the hill is reached let us pause and look back."

The highwaymen did so; but at the time the moon, being hidden by clouds, prevented them from seeing to any great distance.

"I cannot perceive them," said Jack.

"Nor hear them," added Claude. "Come on, Jack—don't linger. The moon will soon break forth again, and when it does we are much more likely to be seen up here, than the officers are below."

"You are right; and so, without any more discussion, turn your horse's head in the direction of the ruined castle you speak of; when we see it we shall be better able to come to a conclusion concerning it."

"It may have greatly changed since I saw it last," said Claude; "but that is a point only to be ascertained by actual inspection. But we need not go so fast as to distress our horses, nor to prevent our conversation."

To this his comrade assented, and at an easy trot, which, without greatly fatiguing the horses, yet which got over the ground in very good style, they made their way in an oblique line across the country.

The clatter of their horses' hoofs, however, and the rapidity of their motion proved a great hindrance to speaking, and so before very long perfect silence reigned between them.

But although they spoke not, their thoughts were busy, for whenever they turned their attention to the probable position of their companions they had ample food for conjecture.

As they journeyed on, the clouds to a very great extent dispersed, leaving the sky clear.

Claude Duval was the first to break the silence which had been for so long maintained.

"Look, Jack!" he exclaimed, slightly reining-in his steed, and pointing with his whip—"do you see yonder, in the distance, something dim and shadowy, on which the moon is shining?"

Jack strained his eyes to the utmost.

"I think I do see a something," he replied, "but I scarcely know what."

"You see the ruins of the castle I spoke of," responded Claude. "In a few moments you will be able to perceive them with much greater plainness."

This quickly proved to be the case, and Sixteen-String Jack looked with a very great amount of interest upon the scene that lay before them.

"There lies the village some distance to the right," exclaimed Claude, "and that's why I am approaching the castle in this direction; I think we have all the better chance of reaching it unseen."

Jack nodded, but made no other reply, the fact being that his attention was wholly taken up by what he saw.

Certainly, the ivy-grown walls had a most striking appearance.

"I see scarcely any alteration at present," was Claude's next remark. "I could imagine that only a few hours had elapsed since I saw it last, so little change has taken place. But let us wait here under the shadow of these trees for a few moments. Do you see yonder cloud which is hurrying up? In a short time the moon will be covered by it, and then we shall be almost certain of gaining the interior of the ruins unperceived."

Jack paused at once.

His eyes happened to be fixed upon the large black cloud at the moment when Claude spoke, and some similar idea had suggested itself to his mind.

They had not long to wait.

In a few moments the light of the moon was entirely obscured, and what might be termed double darkness prevailed, for so it appeared in this sudden withdrawal of light.

"Now, then, forward!" exclaimed Claude. "Follow slowly and carefully in my footsteps, for the ground hereabout is rugged, and in many parts there are deep places, into which a fall would be unpleasant."

Sixteen-String Jack at once dropped into the rear, and Claude Duval took his way onwards with a great amount of confidence, considering the nature of the ground and the length of time that had elapsed since his last visit to this spot.

Soon after, and without any accident, the interior of the ruins was gained.

Claude led the way across the dismantled court-yard, and through a low-arched doorway, into what had evidently been at some time or other a chapel connected with the edifice.

Walls surrounded it; but there was no roof, and on the ground grass was growing thickly.

"This will do excellently well, both for ourselves and for our horses," was Claude's first remark. "If we can contrive to keep them near all will be well; and while we keep within these walls there will be little fear we shall be seen."

"How intense the silence is!" said Jack. "You could almost imagine it a city of the dead."

"Yes, so you might. I did not tell you, I think, the reason why this place is left so much deserted?"

"No, you did not."

"Because of the strange stories current respecting it. You are not afraid of ghosts, I suppose, neither am I, but the inhabitants of this district are, and so the place is shunned by all—not from one year's end to another does a human foot penetrate these ruins."

"It seems so," said Jack, glancing around him with scarcely comfortable feelings. "I never before witnessed such complete desolation."

"It is desolate," said Claude, "and we ought to rejoice at it. At any rate, while we are here, should anyone be foolhardy enough to approach, I will undertake to give him such a fright that he will never venture here again!"

"But what's the story, Claude?" said Jack, following Claude's example by sitting down on a fragment of fallen masonry.

"I don't know the legend," was the answer; "but I have been told that strange sounds have been heard, lights seen in the night, and once, many years ago, a stranger, who had boldness enough to approach the ruins after nightfall, averred that he saw a form resembling that of a monk. He described very accurately the long gray cloak, and afterwards affirmed that he had seen the monk's face, or as much of it as was visible, for the lower half was entirely covered by silvery hair that reached down almost to his waist."

"And I suppose," said Jack, "people were sufficiently terrified at this to feel afraid of coming any more?"

"I suppose so; but no doubt it was all imagination, or else a freak played by some one upon the traveller. Still," he added, "the place is large enough, and if there are ghosts there ought to be room for them here as well as for us."

By the light manner in which Claude Duval spoke, it was evident that he placed but a very small amount of credence in the story he had just related.

Not so Jack, however, who recollected with a very peculiar shuddering sensation the strange events which had happened to himself at the Three Spiders Inn, and recalled, with anything but comfortable feelings, the sequel to them.

He marvelled much that Claude made no allusion to these circumstances; he could only account for it by supposing that they had slipped his memory, and such being the case, he thought it not worth while to revive so disagreeable a subject.

"Well, now, Jack," said Claude, after a pause, "tell me what you think of this place; is it not likely that we shall be able to remain here concealed for the length of time agreed upon?"

"I think there is a strong probability of it; and at any rate, no one could approach us very closely without our knowledge, and one great advantage about the nature of the building is, that we could easily make our way out at any point."

"You are right," said Claude, "but it is very strange to me if we are troubled by the coming of anyone."

While he spoke, Claude took from his pocket one of his pistols, and in a very leisurely, business-like way began to take it to pieces for the purpose of giving it a thorough cleaning.

While thus engaged, the two highwaymen held a consultation as to their future movements, and it was then fully determined that unless something unexpected took place that they would remain in the shelter of the ruins till the time came for them to set out for Hampstead.

The intense silence that prevailed in the ruins had a most chilling and depressing influence upon Jack.

In vain he tried to struggle against it, and to turn his thoughts into some other channel; if he succeeded for a few moments his mind was sure to dwell upon the original subject.

And now once more the moon broke forth from behind the clouds, and shed her silvery lustre upon the time-worn walls.

By this time Claude had carefully loaded his pistol and placed it ready for immediate use, and no sooner did he perceive that the moonbeams were pouring down with full force than he started up and exclaimed:

"Come, Jack, now that it is a little lighter, follow me, and we will make as good an examination as we can of our new quarters."

Jack rose slowly and quietly.

His comrade noticed his manner in a moment, and exclaimed, with a slight laugh:

"Why, Jack, one would think you were no better than the rest—that you were frightened at the thought of some spectre making its appearance."

"No, no—not exactly that," said Jack. "But why not change the subject?"

"Just as you like. But come—look here, and tell me whether you ever saw anything more beautiful?"

Claude pointed to the large courtyard, which was now fully lighted up in every part by the moon's rays.

"It is truly beautiful," said Jack; "but—but——"

"But what? Why do you hesitate?"

"I was thinking that those stones yonder resemble a hyard more than aught else."

ense, Jack," laughed Claude—"you really get worse!"

"Perhaps so, and I may as well confess at once that I cannot prevent my thoughts from dwelling upon that strange circumstance that occurred a short time back—I mean when we saw the shadow on the wall."

Pensibly, Sixteen-String Jack sank his voice while he spoke.

The words no sooner reached Claude Duval's ears than he gave a slight start.

"Was it so?" he said, endeavouring to appear composed. "I had quite forgotten all about it. Confound it, man! why did you mention such a thing as that at the present time?"

"Hark!" said Jack. "What's that?"

The faint but clear sounds of a clock striking the hour, floating through the silent air, came gently to their ears.

Jack counted the strokes half aloud.

"It's the church in the next village," exclaimed Claude. "How strange that we should hear it so far off!"

"And midnight," said Jack.

"Yes, the hour when——"

He paused abruptly, for Sixteen-String Jack just then grasped him by the arm with painful tightness.

At the same instant he raised his other hand and pointed to the extremity of the courtyard.

"Look—look!" he gasped. "What do you see there? You see, the story you were telling me has some truth in it after all."

Claude tried hard to preserve his usual calmness, but, for all that, his cheeks grew white and his form quivered.

Clearly, distinctly, and fully revealed by the moonbeams, he saw on the other side of the courtyard a dark, shadowy form, yet one whose outlines were well defined.

The figure was one wrapped in a long gray cloak, the cowl of which was drawn forwards to its full extent.

Then, while they gazed, the figure paused, the cowl was thrown back, and they saw a thin and wasted countenance, with a huge white beard descending in heavy, wavy masses.

The highwaymen both gazed until their eyes ached; then, unable to look longer, they averted their eyes.

When they recovered themselves sufficiently to look around again, they saw at a glance that the figure had disappeared.

CHAPTER CMLIV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL EXPLORE THE RUINS OF THE OLD CASTLE.

Upon making this discovery, neither spoke.

Sixteen-String Jack gave one glance at his old comrade; then, walking back with an unsteady step, reseated himself upon the piece of stone-work, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"This is too much," he murmured—"too much! Claude, let us depart at once."

"You seem strongly overcome, Jack," answered his comrade. "Shake off these superstitious terrors—be more like yourself."

Sixteen-String Jack only shook his head slowly.

"I can't forget," he said, "what I have seen. Explain that if you can, then I shall be more composed."

"To what do you refer?"

"The shadow that we all saw upon the wall."

"Bah! why not forget that incident, and think about the present? For my own part, I am glad rather than otherwise that we have received this confirmation of the truth of the old legend."

"Glad!" ejaculated Jack, in wonder.

"Yes—because it is very strange to me if that figure, whatever it is, goes out of its way to harm us; and while it remains, do you not see that it will be a most effectual protection to us by scaring away all other people."

"But how dreadful to remain," said Jack—"to know that——"

"Be silent and listen. I looked well at that strange figure, and I must say that never in my life did I see anything that looked more substantial or real."

"Do you think, then, that the——"

"I think it was no spectre," answered Claude, "but a man."

"You say that, but you do not mean it; you think by



[THE POLICE OFFICERS MAKE TOM KING A FAST PRISONER.]

making this statement that you will reconcile me to remaining here."

"Not I. I speak what I believe."

"How was it, then, that the figure appeared and disappeared so rapidly and mysteriously?"

"That we have to find out. Unfortunately, it seems we both averted our eyes at the same moment, and while we did so there was ample time for anyone to get out of the way."

"But should it be a live man, what object could he have in keeping up such a mummery as this?"

"Ah! there, now, you put a question to me I am no better able to answer than yourself. Yet how easy to suppose that some one may, like ourselves, be anxious for remaining in concealment, and if so, what is more natural than to adopt the dress described to be worn by the ghost, and imitate the movements of a spectre as closely as possible?"

"That might be," said Jack, after a momentary silence, "but still——"

"You don't think it," interrupted Claude. "That's what you mean by your hesitation. Well, time will prove. If you take my advice we shall remain here in our present quarters, and the task of probing this mystery to the bottom will find us with an occupation."

After that, Sixteen-String Jack was silent.

It was clear he by no means relished the proposition of his comrade, yet he did not like to confess as much, and when we come to remember the strange circumstances under which the shadow first presented itself to him, we shall not be surprised that he should suffer on this occasion an extraordinary amount of agitation.

"Look here, Jack," said Claude, "we will give up our idea of roaming about the ruins to-night. I can tell you want a little calm, peaceful slumber if you can have it. The difference it will make to you will be surprising

Take my advice; throw down your cloak in yonder corner, wrap it round you and go to sleep. In the meanwhile I will sit here and keep watch, and while I do so, nothing mortal or ghostly shall approach to do you harm."

"No—no, Claude, I cannot sleep."

"Well, try, and after you have done so, I will take your place and you can have mine. By this means we shall surely obtain safety."

After some little persuasion Sixteen-String Jack complied with his companion's wishes, but although he threw himself down in the darkest corner and covered himself with his cloak, his eyes refused to close in sleep

At length, however, fatigue and silence combined to bring a drowsy feeling over him.

Claude called to him in a faint tone of voice, and finding he received no reply, concluded rightly that Jack slept.

The temptation came very strongly over Claude to leave his comrade where he was and take a ramble through the ruins alone.

But he remembered the assurance he had given, and determined to be as good as his word.

The time passed wearily and slowly away, for he had nothing to occupy him save his thoughts, and he experienced no little difficulty in keeping himself awake.

Jack slept during the remainder of the night, nor did he awake until the sun had fairly risen.

He started up and glanced around him in confused bewilderment, when his eyes lighted upon Claude, who looked pale and worn out with watching.

"What's the matter, Jack?" he asked; "you look quite scared."

"I have been dreaming, and the vision was so vivid that I could scarcely persuade myself it was not reality."

"Do not trouble yourself to tell it," said Claude, rising. "I have managed to keep my eyes open till the present moment, but now they must close, and when they do, let me ask you not to wake me up unless something important takes place."

Jack readily gave this assurance, and in a few minutes Claude Duval was quite insensible to all around him.

Sixteen-String Jack was much refreshed, and he looked around him at the crumbling walls with very different feelings to those he had experienced on the night before.

Yet still, when he recollected what he had seen, his feelings were far from comfortable.

Claude slept till long past noon, and his first question on awaking was whether Jack had heard or seen anything.

"Nothing whatever," was the answer—"the silence is as profound now as it was at midnight."

"That goes to show we are alone. Then, Jack, my friend, I feel more and more convinced that we have come to the right place at last. The officers will never think of looking for us here."

"I hope not. But would there be any risk in taking a good look around us?"

"I think not," said Claude. "I was about to propose a ramble. If we are careful we can keep well under cover of the walls, and so be in no fear that we shall be seen. Come this way."

With these words the highwaymen quitted the ruined chapel and occupied themselves for a long time in wandering about the remains of the castle, and making themselves acquainted with its position.

In doing this they saw no signs or token that pointed to the fact that any human beings save themselves had trodden on this ground for years and years.

From time to time they peeped forth from various chinks and crevices, and every time saw nothing but the fair, open country.

At last they reached the keep or this old structure, and, doubtless from the fact that it was more strongly built than the remainder, it had withstood more successfully the ravages of time.

An iron-bound, heavy oaken door was swinging upon its hinges, and beyond this they perceived the commencement of a flight of spiral steps.

"Let us go this way," said Claude. "If we can manage to reach the top of the keep, so much the better; we can crouch down so as to be out of sight; and think what a glorious view of the surrounding country we shall have! We can here have ample warning of the approach of friend or foe."

"Let us try the ascent, then."

"With all my heart!"

This was enough for Claude.

He sprang forward and commenced ascending the steps rapidly.

In many places they were broken, and everywhere slippery and treacherous to the feet.

As they ascended small fragments of masonry were perpetually dislodged, causing them no little apprehension.

In the end the summit of the keep was reached, and at the first glance they took around, neither of the highwaymen could repress ejaculations of delight.

In good truth the scene was a most charming one, such as would have well repaid anyone to have travelled miles to look upon.

Remembering their danger, however, the highwaymen set to work to scan every bit of country attentively.

While so engaged they did not speak, but when at last they had travelled round in a complete circle, Claude observed:

"There's nothing to fear at present, Jack—I'll be sworn no police officers are anywhere near us."

"Yes, I think we may safely assert that."

"Well, is not this the right place to stay in for a time?" asked Claude, somewhat triumphantly. "Why, if we choose to keep this elevated station we shall have timely information of anyone's approach."

"Yes, it's all very well," said Jack, "but yet I can see one objection to it—one difficulty in the way."

"What is it?"

"Why, just at the present time I am most forcibly reminded that a long while has elapsed since I tasted food. Can you tell me how we are to obtain it in this lonely place?"

Claude Duval rubbed his chin reflectively.

"I have not thought much about it," he added, "and yet it seems to me the difficulty is one easily to be got over."

"How so?"

"Why, look! Yonder lies the village, and beyond all doubt there's an alehouse in it."

"Well?"

"It is well," said Claude, "for when night comes we can wrap ourselves in our cloaks, set out on foot, and walk to the village. We shall pass easily as travellers, and at the alehouse we shall be able to get a substantial meal."

"But there's the danger of detection," said Jack.

"Of course there is, and so there will be everywhere."

"And then what should you do on the next occasion?"

"There—there," said Claude, with a laugh, "you ought to know by this time it is perfectly foolish for us to arrange what we shall do at any future time. Let us be content with the present."

Sixteen-String Jack was thus silenced, for he was unable to think of any better plan of operations.

With great anxiety and impatience, however, he watched the decline of day.

He longed most ardently for night to come.

At length, when dusk began to creep over the meadows, they descended from the keep, and, having secured their horses in such a manner that there was no fear they would stray away, the two highwaymen, enveloping themselves in their cloaks, set out at a sharp pace to the village.

Before quitting the ruins, they were most careful to ascertain that no one was in sight who might observe them, then they made their way to the point they wished to reach by the most devious and circuitous route they could think of.

It was getting very late when they entered the long, straggling High Street of the village, and, ere they had gone many paces, they perceived a large, substantial-looking inn, with a huge swinging sign in front of it.

"That's the place," said Claude. "How cheerful and comfortable it looks. If we can only manage to keep quiet there, I shall be in no hurry to take my departure."

"Nor I either."

No more was said until the front of the inn was fairly reached, then they paused a moment, for the sound

of some one singing in a most uproarious voice came upon their ears.

A blind of many colours had been drawn down over the window, yet so carelessly as to leave a place through which the highwaymen could peep and take a glance at the interior.

They saw rather a large, comfortable-looking room, with a huge fire burning on the hearth, the flames of which shot up to a tremendous height, and lighted up the room with a pleasant, cheerful glow.

This was, indeed, the only kind of illumination but it was amply sufficient for those who were present.

Seated around were several persons, who, by their appearance, evidently were inhabitants of the village or the surrounding parts.

"That looks cheerful and welcome, does it not, Claude?" whispered Jack.

"Yes, very. Let us enter—I feel unwilling to remain in the cold a moment longer."

"But shall we go in there, or ask for a private room?"

"Whichever you like."

"Nay, which would be best?"

"Well, I am for entering and making one of this good company. We shall be stared at when we first enter, beyond a doubt. But we shall be able to find some shady corner, as there is no other light than comes from the fire, and after a time we shall be unnoticed."

"And be able to hear all that goes on as well."

"Yes, certainly. That may be an advantage. Let us enter."

With these words, the highwaymen drew their hats down over their foreheads, and pushed open the front door.

They had no difficulty in finding their way to the room they had taken a peep into the interior of.

A burly-looking man was in the midst of one of those long old country ditties.

He did not stop when the two strangers entered, and so they were enabled to sit down in the corner near the chimney without attracting very much notice or remark, though searching glances were cast upon them by many.

At the conclusion of the song, the landlord entered.

"A cold night, gentlemen," he said, addressing our friends—"such a night as makes a seat by the fireside most welcome."

"You are right," replied Claude, "and therefore we have entered to partake of such hospitality as you may offer."

"You can have anything you like to ask for, gentlemen," was the reply, "and that of the best."

The order was given, and very soon a most temptinglooking repast was laid before the two highwaymen, who did it ample justice, listening all the while to the conversation of those around.

In this, however, they found little to interest them—the subjects were those which, for the most part, they were unfamiliar with.

During a brief silence that all at once came upon the assembly, a sound was heard betokening the arrival of another traveller.

One and all turned their eyes towards the door, which soon after was pushed open, and a tall, military-looking man, wrapped in a cloak, made his appearance.

"Good evening, friends," he said, with a slight inclination of his head. "I am chilled to the bone, and greatly fatigued. Perhaps you would allow me a seat in front of the fire."

One was immediately offered him.

He sat down, and stretched out his feet towards the blaze.

"It's a bitter cold night," he said, "or else I feel it more severely than usual. I've been used to rough weather, too, in my time."

A glance at his countenance, now plainly revealed by the ruddy beams of the fire, would have been ample warrant for this assertion.

Apparently he had ordered brandy of the landlord before he entered, for just then that individual came in, bearing a tray before him.

"Mix it, landlord," he said—"plenty of sugar, and don't be too liberal with the water; and while you are doing so, just tell me what confounded place you call that over yonder."

"Which place?" asked the landlord, in some surprise.

"Why, those ruins."

'Oh, of the old castle!"

"Yes, now you come to speak, no doubt it is the remains of a castle."

At these words, Sixteen-String Jack and Claude could not help exchanging glances.

Nevertheless, the next moment they assumed as much indifference as they were able, while, in reality, they waited with breathless eagerness for the next words that might pass the stranger's lips.

"Well, does anyone live there?" he inquired.

"Live there?" ejaculated the landlord. "Heaven forbid! No one would dream of such a thing!"

"Then how was it that I saw a light there a short time since?"

"A light!" was echoed simultaneously by every voice.

"Yes, certainly! But bless me, what's the matter? Why, you all look scared to death!"

The landlord handed his guest the brandy-and-water while he exclaimed, in a trembling voice:

"You don't mean to tell us, sir, that you have seen a light among the old ruins to-night?"

"I most certainly have. The fact is, I lost my way among those confounded winding lanes that you have got in this part of the country, and as I seemed to be doing nothing else but bend round about first one way and then another, I resolved to take a short cut across the meadows, in the hope of finding some place of shelter."

"Well, sir?"

"Well, I thought it was well indeed, for in a short time I caught sight in the distance of a faint glimmering light, such as might proceed at the present time from your window. I galloped towards it, and at length found myself close to a ruined wall."

There was a breathless silence while the stranger went on.

"Then, to my intense annoyance, the light suddenly disappeared. I looked around, but could not see it, and the place certainly appeared as though it had not been visited by anyone for years.

'Directly afterwards I heard a laugh—a wild, mocking laugh—which echoed and re-echoed among the ruins to such a degree that I could not for the life of me make out from whence the sounds at first proceeded. I searched hastily, but without result, then, feeling far from comfortable, I turned my horse's head in the direction of this village. Now, Mr. Landlord, don't look so terrified, man—just tell me the meaning of what I have seen and heard."

The landlord shook his head to and fro several times, and waited so long before he began to make his reply that the stranger fairly lost his patience.

"Sir," he said, at last, "be thankful—be rejoiced that you have escaped to tell this tale!"

"Escaped?" exclaimed the stranger. "I had no difficulty whatever."

"It seems incredible," said the landlord—"quite incredible. But let me tell you that for hundreds of years that ruined castle has been haunted by a spectre!"

"Bah!" said the stranger, contemptuously.

"Strange sights have been seen ere now, such as lights flitting to and fro, strange noises heard, as of rumbling thunder underground. There are some who have described how they have seen the spectre. For those there was no hope."

"What do you mean," exclaimed the stranger, half angrily—"what do you mean? Why do you not speak out fairly and clearly, not keep alluding to things in that fashion?"

"If you will listen," said the landlord "I will tell you all."

CHAPTER CMLV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL FOLLOW THE MYSTERIOUS FIGURE.

CLAUDE DUVAL and Sixteen-String Jack were beyond all doubt more deeply interested in this little episode than any other persons present.

The first thing they did was to congratulate themselves

upon having been so fortunate as to quit the ruins at the time they had; otherwise, had they lingered, there was a strong probability that they would have been discovered by this military-looking stranger, who by his manner, seemed quite insensible to fear.

But especially Claude waited with impatience and anxiety for the landlord to commence his story, for he hoped, by paying great attention to its details, to be able to turn it to good account.

Our two friends and the stranger were the only three persons in the room unacquainted with the legend connected with the ruined castle, and yet, so great a fascination was there in the theme that the others, knowing every word that was about to come, sat still, and prepared to listen as though it was something new.

"You must know, then," the landlord began, "that a great many years ago that castle was in a perfect state of repair, and tenanted by a powerful lord, the last of his race—a proud, passionate, vindictive man. For some offence or other—I know not what, for it has been variously stated—this proud lord slew the father confessor of the castle. You doubtless know, without me telling you, what was thought in those days of such a crime as this.

"The dying monk with his last breath cursed the hand that had laid him low, and prophesied that, ere many years rolled by, that proud castle should be a ruin, and that the owner should be mouldering in the dust. The monk died, and the prophecy was fulfilled. The castle became the ruined place you now see it, and its proud owner died, and with him died the title, for he had no successor."

"Well, well," said the stranger, "what of all this? Surely you are not so absurd as to believe——"

"Wait a moment, sir," interrupted the landlord, with an assumption of great solemnity—"wait a moment, and you shall hear. From that time, at occasional intervals, flitting lights were seen among the deserted walls, and the strange noises heard of which I have spoken. Then one day a man came to the village, who said that, as he passed by the castle, he caught sight of a strange, dim, shadowy figure. The form, he felt certain, was that of a monk. He was closely enveloped in a large gray cloak, the cowl of which was thrown back. He saw an aged, pinched, wasted countenance, the lower part of which was completely hidden by a huge white beard."

"Well, what of that?"

"He was believed by some, disbelieved by others. The ruins were searched, but no trace of a living being found. Then this man died suddenly, and within nine days after the time he had seen the spectre. This happened again and again, until it began to provoke attention; and as all those who had seen this apparition died within nine days of doing so, there was only one reasonable conclusion to be arrived at, which was, that the appearance of this figure was a sure forerunner of speedy death."

As the landlord finished speaking, the rest of the company nodded their heads, while others murmured:

"That's true—quite true, and we never knew anyone who had seen the spectre live long afterwards."

It may seem strange, but this narrative produced a very deep effect upon our two friends.

Strive as they would, they could not altogether shake off a certain superstitious feeling that came creeping slowly over them.

What if there should be some truth in this wild legend?

They had seen this figure, beyond all doubt—the description given corresponded with its appearance; how, then, should it be if it foretokened their own death?

Nevertheless, they listened with attention to the reply the stranger made.

"A very pretty story," he said—"very good indeed—just what I should have expected under the circumstances."

"Then you don't believe it?" said the landlord, aghast.

"Certainly not; I would refuse to give credence to any such rubbish."

"Rubbish?" repeated the landlord. "It is true. I have not lived here all these years without knowing it. We began to think at one time that the ruins had been said to themselves—that the spectre would trouble us no more. All at once, however, he was seen, and from that time no one has ventured to go near the place, nor would anyone who had the least regard for their own lives."

"Bah!" said the stranger, more contemptuously than ever. "Get me another glass of brandy, landlord—a little stronger than the last; and, while you are about it, bring one for yourself, at my expense, and after you have drunk it you will laugh at the idea of having entertained these superstitious follies."

"Never fear, sir," said the landlord, as he rose up to execute this command—"I know what I know, and a glass of brandy will make no difference to my feelings."

The stranger smiled again, but remained silent until the landlord returned.

"Hark ye, my friend," he said. "I am bound on rather pressing business just at present, but when I again come this way, if I can spare the time, I will pay a visit to those ruins, and if I see the figure you describe, my sword shall find out what it is made of."

"Then, for your own sake," said the landlord, "as you seem a brave, generous gentleman, though rash and venturesome, I hope that you will never come again. I should be grieved if any mischief overtook you."

"Thanks," said the stranger; "but I shall not forget, and before many days are over you may expect to see me. I have laid many a ghost before now in foreign lands, and if time was less pressing I could give you the account of several; but I must stay no longer. Good evening!"

He drained his second glass as he spoke, and sauntered in an easy, careless manner from the room.

He had ordered his horse to be ready at a certain time. It was at the door waiting for him, and those within the inn, having listened for a moment, heard him depart, setting forward at a rapid rate.

"There are people," said the landlord, breaking the silence, "who believe nothing that they cannot understand, and I take it this gentleman is one of them. If anyone would offer me untold gold I would not venture within half a mile of the old ruined castle."

"Nor I," said Claude. "I should think any man who did so had more foolhardiness than true courage."

This was a sentiment very much approved of by all present, and it was applauded accordingly.

Claude continued:

"As our worthy landlord says, there are plenty who profess to believe nothing, and to fear nothing. I have known many such, and yet have found that whenever they have been put to the test they have been found wanting."

"You speak most sensibly," said the landlord, "and like a man of experience and discernment."

"I speak as I feel," said Claude Duval, "though I thank you for your compliment all the same."

In conversation such as this the hours slipped quickly by, until it became very late indeed.

The guests one by one took their departure, until only our friends were left, so at last they, with great reluctance, rose to depart.

They failed, however, to learn any additional particulars respecting the ruins and the legend attaching to them.

"It is late to set forth on foot to-night, gentlemen," said the landlord, when they had expressed their determination to leave. "You can have here the best of accommodation."

"I don't doubt it," said Jack, "and we would gladly stay if our business was less important; but you must allow us to know best, and so good-night."

With these words our friends departed.

The landlord came with them to the door with the intention of fastening it after them.

Observing this, the two highwaymen took a direction that led them directly away from the castle, so that there should be no fear of giving rise to any suspicion.

They walked on rapidly and in silence until they judged they had got to a sufficient distance to make it safe to bend round towards their destination.

At length they did so, and Sixteen-String Jack broke silence by saying:

"Claude, my friend, what do you think of all that we have heard to-night?"

"Think of it?"

"Yes. Does not the description given by the land-

hard agree exactly with the appearance we have seen?"

"It does indeed!"

"And suppose," said Jack, hesitatingly—"suppose there is some truth in it, after all? Suppose what we have witnessed heralds our own death?"

"I refuse to entertain the idea at all," said Claude, "though certainly the legend is more likely to be verified in our case, I take it, than in any others, for who runs such continual narrow escapes from death as we do?"

"Don't mention it, Claude," said Jack—"or, at any rate, in that tone."

"I will not. Do you know that I felt strongly inclined to remain at the inn until early morning, and then take our departure."

"And why did you not?" said Jack. "How much more pleasant it would have been!"

"I should have done so but for one determination."

"And what was that?"

"Why, I was resolved, if possible, to set this affair at rest without delay. Understand me distinctly. I hope, Jack, that you will second me in all I intend to do."

"Well, say on."

"In the first place, then, I am more convinced than ever that it is some person who has a motive for remaining in concealment who has chosen to play the part of this apparition. At any rate, should we see it again, I am determined to follow it closely, and learn whether my conjecture is well or ill founded."

"I will be with you to the utmost, Claude," was the reply, "for it would be a great satisfaction indeed to my mind to discover that what we have seen is nothing more than a human being like ourselves."

"Come on, then, move quickly, and we shall reach the ruins before midnight. We must not forget that stranger—he is a bold, resolute man: I read it in his eyes."

"You are right. He will be as good as his word, I'll warrant, and the next time he comes he will make a narrow search."

"Well, we must take our departure before then. Recollect that to-morrow will be the fourth day. We shall not have much longer to wait."

Shortly afterwards the highwaymen reached the ruins of the castle.

Their first act was to make their way immediately to the place where they had left their horses.

They were much rejoiced to find that the animals were safe.

Yet they had a look of distress that puzzled them.

"What ails the animals?" said Claude. "How odd they look! One would think that they had seen the ghost."

"Bah—nonsense!"

"But hark! I can hear midnight pealing forth from the village church. Leave the cattle to themselves awhile, and watch with me."

Filled with an irrepressible curiosity, Sixteen-String Jack obeyed.

They took up as nearly as possible the positions they had assumed on the preceding night, and gazed with fixed attention on the spot where the figure had made its appearance.

The night was not so favorable for their purpose; but their eyes had become tolerably well accustomed to the obscurity.

As the last stroke of the hour of twelve died away, Claude pressed his companion's arm, and whispered:

"Look, it's there!"

For a few fleeting seconds, despite their resolution, the highwaymen could not stir.

Slowly the figure advanced, walking steadily, and appearing as though it intended to make a complete circuit of the courtyard.

The highwaymen shrank farther back into the shadow.

"He comes," whispered Claude—"he comes, and if he passes this spot we will step forth and follow in his track wherever he may lead."

Sixteen-String Jack did not reply. All his faculties were bent upon watching the mysterious figure, which approached with a slow and steady motion.

On it came, nearer and nearer still.

The silence was so profound that the highwaymen were compelled to hold their breath. It seemed to them the slight noise made by breathing was sufficient to discover their presence in that place.

As the figure drew nearer, a distinct rustling sound reached their ears—such a sound as would be made by any person walking in a large and heavy cloak.

No footfall was, however, audible.

Directly afterwards the figure passed them, and as soon as it had gone forward a few paces Claude Duval murmured, with great emphasis:

"I will stake my life, Jack, that what we have seen is no spectre, but a man. Come quickly—follow in my footsteps; but use all caution. We will track him, and solve the mystery."

Noiselessly the highwaymen emerged from their place of concealment, keeping close under the shadow of the huge walls.

They advanced with the utmost caution, pausing every now and then, when the figure seemed about to turn round and look back; but it continued its solitary walk, not turning its head either to the right or to the left.

After going a little further, Claude noticed that they were proceeding in the direction of the keep.

Dimly defined in the darkness they could see the doorway through which they had previously passed.

The figure approached it, and then in a moment became lost to view.

This disappearance was, however, easily accounted for by the darkness, which was so dense in this part that Claude almost lost sight of his companion.

"We have lost him, I fear," he whispered. "But come on, Jack. If he has ascended the steps we have him sure."

Groping their way forward, the highwaymen crossed the threshold, and, reaching the foot of the stone steps, began to ascend as rapidly as they were able.

They listened, thinking perhaps to hear a footfall, but if so they were disappointed.

All was silence, save the whistling of the wind among the walls.

The summit of the keep at last was reached, and then they glanced around them quickly.

No sign, however, of the mysterious figure could be found.

They searched narrowly into every corner, and convinced themselves that no one was in hiding.

"He has disappeared," said Jack, in rather a changed tone—"vanished utterly!"

"Yes, he is out of our sight," said Claude; "but I see nothing extraordinary in that. These ruins must possess many chambers, the existence of which are unknown to us; in some one of them this figure must have sought shelter. Let us descend and keep a closer watch; it is possible we may see him even now."

Jack shook his head; but, nevertheless, willingly enough followed his companion down the staircase.

They paused again just outside the doorway.

Claude was about to speak, when all at once, a strange, odd rumbling noise assailed their ears.

"What's that?" asked Jack, suddenly—"what is it? The ground fairly seems to shake under my feet."

"It does—it does," said Claude.

"And do you remember what the landlord said," added Jack. "He spoke of thunder underground. Is not that just what this sound resembles?"

"It does. But hark! let us listen, and try to follow in its direction."

They advanced a few steps; but the rumbling increased.

Then there was a sudden noise, as of an explosion.

After that all was silent.

CHAPTER CMLVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MAKE A MOST IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

"We shall soon be into the heart of the mystery, I take it," said Claude Duval—"that is, if you, Jack, will aid me in probing it to the utmost."

"I am always with you."

"Yes; but not so heartily on the present occasion as you often are; but never mind, we will not speak of that now. We must search."

"But it is dark."

"Very true; but a light can be quickly and easily obtained."

"Think of the danger."

"It is not worth consideration," was the reply. "If any chance passer-by saw it, which at this time of night is scarcely likely, it would be set down as some doings of the ghost."

While he spoke, Claude Duval advanced a few steps, and paused when fairly across the threshold of the keep.

Here the darkness was intense.

"I am convinced," he said, "that the man we saw went this way."

Jack was silent.

Claude, however, busily scattered a small quantity of gunpowder on the ground.

"Jack," he said, "you have some small pieces of wax taper, have you not?"

"Yes."

"Get one ready, then, and I will soon have a blaze."

While Sixteen-String Jack produced a small piece of taper from his pocket, Claude Duval snapped the lock of an unloaded pistol.

As the flint struck against the steel a shower of sparks came forth.

The gunpowder ignited, there was a momentary light, and then he picked up the piece of paper on which the gunpowder had been placed, and which was now fairly in a blaze.

The candle was quickly lighted, and as soon as it had burnt up a little and sent forth its full amount of illumination, the highwaymen looked around them with the greatest possible amount of curiosity.

Nothing of a more striking character than rough crumbling walls met their view, but Claude searched closely and narrowly, and at last uttered an ejaculation.

"Here you are, Jack," he said—"here's something like convincing proof, and we are on the right track."

He pointed as he spoke to what bore some resemblance to a door, though time had changed its aspect and that of the wall in which it was placed so much, and had, so to speak, so assimilated them, that it was hard to tell one from the other.

What struck Claude's notice, however, was a small piece of gray cloth that appeared to be sticking out from two stones in the wall.

Sixteen-String Jack, whose attention was called to it, bent down and examined it attentively.

"There," said Claude, with great complacency, "that looks as though I was near the mark. Take hold of it, Jack, and tell me whether that cloth has not a most material feel."

"It has indeed."

"Well, then, as I never heard of a ghost walking abroad with a substantial cloth cloak wrapped around him, we may conclude that what we have seen is no spectre at all."

Sixteen-String Jack began in good earnest to think so—yet, strange to say, he was not altogether convinced.

Claude continued:

"I knew the fellow went this way, and in passing through this doorway you see he has shut part of his cloak in with it, and then has impatiently torn it away—a very incautious proceeding on his part; but perhaps, now, immunity from interruption has made him over bold."

"And shall you open this door, Claude?"

"Certainly I shall, if I am only able, and that I doubt not."

Even while he spoke, Claude Duval felt industriously all over the door, but failed to discover any kind of fastening.

At length, however, after much searching, he discovered a small knob of iron, that was scarcely raised above the level of the woodwork.

This he pressed upon with all his strength, and the door creaked slowly open.

The very moment, however, that it swung back upon its hinges, such a gust of smoke and dense, disagreeable vapor poured forth that the highwaymen staggered back before it, and gladly retreated to the open air.

The smoke followed them in strange, waving masses, and, curling upwards in fantastic shapes, was quickly lost to sight.

The two friends regarded each other for some time in silence, and at last Sixteen-String Jack said:

"You seem perfectly correct in all your assumptions, Claude; one would think that you had some knowledge of this affair beforehand."

"Why so?"

"Because you have insisted all along that everything we have seen has been real and not supernatural—among the rest, this explosion, and here we have the smoke."

"Yes, that's what puzzles me," said Claude—"I can't make out what has caused the explosion. I expected to smell gunpowder; but this vapor is altogether unlike it; it seems poisonous."

"It does indeed."

They lingered for some time longer; then, when they considered that sufficient time had elapsed for all the pent-up smoke within the doorway to disperse, they relighted the taper, which had been extinguished by the wind, and again advanced.

Gazing across the threshold of this hidden doorway, they now indistinctly made out a rude flight of steps, descending spirally, as it seemed, into the depths of the earth.

They approached nearer and listened.

But no sound reached their ears.

Although the dense vapor was no longer visible, yet they were still sensible of its presence, for the air was hot, and seemed to scorch their lungs as they breathed it.

It seemed, indeed, as though the atmosphere was loaded with some powerful acid.

Nevertheless, they descended cautiously the flight of spiral steps.

They had not far to go to reach the bottom; then, looking around, the highwaymen perceived, branching off in various directions, what seemed to be an extensive series of vaults.

No doubt, in former times, they had served as the cellars of the castle.

All these passages, save one, seemed bathed and dripping with moisture; that one, however, presented a remarkable contrast to the rest, for it was completely dry.

This, then, was the direction the highwaymen took, and soon they saw before them a wide-open door.

At every step they now advanced, the impurity of the air perceptibly increased.

They experienced great difficulty in breathing.

Yet, impelled by the strongest curiosity, they struggled on.

Reaching the door, they saw, by its appearance, that it had been suddenly and forcibly wrenched open, no doubt by the force of the explosion which had unquestionably taken place.

Having penetrated thus far into the recesses of the castle, a strange sight was revealed to the view of the highwaymen—a sight which well repaid them for all their trouble.

In a spacious vault that was lighted by a bright fire, burning in a singular-looking iron basket, they perceived, ranged along the walls, numberless strange, fantastic objects, most of them unfamiliar to Sixteen-String Jack, but not to Claude Duval; and it is probable that these objects, as well as those suspended from the ceiling, would have attracted much more of their notice had not their attention been suddenly directed and wholly absorbed by another object, that was lying at full length on the ground near the centre of the vault.

This was evidently a human form.

They shrank back a little upon beholding it, then rapidly advanced.

Stooping down, then, they perceived the body of a man well advanced in years.

He was strangely and fantastically attired, and his whole frame was reduced to such a degree of attenuation that the bones seemed ready to break through the skin.

A large beard covered his breast, doubtless it had been white, but now it was shrivelled, scorched, and blackened by smoke.

The features also were perfectly black, and so fearfully convulsed that the two highwaymen turned away, unable to look longer upon them.

Sixteen-String Jack turned an inquiring gaze upon his comrade.

"All this looks strange enough to you, Jack, no doubt," said Claude, "but if you will remember what I told you of my early life you will believe that it is fully comprehended by me."

Jack nodded.

All these strange-looking vials, bottles, alembics, and retorts are used in alchemy, and this man, beyond all doubt, was one of those dreamers who believed it was possible to discover some preparation of drugs that would have the quality of prolonging human life to an indefinite extent, and also that some substance might be found that would change baser metals into gold."

"Yes," said Jack. "I have no doubt that such is the case. But how do you account for his death?"

"Oh, it is very simple," said Claude, pointing to the ruins of what had served a short time since for a furnace. "In some of his experiments he has made use of some explosive compound, and you behold the effects."

"Yes," said Jack. "But do you mean to tell me, Claude, that you had no certain knowledge that this was the actual state of affairs?"

"I assure you I had not, but from the first I believed that all these supernatural stories had sprung from some such cause as we have traced them to. This man, no doubt, for his chemical experiments, has been in danger of his life as a magician, therefore he has come here to screen himself from notice. He has been wholly given up to the pursuit of his art, and, knowing how credulous all these country people are, he has had no difficulty in causing all those strange sounds which were believed to be caused by supernatural agency. Leaving him for a moment out of the question, however, it strikes me that we have made a most important discovery for ourselves and for our friends."

"How so?"

"Is it possible the idea does not suggest itself to you?"

"What idea?"

"Why, have we not been turned out from one place of refuge, and have we not, in the most extraordinary manner, discovered another equally as good—perhaps, for aught I know, better?"

"Do you allude to this place?"

"I do. Just think for a moment how easy it would be for us all to take up our quarters here unseen, and then, having done so, how we can keep off all intruders by personating the spectre occasionally. As for the rumbling noises, no doubt I shall find among the materials here the means of producing them."

Sixteen-String Jack remained for a few moments plunged in deep thought.

Then he exclaimed:

"Safety is a point to be borne in mind before every other consideration, is it not?"

"questionably."

"Well, then, safety is promised us if we remain in this gloomy subterranean abode, but I confess nothing else than that would reconcile me to it."

"Pooh—pooh! You will soon become accustomed to it. Moreover, it is only requisite that we should have some place of concealment to which we could retire whenever circumstances made it necessary. We can clear this vault of that"—Claude pointed to the body of the alchemist while he spoke—"and we can also sweep away all this lumber. Rely upon it this can be turned into comfortable quarters."

Sixteen-String Jack began to think so, but, above all, he was impressed by the probability of security that was held out to them by remaining here.

It needed only a little more conversation with his companion to make him resolve upon this course, and, having once arrived at a determination, Claude instantly set to work.

In the first place, the body of the old alchemist was rolled up in his cloak, and then, between them, they carried him out of the vault and up the steps into the open air.

In a remote corner of the ruins they scooped out a narrow grave by means of their swords.

In this they placed him, and then returned to the vault.

In less than an hour a wonderful difference was made in its appearance, and Sixteen-String Jack began to look forward quite hopefully and confidently to the future, and to congratulate himself upon having been so fortunate.

The door at the top of the steps had been closed, and, therefore, they felt particularly secure from interruption, and, worn out by the fatigue they had undergone, both lay down to slumber.

Claude especially was much gratified by his discovery, for he guessed how well it would be appreciated by Dick Turpin.

And, moreover, there was the satisfaction in his mind of knowing that his conjectures had turned out to be perfectly correct.

"With a little management," he said, to Jack, on the following morning. "this place can be made to answer all our wants. I only wish the time would pass away that has to elapse between now and the date fixed for our meeting on Hampstead Heath."

"So do I," said Jack.

"For one thing," Claude added, "we can surely remain here without making any movement that may attract the notice of the police officers, and that will give us all the better chance of reaching the appointed spot unmolested."

"Stay," said Jack. "There's one thing you have forgotten altogether."

"What's that?"

"Why, the promise that I gave to the tollkeeper who proved so truly my friend."

"Yes," said Claude. "I admit I had forgotten that."

"And, what's more," continued Jack, "unless you can show me a full purse, I fancy another adventure will be necessary before we have sufficient to give him. Mine was much lightened, I can assure you, during my stay at the inn."

"And mine," said Claude, "I tossed to those gipsies, or mendicants, or whatever they were. I did so without a thought of the consequences."

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"That's always the way—always the way; not that I regret it, for this little incident will serve to break the monotony of our stay in this place."

"And yet," said Claude, "there are many reasons that make it advisable for us to remain quiet."

"I grant that; but what I propose is that we gallop away to a considerable distance from this spot, then lie in wait for an adventure. If it should prove profitable, we will ride off at once to Tyburn Gate, afterwards get some refreshment for our horses and ourselves, and then return here before daybreak."

Claude laughed.

"That is scarcely like keeping in concealment. Depend upon it, if your intention is carried out, we shall raise all the country again."

"But I have given my word," said Jack. "Remember that it must not be broken."

"It must not," was the answer, "and so let us determine at once to set forth at nightfall."

Sixteen-String Jack was satisfied, and said no more.

He looked carefully to all his weapons, and to his supply of ammunition; but as the time came on he continued to exhibit greater and greater signs of impatience and restraint.

Night came at last—just such a night as he could have wished for—cold, dark, and miserable, with a violent wind blowing in sudden gusts, and every now and then carrying with it a scud of rain.

"There could not be a night more to my taste," said Sixteen-String Jack, pressing his hat tightly down upon his head as they rode away from the ruins. "The officers, I take it, will be more inclined to get under the roof of some inn than remain patrolling the roads. We shall have the coast clear, and I never felt in better trim for an adventure."

"Forward, then!" said Claude—"follow me. I will lead the way. All we have to do at present is to take every precaution to remain unseen."

Sixteen-String Jack glanced round him while his companion thus spoke.

The darkness was so great that he could not see far, yet he believed that they were quite alone.

The next moment he followed Claude's example of

setting spurs to his steed, and the horses at once broke into a long, stretching gallop, that in a short time carried them away from the ruins of the old castle.

CHAPTER CMLVII.

RETURNS TO DICK TURPIN AND MAUD IN THE OLD QUARRY.

At length we return to the deep, moss-grown excavation where Dick Turpin and Maud had found a refuge.

It will be recollected that after Dick had congratulated himself upon the safety of the place they were in, Maud had suggested at the same time its disadvantages, and while she spoke, Dick felt, with an uncomfortable sensation at his breast, that should the officers become acquainted with his whereabouts, he would be in a trap indeed.

They would only have to guard the one outlet, and then advance and take him prisoner, alive or dead.

Painfully apparent as this was to his own mind, he strove to make it appear otherwise, and affected only to laugh lightly at Maud's fears.

But she by this time knew him too well to be so deceived.

Her heart sank, therefore, within her breast, for the momentary gleam of satisfaction that she had experienced was quite extinguished.

At every slight sound she would start nervously and shudder; then, bending forward, stretch her sense of hearing to the utmost.

But the thousand and one odd noises that broke the silence of that deserted place passed over without any result; but by the time morning dawned she was completely worn out with nervous agitation.

It was not until long after daylight prevailed above that the glimmer of dawn made itself visible in the depths of the old quarry.

By slow and imperceptible degrees, however, the light increased, and one by one, the rugged features of the place were brought into view.

Dick and Maud both looked around them with a curiosity not unmixed with admiration, for the huge masses of stonework looked picturesque and grand.

The bottom of the quarry was of a much greater extent than Dick had at first imagined.

The ground of which it was composed was broken and uneven, yet, strangely enough, vegetation thrived there, and in many places trees of a tolerable size were growing.

There was a little cascade also, the dancing waters of which made pleasant rippling music, and which, when the sun's rays shone upon them, looked beautiful indeed.

"Come, Maud," said Dick, in as reassuring a voice as he was able to command, "look around you, and feel thankful for the shelter you have gained. Surely, now, if we can but escape the linx eyes of the officers we shall be happy and contented enough until the time of meeting arrives."

Maud sighed heavily, as she said:

"I hope so, Dick—I hope so."

"Do not despond. Come a little nearer to the waterfall; you see it is in the most sheltered portion of all. How soft that mossy turf looks. Lie down there upon it and sleep; you can wrap my cloak around you, and depend upon it, I will keep good guard."

In spite of the anxieties that were crowding at her heart, Maud, who was worn out by the excessive fatigue she had undergone, looked longingly to the spot to which Dick pointed

It seemed, indeed, like some naturally-made couch.

"You are sure," she said, pleadingly, "that you will wake me at the first approach of danger?"

"I will—I promise you faithfully I will."

"Then I am content."

Wrapping herself up in the cloak, as Dick had suggested, Maud laid herself down to rest, and so perfectly was she worn out, both physically and mentally, that slumber soon stole over her.

Dick remained watching by her side for some time after she slept; then, finding, at length, that she was quite unconscious of all that was going on around, he turned aside, and muttered:

"Now, then, I will take the opportunity of making a thorough search all over this place, and ascertain whether there is any other means of leaving it than that by which I descended."

Thus speaking, Dick moved off, and for a long time was occupied in searching all the nooks and corners at the bottom of the quarry.

As he fully expected, however, he found that there was only one pathway by which the surface of the earth could be regained.

"That, at all events, is one comfort," he remarked, as he folded his arms and fixed his eyes upon the side of the excavation. "I know now that my foes can only approach me at this point, and while I keep watch there, all will go well."

A faint cry at this moment reached his ears.

He recognised it, and turned round suddenly.

Half a dozen leaps took him to the spot where he had left Maud.

She had partially risen to her feet, and there was an expression of terror on her face.

"Oh, Dick," she cried, "why—oh, why did you leave me?"

"Simply to look around. All is well, Maud—quite well, for the impression left upon me by my search is, that no human feet save ours have tredden in this place for years and years."

Maud gave a sigh of thankfulness.

"Moreover," said Dick, "you need not fear the unexpected appearance of anyone while you keep your watch upon yonder pathway. You can see how it winds zigzag down the side of the excavation. That, then, I am assured is the only means by which a descent into the quarry can be effected."

Maud turned her eyes in the direction Dick had indicated, and no sooner had she done so than a frantic cry of alarm escaped her lips, while she clung frantically to his breast.

"They come!" she said—"they come! Look—look, they come!"

"Who?"

"The officers! Look—look, there!"

Dick followed the direction of her finger, and then, at the very brink of the old quarry, he saw several small moving objects—so small that they scarcely seemed like human beings.

A second glance, however, assured him that they were, though, owing to the fact that they stood back a little way from the edge of the precipice, he was only able to discern the upper part of their bodies.

"They may be officers, or they may not," said Dick; "but at any rate, do not give way altogether to alarm—be of good heart. Follow me quickly; we will get to the shade of some projection, and then, let the officers be as keen-eyed as they may, I will defy them to detect us."

Maud was half fainting with terror, and Dick found it necessary to raise her in his arms, and carry her to some little distance.

He paused when fairly standing in the dark shadow cast by a huge overhanging piece of stone, the appearance of which was truly terrifying, for it seemed as though about to fall down on their heads.

Although satisfied that he was thus tolerably well concealed, Dick had taken up his position in such a manner that he was still able to command a view of the narrow pathway and of the moving figures at the top.

Whether they were officers or not was more than he could tell at that great distance, for the sun's rays shining down into the quarry dazzled and confused his eyesight.

Both listened, too, with the utmost intentness, in the hope that some words uttered in a louder tone than others might be borne floating upon the air.

But no such words reached them—the distance was too great.

Dick Turpin's agitation and alarm—more on account of his companion than himself—were much greater than anyone could have imagined by his manner.

At length the officers, if such they were, retreated so far from the edge of the excavation as to be invisible.

At that moment Dick drew a long breath of exquisite relief.

"They are gone, Maud," he said—"they are gone. All will be well."

"You say so," she replied, with a wan and sickly smile,



[CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AT THE RENDEZVOUS ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH.]

"In the hope that you may induce me to believe it, but I know as well as you do that our position is a fearful one, and that if the officers should take it into their heads to descend, nothing could save us from destruction."

"Hush — hush," said Dick, "let us remain silent! Although their voices may not have descended to us, yet ours may ascend to them: at any rate, we cannot be too cautious."

In this remark Maud fully acquiesced, and became silent accordingly.

Slowly—very slowly and wearily the hours dragged away, until the sun passed the meridian and began to sink down slowly to the west.

Of the officers they saw nothing more.

Maud noticed with regret the signs of exhaustion visible in Dick's blanched countenance, and at length she urged:

"Why not gain a few moments' rest yourself, Dick? Fear not—I shall be able to keep good watch. I will sit here, upon this piece of stone, and never remove my eyes from the pathway. If I see anyone upon it, or if anything else peculiar occurs, trust me I will rouse you instantly."

"Then if you will, indeed, perform this service, I shall be truly thankful," said Dick. "I did not like to make the request, lest you should be fearful. However, as you say, you will be able to give me timely warning of the approach of danger."

"Yes, yes," she murmured, anxiously, in reply—"you can trust me."

Dick knew this well enough, and therefore hesitated no longer to comply with her request.

He was glad to accede to it, for he thought never before had he experienced such a frightful sense of utter exhaustion.

This cannot be wondered at when the amount of exertion he had gone through is recollected.

Wrapping his cloak around him, he lay down upon the bank of moss, and closed his eyes in perfect confidence of safety, and was soon asleep.

No words can tell, however, what an amount of anxiety Maud suffered while he was thus unconscious.

With painful intentness she fixed her eyes upon the narrow zig-zag path, and remained gazing upon it till her eyes ached and every object swam before her.

Wearily and slowly the time passed on, yet Dick did not so much as move.

To all appearances he was as likely to sleep for some hours longer.

Maud became somewhat more assured as time passed on, and she discovered that she was not interrupted by any sound whatever.

She felt impelled many a time to arouse her sleeping companion, but every time she overcame the inclination, knowing well how much depended on his strength for the safety of them both.

It was not, in fact, until after the sun had sunk, and a chill air filled the old quarry, that Dick awoke.

He struggled desperately, and seemed as though engaged in a conflict with some one.

Maud's voice recalled him to himself.

"Bah!" he said. "I have been dreaming."

"And no wonder."

"Why, it is almost dark!"

"It is. Do you not feel rested?"

"I feel like myself," was the heartily-uttered reponse.

"And you have heard nothing—seen nothing?"

"Nothing at all," answered Maud. "The place has been as silent as the grave."

"So much the better, then. Rely upon it, we have found at last a place of shelter. Only one thing is necessary to make it perfectly comfortable."

"And what may that be?"

Dick laughed as he replied:

"Why food, Maud—food! We cannot live without it; and now I have awoke I feel so confoundedly hungry that I could set to work on these hard stones."

Maud smiled, but it was only feebly and wearily.

She was faint and sick for want of food, yet had shrunk from saying so.

Dick noticed the change in her countenance at once, and divined the reason of it.

"Come—come," he said, "cheer up! Don't imagine this any obstacle. I shall speedily overcome it, rest assured."

"How—how so?"

"Why, I will only wait until it grows a little darker, then I will cautiously make my way to the top of the quarry. When certain no one is near to observe my movements, I will cross over the fields to the nearest dwelling I can find, and there obtain what we require."

"But the danger, Dick—the danger?"

"It must be braved and met!" was the response. "We cannot remain and starve here! Rest assured, however, that I will be cautious to a degree."

Maud was silent, for she felt unable to urge him to remain.

"It has grown dark very suddenly," said Dick, looking around him. "Ah! I see now, that huge black cloud has come up, and if we do not have a storm before long it is very odd to me."

"A storm?"

"Yes; do not be alarmed. How is it, Maud, that the least thing seems to agitate you so dreadfully?"

"Hark—hark!"

Maud held up her hand while she spoke, and just then, the low muttering, rumbling sound of distant thunder reached their ears.

"I prophesied aright!" said Dick.

Scarcely had these words passed his lips than the dark cloud he had pointed out overhead discharged its contents, which came down not like rain, but like a perfect sheet of water.

"Back, Maud—back!" said Dick. "The rocks will shelter us to a great extent."

They moved back rapidly while he spoke.

And the rain continued to fall without showing signs of any abatement.

The rumbling of the thunder, too, increased in loudness, and began to be accompanied by lightning, each succeeding flash of which seemed more vivid than the preceding one.

The peals of thunder at length became truly deafening, and when the lightning flashed the whole interior of the quarry was brilliantly lighted up.

Maud was greatly terrified, and clung anxiously to her companion's arm.

"We have nothing to fear here," he said, noticing her tremor, "and while the elements are thus at warfare we shall be secure from all interruption."

While Dick spoke, another vivid flash of lightning came for an infinitesimal portion of time.

Every crevice in the rock-work around was clearly revealed.

Maud uttered a faint, low shriek, as she replied:

"No—no! See—see there!"

"See where?" ejaculated Dick, hastily.

"You are too late now," said Maud, "all is dark."

"But what was it you fancied that you saw?"

"It was no fancy—my eyes were fixed upon that particular spot."

"Well, then, what was it?"

"Something like a human form!"

"A human form?" Dick echoed, being unable to say anything else in his surprise.

"Yes—yes; I am sure of it."

"And where was it?"

"Near the top of the pathway, down which it was slowly and with difficulty making its way."

"Nonsense, Maud—nonsense; your fears have deceived you. At any rate, be prepared for the coming of the next flash of lightning, which will doubtless be here in a few seconds; I will watch keenly too, and we will clear up the doubt. Are you sure there was only one?"

"I only saw one," was the answer. "There may have been others—I cannot say."

CHAPTER CMLVIII.

DICK TURPIN WATCHES THE MOVEMENTS OF THE STRANGER IN THE OLD QUARRY.

EARNESTLY and intently Dick Turpin kept his eyes turned in the direction of the path, while he waited with the utmost anxiety for the coming of the next flash of lightning.

Although inclined to believe that Maud had seen what she had described only in imagination, yet he waited in great suspense to be satisfied whether she had been mistaken or not.

Although scarcely probable, yet, for all he could tell, the police officers might in some extraordinary way have managed to track him to the old quarry.

Then again he thought that surely they would wait until the fearful storm had ceased.

The rain which had been descending in such torrents now partially subsided.

But the thunder still rolled heavily.

Then came a tremendous flash of lightning, more vivid and intense, Dick thought, than any he had witnessed.

He was, in fact, half blinded by it.

Maud again uttered a despairing cry.

An ejaculation at the same time escaped Dick's lips.

During the momentary illumination he had caught sight of what was certainly a human figure descending the narrow, dangerous path.

The glimpse he had was so brief that it did not enable him to ascertain whether this individual was habited as a police officer or not.

He was, however, satisfied that he was alone.

"Did you see him?" asked Maud, as soon as the next peal of thunder had sufficiently died away to enable her to make her voice audible—"did you see him?"

"I did—I did; but only one person. Did you catch a glimpse of anyone else?"

"I did not."

"Then," added Dick, "the circumstance is most strange and peculiar. Who on earth could he be who would on such a night as this venture to make the descent of this perilous path? It was dangerous enough when we descended—how must it be in such intense darkness as this?"

Maud did not reply to this question, but asked:

"Was it an officer, Dick? Do you think it was an officer?"

"No, I am almost sure it was not, for no officer would make his way here alone. But keep silent. Let us wait for the next flash, which no doubt will reveal to us something more. At present do not fear—from one enemy we have nothing to dread."

Nevertheless, Maud clung very closely and tightly to the highwayman.

Another flash of lightning quickly came, and this time both the watchers were better prepared.

They saw, with great distinctness, a man slowly and carefully creeping along the pathway.

Despite the darkness and the many difficulties that were in the way, he had managed to accomplish a considerable portion of the descent, a circumstance which strongly excited Dick's wonder, since it showed that the man must either be urged onward by some powerful motive, or else he was very familiar with the nature of the path which he trod.

"Silence now, dear one," said Dick, in a whisper. "We may be in no danger of being heard, yet let us be careful. Let it be some sort of consolation to you to know that this new-comer, whatever may bring him here, is not a police officer."

"Yet he may be in search of you."

"I scarcely think so; but, at any rate, from one man we have nothing to apprehend. If he sees us I will take good care he does not leave these gloomy depths to communicate the intelligence to others! Now hush—silence!"

Maud was still at once, and after that neither spoke, but both occupied themselves to the utmost in watching the perilous descent of this new-comer.

At every lightning's flash they found that he had managed to accomplish a still greater portion of the descent.

The vivid flashes now came at longer intervals, the thunder only rumbled, and there was every indication that the storm was rapidly passing over.

At length, when the stranger had almost reached the bottom of the pathway, Dick whispered to his companion:

"I have been thinking, Maud, that it is of the highest importance we should gain some knowledge of the motive that brings this man here."

"Surely, yes," was the response; "but how?"

"Do not interpose an obstacle," said Dick, "but promise to assist me."

"I will—I do."

"Then what I have to ask is, that you will remain here, standing beside Black Bess."

"And you?"

"I will creep cautiously across the bottom of the quarry. I am familiar enough with it now to be able to avoid all obstructions, and the darkness will conceal me from view."

Maud trembled excessively as she said:

"You would creep, then, close to this man, and watch his movements carefully?"

"I would take care to keep out of sight and hearing."

"But cannot I come too?"

"You cannot, because then any slight sound that would be made by the progress of one would be doubled, and it is most important that our presence here remains unknown."

Slowly and reluctantly Maud unclasped her arms, and Dick no sooner found himself free than, with a slow and cautious footstep, he began to make his way in the direction of the bottom of the pathway.

The darkness was profound, yet not so great as it had been a short time before, for the clouds above were becoming lighter in color.

Nevertheless, it was no easy task to avoid the many fragments of rock strewn everywhere around, and still more difficult to proceed without creating noise enough to attract attention.

Dick was full of the deepest curiosity to know what possible motive could have induced any person to descend by so dangerous a path into so desolate a place, especially during the raging of a storm.

In the hope that this curiosity would presently be allayed, he crept onward stealthily, and at last, to his great satisfaction, succeeded in reaching the bottom of the pathway, as he believed, unobserved and unsuspected.

He had only just time to crouch down behind a large jutting piece of stonework before the stranger came into view.

He was not more than two feet distant, so Dick saw him with tolerable plainness, and felt perfectly sure that he was no police officer, or at any rate, not in the garb of one.

When the bottom of the old quarry was reached, the stranger paused and looked above.

A deep groan then came from his lips, and he half muttered some words, the purport of which Dick could not catch.

Then, with a somewhat hasty tread and a firm step, the stranger crossed the bottom of the quarry in an obliquo direction.

"What on earth can be his errand?" Dick murmured to himself. "Certainly he is fully impressed with the notion that he has this place all to himself, or he would be more careful to be silent in his movements."

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, Dick carefully emerged from his place of concealment and proceeded to follow in the footsteps of the stranger.

This he had no great difficulty in doing, and the thick green moss which was growing almost everywhere enabled him to tread with an almost noiseless step.

The storm by this time was quite over.

The sky was clearing fast of clouds, and there were indications that the moon would shortly make her appearance.

The stranger did not pause until the opposite side of the quarry was gained, a spot not far from where Maud was standing—so close to it, indeed, that Dick feared he was making his way directly there, and justly dreaded a discovery.

This fear proved groundless.

"Oh for a gleam of light!" Dick heard the stranger say, in low, deep tones. "But it is useless to think of it; the moon will never light up these recesses. I forget—I forget—my brain reels!"

These disjointed exclamations were in themselves highly provocative of curiosity, and Dick watched more absorbed than ever.

For the next few moments he was scarcely able to make out what the stranger was about, but at last he discovered he was occupied in igniting a small lantern that he had taken from one of his pockets.

He closed the door with a snap, and then through the thick convex lens in front came a broad beam of light, which revealed with great distinctness every object on which it fell.

Dick shrunk down again in concealment, fearful lest the stranger, before entering the recesses he spoke of, should flash the light around him in order to make quite certain that he was alone.

This caution was unnecessary.

Never dreaming that anyone was watching his movements, the stranger, timidly and reluctantly as Dick thought, entered a small crevice or fissure in the side of the rock, so small, and of such an appearance, that anyone gazing at it would have imagined that it was simply an accidental rift in the stone such as is often seen, and penetrated to a depth of a few inches only.

The stranger, however, quickly disappeared.

This proved that it was in reality the entrance to some cavern.

Dick crept forward once more, and, as soon as he reached the indentation in the rock, redoubled his caution.

Gazing in, he could perceive the faint glimmer of the light some distance off.

It was too feeble to enable him to see what kind of place it was into which he was intruding, but extending his arms well in front, he walked forward on tiptoe.

He found the ground beneath his feet tolerably smooth and firm.

Having gone a little distance, he discovered that the light became stationary.

Creeping onward again, and scarcely daring to breathe lest the slight sound should be heard, he at last paused, and found himself in a tolerably large cavern, that beyond all doubt was the work of nature.

In one corner of it the stranger was standing, and Dick after a hasty glance around glided towards him.

The lantern was raised high in the air, but as it was furnished with a bull's-eye, the light fell in one direction only, leaving all around in a darkness that seemed doubly great by contrast.

Dick found that the stranger was speaking in a low, murmuring tone, and at first fancied he was addressing some one.

Ere long, however, he found this to be an error.

Either from some strange habit, or else, perhaps, because he fancied the sound of his own voice took off in some degree the loneliness of the place he was in, the stranger spoke his thoughts aloud.

"It is a foolish fear," he said, as though endeavoring to persuade himself into something he could not believe —"a vain and foolish fear, and to satisfy myself that it is so I will take another hasty glance, even though the sight should drive me mad; it would repay me for all—to make certain that my apprehensions were groundless, to be able, in fact, to laugh at my own fears!"

There was, so to speak, a ghastly kind of cheerfulness in the manner in which the stranger spoke, and Dick wondered greatly what it was that he so longed yet feared to look upon.

Venturing to creep even closer still, he watched with a keen eye the stranger's further movements.

The lantern was placed down upon the ground in such a manner as to throw its light in the direction required.

Then the stranger, advancing to the wall of the cavern, stooped down, and seized hold of a huge piece of rock.

Grasping it with both hands, he pulled and tugged with all his might, striving to dislodge it from its position.

As he did so, small masses of earth and stones fell continually upon him from the wall of the cavern, which, oddly enough, seemed to be composed of some soft material.

Heedless of all this, the stranger continued his frantic efforts.

Dick marvelled greatly at his strength, for the huge piece of rock was, inch by inch, drawn further out into the cavern.

At last, after incredible exertion, it was quite removed, and then a small opening was disclosed not much larger than would allow a man to crawl through it.

This the stranger, having picked up the lantern, prepared to do

He cast one hasty, timorous glance around, then, evidently nerving himself for a great effort, and summoning up all his courage, he crept through the opening.

As he disappeared, Dick drew closer, and endeavored to ascertain where the stranger had gone, and what it was he was looking for.

The opening in the side of the cavern was not of any great extent, and Dick caught sight of him only a few feet distant.

"Yes, yes," the stranger said, and his voice sounded odd and muffled, owing to the strange place he was in, "I know I have been needlessly terrifying myself! The evidences of my awful crime are safely hidden where they will never be found. I feel it—I know it! But yet, if I could only summon up my courage for one glance, I should then be sure—quite sure! And if I go away without, all my old tortures may return. I will do it!"

The last words were pronounced with great determination, and the stranger crept a little way further in.

Then he raised the lantern for a moment, turning its beams full before him.

Then Dick saw something which, when he afterwards came to consider upon it, he fully believed was the remains of some human being.

The glimpse he had was a most transient one—the stranger turned his lantern away almost instantly.

But then Dick's attention was distracted by a circumstance which was well calculated to do so.

He had noticed, on first approaching this opening in the cavern, that the soft earth fell down continually, and all at once he became conscious that the fall was greater every moment.

Then, beyond all doubt, he felt that this opening through which the stranger had passed was gradually closing up.

The earth above, unable to sustain its own weight, was rushing down.

Instinctively he drew back, and at the same moment he uttered a warning cry.

"Quick--quick!" he cried. "Escape—escape while you have yet time! This support of the cavern is falling in!"

A dead silence followed his words.

Then came a wild shriek and an awful, mocking laugh that raised many strange echoes in that gloomy place.

The lantern fell from the terrified stranger's trembling grasp, and it was extinguished instantly.

Almost at the same moment, with a hideous rush, the earth descended, and the opening in the wall of the cavern was choked completely up.

So suddenly did all this take place, and so singular was the whole affair, that Dick Turpin remained for some time motionless in the dark cavern, for the simple reason that he was unable to collect his faculties sufficiently to stir.

Then all at once there broke in upon him a perfect understanding of his own great danger.

He was in a huge cavern, from which, for aught he knew, there might be several modes of egress.

In the intense darkness that prevailed, how would it be possible for him to discover the right way out?

His heart beat rapidly, each throb seeming to send the blood with greater force into his brain.

He grew faint and dizzy.

"Courage, Dick," he muttered, at last—"courage! This will never do! I have only to preserve my coolness, and then in a little while all will be well."

Although he said this, Dick could scarcely bring himself to believe it; but as soon as he had finished speaking, he began to grope his way forwards, as he believed as nearly as possible in the direction of the exit from the cavern, through which he had so lately passed.

But the darkness altogether confused and baffled him.

Onwards—onwards he crawled, and it seemed to him as though he should never be able to reach the opposite side.

Could he but once place his hand on the rock-work he would then have better hopes.

At last he succeeded.

The walls were damp, slippery, and smooth.

He passed his hand rapidly over them as he advanced, and having taken many steps, he stopped to think, for no trace of the wished-for opening could he find.

CHAPTER CMLIX.

DICK TURPIN IS RECOGNISED AT THE FARM-HOUSE.

A FEELING of intense and horrible despair overspread Dick Turpin's heart.

He thought how fearful a thing it would be to remain pent up in the darkness of that cavern, unable to grope his way back again to daylight.

He raised his voice and cried aloud, but no response whatever, save the dull, mocking echo of his own voice, reached his ears.

Then, all at once, he recollected something, which it is wonderful indeed he could have forgotten for so long.

That was, that he had about his person the means of procuring a light, by the aid of which what would be more easy than to escape?

His anger with himself upon making this discovery knew no bounds—he was unable to account for such strange forgetfulness.

It is not at all wonderful, however, when it is considered how well calculated such an adventure as he had just met with was to throw the mind of anyone off its balance—in fact, while seeking to escape in the darkness he had, so to speak, confounded himself with the miserable denizen of that inner and smaller cavern.

For him there was no hope, and all the time while groping forward, Dick had fancied that the darkness took strange shapes, and in imagination he could see the stranger vainly endeavoring to effect his own release.

Having the prospect of the fate of this unhappy wretch so prominently before his mind deprived him of all his usual coolness and self-dependence.

Now, however, quite a reaction came over him, and he began hastily to feel in his pockets for the objects he required.

They were ready to his hand, and in a few moments

more, literally speaking, the darkness of the cavern was made visible by the flame of a tiny wax taper.

Dick waited till it had burnt up a little, then, the moment he cast his eyes around him, uttered a cry of surprise, in which satisfaction was strongly mingled.

In fact, only a few paces before him was, he believed, the very identical opening in the rock through which he had so recently made his way.

Even in the darkness, had he groped forward half a dozen steps at the utmost he would have discovered it.

Near the walls of the cavern the ground was damp and wet, so that every step he took left a distinct impression behind it.

Noticing this, he looked closely down at the flooring of the passage he had just discovered, and was rejoiced to find traces of recent footprints upon it.

With rapid, flying steps, he hurried on, and the next moment, with a sigh of unutterable, inexpressible relief, found himself once more standing in the open air.

He could scarcely believe even then in the reality of his escape and of the extraordinary events that had so recently occurred.

Did not the presence of the stranger and his awful fate seem more like a wild dream than aught else?

He was recalled to a full and perfect consciousness by hearing his name pronounced by a voice whose accents he knew full well.

He uttered a word in reply and hurried on.

Fain would he have kept from Maud the horrifying details of the scene he had witnessed, but she was persistent in her inquiries, and he had no resource but to tell her all.

She was overcome with horror and dismay, and when the final catastrophe was described, shuddered from head to foot.

"And—and," she exclaimed, with blanched lips, "do you really think that there is no means of freeing him from his present terrible situation?"

Dick shook his head.

"None whatever," he replied. "The nature is such that hundreds of tons of earth must have fallen down and choked up the mouth of the passage, and it would require the labor of many hands for a long period to open it again."

"And before that time——"

"He would be dead," added Dick, "if he be not so already."

"But his object in coming here?" said Maud—"what can have induced him to do so? How strange that he should walk thus to his own death!"

"Strange indeed! But from the muttered words I overheard, and from the momentary glimpses I obtained of the inner cavern, I feel sure that that man, whoever he may be, had murdered some one, and, in order to conceal his crime, had placed the remains of his victim there, blocking up the outlet with the huge mass of rock I spoke of."

"Horrible—horrible!"

"Truly so; but what a strange retribution there is in it all. I feel certain that the poor wretch had been haunted and terrified by continual apprehensions that the body of his poor victim was not safe—that by some means or other it had managed to escape; that feeling had grown and grown upon him until he could resist it no longer, and so, you see, he had made his way to this lonely spot, perhaps choosing to do so on this night of fearful storm, because he would then be more likely to be unobserved."

As she listened, Maud's terror seemed to grow greater and greater.

Probably she began now fully to realise the awful event.

She sank back slowly, and would have fallen had not Dick stretched out his arm to save her.

"This has been too much for you," he exclaimed; "I feared it would be, but you were so persistent, that I could not refuse."

"No—no," she murmured, feebly, "it is not that, Dick, so much that causes this dreadful feeling of faintness as it is the want of food."

"Of course it is!" cried Dick, whose pangs of hunger had for the time passed away—"of course it is! I forgot that. You shall not remain much longer without what you need."

"No—no, Dick, do not—do not leave me!"

"But I must. Believe me, you will be quite safe. I will hasten back with all possible despatch. There is no difficulty in the matter—none whatever; I shall soon return."

Not without much difficulty did Dick succeed in tearing himself away.

Having at last parted, however, he hurried quickly towards the foot of the pathway, and ascended with much greater speed than was at all consistent with his personal safety.

Full of eagerness, he bounded on, never pausing until close to the brink of the excavation.

Then he stopped a little to recover his breath and to glance around him.

As he fully expected, yet, nevertheless, to his great satisfaction, he found that no human being was in sight.

Cautiously, then, he raised himself up, until he fairly stood upon his feet in the meadow.

The night was still squally and dark; every now and then the wind blew furiously, and at times a few drops of rain would be carried towards the earth with terrific violence.

"So much the better," muttered Dick, as he took note of the aspect of the weather—"so much the better. I am less likely to meet with any person abroad."

Quite at random he struck across the meadow, hoping ere long to find himself near to a small village, or else some habitation where he should be able to obtain the articles he required.

Presently, feeling certain that no one was near, he increased his speed, for he knew full well how lonely Maud would be left to herself at the bottom of the excavation, and was desirous of returning to her as soon as possible.

As he advanced he looked scrutinisingly around him, and at length uttered an ejaculation of satisfaction.

Far away in the darkness he could perceive a faint twinkling light, evidently proceeding from the window of some habitation.

What kind of place this might be he had of course no idea, yet he hastened towards it full of hope.

From its position, and the nature of the ground around, he was not long in coming to the conclusion that it was a farm-house, and having made this discovery he paused awhile, scarcely knowing whether to apply there for what he wanted.

But time was precious, and as he looked about him he could not see a trace of another human dwelling.

It might be that he would have to travel miles before he came to a village.

This probability decided him, and at once quickening his steps, he made his way in a straight line to the farm-house.

Having reached it, he knocked loudly at the door.

Some delay took place before it was opened.

A ruddy-faced girl appeared upon the threshold, who invited him to enter.

The scene that now met Dick's view was one that contrasted very strongly with that which he had just left.

A place more bereft of comforts than the old quarry could scarcely be imagined, and certainly it would be hard indeed to find a place where they were more manifest than at this farm-house.

The huge kitchen was lighted up by the ruddy glare of the fire piled high upon the hearth.

Around were seated several persons of all ages, chiefly comprising the family of the farmer.

An eager gaze was turned upon Dick as soon as he entered.

It was quite an event for anyone of his appearance to cross their threshold.

Dick took off his hat and bowed politely.

"Well, sir," said a voice, proceeding from the chimney corner, "will you be good enough to tell us what you want?"

Dick looked towards the fire, and there saw a small red-faced man seated in a high-backed, old-fashioned chair.

"I have come to ask a favor," said Dick. "It is that you will supply me with a basket of provisions, for which I am willing to pay you liberally."

This probably was about the strangest request that anyone of Dick's appearance could possibly make.

He thought so himself, and wondered what reason he could give for making it.

He was rewarded by a general stare of astonishment, and then the old farmer, slowly removing his pipe from his mouth, echoed:

"A basket of provisions?"

"Yes," said Dick—"a large one. You wonder, no doubt, that I should ask for such a thing, but the fact is I want it for a poor, almost starving family, who have rendered me a service, and I take this way of repaying them."

The farmer could scarcely refuse compliance with this demand, so he answered:

"We have no objection, sir, certainly! What would you like to take?"

"That I leave to you," he responded. "Fill up the basket with whatever you please."

He produced a handful of money as he spoke, and then he noticed, with some surprise, that all fixed an eager, hungry look upon the coins, more especially the old farmer.

The task of filling the basket was now proceeded with, and Dick, jingling the money in his hand, asked what he should pay for it.

To this there came no response.

"Well, then," he said, "take this guinea—that surely will suffice. The remainder you can divide among your young ones."

"Ah! sir," said the farmer, as he took the coin, "you are happy!"

Dick smiled doubtfully.

"What a thing it is," continued the old man, "to be possessed of money! Here have I been toiling all my life, and behold the result. I have had one bad season after another, until to-night, when preparing myself for rent day, which is to-morrow, I am short of many pounds."

"Indeed?" said Dick, thoughtfully.

"Yes," said the farmer. "And the worst of it is, I have mortgaged my property to one who covets it for himself. Any failure of payment on my part will cause utter ruin—we shall be driven forth quite destitute. I am convinced he would show no pity. Hitherto I have managed, in some fashion or other, to meet my engagements; now I see not the remotest prospect of it—nothing but beggary stares us in the face."

"I am sorry," said Dick, "to hear of your misfortunes, and sorry, also, I cannot assist you; otherwise, I would gladly do so. Yet, in return for the kindness you have done me to-night—which is, perhaps, a greater one than you imagine—I am willing to lend you whatever money I have about me, and you can repay me when better times arrive."

The farmer made some faint and feeble protest against receiving money from a stranger, but Dick took not the slightest notice of his words.

It will be remembered that he had not a very large sum about him, yet he counted it out to the last guinea.

"There," he said, "take it and welcome. When I hear that you are in better circumstances I will come back and claim it."

With these words, Dick rose abruptly to his feet, for he saw the basket had been brought.

He picked it up at once, and, unheeding the cries that were made for him to remain, he opened the door and passed out into the darkness.

CHAPTER SIXTY.

THE FARMER'S SON RESOLVES TO DISCOVER DICK TURPIN'S HIDING-PLACE.

No sooner had the door closed behind Dick Turpin than a youth, who had been sitting in a dark corner, rose suddenly, and came to the fire.

He thrust his hand into his pocket and produced a paper, at which he glanced eagerly, spelling it over to himself word by word.

So much absorbed were the rest by the strange incident which had just occurred that they paid no attention to him, nor did he attract their notice until he exclaimed, with loud vehemence:

"I thought so—I thought so. Father, you have let a prize slip through your fingers."

"A prize?" repeated the farmer, gazing at the money in his hand.

"Yes. Don't look at those few paltry guineas. You might have had two thousand and more if we had only been a little quicker. That man who has just left is Dick Turpin, the highwayman—the description is exact. He is hiding somewhere close at hand—that's why he wanted the provisions."

"Well—well," said the farmer, "he behaved liberally enough to me, and in a manner that I imagine few else would, and as he has never done me or mine any harm in his life I wish him none."

"But, father," said the boy, "you have always called me an idle, skulking rascal; now you will find that in point of cleverness I shall be a match for any of you. I have made up my mind to find out where this Dick Turpin is hiding, and I will do it! Don't you know the reward is offered for him alive or dead, and I'll watch my chance, and fetch him down with this. It will be easy enough to say afterwards it was done in self-defence, and no one will trouble themselves to disprove it."

While he spoke, this hopeful son, whose disposition, being so foreign to that of his parents, had caused continual unhappiness, stepped up on to a chair, and reached down from over the mantelpiece a large double-barrelled horse pistol, which all knew well enough was constantly kept carefully loaded.

"Well, Jack," said the farmer, "you are joking sure? Have you no sense of gratitude or humanity left? Didn't that man do for us all he could? and yet you would go out and murder him!"

"You're a fool, father," said Jack, as he bounded towards the door, "and you'd better be civil if you want to make a friend of me. Your troubles have all been brought upon you by soft-heartedness, and serve you right! When I have got the money I fancy you will alter your tone towards me."

"No—no, Jack, never—never! Nothing would tempt me to touch one farthing of money so obtained!"

"Then there would be the more for me," said Jack, putting on his hat preparatory to leaving the farmhouse.

But the farmer rose quickly to his feet, and said:

"Jack, you have always set me at defiance, but now I will use my authority—I will be minded!"

"Catch me if you can!" was the response. "I'm off, and when I come back I shall be worth more than two thousand pounds! I will find him if it takes me a month; he cannot be far away."

With these words, Jack, having flung open the door, bounded out, and was in a moment lost to view in the darkness.

The farmer and his family gathered around the threshold in a dense throng.

They appealed to the boy to return, their voices going into one chorus, but the sounds were borne away upon the wind, and left unheeded.

"It is useless," said the old man. "He has gone, and all the harm that I wish him is, that he may fail in his villanous design. For my own part, I will take good care he never stands beneath my roof again."

And if to show practically how firm he was in this determination, the farmer shut the door, and closely barricaded it.

Of all this, of course, Dick Turpin was quite ignorant, otherwise he might not have stepped across the field in so confident a manner as he did.

All the way back to the quarry he was indeed congratulating himself upon the fortunate turn affairs had taken.

He considered that by promptly rendering up his purse he had secured the gratitude of the farmer and his family, and that if by any chance they found out who he was that they would not betray him.

The darkness of the night was such that Dick had some little difficulty in finding his way back to the quarry, therefore it is no wonder that Jack should see nothing of him.

Most certainly, however, was this ungovernable boy a foe to be dreaded.

With rapid strides, Dick descended the pathway, and no sooner did he reach the bottom than he heard a faint, low neigh.

Directly afterwards, despite the darkness, he perceived Black Bess standing close to him.

She uttered again a neighing sound, which almost resembled a cry of distress.

Then, turning round, she led the way across the quarry.

Dick followed her with a foreboding heart.

He feared some evil had befallen Maud.

Reaching, at length, the spot where he had left her, his presentiments were verified, for he found she was lying upon the ground in a state of total insensibility—so total that it seemed like death itself.

With much difficulty, Dick restored her.

Her joy was great at finding he had returned in safety—so great that another relapse seemed imminent.

Dick, knowing full well what had produced her swoon, persuaded her to eat, and in a short time he soon perceived that she was better.

The remainder of the night passed away devoid of another incident.

But when the morning came, both Dick and Maud looked around them with more contented eyes than they had done hitherto.

The supply of provisions Dick had brought was not large, yet they fancied by care they would be able to make it last during their stay in this place.

That day, too, and the night which followed it, passed away without any kind of interruption whatever.

On the next morning, soon after daylight, Maud uttered a faint cry of alarm.

Dick turned in the direction she pointed out, and saw, near the top of the zigzag path, the form of a youth, who carried something carefully in his hand, but what it was they could not from that distance make out.

"Another visitor," said Dick, who little guessed who it was or what was his errand. "Well, no matter, Maud, if he brings no one with him all will be well."

"He seems alone."

"He does; and what can be his motive for coming here passes my comprehension."

As the reader will guess, this was no other than the farmer's son, Jack, who had passed the time which had elapsed since we saw him last in searching carefully all around.

The country for miles about was well known to him, and there were many places that he knew of well calculated to serve as hiding-places.

These he had visited first, for, oddly enough, the quarry never once occurred to him.

When, however, he recollected the existence of this place, he felt a conviction that he was at last on the right track, and still carrying the huge holster pistol, he made his way towards it.

He had almost shrank from making a descent into the gloomy recesses of this place, and even now, when he had so strong a motive to urge him on, he hesitated.

This was not surprising, for it required no ordinary amount of nerve and coolness to attempt to walk down so narrow and slippery a path.

Growing stronger in resolution, however, he at length began to descend.

Dick watched him as he came lower and lower, still looking more like a tiny puppet than a human being.

All at once, a shriek escaped Maud's lips, drowned by the loud, hoarse shriek that Dick gave utterance to.

From some cause or other—who could tell what?—the boy Jack in his descent had lost his footing.

Whether it was that he was seized by sudden vertigo, or whether his foot slipped upon the treacherous moss which overgrew the rockwork, they could not tell. Certain it is that, after a frantic but vain attempt to retain his balance, he plunged headlong into the depths of the quarry.

In his fall, he struck from time to time against the many rough projections, and each time with a dull, sickening sound, perfectly audible to Maud and Dick.

Finally, he dropped into a stunted tree, where he remained for a second or two, then fell heavily to the earth.

Dick at once rushed forward to his assistance, though he feared no human aid could avail him.

He expected, indeed, to find nothing but a mangled, shattered corpse.

What was his surprise, then, to hear a faint, deep groan?

This caused him to increase his pace; but when he saw the fearful object lying among the rocks he felt that it would indeed have been a mercy had death come upon him earlier.

Consciousness had not left the unhappy wretch.

Although he had struck so many times upon the rocks, yet the only effect of this was to bruise and lacerate his flesh, and the continual bounding from point to point broke the full force of the fall.

Had he remained among the branches of the tree it is possible that he might have recovered from his hurts.

That last fall on to the mass of broken stones, whereon he lay, had wrought fearful injury.

"My poor lad," said Dick, compassionately, "what can I do to aid you?"

With a painful movement, the boy's face was turned towards him.

No sooner did he catch sight of Dick's countenance than he uttered a cry of despair.

"Curses on my luck!" he said. "I have found you at last; but the discovery is no good—it comes too late!"

"Found me?" repeated Dick, recoiling in astonishment.

"Yes!" said the boy, suddenly and painfully raising himself. "And take that—it will at least be a satisfaction to me!"

While speaking, he suddenly raised a pistol, to which, during his fall, he had clung with a grasp like that of death.

With the speed of thought, he placed it on full cock and pulled the trigger.

No explosion followed, however, for the powder had been shaken out of the pan.

He dropped the weapon with a curse.

Then, with an awful shriek that seemed to pierce through and through Dick Turpin's brain, the wretched lad threw up his arms and fell backwards on the stones quite dead.

CHAPTER CMLXI.

DICK TURPIN FINDS HIMSELF THREATENED WITH A FRESH DANGER.

"ANOTHER tragedy!" Dick murmured, as soon as he had satisfied himself that life was really extinct. "How strange too!" he added. "He was evidently in pursuit of me, yet surely never so mad as to dream of effecting my capture single-handed?"

A fragment of paper was protruding from one of the pockets of the dead youth, and Dick, impelled by a curiosity which he did not attempt to resist, stooped down and possessed himself of it. Spreading it open, he then found that it was one of the bills offering a reward for himself and his comrades, accompanied by a full description of the appearance of each.

"He was dazzled by the hope of obtaining so large a sum," Dick muttered. "Well, all is over with him now, and I imagine I have little to fear from anyone else. If he had confided his secret to anyone he would not have visited this place alone. Why he should seek for me here baffles me completely."

This might well seem mysterious to Dick, who did not notice Jack while in the farm-house, yet when he came to ponder upon the circumstance, he came without much difficulty to the conclusion that he must be some member of the farmer's family.

Long and anxious was the consultation that took place between Maud and himself upon the subject.

Maud was for quitting the quarry at once, but Dick lingered.

He felt somehow that while there he was safe, and that if he attempted to find any other place of shelter he would only run into greater danger.

The event proved that he was right.

Time passed on very slowly and very wearily for them, but it did pass, and at length the morning of the last day dawned.

"Only a few hours more, Maud," said Dick, "and we shall quit this place, where we have remained unmolested

rupted so long—only a few hours. And I trust that the others have been as fortunate as ourselves."

Dick had long made every preparation for starting, and so he had nothing else to do but to sit down idly and wait for the coming of night.

Under these circumstances, this one day seemed positively longer than all the rest of the time which had preceded it.

To them, it appeared as if night would never come.

At last the sun sank, and so great was Dick's impatience to depart that he could scarcely control himself so far as to wait until dusk had overspread the earth.

The fate of the farmer's son was to them a caution and a warning as to the manner in which they made the ascent.

For himself, Dick felt little apprehension; all his fears were centred in Maud.

She, however, feeling how much depended on her own coolness, tried her best to retain her calmness of mind, and so by this means the ascent was at length accomplished.

On gaining the level ground once more, both gave a long, deep-drawn sigh of relief.

After that, Dick's spirits seemed to return to him in a wonderful manner.

"Come, Maud," he cried, "all is well now: and look, Black Bess is as impatient as we are for a gallop! We are a long way from Hampstead, but not so far but that we shall reach it long before the appointed time. No matter, I could wait better there than elsewhere."

Carefully considering his whereabouts, Dick determined on the direction he ought to take.

Then, placing Maud on the back of Black Bess, he mounted also, and, despite her double burden, the bonny mare set forward at a speed that few steeds could equal.

When Dick felt himself in his accustomed place, and found that he was getting over the ground in such gallant style, his heart throbbed with joy, and he experienced that elation of spirits that can scarcely be produced by anything else than a good ride on horseback.

He seemed at once to throw off all his cares and fears, and his manner had a proportionately cheering effect upon his companion.

He looked on all objects with hopeful eyes.

The darkness rapidly increased; but he trusted entirely to the sagacity of Black Bess to keep clear of all obstacles lying in her path, and therefore made no attempt to restrain her progress.

Under these circumstances, the rough, open country was passed over rapidly in perfect safety; but had Dick taken the management of the reins entirely into his own hands the chances are a thousand to one that he would not have guided her so far without accident.

This he had learned by long experience, and therefore felt none of that timidity which would naturally oppress anyone in a similar situation.

At last he paused near a large white gate, on the other side of which could be seen the smooth high-road.

He listened for some moments, but not the faintest sound was carried to his ears.

"I have a good mind to risk it," he muttered.

"Risk what?" was Maud's anxious inquiry.

"Why, a gallop along the high-road. It will not fatigue Black Bess half so much as the heavy ground she will otherwise have to pass over, and of late, you must know, her food has been none of the best."

"Use your own judgment," answered Maud. "You ought to know far better than I what to do under such circumstances."

"Then we will try the road," said Dick, decidedly. "You must remember that the hour is very early yet—too soon almost for the officers to expect to find us abroad; no doubt they will be off their guard."

With these words Dick slipped down and unfastened the gate.

He held it open to allow Black Bess to pass through, then secured it again by means of the chain attached to the gate-post.

Once more he mounted, and Black Bess, with a neigh of satisfaction, resumed her former speed, and it was soon manifest that she galloped now with much less exertion.

Fortunately the road was deserted, and this circumstance, strange as it may seem now, was then nothing to be wondered at, for so unsafe were all the highways, and so liable were all passengers to be interrupted by the police officers, that none save those who were compelled by pressing circumstances ventured to travel in the darkness.

Suddenly, however, Dick paused.

He brought Black Bess completely to a standstill, then bent forward and listened.

"What is it?" Maud asked.

"Hush—hush!"

Dick listened for a few seconds, then replied:

"Horsemen are on the road before us—a long way it is true, yet they are approaching, and ere long shall meet."

"But there will be danger then."

"No doubt there will—great danger, for the probility is that these horsemen are police officers."

Maud looked terrified.

"Don't be alarmed," said Dick—"all is well now that we have timely notice of their approach."

"But what shall you do?"

"Seek out a shelter. If we can hide ourselves somewhere, the officers will pass by, and then we can resume our journey."

Dick looked around him while he spoke.

The most noticable object in the landscape was a picturesque-looking little village church, and on this his attention at once settled.

"There is the place," he said—"there!"

"That church?" she echoed, in some surprise.

"Yes. Having no suspicions of our presence here, the officers will never dream of looking for us there. Quick—in a few moments we shall be out of sight."

Dick had satisfied himself that there was no one at hand to observe his movements, and so he made his way at once in a direct line to the church.

The piece of ground surrounding it was bounded by a low stone wall—so low that anyone could with ease have surmounted it, and Dick knew that Black Bess would clear it easily.

She faced the obstacle, and then gave one bound into the air and alighted upon the soft earth in the graveyard.

"Quick—quick," Dick cried—"on—on! I can hear the officers more plainly now, and we must be out of sight before they come much nearer!"

Black Bess picked her way among the tombstones, and at last reached the huge overhanging porch of the church.

Dick dismounted and assisted Maud to alight, then taking Black Bess by the bridle he led her fairly into the porch, and stood with her close to the church door.

A very deep gloom prevailed about this spot, so dark indeed were the shadows cast, that Dick felt perfectly certain that although the church was near the roadway no eye could possibly detect him.

Nevertheless, both Maud and himself listened with a certain amount of anxiety to the clatter of the horses' hoofs, which increased in loudness at every second.

On the horsemen came at a slashing pace.

They we not visible, being concealed from view by a tall, thickly-planted hedge.

"Another moment," Dick whispered, "and they will have passed."

Scarcely had he uttered the words than he was sensible that the whole troop had slackened pace, and then immediately afterwards they all drew up their horses in front of the rustic wooden gate opening from the high-road into the churchyard.

Maud could scarcely suppress a shriek, but clinging tightly to Dick's arm, she whispered, with white lips:

"Surely—surely, Dick, they have not seen us enter this place! If they have, what is to be done?"



[DICK TURPIN AND MAUD TAKE SHELTER IN THE CHURCH PORCH.]

CHAPTER CMLXII.

RELATES HOW THE POLICE OFFICERS MADE TOM KING A PRISONER, AND DESCRIBES THE MEANS THEY ADOPTED TO KEEP HIM SECURE.

It is necessary now that we should go back and describe the incidents that befel Tom King, for, as the reader will remember, he was left in a very ticklish situation.

Above him was the sky, on three sides of him stone walls, so high as to be insurmountable, and in front a dense throng of police officers, who completely choked up the roadway.

A cry of gratified surprise and triumph escaped their lips as soon as they came round the bend of the lane and saw the fugitive standing at bay, with all retreat cut off.

They pulled up in some confusion; but in the twinkling of an eye a pistol appeared in every hand.

It was the greatest wonder in the world that these officers did not save themselves all further trouble by simultaneously firing a volley at the highwayman as he sat so calmly before them.

The reward offered was the same whether the prisoner was captured alive or dead.

Had the officers belonged to London, or had been any of those who had been put to so much trouble by the highwaymen, there is no doubt that Tom's career would have been here cut short.

But this was their first adventure of the kind.

They came from a neighboring town, and had great confidence in their own powers.

Instead, therefore, of shooting Tom down like a dog, one of them, who seemed to hold command of the rest, cried out:

"The game's up now—the race is at an end! Give in quietly, and I will take care that you are not hurt."

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To this pacific speech Tom only replied by raising his pistols.

"I hold the lives of two men here," he said, in a calm voice, "and I warn you, if you do not allow me to pass by unmolested, I will discharge both my weapons, and do my best to cut a way through you."

"Pooh—pooh!" said the officer who had before spoken—"none of that nonsense! If you are not a natural born fool you must know I have only to say the word, and a volley from these pistols will bring you to the ground; not that I want to have your blood upon my hands. I shall be content by capturing you, and handing you over to the proper authorities."

Tom saw at once that this was a dogged, determined man, and could not be dealt with in any ordinary fashion.

Lowering the muzzles of his pistols, he said:

"But if I surrender, what guarantee have I that you will use me fairly?"

"Whatever guarantee you like. I have heard of you before, and if you will give me your solemn word not to attempt to escape I will not handcuff you, or confine your limbs in any way."

"I shall give no such promise as that, rely upon it."

"Then I must take all the precautions I can to keep you safe. Now, then, make your choice. You must know that you are wholly in our power, so which will you choose—death or capture?"

"Capture," answered Tom, at once, across whose fertile brain a plan of escape had flashed—"capture, of course, for then I do stand a chance of my life."

"Well, so you may," answered the officer; "but you will not escape from us—I'll wager my head you won't! But come, you shall not say I have not dealt reasonably with you, so decide. Will you surrender quietly and easily, or shall we use force? We are ten to one, so what could you do on your own behalf?"

"Nothing," said Tom, assuming a more dejected air than he felt. "I give in."

It was plain to see that this was just the answer the officer wanted.

"Very good," he said. "Just give me your pistols, and you must not refuse to submit to any measures that I may take in order to keep you in safety. If you do, it will be quite in vain. Now, then," he added, addressing his men, "get the rope ready, and two of you pull out the largest plank of wood that you can find in yonder fence."

He pointed along the lane while he spoke.

Two men darted off to obey this command, leaving Tom filled with wonder as to what they intended to do with a plank.

"Aha!" said the officer, rubbing his hands gleefully, "those London fellows have made a great fuss, but I fancy we have done them nicely after all! How mortified they will feel! Ah, it's good! It's an honor to all of us!"

The police officers looked vastly pleased, and then immediately afterwards the two men appeared, carrying with them a piece of oak planking of tolerable size.

"The very thing," said the officer—"it could not be better. Now then, Tom, dismount."

Tom complied, but rather reluctantly.

He almost regretted that he had chosen his present course, and wished that he had run the risk of breaking a way through the officers' ranks.

Now he came to look at the men, he fancied it might have been done.

He was still more in this frame of mind when he found himself suddenly seized by powerful hands, and, in spite of the resistance and struggles that he made, was bound round with ropes, and tied very securely with his back on to the plank.

Most especially were they careful to secure his hands and feet, and as they outnumbered him to such an extent they had little difficulty in doing so.

At length, when their work was completed, the men stood aside in order to allow their chief to take a look at what they had done.

His eyes grew bright with triumphant joy.

"That's the ticket! Tom, my boy," he said, addressing his captive, "how do you feel now?—not very comfortable, I should think, and by no means sanguine of making an escape! An escape? Aha! I fancy you or anyone else getting out of Joe Blogden's clutches! I don't mind telling you my plans, Mr. Tom, I feel so sure of keeping you safe. I mean to carry you all the way from here to Newgate just in the position you now are, and no pretext of yours, no matter how good, shall induce me to loosen one of the ropes. There, now, what do you think of that?"

Tom's heart failed him, for he felt that his chance of escaping was so slight as to be scarcely a chance at all.

Yet he would not allow the officers to perceive what was the true state of his mind, so, in as off-handed a tone as he was able to assume, he cried:

"You're not such a bad fellow after all, Mr. Blogden, and I'll do you a good turn one of these days."

"Aha," said the chief officer, "I am sadly afraid that you will take a turn rather sooner than you expect or desire, by-the-way."

The officers all laughed in chorus.

Tom knew this was intended as a joke upon his being turned off at Tyburn, but he would not understand it so, and replied:

"Yes—I shall take a turn for the better, and, rely upon it, I shall owe you no ill will at all. You have done your duty as pleasantly as a man could."

The officer made a mock bow.

"But," said Tom, "I'll wager you any amount you like that, in spite of all your care and pains, I shall give you the slip before we are half-way to London!"

"Well—well, we shall see," said Blogden, pleasantly. "I am not at all alarmed, and so I give you free leave to try your best."

Then turning round to his men, he said:

"Come—come, we have all the rest of the day before us for our little enterprise, and if we stick to it we shall manage to reach London late to-night."

"But what do you wish us to do, Mr. Blogden?"

"Why, four of you will dismount, and lift that plank on to your shoulders, and carry the prisoner in that manner. Your horses will be taken care of in the meanwhile, and when you have gone a certain distance you shall be relieved, and four others will take your places."

It was evident that the men scarcely liked the idea of this march to London, and Tom King noticed the effect with a great amount of satisfaction.

Already his brain was busy with devising a means by which he hoped to regain his freedom.

His reflections were somewhat disturbed by the officers coming to him and raising the plank in the air.

They were by no means so careful in doing this as they might have been, and even when the corners of the plank were carefully settled upon their shoulders, Tom King found it about as unpleasant a mode of conveyance as could have been thought of.

Mr. Blogden was in the highest possible spirits.

He rode along by the side of the prisoner, and as he drew his cutlass and placed it against his shoulder, he made quite an imposing appearance.

One turn of the rope had gone quite across Tom's throat, and was secured underneath the plank, which compelled him to keep his head in a very uncomfortable position, for if he tried to raise or move it in the least the pressure on his throat became so great as to render breathing impossible.

"I am helpless enough now," he thought. "I wonder what is to be the end of it?"

As they journeyed on, and turned from the lane to the high-road, a fresh danger occurred to Tom's mind, which diminished his chances of escaping most materially.

Indeed his courage failed him when he thought of it.

Before these officers could go far, they would, beyond little doubt, meet with some others, who would join them at once, and then, with the number of his guard doubled, or very likely trebled, how was Tom to slip away from so many watchful eyes?

A cold, clammy feeling came over his heart; but in a few moments it passed away, leaving behind it a much better kind of feeling.

This was a determination to watch carefully for the very first opportunity that presented itself for him to make his escape.

Somewhat to his surprise, they travelled on along the

highway without meeting with a single person; but, then, the hour was early—just after sunrise in fact, and at that hour it was not likely many people would be abroad.

The first four officers carried their burden well; but at length they grew too tired to proceed further so four others took their places.

In this way they journeyed on at what was, taking all things into consideration, a very tolerable rate of speed.

Their first halt was made at a road-side inn, a little after eight o'clock in the morning.

This inn had somewhat a lonely situation, for neither human beings nor dwellings could be traced in its vicinity, for it seemed as though it depended altogether upon passers-by for custom.

Upon seeing so strange a procession approaching, every inmate of the place turned out at once into the roadway to catch a glimpse of it, and as they viewed it from the distance many and various were the speculations indulged in by them as to the nature of the object the officers were carrying.

When it was found to be a man, they concluded at once that he was dead.

Great, therefore, was their surprise when the officers, stopping in front of the building, put down their burden and they discovered it was a live man, securely bound with cords.

The plank was placed in a rather slanting position against the tall, massive sign-post which stood in front of the inn.

The position was a very uncomfortable one for Tom King, yet he felt grateful for the change.

It was irksome to remain for so long in a horizontal position.

Moreover, as the officers walked along with irregular steps, his head continually went bump, bump upon the hard wood.

He was well aware that expostulation on the subject would be quite in vain, and therefore said not a word, contenting himself with catching an occasional glimpse of the countenance of the chief officer, Joe Blogden.

He had noticed, as they journeyed on, that the expression of his features had gradually undergone a great and remarkable change.

That aspect of joviality which he had at first worn quite disappeared.

His forehead was furrowed up into reflective wrinkles, his mouth worked as though he was perpetually saying something to himself, and his eyes shone with a bright and peculiar glitter.

What could be passing through his mind Tom had not the remotest idea, nor did the officer drop one hint that served him as a clue.

The apprehensions and curiosity of the dwellers at the inn were quickly put an end to by a statement made by the officers to the effect that they had just been successful in capturing the notorious highwayman, Tom King, and that they had adopted the means they saw for keeping him in safe custody.

The officers were then highly complimented upon the ingenuity they had displayed.

Although pressingly invited by the landlord to enter the inn, they declined to do so, but had a loaf and a huge piece of cheese brought outside, together with some ale, and on this they regaled themselves in the open air.

Tom felt that one draught of the ale would be a most wonderful refresher, but scorned to ask his captors for even so small a favor as that.

Joe Blogden was not, however, a very ill-natured sort of officer, and therefore, when his own wants were supplied, he turned his thoughts towards the prisoner.

"Don't look so down, Tom!" he exclaimed, smacking his lips after the last draught of ale. "You seem quite rueful! What do you say to a drop of this old October? Upon my life, it's the best I ever tasted."

"It would be very welcome indeed," answered Tom; "and if you will put your hand to my waistcoat pocket you will find a guinea there. I am sorry to give you so much trouble," he added, with a smile, "but I cannot help it."

"You mean you cannot help yourself," said Blogden, coming towards him.

"Just as you like. But with that guinea, suppose you order a drop more ale all round, and let me have a mouthful of it, for I assure you I am choked with the dust."

Joe Blogden loved a drop of ale, and he had not sufficient command over himself to resist indulging himself in it whenever he had the opportunity; and as for the rest of the officers, Tom readily believed they were nothing loath.

But for this love of liquor, Joe Blogden might have asked himself the question as to how far it was expedient to supply ale to his men.

If his suspicions had been on the alert as they ought to have been, he would have perceived in this offer of Tom King's the first move towards an ultimate attempt at escape.

He did not, however, but with a loud voice called for more ale all round, insisting that Tom should drink a whole quart of it, and declaring that he, Tom King, was the very best fellow in the world.

Presently the ale was brought.

Then Joe Blogden, taking a large foaming measure full, walked towards Tom King and put it to his lips.

"There," he said, "drink away, old fellow—it will do you good."

Tom did drink, and that right heartily; but he did not finish the measure.

Some little time was occupied in discussing this second supply of ale, but at last Joe Blogden gave the order to mount.

Ere doing so, however, he turned towards his prisoner and thus addressed him:

"Tom King, old fellow," he said, "you are one of a good sort, and the more I see of you the better I like you, and that's what makes me repeat the offer that you refused a little time ago."

"What offer was that?" asked Tom.

"Why, you must be aware," continued Blogden, "that while you are tied to that plank and watched by us, you cannot possibly stand a ghost of a chance of escaping, therefore is it not a pity that you should suffer so much discomfort and inconvenience? Now, as I said before, if you will give me your word to make no attempt to escape, you may mount your own horse and trot comfortably by the side of us."

CHAPTER CMLXIII.

TOM KING IS FRUSTRATED IN HIS EFFORT TO ESCAPE.

"I SHOULD be very glad indeed to change places," said Tom King; "the back of my horse would be much more comfortable than this board; but you must not ask me to give you any such promise, because you may depend that I shall take the first opportunity I can find to get away."

"Then stay where you are, and be d—d to you!" replied Blogden, angry that this considerate offer should be refused.

"Don't lose your temper," said Tom. "I am all right, and if you will let me get on the back of my horse, I shall be much obliged to you."

"No," said Blogden, in a sharp, angry voice—"you have made your decision, and you shall abide by it! While you are there I know you are safe, and shall not trouble myself about anything else but keeping you so."

Now the cause of Joe Blogden's anger was that Tom should refuse to mount his steed under the conditions named because, had he consented, much fatigue and dissatisfaction would have been saved his men, and, moreover, the journey to London would have been performed in about one-fourth of the time it must necessarily occupy under the present condition of affairs.

Like a wise man, however, he resolved to say no more upon this subject, but, having seen his men mounted, except those who were appointed to carry the plank, he turned towards the landlord of the inn, and said:

"We are anxious to get to London. Which do you consider the best and shortest road?"

"Well, I can't say," was the landlord's reply. "I can tell you which is the best, and I can tell you which is the shortest."

"Well—well," said the officer, "that's what I mean—the shortest is sure to be the best."

"I don't know about that," responded the landlord,

"for you must understand that if you follow this highway for about eighteen or twenty miles, it will bring you out upon the London Road, which it crosses. You will then only have to turn to your right, and your destination lies before you. And the road is as good every inch of the way as it is about here, so you cannot deny but what it is the best route."

"Yes, so it is," said Blogden, "only it is such a confounded long way. Yonder is the direction to London. Is there no road by which we could take our way across the country, and so cut off that tremendous corner? It's quite out of our way to ride straight on for ten miles and then turn round."

"Well, there is a road," said the landlord, "and that's the shortest; but, understand me very distinctly, it is by no means the best."

"What's the matter with it?"

"Well, then, it's a cross-country road, and I daresay you know what that means. In some parts it is broad and level, and as good as this, but in others so narrow that only about two of you could ride abreast, and with the mud so deep that it will take those who are walking up to their knees."

"Pooh—pooh!" said Blogden, "not after such a season of dry weather as we have had! The road may be muddy, but it is not so bad as you would make it."

"Well," said the landlord, rather huffed, "perhaps you know best."

"Well, but how much shorter is this road?" persisted Blogden. "If we go that way, how many miles shall we save? That's the point I wish to arrive at."

"Well," replied the landlord, "the road is not very direct—it winds and curves about a great deal, but yet I should say you would save ten or a dozen miles."

"Half a day's journey!" ejaculated the officer, in astonishment, for he did not expect that the difference would prove to be so great. "Why, that's the road for us, by all means, even though it should not be quite so comfortable underfoot as this."

"You ought to be the best judge of that," answered the landlord; "but if I had a good nag before me, I know which one I should prefer."

"No doubt," said the officer. "But just tell me whereabouts this road branches off?"

"About three-quarters of a mile further on. You will see an old finger-post up there, which shows you the way. The entrance is dark and narrow, but after you have gone a little way you will find it wider and the ground much improved."

"Thanks!" said Blogden. "That's the way for me, and for you too, my lads! I should think you are not so fond of walking that you prefer to go a dozen miles further round."

The officers assented at once.

"Well, then, as we are all ready," cried Blogden, "we will start. Good-bye!"

With these words he mounted his horse, drew his cutlass again, and assumed the same attitude as before.

He looked very sulkily and angrily at Tom King, and so did the men, for he was considered to be the cause of the present arrangement.

However, the cavalcade set off without any grumbling being heard.

The cross-road was found with an old battered finger-post at the corner of it, just as the landlord had described.

But the entrance was dark and narrow, and, after going a few feet down it, they came to a kind of slough or quagmire caused by the waters of a rivulet that flowed across the road, but which at the present time was almost dried up, leaving its soft, oozy bed exposed.

Through this the officers with difficulty floundered, and when they emerged on the other side the boots of those who were on foot presented a very dirty, disagreeable appearance, for the mud was green and slimy.

However, they marched onward, hoping ere long to reach an improved part of the road.

Here again the landlord proved to be right.

Without the occurrence of any particular event, they continued their slow march.

Tom King began to feel his head ache terribly, owing to the number of bumps it had from the hard plank.

This might, too, be partly ascribed to the ale of which he had partaken, and if so he felt content, for he judged it would not be without its effect upon his captors, no matter how well seasoned their stomachs might be.

Of course, his mind was still intent upon making his escape, though how this was to be effected he could not at present decide.

When changing bearers, the officers generally paused for a few minutes, placing him, or, rather, the plank, up against a tree, or fence, or whatever might come nearest to hand; and for these brief periods of rest Tom was inexpressibly grateful.

He was chiefly occupied on these occasions in watching the countenance of Joe Blogden, which had again changed, and now presented that peculiar, hungry, anxious look that he had before observed upon it, only that this aspect seemed intensified.

There was one question, however, which Blogden and the officers recollected they had omitted to ask the landlord, and this was, what inns they should meet with upon this road, and how far they were apart.

Now there seemed to be no chance of obtaining this knowledge, for they had not met with or seen a single human being of any description; and it did not appear as though this cross-road was much travelled, for, as a rule, it was overgrown with grass.

In fact, Blogden began to think that, after all, in his anxiety to save distance he had made a great mistake, and heartily wished that he had taken the landlord's advice and proceeded by means of the high-road.

It was too late for this now, and therefore useless to regret, so he continued to urge his men onward, whose grumblings now began to make themselves heard, and which quickly increased in loudness.

The hour of noon approached, and when it came, the officers found themselves still upon the cross-road, and to all appearances no nearer to an inn than they had been for many a mile.

So weary did they become that Blogden was compelled to allow them to pause.

Tom King was put down, and the officers rested themselves by sitting on the grassy embankment upon which the hedgerow was planted.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Blogden, addressing them. "I don't want to remain idly here, so I'll leave the prisoner to your charge while I gallop onward for a few miles and ascertain whether there is a public-house anywhere close at hand."

To this proposal the officers raised not the faintest objection, and accordingly Blogden sheathed his cutlass, struck spurs to his horse's side, and was quickly out of sight.

Now Tom King could not help considering this a favorable opportunity, and yet he was unable to see by what means he could avail himself of it.

He had satisfied himself by repeated trials that the ropes were so firmly tied about him that it was quite out of the question for him to unfasten them without the aid of another person.

He was forced to admit that he was perfectly helpless and powerless, and that all his captors had to do to keep him secure was to fix their eyes upon him from time to time.

Yet he did not despair, and his brain was busily at work devising schemes, when all at once he heard the clatter of a horse's feet, and, looking up, saw Blogden returning with satisfaction beaming from his countenance.

"Up with him again, my lads," he said—"put your shoulders to it; there's a capital inn not much further along the road, where we shall be able to make ourselves comfortable for a little while. I have ordered something good to be prepared, so that it will be nearly ready by the time you arrive."

These words had a very inspiriting effect indeed upon the police officers.

They picked up their burden with right good will, and trudged it manfully.

Nevertheless they were all so fatigued that they had to change repeatedly, even in going the short distance that intervened between them and the inn.

At length they came in sight of a poor, wretched-looking dwelling, from the exterior of which a truss of straw was suspended in the place of a sign, and this, indeed, was the only token there was that the house was one of public resort.

A little further on they perceived a place where the

cross-road was joined by several others, so that if the inn had not been here they would have been greatly puzzled to know which was the way to London.

In expectation of their arrival they found a small group of persons waiting outside this hut, for it was scarcely deserving of any better appellation, though on coming nearer and looking more attentively at it, it was evident that at some distant period it had been a substantial, good-looking dwelling, but it had been allowed by neglect to fall into its present miserable and dilapidated state.

A scene of considerable confusion now ensued.

The wonder of the landlord, his family, and dependants was extreme.

Never before in their recollection had so strange or exciting an incident occurred at their doors.

After a time, however, the horses were all stowed away in the rambling, broken-down sheds which existed in plenty at the back of the inn.

Tom King was raised a little, and thus was enabled to take a good look at his halting-place.

As he gazed upon it he became conscious that at some time or other he had seen this inn before, but when it was he could not for the life of him make out.

The countenance of the landlord was certainly a strange one to him.

Matters having been so far arranged, the officers again picked up the plank and carried Tom King through the front door, along the passage, and into the large kitchen in which they had agreed to take up their quarters.

This kitchen was at the back of the inn, and commanded a view of the littered, untidy yard in the rear, and the tumble-down stables beyond.

As before, the plank was placed on end, with the top resting against the wall.

"Now, Tom," said Blogden, "I owe you no ill-will, although you refused my offer before, and therefore I renew it. Your limbs must be cramped by remaining so long in one position, and you must be hungry as well; why not give the promise I require, and then you can sit down among us quite comfortable?"

"No," said Tom, "I very much prefer remaining as I am to making the promise you are so anxious to have. But let me tell you all my bones ache; I am cramped from head to foot by being thus tied to the board. Surely it is not asking too much to request you to release some of the bonds, so that my blood may have a chance of circulating."

"No," said Blogden, decidedly, "you will find me immovable. If you will comply with my conditions, well and good; if not, stay as you are; you can make your own choice."

After that Tom was silent.

A tolerable repast was then spread upon the table, and when he caught sight of the various eatables, Tom King experienced the pangs of hunger very sharply.

Yet he resolved to say not a word.

The officers ate voraciously, and drunk in due proportion, the liquor being as before, strong, home-brewed ale.

When the meal was over, the effects of it and of what they had drunk, and of their fatigue, made themselves manifest.

One by one they dropped off into a doze.

Tom watched them anxiously.

It was quite clear that sleep had stolen upon the officers unconsciously.

Every one who had closed his eyes had left the task of watching to the others.

At last Tom King felt that the opportunity he had been looking for, which seemed so far distant, now had come.

Now was the time to make a vigorous effort to escape.

Carefully and yet vigorously he tugged away at the ropes which confined his wrists.

To his joy they slackened a little—a very little, yet enough to endow him with courage and determination.

Time wore on, and the officers still slumbered.

Incredible as the feat may appear, Tom actually succeeded in getting his hands at liberty.

When this was the case he felt that the remainder of his task was comparatively easy.

He went on most vigorously with his work, and so intent and so wrapped up did he become in it that he omitted to glance every few seconds at the countenances of his sleeping captors.

When, however, he at last looked up and saw Joe Blogden's eyes wide open and fixed upon him, he gave quite a nervous start of surprise, and dropped the knot he had been attempting to untie.

"Aha!" said Joe, "so you have given me a taste of your quality, have you? Thank you—I am much obliged to you. Doubtless you thought I was asleep. What a mistake! Why, Tom, I have been watching you all the time; and as you have been so clever and done what I believed to be impossible, I shall know what to expect from you if we are in the least degree neglectful. Ho! wake up there!" he bawled, in a voice that seemed powerful enough to lift the roof off.

The officers awoke instantly and sprang to their feet.

Tom King's desperation and anger knew no bounds.

He was almost free, and this made his disappointment all the more bitter.

He resolved not to submit, however, without a desperate struggle.

In his efforts to extricate himself, however, he pulled the plank over, and fell heavily to the ground.

The next moment, all the officers were upon him, the ropes were again crossed and recrossed over his body in all directions, and, indeed, wherever there was a chance.

At last he found himself much in his old position, except that the ropes were tighter, and caused him greater pain than before.

When all was done, Blogden approached and cautiously examined every knot.

"Now you are right, Tom, my friend," he said—"quite right. If you can get out of that, I give you leave to make your escape. You little thought I had my eyes upon you, but—aha!—catch a weazel asleep, Tom, and then you may stand some chance of finding Joe Blogden napping! Aha!"

The officer was so overjoyed at his own preternatural cleverness that he hardly knew how to restrain himself within proper bounds.

The officers of course laughed heartily, and were vastly amused, but the incident terminating so disappointingly to Tom King was a very good lesson to them, since it taught them the necessity of not relaxing in their vigilance for the future in the least degree.

CHAPTER CMLXIV.

IN WHICH JOE BLOGDEN MAKES A PECULIAR PROPOSITION TO HIS COMPANIONS.

So impressed were the officers with this idea, that for some time after the occurrence of the event just described they did nothing but sit stock still with their eyes fixed upon their prisoner.

Observing this, Tom smothered his anger and disappointment as well as he was able, for he knew that if he allowed it to appear in his face the officers would enjoy it and triumph over him.

At last, when they had calmed down a little, Blogden turned towards them and said:

"Now, my lads, just let me know when you think you will feel rested enough to set out again on your journey. It is a disagreeable job, I know, but still, the sooner it is over the better, and when we once get him to Newgate, all the trouble will be off our hands."

"So it will," murmured the officers; "but we are regularly footsore, Mr. Blogden, and do you know how far it is to the next inn?"

"No, I don't; but that is well thought of—I will call the landlord in, and inquire."

Accordingly this was done.

"Now, landlord," cried Blogden, "just be good enough to listen. How far shall we have to travel before we come to the next inn, on the road to London?"

"Well, sir," was the answer, "I should say a matter of fifteen miles."

"Fifteen miles?" roared Blogden. "What do you mean by that? Curse you for a liar! You only want us to remain here in order that you can make plenty out of us! I suppose it is not every day that a large party stops here?"

"If you know better than I do," said the landlord, "what in the world was the good of asking me the question?"

"We don't know; but how can it be possible that the next inn is so far off?"

"Simply because it happens to be the case," said the landlord, with a grin.

The men looked at each other with a very disconcerted and crestfallen air upon receipt of this intelligence.

A considerable portion of the afternoon had now slipped away, for while in their present quarters time passed much too quickly to suit them.

"Why, we should have to travel all night!" ejaculated Blogden.

"That you would," assented the landlord; "and, moreover, if you found your way in the dark you would be a cleverer lad than I take you to be."

"What do you mean by that?" roared Blogden.

"Just what I say," was the response. "The road is so bad and so hard to find that it would be quite a task for a stranger by daylight, and at night would be altogether out of the question."

"Well, we can't stay here," said Blogden, in a decided voice—"that is perfectly certain. We must start off without much delay. But come, landlord, can't you suggest some means by which we can get to London?"

"Well, now you come to ask my advice," answered the landlord, "of course that's another matter; and besides, I am bound to do the best I can for my customers."

"Well—well?"

"Of course," he began, "your prisoner is the difficulty?"

"Just so."

"Well, then, I will tell you something which may perhaps interest you, and you can act upon the suggestion or not, just as you think proper."

"Go on, then; what is it?"

"Why, this evening, about six or seven o'clock, a carrier's waggon will pass here. I know the driver very well and he always stops to take a jug of beer, and nine times in ten the waggon is empty."

"And you would propose——"

"Simply that you lift your prisoner, plank and all, and put him inside the waggon. Some of you could ride inside with him, and the remainder, surrounding the vehicle, ride on horseback."

"Landlord," said Joe Blogden, in a voice of the utmost enthusiasm and joy, "you're a regular downright good fellow! Your advice is worth a heap of money, so just call for whatever you like to drink, and I will pay for it."

"You're very kind," said the landlord, and he glanced uneasily behind him. "But you must just ask my wife."

At this the officers gave a shout of laughter.

"Ask your wife?" said Blogden. "What for?"

"Why, you see, sir, she has a most unaccountable and unreasonable objection to any of the good things down in the cellar passing between my lips. It's too bad, that it is! She keeps everything under lock and key."

"And that makes you like a drop all the more, eh?"

"Well, perhaps it does."

"Then," said Blogden, "as you have got me out of my difficulty, I will get you out of yours; and, if you like, you can amuse yourself by getting blind drunk to-night, and your wife sha'n't know anything about it until too late."

"Don't speak so loud," said the landlord, who was an inveterate drunkard, and who, if not checked by his very strict, resolute better half, would long ago have drunk up everything they possessed.

"Well, first of all," said Blogden, "tell me what you like best?"

"Brandy."

"Then brandy be it! You shall have as much as you like."

The landlord looked at him incredulously.

"You see, I will call for it as if for myself and companions. Your wife will supply it, and I shall pay her; and you can have the pleasure of drinking until you are tired."

The drunkard's eyes gleamed at this prospect, and he licked his parched lips in eager anticipation.

Blogden was as good as his word.

Brandy was called for and brought in, but the manner in which the landlord poured it down his throat was something he was not prepared for.

When a huge quantity had disappeared, without producing, to all appearances, the least effect, he said:

"I don't wonder, old fellow, that your wife should lock up the cellar. Why, hang me! if the sea was brandy, you'd drink it dry, or die in the attempt."

"All right!" said the landlord, thickly. "A drop more—let's have a drop more."

But Blogden refused, for he wished this man to retain his senses sufficiently to enable him to make the bargain with the waggoner when he arrived.

"Leave us now a little while," said Blogden; "I have a little talk I want to have with my companions. You can come back presently, and then we'll have more brandy."

On these conditions the landlord left the room, and soon afterwards a tremendous commotion ensued.

A shrill voice, accompanied by blows, followed.

The officers winked and laughed at each other.

"She's paying him out for it now," said Blogden. "Well, no matter. You ought all of you to be much obliged to him, for we shall get our prisoner a good way on the road to London without any fatigue at all."

"Yes, it's a capital plan."

This was something Tom King could not help acknowledging, but oh, how he hated the landlord, who had so officiously made this suggestion!

He wished from the very bottom of his heart that he had long since been drowned in one of his ale barrels.

Tom King was, in reality, so disheartened by the failure he had met with that, coming as it did almost in the moment of success, he began in real truth to despair.

Just at this time, it should be mentioned, he looked again into the countenance of Joe Blogden, and was somewhat astonished to perceive that its expression had again changed to its former hungry, rapacious look.

Then, to his unutterable astonishment, he heard the chief officer address his companions as follows:

"My lads," he said, "as we have comfortably settled matters so far, there is something else that I've been thinking of nearly all day that I should like to submit to you, and I believe you will declare at once that it is a capital idea."

The officers crowded round him anxiously, and Blogden continued:

"I want to talk to you about the reward. You know how much it is—five hundred pounds—and we had better settle now beforehand how we intend to divide it, so that there may be no grounds for dissatisfaction in the future."

The men remained silent, but looked at him attentively, wondering what was coming next.

"Five hundred pounds is the amount," said Blogden; "and if you will count, you will find, including myself, there are just ten of us; so, if equally divided, that makes exactly fifty pounds apiece—does it not?"

"It does—you are quite right."

"Well, now, it strikes me that for all our trouble that's a very paltry and inadequate remuneration; so I have a proposal to make by which it can be made better worth our while."

"How so—how so?"

The men were eager, yet scarcely more eager than Tom King, who listened with a truly wonderful amount of interest to this conversation, which was something altogether different to what he had expected to hear.

"Now," said Blogden, "if the chief part of this sum could come to the share of one of us, why, then it would be a very good thing indeed for the lucky individual, and the others would not be so very badly off."

"But we don't understand."

"I will explain," said Blogden, whose fingers and mouth worked convulsively, while his features seemed to grow sharper and sharper. "It can be done in this way: We will draw lots for the prisoner—throw for him—raffle him—or decide it in what way you like. For instance, we all know how to rattle a dice-box—let that way settle it."

"But we don't understand," interrupted the officers.

"You will in a moment. Let us take fifty pounds from the whole amount—that will leave four hundred and fifty, will it not?"

"It will."

"Well, then, let the one who gets the greatest number of points be entitled to receive four hundred and fifty

pounds, and let the remaining fifty be equally divided among the rest, by which means you see that there is a certainty of all of you making a very tolerable day's work, and there's the chance of one of us earning something worth our while to receive."

Blogden ceased, and watched, with eyes like those of a vulture, the countenances of his companions.

He was filled with anxiety to know how this would be received.

He was himself an inveterate gamester, and he was aware that those who were with him often passed away an idle hour or two with either cards or dice.

He soon found opinion rather divided amongst them, though it was plain to see there was not one who was not willing to take the chance of securing so large a sum.

"Take a hundred pounds from the chief amount," said one, and let that be equally divided among the losers, and let the principal amount be four hundred pounds instead of four hundred and fifty."

"I have no objection," said Blogden, "if that is more agreeable to you, and should we decide upon it, why, it will be the means of passing the time very pleasantly until the waggon arrives."

For the life of them the men could not resist the temptation to gamble.

They had already become sufficiently votaries of the vice to be infatuated with it, when Blogden cleverly produced from his pocket a dice-box, and dropped a couple of the spotted ivory cubes within it and rattled them.

Whatever scruples or hesitations may have remained in any of their breasts were banished.

Their eyes gleamed wildly with excitement, and they drew their chairs up closely around the table.

"Three throws shall decide it," said Blogden—"three throws each, and if there are any ties, three throws again."

This being agreed to, the dice were thrown for the first time by Blogden himself.

The others followed, and when all were done it was found oddly enough that four had thrown and obtained precisely the same number.

"Then you stand out," said Blogden, in a husky voice. "The matter will soon be decided now."

But again ties were thrown, and Blogden found that the chance rested between himself and the man who had proposed the alteration in the division of the amount.

The box was rattled, the dice thrown, then, with a wild shriek of triumph, Blogden announced himself the victor.

"Mine," he screamed—"mine! The money is mine! The hundred pounds will be divided among you!"

His associates shrunk back, and their countenances assumed a sullen, angry look.

Blogden observed it.

"It's no good grumbling now," he cried, "the bargain is made, and cannot be altered. I hoped that fortune would favor me, yet scarcely dared think it. However, I will behave handsomely to you. We'll have wine all round—that is, if such a thing can be found in the cellars—wine for all of us!"

He rose to go to the bar, and as soon as the door closed behind him his comrades whispered eagerly together for a few seconds.

Then the one who had been so close to winning rose also, and followed Blogden from the room.

What was his errand, Tom King could not guess.

He stretched his ears to the fullest extent in the hope of overhearing what the officers whispered among themselves.

But they spoke in such tones that he was unable to do so.

Nevertheless, he found all these different proceedings very distracting to him, while they annoyed him beyond measure, for he could not help taking notice of all that was going on around, and the events were so strange and varied that they prevented that amount of concentration of ideas necessary for devising some plan of escape.

The officers continued to whisper energetically until Blogden reappeared.

He was followed by the landlady, who was speaking to him in shrill, angry tones.

"I will send down in the cellar for what you want," she said. "But, mark this, not another drop more do you have afterwards! I will take care that you never enter my doors again!"

"I have no wish to return," said Blogden; "but then wine we must and will have! It will soon be seven o'clock, and as soon as the waggon comes up let us know, for we are going by it."

Blogden sat down, and, glancing around, immediately detected the absence of one of his companions.

"Hallo!" he said, "where's Cribbs?"

The officers preserved their countenances tolerably well, and one said, in a tone of indifference:

"He followed you from the room. I thought he would have been back before this."

"Mr. Blogden," said Tom King, "I wish to know how much longer you intend to keep me in this position? My limbs are all so cramped, that I suffer intense pain from head to foot. The circulation of the blood is completely stopped. Surely it is base and ungenerous to treat a prisoner in this manner?"

"It is your own fault," growled Blogden—"quite your own fault! If you had given me your promise you might have taken it easy."

"But that was what I did not feel inclined to do, and which I still refuse."

"Very well, then," said Blogden, "hold your row! You're worth four hundred pounds to me, and I'll take d—d good care that I never lose sight of you until you are safely under the roof of Newgate!"

"We shall see," said Tom King, quietly. "I believe there is such a thing as people being too clever."

"Aha! no doubt," chuckled Blogden—"no doubt—no doubt!"

It was while this conversation was going on between the leader of the officers and the prisoner, that the man who had been called Cribbs returned, and slipped quietly into his seat, exchanging, as he did so, a glance of peculiar intelligence with his comrades, unseen, of course, by Blogden, who had his back turned towards them.

CHAPTER CMLXV.

AFFAIRS AT THE INN TAKE A MOST EXTRAORDINARY AND UNEXPECTED TURN.

Directly afterwards the door of the room was thrown open by the landlady, who stood on one side in order to allow some one else to enter.

Being interested in everything that took place, Tom King languidly turned his eyes in this direction. He would have turned his head, but this was impossible, owing to the tightness of his bonds.

Then he saw enter the room a person he had not yet seen at the inn.

This man was dressed half like an ostler, half like a general servant, and in front of him he carried a kind of tray, on which several bottles of wine were laid.

Directly Tom King caught sight of this man's face he felt perfectly sure that he had seen him somewhere before, but in what place, or under what conditions, his brain was then too much harrassed and perplexed to allow him to remember.

"Here you are, gentlemen," he said, as he set the tray down on the table. "Prime, this 'ere is, and no mistake! I ought to know, 'cause I've fetched it out of the cellars."

"Then," said Blogden, who was inclined to be particularly liberal, "as you are a decent sort of a chap, I don't mind asking you to join us in a glass."

"Well, sir, I don't know as I should mind; but——"

"Jack," said his mistress, in her usual shrill, angry tones, "do you know what you are saying? Do you know I am here? Leave the room this moment!"

Very much in the manner of a kicked cur, Jack sneaked out of the room.

The landlady stalked after him, and closed the door.

"There's a nice better half for a man to have!" said Blogden. "Thank goodness she's not Mrs. B! Now, then, my lads," he said, "we'll drink this nice little drop of wine. You see I have ordered a bottle a-piece for us, and then we shall be in good trim for our journey."

It is worthy of remark that, no sooner were these words spoken than the officers all sprang to their feet,

and each one seized hold of a bottle, leaving one on the tray, which, of course, fell to Blogden's share.

Tom King thought this circumstance peculiar; but Blogden evidently took no notice of it, for he picked up the bottle, and taking the corkscrow that was beside it, quickly tapped it.

"Now, my lads," he said, "follow my example. We must manage to get through this little business before the waggon comes. I am told we may expect it here in rather more than half an hour."

The other officers willingly enough drew forth the corks, then each simultaneously, or nearly so, poured himself out a glass.

"A toast," said Blogden—"a toast. Here's good luck to the winner!"

The glasses were drained.

The officers exchanged glances.

"Upon my word," said Blogden, "it's good! It's many a day since I tasted wine, or you either, very likely. I should take this to be a good old sort. It tastes as though it had been down in the cellar a very long while."

The glasses were quickly filled and emptied, then, for the third time, the wine was poured out, but on this occasion the glasses were allowed to stand before them on the table.

"It's d—d odd," said Blogden, after a pause, "but I can't think what's the matter with my head. That must be uncommonly strong wine, or else it's mixed with the ale. Ah! that's it—a mixture don't agree."

He carried his hand to his forehead while he spoke.

The other officers seemed to be to a considerable extent under the influence of the wine, for they one and all complained of the feeling they had in their heads.

It was rather odd, but every one placed his hand to his forehead, and then, leaning forward, allowed his elbow to rest on the table, so that they were all very nearly in the same position.

Some time elapsed, but not a word was spoken, nor did one move.

Tom King was overcome with astonishment.

Then he began to grow alarmed, and finally hopeful.

Yet he fancied that perhaps this was, after all, only a scheme to annoy him; perhaps they were pretending to be overcome by drink in order that they might have the pleasure of witnessing his struggles to get free.

This consideration kept Tom King for some time quite still, but at last he muttered:

"They are drunk—dead drunk, every one of them; it must be, I suppose, the mixture of the ale and wine, and yet I should have thought their constitutions strong enough to stand anything. Now, curses on it, if I had not made that other futile attempt, I could get free! It is impossible now—quite impossible."

Nevertheless, Tom King tugged away at the ropes, but all the effect he produced was to cut his wrists and arms severely.

All at once he stopped, for he heard a strange, faint tapping sound.

He looked up at once in the direction from which he imagined the sound had come.

Evening was now drawing on apace, and already the room in which the officers were seated was plunged in considerable obscurity.

The darkness had, however, come on so gradually that Tom scarcely noticed it until the present moment.

He looked about him then and saw nothing.

The tapping was repeated.

This time he felt certain that it came from the window.

He looked keenly, and then saw the face of a man.

For a moment a wild idea that he was about to be rescued came over him; but immediately afterwards he dismissed it as absurd.

Nevertheless, with perfect fascination, he fixed his eyes upon the face at the window.

He saw it move.

An arm was raised, and then the casement was slowly and cautiously opened.

The intruder listened for a few seconds, and when he heard the loud and deep snores proceeding from the sleeping officers, he seemed to nod his head with satisfaction.

Then, stepping lightly into the room, he trod on tiptoe past the table, and paused close to the plank to which Tom King was bound.

"Hush—quiet!" he said. "Are you all right?"

"Scarcely," said Tom. "But who are you?"

"Never mind just at present. Keep quiet while I untie these knots."

"You could not perform a more welcome service. But how is it that you, a perfect stranger, are willing to do this for me?"

"Ah! captain," said the man, almost with a sigh, "I find you have forgotten me, and it is as well for you today that my memory is not so short."

"I fancied I had seen you before," returned Tom, "but I behold so many faces, and it is hard to recollect every one."

"No doubt. Quiet—lie there; that knot is untied. Well, once upon a time you dealt liberally and kindly by me, and I am not the one to forget it. But I will explain more in a little while. How do you feel now?"

"Better I think—better!" said Tom, faintly.

The fact was, the loosening of the ropes removed the impediments to the free circulation of the blood, and this being done somewhat suddenly caused a dreadful feeling of sickness and faintness to come over the highwayman.

But Jack, the ostler, resolutely went on untying the knots, and really it was something wonderful to see the manner in which they came undone beneath the skill of his nimble fingers.

"There, captain," he said at last, "you are free. Hullo! though, that won't do!"

Tom King had endeavored to rise, but he failed.

His brain turned giddy, and he fell forward, and would have reached the ground heavily had not the ostler stretched out his arm and saved him.

"Gently—gently!" he said. "Just take hold of me round the neck, will you, and I will carry you out into the fresh air."

Tom had sufficient sense remaining to comply with this demand.

Accordingly, he clasped his arms round the ostler's neck, and that individual, by an exertion of the great strength he possessed, hoisted him on to his back and carried him across the room, through the window, and into the yard.

"There, captain!" he said. "Just keep your feet half a moment, while I shut the window. There, that's it—capital! Now come along with me."

Once again picking him up in a similar fashion, the ostler carried the almost insensible form of Tom King across the yard to the stable.

As soon as he was inside, he shook Tom roughly.

"Now, captain," he said, "you must rouse yourself up. The next thing you have to do is to climb up yonder ladder. I would carry you up if I could, but it's rather too much for my strength. You go first, and I will keep behind you."

Tom was anxious indeed to make his escape, and his faculties were in just such a condition as to make him willing to obey the commands of anyone who spoke to him.

Up the ladder he accordingly with great difficulty managed to climb.

Reaching the top, he found himself in a rather spacious hay-loft.

"Now, captain," said the ostler, "there's plenty of fresh, clean straw, and hay too, and all you have to do is to lie down on it, roll yourself in it, and you are safe for some time to come. Stretch yourself out, and have a good rest. I will answer for it the officers will not trouble you just yet."

Tom King did as he was told, but he had not assumed a recumbent position many minutes before he felt the benefit of doing so.

The blood, working more equally, circulated, and the dreadful aching in his limbs to some extent subsided.

"Now, captain," said the ostler, "just a wee drop of brandy—a wee drop, mind—will be the best thing you can have, and after that something to eat."

Almost mechanically Tom swallowed not much more than a table-spoonful of brandy, which the ostler gave him from a small bottle he produced from his pocket.

Tom's curiosity was greatly raised by the mysterious turn events had taken.

"Never mind me," replied the ostler to some of his



[DICK TURPIN ATTACKS THE CONSTABLE.]

inquiries—"I am your friend—let that be sufficient. I can tell you something much more interesting and to the purpose."

"And what may that be?"

"Why, don't you think it odd that the officers should all have dropped off dead drunk so soon after having had the wine?"

"Very strange indeed!" said Tom.

"Well, I'll tell you the whole truth about it, captain. I was sitting in the stable thinking about you, and cudgelling my brains to think of some method by which I could set you at liberty—for you understand, captain," he interrupted, "I recognised you at once, and determined to do what I could for you."

"I am much obliged."

"Oh, don't mention it!"

"Well, go on, you were saying you were sitting in the stable."

"Yes, I was; that was after Mr. Blogden, as they call him, made master dead drunk. My eye, what a rage the missis was in to be sure! However, I carried him up to bed, and he was all the time muttering something about the waggon."

"Yes," said Tom, "it was arranged that when the carrier's waggon passed I should be placed in it along with some of the officers."

The ostler nodded.

"I heard about the kind of raffle they had for you," he went on, "and was thinking perhaps that might be turned to your advantage, when all of a sudden who should come into the stable but one of the officers. He took a crown piece from his pocket and slipped it into my hand, as he said:

"'Jack, my lad, I have an important service I want you to render me, and if you do it well you shall have four times that amount for your reward.'

No. 201 will be Published next Monday.

"Of course I wanted to know what the officer wanted.

"'Well,' he said, 'you must know we have thrown dice for the prisoner, and all the reward is going to be taken by Blogden. Well, we don't believe he played fair for it, and so want to pay him off in his own coin. Now, I daresay about the premises you have got some kind of sleeping drug or other—I mean such stuff as you would mix with the ale.'

"'Oh, yes,' I answered, with a wink. 'I see you know all the tricks of the trade.'

"'I was in the public line myself once,' this officer said, and then he told me to draw the cork out of one of the bottles of wine, and pop enough of this drug into it to cause anyone to become insensible after drinking a couple of glasses or so.

"I promised, and just then the missis called me to go down into the cellar and fetch up the wine, so, you see, everything favored me."

Tom King listened to these revelations with the utmost amazement.

"Well, captain," said the ostler, "I saw this—that all was plain and straightforward—that I could set you free without any trouble at all, besides which I could play the officers a very good trick. So what do you think I did? Why, I drew the corks of every one of the bottles as fast as I could, and poured enough of the stuff into each; then corked them up again."

"Extraordinary!" ejaculated Tom. "I should almost have said incredible, only what has happened fully confirms all you have stated."

"Yes, captain, it's true—quite true."

"But how comes it," added Tom, "that the officers did not notice that the corks had been previously drawn?"

"Ah, captain, I see you don't know any of the tricks of the trade. Why, there's a corkscrew down in the cellar—a hair corkscrew, they call it—with wires almost as fine as a hair, and yet strong enough to draw out a cork. When it is done the cork can be put back again, and the hole that is left is so small that no one could find it unless they guessed it was there and searched very narrowly for it."

"That accounts for it at once," said Tom King. "But I feel that I shall never be able to thank you enough or to do sufficient to show you how much I appreciate the service you have rendered me. But fear nothing. You shall not go unrewarded—I will take care of that! I shall always remember that I owe you my life."

"There—there, captain, that will do—I don't want any more of that! I consider that what I did just serves the officers right. It's a case of the biter bit."

"Well, but how shall you proceed?" said Tom—"what's the next move?"

"Well, captain, that I leave to you. I thought, perhaps, you might be able to jump on to the back of your horse, and gallop off, but I sadly fear you are too weak and exhausted for anything of that kind."

"I don't think so," said Tom, and immediately he made an effort to rise to his feet.

He quickly found he had miscalculated his strength entirely.

He swayed to and fro for a moment, then fell back on to the mass of hay and straw.

CHAPTER CMLXVI.

IN WHICH TOM KING HAS AN AMPLE REVENGE UPON THE POLICE OFFICERS.

"THERE you go, captain," said the ostler. "I knew just how it would be. You are clean done up, and no wonder; and what's more, if you are able to move for the next day or two, it's an odd thing to me."

"Then," said Tom King, "I am as good as a dead man already, for I must get away from the inn before the officers recover their senses."

"Yes, yes," said the ostler—"either you must go or the officers. Yes, yes—that's quite right."

"What do you mean?" said Tom. "Do you for a moment suppose the officers will leave without making a rigid search of the premises?"

"Yes," said the ostler, "I think it very likely they will."

"But how long will it be before they recover from the effects of the drug?"

"Some hours, captain—I gave it 'em strong."

"Well, then, I have that much rest before me."

"So you have. But, captain, I've made my mind up to one thing."

"And what may that be?"

"Why, that you can't go away from the inn and ensure your safety that way. The officers must go instead, leaving you here snug and comfortable."

"You would be a clever man, Jack, if you could manage that."

"Well, I don't know; it seems to me nothing would be easier."

"You are jesting."

"Not a bit, captain. Of course I needn't tell you what the officers hoped to do was to leave Blogden here, overpowered by the drug, while they took you in the waggon to London."

"Yes, that was their intention, simply because he had won the greatest share of the reward."

"Well, perhaps you know how it was arranged for the waggon to be made use of?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"But," said Jack, very impressively, "that particular arrangement was made with master, and now he's lying on the bed upstairs as drunk as a pig, and it's a question who will recover possession of their senses first, he or the police officers."

"Well, but I can't see what you are driving at."

"Oh," said the ostler, with a twinkle in his eye, "it will be the richest joke that ever was heard of in this world! I will tell you, captain: When the waggon goes by, of course it will stop here—it always does; then I shall tell the driver that a party of gentlemen have stopped here, and, being overcome by liquor, wanted to ride back in his waggon to London."

"But the landlady," objected Tom—"she will tell him all."

"Not so," said Jack. "I will try to keep her out of the way if I can. And then, I must tell you that she hates the sight of these officers, simply because they have made her husband so drunk. Won't it be a good joke, captain? Can't you fancy what a lark it will be to carry those clever gentlemen one by one, and lay them down in the straw at the bottom of the waggon? Then away they will go, and ten to one if they wake up much before they reach London."

In spite of the pain he suffered, and the perilous nature of his position, Tom King laughed most heartily at this idea.

It was a thought that had never occurred to him.

"If it can be done, Jack—if it can only be done! Yet upon second thoughts, I think I had better endeavor to leave here."

"Why, captain—why?"

"Because discovery of the part you have taken is certain, and the consequences will be serious to you."

"I can't see that, captain—I can't see that at all."

"Indeed! Why not?"

"Because the officers, being all drunk alike, won't be able to reproach one another, and you may depend that those who are in the secret of drugging Blogden will be careful to hold their tongues. Then when they come back we have only to say that, not properly understanding the arrangement that had been made, and having no means of asking questions, we had done the best we could under the circumstances."

Tom King tried to rise again.

He would infinitely have preferred to leave the inn behind him; but, to his dismay, he actually found that he was more helpless and weak than he had been a short time before.

"You must leave it to me," said the ostler, decisively, "and if you will only let me carry the matter out, rely upon it, it will end quite well. Hark! As I live, I can hear the waggon approaching now. We shall soon know whether we are to be successful in getting rid of the officers or not."

Tom King was close to the opening in the loft, which served as a window, and being in this position, he was able to hear with tolerable distinctness the approach of the waggon.

The tinkling of the bells upon the horses' harness soon

made itself distinctly heard, and then the ostler, after many injunctions to Tom to keep himself well covered with straw, descended the ladder, and made his way to the front of the inn.

It was only with difficulty that he could restrain his exultation and delight within something like reasonable bounds; he was almost bursting with laughter.

He walked straight to the bar where the landlady was standing.

"Missis," he said—"missis!"

"Yes, Jack, what is it?"

"Why, these gentlemen seem to have gone very quiet all at once, don't they?"

"Yes, the drunken wretches!" was the angry reply. "I daresay they are all insensible."

"Very likely," said Jack. "And here comes the waggon."

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, they agreed with master to ride in the waggon. Didn't you hear something said about it?"

"Yes, I did hear something; but I'm not going to trouble myself about such beasts; they should look after their own business; I don't intend to look after it for them."

"Well, missis, what shall I do?"

"Do as you like," was the answer. "I am not going to say a word to them, and trouble to wake them up if they're asleep, or ask a single question; I only hope their prisoner escapes."

With these words, the landlady flounced round and passed through the door into another room, where she began working away at a prodigious rate, turning every object topsy-turvy, as was her custom whenever her mind was perturbed.

"That's the ticket!" said the ostler, as he slapped his thigh. "It could not be better; now I can manage it first rate!"

At this moment in walked the waggoner. He knew the ostler at a glance, and nodded to him.

"Just see to my horses, will you, Jack?"

"Oh, yes!" Jack replied. "But, Ben, there's been such a lark here to-day, and ain't the missis just mad, that's all!"

"Why, what's the matter?" asked the waggoner. "Where's the gaffer?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said the ostler. "But wait a bit, I will draw you your jug. Missis has left me to look after the place."

A jug of ale was accordingly drawn, and then the ostler continued:

"Why, Ben, a party of the rummest fellows came here to-day; they look to me like police officers; but, however, they are out for a lark. They got master into the room and made him dead drunk, and now he's upstairs on the bed sleeping it off; and as for the rest of 'em they have guzzled down such a quantity of wine that they are as helpless as logs of wood."

"Well," said Ben, "but what of that?"

"Why," said the ostler, "of course some o' these chaps gave in sooner than the rest, and the remainder, knowing that about four were already so far gone as to be unable to ride on horseback, determined to ask you to give them a ride in your waggon. Well, now they're all in the same pickle, and I suppose what they want is to ride all together to London."

"Oh, ah!" said Ben, who probably smelt out something profitable to himself in the undertaking—"that's it, no doubt."

"Well," said Jack, "I should not like to take upon myself to say. Let us go into the room and wake one of them up and ask him."

This was agreed to, and to the room accordingly they went.

Most of the officers were still standing round the table in the position we have described; but some had fallen forward, and two had slipped under the table.

"That seems to be the head man," said the ostler, pointing to Blogden, "because he ordered everything and paid for it, and it was him that made master so awfully drunk. I should think we'd better try to wake him."

"Oh, just as you like!" said the waggoner. "I leave it to you."

Jack shook Blogden furiously for some moments, and at last was successful in extracting a kind of grumbling sound.

"Sir—sir!" said Jack, putting his lips close to his ear and bawling at the very top of his voice—"sir—sir!"

Another groan came by way of reply.

"The waggon's here!" bawled Jack again—"the waggon's come!"

These words seemed in some confused manner to reach the bewildered intellects of the chief officer, for he opened his eyes, and glared vacantly around him, like one half aroused from deep sleep.

"The waggon? Oh, yes, that's right! Put him in—put him in!"

"I told you that was what he wanted," said Jack to the waggoner.

Joe Blogden fell forward, and struck his head quite a sharp blow on the table, after which he remained perfectly still.

"Well, they're a nice lot," said the waggoner—"a very nice lot. But, however, as my waggon is empty, I may as well take 'em as not; they are sure to give me something for my trouble."

"Oh, yes!" said Jack, with a grin, "I shouldn't wonder if you don't find 'em to be very liberal."

"Come on then," said Ben, nothing loath; "you help me, and we'll carry them into the waggon pretty quick."

Jack lent a hand willingly enough.

The officers were one by one taken up and carried by the head and heels out of the inn and placed on the straw at the bottom of the waggon.

Some made a few convulsive movements.

In particular there was one on whom the drug did not seem to have produced so great an effect as the rest, for he opened his eyes to their fullest extent, and in a thick, husky voice, said:

"What's the matter? Where are we going?"

"Into the waggon," said Jack.

"Oh, all right," half-grunted, half-muttered the officer, sleepily, "the waggon, of course—I know—I——"

He lapsed off into silence, and the next moment was lying comfortably by the side of his companions.

When they had all been bestowed, and the waggoner's horse attended to, Jack and Ben returned to the bar to finish their jug, and just then, as fate would have it, the landlady came out of the inner room.

"Good evening," said the waggoner to her. "I've got a rummy load to-night, missis."

"The drunken wretches!" she said, wrathfully. "Have you put them in the waggon?"

"Yes, missis, I have."

"Well, it's more than I would have done for them; they deserve to be every one rolled into a ditch and left there till sober!"

The ale was finished, and as they went away the ostler nudged his friend in the ribs.

"Missis is awfully mad. The old man has not been drunk for months, and she thought she'd got him quite out of it. Won't there be a little bit of a row to-morrow!"

"Very likely," said the waggoner. "I shall most likely be back by about this time to-morrow night, or perhaps by daybreak the next morning."

"All right," said Jack, "and then you can let me know how you have got on with those gents."

"I can; but I say, Jack."

"What?"

"Suppose I was to go all the way to London and they were not to wake up?"

"Well?"

"What should I do then?"

"Well," said Jack, scratching his head with a half-puzzled air, "I scarcely know what to say. I don't mind telling you what I think, and if I do you are not obliged to carry it out."

"Eh! what?" said the waggoner. "I don't understand."

"Yes you do," said the ostler. "I believe these men are officers—judging from their dress, I should say they was, and judging from their actions I should say they wasn't, 'cause it isn't usual for police officers to go about the country getting drunk and riding back to London in a waggon, is it?"

"I never heard of such a thing before," said the waggoner.

"Well, if you should find them helpless when you get there," added Jack, "I should recommend you to drive to Bow Street police station, then you will know more about it. If they are officers, all well and good, and if they are not, why the police will take care of them until they come to their senses."

"That's a very good idea of yours, Jack—that's the proper thing to do," assented the waggoner, "and if in case they don't wake up, that's where I'll take 'em."

"Very well. Good-night."

"Good-night," said the waggoner, as he climbed up into his lofty seat. "Good-night, Jack, and you may depend on seeing me either to-morrow night or the following morning."

With these words the waggoner smacked his whip loudly and off set his team at a very tolerable rate considering the nature of the load they had behind them.

The ostler stood watching until darkness hid the waggon from his sight; then, unable any longer to restrain his mirth, he leaned up against the gate-post and laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks, and until his sides fairly ached.

"Oh, it's too rich a joke—too rich! Won't they be mad when they wake up! I fancy I see 'em; I'd give one whole year's wages freely if I could only be invisible in the waggon at the time when they do open their eyes. Why, I shouldn't wonder if they were to get into a rage and set to work fighting each other like so many mad cats. Oh, it's too good! I can't take it all in yet—I feel I can't. But wait a bit—quiet, Jack, quiet; you have got a great deal to do yet, and above all things don't forget the captain."

CHAPTER CMLXVII.

TOM KING MAKES HIMSELF TOLERABLY COMFORTABLE IN THE LOFT.

While Jack, the ostler, muttered these words half-aloud, his countenance by degrees changed from an expression of uncontrollable mirth to one of extreme gravity.

He shook his head once or twice to and fro, from which it may be inferred that he was not altogether blind to the danger and risk he ran by thus aiding and abetting the notorious highwayman.

He made his way at once direct to the stables, and having entered, closed the door.

By the time he had ascended the perpendicular ladder and gained the loft above, his face had resumed its usual cheerful, jolly aspect.

"Hullo!" he said, in a faint voice. "Captain—captain, I've come back; it's all right."

There was no reply.

"What can be the matter?" thought Jack. "Surely he's not gone. No—no; but wait a bit, I'll get a light."

The loft was now so profoundly dark that it was impossible to see from one side of it to the other.

From the stable beneath, however, he produced a lantern, and by the aid of this in searching about he discovered Tom King lying upon the straw very much in the same position as that in which he had left him.

"He's asleep," said Jack.

This was indeed the fact, although at first it may seem strange, even unaccountable, that Tom King could fall off into a slumber in such a place.

But the fact was, his slumber was one produced by his state of utter and complete exhaustion.

He had sunk off to sleep quite unconsciously—in fact, he had almost swooned.

But the ostler satisfied himself that he was sleeping peacefully, and having done so, he turned aside.

"Let him rest," he murmured—"let him rest; he will wake up a fresh man. I'll see that he is perfectly safe."

Jack sat down at once to watch, choosing a position near to the circular window of the loft, which enabled him to hear distinctly all that might take place on side, and, should the moon break forth, would allow him a tolerable view of the country round.

Here, then, he remained patiently on the watch for a long, long time.

It may be that he dozed once or twice, for it was not until there were palpable indications in the east that the coming of the new day was not far distant that a slight sound was heard indicating that Tom King was rousing himself.

Jack turned round at once.

"Well, captain," he said, "I should think you feel better after that little bit of a snooze; do you not?"

Tom King pressed his hands to his head in a bewildered way; he could not understand at first where he was, and was beyond measure puzzled to know what had happened.

By degrees recollection came back to him, and then he sat up in the straw thoroughly awake.

"The officers," he asked, anxiously—"where are the officers? Tell me that!"

With great difficulty the ostler controlled his propensity to indulge in an explosion of laughter; he was only able to succeed by noticing the extreme anxiety with which Tom asked the question.

"They're gone, captain," he said, "don't be alarmed about them in the least—I assure you there is no occasion."

"Gone?" repeated Tom, incredulously.

"Yes. Just wait a moment, and I will tell you all about it."

Jack did so.

Tom King listened with unbounded wonder.

Then, in a grave voice, he asked:

"And do you really mean to say, Jack, that you have had the audacity to do this?"

"The what, captain? I don't know that word; but if you mean have I done it, why, I say yes. Aha! isn't it a good joke?"

"Jack," said Tom King, "it strikes me you will have to pay dearly for it. Where's my horse—I'll be off at once; and if you are wise, you will make yourself scarce as quickly as you can!"

"Gently, captain—gently—not so fast, if you please; I have not told you all yet."

"Indeed! What have you to say?"

"Why, this: I think I shall clear myself very well in the matter; I am not at all alarmed on account of that."

"But," interrupted Tom King, "the officers will be filled with rage when they find how they have been played with, and an immense troop of them will be sent down without delay."

"I'm not so certain of that," was the answer. "In the first place, they had never been this road before; I gathered that from what they said, and it's odd to me if I didn't give them enough of the drug to make them remain fast asleep until they were delivered at Bow Street station. *Delivered!* only just think of that now!"

Jack laughed again, and this time Tom King joined in heartily.

"Well, when they come to themselves," pursued the ostler, "they won't be able to tell just where abouts this inn really is; they will have an idea of its locality, and very likely will search closely until they find it, but that will take them some time."

"Yes," said Tom King, "that's true enough; I didn't think of that before."

"But I did, captain; and, what's still more to the point, either to-night or early to-morrow morning the waggoner will be passing this way again, and from him I shall learn full particulars, and until then, captain, my advice is that you remain quiet where you are, and get your strength up. Rely upon it you shall not be disturbed."

"Many thanks," said Tom—"many thanks; but I must be moving, and I think I cannot do better than take the opportunity of a parting now."

Jack looked disappointed.

Tom King rose quickly to his feet.

No sooner, however, had he assumed an erect posture than he became all in a moment conscious of the extreme state of weakness he was in.

He reeled and almost fell.

"Now, captain," said the ostler, decidedly, "you must not think of leaving here like that; besides, there is no earthly occasion—take my word for it, you are safe. Just keep still—that's all you have to do."

"But will not this loft be visited?"

"Not by anybody except myself, captain; I have the stables all to myself. I don't think master has been up here since the last lot of hay and straw was brought."

"Then," said Tom, rather faintly, "I will stay; I am not so strong as I should wish to be; besides, I have a wound which, though getting well, gives me much trouble, and—and——"

"What, captain?"

"If you could find me something to eat, and bring it here unknown to everybody——"

"That shall be done, captain; nothing could be easier. You leave that to me; why, I was just about to propose it."

Tom came closer towards the circular window, and looked out.

A fair, pleasant enough scene was spread before his gaze—one of those pretty, rural landscapes for which England is so famous, and upon which the eye is never tired of looking.

"You seem very quiet and lonely here," was Tom's remark as he turned away.

"Very quiet. We are not much troubled by customers; they seem to grow fewer and fewer every day, and if trade doesn't alter I shall look out for a fresh place."

"I will tell you what you shall do," said Tom King. "Such a service as you have rendered me shall not go unrewarded; I will take care to supply you with the means to enable you to set up in business yourself."

"Thanks, captain, and then I shall indeed be deeply in your debt, yet I shall hope for the coming of the day when I may be able to repay you."

"There—there, that will do."

"Well, captain, I'm off now—a fresh thought occurs to me."

"What is it?"

"Why, the officers, when they come, will doubtless approach the inn from the direction of London, will they not?"

"Almost certain."

"Well, then, a particular friend and companion of mine is at work in a meadow some little distance off—I say at work, but that's hardly right: I expect to near him go by the front of the inn every minute."

"Well," said Tom, "what of that?"

"Why, this meadow that he is in is near the top of a hill, and from it you can see for a very long way. He can be trusted, and I will tell him to keep a sharp look-out for police officers. If he sees any he is to come here and let me know."

"That would be doing a good service indeed," answered Tom; "I should feel much more content, because then I should have the chance of escaping."

"Of course you would."

"But are you sure he is to be trusted?"

"I will answer for him, captain."

"That is enough then."

"I'm off. Hark, I can hear him—he always walks along whistling like that."

The sound of some person whistling a very intricate, unmelodious tune could now be heard, accompanied by the tread of a heavy footstep.

Jack descended the ladder precipitately, and carried out his intention.

He also brought Tom King the materials of a rude repast, of which the highwayman partook heartily.

He was now tolerably at ease in his new quarters, for he trusted to having timely intimation of the police officers' approach.

"Now, captain," said the ostler, "don't you feel wonderfully better?"

"I do indeed."

"Well, then, just let me have a look at the wound you spoke of; no doubt it will be the better for a little bathing and fresh bandaging."

"Yes—yes," said Tom, "it pains me sadly."

His hurt was attended to by the ostler, who acquitted himself of the task in a very creditable manner.

When he had finished, he said:

"Now, captain, if you will only take my advice and condescend to be guided by me you will remain just where you are for a few days. Rest and quiet are the only things you require, and if you have them you will be yourself again."

Tom King felt the full force and truth of these remarks.

He had had enough of adventures during the few preceding days to make him desirous of a short interval of quiet.

He reckoned up the time that was still to elapse before the appointed hour of meeting, and having done so, felt that it would indeed be advantageous if he could remain in his present quarters until the time arrived.

Of this he said nothing to the ostler, who, however, watched the workings of his countenance with some anxiety.

Having at last arrived at a decision, Tom said:

"Well, then, my friend—for you have in good truth proved yourself to be such—I will follow your advice and remain here, unless the officers compel me to change my quarters."

"Don't be afraid of them," said Jack, almost contemptuously, "it will be two or three days before they reach here, I'll warrant."

In such conversation as this, much of the time was whiled away.

The extreme state of weakness to which Tom King was reduced made him require an extra quantity of sleep, and therefore much of the time that would otherwise have hung most heavily upon his hands was passed in the unconsciousness of slumber.

So soon as darkness set in, Jack the ostler, having apprised Tom King of his determination, took up his quarters outside the inn with the intention of watching patiently until his friend the waggoner arrived.

His impatience was great, although, as it turned out, he had to wait for a much less time than he had anticipated.

It was, indeed, rather before midnight that Jack's attentive ears caught the sound of the revolving waggon wheels.

"Now for the news," he ejaculated, rubbing his hands briskly together, and starting up from the horse-trough on which he had been seated—"now for the news. Oh, how I wish I could only have seen the joke out to the end."

At length the waggoner drew up before the inn door.

Jack peered up at him, and fancied that his face had a scared, frightened look.

"Hullo!" he cried, "what's the matter with you? Sha'n't you get down?"

"Not if I know it," was the emphatic reply.

"Why not—why not?"

"Why not?" echoed the waggoner. "Because I never mean to come near this place again, if I can help it."

"Then why are you here now?"

"Just to warn you."

"Of what?"

"That you will be taken prisoner and transported for life."

"Oh, stuff—rubbish! I know better."

"But just let me tell you that I drove along, never thinking of anything till I got to London."

"And didn't the gentlemen awake?"

"Awake? Not they!"

"What did you do with them, then?"

"Why, I followed your advice, and drove up to Bow Street. The officers were there, and I told them just the facts of the case. They came at once, looked into the waggon, and then burst out into a roar of laughter."

"Very likely," said Jack, rubbing his hands more vigorously than ever. "Go on."

"Well, then they discovered that they were not gentlemen at all, as you had fancied, but really police officers; and what on earth could have induced them to get into that condition and give out such instructions they could not imagine."

"What did they do?"

"Why, they dragged them all out with very little ceremony, and tried quite in vain to wake them up, then they wanted to detain me, for they said it was a suspicious affair altogether, but I took advantage of their indecision and drove off."

"And is that all?" said Jack, in a disappointed tone.

"Not exactly all," was the reply. "You don't know how it worried me, for I was certain there was something in the matter that I did not understand, so I made haste with what I had to do, put up my horses, and then returned on foot to the police office."

"What for?"

"Why, to make inquiries, to be sure!"

"And what did you learn?"

"Why, that the officers had been recovered from their deep sleep, and they had declared that they had captured Tom King, the highwayman, but had been drugged at an inn where they stopped, the people at which had assisted the highwayman to escape."

"Pooh—gammon!" said Jack. "They must have been drunk or dreaming!"

"Well, whether they were or not, their story was believed, let me tell you that, and orders were given that a party of police officers should be sent out at once. The only difficulty they were in was about the situation of the inn, and I heard it said that a reward was offered for the waggoner who had brought them. As it was, they suspected he was an accomplice, and, at all events, he could show them the way to the inn."

"But you got clear off, didn't you?" asked Jack.

"Yes."

"Then thank your stars for that. You have had a narrow escape, and, if you had been caught, would have got into trouble."

"I knew that," said the waggoner, sulkily. "I didn't think that you'd be the one to serve me such a trick."

"You shall know more about it some day," said Jack, "and perhaps you won't regret it so much, after all. But are you sure that officers were sent out to find this inn?"

"Quite certain."

"Then thanks for the news; I will make myself scarce, for should they return, they would, in their rage, do I don't know what."

"Very good," said the waggoner, as he cracked his whip and drove off. "Good-bye, Jack Ostler, for may I be blowed if ever I stop here again, or take up such a load another time as you supplied me with."

At as fast a rate as his horses would go, the waggoner drove off, leaving Jack standing outside the inn, scarcely knowing whether to laugh or be serious.

CHAPTER CMLXVIII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS MAKE THE OSTLER'S FRIEND A PRISONER.

This intelligence was duly transmitted to Tom King, who, upon hearing it, decided at once to make a move.

But he was overruled by the ostler, who assured him that he would have plenty of warning of the officers' approach.

And indeed, when the night passed away and the next morning dawned without anything of an alarming or unusual character having occurred, Tom King began to feel that in all probability he should be safer where he was than elsewhere.

That day and the following also passed away in quiet.

Nothing had been seen or heard of the officers, which, if the information given by the waggoner was correct, seemed strange indeed.

But the fact was the officers, when they had recovered from their stupor, could give only a very vague and indefinite idea of the situation of the inn whereat they had been so hocussed.

They knew that it was somewhere on the cross-road branching out of the highway, but there were many such, and it was impossible to say which was the right one.

Much time, then, was spent in vainly searching for the inn—unnecessarily spent, indeed, for the better plan would have been to go round to the inn where they had first halted with their prisoner, and from which they would have no difficulty in finding their way.

But this was many miles off; and the man to whom the command of the expedition had been entrusted was about the most obstinate, pig-headed officer that ever breathed.

He had made up his mind to conduct the search in a certain way, and nothing on earth could turn him from it.

At last, however, after going many miles, they came into an ill-kept, unfrequented road, which struck Blogden and his companions as being somewhat familiar to them.

"This is the place, I do believe," he exclaimed. "I fancy, if we ascend to the summit of yonder hill, we shall be able to command such a view as will decide the matter one way or the other."

This was agreed upon; but before they had ascended half-way, the eyes of the chief officer caught sight of the figure of a man running hastily across a large, open meadow

He pointed him out to his companions, and then Blogden exclaimed:

"I will lay my life we are on the right track. That fellow has been put there as a scout; he will give warning of our approach."

"Not if I can help it," said the chief officer. "Let those who have the best horses gallop at full speed in pursuit of him, capture him, and bring him back to me."

Several officers pressed forward at once, but there was one who, by the superiority of his steed, rapidly out-distanced his companions.

The man in the field had by this time gained the cross-road.

He heard the clatter of horses' feet behind him, and looked back.

The officer called to him to stop; but, paying no heed to him, he began to run more swiftly than before.

This man, as the reader must already be aware, was the one selected by Jack the ostler to give warning of the coming of the officers.

It was not long, however, before he discovered that, let him run as fast as he might, he had no chance of getting away from the well-mounted police officer.

Panting and breathless, at last he stopped, and the very next moment the officer was upon him.

With great suddenness and precipitation, he seized hold of him, and, in spite of all his struggles and entreaties to be set at liberty, he was dragged back to the remainder of the troop, who had followed on at a tolerably brisk pace.

"Now, then, rascal," said the chief officer, "confess where you were running to! If you refuse, or if you hesitate, or tell a lie, you shall be made a prisoner, and afterwards transported for life!"

This was a threat that alarmed the country laborer greatly.

His cheeks grew white, and his knees knocked together.

"Speak, villain!" roared the chief officer again—"speak!—tell me what you were about to do!"

In broken, incoherent sentences, this man told the officers all that had passed between the ostler and himself.

He was called upon by Blogden to give a particular description of Jack.

He complied to the best of his ability, and Blogden exclaimed:

"We're right! I recognise the villain now! He brought in the tray of wine! No doubt he has got Tom King in concealment somewhere!"

Upon receipt of this opinion, the officers all pushed forward with fresh vigor, and the unhappy laborer had the mortification of finding himself made a secure prisoner.

He had fancied that by confessing he should get himself out of his scrape.

Had he foreseen the result he would never have spoken.

"All that remains now," said the chief officer, "is for us to approach this inn with due caution, and surround it. We will take prisoners everybody we find there!"

No voice dissented to this arrangement.

By some strange ill-luck, neither Jack the ostler nor Tom King was looking out at this time.

They relied altogether upon the laborer, and the length of time they had remained undisturbed made them careless.

It would have gone hard with them, beyond all doubt, had not a voice suddenly exclaimed:

"Jack—Jack, you idle rascal, where are you? Can't you hear customers are coming? Make haste, will you?"

The voice came from the yard below, and the voice was that of the innkeeper, who had by chance seen a portion of the police officers riding towards his house.

Jack came at once to the little circular window in the loft that we have so often mentioned, and no sooner did he peep out of it than he caught sight of the officers, scarcely more than two hundred yards distant.

He gave a low whistle of alarm, and then, in a voice of tolerable composure, said:

"All right, master, I will be down in a moment."

The landlord at once made his way to the front of the inn, there to be in readiness to receive his guests upon their arrival.

"Captain," said Jack, in a whisper, "they're here!"

"Then," ejaculated Tom, starting to his feet- "we're betrayed!"

"I fear so; but whether we are or not, we must be off quickly. Your horse is already saddled in the stable below, and I have been at some pains to pick out the best from among those left by the officers. I told you I should have to leave the inn, and I shall do so more unexpectedly than I at all thought for."

While the ostler was uttering these words, Tom looked carefully to his firearms, which during the long rest of leisure he had had he had got into proper order.

A glance almost was sufficient to satisfy him that they were right, and as he restored them to his belt, in readiness for instant use, the ostler said:

"Now, captain, down the ladder as quick as you can, and in less than a moment we shall show them a clean pair of heels."

Tom did not reply, but descended the ladder very speedily.

With the utmost rapidity the ostler brought the two horses out.

They were both in excellent condition, and seemed impatient for a long gallop.

"Now," said Jack, "just look here, captain—I can put you up to a wrinkle. The officers will come direct to the stables, no doubt, so we'll bolt and bar the door—that's it!"

"But how are we to get out?" asked Tom. "Be quick—every second is of importance!"

"I know that, captain. Lead your horse after mine through this narrow door; they will follow you, never fear, for this is where the corn is kept."

Tom complied, and found himself in another compartment of the shed.

"Woa—gently now—stand still!" said the ostler to his horse, patting it upon the neck; then, letting go the bridle, he went to one side of the shed where the planks seemed loose and rotten.

Pressing his shoulder firmly against it, the whole mass gave way, leaving an opening quite large enough to allow them to pass through.

"There, captain, I thought that might be useful, so the other day I took the precaution of loosening all the planks. Quick, and we shall be off!"

The ostler led his horse through the opening, and bounded at once into the saddle.

As he did so, he uttered a cry of warning.

Tom mounted hastily, and drew a pistol.

Then he saw there were some police officers not many paces off, who were coming towards them with all speed, uttering loud shouts and cries.

"They mean having us, captain," cried the ostler, "for it seems they were trying to surround the place! But spur your horse well; he can go if he likes! I'll warrant that there's not a horse among all that lot that could come near it!"

This advice was scarcely needed.

Tom allowed the reins to fall loose upon his horse's neck, and at the first touch of the spur the gallant creature went bounding off at a tremendous gallop.

Jack the ostler had no little difficulty in keeping up with him.

The officers were quickly distanced, but it was daylight—a most unfortunate circumstance for Tom, since it enabled the officers to watch his proceedings at a great distance.

"Gently, captain!" cried the ostler. "I know you don't want me with you, and therefore, if you like, we will part now. That will divide the officers."

"No, no," said Tom, "you had better keep with me, under my protection."

"Thank you, captain, but I can shift for myself.

"I can readily believe that, yet I don't wish to desert you."

"It is no desertion, captain—none at all."

"But, then," asked Tom, "when are we to meet again, for, remember, I am under a deep debt of obligation to you, and I shall not rest until it is paid."

"Anywhere—any time, captain," was the reply. "So far from thinking there is any obligation, I am inclined to cry quits. But there's no time now for talk. Farewell! and, some day or other, I trust we shall meet again."

With these words, the ostler struck his spurs sharply into his horse's flanks.

The animal uttered a cry of pain, and the next moment was flying at full gallop over the meadows to the right.

Tom King chose the opposite direction, urging his horse onward to the utmost.

The police officers still came perseveringly enough in the rear, but it was evident that their horses were already so much fatigued by the distance they had journeyed that it was impossible to urge them into a rate of speed at all approaching that at which the highwayman's horse was going.

Although aware of this, Tom King's anxiety was considerable; but when he looked around and saw thick, dark clouds piling themselves up, giving token that darkness would set in much earlier than usual, he felt fresh confidence.

Directly afterwards he gained a cross-road.

He pursued it without hesitation, and as it wound about in a serpentine fashion, he was very quickly out of sight of the officers, for on each side a tall, thick hedgerow had been planted.

The chief thing he had to fear was a reinforcement, and that was scarcely likely to take place in so lonely a part of the country.

CHAPTER CMLXIX.

IN WHICH TYBURN TOLL-GATE COMES TO AN END.

We go back now to Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

It will be remembered that we left them riding at full gallop from the ruined castle wherein they had found so strange and secure a place of refuge.

The night was, in good truth, a most disagreeable and unpleasant one to be abroad in, yet the highwaymen found nothing to grumble at in it.

As a measure of prudence they did not attempt to draw rein upon any of the numerous roads which they crossed on their way from the castle, for they were exceedingly desirous that there should be no suspicion of their presence in that part of the country.

At length, however, Claude Duval cried out rather sharply:

"Halt!"

Sixteen-String Jack drew rein at once.

They were now upon a broad high-road, which they had gained by overleaping the hedge that divided it from a meadow.

"What's the matter, Claude?" he asked.

"Why, I fancy we have come quite far enough now. Surely there can be no risk in lying in wait in this place."

"Not much, I should think."

"Then," he continued, "we have arrived just in the nick of time, for I can hear a horse's hoofs quite distinctly."

"You're right," said Jack, after listening for a moment; "a single horseman is coming, though I don't think he will turn out much good."

"Why not?"

"Because his horse is a poor one, or it would never come at such a shuffling trot as that."

"Well, we shall see. Draw back into the shadow."

This was done, and directly afterwards, on looking down the road, they perceived, quite distinctly, something white, which, on a closer approach, turned out to be a white horse.

On this was seated a man, who was amusing himself by every now and then breaking out into a rude ditty.

As soon as he was near enough, Sixteen-String Jack and Claude both rode out.

"Stop!" they cried, as with one voice—"stop! Pull up! If you refuse, your death is certain!"

They presented their pistols while they thus spoke.

"Bedad thin," said a voice, which unmistakably proclaimed its owner to be an Irishman—"bedad thin, I'll be afther pulling up, for I'm not tired of my life just yet."

He stopped his horse with the greatest amount of coolness in the world.

"Now," said Claude, sharply, "be quick—we're in a hurry—hand over all the money you have about you!"

"Oh! thin it's highwaymen ye are, is it? Well, thin, divil a ha'penny will ye git out of me!"

"We shall see!" said Jack. "If you don't think proper to hand over quietly, we shall take by force what we require."

"Oh! shall ye now? Thin I'd be obleeged if you'd take as much money as ye could out of me pockets and give me a little back again, for it's none at all I can find there."

"None at all?"

"Divil a ha'penny, barring one crown-piece, and that I spint at the inn beyant, and where any more is to come from I don't know."

There was something in the man's careless tones and in the indifferent manner in which he treated the whole of the proceedings that impressed upon the highwaymen the belief he was speaking nothing but the truth.

"Then, if that's the case," said Claude, angrily, "ride on! Only take this caution with you: if you meet any body, don't say a word about us."

"Fakes, thin, I won't, if you will make me a promise in return. Of course you know where this road leads to."

"Yes, to London."

"Shure, man, you're right. Now jist take notice. If anyone should ax you for Patrick M'Gear—that's me, ye know—just say you saw me on the high-road, travelling straight for Oxford—do you understand that?—and I'll be obleeged to you."

With these words, the Irishman jogged on again, taking the road to London.

The highwaymen both laughed, in spite of themselves, though they were annoyed that the adventure should turn out so unprofitable, because the probability was the Irishman would ere long make some one acquainted with their presence on the road.

They had no time to exchange any words on the subject, however, for just then they distinctly heard the rattle of wheels.

"A light cart," said Claude Duval, listening attentively. "Now this, let me tell you, promises us a much better booty."

The sharp stroke of a horse's hoofs upon the hard road now became distinctly audible above the rattle of the wheels, and it was evident that the occupants of the cart were rolling over the road in capital style.

The highwaymen shrunk back again to their place of concealment, and, shading their eyes with their hands, strove to make out who was approaching.

Ere long they discovered that the cart was occupied only by one man, though he had as much superabundant flesh as to be big enough for two, and was in himself quite a big load for a horse.

"That's a farmer, or grazier, or something of that kind," said Claude. "And if he is on his way to market—and there's no doubt that he is—we shall have a profitable adventure. Keep quiet, and, if we both ride out suddenly, we shall, ten to one, frighten him out of his wits."

"If we frighten him out of his money," rejoined his companion, "that will be much more satisfactory."

The highwaymen were silent, for the cart was now very close at hand.

So soon as the horse's head was opposite to them, the highwaymen both pounced out.

Claude Duval seized the horse by the bridle, and forcibly brought him to a standstill, while Sixteen-String Jack presented a pistol at the farmer's head.

"Now, then," he cried, "your money—give it quickly, or I will find whether you are in the habit of carrying your brains in your skull or not!"

This was a threat that horrified the occupant of the cart in no slight degree.

The reins and whip dropped from his nerveless fingers.

"Spare me!" he ejaculated—"spare me! Pray, gentlemen, do not take my life!"

Beyond doubt he would have gone down on his knees in an attitude of supplication, only the shape of the vehicle was such as to make this an impossibility

"You are all right," said Jack—"no harm will happen to you if you give up your money-bags quietly."

With a deep groan the farmer unbuttoned his huge overcoat and thrust his hand into an inner pocket.

It lingered there for a moment or so hesitatingly.

Jack had his eye keenly fixed upon him.

"Come," he said, "no delay—time is pressing!"

With another heavy groan the farmer withdrew his hand from his pocket, bringing with it a good-sized bag.

Evidently, however, he could not make up his mind to part with it so easily, although in such a state of mortal fright.

But Jack saved him any further indecision by suddenly snatching it from him.

"There," he said, "that will do; and as the purse is tolerably weighty we will trouble you no further. Here, take the reins, drive off, and be thankful you have escaped with your life."

The farmer did not require a second bidding.

With the utmost alacrity he snatched up the reins and gave the horse a heavy slash with the whip.

He was quickly out of sight in the darkness, and as Jack tossed the purse up in the air and caught it again, he cried:

"It's heavy—very heavy—just enough for what we require."

"Then," said Claude, "if that's the case we cannot do better than ride direct to the toll-gate; I shall be glad to have that little business over."

"Agreed; I have not the least objection."

"Forward, then; we have but to follow this high-road and we shall reach it in a short time."

No more was said by either of the highwaymen, for the speed at which they were going was such as to make conversation a matter of difficulty.

After a hard gallop, they at length came in sight of the toll-gate.

Reducing their speed, they approached with a certain amount of caution, and it was fortunate indeed that they did so.

Suddenly, from out of the shade at the side of the road, about two hundred yards from the toll-gate, a man sprang.

Claude's horse reared and swerved, nearly unseating his rider.

"Captains—captains!" said a voice. "Is it you?"

"Who speaks?" asked Jack.

"Do you not remember my voice? I am the toll-keeper."

"Yes—yes, I recognise you now. Why are you here?"

"To give you warning," was the answer. "Do not linger here a single moment—pray do not!"

"Why not? What has happened?"

"Why, you see, they have turned me out of my situation. In fact, I have been taken up before the magistrate, and only escaped by the greatest wonder in the world. But there is not time to enter into particulars now—some other time must suffice."

"Well," said Jack, "I am glad we have met. Here's what I promised you."

"Thanks, captain, the amount comes most welcomely. And now I will tell you why I have been so anxious to waylay you here."

"What is it?"

"Why, the police officers have gone to work very cunningly. One of them has taken my place at the toll-gate. He dresses just like me, and inside are a lot of his companions."

"Then they must have got scent of our intention to return," said Claude.

"It looks like it," was the reply, "though I can't make out how they can have guessed it; nevertheless, they are there, and if you had galloped up to the gate you would both have been shot down or else captured—there was a certainty of one or the other."

"It seems, then," said Jack, "that we are indebted to you for our lives on this occasion."

"Yes, gentlemen, and I am indebted to you for this money, which will make me independent for the rest of my life. But hark!" he ejaculated. "Quick—quick! Be off—they'll see us in another moment, they will be in full pursuit."

The highwaymen looked towards the toll-gate while the man spoke, and then they caught sight of a dark-looking mass, evidently a troop of police officers.

"We can save ourselves easily," said Jack; "but how about yourself—how shall you fare?"

"Don't trouble yourself about me," was the answer



[DICK TURPIN, IN HIS DISGUISE, VISITS A BARBER'S SHOP.]

"I have arranged all my plans very nicely. Do you see that little bit of a glimmering yonder?"

The man pointed to one side of the road, where, in the darkness, something that looked like a bright red spark could be seen.

"Yes—what of it?"

"Why, I shall wait till the officers start, and then with that slow-match I shall touch a train of gunpowder which leads from here to the toll-house. There I have some gunpowder stored underneath, enough to blow the old timbers to a thousand fragments. I rather expect that will astonish the officers a little, and while they are recovering from their surprise I shall make off."

The highwaymen were themselves rather surprised by this announcement, and before they had time to make any remark the late toll-keeper exclaimed:

"Now, then, be off as quickly as you can—they are all on the road now. If you hear a slight noise behind you, don't be alarmed—it will only be the old toll-house going to ruin."

It was quite clear that the police officers knew that something unusual was taking place down the road.

They may have suspected the presence of the highwaymen.

At any rate, they rode forth to ascertain what was going on.

The tollman waited until they were at no great distance from him, then taking up the slow-match he applied it to the train of which he had spoken.

There was a rapid and bewildering flash of light along the roadway, then a slight but scarcely appreciable pause, which was followed by a furious roaring noise—a loud explosion and the crash of parting timbers.

A broad red column of light shot up high into the air, revealing for a moment all objects around.

After that a double darkness seemed to settle upon all things.

A universal panic seemed to seize upon the officers.

Their horses, alarmed by the explosion, and the terrific flash of light with which it was accompanied, became restive and unruly, while their riders, deficient of presence of mind enough to guide them, had many narrow escapes of being thrown.

All thought of continuing the chase after the highwaymen was at once abandoned, and the first thing they did upon recovering ordinary possession of their faculties was to ride back to the scene of disaster.

The whole occurrence was, however, shrouded in mystery.

Of the wooden toll-house nothing more than a blackened heap of smouldering ruins remained.

Fortunately no one was hurt

The ex-toll-keeper made his escape easily—in fact, he had no difficulty whatever in getting away, for the police officers never once suspected his presence.

The event startled the two highwaymen not a little, although they were prepared for it. As soon as the explosion was over, however, Claude Duval said:

"Forward, Jack—let us push on! The officers may not trouble us any further, still it is quite time we got back to our safe quarters."

CHAPTER CMLXX.

THE RENDEZVOUS ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH.—THE ARRIVAL OF TOM KING.

A CHANCE belated wayfarer passing over the south-eastern portion of Hampstead Heath on the night appointed for the meeting of the highwaymen would probably have perceived, glimmering in the darkness, a dull red speck of light.

The chances were, at the time of which we write, that no one would venture to cross the heath after dark. There were no well-kept roads intersecting it as now—no lights—no habitations near, except a few little cottages round the old ivy-grown church at Hampstead.

The night was profoundly dark—the ground itself could scarcely be distinguished beneath the feet, and a light, soft rain was falling, that materially increased the discomforts of those who were compelled to be abroad.

The red light, however, of which we have spoken, continued to make itself visible—indeed, as time passed on, it increased in brightness.

This light, as the reader no doubt suspects, proceeded from a fire kindled on the heath.

Standing over it were two men, and the firelight shining on their faces disclosed the familiar features of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

"You were quite right to insist upon lighting a fire, Jack," said Claude Duval, as he stooped down and stirred the embers with a stick. "The night is a most disagreeable one."

"It is," said Jack, with a slight shiver—"there can be no mistake at all about that. What is the time?"

"Nearly eleven."

"Then we are full early yet. No matter; I would sooner wait here than elsewhere."

There was a perceptible amount of agitation in Jack's voice while he spoke. He was exceedingly anxious to know whether his comrades had been as fortunate as himself—whether they would be able to attend the place of meeting.

"I only hope," continued Claude, "that none of our enemies will see this light."

"There is little to fear in that respect, I think," returned Jack. "We have left no clue to guide them here, and who would be out on the heath on such a night as this?"

"Hark!"

"Did you hear anything?"

"I fancy so."

"What was it like?"

"A footstep—a slow, cautious footstep. Hush—listen!"

Both were silent immediately, and for several succeeding moments they listened intently.

But, beyond the low sighing of the wind as it made its way over the uneven surface of the heath, no sound was heard.

"You must have been mistaken, Claude," said Jack, at length.

"Perhaps so, and yet I scarcely think it."

"All seems still."

"Very."

Claude Duval produced his pistols.

"We must be on our guard against any sudden surprise," he said. "It is impossible to say whether we shall be attacked."

"I am ready. But hark—I am sure I heard the footstep then!"

"Who goes there?" cried Claude Duval, in true sentinel style.

"Tom King—Tom King!" was the reply.

The voice was low and faint, and though it evidently came from somewhere close at hand, yet it seemed as though it had travelled for a long distance.

Claude and Jack turned round, and at the same moment caught sight of their old comrade, Tom King.

But he was in his appearance so greatly altered that they shrank back with something like dismay.

"Why, Tom," ejaculated Claude, "where have you been? What ails you?"

Tom King smiled faintly.

"I look like a ghost, I suppose—do I not?"

"You do indeed!"

"Well, you would not wonder at it if you knew all I have gone through. But the captain—where is he?"

"We have seen nothing of him yet, Tom; but, as you may know, it wants quite an hour to the time of appointment."

"Yes, yes! I hastened here with what speed I could."

"We did the same," was the reply, "and, if nothing has happened, we shall see the captain ere long, depend upon it."

Tom King did indeed look pale and wan.

Since we saw him last, he had done scarcely anything besides riding about the country with the officers close at his heels, escaping them only with the greatest difficulty.

This exertion, the want of rest, and his anxiety of mind, caused his wound to assume an alarming aspect.

He was glad to seat himself near the fire, and as he did so he exclaimed:

"See to my horse, Jack—it is close here; I feel too exhausted."

"Then," said Claude, "try a little of this. I'll warrant that it does you good."

He produced, as he spoke, a bottle of brandy from his pocket, which he had obtained from the inn.

Tom felt wonderfully refreshed after a draught of it; but, as he said, it was rest and food that he required more than stimulants.

His state of exhaustion may be imagined from the fact that it was not until now that he appeared to notice the presence of the fire, or, rather, become aware that it might be the means of bringing their foes upon them.

"This is a great risk," he said—"by far too great."

"Do you think so?"

"I do."

"For what reason?" questioned Claude, quickly. "Do you know that the officers are anywhere at hand?"

"I do not—I scarcely think they are; but yet, in spite of all my precautions during the last day or two, I have not been able to keep out of sight of them many hours together. Through a practical joke that has been played them, I have incurred their bitterest animosity They are resolved to hunt me down."

"Pooh, pooh, Tom!" said Sixteen-String Jack. "Do not speak in that despondent voice. You don't seem like yourself. It is your wound and over exertion that makes you look at things in that light."

"It may be," said Tom—"it may be. I assure you I don't feel myself."

He leaned his head upon his hands while he spoke, and looked steadily at the fire.

"I will put on some more sticks," said Claude—"that will keep down the blaze a little, and I am in hopes that we shall not have to wait long until the captain is with us. When he comes we shall change our quarters."

Tom was so listless and apathetic that he never asked his comrades to what place they intended to go.

After this a long pause ensued.

Claude and Jack were busy thinking about their comrade, who, still sitting by the fire, seemed to have fallen into a state of stupor.

They were silent, too, because they were listening.

The wind made odd, confusing noises as it swept over the heath, and they were anxious to become aware at the earliest moment of the approach either of Dick or the police officers.

But the hour of midnight was slowly given birth by the church at Hampstead without anything whatever occurring to disturb them in the slightest degree.

Their anxiety now reached it highest point. Even Tom King roused himself and rose slowly to his feet.

"Surely," he said, "that was the old clock at Hampstead striking twelve?"

"It was."

"And no signs of the captain?"

"None at present."

Silence again succeeded these few brief sentences; but, although they listened long and intently, they failed to catch the sound they so much wished to hear.

Tom King's condition continued to increase the uneasiness his companions felt.

It was soon evident that he was incapable of standing for any length of time without support, and, with a weary sigh, he sank down again into his former position.

Here he remained, motionless and silent, until all at once he raised his head and exclaimed:

"They are coming now—they are coming now! I can hear them quite distinctly. Put out the fire—put it out, or they will be upon us at once!"

Claude and Sixteen-String Jack started when they first heard his words.

Then instantly assumed listening attitudes.

But their well-practised ears failed to catch any sound at all resembling that which would be made by the approach of horsemen.

"You have been dreaming," they said, at last. "It is your fancy."

"No," said Tom, in greater excitement than before. "I tell you that I can hear them now plainer than ever. Listen—listen, and you will hear them too!"

CHAPTER CMLXXI.

SOME SINGULAR EVENTS TAKE PLACE BY NIGHT IN THE LITTLE RURAL CHURCH.

"Hush, Maud—hush!" said Dick Turpin, in a suppressed voice. "Keep your calmness, and I will answer for the rest."

"But where shall you go?" she asked, in a trembling voice—"where can you seek shelter now?"

"I shall not move," replied Dick, "until I learn that the officers—if such they are—really intend to enter this churchyard. It may be that they have only just halted there by accident, and that they intend to go riding on."

"Now, Dick," was the answer, "you must not cheat yourself into that belief. They are opening the gate now."

Maud was perfectly correct.

The rattling sound made by the hasty introduction of a key into the lock of the churchyard gate was distinctly heard in the silence that prevailed around, and then afterwards there was a grating, creaking noise as the gate was slowly pushed open.

Dick took Black Bess by the bridle with one hand, while he passed his other arm round Maud's waist.

"We will quit the porch," he said, "and yet not go far away—at all events, until we know something more than we know now."

Maud made not the slightest hesitation or demur.

In less than a moment the church porch was vacated.

Dick took up his position close to the side of it, standing in the angle formed by it and the church wall—a spot where the darkness was much greater than anywhere else.

Rapid as his movements had been, however, scarcely had he taken up this position than footsteps could be distinctly heard upon the hard gravel-path.

Dick leaned forward and strained his eyes anxiously, in order to make out the nature of these new-comers.

At first he saw nothing save a black moving mass, which on a nearer approach resolved itself into a small throng of persons.

The obscurity was too great, nevertheless, for Dick to say positively that they were not police officers.

Evidently the porch was their destination, for they walked straight towards it, and just as they passed within it, Dick caught sight, as he believed, of a female, but she was so surrounded by men shrouded in long cloaks that he could not make sure.

"Open the door," said a deep voice, in commanding tones—"open the door, and be quick about it! We have no time to waste!"

"I am opening it, worshipful sir," was the answer. "One moment! The lock is rather stiff, and my strength begins to fail me."

The person who had first spoken uttered an impatient exclamation, but even as it passed his lips the door leading into the church was opened, and the whole throng hastily entered.

Dick gave a long sigh of relief.

"You see, Maud, I was quite right in my suspicions—these people have nothing at all to do with us."

"Yes, so I find," said Maud. "And now that they have all entered, let us make the best speed we can to Hampstead."

"With all my heart," returned Turpin. "And yet before we move I should like to take one peep at the interior of the church. I am strongly filled with curiosity at what I have seen. I long to see more."

"No, no—do not seek fresh danger, Dick—make your escape while you have the opportunity."

"Tush—tush! There is no danger—none at all. Keep still. I will just take a peep through yonder window—that will satisfy me abundantly."

He pointed to a small window close by—a window which they had not previously noticed, but now it could be distinctly seen, in consequence of the light that beamed from it.

The sill of this window was at a tolerable height from the ground, but Dick managed to peep through the latticed casement by standing on the broad flat stone of a tomb that adjoined the wall of the church.

A singular scene now presented itself to his gaze—a scene which he had not at all expected to behold.

He beckoned Maud to approach and take her place by his side.

She was not proof against the curiosity which would be felt by anyone in consequence of such a strange visit to a church at so late an hour, and therefore, despite the agitation and terror that she felt, Maud stood upon the tombstone, and peeped into the interior.

She saw that the church was tolerably well illuminated by a number of wax candles standing near the altar, and which, though only just lighted, gave forth considerable light.

Every moment this light increased.

Then it was seen that the party which had entered the church was composed of several persons, all dressed in so rich and elegant a manner as proved them to belong to the upper class of society.

They had cast aside the long cloaks in which they had been enveloped when walking up the gravel-path.

Among them, too, was a girl, fair, young, and beautiful.

Her dress was of white satin, and a white veil was thrown over her head, so that, in the semi-obscurity prevailing in the church, she formed quite a conspicuous object.

But her countenance, upon which the rays of the candles fell, was clearly seen by the two watchers, and it was with no slight amount of surprise that they noticed the fair features were convulsed with anguish, and that tears were rolling rapidly down her cheeks.

Her hands were clasped tightly together, and she was standing in an attitude of imploring entreaty before a man who, with folded arms, looked coldly on her, evidently disregarding her distress.

By the movement of this girl's lips, they could tell that she was speaking, though her voice was well-nigh choked with sobs.

A faint murmur alone came to the ears of Maud and Dick, who in vain tried to make out what was said.

The young girl placed her clasped hands upon this man's shoulder, but he instantly and roughly shook her off.

At the same time, he turned his face towards a distant corner of the church, while, in those deep, stern tones which they had before heard, he cried:

"Is there to be no end to this delay? Cannot the ceremony at once be proceeded with?'

A slight movement followed these words, and then from out of a corner emerged a white figure, which in a moment or so afterwards the two watchers had no difficulty in recognising as a clergyman.

With an aspect of humility in his gait and deportment, this clergyman walked up the silent aisle, and then, opening the little gate in the altar rails, walked up to the communion table, from which he picked up a book.

The grief of the young girl was now something terrible to witness—she at times shrieked aloud in the bitterness of her anguish.

Then the one with the stern voice—who, from his manner, as well as from a certain distant resemblance between them, Dick conjectured to be the girl's father—advanced, and, seizing her by the wrist, dragged her violently forward.

At the same time, he took hold of the hand of one of his companions—a tall, thin young man, with dark, heavy, overhanging brows, which gave a peculiar appearance to his countenance.

His brow was now contracted into a frown, and so low did his brows descend that they seemed to reach his cheeks, leaving his eyes invisible.

With unmistakable aversion, the young girl shuddered and attempted to draw back; but her strength, compared with her father's, was as nothing, and he compelled the couple to join hands.

Slowly and reluctantly, the young girl was then literally dragged up to the altar.

The clergyman, who should have interfered in such a case, and not have been a willing accomplice in such villany, appeared to be quite unconscious of what was taking place around him.

He held before his eyes a large book, from which he appeared to be reading devoutly.

On reaching the altar, the young girl fell suddenly upon her knees, and with a rapid movement disengaged her hand from that of the intended bridegroom.

Once more assuming her former imploring attitude, she again spoke as well as her emotion would allow her.

It was just when events had reached this point that Dick's attention was distracted by another sound, coming from an altogether different direction, and yet a sound which, despite the interest he felt in what was going on before him, he could not disregard.

This was the loud and rapid clatter of a horse's feet.

Some one intent upon making the utmost speed was galloping along the high-road.

Maud heard the sound, and instantly forgot all that she was witnessing.

"There is no need for alarm, Maud," said Dick, in a reassuring voice—"from a single horseman we have nothing to fear."

"Are you sure that only one is coming?"

"Quite sure, though the clatter is prodigious."

Just as he spoke, the sound of the horse's feet ceased suddenly.

"There's an accident," said Dick—"I feel sure of it!"

He was deliberating whether to quit the churchyard, in the hope of being able to render some assistance, when a hasty footstep became audible, and directly afterwards he saw a slight, slim figure running at full speed up the avenue.

This figure made its way to the church door, which gave way before the sudden impetus with which he rushed against it.

He burst into the sacred edifice with the rapidity of lightning.

At the same time, he drew his bright, polished sword from its sheath, and whirled it round him.

Maud and Dick were now once more gazing through the window

Loud exclamations of rage and hate followed the entrance of the stranger, who, by the light which now filled the church, was seen to be a young man of handsome and imposing presence.

Swords were drawn, but before one of them could make a movement, the intended bride, with a shrill scream that seemed to electrify all present, sprang from her kneeling posture, and, fleet as a fawn, hastened to place herself beside the new-comer.

It was wonderful to observe what an effect this action had upon him.

He seemed at once to receive a tremendous accession of courage.

"Down with him!" cried the father of the intended bride—"down with him! Let him not escape! I will hold you all harmless from the consequences of the deed!"

But these words did not cause the young stranger to lose his self-possession in the least.

He whispered a few words to the companion at his side, then, presenting the same bold front, slowly retreated, step by step, towards the church door.

Up to now Dick had remained a perfectly passive spectator of the whole scene.

He had not been able to find any opportunity for interfering.

Now, however, the opportunity presented itself.

His sympathies were fully enlisted on behalf of the young girl, and it was a kind of instinct that made him resolve to side with the young stranger against so many powerful enemies, and assist him to escape.

There was nothing that Dick admired more than courage and true bravery, qualities which it was evident this young stranger possessed in no common degree.

Accordingly, without saying a word to Maud, Dick hastily stepped down off the tomb, and made his way to the door of the church.

He entered quickly, and found that he had made his appearance not a moment too soon.

"Cowards!" he cried, in a loud, ringing voice—"cowards! Would so many of you attack a single man?"

His words and his unexpected appearance for a brief space of time seemed to paralyse the young stranger's assailants.

The girl's father, however, was the first to recover himself.

"This is only one of his vile associates!" he said. "Down with them both! Surely you can be a match for two! Drag Silvia from him!"

"Back—back!" cried Dick, addressing the young man, who gazed in wonder at this new and unlooked-for ally. "Get to the door as quickly as you can! It is madness to contend against so many!"

The whole marriage party—if so it may be termed—now attacked Dick and the young stranger.

Had any of them been provided with firearms, then, beyond a doubt, the highwayman's life would have been in great danger.

The only weapons they carried, however, were swords, and under these circumstances there was just the chance that a skilful swordsman would be able for a second or so to keep them at bay.

Few knew better how to handle this weapon than Dick Turpin, and on the present occasion he made a good probation of his skill.

The bright steel weapons clashed together with a sound that brought out many a strange echo from odd nooks in the old church.

Upon seeing the combatants engaged, Maud uttered a piercing shriek, and this sound added not a little to the confusion of all present.

Silvia, for so she had been named, was unable to bear any longer the horrors of the scene, and sank off into a state of utter insensibility.

The young man to whom she had flown so quickly for protection evidently thought Dick's advice was good, for, picking up his inanimate burden in his arms, he ran hastily with her to the door of the church.

Dick followed him closely, covering his retreat by continually dealing circular sweeps with his heavy sword, which nothing could withstand.

All this, that has of necessity taken us some time to describe, actually took no more than a few seconds in oc-

curring, so that when Maud entered the church porch the young man was in the act of leaving it with his senseless burden.

Directly afterwards Dick followed.

With the quickness of lightning, he flung his sword to the ground.

Then, seizing the massive oaken door, he pulled it shut after him.

His hands were already upon the key, which was still sticking in the lock, as Silvia's father was too impatient to allow it to be removed.

As quick, then, as the eye could wink, the door closed with a bang, and the key turned in the lock.

CHAPTER CMLXXII.

CLAUDE DUVAL MAKES A PROPOSITION TO HIS COMPANIONS.

"CAGED!" shouted Dick Turpin, in a voice of exultation—"caged! That was neatly done, I rather think!"

He stopped abruptly, for just then Maud flung her arms around him.

"You are hurt," she cried—"you are wounded!"

"No, no—not scratched."

"But I say you are—here in the arm!"

Dick carried his hand towards the place, and then, to his surprise, felt that his coat sleeve was wet with blood.

"It is nothing," he replied—"a touch that in the heat of my blood I had not felt. Hark!"

A furious hammering sound came from the other side of the church door.

"Knock away," Dick cried, derisively—"the door is strong enough to laugh at all your efforts. Come, Maud, we will leave this place."

Gladly Maud obeyed; but as soon as they emerged from the porch, Dick again paused.

The young man had placed Silvia on the ground in the churchyard.

Her head was resting on his knee, and he was endeavouring to restore her to consciousness.

"Fly!" cried Dick, addressing him—"Fly while you have time! Your only hope of safety lies in instant flight! They are all within the church now, but they will soon find a means of leaving it!"

"Then I can die in her defence!"

"There is no need for that. Fly, I say, and take your companion with you!"

"If I dared."

"Dared?" repeated Dick, in astonishment. "She loves you, and you would save her from a fate worse than death!"

"I—I trust she loves me."

"Believe it. Her actions prove it. Do not waste another moment, as you value your own life and her happiness!"

"But you, sir?" cried the young man, rising to his feet, and looking inquiringly at the highwayman. "May I ask in whom I have so strangely found a friend?"

"No matter. I tell you there is no time for talk! Raise her up in your arms, and follow me! Hark! I told you they would find a way out!"

A terrific crash of glass accompanied Dick's words

It seemed as though one of the large windows in the sacred edifice had been dashed completely from its setting.

The sound served to arouse the young man and quicken his exertions, though, to tell the truth, his brain was in a whirl, for events had taken so sudden and strange a turn that he is to be excused for feeling a little bewildered.

Following Dick's directions, he picked Silvia up in his arms, and strode with her rapidly along the gravel-path.

Dick and Maud hurried after them, and Black Bess, who had watched attentively every one of her master's movements, brought up the rear.

At the gate the stranger paused.

"My horse is utterly exhausted," he said; "besides, he fell heavily with me the moment I reached the gate."

"So much the better!" cried Dick. "Mount one of these. I will help this lady to seat herself before you, and I will start the other horses to keep you company."

"Why do that?"

"Why, to prevent all chance of pursuit, to be sure!"

"Yes, yes—of course! But pardon me—I am so confused that I am altogether incapable of anything resembling calm thought."

He mounted while he spoke.

Silvia had by this time partially recovered possession of her senses.

Dick lifted her easily to the saddle.

"Now," he cried, "off and away, and my best wishes go with you! Not another moment! See, they are rushing down the path!"

The young man did not stay to turn his head to obtain confirmation of Dick's words, but struck spurs to his horse's flanks instead.

It should be stated that all the horses had been secured to the gate leading into the churchyard, and left there. Dick released them quickly, giving each a sharp cut with a stick as he did so.

Away they flew along the high-road after the two lovers, and ere the discomfited bridal party could emerge from the gate they had all disappeared round the curve a few yards ahead.

Dick Turpin's course was now clear and easy enough.

He placed Maud upon the back of Black Bess, then mounted himself.

He took off his hat and made an ironical bow to the excited throng, who were in various ways giving expression to the mortification and anger they experienced.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said—"a pleasant walk to you! The young couple are quite safe from your pursuit. Shame upon you all to contemplate such a deed!"

With these words, Dick Turpin allowed the reins to fall upon the back of Black Bess.

That was all the noble creature wanted to urge her forward.

Away she flew, and when Dick next turned his head to look behind him the church was completely out of sight.

"An odd adventure, Maud, was it not?" he exclaimed, as he slackened his mare's speed slightly. "Still, I feel that I acted rightly. Without my interference I believe two young hearts would have been made wretched for ever!"

"But your arm?" said Maud, apprehensively. "Are you sure it is no more than a trifling hurt?"

"Quite sure; but, for all that, it is bleeding yet, so we will try a bandage."

Dick's broad neckcloth served well enough for this purpose, and after this slight interruption the journey to Hampstead was continued.

But more time had been, from first to last, consumed by this little incident than Dick believed, and he was quite surprised to find the hour was midnight while he was yet some distance from his destination.

On making this discovery he pressed onward more rapidly, for he knew well that his companions would be suffering great anxiety on his account.

The journey was one that alarmed Maud considerably; but when she found herself in the vicinity of Hampstead Heath, without the occurrence of a single incident, she began to recover her ordinary composure.

The heath was covered with a darkness so intense that Dick found it necessary to reduce his mare's speed to a walking pace.

Fortunately he was thoroughly acquainted with the nature of the ground, otherwise he could not have made his way to that one particular spot where they had agreed to meet.

It was not long, therefore, before Dick caught sight of the red gleam of light proceeding from the fire.

At first this baffled him considerably, and made him doubt whether he had really made his way in the right direction.

Upon coming nearer, and finding that a fire was actually burning on the heath, he paused irresolutely.

"What is it?" Maud asked, with anxiety. "Why do you pause?"

"Do you see that light yonder?"

"Yes. What is it? What does it portend?"

"That is just what I am trying to find out," replied Dick. "That ought to be the place where we agreed to meet; but how comes it there is a light visible? Surely, if the others have arrived first, they have not been so foolhardy as to make a fire?"

This was a matter upon which Maud could give no opinion, and therefore she remained silent.

After a few moments more deliberation, however, Dick again slowly advanced.

From this it will be guessed that Tom King was not laboring under any mistake when he cried out that he could hear some one approaching; but his fancy misled him to a certain extent, inasmuch as he believed that police officers and not Dick Turpin, were approaching.

"Who is there?" cried Claude, raising his voice upon finding that only one horse was approaching. "Is that you, captain?"

"It is," was the reply, and the next moment Dick Turpin joined his comrades.

They were rejoiced indeed to find that he had escaped comparatively unharmed all the many perils which had beset him since they parted, and he experienced an equal amount of satisfaction.

The arrival of Dick had an inspiriting effect upon Tom King, who, by a great effort, shook off much of the languor with which he had been overcome.

"I am hurt, captain," he said, "but not badly. The wound is a trifling one; but I have neglected it, and I have been much harassed. A little rest will quickly put me right."

"I hope so," said Dick; "but now that we are all here, let us, in the first place, consider our future movements. Shall we separate again or not; and if not, where shall we go?"

"I anticipated that question, captain," answered Claude, quickly, "and I am glad to say that the point will require very little discussion."

"How so?"

"Why, Jack and myself have been fortunate enough to discover a retreat that will answer most admirably for the purpose of concealing us. We have thoroughly examined it, and are both fully impressed with its advantages."

"That, then, is good news," said Dick. "I, too, had found a place of refuge, and one which even yet may some day stand us in good stead; but there are many disagreeables and discomforts in connection with it—discomforts which your shelter may not possess."

"Silence!" cried Maud, at this moment—"silence, all of you! I am certain I heard a voice."

"A voice?" echoed the highwaymen, in slight alarm.

"Yes; it is, indeed, faint and far off, but I do believe it was a voice."

"We will listen," said Dick. "I know, Maud, that your ears are keen."

They listened accordingly, and then they heard first what was unmistakably a rapid footstep.

Some one was running across the heath towards the light at full speed.

Hearing this, the highwaymen all produced their arms.

They felt certain it could be no friend that was nearing them.

Suddenly, however, a voice that was almost inarticulate from breathlessness said:

"Captain—captain, are you there? If so, speak at once! Captain—captain!"

Upon hearing these words, the highwaymen all looked at one another in great surprise.

But Tom King quickly exclaimed:

"I know that voice—it belongs to one who has befriended me—one without whose aid I verily believe I should never have escaped from the police officers; but I will tell you all by-and-by. Take my word for it now—he is to be trusted."

"Then answer him."

"Jack," said Tom, "I am here."

The next moment, the ostler from the lonely inn made his appearance.

He was panting and breathless, so much so that he could not, for the life of him, speak a word, although he made violent efforts to do so.

Looking at him, the highwaymen perceived that his apparel was torn and disordered, as though he had recently been engaged in a severe struggle, while one side of his face and head was smeared and matted with blood.

"Take your time," said Dick—"take your time; then tell us what you have to say."

"Officers!" the ostler gasped out—"the officers are close at hand!"

"But not coming here, surely?"

"Yes, yes—in pursuit of me! They have done nothing but hunt me for days past. I knew that I was near the captain here, and was certain that he was coming to this place—not that I should have troubled him, only my horse was shot down under me; another bullet has ploughed up my cheek, and, as I fell bleeding to the ground, the officers pounced upon me and made me prisoner!"

"But you have escaped."

"Yes, I have escaped, and only a few minutes since, and that by the greatest miracle in the world. But the officers are after me; in a few moments at the most you will hear them."

"I can hear them now," was the response, and as the words were spoken, loud voices could be heard shouting in the distance, mingled with which came the dull, heavy beat of horses' hoofs upon the turf.

"We must be off," said Dick. "Are your horses all fresh?"

"Tolerably so, captain," was the reply.

"Then, Claude and Jack, you shall lead the way to this place of shelter you have spoken of—at any rate, we will pay it a visit now, and judge of its merits."

"Good!" was the reply. "Hallo, there, look at Tom!"

These last words were uttered in a very different tone to the preceding ones.

They were called forth by the fact that Tom King had made a hasty effort to mount his horse, but had failed, and after staggering a moment, fell to the ground.

"The captain is weak," said the ostler, "and I don't wonder at it—he is badly in want of rest."

"What is to be done?" said Dick. "It is certain he is incapable of retaining his seat in the saddle."

"If you don't mind me speaking——" said the ostler, hesitatingly.

"No, no. Say on—speak freely!"

"Well, then, I was going to propose that you allowed me to sit on the captain's horse, then you could place him on the saddle in front of me; I would clasp him round the waist, and by that means he will be able to ride well enough."

"Yes, yes," said Tom King, faintly, before any of the others could reply—"that's what I wish to be done."

This settled the matter.

Jack, the ostler, was mounted and seated in the twinkling of an eye.

By the joint exertions of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, Tom King was raised and placed in front of him.

"I can hold the reins," he exclaimed, "if you will clasp me tightly and prevent me from falling off."

"Right, captain—right!"

"This is one more obligation I shall owe you," said Tom King, "for without your aid, it is certain I should never have escaped the officers."

"We have not escaped them yet."

"No," said Dick Turpin, "but we are in a fair way of doing so. Quick, Claude, and you, Jack—make haste and lead the way; depend upon it, we shall not lag many paces in the rear!"

CHAPTER CMLXXIII.

IN WHICH THE HIGHWAYMEN DECIDE UPON THE NATURE OF THEIR FUTURE PROCEEDINGS.

THE next moment the highwaymen moved off, Dick Turpin insisting upon bringing up the rear.

By this time they had all become tolerably well accustomed to the darkness that prevailed, so that they were able to distinguish the ground just in front of their horses' heads.

But, very wisely under such circumstances, they trusted far more to the sagacity of the animals them-

selves than to their own ability to steer them clear of obstacles.

Claude Duval led the way with much confidence.

The speed at which they went was, comparatively speaking, slow, and yet rather faster than most persons would have considered consistent with safety.

"We shall baffle them before we quit the heath, or it's odd to me," he said, to Sixteen-String Jack. "The darkness is terrific—I will defy them to see us; and the ground is so soft and turfy that the horses' feet scarcely make a sound, going at this gentle pace."

This was true enough; but, nevertheless, they could hear behind them, more distinctly than was at all pleasant, the continuous shouting of the officers as they bawled out to one another, and occasionally the rattling of the cutlasses which they carried.

When once the highwaymen gained the border of the heath, and their horses' feet felt the firm roadway beneath them, they set off at full gallop.

By this means they obtained a very considerable start of their pursuers, who were still winding their way over the broken ground, unable to push on at any faster speed than a trot.

Most fortunate indeed was it that the friendly ostler had appeared at so opportune a moment.

But for him it would have been hard to say how Tom King could have contrived to join in the flight at all.

But this ostler, like most of his class, was an excellent horseman, and was as secure and at home when seated in the saddle as he possibly could be anywhere.

Therefore to him the feat of holding Tom King on was easy enough, though to an unpractised horseman it would have been beset with difficulties, for every now and then, in spite of the command which he strove to keep over himself, Tom King would lean suddenly to one side, to such an extent on many occasions that it required the whole of the ostler's strength to bring him back to his former position.

And now, with great suddenness, the wind, which had so long been moaning and sighing, dropped altogether.

There was an unnatural calm in the atmosphere, which endured only for a few seconds.

Then a tremendous downpour of rain was discharged from the clouds.

So thickly and so heavily did the rain-drops fall that in the space of a few moments the whole of the fugitives were soaked with wet.

Still, although the rain beat with painful force into their faces, depriving them almost of breath and of the power to see, they pushed on, knowing full well that, disagreeable as this event was, they would nevertheless be able to turn it to good account.

Certainly, if anything was calculated to clear all the roads in the shortest space of time, that shower was, for no one would willingly endure it any longer than was required for them to gain the nearest place of shelter.

For some time the rain continued to fall at this violent rate; but by degrees it subsided, and when something like tolerable calmness prevailed, the highwaymen all listened intently.

As they fully expected, not a single sound could be heard in the rear.

Evidently the police officers, baffled by the rain, had given up the chase in despair.

"On—on!" cried Dick. "It is not worth while to linger now; the sooner we reach this place of shelter you speak of the better."

These words were addressed to Claude, who made no other reply than setting his horse in motion.

For the rest of the journey scarcely a word was exchanged.

Certainly, nothing was said of sufficient importance to merit being set down.

Nor did they see or hear anything of the police officers, or even of a human being.

When at some distance from the ruined castle, Claude Duval pulled up, and pointed towards it.

The lofty, ruined keep could just be dimly distinguished when pointed out as a mass of something blacker than the clouds, which formed a background to it.

"Let us approach with caution," said Claude Duval. "If we are too careful we only make a mistake on the right side, that's all."

This was at once assented to.

But although they took every precaution they could think of, they failed to see or hear anything of an alarming nature.

When the courtyard was at length safely gained, the horses were left in charge of the ostler.

In good truth, the highwaymen were by no means sorry to have met with such an ally.

Beyond a doubt, his fidelity might be depended upon, and in more ways than one he would prove useful, should he feel inclined to share their fortunes.

Even Dick did not hesitate to surrender Black Bess to his charge: after which, drawing Maud's shivering form closer to him, he followed Claude and Sixteen-String Jack to the entrance of the secret passage.

It was easily found; then a light was produced, which enabled them to make the descent rapidly and easily.

Many were the ejaculations of surprise that were given when they fully comprehended the nature of this strange place.

They questioned Claude eagerly as to how he had discovered it.

But he said.

"We have many mutual explanations to give; let this stand over till to-morrow. In the meanwhile, we will make a roaring fire in the alchemist's furnace, and dry our clothes; after that, a hasty meal and a good long sleep will be the best things we can have."

This proposal was universally assented to.

The fire was duly made, and the remains of the provisions which Claude and Jack had brought from the village inn were produced, and equally divided.

There was not one among them that was not thoroughly wearied out, yet it was necessary that some one should watch while the others slept.

Tom King, now that the ride was over, seemed much better; but his wound was re-dressed, and carefully bandaged up, after which he seemed to sink off into a slumber, so profound that it was hard to distinguish it from total insensibility.

Claude and Jack went above to watch, and until daylight the duty was shared between them and the ostler, who would have watched during the whole of the time if they had permitted him, he was so anxious, he said, to do something to recompense them for having saved him from a capture.

Not the least alarm was given, and when the highwaymen met in the morning they were able to congratulate themselves upon the fact that they had managed to reach their present place of security without their presence in that part of the country being at all suspected.

Under these circumstances, all they had to do was to keep perfectly quiet.

The greatest impatience was manifested on all sides for an account of all that had happened since the separation in the plantation.

To narrate all this, as the reader must be aware, occupied a long time indeed—the greater part of the day was spent in this manner.

But, unquestionably, the strangest circumstance and the one that produced the greatest amount of discussion was the account which Dick Turpin gave of having seen his two comrades, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, meet and accost each other on the summit of the hill.

With tolerable accuracy, Dick Turpin described the exact spot where this strange event occurred, and, after the most careful consideration, Claude Duval and Jack came to the conclusion that they must have been on that particular morning very many miles from the hill Dick mentioned.

But what was strangest of all was, that on that very morning they had met in the manner Dick described, which, as will be recollected, was after their brief separation, and just before Claude and Jack made their way to the inn from which they departed so opportunely.

Tom King was the only one of the party who had listened to the whole of this adventure without making a remark.

But now, when all was fully described, he said:

"There is one way, and only one way, in which what Dick has seen can be accounted for, and that, I imagine, is the true key to the mystery."

"What is it, Tom?" they asked, eagerly—"what is it?"

"Well, then," he said, with a melancholy smile, for his spirit was always saddened when he had occasion to refer to the past, "many years ago, in my youth—I mean, I remember reading—how such an occurrence is far from uncommon. It depends upon some strange state of the atmosphere, which I cannot explain to you, but which brings suddenly distant objects close to hand, so that sometimes, in the midst of a vast plain, trees and houses have been seen, which, upon a closer approach, have seemed to melt into the air."

"Let us ascribe it, then, to that," said Dick, "and so dispose of the subject, for we have far more pressing subjects that require our attention. None of you have mentioned Tom Davis yet; I trust he is not forgotten."

"Certainly not, captain—certainly not! We were waiting for you to speak."

"Well, then, the question is, what shall be done? I confess I have already made up my mind, and that is, at every risk, to set him at liberty; he deserves as much at our hands."

"He does—he does!" was the unanimous reply.

"Such being the case, then," continued Dick, "we can easily arrange the rest. When he is set at liberty we will furnish him with what money we are able to obtain, and put him in the way of leaving England. If we can see him safely aboard some vessel, then I shall feel that we have done our duty to him."

"But," said Claude Duval, "before we go any further, it is necessary that we should learn something more as to his position at the present moment."

"Precisely so," said Dick; "and a knowledge can only be obtained by a journey to London."

"But who is to take it?"

"That remains to be seen."

"Not you, Dick—not you!" cried Maud, for the first time joining in the conversation. "Surely you will not run the risk of paying another visit?"

"Why not?"

"It is tempting your fate too much. Let me go," she added. "I shall be less likely to be suspected than you, and I can bring you back all the information you require."

Dick shook his head.

"I am sorry to deny you, Maud; but, in good truth, it cannot be. I should suffer more on your account than you could possibly suffer on mine, for you would know that I was able to extricate myself from any perilous situation, while you would be incapable of doing so."

"Then," said Claude, "suppose I go."

"I am willing, too," said Jack.

"And I as well," said Tom King, faintly, "if I only felt a little stronger and better."

"You are out of the question, Tom," said Dick; "but what I propose is, that Claude, Jack, and myself shall draw lots. It can easily be managed by a few splinters of wood—one longer than the rest. Whoever draws that, goes to London, and the other two will, in the meanwhile, set out upon an excursion to obtain such a sum of money as would be useful to Tom Davis after we have rescued him."

This was assented to without the least demur, for whatever Maud may have felt upon the subject she kept to herself, knowing from experience that it was useless for her to raise her voice in such an affair.

The small pieces of wood were rapidly prepared, and held by Tom King.

Three were drawn, and Dick Turpin was found to hold the longest.

"That is as I wished," he exclaimed, with sparkling eyes. "I have longed for the opportunity to go, for I feel that it is something which particularly concerns myself."

"But when shall you start?" asked Maud, timidly.

"To-night, as soon as it is dark enough to leave here safely."

"But you will need a disguise," said Claude Duval. "Where shall you obtain that?"

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"It strikes me I shall take very few precautions in that way," he replied. "If I wait here until I find a disguise I shall never go at all. I will ride off, and trust entirely to good luck to befriend me."

"We have an hour or two to spare yet," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and there would be no harm if we were to spend that time in making our arrangements a little more fully."

"None whatever. But first of all, I will go and see that Black Bess is in readiness."

"Why not take one of the other horses?" said Tom King. "Black Bess must be as well known as yourself."

"That may be," said Dick, "and no doubt is the case; but if I went without her that would be no safeguard to me, but the reverse. When I am seated on her back, I feel an amount of confidence and security which I cannot feel elsewhere. No, no—Black Bess must accompany me on my mission, or I must give it up altogether."

With these words, Dick hastened to one portion of the ruins which the ostler had already extemporised into a kind of stable.

He was rejoiced to find his gallant mare looking fresh and ready for any amount of exertion.

The time between then and nightfall passed quickly, for there was much to talk about and decide upon.

It was agreed that Tom King, Maud, and the ostler should remain at the ruins—that Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval should seek a night of adventures, while Dick made his way to London.

Oddly enough, not a word was said about his return, and probably this would have been left altogether unmentioned had not Maud put the question just as Dick seated himself in the saddle.

"There are many hours between now and daybreak," he replied, "and I have them all before me. I shall try my best to get back here before day dawns. All will, however, depend upon circumstances. If I can see good reason for remaining away—if I feel that I should be safer elsewhere—I shall not come here; so do not expect me. Rest assured that, for my own sake alone, I will take the best care of myself."

But Maud could tell, by the manner in which he pronounced these words, that he was just then in the humor for any adventure, no matter of how dangerous a character; and with a burst of grief which she could not control, for her heart foreboded much coming evil, Maud covered her face and turned away.

"Farewell!" said Dick, in cheerful tones—"farewell, yet not for long! I shall soon return, bringing the needful intelligence with me."

CHAPTER CMLXXIV.

GOOD FORTUNE APPEARS TO INAUGURATE DICK TURPIN'S EXPEDITION.

As he gave utterance to these words, Dick Turpin set Black Bess in motion, and took his way slowly from the castle ruins.

Jack the ostler had been sent out as a kind of scout to ascertain that there was no one loitering near, and at this moment he appeared, saying:

"All right, captain—there's not a soul about. You may venture to ride off boldly."

Nevertheless, Dick Turpin did not altogether relax his caution, but continued to keep a sharp look-out on all sides.

But as soon as the ruins were fairly behind him, he allowed Black Bess to put forth her powers of speed.

There was on this occasion a feeling of freedom and ease, as well as energy and determination, about Dick's heart to which he had been for a long time a perfect stranger.

Maud had rightly defined his frame of mind.

But for all his light-heartedness, Dick, as he rode along, wondered by what means he should obtain a disguise.

To ride to London in his own proper character was a feat of daring from which even he recoiled.

Such a proceeding would have been nothing short of actual insanity.

But when and how was he to find the means of so well disguising himself that, should he by chance encounter any of his foes, they would fail to recognise him.

This was a question he asked himself over and over again without, however, being able to frame anything like a satisfactory reply to it.



[DICK TURPIN ASTONISHES OLD MATTHEW.]

Despairing at last of coming to a conclusion just at present, he exclaimed:

"On, Bess, old lass—forward! Now there's plenty of time before us, and I must trust to chance to put something in my way."

Just then Black Bess was crossing a smooth, well-kept meadow of vast extent.

Coming to a low hedge, which divided it from another field, she rose freely in the air, and alighted in safety on the other side.

But the manner in which she came down made Dick aware of something which he might have ascertained before, had not his thoughts been so preoccupied.

This was that the second field had been ploughed up, and, owing to the rain which had lately fallen, was now in a very heavy condition indeed.

This discovery, however, was not made until too late, for such was the impulse Black Bess had gained, that it was impossible to rein her up all at once.

Dick could see the opposite side of the field, and finding there really was not far to go, he resolved to push on rather than turn back.

All at once, however, a loud voice struck upon his ears.

"Hoi—hoi!" cried some one—"hullo, there! What are you doing? Turn back—turn back, I say, or I will take you up!"

Dick looked in the direction from which these sounds appeared to come, and then he caught sight of a stout man, attired in the dress of a parish constable, running hastily towards him.

Although the moon was not shining, yet a certain portion of her light found its way from the clouds, and so diffused a kind of dim radiance over the earth, so that

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Dick was able to see this man with tolerable plainness.

As may be suspected, however, the highwayman paid not the slightest attention to this demand to turn back.

So far from doing so, he continued to advance at the same easy pace as before.

This evidently infuriated the constable to no ordinary extent.

He shouted, and bawled, and ran until he was out of breath, for it was no trifling achievement to run across a ploughed field in such a condition as that was.

The constable, indeed, looked as ludicrous as any such dignified personage possibly could do under any circumstances.

Every time he lifted his feet from the ground he brought with him a huge mass of soil, which was so heavy and clung so pertinaciously to him that it threatened to pull his boots off at every stride.

Nevertheless, as he was making his way directly towards the highwayman, his slow rate of progression was not of much consequence.

A meeting quickly took place.

"Stop, you villain!" he roared, at length, when he found himself close to Black Bess—"stop, I say! Are you deaf? Can't you hear what I say?"

While he spoke, he seized Black Bess by the bridle.

"What's the matter?" asked Dick, calmly, yet he spoke the words in an absent manner, which may be accounted for by the fact that just then his mind was very busily occupied with a fresh idea that had just entered it.

"Matter?" said the constable, endeavoring to speak calmly as well, but failing lamentably. "Don't you know that you are trespassing, sir? No one is allowed to cross these fields, and so I must insist upon making you turn back! Turn at once, and be thankful that you are let off so easily!"

Dick took a glance around him, as the constable thought to ascertain his position in the field, for the next words he said were:

"But look here, my good friend, don't you see that I'm already half-way across this field, and, so far as any damage I may do is concerned, it will be just the same thing whether you allow me to keep straight on, or whether you compel me to turn back."

"Do you presume to dictate to me, sir?" said the constable. "Is that the return that you make for my leniency? Consider yourself my prisoner!"

"Your what?"

"Prisoner. I spoke plain enough, didn't I, stupid?"

"But do you know who I am?"

"No, nor care either."

"So it seems," added Dick, who had already, while this brief conversation was going on, matured his plan of operations. "Still, I think it rather strange that you should presume to speak to me like this on my own land."

"Your what?"

"Land," said Dick, quickly. "I spoke plain enough, didn't I, stupid?"

"Come—come," said the constable, "none of your nonsense! I daresay you think yourself a mighty clever fellow, but there are others as clever as yourself. Come this way. I won't say another word to you."

"But I shall to you," said Dick. "I ask you again, do you know who I am? Of course you do not, or else you would not presume to talk to me about trespassing on my own land."

"How can it be your land," said the constable, "when everyone knows that it belongs to Squire Verrals? And he won't allow trespassers on his estate."

"Well, it will be mine some day," said Dick—"at least, in a manner of speaking. Come a little closer, and I will tell you who I am."

"Sha'n't!" was the answer. "You can tell me from where you are, if you like."

"You will regret your behaviour," said Dick. "Let me tell you that you have been addressing yourself to one who will one day be your Sovereign. I am George Frederick, Prince of Wales."

The constable was greatly taken aback by this audacious statement.

He relaxed his hold upon the bridle of Black Bess at once.

"Nonsense—nonsense," he cried, recovering himself—"nothing of the sort! Fudge! I don't believe a word of it."

"Very well, then, in that case I shall have to treat you as I do everyone that I encounter who denies me as you have."

With these words, and before the constable could have the least idea of what Dick's intentions were, our friend slipped from his horse and caught the constable by the throat.

"Hands off," cried the constable—"hands off, I say!"

"No, no," said Dick—"you shall be punished. I will make a bird of you!"

The constable glared in surprise.

Dick had been careful to assume in his tone and manner a certain amount of wildness, which began to impress the constable in a manner that he intended it should—namely, that the constable had a madman to deal with.

"I will degrade you from your office!" said Dick, with increasing wildness. "You shall be a constable no longer. I will strip off your uniform! Hark! Did you hear that?"

"W-hat?" stammered the constable, in genuine alarm for, like most people, he had a great horror of lunatics, and by no means relished the prospect of an adventure with one in that lonely field.

"Hark!" repeated Dick. "I ask you again, can you hear it?"

"Hear what?"

"The moon," said Dick, with deep solemnity. "It tells me that I am right. It tells me to go on and punish you as you deserve."

As quick as thought, Dick produced a pistol—so quickly that the constable could not, for the life of him, make out where it had come from.

No sooner, however, did Dick present it at him than he dropped down suddenly upon his knees in the clayey mud, and roared lustily:

"Oh, murder—murder! Help—help! Here—murder!"

"If you raise your voice again," said Dick, in determined accents, "you are a dead man, so mind that! I tell you you shall suffer for your offence. Obey me—refuse me if you dare! Off with your hat—pull it off at once!"

The constable complied with a quickness quite astonishing.

But the fact was he, fully believing Dick to be mad, had made up his mind to comply with every demand that he could, in the hope that by this means he should be able to get away.

"Your wig as well," said Dick, who noticed that the constable endeavored to fix this article properly in its place.

It was given up without a murmur.

"Quick!" he continued. "Your cloak, coat, and waistcoat! Do you dare to hesitate and falter, villain? In another moment——"

Dick did not finish his sentence by words, but very suggestively brought his pistol to full cock.

The clicking sound thus made immediately increased the terror under which the constable labored.

Never before had he divested himself of his apparel with so much dexterity and speed.

Dick took the articles one by one, placing them carefully across his arm.

The reader no doubt guesses what was his intention.

It was to obtain from this man these upper outer articles of clothing in order to disguise himself, and yet to obtain them in a manner that would not lead anyone to suspect the purpose for which he required them.

He had now got all he wanted, and nothing remained but to frighten the constable away.

The poor wretch was now shivering, and his teeth were chattering, half with cold and half with fright.

"Quick!" Dick continued—"off with the rest of your things, then you shall roll yourself over and over in the mud until I tell you to stop. Hark again! Don't you hear the moon that commands me to make a bird of you?"

If the constable had had doubts lingering in his mind as to Dick's sanity they no longer existed.

Now he was impressed also with the belief that he was in imminent danger of his life, and therefore resolved to pluck up his courage, and make a bold rush and endeavor to escape.

This was just what Dick had calculated upon.

With a loud shout, then, the constable turned round, and once more set to work to run across the ploughed field.

Dick called after him to stop, and made a feint of pursuing him.

But the constable ran on all the more swiftly.

Deeper and deeper sank his boots in the soft, miry ground, until at last his feet came out of them entirely.

But, heedless of this, he continued his headlong course, leaving them sticking up behind him.

He staggered, stumbled, and fell; he rolled over more than once, and when, after many efforts, he succeeded in gaining his feet, he did indeed present a most pitiable aspect.

Dick watched him for some time, then perceiving in the distance that lights were moving about hither and thither, he guessed the alarm had been given, and resolved to lose no more time in taking his departure.

Nevertheless, he laughed so heartily at the constable's condition, that he could scarcely scramble into the saddle.

He tied all the articles of clothing up into the cloak, with the resolve to attire himself in them as soon as he had a good opportunity.

The constable, floundering on, and, in his excitement, quite blind to all objects in his path, ran headlong into a ditch, and long before those who had been aroused by his cries came and helped him out of it, Dick had left the ploughed field a long way behind him.

"Fortune favors me," he cried, in an exultant tone, as Black Bess leaped over a low hedge into the high-road. "Aha! it has been a good joke! I felt in need of a good laugh about something; but I shall take my success in this matter as an omen of what is to follow. Dressed in these things, I believe I shall be able to disguise myself effectually."

This little adventure had, however, run away with a good deal of time, and so, as the firm, hard road was lying beneath Black Bess's feet, Dick urged his mare to a little better speed.

While journeying on, however, he looked keenly about him in search of some place to which he could retire and make the requisite change in his apparel.

In this matter luck again appeared to befriend him, for before he had gone far he perceived a small, broken-down, ruined shed.

So far as he could tell, it was empty and deserted, and here he determined to remain for a few moments, and don the constable's apparel.

He listened, but all was still, and without further hesitation he entered the shed.

He fancied he heard a slight movement, but was not certain.

Evidently, however, he did not consider it worth taking any notice of, for, untying his bundle, he put on first of all the huge waistcoat with its large flap pockets, and after that the coat.

The constable was so much stouter than Dick, that these articles went on easily over the highwayman's ordinary apparel, and when the cloak, wig, and gold-laced hat were added, the metamorphosis was complete.

In such an eminently parochial-looking individual as he now appeared, no one would think of looking for the daring highwayman, Dick Turpin.

CHAPTER CMLXXV.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN PAYS WITH BLACK BESS, AND FINDS THAT HIS DISGUISE IS BY NO MEANS PERFECT.

Just as Dick had finished making these changes in his appearance, the slight noise was again heard, only this time it was more unmistakable.

"Who's there?" Turpin cried, turning round quickly. "Speak—who are you?"

"What's that to you?" said a growling voice.

"Who are you?" said Dick, again. "And beware how you trifle with me!"

"You be blowed!" said the voice, again. "I should just like to know what you have been togging yourself up in those things for? Dark as it is, I seed you."

"Did you indeed?" said Dick. "Then I'll see you in return, though, if you have no objection, we will have a little light on the subject."

A hasty movement followed these words.

As we have often stated, Dick took good care never to be without the means of procuring a light.

He had not been long in learning the absolute necessity there was for this.

On the present occasion he quickly ignited one of the small pieces of wax taper that he always carried about him, and as he held it above his head it diffused quite light enough to illuminate the interior of that ruined shed.

Lying in one corner, covered over by a heap of rags and straw, was what beyond all doubt was a human being, though of what sex it was impossible to discover, though the voice had decidedly a masculine tone.

"I don't know you," said Dick, "and you need not know me. I thought I had the place all to myself. However, if you like to hold your tongue about what you have seen, and say nothing about it, you can have this for a reward."

As he spoke, he tossed a guinea in the direction of the miserable object in the straw, and no sooner had he done so than he turned abruptly on his heel, and mounted Black Bess as quickly as he was able.

"Confound it!" he muttered. "I am vexed that, after all the precautions I have taken, some one should actually see me assume this disguise; and yet what have I to fear from such a miserable object as that was? Bah! the matter is not worth another second's thought!"

But although he said this, he could not banish the remembrance from his mind, nor could he help it making him feel decidedly uncomfortable.

But soon afterwards his attention was diverted, for, happening to look along the road before him, he perceived the figure of some person on horseback.

The animal appeared to be a very spirited one, for it was prancing, and curvetting, and rearing in a manner dangerous to any inexperienced rider, as the person on his back clearly seemed to be.

"He'll be off," ejaculated Dick, after watching the movements of the horse and rider for a few seconds—"he'll be off—I know he will! By Jove, there he is!"

Just while he spoke, the horse, by a sudden movement, succeeded in unseating its rider, who fell with a heavy, disagreeable crash to the earth.

Luckily, the rider's feet were not entangled in the stirrups, and, what was oddest of all, the horse, having, as one might say, accomplished his purpose, stood perfectly still.

All this appeared very odd to Dick, who, however, accelerated Black Bess's speed in order to reach the scene of accident, and ascertain whether the stranger was seriously hurt or not, and in any case to proffer assistance.

The horse appeared to view Dick's approach with considerable distrust, and once seemed ready to start off at full speed.

Dick noticed it, and resolved not to allow the animal the chance of doing so if he could help it, so, with considerable adroitness, he seized hold of the rein, and secured it to the branch of a tree.

This done, he turned his attention to the stranger, who still lay immovable upon the ground, just in the same position as he had fallen.

Dick stooped down over him, and then saw that the figure was slim, and the face young and almost too delicate-looking for a man's.

The costume of this young man was, however, very rich indeed, and Dick concluded at once that he belonged to some high family, for among the upper ranks of society such an effeminacy of appearance was by no means uncommon.

"Are you much hurt, young sir?" said Dick, bending down over him. "Do you think you will be able to rise with my assistance?"

Not a word was given in reply to this speech, and Dick began to fear that this young horseman had met with his death.

Placing his hand at the back of his neck, however, Dick, by an effort of strength, raised him to a sitting posture.

As he did so, the cap worn by the young stranger was removed, and then immediately a quantity of hair showered down, covering at once his head and neck, and falling far on to the shoulders.

This surprised Dick not a little, and the ejaculation that he gave utterance to upon making the discovery seemed to have the effect of arousing the stranger, who, in a low, faint voice, said:

"Help—help—oh, help me and save me!"

The tones of this voice were inexpressibly sweet and touching; and if Dick had required any further proof than the abundance of hair as to the sex of this stranger, the voice would have been sufficient.

"I will help you," said Dick, in a reassuring voice, "and save you if I can Do you remember your horse threw you?"

"Yes—yes," said the young girl, for such, in truth, she was; "I remember all now, and——"

She started, and even in the semi-darkness Dick could tell that her fair, pale countenance was suffused by a deep blush.

Dick affected to take no notice of it, and he spoke as though he had not guessed the stranger's secret.

"I trust, young sir," he said, "that you are not very dangerously hurt. Do you think, with a little aid from me, you would be able to remount your horse?"

The young girl exhibited many traces of agitation, and endeavored to rise to her feet.

By Dick's assistance she was enabled to do so, and then she limped slowly and painfully towards the spot where he had fastened up her steed.

"I am a little hurt," she said. "I feel bruised and shaken, and my ankle is sprained, I think, but nothing more than that. Many thanks, sir, for the services you have rendered."

"It is not worthy of a thought," said Dick. "But do you not think you are running considerable risk by remounting that spirited creature? He seems to me far beyond your strength."

"Perhaps he may be," was the answer; "but he will probably be calmer now—at any rate, I have no other resource: I dare not linger here."

The young girl tried to mount while she spoke those words, but it is questionable whether she would have succeeded but for the aid Dick afforded her.

"Many thanks, sir," she said again—"many thanks!"

"Here is your hat," said Dick, picking it from the ground; "you had better put it on."

She took it from him, and was about to place it on her head, when she stopped suddenly, for she had discovered that her hair, which she had so carefully concealed beneath it, was flowing over her shoulders.

In the excitement under which she labored she had not noticed this before, but upon making the discovery she believed that Dick must have penetrated her secret.

She was overcome with confusion, but with a great effort she spoke:

"You have behaved so kindly to me, sir," she said, "that I am anxious to stand well in your opinion. How strangely you must think of me to see me in this garb; but, believe me, nothing but the most urgent motives would have induced mo to set out thus attired, and even now I almost shrink from what I have to do."

There was a tone of deep sadness in her voice, which she endeavored to control.

Dick simply bowed, and with increasing hesitation the young girl continued:

"I have known much sorrow and much suffering It has all been caused by one who—who I have come forth to seek to-night. I shall find him," she added, with a deep, long-drawn sigh—"I know I shall find him; but, alas! for me, I——"

Unable to continue any longer in her broken communication, she stopped with more suddenness than Dick had anticipated.

However, she recovered, and looking up to him, she said:

"Farewell, sir—good-night; we shall never meet again; but still, I shall always remember the kind way in which you have treated and spoken to me."

Scarcely had she finished speaking these words than she touched her horse lightly with the spur.

The animal gave a sudden bound, then darted off at full gallop down the road.

Dick stood for a moment perfectly still, gazing after the flying form.

"This is odd enough," he murmured, at length. "There's a mystery there—a strange one too: I would give much to unravel it. I will follow her. Yes—yes, I will follow her; I may be able to render her some assistance."

Dick went a few paces in this direction, which was opposite to the one he ought to take.

But he stopped and muttered:

"No—no, hard as it is to restrain myself, I feel that this is not the time to look after an adventure; I have enough to do before me; besides, she has gone; I may not be able to overtake her—at any rate, for the sake of poor Tom Davis I will not make the trial."

Having thus come to a determination, Dick turned Black Bess's head round, and, dropping the reins upon her neck, urged her forward with his voice.

A few minutes soon took him a considerable distance from the spot where he had met with this strange adventure.

He was now drawing near to London, and, finding such was the case, he relaxed his speed, for he was reminded that as yet he had not come to any definite arrangement as to his proceedings.

"It will never do," he muttered, "to ride through London attired like this, and with Black Bess beneath me. No, no—that will never do! Black Bess would be recognised beyond all doubt. Yet dare I part with her? and, if so, where could she remain?"

These were harassing and perplexing questions, and they cost Dick much thought and consideration before he could come to a conclusion with respect to them.

But while cogitating, he happened to remember that near the entrance to Piccadilly was a small public-house, situate in a narrow street turning out of the thoroughfare just named.

The place was one of a retired description, and he questioned very much whether the people there in whose charge he would leave his mare would recognise her.

At any rate, Dick could think of no better mode of disposing of Black Bess, and so he resolved, without any more hesitation, to adopt it.

When he rode up to the inn, he found that the front of it was in darkness.

Over the gate leading to the stable-yard, however, a dim light was burning.

He pulled away at the handle of the bell, and, after some little delay, a man appeared, who was so busy rubbing the sleep out of his eyes that he could scarcely see anything.

He winked and blinked like an owl.

"Here's this horse," said Dick. "I want you just to pay a little attention to it for a short time, and have it ready when I call. I am not going far, and if you serve me faithfully you will be well rewarded."

"All right, sir!" said the man, who was too sleepy to trouble himself even to take a second glance at the highwayman.

In quite a mechanical way he took hold of Black Bess by the bridle, and led her through the gateway.

The door closed heavily,—and no sooner was it shut than Dick wished he had passed through along with his mare, and ascertained the spot where she had been bestowed.

This was now too late, and, moreover, he thought perhaps it was quite as well that he had remained outside, for if he entered he might confront some one else, and then there would be the danger of recognition.

He felt if he remained lingering near the inn he should regret what he had done, and therefore, with a hurried step, he turned away.

"I will soon be back," he muttered, "or I will send some one for Black Bess, if I fancy there is any danger in going myself. There's plenty of time to think about that, though. I wonder how I look in my disguise? Do I resemble a parish constable, I wonder? I think so. Ah, that will not do—no, certainly not!"

While he had been speaking, Dick, in accordance with a habit of his, had stroked the lower part of his face, and in doing so his hand had passed over his moustache, which caused him to give utterance to the last words.

"Confound it!" he said. "I forgot that my moustache will spoil it all! Who ever saw a constable with such an appendage? No, no—it will never do to remain so! I must find some means or other of getting it removed."

This was likely to be a matter of no ordinary difficulty.

It was necessary that it should be removed at once, for he could not tell how soon he should be met by some one or other.

He could not remove it himself, and the hour was so late a one that there was a very slight probability indeed that he would be able to find any barber's shop open, even if he had felt inclined to run the risk of entering one.

CHAPTER CMLXXVI.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN MANAGES TO GET RID OF HIS MOUSTACHE IN A VERY CLEVER MANNER.

But the more Dick Turpin pondered over this matter, the more he felt the necessity of having his moustache removed.

It was altogether incongruous with his disguise.

He had just reached this point in his reflections, when he caught sight, at some little distance off up the street along which he was hastening, a feeble gleam of light.

On coming nearer, what was his surprise to perceive that the light actually came from a barber's shop.

He paused outside irresolutely.

Really it seemed as though chance had directed his footsteps to that very spot, and he was conscious that if he allowed this opportunity to slip by him he would not have another presented to him.

Nevertheless, he could not make up his mind to walk boldly into the shop; but he stopped outside the window, and by peeping in between the various objects it contained, endeavored to get a view of the interior of the shop.

While he was so engaged, he heard a footstep near at hand.

He looked up and caught sight of a thin, little-sized man, with a remarkable-looking, pointed chin, approaching.

He ran into the shop in what was certainly a most furious manner, and no sooner had he entered it and glanced all around than he uttered several strange cries, all of which were in the strongest degree indicative of violent rage.

Dick was amused at his proceedings, and continued to watch him with great anxiety.

"I'll be the death of him!" said this man, as he pulled off his coat, and flung it down in a passion—"I'll be the death of him! I'll—I'll——"

He stopped, and made a frantic rush to a drawer, from which, in the twinkling of an eye, he produced a razor, which he began to strap rapidly on the palm of his hand.

The noise he had made evidently attracted the attention of some other persons in the house, for just then an inner door was timidly opened to the extent of about a couple of inches, and a woman's face appeared.

The barber—for such no doubt he was—uttered a howl.

"Where's that villain Sam?" he roared—"where is he?—where's he gone?"

"Lor, Mr. Goodge, how in the world should I know? He's such an awful boy that is!" replied the woman, in a remarkably mild tone of voice, which contrasted strongly with the barber's infuriated accents.

"I'll be the death of him!" he repeated. "Let me ask you, ma'am, whether I did not leave him in my shop with particular directions as to what he was to do? Didn't I say that as soon as nine o'clock came he was to shut up the shop and go home—didn't I tell him all that?"

"I believe you did, sir?"

"Of course I did! And how dare I come home at this unearthly hour and find the shop staring wide open, and that villain nowhere to be found. But let me get hold of him—only let me get hold of him, and I'll finish him!"

The barber accompanied these words with such a fiendish look, that the woman, thoroughly alarmed, vanished immediately from the door.

"Then the cause of the shop being opened is explained," thought Dick, who had heard every word of this conversation. "What an odd chance! I'll warrant there's not another barber's shop open in London. I'll enter here at all risks; perhaps in his excited state I can work upon him a little."

With these words, Dick approached the door, and only just in time, for the barber was beginning to think about closing his shop.

Dick stood just on the threshold and projected only his head and the upper part of his body into the shop.

"Good morning—good morning!" he said, assuming a peculiarly vacant smile, and making an odd grimace—"good morning, Mr. Goodge! I am the Prince of Wales. How do you do, eh? Seen the moon lately?"

To say that the barber was astonished by Dick's sudden appearance and his extraordinary words would not be to say much.

So overcome was he that he could do nothing but stagger back a few paces, and goggle his eyes frightfully.

Dick availed himself of the opportunity to slip inside the shop.

He closed the door behind him, and as he did so he noticed that the key was sticking in the lock.

He turned it round, and removed it at once, then coolly consigned it to his pocket.

"Murder!" said the barber, in a faint, exhausted voice—"oh, murder! This is a madman escaped from some asylum! What shall I do?"

Dick certainly simulated the manner of an insane person to great perfection.

The barber was completely deceived by it.

Putting on a most mysterious aspect, and extending one hand before him, Dick approached the barber, who gradually retreated until he was brought up by the wall, and found himself unable to go any further.

Then Dick took hold of him by the collar of his coat, and placed his lips close to his ear.

"Hush!" he said "Do you wish to know what must be done?"

"No—no!"

"I have made a vow—yes, I repeat it—a vow. It was that the first man I met should either shave me or let me shave him."

With these words, Dick pounced suddenly upon a razor which his keen eyes had detected lying close at hand.

He flourished it in the air in a most alarming manner, as he continued, with additional excitement:

"Come on, I am ready—I am armed! Sit down, and I will shave you as you were never shaved before!"

The prospect of this operation horrified the barber beyond all measure.

The bare thought of sitting down in a chair at the mercy of a lunatic who held a razor was too horrible to bear reflection.

"No, no, my good sir," he said, with chattering teeth and trembling knees—"my very good sir——"

"Wretch!—dastard! do you know what you are saying?" cried Dick, pretending all at once to fall into an ungovernable rage. "Is that the way you address me, you miserable, chin-scraping wretch?"

"I beg your pardon," said the barber, who, having heard that the best way of treating lunatics was to comply as far as possible with all their wishes—"I humbly beg your pardon, your Royal Highness! I hope you will forgive me!"

"Ah, good!" said Dick. "Now, then, down in the chair with you at once!"

"But, your Royal Highness," said the barber, bowing and scraping at every word, though he was so horribly afraid that he scarcely knew what he said, "may I call your Royal Highness's attention to the fact that I am already clean shaved—that there is not so much as the ghost of a bristle anywhere on my face?"

"No matter," said Dick—"the razor will go all the more easily"

"But did not your Royal Highness say something about being shaved yourself? Suppose, now, you allowed me to remove that untidy moustache on your lip?"

"Yes, yes—of course!" said Dick. "That's what I meant! How dare you dispute my commands? Quick—come here at once! I have no time to lose!"

These were welcome words indeed for the barber, and he made up his mind to shave his disagreeable customer as quickly as he could, and then trust to his ingenuity to get him out of the shop.

He was not without a hope that he would depart quietly.

This was just the frame of mind that Dick Turpin wished to bring him into, so he put down the razor, and calmly seated himself in the chair.

But while doing this, as the reader may easily believe, he kept the keenest possible eye that he could upon the movements of the barber, for it was quite likely that individual would summon the assistance of his neighbors, and endeavor to capture the supposed lunatic.

"Come on!" he cried, furiously—"come on. How long do you intend to keep me waiting?"

Fearing some act of violence, the barber replied, most civilly:

"Now, your Royal Highness—I am coming now—I shall not be another second."

He bustled about, and made his preparations.

As soon as the barber approached the chair, Dick cried:

"Ah, villain! I read your purpose in your eyes—I know the intention in your mind! You mean to shave off my eyebrows!"

"Nothing of the kind, your Royal Highness—nothing of the kind," said the barber. "If you would allow me to say so, that is entirely a mistake on your Royal Highness's part, as I will soon convince you."

Dick leaned back, pretending to take upon himself a quiet mood, as mad people sometimes do.

The barber, trembling all over, inwardly cursing his apprentice, to whose door he laid this disagreeable adventure, bent himself to the task of shaving his customer with all possible dexterity—in fact, in less than a minute Dick found himself entirely divested of his moustache.

He happened to catch sight of himself in a glass that was opposite, and was struck immediately by the great difference it made to his appearance.

"Performed!" said Dick, with a wild shout, as he sprang to his feet—"performed—the deed is performed! Come, rascal—a towel!"

This article was handed to him, on which he wiped his face carefully.

"Dear me," Dick said, by way of giving the barber a parting fright, "I feel dreadfully hungry! I must have something to eat. Have you such a thing as a baby in the house?"

The barber turned pale with fear.

"I must have a baby!" continued Dick, making a horrible sound with his mouth. "Is there one in the house, eh?"

"No—no," stammered the barber, desperately, "I think if your Royal Highness would only try next door you will find that they have one that will exactly suit you."

"Ah!" said Dick, suddenly, "next door, of course! I will go there."

The barber gave a long-drawn sigh of relief.

Dick produced the key from his pocket, opened the door quickly, and passed out.

No sooner, however, had he crossed the threshold than the barber turned the key in the lock once more, and then, not content with that amount of security, drew a couple of bolts, and put up a bar.

"Thank goodness," he ejaculated, as he sank, limp and half-fainting, into a chair—"thank goodness he is gone! Oh, the dreadful wretch!—the villain! I shall always be frightened to death to be in the shop of a night after this! But it's Sam's fault—I'll pay him out for it to-morrow!"

The change that came over Dick's appearance as soon as the barber's door was closed behind him was truly remarkable.

Stroking his face and adjusting his apparel, he murmured:

"I rather think I have managed that little affair with some cleverness. At any rate, I'll wager the barber will never suspect who he has done such a service for."

With these words, Dick strode hastily onward, for the hour was a late one, or rather an early one, and he was anxious to reach the White Horse without delay.

The streets were almost deserted; but the few people he met did not even trouble themselves to give a second glance at him, which was a source of considerable satisfaction to the highwayman, for it filled him with the hope that he should be able to carry out his mission successfully.

Soon after this he found himself near to Drury Lane, and then began to wonder what steps he should take in order to gain admission to Old Matthew's house.

Certainly there was the little secret door in White Horse Yard; but then that would doubtless be watched, and should he be seen entering by stealth, suspicion would at once be aroused.

This consideration made him determine to walk boldly up to the inn to push open the door, enter, and walk up to the bar without heeding who might be there.

This was certainly a very bold plan of operations; but then its very boldness was well calculated to carry success along with it.

Having come to this decision, Dick evinced no hesitation.

The oil lamp was burning outside the front door of the inn as usual, and through the swinging half-glass door placed a little way down the passage came another dim and feeble ray of light.

CHAPTER CMLXXVII.

OLD MATTHEW PENETRATES DICK TURPIN'S DISGUISE.

"THERE is certainly a slight surprise in store for Old Matthew," said Dick, as, after a hasty glance up and down the street, he crossed the threshold of the White Horse. "At any rate, I will test the efficiency of my disguise. If he fails to recognise me, I shall have the greatest amount of confidence in it."

These thoughts passed through Dick's mind as he pushed open the swinging door we have just mentioned, and which brought him at once into full view of the bar.

Here he was rejoiced to find Old Matthew standing alone, busily engaged in decanting some liquid from one bottle to another.

Dick marched up to the counter with a step very different to his usual one.

Then pausing, he said, in a sharp, cracked voice:

"Mr. Gale, consider yourself in custody!"

Old Matthew, hearing these words, naturally enough gave a great start, and turned round.

He looked Dick full in the face for some moments without saying a word, and while he did so his countenance wore a very puzzled look.

At length the expression of the features changed entirely, and winking his eye, and at the same time shaking his head, he exclaimed:

"No, no, Dick—it won't do, though I am willing to surrender to you whenever you wish it."

"You know me, then?" said Turpin, as he gave a hasty glance around, in order to ascertain that no listeners were near.

"Yes, I know you, of course," said Matthew, coming forward, and shaking him by the hand. "At first, I do confess, I was puzzled. The absence of your moustache makes a wonderful difference to your face. But where on earth did you get that strange costume?"

"I will tell you all about it, Matthew, and plenty more besides—that is if we can only have the opportunity of exchanging a few words with each other."

"Well, we'll try."

"Have you been much troubled by the officers lately?"

"No, not much—very little. After that last adventure of yours, I almost think that they have made up their minds that the wisest thing they can do is to let me alone."

"I hope they have," said Dick. "But where are you going to?"

"This way," said Matthew, who had quitted the bar. "I've got a comfortable room upstairs, and we can surely sit there and converse in private?"

"Will it be safe?"

"As safe as anywhere."

"Enough, Matthew. I have the greatest confidence in you, and place myself willingly in your hands. I know the great extent of your resources."

Old Matthew smiled, and it may be that the smile was one of satisfied vanity.

He preceded Dick up the old oaken staircase, and, push-

ing open a door at the top, he ushered his visitor into a small room plainly yet comfortably furnished.

Producing a light, Matthew ignited a lamp standing on the table.

Then he said, rapidly:

"Wait here a moment, Dick, while I run downstairs and leave the necessary instructions in case of an alarm. I will be back directly."

"And bring something with you," cried Dick.

"Yes, yes—never fear; but do not speak so loud."

With these words Matthew departed.

He was absent only a few minutes, yet to Dick it seemed a long time.

When he reappeared, he was carrying before him a huge tray, on which was set out a very tempting array of eatables and drinkables.

There, now," he cried, "what do you think of such a feast as that, and at a moment's notice, too? The fact is, I feel quite peckish myself, and shall have a good deal of pleasure in joining you."

Old Matthew was a very good hand with the knife and fork, and, no matter what time in the day or night it might be, he was generally ready to make a meal with anyone.

"I expected to astonish you much more by my arrival," said Dick, after a short pause, during which they had both been paying their respects to what they had before them.

"Very likely," answered Matthew; "but the truth is, I expected you."

"Expected me?"

"Yes—I have been looking for you for days and days past. I'll warrant I know your errand—it concerns Tom Davis. You are not the one to leave a friend in the lurch."

"Not by any means," said Dick. "You have guessed rightly—my intention is to get him out of his trouble, and I have come to you to ask you how to do it."

"Well, then," Matthew responded, "I can do that in a very few minutes; and before we proceed to that, I am determined to have from you an account of your late doings. You can be as brief as you like, but I must have it."

Dick knew that it would only be an utter waste of time to hesitate or to attempt to persuade old Matthew to postpone the account of his adventures.

Taking, therefore, what was the shortest way, Dick began abruptly, and, as briefly as ever he could, placed his old friend in possession of those facts with which the reader is already well acquainted.

By the time this was done the meal was over.

Drawing the chairs closer to the fire, they then set about the consideration of the business before them.

That the subject was an important one could be told by the very manner in which old Matthew filled and lighted his pipe and drew the first few whiffs.

"I've a good deal to tell you, Dick," he began, "and I may as well make a straightforward tale of it."

"By all means. Begin by telling me whether you communicated with him or not, according to our arrangement."

"If you will listen," said Matthew, "I will tell you all. And if you abstain from making interruptions, much time will be saved."

Dick simply nodded his head, and Matthew took this hint to proceed.

"When we parted on the last occasion," he said, "I just snatched a few hours' slumber, and the first thing the next morning went to a lawyer that I have had some dealings with, and who I knew to be a very clever fellow. I told him Tom Davis's exact position, said he was a friend of mine, and that I was anxious and willing to go to any expense in order to obtain the best talent on his behalf when his trial took place."

"Good!" said Dick. "It would be impossible to act better than that."

"So I thought," answered Matthew, complacently. "You see I have found that, in a general way, as regards the law, if you have only got the money to pay for it you can obtain what you require, and so I had the strongest hopes for Tom Davis's safety."

"Then the lawyer has undertaken the case?"

"He has, and has had frequent interviews with Tom. He has told him what we intend to do on his behalf, and if this, the first attempt, fails, another will be made."

"He would be glad to learn," said Dick, "that he was not forgotten by his friends."

"He knows you too well to fear being forgotten," said Matthew. "But, however, I have not seen him myself—indeed, I have not made the attempt, for I fancied anything of the kind would only be a means of exciting suspicion."

"And perhaps of getting yourself into trouble," interrupted Dick.

"Very likely; and the lawyer expressly cautioned me against it."

"And what steps has this lawyer taken up to the present time?"

"Nothing further than to engage a most eminent counsel, who will do his best to get the three prisoners off. The charge against Tom is a very grave and serious one, and if they succeed in obtaining his acquittal they will fairly be entitled to a good round sum."

"And they shall have it," said Dick—"they shall have it!"

Matthew smiled at the emphasis with which he spoke.

"Why, what a foolish thing it would be," he said, "for anyone in whom you place trust to betray you; at the most, only a share of the reward would be received as the fruits of what they had done, whereas, by befriending you, they can at any time make sure of double the whole amount."

"That's very true," said Dick, "and I believe we have all owed our safety in a very great measure to that very circumstance. But the trial—when does that take place?"

"The assizes begin to-day," answered Matthew, "and the case is liable to be called on at any moment; it may stand over to the end of the week, and it may be commenced to-morrow morning."

"Indeed!" said Dick—"so soon as that? If so, that leaves a very little time for preparations."

"You are right," said Matthew. "And yet, after all, I hope in all sincerity it will take place in the morning."

"Why so?"

"Because then the state of suspense we are now in will be put an end to—we shall know then precisely what to do. If the lawyers fail, and they are all three sentenced to transportation, we must make up our minds how to set them free."

"Exactly," said Dick.

At this moment there came a gentle rap at the door of the room.

Old Matthew gave such a nervous start that he dropped his pipe, which broke into fragments on the hearth.

"Don't be alarmed, Dick," he said, rising to his feet and going to the door. "I think I know now what I am wanted for."

He turned the key as he spoke, for he had taken the precaution to lock the door.

Throwing it open on its hinges, he perceived the girl who assisted him standing on the threshold.

"You are wanted," she said, "by a gentleman downstairs."

"I thought so" said Matthew; "but at the moment I forgot."

"Who is it?" asked Dick.

"No one but the lawyer. He promised to call here to-night and let me know in case anything unusual should have occurred. I will be back again immediately; but, for safety's sake, just lock the door behind me."

Dick was not slow to comply with this request.

He waited in the utmost suspense, however, until the landlord returned.

He came back at length, bearing on his countenance a very portentous look.

"The news?" said Dick, hastily. "Do not keep me any longer; my impatience while you were absent grew so great, that I was almost ready to come down and join you in the consultation."

"Then be glad that you had the prudence to restrain yourself."

"But the news, Matthew—what have you heard?"

"Why, simply that the lawyer has ascertained that Tom Davis's case is put down for the first in the morning, and in all probability it will be taken then."

"And what time does the court open?"

"At ten o'clock."

"We have not many hours to wait then," continued Dick, "for it is already past midnight."

"So much the better," answered Matthew; "I am anxious for it to be over."

"Did the lawyer express an opinion?"

"Well, scarcely; but yet he alluded to the difficulties he had to deal with. The evidence is so confoundedly straightforward and clear that it is scarcely possible for the cleverest man to bother or confuse the brains of the jury, easy as it often is to do so."

"Rather more than nine hours," said Dick, musingly. "A very short time—a very short time; not long enough to go and return."

"What are you muttering about?" asked the landlord.

"Why," said Dick, "as the trial is to take place so soon, I will make the attempt to stay in London until it is over; but my companions and Maud will all be full of anxiety on my account, and I was wondering whether I could ride over and tell them all was well, and be back in time."

"Don't think of any such foolish proceeding," said Matthew. "You will be able to return before midnight to-morrow night, and they must endure their suspense till then as best they may."

"I suppose so," said Dick, with a sigh; "yet I could have wished——"

"What?"

"That we had been able to communicate with them in some way."

"But how is it to be done?"

"Have you no one that you can trust to send upon such an expedition?"

"No one at all; and, believe me, Dick, I do not think the occasion sufficiently pressing to warrant you in letting anyone else into the secret of your present retreat."

"Perhaps not," answered Turpin. "At any rate, we will think no more about it."

"Wisely determined, I think. And now, Dick, as regards your staying here, I think, if you will only have the prudence to remain in this room, that all will be well. The attention of all the officers will be very much taken up by Tom Davis's trial—they will all want to know the result. For that reason, you can count upon the probability of being left here unmolested. Then, as soon as the verdict is pronounced, I will leave the court, and come here to you."

Dick was silent for a moment, and then he said:

"That's all very well, Matthew, but I have a word or two to say yet as regards the bargain. If I stay here, as I fully intend, I shall not be satisfied to keep close prisoner in this room; on the contrary, I have determined to go with you to the court, and be present at the trial myself."

Matthew started to his feet, and spoke angrily.

"You are mad, Dick—mad—quite mad! No one in his sober senses standing in your position would dream of such a proceeding!"

"I don't know that," said Dick. "I've done it before in safety; and I consider that I have rather a talent in disguises."

"But you surely do not think that mere change in your costume is sufficient?"

"No, I do not," was the reply; "but I have been thinking of that old friend of yours, who has been of assistance to me more than once before."

"You mean the old costumier in Bow Street?"

"I do. Believe me, Matthew, he will be able to disguise me so well that not even you could recognise me."

CHAPTER CMLXXVIII.

DICK TURPIN FINDS HIMSELF IN UNEXPECTED PERIL.

"Don't try it, Dick—don't try it! Take my advice, and abandon that at once."

But Turpin only shook his head resolutely.

"I am sorry to differ from you," he said, "and I like to follow your advice whenever I can, because I know it is good. On the present occasion I feel sure that if I underrate the danger, you overrate it, and therefore I believe it will be safe for me to go."

"Well, Dick, you know a wilful man will always have his own way. If you find yourself in the wrong box don't blame me."

"I won't, you may depend upon it. But in the event of such a thing, don't have any ill-feeling against me, but do your best once more to get me out of the scrape."

"Ah, Dick," said Matthew, more and more seriously, "I feel impressed with the idea that if you are once more made a prisoner and confined in a cell it will be for good—no human aid will ever release you."

It was more the manner in which old Matthew spoke than the words he uttered that impressed the highwayman; nevertheless, while he spoke, Dick shuddered, though he tried hard to feel at ease.

"Come, Matthew," he said, abruptly, "may we consider this matter settled? If so, I will set out for the costumier's at once, otherwise it will be too late."

"I can't alter my opinions," returned the landlord.

"And I cannot bear the prospect of remaining in this room all day," said Dick, rising to his feet, "and, therefore, if you will go downstairs and see that the coast is clear I will take my departure."

"Only think," said Matthew, "that you in your position should have the audacity of thinking about paying a visit to a house situated nearly opposite the police station in Bow Street—certainly within sight of it!"

"That's the reason why it's the safest place in the world," returned the highwayman; "they would never give me credit for such a daring act as that."

"I don't know; they are getting used to your audacious tricks now; I do not believe they would be surprised at anything you did."

"Well—well, we may stay here talking for hours to come without advancing any further. Go now and see whether it will be safe for me to depart."

Very reluctantly indeed did old Matthew obey this request.

He was not absent very long, and when he came back he felt compelled to tell Dick the truth, for he had never deceived him yet, and so he said:

"All's well, Dick; if you wished it you could not have the coast clearer than it is now."

"Then I'm off."

Matthew gave a half sigh, and almost regretted his own open-mindedness, for he was aware that in all probability if he had told Dick there was danger abroad he would have abandoned his perilous enterprise.

But Dick rapidly put on his hat and wrapped the constable's cloak around him.

"Now, Matthew," he said, "not another word of discussion. Lead the way. If we linger only five minutes we may miss this desirable opportunity."

Without a word, Matthew walked from the room, Dick following closely at his heels.

"Leave me here," said the highwayman, as soon as the foot of the staircase was gained; "don't attempt to accompany me to the threshold. When I come back I shall be in a widely-different dress to this, you may depend, and so well disguised that even you, although knowing my intention, will be baffled."

"Have you made up your mind what disguise to take?"

"I have not; I shall be guided by the costumier."

"You cannot do better; he is a perfect master of his art."

"Then, for the present, farewell!"

With these words, Dick walked hastily along the passage, pushed open the swinging glass door, and the next moment was walking rapidly up Drury Lane.

The nearest way to his destination lay directly past the station in Bow Street, but, with all his daring, Dick had the prudence to avoid this route.

He made, instead, a considerable detour.

Entering Bow Street from the upper end, he crossed at once to the side on which the costumier's house was built, and a few hasty steps brought him before the door.

He remembered that in the door-post there was a little bell handle so well concealed among the carving that it required a keen eye to detect it.

Dick placed his hand upon it at once, and as he pulled it, the faint tinkling of a little bell reached his ears.

He waited, then, with some impatience for the door to be opened, and while doing so, he cast several stealthy glances across the road.



[DICK TURPIN AND THE OLD COSTUMIER.]

A little lower down on his left hand he could see an oil lamp burning.

This lamp hung over the doorway of the police-station.

Straining his eyes, he fancied he could perceive several officers lounging near the doorway; but in this particular he might have been deceived by his imagination, for the night was dark.

No notice apparently being taken of his summons for admittance, he pulled the bell again; but this time, before the tinkling had time to die away, the door was opened, and the old costumier, only partially dressed, and carrying a lighted candle in his hand, appeared upon the threshold.

His eyes had a sleepy, vacant look, and he winked and blinked at the guttering candle in a manner ludicrous to behold, yet, for all that, he made out the form of his visitor.

Bowing low, according to his custom, he said:

"Munificent sir, you are welcome. Enter!"

Dick lost not a moment in obeying, and when the front door was closed behind him, and he stood in the dark passage of this house, he felt that he was comparatively safe.

"You wish to avail yourself of my services, I suppose?" said the costumier.

"I do, and I wish you to put forth your utmost skill."

"'I will do so willingly and gladly, for I do not forget the past. This way, sir—this way! Be good enough to follow me up the staircase."

Dick obeyed without the slightest hesitation, for he had the utmost trust in the old man's good faith.

Reaching the top of the first flight of stairs, the costumier led the way into a room which was in every part overstrewed with miscellaneous articles of all descriptions.

"The reward to be earned by this night's service is large," said Dick, as he seated himself upon a table, the only available seat he could find, "for I am about to set out upon an expedition of great danger, and my disguise must be complete."

The old man nodded.

"What would you choose?" he said.

"That I determine to leave to you. I consider that you would be best able to guide me."

The costumier appeared to fall into a fit of profound thought.

His eyes closed, and Dick looked with interest upon his strange, wrinkled physiognomy.

The muscles about the lower part of his face twitched strangely, and the highwayman wondered, yet little guessed, what was the nature of the old man's thoughts.

Opening his eyes at length, he said, as Dick fancied, with some confusion:

"What should you think of a sailor?—would the disguise suit you? Could you personate the character?"

Dick reflected a moment, and said:

"I believe I could—yes, I feel sure I could."

"Then," said the costumier, "I should think it would suit you admirably, for your foes would never think of looking for you in such a garb as that."

"True," said Dick—"quite true."

"Then you decide upon that?"

"I do."

"Well, then," said the old man, "if you will remain here for a few moments—perhaps, too, you won't mind being in the dark, for I have no other light—I will go down and fetch a few things that are requisite."

He said this hesitatingly and awkwardly, yet the cause of this might be that he was solicitous not to give offence to one who had proved himself to be so good a customer as Dick had.

"Very well," said Dick. "I don't mind the darkness in the least; but, above all things, make haste, for I can assure you I have no time to lose."

"I can fully understand that," was the reply, spoken hurriedly and hastily.

No sooner had the last words escaped his lips, than the old costumier picked up the candle and left the room.

He closed the door behind him.

Dick was then in utter darkness, save and except that underneath the door could be seen a bright line of light.

He remained perfectly still, listening to the creaking noise produced by the costumier descending the staircase.

Then, drawing a long breath, Dick said:

"I wonder what it is that ails me? What can there be in the atmosphere of this place that makes it so oppressive? All these old clothes, I suppose. Bah! it is enough to suffocate one! I'll open the door."

With these words, Dick slid off the table, and groped his way carefully to the doorway.

He had accurately noted its position, and so he gained it without coming into contact with any of the many objects with which the place was literally crammed.

The air upon the staircase seemed to his heated fancy to be in no degree purer than that in the room, and he seemed absolutely to be gasping for breath.

Then faintly, and coming from afar off, he could hear the murmur of a voice.

This was a circumstance that roused up all his energies at once.

He immediately became on the alert, and listened eagerly.

But although his sense of hearing was so acute, he was unable to distinguish anything besides a hollow, murmuring sound.

"Who can it be?" Dick thought. "I always fancied that the old costumier lived alone, and what should he have to say, I wonder? I'll find out."

It was purely upon the impulse of the moment that Dick acted. He did not wait to reflect upon his decision; but very slowly and stealthily began to descend the stairs, for he knew that at the lightest tread they creaked dismally.

There was a vague sensation of alarm in Turpin's breast—a sensation that increased every moment in intensity.

It may have been that his proximity to the station at Bow Street produced a certain amount of nervousness—a greater amount than he ordinarily felt.

Be the cause what it might, however, he was most certainly apprehensive of danger to himself, and so, step by step, he went down the old, worm-eaten staircase.

At length he paused.

The murmur of voices became more audible, and one word distinctly reached his ears.

Looking round the angle of the balusters, he perceived at some distance off the glimmer of a light.

From his position he fancied it came from the shop.

"Isaac—Isaac," said the voice, which Turpin had no difficulty in recognising as that of the old costumier—"Isaac—Isaac, get your sleepy eyes wider open. Are you sure you understand me?"

"Quite sure," said a growling voice, though the sound of it made Turpin aware that the speaker was a boy.

"Understand, Isaac," the old costumier added, in a lower key, "it's a fortune that you are going to make within the next half hour—a fortune—that is, enough for you to spend for the rest of your life."

"I quite understand," was the reply; "but what is it you want me to do?"

"Hush—hush—be quiet! There's some one above for whom a large reward is offered."

"You mean the chap that came here once before."

"I do, Isaac—your memory is good. His race must be nearly run now—he cannot last much longer. Such being the case, then, why may not I reap the benefit of his capture as well as anyone else?"

"Better—better!" said the growling voice. "You know that was what I said to you the time before."

"You did, and I have agreed to follow your advice; so now, as I have got all these things in readiness, slip out of the door across the road to the station. Just let the officers know that he is here, and that I am willing to give him up."

"All right," said the boy, and then there was a hasty movement.

"Stop—stop," cried the costumier—"not so much hurry! Wait and hear my full instructions, for the least indiscretion will ruin all."

"Then make haste," was the response. "If you stop down here much longer he will grow suspicious."

"Right, Isaac—that is very likely; but all I have to say is this: when you come back with the officers, enter as silently as you possibly can. Let them surround the house in case of accidents, and you come with the rest up the stairs, dash open the door suddenly, and you will, in all probability, find him seated in a chair, and me standing before him."

"All right," said the growling voice. "You do your part, and I'll do mine. I'm off!"

CHAPTER CMLXXIX.

DICK TURPIN TAKES A DESPERATE LEAP OVER THE HOUSE-TOPS.

DICK TURPIN was so unutterably astounded by this conversation that during its progress he had been unable to move a single limb.

The treachery of the old costumier was well calculated to have an overpowering effect upon him, for, to speak the truth, he had placed as much confidence in him almost as he had in old Matthew, and certainly after what had occurred Turpin would scarcely have been surprised should the latter prove treacherous too.

But he was warned by the increasing brilliancy of the light, and by the shuffling footsteps of the old man, that it would never do to remain any longer in his present position.

The question was, in what way should he act?—what would be the best step to take, and the one most calculated to insure his safety?

His first thought was to rush at full speed down the stairs, overturn the costumier, and immediately make his escape from the house; and perhaps this bold and violent course might have produced success; but Dick hesitated, and the chance was lost.

Not but what he had good cause for hesitation.

In thus precipitately leaving the house, some alarm

would of necessity be created, and the police station was so near that the officers would be upon him, as one might say, immediately.

The old costumier began to ascend the staircase, and as he did so Dick went back step by step higher up, until he reached the doorway through which he had emerged.

Here he paused again in doubt, wondering whether he should wait there for the costumier, and then arise upon him and overpower him.

A second reflection told the highwayman that this course could produce no beneficial result, though it might enable him to wreak some punishment on the perfidious old man.

He felt, however, that to escape quickly was the chief thing, and a plan of operations suggesting itself to him just then, he turned round, and with rapid steps ascended the second flight of stairs.

He heard the old costumier enter the room, for so wrapped up was he in the consideration of the iniquity he was about to perpetrate, that he failed to hear the slight noise Dick made in ascending.

By whom the house was tenanted Dick had not the slightest idea.

A dim light coming from some unknown source enabled him to find his way tolerably well up the steep, old-fashioned staircase, until at length he reached the top.

While ascending the last flight, his hands had been busily groping in his pockets for the materials wherewith to produce a light; therefore, without any loss of time, he managed to ignite one of those small pieces of wax candle which once before that night had been of such service to him.

The dim light it afforded was, nevertheless, sufficient to light up the narrow, confined space in which he stood.

He found that, as he had fully expected, he had reached the top of the house, and was standing on a small square landing-place.

Looking up, he saw in the roof one of those small square openings covered with a trap door, with which almost every house in London is provided, to serve as a means of escape in case of fire.

A second glance showed him a short ladder lying close against the wall.

To seize it was the work of a moment, and while he was placing it in the necessary position, he heard that a great uproar was taking place in the lower part of the house.

"Never mind," he muttered, as he ascended the ladder rapidly, "I believe that I have yet got time."

He stopped at the top and drew back the bolts.

The trap-door was then quickly placed aside, and he found himself with the fresh air blowing down upon him.

The candle was at this moment extinguished.

This did not matter, for he had no longer any occasion for its use.

"I can't fasten the door," Dick muttered, "and so put a stop to their progress in that way, but I will draw up the ladder, and that will make it more difficult for them to reach me."

He suited the action to the word, and sent the ladder sliding down over the tiles until it stopped short in the gutter.

He then began to look carefully around him, so as to make sure of taking the best route across the housetops, for, of course, his safety depended upon the course he chose.

Descending at length, he crawled slowly upon the tiles until he reached the centre ridge.

As he was passing over this, a tile, upon which one foot rested, was dislodged from its position, and so suddenly and unexpectedly that before he could save himself or even make an effort to do so, he was slipping at a fearful rate down the sloping roof.

He struggled violently, and strove to arrest his descent by grasping at the edges of the tiles.

But these did not afford him sufficient hold to enable him to stay his speed in the least.

Down he went, and such a shuddering horror took possession of him that he was unable to turn his eyes and look in the direction in which he was falling.

His heart ceased to beat, and a mist seemed to spread itself before his eyes.

Yet vainly and spasmodically clutching, he rolled down until he was brought up with great force and suddenness by the stone parapet, which most unquestionably saved his life.

Luckily, he struck against it feet foremost, and beyond a sharp shock and a slight pain, he felt none the worse for the accident.

Yet a moment elapsed before he could fully persuade himself that he was really saved.

Attracted by the noise evidently coming from below in the street, he cautiously raised himself from the gutter.

Then, prompted by an irrepressible impulse, he bent his head forward so as to look over the edge of the parapet.

To his surprise, he found that quite a crowd of people had collected, surrounding the costumier's door.

By that mysterious means which puzzles everybody, all those persons present had got to learn what was the matter.

Dick was satisfied with one hasty glance; then he shrank back, for there was just the possibility that one of those below looking up might discern his head, in which case a fresh alarm would be raised.

When Dick began again to crawl along the roofs, he became sensible of the fact that he had bruised himself dreadfully in many places, and when he moved his limbs he suffered considerable pain, which kept increasing each moment.

But his progress was now attended with a much greater amount of caution than at first, so, after all, the slight accident he met with was a fortunate event, inasmuch as it taught him the absolute necessity for caution.

In thus scrambling over the roofs, Dick had no settled idea further than that he might perhaps be able to gain an entrance to some house or other at some distance, and so descend to the street unperceived.

A thousand difficulties were in the way of this course; yet he crept on and on, though his pace grew slower in consequence of the pain in all his joints.

At last, with a sigh of disappointment, he stopped and looked despairingly around.

Just in front of him was a division between the housetops, not very wide, but its great height made the abyss look perfectly alarming.

That he could easily leap such a distance, Dick knew very well; but then he was bruised and shaken, and he shrank back with that dread which everyone experiences upon suddenly finding themselves in such a situation.

He looked back as though with the intention of retreating, but just then he heard many voices talking loudly, and directly afterwards a man crawled out of the trap-door from which he had so lately emerged.

Clearly the officers had found some way of reaching the roof independently of the ladder which Dick had so carefully removed.

They had also provided themselves with torches, which cast a bright, ruddy glare around for a considerable distance.

"It must be," said Dick, as he gathered himself up slowly—"it is my only chance. If I make the effort all will be well; but I question whether any of the officers will be bold enough to follow me."

He stepped up as he spoke on to the edge of the stone parapet, which was not more than a foot wide.

In doing so, he could not avoid glancing down to the ground below, and as he did so such a sensation of dizziness came over him that he almost lost his balance.

Between four and five feet distant from him was another parapet, similar in every respect to the one upon which he stood.

This he would have to clear so as to drop upon the roof beyond.

To take such a leap was terrible indeed.

Truly was it a leap for life, and one only to be taken by a man whose only chance of safety lay in doing so.

Dick prepared himself for the effort as best he could.

He gave one spring into the air, striving to forget that he was standing on the top of a high house, endeavoring to cheat his fancy into the belief that he was only on the level ground.

He alighted on the stone coping opposite.

His footing was insecure; he tottered and struggled for a balance.

For a second it seemed as though he must inevitably fall backwards into the abyss and be dashed to pieces; but by a sudden movement of the upper part of his body, Dick threw himself forward, and fell with considerable force upon the rough red tiles.

But he was safe, and that in a measure compensated for all that he had gone through.

He so far lost his consciousness in his fall as to feel an inclination to lie just where he was without moving a single limb; but the recollection that the officers were near to him enabled him to shake off this sensation of languor and depression.

Rising stealthily, he looked behind him, and shuddered again when he beheld the dark black gulf he had overleaped.

The police officers had by this time all passed through the trap-door, and were making slow and careful progress across the housetops, for Dick had left no track behind him by which he could be followed, and he was now at so great a distance as to be out of the sphere of light afforded by their torches.

These indeed were more hindrance to the officers than good, for one hand was constantly kept occupied, leaving only the other to seize hold of the various projections in the roof.

But Dick, although in comparative safety, was anxious to crawl away to such a distance and in such a manner that the officers should lose all trace of him entirely, and with this view he crouched down again, so that his form was concealed by a parapet, and, almost on all-fours, crept along the narrow, slimy gutter.

Bending all his energies to the task he had set himself, Dick kept resolutely on his way; but at length, having gone, as he considered, a sufficient distance, he paused, and slowly rising to an upright posture, took a survey around him.

Although he was invisible to the officers, yet they were plainly to be seen by him, owing to the ruddy halo of light their torches cast around them.

By their manner, Dick could tell they paused at the edge of the abyss over which he had leaped, and he fancied by their gestures that an animated discussion was going on among them as to whether he had really passed that way or not.

Turning his eyes in the opposite direction, Dick perceived, several yards off, a dim, glimmering light.

At one moment it would be tolerably bright, and then it would fade away so as scarcely to be seen.

"That's from an attic window," he muttered, after a more attentive examination of it, "and I should imagine the light proceeds from a fire. I will creep towards it. Perhaps that will present me with an avenue of escape."

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, Dick set himself in motion.

It took but a short time to gain this attic window, but he approached with the utmost caution, for of course he could not tell whether the chamber was inhabited by anyone or not.

Reaching it at last, he paused and listened.

A tattered curtain was drawn partially across the window, but not so closely as to prevent him from taking a peep at the interior if he had chosen to do so.

But Dick did not attempt, for the very instant that he paused the sound of voices came upon his ears.

CHAPTER CMLXXX.

DICK ONCE MORE FINDS THAT AUDACITY COMMANDS SUCCESS.

Upon making this discovery, Dick's first impulse was to crawl away as silently and cautiously as he had arrived, but the words that first fell upon his ears so interested him that, despite the danger of his situation and the urgency there was of immediately moving, he involuntarily waited to hear more.

The voice that Dick heard speaking was evidently that of a young girl, for the tones were sweet and low, although her words were interrupted by frequent choking sobs, and although there was such a tone of anguish in it.

"Do not grieve so—do not weep so bitterly," she said. "Innocent though he was, yet you must have known what would have been the result; he was so entangled that he could not escape. Do not weep, I say again, but be of better heart, and find consolation in the thought that though he has been pronounced guilty by his fellow-creatures, yet there is One who, knowing all, will acquit him of this fearful charge."

The girl was silent, and in the short pause that followed nothing could be heard but sobs and cries of lamentation.

"Girl," said another voice, and this one was of a character altogether different to the first, for it was shrill and piercing, and was indicative of the utmost mental agony and suffering—"girl, it is well and no doubt easy for you to preach, but such words as you utter bring no consolation to my breast; they may console you, for you cannot feel for him as I do, for I am his mother and he is my only one."

"That reproach is unjust—most unjust," was the quick reply; "but you can render him no aid by thus abandoning yourself to sorrow. You know that now the trial is over there is not the shadow of a hope—he will be sent away, and we shall never live to see him more."

While listening to this conversation, Dick had managed to raise himself a little, so as to be able to peep over the top of the tattered curtain we have mentioned, and as he did so a sad spectacle greeted his eyes.

The attic was small and destitute of nearly every article of furniture.

In the small rusty grate a few sticks were burning, which gave out by far more light than heat.

Crouching down on the floor near the hearthstone was the figure of an aged woman.

She was much emaciated, although Dick could see scarcely anything beside her long, bony arm and almost fleshless fingers.

Her gray hair was streaming in disorder upon her neck and shoulders; her face was completely concealed from view.

The young girl was standing in an attitude of easy, natural grace against the chimneypiece; her elbow was resting upon it, and her head supported by her hand.

Her cheeks were wet with tears, which continually flowed over them.

While gazing upon this scene and listening to what was said, Dick had thought of something which he considered might aid him to escape.

Before beginning to put his project into execution, he looked behind him once more, in order to observe the movements of the police officers.

They had left the parapet where they had been standing, and were busily engaged in dragging some apparently heavy object, but what it was Dick could not make out, nor did he particularly trouble himself to do so, for he had seen sufficient to make him aware that he might safely do what he intended.

Raising his hand, he tapped lightly against the window, and at the same time he placed his mouth close to a pane of glass which had been broken, and through which the sounds of voices had passed, otherwise he could not have heard so distinctly all that had been said.

"I am a friend," he cried, in a low voice. "Do not be alarmed—I have come to aid you."

Notwithstanding the assuring nature of these words, the two occupants of the garret both screamed, though, it must be said, only slightly.

The young girl was the first to recover herself from her astonishment.

With a quick step, she crossed the room and dashed the curtain on one side.

"Open the window," said Dick, "and let me enter. Believe me when I tell you I am a friend, and will do you a good service in return for one that you can render me."

"Alas, sir!" said the young girl, in sorrowful accents, as she unfastened the window, "if you look to obtain any service at our hands you will look in vain, for we are quite helpless."

"Not so," said Dick, as he stepped lightly into the room—"not so, and I will quickly prove it to you."

The old woman half rose up, and pushing the masses of hair off her face, looked scrutinisingly into the countenance of their mysterious visitant.

"I know the cause of your trouble," Dick said—"it is because one near and dear to both of you has been found guilty of a crime."

"It is, sir," said the young girl, quickly; "but, as we well know—though, alas! we could not prove it—he is quite innocent. The judge and the jury thought differently, however, and he is sentenced to twenty-one years' transportation."

"I will take your word for his innocence," said Dick. "I may as well confess to you that I have broken the laws—that the police officers are even now on my track. I look to you to assist me to escape."

"How can we, sir?" said the young girl, shrinking back—"how can we?"

"Easily," said Dick. "I only want you to conduct me noiselessly down the staircase, and let me out of the front door of the house; and, in return, I will pledge my word to use my best efforts to release the young man you speak of. There are those belonging to me who probably will be in the same condition as he is now, and I am determined that, in defiance of the laws, they shall be liberated. The same with this young man; and, in addition, I will put him in the way of leaving England secretly, and supply him with sufficient money to do so."

"It is a dream," said the old woman, speaking for the first time, and uttering her words in a shrieking, hysterical voice—"it is a dream—all a dream! You are not in earnest in what you say."

"But if I prove it," said Dick, quietly, "will you believe me, and will you do what I require?"

"I will."

Dick beckoned her to approach him, and then pointed out of the attic window.

What he saw filled Dick with some little surprise, and caused him to quicken his movements.

The bulky object which the police officers were dragging was evidently a broad plank, or something of that kind, which they could put across from one parapet to the other, and so continue their search over the housetops without hazarding that tremendous jump.

They had now effected the passage, and were fearfully close at hand.

"You see," said Dick, "they are police officers and searching closely for me; you see no time is to be lost. I tell you again I will set the young man free, and those who know Dick Turpin always say he keeps his word."

"Is that your name?" said the old woman, earnestly

"It is."

"Then I believe you," she answered. "Come with me—I have no fear that you will deceive me."

"I shall not. Let me fasten the window on the inner side. There, that will do. Now take me unperceived to the front door, and make all speed back to this room. If the officers speak to you or enter, make a great show of unfastening the window, and then tell them that you have not been disturbed."

The old woman nodded, and seemed so alarmed at the proximity of the officers, that she almost dragged the highwayman from the room.

The stairs were descended rapidly and noiselessly.

Many other persons were doubtless in the house; but, if so, Dick neither saw nor heard anything of them, while the passing of anyone up and down the stairs being heard would not be paid the least attention to.

In a very brief space of time the street-door was reached.

The old woman opened it, and looked forth before she allowed Dick to issue himself.

"The street is clear," she said. "You will escape unseen. Quick—quick, that I may return to the attic!"

"But the young man's name?" said Dick—"what is it? Tell me, and do not be afraid I shall forget."

"Philip Greythorpe."

Dick repeated it, and then said:

"Farewell, and many thanks for this service! If it lies in the power of mortal man to do what I have promised it shall be done!"

With these words he stepped quietly into the street, being careful to avoid all appearance of hurry or alarm.

The door was closed immediately behind him, and the old woman ascended to the attic.

Dick drew a long breath, and gave himself a hearty shake.

"That is what I call an excellent escape," he muttered, "and I fancy the officers will be puzzled not a little at my extraordinary disappearance. Ah, by Jove, they are looking over the parapet!"

Dick could tell this by the broad glare of light that suddenly illuminated the dark thoroughfare in which he stood.

He walked on, however, with as much composure as before, though when he turned round the first corner he came to he felt a sensation of great relief.

He knew, then, that he was out of danger.

But the consideration presented itself to him of where he was to look for further shelter.

It is questionable whether anyone under such circumstances would have come so readily to a conclusion as Dick did, and still more questionable whether they would have adopted his course of action.

This was, in the coolest and most matter-of-fact manner possible to walk back again to the White Horse in Drury Lane.

It was a path beset with dangers, for the officers would all be on the alert, and probably might jump to the conclusion that as Dick had escaped he had sought a refuge there at his old quarters.

But Dick did not allow this consideration to influence him in the least degree.

In the most unconcerned manner possible to conceive he walked at a steady rate along the almost deserted streets, taking care, however, to proceed to old Matthew's by the most roundabout way he could think of.

It was when he really entered Drury Lane that he began to glance somewhat apprehensively around him.

To his vexation, he perceived a police officer standing at no great distance, who, he fancied, eyed him suspiciously.

But Dick walked on as though he did not observe it—in fact, as though he was not troubling himself about anything going on around him.

Upon reaching the White Horse, he glanced up at the lamp over the doorway, and appeared to hesitate.

Then, just as though he was a chance passenger, and had made up his mind to call in for refreshment, he ascended the steps, and walked down the passage.

He was greeted with an exclamation which came from old Matthew, who was standing at the bar, and who, by his manner, was evidently on the look-out for him.

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated. "What on earth can bring you back like that? But don't stop to answer me! Upstairs with you—upstairs! I can wait till then to hear your news."

Dick did not wait to be told twice, but ran up the staircase two or three steps at a time.

Old Matthew was not long behind him, though he entered the room rather out of breath.

"What has happened?" he cried, in genuine alarm "I heard a rumor that you had been captured in Bow Street."

Dick smiled.

"Then I am afraid," he said, "the person who told you did not speak the truth. In sober earnest I was very near it, I assure you."

"And have you been seen to enter here?" asked Matthew. "That's the question."

"I am afraid I have," was the reply, "and, if so, I shall look to you for safety."

Matthew gave a peculiar and reassuring smile as he said:

"Well, if there's any danger approaching, we shall have timely notice of it. Just oblige me by relating your adventures."

Dick complied readily enough.

But no words could convey any idea of the amount of amazement Matthew displayed upon learning the perfidy of the old costumier.

He was, in fact, at first incredulous, only Dick's narrative was of such a character as to leave no room for doubt.

"It was my narrowest escape," said Dick, "and more than once since then I have felt that if ever I get into serious trouble it will be by the perfidiousness of some one in whom I placed the utmost trust."

CHAPTER CMLXXXI.

DICK TURPIN IS MADE ACQUAINTED WITH THE RESULTS OF TOM DAVIS'S TRIAL.

"THEN," replied old Matthew, very gravely, "you may make yourself quite sure, Dick, that I shall not be the one ever to betray you."

"I believe that," answered the highwayman, grasping him by the hand—"I fully believe it; indeed, should you prove false I should lose all faith in human nature."

"But this is profitless talk," said Matthew. "Supposing, now, that I go downstairs for a minute and look round?—there can be no harm in that."

"But will it look suspicious?"

"I think not, and if there is any danger at hand I shall let you know it in good time."

Dick made no further opposition to this course.

Old Matthew was not absent long, but when he came back his face had rather a grave aspect.

"Is there danger?" asked Turpin.

"Not immediate," he replied, "but I hear there is a tremendous commotion going on in and about Bow Street."

"Are the officers still searching for me?"

"I believe they are—at any rate, they were a short time ago. Your mysterious disappearance puzzles them exceedingly, and they seem to be impressed with the idea that you are concealed in one of the houses there."

Dick gave a contented, satisfied smile.

"Now," said Matthew, "I will do my best to keep you in safety while you are beneath my roof. Look here."

Old Matthew went, as he spoke, to a large oaken cupboard which completely filled up a recess on one side of the fireplace.

He threw open the large double doors with which it was provided, and then it turned out that it was not really a cupboard but a closet.

Various articles of apparel were hanging around it on different nails and hooks fixed in the walls.

Apparently this closet was formed entirely of wood.

Matthew, first bespeaking Dick's attention, stepped into it.

"Now, Dick," he said, "there's a hiding-place here which I don't think even you could discover, even if you knew it to exist."

"Indeed," said Dick, "then that is saying a great deal in its favor."

"It is, and yet not more than it deserves. Look here."

As he spoke, old Matthew stooped down and inserted his fingers in between the floor and the bottom of the back of the cupboard, which did not fit so closely as to prevent him from introducing the tips of his fingers.

Putting out his utmost strength, Matthew then raised this back, just in the manner that one might raise the sash of a large window.

When this was done, a small chamber in the wall was discovered, and in it was a chair.

But the place looked as though it had never been pried into or entered for many years, for it was thickly loaded with dust, and everywhere huge cobwebs were suspended.

"What do you think of that?" said Matthew, as he stepped back to look at it with admiration.

"It is very good so far as security is concerned," said Dick, "but yet by no means a comfortable place to think of taking up one's quarters in."

"You are right enough there; but then, safety is the thing you have to consider."

"Just so. But how in the world, Matthew, came you to make this discovery?"

"Oh, I have known of it for a long time," was the reply. "The hiding-place has been made many, many years, and I firmly believe that it is now forgotten or unknown—at any rate, there is no other place in the whole house which holds forth so good a prospect of affording safe shelter."

"I shall take your word, Matthew," replied Dick, "and be guided by you entirely."

"You cannot do better, though I say it. Now, what I have to tell you is this: Whenever you receive any intimation of coming danger, quit this room; see be careful to leave no token of your presence behind you, and enter this chamber—then I firmly believe that the officers will depart without finding you."

"So do I."

"Then, the next thing I have to say," resumed Matthew, "is, that I am going to shut up the house for the night. I feel the want of sleep, and I shall be able to snatch a few hours before morning; so will you, for when I fasten up the house at night I do it in so secure a manner that no one could enter it unawares."

"That is enough," said Dick—"indeed, to tell you the truth, whenever I am here I feel as though I am within a strongly-fortified castle."

Matthew laughed at this idea and left the room, leaving Dick to compose himself as well as he could upon the couple of chairs which the apartment contained.

Dick drew them near the fire, and having got into as comfortable an attitude as circumstances would allow, he dropped off into a deep slumber.

He was aroused from it by a sudden disturbance of some kind in the street, and having ascertained what was the matter, he advanced cautiously to the window.

Looking down, he then saw a large crowd of people assembled, and among them a body of police officers.

They were all looking up at the front of the White Horse, and Dick began to feel that he should soon have to take up his quarters in the secret chamber.

To his surprise, however, the officers, after conferring with each other, departed.

Then, by degrees, the crowd dispersed as well, until the street was left in tolerable quiet.

As soon as this was the case, Dick heard a faint tap at the door, and directly afterwards old Matthew entered.

"Have you looked out, Dick?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply, "and I am puzzled at what I saw. What did you make of it?"

"Well, I may be wrong, but my idea is that the officers having failed to find you anywhere in the vicinity of Bow Street, have imagined that you have sought shelter here, but the quiet aspect of the place, now that it is shut up and in darkness, seems to have laid their suspicions."

"No doubt that is it," said Dick; "but, however, as morning cannot be far distant, I shall not attempt to sleep again."

"Nor shall I."

The remainder of the time was then spent by Matthew and Dick in discussion.

In the end, old Matthew, after a great deal of trouble, succeeded in persuading Dick Turpin that it would be best for him not to venture to Newgate—that, in fact, he was running a needless risk by doing so, and not doing the least good to anyone.

Secretly, Dick felt the full force of this, though he would not allow it.

He did not like on any occasion to change an opinion or a determination that he had formed.

Old Matthew carried the point, however, and having partaken of a good, substantial breakfast, he set out for the Old Bailey, leaving Dick to pass the time as best he might in the room alone.

Before the landlord departed, he again impressed upon the highwayman the necessity of seeking shelter in the secret room the moment the girl told him there was any occasion to do so.

"In fact," he said, "upon the approach of danger you will hear a bell ring violently; when you do, then, lose no time in concealing yourself."

Dick promised obedience, and his last words to old Matthew consisted of an earnest entreaty that he would return and let him know the result the moment the trial was concluded.

It was at quite an early hour when Matthew set out from his house; but then, he knew very well how much difficulty there was in forcing a way into the narrow, confined court at the Old Bailey, where the trials were held.

The first half-hour or so after his departure passed tolerably well to Dick, but after that time he began to grow impatient and restless, and continued to get more and more so as the day advanced.

He was yet, however, quite unmolested.

Beyond a doubt, the greater part of the police officers who had interested themselves in the capture of the highwayman were just then present at the Old Bailey, waiting the result of the trial with as much anxiety as anyone.

Never, under any circumstances, had a day appeared to lag so fearfully as that.

Dick thought the hours would never slip away.

But, for all his impatience and restlessness, old Time pursued his march without the least wavering or alteration.

Noon came and passed; then, after a short period of daylight, night began to close in.

To such a degree had Dick worked himself, that more than once or twice he was on the verge of issuing forth, in order to come to a conclusion earlier.

It was, however, as nearly six o'clock as possible when old Matthew returned.

By the look of his face, Dick knew that he was not the bringer of good tidings.

"Well," he said, briskly, "I will not question you. Speak, Matthew, and put an end to this horrible suspense as soon as you can!"

"Well, Dick, the case came on the very first thing this morning, and occupied the court up to within a short time of my leaving."

"And the result?"

"Is just what I expected—or, indeed, not quite so bad."

"What is it, then?"

"Why, I must tell you that a dead set was made against Tom Davis, and the attempt made to render what he had done a capital offence, so as to be punished with death. Luckily, by the efforts of the counsel I engaged, this was not successful."

"But why not come to the point at once?" said Dick. "What is his fate?"

"Twenty-one years' transportation."

"Twenty-one years?" repeated Dick. "Why, that's equivalent to transportation for life!"

"It is indeed. But don't chafe and fret so; wait until you have heard all, then we can talk over the matter, and if possible come to a decision."

"With all my heart."

"I shall never regret having taken the course I have," resumed old Matthew, "for by the efforts of the counsel Mrs. Davis and Ellen have escaped—when I say escaped, that is scarcely what I meant."

"They have been acquitted?"

"No, not that either, but sentenced to one month's imprisonment. For them you need not trouble; a month will quickly pass away—then they will receive their liberty in a legitimate manner."

"I am glad it is no worse for them," said Dick; "and yet you have no idea how much I regret even that. Still, as you say, they may be left; it is Tom Davis's case which demands our whole attention."

"You are quite right—it is," said Matthew. "And the question comes, in what possible way can we contrive to replace him in possession of his liberty?"

"I know not—I am too confused to think," said Dick; "I must leave all reflection to you."

"Well, it is certain," said old Matthew, "that if he is liberated by our aid he will have to leave England at once—that's the only course of safety open to him."

"And he will gladly enough embrace it," said Dick—"I feel sure of that. Once let him be free, and I will take care that all three of them have the means of quitting this country."

"Well," said Matthew, "and if I may add a few words of my own, I think while you are about it, the best thing you can do is to leave England too; you have run your career quite long enough. Take my advice—be satisfied with what you have done, and quit this land for ever."

Dick received this counsel with a smile.

"We'll talk about that another day," he said; "I have no humor to enter that discussion now."

"Well, be it so," said Matthew, somewhat sadly; "though, mark me, I should prefer that to be the end of your career."

Dick drummed upon the table impatiently with his hand.

"Well, then," said Matthew, "let us consider the ways and means of setting Tom Davis at liberty. He is now in Newgate, where he will remain for some short period."

"And after that?" asked Dick.

"Why, in the usual course of things, he will be put into a van or waggon along with the rest of the prisoners doomed with him, and taken, most probably, to Greenwich, where he will be put on board the convict ship."

"Well, Matthew, what is to be done, and when?"

"Ah, Dick! I cannot answer you that question; but I can very easily tell you what can *not* be done."

"And what may that be?"

"Why, liberate him from Newgate. From what was said at the court to-day, I feel sure that it is suspected that you and your comrades will make some attempt to set him free, and most certainly if you approach anywhere near the Old Bailey you will doom yourself to your own destruction."

"So we may," said Dick; "but for all that, Tom Davis must be set free."

"He must," said Matthew, rubbing his hands together, while a pleased expression gradually stole over his face—"he must. I quite agree with you. Just at this moment I thought of the means by which, in all probability, it can be done."

CHAPTER CMLXXXII.

THE RECESS BEHIND THE CUPBOARD, IN WHICH DICK TURPIN IS HIDDEN, IS DISCOVERED BY THE OFFICERS.

"Do you mean it?" said Dick Turpin, with eager earnestness—"do you really mean it? Come—quick! Speak out—let me know your plan."

"Well," said Matthew, with much complacency, "it is only a rude idea at present, but yet it may be elaborated into something very good indeed."

"Well, well, pass over all that."

But old Matthew seemed rather to enjoy his anxiety, for instead of speaking directly to the point he went on:

"And, by-the-way, there is that young man."

"Confound the young man!"

"Well, it isn't very grateful to say so. I mean that young man that you promised to rescue."

"Well, well, what of him?"

"Why, I think my plan will enable you to set him at liberty at the same time as Tom Davis."

"Indeed!" said Dick. "How so?"

"Can you not guess?"

"I cannot, nor do I intend to try; I am waiting for you to tell me."

"Then I will dally with you no longer. The fact is, Dick, it occurs to me that it will be perfectly possible for you and your three comrades to stop the prisoners' van while on its way to Greenwich, or wherever the place may be, which I can easily find out and let you know."

"Good, Matthew," cried Dick—"very good! Of course we can. I might have thought of it, it is so simple, and I think so very likely to succeed."

"Very likely," said old Matthew—"in fact, I am certain, for if you only partially succeed, the prisoners will aid you to the very best of their power."

"It is a glorious plan, Matthew," cried Dick, enthusiastically and excitedly—"a glorious plan, and one that cannot fail of success—I feel sure of it, and a heavy load is taken off my mind. I can see the means by which Tom Davis can recover his liberty."

"I am glad you approve of it so well. But now while we are on the subject, let us come to this arrangement."

"Well, go on. Why did you pause?"

"Simply because I was considering. However, this cannot be done at present; but leave to me the task of finding out when the prisoners will be removed from Newgate, and to what place they are going to be taken."

"You can easily learn that, I should think, Matthew."

"Yes—very likely I can; but then, having done so, the question is, how shall I make you acquainted with the intelligence?"

"That's a point we must settle, said Dick. "Suppose I should come here again at the end of a certain time?"

"No—no," said Matthew, very slowly. "I am glad enough to see you, Dick—it delights me when I can catch sight of your face; but the less you show yourself here I am sure will be the better. Don't think of it."

"Well, then" Dick cried, "how do you propose to manage?"

"Why, by a very simple means. It will not do for me to arrange to meet you anywhere, because I feel sure that I never leave home on any occasion without being followed by the officers. I'll tell you what I can do. I will write a letter, and find a trusty messenger who will take it to some place that we agree upon between us, and leave it there for you to come and fetch it afterwards."

"That's a good plan, Matthew. We may as well agree to it at once. But where shall the place be?"

"I leave that to you."

Dick remained for several moments plunged in deep thought.

At length he exclaimed:

"Do you know the spot where the river Brent flows under the Edgware Road?"

"Yes—perfectly well."

"Then you may be aware, perhaps, that the old bridge is very much out of repair—most of the stones at the top are loose."

"I see."

"Well, then, let your messenger move the first stone he comes to that is loose as he walks on to the bridge, taking the left-hand side. He will then be able to put the letter, if folded small, either between that stone and the next, or else completely under it."

"Very good," said Matthew. "I quite understand. And now, as there is just the possibility that the letter will fall into some one else's hands, we will agree upon what is to be placed in it. If, as I quite expect, the prisoners are to be removed to Greenwich, I shall not name any place on the letter at all, but will simply write a figure, which will represent the hour when the van will start from Newgate, and immediately after that will be another figure, which will represent the day of the month on which they will set forth."

"That is quite enough," said Dick, "so that these figures are all the paper need contain."

"Yes, all, and then if anyone else finds it, why, it will not matter."

"It is a wise precaution," said Dick; "but I don't feel the least afraid, for I will have the bridge well watched before your messenger arrives."

"You may expect him, then," said Matthew, "by the second night from this. I shall be sure to know before that time."

"And," said Dick, "we must arrange another meeting after that, for I feel myself much indebted to you, and whatever obligation I am under I shall not rest until I have discharged."

"Pooh—pooh!" said Matthew—"never mind such nonsense as that. I do not render you all these services simply for the money I can make out of you, but merely because I like you, so let us hear no more about obligations, I beg."

"It is all very fine, Matthew, for you to speak like that, but I shall not allow——"

Dick paused, for just then he was startled by the ringing of a bell, which caused old Matthew to spring to his feet.

"Quick," he cried—"into the cupboard with you—make all speed! Perhaps it is only a false alarm; at any rate, you can shift for yourself. I will go downstairs. Take good care the officers do not enter this room until you have had plenty of time to conceal yourself."

He spoke these words very hurriedly, and as he pronounced the last, passed hurriedly out of the door, and closed it behind him.

Dick was very rapid in all his movements.

Not knowing how long he might have to remain in his uncomfortable place of concealment, he picked up the glass out of which he had been drinking, and carried it into the recess along with him.

To shut the cupboard doors, and afterwards to pull down the back part of the cupboard, occupied but a very few moments indeed.

Yet he was only just in time.

Immediately afterwards he heard, though indistinctly, the sound of footsteps and the loud murmur of voices.

Of what was said he could not form any idea; but, from the tone used, he guessed something like an altercation was going on.

Then the door leading into the room he had so recently quitted was dashed open, after which came a brief pause.

"I tell you you are playing falsely!" Dick heard a voice cry, in high, exasperated tones. "Do you mean to assure me positively that a few moments ago you were not seated in this room along with another person?"

Dick did not catch old Matthew's reply, for he spoke in a more subdued voice.

"Then I say you do not speak the truth," was the rejoinder. "I have just come from across the way, and as I stood at the barber's bed-room window I could see into this, and made out distinctly you and another person sitting at this table."

Neither knew it, but just as the officer spoke, both old Matthew and Dick were engaged on the very same operation, and that was in inwardly, but none the less bitterly, cursing the barber for his interference.

As before, Dick could not make out what old Matthew said in reply, but the officer—for such beyond a doubt he was—exclaimed:

"Now, my men, is the time to show your sharpness. Never mind a word of what he says—I know him for an inveterate liar. I saw two men sitting here not five minutes ago. There's no one to be found, so it's clear there's a hiding-place somewhere, and you've got to find it."

After those words were spoken, there was a vast amount of clattering caused by the hasty removal of the various articles of furniture contained in the room.

Dick, having heard so much, not unnaturally began to feel very uneasy for his own safety.

After what Matthew had said, he fully believed the officers would, with care and time, discover the recess at the back of the closet.

A cold perspiration broke out all over him, and as minute after minute elapsed, his uneasiness increased.

Most bitterly indeed did he regret having been persuaded to take up his quarters in such a place, for how inglorious it would appear for the officers to break down the panelling and seize him hiding in such a place!

These thoughts made Dick almost desperate.

For the first time, he began to wonder whether there was any outlet from this secret recess.

He had forgotten to ask Matthew anything on the subject.

But the more Dick thought, the more assured he felt that such a place as this would not be constructed without some means being contrived of emerging from it.

Just then the closet door opened, and one of the officers entered, and poked about very vigorously among the clothing with his sword.

Dick held his breath, for there was nothing to divide him from his foe but a thin partition of woodwork.

"Nobody here," was the reply, and then this man, who never for a moment thought of trying whether the back of the cupboard had a hollow sound or not, stepped out, and closed the door behind him.

"Escape number one," said Dick. "But that little incident only makes me feel the more that I shall not be so fortunate a second time."

While these thoughts passed through his mind, he rapidly produced from his pocket a phosphorous match, which he ignited silently.

The light lasted only for an instant, yet it enabled him to glance at the walls around him.

He saw no means by which the recess could be left, but, believing that the means of leaving it would be similar to those by which he had entered, he stooped down, and endeavored to insert his fingers in between the floor and the walls.

At his first attempt he succeeded, and raised the piece of woodwork to the extent of about an inch.

Then he paused.

"I am all right now," he thought, though he had not the remotest idea of where he would find himself after passing through this partition.



[DICK TURPIN ENDEAVOURS TO ELUDE HIS FOES.]

It was at this moment that the closet doors were again thrown open, and Dick heard the man with the exasperated voice cry:

"Don't you think I can believe my own eyesight? I tell you I saw somebody here; and where's he gone? I'm sure there is a secret hiding-place somewhere! I have been told that this old inn is full of them, and I'll do my best to find out to-night!"

While he spoke, the officer began with the butt-end of his pistol to rap against the walls of the closet.

As he began at the side, close to the hinges of the door, where the wall was perfectly solid, the sound returned was of such a character as to make him certain there was no hiding-place there.

On reaching the back, however, the first blow produced a hollow, reverberating sound.

The officer uttered a shriek.

"I have it," he cried—"I have it—this is the place! Never mind finding out the secret! Break down the woodwork—it will be done in a moment!"

With these words, he raised his pistol in the air and brought down the butt-end of it with full force upon the panelling.

A large crack was the result.

The next blow produced another.

The officers came crowding round him, and a few more heavy strokes demolished the woodwork to such an extent that the officers were able to seize hold of it, and by main force pull out a large piece.

The officers sprang forward with a cry of exultation, which quickly changed its tone to one of disappointment.

There was the recess, it is true, but it was perfectly empty, save and except the chair on which Dick had placed the glass out of which he had been so lately drinking.

Old Matthew had during these occurrences suffered such an amount of mental agitation as few could have any conception of, and he looked upon Dick's disappearance as something miraculous, for he was not aware himself that there was any means of leaving the recess.

He could scarcely believe his eyes, indeed; but his satisfaction was, nevertheless, most intense.

"There's nobody there," cried the officer, in dee disappointment—"nobody at all!"

"But there's this glass, sir," said one of the men.

"Oh, d—n the glass! Don't bother me with that!"

"But there's ale in it," continued the officer, speaking cautiously—"there's ale in it; and, look, why, there's froth on it, and it looks as fresh as though it had only been just drawn."

This occurrence arrested the officer's attention, and at the same moment filled old Matthew with despair.

"So it has," cried the one with the angry voice—"so it has! Aha! I knew I was right. He is close at hand, my lads, depend upon it! Look around, and you will see the means of leaving this recess."

Just as he spoke, there came a loud and thrilling shriek, evidently issuing from female lips.

At the sound the officers all stood aghast.

"Help—help!" they heard a voice cry, very distinctly. "Help—help! Murder—thieves!"

"He's caught!" cried the chief officer—"as I'm a living man, he's caught! Down with that bit of woodwork! Dash against it! The sooner you break it down the better!"

The officers obeyed, but it took them rather longer to pull down the panelling than they had anticipated.

CHAPTER CMLXXXIII.

DICK TURPIN PUTS IN EXECUTION A BOLD AND NOVEL EXPEDIENT.

In order to explain the meaning of this strange occurrence, we must go back to the proceedings of Dick Turpin.

He waited until the officer struck against the woodwork with his pistol, then he knew discovery was certain.

Without another second's pause or hesitation, he stooped down, and slowly and noiselessly raised the large piece of wood forming the back of the recess.

He only did so to a sufficient distance to allow him to creep beneath it.

This he did with all secrecy imaginable.

Then he drew it down again.

He was only just in time—indeed, he had scarcely composed himself before the panelling was torn down, and the recess discovered.

He remained perfectly still after this, listening to what took place next.

Where he was he had not the remotest idea, except that it was possible he was in another closet similar to the one he had recently left.

How much he regretted having left the glass behind him, as that unquestionably helped the officers to get on the right track.

When he heard the remarks passed upon it, he was sure that his present place was no abiding spot, and he began to seek some means of quitting it.

Feeling cautiously with his hands, his fingers encountered two doors similar to those opening into old Matthew's room.

They yielded to his touch, and he pushed them open slowly and gently.

Then, creeping out with a stealthiness that would have delighted an Indian, he raised himself to his feet, and endeavored to take a peep at his surroundings.

He was in a room evidently, for he could see the window, through which there came a very dim amount of twilight.

He moved forward, as he believed, in the direction of the door, but he was not looking sufficiently close to his feet, for, with great suddenness, he struck against the post of a bedstead.

It was then that the shrill scream that had so startled the officers broke forth, and it must be confessed that it startled Dick quite as much.

Recovering his presence of mind, however, he exclaimed:

"Do not be alarmed—all is well!"

But his words were perfectly unheeded.

The female by whom the room was tenanted had evidently got hold of the idea that a man was in the room, whose intention was to rob and murder her, and so she kept up the prodigious clamor.

Finding all efforts to silence her vain, Dick, who by this time had discovered the doorway, lost no time in passing through it.

As his hand passed over the lock he felt a key.

He took it out instantly, thrust it in on the other side, and locked the chamber door.

This he knew would cause delay, and, in the meantime, what he had to do was to seek the street.

Accordingly, he descended the stairs at full speed, but, ere he had gone far, some one, alarmed no doubt by the fearful shriek, cried out:

"In Heaven's name, what's the matter? Oh, lawks! who are you?"

"The devil!" said Dick, in a sepulchral voice.

There was a smothered kind of cry, and then the door was hastily shut.

But Dick was very far from being anything like safe.

The house would be so thoroughly alarmed before he could get to the bottom of it, that on attempting to leave it he would most likely run into the arms of the officers.

The first-floor landing was now, however, reached, but just as his foot touched it, a door was opened, and a man with an extraordinary worsted night-cap on his head, a candle in his left hand, and a dark object in his right, appeared.

He seemed to catch sight of Dick, for he cried:

"Take that, you wretch, and don't you disturb me any more! I tell you I won't be bothered with you!"

These words plainly showed that he mistook Dick for somebody else.

When he said "Take that!" he lifted up his right hand in which he held the dark object, which proved to be a missile of some kind, for it flew past Dick's head with unpleasant swiftness.

Its course was stopped by the face of a large clock which stood upon the landing.

There was a crash, and then the mechanism became so deranged that the clock began to strike at a furious rate.

So alarmed was the night-capped gentleman by the effects of his violence that he dropped his candle and precipitately retreated into his room.

Dick made a plunge down the staircase, inwardly cursing his ill-luck.

When about half-way to the ground floor, however, he perceived a small window, which had been contrived for the purpose of lighting the staircase.

Happening to glance through it, he saw that it opened upon some leads, and this caused him to pause.

The way of escape he now believed lay clear enough before him.

To open the window took him scarcely more than a second.

He passed through it, closed it after him, and then found himself standing on what was to all appearances the top of a cistern.

On one side of him was a rather narrow wall, which extended for a considerable distance.

Without hesitation, he stepped upon it, and, without giving a thought to the narrow space on which he stood, ran rapidly along.

Reaching the extremity, he saw, only a few feet below him, the pavement of a narrow court.

He dropped without hesitation, and running forward, quickly found himself in one of the streets lying between Clare Market and Lincoln's Inn.

He set forward to run immediately, though he instantly became conscious of the impolicy of this course, and certainly had he not been so greatly excited he would never have dreamed of adopting it.

His flying form arrested the attention of a man, who set up a tremendous shout.

"Stop him!" he cried—"stop him! A highwayman—a highwayman! There he goes! Stop him—stop him!"

These cries were instantaneously followed by loud shouts and a trampling of footsteps, so that in what seemed a magical short space of time Dick found himself followed by a crowd of persons of all ages and both sexes.

His hopes of escape now sank down to zero, yet he did not on that account in the least degree abate his speed, if anything, he increased it.

Panting and breathless, with the perspiration running down his face in streams, and with a kind of mist before his eyes that half blinded him, he strove to think what would be the best thing he could do in order to baffle his pursuers.

He turned a corner rapidly, and then another; but they were so close upon his track that before he was able to turn again they had him once more in sight.

At every step did the numbers of those who were pursuing him increase; and there was this disadvantage, so far as Dick was concerned, that whereas he was almost spent with running, those who were foremost in the chase had only just begun their task.

All at once, a man started out into the centre of the road and extended both his arms.

To attempt to dodge past him Dick knew would be absurd, and so kept on his course, determined to run the man down, though he feared that in the scuffle he might be delayed sufficiently to enable his foes to pounce upon him.

This, no doubt, was what the man calculated upon, but he forgot to take into consideration his own personal condition.

Clenching his right hand, Dick ran on straight as an arrow.

The man stood resolutely up, but the tremendous blow from Dick's fist felled him like an ox.

The highwayman staggered for an instant, then bounded on.

Actually he had gained a little on his foes, and, perceiving another turning which led towards Lincoln's Inn, he did not hesitate to take it.

But no sooner had he turned the corner than he was struck with a sudden thought.

He was then out of sight of all his foes, and could count upon being for the space of a few seconds, yet not long enough to enable him to reach the top of the street.

But he paused close to a doorway of rather pretentious character, on which was a brass plate.

He perceived this, as well as the name upon it, by means of a lamp that was burning above, and that was placed purposely so as to render the words on the door-plate legible.

With a boldness that was astounding, Dick stepped up to this door, and knocked at it, while at the same time he pulled the bell.

During the brief space that he had to wait for a reply, he read upon the plate the words:—

"Mr. Solomon Cartwright, solicitor."

Just as the door was opened, the crowd of persons turned the corner.

Dick was hidden by the projecting portico, and no sooner was the door opened than, without waiting to be invited to enter, he stepped in and closed it after him.

Then he had the satisfaction of hearing his pursuers rush by.

"What is it, please?" said a female voice with tolerable clearness.

"Is Mr. Cartwright within?"

"Yes, sir, he is; but this is past business hours, and he cannot be disturbed."

"I am sorry for that," said Dick, who scarcely knew what to say.

But his active brain quickly suggested something, and he added:

"Be good enough to tell him that a gentleman wishes to see him on some matters connected with the sale of some property."

Now Dick hoped that the girl would leave him and go to deliver this message, in which case he would have slipped out of the door, and trusted to his good luck to make an escape.

To his deep annoyance, however, he was frustrated in this intention, for a door close at hand was opened, and a gentleman stepped out into the passage.

"What is it, Mary?" he asked—"who is it?"

"A gentleman wants particularly to see you about some property," was the reply.

"Oh, certainly!" said the lawyer, who was never one to allow the chance of obtaining a fresh client to pass by. "Ask the gentleman to walk this way."

Dick had no resource but to comply.

"I'm doomed to nothing but misfortune to-night," he thought. "What on earth can I do? How can I manage to deceive this man?—what shall I tell him?"

Really he had no time for thought.

The door was close at hand.

Without the lapse of a moment, he was shown into a room.

There was a fire burning in it, and a lighted lamp was standing on the table, and surrounded by a great quantity of papers.

"Take a seat, sir—pray take a seat!" said the lawyer as he turned up the lamp, so as to cause it to give a brighter light, and to enable him to see his visitor better. "I happen at the present moment to be quite disengaged."

Dick wished from the bottom of his heart that the solicitor was overwhelmed with business.

Nevertheless, he took a seat, and, with as much calmness as he could command, drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped the perspiration from his face.

"Dear me," ejaculated the lawyer, "how warm you look!"

"Yes," said Dick, concealing his breathlessness with much difficulty, "it is quite sultry."

"How odd!" said the lawyer, with a shiver. "Here have I been crouching over the fire all night."

"I am excited," said Dick—"very much excited, and I have come here at a very rapid rate to see you, as I was fearful I should be too late."

"I am perfectly ready to listen to you," was the lawyer's reply. "Be good enough to let me know the nature of your business."

This was a poser, for what to say next Dick had not the remotest idea, so, merely with the view of gaining time, he once more took out his pocket-handkerchief and wiped his face with it.

While he did so, he could not help noticing that the lawyer was looking at him with an expression of suspicion and distrust.

CHAPTER CMLXXXIV.

DICK TURPIN VERY CLEVERLY MAKES A TOOL OF THE LAWYER.

But Dick Turpin was fast becoming himself again—cool, calm and determined.

The silence that prevailed in the street justified him in indulging in the belief that his pursuers had lost the scent altogether, and that he would have nothing more to do than to speak for a short time to the solicitor and then quietly take his departure.

But even at this moment he heard a loud hubbub, which gradually yet rapidly increased in loudness.

"Dear me," said the lawyer, with an air of vexation, "what in the world can be the matter with the people to-night?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Dick. "There's something the matter; but I don't know that it need concern us."

"No, certainly not. Pray proceed to the business you were about to place before me."

The lawyer made a feint of consulting his watch, as if to show that his time was precious.

"Well," said Dick, "to be brief with you, Mr. Cartwright, the fact is that a dear and much-loved friend of mine is at the present moment in very deep distress."

"Pecuniary distress?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes—in fact, he is in debt, and has been thrust into prison. It is a shocking thing, for I know very well that with anything like reasonable time he could pay off the whole of his debts."

"Then may I ask your object in consulting me?"

"I will tell you in a moment," said Dick, who by this time had arranged his whole plan of future operations, and which promised to be so satisfactory that he threw off at once all the fears and apprehensions under which he had been laboring.

"I am staying at the Regent's Hotel in Piccadilly, and the head waiter there was kind enough to mention your name to me as being a gentleman likely to do what I required."

"Indeed!" said the lawyer. "I am rather surprised at that, for at the moment I cannot recollect such an hotel as that in Piccadilly, nor can I say that I am acquainted with any head waiter either."

"Well, sir, such is the fact," said Dick, with unblushing effrontery. "I am quite a stranger in London, and when this dreadful affair happened to my friend I posted up to town at once. I always stop at the Regent's Hotel, and as the head waiter was the first person I saw I asked him what I had better do."

"But what do you want me to do?" said the lawyer, with a bland smile, for he began to think that so excitable a personage as Dick seemed to be would prove a very good client.

"I have some property in Berkshire," said Dick—"freehold, and of considerable value. I have brought the title deeds with me, and I want to know whether a mortgage can be executed upon it for about one half of its value, which will enable me to set my friend at liberty."

"Yes, certainly," said the lawyer. "I often manage matters of that kind—not that I have money myself, but many of my clients have, who are anxious to lend it out for mortgage."

"That is just what the head waiter told me," said Dick, with great assurance.

"Would you be good enough," said the lawyer, "to let me look at the title deeds you spoke of?"

Dick placed his hand in the breast pocket of his coat, then exclaimed:

"Dear me, sir, would you believe it? In my great state of excitement I have left the papers in my portmanteau at the hotel? What is to be done?"

"Just what you please," said the lawyer, in an altered tone.

"Well, then," said Dick, "suppose you call a hackney-coach: we can then both go to the hotel together, and drink a glass of wine: you can look over the title deeds, and the matter put in a fair way for settlement."

"Oh, certainly," said the lawyer; "I have no objection to that at all; we will go at once, if you are willing."

"Yes, I am quite willing," said Dick—how willing, the lawyer little thought.

They stepped out into the passage, on a peg against the wall of which some cloaks and hats were hanging.

The lawyer selected one of each of these articles.

"My dear sir," said Dick, "would you mind doing me the favor of lending me one of your cloaks? Now that I have got over my excitement I feel the cold strike with quite a chill."

"Oh, certainly," said the lawyer, "with very great pleasure! Take this one. In your present condition you are likely enough to take a cold that will result in your death."

Dick took the proffered cloak gladly, not that he cared about his heated condition, but he knew very well that wrapping this garment around him would greatly change his outward appearance.

"Mary," said the gentleman, "just call a hackney-coach."

The girl opened the door and stood outside, and just as she did so, the very vehicle they wanted came rolling by.

It was stopped at once, and then, with a heart which it must be confessed beat faster than usual, Dick followed the lawyer across the threshold into the street.

Here many people were assembled searching in all directions.

It was pretty clear that they had formed a tolerably good guess as to the exact spot where the highwayman had disappeared.

"What's the matter?" asked the lawyer of some one standing near.

"They're after Dick Turpin, the highwayman, sir," was the answer. "He was chased to somewhere hereabout and disappeared."

"Oh, indeed," said the lawyer, "then I hope he will be caught, for nothing would please me better than to hear the last of him. I have been twice robbed by his rascally associates."

While these few words were passing, Dick had entered the hackney-coach, the door of which was held open by the driver.

Mr. Cartwright followed, and as the door was closed Dick said:

"Drive to the bottom of Piccadilly; I will call to you when to pull up."

Mr. Cartwright was about to make a remark, but just then the coach was set in motion, and such a jolting and such a horrible rattling noise ensued that he gave up in despair the attempt to make himself heard.

At last Dick felt that he had reached the end of his troubles, and therefore he leaned back in the coach with a contented air.

To be sure there was the little difficulty to be got over, that it was necessary to dispose of the lawyer somehow.

But Turpin considered this such a trifle that he hardly bestowed a thought upon it.

Over and over again he congratulated himself upon his good fortune in having so availed himself of the strange turn that events took.

His object in deluding the lawyer with the story about the mortgage of the estate was simply to find a means of reaching the bottom of Piccadilly, which it will be remembered was the place where he had left his mare Black Bess.

Certainly the ingenuity of the plan deserves commendation as well as the successful manner in which it was carried out.

The distance to Piccadilly was not very great, and the two horses which were harnessed to the hackney-coach quickly brought them there.

"Now, my dear sir," said the lawyer, confidentially, "here we are in Piccadilly. Be good enough to point out the hotel."

"It is a little lower down," said Dick, looking carefully through the windows, for he was in search of the narrow turning in which stood the stable where he had left his mare.

But while doing so, he became conscious of the fact that it would be impolitic in the extreme to quit this lawyer hastily, or in such a manner as to give an immediate alarm.

To spoil so good a piece of work by a little bungling at the end was what Dick was very disinclined to do.

Therefore, he again set his brain to work, and this time with as much success as before.

"There it is," he exclaimed, pointing to a well-lighted building which actually stood at the very corner of the thoroughfare he so much wished to reach—"there it is."

"Why, that's not the Regent's Hotel!" ejaculated the lawyer. "That's the Royal."

"Of course it is!" said Dick. "What an absurd mistake for me to make! Did I really say Regent's?"

"You did indeed, and repeated it many times."

"Then you must attribute that mistake to my state of excitement. However, I am calmer now—much calmer."

The lawyer smiled, and then said:

"Still I am puzzled about this head waiter. I most certainly don't know him, for I never was across the threshold of this building in my life."

"You will see directly," said Dick, "for here we are."

He called out to the driver, who at once stopped opposite to the entrance of the hotel.

Dick alighted and gave him so liberal a fare that the coachman actually said: "Thank you, sir!" a piece of civility he had never been known to vouchsafe to anybody before.

The lawyer knew that he had given this man about six times his proper fare, and smiled again, for he thought a man who was so liberal to a hackney-coach driver would be equally so with himself, and so on this very ground was not disposed to say a word about his extravagance.

Scarcely anyone would have had the audacity to walk up the spacious stone steps leading to the fashionable hotel as Turpin did, but he had already found that wherever he had dared the most there he had succeeded the best.

On reaching the top of the steps, the massive plate glass door was opened by an obsequious attendant.

"Coffee-room," said Dick, laconically.

The man bowed and pointed to a door a little way off on which the words were written.

Dick nodded his head in return, and stepped briskly forward.

Reaching the coffee-room door, Turpin pushed it open and stood aside to allow the lawyer to follow him.

It was rather an odd thing, but just at that time the coffee-room happened to be empty.

"I have only a bed-room here," said Dick to Mr. Cartwright, as that gentleman took a seat near the fire, "and of course my portmanteau is there. It will not take me a moment to run upstairs and fetch you the title deeds, so you will excuse me for leaving you here a moment while I do so."

This was said with so offhand an air, and sounded so plausible and reasonable that the lawyer immediately gave his consent.

This was all Dick needed, and his exultation at having managed so well could scarcely be restrained within bounds.

Leaving the coffee-room again, he stepped swiftly along the hall to the door.

Dick hesitated for half a second, then put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a guinea.

He slipped the coin into the hand of the attendant, and as he did so he said, with a wink:

"If that gentleman who came in with me a moment ago should ask you where I have gone, just be good enough to say that you have not seen me."

Whether the man would comply with this demand Dick did not wait to know; but the way in which he slipped the guinea into his pocket was very suggestive.

"Free!" said Dick, after he had descended the steps of the hotel—"once more free, after running the gauntlet of so many dangers—free, too, by my own unaided exertions! Truly has my brain been busy to-night, yet all is well; a few minutes more and I shall be in possession of Black Bess; and when I feel that gallant mare beneath me I shall bid defiance to all that my enemies can accomplish!"

Just as he spoke these words, Dick reached the doorway leading to the stables.

He glanced up and down the street, but all was perfectly silent.

Seizing the bell-handle, he pulled it somewhat vigorously, then waited with a singular mixture of calmness and anxiety for the ostler to make his appearance.

CHAPTER CMLXXXV.

DICK TURPIN IS REMINDED THAT HE IS AS YET BY NO MEANS OUT OF DANGER.

THIS feeling rapidly intensified, and as it did so his anxiety increased.

It reached its culminating point at the moment when he heard a shuffling footstep in the inn yard, and caught sight of a dim gleam of light.

"I have been too precipitate," he muttered—"by far too precipitate! My late successes have blinded me to caution. I should have sent some one here in case of danger, or, at any rate, I ought to have reconnoitred first."

Having come to this conclusion, Dick glanced around him as well as the obscurity that filled the narrow turning would permit.

On the opposite side of the way, and nearly opposite to the stable gates, was a small doorway, that apparently formed a kind of private means of communication with the back part of the hotel.

Dick had resolved to secrete himself in a place where he could watch the course of events, and, as no better one than this presented itself, he darted across the roadway in a moment.

He had scarcely passed into the dark shadow caused by the depression in the wall, when he heard the fastenings of the stable gates noisily undone.

"I'm coming, sir," said a voice—"I'm coming, sir; Just have patience for half a moment."

"What the deuce does he mean by talking like that?" thought Dick. "And how does he know who is outside, I wonder?"

Just then one half of the gates was thrown open, and at precisely the same instant Dick discovered that the door close to which he was pressing in order to get more out of sight was unfastened.

No sooner did he make this discovery than he instantly availed himself of the opportunity which this afforded for a better concealment.

His movements were so rapid, and yet so silent, that by the time he had placed himself on the opposite side of the door—which he held a little ajar in order that he might observe all that took place—the ostler had only managed to get the gate fairly open.

He raised in the air the lantern he carried, and glanced around him in great surprise.

"The devil!" he ejaculated, when he found that beyond all doubt no one was outside. "Why, it's a mistake. Some one rang the bell, and ran off, drat 'em!"

"What's that you say?" growled another voice. "Isn't he there?"

"No, that he isn't."

The second speaker came forward—sufficiently so for the rays of the lantern to fall upon him and reveal his exterior appearance.

Dick, on seeing him, drew back slightly, and pushed the door a little closer.

It was a police officer—a runner from Bow Street.

"Back, Mr. Bishop," said the ostler—"back, sir, if you please. Pray keep out of sight! He may be on the watch for aught I know."

Thus admonished, the officer retreated, and the ostler, after taking another survey around him, retreated also, and closed the gates, saying something in a growling tone all the while.

In less than a moment afterwards all was as silent as before.

"Another narrow escape," thought Dick—"by far too narrow to be at all agreeable. But certainly I must be in luck's way to-night."

Dick might well think this, for, since his departure from the old castle, Fortune had constantly favored him.

But the highwayman, just at that moment, had more to think about in the present than the past.

A rapid glance at his position made him conscious that, to say the least of it, it was a very unpleasant one.

What he had witnessed convinced him beyond all doubt that by some one or other his mare had been recognised, and, in consequence, a watch set in the hope of securing him on his return.

How nearly they had succeeded the reader knows already—but for his lucky second thought, the highwayman could scarcely have got free.

A slight noise behind him caused by the opening and shutting of the door disturbed the highwayman in his thoughts, and reminded him that the place he was in was not at all adapted for an abiding spot.

He had no other resource than to enter the street again.

He did this most reluctantly.

But the narrow thoroughfare still wore its deserted appearance.

Dick glanced up at the high brick walls which defended the stable-yard.

"Black Bess is there," he said to himself—"there, and surrounded by my foes and hers. She cannot help herself. I would as soon part with my life as lose her, and so I shall have to depend upon my own exertions to set her free. It must be done somehow, and that without delay."

Dick Turpin paced slowly down the street in deep thought.

Certainly the task which he had set himself was one which any other man would have given up in despair as being totally impossible; but its very difficulty only served as a stimulus to Dick.

He was not long before he arranged his plan of action up to a certain point.

"Before I can go any further," he murmured, as he turned round and retraced his steps, "I must ascertain the exact force which my enemies muster. I must also find out how they are disposed, and just where about Black Bess is situated. Yes, certainly, that will be the preliminary step to take."

Glancing up to the walls, Dick fancied that he should

be able, by giving a good spring, to get the ends of his fingers over the edge.

He tried, and at the first trial succeeded.

His next act was to draw himself up by his arms to such an extent as enabled him to take a peep at the other side.

Owing to the darkness, however, he was not able to make out anything with much distinctness, though he perceived rather a long range of low buildings, from a window in one part of which a light was shining.

Here, he conjectured, he should find Black Bess; but it was a conjecture merely, for, as the reader will recollect, he was quite ignorant of the nature of the premises. It was, perhaps, about the only occasion on which he had omitted to follow Black Bess to her stable in order to be familiar with its whereabouts, and now he bitterly regretted his indiscretion.

But regrets were useless, and dismissing them from his mind, he began to draw himself up higher and higher still above the wall, being emboldened to do so by the perfect quiet which prevailed.

At length, by dint of a little scrambling, Dick managed to get fairly astride the wall; then, crouching down as closely as he could, he crawled in the direction of the light.

Evidently there was no one outside on the watch; but this was not surprising, for the night air was too cold to make anyone wish for the job, and, moreover, they doubtless considered that they should receive timely intimation of the highwayman's approach.

Dick found that he was on the wrong part of the wall to get anywhere near the lighted window; but he crept as close as he could, and then waited.

It would almost seem as though the slight noise he had made in his progress had been heard, for a door was opened, and the ostler appeared.

Dick sank down from observation.

"It is nothing," said the ostler, evidently addressing some one within—"nothing at all. Everything is quite quiet."

"Then come in, will you, and shut the door, for it is confoundedly cold."

The ostler obeyed with alacrity.

Owing to his elevated and awkward position, Dick was not able to do more than just get a glimpse through the doorway, yet that was sufficient to show him that the interior was fitted up as a stable.

Most probably Black Bess was there, and the officers were watching near her.

What else to do, Dick at the moment knew not.

How to regain possession of Black Bess certainly seemed a greater mystery than ever.

Dick felt it so, and chafed impatiently.

"It would be something," he thought, at last, "if I could only find out how many I have to grapple with. If no more than the ostler and the officer I saw, I will risk an encounter with them."

Dick felt much relieved at having thus arrived at a decision, and he was not long before he devised the means by which he could make this important discovery without running any great risk himself.

Looking back a little way, he saw that the large bell he had rung was fixed to the wall just inside the gate, and was, he believed, in such a position that he could reach it without much trouble.

A peal upon it, he thought, would not fail to draw them forth again.

At any rate, there could be no harm in putting such a stratagem into execution.

Dick seized hold of a piece of the wire and pulled it with all his might.

The clanging was truly terrific, and he kept it up for some time, so as to induce a belief that whoever was outside was anxious and impatient to get in.

"That's him!" cried a voice, as the stable door was flung open—"that's him for certain! Come on! Get all ready; but don't show yourselves till I give you the word!"

"Hush—hush!"

The ostler hurried to the gate, and as he had not replaced all the fastenings, he flung it open in much less time than he had taken before.

And now most decidedly did the fickle goddess Fortune favor the perplexed highwayman.

It so happened that just as the ostler flung open the gate a chance pedestrian wrapped in a cloak was passing by.

The ostler no sooner caught sight of him than he uttered a cry.

At the same time he sprang forward, seizing the stranger by the throat.

The cry was followed by the rush of footsteps, and then, from out of the stable there issued no less than seven police officers.

Had any one of them chanced to cast his eyes up to the top of the wall, it is quite possible that Dick would have been detected there.

But of this there was no fear.

All their faculties were engrossed by the struggle which was taking place in the street, for the stranger, believing himself attacked by robbers, resented with right good will the attack which the ostler made upon him.

The officers hastened to his assistance, and so convinced were they that the right man had been seized that they never troubled themselves to take a second glance, but with the greatest impetuosity joined in the fray.

It was almost a moment before Dick could properly comprehend what had occurred; but as soon as ever the actual truth flashed upon his mind, he said to himself, with great determination:

"Now or never is the time! Such a chance as this is more than I could possibly have expected, and certainly such a one as will not occur again!"

With these words in his mind, if not on his lips, Dick turned, lowered himself rapidly from the top of the wall, and dropped into the stable-yard.

He happened to alight upon some littered straw, so that no alarm was given.

The conflict was going on outside, if possible, with redoubled violence.

Like a shadow, Dick flitted rapidly across the yard and darted into the stable.

Here a light was burning.

A cry of exultation escaped his lips.

There, safe, and to all appearances unhurt, was his bonny mare, Black Bess.

In an instant she recognised her master, and gave utterance to a sharp neigh.

Dick caressed her while he untied her from the manger.

Her trappings had all been removed, and, though he made a rapid search, he failed to find them.

He uttered an impatient ejaculation; but to linger would spoil all—probably bring on his own death or capture.

"It must be thus," he said, addressing Black Bess. "I have ridden you bare-backed before, and can do so again. The halter shall serve me for a bridle."

So saying, Dick led Black Bess to the stable door.

He sprang then into the saddle, for a kind of lull had taken place outside.

The officers had just discovered that they had made a most ridiculous mistake.

The man they had seized, and whom they had at last succeeded in overpowering, they found, upon examination, to bear no resemblance to Dick Turpin whatever.

The clatter of hoofs upon the stones in the yard caused them to turn round.

What words can express their astonishment, rage, and fury, when they saw before them Dick Turpin sitting composedly on the back of bonny Black Bess!

CHAPTER CMLXXXVI.

DICK TURPIN ESCAPES, AND PROVIDES HIMSELF WITH A FRESH SADDLE AND BRIDLE.

"CLEAR the way, there!" cried Dick Turpin, in a loud, ringing voice, for the officers had all fallen into immovable attitudes indicative of their feelings—"clear the way there! Let me pass!"

This speech at once brought the officers to their senses.

Releasing their hold upon the bewildered stranger, they dashed headlong, pell-mell into the yard.

But Dick was prepared for them.

"On, Bess!" he cried, exultantly. "Forward, old lass! On—on! Down with them!"

Never before did Black Bess respond so gallantly or so promptly to her rider's commands.

She gave one tremendous bound forward—a bound which scarcely anything human could withstand.

The officers scattered before it like so much chaff, and, without experiencing a shock, Dick Turpin found himself on the other side of the stable gates.

The ostler was furious at this utter failure of his deep-laid plan.

"Down with him!" he yelled. "Shoot him—shoot him! Where are your pistols? Shoot him, I say! Shoot his mare—that will be better! Curse the brute! I can feel her teeth now! Lend me a pistol, somebody, and I'll shoot her!"

These vindictive words produced a total change in Dick's feelings, for they aroused all his strongest passions.

Any injury meditated towards himself he thought nothing of—he considered that the officers had a fair right to shoot at him if they wished.

But with Black Bess it was another thing altogether.

Things which, had they regarded himself alone, he would have taken no notice of whatever, assumed quite a different aspect when Black Bess was concerned.

Therefore, when these words were uttered, he turned round with flashing eyes.

In his hasty rage, he drew a pistol from his belt.

Without reflection, and acting only upon the impulse of resentment, he levelled it at the cowardly ostler, and fired.

In the confined space in which he stood, the report seemed tremendous.

The ostler uttered a shriek, and, throwing his arms up above his head, fell back.

Turning round again with equal suddenness, Dick hurled his pistol at his foes, and set Black Bess in motion.

His breast was still filled with angry feelings as he dashed down Piccadilly in the direction of the open country, though he experienced a savage satisfaction in the thought that the ostler had not escaped without receiving some punishment for his meditated atrocity.

"So he felt your teeth, did he, Bess?" he muttered. "I am glad of it, and I hope he will feel the pain till his last day! What was it, lass, that made you turn round upon him like that?" he added, aloud.

By the way he spoke, one would have thought that he really expected to receive some comprehensible reply from his mare, and certainly the odd, neighing noise which she made immediately afterwards seemed like an effort at articulation.

Dick's thoughts were now distracted by hearing unmistakable sounds of pursuit coming from the rear.

"No matter!" he said, as he turned round, and looked behind him with a disdainful smile. "Let them come on—I can outrun them easily!"

About this there could be little doubt, provided he had a clear course before him, for never had Black Bess appeared to be in better condition for the road.

Certainly, while Dick had gone through so many hair-breadth escapes she had been resting quietly in the stable.

The night was dark and inclined to be stormy, and, as far as Dick was able to see, there was no one on the road before them.

Accordingly, he allowed the rope attached to the halter to fall loosely upon the neck of his steed.

A gallop of a few miles placed him beyond all fear or danger of pursuit, and, such being the case, he gradually reduced his mare's pace, as he never unnecessarily distressed her by a hard gallop.

He also found that it was far from comfortable to ride so far without those useful appendages, a saddle and a bridle.

"I must make good this loss," he cried, half aloud. "But that can be done easily. I make no doubt—but the sooner the better, for all that."

Dick had not even now recovered his usual equanimity, and there was something angry and altogether unlike his usual manner in the way in which he looked before him in the hope of catching sight of some solitary traveller.

But no one appeared in sight.

A long stretch of rising ground was before him, and up this he allowed Black Bess to proceed at a walking pace.

When the ascent was almost accomplished, a horseman suddenly came into view on the brow of the hill.

"There is the man," was Dick's remark. "He has got what I want, and he had better surrender it to me quietly, for I am in no humor to be crossed."

The new-comer's horse seemed somewhat exhausted after making the ascent on the opposite side, and so it was allowed to pause a little while to recover its wind.

Dick rode forward at the same steady rate.

The sharp ring of a horse's footsteps caused the horseman to look before him and endeavor to pierce the darkness.

He was not long in making out the forms of the highwayman and his steed.

Dick kept unwaveringly on his way until breast to breast with the stranger.

Then he stopped with great abruptness.

"Good evening, sir!" he said.

The salutation was so courteous a one that the stranger could not refrain from returning it.

But evidently he either had his suspicions of Dick, or else he avoided making acquaintances on the high-road at night on principle, for he gave his horse a sharp slash with the whip, intending to set it in rapid motion.

But this intention was prevented from being carried out by Dick, who, with much promptitude, stretched out his hand and grasped the rein.

The horse swerved and pranced, almost unseating his rider, but Dick maintained his hold.

"Not so fast, sir," he cried—"not so fast! We have a little business to settle together before we part."

"You mistake! I have no business with you. Let me pass! I will not suffer to be molested thus!"

"You cannot help yourself," said Dick, gently but firmly, "and if you possess half the amount of good sense I give you credit for having, you will listen in patience."

"Well, sir?"

"It is not very well—in fact, very ill! I am in a little difficulty, and you must help me out of it!"

"That's cool, I must say!"

"Very!" responded Dick, imperturbably.

"Come, sir," said the stranger, impatiently, "I don't feel inclined to be trifled with——"

"Nor I either, sir!"

"What do you want?"

"That is a sensible question, and I will answer it without delay. Doubtless you perceive, sir, that I am unprovided with a saddle and a bridle."

"I do perceive it. But what has that to do with me?"

"Much, or else I am greatly mistaken."

"How so?"

"Why, sir, I must trouble you to favor me with yours, they will just suit me."

"My saddle and bridle?"

"Exactly!"

"And you would have the unblushing impudence to sit there and ask me quietly to surrender my property in that fashion?"

"Exactly!"

"Then damme, sir!" cried the stranger, furious with rage, "let me tell you that you have got the wrong man to deal with! I won't stand anything of the kind! Keep off!"

"My dear sir——"

"Oh, d—n——"

"Do you see this? It is a pistol. One of excellent make, I assure you! Hark! Did you hear that click? It is now on full cock! The muzzle is within eighteen inches of your breast. Now, be good enough to tell me whether you prefer to part with your saddle and bridle or your life, for I am determined to have one or the other, or both?"

There could be no possibility of mistaking Dick's words.

They were terribly in earnest.

They produced a palpable effect upon the stranger, for he shrunk back from before the muzzle of the pistol, and when he spoke again there was a marked difference in his tones.

"Put that pistol up, I beg! It might go off at any moment—accidentally, you know. Put it up!"

"Anything to oblige," said Dick, quietly. "And now, sir, since I have granted your request, grant mine."

"What is it?"

"Let me recommend you to dismount without making any more fuss, and, with what speed you are capable of making, divest your horse of his trappings."

"But if I give you my saddle and bridle, what the devil am I to do?"

"Get another."

"Why don't you?"

"I am about to."

"Curse it, but you know what I mean. My horse has got a backbone that sticks up, and it's as sharp as a nail to sit on, I assure you."

Dick could not forbear a smile.

"All that produces no effect upon me whatever, sir. But come; words enough and to spare have been wasted already. Dismount and off with the saddle at once!"

The stranger appeared to hesitate.

Dick carried his hand to his pocket in which he had carelessly deposited the pistol.

The gesture was sufficient.

With an execration which, if not loud, was deep, the stranger slid off his horse.

"I don't mind confessing to you," said Dick, "because I suppose you suspect it, but I am a highwayman. I have had a close brush with the officers, and you can supply the loss of a saddle and bridle with infinitely less trouble and risk than I can. So make no demur—I cannot tell how soon my enemies may make their appearance. Be quick!"

Upon hearing this, the traveller looked anxiously down the hill.

While he did so he fervently wished that he might be so fortunate as to catch sight of a troop of police officers approaching.

CHAPTER CMLXXXVII.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN HAS A VERY ODD ADVENTURE WITH A VERY ECCENTRIC PERSONAGE.

"Curse it!" said the traveller, under his voice. "Whoever knew of officers to be at hand when they were particularly wanted?"

"What are you muttering about?" asked Dick, who had noticed the rapid glance, and partly caught the half-uttered words.

"Nothing, sir—nothing! Here, take the saddle, and be content. Surely you would not deprive me of the bridle?"

"I must—I cannot do without it. But you shall have this halter in exchange."

The stranger ground his teeth, but another glance assured him that no help was near, and so he surrendered the bridle.

Dick had Black Bess caparisoned with these fresh trappings in a moment, then lost no time in vaulting into the saddle.

"Now, look you, sir," he said, "there is little occasion to make so much fuss. The loss you have sustained is such a one that you can easily repair. You ought, indeed, to think yourself most lucky."

"Lucky?" repeated the traveller, sardonically.

"Yes, lucky in getting off so easily; and I should advise you to part company with me now, or I may take a fancy to whatever money or valuables you may be carrying about with you."

Hearing this, the traveller gave a great start, and hastily mounted his horse.

Either this idea had not occurred to him before, or else he carried about his person some objects he was by no means willing to part with.

"Good night, sir!" said Dick, with a politeness that made the other furious. "A pleasant journey to you!"

What the traveller said in reply was inarticulate, but he struck his spurs sharply into his horse's flanks, and set off down the hill at a pace that must have caused him great inconvenience if his horse's backbone was anything like so sharp as he had declared it to be.

Dick Turpin laughed heartily at the adventure, indeed, he was so amused by it that those angry feelings which had heretofore filled his breast were vanished.

"Now, Bess," he exclaimed, "let us have another gallop, and that will go far towards taking us to our journey's end, when, I doubt not, we shall find many anxiously looking for our arrival. Forward—forward, old girl! It seems to me that we have the road all to ourselves to-night!"

Slackening the reins while he spoke, Black Bess broke out into one of those long, stretching gallops which get over the ground with so much rapidity, and which she seemed to perform with so little fatigue to herself.

Ere he had gone far, however, Dick began gradually to draw her in again, for his quick ears had detected the approach of another horseman on the road.

It was more upon impulse than reflection that he reduced his mare's rate of speed, but having done so, he paused and began to think.

The sound made by the new-comer's horse's hoofs became now much more audible.

"What shall I do?" Dick asked himself. "This little adventure seems purposely thrown in my way. Shall I neglect it? It goes against the grain to do so; and besides, in the carrying out of the little enterprise I have on hand a good supply of money will be absolutely necessary."

He had no further space for deliberation, for just then the traveller's horse came into sight round the bend in the road.

An ejaculation escaped Dick's lips.

He reined Black Bess in with great suddenness.

Then he flung himself from the saddle with an amount of precipitancy that looked dangerous in the extreme.

The cause of these actions is easily described.

The horse which came round the bend of the road at so violent a pace was riderless.

Or rather, at a first glance he appeared to be so.

The highwayman's keen eyes, however, discerned that this horse was dragging at his heels some large, dark object.

What was it?

Dick recognised it with a shudder, and that was why he dismounted so precipitately.

It was the body of a man—

Evidently that of its rider, who by some means or other had fallen to the ground, and in doing so one foot had remained entangled in the stirrup.

The manner in which he was dragged over the rough, hard road was truly terrible to behold.

There was a groan and a faint cry for help.

But Dick was ready.

He was standing cool, calm, and determined in the middle of the road, and when the horse came thundering up he sprang forward and seized it by the reins.

But he almost lost his footing in his attempt to curb the speed of the terrified animal.

Clinging tightly, however, he ran forward a few yards, and then brought it quietly and gradually to a standstill.

The animal exhibited every sign of intense fear.

Its mane seemed standing half erect, its eyeballs were expanded and glaring wildly, while its flanks were covered over with white foam.

Few understood better how to treat a horse than Dick Turpin, and it looked magical to see how quickly he succeeded in taming and calming this frightened creature.

This much being done, and keeping tight hold of the rein in order to be guarded from any other accident, Dick turned his attention to the stranger, whose condition seemed to be desperate indeed.

He lay now without exhibiting the least sign of animation.

Not without some trouble, Dick succeeded in releasing his foot from the stirrup-iron; but having done so, he led the horse to the side of the road, and well secured it to the low-lying branch of a tree.

Here he knew it would be safe, and require no further attention, thus leaving him free to devote all his time to the injured stranger.

"Can you speak, sir?" asked Dick, as he bent over him. "If you can, tell me what I can do in order to assist you?"

A very faint groan was the only reply Dick got to this speech; but yet it contented him, for his object in inquiring was merely to ascertain whether the traveller was alive or not.

Finding that his injuries had not yet caused death, Dick hastened to the side of the road where he had noticed a little brook was flowing.



CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK COMPEL THE BALIFFS TO DISGORGE THEIR GOLD.

He had nothing else to carry water in save his hat; but he did not hesitate to put it to this use.

Returning quickly, he sprinkled some of it upon the stranger's face, who groaned again, and this time more audibly than before.

"Help—help," he gasped—"help! Save me, and what reward you ask for shall be yours! Help—oh, help!"

"I will help you gladly," said Dick. "Do you not already feel much better?"

"Thanks to you, I do. I feel that I am coming back to life! Oh, my bitterest curses be upon them; but they shall rue this deed—ay, they shall rue it!"

While speaking, the stranger evidently in no ordinary degree recovered possession of his senses, for he raised himself partially upon one arm, though the effort seemed to cause him infinite pain,

Dick now, for the first time, had an opportunity of noting his personal appearance.

As to his apparel, it was not easy to form any clear idea of its quality, for it was thickly besmeared with mud, though by its make Dick could tell that he belonged to the higher ranks of society.

"Water," he said, faintly—"give me water!"

Dick obeyed, and the stranger, as well as he was able, removed from his face the blood and dirt with which it was thickly covered, wiping himself upon a handkerchief which he took from an inner pocket.

When this operation was completed, Dick caught sight of a young, round, but very florid face, in which a pair of small eyes were set, giving him a sleepy appearance.

"You have had a narrow escape of your life, sir," said Dick. "I am glad to find your injuries are no worse than they are."

"Curse it, I'm bad enough! But come, help me on my horse—I can't stop here; and just name your reward, and you shall have it."

Dick, as may be supposed, did not relish being spoken to in this fashion.

"I want no reward," he answered. "Money would not purchase my services in such a case. I would have done as much for anyone."

"Is it possible," asked the stranger, "that you do not recognise me

Dick looked at him closely.

Then shook his head

"I have no recollection of ever having seen you," he said, after a brief pause.

The stranger gave a peculiar smile.

"And you refuse payment?"

"I do."

"Then you are an extraordinary person, that is all I can say, and I wish I could have a few about my person like you. However, I am determined to reward you in some way!"

"I want nothing, will receive nothing. Good-night! You are welcome!"

Dick, as he spoke moved to the side of Black Bess, and with his usual quick bound seated himself in the saddle.

"Stay," said the stranger, with greater imperiousness than had as yet been perceptible in his tones—"stay, I command you!"

"I obey nothing but my own inclinations. Once more, good-night!"

"But stay," cried the stranger, again, who seemed to be much interested and surprised by Dick's manner—"stay! At least you will let me know to whom I am indebted for this great service. What is your name?"

"It shall never be said that I refused to own it!"

"Well?"

"Dick Turpin."

"The highwayman?"

"At your service."

"But you stand in peril of your life."

"I am aware of it," was the smiling reply.

"A large reward is offered for your apprehension."

"True again."

"Then how is it that you are not captured?"

"Because a better man than myself has never opposed himself to me. And now, having answered all your questions, perhaps you will not object to reply to mine?"

"Sir," said the stranger, "you forget to whom you are speaking!"

"I do not, for I have not the pleasure of knowing."

"Look you, then," said the stranger. "I cannot bring myself to part with you thus—I will not show myself ungrateful. Take this ring, and if you will bring it some night to St. James's Palace you will hear of something that will turn out greatly to your advantage."

"St. James's Palace?" echoed Dick, for this mention of the abode of royalty not unreasonably filled him with surprise.

"Just so, and whether you like to take the ring or not I leave you to choose. If you don't care to pick it up, it can stay there for the benefit of the next person who passes this way."

With these words, the stranger urged his horse forward, and before the highwayman thoroughly recovered from the state of surprise into which these strange occurrences had thrown him, he was out of sight.

"Well," he ejaculated, at length, "this is an odd adventure, at any rate. What an eccentric person! Who on earth can he be? However, I will pick up the ring, and keep it as a memento of the affair. Some day or other I may feel disposed to find out what it all means, and learn what I am to hear to my advantage."

Having arrived at this determination, Dick once more dismounted and picked up the ring.

"A rare gem!" he exclaimed, as he held it up. "How it glitters and sparkles in this darkness! It must be of great value. Whoever can he be?"

It was in vain that Dick asked himself this question. He might give many guesses, all of which, possibly, might be far removed from the truth.

"I must take time to consider of it," he said, mentally. "Well, old lass," he added, aloud, addressing himself to his mare, "I think we have had enough of adventures for one night; besides, I ought to remember how much uneasiness my long absence will occasion. I will dally no longer. Forward, Bess! We will take the nearest road to our destination."

Black Bess really seemed to understand that she was about to return to comfortable quarters, for she set forward with great willingness.

The highwayman's thoughts were busy as he rode swiftly along through the darkness; but, true to his determination, he did not draw rein until he perceived before him the dark-looking mass of trees which formed a background to the ruins of the old castle.

Greater cautiousness was now required in his progress; but as he rode slowly towards the spot where he had last left his companions he little thought of the strange and startling events which had taken place since his departure.

But in order that the reader shall be no longer kept in the dark concerning them, we will revert to the proceedings of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, both of whom it will be remembered had resolved to set out upon a pecuniary expedition.

CHAPTER CMLXXXVIII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL DO A GOOD ACTION, AND RECEIVE A SUBSTANTIAL REWARD IN RETURN.

"It's a darkish night, Jack," said Claude Duval to his companion, as soon as they gained the first cross-road; "but it is all the better for us on that account, I fancy."

"Most decidedly," was the reply. "And, to tell the truth, I never felt in better tune for a rare adventure in my life!"

"Nor I, and it is very odd to me if we do not meet with what we want. But come—push forward; we are, as yet, much too near the castle to think of attacking anybody."

With these words, the highwaymen at once increased the pace at which their horses had lately been going, and for some time a perfect silence reigned between them.

It was not broken until both, as if animated by the same impulse, pulled up.

"There is some one on the road before us, Claude."

"Yes, I hear them."

"Your pistols are ready, of course?"

"Yes."

"So are mine."

"Then fall back. The new-comers are certainly approaching us, and we shall be able to make up our minds as to whether we shall attack them, or allow them to pass by scot free."

Without further consideration, the two friends backed their horses close to the side of the road, which happened to be thrown into deep shadow.

As soon as they had taken up their positions here the approach of horsemen was more unmistakable than before.

Claude was listening intently, and then he said, in a low voice:

"There are three travellers on the road."

"Yes, there can be no mistake about that."

"Can we manage so many?"

"I am willing to try; but we shall be able to form a better idea when they come up. Hark!"

The sound of voices could now be heard mingling with the trampling of the horses' hoofs, but what was said they could not as yet make out.

As the horsemen came closer, too, it became evident that they were slackening their speed, and when within about twenty yards of the spot where the highwaymen were lying in ambush they stopped altogether.

"Gentlemen," they heard a voice say, "pray listen to me! Surely you must have some degree of compassion?"

"Well, whether we have or not is nothing to do with the present business!" was the gruff reply. "Our orders are clear, and we intend to carry them out."

"Then I hope you will never have to plead as I plead now. Not that I care personally for myself in the slightest degree. It is my poor wife and children that I care about. They will be involved in utter ruin!"

"It's a bad job, that's certain," joined in the third

"but we cannot help it. You ought not to blame us for it."

"But I do blame you!" was the half-angry response. "Had you chosen to do as I asked, you would have found me on your return."

"Oh, very likely; but we have been played that game too often to think about granting such a request."

The first speaker gave a deep sigh.

"It is a hard case," he cried—"a very hard case, and I am sure the world will join with me in thinking so. But when I first got into Joshua's debt I might have guessed what would be the end."

"Then you ought to have known better, that's all I can say. But, come, we have reached the top of this hill, and our horses have winded themselves nicely, so forward once more, for we have many miles to journey yet."

There was a stir among the horsemen immediately.

Not a word of the preceding conversation had been lost by the two highwaymen, who at first were rather at a loss to comprehend the rights of the affair.

But just as the travellers set themselves in motion, Sixteen-String Jack bent sideways towards his comrade and whispered:

"Put up your pistols, Claude. I have an idea! I can't stay to explain it now; but take my opinion for it that it is good."

"I will do so readily; but what else am I to do?"

"I cannot stop to explain."

"Then I will just back you up in everything you say and do."

"In that case all will be well."

There was not time for another syllable to be exchanged.

But Claude Duval had the most implicit faith in his companion's strategic powers, and so was prepared to follow him blindly.

Nevertheless, Sixteen-String Jack's first movement filled him with surprise.

Riding slowly out from his place of concealment, he accosted the three travellers, who naturally enough shrunk back, half in distrust, half in alarm.

But the first words uttered by Jack served to dispel whatever alarm they might have felt.

"Gentlemen," he said, in an apologetic voice, "excuse us for troubling you, but we happen to be journeying your way, and we should be glad to travel with you for protection's sake, as we have a large amount of money about us."

"We purpose riding as far as Oxford," was the reply given by the man with the gruff voice. "But perhaps you are not going so far?"

"No—we have not much further to ride."

"Then you are welcome to join us."

Sixteen-String Jack then very suitably expressed his thanks, in which he was very well followed up by Claude, who wondered what on earth his comrade's designs were.

They rode on after that for some few moments without speaking.

Sixteen-String Jack broke the silence, as though it was irksome to him.

"I hope you will excuse me for mentioning such a thing," he said, deferentially, "but you must understand that when my friend and myself heard some one on the road before us, we thought the most prudent thing we could do would be to conceal ourselves, hoping by that means, if robbers were abroad seeking for prey, we should escape their notice."

"A very wise precaution," said the one who rode nearest to Claude.

"On the other hand," continued Jack, "we made up our minds that should we find respectable travellers were approaching we would ask them, as a favor, to allow us to ride along in company."

"Just so," said the gruff voice, possibly merely because Jack paused, and he therefore felt it incumbent upon him to say something.

"It was then," added Sixteen-String Jack, in a louder voice, "that I happened to hear a conversation between you—of a very private character I make no doubt—but still I heard it, and, I must confess, it not only interested me, but also stimulated my curiosity to such a degree that I am most anxious to hear more!"

"Then, if that is your desire, it shall be soon gratified," exclaimed the gentleman with the sad voice, joining in the conversation for the first time. "The tale is not a long one, and when you have heard it, it is very strange to me if you do not confess that a case of greater and more unmerited hardship was never laid before you."

"Pray proceed," answered Jack, coming a little closer "I am all attention."

"Then," was the reply, "I may just briefly say that I owed a certain person the sum of one hundred pounds. I speak in the past tense, and when you have heard a little more you will say that I do so advisedly."

"Perhaps," interposed the gruff voice. "But, anyhow, you shall have your say first, and then I will have mine afterwards."

"You are quite welcome; but I must first declare that which you cannot deny. When the time came round at which the hundred pounds was due, I was unable to find the money; but I said that if only a short extra time was allowed me it should be forthcoming.

"This was promised, and I set to work most diligently, being determined to make any sacrifice rather than suffer myself to be hauled off to the debtors' jail at Oxford, for this is the fate my stern creditors threatened me with. But I am going too much into detail. I will now lose no time in coming to the point.

"The allotted time expired, and this was at sunset this evening, and my mind was at ease and content, for, by dint of selling off a great deal of my stock at a much reduced price, I managed to collect together the sum of one hundred and two pounds; so, naturally, I felt myself secure. Judge of my surprise when, just about dusk, these two gentlemen—Heaven forgive me for calling them such!—entered my house, and declared they were bailiffs, and that if the money was not paid down to them at once they should remove me to the prison.

"I said at once that there was no need for such threats or boisterous behavior, adding that I had the money ready. While I spoke I took out my money bag and placed it on the table.

"'One hundred and twelve pounds we want!' said the gentleman on my right.

"'One hundred and twelve?' I repeated. 'That is some mistake. My debt is no more than one level hundred.'

"'I know that,' was the reply; 'but the twelve pounds is for expenses already incurred.'

"'Expenses? Good Heaven! there was no occasion for anything of the kind! I had been granted a certain prolongation of time, and at its expiry the money was ready. And then to think the expenses should swell up to something like one-eighth part of the whole debt!'

"As you may perhaps understand, sir, I succeeded in making no impression whatever upon these men. The expenses had been incurred, they said, and must be paid.

"Finding this to be the case, I said:

"'Well, gentlemen, it will be quite foolish on my part to disguise the truth, and so I confess that all the cash I have in this world is contained in this bag, and the amount is one hundred and two pounds, which I hand over to you.'

"'I receive that amount on account,' said the bailiff. 'As for the balance, you must go along with us until you are able to find it.'

"'What?' I ejaculated, almost bursting with indignation, for my passion had been gradually rising. 'Would you carry a man off to the county jail for such a paltry amount as ten pounds?'

"'That's our orders,' was the only reply I could get. 'Make your choice—pay the ten pounds, or come along with us.'

"To pay the ten pounds was utterly out of the question, and there was no one to whom I could apply for the loan of the amount.

"In a word, sir, to make a long story short, these men, having received from me the hundred and two pounds, are now dragging me off to jail for the remaining ten pounds. No words have the least effect upon them—they are deaf to every entreaty. I have no doubt but what they will carry out their cruel intention to the very letter, and if so I am a ruined man for ever—nothing but the workhouse stares my wife and children in the face."

The stranger's voice faltered while he spoke, and the last words were almost inarticulate.

"If this is all true," said Sixteen-String Jack, "I do indeed agree with you in saying that a worse case of oppression was never heard of."

"Well, that may be so," said the man with the gruff voice; "but, with all respect to you, sir, it seems to me that a man should never get into debt, but, if he does such a foolish thing, he must abide by the consequences."

"You are welcome to your opinion," replied Jack; "but, for my own part, I am determined that this poor gentleman shall not be carried off to jail."

"Perhaps," said the bailiff, sneeringly, "you would be good enough to let me know how you intend to prevent it?"

"I shall take a very easy means of doing so," replied Jack, "for, rather than allow such an act of oppression to be consummated, I will pay the ten pounds out of my own pocket."

"Then, of course, if you like to do that, there is an end of the matter."

The poor debtor, hearing these words, could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses.

He was for a moment or so struck dumb with surprise.

At last, in a broken, hesitating voice, he did his best to thank Jack for his generosity.

"Now," continued the highwayman, "where can we settle this business? How far is it to the next inn?"

"Not far, if we turn back again," was the bailiff's sulky rejoinder.

"But I cannot consent to allow you to be taken so far out of your way," said the poor gentleman. "Let us journey on."

"Nay," said Jack, "I have set my mind upon freeing you from these men, and it shall be done at the earliest possible moment; so let us retrace our steps."

"It is most extraordinary," murmured the poor gentleman, "that you, a perfect and utter stranger, should be willing to do what not one of my best-known friends would!"

While these words were being spoken, the whole of the party turned their heads in the opposite direction.

Claude found an opportunity to whisper to his comrade.

"What on earth are you after, Jack?" he said.

"Wait a little while, and you will see. I am going to lay out a little money that will pay a very good rate of interest."

There was no chance of saying more, for there was the strong probability that every word that passed their lips would be overheard.

The bailiffs scarcely knew what to think of the affair, but, not seeing how to hint any objections or make any refusal, they pushed on to the inn.

It was situated just at the foot of the hill, and on their arrival Jack called out in a loud voice for a private room.

This was a request not often made in that out-of-the-way place, and it produced an immense effect upon the landlord accordingly.

They were ushered into a tolerably comfortable apartment, and by Jack's orders a plentiful supply of wine was brought in.

His next proceeding was to draw ten guineas from his pocket, which he flung down upon the table with a careless air.

"There," he said, addressing the two bailiffs, "make out your formal discharge, and release this gentleman from your custody."

This was accordingly done, but as soon as ever the matter was completed Jack said, in a stern voice:

"Now, gentlemen, if you will just drink up your cup of wine, we will part, for I don't hesitate to tell you plainly that I would be much rather without your company than with it. As soon as you are gone, this gentleman and myself will settle matters together."

Jack indicated the poor gentleman as he spoke.

The bailiffs were far from pleased with Jack's manner, but they swallowed their wine and their displeasure along with it.

Without any more delay, they then took their departure, looking very much chagrined, and no doubt feeling that they had been very badly done by.

As soon as ever they left the room, Jack sprang from his seat and ran to the window.

He was just in time to see the bailiffs in the act of mounting their horses.

Without appearing to be particularly interested in doing so, he watched carefully the direction they took when they rode off.

"I suppose," he said, returning to the table, that those gentlemen are off to Oxford?"

"Yes, such is no doubt their intention," replied the debtor. "And now, kind sirs," he added, "as I have somewhat recovered myself from my state of surprise, permit me to thank you for what you have done. I cannot express myself as I should, and as I wish; but come with me and see my wife and little ones—they will prove far more eloquent than myself."

"Enough," said Sixteen-String Jack, who several times during this speech endeavored to interrupt the speaker—"you have said already more than enough. What we have done has been done freely, so, if you wish to oblige us, you will say nothing more about it."

"Such is ever the way with true generosity. But now what bond or deed shall I draw up as some security to you for the loan of the money?"

"None at all. I will not permit anything of the sort. Wait till I am in want of the cash, then I will call upon you. And now good evening. You have not tasted your glass—doubtless you are impatient to get homewards. As for us, time presses, and so, if you will excuse us, farewell!"

The poor gentleman again, to the best of his ability, poured out his thanks, but Jack made a very rapid exit from the room.

He was closely followed by Claude, to whom he said, in a low voice:

"Follow me. The sooner we are in the saddle now the better."

He led the way while he spoke to the front part of the inn, where, in accordance with their instructions, the horses had been left in charge of the ostler.

Without any delay or hindrance whatever, the highwaymen mounted.

Jack turned his horse's head in the direction of Oxford, and set forward at a sharp trot.

Claude lost not a moment in placing himself by his side.

"What on earth does all this mean?" he inquired.

"Cannot you guess?"

"I think I could if I tried; but explain yourself—that will be much more satisfactory."

"I am going to do so. Listen!"

"Say on—I am paying the utmost attention."

"That gentleman at the inn must think us a couple of eccentric personages. Still, we have done him a very good service, and, as I believe, prevented the execution of a great piece of injustice. But the end I had in view was a profitable one."

"I thought so."

"We know now that these two men are on the road before us—we have also certain knowledge of the amount they carry about their persons, so denial will be about as foolish as it will be out of the question."

"Forward, then!" said Claude. "The sooner we overtake them the better!"

"Just so; and, if you are at all in the same mind as myself, it will afford you the keenest satisfaction to compel these rascally tipstaves to disgorge their money."

"But we shan't get the poor gentleman into trouble again, shall we?"

"Certainly not! If he has their receipt he can hold himself clear."

"Then that's all right. And now, Jack, for a gallop, for, if you will believe me, my fingers positively itch to have the handling of some of those fellows' gold!"

"The same here!" replied Jack, and as he spoke he touched his horse rather sharply with the spur.

Claude did the like, and in less than a second afterwards the highwaymen were tearing along the road at the utmost speed their horses were capable of making.

CHAPTER CMLXXXIX.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK COMPEL THE TWO BAILIFFS TO DISGORGE THEIR GOLD

ERE long, our two friends were able to catch the sound of horses' hoofs on the roadway before them, and immediately upon making the discovery they gently reined-in their horses.

When their pace had subsided to a canter, Claude and Jack perceived the forms of the bailiffs before them.

By their manner, it would seem as though they had heard the highwaymen's furious approach, for they had drawn as close as they could get to one side of the road in order to leave a free passage.

Not for a moment, however, did they guess what Fate had in store for them.

It was, then, much to their astonishment and dismay that they found the two new-comers ride up to them, pistols in hand.

"Now, you rascals," cried Jack, in a somewhat excited voice, "we will come to a bit of a settlement!"

"Settlement?" ejaculated the one with the gruff voice. "What do you mean, sir? I thought all matters were perfectly settled between us?"

"Then all I can say is," returned Jack, "that you have made a very great mistake!"

"Yes," added Claude. "Hand over every farthing you have about you, or, as sure as you are rascally tipstaves, these pistols shall make an end of you!"

"But we have nothing—absolutely nothing, except the money we have just received, and surely you would not rob us of that? Why, it would be our ruin!"

"I can't help that!" said Jack. "It would have been ruin to that poor gentleman if you had dragged him off to prison. But that made no impression upon you, so you cannot expect any different conduct from us."

"Drop that!" cried Claude, with great suddenness, and at the same time that he pronounced the words he struck one of the bailiffs a heavy blow upon the knuckles with the butt-end of a pistol.

A roar of pain followed, and the man's grasp relaxing, allowed the pistol which he had drawn stealthily from his pocket to fall to the ground, where it immediately exploded.

Fortunately, no danger was done either to our friends or their horses.

"You thought my eyes were off you, did you?" exclaimed Claude. "Take my advice, instead of making any foolish resistance, hand over the cash!"

"But, gentlemen——" they began, expostulatingly.

"Silence!" roared Claude, at the top of his voice. "Hand over at once, or we will blow your brains out first and then empty your pockets afterwards, which will be quite as troublesome and disagreeable to you as to us, I can assure you!"

With a heavy sigh one took from his pocket a crown-piece and dropped it into Claude's hand, who asked immediately:

"What is that for?"

"I assure you, sir, it is all I have——"

"Bah!"

"All I have of my own."

"I see there is no help for it," said Jack, deliberately cocking his pistol while he spoke. "They won't listen to reason. Down with yours!"

"Jim—Jim!" yelled one, as soon as Jack levelled his pistol. "Give up the dubs! Don't be a fool! I won't sit here and be shot—no, not for ten times a hundred pound!"

Finding that the highwaymen were terribly in earnest, the other bailiff most reluctantly plunged his hand into an inner pocket, from which he drew forth a large and apparently very heavy bag.

Jack snatched it away from him in a moment.

"We're ruined," they both cried together—"ruined completely! What can be done?"

"Why, rejoice to think you have got off so lightly."

"Hurray!" cried the one with the gruff voice, and abruptly changing his manner. "Hurray! Help—help! Highwaymen and thieves! Help—help!"

This sudden outcry took the highwaymen slightly by surprise, but turning their heads in the direction the bailiff was looking they perceived a small troop of horsemen approaching who looked suspiciously like police officers.

"Off and away, Jack," cried Claude Duval. "Let us be satisfied with what we have. It would be worse than folly to remain any longer."

"Follow me then," was the reply. "I can hear some vehicle on the road before us."

So saying, Sixteen-String Jack made his horse face the low-growing hedge which divided one side of the roadway from a green, undulating meadow.

His horse leaped the obstruction easily, and so did Claude's.

Nothing but soft, springy turf being beneath them, they urged their horses onward at the utmost speed they were capable of.

The sharp report of a pistol and the sound of many voices made them aware that the officers had in good earnest begun the pursuit.

The discharge of the pistol was a foolish act, for though the highwaymen were not far off, yet they were out of range.

Nevertheless, it made the highwaymen turn their heads and look behind them.

To their unalloyed gratification, they then perceived that nearly half the officers had come to grief in attempting to overleap the hedgerow.

But those whose horses had succeeded in keeping their footing commenced the chase with a great show of animation and courage.

Well mounted as the highwaymen were, however, it quickly became apparent that the officers had not the ghost of a chance of overtaking them unless some unlooked-for accident should occur.

But yet it was also beyond doubt that they would be able to hang on in the rear of the two friends until they met with some additional assistance.

This Claude and Jack determined to prevent if possible, so they did not scruple to push their horses onwards to the utmost of their power.

In a short time, then, they had the satisfaction of finding that the distance between themselves and their foes had visibly increased, and after the lapse of another quarter of an hour they could not, when they looked back, detect any signs of them.

"All right!" cried Claude. "Pull in, Jack; don't you see there is a village or town before us? If we ride through it at full speed we shall cause such a prodigious clatter that all the inhabitants will be aroused."

The highwaymen had quitted the fields and entered upon what seemed to be the high-road.

Claude's advice was too good to be neglected, so Jack pulled up at once.

"We will go at a walk," he said, wiping the perspiration from his face. "It will enable our horses to recover themselves a little; we have pressed them hard."

This was a palpable fact, for both animals showed unmistakable signs of being greatly exhausted and distressed.

Quite at a gentle walk, then, the highwaymen approached the village.

A profound silence prevailed in the long, straggling street—not a light was anywhere to be seen. The inhabitants had been doubtless fast asleep for many hours.

They passed on without exciting the least observation, but just as they were about to pass out into the open country again, both heard distinctly a low cry of anguish or sorrow.

It was so dark around that for some moments they could not perceive from whom the cry proceeded, but a repetition of it enabled them to discern a dark figure that was crouching down near a doorway.

Whether male or female it was not possible for them at that distance to say, but as if actuated by the same impulse the highwaymen drew nearer.

Aroused probably by their approach, the figure quitted its crouching position and stood upright.

They then found it to be a female.

She was still entitled to be called young, but her face was hollow and pinched, and her scanty clothing disclosed how much her person was emaciated.

She held what seemed to be a bundle of rags in her arms, and but for a faint wailing cry which at this moment broke forth, the highwaymen would no doubt have considered it to be nothing else.

"My good woman," said Sixteen-String Jack, in a kindly voice, "what can you be doing here in the street at this lonely hour of the night?"

For a moment there was a silence.

Then, in a husky voice, the woman replied:

"Alas, sir, I am destitute—nothing to eat—nowhere to lay my head—nothing for this poor little one, who is half dead with cold and hunger. I have knocked and rung repeatedly at this door, and cannot gain admittance."

The two highwaymen looked up at these words, and then they noticed that they were standing in front of a large and gloomy-looking building.

"What place is it?"

"The workhouse, sir" was the answer given, reluctantly, as though from shame.

"And do you mean to tell me," cried Sixteen-String Jack, "that, at this place, erected purposely for the relief of the destitute, you cannot gain an entrance? Would they leave you here to perish on the very threshold?"

"I fear their hearts are hard enough, sir. The beadle, who seems in command, appears dead to pity. He cursed me for disturbing his night's rest, and finished by telling me to move off, as this was not my parish. Then he slammed the door, and I, faint, sick, and broken-hearted, sank down here, unable to proceed another step."

No words of ours could possibly express in any degree the amount of indignation which these words excited in the breasts of the two friends.

"It is monstrous—abominable!" Sixteen-String Jack managed to say at length. "But they shall repent this harshness! Where's the bell?"

He slipped from his horse while he spoke, leaving his companion to take care of it.

A very brief search indeed enabled him to find the bell-handle.

Seizing it tightly, he pulled it up and down with the full vigor of his arm. While doing so, it seemed to him as though his anger was finding an outlet.

Most assuredly never such a peal had been rung upon that bell since a clapper first hung within it.

The clangor was tremendous.

Then, becoming more accustomed to the darkness, he perceived a massive iron knocker.

This he grasped with his left hand, and pounded away with all his might, while the clanging of the bell seemed to grow louder and louder.

Very soon there were signs that the inmates of the workhouse were alarmed.

Then came the sound of the opening of a door, accompanied by a heavy footstep and a flash of light.

"Hullo, there!" said a thick, wheezy voice—"hullo! What the devil is the matter? Is the place afire? D—n it all, I say, what's the matter?"

Just as these words were pronounced a little wicket in the centre of the outer door was thrown back.

The aperture which it disclosed was strongly barred with iron.

On the other side of this grating appeared the florid countenance of a man, who rejoiced in a huge carbuncled nose and a dirty red woollen nightcap.

"D—n it all!" he said again, as he held up the light. "Did I speak, or did the wind blow, eh? What's the matter?"

The woman hearing this, to her, all-dreaded voice, shrank back in fear.

"Can you ask what is the matter," said Jack, sternly, "when you know so well? Why, a human being, a fellow-creature is dying at your gates of cold and starvation—that's what's the matter."

"Good 'Evvings!" ejaculated the beadle, drawing a long breath. "To think that I should live to hear such words! A pauper! Oh, am I alive? Well, curse your impudence! Stay there till you rot, and be d—d to you!"

With these words the parochial functionary shut the little wicket again, and stalked back with a heavy, and what he fully believed in his own self-conceit was a majestic step.

Sixteen-String Jack was so completely taken aback by this reception that he stood for a moment after the beadle had retired more like a man in a dream than awake and in full possession of his senses.

"Can this be possible?" he at last ejaculated. "Confound the rascal! I wish I had him on this side of the doorway. I would quickly make him alter his tone."

"Alas, sir," said the woman, "it is quite in vain for you to trouble yourself. He will not let me in."

"We will have another word or two to the bargain, then."

With these words, Jack once more seized upon the bell and knocker, and, if such a thing could be possible, plied them more vigorously than before.

"It is quite useless, Jack," said Claude, with difficulty making his voice heard. "He will not attend to you again, or if he comes, it will only be to repeat his former insolence."

Jack felt the truth of this, and knew, besides, that he was losing time—moreover, it was most impolitic on their parts to get up such a disturbance, and so bring people around them.

But, for all that, Jack said:

"I must get him to come out once more, and when he does, if I don't give him pepper, call me a fool."

"But what can you do while he is on one side of the gate, and you on the other?"

"You will soon see."

"Oh, gentlemen," cried the woman, much alarmed, "pray take my advice and go away! You cannot do me any good, and you will only get yourselves into trouble."

But Jack paid no attention whatever to her supplications.

Claude looked to see what he was about.

To his surprise, Jack had taken his powder-flask from his pocket, and was busily occupied in placing it upon the ledge of the wicket. He found there was just room for one measureful of powder in between each bar.

"There," he said, as, having finished, he restored the powder flask complacently to his pocket. "I only hope he will put his ugly old nose as close to the bars as he did the last time. If he does, I'll warm it for him!"

"What do you mean to do, Jack?"

"Can't you see?"

"You had better come away."

"Not just yet. Here goes again!"

Jack thereupon began tolling away at the bell at such a rate as would make it quite an impossibility for anyone to remain in the house and listen to it.

As he fully expected, before he had been going at it long the beadle again made his appearance.

His wrath now was something terrific.

He flung open the door of the little wicket, and peered through the grating.

"Well, d—n your impudence!" he exclaimed. "The end of the world has come now, sure enough! Be off, curse you—be off! I'll call the watch, and have you locked up! You're drunk—mad drunk, both of you! What do you mean by disturbing me at this time of night, eh?"

"Because," said Jack, "a woman happens to be dying at your gate for want of sustenance."

"Then let her die, and rot, and you and all! Ah! I can hear some one coming! Now we shall have an alteration, I'll warrant. Here, watch—watch, I say!"

There was certainly some one approaching from the village, the inhabitants of which had doubtless been aroused by the unusual clamor.

But the beadle, little thinking of the trifling retribution that was in store for him, pressed his face close to the bars of the wicket, and bawled with all his might.

This was the opportunity Jack was waiting for.

Already he held in his hand a lighted thieves' match, such as the highwaymen always carried, though, owing to the manner in which he held it, it was invisible to the beadle.

The latter, in shouting out, blew away some portion of the gunpowder, but not much.

Jack touched some of the black grains with the match.

There was a brilliant flash, a puff of white smoke, and afterwards what seemed to be a double darkness.

The beadle uttered one of the most awful yells that the imagination of man can possibly conceive.

At first he was deprived of sight.

"Fire—murder!" he screamed. "Oh, murder—fire! Help—help! Ten thousand curses! I'm blinded and scorched! Where am I?—where are you all? Where's the door? D—n it all, can't none of you speak?"

The agony and pain which the beadle endured was certainly terrible, yet no more than he deserved, for all his life he had ever been readiest in inflicting pain upon others.

"The village is up in arms!" said Claude Duval at this moment, in a low voice. "Come, Jack, we must be off."

"Right! I'll be with you in a moment. Here, my good woman," he added—"here is gold. Take care of it, and procure what you require. Farewell!"

Jack then sprang quickly on to his horse's back

After doing so he gave just one glance behind him.

Then he saw approaching a dense crowd of persons armed with weapons of every possible description.

Many carried lanterns.

"There will be a slight commotion in the village after this, depend upon it," Jack said, as he set his steed in motion. "On, Claude! We will leave the beadle to explain matters to the best of his ability."

Claude did not reply, but, spurring his horse, followed his friend.

When they drew rein again, it was at a considerable distance from the village.

"I think we have had enough for one night, Claude," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, as he looked around him. "What say you?"

"The same, for I can already see the coming of the dawn."

"Then we will make the best of our way to the old castle. At this hour, ten to one if we see anyone. Are you willing?"

"Quite. We ought never to venture to approach the place by daylight. If we are careful in this respect we may remain concealed there for a long, long time."

CHAPTER CMXC.

TOM KING AND MAUD HAVE AN EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE AT THE RUINS.

PRECEDING the two highwaymen in their return, we will narrate the events of that same night as witnessed by those who had been left behind at the ruined castle.

These, as the reader will scarcely need reminding, consisted of Maud, Tom King, and the new ally of our friends, Jack the ostler.

A more useful fellow than the latter the highwaymen could not possibly have met with; but what was most important was the fact that his fidelity had been well tried, and there was little fear that they would suffer betrayal at his hands.

After the three highwaymen had departed upon their excursions, he took up his station at a point which enabled him to command the most extensive view of the surrounding country, and there remained patiently on the watch waiting for their return.

As for Maud, it was with the greatest depression of spirits that she witnessed Dick Turpin take his departure.

A thousand fears thronged into her mind, and, strive as she would, she could not banish them.

She stood watching his retreating figure until the trees hid him from her sight; then, with a heavy sigh, she made her way to the underground chamber, there to count the moments until his return.

The presence of Tom King she was most thankful for. In her present state of mind she felt that solitude was a thing that she could least of all endure.

Tom's wound, though better, was still most troublesome.

The fact is, he stood in need of proper skilful treatment—just the very thing he could not possibly obtain.

Time might bring him round again; but on this particular night he felt extremely weak, and he was conscious that he was by no means out of danger.

The conversation with which Maud and himself whiled away the time until close upon the hour of midnight was not sufficiently important to be worthy of record; but at the time just mentioned they were both startled by the rather hurried entrance of the ostler.

They could tell by his manner and the expression of his face that something was amiss.

"What is it, Jack?" asked Tom King. "Speak quickly."

"There may be no cause for apprehension, but——"

"What have you seen?"

"Why, a few moments ago, as the air was so very still, I caught the sound of carriage wheels. I soon found the vehicle was approaching, and then it was stopped under the shadow of a clump of trees close to the castle boundary."

"A carriage?" echoed Maud, inquiringly, and in great amazement. "What kind of one?"

"A close, shut-up one—a regular gentleman's carriage."

"What next?" asked Tom.

"I crept closer, and saw descend from it a tall, powerful-looking man; but I could make out nothing else, owing to the darkness and the long cloak he is wrapped up in."

"Then," said Tom King, rather languidly, for the excitement which had lent him a temporary strength soon abated, "I do not see that it much concerns us."

"Well, captain, it may not, but I thought it my duty to let you know of it; besides, the gentleman came walking on as though he intended to pay us a visit."

"Then it is more serious than I thought," said Tom King, arousing himself. "We will watch his movements."

"I am sure it will be best to do so, captain."

"Go on, then. I will follow."

"And I as well," said Maud—"I as well. I could not bear to be left by myself in this dreary, underground place."

Tom King did not say a word by way of objection, so she followed him closely.

The open air was soon reached, and then, with much caution and stealthiness, Jack the ostler directed their footsteps towards a crumbling wall at some little distance.

This wall was pierced by a dismantled window, and it was from this point of espial the faithful fellow had observed the stranger's approach.

Certainly there was something strange and highly provocative of curiosity in the fact that anyone should be about to pay the ruins a visit at such an hour.

It was, then, with great eagerness that all peered through the dilapidated casements.

Their ears gave them the first intimation that some one was at hand, for they caught the sound of a voice, and immediately afterwards the unmistakable rustling sound that was produced when anyone walked through the rank, luxuriant grass with which the ground in and around the castle was covered.

"Hush!" said Tom King, in a faint whisper. "Do not speak or move, either of you, on any account. But listen to all with the utmost attention."

The fears of the three watchers suggested that those who were approaching were persons who, by some means or other, had scented out their place of retreat, and had now come to reconnoitre preparatory to an attack.

But this notion was at once dispelled when they saw come into view the stranger that the ostler had described.

He was still shrouded in his long roquelaure cloak; but what the ostler had not mentioned, and what at once raised their interest to the keenest point, was the fact that he led by one hand a little child, which proved to be a girl.

Her age could not have exceeded eight years, at the most—perhaps she was not so old, for she was tall and slender, though full of grace.

Above all, however, Tom noticed her fairy-like appearance, and the manner in which she grasped her companion's huge hand with both her own tiny ones was touching to see.

Tom thought what a loving little creature it was, and a strange longing sprang up in his breast to have such a little child to love, cherish, and protect.

After the pair came in sight there was a pause in the

conversation; but the silence was broken by the little girl.

She looked up into her companion's face, and then, in inexpressibly sweet and silvery accents, she said:

"But what a strange, lonely place it is! And oh, I am so very, very cold!"

She shivered as she pronounced the words, for she was but thinly clad—her dress seeming rather suited for some fashionable assembly than for the open air. On her head, too, the watchers noticed she had nothing but a wreath of flowers and leaves.

"Are you going much further?" she asked; then, finding that her question met with no response, she went on: "Oh, do let us turn back! Don't go any further—please dont!"

"Don't be silly, Ruth! Come on!"

"How cross you speak, uncle. Oh, what a dreary place! Hold me tightly, I feel so afraid!"

"Afraid of what?" said the man, snappishly and angrily. "Don't let me have any more of your nonsense. Hold your tongue till I tell you to speak! Now come along!"

The tears rose quickly into the eyes of the little girl, and, with a sob that she could not repress, and which made Tom's heart feel as though it was breaking, the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Don't cry," said her uncle. "Do you hear me? Don't cry!"

He shook her half savagely while he spoke.

This was a scene which neither Tom King nor Maud could look upon with anything like common patience.

It was only by exercising the strongest possible control over themselves that they resisted their inclination to interfere.

But they felt how important it was that their presence in that place should be not only unknown, but unsuspected.

Not only their own safety, but that of their absent companions depended upon it.

It was this powerful consideration that enabled Maud and Tom King to have the moral strength necessary to enable them to remain mere passive spectators of the scene.

In perfect silence the strange pair came walking on, and if there had been any doubt of their destination it could no longer have existence, for by this time they were fairly within what might be termed the outer portion of the ruins.

In vain our friends tried to come to some conclusion respecting the object of this midnight visit.

Only one idea presented itself to them, and that was of such a truly horrible and abhorrent nature that they strove to banish it from their minds.

But the whole of their attention was now attracted to the little girl's uncle, who began to speak.

"If you had not made me so cross and angry," he began, adopting a conciliatory tone, "I should have told you long ago what I am bringing you here to-night for. Will you be good if I tell you now?"

"Yes, uncle, I will—indeed I will!"

The stranger cleared his throat, as though he had some disagreeable communication to make, or as though his words, like Macbeth's amen, "stuck in his throat."

"Well, Ruth, when your father and mother were alive —— There now, you are crying again. Be good, or I will not tell you any more."

With much difficulty the little creature controlled her emotions.

"When they were alive—you were a little thing then—so little that you cannot recollect them——"

"Oh, but I can, uncle!"

He went on without heeding the interruption.

"They left you in my care to bring up for them. I have done so till now. You are just seven years old, are you not?"

"Yes, to-day, uncle."

"Exactly. Well, then, if you had died before reaching your seventh year, then all the money and property belonging to your parents would have—would have gone —gone to me!"

The last words were only brought out by a great effort.

"Yes, uncle."

"But you see, you are alive, and so, according to the wish of your poor father and mother, I have brought you here on this your seventh birthday."

"And did they really wish you to bring me here?" the young girl asked, looking all about her with a half shudder.

"Of course they did. Have I not said so?"

"And at this late hour of the night?"

"Yes."

"But what for, uncle?"

"Because—because there is in this place a large amount of money and jewels, all of which belong to you, and which, according to your parents' wish, were not to be touched by anyone but yourself."

"In the ruin?" said the girl, incredulously.

"Yes, in this ruin. And pray, may I ask, what right you have to call into account any of your parents' actions, who were so much older than you, and therefore so much the better able to judge what was best?"

This rebuke had the effect of causing the child to be silent.

Her uncle, however, quickly spoke again.

"Come on!" he cried. "We are close to the place now, and when we have once taken possession of the treasure we will make haste back to the carriage."

With a palpable amount of reluctance Ruth accompanied her guardian still further into the recesses of the ruins.

Young as the child was, she seemed to be conscious that there was something highly improbable and untruthlike in the communication her uncle had just made to her.

But, if such were her thoughts, she did not give them utterance, or it may be that it was only a vague, indefinable presentiment of coming evil that cast its influence over her spirit.

"Uncle," she said, after a short interval, during which she seemed to have been reflecting deeply, "and when we have got this money, what is to be done with it?"

"There is time enough to consider that point, my dear. But look! Here, I believe, is the entrance to the chamber that was described."

Now Tom King had come to the conclusion that all which this man had told the child was false; but this belief was shaken when he saw him take a large key from his pocket and insert it into the lock of a door which was half hidden in a thick wall.

With some difficulty the key was turned.

He pushed the door open a little way.

The child shrank back in natural terror when she saw the black-looking place in front of her.

"Now, Ruth," said her uncle, speaking in a high, cracked voice, as though he was laboring under a very unusual amount of excitement—"now, Ruth my dear, enter!"

"But it is dark—so very dark!"

"No matter for that. I will stand here, and you will be able to find the treasure easily."

"You come in as well, uncle," she exclaimed, shrinking back still more.

"No, no—remember what I told you. You, and you alone, must touch this treasure!"

"Then get a light that I may see."

"No—it is needless. Come, do not delay so much time! It is too cold to remain here unnecessarily. Go in! What do you fear?"

She did not reply; but she asked him a question:

"Uncle, do you say that this treasure is all mine?"

"It is all yours."

"Wholly?"

"Yes, wholly."

"And without any reserve?"

"Yes. But why all these questions?"

"And I can do with it just whatever I like?"

"Yes—yes," he answered, impatiently.

"Then, uncle, come away. Let it remain where it is. I do not want it. I would rather give it up a thousand times than enter that dark place to fetch it."

Her companion stamped his foot impatiently.

"Ungrateful, forward, perverse wretch!" he said. "How dare you thus set yourself up in defiance of everyone! Enter at once, I say—enter at once!"

"No—no, uncle!"

"But I say yes; and what is more, I am determined that you shall!"



[TOM KING WATCHES THE ARRIVAL OF MATTHEW'S LETTER.]

"Oh, why do you look at me so wildly? Why do you speak thus? What dreadful change has come over your face? Oh, help—help! Uncle, spare me—oh, spare me!"

Terrified beyond a doubt by the expression of her uncle's countenance—an expression which showed all too plainly what his diabolical intentions were—the young girl thus sent forth her appeal for aid.

He shook her violently, and in his strong hands she was little more than a feather.

"Silence," he said, in a suppressed voice, between his teeth—"Silence, you little wretch! How dare you make such an outcry? Silence, I say!"

"Oh, uncle, what would you do?"

"Compel you to be obedient! Do as I tell you, or I will use force! I am determined to be obeyed!"

But though his harsh, guttural voice betokened so much determination, the child held back, as though she knew that to obey would only seal her own destruction.

Finding this to be the case, the villain grasped her tightly, and dragged her towards the much-dreaded portal.

But no sooner did the child feel his hands thus harshly laid upon her, than she seemed to become all in a moment conscious of her frightful peril.

"Help—help!" she screamed. "Oh, uncle, would you murder me? Alas—alas, there is no need for any such harsh measures! I will give you freely all that you will gain by my death. I will pay you that much if you will only spare my life! Oh, uncle—have mercy—have mer——"

With an angry exclamation the monster dashed his hand violently before her mouth, thus in a moment stifling that voice which should always have sounded in his ears like the sweetest music.

The little thing struggled desperately again at her impending fate.

No. 207 will be Published next Monday.

The instinct of life was strong within her, and she made efforts of which, under any other circumstances, she would have been totally incapable.

But as well might a fly have endeavored to cope successfully with a giant.

Half dragging, half pushing her along the ground, he forced her to the dark, tomb-like doorway.

The nearer she came to it, the more fearful became her struggles.

"Now, wretch," he cried, in a voice which well displayed the malevolence that was pent up in his soul—"now, wretch, begone! You shall trouble and haunt me no more!"

As he pronounced these words, he suddenly released his grasp.

Then, without the delay of a single moment, he pushed her violently forward.

The child staggered—endeavored to stop herself—to gain a footing.

All in vain.

With a shrill, ringing shriek, that echoed and re-echoed through the ruins, she fell headforemost across the threshold.

But the shriek was abruptly cut short by the violent closing of the door.

The key was turned in the lock.

"It is done," said the stranger, in a loud, exultant voice—"it is done, and thus, by one bold stroke, I free myself from all those disagreeable complications in which I was involved. Free—free—I am now free! I am a new man! With this child's wealth I shall succeed in all my plans! I—I tremble now; but the time will shortly come when I shall look back upon this as being the best night's work that ever was performed!"

CHAPTER CMXCI.

TOM KING RESCUES THE LITTLE GIRL FROM HER LIVING TOMB.

It was perfectly certain that the stranger fully and entirely believed that he was all alone in the old ruins—that no human eyes had witnessed the awful crime which he had just perpetrated, for he had taken the greatest pains to make sure that no one had followed in his track.

That some one might have taken up a station in the ruins before his arrival was a thought that never entered his imagination.

Therefore it was that he ventured to give vent to his thoughts aloud.

At this moment there arose a faint, low cry, seeming to come from a long distance off.

"Uncle—uncle!"

"Yes, my dear!"

The reply had a refinement of cruelty in its tone.

"Uncle—uncle!"

"I hear you."

"Let me out—oh, do let me out of this dreadful place!"

"You must wait, my dear, and look about for the treasure, and by the time you have found it I shall be back to let you out."

With these words on his lips the stranger turned away.

He assumed for a moment a listening attitude, then, with a satisfied air, rapidly retraced his steps towards the spot where he had left the carriage.

Tom King touched the ostler on the shoulder.

In a suppressed voice, which told plainly enough how much he was agitated by what had just taken place, he said:

"Jack, follow that man! Watch closely where he goes, and do not return until you have housed him."

The ostler merely gave a nod to show he fully comprehended the nature of the service that was required of him, and at once glided off in the direction taken by the stranger.

We have not interrupted the narration of the course of events to show how and to what extent the spectators of this scene were influenced by it.

From what the reader already knows of the dispositions of Tom King and Maud it may be safely assumed that it was only by the exercise of the utmost self-control that they forebore from interruption.

Indeed, Tom King once did start forward, determined that the act of iniquity should not be perpetrated; but the ostler, divining his intention, touched him on the shoulder, and whispered:

"Keep still a moment, captain! For Heaven's sake do not let him know that we are here!"

This consideration came just in time, and Tom King paused.

But Maud once or twice felt as though she could not tamely remain there a passive looker-on, and several times a shriek rose to her lips; but on each occasion she stifled its utterance, being enabled to do so by recollecting that Dick's safety depended upon her discretion.

When, however, Tom was able to comprehend what kind of death the stranger intended to inflict upon the young girl, he grew more self-composed, though inwardly he execrated the refined barbarity of the man who could thus, without the least remorse, doom so fair and beautiful a creature to a lingering death by starvation, and longed to be able to mete out to him such a retribution as he fully deserved.

But, fortunately, even under these trying circumstances, Tom King retained sufficient presence of mind to remember and be aware that he should actually be of more real and permanent service to the little child by liberating her after her uncle's departure than he could by any sudden or violent interference.

No sooner, then, had the form of the ostler become lost to sight in the distance than he hurried towards the door of what the stranger had meant to be a living tomb.

Maud followed him with clasped hands, tearful eyes, and a wildly-beating heart.

All the womanly affection in Maud's nature was called forth on behalf of this young girl, for whom she already felt a most loving regard.

Both to her and to Tom King it was the greatest mystery how anyone could be of so barbarous and inhuman a nature to treat anything so loving and fairy-like with anything save tenderness and kindness.

"Oh, Tom," she said, "quick—quick! Do not lose a moment more than you can help! Haste—haste! Let the little darling free!"

"Can you hear her?"

Maud listened intently.

But all was still.

No faint cry came from the other side of the massive door.

"Oh, Heaven!" Maud shrieked, in alarm, "she is dead—alas, alas, she is dead!"

"No—no," cried Tom. "But hush! You cannot be too cautious, and I am by no means certain that we are yet out of all danger of being overheard."

"Yes, yes, I will be cautious. But speak to her—call her!"

Tom obeyed.

But the same silence continued.

"Oh, Tom," Maud moaned, "if she should prove to be dead I shall never forgive myself for not having interfered before. I shall always blame myself for being swayed by purely selfish considerations."

"You have no cause as yet to reproach yourself," said Tom King, who was busily at work upon the lock of the door. "She cannot as yet be dead, but her extreme terror may have caused her to fall into a swoon!"

This supposition was so reasonable a one that Maud immediately became calm again.

What was more likely to have happened?

"Should you mind leaving me a moment?" asked Tom.

"Why—what for?"

"To fetch a light. You will get one down below; and when provided with that I shall doubtless be able to open the door; but now, in the darkness, the lock baffles me!"

Maud did not wait to give any verbal answer to this request, but bounded off at once in the direction of the underground apartment, if we may venture to bestow upon it so ambitious a designation.

Indeed, she scarcely waited to hear the conclusion of Tom's speech. She was only too much delighted to find herself in the position to be able to render the little girl a better service than standing idly by and looking on.

But, rapid as she was in her movements, she found that by the time she returned Tom King had managed to open the door.

He took the light from her hand, however, and held it above his head, so as to light up as well as possible the place into which he was about to enter.

It was lucky that he took this precaution, for he stepped back with a cry of horror.

"What is it?" asked Maud—"oh, what is it?"

"Not so bad as I thought," answered Tom, who by this time had taken a second glance. "I thought the flooring of this place was many feet below the level of this ground, but I see now it is only a few inches."

Tom might well be excused for making this mistake.

The fact was, however, as he had stated.

There was one step down from the door sill into this chamber; but he found it rather a steep one.

He descended at once, however, and the first thing that met his gaze was the little girl lying at full length on the damp flooring, to all appearances utterly bereft of life.

Again surrendering the light to Maud, he stooped down and picked up the insensible burden in his arms.

So light and fairy-like was she, that he carried her almost without being sensible of her weight.

With a quick step Maud led the way, and in a few seconds the subterranean chamber was reached.

The girl was at once placed down before the brightly-burning fire.

"Does she live?" asked Maud, bending anxiously over her.

"She does—I believe she does. But look! The poor little thing has injured herself in her fall."

While Tom spoke, he pointed to a slight gash in the girl's forehead, from which the blood was slowly oozing.

Both now in good earnest set themselves to work to restore her to consciousness, and after a time their efforts were crowned with complete success.

The child opened her eyes and looked around her—at first with signs of fear, and afterwards of wonder.

When she saw the two anxious faces bending down over her with kindness visible in every lineament, her apprehension vanished.

"I am dreaming," she said, gently, as she closed her eyes again. "Yes, surely only dreaming. I might have known that nothing half so terrible could possibly be true."

Tom made a rapid sign for Maud not to speak. He was aware that before long the little girl would thoroughly recover possession of her senses, and that until then it would be by far the best to leave her to herself.

In a minute more, during which profound silence was preserved, the little girl opened her eyes again.

She glanced around, and the strange appearance of the place in which she thus suddenly and unexpectedly found herself affected her much.

Again a look of terror overspread her countenance, and she cried:

"Oh, what place is this? Where am I? Alas—alas, then it was no dream!"

"Compose yourself," said Maud, bending down nearer to her. "Do not be afraid—there is no occasion for fear. You are among friends—friends who will protect you and stand by you to the last!"

"Yes—yes," said Tom—"keep calm and still, and endeavor to compose your thoughts. I repeat that you have nothing to be afraid of now."

The assuring words, and the gentle tones in which they were spoken, produced a due effect, and it was truly touching to observe the great efforts the little child made to recover something like an ordinary amount of calmness.

She grew better rapidly, and even ventured to raise herself upon one arm and look around her.

As she did so, her eyes expanded in silent wonder.

It was evident that never before had she been the inmate of so strange a place.

"Tell me," she said, as, after looking well around, she sank back into her former position by the fire—"oh, tell me where I am and what has happened?"

Tom drew back in order that Maud might reply.

"I can only tell you that you are with those who will keep you in perfect safety."

"My uncle!"

The words were pronounced in evident fear, and accompanied by a fearful glance around the subterranean chamber.

"Even he cannot find you here, and harm you."

"Oh, it is terrible," the child said, with a shudder—"so terrible that I can scarcely think it anything but a dream!"

"It is no dream," said Maud; "but a sad reality. But tell me—your name is Ruth, is it not?"

"It is. But how could you know it?"

"I heard your uncle call you so."

"In the ruins?"

"Yes."

"But he told me we were quite alone."

"He thought so, but was mistaken. We were concealed, and witnessed all."

Ruth began to weep and sob bitterly.

She was, in fact, beginning to comprehend her true position.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she moaned. "Oh, what will become of me? Where shall I go?"

"Do not trouble yourself about that," answered Maud, quickly. "For the present you must remain here with us. When you feel better we will consider what is to be done in the future. If you could sleep now it would be so much better. Rely upon it we will guard you well, so do not be afraid to close your eyes in slumber."

Ruth listened dreamily.

She was greatly exhausted mentally and physically, and no wonder, after all she had gone through. Moreover, the warmth of the place was enough to draw her into a slumber.

It was not long, then, before her eyes closed and she became lost in the unconsciousness of sleep.

For some time Maud and Tom King remained silent, fearful if they spoke that the sound of their voices should disturb her.

"The night is going fast," said Tom King. "Surely before long we shall hear something of the absent ones."

Maud started, for she had become so deeply interested in the fate of the poor orphan that for a time the recollection of everything else was driven from her mind.

"Yes," she said, with an anxious sigh. "Let us hope they will return in safety."

"I have little fear of that."

"But how surprised they will all be when they see this little stranger among us."

"They will. But what I chiefly hope is that the ostler will be able to follow that carriage to its destination. If he does so—no matter at what personal risk to myself—I will take such steps as will unmask the uncle's villany! No doubt he now rejoices in the successful accomplishment of his heinous designs; but he shall be awakened from his state of false security!"

"He is a monster in human shape!" said Maud. "None other could perpetrate such a deed. Look at her now, and ask yourself what kind of a wretch must the man be who would harm her!"

"I feel with you, Maud."

"But think what a refinement of cruelty it was to work upon her feelings with such a specious tale as he did, and then doom her to a lingering death by starvation!"

"That is where he made his great mistake, and, surely, Maud, if this little heiress is restored to her rights by our instrumentality that will be a kind of set-off against our other deeds against society."

Maud, at these words, was about to speak—to give utterance to a thought that had long been topmost in her mind—but she hesitated, and when she made up her mind again the opportunity to speak was lost, for a faint tapping from without came upon their ears.

"That is some one returned," exclaimed Tom King, springing to his feet. "Remain here, Maud, and watch. I will soon bring you word who it is."

For greater safety, the entrance to the subterranean apartment was always secured on the inner side when occupied, so that no one could enter from without.

"Who is there?" asked Tom.

"Claude and myself," was the reply. "But where is the ostler? How is it there is no one on the watch?"

Tom opened the door, and then caught sight of the indistinct figures of his two comrades, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

"Strange things have happened since you left," he said. "You must attend to your horses yourselves."

"We have done so; but what has happened?"

"Nothing alarming. Come down."

The highwaymen obeyed, and the entrance was again secured.

Maud was standing near the inner doorway.

She had learned already from the voices that Dick had not returned.

Listening attentively, she heard Claude Duval say:

"Has the captain come back?"

"Not yet."

"Have you seen anything of him?" asked Maud, unable to repress the question.

"Nothing whatever. We did not expect to do so, as we have been in quite a different direction."

"He will not be here before to-morrow night," said Sixteen-String Jack, "for in a very short time it will be broad daylight. But what is it that has happened while we have been away?"

He entered the alchemist's chamber while he spoke, and Maud replied to his question merely by raising her finger and pointing to the sleeping form of the little child.

"Good Heaven!" ejaculated Jack, "where has that little stranger come from?"

"Speak quietly," said Tom, "or you will wake her. If you will give me your attention for a little while I will tell you all."

It was easy to see how deeply interested Claude and Jack were, and when Tom had recited the brief events of the night they broke out into loud execrations upon the uncle's villany.

CHAPTER CMXCII.

DICK TURPIN TAKES LITTLE RUTH TO ST. JAMES'S PALACE, AND MAKES A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

THE event proved that Sixteen-String Jack had spoken rightly when he said that Dick Turpin would not return before the following night.

The day was passed wretchedly by Maud, for her mind was filled with tormenting doubts and fears; but the companionship of Ruth and her innocent prattle prevented her from giving way to them so completely as she otherwise would have done.

But her anxiety was fully shared in by all three of the highwaymen, for they well knew how unusually fraught with danger his enterprise was.

As night approached, their uneasiness grew more marked, though, for Maud's sake, they strove to conceal it as well as they were able.

The hour of twelve had pealed forth from the church in the adjacent village when the listeners were aroused by a summons at the secret entrance.

"It is the captain!" all cried, but they were doomed to disappointment.

It was Jack the ostler, whose countenance wore an expression of unusual importance.

"Well," said Tom King, quickly, "have you been successful?"

"Yes, captain."

"You tracked the carriage?"

"Yes."

"To what place?"

"St. James's Palace."

The last words were echoed by all in tones of amazement.

"And did he enter there?"

"He did."

"And what else did you learn?"

"Nothing. I came straight back, thinking it best not to show myself."

"You were right—quite right! St. James's Palace. Then this little girl must be of higher rank than I took her to be."

"Why not question her?" said Claude. "No doubt she could give much information."

"I scarcely like to trouble her at present. Let her be until the captain's return; then, when we feel no anxiety on his account, we can give all the more attention to what she has to say."

This was assented to, and by way of a change it was proposed that they should all make their way above ground, and keep a vigilant look-out.

But their patience was severely tested, for it was not until nearly dawn that they caught sight of the welcome form of their captain.

When they perceived him approaching—being to all appearances uninjured—they were inexpressibly relieved, for the long delay had filled them with a thousand apprehensions.

In the space of a few more moments he was surrounded with his faithful companions, and had Maud's head resting against his breast.

A dozen questions were asked him at once, but, holding up his hand, he said:

"Have patience for a little while, and I will tell you all."

Leaving the horses in charge of the ostler, and bidding him also to keep a sharp look-out, they made their way to the underground apartment.

The sight of the little girl was an intense surprise to Dick, which was just what his comrades intended it should be.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, "a stranger. Where on earth has she come from?"

Maud would have answered him at once and fully, for her heart was full of indignation at what had taken place; but Claude interrupted her.

"We will hear your adventures first, if you please, captain. After that we will gratify your curiosity."

On this ground Maud was deeply interested, and we are justified in saying that she felt more curiosity and anxiety to hear the recital of the captain's adventures than either of his three comrades.

"I will gratify you," said Dick, "for though I have been away from you so long, I can describe what has taken place in a very few words."

With this he commenced; but he soon found the narrative took much longer in delivering than he had anticipated.

When he described his singular adventure with the gentleman who had given him the ring and mentioned St. James's Palace, his hearers exchanged glances, and wondered whether there would prove to be any connection between the two.

"And now, my friends," Dick said, "that is all. I have no more to tell. But do not keep me any longer in suspense about that little girl. Where did you find her?"

"I will tell you," said Tom King, who thereupon gave a very full description of the occurrences in the ruins on the preceding night.

"Never," said Dick, interrupting him, and speaking in a voice which well showed the state of his feelings—"never have I heard of a case of more atrocity. But go on—go on."

Tom complied

While he was speaking, the young girl, who had awoke from her long sleep, stood beside Maud, listening with as much eagerness as anyone, though every now and then tears would spring into her eyes.

At last, when Tom concluded, Dick said:

"I cannot but commend you strongly for having preserved so much command over yourself. I question whether, under such circumstances, I should have been controlled by any considerations of safety."

"Perhaps I should not have been," answered Tom, "had I been in full possession of my health and vigor."

"At any rate, it is a most fortunate circumstance, for no one now knows anything about our being concealed here, and you have saved the child as well."

"Perhaps saved her more effectually than we could have done by an active interference."

"Very likely. But come here, little pet," said Dick, in a gentle voice, and drawing her towards him as he spoke. "Do not be afraid of me, but believe that I will be your friend, and never fear that any harm will come to you while I am by."

Ruth placed her hands in Dick Turpin's with the utmost confidingness.

"But what think you of her uncle's rank?" whispered

Tom. "The ostler tracked him to St. James's Palace. Who can he be?"

"I can give no guess," answered Dick, glancing at the ring; "but I believe there is one within those walls who feels himself indebted to me on the score of gratitude. I fancy, too, that he possesses power there. At any rate, I will go to-night, and ask him to interest himself and use his influence in this little thing's behalf."

"But I have set myself the task of seeing her righted," exclaimed Tom King, quickly.

"If you have, there are many reasons why you should pass the charge over to me. I have the means of gaining admittance to the palace, which you have not, and although you may feel better than you did, yet I think you are scarcely well and strong enough to undertake such an important matter."

Tom was silent, for he could not but admit the absolute truth and reason of these remarks.

"But," said Maud, timidly, "will it be safe to go? Will there not be a general look-out for you?"

"There may be, but I feel no apprehension as to the result. Besides, there is time for a good rest between now and nightfall, and it so happens that we have no business of any kind until to-morrow, when some one must go to receive old Matthew's letter on the bridge."

"Then I bespeak that duty!" cried Tom King. "I am tired to death of being imprisoned here. I can manage that easily."

"Agreed," said Dick—"that is, supposing that you find yourself sufficiently recovered of your wound."

"I shall be all right after a rest."

"I, too, feel much fatigued, yet, first of all, I should like to ask some questions of our little stranger here, if she would answer them."

Hearing this, Ruth looked up with wonder in her eyes.

"I want you to tell us," said Dick, "who you are, and who your uncle is. I shall then be better able to judge what to do."

"My name is Ruth—Lady Ruth sometimes they call me."

"Lady Ruth what?"

"Comynge."

"And was your father known by that title?"

"Yes."

"And your uncle?"

"He is Lord Comynge now."

"And does he live at St. James's Palace?"

"Yes—that is where he is in attendance upon the King, which is nearly always."

"But how was it he brought you here?"

"I was at a party—this is the dress I wore. I was in the garden, and happened to be alone. Suddenly my uncle appeared, and told me he wanted me to go with him a little way—that my parents wished me to do so when I attained my seventh year."

"And you complied?"

"Oh yes. I thought no harm, though I had always greatly feared my uncle. I wanted to re-enter the house to put on my things, and tell them of my departure; but he said there was no necessity, as his carriage was waiting close by, and that he had already announced his intention of taking me away for an hour or so."

"Poor thing," said Dick, stroking her glossy hair. "I can easily understand how you would fall into such a well-laid trap as that. And so he brought you here to murder you?"

The child was silent.

"The mention of the name," interrupted Claude Duval, "reminds me that this place is, or used to be, called Comynge-Castle."

Then if that is the case it will account for the villain bringing his niece here. I wonder, now, whether there is any truth in this tale about a secreted treasure?"

"I should think not, and yet there may be some foundation of truth in it. However, we can easily look in the morning and see."

"True; but at present I propose some rest, and, if I may judge by your looks, my proposal will be welcomely enough received."

He was right.

All were, without exception, thoroughly worn out

The care of the place was left entirely to Jack the ostler above, about whose fidelity not the shadow of a doubt was now entertained.

In a short time afterwards the profoundest stillness prevailed, and it was not until just as evening was approaching that the highwaymen reassembled.

Claude and Jack had made known the pecuniary result of their last expedition, and as the amount was not sufficient for their purpose it was agreed that they should take another turn upon the highway while Dick repaired to St James's Palace.

He had little doubt that if he merely declared his story, and left the little girl in charge of the stranger he had befriended, she would be well taken care of in the future, and her villanous uncle punished.

At any rate, this was what he hoped.

As the time drew near for the little girl to take her departure, Maud wept plenteously, for short as had been the time of their acquaintance, yet she had learned to love this little girl with no common affection.

As for little Lady Ruth herself, she fully reciprocated this feeling, and also wept at the prospect of separation. Not only was she extremely fond of Maud, but the novelty of her situation charmed and delighted her.

Dick only waited until it was perfectly dark.

In spite of her hard gallop on the previous night, he found Black Bess in capital condition for the road.

Tom King looked with an eye of envy upon the preparations for departure, and almost felt inclined to join them; but Maud's earnest entreaties for him to remain and bear her company, as well as sundry sharp twinges which his arm gave him now and then, induced him to overcome this inclination.

Dick took his departure first.

The ostler had given him the word that the coast was perfectly clear, so he sprang into the saddle and then had the little girl seated in front of him.

"Expect me before daybreak," he cried, as he allowed the reins to fall upon the back of Black Bess; "but if I do not return by then on no account set out to meet me."

The little girl was for some moments terrified at her situation, which appeared to her to be full of danger.

Perceiving this, Dick hastened to reassure her, and in a few moments succeeded in dispelling her fears.

On his way Dick glanced continually about him, for he fully expected to meet with the officers before going far. He was tolerably certain that such a commotion as he had raised on the two preceding nights would not die out very readily.

The little girl noticed his perpetual vigilance, but never once guessed the cause, for they had all been most cautious to keep their occupation a secret.

To Dick's agreeable surprise the journey to London was performed without any accident; but when he drew near to St. James's Palace he began to wonder in what manner he could dispose of his mare.

After the result of placing her in the stable in Piccadilly he was scarcely likely to attempt that mode of disposal again; but the question arose of what else he could do.

He came in sight of the dull, dingy-looking palace without having come to a decision.

"It will not do to hesitate or loiter," he muttered. "Such a course would inevitably give rise to suspicion. I have a good mind to ride boldly beneath the gateway, and give one of the palace lackeys the job of holding her."

This was an idea that probably would have occurred to no one else but Dick Turpin.

Yet the more he considered it, the more he liked it, and so he continued to ride on at his former easy pace.

As usual, a sentinel stood at the entrance of the court-yard.

Hearing the sound of an approaching horse's hoofs, he looked up.

By the aid of the dark, flickering oil lamp suspended above him, and which was the best exterior illumination the palace afforded, he made out the form of our hero.

Dick rode on without bestowing any notice upon him.

Finding himself treated in this unceremonious manner, the sentry allowed Dick to pass without questioning: but had Dick shown any hesitation, admittance would doubtless have been denied to him.

Ere going far, however, Turpin encountered another soldier on guard, and this one was more particular.

"Your business?" he said, briefly.

"Be good enough to look at this ring."

He extended his hand as he spoke.

The sentry made as good an examination as the darkness permitted: but it seemed a satisfactory one, for he said:

"All right—pass on! Knock at the fourth door you come to on your left hand."

"Does your beat extend so far?"

"Yes—just beyond, sir. Why?"

"Because, if you like, I will leave you in charge of my mare. She will be no trouble whatever, as she will stand quietly enough by the door if she is not interfered with; and as you go by, if you will just keep an eye upon her, that is as much as will be required."

"All right, sir."

Dick rode on till he reached the door mentioned by the guard.

Then dismounting, he assisted the little girl to her feet.

"Woa, Bess," he said, in a low voice—"steady, lass! Wait here till I come back."

Having thus spoken, he knocked loudly at the door, raising a thousand echoes in the silent courtyard.

His summons met with a speedy response.

Without waiting to say or hear a word, Dick coolly crossed the threshold.

"Who are you, sir?" said a man, clad in the costume of a yeoman of the guard. "What do you want?"

Dick held out his hand.

"Just look at that ring, will you?"

"All right, sir," said the man, respectfully, after a hasty glance—"pass on. Ascend the stairs. At the top you will be challenged again."

The little girl walked by Turpin's side with the air of one who had long been accustomed to tread beneath that royal roof. Indeed, if Dick had thought of applying to her, she would have made an excellent guard.

Sure enough at the top of the stairs they were stopped again—this time by a man who was not attired in any uniform whatever.

Having looked at the ring, he gazed upon Turpin with no little surprise and curiosity.

"You cannot see him to-night," said this plainly-attired individual.

Dick was strongly inclined to ask, "See who?" for he had not the least idea to whom the ring belonged. But the manifest impolicy of saying anything of the kind made him silent.

In a moment after he replied in a very different manner.

"I must!" he said, curtly.

"Impossible!"

"But I say I must; and if not now, I will wait till I can!"

"If your business is urgent you can confide it to me."

Dick shook his head resolutely.

"Then you can just go back the way that you came; and the next time, if you do not choose to tell me your business, you will have a great deal of difficulty in getting this far, let me tell you!"

"What's that, eh—eh—what's that?" said a voice.

A door was opened hastily, and some one stepped forward with a hurried, undignified, ungraceful step

The gentleman in the plain suit no sooner heard this voice than he uttered an ejaculation of dismay, and seemed ready to fall flat to the floor.

He faced round, however, and began to mutter some excuses.

Dick looked up, and at once recognised the stranger he had befriended.

His countenance showed the marks of the injuries he had received.

"Your Royal Highness——" gasped the gentleman in black.

The words filled Dick with amazement.

At the same time he felt the little girl tugging at his hand, and looked down to ascertain the cause of her doing so.

"It's the Prince of Wales," she said, in a whisper. "Be careful what you say and do, for he has got an awful temper."

CHAPTER CMXCIII.

FOLLOWS THE ADVENTURES OF DICK TURPIN AND BLACK BESS.

THE way in which little Ruth spoke would at any other time have brought a smile to Dick Turpin's lips.

But on the present occasion such an expression of feeling was altogether impolitic and not to be thought of.

It was not possible, however, for Dick all in a moment to overget the astonishment that was produced by the discovery that the person he had saved from such imminent danger, and whose behavior seemed so eccentric, was no less a personage than his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and grandson of the King.

But much of the eccentricity of his behavior was now accounted for.

He was not allowed any further time for thought, however, for the prince said:

"Cameron!"

"Ye—ye—yes, your Royal Highness!" stammered the man.

"Be off, and don't attempt to pry into my private affairs again."

"But, your Royal High——"

"Be off, I say!"

Warned probably by the tone of the prince's voice that it would be unwise to exasperate him any further, Cameron beat a retreat.

"And now, sir," said the prince, addressing himself to Dick, "may I ask your business with me?"

Once again by way of reply Dick simply held out his hand.

"What, is it you?" said the prince, in accents of surprise. "Well, well—never mind. But you must be something more than a man, that is all I can say."

"Nay, your Royal Highness, you requested me to call!"

"I did—I did; yet never thought that you would be foolhardy enough to do so."

"I am here."

"I see you are. Follow me into this room, where we can converse in private."

The prince led the way back into the room from which he had so unexpectedly emerged.

"Shut the door and sit down," said the prince, as he flung himself into a luxurious easy chair. "I don't want to play the prince just now—bah! I am sick of it."

Dick complied with the greatest readiness.

"I told you," began the prince, "that if you liked to call here some night you would hear something to your advantage."

"Your Royal Highness was good enough to say so, but believe me, I had not then the remotest idea of who you were."

"I believe not; but I expected you would come alone. What little girl is that you have with you?"

"Does not your Royal Highness recognise her?"

The prince stretched his little sleepy-looking eyes as wide open as his fat cheeks would let him, then said, slowly:

"I fancy I have seen her before."

"Your Royal Highness, this is the Lady Ruth Comynge."

"Comynge?" repeated the prince, while a black, portentous-looking frown almost hid his eyes altogether.

"Yes; and if your Royal Highness will only be kind enough to listen to what I have to relate you will at once take this poor child's part."

"I don't know that!" muttered the prince.

This was by no means encouraging—moreover, Dick was considerably puzzled.

Nevertheless, he steadily began his narrative, relating everything in connection with the little girl. He proceeded at some length, for the prince listened with avidity, but what was strangest of all, with evident gratification.

Dick trusted ere long to be able to solve all these mysteries.

When he had brought his narrative to a conclusion the prince said:

"This is the second service you have rendered me."

"Second service?" ejaculated Dick, amazed. "How so?"

"In this way: This girl's uncle, Comynge, is the King's confidant. He has his ear in everything, and, what is

more, he is my bitter foe. Yes," said the prince, spitefully, "I hate him! He is ever prying into my private affairs, and poisoning the King's mind against me. I won't fall in with his views, and so, you see, he is determined that I shall be disgraced."

Dick nodded.

"But now," cried the prince, springing to his feet, and pacing the room in exultation, "I have him in my power—completely in my power! I will crush him!"

The prince clenched his hands tightly as he spoke, and the expression on his countenance was one of unmitigated hatred.

"Your Royal Highness," said Dick, also rising to his feet.

"Well?"

"Excuse me a moment."

So saying, Dick pointed to the door, towards which he strode rapidly.

The thick, soft carpet beneath his feet prevented the least noise.

By his movements, the prince comprehended that Dick suspected that some one was listening at the door, and so he looked on with great suspense and curiosity to see what the highwayman was about to do.

Dick carefully took hold of the knob.

Turning it quickly, he opened the door about a couple of feet.

Then, with equal quickness, closed it again.

But there was a sudden, sharp crack audible, so, in the most natural manner possible, Dick opened the door to see what was the matter.

On his knees on the mat, and rubbing his forehead with a very rueful air, was Cameron, the prince's valet.

"Dear me!" said Dick, pretending to be greatly concerned. "I had no idea you were there! I hope you are not hurt, sir?"

Cameron took no further notice of this speech than to mutter some curses under his voice.

Then he struggled to his feet, and retired, looking completely crestfallen.

"Serves him right!" said the prince, laughing heartily.

Dick closed the door again, and resumed his seat

"You understand now," said the prince, after a pause of a few minutes' duration—"you understand now in what manner you have contrived to render me this second service. My enemy will now be effectually removed. Leave Lady Ruth to me, and I will see not only that her unnatural kinsman is duly punished, but that she shall be fully restored to the rights he would have deprived her of."

"The word of your Royal Highness is quite sufficient," said Dick, with much deference, "and I trust you will accept my thanks, though I feel myself unable to express them."

"Enough!" said the prince. "I feel myself under a deep debt of obligation to you, and, in spite of what you are, I cannot forget—besides, I have a still further call to make upon your services."

"Your Highness, you will always find me ready and willing."

"I do not doubt it. I cannot unfold my plans to you to-night, however. Come to me again, and I will be prepared. I require a secret agent in an affair of much importance."

Dick bowed to intimate his perfect readiness.

"Come, Lady Ruth," said the prince, taking her by the hand, "I will be answerable for your safety."

"Your Royal Highness," said Dick, "I take my leave, but if——"

"If what? Say on!"

"If your Highness would reward me so far as to give me a safe conduct from the palace. I have only made my way here at a great risk, and I am fearful that on my return I may be intercepted by my enemies."

Dick, as he spoke, walked to one of the windows in the room, and drew aside the heavy curtain with which it was covered.

Placing his face close to the glass, he peeped out, and found that he commanded a view of the courtyard.

At some distance off he could perceive Black Bess standing as still as any statue.

"All seems well!" he exclaimed, turning back into the apartment. "I fancy there will be no need of your Royal Highness's interference."

"So much the better then, for I wish our dealings to be kept as secret as possible. Go, and have no fear; I will watch at this window until you take your departure."

Dick could not depart without saying farewell to little Lady Ruth.

The child wept, for, young as she was, yet she was conscious that she was parting with a well-tried friend.

"I shall never forget you—never!" she cried, through her tears, as Dick Turpin left the apartment.

The highwayman had taken particular notice of the different corridors he had passed through and the various staircases he had ascended, so he was able to find his way to the little door by which he had entered with as much precision as any inhabitant of the place.

The yeoman of the guard who had admitted him opened the door and allowed him to pass out.

The next moment he was standing beside Black Bess.

But just as he was about to place his foot in the stirrup, a man sprang out of the darkness and seized him by the throat.

"Dick Turpin," he said, "you are my prisoner. Surrender quietly, for you cannot escape! The courtyard is full of my men!"

Dick shook off his grasp, and spoke in indignant tones:

"I am not in the humor to be jested with! Stand aside! What do you mean?"

Dick's perfect coolness staggered the officer.

"Surely," he ejaculated—"surely you don't go for to deny your 'dentity?"

"You are drunk, I think."

"No; but you are Dick Turpin, and at all hazards I will make you my prisoner."

"Then you are a fool, and will suffer for your pains! Stand off, I say!"

"If you are not Dick Turpin, who are you then?"

"What business is that of yours?"

The officer placed a whistle to his lips, and blew it shrilly.

"You will get yourself into trouble, you wrong-headed fool!" said Dick. "I am a friend of the Prince of Wales's, and am even now about to set forth on his business."

"How jolly green you must think me! It won't do, Dick, for you won't impose upon me by such a tale."

Dick played his part very well, but to no effect, and he now looked up with some anxiety at the window at which the prince had promised to station himself.

He was wondering how far the prince would feel inclined to compromise himself on his behalf.

But surely if there was any such thing as gratitude existing, the Prince would interfere.

The officers now clustered around Dick in a dense throng.

He began to grow anxious.

His sole hope rested with the prince.

If he failed to keep his word he was lost indeed.

"Are you coming quietly, Dick?" said the officer. "If not, we can easily overpower you by force."

"Hark—behold!"

At this moment, with a clashing sound, one of the upper casements was thrown open.

"Below, there! Guard—guard!"

There was an immediate stir and bustle, and then from out of a low doorway there issued several soldiers.

"Halt!" said the officer.

The soldiers came to a standstill.

"Give that gentleman safe escort from the palace. He is engaged on my private business."

The voice of the prince was well known.

Indeed, there was something so peculiar in its tone that once heard it was never forgotten.

"Yes, your Royal Highness," replied the officer in command of the soldiers.

The casement was closed again.

The police officer who was so certain of capturing Dick Turpin knew the prince's voice full well, so he shrank back.

"Be careful how you interfere another time," said Dick, "or his Highness will have you removed from your post."

With these words the highwayman, escorted by the small troop of soldiers, quickly trotted out of the palace yard.

When once in the open street he felt that he was quite safe.

But he made up his mind to get out of the vicinity of the palace with all speed.

Accordingly he loosened the reins upon the back of Black Bess, and the next moment he was galloping up St. James's Street at a pace that raised a prodigious clatter

"Home now," Dick muttered, as, having reached Piccadilly, he turned his mare's head westward—"home now. I ought to be well satisfied with all that I have accomplished to-night."

This was certainly right; but before he had gone very far Dick found that he was troubled with a most tormenting thirst.

"I should not have raised an objection if the prince had offered me a glass of wine," he murmured, with a smile. "However, at the next inn I come to I will pull up for a moment and have a good draught of ale."

Being in England, Dick had not to travel far without finding what he sought.

In fact, in rather less than five minutes afterwards he caught sight of one of those pretty roadside inns which were more plentiful along the lines of the different highways then than they are now.

The place looked quiet enough in all conscience, and Dick at any rate ran whatever risk there was in stopping.

He pulled up in front of the long horse trough, from which he allowed Black Bess to drink, but only sparingly.

"Hilloa!" he shouted. "House—house! Landlord—ostler!"

These outcries brought to the front door of the inn a young and rather good-looking girl, and to the yard gate a thin, wiry little man, evidently the ostler.

"A tankard of your very best old October ale, my dear!" said Turpin, to the girl. "Make haste, for I am very thirsty, and if the ale is as good as you are beautiful, it will be very welcome, I assure you!"

The girl was by no means insensible to a compliment, so she smiled quite pleasantly upon the highwayman, and ran back into the house.

"A little hay," added Dick, to the ostler—"just a handful, that's all."

At this moment the blind hanging over one of the windows was drawn aside, and a man peered out.

One of the upper panes of this window was broken, and through this the sound of voices came with tolerable distinctness.

"All right," said some one—"I can see her. She is quiet enough; but I would not sell her for a thousand!"

Dick looked about him, wondering to what these words could apply.

His state of doubt did not continue long, for he caught sight of a very handsome bright bay horse, that was secured by the rein to a ring that was fixed in the wall near the window from which the man had looked out.

"It's a beauty," he muttered, admiringly—"a real beauty! She could almost rival my own bonny Black Bess."

The horse upon which Dick gazed was in good truth a splendid creature, and it is very probable his admiration would have gone still further, but just at this moment the young girl appeared, carrying the tankard.

Dick took it from her with a glance and manner that brought the color to her cheeks.

The ale was of good quality, and Dick was very thirsty, both of which occurrences combined caused the liquid to disappear with great rapidity.

When he paused to take breath, the ostler came with the hay.

A few unimportant words were exchanged, and then, when just about to ride off, Dick slipped a crown-piece into the palm of the ostler, and gave the girl another, bidding her get change and give it him the next time he called.

At a gentle trot, Dick now set forward, for he believed that he was at present quite out of danger, and as there was no occasion to hurry himself, he thought he might as well ride to the castle quietly as not.

But just at the moment when he took his departure from the inn, a gentleman came out of the front door.

"Now, ostler," he cried, "bring my nag this way!"

"Are you off now, sir?"

"Yes; be quick."

"All right, sir."

The gentleman glanced along the road, and caught sight of Dick mounted on Black Bess.

They had indeed only got a few yards away.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated, in a voice of enthusiasm, "what a splendid creature! What a magnificent trot, to be sure!"

As he pronounced the words several other persons sallied forth from the inn.

They were idlers, every one of them, and only came in order to witness the traveller ride off, for he had been vaporing for at least an hour about the qualities of his steed—so much so that the curiosity of all was strongly excited.

Upon hearing the remark made by the traveller, the ostler said:

"Mayhap, sir, you don't know who that is?"

"I certainly do not. Do you?"

"Yes, very well," returned the ostler, with a peculiar smile.

"Well, who is he? I should like to know him on account of his horse. I would ride any distance to see a bit of choice horseflesh."

The gentleman was evidently an enthusiast in the matter of horses.

"I'll tell you if you like," said the ostler.

"Well, who is he?"

"You have heard of Dick Turpin?"

"Of course I have."

"Well, that's him."

The ostler pointed down the road as he uttered these emphatic words.

"Impossible!"

"It is not impossible at all, sir! I know him!"

"Then, you rascal, why didn't you raise an immediate outcry, and try to capture him?"

"What for?"

"What for? Because he is a highwayman!"

"He never robbed me of nothin'."

"That may be."

"Nor I never saw him rob nobody else."

"That's not to the point. If you knew it was Dick Turpin, your duty was to raise the alarm immediately."

"Oh, was it? Very well, I shall know what to do when I see him again."

Evidently the ostler was not inclined to regard Dick in an unfriendly light.

The gentleman gazed after the retreating forms of the highwayman and his steed—both of them now nearly out of sight—with feelings very different to those he had lately looked at them with.

"Why not pursue him now?" said the gentleman, turning to the throng of idlers near the inn door. "We might keep on his track till we met with assistance."

The ostler laughed.

"What are you grinning at, you great idiot?" said the gentleman, angrily.

"Why, at you, for thinking of such a thing. Why, you might as well gallop over a marsh after a will-o'-the-wisp as after Black Bess when Dick Turpin was on her back—you would have about as good a chance of capturing one as the other."

"You are evidently in collusion with this robber," said the gentleman, hotly, "so I should advise you to be very careful what you say and do."

"Collusion?" repeated the ostler slowly, and scratching his head while he spoke. 'And what may that mean?"

"Oh, confound you, don't bother I'll ride off after this Dick Turpin myself."

"Then you're mad, sir," said the landlord, coming forward.

"Are you a confederate too?" asked the gentleman, with a sneer.

"No, I am not; but every man must be mad who would heedlessly ride to his death."



[SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL FOLLOW THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT.]

"Bah! I have no patience with you at all! You seem to be frightened to death at the fellow's name! He is but a man, I tell you, and as such I will be a match for him, as my nag here will be for his mare!"

"Dick Turpin's match has not been found yet," muttered the ostler, "and that is why he remains at liberty. Plenty have pitted themselves against him, but they have always failed."

"No matter!" said the stranger, as he sprang into the saddle. "I know it would be worse than useless to ask any of you to accompany me, so I shall start alone. But don't be surprised to see me come back with my prisoner all safe!"

"I shall!" the ostler was heard to mutter, under his voice, as he turned aside; and he was further heard to say, more indistinctly, something about a wilful man having his own way.

The gentleman took not the slightest notice of him, however, but, giving a patronising nod by way of farewell to those who stood at the inn door, he rode away at a pace that was indeed wonderful.

The horse he bestrode was in good truth a wonderful creature, and justified him to a very great extent in boasting about it as he did.

"If he goes on long at that rate," said the landlord, "he will not be long in overtaking Dick Turpin, I'm thinking."

"That depends whether he lets Black Bess have her head or not," replied the ostler.

The gentleman evidently thought he should quickly overtake Dick, and therefore pushed his horse to the utmost of his capacity.

He was quite right in this, but the event was brought about in a manner he had not for a moment expected, and which, consequently, took him greatly by surprise.

Hearing some one coming along the road at such a

fearful rate, Dick Turpin, so far from urging Bess onward, pulled her up altogether.

Then, turning her head in the opposite direction, he planted her in the middle of the road, and there waited quietly to see who was approaching.

CHAPTER CMXCIV.

DICK TURPIN MEETS UNEXPECTEDLY WITH A NOVEL AND PROFITABLE ADVENTURE.

THIS manœuvre on Dick's part quite disconcerted his pursuer, and by slow degrees he reined-in his steed, until its pace was reduced to a slow walk.

The gentleman really thought that Dick would be afraid of anyone who had courage enough to face him boldly; but the highwayman's behavior quickly dispelled this very erroneous idea.

Had there been any satisfactory way of doing so, the gentleman would unquestionably have turned back again; but he could not do so without passing the inn, and he was one who, above all things, hated to be laughed at, so he held on his way, filled with hesitation and wondering what he should do.

It was not, either, without a great deal of trepidation that he thus rode forward, for he had heard many strange stories of Dick Turpin and his doings, and consequently he was rather nervous as to what fate he might have in store for him.

His horse walked on until it reached the spot where Black Bess was standing.

Dick recognised the horse, and it may be he partially comprehended what was the gentleman's intention.

He took off his hat, and made a very elaborate bow.

"Good evening, sir!" he said, with the utmost politeness. "I feel much pleasure in meeting with you."

The gentleman had not yet recovered his self-possession, nor had he made up his mind as to just what he should do, so in his confusion he returned Dick's salutation with a great deal of ceremony.

"That is a splendid nag you have, sir," remarked Dick.

This seemed to put the gentleman more at his ease, for he replied:

"You say rightly, sir. His equal has yet to be found. I have never met him, and I don't believe I ever shall."

"Indeed! Then he must be of rare quality?"

"He is—he is. I have heard much about a mare called Black Bess, and have been told wonderful stories of her powers; but I should not be afraid to match mine against even her."

"Wouldn't you indeed?"

"I really should not."

"Now supposing, sir, you had the opportunity of taking a trial race with this Black Bess, what odds would you take?"

"Any."

In his excitement and enthusiasm about his horse, the gentleman was ready to forget anything.

But most especially did he congratulate himself upon the turn the conversation had taken, since it would enable him to escape an encounter with the redoubtable highwayman without any disagreeable imputations upon his own courage.

"You speak boldly," said Dick, after a brief pause.

"I mean what I say."

"That is, if you had the chance of trying the speed of your horse against Black Bess, you would be ready to bet any amount that your horse would win? Well, then, sir, you can have your inclination gratified, provided you don't change your mind."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, in deed and in truth, too. For, hark ye, sir, a word in your ear——"

"Well—well?"

"I am Dick Turpin, at your service, and this is Black Bess, at your service too."

It was on the tip of the stranger's tongue to say:

"I know that very well!"

But he restrained himself, and merely repeated the word:

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir," said Dick; "and if you don't mind making it worth my while, why, you shall have the trial race you so much wish for."

"Make it worth your while? How?"

"Why, as I am sure to win——"

The traveller interrupted him with a laugh.

Dick repeated his words.

"As I am sure to win, you must make something like a tolerable bet, otherwise I should not think of putting my mare and myself to so much trouble."

"Upon my word you take it coolly."

"Always did. But come, sir, time is passing. Is your inclination unaltered?"

"Quite."

"Then what is the figure? How much have you about you—I mean in the shape of ready money, rings, jewels, and other valuables?"

The traveller stared at this cool question, and asked:

"Do you think I shall tell you?"

"Yes—why not?"

"Why, I suppose that would only be preliminary to asking me to hand them over to you, and I have heard so much of your courage and prowess that I don't know whether I should feel inclined to run the risk of a personal conflict with you."

Dick bowed to this compliment.

"If you have heard much about me," he said, "you will unquestionably have been told that one of my characteristics is that whenever I pass my word I never go back from it."

'I have heard something of it."

'Then on the present occasion I give you my word that, if you will answer the question I asked you, I will not make the slightest attempt to take what you have from you."

"Then why do you want to know?"

"Answer my question first. Do not be afraid to do so."

"Well, then," said the gentleman, "I should think that, taking the ready money I have about me, and placing a fair value on my ornaments, there may be somewhere about six hundred pounds."

"Indeed, sir, I am glad to hear it."

"May I ask why?"

"Yes—because now there is a chance of our race to come off."

"Be good enough to explain yourself."

"Certainly—nothing is easier. As you may be aware, there is a reward of one thousand pounds to be gained by whoever captures me and takes me to Newgate.'

"I believe it is so."

"It is a fact, I can assure you, and that being understood, I will proceed to give you a form of the wager."

"I am all attention."

"Well, then, we are now on a capital bit of roadway—about the best in England, I should think, and we are by no means likely to meet with anyone at this late hour, so I propose that we adopt it for our race."

"Agreed!"

"Then as to the distance. Let me see, Ealing is the village next on before us. How far should you reckon it to be?"

"Rather better than seven miles, I should think."

"You are about right. We will call it seven miles, and we will let the Horns at Ealing be our goal."

"You mean the little inn on the left-hand side of the road?"

"Yes; and whoever reaches there first shall be the winner of the race."

"Agreed—that is fair enough."

"And now, sir, for the wager itself. If I get to the inn first you will, without any demur or resistance whatever, hand over everything in the shape of valuables you possess—on the other hand, should you get there first, I will, when I arrive, surrender myself to you in an instant, and you can then gain the thousand pounds reward offered for my apprehension."

The gentleman had the utmost faith in the capacity of his steed, and upon hearing the highwayman make this proposition his eyes glittered with cupidity.

"And you are willing and content to abide by that?"

"Perfectly."

'Then give me your word."

"I give you my word, which has never once been broken."

Enough."

"You clearly understand, and unhesitatingly agree to the terms?"

"I do."

"Then no more need be said. Let us be off at once. I am ready whenever you are."

Dick's confidence made the stranger somewhat uneasy; but he strove to calm his mind by thinking that it was more braggadocio on Dick's part than aught else.

"How shall we arrange to start at the same moment?"

"Easily. You see the moon yonder? It is just emerging from behind that dark cloud. When it perfectly breaks forth make your start."

"Agreed!" said the stranger again.

He slightly shifted his position as he spoke, so as to be just abreast of the highwayman.

They had not to wait long before making the start.

The moon came completely out from behind the cloud which had for so long obscured her radiance.

The very instant that the whole of her silvery disc was exposed, the stranger cried:

"Off now and away!"

At the same moment he gave his horse so vicious a dig with the spurs that the animal cleared a tremendous distance at one bound, and then went tearing along at a speed which could only be characterised as terrific.

But Dick adopted no such violent means.

Simply dropping the reins upon the neck of Black Bess as he was in the habit of doing, he cried:

"Now, old lass—forward—forward! Let us see what you can do to-night! I have staked my life on your powers, old girl—don't forget that! Forward, now—forward! That is it!"

It was truly beautiful now to see the manner in which Black Bess covered the ground.

Her gallop just resembled that of the greyhound—being composed of long, swinging, graceful bounds.

But the horse upon which the stranger so prided himself was of no every-day kind.

The start that it gained at the first it preserved well, and Dick found before he had gone far that Black Bess would have to tax herself to the utmost to beat him.

The stranger pressed his hat tightly on his head, and from time to time looked back behind him with the greatest exultation.

But Dick took it very easy, making no further effort to increase his mare's speed—in fact, he had hit upon a capital mode of proceeding.

About her competency to outstrip the horse in front he had not the least doubt. He had tried her too often for that. It is true he recollected how well Sir George's horse had kept behind him on a former occasion; but then Black Bess was wounded and weak from loss of blood, while now she was in the best possible condition.

Going at the furious pace they did, it was not long before Ealing came into view.

At this time the two horsemen were almost level with each other.

But there was this difference to be noted between them.

The stranger was spurring his horse at every step, and making the most frantic efforts to urge him onwards at a more rapid rate.

Dick, on the contrary, was sitting quite at ease, letting Black Bess have all her own way.

It was not until within a quarter of a mile from Ealing that he made the least effort.

Then all he did was to say:

"Sir, you have lost your race."

That was all that reached the stranger's ears, for at the very moment that he pronounced the words Dick slackened the reins still more, and gave utterance to that strange sound so well comprehended by Black Bess, and which meant that she was to put forth her very utmost powers.

She responded right gallantly, for she dashed past the bay horse like an arrow, and at each stroke of her hoofs the distance could be seen to increase between them.

Although he must have seen that it was totally impossible for his horse to win, the stranger was so exasperated at his defeat that he continued to goad the poor creature in a most fearful manner.

Dick drew up with some suddenness in front of the Horns.

"Bravo, Bess!" he cried, exultantly. "I knew you would not fail me. Bravo, old lass, you have behaved yourself right gallantly and well! Ah, here he comes!"

These words were called forth by the clatter of hoofs, for the stranger came thundering along like a whirlwind.

He pulled up, however, a moment after in front of the inn, where Dick was waiting for him so calmly.

The stranger's horse was covered from head to foot with white foam, and now that it had been brought to a standstill it trembled in every limb.

Black Bess, on the other hand, though breathing rapidly, showed no other sign of distress. Her flanks were a little wet, but nothing more.

"I told you you would lose," said Dick; "but I hope you are satisfied that all was quite fair?"

The stranger was silent.

"Don't be disappointed, man," cried Dick. "It is no disgrace to your horse that he has been outrun by Black Bess. When I staked my life you might have guessed what would have been the result. Don't think any the less of your horse either for this defeat, for I question much whether there is another that could have done to-night what he has done."

"He is beaten," said the stranger, "that is enough. He has now lost all value in my eyes."

"Nay—say not so."

"I do say it, because I prided myself upon possessing the fleetest horse in England."

"And I repeat that it is no depreciation to him that he has been outrun by Black Bess."

But the traveller would not look at it in this light.

Attracted by the noise made by their arrival, several persons sallied forth from the inn, which was only waiting for the stage-coach to pass by to be closed for the night.

Among these were the landlord and ostler.

The latter came close to Dick, who beckoned him to approach still nearer.

Then, in a low voice, he said:

"Be quick. I want you to bring me a quart of brandy—the best, mind—in a stable bucket."

The ostler opened his eyes in amazement.

"A quart of brandy in a bucket?" he ejaculated

"Yes—make haste! The sooner you are back the sooner you will see what I intend to do with it."

Struck probably by the force of this remark, the ostler hurried away.

"Now, sir," said Dick, addressing himself to the stranger, "let us settle our little affair before we go any further. I cannot spare any more time, I assure you."

For his honor's sake, the stranger could not refuse compliance with this request.

But, nevertheless, it was with the very worst possible grace in the world that he thrust his hand into his pockets and produced—first a purse, then a pocket-book, then a watch, and lastly some rings from his fingers, and jewellery from various parts of his apparel.

This operation occupied some little time, however, and while he was thus engaged the ostler made his appearance, carrying a bucket in one hand and a quart measure in the other.

"You are sure you want the brandy in this here bucket?"

"Yes—pour it in. Be quick, and then fill it up with water."

The ostler obeyed, indulging the while in vague speculations as to whether the gentleman was going to drink a bucketful of brandy and water for a wager.

"Here it is sir," he said, as soon as he had added the water.

"Just give it my mare, then."

The ostler's astonishment reached its culminating point.

Brandy-and-water to a horse! He had never heard of such a thing.

But Black Bess, knowing full well that the compound was intended for her, began drinking away at it at a rate that left no room for doubting whether she liked it or not.

It was just as Black Bess drained the last drop, that the stranger said:

"There, then, is all I have. I have kept my word to you, have I not?"

"You have, indeed. Here, take this five-pound note back again—it will do to pay the toll-gates. Now what will you take to drink at my expense?"

"Nothing."

The tone in which the traveller pronounced this one word showed what an amount of aggravation he felt.

"Come—come, sir," Dick cried, "think no more of your defeat."

"I have kept my word to the letter," said the stranger, raising his voice so that all around might hear what he said; "but having done so, I call upon these good people for assistance!"

"Assistance?" Dick echoed, while he tightened his grasp upon the reins.

"Yes. Although I promised to surrender to you all I had, I did not undertake that I would keep your identity a secret."

"But it would be base to disclose it!"

Dick backed his mare as he spoke, for the people were clustering around him by far too closely to be pleasant.

"Base or not, I don't care!" shouted the traveller, now quite beside himself with vexation. "Good people all, this is Dick Turpin, the celebrated highwayman, for whose apprehension a thousand pounds reward is offered! Help me to secure the rascal!"

This announcement was productive of an immense commotion.

"My blunderbuss," cried the landlord—"where is my blunderbuss? I will blow him to atoms!"

"Will you help me?" roared the traveller.

"Yes, yes," was the unanimous cry.

"Then, gentlemen," said Dick, "I can only say you will have a long and fatiguing run. I have the honor to wish you all a very good night."

So saying, Dick slackened the reins upon the neck of Black Bess.

As usual, the gallant creature perfectly well understood what was required of her.

Before the landlord and the others in front of the inn could quite make up their minds where to turn and what to do Dick Turpin was full half a mile off down the road, and going at a pace that soon promised to take him out of sight.

Muttering curses, the discomfited stranger rode off in pursuit, though the exhausted condition of his steed showed how perfectly ridiculous it was for him to attempt a pursuit.

But the traveller just then was not in a condition to think very clearly or reason very correctly about anything, and so, with his breast full of angry feelings, he pushed on, trusting in the end either to overtake the highwayman, or else meet with officers or others whom he could set upon his track.

CHAPTER CMXCV.

TOM KING IS FRUSTRATED IN HIS ATTEMPT TO TAKE POSSESSION OF OLD MATTHEW'S LETTER.

"Easy—easy, Bess—take it easy, old lass! There is no need for you to exert yourself now. You have behaved yourself bravely, old girl! By Jove, who would have thought that such an odd, unlooked-for adventure should have turned out so profitably? I am possessed of six hundred pounds in value, at the very lowest estimate. Of that I am quite certain. Well, well, it could not have dropped into my hands at a better time. I have a use for every penny of it."

He was thinking of Tom Davis.

"If old Matthew's plan can only be carried out," he said, half aloud, as Black Bess went slowly on her way, "it will be a glorious thing, and for my part I can see no reason why it should not. I should feel, then, that I had done my duty to one who has ever been a faithful ally."

The hour now was very late—or, more strictly speaking, very early. There was little probability of meeting with anyone upon the road, and so Dick made his mind up to ride direct to the castle.

Accordingly he left the high-road and struck off across the open country, thus unknowingly completely disappointing the traveller in his hope of getting upon his track.

Upon Dick's arrival at the ruins the ostler at once came forward.

"You are back soon to-night, captain," he said.

"Yes," replied Dick. "The others have not returned, I suppose?"

"Not yet, captain."

Dick dismounted and gave Black Bess into the charge of the ostler, who at once took her off to her accustomed place in the ruins.

Maud had heard Dick's arrival, and hastened forward to meet him.

"Well," said Tom King, as soon as Dick entered the subterranean apartment, "have you been successful in finding a friend for the little girl? You do not know how much I regret parting with her. She had quite won my heart!"

"I believe," answered Dick, "that I have left her in the hands of one who is better able to befriend her than almost anyone."

"But will he?"

"Well, little Ruth's uncle is his personal enemy, and he has suffered much at his hands. However, I can see by both of your looks how interested you are, so I will give you an account of every incident that has befallen me."

"A rare night's sport!" said Tom King, as soon as the narrative was concluded. "I wish I could only be fortunate enough to meet with such a one. I feel to be growing absolutely rusty!"

"How is your arm?"

"Better—much better. In fact, I feel nothing of it worth mentioning. It is getting well as fast as it can, and I shall be all the better for a little exercise."

"You still think of looking for old Matthew's letter?"

"If you have no objection, captain."

"Well, to speak truth, I had quite made up my mind to look after that bit of business; but as you seem to desire it you shall go."

Maud heard these words with manifold pleasure, though she said nothing.

Morning came, bright, clear, and beautiful; but it did not bring either Sixteen-String Jack or Claude Duval.

Their non-appearance excited but little apprehension in the breasts of those who watched for them.

They had to endure suspense as to the safety of their comrades; but it was better for them to do that than for the security of their abiding place to be affected.

During the day Tom King was restless to the utmost degree. His impatience made him feel as though night would never come.

No sooner was it dusk than he was in perfect readiness to start.

His pistols had been loaded and put ready for use, his horse saddled, and every possible preparation made at least an hour before.

Dick restrained him until it was really dark enough for him to take his departure safely.

No prisoner released from a long and weary confinement ever felt more elation of spirits than Tom King.

He would have shouted out aloud in his gratification, but the manifest imprudence of doing so fortunately presented itself to him and restrained him.

Dick Turpin and Maud watched him till he passed out of sight, then the former turned round to the ostler and said:

"Is Black Bess saddled?"

"Yes, captain."

Maud clung to Dick's arm, and looked appealingly into his face.

"Surely—surely," she said, in a tremulous voice, "you are not going away to-night?"

"Yes—why not?"

"Consider I am quite alone."

"There is Jack. He will keep good watch and ward."

"I do not doubt it; still think what long and weary hours they will be till you return; besides, Claude and Jack are absent, and how can you tell but what they may be in danger?"

"All the better reason, then," said Dick, smiling, "why I should go out in quest of them. I might chance to be of real service."

"No, no—for once stay here!"

"As you wish, Maud," said Dick after a brief pause; then, turning to the ostler, he added: "Take the saddle and bridle off again. Black Bess shall have a rest to-night."

With these words Maud and Dick made their way down below, where we will leave them watching for the return of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, while we follow in the footsteps of Tom King.

The elation of spirits which he experienced increased rather than otherwise as soon as his horse broke out into a gallop. The animal was very fresh and full of spirit in consequence of the long rest it had had.

Tom King was so familiar with the country that he was able to take his way almost in a direct line to the bridge over the river Brent, which, it will be remembered, was the appointed spot.

He was sorely tempted to indulge in some adventure on the way; but the uncertainty of how long it might be the means of delaying him, and the remembrance of the importance of reaching the bridge early, enabled him each time to overcome the inclination.

Coming at length to a portion of the river Brent at some distance from the spot where it flowed under the Edgware Road, he pulled up his steed and indulged in a brief consideration as to the best thing he could do.

He quickly determined to follow the windings of the little stream, which, at the place where he had halted, seemed more to deserve the name of brook than the ambitious appellation river.

Tom recollected that near the old bridge the river was bordered on one side by a line of tall, stately trees.

Under cover of these he expected to be able to reach the appointed spot without danger of being seen by anyone.

The event proved him to be perfectly right.

The night was not a dark one, yet the shadow cast by the row of trees was dense indeed.

Upon reaching the bridge, Tom alighted, and secured his horse to a tree in such a manner that he could feed in plenty upon the luxuriant grass beneath his feet.

This done, the highwayman crept cautiously forward on foot, and at length took up his position behind a projecting buttress of the structure.

The kind of recess in which he took up his station was wrapped in such obscurity that a passer-by would have required a keen eye to detect him.

From this point Tom King commanded a view of the whole of the bridge, and also of a considerable portion of the road stretching towards London, so that it was quite impossible for anyone to approach from this direction unseen by him.

The silence was profound, and on that one particular night the Edgware Road appeared to be deserted.

This soon began to grow very irksome to Tom, when, all at once, the idea flashed across his mind that old Matthew's messenger might have come and gone, and that the letter he was waiting for might be at that very moment lying beneath the stone.

This was a point Tom resolved to satisfy himself upon without delay, but first he listened intently in order to make sure that no one was close at hand.

The continuance of the unbroken silence made him certain that he had the place all to himself, and that a more favorable opportunity than the present could not be found.

Accordingly he quitted his hiding-place, and with rapid steps made his way to the opposite end of the bridge.

Selecting the stone which had been described to him, he lifted it carefully.

But there was no letter beneath it.

Resolved to be satisfied beyond all possibility of doubt, he lifted successively every stone he could find loose upon the parapet.

This examination convinced him that old Matthew's messenger had not arrived.

The clatter of a horse's hoofs coming upon his ears at this moment warned him to once more seek shelter in his hiding-place.

Ere long a horseman appeared in sight, and as he drew nearer the bridge he reduced his horse's pace, which made Tom think that this must be the messenger.

He quickly found, however, that he was mistaken.

The traveller had merely reined-in his steed to ease him up the rather steep hill which led on to the bridge.

Upon reaching the summit the horse was again put in motion, and the traveller rode on.

Tom gazed after him longingly.

Somehow or other, and certainly without any good or sufficient reason, the idea had taken firm possession of Tom's mind that Matthew's messenger would be of the male sex and that he would arrive on horseback.

Therefore when, some time afterwards, his quick ear detected a light footfall on the hard road, he paid no attention to it.

Presently, however, a female form appeared walking slowly up the hill.

Tom looked at her attentively for the simple reason that he had nothing else upon which to bestow his notice.

As she came nearer, Tom perceived there was a certain air of mystery about her, for she glanced behind her repeatedly with an air of apprehensiveness, as though she feared some one was behind her watching her movements.

Upon nearing the bridge her pace increased until she fairly stood upon it.

Then she stopped abruptly.

She listened.

Then, with great rapidity, she darted to the left side of the bridge, lifted a loose stone from it, and afterwards Tom distinctly saw her place a letter beneath it.

No sooner was this action performed than the girl bounded on as swiftly as an antelope, passing Tom King in his hiding-place so closely as almost to touch him with her garments.

"That's neatly done," said Tom King. "And now for the letter. The sooner I take possession of it the better, that's certain! Ah! what is that?"

Tom heard a slight noise, and darted back into his place of concealment just in time.

Peering out cautiously, he saw a dusky figure approaching.

It was a man.

He was glancing around him with great keenness.

When he came fairly on the bridge he paused, and Tom King heard him mutter:

"That's the little game, is it? Well, I'll see if I can't spoil it, as sure as my name's Bishop. I'll keep an eye upon you, my lady—I shall know you again, never fear!"

Upon hearing these words, Tom King did indeed congratulate himself upon having got back to his hiding-place in good time.

He could see the new-comer now very plainly.

His dress proclaimed him to be a police officer.

It was indeed no other than the individual who had tried so unsuccessfully to capture Dick Turpin in the stable at Piccadilly.

"Confound the fellow!" Tom King said, mentally. "He has been following and watching that girl, and of course has seen her secrete the letter.

Tom said this, and endeavored to reconcile himself to it as a certainty, yet at the same time hoped that the contrary would prove to be the case.

Whatever suspense he may have felt in this respect was very quickly put an end to, for Bishop, the officer, said:

"I saw her with a letter—I'm sure I saw her with a letter, and she has hidden it somewhere on the bridge—under one of these loose stones, I expect."

From these words it became manifest that he had not been near enough to observe where the letter had really been placed.

But in a very matter-of-fact, business-like way he lifted the stones one after the other, looking carefully under every one before he replaced it.

All at once he uttered an ejaculation

The letter had been found.

"What shall I do now?" asked Tom King, of himself. "I must have that letter, and the question is which will be the best way to obtain it?"

This promised to be a very difficult problem, and its difficulty was increased owing to the fact that Tom King's attention was pretty fully occupied in watching the

movements of the officer, and this distraction prevented him from giving the subject proper consideration.

"I wonder what the letter is about?" was Bishop's next remark, as he seated himself upon the parapet of the bridge. "I ought to find out who it's addressed to, at any rate. Ha, ha! If it should turn out as I expect, I rather think I shall have you, Mr. Matthew Gale, clever as you think yourself! Ha, ha! I should catch you then nicely! Wait a bit!"

Bishop placed the letter carefully beside him, and then began fumbling in his pockets.

The first object he produced was from the skirt of his coat.

It was something dark looking, and afterwards proved to be one of those dark lanterns which all police officers made a point of carrying.

After a little delay the officer succeeded in lighting his lantern, for the wind blew rather strongly on the bridge, making this operation a matter of no small difficulty.

Then he said, in a satisfied tone, as a broad beam of light came shining through the lens:

"There, that will do nicely. Now to see the address on the letter. Really, I do believe this will turn out to be about the best night's work I have ever done!"

The letter was then placed so that the light of the lantern fell fully upon it.

Bishop uttered an exclamation of angry impatience.

"Confound his caution!" he cried. "But I might have expected as much—it's just like him. But I'll try my best to nail him, and so I'll see what the letter contains."

There could be no doubt that Bishop fully expected that he was about to make some very important discovery—indeed, he fairly believed that the communication he held in his hand was of such a character as to place old Matthew completely in his power.

A dreadful disappointment was in store for him, as the reader very well knows.

With much superfluous caution, the officer opened the letter and unfolded it.

"Hullo!" he cried. "What's this? Am I done after all? Is there nothing in it? There must be something surely; and yet perhaps this paper was only placed here to throw me off the right track. The girl may have gone on with the real letter, and by this time doubtless has delivered it."

This was such a dreadful idea that the officer felt almost inclined to fling himself backwards off the parapet of the bridge into the water below.

Indeed, in his state of intense aggravation, there is no knowing what he might have done, had not his eyes all at once lighted upon something in the letter.

"Ah!" he cried, "what's this?—something after all?"

He looked closely, and then perceived the figures that Matthew, in case of such a contingency as the present, had agreed to write.

"What does it mean?" asked Bishop, looking up and apparently addressing himself to the obscurity around him—"what does it mean? '9,' and then 21?' Who can make anything out of such a letter as that?"

Having asked this question, Bishop made a microscopic examination of the sheet of paper, the result of which was to convince him that nothing more than the figures had been written upon it.

Then he appeared to give himself up to deep reflection.

Tom King was full of exultation.

"Bravo, Matthew!" he exclaimed, mentally. "You are a clever fellow—indeed you are—a wonderfully clever fellow! 9 and 21! I shall not forget. That is all I want to know. Ha, ha! Mr. Bishop, you have been so sagacious actually as to outwit yourself."

Tom King's satisfaction is something to be imagined more than described.

"I'll be off now," he murmured. "I know all that I wish to learn, and, if I do not linger here, I shall have time, perhaps, for an adventure. No doubt I can steal away unheard and unperceived, and yet very likely if I stay here a little longer, Mr. Bishop will be good enough to take his departure."

Tom's attention was now particularly directed towards the officer, who by this time seemed to have reached a definite point in his reflections.

"I'll put the letter back again," he said, as he put his finger cunningly by the side of his nose—"that's what I'll do. I'll put it where I found it, and then I'll hide. Ha, ha! capital! That letter is put here for somebody who hasn't arrived yet, and if I stay here he won't approach. Who knows, it may be Dick Turpin who is coming, and if so, I'll have him, dead or alive—I don't care which of the two."

With these words, Bishop quitted his sitting position on the parapet of the bridge, and carefully placed the letter where he had found it.

"Now I'll hide," he muttered. "Let me see," he added, as he looked about him, "where will be the best place? Why, yonder buttress, of course! I should think it was made on purpose. I'll hide there, and wait patiently—yes, patiently, for in this instance I feel sure patience will meet with its due reward."

So saying, Mr. Bishop put his legs in motion.

From the direction in which he now made his way, it was evident the buttress he had decided upon as being a good hiding-place was the very one behind which Tom King had ensconced himself.

Immediately upon making this discovery, Tom King cautiously withdrew, and so well did he accomplish his difficult task that he got completely away without causing Bishop to have the remotest suspicion that any other human being save himself was near.

Tom King glided gradually away, but ere he had gone far an unexpected difficulty presented itself.

If Bishop should keep a sharp look-out—as beyond a doubt he would—Tom felt it would be next to an impossibility to make his way unseen to the spot where he had left his horse.

It is true he might have managed to get off without any danger of an encounter with the officer, but that was not what Tom wanted.

He was exceedingly anxious that Bishop should remain all night watching behind the buttress.

"I'll find some means of circumventing you yet," the highwayman said to himself, as he glanced back at the tenant of his late hiding-place. "You shall have no suspicion of my presence, and you shall have the comfort of a long watch in the cold till daylight. If all is quiet, he may even in his exceeding cleverness be fool enough to come here to-morrow night. I hope he does—it will keep him out of further mischief."

With these words Tom King set himself in motion again, and, as there was no longer so much need of silence in his movements, he made much more rapid progress.

He made a very considerable detour, and at length emerged upon the high-road at a spot rather less than half a mile from the bridge.

No sooner had he reached here, however, than he heard a sound upon the road which told him that a traveller of some kind or other was approaching.

"I don't like to pad the hoof," said Tom, to himself; "still, it would be a capital joke to do a bit of business while that highly-intelligent and astute officer, Bishop, was so close at hand."

CHAPTER CMXCVI.

TOM KING TAKES A PRIZE, AND BEFOOLS THE OLD MISER TO HIS HEART'S CONTENT, AND BISHOP, THE OFFICER, AS WELL.

To attempt to stop a traveller in such near proximity to a police officer seemed to be a needlessly daring and reckless experiment; but by the way in which Tom King produced his pistols, it became evident that he fully intended to carry his expressed resolution into effect.

"How wild old Bishop will be with himself," he muttered, "when he comes to know what has taken place. He will wish he had employed his time better than by watching on the bridge. Ha! the traveller is close at hand. I shall soon see whether I am to have anything worth while for my trouble."

Tom was right.

The traveller was indeed very close at hand.

On he came at a steady jog-trot pace, little thinking of the interruption he was so soon to meet with.

"Hold!" said Tom King, the next moment—"hold, I say! Pull up, on your life!"

He spoke in a suppressed tone, for he did not want his voice to travel far through the still night air.

So long as it reached the ears of the traveller and made a due impression upon him, that was all he required.

His command was obeyed.

"What is it—oh, what is it?"

The trembling tones of the voice and the appearance of the rider made Tom King aware that it was an aged man he had stopped.

He also saw that he presented the oddest figure he had ever seen.

His clothes were of the most tattered description, seeming here and there to hold together by nothing but a thread, while the animal he bestrode was a vicious-looking mule, that seemed to be quite as odd a character as its rider.

At a first glance, one would have come to the conclusion that this old man was miserably poor; but a more attentive observation, such as Tom King bestowed upon him, served to show that his poverty was more assumed than real.

Moreover, the highwayman's keen eyes detected that, upon being challenged, the old man suddenly clasped his hands over his breast, as though he had something of value secreted there.

In reply to his question, Tom King said:

"I want what money and valuables you may happen to have with you! Be quick—hand them over, for there is a police officer a little way up the road!"

The old man laughed a shrill, imbecile laugh.

"The idea now, that anyone should think of robbing a poor wretch like myself! Why, I am not worth a groat—absolutely not worth a groat! Let me pass on in peace, young man, otherwise I will raise my voice and summon the police officer you mentioned. Ha—ha!"

"If you did," replied Tom King, with a most menacing voice and gesture, "that cry would be your last! Before you had well finished uttering it the bullet in this pistol would clear a passage through your skull."

"Nay—nay, young man!" said the traveller, with increasing agitation and uneasiness. "Never mind threats, but allow me to pass on. I am poor—oh, so very, very poor!"

"That may be; and yet I am not going to allow you to proceed until I have thoroughly satisfied myself that you do not carry anything about you that I think worth taking."

The old man uttered a cry of dismay.

"No—no!" he exclaimed. "You are wrong—quite wrong!"

He would have pushed on, but Tom prevented him.

"Hark ye!" he said, "I am not inclined to stand any bother! Either you must give me what you have, or else I must search you; and, for your information, let me tell you that I never search a living person—I shoot them first, and then examine their pockets afterwards."

This threat greatly terrified the old man, who pressed his hands more tightly than ever upon his breast.

"I have nothing," he repeated—"absolutely nothing!"

"Then what is that you hold so tightly?"

"Hold so tightly?"

"Yes—I spoke plainly enough, did I not?"

"Well, then—a—it—it—is nothing!"

"False!" said Tom—"false!"

He had been watching the old man closely, and now availed himself of an opportunity to seize him by the breast of his apparel, for at the moment when he replied the old man had removed his hands

A loud yell was the result of this action.

Then a frantic but vain struggle.

Tom King felt something hard, and the next moment beheld in his hands a large leather bag so full of money that scarcely room was left to tie up the mouth.

"What do you call this?" said Tom King, as he flung the heavy bag in the air and dexterously caught it as it descended. "How could you sit there and proclaim such a monstrous falsehood?

But the old miser, for such indeed he was, suffered too much agony of spirit to be able to pay any attention to what the highwayman said.

"My gold!" he said—"my gold! Give me back my precious treasure! It has cost me years and years to amass it, and many a sleepless night to guard it. Oh, if I had only taken the landlord's advice and stopped at his inn all night, this would not have happened! Oh, my gold—my gold! What now will become of me?"

The apparently old man—for he was not old in reality, but merely aged with penury and anxiety of mind—fairly wept over his loss like a little child.

But the spectacle of so much avarice raised no feelings of compunction in Tom's breast. He believed that he was really doing the poor wretch a service by despoiling him

"Ilde on!" he said, "or if you linger I may be tempted to make a further search about your person, and then I doubt not I shall discover some other hoard. Feel thankful that I have let you off so easily, for your avarice and lying deceit disgust me!"

Mournfully and sadly the old miser set his mule in motion.

Tom King gazed after him with mingled feelings, but ere he had gone many yards a fresh thought entered Tom's mind, and acting impulsively upon it, he said:

"Stop—stop, my friend! I want to speak to you! I have something of importance to say—something that will very likely turn out to your advantage."

Hearing these words, the old man, after a little hesitation, pulled up.

"If you like to render me a little service," cried Tom King, a wicked smile playing round his lips the while, which the old man, owing to the darkness, could not see—"if you are willing to do what I require, I will, by way of recompense, give you back the bag of gold I have just taken from you."

"What—what is that you say?"

"You are incredulous; but, believe me, I am quite in earnest."

"What is it, then, you want me to do?—some fearful crime, perhaps? What is it that I can do to be worth so great a sum?"

"I place a different value upon money to what you do. But, in a word, are you willing to undertake this service?"

"What is it?"

"Listen, and I will tell you."

The miser leaned forward eagerly.

"A little further on along the road you will come to an old stone bridge that crosses the river Brent."

"Yes—yes, I know it well."

"Attend, then. Under one of the loose stones upon the parapet there is a letter. I want you to go there, fetch it, and bring it to me."

"And is this all?" asked the miser, in tones of wonder. "Would you pay so much for this slight service?"

"I have said so."

"Then—then——"

"Then what?"

"There must be some special and hidden danger connected with it?"

Tom nodded.

"There most certainly is," he replied.

"But let me know its nature."

"I am quite willing. You must know, then, that I have good reason to believe that the bridge is well watched by police officers, who are on the look-out to capture me. The letter contains the description of the place where a comrade of mine has hidden a vast treasure."

"Treasure, say you?" for the old man's faculties became, if possible, doubly sharpened by the pronunciation of this word.

"Yes, treasure! You understand, my comrade buried it, then wrote down a description of the place, and left it beneath the stone."

"Then why not fetch it?"

"Because if I venture to go near, the officers will seize me, while of you they will have no suspicion whatever. You can take up the letter, bring it back to me, and when you do I promise faithfully to return you your bag of gold."

The old miser's eyes sparkled brightly.

"It is a bargain," he cried—"it is a bargain!"

"I am glad to hear it," said Tom. "Set forward now, at once."

"And where shall I find you?"

"I will sit down here upon this old milestone, and wait patiently for your return."

"Good—good! Do not stir."

"I will not, depend upon it. Be quick!"

"I will; and if you do not stir I shall be sure to be able to find you."

The old miser, without another word, urged his mule forward at the best speed it was capable of making, which was not very rapid.

Tom King watched him for some moments.

He observed the old man frequently and anxiously look round, in order to be sure that Tom had not stirred.

The latter waited until a turn in the roadway hid him from his sight.

Then he sprang from his feet.

"If events turn out as I believe they will," he exclaimed, "you will be taught a lesson you will never forget to your dying day—perhaps it may cure you of your insatiable avarice—and it is pretty sure to make a fool of clever Mr. Bishop."

Having uttered these words half aloud, Tom sprang lightly over the low hedge that bordered the high-road.

He alighted upon the soft turf of a meadow, and then, crouching down, he ran along at a rapid rate.

He did not keep altogether under the shadow of the hedge, but left it some distance on his left.

By doing this, he cut off the curve of the high-road.

Having gone some distance in a straight line, he reached the hedge, and waited there a moment, partly to recover his spent breath and partly to listen.

He then discovered that he had outstripped the old miser, who came jogging along and muttering all the time.

"Yes—yes," Tom overheard him say, "I can see my way clearly now in all I have to do. Yes—yes, beyond all doubt this will turn out a good night's work for me. What a shallow fool he must be. Let me consider now how I shall act. I will, first of all, obtain possession of this letter he speaks of—I will secure it. Fool—fool, to let me know that it contained such priceless information! Then, having done that, I will find out the officers who are lurking near, and tell them where the rascal can be found. Yes, yes—that will be it. They will make their way round to him by the meadows, and pounce out upon him. Yes, yes—of course; and if necessary, I can hold him in conversation. I shall then get my share of the reward—perhaps recover possession of what he has robbed me of, and—then—then afterwards," he added, in shrill tones, "I will repair to this secret spot, and obtain possession of the buried treasure!"

Either he had brought all his arrangements to a satisfactory termination, or else the prospect of obtaining the buried treasure overpowered him to such a degree that he could only muse upon it, not speak, for having said so much he became silent.

"Just what I expected," said Tom, mentally, "though I scarcely thought I should obtain so good an insight into your plans. It will be a lesson for you, old man, and one which you richly deserve."

With these words, Tom King continued to make his way forward, though this time with more caution.

He was as anxious to get as close to the bridge as he could without being perceived, in order that he might be an observer of the scene that was about to be enacted.

To this end, he followed in the footsteps of the old miser, whose mule went at his steady jog-trot on to the bridge.

Oh, how Tom laughed and chuckled to himself!

The old miser had comprehended very well whereabouts the letter had been hidden.

So well that the first stone he raised proved to have the letter beneath it.

He seized the precious paper with a frantic gesture of delight.

But his feelings were destined to undergo a thorough alteration.

Bishop, the officer, had watched the old man seize the letter with almost as much extravagant delight as the old miser himself had experienced.

Like some wild beast that had been long and patiently awaiting the coming of its prey, he bounded out of his hiding-place and seized the miser by the back of the neck with a grip so powerful that it forced him to utter a loud yell of surprise and fear.

Bishop nothing doubted that he had got one of the highwaymen in his grasp, who had thus disguised himself in order to avoid recognition.

It was a very probable supposition indeed for him to make.

"Release me!" said the old man, speaking with a difficulty—"release me, I say!"

"Oh yes! of course I shall—you may depend I shall do that! Is there anything else in a trifling way you would like? If so, speak out—don't be bashful, pray!"

Bishop was so delighted that he grew quite facetious.

"You make a mistake in seizing me!" whined the miser. "I am no highwayman!"

"Very likely not; but I intend to take you whether you are or not—so surrender, and let us have no more fuss!"

The miser groaned.

"Ay, groan away!" cried Bishop, in great exultation. "You feel very bad, I daresay; but you will feel worse before long! Short work will be made of you, that I can promise you!"

"I am a wretched man!"

"No doubt of it."

"I am lost—lost!"

"Not a bit of it, my spark; it rather strikes me you're found! Ha, ha!"

At which stroke of wit Bishop laughed so heartily that he almost released his hold upon the miser's collar.

"Get your lantern," cried the latter, at length—"get your lantern, I say, and look in my face! You will see then that you have made a mistake—a great mistake! You will find I am not the man you take me for!"

By this time Bishop's excitement had abated somewhat, and consequently, being calmer, the old man's peculiar, shrill voice falling upon his ears, made him feel cold and clammy with a dreadful doubt.

Surely such a voice as that was not simulated.

In his nervous agitation, he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew forth his lantern.

Is was still burning.

With an unsteady hand, he directed the light upon the old miser's countenance.

The very first glance at the pinched features and attenuated form convinced him that it was no highwayman he held in his grasp.

With a sigh of bitter disappointment, he restored his lantern to his pocket.

"If you are not actually one of the accursed lot," he cried, wrathfully, "you are one of their agents, and being such, I will take good care that you receive in full the punishment which the law awards. Come with me—you are my prisoner! If you resist, it will be all the worse for you!"

"Mr. Officer!" said the miser, earnestly—so earnestly that Bishop felt constrained to pause and say:

"Well?"

"You are laboring under a great mistake. I am not indeed the man you take me for; but I assure you I know where he is, and if you will only listen to what I have to say, I will make a clean breast of all, and take you to where he is now awaiting my return."

"Cut along then," said Bishop, "and be quick!"

CHAPTER CMXCVII.

IN WHICH TOM KING GETS HIMSELF INTO SERIOUS TROUBLE.

"PATIENCE!" said the old man—"patience, and I will tell you. But I am old and I am frightened well-nigh out of my life."

"Well, go on, can't you?" interrupted Bishop, angrily. "Don't let us have so much of your palaver!"

"As I was journeying along the road, I was stopped by a man who, with many fearful oaths, despoiled me of my purse and threatened to deprive me of my life."

"Where was this?"

"A few hundred yards off, down the road."

Bishop ground his teeth savagely.

"But at last," resumed the old man, "he promised to return me all he had taken from me if I would only undertake to render him a service. I asked him what it was, and he told me merely to fetch this letter, which he stated I should find hidden under one of the stones on the parapet of the bridge."

"Well, what then?" asked Bishop, in a suspicious tone.

"I agreed, and you seized me."

"And what arrangement did you make about the delivery of this letter?"



[THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN IN WAIT FOR THE PRISONERS' VAN.]

"I will tell you. The robber promised to remain seated on a milestone about half a mile hence, where I left him, until I came back. Then I was to give up the letter in exchange for the purse."

Having heard this much, Bishop for several moments gave himself up to deep reflection.

At last, in a wrathful voice, he said:

"Old man, I believe you to be neither more nor less than an infernal liar!"

"I'll swear I speak the truth!"

"I don't doubt but what you would swear to anything. Of one thing I am certain: If you are not actually one of the men I am so anxious to capture you are at least one of their accomplices. Don't deny it, for to prove you I will walk quietly down the road with you to the milestone you mention, and if there is no one there I shall haul you off to jail, you may depend upon that!"

The old man wrung his hands in despair

"I am lost and undone!" he said.

"Why—why? What is the matter now? Does your heart begin to fail you?"

"No—no! I will swear by all that is sacred I speak nothing but the truth!"

"Come on, then! Why do you object that your words should be proved?"

"Because," replied the miser, "he will beyond a doubt be on the look-out, and when he finds I am returning with some one in my company he will conclude at once that I have betrayed him, and be off!"

This struck Bishop as being a very reasonable remark, for in spite of all he had said to the contrary, he could not help thinking that the old miser was telling him the truth.

"Look here," he said, abruptly; "I will deprive you of even that excuse. I will go on the other side of the hedge and creep cautiously along under cover of it. Be

will know nothing of my presence then. But if you attempt to escape! will put a stop to you by firing a bullet after you!"

"You have no occasion for such threats. It is not my intention to play you false."

"We shall soon see about that. Start on!"

"Yes, the sooner the better. The delay that has already taken place may make him suspicious."

Bishop just glanced at his pistols as he walked off the bridge.

Then forcing his way through a prickly hedge at the expense of his skin and clothing, he said:

"Ride on, old man, and beware how you attempt to play false with me."

The miser complied.

Tom King had been a witness of this scene with the most unbounded delight.

"Clever Mr. Bishop!" he said, as he emerged from his place of concealment. "You have overreached yourself this time and no mistake, and so have you, old man. Your covetousness will meet with its due reward, and I hope it will be the means of teaching you a lesson."

As the coast was now quite clear of his foes, Tom King, in the most leisurely manner possible, made his way to the spot where he had left his horse.

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Bishop, for being so kind as to take yourself out of the way just at the time to suit me. I am very much obliged indeed!"

Tom found his horse in perfect safety.

He mounted and rode up on to the bridge.

By the time he reached it he could hear sounds of contention in the distance.

"They have failed to find me, I suppose. Well, here goes for something to bewilder them a little more, and after that I will be off!"

With these words, Tom King discharged two pistols in rapid succession.

The reports rang out clearly and sharply upon the still night air, and were doubtless heard far and wide

The explosion of the gunpowder produced a momentary illumination.

After that a double darkness seemed to reign.

Tom King's object was to puzzle the police officer and the miser, and there can be no doubt but that he fully succeeded.

Of course he did not wait to hear the result, but at once rode off towards London.

He did not for long continue in this direction, for the night was already far gone—so far that it became time for him to think about making his course towards the ruined castle.

Yet he felt unwilling to make his way back there exactly until he had tried his hand at another adventure.

But as he continued to ride on he found the roads were completely deserted.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed, as he pulled up at length at a spot where three roads diverged. "I wonder which will be the best way for me to take?"

He had nothing whatever to guide him in making his selection, and while he sat there debating, he was suddenly startled by a violent downpour of rain.

At first he could not make out what was the matter, the storm came on with so much suddenness.

The hard pelting of the hailstones, which were of unusual size, soon made him conscious that the pleasantest thing would be to seek out some place of shelter.

The question was, where would this be found?

He took the road before him at a venture, and soon discovered that his choice was a wise one, for directly he passed round a bend that was a few yards off he came in sight of a small public-house.

The sign that swung upon the post outside the door was creaking most dismally as the force of the wind compelled it to swing backwards and forwards with more than usual violence.

The exterior of the inn was completely dark, as though the inhabitants had long since retired to rest; but in despite of this, Tom King determined to make an effort to get shelter from the storm, the violence of which increased rather than abated.

"Hilloa — hilloa!" he shouted. "House — house! Hilloa!—house! Open—open!"

His words were echoed by a loud cry as if of execration, and immediately afterwards a man appeared, who seemed to spring up out of the darkness so quickly that it was impossible to say from whence he came.

Nor was he much less speedy in disappearing, for he dashed past Tom King and forced his way through the hedgerow on the opposite side of the way.

He was gone almost before Tom King was thoroughly cognisant of his presence.

But the highwayman noticed that as he fled some rather heavy objects appeared to fall upon the ground.

To attempt to pursue this man was perfectly useless; moreover, Tom had no particular motive to do so.

But he could not resist the temptation of springing off his horse and looking to see what the man had dropped in his hasty flight.

The first thing Tom's hand came in contact with as he groped along the ground was a bag, which by its feel evidently contained money.

Tom King weighed it in his hand, then complacently consigned it to his pocket.

A few steps further on he found another bag of similar appearance; and perhaps there might have been another still further on, but he did not stop to look, for just then doors and windows were suddenly thrown open, showing that the inhabitants of the inn were thoroughly aroused.

Tom King advanced, leading his horse by the bridle.

"I want shelter from this storm," he said. "Can I have it, and can you put my horse under cover until the fury of it is past?"

"Yes, sir—yes—yes—certainly!"

At this moment loud sounds as of a great disturbance taking place within came upon their ears.

"I rather think," said Tom King, "that you have been robbed, for just as I pulled up before the door a man ran away at full speed, breaking his way through the hedge yonder."

"Thieves—thieves!" cried a loud voice at this moment—"thieves—thieves! I have been robbed! Call the police! Thieves—thieves!"

In front of the inn there was a large old-fashioned, overhanging porch, upon the trellis-work of which there grew in summer time quite a profusion of leaves, and it was under this that Tom had stood while these few words passed between him and the landlord.

The porch was quite large enough to shelter his horse, so Tom, without more ado, secured the reins to a ring in the doorpost.

Upon hearing these words from Tom King, and upon hearing the alarming cries in the house, the landlord stood struck with consternation.

Lights could now be seen approaching, and directly afterwards a throng of excited persons appeared in the entrance-passage of the inn.

Foremost was a tall, thin, wiry man, attired in a very singular-looking dressing-gown.

He sprang forward and clutched the landlord by the throat.

"Wretch—rascal! Do you hear what I say? But this is all your work! I might have guessed it when you showed yourself so anxious that I should stay here all night. You preached well about the dangers of the road but you said nothing about the dangers of this d—nable inn, curse you!"

"I protest," said the landlord, speaking with some difficulty, for the traveller's clutch upon his throat was a very tight one—"I protest I am quite innocent in the matter!"

"D—n you, yes—of course you are!"

"I am sure I am; and if you ask this gentleman he will tell you all—that just when he rode up he saw a man ride away."

"Yes, yes—it's all very well managed indeed! But let me tell you I can see a hole through a ladder before anyone knocks a round out. This is part of your plan Gentleman, forsooth!—more likely the robber!"

"You are heated," said Tom King, "and I excuse you for you are speaking quite at random. What I tell you is no more than the truth."

"Of course not—I know all about that, very well. Let me tell you I've seen a thing or two, and you won't impose upon me very easily."

"If you want to find the man who robbed you, just push through that gap in yonder hedge—that is the way he took."

"Wouldn't you like it? A light—a light! D—n it all, won't you give me a light? I will just have a look at this fly-by-night's face! What respectable traveller would be abroad at this hour? I may recognise him, for aught I know."

Upon hearing this, Tom King, as may be expected, felt anything but comfortable.

He wished to escape observation as much as possible, but, if the traveller did not happen to recognise him, perhaps when the light of a candle fell full upon his features some of the others would.

It was a very serious risk indeed, and Tom glanced around him without seeing any means by which he could avoid it.

During this conversation, he had been gradually surrounded and hemmed in by the various inmates of the inn, and to such an extent did they now press upon him that he could not possibly beat a rapid retreat.

A candle was quickly thrust into the traveller's hand.

He held it in such a manner that its rays fell full upon Tom's features.

"Ha!" he yelled, in a furious voice. "This is just what I expected! Now, then, to prove whether you are good men and true, or whether you are all rascally accomplices of this execrable wretch! Assist me to take him prisoner!" he cried, as he sprang at Tom, and fastened on his throat like a tiger.

"But who is it? What has he done?" cried all, in chorus.

"Done?—what hasn't he done? Why, he has robbed me to-night, and many another before me! But his time is up! This is Tom King, the highwayman! I will swear to it! I say again, this is Tom King the highwayman!"

CHAPTER CMXCVIII.

RELATES TOM KING'S ADVENTURES WITH THE TRAVELLER AT THE INN.

In anticipating the worst, Tom King had hardly thought that the stranger would have recognised him so readily, therefore our old friend was taken somewhat by surprise.

The feeling passed away so quickly, however, that not one of those who were present could have told that it had existence.

The people in the inn crowded closer and closer.

Tom's first act was to free himself from the stranger's grasp, a feat which apparently he performed with the greatest ease.

"Your loss has turned your brain, sir," he said, in a cold and haughty tone of voice, "and you may think yourself fortunate that I have not as sudden and hasty a temper as yourself, otherwise——"

Tom did not trouble himself to finish the sentence—the significant look with which he accompanied the words rendering it quite unnecessary.

All traces of his early life and training had not become extinct in Tom King. In spite of his continual attempts to disguise his nature, there were times when the true gentlemanly bearing would peep forth and show itself.

The present was one of them.

His manner caused the traveller for a moment to recoil, wondering whether he was a victim to a complete delusion of the senses.

But he quickly recovered himself, and, with a passionate exclamation, sprang forward again.

But this time Tom King was prepared for him, and stopped him.

"Keep your hands off!" he roared—"keep your hands off, or I shall lose all control over my temper!"

The stranger was awed.

Nevertheless, he cried out:

"I declare this is Tom King, the highwayman! I declare he has robbed me! If his pockets were searched, you would find my money upon him!"

This was true enough, and it seemed to be quite a problem how Tom would get out of his awkward position.

But Tom, with his ready mind, had thoroughly comprehended his situation, and, what was more, had resolved what to do.

"It is generally a hopeless task to attempt to reason with a man in your condition, but, if you like to step with me into any of these adjoining rooms, I will quickly give you a proof that you never made a greater mistake in all your life"

"Why not give the proof now?"

"Simply because I do not choose to do so, and, if you hesitate a moment longer, I shall refuse to satisfy you at all—mark that!"

Tom King's cool, collected, haughty bearing produced an immense effect upon the stranger.

Although it seemed against his inclination, he could not resist compliance.

Pushing open the door nearest to him, he strode into the chamber beyond.

Tom followed.

"Close the door," he said, as he entered, "and lock it as well."

"What for?"

"In order to guard against interruption; and, if you are still demented enough to persist in your belief, it will be a means of preventing my escape."

Whichever of these reasons it happened to be which weighed with the stranger does not matter; but he obeyed Tom's order, closing and locking the door.

Then, turning round, he said:

"Now, sir, as I have complied with all your demands, let me request you to be quick."

Tom King approached very closely.

Strangely enough, the traveller's suspicions were not at all excited.

But with the suddenness of lightning, Tom seized the stranger by the throat, at the same time that he thrust a pistol roughly into his mouth.

"A word," he murmured—"a syllable above a whisper, and your brains will be scattered round this room!"

The stranger turned pale, and was silent.

Much of his excitement had abated.

"Make no mistake," said Tom King—"I am indeed what you declared me to be; and your position just at the present moment is one of great danger, though perhaps you may not realise it. If you know anything of me, you will be certain that I shall be as good as my word in this affair."

Evidently the stranger thought so, for he neither offered to speak nor to make the slightest movement.

The knowledge that the muzzle of a cocked pistol was between his teeth, and that its trigger was encircled by Tom's finger overawed him.

"You might have known that single-handed you could be no match for me. You do not take into account that when a man is fighting for his life he would do that from which all others not so circumstanced would naturally shrink. I could have escaped without this trouble, but I did not want a hue and cry at my heels—do you understand?"

The traveller nodded, to show that he thoroughly comprehended.

"Then," said Tom King, "you will have to submit to be bound and gagged. When I know you are safe I shall take my departure from the inn. You will not suffer the inconvenience long—the people here will soon peep in upon you."

"But my money?" the traveller managed to summon up courage enough to mutter.

"I tell you the truth concerning it," replied Tom King, "and you may believe me or not, just as you like: I am quite indifferent upon the point. Once more I repeat that when I rode up to the front door a man hastily started up and ran away; I have not the least doubt that he was the robber."

"Then have pity upon me," said the traveller, in a husky voice, "for I assure you I am a worthy object of commiseration. The money and valuables I have lost represent a very large sum indeed. Had the amount been my own, I could have borne my loss with more patience; but, unfortunately, I only held it in trust for another In fact, sir, as you have kindly taken away the pistol, I assure you that I am neither more nor less than a commercial traveller, and the goods I carry with me consist of watches, rings, and other such articles—very valuable, and all lying in a small space. To-night, at this accursed inn, I have lost all. I question whether I shall ever recover a fraction."

Tom was silent. He was interested in what the traveller was stating; but he kept a sharp eye upon him, and waited to hear more.

"My master," continued the commercial traveller, "is a Jew, and as I don't happen to be of his religion he will have no mercy upon me. I am a ruined man; and when I make known my loss, what will become of my poor wife and children I know not. And yet, in what way am I to blame, except that the violence of the weather—which I ought to have disregarded—made me comply with the urgent solicitations of the landlord to remain all night at this place."

"I do not see that you are to blame," replied Tom King, for the great distress which the traveller manifested touched him to the heart.

But his words produced no consoling effect.

"Go," said the traveller—"go! I will do nothing to hinder your departure—I will not say one syllable. I will take your word that you have had no hand in robbing me of what I have lost."

He sank down upon a seat while he spoke, and bowing down his head, covered his face with his hands.

Tom King moved slowly towards the door; but when within a few paces of it he paused, and stood irresolute.

The traveller appeared to be unconscious of everything.

Tom King did not feel quite at his ease, and while he continued to gaze upon the sorrowing form he felt less and less so.

The traveller had acquitted him of all share in the robbery; but this was wrong, and Tom felt it to be so.

Then a struggle began in his breast.

Should he give up the two bags of money he had picked up? Surely that would be better than taking them away.

Thinking so, Tom King turned round with the intention of restoring them; but all at once he thought how strange it would be for them to be found in his possession, for the stranger had stated his disbelief that Tom had had any hand in the robbery, and our friend had not denied it.

Quickly he thought of a means by which he could relieve himself of his embarrassment.

Taking from his pocket the money he had obtained from the miser, he exclaimed:

"Look, sir—to show you there is such a thing sometimes as good returned for evil, I give you this money. Take it, and never mind troubling yourself to utter thanks; you are heartily welcome. Not a word! I am off."

The traveller took with trembling hands the wealth that was so unexpectedly offered him.

But he was not going to allow Tom to depart so easily.

Springing up, he caught him by the hands, and in a broken voice, poured out his thanks.

So firm was his grasp that Tom felt himself unable to shake it off without doing so roughly.

At length the traveller, completely overcome by what had taken place, burst into tears.

Tom took this opportunity to break away from him.

But ere he left the room he exclaimed:

"I have good reason to think the robber was disturbed, and that in his hasty flight he dropped some portion of his booty, which he did not dare stop to pick up. He broke through the gap in the hedge yonder, so you will have no difficulty in getting upon his track."

With these last words, Tom King passed hastily through the doorway

Just outside he encountered the landlord and the other inmates of the inn, who doubtless had been eager listeners to what few chance words happened to fall upon their ears.

They regarded Tom King distrustfully.

But the highwayman took not the least notice of this, apparently but said, with admirable coolness:

"The storm is well over now, I think. Good night, gentlemen. I think if you go in yonder room you will find that I have succeeded in satisfying the gentleman that he was laboring under a most extraordinary delusion.

There was a general move in the direction of the room the traveller occupied.

Tom took advantage of it.

Passing out quickly, he sprang into the saddle, and rode rapidly away.

The storm was indeed fairly over, but a soft and gentle summer rain was falling.

This Tom paid no attention to—in fact, he found the cool sprinkling drops rather agreeable than otherwise.

He was not in the mood for any further adventures that night, so turned his horse's head at once in the direction of the ruins.

Fortunate it was that he did do so, for although he made quite as much speed as he well could without distressing his horse, daylight was very close at hand indeed when he arrived.

He found Dick Turpin waiting for him at the usual spot amid the ruins, and quickly learned that the captain had yielded to Maud's persuasions, and had remained there all the night.

Dick was very anxious about the letter.

"Did you get it?" he asked.

"I did not. But yet I was made acquainted with the contents; but the circumstances were so very strange that I will relate them to you at full length."

"Satisfy me first," said Dick, "what time they start."

"At nine o'clock."

"In the morning?"

"I suppose so."

"And the day?"

"The twenty-first."

"Two days hence," said Turpin, musingly. "That will give us time to mature all our plans and make every preparation. There is only one thing that I am afraid of."

"What is that, captain?"

"Why, starting at so early an hour in the morning, I am afraid they will reach their destination by daylight, in which case the difficulties of our task would be increased tenfold."

"Yet they must be overcome."

"Yes, as you say, they must be overcome; and, between now and the time mentioned, we shall have ample opportunities for consideration."

"We shall. But where are Claude and Jack?"

"Not returned."

"Not returned?"

"No—I have seen nothing of them since they left last night—or, rather, the night before last, for it is fairly morning now."

"It is. I sadly fear——"

"That something serious has happened to them?"

"I do indeed."

"That, also, is my fear. Still, a little time must elapse between now and daylight. Let us hope that they will return."

Tom did not say a word in reply, for his mind was full of uneasiness on account of his absent comrades.

He shifted his position to a place where he was able to obtain a more extensive view of the way by which they would be likely to approach, and looked out anxiously.

But he was unable to see anything of them.

Dick placed himself by his old companion's side, and immediately afterwards they were joined by Maud.

She needed only to give one glance at their countenances to see that their minds were greatly troubled.

"What is it?" she asked—"oh, what is it?"

Her tones were filled with alarm.

"Nothing—nothing serious—that is, at present."

"But tell me!"

"It is a dread."

"Caused by the long-continued absence of Claude and Jack?"

"Yes, Maud, that is it. When they did not return yesterday morning I thought but little of it, believing that they had got too far away to be able to return without the risk of being seen. But if that supposition had been correct, they would have been here soon after midnight."

"Yes, that was the arrangement," said Tom King.

"Then," exclaimed Maud, in much anxiety, "you justly dread that some serious accident has befallen them?"

Dick was silent, but Tom King said:

"Certainly, our uneasiness ought to abate when we think

how well competent both are to take care of themselves, and how often they have got themselves out of difficult situations."

But Dick Turpin appeared to derive but little consolation from this reflection.

As minute after minute passed away, the gloom upon Dick Turpin's countenance settled and deepened while Maud's features soon became the reflex of his own

And thus they stood and watched for the coming of the absent ones, and while thus engaged and a prey to all manner of anxious doubts and fears, we will go back and endeavor to explain the mystery of their long absence.

It will be recollected that Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack both set off together with no other object before them than that of obtaining an additional amount of money to be placed along with that they had already in their possession.

The purpose for which this money was destined we need scarcely inform the reader was to enable Tom Davis and his relations to quit England, and find them in such means as would enable them to live in tolerable comfort and independence abroad.

Whether the highwaymen were ever destined to acnieve this important purpose time alone can show, but, as we have said, we will in the meantime follow the fortunes of Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, on whose behalf it is hoped the reader feels the same amount of anxiousness as their companions in the ruins.

CHAPTER CMXCIX.

IN WHICH CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SEEK FRESH GROUND FOR THEIR ADVENTURES.

We go back, then, to the time when they took their departure.

For some considerable period, the highwaymen rode onward without pausing. This was for a double reason. They did not wish to make an attack too near their present abiding-place, and, what was still more cogent, they did not meet with anyone, so they were not assailed by temptation.

"The roads seem empty enough to-night, Claude," said Sixteen-String Jack—"at present by no means promising for our expedition."

"You are right," was the reply. "Do you know what I have just been thinking?"

"No."

"Well, then, I will tell you. It is that for once in a way we quit the highway and try our fortune in some of the by-lanes, or cross-country roads."

"But why?"

"Because it is so generally known how much the high-roads are, and therefore I fancy people are in the habit of making their way from place to place by other routes, less frequented in a general way, and therefore by them considered as safer."

Sixteen-String Jack reined-in his steed as he said:

"Claude, my friend, there is a very great deal of truth in what you say, depend upon it; I wonder we have not thought of that before."

"Well, it is all in good time."

"So it is."

"Are you agreed, then, that we shall turn down the next narrow turning we come to?"

"Yes—quite."

"Forward, then."

At a more gentle rate of speed than before, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack took their way along the high-road.

Ere they had gone far, they came upon the entrance of one of those picturesque, leafy lanes that form so characteristic a feature in English scenery.

So densely overgrown was it that had the highwaymen been journeying along more rapidly they would in all probability have passed it unperceived.

"Here we are, then," said Claude, changing the direction of his horse's head.

Sixteen-String Jack followed his example.

It was intensely dark; but after going about thirty yards, the trees on each side by no means grew so thickly, so that it was much lighter in consequence.

They pushed on for nearly a mile at a tolerable speed, then they paused, in order to allow their horses to ascend a hill.

It was not that this hill was so very steep, but the ground underfoot was very miry, and as the soil was of a clayey character it clung almost as heavily to the horses' hoofs as new-ploughed land would have done.

"There is one thing about these lanes, Claude," said Jack, "if their condition in a general way is at all like this, they must be very unpleasant to travel over."

"You are right there; but people afraid of losing their purses would consider it of minor importance, I expect."

Just then the summit of the hill was reached, and at the same moment Sixteen-String Jack, with a slight exclamation, drew his horse close to one side of the lane, in order to be shadowed by the hedgerows.

"There is some vehicle below us, Claude, toiling up the hill. Draw aside, or we shall be seen"

Claude lost not a second in complying with this hastily-uttered injunction, and from the secure position he occupied, proceeded to reconnoitre.

He quickly made out the character of the approaching vehicle.

"Why, as I live, Jack, it is nothing more than a clumsy old waggon! Push on once more. The driver in all probability is fast asleep, and therefore will not heed us."

"Gently!" said Jack. "Do you know in all probability we shall find a booty in that waggon well worth our taking?"

"What makes you think so?"

"You must be aware that there are many who, whenever they can, adopt such a conveyance as this in preference to the stage-coach, because it costs much less money, and, by the rule you have just been mentioning, people travelling with valuable property may be riding in this waggon, being under the impression that by so doing they were running a much better chance of security."

"That is, if this waggon should happen to be empty."

"Of course; and as there will be little trouble to ascertain, I propose that we ride on."

"Why not wait till the waggon reaches the top of the hill?"

"We can stop it more easily where it is. Come on!"

No second bidding was needed, and so, at a smart trot, the highwaymen made the descent of the hill.

Reaching the waggon, Claude Duval cried, in a stentorian tone:

"Stop! Confound you, stop! Are you asleep that you can't see the toll-gate? Stop, I say—I want the toll!"

The driver was really asleep when Claude spoke. He knew from experience that his horses were well enough acquainted with the road to make their way to their destination by their own instinct.

But Claude's words bothered the driver completely.

Although he had been awakened so suddenly, yet he seemed to know just whereabouts he was, therefore he gazed about him with the most perfect bewilderment.

"Toll-gaate?" he drawled, in a strong provincial dialect. "There's ne'er a toll-gaate here, mun, nor never was. Get out—you're drunk! Come up, captain!"

The last words were addressed to the leading horse, who beyond shaking his ears lazily made no movement.

"Come," said Claude, "let us have no more nonsense. There's a toll-gate on this or any other road whenever we feel inclined to set one up. Keep still and quiet as you value your life."

"Highwaymen by Gom!" ejaculated the waggoner.

"Yes, depend upon that."

A chorus of screams came at this moment from the interior of the vehicle, at once letting our friends know that it carried a living freight.

"Take care of the front, Jack, and just let me have the pleasure of looking after those inside."

Sixteen-String Jack complied without any hesitation, and Claude Duval rode direct to the back part of the waggon.

As usual, the interior of the vehicle was concealed from view by means of two huge canvas flaps, but Claude very quickly drew these on one side.

The interior of the waggon was then dimly revealed to him—the illumination, such as it was, proceeding from

a small oil lamp that was flickering as though at the point of extinction at the upper end of the waggon.

At the first glance Claude Duval saw that the vehicle contained several persons of both sexes.

But it would appear that he was even more distinctly beheld by the occupants of the waggon, for immediately upon his appearance there arose a general cry of dismay, while one fearfully stout old lady went right off into a faint at once, falling rather heavily upon the person who sat next to her.

As soon as ever he had a chance of making himself heard, Claude Duval spoke.

Taking off his hat and making a very deep and respectful bow, he said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I beg you will not be under the least alarm: there is not the slightest occasion for it—that is, unless you wilfully bring danger upon yourselves, and I hope you have all too much sense to think of doing that."

"Since you are so d—nably polite," said a voice at the further end of the waggon, "perhaps you will be kind enough to inform us why we are thus stopped and hindered in our journey?"

"I have no objection whatever," replied Claude. "In fact, that was just what I was about to inform you when you spoke."

"What is it, then?"

"To levy a contribution upon you—not for any charitable purpose, mind—so please be generous. You will comprehend the facts of the case immediately when I inform you that this is a portion of my dominions, and it is always a custom for persons passing to pay tribute. That is my business on the present occasion, ladies and gentlemen, and I hope you will not delay me any longer than you can help."

Claude said all this in such a calm, matter-of-fact manner, that the people in the waggon looked at each other in perfect bewilderment.

"It's a d—d odd thing," said the voice which had previously spoken, "but I have travelled this way for many a year and never before heard of anything of the sort!"

"That may be," said Claude. "But as you are doubtless anxious to resume your journey, and as I am not desirous of losing any more time, I should be glad if you would at once begin to make a display of your liberality. Here, take my hat and pass it round—it will serve admirably well to receive donations."

But the person to whom he offered the hat refused to take it.

"Confound it, ma'am!" cried the individual upon whom a fainting female had chanced to fall, and who had been making frantic but unavailing efforts to restore her to consciousness. "Confound it, ma'am, wake up! You lie on a fellow just like a ton weight!"

There was a general laugh at this.

Claude Duval even joined in the merriment.

The incident was a most ludicrous one; the female was truly of Herculean dimensions, while the unhappy wight upon whom she had fallen was one of those little men who cannot be better or more forcibly described than by the word insignificant.

But his words were paid no attention to by his burden.

He strove at first to lift her up, but he might just as well have tried to lift up a house.

Then he endeavored to wriggle himself from underneath her, but in this second attempt he succeeded no better than in the first, so, with a sigh of despair, he was obliged to resign himself to his situation, being about as helpless as a worm under a stone.

"It seems to me," said another person who had not as yet spoken—"it seems to me that all this foolery means neither more nor less than highway robbery."

Claude assented by a bow and a smile

"Highway robbery!" cried a shrill female voice. "Highway robbery! Do you hear that, Captain Septimus Smith, or have you turned deaf all of a sudden?"

"I hear it plain enough, ma'am—a d—d deal too plain!" said the first speaker, who, as it would appear, rejoiced in the name and title of Captain Septimus Smith.

"Then in that case, sir," said the lady, addressing him with still greater asperity of tone—"in that case, why don't you give us the opportunity of witnessing a little of your prowess? You were telling us all a little while ago what you should do in such a case as this. Why don't you blow the robber's brains out at once? I would pretty quick, if I only happened to be a man!"

"I wish you were, with all my heart!"

"Do you, you abominable wretch? But I'll be even with you, you contemptible, not-worth-looking-at scum of the earth! I'll be even with you, depend upon it! The idea of such a creature as you being a captain! Faugh! it's enough to make anyone sick!"

"Really, ladies and gentlemen," cried Claude Duval, in a deprecating tone of voice, "I am extremely sorry to interrupt your agreeable conversation, but the facts of the case are just as I have laid them before you. Once more I present my hat. Make it heavy enough to satisfy me, and you can depart in safety; until then you will remain where you are. I don't wish to threaten, but still if you persist in giving me trouble, I shall take the wheels off the waggon and leave you to perform the rest of your journey on foot. You won't like that, for perhaps I need not tell you this is a very lonely part of the country, and you will have to go a great distance before you either meet with a human habitation or any other means of conveyance."

"Come—come, all of you," said the little man with the fainting lady, and speaking with difficulty in consequence of the great weight upon his internal combinations, "why don't you contribute a little each, and let the gentleman ride away?"

"That is a very sensible speech indeed'" said Claude Duval, approvingly.

"Perhaps, my little Jacky," said the person who sat opposite to him, "you will be kind enough to set us the example."

This undignified epithet threw the little fellow into an ungovernable fury, but he managed to reply:

"How the devil do you think I am going to get to my pockets with this great porpus atop of me? I'll be d—d if she doesn't grow heavier every minute!"

Upon this the huge female uttered a scream.

"Oh, you have woke up at last, have you, ma'am? I'm glad to hear it! Just put out your strength a little, and then, perhaps, you will be able to raise yourself up, with my assistance."

"Your assistance, you miserable little dandiprat—your assistance? I wonder what good that would be? Talk of strength—why, you could not crack a flea, you contemptible, under-sized mortal!"

This scene in the waggon amused Claude mightily, and there is no knowing how long he might have felt disposed to remain as a witness of it had he not been aroused by the sound of Sixteen-String Jack's voice calling out to him in very impatient tones.

"Hark—hark!" exclaimed Claude. "Do you hear, ladies and gentlemen, my honorable companion is growing tired of being kept waiting so long. Be good enough to comply with my demands!"

"I'll be hanged," said a respectable-looking man, who sat at the tail-end of the waggon—"I'll be hanged if you are not about the coolest customer I ever met with or even heard of!"

"Yes, very likely—I always was. But excuse me—we must make a beginning, so, as you happen to sit nearest, be good enough to let me have your donation."

Although Claude Duval spoke in such a tone of banter, yet the person he addressed could tell that he was thoroughly in earnest, and he felt it would be unwise to tempt the highwayman too far.

Notwithstanding this conviction, he produced a purse, and flung it into Claude's hat with a very bad grace indeed.

"That is a capital commencement!" ejaculated the highwayman. "Pray hand it round to the next!"

This was done, and very slowly the hat made a complete circuit of the different people occupying the waggon.

At last it reached Claude.

He took hold of it with a very dissatisfied air, for, looking in, he saw that it contained very little indeed beyond the purse which had been first of all placed into it.

"Upon my word," he said, "this is what I call too bad—by far too bad! As there are so many young and charming ladies present"—here Claude made a bow and gave a glance which comprehended all of them—"I can

not bring myself to utter any threats or resort to any violent measures; but, unless I am treated better I cannot say what I may be tempted to do!"

"Oh, you paltry villains!" cried the lady with the shrill voice. "How I wish I was a man, that I might give you an example of what a man's conduct ought to be in an affair like this! You mean-spirited wretches, either give up what you have and let us go on our way in quiet, or else stand up for your own, and fight it out like men!"

This martial address was, however, provocative of little effect.

Either the male travellers were sadly deficient in courage, or else they felt that they did not carry about with them enough of this world's wealth to make it worth their while to run any great risk in order to retain it.

"Very good!" responded Claude, in a deep voice, after a brief pause had taken place. "The lady speaks well. Just be good enough to let me know whether you intend to deliver up quietly what you have, or whether you intend to fight it out—I shall know then what to do."

CHAPTER M.

CONTINUES TO FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

THE travellers quickly came to a decision.

The hat was once more passed round.

By this time Claude's eyes had become much more familiar with the dim light which pervaded the interior of the waggon.

At first the obscurity was so great that he could scarcely distinguish the outlines of the people.

Now he could see them quite plainly, and, moreover, was able to make out all that they did.

The contributions cast into the hat were now of a much more valuable nature than before.

Every time a fresh object was dropped in, Claude nodded his head approvingly.

Presently the hat was placed in the hands of one who immediately attracted Claude's notice.

This was a young girl, upon whose thin and pallid features the marks of premature old age could be descried.

She was attired in deep black, which made the ghastliness of her countenance seem more apparent.

By the peculiar cap she wore, she was proclaimed a widow.

She gazed at the hat for a moment, as Claude thought, with tearful eyes; then, with an audible sigh, she produced from a little reticule she carried a small bead purse.

There was another moment of hesitation—another deep sigh, and the little purse was dropped into the hat, which was passed on to the next passenger.

When it again reached Claude's hands, he found the weight very much increased—indeed, the booty was quite as much as he could have hoped to obtain from such a source.

To be sure, if he had searched the travellers one by one the booty would have been increased, but then Claude Duval infinitely preferred his present mode of managing the affair.

Emptying all the valuables into his capacious pockets, he made another bow, and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have the honor and the pleasure of wishing you a very good-night."

"Hark ye!" said the man who sat nearest to Claude. "You have carried things off with a very high hand, and doubtless you are mightily satisfied with what you have done; but let me tell you I have in the meantime had a very good look at your face all this time. Your features are so imprinted upon my memory that I shall never forget them, and no matter when or where I see you again, I shall know you. And what is more, should you ever be captured, as no doubt you will be, I will make my way to the court and swear this little job on to you, which will be quite sufficient to insure you a hempen collar at Tyburn."

"Thank you!" said Claude, quite calmly, though inwardly he could not help feeling a good deal of annoyance—"I am much obliged to you for your candor, and *when* I am captured, I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you again. Once more, good-night, ladies and gentlemen!"

The last words particularly were pronounced with a most unruffled demeanor.

At the same moment, he turned his horse's head and rode away.

Perceiving this movement, Sixteen-String Jack discontinued the guard he had been keeping over the waggoner.

"Drive on," he said, "and be quick!"

The waggoner smacked his whip; but before his heavy team had fairly got the cumbersome vehicle in motion again, the two highwaymen were a long way off down the lane.

"I'll be hanged, Claude," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, "if I did not think you never meant to bring that adventure to a conclusion! What on earth were you about to be so long? I shall expect to see a capital booty."

"You will have little to grumble at on that score, my friend. But the incident altogether was such a comical one, owing to the number of odd people who rode in the waggon, that I could not forbear lingering over it."

"I heard a great deal that passed, and could not help laughing heartily myself."

"You ought to have seen as well as heard," replied Claude, laughing at the bare recollection; but suddenly the sounds of merriment died out, and his countenance assumed an unusually grave appearance.

At the same time, very much to the surprise of his comrade, he reined-in his steed.

Sixteen-String Jack of course did likewise.

Then, in a voice the tones of which well expressed his wonder, he exclaimed:

"What on earth is it, Claude—what is the matter?"

"I did not tell you, Jack," was the slow reply—"I did not tell you there was one seated in the waggon with the rest, whose years were little more than those of girlhood, who was attired in widow's weeds. Her face was pale and deeply marked with careworn lines."

"Well," said Jack, interrupting him and speaking somewhat impatiently, "what of her?"

"Why," said Claude, huskily, for the saddened face rose up vividly in his mind, "she seemed half dead with fright; and when the hat was handed to her she dropped a little bead purse into it, and as she did so she gave a heavy sigh. I do believe, Jack, that was all the wealth that she possessed."

"Why did you take it?"

"I know not; but now I bitterly reproach myself for having done so. Poor thing! I'll warrant she has had trouble enough already, without any of my causing."

"Never mind, Claude. Come on—it is past and done for."

"No, no, Jack, I feel that I cannot come on."

"Not come on?"

"No. Although I have taken the poor widow's all, it is not too late to make restitution."

"Restitution?" repeated Jack. "Do not think of anything so foolish."

"Foolish or not, I mean to take back her little purse."

"Think of the risk! We got off safely, but by this time perhaps——"

"Jack, it is quite in vain for you to urge any such considerations; I cannot—will not listen to them. Risk or no risk, that purse shall be returned."

He thrust his hand into his pocket while he spoke.

"Think again!"

"Never, for fear I might change the resolution I have come to, and which I feel to be a right one. If you do not like to accompany me in my return you need not. Stay where you are until I return."

"Nay, Claude, I can tell now that you are offended."

"No, but if you do not like to come——"

"Where you go I go too; if I did not, I should be unworthy of your comradeship."

"That sounds more like yourself, Jack. Come on!"

As he pronounced these last words Claude Duval turned his horse's head in the opposite direction and rode swiftly after the waggon.

At the rate he went, it was clear he would not be long in overtaking it.

On the way no further words were exchanged, although Sixteen-String Jack kept breast to breast with him.

Although he could not but condemn Claude's act as being a most imprudent one, yet Jack could not withhold his admiration of the motives which had prompted his friend to act in this manner.

In a short time the waggon appeared in sight creeping on its tedious way like some huge black snake.

"Hold!" cried Claude, at the top of his voice. "Hold, I say!"

But as the sound came from the rear, all the waggoner did was to whip his horses, for he feared nothing else than another attack, out of which he might not chance to come so well as out of the last.

This was a circumstance that signified little, for Claude was soon able to overtake the slow-moving vehicle.

But even as he reached the back, some horsemen suddenly reined-up in front, and in a loud voice called upon the waggoner to stop.

"Officers, by all that's unlucky!" ejaculated Sixteen-String Jack, who at once perceived who the new-comers were.

"Impossible!"

"It is true, Claude. Fly—fly at once. That is the only chance you have of saving yourself! Fly—fly!"

"Never—at least, not until I have performed my errand!"

These proceedings occasioned a vast amount of commotion inside the waggon, the inmates of which, filled with an insatiable curiosity, drew aside the back flaps just as Claude reined-in his panting horse.

This was fortunate, as it prevented a delay, the consequences of which might have been most serious for him.

Claude knew just where the young widow was seated, so, leaning slightly forward in the saddle, he tossed the purse into her lap.

"Take it!" he cried—"take it, and keep it, and remember that it is possible for a highwayman to have as much feeling as anyone."

At the same moment, Claude drew back, or, rather, attempted to do so, for all at once he experienced a sudden check upon his movements.

The traveller seated next the end, and who had announced his intention of appearing against Claude should he ever have the opportunity of doing so, seized him by the arm with a tenacious grasp.

"Help, ho!" he cried—"help, ho! Assist me, all of you! The officers are at hand, and if we can only keep him a moment or so all will be well!"

"Fool!" said Claude Duval, as, by an exertion of the immense strength he possessed, he shook off the traveller's detaining hold. "You will tempt me too far!"

But just as he spoke Claude gave his horse the reins, and pressed him sharply on the flanks with the spur.

The animal obeyed the impulse bravely.

With one bound it cleared the low hedgerow, and afterwards flew at a tremendous rate across the long stretch of meadow land that lay before it.

Sixteen-String Jack, as the reader may make sure, was not very far behind his old ally.

It must be understood, however, that the officers, when they rode up to the waggon and hailed the driver, never suspected for an instant that those they sought were so near.

Their object in speaking to the waggoner at all was merely in order to ask him whether he had chanced to notice on the road any such persons as they required.

The bulky waggon hid the highwaymen from their view, while the clatter of their own horses' feet effectually drowned those of our two friends.

But the loud cries coming from the interior of the vehicle soon made them aware of what was amiss, though at first they were unable to credit that the highwaymen, bold as they knew them to be, could actually have the audacity to plunder the passengers in the waggon while they were by, and this, of course, not knowing the facts of the case, was just what they thought.

With a loud hue and cry, the officers set off across the fields in pursuit of their prey.

The highwaymen were fairly in sight, and their gratification was extreme accordingly.

They had come out purposely with the hope of meeting with their prey, and this success so far was much more than they had ventured to look for.

Their horses were fresh, and of the best quality they could procure.

The riders themselves were bold and determined.

Under these circumstances, despite the number of their failures, they not unreasonably hoped on the present occasion to bring the chase to a successful termination.

As for the highwaymen, their danger had been so imminent and so great that, by comparison, they were now at ease.

But Sixteen-String Jack, happening soon to look back over his shoulder, perceived with what vigor their pursuers were pushing on after them.

"You must push on, Claude," he cried, "we have been taking matters too easily! Look behind you and see how close they are."

Claude did so, and immediately increased his speed.

"What course shall you adopt to shake them off?" asked Jack, riding as close to his companion as he was able. "Have you made up your mind? It will never do for us to have them dangling at our heels all night."

"I am inclined for making one good hard push—a sudden effort. So far as I can tell, that seems to me the most likely means of shaking them off."

"It does indeed."

"Are you agreed?"

"Yes, quite."

"Then make what effort you are able."

Now the police officers had indulged themselves in the flattering but fallacious hope that the horses ridden by the highwaymen were weary.

What words, then, would suffice to paint their chagrin when they, all at once, noticed their prey start off at almost a double rate.

Already the officers had been urging their horses to the utmost of their capacity, so that the manner in which the two highwaymen shot ahead seemed alarming indeed.

The one in command of the officers could not help feeling this, and he could tell that the same might be said of his companions, for the expression of their countenances spoke plainly enough.

Wishing to encourage them as much as possible, he assumed a cheerfulness of manner that he was far from feeling as he said:

"Come, come, my lads, don't be downcast at such a trifle as this. It is only a spurt, and will soon be over, leaving their horses more exhausted than before. You have only to keep steadily on their track, and we shall have them in the long run."

If the police had not failed so very, very often, it is probable that this speech would not have been made without good effect.

As it was, the officers would not allow themselves to be much animated by it, and no wonder, for they saw the distance between them and the highwaymen was rapidly and surely increasing.

Claude and Jack certainly did push their steeds unmercifully; but they did so, believing that it would turn out the best in the long run.

The event proved that they were right.

It was shortly afterwards that Claude, looking behind him, exclaimed:

"Look back, Jack! Your eyes are much better than mine if they can descry them now!"

"They are out of sight, surely enough; but it will not be for long—we shall soon lose what ground we have gained."

"I know that, but while they are out of our sight we can make up our minds what step to take next."

"What do you think?"

"Why, to hide will be best."

"We have no other resource. But where?"

"That is just the question. It won't do to push our horses much further at this rate; if we do, we shall knock the poor beasts up completely."

"We shall indeed."

Claude Duval took a good look around him.

"For my part," he said, at length, in a deliberate tone of voice, "I don't believe we can do better than get under cover of yonder trees. They are close at hand, and seem to form a portion of a wood of very considerable extent."

"But we must get within their shelter unseen."

"That will be easily managed if we are speedy, and if even they do suspect us of having entered the wood, it will be just like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay for them to attempt to find us."

"So it would—so it would. Push on, a couple of minutes' gallop will take us fairly under the trees."



[THE HIGHWAYMEN'S ATTACK ON THE PRISONERS' VAN.]

CHAPTER MI.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL FOLLOW THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT INTO THE RECESSES OF THE WOOD.

As soon as the two highwaymen fonnd themselves fairly past the border of the wood they pnlled up.

"Safe and sound so far, Jack," cried Claude Duval.

"Yes, undoubtedly."

"Then we ought to congratulate ourselves upon our good luck."

"Decidedly. But hark! How the wind has got up and how the darkness has increased all at once. What does it mean?"

During the excitement of the chase, the two highwaymen had failed to notice the changes which had gradually come over the face of nature.

The wind had increased from a stiff breeze to what might, with scarcely any exaggeration, be called a hurricane.

This had been accompanied with dense, heavy rain-clouds, which, by the immense force of the wind, were drifted furiously across the face of the heavens.

There is no doubt that had the wind lulled but a single second they would have poured down their contents upon the earth.

But the darkness grew greater and greater every moment as more and more clouds were drifted in from windward.

"What a gust that was!" exclaimed Claude Duval, as the wind rushed and roared with terrific violence among the tree-tops.

"A gust indeed! And how dark."

"Yes; if the officers find us now, I will admit that they possess far more cunning than I give them credit for."

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"Nevertheless," answered Jack, "it would be best not to make too sure."

"Decidedly."

"Then let us penetrate still further into the wood. We shall not be so exposed to the storm which I feel sure is about to break out, and we shall not be in so much danger of being seen by our foes."

Claude turned round without a word, and led the way into the recesses of the wood with as much confidence as he would had they been thoroughly well known to him.

The space between the trees was narrow, so Jack had to follow at his heels.

At last, having as they believed gone far enough to answer their purpose, Claude said:

"We will tether our horses here for awhile, Jack. It is a quiet, retired spot, and it will take them some time to recover from their late exertion."

"And in the meantime we can shelter ourselves from the storm."

"Just so."

The wind still blew with great fury among the tree-tops, but no rain fell.

Suddenly Claude Duval gripped Sixteen-String Jack tightly by the arm as he said, in a low whisper, which the angry blast made almost inaudible:

"Look—look! What is the meaning of that? Do you see? Yonder—look—look! Surely they cannot have tracked us so quickly and so well!"

"What—what?" exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, who was slightly taken by surprise—"oh, what is it?"

"There—there! Surely you see now?"

"That light?"

"Yes."

Sixteen-String Jack now observed that a faint light was at some distance glimmering through the trees.

He gazed at it attentively, and so did Claude.

To both the light appeared to flit about in a most extraordinary fashion.

At one moment its light would seem to be absolutely brilliant—then the next moment it almost died away.

"What do you make of it, Claude?" asked Jack, at length.

"I am unable to form any opinion. My first idea was that it proceeded from a lantern carried by some officer."

"No, no—I scarcely think it can be that."

"Nor I now."

"Then you confess yourself puzzled?"

"I do."

"I have only one idea about it, which is, that it must be some will-o'-the-wisp. You have heard of that, have you not?"

"Yes, and seen one; but this light seems altogether different."

"It is getting further and further away."

"It has that appearance."

"I am sure of it."

"Shall we follow it?"

"If you like—we have nothing else better to occupy our time just at the present moment, and I look upon it as in some sort our duty to look closely into everything we cannot understand."

"Decidedly."

"Come on, then."

"Yes—but be silent. There is no fear that we shall be overheard, still it is always wisest to remember to be cautious."

With these words the highwaymen crept forward with stealthy steps.

In good truth this seemed like a superfluous amount of caution, for the wind was, if possible, blowing with greater violence than before, and the noise that it created among the tree tops was sufficient to drown completely every other sound.

Sixteen-String Jack happened to be first as they stood, and so he led the way, his comrade keeping close upon his heels, for the way between the trees was not wide enough to allow two to pass.

The mysterious light—for it had good claims to this designation—continued to flit about in a very remarkable and eccentric manner.

Sometimes it would disappear altogether.

Then the next moment they would see it shine at some distance off.

As they pushed still deeper and deeper into the recesses of the wood the curiosity of the highwaymen increased.

Suddenly the wind dropped.

At this instant a scud of rain, that actually seemed to have been held in suspension by the gale, fell with great violence to the earth.

It lasted only for about a couple of seconds—then the wind, as it rested by its short lull, began to blow more furiously than ever.

It so happened that the countenances of the two highwaymen were turned in such a direction that the mass of rain dashed upon them, and such was the suddenness of it that for a moment or so they were half blinded. The effect was as though a quantity of sea spray had been dashed into their faces.

But when they had succeeded in removing the moisture from their eyes and took another glance around them, the light was nowhere to be seen.

At first this occasioned them but slight surprise, and they continued to gaze around, expecting to see it start out again in some fresh quarter.

But they were disappointed.

They waited for what seemed to be a long and weary time; but they perceived no signs of the light.

"How vexatious!" cried Sixteen-String Jack.

"It has gone now for certain," replied Claude. "I begin to think it was a will-o'-the-wisp after all."

"Can you form any precise idea of the spot where it disappeared?"

"I think so."

"Then let us push on. Perhaps when we reach there we may be able to make some fresh discovery. It galls me to be baffled thus!"

Accordingly they advanced.

Before they had gone very many paces they found themselves in a small open spot that was not more than ten or twelve feet in diameter.

It was thickly surrounded by trees, which cast a deep gloom upon it.

"A strange place," remarked Claude, as he glanced around.

"Yes, and, if I am not very much mistaken, this is just where the light vanished."

"But where can it have gone?"

"I know no better than yourself."

"Hilloa! Why, there it is! Look! Can you see it?"

"Yes—quite plainly."

"Then follow it."

The light had indeed most strangely reappeared among the trees.

The highwaymen quickly quitted the enclosure; but before going many paces Claude stopped.

"Why do you halt?" asked his companion.

"Why, look! Can't you see the light is actually approaching us?"

A second glance satisfied Sixteen-String Jack that this was indeed the case.

"That is very odd," he ejaculated. "We shall soon know now the solution of the mystery."

"It seems like it."

The light most unquestionably advanced, and it was apparent that it burnt more steadily than before, although it occasionally vanished and reappeared; but this might be caused by the interposition of one of the thick-trunked trees.

"Stand back," said Claude. "The light is manifestly coming nearer. If we conceal ourselves here, we may watch it closely as it passes by."

"A good thought," replied Jack, as he at once concealed himself among the dense vegetation.

Both now bent the whole of their attention upon the approaching light.

After looking at it very steadily for some time, during which it came closer and closer, Sixteen-String Jack whispered:

"As I live, Claude, I do believe that it is some one carrying a lantern, after all."

"I should think so but for the odd, fantastic manner in which it has flitted about. What on earth object could anyone have in turning and winding about among the trees at this hour?"

"It is very strange."

"Very strange indeed. But keep quiet—perhaps we shall yet succeed in finding a solution to the mystery."

"Hush—hush!"

There was an immediate silence.

The light was now very close at hand—so close that the highwaymen could no longer doubt the correctness of their conjecture.

Moreover, there also came upon their ears at frequent intervals a rustling, crackling sound, which made itself occasionally heard above the howling of the wind.

This sound was just such a one as would be produced by a man forcing a passage through the thickly-growing forest trees.

"It is a man with a lantern," said Claude, faintly. "What can be his errand and his purpose in wandering thus among the recesses of the forest?"

"That, I trust, we shall shortly find out, my friend."

"Hush—hush!"

"He cannot hear us—the wind roars too violently."

Nevertheless, his comrade preserved silence.

To watch the proceedings of this man sufficiently occupied their attention.

He came on with tolerable steadiness, though he swung the lantern carelessly about in his hand.

By the course he was taking, it was certain that he would pass very near the spot where our two friends had hidden themselves.

To descry what kind of looking individual he was seemed impossible, owing to the dazzling effect produced by the lantern.

At length he passed them—so closely that if the highwaymen had chosen to extend their arms they could have touched him.

Our friends held their breaths.

The man passed on, but when he gained the little open space which Claude and Jack had so recently quitted, he came to a dead stop.

"I dare not go any nearer with the light," he muttered—and the highwaymen heard him plainly, for his position was such that the wind carried all sounds from him to them—"but curse all such caution, say I! Just tell me, will you, who is likely to be watching for a light in the forest at this time of night? But here goes—anything for a quiet life!"

Having uttered these singular words, the man opened the door of the lantern, and extinguished the light.

A double darkness then seemed to reign around, but, by straining their eyes to the very utmost, the highwaymen were able to keep him in view.

He advanced a few more paces, and finally paused again at the opposite side of the clearing.

Then above the roaring of the wind there arose shrilly and clearly the sharp notes of a whistle, whose tone admirably counterfeited the cry which would be uttered by some night bird.

The whistle was repeated thrice.

Scarcely had the last notes died away than a faint gleam of light ascended into the air.

"Is that you, Drotchill?"

"Yes."

"Come down, then! Be quick with you!"

By the misty illumination which was shed around—and which appeared to emanate from some light burning beneath the surface of the earth—the highwaymen saw the form of the man more distinctly than ever.

He gradually descended till he passed out of sight, then there was a faint sound, succeeded by darkness and silence.

The two highwaymen were so much surprised—for what they beheld was something quite unexpected—that some moments elapsed before they either moved or spoke.

At last Claude said:

"Well, Jack, what do you think of that?"

"I scarcely know at present."

"Nor do I, though I have arrived at one conclusion."

"What is it?"

"Why, that the light we saw first of all was not the same as that which has just been extinguished."

"What was it, then?"

"Why, it must have been some other man. His passage through the wood may not in reality have been so devious as we imagined. Then don't you recollect that upon reaching this spot the light vanished?"

"Yes."

"Then the second light was carried by some other person approaching this self-same spot."

"No doubt you are right, Claude. I thought it odd the light should show itself again so far off and in a different direction. But still, that does not enlighten us much."

"Not very much; still, it is something."

"At any rate, there is some underground cavern hereabouts, inhabited by at least two persons."

"Yes, that much is certain."

"Then shall we rest content with possessing that amount of knowledge, or shall we try to make some further discoveries?"

"I am in favor of the latter course."

"So am I, for, who knows, it may turn out to our advantage."

"Creep forward, then, and let us try to discover the exact spot where they disappeared."

"Yes, but be cautious."

The highwaymen crept forward with great stealthiness.

Beyond their determination to discover, if possible, the entrance of the cavern, they had made no arrangements as to what else they should do, and it was quite as well, for they would have been rendered of no avail.

Suddenly, to their great surprise, the dim light showed itself again not many paces off.

The murmuring of voices could be heard.

Then, one after another, the two highwaymen, who had at once drawn back into concealment, counted fourteen men appear.

They all looked dusky and shadowy.

"Are you all here?" said a voice.

"All but old Robin."

"Then let him come forth as well, for what we have to do will require the united assistance of all of us."

CHAPTER MII.

IN WHICH CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SUFFER THE PENALTY OF INTRUDERS.

THE man who pronounced these words spoke in an authoritative tone of voice, and stood rather aloof from the rest, his manner and bearing being clearly that of a leader.

In response to his words, one said:

"Hilloa, Robin! Come forth! You will have to quit grubbing underground for an hour or two. Come forth, you lazy old mole!"

"I'm coming," said a grumbling voice—"I'm coming! But what on earth do you want me up above for?"

"You must ask the captain if you want to know."

"Robin," said the one who had been styled captain, "you are wanted to come with us—let that much suffice."

"But the old place?"

"It must take care of itself for once. We cannot spare anyone. Make up the entrance as well as you are able, then be in readiness to follow us."

Old Robin made some grumbling reply.

After that the faint halo of light which had ascended from below, rendering these strange beings dimly visible, faded completely away.

No sooner did this happen than at a word all the men walked hurriedly off, quickly disappearing from view.

Our two friends waited until all sounds of their progress had died away, and then Claude cried:

"Fortune favors us, Jack!"

"It does indeed. That secret band have a habitation of some kind underground, and it seems to me that at the present moment all its inhabitants appear to have departed."

"There can be no doubt of it."

"Then, my friend, if you feel half as curious as I do, you will not miss the opportunity of paying their stronghold a visit."

"There is only one thing—it is getting on towards daybreak, remember."

"We have some hours before us yet, and this little adventure will not occupy us for long, you may depend."

"Come on, then, I am willing."

So saying, the highwaymen quitted their place of con-

cealment, and stepped forward as well as they could judge in the direction of the opening into the cave.

"It must be somewhere near here," said Jack, as he paused and bent down towards the ground. "Yet I cannot see anything of it."

"Depend upon it, we shall have to get a light."

"Then we must be cautious in its use. Remember the light of a lantern betrayed these men to us."

"It will be easy to be as careful as they were."

With these words, Claude produced a small lantern which he invariably carried.

It was quickly ignited by means of a phosphorous match.

The lantern was provided with a condensing lens of excellent quality, and the beam of light that came from it, though small, was very brilliant.

Claude turned it so that the light fell upon the greensward, of which he was thus enabled to make an accurate examination.

But nothing whatever resembling the entrance to a cavern met his view.

"If I did not know for certain that it was somewhere close here," he said, at length, "I should begin to grow doubtful."

"So should I."

The search was continued for some moments longer, but with no better result.

"The entrance is indeed well hidden!" exclaimed Jack, in a tone of mingled vexation and admiration. "Where on earth can it be?"

"I don't know," said Claude. "Let us sit down here for a moment, and look carefully all around."

He pointed, while speaking, to the stump of a huge old tree, which projected some little distance above the ground.

There were several stumps scattered about the open space, which served to show that the clearing was an artificial one, but this was the largest of all, since it allowed the two highwaymen room to sit side by side.

There was a silence of a few seconds, and then Sixteen-String Jack observed:

"Claude, I feel certain we are as nearly as possible on the very spot where those men stood."

"So am I," was the unexpected reply; "and what is more, I believe we are at this moment much nearer the secret entrance than we have been."

"What do you mean?"

"Why," said Claude, rising to his feet again, "it is my belief we have been sitting upon it."

Sixteen-String Jack sprang quickly to his feet, for this was an idea which had not occurred to him.

"Why do you think so?" he asked. "The stump looks as natural as the rest."

"Well, we shall soon see," said Claude, kneeling down and making a rigid examination of it.

But he saw nothing.

He tried to move or shake the mass of wood, but in vain.

But he was not to be baffled very easily.

All at once, Sixteen-String Jack uttered a low cry of gratification.

"Have you found the secret?"

"I have. Look here!"

Just as he spoke, he pushed against the stump horizontally, and the result was that the upper portion slid quite away, turning freely on a kind of pivot at one side.

The reason the highwaymen had not made this discovery sooner was because they had been looking for a secret spring or fastening of some kind, whereas, the entrance had been left quite unguarded.

"That's very odd," said Claude, remarking it; "but I suppose they had no means of fastening it outside."

"No; depend upon it that is the reason. Old Robin, as they called him, was always left in charge."

The dim, misty light again rose into the air, and upon looking down, the highwaymen perceived that it proceeded from an oil lamp that was hung many feet below them.

The construction of this covering to the cavern, though so simple, was admirably planned.

The upper portion of the stump of the old tree had been carefully sawed off, then the remaining or lower half next the ground had been as carefully hollowed out.

As we have said, the upper part had then been fitted on and secured in its place by a pivot at one side, which allowed it to turn freely.

The aperture at the top was not much larger than would suffice for the passage of a man's body; but a little way down the width materially increased.

Some rudely-cut steps were discernible.

"Here we are," said Jack, after they had both peered down for some time in silence.

"It seems quiet enough."

"As the grave."

"Let us descend, then."

"With all my heart."

"Will you go first?"

"Yes, if you like."

Jack nimbly descended.

Claude followed with the lantern.

"Wait a moment," the latter said; "perhaps there may be some kind of inner fastening; if so, the best thing we can do is to make use of it."

"Certainly."

"Just hold the light, then."

Claude was glad he thought of taking this precaution, for, upon examination, he found that there was a very strong fastening indeed, consisting of a hasp and staple, into which fitted an iron pin.

"There," said Claude, in a tone of very great satisfaction, "I shall feel much better contented, I can assure you, for I feel certain that no one can make a sudden entrance upon us. We shall have timely warning if anyone attempts to gain admittance."

"Very good," said Jack, as he cautiously descended the rude flight of steps; "but I rather think before any of that crew returns we shall be many a mile away."

Just as he spoke these words, he reached the bottom of the steps, and having done so, he paused to look about him at the strange place in which he found himself.

The oil lamp was a very primitive affair, and was suspended by means of an iron chain.

The use of this lamp was obvious.

It was placed there in order that the difficult descent of the steps might be made in safety.

Leading from the bottom step, and sloping downwards, was a kind of passage, the extremity of which was covered over with some dark substance.

Advancing, the highwaymen found this to be a kind of curtain.

As it hung there, it served the purpose of a door.

Drawing this aside, they saw before them an underground chamber, which, from the regularity of its form and the manner in which it was shored up with wooden supports, was evidently the work of human hands.

A stifling kind of heat was in this place, arising doubtless, in part, from defective ventilation, and partly from a smouldering, half-extinguished fire.

This chamber, if so we may term it, was furnished with a rude kind of table and several blocks of wood, which did duty for chairs.

On this table stood bottles and glasses, presenting an aspect of great disorder.

It seemed as though some merry-making had recently been going on.

The floor of the cavern was littered all over with objects of every description—articles by far too varied and numerous to allow of recapitulation.

"A strange place," was Jack's remark, after a silence of some minutes, during which they had been engaged in gazing upon the various objects to which we have adverted.

"Very," said Claude. "Yet there can be no doubt as to the profession of these men."

"Robbers?"

"Most certainly, and, I will warrant, of the worst sort, accompanying all they do with deeds of ruthless, needless violence."

"What makes you think so?"

"The aspect of this place, and the fact that so many are banded together. They are arrant cowards, every one of them, I'll warrant."

"Let us come a little closer and make a better examination. I am inclined, however, to think you are quite right."

"I am sure of it."

The highwaymen now advanced into the cavern; but

they did not find within it anything more than they had already noted.

On the opposite side, however, they came to a crevice in the wall, that was protected by a door, dark so far in as to be at first invisible.

"Now, then, Jack," cried Claude, "the light!"

The door yielded to a touch.

Crossing the threshold, the highwaymen found themselves in another cavern, much smaller than the first, but stored up with a great number of small packages, doubtless containing articles of value.

There was another door close at hand, leading into another cavern; but this was perfectly empty.

"Snug quarters, truly," observed Jack, as they returned to the outer chamber, "and it is certainly too bad that they should be occupied by such a crew as hold possession of them."

"Have you seen enough?"

"Yes," was the reply, given in a lingering tone, and with a reluctant glance around.

"Then let us be going. Time is flying past; and this close atmosphere is disgusting to me."

Without waiting to hear what more his companion might have to say upon the subject, Claude led the way to the flight of steps.

He ascended them as rapidly as he was able.

Jack followed more slowly at his heels.

The iron pin was withdrawn from the staple, the hasp removed, and Claude, with a sigh of satisfaction, was about to push the covering away, when, to his dismay, he heard a voice close to him exclaim:

"What the devil is the matter with the trap? It's d—d odd that it should be fast. There cannot be anyone below? I'll try again."

What was Claude to do?

It was too late to refasten the hasp and staple. Moreover, if there had been time for him to do so it would have been of no avail—they would have been like rats in a trap.

Jack overheard what was said, and luckily decided on the right course to adopt.

"Down, Claude—down! Leave the door—we must hide!"

Even while he uttered these words in a suppressed voice, yet quite loudly enough to reach his comrade's ears, he descended the steps with the utmost precipitation.

Claude heard the individual above endeavoring to remove the trap.

A kind of instinct made him follow in Jack's footsteps.

The cavern was quickly reached, and then both gave a hasty glance around them in search of some place of concealment.

But at first none presented itself.

Footsteps were heard upon the stairs.

"Where shall we hide?" asked Claude.

"I see no other place than this. Be quick, and all will yet be well!"

Sixteen-String Jack, as he spoke, placed his hand upon a large barrel which was standing upon end in one corner.

It had evidently served for a seat, and as there was a large bunghole at the side, it was quite clear that it was perfectly empty.

"Do you mean inside?"

"Yes."

"But there is not room for two."

"There is another barrel yonder, of similar appearance. Quick—quick! If you stay to utter another word, we shall be lost!"

About this there could be no doubt, for the sound of a footstep could be heard just outside the covered doorway.

Sixteen-String Jack at once crept into his hiding-place, and Claude, who had not yet recovered from his bewilderment, hastened to do the same.

They were only just in time.

Scarcely had the barrels been settled into something like their former position than the curtain was drawn aside with an impatient hand.

It was rather strange, our two friends thought, that the man should have been so long in making his appearance; but the fact was that he had stopped to carefully secure the trap-door in its place.

The delay was most fortunate for the highwaymen; without it they could not have escaped discovery.

Upon entering, this man paused and stood near the threshold.

The two highwaymen were able to observe his movements with ease and precision by placing their eyes close to the bungholes, which, as we have said, were in the sides of the barrels.

The new-comer looked about him for some moments with a suspicious air.

But the quietude of the place appeared to reassure him.

He passed his hands once or twice before his eyes.

Then spoke.

"It's d—d odd!" he said; "but I could have sworn that when I tried the first time the trap-door was fastened. And yet it could not have been, for it yielded easily the next time I tried. I must have bungled. My brain feels strange and dizzy. I have not had enough—certainly not enough. I want more brandy to steady my nerves."

From off a small shelf at one side of the cavern the man took a bottle, which without a moment's hesitation he placed to his lips.

A loud gurgling sound followed, and from the length of time which this continued it was evident that a great quantity was imbibed.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, "I feel better now; and yet if I did not know that was the best spirit to be had, I should declare it to be no better than water. Bah! but I am better—much better!"

Claude and Jack had thought it strange that the man's suspicions about the fastened door had very quickly been allayed; but now it was accounted for by the fact that he was some distance gone in intoxication, yet not so far as to prevent him knowing what he was about, or to incapacitate him for action.

CHAPTER MIII.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN ARE WITNESSES OF SOME VERY SINGULAR SCENES BENEATH THE EARTH'S SURFACE.

To speak the honest truth, Sixteen-String Jack, now that he found himself ensconced in a comfortable hiding-place, felt rather pleased than otherwise with the turn affairs had taken.

Although his attention was fully occupied in watching all the movements of the man, yet each moment he recovered more and more his usual self-possession.

With something like sensations of perfect composure, he noted that this man had nothing peculiar enough in his dress to make him conspicuous among his fellow-creatures.

As to his countenance, that was about as hideous and repulsive as a countenance well could be and yet reserve some traits of humanity about it.

Jack anxiously wondered who he could be, and what was the errand that had brought him back there alone.

Beyond all doubt, patience and the progress of time would give a satisfactory answer to these questions.

"Now, to complete my work," the man muttered, "I have got rid of them all; and what is more, without exciting any suspicions against myself. But I must make the best use of my time. It is lucky that I have so little left to do."

With these words on his lips, the man opened the door communicating with the cavern where our friends had noticed so many articles stored up.

Making use of the utmost expedition, this man rapidly carried out the various packages, and stored them in the contiguous chamber that had been so recently explored by the highwaymen.

This labor he continued for a great length of time, so long that the two watchers grew tired of observing him.

There was one discovery, however, which both made, and almost at the same moment.

This was that this man was no other than the one who had assumed the manner of a leader among those outside, and who had uttered his commands in so peremptory a voice.

It was strange that he should be there alone, and under circumstances of so much mystery.

One inference could only be drawn, which was, that he

was engaged in doing something which, for particular reasons, he wished to keep secret from his companions.

Such an act must be one of a villanous character—at least, that was Jack's assumption, and he determined to do his best to prevent its consummation.

Claude Duval, on the other hand, felt fidgety and uneasy.

He was sure, from the length of time that had elapsed, that dawn could not be far distant, and he had wished to return to the ruins.

Clearly, however, it was too late to think of doing this now.

Then there was no knowing how long he might be detained by this man and his associates, and he looked forward to remain cooped up under the barrel for an indefinite period with anything like pleasure.

There was no help for it, however, and this knowledge, so far from enabling him to become reconciled to his position, only made him chafe the more.

In the meanwhile, the robber captain—for such Sixteen-String Jack had designated him—proceeded steadily with his task until he had completed it.

This was not until what seemed to the highwaymen a long and weary time had passed—how long they were unable to form any definite idea.

"At last," he murmured, with a heavy sigh of relief, as he sank down and wiped the perspiration from his face—"at last the task is completed. Now I am in readiness, let them come when they choose."

He waited for a short time as if to recover himself; then, having closed both the doors and restored the place to its ordinary appearance, he entered the passage, ascended the steps, and, so far as our friends were able to judge, pushed open the trap-door and went outside.

For some moments our friends remained perfectly silent, listening intently.

But Claude, whose impatience had in no degree abated, at length said, in a faint whisper:

"Jack."

"Yes, Claude?"

"Has he gone?"

"I think so."

"Then let us go too."

"That would be most unwise. He may be only waiting just above. Consider that by this time it is daylight."

"Yes, confound it, I have no doubt it is!"

"You seem vexed."

"Yes, I cannot look forward with anything like calmness to remaining here for perhaps twelve or fourteen hours."

"It will be irksome; but, then, as it is impossible to return, and as the day must be spent in some place or other, I think we cannot do better than remain here. In all probability we shall be quite safe."

"I should prefer being above ground."

"I don't know that I should."

"You seem to like your quarters."

"Not particularly; but I have a presentiment that if we only remain we shall see and hear something well worth witnessing."

"Then, if that is your impression, I will reconcile myself to remaining."

"Hush—hush!"

There was instant silence.

After a short pause, Jack spoke again.

"I thought I heard him returning," he whispered, "but it must have been my fancy. How lucky it was we escaped down the steps so well as we did!"

"Most lucky! I can scarcely understand how it was the fellow did not discover us."

"He is in a state of great excitement—that is it; and, if I am any judge of matters, I should give my deliberate opinion that this man meditates an act of more than ordinary atrocity."

"But of what nature?"

"There I confess I am in the dark. We must watch closely the course of events."

"And what do you think of doing?"

"Interfering, if I can see my way clear to so doing."

"Well, Jack, my friend, I will not say to you one word of my private thoughts, simply because they are in entire opposition to yours. But it is quite clear that you have set your heart upon seeing this little drama played out, and therefore I will not attempt to balk you."

"I shall avail myself of your generosity of spirit, Claude, and I am moved to do so because I feel more strongly than ever that you will have no cause to regret having done so."

"Very well, Jack—I resign myself entirely. You will excuse me, however, for just mentioning one thing."

"What is that?"

"Can you tell me how we are to make our exit from this place when you feel that we have stayed here long enough?"

"I have not thought about that, Claude."

"I fancied not."

"And, what is more, I believe it would be foolish to think of it, because we cannot possibly tell what extraordinary turn events may take. At any rate, if we find here a day's safe shelter, that will be something to feel satisfied about."

"So it will. Yet I could have wished for more comfortable quarters."

"It is the barrel you don't like, Claude?"

"I confess it."

"Well, then, as this fellow seems to have sought the upper earth we may venture to emerge. It will be more comfortable than remaining cooped up, and when we hear him returning there will be plenty of time for us to conceal ourselves again."

"I was thinking so, but was in doubt whether it would be prudent."

But Claude hesitated no longer, for he lifted the barrel to one side and crept out.

Jack did the same.

Their first act was to hasten to the curtained doorway.

They listened a moment or so, and convinced themselves that the man had really passed out at the trap-door.

And now really one would have thought the wisest course that the highwaymen could possibly have adopted would be to have taken advantage of the present opportunity to get away from such close and uncomfortable quarters.

By remaining they ran a thousand and one risks.

But Jack would not think of any one of them.

It was decidedly a comfort to be freed from the casks, and they stretched themselves every now and then, as if rejoicing in their liberty.

Their conversation was not sufficiently to the point to be worth placing before the reader—it consisted chiefly in speculations as to what was likely to be the termination of what they had witnessed.

In this manner the whole day passed—not that they were able to tell anything about light or darkness by absolute observation, but Claude happened all at once to recollect that he had a watch in his pocket.

They remained, then, quite undisturbed until close upon the verge of midnight.

Then a faint, grating sound reached their ears.

It was produced by the removal of the cleverly-contrived trap-door.

No sooner did the sound strike upon their ears than our friends hastened to regain their respective places of shelter.

This was quickly done, but, although they were so rapid in their movements, they had scarcely settled themselves before some one entered.

The noise which now became audible informed them that the whole of the gang had in all probability come back.

Our friends at first rather shrank back, but gaining confidence after the lapse of a few moments, they looked through the bungholes.

Among the rest, they quickly caught sight of the leader, who looked more flushed and excited than usual.

In a voice that sounded high and unnatural, as though he was endeavoring to conceal feelings which would be betrayed by the tones of his voice, he said:

"Gallant comrades, are we all here?"

This question caused everyone to glance in the countenance of the one who happened to be standing next to him.

Then followed a unanimous:

"Yes!"

"Good! And is the trap-door above secured?"

"Yes, captain."

"Is that you, old Robin?"

"It is."

"And you have fastened it?'

"I have."

"Then we need not be much afraid of being disturbed. Seat yourselves, my gallant comrades—seat yourselves once more around this board, which has witnessed so many of our meetings. Come, come—be quick. As you know, we have much before us to-night."

"What the deuce," Jack asked himself, "can it be all about?"

Consequent upon these words from their captain, the men assembled themselves round the table, choosing for seats whatever movable object came nearest to hand.

And now our friends found themselves threatened with a great danger, because it was altogether unlooked for.

One man walked deliberately up to the barrel beneath which Jack was concealed, and placed his hands upon it, in order to roll it up to the table.

Jack considered all was over.

But a feather will serve to turn a balance.

If the man had actually moved the cask, Jack's presence must infallibly have been discovered.

At the very moment that he stooped, however, the captain called out:

"Don't roll that great lumbering thing up to the table; see, there are plenty of seats without that!"

With a grumbling sound, the man rose again.

What a long-drawn breath of relief Jack gave!

It was about as narrow an escape from discovery as anyone well could have.

Little dreaming what had been the consequence of his speech, the captain, with a kind of forced hilarity, invited the men to seat themselves around the table.

They complied, and in a short time something resembling order was obtained.

Several bottles were placed upon the table, containing wines and spirits of every variety.

Glasses were rapidly filled and emptied, and at length the captain rose to his feet and glanced down the table at the two rows of ferocious-looking faces.

There was a general silence.

"My gallant comrades," said the captain, "let me, first of all, drain a bumper to the good luck that has attended us in our late enterprises."

The bumper, without the least hesitation, was drained with enthusiasm.

In fact, the men seemed as though they were quite inclined to drink upon the least pretext or provocation.

"Now, then, friends all," the captain resumed, "according to our usual custom, let the proceeds be produced. I will set you the example."

So saying, he took from his pockets a considerable quantity of gold coin, which he placed in a heap on the table before him.

No sooner had he finished, than those around him followed his example.

In the space of a few moments the table was covered with an immense amount of money, which was roughly made up into one great heap.

"Is not that a glorious sight, my comrades? Have we not had a slice of luck?"

Various murmurs escaped the lips of the men—apparently murmurs of dissatisfaction.

It was evident the captain took them for such, for he cried:

"What—what! do I hear grumbling? Who could find fault with such a night's work as this? What do you all mean? Speak, somebody! Let me know what is passing in your minds. Remember, no concealments is our rule."

Some whispering followed this speech, and then one of the men, with the common consent of his fellows, said:

"Captain, it is because we are satisfied, not dissatisfied, with our night's work that we grumble."

The captain opened his eyes wide with astonishment.

"Because you *are* satisfied?"

"Yes. You seem surprised. But it is because we see what can be done if we remain together, that makes us dislike agreeing to your proposition. Now it's out, and I hope you will not be offended, captain, but that you will think twice before you act."

The captain's countenance was fully revealed to Sixteen-String Jack, who noticed that there came over it an awful and ominous change.

It would seem as though the captain himself was conscious that his face betrayed the state of his mind, so, to conceal it, he poured out a glass of brandy and held it to his lips.

But Jack noticed that his hand trembled so excessively that much of the brandy was spilt.

But of this fact the captain either was, or affected to be, unconscious.

The men sat in what seemed to be a sullen silence.

They were evidently waiting in great anxiety for the captain to speak.

They had not long to wait.

CHAPTER MIV.

IN WHICH THE CAPTAIN FINDS THERE IS SUCH A THING AS RETRIBUTION EVEN IN THIS WORLD.

THE captain, still holding the glass of brandy in his hands, rose deliberately to his feet.

"My comrades," he said, glancing all around him, "I am not altogether surprised at your feelings in one respect. But in another I am. I quite thought that this business had been so far settled as to need no further discussion, but simply a few plain statements from myself. What say you?"

There was a silence.

"Then," said the captain, after a brief pause, "I shall take your silence for consent. What I have to say, then, is this: We have carried on our little transactions for a long time in perfect immunity. We numbered twenty at the first, but one after another your companions have in various ways been removed from you."

The captain moistened his mouth with some brandy, for he spoke with difficulty.

"I need scarcely remind you of the terms of our association. We were to remain banded together for a certain time for the general good, then at the last all which we had was to be equally divided and the association dissolved.

"The time has now come, but at the very last moment it seems to me some of you are inclined to raise disputes. Once for all, I will not listen to them; the general safety compels the adoption of the plan I laid before you."

The excitement under which the captain labored visibly increased.

To what point his remarks were about to tend, or what would be the upshot of the whole affair, the highwaymen could not, for the life of them, imagine, and this made them look on with redoubled instead of diminished interest.

"It is not necessary to tell you that we have been surprisingly successful, and I have no doubt many of you think that the association can be carried on for a much longer period to our mutual advantage."

There was a general murmur of:

"We do—we do!"

"That is just what I thought, but let me assure you it is an error—a fatal error; and what is more, if we were to adopt it we should lose what we have already, instead of gaining more. No, no, take my word for it, the scheme has been carried on quite as far as will be safe. After to-night, any attempt to prolong it will end in destruction."

There was a whispered conference among the men, and then one said:

"Well, captain, you know very well by the terms of our agreement that we are bound to obey you. We have always done so, and don't intend to break through a good rule now."

"That is well!" cried the captain, trying hard to stifle the sigh of relief that rose to his lips.

"But," said the man who had hitherto served as a mouthpiece for the expression of the opinions of his comrades, "after this association is dissolved, I suppose there is nothing to prevent those of us who choose to do so forming another association of a similar character?"

"None whatever," cried the captain—"none whatever—only bear in mind no persuasion will induce me to join you."

This announcement was received with silence.

Then, with a resumption of all that excitement and nervousness which had previously characterised his words and movements, the captain said:

"A few words now will have to pass between us. The time has come for the wealth which has been accumulated to be divided amongst you all. That shall be done at once. You have all helped to pack this wealth up into a portable shape—all except this gold on the table, which remains to be divided. It was placed in yonder inner cavern, as you all well know."

So saying, the captain pointed to the door communicating with the smaller cavern, in which our friends had seen so many parcels packed up, all of which, it must be understood, had been most carefully removed by the captain on the preceding night, or rather morning.

"When you are ready," continued the captain, "rise and go, all of you, to the door, bring forth the wealth, and let it be divided."

With surprising alacrity all the men rose to their feet in perfect readiness on this occasion to obey their captain's commands.

A grim smile came over the latter's countenance as he observed it.

In a dense throng they stood together, as if waiting for the captain to lead the way.

But he hung back, pretending to be very busy with a small hand-lantern which he carried.

"Go on, my friends," he cried, in quavering tones—"go on. There is no need for you to hold back for me. Go on. Be quick, and bring forth the wealth."

Still keeping in a body, the men advanced to the door which had been indicated.

They threw it open on its hinges and entered.

No sooner had the last one crossed the threshold than the door closed.

Then the captain, who had been stooping down, flung himself flat on his face.

There was a flash of light—

A dull, heavy, roaring sound like thunder—

Blows—cries—groans—another roar—then silence.

Silence and darkness.

The highwaymen were stunned and bewildered.

The barrels in which they had concealed themselves were overturned, and hurled with great violence against the walls of the cavern.

Upon recovering possession of their senses, Jack was about to call aloud to his comrade, when fortunately he was arrested by hearing a voice exclaim:

"It is done—the deed is done! At last—at last all—all is over! Dull fools never to suspect me! But that is over now. I will get together all these valuables, and depart. Then, sleeping or waking, I will try to forget that there is, or ever was, such a place as this. How the powder roared. Well—well, I will not think of it. Why should I? It did its work effectually and well. They are dead—all dead—every one perished, and so there is no one who can contest my claim to the whole. Ha, ha! This is indeed a good night's work, and yet why should I feel so nervous? Why should my flesh crawl, and the blood seem to turn cold in my veins? It is all fancy! I must, and will get the better of it! It is impossible for one of them to be alive."

By the time the man had done giving utterance to these ejaculations, Sixteen-String Jack was able to arrive at a tolerably correct conclusion respecting what had happened.

Much that had been obscure to him before was now made clear.

He guessed at once what would be an awful punishment to this treacherous monster.

Placing his hands in a peculiar manner before his mouth, he gave utterance to a most awful groan.

It was echoed by a shriek of dismay.

"Mercy—mercy!" cried the captain—"have mercy upon me! Is it possible that some one has escaped with life?"

Jack groaned again—this time more awfully than before.

The captain seemed to fall down on his face.

To him the intense darkness that prevailed had a thousand terrors.

His imagination peopled it with all manner of hideous things, and it is no exaggeration to say that in a few moments he suffered whole ages of torment.

Claude Duval had been dashed down with greater force than his companion, for he appeared to be much nearer to the doorway.

Consequently, it was some time before he recovered possession of his senses.

He did so with Jack's first groan ringing in his ears.

Puzzled and bewildered, he remained perfectly still for a moment, not able to comprehend exactly where he was or what had happened.

Then came the second groan.

Recollection then rushed full upon him.

His first thought was for his companion's safety

"Jack—Jack," he cried, "where are you? Speak—speak! Are you much hurt?"

The captain heard these words.

His terrors increased, for the impression came over him that his deliberate plan of wholesale murder had by some mysterious means or other completely failed, as in his agitation he did not notice that Claude's voice was a strange one.

"Help—help!" he gasped—"help and save me! No—it is useless to ask for mercy—I must escape! If needs be, I must fight my way to freedom! No mercy—no mercy!"

Jack guessed at once what were the captain's feelings, and hastened to take advantage of the circumstance.

"Villain!" he cried, at the very top of his voice, "you shall receive the reward due to such atrocity as yours! It will be in vain for you to attempt to escape—you are doomed!"

With a wild shriek of terror, which proclaimed the fearful condition of his mind, the captain sprang to his feet and made a frantic dash across the cavern.

Jack heard him, and felt certain that he had gone in the direction of the steps.

Fearful that his knowledge of the intricacies of the cavern would enable him to escape—a thing which Jack was most anxious to prevent—our friend cried:

"Hold—hold, villain that you are! If you attempt to move another step your death will be certain!"

But his words were disregarded.

The captain was struggling furiously with the curtain which obstructed his progress, and which, for the life of him, owing to the state of mortal fright he was in, he could not dash aside.

"Hold!" cried Jack, again groping his way through the darkness—"hold, or I fire!"

But the captain gave a cry of delight.

The curtain was now torn down, and he was now hurrying towards the steps.

Guided by the sound only, Jack raised his pistol and fired.

There was a tremendous report, which caused numberless fragments of earth to fall to the floor of the cavern—fragments which had been detached by the explosion.

Then came an awful cry that rang with terrific effect through the cavern.

It was a cry such as Claude and Jack hoped never to hear again.

It was followed by a heavy, crashing noise.

"Claude—Claude!"

"Yes, Jack?"

"Where are you?"

"Here—here."

"Quick—a light!"

"In a moment. Are you unhurt?"

"Yes, quite."

A momentary delay, which seemed almost like an age, took place.

Then there was a faint glimmering of light.

Claude quickly had his lantern lighted.

Then, advancing, he held it up.

The first object upon which its beams fell was the haggard countenance of his companion.

"Why, Jack," he exclaimed, "you look as though you had seen a ghost!"

"No matter—no matter," was the impatient answer. "Give me the light, and follow me. This way—this way!"

Guided as much as anything by a succession of awful groans, the two highwaymen made their way across the cavern.

Upon reaching the kind of passage leading from it, a most horrible sight presented itself.



[TOM DAVIS IS OVERCOME WITH GRATITUDE.]

Lying in a strange, huddled-up mass, and literally bathed in blood, was the man who had been styled captain.

Jack's bullet had told fearfully.

But without any great stretch of the imagination, it would be easy to believe that the bullet had been guided by some retributive power that was unwilling to allow such a monster to escape.

At any rate, there he lay, bleeding profusely, his eyes almost starting from his head with horror.

It would seem that at the time when he was struck by the bullet he was in the act of ascending the rude flight of steps.

It was either that, or else, directly after the infliction of the wound, he had staggered and attempted to ascend—

Then fallen headlong back.

Jack turned the light of the lantern full upon him.

After the first glance, however, he was compelled to avert his eyes.

"Mercy—mercy!" gasped the captain, in a feeble voice. "Oh, have mercy upon me! I was tempted—yes, sorely tempted to do this deed; and you see how I have been punished! Mercy—mercy—oh, have mercy upon me!"

"You are past our help," said Sixteen-String Jack, "but you have brought death upon your own head."

"I know it—I know it, and rejoice in the knowledge that at the most I have only a few minutes to exist. After this night, life would be a greater punishment to me than I could bear."

"I meant not to slay you," said Jack; "my intention was merely to put a stop to your escape."

"And you have done it. But ah! who are you? Strangers—yes, strangers, for although the mist of death is thick before my eyes, yet I am sure that I never saw you before."

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It was strange that the captain had not made this discovery sooner.

"Yes, we are strangers," said Jack, "but, beyond saying that, I do not intend to give you any information."

"I do not want it—I do not want it! I fancy, too, that there is little need for me to tell you what is the meaning of all that has occurred."

"I think we comprehend it pretty fully."

"I had laid my plans well—yes, exceedingly well. All went well to the last—quite well; then I—I—I——"

He gasped painfully several times for breath.

But at each effort to recover the wonted action of his lungs, he grew palpably weaker and weaker, until, after a long-drawn sigh, he expired.

After this there was a momentary silence.

It was broken by Sixteen-String Jack, who simply exclaimed:

"He is dead!"

"Yes, quite dead," said Claude, touching the bleeding mass with the toe of his riding-boot. "Now let us get to the upper air; this place stifles me."

He pushed forward as he spoke; but Jack cried:

"Hold—hold, my friend! You forget."

"Forget what?"

"Why, it is just within the bounds of possibility that some of this man's companions may have escaped the effects of this explosion; if so, it is clearly no more than our duty, bad as they are, to render them what assistance lies in our power."

This was something which Claude could not dispute.

He turned back, though somewhat reluctantly.

Jack led the way with a rapid step across the cavern, and paused at the door, or rather where the door had been.

The doorway was now filled up with earth, and a little examination seemed to show them that the force of the explosion had caused the roof and side of the inner cavern to fall in.

Therefore if any of those unfortunates who entered it had happened to escape from the explosion they must have been buried under many tons of earth.

"We can do no good here," cried Jack; "they are past our help."

"Hark!"

Both listened.

But the silence of the very grave itself reigned around them.

"All is over," said Jack—"all is over. But what an awful slaughter!"

He shuddered as he spoke, and turned to leave the cavern.

Claude hastily followed him.

As he did so, his eye fell upon the pile of glittering gold, which, strangely enough, had remained undisturbed.

"What shall be done with this?" he asked.

"Nothing—at least, nothing just at present. Like you, I feel sick and faint. Some other time perhaps——"

Jack ceased abruptly, for just at that moment a death-like feeling came over him.

With an effort, he shook it off, however, and managed to stagger across the cavern.

The steps were ascended with still greater difficulty; but at last the top was reached, the strange covering was removed, and then, with a sensation of most indescribable and inexpressible relief, the highwaymen found the fresh breath of heaven blowing in their faces.

CHAPTER MV.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN MEET WITH A SINGULAR INCIDENT AT THE ROADSIDE INN.

For some moments Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack literally seemed to do nothing but drink in the cold night air.

No words can describe how welcome and refreshing it was to their panting lungs.

"Thank Heaven, Jack," said Claude Duval, "that we are safely out of that place! It will be some time before I feel inclined to burrow underground again, I rather think!"

"It has been an awful escape. Would—oh, would that I could have guessed at the intentions of that monster! It is terrible to think that so many have perished."

"Well, Jack, you may think so."

"Do not you?"

"I cannot exactly say I do. They were a very bad lot indeed—that is quite certain; and we may be sure that, if they had lived, every one would have come to some bad end or other."

"That may be, and yet——"

"Do not waste time to speak of them. Are you better?"

"Much."

"Then, my friend, if you will be guided by me, you will do your best to recover possession of our horses, and after that we will make our way back to the castle."

"I shall be ready in a few moments, but I cannot so readily banish from my mind the remembrance of this affair. Besides, before we leave we ought to take accurate note of the exact position of this place, so that, should it ever be necessary, we can find it again."

"I don't think there will be much difficulty about that."

Sixteen-String Jack looked well around him, so as to imprint every feature of the place upon his mind, then glanced upwards to note the position of the stars.

"I shall know it again," he said. "But the gold which was upon the table—what about it, Claude?"

"If you ask me, I should say let it remain where it is. What would it be worth, think you, to encounter that dreadful scene again?"

Jack was silent.

"My opinion is," continued Claude, "that the best thing we can do is to lay all the facts before the captain when we return, and hear what he has to say upon the subject."

"Agreed, then. There are many things connected with the affair which I should much like to have cleared up. But I suppose we can do no more than indulge in speculations?"

"Nothing; but, for all that, I feel tolerably certain that we shall come somewhere very near the truth."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. These men have been in the habit for some time past of committing depredations. The booty was brought here. At first, no doubt, it was intended that all should be fairly and equally divided, but the spirit of avarice came in and took a lodging in the captain's breast. That led him to the deed he perpetrated to-night."

"Yes, that must be so."

"He must have availed himself of various opportunities to lay a mine beneath that small cavern, in which, of course, his companions, when they entered it, believed the booty was stored."

"He must have made some excuse to them to get away from them during some part of their last expedition."

"Yes, and all the rest is clear. As soon as all were standing in the treacherous inner cavern, he applied his light to the train of gunpowder. That, it seems to me, is the long and the short of the whole affair."

"But how awful!"

"Truly so."

Sixteen-String Jack sat still for some time in perfect silence.

At length rising and giving a parting glance around him, he exclaimed:

"Come, Claude, let us go. But, like you, I think I shall be most reluctant to visit this place again."

Without another word, the two highwaymen set out in quest of their horses.

As may be imagined, it was no easy task for them to retrace their steps among the trees, for not the slightest trace remained to show them the track by which they had come.

They soon discovered, too, that the wood was of a much greater extent than they had at first imagined it to be, and the trees were all so much alike that they began to fear their search was a hopeless one.

Suddenly, however, Claude paused and exclaimed:

"Hark, Jack—did your hear that?"

"Yes, quite plainly. It was a neigh, and of course from one of our horses. We must be close to them now."

"Have you a good idea of the direction from which the sound proceeded?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Lead the way, then."

Jack stepped forward with a tolerable amount of confidence, and, after a brief search, the eyes of the two highwaymen were gladdened by the sight of their steeds.

They were standing just as they had left them, having made apparently no effort to break their tether.

Taking them by the bridles, our friends led them towards the borders of the wood.

From the length of time that had elapsed, and from the fact that their horses had not been discovered, there seemed little to fear that the officers were still on the look-out for them.

No doubt when they once discovered that the highwaymen had fairly gained the recesses of the wood, or forest—for it seemed more like the latter than the former—they gave up the chase in despair.

Nevertheless, Claude and Jack did not venture to quit the protecting shadow of the trees until they had satisfied themselves by reconnoitring that there was no one lurking about.

The darkness prevented them from executing their task with any amount of exactness, still the darkness was in their favor, for it would serve to keep their forms concealed.

"I think we may venture," said Jack; "there does not seem to be anyone about."

"The coast seems perfectly clear," replied Claude. As he spoke he at once rode out into the waste ground with which the wood was engirdled.

"The night is already far spent," exclaimed Jack. "I think now our wisest course will be to make our way back to the ruins where, doubtless, Dick and the rest are waiting for us with great anxiety."

"That is exactly what I was about to propose."

"Push on, then. Our horses, after their long rest, ought to be able to make tolerable speed."

Having uttered these words, the two highwaymen without further delay set their steeds in motion, and soon were stretching across the open country in the direction of their destination.

During the time, however, that they had remained concealed in the cavern much rain had fallen, and they soon discovered that the heavy, soddened nature of the ground taxed their horses' powers most severely.

Presently they pulled up, and with some abruptness, for they saw that a ploughed field of vast extent lay before them.

"It will never do to attempt to take them across there, Claude," said Jack—"it would knock them up completely."

"You are right, it would; even now they show signs of great exhaustion."

"What is to be done?"

"I fancy the best thing will be to keep along under this hedge until we meet with a lane or cross-country road. Rely upon it, we shall not have to go far before finding one."

The direction of their horses' heads was now changed, and at a much slower rate than before, they journeyed on.

Our friends found their anticipations well founded.

Ere they had gone much more than half a mile they found themselves near a narrow winding lane.

It was separated from them, however, by a tall, stout wooden fence, the top of which was garnished with a great quantity of rusty iron hooks.

Claude and Jack shook their heads at this obstruction.

It would not only be foolish but cruel to make their horses face such an obstacle, as in case it should not be cleared very serious injuries would be the result.

"We must look for a gate," said Claude. "It will never do to try such a rasper as that while our horses are in this exhausted condition."

"There is no occasion for the attempt to be made, I think," replied Jack, "for unless my eyes deceive me I can see a gate a little way down yonder."

Claude looked in the direction to which his companion pointed, and cried:

"Yes, there is a gate, sure enough We are all right now."

Upon the gate being reached, however, it was found to be very strongly and carefully secured by means of a padlock and a stout iron chain.

Claude was unprovided with any materials requisite for removing such an obstacle as this, but he dismounted quickly, for his eye happened to light upon a large round stone at least as large as his own head.

Raising this with both his hands, he flung it against the gate.

A sharp crash was the result, and upon examining the padlock afterwards it was found to be completely demolished.

The gate swung open, and Claude rapidly remounted.

Neither had a very good idea of where this lane was likely to take them, for to the best of their knowledge they had never been in it before.

After a brief consideration, however, they turned to the right.

For some time they rode on rapidly and in silence, for the ground beneath their horses' feet was good, showing that the lane was well cared for.

Passing round rather a sharp curve, they came in sight very suddenly of the high-road.

Mechanically they drew rein and looked around.

The first thing that attracted their notice was a building situated just at the spot where the lane joined the highway.

A second glance at it made them aware that the building was an inn.

Having made this discovery, they rode forward with greater cautiousness than ever.

Lights were shining from most of the windows on the ground-floor, showing that the inmates had not yet retired to rest, or, what was more likely, that they had just risen, for the hour was that dark one which is popularly supposed invariably to precede the dawn.

Seeing that the inhabitants of the roadside inn were astir, Claude said:

"What say you, Jack, to halting here for a few moments? There cannot be much risk in doing so, and our horses will be all the better for a little refreshment."

"They are sorely in need of it; and I feel that nothing would be so welcome to my lips as a tankard of good home-brewed ale."

"We are very likely to get it here. No doubt they are up at this early hour to be in readiness for one of the coaches passing by."

"No doubt that is it. Come, I can see there is a horse-trough in front. We have no time to spare, but yet our halt here will not prove any loss of time."

With this understanding the two highwaymen guided their horses to the front of the inn.

No sooner did they pause than a man made his appearance from round an angle of the building.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "are you going to favor me with a call?"

"No, I think not," answered Claude. "But if you will bring us a tankard of your best ale, and while we are drinking it supply the horses with something eatable that they can amuse themselves with while we drink it, I shall be obliged."

"Your instructions shall be carried out, gentlemen. But, excuse me, I have no stable accommodation at disposal; but if you like to let your horses stand round the corner for a few minutes with the rest, they can have what they require, and you can step indoors the while and warm yourselves, for it is 'nation cold."

"It is indeed," said Jack, shivering, "but we are in too great a hurry."

"You know best, gentlemen, so wait half a moment while I attend to you."

"That must be the landlord, I should think," observed Jack, as the man bustled into the house.

"What horses did he mean?" asked Claude. "I have a great mind to have a look."

Just then there seemed to be a great commotion all at once within the public-house, and in a second afterwards several individuals rushed forth.

Our friends did not need to give a second glance to recognise them.

They were police officers.

"Off and away, Jack!" cried Claude Duval, for he perceived at once that they were known.

It was a great disappointment to be disturbed at this moment, but they thought not of it.

Wheeling their horses round with great suddenness, they set off at a full gallop along the road.

As they passed the angle of the inn from where the landlord had appeared, the highwaymen caught sight of the horses belonging to the officers, which were standing with their heads turned to the wall, and eating away at a great rate.

"What a narrow escape!" cried Jack.

"Yes—yes! But push on—push on! We must get clear of them at once, or we shall take them too near the castle."

Jack felt this, and spurred his horse hard.

For one thing, they had obtained a good start, for as yet their enemies had not begun the chase.

Jack glanced back again, and as he did so he uttered a loud laugh, for a most amusing spectacle met his gaze.

Claude turned round and laughed heartily as well.

Still they did not linger, and the next moment a curve in the road hid the inn from their sight.

To explain what Jack saw, it is necessary to go back a little.

These officers, then, were no others than those who had made such strenuous efforts to overtake the highwaymen on the preceding night.

They had kept up the chase ever since, but fruitlessly, for they were clever enough to get altogether upon a false scent.

Worn out at last with fatigue, they all pulled up at the inn where our two friends chanced to pause.

In default of stable room, the horses were placed at the side of the house, where they were tolerably well sheltered from the cold.

The officers went inside.

This was about half an hour previous to the arrival of Claude and Jack.

When the landlord entered for the purpose of obtaining the tankard of ale Claude had asked for, he remarked that two travellers had arrived outside, and were in too great a hurry to enter.

This communication caused a couple of the officers to start up and look through the window.

They recognised the highwaymen at the very first glance, and rushed out pell-mell.

They made a frantic dash for their horses, shouting and swearing all the time at the very top of their voices.

In order to allow the animals to eat more at ease, the landlord had taken upon himself to remove the bits from their mouths and also to loosen their saddle-girths.

The first delay occurred in replacing the bits.

This done, the officers went in hot haste to mount.

But the moment they put foot in the stirrup and sprang up, the weight of their bodies caused the saddles to turn round.

Down went the officers on their backs in a moment.

As they lay sprawling about under their horses, they did indeed present a most ludicrous spectacle.

No wonder Jack and Claude laughed so heartily.

The officers, however, failed to see the most distant semblance of a joke in the incident.

Covered with mud from head to foot, and suffering some little pain from the bruises they had sustained, they struggled to their feet, pouring out, as they did so, the most awful imprecations that can be imagined.

But it was against the landlord that their wrath was directed, for beyond doubt he was the cause—though an innocent one—of the mischief.

Animated by a spirit of revenge, which for a time made them oblivious of all else, they made a simultaneous rush upon the unfortunate man.

He was seized in a moment.

The officers' fury was augmented by the landlord's demeanor, for the accident had so tickled his fancy that, instead of hastening to the assistance of his guests, he had leaned up against the wall, and, with his hands to his sides, had indulged in a tremendous burst of laughter.

The officers' rage was redoubled.

"To the horse-trough with him!" roared one. "D—n him—I'll let him know whether he is going to play off such tricks as these upon us with impunity! This way—this way!"

Never was command more promptly obeyed.

The landlord's merriment subsided with amazing suddenness.

In vain he assured them that it was no practical joke that he had played upon them.

In vain he entreated them to have mercy upon him.

The officers were completely deaf.

In the hands of so many, the landlord was utterly powerless.

His frantic struggles were as unable to save him from his impending fate.

The horse-trough was reached.

By main strength the unfortunate man was raised and tossed into it.

Then, not content with giving him this icy bath—for the morning was a bitterly cold one—some held him down, while others with hearty good will plied the handle of the pump which stood at one end of the horse-trough.

Nor did they cease their discipline until compelled to do so, partly from exhaustion, and partly because reflection returning reminded them that all this time they had been neglecting important business.

Ceasing suddenly, then, their treatment of the landlord, they hurried back to their horses.

With many horrible curses they tightened the saddle-girths, and, having seen that all was secure, mounted.

By this time the landlord recovered himself sufficiently to scramble out of the trough.

He presented a deplorable spectacle.

The water ran from him in streams, and as he walked he left a perfect brook behind him.

He was breathless, yet he contrived to stammer out threats of vengeance.

But the officers only laughed at him, which increased his incensement tenfold.

"Forward!" cried the police officer who was in command of the rest—"forward, I say, or we shall be too late!"

As he spoke, he clapped spurs to his horse's sides.

His example was followed by his companions, and away they went at full speed down the road in the direction the highwaymen had taken.

But a considerable delay had by this time taken place—so considerable that it enabled the highwaymen to obtain an excellent start.

Although their prey was now out of sight, the officers pressed onwards.

Their course, however, was taken completely at random.

Yet it was not until daybreak that the chief officer admitted that he had been utterly foiled.

"It's no use, my lads!" he cried. "D—n that landlord—it's all his fault, though. But we'll be even with him one of these next days. It's no good going on any further—not a bit. We must turn back. But, for all that, I mean to have another try, whenever I get the chance."

So saying, the officer turned round, and the whole of the troop, looking very tired, very angry, and very crest-fallen, retraced their steps.

In the meantime, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack had improved this incident to the utmost.

By pushing their horses to the utmost of their capacity at the first starting, they had managed to get quite out of sight of the officers.

Then, gradually reducing their rate of speed, they changed their course again, and once more rode direct towards the place they wished to reach.

CHAPTER MVI.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN DEPART ON THEIR PERILOUS EXPEDITION.

It was very close indeed upon daylight when Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack reached the ruins of the old castle.

While approaching it, they had kept the most careful look-out, and felt satisfied that they had gained the rendezvous unperceived.

As they fully anticipated, they found their companions anxiously awaiting and looking for their arrival.

"Safe and sound, I see," were Dick Turpin's first words. "I had begun to grow anxious about your safety."

"And no wonder," said Claude, as he alighted. "Here Jack Ostler, take my horse; I am too weary to do anything myself."

Sixteen-String Jack was not less fatigued.

Nevertheless, they were not permitted to rest until they had given an account of their adventures.

Dick Turpin listened to the whole recital with great interest, and so did Maud.

"Have you any idea," asked the former, "what might be the actual amount of wealth contained in the cavern?"

"I have not," replied Jack; "it is, however, of considerable amount, though, if it was twice as much, I question whether Claude would descend to fetch it."

"Is, then, the sight so very horrible?" asked Maud, speaking with considerable hesitation.

"It is indeed," answered Jack, with a shudder.

Maud looked deeply disappointed.

"At any rate," said Dick, "should we ever be badly in need of a sum of money, and not know where to obtain it, there would at least be that resource to fly to."

"Beyond all doubt there would."

Hearing these words, Maud's countenance brightened again.

The reason why she grasped so eagerly at the idea of taking possession of this wealth was that during the night Dick and herself had passed alone in the ruins she had made use of every argument she could think of to induce him to abandon his present mode of life.

Dick loved Maud too tenderly and truly to listen unmoved to her entreaties, yet he knew not how to comply with them.

At last he was induced to promise that, should he ever be able to amass a sufficient sum of money to keep them above want, he would, without delay, seek out a place in some foreign land where he was unknown, and live there a life of peacefulness and rest.

Oh, how glad this promise made the heart of Maud! for she could at last see something like a definite prospect of her husband quitting his perilous career.

How this account of Sixteen-String Jack's coming so close upon the promise naturally filled her with excitement!

As for Dick himself, he felt inclined to look upon the matter in a light more serious than he had hitherto done.

It was with a keen pang at his heart that he reflected how truly fearful would be Maud's career should he by any means be deprived of life.

It is true that so far he had with impunity braved almost every danger; but yet a time might come when his good fortune would desert him.

At any night, upon one of his excursions, a bullet might lay him low.

Then, deprived of his support, what was Maud to do?

It is easy to understand how well calculated to induce serious feelings these thoughts were.

Yet, with admirable self-possession, he contrived to keep them locked up in his breast, though he could not help dwelling mentally upon the account which his two comrades had given him.

There are moments in our lives when all seems dark and dull—when favourite and eagerly-followed pursuits lose all their charm—when a kind of despondency weighs upon the spirits, and when we long for some great change to take place in our lives.

It was thus, to a certain extent, with Dick Turpin at this moment.

A longing for something like repose came over his mind—a desire for some sort of respite from his adventurous course.

The prospect of a peaceful, happy home with Maud, in some fair clime, where summer always reigns, and where he would have nought to fear from his fellow-creatures, seemed most enticing, and just then he longed ardently for its realisation.

He believed that could this dream only become reality he should be happy and content.

It is very questionable, however, whether such would have been the case for long.

After a time, in all probability the desire would return with redoubled force for adventure and excitement.

Whether this was ever destined to be the case, the course of events only can disclose.

During that day nothing occurred important enough to deserve recordation.

At nightfall, however, the highwaymen assembled, and gave themselves up to a careful consideration of the enterprise that lay before them.

Despite its risks, they were fully resolved to undertake it.

Still they consulted carefully together, for, despite their resolution, they could not but feel that they were about to run into a very serious danger—perhaps the conflict in which they were about to engage would prove fatal to one or more of them.

It is not necessary to place their deliberations before the reader.

Events will soon show their nature.

Every preparation was made

Maud wept bitterly.

She dreaded to see Dick depart on an errand fraught with so much peril.

Most earnestly did she entreat him to allow her to accompany them.

Over and over again she assured him she would not be in the way—that she would be brave, and that the expedition would be shorn of half its dangers.

But Dick felt it impossible to accede to her request, though it pained him much to deny her.

He felt that Maud's presence at such a time would be the very thing that would unnerve him.

He would be concerned and abstracted all the while, on account of her safety, whereas, by leaving her at the ruins, this anxiety was avoided.

But to Maud there was something inexpressibly dreadful in remaining for so long a period in the ruins by herself.

She soon found, however, that Dick was determined, and that it would be utter futility to attempt to persuade him to change his resolution.

But it was with a heavy heart, and with many forebodings of coming danger, that she resigned herself to her dreary fate.

What caused the highwaymen the most consultation and the greatest uneasiness was the doubt they experienced as to whether the van would start in the morning or at night.

In the former case their destination would be reached before midday, in the latter, before midnight.

It was as likely to be the one as the other.

If the first, the hazard of making the attack would be so great that one would think no sane men would venture it.

But Dick and his comrades were not ordinary mortals, and therefore unswayed by ordinary considerations.

It was finally thus determined by Dick Turpin:

"We will make sure both ways," he cried, "and we will contrive to do it in this way: On the night of the 20th—that is the night next following—we will set out for our destination."

"That is very soon," observed Maud, timidly.

"Not a moment too soon," replied Dick, with decision "In case the van should start at nine in the morning we shall be there in readiness to intercept it. If at night, so much the better. It will be an easy matter for us to conceal ourselves until the proper moment arrives."

It was felt at once that no better arrangement than this could possibly be made, and it was decided upon without the least hesitation.

So great was the suspense and impatience of all concerned, that the time seemed as though it would never pass away.

At the appointed hour, however, the shades of evening began to close in, and the ruined castle at once assumed an aspect of bustle and excitement.

So soon as ever it was dark enough to make it safe, the highwaymen mounted in readiness to depart.

Maud clung tightly to Dick, and seemed as though it would be a total impossibility for her to part with him.

Gently but firmly, however, Dick released himself from her close embrace.

As he did so, he said:

"Be brave, Maud—be of good heart! Believe me all will yet be well. Do not suffer greater apprehensions on my account than you can help; and above all things do not on any account be induced even for a moment to leave the protecting shadow of the ruins. I leave you with one whose fidelity has been well tried, and I do not feel afraid but that he will protect and save you from all

harm. Farewell for a brief space, and, while I am away console yourself with the thought that you are perhaps much nearer to the realisation of your great hope than you imagine. Once more, farewell!"

As he uttered this last word, Dick Turpin rode somewhat hastily away, for he was afraid to trust himself to linger longer.

Maud, with a faint, moaning cry, sank back and leaned against the ruins for support.

It was only with the greatest difficulty, and by the exercise of the greatest possible amount of self-control, that she prevented herself from fainting.

What helped her, however, perhaps more than anything else to retain possession of her senses was the strong desire she felt to watch as long as she was able the retreating forms of her husband and his companions

Pressing her hand, then, tightly upon her heart, and leaning against the crumbling walls, she watched them until a projection of the stonework hid them from her sight.

Dick did not trust himself to look back, but pushed on at a pace almost too rapid for the exercise of due caution.

London lay between the highwaymen and their destination, but they carefully avoided the metropolis.

This necessitated a very considerable detour, but then there was not so much fear that they would encounter any band of police officers, and, moreover, they were able to put their horses to good speed.

Dick's intention was to ride direct to Greenwich with all possible speed; then, upon his arrival there, to work his way back towards London, until they could either obtain the information they required, or else take up their position in a favorable spot.

Owing to the unfrequented routes they were careful to take, they succeeded in reaching Greenwich without encountering any interruption whatever.

They paused outside the town, and just then a church clock began to strike.

By counting the strokes they found the hour to be ten.

"We have plenty of time before us," Dick remarked, "but we must be careful what we do. It is quite certain that we are here first, and all we have to do is to go quietly towards London. We shall then be certain of meeting with the van.

Accordingly, keeping in twos and at some distance apart, so as not to appear all in one company, which might have attracted suspicion, they journeyed at an easy rate along the high-road.

By the hour of eleven they found themselves some six or seven miles distant, and close to an inn that was very pleasantly shaded by some tall trees of luxuriant foliage.

"This is the place to gain the information we require," said Dick.

"But you must conduct your questionings carefully."

"Oh, of course! We will just pause here for some few moments, but not dismount."

To this Tom King assented, at the same time making a sign to his comrades behind to ride on without taking the least notice of them.

It was a bold step for Dick to take, but then he had borne in mind the fact that he was now in a part of the country which he had never before visited, and where, consequently, there was not much fear that he would be recognised.

"House—house!" he cried, in a loud voice; but, to his surprise, no notice was taken of his summons.

He repeated it, with no better effect.

"One would think, Tom, that all the people had gone to bed, only it is scarcely likely they would do so and leave the house open and lighted up in this fashion."

"It is odd," said Tom. "I will call; perhaps my voice may reach further than yours."

Tom called accordingly, but all remained as silent as before.

This was more than strange.

The inn had a remarkably quiet look, as though, as a rule, but little trade was done at it; and if the present was a sample of the amount of attention they paid to callers, want of business was not to be wondered at.

Our two friends waited for several moments in patience, but with no better success than at first.

"This is about the oddest thing that ever happened to me," said Dick.

"It seems to me we shall get no good by waiting here," rejoined his comrade.

"It does indeed; but still my curiosity is excited by such an unusual circumstance. Let us alight for a moment, and ascertain, if we can, what it means."

Nothing loth, Tom King left the saddle.

The two horses were then secured to a couple of rings fixed in the trough for that purpose, and then the two highwaymen boldly crossed the threshold of the inn.

The first room they came to was illuminated by the blaze of a cheerful fire, but a glance served to show them that it was vacant.

Wondering more and more, the two friends strode on.

Suddenly both paused, for a strange and muffled noise had just then assailed their ears.

After listening for a moment they ascertained its character.

Some person or persons were sobbing and sighing at a great rate, as though suffering an extremity of woe.

Guided by the sounds, they pressed onwards, and presently paused at a door that was slightly ajar.

It was evidently from the room beyond that the sounds of sorrow came.

Dick gently pushed the door open about an inch wider, and peeped in.

His eyes then fell upon a most sorrow-stricken group.

Seated in a most dejected attitude by the fireside was a man.

Dick could not see his features, for his face was turned towards the fireplace.

Next to him sat a woman, who, though of middle age, yet preserved in a remarkable degree an appearance of youthfulness.

Her face Dick could see, and as he gazed upon it, he felt that he should not forget it for many a day.

The expression it wore was one of stolid, soul-chilling despair.

It was as though all hope had been frozen in her bosom.

Near her was a young girl, whose face was buried in her hands.

But glistening tears forced their way through her fingers, while her sobs were truly heart-rending to listen to.

A man, attired half like a waiting man, half like an ostler, was sitting on one corner of a table, dangling his legs to and fro, and keeping his eyes resolutely fixed upon the floor.

There seemed to be several others in the room, but these were all that could be seen distinctly through the narrow crevice of the door.

For a moment or so, Dick hesitated.

He was in doubt whether he should retire quietly, leaving the people at the inn altogether ignorant of his visit, or whether he should make his presence known.

It almost seemed as though their grief was of too deep and sacred a character to be intruded upon by strangers.

It was evident that it utterly absorbed their faculties, rendering them quite oblivious of all that was taking place around them.

But it was the very intensity of this grief which made Dick Turpin hesitate.

He was full of curiosity to know what species of calamity it could have been to have wrought such great effects.

His inclination was strong to enter, and most assuredly he would have done so had he had the slightest inkling that he could have been of any service to them, or if he thought he could in any way assuage and mitigate their great grief.

With a sudden effort, he arrived at a decision

Pushing open the door somewhat suddenly, he strode into the room.

The noise made by his entrance caused the different members of the group to look up.

But when Dick encountered so many tearful visages, and saw so many stony eyes turned upon him, he wished he had decided differently.

But it was now too late to retreat.

All gazed at him inquiringly.

"I am very sorry to intrude upon a scene of such great domestic trouble," he said, in a gentle voice that came naturally to him on occasions like the present, and which had a most soothing effect upon his hearers. "I repeat I am sorry to intrude, but I did so inadvertently. We halted at your door, called aloud in vain, and at last entered to see whether the place could be deserted."

"Gentlemen," said the man before the fire, and who, beyond a doubt, was the landlord—"gentlemen, if you wish for refreshment of any kind do not seek it here—quit this abode of misery. Ride on a little further, and you will find another inn where all your wants will be attended to. We cannot serve you here."

It was palpable that the landlord spoke with only the greatest possible effort.

Every now and then his voice would become choked and almost lost.

Then it would quaver in a manner which showed to what a sore extent his heart was oppressed.

Again Dick hesitated.

The landlord, without troubling himself to see whether his words were attended to, resumed his former attitude.

So strange a reception surely was never given in an inn before, and Dick wished from the bottom of his heart that he should be able to arrive at some solution of the mystery, though how to set about it he had not the least idea.

CHAPTER MVII.

IN WHICH IT WILL BE SEEN THAT FORTUNE FAVORS THE HIGHWAYMEN IN AN UNCOMMON DEGREE

A FEW moments elapsed, and then the landlord, raising his head, said, in a voice of extreme bitterness:

"Is the sight of our woe so pleasing to you that you can do nothing but feast your eyes upon it? If so, gaze on—you are welcome."

"You mistake my motive for lingering altogether," said Turpin, who was not a little embarrassed by the manner in which he had been addressed

"What is it, then?"

"To offer you consolation, such as——"

The landlord interrupted him with a shrill, contemptuous laugh.

"Or, what would be better," continued Turpin, retreating towards the door, "to do anything which happened to be within my power to alleviate your distress, which, I can assure you, wrings my heart to witness."

It was impossible for anyone to doubt the earnestness of what Dick said.

Sincerity itself was in every tone of his voice.

The landlord seemed to think so, for, in a voice of less asperity, he replied:

"Sir, such behaviour as this from a stranger is unusual indeed. I am sorry I so much mistook your intention. Let me assure you, however, that my grief is so deep and so irremediable that it must be far beyond the power of any stranger to mitigate it in the least degree."

"I regret to hear that," answered Turpin. "Still, it would be quite possible for you to be perfectly ignorant of the powers I possess. Would money serve you?"

The landlord slowly and sadly shook his head.

"I see how it is," he said. "You are curious, and it is not unnatural that you should be. Have what you want. You shall not depart unsatisfied, and I will lay bare all my troubles to you."

"I can only express my satisfaction at your determination; and, oddly enough, there comes over my mind a conviction that I may be able to soothe your pangs."

The landlord shook his head in token of dissent, then said:

"Sit down, gentlemen—sit down. What I have to tell I shall not be long relating, though I little thought that I should ever make a stranger acquainted with my disgrace."

This was rather a difficult speech to make any reply to, so, very wisely, Dick Turpin remained silent, waiting for the landlord to commence.

His suspense was soon at an end, for in a trembling, hesitating voice the landlord began thus:

"Sir, you must understand I had a son—indeed, I have him now in one sense, though he is lost to me for ever. My only son, sir, you understand, and therefore petted and fondled, and indulged too much—until, in fact, the very kindness with which we treated him proved his ruin. I lay the blame more upon myself than upon him," he added. "Don't you, wife?"

This appeal was answered by a loud and passionate burst of grief.

After a brief pause the landlord resumed:

"He was always a wild, harum-scarum young fellow—always in mischief from his very birth; but his pranks amused us, and, so far from checking him, we encouraged him in them. But I shall tire your patience if I go on thus."

Dick warmly protested the contrary.

"Nevertheless, I will pass over all that, and come to my trouble at once. Things went on and on, and at last my poor boy got into companionship with a lot of bad fellows. I was sure they would bring him to no good, and remonstrated with him on the subject, pointing out to him what would be the inevitable result. But he only laughed at my 'groundless fears,' as he called them, and went on as before. Then, indeed, did I blame myself for the course I had pursued. Had I kept a better check upon my boy in his younger days I should have been able to control him then. As it was, I had not the slightest influence or power over him. And then he was always so lively, so kind, so generous, and so happy. His cheerful spirits always filled the house with sunshine, and I, weak, insensate fool that I was, could not bring myself to think even of adopting any harsh measures towards him. But I am running on and on, and not coming to the point."

But Dick again declared how deeply interested he was in every word, which was not to be wondered at.

There was a rude kind of pathos in the landlord's manner, and the way in which he spoke of his scapegrace son, and the construction he tried to place upon his acts, showed all a fond parent's devoted love.

Alas, how often is this precious love poured out and unrequited!

"In a word, sir," resumed the landlord, suddenly, and speaking with apparent effort, "my boy got from bad to worse. Insensibly his bad companions led him on, and he began to descend the steep hill of ruin. He was past me now, although I still made use at every opportunity of prayers and expostulations.

"At length, sir, he—he was accused of being concerned in a robbery.

"The charge seemed to crush me, but, rallying myself, I set forth at once to see what could be done on my boy's behalf.

"I tried my utmost to compromise the affair, but the prosecutor was a stern, unmerciful man, who had never known what it is to feel a father's affection for his child.

"Despite all my efforts, my boy was arrested, brought up before a magistrate, examined, and, on the evidence then produced, committed for trial.

"Still, I did not relax my efforts, but they were all quite unproductive.

"He was carried to Newgate, and a few days ago took his trial.

"I engaged eloquent counsel on his behalf, but their skill availed not against the array of incontrovertible evidence.

"The rascally crew with whom he had been associated managed matters so that my boy was their scapegoat.

"He suffered for all their sins, while they escaped scot-free.

"Oh, sir," the landlord continued, with a fresh burst of feeling, "you cannot conceive what a terrible blow this has been to me! To think that my only, much-loved son should be the first to bring shame and disgrace upon our name! It is more than a hundred and fifty years since this house was built by one of my ancestors. His descendants have lived in it ever since, and during all that time there has not been even the shadow of a stain cast upon their characters.

"Now that good name, so long preserved, so highly valued, is gone—gone for ever!"

With a sob that sounded more like a groan, the landlord allowed his face to fall between his hands.

Dick and Tom King were deeply moved by this recital, for quite unconsciously the landlord in his excitement ha-

risen to a pitch of rude, untutored eloquence that was all the more touching on that very account.

Quickly raising his head, he continued:

"I ought to disown him—to cast him forth—never to think of him again! He has proved himself unworthy of all consideration. I ought to curse him—to curse the very day and hour——"

"No, no, John," said his wife, tearfully, rising from her seat and placing her hand upon the landlord's shoulder, 'you ought not to curse. It is not so much our poor boy who is to blame, but ourselves. If we had acted more wisely, the result would have been very, very different."

"Yes, wife, you are right!" ejaculated the landlord, dashing his hand violently against his forehead—"you are quite right—the fault is ours. And now, sir, I have done. Is not my grief inconsolable?"

"I trust not."

"Trust not? In what way can i. be relieved?"

"You have not told me the result of the trial."

"No, no—I forgot that. Well, then, by the sanguinary laws of this land, my poor boy was liable to a shameful death upon the scaffold."

"Yes," said Turpin; "but the time will come when that sanguinary law will exist no longer, and when the legislature will not believe the theft of any sum over a shilling in value shall be heinous enough to deserve death."

"Well, well, it may be so, but that will not alter my case."

"No, truly. But your boy—is he——"

"Condemned to die, you would say."

"Yes."

"He had a narrow escape, but the counsellor I engaged pleaded for mercy so effectually and so well that his sentence was commuted to transportation for life."

"For life?"

"Yes, and we are now about to gaze upon him for the last time—one more glimpse will be accorded to us. As if to make the disgrace more bitter and hard to bear, he will be brought from London to this place, where we are all known so well, and from whence he will embark on board a vessel chartered to take out him and other condemned prisoners. Now, sir, you do indeed know all, and I cannot but thank you for the interest and sympathy you have shown in the whole narration."

Again the landlord buried his face.

Dick glanced into Tom King's countenance.

A meaning look was exchanged between them.

Dick rose.

"Perhaps," he said, "we may be able to render you more effectual assistance in your strait than you imagine; but before I commit myself by saying anything further, I will just hold a brief conference with my companion."

The landlord was so amazed at this speech that he could not utter a single syllable.

But his countenance well expressed his astonishment.

Tom King followed Dick Turpin to the front of the inn, where they found their horses in perfect safety.

"Could anything have happened more fortunate than this?" exclaimed Dick.

"Fortunate! that is a strange word to use."

"It is on the present occasion, but you know what I mean?"

"Oh, yes."

"It was very strange that I should feel so much curiosity in the landlord's trouble from the very first."

"I suppose you intend to tell him what we are to do?"

"Yes, in this way: If he is willing that his son should be rescued——"

"You may make sure of that, Dick. He is so fond that he would sacrifice his own life for him."

"Well, then, supposing that to be so, he will be a most important ally—in fact, just the man we require, and that we could not very well do without."

"We should have pretty good hostage of his fidelity."

"Yes, I should not be afraid to trust him, and now I propose that we broach the subject to him. Should he fall in with our views, he will find us safe shelter till the moment for action arrives."

"And he will be able to tell us what time we may expect the van."

"Of course he will, and we could scarcely have put the question to anyone without exciting suspicion,"

"That is just what I was thinking."

"Well, then, suppose you mount and ride after Jack and Claude, bring them here, and you can explain matters on the road."

"And you?"

"I will remain here and sound the landlord."

Feeling certain that no better arrangement than this could possibly be made, Tom King sprang upon the back of his horse and galloped after his companions.

Turpin watched him for a moment, then turned into the inn.

He encountered the landlord in the passage, that individual having recovered possession of his senses sufficiently to rise and walk towards the front door.

"Step into a private room with me," said Dick, "I have something of importance to communicate."

Almost mechanically the landlord obeyed.

Dick shut the door.

Then turning round, said:

"In the first place, I am about to confide to you a momentous secret, but I shall trust to your honor to keep it inviolate. If you betrayed me it would be the depth of baseness."

"Never fear, sir; but what may this secret be?"

"Wait a moment and I will tell you; but first of all you must answer me some questions."

The landlord inclined his head.

"In the first place, you would be glad if by any means your son could recover his liberty?"

"Sir—sir, forbear!"

"Forbear?"

"Yes; do not mention such a thing to me, or you will drive me mad! That is a hope and a thought I dare not entertain!"

"But for supposition's sake?"

The landlord shook his head.

"Tell me," said Dick, speaking in an impressive whisper; "suppose it should be possible to set him free, should you scruple much at the means employed?"

"I do not understand you," answered the landlord, breathlessly.

"If you could rescue him from his guard, would you do so?"

"But that would be utterly impossible."

"But supposing it was in your power, should you do so?"

"Yes; and if I thought I should succeed I would gladly pour out every drop of my heart's blood."

"That is exactly what I expected," said Dick; "but hark! I hear some one approaching—they are friends of mine."

"Friends of yours?"

"Yes, true, devoted allies—not friends in the ordinary sense of the word. Wait a little while. What else passes between us shall be said in their presence."

There was a brief pause, and then the three highwaymen entered.

"I should think we had better not leave our horses outside," said Tom.

"No, no, gentlemen, you shall not. I will see to them. Here, Isaac—Isaac!"

In response to this call the servant man appeared.

He looked to the full as dejected as his master; but then the landlord's son had ever been his favorite.

"Only put the horses somewhere under cover," said Dick; "do not remove any of their trappings. We may require them at an instant's notice."

The ostler simply nodded his head, and passed out.

"You can trust to him, gentlemen," said the landlord. "In his charge your cattle will be perfectly safe, I will answer for that."

The door was then carefully closed.

The landlord trembled with excitement, while his heart beat at so violent a rate that he could scarcely breathe.

He expected some strange and startling disclosure, yet could not for the life of him make out what its exact nature would be.

But Dick Turpin soon relieved him from his state of suspense.

"Just listen attentively," he began. "We have all made up our minds to stop the prisoners' van before it reaches Greenwich and to rescue from it one of the



[MAUD AND JACK OSTLER WATCHING THE INTRUDERS.]

prisoners—a friend of ours, you understand—who, like your son, is under sentence of transportation."

Upon hearing this announcement, the landlord staggered back, until he was brought up rather violently by a wall behind him.

Dick spoke in the calmest and most matter-of-fact manner possible to conceive, and, having spoken, waited patiently for the effect it produced upon the landlord to subside.

"Stop the prisoners' van?" he gasped, at length.

"Yes, such is our intention."

"What, you four?"

"Yes."

"Impossible!"

"Why so?"

"It is too well protected by officers. You would lose your lives in the attempt."

"Leave that to us," said Dick. "We are not at all alarmed on that score. Now I will tell you what we require of you. In the first place, we want to know when the van is likely to reach here—in the second, whether you will afford us safe shelter until then? If you consent, then, in return for doing so, we will take care to set your son at liberty. You are surprised, but take a minute to recover yourself."

"No, it is not requisite. Still, I must say that I consider your attempt will be nothing short of utter madness, and will inevitably result in your destruction."

"As I said, you must leave that to us. You can believe me or not when I say we *shall* do it. Now, then, are you inclined to agree?"

"It would be folly to hesitate in such a case."

"I thought that would be your decision."

"But—but I have my doubts still about your success."

"Time will soon show whether they are well or ill

founded. But about the van—when will it pass here?"

"I expect between ten and twelve to-morrow."

"That is awkward."

"That is what I thought," said the landlord. "If you had proposed to carry out your attack under cover of darkness I should have thought it much more feasible."

"Daylight does indeed fearfully augment the difficulties of our task; but still, for all that, our associate must be set free."

"I don't see how it is to be done. The van is always so well guarded, and, except at night, this road is always well frequented."

A shade of uneasiness overspread Dick's face upon hearing this intelligence, for, of course, the landlord knew perfectly well what he was talking about.

"No matter," he said, resolutely—"it must be done, and I have never set my mind upon a task yet and failed in it. However, we must have a private consultation among ourselves. Are you willing that it should take place in your house?"

"How could I refuse you so reasonable a request, for, crack-brained as I consider your scheme to be, yet, for my son's sake, I most heartily hope that you will be successful, though, at the same time, I feel that it is hoping in defiance of probability. Can I be of any further assistance to you?"

"Not at present, I think; but you can bring us some refreshment, for we are all thirsty."

"You are heartily welcome to all the house affords; and if you only save my son from his dreadful fate, I shall ever look upon you as the greatest benefactors the world can show."

"Hark!" said Dick.

"What do you hear?"

"Horsemen on the road."

"Yes, I hear them now quite plainly," answered the landlord.

"Who are they, think you?"

"It is a troop of some kind—ten or a dozen at least; but I will soon have a look."

With these words the landlord sallied forth.

"I do believe," he said, returning quite out of breath, "that they are soldiers."

"Or police officers," suggested Dick.

"Yes, or officers."

"Then, if they are, you can easily understand that we wish to run no risk of being seen by them. Have you got any private chamber that we can occupy?"

"Yes, upstairs."

"Then conduct us to it."

"I don't think it at all likely the officers will call here."

"Still, in case they do?"

"You shall go if you wish it."

"We do."

"Then follow me at once."

With these words they all sallied forth into the passage.

They were headed by the landlord, who at once led the way to the staircase.

Just as he placed his foot upon the bottom step the horsemen drew up with a dash in front of the inn, and began bawling at the top of their lungs for the landlord.

"I did not think they were so near," he said.

"Nor I," answered Dick. "Tell us which the room is, and we will ascend alone. You go at once to the door, and, above all things, preserve your calmness."

"You may depend upon me doing that."

"Which room?"

"The first door on your right at the top."

"Enough; and bear in mind if those outside are officers, and if they ask you any questions about us, you must be careful to tell them that you have not seen us."

CHAPTER MVIII.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES LEARN SOME IMPORTANT INFORMATION FROM THE POLICE OFFICERS.

WITH these words, Dick Turpin and his comrades rapidly ascended the staircase while the landlord hastened to the front door of the inn.

It took our friends but a moment to reach the door which had been described to them.

Opening it, they found themselves in a tolerably spacious and well-furnished apartment.

It was quite dark, with the exception of what slight amount of illumination proceeded from the two latticed casements, through which the night sky could be dimly seen.

But our friends liked it all the better for being dark.

Their first act was to secure the door.

This done, they crept on tiptoe along the flooring towards the windows, being careful not to make an uproar by coming unexpectedly into collision with any article of furniture.

Two things afforded them especial gratification.

The first was that the room was in the front of the house, and that the windows commanded a view of the high-road below.

The second was, that one of the windows was open.

At a first glance they saw that a troop of mounted police officers had drawn up near the horse-trough.

Upon counting, they found the number to be nine—in all probability eight subordinates and a sergeant.

Our friends were careful to keep back so as to be out of sight.

The open window allowed them to listen to every word that was uttered below.

So expeditious were they in their movements that they had actually just taken up their position at the window when the landlord accosted the officers.

"Good evening, gentlemen!" he said. "What shall I have the pleasure of serving you with?"

"Nothing on the present occasion. We are on important business, which admits of no delay, only we called here to ask you a question."

"A question?" echoed the landlord, not knowing exactly what better to say.

"Yes. I want to know whether you have happened to see four dashing-looking horsemen anywhere in the vicinity—one mounted on a magnificent coal-black mare?"

"Four horsemen?"

"Yes. I may as well tell you who they are. Their names are Dick Turpin——"

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the landlord.

"Tom King," continued the officer, without heeding the interruption in the least, "Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack."

"Good gracious!" said the landlord again. "You don't mean to say that those desperate characters have taken this road? If they have, there will be an end to my custom!"

"I will tell you how it is," said the officer. "But stay, here is a bill describing their persons, and offering a reward of three thousand pounds if they are all captured. A gentleman who has been robbed lately has just added five hundred pounds to the amount."

"Three thou——"

"Sand pounds," added the officer. "Bear that in mind, and keep a sharp look-out, will you?"

We are sure the reader can form but a slight idea of the state of mind the four highwaymen were in during this conversation.

They were apprehensive, and not without good cause.

They knew but little of the landlord, and, for aught they could tell, the hope of gaining a share of so large a sum as three thousand pounds might overcome all other considerations.

Then any incaution on his part would serve to excite the suspicions of the officers.

If once these were aroused their situation would be ticklish indeed, for they were quite ignorant of the whereabouts of the stables, so it was scarcely possible that they would be able to gain possession of their steeds.

It was, therefore, with the most acute suspense and anxiety that they watched the progress of events below.

The landlord, by the aid of the lamp hanging over the front door of the inn, had taken a good look at the bill.

Of course he had perused the descriptions, and if

so, could not have failed to know who his guests were.

It was a critical moment.

"Well," asked the officer, "have you seen any one answering that description lurking about?"

"No—I am pleased to say I haven't, and, what's more, I hope, for the sake of my trade, I never shall."

The highwaymon drew a long breath of relief.

One anxiety was removed.

The landlord had committed himself, and, for his own safety's sake, would take care not to betray the highwaymen, otherwise he would be liable to punishment as an accomplice.

Still the danger was by no means over yet.

"Then you haven't seen them?" said the officer.

"I haven't."

"Well, then, just let me tell you the best thing you can do is to keep an uncommonly sharp look-out."

"But are they really on this road?"

"It is suspected so, and, if you must know, the facts are just these: An accomplice of theirs has been sentenced to transportation. It was expected they would try to rescue him from Newgate, and every precaution was taken in case the attempt should be made. But all has gone quiet so far; but, from circumstances which have occurred, there is reason to believe they will attack the van that will convey the prisoners to Greenwich."

"Good gracious!" said the landlord again.

"They are known to be somewhere north of London, and at this moment all the roads about London are so closely watched that they cannot get here unseen."

"But you fancy they have been beforehand with you?"

"Well, there is just the possibility of it, and we are determined not to leave a point unguarded, so we have come on in order to clear the way for the van."

"But that won't be here till to-morrow, will it?" asked the landlord.

The officer put his finger to the side of his nose, and assumed a highly sagacious look.

"That's just where we shall trick 'em."

"Is it, indeed?"

"Yes—nine o'clock to-morrow morning is the time given out for the van to start from Newgate; but we are to steal a march upon the rascals altogether. By that time all the prisoners will be safe under hatches, or it's d—d odd to me!"

"I see," said the landlord; "and a very good plan it is."

"Yes—there is reason to believe they know the time first appointed for the setting out of the van; but that they are quite ignorant of the alteration. So they will come a day after the fair, and we shall be assembled here in such force that we cannot fail to capture them."

"I hope you will, and not let them play up their game on this road. It is no credit to you that you have not captured them long before this."

"It's because so many innkeepers like yourself befriend them," said the officer, "and, while that continues to be the case, we shall have a good deal of trouble in capturing them."

"Well, they won't make any such friends on this road, I assure you."

By this time the officer seemed to realise that he had stopped chatting long enough, so he at once gave the word to push on, repeating his caution to the landlord to keep a sharp look-out.

Not until the last man in the troop of police officers was fairly out of sight, did the landlord venture to quit his position beside the horse-trough.

But as soon as the last one was invisible, he hurried with all speed up-stairs.

"There," he said—"there, did you hear that?"

"Every word."

"And what do you think?"

"That fortune is befriending us as she always does, and this time to a greater extent than we could have ventured to hope for."

"Fortune favours you?" repeated the landlord, as if unable to credit the evidence of his own senses.

"Yes—most assuredly. Our chief obstacle is removed."

The landlord clearly could not comprehend our friend at all.

"I suppose, now," said Dick, "there is no certainty when the van will arrive?"

"No—it may reach here at any moment."

"It won't be long first, I feel convinced, and so I will make my arrangements accordingly. Come on—we will set out at once."

"Stay," said Claude Duval. "Perhaps the landlord here, from his knowledge of the locality, may be able to tell us which would be the most advantageous point at which we can take up our positions."

"Well thought of," said Turpin, who at once turned an inquiring glance upon the landlord, who replied:

"About a mile from here, or it may be rather less, there is a capital place—just suited for your purpose. It is what we call about here a holloway, and even by daylight it is quite gloomy there, and at night, pitch dark."

"I know what you mean," answered Dick. "It will suit us excellently—nothing could be better."

"Is this holloway to the right or the left when we leave your door?"

"To the right."

"Then the van will pass this house before we attack it?"

"Yes."

"So much the better, then. Is there any chance of it stopping?"

"I think not."

"Still, if it should, endeavour to loosen the pins in the wheels. If there should be a break down it will make our task so much the easier."

"I fear there is not much chance of that either. However, you may depend that I shall do all that lies in my power to assist you."

"I do not doubt it."

"Will you start now?"

"Yes, if you will lead us to the stables."

"Follow me, then."

Without another word, the landlord conducted the highwaymen to the stables, where they found all the horses perfectly safe and looking very comfortable.

To lead them out and mount only occupied a few moments.

"Be prepared for the result," said Dick, to the landlord.

"I will."

But fancying his meaning was not thoroughly comprehended, Turpin added:

"The chances are a thousand to one whether you will see any of us again."

"I shall never forget you!" was the answer, given with great warmth. "My everlasting gratitude——"

"Tush—tush! I want to hear no more of that. We are merely serving ourselves."

"I cannot look upon it in that light."

"Well—well, what I was going to say is that, immediately upon releasing our friend we shall beat a precipitate retreat—in a short time we shall be miles from here, no doubt."

The landlord nodded.

"Your son will then be left to shift for himself. I shall not be able to single him out from the rest, for I have not the slightest idea what his personal appearance is like, and, even if I have, I question whether I should have any chance of recognising him."

"What will he do, then?"

"That I must leave to you. If you can contrive to meet with him soon after his liberation is effected all will be well. Of course he will have to quit the country."

The landlord sighed.

"Better do that voluntarily than in the convict ship. One thing you may depend upon, and that is, that the closest search and most vigorous pursuit will be made after all those who are set at liberty, so that your son will have to be both careful and expeditious in his movements."

The landlord's countenance grew still more thoughtful in its expression.

It was pretty clear that he had been too much excited and bewildered by what had occurred to give much thought to future arrangements.

"If—if——" he said, and then stopped.

"Speak on," cried Dick.

"If, then, you would not mind adding to the bond of obligation——"

"Pooh—pooh, State your wish freely and clearly."

"You are generous. I was about to ask you to give me your advice in this matter. What do you think would be the best thing for my son to do?"

Dick seemed deeply plunged in thought for a few moments.

Then, looking up, he replied:

"My advice is simple enough."

"And no doubt all the better on that very account."

"You shall judge. I should recommend your son to push on with all speed to Sheerness—or the nearest point on the coast where he can get a ship. Then let him embark, and as soon as he is in a place of safety he can communicate with you."

"Nothing could be simpler and better!" cried the landlord, with the air of one who feels immensely relieved. "My best thanks, gentlemen, are your due; and should there ever be an opportunity, you may depend I shall do my best to requite you."

"Enough—enough! As that point is settled, we will say farewell. It is quite time we took up our position."

In this the landlord coincided, and after the exchange of a few more words they separated.

It was at a quiet, easy pace that Dick Turpin led the way towards the spot that had been described to him by the landlord.

"We have abundant cause to congratulate ourselves," he remarked to his comrades. "Fortune has indeed favoured us to an extraordinary degree."

"You are quite right, Dick," returned Claude Duval, "and, what is more, I am inclined to look upon the good luck we have already met with as a presage of the success which is to attend our efforts."

"It will be well to think so—at the same time, in spite of every obstacle, Tom Davis must be set at liberty!"

"We will do our best, Dick, and we can do no more."

"I am aware of it. I am chiefly concerned to know how many officers are actually in attendance upon the vehicle."

"That is an important point; but we have no means of ascertaining it."

"That is just what I regret. However, as soon as we commence the attack let us direct all our energies to the liberation of the prisoners, because, as soon as they are free, they will assist us in our struggles with the officers."

This speech was received in silence, from which it may be inferred that Dick's comrades felt somewhat doubtful regarding this conclusion.

Dick did not speak again, but changed his mare's speed from a walk to a gentle trot.

This soon served to bring them to the spot they wished to reach.

Upon arriving, they found that the landlord's description of the holloway was perfectly correct, and a close examination convinced them that a better place for their purpose could not possibly have been found.

They looked upon this as a good omen, and were in the best of spirits accordingly.

At one time it would seem as though the high-road had been carried over a high but steep hill—or, more properly, ridge, which extended to the right and left for a considerable distance.

The difficulty and danger consequent upon making so steep an ascent and descent had led to the road being made level, or nearly so, by cutting a way through the ridge in question.

The consequence was, that for a distance of something like two hundred yards the road was bounded by a high and almost perpendicular embankment, which was somewhat higher on one side than the other.

These embankments were covered all over with orake, furze bushes, and such like vegetation, while here and there a huge tree rose up, stretching its giant branches far over the roadway.

The size of these trees sufficed to show that this lowering of the road was no modern improvement.

From these causes this part of the roadway was involved in great obscurity.

The high banks shut out a great deal of light, and cast a deep shadow, and the trees only served to increase the gloom.

So dark was it that when they backed their horses close to one side and stood together, the highwaymen were scarcely able to distinguish each other's countenances.

They listened for some moments in perfect silence.

No sound, however, resembling the approach of the vehicle reached their ears.

"Look to your weapons," said Dick, at length, and setting the example of examining his own while he spoke. "You cannot be too careful, and, above everything, have your firearms in readiness."

His companions soon ascertained that all was well in this particular, and Tom King observed:

"I have been wondering, Dick, what means you think of adopting in order to bring the vehicle to a standstill. It will not be like calling out to an ordinary driver, bear in mind. The officers, depend upon it, will be sharp enough to know that their best chance will be in lashing their horses onwards, and you may depend this is what they will do. If they once get out of this shadow they will ascertain our exact force, and I fear matters will go hardly with us."

"I have been thinking about all that," replied Dick, "and I cannot quite see my way clear at present."

"How, captain?"

"Why, if we place any obstruction in the road it must be of a somewhat substantial character to bring a heavy vehicle to a standstill."

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, it will necessarily take some time to construct, and then, by the time we have done it, something else may come along."

"You are right, captain."

"Then if we wait till we know the van is coming we shall not have time to get ready the obstruction at all."

"Some means of stopping the van must most certainly be devised," replied Claude Duval, "and I should suggest that one of us should ride on towards London for some distance, take up a good position, and then, upon hearing the van approach, gallop back and let you know."

"That is about all that can be done, I fancy," returned Dick. "Who will take this duty?"

"I will, if you like," said Claude.

"Then do so, as you were the first to propose it."

"Then about the obstruction?"

"That can easily be managed," Sixteen-String Jack cried, "for in the yard at the back of the inn we have just left I saw some large, strong, square pieces of wood. One of these brought, and placed right across the roadway, and firmly fixed a foot or two above the ground, will be the thing above all others to stop the van."

"It will," said Dick, "and now let us spend no further time in consultation. You, Claude, ride off at once, and give us timely notice of the police officers' approach; and you, Jack, obtain one of the pieces of wood you mention. In the meanwhile Tom and myself will remain here together, awaiting your return."

CHAPTER MIX.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMPANIONS ATTACK THE PRISONERS' VAN.

Upon this understanding both Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack took their departure.

Dick Turpin and Tom King watched them in silence till they had both disappeared in the darkness, then, turning round, the latter said:

"It will be sharp work, Dick, you may depend; and after this event, rely upon it, the officers will make greater efforts than ever to capture us."

"I have been thinking so myself, and believe the best thing we can arrange to do is to lie quiet for a time somewhere."

"Unquestionably it would; but what shall you do with Tom Davis?"

"Get him safely out of the country, I think."

"It would be much the best; for after having been

successful so far the authorities will be furious when they find their prey has slipped through their fingers."

"And, what is more, they will spare no efforts to make him a prisoner again, and should they once do that it will be all over with him. Hark!"

"What do you hear?"

"It is Sixteen-String Jack, I think."

"Yes, or some one else on horseback coming from the direction of the inn. But, Dick——"

"What now?"

"I have just thought of something which we have forgotten."

"What is it?"

"To provide a horse for Tom Davis."

Dick uttered an exclamation.

"That quite escaped me altogether; but it is not now too late to supply the omission."

"Stay. I think is is quite as well that we have not incumbered ourselves with a spare horse."

"But where is Tom to ride?"

"Why, it will be better for him to ride by turns behind all of us. Besides, he may not be altogether in a fit condition to spring on to a horse and ride off at full gallop. We think nothing of it because we are used to it; but it is impossible to say in what way his imprisonment may have affected him."

Dick assented, and then both became silent.

After the lapse of a few moments, during which the beat of a horse's feet had become more and more distinct, Sixteen-String Jack appeared dragging after him a long piece of wood, such as would be suitable for building purposes.

His companions sprang forward eagerly to assist him.

"This is just what we want," cried Dick.

"Is it long enough?"

"Yes, quite."

Nevertheless, to make quite sure, the wood was tried, and found to be quite long enough.

They also perceived that there would be little difficulty in wedging the ends of it between the masses of sandstone of which the lower part of the holloway was composed.

Once more drawing back to their former positions, they waited with great impatience for Claude to appear and give them warning of the approach of the prisoners' van.

It so happened that their suspense was not put to a very severe trial, for Claude Duval appeared suddenly among them.

So suddenly that his appearance caused them all to give vent to expressions of amazement.

"Is it coming?"

"Yes—yes," he answered, somewhat breathlessly.

"But how is it you have come upon us with so much abruptness—we never heard your horse's hoofs."

"I did not intend you should. I purposely took to the meadows at the side of the high-road in order that no suspicions should be awakened in the breasts of the police officers."

During this hurried conversation all four of the highwaymen were busily occupied in raising the barrier which they had devised.

It promised to be an effective one, for the piece of wood, though slight, was strong, and, as they expected, they succeeded in wedging the ends in between the rocks with great firmness.

"Now, my comrades," said Claude, "just let me bid you to prepare, for we shall have the toughest bit of fighting to do to-night that we have ever had in all our lives before!"

"We are ready."

"So am I. Did I tell you I had a peep at the van?"

"No, no—have you seen it?"

"Yes. After going some distance I took to the meadows, and pushed on until presently a vehicle came in sight. I pulled up, and, taking care to keep well under cover, watched it go by."

"And was it well guarded?"

"Pretty well."

"By how many officers?"

"Six or seven."

Dick gave a long whistle, and then ejaculated:

"Rather long odds!"

"Very, I should say."

"Are you sure there are so many?"

"Tolerably so. I saw either four or five riding on the outside of the van, and two more were riding on horseback at the sides."

"Indeed, then, you may depend that these will be the men who will give us the most trouble. There must be no blundering, mind," Dick added. "You must understand that it is a life or death matter—either they will slay us or we must slay them, and of the two evils I should prefer the latter. When those officers come, attack them at once, and down with them!"

"There they are, then," cried Claude.

Scarcely had the words escaped his lips, than a distant rumbling sound was heard—a sound which could not be mistaken.

"Are your weapons all ready?" asked Dick. "Make quite sure."

"All's well, captain."

"Then keep well out of sight until the horses reach the barrier, then the greater suddenness with which you spring out the better."

They were anxious moments that elapsed while they listened to the approach of the heavy vehicle—anxious in every sense of the term.

Keeping a tight hand upon their bridles, they watched with eyes strained in the endeavour to pierce the gloom.

At length a dark object appeared in view, and, as if to assure his comrades that there was no mistake, Claude whispered:

"There it is—that is it!"

"Be ready, then," said Dick, in a low but firm tone.

There was neither time nor opportunity to utter another word.

The prisoners' van was drawn by four horses, for the authorities were anxious that the journey should be made with all possible speed, and it came on at a truly slashing pace.

This the highwaymen were glad enough to see, because it promised them all the more success.

Even if the driver should catch sight of the barrier he would not be able to pull up in time to save his horses, while, if they kept up their speed, the vehicle would be brought to a standstill with so much suddenness that the whole of the officers would for a second at least be quite overcome with surprise.

And now, strangely enough, the two officers on horseback who had been riding a little in advance of the two leading horses dropped back to the rear for some purpose or other.

Had they kept their proper positions, and the positions they were intended to take, namely, about twenty paces in front of the leading horses, the barrier would have been discovered.

But it was fated that events should turn out otherwise.

With a crash that was truly awful and sickening to hear, the two first horses dashed with full force against the barrier.

Down they went as if struck by lightning, and it was a thousand wonders they did not bring the other two horses down with them. They lay on the ground kicking and plunging at a furious rate, and making terrific though ineffectual attempts to rise.

Owing to the sudden stoppage, the van swayed backwards and forwards in an alarming manner for a moment, and it really seemed for a time as though it would overbalance and topple to the ground.

But it righted itself.

In the meantime Sixteen-String Jack had hastened to the spot where the two fore horses were lying.

With about three strokes of his sword he demolished the harness which obstructed their movements.

No sooner were the animals freed from this incumbrance than, making another tremendous effort, they rose to their feet and started off at a headlong gallop down the road.

While Jack was thus employed, his comrades were fully occupied.

The police officers for a few fleeting seconds seemed absolutely paralysed by the suddenness of the shock.

Our friends made the most of this advantage.

In a loud voice Dick Turpin cried:

"Surrender—surrender! Resistance is folly, and can only end in death! Our force far exceeds yours, and we are determined; therefore surrender ere blood be spilt!"

"Surrender be d—d!" said a voice. "Here they are at last! Down with them! One good volley sweeps them from our path! Fire!"

Before the officers had time to obey this order of the one who had command of them, the highwaymen fired their pistols, then rapidly shifted their positions.

The consequence was that when the officers fired their volley—and as they had their fingers pressing on the triggers they could not stop themselves—it was absolutely of no effect, while the highwaymen had seriously wounded two of their assailants, and injured the right arm of another.

It was at this moment that a tremendous uproar began to make itself heard within the van.

The prisoners, with wonderful quickness, seemed to have arrived at a correct conclusion respecting what was going on outside, and were making the most frantic efforts to liberate themselves accordingly.

At this our friends rejoiced, nor did they fail to call aloud to the prisoners, urging them to use their best efforts to procure their own liberation.

The officer who drove the van was possessed of no ordinary amount of courage, for, in spite of the peril of his position, he laid about him with his whip with great vigour, doing his utmost to get his horses once more in motion.

He might have succeeded in his intent, for the barrier had been broken down by the weight of the horses falling upon it, but Claude Duval kept a tight hold upon the bridle of the off horse with his right hand, while with his left he brought down with one shot the remaining mounted officer.

The odds against the highwaymen were now by no means so great as before, therefore not unreasonably they looked forward with great hopes to their success.

Still there was much to be done.

The officers who remained were resolute, determined men, and seemed as though they would fight to the last gasp rather than surrender their prey.

There was great necessity for speed, as the alarm might be spread and reach the officers who, as our friends knew, were before them on the road, and who had almost had time enough to reach their destination and turn back again.

In all probability it was the belief that assistance was near at hand which made the officers hold out and fight with so much desperation.

All at once there was a terrific crash.

The prisoners within, by some means or other, had contrived to burst open the door at the back.

They rolled out pell-mell, and the scene of confusion which now ensued defies all description.

When this event took place the officers gave up.

They knew too well the general character of the prisoners to doubt but that they would seek the very earliest opportunity of wreaking vengeance upon them.

Therefore those who were unhurt, and those who were wounded as well, turned towards the highwaymen and cried:

"We surrender—we surrender, upon condition that you save us from the brutality of the prisoners!"

This supplication was at once granted.

At the command of Dick, the officers unharnessed the two remaining horses, mounted them as best they could, carrying their wounded companions with them, and so they made their escape; for, as Dick said, he could not possibly hope to exercise much control over the men who had been liberated, and who, for the most part, were quite unworthy of receiving such a benefit.

But in the haste and hurry of the moment, Dick and his comrades overlooked a most important circumstance.

They ought to have taken care that the officers had ridden off in the direction of London, as then there would have been less danger of meeting with assistance; as it was, they were permitted to gallop off in precisely the opposite direction.

The coast was now quite clear, and Dick called out, in a loud voice:

"Tom Davis—Tom Davis, where are you? Speak out! We are your friends come to your assistance!"

There was no reply.

The highwaymen looked uneasy.

But just as they were beginning to wonder whether, after all, they had not made an awful mistake and released the wrong lot of prisoners, they heard a well-known voice say, faintly:

"Here I am, captain—here I am! I could not speak before—joy overcame me, and took away my voice."

Guided by the sound, Dick and his comrades made their way towards the back part of the van.

Then ensued an immediate hush and silence.

Those who had been thus unexpectedly released stood still and noiseless, in order that they might catch sight of their deliverers.

"Quick—quick!" cried Turpin, to them. "Do not dally, as you value your liberties! Fly—fly at once, or you will have the officers once more among you!"

The prospect of this event seemed to strike an immediate panic to their hearts.

With one rapid and simultaneous rushing movement, they turned round, and, with incredible swiftness, disappeared in the darkness.

They dispersed in all directions, so that it would be no easy task for the officers to capture them now.

But Dick soon ceased to observe them.

His attention was concentrated upon a single object.

This was Tom Davis, who still seemed thoroughly overcome.

All at once, however, he started to his feet, and sprang towards Dick Turpin, whose hands he seized upon with a frenzied grasp.

Despite Dick's resistance, he carried them to his lips, pressed them to his bosom, and displayed a thousand frantic emotions of joy and gratitude.

Then, sinking down upon one knee, he said:

"Captain—captain, my life now is yours—do with it whatever you think fit! I could not believe that you would forsake one who has proved true to you after so many have proved false! And yet this was more—far more than I dared hope for—nay, more than I deserved, for you have all perilled your lives for me."

"Nonsense—nonsense, Tom!" cried Dick Turpin, in careless tones. "You might have known that we should not abandon you to your fate without making at least an effort to save you. Rise—rise! Quit that position, for we must fly at once if we mean to secure your safety!"

With much difficulty, Tom Davis was prevailed upon to rise to his feet, and even then he continued to pour out his protestations of gratitude.

His state of mind is easily understood, for he had been suddenly and unexpectedly transported from the lowest depths of despair to the very summit of hope.

He had given himself up for lost when, on leaving Newgate, he was placed with the rest in the hearse-like prisoners' van.

Now, almost with the suddenness of enchantment, he was a free man.

The change was almost enough to overpower anyone.

With what rapidity they could, they mounted their horses, Tom Davis being first accommodated with a seat behind Dick Turpin.

It was then found that Sixteen-String Jack had been wounded in the conflict.

The others had sustained no greater injuries than a few scratches, and these were of so insignificant a character that they were not worth talking about.

Jack, however, had been struck in the left shoulder by a pistol bullet.

At first he had thought nothing of it whatever, believing the wound to be much less serious than it proved.

Now, however, that he had had time to grow somewhat cool, he found, upon attempting to move, that his shoulder was perfectly still and the least change of position was the cause of intolerable pain.

So great was the anguish caused by the exertion of mounting his horse that he almost fell from the saddle after he had seated himself, owing to the deathlike feeling of faintness and dizziness that came over him.

Claude was the first to notice this circumstance, and he cried out:

"Jack—Jack, you are hurt more severely than you gave us to understand!"

"I—I—fear I am."

"I am sure you are."

"I should be better, I think, if you could bandage my wound up with my neckcloth. Now I have moved, I can feel it has begun to bleed afresh."

"By all means do so," said Dick Turpin, who, nevertheless, felt rather uneasy at the delay that must of necessity occur.

But Claude Duval was very expeditious in his movements.

It was by no means the first time that he had bandaged a wound, though this time the difficulty of the operation was much increased, owing to Jack's position on horseback, and he would by no means allow him to alight, for his experience told him that the dressing of the wound would cause a renewal of the sensation of faintness; moreover, there would be the danger of shifting the bandage in the act of mounting.

A piece of the linen was first torn off his neck cloth and soaked in water, plenty of which was trickling down the sides of the rocks.

This piece was folded square and placed upon the wound, and the neckcloth bound tightly over the whole.

"There," said Claude Duval, "it is true a professed surgeon might have made a better job of it perhaps, but I question whether it would have been more effectual in stanching the blood."

At this moment the attention of all was aroused by hearing on the road the clatter of horses' feet.

"The officers at last!" ejaculated Dick. "I have been expecting them for some time! Forward—forward!"

"Ride on first," said Claude Duval; "you carry a double burden. I shall have time to complete my operations."

"No, no," said Sixteen-String Jack, "you shall not run any risk of fresh danger on my behalf; I shall do very well as I am."

"Be quiet!" said Claude. "Save your strength for something better than mere words."

"Yes," said Dick, "go on with your task; we will neither of us start until it is completed."

It would have greatly annoyed anyone to have seen how coolly Claude Duval proceeded with his task; one would have thought that there was no occasion for haste at all.

But those who watched him closely would have seen that this slowness was only apparent, and was caused by his extreme calmness.

That he was, on the contrary, very rapid in his movements was evinced by the few seconds it took him to finish properly bandaging the wound.

Nevertheless, by that time the officers had now got very close to the highwaymen.

Looking along the road, the officers could plainly be distinguished coming along like a cloud, though it was questionable whether they could see the highwaymen as yet, because our friends were standing in the deep shadow of the holloway.

CHAPTER MX.

THE HIGHWAYMEN SUFFER THEMSELVES TO BE LULLED INTO A STATE OF FALSE SECURITY.

"ARE you ready, Claude?" asked Dick.

"Yes, quite."

"Forward, then—forward, then! We have not a second to lose! Follow me!"

As he spoke, Dick Turpin turned Black Bess's head in the direction of London.

But he did not long pursue this course.

He availed himself of the first lane he came to being anxious to get fairly into the open country.

The turning down the lane, however, was not accomplished without being seen by the officers, who, observing the movement, uttered a cry of gratification.

They did not dare to expect that they should be able to overtake the fugitives; but they did hope to be able to keep upon their track, and not lose sight of them.

As was generally his custom in such a case as the present, Dick Turpin urged his mare onwards to the full extent of her power, being aware that a sharp push for a short time would not be likely to fatigue her so much as a long gallop at something like an ordinary rate of speed.

Although Black Bess carried a double load, it was surprising to see with what ease she maintained the lead.

The other horses had all the advantage, but yet they kept in the rear.

The speed they made, however, was something prodigious, and it is probable they would never have accomplished it but for the stimulus Black Bess was to them.

The officers were quickly left in the rear; but yet, as the lane had gone winding on without branching off in any fresh direction, there could be no doubt that they were still fairly on the track

This was a state of things, however, that Dick Turpin was resolved to put an end to.

Finding a five-barred gate some distance ahead which led into a field, he pulled up.

His companions hastened to follow his example, and when the commotion caused by their stoppage had died away, Dick assumed an attitude of listening.

"I can hear nothing of them," he said at length, "so it is fair to presume they cannot hear us—indeed, they may not be listening at this precise moment."

"Black Bess has carried her double load long enough, I think," responded Tom King.

"Yes, and you may take your turn next, if you have no objection," replied Dick.

"None in the world," was the answer. "Come Tom Davis, the sooner we are off again, I am sure, the better."

"Through the gate yonder," said Dick. "I will open it and close it securely afterwards. In the meanwhile, you push across the meadow; I will quickly overtake you"

"Shall you attempt to regain the ruins to-night?"

"I think not; it would be unwise, for at the most we cannot count upon more than an hour's darkness."

"Scarcely that."

"But I was thinking of Jack's wound. If we could by any possibility get back it would be an advantage to him."

"Never mind me," murmured Sixteen-String Jack, faintly.

Tom replied, without taking any notice of the interruption.

"We can easily obtain some place of shelter where we can pass the day, then we can set out for the ruins at nightfall; rely upon it, that would be much the best in every way."

"It would be better for Jack," said Claude Duval "The less exertion he goes through during the next few hours the better, and the sooner he will recover."

"That is sufficient to decide me. Quick! On—on, or we shall have the officers at our heels again! Once through the gate we shall be tolerably safe from their pursuit, for they will, ten to one, ride on."

Not another moment was lost in carrying out Dick Turpin's suggestions.

The gate was opened, the little party passed through, and Dick carefully closed it after them, so that there was actually nothing whatever to induce the officers to suppose that the fugitives had passed that way.

Rapidly mounting, he rode after his comrades.

Trifling as was the delay caused by fastening the gate yet, as his companions had put their horses to speed, it had enabled them to get a long way in advance.

But Black Bess seemed to pass over three yards while they passed over two, so that very quickly indeed she was in her accustomed place in front.

Dick then checked her speed, and as he did so, and thought how quickly she had outstripped the rest, he could not help the reflection occurring to him that had he been alone he could easily have regained the ruins before daylight, and so have saved Maud many hours of anguished suspense.

Somehow, whenever he thought of her he experienced a strange tightening at the chest and heaviness of heart, which made him dread that some evil had befallen her.

And yet in the next breath he would ask himself what harm could happen to her there.

Certainly none.

The only fear was that she might find the solitude insupportable and quit the protection of the ruins.

In this case it was hard to say what harm might happen.

So much did this feeling of uneasiness grow upon him

in spite of all the strenuous efforts he made to banish it, that he felt almost inclined to propose to his comrades that he should gallop off alone, and leave them to follow at their leisure.

But this looked by far too much like deserting his friends to make Dick feel inclined to adopt it, and so he rode on, though his impatience was manifested by the long distance he kept in advance of his comrades, who continued to press forward with all the speed their horses were capable of.

In this manner they continued the journey on across the open country without meeting with any interruption till morning dawned.

Where they were was rather a difficult thing to ascertain, and Dick began to look around him accordingly, in the hope of being able to recognise some features of the landscape.

But no—all was strange to him, and to the best of his belief it was a portion of the country he had never before been in.

Upon making inquiry of his companions he found them to be equally at fault.

"No matter," he answered. "In all probability before going much further we shall find a little habitation where we can ask for shelter without fear of being recognised."

"Yes, surely no resident of this part could be familiar with our outward appearance."

"I should think not."

During this brief consultation the little party had halted upon the summit of a piece of gently-rising ground, from which a tolerably extensive view of country could be obtained.

It was growing lighter every moment now, and the longer they gazed more objects came into view.

Raising his arm and pointing straight before him, Tom King exclaimed:

"Look, Dick, I fancy among those trees I can perceive a thin wreath of smoke curling up as though from a cottage fire freshly lighted!"

Upon looking in the direction indicated, Dick perceived that his companion was right.

"Shall we make our way towards it?" asked Tom King. "It seems to be in a very sheltered situation, and therefore just the place for us on that very account."

"Yes," said Dick, "that will suit as well as anywhere, no doubt."

Accordingly they set out for the cottage, the thin wreath of bright blue smoke curling upwards enabling them to direct their course with great precision.

The scenery around was truly delightful, and from every bush and tree birds could be heard pouring out their twittering melodies, to which the murmuring of water and the rustling of the tree-tops made an excellent accompaniment.

Gazing upon such a scene, it was hard to believe that there could be in the world such things as strife and crime.

As they rode on there was not one of the group that was not amenable to the influences of this sweet morning in early spring.

As they drew nearer to the hut or cottage the harmony of the scene was rudely broken in upon and disturbed by the sound of harsh, discordant voices engaged in quarrelling.

Our friends heard this long before the habitation itself came into view.

At last, breaking through the trees, they saw before them a little thatch-covered building of picturesque appearance.

In front and at the rear was a large piece of garden ground, which showed signs of having once been in the highest state of cultivation, but now everything had a forlorn, neglected look.

At one time, and certainly not long ago, the front of the house had been ornamented with honeysuckle and woodbine, which had been made to twine all over it, but now their long branches trailed upon the ground in the utmost disorder.

Near the garden gate were a couple of children, a boy and a girl, both of whom were crying bitterly.

The sounds of contention that had come from within now abruptly ceased.

Probably those engaged in the wordy war had looked through the windows and witnessed the arrival of the new-comers.

This was no doubt the case, for at the door two specimens of humanity made their appearance.

One was a man of particularly brutal and sinister aspect, although there lingered about him indications which to a close observer pointed to the fact that he had once been a very different individual.

Behind him, shading the light from her eyes in order to take a better view of their visitors, was a dirty, untidy woman—undoubtedly the wife of the man.

Dick Turpin, as may be guessed, was by no means pleased with the exterior of these people, and wished from the bottom of his heart that they had turned some other way.

There was no positive reason why they should not ride on and seek some other place, but a second's reflection told Dick that it was the best and wisest course to keep out of sight as much as possible.

These people had seen him, and he was determined if possible that they should be the only ones who would.

Therefore, controlling that disgust which he could with difficulty prevent from showing in his countenance, he said:

"We are travellers, as you see, and have been so unfortunate as to lose our way in the darkness; we have wandered I know not how many miles, and have not been able to find a human habitation of any kind except this cottage of yours, which we deem ourselves lucky in having lighted upon. We are now quite weary, and should be glad if you would allow us shelter for a little while in order that our horses and ourselves may obtain a rest."

This was a very long speech for Dick to make, but he paused frequently in order to give, as he thought, an opportunity of speaking or of offering that for which he was in the end obliged to ask.

He might have spoken for an hour resultlessly, for even after he had finished there was no reply whatever made.

The man and woman looked in each other's faces and seemed to be having a silent conversation between themselves—most likely as to whether an affirmative or negative answer should be returned.

At last, with considerable awkwardness and embarrassment, the man said:

"If your honors don't mind taking up with such an untidy place as ours is——"

"It will suit us very well," said Dick. "We are quite exhausted, so make no more apologies."

"I was only going to say," continued the man, "that not very far from here there is a decent inn, where you would find much better accommodation than we can give; there are also stables where your horses could be fed."

Dick's determination to keep as much out of sight as possible exerted its full influence on this occasion, and made him resolve to refuse this tempting offer.

"We will go there if you like," said Dick, "but we prefer staying here to going even a yard further, we are so completely knocked up—so if you like to do your best, rely upon it we will pay you well for the accommodation."

These last words appeared to be productive of great effect.

"It shall be just as your honours like," replied the man—"it is not for such as me to dictate to you."

While the man was giving utterance to these not very hospitable words the whole party alighted.

It was now for the first time that it struck Dick that the fact of one of their horses carrying a double burden was, to say the least of it, a suspicious circumstance.

This might perhaps account to some extent for the surliness of the man's behaviour.

What plausible explanation to give Dick did not know, therefore very wisely determined to pass it over in silence.

The highwaymen all regretted that there was no accommodation for their horses, but this could not be helped, so they had to submit to it.

The man, upon promise of reward, however, undertook to obtain for them a plentiful supply of fresh green grass.

Our friends now entered the cottage, and found that the interior corresponded well with the exterior, for it was a complete picture of dirt and neglect.

That the woman was not dead to its condition was proved by her apologies.



[THE DREADFUL FATE OF MAUD'S COMPANION.]

"Ah, gentlemen, this is a sorry place for you to put your heads in, is it not?" she exclaimed, heaving a deep sigh while she spoke. "It was not always so, however, though I am in despair of any change for the better taking place again. It's drink that's done all this, sir—nothing but drink. My husband was the best man in the whole country-side until he became what he is now—a confirmed, hopeless drunkard. It will bring us to the workhouse yet, for I have followed his bad example, and am little better than he is, though I take shame to myself for saying it. But, then, if it was not for the drink stupefying me, how do you think I could bear all this?"

The woman paused in her gossip, and with her apron wiped the tears from her eyes.

The cottage was divided into two rooms, and into the inner one she now proceeded to usher the highwaymen.

It had no doubt been called at one time the parlour, but now most of the articles it had contained had been carried away, though still it was a comfortable apartment contrasted with the other.

It was not likely that our friends would fare very well in such quarters as these, yet they managed to make a tolerable meal.

Their success, however, and the belief that they were now in a position of absolute safety, caused them to forget that amount of caution which they generally exercised, for they talked loudly, and called one another by their names without the least reserve.

As the day wore on, they one by one felt a great drowsiness come over them, to which the profound silence around in no slight degree contributed.

The woman, who, like all her sex, was curious in the highest degree, crept cautiously close to the door, and, applying her ear to the keyhole, listened intently.

She had little difficulty in making out what was uttered.

After listening for some time, she rose, and quitted the house.

She glanced around for her husband, and caught sight of him carrying some fodder to the horses.

"Jack, you lazy, drunken villain," she said, in a suppressed voice, "come here!"

"What now?" he growled. "What do you want to be throwing that in my teeth for ever?"

"You deserve it, you idle wretch! Come here, I say! What was that I heard you talking about the other day? You know what I mean—about those robbers?"

"What robbers?" said the man, sulkily, having apparently paid but slight attention to his wife's words.

"You know very well what robbers without asking. I mean Dick Turpin, and all that lot."

"Don't bother."

"But I shall, you idle sot! What reward did you tell me was offered for them?"

"Why, somewhere about three thousand pounds, I think. But why do you ask?" he added, struck by the unusual expression upon his wife's countenance.

"Because," said she, clutching him by the arm so tightly that her nails were almost buried in the flesh —"because they are all four in the house now, and another man with them, whom they call Tom Davis."

Having made this communication, she released her hold upon her husband's arm.

He staggered back aghast with surprise.

"How do you know, you witch?" he at last gasped out.

"Be quiet, fool; they will hear you!"

"But how do you know it?"

"I have been listening at the door, and have heard them talking."

This was so rational and probable a source of knowledge that the man could not utter another word.

He sat down upon a log hard by, and rubbed his forehead vigorously.

It was more than his mind could take in at once.

"Now, dolt," cried his wife, "do you know what you must do?"

He gazed blankly at her.

"Listen to me and I will tell you," she added. "You must make the best of your way to the nearest place where you are likely to find any officers—don't speak a word to anyone on the way, mind, or you will lose the reward—then tell them to come here."

"And perhaps by that time they will have left."

"No fear of that if you make haste. They seem very tired, and some are actually going to sleep, so you cannot have a better chance. They are sure to stay an hour or two; but make as much haste as you can."

Upon this the man rose from his seat and prepared to start.

Just then his eyes happened to alight upon the horses, and as they did so his face brightened as though he had been struck by a capital idea.

"Hadn't I better take one of those horses?" he said. "I could be back then in half the time."

"No, you fool," was the reply, "you had better do nothing of the sort! Ten to one if they did not hear you, and then it will be all up at once; and one might pop out while you are away and then what could I tell them? and besides, you have never been across a horse's back in your life, you looby, so how can you ride. I should like to know?"

The woman's words were poured out with that particular amount of fluency for which the feminine organs of speech are so remarkable.

The last point seemed to settle the matter.

"Make haste, you besotted idiot," she muttered, "and never mind bothering your own stupid brains; just attend to me—that is all you have to do! Be off, I say—be off without another word!"

With these words ringing in his ears, the man hurried off, while the woman, in a perfect fever, returned to the house.

All was silent in the inner room, or parlour, as she always called it.

The fact was, the whole of the party was asleep with the exception of Sixteen-String Jack, the pain of whose wound prevented from slumbering, therefore he had undertaken to keep good watch and ward while his companions reposed themselves.

But even the silence was not without its effect on him, for he was greatly fatigued, and every now and then he dozed off for a few moments; but the intolerable smarting of his wound would make him start awake again.

At length, desirous to shake off his drowsiness, he rose and gently opening the door, stepped out.

The woman no sooner saw him than she appeared overcome with terror.

Jack noticed her confusion, but was very far from suspecting the cause of it.

Passing out quickly, he made his way to where the horses were standing.

The animals were perfectly safe and quiet, and apparently tolerably comfortable.

Observing that all the grass was eaten, he looked around him for the man, and not seeing him, went back towards the front door of the house.

"My good woman," he said, "where is your husband?"

"My husband, sir?" she said, her voice quavering like some extraordinary musical instrument out of tune—"my—my—husband, sir?"

"Yes!" said Jack, speaking rather angrily, for his wound just then gave him a terrific twinge. "Where is he? Where's he gone, I say? What's the matter with you? Are you struck dumb or what?"

CHAPTER MXI.

THE HIGHWAYMEN RETURN TO THE RUINS AND MEET WITH A SURPRISE OF AN UNEXPECTED CHARACTER.

How true it is that a guilty conscience stands in need of no accuser!

The woman jumped at once to the conclusion that Jack had fathomed all, without pausing to think how highly improbable it was that such should be the case.

Her hesitation and confusion went far towards changing suspicion into certainty.

Jack eyed her closely.

"I—I am not drunk, sir," the woman managed to articulate at last; "but you spoke so sudden and sharp-like, that I thought something must be the matter, and felt frightened."

Jack was only half satisfied with this explanation.

"Where is your husband, woman? Why do you not answer me that question?"

"I—I thought he was outside. He—he must have gone to look for some more food for the horses."

"It may be so," said Jack, "for they require it, and I was going to tell him to seek for some at once."

The woman drew a long breath of relief.

Finding that her worst expectations had not been realised, she recovered her usual calmness and presence of mind with wonderful rapidity.

"Shall I go and look for him, and tell him what you say? I daresay I can find him."

"Yes, do so. If our horses are not fed we cannot complete our journey."

Without another word the woman withdrew.

Jack stood at the front door and watched her take her departure.

He was unable to see her for long, however, as the dense masses of trees around quickly hid her from his view.

How long he remained leaning idly against the door-post Sixteen-String Jack had no conception, for he seemed to fall off into a drowsy half-slumber, during which he was just conscious of where he stood and nothing more.

When at length he started up wide awake, he found the setting sun shining redly in his face.

At first he was dazzled and half blinded with the glare, but putting his hands to his eyes to screen off the ardent rays, he perceived the woman approaching.

She was alone.

"Have you found your husband?" Jack asked, as she came nearer.

"Yes," was the reply. "All is well. He will be here in a short time."

If Jack had known exactly how long he had stood at the door his suspicions would have had full force.

As it was he turned round and entered the room where he had left his companions

The noise he made in entering aroused them.

They all looked up inquiringly.

"Well," said Dick, who was the first to speak, "how now, Jack? Is all well?"

"I scarcely know how to answer you," said Jack, in a faint whisper, for the conviction irresistibly came over him that the woman was listening at the door. "But the man has gone off somewhere—perhaps, for aught I know, to betray us."

"Pooh—pooh, Jack," returned Turpin, "there is no fear of that. How is he to know us? Just tell me that."

Jack was silent.

"It's your wound," added Dick. "It has made you feel nervous and unnecessarily alarmed. Sit down and calm yourself. We will make another levy upon the provisions in this house, and then we will depart. By then darkness will have fairly set in."

Sixteen-String Jack was not, however, in the least inclined to sit down.

He walked to the window and looked out.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation.

"Look—look!" he ejaculated. "This is just exactly what I feared and expected."

"What—what?"

"We are betrayed! Yonder is a troop of police officers! Quick—quick! If we are speedy we may be able to mount and ride away."

This intelligence was so startling and unexpected, that for a second or so it had a paralyzing influence upon all present.

Then simultaneously they rushed to the window, as though unable to credit the statement that had just been made by Jack.

One glance, however, served to dissipate every doubt.

A troop of police officers were just emerging from the trees.

They did not stay to count them; but from the bulk of the throng their numbers could not have been much, if any, under a dozen.

They were every one well mounted, and by their manner it was evident that they were approaching stealthily in order that they might take the highwaymen all the more by surprise.

There could be no doubt in the minds of the highwaymen as to the person by whom they had been betrayed, for the man was walking in front of the officers, and pointing excitedly in the direction of the cottage.

Dick's course of action was decided upon in a moment.

"Come, my friends," he said; "I do believe it is possible for us to get round to the place where our horses stand without being seen by these fellows. If so, we shall be off and away before they are aware of it, and shall in consequence obtain so good a start that by nightfall there is every probability that we shall elude them altogether."

"Come on, then!" cried Tom King. "Do not let us waste another moment."

As he spoke, Tom hastened to the door, and placed his hand upon the latch.

In an instant he discovered the door was fast.

"Caged!" he shouted. "The door is locked!"

"Stand aside, then!" said Claude Duval.

Tom did so, for he guessed what his comrade was about to do.

Gathering up all his energies, Claude Duval rushed across the room, and bore with full force against the door with his shoulder.

It turned out that he put forth about three times as much force as was necessary.

He had not taken into consideration the flimsy construction of the door, and the consequence was that no sooner did his shoulder strike against it than it flew open with great suddenness.

Claude could not stop himself, and, indeed, before he well knew what had happened, he was half-way across the outer apartment.

In his headlong course he came in contact with the woman, who had not time enough to get out of the way.

Down she went, as if struck by a cannon ball, and down went Claude as well, after making several futile efforts to retain his footing

Despite the peril of their position, our friends could not forbear a hearty burst of laughter at this incident.

It was clear, however, that the noise of the scuffle had reached the ears of the police officers, for they could now be seen coming across the open space very rapidly indeed.

"Quick!" said Dick Turpin, as he observed this circumstance—"quick, or we shall, after all, be too late Through yonder window—that will be the best and nearest way. The officers may not see us at all until after we are mounted. Quick—quick!"

Dick Turpin set his companions the example as well as issued his directions

Flinging open a small window, he sprang through it with remarkable dexterity, and found himself close to Black Bess.

"Now, Tom Davis," he exclaimed, "come on! I fancy you had better share my saddle."

In less time than anyone would have deemed possible, the highwaymen were all fairly seated in their saddles, though a slight delay had taken place owing to Sixteen-String Jack having but one arm at liberty.

The police officers, however, must have guessed the highwaymen's design, for they came galloping up at full speed, and, despite all the expedition our friends had used, they found themselves threatened with a hand-to-hand encounter.

This was by no means what they desired, and no sooner had Dick seen that Jack was safely seated in the saddle than he gave the word for an immediate rush.

This was obeyed, though the officers set up a loud shout, in which the word "Surrender!" could be detected.

Not the least notice was taken of it by the highwaymen, however, who bent all their energies to get clear from the present embarrassing situation.

Finding no regard paid to them, the officers discharged a volley from their pistols, and set off in immediate pursuit.

The first act was a very thoughtless and inconsiderate one, but it was performed upon the impulse of the moment.

When the pistols were discharged the fugitives were well out of range.

Consequently no harm was done.

It was fortunate that the trees grew so close at hand, for Dick was thus enabled to get himself and his comrades out of sight of their pursuers almost immediately.

Still, he was careful not to penetrate too deeply into the recesses of the trees, lest they should suddenly encounter some obstacle to their progress.

The police officers, however, were by far too resolute and too close behind them to be shaken off very easily or rapidly.

Dick Turpin nevertheless experienced but a slight amount of uneasiness.

Every moment the shades of evening grew darker and darker, for by this time the sun had dipped below the horizon.

In a short time, however, the confines of the wood were reached, and a vast extent of open country lay spread out before them.

Dick paused a moment, in order to allow Tom Davis to change to Tom King's horse.

The officers could not be very far in the rear, but at present the trees hid them from sight, while the soft turf which was growing everywhere prevented the hoof-beats of their horses from being heard.

"I think the best plan now will be to push on with all the speed our horses are capable of making," said Dick Turpin. "And, if we are careful to make a considerable detour, I believe we shall be able to reach the ruins unperceived, while the period of our arrival need not be later than midnight."

"As you like, captain—you shall decide."

"Forward, then!" cried Dick, without another second's hesitation.

It was perfectly certain, though, that, let them use what speed they might, it would be impossible to get so far away as to be out of sight of the officers, who they expected each moment to see make their appearance among the trees.

The speed at which our friends started off however

was such that in a very little while they got over a great deal of ground.

Looking back, however, Dick perceived that the officers had by no means abandoned the chase, nor did they show any indications of being about to cease their endeavours.

That they would be able to come up with our friends was most unlikely, however, for almost at each moment it could be seen that the distance between them had increased.

As they journeyed thus rapidly along that feeling of uneasiness and impatience to which we have before adverted again filled Dick's breast, and this time the intensity of the feeling was increased tenfold.

His imagination busily suggested a thousand evils which might have happened in his absence, and as he went the presentiment of some great grief and danger in store pressed more and more heavily upon his spirits.

In vain he tried, as before, to banish these sensations.

They seemed to laugh at all his efforts.

In such a state of mind as we have faintly and imperfectly described the rapid motion was a relief rather than otherwise, though to his feverish mind the speed at which they went seemed tediously and insufferably slow.

The desire to reach the ruins with as little delay as might be caused him not to make so considerable a detour as he had at first proposed, although by doing so, as he was well aware, he voluntarily courted danger.

His comrades noticed the change in his course with some surprise; but they had undertaken to leave the carrying out of the affair in his hands, and they had so high an opinion of his abilities in such a matter that they never once for a moment thought of making any comment upon it.

The pursuing officers were by this time completely out-distanced, and this circumstance made a great difference.

In the midst of all his terrible forebodings, Dick did not forget what he had overheard respecting the roads being watched, in order that he might be intercepted, and therefore, to guard against any possibility of coming into collision with his foes, he directed his course in such a manner that the ruins were left considerably on his right hand.

He rode on, bending round slightly, and at length, with a sigh of relief, made his way in a direct line to the place he wished to reach, though, as well as he understood, he approached in precisely the opposite direction to what be expected.

He congratulated himself upon having adopted this course, for they met with no opposition whatever.

They did not so much as catch sight of a single living being.

But as he drew nearer and nearer to the ruins, instead of increasing his pace in order that he might all the sooner put an end to the suspense he had been so long enduring, an unaccountable feeling made him tighten his hold upon the rein, until Black Bess's speed was reduced to a walk.

He did not attempt to analyse this feeling, but he seemed irresistibly impelled to act in the manner we have described

"Hullo!" said Tom King, pressing forward a little. "What is the matter, captain? Why are you pulling up?"

Just as he spoke he happened to catch sight of Dick's countenance.

He was so struck by its aspect that he immediately added:

"Why, what on earth is the matter, Dick? You seem as though you had seen a ghost! Can it be possible that you are hurt?"

"No—no, Tom, it is not that. I am almost ashamed to confess it; but if you will believe, my heart is so heavily oppressed that it seems as though it would weigh me down."

"But what is the cause, captain?" asked Claude Duval, who was close enough behind to overhear what had passed.

"I fear that—that while we have been away some great calamity has happened, of what nature I cannot even guess; but so strongly has the presentiment taken hold of me that I positively dread to approach any nearer, because—because I feel some terrible discovery awaits me."

"Why, Dick," said Tom King, after a long pause, for, to tell the truth, he scarcely knew how to reply, "I thought you were one never troubled by any such fancies."

"Fancies or not," said Sixteen-String Jack, "I should be the last to disregard them. Still, let us approach. Knowing the worst will not be so bad as this state of terrible suspense, with our suspicions suggesting all manner of terrible occurrences."

"Jack says rightly," observed Claude. "Come, Dick, shake off this heaviness—let us approach."

Thus urged, Dick Turpin once more pushed Black Bess forwards at a better speed.

There was one spot where, on nearly every occasion when they returned, they had found Jack the ostler waiting for them.

It was a kind of out-post in the ruins, from which a view of considerable extent could be obtained.

This time he was not to be seen.

His absence struck a chill to the breasts of everyone—it seemed so like a confirmation of Dick's forebodings.

It was a moment before anyone could speak, and then Dick said:

"How strange it is that Jack Ostler is not here to meet us as usual!"

His voice was unsteady and constrained.

"It is," returned Tom; "but push on. It may be that Maud feels disinclined to remain alone in the ruins."

Dick shook his head at this supposition.

He knew full well that Maud's anxiety would be equal to, if not greater, than his own.

So far from making any such excuse, he thought she would be the first to place herself at the nearest point, and watch untiringly for his return.

With a thousand more apprehensions than before, Dick continued on his way.

By this time his apprehensions were fully shared in by his companions, so highly contagious is everything resembling fear.

It might have been fancy in a great measure, and yet to them it seemed as though there was an unusual air of desolation pervading the place—

A desolation and silence which they had never before noticed.

A few minutes brought them to the courtyard, where, at least, Dick felt certain Maud would be watching for his arrival.

But this spot seemed even more silent and deserted than elsewhere.

Without a word, Dick alighted from his steed.

He did not speak, but all could see how deeply his heart was moved, and they knew that such feelings as he then experienced could not be expressed in words.

Silently, then, they too followed his example.

At length, in a faltering voice, Tom ventured to suggest that both Maud and Jack had for a short time descended into the secret chamber.

Dick shook his head.

"That is a point soon enough ascertained," said Dick. "Follow me."

"Shall we lead the horses after us, or leave them here?"

"Better leave them here. They are familiar enough with the place not to stray away. If it turns out as you suggest, they will quickly be attended to."

From this speech it was evident that Dick Turpin was doing his best to cheat himself into the belief that Tom King's suggestion was likely to prove correct.

The horses were released, though no attempt was made to remove any of their trappings.

The animals justified the remark that had been made.

They were familiar with the place, and showed no disposition to stray off.

Indeed, Black Bess seemed more than half inclined to follow at her master's heels; but after going a little distance she, at a word from him, came to a halt.

In perfect silence, then, and with heavy, slow, lingering footsteps, the highwaymen made their way in the direction of the entrance to the subterraneous apartment.

To reach it took them little more than a moment.

The aperture was not closed, and this discovery caused a thrill of delight to shoot through their frames, for it did indeed seem as though Maud and Jack the ostler were below.

"It's all right," said Tom. "Go on, Dick; you had better be the first. They will be surprised at our return; rely upon it, they did not expect us back so soon."

"Maud—Maud!" cried Dick, as he began to descend. "Maud—Maud, speak to me—let me hear your voice! Maud, I say! I have returned in safety and unhurt!"

Dick paused.

His heart beat violently.

A cold perspiration started forth in large drops upon his forehead, while he gasped painfully and laboriously for breath, as though his lungs had suddenly refused to perform their proper functions.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, his voice seeming rather to burst from his lips than to be a natural articulation. "What can be the meaning of this? What—oh, what can have happened?"

"Descend—descend!" cried Claude Duval. "Be quick! We can ascertain nothing here; or stand aside, if you would rather, and I will go first and lead the way."

"No—no!" groaned Dick, while they could see that he trembled from head to foot like an aspen. "My worst forebodings are now realised! This was the direction in which all my ghastly fears pointed! Alas!—alas!—what is to be done?"

"Descend—descend!" said Tom King, in a scarcely less agitated voice than that of his leader.

His injunction was complied with.

The whole party slowly descended the flight of steps, and with faltering steps made their way along the passage.

It was at this moment that, with a triumphant shout, or rather yell, of exultation, an officer dashed round from one of the corners of the ruins, where evidently he had been in hiding.

He was followed quickly by a dense throng of others, who exhibited scarcely less frantic demonstrations of excitement than himself.

They clustered round the entrance to the underground apartment.

Then the first, who was no other than Bishop the police officer, threw his hands up above his head and screamed aloud:

"Caged—caged! I knew it would be done! Ha, ha! Ha, ha! Earthed—earthed—run to earth! I told you so! Caught—caught! Caught at last!"

CHAPTER MXII.

EXPLAINS THE APPEARANCE OF THE POLICE OFFICERS AT THE RUINS.

To explain the mysterious disappearance of Maud and Jack the ostler, and the no less mysterious appearance of Bishop and a troop of officers, it will be necessary to go back and relate sequentially what took place at the castle ruins after the departure of Dick Turpin and his comrades

We have said already that Maud stood and gazed after her husband until the stonework hid him from her sight.

But she continued to gaze long after that, for in fancy he was yet present to her vision.

Jack Ostler withdrew to a distance, leaving her to herself.

When afterwards she came to give an account of what had happened, she was unable to give anything like a clear idea of how long she might have remained in this position.

Her thoughts wandered, and she gave herself up to a kind of waking day-dream.

She was longing for the time when Dick would leave England with her, and when there would succeed to this turbulent career a period of peace and rest.

Suddenly, however, her attention was aroused by a sound which instantly put all her dreams to flight.

It was only by the exercise of the greatest self-control that she was able to suppress a shriek.

The sound which struck upon her ear was the one above all others to cause her the most alarm.

It was a human voice.

At first she might have been incredulous, but soon there was no room left for the least amount of doubt.

The sound of voices continued, and Maud quickly became conscious that more than one person was approaching the ruins.

How many more she could not estimate.

Her heart fairly stood still.

The feeling was an awful one

In vain she tried to draw her breath.

In vain she strove to move.

Then she became conscious that she was about to fall into a swoon.

This knowledge enabled her by a sudden effort to regain possession over her almost paralysed faculties.

It was just as she thus recollected herself that she found Jack the ostler was standing by her side.

His presence was to her a source of infinite relief, for she had just been assuring herself that it was necessary for her to set out in quest of him.

Jack placed his fingers to his lips, in token of silence.

Then, in the faintest possible whisper, he murmured:

"Don't be alarmed, but strangers have entered the ruins."

Maud nodded, and by her manner signified to him that she was already acquainted with the fact.

"There's three of them," he continued, in the same cautious tones, "and what they want I cannot imagine."

"They—they—are not——" gasped Maud.

"No—no," answered the ostler, without waiting for her to complete her question—"they are not police officers."

Maud involuntarily gasped:

"Thank Heaven!"

The knowledge that these new-comers were not police officers had a wonderfully reassuring effect upon her.

"Who can they be, then?" she murmured. "What can they want here?"

Jack shook his head.

"It will be best not to talk, miss," he said—he always called Maud "Miss"—"we may be overheard. Look there!"

He pointed across the ruins as he spoke.

Maud looked in the direction in which he pointed, and then saw three persons come into view.

One walked in advance of the other two, and by his costume it could be seen that he belonged to a higher grade of society than they did, while their manner showed that they were ready to do his bidding in anything that he required.

The first one came very near to the spot where Maud and Jack Ostler were concealed.

Indeed, they had to shrink back very closely into the shadow of an abutment to escape detection.

Even then they would have been in great danger of being seen but for the obscurity which prevailed, and which seemed to increase rapidly every moment.

The gentleman—for such by his attire he seemed to be—paused, and raising one arm, pointed towards the keep.

"There can be no doubt this is the place," he said—"not the least doubt in the world; but if I had known it was such a devilish long way off, I should have waited till the morning."

"What is to be done, then, sir?" asked one of the men, in a respectful voice.

"Done?—why, nothing at all can be done to-night—that is the worst of it."

"Shall we go back, sir?" asked the one who had before spoken.

"Wait a moment—I will think."

The stranger appeared to consider carefully for a minute or two, and then he replied:

"My orders were, not to leave this place until my task is completed; but, as I said before, it is no use attempting to commence to-night. You two shall stay here, however, and make yourselves as comfortable as you can, and I will ride on to the next village, and try if I can find any accommodation at an inn."

By the expression upon the countenances of the two men, it was quite evident that they by no means relished this proposition; but they were too much under the subjection of the stranger to utter even a word by way of remonstrance.

By the way the gentleman spoke it was clear that he intended to seek accommodation for himself only.

"You quite understand," he added. "On no account are you to quit these ruins even for a moment, and wait here till my return. I will be here by daybreak in the morning, and don't you stir till then—you know what the consequences will be if you disregard my injunctions. You have some provisions, so make yourselves as comfortable as you can."

"And the horses, sir?"

"Oh, they will be right enough—there is plenty of good grass about. Above all, mind what I have said."

With these words the gentleman turned on his heels and departed.

The men looked after him very sullenly, and as soon as ever he was out of sight, one said:

"Curse me, Isaac, if I like this job!"

"Nor, I," was the answer given by the other; "it was a fool's trick to start so late from London."

"We had better have come in the morning, that's certain."

"We must grin and abide by it, mate, I suppose."

"Come further into the place, then. Let us have a good look all over it first of all. It will serve to pass the time away."

The other assented, and the pair passed on into the courtyard, going so close to Maud and the ostler in doing so that it is a thousand wonders a discovery was not made.

Jack waited a moment or so after they had disappeared before he ventured to speak.

Then he said:

"I can't think who they are, miss, nor what they want here. It bothers me entirely."

"Alas," replied Maud, "I fear we shall be no longer able to find a shelter within these crumbling walls. The one who announced his intention of returning by daybreak seems to me to have some authority—perhaps he is the owner of the property."

"That's very likely," said Jack. "I never happened to think of that; but in the meantime, miss, what are we to do?"

"Alas, I know not!"

"Don't be down, miss—don't be down. If we think a little while we are sure to be right."

Jack's confident and cheerful manner was not without its effect upon Maud.

"I'll tell you what," Jack continued. "I can give these chaps a regular fright, and perhaps scare them off in that way."

Maud shook her head.

"That won't answer, Jack, because they would come again in the morning."

"True—true, we should be no gainers in the end, I can see."

Jack scratched his head with a puzzled air.

"It seems to me," said Maud, after a brief pause, and her heart beat hard and fast as she spoke—"it seems to me that the only course open to us is to follow them to Greenwich."

Jack looked very grave at this proposition.

"It would be running a very great danger," he said; "perhaps we might get the captain and the rest into trouble."

"Yes; but it will not do to let them arrive here while these strangers are here. They would be discovered."

"True again," said Jack, who was now quite unable to see his way out of the difficulty.

While in this state of indecision his attention was distracted by another sound.

This was most unmistakably the trampling of horses' feet, and of a considerable number.

They came nearer each moment.

"Fresh arrivals," said Jack, as he passed his hand over his face. "Sure, the place must be bewitched."

Maud trembled and turned very pale.

"Who can these be?" she gasped. "Surely they have not returned already."

"No—no, they are not back—besides, I can hear at least a dozen horses."

"A dozen?"

"Yes. Hush—hush!"

The horsemen were now very close at hand.

It was quite evident that the ruined castle was their destination.

In another moment they came into sight.

Their arrival had been heard by the two men, for they came out into the open space again with their countenances wearing an expression of the utmost surprise.

The new-comers were police officers, and they numbered something like a dozen.

"Surrender—surrender!" they cried, as soon as they caught sight of the two men. "Surrender, if you wish your lives to be spared!"

"We have no intention of resisting," said one of the men. "What on earth do you want with us?"

"Well, curse me, that's cool! Seize them, my lads—seize them!"

"Perhaps you will first of all be kind enough to show me your warrant?"

"Warrant? the idea of such a thing!" said the chief officer, who was no other than Bishop. "Well—well, I never heard a richer thing than that in my life—never!"

"You are all mad or drunk," said the other man, "or labouring under some strange mistake or other!"

"Nothing of the kind! Seize them!"

The order was promptly obeyed, for the men never offered to make the least resistance.

"Now, then, out with your lanterns."

Bishop fully believed that he had made an important capture, but the coolness of these men, and the quiet way in which they surrendered, caused him to have his doubts.

For this reason he called for the lanterns.

They were quickly produced.

Long and earnest was the scrutiny bestowed upon these two men, and in the end, though most unwillingly, Bishop was obliged to admit that he was very far indeed from having made the important capture he had imagined.

"Perhaps," said the man who had previously spoken—"perhaps now you will be good enough to explain all this? Pray, who did you take us for?"

His manner irritated Bishop excessively, and therefore, with ill-suppressed rage, he cried:

"You may consider yourselves in custody. Keep them secure, my men! Your presence at this hour in this place is sufficiently suspicious to warrant me in taking you prisoners."

"Oh, is it?" said the man, sarcastically. "I have always heard that police officers were promoted and placed in command in proportion as they showed themselves blundering and incompetent. I believe it now, and what is more, I am sure your talents fit you for the highest position in the force."

Bishop ground his teeth with rage—indeed, his anger was so great that it stifled him.

Had his life depended upon it he could not have uttered a syllable.

The man continued:

"You will please understand that we are here by the express commands of the Lord Chancellor, whose express commands to us were that we were to take up our quarters here, and on no account to leave—even for a moment. If you don't like to believe us you can run the risk of not doing so. The Chancellor's private secretary is now at the inn in the next village. He will be here again at daybreak. If you remove us from here you will forfeit your place, for not even ten times the amount of stupidity you possess would save you."

There was something so clear and distinct in this man's voice—something so calm and unruffled in his demeanour, that every word he uttered carried an impression of truth along with it.

There was not one of the officers—even including Bishop—but what was compelled into belief.

The latter at length commanded himself sufficiently to speak.

"What you say may or may not be true, but we have information that four highwaymen have been seen in this vicinity, and your looks are such as to raise suspicion in anyone's mind."

Bishop felt he had his antagonist there, for the man's outward appearance was certainly most unprepossessing.

"That may be," was the answer, "but if they looked people up on account of their looks you would never be out of jail."

"Come—come," said Bishop, biting his lips and endea

evening to assume a calmness that he was far from feeling, "let us have no more of this. At the least I consider you ought to give a more satisfactory account of yourselves than you have yet done."

"I don't know what more you can want. I can only say that you will find every word we have uttered perfectly true."

"Tell him," said the other—"tell him all, or we shall have no peace."

"Well, then," said the man, "since you must know, this property belongs—or rather did belong, for he's dead now—to Lord Comynge. His daughter, a little girl, is now a ward in Chancery. Her uncle, who has for some time been known as Lord Comynge, is accused of attempting to murder his niece."

"Yes," said Bishop, interrupting him. "I have heard something of this before."

"Perhaps you have heard all, in which case I may as well save myself the trouble of talking as not."

"No—no. Go on, I beg."

"In the morning we are to make a thorough search all over these ruins."

"What for?"

"Ah, that's just what we don't know."

"It seems like a matter in which police officers ought to be employed."

"But you see," replied the man, maliciously, "the Lord Chancellor happens to be of a precisely opposite opinion."

Bishop could make no reply to this hit, so he turned the conversation.

With an affectation of great communicativeness he exclaimed:

"The reason why we are here is, that from information we have received, we believe Dick Turpin and his gang have been secreting themselves somewhere in this neighbourhood, and this ruined castle struck us as being the most likely place."

Upon hearing these words, the two men exchanged significant glances.

Bishop's eyes were keen enough to perceive it, so he at once said:

"You know something of this."

"Well, it is not much, but from the look of the inside of the place I should say there have been several horses here for a length of time."

"Are they here now?"

"No, and I don't believe anyone else is, for we have had a good look around."

Bishop considered for some time in silence.

At last he said:

"Let me enter and have a look, I shall then be able to judge for myself."

With these words, Bishop and his companions followed the two men into the interior of the ruins.

It needed only a glance to convince the police officers that horses had been there, and very lately.

"We are on the scent at last," he cried, in an exultant voice. "Do you know we have been quite at a loss where to look, although we have known them to be in hiding somewhere."

"But I rather think the scent is cold," said the man Isaac.

"I don't believe they have left here yet," said Bishop, confidently.

"Why not?"

"Because they would never quit such a place of shelter unless driven from it."

"Then you think they will return?"

"Undoubtedly. Depend upon it, they are out upon some expedition, and will return here towards daybreak."

"There is a good reward offered for their capture, is there not?" asked Isaac's companion.

"Yes, very good," said Bishop. "And, if you like, we will share your watch in this place, and you shall take an equal share of the reward with the rest."

"Providing we are successful?"

"Yes, of course; but I don't feel very doubtful this time."

"Well, we agree," replied Isaac, after a brief whispered conference with his companion.

"Very well, then; we will say that is settled."

"Yes, quite."

"You say there is no one in the ruins but ourselves?"

"No one but ourselves, though, depend upon it, we have yet some discoveries to make."

What is your meaning?"

"Why, you don't suppose these fellows kept out of doors all the time, do you? No, no—rely upon it there is some chamber or such-like place where they could make themselves tolerably comfortable."

"Of course not," said Bishop "I wonder I did not think of that."

"So do I," said Isaac, in his usual sarcastic manner. "However, let us set about it."

The police officers were by no means loth to comply with this proposition.

In one throng the whole party passed into the recesses of the ruins, and, after dispersing themselves, they after a brief search discovered the entrance to the subterraneous chamber.

Indeed, it is rather wonderful they did not make the discovery earlier, for, owing to the sudden manner in which the secret apartment had been left, the highwaymen had omitted to close the entrance.

They would scarcely have thought such a thing necessary, as Maud was about to return to it in a short time.

The man who noticed the opening at once set up a loud shout, which had the immediate effect of assembling all the rest around him.

The exultation of Bishop knew no bounds, and no doubt his delight would have manifested itself in some extravagant manner or other but for the sarcastic observations of Isaac.

After a brief consultation held round the entrance to the subterranean chamber, it was decided that they should descend and make a thorough exploration.

Some little difficulty then arose as to who should be the one to lead the way.

Bishop, for his own part, was inclined to take up a general's position—that is, keep in the rear, so as to be as much out of danger as possible, but it was insisted on all hands that no one was so fit to lead the van as himself.

The jeers of Isaac made him unwilling to refuse.

It was, however, with no slight amount of reluctance that he began the descent of the steps.

He was by no means assured that the highwaymen had all left the ruins, and he was haunted by the terrible dread that, if really absent, the highwaymen might have left behind them some contrivance for bringing down death and destruction upon the head of any intruder.

It was, therefore, with very slow and cautious steps that he advanced.

Each moment, however, as he found no ill consequence ensue, his confidence increased.

At length they fairly stood within that little chamber wherein the highwaymen had passed so many hours in perfect security and freedom from interruption.

Here abundant proofs of their recent presence manifested themselves to the lynx-like eyes of the officers.

The result of their search convinced them that the whole of the highwaymen were really absent.

This being ascertained, they made their way once more to the upper air.

A consultation was now immediately held.

"The direction of this affair must be left to me!" cried Bishop, arrogantly. "And when you have heard the plan of operations I am about to propose I am sure you will agree with me that nothing better could by any possibility be devised."

"Well, that's modest, anyhow," observed Isaac, in his usual aggravating manner.

Bishop affected to take no notice of the remark, but spoke shortly and decisively to the point.

"Depend upon it," he said, "these fellows will come back if we are only careful to keep from them the knowledge that we are here. We will hide ourselves behind yonder wall, and on their arrival will wait until they have every one descended into the cavern—or whatever you like to call it. Then all we shall have to do will be to rush forward and surround the entrance. They will be completely at our mercy, and we shall make them prisoners with scarcely any trouble whatever. Let me

hear a better plan than that proposed," he added, giving a triumphant glance around, "and I will give in at once and for evermore."

CHAPTER MXIII.

MAUD AND JACK THE OSTLER DETERMINE TO WARN DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES OF THEIR DANGER.

Bishop paused, and he had the infinite satisfaction of finding that his plan was received with universal acclamation.

Not even Isaac raised a dissentient voice.

On the contrary, he liberally applauded the plan as being of all others the one best calculated to succeed.

In order that there might be no further difficulty, they at once withdrew to the place mentioned, which was exactly calculated to afford them safe shelter.

The horses were taken with them, and every precaution adopted to efface every trace that they or their animals might have left behind them.

Once having taken up their position behind the wall, several huge blocks of stone that had apparently fallen from the summit of a crumbling tower were rolled up into convenient situations, so as to serve them for seats.

Here they resolved to wait patiently for the arrival of their prey.

Leaving them here, we will revert to the proceedings of Maud and Jack the ostler.

After a little deliberation, they decided that it was most important that an effort should be made to overhear, if possible, the plans of their foes.

"If you will only stay here, miss," said Jack, "you will be perfectly safe. I will then creep on silently, and gather all the information I am able."

"No, no," said Maud—"I cannot remain here alone! Let me come with you!"

"But, miss, consider the extra danger."

"I will be cautious—very cautious! But do not ask me to remain here—anything would be preferable to that!"

Jack hesitated.

"Oh, stay," said Maud—"you remain here, and I will venture nearer to listen. I could not bear suspense."

As she spoke she moved forward.

Of course, Jack did not for one moment think of remaining behind.

Without uttering a syllable, he followed cautiously in Maud's steps.

All the time he was in an agony of dread lest the slight rustling of her dress should betray them to their foes.

But Maud was extremely careful, and at length was fortunate enough to approach sufficiently near to overhear every syllable.

She listened with the utmost dread and terror, though there was little fear Dick and the rest would arrive that night.

When the officers withdrew behind the wall and seated themselves upon the stones in the manner we have described, Jack endeavoured to persuade Maud to retreat.

But she refused to listen to any such suggestion, and changed her position, so that she was able once more to listen to their conversation.

The first words she caught were uttered by Bishop, who said:

"We have told you our business here, and a good thing it is for you, I consider, therefore you ought to satisfy our curiosity as to your presence in this place."

"We have little to tell," replied Isaac, "beyond what you know already. We have been sent down here on behalf of the little heiress, and we are thoroughly to search the ruins for something, but I know not what."

"Still you could hazard a shrewd guess?"

"Perhaps I could."

"Let us hear it, then."

"I don't know whether I ought to mention anything of the kind," was the hesitating reply.

"We have taken you into our confidence, so I don't see how you can with very good grace refuse."

Isaac was silent a moment or so; then, in a lower voice he said:

"Well, it is my own belief that somewhere among these ruins a large amount of money has been hidden, and in the morning when the Lord Chancellor's secretary arrives we shall have to search for it. Don't ask me for any more information, because if you do you won't get it."

"Very good," said Bishop. "But you might say whether what I have heard about Lord Comynge is correct or not."

"What is it?"

"Why, that he made an attempt upon the life of his niece."

"Yes, it was—in these very ruins."

"And that in consequence, although he stood so high in the favour of the King, he has been arrested on this capital charge?"

"Quite right," said Isaac. "But I don't suppose that result would have been brought about but for the Prince of Wales."

"Indeed. How so?"

"Why, you see, Lord Comynge has ever been his most bitter enemy, and done more towards estranging him from the King than all the world besides, therefore it may be chiefly on this account that he has taken up the case of the little heiress. Anyhow, he has declared that he will know no rest until he has seen her fully restored to her rights, and until her guardian has been justly punished for his crime."

At this moment Maud touched Jack upon the arm, and made a sign that she had heard enough, and was ready to retire.

Jack moved away with great readiness and willingness, for he was well aware of the great risk they were running by remaining so near.

The retreat was effected with the utmost amount of caution, and without raising the least suspicion in the breasts of the ambushed officers.

As the reader may suppose, it was with feelings of the greatest satisfaction that Maud listened to the communication made by Isaac.

Her interest in the fate of the little girl was great, and she was truly rejoiced to learn that she was at last in safety, and in so fair a way of recovering her rights.

But the circumstances of her position prevented her from dwelling so much upon the subject as she would otherwise have done.

So soon as ever they had got to a safe distance from the wall, Maud asked, eagerly:

"What is to be done now, Jack—oh, what is to be done?"

"Well, miss," was the answer, "it seems to me that the best thing will be for us to have a few words together about that."

"Give me your opinion—you are calmer than I am."

"Come on, then, miss—we will get as far away from that varmint as ever we can."

"But we can talk now as we move forward?"

"Oh, yes, of course we can!"

"Well, then, what do you advise? Let me hear, for I am all impatience and anxiety."

"Well, miss," said Jack, with great emphasis, "if so be the captain or any on 'em walks up to the secret entrance without knowing what's o'clock, why, nabbed they would be to a certainty; and if they went down below they would be caught like rats in a trap."

"Very true," said Maud, shuddering at the bare idea of such a catastrophe. "The thing for us to decide is, how we can prevent it."

"Right you are, miss."

"How is it to be done?"

"In my opinion there is just one way, and only one."

"And that is——"

"For you and me, miss, to leave this here place at once and meet the captain and the rest on their way back. We should then be able to warn them of their danger."

"Yes—yes, so we should. That is the course we must pursue, Jack."

"You are decided, miss?"

"Yes, quite."

"I only wish, then, we had a couple of horses, for in that case it would make our task infinitely easier; however, as we are without them, the less said the better."



[MAUD'S ARRIVAL AT THE ROAD-SIDE INN.]

"Yes, yes, we can do quite well on foot. Come, come, Jack, we will not lose another moment. I shall know no rest until I have seen and warned them."

"Nor shall I."

During this conversation they had been moving forward somewhat rapidly, and by this time had got quite clear of the castle ruins.

Jack knew well enough what was the destination of the highwaymen; but another difficulty presented itself rather vividly to his mind.

It was more than he or anyone else could tell which way they might take on their return.

Therefore, although they thus set out, the chances were a hundred to one that they would be missed.

This consideration, however, had evidently not yet presented itself to Maud, and Jack had not the heart to suggest it to her.

She was now in the best of spirits, doubting nothing that she should be able to convey her warning in good time.

It is not to be wondered at that the excitement she had so recently undergone should render her less capable than usual of calm thought.

No surprise must be manifested, then, that she should, without asking a single question, walk confidently by the side of her companion, for she firmly believed that he was capable of conducting her to her destination.

A furious blast of wind coming from the north-east caused her to shiver and draw her little cloak or cape she wore closely around her shoulders.

Jack noticed the movement, and looking up, observed:

"I am afraid, miss, it is going to turn out a roughish night."

Maud looked up, and for the first time noticed that the sky was covered up with dense, black clouds, which

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went scudding onward at a violent rate as they were driven by the fury of the gale.

So preoccupied was she that not until now had she observed the aspect of the weather.

"I—I fear there will be a storm," she said.

"Yes, miss," was the reply, "it looks uncommon like it."

"Then we will push on with all the speed we are capable of making, so as to get as far as possible before it breaks forth."

As she spoke she quickened her steps to such an extent that Jack found some little difficulty in keeping pace with her.

But soon the indications of the approaching conflict of the elements became more and more unequivocal.

Large, heavy spots of rain began to fall, the precursors of the drenching descent of water that was to follow.

Still Maud hurried on with more rapid though uncertain steps.

She was filled with the foreboding dread that this storm would be the means of preventing her from giving the necessary warning.

The plashing of the rain-drops increased, and then from the distance came a low, muttering sound.

"Thunder," observed Jack, as soon as ever he heard it.

Scarcely had the words escaped his lips than there came a sudden flash of lightning.

When it was over a double darkness seemed to prevail around them.

Maud stopped affrightedly.

In common with many persons, the crashing of thunder and the vivid coruscations of the forked lightning filled her with the utmost alarm.

"Can we not seek a shelter somewhere?" she asked. "This storm is terrible!"

"And the rain is not comfortable, by any means; and if we are not quick we shall be drenched to the skin!" answered Jack.

"But is there no shelter?" Maud asked, for the flashes of lightning terrified her to such a degree that she dared not lift up her head to look.

"There is a big tree yonder, miss," said Jack. "I should think that will serve our purpose."

"Yes—oh, yes!"

"Come, then—do not be afraid; I will lead the way."

Maud grasped Jack's arm very tightly, and ran by the side of him to the tree of which he had spoken.

It was a magnificent oak—many centuries old, no doubt—with huge branches stretching far across the roadway.

Its leaves were large, and grew so closely together that they formed an almost impervious screen from the rain, which, however, raised a prodigious pattering upon them.

"That is better, miss, is it not?" said Jack, speaking in as encouraging a tone as he was able.

The shadow of the huge tree was indeed most welcome to Maud, who, cowering down, clasped her hands over her eyes so as to shut out the vivid flashes of lightning.

In a few moments the storm was at its height.

The forked lightning flashed almost without intermission, while the claps of thunder followed each other so rapidly that the effect produced resembled a continuous peal.

Maud's alarm increased tenfold.

The rain descended in a deluge, and in order to escape it they both tried to press as closely as they could to the trunk of the tree.

Maud closed her eyes, for intense fear made her unable to keep them open any longer.

Suddenly she experienced a strange sensation.

It was altogether indescribable, and quite different to anything which she had previously experienced.

For a few seconds she seemed deprived of all motion, though she partially retained possession of her senses.

There was upon her mind an impression of an intense scorching sensation—a faint cry, and now her sense of smell was invaded with an odour of a sickening character, and which she could liken to nothing.

An oppressive stillness reigned around her, for the thunder no longer reverberated in such incessant peals.

Tremblingly she opened her eyes, and was confounded by the intense darkness.

She called aloud upon her companion, who she was unable to perceive.

In vain.

There was no response to her words.

Then a terrible, indefinable feeling of dread took entire possession of her.

She apprehended something awful, but what she knew not.

She called again.

The same result.

Then, with a frenzied step, she advanced a pace or two.

It was at this moment that the lightning again blazed forth.

The brilliant though evanescent illumination disclosed to her eyes a sight of horror.

Lying stretched at her feet—she must have stumbled over him had she attempted to advance another step—lay the body of Jack the ostler.

He was dead—dead beyond all doubt.

One glance was sufficient to assure anyone of this, for his countenance was so scorched and disfigured as to present an awful spectacle; and had not Maud been aware of who had been standing by her side she could never have recognised him, for his features were so distorted and rendered so hideous that their appearance was totally changed.

Maud shrieked in horror at the awful sight thus for a second revealed to her affrighted gaze.

How thankful she was when darkness again surrounded every object!

Cautiously, though trembling in every limb, she turned away.

She felt that no earthly consideration whatever would induce her to bestow another glance upon anything so fearful.

She quitted the dangerous, treacherous shelter of the tree, and with a sensation of relief felt the heavy rain-drops beat upon her head and face.

There could be no doubt about the cause of Jack Ostler's sudden death.

The lightning, attracted by the tree, had struck it, and the treacherous fluid, passing through his body, instantaneously deprived him of his life.

Maud must have escaped by something little short of a miracle, for she was standing close beside him.

She must have been affected in some slight degree, as was evidenced by her partial loss of consciousness.

No words of ours can adequately describe the nature of her feelings at this juncture.

A sudden death even of a stranger cannot fail to make a deep effect upon the most callous heart.

How much, then, must the effect be increased when the person is one who stands in the light of a protector!

Maud was distracted, and as she stood alone in the drenching wet, wrung her hands in anguish and despair.

Deprived of the ostler's faithful guidance and advice, where was she to turn—what step should she take next?

She stood distracted.

All the difficulties of her position rushed upon her with overwhelming force, and she felt crushed by them.

No one could possibly be more ignorant of her whereabouts than she was, and she had not the remotest idea of the direction in which her destination lay.

Under these circumstances the task of meeting with Dick and his comrades seemed a hopeless one.

While she was thus wandering at random they might pass her a thousand times.

This knowledge increased if possible the poignancy of her grief.

She wept and sobbed aloud, and to her distempered fancy the very wind seemed to laugh among the branches of the trees and mock her grief.

For a brief space she indulged in the only hope that was left to her.

This was, that Jack the ostler might not have perished.

Oh, how she clung to this vain, improbable idea.

She felt it was improbable, for it was as much the dread of having this last hope destroyed as it was unwillingness again to encounter the hideous spectacle that made her hold back.

At length she raised her voice, but there came no reply.

At last, with a fresh burst of grief, she exclaimed:

"Alas—alas! there can be no doubt that he has perished—and I am indeed forlorn! What to do now for my own safety and for theirs I know not."

It was a long while before she could arouse herself and calm in a slight degree her agitated feelings.

But the necessity there was for immediate action pressed itself most strongly upon her.

With a resolute effort she dashed the tear-drops from her eyes and gazed about her.

She was standing either in a lane or cross-country road, and that was the sum total of the knowledge she was enabled to gather.

Hesitatingly she advanced with the air of one ignorant of where their steps may lead.

But the remembrance of her husband's danger and the reflection that her husband's life rested in her hands were burnt into her brain and served to animate her.

Her hesitating steps became decisive ones, her walk quickened into a run, nor did she pause until compelled to do so by sheer breathlessness.

During this time she had done nothing but follow the winding of the road, which bent about in a most disheartening fashion.

Again Maud looked about her, but was unable to form any better opinion of her locality.

The thunder and lightning had altogether ceased, but the rain continued to fall with unabated steadiness, and by the inky aspect of the sky above there seemed every probability that it would continue to do so for a considerable length of time.

Her impatience would not suffer her to pause and recover possession of her breath and strength, but she struggled on, though her pace was exceedingly slow, yet she was comforted by the knowledge that she was advancing.

At the same time, however, the utter hopelessness of her undertaking pressed more and more heavily upon her.

She was conscious—fully conscious that success was all but an impossibility.

Could she but have seen before her the prospect of ultimate success it would have urged her onward with unflagging spirit.

As it was, her bodily strength decreased as her spirits sank lower and lower.

More than once, overcome by fatigue, she felt as though she must sink down upon the damp earth in the road, but with a sudden effort she would start and struggle on her lonely way.

No sounds of human life—no prospect of a human habitation, however humble, gratified her view.

All around was a darkness and gloom that well typified the condition of her own mind.

Never before in the whole course of her life had she experienced so much utter wretchedness.

She was drenched to the skin now with the rain, and her soaked garments clinging tightly to her materially increased the difficulty of motion.

At last, after a weary interval, she saw before her a dark-looking mass of something, but what she knew not.

A closer approach showed it to be a dwelling of some kind.

She was now so entirely overcome, that it was only by the greatest effort that she could place one foot before the other.

When nearly opposite the building she was compelled to pause, for all strength seemed to forsake her.

Had she not clung tightly to the massive wooden post which supported the swinging sign she must have fallen.

As it was, it seemed as though the earth and all things else were slipping away from beneath her feet.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MAUD MEETS WITH A STRANGE ACQUAINTANCE AT THE JOLLY SAILOR INN.

Several moments elapsed before Maud became conscious of the nature of the support to which she clung, but, having ascertained it, she knew at once that by great good fortune she had halted before an inn.

Either her eyes had become more accustomed to the darkness, or else the obscurity was not so great as it had been, for she was now able to make out that the structure was a very old-fashioned, picturesque one

From the manner in which it was built, it was clear that at least a couple of centuries had elapsed since its erection.

The exterior, however, was plunged in utter darkness.

Not even from one of the upper windows did a gleam of light appear, so that Maud very justly concluded that the whole of the inmates had retired to rest.

Just as she made this reflection, such an accession of the fainting feeling came over her that she feared this time consciousness would entirely abandon her.

As before, a vigorous effort of the will saved her.

She then determined that at all hazards she would knock at the door of this inn, and endeavour to arouse its inhabitants.

She would implore them to allow her brief rest and shelter, for she was now so fatigued that it was impossible for her to proceed any further.

Another reflection only served to confirm her in this resolution.

This was that it might be that at this inn she should be fortunate enough to find a horse which she could hire or purchase.

Luckily, she carried with her a considerable sum of money, so that all was well upon this score.

The prospect of obtaining a horse seemed in a wonderful degree to reanimate her drooping spirits.

She fancied that with a good steed beneath her all those difficulties which now appeared so gigantic would shrink into comparative insignificance.

She would be able to take so much wider a range with so little fatigue to herself, that the chances of her success were at least doubled.

It was these considerations that lent her the requisite strength to quit her sustaining grasp upon the sign-post and totter to the front door of the inn.

She knocked loudly and boldly at it, the sound echoing strangely in the intense silence which prevailed.

For a long time she knocked in vain.

At length, however, a crashing sound was heard above.

This was followed by a volley of oaths.

Looking up to ascertain the cause of this, Maud found that a gust of wind had torn the latticed casement from the grasp of the man who opened it, and dashed it with such violence against the wall that several panes were totally demolished.

"Hilloa!" cried a rough voice—"hilloa! I say, who is there—what is the matter?"

"I want shelter from the storm," answered Maud, in a faltering voice, for her heart sunk within her at such a reception as this. "Fear not that I am unable to pay for the accommodation," she added—"rest assured that I will reward you well."

These words were not without their due effect.

In a considerably mollified voice the man above said:

"Wait where you are a moment, miss, and you shall be attended to. We are all a-bed."

"I will wait," said Maud—"wait patiently."

A brief space of time elapsed, and then her ears caught the welcome sound caused by the removal of bars and bolts.

The next moment the door was opened.

Such a blaze of light seemed to stream across the threshold that for a moment or two Maud's vision was quite confused.

But this was only the effect of the darkness.

When it wore away, she perceived that the illumination proceeded only from a candle, behind which stood a man of sinister aspect

He was regarding Maud suspiciously

Her drenched and bedraggled appearance by no means prepossessed him in her favour

Maud by one glance into his face could read his thoughts with as much ease and readiness as she could have read a book.

"I don't know whether I can accommodate you," he said, at last, in gruff, surly tones

"You judge from my appearance," said Maud, "that I shall be unable to pay you."

The man started upon finding his thoughts so rightly interpreted.

"You need have no fear on that head," Maud continued. "Look—here is more than sufficient to discharge the most extortionate reckoning."

So saying, she produced from her pocket a good-sized purse, which she opened just wide enough to allow the man to see that it was filled with guineas.

The sight of this wealth wrought an immediate change.

All his gruffness and sullenness vanished

He was ready to prostrate himself before Maud, and in the most cringing tones invited her to enter.

Maud was so disgusted with his behaviour that she felt almost inclined to retreat, but the uncertainty of whether she should be able to find another place of rest overcame every other consideration, and she entered.

The man, with great obsequiousness, ushered her into a room, in which he requested her to seat herself.

At the same time he placed the candle upon the table.

"I cannot eat," said Maud, in reply to his question as to what he should place before her. "I feel that if I attempted to swallow a mouthful it would choke me. No—no! all that I require is the opportunity to rest my wearied limbs."

"Very good, miss," said the man, with a peculiar light blazing in his eye, which if Maud had noticed would have served to make her feel very uneasy. "Indeed, I will make you as comfortable as I can. But, perhaps, while I am getting your bed-room ready, you would like to take a glass or two of wine?"

Maud did not reply, for just then her thoughts were wandering far away, and although the man's words fell upon her ears, yet their signification did not penetrate to her understanding.

He, however, evidently took her silence for consent, for he left the room immediately, and after the lapse of a few moments returned with a bottle and a wine-glass.

"Here you are, miss," he said, as he put the articles down upon the table.

His entrance roused Maud from her reverie.

"Your room will soon be ready," said the man. "As you are so wet, a glass of wine will do you good."

Maud shuddered, for just then her thoughts reverted to Jack the ostler and the fearful aspect he had presented as he lay stark and stiff beneath the tree.

The man, attributing this to cold, officiously poured out a glass of wine, and pressed her to drink it.

Maud was just about to raise the glass to her lips, when, happening to turn towards the door, she saw the most singular-looking head and face she had ever happened to behold.

It was only for a moment, however, that she caught sight of it.

The man, following the direction of her eyes, no sooner caught sight of the head and face than he seized a heavy boot-jack that happened to lie upon the table and flung it with all his force.

So suddenly was this act performed, and so accurate was the aim taken, that before the head could be withdrawn it received a terrible blow that echoed and re-echoed through the house.

A loud yell of pain followed, succeeded by a lumbering sound.

Then all was still.

Maud put down her glass of wine untasted on the table, and gazed on the man with mingled wonder and disgust.

Perceiving the nature of the regard that was bent upon him, he said, in an apologetic tone of voice, and with considerable confusion in his manner:

"You see, miss, I am apt at times to be a little short-tempered. But it's over in a moment, and then, Lor' bless you, I thinks nothing of it. Now, that was a rascally young nephew of mine, who has been shamefully misbehaving himself, and I ordered him to keep his room, do you see, miss, but he must needs disobey, and come peeping and prying, so you see he has got what he deserved."

Maud could by no means see this very clearly, but was silent for she felt however much she might disapprove, yet she could not presume to find fault with the domestic arrangements of the house.

"You have not drunk your wine, miss."

"No—no; believe me, I cannot. Is my room ready?"

"I dare say it is, by this time."

"I do not want to remain here any longer than will be necessary for me to recover my strength; but in order to continue my journey I want a horse. Can you provide me with one? I will either buy or hire it."

"I can accommodate you, no doubt," answered the man, with a grin that much increased the natural hideousness of his countenance; "but as you are very weary, suppose we leave the settling of that until after you have rested yourself."

Maud was only too willing to consent.

Her fatigue momentarily increased, and her eyelids seemed as though pressed down with leaden weights.

Mechanically, like one walking in a dream, she followed the man up a flight of old-fashioned, crumbling, oaken stairs.

He paused at a door situated at the extremity of a long corridor.

Pushing it open, Maud saw that a lamp was burning on a large chest.

As she crossed the threshold, the man said:

"I don't know whether you need anyone to wait upon you, miss. If you do, I will call up my wife, and she will be with you in a few moments."

"No—no," said Maud. "I shall manage best by myself."

"Very good," was the gruff answer. "Good night—or, rather, good morning, for it is nearer the one than the other."

With these words the man departed, closing the door carefully behind him.

Maud shivered from head to foot, and glanced around her with a sensation of trembling dread for which she could not account.

It was probably imagination merely, but to her it seemed as though the atmosphere of this bed-chamber was heavily laden with some thick, oppressive, sickening odour, of a kind she had never experienced before.

The aspect of the room, too, was in itself quite enough to strike a chill into any heart.

It was barely and plainly furnished; the principal articles consisting of a massive bedstead and a huge oaken chest, which did duty for a dressing-table.

There was no fire in the grate, and the damp and cold from without seemed to penetrate through the window.

But Maud's exhaustion was complete.

Despite the oppressive odour, the chillness, the cheerlessness, she removed a portion of her upper apparel, and lying down on the outside of the bed, covered herself with the coverlet.

Almost as soon as she assumed a recumbent attitude her eyes closed, and she fell off into a deep sleep, that for a time rendered her oblivious of everything.

How long this heavy slumber continued she knew not; but presently she began to dream.

She fancied that Dick Turpin was in some place, and only separated from her by a window.

Slight as this obstruction seemed, yet it appeared to be more than Dick could overcome, so he was tapping upon it with his finger nails, and making signs for Maud to open it for him and allow him to escape.

Maud comprehended this fully, and made the most superhuman efforts to rise and do his bidding.

But every limb refused to obey the dictates of her will.

Again and again she struggled to rise, but it seemed as though tons and tons had been piled upon her breast.

Her anguish was increased by the impatience which was expressed upon Dick's features.

Suddenly, however, the spell was dissolved.

She opened her eyes, and found herself lying on the bed.

During that confusedness of feeling which all experience when awaking in a strange place, her ears were still assailed by the faint clattering, tapping noise which she had heard in her dream.

She listened for several moments; but the sound continued without any intermission.

"What can it be?" she murmured, as she gently raised herself to a sitting posture

Her heart beat quickly with alarm.

She apprehended she knew not what.

On retiring she had left the candle burning.

It was alight now; but it carried a wick of such portentious length, and with such a huge Turk's head surrounding it, that it gave forth only the dimmest and most uncertain illumination conceivable.

Her alarm increased, for either in fancy or reality the tapping increased in loudness.

With the exception of this the silence which prevailed was oppressively profound.

The longer Maud remained thus the more did her courage evaporate.

The dread of all kinds of evil came over her.

At last, by a most vigorous and determined effort, she slipped off the bed, resumed those clothes she had removed, and looked around her with a calmness that was more assumed than real.

It appeared now that the sound was less equivocal in its character.

Maud was certain that it was produced by tapping upon glass.

But the sound was so strange, so constant, that all kinds of superstitious imaginings came crowding unbidden into her mind.

To what kind of visitation was she to be subjected? for she could scarcely believe that the mysterious sound proceeded from any human agency.

Her heart throbbed so painfully that she seemed every moment in danger of suffocation.

Nevertheless, it was almost involuntarily that her eyes turned in the direction of the window.

Having gazed upon it, she could no longer doubt that the tapping was given upon one of its panes.

But by whom?

For what reason?

Vainly she asked herself these questions.

Her curiosity was raised to the highest pitch, yet it was some time before she could summon up sufficient courage to enable her to move slowly towards it.

As she approached, the tapping abruptly ceased.

Drawing closer still, Maud endeavoured to peep through the glass, but at first the intense darkness without completely baffled her.

Another tap, tap, was given.

She saw something move, and recoiled in affright.

Just then she thought of the condition of the candle, and, with a trembling hand, removed the snuff.

A bright, clear light immediately ensued, by the aid of which, as she again glanced towards the window, she saw a human face pressed closely against the panes.

She seemed about to shriek aloud in the extremity of her alarm, but terror seemed to freeze up her voice, and only a hoarse whispering sound escaped her lips.

The countenance was one well calculated to strike terror into any sensitive breast, and its ugliness was probably much increased by the manner in which all the features were flattened against the glass.

Maud had to clutch the edge of the table very tightly to support herself, otherwise she must have fallen.

All the time her eyes remained riveted upon the face at the window as though her eyes had been fascinated by some serpent.

The tapping was resumed, and Maud was no longer in any doubt as to the exact cause which had produced it.

The person outside, whoever he might be—Maud had no doubt about the sex—was clattering with his finger nails upon the glass.

As she continued to gaze, however, she could not help fancying that the face had upon it a friendly expression, and which, if rightly interpreted, meant that, for some reason or other, a communication was desired.

This idea, having once taken possession of her mind, increased so much in force that she by slow degrees again approached the window.

There could be no mistaking the satisfaction visible upon the features of the face outside.

The hand that had been so busily engaged in tapping was now employed in making signs, the evident purport of which was that she should open the casement.

But naturally Maud hesitated to comply with this demand.

It might be a most serious thing—perhaps a fatal step to admit this stranger to her apartment

Her feelings must have expressed themselves upon her countenance, for the face assumed an aspect of so imploring and entreating a nature as to be almost irresistible.

Hesitatingly Maud stretched forth her hand to remove the fastening.

Then drew it back again without effecting her purpose.

The face looked deeply disappointed—nay, despairing.

Again Maud hesitated.

Her hand touched the fastening.

It was removed, and a gust of cold night air, carrying upon it some thousands of watery particles, dashed into the room.

Its immediate effect was to extinguish the candle.

Finding herself in the dark so suddenly by no means tended to calm Maud's feelings, though the cool wind seemed to disperse those vapours which hitherto had seemed to hang about her brain.

"Don't be afraid, lady," said a suppressed voice, in what was doubtless intended to be a very encouraging tone—"don't be afraid. I have come to save your life! Do not doubt me, but let me enter."

"Come in," said Maud—"come in. If you intend me any harm, may Heaven pardon you for your wickedness in thus deceiving a poor, helpless woman!"

Almost before she had finished giving utterance to these words, she found one of the strangest and most uncouth-looking figures she had ever beheld standing before her.

Her first sentiments were those of undissembled terror.

The being who had entered was scarcely an inch taller than the oak chest close to which he stood, yet his head and face had the appearance, both in size and expression, of a full-grown man.

In this appearance his shoulders joined, for they were uncommonly broad, square, and muscular.

His arms, too, were long and powerful, and so out of proportion to the rest of his body that when he stood upright he could almost touch the ground with the tips of his fingers.

His back seemed to have received some kind of injury in childhood, which had prevented the growth of the lower part of his body, so that, in fact, he presented the appearance of a child's body surmounted from the waist upwards by the body of a man.

Well, then, might Maud feel terrified at beholding this intruder into her chamber, for the darkness, although it permitted her to make out his general appearance, would not allow her to scrutinise him with any closeness.

"Don't be afraid, lady," he said, in a faint, piping voice, which sounded very oddly coming from so capacious a chest, "Hunch will not hurt you, lady. Wait a moment—I will shut the window and get a light."

There was something assuring in these words, and also in the manner in which they were uttered, and Maud felt much of her fear abate.

The window was closed, and when the candle was relighted, Maud was able to look more closely at the form of her nocturnal visitor.

So far from exhibiting any aversion or disgust, her heart filled with pity and commiseration for the unfortunate being.

She was, however, scarcely prepared for the result.

He recognised in a moment, as if by intuition, the state of her feelings towards him, and the tears rose thickly to his eyes.

At the same time he threw himself down upon his knees, and seizing her dress, pressed it repeatedly to his lips.

"My life is yours—my life is yours, lady, for you are the very first that has ever given a kind glance at poor Hunch! Be kind to me; but whether you are or not, I have come here to save your life! Don't be frightened, Hunch can do it! Hunch will save your life—he will indeed, lady—he will indeed!"

CHAPTER MXV.

FRESH DANGER IS FOUND BY MAUD AT THE OLD INN.

MAUD gazed for a moment or two in silence upon this singular specimen of humanity.

Then in a low voice which she vainly tried to make calm, she asked:

"If my life is in danger, how came you to know it?"

Upon hearing these words, Hunch, as he called himself, looked around with wildness and terror in his looks.

Then, very faintly, he whispered:

"Hush, hush, lady, and I will tell you all!"

"All what?"

"All the mysteries and crimes of this fearful place. Have you not felt the effect of its shadow upon you? Does not your breath come short and thick? Does not your heart knock against your ribs?"

Maud was fain to confess feeling these sensations.

"It is because," continued Hunch, in a more hollow whisper—"it is because you scent the blood which is in the air—because you feel that you breathe the atmosphere of murder."

At these dreadful words, which were pronounced with bated breath and flaming eyes, Maud's very lips grew white.

"I frighten you, lady," observed Hunch, perceiving the effect his words had wrought. "But be not afraid. I will save your life."

"If you would tell me how it is in danger," answered Maud, "and if you would make me acquainted with the means by which you intend to save it, I should be more content."

"I know that, lady."

"Satisfy me, then."

"I will, without delay; but do not speak so loud, or you may be overheard; then even I will be powerless to save you—ay, as powerless as you would be to save yourself."

"I will be silent."

"I wonder how it is," began Hunch, musingly, "that ever you came to cross the threshold of the Jolly Sailor?"

"Is that the name of the inn?"

"It is. Did you not see it on the sign, and the figure of the sailor over the door? Ha, ha! the Jolly Sailor and myself are the very best of friends!"

These words, coupled with the wildness and strangeness of his appearance and demeanour, strengthened an opinion which, during the last few minutes, had been growing in Maud's mind, namely, that this uncanny creature was not in proper possession of his senses.

"It was dark," she said, replying to his question, "and I was unable to see anything. I came in here for shelter from the storm."

"Yes, yes, I might have known that. And now, lady, listen to me. You have had the ill-fortune to enter a den of murder, for this place is nothing more"

Maud gasped for breath.

"Whenever a solitary traveller enters this place, who happens to have about him any considerable sum of money, he never departs again. He is ruthlessly slaughtered, and his body thrown down the old well. Ha, ha! what a tale could be told by that old well, to be sure, if anyone would bring its contents to the light of day!"

"You affright me," said Maud; "surely you cannot be in earnest in what you say?"

"You shall judge shortly. Did you not show my uncle your purse when you stood outside the door?"

"I did—I did! Oh, Heaven! Yes, I did!"

"That obtained your admittance," said Hunch, slowly, and nodding at every word as though in order to give the utmost emphasis to what he said, "but it was only in order that you might be murdered and despoiled of it. Oh, I know all!"

"Then—then—the landlord of this awful place is—is—your uncle?"

"He is, and treats me just like a nephew. Did you notice him throw the boot-jack at me?"

"Was it at you?"

"Rather! Look here."

As he spoke he removed a rough frieze cap which he wore, and showed one side of his head, in which was a deep gash, from which the blood was slowly oozing.

"I wonder it did not kill you."

"Lor' bless you, lady, that's nothing. He has treated me like a dog, and so has everyone else that I have met with except you. But I am planning my revenge, and before the new day comes it is odd to me if I am not fully satisfied for all the injuries he has done me!"

"What do you mean?"

"Hush—hush! I will explain directly. Hark! hark!"

A strange sound came from below.

"He is getting ready," said Hunch, in a hoarse whisper. "What, after all, if they should be too late!"

"Explain—explain yourself!"

"No time—no time!" said Hunch, moving to the window and looking out. "Listen—listen! Can you hear anything like the tramp of horses' feet? If so, all will be well."

"No—no!" said Maud, with chattering teeth. "I can hear nothing but the sighing of the wind among the tree tops."

"Then he will discover us!"

"Can we not escape?"

"What, by the window?"

"Yes."

"No, no; that would be impossible."

"How so—how so? By what means did you ascend?"

"Lady, they tell me I am like a cat—can climb anywhere. Look, here is an old, half-rotten pear-tree fastened to the wall—that was the means I used to make my ascent."

"Can it be possible?"

"You cannot get that way; but I have another expedient ready. Quick—quick! Off with your dress and cloak."

Maud hesitated to comply with this demand, and yet she could see by the hasty movements of Hunch that there was the utmost necessity for speed.

As for the latter, he with great rapidity removed every object which stood upon the oaken chest we have before had occasion to mention.

There was so much mystery in all these occurrences that Maud could do nothing more than stand still like a statue and watch all that her companion did.

The lid of the chest was very heavy, and she saw him struggling to raise it.

Although quite ignorant of his intentions, she, unbidden, stepped forward to assist him.

But when, by their united efforts, the lid was fairly raised and Maud took a glance at the interior of the chest, she almost swooned with horror and disgust.

For a few seconds everything spun round her with lightning speed.

She could tell Hunch was saying something to her in earnest tones, but his voice sounded only like the faint and distant murmur of the sea.

The first words she distinguished were:

"I ought to have told you of this; but here is a proof—an awful proof of the truth of what I have told you. That which lies within the chest is the body of a traveller who halted here last night after sunset. You see how he has been treated. He was lying on your bed; and how do you think this room was prepared for your reception? Why, simply by lifting the murdered traveller out of the bed and placing the body in this box, as there was no time to carry him to the well in the cellar!"

The reader may perhaps be able to form some slight idea of the effect which these horrifying details produced upon Maud.

She stood like one changed into stone.

But her companion's next words aroused her.

"Look here, miss, this is what I intend to do, and, rely upon it, the scheme will answer. I am going to lift this fellow out of here on to the bed again, wrap him in part of your clothes, and leave him there. My uncle will know nothing of the substitution, for he is always obliged to prime himself well with brandy before he can undertake a job like this!"

Maud's blood ran cold.

"And—and we," she gasped—"where—where shall we be?"

"We will hide."

"Where?"

"Beneath the bed."

The sound of a footstep ascending the staircase could now be heard.

"Quick—quick," said Hunch, "out with the candle! There must be no light save the one he will bring with him. Then lend me your cloak. I will make shift for that to do. Never mind your dress."

While issuing these hasty injunctions Hunch was by no means idle

With an exertion of strength for which, certainly, no one would have given him credit for possessing, but which was due to the singular conformation of the upper part of his body, he raised the dead body of the traveller from the box and staggered with it to the bed, which, luckily, was only about two paces distant.

He had to be particularly careful in placing the body upon the bedstead, but he accomplished the feat successfully.

Quickly, then, he wrapped Maud's cloak about the inanimate form, and covered it over with the bed-clothes.

Without any pause he then closed the chest, replaced the articles upon it, and taking Maud by the arm, bade her creep beneath the bed.

This was no time for demur, and Maud obeyed with the utmost promptitude, for happening to look towards the door she saw a bright light shining beneath it and heard some one speak in a low whisper.

All attempts to describe her feelings now must be futile.

We leave it for the reader to imagine her sensations while she waited for the conclusion of this the most awful adventure she had ever encountered, or ever heard of.

It was some satisfaction to her when she felt her strange companion take hold of her hand, for it assured her that she had a protector near.

All considerations were, however, quickly swallowed up by the absorbing interest caused by the events that ensued.

The whispering sound lasted only for a few seconds, and was succeeded by a profound silence.

Probably those outside were listening.

Maud fancied she had secured the door, but if so, the intruders must have possessed some ready and mysterious means of removing the fastenings, for the door was slowly and gently opened just wide enough for one person to enter.

Then came another pause.

At last, with a slow and shrinking step, a man entered the room.

Maud could see him plainly, for the person by whom he was accompanied stood upon the threshold holding a light, the rays from which fell clear and bright into the room.

The man crept towards the side of the bed, then pausing, faintly whispered.

"Why the devil don't you come nearer with the light! Are you afraid, or do you wish me to blunder up against something in the dark and spoil the game?"

"I was afraid the light would wake her."

"Never fear! You mean you are afraid to come in."

"Nothing of the kind."

With these words, the second speaker came into view of the two watchers.

It was a woman, though both in her mind and person all traces of femininity had long since been trampled out.

The former was embrutalised, and the latter hideous in the highest degree.

Although she had declared herself free from fear, yet the candle trembled in her grasp, while she shook like an aspen from head to foot, thus giving the lie to her assertion.

She did not advance very far into the room, but stood near the door, and held the candle in such a way that its light was well diffused, though the draught which seemed to ascend the staircase caused the flame to flicker in such a manner that the illumination was most uncertain.

Nevertheless, it was sufficient to enable the murderer to make out that something resembling the form of their last guest was lying on the bed.

He did not dare trust himself to look at it too closely, lest the spurious courage which enabled him to execute such deeds should abate.

"Get your knife," whispered the woman—"take my advice and get your knife! It will be much the best."

"Not I," answered the man, in the same hushed tones—"there is no need for it. The pillow will do as well."

"Bah!" ejaculated his companion, contemptuously.

"You know I hate to have anything like this to do with a woman. I don't think it worth while even now."

"Bah!" said the woman again, but with much greater contempt than before. "Either do it or stand back and let me!"

The man did not say a word more, but took a step towards the bed.

He did not approach any nearer the head of it than he was positively compelled, but, stretching out his arm as far as ever he possibly could, he took hold of the pillow.

His movements now were all very rapid.

Neither Maud nor Hunch could see exactly what he was about, yet they could tell that he took hold of the pillow, and, placing it over the face of the supposed sleeping person, held it in that position for several minutes.

During this time, Maud and her companion only drew their breaths by stealth, so fearful were they that the slight sound would be overheard by the two watchers in the painfully-intense silence that now prevailed.

At length the woman whispered:

"That will do—that is quite long enough! She has drawn her last breath now."

Silently the man removed the pillow, and stood listening.

Maud and Hunch now held their breaths altogether.

"It's all right," cried the woman. "Come away now. She is dead enough!"

Just as she spoke these words, the sound of a tremendous knocking from below reached their ears.

The two guilty wretches were so alarmed at it that they both ran against each other.

The candle was knocked from the woman's feeble grasp, and, falling to the floor, was instantly extinguished.

The man, upon gaining possession of his voice, poured out a volley of curses.

"What—what can it be?" gasped the woman.

"Why, some one at the door."

"But who—who?"

"Why, some chance travellers, of course. Who else?"

"I—I felt terrified, and so did you, though now you will try to brave it out!"

"Nothing of the kind, fool! Stand aside! What the devil did you want to drop the light like that for, curse you!"

With these words the man groped his way out of the room in the best way he could, and stumbled down the stairs.

The woman followed him, all the time crying on him to stay.

But he disregarded all her appeals.

No sooner had they both quitted the apartment than Hunch quitted his place of concealment.

Maud hastily followed his example, though such was the state of horror she was in that she was scarcely conscious of what she was about.

Hunch rubbed his hands together briskly, and in various eccentric ways testified to feeling a great amount of satisfaction.

"Do you hear that knocking?" he asked, gleefully. "It seems to have increased tenfold."

"It does—it does!"

"Hark! is it not music!"

"Do you know the cause of it?"

"I do—I do!" replied the singular creature, more triumphantly than before.

"Explain it—explain it! Do not keep me for a moment in suspense! Let me know at once just what it means!"

"Be under no apprehension—all is well. You are safe now, lady—quite safe; and, as for my uncle, why, his little game is done with for ever."

"Still I do not understand. Speak plainer."

"Well, then, I will make all so clear that you cannot fail to understand it."

"Quick, then—be quick!"

"Well, lady, if you only knew how ill-treated I have been by my uncle you would not wonder that I should burn to avenge my wrongs!"

"Well?"

"For a long time I have been unable to find any means

of doing so, but at last I hit upon the plan. They kept me closely confined here, not allowing me to leave the premises, but I found out how to baffle them—ha, ha! I made a pen with a piece of sharp-pointed wood, and with the blood that I purposely made to flow from one of my fingers I wrote a letter to the magistrate at Bow Street, describing the situation of this house and the awful deeds enacted in it, requesting him to send down a troop of officers with all possible secrecy and despatch. They have arrived now. Hark! how they hammer at the door! Nunky must know who they are, and is frightened to admit them! Ha, ha! Oh, it's good—it's good!"

To say that Maud listened to this explanation with speechless horror would be only to convey a very feeble idea of the state of her mind.

So appalled was she that her lungs refused to perform their usual functions—respiration was completely stopped.

Her eyes started from their sockets.

Her teeth chattered, and she stood slightly bending forward in an attitude of intense fear.

Hunch observed the effect of his disclosure with an astonishment that was ludicrous.

"Have you heard aright, lady?" he inquired at length—"have you understood me?"

She nodded.

Speech was denied her.

"What, then, causes this terror? There must be a mistake somehow."

By making a great effort, Maud managed to murmur:

"No, no—no mistake!"

"Why, then, this terror?"

"Because the presence of officers is to the full as perilous to me as it can be to your uncle."

"But—you—you do not—mur——" gasped Hunch.

"No, no—not that! But I have been arrested and tried for a crime of which I was and am perfectly innocent; nevertheless, I was pronounced guilty."

"And you escaped?"

"Yes, by the aid of friends I escaped, and since then have, with the utmost difficulty, eluded the officers. Now they are here, and I cannot escape. At the first glance they will recognise me. I shall be powerless to resist them! Then—then—oh, then all—all will be lost!"

As she uttered these last words, in tones of indescribable agony, Maud threw her arms up above her head, and, with a cry of intense anguish, sank sobbing and fainting upon a seat.

Hunch gazed at her for a second or two in silence; then, by that time being able to comprehend pretty well what mischief he had caused, he went deliberately to the wall, and dashed his head a great many times against it.

This action diverted Maud's attention, and caused her to look up.

"Good heavens!" she ejaculated, "what are you about?"

"Only serving myself out, lady, that's all," replied Hunch, pausing in his self-inflicted punishment.

"Do not be so foolish as that! What you did was for the best."

"But that does not make matters any better for you, lady."

"No, but——"

What Maud would have said then is uncertain, for she was interrupted by a terrific crash, which came from the bottom of the house, and which completely drowned all other sounds.

"What—what is that?" she gasped, as soon as the noise ceased.

Hunch ran immediately to the door, and opened it to the extent of two or three inches

The crash was caused by the yielding of the front door, which had given way before the furious blows rained upon it by the police officers.

There was then a hasty rush of feet, and a voice cried:

"Lights—lights! Lights, I say—at once!"

Then, almost immediately, the same voice exclaimed:

"Seize them—seize them both, and bind them securely! Beyond a doubt they are the miscreants of whom we are in search!"

A slight scuffle ensued, but the officers were so overpowering in their numbers that after a brief struggle the man and the woman were securely made prisoners.

This scene was imperfectly beheld by Hunch, who projected his head a little way through the partially open doorway and peeped down the staircase.

In his interest there is no knowing how long he might have stood a spectator, oblivious of aught else

Suddenly he felt a slight touch upon his arm.

Turning round, he caught sight of the pallid face of Maud close to his own.

"The officers have entered?" she said, interrogatively.

"Yes," replied Hunch, whose astonishment was unbounded at the calm manner in which Maud now spoke

"Then—then, you must assist me to escape!"

"How—how?"

"Cannot you suggest the means?"

"I fear, lady, it is impossible! Oh, I wish I had died a thousand times before I had lived to bring you into so much peril!"

Some loudly-uttered words now struck upon the ears of both and arrested their attention.

"That is right," said a voice below. "Now search the place thoroughly from top to bottom, and particularly an old well situated in one of the cellars. We shall then soon know whether we have been deceived by false information, or whether what we have heard is quite correct."

An immediate movement followed these words, and the voice continued:

"Two or three of you keep a sharp look-out on the outside of the building, so that no one shall leave the premises unperceived. Then as for the rest, let them follow me upstairs, where I fancy the most important discoveries are to be made."

No sooner were these injunctions uttered than the sound of heavy footsteps informed the listeners that they were in the act of ascending the staircase.

"Fasten the door," said Maud, calmly, though she spoke only with the calmness of despair—"fasten the door; and that, if it does no more, will impede their progress, and give us a little time to think what can be done."

CHAPTER MXVI.

THE OFFICERS ADOPT SOME ENERGETIC MOVEMENTS AT THE INN.

HUNCH rapidly complied with Maud's command, though when she gave it she really knew not what would be the good actually effected.

At any rate, it would prevent the officers from entering so speedily as they would otherwise have done.

"What next, lady?" said Hunch, turning round to her.

"Escape!" she cried. "I must escape!"

"You heard what the officers said?"

"I did."

"Then how is it to be managed?"

Maud only shook her head.

Hunch was anxious and bewildered.

"I must—I must escape," Maud murmured, "no matter what risk I incur in doing so! Not only my own life and liberty, but also the lives of those near and dear to me depend upon my getting away! At all hazards it must be done!"

"I fear it is impossible."

Maud just at this moment darted to the window.

In the tumult of her mind she had forgotten all about it.

Now it presented itself to her as an outlet for escape.

Dashing open the casement she looked out, but the intense darkness appalled her.

"I don't know how you can get that way, lady."

"Did not you ascend?" said Maud, overcoming as well as she could her sensations of terror, and endeavouring to extinguish the nature of the various objects outside

"I climbed up," said Hunch; "but it was by clinging to the branches of the old cherry-tree. You could never make such a descent."

It was just at this moment that the officers, having made a hasty search of the other rooms, came to the one in which Maud and Hunch were.

They tried the door and found it fast.

The sound of her foes being so near to her endued



[BISHOP, THE OFFICER, TRIES A SHOT AT BLACK BESS.]

Maud with a degree of courage which she never dreamt she had possession of.

Comprehending the means by which Hunch had made his way into the chamber, she did not hesitate to attempt to leave it by the same means.

Hunch in vain attempted to prevent her.

Almost before he was aware of it, she had lowered herself through the casement.

Perilous as the attempt was, yet she preferred making it to remaining in the room and facing her foes.

With the strength which nothing but despair can give, she clung to the branches of the tree.

Most fortunate indeed for her was it that she was surrounded by so intense a darkness, for it prevented her from beholding her perilous position.

Could she but have had one glance at the ground below, all nerve, strength, and self-possession would have deserted her.

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Clinging close to the wall, however, she directed all her energies to keeping a secure hold upon the tree.

Hunch, finding that she descended with safety, did not hesitate to lower himself through the window.

To him the feat was the most ordinary feat in the world.

The immense strength which he possessed in the upper part of his body easily enabled him to hold on with one hand while with the other he closed the window, though, of course, he was unable to fasten it from the outside.

He had scarcely done this before the door of the room yielded to the violent kick given to it by one of the police officers. Several rushed across the threshold.

Hunch waited to behold no more, but lowered himself with a speed that looked reckless in the extreme.

But he reached the ground with absolute safety.

He found Maud cowering down close to the wall.

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Now that she had escaped so far her nerves became unstrung, and she had no longer the power to do anything to assist herself.

Tears were rolling down her cheeks.

Her sudden prostration filled Hunch with surprise.

Without exactly comprehending it, he said:

"Come—come, lady, you must not give way thus. Courage—courage! The worst is over, though we are by no means out of danger."

Maud roused herself a little, as she asked:

"What is to be done now? Tell me—oh, tell me what will be our next step?"

"Why, to get away."

"But the officers are watching."

"True, and on that account it will be no easy matter. Yet it must be accomplished."

"And you remember," said Maud, with a fresh burst of grief—"you remember what I told you about my friends?"

"I do, my lady."

"Time, precious time, is flying fast, and here am I doing nothing on their behalf. If I do not see them and warn them of their danger, they will go headlong to death!"

"Keep your heart up, lady. We have succeeded wonderfully at present. In the end, no doubt, all will be well."

These words had quite an encouraging and reassuring effect upon Maud, who rose silently to her feet.

Hunch glanced up to the window of the room they had just left, through which came a bright light and also the sound of many voices speaking in loud tones.

"They have made a discovery," he whispered to Maud, "which will doubtless occupy them for some time. This is the opportunity we ought to seize to escape."

"Are there any horses on the premises?" Maud asked. "If so, let us endeavour to gain possession of them. We shall not only stand a better chance of getting away from these officers, but I shall be enabled to meet with my friends."

"Yes—we have two horses in the stable close at hand; but——"

"But what?"

"I question very much whether there is the least hope of our being able to get possession of them unseen by the officers."

"Nevertheless, let us try," replied Maud, with that decision which seemed to come natural to her in moments of the greatest difficulty.

"Come, then," said Hunch, in a faint whisper—"follow me. I will lead the way."

Although the storm was over, yet the sky had by no means cleared, and the density of the clouds caused an intense darkness to prevail.

Yet, by straining her eyes, Maud was able to keep the form of her strange companion in view.

She followed him across a kind of yard, littered over with rubbish of every description.

At length, without having apparently attracted the attention of anyone, or raised the least alarm, they paused before a roughly-made door communicating with a wooden shed.

This door yielded to the slight touch which Hunch gave it.

He beckoned to Maud to cross the threshold.

Then closed the door again.

"We may congratulate ourselves so far, lady," he murmured, in the same cautious tones. "If I can only manage to get the horses bridled. I do believe we shall get off safely."

Maud's heart beat high with hope.

Hunch groped about in the dark.

He must have been wonderfully well acquainted with the place, for he found what he wanted with very little trouble.

As soon as the two animals were caparisoned he cautiously led them out.

The utmost rapidity now characterised every one of his movements.

He assisted Maud to mount, and vaulted into the saddle himself.

Scarcely had he gained his seat than a loud cry of alarm was uttered by some one close at hand.

The discharge of a pistol followed, though it would seem that the weapon had been fired merely as the means of attracting attention.

"Follow me," cried Hunch, in his odd, shrill tones—"follow me closely, and all will be well."

Maud followed this injunction without hesitation.

Dimly—very dimly before her she could perceive the form of the hunchback.

In order to leave the premises at the rear of the inn it was necessary to emerge into the road.

This was the moment of greatest danger.

Hunch felt it, and knew that if they could once get a clear start there was a strong probability of ultimate escape.

The explosion of the pistol had put every one of the officers on the alert.

The alarm was general.

"Hold—hold!" cried a loud voice, as the fugitives went dashing by. "Hold, or the consequences of refusal be on your own heads! Pull up, or we fire!"

Hunch took not the least notice of this command, neither did Maud.

The officers, enraged at this contumacy, at once discharged a volley.

The report was deafening, and for an infinitesimally brief space of time everything around was revealed by the flash.

A faint cry came to Maud's lips.

As she uttered it she fancied one of a similar character came from her companion.

Of this she could not be sure; but observing that he put his horse to additional speed she, without hesitation followed his example.

The officers were not mounted, and, consequently, the slight delay which was inevitably caused by their mounting to their saddles enabled the two fugitives to get a tolerably good start.

Maud called out several times to her companion to know whether he was hurt.

But on no occasion did she receive a reply.

She urged her own horse onward, and endeavoured to get breast to breast with Hunch, but was unable to do so, for the more she tried to overtake him the faster he went.

Her fears were now aroused by hearing the tremendous clatter caused by the hoofs of the officers' horses, which were thundering along at the top of their speed.

At this moment Hunch, with great suddenness and abruptness, turned his horse's head down a narrow lane on the right hand.

So short was the turn he took that she feared at first it would hurl him from the saddle.

The manner in which he swayed about from one side to the other was truly wonderful to behold.

Again and again Maud called out to him.

But so far from taking any notice of her voice, he leaned first to one side then to the other in a manner more alarming than before.

It seemed to her as though he was making frantic—nay, superhuman efforts to retain his balance.

All these efforts quickly proved in vain.

With a sudden lurch his body fell over to one side, and reached the earth with a dull, sickening crash.

Maud closed her eyes, and shrieked aloud in horror.

The horse still continued his frantic career, and Maud's horror was now greatly intensified by perceiving that, in falling, Hunch had not been fortunate enough to clear his foot from the stirrup.

At every bound the now thoroughly terrified animal took, his body was dashed with fearful violence upon the ground.

Whether life was extinct or not Maud could not tell, nor had she any means of ascertaining.

In vain she urged her own horse to the utmost of its capacity, in order that she might make an attempt to put a stop to the frantic creature's career.

As before, however, Hunch's horse maintained the lead, and at last Maud was obliged to resign herself to the conviction that it was out of her power to overtake him, or do anything to help or save him.

In the intense interest she felt in this pursuit she forgot for a brief period all about the police officers who were pursuing her so eagerly.

Beyond question the endeavour to overtake her companion caused her to make greater speed than she would otherwise have done.

The intense excitement deadened her to the danger that naturally attached itself to such a headlong course.

The animal in front of her was now quite mad with terror, and consequently it is easy to conceive at what a furious rate it went, since all its efforts seemed to be to outrun the mass that was lumbering at its heels.

Nevertheless, although its speed was so terrific, Maud managed to keep up with it, and the terrified animal, in spite of all its efforts, was unable to increase the distance there was between them.

How long this terrible chase continued Maud knew not, but long ere it was brought to a termination she felt an odd sensation of faintness and sickness come over her for which she was not altogether able to account.

Then she became sensible of a dull, aching pain in her right side.

Mechanically she pressed her hand upon it, believing the pain to be produced by nothing else than the hasty gallop.

She withdrew her fingers with an ejaculation of terror.

Her dress on that side was wet and sticky, and in a moment she became aware that when the officers had fired their volley she had not escaped injury.

She could not believe, however, that the injury was a very severe one, because had it been it would unquestionably have manifested itself sooner and in a different manner.

When the first shock of this discovery was over, Maud again turned her attention to her unfortunate protector.

Just as she glanced down the road the horse contrived in some way to get rid of his burden.

Either from the stirrup-leather giving way, or from his foot becoming released from the stirrup, Hunch's frightful course was brought to a termination.

So suddenly did this event occur that Maud had much ado to pull her horse up in time to prevent herself from riding over him.

As soon as ever her own steed, which showed every symptom of great terror, was brought to a standstill, she dismounted and bent over the prostrate form of her unfortunate protector.

It was now each moment growing lighter, for morning was close at hand.

By the dim, gray illumination, Maud beheld a terrible and fearful spectacle.

Poor Hunch was from head to foot nothing but one disfigured mass of bruises and scratches covered with dust and blood.

The manner in which his torn apparel was soaked by the latter showed that he must have been badly wounded by one or more bullets when the officers discharged their volley.

Maud pronounced his name, but it was in a most hopeless tone of voice.

There came no reply.

Indeed, it was too much to suppose that any human being could survive such frightful injuries as he had received.

Upon making the discovery that he was indeed no more, Maud burst out into a passion of regretful tears.

Misfortune and death did indeed seem to follow in her footsteps, and to be the fate of those who were willing to befriend her.

The fatality was a strange one.

This was the second faithful protector she had lost upon this truly fearful night, and now she found herself once more solitary, alone, and unprotected, and as regards the important expedition upon which she had set out, so far from being nearer, she actually seemed further from the accomplishment of the important errand upon which she had set out.

Despairingly, and with her heart completely weighed down, she rose and looked around.

The dull, distant, but unmistakable sound produced by the horses of the pursuing officers struck upon her ears, and once more aroused her into fresh life and activity.

She remembered most vividly and painfully how irresponsible was her present expedition.

For herself she cared little, if anything.

She felt that her life could not be better spent than in saving Dick, who to her was far dearer than her own existence.

Nothing else but this feeling could have enabled her to struggle against, and finally to some extent overcome, the deathlike sensation of faintness which now came over her.

She reeled, and every object seemed to be gyrating round her at an awful speed.

Nevertheless, with the manner of one deprived of sight, she groped about, in order to obtain a grasp upon her horse's saddle.

The animal stood perfectly quiet, though intense terror caused him to tremble in every limb.

Maud feared, however, that to remount was a task far beyond her failing powers.

She tried again and again.

But in vain.

Each attempt was of a more feeble character than its predecessors.

But now the sound of her pursuers came upon her ears with much greater distinctness than before.

Surely now they must be close—very close at hand.

This knowledge nerved her to one more trial.

Summoning up the whole of her remaining strength, she renewed her endeavours.

This time she succeeded, though before she had time to settle herself properly in the saddle and obtain a firm seat the terrified horse dashed off.

By clinging partly to the mane and partly to the pommel of the saddle, Maud contrived to save herself from falling.

Then, despite her insecurity, she urged her horse onward with her voice, so anxious was she to make all speed.

But there was little need for this.

The creature's terror seemed to increase rather than abate.

Every moment his pace became more terrific.

Closer and closer upon his back Maud crouched as she felt herself in more and more imminent danger of falling off.

Great as this peril was, yet it shrunk into absolute insignificance when compared with that from which she was escaping; and, under the circumstances, there was one thing which could not fail of affording her satisfaction.

She was certainly distancing her foes, for now they could no longer be heard trampling so loudly upon the roadway.

It would almost seem as though Maud was now about altogether to elude her foes.

But such was not the case.

Again, and with tenfold intensity, the sensations caused by the loss of so much blood as had flowed from her side reasserted themselves.

And now indeed was the great danger.

Her position upon the back of the horse was not in the least degree more secure than it had been.

Every object seemed to fade away from her.

The hedgerows retreated until they were lost to sight altogether.

Strange sounds, like the clanging of far-off bells, were ringing in her ears.

Yet, with the grasp of despair, she continued to maintain her hold.

Unconsciously, however, her fingers relaxed.

Gradually all muscular power was departing.

She gasped for breath.

She tried to utter a cry—to call out for assistance in that spot, although she was dimly conscious that she should find none.

More and more to one side her body hung.

The horse, snorting with alarm as he felt the fluttering of her apparel against his flanks, dashed on more furiously than ever.

There was a sudden, rushing sound—

A gurgling cry—

A heavy splash, and the next moment the horse continued his headlong course—

But he was riderless!

CHAPTER MXVII.

CONTINUES TO DESCRIBE MAUD'S MISFORTUNES.

It so happened that at the moment when Maud slipped from the saddle the horse was passing over a rustic wooden bridge which spanned a stream.

In a general way but a small amount of water flowed beneath the rudely-constructed arch, but now the volume of the stream was much increased by the quantity of rain that had so recently fallen.

The effect of this was also that the little water-course flowed with much greater swiftness than was common.

In one sense, it was fortunate that this should be the spot where Maud fell.

In some strange way, she seemed to slip from the saddle, and dropped in comparatively speaking a gentle manner into the brook.

Such was the force of the current that she was instantaneously drifted beneath the arch, narrowly escaping a violent blow from some of the massive wooden supports belonging to the structure.

The sudden immersion into the cold water had the effect of partially restoring her to the proper possession of her faculties.

Still, she was not able to make any effort to support herself upon the surface of the water.

Luckily, her garments becoming distended by wind caused her to float, and to this circumstance alone must the saving of her life be attributed.

She knew nothing about the officers who came galloping up, and who, upon reaching the little narrow wooden bridge, came to a pause, in order that they might ride in single file across it.

These men could still hear the clatter of horse's feet before them; and never dreaming that Maud had quitted the saddle, they continued the chase without delay.

But of all this Maud knew nothing.

The rapid current of the stream carried her along for a great distance, until suddenly she experienced a fall, as though she had passed over the verge of some mimic waterfall.

Then her further progress down the stream was arrested by an obstacle of some kind.

What it was she knew not, but with the instinct of self-preservation she seized hold upon it.

The water no longer rushed past her.

All was comparatively calm and still.

Gradually and slowly morning dawned.

The early light shone grayly and chilly upon the water and the two buildings that were near it.

One was a singular-looking white edifice, built quite close to the water's edge,

The other was a cot—a humble yet pleasant-looking building.

It was just as the sun rose above the horizon that the door of the little cottage was opened,

A man appeared upon the threshold.

The sun fell clear and red upon him, showing that he was past the middle age, and apparently the possessor of immense strength.

In his outward aspect there was, however, little calculated to prepossess an observer in his favour.

Pausing for a moment on the step of the dwelling, he placed his hand before his eyes to screen off the rays of the sun, and as he did so he remarked to some one within:

"Just as I expected, wife—just as I expected. It's an ill wind that blows nobody good, that's true enough. There are plenty no doubt to whom last night's storm has done much harm, but there's water enough now in the pool to turn the old mill for many a day."

These words were uttered with a degree of cheerfulness that one would scarcely have expected in a man of his appearance.

No sooner were the words pronounced than he stepped towards the water.

It now became clear that the singular-looking building was no other than a water-mill.

Having reached the water's edge, the man made his way to one particular portion of it, where some sluice gates were fixed.

His object evidently was to open them so as to allow the water to flow sufficiently to set the water-wheel in motion.

But no sooner did he reach the old, moss-grown sluice gates than he uttered a loud cry, which had the immediate effect of bringing his wife to the door of the cottage.

"What is it—what is it?" she asked.

"Here—here!" said the man. "Look here. Did you ever see the like?"

The woman hastened to place herself by her husband's side.

Then looked in the direction in which he pointed.

"Why," she gasped, "it's—it's a woman!"

"Yes—and a dead one."

"How came she there?"

"I know no better than yourself, for I have only just seen her."

"It is fortunate you did not open the gates."

"It is. If I had, nothing could have saved her from going under the wheel."

The reader probably comprehends that the stream down which Maud had been carried discharged itself into a large pool, which served the purpose of a reservoir to the mill.

This pool had but one outlet—the sluice gates.

It was against those that Maud had been carried, and it was to these she had clung with the tenacity of a drowning person.

The man and his wife gazed upon her for some moments in silence.

At length the woman spoke.

"Surely—surely, John," she said, "she must be dead!"

"Oh, yes, dead beyond a doubt! She cannot be alive! The great puzzle is, to me, how on earth she came there."

"What is to be done?"

"I don't know."

"If she is dead——"

"There is no 'if' about it!"

"Well—well, you need not be so sharp. As she is dead we shall probably find ourselves in some trouble!"

"How so?" asked the man, with a start of surprise.

"Why, as you know full well, we have more enemies than friends hereabouts, and when they come to hear of this we shall have hard work to persuade them that we have had no hand in this creature's death."

The man knit his brows savagely and muttered a curse.

"It's no good swearing!" said his wife. "What is to be done? Be quick and make up your mind!"

"What do you advise?"

"Advise?"

"Yes; let me hear what you have to propose. What do you consider would be the best?"

"Oh, how kind you are, to be sure, John," said his wife, with a sneer; "but don't think I am such a fool as to be taken in by you! Wouldn't you just like me to tell you what to do?"

"I should, for I don't know myself."

"Oh, of course not! You would like to put all the responsibility on my shoulders, so that if anything should arise from it you would be able to say, 'There, that's your doings!' No—no, John Costard, I am determined not to allow you the opportunity! There now!"

These words were pronounced in a very triumphant tone indeed, and their emphasis was increased by the manner in which she clapped her hands together at the conclusion.

The miller looked very wroth for a moment, but probably he had long ago learnt that any demonstration of anger was quite useless.

Therefore, smothering his resentment, he said, in as calm and quiet a tone as he could assume:

"Well, then, in my opinion the best thing that can be done is to get her out of the water at once and ascertain whether she is really dead or not."

"Very well, John Costard. Do just as you like. But I have one great consolation—you won't be able to blame me afterwards for what's done! That is a great consolation!"

The miller cursed again, but this time it was under his breath.

Without taking any further notice of his helpmate, he

bent himself seriously to the task of recovering the body of Maud.

This was no easy task, owing to the situation of the sluice gates.

After a short delay, however, the miller succeeded in slipping a rope round Maud's waist.

Then, crawling back to the shore, he, by means of it, pulled her towards him.

When near enough, he stooped down and lifted her on to the smooth grass by which the pool was bordered.

"I fancy she is dead," he muttered, after gazing at Maud for a few moments.

"Then if she is just let me ask you what is to become of us? We shall be found guilty of murder! What is to be done?"

"I should think we had better try all we possibly can to revive her; if we succeed there will be an end to that danger."

"Very well—do just as you like; I shall not have a word to say either way in the affair."

The fear these people had that a dead body would get them into trouble made them most anxious that Maud should recover.

By the assistance of his wife, the miller carried her into the house, and every means was used to restore her to sensibility.

But for a long time their efforts were quite in vain.

In removing her apparel, the weight of her dress was noticed.

The miller's wife was curious enough to ascertain the cause.

It was found to be the heavy purse which Maud carried, and the sight of which had excited the cupidity of the villanous innkeeper.

Even the miller's eyes gleamed when he caught sight of so much wealth.

The interior of his dwelling did indeed present a melancholy spectacle, for on all sides could be seen unmistakable tokens of the presence of the gaunt spectre Poverty.

For a long time things had gone badly with the miller.

The water which turned the mill had lately been very deficient in supply, and consequently his mill had rusted with disuse.

To him the purse of gold that his wife held up before his eyes represented wealth—a fortune.

"Put it away," he said, averting his eyes—"put it away! Do not tempt me with the sight!"

It was at this moment that Maud showed some signs of returning animation.

The woman's guilty conscience made her hastily secrete the gold, and immediately afterwards she was bending over the cold form with an appearance of hypocritical solicitude.

Wearily and heavily Maud opened her eyes.

The daylight confused and blinded her.

"What place is this?" she gasped. "What—oh, what has happened?"

The utterance of these words proved too much for the slight amount of strength which she then possessed.

Her eyes closed, and she again lapsed into unconsciousness.

The fears which had hitherto animated the minds of the miller and his wife were now at rest.

The latter, however, fixing her eyes upon her husband, said:

"What think you now will be the reward we shall receive for thus restoring her to life?"

"Reward?"

"Yes. How much do you think she will give us?"

The miller shook his head.

His wife stamped her foot impatiently, as she exclaimed:

"Answer me, dolt that you are—answer me, I say!"

"Something considerable, no doubt," replied the miller, in a voice of restraint.

"Yes—yes; but how much?"

"The contents of that purse, perhaps."

"Never fear; I'll warrant that is all she possesses, and I don't suppose, by the look of her, that she came by it honestly."

In good truth, poor Maud's outward appearance at this time was far from being prepossessing.

She bore upon her garments the marks of the many vicissitudes she had lately gone through, and in particular this last adventure had by no means improved them.

After a long discussion between themselves, it was determined by this precious pair that they would do the best they could for the stranger who had been in so peculiar a manner thrust upon their care, and that on her recovery they would trust to her generosity to reward them handsomely.

Accordingly, she was laid upon the only bed the place could boast, and it was not until this was done that the wound in her side was discovered.

The hemorrhage had for some time completely ceased.

No doubt the sudden immersion into the cold water had had the effect of checking the flow of blood.

The first shock of surprise being over, the miller's wife set herself to work to examine it.

She quickly found that the hurt was by no means a serious one, and certainly not beyond her own powers of surgery.

With considerabe skill she bandaged up the wound, and then waited patiently for Maud to show some symptoms of returning animation.

But she waited for a long and weary time—until, indeed, the whole of that day had passed—until the thick shadows of evening began to fill the apartment.

Suddenly, with a loud scream, Maud awoke as though from some dreadful dream.

She sprang up at once into a sitting posture, and gazed around her with a countenance upon which alarm was most vividly depicted.

"What is your fear?" said the miller's wife, somewhat gruffly. "Keep still, or you will make yourself worse than you already are."

The voice caused Maud to turn her eyes in the direction of the speaker.

Her gaze was one of inexpressible surprise and wonder.

It was quite evident that at present Maud had no idea of where she was, nor any recollection of what had happened.

"Tell me," she said at length, speaking with a great effort—"tell me where I am and how I came here?"

"Nay—nay," said the woman. "Be calm—be still. You shall know all in good time."

"Calm?" echoed Maud—"calm? You know not whom you speak, or you would not address such a word to me! Keep me not in suspense, I entreat you, but answer my question without delay!"

As she proceeded, Maud's agitation increased.

By degrees recollection was coming back to her, and all this time her heart painfully fluttered with dismay.

With that rapidity of which thought alone is capable, she followed up all the different events which had occurred to her until the fall from her horse, of which she had only a very slight and dim remembrance.

"Tell me," she said again, and with so much additional excitement that the miller's wife was afraid to withhold the information any longer.

Maud listened with a terror and alarm for which the narrator could not account.

"And—and," gasped Maud, with parting lips and panting breath, "you say that it was this morning—early this morning that you found me?"

"Yes, lady, at sunrise?"

"And now—what is it now?"

The woman looked bewildered.

"I mean, how long is it since then?"

"About twelve hours."

"Then it is close upon night?"

"It is. Do you not perceive that the room grows darker every moment?"

"I must go—I must go at once," said Maud, in shrieking tones. "I cannot stay here any longer—I must go this moment!"

"You cannot."

"Woman, do not be so cruel as to try to stop me! I tell you many lives hang upon my movements! Get me a horse. Fear not that I shall fail to reward you well!"

"But I say again you cannot."

Maud, with a cry of despair, slipped off the bed.

No sooner did her feet touch the ground, however,

than she became fully sensible of her extreme weakness.

She tried to move, but all motion was denied her.

"Lost—lost!" she cried, in a voice of such terrible anguish that it penetrated even to the heart of the miller's wife—"lost, now—all—all is lost—lost—lost!"

And with these words upon her lips, she threw up her arms above her head, and sank down upon the floor again totally bereft of consciousness.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DISCLOSES THE PERILOUS POSITION OF DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES AT THE OLD CASTLE.

To say that Dick Turpin and his comrades were astounded and amazed upon hearing the loud yells of the police officers and their triumphant cries as they clustered around the entrance to the subterraneous chamber would only be to convey a very faint impression of the actual condition of their minds at this juncture.

Dick Turpin stopped short as though by some magical process he had been instantaneously transformed to stone.

His comrades paused as well, and gazed blankly at each other.

In this manner they remained until the first outburst of triumph on the part of the officers was over.

"Below, there!" cried Bishop, in a stentorian voice—"below, there, I say!"

This was probably intended as a summons for the highwaymen to reply; but if so, no notice was taken of it whatever.

"Surrender—surrender!" cried Bishop, "and so save your lives! Dick Turpin, give in game and handsome, as a fellow like you ought to. Our number more than trebles yours, and you are down there like rats in a trap. Escape is out of the question quite, so make the best of a bad job by giving in quietly!"

These words had the effect of dissolving the kind of spell which had hitherto pressed upon the minds of our friends.

So perfectly secure did they consider themselves in their present quarters, that when they first heard the sound of voices and the trampling of feet above they could scarcely believe that their ears had served them aright.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Tom King. "What is to be done?"

"Alas!" said Dick, "I now feel myself incapable of all action and direction."

"Nay—nay, captain! Look up! Do not suffer yourself to be cast down by this?"

Dick groaned.

"It is not of myself that I am thinking," he responded—"for my own part I care little, but it is Maud—Maud! What can have become of her?"

The uncertainty Dick Turpin was in about Maud's fate, and the apprehensions he experienced concerning it, unmanned him quite.

His companions witnessed it with genuine grief.

"Something must be done," remarked Claude Duval, after a brief pause. "Let us be quick and decide, or we shall have those fellows down upon us."

"But what can be done?" asked Tom King. "They have the advantage of us in every way. I believe any attempt at resistance would be perfectly futile."

A gloomy silence followed the expression of this opinion.

It was so fully shared in by everyone present that not a single word could be said.

As for Dick, he almost seemed as though every word uttered by his comrades was lost upon him, so absorbed was he by his grief for Maud.

The officers, however, by no means seemed to relish the idea of descending the steps.

They much preferred remaining where they were.

A short time having elapsed, however, Bishop bent over the abyss, and in as loud a voice as he possibly could, shouted out:

"Dick Turpin and the rest of you, listen to what I say. I will give you three minutes to consider my proposal, and if at the end of that time we hear nothing from you we shall use our weapons, for this time we are determined to have you, alive or dead! If we suffered you to slip through our fingers on such an occasion as this we should be a laughing-stock for the whole country! Are you listening to what I say?"

The same profound silence was preserved by the highwaymen.

A silence that made the officers begin to feel rather uncomfortable.

Tom Davis all this time had been too dumbfounded to open his lips.

Indeed, the whole place being strange to him, he scarcely comprehended his position.

Yet it was singular that when he did speak he was the first to propound a really practical question.

"Is there no other way of getting out of this place except that by which we have entered it?"

Sixteen-String Jack started at this question.

"A way might be made," he answered, "if those fellows would only allow us the time to do it."

Tom Davis shook his head.

"Is it possible," he asked, "that you have remained here so long without taking care to have several exits? That ought to have been your first care."

"It ought; but it's too late to talk of that now."

Tom Davis was much grieved to observe the apathy which had settled upon the captain.

No one, however, knew Turpin's disposition better than he did, and on the present occasion he hastened to make use of his knowledge.

Touching his old companion on the arm, he said:

"Dick, if you were by yourself, and had no one depending upon you whatever, this total abandonment to grief could be defended. As it is, we are here awaiting your judgment and commands, therefore the indulgence is unjust."

Dick raised his head.

His voice was trembling and almost inarticulate as he replied:

"Tom, you can form no opinion of my feelings, because you have never known what it is to sustain such a fearful loss. However, I must admit that your reproof is just, and therefore, shaking off as well as I can all my own private sorrows, I will do my best to obtain your safety."

"That is spoken like yourself. Now, then, tell us what to do. The officers surround the opening above, so that there is no hope whatever of making our escape that way. As we ascended the steps, we could be picked off one by one, like sparrows; and you may depend the officers would not hesitate to do it."

"No; that is certain."

"I have just been blaming you all," said Tom Davis, "that you did not provide against such a contingency as this by making another outlet."

"It should have been done."

"But it is not," said Claude, "and therefore to talk about it now is only to waste precious time."

"Right," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but if you will go to the foot of the flight of steps, I will show you a passage which I have partially explored."

"And whither does it lead?" asked Dick, eagerly.

"That I cannot tell you."

"Do you know whether there is an outlet?"

"I do not yet. I fancy one might be made."

"Why?"

"Because I could feel fresh air."

"Let us go there, then."

"With all my heart," said Jack; "for we cannot possibly make our position worse by moving from one part of this subterranean place to another."

No sooner were these words spoken than, with the greatest amount of caution possible, they made their way back to the foot of the steps.

Careful as they were yet it would seem that their approach had not been made without reaching the keen ears of the officers above.

"Be ready," they heard Bishop say, in a suppressed voice—"be ready, for I can hear them coming. Perhaps they intend to make a rush. If so, discharge all your pistols at once down the staircase. We cannot fail to have every one of them then."

Bishop uttered this cold-blooded command in the calmest and most business-like tone possible to conceive.

Dick could not avoid shuddering as he heard it, for he thought of what Maud's fate was likely to be, if she had

fallen into such hands; and he believed she had, for all circumstances seemed to point to this conclusion.

"Below there!" cried Bishop, again. "Did you hear what I said? Are you inclined to accept my proposal or not? At any rate, I shall wait no longer."

"Hilloa!" said Turpin, though the tone in which he pronounced the word was so unlike his usual voice, that his comrades could scarcely believe that he had spoken.

"Oh," said Bishop, "you have found a voice at last, have you? How do you feel down there now?"

"Much the same as you do above."

"Oh, do you? Perhaps you intend that for a joke. If you do, I can assure you you will find in a little while that you will be ready to laugh the other side of your mouth."

"Oh, shall we! I suppose you are not content with the one capture you have made, eh?"

Now these words were spoken by Dick with a view if possible of ascertaining something about Maud.

Surely, he thought, if Bishop had made her a prisoner this would elicit some remark concerning her.

But Bishop had not been successful enough to do anything of the kind.

Therefore, Dick's words were not a little enigmatical to him.

In the course of a moment, however, that sagacity for which he was so famous suggested that Dick must refer to the capture of himself and companions.

To Dick's great surprise, then, the astute officer answered:

"Yes, I am tolerably satisfied, because I know you cannot escape. I am only waiting to have you securely bound, and then my satisfaction will be complete."

"Will it?"

"Yes, decidedly; and now listen to reason: You must by this time have realized that you are completely trapped—yes, trapped is the word. We could starve you into submission if we only liked to wait and take the trouble; or by making a sudden descent we could, by one volley down the passage, sweep every one of you from the earth. But you are a decent fellow, Dick, and I should be sorry to take your life; I have a respect for you, and I hope you will surrender quietly to my power in order that I may have the credit of having captured you alive."

"You are remarkably kind," said Dick, in a sarcastic voice. "Perhaps you will allow me to speak to my companions and ask them whether they prefer being shot down by your pistols or whether they will give in quietly?"

Bishop concluded from this speech that he really had a chance of achieving what he so wished to accomplish. He believed he could perceive the symptoms of an inclination to yield without bloodshed.

It was, therefore, while labouring under this pleasing but delusive impression that he said:

"You shall never say that I did not treat you properly, so I will give you two minutes to decide."

Bishop thought he was arranging matters very cleverly indeed.

Not so Isaac, who proclaimed his disgust in loud tones.

"You're a d—d fool!" he remarked, in an audible voice, as soon as Bishop had concluded the last sentence.

The chief officer turned round and cried, indignantly:

"Who, sir?"

"Why, you, of course! Did you imagine more than one was in the company?"

"I know there is one," said Bishop, with a significant glance; "and what is more, he is an intermeddler and a busybody besides!"

"I understand your insinuation, but I don't hesitate to call you a blundering fool, nevertheless; and what is more still, I wash my hands entirely of this affair—I will have no more to do with it!"

"Very well, please yourself!"

"The idea," muttered Isaac, "of a man being fool enough to stand at the top of a flight of steps while he knows those he wants are below, and, instead of rushing down upon them at once, kindly gives them as much time as they want to make an escape!"

"Hold your row!" said Bishop, savagely.

"I shall speak if I like; and this I will say, I have wondered many and many a time how on earth it was that Dick Turpin and his comrades have managed to avoid capture on such a many occasions. But I shall wonder no longer, for I daresay your brother officers have been kind enough to allow them every opportunity of escape, as you have!"

"How escape?" asked Bishop, contemptuously. "If you must make your voice heard, do let us have the satisfaction of now and then hearing a few words of sense! How can they escape, you idiot? Ain't they as fast as rats in a trap?"

"Don't you make too sure of that, my friend!—don't you make too sure! However, I am clear of the whole affair now; and whether you capture them or whether you don't does not signify to me in the least degree. I know I should have acted very differently under the same circumstances!"

"And pray," said Bishop, putting on as sneering a tone and manner as he knew how—"and pray may I make so bold as to venture to ask what my very wise friend would have done under the circumstances?"

The mock humility which Bishop displayed, he thought, was cutting in the utmost degree.

"Yes," said Isaac, "I will tell you, though I don't suppose you will have the sense to act up to it on another occasion."

"Well, well—I'm a-waiting."

"Well, the moment they descended, instead of flourishing my arms about and bawling aloud like a madman, as you did, I should have rushed as speedily as I could down the steps and should have had hold of every man Jack of them before they had the least idea of what was the matter."

"Very clever—very clever indeed," and Bishop, who nevertheless could not help inwardly succumbing to the conviction that the course of action proposed by Isaac was by far the most rational and the most likely to succeed.

The allotted time had by this time expired, so Bishop approached more closely to the secret entrance.

He was much annoyed with himself, and just in the humour to be put out by any trifle.

A most ominous silence seemed to him to prevail below.

He would not allow any signs of his anxiety to manifest themselves in his countenance, though he could not altogether control a slight unsteadiness in his voice.

"Time's up," he said—"time's up, Dick. Have you made up your mind? Whether you have or have not, I can't wait any longer. Dick, I say, have you made up your mind?"

No reply whatever came to this inquiry.

The men began to murmur.

As for Isaac, he, by various contemptuous and aggravating actions, expressed that this was just what he expected.

"Told you so," he cried—"told you so! You kindly gave them the time and opportunity they required, and by this time are far enough off, laughing at your monstrous credulity."

This speech, and the disagreeable inward conviction that what Isaac stated was no more than the truth, put the finishing stroke to Bishop's aggravation.

He could stand these taunts no longer.

Clenching his fists, he rushed up to the spot where Isaac stood with the intention of administering severe bodily chastisement to that individual.

But Isaac was prepared for him.

With that calmness which was so habitual to him, and which had such an aggravating effect upon almost everybody, he stepped back, and, clenching his fists, struck out straight from his shoulder just as Bishop was rushing up to him.

The consequence was that the last-named gentleman's nose came into most violent contact with Isaac's fist.

Indeed, such was the force of the blow that Bishop's onward career was instantaneously checked and a contrary direction imparted to his motion, inasmuch that he staggered back several paces.

"How do you like that?" said Isaac, more imperturbably cool than ever. "If you are not satisfied with that you had better come on again, my ancient Trojan."

But either Bishop had come a little more to his senses, or else the stunning blow upon his nose had cowed him.

for he showed no symptoms nor inclinations of renewing the contest.

Wiping away the ensanguined stream that flowed from his nostrils, he returned to the secret entrance.

"No more dallying," he said to his men, who could not help smiling at his ludicrous appearance. "Down with you! Take them alive or dead!"

The officers, it would seem, were a little stung by the taunts to which Isaac had given utterance, for with a great assumption of boldness and courage they dashed down the steps.

Some had taken the precaution to provide themselves with lights, and as soon as these reached the bottom they held them aloft.

A ruddy light was cast around.

But it fell only on the damp walls.

The highwaymen were nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER MXIX.

MR. BISHOP TRIES A SHOT AT BLACK BESS.

Of this, however, Bishop was ignorant, for he very prudently kept in the rear, and did not reach the bottom of the steps until after all the others.

"Down with them!" he cried, now thoroughly infuriated, and only too glad to find some object to expend his wrath upon. "No quarter! Shoot them down and make an end of it!"

The officers were silent.

Of course, as there was no one to be seen, no discharge of weapons took place.

"Why don't you fire?" yelled Bishop.

"There's nobody here, sir."

"Nobody here?" he screamed. "Forward—forward, they can't have got away—they must be somewhere close at hand."

The loud, mocking laugh of Isaac above, who had heard what had passed, made the officer's blood boil in his veins.

The next moment he stood at the bottom of the steps.

When here, he had ample proof that his men had spoken correctly.

Not a trace of the highwaymen could be seen.

The men, however, in obedience to his commands, had rushed along the passage into the chamber habitually occupied by those of whom they were in quest.

But not the least trace could be perceived of them here.

"This way, idiots!" roared Bishop—"this way! Can't you see? this way! Where are your eyes, dolts?"

The officers hastened to place themselves by the side of their leader.

He was pointing to a passage that branched off from the bottom of the stairs, but which, strangely enough, they had not noticed.

"That is the way," he said. "Quick—quick! they have not had time to get far off. Quick—quick, I say!"

The officers hurried down the passage with great alacrity.

They could feel that fresh air was blowing in their faces, and this circumstance caused them to push on at the greatest speed they were capable of making.

In a short time they found the passage communicated with a series of vaults or dungeons.

They did not turn aside or pause to attempt to enter any one of them, for the strong massive doors were all closed, and had been apparently for many centuries.

Moreover, they fancied they could hear in advance the trampling of footsteps, though probably the sound was no more than the echo of their own feet.

Suddenly they came to a door that was partly shut.

Pushing it open, they found themselves in an arched stone chamber.

At one time it had been used as a repository for the dead, as numerous coffins, or, rather, the remains of them, could be seen stacked up in niches against the walls.

Upon these, however, the officers scarcely bestowed a glance.

Their attention was attracted and absorbed by the dusky figure of a man which they could indistinctly see creeping through the window—or, more properly speaking, the grated aperture at the end of the vault furthest from the door.

"Fire—fire!" roared Bishop. "Why do you p Fire—fire!"

Half a dozen of his men obeyed his command.

In the confined space, the noise resulting from the simultaneous discharge of so many firearms was something terrific.

Mingling with the loud report came a loud splash as of some heavy body falling from a considerable height into water.

The vault was instantaneously filled with dense blue smoke, which the light of the torches could not penetrate.

"On—on!" cried Bishop, setting the example of rushing forward.

His men kindly gave him place, and allowed him to take the lead.

The disappointment and rage of the chief officer at the present juncture are beyond all expression.

But what most galled him was not his defeat, but the mockery of Isaac to which he would be subjected.

At the extremity of the vault, and rather high up from the ground, was an aperture in the stone wall.

It was not much wider or higher than was requisite to permit the passage of a man's body through it.

Being near the foundation of the old castle, the wall was of uncommon thickness.

The aperture gradually widened to about double the size at the other end.

By the aid of his men, Bishop was raised up sufficiently high to enable him to crawl along this tube—for this was what it more resembled than aught else.

He called aloud to his men to follow him speedily.

So little time had been lost by these proceedings that when he reached the end he caught sight of those of whose capture he had a little while before made so sure.

But upon reaching the extremity of the aperture Bishop paused, and well he might.

At a distance of about fifteen feet below him was a wide sheet of water, which, from its appearance and situation, was no doubt the remains of the moat which had at one time surrounded the castle.

In the act of swimming across this piece of water was Sixteen-String Jack.

His comrades were all standing on the opposite bank, shaking and wringing the wet from their apparel.

Bishop's position was a most awkward one, yet nevertheless he endeavoured to draw a pistol from one of his pockets.

The attempt was very nearly costing him a good ducking, for he leaned forward so much that he all but lost his balance.

Dick Turpin divined his intention, and producing a pistol, levelled it at him.

"Retreat, Bishop, retreat, and leave us in peace! Retreat, I say, or I fire!"

Bishop had a conviction that from that distance Dick's bullet would be unpleasantly effective, so he drew back with a suddenness that was ludicrous.

"Back again!" he cried to the men. "Up the steps, and run round to the other side of the keep—they are all there, and if you are speedy you may yet be in time! Down with them, if you have the chance! Show them no mercy!"

An immediate movement followed this injunction.

The men had made so sure of gaining the large reward on the present occasion that they could not bear to entertain the idea that they were about to lose it.

At any rate, they determined upon making a last great effort.

Accordingly, very little time was lost by them in gaining the upper air.

To tell the truth, they much preferred being there to groping about in the subterranean portion of an old ruined castle.

For a brief space, however, we will return to the movements of the highwaymen, which must to our readers possess infinitely more interest than the doings of the police officers. Already a tolerably good idea can be formed of the manner in which the escape from the subterraneous passages had been accomplished.

Isaac little thought how truly he spoke when he said that the two minutes' delay granted by Bishop was just what the highwaymen wanted to allow them to get off.

Such, however, actually proved to be the case.

Sixteen-String Jack, who had been the first to mention



[DICK TURPIN ASKS BLACK BESS A QUESTION.]

the other passage, set the example of hastening along it as soon as the conference between Bishop and Dick Turpin was brought to a conclusion.

The others followed quickly in his footsteps.

Upon reaching the dungeon doors we have already mentioned, the highwaymen were in doubt whether it would be policy to open any of them or to rush on.

The latter was the course agreed upon by the general voice.

On arriving at the vault at the extremity, a little delay took place in consequence of the difficulty which they experienced of opening the door.

The rusty old fastening had to be removed by force, and consequently they had no means of securing the door, and so use that as a protection between themselves and their foes.

The aperture quickly attracted their attention.

Dick mounted first, and crawling along, encountered a large iron grating.

But time and the weather had had such a destructive effect upon it, that a few hearty shakes enabled him to dislodge it altogether from its setting.

He released it from his grasp, and it fell with a terrific splash into the water below.

The sound caused Dick great apprehension, for he made sure that it would be heard all over the ruins.

Looking forward, he found that the iron grating had covered a kind of loophole in the outer wall of the castle, that was at a considerable altitude from a large sheet of water.

Escape lay in this direction, yet it was by no means pleasant to think of taking a head-foremost plunge from such a height, and without any knowledge as to the depth of the water.

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Yet there was no resource.

The dimensions of the apartment were so confined, and the stonework so very smooth and slippery, that to turn round seemed a matter of impossibility.

Looking back over his shoulder, Dick explained the situation and the difficulties of it to his comrades.

Tom King was next to him, so he said:

"Hold my hands, and I will endeavour to descend feet first."

Dick tried, and succeeded.

He dropped with unpleasant force into the moat, the depth of the water in which was by no means so great as he had expected.

In fact, when he stood upright the water reached no higher than his waist.

It was lucky he did not try to plunge head first.

If he had he must have sustained some injury.

No sooner did he find himself in safety on his feet than he dashed the water from his face, and said, in cautious tones:

"Come, Tom—it is all right! Be quick, and we shall escape them yet!"

Tom King needed no further bidding.

Following his leader's example, he lowered himself without hesitation.

Dick was standing ready to receive him, so that Tom made the descent with comparative ease.

Tom Davis followed; but as he was of much greater bulk, and by no means so agile in his movements as the highwaymen, he failed to turn, and came down with a splash almost loud enough to rouse the people in the next village.

However, all continued silent.

Apparently no alarm had been given.

Claude followed.

Last of all came Sixteen-String Jack.

He found he laboured under a considerable disadvantage, for he had no comrade to hold him by the hand while he turned round.

Nevertheless, in spite of this and a certain amount of awkwardness resulting from his wound, he accomplished the feat successfully.

But he was just in time, and that was all.

The delay of another couple of seconds must have cost him his life.

Nothing could have saved him when, by the direction of Bishop, the officers fired that volley into the loop-hole.

Indeed, so little was Jack beforehand that the splash which he made by falling into the water, and the discharge of the pistols, seemed simultaneous sounds.

What occurred on the appearance of Bishop we have already described.

The highwaymen and Tom Davis waded quickly to the bank, and did not fail to congratulate each other when they once again found themselves on firm earth.

Perceiving how impossible it was to do anything in his present position, and influenced to a very great extent by the pistol which Dick Turpin had pointed so calmly at him, Bishop, as we have already stated, beat a precipitate and very undignified retreat.

With all the speed he could make, he followed his men on their way to the staircase.

"If we had but our horses," exclaimed Claude Duval, "we should be able to get clear off without much further trouble."

"Or," added Sixteen-String Jack, "by making good speed, we might be able to reach the secret entrance first. We could then close it and make them every one prisoners."

There was a general laugh at this proposition of turning the tables upon the officers, in which Dick Turpin himself could not help joining.

"It is not half a bad idea," said Claude, quickly; "and to prove that I think so, I will try to carry it into effect."

It was a matter that would not allow of discussion, for while the pros and cons were being considered the opportunity would be gone.

All the rest followed rapidly in Claude's footsteps—not that they thought his scheme was likely to be carried out, but because it was necessary for them to go in that direction to recover their horses.

With a great deal of confidence, Claude hurried forward and actually was just in time to close the secret door as the first of the returning officers was about to emerge.

That gentleman, to his very great astonishment, found the door suddenly banged in his face, and then the whole of them were in total darkness, for the concussion of the air consequent upon the discharge of the pistols had extinguished their lights.

But this act very nearly cost Claude his life.

Of course our friends knew nothing about Isaac and his companion, both of whom had been left outside by Bishop.

The former, seeing Claude and guessing from his actions who he was, carefully levelled a pistol.

By great good fortune Dick espied him and fired as well, but without having time to take any particular aim.

Nevertheless, his shot produced just the effect he intended it should.

It startled Isaac and distracted his attention at a very critical time.

Isaac fired, but the careful aim was lost.

Nevertheless, the bullet whistled past Claude in much too close proximity to be at all pleasant.

"This way, Claude," cried Dick Turpin, in a loud voice—"this way! Quick—quick! we shall yet be in time!"

Isaac no sooner perceived how very much he was outnumbered than he very prudently desisted from any further hostilities, and our friends were not the sort of men to seek vengeance for what had occurred.

The cooped-up police officers, however, upon hearing the discharge of firearms, became greatly infuriated.

Loud blows were rained upon the door.

But it was strong, and withstood them well.

They were not in the secret of opening it, and had not Isaac and his companion been outside, the highwaymen would have been able to take it very easily.

No sooner, however, had the latter vanished round a projection of the masonry in quest of their horses, than Isaac with great haste ran to the door.

He was not in possession of the secret, but, his efforts from without, joined to those of the officers on the other side, quickly demolished the door.

On they rushed in such hurry and confusion that the entrance for a moment was choked completely up.

No sooner, however, had Dick and his friends got out of sight than the former said:

"Some inward presentiment—for I can call it nothing else—seems to assure me that shortly before our arrival Maud must have been made prisoner by some of these men. If so, she is now in the ruins, in which case, as I need scarcely say, I cannot think of retreat until she is rescued."

His companions remained silent, waiting to hear what he would say next.

Dick continued:

"To get the horses will probably occupy a few minutes. While you are thus engaged, I will take a stealthy look round and try to ascertain where they have bestowed her."

"Dick."

"Yes, Tom?"

"I am your comrade, am I not?"

"Certainly."

"We are all your comrades," cried the rest.

"And, therefore," added Tom, "we will all join you in your search."

"Many—many thanks!" said Dick. "I should be glad to believe that my poor Maud occupies a warm place in all your hearts."

"She does—she does—believe us, she does."

"Well then, my friends," said Dick, in a voice which displayed how deeply he was affected, "you can render me signal aid by dispersing yourselves all over the ruins, as then we should search narrowly every part—that is," he concluded, "if you are willing to run so much extra risk solely on my behalf, when the path of your own safety lies clear and plain before you, if you only choose to avail yourselves of it."

Tom and the rest scarcely waited to hear the conclusion of this speech, but separated at once, and without hesitation, in order to do their captain's bidding.

Of course, being acquainted with the exact nature of all the events that have occurred, the reader knows how

very erroneous was Dick's impression regarding Maud's presence in the ruins.

But a moment's reflection will show that this idea was of all others the one most likely to fix itself in his mind, and one about which there was the strongest degree of probability.

What a pity it was that he and his companions should run this perfectly unnecessary and frightful risk, for, of course, the search would prove totally resultless as Maud was at that time many miles away from the place.

The length of stay, however, which our friends had made at the ruins had enabled them to become well acquainted with all its intricacies.

Therefore the search when once made would be a thorough one, and executed without any loss of time by going over the same ground twice.

As the reader is aware, no trace of Maud or Jack the ostler could be seen.

Dick was distracted.

Rather than abandon his preconceived idea, he contended that she must have been conveyed to some other place.

Very certain, however, was it that she was nowhere about the ruins.

Thus was much valuable time lost, and thus were the officers enabled to improve their position in no inconsiderable degree.

For a brief space, then, we will leave them, and revert to the energetic proceedings which were now taken by the police officers.

CHAPTER MXX.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN RESENTS BISHOP'S COWARDLY SHOT.

Bishop now was in such an exalted state of exasperation that there is no knowing what absurdity he might have been guilty of had he not happened to catch a remark which fell from the lips of Isaac, and which brought about a condition of partial calmness.

Isaac's remark was this:

"There, I have done with you now—I am determined to have no further hand in the affair; yet, if I had the conduction of it, I should take care to secure the horses belonging to the rascals; it would not be very difficult, and they would find it by no means so easy to get away."

Bishop seized upon the hint at once.

But he pretended not to have overheard one word that Isaac had said.

Summoning his men around him, he gave them the order to, first of all, bend all their energies towards capturing the horses.

An immediate move was made to carry out this direction.

Isaac observed this with a contemptuous, sarcastic smile, but he made no remark.

In his own mind, he was exceedingly sorry to think he had made the suggestion, for his feelings towards Bishop now were of such a character that he really wished the highwaymen to escape in order that he might have the opportunity of exercising his powers of aggravation to the utmost advantage.

The officers were not long in making the discovery that they were just a few minutes too late.

Having satisfied themselves that Maud was nowhere in the ruins, the highwaymen, with the exception of Dick, had taken their horses, and had seated themselves in readiness to start.

But Turpin could not by any means divest himself of the notion that Maud must be there, for he could scarcely think that she had succeeded in making her escape.

It was thus being animated by this feeling that made Dich unable to tear himself away from the castle.

Systematic as the search had been, he was by no means satisfied with it, and therefore lingered until the very latest moment, in the hope of making the much-wished-for discovery.

Suddenly, the officers burst upon the highwaymen.

Claude Duval had taken Tom Davis up into the saddle behind him.

Black Bess was standing at a little distance.

Self-preservation compelled the highwaymen to shift from their position, but they took good care to do so in such a manner that they would prove a partial defence to their captain, to whom they cried aloud at the top of their voices.

"Fire!" yelled Bishop—"fire, I say!"

The order was immediately obeyed, and it was only by making a sudden movement that our friends saved themselves from being riddled by the bullets, which clattered against the stone walls like rain.

It was immediately after this discharge that Bishop caught sight of Black Bess.

He recognised the noble creature instantly.

In a moment the impulse seized upon him to try and capture her.

She was standing there so still and quiet that he fancied the capture would not be a very difficult one.

Not only would Black Bess herself prove to be to him a most valuable acquisition, but if he had her in his hands his chances of capturing her owner would be very much increased.

His men wondered what on earth he was about when they saw him walk quietly forward, for he did not utter one syllable as to his intention.

Black Bess still retained her former attitude.

But she was not unaware of the police officer's approach, as could be seen by the manner in which she projected her ears towards him.

Bishop put into practice all the coaxing ways he could think of.

His heart beat with exultation, for he got closer and closer, and still Black Bess did not stir.

He reached out his hand as soon as he believed himself near enough to clutch the bridle, and made a sudden effort.

But his fingers did not so much as touch the loosely-dangling reins.

Black Bess divined his intention, and gave a sudden bound, that had the effect of making the distance between herself and her would-be captor about the same as it was at first.

Bishop was never blessed with a very patient temper, and now it was exacerbated to such a degree that the moment anything went wrong he fell into a kind of fury that more resembled the transport of a lunatic than an outbreak of passion on the part of a sane person.

"D—n you!" he cried, savagely, "I believe you are no better than a witch! No human horse could have done what you have, and escaped with your life so many times! I will make one more attempt to seize you, and if that fails I will try whether you will be proof against one of my pistol bullets!"

Bishop had a loaded pistol in his hand, and while he spoke these words he rapidly cocked it.

Then advanced in the direction of the spot to which Black Bess was standing.

But this time the gallant animal distrusted him more than before.

She seemed ready to start at once.

Suddenly a faint chirping sound was heard—

A sound which more resembled the twittering of some little bird than aught else.

It was Dick Turpin's well-known signal.

No sooner did it strike upon the ears of Black Bess than she gave a rapid bound, which carried her clear over the trunk of a fallen tree that happened to be lying near her

"Curse the beast!" said Bishop. "I could have wished her alive, for she's a beauty; but I will put a stop to her galloping for the future!"

With this he took as good an aim as he could

His finger pressed the trigger

There was a loud report.

Mingled with it was a faint snorting sound, but so faint and so brief that it was hard to say whether it was reality or fancy.

Bishop shouted aloud to his men, and immediately rushed forward.

He was in hopes of making a capture of Dick Turpin himself, for he gave a shrewd guess as to the meaning of the twittering sound.

In a general way, Bishop took good care not to push himself too forward, for fear he should by chance lose his

life, which would have been a serious calamity for the world at large.

On the present occasion, however, his impetuosity carried him more forward than usual, and he soon had occasion to repent it.

All at once Dick Turpin started into view.

Bishop came to a halt at once, and felt for another pistol.

The former, however, cried in a stern, menacing voice:

"You are welcome to try as many shots upon me as you like—I don't mind it, and should never seek for vengeance on that account; but to aim at my mare is an action that I can neither forget nor forgive! Take that—you deserve it, for I believe bonny Black Bess has been severely injured by your dastardly shot!"

While speaking these words, Dick Turpin levelled a pistol full at Bishop's head, and pulled the trigger.

But the weapon only flashed in the pan.

Dick gave utterance to an angry exclamation, and at the same time hurled the pistol with all his force.

His resentment was now worked up to its highest pitch.

So accurate was his aim that Bishop fell to the ground stunned.

But more than this Dick did not wait to see, for the officers now came rushing upon him in a body.

"On, Bess!" cried Turpin, as he ran hastily after her—"on, old lass! Do not stop for me; I can mount easily as you are!"

Black Bess cantered on.

Dick Turpin put forth all his powers.

The officers perceiving him run before them, gave him hearty chase.

They strained every nerve, for they felt that if once they permitted him to mount, all chance of overtaking him was at an end, or nearly so.

But there were few fleeter runners than Dick.

A few seconds enabled him to place himself side by side with Black Bess, for the noble creature doubtless comprehended his purpose, and adapted her pace accordingly.

Suddenly, Dick seized hold of the saddle, and while thus holding it, ran for a moment or so by her side.

Then, giving a sudden spring, he swung himself clearly and lightly into the saddle, where he seated himself in a moment.

His comrades had viewed all these proceedings, but without having a chance of interfering in any way.

No sooner, however, did they perceive their captain mounted than they put spurs to their steeds and galloped off.

Some little delay took place before the officers were ready to pursue them, and by the time the former fairly started, Dick and his comrades had got to a considerable distance.

Still, in the present state of their tempers, it was not likely that the officers would very readily abandon the pursuit.

Bishop, however, was in a state of utter unconsciousness, and therefore unable to join in the chase.

For a time he was oblivious of all things.

Those officers who actually commenced the pursuit began in good earnest.

They were also very well mounted, and therefore, not unreasonably, they looked forward to a satisfactory termination to this troublesome piece of business.

Had not the highwaymen been hampered with Tom Davis, their chances of escape would have been very much increased.

Claude's horse was a powerful one, and carried him with tolerable ease, it is true, but then, had it not been for the double load his rate of speed would have been very much greater.

Of course the others accommodated the pace of their horses to his, for it was important they should all keep together.

Tom Davis soon rightly comprehended his position.

"Put me down," he said. "I can see just how the land lies, and it would be much better that I should be recaptured than that you should all run the risk of another encounter."

"And is that the sort of return, Tom, that you think we should make for the unwavering fidelity you have shown us? No, no, we know better how to serve a friend than that."

"Say no more upon the subject," said Tom King. "Either we will place you in some place of complete security, or else we will perish in the attempt."

Dick Turpin paid but little attention to this conversation.

The pace at which they were going was one that Black Bess could perform without the slightest effort.

As for the injury she had received, it fortunately turned out quite contrary to Dick's fears.

It was what might be termed a trivial one.

The bullet had passed very near to the top part of her head—

So close that it had cut out a small circular piece from the extreme tip of one ear.

The blood flowed freely—but that was in consequence of the motion—but not in any quantity to excite apprehension.

But Dick's heart burned with anger within him as he gazed upon it.

Patting her upon the neck, he muttered:

"A very little more, and there would have been an end to the best piece of horseflesh in the kingdom. The difference of a hair's breadth in pulling the trigger, and the bullet must have entered her brain! It's an escape, old lass, and a narrow one. Most thankful am I that it is no worse!"

But the satisfaction derived by Dick from this reflection was but slight, for the mark was one which his mare would always carry.

Another consideration now pressed itself upon him.

What steps should be taken to shake off the officers who, although not able to get up to our friends, nevertheless succeeded in keeping at a uniform distance behind them?

In a short time morning would be upon them, and Dick felt the stern necessity of shaking off his foes before that time.

The question was, how could it be done?

"Claude," he cried, turning back, "those fellows behind us seem to me to be coming on as fast as they are able."

"They keep well on our track."

"They do, and I want to shake them off"

"How is it to be done?"

"Do you think that for a short distance you could push your horse on faster? If so, we shall soon distance them, and when once out of sight we can adopt twenty expedients if necessary."

But Claude shook his head.

"I wish you would make the effort," said Dick, with an air and tone of vexation. "I don't want to get any further away from the ruins than I can help, and, besides, it will soon be daylight."

"Wait a bit," said Tom King. "If you put Davis behind me, that will give Claude's horse a rest. He seems fatigued already, and for a little while I am sure my horse can push on well."

"Be it so, then. I can see only one objection, and that is, the delay caused in changing. You must be speedy in your movements."

"You had better leave me behind," said Tom Davis; "that will be the easiest. I might slip off and conceal myself behind the hedge without the officers being any the wiser."

"You might, it is true; but we do not intend to give you the chance. No, no, Tom—we would never be so base as to desert you. So say not another word, but jump up as quickly as you can."

The delay caused by this change was really very slight, and no sooner was it effected than a wonderful difference was made in their speed.

Tom King pressed his horse hard without scruple, for he knew that it would only be a sharp touch and soon over, and not so much calculated to distress him as a long, continued gallop.

In order that he might not relax in his endeavours, the others kept a few yards in advance.

The natural spirit of Tom's horse, therefore, made him endeavour to overtake or, at least, keep pace with the others.

The officers observed this alteration with much alarm and dissatisfaction.

They spurred their horses again and again, but to no purpose.

The horses were already going at their best speed.

To their unmitigated chagrin, they perceived the distance between them and the fugitives gradually but surely widening

They felt then that they might almost as well confess themselves beaten; but yet they could not at present bring themselves to admit it.

As for the highwaymen, the success they had met with served to inspire them to make fresh exertions.

At length, when Dick considered that a safe distance had been placed between the officers and themselves, he began to look out for some narrow turning that would enable them to leave the high-road.

Some time elapsed before anything of the kind presented itself; but at length he caught sight of a cross-road—it was too wide to be called a lane.

At this spot stood the remains of what had once been a finger-post.

It had now fallen into thorough decay.

The upright post leaned far out of the perpendicular, and was thickly overgrown with moss, the dampness of which materially served to rot the wood.

One arm, and only one, was remaining, and that was in so mutilated a state that it was impossible to discern any lettering upon it.

Seen by the very dim gray light which now began to creep over the landscape, this finger-post had an inexpressibly forlorn and dreary look.

"This way!" shouted Dick, to Tom King, and pointing to the left while he spoke—"this way: One more push, and then I hope we shall be able to take it more easily."

It did not appear that this cross-road was made much use of, for in the middle were two very deep ruts, and all the rest was overgrown with grass so tall that it reached up to the horses' knees.

Over this their progress could not fail to be silent.

Having gone to some distance, Dick pulled up.

"My friends," he said, "I have an idea; let me know what you think of it."

They prepared to listen intently.

"It strikes me very forcibly that as soon as ever the officers come to the finger-post they will guess which way we have gone, and then, although we may be rid of them for a time, yet they will eventually plague us."

To this all assented.

"Now, what I want to do is to throw them off the track altogether, so as to leave us free to adopt any course we may think proper, without having the dread of their appearance at any unexpected moment upon us."

"That would be very desirable indeed," said Tom King; "but, for my own part, I don't see how it is to be accomplished."

"Listen, and I will tell you my idea—it is only an idea, mind you, and if you don't like it, why, do not, out of any consideration for me or my judgment, omit to say it—promise me that."

"We promise, Dick; but do not keep us any longer in suspense."

"I will not."

The highwaymen were silent, and prepared themselves to listen with the utmost intentness to what Dick Turpin had to say.

CHAPTER MXXI.

DICK TURPIN ASKS BLACK BESS A QUESTION.

"My idea I consider is a very simple one," began Dick Turpin, "and yet perhaps you may think it very extraordinary. It is, to quit this lane at once, and, completely doubling our course, make our way back to the ruins."

"To the ruins?" echoed Tom King, in a tone of voice which showed plainly enough how much he was surprised.

"Just so," answered Dick, gravely.

"But you surely do not think of entering them again?"

"No, I can't say that I do. My intention is merely to get back to their vicinity, for I believe that is about the last place where the officers would think of looking for us."

"Perhaps so," said Tom King.

"At any rate," added Claude Duval, "it would be much better to do that than to attempt to seek any shelter hereabouts, for if we did we should be disturbed in an hour or two at the most."

"I see you are getting reconciled to the idea," continued Dick, "and let me request you to make up your minds quickly."

"You are captain," said Sixteen-String Jack—"the direction of our movements ought to be left to you."

"I know all about that, but the best of generals is not the one who relies most on his own judgment, but the one who in situations of doubt and difficulty holds a consultation with his chief and most experienced officers."

"Then I for one," cried Claude Duval, "am inclined to adopt Dick's idea."

"It is certain," remarked Tom King, "that we must ere long get shelter somewhere. In a little while daylight will be full upon us, and such a party as we now make could not pass anywhere without attracting a great deal of notice."

"Our horses are weary," said Dick; "we must rest, and, what is more, it is necessary that we should find some place where we can remain an hour or two in perfect quiet and talk over our position. We shall have to consider most carefully what is to be the nature of our future movements."

"On, then!" exclaimed Tom King. "Lead the way! Let there be no more delay, for every moment is of value."

This was true enough.

A little time had been consumed by this conference, but it could not by any means be said that time had been lost.

Indeed, the brief halt had enabled the horses to recover their wind to a very considerable extent, and now, after this temporary rest, they seemed to set forward with fresh vigour.

The speed made for some time was all that the highwaymen could desire.

Their way lay across a succession of smooth meadows, the turf in which was particularly grateful to the horses' feet.

Dick's comrades were by no means surprised that he should manifest so strong a desire to return to the old ruins.

Not a word had been breathed respecting Maud, but yet all knew that it was Dick's strong impression that she was in the vicinity of the castle, which made him so anxious to return.

At any rate, the step which they had taken seemed, so far as they could tell at present, a wise one.

The officers appeared to be completely baffled.

By this time the daylight had much increased in intensity, and in the east could be perceived a ruddy glow that proclaimed the speedy rising of the sun.

As our friends happened to ascend some rising ground they were able, by looking back when they had gained the summit, to command a very extensive view of the country around them.

Hill and dale, river and stream, bush and tree, were all revealed with a clearness and brilliancy that was delightful to contemplate.

In vain, however, did our friends strain their eyes in the endeavour to catch sight of their pursuers.

At some distance several men could be seen in the act of crossing a ploughed field; doubtless they were on the way to the scene of their daily labours, but these were the only human beings the highwaymen were able to discern after the longest and closest scrutiny.

"All's well," said Dick, at last, though his voice proclaimed that in truth all was not well with him. "Forward once more, my comrades; the ruins cannot be far distant now."

"Do not forget that we are on the look-out for a place of shelter," observed Tom King. "It is true, we have been singularly fortunate at present, but then we are running a very serious amount of risk by riding thus by daylight."

"I am well aware of that," answered Turpin, "and it shall continue no longer than we can possibly help"

After this the highwaymen rode on for a considerable distance in perfect silence.

Each one, indeed, was busy with his thoughts.

At last they found before them a pretty narrow lane—one of those places that are so charming in the glorious summer time, either at sunset or sunrise.

"We will go a little way up and down this lane," said Turpin, after a brief consideration. "If we do not succeed in finding any shelter near, we shall, at least, have reconnoitred well, and made sure that none of our enemies are lurking near, so that, any way, the step is well worth taking."

From this his comrades did not for one moment think of dissenting.

The hedge dividing them from this lane was a low one, so that it was easily overleaped.

Tom King then went to the right, and Sixteen-String Jack to the left.

The other two waited for their return.

Sixteen-String Jack was the first to appear.

The expression of his countenance showed that he had made some welcome discovery.

"What is it, Jack?" asked Dick Turpin.

"There is an inn a little below here," he said—"a capital place, and one that would suit us exactly, I should think."

"Is it retired?"

"Very. About the most sleepy-looking place you could imagine, I should think. It looks as though never more than one traveller a week stopped there."

"That is the place for us, then. Is it in this lane?"

"Well, scarcely; for about a quarter of a mile below here, the lane, after a sudden turn, emerges into a cross-road, and this inn stands just at the corner."

"Wait a moment, then, I can hear Tom King coming. Let us hear what news he brings."

In a few seconds afterwards Tom made his appearance.

"There is nothing to be seen that way," he said; "the lane goes winding on for I don't know how far, and the further you go the more unfrequented it looks."

"Then you have not seen anyone, Tom?"

"Not a soul."

"Then, Jack, we will bend our way to this inn you speak of."

The next moment the little party was in motion.

It took them but a brief space of time indeed, and on their arrival they found that Sixteen-String Jack's description had been a very good one.

The noise of their arrival brought a fat, sleepy-looking individual to the door.

This they conjectured was the landlord.

It would seem as though he had only recently risen, for it cost him quite an effort to keep his eyes open sufficiently wide to observe our party.

"Going to stop here, gentlemen?" he asked, perceiving that they were drawing rein.

"Yes."

The reply evidently took him by surprise.

He had expected a negative, for such a large party as that to stop at his door for refreshment was quite an unparalleled circumstance.

But the realisation of this fact produced a wonderful effect upon him.

His eyes opened wide at once, and remained so without any trouble while he bawled aloud:

"Robin—Robin! You idle skulk! Robin, I say! This way!"

In response to these words another sleepy-looking personage came upon the scene.

This was the ostler and general factotum upon the establishment.

"Coming, master!" he growled, lazily. "Coming—coming! Oh, my eye!"

The last exclamation was wrung from him by the unexpected sight at the front door.

"Never mind your eye," said the landlord, who had overheard the ejaculation, "but just attend to these gentlemen's horses."

In the meantime Dick and his friends had dismounted.

Just as the ostler took charge of the horses, Dick said:

"I suppose, landlord, you can find us accommodation for an hour or two?"

"Oh yes, sir, the best—the very best, I assure you!"

"That is all right, then. But the fact is, you see, we have made a very long and tiring journey. We did hope to have accomplished the whole of it without making any halt whatever, but one of our horses met with an accident, you understand."

Dick made this remark in order to account for Tom Davis being unprovided with a steed.

The landlord appeared to be perfectly satisfied, and, with a great deal of obsequious ceremony, ushered them into a decently-furnished room.

Dick looked around him with satisfaction.

"The accommodation will suit us very well," he said, "provided you like to agree to one condition."

"And what may that be, sir?"

"Why, that during our stay here we have this apartment entirely to ourselves; we should not like the intrusion of a stranger. Of course," he added, "we don't want to have a private room without paying for it accordingly."

"Lor' bless you, sir! Why, you need not have any fear upon those grounds. Why, I shall think business is very brisk if I see one more traveller between now and this day week."

Our friends heard this declaration with an amount of satisfaction which they could scarcely conceal.

A good meal was then ordered as a preliminary, and during its preparation Tom King strolled about the premises and peeped into the stables with the air of a listless idler.

This, in fact, is what anyone would have taken him to be by his movements.

It would have proved a very great mistake, however, for Tom was busily engaged in making himself familiar with the whole of the premises, so as to know just what to do and where to go in case of an alarm.

Situated as the highwaymen were, the reader cannot fail to see that this was a very necessary precaution indeed.

While thus engaged, the ostler crossed the yard, carrying under his arm a quantity of corn, which he had just received from the landlord.

He touched his hat respectfully to Tom, as he said:

"Perhaps, sir, you would like to see the horses have their corn."

Tom assented eagerly, being only too anxious to embrace any such opportunity as this for the reason above stated.

There was only just sufficient accommodation for the horses, but Tom King had the satisfaction of seeing each manger well filled with corn.

After a few casual, unimportant remarks, he withdrew.

"Is all well at the back?" asked Dick, as soon as he entered the room they had engaged and closed the door after him.

"Yes; we seem to have tumbled into capital quarters. I have seen the horses fed. Each one has a mangerful of corn."

"Then they will do very well."

Just after this, the meal they had ordered was brought in, but before sitting down to it, Turpin rose upon some slight pretext and quitted the room.

He was anxious to see for himself that all was as well as his comrade had reported.

He was absent only a few moments.

As soon as the landlord had retired and they were once more alone, Tom said:

"You found all right, did you not?"

"Yes. But did not you say you saw each horse well supplied with corn?"

"Certainly I did."

"Then they must have eaten it with amazing quickness, for now every manger is quite empty."

Tom looked incredulous.

"It is doubtless some roguery on the part of the ostler," continued Dick. "I have often suspected that some such trick as this was played. Of course, it is impossible that the animals can have eaten such a large quantity of food in so brief a space of time."

"Well, just wait till we have finished this," said Tom King, alluding to the meal they had before them. "I will go out again then and try to find out the trick, for some trick there is I am quite convinced."

"And after that," said Turpin, sadly—"after that——"

"We will hold a consultation," interrupted Tom; "and if we all lay our heads together you may depend we

small hit upon the course of action that will be the best for us to pursue."

"Let us discuss this first," said Claude Duval. "My appetite is prodigious, and this is the first comfortable meal I have sat down to for a very long time."

By common consent, all consultation as to their future actions was postponed, while the whole of their attention was paid to the good things before them.

No sooner, however, was the meal over than Tom King made his way to the stables, upon pretence of seeing that the horses had been supplied with water.

He was so fortunate as to enter unseen by the ostler, who just then happened to be engaged indoors.

Tom was considerably puzzled to know how the corn had been disposed of so suddenly and completely, for the mangers were positively bare.

The horses looked hungry and discontented, having nothing to satisfy themselves with besides some not over sweet hay in a rack above.

Tom, however, happening to look very closely, perceived that at one extremity of the manger a small bag was fitted, so placed and so contrived that a great quantity of corn could be swept into it in a moment, which, falling to the bottom of the bag, was of course quite out of the horses' reach.

Having made this curious discovery, Tom scarcely knew what to do.

However, he determined to return and confer with Dick before taking any decisive step.

The ostler being still absent, Tom quitted the stable without any of the occupants of the inn being aware of his visit to it.

He quickly communicated his discovery to Dick, who, of course, was much incensed.

"I don't believe the landlord is to blame," said Tom. "It's the villanous ostler. By adopting this little expedient you may depend he makes a capital addition to his wages."

"Come along with me," said Dick—"I have an idea. You will see what it is in a moment without my taking the trouble to describe it to you."

With these words the whole of the party repaired to the yard.

No sooner did Dick cross the threshold than he gave that signal which always had the effect of bringing Black Bess to his side.

The stable door was open, but Bess was confined by a halter.

One sudden snatch, however, enabled her to break the rope, and she at once trotted out into the yard, to the great astonishment of the landlord and the ostler, who both came out into the yard.

"Hilloa!" said Dick, as soon as he caught sight of his mare. "So there's some roguery here, is there!"

"Roguery!" gasped the landlord.

"Yes," answered Dick; "this mare of mine is a very sagacious and intelligent animal, and whenever she meets with any ill usage she always contrives to let me know of it."

"Ill usage?" ejaculated the landlord and the ostler in one breath.

"Yes; and by the way of her I don't believe she has had any corn given to her. She is hungry—that is what's the matter."

The landlord looked inquiringly at the ostler.

The ostler at once appealed to Tom King.

"Why, sir," he said, "did not you see me carry the corn through the yard, and did not you see me fill every one of the mangers?"

"I did," answered Tom, "and therefore I cannot help thinking my friend is mistaken."

"Of course he's mistaken!" cried the ostler, with a long-drawn breath of relief.

"We shall soon see," said Dick, carelessly, and advancing a few paces while he spoke, so that he could place his hand on his mare's neck.

"See?" ejaculated the landlord. "How can you see? I hope you'll be careful in what you are saying! Don't you try to take away the good name of my house!"

"Well," said Dick, with the same affectation of carelessness, "I shall just ask my mare the question, and shall be satisfied with her reply."

"With her what?"

"Her reply."

The ostler grinned.

"You don't mean to tell me that your horse can speak, do you?" cried the landlord.

"You shall see and judge for yourselves," answered Dick. "Just wait a moment."

With these words he put his mouth close to his mare's ear, and pretended to ask some question in a faint whisper.

Having done so, he touched her upon the flank, and the immediate effect of this was to cause Black Bess to turn her head round so that her mouth was close to her master's ear.

The effect was just the same as if the creature had really spoken.

"Just what I thought," said Dick, looking up, and encountering the wondering countenances of the landlord and the ostler. "My mare declares that she has not had more than one mouthful of the corn that my friend over there put into her manger."

The ostler laughed very loudly, but he was not at his ease for all that—indeed, he felt decidedly uncomfortable.

The landlord looked at the matter in a serious light.

CHAPTER MXXII.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMPANIONS MEET WITH A SURPRISE AT THE INN.

"I DON'T know, gentlemen," he said, "what may be the meaning of this little farce—for so I cannot help calling it—but, understand, you have not a fool to deal with, and I won't suffer the good name of my inn to be taken away with impunity! Do you mean to try to impose upon me with the tale that a horse can speak?"

"I have said it," answered Dick, "and, if you don't believe, I will give you a proof."

"A proof?"

"Yes."

"But how?"

"Why, by my mare."

"I don't understand you!"

"Then I will quickly make my meaning clear. I am going to ask my mare what became of the corn that my friend saw put in the manger, and rely upon it she will tell me the truth about it."

At this the landlord looked incredulous and impatient—

The ostler uneasy and confused.

As before, Dick made a great pretence of whispering to Black Bess, and afterwards, in the same manner as before, she placed her mouth to his ear.

Dick nodded his head as though he had received a communication of a very satisfactory nature indeed.

"Well, sir?" asked the landlord, haughtily.

"I am glad to say that all doubt and suspicion will now be at an end."

"How so?"

"Because my mare has given me a proof of her former assertion."

"May I ask what it is?" said the landlord, more stiffly than before.

"Oh, certainly! My mare tells me that fixed at the end of her manger is a bag, into which all the corn was swept by the ostler as soon as my friend's back was turned, and the other horses were served just in the same way."

"And," said the landlord, staggering back a little, "do you mean to look me in the face and say that your mare told you that?"

"You don't believe it, then?"

"We—well, I—I——"

"Your hesitation is quite sufficient. You need not trouble yourself to utter the denial which is trembling on your lips."

"I—I——"

"Enough! I will give you the proof which fortunately is in my power. Stop your ostler from entering the stable, and then come in with me yourself, and then, if you do not find the bags just as I have described them, you are welcome to persevere in your disbelief. If you like, I will lay you two hundred guineas against two that all I have told you is neither more nor less than the truth."

The positive tone in which Dick spoke—

The anxiety which the ostler manifested to rush into the stable first—

And, above all, Dick's offer to stake so large an amount made so deep an impression upon the landlord that he began to waver in his disbelief and credit that a horse could speak.

"If there is any such contrivance as you say," the landlord managed to say at last, "I beg to assure you it is altogether against my knowledge. I would not wittingly allow such a dishonest practice to be followed on my premises."

"I don't say that you know anything of it," cried Turpin, quickly—"in fact, I firmly believe that you are guiltless of all complicity in the deed."

"Thank you for that, sir! I have always taken the utmost care that all should be square and straightforward. As you saw, I do not allow the horse corn to be kept in the stable, but serve it out in the house as wanted."

"Let us have a look," said Dick—"that is the best way to satisfy ourselves. If the bags are not there, I will never believe a word my mare says again."

Leaving Black Bess's side, Dick took hold of the landlord's arm, and led him into the stable.

They walked at once into the stall that had been occupied by Black Bess, because that was the only one that was vacant.

Full of curiosity and amazement, the landlord approached, and quickly discovered that what he had been so strangely informed of was perfectly correct.

The proper end of the manger had been removed, and at this place the bag had been affixed.

A sweep or two with the hand was then all that was required to empty the contents of the manger.

In, fact upon further examination, it was found that this bag contained the whole of the corn.

No one could have been more surprised at this discovery than the landlord was.

Dick at once, and for ever, exonerated him from any share in the petty theft.

"Confound the rascal!" the landlord cried, after having examined all the other mangers and found them fitted with a similar appliance. "Confound him! I can understand how it is that my trade has dropped off so much lately. But wait till I catch him, that's all! I'll be even with him, I'll warrant!"

With these words the landlord rushed hastily out of the stable into the yard with the full intention of visiting condign punishment upon the ostler.

But that individual, finding that his cheat had been discovered, took care to make himself scarce, for he was nowhere to be found.

For some moments the landlord's transport of rage continued.

Then it suddenly abated.

His eyes fell upon Black Bess, who was still standing quietly in the yard.

He gazed at her with a stare of so ludicrous a character that all the highwaymen were forced to laugh.

But the landlord neither saw nor heard them.

All his faculties were centred upon Black Bess

With hesitating steps he ventured to approach her, but stopped short when some few paces distant, and gazed again with a look full of mute amazement.

He was evidently fully impressed with the belief that Black Bess was gifted with the powers of speech—that he had really, for the first time in his life, looked upon the surprising and unheard-of phenomenon — a talking horse.

He peeped at her inquisitively everywhere, as though anxious thoroughly to imprint her image upon his mind.

At length he turned towards Dick, who was so amazed at the scene that he felt he could have continued to gaze much longer without tiring.

"Sir," he said, "this surprises me very much. It does indeed! I can't reckon it up at all—no, not a bit! I never in my born life heard of a horse telling tales—never! Can you give me another proof of her powers in this way?"

Dick gravely shook his head

The landlord looked deeply disappointed.

"At least," he said, "you will tell me how it was you came by her — how it was you found out that she could talk?"

Now this was a difficulty which Dick had not at all taken into consideration.

He felt he had been somewhat indiscreet thus to call such public attention to his mare.

It would have been most easy for him to have declined to answer these impertinent questions of the landlord, but, then, Dick felt it would be far better to allay his curiosity, if possible; otherwise, if permitted to exert itself without restraint, it might pass all bounds.

The highwaymen wished to stay for a few hours—say during daylight—and be perfectly undisturbed the while.

Now, if the landlord was not satisfied in some way, the secret would burn in his breast to such a degree that he would be obliged to ease himself by telling the whole account to some one.

All these considerations presented themselves to Dick in a moment, but he could not so readily or so quickly hit upon the means of doing what he wished.

He therefore affected to hesitate, but in reality it was only to gain a little time in order to think.

The landlord renewed his entreaties, and at length, as if suffering himself to be overpowered by them, Dick led him to one side with a very mysterious aspect, and then said, in a solemn whisper:

"I am going to tell you something which will have the effect of placing my life in your power. Don't start, but listen."

The landlord did listen, with his eyes so staring that they actually seemed as though about to start from his head.

"Many years ago," said Dick Turpin, in the same mysterious and solemn tones, "I devoted myself very closely to the black arts, and made such progress in magic, that I learned the secret of metempsychosis. Do you know what that is?"

The landlord professed his entire ignorance of so abstruse a subject.

"Then," said Dick, speaking if possibly with additional solemnity, "I must inform you that metempsychosis means the art of possessing the power to change the form of living creatures—that is to say, to change a cat to a rabbit, or a rabbit to a wolf, and so forth."

The landlord's jaw dropped.

"I made many experiments, by which I fully demonstrated that I possessed the power; and now I can go no further unless you swear solemnly never to divulge to a living soul what has taken place. Do you swear?"

"I do."

"That's enough. Now, do not start! Don't be incredulous. But you see that mare yonder?"

"I do."

"Then that is my wife."

"Your what?" ejaculated the landlord, fairly staggering back.

"My wife."

"That—that——"

"Yes. Or, rather, I should have said, she was my wife until I practised my art upon her."

"Met—met——"

"Metempsychosis."

"Ah! that's it," said the landlord, drawing a breath of relief and wiping the drops of perspiration from his brow.

"Now, that is all."

"But—but——"

"But what?"

"You have not told me what were your motives for transforming your wife into a horse."

"Oh, I will tell you that."

"Ah, do!"

"She was a dreadful scold."

"Yes—yes."

"So dreadful, that I never knew what it was to have a moment's peace of my life. I tried everything I could think of. In vain. Indeed, I began to think that she grew more and more a vixen every day, so that at last, in sheer self-defence, I was compelled to practise my art upon her."

"And you succeeded!" gasped the landlord.

"Behold the result?"

Dick Turpin pointed to Black Bess as he spoke.

The landlord could not remove his eyes.

Dick Turpin hardly thought the landlord would be credulous enough to swallow so monstrous an invention as this.



[THE DEAD BODY IS CARRIED TO THE INN.]

At his astonishment every word was implicitly believed.

"It's amazing," the landlord at last managed to utter—"truly amazing! But, sir—sir——"

"What now?"

The landlord came closer to Dick, with his face wearing a most mysterious aspect.

He looked cautiously around him in order to make sure that no one was near.

Then he took hold of Dick by the lapel of his coat, and in a whisper he said again:

"Sir—sir!"

"Well, what now?"

"Such a secret as you say you possess must be worth a very great deal to one who—who——"

"Who what?"

"Who happened to be troubled with a scolding wife, as you were, sir."

"No doubt. You see she was before the plague of my life; now I have turned her to the best account. She is invaluable."

"But yet you did not stop her tongue," said the landlord, grinning.

"How so?"

"Why she tells tales now."

"But she can only speak in a whisper," said Dick, who was slightly taken aback by the last remark, "and then not unless I speak to her first, so you see that is an advantage rather than otherwise."

"Decidedly. But now, sir——"

The landlord's mysteriousness increased.

Dick felt curious, for he could not imagine what the man was driving at. There was evidently something trembling on the tip of his tongue to which he hesitated to give utterance.

"Pray speak," he said. "Do not be afraid."

"Well, then," began the landlord, after a second apprehensive glance round the yard and particularly towards the house, "you must know that I am at the present time afflicted in the same way that you say you were."

"With a scolding wife?"

"Yes; but however bad yours may have been, I make bold to affirm than mine is ten times worse."

"Impossible!"

"But I get not a second's rest night or day; I live like a toad under a harrow."

"So did I."

"Then, sir, as you know what it is like," said the landlord, beseechingly, "have pity upon me."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Why, be kind enough to exercise your art upon her."

"Transform her?"

"Yes. I should then be ever your debtor—I should indeed, believe me. You must know that by an accident I have recently lost the very best horse in my stable. Trade is so bad that I cannot afford to buy another to take his place. My wife I could well spare, and therefore if you would only——"

Dick now found himself in another dilemma.

But his ready invention quickly helped him out of it.

"Do you know," he said, "that if what we have been talking about was to come to the ears of a third person it would cost us our lives?"

"Yes, yes—I know that."

"We should be hung, drawn, quartered, and afterwards burnt if we were known to have plotted anything of the kind against a fellow-creature."

"Yes, yes—I know that too. But excuse me, sir, you ran the risk, and I am quite willing to do so."

Dick saw that the landlord's anxiety to get rid of his scolding wife made him credulous to the utmost degree.

No imposition would be too gross for him to swallow.

"I consent," he said, as it appeared, after a few moments' reflection—"I consent, out of the fellow feeling I have for you; but upon condition that one stipulation is scrupulously observed by you——"

"Yes—yes. Anything—anything!"

"In order for my spells to work, time must be had. I have many things to prepare, and you must yourself go through a preliminary course."

"Eh? How?"

"Why, for nine days you must eat nothing but bread, and drink nothing but water. Do you promise to observe this faithfully?"

"I do," answered the landlord, who, as his appearance denoted, was strongly addicted to the good things of this life, therefore he pronounced the words somewhat unwillingly.

"In the next place, not a syllable must be mentioned about what you have seen to-day, nor respecting your intentions. Lastly, but not by any means the least in importance," continued Dick, laying his hand upon the landlord's shoulder, "money must be provided, in order that the necessary preliminaries can be carried out fully and properly."

"How much will be required?"

"Well, of course you cannot expect me to take all this trouble for nothing; besides, it is worth something to possess such a secret, and it cannot be made use of unless well paid for."

"How—how—much?" asked the landlord, breathless now with impatience and anxiety.

"Why, to commence with, I shall want fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds?"

"Exactly. That you must pay down to me before the business can be carried any further."

"And how much afterwards?"

"Are you in the mind to find the first fifty?"

"Well, you see, sir, my wife is a miser—a regular miser, and that's the long and the short of it. I can never get hold of any money; but she has plenty."

"How shall you manage?"

"Why, it happens most providentially. But this very morning, sir, as true as I stand here, I discovered one of my wife's secret receptacles for money, and I should say there is as nearly fifty pounds there as can be."

"That will be the very thing then. She little thought for what purpose she was saving up her money, did she?"

"No, no—I'll warrant not."

"Well, then, this fifty pounds must be placed in my hands at the earliest moment possible, and the rest——"

"Yes—yes, the rest——"

"That will be fifty pounds more you must bring on the ninth night from this to the ruins of the old castle close by here."

"You mean Conyngs Castle?"

"I do."

The landlord's teeth chattered with fear.

"I have heard frightful stories about that place," he said—"yes, truly frightful stories."

"Disregard them. You must meet me there in the courtyard; at the hour of midnight I shall be with you."

"Midnight?"

"I have said it."

Clearly, the landlord did not relish the concluding portion of the adventure, but doubtless he considered he had now gone too far to retract.

"I—I will be there."

"Give me your hand, then."

A mutual grasp followed, and then Dick, after many more injunctions about secrecy, and particularly bidding him to bring the money at once, he accompanied him to the house.

Dick's comrades followed.

As soon as they had entered the room, and the door was closed, they everyone indulged in a hearty but yet by no means noisy laugh.

Dick held up his hand for silence.

"Oh, captain," said Sixteen-String Jack, in whose eyes the tears caused by his suppressed laughter were standing, "I will give you credit for ingenuity, though I could never have believed that any man would have been such a gudgeon as to swallow so monstrous an invention."

"Nor I," said Dick, "only I discovered his intense gullibility as I went on."

"Do you think he will bring the fifty pounds?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"And shall you meet him at the ruins?"

"That I can't tell at present."

"I only hope," said Tom King, "that he will not be fool enough to leak out anything; if he does, there will be so much curiosity raised that our recognition must inevitably follow; then who can say what trouble will ensue?"

"I don't think there is much need for apprehension. We will keep a sharp watch upon everything that goes forward."

"And we shall only stay here till dusk, I suppose?" said Claude Duval.

"Not a moment later. And now things having been so far settled, let us occupy the rest of the time in deciding upon our future movements," answered Turpin.

At this moment there was a faint tap at the door.

"Come in!" said Dick.

The landlord entered, carrying in his hand a well-filled leather bag, which he placed in Dick's hand.

"I have performed my part of the contract so far," he said, significantly, "and I fancy that ought to be sufficient proof of my sincerity."

He pointed to the bag as he spoke.

"I have no doubt of it," answered the highwayman, as he very contentedly consigned the money to his pocket; "and if you are only careful to be discreet all will be well."

"Depend upon me."

"I will. But understand, the least disclosure—the slightest allusion to what is going to take place, and we shall both be ruined in this world and the next."

The landlord made so many protestations of his determination to preserve strict secrecy that it would be tedious to repeat them.

Much pleased with the prospect of getting rid of his scolding wife, he left Dick and his companions to themselves, though not until the former had impressed upon him the importance of being at the ruins at the appointed hour.

"Now, my comrades," said Dick, "let us dismiss this fellow from our minds. Perhaps it is as well that we have had this little incident to divert our attention [illegible]

now we must devote ourselves to more serious business. I want you to view our position in every possible way, and to assist me to come to a determination, for I never felt less able to rely upon my judgment in my life."

"You may depend that we shall do our best," said Tom King; "but still, for all that, Dick, I consider you are the proper person to speak first in the affair."

CHAPTER MXXIII.

EVENTS OCCUR AT THE INN WHICH CAUSE DICK TURPIN TO ALTER HIS ARRANGEMENTS.

"SINCE you will have it so," began Dick, "I can only say that my chief anxiety is to discover what has become of Maud."

"Yes, certainly—that is the first step," assented Tom King.

"It is still my impression," continued Turpin, "that, despite our unsuccessful efforts to discover her, both she and Jack the Ostler have been pounced upon suddenly by the officers, made prisoners, and carried away."

"This must be ascertained," said Sixteen-String Jack—"there must be no doubt about it; and should things turn out as you imagine, she must be rescued."

"Or I die," said Dick, with earnest emphasis.

"And so say all."

Dick was much gratified by the ready response from his comrades; it was a proof of that oft-made assertion that they would if requisite die to serve him.

"Then, now," he continued, "let us think which would be the best and likeliest way for us to gather the information we require. I confess, for my own part, that the likeliest course seems to hover about the ruins, which I believe might be done without the risk of much danger."

In this opinion his comrades coincided.

"You are forgetting me," said Tom Davis, who had been waiting for an opportunity to speak. "I can see very plainly that I am a very great clog upon all your movements, and that I shall be the means of materially increasing your danger."

"I cannot deny that," said Turpin; "still, the evil, such as it is, cannot be avoided, therefore must be endured."

"I do not agree with you."

"Very likely; but you need not imagine that we shall show ourselves so ungrateful for what you have done in our behalf as to abandon you now to your enemies."

"It would be no abandonment," answered Davis.

"But it would."

"Nay, listen. Do not you think that the landlord's credulity could be turned still further to account?"

There was a general laugh at this question, and Dick asked:

"How?—in what way?"

"Why, could you not induce him to give me safe shelter for a few days? I could easily meet you when and where you liked to appoint; and I should think the threat of the disclosure of his plot against his wife would be sufficient to overawe him should he prove refractory."

"We will discuss that further presently," said Dick. "The idea is not a bad one; but, first of all, we will——"

He paused abruptly.

His comrades started rapidly to their feet.

The deep and sleepy silence which had hitherto prevailed around them was now broken in upon by sounds which were precisely of such a character as to excite apprehension in the breasts of our friends—

The hoarse murmur of many voices—

The heavy trampling of many feet.

"That means danger," said Claude, as he hastily seized his pistols.

Dick held up his hand.

"Silence!" he said. "Do not let us be too hasty. Approach the window with me and reconnoitre; but take care that you are not seen by anyone without."

This sensible suggestion was immediately complied with.

Peeping cautiously through the panes, the highwaymen caught sight of a large crowd of persons approaching

They were all on foot

Amidst them seemed to be some object which attracted all their interest.

Dick and his comrades gave a sigh of relief.

The new-comers were not police officers, though a constable and a beadle could be distinguished among the throng.

As they came nearer, it was perceptible that those persons occupying the centre of the crowd were engaged in carrying some heavy object.

What it was our friends had no means of telling.

The very moment, however, that Dick discovered what these people were about, he experienced a sensation such as one might imagine to be produced by the pressure of an icy-cold hand upon the heart.

His cheeks blanched, and he leaned forward without daring to breathe, for now his mind was occupied by a worse foreboding than he had hitherto entertained.

The procession, if such we may term it, came steadily along the road.

It was approaching the inn, and by the glances given and motions made by the beadle and the constable, it would seem as though this was to be their destination.

We cannot possibly describe with what intentness and anxiety all the highwaymen watched the movements of the throng.

All seemed to feel that it was in some way connected with them and with their fortunes.

At length the door of the inn was reached, and then all doubts as to the destination of these persons was set at rest.

They stopped, and the beadle spoke for a few moments with the landlord, who, no less full of curiosity than our friends, stood upon the threshold.

What it was the beadle said the highwaymen could not overhear, but it was certainly assented to by the landlord.

They could tell that by his gestures.

The beadle raised his long gilt-crowned staff, and cried, in a loud, authoritative voice:

"Now, then, you who are carrying the body, this way! Keep quiet—no rushing! Only the bearers will be allowed to enter the inn. Mr. Samuels, please stand by that doorpost, and between us we shall be able to keep the rabble back."

The person thus addressed was the parish constable, and he took up the required position without a moment's hesitation.

A great deal of dissatisfaction was, however, created among the crowd by this order, but the two officials stood firm.

The crowd of people, being thus forbidden to enter, clustered thickly round the door—so thickly, that none of our friends were able to obtain a single glimpse of what was carried by so many men.

From the beadle's words, they knew it to be a body; but without this it could have been guessed by the expression upon the countenances of the crowd.

There was a hurried trampling of heavy footsteps in the passage outside—the same continued upon the staircase, then a heavy lumbering overhead, and finally comparative silence.

Those five persons in whose fortunes we are so much interested stood and stared blankly at each other.

But Dick Turpin was the one who was most overcome.

His countenance was pale even to ghastliness, while the manner in which his features quivered was painful to behold.

Fain would they all have hastened to the room above, whither the body had been carried, and by one glance have satisfied the terrible doubts which assailed their hearts.

But the fear of recognition held them back, for it could scarcely happen that among so many persons the appearance of our friends was unknown.

The risk was one too great to be run.

"It is strange," said Tom King, breaking the oppressive silence, and speaking with a palpable effort—"very strange that this incident should have had such an overpowering effect upon us."

"I—I—would give much for one glance at the body."

Dick did not speak.

"Let us call the landlord," suggested Sixteen-String Jack. "There is a bell here by which we could summon him."

Dick held up his hands.

"This suspense and uncertainty is painful—very pain

ful to all of you, but especially to me; but I feel that our wisest course is to remain quiet a little longer, and endure it as best we can. In a short time these people will doubtless leave the inn. Let us keep out of sight till then. If we make no movement, the landlord may, in the excitement of this fresh arrival, forget all about us, and so these others will be quite ignorant of our presence here."

Dick spoke firmly and quietly.

His companions listened intently to every word, and, when he had finished, unanimously signified their belief that the course proposed was the best that could be adopted.

But to no wretched criminal awaiting the pronunciation of his doom did time lag so fearfully as it did on this occasion to Dick Turpin and his comrades.

It seemed as though the curiosity of the crowd outside would never abate.

There was a complete Babel of sounds.

Fruitlessly did the highwaymen endeavour to make out a few distinct words from the mass of gabble.

More than once they felt as though their patience must give way.

At last the constable, beadle, and those who had carried the body left the inn.

Some who were outside followed them.

Others indulged themselves with a longer and more minute inspection of the building before they finally took their departure.

Shortly after, according to Dick's anticipation, the landlord knocked at the door.

Now that the moment had arrived when all their doubts would be resolved, Dick Turpin became quite unnerved.

He was too agitated to pronounce the words, "Come in!"

The landlord, however, did not wait for this, but opened the door.

His face was full of mystery and importance.

"Gentlemen," he said, with a deprecating bow, and rubbing his hands together as he spoke, "I hope you have not wanted for anything, and that you will pardon my neglect, but—but——"

"What has all this commotion been about?" asked Tom King, speaking with tolerable steadiness. "I thought you told us this inn was such a quiet place?"

"Gentlemen," said the landlord, uplifting his hands to give additional assurance to what he said, "I assure you this is such a thing as has never happened at this inn since I have been the landlord of it, and that's a good many years, I can assure you. Why, you see, it's quite, as I may say, a history—yes, quite a history."

"But come to the point at once."

"I am sure I don't know how, for, you see——"

"What was it those people brought in?"

"A body."

"A dead body?"

"Yes, a corpse."

"Of—of—wh——"

"Ah," cried the landlord, interrupting him, "that's what nobody knows?"

The highwaymen repeated the words in extreme astonishment.

"A perfect stranger, gentlemen—a perfect stranger."

"But cannot you tell us," cried Dick Turpin, in a voice of the utmost agitation, for this suspense was to him the most acute of tortures—"cannot you tell us whether it is a man or ——"

The landlord gazed at Dick aghast, and well he might.

His eyes were gleaming, his lips trembling, and the cold dew of apprehension was on his forehead.

Well might the landlord be surprised at the manifestation of so much anxiety.

"Why," he said, "it's a man—of course it's a man! I thought that you knew that. But, bless us and save us, what's amiss?"

A fervent "Thank Heaven!" burst from Dick Turpin's lips.

Then he was himself again.

The trouble that had weighed him down seemed to have rolled away as a mist suddenly rolls upon the sides of a mountain.

The reader has no doubt interpreted his terrible fear aright.

He was not unreasonably under the dread that the body was that of Mard.

He fancied in some way she must have met with her death—and what was more probable? for the reader knows already how near was the occurrence of that catastrophe—and that her body, having been found, was carried to to the inn, there to await a judicial inquisition.

But now that fear was completely dissipated.

The shock, however, was almost too much for endurance, for he flattered himself with the idea that he had prepared himself for the worst.

"What man?" asked Claude Duval, for the landlord, having spoken, stood stock still, gazing upon Dick, whose extreme emotion seemed to have raised a dim kind of suspicion in his breast.

Claude had to repeat his question before it was responded to.

Then, with a start, the landlord said:

"I beg your pardon, sir, ten thousand times—I do indeed; but really, what with one thing and the other, I really don't know, as the saying is, whether I stand upon my head or my heels, or whether I am myself or not."

The landlord did indeed seem greatly flustered, and it would have been a great wonder if he had been otherwise.

Wiping the perspiration from his forehead, he sank into a chair, and ejaculated:

"Gentlemen, if you will allow me I will try to give you an account of this affair from the beginning to the end. You will understand it better and so shall I, for I am so flabbergasted, in a manner of speaking, that I scarcely at present comprehend the rights of it myself."

"Sit down, then, and begin. Tell the tale after your own fashion."

The highwaymen felt that now their minds were so much relieved that they could endure any amount of prolixity upon the landlord's part.

"It appears, then," he began, "that early this morning, as a cowboy was going along a cross road not far from here, he saw what he thought was a man asleep under a tree. As he came nearer, however, he saw that the animal he was in search of was bending its head down on the prostrate form, while a dense swarm of flies and insects filled the surrounding air."

"So it was a dead man?"

"Yes, that was what it was found to be. The boy was frightened out of his wits almost, and ran along the road as if the devil was after him, nor did he stop until he met with some men who were on their way to work. To them he communicated his discovery, and they all went back in a body."

"And then the corpse was brought here?"

"Yes, sir," said the landlord, rather annoyed to find his narrative thus interrupted. "The constable was fetched, and so was the beadle. The body was examined and found to be that of a perfect stranger. Many looked at him, but none could remember having seen a man of his appearance in the neighbourhood."

"And what was the cause of death?"

"Ah, that is to come."

"Well, proceed."

"The beadle was the first who dared to have a good look at this man's face. I don't wonder that the others shrunk from it, for it is an awful sight, such as I hope I may never see again!"

The landlord shuddered while he spoke.

"Go on—go on!" cried Dick.

"It is most frightfully disfigured, so much so, that it is scarcely possible to distinguish one feature from another. They seem to be charred with fire. The plain fact is the man must have been struck by a thunderbolt in that fearful storm; the tree itself under which he was found is, I am told, terribly shattered."

"Then by that and your description," said Turpin, "there can be little doubt that he met with his death by a stroke of lightning."

"He has been brought here, I suppose, in order that an inquest might be held?" observed Tom King, who had hitherto listened in deep thought, and who now broke the silence which followed Dick's last words.

"Yes sir, that is it."

"Where is he now?"

"Upstairs."

"In the room over this, I think?"

"Yes."

"Is there anyone with him?"

"No, the door is locked."

"Where is the key?"

"In my pocket."

"Then," said Tom, bringing his series of questions to a close, "I have a very great desire to have one look upon this body."

"But—but——"

"What objection have you?"

"The sight is dreadful!"

"You said so."

"I dare not look upon it again!"

"You need not. Show us up. You need not so much as cross the threshold. We will leave you at the door."

"Yes," said Turpin, rising, for he fancied he knew what was passing in Tom King's mind, "I have this desire quite as strongly as my friend has—so, landlord, show us up at once."

"But I had particular orders from the beadle and the constable on no account to allow anyone to enter the room unless they were present, and if I disobey the injunction, why, I shall get myself into serious trouble."

"Nothing of the kind," said Dick. "Who is to learn anything about it, I should like to know? We shall never mention it, and surely you would not be fool enough to do so?"

CHAPTER MXXIV.

IN WHICH THE HIGHWAYMEN DETERMINE THE NATURE OF THEIR FUTURE PROCEEDINGS.

"WELL, I can't say that I should," answered the landlord, with a smile at Turpin's brusqueness.

"Then let us have no more words about it. Show the way upstairs."

The landlord did not like to refuse Dick anything, so great was the dread and respect he felt for the powers which he supposed him to possess.

Rising then from his seat, he advanced to the door, bidding our friends follow him.

They needed no second bidding.

Knowing what has happened, the reader, beyond all doubt, guesses accurately at the identity of the dead stranger.

A dim suspicion of who it might be was floating in the minds of all the highwaymen.

It was most important that this suspicion should be resolved.

Treading in the landlord's steps, they ascended the staircase and paused before a door.

A key was inserted into the lock.

"Enter, gentlemen," the landlord cried, "and be quick out again. As for myself, I have seen the horrid sight once too often already."

The highwaymen, of course, did not press him to accompany them.

Indeed, they were glad that he manifested a disinclination to be present, lest, in the event of their suspicions being correct, he should observe some alteration in their demeanour and so begin to suspect them.

The dead body had not been laid upon a bed, but upon a table formed by placing several planks upon some trestles.

A white sheet concealed the relics of humanity from view, but it had been cast over long enough to have settled down close to the form, so there would have been no difficulty in making out the nature of the object that lay there so calm and still.

It was Dick Turpin who took hold of one corner of the sheet and removed the covering from the face of the corpse.

A sensation of unutterable loathing came over him.

Conquering the feeling, however, he turned down the sheet still more.

The moment their eyes fell upon the apparel they recognised it.

It was well, indeed, that the landlord was [illegible] at hand to look upon Dick Turpin's countenance at this juncture.

It fully expressed the dreadful agitation of his mind.

Several minutes were passed, during which all continued to gaze at the stark and inanimate form before them, and so might some time more had they not been arous[illegible] by the voice of the landlord.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "if you have seen enough, let us be going. I am afraid every moment that the beadle and constable will be here."

Without the utterance of a syllable, the sheet was replaced, and the little party betook themselves to the room below.

"Well, gentlemen, what think you of it?"

It was the landlord who asked the question.

"The sight is an awful one."

This was all they would say in reference to the subject.

So soon as ever they were alone they drew close together and waited for the captain to address them.

"I scarcely know what to make of this discovery," he said, in grave tones. "Let me hear what is your opinion of it?"

"I can give you my views in a very few words," said Tom King.

"Then do so."

"I consider that your belief about Maud's capture in the ruins is quite erroneous."

"You have entertained that opinion all along, have you not?"

"I have, and now it is an opinion no longer."

"What then?"

"A conviction."

"You think that——"

"Patience, and I will tell you. Depend upon it, Maud and Jack the Ostler were aware in good time of the approach of the officers. They then hastily made their retreat."

Dick was not convinced.

"Remember," Tom King continued, "I once had an excellent sample of Jack's cleverness in dealing with police officers, and that makes me fancy that he would neither be surprised easily nor yield readily. Let us suppose that he was aware of the presence of the officers in good time, then what would be the most likely thing for him to do?"

"Beat a retreat."

"Of course, and take Maud with him. They would immediately seek safety in flight, and would also leave the ruins, beyond doubt with the intention of meeting us and warning us of our danger."

The reader knows, of course, how very closely Tom's supposition approached the truth.

Dick could not fail to see the plausibility of it, and yet he was only half convinced.

"You think," he remarked, after a brief pause, "that they left together, took shelter under the tree together to escape the violence of the storm, and that Jack the Ostler perished?"

"I do, and that by great good fortune Maud escaped."

Dick shook his head.

"It is still as easy to believe, and quite as probable, that Jack escaped alone. If they had both been under the tree together one could scarcely have perished and the other escaped."

Tom could not gainsay this; but he observed:

"At any rate, this discovery will cause some alteration in our plans as heretofore decided upon. I think the first thing we ought to do is to find out the particular tree, and make a close search in its vicinity. Who knows but what we may light upon some trace of Maud?"

Dick smiled sadly.

"It may seem strange—nay, foolish to cling with such persistency to what is after all no more than an idea; still, I must confess that my original impression remains almost unshaken."

"At any rate," said Claude, "we will go first to this tree before we come to any absolute decision."

"Yes," said Turpin, "I think it would be best."

"Then let us call in our friend, the landlord!" cried Sixteen-String Jack; "he will be able to describe to us tolerably well whereabouts the tree is."

"Very good."

The landlord accordingly was summoned and questioned.

He was easily able to direct them.

"If you will go along this lane," he said, "instead of going out upon the high-road, and if you will keep on until you come to an inn, and then go past that inn almost as far as it is from here to it, you will see the tree on the right-hand side; it is a magnificent, wide-spread-

ing oak. You cannot fail to find it, because I am told it is quite rifted by the lightning."

"Stop a bit," said Claude.

"What is it?" asked the landlord, turning to him.

"It appears from your account that there is an inn nearer to the scene of the catastrophe than this?"

"Yes, of course there is—the Jolly Tar."

"Then why was not the body carried in there, and the inquest held upon it in that place?"

"Ah!" said the landlord, in reply, "thereby hangs a tale, as I heard a man say in a play once."

"Be quick; let us have it, then."

"Well, I must begin by telling you that the Jolly Tar has had rather a queer name for a long time past. Persons have been heard of entering its doors, but never passing out of them again."

Dick nodded.

"Well, I have just heard that there was truth in these reports; a body of police have found out all about it. The place is a regular murder den, and the landlord and landlady are by this time safe in jail."

"So the place is shut up, I suppose?"

"Yes; and that was the reason why the body was not carried in there."

This was all the intelligence of any importance that they were able to obtain.

It did not interest them very much, for they little guessed how close a connection that closed-up inn had with Maud's fortunes, and how narrow was the escape she had of losing her life there.

Little did they imagine that they were so very close upon her track.

There was no chance, however, that they would be enlightened as to the true facts of the case.

Indeed, the probability was that in their unhappy mental blindness, they would recede from instead of approach the object they were so anxious to attain.

At length this long and weary day—for so it was to our friends, in spite of the strange incidents with which it was diversified—wore away.

The welcome shades of twilight came creeping over all things.

So soon as they deemed it prudent, they took their departure.

So far as they could, not the faintest suspicion as to their identity existed.

The landlord assisted them to prepare the horses for the road.

Just as he was on the point of riding away, Dick Turpin turned round, and said, solemnly:

"Remember our compact and the appointed hour. Do not fail; I shall be there."

Leaving these words to have their due effect upon the credulous landlord, Dick Turpin hurried off.

It was easy enough to find the road, they knew; but as soon as a turn of the lane concealed them from the landlord's view, Dick said:

"I am glad we obtained the information concerning this Jolly Tar Inn. Ten to one some police officers are still there, for in such cases the premises are rarely left, so that if we rode by we should stand a very good chance of being recognised."

"Right, captain," said Claude. "I was wondering whether you would think about that. I should propose that we take to the fields at once, and make a considerable detour—in fact, approach the tree from precisely the opposite direction to this."

A unanimous consent was given to this proposal, and the next moment they were all making their way at a rapid rate across the open meadows.

In this manner they were able to keep altogether out of sight of the Jolly Tar Inn, so that they avoided all possible danger of detection in that quarter.

At length Dick changed his course, for he saw before him something that looked like a human habitation.

Shortly afterwards he emerged into a lane—that very lane down which Maud had ridden at such a fearful speed in company with Hunch.

They looked about them, however, without for a moment suspecting anything of the sort.

All was calm and quiet, and accordingly they ventured to approach the tree.

They reached it undisturbed.

Now that the lightning had struck it, this tree was indeed a strange-looking object, and would for the future form an unmistakable and easily-recognised landmark.

Dismounting, they made a close search around, but the result of it did not prove at all successful.

There was no trace of Maud—

Nothing whatever to point, however distantly, to the fact that she had stood side by side with Jack the Ostler beneath its branches.

Tom King was the last to give up the search.

He was compelled to own that his expectations were not realised.

Dick, of course, was only the more confirmed in his opinion.

As the spot seemed silent and retired, the highwaymen chose it as their place of conference.

Long and anxious was the discussion which ensued.

Eventually, their future movements were decided upon.

It was agreed that a separation should take place.

Tom Davis, feeling how great a clog he was upon the movements of the highwaymen, was most anxious to be left behind.

But it was considered that the presence of police officers at the Jolly Tar, and, above all, the fact that an inquest was about to be held at the inn they had left, made it most unsafe and dangerous for him to linger in that neighbourhood.

"No," said Dick Turpin, "you shall, Tom, if you have no objection, come with me, and I will at the earliest moment either provide you with a place that holds out some slight prospect of safety, or else obtain you a horse."

"And I," said Tom King, "feeling sure that my opinion is the true one, will do my best to get upon Maud's track."

"And we," said Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, "will work together to the same end."

"Agreed," said Turpin. "My course, as you know, lies in the direction of the ruined castle."

"Be careful, captain, for there is much danger there."

"Trust me—I will be careful."

"And now," said Claude Duval, "when we have decided upon our meeting place, I think we may venture to part company without any more discussion."

"Let this be the place," said Dick Turpin, "or somewhere near it."

"Agreed. And the time, when?"

"Between midnight and dawn."

"To-morrow night?"

"Yes."

"And if we can none of us keep the appointment, then it will hold good for the next night."

"Enough."

"We part, then. Farewell."

A few more words were exchanged, and then the highwaymen separated according to their arrangement.

Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval were the last to leave the spot.

The reason for this was, that they wished to allow Tom King to choose his own course.

As soon as they observed in what direction he rode off they departed in just the opposite.

There was chance alone to direct them, and it so happened that this led them far away from that water-mill where certainly some tidings of Maud would have been gained.

The country around was remarkably desolate.

There were few trees around, and no vestige whatever of human habitations.

Still Claude and Jack rode on for some distance, but at length, upon a word from the former, they arrested their horses' steps.

"I am afraid, Jack, that we, at least, are upon the wrong track."

"So do I. I should imagine Maud would not go very far on foot, and certainly would have no reason to persevere in this direction."

"I think not."

"Shall we turn back, then?"

"And try another way?"

"Yes."

"I don't know," was the reply. "Suppose, before giving a reply, we go on a few miles further?"

"Agreed."

"The nature of our surroundings may then be considerably altered."

"True."

"Forward, then."

Once more the highwaymen set their steeds in motion.

Ere they had advanced many steps, however, they were startled by hearing the sound of hasty footsteps.

The next moment a man came into view.

He was on foot, and running at the very top of his speed.

So excited did he seem, that he appeared altogether unconscious that horses were on the road before him, which happening to be narrow about that part, there was every probability that he would come into violent contact with them.

At the very last moment he beheld our friends, and stopped himself abruptly.

For a moment it seemed as though he was about to turn round and endeavour to force a hasty passage through the quick-set hedge with which the road was bounded.

But if this had been his intention it was immediately abandoned.

A great change came over him.

With one bound he placed himself in front of Claude and Jack, and then, in the accents of indescribable fear, he cried:

"Gentlemen—gentlemen, in the name of common humanity I call upon you to protect me! Save me—oh, save me! Gentlemen, save me—save me!"

There was something so extraordinary and withal so ludicrous in the appearance of this new-comer, that the two highwaymen, instead of responding to his appeal, sat stock still upon their horses, regarding him fixedly.

While they are thus engaged we will take the opportunity of describing in a few words the nature of this man's exterior.

He was about the middle age, and somewhat inclined to be corpulent.

His attire was that of a tolerably well-to-do London tradesman, but it was now in a terrible condition.

His coat had been split up the back, so that it hung behind him in two most extraordinary-looking tails.

The rest of his clothing was torn in many places and literally beplastered with mud, looking as though in his headlong race he had tumbled down, and then had rolled over and over in some mysterious way until he had rolled himself on to his feet again.

His hat and wig were both gone, and his bald, shining pate added not a little to the ridiculousness of his appearance.

"My good man," said Claude Duval at length, "what is the matter, and what do you want me to save you from? So far as I can tell, we are the only people near this spot."

The stranger was so exhausted, and so scant of breath, that he could not immediately make a reply.

Puffing and blowing like a grampus, he cast apprehensive glances around him.

"They are coming after me," he gasped at length—"I am pursued, but, luckily, I have out-distanced them a little. Hark! can you hear?"

Our friends listened intently, but no sound whatever came upon their ears.

"What is the meaning of all this?" asked Jack. "By whom are you pursued? I can hear no one."

"Ah, gentlemen," said the man, "you have no idea what I have gone through during these last two days and nights—no idea whatever! Ah me! and when I tell folks, I shall be disbelieved and laughed at, I know I shall. Ah!"

He wiped the perspiration from his brow while he spoke, and seated himself on a long stone that happened to be close to the hedge-bank on one side of the road.

"I do believe," he continued, "that I am in a fair way of making my escape. If I could only rest a little, gentlemen, and recover my wind and strength a little, I should doubtless get away altogether. But I dare not stop here unless you will be so kind as to remain and protect me if they come."

"They?" echoed Claude. "Who do you mean by they, and what have you done that you should be pursued?"

"Done?"

"Yes, done."

"Nothing, gentlemen—nothing at all!"

"Then why are you pursued?"

"That would take some time to tell; but while I am resting here for a few moments I will, if you like to listen, make you acquainted with the most extraordinary concurrence of circumstances you ever heard of! Ah!"

This interjection is to represent the peculiar kind of sigh with which this singular personage concluded every sentence.

The curiosity of Claude and Jack was greatly roused, and therefore they at once desired their singular companion to speak freely.

"I am glad of that," he ejaculated, immediately upon receiving their permission—"very glad indeed, for do you know that I am so perplexed and bewildered by the many events which have occurred, that a narration such as I am about to make will materially assist me to comprehend them."

"Be speedy, then," said Sixteen-String Jack, "for we are engaged upon business of importance and cannot afford to stay long."

"Ah, me! Well, I am a tradesman from London—a respectable tradesman. My shop is at the corner of Bucklersbury. Perhaps you may know it, gentlemen."

The highwaymen shook their heads.

"It don't matter," continued the stranger. "You will have to take my word for more than that. However, it is a fact. Mine is one of the largest establishments, and I deal only in the very best silks, velvets, and such like."

Some little impatience was manifested by the highwaymen at this detail.

The stranger, however, went on.

"Lately I have had a very constant, and as I believed, excellent customer—quite a lady she appeared to be, and she bought many of my things and paid a good price for them. Who she was I neither knew nor cared, but I learned that she kept a first-class house in a fashionable street, and lived in first-class style. Don't think I am going about the bush too much. I am not indeed. Oblige me by listening, gentlemen, for I assure you the strange part of my story is to come, and you will admit that you never heard anything so monstrous. Ah!"

CHAPTER MXXV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL FOLLOW UP THEIR ODD ADVENTURE.

Upon receiving this intimation, our friends prepared themselves to listen more attentively, and the stranger continued, in a rapid voice:

"Two days ago I received a letter from an unknown correspondent, warning me that a suspicious character had been frequenting my shop of late, and that she no doubt intended to make a victim of me.

"Unfortunately, the writer of the letter was not sufficiently explicit.

"I was thinking over this, and endeavouring to remember all the different people who had been in the shop lately, when the lady I have mentioned to you drove up to the door in her carriage.

"I went myself, opened the door, and assisted her to alight, and this completely drove out of my head all recollection of the letter.

"You will not wonder at this when I tell you that the lady was in a very gracious humour. She told me she wanted to make some very extensive purchases in silks and velvets. Nothing that I put before her was too good or too dear in price, and I began to think, as one roll after another was bought, that I was going to do a capital day's work."

"This lady, I presume," said Sixteen-String Jack, "was the cause of all your troubles?"

"She was. But you shall hear. Have the patience to listen to me for a few moments longer."

Jack promised, and the stranger continued his narrative:

"At last she told me she had bought all that she required. She asked for the bill. It was made out in due course. The amount was just over two hundred pounds.

"She put her hand into her pocket, and then exclaimed:

"'Oh, sir, I have not enough with me to pay you.'

"She looked awkward and confused for a moment, and I suppose so did I, for I did not like to offend such a good customer; and just then the recollection of the warning letter flashed with unpleasant vividness upon my mind. I resolved to be careful.

"After a moment's reflection, the lady seemed to recollect herself.

"'It is very annoying,' she exclaimed, with a smile, 'and I don't know how I could be so careless; however, I have been thinking that, after all, it will be for the best!'

"I expressed my satisfaction.

"'Yes,' she continued, 'I am now very glad I thought of it. You must know that I have an aunt staying with me at my house a little way out of town, and I am certain she wants to make some similar purchases to mine, though not to so great an extent. What I am going to propose to you is that you should get into the carriage and ride home with me. On our arrival, I will give you the money; and in order that your journey may not be lost, you can take some other things in the carriage with you for my aunt to select from.'

"Now, gentlemen, I appeal to you—did you ever hear anything more reasonable, or straightforward, or proper than that? I ask you before I go any further."

"Nothing," said Claude. "But what that has to do with your running away I really don't know."

"But you will see in a moment, sir. Delighted and overjoyed with the prospect of doing so large and excellent a stroke of business, I selected silks and velvets that I thought likely to suit to the value of between two and three hundred pounds more. The whole was placed inside the carriage, and the lady would insist upon my entering with her, though I refused for a long time, and declared my resolution of sitting beside the driver on the box.

"Eventually, however, she overruled me. The carriage was entered, and away we went.

"Now, I left the shop in such a hurry that I never went behind to speak to my wife and tell her where I was going; but just as I passed out I told the assistant in the shop that I should be back in three hours at the most.

"Ah, gentlemen, now for my misfortunes. You will ask why I have troubled you with all these trade details, but it is necessary that you should be made acquainted with them in order for you to understand what follows.

"I confess I never enjoyed a ride so much in my life, though now I shall look back to it with feelings of anything but pleasure. The lady proved herself to be a most entertaining companion, and laughed and chatted on the way in the most affable manner you can conceive.

"London was left behind, and the country gained. I looked about me with pleasure, for, like most inhabitants of cities, I was delighted with the sight of a green field.

"Well, we rode on and on a long way into the country; I knew that, although the time passed so agreeably and so quickly.

"At last we came to a very high and long red brick wall, such as may be often seen surrounding a gentleman's estate. This one appeared to be of unusual height and strength, for at frequent intervals it was supported on the outer side by stout buttresses.

"The carriage here sensibly slackened pace, and therefore I imagined we had reached our destination.

"I was about to ask the question, but was saved the trouble, for just then the carriage stopped before some large, massive wooden doors set in the wall, and corresponding well with it.

"The stoppage was only momentary, however.

"The gates were opened.

"The carriage rolled through them, and immediately afterwards I found that we were traversing a broad, well-kept avenue.

"I was now quite elate and quite satisfied of the rank and position of my customer.

"I was wondering what extra price I should put upon the goods, when the carriage stopped again.

"This time, it was in the front of the house.

"The carriage-door was opened, and I officiously jumped out in order to assist the lady to alight.

"She rewarded me with a smile.

"I was about to remove the piles of velvet and silk, but she said, sweetly:

"'Never mind, I will send for them. Please to enter with me.'

"Just then, the front door was opened.

"I followed the lady up the flight of steps and crossed the threshold.

"The door was immediately closed, and the first thing that struck me was the obscurity of the entrance.

"It struck me as being very great, for, having just come from the glare of sunshine without, I could scarcely see who was standing before me.

"But the voice and manner of my companion altered suddenly.

"So great was the change that I could scarcely believe the evidence of my ears, which were the only organs of sense I could make use of, my eyes being, as I told you, of very little service.

"The lady seemed to be weeping, and her voice was that of one enduring the utmost affliction, as she said:

"'Alas, sir, you see I am here.'

"'Yes, madam. Is this the person you spoke to me about yesterday?"

"'It is, sir. This is my truly unfortunate husband. Oh, sir, what shall I do?'

"Husband!

"Gentlemen, I can assure you my backbone opened and shut just then, for all the world like a great clasp-knife.

"Husband! I could scarcely believe I was in possession of my senses.

"'Pray, my dear madam,' said the same voice which had before spoken—'pray be calm; any agitation on your part may be productive of the worst consequences—the very worst.'

"What on earth were they talking about? I asked myself. What did it all mean?

"But I could not manage to pronounce a syllable aloud, I was so entirely flabbergasted.

"I stood there like a stock-fish.

"'Oh, his delusion is now most painful,' continued my strange companion. 'I had to get him here by pretext; but all the way he has declared I am not his wife—that he does not know me—that his wife is at home in the parlour behind the shop in Bucklersbury; and then he babbles about velvets and silks.'

"'Such hallucinations, my dear madam, I am sorry to say,' answered the soothing voice, 'are far from being uncommon. However, you may depend that all that lies in my power——'

"'Yes—yes, I know you will do everything you can; but, oh, it is so very, very dreadful!'

"Gentlemen, I can't describe to you what an actress she was.

"Even I felt in doubt once or twice.

"A little reflection soon brought me to myself.

"I had a dim idea of the nature of my situation.

"I resolved to be calm, and to give quietly an explanation.

"'Sir,' I said, addressing the man with the suasive voice, 'I beg to assure you that I have been brought here under false pretences. This is no wife of mine, I assure you, but——'

"At this point the lady fluttered her handkerchief and became deeply affected.

"'Yes, yes, my dear sir, we know all about it. Come, come, be calm and reasonable. Let me assure you this will be all for your good.'

"'Oh, oh,' sobbed the lady, 'I cannot bear this trying scene any longer! Good-bye, my dear husband, I hope you will soon be better—pray be calm, for my sake. Good-day, doctor!'

"'Good-day doctor the devil!' I roared, unable to restrain myself any longer. Stop her—stop that woman! Don't let her go. Murder! Stop her, I say. There's all my velvet and silk in the carriage; five hundred pounds' worth at the least. Oh—oh! I see it all now. It's a swindle—a swindle! I understand the letter now. Help—help! will none of you stop her?'

"At the first word I darted forward, and endeavoured to put a stop to her departure.

"But in a second, I felt many strong hands upon me.

"I was held quite powerless.

"What aggravated me most, however, was the soothing manner adopted by the doctor.



[TOM KING ENTERS THE JOLLY TAR INN.]

"'My dear—dear sir,' he said, most beseechingly, 'do pray be calm! You cannot imagine what injury you are doing your case by being thus violent. You will much retard your recovery if you persevere in such behaviour.'

"'Recovery!' I cried, my voice rising in spite of all my efforts to restrain it. 'Let me assure you there is nothing the matter with me. Feel my pulse—feel my pulse, I say, and you will find me as hale and as sane as any man in the kingdom.'

"The doctor carried the soothing system out perfectly.

"He did not for a moment refuse my request, but, with an appearance of interest and earnestness that raised fallacious hopes in my brain, pressed his fingers over my pulse.

"He waited a moment, then very gravely shook his head.

"'I am very sorry—very sorry to find your pulse so exalted. The danger is imminent. I would not have answered for the consequences if he had been allowed to remain one day more at large—I would not indeed.'

"These last words were spoken in a lower key, and not addressed to me, but to the vile wretch who had so speciously decoyed me to this place, but they reached my ears as well.

"'I suppose I can do nothing for him?'

"'Nothing whatever—leave all to me.'

"I will. I am most anxious to depart, for the scene is more than I can bear.'

"'Stop her!' I yelled again. 'Listen to me, all of you—listen, I say. My wife, I tell you, is at home, sitting in the parlour behind the shop. If you don't like to believe me, keep us both here while you send some one to see Can I say fairer than this?'

"The sympathetic but incredulous smile upon the doctor's countenance aggravated me to such a degree

that I felt as though I should like to rush upon him and fell him to the earth.

"But I was too tightly held for that.

"'My dear—dear sir,' he said, smiling still. 'Let me entreat you—let me implore you to drive this unfortunate hallucination from your mind, for such it is. If you thus persist in it, you will be in great danger of becoming permanently insane.'

"'D—n you for a grinning, batter-brained fool!' I yelled, unable to control myself any longer. 'I tell you I am being robbed—robbed in the most barefaced manner ever heard of. It's a swindle—an awful swindle; I can see it all now! This is a private lunatic asylum, is it not?'

"The doctor assented with a bow and another of his d—nably aggravating smiles.

"'I know it—I know it; I comprehend the whole plan now. Seize her, I say—I give her in charge. Take her into custody. She is a swindler. Do you hear me?'

"I was heard, certainly, but no attention whatever was paid to my words.

"The viper appeared to be more and more affected every moment, and the doctor at length led her to the door.

"It was opened.

"I saw them both descend the steps that led down to the graveled avenue.

"I saw the doctor hand her into the carriage and close the door after her.

"A few more words were exchanged, the order given to the coachman to proceed, and away rolled the carriage, with the thief and my five hundred pounds' worth of property in it.

"My fury, then, I must admit was ungovernable.

"But, gentlemen, I appeal to you. Does it stand to reason that any man could stand quietly by and see his wealth carried away from him in such a fashion?

"So frantic were my struggles that I almost broke away from my captors, strong as they were.

"But the door was closed, more keepers were summoned, and I was finally overpowered, for my tremendous efforts greatly exhausted me.

"You will be surprised, perhaps, but, gentlemen, I can assure you I burst into tears.

"Five hundred pounds is a very serious loss to me, especially at the present time, when many of my most important ventures have turned out unfortunately.

"'There—there, he will be better now, poor man,' said the doctor. 'Carry him to one of the dark cells, and be sure you are sparing with his diet. I will send the barber to him before long.'

"These words acted upon me like the contact of fire with gunpowder.

"All my angry passions broke out afresh.

"Another furious struggle commenced.

"'I see—I see,' the doctor ejaculated, 'leniency will not do in this case—compassionateness is thrown away altogether! Drag him away; clap a strait waistcoat on him, and let him remain for twelve hours in the dark.'

"In spite of all my efforts to prevent it, this barbarous purpose was carried into effect.

"I was confined in that atrocious instrument of torture called a strait waistcoat, and in this helpless condition was carried through several passages and down various flights of stone steps.

"A door was opened, and I was roughly thrust into a kind of cellar that smelt for all the world like a grave.

"The door was closed again, and I found myself surrounded by the deepest darkness you can conceive—in fact, I never knew before what was expressed and meant by the word darkness.

"There I was allowed to remain, as I suppose, for the time specified. I had no means of noting the flight of time.

"No sound whatever penetrated to that dark and gloomy place

"How I passed those hours I can scarcely describe to you; certainly you can form no conception of them yourselves. I wept, prayed, raged all by turns until compelled to cease from sheer exhaustion.

"I now fully comprehended by what a clever and well-planned scheme I had been defrauded of my goods.

"Nothing more ingenious I had ever heard of.

"What puzzled me most was to know whether the people at this asylum were in league with the ad venturess.

"Such a thing was far from improbable; but then, on the other hand, I could see how very easy it would be for her to impose upon and make dupes of them.

"My property was gone—of that there was no doubt—and I endeavoured, with what philosophy I could command, to reconcile myself to my loss. This I found a difficult and almost impossible task.

"I was determined that I would in the morning be as calm and quiet as it was possible for any human being to be, for I could see that was the only chance I should have of regaining my freedom—unless, indeed, it was all a planned job to keep me there.

"I suffered a fever of apprehension on account of my wife, who would, I knew, be tormenting herself to death on my behalf.

"At last I heard the welcome sound caused by the removal of the fastenings of the door.

"I sat quite still.

"Several keepers entered.

"'He's quiet enough now,' said one, in a low tone. 'We'll venture to take the waistcoat off him. If he's obstreperous we can soon master him again.'

"While he spoke, this man very ostentatiously flourished and cracked a huge, heavy cart whip.

"A sympathetic shudder thrilled me.

"I sat as still as a statue while I was unbound.

CHAPTER MXXVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK CONTINUE THEIR SEARCH FOR MAUD.

THE interest with which Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack listened to this interesting narrative was so great that they manifested great impatience while the poor man paused a moment or so for breath.

"I suffered myself to be led to an upper chamber," he continued, "and when there I was told to sit down in a chair that was placed near the centre of the flooring.

"I obeyed.

"No sooner did I seat myself, however, than, with great suddenness, several springs started forth and held me fast.

"One confined me across the chest, another clasped my legs, and so on, while two others held my head in such a manner that I could not move it in any direction in the least degree.

"I wondered what was coming next.

"I was not kept very long in suspense.

"The door opened, and in stalked the doctor, who was followed by another individual wearing a white cap and a white apron.

"I guessed their purpose at once, and a cold sweat burst out all over me.

"But I was as powerless as I should have been had I by some magical power been suddenly converted into stone.

"'How is the patient?' asked the doctor.

"'Uncommon quiet,' answered the keeper.

"The doctor shook his head, and again felt my pulse.

"Oh, how I wished that one limb was at liberty. What intense delight it would have given me to have felled him to the earth!

"But there I was, as I have described to you, unable to move a muscle.

"'His pulse is still very high,' said the doctor, with the utmost gravity, 'and therefore we may safely conclude that this present unusual calmness of demeanour is only assumed, and that immediately upon recovering his liberty he would resort to deeds of violence. This is a very severe case, and I shall have to use unremitting care to bring about a cure.'

"I cannot give you an idea, gentlemen, of how much these words galled me.

"My indignation was something I cannot describe, and I feel pretty sure that had I at that moment been released from my fastenings I should have perpetrated some rash act or other.

"But I was not allowed the opportunity.

"'He must be reduced,' said the doctor, 'and every

means tried to get him really quiet. First of all, barber, we will cool his brain.'

"I knew very well what this meant.

"My tongue, which I had contrived to keep still all this time, would be restrained no longer.

"I broke out into a furious burst of angry invective—I reviled the doctor and his associates—declared what I would do to them if I only had the opportunity, and repeatedly averred that I was not mad.

"All listened with a pitying smile, which went far to increase my fury.

"However, there I was, more helpless even than a new-born babe—they could do with my person just whatever they thought fit.

"Gentlemen," continued the unfortunate tradesman, "you see my head—it was lately covered with hair, of which my wife was so fond that she would not let me wear a peruke, according to the fashion of the times. Well, while I sat there in that abominable chair, one of the keepers, with some huge bright scissors, snipped it off close to my head, and then the barber finished the horrid work with his razor; in less than a moment my head was as smooth as the back of my hand.

"I was so grieved over my loss that I positively wept.

"Here was an accumulation of one misfortune after another.

"I began to dread that the upshot of all this would be that I should go mad in reality.

"My fury again became ungovernable, for it required a greater amount of self-command than I possessed to think over such wrongs as mine unmoved.

"'Ah, well,' said the doctor, who had been watching me, 'I see it is a desperate case, and we may as well do all we can for him at once; it will be a saving of time and trouble in the long run.'

"While he spoke, he took a lancet from his pocket.

"I looked at the little glittering instrument with the utmost apprehension.

"My arms were tightly bound down to my sides by means of the strait waistcoat; but I discovered that there was an opening left in this by which my arms could be punctured without being removed from restraint.

"This the doctor at once proceeded to do. The incision was made, and I watched the outpour of the blood until I grew sick, faint, and giddy.

"'That will do,' I heard the doctor say at last, though his voice seemed to me to sound as though it came from miles and miles off. 'Release him, and carry him back to the dark room; you will find him tame when you visit him next time.'

"He was right, for when I aroused myself from the state of dreamy torpor into which the loss of blood had thrown me I was so fearfully weak that I could hardly raise my head from the hard mattress on which I had been thrown.

"How long I remained thus I know not, for in that dismal place it was, as I have told you, impossible to keep any note of time—not even the ordinary distinction of night from day could be observed.

"At length my tormentors made their appearance.

"One carried a small basin containing some delected nutriment; this was placed to my lips, and I swallowed it half unconsciously.

"I quickly experienced the benefit of it.

"I was pronounced to be by no means so dangerous as I was. The fellows declared that the mad light, as they called it, had gone out of my eyes.

"Then afterwards the doctor came.

"He, too, declared me better, and allowed the strait waistcoat to be removed, and also had me conveyed to another chamber.

"As soon as I was left alone here I began to give myself up to serious thought.

"An end must be put to the present state of things somehow—I felt that keenly; if not, I should, beyond all doubt, eventually become quite mad.

"I began to see that nothing but the greatest hypocrisy would save me.

"My loss I now began to bear with greater patience.

"It was severe certainly, but then it was not irretrievable.

"My anger always rose, however, when my thoughts dwelt upon the villanous woman who had so cruelly duped, robbed, and deceived me.

"I promised myself that when I recovered my freedom no effort should be wanting on my part to bring about her capture.

"I fancied, however, that if I humoured the doctor's notions, and no longer persisted in a denial of what he held to be facts, that I should be set at liberty.

"Therefore I resolved to dissemble.

"The next time the doctor saw me, I looked at him without any of that fierceness of aspect with which I had hitherto invariably regarded him.

"He noticed the change at once.

"'Ah!' he said, rubbing his hands briskly, 'how are we now?'

"'How am I?' I said, passing my hand over my forehead. 'Has there been anything the matter with me? I have been trying to make out where I am and how I came here until my brain is in a whirl.'

"'Hush—hush!' said the doctor. 'Be calm—pray be calm! In good time you will know all. At present you cannot keep yourself too quiet.'

"A few more words were exchanged between us, and then the doctor left, promising to send me a draught that would put me right, and assuring me that after I had partaken of it I should leave for my own home.

"'Yes,' I said, 'Bucklersbury, No. 97. Alas! what will not my wife have suffered during my inexplicable absence? That villanous wretch——'

"I stopped myself, for I saw the doctor's eye was upon me.

"I had forgotten my caution, and felt ready to bite the end of my tongue off.

"I could see then that the doctor did not believe in my restoration to sanity—that I was, with the cunning for which lunatics are celebrated, deceiving him by a false calmness in order to regain my liberty.

"He did not say a word of all this, but quietly backed out of the room.

"As soon as he was gone, I sprang to my feet, for I was no longer under any species of personal restraint, and was considered to be so far better as to have a light and cheerful apartment allotted to me.

"I felt that now or never was the time for me to make my escape; and if I did not succeed, there was no knowing how long my stay in that place might be protracted.

"It was already growing dusk, so I considered all things favourable for my design.

"I rushed to the window.

"This was protected by iron bars.

"Anxiety and excitement lent me a strength such as I had never dreamt of possessing.

"One bar was partially removed from its place, and I at once set to work to force myself through the narrow opening thus made.

"I received many injuries in the attempt, but I persevered, for I considered this to be my only chance of success.

"My hands were lacerated, my clothes torn, and my flesh terribly bruised, but, heedless of these minor evils, I persevered with my task.

"At last I got through, and dropped a considerable distance to the ground.

"Fortunately, I alighted upon some soft mould in a garden.

"I was stunned by the fall, but soon recovered myself.

"I found that, beyond a good shaking, I had not sustained any injury.

"Rushing along, I made my way to the boundary wall which I have before mentioned.

"My heart now sunk within me, for how was I to surmount such an obstacle?

"My spirits revived again directly afterwards, for at some little distance I perceived a man standing on a ladder that was leaning against the wall.

"I crouched down to observe his movements.

"I was not long before I found that he was engaged in studding the top of the wall with numberless pieces of broken glass, doubtless with a view to prevent such an escape as I was now contemplating.

"The question now arose of how I was to pass him on the ladder. I was afraid that I should be hurled to the ground—that an alarm would be raised and that I should be recaptured.

"Luckily, I recollected that he would be compelled ere long to descend for more materials, and just as I thought of it he began to come down.

"I now held my breath with anxious anticipation, for I was determined, at all risks, that as soon as his feet touched the ground I would bound forward, ascend the ladder, and drop myself from the opposite side.

"The man reached the ground.

"He stooped down to supply himself with more materials for his work.

"With a sudden dash I reached the foot of the ladder, and then ascended it with more speed than I felt convinced a ladder had ever been ascended with before.

"Ere the man could recover himself from his state of surprise, or even comprehend what had taken place, I had reached the top.

"He bawled frantically to me to stop.

"But I disregarded him, for just then I had fairly gained the wall.

"For a moment I sat astride it.

"I seized the ladder with both hands, and threw it down.

"The man had to step back to escape injury, and I felt certain that I had prevented him from following me so speedily as he would have done.

"But a general alarm had now been raised.

"My escape so far had been discovered, and they were organising a pursuit.

"I looked down on the outer side of the wall with a feeling of great misgiving.

"However, I could not hesitate, having succeeded so far.

"I lowered myself as well as I was able till I hung down at the extreme length of my arms, and let go.

"I reached the hard road with great force, but I was on my feet again in a moment.

"I knew at once which way would take me towards London, so I ran with all my might; but before I had gone far I could tell that the doctor and his crew were on my track.

"This circumstance, so far from causing me to despair, only made me double my speed, and when I found that I was actually distancing them I made increased exertions.

"Now, gentlemen, I have done, for it was soon after this that I was so fortunate as to meet with you. And let me thank you for having patience to listen to so long a narrative."

"But I hear nothing of your pursuers," said Claude Duval; "and besides, if they were so close after you as you describe, they must have reached this spot ere now."

"They must have abandoned the chase. Perhaps I have distressed myself with running without absolute occasion. At any rate, my best thanks are yours."

"You are welcome," said Claude. "And, what is more, should we encounter any of your pursuers, we will send them upon a wrong track."

"Thanks again! And if ever you call at 97, Bucklersbury, you will find Simon Pursall will make you welcome."

"It is the most extraordinary narrative I ever listened to," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"It is indeed, gentlemen. I knew you would say that."

"Farewell!" cried Claude. "We have stayed here too long already, for we have much important business to attend to."

They rode off as he spoke, scarcely giving the man time to utter the word farewell.

"What do you think of that adventure, Claude?" asked Sixteen-String Jack, when they had got to a little distance.

"Why, that it was about the oddest we have ever encountered."

"So I think; but my chief concern is to know whether the man has been insane or not."

"What is your opinion?"

"I can hardly give one. It may be all true; and if so, he has been badly used, though at the same time the cheat is of a more elaborate description than I have ever before heard of."

"There is a certain amount of probability about it, is there not?"

"Yes, there is; but then I have often heard that mad people are very cunning sometimes in concocting apparently coherent, but yet extraordinary, narratives, such as this we have just listened to."

"We may speculate upon it till doomsday, I expect, without coming much nearer to a conclusion."

"Yes, and therefore we may as well give it up at once and turn our attention to the business we have in hand."

They rode on for some distance in silence, but at length Jack said:

"We are getting too far away, Claude, I feel convinced we are. Let us retrace our steps and start off upon a fresh track."

"With all my heart."

"I have been trying to think what would become of Maud."

"So have I."

"With what success?"

"None. Have you?"

"I have not. If she was with Jack the Ostler under that tree when it was struck with lightning, I cannot conceive how he could perish and she escape."

"It baffles me completely, and I feel like one groping in the dark."

"So do I, and therefore I consider there is but one course open to us."

"And what is that?"

"To leave all to chance. We have nothing better to direct us; and—who knows?—we may by mere accident stumble upon the right track."

"It is possible."

"Come, then, we will get a little nearer to the blighted tree. I feel certain we are taking the wrong course now."

With these words they changed the direction in which they were going.

Scarcely had they turned round, however, and fairly got their horses in motion, before Sixteen-String Jack perceived in advance of him a faint and distant light.

Immediately upon making this discovery he directed the attention of his companion to it and pulled up.

No sooner were the horses at a standstill than Claude exclaimed:

"I can hear wheels now."

"So can I."

All doubt about the character of the light was now at an end.

A vehicle could be heard approaching, though what puzzled the highwaymen was to see only one light, as it was the custom for carriages of almost every description to carry two.

Our friends remained in the middle of the road where they had paused, undecided what to do.

"Come, Claude," said Jack, arousing himself, "what is to be done? If we wait here, the carriage will in a few moments be upon us."

"I think we had better not interfere with it, under the circumstances," said Claude, though he manifestly spoke with great reluctance. "Let us attend first of all to the task we have undertaken."

"Very good," replied Jack, who did not like to say anything in contravention to his companion's expressed decision.

As he spoke he backed his horse close under the shadow of the hedgerow.

"Why are you taking up that position?" asked Claude, in suspense.

"Simply in order that the carriage may pass freely. If you place yourself by my side, those approaching will pass on without having the least suspicion that we are on the road at all."

"Which may be important," said Claude, as he at once backed his steed close to his friend's.

By this time the approaching vehicle was very close at hand indeed—so close, that there was no reason to fear that their patience would be exhausted by much waiting

CHAPTER MXXVII.

IN WHICH CLAUDE DUVAL HAS QUITE A CHIVALRIC AND PLEASANT ADVENTURE.

Not another syllable was spoken, on account of the fear they had that the sound of their voices might be floated

on the still night air to the ears of those who were so rapidly nearing them.

As may be expected, the highwaymen, despite their resolution not to attack the carriage, kept their eyes riveted upon it, for they could not help experiencing a considerable amount of curiosity and interest.

They were soon able to make out that the carriage was a closed one—something after the fashion of a post-chaise.

But it looked very odd to see a lamp burning at one side of it and not at the other.

The horses that were attached to it seemed of good quality, for they drew it along at a tolerable rate.

This was about all the highwaymen were able to make out.

In another moment, with a sudden rush, the vehicle swept past.

As soon as the rattle of the vehicle had died away a little, Claude exclaimed:

"Hang me, Jack, if I like to remain idle like this, and allow a carriage to go by in that fashion! Follow me! We will overtake and stop it at all hazards!"

Sixteen-String Jack was not very much surprised at this sudden change of his comrade's determination.

Without a single word of dissent—for the proposal exactly accorded with his feelings—he followed his friend.

Their weapons they knew were in perfect readiness.

They now put their horses to the utmost speed they were capable of making, and the manner in which they flew over the ground was something extraordinary.

As the pace they were going at was at the very least double to that made by the vehicle in front, it follows that they overtook it in a very short time indeed, despite the efforts which the driver made upon hearing some one powdering after him at such a rate.

"Hold!" cried Sixteen-String Jack, who happened to be first—"hold, I say! Pull up your horses! If you disobey, I will let daylight into you!"

A chorus of screams came from the interior of the vehicle immediately after the pronunciation of this threat.

The coachman, like a prudent man who places a due value upon his life, tightened the reins, and the panting horses very gladly came to a standstill.

Jack turned round and saw that Claude had made the best use of his time.

He had already gained the door of the carriage, and was looking into the interior.

Perceiving this, Sixteen-String Jack thought he could not be better occupied than by keeping guard over the driver; he resolved to remain in the position he had taken up, and leave the rest to his companion.

Leaving Jack to this piece of duty, we will return to the proceedings of Claude.

The moment he rode up to the window and looked in, he beheld a sight for which he was scarcely prepared.

The carriage contained half a dozen persons; and what was surprising was that they were, without exception, young girls whose ages might be taken at an average of seventeen or eighteen years.

By the manner in which they were attired it could be perceived at once that they belonged to the upper ranks of society.

They were, too, all beautiful, so that Claude was for a moment quite dazzled and overpowered by the sight of so much loveliness.

Our friend's appearance was greeted by a succession of faint screams.

The loudest was uttered by a young lady who held in one hand a lamp, evidently the one that should have been at the side of the carriage.

In her real or affected consternation, she suffered it to slip from her hand.

It would have fallen to the floor of the carriage but for the quickness with which Claude put out his hand and caught it.

This he was able to do easily, for immediately upon finding that he had nothing but ladies to deal with, he had consigned his pistol to the holster of his saddle.

The manner in which he now held the carriage lamp was such as to allow its beams not only to fall upon the bevy of fair ladies, but also upon himself, for he could perceive that, despite their real or pretended terror, they were stealing glances at him, and Claude was rather inclined to be vain of his personal appearance.

And, indeed, rarely had he appeared to greater advantage than he did at that very moment.

His countenance was one which even his detractors could not but admit was a most pleasing one, and his dark moustache—then quite an unusual appendage to the face—gave him a decidedly foreign and distinguished look.

Then his eyes were remarkably fine and bright, and as the light of the lamp fell upon them they seemed to glitter almost like diamonds.

Then there was his picturesque-looking hat.

His no less picturesque-looking costume, for his bright scarlet coat and white vest gave him quite a military appearance.

It did not require much penetration to discover that his exterior had made a very favourable impression upon the ladies.

With a smile which was really charming, and which seemed at once to dissipate any apprehension which the ladies may have experienced, he said, with a graceful inclination of the head and many gentle accents:

"Excuse me, fair ladies, for my seeming rudeness, but I little dreamt this road would be enriched with so much loveliness to-night. I cannot bow, I fear, for both my hands are occupied, and yet——"

Even as he spoke he, with a rapid movement, shifted the lamp from his right hand to the left, in which he held the reins.

He found it was able to do this double duty very well.

His right hand was now at liberty, and the first use he made of it was to remove his hat and make a very deep and respectful bow.

Now it is not a very easy thing to bow gracefully on horseback, but Claude managed it to perfection.

Then with a slight shake of his head he caused his dark mass of hair to fall into a profusion of natural curls.

At this time it was no less singular to see a gentleman wearing a moustache than it was to see him with his own hair, for barbarous fashion dictated that nothing but wigs should be worn.

The effect produced upon all the ladies by this was greater than before.

One was so overcome by it that she actually uttered a sigh, which had the effect of bringing Claude's eyes full upon her, and which, of course, threw her into a great deal of confusion.

A rather awkward pause now ensued.

It was broken by the young lady who had held the lamp, and who appeared to be of a more sprightly disposition than the rest.

The manner in which she glanced at Claude while she spoke clearly showed that our adventurer had made quite the reverse of a disagreeable impression upon her.

"Perhaps, sir," she said, with a saucy toss of the head and an air of assumed indifference, "you would be kind enough to let us know why you have interrupted our journey in this threatening manner?"

"Ladies," said Claude, resuming his hat and placing his hand upon his heart, "I beg you will not prove yourself so unkind as to turn a deaf ear to my supplicating apologies. I do indeed most heartily regret that I should have disturbed your journey; but can you wonder if I confess that now I feel rejoiced, for never before have my eyes rested upon such an effulgence of loveliness."

This speech was very favourably received by the ladies to whom it was addressed, and from whose features all appearance of fear had completely faded away.

"It seems very strange," said the one who had first spoken, "that you should stop us thus. May we inquire your motive for doing so?"

"Ahem!" said Claude. "I—I—am a wandering knight."

"A wandering knight?" echoed all the ladies in chorus, and with a manifest accession of interest.

"Yes."

"Oh, how delightful!" said the one who had first spoken, and who appeared to be the youngest of the party. "Why, do you know, I have been reading the most charming book. Here it is: 'Rosalba, or the Wandering Knight.' But then, it can't be you—your name is not Rosalba?"

"It is not," said Claude; "but yet I am a wandering knight, as I informed you."

By this time our friend had discovered that he had chanced to fall in with some very romantically-inclined young ladies, and he made a mental determination to bring the adventure to a pleasant termination.

The reason of the lamp being carried inside the carriage was now apparent.

The young ladies had beguiled the tedium of their journey by reading aloud one of those old romances of chivalry which were at that period so much in favour.

"Really a wandering knight?" pursued the lady, in accents of incredulity.

"Indeed and in truth."

"And in search of adventures?"

"Yes, though when I set out to-night I little thought that I was about to experience so much happiness, or, as I said before, that my eyes would be gladdened by such a galaxy of beauty."

The ladies fluttered their dresses and looked at each other, but they were so overcome at having encountered, as they imagined, one of their favourite heroes of romance, that they could say nothing.

"Ladies," said Claude, after the silence had continued a moment or so, "believe me, I could remain thus for ages feasting my eyes upon your beauteous features; but you, I doubt not, are all anxious to resume your interrupted journey, I should therefore esteem it a favour if you would answer me one question."

The ladies were at once filled with curiosity, and anxiously assured him that he was welcome to ask a hundred.

"Then, ladies," said Claude, with an air of affected embarrassment, "what I wish to know is, whether your favourite knight, of whom you have been reading——"

"Rosalba?"

"Yes. Well, I want to know whether he was poor?"

"Poor?"

"Yes—whether he was in want of money, or whether he possessed an ample share of that not-to-be-despised commodity?"

The ladies shook their heads.

"Then he was poor?"

"Oh, very!"

"Then I resemble your knight in more ways than one?"

"Are you poor, then?" they asked, with compassionate earnestness.

"Oh, very!"

Their looks bespoke their regret

"I am even now pressingly in need of a considerable sum of money; and if you, ladies, could help me to it, I should never fail to look back during the rest of my life to this adventure with the liveliest sensations of gratitude and joy."

"Oh, it's impossible!" said the young lady who had been reading the adventures of Rosalba. "We have nothing in the shape of money with us except——"

"Ah, there is an exception."

"Yes, we carry with us what all true knights would regard as a sacred *depositum*."

"Ahem! May I ask its nature?"

"Oh, certainly! You see this young lady here?"

She pointed to one who sat nearly opposite to her.

Claude bowed.

"Well, that is my dear friend, Angela, and she is going to be married."

"Then," said Claude, "I take the present opportunity of wishing her every possible happiness which she can enjoy in that state."

The confusion which Angela now witnessed only made her look more charming than ever.

She thanked Claude for his good wishes with a perfectly intelligible glance.

"And the *depositum*?" he asked.

"That is her dower—her marriage portion."

"And have you that in the carriage with you?"

"Yes, in three bags, each one containing a thousand pounds."

Claude looked amazed.

He was scarcely prepared for the exhibition towards himself of such an amount of confidence.

The bride elect looked as though she considered her friend somewhat indiscreet.

"I should think that is rather an unsafe way of carrying money."

"But who is to know of it?"

"Why, I do for one."

"But that does not matter."

"I am glad to hear that," answered Claude, with a smile. "But you remember what I told you about my wants?"

"Oh yes; but now we have explained this to you of course you will not think of touching it."

Claude was amused at the confident tone in which the young girl spoke.

"My wants are so very pressing," he said, "that——"

He was regarded with surprise and suspicion.

"Really," he continued, "if you only knew now many misfortunes I have experienced lately you would not be surprised at my importunacy. If there was time I would relate them to you at full; as it is, I must leave them to your imagination. Such a sum as you mention as having with you would relieve me of the whole of my troubles; and as for the bridegroom, surely he would be content to be united to so much personal beauty without wishing for the riches."

The words, and, above all, the manner in which they were spoken, awoke the girls from the illusion in which they had indulged.

They began to see their incaution in its proper light, and felt that the wedding portion was already as good as lost.

"I—I—am afraid," said the girl who had been reading, "that you have been deceiving us."

"I have not indeed."

"You cannot be a knight—I begin to fear that——"

"Nay—nay, be under no apprehension; I would not injure you for the world."

"I mean I begin to believe that so far from being a knight, you—you are only——"

"Only what?"

"A high——"

"Wayman?"

"Yes!"

"Surely you would not call me by so harsh a name?"

"That depends upon your demeanour, sir."

"Then I'm afraid you will have to think harshly of me. If I was not so much pressed I would allow you to pass free, but as it is——"

They were all pale now and trembling.

"I regret to say that I must have the dower; and you will always be able to have the satisfaction of reflecting that it will be of infinitely more service to me than it could possibly be to the intended bridegroom."

"Nay, nay—do not be so cruel!"

"The cruelty is on your side, fair ladies, to deny me thus."

"Must you have it?"

"I must."

The bride elect burst out into a passion of tears.

She sobbed as though her heart would break.

"Must you have all?" the other asked again.

Claude's heart was touched by the distress he witnessed—so much so that his heart seemed in danger of melting altogether, for he was one that could not bear to contemplate the spectacle of a fair and lovely being in tears, and know himself to be the cause.

"I will not take all," he said after a momentary pause; "and do not any longer accuse me of harshness or cruelty."

"How much do you demand, then?"

"One-third only of the whole amount. Surely you will consider that proposition a reasonable one. My urgent needs will be temporarily supplied, and the bride will suffer no great loss of fortune."

Every occupant of the carriage was by this time half fainting with terror,

The bride half dried her tears.

Then, stooping down, she pulled from beneath the seat a small valise.

So great was her agitation that she could scarcely insert the key into the lock.

At length she succeeded, and produced a bag, which was evidently very weighty.

It was handed to Claude, who lowered his eyes when he received it, for he could tell that all the ladies were

gazing upon him with very different looks to those with which a short time before they had regarded him.

The bride's distress now much increased.

"Shall you really take it?" said the young lady who had carried on most of the conversation.

"I cannot leave it. What am I to do?"

As he spoke, Claude placed the heavy bag into his pocket, though his conscience smote him heavily as he did so.

The whole party was now in tears.

Claude half turned away.

But his heart failed him.

Looking once more into the carriage, he said:

"Believe me, ladies, I cannot depart and carry away with me the knowledge that I am leaving so much acute distress behind me—I cannot—indeed, I cannot, so I fear that, despite all the inconveniences to which I shall inevitably be exposed, I must leave this wealth behind me."

"Nay—nay," said the bride, speaking only by a very great effort. "Take it, sir—take it, and depart!"

"I cannot," said Claude. "And yet I cannot bring myself to depart altogether empty-handed. Ladies, I will tell you what I will do. Listen to my proposition."

The utmost curiosity was manifested.

"This wealth," said Claude, producing the bag, "can be recovered—that is, if you are willing to pay ransom for it."

"Ransom?"

"Yes."

"But what ransom can we pay?"

"One that I hope will not cost you so much reluctance and grief as this. What say you—do you consent?"

"That depends upon the nature of the ransom. What is it?"

Claude smiled a roguish smile, and said:

"That each of you fair ladies will come one by one and press your sweet and charming lips to mine. If that is done, you are welcome to your gold, for I should prize such a favour above a dukedom."

This audacious proposal was received with six separate and distinct screams of dismay.

"Are you in earnest?" said the lady who had held the lamp.

"I assure you I am."

"Then you are a most audacious wretch!"

"Just so."

"And very ugly."

"That is why I admire your beauty so much."

"But really, in order to get rid of such a disagreeable monster one ought to be prepared to do disagreeable things, so I will set an example to the rest. I feel that I am most to blame for making you acquainted with the fact of the money being with us, and that I ought to pay the penalty. Take off your hat, sir, and as I contributed to place that money in your possession, I will do my best to recover it."

With these words, she rose and shook her curls carelessly and yet saucily from her brow.

Claude, with a throbbing heart, removed his hat.

His veins tingled with anticipated pleasure.

The young girl drew back once or twice without having the courage to carry out her intention.

Her colour rose to her very temples, for she could observe what glances of intense admiration Claude bent upon her.

Suddenly she bent forward and just touched the high wayman's lips with hers.

So quickly and so lightly was the act performed, that a bystander might well have been in some doubt whether the salute was given or not.

But in spite of its transiency, Claude was in no doubt upon the subject.

The light, scarcely-perceptible pressure of her lips upon his own thrilled through every nerve and fibre of his body like an electric shock, only the feeling was one of the most intense and intoxicating pleasure that can by any possibility be conceived.

Claude was confused—overpowered.

He was recalled to himself by hearing her say:

"There, sir, your claim is paid. Now, then," she continued, "follow my example, and then we shall the sooner be rid of him."

But the manner in which she spoke clearly showed that she was by no means so displeased with Claude as her words would have led anyone to imagine.

The bride elect was the next who paid her share of the ransom, and the others, after many pretty delays, followed.

The last kiss was given, but none impressed Claude like the first.

"Here is the prize," he said, as he surrendered the bag of gold. "Take it; and my fervent wishes will always be for your happiness and welfare! Farewell!"

"Stay," said the young girl. "You have forgotten the lamp."

Claude in his excitement had forgotten it.

He gave it back with a smile, and as he did so his fingers came in contact with hers.

He would have given much to have pressed it in his own.

"Once more, ladies," he said, "farewell! I trust you will perform the remainder of your journey unmolested."

"We have very little further to go."

Claude once more raised his hat and bowed.

"Stay!" said the young girl again.

He stopped at once.

"Now and ever," he exclaimed, fervently, "I am at your commands."

"You will not leave us until we know who you are?"

"A wandering knight."

"Yes, I know—you said that!" she answered, half impatiently. "What I want to hear is your name."

"It—it is——"

"Yes, yes. What?"

"Claude Duval!"

The announcement was received with the utmost astonishment conceivable.

But Claude would not linger now

"Come, Jack," he cried, "away—away!"

He galloped off as he spoke, leaving his comrade to follow him.

They did not pull up until the next hill was reached

"Well, Claude, what luck?"

"Eh?" said Claude, with a start, for his thoughts were so busily engaged that he had not heard his companion's question.

"What luck, I say?"

"None, if you mean booty."

"How! did not I hear something about three thousand pounds?"

"Yes."

"Let me know."

Claude related the adventure.

"And you actually had a thousand pounds in your hands?" asked Jack.

"I believe so."

"And you gave it back?"

"I did. I could not find it in my heart to keep it."

"Ah, Claude, my friend, it is all very fine for you to say that, but it seems to me pretty clear that my turn ought to come next, for you had decidedly the best of that adventure."

CHAPTER MXXVIII.

TOM KING HEARS UNEXPECTED TIDINGS OF MAUD, AND SUCCEEDS IN EFFECTING AN ENTRANCE INTO THE JOLLY TAR INN.

LEAVING Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval for awhile, we now revert to the proceedings of Tom King, whose adventures on this particular night will be found to possess no ordinary amount of interest.

The route which he took was exactly that which Maud had followed.

Of this he was ignorant, though he knew he was making his way towards the Jolly Tar Inn, so that he was particularly careful in all his movements.

As he thus slowly rode down the lane, looking keenly in every direction, he fancied he saw some glittering object lying upon the ground.

It caught his eye only for a moment.

He stopped, however, and proceeded to search more closely.

The result was that he found, close to the edge of the ditch, a bracelet, which he recognised in a moment as having belonged to Maud.

Here, then, was something like proof positive that he had got upon the right track.

He remained gazing upon the jewel for some moments in deep thought.

He was more than half inclined to ride back after his comrades, and make them acquainted with his discovery.

Eventually, however, he decided to do nothing of the kind.

Much time would have been occupied by the adoption of this course, and then it was questionable whether the search could be so successfully conducted as it could be if he was left to his own resources.

This decided him, and, once more mounting his horse, he rode with still greater slowness and caution down the lane.

On one side of him there was quite a tall hedge, and just as he was passing by Tom was greatly startled to hear a strange voice pronounce the words:

"Good night!"

Tom King returned the salutation, and at once pulled up his horse, greatly wondering who it could be that had thus addressed him, and what was the object for doing so.

Some of the twigs of the hedge were then parted.

It was not so dark but that Tom could see through the leaves the head and face of an elderly gentleman, whose countenance was certainly expressive of good temper and benevolence.

"I think, my friend," he said, addressing Tom, "I saw you pick up something in the lane a few minutes ago?"

"It is quite possible you might, sir."

"May I ask what it was?"

"Certainly, if you can show me any good reason why I should tell you."

"Well, then, it is just in this way. I happen to be Lord of the Manor here, and I always consider I have the best claim to anything that may be found hereabouts."

"In a great way, my lord, perhaps you have, but you certainly have not in the present instance."

"Indeed—why not?"

"Because what I have found happens to belong to some one with whom I am well acquainted, and of whom I happen to be in search."

"In search?" echoed the old gentleman. "Are you a police officer, then?"

"I am not."

"I thought you did not look like one; but come, tell me who this is of whom you are in quest; perhaps I may be able to afford you some information, for in default of having something else to do I occupy myself in walking over my property and making myself acquainted with all that occurs."

Upon hearing this statement, Tom King immediately became deeply interested.

It flashed upon him that chance might so far have favoured him as to bring him face to face with the very man who would be able to furnish the information he so much required.

Without the slightest hesitation then, he gave a full description of Maud's personal appearance, stating that she was a dear friend of his, and that he was most anxious to discover her.

"Have you seen anyone answering to this description," was Tom King's earnest inquiry, as soon as he had finished, "or have you heard anything?"

"I have not."

Tom was deeply disappointed at this reply, for he had suffered his hopes to carry him away.

"Can you tell me whither this lane leads?" he asked, at length.

"Yes, on to the London Road."

"And are there any intermediate places where you think she might be likely to stay?" asked Tom.

"Only two inns: one a long way off—just at the junction of the London Road, in fact—the other is not so far away, being just beyond the boundary of my estate."

Tom knew this perfectly well.

"As for the last," continued the old gentleman, "I have heard that it is a fearful place, though no suspicion has existed until recently. I believe, however, it is one of those murder dens of which it is to be feared there are many throughout the land. If the young person you seek has sought shelter there, I fear her fate would be a sad one."

"The place is now in the occupation of police officers, is it not?"

"It is."

"Alas!" said Tom, with a sigh, "I fear I have a difficult task before me. Many thanks for the information you have been able to afford. Good-night, for time is precious, and I cannot linger."

The salute was returned, and Tom King resumed his progress down the lane.

His mind was now filled with many anxious thoughts.

That Maud had made her way down that very lane there could be little or no room to doubt.

The question was, what had become of her?

"Beyond all doubt," he said, "she was beneath that tree with Jack the Ostler. They would foolishly seek its dangerous shelter to escape the rain. Yes—yes, that must be so. Then when the awful catastrophe happened she would fly in horror. The rain and the storm would have no terror for her then."

As the reader is aware, Tom King came very closely indeed to the truth in these conjectures.

"Then," he resumed, "so great would be her alarm that she would run on at so violent a rate as rapidly to exhaust herself altogether. She would again look out for shelter, and if she happened to see this Jolly Tar, she would be likely to enter there and remain until the storm was over."

Still Tom felt that these were only conjectures, and it was quite possible that Maud had acted in entirely a different manner.

He was only judging by what he himself would have done under similar circumstances.

"If she entered there," he muttered, "I fear it is no use looking for her any further. She could scarcely escape the double danger. Still it would be satisfactory to ascertain her fate; and better me execute the task than Dick, for he would be carried away too much by his feelings, the enterprise would be doubly dangerous to him."

Tom was right enough here.

"I am afraid," he murmured, "that the police officers would arrive during her stay here. They could not fail to recognise her in a moment, and they would make her a prisoner, for she would not be able to do anything in her own defence. If so, they have had time enough to take her to London and lodge her in Newgate before now."

Tom was silent, but his mind was busily engaged in wondering by what means he could free himself from these suppositions—how he was to make certain whether they were right or wrong.

"There is only one course to pursue that I can think of," he said, at length, "and that is to go direct to the Jolly Tar Inn. There is danger in the adoption of such a course, but then I would gladly run ten times as much risk for her or Dick. Yes—yes, if she has visited the Jolly Tar I will take care to learn all about it."

When Tom had come to this decision his mind grew quite easy.

Many, however, would have wondered by what earthly means he was about to put his design into execution.

It seemed like a man running into the lion's mouth.

Our gallant friend, however, did not allow this portion of the affair to disturb him much.

His arrangements were soon made.

He rode on until he came to within quite a short distance of the place he wished to reach.

Then dismounting, he secured his horse to the branch of a tree that grew at some little distance from the roadside.

This much accomplished, he bestowed a careful examination upon his weapons.

Finding them all in perfect order, he crept forward cautiously on foot.

He made his way first of all towards the back part of the inn, for he believed that he stood a much better chance of gaining the rear of the premises unperceived by his foes.

Getting nearer, he found that all the windows at the back were plunged in profound darkness.



[TOM KING WATCHES THE MOVEMENTS OF THE POLICE OFFICERS.]

Indeed, so dark and so silent seemed the place, that he began to think that the police officers had deserted it altogether.

With a view of ascertaining this, he crept round with redoubled caution to the front.

Here, however, from one of the windows on the ground floor he discovered a faint light gleaming.

This was where the officers were watching, beyond all doubt.

Tom would have given much to know how many were engaged upon this important service, and what they were about at that precise moment of time.

This seemed to be impossible to ascertain.

Accordingly, he retraced his steps to the back.

The yard was reached without difficulty.

Drawing nearer to the house, he began to look about him very closely, in order to discover some means by which he could effect an entrance.

So far as he could tell, every precaution had been taken to fasten both doors and windows.

This was no more than he expected.

Still he kept perseveringly to his task.

He was rewarded by discovering a window which seemed to promise to answer his purpose.

It was a small latticed casement opening like a door—the modern sash window had not been invented then.

A great number of small, diamond-shaped panes were fitted into it, being held in position by means of a lattice of lead.

One of these panes Tom King had not much difficulty in removing, for the only tool he made use of was a clasp-knife, by means of which the lead was bent back.

With great care the piece of glass was lifted out and placed down.

"That much has been done without creating any alarm, I think," said Tom King to himself.

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However. In order to assure himself upon this head, he placed his ear close to the opening of the window, and listened intently for several minutes.

All was still, and certainly, but for the fact that he had seen a light shining from one of the front windows, Tom would have come to the conclusion that the house was empty.

Nevertheless, he had now every encouragement to prosecute his enterprise.

Replacing the clasp-knife in his pocket, he cautiously introduced his hand through the aperture he had made.

There was only just room—indeed, he found no little difficulty in turning the little button by means of which the window was secured.

At length, however, this important object was achieved.

The casement swung slowly open.

The way was now clear before Tom, if he thought fit to enter.

He bestowed another careful examination upon his weapons, listened intently once more, and then, with a nod of satisfaction, he stepped over the window-sill.

Having done this much, his first act was to refasten the window again.

He was plunged in the most profound darkness.

What kind of room it was into which he had penetrated, and what kind of furniture it contained, he had not the least idea.

To exhibit a light was something more than he dared do under such circumstances, for what would be more likely to bring about a discovery of him than that?

And yet he dreaded to advance even a single step, for fear that he should come into sudden and violent contact with some heavy object, and so cause such a noise as would infallibly reach the ears of the police officers.

To remain standing still was, however, quite useless and ridiculous.

Accordingly, Tom stooped down, and with his hands stretched out before him, groped his way along in this fashion

To his surprise he encountered nothing.

It almost seemed as though that chamber was destitute even of a single article of furniture.

Suddenly, however, in spite of all his precautions, some hard, cold object struck him a sharp blow on the forehead.

A slight exclamation involuntarily escaped him.

"D—n it!" he muttered, "what was that?"

He put up his hand to feel, and his grasp presently encountered what he found to be, after a little further examination, the handle of a pump.

There could now be no sort of doubt as to the nature of the chamber he was in, and its destitution of furniture was comprehensible.

Still groping on, Tom's hands at last encountered a door.

This he opened with a great deal of caution.

No sooner had he done so than the faint murmur of voices came upon his ears.

It was evident that either the speakers were a long way off, or else that a closed door intervened between them.

All was still profoundly dark—indeed, Tom was not able ocularly to distinguish one single object.

Adopting the same method of progression as before, however, he cautiously crept on, taking the sound of the voices for his guide.

He was now in a kind of passage, which was tolerably straight, and along which he was able to make his way with a certain amount of ease, for he had only to keep close to the wall upon one side of it.

Suddenly he encountered a door.

He paused at once, and carefully passed his hand over it until he found the fastening.

Before he ventured to raise the latch, however, he listened with an intensity that was almost painful

He could still hear the murmur of voices engaged in conversation, but finally he came to the conclusion that the speakers were not just on the other side of this door.

Cautiously, then, the door was opened.

He paused, and was half inclined to close it again, so very audible did the voices now become.

A peep which he ventured to take enabled him to comprehend the cause of this.

With renewed confidence he glided into the room with which this door communicated.

The apartment in which he now found himself was not altogether dark, but was pervaded by a kind of dubious twilight.

This proceeded from a door that was standing a little way open.

The clearness with which he could hear two men talking convinced Tom that the police officers were in the adjoining room.

Double caution was now requisite.

On tiptoe Tom crossed the room, nor did he pause until he reached this inner door.

He made his way towards the hinges of it, for owing to its position there was a chink here through which he hoped to be able to see his foes, and observe all their movements as well as listen to their words.

Scarcely had he taken up his station here, than he heard a voice say:

"Did you hear something then?"

"Of course I did. Didn't you?"

"Well, I might have heard a faint sort of a kind of a noise, but, as I said before, in a quiet old place like this you are sure to hear hundreds on 'em."

"But I tell you I heard something then."

"What was it like?"

"Why, like a door opening and shutting."

"Well, old fellow, if you pay attention to every trifle you hear like that you will have enough to do. Why you will be running about and a-worrying of yourself all night, to say nothing of me."

"But I am satisfied—I felt sure I heard somebody."

"Then you had better go and look."

"I will; and if I don't see anything this time, d—n me if I pay any attention to my ears again!"

A dark lantern—of that kind commonly carried by police officers—was on the table; but in order that they might obtain the benefit of a diffused light, the door was left standing open.

Taking this in his hand, the officer who had last spoken rose from the chair on which he had been sitting and advanced towards the door.

Tom King, hearing and seeing him, grasped his pistols tightly, so as to be in readiness to use them at a second's notice.

He was well aware that he was in most imminent danger of discovery.

Indeed, to escape being seen seemed next to an impossibility.

But Tom was prepared for the worst, and resolved not to yield himself a captive without a desperate struggle.

The police officer advanced about a couple of paces into the outer room.

He pushed the door open considerably wider.

The effect of this was that, owing to the position our friend had taken up, he was more completely concealed.

The officer held the light above his head and peered around him.

Tom held his breath, fearful that this slight sound should betray him.

It now became a very nice question as to what extent the officer would carry his investigations.

If he advanced far into the interior of the room he would scarcely fail to behold Tom King.

But his fellow-officer, who had been left inside in the dark, was beginning to grow impatient.

CHAPTER MXXIX.

THE EVENTS WHICH OCCUR AT THE JOLLY TAR MAY BECOME EXCITINGLY INTERESTING.

"Now then, mate," he cried, "what can you see?"

"Nothing yet."

"Then come back, can't you, what do you want to leave a fellow in the dark all this while for?"

These words caused the other officer to turn back at a moment when, if he had gone a couple of steps further, Tom must have been discovered.

But such chances are happening every day.

"D—d if I believe my ears again!" he growled as he retraced his steps. "I'll shut the door—I sha'n't be bothered with hearing every slight sound then."

Tom was in despair.

If the door was closed, all hopes of listening to any part of the officers' conversation was at an end.

But his good fortune again befriended him.

"Don't make such a fool of yourself, Moggs. Sit down, can't you, and let the door alone?"

"I will when I've shut it."

"Leave it a little way open, I say, and leave the listening to me. If it is shut, how are we to tell whether there's any disturbance or not? I tell you again—don't be a fool; don't go for to make a hass of yourself!"

Moggs, for such apparently was the cognomen in which this officer rejoiced, growled out something that was not very intelligible, and came back to his seat.

"Stir the fire," said his companion, just as he was about to resume his seat; "you may as well now you're up, and put another log on—I am as cold as a key."

Moggs complied with this request.

There was already an excellent fire burning on the hearth, and when the embers were stirred, the blaze that shot up into the chimney imparted to the whole of the chamber a highly comfortable look.

"That's something like, Moggs," said the officer, as he rubbed his hands briskly together. "I shall feel quite like myself in a little while."

"That's more than I shall," growled Moggs. "I hate the sight of this infernal place, and I wish from the very bottom of my heart that I was well out of it. Whenever I breathe, the air seems full of blood."

"Oh, stow that!" said the other, with an uncomfortable movement. "What do you want to be talking like that for?"

"You ain't frightened, Joel, I hope?"

"Frightened? No, but what the devil do you want to say such things as that for? If you can't find anything more pleasant to talk about, shut up!"

"Oh, you be blowed! You always was a houtragious fellow, Joel!"

After this there was a pause.

From his post of espial, Tom King could see very well into the inner room.

Moggs was sitting in a large arm-chair on one side of the fire, and Joel on the other.

Between them was an old rickety table, on which stood several bottles and a couple of partially-filled glasses.

Both men were engaged in smoking.

During the lull in the conversation which now ensued, each sat with his eyes fixed upon the blazing fire, and smoked.

The atmosphere was so laden with the reek of tobacco smoke that Tom King felt once or twice as though it would be utterly impossible for him to resist clearing his lungs by a slight cough.

The first movement was made by the police officer who had been called Joel.

He stretched out his hand and took hold of the bottle with the intention of filling up his glass.

"I told you how it would be, Moggs," he ejaculated. "We shall have to go poking about down in the cellar for some more gin, or else we shall have to sit the rest of the night without any."

"Is it all gone?"

"Not quite, but it will be by the time you have filled your glass. Come, pour up! Don't shirk the bottle!"

Moggs complied.

"I was thinking, Joel," he remarked, after having drank about half a glass of gin.

"Thinking what about?"

"Why, this here place, and what a rum start it was from the first."

"Very rum indeed! How was it that it got found out?"

"Don't you know?"

"Do you think I should have asked you if I did?"

"Well, you needn't be so sharp—I thought you did. But if you think it rum now, I'm blessed if I know what you'll think of it when you come to hear the pertik'lars."

"Let's hear 'em, then."

"Why, one day, as a cove was a-going down the lane, what should he see but a piece of paper."

"A piece of paper?"

"Yes, it came fluttering out of one of the top windows, you understand, and naturally dropped in the road."

"In course!" said Joel, with a grave nod.

"When the cove picks up this paper and reads it—which of course he did—what should he see in it but that the inn was a den of murder, where all travellers who entered with money were dropped down a deep well in the cellar and never heard on arterwards, and a requesting him to let the police know about it without delay, for the writer of this here precious note was kept a close prisoner upstairs, and that he had managed to write by dipping a stick in his own blood."

Joel at this point of the narrative removed the pipe from his mouth, and sat with his jaws fixed open, waiting for what was coming next.

"Well," said Moggs, "I don't say that there's anything very extraordinary so far, but what I look at is this—when we gets in here, we finds ouly a man and his wife and a dead body, but not no signs of the person wot had wrote that note. You know there wasn't."

"No—no, that's right."

"Well, then, I want to know who it was that wrote it."

"Mightn't it be the dead body."

"How could it be, you fool?"

"Why, I means before it was a dead body."

"Oh!"

"What do you think?"

Moggs very gravely shook his head several times.

"You don't think it?"

"I don't."

"Why not?"

"Because I've formed my own opinion."

"And what may that be?"

Moggs glanced around him with evident apprehension. Then sinking his voice to a very low key, he said,

"Why, Joel, it's my own private and particular opinion that the letter was wrote by the ghost of one of the persons wot have been murdered here."

Joel pushed his chair back several paces, as he gasped:

"No—no, Moggs, you don't mean that?"

"Indeed, but I do."

"Pooh—nonsense! I'll never believe it!"

"Nobody axed you to that I knows on. You needn't without you like."

"Then I won't."

"Perhaps, then, you will tell me how it was that the letter came to be wrote?"

Joel sat silent for some moments.

Then, very diffidently, he remarked:

"You seem to have forgotten all about those folks that ran away. How do you know but that it might be one of them?"

Moggs regarded his companion with the utmost contempt.

"Why, you ninny," he cried, "do you think they'd run away after writing like that? Why, we should be the very folks to take care of them, shouldn't we?"

"It's a mystery to me altogether."

The reader may perhaps be able to imagine with what intense eagerness Tom King listened to every word of this conversation.

Indeed, so absorbed was he by it, that he became unconscious of everything else.

He would have given much to have been able to ask one or two questions.

Most anxious was he to obtain some additional information about those who had ran away from the inn on the approach of the officers, but this information was not likely to be imparted, because one officer probably knew as much about the matter as the other.

Of course it was to the flight of Hunch and Maud that they were alluding.

A remark dropped by Joel, however, set Tom in a perfect fever of impatience.

"But don't they declare," he said, "that one of those who ran away was a woman?"

"Yes, they say so, but I don't know how true it is, for I was no more in the pursuit than you were. But they did not catch her, and, ten to one, would not have had the other but for the accident."

"You mean the hunchback?"

"Yes."

"What an odd-looking creature he is."

"Don't name it," said the other; "I can't get his horrible face out of my mind. Why they didn't leave him in the road, I don't know. Curse them for bringing such a thing under this roof, say I! There's horror enough already!"

Both shuddered, and again there was a pause.

Tom's excitement and anxiety now knew no bounds.

"If it was a woman," remarked Moggs, at length, "she must have been a regular out-and-outer. Why, she made no more account of a pistol bullet than nothing at all, and rode like the very devil himself."

"Yes," assented Joel; "and then I have heard of highwaymen slipping off their horses while going at full speed, and then hiding while the officers went by in pursuit of the riderless horse; but the idea of a woman. Oh, no, it's out of the question. It was no woman, I'll be bound."

"But they say it was."

"I know they do, but I don't believe it—no, not a bit; and now then, as all the gin is gone, let me ask you what is to be done for some more?"

"Go down in the cellar."

"It's very fine to say that; but who would relish the idea of doing that now? Why, it must be close upon midnight."

"Well, for my part," said Moggs, as he settled himself more comfortably in his chair, "I consider it would be nothing more nor less than flying in the face of providence to go down in the cellar where that well is at this time of night; and so I tell you, plump and plain, I don't intend to do anything of the sort!"

Joel grumbled and growled for some moments in an inarticulate voice.

Then he took up the bottle and carefully drained out of it the very last drop that it contained.

"A nice, pretty go," he muttered, "to sit here for six or eight hours and no more to drink than this!"

"Hold your row!" said Moggs.

"I shan't!"

"Then if you want some gin, why the devil don't you go down in the cellar and fetch it?"

"You come with me."

"I shan't!"

"What are you afraid of?"

"Never mind. In that cellar there's a well."

"D—n the well!"

"Oh, you can curse it if you like, but I wouldn't do such a thing, and I'm not very particular, as you know. There's nobody knows how many dead bodies are lying at the bottom of that well, and let me ask you whether the spirit belonging to any one of them could rest quiet in such a grave? In course not!"

"Shut up!"

"It don't stand to reason," continued Moggs, altogether ignoring his companion's injunction. "In course it don't stand to reason to think of any man coming here and going to bed, and then being murdered in his sleep and his body thrown down that well where——"

"Shut up!" yelled Joel, in such stentorian tones that the voice of his companion was completely drowned.

"Shut up, I say!"

"Who's afraid now?" sneered Moggs.

"Why you!"

"No I ain't, it's you!"

"Why——"

What more would have been said no one can possibly form the least idea, for it was just at this point that the two speakers were interrupted by a loud, heavy, and long-continued knocking.

CHAPTER MXXX.

CONTINUES TO RELATE TOM KING'S ADVENTURES WITH THE OFFICERS.

SIMULTANEOUSLY the two police officers sprang to their feet—

Simultaneously they made a rush—with what purpose is not clear—and both in one direction.

The consequence was that one came in contact with the other, and with so much violence that the breath was knocked out of both.

It was a wonder the table was not overturned.

Bang—bang—bang—bang! came the knocking again, and this time with so much violence that it echoed and re-echoed through the silent house like the clangour of ten thousand hammers.

The panic of the two officers increased.

Tom King was in no slight degree perturbed.

Once more his hands grasped his pistols.

This knocking, he thought, could not fail to presage danger to him.

It was mysterious and unexpected, or the officers would not be so disconcerted by it.

"Moggs," gasped Joel, at length, "who's that knocking?"

"How the devil do you think I should know, you fool? Let go, can't you! What do you want to claw me like a wild cat for?"

"I ain't!"

The officers separated.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Joel—"you're frightened—that's it!—so d—nably frightened that you don't know what you are about!"

"Bah! Go and see what the knocking is, and don't be a *hass!*"

"Go yourself!"

"I shan't!"

"Pick up the lantern, then, and come with me."

"Pick it up yourself!"

"Do you know who you're a speaking to, eh?"

"Yes; do you?"

"Yes, I——"

During this brief colloquy there had been a cessation of the furious knocking.

It almost seemed during the interim that the two officers would work themselves up to fighting point.

But then, with great suddenness, the knocking was renewed.

The sound appeared to cause all their valour to sink down into their shoes.

Their mutual recrimination ceased, and while the knocking lasted all they were capable of doing was to hold fast to the backs of the chairs on which they had been seated, and stand stock still with wide-open mouths.

"It's—it's," gasped Joel—"it's the ghostcses, Moggs! I feels sure of it—I knows it!"

"Gammon!" replied Moggs, though the incredulous word was uttered in anything but a decided tone.

"It—it must be!"

"No—no!" said Moggs, faintly.

"What is it, then?"

"Somebody at the door."

"Door?—what door?"

"Why, the front door."

"Who could be there at this time of night?"

"How should I know? Travellers, perhaps."

"And do you think travellers would knock like that? Just hark!"

The knocking was more furious than ever.

Moggs and Joel listened for some time in silence.

It is to be presumed that a little reflection came to their aid.

Certain, however, is it that after an interval it began to dawn upon their obtuse mental faculties that the knocking could only be caused by some one outside clamouring for admittance.

"You're a fool, Joel!" said Moggs, speaking in something like a reasonable voice.

"So are you!" retorted Joel.

"Come along!" cried Moggs, as he snatched up the light off the table—"come along, and let us see who is there. If we are not quick they will have the door down!"

Joel was not disposed to remain in the dark, so he followed closely in his companion's footsteps.

So rapidly did they make their way across the outer room that they never once glanced behind them, so Tom King remained in his place of concealment undetected.

But the question was, how long would he remain so?

Tom had come, as he believed, to a correct conclusion regarding the cause of the knocking.

He was quite under the impression that by some means or other a detachment of police officers had tracked him there.

If this was so, what was he to do?

He glanced rapidly around him, but he could see no outlet for escape.

That his present hiding-place would not be tenable much longer was certain.

Even if the knocking had a different origin to what he was persuaded it had, no one could possibly enter the outer room from the passage without seeing him.

Tom gave up all hope of making an escape—at least, just for the present.

He looked about for a fresh place of concealment.

This was no easy matter, for the room would have appeared to be quite dark to anyone who had not been in it so long as Tom had.

A dim kind of twilight came from a small unshuttered window, through which the dull night sky could be discerned.

Tom could only see one place that offered him the slightest chance of security, and that was behind a kind of screen or seat, furnished with a high wooden back, of a kind frequently to be seen at country inns to this day.

This was a very slight kind of hiding-place indeed—one that would not hold out against a moment's search.

But, then, it was what would suit Tom very well.

He had resolved that the moment he found his hiding-place was so much as guessed at he would sally forth and do battle with his foes as best he might.

Having come to this determination, then, he carefully made his way towards the screen, which happened to be only a few paces from him.

Less than a moment served to enable him to get behind it.

When standing up, he was able to see well over the back, and so command a view all around him.

This was the position which he first of all took up.

At the first approach of his foes he would be able to sink down silently; and so, with his head inclined forward, he stretched his hearing to the uttermost, in order to make out as much as possible of what was going on.

All these movements of Tom's were made very rapidly indeed, though the reverse might be suspected from the length of time which it has taken us to describe them.

Indeed, when he assumed the listening attitude just mentioned, the officers had done no more than reach the front door.

There was no longer any room for doubt about the cause and origin of the knocking.

Some one was outside most impatient for admission.

"Who's there?" bawled Moggs, speaking very loud, in order to conceal, if possible, the trepidation he was in.

"Let us in!" roared a voice, in authoritative tones. "Where the devil have you been all this time? A nice lot you must be to keep guard in a house, and not hear such a knocking as this!"

"Oh, stockings!" cried Moggs.

From this remarkable ejaculation, and from the fact that Moggs and Joel suddenly became as silent as the grave, Tom inferred that the voice which had just spoken was well known to them.

"Open the door, you dolts!" said the authoritative voice again—"open the door, I say! What the devil do you mean by keeping us here like this?"

"Is that you, Mr. Clarke?" said Moggs, but very humbly indeed.

"Yes, it is—of course you know it is! Open the door at once, and be d—d to you!"

The sound caused by the removal of bolts and bars now came quite clearly to Tom's ears.

Finally, a chain was flung down with considerable violence, and the door was opened.

Tom endeavoured to make out by the sounds how many people entered, but there was such a sudden rush of footsteps that he found this to be impossible.

"As we are here at last," said Mr. Clarke, "perhaps you will give us some account of your conduct!"

"Conduct?" asked Moggs and Joel both together.

"Yes. Didn't you hear me knock?"

"Yes," was the dogged answer.

"Then, why did you take no notice of it?"

"We did not know who it was," Moggs managed to stammer forth.

"Oh, didn't you? Well, it seems to me that the noise threw you into a devil of a fright. Why, you are as white as ghosts now! Yes, you must have been frightened to death, and afraid to move!"

There was a general laugh.

The approach of footsteps now warned Tom that it was time for him to sink down into his concealment.

He did so only just in time, for it was at this precise moment that the whole party entered the apartment.

Tom had the audacity to come quite to the end of the screen and peep round it.

He did so very carefully.

At the first glance he perceived that the number of the police officers had been increased to five.

There were Moggs and Joel, the one who had been called Mr. Clarke, and two others, who brought up the rear.

Without troubling themselves much to look about them, they passed through the doorway into the adjoining room.

"I'll be d—d," said Mr. Clarke, whose voice was so peculiar that Tom could easily recognise it—"I'll be d—d if this don't look like being comfortable! You won't care about being disturbed, I'll warrant."

"Sha'n't we!" said Moggs. "I only wish as how I was never going to see the blessed place again!"

"Why, what's the matter?"

"There's nothing to drink," was the reply—"at least, nothing without going down into the cellar to fetch it."

"And is that too much trouble?"

"Trouble? It ain't a question of trouble. I should like to see the man that could do it."

"Why, not go down?"

"Not at night."

"Why not?"

"Because of the well."

"What well?"

"The one with the dead bodies in it."

"Bah!"

Moggs was silent.

"You are frightened," said Clarke—"yes, that's it. You have sat here talking to one another until you have both got horribly afraid. Don't deny it; I can see it in your looks. I know as well as if I saw you that our knocking almost frightened you out of what little wits you have got. Perhaps you thought a whole troop of ghosts were coming down upon you at once. Ha, ha!"

The two officers who had arrived in company with Mr. Clarke laughed heartily.

But neither Moggs nor Joel could see the fun.

"You did not expect to be disturbed, I'll warrant," said Clarke, after a pause, during which he had been amusing himself by stirring the fire vigorously; "but you will have to change your quarters, let me tell you."

It was at this moment that Tom King, having the audacity to quit his place of concealment, reached the door and took another peep through the chink.

He saw Moggs and Joel looking considerably surprised upon hearing this last announcement made by their chief, Mr. Clarke, who continued speaking:

"Knight and Cunningham will take your places here," he said, "and you will return with me to London."

"Very glad to hear it," muttered Moggs, while Joel gave a sigh expressive of the relief which he experienced.

"Don't believe you," said Clarke. "It's a d—d sight colder outside than it is here, let me tell you; and what is more, it's beginning to rain."

"I don't care," said Moggs, resolutely.

"Nor I," answered Joel, with equal determination.

"You are a couple of chicken hearts," said Clarke—"that's what you are. I can see you are frightened almost to death now."

"We have been frightened," said Moggs, "and I don't go for to deny it."

"But upon what grounds?"

"Never mind; let those who are left here find out for themselves. I don't care how soon I am out in the cold and the wet."

"Well, you will be in a moment or so," said Clarke, who looked curious and somewhat uneasy. "I want to start at once."

"The sooner the better."

"You are wanted to give your evidence before the magistrate in the morning," Clarke continued. "The prisoners now are under remand, and as you were here at the time of capture, you are wanted, though what for exactly is more than I know. If I had thought there was the least likelihood of your being wanted I should not have left you here."

"And what am I wanted for?" asked Joel.

"I don't know," was the reply. "My instructions were to bring you both to London, and to leave two police officers here in your stead."

"I wish them joy of the job, then!" said Moggs, rubbing his hands slowly. "There's nothing to drink on the table, but there's plenty down in the cellar to be had for the fetching. Ha, ha!"

In the laugh Joel joined, though somewhat feebly.

"None of your larks, now," said Clarke. "I have told Knight and Cunningham all the particulars—every one. They are used to jobs of this sort, and have courage enough to face a thousand ghosts—haven't you?"

Both declared, with a great deal of bluster, that their courage had not been overrated.

"I'll warrant they won't be frightened to death and unable to move if they happen to hear a tap at the front door, but will come at once to see what is the matter."

To this neither Moggs nor Joel seemed able to make an effective reply, for they remained silent and looked very sheepish.

"But come," continued Clarke, "we must be moving—there is no time to lose. I am not surprised at your getting a little nervous remaining here so long by yourselves. Come along—let us be off at once!"

Moggs and Joel were both quite ready and willing to depart.

Upon hearing this, and perceiving that the words were followed by an immediate stir, Tom King once more returned to his hiding-place.

So light and so rapid were his movements that he succeeded in reaching it unseen.

Clark in the meanwhile busied himself by issuing his instructions to the two men about to be left in charge, though the low tone in which he spoke prevented Tom King from catching the import of his words.

The next moment the threshold was crossed.

"I suppose there will be no fear about our being able to prove the charge against them?" Tom heard Moggs say as he followed Clarke into the outer room.

"Against whom?"

"Why, the people who kept the house, to be sure."

"I should think not."

"I asked," continued Moggs, "because it almost seemed as though there was some proof wanting, and that we were sent for to supply it."

"Well, it may be so—I cannot take upon myself to say. But be careful—remember the conviction must follow."

"I know. But, Mr. Clarke."

"What now?"

"How about the girl?"

"What girl."

"The one you pursued."

"Along with the hunchback?"

"Yes."

"I should have called her a woman—she is more like one than a girl."

"Well, perhaps you are right. You have not heard anything of her since, I suppose?"

"Nothing."

"Well, as I said a little while ago, she's a regular out-and-outer. I have heard of highwaymen slipping off their horses while going at full gallop and then hiding in in the hedge, but for a female to do it—there, I can hardly believe it!"

"It is true, nevertheless," said Clarke, in a tone which testified to the existence of no slight annoyance concerning the matter. "We caught the horse."

"Did you get any clue from that as to the rider?"

"None; but I have had a close watch set all around the place where she must have disappeared and, if my men only do their duty, she cannot fail to be discovered ere long."

"And have you no suspicion as to who she is?" asked Moggs, whose curiosity and interest were evidently powerfully aroused.

"Well, I—a——," said Clarke, hesitatingly.

"Then you have a suspicion?" cried Moggs, eagerly.

"I don't mind saying that I have."

"Who is she, then?"

"Why, it is my belief—founded on a good many circumstances—that she is no other than——"

"Who—who?"

"Why, the girl Maud, for whose apprehension so large a reward is offered."

"Do you mean Dick Turpin's wife?"

"I do. I cannot think of any other woman who would act with so much resolution; and, if you will remember, we have had more than one specimen of what she can do."

"But what should bring her to this place, and separated from all her companions?"

"That's just what I should like to know. But come, we have stayed here long enough. We can chat the matter over further as we ride to London."

With these words the trio, who had paused during this brief conversation, left the room.

Can the reader imagine with what breathlessness Tom King listened to every word which had passed between them?

So strongly was he moved, that he was more than half inclined to follow them at all risks in the hope of hearing something more.

For a moment he hesitated and was undecided.

During that moment the opportunity was lost.

A sudden bang came upon his ears, proclaiming that the front door had been shut.

The officers had taken their departure.

After this, for a little while, Tom remained perfectly still.

He was thinking deeply.

The next sound he noticed was that produced by the concussion of horses' hoofs upon the road, and which showed that Clarke and his two subordinates had fairly started for London.

Tom had now only two officers to deal with.

But what he had heard was provocative of much reflection.

In his own mind he felt an inward presentiment, which amounted almost to a conviction, that Clarke's suspicions were perfectly well grounded and correct.

What had become of Maud was the question.

Clearly she was not a prisoner in the hands of the police.

Neither was she anywhere about the inn.

These two circumstances being taken for granted, it became clear that Tom was not likely to do much good by remaining in his present dangerous position.

Having obtained this clue, what he had to do was to follow it up with the least possible loss of time.

Yet as the reader may suppose, Tom was in a good deal of doubt and confusion.

Maud's flight from the inn seemed mysterious, for who could be the person with whom she was in company?

"Clearly not Jack the Ostler," he said to himself, "for he was dead."

He could scarcely understand her making a new friend so very soon after she had lost her other one.

Yet the more he thought the more did his belief strengthen that it was indeed Maud and no one else of whom the officers had been speaking.

Many things pointed to this conclusion.

First he had indisputable evidence of the fact that she had recently been very near to the inn.

There was the bracelet he had found in support of this.

Then from what Tom knew of Maud's character, he felt certain that the presence of danger would suffice to stimulate her to the doing of deeds from which at other times she would have shrunk in the utmost terror.

When the police officers arrived at the inn, he could well imagine what desperate steps she would take in order to effect her escape, especially at a time like the present, when she would be impressed with the belief that she had not only her own safety to look after, but that the lives of the rest rested entirely upon her ability to warn them of their danger.

Having reached this point in his reflections, Tom King determined to leave the inn without delay.

It was certain that Maud, not long ago, had been in

the vicinity, and therefore he indulged in the hope that by making the utmost exertions he should be able to discover her.

But when he had arrived at this decision, he quickly became sensible that he should have some little difficulty in carrying it out.

The two officers who now occupied the adjoining room were of a very different type to those who had just left.

Tom had had ample opportunity to look closely into their countenances.

He was a little bit of a physiognomist, and the result of his examination was, that he felt they would by no means be easily deceived.

There was also a special and particular watchfulness about them, and he felt assured that if any slight noise of a suspicious character did strike upon their ears, they would not allow themselves any rest until they had used their best efforts to discover the origin of it.

Of course this alertness was no doubt mainly owing to the fact that they had only just entered upon their new duties, and there was a probability that after a time much of their vigilance would wear off.

But then Tom King could not afford to wait for this.

It was necessary that he should depart at once.

It therefore became a most anxious consideration for him as to whether he should be able to quit his place of concealment, cross the room, pass out at the door, and finally leave the premises without the watchers being aware of it.

Such a feat seemed like an impossibility.

But Tom King had great faith in his own powers, and therefore made no scruple of attempting to carry out his design.

Just, however, as he was about to quit his place of concealment, some words uttered by the police officers caused him to pause.

CHAPTER MXXXI.

EVENTS AT THE INN CONTINUE TO INCREASE IN INTEREST.

"I say, Knight."

"What now?"

"I have just been thinking that we ought not to have been so ready in sitting down like this."

"So have I."

"Confound it! I wish we had only thought of it a few minutes ago—now it's too late."

"What's too late?"

"Why, what we ought to have done upon entering upon this duty was to have gone all over the premises in every part, leaving no place unexamined, taking Clarke and those other two fools with us, so that we should have known what condition the place was in when we took to it."

"We most certainly ought," assented Knight. "As you say, truly, it is now too late, for they are all three a goodish way off by this time."

"I can't think how I could have been so incautious—so forgetful," said Knight, in a voice which showed the extent of his vexation.

"I can account for it, I think," said his comrade.

"How so?"

"Why, having to wait so long at the door was enough to drive thoughts out of anybody's head, and standing in the rain, too, all the while, after such a long ride; then, when we got in here, this fire looked so comfortable that I could think of nothing but enjoying it."

"That was it, no doubt; still, we deserve to suffer for our stupidity."

"I don't think it quite so serious."

"I do, though."

"Suppose now, as our clothes have got tolerably dry by this time, that we set out without any more regrets and delays, and examine the place ourselves?"

"What, alone?"

"Yes, there is no one to go with us, and I think we had better do it thus than leave it undone altogether."

"Yes, so do I."

"Come on, then, at once—there is nothing like time present."

"Right. But what cowardly fellows they must have been to be afraid of going down in the cellar for a drop of something good! Do you think we shall be so squeamish, eh, old boy?"

"Not exactly."

"I think not. Now come on!"

"Nay, I have a fresh thought."

"What is it?"

"Sit down a moment, and I will tell you. A few minutes one way or the other cannot make much difference, now, and the result may be important."

"What do you mean? Why don't you come to the point at once?"

"I will, never fear. First there are two dead bodies in the house, are there not?"

"Clarke said so."

"One a traveller, and the other a hunchback lad that nobody knows anything about."

"Yes."

"Well, we must have a look at them first; and now listen: These people have been carrying on their game for some time, have they not?"

"No doubt of it."

"Then their spoil must be immense."

"Not so much; I don't think Clarke found so very much value upon the premises considering."

"Nor do I, and that's what I have been thinking about. I feel pretty sure that there must be a great deal of swag hidden somewhere in this place."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, the fact of Clarke having been able to find so little."

"And a good reason too."

"Then my proposition is, that we look most carefully around, and what we find belongs to ourselves—no one will know anything about that."

"Certainly not."

"I have a presentiment that this will turn out a capital night's work for us; and what is more, the occupation will serve to make the time pass quicker."

"It will, and we have searched houses before to-day."

"Rather."

"And you understand share and share alike is the understanding?"

"Of course!"

"Then that being settled, we will set about the business at once."

The sound which now reached Tom King's ears convinced him that the officers were about to sally forth upon their questionable errand.

Our friends' position was now most ticklish.

Very little penetration or attention would have quickly convinced anyone that these two men were sharp and astute, and not by any means to be thought of at the same time as Moggs and Joel.

What Tom was anxious to know was whether they would commence their search in that outer room.

Nothing was more likely, and if so, nothing could prevent his discovery.

That he should be a match for these two men our old friend did not doubt, but yet he might sustain such an injury as would disable him.

He was therefore desirous of avoiding a contest, if such a thing was possible.

Another moment would decide the matter.

Like prudent men, the two police officers had carefully examined their weapons, so as to be in readiness in case of any emergency.

This done, they took up the lantern which the others had left behind, and sallied forth.

When about half-way across the outer room they paused.

Knight lifted the lantern above his head and glanced around him.

"There seems nothing here," he said, after a short pause.

"Nothing, but we will look more closely upon our return. It is no good beginning to do a thing in the middle."

"None at all."

"Come on, then."

"But we have not settled about where we shall commence the search."

"What do you say?"

"Oh, I don't mind! It will come to much the same thing, I suppose, whether we begin at the top of the

house and work our way down, or whether we begin in the cellar."

"No, no—the former is the best."

"As you like."

"We will go at once to the top of the house, and work our way gradually down. We shall pass over nothing, and we shall clear the way before us."

"Very good."

"You think that will be best?"

"I do."

"Then follow me—we will look for the stairs at once."

With these words, the two police officers quitted the room.

While they remained in it, Tom King had not ventured to draw his breath.

He had been crouched in the smallest possible compass behind the screen.

Now that his foes were gone, however, he noiselessly rose to his feet.

The sound of footsteps, the glimmer of the light, and the murmur of voices all grew fainter and fainter each second.

Still Tom listened.

At last the peculiar sound caused by the heavy riding-boots of the officers creaking upon the stairs reached Tom's ears.

Then he ventured to step out from his hiding-place.

The way of escape lay plain before him.

While the officers were at the top of the house, what would be easier than for Tom to slip out by the same means that he had employed to enter?

Fortune had favoured him indeed.

When the search was first talked about, the little window by which he had entered occurred to his mind, and, though he had taken the precaution to close it, yet the suspicions of the officers could not fail to be aroused by it.

Yet this danger was avoided.

With perfectly noiseless steps Tom crossed the room.

His intention was to make his way to the little window without a moment's delay.

But all at once he stopped.

A fresh thought had occurred to him, and he remained for about a moment in an attitude of deep reflection.

Then he seemed to come suddenly to a decision.

"I will do it!" he muttered to himself, with an air of great resolution. "It would be foolish to miss such a chance! I should ever repent if I missed it, and am glad I thought of it in time."

What Tom intended to do will quickly be seen.

He took one pistol in his hand, and held it in readiness for instant use.

Then he crept stealthily towards the staircase.

He had but little difficulty in making out where it was, for as yet Knight and Cunningham had not ascended so high as to prevent all beams from their light finding their way down below.

Cautiously, then, Tom began to ascend.

The reason for this sudden change in his proceedings was the intense anxiety and curiosity he experienced to have a peep at the body of the person who had accompanied Maud in her flight.

It cannot be wondered at that he should be anxious on this head.

He had overheard that he was a hunchback, that he had met with an accident, and that he had been brought back to the inn.

Now Tom not unreasonably thought that he should gain something if he could only take one peep at this hunchback's face.

Most people doubtless would have thought the risk by far too great.

Tom, however, considered the matter in quite a different light.

He believed that a special opportunity was afforded him, and that he should be much to blame if he neglected it.

Accordingly, he rapidly ascended the stairs.

The speed he made use of actually prevented any noise being made by his ascent, but yet when near the top he paused and listened somewhat anxiously.

Looking through the old oaken banisters, he could perceive a long kind of passage or corridor.

At the extremity of this could be perceived the gleam of light.

"I tell you there is no other way up!" he heard one say.

"Come on, then! I thought there was."

The officers now both approached Tom, who crouched down, scarcely comprehending what they were about.

Nearer and nearer they came, until they reached a kind of ladder which apparently formed a rude means of communication with an upper chamber.

This the officers ascended.

They were absent only for a moment, and then returned.

From their remarks, Tom understood that the ladder did not communicate with any upper room, but with the roof.

The officers did not trouble themselves about the staircase upon which Tom was hidden, for they did not so much as cast a glance towards it, so sure were they that no one could be there.

The first room they entered was the one nearest to the head of the staircase.

A moment only was required to enable them to examine this, and they came out, leaving the door ajar.

The next door was the one communicating with the room in which Maud had endured so much horror.

No sooner did they cross this threshold than Tom King, with the same noiseless step, bounded up the remaining stairs.

When at the top, one stride took him to the mat that lay just outside the door through which the police officers had passed, and which they had left half open.

Standing here, Tom was able to command a tolerably good view of the interior of the room, though he took care to keep in such a position as would prevent the officers from seeing him.

In this, however, he was almost unnecessarily cautious.

So intent and so absorbed were the police officers by what they beheld, that had Tom stood beside them they would scarcely at first have noticed his presence.

And no wonder at all was it that their faculties should be thus enwrapped.

Lying side by side upon the bed were two dead bodies.

At all times is death an unpleasant and uncomfortable spectacle, but on this occasion there was everything to aggravate its horror.

The first body was that of the traveller, whose corpse, as the reader will remember, Hunch had removed from the large chest and placed upon the bed.

The light from the officer's lantern fell full upon the face which Tom could tell belonged to one who might justly lay claim to the title of gentleman.

Upon his distorted features, however, there was an expression which seemed to convey the idea that at the moment of his dissolution he was conscious of the horrible and appalling fact that he was being secretly murdered, and that nothing more would be heard of him upon earth.

One glance, however, was all that Tom bestowed upon this unknown personage.

Lying by the side of him was Hunch.

The poor fellow presented a truly revolting sight.

His apparel had become soaked in blood, which had escaped from a wound in the breast, given him just as the inn was left.

Then his face was horribly battered, scratched, and disfigured, in consequence of the distance he had been dragged at the heels of his awe-struck horse.

His features were scarcely distinguishable.

Altogether, he was in a terrible plight, for the officers had carried him to the inn and placed him upon the bed in the same condition as they had found him.

"A nice piece of work!" said Cunningham, who was the first to speak. "It is not very comfortable to think you have got to keep guard over such things."

"Bah!" said the other. "Don't think of it except in the way of business; I never do, and I find it to be by far the best and wisest plan."

"If you can do so," replied the other, with a shudder. "Come on, I have had enough of this."

There was an immediate movement, and Tom at once beat a retreat



[TOM KING PURSUES THE FLYING FIGURE.]

His first thought had been to seek again the shelter of the staircase, but he feared that he should not be able to descend unseen.

A second thought told him that it would be much better for him to have the officers in front of him than at his back.

Accordingly, he just stepped to the door of the room the officers had lately visited, and which he reached with one stride.

To enter took him but an infinitesimal portion of time; and when once fairly in the chamber, he felt that he was about as safe as he well could be while beneath that roof.

The officers, having once satisfied themselves that there was no one there, would scarcely enter it again.

So thought Tom.

There was but one more bedchamber, and in that they remained so long that Tom was almost tempted to go and see what they were about.

His sense of hearing, however, enabled him to come to the conclusion that they were engaged in making a minute examination of the various articles it contained.

"I understand," said Tom, to himself, with a satisfied nod. "That must be the room generally occupied by the two wretches who kept this place. They are looking for booty."

This was no doubt the absolute fact of the case.

At length the officers came out again into the passage.

Tom just caught sight of their faces as they were about to descend the stairs.

It was easy to see that they had been baulked in their expectation of finding money.

"Depend upon it," said Knight, "they have chosen a good place to keep their ill-gotten wealth."

"But where is it?—that's the question."

"We must find out."

"I fancy that will give us some trouble."

"No doubt. But what does it matter—we have nothing else to do?"

"True; only it would be d—d annoying to work for nothing!"

By this time they had reached the bottom of the staircase.

Tom came from his hiding-place and looked down.

The officers were busy looking for the means of gaining admittance to the cellar—their impatience and the fact that they had made no discovery hitherto causing them to abandon their expressed intention of searching the house methodically.

The ground floor then was, by mutual consent, left unexamined for the present.

A door was found opening from under the staircase which apparently led down into the cellar.

"This is the way," said Knight. "Come on!"

He commenced the descent as he spoke.

His comrade followed without loss of time.

All now was dark.

As noiselessly as before, Tom King descended the stairs.

Once more was the way of escape open before him.

All he had to do was to make his way back to the little window by which he had entered, and so depart.

But again he hesitated to avail himself of this opportunity, though what he did seemed neither more nor less than daring danger to the uttermost.

An insatiable and uncontrollable curiosity, not only to see the cellar where the innkeeper and his wife had disposed of the evidences of their atrocities, but also to know what success the officers met with in their search for wealth, made him resolve still further to follow in their steps.

There can be no doubt this boldness was engendered by the success he had previously met with.

But other ideas were floating in Tom's mind—ideas which he hoped he should so elaborate as to cause them to turn out to his advantage.

What these ideas were will be quickly seen.

It did not take him more than a moment to decide upon his course.

By the time the two police officers had reached the bottom of the steps he was ready to follow them.

He did so, and discovered that now there was little fear that his footsteps would be overheard.

For some reason or other, the steps leading down into the cellar had been thickly covered with sawdust—

So thickly that, as Tom King descended, his feet sank deeply into it, so that he was absolutely able to make his way down with the noiselessness of a spectre.

CHAPTER MXXXII.

TOM KING TURNS HIS ADVENTURE TO GOOD ADVANTAGE, AND SUCCEEDS IN FRIGHTENING THE TWO OFFICERS.

When Tom reached the bottom of the steps, he found the officers before him in a cellar of considerable extent.

There were few barrels and bottles to be seen, however.

In the centre of the sawdust-covered floor was a large, dark object, the nature of which he could not at the first glance make out.

This, however, he soon after found was the well of which he had heard such a horrible account.

It was bricked round to a height of between three and four feet.

This was the most notable object the cellar contained.

The officers at once advanced to it.

Tom, concealed behind the brickwork, watched them eagerly.

The one with the light held it so that most of its beams were thrown down the terrible abyss.

"How deep!" said one.

"Hark! I can hear the water! It seems to be rushing at a fearful rate."

The other loosened a brick at the side of the well, and threw it down.

There was a succession of sharp blows, each one following its predecessor more swiftly, and then finally a heavy splash.

"Depend upon it," said Knight, as soon as the sound had died away, "that no one ever thrown down that well would be found again."

"It seems like it. The depth must be immense."

"Truly so. But we shall not find here what we seek, so let us set to work."

Hearing this, Tom King drew back.

The cellar was searched thoroughly, but with no result.

Tom King, however, was much interested in noticing the business-like manner in which they set about their work.

It was clear they had had plenty of experience.

"There's nothing here," said Knight; "but still, don't despair—there is the other cellar to search yet. Perhaps there we shall be rewarded."

"I fancy that is the likeliest place."

"So do I."

Tom King up to the present moment had not noticed that there was another cellar beyond the one in which the two officers stood, and which communicated with it by means of a low, arched doorway.

The officers passed through this in a moment, and the effect was that Tom King found himself again in darkness.

Determined not to miss seeing what they were about, he quickly crossed the floor of the cellar—which, like the steps, was covered with sawdust—and cautiously peeped in.

He saw before him a number of miscellaneous articles, chiefly, however, consisting of bottles and casks.

The latter the officers examined very particularly, as though they expected to find what they sought concealed in one of them.

If such was the case, their expectation was quickly realised, for Knight suddenly gave utterance to a loud cry, which was unmistakably one of triumph.

"Here we are," he said—"here we are! Hurrah!"

"Quietly—quietly," said his less-impressionable companion. "Don't make too sure."

"Let's settle it at once."

Knight held in his grasp a small cask, or rather keg—one of the kind used for small quantities of brandy.

This apparently was of great weight, and the contents were loose and rattled, so that there were reasonable grounds for conjecturing that this contained what they wanted.

But Knight, as he spoke, took speedy and effectual means of removing all doubts whatever.

Depositing the keg upon the ground, he glanced around him, as though in search of something.

His eye immediately fell upon a wooden mallet and a chisel.

Seizing upon these, he, by their aid, quickly broke open the cask.

The head fell out, and immediately there rolled upon the ground a quantity of glittering objects of all descriptions.

Tom distinguished watches, rings, brooches, guineas, silver coins, and, in fact, almost every article of personal adornment that was of value.

The contents of the keg could not be estimated as being worth less than several hundred pounds, so the officers might consider themselves as being well paid for the trouble they had taken, as of course they intended to keep this little find all to themselves.

"Cunningham, my boy," cried Knight, in a voice of great exultation, "this is something like, is it not?"

"Rather; but no more than I expected."

"Ha, ha! it's capital! Now you see what a thing it is to have a little courage! Why, lor' bless you, nine officers out of every ten would be frightened to death to come down into such a place as this."

"I can easily believe that, for I don't half like it myself."

"Bah!—nonsense!"

"But I tell you I don't! I fancy that well scents the whole place. To me it seems as though I kept on drinking blood instead of merely breathing the air."

"Hold your row, you fool! What do you want to talk like that for? If you go on so, you will end by being as frightened as the rest."

"I—I can't help it! I shudder now, and my back feels as though some one was pouring cold water down it."

"Ha—ha! Well, this is rich! But I'll tell you what, mate, is the best thing you can do."

"What—what?"

"Why, turn the whole of your attention to this nice little heap of treasure here. Just look at it—feast your eyes upon it, and you will soon get the better of all those ridiculous fancies."

"I—I can't do it!"

"Nonsense! Here, have something to drink."

"I could not touch it!"

"Yes, but, d—n it all, you are not going on like this, I hope! Come, bundle the things together again, and we will carry them upstairs."

"But—but——"

"What now?"

"Why, can't you see?"

"See what?"

"That they are all covered with—with blood! Yes, look, there is blood upon every one!"

"I'll be d—d if I should have thought this of you, old fellow; you are quite beside yourself."

The officer's teeth chattered together like castanets, and his eyes rolled in the most fearful manner around the vault, as though he expected every moment to encounter some horrible spectacle.

The alteration in his demeanour seemed at first to be surprising; but then, when the nature of the place is duly considered, it is not so much to be wondered at.

It is a well-known fact, however, that there is nothing more infectious than fear.

Now, Knight was about as free from all kinds of superstitious, or rather supernatural, impressions as any man well could be, yet this change in his comrade's demeanour produced a marked effect upon him.

Cunningham seemed every moment to grow more and more overcome.

Staggering slowly back, he paused at length with his back against the wall, his eyes rolling, his teeth chattering, and drawing his breath in short and fitful gasps.

Tom King watched all this with feelings of the greatest satisfaction.

It was just what he had been wishing for.

He now believed that he saw before him the means of accomplishing the purpose which had been hovering in his brain.

After a moment's reflection, he seemed to decide upon his course.

With hasty steps, he made his way to the staircase and ascended.

With the same rapidity, he entered the room where he had concealed himself, and where he recollected there was something which would be necessary to the carrying out of his intention.

This was nothing else than a large white table-cloth.

It was really astonishing to observe with what quickness Tom moved the different articles that stood upon the table, and then removed the cloth.

Rolling it up into a small compass, he again descended to the cellar.

Pausing at the bottom of the steps, he ascertained that the two officers were still standing where he had left them, the one endeavouring to inspire the other with courage, while he was conscious that his own firmness was fast giving way.

Silently, Tom glided to the well and took up his position in such a way that the brickwork around it was between himself and the entrance to the inner cellar, thus serving him with a slight and temporary hiding-place.

His first act was to spread out the table-cloth, and so on thoroughly to envelop himself in it.

The cloth was not long enough to cover the whole of the lower part of his person, but he considered that it would answer his purpose admirably.

One corner of the cloth he arranged to fall over his head and face, after the manner of a monk's cowl.

These preparations were made in much less time than it has taken us to describe them, and by the time they were completed there was a stir made by the officers.

Tom crouched down as low as ever he possibly could.

The brickwork of the well was quite sufficient to conceal him from the gaze of the two police officers when they emerged.

The reader will perceive that Tom's intention was to give them a terrible fright.

To what extent he succeeded will be quickly seen.

"D—n it all!" cried Knight, "don't stop here! Come on! Help me to carry the swag, and you may go on how you like upstairs."

"I—I cannot touch it!"

"If you don't help me you shall not have a shilling of it!"

"The curse of blood is on all!"

"The curse of a fiddlestick! Here—take the light! Are you afraid to carry that?"

There was no reply; but Tom concluded that the lantern was put into Cunningham's hands, for Knight said:

"There, there—hold it steady! Don't shake it about like that! D—d if I don't believe you will drop it, after all; if you do, we shall be in the dark, recollect!"

"No—no!" gasped Cunningham.

"But I say we shall!"

"I mean I shall not drop the lantern."

"All right then. Come on! That's the way. Pluck up your courage. What is there to be afraid of, I should like to know?"

Knight pronounced these words in a very defiant way, but yet it did not seem as though he was quite assured that there was nothing to be terrified about.

Stooping down, he picked up the keg of treasure, and, with heavy steps, advanced towards the doorway.

"You must go first," he said to his companion, "in order to show the way."

"D—d if I do, then!"

"How can I see?"

"I don't care. Put the treasure down."

"Don't you think you see me doing it, eh?"

"I do not want it."

"I do, though."

"Then carry it."

Thus disputing, the two officers passed from one cellar to the other.

Cunningham already was so frightened that he could scarcely move—indeed, it was only his strong desire to quit his present uncomfortable quarters that enabled him to make use of his legs at all.

Knight was just in that condition of mind which enabled him to preserve an outward semblance of boldness, but which would change into panic-stricken fear at the slightest unusual occurrence.

Just as the pair passed through the doorway, Tom King placed his lips close to the brickwork of the well, and uttered a low, deep groan.

The sound was most peculiar.

Tom himself was half startled by it.

The whole of the cellar seemed to ring with it, and to decide upon its source was assuredly a matter of impossibility.

It was echoed by a dismal yell from Cunningham, who gave so great a bound that it is ten thousand wonders the lantern did not fall

Knight stood motionless.

Silently, and without the least sound, Tom King rose to his feet.

It so happened that the eyes of both officers were turned towards the inner cellar, as though they were under the impression that the sound had come from thence.

Tom extended one hand in a warning, denunciatory manner.

Just then Knight and Cunningham caught sight of him, and both at the same moment.

The view of this ghastly-looking apparition standing as though it had just ascended from the well, made what little courage and fortitude they possessed abandon them.

They were at first struck dumb and motionless.

It would have been an ineffable relief to both could they but have given utterance to the yell of fear that was

ready to burst from their lips, or if they could have fled from the spot.

But speech and motion were alike denied them, so they remained silent, rooted to the spot.

So hideous was the scene that Tom had much difficulty in repressing a smile.

But he saw how slight a thing would now suffice to put a finishing stroke to their alarm, and cause them to flee as though ten thousand demons were at their heels.

"Impious villains!" he said, in low and sepulchral tones. "Your doom——"

He had time to say no more.

The awful words, and the still more awful voice in which they were pronounced, dissolved the spell that had weighed upon the officers.

Simultaneously, awful yells came from their lips.

Then there was a crash and total darkness.

Knight had dropped the cask—

Cunningham the lantern.

The former fell to the ground with so much force that it burst, and the valuable contents were strewed in all directions.

But Knight was quite heedless of them now.

The lantern had slipped from Cunningham's trembling fingers, and after rolling over once upon the sawdust was extinguished.

Then there was an awful rush.

The officers were anxious to a degree to quit this horrible place, but that very anxiety defeated their intention.

So blinded were they by their terror, and so confounded by the darkness, that though the steps were within a few feet of them, they groped about vainly and fruitlessly.

Tom groaned again.

Their terror was redoubled, and the scuffling incredibly increased.

At last, however, the foot of the steps was reached, and up they went with greater speed than ever they had made use of before.

Tom was delighted to think his stratagem had been so successful.

So soon, however, as he was certain that the officers were fairly on their way to the upper regions of the house, Tom proceeded to put the remainder and by far the more important portion of his plan into execution.

This related to the valuables which the officers had been terrified into leaving behind them.

Hastily throwing off the table-cloth which had served him so well, Tom folded it and proceeded to put it to still further use.

The darkness was profound, but yet he was able to find his way without difficulty to the spot where the precious contents of the cask lay scattered upon the floor.

With great speed he gathered them together and placed them in the middle of the cloth.

No doubt, in his haste, many escaped him—indeed, Tom intended that some should remain in order that when a little calmness took possession of the officers, which would probably be towards daylight, they would be able to perceive that they had been tricked out of their spoil.

The anticipation of their state of aggravation gave Tom much delight.

By far the greater part of the valuables was placed in the cloth; and then hastily forming the whole into a large bundle, Tom threw it over his shoulder and hastened up the steps.

Upon gaining the top he stopped, in order that he might, if possible, form some conception of the whereabouts of his terrified foes.

But all was profoundly still.

So still that Tom began to think that they had actually quitted the premises.

Whether they had done so or not, however, or whether they had concealed themselves in some inner room, Tom took no steps to discover.

He felt that the best thing he could do now was to get from beneath that roof with all convenient speed, as at any moment the courage of the officers might return to them, and then an awkward encounter might ensue, as they would be in a state of absolute frenzy.

Accordingly, when he had satisfied himself that the coast was clear, our friend made his way as well as he could to the little window by which he had entered.

He succeeded in finding it without much difficulty, and gained the open air without hearing or seeing aught of his foes.

Altogether Tom had ample grounds upon which to congratulate himself respecting the whole affair, but most especially upon the conclusion of it.

The bundle upon his shoulder was both large and heavy, and he felt that it would not be over convenient for him to carry it with him to any distance.

He made his way with it to the spot where he had left his horse.

The animal he found safe enough, and very contentedly cropping the sweet grass that grew about its feet.

It was not until after some moments' consideration that Tom mounted, and then it was with the resolution to find as speedily as possible some retired nook where he could bury his booty.

CHAPTER MXXXIII.

IN WHICH TOM KING GETS VERY STRANGELY ON THE WRONG TRACK.

It was not long before just such a place as Tom King required presented itself to his notice.

At no great distance from the inn he came across a small pool of water, over which hung a remarkable-looking weeping willow tree.

Among the roots of this he determined the treasure should be deposited.

He had no other tool for the purpose of making an excavation except his sword.

With this weapon, however, he set to work in good earnest.

It was not the first time he had put a sword to a similar use, and so he worked rapidly.

Moreover, the ground was of a very soft nature, which assisted him materially.

As soon as the hole was deep enough for his purpose, he wrapped the cloth well round the valuables and deposited them in it.

The earth was quickly covered over and the place restored to its usual appearance—the superfluous earth being easily got rid of by being thrown into the water.

Tom hastened over these proceedings as much as he could, for he was well conscious that the night was wearing fast away.

He had set his mind upon discovering Maud's whereabouts, if possible, before morning came upon him.

Mounting his steed and looking well around him in order that he might be able to recognise the place easily again, he rode off in the direction mentioned by the two officers.

This was actually for some distance on the direct road to the old water-mill where Maud had had so narrow an escape from death.

Tom looked about him very cautiously, for he did not know how soon he might catch sight of his pursuers.

But for a long time his pains and trouble met with no reward.

All at once, on passing round a sharp curve in the cross-road, he believed he saw something like a female figure flit before him at some distance on in front, and immediately vanish round the next turn.

This was quite enough to stimulate him to the utmost.

Touching his horse lightly with the spur, he set forward at full gallop.

The next turn was rounded, and again the figure came in sight.

There was no room for doubts now.

It was unquestionably a female, though in the darkness the outlines of her form were dim and ill-defined.

It would seem as though at this moment that she became conscious some one was pursuing her, for she uttered a shrill cry, which was unmistakably one of terror, and bounded onward at a rate which intense terror could alone have enabled her to make.

Tom echoed her cry by another.

But his was one of encouragement.

He did not suffer his horse to abate his speed, and as he galloped on he shouted:

"Maud—Maud! Fear nothing! All is well! I have come to save you!"

But either his words failed to reach her ears altogether, or else her great alarm rendered her deaf to every sound

for she continued to run with even greater swiftness than before.

But remarkably fleet as she was, it is not to be supposed that she could long keep ahead of Tom.

Yet although she must have known that to be overtaken was inevitable, she continued to strain every nerve.

Again and again Tom called after her, but with no more result than at first.

Once Tom's horse's head almost touched her shoulder.

At the same time she turned to look back, and the sight so startled her that she gave a tremendous bound, which at once carried her several feet ahead.

But it was a last effort.

With a wild, despairing cry, which thrilled strangely to Tom's heart, she sank down in front of him as though all at once struck down by lightning.

Tom uttered a shout.

He felt assured that nothing could save her from being run over.

He pulled the rein hard, and the horse, seeing something lying in its path, swerved aside, and with so much abruptness that Tom was almost unseated.

The effort he made to regain his proper position in the saddle increased the fright which the horse already felt, and he broke out into a terrific gallop.

It was some moments before Tom could bring him to a standstill, but having done so, he compelled him to retrace his steps.

On regaining the spot where she had fallen, Tom precipitately alighted.

He fancied she had lost all consciousness, but this was not the case, for on his appearance she endeavoured to rise to her feet and resume her headlong flight.

But her strength was gone, and she sunk down again with a moan.

Now Tom was never more certain of anything in his life than he was that this was Maud.

It never once occurred to him that there could be a possibility of its being anyone else.

What, then, was his surprise when he all at once discovered that he had been quite upon a wrong track.

Although not exactly morning, yet there was sufficient dim gray light to enable him to perceive that this was a young girl many years younger than Maud, and that her skin was so dark that she looked like an Indian.

Indeed, Tom came at once to the conclusion that she was not of European birth, there was something so foreign-looking in her countenance.

But for all that, the dusky features were truly beautiful.

No tiny bird fluttering beneath a hawk could have manifested greater terror than this young girl did when Tom bent over her.

Perceiving it, he endeavoured, by speaking in gentle tones, to reassure her.

"Fear nothing," he said—"do not be afraid. You have not, believe me, the least cause for alarm. I took you for another of whom I am in search."

Tom spoke without thinking whether his words would be understood.

Evidently, however, they were not only comprehended, but believed, for, raising her head, she clasped one of his hands in both her own, and sank down upon her knees.

"Help me—help me!" she said, faintly. "Help me and save me, for I am sorely in need of protection!"

"Be calm—be calm!" cried Tom, allowing her to continue her appeal; "such help as I can give you shall be afforded freely. Tell me what it is you fear."

The young girl glanced around her timorously.

She placed one of her tiny hands to her ear and listened intently.

Tom noted that the fingers were loaded with jewelled rings.

"I have escaped," she said—"escaped from a fate far worse than death itself. Yes—yes, I think I can now venture to say that I have escaped."

"No harm shall reach you while I am near," said Tom, resolutely, "so be under no more apprehension. Tell me what I can do to serve you?"

This was a question that seemed to cause the girl considerable perplexity.

Tom saw she was in deep thought, and waited patiently for her answer.

But instead of giving it, she burst into a flood of tears.

Tom allowed her grief to have full vent for some moments, for he knew how much her heart would be relieved.

Then, if possible, with greater deference, he repeated his question.

"Alas—alas, sir!" she replied; "I know not how to answer you—in fact, I feel myself unable to give you a reply."

"Can I assist you with my advice?"

"Would you have patience to listen to a few particulars of my life? If so, then——"

"Say on. Speak freely. Believe me, on my word, when I say that from this moment forth I am devoted to your service until I can place you in some safe position."

The young girl looked the thanks she was not able to express, and murmured:

"It is strange indeed to meet with so much sympathy. Believe me, I shall ever be your debtor."

Tom laughed.

"Think not of me in such a light," he said. "Indeed, the less you know of me the better."

His words caused a look of surprise to flit across her features, but observing that Tom stood waiting to hear the particulars of which she had spoken, she said:

"I must go so far back as to tell you that my mother was the only daughter of an English officer in India. She was his pet—his idol. But as she grew up, chance threw her in the way of one of the native Indian princes. He was young, chivalric, rich, and handsome. A mutual love ensued, which, however, upon discovering, her father sternly forbid.

"But his mandate was unheeded. The young Indian chief's tender entreaties, glowing pictures of the future, and assurances that in the end all would be well, proved of far greater power than her father's mandates.

"Flight followed. They were married, and a year afterwards I was born.

"It seems strange that I should tell you all this. Yet in a few moments you will perceive the necessity of it, for I am utterly friendless and helpless in a foreign land, where I have known little save unhappiness since my arrival in it."

"I am deeply interested," Tom observed; "and if I made any remark upon the subject, it would be to request you to enter fully into all particulars. Rely upon it I shall be a patient and observant listener."

"Thanks—many thanks! My reason for telling you so much of the past is that you may the better comprehend the present. My grandfather was bitterly wroth when he discovered my mother's flight, and his hatred now became as intense as his love had been.

"My father perished in a skirmish with his foes, and my mother after that endured many privations, all of which I shared, though I was then too young thoroughly to comprehend them.

"One day, however, the news came that my grandfather had died in England—that with his last breath he had forgiven his daughter and left her the whole of his vast wealth. At that time he was not certain whether she was alive or dead. If the former, then she was to make her way to England without loss of time; if the latter, then her children were to do so; and in case none survived, the property was to pass into the hands of a nephew of my grandfather's.

"This nephew was also appointed executor for the time being—I believe that is the proper word.

"My poor mother had lived so long without her father's pardon that she had ceased to hope for and expect it. The knowledge that his displeasure still continued, and the loss of her much-loved husband, weighed upon her spirits to such a degree that she pined away daily. I have heard it said that joy never kills, but it is certain that after this news my mother sank quickly into the grave.

"However, she started for Calcutta, in company with myself, her only child. We took passage on board a vessel, but ere we had gone a hundred miles my mother breathed her last.

"My position then was sad—sad indeed—sadder indeed, I think, than you would be able to form any conception of

"But I must not linger. In brief, we reached London, and then I met this nephew of whom I spoke, and who I now learned had, in consequence of my mother's death, become my guardian.

"When I saw him first I shuddered involuntarily. I knew not why, for there was nothing extraordinary or repulsive in his manner or appearance, and I felt ashamed of my sensations.

"He took me at once to a magnificent house a little way from London, and in a few days he began to make proposals of marriage to me.

"I felt assured that it was not love for me which prompted him to take this course.

"It was merely in order that he might not lose the money and estates.

"I at once replied firmly in the negative, and positively assured him that his suit was useless. But he took not the least notice of my denial, and urged upon me that it was my grandfather's last wish that we should be united.

"This consideration had not the least weight with me; indeed, as I had never heard of this before, I believed it to be neither more nor less than a fabrication made to answer his own ends and purposes.

"He little thought, perhaps, that I was one who would not be moved from a course resolved upon. Even had he prepossessed me favourably, instead of the reverse, his suit would have been equally in vain, for—for—there—there—was——"

"Another?" said Tom, perceiving her hesitation.

"Yes, one whom I had known from childhood—my constant playmate—one that I loved dearer than life—the only son of my father's dearest friend, and, like my father, a native Indian prince.

"We were affianced before my departure from the land of my birth, and he promised to follow me here with all speed."

"And has he done so?"

"Yes, and on his appearance my guardian grew furious. He called him a barbarian, and declared that his consent should never be given to such a union, and accordingly began by preventing all communication between us.

"At the same time he took prompt measures to coerce me into a marriage with himself. I resisted to the utmost of my ability; but it availed little, his power was so much greater than mine.

"At last, soon after sunset yesterday, I was suddenly surprised by the entrance of many persons into my chamber, which, though a luxuriously appointed one, was nevertheless to me nothing more than a dungeon, for I was not allowed on any pretext to leave it.

"I was amazed at what I saw, and for a little while was quite unable to comprehend it.

"But I soon discovered that every preparation had been made for the performance of the marriage ceremony.

"In spite of my entreaties, remonstrances, and resistance, a mockery of the solemn service was gone through. Those persons who were present were clearly mere tools of my villanous guardian's. In a few moments I was declared a wife, the ceremony being pronounced a legal and a binding one—indeed, all those present were willing to swear such was the case.

"This overwhelmed me quite, and I burst into a frantic passion of tears.

"My guardian approached me with an exultant smile upon his lips.

"'Fool!' he said. 'Did you for a moment think that I should suffer myself to be reduced to beggary by such a one as you are? No, no! Learn now, if you were ignorant of it before, that you are irrevocably mine!'

"His words rang in my ears like a death-knell. I was overcome, and in a faint voice murmured a request to the effect that I might be left alone.

"'Willingly,' he said. 'You need be under no fear that I shall trouble you much with my company. My end now is achieved, and I am content.'

"With these words, he left me.

"I sank down distracted.

"What was I to do?

"I felt that the time had not yet altogether passed away for me to make resistance, and, impressed with this conviction, I sprang to my feet.

"I darted at once to the door of my chamber.

"For the first time for a long while, it was unfastened. When I found it yield easily to my hand, I could scarcely believe in the reality of so much good fortune.

"Without pausing to consider, however, I passed out, wondering all the while whether in his excitement my guardian had forgotten his habitual caution, or whether he believed that I was now hopelessly and for ever in his power.

"Be this how it may, I descended the staircase with a fast-beating heart.

"I was so fortunate as to reach the foot of it unheard—unseen.

"There was a door close by opening into the garden; I gained it, passed out, and finally got quite clear of the premises.

"Before I had time to run far—for I fled with all the speed I was capable of making, though chance alone directed my footsteps—I became conscious that my flight had been discovered and a pursuit commenced.

"I had not time to think which way I should go—to me all roads were the same, so that they led me away from my hateful prison.

"My strength, however, quickly failed me, and I almost gave myself up for lost.

"My pursuers were coming on rapidly behind me.

"But in India I had had to fly more than once, and therefore knew what stratagem to put into execution.

"Observing a dark place in the road, I concealed myself behind the bushes that grew there, forcing myself among their roots, and lying so closely on the ground that I felt certain nothing but a rigid search could discover me.

"But my pursuers rode on without dreaming I should put any such stratagem into practice; and as soon as ever they were out of hearing, I rose again, and swiftly retraced my steps, for then I knew that I was getting away from them at a double speed.

"Ere long, I felt certain, they would guess what I had done; but before that I hoped to be on the road to a place of safety.

"Not to detain you longer, I can say that all this night I have been pursued, with difficulty keeping out of their hands. I was just congratulating myself that I had shaken them off at last when I perceived you, and, of course, at once took you for one of my foes."

"A very natural mistake," said Tom.

"Tell me," she continued, with greater earnestness than she had before employed—"tell me where I am to go—what I am to do!"

This was a matter not easily decided.

Tom looked thoughtful.

He began to feel that he had incurred a very serious responsibility.

The more he thought over his position, the more his embarrassment increased.

"Is there no friend under whose protection I can place you?" he asked, at length.

"None whatever. I am a total stranger in England."

Tom looked more perplexed still.

Just then he felt he had quite enough to do to look after his own safety without being burdened by anyone.

Still, his word having been given, he felt also that he could not run back from it.

What added to his embarrassment very considerably, however, was the fact that the Indian girl kept her full black lustrous eyes bent upon his face.

Suddenly, however, she started up.

A strange cry escaped her lips—a cry that echoed far and wide over the mist-covered meadows.

Then, in shrill tones of great excitement, she cried, clasping her hands together:

"Zariel—Zariel—Zariel!"

CHAPTER MXXXIV.

THE POLICE OFFICERS KEEP CLOSE UPON TOM'S TRACK.

It would be easy enough to say that Tom King was very much startled and surprised at this sudden change in the manner of the Indian girl, but then those words would be very far indeed from conveying a just conception of his amazement.

Her hands were clasped together, and her arms out-

stretched, while her eyes appeared to be fixed upon some distant object.

As soon as ever he recovered from the first shock of his astonishment, Tom turned round to look in the direction upon which his companion's gaze was riveted

He then saw, riding along at a rapid rate, a young man whose appearance was very extraordinary, for he was clad in Indian costume.

Nevertheless, he sat in the saddle with peculiar grace and the horse which he bestrode was one of the most magnificent-looking creatures that Tom had ever beheld.

His speed and action, too, were in accordance with his appearance.

By this time the day had fairly dawned, though it was not yet light enough for distant objects to be descried distinctly.

It was evident that the horseman had heard the words which had just been pronounced, for he reined-in his steed with great abruptness and looked eagerly about him.

The spot occupied by Tom King and the Indian girl happened to be in deep shadow, so at first, owing to the uncertain light, he failed to perceive them.

But she was determined not to let him remain long in ignorance of her whereabouts, for she cried:

"Zariel—Zariel! Come—come! I am here!"

The words evidently reached the horseman's ears, for he immediately galloped towards them.

As he came nearer, Tom saw that he was both young and handsome, though his beauty was of the Oriental type.

The unmistakable joy and delight visible upon the countenance of the young girl, and the ardour of the horseman, very quickly let our old friend know that this was the lover of whom mention had been made.

When he had reached to within a few yards of where they stood the girl bounded forward, again pronouncing the singular but yet musical name.

Zariel, seeing her approach, at once stopped his horse and slipped from the saddle and, altogether heedless of Tom's presence, clasped her tightly to his breast.

The manner in which the embrace was received was quite enough to let the highwayman know that they were on the best of terms with each other.

To tell the truth, he was heartily rejoiced at this encounter, which had taken place just at the moment when his perplexity was greatest.

He was conscious also that he was not wanted any longer, so he quickly mounted his steed and rode off.

But no sooner were the first transports of joy over between the lovers than the Indian girl poured out a rapid account of what Tom King had done in her behalf.

Consequently, before our friend had gone far, he heard a loud voice calling upon him to stop.

He obeyed with great willingness, for his eyes having been busily at work glancing around him, disclosed to his view a small party of police officers.

They would have been invisible but for the fact that the just-risen sun, towards which Tom's back was turned, poured his rosy rays full upon them.

Moreover, at this precise moment of time they happened to occupy a slightly-elevated piece of ground.

To have gone on any further in that direction would have been madness.

So far as he could tell, Tom believed that the police officers had not been sufficiently lynx-eyed to catch sight of him.

He turned round, therefore, in a moment, and the first thing he saw after having done so was Zariel waving his hand to him.

On reaching the spot where the lovers were, Tom bowed and paused.

"We cannot let you leave us thus, sir!" said Zariel, speaking English with some hesitation and difficulty, and with a peculiar foreign accent. "I have just heard of your sympathy and devotion, and cannot allow you to part without making you some recompense for it."

"I seek no recompense," replied Tom, somewhat haughtily. "What I have done has been of my own free will and without any expectations whatever. In a word, you are quite welcome."

"But we cannot allow you to part thus," said Zariel—"indeed we cannot! Surely your position cannot be such that it is impossible for me to do something for you in return?"

"There is one question to which I much wish an answer," said Tom; "and if you have been riding far to-night you may be able to answer. That will be quite a sufficient return for what I have done."

"Speak—speak!"

Tom then gave a close description of Maud's personal appearance, and asked if he had seen her.

The reply was a negative.

"That is enough!" he said. "Farewell!"

"Nay, nay," said Zariel; "surely you will not refuse to accept of some slight hospitality? I cannot entertain you as I could wish, but a short distance off there is a dwelling where I reside, and to which you are heartily welcome if you will only favour me so far as to come."

These words caused Tom to hesitate.

He was thinking busily.

It took him but a moment to decide.

He remembered the officers of whom he had caught sight.

He recollected that it was not until midnight that he should be able to meet with his companions.

All the day was before him—the very period when it was hardest to conceal himself from his foes, and when he could do least towards a discovery of Maud.

These considerations rapidly presenting themselves to him induced him to murmur a few words of thanks for the invitation which had been given, and to accept it.

There can be no doubt the young Indian was in earnest, for his face lighted up immediately.

"Come, sir," he said; "henceforth I hope we shall be to each other as friends and brothers. Follow me; you are heartily welcome to share all I have."

With these words he alighted, lifted the Indian girl to the saddle before him, and led the way.

Tom breathed freely, for the direction was such as to lead him right away from the spot where he had seen the officers standing.

After this no words of importance were exchanged, for Tom King purposely kept some distance in the rear, in order that the young couple might converse freely with each other.

In a few moments Tom perceived a large, stately-looking edifice surrounded by a high brick wall, and which he doubted not was destined to be his halting-place.

"I ought to deem myself lucky," he said, "for surely beneath this roof I shall be able to remain a few hours unmolested."

His conjecture respecting his destination proved correct.

The young Indian prince rode direct towards some fine massive-looking gates.

His approach must have been expected, or at least perceived, for immediately upon his arrival one half of the folding doors receded upon its hinges.

A broad, well-kept gravel path was then disclosed, along which they proceeded rapidly, and finally paused in front of the mansion itself.

Quite a troop of servants—but all of them Indians, doubtless devoted followers of the prince—came forth, and after many salaams assisted him to alight.

But Tom slipped from his horse before anyone had time to reach him.

"This way," said Zariel—"this way. Would that I could give you such a reception as I should wish—such as you shall have if ever you visit me in my own land!"

Tom murmured a few words of thanks and crossed the threshold.

He looked about him with great interest and curiosity, for all that he beheld possessed the charm of novelty.

The young prince had endeavoured to make the interior of the plainly-built mansion as much like one of his own palaces as possible, and the effect was in consequence rather incongruous, and yet by no means unpleasing.

An Oriental repast was quickly laid before them, to which Tom did ample justice.

He was able to discover, however, among the frequent pauses in the conversation that the young couple were far from being well at ease.

His presence could not fail to be a restraint upon them, and therefore he resolved to relieve them of it.

Accordingly he pleaded extreme fatigue, and requested that he might be shown into an apartment where he could refresh himself with a few hours' sleep.

His request was readily complied with.

Zariel, however, would insist upon accompanying him to this fresh chamber, for he was grateful for what Tom had done in his loved one's behalf, and he felt that he could not do him too much honour.

The apartment they entered was, like all the rest, fitted up in Indian fashion.

Tom never could tell what it was that prompted him to advance to the window and look out, but he did so in obedience to an impulse that he could not resist.

Perhaps in his mind lingered some remembrance of the officers he had seen, together with the fact that this window being on an upper floor would enable him to command a tolerably extensive view around.

Be it what it may, however, this was his first act.

He shrank back at once.

At the very first glance he had caught sight of the officers.

They were on foot, and walking up the broad, gravelled path leading to the house.

Although some little distance from the window, Tom was able to observe their movements, though, owing to this change of position, he felt certain that there was little danger of the officers catching sight of him.

How on earth they could have tracked him hither was a mystery, for, of course, by no other supposition than this could their presence be accounted for.

What was to be done?

Tom asked himself this important question with a slight amount of uneasiness.

He glanced towards the prince, who at that moment was busily occupied in giving some directions to an attendant.

The moment the highwaymen's eyes fell upon him he was struck by an idea.

"Prince," he said, "one moment! I wish you to look through this window."

The prince came forward at once.

But, to Tom's infinite chagrin, the officers were out of sight.

"I wished to call your attention to some men I saw approaching. They must be concealed by that clump of evergreens. Yes, look—look! here they come!"

At this moment the officers appeared in view again, their disappearance being merely owing to the fact that the path they were pursuing wound round a large mass of dark-leaved trees.

And if Tom had had any doubt about the intentions and destination of these officers it would have been completely dissipated by their actions.

One who was walking slightly in advance half turned round to those who were behind him, while at the same time he raised one arm and pointed towards the mansion.

That he said something was certain, though of course the distance was much too great for the words to be overheard where Tom stood.

Having pointed out the officers to the prince, he led him from the window, and said, in a low and impressive voice:

"Prince, there is no time now for explanation—let it suffice to tell you that those men you have just seen are my foes, and that they seek my life."

The prince at once carried his hand to the hilt of his jewelled sword, as if to show his readiness and willingness to do battle on his guest's behalf.

But Tom restrained him.

"They must be met by cunning, not violence."

"I do not understand you."

"I can soon explain."

"Do so—do so! Command me to the uttermost!"

The prince was so accustomed to sudden encounters of one sort or another in his native land that he would, if Tom had permitted him, have put the mansion instantly in a state of defence, and called upon his army of attendants to do battle.

But such a course as this Tom knew very well would eventually produce more harm than good.

Stratagem must be adopted.

"Prince," he said, "what I wish is to induce in the minds of these men a belief that I am not here."

The prince looked half puzzled.

"No hiding-place would be secure against them, and so what I want you to do is simply to disguise me in some apparel like your own, and, if questioned, merely say that I am a friend who has accompanied you from India."

The prince caught at the idea at once.

He clapped his hands.

The door opened, and he immediately poured out a torrent of words that Tom could not understand, but which he guessed were instructions what to do.

The servants rushed out, tumbling over each other in their eager haste.

But they made good speed.

Tom was attended by a wonderful retinue.

More hands than he could count were busy about his person.

He remained quite passive, for he thought he could not do better than resign himself totally to them.

Their dexterity was surprising.

Almost with the quickness of a magical transformation, Tom King's outward semblance was quite changed.

Last of all was brought some liquid in a vial, which was sparingly applied to his face and hands.

The effect was to impart to the skin of both that peculiar tint which so well became the prince himself.

This done, the troop of busy attendants stood on one side, and, for the first time since the commencement of these operations, Tom King caught a full-length view of himself in a large swinging mirror that hung opposite to him.

He started with surprise, as well he might.

He failed utterly to recognise himself.

At this moment there came one loud, heavy, blundering knock upon the front door of the mansion, thus making known the coming of the officers for the first time.

The fact that Tom's metamorphosis had been made complete while the officers were walking up the winding avenue will serve to convey a tolerable idea of how speedy it had been.

But our friend happened to be about the same height and build as the prince, so that the apparel fitted him admirably, and when thus costumed they looked like two twin brothers.

"Caution your attendants not to say a word about this, and to secrete my apparel," whispered Tom.

"It does not matter," answered Zariel, "there is not one that can speak or understand a single word of English; still it will be best to be on the safe side."

Some words of caution were then addressed to the servants, who quitted the chamber and separated.

In the meantime the officers were admitted.

"I think you can make yourself content now," said the prince, as he sank indolently upon a pile of cushions.

"Yes, thanks to you."

"Nay, do not mention it."

"I cannot forbear doing so."

"I am only too glad to think that an opportunity has so soon arisen of requiting you for the service you have rendered me."

"There is one thing——" said Tom, and then he checked himself.

"What—what? Say on."

"It would serve to blind the officers still more if we were to descend the staircase together, and go for a walk in the grounds. They would not be able to gaze at me so narrowly as they perhaps would if they found me in a room, nor would they be able to stay so long."

"Be it so," said Zariel—"the thought is good—come!"

With these words he arose.

Tom followed him quickly.

On passing round a bend in the staircase they caught sight of the officers down below in the hall.

They were endeavouring, though vainly, to make their errand known to the prince's retainers.

The latter, upon seeing their master approach, turned round and greeted him after the Oriental fashion, remaining with their heads hung down until after he should have passed.

Thus to walk right up to the officers was subjecting Tom's disguise to a very severe ordeal; but, then, he felt assured that the very boldness of this proceeding would go far towards causing success.

In spite of his boldness, he could not help feeling



[MAUD DEFENDS HERSELF FROM THE MILLER AND HIS WIFE.]

slightly uneasy at the consciousness that the eyes of so many of his foes were upon him.

But of this Tom admirably concealed all outward manifestation.

Watching the movements of the prince very closely, he imitated them as well as he was able.

He succeeded much better than he dared to flatter himself he did.

The foremost officer involuntarily made an awkward bow when he saw Zariel approach, and as he did so he said:

"Beg pardon, sir, I am sure—very sorry!—but we have traced a desperate character to the neighbourhood of your dwelling. We are most anxious to capture him, and wish for your permission to make a thorough search about these premises."

"You are welcome," said the prince— go where you choose."

He waved his hand as he spoke

The police officers mechanically stood aside to allow him to pass.

Tom accompanied. as before.

So close did he pass to his foes, however, that his ample dress almost touched them.

But no suspicion of his identity was entertained.

'T was easy enough to see that, and besides, had there been, those officers must have been gifted with an almost supernatural share of cleverness.

The prince and the highwayman passed out of the doorway together, descended the steps, and strolled into the grounds.

Tom had not been candid enough to give the prince his principal reason for wishing to be in the open air.

It was because he knew full well, in case of his disguise being penetrated, he should then have a ten times better chance of making his escape

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But that danger was to all appearances over.

Tom, however, was not one to suffer himself to be lulled into a state of false security, and therefore, although things seemed going on so well, he kept a vigilant look-out.

As soon as they had retired to a safe distance, the prince laughed lightly, and said:

"Excellent! No one could recognise you now, I feel convinced, so greatly are you altered. You are deserving of much credit."

"Nay—nay, the credit belongs to you. I shall ever be your debtor."

"No more of that. But it amuses me to think you should have walked before them in so barefaced a manner. I know not who you are, but that act convinces me that you are gifted with no ordinary share of courage. I should never have thought of so bold a thing."

Tom laughed.

In this manner a considerable time elapsed, during which the police officers were busily occupied with unnecessary labour.

By-and-by, however, they came into the grounds, and then the prince and Tom, without particularly appearing to avoid them, sought the shelter of the house.

Still it seemed as though the officers were by no means satisfied, but at length, after much lingering, they took their departure, to Tom's great content.

Again he betook himself to his chamber, but he did not venture yet to change his costume, lest he should be favoured by another visit.

All hope of getting a few hours' sleep, too, was at an end, for he felt that it was requisite for him to keep a sharp look-out from the window.

He maintained this position until nearly mid-day.

Up to that time all had gone well, and as he was overcome with fatigue, he flung himself upon the cushions and fell asleep.

It was not until dusk had fairly crept over the earth that he opened his eyes again.

Perceiving how late it was, he, after a little reconnoitring, resumed his own apparel, which he was very glad to do.

He had scarcely finished when the prince entered.

"With your leave," said Tom, "I will now take my departure. I have an important appointment to keep at some distance from this place, and so I must bid farewell to your hospitalities."

"I am glad you have spoken first," said the prince, "otherwise you might have thought that I was anxious for you to depart, and rather than that I would put up with any inconvenience."

"I do not understand."

"I will explain in a few words. During the day we have been holding an anxious consultation, and the result of it is that we have determined to quit England together with the least possible loss of time."

"And a very wise determination too," said Tom. "It was the very course of action I was about to recommend you to follow, for, by what I know, I fancy that the guardian has by far the better claim. The only difficulty is her wealth, to which he has no manner of right and title, and therefore he ought not to be permitted to enjoy it."

The prince snapped his fingers contemptuously.

"I care not that much for all the wealth—I have now all that I require."

"In that case, then," said Tom, "let me assure you that you cannot too soon take your departure from England, and, in order that no time be lost, let me now bid you farewell."

The prince seemed much affected at this separation, for short as had been the time during which they had been together, yet it was long enough to enable Tom to win his way to his heart.

It is only natural that the prince should like him, for from his earliest years he had been taught to look upon bravery as the most important of all personal qualifications, and Tom had shown that he possessed more than an ordinary share of that quality.

After the exchange of a few more words, the prince clapped his hands, and upon the appearance of the attendant gave orders for Tom's horse to be immediately got in readiness.

Our friend then descended with him and took his farewell of the Indian girl, who was no less affected than Zariel at the prospect of a separation.

His last words to the prince, who followed him to the door of the mansion, were:

"Do not fail to take my advice. I should be glad to know that the happiness of both of you was assured in the future, and it will, I feel confident, if you are left unmolested. Therefore, quit England without loss of time."

"I have made every preparation," was the reply, "and shall take my departure almost immediately. In order that we may travel with all speed, I shall leave nearly the whole of my attendants behind me."

"That is right. Let nothing occur to make you change your determination. If you do, I feel assured that you will rue it."

So saying, Tom descended the steps before the front door and mounted his steed, which was held by a swarthy attendant of the prince's.

Tom's eye sparkled when he saw how well cared for the animal had been.

Never had he seen it look to better advantage.

Never did it seem to manifest so much impatience to be off, and never did it seem more competent to outrun any others that might pursue it.

In a moment Tom was seated in the saddle.

All around him was very still—suspiciously still, he thought.

As he rode slowly away, and got behind the clump of evergreens which we have mentioned as having for a time concealed the approach of the officers, he thoroughly examined all his weapons.

After having satisfied himself that all were in perfect order and in readiness for instant use, he increased his speed.

The massive gate opened at his approach, and closed behind him again with a heavy clang, which seemed to Tom like a harsh note of separation between himself and his new-made friends.

But this fancy was quickly dispelled by the sound of footsteps and the cry of voices.

"There, now!" he heard some one say quite distinctly. "I told you so—didn't I? Quick—quick! We shall have him after all!"

Tom turned quickly, and caught sight of the police officers who had made so ineffectual a search about the mansion and grounds.

They had concealed themselves behind an abrupt angle formed by the high brick wall which we have already described.

There was a sudden rush while these words were spoken, and then the foremost officer rapidly raised a pistol and discharged it before Tom King was aware of his intention.

"My orders are, alive or dead," muttered the officer, as he pulled the trigger, "and I mean to make sure of you. I don't see why one need be so very particular about a d—d highwayman!"

Tom reeled in the saddle.

For a moment he fancied he should fall.

So did the officers, and with loud yells of triumph they came bounding on.

But Tom recovered himself.

Although believing that he was badly hit, yet he determined to show fight to the last.

Rapidly drawing one of his own pistols he turned round and fired, taking no particular aim except that he marked at the throng of officers.

Then, without waiting to see what, if any, effect was produced by this discharge, he faced his horse round and urged him onward at full speed.

The first thing he wondered at was that he should feel such slight effects from the bullet which had been discharged at him.

It was a mystery, and while galloping along at that terrific pace he resolved to do his best towards elucidating it.

The discovery was quickly made.

The bullet had actually struck against one of the large metal buttons on the front of his coat.

But it had struck obliquely, and had then glanced off, doing him no injury.

The force and suddenness of the blow, however, were such as to cause him to reel in the manner we have stated

This was a most agreeable discovery to make, and Tom heartily congratulated himself upon his good fortune.

Still, the narrow escape he had had from death did not fail to make him feel decidedly uncomfortable.

He was therefore very wise to make the resolution of banishing the thought altogether.

Under such exciting circumstances as the present it was likely enough that he would succeed.

Glancing back, he saw that the police officers had commenced a pursuit, and if the manner in which they whipped and spurred their horses could be taken as an indication of their intentions, then most assuredly did they intend to strain every nerve to attempt the accomplishment of their purpose.

But Tom only smiled while he observed their efforts.

He had got an excellent start already, and was well aware how important a thing that was in a race.

Then, his horse he felt certain could go at a speed which would utterly preclude all hope of any of the officers overtaking him, unless he should be so unfortunate as to meet with some accident.

Tom King accordingly took off his hat and made a very low bow with it, just as he would have done had he been wishing some one good night with an extra amount of politeness.

This act was thoroughly well understood by the officers, and the reader will not need to be told that it would have a most galling effect upon them.

It was well calculated to work up their aggravation to the highest pitch.

Tom King now turned his attention in good earnest to getting away.

Already the night was closing in, and although it wanted several hours of the time when he had appointed to meet his companions, yet he wished to have his actions unfettered without delay, in order that he might make one more attempt to discover the whereabouts of Maud.

Tom's horse galloped on in gallant style.

Indeed, it is no exaggeration whatever to say that for every three yards which the officers' horses made he went six.

Such being the case, it follows as a matter of course that they were ere long left quite behind.

When completely out of sight and hearing, Tom abruptly changed his course, for all this time he had been going in a direction almost opposite to that which he had made up his mind to take.

He did not very greatly relax his speed until he found himself once more in the vicinity of the Jolly Tar Inn.

But he was not so temerarious as to venture too near to it this time.

Working round this building in a circle, Tom sought everywhere for some trace of Maud.

But quite in vain.

Nothing at all could be seen of her.

Yet, despite his non-success, he continued his search perseveringly.

At length the hour of midnight drew near.

"I must give up," he said, "and yet it vexes me extremely to have to do so. I made sure that I was on the right track. I ought to have discovered her—I feel that I ought, and I shall ever blame myself for not having done so. My only hope is that some of my comrades may have been more fortunate than myself, but that, I feel, is a frail, frail hope indeed."

It was therefore in great depression of spirits that Tom slowly made his way to the place of rendezvous.

He reached the blasted tree somewhere about the appointed time.

On his arrival he found all dark and dreary.

He had arrived first.

The wind howled with a dismal sound among the branches of the trees around, and sounded in Tom's ears like a prognostication of coming evil.

Time passed.

Still, save and except for the melancholy wailing of the wind, the silence remained unbroken.

All the while Tom kept his sense of hearing on full stretch.

At last he was rewarded by hearing a welcome sound.

It was the clatter of horses' feet.

Clearer and clearer and more unmistakable became the sound, and he leaned forward eagerly in the saddle, in the hope of being able to see who it was approaching.

"Three riders," he muttered, as he detected the footfalls of three horses—"three riders. Who can they be? Am I doomed to a disappointment after all?"

As he asked himself the question, he shrank back as far as he was able into the concealing shadow cast by the gloomy trees.

CHAPTER MXXXV.

RETURNS TO MAUD IN THE MILLER'S COTTAGE.

It is necessary now that we should revert to the proceedings of Maud.

We feel assured that the reader will willingly follow us in a recital of her fortunes, especially as we have left her for so long a space.

We go back, then, to that poverty-stricken cottage, or rather hut, that adjoined the water-mill.

It will be remembered that when Maud learned from the lips of the miller's wife that the time had passed when she ought to have conveyed the warning, she, with a despairing cry, had sprung up from the bed, intending to set out then.

But she had miscalculated her strength, and at once fell down in a swoon.

When she recovered her consciousness, she found herself again upon the bed, and the woman occupied in sprinkling water upon her.

A copious flow of tears now came to her relief.

But sad indeed and full of anxiety was her heart, for she dreaded that Dick and his companions had perished.

Nothing else, save that utter bodily prostration to which she was a prey, could have kept her there inactive.

Anything would have been preferable and better than lying there so helplessly.

And yet after a time, when she grew calmer, she began to ask herself what she should do—where she should go, supposing the use of her limbs had not been denied her?

But she asked these questions vainly.

And so the weary, weary hours passed by.

Her heart ached when the dim gray moonlight found its way into the room, for she was suffering from the worst of all agonies—suspense.

During the day her strength partially returned to her, and beyond doubt her recovery would have been more rapid had the requisite things been at hand; but in that lonesome hut scarcely the bare necessaries of life could be obtained.

Still, when night came she was better—so much so that she rose and reapparelled herself with but little assistance.

At present she had said not a word to the woman respecting the payment she intended to make for these services; but the truth was, Maud's mind was by far too busily engaged in other matters to think of these, and so the hints and remarks which the woman threw out were passed over unregarded.

Neither did Maud observe on this night that the woman cast upon her threatening looks, and conversed in a low tone with her husband, who did nothing but crouch over the fire in an attitude of sullen indolence.

"John—John!" whispered the woman, for at least the twentieth time that evening.

"Well, well—what do you want?"

"You know what I want."

The man moved uneasily.

"Have you made up your mind?" continued his wife.

"Silence—still!"

"I tell you you are a fool and a coward, John Costard. So you have always been, and so you ever will be, I suppose."

"Hold your row!"

"I sha'n't! I shall talk if I like! I ask you again, have you made up your mind?"

"Hold your row, I say!"

"I sha'n't! You have the chance now, but who knows how long you may have it? Perhaps not more than half an hour. Look!—she seems half inclined to be off now."

The man turned his bloodshot eyes towards Maud with a wolfish gaze.

Not one word of this discourse had reached her ears—or, at any rate, none had penetrated to her understanding.

There could be no mistaking the meaning of that gaze.

It would have had the effect of warning Maud and putting her upon her guard; but she beheld it not.

The glance meant murder.

The word was expressed almost as unmistakably as it it had been uttered by the lips.

His wife's instigations had produced a partial effect.

The man had all the inclination to commit the hideous crime, but he lacked the courage to set about it.

But his wife, noticing his irresolution, and perceiving too that some impression had been made, continued with her urgings.

"What are you afraid of, John?" she hissed in his ear—"what do you dread?"

"Suppose she should get away?"

"We must prevent it."

"Why not do the deed yourself?"

"A fine idea, truly! You want the money, do you not? Wouldn't such a sum as that set you up in the world again? Look what rings she has on her fingers, too!"

"I cannot do it."

"But I say you can and shall! You must do it!"

He shook his head and shuddered.

"Who is to know?" urged his wife. "What have you to fear? Surely we can master her easily enough. Not a soul knows of her presence here—no one will know then. You saved her, didn't you?"

"I did."

"Then what difference will it make whether she goes in the old mill-pond now or then?"

"But—but——"

"What now?"

"If you—threw her in——"

"Well—well?"

"The—body—would—would be found."

"No."

"But it would?"

"I say no! We could put her into one of the sacks and tie a weight to it—then who would see her again, I should like to know?"

The man recoiled.

He was not quite so hardened in iniquity as his wife.

"Then—then, she would scream," he urged.

"Nothing of the kind—nothing of the kind! There—take this! Take it, I say! What are you frightened of? That will do the business!"

Not without considerable difficulty, the woman slipped something into her husband's hand.

She stole stealthy glances at Maud all the time, who still sat unconscious of what was going on.

The something thus stealthily conveyed was a knife.

A bright, sharp, cruel-looking weapon, well suited for such a deed as that which they had in contemplation.

The man's cheek blanched as he gazed upon it.

"Now, then," whispered his wife, "what could be more easy? Look where she sits like one in some deep sleep. One stride will take you to her side—one stroke with the knife will——"

"Hush—hush!"

Maud moved and looked up.

She had just then made up her mind that she would, in spite of all hazards, leave the hut and resume her search for Dick.

She fancied that her strength was now adequate to such a task.

But the man at once jumped to the conclusion that she had either overheard what had been passing between his wife and himself, or else that she suspected their design.

How very true it is that a guilty conscience stands in need of no accuser.

He trembled excessively, and it is a thousand wonders that the knife did not fall from his strengthless hand.

"I did not mean it, miss," he said, abjectly—"indeed—indeed I didn't!"

Maud regarded him with unmixed surprise.

"Mean what?" she asked.

"Silence, fool!" said the woman, in a low tone, which, however, reached Maud's ears—"silence, idiot! Do you want to spoil all?"

Maud wondered what was meant.

Some inward kind of presentiment came over her at this moment.

Without knowing exactly how, she became conscious that she was menaced by danger of some kind or other.

But of what precise nature she could form no accurate idea, so that she felt particularly uneasy.

The looks of the man and his wife by no means pleased her, but she scarcely thought of them, for she intended to leave the place without delay.

At this moment the woman came forward with a great affectation of hypocritical solicitude.

"Don't pay any attention to my husband, miss," she said, in sycophantic tones, which grated terribly on Maud's ears. "He is a good enough man in his way, but a little bit odd at times. Don't take any notice of him, but let me know what you may please to want."

"I want nothing further, thank you," said Maud, quietly. "I am about to take my departure now and I must again and again thank you for the attention you have paid me. It shall not go unrewarded."

Maud placed her hand in her pocket, intending to draw forth her purse.

Of course she would have liberally recompensed these people with its contents.

But the purse was gone.

The woman had taken good care to remove it.

Maud at once stepped back into the adjoining room, fancying she must have left the money there.

"Now, John Costard," hissed the bold, bad woman, "what are you going to do? We have got the money—you know we have. She will find out the robbery in a moment; and just tell me whether you feel ready to go to the gallows, when you have such an easy means of getting out of it? She will scream out, and all the neighbours will hear her. Then, when it is too late, you will wish you had taken my advice."

These last words seemed to work more upon the man than any which had previously been uttered.

His lips moved convulsively, while he grasped the handle of the murderous-looking knife with a savage grip.

"One stroke," cried his wife, urgently—"only one, and then all is over. Mind, there must be no second blow!"

The miller seemed to have made up his mind at last.

It appeared that he could no longer withstand the incitement of his wife.

With stealthy steps he made his way across the rough flooring to the doorway through which Maud had just passed.

But just as he reached it she appeared upon the threshold.

Maud started back, uttering a loud scream of terror.

There was no possibility of mistaking the purpose of those to whom she had been giving so much credit for kindness and charity.

"Too late!" groaned the man.

"No, no!" shrieked his wife. "Forward—forward! If she escapes now we are as good as hanged already! Stop her—stop her, I say!"

Worked up to the highest pitch, the man made a blundering rush forward with the full resolution of putting an end to the matter before he could have time for further reflection.

But Maud eluded him without much trouble, for his movements compared to his were those of a fawn to an elephant.

Nevertheless, she was almost half dead with terror.

In the extremity of her fear, however, she caught sight of an old rusty sword, which was hanging against one of the walls.

To rush towards this spot and to seize the weapon took her so little time that the man seemed stupified with amazement when he saw the sword in her hand.

Maud grasped it by the hilt, and held it before her in a posture of defence.

Her life was dear not only to herself but to others, and therefore she resolved not to resign it to these murderous wretches without a struggle.

She saw, too, what an arrant coward she had to deal

with, and this inspired her with more courage than she could otherwise have called to her aid.

The threatening attitude which she assumed, and the expression of determination, made the miller shrink back.

Despite of all consequences, he would then and there have abandoned his purpose.

But his instigating wife was still behind him urging him on.

"Kill—kill," she cried—"kill her, or perish yourself!"

"Beware!" said Maud. "I know how to use this weapon, and shall have plenty of resolution to enable me to do so to advantage. Come nearer at your peril!"

Even while she spoke, Maud's heart sank within her, for she mentally asked herself what could she do against these two.

Her eyes just then fell upon the door, and she thought in a moment that if she was speedy in her movements she might gain the open air and escape unhurt.

No sooner did the idea occur to her than she proceeded to carry it out.

She made a sudden feint, as though her intention was to rush forward and commence the attack.

The *ruse* succeeded to perfection.

Uttering a loud yell of fear, the man dropped the knife and endeavoured to interpose his wife between himself and the threatened danger.

Maud flung the sword at the pair with all her strength, and then darted out of the cottage like a flash of light.

When she saw her thus suddenly disappear, the woman's fury knew no bounds.

She was maddened to think she had been deceived by such an artifice.

She soothed her mind a little by bestowing a heavy blow upon her husband.

Then snatching up the knife, she dashed out of the hut.

She just caught a sight of Maud bounding forward in the distance.

This was enough to urge her to the utmost.

The manner in which she now started off in pursuit was astounding.

Maud had fear as an incentive to speed—the woman angry passions.

Poor Maud heard this fury bounding on behind her, and looked back in affright.

Her terror was redoubled when she saw how close behind her her pursuer was.

No sooner did the miller's wife catch sight of her back-turned face than she uttered a frantic cry and brandished the knife above her head.

Faint and sick with dread, Maud endeavoured to increase her speed.

All objects seemed to swim before her, and she was only dimly conscious that she had gained what looked like a well-beaten road.

Her breath came panting from her breast.

She felt each moment as though she should sink.

Indeed, it was a truly wonderful circumstance that she should have been able to maintain such a rapid rate of speed for so long a time.

But her limbs now failed her.

She staggered and nearly fell.

By an almost superhuman effort she recovered herself and continued her headlong course.

But the woman had gained upon her wonderfully.

Maud could hear her heavy footsteps sounding, through the exaggeration of intense fear, like thunder.

She could hear her heavy, labouring breath, and every now and then a half-articulate summons to come to a standstill.

The summons was disregarded, but it was quite evident that Maud's strength would not hold out a moment longer.

What she then endured we are unable to convey an adequate conception of.

In imagination she could see the woman behind her with uplifted knife, only waiting for a favourable opportunity to strike.

So impressed was she by this dread that it rendered her oblivious of all things else.

A small twig—it could scarcely be called by any other name—lay directly in her path.

It would have been under ordinary circumstances the easiest thing in the world to have stepped over it, or gone a little to one side.

But Maud did neither.

She did not even see it; and consequently, before she was aware of it, her feet became entangled, and she fell, face foremost, to the ground.

Consciousness almost left her, but not quite.

The intense horror she had of what was to come prevented her from losing her senses entirely.

But she did not hear the clatter of a horse's hoofs, though the next instant a powerful yet pleasant voice struck upon her ears.

"What hellgame is this, you old witch?" the voice cried. "Be off, or I will be the death of you—be off, I say!"

Then all was still.

The next thing Maud became aware of was an unpleasant stinging sensation.

She opened her eyes and looked up, though she fancied she was about to take her last look of this world.

To her astonishment, and joy as well, she caught sight of some one bending over her with an air of tender interest.

The moon was shining clearly and brightly, lighting up everything with her magic lustre.

The clear, cold beams showed Maud that she was indebted to a stranger for the piece of good fortune she had just received.

Almost in doubt whether what she saw was real, Maud closed her eyes again, but only to open them the next moment.

CHAPTER MXXXVI.

IN WHICH MAUD MAKES A FRESH ACQUAINTANCE, AND ONE WHICH SHE IS DESTINED TO RENEW.

THE form of the stranger was still there.

It needed no more than one glance to show her that he was young and not without good pretentions to being considered handsome.

His face had upon it a pleasant though somewhat reckless expression—and this was more noticeable about the eyes.

He was well formed, and his somewhat picturesque-looking apparel showed off his figure to the utmost advantage.

"I am glad you have recovered," he said, in those peculiar accents which always distinguish those who are in the habit of moving in good society. Then observing that Maud glanced about her in terror, he added: "Be under no apprehensions now. The danger is over—the old hag is gone."

His words afforded wonderful relief to Maud's heart, and now for the first time the tears began to flow.

Young as the stranger was, he must have possessed some knowledge of what was best to be done in such a case, for instead of making the least attempt to check her weeping, he removed to a little distance, under the pretence of seeing whether his horse was properly secured to the branch of the tree to which he had attached the reins.

Thus left to herself, Maud rapidly recovered her composure.

The tears she shed wonderfully relieved her breast, and in a moment or so she made an attempt to rise.

The stranger at once hastened forward and assisted her.

"You are better now, I hope?"

"Yes—yes," answered Maud, with some slight hesitation, for she fancied the stranger had an admiring eye upon her. "My best thanks, sir, are your due, though I cannot express myself."

"Tush—tush!"

"It is in vain for you to attempt generously to underrate the service which you have rendered me. I am well aware that but for your most timely interposition I should before this have fallen a victim to that woman's fury."

Maud could not avoid shuddering and glancing around her while she spoke.

"She is gone now," the stranger hastened to remark, in reassuring tones. "But did she really mean murder?"

"I fear so."

The stranger looked at once curious and interested.

Maud briefly told him that circumstances had induced

her to take up a temporary abode in Mill Cottage, and the result.

"You have had a fortunate escape," he said; "and I rejoice to think that chance should have led me in this direction."

"I am deeply grateful to you, I assure you, but——"

"No more—no more. Excuse me, but if I am any judge, I should say from your manner that you had some other cause for grief and trouble than even this."

Maud was silent.

"Don't think me intrusive," he continued, "but, if there is anything else I can do to save you, you have only to name it, and I am quite at your disposal."

"Thanks—many thanks," said Maud, speaking with difficulty through her tears. "It may sound ungrateful, and yet the only favour I can ask you is to leave."

"And it is the one that I should grant with the most difficulty. But, however, if you persist——"

"It must be so! Do not be offended, but—but——"

"Why do you pause? What would you say?"

"Simply leave me!"

"Enough."

The stranger took off his hat, and made a bow that was full of grace.

"Farewell, since you will have it so, but, take my word for it, these roads are by no means safe for a woman to travel alone and unprotected, so, if you are going far——"

"I am not afraid," Maud answered. "But do not press me further, I am distracted."

"I can see that you are much troubled, and that is why I urge you thus. Under other circumstances, rely upon it I should not do so."

"I appreciate your kind intent, and believe me when I say that I feel deeply grateful; but still I must renew my request."

"You are strangely persistent, and must have some strong reason for being so, I make no doubt. Since you will have it so, once more farewell."

This time he not only bowed, but went to the spot where he had left his horse, unfastened the noble animal from the bough, and with one bound vaulted clean into the saddle.

But he did not so readily take his departure.

"It is not yet too late," he said. "Forgive me for being thus urgent, but I feel that I ought not to leave you thus. Let that be my apology."

"No apology is needed, sir," answered Maud, who could not feel offended at the manifestation of so much interest in her behalf, for she was judge enough of human nature to feel certain that it was well-intentioned.

"And you are still resolved to go alone?"

"I am."

"Once more good night, then. Let me say, however, that I feel more than a common interest in this encounter. Why I should do so I know not. There is, too, a presentiment upon my mind to the effect that we shall meet again—that we are destined to become much better acquainted with each other. However, this will be proved by time."

While speaking these words, he turned his horse round and, reiterating the word "Farewell!" rode slowly away, as though in the expectation that at this, the last moment, Maud would call to him to come back.

Ere he had gone much more than a dozen paces he stopped again.

"I forgot to mention," he added, "that my name is Hawk—commonly known as Captain Hawk; and if ever you find yourself in any great distress, you can hear of me at the old inn about a mile further along the road—the Horns they call it. Speak to the landlord—he will tell you all about me, and if what you want lies within the power of mortal man to accomplish, I will do it. Now, for the last time, farewell!"

Having made this singular speech, the stranger—or Captain Hawk, as we may as well call him, since he had given himself that designation—struck spurs to his steed, and galloped off.

As may be supposed, his last words took Maud quite by surprise, and as she watched his retreating form she murmured to herself:

"Captain Hawk, and the old Horns Inn upon this road. I will not forget that. I like him, for he seems bold and generous. He has a face, too, which would command trust and confidence in any breast. I may require his aid—Heaven knows!—and I ought not to despise it, for where—where am I to look for a friend?"

This question brought Maud back to a full sense of her present wretched, desolate position.

Wringing her hands, she burst out into a violent fit of sobbing and weeping.

The paroxysm lasted for some time; but of course, eventually it expended itself, and she began to think a little more calmly about her position and prospects.

"Where am I now?" she asked herself, as she glanced around at all the objects about her now beautifully revealed by the moon's rays.

She had not, of course, the least idea of her whereabouts.

Everything she looked at was fresh and strange to her.

She wrung her hands again, and once more her tears poured forth.

She began to be sensible that she ought not so readily to have refused the stranger's offer of assistance, for at each moment she began to be more and more sensible of the difficulties by which she was environed, and from which she was not able to see the way to an extrication.

"What shall be my first step?" she murmured, half aloud. "Alas! I fear that all my efforts will be of no avail! Too late—too late! Dick and the rest are, beyond doubt, by this time either slain, or else prisoners in the hands of the police, and it is my fault—all my fault! I ought to have warned them, and failed to do so!"

Maud was scarcely right in thus taking all the blame to herself, and yet she did so.

"But it is suspense that I suffer now," she continued; "and what can be worse than that? Nothing—nothing! It would be better far if I was able to comprehend the full extent of my misfortunes, for how do I know whether Dick is alive or dead?"

Tears again choked her utterance, and this time she seemed to abandon herself to her grief more than she had done on any former occasion.

As before, however, the violence of her grief abated.

"I must and will know the worst! I will set about that at once! That shall be my course!"

As she made this resolution she dried her tears, and plucked up what resolution she was able.

But another difficulty presented itself to her, and the readiness with which it started into her mind only serves to show how thickly she was beset by them.

No matter which way she turned, one sprung up before her.

She had determined to discover what had befallen Dick and his comrades.

But how was she to do it?

In vain she endeavoured to frame some reply to this pertinent question.

She knew not which way to turn.

Once she thought of making her way towards London, where, as she knew full well, she should quickly learn what had happened.

But she had not the remotest notion of which way to take in order to reach the metropolis.

There was not one thing she knew to guide her.

Then she thought perhaps something could be learned at the ruined castle.

But here again the same difficulty confronted her.

She knew the way there no better than to London.

Upon consideration, however, she believed she could find her way back to this place, and then, if her inquiries here proved futile, she could but go on to the metropolis.

Scarcely, however, had she reached this point in her deliberations than she heard the sharp clatter of a horse's hoofs.

She was well enough experienced in such sounds to know that it was a single horseman who was approaching.

Not wishing to be seen, she drew back to one side of the road, where an umbrageous tree cast a deep shadow.

This position had not been occupied many seconds before Maud, to her great surprise, saw her protector come in view

"Why—why," she said, "surely that is Captain Hawk! What can bring him back this way?"

It would seem strange he should thus have altered his direction.

Maud looked again, fancying some accidental resemblance had misled her.

But no.

The moon, which was shining so brightly, poured her full light upon him as he advanced, and made anything like difficulty of identification impossible.

Maud's immediate thought now was that he might be able to direct her to the ruined castle.

Should she ask him?

There was no time to deliberate.

She made up her mind to do so, for it was hard to say how long it would be before she had another opportunity.

Acting upon this decision, she stepped out of the shadow on to a spot where the moon's rays fell undimmed.

Captain Hawk saw her immediately.

She knew it, for the ejaculation to which he gave utterance was carried to her ears.

He pulled up with great abruptness, and the manner in which his steed rose upon his haunches, in his endeavour to check his speed, told Maud how swiftly he had been coming on.

"One word," she said—"only one!"

He did not reply, but simply held up his hand as though he would have commanded silence.

At the same time he turned his ear in the direction from which he had just come, and listened intently for several seconds.

Seeing him do so thrilled Maud strangely.

It was an action she had seen Dick perform hundreds of times.

"I can spare a moment or so," he said, patting his panting steed; "but, you see, urgent business has compelled me to ride swiftly back to-night. However, as I said, I am now and ever at your service. Command me!"

"Many thanks," said Maud; "but the favour I require will scarcely detain you a second."

"Speak—speak!" he said. "Speak freely."

Then, in an altered tone, he exclaimed:

"Quiet, Satan—quiet, I say! Stand still, Satan! Woa, old boy!"

These last words were addressed to his horse, which Maud noticed now more particularly than she had yet done.

It was of a magnificent jetty black—truly, a beautiful creature—such a piece of horseflesh as one rarely sees in a whole lifetime.

No briefer or more fitting description could be found than that given by Shakspere of the steed of Adonis:—

"Round hoof'd, short jointed, fetlocks shag and long,
Broad breast, full eye, small head and nostril wide,
High crest, short ears, straight legs, and passing strong,
Thin mane, thick tail, broad buttock, tender hide,
And what a horse should have he did not lack."

As she gazed upon him, Maud's thought was, that if a match or mate for Black Bess was anywhere to be found it certainly stood before her.

But she had not then a very good opportunity of observing him closely, for she could tell, in spite of the rider's manner, that he was most anxious to be off.

What struck Maud most was the strange name which had been given to the steed, and under any less pressing circumstances she would certainly have asked what had led to his receiving so unusual a designation.

As it was, however, she contented herself merely with inquiring the way to the ruins.

"Comynge Castle?" repeated the stranger, slowly. "I have heard the name somewhere, but I cannot remember where."

He observed the look of disappointment which clouded Maud's face, and asked:

"Can you describe the place? I may know it well by sight if not by name."

As well as she was able, Maud gave a description of it.

"Yes—yes, I know now. And it puzzles me how I forgot. Why, you have but to keep straight on the way I have just come till you reach the top of a steep hill. Then, if you look over the fields to the left, you will see the gray walls plainly enough in the moonlight. Ha! I hear them now," he broke in, abruptly. "They still keep at me. If I am not quick," he added, addressing Maud, "my friends will overtake me. Good-night. We shall meet again."

Without waiting for her to utter a syllable, he let the reins fall upon his impatient courser's neck.

No other impulse forward was needful.

Away he flew almost with the speed of an arrow newly discharged from a bow.

A bend in the road quickly took both horse and rider from Maud's sight.

Strange thoughts were passing through her brain.

What to think of her new acquaintance she scarcely knew. It was evident, however, that he was no ordinary individual.

Further reflection was at this moment cut short, for the sound which now reached Maud's ears was such as to fill her mind with the liveliest apprehension.

It was that produced by the hoofbeats of a number of horses—a dozen at the least.

Maud, had she been asked, could not have told why she felt alarmed, nor why she felt impelled to break her way through a narrow gap in the hedge and crouch down, trembling, out of sight.

She had not taken up her quarters here very long before the horsemen whose approach she had heard came in sight.

Maud could see them plainly through the interstices near the roots of the hedgerow.

Upon catching sight of them, she had to compress her lips very tightly to suppress a scream.

Then she crouched down—lower—lower down, though this was needless, for there was scarcely a possibility that she could be seen.

The riders were police officers, every one of them.

They were all well mounted and well armed.

They were lashing and spurring their steeds most unmercifully, and dashed by Maud's place of concealment like a whirlwind.

There was a jingling of accoutrements—

A cloud of dust.

Then they swept round the corner we have already mentioned.

But it was not until long after the heavy clatter of their horses' feet had died away that Maud ventured to look up.

Even then she trembled so excessively that she was scarcely able to rise to her feet.

The danger, however, was over, and when once assured of it Maud thought of her determination, and forced her way into the high-road again.

It was not more certain that they were police officers who had dashed by than it was that they were in pursuit of the so-called Captain Hawk.

But why?

Maud, of course, was not in a position to return any definite answer to this question, and, moreover, her own affairs now pressed too much upon her mind to allow her to reflect upon any foreign subject.

At the same time, she could not help acknowledging to herself that she fully shared in the presentiment that they were destined to become much better acquainted with each other.

The dread she was in about the officers who had passed by lent great speed to her feet, so that she reached the summit of the hill Captain Hawk had mentioned in much less time than she would have done under ordinary circumstances.

Panting and tired, she stood upon this piece of elevated ground, and strained her eyes in the endeavour to catch sight of that well-known place, which almost seemed to her like a home from the length of time she had sojourned there.

The sight of it seemed to have the effect of restoring her failing energies.

Now that her destination was in sight, she seemed all at once to become possessed of the requisite vigour to reach it.

That she should be so near to the ruins seems very strange. Such, however, was the fact, and it only serves to show how much she must have doubled upon her course.

The descent of the hill was accomplished without much difficulty, and then Maud had the boldness to strike off across the meadows, keeping her eyes fixed upon the tall keep of the castle, which, from its great height, formed a conspicuous object in the landscape.

But as she wearily walked on, she found that the distance she had to go was much greater than it had appeared to be.

To her it seemed that as she advanced so did the ruins retreat, thus mocking all her efforts to reach them.

More than once she was glad enough to sink down and rest her weary limbs.

Nothing but the strong, all-powerful desire to ascertain if possible the fate of her husband and his companions could have kept her up.

But the longest and most tedious journey must come to an end at last.

After the lapse, then, of a long, long time—so long that Maud was unable to form a clear idea of its duration—the outer portion of the ruined castle was gained.

Maud's heart now beat so fast as almost to prevent her breathing.

Indeed, she believed nothing could save her from swooning.

Urged by that all-conquering desire, she feebly struggled on.

The old castle had a spectral, ghastly look, as the moon poured her flood of light upon its gray and crumbling walls.

Almost oppressive silence, too, reigned around—a silence which Maud thought was horribly suggestive of the tomb, and most disastrous to the hopes in which she had indulged.

It was when she had fathomed the very lowest depths of despair that she heard a voice give vent to a glad cry.

"Maud—Maud—Maud!" said a well-known voice. "It is I! I am here—I am here!"

CHAPTER MAAXVII.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD ARE SURPRISED BY THE OFFICERS IN THE RUINS.

Had not these words been followed by the sound of rapid footsteps, and had she not caught sight of a well-known form hastening towards her, Maud would have concluded that she had been the victim of some cruel delusion.

Fortunately, she was spared this pang additional to those which she had already suffered.

But her joy had almost as great an effect upon her as a shock of grief or disappointment.

The next moment she found herself in the arms of the one she loved so truly and so well.

So exhausted was she bodily, and so completely overcome mentally, that for some time she could do nothing more than remain half passive in Dick's arms.

While remaining thus, and only in a state of semi-consciousness, the past, and all the horrors she had gone through, seemed by far more like some hideous dream than stern reality.

Was she waking then, she asked herself, or was she dreaming now?

The last question there was difficulty in making a reply to.

All—all was real.

But by what chance could it be, she again mentally inquired, that Dick was there, to all appearances safe and unhurt—just in the very place she had set out from in order expressly to warn him from approaching, and where—greatest mystery of all—he was, beyond all doubt, quite secure and safe?

Such interrogations as these thronging thickly in her mind might well confuse Maud's brain, and make her close her eyes in an attempt to think calmly and clearly.

"Rouse up—arouse yourself!" she heard Dick say, for he fancied, from her closed eyes and pallid cheeks, that she had fainted. "You are in no danger now, and—and you are not hurt, I trust?"

Dick pronounced these words with considerable diffidence.

The first tumult of joy which he experienced when he first caught sight of her had made him forgetful of such a contingency as this.

Now that the idea had occurred to him, however, he suffered a thousand apprehensions, for he sadly feared by Maud's manner that she had suffered some fearful accident.

"No—no," she murmured, feebly, "I shall be better soon. Water—water!"

"Tom," said Dick, in a loud voice—"Tom Davis!"

Tom Davis came forward.

"Here I am, captain. What's amiss?"

Some water, now, at once!"

Tom started off at full speed.

There was a plentiful supply of clear spring water in the ruins, which had been of the greatest service to the highwaymen during their sojourn there, and Davis made his way to it at once.

He quickly returned.

Maud drank a little of the water—but very little.

The remainder Dick sprinkled in her face.

After this, she was considerably revived.

"Is it possible," she asked—"can it be possible that you are here safe and unhurt?"

"Quite. And you?"

"Not much hurt. But never mind now—tell me about yourself?"

"Nay—nay! I must first be satisfied——"

"Take my word for it," she said; "all is well."

"But where have you been? and where is Jack?"

"Alas—alas!"

"Do not weep—but speak; tell me—relieve me from the terrible suspense which I now endure!"

"I discovered the presence of the officers here, and knew they intended to wait in ambush till you had descended——"

"Yes—yes—I know all that!"

"You know it?"

"Certainly."

"Then my curiosity is greater than yours. How have you escaped?"

"I will tell you, but I must hear about your proceedings first. No hesitation—your curiosity will be most speedily allayed by a prompt compliance, for in this case I will take no denial."

Maud knew very well that when Turpin had once expressed himself positively on any occasion it was quite futile to induce him to change his mind, so she at once began the recital of those events which are already well known to the reader.

It may perhaps be imagined with what amount of astonishment and dismay Dick listened to her narrative.

When she had concluded, he drew a long breath, and said:

"Thank Heaven that is over, and that I have heard the last of these perils! I had imagined, as I thought, the worst of evils, but never dreamt of such a succession of calamities as I have heard."

But Maud's impatience was so great that she could scarcely listen to these few remarks, but eagerly she sought him to let her know by what means he had managed to escape his foes.

Dick finished with these words:

"I felt convinced," he said, "but I know not why, that I should find you somewhere near the ruins, and hence my presence here to-night. My fear was, however, that you had fallen into the power of the officers."

"No—no, I should have warned you, had I been able."

"I find so! Tom King was nearly right in his guess, but a kind of fascination seemed to draw me to this place. There was peril and hazard in approaching here, but I was careful."

"Have the officers departed?"

"Yes, they have gone. I was in time to see the men depart who had been left in charge. It seems every part of the ruins has undergone a rigid scrutiny, and from what I overheard——"

"Overheard?"

"Yes; on first reaching here, upon finding the men were present, I crept as close to them as I could, in the hope of hearing something about you."

"I understand."

"I gathered from their conversation that a large amount of money had been discovered, buried near the spot where we remained so long."



[BLACK BESS LEAPS THE WALL.]

"The secret chamber."

"Yes, that was the spot. The amount is great. Upon hearing of it I could not help thinking of your long-expressed wish——"

"Yes—yes."

"Of leaving England."

Maud sighed deeply.

"That would have furnished us with sufficient to have lived on in some foreign land, for there are times when this wild life palls upon me, and most of all has it done so during your disappearance."

No words can tell what an amount of joy those words infused into Maud's breast.

She flattered herself with the idea that she could now see something like a prospect of the realisation of the dearest wish of her heart.

Oh, if she could only keep Dick in his present humour,

she fancied there would soon be an end of all those perilous accidents which they had suffered!

To Maud, the prospect of a residence in some other land, where they would have nothing more to fear from the power of the law, was like the anticipation of a calm, safe harbour and the charms of home to some far-out-at-sea and storm-tossed mariner.

There was rest, peace, happiness, and safety, to look forward to.

"It would yet be possible, I think," she said, after a few moments' pause, for at first she was too much overcome to utter a syllable. "Believe me, it is my one wish, the great desire I wish to have gratified. Oh, if you only knew what happiness it would bring to my weary heart you would not deny me!"

"I feel that I ought not," said Dick. "You have already made by far too many sacrifices on my behalf. I

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will promise you to take into full consideration all you urge, and the next time we all meet together the subject shall be fully discussed. If it is practicable it can be done."

Maud was quite contented with this promise. She knew full well that it was not lightly made.

She wept plentifully.

"Dry your tears," said Dick, "or I shall change my mind. I want to see smiles, not tears."

"They are tears of joy, Dick," she sobbed. "I shall be calm soon."

At length Maud looked up, and said, quietly:

"Where was it that you appointed to meet the rest?"

"Not far from here; and as soon as you have recovered yourself we will set out, for the time now is overpast."

"I am ready."

"And what will be your next step?"

"That I scarcely know. For one thing, however, I shall propose that for the present we once more take up our quarters in the ruins."

"In the ruins?" asked Maud, scarcely able to believe that she had heard aright.

"Yes."

"But you forget the police officers."

"Indeed I do not, nor those who have been set here to guard the place; but I have certain knowledge that the guard will be no longer kept. The officers will never suspect we have had the audacity to come back, and in all probability the old castle will be more left to itself than it has ever been."

The moment Dick made this remark, Maud was much struck by the force of it.

What more unlikely place could there now be than this for them to be concealed in? She would never have guessed, and she felt certain the officers would not be cunning enough to do so.

"You are right," she said. "At first, the audacity of the proposal staggered me——"

"That is just what I rely upon for success," answered Turpin; "the bold course is always the best."

"And then what will be your next step?"

"We will reserve the consideration of that until we all meet again; we shall then have many important things to arrange and settle."

It was at this moment that Tom Davis came running towards them with the utmost consternation in his looks.

"Captain—captain!" he gasped.

"Well, what now?"

"Up—up! Be quick, or you will be too late! Follow me!"

"What is the matter?"

"We must have been watched to this place."

"Watched?"

"Yes, or else Maud, for a large troop of officers have crept cautiously up to the castle walls. I did not discover their presence until almost upon them. Quick—quick, or we shall be too late to escape, for they intend to surround the castle, and in such a manner as to prevent all possibility of exit from its walls, and we must be off before the circle is completed."

This was startling intelligence indeed, and it came upon both Maud and Dick with more than usual force, for they had only just reasoned themselves into the comfortable belief that they were perfectly safe in their present quarters.

Indeed, for at least a second Dick was quite incredulous.

"You needn't stare like that, captain," cried Davis—"it's true. Come, come, we must be into the saddle at once!"

Recovering himself from his shock of surprise, Dick hastened after his faithful ally.

Maud was greatly alarmed as this intelligence, and, what was more, she was much angered with herself.

She believed that the police officers must have tracked her to the ruins, and she much blamed herself for having approached with so little caution.

She well remembered that from the moment she commenced the descent of the hill, from the summit of which she had caught the first glimpse of the castle, she had never once turned her head to look behind her.

The fact was, the state of excitement under which she laboured was by far too great for her to think of any of these things!

Now she blamed herself for her remissness.

When the first shock of surprise was over with her she hastened to follow Dick, for she seemed in a moment to realise the importance of immediate flight.

The distance to the place where the horses had been left was not great, and the reader may rest assured that no time was lost in mounting.

Tom Davis had been so fortunate as to provide himself with a horse, and Turpin wished that another could have been found for Maud, as in that case all their future operations would have been rendered much easier and agreeable.

It was a deficiency which Dick, at the moment when he swung Maud on to the front of the saddle before him, determined should be supplied at the earliest moment.

There could now no longer be any doubt as to the correctness of the information which Tom Davis had given; and had there been any lingering spark of incredulity in Turpin's mind it must have been quenched by what he next beheld.

A number of well-armed police officers came into sight

No sooner did they catch sight of the little party of our friends than they gave utterance to a loud shout, which certainly seemed more like one of intense surprise than aught else.

But this surprise they rapidly recovered themselves from, and rushed forward intent upon an attack.

Dick, however, was in no humour for an encounter.

But he was in readiness to start.

He merely called out to Tom.

"Forward," he cried—"forward at your best speed!"

He set Black Bess in motion as he thus spoke.

The gallant animal then, as on many a previous occasion, made no account whatever of her double burden.

Tom Davis was well mounted, so he kept behind Dick without much trouble, for of course in that confined area Black Bess could not put out any extraordinary speed.

The officers immediately commenced a pursuit; but what troubled Dick more than this was the fact that one of them placed a small whistle to his lips, which he sounded so shrilly that all the ruins echoed and re-echoed, and most certainly no one but a boatswain could have piped better.

This was a signal which doubtless would be well understood by the other police officers at hand.

"Forward!" said Dick again. "The sharper we are in our movements the better it will be for us."

"Go on, captain," said Tom. "I will keep close enough behind you, never fear."

At this moment Dick turned the angle of a bastion, and the very instant that he did so he became conscious that he had just committed a very unfortunate action.

He had run full tilt upon another party of officers.

They joined at once in full cry.

But Dick dashed on.

In spite of being thus taken at unawares, he knew as if by intuition that the only chance he had lay in keeping on.

Straight in his path, however, was an old stone wall.

The height was enough to make every prudent horseman pause and consider well before he made the attempt to put his horse to overleap it.

The officers uttered shouts of triumph, and began to close round in a kind of circle, thinking, no doubt, that this wall would prove a barrier to the highwayman's further progress, especially as his steed carried a double burden.

But Dick held on steadily

"Over, Bess, old lass!" he cried, in an inspiriting voice, when within a short distance of the truly formidable obstacle.

That was the only incitement she required.

But it was observable that the noble creature gathered herself together, so to speak, and prepared to make a more than ordinary effort.

Up she rose in the air, almost as though without any muscular exertion on her part, or as though she had been suddenly raised by some supernatural and invisible power.

For a fleeting portion of time she was seen clearly above the obstacle, and then, in the twinkling of an eye afterwards, she alighted safely and gently on the other side.

This was a sight which could not fail to excite some emotions of admiration in every breast, but the feeling by which the officers were actuated was far more like aggravation than aught else.

One of those in command of the rest no sooner saw Black Bess rise from the ground than he made sure the wall would be cleared easily, in which he was proved to be right.

He gave vent to a cry of rage and disappointment.

At the same time he rushed forward.

He held a cocked and loaded pistol in his extended hand.

His cry seemed to be taken by some more of his followers as a signal to rush forward as well, but perhaps they were only influenced by mere example.

Be it how it may, they advanced, and had any immediate effect followed the shot which their leader now fired, they would have been in readiness to act.

The pistol which, without any note of warning, had been discharged at the fugitives just as they were clearing the wall was not to all appearances, of any good whatever.

The fury of the officer was on the increase rather than otherwise, for he flung the discharged pistol over the wall with the full fury of his arm.

But despite the vigour with which the missile was hurled, it fell harmlessly upon the long rank grass, for Dick was by this time far ahead.

Not once had he paused, but had kept all his energies bent upon the execution of one task—that of getting quite clear from the ruins of the castle in the shortest possible space of time.

CHAPTER MXXXVIII.

DICK TURPIN IS WITNESS OF A VERY EXCITING INCIDENT.

"Are you hurt, Maud?" was, however, Dick's first anxious question after the report of the pistol had died away.

"No. Are you?"

"I am whole and sound."

"And Bess?"

"Whole and sound too, to the very best of my belief. I heard the bullet whiz above me. We must have begun to descend just when he pulled the trigger."

Maud shuddered.

Such narrow escapes as these—escapes which might literally be called miraculous—were truly terrible.

The horse which Tom Davis bestrode displayed his qualities to good advantage on this occasion.

The wall was surmounted with tolerable ease, and he was able to keep at the heels of Black Bess without Dick having to keep much check upon the rein.

It became evident though that the officers did not intend to let them off any more easily than they could help, for they at once organised a pursuit which, in all fairness, must be said to have commenced with really military alertness.

But our friends had the start, and there was every probability that, provided no remarkable and unforeseen accident occurred, they would succeed in keeping it.

A chase, nevertheless, is proverbially a very doubtful matter.

Like a race, it is sometimes neither the swiftest nor the best that wins.

"Tom," said Dick, in a loud voice, so that there should be no fear about his words being misunderstood, "just let me see what speed you can make—push on to the best of your ability. Never fear that I shall be left behind."

Tom Davis immediately complied, and the advantage of this method of procedure soon made itself manifest, for it prevented Dick from unduly checking his own mare's speed in order to render it accordant with that of his companion's.

On came the officers, however, with remarkable vigour and spirit.

All at once there was a kind of consternation in the rear, and not one of our friends could resist the temptation of looking back in order to ascertain by what it was occasioned.

The moon still continued to shine with a brilliancy which enabled them to distinguish objects at a considerable distance.

Behind them, and distinctly visible in consequence of the position which it occupied, was the old castle.

Not far from the outer walls they immediately caught sight of what had certainly distracted the attention of the pursuing officers.

This was nothing more nor less than a man mounted upon a magnificent black steed, which seemed to fly over the ground with the speed and grace of an antelope.

The horseman sat in the saddle with the unmistakable ease of one who has perfectly mastered the by no means easy science of riding.

In fact as he bounded on at this tremendous pace it might be said of him that—

> "He grew unto his seat,
> And to such wondrous doing brought his horse,
> As he had been incorpsed and demi-natured
> With the brave beast."

Almost immediately afterwards a small troop of police officers emerged from behind a clump of trees.

They were most certainly in full pursuit.

On they went with full hue and cry.

So excited was Dick by this singular spectacle that he totally forgot all about the peril in which he himself stood.

His curiosity was raised to the utmost pitch.

The rider was a total stranger to him, and Dick was confident he could never have so much as glanced at that magnificent horse and have forgotten him.

The course taken by this flying horseman served to bring him each moment more distinctly to the view of our friends.

From the first Maud had watched him with the closest attention, and now she exclaimed:

"Yes, yes—I am certain I am right—it can be no other."

These words served to bring Dick back to a recollection of what was passing around him at the present moment.

"Who—who?" he asked, quickly. "What do you mean?"

"Why, I am certain that is the stranger of whom I spoke."

"That flying horseman?"

"Yes—Captain Hawk."

"Captain Hawk!" repeated Dick, musingly, as though he had a kind of half recollection that he had somewhere heard that name before.

"Yes. Look now! Did you ever see such a noble steed?"

"Never but one," answered Dick.

He patted Black Bess upon the neck while he spoke.

The pace at which Captain Hawk was going was something extraordinary.

And now a rather singular event took place.

That small knot of police officers who were in pursuit of Captain Hawk stood not the remotest chance of overtaking him.

He went two steps to their one.

The distance between them, therefore, could be seen to increase visibly every moment.

By the manner in which the captain pushed on it would seem as though he had decided upon the policy of having a sharp push and getting the pursuit over with as little delay as possible.

The course he took, however, was such as to cause him to approach in a diagonal direction on the large troop of officers who were in pursuit of Turpin.

Of this the captain must have been ignorant.

It would never occur to him that two parties of officers were out, and owing to the nature of his position it was scarcely possible that he could perceive them.

The troop of police officers seemed aware of this, and also to arrive at the conclusion that the capture of Dick was a very doubtful matter, while that of Captain Hawk seemed certain, for if he held on he would dash right into them.

On came Satan in that tremendous style which could not fail to rivet the attention of every beholder.

The officers came to a halt.

No doubt it was galling to give Dick up in this manner, but they were resolved to make a prisoner somehow.

It may seem strange that they did not divide their force, but then it must be considered that if they had

lone this Captain Hawk would have seen them in time.

Dick was not a little surprised at this sudden change in the behaviour of the officers, but he was not long in comprehending their tactics.

What greatly astonished him was that they should abandon a pursuit of him in favour of somebody else.

Previously to that moment he had the vanity to suppose that he was of more importance to them than anyone else.

Their conduct on the present occasion served to show, however, that this was a mistake.

As may be supposed, Dick's curiosity respecting this Captain Hawk greatly increased.

Who could he be?

What had he done that the police officers should be so exceedingly solicitous about his capture?

These were the questions which Dick asked himself, but without being able to give an answer, though he was vaguely conscious of having heard his name mentioned by some one.

Beyond this his memory did not serve him.

"Dick—Dick!" cried Maud, who was attentively watching all that was going on—"Dick, he does not see them. He is riding to his death."

"He is indeed!"

Dick had also brought his mare to a standstill, and so had Tom, now that the officers were no longer in pursuit.

Clearly, however, so far as their own safety was concerned, they ought to have made the best of their speed away.

Dick could not tear himself from the spot, so extreme was his interest.

"Can you not save him?" asked Maud, with deep anxiety.

"I have every wish to do so, but I fear it is an impossibility."

"But you cannot see him perish before our eyes! Remember, he was kind and generous enough to render me a service!"

"Do not fear I should forget it. But what can I do against so many?"

Maud sighed.

"I'll tell you what you might do," said Tom. "You might attract his attention to us, and then perhaps we could by signals apprise him of the danger with which he was threatened."

"A very good suggestion, Tom. A pistol will do it, I fancy."

"Beyond a doubt it will."

"Here goes, then."

Suiting the action to the word, Dick drew forth one of his pistols.

He pointed it upwards and pulled the trigger.

The sharp discharge which followed rang out clearly over hill and dale.

It attracted the immediate attention of Captain Hawk, for to him such a sound could bode nothing but danger.

When once the captain looked towards our friends they came forward and took up such positions as would render them more easily to be seen.

When this was done, they waved their arms and pointed to the spot where the officers had—if we may be allowed the term—ambushed themselves.

Captain Hawk was indisputably quick of apprehension.

He might not have known just why Dick and Tom Davis pointed, but he guessed that danger lay in that direction, and abruptly changed his course to one that lay nearly at right angles to it.

With a politeness that seemed to form part of his nature, he did not thus turn aside until he had acknowledged, by a graceful wave of his hat, the good service Dick had rendered him.

Not for long, however, was he in ignorance of what kind of danger he had been threatened with.

The discovery that their intended prey had been warned, filled the officers with ungovernable fury.

They could restrain themselves no longer.

Uttering loud yells and shouts, they rushed forth from their concealment.

"Divide—divide!" cried the leader. "Divide, I say!"

This vague order was productive of a little confusion, and yet in a short space of time the officers, now forming two parties, were in full chase.

It would have been a very great satisfaction to Dick could he but have seen how the captain further fared.

It was important, however, that he should see to his own safety.

In less than a moment various intervening objects hid him from view.

The brief pause that had so strangely taken place was productive of one good effect.

It had enabled Black Bess thoroughly to recover her wind and strength, for, of course, it was a very different thing for her to carry a double burden at such a rapid rate instead of a single one.

It was, therefore, with renewed vigour and spirit that she set forward for the second time.

The same arrangement was adopted as before—that is to say, Tom Davis rode on first at the best speed his horse could make, while Dick followed at his heels.

From time to time, however, Maud looked across the country whenever she had the opportunity, in the hope of again catching sight of Captain Hawk, but all trace of him appeared now to be lost.

With uniform steadiness Dick found that he was increasing his distance from the officers, so that unless they were reinforced by fresh horses, or in case an accident occurred to our friends, it was almost impossible a capture should be effected.

It was just about half an hour after this that Dick called out to Tom Davis to come to a halt, and at the same time tightened his rein.

He chose an elevated piece of ground for doing this.

Some time had elapsed since he had seen or even heard anything of the police officers, and he was anxious to ascertain if he could whether or not they had abandoned the chase.

Having pulled up, then, he looked back.

He was agreeably surprised to find that his position commanded a much more extensive view of the surrounding scenery than he had expected, though the moon, having now declined towards the west, no longer poured forth her light with such effulgence as hitherto.

Still he could see tolerably well.

He continued his scrutiny for some moments, but without being able to catch a glimpse of his foes.

"I believe I may venture to say all is well. I can see nothing of them."

"Nor I," answered Tom, "nor hear either."

"Then in that case I think we may venture to direct our course to our destination, which I had hoped to reach long ere this."

He was about to urge Black Bess forward, when Tom cried, somewhat suddenly:

"I can hear something now, captain."

"Hear what?"

"Listen!"

Dick did so.

"A single horseman?" he said, interrogatively.

"Yes."

"Well, he cannot concern us. Forward once more!"

Tom did not offer to show the least hesitation, but set his horse in motion at once.

Now, it is rather singular that both should have fallen into an error concerning the sound they heard.

As to its character there could be no mistake—most certainly a single horseman was approaching.

But without saying so to each other, and without pausing to consider carefully, both Turpin and Tom Davis came to the conclusion that this horseman was on the road behind them.

They had not gone very far before they became aware that just the opposite was the case.

The horseman was on the road before them, and, what was more, he was approaching them, and that, too, at no common rate of speed.

They all became conscious of this at the same instant, but Maud was the first to remark upon it.

"It is some one approaching us," she said.

"Yes, clearly so," answered Dick, "though I thought otherwise."

"What shall we do, captain?" asked Davis.

"Ride on," replied Turpin. "I see no reason why we should trouble ourselves to go out of our way for any chance passenger, and we are late enough already."

"He may pass without taking any notice of us, captain."

"He is most likely to do so."

"Push on, then—we will pass him rapidly."

Just at this moment they reached a spot where the road bent round at a somewhat acute angle, and afterwards stretched out for a great distance in a perfectly straight line.

They then caught sight of the horseman, and Maud uttered a sharp cry.

"What is the matter?" Dick asked, anxiously.

"Nothing—nothing—but—but—yes—yes—I am sure it must be!"

"What—what?"

"Captain Hawk!"

Maud pointed at the horseman as she pronounced the name.

He seemed to be coming on more swiftly than ever.

"I do believe it is," said Dick.

"I am certain of it," answered Maud.

"But by what means short of magic can he have got here?"

"I know not, but he seems to haunt us like a shadow."

"He does indeed. Who he can be puzzles me, and why he should be so fond of riding into the very mouth of danger is something which passes my comprehension."

"How furiously he comes now!"

"Yes; we will stand aside and allow him free passage, otherwise he may do us a mischief."

Considering the undiminished rate at which this eccentric being was coming on, it certainly seemed no more than wise to adopt this precaution.

Very much to the astonishment of all three of our friends, however, they had no sooner made this change than they perceived him slacken speed.

He was drawing the rein very tightly.

The horse was such a powerful-looking creature that it seemed strange for a slim, slight figure like that of Captain Hawk to possess such absolute control over him.

The noble animal, however, despite his tricksiness, was perfectly obedient to the rein.

"What on earth can he be pulling up for?" asked Dick.

This proceeding was quite as singular as any of his others, and only in accordance with that eccentricity which seemed to govern all his actions.

Dick wondered whether he had caught sight of Maud and himself.

This was a point about which they were destined not to wait for a very long time in doubt.

The captain halted within half a dozen paces of where they stood.

"Excuse me," he said, as he removed his hat from his head and made a bow. "It is odd to introduce oneself thus, but I am not altogether a stranger, since I had the pleasure of rendering that young lady a service a little while ago."

"I am very glad to see you," said Dick, "for I feel deeply indebted to——"

"Now, no more of that! I am indebted to you. Thanks for arresting my attention, or I should have dashed headlong into those fellows. You seem surprised to see me riding back, but I thought I would, if possible, embrace the opportunity of thanking you for the warning that you gave."

CHAPTER MXXXIX.

DICK TURPIN TAKES QUITE A FANCY TO CAPTAIN HAWK.

THERE was something verging very closely upon the ludicrous in the coolness and carelessness with which Captain Hawk pronounced these words.

The idea that a man, instead of getting as far away from his foes as he could, should actually turn round again and gallop back, with no other object than that which he had expressed, was certainly out of all character.

Dick Turpin thought so, and said:

"You are very welcome, and I am glad you got off so easily; still, I should scarcely have expected that you should take the trouble, and also run the risk of——"

"Galloping back again, I suppose you were going to say," interrupted the captain, with a merry laugh. "Bless you! I think nothing of it, for, thanks to Satan——"

"To Satan?" echoed Dick.

"Not his infernal majesty, by any means," answered the captain, "but to my horse here, whose equal never did and never can exist. He is matchless in every attribute that a horse should possess."

Dick gave a peculiar smile.

"You think so," he said.

"I am certain of it."

"Then I beg to differ."

"Differ?"

"Yes, and, without offence, I hope you will permit me to say that, while admitting yours is a noble creature, and one which you ought to prize as you do your own life, yet I have one in my possession that I cannot allow to be inferior to him in any respect whatever."

"Indeed!" said the stranger, somewhat stiffly. "You are welcome to your own opinion, but you must not expect me to subscribe to it."

"Just so, and allow me to make the same remark."

"Certainly. There is but one steed in the whole world to which I can believe my Satan to be inferior, and that steed I would give much to see. I have heard much of it by report, but I am not disposed to credit more than half of the wonderful stories that I hear. But even if I ever am so fortunate as to see it, I shall not be very ready to yield the palm."

"Indeed," said Dick, with the same peculiar smile upon his countenance—"and may I ask you what steed it is of which you have heard so much?"

"The one in the possession of Turpin, the highwayman, and I believe commonly known as Black Bess. But what are you laughing at?"

"Excuse me, at you."

"At me! What for?"

"Merely for thinking that your steed, however good his qualities may be, could for a moment compare with Black Bess."

"You don't think so?"

"I am certain."

"Well, as I told you, I would give much to see this wonderful mare, and scarcely any less to see her rider."

"Then," said Dick, quietly, "you can do so without further trouble."

The captain stared at him incredulously.

"You don't mean to say that——"

"Well, I do mean to say that this is Bonny Black Bess, and I am Dick Turpin, very much at your service, and very much obliged to you for your kind behaviour to my wife here."

"That your wife?"

"It is, I assure you."

The captain was so amazed that he could not utter another word.

He sat on his steed like a statue of astonishment.

"You seem incredulous!" said Dick, after a pause.

"No, surprised, that's all," cried Captain Hawk, with something like a return to his former gaiety of manner. "Dick Turpin," he said, extending his hand, "I am heartily glad to see you! I have longed, wished to do so, and let me say if you want a friend that will stand to you back and edge, you have such a friend in me."

Dick cordially grasped the hand so warmly extended to him.

"Beyond being aware that you are called by the name of Captain Hawk, I know nothing of you. Still, be you whom you may, I rejoice to make your acquaintance, and accept your offer as freely as it is made."

"That's just it!" said the captain. "And if you don't mind listening I will give you a very brief account of myself. That formality may well be dispensed with in your case, as your reputation is by this time tolerably established."

Dick bowed.

"I should feel very much favoured," he said, "for I have some dim recollection of having heard of you."

"But there is no reason why you should be detained the while. If you have no objection I will ride for a little way by the side of you, and if we do not go very fast we shall be able to converse at our ease."

"Will it be taking you out of your way?"

"No, not at all. I am bound for nowhere to-night, so that it matters little which direction I take."

"In that case, then, I shall be glad to adopt the arrangement, for I have an appointment I do not wish to miss."

"Exactly so," said Captain Hawk, with a smile, and at the same time he turned his horse round and urged him gently forward.

This, however, was by no means so easy a matter as it might appear, for Satan was impatient at the least restraint.

As for Black Bess, so well did she understand her master's manner, and so thoroughly was she under subjection to him, that he had no difficulty in making her go at just what pace he desired.

"I daresay you wonder what brought the police officers to the ruins," the captain began, "but I am to blame for that; though as things have turned out all right, I hope you will forgive me."

"But I do not understand."

"I will soon explain myself, however. I daresay you have heard of the particulars of our meeting in the lane?"

"You mean between yourself Maud?"

"Yes, if that is her name. Well, after she had asked me which was the way to the ruined castle I began wondering whatever she could want there at such a lonely hour. The longer I thought the more did my wonderment increase, and at last I resolved to shake off the officers as well and as soon as I could, double upon my course, and make my way to the ruins myself, in order to find out if I could what she wanted there, and also, believe me, I was animated with the idea that I might be able, perchance, to be of some assistance to her."

"You are thoughtful," said Dick, "and I appreciate your intention just as I should if it had been carried into effect."

"Well, now, I should rather think you would have wished me a thousand miles away, for, but for my interference, you would not have been interrupted by the officers."

"It does not matter, as it has turned out."

"No. For my part, I am glad, since it has procured me what I have wished for for so long—an introduction to yourself. But, leaving that, let me tell you I rode rather carelessly into the ruins, and must have been seen doing so by the grabs, for they were upon me in a moment."

"I had wondered what brought them there," said Dick. "It was a mystery to me, quite; but now all is explained."

"Yes; and I hope to your satisfaction."

"Quite so. And yet was it merely upon the chance that you might meet with us and thank us for warning you that you ran the great risk of galloping back?"

"It was indeed."

"Then you are one of two things."

"May I ask which and what?"

"I cannot well answer the first part of your question, but what I was about to say was that you were either very brave or very reckless."

"Just whichever you like—perhaps a little of both," responded the captain, with a light laugh.

"It may be so; but still——"

"You would have hesitated, I suppose?"

"I should."

"Well, you see, I place so much confidence in Satan's powers. He has carried me out of so many scrapes that I begin to have absolute belief in his powers of speed."

"Mind you do not put trust in him once too often," said Dick, seriously. "It is a pity to try a horse too much."

"Does Satan look the worse?"

"No; he does not, I confess."

"But stay! I am running on in this fashion, and yet I have not told you who I am—or, rather, I have not made you acquainted with my profession. I daresay, however, you can guess it."

"A highwayman?"

"Well, yes, I suppose that is what people will call me, and yet when I think of—— But no matter—no matter!"

Some reminiscence of somewhat a sad character evidently came over the captain's face at this moment, but by an effort he banished it, and was again smiling and light-hearted as before.

"Perhaps," he said, "the time may come when we shall be better acquainted, and if so, I may relate to you something of my early life. You will find much that is strange in it."

"Very likely; and at the same time I may be able to convince you that your Satan is inferior to my own Black Bess. We will have a trial of speed some day—of course, now it is impossible, as she carries a double burden."

"Certainly!"

The captain seemed as though he was about to say farewell to Dick, and yet for some reason or other he appeared to shrink from doing so.

"I have a further favour to ask of you," he said, "though I fancy you will consider me too importunate."

"Not at all. Pray speak freely."

"Well, then, above all other things, I should desire to be made known to your comrades. I have heard so much of them by common rumour, that I am most impatient to do so."

"I see no reason why that request should not be granted," answered Dick, "for I am now within a very short distance of a place where we had agreed to meet, and where they are doubtless impatiently awaiting our arrival."

"I will take you at your word," said Captain Hawk, "for such a chance may not occur again."

"I intended you to take me at my word. Let us make better speed. We shall soon reach our destination."

This was quickly verified, for at that time Dick was not very far from the blighted tree.

Owing to the increase in the rate of speed, but few words were exchanged.

Captain Hawk was one of those individuals that few can help liking.

As for Dick Turpin, he took a strong fancy to him from the first, there was something in his manner so very jovial and free.

Tom Davis, however, did not look exactly pleased, and by his manner it would seem as though he was exceedingly desirous of saying a few words to Dick in private.

For this, however, there was of course no opportunity, so he fidgeted about very uneasily indeed.

Tom was by nature rather distrustful of new-comers, and he by no means shared in Dick's prepossession in favour of Captain Hawk.

Without knowing why, Tom felt dubious about him, and he felt positive Dick had been indiscreet to give so ready a compliance to his last-made request.

All Tom Davis could do was to keep a sharp look-out on all the movements of the captain, and as his action was limited to so little, he resolved to perform that little well.

The old tree was reached, however, without the occurrence of any incident whatever.

But Tom Davis was not inclined to abate any of his caution on that account.

No sooner had they all come to a halt, than Dick exclaimed:

"I scarcely expected to be first upon the ground. What can have detained the others so long, I wonder?"

The reader will remember that Tom King was the first to arrive at the place of rendezvous, but upon hearing the horseman approach, had carefully concealed himself.

The very moment, however, that the sound of Dick's well-known voice reached his ears he came forth.

"I am here," he said.

"And Claud and Jack?"

"I have seen nor heard nothing of them since we parted."

"Hush!" said Maud. "I hear some one now."

The sound of horses' hoofs could now be distinguished plainly.

"Here they are. I'll be bound!" cried Dick.

"It would be wisest to draw aside and make sure, would it not, captain?" said Tom Davis.

"Certainly it would."

Without the utterance of another syllable, this proposal was carried into execution.

They had barely time to take up their positions before the horsemen made their appearance.

They were recognised at a glance.

"Safe and sound?" asked Dick, riding forward.

"Wind and limb, captain," was the reply; "but we have met with no success, and so our only hope is that you have been more fortunate."

"I have. I have recovered Maud, who has sustained no serious injury. She has been aided and succoured by one I have great pleasure in making known to you. His name is, I believe, Captain Hawk."

"Quite at your service, gentlemen, and very happy indeed to make your acquaintance."

Tom King, as well as Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, were much taken by surprise.

It was one of the rarest things in the world for them to make a new friend.

The darkness that reigned about this place prevented them from seeing the captain very distinctly.

The latter, fancying he observed some reserve on their part, said:

"Do not distrust me. I shall always be glad to aid you in any way I am able; and what is more, you will be pleased to understand that I am of the same fraternity as yourselves."

The announcement was by no means expected, and the effect of it was to cause a greater appearance of friendliness on the part of the three highwaymen.

Captain Hawk, however, was gifted with a full share of penetration.

He could see very well that the friends had some topics they wished to discuss, and to which they did not exactly feel inclined to make him party.

"It will not be long, I trust, before we meet again, but for the present we must part, as I have made arrangements I do not wish to break. To make any treason place of appointment with you would, I know full well, be useless; but I shall trust to chance to throw us together again ere long. Good-bye to all!"

He bowed as he spoke.

"Remember, you have to be convinced about your steed!" Dick said, as he was departing.

The captain waved his hand, but made no other reply.

The next moment he had vanished in the darkness.

"Captain," said Tom Davis, urgently, though he scarcely raised his voice above a whisper—"captain!"

"What is it?"

"Do you think we ought to have let him go like that?"

"Let him go! What do you mean?"

"Why, captain, I distrust him, and that's the truth! What guarantee have you that he will not go at once and betray us to the officers?"

"No guarantee, certainly; but still, I consider it most unlikely that he should do so."

"I am of another opinion, captain."

"But what grounds have you?"

Here Tom Davis became mute.

He could only admit that he had been swayed by prejudice.

"It cannot matter either," added Turpin. "We do not intend to remain in this place many moments."

"No, decidedly not," said Claude Duval, with a shudder; "and the question we have first to decide is where we shall next take up our quarters."

"And it is a question deserving of much consideration," said Dick. "I had fancied that there would be no difficulty about this, but now I am quite at a loss for the moment what to advise."

This remark elicited some questions from his comrades, and Dick at once stated his former intention of returning to the ruins, but how the officers had seen them there.

He also made them aware of the manner in which he had become acquainted with Captain Hawk.

"But for that unlucky incident," said Sixteen-String Jack, "you may depend that no better or safer place for us could have been found for the present, and if one only half as good is now proposed I shall think we are extremely fortunate."

"Then just listen to me for a few moments," said Tom King. "I have been here waiting for you for some time, and have all the while occupied my mind by thinking upon this very subject."

"And you think you can get us out of our difficulty?" said Turpin.

"I think I can."

"Proceed, then; there is no time to lose."

"First of all," said Tom, "it will be necessary for me to give you a brief account of my doings since our parting; without this explanation you will not be able to comprehend what I have to propose."

"Go on, then, only be careful to put your narrative into as few words as you can."

"You may depend I shall do that. Listen!"

Amid a profound silence, then, Tom King proceeded to make his comrades acquainted with those facts which have been already detailed to the reader.

In the intense interest which this narrative awakened they became forgetful of everything else.

When Tom brought his adventures to a conclusion, all declared that nothing could surpass them.

"But now, Tom," said Dick, "what is it you have to propose? I confess I am no nearer to forming any conception of it than I was before."

"Is it so indeed?"

"It is."

"Then prepare yourselves for a startler, for what I have to say will, I feel pretty certain, take you completely by surprise."

CHAPTER MXL.

RELATES WHAT BEFEL DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES BENEATH THE ROOF OF THE JOLLY TAR INN.

THE strongest curiosity was evinced, but what words can express the astonishment of all when Tom King said, as coolly as though it was the simplest and most trifling matter in the world:

"I propose, then, comrades, that for the present we take up our quarters beneath the roof of the Jolly Tar Inn."

"Where?" cried Dick, in utter amazement.

"I told you to prepare for a startler."

"But you are not in earnest?"

"I assure you I was never more so in my life."

"Then you are mad."

"I think not, captain."

"But the thing is impossible."

"Not at all."

"How so?"

"Where is the difficulty?"

"Why, how shall you get rid of Knight and Cunningham?"

"Get rid of them?"

"Yes."

"Why they are got rid of already."

"By whom?"

"By me. Depend upon it, they were so horribly frightened that no earthly consideration would ever induce them to cross that threshold again."

"But, then, there are the others."

"What others?"

"The officers."

"I doubt there are any there now."

"Why not?"

"The inquest was to have been held as yesterday—for it is nearly morning now—and when this formality is over, the bodies would be removed, the inn shut up and doubtless left to itself."

"It is worth trying, I think," said Turpin, after several moments' deliberation, "though to me it still looks like running our heads into the lion's mouth. However, should the officers find we have had the audacity to do this, we shall never be able to astonish them again."

"No matter for that," urged Tom. "I still consider the scheme practicable in every way, and I do not believe that either of you could propose a place where we should be safer."

"Perhaps not," said Dick; "and if the officers have really left the premises for good, I quite agree with you; I would give much to be satisfied on that point."

"You must be content to run the risk of that."

"The advantage which weighs principally with me," said Turpin, "is that we are now so near the spot proposed for our abiding-place. It will be very soon quite daylight, and we ought to be under cover by then."

To this all assented unanimously.

"What do you say, then, comrades," asked Dick, "are you willing to say it shall be so?"

"Nay, you are our captain, and with whatever decision you may come to we shall be content; we know you would intend it for the best."

"Yes, and for all that my judgment might lead you astray; I do not desire that you should look upon it as infallible—that would be undertaking too great a responsibility."

"Well, captain, we are willing if you are."

"Can you suggest any other place?"

"No—not any."

"Then in that case I consider we have no alternative left us."

"You have decided, then?"

"Yes, in this way: we will try the inn for a few hours, at all events, and then we can come to any decision afterwards we may think proper."

This was agreeable to everyone.

Tom was pleased to find his proposal assented to.

It was really wonderful to see how they became reconciled and accustomed to the idea which had so startled them at first.

Already they began to look at it quite as an ordinary proceeding, their only concern being whether the officers had really left the premises or not.

They went the right way to ascertain this, for, without any more discussion, they turned their horses' heads in the requisite direction.

The distance could not be considered otherwise than trifling.

A short space of time brought them in its vicinity, and then Tom recommended a halt.

His recommendation was unhesitatingly complied with.

"I have been thinking," he said, "that it would be much the best to reconnoitre before venturing to approach too near; so if you will remain where you are and take care of my horse, I will soon let you know the existence of the present state of affairs."

"But shall you go quite alone?"

"Yes, I think it will be best, and I flatter myself I can execute the task better than either of you, because of my familiarity with the premises."

"Yes, that is an advantage."

"I am off, then. Above all things do not move one step from this spot until my return."

While these few words were being exchanged, Tom King had slipped off his horse and given the reins to Claude Duval.

"Are your pistols ready for use?" asked the latter, as he received the charge.

"Yes."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite."

"Be off, then, and good luck to you!"

Tom knew the value of time, so he did not wait for any more to be said, but glided off into the semi-darkness at once.

His comrades were able to observe his progress for some time, but at last he disappeared.

Tom grew more and more cautious as he approached the building.

The silence which prevailed was in the highest degree assuring.

By slow degrees he made his way round to the front of the inn.

To his great joy, not a single gleam of light appeared.

"They have gone," he muttered to himself. "I was certain they would not stay after such a horrible adventure as that."

However, neither the silence nor the darkness could be taken as proof that the inn was empty.

The question was, how was this very important and necessary fact to be ascertained?

Tom was a very little while in hitting upon an expedient.

It was one, however, that involved some degree of risk of discovery.

Nevertheless, he determined to put it into practice.

It was to hurl a small stone through one of the windows, and with sufficient force to cause considerable noise.

A moment's search enabled Tom to find just the kind of missile which he required.

This was a smooth round pebble.

Aiming it at one of the upper windows, he threw it with the full strength of his arm.

The crashing of glass sounded with alarming distinctness in the profound silence which prevailed.

Tom crouched down and anxiously awaited the result.

One, two, three, four minutes passed.

At the expiration of that interval there was no more indication that there were any human being in the house than there was at first.

"I knew I was right!" Tom muttered. "Everything falls just as I expected."

However, to make doubly sure, Tom once again made a tour of the premises.

The result was the same.

He now considered he was warranted in returning to his companions.

He found them all waiting for him in great suspense.

They had heard the crash of glass even where they stood, and had indulged in many vague speculations as to the cause of it.

Tom King soon resolved them.

The intelligence was received by all with the greatest satisfaction, Maud, however, alone excepted.

The fact of no notice having been taken of the stone was looked upon as sufficient proof that the house was empty.

But although she had not ventured to make any observation whatever, Maud shrunk back, appalled and terrified at the idea of taking up a residence in a place which had witnessed the perpetration of so many awful crimes.

Of one thing she was certain.

By no possibility could she ever summon up her courage to remain alone in that dwelling.

But where Dick Turpin was she felt herself tolerably safe, though now she trembled from head to foot.

She thought it rather strange that Dick did not observe this circumstance, but the fact was, the whole of his energies just then were centred upon the task they had before them.

The nearer Maud drew to the hateful place, however, the more did her alarm increase.

The next words spoken by Tom King, however, gave her a fleeting satisfaction.

"Stop," he said—"there is one thing we have omitted now."

"What is that?"

"How are we to dispose of our horses?"

"True," answered Dick. "I don't know how we came to forget that."

"Are there no stables at the back?" asked Claude.

"I think so; but would it be safe for us to put our cattle there?"

"As safe as anywhere else, I imagine."

The matter was, as usual, left for Dick's decision.

"We will go a little closer," he said, "and then we shall be able to judge better."

Again they advanced towards the ill-omened dwelling, dispelling Maud's hope that something had been thought of which would result in an alteration of their arrangements.

They were careful to approach the inn with all due caution.

The first glance showed them that the outbuildings were of a spacious description.

"No fear of not finding accommodation here," said Claude.

He was right, for stable room was to be had in plenty, and, what was more, our friends found, after a brief search, that the place was by no means ill supplied with provender,

In order to be prepared for any sudden surprise, none of the trappings were removed from the horses.

The girths were loosened and the bits removed, but the bridles were not taken off.

Having seen thoroughly well to the comfort of their steeds, the highwaymen proceeded to look after their own accommodation.



[TOM KING PREVENTS THE ENTRANCE OF THE OFFICERS.]

By common consent, Tom King was allowed to take precedence of the rest.

He led the way at once to the little window through which he had previously effected an entrance.

Maud now clung so closely to Dick that he could not help noticing her excessive agitation.

"What ails you?" he said, in a whisper. "What do you fear?"

"To enter that fearful place."

"It has no doubt terrible reminiscences for you, but let me implore you to shake off all these timid feelings—they are unworthy of you, quite."

"I cannot help it."

"But, consider that I am with you, and while I am, ought you not to feel secure?"

"I ought, I confess, but yet——"

"Tut, tut! Banish these fears. You ought to consider the probabilities there are that this place will prove for us a safe asylum, since it will doubtless be shunned by all other living creatures."

"And we are forced to take up our habitation where no other human beings would venture to come."

"What of that?"

"Think of the awful deeds committed."

"What if we do? We are not guilty of them, so why should we fear?"

"Yes, but think of the poor creatures——"

"Nay, you had better not think at all, unless you will think as I do."

"How is that?"

"Why, all these people who may have perished here could, when alive, have done me but little harm had they chosen to combine against me; and such being the case, how unreasonable it would be to dread them now they are dead and past all power of interference in human affairs!"

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Dick's certainly was a bold manner of thinking, and as certainly was it full of sound philosophy.

What farther might have been said just then upon this topic we know not, for it was just at this moment that Tom King reached the little window.

He found it in precisely the same condition as he had left it, and this he and all the rest looked upon as a most favourable omen.

Before entering, however, they listened at the open window for the space of several moments.

The same silence continued to reign.

Encouraged by this, Tom King made his way in.

Dick Turpin came next, and assisted Maud to follow.

The others quickly entered too, and then the window was closed.

The darkness was intense.

"I think we might venture to risk a light," said Dick.

"We shall never grope our way if we do not, I am thinking," said Claude, who at once busied himself in producing the necessary materials.

A small lantern was quickly lighted, which did not give a very brilliant illumination, but yet quite sufficient to enable them to find their way across the room, which, it will be remembered, was the kitchen of the inn.

On gaining the passage beyond, greater caution than ever was made use of, though it was almost beyond doubt that no officers were in the place, or they must have heard the noise made by the entrance of so many people.

At length the room was gained where Tom had had so narrow an escape of discovery.

Here all was dark and silent too.

"I think we may venture to make ourselves contented now," said Tom. "I told you I was convinced that nothing would induce the officers to remain."

"You were right," said Dick, as he pushed open the door and entered the apartment which had been made the head quarters of the officers.

There were plenty of evidences of their presence to be seen, and from various indications the highwaymen concluded that their foes could not have taken their departure very long before.

For instance, the wood-ashes on the hearth were by no means cold, and dim wreaths of tobacco smoke hung about here and there.

"I hope we shall be safe for an hour or two, at all events," said Dick.

"So do I," responded Tom. "Our first care ought to be to go thoroughly over the premises, and see that every door and window is secured; we should then have nothing to fear from being suddenly taken by surprise."

All saw in a moment the absolute necessity of the adoption of this course, so it was set about being carried out without any more discussion.

But Claude was especially careful to carry the lantern in such a manner as to preclude, as far as possible, the chance of any of its beams being seen by any chance passer-by outside.

They came first to the front door.

This was fastened, but only by means of the lock, the key of which was absent.

"They would be able to enter readily enough, would they not?" said Tom. "But this will rather interfere with their arrangements."

While he made the last remark he put up a heavy iron bar, and pushed two heavy bolts into their sockets.

"Yes," said Claude, "they cannot enter that way without making a little noise—that is certain."

"They are excellent bolts and bars," remarked Dick; "and so far as this means of entrance is concerned I shall not feel in the least degree alarmed."

The remainder of the inn was then carefully gone over, and every available fastening was made use of.

When on the upper storey, the chamber of death was peeped into.

The result was that Tom's conjecture was proved to be quite correct.

The two dead bodies had been removed.

When this fact was made known to all the rest, a feeling of increased security took possession of their breasts.

So far as they could tell, there was nothing to induce the officers to make a return to the premises, unless they should suspect that our friends had taken up their quarters there, and this suspicion it was almost impossible that they should entertain.

On the present occasion, then, Dick Turpin and his associates may very fairly be excused for giving themselves over to the belief that for a time they were perfectly secure.

After some little deliberation, it was determined that they would make the apartment which the officers had occupied their head quarters.

Their feeling of security, however, was not so great as to cause them to omit the precautions which they usually took.

It was unanimously agreed upon that one should keep good watch and ward while the others slept, with the express understanding that the alarm should be given in case of the occurrence of the slightest circumstance of an unusual nature.

If the reader will think over the events which we have recently related he will discover that our friends had but few opportunities of enjoying rest.

As they had all been very busily engaged, they were now consequently terribly fatigued, and the feeling grew upon them now that there was no immediate need for active exertion.

On this account it was determined that all discussion as to their future movement should be postponed for a few hours.

In the meantime, they would all do their best to recuperate their wasted energies by sleep.

Dick Turpin kept watch for the first hour, and then he was relieved by Tom King.

CHAPTER MXLI.

IN WHICH THE HIGHWAYMEN HOLD A CONFERENCE AND ARRIVE AT SOME HIGHLY-IMPORTANT CONCLUSIONS.

Alternating in this manner, many hours were passed.

The place chose for keeping guard was the small attic at the top of the house, and this, with a little trouble, was made to answer the purpose required of it as well as though it had been especially constructed and designed to answer the end in view.

As it stood, this attic had but one window, and this was situated in the front of the inn.

But the roof of the attic was composed of nothing but thatch, and in the highest place was not much above six feet from the floor.

It came sloping down equally on both sides from a point in the centre.

What our friends did then was to remove just as much of the thatch as was necessary to make a hole large enough for them to look through.

This was done on both sides, and opposite to the window as well.

The consequence of this arrangement was that, provided a good look-out was continually kept, it was not possible for anyone to approach unseen.

Here then, turn by turn, the highwaymen and Tom Davis kept watch.

A large expanse of country was presented to their view.

Night approached, however, without anything having been seen to give rise to the least alarm.

When darkness fairly closed in, of course this look-out from above became impossible.

All assembled, therefore, in the room below, which they had made as comfortable as the means at their disposal would admit of.

Without exception, everyone was in excellent spirits, for they, reasonably enough, looked upon their freedom from molestation so far as an earnest that they would continue to remain so.

The rest which they all enjoyed enabled them to think clearly upon the different matters about to be discussed, and assist them in coming to satisfactory conclusions.

All noticed what a look of intense expectation the countenance of Tom Davis wore.

They were not ignorant of the cause.

As for Davis himself, however, he did not give utterance to a word, but merely looked on anxiously.

"It seems to me," exclaimed Dick, after some preliminary but not very important observations had been exchanged—"it seems to me that the first thing to be considered is as regards our sojourn in this place."

"In what way, captain?" asked Tom King.

"Why, I want to know whether you are all inclined and determined to remain here so long as the officers will allow us to do so?".

"Decidedly," replied a chorus of voices, in which, however, Maud's was not heard.

"That being resolved upon," continued Dick, "the next thing is with regard to Tom Davis's wife and Ellen. I need not say anything to remind you that we had resolved to allow them both to undergo their term of imprisonment. Not only were we at that time unable to offer them any assistance, but it was thought best that, as the term was so short, it had better be passed, and then they would be free from the officers so far as that offence was concerned."

"Exactly," said Claude Duval, "and if I am not greatly out of my reckoning, the time has nearly expired."

"It has, Davis, has it not?" asked Turpin

"Three more days, captain," was the murmured reply.

"Then it is time we came to a decision. For my part, I have been considering the subject carefully, and the result is that several things have presented themselves to me of which I had not previously taken any account."

An immediate desire was expressed for an explanation.

"These things are of more moment to us than you may perhaps imagine. But to commence: in the first place, of course, at the appointed time they will both be set at liberty."

"Just so."

"Well, it will then be necessary that they should join us. But how is this to be done?"

"We might contrive to let them know," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Yes, so we might," assented Dick, "it is not there that I see any particular difficulty."

"Where then?"

"Why, you must bear in mind how anxious the officers are to capture us."

"Don't be afraid we shall forget it, captain."

Dick laughed as he added:

"And do not forget that Tom Davis has been extracted from their clutches. This, however, is the point I wish to arrive at: the officers will know very well at what time Ellen and Mrs. Davis will be set at liberty, and you may depend that they will take all the advantage they can of the circumstance."

"But in what way, captain?"

"Why, they will think, of course, that the first thing the released persons will set about doing will be to regain their friends. Now do you understand me?"

"I think so," answered Tom King. "But go on—let us have it clearly understood."

"It is important enough."

"Clearly so."

"Well, then, the officers, depend upon it—or if not them, some of their agents—will be on the watch outside the prison, and as soon as Ellen and Mrs. Davis come forth they will fix their eyes upon them, and keep the closest watch upon every movement they may make."

Tom Davis covered his face with his hands, so that the expression of it might not be observed during the further progress of this, to him, important discussion.

"Depend upon it," said Claude Duval, "that is what they will do; but till it was mentioned, I never once thought of such a thing."

"It is well," said Dick, "that it has been thought of in time."

"Yes, thanks to you, captain."

Turpin passed over this compliment without remark, and went on to say:

"What we have now to consider is, how we can continue to prevent the officers from carrying out this plan. Rely upon it, they will try hard to get upon our track by this means; and if they do they will take care to be in such force as to make resistance difficult."

This prospect alarmed Maud greatly, and she crept more closely to Turpin's side, as she always did upon the approach of danger.

"Captain," said Tom Davis, "I can see very plainly how dangerous this will be to you, and therefore you must leave us to shift for ourselves; I will not consent that you should all be drawn into so much extra peril—it is not rightful, and it shall not be!"

"Tom Davis!"

"Yes, captain."

"If you make another such a speech as that you shall be turned out of the room and not be allowed either to listen or to take part in the discussion."

"But——"

"Not another word. You must leave us to be the judges of what we think best and expedient, and what we intend to do."

"Certainly," cried Sixteen-String Jack. "Do you think we are going to make you such a return as that for all that you have done for us in time past?"

"But you have requited that obligation times and times over," said Tom Davis, still with his face hidden, and speaking in a broken, husky voice.

"Nothing of the kind. But it is like you to forget all about the past. Let there be no more of this, for the way out of the difficulty I have laid before you is not so very perilous after all."

"Indeed, captain!" ejaculated the poor fellow, looking up with brightening eyes. "You must know this is the longest separation there has ever been between my wife and myself and Ellen. We have known good and evil fortune, but we have always been together. And as for Nell—bless her!—I love her as though she was my own child. It drives me mad when I think what I have brought her to."

"Rather remember what you saved her from; but that is like you again—never to remember the benefits you confer."

"But what was the way out of the difficulty that you spoke of?" interrupted Tom King, who spoke with considerable impatience.

"You shall hear."

"Go on then—we are listening."

"In the first place we must communicate with old Matthew."

"That sounds like getting into one difficulty to get out of another."

"It may be so; but listen."

"We will."

"I say we must communicate with old Matthew—and the sooner the better. This is in order that he may see Mrs. Davis and Ellen—if possible before their liberation—and make them acquainted with the nature of our plans."

"Just so. But——"

"Wait a moment, and you shall hear. What I suggest in order to baffle the officers is, that they shall both take up their quarters at some decent lodging in or near London——"

"London!" ejaculated all, in tones of surprise.

"Yes, and there they are to remain, say, for about a fortnight—or longer, if necessary. By the end of that time the ardour of the officers in watching them will have abated; then they must embrace an opportunity to slip off unperceived and make their way to us."

"But where will that be?"

"That we must determine."

"And it will be no easy matter, I fancy," said Claude Duval.

"So do I," responded Sixteen-String Jack. "I should like to know very much where we shall be to-morrow let alone a fortnight hence."

"You seem amused," said Dick, with a smile; "but let me assure you that I can see my way quite clearly."

"You can?"

"Certainly."

"Then where shall we be?"

"Without directly answering that question, I think I can satisfy you. Suppose we fix upon a certain future time—say three weeks or a month hence—on one particular day, and at a certain hour we can arrange to be at a specified place—that is, if we are alive and it lies in the power of human beings."

"I begin to understand," said Tom King. "You would appoint a place and arrange for us all to meet there?"

"Certainly; and I cannot see any remarkable obstacle."

"Where shall we say?"

"Can you name a place?"

"I could, certainly; but before doing so, would it not be better to talk over our own proceedings in the meantime?"

"It would. That is well thought of."

"You have thought of this as well, captain?"

"I confess I have."

"Then let us hear all you have to say."

"I propose, then, that between now and the time of meeting we all occupy ourselves to the best of our ability, so as to get together a good round sum."

"For what purpose?"

"In order to place in the hands of Tom Davis for him to use as he may think fit, which will, I hope, in some measure recompense him for his losses."

"Now, captain, none of that."

"Tom Davis!"

"Yes, captain."

"Be good enough to understand that the only terms upon which you may be allowed to listen to our conference are, that you preserve a profound silence."

"But, cap——"

"If you interrupt again, out you go, and you hear no more."

After this, Tom Davis was obliged to be quiet, though he was burning to give utterance to his expostulations.

"Very good," said Tom King, approvingly. "I for one will do my best to make the sum as round as possible."

"So will we," cried Claude and Jack. "We will show him what we think about him."

"As to the manner in which this money is to be employed, I have my own ideas, and if you, my comrades, think them good, they will be carried out, I hope."

"Cap——!" began Tom Davis.

"Silence, will you!"

Thus admonished, the highwayman's faithful ally held his tongue.

"My proposition is, that as soon as we place the money in his hands he shall, with all speed possible, make his way out of England. The amount, I hope, will be such as will enable him to live out a long life in comfort in some other clime."

This proposal was received with universal acclamation.

"Captain," broke in Tom Davis, the tears rolling down his cheeks, "I shall never be able to utter my thanks; and rest assured I shall never be able to forget this generous mark of your favour."

"So far, then," Dick went on, "we may say all is settled, and all that there is for our consideration is one or two minor points."

"But yet unfortunate ones."

"Yes, decidedly. In the first place, as to the rendezvous."

"It ought surely to be near to the sea-side."

"Yes, bearing in mind the end we have in view, it ought."

"And as solitary and retired as possible."

"It cannot be too much so."

"Then where is that place to be found?"

"Can you tell?"

"Not straight off at once. Can you?"

"I have had a place in my mind, but perhaps some better one may be suggested."

"Nay, let us hear it."

"I would rather not at present."

"Yes—yes——"

"Well, then, since you will have it—Stonehenge."

"Stonehenge?" all repeated.

"Yes; you know it, do you not?"

"We have heard of it."

"That, then, is all that I can say."

"But what made you fix upon that place?"

"I have always been led to believe that it is far away from every human habitation, and that no one is seen there except some occasional wanderer brought thither by curiosity. Not only that, however, it is a place that can so easily be found, and the way to which may be asked without the creation of much suspicion."

"You must have considered this subject well, captain," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Do you think so?"

"I do, or else you could not possibly have been so well prepared at all points as you are. You have actually left us nothing to do but to give our consent to whatever you have advanced."

"But I did not intend such to be the case. I wanted to hear your opinions."

"But we could think of nothing so good as that which you appeared to propose offhand."

"Well—well. If you are satisfied, that is all."

"We are perfectly. There is only one thing, though."

"What is that?"

"We have not come to a conclusion about the communication with old Matthew."

"No, true."

There was a peculiar smile upon Dick Turpin's lips, and a peculiar intonation of his voice as he thus spoke, which made Maud creep closer still to him.

"Let us decide it, then."

"With all my heart; and as you all say you have done nothing hitherto but give consent, let me now hear one of your proposals."

There was immediately such a sudden inclination for all to speak, that nothing save a confused Babel of sounds arose.

"One at a time," said Dick—"one at a time!"

"Will you hear me first, captain?" cried Tom King.

"Yes."

"Well, then, I will resolve the difficulty in a moment; I will just ride over to old Matthew to-morrow night and put matters square."

The cool manner in which Tom spoke forced every one to smile.

"It is too much risk," interposed Tom Davis, but he was silenced and cautioned before he could say any more.

"You have soon settled it, Tom," said Dick, "and in the same manner as myself, but with this difference, that——"

"You intended to go yourself, I suppose you would say?"

"Just so."

"No, no," cried Maud, clinging tightly to him, "for my sake let me implore you to abandon this idea! Banish it at once! I could not survive the time that would elapse during which you would be absent!"

"Come, Maud—Maud!"

"It is in vain to appeal to me! It is not often that I ask you a favour; do not let me this time beg in vain!"

"But you must consider——"

Maud shuddered, and then burst into tears.

Against this last Dick was not proof for a single moment.

He could bear all things but Maud's tears, and they conquered him at once.

The sight of her distress was more than he could bear.

"Dry your eyes," he said. "Do not weep. Your request is granted."

"And you really will not go?"

"I will not, since such is your wish."

The smile that overspread Maud's countenance at this moment was sufficient recompense to Dick for anything, though for all that he felt that it would have afforded him no ordinary satisfaction could he but once more have grasped old Matthew's hand and gazed upon his jovial face.

CHAPTER MXLII.

TOM KING IS RECOGNISED ON REACHING LONDON.

"Is it determined, then," asked Tom King, briskly "that I shall go?"

"Well, you spoke first."

"I did."

"But what say Claude and Jack?"

"Well," responded the pair alluded to, "we will resign our claims in favour of him. It would be too bad to disappoint him—he seems quite to have set his heart upon it."

"I have," said Tom—"you are perfectly right there."

"When would you start?"

"I am ready now."

"I think the enterprise had better be postponed until to-morrow night," said Dick. "If you were to start now, you would have scarcely time to get there before daybreak."

"You are right; and not only that—some cunning scheme must be devised, for I daresay the officers keep as sharp a look-out as ever upon Old Matthew's premises."

"You may depend they do."

"I have no wish to run any extra risk of capture if I can help it."

"Of course not."

"And now I shall have good time to think."

"And your horse to rest."

"Just so."

This concluded the settlement of every arrangement.

The rest of the night was passed in conversation, which, though interesting enough to those who took part in it, is scarcely worth reproducing to the reader.

No disturbance whatever took place, and Tom King was over and over again congratulated upon his wisdom in choosing out such a place of refuge.

There was indeed little fear that the officers would visit it again, and then it was still more improbable that any persons would come forward who were desirous of occupying a place with so evil a name.

The hours of the following day lagged by somewhat tediously.

All were anxious for night to come.

Maud, however, was filled with a strange dread.

She was afraid that when the hour arrived for Tom King to set forth, Dick would want to set out upon an adventure too.

How far she was correct in her surmise will shortly be seen.

Long before the approach of twilight, Tom King had completed every preparation he had resolved to make.

It is not necessary here to state just what precise steps he had determined to take, because we shall follow him, and then his actions will speak for themselves.

Moreover, it was a case in which it was not possible to arrange much beforehand, as the least chance circumstance might have the effect of altering everything.

Of one thing there could be no doubt.

Despite the cool, offhand manner in which he treated the enterprise, it was one of very great risk and danger.

So soon as ever the obscurity of twilight had deepened sufficiently to make it prudent for him to begin his journey, he led his horse out of the stable and mounted him.

His companions watched him until the trees hid him from their view.

"Now, captain," said Claude, "have you any arrangements for us to-night?"

"None that I know of."

"In that case, then," continued Sixteen-String Jack, "we had made up our minds for an adventure or two together."

"Of course tending to the end we have in view."

"Yes, certainly. None so profitless and unsatisfactory to others as Claude's adventure with the ladies."

Dick laughed, for he had been much amused when the incident was related to him.

"If so," he replied, "Tom Davis will come but poorly off."

Claude and Jack were quite ready for the road, with the exception of mounting their steeds, so that before many seconds had elapsed they had taken their departure.

"And now, Maud," said Dick, "do not seek to dissuade me from what I purpose, and then you will be spared the mortification of finding your appeal disregarded."

"No, no, Dick!" she cried, imploringly. "You—you must not go!"

"I cannot stay here; and bear in mind, I do not ask you to remain alone—Tom Davis will be with you, so that I shall be under no apprehensions whatever as regards your safety, because I know how well qualified he is to keep guard over you, and because I know he would lay down his life in your defence."

"Yes, captain," said Tom Davis—"you are no more than right there."

"Still—still, you must not go!" sobbed Maud. "The bare thought of having to remain in this dreadful place without you almost kills me!"

"Maud, I have spoken," said Dick, endeavouring to display an amount of firmness and resolution he was far from feeling.

"And I have spoken too. If my entreaties are of no avail, I will cling to you thus, and nothing but actual violence shall cause me to release you!"

"And that you know I shall not offer."

"I hope not, and so abandon this project at once or if you must go, take me with you."

"Take you with me?"

"Yes—why not?"

"Do you know the nature of the enterprise?"

"That signifies not, so long as I am with you."

"But in the moment of danger what could I do if I had you? The consciousness of your presence would paralyse my arm."

"Then why has it not done so on many an occasion when you have freed me from great peril? Dick—Dick, that is nothing but a pretext—an excuse!"

"Nay—nay."

"It is so. It is the inclination that is wanting; and when that is the case it is the easiest thing in the world to frame excuses."

"Maud, I——"

"You no longer wish me to be with you—that is it! But go—go!—you are welcome now. I have tested you, and am satisfied."

But Maud's satisfaction was of a very singular character indeed, for she immediately turned round and wept bitterly.

Dick displayed a momentary hesitation.

Then coming suddenly to a decision, he said:

"Come, Maud, for once you shall have your way. I could not pass the night in inaction beneath that roof, so I will take you with me; but you must promise to obey all the instructions I shall give you that shall tend to a preservation of your safety."

"Yes, yes—I promise all gladly—I will promise anything!" exclaimed Maud, for, to tell the truth, she was delighted at the prospect of quitting the inn during the long, silent hours of the night.

It was then agreed that the place was to be given into the charge of Tom Davis, upon whose horse Maud was to ride.

A few moments enabled them to get in readiness to set forth.

"It is a long time since we had an adventure together, Bess," said Dick, as he sprang on to the back of his bonny mare; "but I hope fortune will favour us this time."

Maud was in the best possible spirits; and as the horse upon which she sat was a very good one, she was able to keep pace well with Black Bess.

Her breath came and went quickly, and her cheeks were vivid red, for she could not control the agitation and excitement which the prospect of a night of adventure occasioned.

We shall leave them together setting out from the inn, however, as we shall also leave Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

We feel that Tom King has the first and strongest claim upon our attention.

For this reason we shall follow closely in his footsteps, and it will be found that his adventures on this occasion were truly of unparalleled description.

Our old friend, then, rode on for some distance in deep thought.

He knew very well that this part of the country was of a very lonely character, and that his chances were quite against his meeting with anybody.

Swayed by this conviction, he did not look about him with that keenness and closeness which he usually made use of.

The only disguise he had was in the shape of a voluminous riding cloak, in which, when on foot, he could, if he chose, envelop his whole form.

This seemed rather inefficient, considering the nature of the place in which he proposed to venture.

"I must ride fast," muttered Tom, "to get all done in time, and therefore, no matter how tempting an adventure may present itself, I must pass it by, or else relinquish what I have in hand, and that can never be."

Tom increased the speed of his horse as he spoke.

It so happened on this occasion that he was not subjected to any temptation; and this will appear the less surprising when the reader is informed that, in accordance with his usual custom, Tom altogether forsook the high-road and lanes, bending his way in as straight a line as possible across the open country.

By adopting this means he reached the environs of London in a much shorter time than he would have done otherwise.

"I will put a bold face upon it," was Tom's thought as he rode into the metropolis. "It is more likely to command success than any elaborate scheme. At any rate, I will make the trial to-night of how much can be accomplished by the sheer force of impudence alone."

It was scarcely likely, however, that Tom would be insane enough to think of riding up to old Matthew's door, and yet he held on his course as though such was his intention.

On nearing Covent Garden—then strikingly a different place to what it is at present—he came to a halt.

So far had he proceeded, to all appearances, in perfect safety.

The hour would not now be considered at all a late one, and yet Tom had found but few people abroad.

But in those days, when the only illumination the streets boasted of only served to render darkness visible—necessitating late travellers to engage the services of a link-boy, who would run before them with a lighted torch—few people ventured out after dark, unless upon some particular occasion.

Tom King drew rein close to the entrance of a dark and gloomy archway.

At first he did not alight, but, shrouded by the darkness, sat in the saddle, straining his eyes and endeavouring to make out whether the coast was clear.

"Hullo, my noble captain!" said a voice. "Air you a looking for some cove for to mind yer horse, because if so, d'yo see, I'se here."

Tom King was not able at first to make out from whence the voice proceeded.

Upon looking down more closely, however, and having also the sound to guide him, he caught sight of an attenuated form, clad in tattered clothes, which was holding the stirrup, in order to assist him to alight.

The face turned up to the highwayman's gaze was pinched and thin with hunger, the cheeks white and sunken, and the eyes large, staring, and preternaturally white.

"Can I trust you to take care of him?" asked Tom King, endeavouring while he spoke to obtain a better view of the hunger-starved face.

"Rather," was the reply. "You don't come here very often, or you'd a knowed me. I'se always here."

"Well," said Tom, slipping quickly from the saddle, "I'll put faith in you. I am not going far, and do not expect to be detained many minutes."

"I'll take care of him, captain, no matter how long you may be."

"Above everything," said Tom, "don't stir from this place. Whatever the time may be when I return, let me find you in this exact spot, because I shall be in a hurry."

"All right—you can depend upon me."

"Take that, then, as an earnest of what I shall give you."

Tom slipped a shilling into the boy's hand.

"Oh, my eye!" he exclaimed; then, as if suddenly smitten with a doubt as to the genuineness of the coin, he slipped it between his teeth and endeavoured to bend it.

"It's good," he said, in a satisfied voice, and immediately thereafter the shilling disappeared.

"You will be sure to comply with my instructions?"

"Certain."

"That's enough. I shall not be more than half an hour at the——"

At this instant there was the sound of footsteps, and the flashing of a light.

"Hullo, there!" said a gruff voice. "What are you about there? Is it murder, or treason, or what?"

"Or what," answered the boy. "Don't make a tool of yourself, Moses. Don't you see it's me? It's all right."

Tom, turning round, saw that this new-comer was clad in the garb of a watchman.

He was closely muffled up in order to protect himself from the cold, and in one hand he carried a lantern, and in the other a stout cudgel.

Tom was annoyed at the light being brought, but dared not show his annoyance.

He kept himself closely shrouded in his cloak, however; and as if to prevent it from being blown off by the wind, drew his hat down further over his face.

"Take this, my friend," said Tom, giving the watchman a shilling, "and buy something to keep the cold out; and at the same time, if you would have an eye on my mare here I would be obliged to you."

"Your honour's honour is a perfect gentleman. Good luck go with you for the rest of your days!"

Tom merely waved his hand.

Then hurried off.

All things considered, he believed he had managed matters so far with a tolerable amount of success.

A very few minutes, he knew, would enable him to walk as far as old Matthew's, and he determined not to stay here any longer than was just necessary to enable him to communicate Dick's wishes.

Had he lingered a little while, however, or could he have heard what took place immediately after his departure, his satisfaction would have suffered a considerable abatement.

The boy, with his dark, gleaming eyes, watched Tom for some distance.

Then turning round, he placed his hand to his mouth and said, in a hoarse voice, which scarcely rose above a whisper:

"Moses—Moses!"

The watchman, with a laudable desire to act upon the good advice given him by Tom, was already on the way to a house where he knew he could obtain a cordial that would comfort him greatly.

Upon hearing his name pronounced, however, he looked back.

"Well, young villain!" he ejaculated. "What now?"

"Here—here!"

"What do you want?"

"Come here, and I'll tell you."

"Don't you wish you may get it! I'm off."

"But, Moses—Moses!"

"Oh, bother!"

"Come here."

"I sha'n't!"

"Who stole the church can——"

The watchman uttered a howl which drowned the concluding syllables of the word which the boy had begun to utter.

At the same time Moses turned round and rushed towards the boy, brandishing his cudgel in a manner well calculated to inspire fear.

The boy dodged behind the horse with the agility of a monkey.

"You young demon!" snarled the watchman—"I'll be the death of you, I will! I'll beat your bones to batter! Take that!"

He aimed a desperate blow with his heavy cudgel as he spoke, but it was easily avoided.

"Don't be a fool, Moses!" said the boy. "I've got something more important to tell you than ever you heard in your life. What do you think of that, now?"

"Bah!"

"It's true!"

"What did you mean by yelling out like that?"

"Because I wanted you to turn back."

"Yes, curse you!"

"And I knew well enough that would make you. But listen, Moses—there's no joking about the matter, none at all—not a little bit, I assure you."

"Come, then, be quick—tell me now at once; and if ever you allude again——"

"Oh, never mind that!"

"I say if I ever hear you allude again——"

"To your stealing the church can——"

"I'll be the death of you, I will, and I'll sell your body to the doctors. What do you think of that?"

"Why, I think you are a fool for not listening to what I have to say."

"Speak quick, then!"

"I will. I should have told you before this, only you would not listen."

There was something in the tones of the boy's voice, and something in the manner in which he bent forward, his breast panting fearfully, that made the obtuse-perceptioned watchman conscious that the disclosure about to be made was of no ordinary or slight importance.

"Speak," he said—"speak—I am listening!"

"Then you saw that swell cove that was with me?"

"The one belonging to this horse?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"No—never saw him before."

"Ah!"

"Do you?"

"What?"

"Know him?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

The boy bent closer still to the old watchman.

He caught hold of the collar of his white duffel coat, and pulled him down by it until his lips were close to his ear.

Then he whispered something.

The watchman gave a great start.

"That Tom King the highwayman?" he ejaculated.

"Hold your row, you fool!" growled the boy, savagely. "Do you want all Covent Garden to hear you?"

"But it ain't true."

"I tell you it is!"

"Are you certain?"

"As certain as I am this is a horse."

"How came you to know him?"

"I've seen him afore. I thought I knew him afore you came up, but when the light of your lantern fell on his face I was quite certain—I would swear to his 'dentity out of ten thousand."

"Then we will call the police and follow him. No, stop—I'll spring my rattle. That's the ticket!"

With more agility than he had displayed for many a day, the watchman dropped his cudgel and drew his ponderous rattle from his belt.

But the boy, with a cry of suppressed anger, snatched it from his hand and threw it with all his might down the gateway.

"You infernal old fool!" he exclaimed, almost choked with passion. "You idiot! Do you know what you are after?"

"Yes—do you?"

The watchman quickly repossessed himself of his cudgel, and aimed another blow at his companion with it.

But, as before, it was evaded.

"Moses, if you don't listen quietly," he said, "and do what I tell you, I'll peach about the——"

"Go on. I'm quiet."

"Well, then, now pay attention, and I will let you know how to go to work to get the most of the reward."

"That's it—that's it."

"Then, if you had gone on we should have had none."

"What must I do, then?"

"Why, he's got so far off by this time that you could not overtake him now, but you might make him aware that we know who he is, and then what should we have for our pains?"

"His horse."

"True; we should have that in any case; but I want something more."

"The reward?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"But why don't you tell me what to do at once?"

"There is no violent hurry, and I want a little time to reflect. Ah! I have it."

"Where?"

"Here, in my brain box. He will be sure to come back for his horse, won't he, because he will think all is right?"

"Yes, I should say he is sure to come back."

"Well, then, you must go over to the station in Bow Street—— Or, stop a moment. You mind the horse."

"I sha'n't!"

"Then I peach!"

"Come on!"

The watchman took hold of the rein of Tom's horse, though somewhat reluctantly.

The boy was evidently in possession of a secret that gave him the mastery whenever he threatened to divulge it.

"Now don't you stir, Moses," he said. "If you do, you know the result. I have threatened you many a time, but that would be the last. Mind you are here when I come back."

"Never fear me."

"That's enough; I am off."

"Where to?"

"Why, to Bow Street, to be sure."

"What to do?"

"Fetch some police officers. But don't be alarmed, I sha'n't tell them anything about you unless you force me to do so by neglecting my injunctions."

With these words upon his lips, this singular being turned round and bounded off into the darkness.

The watchman felt far from comfortable, and more than once he was tempted to let go the horse and be off, leaving his companion to finish the adventure how he liked.

But the dread of his wrath prevailed, and perhaps, too the prospect of a share in the reward offered for the apprehension of the highwayman had some weight with him.

The boy was only absent a few minutes.

Each second, however, seemed to the watchman almost an hour in duration, so great was the excitement of mind under which he laboured.

At length, to his mingled satisfaction and alarm, he heard the sounds of many footsteps.

The next moment the well-known voice of the boy reached his ears.

"This is the place," he heard him say, "and here is his horse just as I told you. Do you believe me now?"

The six officers who accompanied the boy seemed incredulous.

Some questioned the watchman.

Some particularly examined the horse.

The result of this was, that after a brief conversation they came unanimously to the conclusion that fortune had at length placed the highwayman in their hands.

"Now," said the boy, with that sharpness which seemed natural to him—"now that you are perfectly satisfied that all is right, just let us frame a bargain."

"A bargain?" repeated one of the officers.

"Yes, a bargain," mimicked the boy, though he spoke with great resolution. "I know you all of old, and don't intend to be fobbed off as you have many I have heard of."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, and in fact too. You needn't sneer!"

"What terms do you propose?"

"Why, there are eight of us altogether, and the reward must be equally divided."

"Oh, must it?"

"It must."

"But suppose we don't agree?"

"Then you don't take your prisoner!"

"You can't prevent it."

"Can't I?"

"No."

"Well, you'll see! If I have any bother with you I shall just shout out to him when I see him coming, and make him aware of his danger, and I should not care what you did with me afterwards!"

"Well, my lad, you seem quite a sharp chap—certainly a credit to your mother, I should say."

"Never mind that. Do you consent—yes or no?"

"Why, yes, of course. We never thought of anything else, only you would put yourself out about nothing."

"Never mind, I am determined to have my equal share of the reward; and if you attempt to do me out of it you will suffer for it; and you can ask Moses here whether I shall not be as good as my word."

"He's a little demon," said Moses, though in an admiring way rather than otherwise.

"Well," said the officer who had all along spoken, and who happened to be a newly-made sergeant, and consequently very proud of his new dignity, "as we have settled all that, let us hear what comes next?"

"Why," said the boy, "you must all hide yourselves carefully in that gateway, taking the utmost care to keep out of sight. It's a cute fellow you have to do with, bear in mind—one that can smell danger a long way off, as they say a rook can smell powder."

"We could have told you that, sharpshins."

"Then let me advise you to hide at once, and say no more, for I expect him to come every moment, and the sound of voices would put him on the alert at once."

The officers were much annoyed at the commanding tone of this boy, and if they could possibly have acted in opposition to his injunctions they would have done so.

But they were quick-witted enough to see that what he

proposed was the best course of action that could be pursued.

Without exchanging any more remarks, then, they took up their positions in the gateway as directed.

This was so large and so profoundly dark, that they experienced no difficulty whatever in concealing themselves effectually.

The whole of the party was in high spirits.

The police officers saw the immense advantage they possessed.

The highwayman would be sure to return for his horse, and then, if they kept still, how could he suspect anything of their presence?

Then, if they waited until he was in the act of mounting, how easy it would be for them to spring forth and overpower him?

There was little fear, either, that he would escape from them after capture as he had escaped from others

They were within almost a stone's throw of Bow Street police station, so that they could deposit him there in the space of a few moments.

So far as the officers themselves were concerned, it was impossible that things could wear a more encouraging aspect.

There was not one of them who did not look upon the affair as completely settled.

The boy was so excited that he could scarcely breathe.

He endeavoured to reckon up what would be his exact share of the reward, but this arithmetical feat was far beyond his capacity in his present perturbation of spirits.

Truly now was the peril that threatened our old friend great indeed.

Of all this he was as profoundly ignorant as it was possible for a human being to be of anything.

The street, too, had a deceitful air of calmness and repose about it.

A chance passer-by would never for a moment suspect that half a dozen well-armed, determined men were hiding in the gateway.

Time passed on.

Not more than an hour certainly; but this space of time seems of endless duration to those who are each moment in the expectation of the occurrence of some particular event.

The officers began to grow uneasy.

The boy, too, began to lose some of that confidence which he had hitherto felt.

Could it be possible that by some means or other—means both mysterious and incomprehensible—Tom King had become acquainted with this design upon his life and liberty?

The thought was a maddening one.

But the time had not yet arrived for despair.

Upon a reconsideration of the whole matter, the boy could scarcely bring himself to believe that it was possible for Tom King to suspect anything.

While in the gateway, the officers had held a long, whispered conversation with Moses, the watchman.

He assured them positively that the boy spoke the truth, for, not altogether unreasonably, the officers had their doubts.

These, however, were completely dispelled after the watchman had answered their interrogations respecting the outward appearance of the traveller.

These answers made them certain that it could be no other than Tom King.

It was scarcely credible that the same description could apply so closely to another person.

More time passed.

All were too anxious for the result now to utter a single word.

The silence became irksome.

The boy strained his hearing to the utmost.

At length he caught the sound of a rapid footstep.

"Hush—hush!" he said, in a whisper, to the officers behind him. "Be in readiness to act, but do not be too precipitate, and so lose him. Not one word! He is coming now! Can you hear him? Hark—hark!—he is coming!"

CHAPTER MXLIII.

TOM KING FALLS BLINDLY AND HELPLESSLY INTO THE SNARE SO CUNNINGLY LAID FOR HIM.

WHETHER or not it was really Tom King who was approaching the spot where the officers were so cleverly concealed we must now proceed to ascertain.

In order to do this, we must follow in our old friend's footsteps.

Having left his horse in the joint care of the boy and the watchman, in the manner we have described, Tom felt tolerably satisfied so far as that point was concerned.

It is not surprising that it should be banished almost entirely from his thoughts before he had well quitted the precincts of Covent Garden when we bear in mind what other weighty matters were pressing on his mind, all of which required particular consideration.

He glanced about him keenly as he drew nearer to the place of his destination, for it was here that he looked for and expected danger.

But on this particular night an unusual quiet reigned in the streets—a quiet which, had Tom been fancifully disposed, he might have looked upon as of ill omen.

Strangely enough, however, he never felt more at his ease or more confident of his own powers.

There was no inner intangible sense to warn him that he was in so great peril.

Drury Lane looked strangely dark and drear.

Tom made his way into it by means of a court leading out of Brydges Street, and which brought him out almost directly opposite the White Horse Inn.

Under the concealing shadow of the entrance to this court, Tom paused a second to reconnoitre.

He could see no one about.

He could not even detect the sound of a distant footstep.

As usual, a light was shining forth from the ground-floor windows of the inn, and where he stood he could hear the sound of noisy, boisterous merriment.

Now was the opportunity.

It might be that such a one would never occur again.

Tom thought so, and darted across the street like a quickly-flitting shadow.

He drew a long breath upon finding himself fairly over the threshold.

Without hesitating an instant, he pushed open that inner half-glass door which in the course of this history we have so frequently had occasion to make mention of.

The bar window was now before him.

He reached it in half a dozen steps.

Matthew was there alone.

He seemed to be half dozing over a newspaper.

But he looked up upon hearing a footstep.

Tom did not speak.

He merely made a sign with his hand.

Matthew comprehended it, though his face turned a shade paler as he hastened to open the door and admit his visitor.

As Tom entered, Matthew hastily pressed his hand, and then pointed to the door leading into the private room.

"I cannot stay above five minutes, Matthew," said Tom, as soon as this door was closed behind them.

"Is it really you or your ghost?"

"Myself."

"Then sit down by the fire. You are most welcome, though it spoils the pleasure I should feel in entertaining you when I think of the risk you run."

"Never mind it. I have got in unseen."

"Do you think so?" asked Matthew, eagerly.

"I am almost certain of it—I might say I am quite certain."

"Then that is good news, for I believe you can reckon yourself safe. It would be a strange and unlucky chance if we were interrupted now."

"Have the officers discontinued their attentions?"

"I have not seen one in the place for a longer period than I can remember to have passed without doing so, and yet when, hitherto, I have felt a sensation of security on this account I have invariably been disturbed soon afterwards."

"Then I hope that this instance will prove an exception."

"So do I, Tom. But tell me what urgent business it is



[TOM KING IS CAPTURED BY THE POLICE OFFICERS.]

that brings you here to-night. Have something to drink, however, before you begin to speak."

Old Matthew bustled about quickly, and soon placed some tempting refreshments before his guest, to whom, in good truth, they were most welcome.

"And you are sure you left them all sound and well?" he asked, referring to Dick Turpin and his associates.

"Quite sure."

"That, then, is good news. But come, you have not yet told me what brings you here to-night. It is something out of the common, I feel certain."

Tom King, in a very few words, explained his errand.

When he had finished, old Matthew nodded his head approvingly.

"I was thinking about them," he said, "and wondering what you would do."

"What think you of the plan?"

"It is excellent."

"And you will see to the carrying out of your part of it?"

"I will, depend upon it. And what is more, I think I know a place where they can both get comfortable lodgings, and no questions asked. And in order that the suspicions of the police may be the better allayed, I will seem to hold no communication with them whatever."

"It will perhaps be quite as well."

"I am sure of it; and if Tom Davis and his wife and Ellen can get clear out of the country, I am sure it will be the best thing in the world for them."

"We are unanimous in our opinion in that respect. And now, Matthew, I will be off."

"What, so soon?"

"Yes. This is an atmosphere of danger for me to breathe, and I neither wish to bring you into trouble nor myself; besides——"

"Besides what?"

No. 224 will be Published next Thursday.

"I have left my horse outside in charge of a lad, and I told him that I should not be away many minutes."

"Outside?" ejaculated Matthew.

"Well, some little distance off, of course."

"Then I will send——"

"Nay—nay, it is not worth while."

"But I think it is. It will be safer."

"I don't know about that. I shall be back quickly; and what is more, I don't suppose the boy would surrender the horse to anyone but myself."

Old Matthew still hesitated.

How strange it was that Tom should decline this service!

If he had accepted it instead, the treachery of the boy and watchman would have been made apparent.

But it was not destined so to be.

Tom pressed the hand of his old and staunch friend very tightly; and, recommending him to do his best for Mrs. Davis and Ellen, he said farewell.

Old Matthew, however, would not allow him to depart until he had satisfied himself that there was no police officer on the watch outside.

He was absent some time; and when he returned, Tom said:

"Is all well?"

"I believe so. I can see no one."

"That is right. I will be off now. Once more, farewell!"

"Stay a bit," said Matthew.

"What for?"

"I will come a little way with you."

"Let me thank you all the same," answered Tom; "but, believe me, I feel that it would be best not to do so."

"Why so?"

"You might be observed; and I have no wish to bring danger upon you, as would be the case if you were found with me."

"Well, well, I feel you are right; and yet I have a strong desire to do something to serve you—to render you assistance; it is a feeling which I cannot at all comprehend."

Tom's only reply was a light and careless laugh, and the next moment he had passed through the doorway into the dark and silent street.

After his departure, Matthew's vague, uncomfortable sensation that something was going wrong grew stronger and stronger.

Still, the feeling was too vague for any decisive course of action to be produced from it, and so, in a state of mind the very reverse to pleasant, he resumed the perusal of the newspaper which the arrival of his unexpected guest had interrupted.

In the meantime, Tom King was rapidly making his way towards his destination.

Strange to say, his mind was filled with a sensation of security, much greater than that which he usually experienced.

Never for a moment did he believe that the boy had played him false.

In the first place, Tom felt almost certain that he had so well enwrapped his form that recognition was impossible; and in the second, he considered that, as the boy would be expecting him to return every moment, he would not venture to quit the spot where he had been left.

And so Tom hurriedly walked on.

He glanced perpetually from side to side, but without seeing anyone.

It almost seemed as though he was the sole pedestrian abroad that night.

What a pity it was, however, that there was no kind spirit to whisper in his ear some warning of his hidden danger!

But no.

He walked on, if possible, with a more confident step towards the fatal spot.

The footstep which the treacherous boy had heard approaching was indeed that of our old friend—now menaced by a more terrible danger than any which had threatened him during the entire course of his career, for now he was totally unprepared.

The officers at once placed themselves in readiness for instantaneous action.

Then they remained immovable, but listening with the utmost intensity to the approach of the rapid footfall.

Nearer, nearer came the victim to the trap.

"Are you there?" they heard Tom say, as he drew closer, for so dark were the shadows round about the old gateway that he was unable to discern the form of his horse at any distance.

"Yes—yes!" answered the boy, striving hard to conceal the impatience which struggled to manifest itself in any way.

"Come this way then."

The boy made a show of leading the horse towards where Tom stood.

But the highwayman was too impatient and too anxious to wait for this, so he advanced to his horse himself.

The boy held the reins tightly.

It almost seemed as though he grasped them on purpose to support himself, for he trembled so excessively that he seemed in imminent danger of falling to the ground.

But Tom was too busy to notice this.

Besides, the darkness of the night, to a great extent, prevented him from doing so.

His hand was on the saddle.

One foot was in the stirrup.

Another second, and he would have been mounted.

But before this second could elapse, the officers bounded forward.

In their excitement, all gave utterance to a suppressed cry of triumph and relief, which, forming one aggregate sound, came very strangely upon the ear indeed.

Before Tom knew where he was—

Before he could form the least idea of what had happened, he found himself grasped tightly in several places by many powerful hands.

Where his assailants had come from he could not guess.

Had they been dropped upon him from the clouds their appearance could not have been more sudden or more startling.

He had not even time to utter a cry, much more to raise a hand in his own defence.

It was just as the first shock of the surprise passed away, however, that he heard a voice cry:

"Tom King, you are our prisoner! You are safe—caught—nabbed! Keep yourself quiet, for resistance will only have the effect of bringing down ill treatment against you! However, you can please yourself! Our orders are to take you to Newgate dead or alive; and in one state or other we'll do it, mind that! So you had better give in at once, and not be fool enough to make any fuss! Why don't you speak? Just let us know whether you are open to reason or not!"

CHAPTER MXLIV.

TOM KING IS TAKEN PRISONER BY THE POLICE OFFICERS.

From the moment the police officer had begun to speak, Tom King had remained profoundly still.

He had not attempted to make the least movement.

To all appearances, he was paying the utmost attention to what the officer said

But Tom was quite willing that he should have gone on gabbling for some time longer, as during this period Tom was collecting his shattered thoughts.

This, under such circumstances as we have just related, was very far from being an easy task.

But Tom was used to surprises.

Great, therefore, as this one was, he rapidly recovered from it.

This much done, the next thought was to busy his brain as to the course of action he should take.

Here was subject for long and anxious deliberation indeed; but Tom had no more than a few fleeting seconds allowed him.

Nevertheless, even in that brief period he came to some kind of conclusion as to what he should do.

Already there was hovering in his mind the dull, dim outlines of a scheme which, if prosecuted, would release him from his foes.

He still remained silent, thinking deeply.

Resistance was out the question; and, moreover, it

was certain that if there seemed to be any chance of his getting away, they would not hesitate to fire a volley after him; and this, coming from so many weapons, and from so short a distance, could not fail to be fatal.

Tom knew the officers too well to believe that they would hesitate a moment about doing this.

The one who had spoken waited thus long for some kind of reply.

But finding none came, he said:

"Tom King, I see you surrender handsomely. Well, it is no more than I expected of you, so come along. It will be all over in a moment."

Tom King affected to be much cast down and overcome.

"Nay—nay," said the officers, "never be downhearted! Keep up your courage! You must have known that, some day or other, it would come to this, so be game—be game to the last!"

Tom sighed, and appeared to be more dejected than before.

"Don't be down, I say! You have set us at defiance a long time, and now our turn has come."

"I feel it."

"No doubt you do; but it cannot be helped."

"You misapprehend me."

"Do I?"

"You do indeed."

"What do you mean, then?"

"Why, I feel that your turn has come to triumph, and that it will be all over with us now in a very little while."

"Very likely."

Tom was again silent.

"Now, then," cried the officer who had before spoken, "out with the darbies, and clap them on! Would you like a hackney-coach? I am willing to do the thing decent."

Tom really seemed as though this sudden blow of misfortune had paralysed him.

No one could have displayed more dejection.

But when the officers, in obedience to the injunctions of their leader, set about handcuffing him, he aroused himself.

"No—no," he said—"not that! There's no need for that! Have I not given into you quietly enough?"

"Very true, you have; but, then, you know, you are such a slippery customer that we should be greatly blamed if we omitted to take any one precaution."

"There's no need for it," said Tom—"no need at all. But I wish you would let me say a few words to you in private."

"What, now?"

"Yes; no other time will suit."

"Impossible!"

"I will give you my word not to try to get away. And if you refuse this request you will repent having done so to the longest day of your existence."

There was a peculiar earnestness, not to say solemnity, about the manner in which Tom King spoke, and the officer, in spite of himself, was greatly moved.

He at once became filled with curiosity to know what it was the celebrated highwayman had to communicate to him.

But he hesitated about giving his consent.

Curiosity, however, at length obtained the victory.

"I will take your word," he said.

"You have chosen wisely," answered Tom. "I just want to whisper something in your ear—that is all."

At a word from the one in command, the officers who held Tom released him.

But the chief held him by the arm, apparently only in the manner that one friend might hold another, but in reality, his grasp was one that could not have been shaken off very easily.

Moreover, the other police officers held their pistols in readiness for instant use, so that, had the highwayman contemplated the perpetration of any treachery, he was denied the opportunity, for before he could get free such a volley would be fired after him as could not fail to cause his death, or at least inflict such serious hurts upon him as to render him incapable of motion.

But Tom's plan, as will be seen, was by far too elaborate and skilfully laid to have in it any such clumsiness as this.

Besides, he had given his word.

"Now, then," cried the officer to him, "what is it? Speak quickly!"

"I will. Listen."

"I am paying every attention."

"Well, I quite give into my fate—you understand that. But I am afraid it will go very hard with me."

"I'm afraid it will; I won't misrepresent matters."

"I am glad to hear you say so."

"Well, go on."

"What I want to know is, whether it would be possible for me to do anything that would make things better?"

The officer shook his head.

"Don't you think I can?" Tom asked, in a most anxious tone.

"Well, you see, you have been so out-and-out. Nothing can save you from Tyburn, I fear."

Tom looked disappointed.

"You had got something to propose, hadn't you?" asked the officer, who fancied already that he could scent out something that would eventuate to his advantage.

"I had."

"Then let me hear it."

"What's the good? Come on; I am ready to go with you."

"You may as well let me know," continued the officer, with an eagerness which Tom had artfully elicited. "It can do no harm, you know."

"Nor good to me."

"Perhaps—who knows? At any rate, I could tell better if I heard your proposition."

Tom seemed undecided.

The officer repeated his request with additional eagerness.

"Well," said Tom, "the officers and the other authorities are very anxious to capture Dick Turpin, are they not?"

"I believe you."

"And Claude Duval?"

"Rather!"

"And Sixteen-String Jack?"

"Of course!"

"And there's Maud."

"Certainly."

"You are very anxious to capture them as well as myself?"

"Of course we are, though we can't manage to do it."

"You have failed hitherto," said Tom, with great gravity. "But now that you have nabbed me, I feel assured that the others will fall into your hands ere long."

"I hope so!"

"Now," said Tom, slightly sinking his voice, "do you think if I was to deliver them all into your hands, so that you could capture them without any trouble, that such a service would do anything towards getting me off lightly?"

"Are you in earnest?"

"Answer my question first."

"Then I should say it most certainly would."

"You really believe that it would influence the authorities and make them inclined to act leniently to me?"

"There can be no doubt of it."

"What difference would it make?"

"Why, you would get off with transportation."

"Then, if you are agreeable, it shall be done."

"But I can't believe you are in earnest."

"Why not?"

"Because I have always been told that nothing would induce you highwaymen to prove false to one another—that you would die rather than betray."

"Yes, that has always been our rule; but, then, I can see very plainly now that they cannot escape much longer, so I think I might just as well reap some benefit by their capture as not."

"That is certainly a most sensible and businesslike way of looking at the matter," replied the officer; "and I should be the very last in the world to blame you for adopting such a course."

"I think no sensible person would blame me."

"Then, have you made up your mind?"

"I have. And now I want you to tell me how to proceed in the matter."

"Where are they all?"

"Lying in concealment, and waiting for my return. They will not move till I go back."

"Could we take them at unawares?"

"Easily."

"Have we sufficient force here?"

"I should think so. You would be able to take them by surprise as you did me."

The officer drew a long breath.

The prospect of taking prisoners Dick Turpin and all his companions in this manner was certainly dazzling, and no one could be surprised at the officer being considerably thrown off his guard by it.

He knew well how great was the aggregate reward, and thought what a first-rate thing it would be if it only had to be shared between him and his companions.

It must have been noticed more than once that the very magnitude of the reward offered for the apprehension of the highwaymen defeated its own object, as all officers were anxious to get as great a share as they could.

The leader of the present troop was not, however, altogether blind to caution, for he asked:

"But what guarantee have I that you will not play me false?"

Tom pretended to consider.

"I don't know what guarantee you can have; but I will tell you what I have been thinking, if you like."

"Very well."

"You will then see that the affair is left entirely in you own hands.

"All right, then," answered the officer, with a sigh of relief, "let me hear what you have to propose."

"Very well. In the first place, I should recommend you to obtain horses for yourself and your comrades. I can ride on my own; and I will take you all to the place where they are concealed, and where you can capture them with less trouble than you did me."

"That's the ticket! But I say."

"What?"

"If I trusted you to get on your horse again, how do I know but what you would take the first opportunity to bolt off?"

"You would be greatly to blame if you allowed me any such opportunity."

"I suppose I should. But then you are as slippery as an eel, and as cunning as a fox."

"You are complimentary."

"I am, if you choose to think so."

"But this is not the point."

"No, truly."

"First of all, do you consent—yes or no?"

The officer reflected for some moments, and then said:

"I will consult my companions."

"Do so. But shall you make the boy and the watchman party to it? They would be no good, and would only make two more to divide the reward amongst."

Tom could not have employed a more cogent argument than this.

"Leave them to me," said the officer. "I'll see to them, never fear."

Having spoken these words in a very confident tone, he moved off a step or two in order to consult with his companions, who were not a little curious and anxious to know what had passed between the prisoner and their chief.

They were not long left in ignorance.

Tom watched them with a keen eye.

Upon the decision arrived at depended his liberty and his life.

No prisoner standing in the dock waiting for the verdict of the jury could have suffered greater anxiety than he did.

And yet to have gazed upon him no one would have thought that he was even moved.

He was sorely tempted to try to make a run for it, but the recollection of the pistols held so handily by his foes, and the thought that they would in all probability assent to his proposal, induced him to remain firm.

Whether this was a chance he ought to have embraced or not would be hard indeed to say.

At any rate, be the case how it might, the chance was lost, for the chief officer came to him and said:

"My fellows are all inclined to agree to your proposal, though they could hardly believe at first that you were in earnest in intending to betray your companions, it was so foreign to your nature."

"It may be so," answered Tom, grimly, "but then you should always bear in mind that circumstances alter cases."

"That is very true."

"But do they consent?"

"With one condition they do."

"What is it?"

"That you suffer yourself to be bound upon your horse in a secure manner, and ride in the midst of us."

This was a difficulty.

Tom hardly saw his way out of it, though, for all that, he said, offhand:

"I think it a pity you lot cannot mind me without putting me to so much pain and inconvenience."

"They have such an opinion of your abilities."

"Suppose I refuse?"

"Why, then, they recommend that we take you direct to Newgate, and so make sure of you, at all events. And this is what I should do, for I am one of those who firmly believe that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

Now the reader must know already that, in spite of all he had said, Tom's ultimate idea and intention was escape.

The mere fact of his being bound on his horse's back would materially impede the carrying out of this project, and yet, how was he to avoid it?

He might have given his solemn word not to attempt to get free, and doubtless, had he done so, the officers would have been satisfied; but that would by no means have agreed with Tom's intentions, for he placed too high a value upon his word ever to break the pledge, no matter what the circumstances might be.

Clearly, however, it was better to consent to any terms, no matter how hard, so long as he got further away from London, than it would be voluntarily to consign himself to a cell in Newgate, from whence there would be scarcely the faintest shadow of a hope of effecting his liberation.

"We sha'n't put you to any pain, that I know of," continued the officer, "and not to any more inconvenience than we can help. We shall just secure you with a rope to prevent you from giving us the slip, and no more."

"Well," said Tom, "if you won't trust me, why, of course I must submit, and I hope that will go a little way towards convincing you that I am quite in earnest."

"It will certainly."

"Then send for some horses, and we will be off at once. But for your own sakes keep the matter quiet."

"You trust me."

Immediately after this, one of the officers was, after many injunctions, despatched to fetch the requisite number of horses to accommodate the troop.

The watchman and the boy were aware something of a peculiar character was going on, but the officers took particularly good care that they should not find out what.

The chief took advantage of the absence of his subordinate to address a few words to them.

As for the watchman, he was soon disposed of.

No sort of stipulation or agreement had been entered into with him whatever, and therefore he was abundantly satisfied upon receiving half-a-crown in return for his trouble.

But with the boy it was different.

His eyes looked brighter—

His face more hungry-like than ever, owing to the expression of preternatural acuteness which rested upon it.

"Now, my lad," said the officer, "will you take a certain sum down for your share in this affair, and be off about your business?"

"Eh?"

"You know very well what I said; and if you don't, I ain't going to repeat it."

"Well, then, I will take one-seventh part of the amount of the reward offered."

"Oh, will you, indeed?"

"Yes, certainly. That was what we agreed upon.

"Very well. You mean to say you will be quite content with that?"

"Yes, I shall."

"Then come to me at the police office in the morning and you shall have the amount."

"But I shall go with you to Newgate and see him safely lodged."

"Well, that you can please yourself about; but we are going out on some business that does not concern you in any degree."

The boy opened his eyes a trifle wider as he said, with remarkable determination:

"I'm going with you!"

"Are you?"

"I am!"

"Then you will have to do so in the best way you are able. I don't intend to find accommodation for you; and, what is more, you had better be civil if you are wise, for, remember, you have not got the money yet, and I shall have a share in the paying of it."

At this moment the clatter of horses' hoofs became audible, importing that the officer was returning.

CHAPTER MXLV.

RELATES THE SURPRISING ADVENTURES OF TOM KING AND THE OFFICERS.

This last speech of the officer's seemed to furnish the boy with food for reflection, for he remained perfectly silent.

Tom was busily engaged in thought.

The horses were soon opposite the gateway, and the one who had been despatched to fetch them showed a piece of long, strong rope that he had brought as well.

"That's the ticket!" said one of his companions, seizing upon this article with evident satisfaction.

There was now a scene of great bustle and excitement.

The horses were soon ready.

The officer with the rope advanced, and, having formed a running noose in the middle of it, he put it over Tom's head and brought it down to his waist.

He was about to draw it tight, in such a manner that Tom's arms would be confined to his sides at the elbow.

This he strongly protested against, and after some discussion the rope was merely secured round his waist, and his arms were not confined at all.

This much having been done, he was requested to mount his steed.

He did this with an alacrity that was unfeigned.

Two officers then took hold of the ends of the rope and mounted their steeds also.

Then placing themselves abreast with Tom, they took firm hold of the rope.

"I hope now you have me secure," said Tom, with a forced laugh. "At any rate, if I go anywhere I shall have to take the pair of you with me."

The officers echoed his laugh with great spirit, for they were much delighted at their extraordinary cleverness.

The others now mounted, two going in front and two following in the rear.

Thus hemmed in, it certainly did not seem possible for any human being to escape.

Tom thought so too, and wondered in what way and to what extent Fortune intended to favour him.

How he was to get free he was still unable to make out.

During the ride which was about to ensue, however, he considered he should have some opportunities for reflection, and he trusted that his brain would furnish him with an expedient that would enable him to achieve his purpose.

To start with, however, there was one palpable fact.

This was, that while he retained his present position, to get away was impossible, except by the intervention of some miracle, and Tom was not foolish enough to believe that any miracle would be wrought in his behalf.

"Now," said the chief officer, "are you all ready to start?"

"Yes," was the unanimous answer.

"Forward, then, and let us go as fast as we can just at first, so as to get rid of that boy in case he should try to follow us."

"Keep the Oxford Road," said Tom King—"ride along it till I tell you to turn off."

This direction was clear and easy to be carried out.

The boy, seeing them all start, started too.

No doubt he had great faith in his power of wind and rapidity of motion.

But his vanity, if so we may term it, received a check.

The officers started off at full gallop; and after running for some distance, the boy, with a howl of vexation and despair, was forced to confess himself beaten.

It was hard indeed that he should see the highwayman go out of his sight.

But what could he do?

He was unable to prevent it.

He was panting and exhausted, and so he sat down to think.

Leaving him thus engaged, we will follow in the steps of the police officers and Tom King.

They did not long maintain the rate of speed with which they had commenced their journey.

When they slackened, however, they took good care that they should surround Tom as closely as ever.

The officer who had thought of the device of the rope did nothing but chuckle about it; and Tom wished that so clever a personage was at the bottom of the sea, as perhaps but for this he could have given them the slip.

Still, as he rode along in company with his captors, Tom could not help feeling a very great degree of satisfaction.

Looking back, it seemed scarcely credible that the officers should have brought him right away from London, when they had him so near to a place of detention.

There can be no doubt, however, that the officers were firmly persuaded that, let what would happen, they were on the safe side.

Even supposing they should fail to capture the others, they knew they should have Tom safe, and they trusted to their own ingenuity and sagacity to keep him secure.

And certainly, looking calmly at the matter, it did seem much easier for them to do this than for Tom to escape.

However, we shall soon see how all fared by watching the progress of events.

They had now performed a considerable distance, London being so far behind that they might with justice call themselves quite in the country.

The leader of the troop began to grow impatient.

"Is it much further?" he asked.

"Not very far," answered Tom, who up to this moment had by no means made up his mind where he was to take them.

At any rate, it would not be anywhere in the vicinity of the Jolly Tar Inn, for Tom was resolved if he could not get free himself he would not be the cause of bringing trouble and danger upon his comrades.

"What kind of a place is it?" persisted the officer. "Surely you can give us some description of it?"

Tom could not very well get out of this, and, simple as it seemed, this was a great danger, and one that he had altogether omitted to take into account.

To be sure, it would be easy enough to draw upon his imagination for the description of some unexisting place, but then there was the difficulty of finding a place that would accord with his description.

"Can't you wait?" he asked, pretending to laugh. "You will know when you see it."

"But why not tell us?"

"Why should I?"

"Is it in a wood?"

"Yes."

"A cave?"

"Well, not exactly a cave; but do wait a few minutes longer, and I will show you."

The officer was silent, and Tom rejoiced to think he had got off so easily, for, as will be seen, he had not pledged himself to anything definite.

He racked his brain more than ever in order to decide upon some course of action, but in vain.

Morning, too, was coming on, and he was conscious that by daylight his chance of effecting his liberation would be materially lessened.

It seemed advisable, then, to take some speedy and decisive step, could he but resolve upon its nature.

Gazing before him, he saw in the distance a great mass of trees.

In his excursions he had noticed them many a time, but he had never been very near to them.

From their appearance, however, it was tolerably clear that they formed a portion of a wood of considerable extent.

The conclusion which our friend now came to was that while he remained on horseback he stood no chance whatever of effecting his purpose.

But how was he to alight and to induce his companions to do likewise?

The wood seemed to promise to answer this purpose, and so desperate had Tom King by this time become that he was resolved to dally no longer.

Accordingly, looking towards the trees, he asked:

"Do you see that wood yonder?"

"Yes. Is that the place?"

"It is."

"Then it is time to quit the high-road?"

"Yes; you will find the road easy enough across the meadows."

Just then the officers happened to be opposite a gate leading into the fields.

This gate one of the officers, having dismounted, threw open.

A succession of green, undulating meadows alone divided them from the wood to which Tom had pointed.

To ride across these was, of course, no harder than to journey along the high-road.

The excitement of the officers was now wound up to too great a pitch to allow them to speak.

For this Tom was thankful, for a succession of inquisitive questions could not have failed to embarrass him.

The border of the wood was quickly reached.

The trees did not grow here so closely together as to make it necessary for the party to dismount.

But Tom led the way to the thickest place he could find.

The officers seemed unwilling to quit their steeds, and so forced a way as far as they were able, but at length the extreme density of the vegetation compelled them to come to a halt.

"What are we to do now?" asked the leader.

"Dismount," answered Tom, laconically.

"But our horses?"

"You must leave them here with some one to mind them."

"But is there no means of getting to this place without quitting our saddles?"

"None whatever. Do you think Dick Turpin would take up his quarters at a place that you could drive a carriage and four into?"

This was not deemed at all likely, so, after the expression of much disapproval, the officers dismounted.

They were most careful to keep a sharp look-out upon Tom, whom they surrounded even more closely than ever.

"You seem greatly afraid of me," he said.

"So we ought to be, considering who you are and where we are. Rely upon it, we are not going to let you slip through our fingers as others have done."

"But you are not going to keep this rope round me, surely?"

"Indeed but we are!"

"It will be most awkward to get through the trees in this fashion."

"It cannot be helped, for we do not intend to proceed in any other manner."

"Well, as you will," replied Tom, resignedly. "I can perform my part of the affair."

The two officers who held the ends of the rope that was fastened round Tom's waist seemed to fix their hands for even a firmer grasp than they had yet maintained.

Hemmed in, then, by his foes even more closely than when on horseback, the little strangely-assorted party forced their way among the tangled brushwood.

At every step they took it became darker and darker, for the tall trees cast deep shadows about their roots.

Still, Tom could not help admitting to himself the disagreeable fact that he was about as far from the accomplishment of his design as ever.

He fancied, too, that the officers regarded him suspiciously, as though they had an idea that he was not acting in good faith towards them.

Perhaps it was Tom's own conscience—which is ever its own accuser—made him fancy this.

The crisis had arrived, however.

The next few moments would either show him a free man or else the officers would discover the deception that had been practised upon them.

The latter seemed to be more probable than the former.

Tom pressed his teeth together hard, and, looking keenly round him, resolved to embrace the first opportunity that presented itself.

But he watched in vain.

All at once, to his disappointment and dismay, they emerged into a considerable space that was quite bare of trees.

The officers gave vent to exclamations of surprise.

Tom was no less astonished, but he concealed the state of his feelings tolerably well.

He continued to advance with a confident step across the clearing.

The ground around now partook of quite a rocky character.

Ere they had gone many yards, they found themselves on the brink of what could not be termed anything but a precipice.

They came upon it suddenly, owing to the manner in which the ground sloped upwards, thus preventing them from knowing what laid in their path until they were within a few steps of the verge of the abyss.

"Hullo!" cried the chief officer. "D—n me if this isn't a rum place you have brought us to! Where are we to go now?"

Tom could not tell himself.

But he retained his confidence admirably.

"This way," he said, and he approached a little closer to the brink of the chasm.

He took in at one glance the features of the scene around him, and at the same time resolved upon the course he should adopt.

But before relating it we must give a brief description of the spot.

At the foot of the abyss we have mentioned flowed a current of water—too wide to be called a brook, and yet scarcely important-looking enough to be designated a river.

It was probably a woodland stream which was greatly swollen by rains, for it rushed along almost with the violence and rapidity of a torrent.

Where this stream came from could not be discerned; but it flowed beneath a rude kind of archway in some rocks.

The depth to the surface of this water from where Tom and the officers stood was close upon twenty feet.

"Which is the way?" asked the officers again.

"This," was Tom's reply.

At the moment he spoke, he summoned up all his energies, and gave a tremendous bound forward.

He had observed that the rope was held scarcely so tightly as it had been, for the officers seemed disinclined to stand too near to the brink, and doubtless they thought Tom would not venture to go closer.

But his sudden movement took them completely by surprise.

They had the chance either of releasing their hold or plunging over the abyss with their prisoner.

They chose the former course.

The rope slipped through their fingers, and the highwayman disappeared.

There was a general shout, and then the one in command came as close to the edge of the precipice as he dared, and looked down.

He caught sight of Tom in the water.

He was either swimming or else being carried along by the current.

It was scarcely light enough to distinguish which.

"We have not lost him yet," he screamed—"not yet! Follow me! We shall have him after all! It is impossible for him to escape!"

CHAPTER MXLVI.

CONTINUES TO RELATE THE UNPARALLELED ADVENTURES OF TOM KING.

NOTHING but the knowledge of the fact that his life was at stake, and that this was his only chance of escape, could have induced Tom King to adopt so perilous an expedient as the one we have described.

He was, in fact, just then rendered desperate, as he greatly feared that the officers would suspect he was only playing with them.

He trusted that the depth of the stream would be sufficient to preserve him from any injury, and certainly the tremendous rapidity with which the water rushed along would serve to keep him from reaching the bottom very easily.

He scarcely hoped, however, that he should be able to snatch the rope from the hands of the officers.

Still, he had no doubt that if he carried them over the abyss he should have little difficulty in disentangling himself as soon as he reached the water.

This trouble, as it happened, was saved him.

The rapid descent through the air deprived Tom of breath, and upon plunging into the stream he was partially deprived of consciousness.

Still, he was sensible of a sharp shock of pain, and instantly afterwards, actuated by instinct, he was battling with his arms.

The great force of the current carried him rapidly along without any effort on his part.

The only exertion he had to make was that requisite to keep his head above the surface of the water.

This was a comparatively easy matter.

The intense coldness of the water seemed to have a reviving and stimulating effect upon him.

His brain grew clearer each second.

He could hear the cries of his pursuers.

Whereabouts they were situated he could not tell, nor did he make any particular endeavour to inquire.

They were in his rear, and that sufficed.

Then a shadow seemed to fall upon him.

Looking up, he perceived a huge, ragged mass of rock.

Before him was the rudely-formed arch to which we have already adverted.

The force of the stream was drawing swiftly to it, and at the prospect he could not repress a shudder—

It seemed to him that if he once passed under, he should be hurried into the very bowels of the earth.

He tried to arrest his course.

But the effort was a vain one.

He had not the strength to cope with so large a body of water.

He drifted beneath the arch.

The effect was as though he had plunged from day into the darkest night.

But just as he passed under he heard a loud cry behind which he felt assured was given utterance to by the officers upon seeing him disappear.

The loudness of the cry convinced him that they could not be far off, so that had he succeeded in arresting his course at the moment he wished to do so, he would have fallen again into the hands of his foes; for in his present condition, it was next to impossible that he would be able to cope successfully with so many.

Of the two, then, he infinitely preferred drifting beneath the rocks to becoming again a prisoner.

Whether or not he should ever again see the light of day was a question which he could not answer.

He had often heard of streams which had thus rushed under mountains and which have never been known to emerge again

To what point those waters might flow was a thing unknown to man—perhaps they went to feed some huge reservoir in the centre of the earth.

These and other strange speculations flitted across Tom's brain in a space of time that would have appeared incredibly brief had the rapidity of thought not been well-known.

How long it was after entering this subterranean passage that he became aware pieces of rock were hanging pendent from the roof he could not tell.

It must have been only a few moments, however.

The thought at once occurred to him that if he could manage in his rapid course to seize upon one of these stalactites, he might be able to arrest his further progress, and remain there until the officers had taken their departure from the vicinity.

No sooner did this thought strike him than he endeavoured to carry it into effect.

The first he attempted to catch hold of eluded his grasp, for the water dashing continually against the rockwork rendered it as smooth as ice.

But it seemed, nevertheless, to check the tremendous speed at which, up to that moment, he had been going.

For this reason he had all the better chance of seizing the next.

He did so, and, to his extreme satisfaction, succeeded in achieving his purpose.

Clinging tightly to the slippery object, he, after many struggles, succeeded in getting upon his feet.

Even then it required no trifling amount of exertion to maintain an upright posture.

But it was a great relief thus to be freed from the rude buffetings of the water, for now that he stood up the water did not reach up so high as his waist.

The officers, to whose proceedings we now for a moment or two return, instantly followed their leader, who took his course in the direction of the very archway of which we have had occasion so many times to make mention.

His quick eye had descried a path by means of which he would be able to descend to this point.

He had, however, to take a very circuitous route, so that before he could reach this point, Tom King drifted out of sight.

It was then that they set up the cry which floated along the surface of the water to the ears of our old friend.

They crowded as closely as they could round the mouth of the arch, and, stooping down, they endeavoured to see what lay beyond.

But they could see nothing but darkness.

"This is a rum job," said one—"blow me if it ain't! I should think he must be mad, or he would never have taken such a jump as that—and to go under there too! Why it seems to go into the very middle of the earth!"

"I believe," said another, "that he was insensible from the fall, and drifted under here without knowing where he was going."

"At any rate," said the chief, "I will find out whether he is hiding just a little way under in the dark."

"Do you think he is?" asked one of his companions.

"I do—he would scarcely venture to follow the stream. Stand aside!"

With these words, he came nearer to the arch.

"Tom King," he said, "I believe you are hiding close at hand. If you are, come forth, for if you don't show yourself we will fire a volley upon you, and we shall have the reward all the same, you know."

No answer whatever was vouchsafed to this speech, though the officer waited for one for several seconds.

"Now, boys," he said, "make ready, and give it him all together!"

The officers had their pistols ready, and at once levelled them in obedience to this command.

"Keep your barrels low," said the chief. "Now fire!"

A scattering discharge followed, for the police officers were not well enough practised to fire off a volley with military exactness.

The smoke obscured everything for a short time, but when it had dispersed, and when the many rattling echoes which the discharge of the firearms had called forth had died away, there was no change visible in the aspect of affairs.

"I'll follow him," said the chief, in tones of determination—"yes, if you have to ride a hundred miles to fetch a boat! Go, three of you, at once upon this errand, and I will wait here with the rest till you come back."

We now return to Tom.

He heard distinctly the orders given by the chief of the police officers, and as soon as ever he found they were about to fire a volley he at once took what he thought would be effectual means to secure his safety.

He had all at once recollected the rope which was secured to his waist, which of course would assist him in retaining his hold.

He thought he should be able to lash himself tightly

to the pendent piece of rock, and in such a manner that he could stoop down altogether under the water, which would of course shield him from all injury.

This manœuvre he proceeded at once to carry into execution.

The volley was fired.

Just at that moment, however, from some cause he could not discover, the rope gave way, and he found himself whirled round and then carried along the stream with additional velocity.

Whether it was that he had failed to secure the rope properly, or whether the rock was of too slippery a character to afford a hold, he could not tell.

It might be, too, that the concussion of the atmosphere in so confined a space, consequent upon the discharge of so many firearms, had had the effect of loosening the stalactite in its setting.

No matter from what cause, however, Tom found himself being whirled along in the manner we have mentioned.

The consequence of this was that he failed to overhear what the officer in command said about a boat.

Louder and louder roared the water.

Faster and faster, too, it flowed, for its channel kept continually getting more and more constricted.

Tom made continual frantic efforts to seize upon the rocks as he rushed by them.

He broke his nails and lacerated his fingers in the attempt, but without succeeding.

Then suddenly he experienced a sharp, heavy blow upon the head, and then after that all was a blank.

The blow had been given by a mass of down-hanging rock against which his head, being raised in his endeavour to check his course, came into violent contact.

Not more than a second, however, appeared to elapse before he opened his eyes again.

How long he had remained unconscious was, however, a thing about which he could form no sort of idea whatever.

He looked about him at first vacantly and dreamily.

Then a voice—yes, surely a human voice—sounded in his ears.

That did more towards bringing Tom to his senses than anything else could.

A voice meant danger.

Accordingly, he made a tremendous effort to regain his footing, for he was aware that he was no longer in the water.

In this attempt it is not likely he would have been successful, however, had not some one's hands grasped him tightly and assisted him to rise.

By the time he was in an erect posture, Tom had recovered the use of his senses, and was able to take full cognizance of all that was going on around him.

At first he was so amazed at the strange character of the objects he beheld that he was at a loss to know whether he was really awake or dreaming.

Looking around, he first of all made the discovery that he was standing in the midst of a huge, almost circular, dome-like chamber.

The sides were composed of masses of rugged rock, which in some places glittered and shone resplendently, as though some one had been busy covering them with gems and burnished gold.

But the glittering, as Tom perceived, had its origin in the light falling upon certain places where the rockwork was prismatic.

How high this cavern was he could form no accurate conception, for a kind of luminous misty cloud concealed the topmost portion of the dome altogether.

There was also a strange vibration of the earth and a deafening, rushing noise.

This he quickly found to be caused by the impetuous current of the stream, which rushed into the cavern with great violence.

Then there was a kind of mimic waterfall, close to the base of which was a sheet of nearly placid water of considerable extent, and finally there was another rude arch, beneath which the turbulent water once more escaped.

These were the most striking features of the place in which Tom thus strangely and unexpectedly found himself, and such as he was able to take in and comprehend by giving one glance around him.

But the being in whose grasp he still was?

Who was that?

Tom wrenched himself round with considerable violence—with much more, indeed, than there was any necessity for him to make use of, and consequently he staggered and nearly fell again.

Then his eyes encountered one of the most singular beings in human shape that he had ever looked upon.

It was a man whose age would be the most difficult thing to guess at, for the whole of his face was thickly covered with grizzly, bristly hair, which had the appearance of being totally neglected.

The same thing, too, might have been said of his head, for the hair upon it was inextricably matted together, and hung down in tangled masses upon his back and shoulders.

His clothing was torn and tattered in a thousand places, and so faded and so worn that scarcely a guess could have been hazarded as to its original condition.

He regarded Tom with a look by no means unfriendly, though he seemed not a little surprised at the rough treatment to which he had been subjected.

Observing with what astonishment Tom gazed upon him, the singular figure spoke.

"You are amazed to see me here, no doubt," he said, in a low, constrained, sad voice; "but not more so than I am to behold you in this place, for I believe that since the creation of the world we are the only human beings who have ever stood beneath this roof."

"You speak truly," said Tom, "I am amazed indeed. But how chances it that you are here?"

The stranger smiled sadly.

"You shall know," he said. "We shall have ample time for explanation and communication with each other. We are destined to become better acquainted than we are now."

"How so? Your words must be, I think, needlessly enigmatical."

"They shall be so, then, no longer. Let me ask you whether you did not by an accident find yourself in the power of the current, and whether you were not helplessly carried beneath a rude natural archway at the base of a mass of rock?"

"Such was the case," answered Tom. "But why do you ask? How did you surmise it?"

"Because that is just how I, long, long ago, was carried into this place."

Tom started, for a fearful, horrible supposition began to force itself upon his mind.

"And why have you remained?" said Tom, though when he asked the question he dreaded to hear the reply to it.

"Because I have not been able to leave."

"Why not?"

"I am kept a prisoner."

"By whom?"

"By these masses of rugged rock."

"You still speak in enigmas," said Tom, endeavouring to maintain his usual calmness.

"Then I will speak plainly, and in a few words you shall know the worst. And yet before I speak, let me desire you to summon up to your aid all the fortitude which you possess."

"I am prepared."

"Then, as I have said, I was caught by the current and carried under the arch. I had been out with a boat, and had been expressly warned against this place; but I was in the vortex before I was aware of it."

"And how did you escape?"

"By a merciful providence I was thrown up on the shore here, if I may so call it. Luckily, I had sufficient strength and sense to drag myself completely out of the water."

"And do you mean to assert," said Tom, glancing around, "that there is no means of exit from this place?"

"None whatever."

"Have you tried?"

"Yes, as a man would try whose object was to free himself from a lifelong solitary imprisonment."

Tom drew a long breath.

He knew what an incentive such a motive as the stranger had expressed would be



[DICK TURPIN AND MAUD AT THE TURNPIKE GATE.]

Yet Tom was not satisfied.

Up to this moment the exciting nature of the extraordinary events which had just occurred had prevented him from thinking at all about the officers, but the word imprisonment had served as a key-note to bring him to his recollection.

He listened.

No sound, however, reached his ear to indicate that such persons as police officers had existence even.

That they would follow him seemed in the highest degree doubtful.

The consideration of this contingency, however, suggested another thought, and he asked, quickly:

"Have you never tried to leave this place by the same route as that by which you entered it?"

"I have. That was the most obvious course."

"It is impossible, then?"

"It is."

"Why?"

"Because just where the stream enters the cavern the violence of the current is so tremendous that it is altogether impossible to stand against it. I have tried and tried again and again, as you may easily suppose I should when I discovered that there was no other chance of leaving."

"But where does the water flow?"

"Through another low and narrow arch yonder; it is at the opposite extremity of the cavern."

"And where does that lead?"

"Heaven knows," answered the stranger, with a shudder. "For aught that I can tell, it may flow miles into the earth, or, what is more likely, it may by some underground course empty itself into the sea. Look, the ocean must at one time have rolled where we now stand,

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and this huge chamber, doubtless, was hollowed out by the never-ceasing rushing of waves carried on for countless ages."

While making this impressive speech, the stranger had picked up from the floor of the cavern what seemed to be a handful of coarse sand.

But upon investigation, Tom found that it consisted of numberless shells—some merely fragments, and others quite entire.

"You amaze me," said Tom, gazing around him with admiration. "I had no conception of the existence of such a place."

The stranger sighed.

"Under other circumstances," he said, "a close and diligent examination of this cavern would have afforded me infinite delight; as it is, it has served to while away the tedium of many, many hours."

"And have you been long in this place?"

"So long that I have lost the computation of time, for I know not the day, the month, nor even the year. I had lost all hope of ever beholding one of my fellow-creatures again; and when, a short time ago, I saw you floating in the water, no words can describe my sensations."

These disclosures produced a dull, stupified effect upon Tom King.

He could not thoroughly realise the awful nature of his situation.

Perhaps the manner of the stranger tended in no small degree to produce this feeling, for he spoke with the calmness and resignation of one who knows that what he utters is a foregone conclusion.

By his manner he was evidently fully convinced that it was not in the power of human beings to effect an escape from that place.

Tom was not so assured of this, however, and, in spite of his disagreeable position, he could not help experiencing considerable satisfaction at having thus escaped from the power of his foes.

All things are judged by contrasts, and therefore, by comparison, Tom did not feel that discontent which any other person would have exhibited who was not similarly situated to himself.

That his enemies would have the boldness to penetrate to his present retreat, he did not for one moment believe.

Nor was Tom in any immediate hurry to make the attempt to get free, lest in succeeding he should again fall into their power.

The stranger was not a little astonished at Tom's indifference, and at length he was compelled to remark:

"You must be no ordinary man to treat this matter so calmly. I should have imagined that so dreadful a prospect as imprisonment for life would have filled you with despair."

"I don't know that I am very different to other people," answered Tom; "but, for one thing, I do not very readily yield myself to despair."

"Ah! I see now how it is—you are incredulous; you do not believe that you are threatened with such a fate as I have mentioned."

"I do not doubt one word you have said; but I confess I shall be much better satisfied of the impossibility of quitting this place when I have tried my best to do so and failed."

The stranger looked at him with compassion.

"Believe me," he said, "this hope you cherish is a delusive one. Had escape been possible, do you think I should have remained here thus, sundered from all who hold me dear, and who must ever remain in ignorance of my miserable fate?"

Tom did not reply, but, feeling by this time something like himself, proceeded to look around the cavern into which he had been so strangely cast.

The stranger followed in his steps.

He really felt the deepest sensations of pity for our friend, for he knew how long it was before he could bring his mind to a realisation of the dreadful fact that he was entombed alive.

He remembered what he suffered at the time when all hope was extinguished, and he deeply compassionated our old friend.

But then this stranger did not know Tom's indomitable resolution, and doubtless the reader feels most strongly convinced that the impediments would be of no ordinary character that would prevent him from once more working his way to the surface of the earth.

Suddenly Tom stopped.

"I have just been wondering," he exclaimed, "how you manage to obtain food in this subterranean place. Of course there must be some means of doing so, or you would not be in existence at the present moment; but what it can be completely puzzles me."

"I am confined to one particular kind of diet—a thing which, under some circumstances, would no doubt be deemed a hardship, but it is infinitely better than starvation."

"But what is it? I am filled with the utmost curiosity to know."

"Why, that pool or lake yonder—whichever you think fit to call it—abounds with fish, and, fortunately for me, they are easily captured."

"And is this the only means of support you have had?"

"It is indeed."

Tom half shuddered.

Such a life as the stranger described having led must in good truth have been a dreadful one.

But Tom at present was animated and inspired by the belief that he could, if he made the attempt, release himself.

Whether this belief was well founded or not will soon be seen.

He examined the interior of the cavern with great curiosity, looking closely into every nook and corner, for all that he saw was new and strange.

In one nook he came upon the remnants of a fire.

Only a few white-looking embers remained, and they seemed on the very point of utter extinction.

"That must have been one great comfort and consolation," remarked Tom, pointing to it.

"It has been indeed, but will be no longer," was the answer given, with the deepest dejection.

"Indeed! How so?"

"Why, when I first drifted into this place, being a smoker, I had the means about me of producing a light readily. From time to time, quantities of dead leaves, twigs, and other rubbish had accumulated in various corners; with these I made a fire. I thought the supply of material would be inexhaustible; but I have discovered my error. The last morsel has been used."

"Then a sojourn here in future will be even more uncomfortable than it has been hitherto?"

"It will," answered the stranger, with a sympathetic shiver, "for in the gloomy winter time the nights here are fearfully cold, owing, I suppose, to the presence of so large a body of water."

Tom said no more, but continued his exploration.

He paused for some time before the archway through which he had been carried.

Here the water issued with such tremendous rapidity and violence that it seemed to be boiling.

Never before had Tom beheld so impetuous a current.

The stranger stood silently by his side.

"It would be an achievement of no ordinary difficulty, would it not, to attempt to force a passage in defiance of such a stream as that? What chance, think you, would you have of retaining a footing there?"

"It would be impossible to do so unaided," replied Tom, after a few moments' reflection; "but I am far from feeling convinced that it would be impossible for us, by our united means, to overcome even a greater obstacle than this."

In spite of his belief that there was no hope of release, and in spite, also, of thinking that this conviction was firmly impressed upon his mind, a slight flush of colour tinged the stranger's cheeks.

Tom noticed it; but made no comment.

His thought just then reverted to his foes.

He wondered whether they had abandoned the pursuit as hopeless

He fancied they must have done so.

Whether the police officers would be mad enough to trust themselves in a boat to thread the intricacies and encounter the unknown perils of this subterranean stream time alone can show.

At any rate, he could not distinguish above the roaring

of the water any sound indicative of their approach.

The spot upon which he had been standing was considerably above the level of the other portions of the cavern floor, to reach which it was necessary to make their way down a winding path.

The water, however, rushed off the brink of a kind of precipice, and fell with great force into a kind of basin, thus forming that mimic waterfall of which we have already spoken.

The water whirled round for some time, and finally expanded itself into a pool, the surface of which, by comparison, was almost calm.

It was from here, as the stranger had said, his only food had been obtained, and Tom, as he looked down at the water, could see multitudes of one kind of fish disporting themselves.

Passing on, Tom came at last to the other outlet of the water.

This arch closely resembled the one at the other side of the cavern; but it was higher and wider, and the water did not rush through with so much swiftness, though, as he stood listening and looking down the dark passage, he fancied he could hear a commotion of waters like that which would be produced by another waterfall.

Whether this was so or not, he was unable to determine, for the darkness which prevailed just within the arch was such as to seem of a tangible character—an actual substance—instead of something merely produced by the absence of light.

CHAPTER MXLVII.

TOM KING MAKES A MOST DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE FROM THE CAVERN.

STILL continuing to look down, Tom indulged in many speculations as to the course which the headstrong stream would probably take.

The idea which his new-found companion had expressed concerning it seemed to be a very probable one indeed.

As he gazed, nothing seemed more likely than that this watercourse poured itself into some inner chamber of the earth.

He was compelled, too, to admit that the aspect of things did not promise well for the success of an escape.

But for all that, our old friend was not downhearted.

Had he been confined in the innermost dungeon of Newgate, with his limbs loaded with irons, and with the closest guard kept upon him by his jailors, he would not have looked upon self-liberation as impossible, and would have essayed his best to regain his freedom.

In comparison with such a task as this, the escape from a cavern seemed absolutely trifling.

The stranger watched Tom's countenance very closely, striving to read all the thoughts that were passing through his mind.

Although he would not admit it even to himself, Tom's confident manner had done much towards enlivening that hope which the stranger fully believed was quite extinct in his breast—namely, that, after all, it might be possible once again to look upon the surface of the earth.

"What think you of the prospect now?" he asked, in a voice which he strove hard to make seem indifferent. "Do you find that I have exaggerated the position?"

"Not much," said Tom. "I confess the situation is unpromising enough. Still, I can assure you that I shall use every effort to get away, nor shall I be at all particular in what I attempt, as I shall feel it *is* better to lose life in such a cause than passively sit down here and pine out a miserable existence."

"You are right," answered the stranger, "and I ought not to have shrunk so much from risking my life as I have done."

Tom did not reply, but looked narrowly at the walls of the cavern, as though with a view of forming some estimate of the probability of finding a means of scaling them.

The stranger, observing him, added:

"In what way shall you make your first attempt?"

"I can scarcely answer that question yet," replied Tom King, thoughtfully.

"But you were thinking about scaling the walls."

"I was wondering whether such a thing was possible, because up above there must be numberless crevices and fissures, or else how would this light penetrate here?"

"There can be no doubt about the existence of such fissures as you describe; but then the walls are so perfectly perpendicular and smooth, that I do not see how they can be climbed."

"We shall see better after awhile," was Tom's answer. "But if all other means fail, there is one which I shall have desperation enough to hazard."

"What is that?"

Tom did not verbally reply, but raised his finger and pointed to the dark cavernous arch through which the water seethed.

"You do not mean that you would commit yourself to that torrent?"

"I should. But let me tell you that would be the last resource."

"I should think so," replied the stranger, with a shudder. "It would be a desperate chance indeed."

"Yet I should think it preferable to long years of imprisonment in this place, and then perhaps at the end a painful death by starvation and cold."

"But consider," said the stranger: "you know not even that this watercourse conducts to freedom. Then how horrible the idea of imagining oneself hurried with breathless rapidity through intense darkness, and borne, it may be, into the very centre of the earth."

"I admit all that; but I should not think it any more horrible than the contingency to which I have just referred."

To this the stranger made no answer, and Tom King now set about the task of scrutinising every portion of the wall.

He considered that by now a sufficient length of time had elapsed to warrant him in taking steps for his liberation, as he thought the chances were he should hear no more of the police officers.

Could he but succeed in getting away from his present most undesirable quarters, he felt he should indeed have ample grounds for self-congratulation, while the intense and utter disappointment suffered by the police officers would always furnish him with a mirthful subject.

An examination of every portion of the cavern's walls impressed Tom strongly with the conviction that, situated as they were, it was hopeless to think of scaling them.

"No matter," he said, "my resources are not exhausted yet; and so far from allowing this first failure to dishearten me, I shall only set about the next with additional vigour and determination."

The stranger, upon hearing this, gave a peculiar smile, which, however, Tom was by far too busy to notice.

But doubtless the stranger was thinking of the time when he was as full of ardent aspirations as Tom was then.

Our friend now bent his way again to that point at which the stream entered the cavern.

"Is the current always as strong as it is now?"

"Very nearly. I fancy the volume of water has been greater lately."

"Have you ever tried to stand against it?"

"Yes."

"And failed?"

"Completely."

"Well, it is but the matter of another wetting," said Tom, calmly, "so I will try myself. Besides, perhaps you did not have such a thing as this to aid you."

As he spoke, Tom King caught hold of one end of the rope, which still remained tied round his waist in the manner we have described.

The stranger shook his head.

Tom untied the knot.

The rope was long and strong.

"The very thing," said Tom. "Now look here—I will show you how to try an experiment."

Some little distance above the centre of the arch was a sharp, jutting piece of rock—in shape more like a gigantic spike than aught else.

A slip knot having been tied in one end of the rope, Tom cast it over this projection and drew it tight.

Then grasping the other end securely, Tom stepped into the stream.

The violence of the current was, however, something of which he had no conception until then.

Before he was aware of it he had lost his footing.

In vain he struggled to regain it.

He kept fast his hold upon the rope, and well it was that he did so, or he would inevitably have been carried over the verge of the waterfall.

So great was the force of the water, that all attempts to make his feet touch the rocky bed were futile.

He was completely borne up upon the surface.

"Help me," he said, to the stranger—"pull me to the shore!"

The request was complied with in a moment.

"You seemed at first to think," remarked the stranger, "that I had made no thorough, resolute effort to release myself, but that was a mistake, for, as you see, your second attempt has succeeded no better than the first."

"Very true," said Tom, as he shook the water from his drenched garments. "I am now thoroughly convinced of the hopelessness of attempting to effect an egress in that direction, though I have no doubt that, could we but once get beneath the arch, we should then find that the violence of the current was much abated."

"But how to do it?"

"I don't believe it can be done."

"You have tried, then, what I believe to be the only means by which the cavern may be left."

"You forget the other arch."

"No, I do not, but I do not look upon that as another means, and I should think that to pass under it would be nothing in the world else but deliberate suicide."

"Why so?"

"Because it is opposed to all probability that the water-course can find an outlet anywhere above ground."

"And I consider you have very slight grounds for coming to such a conclusion."

"Then you think it likely that it flows out somewhere at the side of the mountain?"

"I do."

The stranger shook his head.

Tom now set about the removal of his rope from the projecting point of rock, which he found to be no easy matter.

In the end, however, he succeeded, and then sat down to rest himself and to think further of what he purposed doing.

There was no shrinking from his purpose, for Tom's nature was such as to cause him to prefer losing his life in an attempt to release himself from captivity to remaining for an indefinite time a prisoner.

And yet, for all that, he had no desire to throw his life away, and that is why he sat down to give the subject further consideration.

He wished to make a trial first of what he was about to do, and then, should it fail, for him to be able to make his way back into the cavern again and try some other scheme.

His reflections were of too busy a nature to allow him to remain long seated.

Starting up, he made his way to the second arch, and there remained for several moments as though vacantly gazing upon the water that was hurrying beneath it.

The stranger still continued, as before, to watch every movement and change of countenance with the utmost closeness.

Before Tom had been gazing long he came to the conclusion that the current here was by no means as violent as at the other arch—indeed, he believed he could successfully make a stand against it.

This was a point most important to be ascertained.

Tom was not the one to remain long in doubt in a case where the matter might so easily be solved, so he once again called the services of the rope into requisition.

Affixing it to a point of the rock and seizing hold tightly of one end, he committed himself to the water as before.

A cry of satisfaction announced that his anticipations were not ill founded.

By the aid of a slight amount of assistance from the rope he was able to maintain his footing firmly.

This was a great deal accomplished, and encouraged him to proceed.

His next step was to pass cautiously under the arch—the water being about only up to his middle.

In this manner he proceeded as far as the rope would allow.

He was now in profound darkness, but he was greatly surprised to discover that the channel widened considerably, so that the water neither flowed so swiftly as before nor was it so deep.

"I wish the rope was a few yards longer," he muttered as he made a vain endeavour to pierce the deep obscurity. "But this is a great deal gained. I must now set to work and try what my ingenuity can invent."

Tom had not much trouble to get back again.

"What think you of our prospect now?" asked the stranger.

"I have every hope of success," was Tom's reply.

"But how?"

"The current, as I told you, is nothing like so strong as I imagined, and I believe it would be quite possible for us to follow the course of the passage so far as we thought proper, and then retrace our steps, should there be a necessity for doing so."

"But is it not a desperate chance?"

"No more desperate than we ought to try. Listen: The sides appear to be uniformly rough and jagged. Now I think that if we secure the ends of the rope round each other's waists, we might venture in safety, because you would take one side and I the other. Then, by clinging tightly we could advance, and have double the power over the force of the current."

"I don't think much of your plan," said the stranger, with great candour. "But perhaps you understand these matters much better than I do, and therefore I shall leave this to you."

"But do you consent to aid me?"

"I do; for I am so weary of my existence here that I would do anything that offered a chance of putting a period to it."

"Come, then," said Tom, "let us try now. The sooner we set about it the better."

The rope was now disengaged.

One end Tom secured tightly round his waist in such a way that the knot would neither slip nor come undone.

The stranger followed his example, and then, after repeating his instructions, Tom ventured to enter the water.

The stranger entered at the same moment.

Both took a tight grasp at the sides of the arch, and then prepared to advance.

"Cling tightly," said Tom; "and I will get as far as I can in advance. Then I will hold with all my might, and you can advance too."

"Go on," was the reply given, in tones of great determination.

Tom was very circumspect in all his actions, never releasing his hold upon one point of the rock until he had tightly grasped another.

But keeping thus to one side carried another advantage with it, for this was where the water rushed with great impetuosity.

The tightening of the rope warned Tom that he could proceed no further, so, grasping a jutting portion of rock with both arms, he called to his companion to follow him.

His injunction was immediately complied with.

All went well.

Each step taken thus safely served to fill the stranger with increased confidence and hope.

He, too, went on until the tightness of the cord prevented him from going further.

"Now," said Tom, "maintain a tight hold, so that, in case I may miss my grasp, you will be able to save me from drifting completely away."

"Right. Go on."

Tom obeyed unhesitatingly, and the progress they made soon served to show the stranger the excellence of the mode of operation.

It was a dreadful progress, though, and one that taxed the courage to the utmost.

In a very short time indeed they became totally involved in darkness.

When they turned a shuddering look back, the archway through which they had passed was scarcely discernible from the general gloom.

Before them not the faintest ray of light could be perceived to indicate that there was in front any opening by which they could achieve their much-wished-for escape.

The roaring of the water, too, added inexpressibly to the dismalness of their situation.

"Courage!" cried Tom, fancying his companion flagged a little—"courage! All is going well! This is much more than I ventured to anticipate."

But his voice was almost drowned by the deafening din of the tumulting water; and he was scarcely certain whether the full import of his words had been caught

The stranger, however, struggled on.

But the water, which was of an icy coldness, had an awfully numbing effect upon their limbs.

Their fingers, too, were so much chilled that every moment the task of holding the rockwork became more and more difficult.

There was another circumstance, too, which shortly occurred, and which promised badly for them.

The passage narrowed, and, as a matter of course, the current increased in impetuosity.

The water also flew up in a kind of spray, which, falling on the rockwork, rendered it as slippery as glass.

The stranger felt his strength was failing him.

He wished to retrace his steps, believing that nothing lay before them but certain death.

He called out to Tom to that effect.

But his voice was drowned by the roaring of the water.

He called again and again.

Finding no notice taken, he waited till the rope tightened.

Then he tugged at it, in the hope of conveying to Tom his desire to retrace his steps.

But this action was performed at a most unfortunate moment.

Tom felt that he had not so good a grasp as usual, and endeavoured to better it.

This was the moment when the stranger gave the rope a sharp snatch.

Slight as it was, it proved too much for the strength of Tom's fingers.

His grasp slipped off the glass-like rock, and in the twinkling of an eye he found himself being carried with frightful rapidity along the watercourse.

His first act upon recovering his senses a little was to utter a loud shout of warning to his companion.

But long before this cry had escaped his lips the stranger had been dragged from his hold by the force with which Tom had been carried away.

After making several ineffectual efforts to arrest the rapidity of his progress, Tom abandoned the attempt, and directed all his energies towards the task of keeping himself from being violently dashed against the rugged sides.

On—on he went, with a swiftness that made the preservation of his breath a matter of extreme difficulty.

On—on, each moment his speed becoming more and more terrific!

On—on, until by degrees all consciousness left him, save a small amount which still enabled him trom time to time to make feeble efforts for his preservation.

How far he was thus carried along in this Egyptian darkness he was not, of course, able to form the least idea.

It must, nowever, nave been a very great distance, for a long time elapsed, and the current carried him along with extreme velocity.

More than once his body was dashed with considerable violence against the rockwork, and this would serve to restore to him a portion of his senses just as he was about losing them altogether.

At last, with a sudden rush, he found himself carried out into the daylight.

How it was he could never recollect

He must have been in a condition closely verging upon insensibility, for he never noticed the gradual change from darkness to light which must inevitably have taken place.

He was weak, bruised, and much exhausted.

Nevertheless, he managed to crawl to the sloping shore: but no sooner was he fairly out of reach of the water than his strength utterly left him and consciousness as well.

The next sensation he experienced was one of intense cold.

Opening his eyes, he found that the moon and stars were shining brightly in the undimmed sky above him.

By slow degrees, as he painfully raised himself up, the recollection of what had happened came clearly to his mind.

With a sudden start he looked round, hoping to catch sight of his companion.

But he was disappointed.

There was the rope still attached to his own waist, but by some means or other it had been parted in the middle—apparently by chafing against some point of rock.

Painfully and with difficulty Tom rose to his feet, for a most benumbing stiffness had taken possession of every joint.

At first he was so weak as scarcely to be able to maintain an erect posture.

Straining his eyes, he endeavoured to catch sight of the stranger.

But in vain.

All around was as silent as some forest never trodden by human feet.

The scene was picturesque and beautiful—especially so now that all harsh and rugged features were softened by the silvery effulgence of the moon.

On one side was a mass of rock of a kind and structure rarely met with in an English landscape.

It was from the base of this that the subterranean stream had issued, and Tom listlessly watched where it flowed calmly and gently through the smooth green meadows, affording no indication of its former turbulence.

"He is gone," said Tom King, at length, having satisfied himself that no trace of his late companion could be seen—"he is gone, but where I cannot guess. I must be moving, too. My veins are like ice, and nothing but rapid motion will get my blood once more into proper circulation. My horse, too, I have lost that. No matter, I have escaped the officers, and my loss is by no means irreparable. If all is well, I shall be able to make my way back to the inn easily by daybreak."

With these words Tom turned round, and, at first with a slow, uncertain steps, made his way from the spot which had so nearly proved a fatal one for him.

CHAPTER MXLVIII.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN HAS A SINGULAR ADVENTURE ON THE HIGHWAY, WHICH IS PRODUCTIVE OF STILL MORE SINGULAR RESULTS.

LEAVING the completion of Tom King's adventures on this night to be related at a more convenient opportunity, we will return once more to the yard at the back of the Jolly Tar Inn, where, as the reader will doubtless well remember, we left Maud and Dick Turpin, both mounted and in the act of setting out.

The prospect of a night of adventure and excitement caused Maud's cheeks to glow, her heart to flutter, and her breath to come and go quickly.

"Are you quite ready?" Dick asked.

"Quite."

"Come, then. Keep close by my side, and at all hazards obey implicitly every one of my injunctions."

"You may depend upon it," Maud answered, as she gave her horse the rein.

The prospect of sharing all danger with Dick, and of passing several hours in his company when she expected to be left in the dreadful solitude of the inn, enduring a thousand apprehensions, filled her mind with a joyfulness to which she had long been a stranger.

Dick noticed her good spirits, and guessing at the cause, could not help experiencing a very large amount of satisfaction.

"Oh," Maud exclaimed, with joyful accents, "what a delight is this! I feel it because of the contrast which it offers to a sojourn in that awful place."

"We will not remain there long," replied Dick, "though you ought to place due weight upon the security it offers."

"I do—I do. But, nevertheless, it does not abate its horror. When shall you commence your journey to Stonehenge?"

"It will not be long first."

"Do you not think, Dick, that if you were to try, you could between now and then make such arrangements as

would enable us all to leave England in company with Tom Davis?"

This was a question which, on many accounts, was a difficult one for Dick to answer.

Fortunately, chance intervened and saved him the trouble.

"Hark!" he cried, just as Maud was pronouncing the last word of her interrogation—"hark! I fancy I heard something then!"

Maud, dreading the approach of danger, listened with the utmost intentness.

But all was still.

"What was it like?" she at length ventured to inquire.

"I fancied a horse's hoofs, but I must have been mistaken. Ha! here is the high-road. Now, then, it will be necessary to make use of the utmost caution."

Up to this moment they had been making their way across the open country, but now, as Dick had said, they had come to the high-road, which was only separated from them by a hedge so low that Maud felt sure her horse could easily leap across it.

Dick thought so too, and so jumped Black Bess over first for an example to the other.

In less than a second Maud was by his side.

So far, then, all was well.

"Do you intend keeping upon the highway to-night?" asked Maud, with some trepidation.

"I had not decided," was the reply, "but I think so, since my intention in coming out to-night is to meet with a good adventure if I can; and where am I so likely to succeed as upon the high-road?"

This was an unanswerable question, so Maud wisely remained silent.

Dick occupied the interval by listening keenly, for he could scarcely make himself believe that he had been deceived by some accidental sound.

Still he was unable to hear anything more

"Come," he said; "we will ride on quietly, and trust to chance to place something in our way"

Maud's excitement increased, and it was no wonder that it should do so.

Suddenly Dick raised his arm and pointed in advance.

"What is that?" he asked. "It is something white."

"A gate, I think," answered Maud.

"Yes, to be sure—I see it now distinctly. It is a turnpike."

"It is closed."

"Yes, you might expect it would be at this hour."

"Shall you venture to pass through?"

"I think so. I may be lucky enough to learn whether any officers are on the road to-night."

Maud offered no opposition.

Indeed, it would have been most unwise for her to have attempted to do so, since Dick must be allowed to be the best judge of what ought to be done in all cases.

A very few minutes enabled them to reach the toll-gate.

A dim light was shining from one of the windows in the tollman's little wooden dwelling.

"Gate—gate!" cried Dick, in a loud voice.

After a short delay the door was opened, and the toll-keeper made his appearance.

"Dang me!" he said. "I was just going to try to have a little bit of rest. I have been waiting here for more than an hour for some one to come to the gate."

"And has no one passed during all that time?"

"Not a blessed soul, sir."

"That's very singular, isn't it?"

"We used to think so, but now we are getting used to it."

"How so?"

"Why, the people are all in such a mortal fright about Dick Turpin and the rest of the highwaymen that they would rather do anything than travel after dark. I don't mind it much, for it gives us a little more peace."

"I suppose so," answered Dick. "And as we have disturbed you, take that for your trouble—I will call for the change some other day."

During the conversation just given, the gate had been unlocked and thrown open.

Dick slipped a guinea into the tollman's hand, who was far from expecting any such sum

But it developed in him a very great deal of latent respect and civility.

He touched his hat several times.

Just as Dick was riding off, he said:

"Don't be afraid to ride back at full speed, captain," he cried, with a meaning intonation of his voice. "You will find the gate wide open."

"All right! Thanks! Good night!"

"He knew you!" ejaculated Maud.

"He guessed who I might be, perhaps. However, I shall look upon that guinea as being particularly well laid out."

"But should you trust to what he said?"

"Certainly! I have gained so much and lost so little by trusting to people that I shall continue to do so. If I distrusted I could do nothing."

"It is fortunate no officers are on the road."

"It is. And yet, if what he says is correct, I may have a good deal more trouble in looking for an adventure than I at all anticipated."

"It is getting very dark."

"Very," said Dick, glancing up at the sky. "We shall have some rain, perhaps a heavy storm, before long."

This was anything but a comfortable prospect.

There was little doubt about Turpin's words coming true.

Since their departure from the inn, immense masses of clouds had rose and thickly covered over the whole face of the firmament, causing the densest darkness to prevail.

The wind moaned and whistled, too, among the rustling tree-tops with that peculiar and unmistakable sound so often heard before a storm.

Every now and then Maud would shiver and draw her cloak more closely around her, for the air was in truth very keen.

Still, Dick journeyed on with a resolute air, as though he by no means intended that the elements should interfere with his night's sport.

"Hark!" he said again. "Surely I cannot be mistaken this time?"

"No," said Maud, "I can hear a horse approaching."

"Yes, and only one. Depend upon it, this will prove a lucky adventure, as we can make sure nothing but some urgent business would induce anyone to be abroad at such an hour as this."

The traveller came on at a steady rate, as though he had a long journey before him.

Dick came to a halt.

"Now, Maud," he said, "place yourself in the shadow of this hedge. There, that will do, and on no account must you move until I come back to you. If I feel sure you are here I shall retain my calmness. If you venture forth, it will so discompose me that my adversary will be able to take every advantage of it, and the worst may happen."

"I promise," said Maud, who was terrified to death at the thoughts which Dick's words had suggested—"I promise faithfully to remain immovable. Don't let that disturb you, but for my sake do—do be careful of your safety!"

"I will, depend upon it!" said Dick, who now rode slowly on towards the approaching traveller.

When he judged himself close enough, Dick increased his pace.

Somewhat to his surprise, the traveller did so likewise, as though he was anxious to bring about a meeting as quickly as possible.

Dick was still more surprised at finding that this stranger, beyond all doubt, rode directly towards him, and manifestly in a most aggressive manner.

This was something altogether unaccountable and unprecedented.

But Dick's state of wonderment did not prevent him from holding on his course with his accustomed steadiness.

Another half-dozen paces brought himself and the stranger face to face.

"Stand," said Dick, in a resolute tone of voice—"stand! No trifling! Hand over what valuables you have about you!"

The stranger stopped at once.

But instead of seeming affected by the highwayman's demand, he burst into a loud, coarse-sounding laugh.

"What!" he exclaimed, "you're not on the toby lay, are you? That's a joke now! I was just going to cry 'Stand and deliver!' to you, for I was fairly out of patience with waiting. I have positively been riding up and down here for the last two hours without catching sight of anyone but yourself; and as for money, I only wish I had a trifle about me; if I had, you would not see me here in the cold."

"But—but," ejaculated Dick, who was considerably taken aback by this address, "you don't mean to say you are a highwayman?"

"Nothing more nor less," responded the man, with another laugh. "What do you say—shall we join together, and try whether fortune will favour us?"

"No, no," answered Dick, somewhat hastily—"you go your way and I will go mine."

"As you like," was the reply, given with another laugh. "Good night! and I hope you will have better luck than I have met with at present."

"Good night!" said Dick, who was more annoyed at this encounter than he liked to admit even to himself.

The highwayman rode on somewhat smartly in the direction of the toll-gate.

Dick repaired to the spot where he had left Maud.

He found her trembling slightly and full of anxiety to know the result of the adventure.

"Why—confound the fellow!—he had the impudence to tell me he was a highwayman."

"A highwayman?" ejaculated Maud.

"Yes; and what is more, he declared he was about to cry 'Stand!' when I forestalled him."

Maud could not help smiling.

"What a harsh, disagreeable laugh he had!"

"Very. But come on, we will venture to try fortune a little further."

"Did you feel that?"

"What?"

"That drop of rain."

"No; but now I do, though."

Dick Turpin might well say this.

The first drop which Maud had felt seemed to be the immediate precursor of a thousand others, for such a violent descent of rain now ensued that was altogether unparalleled in Dick's experience.

In less than a moment they were both nearly drenched to the skin.

"Confound it!" Turpin said. "Nothing but misfortune! What could be more unfortunate than this? You should have stayed at the inn, Maud, and then you would have been spared this wetting."

"But I should have been separated from you, and that, in my thinking, overbalances every other consideration."

Dick could not be displeased at this speech.

But he was determined that Maud should suffer no more from her devotion to him than he could possibly help.

By the aspect of the elements, he could tell that the rain would continue to fall for a considerable length of time.

Consequently, he began to look about him for a shelter of some kind, to which they could betake themselves until the violence of the rain had to some extent abated.

He had not been looking long before he caught sight of a light glimmering at some distance in advance.

Nothing could have been more welcome to his eyes than this.

He accelerated his speed instantly.

"Come, Maud," he cried, "we will try to get under cover for a few moments at any rate."

Upon drawing nearer, he discovered that the light proceeded from one of the windows in a comfortable-looking old roadside inn.

Upon seeing this, he paused for half a moment, for he was doubtful whether it would be altogether safe or expedient to attempt to gain an entrance here.

But he had the word not only of the tollman, but of the highwayman as well, that there had been no one whatever on the road for a considerable length of time.

It was consequently rather unlikely that he would be recognised by the people keeping the inn, for, to the best of his belief, Dick had never been in this part of the country before.

This consideration induced him to run the risk of taking shelter for a time.

The clatter of their horses' feet, as they drew up beside the long wooden horse-trough, quickly brought the landlord and ostler to the door.

"A roughish night, sir," said the former, saluting Dick—"but just such weather as I expected we should have."

"We will stay here awhile," said Dick, "if you can accommodate myself and my wife with a private room."

"Certainly—certainly!" was the brisk reply. "Step this way, if you please."

Dick was on the ground in a moment, and assisted Maud to alight with a rapidity that astonished the two lookers-on.

"Leastways, sir," continued the landlord, as he ushered his guests across the threshold, "it's not exactly a private room, but I have no doubt it will answer your purpose quite as well, if you do not think of making a long stay."

"Let us see it."

"Yes, yes—certainly! Be good enough to follow me. This way, if you please."

With an abundance of obsequiousness, the landlord conducted our two friends along the passage of the inn and into a room in which a bright fire was burning cheerfully, and which most certainly was not a private one, inasmuch as several persons were sitting in it, engaged in the agreeable occupations of smoking, drinking, talking, and warming themselves at the fire.

The landlord crossed this apartment, and opened an inner door leading out of it.

Dick and Maud followed him as closely and as quickly as possible, in order to escape the curious regards which were bent upon them.

The chamber into which the landlord conducted them could not be called otherwise than a very comfortable one.

There was a fire burning, a lamp was lighted, and a general air of that comfort and cleanliness for which, as a rule, country English inns are so celebrated, pervaded everything.

"This will do, sir, I suppose?" said the landlord.

"Oh yes, very well! I will just follow you out to the back, to see where the horses are put——"

"Oh, sir, there is no occasion for your taking that much trouble, I assure you! I will make a point of attending to them myself."

"Thanks!" persisted Dick; "but there are some little matters in the holsters of which I stand in need, and these I should much prefer fetching myself."

"Oh, by all means! You can follow me this way—there is no occasion to go through the front room."

The landlord now opened another door, which Dick had not yet had time to perceive.

It communicated with the back part of the premises.

Dick was very glad to see it, for it seemed to promise him an avenue for speedy escape in case circumstances should arise to render flight necessary.

"I shall not be a moment, Maud," he said, with a peculiar smile. "Remain here till I return."

With these words upon his lips, he followed the landlord into a kind of kitchen, by means of a door in which they gained access to the yard.

The stables were close at hand.

Dick had only made an idle excuse when he mentioned the holsters, but still it sufficed to furnish a plausible reason for wishing to pay a personal visit to his horses in the stable.

When he entered, the ostler was engaged in removing the trappings.

"Stay!" cried Dick—"it is not worth while to do that, for I shall only stay here a very short time. Just loosen the girths and take the bits out of their mouths—you need not trouble yourself to do anything more."

The man at once desisted, and proceeded to fetch the corn, a greater quantity of which was put into the manger than probably there would have been had Dick not been present.

Dick fumbled at the holsters, and then said:

"Give them both a good rub down, my man, and have them ready at the time I want you. I sha'n't forget you."

"All right, sir."

So saying, Turpin hastily ran after the landlord into the house, for the rain seemed to be coming down faster than ever.

"Bring a bottle of wine," he said.

"Very good, sir—a drop of the best?"

"Yes, the very best your cellar can afford—the price will not be out of my reach."

The landlord made a more obsequious bow than usual, while he wished that such customers as Dick were only a little more common.

Maud was glad to see Dick return.

"It is rather ridiculous," she whispered, "to call this a private room."

"Why so?"

"Because don't you see that formerly this and the next both formed one room, and now they have been divided by a very thin wooden partition, which does not reach to the ceiling. We are private so far as being free from being seen, but every syllable can be overheard."

"No matter," said Dick, though he was not very well pleased, nevertheless. "We shall not be here long, so it is not worth while to make any fuss about it."

They were interrupted at this moment by the entrance of the landlord carrying the bottle of wine.

"There," he said; "when you taste that you will say it is not such wine as ordinarily falls to a traveller's share. In fact," he added, in a confidential whisper, "I bought it for my own drinking."

Dick fancied Maud looked somewhat pale and languid, so he said:

"Have you anything at hand tempting to the appetito?"

"As luck will have it, I have; for you must know, sir, that a sale will be held here to-morrow, and a cold dinner is to be provided. We are cooking the things now, and I feel pretty certain there are some beautiful boiled chickens just ready to take out of the pot."

"The very thing!" cried Dick. "Be quick, and bring one here!"

The landlord vanished.

Maud smiled, and murmured:

"It is very kind of you, Dick, to be so thoughtful."

"Tut, tut—nonsense! But what a nuisance that noise is."

The noise to which Dick referred proceeded from the adjoining room, and was caused by the persons who were sitting there talking all together in a loud voice.

But Dick soon saw this was an advantage, for it prevented any conversation between Maud and himself from being overheard.

"We ought to think ourselves most fortunate in falling into such comfortable quarters. I assure you it is far more than I ventured to expect."

Just as he spoke, the landlord again entered, carrying before him on a tray about as tempting and appetising a meal as could well be placed before any hungry travellers.

There was a beautiful boiled chicken, with some white home-made bread and other necessary etceteras.

"There!" the landlord cried—"though I say it, that is a meal for an emperor. Is there anything else you require?"

"Nothing, I think."

"If there is, just pull that bell-wire, and I will be with you in a moment."

So saying, to the relief of both our friends, he quitted the room.

Maud and Dick both laid aside as much of their apparel as they could, and hung it on some chairs in front of the blazing fire.

Then they both sat down to discuss the meal.

Ere they had partaken of more than three or four mouthfuls each, both heard a sound which caused them to stop simultaneously in what they were about.

That sound was the trampling of a horse's feet.

Nearer and nearer came the sound.

"Who is that?" asked Maud.

"Hush—hush!"

Just as Dick pronounced these two words, the clattering of the horse's hoofs abruptly ceased.

It was evident that some one had pulled up with great haste and suddenness in front of the inn.

CHAPTER MXLIX.

CONTAINS THE SEQUEL TO DICK TURPIN'S STRANGE ADVENTURE.

Maud started to her feet, with alarm visibly depicted upon every feature of her face.

"Hush—hush!" said Dick again. "Be still—oh, be still!"

"But who is it?"

"That I cannot tell—perhaps nothing that concerns us. At any rate, let us remain here where we are until we hear something further."

The people in the adjoining room had evidently heard the fresh arrival, for they became hushed and silent, listening in expectation of learning who it was.

The murmuring of voices was heard without.

Then a door was thrown open, and a heavy footstep sounded in the passage.

This footstep came nearer and nearer to the door of the room in which the company was sitting.

Upon the threshold he paused, and after fumbling a moment with the latch, flung the door open.

His appearance was greeted with a universal cry.

"Hullo, Craddock!" said two or three at once. "What ever brings you back here again? We thought you had gone for good."

The reply was a laugh.

That laugh made Turpin start.

He had heard it before.

There could be no mistaking the loud, coarse tones. It was a laugh which, once heard, could be always remembered.

Dick was in no sort of doubt whatever as to the identity of the new-comer.

It was the man he had stopped so short a time before upon the road, and who had declared himself to be a highwayman.

It struck Turpin as being very strange, though, that he should be so well known by the inn guests.

He waited somewhat impatiently to hear more, in the hope of having all his speculations set at rest.

"You are surprised," cried the new-comer, laughing again; "but I am not, I assure you. I wish I had taken old Boniface's advice; I should then have escaped this drenching. But, then, you know a landlord never wants to lose sight of a good customer. He told me it would rain, and, my eyes and limbs, don't it!"

"So it made you turn back?"

"It did, and I account myself a wise man for having done so. Why, except the toll-gate, there is not a dwelling to be met with for the next fourteen miles."

"You did right," said the landlord, joining in the conversation. "If you had gone on you might have met with highwaymen, and so lost all you have about you, and you know well it is no trifling amount."

"Highwaymen?" said the new-comer, in a voice expressive of the utmost contempt and scorn. "Why, I don't care a tinker's d—n for a whole regiment of them! I have never been robbed yet, and never shall, I dare be sworn! Let us come to the fire."

There was the peculiar sound made by moving chairs quickly across a bricked floor, and then it would seem that the wet traveller got close to the fire to dry his clothes.

"Ah, Mr. Craddock!" said the landlord, in a serious voice, "it's all very well to talk like you do, and let me tell you that you are by no means the first I have heard make such remarks; but, recollect, they everyone came to grief in the end, and so will you some fine day or other, despite your boldness."

"Have your own way," replied Mr. Craddock, for so we may as well henceforth designate him, since it would appear that this was his name. "Every man knows his own know best. But I tell you again, I hope I may live till I am robbed, and then I shall be assured of a good long life."

The confidence with which these words were pronounced is indescribable.

Dick listened with all his ears.

All that he had heard since the stranger's arrival had been in the highest degree enigmatical.



[DICK TURPIN HAS HIS REVENGE UPON MR. CRADDOCK.]

Being so deeply interested in the whole matter as he was, the impatience with which he waited to listen to the rest may possibly be imagined.

He felt certain that he had yet something of importance to learn.

"We shall see," was the answer made by the landlord to Mr. Craddock's last speech.

"So we shall. Just hark how the rain comes down!"

"But how is it," inquired some one, "that you consider yourself so free from what almost everyone else is so liable to?"

"Ah, that is a secret!"

"And one worth knowing."

"I should think so."

The last words were accompanied by one of the speaker's boisterous laughs.

"But surely you will not be so unjust and so unchristian-like as to keep it to yourself?"

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"Indeed, but I shall though!"

"Then, there, I think, you are wrong. You ought to allow your friends to participate in it at least."

"But were you ever stopped, Mr. Craddock?" inquired another of the company.

"You mean by a highwayman?"

"Yes."

"Then I have."

"Many times?"

"Yes."

"When was the last?"

"To-night."

"To-night?" echoed the interrogator, amid a general expression of the utmost surprise.

Mr. Craddock laughed again.

Dick thought more boisterously than ever.

"You need not look so incredulous," he continued. "I can assure you it is neither more nor less than the truth."

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"But pray let us hear more about it. You have now inflamed our curiosity to the very utmost. Do you really mean to say that you have been stopped to-night by a highwayman, and that you have brought back all your money?"

"I have. Here it is. Hark!"

Mr. Craddock slapped his pocket as he spoke.

"We are amazed! Did you shoot the fellow?"

"No. We parted in quite a peaceable and friendly manner."

There could be no doubt that Mr. Craddock was amusing himself in no inconsiderable degree at the expense of the company assembled.

There was a brief silence after this, and Mr. Craddock was the first to break it.

"Landlord, you shall bring me a bottle of that rousing old port of yours. I'll be d—d if the rain has not chilled me to the very bone!"

"Then let me tell you, Mr. C., that you could not have anything better than my port in such a case," replied the landlord as he left the room to execute the pleasant commission.

All the guests were now literally devoured with curiosity to hear some details of that highway adventure which Mr. Craddock treated with such extraordinary coolness.

Dick Turpin having by this time quite satisfied himself that he had no particular danger to apprehend, sat down to his meal again and motioned to Maud to follow his example, which she did very willingly.

But no words were exchanged, because of the probability that Mr. Craddock would overhear Dick, and would then most likely recognize his voice.

The wine was presently brought; and from the sounds which reached his ears, Dick concluded that Mr. Craddock had sat down near the fire to enjoy it.

"Shall you stay here all night now, sir?" the landlord inquired.

"Not unless the rain compels me to do so. It comes down now as fast as ever, doesn't it?"

"Faster, if possible."

"Ah, well! If it leaves off I shall depart, for my business is important, and I ought to be some miles further on my road than I am. Gentlemen all, I drink to your good healths!"

The jingling of glasses followed.

"Come, Craddock, old boy," said some one, who to the best of Dick's recollection had not yet spoken, "don't be so unreasonable as to keep this matter to yourself. Tell us, and if you like we will undertake to say that it shall go no further."

"Yes—yes!" cried several voices in response.

"I suppose I shall know no peace if I do not satisfy you, and yet I am afraid I shall be parting with a very valuable secret without any recompense; perhaps I may live to repent it."

"No—no," said all those present who over and over again asseverated that whatever he said should be treated with the utmost confidence.

Of course they imagined themselves quite alone, for the excitement under which they laboured made them altogether forget the presence of the two travellers they had seen enter the adjoining chamber.

"You promise well," said Mr. Craddock, at length, "and if the secret goes no further, it will not matter."

"We assure you it shall not."

"So you said—so you said. But you must please to understand that there is something more in store for you than the mere gratification of your curiosity, for the revelation I am about to make will enable you to defy the power of all highwaymen just in the same way that I do."

This announcement of course had the effect of making them all, if possible, more ardently desirous to hear the disclosure.

"I have heard," began Mr. Craddock, "that a very wise man once remarked that the cleverest and most successful schemes are the simplest; and if this observation holds as good in every case as it does in this, it is true indeed."

This preliminary speech was listened to with sundry manifestations of impatience.

"My scheme is certainly the simplest of the simplest," he went on, "and it will be best explained by relating to you what took place just after I left the inn here this evening. I never make any alteration; and you may, if you choose, adopt the plan with as much ease and with the same good result as myself."

"We are all attention."

"I know that," responded Mr. Craddock, with another of his hoarse laughs; "and what is more, you are burning to hear the next words I have to say."

"Well, we confess it; and now keep us in a state of anxiety no longer."

"I will not. Well, when I set out from here I had not got far before I heard a horse approaching. 'Hullo,' I says to myself, 'I wonder who's coming!'

"Well, I went along very quietly, for I more than half expected what this horseman was, as few people would be out on such a night unless compelled by necessity, or unless to rob some one else.

"In a short time I saw a man.

"He was riding slowly towards me, and by his very manner (for I have had some experience in these matters, let me tell you) I could tell this was a highwayman, and that he intended to call upon me to stand and deliver.

"Such being the case I resolved to adopt my never-failing plan, so I quickened my horse's pace and continued to ride direct towards him.

"When I got a little nearer, this fellow called out to me to stop, speaking in what he thought was doubtless a very intimidating tone of voice, but which made no impression at all upon me.

"On the contrary, as soon as he had finished speaking, I began to laugh as though I was heartily enjoying some capital joke.

"This considerably puzzled the highwayman, as it has done every one of the order upon whom I have tried the experiment.

"'Why,' I exclaimed, 'do you really mean it? Why, I was just going to make the same demand of you.'"

"You said that to the highwayman?"

"I did, for my plan in these cases is nothing more than to pretend to be a highwayman myself. That does the business capitally."

"Well, and what happened next?"

"Why, he stared in astonishment, so I went on to tell him that I had been riding up and down the road looking for prey until I was out of all patience, and that I had been congratulating myself upon hearing somebody at last."

"And did he believe you?"

"He did."

"Well, we will take your word for it, but——"

"But what?"

"Why, we should scarcely have thought that a highwayman could have been so easily imposed upon."

"Ah, that's it! It is the very simplicity of the thing that does it. It is that alone to which it owes its success, though I do begin to believe that these highwaymen fellows are no better than fools."

"It would seem so, however, by your showing. I could scarcely have thought it."

"Nevertheless, I assure you it is a fact."

"And did he ride away then?"

"Yes, shortly after. I told him I was quite out of luck and not blessed with a single coin of the realm, and so I proposed that we should go partners with each other for the rest of the night."

"You—you had the impudence to say that?"

"I had."

"And what did he say?"

"Why, declined, of course; I knew very well that he would, which was the reason why I asked him. Ha, ha!"

"But suppose——"

"Suppose what?" asked Mr. Craddock, somewhat sharply.

"That he had agreed?"

"What, to join with me?"

"Yes."

"There was no fear of such a thing; but still, if he had, I should have trusted to my ingenuity to frame some excuse."

"It seems to me," said another voice, "that the plan is a very excellent one, and I shall not fail to adopt it if ever I have occasion, which I sincerely hope I shall not."

"It is no pleasant matter, I can assure you," remarked Mr. Craddock, "and by no means easy to preserve such a

bold front as will deceive your adversary—in a word, you must play your part well."

"Of course," said the voice which had just before spoken. "It cannot be said that I shall fail for want of knowing the way these affairs are managed, for I have been robbed thrice."

"Do you mean to say you surrendered your property on every occasion?"

"I did, for there was always a pistol before me, and I reasoned thus: This wealth I am about to lose I can replace again; but if I lose my life, there will be no recovering that again."

"You speak like a philosopher," said Mr. Craddock, with a sneer.

"Do I? Well, my philosophy will not prevent me from adopting your stratagem, especially if I should be assailed upon this journey, for I have over three hundred pounds with me."

"And that would prove a serious loss."

"It would, in the present state of trade. However, my old friend Tompkins is going to ride with me, so we shall be able to personate highwaymen capitally."

"Perhaps Mr. Craddock would not mind accompanying us," said Tompkins; "we are going his road, you know."

"What time shall you start?"

"Not till after breakfast in the morning."

"Then you will have daylight, and consequently nothing to fear from highwaymen, for they are like owls—never seen by daylight. As for me, my business is too urgent to allow me to remain. I must be jogging on as soon as ever the weather will permit."

Bearing in mind that Dick Turpin heard the whole of the foregoing conversation, the reader may possibly be able to form some conception at the amount of annoyance he experienced.

To think that he, above all others, should have been tricked—deluded by so shallow a device.

He frowned and bit his lip, and every now and then, upon the utterance of some more than usually aggravating remark, he would start, and seem almost about to spring to his feet.

Maud could not help feeling some amusement at the chagrin which he displayed.

Certainly, it was enough to anger him in no ordinary degree.

But as he listened on, his face gradually assumed a very different expression.

Maud noticed it, and knew very well what it meant, for in a general way Turpin's countenance was as easily read by her as a book.

The expression boded no good to Mr. Craddock.

Indeed, before that very hilarious gentleman had brought his narrative to a conclusion, Dick had resolved upon what he should do.

His determination was that Mr. Craddock should no longer make a boast of his immunity from highway robbery.

Having thus, as we have said, decided upon his course of action, Dick became calmer, and even drank his wine with an air of complacent satisfaction.

What he had determined upon will appear in due course.

In the meanwhile he remained comfortable enough by the side of the roaring fire, complacently awaiting the pseudo highwayman's departure.

On the whole, while felicitating himself upon the manner in which he was about to avenge himself, Dick was not disposed to find much fault with the turn events had taken.

Quite unexpectedly, both Maud and himself had got into warm and comfortable quarters, for which both were grateful, and Maud especially.

It was getting very late before the rain showed any signs of abatement.

So great had been the downpour of rain that Dick heartily congratulated himself upon having escaped exposure to it.

"It's left off raining, I think," said Mr. Craddock, at length.

He rose from his seat as he made the observation, and going to the window, looked out.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "it's fine enough now. Let me have my horse, landlord, as soon as ever you can."

"I should advise and recommend you to stay till morning."

"No, no—I cannot afford the time."

"Well, have your own way. Your horse will be ready immediately."

With these words, the landlord quitted the room.

Maud now looked up, expecting that Dick would make some movement.

But she was disappointed, for he remained perfectly still.

After a brief delay, the horse was brought round to the front of the inn.

As soon as ever Mr. Craddock caught sight of it, he exclaimed:

"Good night, friends—or good morning, whichever you like to call it! Here's hoping you'll meet with a prosperous journey, and don't forget the secret. Above all, don't let the highwaymen guess what's o'clock, or the game will be spoilt for ever."

"Never fear—never fear!"

Mr. Craddock drained his glass and departed.

No sooner had he fairly left the premises than Dick rose quickly yet noiselessly, and motioned to Maud to be in readiness to follow him.

He then crossed the room to the door through which he had passed in company with the landlord on the occasion of his paying a visit to the stables.

This last-mentioned place was, of course, Dick's present destination.

He passed out unquestioned into the yard in company with Maud.

Ere they could gain the stable door, however, they perceived the landlord and the ostler coming towards them.

"Oh, sir," said the former, "I trust you have not wanted anything, and that you have not thought me neglectful!"

"Not at all—not at all!" responded Dick, heartily. "But as we only dropped in here for shelter, I am anxious, now that the rain is over, to be getting on the road again."

"Very good, sir! I am only anxious to know whether you are satisfied?"

"Very much so," answered Dick, with an air of great gusto. "And you may depend I shall not fail to recommend your inn to all my friends and acquaintances."

"I am much obliged to you, sir!"

In the meanwhile, the ostler had gone into the stable and brought forth the two horses.

Owing to the instructions which Dick had given, there was no time lost in preparing them for the road—the only thing requisite being to tighten a few buckles.

Nor did it take Dick very long to settle with the landlord, and, judging by that individual's appearance, it would seem that this had been done in a highly satisfactory manner.

Dick was indeed in a great hurry to be off, so without loss of time he assisted Maud to mount, and then sprang into the saddle himself.

He had a crown-piece ready to slip into the ostler's extended palm, and then he immediately set his steed in motion.

Maud followed him.

Upon reaching the high-road, Dick turned at once in the direction of the toll-gate, for, as the reader must already have surmised, it was his intention to pursue that highly-ingenious gentleman, Mr. Craddock.

He was careful not to ride over fast from the inn, lest by so doing suspicion should be excited.

No sooner had the first bend in the road been turned than he cried:

"Now, Maud, let us see what your horse can do! Forward—forward! The faster the better!"

There was no fear of Black Bess being left behind, so Maud urged her horse to the utmost.

It was really an animal of very good quality, and having just been rested and fed, it was in capital condition for speed.

Away, then, they flew along the level surface of the hard high-road, at a pace that made the hedgerows and trees literally seem to fly past them, and which made the rich colour mantle in the checks of both.

It was very unlikely that Mr. Craddock had made any such speed as this, so, after having proceeded some dis-

tance, Dick began to look about him, being under the impression that he ought by this time to be in sight.

It was by no means so dark as it had been, for the heavy downpour of rain had materially cleared the atmosphere, and already in the eastern sky there could be perceived some indications of the dawning of another day.

CHAPTER MI.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN HAS HIS REVENGE UPON MR. CRADDOCK.

It was not until Dick Turpin paused upon the brow of a somewhat steep hill, and looked steadily before him, that he caught a glimpse of the individual of whom he was in pursuit.

Mr. Craddock was riding along at a very much swifter rate than when Dick had encountered him some hours previously.

Perhaps he was anxious to make up for the delay.

At any rate, there he was, and Dick felt that it was necessary for him to be prompt in his actions.

"Now, Maud," he said, speaking somewhat hurriedly, "you see that gentleman yonder? Well, I am going to overtake him and serve him out for deceiving me in the way he did; and what I want you to do in the meantime is to ride quietly after me so as not to be in danger. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly."

"And yet do not press too closely after me as, if I should suddenly become aware that you were threatened with peril, the discovery would have the effect of paralysing my arm at the moment when it would be of the most service to me."

"Fear nothing on my account," was Maud's answer.

"If you act in accordance with my directions, all will be well."

Having settled this point, Dick gave Black Bess the rein.

Away she flew down the hill with a long, light, stretching gallop, like that of the greyhound.

Fast as Mr. Craddock was going, it must infallibly happen that he would be overtaken in the space of a few minutes.

Dick now, indeed, expected every moment to catch sight of him again, and presently, after passing round a somewhat sharp turn, he did so.

Mr. Craddock of course could not fail to hear that some one was powdering after him at a tremendous rate.

But the confidence he felt in his very clever plan, and the bold assurance that formed so strong and considerable an ingredient in his disposition, prevented him from feeling any uneasiness on this account.

He did just glance behind him to see who it was, but he did not increase his pace in the slightest degree.

"Hold!" cried Dick, in that loud, commanding tone which he could when he chose assume. "Pull up, I say, unless you wish to be brought to by a bullet!"

These words reached Mr. Craddock's ears and made him feel just a little uncomfortable, but without his knowing exactly why.

However, with an assumption of a great deal of surprise, he drew rein and wheeled about.

He recognised Turpin at once.

"Hullo!" he said. "Do we meet again? I hope you have had better luck than I have."

"Then you have your hope gratified," answered Dick, "for I assure you I have been very fortunate indeed."

"Have you really? Well, it's more than I have. The road this way has been quite deserted."

"Has it? Excuse me!"

Dick, as he spoke, placed himself in very close proximity indeed to Mr. Caddock.

"Hullo, sir! What do you mean?"

This exclamation was called forth by the sight of a pistol which Dick very calmly levelled at him.

"Stop—stop!" he continued, shrinking back, for he thought he could see quite down the barrel of the deadly weapon, and even catch sight of the bullet it contained—"stop, I say! What the deuce are you about?"

"You see this pistol?"

"Yes—rather plainer than I care about. Pray turn the muzzle of it another way."

"Nothing of the kind!"

"But I say you must, sir!"

"I decline!"

"Do you know who you are talking to?"

"Perfectly well. And I beg to assure you, in the first place, that when I say a thing I am invariably as good as my word."

"As bad, you mean!" said Mr. Craddock, endeavouring to get up another of his loud laughs; but the attempt was a perfect failure.

"As good or as bad—just whichever you like," continued Dick, imperturbably. "It comes to the same thing; and understand, that unless you quietly surrender to me all the money and valuables you have about you, this bullet shall find out whether you skull contains any brains or not."

"Take my word for it that it does. Don't attempt to discover it by any such means, I beg. But what do you want? What is the meaning of all this?"

"Simply that I require you to deliver over to me all the money you may at the present time be carrying with you."

"What!" ejaculated Mr. Craddock, "is this the way you observe honour among thieves?"

"Silence!" cried Dick—"no nonsense!"

"No, but surely dog would not rob dog. No, no—you don't understand, I feel sure. Would you without scruple deprive a fellow comrade of his spoil?"

"Certainly I would."

"Then you are a base villain!"

"I am content to be auything you like to call me," auswered Dick, "provided I get your money."

"But this is monstrous. For one highwayman to attack and rob a comrade is a thing unheard of."

"No more nonsense!" cried Dick, with greater sternness than he had as yet displayed. "I have certain knowledge of two things."

"May I ask what they are?"

"Yes. In the first place, that you carry with you a considerable sum of money."

Mr. Craddock was silent.

"And the second is, that your highwaymanship is neither more nor less than an impudent assumption—one which, though it may have served you hitherto, will assuredly fail you for the future."

Upon thus finding that his long-maintained cheat was discovered, Mr. Craddock shook a little in the saddle, and turned a trifle paler than he was before.

"I shall stand no nonsense!" Dick added. "You imposed upon me once, and I am determined not to be satisfied with anything but the whole of the property of a valuable character that you have about you; so if you wish to escape any disagreeable consequences, you will hand over the whole quietly, without making any more fuss."

There was no possibility of thinking that Dick was not in earnest in what he said.

Mr. Craddock, in spite of the large amount of assurance which he possessed, felt in his heart that Dick fully meant every word he said.

But for all that, he was most reluctant to part with any of his property.

This was not solely on account of the value of it, but because of the dread he had of the ridicule that would in future be poured upon him.

Still, what was he to do?

To oppose himself in single combat with the highwayman was what he never once dreamt of.

He was by far too prudent to risk his life upon such a desperate chance.

He looked around him as though for relief.

Unable to see anyone, however, or even to hear a sound indicative of the approach of assistance, he, with a heavy sigh, thrust his hand into his pocket.

He produced a purse containing only a few guineas.

This, with manifest reluctance, he placed in the highwayman's hands.

"I want more than this!" cried Dick. "Tell no lies about what you have. I may as well inform you that I overheard every word that passed between you and the people at the inn just down the road, for I happened to be in the adjoining room at the time."

Upon hearing this avowal, Mr. Craddock gnashed his teeth with rage, because he saw that his own mouth had betrayed him

If he had resisted the importunities of his friends, and kept the secret to himself, this humiliation would never have taken place.

"Come," said Dick, "my patience is exhausted. Just let me know whether you intend handing over the money yourself, or whether you prefer that I should take it from you by main force. Let me tell you that I am determined to have it by one means or other, so make your choice."

Once more Mr. Craddock's hand wandered to his pocket.

Once more he drew something forth.

This time it was something more worthy of Dick's acceptance, for it consisted of a very large bag of bank notes and gold, with which valuable contents it was crammed to repletion.

"Now the rest," said Dick—"I am resolved to have everything. And you ought always after this to esteem yourself a very lucky man for having got off so easily."

Mr. Craddock groaned.

Another bag was produced and surrendered.

His watch, rings, and indeed everything he had about him that was at all of a valuable character, followed.

"Now," said Dick, "you are at liberty to ride on. Be off with you, and the quieter you keep this little adventure the less you will be laughed at."

Mr. Craddock seemed glad enough to receive this intimation that he was at liberty to depart.

He at once struck his horse's flank with his heel and rode off.

Ere he had gone many paces, however, he wheeled round suddenly and raised his arm.

Rapid as the movement was, Dick saw it, and was as rapid in his own motions.

At the first glance Dick saw that Mr. Craddock held something in his hand, and intuitively guessed not only what it was, but what he intended to do.

He shifted his position with great suddenness.

At the selfsame moment there was a vivid flash and then a loud report.

But Dick, owing to the rapidity of his movements, escaped all injury.

A fierce feeling, however, instantly arose in his breast, for there was nothing which Dick so much detested as treachery, and nothing which filled him with so much resentment.

Without pausing to think, he started off in full pursuit.

Mr. Craddock saw him coming.

He had the mortification of finding that his shot had been wholly unavailing, and that the highwayman would not be satisfied until he had had his vengeance upon him.

Frantic with fear, he whipped and spurred his horse into a most furious gallop.

Black Bess put forth her extraordinary powers of speed, and consequently Dick Turpin soon found himself near enough to make his voice heard.

"Pull up!" he cried—"pull up, as you value your life! I owe you a shot, and if you disobey me I shall requite the obligation. Pull up, I say! My aim will be a better one than yours!"

But Mr. Craddock was in too great a state of terror to pay any attention to these cries.

If anything, he urged his horse to still greater exertion.

Dick's anger now was by no means so furious as it had been. Still, he was determined to have his revenge.

His pistol was raised, and now, taking a careful aim, he fired at the flying horse and rider.

The reader, however, must by this time know Dick too well to think that he was capable of so base an act as that of shooting a man down in cold blood.

His aim was correctly taken, and the bullet did its work, but it was at the horse he fired, and not at Mr. Craddock himself.

The effects of the shot, however, were not at the moment perceptible.

Very soon, however, the desperately wounded animal began to swerve and stagger, until finally, with a dull, heavy crash, it fell headlong to the earth.

Previous to the occurrence of this catastrophe, however, Mr. Craddock had surmised what was amiss, but he was unable to think of anything else but retaining his seat as long as possible.

When the horse fell, of course he was not taken at unawares, and consequently escaped without any serious injury.

But before he could recover his breath sufficiently to make the attempt to rise, Dick was upon him.

"Now, rascal," he cried, in a savage voice, "what reason can you offer to prevent me at once taking away your miserable life as a punishment for your treacherous act? I look upon you as a murderer—you are one in intent, and it was through no fault of yours that you failed to be one in reality."

His words put Mr. Craddock into a still more dreadful state of fright.

He fully believed that his last hour upon the earth had come, and therefore he began to utter prayers with extraordinary volubility.

"Rise!" cried Dick, with more fury than ever in his tones—"rise, I say! Disobey me at your peril!"

Shaking in every limb, Mr. Craddock slowly and with much difficulty raised himself to his feet.

"You deserve nothing but death," said Turpin, "but yet I do not intend to cheat the hangman; but you shall pay dearly for that treacherous shot!"

While speaking these words, Dick produced from his pocket a piece of thin but particularly strong cord.

Mr. Craddock eyed it with great misgiving.

His apprehensions increased when he saw Turpin deliberately set to work and make a running noose in the end of it.

He thought this surely must be intended for his neck, but he soon found that Turpin had quite another use for it.

Before he quite knew what was intended, he found the cord tightly encircling his right wrist.

"Now," said Turpin, "this way, and if you are a wise man you will not think of offering the least resistance."

Dick gave the rope a sharp tug as he spoke, causing it to cut rather deeply into the flesh.

"Murder!"

"Silence, will you! This way, I say!"

Mr. Craddock obeyed promptly.

Dick merely conducted him to the trunk of a large elm tree that grew by the roadside.

Round this our old friend rapidly passed the cord, and with remarkable dexterity secured the other end to his captive's left wrist.

Mr. Craddock was now compelled to clasp the tree in a very close embrace—much closer than was at all agreeable, for Dick drew the rope as tightly as ever his strength would allow him, totally disregarding the while the horrible howls with which the process was accompanied.

"There," he cried, when he had finished, "you are disposed of now, Mr. Craddock! And you may amuse yourself by cursing the tree, which is close enough to your teeth, until some one comes by who is willing to release you."

Mr. Craddock was now rendered so furious at finding himself in this ignominious situation that, without thinking of the consequences, he gave a snatch with all his might, thinking that he might by this means snap the cord.

But all he did was to force a cry of great agony from his lips, for the rope showed no signs of giving way whatever, and the force he had made use of cut his flesh almost to the bone.

"Try it again, my friend!" cried Dick, with a laugh. "You didn't half try that time! Take my advice, and give another good pull—you will be able to tell better then how strong the rope is."

Mr. Craddock cursed and swore horribly.

"It's no good," Turpin continued. "And what is more, you will not be able to deny having been robbed, as you might have done had you rode off quietly, as I was quite willing to allow you to do. It is all your own bringings on, and you have no one in the world to blame but yourself."

Mr. Craddock howled again.

"I have not done with you yet," his tormentor went on. "There shall be no mistake about the matter—I will take good care of that!"

Turpin's next proceeding was to open Mr. Craddock's own pocket-book, and upon one of the blank leaves in it he wrote these words:—

"Robbed this morning by Dick Turpin, who discovered the cheat so long practised, and therefore emptied his pockets. Afterwards, for a cowardly, treacherous shot, was tied by the said Dick Turpin to this tree, in order to afford him the opportunity of thinking over his present and future prospects."

The words Dick wrote in a large and certainly indifferent hand, but he took care to wet the point of the black-lead pencil at every letter, and to bear very heavily upon the paper, so that there should be no fear of any of the words being easily effaced.

This done, Dick pinned the paper on to the back of Mr. Craddock's coat, from whence, as he knew very well, he could not remove it himself.

"I will leave you now," said our old friend, after giving an approving glance at what he had done, "and I hope some time will elapse before anyone chances to make his way past this spot."

Mr. Craddock continued to swear in the most frightful manner, but this did not afford him the slightest aid in releasing himself from his bonds, though possibly his angry feelings were somewhat soothed by it.

Having now done all that he intended, Dick leisurely mounted Black Bess, and rode towards the spot where Maud was waiting for him, for she had faithfully observed his injunctions, though she had nevertheless been a witness of all that had taken place.

"Oh, Dick," she ejaculated, as soon as he was near enough to hear her voice, "you are sure you were not injured by that treacherous shot?"

"Not in the least, I assure you," was the reply. "And I feel comfortable now, because I have paid him for it in a style which he will not easily forget."

"Shall you leave him where he is?"

"Certainly I shall! Of course, before many hours elapse, some one will pass by and release him."

"And what was that you wrote?"

Dick told her.

Maud looked grave.

"Surely," she said, "that was most unwise!"

"Why so?"

"Why? Because now they will have certain knowledge of your presence hereabouts."

"It does not matter," he replied. "It is my intention to quit the inn. I cannot make up my mind to remain any longer in a place for which you manifest so much aversion."

"But there are other things to be considered besides my fancies."

"It may be so, but your inclinations shall not be wholly disregarded for all that."

"What is it, then, you think of doing next?"

"Why, getting down somewhere in the neighbourhood of the place we have agreed to visit."

"Stonehenge?"

"Yes, I believe we shall be safer there. At any rate, we shall be more miles from London, which is to us the seat of danger."

Against this proposition Maud had not a single word to say.

Not only was she most anxious to quit the ill-omened roof of the inn for ever, but she fully and entirely believed that they would be in more safety if their distance from London was increased.

Maud was not a little surprised, though at the same time she felt gratified in a very high degree, at finding Dick so observant of her comfort and happiness.

Moreover, she fancied that of late she had detected, not only in the accents of his voice, but also in his glances, a greater amount of tenderness than he had ever before displayed.

She was too delighted in making this discovery to think of speculating upon the feelings and causes which had given rise to it, but she was conscious of the existence of a greater amount of happiness in her breast than she could remember having possession of before.

By this time it had begun to grow quite light, and therefore Maud rather anxiously inquired of Dick whether it was his intention to retrace his steps.

"Very shortly," he said. "But first of all, I expect to have a little bit of game arrive in a few minutes—a chance which I would not miss on any account, for not only does it promise some sport, but I feel certain it will turn out profitable. Hark!"

While he was addressing these words to Maud, our hero had caught the sound of horsemen approaching.

A moment's listening convinced him that he had not been mistaken.

"Now, Maud," he exclaimed, "once more retire into the shadow of this hedge, and I will ride on to meet them."

"Be careful."

"I will indeed."

"Promise me," said Maud—"promise me that you will continue to think favourably of what I assure you is the darling wish of my heart, and that which will serve to make my happiness complete."

"I will, but bear in mind that much money will be required."

"Alas!" she sighed, "there is that obstacle."

"But the amount will soon be less than it is even now, for the booty I hope to obtain in a few moments will prove no inconsiderable one. But promise me not to quit your place of safe shelter."

"I promise."

"And I, too, promise," said Dick, with that tenderness in his voice and eyes which it so thrilled Maud to listen to and see. "I will make a promise, and it is that if my companions will give their consent, we will quit England for good as soon as ever an opportunity displays itself."

"Are you quite sure—quite in earnest?" she asked, with her eyes brimming with the tears that excess of joyfulness had called there.

"Quite. I cannot stay to say more, or the chance will be lost."

In good truth, Dick had permitted the approaching horsemen to come very near to where they stood, for the clatter of hoofs now overpowered every other sound.

As he spoke the last words, however, Dick galloped down the road towards the travellers.

As for Maud, she felt so overcome with happiness as scarcely to be conscious of where she was, or what Dick was about.

She did, indeed, find it hard to believe that she had really heard the words which had just been spoken.

It seemed far more likely that she was the victim of some extraordinary delusion, for hitherto, when hoping that Dick would quit his dangerous profession, she had not been able to conceal from herself that she was in reality hoping against hope.

She could not be dreaming.

There around her lay the usual features of an English landscape.

The light early morning breeze was rustling among the topmost branches of the trees.

The first rays of the new-dawning sun were beginning to glint upon the more lofty objects with which she was surrounded.

No, no, it was no dream and no delusion—for she could hear still the beat of horses' hoofs.

Suddenly, however, the sounds ceased and the distant murmur of voices floated to her ears.

CHAPTER MLI.

CONTINUES TO RELATE DICK TURPIN'S ADVENTURES.

Leaving Maud to bear with the suspense which she had to endure as best she might, we will, as usual, follow in the footsteps of the highwayman.

Ere he had gone many yards he caught sight of two mounted men approaching, who, upon seeing him, discovered certain signs of uneasiness and irresolution.

Dick was sure that they were no other than those friends to whom Mr. Craddock had confided his very valuable secret, and who had agreed to put his *ruse* into practice.

Our hero was rather curious to see how they would manage the matter. It was scarcely to be expected that they would succeed as well as the originator of this very clever idea, because they were not in possession of so great an amount of impudent assurance.

"Hold, gentlemen," cried Dick, placing himself directly in their path—"hold—hold, I say! You cannot proceed any further on your journey until you have transacted a little business along with me."

They came to a standstill without any hesitation, and at the same moment Dick produced a pistol, which had upon them a decidedly uncomfortable effect.

"Now, gentlemen," Dick went on, after having satisfied himself that his weapon was in perfect readiness for instant use, "there is no reason why you should be delayed many minutes upon your journey, for all I require of you at the present time is the whole of the articles of a valuable nature—money included—which you carry with you. When you have placed that in my hands you are at perfect liberty to ride off—no further molestation will be offered you, I assure you."

The extraordinary coolness of this speech seemed to dumfounder the travellers.

Some moments elapsed before they were able to move, or to remember what it was they had agreed to do.

During this interval Dick sat in the saddle, considerably enjoying their utter state of bewilderment.

"Come!" he said, when he considered he had waited long enough. "My patience is entirely exhausted; and though I don't wish to proceed to extremes, yet I must assure you that if you do not comply with my request unhesitatingly, I shall be compelled to use force."

"But, my dear sir——"

"Well?"

"We—we—we are——"

"Highwaymen!" gasped the second, finding that his companion's utterance failed him, and would not allow him to pronounce the important word.

"Yes—we are both highwaymen ourselves," said the first, jerking out the words all at once in the most comical way imaginable.

"Are you indeed!" ejaculated Dick.

"We are."

"Then I am glad to hear it."

"Glad to hear it?"

"Yes, because a highwayman will never refuse a request made to him by one of his comrades; and as I am badly in want of cash for a particular purpose, of course you will not object to place your pockets quite at my disposal."

Upon hearing these words the two travellers stared blankly at each other.

This was something for which they were not in the least prepared, and they fervently wished Mr. Craddock had been a little more explicit, and told them what he should have done under such circumstances.

"Silence, I presume, in this, as in other cases, denotes consent," pursued Dick. "As I am in a hurry, be good enough not to keep me any longer waiting."

"My dear sir——"

"Yes, my very dear sir——"

"As dear as you like."

"What a joke—what a capital joke! Ha, ha! Do you see the joke? Ha, ha! Capital!"

"Yes, capital," muttered the other, trying hard to force a laugh.

"Then, excuse me," interposed Dick, "you have both considerably the advantage of me, for I am forced to confess that I don't see any joke at all."

The artificial merriment of the two travellers subsided into absolute amazement.

"I must be plain and straightforward with you," said Dick, at length. "I see I am obliged to be so."

"Yes—yes."

"Well, then, let me tell you that I happened to overhear all that passed at the inn between Mr. Craddock and yourselves. Ha, ha! I can see a joke now! Can you?"

If they did see it they certainly did not seem to appreciate it in the slightest degree, for they sat on their horses' backs as though they had been changed from humanity to stone.

"I don't want to come to hard measures," Turpin went on; "but I am determined to possess myself of all the valuables you carry, and I leave you to make your choice whether you quietly surrender them to me, or whether you will compel me by main force to take them from you. In either case the result will be the same."

"No—no! Dear, good, kind sir, have mercy upon us!"

"I intend to be merciful."

"Thanks—many, many thanks!"

"But for all that, I intend to have your cash, so hand over before my patience is worn out!"

Both groaned heavily.

Dick raised his pistol.

"I shall count nine," he said, "and if, by the time I have finished doing so, you do not begin to show me the contents of your pockets I shall have to bring the services of this little tool into requisition."

The sight of Dick's holster pistol—he had purposely selected the most terrifying one he had with him—made them shake in their shoes for dread.

Dick began to count in a very deliberate tone of voice.

"Stop—stop!" cried one, as Dick cried "Eight!" "I cannot stand this any longer!"

So saying, he dived his hand into his pocket.

Dick extended his left hand, allowing the reins to fall upon the neck of Black Bess, for he knew very well she would stand still without any restraint.

This first traveller produced a very stout pocket-book, which was crammed so tightly that it seemed in danger of bursting.

It slipped into Dick's pocket with the greatest celerity.

"Now then," he cried, "follow on with your purse, your loose cash, and your watch! Be quick, for time is precious!"

The traveller looked around him with a glance so ludicrously despairing as would provoke a smile from almost any beholder.

But there was no one near at that early hour.

Finding that it was vain to resist, and that he had no other resource save compliance, the traveller made a virtue of necessity, and emptied all his pockets, satisfying Dick that there was nothing left in them by turning each successively inside out.

Having finished with him, he next turned to his companion, who, of course, now was not in a position to think of offering resistance of any kind.

Refusal was out of the question, so he followed the example of the other in every respect, though he accompanied every one of his actions with many heavy groans and dismal shakings of the head, not even putting up with his loss with as much calm philosophy as his associate.

"And now," Turpin exclaimed, "I should just like to make a remark or two before we separate. In the first place, if you will take my advice you will never try this trick again, or, if you do, rehearse the part you have to perform much better, otherwise you will infallibly be known not to be highwaymen at the very first glance."

"I never will," muttered one, in a tone that was conclusive as to his sincerity.

"Nor I either."

"Then as for your very ingenious friend, Mr. Craddock," continued Dick, "I have some interesting information to give you concerning him."

Upon hearing this, the pair pricked up their ears.

"He tried his plan upon me, but I need scarcely tell you he found it of no avail, and in the end he had to clear his pockets of every article."

"Did he indeed?" they ejaculated, with evident satisfaction.

No doubt it was some solace to them, under the circumstances, to be made aware that their friend, after all his boasting, had not been able to escape.

"Just at the present time," Dick went on, "he happens to be so situated as to stand in need of your assistance, and if you ride down the road you will doubtless see or hear something of him. If he denies having been robbed, ask him to pay the gate just below here, and then you will know whether he speaks the truth or not."

With these words, Dick abruptly wheeled his mare round and galloped off before the travellers could recover themselves from their bewilderment.

Maud greeted Dick with a glad smile.

"No more adventures now," she cried.

"None; I have succeeded much better than I could have dared to anticipate. I have capital booty, which I have been lucky enough to obtain with very little risk and difficulty."

"And now you purpose returning to the inn."

"I do. Force your way through that gap. We will make our way across the fields, as by that means we shall save a mile or two."

Maud gladly enough complied, for now that it was daylight, she was most anxious for Dick to get back to the inn, for which place she by no means felt so much repugnance during daylight as at night.

As soon as the open meadows were gained, she looked about her with apprehension, for she was quite at a loss to imagine how it was that during the whole of the past night they had not once been interrupted by their foes, and therefore now naturally dreaded to catch sight of them.

Nothing, however, save the fair and smiling face of the open country met her view, and she began to indulge in the hope that they would be successful in reaching their destination unmolested.

Her mind being thus relieved upon this point, her thoughts naturally averted to what Dick had said to her respecting his accedence to her request.

"It seems too much happiness to be realised," she said, with a deep sigh. "I fear, somehow, I know not why, that it can never be."

"Nonsense, Maud; banish such fears as those—they are unworthy of you. Nevertheless, I don't scruple to tell you that I have been weak and foolish enough to be influenced by a vague presentiment of some coming ill; and without knowing why, I feel assured that if your wishes are carried into execution, a great calamity will be avoided."

These words struck a cold chill to Maud's heart, which seemed as though it had been plunged into ice, thus freezing up her life blood at its very source.

"Do not call any such feeling weak or foolish, Dick, but rather believe it to be some delicate instinct warning you of some hidden approaching danger. Let me beseech you not to disregard the whisperings of such an inward monitor."

"I will not," replied Dick—"I will not for your sake. At present, your life has been sacrificed to me; I can see by your wasted frame, your haggard look, the dulness of your eyes, and numerous other indications, how much the wild life you have so long led has told upon you. I wonder you have borne up so well as you have, for you were never fitted by nature for so many hardships."

"And yet I have been happy, Dick—quite happy in your love, and therefore quite content to bear all, and even more."

"But you shall be happier—of that I am quite determined. Now, when I see the ravages which have been wrought in your beauty, your countenance is a reproach to me; but it shall be so no longer."

Maud wept freely.

"Cheer up!" cried Dick—"let me implore you to cheer up! Our arrangement with Tom Davis and the rest must be carried out; but by the time a month has expired I trust we shall be safely on some bark taking our last look of the shores of England."

There was something saddening even in this.

In particular Dick felt how hard he should find it thus to exile himself from the land where he had passed so busy a career.

"Come," he cried, for he felt no inclination to pursue the subject further, "urge on your horse, Maud! The sooner we reach the Jolly Tar the better."

Upon this point it was impossible that any diversity of opinion could exist.

As before, Maud pushed her horse to the utmost speed he was capable of making, and Dick kept easily by her side.

The only interruption they met with in the course of their long ride was of so slight a character as scarcely to be worthy of the name.

It was while they were crossing a meadow of considerable extent.

Suddenly a loud voice was borne upon the air.

Looking behind them, they caught sight of a man mounted upon a very sturdy-looking roan cob.

He was alone, so whatever apprehensions our friends may have felt instantly subsided.

Seeing that he had attracted their attention, this individual waved his arms about in a very wild and extraordinary manner, while at the same time he bawled out something at the very top of his lungs.

But he was too far off for the purport of the words to reach Dick's ears.

"What does he want?" asked Maud.

"I fancy he is telling us that we are trespassing upon his property. He looks like a farmer, or landholder, or something of that sort. By his violent gesticulation I fancy he wants us to turn back."

"And we are not likely to do that."

"Decidedly not. Push on faster, for as I live he is actually foolish enough to give us chase!"

Whether Dick's supposition was correct, or whether this stranger suspected who they were, is hard to say.

At any rate, he flogged his pony unmercifully with a stick he carried, and made him gallop over the turf at an astonishing rate.

It was quite out of the question, though, that he should succeed in overtaking Black Bess.

Such a thing would be too ridiculous.

Nevertheless, so good was the speed made by the pony, that it was not until they had crossed two more fields that they lost sight of him.

The cross-road now lay before them, and they made their way into it easily by means of a gate which Dick alighted and opened.

About the rest of their journey there was no difficulty whatever.

The Jolly Tar had always occupied a very lonesome situation, and now, in consequence of the dark deeds which had taken place in it, the vicinity was more shunned than ever.

Tom Davis, however, was awaiting their return with very great impatience and anxiety.

He shook his head as soon as he caught sight of them

"I can't think it wise, captain, to venture back here by daylight in this manner. You are sure to be seen."

"It was unavoidable. Have the others returned?"

"Claude and Jack have."

"Not Tom King?"

"No."

"That is strange!"

"Very; and yet he may have had the prudence to conceal himself somewhere rather than run the risk of making his way here by daylight."

Dick could not fall in with this supposition.

He knew where Tom had gone, and it seemed far more probable to ascribe his absence to the fact of his having got into some serious trouble.

Of this private conviction, however, he uttered not one word.

At this moment Claude and Jack made their appearance at the back window of the inn.

They had stationed themselves on their return in the "look-out," for so they called that upper chamber, from which, as we have already informed the reader, they could obtain a view in any direction.

Dick soon discovered that his apprehensions concerning Tom King were fully shared in by his comrades.

There was just the hope that what Tom had said was correct, and this they had perforce to cling to during the whole of the day.

They determined to wait for him until midnight, and then, if he did not make his appearance, to come to some resolution as to how they should act.

The excursion of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack on that night had not been marked by an adventure of any particular or unusual character.

But they were successful in so far as the purpose for which they set out was concerned.

A good booty had been secured, and with very little trouble.

In one of the cross-roads the highwaymen had encountered a covered waggon—one of that kind in which people at that time often rode from place to place.

They guessed at once the nature of the load carried by the waggon on this occasion, and by threats compelled the driver to stop his team and to sit on his high seat without offering any opposition or resistance.

The people in the waggon were easily terrified into submission.

We have formerly stated that people who could afford another mode of conveyance often chose one of these waggons as holding out a greater prospect of safety than a stage-coach.

In the present instance our friends were so fortunate as to meet with an old avaricious fellow, who preferred to ride in a waggon not only on account of the reason just given, but because it was so much cheaper.

Although he at first declared he had nothing whatever, Claude made a search—a thorough one—and the result was the discovery of a large bag of money.

With this booty they rode off, leaving the man almost



[TOM KING IS MADE ACQUAINTED WITH HIS DOOM.]

frantic at the loss of that which he actually prized above his own life.

The particulars of this adventure having been related, the whole of our friends betook themselves to rest, adopting the plan which on a previous occasion we in full described.

The approach of night was waited for with great impatience, and when it began to grow dusk the anxiety of all was so great that they, without exception, repaired to the look-out, hoping shortly to catch sight of their absent comrade.

The hours passed slowly and wearily, until at length Dick Turpin, consulting the watch he had taken from Mr. Craddock—which was a valuable repeater—announced that the hour of midnight had arrived.

But although they both looked and listened, they neither saw nor heard anything of Tom King.

CHAPTER MLII

TOM KING LEARNS HIS FUTURE DESTINY.

We go back to our old friend Tom King, who was left in anything but comfortable circumstances, although the narrow escape he had just had from death made them more endurable than they would have been otherwise.

But Tom was most moved by the hapless fate which had befallen his companion, and he renewed his search again and again in the hope of discovering something of him.

All was in vain, however.

If the unfortunate stranger had really made his egress in the same manner as our friend, he must have been carried away completely by the stream, and this, judging from the nature of the place, seemed hardly probable.

The idea which fixed itself in Tom's mind was, that

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the subterranean stream might at some point have branched off into two directions, one leading to the open air, the other conducting to some of those mysterious recesses of the earth of which the stranger had himself so graphically spoken.

Supposing this hypothesis to be correct, Tom had still further cause to congratulate himself upon the good fortune which had attended him.

Other and more pressing matters, however. now called upon him for immediate attention.

The loss of his horse must be repaired, and then his next and most important step was to make his way back to the place where he knew his friends were so anxiously expecting him, and make them acquainted with the success he had met with in the prosecution of the enterprise upon which he had been despatched.

But many difficulties stood in the way, which by many would have been deemed well-nigh insuperable, and yet which Tom thought but little of.

His first care was, if possible, to ascertain whether the police officers who had so nearly secured him, and who would infallibly have done so but for their own overreaching cupidity, were in the vicinity.

Tom's own opinion, formed after a careful survey of the place, was that they must be on the other side of the rock, unless, indeed, they had ventured to pass beneath the archway in a boat; then it would be hard indeed to say what had become of them.

After reconnoitring for some time, the coast seemed perfectly clear, and Tom having by this time recovered the use of all his limbs, and who felt that the proper circulation of his blood had been restored, at once turned his back upon the scene of this adventure, now intent upon obtaining his first necessary—a horse.

How he was to obtain one seemed in the highest degree mysterious, for he did not happen at that time to possess the sum of money that would be requisite for the purchase of one.

It is true that in some of the meadows around him he might have found an animal to answer his purpose, but then he would have been short of all the trappings—a deficiency, of course, which anyone not similarly situated to himself could easily have supplied.

While pondering over these matters Tom's attention was arrested by a light which he perceived dimly twinkling at some distance in advance.

At first being uncertain as to the source from whence the illumination proceeded, he advanced with considerable caution until he found that the light in question streamed from the side window of a roadside inn.

This discovery seemed to have the effect of causing him to feel with additional acuteness the discomfort of his present condition.

The imaginary prospect of a glowing fire and some blood-warming beverage arose most temptingly before him, and so strong was the effect produced that he found the inducement to enter was irresistible.

Accordingly, he approached with a more rapid step; but before he ventured to enter he peeped cautiously into the room from which the light was shining.

This he was able to do easily, for there was no curtain to obstruct his vision—the light, indeed, thus suffered to shine forth proving a beacon to many a belated traveller, who but for it might have wandered past the inn.

Tom found that he was looking into a room that evidently, from its character, was set aside for the accommodation of the public.

Straight before him was the hearth, upon which a huge wood fire was blazing, giving out so much light that the rays of the lamp were almost made invisible.

At this moment the room was occupied only by one individual, who sat with his back to the window and his face to the glowing embers, so that Tom was not able to note him very distinctly.

By his dress he would seem to be a gentleman.

From such a one as this Tom not unnaturally thought that he had little or nothing to apprehend, and so without further hesitation he advanced to the front door of the inn, opened it, and entered.

The noise which this occasioned had the effect of bringing the alert and attentive landlady forward.

But Tom had accurately noted the situation of the door communicating with the room into which he had peeped, and he opened it without ceremony.

The landlady followed him across the threshold.

"Good evening," said Tom to her, advancing to the fire and nodding to the traveller who sat there. "You see, I have been so unfortunate as to get a ducking this cold night."

"Dear me, sir, so you have! What shall I do? How did it happen?"

"Why, curse it, it is not my only mischance to-night—I have lost my horse as well!"

"Lost your horse?"

"Yes; I wanted the confounded brute to leap a stream, which I am convinced he could have done easily enough, but he jumped short, and we both fell into the water."

"Was it near here, sir?" asked the stranger, who had looked at, and listened to, Tom with great attention.

"A mile or so," was the answer. "I cannot describe the exact spot, for I am a stranger in the locality. But what was worst was that I found the current so strong I could scarcely resist it. Being a good swimmer, though, I gained the shore, and strove to rescue my steed; but in the meantime he had floated to a great distance—to a place where the velocity of the current had so increased that he was carried along like a feather; and in spite of all my endeavours I had the mortification of seeing him drift under a rocky arch that leads I know not where—I should fancy into the bowels of the earth."

"I know well the spot which you describe," observed the traveller; "but it is considerably more than a mile from here. You may consider yourself lucky in having escaped with your own life. Had you passed beneath that arch you would never have been seen or heard of on this earth again."

"The gentleman says truly," added the landlady; "and you must consider yourself fortunate in having escaped so well."

"I do," answered Tom, with a smile, for he was thinking of the officers.

"But, dear me," continued the landlady—"here I am rattling to you in this fashion, and not thinking that those wet clothes will give you your death of cold. Let me show you to a bed-room, where you can remain until all your things are dry."

"Nay, nay—it does not matter. If you will bring me some boiling-hot brandy-and-water I will dry myself by this blazing fire. It is not the first time that I have been soaked to the skin, and without having the advantage of any fire at all. Perhaps, sir," Tom added, addressing the traveller, "you would favour me so far as to join me in discussing a glass hot and strong?"

"I have no objection—none in the world."

"Then, landlady, let us have two glasses with all possible speed. In the meantime I will make myself comfortable."

"You had better take my advice, sir."

"No, no—I shall do best here. Be quick, for I am cold without and within."

Tom hastily removed his upper clothing and hung it near the fire, and then warmed himself thoroughly.

"I think you are running a great risk," said the stranger, who had sat watching him for some time in perfect silence.

"It is nothing," answered Tom, carelessly. "I have seen hard service in my time, and have become inured to all these hardships."

At this moment the landlady reappeared; and after the exchange of some conversation, with which it is needless to trouble the reader, she again quitted the apartment.

By this time Tom began to feel very comfortable in his new quarters.

"What vexes me most of all," he remarked to his companion, "is the loss of my horse, which could not have taken place at a more unfortunate moment. I am anxious to reach a place some miles from here before daylight, and how I am to do it completely puzzles me."

"I think I can get you out of your difficulty."

"In what way, sir?"

"Why, at the present moment I happen to have a horse in the stable here which will just suit you, and which I am willing to part with for a reasonable sum."

"I am much pleased to hear you say as much," responded Tom King, with great heartiness. "It has relieved me of an immense amount of uneasiness."

"I am delighted to hear it!"

"You could not confer a greater favour upon me than by allowing me the opportunity of making this purchase," said Tom. "And if you have no objection we will, after we have drained our glasses, pay a visit to the stable."

"With all my heart!"

It may seem strange that Tom should manifest so much readiness to purchase a horse at a time when he had no means of paying for it.

Either he forgot the state of his exchequer, or else he had devised some plan for dispensing with the necessity of payment.

The pair sat together for some little time—the stranger insisting upon two more glasses being brought, and Tom did not wish to leave until his clothing was completely dried.

The stranger, too, had an object in calling for more brandy—he believed he should be enabled to drive a better bargain.

But he had got the wrong person to deal with.

The glasses at last were emptied, and they rose and repaired to the yard, Tom's apparel being now quite dry and comfortable again.

The traveller was in excellent spirits, doubtless in consequence of the largeness of the profit he was about to make.

Some little delay took place in arousing the ostler; but at length that individual made his appearance, carrying a large stable lantern.

By the aid of the article last mentioned Tom made a tolerably good examination of the horse, which, so far as he could tell, was of an average good quality, and free from blemishes and faults.

"What do you think of him?" asked the traveller, somewhat anxiously.

"Why, I believe he will suit me admirably."

"I feel sure he will. Have him led out into the yard, you will be able to judge better of him then."

To this proposition, of course, Tom King did not for a moment dissent, and accordingly the steed was led out.

In his own mind our friend thought, possibly, that the animal might be worth twenty guineas, and the trappings five guineas more.

"There is only the price," he said—"I should like to know the price."

"Well, I shall not have many words about that," was the reply. "It is a good beast, and suits me very well, and I only part with him for your accommodation. The price is one hundred guineas."

The traveller made this extortionate demand with some trepidation, showing that he had a certain amount of conscience left.

He fully expected that Tom King would make some remark upon the price; and the stranger was, as the reader will readily believe, prepared to make a considerable abatement; but, to his surprise, Tom never opened his mouth or seemed in the least astonished, which was more than the ostler did, for upon hearing so monstrous a sum demanded he grinned from ear to ear.

The next feeling in the stranger's mind was that of disappointment.

He actually wished he had asked more, for Tom's behaviour impressed him with the idea that it would not have been deemed too much.

"I like him," Tom remarked, at length. "The price is high; but then one must expect to pay for an accommodation according to its value. Now, I would rather pay a thousand pounds than not reach my destination at the time appointed."

"Then you think we may say the matter is settled?"

"Well, nearly so. I confess, if you have no objection, that before paying for him, I should just like to try him for a hundred yards or so. I have no doubt I shall be satisfied with him, however."

"Of course you will."

The stranger hesitated a little about allowing Tom a trial, but he was afraid to refuse, lest by doing so he should altogether lose the capital bargain he believed he was about to make.

"What do you say?" asked Tom, observing his indecision.

"Oh, I don't mind! Ostler," he said, "just fetch the saddle and bridle!"

These articles quickly made their appearance, and in a few seconds the horse was fully caparisoned.

"He looks all the better now," observed the owner, patting his horse upon the neck, though when he performed the action he did not know it would be for the last time.

Tom was in the saddle in a twinkling, for he felt by no means assured that the stranger would not alter his mind.

He walked quietly out of the inn-yard into the road, and then, having seated himself to his satisfaction, trotted off.

As he receded the stranger felt very uneasy.

He watched keenly, but Tom King rode on in the most careless manner.

The traveller's anxiety had reached its highest pitch—he was, indeed, about to give utterance to a shout, when Tom turned back again.

Oh, what a relief that was!

Our friend, with an amount of audacity of which few would have dreamed, let alone put into practice, rode back to the front of the inn.

"Well," ejaculated the stranger, "what do you think of him now?"

"My opinion has undergone no alteration."

"I rejoice to hear it. I assure you you become his back excellently. Don't he, Jack?"

"*Ra-ather!*" responded the ostler, who was the individual appealed to.

"Well," exclaimed Tom, gathering the reins in his hand, "it seems we are all of one opinion. Good night to you both! The settling can stand over till another day."

Just as he pronounced these words, the highwayman gave his new-found horse so sharp a dig with his spurs that the animal, snorting with pain, first reared upright, and then, with a tremendous bound, set forward on his journey.

Simultaneously with that bound came four distinct and different sounds, which, uniting, swelled into a horrible and discordant chorus.

Of course we shall be compelled to mention these sounds separately, leaving the reader to imagine what the effect would be when they were all heard together.

The first was a dreadful kind of whooping howl, which came from the traveller's lips upon realising that his horse was gone for ever.

The second was a loud shout from the ostler, who regretted the loss of his own fee more than he did the abduction of the traveller's horse.

The third was a shrill scream from the lips of the landlady, who had been brought to the front door of the inn by curiosity, and who witnessed with horror the decampment of one whom she had set down in her own mind as being a perfect gentleman.

The fourth and last was a loud burst of laughter given utterance to by Tom King, who was mightily amused at the success of his stratagem and the dismay occasioned by it.

Before any course of action could be decided upon, both horse and rider vanished from the view of those assembled at the inn-door by passing round a bend in the road about a hundred yards or so in advance.

The horse which Tom had so unexpectedly acquired was certainly no beauty as far as appearance was concerned. He was by far too wiry and bony.

But he possessed the virtue of being able to get over the ground in an amazing style; in fact, our old friend at first could scarcely believe that the animal had such powers of speed.

He was soon convinced of it, however, beyond all possibility of doubt, and he discovered likewise another recommendation—namely, that the horse possessed remarkable powers of endurance.

Under all these circumstances, Tom had good cause to congratulate himself.

"Serves him right!" he muttered to himself, as he thought of the traveller's disappointment. "He will doubtless think of me the next time he attempts to overreach anybody. The idea, now, of a hundred guineas for a screw like this! As to the people at the inn, I will call and make it right with them some day."

Other thoughts, however, of a more serious and important nature quickly drove all these considerations from his mind.

His stay at the inn had consumed much more time than he was aware of, and he was really doubtful whether he should be able to reach his destination before daylight.

This, of course, he was most anxious to accomplish, for he knew how intense would be the anxiety suffered by his comrades. Besides, he was also forcibly reminded that he stood greatly in need of rest.

These reflections induced him to urge his steed to yet more rapid motion.

The trees and hedgerows seemed to flit by him like shadows.

Suddenly there came upon his ears a loud shrill cry, and at the same instant a dark figure started up in his path.

Who or what it was he could not immediately ascertain, for either the cry or the sudden appearance of a dark object in its path, or both, terrified his horse exceedingly.

The animal gave such a bound that Tom was bumped violently upon the pommel of the saddle, and but for his long practice in the art of riding he would have been hurled to the earth.

As it was he was fortunate enough to retain his balance, but ere he could properly regain his seat his ears were assailed by the shrill tones of a voice which surely must have belonged to a female.

"Ha, ha! it is a brave deed, is it not, to injure and insult those who are aged and too weak to offer any resistance to oppression? A brave deed in good truth, but for once you are deceived! I possess both the power and the will to work harm to you and yours! Ay, and I will do it, and that at once! No—no, I will not suffer this! Have I, then, lived to be ridden down on the highway, and by the likes of you? No, no—a thousand—ten thousand times no!"

These words were poured out with a volubility of utterance truly surprising.

They were pronounced, too, with great emphasis and bitterness of tone.

Tom listened in amazement.

What he had done to call down all this anger upon his head he could not tell.

Straining his eyes in the darkness, he indistinctly and gloomily made out the figure of an aged woman, whose gaunt thin frame was enveloped in an old and tattered cloak.

From what she said it would seem that Tom had been near to riding her down; and what was more, she seemed impressed with the idea that it had been done purposely.

Such, however, was far from being the case, such an act being entirely opposed to Tom King's nature.

"My good woman——" he began.

"Good woman forsooth!" she shrieked, with more bitterness and discordance than ever. "Do not good woman me! I tell you that you shall rue this deed, and let it stand as a warning to others who would act as you have done!"

"Listen to me!" cried Tom, seizing upon the first opportunity of saying a word that had presented itself. "I assure you——"

"Ha, ha! It is vastly fine thus to attempt to palliate what you have done! But the excuse shall not avail you—not in the least!"

"Then, since you will not listen to reason, I will ride on," exclaimed Tom, who now concluded that he had some madwoman to deal with, and that it would be consequently useless to expostulate.

But the woman would not allow him thus to make his escape.

With a sudden spring she placed herself directly in his path, extending her arms like those of a phantom, and waving them furiously the while.

Tom's horse had not yet recovered from his first terror, and now it reared and swaggered, resolutely refusing to pass the strange-looking object.

In vain Tom gored his horse with the spurs.

The animal only became more and more unmanageable, and, if possible, more determined not to advance.

"Ha, ha!" screamed the hag. "Why not make your steed ride over me now? You cannot do it! I defy you to do it! He will fling you to the earth first! My eye is fixed upon him, and he cannot disregard my gaze. No, no—you shall remain there until I make you acquainted with your doom—that doom which, though you know it not, is fast approaching!"

In spite of himself, Tom could not help being sensible of an indefinable sensation of dread which crept over him.

"It moves you, then?" she shrieked, in continuation, and her eyes must have been keen indeed to have detected any alteration in Tom's manner. "That is because every word I utter finds an echo in your heart! What I speak is the truth! There shall come woe upon you and yours—evil for them is gathering like a cloud, and soon—very soon it will encompass them so that there will be no hope of escape!"

"I have no desire to listen to your idle words!" cried Tom, vehemently, and once more striving to urge his horse into motion.

"Idle do you call them? You will soon have cause to think of them differently. Your own end draws nigh! You are young—you are full of life and strength! But for all that you shall die: not under the hangman—your neck has once already been encircled by the gibbet's rope, and you deserve to end your days at Tyburn! But such shall not be your fate—such shall not be your fate!"

"Begone!" said Tom King, who was scarcely able to pronounce the word, so much was he overcome by these last startling words.

Well calculated, indeed, were they to produce a profound impression upon him.

By what mysterious means short of the supernatural could this woman—whose features he had not even seen—have become acquainted with this dark episode of his life? That she was acquainted with it was certain, though Tom could scarcely at the moment bring himself to credit it or believe that his ears had served him rightly.

"You are surprised," continued this strange being. "Accept that as a proof and token of my power, and let it cause you to place reliance upon what I predict shall happen in the future. I tell you that your fate lies open and plain before me, and as easy to read as it would be if written in a book. You cannot avert your doom—you cannot escape it."

"Then let me know the worst at once," said Tom King, with sudden boldness. "I am tired of these indirect allusions. What have you to prognosticate? Tell me, and allow me to depart!"

"You are bold now—but what I have to tell will blanch your cheek and abate your haughtiness of tone."

"You are wrong—quite wrong! Tyburn Tree is all that I fear, and you have just told me that I shall not die there."

"Nor shall you—a worse fate awaits you!"

Tom laughed derisively.

"Nay, scoff not! You have a friend."

"More than one, I trust."

"Ay, now you have, but they will pass away ere long, and one only shall be left. That one is your stanchest, truest, oldest, and best friend—at his hands shall you meet your death!"

Tom laughed more scornfully than ever.

"Ay—ay, you may jeer and deride me; but wait—wait you will find then that my prophecy is true."

"I laugh at it," said Tom, "and shall always do so. I hope I may live until my best friend takes my life."

"Vain, foolish wish! I tell you even your very days are numbered; and I repeat that you will die by the hand of your best friend. You need fear no other danger. You can court death in whatever shape you like, and it will not come to you—but from your friend you cannot escape."

"And I repeat that I hope I may live till then. And as for your prophecy, I say once more that I utterly despise it. Now let me pass."

"You say those words with your lips only, and you know full well that there is within your breast a still small voice against whose tones you cannot close your inward ears. I tell you, you are doomed! Forget my words if you can! Now pass on!"

With these words this mysterious person vanished as suddenly and as strangely as she had appeared, leaving Tom equally in the dark as to whence she had come and whither she had gone.

The highwayman's first impulse was to strike his spurs deeply into his horse's flanks, but in good truth the animal now needed little urging forward.

The sole obstacle to its onward progress was now removed, and it relieved itself of its terror by galloping from the spot at its utmost rate of speed.

So strange and rapid had the whole of this adventure been, that Tom could hardly bring himself to believe that it was a reality.

He fancied that his mind had played him some strange prank—that he had been the victim of some singular delusion or waking dream.

As he reflected, however, he soon came to the conclusion that the encounter had indeed taken place; and although he strove his best to do so, yet he was unable to banish from his mind the remembrance of the singular prediction.

"I will not waste another thought upon it," he muttered for the fiftieth time, as his horse continued its mad, headlong career through the darkness. "And yet how strange! What if, after all, it should come true? Die by the hand of my best friend! Why, that can be no other than —— No—no, I can never credit it—it is too monstrous for belief!"

But in spite of such words as these, his thoughts would persist in recurring to this circumstance.

"Evil befall us all," was his next mental ejaculation. "Well, I will think about that; it will go hard with me if I don't baffle her. I will persuade Dick and the rest to leave England with Tom Davis—whether we ever return again is another consideration. Yes—yes, that is what I will do. We will secure our safety while we have the chance."

The reader will not fail to notice the singular coincidence between the thoughts of Tom King and of Maud and Dick.

Was this to be taken as an omen of good or evil?

Time will show.

Upon Tom King's mind, however, remained a most disagreeable conviction—one which he tried hard to conceal even from himself, but, of course, without success. It was that the bond of fellowship which had so long existed was about to be broken up—that their long career of daring and perilous adventure was drawing to a close.

It is not surprising that his singular adventure should have left such an impression upon his mind, especially when we bear in mind the incidents which had latterly befallen him, the nature of which would be all sufficient to dim and overcome the most powerful intellect.

His preoccupation prevented him from making use of that amount of caution which is requisite to safe progress; and all at once his horse gave a sudden plunge, and before Tom knew what had happened, he found himself lying at full length in the roadway.

He had been sitting carelessly in the saddle, and the unexpected movement upon his steed's part had been sufficient to unhorse him.

Muttering some angry execrations, Tom scrambled to his feet.

The horse, having performed this feat, stood perfectly still, with its eyes fixed upon, and its ears pointed towards, the object which had terrified him.

Cursing the unruly beast, Tom walked gently towards him, and was fortunate enough to grasp the rein just at the moment when he was about to gallop off.

By this time the intense darkness which had hitherto prevailed was beginning to dissipate.

There was a chill gray light about the eastern portion of the sky which gave to every object a spectral-like, unnatural appearance.

A thin white mist also hovered over the surface of the earth.

Tom shivered as he rapidly brushed the dirt from his apparel.

Beyond a good shaking and a few bruises, he had not sustained any injury from his fall.

"Curse you!" he ejaculated, bestowing a sharp blow upon the brute. "What had you to be frightened at, I wonder? Ha, I see now!"

As he uttered these words, Tom became silent, and gazed with an intensity only equalled by that of his steed upon the object before him

It was a double gibbet, from whose time-blackened arms two mouldering corpses were depending, looking, in that dim light, and viewed through the floating mist, ten thousand times more horrible than they could have done under any other circumstances.

A chill, damp breeze was blowing, which in itself was most depressive to the mind.

It lifted the hair from Tom's face, ruffled the mane upon his horse's neck, and whistled with a wailful, melancholy sound through the mass of ironwork in which the bodies of the malefactors were enclosed.

CHAPTER MLIII.

IN WHICH THE HIGHWAYMEN ARE DISAGREEABLY INTERRUPTED.

"I do not wonder at your terror," Tom at length ejaculated, apostrophising his steed, and turning shudderingly away. "In good truth, it is a most loathsome spectacle."

The highwayman spoke truly.

It would have been hard to find anything else so soul-chilling.

It would, too, be impossible to conceive anything more desolate and forlorn than his surroundings.

The double gibbet was situated at one corner of a large piece of waste ground or common, over the vast level surface of which the mist rolled like an ocean of vapour.

A moment or two elapsed before Tom could summon up strength of mind sufficient to avert his eyes from the dreary scene.

Dismal, unutterable thoughts thronged unbidden into his mind.

The recollection, however, that he had some miles to go before he reached his destination had the effect of arousing him.

He turned round quickly.

The old hag's prophecy was near proving a false one, I fancy!" he murmured, as he settled himself in the saddle, thinking the while of the narrow escape which he had had from receiving a fatal injury by his fall.

The next moment he was galloping swiftly on his way, for his horse, having perhaps discovered that the gibbet was an immovable object, no longer hesitated to pass it.

Without any further accident or mischance, Tom succeeded in reaching the Jolly Tar.

His approach had been descried from afar, and his appearance had been heartily hailed by his comrades on the watch.

"You have kept us in a state of great suspense, Tom," were Dick Turpin's first words. "I do believe this night is one of the longest I ever spent. But what a terror you are in! What has happened?"

"You shall know all presently."

"You seem faint and languid."

"I am—I am! But you shall know all."

"Enter, then—enter! Tom Davis shall see to your horse—I see it is a fresh one."

"Yes—yes!"

"We had made up our minds to wait no longer than midnight for you; but when the hour arrived without your making your appearance, we resolved to give you a few moments more, and so we have remained procrastinating our intent until the present moment."

The conversation was changed as they made their way into the interior of the building.

A glass of brandy brought from the cellar served to revive Tom considerably; and having swallowed it, he proceeded to make his friends acquainted with what had befallen him.

The account of his capture was listened to with the most absorbing interest, and although he was congratulated on the skill and address which he had shown in procuring his liberation, yet all expressed it as their opinion that this disappointment would have the effect of rendering his foes more furious than ever, if indeed it was possible for this to be the case.

For some reason, but what it would have puzzled him to tell, Tom King withheld all mention of his singular meeting with the hag, so that his comrades remained in entire ignorance of the strange prediction.

Tom would have liked very much to persuade himself that he adopted this course of action because he placed no importance on the incident, but had he been pressed closely he could not have made this avowal truthfully.

His narration having been brought to a conclusion, he withdrew to obtain that rest of which he stood so much

in need, having first made an arrangement that the succeeding night should be devoted to a consultation.

To Tom himself the intervening hours passed rapidly enough, for he did not awake until just as the shades of evening were closing in, the task of keeping watch being taken upon by his companions.

It was just when evening was changing into night that they all assembled themselves before a fire in the apartment they had hitherto occupied, and which the ruddy light from the fire caused to have far from an uncomfortable appearance.

When we say all, we except Tom Davis.

It was thought he could best be spared from the discussion which was about to take place, and so he was set to watch in the upper chamber, though the length of time which they had remained unmolested began to have its usual effects—namely, to beget a feeling of false security.

They all looked to Dick to speak first, but on this occasion he would have preferred to hear the opinions of his comrades first.

But they would not for a moment listen to this arrangement.

"Well, then," said Dick, with a smile, and glancing at Maud while he spoke, "I fancy what I have to say will take you all by surprise; but yet I hope, for all that, that you will give the subject due consideration."

"We are sure to do that, Dick," said Claude Duval, "because we know you would not broach the matter unless you had considered it well beforehand."

"Well, then, it is that we should all, for a time at least, quit the shores of England in company with Tom Davis."

"Quit England!" cried the rest in chorus: Tom King because he was amazed at hearing that which he intended to propose himself, and Claude and Jack because such a course of action had never once entered into their imaginations.

"You are astonished," Turpin continued, "which is just what I expected. But the first shock of your amazement being over, I think several things will present themselves to you that will induce you to think favourably upon the subject."

"It is most extraordinary," responded Tom, "for I myself intended to propose the self-same thing."

"Is it possible?"

"It is more, for it is true; and I fancy Claude and Jack will not be long in seeing the policy of this course of action."

"But," asked Jack, "is it your intention to quit England for ever?"

"That had better be reserved for future consideration."

"Because," continued Jack, "if that had been your thought, I should have returned a negative at once."

"There is ample time to decide that. The question now is, whether we shall leave Stonehenge for the coast, and, taking a boat there, all make our way to France, and remain there until the popular excitement has calmed down a little?"

There was a pause.

Maud waited with bated breath for the result.

Although Dick had spoken only of a temporary exile, she hoped that when she had once got him away from England her influence would be sufficient to prevent him from returning.

"Do you see any objections to the course proposed?" Dick asked, at length, upon finding that the silence remained unbroken. "If so, do not hesitate to speak out. I am only anxious to obtain your opinions."

"As I said," replied Tom King, "I am quite in favour of it."

"And I see no objection," added Claude Duval.

"Nor I," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Then we may look upon the affair as settled?"

"I suppose so."

"The next thing is as to the funds in hand. I have formed what I believe to be a tolerably correct estimate, and I think there will be no need to engage in any more adventures just at present. When we leave here for Stonehenge, which must be shortly—as it is impossible to say how long we may be detained upon the road—we will separate, and each follow our own inclinations."

Scarcely had these words been pronounced than a hasty footstep was heard without.

The next moment Tom Davis made his appearance upon the threshold.

There was an expression upon his face which spoke plainly enough, without the aid of words, telling his friends that something was amiss.

"What is it?" Dick asked, springing to his feet

"Officers, captain!"

"Officers?" repeated the rest, following Dick's example.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Outside. I saw them from the look-out. You had better come and see for yourselves."

"But did they seem as though they had tracked us here?"

"I cannot answer that question, captain. I did not stay long enough to notice. Be quick! You ought to reconnoitre carefully."

In this all agreed, and there was an immediate stir.

"Do not be so much terrified, Maud," said Dick, observing that she clung very tightly to him, and that even her lips were white. "The danger is not so great as you seem to think it—indeed it is not! Perhaps these officers may know nothing of our being here, their presence being merely accidental; and if so, they will ride by, leaving us in peace, for there is nothing in the exterior of this place of such a character as to create suspicion."

These words calmed Maud somewhat, and her heart fluttered rather less painfully than it had done a few moments before.

"I don't know how it is, Dick, and you will laugh at me, I daresay, for having what you will of course call a foolish notion."

"What is it, Maud?"

"Why, this sudden and unexpected realisation of my wishes does not seem to fill me with that joy which I expected. On the contrary, I feel a strange and altogether indescribable calmness, and—and——"

"And what?"

"Over all is a presentiment that something will occur that will prevent the carrying out of our arrangements."

This little conversation passed during the ascent of the stairs; but by the time the last words were uttered the look-out was gained, and so Dick was prevented from returning any reply to Maud's last remark.

Not that Dick altogether regretted this, for there was an aching pain in his breast which seemed sympathetic with Maud's feelings which would have rendered a cheering response difficult, if not impossible.

The various points of espionage were now immediately occupied, and a quick search made for the police officers.

The night was rather dark, but yet the obscurity was not so great as to prevent them, from that elevation, obtaining a tolerably good view of contiguous objects.

"That's the place, captain," said Tom Davis, in a faint whisper—"that's where I saw them! Are they there now?"

Dick looked closely, and at the first glance saw that Tom Davis had not given a useless or unnecessary alarm.

Coming slowly along the lane was a body of police officers.

All were mounted, and as they rode the clanking of accoutrements could be occasionally heard, showing that they were fully armed.

They were making their way steadily along the lane in the direction of the inn, from which, when Dick first caught sight of them, they were not much above ten yards distant.

"Close quarters!" whispered Claude Duval, at this moment, looking over Dick's shoulder.

"Much too close to be pleasant."

"What are they after?"

"That is what puzzles me."

"Are they coming here?"

"I fear so. What else but the intention of paying a visit to this place can have induced them to make their way into this desolate, deserted region?"

"We had better be off, then."

"Wait a moment. We had better not be too precipitate. We cannot leave even now without discovering ourselves."

"Very true."

"Then, as I need scarcely tell you, there is just the bare possibility that their errand may not concern this place in the least degree, and we may have the satisfaction of seeing them ride by."

"We may, but I doubt it."

"We shall see."

"Certainly we shall. But just look at that fellow there—I mean the one with the staff yonder."

"Yes, yes—I see him."

"He is most certainly pointing to the place, and he and his companions are as certainly talking about it."

"Nothing more likely; but still, at the same time, their conversation may only refer to the deeds which they have heard of as having been enacted here."

"It may be so, possibly."

"At any rate, we can only remain here as we are, and await the event."

"Just so."

This whispered conversation had been listened to by the other members of the little group.

But we cannot stay now to particularise them.

The next few moments were moments of the most intense anxiety to our friends, though none would have thought so from the profound silence which prevailed.

On came the officers at the same slow and steady pace.

They were talking to each other, for the murmur of conversation ascended to the ears of the listeners, but it was indistinctly, nor, in spite of all their efforts, were they able to make out one articulate word.

The suspense grew greater and greater.

In the course of another moment the officers reached the front of the inn, and no sooner had they reached this position than, owing to the slope of the roof, our friends were unable any longer to observe their movements.

But they could listen.

The tread of the horses' feet was still audible.

Suddenly a loud voice pronounced the word:

"Halt!"

In an instant ensued considerable confusion, but it quickly died away, as one after another the officers succeeded in bringing their animals to a standstill.

"Dick," whispered Claude, "we have waited too long."

"Not at all," was the reply; "it would have been little short of madness to have left earlier."

"What is to be done?"

"There is yet time, if we only retain our calmness and make use of proper expedition."

"Issue your instructions, then."

"The officers have taken no measures at present to surround the place, so that I have no doubt we shall get off all right. Descend the stairs speedily and silently. The sooner we get to the stable and have the horses in readiness for travelling the better."

No sooner were these words pronounced than they set about obeying them.

Dick looked to his weapons.

Maud watched him closely.

"The danger is great," she said—"very great!"

"No—no, not at all. I believe we shall get off without the officers being any the wiser until they are too late to act."

"Then you think they are not aware of our presence here?"

"I am certain of it, or they would have made widely different arrangements."

"Just at this moment they reached the foot of the staircase, which happened to be at no very great distance from the front-door.

Here they paused a moment as though by common consent.

"D—n the lock!" said a voice. "What the devil ails it?"

"What's the matter, sir?"

"Matter? Why, the key won't turn a bit. Here, you try!"

The rattling of the key in the lock now followed, and an effort was made to open the door.

"Are you sure it was not fastened on the inside?"

"Fastened on the inside, you booby? Don't I tell you this is the way we came out, and Bob Paterson locked it and gave me the key!"

"Then Bob ought to be here to unlock it, for I'll be d—d if I can! I tell you I am sure it is fastened on the inside."

Dick and his friends did not wait to hear any more, though it was evident that a very angry discussion ensued, for the police officer in command was one who could not brook the least contradiction.

What they heard impressed our friends with the hope that they should yet have time to get away before their foes were aware of their presence.

All regretted, though, that they should be compelled to quit their present quarters so soon, for now there would be no returning to them, as immediately upon the officers forcing an entrance they would find traces of the house having been inhabited, even if they did not hear them in the act of effecting their retreat, which was a very likely thing indeed.

The back part of the inn was reached in silence and with great rapidity.

One after another they passed with all possible speed through the window, and then flitted across to the stables.

There were many nimble hands at work, and the horses were quickly provided with their trappings.

Maud was left just outside the stable-door, in order to give timely warning should any of their foes approach.

"Quick!" she murmured. "I fancy I can hear them coming round this way."

"One more moment, and we shall be ready."

"The attack on the front door has ceased. Yes, yes, they are coming round to the back—they are here!"

As she spoke the words, Maud entered the stable hastily and closed the door, for had she retained her former station the officers must have seen her.

"How cursedly awkward!" growled Claude Duval, under his voice. "Another half-minute, and we could have been in the saddle and off."

"Hush, hush!" said Dick. "Let us watch them; perhaps there is no immediate cause for alarm."

This was a strange speech, but Dick's companions understood it.

Once more, then, were the whole of their energies concentrated upon the task of watching closely every movement made by the officers.

The one in command must have come to the conclusion that the front door had been fastened in some mysterious way or other, and seemed to have made his way round to the back, as though aware it would be easier to gain admittance from that quarter.

They all went direct to the back door, which, as our friends knew, was well fastened—so well, that our friends had preferred making their way in and out of the window to unfastening it.

"This is as fast as the other, sir."

"I thought so—we took every pains to make it secure."

"Then who could have fastened the front door?"

"Never mind bothering your stupid head about that! We will break this door down—it don't seem so strong as the other. I am determined to get in somehow!"

"We want something heavier than we carry to do this job, sir. What can we have?"

"Look about—you will be sure to see something."

"Shall I look in the stable yonder?"

"Yes, d—n you!—wherever you like! And as for the rest, let them commence the job with their pickaxes, and then we shall have the door down before you come back!"

Notwithstanding the taunting, sneering manner of his chief, this obtuse, wrong-headed police officer made his way direct to the door of the stable.

The question now was, what should our friends do? They felt very undecided.

To prevent the approach of this man was impossible, while, if he entered, discovery must ensue.

"What is to be done, Dick?" asked Tom King.

"Let him come in. Keep out of the way, all of you, and as soon as he is fairly inside, seize him and prevent him from crying out."

"But what good will that effect?"

"Hush—hush! Obey—there is no time to discuss the point now."

The police officer was indeed almost on the threshold.

No resource was left for our friends save to obey their

captain's commands, and they immediately resolved to do so, trusting entirely to his sagacity.

The officer, upon reaching the stable door, gave it a push with his hand, and finding it yield, he at once advanced.

"It's d—d dark!" he said. "How the devil shall I find anything in here, I wonder? Hullo——"

That was the last word he had an opportunity of uttering, and it was spoken above a whisper, and that was all.

To his unutterable surprise, he felt himself seized tightly by two persons, while a third dashed his hand roughly before his mouth, and so effectually as completely to preclude the possibility of further speech.

"Secure him," said Dick, in a whisper; "and be as speedy about it as you can. In the meantime, I will keep a sharp look-out."

Upon looking through the doorway again, Dick saw that the officers were very busy with their cutlasses, and yet without producing any particular result.

The fact was the weapons were too light and by no means well adapted to the job; besides which, the door was composed of some unusually tough oak.

"We want something heavier, sir," said the police officers, desisting at length. "A sledge, now, would be the very thing."

"A what?"

"A sledge hammer."

"To be sure it is! But where is Partridge?"

Partridge was the name of the officer who had been so cleverly and silently secured by Dick's associates.

A general look was turned in the direction of the stabling.

"What can he be after? Has the rascal gone to sleep? Hi! Partridge—Partridge! Why the devil don't you answer?"

Partridge had a very good reason for not answering, had his commander but been aware of it.

While this little dialogue had taken place our friends had with nimble fingers strongly secured him by means of a rope, with which as well they contrived to gag him very effectually.

Moreover, Tom Davis stood over him with a loaded pistol.

"It's d—d odd," said the chief officer, "that he don't answer—d—d odd indeed! Partridge, I say!"

But, as before, no response was returned.

Up to this moment the existence of the little window which had served the highwaymen as a means of entrance and exit had escaped the notice of the officers.

Now one saw it, and hailed the discovery with a shout.

"Why," he said, "if we had but have seen this before we might have made our way in a dozen times over. Why, behold! the window is open!"

"That's d—d odd too!" remarked the chief officer. "But where's Partridge?—that's what I want to know!"

CHAPTER MLIV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN TAKE THEIR LAST LOOK OF THE JOLLY TAR INN.

THE last words were uttered in a tone of suspicion and distrust, showing that at last the chief police officer had become conscious that there was something wrong.

What this was he had not sense enough to surmise, but he felt that he was upon the brink of some astounding discovery.

"Partridge!" he bawled, for the third time.

But, as before, Partridge replied not.

Meanwhile, our friends in the stable were not idle.

Dick had concerted his plan of operations, and he now proceeded to have them carried into execution.

Having seen Partridge disposed of according to his instructions, he said:

"Now mount, all of you; and at the word of command be prepared to follow one another out as fast as possible. The officers will be so taken by surprise that they will be a moment or so before they recover themselves."

"Right, captain!" was the answer.

It was a desperate chance.

But yet Dick's comrades could see that it was their only one.

Accordingly they set about making their preparations with great alacrity.

The reader will scarcely require to be told that it did not take them many seconds to place themselves securely in their saddles.

As before, Maud shared Black Boss with Dick Turpin. She was terrified, but calm.

"When we ride out," whispered Turpin, as he drew her closely towards him, "be sure you bend your head as low down as you can, so as to avoid all contact with the top of the door. It is very low—you cannot stoop too much."

"I will be careful," she replied. "Do not trouble yourself to look after me, Dick—mind your own safety, and I will take care of myself."

"We are all ready, captain," whispered Tom King, at this juncture.

"Is Tom Davis mounted?"

"Yes."

"Then prepare! Ha! I fear, after all, we are too late! Quick—quick! Follow me! Charge—charge!"

These ejaculations were caused by the proceedings of the officers.

By this time they began to guess what had caused the detention of Partridge.

One happened, too, to hear the click of a horse's shoe against the rough bricks with which the stable was paved.

"There's some one in the stable, sir!" cried one of the officers—"I am sure of it!"

"Seize them, then! Forward—forward!"

But just at that precise instant of time, Black Bess dashed through the doorway of the stable with the swiftness of an arrow.

The officers were so taken by surprise by this sudden movement, that they drew back in order to escape from injury, and then remained just as they were, as though completely dumfoundered.

"Good evening!" cried Dick, reining Bess up with such suddenness that she rose on her hind legs and pawed the air with her fore feet. "You seem taken by surprise by this sudden meeting. Here's wishing you success! Good-night, gentlemen. If you are inclined for a gallop across the country, say the word—I would not baulk your inclinations for the world!"

With these words on his lips, Dick turned and galloped off, and he had actually got several yards before one of the officers sufficiently recovered the use of his senses to fire a pistol.

"Dick Turpin, by all that's d—nable!" roared the chief officer. "Who ever would have dreamed that he was here—and all his gang, too? Fire—fire, my lads!—fire steady! Remember, the reward is just the same dead or alive!"

A straggling, dropping volley followed these words; but by this time all our friends had managed to get out of the range of the short, stumpy pistols that the officers at that time were so fond of using, and which were only effective in very close quarters.

"Oh, Dick," said Maud, "why did you terrify me by pulling up in front of them as you did? Surely that was an act of needless daring—I might call it mere bravado!"

"But we are safe."

"That does not make any difference."

"I think it does. Besides, I had a deeper motive than any which seems to have occurred to you."

"What was it?"

"Why, did you not see that I diverted the attention of the officers, and so was the means of enabling the others to make their way out of the stable in safety?"

"True; but it was at the hazard of your own life."

"I thought the risk not too great to be run; and you see the event has proved that I was quite right. Do they mean trying a gallop? Well, let them come on—I am ready for them."

Dick was quite right in what he said about diverting the attention of the officers.

It was in the highest degree generous of him to run the risk for his friends, but then it was no more than the reader would expect from him under such circumstances.

The plan answered admirably.



[DICK TURPIN AND MAUD FIND A PLACE OF REFUGE.]

The police officers had eyes and ears for nothing else but him, so that his companions were enabled to quit the stable without any molestation whatever; and, as we have said, when the officers did make a demonstration against them, it was too late to be of any service.

But, furious with anger to think they had so grossly blundered about their work, and oursing their stupidity a thousand times over for not having thought before about what was the real state of the case, the officers rushed round to the spot where they had left their horses, and began to scramble into their saddles like so many demons.

But expeditious as they were in their movements, our friends were enabled to get an excellent start.

Away they swept over the meadows in a straggling, irregular line, intent upon making as much speed as they could, being well aware of the importance of doing so.

No. 227.—Black Bess.

They did not pull in in the least until compelled to do so by coming to a piece of rising ground, up which they allowed their horses to proceed at a walk.

They were now able to get closer together than they had been hitherto, and also had the opportunity of exchanging a few words with each other.

Sixteen-String Jack was the first to speak.

Great exultation was in his tones.

"I must say," he cried, "that that was about as neatly managed as a thing well could be! Dick, that was a bit of your old spirit, and I was glad to see it, for I judged from the remarks you dropped to-night, that you were beginning to grow tired of the road."

Of the last part of this speech Dick Turpin did not think fit to take any notice, so he merely said:

"Of course you are all unhurt?"

"Yes, thanks to you!"

"It was splendidly managed, Dick," said Tom King,

in a voice of enthusiasm. "Nothing could be better."

Dick acknowledged the compliment with so profound a bow that a general laugh was elicited.

"They are coming," he remarked, after having cast a glance behind him "They mean to give us all the trouble they can."

"They must be mad to think of chasing us."

"Yet they think of doing it. They are much exasperated, no doubt, and perhaps they flatter themselves that they will be able to hang upon our heels until they meet with assistance of some kind or other."

"Perhaps they do, but this hill will check their ardour."

"I fancy so."

"But we are nearly at the top. Had we not better arrange what we shall do?"

"What do you propose, captain?"

"Why, I think we cannot do better than take the present opportunity of carrying into effect that which we had just agreed upon."

"A separation?"

"Yes. Are you all agreed?"

There was a little discussion upon this question, but eventually an answer in the affirmative was given.

"Then let us part upon reaching the summit of this hill."

"And our meeting-place?"

"Stonehenge."

"About a month hence?"

"Yes, rather less than that time."

"And how shall we separate, captain?"

"That I will leave you to settle among yourselves. Remember to be punctual, and Tom King, my friend."

"Yes, Dick?"

"Don't forget to bring with you that nice little treasure which you buried. It will be most useful."

"I will not, you may depend."

"And remember," said Dick Turpin, "these last words: In all the adventures which you have between this time and that appointed for our meeting you have to keep in view one thing, and that is to make as much booty as you are able, for, rely upon it, we shall have good need of it."

"You may depend upon us, captain."

"Then now farewell! Disperse, and that will add not a little to the confusion of our foes. They will not know how to divide themselves so as to continue the pursuit with any prospect of success. Above all, be careful not to run into too much danger, because it will be difficult to afford assistance."

"Right, captain."

"Once more, then, farewell! It will be madness to linger longer."

"Farewell!"

"You, Tom Davis, follow me," cried Dick.

Not another word was spoken.

The brow of the hill had been reached a moment or so ago, and the officers, perceiving that the objects of their pursuit made a stand, pushed on with additional vigour, in the hope of turning the circumstance to their own advantage.

No words of ours, however, can express the dismay and consternation which they experienced upon seeing the whole of the party suddenly break up and ride off in different directions.

What to do now they knew not, so they found themselves under the necessity of coming to a halt and holding a consultation.

It was at length decided what they should do.

"Let us follow Dick Turpin. His capture is worth the most money, and we are more likely to succeed if we do this than if we weaken ourselves by a division."

This proposition had everything to recommend it, so it is not surprising that it should be unanimously agreed to.

Not one relished the idea of separation, for they fully realised the strength which attended their union.

Perhaps, as some one was to be pursued, they could not have made a better choice for the highwaymen than Dick Turpin himself.

He smiled when he turned and saw what tactics they had resolved to adopt.

"Let them come," he said, "and I will undertake to give them a tiring. Get ahead, Tom Davis, and let me see what speed that horse of yours is capable of making when hard pressed. Never fear but that Black Bess will keep up with you."

Tom Davis well understood what was required of him, and caused his steed to lay out in excellent style.

Despite her double burden, though, Black Bess kept just a pace or two in the rear, contriving to do so without manifesting the least exertion.

The officers, seeing that so good a start was made by the fugitives, grew more furious than ever, and spurred their horses so savagely that their track might have been followed by the drops of blood which dripped from the poor animals' panting flanks.

This barbarity, however, did not enable them to accomplish their wishes.

Although the spur was seconded with sharp lashes from the heavy riding whips they carried, they had the mortification of finding that the objects of their pursuit kept increasing the space there already was between them.

Maud glanced continually over Dick's shoulder.

At first she did so with uncontrollable trepidation; but when she saw that after all their exertions the officers kept dropping further and further into the rear her courage revived.

As for Dick himself, he was well aware that Black Bess could not sustain her double burden with impunity.

The strain must of necessity be greater, and the shorter its duration of course the better.

It was this which made Dick determine to put a period to the chase as speedily as possible, and long experience had taught him that the most effectual and speedy way to do this was to continue their rapid flight unhaltingly, so that the officers, finding their prey out of sight, should the sooner abandon the chase.

Not a very long time elapsed before the consummation of one of his purposes, for owing to the obscurity of the night he soon got quite out of view.

But the officers were able to follow the sound made by the horses' feet.

With a view of baffling them in this respect, also, Dick chose some soft marshy ground which, though rather heavy for travelling, yet, nevertheless, served to dull the sound raised by the concussion of the hoofs.

Not for long, however, did he continue thus.

As soon as ever he deemed it expedient, he directed Tom Davis to make his way to a large tract of woodland, which could be dimly distinguished in the distance, looking like a huge dark cloud.

"Gently, Tom," he added—"gently now! There is no longer the necessity for distressing your poor beast. Take it easy!"

But Tom did not slacken his speed much, for he could not help thinking that the officers were much too close behind them to be pleasant.

"Shall you seek shelter there, Dick?" Maud asked, pointing to the trees.

"I cannot tell at present, but I think it likely that I shall make use of it to baffle them—perhaps we may make our way completely through it."

"As you will—I leave all to you."

The trees now became at each moment more distinct, and Maud was surprised when she perceived the distance to which the wood stretched.

At length its confines were gained; and having reached this point, Dick called to his companion to pull up.

At the same time he drew rein himself, and wheeling Bess round, looked keenly and for a long time in the direction he had just come.

But the darkness completely hid his foes from his sight.

Yet for all this they might be much nearer than would be at all agreeable, and, therefore, he directed Tom Davis to dismount and place his ear against the ground to listen.

Our old friend well understood the art of listening.

He remained stretched at full length for several moments, during which a profound silence was maintained.

At last he rose.

"I can hear nothing at all but that odd rushing sound which you of course must know full well."

"Ay—ay. And nothing else—no hoofbeat?"

"No, captain, nothing like one."

"Then we will not distress our horses any longer, but reserve them for a time of greater need."

"What is it you think of doing?"

"Entering the wood."

"Shall I mount again?"

"Yes, by all means. It will be time enough to walk when we are unable to advance on horseback."

Having thus spoken, Dick once more turned his mare's head towards the trees and rode slowly forward.

Tom Davis speedily followed.

For some time they were able to proceed with but little difficulty.

At last, however, the density of the vegetation compelled them to quit their saddles.

On the way, Dick had been considering somewhat attentively what should be the nature of his future proceedings.

Upon reflection, he considered that he had by no means got far enough from the scene of his late exploit to be very safe, and doubtless ere many hours elapsed a rigid search after him would be instituted.

By what means could he best hope to escape it?

Taking into account the vastness of the wood and the difficulty there must of necessity be in attempting to explore it thoroughly, he could not avoid coming to the conclusion that if he could only find something like a shelter from the open air he could not do better than remain where he was until the first fury of the pursuit should have been expended.

He then made his two companions acquainted with his thoughts, with the justness of which they both agreed.

For some time they continued to push on through the trees, Dick's object being to gain, if possible, about the middle of the wood.

Many were the obstacles they had to surmount, but having overcome them, they looked back upon each as an additional means of defence from their foes.

But suddenly an exclamation escaped Turpin's lips—an exclamation which was at once echoed by Maud.

Chance had directed their steps to one of those open spots so often to be met with in woods of great extent, where, from some cause or other, no lofty vegetation seemed able to flourish.

This open spot was not a glade, though it partook somewhat of that character.

Having been so long in the darkness among the thickly-growing trunks of the old trees, this open space, by contrast, was quite light, and they were able to distinguish every portion of it.

The object which had arrested Dick's attention was a small half-ruined hut, which apparently had been hastily built of the rudest materials.

"Behold," said Dick, pointing towards it, "there is such a shelter as we seek."

"But suppose it is inhabited?" suggested Maud.

"It has not that appearance," Dick responded. "But the point is one which we will quickly ascertain."

"Be careful!"

"I will, depend upon it. Come, there is, I feel assured, nothing to be afraid of."

Nevertheless, Dick took care to have his weapons in readiness for instant use.

A very few steps brought them to the threshold of the hut—though shed would, perhaps, be a more accurate denomination.

Dick pushed open the door hastily, and no sooner had he done so than his nose was assailed by a pungent smell of smoke coming seemingly from a smothered fire.

"There has been some one here recently, that is certain," Dick remarked. "However, we will venture to enter, for all that."

He was just about to cross the threshold when the sharp report of a fire-arm came upon his ears.

The sound caused him involuntarily to come to a standstill.

"What was that?" he said.

"A gun, I fancy," answered Tom Davis.

"Surely—surely," Maud cried, tremblingly, "they cannot have got so close behind us——"

"No—no," said Dick. "Banish that fear; the danger you apprehend is impossible."

"Hush—hush!"

"What is it, Tom?"

"Let us listen"

There was an anxious interval of silence.

"What do you hear, captain?"

"A footstep."

"So do I."

"It is approaching."

"There is no doubt of it. What shall we do?"

"Remain where we are, and abide the result. Only one person is coming, so we have nothing to dread."

In spite of the confident tone in which Dick pronounced these words, Maud suffered great anxiety.

The footstep came nearer and nearer, however, until at length a human form presented itself to their view.

So strange was the aspect of the intruder that all three of our friends gazed upon him with the utmost intentness.

The new-comer, too, as was evident from his actions, was not a little astonished at beholding strangers in the vicinity of the hut.

He threw down some heavy object which he had been carrying, and immediately placed to his shoulder an old rusty firelock that he carried.

"Hold off, there!" he said, in a gruff, surly voice. "Who are you—what do you want?"

"Come forward," was Dick's response. "Lower your gun; we mean you no harm."

With some hesitation the man complied, and again resumed his burden.

As he came nearer he was seen with more distinctness.

He was clad in a strange mixture of ordinary clothing and the skin of deer rudely adapted to wearing purposes.

His face was scarcely to be distinguished, in consequence of the mass of hair with which it was overgrown.

The heavy object he carried proved to be a young fawn.

This, no doubt, explained the shot which they had heard.

"Willingly, master," he said, gruffly, but not as though disposed to be courteous. "What want you here?"

Dick looked at him closely for a moment, and answered:

"Shelter for ourselves and horses. If you furnish us with it and ask no questions we will reward you well."

"Such shelter as I have to offer you," was the reply, "you are welcome to, though I am astonished at the request. But, no matter, I am not inquisitive by nature. If you like to sup with me you are welcome to that too—ha, ha! quite welcome. You can eat as much of my lord's fat fawn here as you like. Ha, ha! quite welcome. Come in—come in. I damped the fire, but you will see a blaze in about a minute. Come in, I say; I don't often have company. Ha, ha!"

CHAPTER MLV.

RELATES THE PARTICULARS OF CLAUDE DUVAL'S UNPARALLELED ADVENTURE.

For the present we leave Dick Turpin and his companions in their new quarters, as other incidents of a more startling character call for our attention.

We go back, then, to the time when the separation of the highwaymen took place.

Of course Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack quickly found themselves to be no longer the objects of the officers' pursuit.

Accordingly they reduced their speed to a leisurely pace which neither distressed themselves nor their horses.

The course taken by Claude Duval quickly took him away from his comrades, and when at length he reined-in his steed he found himself completely alone.

"I can't say I meant this to be the case," he remarked to himself. "I hate to be alone, and I am quite sure I never enjoy an adventure so well as when I have my old comrade Sixteen-String Jack to share it with me."

Claude Duval pronounced these words in tones of deep regret, and, having done so, looked across the country.

"No, no," he muttered, "it is too late now. It would be ridiculous to attempt to overtake Jack now. He is far enough off by this time."

Consequently, very much against his will, Claude found himself completely alone.

"And a whole month to look forward to," he continued. "A nice prospect that, is it not? Well, well, I suppose I must resign myself to it in the same way as I have had to

more than one disagreeable thing during my life. But, who knows, I may be fortunate enough to change one of them ere long?"

It was perhaps in order that there should be some probability of the occurrence of this much-wished-for event that he slightly changed his course, keeping, as he judged, in a direction that would take him towards his friend.

Certainly there was never anyone less unsociable than Claude, and, consequently, as may be expected, he continued to give vent to many grumblings as he rode along.

His course for some time lay right across the open country, but at length he reached a point where the meadows were separated by a broad dusty high-road.

Upon reaching this point our old friend stopped for the double purpose of listening and deliberating how he should act, as at present he had formed no plan of operations in his mind whatever.

Not for long, however, did he remain thus in consideration, for no state of inactivity suited him for long together.

Riding along by the side of the hedge with which the meadow was defended from the road, he made his way to a five-barred gate that was a few yards distant.

To dismount, open this, and pass through, was, in his opinion, more agreeable than making a leap over a thorny hedge that was both taller and wider than is usual.

Accordingly he did so, and having gained the high-road, trotted swiftly down it.

"The hour is by no means late," he muttered, "and I may be lucky enough to meet with some one worth crying, 'Stand and deliver!' to. I may as well have all the fun I can while the chance remains to me, as the captain and Tom seem so strongly inclined to rest."

He smiled somewhat contemptuously at this idea, though then he little dreamed to what a disastrous train of circumstances this determination was destined to give rise.

It was just at this moment that the moon peeped out from behind a cloud, thus enabling him to form a much better idea of the nature of his surroundings than he had been able to do before.

The object which first attracted his attention was a large, handsome-looking mansion, which being situated upon the brow of a gently-sloping hill, formed a conspicuous feature in the landscape.

From some of the windows on the ground-floor of this mansion lights were gleaming, and Claude was at once impressed with the air of comfort and happiness which seemed to reign around.

Coming nearer he checked his horse's speed and gazed upon the building, for somehow there even came over him a strange yearning for rest and peace.

"How fortunate must be the lot of the dwellers in that abode," he muttered—"how calm and peaceful their existence—how free from the many hazards and dangers which are the accompaniments of such a career as mine! Yes, yes, I feel I cannot help envying their lot, for it is scarcely possible to conceive discord and misery existing in this fair scene."

This was a most unusual train of thought for the highwayman to indulge in, and for a moment or two he pursued it in silence.

Suddenly, however, the deep silence which had hitherto prevailed around was broken in upon by a low, deep sigh, that perhaps might be more correctly denominated a groan.

Claude started, and then his next act was to back his horse into the shadow.

Scarcely had he taken up a position close to a tall hedgerow than the sound of an approaching footstep reached the highwayman's attentive ears.

He watched eagerly, for already he felt a deep interest in this mansion, and the conviction somehow came over him that the sounds he had just heard were in some way or other connected with it.

He was not for long left in doubt upon this point.

The footstep became louder, and in another moment Claude caught sight of the figure of a young man.

He seemed to leap over a stile, then advancing up the road towards the spot where the highwayman was stationed, paused and gave utterance to a sigh of a character precisely similar to that which Claude had before heard.

It was a sound which indicated the existence of mental agony of no ordinary description.

Duval became more and more interested.

It seemed strange for one so young to be afflicted with so great a sorrow.

He was now within a pace or two of the spot where our friend was, whom he could certainly have seen had he once turned his gaze in that direction.

But he seemed to have eyes for one object, and but one alone.

That was the mansion on the hill.

"Alas!" he exclaimed aloud, little thinking that anyone was near enough to overhear his words—"alas! and must this be my last look—must I now say farewell for ever to those walls which contain all that is dear to me on earth? It is my fate, and I am wretched. Yet, if by some stratagem I could only obtain one parting interview, how much it would solace me in the future! But it is impossible—quite impossible."

The last words were scarcely distinguishable.

After a pause, however, he looked up.

"How peaceful the place seems!" he continued. "What an air of happiness is over all! To gaze upon it as I do now, who would for a moment imagine that a lone and aching heart is beneath that roof; and that, instead of kindness and affection, discord and tyranny reign there? But yet—yet—I cannot say the word farewell!"

It would perhaps be a task of no ordinary difficulty to make the reader sensible of the deep amount of interest with which Claude listened to these incoherent sentences, nor imagine how intensely curious he was to know something more of those mysteries which he felt certain were connected with that peaceful-looking dwelling.

Claude longed to address the stranger, but was unable to think of any satisfactory method of doing so.

At length the young man, having to some extent regained command over himself, exclaimed, in tolerably firm accents:

"Farewell—farewell! I will not say for ever, for even at this moment of deep dejection something whispers to my heart that I shall visit this spot again. For the present only, then, I say farewell!"

As he uttered the last word he turned round hastily and seemed as though he was about to quit the spot with as little delay as possible.

But in changing his position his gaze happened to fall on the forms of the highwayman and his steed.

"Ha!" he ejaculated. "Who is here?"

"A friend," was Claude's answer, as he advanced into the roadway.

The young man gave utterance to a bitter laugh.

"A friend!" he at length exclaimed, scornfully. "But—but why? I know you not—to the best of my knowledge I have never seen you before."

"I may say the same."

"And yet you proclaim yourself my friend."

"I do, and am willing to convince you of my sincerity if you will only give me the opportunity. I think I am not far wrong when I say you need a friend."

"I do—I do!"

"Then do not scruple to call upon me in any way you may think proper."

"But who are you?"

"That matters not. Be contented to know that I am what I first declared myself—a friend."

"But this sudden interest in one who is a perfect stranger——"

"Seems extraordinary, no doubt," interrupted Claude, "but it is nevertheless quite true."

The young man appeared to hesitate for a moment or so, and then, with some hesitation, he said:

"Give me some proof of your good faith."

"It seems strange for one so young to be so doubtful and suspicious."

"It may be," was the sadly-spoken answer, "but I have already paid dearly for over-confidence."

"Then you have been once betrayed?"

"I have, by the friend I trusted most."

"Well, then, if you cannot believe in my sincerity, why, I will just continue my journey, and leave you to do the same."

"Nay, nay!" cried the young man, placing a detaining grasp upon Claude's bridle. "I do not feel inclined to part with you thus."

"As you will. Odd as it may seem, I am at your service. In what way can I aid you? You are in trouble."

"Then you have heard my half-uttered thoughts?"

"Part of them."

"Well, well! Give me a moment to consider upon my course."

"Willingly."

The young man walked away a few steps, then paused, and seemed to fall into a fit of deep reflection.

For some time he continued thus.

At length, coming back, he extended his hand and said:

"I will trust you."

"Without seeking to know more than I choose to communicate about myself?"

"Yes."

"I am agreed," exclaimed Claude, grasping his hand warmly. "Now tell me why it is you feel so much reluctance to bid adieu to this spot. I ask not so much to satisfy my own curiosity, but in order that I may assist you with my advice. and with my strength of arm if necessary."

The young man looked at Claude's muscular form with admiration, and doubtless thought what a powerful ally he would make.

But he manifested considerable reluctance to commence his recital.

The hesitation was no more than natural.

After a pause he said:

"I know not why I should feel this strong inclination to confide in a stranger. It is foreign to my usual feelings, I assure you. But I will yield to my impulse and let you know my sad story in as few words as possible."

Claude prepared himself to listen attentively.

"You must know, then," began the young man, "that an unhappy passion is the cause of all my misery."

"I guessed it."

"I loved and was beloved. I will not tire you by saying more. Our choice was approved of by the occupant of that lordly-looking dwelling, until disgrace—yes, disgrace fell upon our family; yet not through me—through no cause of mine. I was as innocent and unconscious of it as yourself. But my visits were forbidden. I was sternly told that my beloved could never link her destiny with mine, and I was threatened with many penalties if I even attempted to do so much as see her and speak to her again."

"But you did both?"

"Yes, in defiance of the prohibition. Agnes I found unchanged, and looking upon what had occurred as something for which I surely should not bear the blame and be so heavily puuished. We met again and again, and I took a friend into my confidence."

"The one who betrayed you?"

"Yes; Agnes finding her father inexorable, and knowing by former experience that his obstinacy was so stubborn that no earthly consideration would induce him to change his resolution, made her choose rather to take the perilous step of flying with me than suffer herself to be doomed to a life of eternal wretchedness. All was arranged for the flight. The services of a trusty friend alone were needed. I told him all my plans; he promised me his aid; but at the moment when I was about to clasp Agnes in my arms there was a sudden alarm, and her father appeared before me.

"With much difficulty I escaped; and as for my friend, he flattered and fawned upon Mr. Glossin, and at length asked him to bestow Agnes's hand upon him.

"Great Heaven! until then I could not conceive such perfidy existed.

"Agnes, I felt, would remain true to her vows; but then she was unable to help herself, and so great is the terror her father inspires in her that she has no courage to oppose him.

"Since then she has been kept close prisoner, and all my efforts to gain another interview with her have failed.

"On his part he has done all in his power to push on this odious match, and to-morrow morning is the time fixed upon for the celebration of the ceremony. Finding myself foiled at every turn, I gave way to despair, and as I felt that I could not endure to be a witness to her being given to my treacherous friend, or even bear to be anywhere in the vicinity, I determined to bid the place farewell for ever."

"And do you think that a wise determination—such a determination as you ought to make?" asked Claude, who had been listening in attentive silence.

"I—I—I——"

"Do you not think that you ought to have made one more effort? You ought not to forget the motto: 'While there is life there is hope.'"

"And you would bid me hope?"

"Certainly I would. She is not yet lost to you. It will be time enough to despair when she is, not before."

"You animate me with fresh courage," cried the young man, with sudden vehemence; "I feel as though I could dare——"

"Be calm—be calm! There is no occasion for rashness. Let us think the matter calmly over."

"I will think it over, but I cannot promise calmness."

"Well, such calmness as you can command."

"I will."

"In the first place, then, do you think that if you could gain access to her, and if you had the chance of speaking to her for a short time, and if you saw before you the chance of getting clear of the premises with her, do you think she would be willing to accompany you?"

"But," exclaimed the young man, half aghast, "how many 'ifs' are in the case!"

"Yes, yes, I know," returned Claude, somewhat impatiently, "but supposing such a condition of things to exist?"

"But why?—it is utterly impossible."

"You think so?"

"I am certain."

"You should never make too sure of anything. Answer my question: If there was the opportunity would she fly with you?"

"Most certainly."

"You speak confidently."

"I should not deserve her if I doubted her."

"Then I hope you will not be disappointed."

"Disappointed?"

"Yes, for you shall have the opportunity."

"Then you have more than mortal powers."

Claude laughed.

"You never made a greater mistake."

"And yet by mere human aid do you mean to say you will accomplish what you say?"

"I am ready to give you proof of it."

"I am amazed I can scarcely believe that I am not dreaming."

"Take my word, then, that you are not, and let the adventures of to-night teach you never to despair in the future. You will find all the obstacles you speak of vanish like a wreath of snow."

"How—how? Tell me how?"

"Nay, that is my matter. Besides, we have no time to spare. You understand what I intend to do for you?"

"I think so."

"It is to afford you the opportunity of running off with your sweetheart if she is willing to accompany you."

"Do that," said the young man, "and I shall ever account myself your debtor."

"It shall be done, then. All I stipulate is that you must blindly and unhesitatingly obey my commands without stopping to ask why or wherefore. Do you promise this implicit obedience?"

"I do."

"That is well, for upon this will depend everything."

"But at least you will enlighten me a little further—you will not keep me completely in the dark?"

"You shall know all in good time; at present we have not a single second to waste."

"But—but——"

"Do you hesitate already?"

"No—no."

"Then take this riding-cloak of mine, wrap it closely round you, change hats with me, and make as much difference in your outward appearance as the means at hand will permit: your object is to disguise yourself."

"I understand you."

"Then follow me towards the house; I have much to think of by the way."

Fain would this young man have learned something of Claude's intentions, but he could see it would be useless to question him, and he was wise enough not to make the attempt

In truth, Claude had much to arrange.

An idea had occurred to him as regarded a means by which he could accomplish what he had stated; but it was an idea merely, and required much elaboration.

He dismounted at the lodge-gates and left his steed in charge of the lodge-keeper.

This was a strange step for Claude to take, but then he had a motive for it.

The young man muffled himself in the cloak so well, and the change of hats had effected such an alteration, that he passed through the gates in company with his new-found friend without being recognised by the lodge-keeper.

As Claude strode up the well-kept avenue his thoughts were busy indeed.

But his fertile brain quickly enabled him to seize upon the most salient points of his design and reduce them to order.

Long before the front door of the mansion was gained his course was thoroughly determined upon.

From what the reader knows already of Claude Duval, he may feel certain that the highwayman had some further object in view than he allowed to appear.

What this was will in due time be made apparent.

Setting all other things aside, however, it certainly was a most daring act for Claude, with such a price as there was set upon his head, to venture to walk up to the front door of a gentleman's residence without attempting to alter his own character.

But audacity was one of the means he counted upon to obtain success by.

He had already obtained such information as would enable him to know how to act.

On reaching the front door, his first act was to knock loudly at it.

The hour was late, and perhaps that is the reason why so long a time elapsed before the summons was attended to.

Claude knocked a second time, but ere he could relax his fingers from the knocker the door was opened, and an aged domestic appeared.

He seemed rather confused by the darkness, and in a tremulous tone asked what was wanted.

"Will you be kind enough to tell your master that a gentleman who has ridden post haste from London desires to speak to him upon most urgent business?"

"But I cannot disturb him to-night—the hour is late."

"Is he in bed?"

"No, but he is about to retire."

"Then I must see him. Go, deliver the message I have given you."

"What name did you say?"

"I said none—because none is required; simply say what I told you."

The servant was not able to raise any further objection, and therefore retired to deliver the message, having first asked the two visitors to enter the hall.

The invitation was complied with and the door closed.

As soon as ever the old man had retreated a few paces, Claude whispered:

"Now, my young friend, I am going to endeavour to obtain you a licence to go all over this house without being questioned or molested. Do not stare so, I mean what I say."

But the young man continued to stare, for he began to think that he had been so unfortunate as to fall into the clutches of some cunning lunatic.

"You comprehend me? And now all I want of you is to remain patiently on the watch; and as soon as ever you see the opportunity to effect your purpose, embrace it. Hush, hush! You will soon hear more. Remain here and wait."

By this time the domestic returned.

"My master will see you," he said. "Please step this way."

Claude alone advanced, leaving the young man standing near the door with his mind in such a state of confusion and bewilderment as baffles all description.

How he was to act, or how he was to avail himself of the turn of circumstances he knew not.

But, nevertheless, he had the prudence to keep his face well muffled in the cloak, in order to avoid, if possible, the recognition of the old servant, to whom he was well known.

In the meanwhile, Claude had been conducted to a door, which, after tapping slightly, the servant opened.

Claude then found himself in a magnificently-furnished room.

Let the eyes turn whichever way they would, nothing but articles of the utmost value greeted them.

On the centre table was an elegant silver candelabra, in which two wax candles were burning.

The light from these fell upon the countenance of a man of middle age, whose brows seemed contracted by habitual sternness.

He looked frowningly and inquiringly upon Claude as he said:

"May I ask, sir, what is the nature of this business that you think is of so much urgency as to warrant you in disturbing me at this hour of the night?"

From what the young lover had communicated, Claude fully expected this mode of address, and had made up his mind how to reply to it.

"I am exceedingly sorry to disturb you," he said, making a low bow, "but, really, your lordship——"

"No, no—I am no lord."

"Indeed! Then I trust you will pardon my mistake, which you will the more readily forgive, because the beauty and magnificence of this place within and without are such as few lordly dwellings could boast of."

This was touching the proud man in a sensitive place.

His pride was flattered.

"Sit down—sit down," he said, "and let me know your business."

"Certainly. But you will not fail to perceive that the fact of my being ignorant of your rank——"

"Rank?" he interrupted, with a smile. "There is no rank in the case. I am just a simple squire, and no more."

"But you are a magistrate, I believe?"

"Yes—yes! But I am impatient."

"I will not detain you another moment. I come from the chief magistrate at Bow Street, Sir Walter Stanton, as, of course, you well know."

"But has he sent you to me?" asked the squire, in a flutter.

"Not specially to you," was Claude's reply, given with the gravity of a judge. "But you must be kind enough to listen to a brief explanation."

"Well, sir, proceed."

"Then, squire, of course you must have heard of the doings of that band of desperadoes headed by that celebrated highwayman, Dick Turpin?"

"Yes, I have heard. But what of them?"

"Do not alarm yourself, my dear sir—do not, I beg. But you must understand that there has been a great outcry made about the inability of the police force to capture these daring offenders, though they have made many attempts and have been the cause of a great deal of expense."

"Yes," said the squire, "I have heard many speak of this, and all have been unanimous in declaring these repeated failures to be a disgrace to the Government."

"Just so, squire," continued Claude, with much emphasis; "and that will probably account for a disclosure I have to make to you."

"What, about these wretches?"

"Do you mean the police officers?" asked Claude, with difficulty preserving his gravity.

"No, no, of course not—the highwaymen."

"Oh, pardon me—yes. Well, as I was saying, Sir Walter has at last taken this affair into his own hands, in consequence, I fancy,"—and here Claude sunk his voice to a low whisper—"of having received a very pressing communication from high quarters."

"Of what nature?"

"Respecting the inefficiency of the police, and I almost think with something more disagreeable beside. However, as I ought to have told you at first—though doubtless your own penetration has enabled you to guess it—I am the private agent of Sir Walter, the person he employs upon all affairs of secrecy and importance."

"Indeed, sir—is it so?"

"It is. I have the inexpressible honour of representing Sir Walter's person."

The squire bowed upon receipt of this intimation, and then said:

"May I ask to what cause I am indebted for your presence here this evening?"

As soon as the question was asked him, Claude glanced round the apartment with an air of well-affected mysteriousness.

"Prepare yourself for a considerable surprise," he said, in a low voice; "but above all things retain your calmness—on no account make a movement."

The solemnity with which Claude spoke produced a due effect upon the magistrate, who waited in the utmost suspense to hear the disclosure which was about to be made.

"What is it?"

"Are you prepared for strange tidings?"

"Quite," was the answer, though the word was not pronounced with any particular amount of firmness.

"Well, then, squire, I have most certain and indubitable information that—now, be calm—that the celebrated Claude Duval is somewhere about your premises—as I believe, under your very roof."

In spite of his firmness, the squire started from his chair, aghast with surprise.

"My dear sir," continued Claude, "remember what I said to you—be calm!"

"Calm? Calm the devil! How on earth can a magistrate and a gentleman be calm when he knows such a ruffian as Claude Duval is in his house?"

"But, my dear sir, I assure you you will ruin all if you are in the least precipitate—indeed, I would not answer for your valuable life."

This speech moderated the squire somewhat.

Little did he think, however, what a double meaning lurked under every one of Claude's sentences.

"I must entreat you," said the highwayman, "to leave all to me—to do as Sir Walter has done—namely, put the conduct of this night's great business into my despatch."

"Well, sir—well?" said the squire, sinking into his chair again. "What would you say and do?"

"That which, I judge, will prove the best."

"Let me hear it."

"Believe me, I have taken my measures most effectually, and the result will be undoubtedly the rascal's capture."

"Explain—explain! Make haste! Do you not think you are wasting valuable time?"

"By no means, sir. There is no occasion for hurry—not the least in the world."

"Well, you know best."

"I trust, sir, you will put faith in my judgment."

"I will, willingly."

"Then let me assure you that I have watched Claude's every movement, and I at length tracked him here. He has no idea whatever of his danger; but yet I have managed to surround this dwelling in an unbroken circle, the boundary of which I feel confident he cannot pass at any point."

CHAPTER MLVI.

IN WHICH CLAUDE DUVAL CARRIES MATTERS TO EXTREMES.

"THEN, if that is the case," said the squire, "I should think you have been tolerably secure already."

"I should think so if any ordinary individual was in the case; but the many failures which have been made already serve as beacons to warn me against over confidence."

"Just so—just so; you are right. Be good enough to let me into the light of your plans."

"I will do so; and I trust you will approve of them."

The squire inclined his head.

"My object, then, is," said Claude, in a confidential tone of voice, "just to scare this fellow out of his present quarters without letting him have any idea that he is menaced by such a danger as contact with a large body of officers. He will thus be taken by surprise. He will leave the house, and before he goes many yards will encounter the officers. An alarm will be instantly raised, so that escape will be utterly out of the question."

"Capital—capital!" cried the squire, in a transport of enthusiasm. "It would be impossible to devise anything better. It is sure to succeed."

"I am very glad you think so," said Claude, bowing, "though I confess I cannot help flattering myself that it is a good scheme; and if it had been put into execution sooner the rascal would long since have ended his career at Tyburn."

Claude made a wry face as he pronounced the last ominous word.

Like Macbetti's "Amen!" it stuck in his throat.

But the squire was too much absorbed by what he had heard to pay any attention to so trifling a circumstance.

"I never knew anything half so good!" he cried, rubbing his hands together. "But now I have a favour to ask of you."

"Name it, sir—name it," said Claude, though his words were unavoidably tinged with surprise, for he could not imagine what on earth was coming next.

The squire drew his chair closer.

"You see," he said, "that this arrest and capture of the notorious highwayman will be a very great service rendered to the State, and therefore some sort of return ought to be made for it."

Claude, aided by the information he had obtained from the young man, guessed at once to what the squire was alluding.

"Well," he said, "the matter will all fall into my ordinary routine of business, and I shall get no more for it than perhaps a few words of commendation: rather aggravating. I must say, when I know very well that if the work had been performed by any other hand—say, by the activity of a magistrate of high standing, like yourself, for example, such a public service would be rewarded by the bestowal of a knighthood—perhaps, even, the rank of baronet might be conferred."

The squire's eyes glistened like those of some avaricious old miser upon the prospect of obtaining a large amount of gold.

Claude saw that his words had told.

The fact was, the whole and sole dream of this man was the obtainment of some degree of rank or other above that of squire, which he imagined but ill assorted with his social importance.

He grasped greedily at Claude's words.

"Do you really think so?"

"I might say I am sure or it."

"And Claude Duval, you say, is somewhere beneath that roof?"

"I believe I could make bold and certain enough to say he is."

"And—and," continued the squire, with increased excitement and agitation, "you think that if I assisted to capture him—if I took some active steps in the matter—I might anticipate such a return?"

"I do; though, at the same time, there is no occasion for you to put yourself out of the way in the slightest, or run the slightest possible amount of risk."

"And yet achieve the recompense?"

"Certainly."

"How—how? Be good enough to explain yourself?"

"I will, for I think there is a chance of our coming to an understanding with each other."

"An understanding?"

"Yes. Now, as I explained to you, this business will all be reckoned in along with my ordinary business. I shall have no particular recompense for it; but in drawing up my account of the case I could say—of course for a consideration—of what immense service Squire So-and-so was in the management of the affair, and that it is chiefly owing to his exertions and his sage counsel that success has been achieved."

"And you think that the insertion of something to that effect in your report would have the effect you mention?"

"I have little doubt of it."

The squire drew his chair much closer.

"What is the consideration you would require, now, for rendering such a service as that?"

"Whatever you might think it worth."

"Well, well, if I could make sure of it—I say, if I could make sure—I should not mind, say, five hundred pounds."

"It's a bargain, then," said Claude; "for if the result does not follow I will not claim a penny. That's fair, anyway."

"Quite fair; and to show that I am in earnest, and in order that you may have every encouragement to make

out your report well, I will give you one hundred on account—as a kind of earnest, you know."

The squire opened a drawer in his writing-table, and took from it the amount he had just mentioned.

Claude pretended to feel some compunctions about receiving it, but it was forced upon him.

"Now, then, that's settled."

The squire, as he uttered the words, sank back in his chair complacently, for he already fancied himself a knight.

Claude coolly pocketed the coin.

"And now," resumed the squire, after a pause, "I am most anxious to know what steps you are going to take to bring about a capture?"

"You shall not be kept a moment longer in suspense. I have no doubt, in the first place, that the rascal entered this house with the intention of robbing you."

"Curse his impudence!"

"Do not be too angry with him. Think what effects will follow from it."

"Yes—yes! Just so! And he is concealed somewhere?"

"Yes—hidden, no doubt."

"How shall you proceed.

"I will tell you. I have, outside in the hall—just by the front door—a very clever and faithful subordinate."

"Well?"

"Yes—I call him 'The Mole,' because he is always so clever at working in the dark, and ferreting people out who are in concealment."

"Yes, yes—I begin to understand."

Claude now began to grow anxious, for he was about to approach the point he had been at so much pains to reach.

But he suffered no trace of his anxiety to display itself.

"What I want you to do is, to allow me to instruct the Mole to go all over the house, and pry into every corner of it. He will soon disturb Mr. Claude, and scare him off. But, mark me, it is important he should be alone. He is an odd fellow—cannot bear anyone to see him at work, and he will not brook the least interference; so I must ask you to give particular instructions to your servants to this effect, for I do not hesitate to assure you that upon Mole depends the entire success of the business we have in hand."

This was another of Claude's equivocal speeches, and he could not suppress a smile at the readiness with which the squire agreed with it.

"Then perhaps you would call and give the necessary instructions?"

The squire placed his hand upon the bell, and was about to ring, when some one tapped at the door.

Claude started, for this was an unexpected event, and he wanted to know what it meant

"Come in!" cried the squire.

The door opened, and the old servant appeared upon the threshold.

It needed only one glance at the fellow's countenance to let Claude know that he had made some important discovery, and was about to communicate it to his master.

What the discovery was, Claude guessed rightly, and he at once set about counteracting it.

He knew quite well, as if he had been told so, that the old man had recognised the young man in the hall, and was about to apprise his master of the discovery.

If he succeeded in his intent the whole affair would be ruined, which would have been serious to Claude, who was not half done with the pompous old squire yet.

"Master," said the old man, "there is in the hall—close to the front door——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Claude, boldly—"the squire knows all about it."

The old man stared with amazement, and then managed to utter:

"But this young man, master——"

"Yes, yes!" interrupted Claude. "You see, squire," he added, "that the interference has begun, and really, if Mole is crossed, I tremble for the result—the whole scheme will inevitably fall to the ground."

"But——" interposed the old man again, vainly endeavouring to make himself heard and understood.

"My dear sir," interrupted Claude again, purposely speaking in a loud tone, "will you allow me to give the necessary instructions to your servant? It is most important they should be attended to."

"Yes, yes—by all means do so!"

"Now, listen to me," began Claude, fixing his eyes sternly upon the old man. "The person in the hall you are to allow to go wherever he thinks proper about the premises, and you are on no account to follow him, to watch him, or interrupt or interfere with anything he may be doing, nor are you to allow anyone else on the premises to do so. Now, do you understand that?"

"Yes, sir; but——"

"Let us have no buts in the case—I am not in the habit of having my orders questioned. I believe I spoke quite clearly, squire, did I not?"

"Quite so—quite!"

"Then perhaps this fellow wishes for the satisfaction of hearing you say he is to carry into execution the orders I have just issued?"

"Yes," said the squire. "Williams, mind you obey those orders to the letter, and don't let us have any of your d—d officious interference!" he concluded, seeing that the old man was again about to speak.

Claude had purposely exalted his voice while speaking, so that every word should reach with distinctness the ears of the young lover, who listened with an amazement not to be conceived.

"I will just speak to him," said Claude, as the old man was about to leave the room.

He advanced to the door as he spoke, and beckoned the young man to approach.

"The squire has given his permission for you to go all over the house at your pleasure, and has given orders that no one shall interfere with you in any way; so be off quickly! The sooner you get the business over the better."

The young man nodded, to show that he comprehended the hidden meaning of Claude's words, though he was so amazed at the extraordinary turn events had taken that he could not help thinking that he was being made the sport of some fantastic dream.

But his amazement and bewilderment were, if possible, excelled by the old man, who had not yet recovered from the shock.

But Claude held the door for him to retire, and closed it after him as speedily as possible.

"You heard your master's orders," said the young man, with a menacing gesture. "Beware how you attempt to disobey them in any particular!"

So saying, he bounded towards the staircase with rapid steps.

As for the old man, he was overwhelmed.

Throwing up his hands, he said:

"Well, well—who would have thought of this? I am either daft or else my master is clean, stark-staring mad!"

In the meanwhile, the young lover, with a fast-beating heart, ascended the noble staircase.

He knew full well in which chamber Agnes was secluded, and he made his way to it without delay.

He reached the door in safety, and having done so, all his strength appeared to forsake him.

He caught his breath in short and sudden gasps.

But he was conscious that time was passing—that such an opportunity as this could never occur again, and that every moment was precious.

This enabled him to summon up courage to knock.

The door was opened by Agnes herself, upon whom no further restraint had been placed than not being allowed to leave the house unless in company with some one.

Upon catching sight of her lover, she uttered a faint shriek, which would have been a louder one had he not, with admirable presence of mind, clasped her in his arms and stopped her breath with a fervent kiss.

"Hush—hush, my darling—do not make a sound!"

With some little trouble, Agnes disengaged herself.

"I—I thought it was my maid, Ada."

"But you were wrong."

"Oh, fly—fly, Herbert—do not linger here! I must not speak to you—indeed I must not!"

"But you must listen," he said, grasping her wrist.



[DICK TURPIN ON THE LOOK-OUT AT STONEHENGE.]

"The time has come to show whether your love for me is real or visionary. The time has come for you to make your choice."

"What mean you?"

"You look but little like a bride," he went on, vehemently, without heeding her interruption. "There are even now traces of undried tears upon your cheeks—your eyes are red and swollen—your cheeks pale and haggard. Surely I may judge from this that you are not happy?"

"Happy?" she echoed in a tone of so much agony that it cut him to the heart.

"You do not seem as though you were anxious for to-morrow's ceremony."

"Oh, Herbert!" she exclaimed, with a outburst of tears—"why do you address me thus?"

"Because I want your decision."

"Decision?"

"Yes—the way to escape lies open before you, if you like to avail yourself of it."

"Escape?"

"Yes. Why do you echo my words so strangely?"

"Oh, Herbert, I am nearly mad—almost distracted!"

"Tell me, then," said her lover—"will you embrace this present and unlooked-for opportunity to fly with me, and give me that power over you which no one can contravene; or will you remain here, and doom yourself to lifelong misery and degradation as the bride of a man you have assured me you detest, and who should be abhorred by all for his black treachery?"

"Hush, hush—you are mad with excitement! By what means came you here?"

"By a train of most extraordinary circumstances which I now cannot pause to relate. You shall know all presently."

"But—but——"

"Take my word, Agnes, the way of escape lies open before us at the present moment, though how long it will remain so is very doubtful."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite—quite. Let me ask you once more, will you come—will you make me happy for the remainder of my existence, or render me the most wretched being on the face of the earth?"

But Agnes was greatly agitated.

The utterly unlooked-for appearance of her lover had taken her by surprise—so much so that she could not all at once recover proper command over her mental faculties.

Then she could not bring herself to believe in the reality of the statement he had made respecting the possibility of escape.

Herbert saw her excessive agitation, and with admirable presence of mind did all he could to abate it.

His efforts were crowned with more success than he had dared to anticipate.

He gave her a brief outline of what had occurred to him. But considering the agitated state of both, and that the young man himself was considerably in the dark, it may readily be believed that the narrative was excessively incoherent, if not incomprehensible.

"Once more, dear Agnes," he said, in calmer accents, "will you fly with me—will you be mine? You have no other means of securing your future happiness in this life if you love me as you say you do."

"Heaven knows, Herbert, I do love you!"

"Then come with me—come with me, I entreat you! Hesitate no longer."

"But by what means shall we escape?"

"The easiest in the world. Come down the staircase with me, and we will pass out of the front door."

"You are mad! It is an impossibility!"

"I tell you it is not; take my word for it our departure will not be hindered. Quick—quick, put on some outer garments, for the night air is very chill, and above all be speedy, or after all we may be intercepted and the chance lost."

Agnes appeared by this time fully to have made up her mind.

With great haste she assumed a bonnet and shawl.

Then, trembling with agitation, she took hold of her lover's arm.

All within the house was very still.

He led her to the staircase.

Again they paused to listen.

Then they descended.

Scarcely, however, had they reached half-way when the door of the room in which the squire sat, was opened.

Herbert's heart stood still.

He felt that the chance was gone.

Agnes felt as though she should faint.

"Courage, darling," Herbert whispered—"courage and silence! Perhaps even now all may yet be well."

CHAPTER MLVII.

CLAUDE DUVAL BRINGS HIS DROLL ADVENTURE TO A CONCLUSION.

LEAVING the lovers in this state of incertitude and fear, we will return to the apartment where we left Claude Duval and the worthy squire upon such apparent good terms with each other, and where events of a most interesting character were taking place.

"If there is one thing I hate," said Claude Duval, as he closed the door, "it is a meddling domestic who is not content to take orders as he receives them, but must, forsooth, stop to favour you with his own views upon the subject."

"It is indeed annoying," assented the squire; "but it is a kind of presumption which old servants often take upon themselves. But come, sit down, we have other matters to talk about just now."

"Yes, yes—very true."

"I suppose we shall soon hear an alarm?"

"No, I apprehend not. Mole does his work quietly. Moreover, I took upon myself to impress upon him very particularly that, above all things, he was not to allow any kind of a disturbance to take place beneath this roof. 'Now, Mole,' I said, 'one word is enough; the row must be all out of doors. It was consideration for the different members of your honour's family that made me issue these commands," Claude added.

The squire, of course, could not help confessing that he was vastly obliged.

"By-the-way," he said, "I have heard that this Claude Duval is a devilishly gentleman-like fellow—been a soldier, or something of that kind abroad, I have been told. I should uncommonly like to see the fellow."

"I think you are very likely to have your curiosity gratified."

"Egad, yes, I hope so! But you will excuse me for making the remark?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"Well, then, I must say—going, of course, altogether upon report—that—that——"

"What?"

"That you bear no very distant resemblance to the individual in question."

Claude laughed loudly and heartily.

"A proof of your penetration, squire—a good proof of it! I do believe myself that this rascally Claude Duval has the impudence to bear some resemblance to me. That is one reason why I should be glad to have him tucked up, because it might be unpleasant to be taken for a highwayman under some circumstances."

"I should think so."

"Fortunately, I am well known, and therefore it is not likely to cause me any inconvenience. By-the-way, squire, talking of Claude Duval, I could tell you some extraordinary incidents in connection with him."

"No doubt. I have heard that he possesses an amount of audacity which it is hard to believe is possessed by any mortal person."

"Perhaps you would like to listen to his last exploit; though, I forget, perhaps it may already have reached your ears?"

"No—no; I should, above all things, like to hear an authentic account."

"Well, this is a most barefaced and impudent affair—most shameless, disgraceful trick."

"I am all impatience to hear the particulars of it."

"Then I will gratify you without further delay."

The squire prepared to listen attentively.

Claude began.

"I have been credibly informed," he said, "that this Claude Duval, by some most audacious means, succeeded one night in gaining admittance to a gentleman's mansion, as, for instance, this may be."

"Indeed! What were the means made use of?"

"Well, there I am by no means credibly informed, more than one version having reached me. However, it is certain that the rascal actually had the boldness not only to penetrate into the mansion, but also to gain a private interview with the occupant, a very worthy though somewhat gullible gentleman."

"But how did he contrive to obtain this interview? I can only judge by myself; I am quite certain he could never do it here."

"I should think not," assented Claude, with a hearty laugh. "He would hardly try it on with a magistrate."

"No—no."

"Still, Claude Duval is no ordinary freebooter, and must not be judged by any ordinary standard."

"I suppose not."

"It would be most unjust to do so."

"Well, well, proceed. You say that he succeeded in obtaining a private interview with a gentleman."

"Yes, the very owner and occupier of the mansion he was about to plunder: but of course there was nothing so vulgar in his case as an ordinary burglary."

It was now the squire's turn to laugh.

"I must confess," he said, "that I am unable to see these very fine differences."

"Very likely."

"But go on—pray go on with your tale."

"I will do so; I am glad it interests you."

"It does. But ought we not to hear something of—of——"

"Mole, I suppose you mean. Oh, you leave the business to him. I'll be bound it is all right."

"I will take your word."

"Well, to go on, I am told that before he had been talking long with the gentleman—who, I must tell you

had no more idea he was talking to a highwayman than you have—I say the interview had not lasted long before he actually gammoned some money out of his pocket."

"I suppose you mean Claude Duval gammoned some money out of the gentleman's pocket?"

"Just so—just so. I did not express myself very clearly. The amount was large, however."

"Pray continue."

"Well, the conversation went on very agreeably for some time longer, and then this highwayman asked the gentleman if he had heard Claude Duval's last trick—just as I might have asked you, you know.'

"The fellow really did that?'

"Undoubtedly."

"Then d—n his impudence!"

"How strange! That was the very remark I made when I first heard of it."

"It's very odd!"

"You will say so when you hear the conclusion of the adventure."

"Do not keep me in suspense any longer, then."

"I will not, depend upon it."

"Proceed."

"Well," continued our friend, "I must tell you, Claude got up without the gentleman having the remotest suspicion of who he was, and said that this last trick was the best that ever was heard of, and added he could show it much better than he could explain it."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Claude got up just as I might get up now."

Claude suited the action to the word.

"Yes—yes."

"Well, now, squire, just for the fun of the thing, suppose yourself to be the gentleman I have been mentioning."

"The gullible gentleman?"

"Yes—precisely."

"And you?"

"Why, I—likewise, just for the fun of the thing—will personate the highwayman: you must imagine me to be the notorious Claude Duval himself."

"Indeed! Upon my word, I must say you look the character perfectly well."

"Ha, ha! Good! That's a capital joke! Only, if I had not so great a respect for you as I have, I might retort by saying just the same thing of yourself."

The squire, in spite of his determination to keep on good terms with his visitor, nevertheless looked annoyed at the freedom of this last speech.

But our old friend rattled on.

"You comprehend, squire, that for a time we have changed characters?"

"Yes; though what this is all to lead to I cannot think."

He spoke impatiently.

"I will not tantalise you any longer," Claude answered. "In the first place, then, the rascally highwayman's words were something like these—as near like them as my memory will serve."

"Well, what did he say?"

"Something like this: 'Would you believe it, squire, this Claude Duval, as I am credibly informed, stood before the gentleman and asked the squire for his watch—just as I might ask you," added our friend, stretching out his hand and taking hold of the tremendously thick gold chain which festooned over his dupe's waistcoat.

"But—but——" said the squire, grasping the chain as well.

"Excuse me," interrupted Claude—"just allow me for a moment—I merely want to show you."

The squire's watch was in his hand while he spoke.

He slipped it at once into his coat-pocket.

"Well," he continued, "this gullible gentleman looked rather blue upon seeing his watch disappear—just as you might now."

"But I don't understand you."

"You will in a moment though—you will see that the whole was an ingenious device upon Claude Duval's part to commit a robbery in a pleasant manner—without the least violence or noise, you know."

"Well, well, I suppose so; but I am anxious to reach the end of your tale."

"Your anxiety will not last many moments longer."

"I am glad to hear it."

"Well, Claude next took the gentleman's snuff-box—just as I might take yours now, you know—and slipped it into his coat-pocket after the watch, thus."

As our friend spoke the snuff-box disappeared.

"But I assure you, sir——" the squire began.

"Excuse me," cried Claude, drowning the squire's voice by speaking in loud tones, "I will not detain you a moment longer: I will just trouble you to lend me those rings a moment. There—thank you!"

The squire passively suffered himself to be despoiled of his rings, which immediately went to keep company with the other articles in Claude's pocket.

"Now for this diamond pin in your scarf. That's it."

"But do you mean to tell me, sir," said the squire, sitting very upright in his chair—"do you mean to tell me that the gentleman was so truly gullible as to sit still and allow his jewellery to be taken from him in this fashion?"

"I do assure you such was the case—just as you might sit now."

"Then I mean to say that he was a d—d fool! And now, Mr. Agent, or whatever you call yourself, be good enough to return me my things and finish your tale."

"Fair and softly, sir! I am already at the conclusion. I have only to tell you that the gentleman began to grow suspicious; and so Claude outs with a pistol, just as I might now."

"Now don't—don't! What do you want to point that thing at me for? Turn it away, can't you?"

"But I am showing you what Claude Duval did."

"D—n Claude Duval!"

"With all my heart! But, nevertheless, he pointed the pistol thus, and calmly requested the gentleman to hand him his purse and pocket-book in order that he might come to the end of the matter."

The squire now began to have some very serious doubts as to whether the matter was a jest or something serious.

But for the state of bewildered confusion he had been in ever since Claude's arrival, he might have been able to come to a correct conclusion upon the matter.

He thought, perhaps, that as the pistol continued pointed so menacingly towards him it would be best to look upon it as a joke.

It was therefore with an affectation of jocoseness that he handed over the articles for which our friend so audaciously asked.

"If the gentleman was gullible enough to do this," he said, "he was a fool, and deserved to lose what he parted with so readily."

"Squire, you have exactly hit upon my sentiments."

"But the comedy is played out now, I should hope?"

"Very nearly. However, you may as well hear the concluding scene, by which time I hope we shall hear something of Mole."

Claude really did wish this, as now, having succeeded in his designs so far, he was most anxious to know whether the young man had succeeded in getting clear of the house or not.

"I hope so, too," added the squire. "But go on."

"Well, then, just to finish, I must tell you that Claude Duval, having succeeded so far, blew the candles out—just as I blow out these—walked across the room, opened the door, passed out, and——"

While speaking these words the reader must understand that Claude accompanied each with its corresponding action.

He passed out of the door and closed it after him.

Of course what he said could no longer be heard then.

But a suppressed howl—apparently of remonstrance and discontent—reached him from the apartment.

Claude rapidly turned the key in the lock, and then tapped upon the panel.

"Hullo!" said the squire, gruffly. "Have you done?"

"Yes," answered Claude, through the keyhole.

"Then come in, and let the candles be lighted. I'll be d—d if I don't think the joke has been carried a little too far!"

It was at this moment that Claude looked anxiously around, in the hope of catching sight of the young lovers.

His quick eye at once detected the two shrinking forms upon the staircase.

He made a rapid but unmistakable sign.

They both descended.

"This is my new and unknown friend," whispered the young man—"the one to whom I am solely indebted for my present happiness."

Just at this juncture the bell in the squire's room was rung most furiously.

Probably by this time the conviction had settled upon his muddy-pated intellect that he had been most egregiously duped.

Finding that an immediate response to his summons was not given, he rushed across the apartment and thundered away at the door with both hands and feet in a most reckless and unmagisterial manner.

"Quick quick!" said Claude.

Williams had left the hall in order to make his fellow-servants in the kitchen acquainted with what was going on up above.

He now made his appearance near the foot of the staircase; probably he came in answer to the vigorous peal upon the bell.

It is certain, however, that the first glance sufficed to give him a tolerably correct idea of the exact state of affairs.

In defiance, then, of the injunctions which had been so strictly laid upon him, he rushed forward and endeavoured to prevent the departure of his master's daughter and her lover.

But he was too late.

The hall door had been already opened, the broad perron descended, and by the time he had reached the threshold the fugitives were fast disappearing in the gloom.

He raised a loud outcry for the purpose of alarming the remainder of the inmates of the dwelling.

Just as he did so he heard a terrific crash.

Passion had lent the old squire momentary strength sufficient to enable him to burst open the door of the room in which he had been confined.

He rushed to the front door.

"After them," he cried—"after them! If you are speedy you will have them! Run—I will follow you!"

Williams scarcely waited to hear the remainder of this speech, but dashed down the steps with alarming swiftness.

Claude saw him coming, with the angry squire hard at his heels.

He could not help laughing at the ridiculous figure which both cut.

But he remembered that the young lovers were not yet free from the squire's premises, nor were they, so far as he could tell, provided with the means for making a rapid flight.

This reflection induced him to attempt to put a stop to the headlong course of Williams and the squire.

Accordingly, our friend ran on in the steps of the fugitives, but at such a pace that he felt sure the squire and his companion must inevitably overtake him.

"Quick—quick!" cried the squire. "Seize the villain—seize him! He has no end of my money and valuables about him!"

Williams redoubled his efforts, and shot somewhat ahead of his master.

Claude saw that the moment for putting his preconceived stratagem into execution had come.

"Not so fast, Mr. Williams," he remarked to himself.

As he spoke, he dropped with great suddenness upon his hands and knees.

Williams saw him, but was not able to check his speed.

His feet became entangled, and down he fell, shooting over Claude's body with great swiftness, and grazing the ground to a considerable distance.

The squire beheld the downfall of his dependant, but was not able to put any material check upon his speed.

Claude, however, who had obtained some slight injuries about the ribs, caused by the thick-soled boots Williams wore, rose to his feet.

The squire, rushing on, came full upon his servant as he was in the act of rising.

The consequence was that both lay sprawling on the gravel path in a moment

A furious struggle ensued, caused by the haste both were in to rise, and this very haste for a time defeated its own object.

Leaving them thus, Claude hurried off in the direction of the lodge gates.

He was most anxious to recover possession of his horse, without which he felt his chances of safety would be very small.

Moreover, he was not able to see anything of the lovers.

Quite heedless of the havoc which he committed upon the various flower-beds that lay in his way, Claude directed his course in a perfectly straight line, thus saving much time, for the gravel path wound round in a very ostentatious manner.

He reached his destination in a very few minutes.

He was glad to see his gallant steed just where he had left it, with the gatekeeper standing near.

The latter was looking anxiously towards the house, from which direction loud, tumultuary sounds came upon his ears.

"Quick—quick!" said Claude, as he drew nearer.

"What is the matter, sir?"

"Matter? Why, the house is attacked by robbers! Run up as fast as you can; but open the gate first, as I am going to gallop off for assistance."

This, though startling, was probable, intelligence, and accordingly the gate was opened without demur.

Claude vaulted into the saddle with one bound, and was out in the road in a twinkling.

"Now," he cried, "run up to the house. Your master is furious at your absence."

With these words he galloped off, without waiting to see whether his commands were attended to or not.

But he went only a short distance, for he pulled up as soon as he was able in order to ascertain what had become of the young couple.

Riding slowly forward, he kept a vigilant look-out but without success.

Still he was unwilling to leave until he had seen them, once more and satisfied himself that they were in a fair way for safety.

All at once, however, he heard a shout, and immediately perceived the squire accompanied with several of his domestics.

They were all mounted, and carried with them an odd assortment of defensive weapons.

About such antagonists as these it is not likely Claude would have given himself much trouble; but, as ill luck would have it, another shout came to him from the rear, and before he could turn round to ascertain its source the report of a pistol followed.

"Officers!" ejaculated our friend, as he gave a hasty glance around him. "I must be off and leave the young people to their own resources. They may have got shelter by this time!"

This was scarcely likely, but it was more agreeable for Claude to think thus than otherwise

When the pistol was discharged he was out of range, and now he immediately urged his horse to full gallop

Claude began to fear that these officers might be induced by the magistrate to commence a search after the young people; and if so, they could scarcely escape it.

But the squire and his servants all called out:

"A robber—a robber!—a highwayman!"

"Claude Duval!" yelled one of the officers, as the troop dashed by. "I knew him at a glance, and wish I had been a little nearer when I fired."

Claude slightly reduced his speed.

"I will lead them to suppose that they stand a tolerably good chance of overtaking me, and that will decoy them from this place, and so give the lovers a better chance of securing their future happiness."

This was a very generous act for Claude to perform, for he ran no ordinary risk in thus playing with his foes.

The bait was snapped at greedily.

"His horse is blown," cried one. "Push on—push on, we are bound to have him!"

But after about half an hour's hard riding they had the inexpressible mortification of discovering that they had not gained on the object of their pursuit in the slightest degree.

"I think the farce has lasted long enough now," Claude muttered, as he looked behind him and saw that the officers' cattle seemed fearfully tired. "I will now shake them off and cause them to open their eyes a little bit. Here goes!"

With these words he spurred his horse slightly.

The animal answered freely and readily to the incentive.

During this time the highwayman had, to use his own phrase, been "nursing" his steed, and consequently away it went at a prodigious rate.

The officers were so overcome with surprise that they were rendered speechless—indeed, motionless, for they only retained their seats mechanically.

A more aggravating occurrence than this could hardly be conceived after indulging so fondly in the belief that success would ere long crown their efforts.

But they instinctively felt that their hopes were frustrated this time, and we leave them to get over their disappointment in the best way they were able.

In the meanwhile, Claude Duval, having got quite clear from pursuit, began to wonder where he should take up his quarters so as to remain concealed during the day which was just about to dawn.

CHAPTER MLVIII.

TOM KING MAKES SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HIS CONFIDANT.

THE course of the narrative now reverts to the proceedings of Dick Turpin's two other companions on the night in question.

At the time of separation, Sixteen-String Jack had determined to rejoin Claude at the earliest moment possible, but this intention was prevented by the great speed made by the horse of the latter.

All at once, however, Jack heard a loud cry.

Turning round, he saw Tom King hastening towards him.

He at once checked his speed, and slightly altered his course, so as to allow his comrade to join him as speedily as possible.

They were already out of sight of the officers, who as we have already stated, had elected to pursue Dick Turpin.

"What is it, Tom," asked Jack, as soon as he was able to make his voice heard.

"Nothing particular, only as we got rid of the Philistines so easily I felt most reluctant to remain solitary, and so I thought you might be inclined to join with me."

"With all my heart, for I hate loneliness above all things."

"Where is Claude?"

"Galloped off, as though he had a score of his foes at his heels. Perhaps we shall meet with him presently, for he likes anybody's company better than his own."

"We are all alike in that respect, I think."

"Yes; let us ride on. Perhaps we shall catch sight of him ere long."

His hope was, however, destined to prove a fallacious one.

"Well, we will leave him to his own devices, Jack," said Tom, as he reined-in his steed.

"I suppose we can do nothing else."

"Nothing; and besides, it is a very long time indeed since we had an adventure together, so that if we do not separate there will be some novelty in that."

"I am quite willing to remain with you."

"Then, in the first place, let us make up our minds as to what we shall set about doing."

"What have you in your mind?"

"If you must know, I have been thinking of that treasure of which the captain spoke?"

"That which you frightened the officers out of."

"Just so."

"Well, what about it?"

"Why, it is necessary that we should get it moved to somewhere near to our appointed meeting-place, and as there is no knowing where we may be drifted to in the course of a week or so, I think it would be wisest to unearth it now."

"And proceed at once in the direction of Stonehenge?"

"Yes."

"I am inclined to be of the same opinion."

"Then let us waste no more time in discussion, but commence at once."

"With all my heart!"

This determination having been arrived at, the two highwaymen at once changed the direction in which they had been travelling, making their way back towards the Jolly Tar Inn.

"Are you sure you can find the place again, Tom?" asked Sixteen-String Jack.

"Yes, I took accurate note of it, and have no doubt I can ride to the spot at once."

"That is all right then. And now, Tom, my friend, I am most anxious to know what you really think about this project of leaving England for a time."

"I approve of it."

"I fancied so. But how resolved the captain seems! It is odd to me if it is not Maud we have to thank for this alteration."

"Then you would rather stay?"

"Not to remain by myself; but still, personally, I do not feel inclined to adopt this course."

"Then believe me, Jack, it will be a wise thing for us all, and I hope ere long to be able to bring you to my way of thinking."

Jack shook his head.

"You may be incredulous now, but wait and see."

"I am reconciled to it, and shall remain so, because I think no harm can possibly come of it."

Little did Jack think then that he never made a greater mistake in his life.

"We have been successful for a long time," continued Tom King; "and as all things in existence must come to an end at some time or other, so must our good luck. Besides, a rest would be by no means disagreeable after the hurry and bustle we have had lately."

"Well, it may be so. But, Tom, just tell me whether I am right in this supposition."

"What is it?"

"Why, I fancy you have some other reason for this than you have yet given anyone."

Tom was silent.

"Tell me now—am I right?"

"You are."

"Then what is this consideration? I felt convinced one existed of some kind or other. Let me know what it is, and it may have equal weight with me."

"I feel pretty certain it would not"

"Would not?"

"You seem surprised!"

"I am exceedingly so; and, what is more, I am very curious as well, and shall not rest satisfied until that curiosity is satisfied."

"Then, if that is the case," answered Tom, and forcing a laugh while he spoke, "I may as well tell you at once."

"Do so—pray do so!"

Tom hesitated a moment, and then, ashamed of displaying so much reluctance, acquainted his friend with his strange adventure with the hag, and repeated her prediction.

"And why have you not spoken of this before?"

"Because I felt a strong disinclination to do so. I fancied that I should be laughed at for being influenced by the impotent rage of an old woman."

"Then let me tell you I consider it in another light."

"You do not for a moment imagine that the prophecy will come true, do you? Dick Turpin is my best friend, and if I do not die until he deprives me of existence, I shall make sure of a good long life."

Jack was silent.

"What do you say?" asked his friend.

"Who? I? Why, if you must know, I would rather not say anything."

"Then that is equivalent to telling me that you place some dependence upon the prognostication?"

"You can think so if you like."

"But, Jack, I did not think that—that——"

"That what? Out with it!"

"That you were so superstitious."

"I knew that is what you would say. But I happen to remember very vividly something which appears to have slipped your recollection altogether."

"What is it? It is now my turn to feel curious."

"Can you not guess?"

"No."

"Well, then, I was thinking of *the shadow on the wall!*"

Jack shuddered as he pronounced the words.

He always did when the awful, mysterious, and seemingly supernatural event he had just mentioned was forcibly brought to his mind.

The recollection made Tom feel exceedingly uncomfortable.

"We are on a disagreeable topic now" he said—"let us change it."

"Just as you please. The subject is one I never care to talk about."

"Then cease."

"I will," muttered Jack to himself. "But I shall not forget the gipsy's prophecy for all that."

They rode on for some time in silence, nor, indeed, was a word spoken until Tom suddenly exclaimed:

"Here we are, my friend! And now, if you will dismount and lend me your assistance, we will quickly uncover the valuables."

Sixteen-String Jack looked well about him, and finding that, to all appearances, they had the place quite to themselves, he quitted the saddle and set to work.

The earth was soft, and was soon removed by means of their swords.

"It is only just below the surface," Tom remarked. And then immediately added: "Here it is!"

He pulled out the bundle as he spoke.

It was bulky, and they began to wonder how they should carry it.

"Let us divide the whole," said Tom. "We shall find room somehow or other, depend upon it."

The bundle was opened, and the glittering contents displayed to view.

Jack's eyes sparkled, and, without hesitation, he followed his comrade's example of filling all his pockets.

When this operation was brought to a conclusion, a considerable quantity remained; but this they disposed of by filling the small leather pouches which were under the flaps of their saddles.

Thus loaded, it would be by no means comfortable to travel, which made them still more determined to make their way to Stonehenge without further loss of time.

"There is one thing," remarked Jack, as they commenced their journey—"we shall be almost unknown to that part of the country, I should think."

"Yes, we can bear that in mind when we think upon our future proceedings."

"Forward, then."

The long journey they had before them was now commenced.

On the way, however, Sixteen-String Jack manifested great impatience, and his feelings with respect to the project for quitting England for a time underwent a complete alteration.

The gipsy's prophecy was continually uppermost in his mind; and though he could by no means see how it was likely to be fulfilled, yet he set about doing all he could to prevent the occurrence of such a catastrophe, thus strangely contradicting himself in his belief, as, if such was doomed to be the case, he knew full well no exertions of his could change the decrees of fate.

His manner did not fail to produce a deep impression upon Tom King, whose mind became overwhelmed with gloom.

Without confessing so much to each other, both felt that a calamity of no ordinary nature was impending over them.

CHAPTER MLIX.

TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HAVE A SINGULAR ADVENTURE ON THE COAST, AND MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR A DEPARTURE FROM ENGLAND.

"THAT, then, is Stonehenge?"

The words were uttered by Sixteen-String Jack, as he came in sight of the picturesque ruins which bear this name.

The time was early morning, and the first rays of the rising sun glinted redly upon the masses of unhewn stones about the uses and origin of which so much diversity of opinion exists.

"And you have never been in this part of the country before?" said Tom King, interrogatively, as he gazed upon the sublime scene before him.

"Never. Have you?"

"Many—many times."

"It's an odd thing, Tom, but you seem familiar with every place—you seem to know your way wherever you may chance to be."

"I had opportunities for travel when I was young," he answered, in a sad voice—"opportunities falling to the lot of very few."

"And you made good use of them."

"I did."

Sixteen-String Jack did not pursue the subject any further, for he knew how much it pained his friend to have the past brought vividly before him.

"It is a beautiful sight," continued Tom, still gazing at the ruins—"one which I have always much admired."

"And very lonely."

"Yes, exceedingly so. The chances are quite against our being disturbed by anyone."

"Forward, then, my friend! And I hope for the next twelve hours or so we shall be left in peace."

"Your hope is in a fair way of being fulfilled, I think," said Tom, as he directed his weary horse towards their destination.

Since taking their resolution, the highwaymen had by no means let the grass grow under their feet, while such was the caution they exercised that they felt tolerably certain they had left no track behind them.

The very secrecy which had attended all their movements deprived them of any unusual amount of interest.

They had been most careful to avoid adventures of every kind, in order that their presence in that part of the kingdom might be wholly unknown and unsuspected.

A few minutes enabled them to cross the open piece of ground which lay between them and the ruins.

When once here, the huge mass of stone-work served to conceal them completely.

"Years ago," said Tom, "there used to be the remains of a wooden hut, in which dwelt an old woman who used to obtain a livelihood by begging from the visitors to the place."

"And is she here now?"

"If she is, her age must be patriarchal, for at the time of which I speak her age was extreme, and her hut little more than a few old pieces of blackened timber roughly nailed together. But step this way, and we shall soon find out whether any such place now exists."

Sixteen-String Jack followed his comrade, and after threading a way among the huge stones they came to a remote spot where such a building as Tom had described was standing.

"The hut is here," he said, "but whether its inmate is we must find out."

There was not much difficulty about this.

The crazy door was swinging idly open, as though inviting them to enter.

Crossing the threshold, the highwaymen entered the hut, which the first glance showed to be completely empty.

"Some time has elapsed since it was inhabited, I fancy," said Jack.

"There is every appearance of it."

"Still, it will afford us shelter from the weather. And now, then, what is the first thing to be done?"

"To rebury the treasure."

"What, here?"

"Yes, we can conceal it easily"

"As you like. I am quite tired of carrying so heavy a load about with me."

In fact, now Tom came to make a closer examination of these valuables, he found that they represented a much larger sum than he had previously imagined—so much more, in fact, that he was sure that this alone would be sufficient to warrant them in leaving England for a time.

Without any loss of time, this wealth was deposited in one corner of the wooden hut, and covered over with a small quantity of loose earth.

"Now for a rest," said Tom King; "and when night comes we can talk over what we are to do next."

Sixteen-String Jack willingly assented, for their journey had been a most fatiguing one.

But although both were weary and to all appearance in perfect safety, they did not neglect their general precaution of watching and sleeping alternately.

In this way the day passed without the occurrence of anything to disturb them.

When twilight was deepening, they held their consultation.

It did not last long, and the result of it was that they rode away from their new quarters, making their way towards the sea-coast.

They had determined to engage a vessel at the nearest point to take them across the channel, so that when the whole of the party arrived there should be no delay on this account.

By hard riding they reached the sea-coast before morning, though the dawning hour was close at hand.

The weather was rough, and a piercing wind blew obliquely from seaward.

The sky was covered over with one huge cloud, which effectually blotted out all traces of the moon and stars.

"What is to be done now, Tom?" asked Jack, with a shiver. "Do you know where you are?"

"I am slightly out in my reckoning, for the darkness has misled me."

"Where are we, then?"

"About a couple of miles from a small fishing village."

"And you think we can there obtain what we want?"

"Oh, there is no doubt about that!"

"How shall we reach it?"

"By making our way along the coast here to the right. The road is tolerably good, and we shall get there in little more than a quarter of an hour."

"Ah!" ejaculated Sixteen-String Jack. "What's that?"

"What—what?"

"Did you not see it?"

"I saw nothing."

"Look—look! There goes another! What is afloat, I wonder?"

As he spoke, Sixteen-String Jack pointed seaward, from which direction two bright lights had shot up, seemingly discharged from a rocket.

Tom King looked intently.

"That's a signal," he said, "and if we wait we shall see the conclusion of it. Ha! there it goes, you see!"

Another ball of fire shot upwards into the darkness, and when it burst and descended in blazing masses the effect was beautiful.

Scarcely had the last of these died away than our friends suddenly caught sight of a light burning steadily on the beach below them.

"See—see," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack. "What is the meaning of that?"

"The response to the signal."

"You seem to know all about it."

"I have had some experience. But keep still, I want to make out what is going on below."

By slightly changing their position, and by making good use of their powers of vision, our friends were able to distinguish a group of dark, rapidly-flitting figures.

By their motions it could be observed that they were one and all labouring under an excitement of no common character.

"What do you make them out to be?" asked Jack, at length.

"Let us draw a little closer—we shall be able to do so unperceived—and then I can tell better."

There was very little fear indeed that they would be detected, for the roaring of the wind among the cliffs and the rush of the breakers were terrific.

The path was rude and slippery, but it was traversed by the two highwaymen without accident.

Tom paused at a point some height above the level of the beach, and from which he was able to command a good view of all which he wished to take cognizance.

The group of people was now made out to be composed of rough-looking specimens of humanity of both sexes.

Their garments were soaked with the sea spray which dashed continually upon them, and of which they seemed to take no notice at all.

They are smugglers, are they not, Tom?" said Jack, in his companion's ear.

"Yes, there can be no doubt of it."

"And that is some vessel of theirs in the offing?"

"Yes, and on such a night as this it will be no easy task to keep the bark clear of the thousand tooth-like rocks with which these shores are studded. They have need of a good pilot."

"Which they have doubtless got. But you have some object in being thus attentive to their motions?"

"I have."

"What is it?"

"Why, I think these will be the very people to treat with to take us over to France."

"But can we trust them?"

"I should not let them know who we are."

"Yes; but remember how we were served when making a journey from the opposite coast."

"It is not likely that I should ever forget such a time of horror as that."

"And shall you run the risk again?"

"Not blindly."

"What do you mean?"

"Let us continue to watch the movements of these men, and we can afterwards be guided by circumstances."

To this Jack offered no objection.

The proceedings of the people below were not without interest, for they were all anxiously at work, signalling to those on board the bark to escape the rocks of which Tom King had spoken, and which were fearfully disastrous to any ship that might be unfortunate enough to get among their points.

At length the vessel out at sea could be dimly distinguished as a dark, rolling mass upon the surface of the almost as dark waters, which boiled and seethed like some huge cauldron.

As the bark drew nearer the excitement on the beach increased, and the utmost anxiety was manifested to bring her safe to shore.

"Here she comes!" cried Tom King, who had watched the whole of the proceedings with as much breathlessness as if he had been personally concerned in the venture. "Here she comes! Now they have her!"

A grating sound followed as the ship, with one lumbering roll, pitched upon the sand.

"What is the next step, Tom? Mind, I place myself absolutely under your guidance in this matter; for, instead of growing lighter, as it should, it grows darker and darker every instant."

"Still the dawn cannot be far distant. But come, follow me—we will try whether it will not be worth while for them to purchase our silence respecting what we have just seen."

Jack understood this at once, and followed his companion down the rugged path with considerable confidence.

The distance to the spot where the vessel had been run ashore was by no means great; but owing to the inequalities of the ground, it took them some time to reach it.

So intent were the smugglers upon what they were about that it was not until our friends were actually among them that they became aware of their presence.

Immediately there was a cry of startled dismay, and our friends were near paying dearly for their temerity, as a voice cried:

"Spies—foes—foes! Down with them! Sweep them from the earth!"

"Hold!" cried Tom King, in a voice which was heard by all present, and the commanding tone of which instantly compelled every one instinctively to pause. "Hold, I say, and listen! Would you destroy your friends?"

The last word was repeated in incredulous accents by many lips.

"A light here—a light!" said the gruff, stern voice which had before spoken. "A light, I say! Let us see who these intruders and so-called friends may be."

A lantern was immediately produced and handed to a man of so Herculean a build that he seemed to stand at least a head and shoulders taller than his companions.

He came forward, grasping the light, which he held in such a manner as to cast all its beams upon the forms of the two highwaymen.

"Friends, are you?" he said. "Then how is it we do not happen to know you?"

"We mean to be friends," said Tom King, "and we have come here because we wish to secure your services in a little matter, for which we will reward you liberally."

"Well?"

"If you consent—and I give you credit for having too much good sense to refuse—I say, if you consent, we will both remain profoundly silent regarding all we have seen to-night, and lend you a hand to stow your goods away safely as well."

The smuggler captain paused, and looked intently upon our friends.

But they bore the scrutiny without flinching.

"You are no ordinary men," he said, at length; "and what is more, I don't believe you are traitors."

"We will give you leave to shoot us down like dogs if you see us show the least symptom of playing you false," said Tom King, with a bold, undaunted air.

"Give us your hands," said the captain. "We are short of men to-night, and badly want assistance to secure our goods. The weather is against us, and we have certain knowledge that a revenue cutter has been on the watch all night. I made sure at first that you belonged to them."

The smuggler captain did not trouble himself then to inquire any further about the service required of him, but at once set the highwaymen to work.

Our friends laboured with a will, and as soon as ever the remainder of the crew saw them at work, their apprehensions of betrayal vanished, for their unexpected assistants were now participators in their unlawful act.

By the manner in which the smuggler issued his commands, and the promptitude and accuracy with which they were obeyed, our friends easily came to the conclusion that they had all been for a considerable space of time engaged in this species of traffic.

In rather less than an hour the stranded vessel was completely relieved of her cargo, which was piled up upon the beach.

As soon as the last package had been delivered, there was an immediate commotion.

The cause of this soon manifested itself.

They were all most anxious to take advantage of the fast receding tide.

It was important that the lugger, for such the vessel was, should be got afloat, or else the locality of their secret store would be guessed at.

But the danger was imminent that, in spite of their efforts, the vessel would be left high and dry upon the beach, in which the keel had deeply imbedded itself, in consequence of the violence with which it had been driven ashore.

But this clearly was no fresh task.

Tom was afraid the attempt would be a failure; but all at once, with a rush, the lugger was fairly sent into the sea, where for a moment it rolled and tossed tremendously

But the commander was skilful, and soon had his somewhat clumsy bark fairly under weigh.

The departure of the lugger was watched with much interest for some moments, and then all hands were set to work to remove the cargo.

It was while they were all thus engaged that a heavy booming sound came floating over the water, reaching the ears of every one, in spite of the tumult of the elements.

"Ten thousand curses!" said the smuggler captain. "That is the cutter! Quick—quick, my lads! Work now if you never worked before! It will be daylight directly, and there must not be a sign left to show that the run has been made here."

At this moment there was a flash of light to seaward, almost instantly followed by a dull report.

"They are calling to her to lay to," said the smuggler chief. "It does not concern us now. Attend only to the task that lies before you."

The men responded well, and by their united aid the packages and casks—for the cargo had consisted of both—were rolled to a small cavern in the cliffs, the entrance to which was so small, dark, and unpromising, that no one would have thought human beings would penetrate it.

Hitherto, the two highwaymen had not passed beneath this gloomy archway, the labour in which they had been engaged being that of carrying the packages across the beach.

This being at last completed, the captain said:

"Enter—enter. Fear not. The way is smooth enough, if you follow the rest."

"But our horses," said Tom King—"how shall we dispose of them? If we leave them where they now are, will they not be the means of directing special attention to this spot?"

"You are right," said the captain; and then he paused as if reflecting deeply.

"Will you trust me?" he said at length.

"Certainly."

"Then leave the horses to my care. I will be answerable for them."

"But we might need them upon some sudden emergency."

"If you do, I will undertake that they shall be close at hand. Will you be content with that assurance, for I cannot disclose all our secrets to a stranger"

"Give us a moment to confer."

"Be quick, then. It is beginning to grow light, and it is most important that not a single being shall be seen about this spot."

Tom King drew his companion on one side.

"Do you feel inclined to trust this man?"

"Do you?"

"Frankly, then, I say yes. His gang and himself are to some extent in our power."

"But where will he take our horses?"

"Why, in all probability there is some other mode of entering their cavern at a point further inland, and this is where they will be taken."

"Ask him the question, and if he answers in the affirmative we will enter with him."

Tom did so at once.

"You have guessed rightly," answered the captain, in a subdued voice, as though he was anxious that what he said should not be overheard by his crew. "That is what I intended, though I cannot let you know where that other entrance is."

"We will trust you," said Tom King; "and we hope that will go a long way towards convincing you of our good faith."

The captain nodded his head, and urged them to enter.

He had little doubt of their sincerity, and with an amount of discernment for which he deserved due credit, he fancied the service he was required to do was one that would yield him a good pecuniary profit, although it might involve considerable personal danger.

Without hesitation, our two friends crept under the archway after the captain.

The darkness was profound.

For some distance they were compelled to proceed in a crouching position, but all at once they heard the captain say:

"Rise to your feet now and walk forward boldly. The path is clear."

It was no very easy or comfortable thing to walk along through pitch-like darkness, even after such an assurance as this.

The highwaymen were soon aided by a dim, twinkling light, on which they fixed their eyes.

Gradually this increased in size and brightness, until they found that it proceeded from an irregular opening in the rock.

Through this could be seen the interior of an extensive cavern.

Upon entering, our friends looked about them with great interest.

The only light there was came from a huge fire, which was burning brilliantly on the rocky floor of the cave.

The whole of the crew was engaged in stowing away the various articles they had brought to shore.

After the issue of a few necessary commands the captain invited our friends to a seat at a rude table near the fire, on which he had caused a bottle and glasses to be placed.

"Come," he said, "we will have one glass of *eau de vie* together, to drive the cold off our stomachs, and after that business, for I am very curious to learn the nature of the service you require me to perform. That's good, isn't it?" he added, after the glasses had been emptied.

"Capital!" answered the highwaymen, with tears in their eyes.

"The strongest brandy you ever tasted, is it not?"

"It is indeed."



[THE CAPTURE AT STONEHENGE.]

"Ah, there has been no doctor at work at that, making it palatable. But now, then, come—keep me no longer in suspense."

"What we want, then," said Tom King, "is the use of a boat, to convey a party of, let me see—yes, eight persons in all."

"And what else?"

"Nothing, except a few things we shall have with us; and a horse or two, perhaps."

"You would want the lugger?"

"Yes, and the crew as well."

"And where is your destination?"

"The coast of France."

"I thought so," said the captain, with a significant nod.

"The greatest secrecy will be required," continued Tom; "And if you are faithful, you will find it about as good a night's work as you have ever done."

"What will you give to have the service faithfully performed, and without the asking of more questions than you may choose to answer?"

"How much do you want?"

"Nay, how much will you give?"

"A hundred guineas."

"Make it two hundred, and it's a bargain. I would take you then, no matter who you might be, or who was after you."

"Right—agreed! Though," Tom added, "please to understand that I do not apprehend a pursuit."

"Then I make the bargain. And now about the time—when?"

"That I cannot fix precisely; but certainly not for a fortnight to come."

"Good! But yet, let me have timely notice."

"I will, never fear. And now there is one thing more."

"Speak."

"We are to rejoin our friends not far distant from here; but they will not arrive at present. Now, should we require it, would you give us shelter here till then?"

"Most certainly. You are heartily welcome to make free with whatever the cave holds, for you did us good service by your aid to-night. If the rest had worked like you we should have finished an hour earlier. But no matter, all's well, and so there ought to be no grumbling."

So saying, the captain rose; and, having again impressed upon our friends that they were welcome, he moved off to superintend the movements of his crew.

"This has been easily managed," said Sixteen-String Jack. "And now all I wish is that Dick and the rest will speedily make their appearance, for I cannot help feeling that the sooner we are off the better."

"All in good time, Jack," was the reply. "We ought to be well satisfied with what we have done so far."

"I am—I am. But yet I feel a dreadful presentiment of coming ill."

"Dismiss it," said Tom. "It is caused by the thought that you are about to say farewell to adventures for awhile."

"I was never less in the humour for them in my life," answered Jack, in a tone of so much despondency that his comrade was quite surprised at it. "My heart is heavy, Tom, and I am heartily glad that you asked for and obtained permission from the captain for us to remain here."

"Nonsense," said Tom—"you will soon get over this."

But Sixteen-String Jack only shook his head.

CHAPTER MLX.

THE MEETING AT STONEHENGE.—THE CATASTROPHE.

THE hour was shortly after sunsent, and the time about three weeks after the completion of the compact with the smuggler captain, as related in the last chapter, that three rather weary-looking travellers emerged from a small coppice, and cautiously looked around them.

The view which they obtained from the spot whereon they stood was an extensive one, and long and earnest was the scrutiny bestowed on every object in the landscape.

"The coast seems quite clear, captain," said one of the travellers, at length.

"Yes, I think we can safely say all is well so far," was the reply. "Come, Maud, cheer up—we are close now to our destination."

Maud smiled faintly as she looked up into Dick Turpin's face.

There seemed to be traces of tears clinging to her long eyelashes, and her face looked pale and worn, as though the journey had told much upon her.

Dick witnessed the alteration, and sighed.

His heart reproached him strongly.

Her recollected what Maud had been until her unfortunate connection with himself, and he wished mentally for her sake that they had never met.

For his own part, he felt now that he would rather part with his own existence than with her.

Now, too, he could no longer blind himself to the fact that the never-ending fatigue and the ceaseless anxiety of mind inseparable from such a career as his were killing her by inches.

They were not without an effect upon the robust forms of himself and his comrades.

How much more severely, then, must they have been felt by one so delicately brought-up and nurtured as Maud had been?

All this had long been pressing upon Dick's mind, and accounted for the fact of his being in the vicinity of Stonehenge at least a week earlier than he had at first contemplated and intended.

What endeared Maud to Dick most, and made him still more anxious to gain a place of safety, was that throughout all their privations and sufferings no word of complaint had escaped her lips—she had not wounded him by the utterance of one reproach, nor would she have done so, as he knew full well, if she had died while in his companionship.

To be with him was all that she desired; and in order to have this gratification secured to her, she needed not what hardships she was compelled to undergo.

"Cheer up," said Dick again, as soon as he could command his voice sufficiently for utterance, and placing his hand upon hers at the same moment—"cheer up, Maud. Let me once again see something like a look of happiness upon your pale face, for I assure you, on my word, that if we live, and no unforeseen events occur, forty-eight hours more is the longest time we shall be in England."

Maud pressed Dick's hand, for she could not trust herself to speak after receiving such an assurance.

Her throat swelled and ached until the pain was almost beyond endurance.

She shrunk, too, from letting Dick know that the close realisation of that for which she had so long sighed and wished, was not productive of that amount of joyfulness which she had anticipated.

She felt that it was wrong upon her part to give way to such sensations as these, and she thought it would be a poor return to offer to Dick if she admitted that her strongly-expressed wishes were no better than idle whims.

Finding that she did not break the silence, and attributing her reticence to overjoyfulness, he said:

"Come, then, once more forward—a short half-hour will enable us to reach the place of rendezvous."

He gave Black Bess the rein as he pronounced the words, and the next moment they were all speeding to their destination.

No sooner were they beneath the shadow of the Druids' Stones than they heard voices and footsteps.

"Captain—captain," said some one, "is it you?"

"It is, Tom."

"Safe and sound?"

"Quite so."

While speaking, Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack came forward.

They were much rejoiced to find that Dick and his two companions were quite safe, and this very circumstance went far towards dissipating that gloom which had settled upon Jack's spirits.

"Have you seen nothing of Claude?" was Turpin's next question.

"Nothing. But as he is well able to take care of himself, most likely he is all right."

"And you have met with no alarm here, Tom?"

"None whatever; and so far as we are able to tell, our presence in this part of the kingdom is a profound secret."

"So much the better. We have been most careful in all our movements, and I think I can safely say that no one has recognised us."

"I am glad to hear it," answered Tom; "and I hope the rest will furnish us with a similar account, for we have been here some time, and have effected some important arrangements."

Tom King then informed Dick of his meeting with the smugglers, and their undertaking to convey them in safety across the channel.

This communication greatly improved Maud's spirits, and a certain amount of cheerfulness was noticeable in her mien immediately.

"And have you remained all this while in the seclusion and inactivity of the smugglers' cave?"

"We have; but chiefly on Jack's account, who has suffered himself in a most extraordinary degree to be influenced by——"

Here Tom paused, as for the moment he forgot that he had not mentioned to those present his meeting with the old woman who had uttered the strange prophecy.

"By what, Tom? Why do you pause?"

"Because," interrupted Jack, "he does not care to let you know that he encountered an old woman who predicted that—that——"

"What?" asked Dick, impatiently. "Why do you hesitate and look so grave?"

"It is ridiculous for him to do so," said Tom King, interrupting in his turn, and speaking with as much levity as he could call up. "Because he is foolish enough to pay a deep regard to the impotent curses of an angry old woman."

"But what did she say?"

"The most improbable thing in the world, Dick—that which you would never guess if you tried for a month, it is so monstrous."

"I shall not make the attempt, then. But, as my curiosity is strongly excited, perhaps you will tell me without keeping me any longer in suspense."

"I will. She prophesied that my death was at hand, and that I was doomed to die at the hands of my best friend."

"Your best friend?" echoed Dick, in tones which showed how extreme was his surprise

"Yes, such were the words."

"Then that must be——"

"No other than yourself, Dick. Nay, don't regard it. If I live till you, my longest, truest, stanchest friend, deprive me of life, I shall make sure of a long existence; or if the prophecy must be fulfilled, I would sooner take it from your hands than from the hangman's rope. But give us your hand—there, that's it!—and think no more about it!"

Tom King, as he spoke, grasped his old comrade's hand and shook it warmly.

Dick did not speak, but the communication he had just received made a very deep impression upon him.

Whether he would have made any remark upon recovering from the state of surprise into which he had been thrown is uncertain, for just at this moment some one was heard approaching.

Looking out, they saw that it was Claude Duval, who was riding slowly, and apparently in doubt as to what point of the ruins he should direct his course.

In a low voice, Dick called to him. He was afraid to hail him loudly lest there should be some lurker near.

Upon hearing the tones of that well-known voice, Claude rode briskly forward, and the next moment was surrounded and warmly greeted by his expectant friends.

"You are safe and sound, I see," remarked Sixteen-String Jack.

"Yes, all has gone well with me. I have had an odd adventure or two, which I will recount to you when I find an opportunity; and I do not come back empty-handed. Look at this."

Claude, as he spoke, produced from the pockets in his saddle a goodly quantity of valuables, and intimated that the pockets of his own apparel were equally well filled.

"You have been more successful in this respect than the rest of us," said Dick Turpin. "Still, as we have enough for our purpose, we ought to be satisfied. It is my intention to leave here for the coast as soon as Ellen and Mrs. Davis arrive, Tom and Jack having already made arrangements for the transport of ourselves and our horses."

"But why this haste?"

"You shall know in good time," said Sixteen-String Jack. "The matter now is finally settled."

"Well, you will not find that I shall quarrel with your determination, for I am so overcome with fatigue that I feel as though I should like to lie down and go to sleep, and not wake up for a month at least."

Claude's excellent spirits had the effect, to a considerable extent, of banishing the gloom which had been visible upon the countenances of all composing the group.

Nevertheless, he was quick-sighted enough to see there was something amiss, and at once became importunate to know what that something was.

"It is Sixteen-String Jack here, with his odd, superstitious fancies," said Tom King. "You know what he is, so think no more of it."

"Remember the shadow on the wall," said Jack, solemnly.

At the remention of this unaccountable event, all started, and paled slightly—that is, all but Tom King, and probably he would not have been an exception had he not guessed what his comrade was going to say, and prepared himself accordingly.

An ominous silence followed—a silence which Claude Duval was the first to break.

"Why do you recur to that circumstance?" he said.

"Because the remembrance of it ought to teach you not to think too lightly, if anything that happens to be beyond your comprehension," was Jack's answer.

"But why not tell me what it is that has since made such an impression upon you?"

Tom King, thinking the explanation would best come from him, related his adventure with the woman.

In spite of what Jack had said, it was plain that he (Tom) was determined to make light of it, or at any rate, appear to do so.

But in spite of the levity with which he spoke, Claude was considerably affected, and, strange as it may seem, his exuberant spirits subsided from that moment.

This, however, he was pleased to ascribe to the fatigue of which he had previously spoken.

He at once sought out a place of repose.

The accommodation was very limited in this respect, and on the present occasion Claude Duval was even less inclined than usual to be particular.

Thinking of what had just passed kept sleep for a long time from his eyelids, and when at length he closed them in slumber, he was tormented by all manner of distracting visions.

As the reader may be sure, Maud was much affected, and at the first opportunity she had of speaking alone with Dick Turpin, she said:

"Tell me now, and tell me truly, what do you think of this strange occurrence?"

"I would rather not speak at all."

"But at least you will tell me whether you think the prophecy is likely ever to be fulfilled."

"In a word, then, I do not. I should not hesitate to characterise it as the most improbable thing to occur; still, it is not impossible."

"Not impossible?" echoed Maud, in some surprise at his words.

"No. But if Tom loses his life at my hands, it will only be through the occurrence of some most remarkable accident. Rest assured, it is a contingency which I shall ever do my best to be on my guard against; and now let discussion upon this profitless subject have an end; it can lead to no result."

CHAPTER MLXI.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES ARE GLADDENED BY THE APPEARANCE OF ELLEN AND MRS. DAVIS AT STONEHENGE.

Thus admonished, Maud relapsed into silence; but it was not likely she could help her thoughts brooding upon the matter.

One of the strangest things connected with it was the deep effect which the prophecy had upon all who heard it.

One might almost have fancied that it found an answering echo in all their hearts—that without being conscious of so doing, all had expected it.

Tom King was surprised at the manner in which his communication had been received by his companions, and it became very difficult indeed for him to maintain, when alone, that levity which he had not very easily assumed when in their presence.

During the night which ensued nothing occurred worthy of special mention.

To all appearances, they were as much in solitude on Salisbury Plain as they would have been upon some desolate, uninhabited island.

The highwaymen, one and all, congratulated themselves upon having found such isolated quarters.

For form's sake, their usual method of keeping watch was adhered to; but nothing occurred to break in upon the security of their position.

No sound was heard save the low baaing of some distant sheep, which came upon the ear with a melancholy effect; it seemed to make the loneliness of their position more apparent.

The ensuing day was chiefly spent in wandering about the stupendous ruins, which then had not that marred, defaced appearance which they now present.

Sixteen-String Jack had had the prudence to bring with him from the smugglers' cavern a tolerably large supply of such provisions as he could lay his hands upon, with excellent wine in profusion.

On this score they had nothing to trouble them.

As soon as the sun began to decline towards the west, they commenced their look-out for Mrs. Davis and Ellen.

It was unanimously wished that they would speedily make their appearance.

The present seemed so favourable an opportunity of carrying out their design of leaving England, that it seemed a thousand pities not to avail themselves of it; for even at Stonehenge the highwaymen could not count upon remaining long in this state of seclusion.

"Understand me," Dick had said, "if they arrive at anything like an early hour to-night, we will at once bend our course to the sea-shore."

No demur whatever was raised to this proposition, which was looked upon as being fully agreed to.

Without separating much from each other, the highwaymen contrived to post themselves at various points of the ruins in such a manner that they were able to command every approach.

While they remained thus, they could not fail to be made cognisant at an early moment of the approach of those they looked for.

Thus they remained for some time, talking busily with each other; but as the subject was almost exclusively their project for leaving England, their conversation would be tedious to set down.

Night came at length.

The stars, one by one, peeped forth, and at length the moon rose in all her silver majesty.

Her beams, unobstructed by any intervening obstacle, lighted up the open plain around to a great distance, and the hoary stones themselves seemed to catch and reflect a portion of her argentine lustre.

But morning came at length, but without bringing those they wished to see.

Anxious and impatient, they passed the hours for the most part in uneasy slumber.

The perpetual suspense that they endured was hard indeed to bear, but there was no help for it, though this knowledge afforded them but a small amount of consolation.

It was not, indeed, until the third night—when all were sick and weary with long waiting—that their watching was rewarded.

Just at that time when the indistinctness of twilight merges into the obscurity of night Dick Turpin uttered a low sound, which had the effect of causing all the rest to come clustering round him.

"Hush—hush!" he said—"keep back! I think all is well. But still, let us keep, if we can, upon the safe side."

Tom Davis was with great difficulty restrained from rushing forward.

But Claude Duval twined his arms round him and held him fast.

"No—no," he said—"no you don't, Tom! Just keep quiet a bit, will you!"

"But I tell you they are approaching."

"Well, if they are, there can be no harm in waiting a moment or two in order to make sure."

"Sure!" echoed Tom. "Do you think that I could be in any doubt respecting those two forms which are so well known to me? No—no! you may be doubtful, but I am sure—quite sure!"

"It may be so," said Dick; "but still, the general safety requires that you and all the rest remain here in concealment. Who knows?—they may be watched. Be still, I say—your patience will not be put to trial for more than a moment longer."

With eager, expectant eyes, Tom Davis fixed his gaze upon the two dusky forms which could be seen approaching.

Despite the general gloom, it was quite certain that they were females.

One seemed much overcome with weariness, and at every few steps would pause and lean heavily for support upon her companion, whose slight figure seemed but ill adapted to sustain her weight.

For some time they came on in a direct line towards them, as though in no sort of doubt whatever as to their destination.

But as they drew nearer this confidence of demeanour vanished, and irresolution succeeded.

"They will never find us if we do not disclose ourselves," whispered Tom Davis, in an agony of impatience, which made him regardless of what the captain had said.

This seemed only too probable; but Dick was somehow strangely impressed with the idea that there was great necessity for cautiousness.

Apparently there was nothing either visible or audible to account for this feeling.

At length, however, in a low tone of voice, he cried out:

"This way—this way! Ellen—Ellen! Hist! This way!"

A glad cry from the girl's lips let him know that he had been heard, though Dick was much annoyed at the want of caution which this evinced.

The sound reached also the ears of Mrs. Davis, who felt her exhausted strength suddenly return.

In another moment the dark black shadow of the Druid's Stones was reached.

Over the meeting we shall pass in silence, feeling sure that, knowing so much of all the characters as the reader does, it must be easier to imagine than describe it.

As soon as ever the first demonstrations of joy were over, Dick questioned Ellen.

"Have you had an uninterrupted journey hither" he asked.

"Perfectly so."

"You have seen nothing of the officers?—you have no reason to suppose that any of our foes followed you from London?"

"I am almost certain not."

"How almost?"

"As certain as anyone could be who was not actually informed of the fact."

Dick drew a long breath of relief.

"Why, so far, then, all is well," said Tom King.

"Yes," added Sixteen-String Jack; "let us set about leaving at once."

"In good time. I see no reason for immediate haste; I would fain learn how matters stand in London. Doubtless Old Matthew has sent some message. Tell us," he added, turning to Ellen, "did you not meet with Old Matthew as soon as you were liberated?"

"No But we were accosted by some one who said he was a friend of his, and promised to take us to him."

"And did he so?"

"Yes."

"And he found you a shelter?"

"Yes. We are both most grateful to him, and to you who prompted it."

"Never mind that now," interrupted Dick, hastily. "When you left, what did he tell you?"

"That we were to say that the officers were all uncommonly quiet, and that he did not half like it. He could not make out what this change of tactics meant, and felt much troubled concerning it."

"And was that all?"

"All, save that he had a piece of advice to offer you, which he hoped you would have the good sense not only to listen to but follow—those were his exact words," Ellen added.

"And what was this advice?"

"That you should all leave England at the very earliest moment possible, and not return to it for some time."

"Hurrah for Matthew's advice!" said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Hush—hush!"

"What is it?"

"Nothing, only we ought not to be too noisy. Old Matthew's counsel shall not be disregarded even for a moment. I feel that this complete silence on the part of the officers is a bad sign for us, and as soon as you can get your horses ready we will start."

CHAPTER MLXII

ADVERTS TO THE ENERGETIC PROCEEDINGS OF THE POLICE OFFICERS IN LONDON.

In order that the calamitous events which followed the arrival of the highwaymen at Stonehenge may be fully understood, it will be necessary for us to devote a little space to the occurrences which had been taking place in London—to explain, in fact, that extraordinary lull on the part of the officers of justice which, as Old Matthew and Dick Turpin rightly thought, was no good sign.

In the first place, then, we must mention a singular coincidence.

It will be remembered that when Claude imposed so cleverly upon the credulous squire, he stated something

which he thought probable enough, but without knowing that such a thing had been done.

He passed himself off as an agent from the chief magistrate at Bow Street, and stated that certain high Government officials had sent an urgent communication respecting the many failures which had been made to capture the highwaymen.

Now, oddly enough, this was exactly what had taken place.

The numerous defeats which the police officers had met with, and the no better success which had attended the plan of patrolling the roads by dragoons, were felt to be a scandal and disgrace to the police officials.

The people at large, ever ready to find fault with the ruling powers, were loud in their complaints, and these complaints at length reached the ears of his Majesty's officers of State—or rather, the outcry became so loud, that they could no longer pretend to be ignorant of it.

Accordingly a particular message, of a private and confidential character, was sent to the chief magistrate at Bow Street respecting the matter in question.

The subject of this communication was, that he must make use of every means he could to capture the highwaymen, either dead or alive; and further added, that if this was not done after the elapsion of a reasonable time, he would be dismissed from office.

This was the most unpalatable and alarming part of the missive, but it was smoothed over by the addition that in the event of early success he might look forward to some lasting and substantial recognition of his services.

This hint was enough.

The magistrate felt he must bestir himself, for already he had remained at his post almost long enough to entitle him to a life pension should he be removed from it from any cause; so that dismissal, in his case, would have been excessively aggravating.

Upon receiving the communication the magistrate resolved to lose no time in taking promptly the strictest steps.

A conversation with his chief clerk resulted in an interview with a very singular individual, who rejoiced in the cognomen of Antrobus Skellum.

This man had led for some time a precarious life in making himself generally useful in police business, and in all that he undertook displayed so much sagacity and cunning that it was supposed he would prove the best agent for the capture of the celebrated highwaymen.

Until this moment the chief magistrate had never troubled himself to notice very particularly the exterior appearance of this man; but now, looking at him, he saw that he was a little under-sized fellow with a very wiry frame, and, probably, having not one ounce of superfluous flesh over his whole body.

His eyes were bright and piercing, and the magistrate, who, from his very occupation, was no bad judge of human nature, felt at once that chance had supplied him with the very agent he required, and that if he failed to accomplish his purpose it would be strange indeed.

Skellum's eyes grew brighter than ever when he learned the cause for which he had been summoned before the magistrate.

"If you will only place power enough at my disposal, and give me a decent sum by way of a reward," he said, "I will undertake the capture of them all before a month from the present date."

"What power do you require?"

"As many police officers as I may judge necessary for my purpose, all of whom must be absolutely under my control, and who are to obey all my instructions faithfully and without demur."

"Granted," said the magistrate. "You shall have them. And now for the reward."

"That, your worship, I leave to you."

"Nay—nay: name your terms, and let the matter be settled now and for all."

Skellum paused for a moment in deep reflection, as though weighing his chances of making a good thing of the business in hand.

The magistrate grew impatient.

"Two guineas a week," said Skellum, at length, "for as long as either of us may live. No matter which dies, the payment ceases."

The magistrate stared, or he had not anticipated that a reward would have been asked for in such a shape as this.

He held a whispered conference with his clerk, and took into account Skellum's age and the probable length of time he would live.

Last of all he thought that his pension depended upon this man's success, and that decided him.

He thought he could well afford to pay such a sum out of the amount to which he would be entitled.

"Agreed!" he said.

But Skellum was particular, and required a written memorandum of the agreement, in order that there might be no dispute in the future.

After some demur this was given, and an authority issued for him to pick out of the whole force such men as he thought would be most likely to perform efficiently the services he required of them.

Skellum began without delay.

To detail the whole of his proceedings would be somewhat tedious.

We shall give, instead, a general outline of his actions.

After much earnest deliberation and the abandonment of many plans which had suggested themselves to his quick-witted intellect, he remembered the fact of Mrs. Davis and Ellen being under sentence.

His next step was to ascertain when the term would expire, and found that he had not long to wait.

He then made a further stipulation, which was, that no active measures should be taken by anyone else in London against the highwaymen but himself.

This was the cause of that cessation of hostilities which had first surprised Old Matthew, and afterwards caused him to experience considerable alarm; for Skellum was so careful that he managed to preserve a complete secrecy as to his intentions.

The success he met with in this respect may be best understood and estimated when we say that Old Matthew was kept in the dark respecting his designs.

There was something, too, quite augurative of success in the calmness and patience with which he waited for the ripening of his plans.

It was suggestive of the manner in which a cat will keep on the watch for prey, with the certainty that if it only waits long enough its object will be achieved.

Thus matters went on until the morning when the prisoners were released from durance.

A trusty agent of Mr. Skellum's was placed on the watch at the outer gate.

He would have performed the service himself, only he feared that if he was seen there the cause of his presence would be suspected.

This man performed his part so well as to escape the notice of the person Old Matthew had sent, in pursuance of his agreement with the highwaymen, to meet the prisoners.

With the vigilance of a fox, Skellum's agent watched every movement made, and finally succeeded in tracking them all to the house which Old Matthew had provided for their reception.

This was done, too, without giving rise to the least alarm.

The house was situated in a small back street, and the spy took lodgings at a house immediately opposite, so as to remain perpetually on the watch.

At dusk he was joined by Skellum, who had been made acquainted with his whereabouts.

"You are sure they do not suspect that they have been watched and followed?"

"Quite sure."

Skellum rubbed his hands gleefully.

"All will be well now," he cried, exultantly. "It is nothing but fair and straightforward sailing now. No more is to be done save to keep a close watch upon the movements of those two females, and we shall come up with the whole gang at last."

The spy himself was sanguine of success, and as he had been offered a very considerable reward, he felt quite a warm interest in the affair.

But when a whole week elapsed without either Ellen or Mrs. Davis having gone abroad, doubts began to intrude themselves upon him.

He mentioned them, but Skellum only laughed.

"I am so sure in my own mind that what I have said

will come to pass, that I should have patience enough to remain for a month, or even longer, watching thus.

It was on the very next day after this that something occurred which would have had the effect of strengthening Skellum's convictions had they showed any signs of weakening.

This was that Old Matthew, under cover of the darkness, one night paid them a visit.

Our jovial friend had waited as he thought a sufficient time; and being, as we have said, in entire ignorance with regard to Mr. Skellum and his doings, conceived that he had waited long enough to make it safe for him to pay a visit.

"Keep good watch now," said Skellum, as soon as he was informed of this event—"keep good watch; for, rely upon it, the time is close at hand when the birds will take their flight, and we must be prepared to follow them with all secrecy."

This made the spy more watchful still, for he had the very highest opinion of Skellum's abilities.

But another week elapsed, and then Old Matthew paid another visit.

This was the period at which he told them that it was time for them to start, and gave them such information as would enable them to reach their destination

The quiescence of the officers made him more and more uneasy, and occasioned him to send that message to Dick Turpin which the reader has already heard Ellen deliver.

He was most particular in enjoining secrecy; but, alas! how needlessly—all their efforts were of no avail, and he himself did not believe that the police officers were watching the premises.

Matthew himself provided them with funds for their journey, which, however, he recommended they should make on foot, as they had plenty of time before them, and by this means it would be more difficult to trace them.

Old Matthew then bade them farewell, and took his departure.

Skellum was now on the alert in good earnest.

He took every precaution which astuteness and an anxious desire of success could suggest.

Then he waited, and on the following night, happening to be at his spy's lodgings, he was rewarded by seeing the pair come forth.

With the same skill as before, Ellen and Mrs. Davis were followed; but though both turned continually and looked anxiously behind them, they had not the least suspicion that foes were on their track.

And thus they commenced their long and tedious journey.

In one respect, however, Skellum, with all his adroitness, was at fault.

When he saw them set out on foot, he had jumped to the conclusion that they had not far to journey.

He was not long in discovering his mistake, and wished he could hit upon some means of discovering their destination.

This he was compelled to abandon as impossible, for he gave them both credit for possessing sufficient good sense to preserve this a complete secret.

He again summoned patience to his aid, and of this commodity he possessed a tolerably good stock.

But he continued to lay his plans.

He strengthened his force, and sent to the chief magistrate accounts in which he expressed himself more sanguine than ever of success.

One person alone followed the fugitives, and as he went along he continued to leave accounts of his progress, so that the officers Skellum commanded had no difficulty in keeping in his footsteps, nor was there any necessity for the observance of secrecy on their part.

When he had gone far enough to form an idea of their course, he guessed their destination to be some point on the south-western coast.

"We shall have a good haul," he said, triumphantly, to himself—"we shall nail them just as they are about to make their escape from England. Ha! ha! my annuity is as good as secure now; and, upon my word, I believe that I have earned it."

In this comfortable state of mind he continued the journey, though the slow progress they were compelled to make was excessively tiresome and trying to the patience of the men.

Whenever he fancied he discovered any symptom of disaffection he painted, in glowing colours, the certainty there was that they would achieve success if they continued to remain true to his instructions.

He was afraid to remain far behind in the rear of his spy, for of course he could not tell how soon the fugitives might join the highwaymen, and he was desirous of pouncing upon them at unawares.

Thus matters went on, with little to vary the monotony which characterised them, except that each day their progress became slower and slower.

Mrs. Davis was excessively feeble, and Ellen by no means strong.

The reader will easily believe this when he remembers how much both had latterly gone through.

At last, however, Salisbury Plain was gained, and the knowledge that they were so near the appointed meeting-place reanimated the failing strength of both.

But the open character of the ground now made it most difficult for the spy to perform his duty unseen.

Still, by various stratagems, he continued to keep his prey in sight, until he beheld them enter Stonehenge.

Then he paused, and finally retraced his steps to a little distance.

Here he waited for the arrival of the troop.

"Ha," said Skellum, in whom this intelligence had produced an excellent flow of spirits, "now I have it! This will prove the meeting-place for all the gang, which I know to have been dispersed! If we are careful we shall have them all at one swoop!"

Skellum was amply provided with men, and he set about taking his measures with great rapidity and prudence.

He seemed to grasp at the capabilities of the place at once.

He was most particular to enjoin stealthfulness on the part of his men, who were able to make their way over the soft turf almost unheard.

Having first of all seen them posted round the ruins in a circle, with the men at such distances that they could communicate readily with each other, he proceeded to visit them one by one, and ascertain that their weapons were in perfect order.

He also gave them their instructions one after the other, so that there should be no fear of a misunderstanding.

The course he had decided upon to capture our friends was fearfully well calculated to answer the end in view.

Having placed his men round the ruins as we have described, he told them to be in readiness to advance slowly and steadily, and, as near as possible, all at the same rate of speed.

The consequence of this was that as they thus advanced the circle became less and less, and by consequence the men got closer to each other, until they were ere long shoulder to shoulder.

So silently had all their movements up to this moment taken place that the highwaymen were entirely unaware of their proximity.

The police officers listened.

They heard sounds which convinced them that those they sought were close at hand.

"Now a sudden rush," said Skellum, "and the business will be done—we shall be upon them before they know what is the matter! Be, every one of you, ready to make the best use of your powers during the next few moments! All is ready! Forward—forward! Down with them all! Remember, dead or alive! In either case the reward is just the same! Forward—forward!"

CHAPTER MLXIII.

THE RESULT OF THE POLICE OFFICERS' ATTACK UPON DICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS AT STONEHENGE.

THE reader now will have no difficulty in thoroughly comprehending the tremendous nature of the peril with which the highwaymen and their friends were threatened.

So well generaled had the police officers been that they were all in utter ignorance of their proximity.

One or two causes conspired to produce this result.

In the first place there was the general excitement which took place on the arrival of Ellen and Mrs. Davis, and during which they had omitted to make use of their customary caution.

A gusty wind, too, had blown up, which every moment increased in intensity, and the odd whistling sound which it made in searching a passage through the crevices of the old stones was sufficient to submerge any slight occasional sound.

Moreover, this wind had brought with it some dense masses of black cloud, which went driving across the heavens, threatening every moment to discharge a torrent of rain upon the earth below.

The elements, therefore, went very far to favour the officers.

It was, however, just before the police officers made their onslaught, that Dick Turpin uttered those words which will be found at the close of a preceding chapter.

As there was a unanimous desire to quit the ruins, preparations were instantly commenced for a departure.

Tom Davis, Claude, Jack, and Tom King started off to fetch the horses; and this was the time that they first became aware of their peril.

"Danger—danger!" cried Tom King, at the top of his voice, and preparing himself for an immediate defence. "The foe is upon us! The ruins are alive with officers!"

The concluding words had scarcely passed his lips before the whole troop rushed into the small open space where the conference of our friends had taken place.

Some remained mounted, while others were on foot, so as to be in readiness to attack in every way.

So suddenly did this irruption of the officers take place—so utterly unexpected was any such event, that our friends were completely paralysed by surprise.

Even Dick Turpin, accustomed as he was to sudden surprises of every description, stood as though he had been suddenly converted into stone.

True to the bloodthirsty hint which had been given them, the officers discharged their pistols; but they were too hasty and too excited for the volley to produce as much harm as one would have anticipated from it.

After this all was confusion.

Had there been a disinterested spectator of the scene, he would have been conscious of nothing save the clash of weapons, loud yells, groans, and cries, and the discharge of firearms.

Mingled with all this could be heard the trampling of horses, the rushing of many feet, and general uproar and confusion, while the gloom which prevailed was trebly increased by the smoke from the exploded weapons, which hovered over the combatants like a mimic crowd.

Dick Turpin's surprise, however, lasted only until the first pistol shot fell upon his ear.

That well-known and familiar sound brought him to himself.

In the twinkling of an eye he was ready for action.

But, to his dismay and horror, a wild and awful shriek thrilled from the lips of Maud; and after a frantic effort to save herself by grasping at Dick's apparel, she fell heavily to the ground.

Such an event as this was sure to have one of two effects upon Turpin.

It would either render him motionless or helpless, or else endue him with the rage and vigour of a dozen men.

Fortunately, it was the latter effect which was produced upon him.

In fact, it may be questioned whether he instantly comprehended to the full extent what had happened.

Be it how it may, he bestrode Maud's prostrate body, and, levelling the two pistols which he held full at the forms of the officers who were in the act of rushing upon him, discharged them.

Both bullets told, for, despite his tremendous agitation, Dick's nerves were steady.

Without pausing, he flung the two useless weapons at his foes with the full strength of his arms.

His next act was to stoop and raise Maud.

Supernatural strength seemed to be afforded him, for he lifted her up with as much ease and swiftness as he could have done a little child.

Then, having nothing before him but Maud's peril he made a rush to escape.

But it was scarcely possible he could succeed in getting clear of so many foes.

But fortune favoured him.

Close beside him was his own gallant mare, Black Bess, standing calm and unhurt amid the tumult.

Never had she rendered her owner a greater or more highly-prized service than by being at hand at that juncture.

The rapidity which characterised all Dick's movements now was something marvellous.

In a second, with a continuation of the preternatural strength with which he had been endowed, he placed Maud across the back of Black Bess, and sprang into the saddle behind her himself.

But rapid as he had been, yet the time had been sufficient to enable his foes to be busy; and just when he had accomplished thus much, our hero found his further progress opposed.

But he was then more like a madman than a sane being, and bent only on one thing—namely, a frenzied desire to escape.

He drew his sword, and flashed it round him with so much vigour and with such lightning-like rapidity, that his foes scattered before him like chaff, and shrunk from him as from a demon.

"On, Bess!" he cried. "On—on, old lass! If ever you strove for your master, strive now!"

Black Bess seemed not only to hear his voice, but also to comprehend the purport of the very words her rider uttered.

She reared and plunged as though driven to madness.

Turpin's foes shrank from her iron-bound hoofs.

But the struggle was only for a space of time so brief that we are unable to find a word to characterise it, though to Dick it seemed an age.

With one bound Bess cleared herself from the police officers—another took her beyond the precincts of the ruins.

Never before had she taken such furious leaps.

Nothing could withstand them.

Away—away she flew.

Shots were fired from the rear, but Dick heeded them not.

Other officers spurred their steeds unmercifully—steeds which had been expressly chosen by Skellum for their more than ordinary powers of swiftness and endurance.

On they came, till the earth seemed to shake and resound beneath the furious beat of the iron hoofs.

But of this also Dick was supremely heedless.

He laughed to scorn their puny efforts, for Black Bess was bounding over Salisbury Plain with the swiftness of an antelope which finds itself hard pressed by the huntsmen.

As though utterly unconscious of the double burden which she carried, she kept up that long stretching gallop for which she was so remarkable.

Away—away, until in the distance can be seen the boundary of the huge plain they are traversing with such rapid flight, and until the police officers are far behind.

But yet the gallant animal relaxed not her speed, seeming rather to possess some portion of the frenzy with which her rider's heart and brain were filled.

But we must leave them thus for awhile, and return to the scene of action, where much had taken place to which attention must be given.

We shall have to treat of these occurrences successively; but of course the reader will understand that this is compulsory, though the events themselves occurred simultaneously.

When they made their first sudden dash, the police officers succeeded in seizing four persons, or rather five, for they grasped Claude, but he, by a rapid, ready movement, and by a powerful exertion of his enormous strength, contrived to get free and stand upon the defensive.

The other four were not so fortunate.

These were Tom Davis, his wife, Ellen, and Sixteen-String Jack respectively.

The three first made very little, if any, resistance, and were immediately dragged away, Tom Davis himself having received a pistol shot.

As for Sixteen-String Jack himself, he was thrown into a complete state of paralysis, caused by intense surprise.

Nothing could possibly have astonished him more than

for the officers thus to spring upon them, and for some moments he was literally bereft of motion.

He only stood and stared around him, and, indeed, exhibited all those signs of semi-consciousness which sometimes follow a heavy blow.

He could scarcely believe that his eyes were serving him aright.

When he recovered himself from this state of mental stupor, which in reality had not lasted half so long as he had imagined, he found himself standing calmly with a police officer on each side of him, the vice-like character of whose grasp was far from pleasant.

The officers we in no slight degree amazed by the apathy of their prisoner.

His demeanour was so different to what they had expected that they scarcely knew what to make of it.

The instant he recovered himself, Jack made a sudden effort to release himself.

But it was in vain.

He discovered, first of all, that his wrists had been securely handcuffed behind his back, which made anything like an effectual struggle out of the question.

A dull sensation of aching pain somewhere in the neighbourhood of his ankle joint made him sensible that he had been injured in that quarter.

By the pain, he fancied it must be from a pistol bullet.

Both the officers by whom he was held had their drawn swords in their right hands, and they at once presented their points menacingly at the breast of their prisoner, while they said, in tones which admitted no doubt of their sincerity:

"If you offer any resistance we will make short of the matter by plunging these swords into your heart, for our orders are to take you dead or alive—it matters not which!"

Upon hearing these words, Jack gave himself up for lost.

At any rate, it would have been a mere act of suicide to have offered any further resistance then.

"I surrender," he said calmly. "I cannot help myself."

"Spoken like a sensible man, who knows how to give in handsomely when he is beaten."

To this maxim the highwayman made no comment.

His brow was contracted, and his breath came thick and fast as he gazed upon the scene of carnage going on before him.

But it is to be hoped that this resignation to his fate was seeming only, and that the expression of his unconditional surrender was only made in the hope that his captors might be to some extent thrown off their guard by it, and so afford him a chance of making a rush for freedom.

But in good earnest, Sixteen-String Jack's heart was very, very heavy.

For a long time he had been dimly conscious of what was going to happen, and this had manifested itself in the strong desire which he had shown to leave England with all haste.

Now this disastrous attack seemed to have crushed him utterly, and he hung his chin upon his breast with an air of dejection that was painful indeed to witness.

But aid was near, although he knew it not.

Tom King and Claude Duval had been the most self-possessed of the whole group, and had been the first to make a decided stand against the multitude of foes who pounced upon them.

Back to back they placed themselves, overcoming all opposition, and escaping by a miracle any serious injury from that storm of bullets that hailed around them, though several slight injuries had been received by both

It was in vain—nay, it was madness for them to combat with so many.

But they had the satisfaction of witnessing Dick's escape, and they both hoped that Maud's hurt was not a severe one.

The real object of their attention was Sixteen-String Jack.

Towards him they fought their way

They wondered much to see him standing still so quietly, and still more that he had suffered himself to be made prisoner so easily.

Their intention was to rescue him.

No sooner did Jack see them, and guess their intention, than he cried, in a loud voice:

"Desist--desist! Your attempt is madness! Leave me!"

"Never!" said Claude; and as he pronounced the word, he cut down the officer who had opposed himself to him.

"I tell you it is more than madness!" vociferated Sixteen-String Jack, in return. "You cannot contend successfully with so many; you must be defeated! Leave me—you cannot help me!"

"Never!" cried Tom King, fighting desperately.

"Then you are giving yourselves up and doing me no service. If you escape and join the captain, all will be well."

"Never, without you, Jack!"

"But do you not understand," cried Jack, almost frantic, "that while you are at liberty you have the chance of assisting me? If you are captured or slain you will require assistance yourselves; and where will you get it? Not another word, I say! Fly—fly!"

"Jack is right," said Tom King, in a tone of vexation. "We can help him best by deserting him."

"A bold charge, then!" cried Claude. On—on! We must have our horses!"

But the officers, now under the generalship of Skellum, had formed themselves into a collected force.

They were prepared to bear down upon the remainder of the band.

But Claude and Tom both felt that they were fighting not only for themselves, but for their companions, and this knowledge impelled them to enact prodigies of valour.

As the last words were pronounced they made a sudden dash and managed to get clear of those of their foes who immediately surrounded them.

Then, summoning up all their powers of speed, they dashed among the ruins, the intricacies of which enabled them to baffle their enemies considerably.

Before them were some horses belonging to those police officers who had dismounted.

Panting and breathless, the two friends reached them.

They flung away their swords, for the weapons now would only have been an incumbrance.

Then, amid another shower of bullets, they sprang into the saddles.

"Away—away!" said Tom King, faintly. "We must part, and that will distract them. Away—away!"

The last word was scarcely audible, for Tom had been badly hit by one of the bullets in the last discharge of firearms.

CHAPTER MLXIV.

DESCRIBES THE PRECAUTIONS SKELLUM TOOK TO CONVEY HIS PRISONERS IN SAFETY TO NEWGATE.

We feel it necessary to remind the reader that all which we have described at such length actually occurred in an extraordinarily brief space of time.

So brief, indeed—so rapid had been all the varied events, that from the moment when the officers first dashed in up to the time when Claude and Tom King got away, certainly not more than three minutes had elapsed.

To those we have just mentioned the lapse of time by no means appeared to be so great.

The whole seemed to them like an electric shock.

As the whole party of the highwaymen and their friends had been thus suddenly separated, it will be necessary for us to describe sequentially what befel them.

Assuming, then, that for the present at any rate, Sixteen-String Jack's position to be the most critical, we will first of all give our consideration to him.

When he saw Claude and Tom also succeed in liberating themselves, he was overcome with joy.

Despite the terrible nature of his situation, he by no means looked upon it with the same sensations as he had done a moment or so previously.

He was quite certain that no effort upon their part would be wanting to set him once again at liberty.

This conviction caused him to resign himself still more calmly into the hands of his captors.

Skellum, however, was furious at the slight amount of success he had met with.



[DICK TURPIN AT MAUD'S DEATH-BED.]

He could not understand it.

Still, one would have thought that he might have experienced some amount of contentment and satisfaction at having made four prisoners, one of whom was no other than the notorious Sixteen-String Jack, who had hitherto so skilfully contrived to elude capture.

For all that, though, Mr. Skellum was bitterly disappointed.

He had made sure of capturing the whole of the band, and now his chances of doing so seemed somewhat doubtful.

Like a prudent and sensible man, however, he elected to remain and take great care of those prisoners he had made, and left to his subordinates the task of keeping up the pursuit.

It was not long before, owing to the darkness of the evening, both pursuers and pursued were quickly lost to sight.

When this was the case he turned round to address those of the men who remained with him, and whose numbers anyone would have thought were more than sufficient to prevent any possibility of escape or rescue.

"Now, then," he cried, in savage tones, "look to all being made right and secure, and without any more delay we will turn our faces Londonward.

He drew near to Sixteen-String Jack as he spoke, for of course he was his most important prisoner.

"It shall be a short shrift for you, my buck!" he said to Jack, glaring at him horribly with his squinting eyes. "You may think that you will give me the slip as you have done others who have had you in custody; but if you do," he added, with a horrible imprecation, "I'll forgive you!"

There was something about this man's manner more revengeful and malevolent than Jack had ever experienced.

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But he affected to take no notice of what had just been said, behaving as though he thought the words had been addressed to anyone rather than himself.

This, as he quite anticipated, made Skellum more savage than ever.

But just at this moment an officer came behind him and touched him on the shoulder.

Skellum turned round quickly.

"Well, what is it?" he said, sharply.

"Beg pardon, sir, but——"

"Come, out with it!"

"I wanted to know whether you had decided on any particular plan for carrying your prisoners to London?"

Skellum remained silent.

In good truth he had not once thought of what had just been mentioned, though he did not care about acknowledging so much to his subordinate.

Nevertheless, in a subdued tone, he asked:

"Am I wrong in thinking, Jenkins, that you have some particular plan to propose?"

"Well, sir, I——"

"Have you not thought of something which you deem will be worthy of being put in practice? If so, speak—don't be afraid."

"Well, Mr. Skellum, I had been thinking that as two of our prisoners happened to be women it would be necessary to find out some way of taking them safely."

"Very good; and how do you propose to do it?"

"Why, you must remember that there is a farm-house not very many miles from here."

Well?"

"I thought if we went there we might be able to borrow some kind of a covered vehicle in which we could place them all, and to which we could harness six or eight horses. We should be able to keep good guard round, and prevent anyone from getting out of it; and it strikes me that the prisoners would be carried to London much sooner."

Mr. Skellum paused to consider.

"Yours is not a very bad plan, and something of the sort must be adopted."

"Yes, sir."

"But I can propose an amendment which I believe will be an improvement."

The officer looked expectant.

"It can't be many miles to Salisbury, can it?"

"It can't; though I don't justly know how far it may be."

"Well, we will, in the first place, make our way there, and, having arrived, we'll engage the stage-coach."

"Engage the stage-coach!" echoed the officer, in some surprise.

"Yes, we can easily do so. That, you will see, is a much better vehicle for rapid travelling than anything on wheels that we could hope to find at a farm-house."

"Besides, the whole of you could take it in turns to ride on and in the coach along with the prisoners, which would rest you from the fatigues of riding continually."

"Very true, sir, so it would."

"Then let it be done. We can continue to keep the prisoners secure until then."

"And I suppose you would wish some one sent on to Salisbury to make the necessary arrangements?"

"Yes; and now I think of it, that service cannot be performed better by anyone than yourself."

The officer bowed low to this compliment, as he said:

"Then, with your permission, Mr. Skellum, I will start at once."

"Yes, yes—the sooner the better. I will see to the rest."

The officer departed, mounted his horse, and was soon galloping to his destination.

Although this dialogue had taken place within a few paces of where Sixteen-String Jack stood, yet the speakers had been careful to carry it on in a tone so low that he was unable to overhear many consecutive words of it.

He was not able to catch sufficient to enable him to comprehend their intentions.

A scene of considerable animation now ensued.

Without any exception, the police officers were most solicitous to preserve the prisoners they had made, and turned all their attention to this end.

By the special direction of Skellum, Sixteen-String Jack was accommodated with several yards of strong rope, which the officers had brought with them for the purpose of securing their prisoners.

This was bound round him in many directions, and knotted everywhere with so much tightness that it was only by enduring much pain that he managed to move even a single limb.

Tom Davis was also strongly bound, he being considered a most desperate character.

As for Mrs. Davis, her state of bodily feebleness was too extreme for any fears to be apprehended on her account. Still, in spite of the remonstrance of Ellen and Sixteen-String Jack, her hands were tightly tied behind her.

Ellen herself was even more carefully secured.

The whole were then mounted, and at an easy rate the whole procession started for Salisbury.

Little occurred upon the route, for the darkness was great and the loneliness extreme.

Sixteen-String Jack strove to pierce the gloom, and listened for any sound which might betoken the contiguity of his comrades, but in vain.

Bound as he was, and so closely surrounded by resolute, well-armed men, whose sole care was to look sharp after him, of course Sixteen-String Jack had no chance—nay, not even the ghost of a chance—of making his escape.

Owing to the difficulties with which they were beset, it was not until day had fairly begun that they rode into the ancient city of Salisbury.

The intelligence of their anticipated arrival had been noised abroad, for the officer had made no secret of the matter.

The consequence was that a large concourse of people were assembled outside the city, all of whom were filled with curiosity to see the notorious highwayman.

When Jack first caught sight of them his spirits rose, for the thought occurred to him that their presence might be owing to the exertions of his associates.

But a moment's reflection, as well as the demeanour of the vast multitude, convinced him of his error.

But he determined not to allow any trace of his vexation to be manifest; and so, although it cost him a great effort, he held up his head and looked calmly around him.

All the way to the inn at which the stage-coach was standing the way was lined with people, crushing, crowding, and jostling with each other, and only kept clear of the advancing cavalcade with much difficulty.

At length, however, the inn was reached in safety.

It now became necessary for the police officers to arrange themselves in a semicircle in order to keep off the people.

A little delay now took place, for the wants of the horses were attended to, and the officers themselves refreshed, for they were all hungry and thirsty.

Refreshments were offered also to all the prisoners, who, however, declined to receive anything.

Mr. Skellum's impatience to reach London was too great to allow any unnecessary lingering, and ere long all was in readiness for a start.

One of the best horses was then picked out, and an officer selected to ride him.

This man was to gallop on in advance, and give notice of their coming, making arrangements for frequent relays of horses, so that no unnecessary delay might take place.

Sixteen-String Jack was then lifted into the stage-coach, for his bonds were of such a character as to render him incapable of entering by himself.

His three fellow-prisoners were then pushed in after him, and two police-officers followed.

Both were strong, resolute, well-armed men, and were seated at the opposite doors, so as to give an immediate alarm in case of any movement on the part of the prisoners.

Other officers would have entered had there been room, but the interior of the stage-coach was only constructed to carry six passengers

The doors were then secured by means of chains and padlocks, and as many well-armed police officers as could be accommodated then took seats upon the roof.

Thus freighted, the stage-coach moved off amidst the tumultuous cries of the assembled people.

Mr. Skellum himself sat next to the driver, and his queer-looking little figure and unprepossessing countenance called forth abundance of remark.

No less than six horses were harnessed to the coach, and as they were all of the best quality there could be little doubt but that they would be able to make good speed upon their journey.

The remainder of the police, mounted upon their horses, formed a kind of guard or escort round the stage-coach, which they were careful to surround completely.

It was in this fashion that Sixteen-String Jack quitted the good city of Salisbury and began his journey towards London.

Such skilful arrangements as these were well calculated to prevent all possibility of the occurrence of any escape whatever, either through the astuteness of the prisoners themselves or through any attack which might be made upon them by their friends in the course of the journey they were about to take.

That such precautions were not unnecessary the reader must be aware, since nothing was more likely than that Sixteen-String Jack's companions would attempt to rescue him.

But Jack's own heart sank within him when he witnessed the preparations made for his safe detention, and a deeper gloom than ever settled upon his spirits.

As for Tom Davis, he did nothing but reproach himself over and over again, for he persisted in attributing the calamity which had occurred to his presence among the highwaymen.

"But for me," he groaned out repeatedly, "this would never have happened. Oh, that I should live to see such a day as this!"

"You might have expected that it would come sooner or later, Tom. Let us hear no more of your reproaches, they are unjust."

But Davis would not listen to this.

As for Mrs. Davis, she was too much overcome, both bodily and mentally, to be able to take cognisance of what was being said. She seemed, indeed, to be unconscious of everything that was going on around her.

No tears filled her eyes—no sobs broke from her breast. She sat stony cold and apathetic, exhibiting that form of intense grief which is most painful to look upon.

As for Ellen, she wept incessantly.

These tears would not allow her to speak, but her self-reproaches were none the less audible to herself.

She felt strongly, although no one had dropped a hint to that effect, that she, and she alone, was to blame for what had happened.

It was as clear to her as noonday that the police officers had followed in her footsteps in consequence of not taking sufficient precautions for secrecy, although the necessity of doing so had been so strongly impressed upon her by Old Matthew.

She could not help thinking of all this, and yet she felt that if she continued to do so the harrowing nature of her reflections would drive her mad.

She expected that Sixteen-String Jack would overwhelm her with the bitterest reproaches for the evil which she had brought down upon him.

But our old friend never thought of uttering one word.

On the way his thoughts were about equally divided between wondering what had become of his companions and how they had fared in their flight, and endeavouring to devise some means of escape.

The latter was a difficult enough task, and one that was more than sufficient to occupy all his thoughts.

He trusted that the extraordinary vigilance of his captors would abate after a reasonable time had elapsed, but he found, to his disappointment, that the nearer they drew to the metropolis the more did their watchfulness increase.

CHAPTER MLXV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND HIS COMPANIONS ARRIVE AT BOW STREET POLICE-STATION.

"My eyes and limbs! What is coming now? Blow me up as tight as a bladder if ever I see such a thing afore! Here missus—missus, just come here, will you, and have a look! There's a treat in store for your eyesight—spificate me, if there isn't!"

These very extraordinary ejaculatory phrases were given utterance to disjointedly by the keeper of the tollgate at Tyburn.

He had just put his head outside of the door of his little wooden house, and, happening to look along the road to the westward, had caught sight of an extraordinary spectacle.

The latter part of his speech was addressed to his better half, who, having been on the late turn the preceding night, had not yet left her morning couch.

As may be supposed, the violent outcry had the effect of arousing her, and, actuated by that spirit of curiosity which is so prevailing a characteristic of the sex, sprang from the bed, and in a state of extraordinary dishabille, and without hesitation, projected her head through the window.

She then remained transfixed with astonishment, and became wholly unconscious of the extraordinary figure that she made.

The object which had attracted their attention so forcibly was the stage-coach, upon the top of which the police officers were clustered so thickly, and which was so completely surrounded by others on horseback.

"Good lauk!" ejaculated the tollkeeper's wife, at length "What can be the matter?"

"Blame me if I know!"

"It must be the Young Pretender caught at last! Serves him right! I hope he is."

"Don't be a fool, you idiot! Go and stick your stupid old head under the bed-clothes again! The Young Pretender! Bah! The idea of such a thing!"

"I hope as how it is the wagabone!" continued the fair lady, apparently unmoved by the epithets addressed to her by her husband. "It's how he ought to be, and all who think with him—them's my sentiments, and I don't care who knows them!"

For the behoof of those who may not quite understand what was meant by this sudden outbreak of mutual wrath we may as well simply state that the tollkeeper and his wife happened to belong to precisely the opposite parties of politics—he being a blind Jacobite, and she a staunch Hanoverian—so that, in consequence, many were the fiery encounters which occurred every day, every topic somehow leading to this irreconcilable one.

Probably these little lively discussions served to vary what must be the awful monotony of keeping a tollgate.

On the present occasion, however, the tollman himself was so much surprised at what he saw that he abandoned politics entirely.

"It's a d—d sight more likely to be Dick Turpin!" he muttered, as the cavalcade came nearer.

The words reached the ears of his yoke-fellow.

"Dick Turpin caught at last! I hope he is! Serves him right! So he ought to be—and all such villains!"

"Hold your row, will you! Don't I tell you that whenever you open your mouth you make a confounded fool of yourself!"

"That's as you may think; but when it comes to fooling——"

"Hold your row, I say! Can't you see they are close to the gate?"

Expectancy and curiosity now made the woman silent.

All her faculties were concentrated in gazing upon the spectacle before her.

The desire to know who it could be thus strongly and sedulously guarded now reached burning point.

A single horseman—a police officer—rode about two hundred yards in advance of the rest of the procession.

He was the one who had undertaken to arrange the relays upon the road; but as the place where the last change had been effected was passed he had fallen back upon the main body, and only rode forward now in order that there should be no delay at the toll-gate.

"Open—open!" he cried, as he came nearer. "Be quick, I command you, in the name of the King!"

"Will you settle for the toll?" was the pertinent question asked by the pikeman, as he fumbled in his pocket for the key.

"Yes, yes—of course I will."

"That's enough, then."

The gate was unlocked and opened.

During this operation the tollman said.

"May I make so bold as to inquire who it is [illegible]

you have so strongly guarded yonder? Is it Dick Turpin?"

"No—but one of his associates."

"Who?"

"Why, Sixteen-String Jack, to be sure, and the people that used to keep a ken for them."

"Who are they?"

"Stand aside, unless you wish to be trodden down under the horses' feet!"

The man shrank back quickly, and at the same moment the stage-coach and its escort dashed at a tremendous pace through the gate.

It was gone almost like a flash, and left nothing but a cloud of blinding, choking dust behind it.

"Fuff—puff—a-chew—a-tish-o! The devil!" sneezed the tollkeeper, whose lungs were full. "Tuppence a-piece for the horses, and thruppence for the coach."

The demand was settled, and the police officer galloped after his companions.

The hour was comparatively speaking an early one, and but few people as yet appeared in the streets of the metropolis, for the shops were closed.

Yet those who were abroad turned without exception a glance of strong curiosity upon the throng as it dashed by, and many were the speculations indulged in as to the meaning of what they saw.

Few guessed rightly.

On rolled the *cortege* without interruption or delay until Bow Street was reached.

With a dash and a clatter as had not been heard there for many a day they pulled up the panting horses in front of the entrance to the station.

A scene of tremendous and indescribable noise and confusion ensued, which was in part caused by the mounted officers endeavouring to surround the stage-coach still more closely, and by those who were on the top descending hastily, so as to be in readiness for action, should it be requisite.

With that facility and rapidity for which London is famous, a crowd of persons assembled in the street, and every fleeting second witnessed some accession to their number.

The officials in the police-station were all on the alert, and the superintendent soon made his appearance.

All were alike impatient and anxious to know what important prisoner it was that had arrived.

Under the directions of Mr. Skellum, who was of course puffed up by importance, the officers on foot were drawn up so as to form a kind of lane reaching from the door of the coach to the door of the police station.

All was expectation and suspense.

Ellen was the first lifted out of the coach.

With downcast head and streaming eyes she hurried as rapidly as she could through the living thoroughfare, and felt relieved when she passed beneath the dark and gloomy portal.

Two police officers conducted her to the charge-room.

Mrs. Davis was lifted out next.

The journey had told most fearfully upon her.

She was more like one dead than alive, and had so far lost all use of her limbs that she had to be carried by her guards, who deposited her upon the rude bench just inside the charge-room—so called, because it was here that prisoners were in the first instance taken, in order that the charge against them may be entered by the inspector.

Tom Davis followed.

Poor fellow! he strove to keep up as brave an appearance as he could for the sake of those with whom he was connected, but he succeeded very indifferently indeed.

Sixteen-String Jack was the last to leave the vehicle.

The public curiosity had now reached its highest point, for it had become known who he was, and all present were equally anxious to catch a glimpse of the bold highwayman of whom they had heard so much.

"He looks helpless enough now, anyway," remarked one of the bystanders.

The remark was true enough.

Jack was helpless.

He had to be lifted out by two strong men.

The cord with which he had been so tightly bound had never once been moved or slackened since the commencement of the journey.

The consequence was that all his muscles had stiffened, until he had lost all power over them.

It was a despairing, dejected glance which our poor friend cast around him as he was quickly hurried past his foes.

He scarcely dared to hope that he should catch sight of any friendly, well-known countenance; but that he had, almost unknown to himself as it were, indulged in such a hope was evidenced by the disappointment he felt upon being carried into the narrow passage without having done so.

Owing to the restrictions of the circulation, he was icy cold, and his heart only beat with the feeblest of pulsations.

So serious was his condition deemed that his bonds were at once released and his limbs chafed before a roaring fire, the warmth of which seemed to have the effect of infusing some little vigour into the scarcely animate frame of Mrs. Davis.

Jack soon felt the better for this treatment, and by the time the operation was over the inspector made his appearance at the little wooden desk by the window, and prepared to enter the charges in the book before him.

This matter of form was speedily gone through.

The least important of the prisoners—that is to say, Tom Davis, his wife, and Ellen—were dealt with first.

The charge against the first was, of course, his having escaped from custody after a previous conviction.

The two next, merely for having been found in the company of the highwaymen.

Then it came to Jack's turn.

"What charge shall I enter against him?" the inspector asked.

"Why, highway robbery, of course."

"But what one in particular?"

"That cannot be told at present. It will be enough for you to enter the general charge, as the rewards have been out for him so long."

"I don't want to be told my duty by such as you!" growled the inspector.

"It is your fault that I spoke at all," retorted the officer.

"Hold your row a minute! Now sign this."

The book was pushed towards him, and then he wrote his name.

This brought the preliminary business to a conclusion.

The next step was to remove the prisoners to some place of security until the time came for opening the Court.

Some little discussion arose upon this point.

The usual course was to remove all prisoners to a large underground cell, where they were all herded together like so many cattle.

But it was considered by Mr. Skellum that this would not suit any of his prisoners, who were required to be looked after with much more than ordinary care.

Finally, it was settled that Ellen and Mrs. Davis should be confined together in one cell, the state of the latter being such as to require attention.

Tom Davis was accommodated with a separate chamber, in which also sat two well-armed police officers, who were instructed to watch closely his every movement, and raise an immediate alarm if the least reason arose for doing so.

Sixteen-String Jack was also conveyed to a separate cell, but his bonds were not removed.

Four officers shared the cell with him; and Mr. Skellum's dread of Sixteen-String Jack's power of escape was so great that he also deputed four more men to watch on the outside of the double-locked and strongly-barred door.

After that he felt tolerably assured of their safety; but he could by no means make up his mind to quit the station, though he was so worn out with fatigue as scarcely to be able to rise after having once sat down.

But it was necessary that some specific charge should be preferred against Sixteen-String Jack when he was brought before the magistrate.

There was no time to lose in seeing to this.

The aid of the inspector was called in.

"We must have something sure and undisputed," Skellum said to him.

"What is it to be?"

"The difficulty is, I suppose, to make a selection?"

"Just so."

"Then consider it over'

"I have it."

"Well?"

"Do you remember that case that occurred not long since, when this Sixteen-String Jack, in conjunction with Claude Duval, robbed a couple of bailiffs?"

"Yes—yes!"

"That will be the case, then."

"Right."

"But can you find these men?"

"Yes, without difficulty."

"And have them in readiness to appear when the Court opens?"

"Yes—then or very soon after it."

"Then let me request you to see to it at once."

The inspector promised that no time should be lost; and Mr. Skellum, in despite of his anxiety and determination to be wakeful, dozed off to sleep at the top of the steps which led to the cells in which his prisoners were confined.

He was aroused by the return of the inspector.

"All right," he said. "They will be here directly. The case is as clear as daylight, and will serve well enough for the first and principal count on the indictment at the sessions. He is sure to be convicted."

"I should think so," said Skellum, stretching himself wearily. "If I could have my way, such fellows should be strung up as soon as captured. It would be the saving of a world of trouble and expense."

"You are right. If such was the law of the land there would be fewer such freebooters abroad, I'm thinking."

"What's the time?"

"Close on ten. But I've been thinking, Mr. Skellum——"

"What?"

"Why, that since they have been here you have given the prisoners no breakfast. Who knows, they might be *owdacious* enough to complain about it?"

"They might; but I will just pop down and see myself how they are getting on, and I will ask them at the same time whether they would like to take anything. I shall feel better satisfied when I have seen with my own eyes that they are all right."

Accordingly Skellum, with some difficulty, arose, for all his limbs felt stiffer than ever.

Down he went to the cells, where he found everything just as he could wish it.

His question as to whether any refreshment was wanted was answered negatively in all cases.

With a feeling of tolerable satisfaction, nevertheless, Skellum made his way to the upper air again.

He then found that the magistrate had arrived, and the Court had opened.

As was usually the case, the long list of "night charges," as they are termed, had to be disposed of.

An hour was generally thus occupied, for the chief magistrate made very short work of the delinquents.

By that time Skellum hoped the two bailiffs would arrive, because he wished to have a little confidential talk with them before they stood up in the witness-box.

In this hope he was not disappointed.

The inspector soon after brought the two men before him, and a long whispered conference ensued.

CHAPTER MLXVI.

THE MAGISTRATE DULY COMMITS SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND HIS COMPANIONS TO TAKE THEIR TRIAL AT THE NEXT OLD BAILEY SESSIONS.

THE intelligence that Sixteen-String Jack, the notorious highwayman, had been brought in a coach, a strongly-bound prisoner, to Bow Street police-station flew with lightning-like rapidity all over London.

No one who heard the news was uninterested in it, and for that morning at least our old friend formed the general topic of conversation.

For one anxious to be known among men, this would doubtless have been very delightful; but Jack thought nothing at all of the matter.

Indeed, he would much rather that the public tongue had been otherwise employed.

Upon no one, however, did the intelligence produce so deep an effect as on Old Matthew.

The shock first of all deprived him of all sense and motion.

But with returning consciousness came absolute incredulity.

He could not bring himself to believe that such an awful catastrophe had taken place.

But from everyone he heard some confirmation of the disastrous news.

As we have said, all lips were employed upon the subject.

Many and various were the details of the affair; but about the main fact there was universal consistency.

Old Matthew resolved to set out and learn the truth.

He could bear to hear the worst much better than he could bring himself to remain in inaction and doubtful suspense.

The distance to the Bow Street police-station was not great, so that in a few moments after leaving his own door he reached his destination.

The great concourse of people standing in the roadway afforded corroborative evidence that something very unusual had occurred.

Mingling with the throng Matthew listened to the remarks made by those around him.

These served to confirm the worst.

The most general account was that Sixteen-String Jack and several of his accomplices were fast prisoners, and that his comrades had been mortally wounded, and by this time were doubtless on their way to London under the protection of a strong escort.

Old Matthew groaned inwardly.

By what he heard, he soon came to find how it was that the officers had got upon the highwaymen's track, and he bitterly blamed himself for his own want of caution.

He saw plainly enough that he, and he alone, had been the primary cause of the disaster.

Had he but made use of a greater amount of care and precaution, most probably nothing of the kind would have happened—at any rate, the severity of the misfortune would have been much mitigated.

His self-reproaches were of the keenest character.

But, as the reader knows full well, Old Matthew was not the man to dwell idly upon any grievance, no matter how serious the character of it might be.

Accordingly, before many minutes had elapsed, he set himself to work to think what would be the best thing to be done upon the present emergency.

He had the strongest wish to aid Sixteen-String Jack and those who were with him; but the question was, how should he accomplish it?

After much anxious deliberation he could think of nothing better than to engage a lawyer to watch the case at the police court.

For this there was no time to lose, as the hour for commencing business in the court was close at hand.

With some difficulty, then, Old Matthew disengaged himself from the dense mass of people by whom he was surrounded, and walked meditatively away.

"I am afraid it will be quite a useless thing," he said, to himself. "His commitment is sure to follow—not the eloquence and subtlety of all the lawyers in the land can prevent it. Still, for all that, if Jack finds some one there, it will serve as a reminder to him that he is by no means forgotten by his friends."

The last consideration had the effect of fixing his determination in his mind, and with a firmer and more rapid step he made his way towards Lyon's Inn.

Passing under the gloomy archway, he directed his course towards a tall, dingy-looking house situated in one corner of the quadrangle.

"I know not whether I shall find him here so early," muttered Matthew, as he ascended a dark and narrow flight of stairs; "and yet, I suppose, like plenty more, he sleeps at his chambers."

The portly landlord had to pause more than once in

his ascent of the stairs; but at length he paused before a door at the summit of the topmost flight.

He had to knock repeatedly before any notice was taken of his presence, and then the door was opened by a young man in a very alarming condition of undress.

He seemed astonished when he beheld his visitor; but after a momentary hesitation he invited him to enter.

Old Matthew obeyed.

It needed but one glance round the apartment into which he had just penetrated to afford satisfactory evidence that the inmate of it was by no means well off in worldly goods and chattels.

Indeed, the aspect of poverty was so apparent as to send a chill through Old Matthew's heart.

"You look surprised to see me, Mr. Godfrey," the landlord began; "but you told me once, when sitting in my bar-parlour, that you should look upon anyone who gave you a little legal employment as a benefactor, and so——"

"And so my warm-hearted friend," said the young man addressed, his thin and wasted face lighted up the while with a feeble smile—"and so you have been getting into trouble of some sort merely in order to—to——"

"No, my young friend, you mistake; but some persons in whom I happen to feel a very warm interest are at this moment in much distress and danger, and I have come to you, thinking you might be able to help them out of it."

"Well—well," said the young lawyer, with greater huskiness of manner observable than before, "I will do my best. But let me know in what precise circumstances your friends stand."

Old Matthew, then, with great freedom, told him just what had happened, and requested him to watch the case on behalf of the prisoners when they were taken before the magistrate.

But the young lawyer shook his head.

"You don't feel inclined to mix yourself up in the business, then?" said Matthew, rising from the rickety chair on which he had been seated. "I should not have thought," he added, as he glanced around at the bare walls, "that you would have been so scrupulous."

"Nay, nay—do not be offended, Mr. Gale. You are too hasty. You did not understand me."

Old Matthew stopped at once.

"I mean that I can do nothing that will be of service to these people. The public and legal feeling is very strong against them, and you may depend every effort will be tried to make an example of them."

"I know all that; but still it would be better that they should not be altogether undefended, and if you are willing to undertake the case I myself will pay you liberally for your trouble."

The lawyer hesitated.

He felt that, so far as his future prospects were concerned, it would be by no means wise to mix himself up in so questionable a transaction as this.

But he had been waiting months and months in hunger and poverty for business of some sort to be brought to him; but none had come.

At the present moment he had all but reached the end of his resources.

If he threw this chance away it might be long indeed before he had another.

This consideration decided him.

He held out his hand to Old Matthew.

"Depend upon it," he said, "I will do my best, though I am afraid that when it is done you will think it but little."

"Make haste, and apparel yourself, then. I will wait here for you, and we will both walk to Bow Street together."

"As you please."

"I want you to procure me admission to the court," pursued Matthew; "and you may take my word for it that it will be no easy matter to-day."

"I can manage it, nevertheless, I daresay," was the response. "Sit down a moment. I will be with you almost immediately."

He passed into an adjoining room as he spoke.

But our old friend was too much agitated to be able to sit down quietly.

During the absence of the young man he walked about uneasily.

Fortunately, he was not long kept in suspense.

Mr. Godfrey appeared, and without further pause they descended into the street.

At a brisk pace they walked to the police-court; and such good use had Old Matthew made of his time that they reached it just as the proceedings were about to commence.

For the young lawyer to gain admittance was an easy enough matter, and a small gratuity slipped into the palm of the stern guardian at the door procured admittance for Old Matthew also, who was also so lucky as to get a seat among the lawyers.

Just as he sat down a side door was opened and the magistrate made his appearance.

His clerk was already seated at the little table below him, and immediately upon the appearance of his superior he stood up and whispered something which seemed of a very satisfactory nature, for the magistrate, whose face had been frowning and sullen, now smiled and rubbed his hands together briskly, as if much pleased.

The reader will guess that the communication was concerning Sixteen-String Jack and his associates.

The Court was now opened in due form, and the ordinary business of the day commenced.

Old Matthew thought there would never be an end to the tedious night charges; but at length the termination of his impatience was reached, for the last case was dismissed.

There was then an immediate stir and commotion in the little Court, as though all were preparing to listen with greater attention to what was about to follow next.

Matthew was most anxious and expectant, for he did not know who would be the first to be brought forward.

But his incertitude upon this point was quickly put an end to by the ushering of Mrs. Davis and Ellen into the dock.

The former, being quite unable to stand, was accommodated with a chair.

Ellen buried her face in her hands and sobbed bitterly.

"Who are these people?" asked the magistrate, in an under tone.

"Accomplices," whispered the clerk, in reply, yet loud enough to be heard almost all over the Court.

Then, rising to his feet, with a paper before him, he said:

"Prisoners at the bar, you are charged with aiding, abetting, and comforting several of the most notorious desperadoes in his Majesty's dominions, which is felony. Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

Mrs. Davis was too far gone to pay attention to what was going on around her.

Ellen's voice was choked by her sobs and tears.

The magistrate's clerk repeated his question.

"Does anyone appear on behalf of these people?" inquired the magistrate.

"I do," replied Mr. Godfrey, rising immediately.

This had the effect of calling the attention of the prisoners to him.

Both at the same time saw Old Matthew, who nodded his head rapidly, as though to intimate that all was right.

His presence wonderfully composed both.

Mr. Godfrey came close to the dock, and, leaning over, whispered:

"Say, 'Not guilty,' both of you, as loud as you can, and leave the rest to me."

They nodded in acquiescence, and obeyed.

Mr. Skellum now placed himself in the witness-box.

He glanced around the court, and particularly at the magistrate, with a very self-satisfied air.

"Do you appear to give evidence against the prisoners?" asked the clerk.

"I do."

"What is your name?"

"Antrobus Skellum."

"And profession?"

"A—a—a—officer of police."

"What have you to depose?" inquired the magistrate, seeing that his spy was somewhat embarrassed by the last question.

"Your worship," he said, "on the eleventh of the present month I captured the two prisoners at Stonehenge. They were then in company with Dick Turpin and his notorious companions, and, from the way in which we found them all conferring together, I have no doubt they were planning some fresh and daring robbery."

"They have both been in custody before upon the same charge, I think?"

"They have. It is now only about a month since their liberation. They were let off the first time with an easy sentence."

"That, then, is the charge?"

"It is."

Another police officer was then called, who corroborated Skellum's testimony, and the magistrate said:

"Prisoners at the bar, what have you to say in your own defence?"

"Your worship," said Mr. Godfrey, rising quickly to his feet, "will, I presume, commit the prisoners for trial?"

"Sir——"

"I say your worship will, I presume——"

"I allow no one to presume in this Court."

"But——"

"Let me have none of your buts or barrels either!"

"Really, your worship, you will excuse me saying that this exhibition of petulance is very undignified and very unworthy of you."

The justice was unable to speak from passion, so Mr. Godfrey took advantage of his silence to say:

"I am advised to say that the prisoners will reserve their defence."

"Very good; then they stand committed to take their trial, and bail will not be taken; and if you or any other young jackanapes attempt to dictate to me I will have you committed for contempt of Court."

Mr. Godfrey sat down, very wisely taking no notice of what had just been said.

Tom Davis was next placed in the dock.

His eyes wandered round the Court as though in search of some one, and presently he saw Old Matthew, who again endeavoured to show that all was well.

"Prisoner at the bar," said the clerk, reading from his paper, "you stand charged with feloniously aiding, abetting, and comforting several desperate offenders against the law, to wit, Dick Turpin and others; and also with obstructing the officers in the discharge of their duty; and still further with having escaped from custody while on your way to a penal settlement to which you had been sentenced for the remaining term of your natural life. Prisoner at the bar, do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

In obedience to a whisper from Mr. Godfrey, a plea of not guilty was returned.

Mr. Skellum was again the chief witness, and he deposed, of course, to the capture of Tom Davis under the circumstances so well known to the reader.

Another witness—also a police officer—identified the prisoner as having before been tried and condemned, and having been removed from custody by the aid of a desperate band of highwaymen.

Mr. Godfrey again stated, in answer to the usual question, that the prisoner reserved his defence.

After this the magistrate had nothing else to do than commit the prisoner to take his trial at the next sessions at the Old Bailey—which he did *pro forma*.

Immediately afterwards the prisoner was removed.

Then again there was that indescribable commotion which betokened that all were anxious and expectant.

What had gone before might be likened to some trifling interlude at a theatre, introduced as a kind of preface to the *piece de resistance* of the evening.

All eyes were turned towards the narrow doorway through which the prisoners were brought into the Court.

There was a moment of suspenseful silence, and Sixteen-String Jack was more than half carried into the dock, where he remained with a police officer standing on each side of him.

CHAPTER MLXVII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HAS A STRONG ESCORT TO NEWGATE.

EVEN after Sixteen-String Jack had taken up his position in the dock, the deep expectant silence continued.

All eyes were fixed upon him, for all were equally anxious to gaze upon so notorious and daring an offender against the laws.

It was sufficiently embarrassing to remain thus the cynosure of so many eyes, and subject to such close scrutiny; but our old friend preserved an undaunted calmness of demeanour which was as far removed from vulgar insolence as it was from shrinking cowardice.

As the silence continued, Jack took the opportunity of looking well round the Court, which he did apparently with a most unembarrassed air.

Of course, he saw his old associate and friend, the landlord of the White Horse; and one glance at his ruddy, jovial-looking countenance made the prisoner more comfortable and at ease in his mind than he had hitherto been.

Jack experienced to the full that intense satisfaction which all cannot help feeling when, in the hour of adversity, they find themselves not forgotten by those who were friendly in prosperity.

It was such a solace to Jack's heart as no words could possibly express.

It was a most unusual thing for a prisoner to be brought to the bar strongly bound as Sixteen-String Jack was, and this fact alone was the cause of a very great deal of attention being bestowed upon him.

"It is somewhat irregular, is it not, for a prisoner to be brought up thus?"

"It is," replied Mr. Skellum, glibly; "but the well-known recklessness and audacity of the prisoner made us feel that we were not exceeding our duty by taking these precautions to keep him perfectly secure."

This speech was greeted by a general hiss from the body of the spectators, coupled with loud cries of "Shame—shame!"

The magistrate stood up, black in the face with passion.

"Clear the Court," he yelled—"clear the Court! I will allow no such manifestations of sympathy with a desperate criminal like the one before us!"

A scene now of tremendous excitement and confusion ensued, for the police were only too glad to put the magistrate's injunction into execution.

But their task was not accomplished without a great deal of difficulty.

Finally, however, the numbers of the officers, and their hard, thick staves prevailed, and the people were driven out and the door closed.

In a minute or two afterwards comparative silence was obtained.

Mr. Skellum made a succession of bows, and intimated his desire to have an opportunity to speak.

"If your worship thinks," he said, in cringing tones, "that I have exceeded my duty in the care I have taken to have the prisoner strongly bound, with a view of preventing the possibility of an escape, and if your worship wishes it, the bonds can be unloosed."

"No—no!" replied the magistrate, at length. "I consider the desperate and well-known character of the accused is such as fully to warrant us in adopting this extreme course, for which the prisoner has only to thank his own violence."

"I am not aware that I have offered any," said Jack, firmly, speaking for the first time.

"Pray say nothing," whispered Mr. Godfrey, earnestly. "Leave all the talking to me. I want you to do nothing but plead not guilty when the proper moment comes."

Jack promised obedience.

The ordinary formalities were then commenced and proceeded with.

Jack put in his plea as he had been advised.

As before, Mr. Skellum made his appearance in the witness-box.

Having been sworn, the clerk asked:

"Do you recognise the prisoner at the bar?"

"I do."

"Who is he?"

"His name, I believe, is John Rann, but he is more commonly and popularly known as Sixteen-String Jack. He is so called in the handbill offering an aggregate reward of two thousand five hundred pounds for him and his accomplices."

"You have a description of him there, I suppose?"

"Yes, your worship."

"Read it."

Skellam obeyed.

"That establishes the identity beyond all question," remarked the magistrate. "We could not possibly have better evidence than that."

"Just so, your worship."

"Now let us hear the full particulars of the matter."

"Yes, your worship."

Amid a profound silence, Skellum began.

We shall give his narrative rather fully, as the reader will then comprehend what aspect the matter presented when treated by him.

"From certain information received, your worship, I went down to Stonehenge, where, as I had reason to suppose, the highwaymen contemplated a meeting."

"And you found you were right?"

"Yes, your worship. By carefully surrounding the place we found them all together. They were well armed, every one, and furious at so close a prospect of defeat. However, we rushed upon them, calling out to surrender. But instead of paying any attention, the most violent resistance was at once commenced. Pistols were fired, and we were obliged to make use of our weapons in self-defence."

"Well," said the magistrate, inquiringly, for Skellum paused, "is that all?"

"No, your worship."

"Go on, then."

"The resistance these men made cannot be imagined—as may be learned by the fact that five police officers have been killed, and ten more now lie dangerously wounded, and scarcely expected to recover."

"And the other highwaymen—where are they?"

"They succeeded in violently breaking through our ranks; but all three, or, I should say, four who thus got off were badly wounded, and separate bodies of officers were sent after each. They cannot fail to be captured ere long. I expect every moment to hear tidings of their death or capture."

"But this one, you say, you secured?"

"Yes, your worship, though it was with much more difficulty than your worship can form any conception of."

"It seems to me that you have acted very gallantly, and I will take care that your resolute and courageous conduct shall be duly represented in the proper quarter."

"Thanks, your worship. But I feel I have done no more than my duty," replied Skellum, in a whining tone, who, however, thought nothing of the kind.

"Well—well, say no more about that. Go on with your deposition. Can you, or any of your force, positively swear that one of the police officers received his death-wound at the hands of the prisoner at the bar?"

"I have no doubt that such is the case," said Mr. Skellum, after a momentary hesitation, for he seemed in doubt how to reply; "but——"

"You cannot prove it?"

"I cannot, your worship—that is, not satisfactorily."

"Enough. But you have some specific charge against him?"

"Oh, yes, your worship!"

"What is it?"

"Two highly-respectable men will identify him, and also swear to him as one of two by whom they were attacked and robbed only a short time ago."

"That will do, then. You can stand down."

Skellum looked askance at Mr. Godfrey, as though he quite expected to be cross-examined; but he was disappointed.

The lawyer merely made a sign; but it expressed plainly enough, "Stand down; I don't want you."

One of the bailiffs was then put into the witness-box.

He was a snabby, underminded-looking fellow, who fidgeted with the front of the witness-box as though very far from being at his ease.

"Well, what is your name?"

"John Rutter."

"What are you?"

"A bailiff."

"Look at the prisoner at the bar. Do you recognise him?"

"I do."

"Who is he?"

"The man who robbed me of a large sum of money and put me in great bodily fear of my life."

"Was it the prisoner who took the money?"

"It was."

"And you swear positively that this is the same man?"

"Most positively, your worship."

"Just relate briefly the particulars of the case."

The bailiff complied.

As, however, all the details of the adventure between Claude and Jack and the two tipstaves must be fresh in the recollection of the reader, we forbear from repeating his words.

Although he considerably exaggerated the occurrence, yet the deviation from the absolute truth was not extraordinary.

Mr. Godfrey did not think proper to ask this witness any questions.

Indeed, he saw that nothing could save Jack from committal, so that it would have been an absolute waste of time.

The other bailiff then corroborated what had been said by his partner, and this closed the case.

The evidence was certainly more than sufficient to warrant the magistrate in discharging the duty required at his hands in such cases.

"Prisoner at the bar," he exclaimed, "have you anything to say?"

Mr. Godfrey rose instantly.

"Your worship," he said, "as the accused will inevitably be sent to take his trial, he reserves his defence till then, being unwilling to occupy needlessly your worship's valuable time."

"I shouldn't wonder," said the magistrate sneeringly.

Then, in a different voice, he added, turning to the dock:

"Prisoner at the bar, you stand fully committed to take your trial at the next sessions at the Old Bailey, upon the charge of highway robbery, and of obstructing his Majesty's officers in the execution of their duty."

This was the last case, and as the worthy magistrate had some luncheon waiting for him in the adjoining room he made a precipitate and very undignified retreat through the little door by means of which he had gained admission to the Court.

At a given signal a stream of officers poured into the Court for the purpose of removing the prisoner.

We should have stated that, when the order for clearing the Court was carried out, our old friend Matthew was not ejected.

This was solely through the good offices of the lawyer, next to whom he was seated.

Now that the magistrate had left the Court the worthy landlord did not hesitate to quit his place and press towards the dock.

Sixteen-String Jack saw him, and smiled a recognition.

But the smile was a sickly and feeble one: by no means like that which in former times habitually irradiated his features.

"Be of good heart, Jack," Matthew cried, though Mr. Godfrey plucked him by the sleeve and besought him to be silent—"be of good heart, old boy! Remember you have friends yet who will do the best they can for you."

Jack shook his head, which was, indeed, about the only movement he was capable of making.

The officers then closed densely round him.

Skellum looked at Old Matthew with a hungry eye, as though he would much have liked to take him prisoner.

But Matthew knew well enough that the words he had made use of were not enough to bring him within the power of the law.

But Skellum resolved that a good watch should be set upon the contumacious landlord, of whose powers he, with good reason, had abundant dread.

By main bodily force Sixteen-String Jack was lifted up by his guards, and in this manner carried out of the Court into an adjoining room.

Old Matthew and the lawyer went towards the street.



[SIXTEEN-STRING JACK IN HIS CELL AT NEWGATE.]

This now presented a startling spectacle.

It was completely blocked up as far as ever the eye could reach in every direction by a surging, swaying mass of human beings, who had all been drawn to the spot in the hope of catching a glimpse of the notorious prisoner.

The same desire caused all the windows and house-tops around from which a view might be obtained to be lined with faces.

"If they were only in the humour," mused Matthew, as his eye wandered over the vast assemblage, "how easy it would be to make Jack a free man!"

It was quite easy to see, however, that no such thought as this found a home in the breasts of those who composed the huge multitude.

So long as their gaping curiosity was gratified, their satisfaction would be complete.

The appearance of Matthew and his companion at the door, together with certain movements on the part of the police officers, caused the whisper to circulate with lightning-like rapidity among the crowd:

"He's coming—he's coming!"

Matthew and the lawyer were quickly compelled to quit their position, as they would otherwise have interfered with the arrangements made.

The same anxious care and determination to avoid all risk of escape characterised the present movements of the police.

All the officers who could be spared were drawn up in a double line, which commenced at the threshold of the police-court and ended at the door of the hackney-coach which had been provided for the transit of the prisoner to Newgate.

All these men were armed with drawn cutlasses

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It will be understood that they thus formed a lane of about five yards in length, the walls of which were composed of resolute men.

The barrier was one by no means to be easily broken through.

The hackney-coach was also surrounded in a similar manner, in order to prevent the populace from crowding too closely round it.

Jack's case was hopeless indeed.

Had he been possessed of ever so much subtlety and strength, escape would have been impossible.

A few moments of anxious suspense elapsed.

Then the prisoner appeared.

It was hard indeed, if not impossible, for those who were on foot to distinguish him from his captors, so closely was he surrounded by them.

Not content with the way in which he had been secured already, fresh bonds had been added, and the effect of these was to deprive him of the use of every limb.

Just as though he had been some carefully-packed piece of statue-work the highwayman was carried down the passage and across the pavement to the door of the coach, which was held wide open in readiness to receive him.

The mob set up a cheer, though what they cheered at is hard to say; but, then, it is well known that a British mob eagerly seizes upon making any kind of demonstration.

Sixteen-String Jack was lifted into the vehicle, and deposited in a somewhat awkward manner upon one of the seats.

As many officers as the carriage would conveniently hold crowded in after him for the purpose of keeping a strict watch upon all his proceedings.

The others sat on the roof with their legs dangling down over the windows, while others, again, seated themselves upon the driver's seat.

In the meanwhile, under the directions of Skellum, those police officers who had assisted in forming the living lane were sent to reinforce those who formed a ring round the coach.

As soon as this was done Mr. Skellum gave a signal, and the horses were immediately set in motion.

This occasioned another cheer from the populace, who, far from having their curiosity gratified, resolved to follow the vehicle to its destination.

Owing to the great weight of the load, the two lean-ribbed horses harnessed to the hackney-coach were unable to take it at a more rapid rate than a walk.

But this pace just suited those officers who had to keep up with them, their orders being to preserve the cordon strictly until they reached the prison.

Slow and tedious was the journey.

Many and various were the stoppages that took place.

To Jack the time seemed twice as long as it was in reality.

To some extent this was occasioned by the discomfort which he experienced.

His position was as awkward and uncomfortable a one as could have been imagined, and it would have been an easy enough matter to alter it.

But the police showed no inclination to trouble themselves, and Jack would have suffered anything rather than have made the request—perhaps, even, to be refused.

At length the corner of the Old Bailey was turned, and the gloomy walls of Newgate came into view.

Jack knew it, though he was so placed that he could not see them.

In another moment the jolting, lumbering conveyance came to a final halt.

CHAPTER MLXVIII.

REVERTS TO THE PERILOUS POSITION OF DICK TURPIN AND MAUD.

FAIN would we continue exclusively to devote ourselves to a consideration of Sixteen-String Jack, now he is in a position of so much greater danger than any that had befallen him during the whole of his long career.

But in order to preserve something like a chronological sequence of events it is imperative that we should leave him awhile upon the very threshold of the heart-chilling old prison of Newgate.

We promise, however, to return to him with all possible celerity.

But there are others on behalf of whom it is believed the reader feels an interest of no ordinary kind, and whose perils, if anything, exceeded those which happened to Jack himself.

Of the subsequent movements of his comrades nothing further is known than what was stated by Mr. Skellum in the presence of the magistrate.

Whether his confident anticipations of a speedy further capture were well or ill founded we shall now proceed to show.

First of all, then, we shall devote ourselves to a relation of what befel our hero, Dick Turpin.

It will be recollected how gallantly he had raised Maud upon finding that she had been wounded, and how the consciousness of her imminent and deadly danger had enabled him successfully to fight his way through the death-storm that raged around him.

He had swung Maud on to the saddle before him, and mounted himself.

Then, while the bullets showered round him like hail he had urged Black Bess to make speed now if ever she had done so in her life before.

Need we say how nobly the gallant, incomparable steed acquitted herself?

Her speed was something which, if beheld, would make the observer believe that "his eyes were the fools of his other senses."

It the twinkling of an eye her sable form mingled with, and was swallowed up by, the darkness which everywhere prevailed.

On the soft turf her hoof-strokes were inaudible, or nearly so.

But although his pursuers were soon left behind, Dick would not suffer her to relax her speed.

On the wide open plain of Salisbury no refuge could be found for him—he must make his way to some place miles and miles off.

Since their starting Maud had never once moved in the slightest degree.

He had called to her.

But in vain.

No answer was returned to his earnest words.

He felt her hands.

They were icy cold.

So, too, was her face.

Again and again he called as they rushed headlong on in the deep darkness, but with no better result than before.

He placed his hand upon her breast, but withdrew it instantly.

He had touched something cold, clammy, and sticky.

He knew full well what it was without the aid of vision.

It was blood.

A terrible groan escaped his lips.

Then he turned his head to listen.

Floating faintly upon the wind he heard, or fancied he could hear, the trampling of many horses' feet upon the turf, as well as loud shouts and cries.

"I cannot stop now," he muttered, as he urged Bess to make fresh exertions. "That would only be to precipitate our fate. No, no! On, Bess—on, my lass! Our only hope is in speedily reaching some place of shelter."

But where was he to seek for this, with the whole country alive with foes all eagerly searching for him?

Oh, how he wished that Tom King was with him!

By his guidance, the vessel engaged to take them across the Channel could have been gained, and then, doubtless safety would have laid before them.

As it was, Dick had only the vaguest idea in the world of the position of the smugglers' cave.

Could he but have reached this it would have been a place of safe refuge.

But in this he was equally at fault.

So sudden, too, had been his flight from the ruins, and so intense the darkness which prevailed, that he could

not take upon himself to say with any degree of certitude whether he was going in the direction of the sea-coast or away from it.

He was compelled, too, to keep on this random course for the want of knowing which way to turn out of it.

These reflections, together with Maud's continued state of inanimation, seemed to have the effect of searing his heart and brain with fire.

On, on he sped, until the seemingly interminable expanse of Salisbury Plain was crossed.

On, on farther and farther still—across dusty high-roads—down narrow, winding lanes—over the open country—away—away—

Past houses and little clusters of humble cottages—places where he would fain have stopped for a brief space in order that Maud's hurt might be looked to; but in vain—in vain.

Either in reality, or else in his exaggerated fancy, he could still hear his pursuers tearing after him with redoubled speed, and calling upon him to surrender.

Although the speed of his mare was now greater than he had ever known it to be before, he did not scruple to urge her to still greater efforts.

To say that the various objects in the landscape seemed to sweep past them like rapidly-flitting shadows would be to convey a feeble and inadequate idea of her tremendous rate of speed.

And still Maud had neither moved nor spoken, nor had she shown herself to be in the slightest degree conscious of Dick's anxious and impassioned calls to her.

He had placed his hand over her heart—in close and dangerous proximity to which vital organ was a gaping wound. He pressed tightly upon it, for by this means the flow of blood was checked, and at the same time he tried to ascertain whether there was any pulsation.

At times he fancied he could detect a feeble, fluttering beat; but it was so faint and so uncertain that he was full of doubts upon it.

And every moment of his headlong career the agony he suffered was almost beyond endurance.

What if Maud should die?

What if this ghastly wound should prove a fatal one?

The thought drove him frantic.

The blood in his veins seemed turned to liquid, boiling metal.

A mist came over his eyes.

All objects seemed bathed in blood, and it was only by a great effort and a species of instinct that he retained his balance, for he had swayed fearfully to one side.

He had forgotten all about his own wound.

The excitement under which he had laboured since receiving it had made him altogether forgetful that he had received an injury at all.

Now it only made its presence felt by means of the weakness that had been produced by excessive loss of blood.

This proves, of course, that the wound was by no means of a serious character.

Indeed, had it been bound up at the first, probably nothing more would have been felt of it, the injury being quite superficial.

The violent exertion of riding on horseback at such a furious pace, as well as the feverish condition of his blood, caused the hemorrhage to be much greater than it would have been under other circumstances.

But finding that he grew rapidly weaker every moment, Dick brought his foaming steed to standstill.

He then roughly and hastily bound up his wound; but the task of doing so at all was one of no ordinary difficulty.

The good effects of it, however, very quickly made themselves apparent.

He listened—listened intently, for there came upon his ears faintly and from afar off a strange monotonous sound.

"What is it?" Dick asked himself—"what is it?"

He listened again.

"It is the sea!" he cried, in a voice of joyfulness.

"We must be at no great distance from the coast. Fast as you have been, Bess, lass, I little thought you had brought us so far in such a little time. Yes, yes, there can be no doubt about it—it is the sea!"

At this moment Maud made a slight movement.

It was the first since they had left the ruins.

A faint, fluttering sigh also escaped her lips.

The sound made Dick's heart bound within him.

"Maud dearest!" he cried. "Listen—oh! listen to me! Cheer up! Believe me, the danger now is past, and we are safe! Hark! can you not hear the breakers roar? We are close to the coast, and in a few minutes we shall reach it."

Dick paused anxiously for a reply.

But none came.

He was left equally in doubt as to whether Maud was incapable of utterance, or whether she had failed to hear the words which he had addressed to her.

In either case it was folly to linger longer.

The first and most important step was to get out of danger, and he strongly felt that every moment of time was of incalculable importance.

Accordingly, despite his anguished state of doubt, he again set Black Bess in motion.

Unexpectedly finding himself thus at the sea coast changed the current of all Dick's previous thoughts and intentions.

He felt now that he could not do a wiser thing than engage some little vessel to take them across the Channel.

The only thing against it was that Maud's hurt required immediate attention, and that the delay and journey across the sea would have the effect of aggravating its unfavourable symptoms.

But, then, on the other hand, it seemed quite certain that, under the most favourable conditions, a considerable length of time would elapse before Maud would be sufficiently recovered to move, and it was too much to expect that they would be allowed to remain undisturbed by the police officers during such an interval.

From the strengh of the force which had attacked them—so much more numerous than any other which had been brought against them—he was sure that unrelaxing efforts would be made to recapture him.

He had pursued a tolerably straight course hitherto, having put into practice no stratagem whatever of a character calculated to lead them astray.

All that he had gained was time; and if he only gave the officers the opportunity they would soon be up with him again.

Then, with Maud lying on a sick couch, what could he do?

Not leave her to the care of others, for she was obnoxious to the law like himself, and they would show her no consideration because of her injuries.

The only chance that he had was to quit the coast altogether.

Whether he should be able to do this or not was doubtful; but with an undaunted heart Dick rode on.

It was never his nature to meet difficulties half way.

He waited till they faced him, and then his undaunted resolution generally enabled him to overcome them.

Already he could see in the distance a long white line of light, which indicated the whereabouts of the breakers.

Animated by the sight, he pushed on with more rapidity.

At last the water's edge was reached.

The spot upon which he had chanced was a bleak and desolate one.

As far as the eye could reach on either side nothing could be seen but a long line of broken, jagged coast, on which the waves broke ceaselessly with a tumultuous roar.

No human habitation could be descried.

Dick's heart sank within him when he asked himself the question, what human beings could be found who would choose such a spot for an abiding-place?

Some distance further on he might perhaps find what he sought; but he knew not which direction to take—the right or the left.

Scarcely pausing to consider—for an hour's deliberation would not have brought him any nearer to a decision—he chose the latter.

The nature of the ground was such as to prevent any considerable speed being made.

Yet he pushed on with greater swiftness than anyone could have expected.

Suddenly, however, he came upon a small indentation in the shore, which had been hidden from him by the huge masses of rock.

Nothing could have come upon him more unexpectedly.

He pulled up, and uttered an exclamation, the tone of which showed that he had made a pleasant discovery.

And in truth he had.

Below him, but easily accessible by means of a zigzag path, could be seen a small cluster of cottages, seemingly the abode of fishermen.

Drawn up high and dry on the beach were several boats of various sizes, but all of such a kind as would be used for fishing.

Dick now believed that the way of escape lay clear and plain before him.

Without hesitation he commenced to descend the zigzag path we have mentioned.

A few minutes served to bring him to the huts, for by this word they are most appropriately called.

The inhabitants of the little hamlet seemed long since to have retired to rest.

From one window, and one only, came a dim, uncertain ray of light.

To Dick Turpin it was a beacon, and he hastened towards it with rapid strides.

Arriving at the door, he knocked loudly at it.

But he had to knock a second time before any notice was taken.

Then the door was opened, and the gaunt, attenuated figure of a man presented itself upon the threshold.

The flickering light from the small, rude-made iron lamp he carried vividly displayed the deep, sunken hollow of his cheeks.

"Who are you?" he said, in hoarse, guttural tones, which were in admirable keeping with the roughness of his exterior. "What want you, that you should disturb the dying at this hour?"

The word "dying" struck upon Dick's heart with an ominous chill.

So much so, that, without being conscious of so doing, he echoed it.

"Ay, dying," reiterated the man. "Tell me quickly what you want?"

"I am in sore distress and danger," said Dick, "and I want an immediate passage to France."

"Then you want what you cannot have."

"Why not?"

"Why not? Because there is no man living who would venture to put off from the shore to-night. Immediate destruction would be the result. Had it not been so, think you those boats would be lying idly on the beach?"

Dick's heart sank within him.

Already he fancied the officers were upon him.

Certainly they would arrive ere long.

"Well," said the man, "why stand you here? Have I not spoken? I say again it is impossible."

"My good friend," said Dick, in a deep and broken voice, "did you not tell me some one was dying here?"

"Ay, my wife."

"Your wife?" repeated Dick, struck with the strangeness of the coincidence.

"Yes—and the best that ever man was blessed with! When she is gone I—I——"

Sobs choked his further utterance, and tears rolled down the rugged, weatherbeaten face.

"Is the case hopeless?" said Dick—"wholly and completely hopeless? Is there nothing that can be done that will give her some chance of recovery?"

"Why—why, yes, there is; but it was a mockery for the doctor to mention it."

"What is it?"

"Never mind. Why should I parley with you?"

"Simply because I, too, have the same grief as yourself. My wife, who is with me here, is, I fear, dying, and the only chance there is of saving both her life and mine is that we reach the French coast to-morrow."

"That is your sole chance?"

"It is."

"Heaven help you, then!"

"But what is yours?"

"Why, delicacies—nutritious substances, luxuries only within the reach of the rich man's purse. The idea," he added, with a bitter laugh, "to tell that to a man who is himself dying for the bare necessaries of life!"

"Hush—hush!" said Dick. "Be calm."

"Calm?"

"Yes. Repine no longer, for I believe that it is decreed by fate that we shall be of assistance to each other."

"In what way do you mean?" asked the man, with extreme eagerness.

"Listen, and I will tell you."

"Well?"

"If you save my wife's life by the performance of the service I require, I, in return for it, will give you such a sum of money as will make you comparatively a rich man for life—so rich that there is no delicacy, however extravagant in price, which will be beyond your powers of purchase."

CHAPTER MLXIX.

DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN GETTING A PASSAGE TO THE COAST OF FRANCE.

The man looked upon Dick with an air of amazed incredulity.

He was speechless.

"Do you understand me?" Dick asked, at length.

"Are you in earnest?"

"I never was more so in my life. Come, speak quickly! Say whether the deaths of three persons shall rest upon your head."

The man hesitated.

"You want to cross to France?"

"I do."

"And now?"

"At once."

"I fear it is certain death to attempt it."

"Tush—tush, man! Who can say?"

"Well, I can; for you may believe me or not as you think proper, but there is no man here who could be found willing to put off to sea on such a boisterous night."

"But think of what a powerful incentive you have before you! You might not, perhaps, feel inclined to risk your all upon the uncertain chance of catching a few fish, but yet you might if you knew that your wife's life was at stake, and that you could save it."

"I know not who you are," said the man, with sudden energy, "thus to tempt me to destruction, but—but make good your promise, and—and I will take you."

"I swear to do so," said Dick, solemnly—"swear by everything which men hold sacred!"

"Enough! I consent."

"And how long will it take you to make your preparations?"

"Half an hour."

"It must be less."

"It shall be, if possible."

"Then I will alight and enter. I see you have a fire burning, and the warmth may serve to recover my wife from her swoon."

While speaking, he slipped from the saddle and tried to lift Maud down.

But his strength was insufficient.

The fisherman ran to his assistance, and by their united exertions Maud was carried in.

"Why—why," cried the fisherman, in surprise, "here is blood!"

"Yes; did I not tell you she was wounded?"

"I did not hear you."

"Quick—quick! I will tell you more anon—at present we have no time to talk."

"What is it?" cried some one, in a feeble voice—so

feeble that Dick felt Death must be very close at hand indeed.

The voice came from one corner of the hut.

There was not much light, but still Dick could just perceive the outlines of a dark mass, apparently of rags, which served the purpose of a bed.

A second glance enabled him to make out the wasted form of a woman, who looked around her in manifest amazement.

"Hush—hush, Bessie!" said the fisherman, in a voice so tender that Dick could scarcely believe his ears served him rightly. "Do not excite yourself, but take my word that all is well. Fortune has sent this gentleman to save us. He requires a quick passage to France, and I have agreed to take him; and the payment I shall receive will make us rich for life."

"No, no," said the woman, wildly—"do not go—do not trust yourself again upon the sea! You told me to-night that no one could set out."

"Yes—yes," said the man, soothingly; "but that is some hours ago. Be content to leave this matter quite to me, and in the end all will be well."

"No, no—not well! But I am dying—slowly but surely dying!"

"But you remember what the doctor said, Bessie?" exclaimed the fisherman, bending over the humble bed. "He told you that if you could have certain things you would recover, and this gentleman will give me enough to enable me to buy them."

The woman wept.

"I see how it is," she said, through her tears, "though you would fain conceal it from me. You are willing desperately to risk your life upon the bare chance of saving me."

"No—no."

"But I say yes!"

"And I again say no! Not only does your life, but the lives of this gentleman and his wife, depend upon me; and must I selfishly sacrifice them all? No, no! I must go, Bessie. Keep up your spirits till I return—I shall not be long."

The woman wept still.

There was a gloomy, heavy foreboding in her heart.

While these words had been passing between the fisherman and his wife, Dick had by no means been an idle listener.

On the contrary, he had placed Maud in as comfortable a position as he could in front of the fire, in the hope of infusing fresh warmth into her chilled frame.

He also endeavoured to ascertain the character of the wound.

But he found the blood had coagulated in a mass over the orifice, thus forming a natural styptic.

He knew well enough if this clot was removed the hemorrhage would re-commence, and he would be powerless to stanch it.

Until medical aid could be obtained, it was best to leave this as it was.

Dick would have given much had he been able to ascertain more exactly the nature and extent of the wound.

His greatest apprehensions were excited by its position, which made him fear that the hurt was a mortal one.

He strove hard to think otherwise, and occupied himself by endeavouring to bring her back to reanimation.

But it was not until the fisherman had left the cottage for the purpose of getting the boat in readiness for launching that he succeeded.

Maud opened her eyes quietly and languidly.

Her gaze fell upon Dick's face, and her face lighted up with a faint smile.

She pressed his hand to show her thankfulness at finding him safe and apparently unhurt.

She was about to speak, but Dick checked her by a rapid gesture.

He was afraid that any attempt to exercise her voice would be attended with the worst and most dangerous results.

"Do not attempt to utter one syllable," he said, in low tones, but sufficiently loud for her to catch the purport of what he said. "Be satisfied for me to tell you that the danger is over, and that in a very short time all will be well—quite well."

Maud shook her head.

"Yes, yes! Believe me, I speak truly. We are even now about to embark for France. We are now in a cottage on the sea-coast. If you listen, you will hear the roaring of the breakers."

Again Maud seemed as though about to speak.

But Dick checked her once more.

"Silence is imperative," he said. "Once more I ask you to be content with my earnest assurance that all is well."

"No, no," she said, in a low, hurried whisper—"all is not well, Dick, for—for, Dick, I feel that I am dying."

"No, no!" Dick cried, with eager earnestness, though while he spoke his heart swelled so painfully as to be well-nigh past endurance. "You are weak and faint from loss of blood, I know; but that has ceased, and when we reach France medical aid can be had without fear of the result. Cheer up, dear one! A brighter and happier dawn is coming."

As he spoke, Maud felt that in one sense it might be so, but she offered no remark.

Indeed, the effort to speak as much as she had was so severe as to render her incapable of repeating it.

As for Dick himself, he was constrained to turn aside to conceal his emotions.

There was that on Maud's face which he could not bear to look upon.

It was something indescribable, yet he was innately conscious that the cause of the effect was the flappings of Death's sable pinions.

Fortunately for him, it was at this moment that the fisherman returned.

"Is all ready?" asked Dick, eagerly.

"Yes, quite."

"Then do not let us lose another moment."

The fisherman bade his wife a hasty, whispered adieu.

Dick partially raised Maud.

The fisherman came to his aid, and between them she was carried to the vessel.

The roughness of the ocean had now to a very considerable extent abated—a circumstance which did not fail to cause Dick sensations of great pleasure.

Still, it was what an old sailor would have called a "dirty" night.

The bark which was in readiness for them was small in size, and yet large when the fact that one man could work it was taken into consideration.

Maud was carried on board, and, as a matter of course, was made as comfortable as the nature of things permitted.

The next thing was to get Black Bess also aboard the craft, and had she not been so docile and so thoroughly obedient to her master's will, the task would have been one of no ordinary difficulty.

The fisherman was filled with wonder.

"Your horse seems to have as much intelligence as a Christian."

"She is worth her weight in gold," said Dick, caressing her fondly. "Had it not been for her to-night——"

He ceased, for he thought it would not be prudent to let the fisherman know too much.

All now was in readiness.

The boat was pushed off from the shore, and the fisherman climbed over the side.

A few strokes with the oar carried them fairly out on to the ocean, and then the task of hoisting the sail was commenced.

In this operation Dick was of great service.

"If this breeze continues," said the fisherman, "and all goes well, we shall make a speedier journey to France than has been heard of for many a year."

Dick looked around him, or, more correctly speaking, he endeavoured to do so.

But so intense was the darkness that the surface of the waves could scarce be distinguished.

Already the recently-left land had vanished altogether from their view, and as he tried unsuccessfully to pierce the gloom which hung before them like some velvet pall, Dick was indeed sensible of the amount of courage, skill, and daring requisite to enable anyone to undertake such a journey.

But the demeanour of the fisherman filled him with admiration, and at the same time inspired him with confidence.

Now that he was afloat, there was no eagerness or excitement about him.

He was as calm to all outward appearances as it was possible for a human being to be under any circumstances.

It was evident now that he thought nothing of the risk and danger of the undertaking, but bent all his energies towards bringing it to a successful termination.

When the sail was properly fixed, the motion of the vessel was much accelerated, and Dick found an opportunity of placing himself beside Maud.

She was shivering with cold.

His first care was to wrap her up still more effectually.

He could not see her face—the darkness was too great for that.

But he spoke reassuring words to her, and over and over again repeated that they were now free from all danger.

He could tell that his words were heard and understood by the occasional and feeble pressure of her hand.

The boat surged through the foaming water at a furious rate.

The fisherman was right when he said if the wind continued steadfast the passage would be a quick one.

At present it blew directly from the English coast, and as they carried quite as much, perhaps even more, sail than was exactly compatible with ordinary safety, and as the fisherman added to the velocity by working lustily at the oars, it may be believed that their rate of progress was sufficiently rapid.

And yet, despite this swiftness, Dick was full of all-devouring impatience.

This, however, was on Maud's account, which was enough to account for it.

Every moment Dick fancied she grew colder and colder, and he was inwardly conscious that her life was ebbing fast away, while he was powerless to arrest its departure.

Nothing could have shown more convincingly how perilous was her condition than the fact that up to the present moment she had not seemed to have observed the absence of Dick Turpin's comrades, on behalf of whom the reader will scarcely require to be told Dick himself experienced the utmost anxiety.

He feared, and feared truly, that things had gone hard with them.

Insensibly he was led to think of how strange it was that this stupendous catastrophe should have taken place at a moment when they felt most convinced of their own safety, and when they were all indulging in reflections upon the immunity from peril they were about to enjoy.

Of course, Dick was not so well informed as the reader is, and therefore he found it most difficult to think by what means the officers had been enabled so thoroughly to surprise them.

Things went on thus until, faintly and chilly, morning dawned upon the wide waste of waters.

Long before there was light enough in the east to enable any objects far away to be distinguished, Dick was standing up in the boat and looking earnestly in advance.

"We shall see land in a few minutes, Maud, dearest," he exclaimed, as the dawn brightened. "Cheer up, dear one, a little longer—only a little longer! The worst is over now, and assistance is close at hand. Do not—pray do not, for my sake, give way to despair! Believe me that you are safe."

A more convulsive pressure of his hand was all the reply which Maud was able to make to this speech.

Dick was in despair.

Again he bent down eagerly over her, looking into her countenance by the aid of the light which the dim gray dawn afforded.

This in itself was sufficient to impart to all objects a cold and ghastly appearance, so that it is not surprising that what he beheld should fill him with the most poignant grief.

Death-like indeed did her thin and pallid countenance appear.

Dick's heart swelled, and heavy drops of sorrow fell from his eyes.

Maud felt them.

Her eyes had hitherto been wearily closed, but now they opened.

Tears quickly rushed into them, obscuring all things, and again they closed.

Her lips parted with a faint, faint smile, which grieved Dick more to look upon than would the loudest manifestations of grief and pain.

Once more he sprang to his feet.

Once more shading his eyes with his hands, he looked keenly in advance.

An exclamation of joyfulness escaped him.

"Land—land," he cried—"land is in sight at last! Help now is at hand indeed!"

"Impossible," exclaimed the fisherman, drawing the oars into the boat.

"What is impossible?"

"Why, that land should be in sight."

"Come and look for yourself."

The fisherman came forward.

"You are right," he exclaimed. "I knew we had come swiftly, and yet I little thought that we were so near our journey's end. You have good cause to be thankful."

"I am indeed," replied Turpin, in heartfelt accents; "but yet every moment of time is precious."

"Maud, dearest," he added again, bending over her, "you heard me say that land is in sight? I can aid you best, and most truly show my love for you, by making every effort to increase our speed; I am about to leave you in order to assist the fisherman in rowing."

Dick turned away without giving Maud an opportunity to reply, or even to make a sign.

He took hold of one of the oars and prepared himself to use it.

"That's right!" said the fisherman. "It will make a wonderful difference."

As may be expected, Dick Turpin was not very expert in the use of the oar, but yet he handled it in such a manner as to elicit the fisherman's admiration.

But then Dick felt he was rowing for a life that he accounted ten times more precious than his own, and so his exertions are not to be wondered at.

Without Maud he felt he should indeed be a wreck—a waif, and an outcast from all humanity.

After her death life would be nothing more to him than a weary blank.

CHAPTER MLXX.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN LOSES HIS NEAREST, DEAREST, TRUEST FRIEND.

GRADUALLY the morning brightened.

Dick and the fisherman laboured incessantly.

Although the land appeared to be so close, it seemed a weary time until it was fairly reached.

As they drew near to it, Dick perceived a small collection of houses—too small for the place to be dignified by the name of village.

What place it was, he was too busily occupied with his own thoughts to inquire.

Such matters of detail were far beneath his notice now.

Just, however, as the sail was taken down, he said:

"Do you know of any person in this place who, by being well paid, would consent to receive us into a house?"

"I do know a poor widow, who lives in the end cottage yonder; it is a poor place, as you see."

"Quite good enough," interrupted Turpin, impatiently.

"Will she receive us?—that is the question. Is there a doctor at hand?"

"Yes."

"How far off?"

"Perhaps a league."

"Quick—quick!"

The fisherman now slightly changed the direction of his boat, so as to enable them to land nearer to the widow's cottage.

Dick's impatience and anxiety had now reached fever point.

Maud was quite insensible.

No sooner did the keel of the little vessel grate upon the beach than he seized her in his arms and jumped ashore.

Black Bess instantly followed him in the same way that a huge spaniel might have done.

The fisherman was amazed to see how easily Dick ran with Maud in his arms across the rough beach towards the widow's door, and not less so at seeing Black Bess following in his footsteps.

With all speed possible he made secure his boat.

Before he had finished doing so, Dick had gained admittance to the lowly dwelling.

The widow's kindly heart was at once touched.

As Dick was able to speak the French language sufficiently well to make himself understood, he had no difficu'ty in letting the widow know what he wanted.

Her kindly heart was at once touched both by his distress and Maud's dangerous-looking condition.

She consented instantly, and with pleased alacrity led the way to a small but clean inner chamber which was furnished as a bed-room.

Gently Maud was deposited upon the bed.

"Leave her to me a moment or so," said the widow; "she needs my attention. Do you at once hasten for the doctor."

Dick immediately withdrew.

On reaching the threshold he found himself confronted by the fisherman.

"How far did you say it was to the doctor's?" he asked.

"About a league."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Yes."

"Then mount my mare—do not be afraid of her, she will carry you swiftly and safely. When you reach the doctor's let him mount her in your place and gallop back."

"I will."

"Tell him that life and death depend upon his speed, and assure him that he shall be amply recompensed for his trouble."

Fortunately, the fisherman knew how to ride.

Upon an ordinary occasion Black Bess would have suffered no one save her master to cross her back, nor would he have allowed anyone else to mount her.

But now he patted her, and made her clearly understand the nature of his wishes.

"Quiet, old girl," he said—"quiet and quick! You will render me another priceless service this day!"

The next moment the fisherman was off.

Dick watched them as long as he could keep them in sight.

Then, with swelling heart and tear-filled eye, he turned and re-entered the cottage.

The old woman emerged from the inner room.

"She has recovered her consciousness, and has asked for you."

Dick reached the bedside at one stride.

Maud's face was turned anxiously and expectantly towards the door, and it lighted up joyfully when she caught sight of Dick's well-known form.

He bent down over her and grasped her hand.

"Maud, dearest, we are absolutely safe at last—no one can touch us here. The doctor will arrive directly. He will see to your hurt, and then—why, then all will be well."

Dick's voice almost entirely failed him as he gave utterance to the hope which he could not feel.

Maud shook her head.

"No, no, Dick," she answered, in a whisper so faint that he had to strain his sense of hearing to the utmost to catch the purport of her words—"do not try to fill me with a hope which you do not experience yourself."

"Nay, I——"

"Hush, hush! Hear me, Dick—I am dying: yes, slowly, surely dying. You will tell me that I only fancy this; but, believe me, I have a feeling within me of such a nature as convinces me that I am not mistaken."

"But this—this is dejection. When the doctor sees you your feelings will undergo a total change."

Again Maud slowly shook her head.

"But while there is life there is hope," Dick murmured, scarcely knowing what he was saying, for he could not close his eyes to the conviction that Death was indeed hovering over her.

But yet the doctor might be able to save her.

That was his last hope, and he clung to it with pertinacity.

A deep silence ensued.

Maud had again closed her eyes.

The slight exertion involved in keeping them open seemed now to be too much for her.

Her breath, too, seemed only to be drawn in irregular, spasmodic gasps.

Oh, how anxiously Dick waited for the sound that would be made by Bess returning!

The old woman came to the threshold.

"Run to the outer door," said Dick. "Look out well for the doctor. You will see him coming on a black horse. The very moment you catch sight of him let me know."

The widow promised obedience, and as soon as her aged, weakened powers would let her, took up the required station.

More anxious time then passed.

At length, however, after weary waiting, Dick heard her cry:

"Here he comes—here he comes! My faith, the horse seems to fly!"

Dick uttered an ejaculation of deep thankfulness.

In little more than a minute afterwards the clattering of a horse's hoofs came upon his ears.

Louder and louder grew the sound, until it ceased suddenly at the outer door.

Dick hurried out.

A white-haired gentleman, attired in black, dismounted.

For once Black Bess was left unheeded by her master.

He dragged the doctor in, and, as he did so, he hoarsely whispered in his ear:

"Save her—save her! Restore her once more to herself, and you shall name your own reward!"

"I will do my best," was the reply.

Dick paused upon the threshold of the inner room, which the doctor entered in company with the poor widow.

Dick seemed stupified with his grief.

How long he would have stood there in the same immovable attitude, apparently unconscious of everything, is hard indeed to say, had he not been aroused by a low neigh.

He started, went outside, and for a time was enabled to distract his anguish by attending to his steed.

But it was not until an hour had elapsed that the doctor came forth.

His face looked grave and sad, and in its general expression was such as to extinguish all Dick's hopes.

Nevertheless, he hurried forward.

"Well—well," he said, "what is the result? Tell me quickly! I can bear anything better than suspense!"

The doctor shook his head gravely.

"My good sir," he said, "you must prepare your mind for the worst."

"The worst?"

"Yes."

"Is the wound a mortal one?"

"It is."

Dick groaned.

"Be calm—be calm. Obtain what command you can over yourself, and enter her room. You will have but a short time to pass together now."

Dick clasped his hands over his face, and gave way to a transport of frantic grief, which the doctor in vain endeavoured to check or mitigate.

But the storm of passion was too violent to last very long.

As he grew calmer the doctor talked gravely to him.

Much that he said fell upon unheedful ears.

"Tell me," said Dick, presently, calming himself by a terrible effort: "Is what you tell me the absolute truth?"

"It is indeed. It is absolutely impossible for any individual to recover from such injuries as she has sustained."

"And—and do you think, doctor, if she had had medical assistance sooner that——"

"I suppose you had it at the earliest moment?"

"Heaven knows I had, indeed!"

"Then it is in vain to speculate upon the consequences of anything that could not have happened."

Dick bowed his head.

He understood full well what was meant by the speech

Maud perhaps might have been saved had she received immediate surgical assistance.

This was, in truth, a most bitter thought for Dick, who would carry the reproach with him to the grave.

"You must not think of that," the doctor said, perceiving how deep was the impression he had made. "She told me you had done everything in the power of mortal man on her behalf. Linger here no longer, for, believe me, precious moments are flying fast."

"Is she, then—then really dy——".

A huge sob rose in the highwayman's throat and choked the word.

"She is," answered the doctor. "It would be false kindness to keep the knowledge from you."

The worst had now been made known, and Dick grew gradually calmer.

With some difficulty he prevailed upon the medical man to receive a small fee, for he declared that as he had done nothing, then nothing was his due.

With a heavy, faltering step, Dick made his way towards the threshold of Maud's room.

As he reached it her face again lighted up with the old smile, but on this occasion it caused Dick more anguish than a violent outburst of sorrow.

The next moment he was bending over her with her hand clasped in his.

For some moments he was mute, while Maud herself seemed too exhausted to utter a syllable.

Her lips parted, but no sound came from them.

In the silence, Dick could hear her painful and laboured attempt at respiration.

From the sound, it seemed as though the lungs had been seriously injured—too seriously for any hope of recovery to be indulged in.

"Dick," Maud faintly murmured, at length—"Dick, I have heard what the doctor has said; and even if I had not, your looks and my own feelings would have been sufficient to—to——"

"Nay, Maud," Dick cried, with a sudden outburst, for he could not trust himself to speak calmly, "I must and will believe that while there is life there is hope!"

"Then how slight must be your hope if you reckon it by the amount of life I have got now!" answered Maud, faintly. "No, no—I feel that at the most I have but a few minutes to live: let us make use of them in bidding each other a long farewell."

"And what will life be to me without you?" asked Dick, faintly, as he bent down yet lower over the humble couch.

Maud did not reply.

From her manner, it would seem as though she were endeavouring to pronounce the word "Farewell," but that utterance failed her.

Dick gazed again into her wan face.

Dim as his eyes were with burning tears, yet he could not help acknowledging that she was a true prophet.

There was that unmistakable hue spread over her whole countenance which proclaimed all too plainly that Death was hovering over her, and that in a brief space of time indeed he would let fall his fatal dart.

Maud vainly strove to speak.

The appearance of her countenance now filled the highwayman with dismay.

At length, by making what seemed to be almost a superhuman effort, Maud whispered a few words.

"Dick," she said, "I cannot see you, for the room is very dark; but kiss me once more, and say the word 'Farewell!' for we must part."

Dick pressed his lips upon hers with frantic vehemence.

At the same time Maud sighed deeply.

It was her last breath.

The lips grew cold like those of a corpse.

Still Dick did not rise.

He could not as yet realise that Maud had passed away from him and from the world for evermore.

It did not seem to him as though there could by any possibility come such a sudden termination, and so awful a one, to their long and loving companionship.

Dick never knew how long he thus remained.

The widow ventured to the door, and saw him in the position we have described, and, unwilling to disturb him, went away.

But hours and hours passed away without any sound coming from the inner room.

Then she grew alarmed, and her terror had reached its highest pitch when the doctor made his appearance.

Business had brought him near, and so he had entered, thinking perhaps he might be of some service.

In his company, the widow entered the little bedchamber.

Maud was then found quite dead, and Dick beside her, apparently dead also.

But the highwayman was only in a swoon.

The doctor recovered him; and, although life returned, yet his patient was in a high fever, and raging in delirium.

The cause of this was quickly found.

Dick had been wounded, as we have said.

The quantity of blood he had lost was immense, and the excitement he had suffered had brought on inflammation.

The doctor shook his head.

"We shall have a hard case here," he said. "I never saw an uglier-looking place in my life."

But, fortunately, Dick had fallen into good hands.

Unwearied was the care bestowed upon him.

In spite of it, however, he still remained delirious.

Strange indeed were the words to which he gave utterance in his ravings; and had he been in England, they would infallibly have led to his detection.

As it was, he spoke in English, and it so happened that the widow and the worthy doctor were entirely unacquainted with the language.

As money was found in his pockets, and as, after the lapse of three days, he evinced no signs of returning sense, Maud was buried in the little churchyard close at hand.

It was sad indeed to think that there should only be strangers to perform for her the last offices rendered to the dead.

There was no chief mourner by the grave when the coffin containing her remains was lowered into it.

But when the ceremony was concluded, and the earth was filled in, scarcely a dry eye could have been found in all the group that had assembled, for in that lonely spot on the sea-shore it was a rare occurrence for a stranger to be buried.

Had she been conscious of it, Maud would have had the satisfaction of knowing that, although in a foreign land, she had not been lowered into the grave unmourned and unregretted.

And as the people slowly dispersed they looked towards the widow's humble habitation, and whispered that in all probability no long time would elapse before they were called forth to witness another funeral.

And so passed away all that was mortal of the fond and faithful wife of Dick Turpin, the highwayman.

CHAPTER MLXXI.

RETURNS TO SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, AND RELATES WHAT TOOK PLACE UPON HIS ARRIVAL AT NEWGATE.

ONCE more we take the reader back to the dismal old prison of Newgate.

It will be remembered that we left Sixteen-String Jack at the moment when the hackney-coach came to a standstill at its destination.

As the vehicle had crawled along so slowly the reader may make sure that the crowd which started from Bow Street considerably augmented in size after having passed through the principal streets of the metropolis.

By the time the prison was gained it had swelled to a bulk that excited considerable consternation in the breasts of Mr. Skellum and his assistants, for they apprehended a rescue.

Before, then, any attempt whatever was made to release Jack from the hackney-coach, the police officers placed themselves more densely round it, and so formidable was their force that they could undoubtedly have repelled a very serious onslaught.

But these precautions were all superfluous.

It did not seem as though the mob contemplated any aggressive movement.

They were content to remain spectators of the scene that was about to ensue.

While these steps were being taken, due notice was given at the portal of the prison that a prisoner of no ordinary importance had arrived.

Accordingly the door was opened by the man on the



[THE DISCOVERY OF CLAUDE DUVAL.]

look, and, at the suggestion of Mr. Skellum, all the available men on duty were summoned from their respective posts to the vestibule.

As at Bow Street, those police officers who were not packed round the coach were drawn up in a double lane, so as thoroughly to protect the prisoner during his brief passage from the one door to the other.

Of course, Jack could not help seeing all these precautions, and as he gazed he could not forbear smiling, for he had made up his mind not to attempt to escape under such hopeless circumstances as the present.

For this reason, all this superextra care seemed to him ridiculous.

At length all the preparations were complete, and then, and not till then, Mr. Skellum gave the signal for opening the door of the hackney-coach.

Jack was almost stifled, for the uncomfortable vehicle had been crammed with police officers to the fullest extent of its capacity.

These now alighted, leaving the prisoner, about whom they were so solicitous, perfectly helpless and motionless.

"All's ready," said Skellum. "Take hold, and carry him quick. I shall be glad when that part of the business is fairly over."

The command was obeyed with all imaginable promptitude.

Several of the strongest of the police officers lifted him up in their arms, and literally carried him across the pavement and up the steps into the vestibule of the prison.

Then, no sooner was the threshold crossed than the door was closed by Mr. Skellum himself, who gave utterance to an audible sigh of relief as he performed the operation.

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Evidently he looked upon his tightly-bound prisoner as being many degrees safer than before.

An ordinary spectator would have been much amazed to see so many strong and well-armed men intent solely upon the safe custody of one who seemed the slimmest of the whole party.

Yet such was the extraordinary spectacle which the vestibule of Newgate presented.

Mr. Skellum next made his way towards the Governor, who was the successor to the man who had held the office at the time the highwaymen paid their last visit.

This present Governor had formerly been in the army, and in consequence he had created something resembling the discipline of a garrison in the prison.

"You see, Major Oneyer," said Skellum, with a half bow, "I have brought you a prisoner of some distinction, and I hope you will do the State good service by keeping him in safe custody."

"You may depend," answered the Governor, gruffly, and curling his huge moustache as he spoke—"you may depend that nothing on my part will be wanting."

"I am sure of it. Here are my necessary papers, please take them, and let me have the ordinary receipt in return."

The Governor scowled fearfully at the documents, and complied with the request just made.

"Of course," said Skellum, as he pocketed the important paper—"of course my duty properly ends here; but still, as I have more than ordinary interest in the safe custody of the prisoner, I will, with your consent, remain here and see him conveyed to his cell."

"I—I know my duty, sir!" said the major, drawing himself up to his full height, and assuming as much importance as he was able.

"I do not for a moment doubt it," said Skellum, with servile humbleness; "but still, as it would afford me very great satisfaction, I trust you will not refuse me the request."

"Well—well, I suppose not."

"Thank you, major; and if at any time I can be of service to you do not fail to command me."

The major turned on his heels with ill-concealed contempt expressed upon his countenance.

"Let the blacksmith come forward there at once!"

A door was opened, and the command repeated by one of the turnkeys, who shouted it down a passage with as much vigour as his lungs would permit.

A moment elapsed, and then a heavy, clattering, clanging sound was heard.

Jack could not resist the temptation of turning his head to ascertain the cause of it.

Directly afterwards the prison smith made his appearance.

He carried in one hand a large and heavy basket of tools, while behind him he dragged some unusually massive fetters, which certainly must have weighed at least two hundredweight.

The throng divided so as to allow this personage to come close to the prisoner.

Depositing the fetters with a hideous clatter, the blacksmith produced from his basket a portable anvil, which, with great care, he placed in a convenient position upon the stone floor of the vestibule.

His other implements were then produced, and laid ready to hand.

These preliminaries being over, the next proceeding was to invest Jack with his heavy irons.

In order that this might be done, it was necessary entirely to remove the other bonds by which he was secured.

This was a proceeding which Mr. Skellum viewed with the utmost trepidation.

He was fearful lest in some most mysterious and unaccountable way his prisoner should escape.

Accordingly he placed himself directly in front of Jack, and then pulled from his pocket a horse-pistol, the largeness of which was enough to make anyone shudder.

A more bloodthirsty, death-dealing looking weapon could scarcely be conceived.

"Now, Mr. Sixteen-String Jack," Skellum said, as he deliberately cocked his pistol, "I hope you see this pleasant little friend of mine. Take my word for it, it is heavily loaded, and at this distance I can cover your brain nicely. So! You quite understand? Now, unless you permit these men to remove your present bonds, and substitute these fetters, without so much as raising a finger in resistance, I will pull the trigger and blow your brains out without the least remorse!"

There could be no mistaking the earnestness of the speaker, and at the moment he looked more like some fiend than a human creature.

These words seemed to strike the Governor dumb.

Such an interference with his authority he had never before experienced, and he could scarcely credit the reality of what had occurred.

But the attitude of Skellum left no room for doubt or incredulity.

The major's moustache seemed actually to bristle up.

"Sir," he ejaculated, hoarsely—"Mr. Skinem, or whatever you call yourself—do you know, sir, that this interference with one of my prisoners is insufferable, sir?—yes, and intolerable, sir! I repeat the word intolerable, sir! and rest assured that Major Oneyer is not the man to permit it! D—n me, no, sir!"

Mr. Skellum never moved.

"Sir," said the major, more wrathful still, and stalking towards him as he spoke—"sir, do you hear me?"

"Certainly I do."

"Then I tell you I will not suffer this."

"You cannot help yourself."

"Not help myself?"

"No, sir. Just look at that."

The major snatched from Skellum's hand a small piece of paper.

He glanced at it savagely.

"You see," said Skellum, still retaining his position, "the chief magistrate at Bow Street, acting under the direction of the Secretary of State, has thought fit to give me absolute control over the prisoner, so let us have no more fuss. If he stands quiet all will be well."

"Well, do you call it?" cried the Governor, furiously. "Let me tell you that I think it anything but well! This interference with a man who knows how to perform his duty, and one who has been an officer, is—is—yes, d—n me, sir!—is outrageous! But I know what I'll do—I'll sell out; no, no, I mean I'll resign, and have no more to do with a parcel of d—d, cowardly thief-takers!"

Mr. Skellum did not allow himself to be moved in the least by the fury of the Governor.

Just as though not a word had been uttered, he stood in the position which he had formerly taken up, for the operation of removing Jack's bonds had commenced.

As for the highwayman himself, the calmness which he manifested was only rivalled by that of Skellum.

It was by no means a comfortable thing to stand as Jack did within a couple of yards of the muzzle of a murderous-looking horse-pistol; but our old friend never moved a muscle.

But the officers were by no means so unapprehensive of the weapon, and every now and then they paused in their work to throw a glance at their superior officer, for they knew full well that in the event of the discharge of the pistol they could scarcely hope to escape very serious injury.

Finding that their prisoner continued to stand so calmly had in a short time the effect of infusing a feeling of much greater confidence into their hearts.

Their own impression was that Mr. Skellum's pistol had awed him into complete submission.

But, as we have already remarked, Jack had no intention of making any resistance at present, for he was fully conscious that it would not serve to better his condition in the least.

Still, it was not without a great inward struggle that he suffered himself to be loaded with the heavy fetters, which had been provided for his express accommodation.

The task of riveting them on was soon performed, for the blacksmith was well skilled in his duties.

"There," he said, with an air of satisfaction, as soon as he had finished, and retiring a few steps while he spoke in order that he might contemplate his handywork, "I don't think you will get rid of that amount of jewellery so easily as some that you have been provided with. Those fetters have not been used by anyone since the time when they were used for Jonathan Wild."

Skellum did not pay any attention to this speech.

When he saw his prisoner loaded with such a mass of iron-work that it was only by an exertion of great strength that he was able to stand upright he felt satisfied.

He uncocked his pistol, and slipped it into his huge side pocket.

All the while the smith had been at work he had watched him with a keen and critical eye, and from what he had formerly seen of such matters, he felt confident that there was not one faulty place in all the irons.

The Governor's looks bespoke his inward fury, and he still stood looking on, engaged in curling the ends of his moustache.

Evidently, he now expected that Skellum would take his departure; but that individual still lingered, being most unwilling to lose sight of his important capture.

"Major," he said, at length, "I don't think you ought to be so glumpish over this business. You don't know how much I have at stake in it."

The Governor did not speak.

Skellum continued:

"I have only one more favour to ask of you, and after that I will willingly take my departure. It is, that you will allow me to see the prisoner conveyed to his cell."

"Favour be d—d, sir!" returned the Governor, in a tone of voice which showed his wrath to be as great as ever. "Haven't you an infernal slip of paper, sir, that sets my authority at naught?"

Mr. Skellum said nothing further, but looked upon this last speech as granting his request.

One of the turnkeys came forward, and in respectful tones asked which cell the prisoner should occupy.

"Don't make a d—n fool of yourself by asking me!" was the major's reply. "Ask him. I wash my hands of the entire matter."

Skellum was evidently tolerably familiar with the interior of the prison of Newgate; for upon the turnkey looking towards him, he said, unhesitatingly:

"No. 54."

The man stared and looked towards the major, who, however, refused to take any notice of his glance.

"Do you hear me?" Skellum cried.

"Yes; but——"

"None of your buts to me, sirrah! No. 54, I tell you."

The turnkey hung up the bunch of keys which he had taken in his hand in readiness, and, going to the wall, took down another bunch which, judging by the mingled rust and dust that had accumulated upon them, had not been used for many a day.

Indeed, the turnkey's hesitation only arose from the fact that the series of cells of which No. 54 formed one, had never, to his knowledge, been made use of.

In fact, No. 54 was situated in a portion of the old building, and its position was much below the ordinary level of the cells.

He had, however, nothing to do but obey; so, having taken the fresh bunch of keys in hand, he led the way out of the vestibule.

A procession was immediately formed, and so arranged that Sixteen-String Jack should form the centre of it.

So great was the weight of the irons, that, added to the pain of his wound, he was scarcely able to move.

Still he was unwilling to confess as much to his foes, and staggered on in the best way he could.

The distance was great.

The corridors threaded and the steps descended seemed innumerable.

At length a door was reached which for a long time defied the powers of the officers to open it.

At length, however, it receded upon its hinges, disclosing another flight of steps—damp-shining steps.

Care had to be taken in descending these, and Jack was glad to avail himself of the proffered aid of two of the turnkeys.

At the bottom of the flight of steps a long corridor extended, the atmosphere of which was sickening and most oppressive to the lungs.

After going about half-way along it the turnkey stopped.

"This is No. 54," he said. "Wait a moment, and I will find the key."

CHAPTER MLXXII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK BECOMES THE INMATE OF NO. 54.

THE lamp which the turnkey carried burnt very dimly in that damp, subterraneous passage, the confined atmosphere of which was most unpleasant to the lungs; and he was obliged to look very closely at the bunch of keys in order to find the one which fitted the lock of No. 54.

Skellum looked on impatiently.

Each key had attached to it a small piece of metal, on which was stamped one or two figures denoting the number of the cell to which they belonged.

"Here it is, sir," said the turnkey, at length, fixing upon one particular key. "And by the looks, I should think it has been a precious long time since it has been used."

"Never mind your thoughts," interrupted Skellum—"nobody here wants to hear them! Be quick and open the door!"

Growling out something in a suppressed voice, the man obeyed.

But it was not very easy to make the huge key turn in the wards of the ponderous lock.

At last, however, the bolt was shot back, the heavy crossbar removed, and the door pushed open.

The turnkey raised his lamp above his head, and, standing on the threshold, peeped in.

"Enter!" said Skellum. "Do you think we want to stay here all night?"

With more muttered execrations about Skellum's officiousness, the man complied with this new demand.

That he was quite right in saying a very long time must have elapsed since the cell had been used was proved by the first glance which was cast around.

The floor was covered with moist, sticky dirt, while the walls fairly shone with watery exhalations.

Huge poisonous-looking fungi grew in the dark corners, where they found a congenial soil.

The mere aspect of such a place as this was quite enough to strike a chill to the heart of the bravest man.

How much more dreadful must it then have been to contemplate a lengthened solitary sojourn in it!

In spite of the stern control which he had hitherto exercised over himself, the highwayman shuddered.

Those who were with him shuddered too, but probably the cold was the cause of the spasmodic movement.

Mr. Skellum was in no humour to linger.

He walked straight to the further end of the cell.

The floor here was rather higher than elsewhere, and the consequence was that it was not so damp and disagreeable.

The first object which attracted the prisoner's attention was a broad stone bench.

Just below this was a strong iron bar raised about three inches from the flooring, to which it was strongly secured at both ends.

If Jack had been in any doubt as to the uses to which this long iron bar was put, these doubts would soon have had an end.

Another turnkey advanced, carrying in his hand a huge padlock and key.

From Jack's waist depended some strong iron links, which were connected by means of a ring with the fetters which confined his wrists.

This again was joined by the fetters round his ankles.

The turnkey took hold of the iron ring we have mentioned and passed through it the bow of the padlock, which he afterwards clasped round the horizontal iron bar.

The key was turned and removed.

The highwayman was then considered to be a secure prisoner.

Mr. Skellum attentively watched all these proceedings with strong sensations of satisfaction.

As for Jack, he was so much exhausted, not merely with the weight of the fetters, but also with the fatigue and weakness caused by remaining so long tightly bound, that he very gladly sank upon the stone bench, offering no resistance at all to his foes.

This passiveness was the only thing that caused Skellum any anxiety.

He looked upon it as being altogether an unfavourable

symptom, and he hoped that the prison officials would not suffer themselves to be deluded by it.

The reader will comprehend that the mode in which the highwayman was fastened allowed him a certain amount of liberty, inasmuch as he could, if he chose, walk the whole length of the iron bar, which was so constructed that the bow of the padlock could slip along it easily.

Jack at once bent his eyes upon the ground, and by his appearance seemed to be altogether unconscious of the fact that he was not alone.

When all was completed, Mr. Skellum stood for some moments looking at him.

But he could not take his departure until he had satisfied himself that Jack was secure.

He did this by making a careful examination of the fetters.

Of this also Jack seemed to be unconscious, for he never moved a muscle.

The fact was that he was in a state closely resembling insensibility.

He was too much overcome to make the slightest motion, and he was only partly conscious of what was going on around.

And when we consider what our old friend had gone through, no surprise will be felt at the helpless condition to which he was reduced.

At last Skellum signified his readiness to depart; but as he went he continued to cast anxious glances towards his prisoner.

With the closest attention he watched the turnkey secure the door, and as he walked back along the gloomy passage he said:

"Do not for one moment suffer yourselves to be deceived by the apathy of the prisoner; I am convinced that it is only assumed, and of course only with the intention of throwing you off your guard."

The turnkeys were silent, for there was not one who relished this interference with their duties.

"If you are wise you will pay attention to what I have said," continued Skellum. "The Government is determined to hang this man; and should he escape, depend upon it every one who has any share in keeping guard over him will be transported."

Still there was no reply, and this persistent silence made Skellum grind his teeth with rage.

Moodily he stalked on until the vestibule was once more reached, and then he looked around him as though he had anticipated to see the Governor.

But the major had retired.

Skellum, having no excuse for remaining longer, reluctantly took his departure.

On the pavement outside he paused, however, and assembled his men around him.

"I have no faith in the present Governor of Newgate, nor in one of the officials, so that, to counteract their carelessness, you shall form a close circle round the prison, and keep a sharp look-out upon every part of it. Perform this service well, and you shall be well rewarded. Never fear but that I will see to that."

The men separated, and Skellum retraced his steps to Bow Street.

He was now full of anxiety to learn something about the movements of those who had started off in pursuit of the remainder of the band of highwaymen.

But on his arrival there was no intelligence, and this circumstance had the effect of filling his mind with painful doubts.

He began to think that they had not met with much success, or he would have heard of them sooner.

We fancy, however, that the reader would prefer a relation of what happened to Jack to the proceedings of the police officers, and accordingly we return to Newgate.

The Governer was a long time before he could bring his furious anger into anything like reasonable bounds.

This superseding of his authority was something which his haughty nature could not brook.

His first act was to take pen, ink, and paper as soon as he could recover himself sufficiently to do so.

In very intemperate language he then wrote out his resignation of the office he held, and concluded with the suggestion that, as so much confidence was felt in Mr. Skellum's abilities, he had better be put in his place.

This missive he immediately despatched by special messenger; and having done so, he felt much more composed than he had hitherto done.

We mention these circumstances because of the effect which they produced upon Sixteen-String Jack's condition.

Every night it was the custom of the major to make a complete round of the prison, so as to insure that all was going on as it should be.

He did not allow his passion to prevent him from making the present evening any exception to the rule.

The usual round was taken, and when he had finished he said, in surly tones:

"And where the devil, may I ask, is No. 54?"

The turnkey explained the position of the cell.

"I suppose I may be allowed to visit this cell too? But the devil burn me, if the time will not soon be here when I shall not know what to do in the prison. Lead the way, will you?" he added, to the jailer. "Don't stand there like a grinning idiot, as you are!"

The man, without a word, conducted the major to No. 54, for he knew very well that it was a most unwise proceeding to offer the choleric Governor any provocation in his present angry mood.

"And this is the place they have thought fit to put a fellow-man and a Christian in, is it?" said the major, as he paused before the door of Jack's cell. "Faugh!—bah! the stink is enough to kill a regiment of soldiers!"

The turnkey opened the door.

The grating sound caused Jack to look up.

He wondered greatly what could be the meaning of this unexpected visitor.

The Governor stalked up close to the damp, moss-grown bench on which our old friend sat.

For some moments he looked on in silence, but at last his thoughts broke forth in words.

"May I be d—d!" he ejaculated, "if this is not worse than the Black Hole at Calcutta! It's a disgrace! But," he added, with a string of oaths which we prefer to omit, "it shall never be said that Major Oneyer permitted such a state of things to exist. You may be a bad sort of a fellow, but d—n me, sir, if you shall be treated like a beast!"

Sixteen-String Jack listened to these remarks in unbounded amazement.

In vain he tried to comprehend their exact purport.

It was not long, however, before he found that the disagreement between the major and Mr. Skellum would be beneficial to himself.

"Give me the lamp," said the major, furiously; "and now go and fetch some one to help you. I will stop here and keep guard the while."

"And what is to be done, sir?" the turnkey ventured to inquire.

"Done!" echoed the major. "Why, this d—d hole shall be cleaned out, and made as comfortable as possible. Don't stare at me. It shall be done, and, harkye: order a fresh mattress to be brought and placed upon that stone bench. Why, it is damp enough to kill anyone who sat on it—and bring blankets, too, and a loaf."

The turnkey departed, anxious to communicate to his companions the extraordinary commands which he had received.

During his absence, the Governor walked up and down the cell, the fever in his mind being too great to allow him to remain still.

At the same time he occupied himself with pouring maledictions upon Skellum's head.

But as soon as Jack could recover from his astonishment he spoke:

"I don't know, sir," he said, in an unsteady voice, for the unexpected kindness of the Governor went to his heart—"I don't know why you should trouble yourself so much about my condition; but rest assured that I am deeply grateful to you for your humanity. I was always poor in expressing my thanks, but never poorer than I am at this moment."

"Never mind about that," said the Governor; "I am a soldier, and have got my own notions of what is right and wrong. It is certain that I was never cut out to be the Governor of a prison, and d—n me if I will be, and that's the truth! As for that Skinem or Killem, or whatever the blackguard's name is, I only wish I had the power to keep him in this place a week or two!"

What more the major may have said we know not, for just then the turnkey, accompanied by three others, appeared.

The men set about their task with hearty goodwill, for they knew the angry nature of the Governor; and in much less time than would perhaps have been thought possible, the cell was cleaned and made to present a widely different aspect.

A new mattress was placed upon the stone bench, and a couple of blankets were placed at the disposal of the prisoner.

Bread was brought, and also a pitcher of water.

"There, Mr. Skinem," the major ejaculated, when all his commands had been thoroughly carried out, "I have disappointed your base-hearted spite, and be d—d to you!"

These words of course let Sixteen-String Jack into the full light of the affair, and he comprehended it was the desire for revenge upon the man who had offended, more than humanity, that had induced the Governor to adopt his present course.

But this did not prevent the highwayman from expressing his gratitude for the amelioration of his condition.

In this, however, the major manifested his bluntness and honesty.

"Don't thank me," he roared, drowning Jack's voice completely. "You have nothing to thank me for."

"But I easily might have something," Jack answered.

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this, sir: I have been wounded in the leg by a bullet — somewhere near the ankle, I believe—and I should never forget your kindness if you were to send the surgeon to look at it. Your kindness has touched me, for when I entered this place I made up my mind to die rather than ask for assistance."

The major remained standing stock still for several seconds after the prisoner had finished speaking.

The first use which he made of his voice was to launch out into a volley of imprecations upon Skellum's inhumanity.

"And so you are a wounded man?" he said, at length, in a calmer voice.

"I am."

"And a brave one too," added the major. "What an infernal pity it is you did not turn soldier instead of highwayman. If you had, d—n me, sir, you would have been a credit to the country!"

The major spoke with so much emphasis as to call up a smile upon Jack's countenance.

"You shall have a surgeon in less than a quarter of an hour," he continued; "and as for the rascal Killem, I'll be even with him some day, the blackguard!"

CHAPTER MLXXIII.

THE RESULT OF SIXTEEN-STRING JACK'S TRIAL AT THE OLD BAILEY.

The Governor was as good as his word.

The surgeon came, who made an examination of Jack's hurt, which he pronounced not serious, but still in a bad state through neglect.

One dressing, however, had the effect of almost entirely relieving Jack from the smarting pain which he had suffered.

This being over, the highwayman threw himself at full length upon the hard mattress, and fell off into a profound sleep, which was solely caused by utter exhaustion.

He was awoke by hearing the fastenings of his cell door undone.

He looked up faintly and wearily.

A smile of pleasure immediately appeared upon his lips when he saw upon the threshold the young lawyer, Mr. Godfrey.

He came at once to the rude pallet and seated himself upon it.

"You have been sent by Old Matthew?" said Jack, inquiringly.

The lawyer nodded.

"My best thanks to him," answered Jack, "but he can do me no service. I feel that my race is run. I shall take the will for the deed, however. Assure him of my gratitude."

"I will, never fear. But I shall appear in your behalf at the trial, when, rest certain, every effort will be made to get you off."

"But made in vain."

"Nay—I don't know that."

"But I do."

"You are most despondent."

"I am; for I feel that my case is hopeless."

"Nay—nay—do not begin to despair yet."

"When is the trial?"

"In two days."

"So soon?"

"Yes. I shall try to get it postponed to next sessions."

"You will not succeed."

"You must allow me to judge best about that."

"Nay—nay; believe me, I realise much better than you do the exact nature of my position."

"You may think so."

"I am certain of it. I am in the toils, and I have set the authorities too long at defiance to indulge in any hope of getting off."

"You will think differently soon."

Jack shook his head.

"I am not surprised at your dejection; this place is enough to give anyone the horrors."

"Right—but what did you think of doing for me at the trial?"

"Getting up an *alibi*."

"Won't do."

"We shall see about that," said Mr. Godfrey, smiling. "I have had some little experience in these matters."

"And you really hope to succeed?"

"I do, because I shall bring witnesses forward to prove you were elsewhere."

"It will be useless."

"It will be done, nevertheless."

"Have you heard anything of my friends?"

"Nothing."

"There has been no fresh capture made?"

"I believe not."

"Then I have hopes for them. And now I wish you to pay the utmost attention to something I am going to say to you."

"I shall do so, never fear," answered Mr. Godfrey, taking out his note-book.

"Nay, it is nothing you have occasion to write down—merely listen."

"I will."

"About the trial, then, I have no doubts. I know full well how that will terminate."

"But——"

"Nay, no interruptions. After it is over I believe that my comrades will endeavour to rescue me, and will doubtless put themselves into communication with Old Matthew before doing so."

"Well?"

"Should they do so, take to them from me the assurance that it is my earnest desire that they will attempt nothing of the kind——"

"But stay——"

"Hush! The attempt cannot benefit me, for it will fail; and as for my comrades, they will perish."

"Really," cried Mr. Godfrey, "you take too gloomy a view of things, and you will not allow me to interpose a word."

"Promise me," continued Jack, unheedful of the interruption—"promise me that you will faithfully deliver this message. It is my last request, and I shall suffer much if it is not granted."

"You may depend that I will report all that you say. At the same time, endeavour to assume a little cheerfulness. Every effort will be made for you——"

"I know all about that, and I am deeply thankful to you all. But what I have seen since I have been an inmate of this prison convinces me that the Government will never allow me to slip through their fingers this time; the precautions taken are extraordinary."

"Still that ought not to make you despair."

"Why?"

"Because the race is not always to the swift, you know, and therefore it is possible for these extra precautions to defeat themselves."

"It may be so, but it is a frail hope indeed."

"Still it is a hope; and now let me give you one word of parting counsel, for the time allotted for my interview

has almost expired. When you are brought up, plead not guilty, and leave the rest to me. Promise me to open your mouth."

"I promise that readily."

"Enough. I must now bid you farewell."

In fact, it was at this moment that the turnkey who had been standing near the door came towards them and gruffly announced:

"Time's up."

With a few more words of encouragement the young lawyer departed, and Jack was once more left to the solitude of his cell.

The visit, however, caused rather an increase than an abatement of Jack's despair.

A deep gloom seemed gradually settling upon his spirits.

It was because his heart was oppressed by a heavy presentiment.

An inward voice seemed perpetually to assure him that he had seen his faithful comrades for the last time, and that the duration of his life upon this earth would now be short indeed.

To what extent these dismal forebodings were correct, time now will very quickly show.

After the interview we have just recorded, nothing took place to disturb the monotony of existence that was of a character sufficiently important to merit particular consideration at our hands.

The two days mentioned by Mr. Godfrey as intervening between the one appointed for his trial quickly passed away.

The eventful morning came.

It found Sixteen-String Jack quite calm and composed.

He was like one who knows the worst—not like one enduring the liveliest suspense.

It was evident that the authorities were apprehensive that a rescue would be attempted, and therefore every conceivable precaution was adopted.

Jack's fetters weighed heavily upon him, preventing him from taking that amount of repose which his exhausted condition required.

Consequently it was with satisfaction that he looked forward to the commencement of his trial, because during it he fully expected to be relieved from the ponderous mass of iron.

But this expectation was doomed to disappointment.

To his unbounded astonishment, he was informed that it had been determined to place him in the dock with his fetters still upon him.

Jack uttered no word of remonstrance, because he knew full well that it would be unavailing.

But he looked upon this circumstance as a strong confirmation of his gloomy anticipations.

It was determined that he should perish.

His trial would be a mere idle form—an utter mockery.

He felt that he was foredoomed, and knew that the verdict and sentence were already decided.

It was, however, quite an unexpected thing for any prisoner to be placed at the bar while encumbered with his fetters, and a murmur of astonishment, not to say indignation, made itself heard as soon as the highwayman was brought into Court.

But this manifestation was speedily checked, for the spectators felt that they were only there out of sufferance, and that any misbehaviour would result in immediate expulsion.

Some compassion was, however, displayed for Jack's state of weakness, and, by the order of the presiding judge, he was provided with a chair.

Into this Jack sank gladly, and prepared to listen to what was about to take place, though with a strengthened consciousness of what the result would be.

The usual formalities attendant upon the opening of the Court were then gone through.

The jury were sworn, and the indictment against the prisoner read.

Stripped of all its confusing technicalities and needless repetitions, the substance was that at a certain time and place the prisoner at the bar did stop on the highway two of his Majesty's subjects, whom, after putting them in great fear of their lives, he despoiled of a large sum of money.

In accordance with the instructions given him, Jack, when called upon, pleaded "Not guilty."

Mr. Godfrey then rose.

"My lord," he said, "I beg to state that the prisoner is unprepared with his defence. It is now only three days since his examination, and the time has not been sufficient for the obtainment of the witnesses who will declare his innocence. For this reason I have to request that the trial be postponed until the next sessions, by which time the prisoner will be prepared."

No sooner had the last words left the young lawyer's lips than the counsel for the prosecution sprang to his feet.

"My lord," he said, "I beg to oppose the application of my learned friend. I maintain that sufficient time has elapsed in order to enable the prisoner to arrange his defence. Moreover, as I need not inform your lordship, the prisoner is one of a notorious band of desperadoes who have long set the authorities at defiance. With great difficulty this one has been captured, and any postponement of his trial would only afford facilities for his escape."

"Without taking the latter into consideration at all," replied the judge, "I deem the former objection quite valid. Sufficient time has elapsed, and the trial must now proceed."

This was Mr. Godfrey's first discomfiture.

But he had expected it, and, therefore, suffered but little disappointment.

His next effort was to rid Jack of his fetters.

"I bow to your decision, my lord, but I have yet another request to make. You see that the prisoner at the bar is loaded with fetters of such an enormous weight that it is quite wonderful how he sustains himself in them. My request is that, during the examination which is about to take place, the fetters be removed."

"My lord," interposed the counsel for the prosecution, "I must also oppose this application. We have good reason for believing that an attempt will be made to rescue the prisoner from custody, and therefore it has been deemed advisable to depart from the usual course, and cause the prisoner to appear before you as you see him."

The judge inclined his head.

"I consider the reason given by my learned friend for the prosecution quite sufficient," he said, "and I cannot make any interference."

Mr. Godfrey looked really disappointed this time, for he had quite calculated on carrying this point.

Those in the Court exchanged whispers with each other.

The general impression was that Jack's fate was sealed.

No very far-sighted person was required to see that the prosecution would have it all their own way, and that so far as the ultimate result was concerned, all the debates of the trial might as well be dispensed with.

The counsel for the prosecution now again rose.

Amid a breathless silence he commenced his address.

In a very circumstantial manner he related how the two bailiffs had been robbed on the high-road by Sixteen-String Jack.

As all the particulars of this adventure must be fresh in the minds of the reader, it is needless for us to report his speech in full.

His concluding words, however, may as well be put on record.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said,—"this is a brief statement of the facts of the case against the prisoner. Witnesses will now be called who will depose to all the circumstances; and, having heard this evidence, it will be for you, gentlemen of the jury, to decide whether the prisoner at the bar is guilty or not. If the former, do not hesitate to pronounce your verdict, because it is only by making an example of such a man as the prisoner at the bar that we can hope to restore something like safety to his Majesty's subjects while travelling. The state of our high-roads has long been a disgrace to the whole land, and therefore, gentlemen of the jury, you will be able to see that your duty is more than ordinarily important upon the present occasion."

These last words were considered so unfair and so prejudicial that they were greeted with a general hiss from the body of the Court.

A scene of great confusion then ensued, and it was some moments before order could be restored.

In the meanwhile one of the witnesses had been placed in the box.

It was one of the bailiffs.

As soon as he had been sworn, he gave a very clear and truthful account of the manner in which he had been robbed.

He swore positively that Sixteen-String Jack was one of his assailants, and added over and over again, with great emphasis, that he could not possibly be mistaken in the matter.

Mr. Godfrey subjected him to a very close and searching cross-examination.

It was all to no purpose, however.

The man kept pertinaciously to his tale.

The other bailiff gave corroborative evidence, and then a whole army of police officers and other persons were marshalled successively into the witness-box.

They were called by the prosecution, and with the sole object of identifying the prisoner.

Every one swore most positively that the prisoner at the bar was no other than the famous highwayman, Sixteen-String Jack.

The bill offering the reward was then handed in.

Upon this, as the reader knows, was printed a description of Jack's appearance.

This was found to tally in every respect, so that the question of identification seemed settled beyond all possibility of doubt.

The evidence was overwhelming; but yet Mr. Godfrey did not despair.

He had his witnesses well and carefully instructed, and now he proceeded to call them.

Their evidence was that the prisoner at the bar was not Sixteen-String Jack, but a person who unfortunately bore a strong resemblance to him, and that at the time mentioned as that when the robbery was committed, he was many miles from the place.

The Old Bailey has long had an infamous notoriety for hard swearing, and surely never was harder swearing known than on the present occasion.

To the uninitiated it would have appeared difficult to come to a decision in the face of so much opposite and conflicting testimony.

But the jury, when the time came for them to deliberate upon their verdict, did not so much as turn round in their seats.

Their minds were quite made up, and when the Clerk of the Arraigns put to them the usual question, the foreman replied:

"Guilty."

CHAPTER MLXXIV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MEETS WITH AN INTERRUPTION ON HIS WAY TO TYBURN.

From what has already been said, the verdict found by the jury will occasion no surprise to the reader.

Jack himself never moved a muscle when the fatal declaration was made.

Many who watched him marvelled at his coolness; but they did not think that for many hours he had exclusively occupied himself in preparing his mind for this result.

The usual question was put by the Clerk of the Arraigns as to whether the prisoner had anything to say why sentence should not be pronounced upon him in accordance with the verdict which had just been found.

Jack shook his head.

Like the rest of the proceedings on this day, the question was a form merely, for, without waiting a second after the clerk had finished speaking, the judge commenced to pass sentence.

Already he had assumed the hideous black cap which is supposed in some mysterious manner to impart additional solemnity to what is said.

The judge spoke in very low, subdued tones, yet so intense was the silence which now prevailed in the Court that there was no difficulty experienced by anyone present in hearing every syllable.

Before pronouncing the last awful words, the judge, as is customary in such cases, made some prefatory remarks, the tenor of which was the enormity of the offence of which the prisoner had been found guilty.

Then he concluded

"The sentence of this Court upon you is that you be taken hence to the prison whence you came, and from thence to the place of public execution, there to be hanged by the neck until you be dead, and may Heaven show you that mercy which the laws of this land will not permit us to display."

A kind of shudder seemed to run through the whole Court when the judge finished, as though the crowded assemblage had been possessed of but one body.

It was impossible that Jack could listen to these awful words unmoved.

Had he done so he could scarcely have been human.

He was aroused by feeling a tap upon his shoulder.

He looked round, and saw that the officers were waiting to conduct him to the cell.

He prepared to rise, but before doing so, made a sign which brought Mr. Godfrey to the front of the dock.

"You see I was right," said Jack, calmly. "Now remember to impress upon Old Matthew that it is my earnest desire that he pays strict regard to my last wishes."

Just as he spoke, Matthew himself pushed forward, and before anyone was aware of what he was about to do, he seized Jack's hand and pressed it warmly.

"Keep up your courage," he said, in a faint whisper.

"Good-bye, old friend," responded Jack, in a broken voice, and returning the friendly pressure while he spoke —"good-bye, though you ought not to have endangered yourself by thus publicly recognising me."

"Leave that to me. They can't make it a criminal act to shake hands; and as for the public-house, I have made up my mind to give that up and retire."

The officers now interposed and prevented any further conversation.

Jack was much pleased at being thus recognised, and he felt that it would enable him to pass through the ordeal which awaited him.

Upon reaching the room beneath the dock he found that Tom Davis with his wife and Ellen were among the inmates.

Fain would he have lingered and addressed to them a few last words.

But his jailers would not permit him to pause a single moment.

All he could do was to bestow upon them a brief parting glance.

The next moment the closing of the heavy door hid them from his sight.

The case against Tom Davis was the next one on the list, and accordingly they were summoned to the Court above.

Mrs. Davis was still in a condition of most deplorable weakness and exhaustion.

So faint was she, that she was allowed to seat herself upon the chair which had been so lately occupied by Sixteen-String Jack.

In accordance with the advice of Mr. Godfrey, all three of the prisoners pleaded "Not guilty."

Tom Davis was taken separately.

The charge against him was not only having been an accomplice of the band of highwaymen, but also with being an escaped convict.

In spite of an eloquent speech from Mr. Godfrey wherein he entreated the mercy of the Court, the judge sentenced him to transportation for life.

Ellen and Mrs. Davis were then separately charged with aiding and abetting felons.

The young lawyer contended that there was no direct evidence against them.

But the Court looked at the former conviction for the same offence, and sentenced them both to imprisonment with hard labour for the space of two years.

If outward appearance could be taken as any indication, then it was tolerably clear that Mrs. Davis would end her days within the walls of a prison.

The scene which followed when the moment came for the separation was heartrending.

So painful was it that we feel ourselves compelled to pass over it in silence.

All three knew that it was a lifelong separation that was to follow.

Mrs. Davis did not long survive the shock.

She died before the time came for her removal from Newgate.

As for Jack, he had resolved to try his best to meet his coming fate with fortitude.

He had played a game of which Death was the stake.

He knew that some day or other there must be an end to his career, and he was conscious that it had come at last.

There was only one point upon which he suffered anxiety.

This was the fear he had that his other comrades would make some desperate attempt to rescue him.

From the precautions that had been taken, Jack was absolutely certain that the result could be nothing but defeat—and defeat to the highwaymen meant nothing but death.

The attempt, so far from benefiting him, would only have the effect of consigning them to that fate from which he felt he could not possibly escape.

As it was, Jack felt that it would be no inconsiderable satisfaction if he could die knowing that his companions were safe.

But he feared, and with good reason, that his comrades would freely die in the attempt to save him.

He was doubtful, too, whether his urgently-made request would have any effect upon them.

Judging by himself, he knew that it would make no impression upon him were he in their place.

It may safely be said that this topic occupied his thoughts much more than any other; and in the long, dark, and silent hours of the night he would listen with feverish impatience, expecting to hear something that would give token of the approach of his comrades, and starting nervously when any faint sound floated to his ears.

There were only four days standing between the one upon which he had taken his trial and that fatal Monday upon which, for fifty-two times every year, so many trembling human beings were offered up as sacrifices to the majesty of outraged law.

Short as the time was in reality, yet it seemed very long to Jack, who had nothing to occupy him save his own sad thoughts, and nothing to break the dismal monotony of his cell.

When Sunday came, he fully expected that he would have to pass through what was to him infinitely the most painful of all—that of sitting in the chapel while the Ordinary of Newgate preached a funeral sermon.

But so great were the apprehensions felt about the safety of the prisoner that it was determined to do away with the customary ceremony.

Great, therefore, was the disappointment of those who could find no better Sabbath occupation than that of flocking to the prison chapel, in order that they might gratify their morbid curiosity for gazing upon men so soon about to die.

But with Sixteen-String Jack absent, the show was shorn of half its attractions.

As for the condemned man himself, he felt deeply grateful for his escape.

The Ordinary visited him in his cell; but Jack could not fix his attention sufficiently to understand what he said.

He was wondering all the time what his companions were about; and though he would firmly have denied that such was the case, yet in his inmost heart he experienced something akin to disappointment at having heard nothing of them.

It seemed so like deserting him; and nothing could have caused Jack half so keen a pang as the thought that he was neglected by those whom he had ever thought his best and dearest friends.

Whenever this thought occurred to him he dismissed it with angry impatience; yet, for all that, it continued to return over and over again.

Each repetition, too, seemed to be stronger and stronger, and Jack's dejection much increased.

And so passed on the time until the evening came preceding the morning which had been fixed for his execution.

And now there was deeply impressed upon Jack's mind the consciousness that his end was close at hand.

No effort of his own, no exertions of his friends, would serve to avert his doom.

The time had arrived when he was destined to take his parting look of this bright world.

Then, when the hour of midnight approached, a low and distant roar, like that arising from the sea when heard from afar off, came upon his ears.

At first he wondered what it could be that produced it.

He listened attentively for a few moments

Then he resumed his former attitude.

"I know well enough now what it is," he murmured. "It is the crowd—the gaping crowd already taking up their position in order to obtain a glimpse of the bold highwayman they have so often heard of, and to note how he looks upon his first setting out upon his journey to certain death.

"But they will be disappointed," he added, after a brief pause—"that is, if they expect to see me exhibit any great signs of emotion. I will so school myself that, no matter what feelings there may be about my heart, they shall not find expression in my countenance: no, no—that shall be a blank to them."

After the utterance of this determination, a kind of stupor seemed to creep over the highwayman's faculties.

It was not sleep, nor was it a swoon, although he was all but unconscious of everything around him.

It was rather an anomalous condition produced by want of sleep and by a terrible exhaustion.

How long he remained thus Jack had no very clear conception.

He was aroused by a touch and by the sound of voices.

Looking up, he saw himself face to face with a turnkey.

"You're a tight one, you are!" he exclaimed, with a certain kind of admiration. "Let me tell you it is very few we have to awaken at such a time as this. However, I see you mean to die game. What will you have for breakfast?"

It cost Jack a great effort to control his inclination to shudder.

"What you like," he said—"anything, so long as you leave me to myself."

A meal was brought, which constituted only the ordinary prison fare.

But Jack did not taste it.

Then came the usual visit from the officials connected with the prison.

Jack submitted to everything mechanically.

The only sign of consciousness he gave was a deep sigh of relief at the moment when his heavy irons were struck off.

He felt then as though he was almost a free man.

His jailers were on the alert, fancying perhaps the prisoner would choose the present moment for making some insane resistance.

But they were deceived.

Jack was as calm as ever.

He was then conducted to the press-yard, and upon reaching this place he inspired gratefully the fresh, cool morning air—fresh in comparison with the damp, malarious exhalations of his dungeon.

Here the hangman was in waiting, and here he was pinioned again, though in a different fashion than before.

Afterwards he was half-led, half-carried into a kind of courtyard.

This place was crowded to the utmost of its capacity by police officers.

Jack had wondered greatly how it was he had seen nothing of Skellum on this eventful morning.

The fact was that the individual just mentioned had been extremely busy in posting his men along the line of route, and taking every precaution to prevent the possibility of a rescue.

Strange rumours had been floating about the country to the effect that a desperate attack would be made while the highwayman was on his way to Tyburn, and in consequence Skellum had taken such measures as would, he felt convinced, make any such attempt futile.

Some little delay took place before all was in readiness for a start.

At length, however, Jack was lifted up into the cart and forced to take a seat upon the hideous black-and-white coffin which was destined for the reception of his body after death



[THE END OF CLAUDE DUVAL'S DEVOTED FRIENDSHIP.]

The Ordinary placed himself by his side.

The hangman mounted to a seat in front.

Under the direction of Mr. Skellum a dense body of police officers then surrounded the vehicle.

The sheriffs had by this time seated themselves comfortably in the gaudy carriage provided for their use.

Outside the large folding doors a troop of light dragoons were stationed, who for some hours past had had no small difficulty in keeping the populace at a respectful distance.

The signal for starting was given by the irascible Governor of the prison.

Scarcely had the sound died away than the folding doors were thrown open, and the first portion of the procession set itself in motion.

As it slowly defiled into the Old Bailey the assembled multitude set up loud cheers and other cries.

A fearful succession of groans proclaimed the moment when the executioner was caught sight of.

These changed again into cheers as the highwayman himself came into view.

Mr. Skellum heard the sounds with dismay.

To his ears they seemed to mean rescue.

He by no means liked the extreme resignation which Sixteen-String Jack manifested.

He inferred from it that something was going to happen.

"Keep close around him, my lads," Skellum said. "Be on the watch, and above all things don't suffer yourselves to be so much thrown off your guard as to be taken by surprise."

When the heavy vehicle passed out into the open street, Sixteen-String Jack raised his head and looked keenly around him.

But the multitude of faces which he beheld bewildered and confused him.

It was in vain for him to hope to distinguish one familiar and friendly face out of so many.

A half-repressed sigh of disappointment escaped his lips, and then he resumed his former manner.

Mr. Skellum knew not what to make of this, although he watched the condemned man's every movement, and tried his best to read his thoughts.

The troop of soldiers brought up the rear of the procession.

All carried their swords drawn, so as to have them in readiness for use at a moment's notice.

Skinner Street and Snow Hill were passed in safety—the Fleet bridge crossed and the ascent of Holborn Hill commenced.

Here it was customary to make a halt, and this would be the moment chosen most likely for an attempt at rescue.

Accordingly Mr. Skellum concentrated his forces at this point, and kept a more than ever vigilant look-out.

But the people, beyond shouting, screaming, and swaying to and fro, did not seem inclined to make any demonstration.

As soon as possible, the word was given for the journey to be recommenced.

By this time Sixteen-String Jack began to realise how unawares he had suffered hope to hold possession of a portion of his heart.

When near the gates of St. Andrew's Church, he had indeed looked wistfully and expectantly around.

At this point he made sure of seeing something that would convince him he was not neglected and forgotten by his friends.

The disappointment made itself felt most keenly.

At the same snail-like pace the procession resumed its course.

Holborn was slowly passed through from one end to the other, and the High Street of St. Giles's reached.

Here again it was customary to stop.

The landlord came out with the bowl of punch, which it was then the rule to offer to the prisoner by way of refreshment.

Jack took it as well as his pinioned arms would let him, because it afforded him a pretext for standing upon the cart.

In this position he was able to see all around him.

There were on all sides as far as his eyes could reach nothing—nothing but white faces all upturned towards him—all staring at him.

Skellum was full of excitement.

The multitude was silent—strangely and awfully silent when the vastness of it was taken into consideration and the noise which had hitherto attended it.

Jack remained thus for some moments, looking eagerly around.

Then, with a weary sigh, he returned the bowl of punch untasted, and sat down on the coffin.

This was the signal for the commencement of the former turbulence.

The silence of the people had arisen solely from the notion that Jack was about to address them, it being no unusual thing for a prisoner to make a speech when at this spot.

Now they were loud in their expressions of disappointment.

Again the procession started.

It would be hard to say, however, whether Mr. Skellum's fears were to any extent abated.

He was still a prey to great anxiety.

Jack now gave himself over to greater despondency than ever.

He felt that he was abandoned by all his friends, and the thought sent a bitter pang to his heart.

He was deserted.

And then again he would think that all that was going on around him was nothing else save some hideous dream.

In a short time he fancied he must awake to find all that which was now seemingly so real nothing but baseless unsubstantiality.

He thought, too, as he grew a little calmer, that it was most probable that all his comrades were in positions of danger scarcely inferior to his own, and such being the case, how unreasonable it was of him to look for their presence.

He resolved to think of them no longer, but to bend all his energies to the one task that lay before him—that of dying bravely.

When he again raised his eyes, he felt that present occurrences were indeed no vision, for before him he could see the dark timbers of Tyburn Tree.

It was just, however, at this moment that he became conscious that something of an unusual character was going on near him.

CHAPTER MLXXV.

TAKES A GLIMPSE AT THE FORTUNES OF CLAUDE DUVAL.

This something clearly caused a considerable amount of confusion, but what it precisely was we must go back a little way to explain.

It is with the proceedings of Claude Duval that we are now about to concern ourselves, and we revert to the moment when he broke away from the police officers at Stonehenge.

It is not for a moment to be supposed that so many fire-arms could be discharged without producing serious results.

We have seen already that Sixteen-String Jack, Dick Turpin, and Maud were more or less severely injured, and Claude Duval did not escape.

Indeed, he was wounded in no less than three places and all the hurts were serious ones.

Nevertheless, he was not incapacitated from retaining his seat in the saddle; it would indeed be a serious wound to cause him to fall, for to him riding could only be called second nature.

Away, then, he went across the broad expanse of Salisbury Plain, urging his horse by every means at his command to put forth his utmost speed.

In a moment both horse and rider seemed to be swallowed up by the intense darkness which reigned around.

Claude was in too much haste, and too much bewildered by the events which had recently occurred, to take any notice of the direction his horse was taking.

Indeed, to him just then all roads were the same.

His only object was to get out of the way of his pursuers.

The separation of the highwaymen in the manner we have previously described really was the best course they could have adopted, since the officers were much embarrassed by it.

Of course they divided all their forces so as to give chase to all the fugitives; but then they could not part themselves into various small troops without a little confusion and several moments' delay.

Claude, however, in spite of his exertions, was not able to get out of hearing of his foes.

Every now and then the wind would carry to him the dull, heavy sound produced by the concussion of many horses' hoofs upon the ground.

Whip, spur, and voice were all employed by Claude in his exertions to urge his steed forward at his utmost speed, and certainly the animal responded nobly.

It seemed an awful thing to be rushing at so tremendous a speed through the intense darkness.

He had to trust entirely to the sagacity of his horse to keep clear of any obstacle that might lay before them.

Away, away they sped in mad career, and surely at a more rapid pace than the more heavily-mounted police officers would be able to make.

But as Claude continued to call out in inspiriting tones to his steed, his voice grew weaker and weaker, until at last it became inaudible to himself.

Still he paused not, nor relaxed those efforts he was able to make.

The darkness seemed to roll around him in huge and palpable masses.

He rocked to and fro in the saddle, maintaining his balance only by a species of instinct.

His pursuers were out of hearing now, but Claude knew it not.

On the contrary, his exciting fancy made him believe that they were still hard upon his track—that the hoarse beats of their horses were thundering in his ears.

The margin of Salisbury Plain was reached, and the wooded country beyond gained.

Of this, also, was Claude ignorant.

His sole consciousness extended only to the fact that his horse was carrying him along at a furious rate, and even the sense of this grew less and less distinct every moment.

Had it been possible for any person to watch his headlong course, the utmost apprehensions would have been excited.

Every now and then it seemed as though he must inevitably be dashed to pieces.

Yet, strangely enough, he held on—held on until all became a blank.

There seemed to be a rushing sound in his ears, a mist of light before his eyes, and then all was silence and utter darkness.

Claude had swooned.

The quantity of blood he had lost was prodigious; but he did not fall from his horse until he was totally insensible.

Fortunately, just at this moment the horse was making his way across a piece of soft open ground.

On this Claude fell without injuring himself.

Falling, his feet became disentangled from the stirrups, and the horse, half maddened with terror and the manner in which he had been ridden, continued his race with undiminished speed.

He was out of sight in a moment.

Claude lay quite still—quite helpless; and had his pursuers come in that direction they would have made an easy capture.

It seemed to Claude that only a moment elapsed after his fall from his horse until he opened his eyes again.

But this was a delusion.

Contrary to his idea, many hours had passed away.

In a dreamy, semi-conscious fashion, Claude remained upon the ground, not feeling himself able to command his will sufficiently to enable him to make the slightest movement.

It was daylight.

Whether he was really aware of the circumstance is very doubtful.

At any rate, he took no notice of it.

The early morning sun had attained a considerable elevation, and his warm, rosy beams fell gratefully upon the wounded highwayman, warming his chilled limbs once more into life.

He might have remained thus for an hour, or even more, when he became conscious of something else.

This was a sound.

He listened, wondering vaguely what it was.

"It is a voice," he murmured. "Some one is singing. What a sweet and beautiful voice! Surely it must be a child's."

And then Claude relapsed into his former state—that state which was more like insensibility than life.

The voice continued singing.

It was, in truth, a sweet one.

The tones were most entrancing to the ear, and the notes were warbled forth as they might have been by some beautiful song bird.

Claude listened with intense delight.

Never before had his ears been ravished with so much melody.

As he then felt, he could have been content to remain listening for ever.

But the beautiful sounds suddenly ceased.

A shrill shriek followed, and this cry seemed to have the effect of rousing Claude partially into life.

Through his half-opened eyes he could now see the singer.

As he expected, it proved to be a young girl, who was as lovely as the sunshine of that bright morning.

The cry of alarm had been brought to her lips by coming unexpectedly upon the prostrate body of Claude Duval.

Well might her tender heart be filled with terror, for the highwayman presented a sad spectacle.

His apparel was almost everywhere soaked in blood, his hair was matted, and his face seemed to wear upon it the pallid hue of death.

The little girl carried a basket on her arm, and this, in her extreme fright, she allowed to fall to the ground.

Another moment and she would have fled precipitately from the spot, but, fortunately, just then Claude recovered the mastery of himself so as to be able to call out in a low, weak voice.

The sound reached the girl's ears and arrested her attention.

"Help!" said Claude—"help me! Don't run away! You have nothing to fear. Mercy—mercy! Help me!"

While speaking he, by a sudden effort, raised himself a little.

At first all objects spun round him so swiftly that he could distinguish nothing.

Then his vision cleared, and he perceived the little girl standing near him with her hands clasped and her eyes suffused with tears.

Traces of alarm were still distinguishable upon her countenance.

"You have no cause for fear," the highwayman continued. "If I had the will to injure anything so beautiful I have not the power. I am weak, helpless—I fear dying."

And, in fact, just at this instant such a deadly sensation of faintness came over him as justified him in thinking that his end was near.

But the young girl now showed that she was worthy of the name of heroine.

Her first fears had now quite vanished, and she came nearer in order to see whether she could not be of some assistance.

She shrunk back a little when a closer view made her more fully acquainted with Claude's terrible condition, but she overcame the weakness almost immediately.

"Shall I fetch you some water, sir?" she asked, in a gentle voice.

Claude made an affirmative sign.

He was too far gone to speak.

The girl ran to her basket, in which she seemed to have various kinds of provisions.

Her search was for a large cup, with which she ran to a spring close by and returned with a good draught of clear cold water.

Claude drank it eagerly, and the effects were almost magical.

The fever about his eyes and brain was lulled, and a fresh vigour seemed to be imparted to his limbs.

"Thanks—many thanks!" he said. "Would that I could tell you how deeply grateful I am!"

"But how came you thus?" the girl asked, in accents of great curiosity. "You are wounded, and your clothes are stained with blood."

"Yes—yes."

"How is it?"

"You shall know all in good time—I am too weak now."

"Yes—yes; how wrong and thoughtless it was of me to ask you."

"Nay—nay; it was no more than natural. May I ask you to increase still further the obligation I owe to you?"

"In what way can I aid you, sir?"

"With a little of your help," replied Claude, in a stronger voice. "I fancy I shall be able to rise to my feet."

The girl anxiously proffered the required assistance.

But Claude found the effort to rise much more severe than he had anticipated.

At last, when he was erect, the girl had to support almost all his weight, or he would have fallen back again quite helpless.

But this was produced mainly by the change of position, and the sensation quickly died away.

"Alas! sir," said the young girl, with mingled pity and distress—"alas! sir, what will you do? Where can you go in your condition?"

"Heaven help me!"

"Come, sir, be of good heart. If I might make so bold as to offer you a shelter——"

"A shelter?"

"Yes. If you will look yonder, across the moor, you will see a little thatched cottage—it is a humble place, but my home."

Claude strained his weak and weary eyes in the endeavour to make out the building of which his fair companion spoke

Dimly and imperfectly he could see something in the shape of a pretty rustic cottage.

"And you would be willing to give me shelter there?" he said, inquiringly.

"If you would accept of it."

"I shall do so, gladly."

"Then try if you can walk—do not hurry—and do not be afraid to bear upon me, for I am young and strong. We are poor—my mother and myself—and we are quite alone in the world, but still, what we can do for you shall be done willingly."

Claude was too much overcome by his feelings to utter a single word.

This young girl's behaviour touched him deeply

Oh, how glad he was to avail himself of this unexpected offer of shelter!

To his yearning spirit the little cottage seemed as the desert oasis to the parched and wearied traveller.

He made an effort to rally his remaining strength.

The task of walking was, however, almost beyond his powers, and often and often was he compelled to pause and recover himself.

But the young girl was all patience.

Instead of chiding his delay, she did her best to cheer his drooping spirits and revive his failing hopes.

"There, sir," she said at length, "your long and tiresome walk is over now. Here is our little garden-gate; and, look! there is mother in the porch, looking and wondering who it is that I have brought with me. Cheer up, sir—do cheer up! A few more steps, and then you are welcome to rest as long as you think proper."

Claude tried to murmur some words of thanks, but his voice choked him.

CHAPTER MLXXVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL IS NOT SUFFERED TO ENJOY A LONG PERIOD OF REST.

"LOOK, mother," said the young girl, as she passed through the little garden gate—"I found this poor gentleman lying dangerously hurt upon the moor, and I have offered him shelter."

"Right, Alice," Claude heard a voice say, in kindly accents.

"You need not shrink from your trouble," said Claude, faintly, "for I have the means about me to—to reward you well for what you do."

"We are Christians," was the answer, "and——"

What more was said Claude knew not.

He had been able to keep up thus far, but now his strength utterly deserted him.

A mist came before his eyes, and he was conscious of nothing further.

When he regained possession of his senses, he found himself in a small but comfortably-furnished bedchamber.

The blind had been drawn down to shut out the tooglaring rays of the sun, and over all there was such an air of calmness and peacefulness as made Claude think how enviable was the lot of those who were born to spend their lives amid such a scene.

The window was a little way open, and the hum of the busy insects without and the melody of the feathered songsters of the air reached the ears of the wounded man distinctly.

These sounds contributed much to make him inclined for rest, and insensibly his eyes closed in sleep

The slumber was long and deep, and consequently refreshing.

When Claude awoke, he felt like a new man.

Still he was in a terrible state of weakness.

He now discovered that either during his insensibility or his sleep his wounds had been skilfully bound up.

He wondered by whom, and with an inward shudder thought of the risk of detection he had run.

Indeed, he was greatly surprised that he had heard nothing of the officers, whom he fancied were close upon his track.

Apparently, however, he had eluded them.

In this way three days passed, during which the most important intelligence which reached the highwayman was that he was indebted to the good woman of the house for the care she had bestowed upon his hurts.

She explained to him that the portion of the country in which they were was so remote from other habitations that they were compelled to rely upon themselves for everything; and as she possessed a little surgical skill, she had thought it best to attend to his wounds at once, instead of waiting for assistance to arrive.

Claude thanked her earnestly, and complimented her upon the skilfulness she had displayed.

Each hour saw Claude stronger, and it was on the fourth day that for the first time he rose and dressed himself.

The woman, in the meantime, had cleaned and repaired his apparel, so that, when attired, Claude looked something like himself.

His weakness, however, was extreme, and towards evening he was compelled to throw himself at full length on the bed for rest.

Here he remained pondering deeply upon his position, and wondering what had become of his companions.

Especially was he anxious about his old comrade, Sixteen-String Jack, whom he had left in so much peril.

Now that he came to think more calmly over the matter, he regretted that he had consented to leave him in the hands of his foes without making an effort to release him.

That regret now was vain, and the consciousness of this chafed him terribly.

The longer he remained in reflection the more anxious he became, until the blood in his veins rose to feverheat.

To remain longer in the cottage he felt would be impossible.

Just then he heard a faint sound in the outer room.

He listened, and found it had been caused by the return of the young girl to whom unquestionably he owed his life, and who had been absent nearly all the day.

"Oh, mother," Claude heard her say, in cheerful tones, "you know you thought it strange that no inquiries should have been made for the poor gentleman in the next room? Well, I met with a friend of his in the town."

Claude's heart gave a great bound.

Could it be possible that his companions were at hand?

But the next words that the young girl artlessly uttered undeceived him.

"It was a man who wore a large red waistcoat—I never saw such a one before, and it made him look so strange. I heard him speaking to several others near the market-place, asking very particularly for some gentleman, who I found, from the description, must be no other than the one I found wounded on the moor."

"And did you tell the man in the red waistcoat so?"

"Yes."

Claude sprang up in bed like one suddenly galvanised.

"I quite expected to find him," the girl continued, "for he told me he should come at once. But he will be here in a moment or two at the farthest, I am sure; I will run to the door and see whether he is coming."

Here was startling intelligence indeed.

By an extraordinary accident the police had got upon his track.

He had been most innocently betrayed by the young girl.

What was to be done?

The danger was imminent indeed.

Yet how was Claude to escape it?

The mere exertion of moving about a little during the day had so much exhausted him that he was compelled to rest.

How, then, was he to hope for the power of making such efforts as would enable him to get away from his foes?

It is wonderful what a spur extreme danger is.

Claude was an exemplification of it.

Without indeed thinking for a moment of what he was about, he slipped off the bed on to the floor.

For a second he felt dizzy and sick, but the sensation speedily passed away.

It was now so dusk that he could scarcely discern the different objects the room contained, but he had often noticed that there was hanging up behind the door a cloak such as might be worn by a mounted soldier.

This Claude did not hesitate to appropriate to his own use.

At the same moment he shot the bolt softly into its socket.

This was the only fastening the door had: but slight as was its character, Claude thought that it would delay his foes at least a moment, and to him even so brief a space of time as that was of inestimable value.

Then he stepped towards the window.

So absorbed was he in what he was about that his weakness was for the time forgotten.

The room in which he had slept was level with the ground.

He looked keenly through the little panes, but in the gathering gloom he could discern no one.

No more time was to be lost.

The window was speedily opened, and Claude passed out.

"Thank Heaven," he muttered, as he stood upon the soft mould in the garden, "all is well so far! I wonder whether the officers are close at hand? If I had but my horse now I would bid them all defiance."

Crouching down so as to be sure of escaping all observation, Claude made his way to the end of the garden.

Here a low hedge barred his further progress.

At this point he stopped and looked back.

His heart beat violently.

He could command a partial view of the moor, and as he gazed in this direction he caught sight of many moving forms.

"They are here," he murmured.

Evidently the officers were making their way as quickly as possible towards the cottage, in the hope apparently of taking their intended prisoner by surprise.

Claude was compelled to remain where he was, for he feared that if he attempted to climb over the hedge he would be seen.

In less than a moment the cottage hid his foes altogether from his view.

This was all he needed.

The hedge was crossed at once, and the highwayman felt as though his escape was half accomplished.

But the officers would in a very little while find that he had taken his departure.

They would be in no sort of doubt as to the direction in which he had gone; and as they were well mounted and strong, while he was on foot and feeble, it seemed tolerably certain that they would overtake him before he had gone many yards.

Claude now found himself in a small meadow, and at the first glance he gave around him he perceived some dark object only a few yards off.

At first he could scarcely believe in the extent of his good fortune.

But a second glance seemed to show him that he had fallen into no error.

The dark object was a horse.

If he could but capture it and mount, why even then all might be well.

He approached cautiously.

But another surprise, and one of a most agreeable character, was in store for him.

The horse he saw was his own.

The trappings had not been removed, and the creature looked fresh and full of vigour.

By what mysterious means he had got there at so opportune a juncture, Claude did not pause to inquire.

He spoke, and then the intelligent animal seemed to recognise his voice.

At any rate, it permitted him to walk straight up to it and seize the bridle, which is probably what it would not have allowed a stranger to do.

Just as our friend was about to mount, he heard a great tumult in the rear.

He knew well enough what it was, without troubling to look round.

He knew, too, that it would require a concentration of all his energies to accomplish what laid before him.

To mount his new-found steed was no easy matter, and but for the fact that the police officers were so close behind him, Claude would never have succeeded.

Once astride, however, and he cared for nothing.

Without waiting to settle himself in his seat, he urged his horse forward.

He was only just in time.

The officers, furious with disappointment, were close behind him.

The foremost one discharged a pistol, and with so good an aim that the highwayman felt the bullet strike his back.

But the force of the shot was spent, and so he received no other hurt than a slight shock, which, of course, he thought not of.

Once again, then, was Claude going at headlong speed.

The officers, however, were determined to give him persistent chase.

They knew the feeble condition to which he was reduced, and felt certain that he would not be able to keep up long.

Claude himself felt very dubious as to the result.

Still his resolve was to hold on to the last.

The constantly increasing darkness was greatly in his favour.

Large clouds kept continually driving up, until the whole face of the heavens was covered up.

Then drops of rain began to fall.

At first slightly, but their force soon increased.

The cool water fell upon Claude's heated form most refreshingly.

It seemed to freshen him into new life.

He cried out in encouraging tones to his horse, and the animal bravely responded to them.

The rest it had enjoyed had made it fresh and vigorous.

No doubt it had been attracted to that meadow after Claude had fallen from the saddle, and so little frequented was this part of the country that it was no wonder it was allowed to remain for that space of time unmolested.

Away—away it flew, taking an almost direct course across the country, and utterly disregarding the various obstacles in its path.

More than one of the hedges over which it leaped were of a height and character to dismay an ordinary rider.

But the officers, having Claude's success before their eyes, essayed each dangerous leap.

Of course, riding pell-mell and in such a throng, some came to grief, but still a formidable band kept at the heels of the highwayman.

Still Claude kept on, sustained not only by the strong desire of effecting his own escape, but also by the hope that he might yet be able to be of service to his old comrade, Sixteen-String Jack.

The rain descended in torrents, and at no very distant intervals a flash of lightning would be seen, followed by a clap of thunder.

A violent storm evidently was brewing; but the conflict of elements had no terrors for the flying highwayman.

He was already drenched to the skin by the rain, and then he had the consolation of knowing that he could not by any possibility become wetter.

He listened continually—that is, as well as his rapid flight would allow—and he fancied he was fast distancing his pursuers.

This incited him to fresh efforts.

As to seeing, that was quite out of the question.

The darkness swallowed up every object at more than a few yards' distance.

But animated by the hope that success would ere long crown his efforts, Claude conquered the weakness that at times endeavoured to assert itself.

At length he came to a high-road.

He had been for a long time on the look-out for this, because he wished to change his course.

He stood for some time in doubt, however, for he knew not whether to turn to the right or left.

What he wished was to get on towards London, but as to the direction in which it lay he was unable to hazard even a guess.

"I fancy it must be to the right," he at last muttered to himself—"at any rate, I will try."

He now allowed his horse to go at a more gentle rate of speed in order that it might recover wind and strength.

The immediate fever of the pursuit was over now.

The police were, doubtless, well upon his track, and would in time come up with him if he relaxed his efforts altogether.

Claude felt terribly weak, and nothing but his stern determination enabled him to keep on.

Presently he saw before him a faint, twinkling light.

He hastened towards it.

As he had expected, this had proceeded from a road-side inn.

The sound of his horse's hoofs brought an ostler forward.

"Here you are, sir," he said, holding the stirrup for Claude Duval to dismount.

"No—no," said the highwayman, faintly, "I shall not alight. Bring me some—some brandy—a large glassful—and some oatmeal and water for my horse."

"All right, sir."

The ostler quickly returned with the articles for which he had been sent.

Claude drank nearly half a pint of neat brandy at a draught.

"My eye," the ostler ejaculated, "he's a well-seasoned vessel, and no mistake!"

The horse greedily partook of the refreshment offered it, and then Claude said:

"I am going right for London, I suppose?"

"Eh?"

"London—is this the way?"

Claude pointed in advance as he asked the question.

"Yes, that's the way," answered the ostler, scratching his head; "and a precious long way it is too."

"How far?"

"How far? Why, near enough two hundred miles. It's one hundred and ninety-nine and a half howsomever."

"So far?" said Claude, with a sigh.

"Yes. You ain't going to ride there, are you?"

"Never mind. Look here! Do you see this? It's a guinea."

"All right."

"And here's another. Now, if anybody comes and wants to know whether you have seen me, just know nothing about it; and in order that your forgetfulness may be complete, here is another."

"All right. I'll go and go to sleep, I will, and blow me if I don't think it will be a job to wake me—that I do."

He evidently comprehended.

Claude finished his brandy, and then set out upon what was to him a formidable undertaking—a ride to London; for it was here that he naturally enough expected to hear something of his comrades—at any rate, it was here where he should obtain intelligence of Sixteen-String Jack.

CHAPTER MLXXVII.

IN WHICH CLAUDE DUVAL MANIFESTS THE EXTENT OF HIS FRIENDSHIP FOR SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

It was on that very morning when Sixteen-String Jack began his ride from Newgate to Tyburn that a horseman was urging his horse along the western high-road.

In the distance he could discern the huge mass of buildings composing London.

There was something inexpressibly anxious in his gaze.

The horseman had about him many marks which showed that he had travelled far and at a rapid speed.

His long riding-cloak was spattered with mud even up to the shoulder, while as for his steed, it would have been a most difficult matter to decide what was its natural colour.

The poor animal was fearfully jaded.

At every step its limbs trembled convulsively, showing how great was the effort required for moving even at this pace.

The traveller himself looked also ready to drop with excessive fatigue.

His face looked more like the face of a corpse than of a living being, except that now and then it twitched nervously, as from some keen mental or bodily pain.

The reader will scarcely require to be told that this worn-out and travel-stained horseman was no other than Claude Duval.

With infinite difficulty he had performed thus much of his long journey, and now that its termination lay before him he almost feared that he should be unable to reach it.

From time to time he had been compelled to pause for rest upon the road, but still the time allowed for his repose was short indeed, for the police officers still hung upon his track though unable to come up with him.

It is indeed a matter calculated to excite the greatest wonder that he should have been able to perform the journey at all.

Stimulants alone had enabled him to keep up.

The reaction would doubtless come at last, and, when it did, would be all the more terrible for having been so postponed.

But whenever Claude felt the sinking sensation coming over him he would swallow a huge draught of brandy, thus obtaining a fresh but factitious supply of strength.

Claude, however, was determined to get to London.

The idea had so fixed itself in his mind as to amount to a positive mania.

But then it is well known that it is impossible for the body to be affected without the mind becoming affected too, and certainly this must have been the case with Claude, for his ideas extended no further than simply arriving at the metropolis.

What he should do when there he would have been puzzled to tell.

What he could hope to accomplish now that he was reduced to the last stage of exhaustion was a mystery.

At the moment when his destination came in sight, some such questions as these crossed his mind, but his mental faculties were too much debilitated to allow him either to dwell upon or answer them.

He seemed impelled to go to London, but beyond that all was a blank which he vainly strove to pierce.

Another inn appeared in sight, and here he made another halt.

The landlord happened to be standing on his doorstep, and when he caught sight of the approaching traveller he could not help giving utterance to an ejaculation of amazement.

"Bless us and save us!" he cried—"what have we here?"

"Brandy!" said Claude, faintly, as without difficulty he brought his weary horse to a standstill—"Brandy!"

"Yes, sir!—hot or cold?"

"Half a pint neat, and send the ostler with something for the horse."

The landlord's amazement increased.

Nevertheless he passed indoors to execute the orders that had been given him.

His astonishment grew greater when he saw with what ease the large quantity of brandy was disposed of.

Some time had now elapsed since Claude had heard anything of his pursuers, and he might certainly have indulged himself in safety with a few hours' rest.

But his impatience now that he was so near to the end of his long journey was too great to permit this.

As soon as possible he took his departure from this inn, where the extraordinary appearance of himself and steed furnished a topic of conversation for many a day.

The stimulus of the ardent spirit now began to show itself.

His eye brightened, and much of his weakness passed away.

His horse too was perceptibly better.

The next halt was at Tyburn toll-gate.

Claude could not control the powerful impulse which prompted him to turn his eyes in the direction of the triple tree.

He started and looked again.

"Surely," he said, with a shudder, "this is Monday morning!"

He spoke as though up to that moment he had been unaware of the circumstance.

Beneath the blackened timbers of the gibbet could be seen the glittering helmets of many soldiers, while all around a remarkable concourse of people had assembled.

This was enough to make Claude aware that an execution of no ordinary character was about to take place that day.

But who was it?

Some prisoner of great importance, or the guard would not be so numerous and well armed.

Claude's heart sickened with dread.

"Now, sir," said a voice, "tuppence, please!"

The sound recalled Claude to himself.

He remembered that he was standing at the toll-gate.

Almost mechanically he plunged his hand into his pocket and dropped a piece of silver into the toll-man's hand.

"Tell me," Claude Duval asked, in a hollow voice—"who is it that is to be—be executed to-day?"

Before replying, the toll-keeper honoured him with a long stare, while he jingled the change in his hands.

"You must have come from a longish way off," he answered, at length, "not to know that."

"Who is it?" the highwayman asked again, with an impatient gesture.

"Why, Sixteen-String Jack, to be sure, that has been for so long the terror of the road. Why—but I say—hallo!"

These disjointed exclamations were caused by Claude's actions.

The shock of this intelligence was at first so great that it was with the utmost difficulty he saved himself from falling from his horse.

Every object seemed to fade away from before him.

Then with a heavy groan he recovered his senses.

He called out in a loud tone to his horse, and spurred him cruelly.

The exhausted animal made a final effort and broke into a shuffling gallop.

The highwayman's brain was now on fire, while his swelling heart seemed as though it must burst.

Jack about to be executed!

He had, then, arrived too late.

What could he do now to save him?

What course could he adopt to rescue him from his foes?

Claude thought and thought until he wrought himself into a state of positive madness.

Frenzy alone had possession of him—frenzy alone can account for what he did.

Indeed, had he been in possession of his proper senses, he would not have thought of riding into London by broad daylight without making the least attempt at concealment.

To be sure, his cloak enveloped his form, and his face was so altered by illness and fatigue as to have but little semblance to its former appearance.

Still, to ride on as he rode can only be characterised as absolute insanity.

Suddenly, as he passed round a slight bend in the high-road, he came in sight of a dense throng.

His brain reeled.

Then his eyesight grew clearer, and he was able to make out the component parts of the multitude before him.

He saw soldiers mounted and glittering with weapons and accoutrements.

He saw multitudes of police officers, nearly all on horseback, and every one armed with a drawn cutlass.

He saw in the distance the hangman's cart, the sheriffs' carriages, and, last of all, more soldiers and police officers.

And around all these, as water round an island, was a number of people greater than Claude had ever before seen.

The distance was too great for his eyes to make out who was the occupant of the fatal cart, but his heart told him.

He was inwardly conscious that it was his old and well-tried companion, Sixteen-String Jack.

At this moment Claude began to have doubts whether all that he saw was real, or whether he was the victim of some extraordinary illusion of the senses.

But this state of doubt was not permitted to continue very long.

There could be no doubt about the reality of the yells and cries that came from the throats of the assembled populace.

Then Claude asked himself what could be done?

Where now should he turn his eyes to look for help and assistance?

Tom King and Dick Turpin were he knew not where.

But for all that he could not think of permitting his old comrade to go passively to death without at least some effort, no matter how desperate, to save him.

There was no time for consideration.

The moment for action had arrived.

And now most certainly, had Claude not been more than half crazed, he would never for a single instant have contemplated making an attempt to save Jack single-handed.

But some such thoughts as these were running through Claude's mind.

He knew that popular sympathy would be on Jack's side, and he was sufficiently acquainted with the temper of crowds to be aware that this sympathy would be confined to mere cheers and cries unless some one should come forward and set them the example of action.

In that case he knew that their dislike of authority and its representatives would quickly instigate them to deeds of violence, and the liberation of the prisoner would afford them the utmost satisfaction.

Wild thoughts were these—desperate ones; but they were followed by others more wild and more desperate still.

Claude drew his cloak well around him, and pulled his hat low down over his brow.

Then he drew up to one side of the road, and awaited the coming of the procession.

It was now only a few yards off.

All eyes were at once turned towards Claude; but no one seemed to recognise him—a fact which will serve to show how much late events had altered his appearance.

"Halt!" he cried, in as loud and important a voice as his fatigue would allow. "Halt—halt, I say! Where is the sheriff?"

As might have been expected, no notice was taken of these words.

The procession continued on its way.

But as soon as Claude fairly found himself among the crowd, he cried:

"The sheriff—the sheriff! Where is the sheriff? I must see him! Where is he?"

The people, thinking probably that Claude carried a message of some importance, divided right and left, thus leaving him a clear passage, through which he could make his way as rapidly as he liked.

Claude did not fail to avail himself of this to the utmost.

There was no hesitation about him now.

He seemed to have made up his mind to a definite course of action.

And so he had.

What it was will be quickly seen.

There was no difficulty in picking out the sheriffs' carriages, for their excessive and gaudy ornamentation made them conspicuous objects.

Claude endeavoured to catch a glimpse of Jack as he sat in the cart.

But so densely was he hemmed in by mounted police officers that this was altogether impossible.

A very few minutes brought him to the door of the carriage in which the under-sheriff was riding.

His appearance attracted the attention of everyone.

But no one for a moment suspected that the haggard-looking individual was Claude Duval.

Such audacity as would be required for one with so heavy a price upon his head to mingle with a procession on its way from Newgate to Tyburn was undreamt of—incomprehensible.

The sheriff was a little red-faced man, whose eyes were almost buried in fat.

He looked as surprised as he was able when Claude placed his hand upon the sill of the coach window.

"Sir," he said, speaking in tones of deep sadness, to the effect of which the hollowness of his voice contributed not a little—"sir, I have a great—very great favour to ask of you, and in the sacred name of humanity I must ask you not to deny me."

"Eh?—what?" said the sheriff, with a puzzled air, for he was never able to grasp at the meaning of a sentence containing many words.

"I say I have a favour to entreat."

"But this isn't the time."

"Pardon me for being bold enough to differ from you; but—but—this is the time—the very moment."

"Eh? But what's it all about? What does it mean?"

"If you will allow me," said Claude, "I will explain."

"Well, well, go on—I am listening."

"It concerns the prisoner."

"The prisoner?" echoed the sheriff, with a slight change of colour.

"Yes, the condemned prisoner."

"The one in the cart?"

"Even so."

"Sixteen-String Jack?" said the sheriff, who, as Claude was silent, felt impelled to say something or other.

"Yes, so the unfortunate man has been known, but to me he is simple John Rann."

"To you—to you? How do you mean to you?"

"Why, in days long past, in the time of boyhood, he was my best and only friend."

"Your friend?" cried the sheriff, shrinking back.

"Yes; do not be alarmed. As you must be well aware, he followed evil ways. I knew what the result would be, but still he persisted in his fatal course. You understand me, sir?"

"Yes: but I don't know what it has to do with me."

"But you will see in a moment."

"Go on, then."

"I live more than two hundred miles from London, in a remote country place. By chance the intelligence that my old boyhood's friend had been captured reached me. I was ill—suffering greatly. But not long ago the parents of this misguided young man had died, and on their deathbed they had entreated me to use my best endeavours to reclaim the lost one. A dangerous illness alone prevented me."

The sheriff fidgeted about impatiently.

Claude spoke more rapidly.

"As soon as I heard what had happened, I started off. I have travelled almost incessantly ever since. I hoped to be in time to say farewell to him—I have just arrived, and find him on his way to Tyburn."

"Well, sir, and what do you want?" asked the sheriff, who never for a moment seemed to fancy that what Claude said was untrue.

Indeed, the highwayman's appearance was just calculated to corroborate what he had said.

He looked like one who had risen from a sick bed and made a long and fatiguing journey.

"Well, sir," repeated the sheriff, finding Claude did not speak, "I ask again, what do you want? What has all this to do with me?"

Claude's emotion increased.

"I want to ask you, sir, to grant me a great favour."

"And what is it?"

"That you will stay this procession for a moment, and that then you will allow me to say a few words of farewell to my old friend, and convey to him the last words of his parents. Had I arrived at Newgate in time, I know the request would not have been denied to me. It would be hard to deny me now, because I have been unable to make better speed. You will grant this favour, will you not?"

The sheriff shook his head.

"Why not?" asked Claude, with an earnestness that was real indeed. It is not much I ask."

"But—but——"

"But what?"

"We—we are apprehensive of a rescue.'

"Is it possible?"

"We have heard that some desperate attempt will be made to set the condemned man at liberty."

This intelligence caused such a revulsion of feelin on Claude's part that it was a great wonder the sheriff did not perceive his agitation.

Perhaps he did perceive it, but failed to ascribe it to its proper cause

CHAPTER MLXXVIII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK TAKES HIS LAST LOOK OF THIS WORLD.

This announcement made by the sheriff, to the effect that an attempt at rescue was apprehended, made Claude Duval doubly determined to bring the procession to a standstill.

Perhaps if he could only succeed in doing this he would be giving the opportunity for the attack to be made, for, of course, Claude jumped the conclusion that the sheriff had been correctly informed.

It is not surprising that he should do so.

Of the movements of Dick Turpin and Tom King he was quite ignorant, but considered nothing more probable than that they would endeavour to organise some plan of attack when they learned the serious position in which Sixteen-String Jack was placed.

These thoughts passed through his mind with that rapidity of which time alone is capable.

"Surely, sir," he continued, in reply to the sheriff's last remark—"surely, sir, you will not on that account refuse me this favour. Suppose for a moment you were in my place, should you not think it hard to be denied? Besides, consider what a consolation and satisfaction it would be to my unfortunate friend, not only to learn that his parents were not living, and so could not be sensible of his disgrace, but to hear the last words which those parents had said concerning him."

Claude's appeal evidently moved the sheriff.

"I will call Skellum." he said, "and hear what he says."

Who Skellum was Claude knew not, for he had never heard his name pronounced before.

Still, he drew his cloak up a little closer round his throat.

Skellum having been called, quickly made his way to the sheriff's carriage, for he expected to receive some important information.

The sheriff quickly explained to him the nature of Claude's request.

Skellum looked at the disguised highwayman keenly, but failed to recognise him.

Truth to tell, the idea that it might be one of the highwaymen of whom some of his men were in pursuit, never once crossed his mind.

"What is the answer, sir?" Claude asked, anxiously, for they were getting very near to Tyburn now.

"I leave it for Mr. Skellum to decide," said the sheriff. "To me the request seems a very reasonable one, and if Mr. Skellum has no objection, I consent."

Claude was profuse in his thanks.

Then addressing Skellum, he said:

"Do not refuse me—pray do not! What can you have to fear from one worn down to the last degree of weakness as I am? What could I do in the shape of harm, even if I had the will?"

There could only be one answer to this question.

Skellum's first suspicion that there was something dangerous in all this was allayed.

He knew not how to refuse, and so gave his consent.

But he determined to keep very close behind Claude and to observe his every movement with the keenest attention.

A feeling of unalloyed satisfaction now took possession of Claude Duval's heart.

Already in imagination he saw his old comrade a free man.

His presence by his side would be of the utmost service to those who intended to attempt a rescue.

But his breath came short and thick as he made his way through the throng under the guidance of Mr. Skellum, who made his way straight for the hangman's cart.

Claude wondered what effect his sudden appearance would have upon Sixteen-String Jack.

Would he recognise him?

Perhaps so.

This, however, was a risk which Claude was quite willing to run.

By command of Mr. Skellum the procession was brought to standstill.

It was the confusion consequent upon the execution of this order that had aroused Sixteen-String Jack to a knowledge of the fact that something of an unusual character was taking place.

The next moment he beheld Claude Duval.

He recognised his old comrade at the very first glance, but closed his eyes quickly, feeling certain that he was the victim of some inexplicable delusion.

He opened them again, only to see Claude standing still nearer, and to hear the familiar tones of his voice.

What could be the meaning of so strange a phenomenon?

Claude at liberty among so many of his foes, and, above all, with Skellum not an arm's-length from him.



[DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING MEET AGAIN AT OLD MATTHEW'S, IN DRURY LANE.]

Well indeed might Jack feel disposed to doubt the evidence of his own senses.

His heart bled when he saw to what a wreck Claude had been reduced, and fully comprehended how much he must have suffered since the time of their separation.

Claude came close to Jack's side.

"I am here either to save you or to die with you," he whispered. "Do not start—maintain your calmness at all hazards."

Claude glanced around him to ascertain whether Skellum was near, but he found that individual was no longer standing in the place where he had last left him.

Claude did not wait to ascertain his whereabouts, but resolved to avail himself to the utmost of the present opportunity.

"Be of good heart, Jack—the others have organised a rescue."

Jack's heart was so full that he could scarcely command his voice to speak.

He had just been endeavouring to reconcile himself to the unpleasant fact that he was deserted by all his friends, when lo! here was Claude actually at his side.

Hope revived in his breast, for he thought that Claude had spoken from positive knowledge, and Jack had great faith in Dick Turpin's powers.

But alas! those hopes were doomed to a most bitter disappointment.

"How came you here, Claude?" Jack asked. "It puzzles me completely."

"Hush—hush! We must reserve explanations to another time. I wonder how it is they do not commence an attack."

Claude Duval was firmly impressed with the notion that his presence near the cart would serve as a signal for the commencement of the attack.

No. 235 will be Published next Monday.

Each second he expected to hear the signal given, and then he determined to cut the cords with which Jack was bound, even if his life paid the penalty of the deed.

And now we must make the reader acquainted with something of which both Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were unfortunately in ignorance.

The very moment that Mr. Skellum stopped near the cart he felt some one touch him gently on the coat sleeve.

Turning round, he saw that it was a police officer.

There was unbounded wonder expressed upon the man's countenance.

He made a sign for Mr. Skellum to come nearer.

That individual complied instantly, for he knew by the officer's manner that something was amiss.

This was how it was that he happened to be out of sight when Claude turned round.

"Well," said Skellum, hastily, keeping his eyes all the time fixed upon the cart—"well?"

"Mr. Skellum."

"What?"

"D—don't you know who that is?"

"Who—who?"

"That man in the cloak—there—there!"

"Well—what of him?"

"Don't you know him?

"No; how should I?"

The man looked aghast.

"How comes he here?"

"Speak, dolt; who is it?" said Skellum, impatiently.

"I can't believe my eyes," said the man; "and yet it must be. No, no,—it can't: it is too outrageous."

"Who—who?"

"Why, that man in the cloak, standing there, is—is——"

And then again he paused, as though incredulous.

"Will you speak?"

"It is Claude Duval!"

"Who?" cried Skellum, with a perfect yell—"who?"

"Claude Duval. I am certain of it. Look at him now."

"Down with him!" roared Skellum—"shoot him! Fire—fire! That is Claude Duval, and the reward is just the same for him alive or dead!"

"Discovered!" cried Claude, in a voice of inexpressible anguish. "All, then, is lost! Help—help!"

"Shoot me, Claude!" cried Sixteen-String Jack. "Do me that last service! Save me from the disgrace of the hangman's rope!—shoot me! Let that be the last, as it is the first, proof I have asked you to make of your friendship."

Claude drew his pistols, but whether he meant to comply with his comrade's demand is not clear.

The officers had at first been too paralysed with amazement to obey Skellum's command, but they stood with their pistols levelled.

"Fire!" cried Skellum again. "Ten thousand curses! Why do you not fire? Shoot him, or he will rescue the prisoner and escape."

Scarcely had the words escaped his lips than there was a sudden volley from more than a dozen pistols.

For a brief space of time a cloud of blue smoke concealed everything, and yet Skellum fancied he had seen Claude in the act of falling from his horse.

When the mimic cloud cleared away, which was in less than a moment, he found that he was right.

Claude Duval was lying helpless and motionless upon the ground—his body riddled with bullets—an ever-widening pool of blood surrounding him.

The confusion and uproar now were things of which we cannot hope to convey an idea.

"Guard your prisoner," cried Skellum, in stentorian tones—"look well to him, or he will be rescued! Stand firm!"

His orders were well responded to.

It was indeed a thousand wonders that Sixteen-String Jack had not been mortally wounded.

But the bullets whistled around him on every side and left him unhurt.

But the sudden slaughter of his old friend in cold blood almost maddened him.

He made a desperate attempt to break loose.

But he was too well bound for the attempt to succeed.

The next instant the officers were around him.

Skellum flung himself from his horse, and rushed to the spot where Claude lay.

"He is dead," he ejaculated, gazing upon him—"quite dead! How extraordinary! Who could have believed it?"

After what had occurred, Jack sat in the cart like one stunned by a heavy blow.

Life now, indeed, was bitter, and he felt that he cared not how soon he was rid of it.

Claude was dead, while he knew not what fate had befallen Dick Turpin and Tom King.

But from the fact that they had made no demonstration on his behalf he drew the worst conclusions.

The body of Claude was presently picked up, and a rude kind of bier extemporised, on which it was placed.

The order was given to convey it to Newgate, and a portion of the guard of officers and soldiers was ordered to accompany it, so as to protect it from the people.

Oh, how wistfully and earnestly Jack gazed after Claude as his remains were carried off!

When at last he could see his friend no longer, bitter tears forced themselves from his eyes and rolled down his cheeks, while heavy sobs seemed as though they would burst his chest.

As soon as ever the second procession had been started on its way to Newgate, the interrupted journey to Tyburn was resumed.

A closer watch and guard than ever was kept upon Jack.

But it was needless, for he had quite given up all thoughts of making his escape now.

After what had happened death was preferable to life.

Tyburn no longer had terrors for him.

On the contrary, he was impatient for the termination of his journey to be reached.

They had not far to go.

Tyburn Tree was not many yards distant, but their rate of progress was very, very slow, for a path had to be forced through a mass of people who already seemed packed together as closely as was possible.

Jack's head was still bent down.

He did not turn his eyes to look, but he could *feel* just how far distant they were from the fatal tree.

Amid frequent stoppages the journey was continued.

At last there was a final pause.

The sun was shining in mid-sky, and there fell across the cart the dark shadow of the beams of Tyburn Tree.

Jack knew where he was then.

The end of his journey was reached.

Some one touched him.

He shrank back with a shudder of loathing

It was the hangman.

The Ordinary now stood up with his open book in his hand.

For some time past he had been reading the service for the dead; but though his voice was loud and clear, Jack had been unconscious of it.

As one may say, mechanically Jack followed the Chaplain's example and stood up in the cart.

A silence that was awful from its very intensity now prevailed.

Jack gazed around him with a semi-conscious, half-stupified air.

The events that had marked the latter portion of his journey had been of so awful and so sudden a character that no one can wonder that his brain was half turned by it.

He kept continually vaguely wondering whether this could indeed be real, and this wonder was accompanied by a kind of sensation that he should presently recover his senses and find all to be an hallucination.

But, alas! for him, this species of presentiment was not destined to be realised.

All was real, and although it might be said he was not aware of it, yet he was standing on the very threshold of eternity.

The duration of his life upon this earth could easily have been counted in seconds.

Again Jack felt a touch, and it seemed to arouse him a little.

It was the hangman.

This functionary had been during the last few moments

busily occupied in securing the rope to the cross-beam.

Apparently it was now adjusted to his entire satisfaction.

He had hung upon it so as to stretch it, and now nothing remained but to make a noose with it round the neck of the condemned man.

Before Jack could precisely comprehend what was going on, the rope was passed round his throat.

A choking sensation seemed now, at this last moment, to bring him back to life.

He looked around him, but the faces of the people seemed to float away, and in their place he saw, in imagination, the tragedy of Claude's death again represented.

Apparently that was his last earthly sensation.

The preparations had all been rendered complete.

The hangman and the Ordinary had quitted the cart, of which Jack was now the sole occupant.

It was, however, just as the hangman seized the bridle of the horse that some kind of disturbance seemed to be taking place on the outskirts of the crowd.

Whether Sixteen-String Jack was aware of it, or whether he derived any hope from the circumstance, who can tell?

It is perhaps scarcely necessary to remind the reader of the different manner in which executions were arranged in the times of which we write.

There was no platform then, with the falling trap that so speedily deprives the victim of his life.

The prisoner was left standing, while the cart was drawn from beneath him.

And it was thus that Sixteen-String Jack quitted this life.

Who can say what awful sensations seared his brain when he felt the only thing between him and death slipping slowly away from beneath his feet.

There seemed a kind of convulsive effort to retain a footing, and then all was over.

CHAPTER MLXXIX.

DESCRIBES WHAT BEFEL TOM KING AFTER HIS FLIGHT FROM STONEHENGE.

We refrain from entering into any further details of the sickening scene.

We will only mention that the condemned man—to employ the phrase made use of at the time—"died hard."

And no wonder that there should be a desperate struggle between life and death when the victim was slowly choked—strangled by the weight of his own body.

But in a few moments the bold, daring highwayman, who had for so long a period set the whole machinery of the law at defiance, breathed his last.

Nothing remained of him save a senseless mass of inert clay that slightly swung to and fro, and half turned round in a hideous fashion as it was swayed by the light morning breeze.

No sooner, however, was it known that life was extinct than the intense silence of the assembled crowd changed to a tremendous uproar.

Some said that a well-organised attempt to rescue the prisoner had been made, and the chief cause of its failure was that the attempt had been made too late.

There were others, though, who said that this was a mere idle rumour.

At any rate, the scene of fearful riot which now ensued was a disgrace to a nation setting up any claim to civilisation.

Savages could have behaved no worse.

And this lasted for an hour—the time prescribed for elapsion before the hanged man was cut down.

A great part of the crowd no doubt dispersed before this, but the bulk remained.

After the ceremony they had by degrees separated.

The body was roughly placed in the rudely-made coffin provided for its reception, and, still guarded by soldiers, made its way back to Newgate.

Here the two highwaymen who had been so long united during life were again placed side by side in death.

The fatality was a strange one.

It was about this period that the custom of interring executed prisoners within the walls of the prison was commenced.

Previously they were either handed over to the doctors for dissection, or else suspended in irons upon a gibbet in proximity to the scene of crime.

But Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were to be buried in the prison.

A larger grave than ordinary was dug, and in this the two coffins were placed, so that the two friends were still side by side.

The earth was shovelled in, and the sole funeral service was comprised in the remarks made by the turnkeys as they as hurriedly as possible got through their disagreeable task.

That the intelligence of the extraordinary manner in which the famous highwayman Claude Duval had met with his death should fly like lightning over the whole city is no matter for surprise.

But the effects of this news upon those particularly interested in the highwayman's welfare we must defer to another occasion.

So much is waiting for relation in order that the narrative may be brought down to one point, that we must defer for the present a description of the startling events which followed fast upon the interment of the two highwaymen.

We go back several days—in fact, to the morning which succeeded the night when the highwaymen were attacked at Stonehenge.

It was only just getting light, and objects for the most part were buried in a dense white vapour.

As this by degrees rolled away, the different features of the landscape came into view.

One of the most prominent was a precipitous cliff, which served for a wall to prevent the encroachment of the ever-surging sea.

The landward side of this cliff was rugged and steep, and in most places overgrown with tangled vegetation.

The spot was excessively lonely and drear, and looked so, especially when shrouded by the white vapour we have mentioned.

No traces of even the occasional presence of human beings on that dreary spot could be discerned, and the silence was only broken by the unending roar of the breaking waves on the beach below.

All at once, the desolation of the place was strangely broken in upon.

An eye fixed upon a certain portion of the cliff side would have beheld a singular phenomenon.

What seemed to be nothing else than a portion of the solid rock slowly rose up, disclosing a dark oblong opening in the ground.

Immediately afterwards, a dusky form appeared at the aperture.

"I told you so, captain," said a gruff voice. "Morning has fairly come at last, and devil a sign is there to be seer of the old Ferret or his waggon either."

"Are you sure?"

"Come and look for yourself, captain."

Another dusky form now appeared at the mysterious opening.

"What a fog!" said the new-comer. 'If the Ferret would come even now I would risk it; anything would be better than keeping the cargo here."

"Oh, it's safe enough, captain—take my word for that no one will find this place out."

"No matter, the goods ought to be inland by this time."

"Hush!" said the first speaker. "I heard something then."

"What was it like?"

"A horse."

"Then perhaps it is the Ferret after all. Curse him for being so long, say I! What the devil can have detained him?"

Both listened.

"It's not the Ferret, captain."

"If it is, he is without a waggon."

"No—no, he would not ride like that. Why, a man must be mad to gallop a horse at such a rate!"

The rapid beats of a horse's hoofs could now be heard, and, from the rapidity with which these succeeded one

another, it was evident that the animal was making no ordinary speed.

The two dark forms at the opening in the ground stood with eyes fixed wide open by curiosity.

"I should think it is some horse broke loose," said the captain, at length. "No one would be mad enough to ride towards the precipice at such a rate as that."

"We shall see in a moment," returned the other. "Curse the fog, how thick it is!"

"Yes—yes, there it comes—a horse with something on its back; but not a man, surely!"

The utmost excitement now prevailed.

Through the dense mist could be seen the figure of a horse, which seemed to be enveloped in a cloud of half-transparent vapour.

Upon the animal's back was a something, but what could not be distinctly seen.

It did not look like a man, for it was something that appeared to be crouching close to the saddle, and partly hanging down on one side.

But two causes combined to dispel the mystery.

The mist was fast rising, and the horse was galloping towards the opening in the ground with scarcely, if at all, diminished speed.

"It's a man," said the captain, at length—"yes, it's a man; and either dead or badly wounded."

There could no longer be a doubt about the correctness of this conjecture.

But, stranger still, the horse, finding himself near the aperture, stopped suddenly—so suddenly that its rider, unable any longer to keep the saddle, fell heavily to the ground.

Ejaculations of astonishment burst from the lips of the captain and his subordinate upon viewing this occurrence.

"Who can it be?" gasped the former.

"The horse has been here before," was the reply. "He knows the place well enough, that is evident, or why should he stop?"

"Let us see who it is," was the captain's next remark. "Curse it! if they are here many moments it will be quite light, and then there will be no knowing who may see us."

"The place may be discovered."

"We must prevent that, at all hazards. Ah!" said the captain, bending down over the blood-stained and apparently lifeless form, "I know him. It's all right. Call some of the Sea-gulls to carry him inside, and lead the horse in as well."

"Who is it, captain?" asked the other, who had just whistled shrilly.

"Why, one of those chaps that rendered us such good service the other night."

"What, the one we have provided the Sea-gull for?"

"Yes."

At this moment the aperture was thronged with men, all clad in a species of naval costume.

The captain of the band of smugglers—for he indeed it was—had not been mistaken.

It was Tom King who had been brought thus to the secret entrance of the cave.

The reader will easily be able to account for his presence in this place.

After speaking to Claude Duval in the manner we have related at the close of a preceding chapter, he had started off at full speed.

But Tom King was badly hurt—

So badly that his last words were almost inaudible.

But, nevertheless, although all objects seemed whirling around him, he retained his place in the saddle.

He was, however, quite beyond the power of making any effort to urge his horse forward.

The animal went entirely at the rate which pleased him.

By an accident, this chanced to be extremely rapid.

The horse had been wounded by one of the pistol shots—just sufficient to madden the creature by the irritation it occasioned.

Under this incitement, as though urged by the spur, the poor animal flew across Salisbury Plain with a speed which equally defies description or conception.

We can only characterise it as furious to a degree.

An ordinary rider would have been appalled at finding himself upon the back of such an infuriated animal; but Tom King thought nothing of it.

His life depended upon his getting away quickly, and he would have preferred a thousand times to meet with his death by some unforeseen accident than fall into the hands of his foes for a moment.

Tom reasonably enough dreaded capture, for he was fully convinced after what had happened he would never be allowed the ghost of a chance of making his escape.

Still, as he was able to exercise so little control over his steed, there seemed every probability that his capture would ere long take place.

The animal's terror would most likely abate before long, and then, being left to himself, his rate of speed would be decreased.

Of this danger it cannot be said that Tom King was precisely conscious.

He knew he was flying from his foes, but of the direction in which he was going at so frightful a pace he had no idea.

But truly to him, under these circumstances, all ways were alike so that his foes were in his rear.

But the animal showed no signs of flagging—to have beheld it one would have thought it must be under the continual influence of whip and spur, and that they were both plied with the utmost vigour.

As we have seen, however, the horse, in spite of its terror, was not altogether blind to instinct.

The reader will remember that its last journey was from the smugglers' cave to the ruins at Stonehenge.

In the former place it had remained for some considerable time, and all the while it had been well treated, so there is nothing wonderful in the circumstance that it should make its way back to its old quarters by the nearest and most direct route.

How opportune was the moment of its arrival there is known.

Consciousness had left Tom for some time, and he only owed his seat in the saddle to the vigour with which he had grasped the pommel of the saddle.

He had seized it with the convulsive grasp of a dying man, and so, half lying on the horse's back and half lying on one side in the most perilous position imaginable, he had reached his destination.

The sudden jerk, however, dismounted him, and bereft him of what little consciousness he might have retained up to this moment.

At a word from the captain, several of the men came forward, and, raising Tom in their arms, carried him into the cavern.

The horse was now quiet and subdued enough, and permitted himself to be led in unresistingly.

"Down with the trap!" cried the captain, in a rapid voice. "Look! I can see horsemen yonder! Quick—quick, or we shall be discovered!"

There was a sudden rushing noise, and the huge trap-door resumed its former position.

"That's well," was the captain's ejaculation; and then, having issued a few commands respecting Tom King, he mounted to another place where, through a kind of loophole, he could obtain a partial view of the scene without.

Of course the approach of these horsemen filled him with some little anxiety, and he wished to keep a close watch upon all their actions.

The reader will not require to be told that these horsemen were Tom's pursuers.

They were only able to get thus far so soon by treating their horses cruelly and by obtaining relays.

On they came, and by their manner they evidently expected each moment to catch sight of the fugitive.

By this time very little of the mist remained.

The sun had risen, and his beams illuminated the scene for miles round.

The officers looked keenly about them.

But, in spite of their efforts, they failed to catch a glimpse of the object of their anxious pursuit.

But they came on towards the cliff as though aware that the fugitive had taken this direction.

The captain began to grow anxious.

He was apprehensive that there might be on the ground some marks by which the officers could follow in the right track.

it so, the secret of the cave would undoubtedly have been discovered; and the captain was more than usually anxious in consequence of the quantity of goods now stowed away in it.

But his apprehensions subsided.

The police officers rode by, making their way apparently to the top of the cliff.

No doubt they thought that from this point they should be able to command an extensive view.

More easy in his mind now, the captain quitted his post, and made his way to that portion of the cavern to which he had directed the wounded highwayman to be taken.

He found Tom quite insensible, and bending over him was a woman who possessed no ordinary skill in surgery, especially in the matter of shot-wounds or sword-cuts.

From the nature of the smugglers' occupation, her skill was very often called into requisition.

"Well, Meg," asked the captain, "what do you think?"

"Bad—very bad."

"But you will bring him round?"

"I will try."

"Take my advice, and try your best, for, unless I am now more mistaken than I have ever been in the whole course of my life before, this is a man who will reward you in no ordinary fashion for restoring him to life."

"It will take a long time," muttered the old woman, "no matter how he may be favoured."

To this remark the captain did not think fit to make any reply, but walked away with the air of one by no means easy in his mind.

For a long time the old woman tried in vain to restore Tom to his senses; and when she did succeed it was but for a moment, for the highwayman immediately closed his eyes and sank off into a profound slumber.

But this augured well, and in the meantime she took the opportunity of attending to his hurts.

They were indeed of a frightful character, and any one of them would have sufficed to create grave doubts about the ultimate recovery of the patient.

Fortunate—thrice fortunate was Tom in having thus fell into such good hands.

Had his wounds been left for any longer time unattended to, his death must have been the result.

Now, however, thanks to the sagacity of his horse, he was in what might be termed a place of perfect safety, for there was no fear that the smugglers would betray him; and as for the officers discovering the entrance to the cave, that was scarcely likely.

CHAPTER MLXXX.

IN WHICH TOM KING SETS OUT ON HIS EXPEDITION IN SEARCH OF HIS MISSING COMRADES.

A VIOLENT fever seized upon Tom King, attended by delirium.

The smugglers in the cave listened in wonder to his wild ravings, from which, however, they obtained a clue to his identity.

Days elapsed before the wounded man obtained the least inkling of his condition or of his whereabouts.

But when he opened his eyes and languidly looked about him he was aware that the objects he beheld were familiar ones.

Where it was he had seen them, or how he came now to be surrounded by them, were questions which, in his present state, he was powerless to solve.

But from the moment when he thus, for the first time, regained possession of his mental faculties, he grew steadily better.

Never had old Meg obtained a greater victory, for so desperate had been the highwayman's condition that half the doctors in London would have given him up as a hopeless case.

With many a bitter pang, however, did the remembrance of past events return clearly, though slowly, to him.

His last remembrance was riding at a headlong pace through the darkness.

How he had come to be an inmate of the smugglers' cave he knew not.

He was chafing from the ignorance he was in upon this point, when the captain, who had heard he was better, came to the side of the rude bed.

Tom questioned him anxiously, and then he learned all those particulars with which the reader has already been made acquainted.

From this knowledge the wounded highwayman derived but little consolation or satisfaction.

Fain would he at that moment have set off in quest of his lost comrades, but he found himself unable to raise his head six inches from the bed.

"Rest and be quiet," said the captain. "It is the only chance you have; and the calmer you keep yourself the sooner you will recover and be enabled to take your departure."

Tom knew this well enough without being told.

The difficulty was, under such circumstances as those in which he was placed, to put such counsel into action.

Although, mentally, he was greatly agitated, yet he contrived to keep himself tolerably calm.

More weary time passed.

How long Tom knew not, for in that dark place, where there was nothing to distinguish day from night, it was no easy matter to keep count.

Still he was encouraged by the knowledge that he was steadily continuing to gain strength.

Finally a time arrived when he felt it would no longer be possible to remain in inaction.

He was able to move about the cavern, and as soon as this was the case it became impossible for him to remain any longer in confinement.

Fortunately he had about him such an amount as satisfied the smuggler captain, who said, with great impressiveness:

"Tom King, you and your companions can, with the utmost safety, trust yourselves in my hands. No earthly consideration shall induce me to betray you."

"You shall be well rewarded for your fidelity," answered Tom.

"That I know well; and now will you consent to take a little advice from me?"

"Assuredly."

"Well, then, as soon as you can meet with your companions send them here—one at a time, if you like: you see the retreat is a perfectly safe one."

"True."

"Then as soon as you are all assembled and in readiness to start, I will have a craft at hand that shall waft you over to the coast of France in less than twelve hours."

Tom warmly expressed his thanks, and declared that he should not fail to put such a good piece of advice into execution.

At any other time he would have had much more to say upon the subject, but now he was too anxious to rejoin his companions to be able to think of aught else.

He was pleased to find that his horse was in the best condition, for during his illness it had been well attended to.

The animal seemed capable of making a very long journey indeed.

Plenty of ammunition was placed at Tom's disposal, so that he may be said to have been as well equipped for his expedition as could be desired.

Before leaving, however, a scout was sent out to ascertain whether the coast was clear, and on his return with the intelligence that there was not a soul in sight, the huge trap-door was raised by means of the machinery attached, and Tom issued forth.

He mounted without delay, and rode off, while the trap-door was immediately closed, lest its whereabouts should become known to some prying eye.

The night was dark but fine—just such a one as would be chosen for an excursion on the high-road: but on the present occasion Tom had other thoughts.

He had been for so long an inmate of the cavern that he felt the cool night wind acutely.

He shivered, for it seemed to cut through his very bones.

Every now and then he would be reminded most unpleasantly that he was in a state of very great weakness, and but little fitted for the task he had undertaken.

But his strong determination enabled him to master his weakness in a very great degree.

Ere he had gone far, however, he began to ask him-

self a question which he ought to have taken into consideration earlier.

This was, where should he be likely to meet with his comrades?

When they separated there was no time to arrange a meeting-place, and so there was nothing but uncertainty before him.

Strive as he would, he could not make up his mind as to which would be the point they would most likely fix upon to repair to

At last, as one may say almost in sheer desperation, he resolved to turn his horse's head in the direction of Stonehenge.

It was there he had seen them last, and perhaps on arrival there something would arise to put him on the right track.

This was a frail hope indeed, still it was his only one, and so he clung to it as people do cling to a thing when they know it is their last and only resource.

The distance to Stonehenge was considerable, yet such was the excellent condition of his steed that the journey was performed in comparatively speaking a short space of time.

On reaching Stonehenge Tom found the place silent and deserted, and showing no signs of the conflict which had taken place there such a short time ago.

To Tom it appeared particularly short, owing to the length of time he had passed while in a state of complete unconsciousness.

Vainly, however, did he search around for some trace of his absent friends.

He even had the temerity to raise his voice and call aloud upon them by name, but the only reply he received was the mocking echo of his own voice.

Tom's heart was heavily oppressed.

He was weighed down by a presentiment that something terrible to all of them was about to happen.

The mysterious gloom which enwrapped the Druids' Stones was well calculated to inspire melancholy reflections.

Suddenly, however, the silence was broken in upon by a sound that struck a chill to Tom's heart.

It was a mocking laugh.

"Ha, ha!" said some one.

Tom raised himself and looked around, while his hand instinctively sought for his weapons.

"Ha, ha!"

Nothing could be more horribly discordant and unmirthful than this laugh.

Tom felt that it was in derision of himself and his efforts.

"Ha, ha!"

The unnatural sound seemed to come from different quarters of the ruins.

Tom shuddered, for, in spite of himself, superstitious fancies began to crowd about his heart.

He was just then in the state of mind for an occurrence of this description to make a deep impression upon him.

"Who and what is it?" he cried, though it cost him a great effort to raise his voice. "Who and what is it, I say?"

No answer was returned.

Tom waited, but the silence seemed to grow more and more profound.

"I will trouble myself no further with this," he said, half aloud and half to himself. "I am weak and fanciful, and this desolate spot affects me. It may have been my fancy only. I will go—I will go."

He urged his horse forward a few paces and then stopped.

"In what direction shall I go?" he asked himself, with a heavy sigh. "Alas! I know not, but feel as though I stood on the brink of an ocean of misfortune. Let me try to think again. London—yes, Jack was taken to London: that is, if he did not escape by the way. He has gone to London. I promised to rescue him. The others have doubtless gone thither—I will go there too, and will do my best to help him. Yes—yes, I ought to have thought of it before. London—London."

"Ha, ha!"

Again that derisive, mysterious laugh.

He had uttered the last word a little louder than the rest, and the laugh seemed to mock at his intention.

"This is unbearable!" he exclaimed. "It is no freak of fancy! Dastardly coward! Whoever you may be, come forth and face me—I fear you not!"

Again silence.

This was most provoking.

Tom was tempted to stay and endeavour to unravel the mystery; but upon a second thought he remembered how precious was every moment of time, and that in justice to his comrades he ought to allow no delay.

"Some other time," he muttered—"some other time—not now. London—London—I must go to London."

"Stay!" said a voice, so abruptly and so close at hand, that Tom started, while his horse swerved violently.

Tom glanced around, but in the dark shadow cast by the Druids' Stones he could distinguish nothing.

But there was something definite about the command, and Tom almost mechanically obeyed it, while he waited impatiently to hear something more.

But again vexatious silence followed.

"Why should I stay?" the highwayman asked, angrily.

"You ride to your death!" said the same voice.

But this time the speaker seemed behind him.

Tom instantly wheeled round.

But, as before, he could see nothing.

"I ride to London," he said, at length.

"You ride to your death!" repeated the voice, but in such wild, screaming tones, that it was impossible to say whence the sound proceeded.

"I will hear no more!" Tom cried. "It is doubtless some person playing a game at the expense of my credulity and superstition. But if ever I discover them, woe be to them!"

Tom at once set forward with the settled determination of riding out of the ruins as quickly as he could.

But the hideous voice pursued him with yells and screams, and occasional outbursts of unnatural laughter.

"You ride to your death!"

The shrieking tones rang in Tom's ears as he urged his steed towards London.

Cold drops of sweat stood upon his brow.

Had this adventure left him unmoved, Tom would indeed have been something more than mortal.

Strive as he would, he could not bring himself to believe that all this proceeded from a trick—though he would fain have persuaded himself so.

It seemed as though he had been warned that if he rode to London he should ride to his death.

But even had he been sure that the warning was a real one, it would not have induced him to abandon his companions to their fate.

"It may be to my death," he said, with another weary sigh, which seemed to be wrung from him more by excessive bodily exhaustion than aught else—"it may be to my death; but, for all that, I shall ride to London; and as for the incomprehensible event which has just occurred, I will banish it from my mind, as it deserves to be."

It is easy enough to make resolves of this kind, but very difficult indeed to carry them out.

Tom found this to be the case, for as he urged his horse at a hard gallop in the direction of the metropolis, he fancied in every hoofbeat that he could hear the echo of that horrible voice.

The wind whistled it in his ears—

The rustling of the tree-tops resembled it.

It could not be banished.

But still Tom kept bravely to his course.

He wanted to make the most of the hours that remained between then and daybreak.

He had only his own senses to guide him on his course, but, like the manners of old, he glanced up at the shining stars in the sky, and shaped his course accordingly.

Thus he continued until the morning sun was some distance above the horizon.

The part of the country he was in proved so very lonely and unfrequented, that he resolved to push on, though his original intention had been to travel only during the night time.

It was somewhere towards ten o'clock when he caught sight of the first habitation he had seen for a long, long time.

Fancying it might be an inn, he slightly changed his course, and turned his weary horse's head towards it.

His conjecture proved correct.

The place had a silent, sequestered air, as though it was only rarely that travellers paused before the door.

No one was in sight, and Tom was about to call aloud for the ostler, when his attention was attracted to a bill that was pasted on a pump that stood at one end of the long horse trough.

Prompted by curiosity, and perhaps also by a conviction that the bill in some way concerned himself, he drew nearer.

The first glance was enough to satisfy him that he was not deceived.

He did not stop to read it.

He was satisfied when he saw that it offered a large reward to anyone who would capture Dick Turpin.

Clearly, then, this little public-house was no resting-place for Tom.

While a description of himself was pasted upon so conspicuous a situation he could scarcely hope to remain unrecognised.

Accordingly, upon the very instant that he made this discovery the highwayman set spurs to his tired horse, and continued on his way just as the landlord and ostler made their appearance.

They called aloud for Tom to stop, but, of course, he disregarded their cries entirely.

"Very likely I shall find this to be the case at every inn upon the road," he murmured, "and, for fear that it should be so, will not attempt to stop at any of them. What I require I must obtain elsewhere."

This was no pleasant prospect for Tom, who thought, and not without reason, that he might travel a long time without meeting with a habitation of any kind.

But fortune seemed inclined to favour him, for, before noon, he observed a farm-house pleasantly situated upon a hillside, and only a little way out of the course he intended to take.

Here he repaired, and the inmates of the place, who were easy-natured, good-tempered people, treated him most hospitably.

It was certain that they had not the remotest idea of his identity, though one would have thought there was much in the appearance of the highwayman to excite suspicion.

Despite his terrible fatigue, Tom stayed here only till nightfall.

His anxiety to learn something of his friends made rest almost an impossibility.

His horse, however, was all the better for this brief halt; and having liberally rewarded the people at the farm, Tom King continued on his way.

"London," he murmured to himself—"when shall I be there? Late—too late, I fear! Riding to my death! Am I doing so? Bah! I will think of it no more."

To follow the highwayman's course more minutely than we have already done would only be tedious.

It was not as though his journey was likely to be marked by any incidents of a deeply-interesting or very extraordinary description.

His main care was to keep out of sight of his fellowmen as much as possible, and arrive at his destination in the least possible space of time and by the most unfrequented route he could discover.

The reader, then, will not be surprised to learn that, without the occurrence of anything of a sufficiently startling description to merit record, he reached London.

By a strange fatality, however, the time of his arrival was something less than twelve hours after Claude Duval's.

As Tom King rode at a round pace along the broad high-road little did he think by what a short time Claude had preceded him; and still further from his thoughts was the supposition that at that very moment, when he was looking forward hopefully to a reunion, two of his old comrades were lying interred beneath the flagstones in one of the passages of Newgate.

A terrible blow awaited him—one that would be all the more terrible on account of its entire unexpectedness.

Unlike Claude, in the morning, Tom King had arranged in his own mind a clear and definite course of action.

He had no need to pause for deliberation.

His intention was to make his way as secretly as he could to Old Matthew's, in Drury Lane.

There was much danger to be encountered, doubtless, in the attempt, but he felt that if anywhere, the White Horse was the place where some intelligence of his friends could be obtained.

Taking every precaution, then, to avoid recognition, he rode through the gate at Tyburn.

A glare of light attracted his attention to a spot lying on his left hand.

It was where the hideous gallows stood, near which, for some cause or other, a hugh fire was burning.

Dusky figures moved about, exciting the highwayman's curiosity very strongly, but he could not spare the time just then to ascertain the meaning of what he saw.

He fancied that an execution was about to take place on the morrow—not that there had been one early that morning.

London now was only a very short distance in advance.

An hour at most, he hoped, would see him on Old Matthew's threshold.

Turning at once into the dark and narrow streets, he made his way, in a devious direction, to the spot he so much wished to reach.

Contrary to his expectation, but little notice was bestowed upon him, and from this he derived the hope that he should be able to gain the White Horse undetected.

There was a reason, however, for Tom's remaining thus unmolested.

The officers were all busy congratulating themselves upon the success they had already achieved, and were planning fresh designs to be put into immediate execution.

Thus it happened that the highwayman succeeded in reaching Old Matthew's in perfect safety

Tom shrunk a little from entering, however, for the house seemed unusually full of company.

CHAPTER MLXXXI.

BRINGS DICK TURPIN ONCE AGAIN BEFORE THE READER.

TERRIBLE indeed was the shock to Dick Turpin when, on recovering from his illness, he discovered that what had haunted him, and seemed like a terrible dream, was a hideous reality.

Such grief as preyed upon Turpin's heart cannot be expressed by words—only those who have suffered a similar bereavement can form a due conception of it.

Maud was dead!

It seemed, then, as though the only tie that bound the bold highwayman to earth was rudely severed, and for ever.

Buried, too—laid beneath the earth by strangers' hands, and, above all things, him absent from the ceremony.

That, indeed, was an additional pang of extreme intensity.

It would not be too much to say that this circumstance redoubled Dick's grief, were it not for the impossibility of such a thing.

During the state of utter prostration which followed his recovery from the violent fever into which he had been thrown, he occupied himself in minutely questioning the good woman of the house.

From her lips he learned the whole of the particulars connected with poor Maud's decease and burial.

Then, when strength returned to the highwayman's exhausted frame, the first use he made of it was to creep towards the little graveyard.

The distance was trifling, but almost too great for Dick in his present state.

He accomplished it; and when he entered the silent little enclosure he needed no one to point out the grave.

Interments in this retired hamlet were comparatively rare events.

There was but one grave that was not furnished either with a rude cross or headstone, or else was covered with beautiful flowers.

That one grave looked conspicuous enough among those around it, for the dark colour of the recently-dug earth formed a great contrast to the bright green flower-spangled turf that met the eye on every side.

With a terrible groan—such a sound as one would imagine a human being would give vent to at the

moment when a heart is broke with grief—Dick Turpin threw himself at full length upon the grave.

Tears, hot and scalding, streamed from his eyes—sobs that shook his whole frame seemed to burst from his throat rather than be uttered.

There was no human being near to look upon his great affliction, and Dick gave way to it without restraint.

Bitterly—most bitterly did he reproach himself for having been the means of bringing down upon one so good and gentle such an untimely, undeserved fate.

But for the fatal chance that had brought them together, how happy and how stainless might have been her lot!

Vain indeed were these regrets, and it was the knowledge that they were so which made his reproaches all the more poignant.

Oh, how he wished that he had never lived to be made acquainted with so much misery!

How he wished that he was lying calmly and peacefully at her side!

From this moment forth he felt life would have no charms for him.

The bold, light-hearted terror of the road was in existence no longer—Turpin's life would never be again what it had been.

He felt that he should court death rather than shun it, and that he should rejoice when a bullet laid him low.

More than once, in his distracting anguish, he was about to lay violent hands upon his own life.

It was only a sense of duty—a knowledge that he had something to perform—that enabled him to restrain himself.

He thought of his companions—those who looked up to and trusted him as leader.

He was certain that they never stood more in need of his services than they did now.

At length Dick rose from the grave; and if anyone had observed his face at the moment when he entered the little churchyard and had seen it now, the difference would indeed have apeared striking.

His features were now composed.

To all outward appearances he was calm; but he looked like one who had decided upon the performance of some great and necessary duty.

Determination—invincible determination showed out in every lineament.

His step was slow as he made his way back to the little cottage, but he fancied it was somewhat firmer than when he set out.

Suddenly, however, as he walked on his way, a bright flush of colour came into his cheeks—a light sparkle in his eyes.

All at once his gaze had fallen upon his gallant mare, Black Bess.

Some idea of his grief may be formed when it is known that up to this moment he had been so absorbed that the very existence of his faithful steed had been forgotten.

As he gazed upon her noble form his heart smote him, for no one knew better than himself how much he owed to her.

Black Bess, as usual, had recognised her master.

With a low neigh, expressive of the utmost gratification and delight, she bounded towards him and rubbed her head against his breast, as was her wont.

Tears stood in the highwayman's eyes.

"Poor Bess," he murmured, though his emotion almost choked him—"poor Bess! I ought to think myself fortunate in having you left me. God knows, when you are gone, I shall be a wretched and forlorn outcast indeed!"

The prospect seemed too terrible for contemplation, and holding down his head, he caressed the noble creature's neck.

But the joy which Black Bess exhibited upon then finding her master after so long a separation jarred most unpleasantly upon Dick's spirits.

He could not bear to see it, and so continued his way to the cottage.

He had some trouble to prevent her from entering after him.

The next day saw the highwayman once more calm, settled, and determined.

He was leaving the cottage with the intention of again visiting Maud's last resting-place, and wondering how he should proceed to render assistance to his comrades, when he caught sight of a form that seemed familiar to him.

It was that of a man.

Evidently he recognised Dick, for he waved his hand and walked rapidly up from the beach.

Turpin, however, could not remember where he had seen the man before.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the new-comer, touching his hat in nautical fashion, "I hope I do not intrude upon you, but I thought—that is, I fancied that you might want my boat again, and if you do, there it is high and dry on the beach."

Dick now remembered the man perfectly.

It was the fisherman who had done such good service by bringing Maud and himself over from England in his bark.

There was a certain air of embarrassment about the fisherman, a kind of expectation of something, the cause of which Dick did not for a moment comprehend.

But his memory was beginning to come back to him and to serve him more faithfully.

"I have not yet fulfilled my promise about the reward," said Dick, in reply; "but fear not that I shall fail to do so."

"Oh, sir, that's all right enough; I would not have mentioned such a thing for the world. I was very sorry to hear of your loss," he added, with a tear in his eye, "because I can understand it."

"Is not your wife better?"

"No better, sir, I am afraid, and yet I can't say that she is worse."

"Let us hope for the best."

The man shook his head.

"At any rate," continued Dick, "you shall have the means of providing her with every luxury; and if delicacies will save her life, be under no apprehension about it."

"I hope it may be so, but yet I can't help thinking that you rate my service too high."

"That would be impossible. But never mind that now. Your presence here just at this particular moment is most opportune, and you will be able greatly to increase the obligation I am under to you."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Yes, I desire instant passage back to England—that is," he added, in a broken voice, "in the course of an hour or two."

The prospect of leaving Maud affected him terribly.

"I shall be ready, sir," answered the fisherman. "I will go and trim my boat at once. The tide will serve in about a couple of hours, and we ought not to lose the advantage of it."

"No, no, certainly not. I will take care to be quite ready by then. On my arrival I will place the reward in your hands."

The fisherman expressed his thanks as well as he was able, then turned away.

Dick Turpin, with slow and melancholy footsteps, took his way for the last time to the little graveyard, beneath the turf of which reposed all that was dear to him in this life.

Seating himself upon the little mound of earth which marked Maud's grave, he buried his face in his hands and gave himself up to thought.

Who shall attempt to describe the nature of his reflections on this occasion?

We shrink from the task.

The solemn sound caused by the church clock striking the hour roused him once more to the concerns of this life.

When he lifted his head his face was very pale, and his eyes deep sunk and lustreless.

Ineffably sad and yearning was the glance which Dick gave to the grave; then, as though he could not trust himself to remain a moment longer, he turned away.

Near the little picturesque gate, however, he was obliged to pause.

He looked around him carefully and slowly, as though desirous of impressing every one of its details upon his mind.

There seemed to be an inward consciousness that no



[KING IS SHOT BY DICK TURPIN.]

No. 235.—Black Bess.

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should never again be able to look upon that peaceful scene except in imagination.

Yet his determination was that if he could only succeed in performing the duty which he felt was owing to his comrades by himself, he would make his way back to this place, and pass the remainder of his life in it in humble retirement.

But another and different fate was in store for the highwayman.

The conviction upon his mind was destined to be realised.

He was in good truth taking his last look of that scene.

It cost him a great effort finally to tear himself away, but the time for departure came, and could not be delayed.

Returning to the cottage, he placed in the hands of the good woman all the money that he possessed.

The amount was considerable; but he gave it all to her without reserve, save and except that he bound her to tend Maud's grave as the other graves were tended, and to cause to be placed at the head of it a stone inscribed simply with the name of "Maud."

Inexpressibly mournful was this last duty, and more than once Dick felt as though he should break down under it.

It was therefore more with the view of concealing the emotion which he could not longer repress that he took his departure in a hasty manner.

On reaching the beach, however, he found the fisherman waiting for him.

The tide then was just upon the turn.

A little delay was caused in getting Black Bess aboard the boat.

For the first time, she seemed reluctant and unwilling to obey her master's bidding.

Rightly or wrongly, Dick ascribed it to the fact that she missed Maud, and was undesirous to proceed without being able to comprehend the reason of it.

This may have been only a fancy on the part of the highwayman; but it pleased him.

Had he felt disposed to chide his mare for her disobedience his emotion would not have suffered him to do so.

At last, however, Black Bess entered the boat; but having done so, she seemed to look back to the shore with a glance as wistful as her master's

Gradually the shore receded from their view; and as it grew more and more distant, Dick's heaviness of heart increased; and when at length darkness set in, and when there was no fear that he should be observed, Dick sank down to the bottom of the boat and gave way unrestrainedly to his grief—a grief a thousand times more poignant than any he had suffered in all the vicissitudes of his life.

CHAPTER MLXXXII.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN VERY UNEXPECTEDLY FINDS HIMSELF IN THE MIDST OF HIS FOES.

THE coast of England was gained in safety.

How long a period of time the voyage had occupied Dick Turpin knew not.

All the time he remained in the position we have just described—that is to say, crouching down in the boat in an attitude of overwhelming grief.

The fisherman, actuated by friendly motives, spoke to him once or twice, but no answer was returned.

The sudden jerk caused by the boat running on to the beach aroused him, however, and, with a powerful effort, he shook off the reflections that had weighed him down, and prepared himself to perform those duties which lay before him.

Springing from the boat with a swiftness and readiness that surprised the fisherman, Dick prepared to get Black Bess on shore.

This was done without much trouble, and, the boat having been hastily secured, they made their way towards the cottage.

"I cannot linger here," said Dick Turpin, "for every moment is of value. Still, I must fulfil the promise that I made to you. Can you obtain a horse?"

"There is a little inn not very far away," replied the fisherman, "where I might hire one."

"Then go at once. Be careful to say nothing about the purpose for which you require it. I will wait for you here. Be speedy," he added, as the man started off. "I shall be full of impatience till you return."

Dick did not enter the cottage, but remained on the beach caressing his noble steed.

Now that Maud had passed away, the tie that bound them together was drawn closer.

Black Bess was now the highwayman's dearest friend.

In spite, however, of his affection for her, his eyes very often looked yearningly across the vast expanse of dark, rolling water, and as he did so his heart would swell almost to bursting, for this was the first great grief that he had known, and therefore it was more deeply felt.

Although the fisherman made good speed, the time seemed terribly long until he returned; yet it was quite as well that this delay occurred, for it allowed the day to close in.

It was, however, little more than dusk when the pair set out in the direction of Stonehenge.

Dick was unconscious of the great amount of danger he was running, for he knew nothing of the movements of the police officers.

These individuals were, however, with a great deal of perseverance, searching in every direction for the highwaymen, and leaving descriptions of them at every habitation they perceived.

Had he known all this, Dick would scarcely have rode along the highway with so much indifference.

This bold course, as often happens, proved a safe one, for the old Druids' Stones were reached without the occurrence of any incident whatever.

Going, then, to that place where the booty had been deposited, Dick unearthed it.

The amount he placed in the hands of the fisherman far exceeded all expectation; but then it was not likely that Dick would underpay the person who had rendered him such a service.

The remainder of the wealth Dick bestowed about him, for he judged this would be the more prudent course, as who could tell what sudden emergency might arise?

The fisherman, having uttered a thousand protestations of gratitude, rode back to his humble dwelling, while Dick resolved to remain in his present quarters for a little while, in order that his mare might have food and rest.

It seemed a strange spot to choose for a resting-place; but then Dick judged that of all others it would be the one where the officers were least likely to look for him.

While speculating upon the possible whereabouts of his comrades, however, Dick little thought that scarcely twenty-four hours had elapsed since Tom King stood within a few yards of him.

Like Tom King, Dick Turpin, after some reflection, felt that London was the place where he would be most likely to hear tidings of the rest, and he resolved to make his way there with as little loss of time as possible.

Having once made this determination, he found it the most difficult thing in the world to restrain his impatience so far as to enable him to stay as long as he had intended.

For himself rest was out of the question.

He tried in vain to close his eyes in sleep—indeed, so great was his agitation that he was compelled to pace up and down like some wild animal chafing at confinement.

Long before it was dark, then, he was on his way to London.

With the utmost assurance he continued to keep on the highway.

He knew full well that this was the most direct road, and also that his mare would not be so fatigued in journeying along it as she would be if he attempted to take her across the country.

Plunged in deep thought, he paid but slight attention to what was going on around him, nor did he seem conscious of the rapid approach of darkness.

But he was destined to be aroused from his reverie in a manner more startling than agreeable.

All at once his ears were assailed by a loud shout.

There could be no mistaking the tone of it

It was a shout of surprise.

It was enough to make Dick look around him hastily, and as he did so a loud ejaculation escaped his lips.

He found, to his great surprise, that he was exactly in front of an inn of considerable extent.

The house lay at some little distance back from the high-road, and round the door a number of mounted men were clustered.

It did not require a second glance to prove that they were police officers.

Apparently they had halted there merely that they might take some hasty refreshment while in the saddle.

It was from them the shout of surprise had come, and the cause of it was the sudden and unexpected appearance of the highwayman.

"Dick Turpin," roared one of them, in accents of amazement, as soon as the shout of astonishment had died away—"Dick Turpin and Black Bess, by all that's d—nable!"

But before he had reached the conclusion of this ejaculatory speech the object of it had taken the alarm and was flying along the high-road at a speed which seemed to promise to make pursuit a hopeless matter.

Nevertheless, the police officers hastily dropped the jugs from which they had been drinking, while the one in command threw down some pieces of silver for the reckoning.

"Now, my boys," he said, "off and away! It is a long time since we had a chance of doing anything, so do not let us miss the present opportunity. Try your best. Now, then, forward—forward!"

This urging seemed, however, to be scarcely necessary, for the men, without exception, seemed full of anxiety to capture the highwayman.

They were, too, in the best of spirits.

Their horses were in good condition, having had a long rest, during which they had been well attended to.

They consequently seemed to stand a good chance of effecting their object.

As we have seen, Dick Turpin's astonishment lasted but a second.

The first thing he did upon recovering himself was to give Black Bess a sudden impulse forwards.

Gallantly was that impulse obeyed, and it was with a sudden thrill of pleasure that Dick thought of the splendid qualities of his matchless steed.

That exhilaration of the spirits which cannot fail to be felt while riding rapidly under circumstances of excitement soon told upon Dick.

For the moment all was forgotten.

His eyes brightened.

His breath came thick and short, while the warm blood leaped with a tingling motion through his veins.

He was dominated by an intense and ungovernable excitement.

Once again he felt himself the bold dashing knight of the road, fearing no danger, no matter how great, and laughing to scorn all attempts at pursuit.

But, despite the great speed that Bess made, the police officers could still be heard—though faintly—in the rear.

"They are better mounted than I could have believed," he muttered, as he glanced behind him.

But the darkness was too great to enable him to see far.

The unmistakable sound, however, produced by the concussion of many horses' feet upon the hard highway still came to his ears.

"They will try their hardest," he muttered to himself; "but it will be in vain. They have lent me a little stimulus, and the result probably will be that I shall reach London sooner than I should have done had I been left to myself."

The speed at which Black Bess was going, though a very rapid one, was, nevertheless, of such a character as she could maintain for a considerable length of time without much distress to herself.

But when several miles had been passed over in this manner Dick Turpin's first excitement abated, and he began to think with greater calmness upon the nature of his position.

"No, no," he said to himself, as he tightened the rein—"it won't do to keep up this kind of thing, for, if I do, the probability is that I shall enter London with the police officers after me like a pack of wolves! No, no—that will not answer."

Black Bess, feeling the check upon her bridle, very willingly obeyed it.

Her pace grew slower and slower until it reduced itself almost to a walk.

Dick was thinking.

Slight, however, as was the delay thus caused, it was of manifest advantage to the police officers, who still pushed on at the utmost speed their horses were capable of making.

Very faintly, but still growing louder and louder each moment, could be heard the hoofbeats of their horses in the distance.

"I must give them the slip," said Dick, again speaking half aloud. "It will be by far the wisest course; and yet how am I to accomplish it? What stratagem can I make use of that will be effectual? It must be something out of the ordinary course, for, rely upon it, they will not suffer themselves to be very easily thrown off the scent. What can it be? Thought eludes me! I do not feel capable of that invention which once came so readily to me. How they come on! Let it be how it will, some greater distance must be placed between them and me than there is already—nothing can be done in such close quarters as these. I will try another gallop. That, perhaps, may clear my brain of the vapours that now overcloud it. At any rate, by getting further off I shall be better able to put into execution whatever I may decide upon. Forward, Bess, old lass—forward once again, and give them a taste of your rare mettle!"

CHAPTER MLXXXIII.

DICK TURPIN CONCEIVES A VERY CLEVER SCHEME FOR ELUDING THE POLICE OFFICERS.

It often happened that Black Bess obeyed the bare words of command, as she did in this instance.

To all appearance she understood the words that were addressed to her, but probably the fact was she understood from the tone of her master's voice what it was that he required her to do.

When wishing her to make good speed, Dick always spoke in a lively and encouraging manner, and it was rarely that anything more was needed.

Having perfect confidence in her, he allowed the reins to lie quite loosely upon her neck, for in the matter of avoiding obstacles of all description he relied more upon her matchless instinct than upon the quickness of his own vision.

Never had Black Bess appeared to be in better condition.

Away she flew along the broad, well-kept high-road, with the ease and swiftness of a greyhound.

Very soon indeed did it become impossible to catch the least sound of his foes, but Dick kept on.

He was anxious to have the best possible opportunity to carry anything he might resolve upon into effect.

His brain was busily at work, but as yet his mind had failed him.

It did indeed seem as though he had lost that faculty upon which in times gone past he had so prided himself.

All at once Black Bess changed her position from the middle of the road to one side of it.

The darkness was so great that Dick could not see what had caused her to make this sudden movement.

By dint of straining his eyes, however, he made out a dark-looking object, which immediately resolved itself into a covered van, or, rather, cart, for it had but two wheels.

This vehicle was drawn swiftly and smoothly along by a powerful horse.

Dick was past it in a second of time, but before he had gone many hundreds of yards in advance he pulled up.

A thought had at last occurred to him.

It had been suggested by the cart.

The nature of it will soon be seen.

At present it was an idea merely, and it was impossible to say whether it could be carried into effect until the cart arrived.

For this event Dick waited with much impatience.

A rumbling sound soon assailed his ears, and finally, after the lapse of a few moments, the vehicle reached him.

"Hoy—hoy!" Dick bawled, in a loud voice. "Stop—stop, I say!—stop a moment! Hoy—hoy!"

His summons was heard, and the covered cart was brought to a standstill.

"Dang me," said a voice, "if I did not think it was a highwayman! Not that it would have siguified if it had been, because, you see, I am not such a fool as to travel with anything worth taking. He, he!"

"A very wise precaution," assented Dick.

"Yes—yes! I ax your pardon, sir, for having had such thoughts about you, sir, seeing as how you're a genelman. He, he'"

The person in the cart was evidently facetiously inclined.

Dick rode closer to the vehicle.

"I have stopped you," said Dick, "in order that I may ask you a question of great importance to yourself."

"Well, that's cool, at any rate! What may this question be?"

Dick spoke in a deliberate tone, for he wished to make an impression.

"I want to know whether you have any objection to earning a couple of hundred pounds in the next hour or so?"

"Eh?—what?" ejaculated the man, amazed in no slight degree. "Just be good enough to say that over again, will you?"

Dick complied, and, if anything, his voice was more deliberate and emphatic.

"It seems pretty clear," he replied, "that you take me for a d—d fool."

"How so?"

"Why, you must, or you would never ask me such a question."

"Then you are willing?"

"Certainly! But," he exclaimed, all at once, as though struck with a fresh thought, "you don't want me to commit murder, do you?"

"Certainly not!" said Dick, who could not help laughing at the tone of extreme anxiety the man employed.

"Nor rob, nor fire a rick, nor——"

"Nothing that you need fear any after consequences from."

"I'm your man, then. What is it?"

"Listen attentively."

"Don't be afraid about that."

"I want you, then, to take your horse out of the cart, unharness it, and turn it into that nice meadow over the hedge yonder. Do you understand that?"

"Well, I know what you want me to do, but as for understanding why it is to be done——"

"There is no occasion for you to trouble yourself about that—you shall know more in good time."

"Very good. What next?"

"You will then put the harness on my mare here—I think it will fit—and put her into the shafts."

"Put that mare of yours into my cart?"

"Just so."

"And what then?"

"Continue your journey."

"And what about my horse?"

"That will be safe enough in the meadow till you have the opportunity to come back and fetch it."

"And what should you do?"

"Ride with you in the cart."

"Where to?"

"Only just along the high-road."

"How far, though?"

"A mile or two."

"And what else?"

"That's all."

"All?" repeated the man, incredulously.

"Everything."

"But you don't mean to say that you are willing to pay a couple of hundred pounds for having that done, do you?"

"I am not only willing, but quite ready."

"Then there must be more in it than I am aware of."

"Undoubtedly there is."

"Then let me know it, or I'm off. I never buy a pig in a poke, as the saying is."

Dick debated for a moment within himself as to whether he should take this man into his confidence.

It would be a great risk to do so; but at the same time Dick felt that, could his plan be efficiently carried out, he would have an excellent chance of escape.

From the man's manner of speaking, too, Dick felt tempted to trust him.

What also weighed greatly with him was, that if this man did undertake it there was no doubt about his ability to play his part well.

"Well, guv'nor," interrupted the man, "how do you bring in the verdict?"

"I will trust you."

"Very good."

"Fully and entirely trust you."

"So much the better."

"In a word, then, I am pursued by police officers—they are hard upon my track, and by doing what I have just said I shall be able to escape them easily."

"I see now. And you are?"

"I may as well tell you, for half confidences are more dangerous than whole ones."

"True again."

"Then I am commonly known as Dick Turpin."

"Blest if I did not think so!" answered the man, without displaying any of that astonishment which the highwayman thought the announcement would call forth.

"You thought so?"

"Yes."

"And why, pray?"

"Why, by the looks of the mare of yours; and, besides, what you have proposed is just like one of your tricks."

"Well, be it so. Tell me whether you feel inclined to take two hundred pounds from me or not."

"I should not hesitate a moment," was the reply, "if I could make sure that I should get into no trouble about it afterwards."

"I don't think there is any need for fear. But you must make up your mind quickly, or I shall have them in sight."

The man considered for a moment or two; but the prospect of coming into possession of so large a sum as two hundred pounds overcame the scruples of prudence.

"In for a penny in for a pound," he cried at length. "I'll take you."

"Agreed," said Dick; and the very moment he pronounced the word he slipped from the saddle.

The man was not long in descending, and between them the horse was unharnessed and taken out of the cart in a very brief space of time.

Dick was in high spirits, for, having obtained the man's consent, he made sure of being able to baffle his foes.

As rapidly as possible he took off Black Bess's saddle and bridle, and threw them into the back of the cart.

While he was thus occupied the man took his horse by the forelock and led him through a gate into a meadow on the right-hand side of the road.

"There," he said, as he fastened the gate again, "you ought not to grumble at this little arrangement, for you are clearly a gainer by it."

The horse seemed to think so; for, as if to testify his satisfaction, he kicked up his heels and vanished into the darkness in a moment.

Nothing now remained but to put the harness on to Black Bess and place her in the shafts.

This did not take long, for the noble creature seemed to know that what her master most wanted of her then was docility.

It was really wonderful to notice how different Black Bess looked when harnessed to the cart.

The great, clumsy trappings formed for her an effectual disguise, and in the darkness there was little fear that the officers would be able to recognise her.

Dick Turpin was delighted beyond measure.

"Capital," he said, as he patted his mare upon the neck—"capital! We shall do the officers nicely! And hark! As I live, they are coming; we have not a moment to lose!"

The man listened.

"I can't hear them," he said.

"Very likely not; but then you must remember that you are not as well practised in listening as I am. If we linger here we shall hear them more than is desirable."

Dick climbed up into the cart, and the man hastened to follow him.

"Will you drive?"

"No," answered the highwayman; "I will get to the back of the cart and cover myself up with the straw; at the same time, I shall be able to look out at the back."

"Very good."

Black Bess showed herself quite tractable and quiet in harness.

No sooner did the man take hold of the reins than she jogged off as though she had never been used to any other employment in her life.

The canvas at the back of the cart consisted of a couple of flaps, and though these were tied together, yet space enough was left to allow Dick to peep through.

The cart rolled along at such a rate that Dick was obliged to say:

"Don't drive so fast, or you will excite their suspicions."

"Very good; though I do like to be behind a horse that can go."

Their speed was now somewhat diminished, and in consequence the sound made by the officers' horses could again be heard.

More and more distinct it became, and Dick was sure that they would overtake the cart in less than a quarter of an hour.

Just as he made the reflection the man called out to him.

"What is amiss?"

"Oh! nothing, only you have not told me what I shall say to the officers in case they should speak to me."

"Well thought of. The simplest thing will be to declare that no one answering my description has passed you, and, of course, they will conclude that I have made my way across the country."

CHAPTER MLXXXIV.

DICK TURPIN FINDS THAT HE IS BY NO MEANS OUT OF DANGER.

"Just as you please," replied the man. "You may depend that if it is agreeable to you it will suit me."

"Well, then, I am anxious to get to London as soon as ever I can, though I don't want to get there with a pack of officers behind me."

"I understand. And if you can once give them the slip you will push on along the road as fast as you are able?"

"Exactly."

"Well, all I can say is that it is a capital plan, and it ought to succeed."

"We shall soon know. The officers will be almost sure to stop you and make inquiries. You must be very careful, for if you excite their suspicions it will be all over with me."

"Oh, you leave Joseph to that. I was born before the middle of last week—I suppose you know that?"

"Yes; if I hadn't I should not have trusted you so far as I have already."

Dick now once more betook himself to his look-out at the back, for the sounds of the officers' approach became unmistakable.

Still, the darkness was too profound to permit him at present to get even a glimpse of them.

It was impossible for this state of things to continue very long, however.

The officers, as far as could be judged by the sound, were coming on as swiftly as ever.

At length, like a darkness, Dick could distinguish them behiud him.

He now began to feel conscious that, in the event of anything going wrong, his position was a very ticklish one.

Discovery would, in point or fact, be fatal to him.

It was this reflection that led the highwayman to ask himself whether he was not placing more confidence in this man than was justifiable.

Suppose he should play him false?

The probability was a terrible one to contemplate, and yet it was impossible for Turpin to close his eyes to it.

Indeed, the nearer the officers came the more did it obtrude itself.

He had no guarantee whatever of the man's fidelity, and the temptation to betray him was very great.

Not only was there the very considerable amount of the reward, but he held possession of Black Bess; and to a man fond of a good horse, the hope of being able to secure her would perhaps prove to be the greatest temptation of all.

"I won't leave the power all in his hands," muttered Dick, conclusively; "I will at least have some warrant for the safety of my life."

Just as Dick Turpin arrived at this determination the police officers came fairly into view.

Not only were the forms of themselves and the horses visible, but even their accoutrements could be distinguished.

"Joseph—Joseph!" whispered Dick.

"Hullo, captain!"

"Hush—hush! Speak low! The officers are close behind us!"

"All right. But you startled me a bit. The fact is, I was thinking."

It might have been the highwayman's fancy, but the driver appeared to manifest no little confusion or embarrassment.

"I have been thinking too," answered Dick, in a significant tone.

"Have you, captain?"

"Yes. Do you feel that?"

"Lor, yes! What is it?"

"A pistol!"

"Don't—don't!"

"Silence, I say! Just listen a moment, will you!"

"I can't with that horrid thing touching me. It's just like ice!"

Dick removed the pistol, though he took care to hold it so that it would be ready for immediate use.

"Now, I don't want to say anything unpleasant, you know," he whispered; "and you will forgive me for thinking that perhaps the idea had occurred to you that you might be able to make a better bargain than you have already."

"What do you mean, captain?"

"Why, simply as a mere matter of self-defence, I shall take such means as will effectually prevent you from giving the officers a hint that I am in the cart with you."

"But, captain, you don't think that of me, do you?"

"I should be sorry to have a bad opinion of anyone," answered Dick, "but in the present case my life compels me to adopt every precaution. Do you understand?"

"Quite."

"Then I am sure you will not take it amiss of me if I hold this loaded pistol ready in my hand, like this."

"There is no occasion."

"I hope there may not be; still," added Dick Turpin, in a resolute and even menacing tone, "if I have the least suspicion that you are about to play me false I'll blow the top of your skull off, and with as little hesitation as I should have in killing a sparrow. Those who know me best invariably give me credit for being as good as my word, and fear not that I shall make this matter an exception."

The man shuddered.

"Dang me!" he said. "If I'd a known I was going to drive with a loaded pistol at my back I would have seen you at the bottom of the Red Sea before you should have got into the cart at all!"

"If you mean well by me, you have nothing whatever to fear—you will be quite uninjured. If anything unpleasant takes place, you will have none save yourself to blame. But, hush! the officers are here—not another word! Remember what I told you. In answer to al their questions merely say that no one answering to my description has passed you on the road."

It was high time now to be silent, for the police were so near that there was great danger of their discovering that the cart was occupied by two persons should a word be uttered in a louder tone than a whisper.

Not more than a minute elapsed after this when some one called out, in a loud voice:

"Hullo, there! Pull up, will you?—pull up, in the King's name!"

The driver now brought Black Bess to a standstill.

The vital moment had now arrived.

It was scarcely possible for any human being in Dick's position to preserve anything resembling ordinary calmness.

The slightest thing would have served to discover him.

If the officers, prompted by suspicion or otherwise, merely glanced into the cart, his detection must have followed.

All he could do was to remain profoundly sti" and await the issue of events.

No sooner was the vehicle stopped than a police officer rode close up to it.

The others clustered around at a short distance, so that Dick might be said literally to be surrounded by his foes.

Certainly many of them were within an arm's-length of him.

"How far have you travelled?" asked the officer, in a hectoring voice.

"What do you want to know that for?"

"I demand the information in the name of the King."

"Very well, then, since you must know, I come from Meadbrook."

"Oh, ah! Meadbrook. Well, as you have been driving along the high-road, did you notice a man pass you riding on a black horse, and going at a violent gallop?"

"No."

"You have not?"

"I have not," answered the man, firmly, for the pistol behind him was prominent in his imagination.

"But perhaps you have been asleep?"

"It isn't likely."

"Then are you perfectly certain that no such person has passed you to-night?"

"Perfectly certain."

This answer evidently was a very different one to what the officers had expected, and produced no little confusion.

A consultation was immediately held.

Dick overheard the greater part.

"I told you so, sir," said some one, in a positive tone of voice—"something seemed to strike me that as soon as he got out of our sight he would make his way across the open country instead of keeping to the high-road."

"Then, if you thought so," rejoined the chief officer, "why the devil couldn't you say so at the time? What the devil is the good of telling us now it is too late?"

"I did not like to take the responsibility."

"D—n your scruples! You might have given your opinion."

"What do you think we had better set about doing? If we stay here long the scent will grow quite cold."

"I am afraid it's cold already," was the reply. "I should like to know whether anyone has a proposition to make?"

"I can't help thinking that he kept to the high-road," said another.

"But how could he have done so without being seen by the driver of this cart?"

"Perhaps it was made worth his while not to see."

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Officer," cried Joseph, "if you *insinervates* anything agen me, blowed if I don't get out of my cart and punch your head!"

"Don't be a fool!" said the chief officer. "Drive on. We will keep you company till you get to the inn yonder, and then we shall soon find out whether you have spoken the truth or not."

Having received this permission, the man set his cart in motion.

The officers rode along with it after the fashion of a guard of honour.

Dick was not aware of the proximity of any inn until the officer had alluded to the fact; and what had just been said by no means tended to make him feel easy in his mind.

He was just congratulating himself upon having got off so well when the inn was mentioned.

There was no help for it, however.

Being quite powerless, all he could do was to resign himself to Fortune.

Luckily for him, he was not destined to remain long in suspense.

With a sudden jerk, the cart a moment or two afterwards stopped in front of the inn.

Dick would have given much for the power to take a peep about him, but this was impossible.

Concentrating all his faculties into that of listening, he waited to hear what would next be said.

Some little confusion seemed to be going on in front of the roadside inn, and Dick afterwards found that the cause of this was that another troop of officers, who had come from the opposite direction, had stopped there to bait their horses.

Dick drew a long breath, and congratulated himself upon his narrow escape.

Had he not put his cleverly-conceived stratagem into execution nothing could have saved him from riding full tilt into this fresh party, and then his chances of ultimate escape would have been slight indeed.

But events were fated to fall out otherwise.

"We shall know the truth now," said the officer who had proposed making a halt at the inn.

"Yes, yes—to be sure we shall."

Then, addressing himself to the officer in command of this second troop, he asked:

"Any news of Dick Turpin?"

"Divil a bit!" was the reply, given in so strong a brogue as to leave no doubt upon the subject of the speaker's nationality.

"I hope you believe me now," said Jeseph, triumphantly. "If he had gone this way the officers must have seen him."

"Why do you ask, my jewel?" continued the officer belonging to the second troop. "Have you had any luck now?"

"We caught sight of Dick Turpin," was the reply.

"Tare and ouns!"

"We gave chase, and thought we had him on the road before us; but it seems pretty certain that he has given us the slip somehow."

"And what's that man in the cart to do wid it? Who's in there?"

"Oh, nothing! He told us Dick Turpin had not passed him, but we did not know what to do about believing him."

"But you believe me now, don't you?" asked Joseph, triumphantly.

"Yes."

"And I may drive on, I suppose?"

"Yes—if you like. What the devil do you want bothering me for?"

"Don't lose your temper, my friend," returned Joseph, imperturbably.

Then he added:

"Good night, gentlemen all. I wish you luck."

With these words he drove off.

Dick ventured to shift his position a little, and looked out at the back.

He could see the officers in front of the inn quite plainly; and it was perhaps merely his excited fancy which made him think that several officers gave suspicious glances at the retreating vehicle.

CHAPTER MLXXXV.

DICK TURPIN UNEXPECTEDLY RECEIVES SOME VERY IMPORTANT INTELLIGENCE.

Not for long, however, was Dick allowed to have even this partial glimpse of his foes.

A sudden bend in the high-road hid the inn completely, and so he was deprived of the opportunity of ascertaining whether his suspicions were well or ill-founded.

He listened for a little while, but finding all was silent, he ventured to draw a long breath upon finding himself out of so dangerous a position.

As for Joseph, he protested himself to be vastly pleased with the result of his stratagem, to the success of which he declared his own cleverness tended in no slight degree.

Dick ventured to uncock his pistol and to replace it in his pocket.

"Captain," said Joseph, descrying Dick's action, "I am heartily glad to see that ugly-looking thing out of the way. It was too bad of you to distrust me—I did not deserve it."

"So it seems. Give me your hand—there. And now forgive me for my doubts, which, groundless as they were, you cannot blame me for feeling."

"All right—all right: don't say another word about it. I rather think we are out of our difficulty now."

"I hope so."

"Don't you think we are?"

"Well, it is doubtful."

"But what do you think of doing, captain—and how am I to get my horse back?"

"Never mind that now—your horse will be all right, and I shall want you to let me ride in your cart a mile or two further yet."

"Very good."

"You say you like to be behind an animal that can go don't you?"

"Rather!"

"Then for the next twenty minutes the wheels of this cart will go round faster than ever they have gone before."

"You are going to put Black Bess upon her mettle?"

"Yes, and without distressing her either."

"And you will let me hold the reins?"

"Yes. Slacken them. That will do nicely."

The moment the man complied with these directions, Dick gave his old signal to his mare.

Before the sound had well-nigh left his lips, away she went at a pace that made their former speed seem miserably slow, although, as may be supposed, it was pretty considerable.

Joseph was so amazed and, withal, so delighted that he could do nothing but sit breathless and speechless holding the reins.

So terrific was the speed that the wheels seemed to bound from the road.

Sparks flew and stones were scattered on every side.

The cart was but ill adapted for such rapid locomotion, being very deficient in the matter of springs, so that it was by no means comfortable to sit in it.

Dick, however, just then was not very studious about comfort.

All he wanted was to get away from his foes as quickly as he was able—so that he could, indeed, make after pursuit utterly useless.

As for Joseph, he was in his element.

This furious rate was kept up for something like the period Dick had mentioned, and by that time, the reader may be sure, they had rattled over many miles.

Wishing now to resume the saddle, Turpin spoke to Black Bess, and in a moment she reduced her speed until it became a very gentle trot.

"Astonishing!" ejaculated Joseph. "You have got her under rare command, captain, and no mistake! Ah," he added, with a sigh, "what wouldn't I give for such a creature!"

The highwayman hardly liked the tone in which these last words were pronounced, but of course he made no allusion to the circumstance.

Leaning forward in the cart, he looked out right and left of him for a narrow turning down which he could drive for a few yards, so as to have the opportunity of removing Black Bess from the shafts without being seen by anyone who might chance to pass by.

Joseph seemed to guess his intention, for he remarked, rather hastily:

"Captain, do you know that I am within a couple of miles of my journey's end, which is the next market town we come to? Now, if you would drive to there before you took your mare out it would make a great difference to me."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; do you see, I should do my business, and borrow a horse from a friend, who would ride back with me in the cart until we got to the meadow where mine is, and then he would ride horseback to the town again."

While speaking these words, Joseph displayed so much eagerness, while seeming to suppress all symptoms of such a thing, that Dick's suspicions were revived with full force.

"Perhaps he has some deep-laid plan in his mind to attempt my capture," thought the highwayman to himself; "and yet I may do him a great injustice by harbouring such thoughts. At any rate, I will not run the risk."

Having arrived at this determination, he said, significantly:

"I shall pay you so liberally for the service you have done me so far that you will think nothing of the inconvenience of being left no more than two miles from your destination."

"Then you won't take me, captain?"

"I prefer not to do so. Just turn down that dark lane there on the left; we shall be nicely out of sight there."

Without another word, and without manifesting the least hesitation, Joseph obeyed the mandate.

The lane was narrow and miry, so that Dick soon had the vehicle brought to a standstill.

The task of taking Black Bess out of the shafts, and reinvesting her with saddle and bridle was very quickly performed; and then Turpin's next course was to produce some of the money of which he had about him so plentiful a store.

That he treated Joseph liberally the reader may be sure, for Turpin was about the last man on earth to underrate any service that was performed for him.

The amount, indeed, evidently exceeded the expectations which Joseph had formed himself.

"I shall leave you to look after yourself," were the highwayman's parting words. "I know very well that you are capable of doing so, but still, let me caution you, for your sake, not to let the police officers surmise what share you have had in my escape to-night."

With the last word on his lips, Dick rode away, leaving Joseph standing in the lane and looking very much as though he was in doubt of the reality of what had lately passed.

Turpin's intention was to push on with unabated speed, for Black Bess did not at present show any effects whatever from the exertions already made.

The course decided upon accorded well with Dick's own impatience; and not only that, it rendered him still safer so far as regarded those officers who were on the road behind him.

Ere long, however, he became sensible that Black Bess would be all the better for a brief rest and some slight refreshment, and accordingly he began to look about him for a roadside inn.

The hour was very late, and he had grave doubts as to whether he should find a place open.

Just, however, as he was making this reflection, he perceived a glimmering light ahead of him and hastened towards it.

As he had hoped, he found it to be just the place he was so anxious to meet with.

On a nearer approach, too, it became evident that he had arrived in the very nick of time, for a man was engaged in fastening the shutters.

This individual hearing the sound of a horse's feet, came forwards and proved to be the ostler.

All around was so perfectly quiet and apparently so free from alarm that Dick was tempted to alight.

He allowed his mare only a little hay, with some water with which had been mixed a small quantity of brandy.

"Now a whisp of hay," he exclaimed, taking hold of a handful.

He began rubbing Black Bess thoroughly from head to foot; and while he was thus engaged the ostler, pretending to be very indifferent, walked with his lantern towards the horse-trough.

Turpin did not pay any particular attention to his movements.

Had he done so, he would have seen the ostler hold the lantern close to a part of the great pump which was much whiter than the rest of the wood of which it was composed.

From time to time the ostler glanced towards Dick, who, having finished rubbing his mare down, comprehended what was going forward.

"Here," he said, "come and take your reckoning."

"I knows you," said the ostler, in an excited voice, and raising his lantern while he spoke.

"Then you have the advantage of me," answered the highwayman, carelessly.

"I wish I had!" was the muttered response. "Dick Turpin," he added, in a louder voice, "the officers are after you."

"Thank you! I was slightly aware of the fact," was the provokingly cool rejoinder.

"There's a bill up offering a reward for you at every inn and public place on this road. There are hundreds of people on the look-out for you."

"Then they will take a great deal of trouble without

any profit to themselves, unless they should happen to possess an uncommon share of good sense, as I think you do."

"What do you mean?" asked the ostler, full of curiosity.

"Simply that here is a twenty-pound note for you, and all I want you to do in return for it is to know nothing at all about me."

"Right, captain," was the reply. "Give us the money, and trust to my honour; and to prove that I don't mean bad by you I will give you a little information that may prove valuable."

"Thanks. What is it?"

The ostler, having examined the bank-note by the insufficient aid of the lantern, folded it up carefully and placed it in his waistcoat pocket.

Then, lowering his voice, he said:

"Captain, I don't know whether you are aware of it, but there is a party of more than twenty police officers on the road before you."

"Before me? Are you sure?"

"Quite. They were all here not more than half an hour ago, and I heard them saying to each other that they intended to keep on quietly in the direction of London, making inquiries all along the road."

This was indeed important intelligence, and true beyond a doubt.

Dick stopped, uncertain what to do.

The ostler appeared to have a tolerably good idea of what was passing through his mind, for he said:

"Look here, captain, if you don't mind another flimsy I can tell you something much better worth your knowing still—that is if, as I suppose, you want to get to London."

The highwayman did not think it worth while to waste time by uttering any reply.

His sole answer was to produce a second bank-note of the same value as the first, and place it between the ostler's extended fingers.

It was perfectly well understood.

"Captain," he said, "I know the officers have taken the high-road. Well, you must know that there is, at a little more than three-parts of a mile from here, a turning. It is a cross-road, in fact."

"Well?"

"The turning is on the right-hand side as you go from here. Now, captain, if you will take that turning, and make good speed, you will be able to get in advance of your foes."

"Can it be possible?"

"It is perfectly true."

"But how—how?"

"Why, this cross-country road brings you out on the London Road many miles from here—in fact, I should think the distance saved is pretty nigh five miles, for the road goes cornerwise, you understand."

"The road is much used, then?"

"No—scarcely at all."

"How is that?"

"Why, people prefer the highway, especially at night, and the cross-road I am telling you of is very dark, by the reason that it goes for some distance through a very dense wood; then again, for the first mile or two, the ground underfoot is very bad, though it improves afterwards; but the chief reason is that, many years ago, every traveller who went that way was robbed, and several were murdered into the bargain. At last the robber was taken, and hung in chains near the scene of his crimes, which is about the most dismal part of all the road."

"I suppose so," said Dick, musingly.

"Of course, captain, you would think no more about such a thing as that than I should, and I would go that way alone and on foot at any hour of the day or night."

Although he did not confess it or even hint such a thing, the ostler's narration raised anything but comfortable thoughts in Dick's mind.

"And do you really believe," he said "that I can actually get on in advance of these officers that you tell me are now in front?"

"I am sure you can—unless all I have heard about your mare, Black Bess, is a jumped-up lie. Take my advice, captain, and try it. Any way, it will save you a good five miles, and that ought to be considered in a long journey."

"Certainly it ought."

Be off with you, then—don't waste another minute."

"You are sure the officers have not taken that way?"

"Quite sure—they know nothing about the road, and the entrance to it is so narrow and dark, that unless you keep a good look-out you will ride by without seeing it."

"Dick Turpin," cried a loud voice, with startling suddenness, "I know you, and have heard all! Surrender!"

The voice came from the inn, and, turning in the direction of the sound, Dick caught sight of the figure of a man.

Turpin merely laughed.

But there was a flash and a loud report; but as Black Bess had just set herself in motion, her rider and herself were quite unhurt.

"Away—away!" he cried.

Then, turning to look back, he saw that all the inmates of the inn appeared to be aroused.

"If you want me you will have to catch me!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

Black Bess gave a few prodigious bounds, which had the effect of carrying her out of sight of the inn in a moment.

CHAPTER MLXXXVI.

DICK TURPIN MEETS TOM KING AT OLD MATTHEW'S IN DRURY LANE.

As Dick Turpin was under no apprehension concerning whatever pursuit might be set on foot by the people at the roadside inn, he reduced his mare's speed, for he wanted a little quiet thought, a thing impossible of attainment when Black Bess was going at full speed.

If it could be relied on, the importance of the information given by the ostler could scarcely be over-estimated.

But could it be relied on?

That was the point.

Dick somehow felt doubtful and distrustful.

Suppose that this road he was advised to take should turn out to be an ambush, or perhaps lead him blindly into the arms of those he was anxious to avoid?

Long and anxious was the consultation which Dick held with himself.

If he could only have obtained some evidence confirmatory of what the ostler had said, the case would have been different, but this was what there seemed to be no probability of obtaining.

Turpin's indecision was, if anything, rather greater than otherwise when he reached the turning in question.

The ostler had very correctly described it, for it was narrow, dark, and more than half concealed.

Judging by appearances, it must have been long since anyone had gone in that direction.

"I can at least tell whether the officers have gone down here," Dick muttered; and at the same moment he dismounted.

We have often stated that he never failed to carry about with him the means of procuring a light readily.

In a moment or so he had lighted a small lantern, which, nevertheless, emitted a bright though concentrated light.

By the aid this afforded Dick narrowly examined the ground at the entrance of the lane, or, rather, cross-road, and the result of his scrutiny was the conviction that no considerable body of mounted men had gone in that direction.

So far, then, the ostler had spoken truly; but yet Dick's suspicions were by no means allayed.

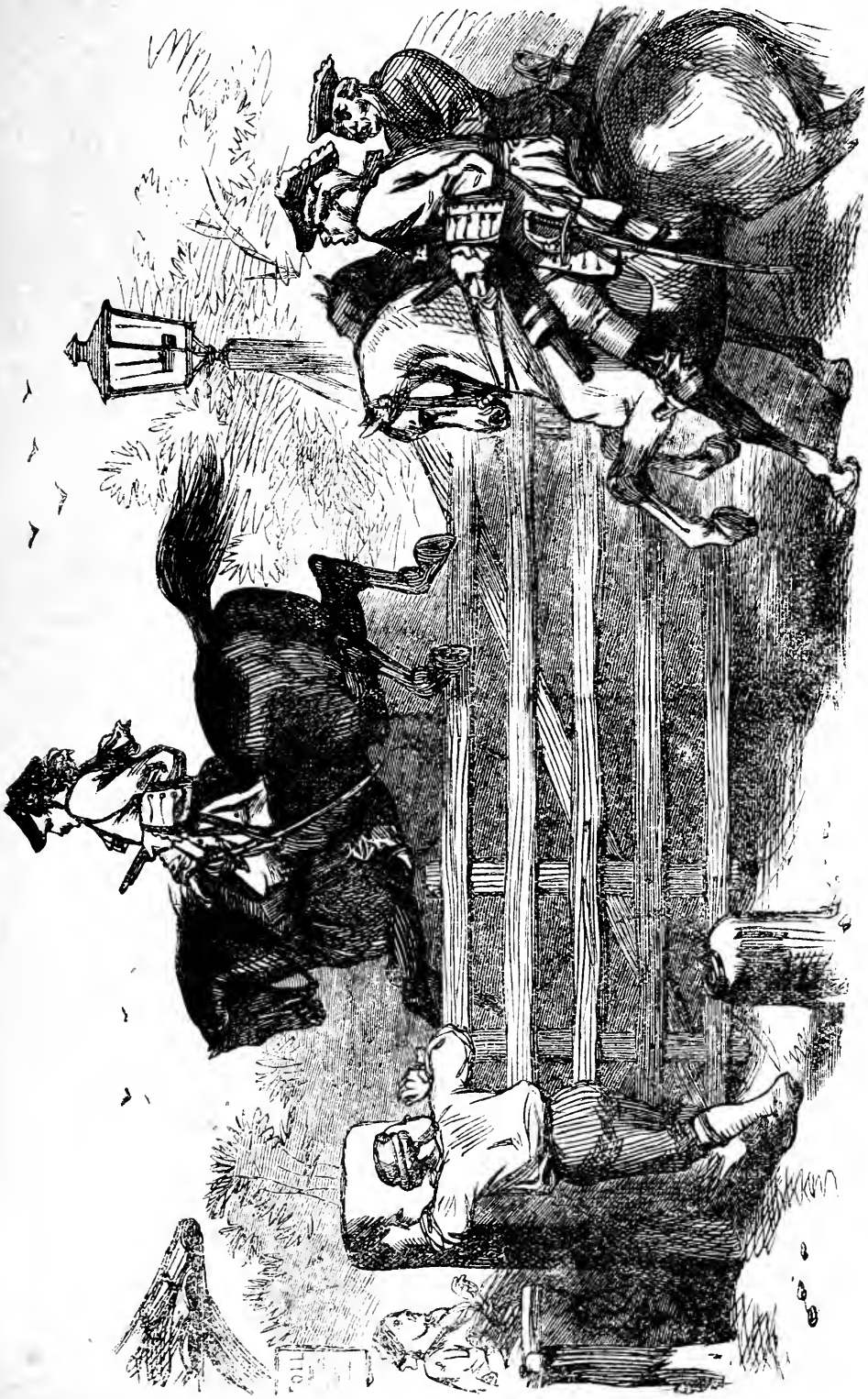
The lane, so far from communicating with the high-road, might have no outlet, in which case he might fall an easy prey to any officers who should follow him.

To remain in this state of hesitation, however, would never do, and, therefore, he hastened to come to a conclusion.

"I will go a little way in this direction," he said to himself, extinguishing the lamp and reseating himself in the saddle "and if I find that the appearance of the road does not correspond with the ostler's representations I will quit it and make my way across the country."

This resolution was no sooner formed than it was put into practice.

The lane being fenced in by masses of trees on both



[DICK TURPIN ON THE ROAD TO YORK.]

sides, was intensely dark; but Dick trusted to the finer instincts of his mare to keep him out of any danger that might lie in their path.

Black Bess galloped on apparently with the utmost confidence.

It was a terrible thing to be carried so swiftly through the darkness; but Dick did not attempt to check her speed.

All at once, however, he came to a spot which, when compared with the rest, seemed tolerably light

He was just able to see about him.

Black Bess, with abated speed, went on, but kept drawing nearer to one side of the road.

Straining his eyes in the hope of being able to discern the cause of this, the highwayman perceived the gibbet of which the ostler had spoken.

It was not possible by the eye alone to make out the details of the object swinging from the short crossbeam, but imagination easily served to fill in the outlines.

A sickening feeling came over Dick's heart as he averted his eyes and urged his mare to make good speed past the loathsome spectacle.

No sooner was the gibbet behind her than Black Bess started off at a speed which seemed to be the effects of terror.

A considerable tract of open country now stretched far away on both sides of him, and the apprehensions in which Turpin had indulged almost if not entirely vanished.

Encouraged by the belief that he should, after all, succeed in getting in advance of the large troop of officers, he did not hesitate to push his mare onward, although morning now was not far distant.

But he judged that the officers, after having been on the road all night, would rest during the day at the first inn they came to after sunrise.

It was this belief that made him so anxious to make the best use of the time there was before him, in spite of the risk of doing so.

Every step he went now seemed to convince him that the ostler had acted towards him in perfectly good faith, and this made him hope that he would escape any dangerous consequences for having befriended him.

A dim gray light was visible in the east when Dick found himself in proximity to the London Road.

Considerable caution was now requisite, or he might precipitate that which he had been at so much pains to avoid.

He reconnoitred carefully before he ventured to emerge.

His joy may be perhaps understood when he saw that the coast before him was quite clear.

He drew from it the most favourable auguries of the success of the rest of his adventure.

And now, strangely enough, as he found himself apparently unmenaced by any pressing danger, that flow of spirits he had experienced suddenly ebbed away, and he once again became lifeless and dejected.

It really seemed as though, by some mysterious agency, Black Bess was acquainted with the change in her master's manner, for her head dropped, and she evinced unmistakable signs that the night's exertion had not failed to produce an effect upon her.

Great as was Dick's abstraction, it was not long before he noted this circumstance, and it awoke him to the necessity of finding good quarters for her somewhere during the approaching day.

But where was he to look for them?

How could he hope to find them on a road that had been so closely watched by the police officers?

Still, this was imperative if he wished to get rapidly to London.

He was anxiously debating upon the subject when the sun rose and the day fairly began.

Ere long the rural population would be abroad, and the appearance of a travel-stained rider and jaded steed could not fail to attract their special notice.

Yet no place holding forth the slightest prospect of safe shelter for a few hours could be descried, although now objects could be distinguished afar off.

Dick's attention was distracted from the consideration of this difficulty by seeing a man some distance off riding upon a horse, or rather cob, which, despite its short, clumsy-looking make, was tearing over the ground at a gallop which few hunters could have equalled.

Dick's first thought was that this man was hurrying towards him with hostile intentions, and his hands involuntarily sought his pistols.

But before he drew one of these weapons from his belt he saw that his opinion was erroneous.

The man was coming towards him, it is true; but as he came nearer, Dick perceived readily enough that he was being carried along entirely against his will.

The cob, in fact, was running away, and apparently had the bit firmly between his teeth, so that it was impossible to check his mad career by tugging at the reins.

Dick stopped abruptly.

For the moment he forgot everything in the intense interest he felt in this fresh spectacle.

It was impossible for him to render any aid—all he could do was to remain a spectator.

The scene did not continue long, however.

A tall, quick-set hedge dividing the fields from the roadside came in the cob's way.

Either the animal was too terrified to see the obstacle, or else it thought it could be surmounted.

At any rate, on it came at undiminished speed; but when within a couple of yards from the hedge-row it stopped short, as though arrested by the powerful hand of some enchanter, planting its fore feet most doggedly upon the ground.

The result of this sudden stoppage can be imagined.

Away flew the rider over the horse's neck, executing a kind of half-somersault over the hedge, and finally dropping head foremost into the road.

Here he lay like one deprived of life, while the cob, as though quite unconscious of the mischief it had done, turned round and trotted composedly across the meadow.

All this happened with extreme rapidity.

Indeed, it seemed to Dick that not more than half a moment had elapsed since he first caught sight of the terrified animal.

Under such circumstances as those in which the highwayman was placed, he might have been pardoned if he had continued on his way.

But Dick was not so inhuman.

As soon as ever he recovered from the first shock of his surprise—and this was not long—he hastened to place himself at the side of the prostrate man.

His worst fears were not realised, for he found him recovering possession of his senses.

Dick did what he could to restore him, and when he had to some extent succeeded, the farmer—for such by his costume he appeared to be—broke out into violent maledictions, not launched at his preserver, but at the beast which had served him this scurvy trick.

"I don't know who you are, sir," he said, addressing Dick, after a moment or two had elapsed; "but you are a Christian, and I am much obliged for your kindness."

"Oh, don't mention such a trifle. I hope you are not much hurt."

"No—no," answered the farmer. "I fell clear on to my head, so I think there is not much the matter."

The satisfied tone in which this remark was made brought a smile to Dick's lips.

Having thus spoken, however, the farmer endeavoured to gain his feet, and, in the effort that he made, appeared to become sensible that he was more injured than he imagined.

Nevertheless, by Dick's assistance, he at length stood erect.

"I feel very dizzy about the upper storey," he remarked, placing his hand to his head; "but I shall get over that in a moment or two, I think."

But the farmer seemed to get worse.

"It is a thousand wonders you were not killed," remarked Dick. "Is there anything that I can do for you? If so, speak."

"Do you mean what you say?"

"Certainly."

"Then that emboldens me to utter a request which otherwise I should not think of making."

"What is it, then?"

"Why, if you would help me up on to your horse, and lead me home—it is only a little way from here—I shall be always indebted to you, for, to tell the truth, I am afraid I am more hurt than I thought at first."

"I hope not," said Dick; "but I comply with your request most readily."

"Many thanks. One of these days I hope I shall be able to return the obligation."

"You can easily do so at the present moment."

"How, sir?—my good sir, how so?" asked the farmer, eagerly, who by this time had succeeded in seating himself upon the back of Black Bess.

"Show me the way," answered Dick, "and I will tell you as we go along."

The farmer indicated the position of his house, and Dick, without an instant's delay, set off in that direction.

The farmer had a little difficulty in retaining his seat, for his brain reeled.

Still, he professed himself most anxious to become acquainted with Dick's request.

"I am journeying to London," said Turpin, "and have been travelling all night. When I saw you I was looking out for a place where I could find shelter for a few hours for myself and steed, so if you will not mind according me your hospitality for a little——"

The farmer interrupted him.

"You are welcome to the best my house affords," he said, heartily, "and doubly welcome. This is a poor favour to render in return, however."

"Not at all so—not at all so."

At this moment Dick came in sight of a substantial-looking farm-house, which, although situated not very far from the high-road, was, nevertheless, concealed from it by some rising ground.

"That is your home, I suppose?"

"It is. We shall soon be there now. Curses on the brute! I'll have it shot, I will."

The approach of Dick was noticed by the inmates of the farm-house, who came out with their faces expressive of the greatest curiosity and alarm.

An explanation was soon given, and a surgeon thereupon immediately sent for, though the farmer resolutely protested against it.

He maintained stoutly that he should come round in a minute or two; but he kept getting paler, and before he had fairly crossed the threshold he almost swooned.

But he was most particular in giving instructions that Dick should be treated with the utmost hospitality, and not allowed to want for anything.

The highwayman could not help congratulating himself upon having got into such comfortable quarters, although it had been at the expense of a serious injury to the farmer.

Dick would not suffer any attentions to be shown to himself until the farmer had been thoroughly attended to, and while this was done he occupied himself in looking after his mare.

When he returned to the house, however, he found a substantial and tempting repast awaiting him, to which he did ample justice.

After that he retired to a bed-chamber, having first ascertained that the worthy farmer appeared to be considerably better.

As for Dick, he was terribly fatigued; and now that there was a prospect of rest, he seemed to become doubly sensible of it.

Fastening his door, he flung himself, dressed as he was, upon the bed, and no sooner had he assumed a recumbent position than he fell fast asleep.

His slumber was so profound that no ordinary noise would have been capable of arousing him from it.

This was not surprising, for he had by no means recovered from the effects of his illness, and a long time had elapsed since he had taken any proper rest.

He continued to sleep undisturbedly until just when evening was beginning to close in.

Then he awoke and made his way downstairs.

He was glad indeed to find the farmer sitting by the fireside; and by his manner it could be told that he was much better.

That good cheer and hospitality for which England is celebrated was shown to Dick, who was strongly urged to prolong his stay.

But this he declared impossible, owing to the urgency of his business.

Just as he was about to quit the house he perceived a small party of officers approaching.

Doubtless this was a portion of a larger troop which had been sent to the farm-house upon the chance of obtaining some information.

Dick drew back at once.

"Show me a back way to the stables," he said, addressing one of the farmer's sons; and then, very much to the surprise of all present, he added:

"Some men are coming across your fields who seek my life. If you wish to increase my obligations to you, you can do so by telling them that you have not seen anyone answering to my description."

These words caused so much surprise, that Dick, despite his danger, could not help feeling a little amazed.

However, before the farmer and his family could recover themselves, he followed the young man to whom he had first spoken, and who was waiting impatiently for him.

Just as the back door was closed, Dick heard a loud knocking at the front.

As the stables were situated in the rear of the farm-house, it was easy enough to gain access to them unseen.

As if to favour Dick's flight, too, a thick white mist had arisen from the meadows, which had the effect of making everything look indistinct.

The quickness with which Dick saddled and bridled Black Bess elicited the admiration of the farmer's son, who had never before been witness of such expedition.

In another instant Dick was in the saddle and making his way across the meadows, the vapour upon which quickly hid him from sight, while the soft turf made the strokes of his mare's hoofs almost inaudible.

Black Bess seemed as full of fresh vigour as her master, evincing not the least signs of having journeyed so far already.

"Luck is on my side," Dick ejaculated, when he at length emerged upon the high-road at a point nearly a dozen miles distant from the farm-house. "I have missed the grabs nicely, and now then for a speedy journey to London."

Before starting, however, he listened with the utmost intentness; and as the night was a calm one, he was convinced that his foes were nowhere very near to him.

This point ascertained, he did not hesitate to give Black Bess the rein.

Once more, then, did this matchless steed stretch along the high-road as though animated by the same impatience as her rider.

Fain would we continue to describe her gallant progress, but it was not diversified with any incident of sufficient importance to warrant us in doing so, and moreover, many important stirring incidents are waiting for recital.

It must suffice to say, then, that Dick performed the remainder of his journey safely and with little trouble, for the officers did not appear to be so vigilantly on the look-out as he got nearer to London.

Both Bess and himself were tired, but he continued to push on, for his anxiety to reach his destination grew greater as he got nearer and nearer to it.

It thus happened that he gained no intelligence whatever concerning the fate of his two comrades.

He entered London, too, by an easterly direction, and made his way, by various unfrequented roads with which he was familiar, to that narrow passage which we have so often made mention of, and with which Old Matthew had communication by means of a private door.

There was a time when the narrow passage was constantly and closely watched by the police; but Dick on the present occasion did not hesitate to enter it, for he judged that there could not possibly be the least suspicion existing that he was in London at all.

When he paused near the old familiar doorway, many and strange were the thoughts which passed through his mind.

A long time had elapsed since his last visit, and he had no certain knowledge that Old Matthew would be there, for he could not tell whether he had escaped the consequences attaching to his communication with Tom Davis, about whose fate Dick was most anxious.

Whether Matthew was still at his old quarters or not was a point which he felt would be quickly ascertained, for having found the concealed handle of the bell, he pressed upon it.

Hardly a moment elapsed before what seemed to be a portion of the solid wall receded, and Old Matthew stood before him.

At the very first glance Dick saw that Old Matthew's countenance had upon it an expression such as he had never seen it wear before.

But ere he uttered a word or allowed the landlord time to recover from his amazement, he entered, leading Black Bess by the bridle.

His next action was to close the secret door behind him.

Then, and not till then, did he venture to speak.

"Why, Matthew," he exclaimed, forcing a gaiety which he was far indeed from feeling, "is this the best face you can show to me after so long an absence?"

Then perceiving that the horror-struck expression upon his friend's countenance intensified, Turpin's assumed gaiety vanished instantly, and intense anxiety took its place.

Old Matthew's silence and strange manner struck a chill to his heart.

He felt sure that some dire calamity had happened, and therefore prepared himself to hear some terrible announcement.

But still he was far from imagining anything half so awful as what had happened.

Old Matthew too, who could scarcely believe that Dick Turpin was ignorant of the disasters of that day, was in the highest degree amazed at the strangeness of the highwayman's behaviour.

Thus they stood for some moments regarding each other in silence.

Old Matthew, after many efforts, succeeded in finding his voice.

"Is it—can it be possible that—that——"

"What?" cried Dick, his impatience and dread now amounting to absolute agony. "Speak—speak out at once! You have something terrible to tell! Out with it, man! I am prepared, and can bear anything but suspense!"

"But surely you must have heard——"

"I have heard nothing!" interrupted Dick, hastily.

Matthew groaned deeply, and wrung his hands.

"Then from the bottom of my heart," he said, "do I wish it had fallen to the lot of some one else to have to tell you. Stand firm, Dick, the shock will be dreadful, for I can tell that though you think yourself prepared, you have no conception of what has happened. Tell me, will you endeavour to stand firm?"

"I will—I will!"

"Then," said Matthew, hanging down his head and speaking in a hollow, stifled voice, "Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval are—are—Heaven help me!—dead—both dead—quite dead!"

CHAPTER MLXXXVII.

RELATES THE EVENTS WHICH FOLLOWED THE ARRIVAL OF THE HIGHWAYMEN AT THE WHITE HORSE INN.

Had Old Matthew's words possessed some instantaneous petrifactive effects they could not have made Dick stand more stone-like than he did.

Not a muscle moved, but he stood with dilated eyes gazing upon the landlord.

This first shock being over, a feeling of absolute incredulity succeeded.

Surely his ears had played him false, or else what he had believed to be recent, real events were no more than the vagaries of a distempered dream.

Claude and Jack dead!

The fact seemed too monstrous to be true.

He would almost as soon have believed that he was himself in a state of non-existence.

Yet some kind of horrible consciousness that the appalling intelligence he had just received was indeed only too true chained his tongue.

Fain would he have questioned his old friend, but for a long time his voice resolutely refused to perform its office.

But his glance was so terribly expressive that had Matthew but once looked up, he would have been able to understand it as easily as spoken words.

The landlord, however, was too much overcome to look up, or, indeed, to make a movement.

But at last Dick managed to articulate.

"Again—again, Matthew—tell me that again! Unless you do, I must believe that my ears played me false! Again—again, I say!"

"It's all true, Dick—there is not room for even the shadow of a doubt."

"Both dead?"

"Yes, and buried, too, by this time."

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Dick, with a deep groan.

"I thought you must have known something of it."

"No, no—I have only just arrived, after having sustained the most terrible of all losses."

"Losses?" echoed Matthew; and as he pronounced the word he glanced towards Black Bess.

Dick understood him.

"No, no," he said—"I do not refer to her. It—it is Maud I mean."

"Maud?"

"Yes."

"What has happened to her?"

"She is dead," he replied, with a burst of emotion which he tried in vain to control.

"Calamity on calamity!" muttered Matthew. "And where is Tom King, I wonder, all this time?"

"What is that you say about my old comrade?" asked Dick, removing his hands from his face, for he had caught the sound of his name.

"I was wondering where he could be."

"Do you not know?"

"No. Do you?"

"I have not heard of him since our parting at Stonehenge."

"A dreadful business that," said Matthew, shaking his head. "I shall always blame myself for having had some share in that catastrophe."

"But Tom is not dead, is he?"

"Not to my knowledge. He has not been heard of since the time you mention."

"Then I fear the worst, for I know he was badly hit."

Matthew made no response.

It seemed as though he had his own forebodings, but did not like to give them utterance.

As though anxious to divert the subject, he cried:

"Come, Dick, we will not remain here. Take hold of Bess by the bridle. We will lead her to her old quarters."

Dick prepared to comply without uttering a word.

"He seems heedless whether there is danger or not," Matthew said to himself, as he opened the door communicating with the stable.

Then, in a louder voice, he added:

"I don't feel much afraid that the officers will trouble us to-night, Dick, they are too full of the business they have done. Rely upon it, a day or two's quiet will follow."

But Dick's thoughts seemed too much absorbed for him to give such matters as these any consideration.

Black Bess, in fact, came in for a greater share of neglect than he had ever before shown her.

He was like one who had been stunned by a heavy blow and had only partially recovered from the effects of it.

But the mare having been properly attended to, Matthew took hold of the highwayman's arm and led him towards that door we have so often described, which formed a means of communication between the yard and the private parlour behind the bar.

Dick sank down helpless, and went into the first chair he came to, and then, in a hollow, murmuring voice, he said:

"Now, Matthew, if you feel sure from interruption, sit down and tell me all this horrible business from first to last. I know nothing of the movements of my comrades after we separated at Stonehenge."

Dick Turpin having thus spoken, bent forward in his seat, and placing his elbows upon his knees, covered his face with his hands and prepared to listen.

Before, however, the landlord could collect himself for the commencement of his sad recital, some one tapped lightly with their fingers against the door leading into the bar, which was no longer half-glass as formerly, but composed entirely of wood.

It hardly seemed possible that Dick Turpin had not heard this sound; but if he had he took no notice of it, though by the look of Old Matthew it would seem as though there was danger to be apprehended.

"Keep quiet," he said; "I will just run out and see what is the matter. You shall have timely warning if there should be any danger."

But to all appearances his words fell upon unheeding ears, for Turpin neither moved nor spoke.

Matthew hastily opened the door and passed through, closing it carefully and quickly after him.

But another surprise awaited him.

Standing at the bar window was Tom King.

It was not possible to be in any doubt as regarded his identity, but he looked so pale, so thin, so worn, and haggard, that Matthew's first impression was that the highwayman's spectre stood before him, and not himself.

Tom observed his astonishment, and smiled faintly.

"Do you take me for a ghost, Matthew? You look as scared as though you do. Don't be alarmed—I am here in the flesh, though terribly worn out. I want the captain."

By the time Tom King had finished speaking these words Old Matthew had recovered himself.

Quick as thought, he rushed across the bar and, opening the door, bade Tom enter.

Then, without giving him time to say a word, he dragged him to the inner door, opened it, and pushed him over the threshold.

The noise thus made caused Dick to look up.

He recognised his old comrade at a glance.

He sprang up with an ejaculation of joy and thankfulness upon his lips, and the next instant he had clasped Tom's hands in both his own.

Old Matthew prudently bolted the door to secure them from interruption, whilst at the same time he implored them to make as little noise as possible.

The meeting was most unexpected on both sides.

The satisfaction both experienced at this reunion for the first few moments rose superior to everything else.

But Tom's first inquiries brought Dick to a remembrance of the calamities which for the moment it may be said he had forgotten.

The questions served to show that he was quite ignorant of the fate which had fallen upon his companions.

Again it became necessary for Matthew to break the awful intelligence, for Dick was wholly incapable of the task.

As the reader will readily suppose, Tom King was not less affected by this appalling news than Dick himself.

Like him, he was at first absolutely incredulous.

After their long association, it seemed impossible that there should come such a sudden and violent cessation.

Like Dick, also, he did not yet realise that he had indeed looked upon the countenances of his faithful allies for the last time.

"I was just about to tell the captain all the particulars of what had happened when I heard that tap at the door."

"Do you think we shall be interrupted?"

"No, not to-night. The officers are all too busy congratulating themselves upon what has happened."

Tom shuddered.

"I forget to say," he added, after a brief pause, "I left my horse outside."

"What! in the street?"

"Yes."

"That was highly incautious. Who is in charge of it?"

"No one."

"No one?"

"No; the poor animal has come too many miles for me to be at all afraid that she will run away."

"She must be seen to," said Matthew. "If the officers should see her they will, of course, suspect——"

He did not stop to finish the sentence, but abruptly left the room.

Dick Turpin and Tom King were now alone.

"This is a dreadful business, Dick," said the latter. "How did it all happen?"

"Do not ask me. I have no idea of the particulars. Matthew was about to tell them to me when you came."

"True—I remember."

"But there is another calamity still."

"Another?"

"Yes, one that you have not heard of."

"Is Maud concerned in it?"

"Yes," said Turpin, his voice almost choked.

"I feared so."

"For what reason?"

"Because I fancied that the wound she had received was mortal."

"It proved so."

"Then you have my sincere pity, Dick."

"I know it. But I feel as though life had no longer a charm for me."

"And so do I."

"But you have experienced no loss."

"True; but yet I have a kind of dread upon my mind which I cannot get the mastery of."

"A dread?"

"Yes. Do you remember the prophecy?"

"Prophecy—prophecy?"

"I can tell you do not. I mean about me being destined to die at your hands."

"Pooh, pooh, Tom! Cast aside such foolish thoughts. I would sooner believe that Old Matthew is destined to betray us to the police."

"Hark! he comes."

At this moment the landlord entered.

He looked rather more cheerful than he had done hitherto.

"The coast is clearer than I had hoped to find it!" he exclaimed. "The officers must be holding high revel somewhere; there has not been one seen outside all the day."

"They must imagine we are away from London," said Tom.

"Depend upon it, they have no suspicion of your being here; and such being the case, I have no doubt you will be able to remain unsuspected some time—that is, if you wish to do so."

"We hardly know what we wish for at present."

"No—no, certainly not. However, your horses are both in perfect safety, and yet where you can have them again almost in a moment if you wish."

"Thanks—thanks!" said Turpin, displaying a little impatience. "But, come, sit down and satisfy our curiosity."

"I will."

Matthew seated himself between the highwaymen, who prepared themselves to listen with the closest attention to every word which might fall from his lips.

As the reader is already acquainted with all the particulars connected with Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, it would be nothing more than waste of time to set down what Matthew said.

And the reader will easily understand what sort of effect was produced upon the two highwaymen by what they heard.

When they were informed of the manner in which Claude had been struck down their indignation knew no bounds.

At first they refused belief altogether, but Matthew assured them that what he said was quite correct.

"I could do nothing in the matter," the landlord added, in conclusion. "Every movement I made was watched with the utmost closeness. Strive as I would, I could not escape their scrutiny. They seemed as though quite certain that if any attempt at rescue would be made it would be organised here. I was in momentary expectation of seeing you, yet I dreaded to do so, for I thought if you approached this quarter your fate, too, would be sealed."

The discussion upon what had happened was prolonged to a very late hour; or, rather, an early one, for day was close at hand when the conference broke up.

Matthew then proposed that they should retire to rest.

"I have a couple of good rooms upstairs," he said, "which are quite at your service, and I should recommend that you remained in them. I don't believe anyone has seen you enter the house; and if you do not come downstairs, and I only allow those who can be trusted to go up, I don't see why you should not remain undetected for a long time."

"There seems every probability of it, Matthew," said Dick. "And some little time will be necessary for us to talk matters over and decide upon what is to be done."

"Certainly!"

"Moreover, we are both weak and ill—our nerves are shattered; but if we have a little quiet we shall soon get something like ourselves again, I hope."

"So do I. Come, follow me!"

The landlord led the highwaymen upstairs.

The rooms of which he spoke were at the top of the house, and the windows were so placed that it was impossible for any of the people in the neighbouring houses to look through them

Thus there did indeed seem some chance that the highwaymen would have a brief period of rest and quiet after the terrible events which had recently occurred, for on Old Matthew's fidelity they could thoroughly rely.

CHAPTER MLXXXVIII.

DICK TURPIN LEARNS THAT THE REWARD OFFERED FOR HIS APPREHENSION HAS BEEN DOUBLED.

When Dick Turpin said that both himself and his companion were weak and ill he spoke truly, for both of them were reduced to what might almost be termed the last stage of physical and mental prostration.

With Tom King this was particularly the case.

The reader knows how severely he was wounded, and, for recovery, rest of body and peace of mind were strongly needed.

So far, however, from being able to avail himself of these means of restoration, he had been compelled to go through exertion of the most violent kind, and then, at last, he had received two terrible mental shocks.

Dick Turpin could scarcely be called any better.

Conversation with his old comrade, with whom he had been so long separated, had no charm, and as soon as ever Old Matthew had left, Dick threw himself upon one of the beds, and either fell fast asleep or else gave himself up to deep reflection.

Tom saw he was in no humour to be spoken to, and therefore followed his example.

Both felt themselves for a time out of danger, for Old Matthew would not fail to give them timely notice if any officers came near.

Thus things remained until late in the day; even then they might not have aroused themselves if Matthew had not entered.

He had not overlooked the necessities of his guests, and carried before him on a tray a substantial and tempting repast, which he had prepared with his own hands.

His entrance aroused the two highwaymen, who came eagerly into the outer room, inquiring whether all was well,

"Yes—yes," said Old Matthew, "everything is perfectly quiet, so sit down and enjoy this meal in peace; I am sure you must want something."

"You are a real friend, Matthew."

"I am glad you think so."

"And have the officers resumed their watch?"

"What, upon these premises?"

"Yes."

"At present I think I may venture to say they have not."

"All has been quiet, then?"

"Perfectly so."

"That is encouraging."

"Very. I hope you will be able to remain in peace until you become once more like yourselves."

"Ah! Matthew," said Dick, with a heavy sob, "after what has happened it is in vain for you to expect that we shall be anything like what we have once been."

Tom King assented with a gloomy shake of the head.

"Well, well, we shall see," answered Matthew. "Sit down to the table, and do not forget that there is an old proverb which says Time works wonders."

"It may be true," said Dick, with a slight shudder, 'but I shall never, never forget the past."

The highwaymen had not much appetite for the meal which had been laid before them, and it was more a disinclination to offend their old friend, the landlord, than aught else which induced them to touch it.

When the repast was over, Matthew closed the shutters and lighted a couple of candles, which he placed on the table near the fire.

Then he drew from his pocket a crumpled piece of paper, which he smoothed out with great care.

"What is that?" asked Dick.

"The *Gazette*—the newspaper which contains all the latest intelligence."

"And is there anything in it about us?"

"There is about you, Dick. The reward for your apprehension has been doubled, so that now it represents a tolerable amount."

"Lend it me," said Tom King—"I will look over it."

"Do; it will serve to pass the time away. I will go down again, for any long absence on my part might be noticed, and so give rise to suspicion."

"Try to keep our presence here a secret."

"You may depend upon it."

"It will not be very easy," remarked Tom King to his companion just as the landlord closed the door of the room behind him.

"What makes you say that?"

"Simply what I have been reading."

"Let me hear it," said Dick, with languid interest.

"Well, what Matthew says about doubling the reward is perfectly correct, so that that will stimulate our foes not a little. I was not referring to that, however."

"What then?"

"You will be able to judge best by hearing me read it Just listen."

Tom King then read aloud the following paragraph:—

"'Our readers will see in another column that the reward offered for the apprehension of that noted offender, Dick Turpin, has been doubled. We gladly give publicity to the fact, because we believe, when widely known, it will be the means of bringing him to justice. We have good authority, moreover, for stating that there is unusually strong probability of his speedy capture. He has been seen very recently on the Western Road, apparently having London for his destination. The officers are following up his track with a closeness and perseverance which promise eventual success. When the notorious highwayman has been brought to justice it is hoped that passengers will once more be able to make their way safely along the high-roads which have for so long been disgracefully dangerous to all travellers.'

"There, Dick," cried Tom King, when he had finished reading, "what do you think of that?"

"Very little. They will have to be much sharper than they have ever shown themselves, or Old Matthew very careless, for them to be able to hunt us down here."

Tom did not answer.

In fact, he had gone on reading, and apparently what he read was of so interesting a character as to render him oblivious of all else.

Dick at once relapsed into a reverie.

His eyes were fixed upon the fire, but instead of seeing it he perceived only the quaint little churchyard where Maud lay.

An exclamation from Tom King aroused him.

"Here is something still more startling," he said, in an agitated voice.

"About us?"

"About one of us," answered Tom, vainly attempting to conceal his perturbation of spirits.

"Which one?"

"Myself."

"Read, then," said Dick, rousing himself more thoroughly than he had done.

Tom King, in a low and tremulous tone, then read as follows:—

"'Important.—If the son of the late Marquis of Belgarde (the son by the second marriage, which was afterwards decreed invalid), and who mysteriously disappeared after the trial, will apply to Messrs. Flint and Steele, Solicitors, York, he will hear something greatly to his advantage.'"

"Well," said Dick Turpin, with an air of surprise and disappointment, "is that all. In what way can that advertisement concern either of us?"

"Is it possible that you forget——"

"Forget what?"

"I see you have forgotten," remarked Tom King, with increasing melancholy. "But do you not remember that a long time ago I related to you the history of my early life?"

"Yes, I remember it perfectly."

"Well, then——"

"Belgarde—Belgarde: the name is familiar."

"After what has happened I am not surprised that you should forget. Besides, it is a long time ago since I made the narration."

"My memory fails me."

"No wonder. Well, I will tell you again. My father was the Marquis of Belgarde. He died before I was two years old, and I was brought up on one of the estates, where I remained until nearly of age—of course, anticipating that I should be the marquis. Instead of that," he added, in a changed voice, and with a bitter laugh, "I have become a highwayman."

"I remember now," said Dick; "there was a former marriage—on your father's part—a discarded wife—whose son was by law declared the true heir to the title and estates."

"Just so. It is a tale of sin and wrong. As you know, when I found out what the verdict was, I fled, for my pride would not allow me to remain there a finger-pointing object for everyone."

"Then it is you who are advertised for?"

"Undoubtedly."

"What can it be that is to your advantage?"

"There I am as much in the dark as you are. But I cannot describe the effect which those few lines have had upon me, and how vividly they have brought back to my recollection my youthful days."

Just as he uttered these words, Old Matthew appeared.

"Is all well?" Dick asked, for he guessed this visit had some cause.

"Yes, all is well," was the reassuring answer. "I merely came up for a moment to see whether you were in want of anything."

"Do you often read the newspaper, Matthew?" asked Tom King.

"Yes, pretty regularly," he answered, in some surprise. "Why do you ask?"

"Why, because I thought you might perhaps have seen some mention made of—of—the Marquis of Belgarde?"

"Well, yes, I have," he replied, curiously. "But why do you inquire?"

"Perhaps merely from curiosity," said Tom King, displaying great impatience. "At any rate, I shall feel myself indebted if you will tell me all you know."

"I will do so willingly; but you will find it very little. I suppose you know that the marquis has just died?"

"Just died?" ejaculated Tom.

"Yes—and at the time of his death I saw a few particulars in the paper concerning him."

"Was it respecting the manner in which he succeeded to the title?"

"Yes."

"I thought so."

"It seems his mother lived the greater part of her life in great poverty in London, and here the marquis was brought up like any ordinary vagabond."

"I know that," said Tom, hastily. "The woman was really married, though the marquis, his father, thought the ceremony a sham one. This was proved by his marrying again."

"Yes," chimed in Matthew, "and he had a son by this second union, who was brought up as the heir; but when the trial was decided against him he disappeared."

Tom nodded.

"It seems that the son by the first wife, and who lived but a very short time to enjoy his wealth and title, always regretted that he had deprived another of so much, so that, you see, despite his bringing up, he was not quite dead to every good feeling."

Tom's lips curled with a bitter, incredulous smile.

"He was in earnest," continued Old Matthew, for, having no near relative of his own, he has bequeathed by will the whole of his possessions to this second son, who has been searched for with the utmost diligence."

"He has not been found?" said Tom.

"No—you may see the advertisement in that very paper."

"I have seen it."

"Well, now that I have told you all I know, at least satisfy me why you feel so uncommon an amount of interest in the matter?"

"I——"

But Tom did not finish, for at this moment the faint tinkling of a bell was heard.

"I am wanted," interrupted Matthew, hurrying to the door

"Is it danger?" asked both highwaymen, springing to their feet.

"No, no—don't be alarmed. Sit down again, and remain easy and quiet. You shall have timely warning if you are threatened with any peril."

So saying, Matthew closed the door and hastily descended the stairs.

CHAPTER MLXXXIX.

OLD MATTHEW GIVES THE HIGHWAYMEN THE BENEFIT OF HIS ADVICE.

"He will not deceive or mislead us," said Dick, sinking down into his chair again. "I am amazed," he continued, "at what I have just heard."

"Are you?" asked Tom, with another bitter laugh.

"Yes, because you are the person advertised for, and of course the heir to a large fortune."

"And what good would it do me?" inquired Tom, moodily. "I dare not step forward to claim it; if I did, I should have to answer for my life."

"I suppose that is the case. Hark! here comes Old Matthew."

The landlord now returned.

"It is all right," he said; "I was misled by hearing another bell. All is well; and I thought such being the case, the best thing I could do was to make haste back and say so."

"Many thanks."

Old Matthew evidently meant to stay, for he sat down before the fire, and said:

"Now, Tom King, it is not often I speak in such a way, but let me tell you that I do not intend to stir from here until you have told me all about this Belgarde affair. You had some particular reason for asking, and I think I am justified in demanding to know."

There could scarcely have been any request to which Tom would have accorded so unwillingly as this.

But he felt that he could not with very good grace refuse anything to one who had done them such service as Matthew had.

This consideration decided him, and, though very reluctantly, he related those particulars of his early life with which the reader is familiar.

Matthew listened in unqualified amazement—indeed, almost in disbelief.

But he soon found that Tom was thoroughly in earnest.

"This is enough to stun anyone!" he exclaimed, as soon as Tom had brought his narrative to a conclusion. "But I must think upon it—I must really think upon it, for I am already impressed with the notion that the occurrence can, and ought to be, turned to the advantage of you both."

Tom shook his head.

Old Matthew, however, did not allow this gesture to discourage him, but sat staring into the fire with the air and manner of one who is thinking deeply.

He remained thus for some time, but at length he broke out, emphatically:

"You must both of you—or, at least, you, Tom—go to York."

"To York! What for?"

"To see these lawyers."

"And be recognised and made prisoner!"

"No, no—you must manage better than that."

"But how is it possible for me to do so?"

"That we must consider. First of all you must not overlook the circumstance that in this land of freedom money is all-powerful, and the possessor of enough of it can do anything he pleases."

"Well, granting that, what of it?"

"Why, the heir to the estates of the late Marquis of Belgarde would be looked upon as a very different person from Tom King, the highwayman."

"Come, Matthew," said Turpin, joining in the conversation, "it is an odd thing to me if you cannot see some means of turning this coincidence in our favour."

The landlord's eyes glittered.

"Well," he said, with an affectation of modesty, "I certainly had an idea in my mind."

"Then out with it! Let us hear what it is. I will be bound it is something good!"

"That depends upon how Tom takes it," said Matthew, with a side glance at Dick's companion.

"I cannot tell till I hear what you have to say," said Tom King.

"In the first place, then," Matthew began, "I suppose you have the means of proving your identity?"

"Oh yes!"

"About you?"

"No—but I could easily procure the necessary evidence."

"Very good—that comes to just the same thing."

"What do you propose?"

"Why, I think you should go to York."

"To York?"

"Yes—that is a part of the country you have not visited, I think?"

"We have not."

"Then you might count upon being unknown if you can only get away from here unseen, and I think I can undertake to manage that part of the business for you."

"And what are we to do at York?"

"Why, you must put yourselves into communication with these lawyers."

Tom shook his head.

"Stay—hear me out!" cried Matthew, rapidly. "You must manage all with caution. Let them know who you are, and, take my word for it, they will interest themselves and obtain a pardon for you; and, remember, you will be able to pay them well out of the property you are coming into."

"A pardon!" repeated Tom, with the air of one who is thinking deeply.

"Yes—a pardon."

Tom shook his head.

"I fear I have done too much for a pardon to be granted to me."

"Tut, tut! Don't I tell you that money will do everything in England. If you were ten times as black as you are it would wash you as white as snow!"

"Do you in good earnest think there is a possibility of such a thing?" asked Dick, anxiously.

"If I did not," asked Matthew, "do you think I should counsel you to do it?"

"Well, of course not."

"But," said Tom, "enter a little more into explanation."

"I should be very glad to do so if you would only allow me the opportunity."

"We will listen, then."

"Very good; and you may take my word that I believe things could be managed as I say. If influence powerful enough was only brought to bear, your pardon could be obtained."

Although Tom tried to conceal his sentiments, yet it was plain enough to be seen by his manner that this prospect was far from displeasing to him.

"To tell you the truth," he exclaimed, for he guessed that his friends had read his thoughts, "I am tired now of the life I have been leading after what has happened to Claude and Jack—I feel that I can never take the least pleasure in it again."

"I don't wonder at it."

"Moreover," said Tom, displaying more excitement and interest than he had done hitherto, "if I succeed in getting my own pardon, I shall then have so much influence perhaps as will enable me to get a pardon for the captain too."

Dick put up his hand.

"You will not have to take that trouble, Tom."

"Why not?"

"Because I have made up my mind to take the very first opportunity I can find to leave England."

"Leave England?" ejaculated Old Matthew, pushing his chair back several inches in his intense astonishment.

"Yes; this land has no longer the slightest charm for me—not the slightest. I—I—long to be on the other side of the channel—near to the little hamlet or village I spoke of. There, and there alone, could I wish to end my days and if I can succeed in reaching that spot I shall be beyond the reach of pardon."

"Very true," said Tom.

"But you won't do it," cried Matthew, vehemently—"I am sure you won't do it."

"If I live I shall," answered Turpin, in those quiet, earnest tones which are so much more expressive of stern determination than loud and boastful protestations.

"Well, we shall have to see about that," replied Matthew, resolved that if he could do nothing else he would at any rate change the subject. "Let us first talk about this journey to York. Are you inclined to undertake it?"

"What do you say, captain?" asked Tom King.

"I am quite willing. All ways are the same to me now. Except," he added, "that it may be I shall be able to get a boat from the vicinity of York much easier than I could from any other part of the country, for there I should rely upon being thoroughly unknown."

"And no doubt justly so," said Matthew. "May we look upon this matter, then, as being quite settled?"

"Yes," said Tom, with a sigh, "I suppose we may."

"Then why that sigh?"

"I know not. I was only thinking of——"

"Thinking of what?"

"Some foolish remarks," was the reply. "They are not worth consideration."

But Old Matthew evidently thought himself entitled to know everything connected with the highwaymen, and became so pressing that, in order to get rid of his importunities more than for any other reason, Tom related to him the particulars of the strange prophecy.

Matthew greeted the recital with a laugh.

"I only hope we may all live to see that day. If we do we shall have nothing to complain of on the score of old age. Nothing could be more unlikely to come to pass than that."

It was clear, however, that a certain impression had been made by it on the mind of Tom King—perhaps more than there would have been had he just then been in his usual state of health.

Dick, too, had heard the story so often repeated that a vague feeling that there might be something in it came over him.

The subject was immediately changed by Matthew, who was full of the project he had started for a journey to York.

"If you would take my advice," he said, "you will consent to remain here as long as possible; or, at any rate, until you are sufficiently recovered to start upon your journey."

"The counsel is too agreeable to be disregarded," said Turpin. "I confess I should like to feel that I had recovered something like a proper share of my strength before I attempted any fresh undertaking."

Thus was the matter decided.

A day passed over in perfect tranquillity; but Dick, in watching his companion, saw that hour by hour he grew more and more uneasy, nor was he at any loss about the cause.

The prospect Matthew had held out to him—not only of obtaining a pardon for all his past offences, but also of recovering possession of what had once been his—continued to make a deeper and deeper impression upon him.

Who could wonder that such a future should display itself to him in the most tempting of colours?

The more he reflected the more glowing did his anticipations become, and that which at first he was inclined to pass over without notice came to be the one great object of his life.

His impatience at length became too great to be altogether concealed.

He did not say so, but yet he hinted in many ways that he was tired of his stay, and full of anxiety to know whether Matthew's ideas had any substantiality.

As for Dick, the monotony of confinement in those rooms at the top of Old Matthew's house quickly became excessively irksome to him.

It was, then, on the third night after their arrival that they announced to Old Matthew that they were in readiness to go.

"I had certainly not expected you would take so nasty



[DICK TURPIN TREATS BLACK BESS TO A BEEFSTEAK.]

a departure; otherwise I would not have mentioned the matter just at present. Let me persuade you to stay a little longer yet—you are scarcely in condition to cope with any great danger, should any arise."

"I shall get no better here," said Tom King, impatiently. "What other reason is there why we should not go at once?"

"None that I know of."

"Then we will go."

"But at least not to-night—it is already too late to think about it, because no preparations whatever have been made."

"Well, let it be to-morrow night, then," said Dick Turpin.

"As you please. I will see that by dusk everything is in perfect readiness."

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This point being decided upon, some hours were spent in anxious deliberation.

Tom King and Turpin, between them, were possessed of a considerable amount, and this they were both anxious to induce Matthew to accept. But he firmly refused it.

"No—no," he said; "you cannot tell what want you may have for it. Keep it—keep it; I will settle for all the past, Tom, as soon as you are pardoned and in undisturbed possession of your wealth."

But Dick insisted that half of the larger sum should be given to Matthew there and then.

He would take no refusal.

The remaining half he roughly, but as near as could be equally, divided between his comrade and himself.

This being done, they separated and awaited with the utmost impatience the coming of the succeeding night

which they hoped would prove to be the herald of better times for both.

Hopes how vain!—how impossible of realisation!

CHAPTER MXC.

THE PROPHECY FULFILLED—DICK TURPIN SHOOTS TOM KING IN DRURY LANE.

It has been said truly that we believe readily that which we wish to be true and likely to come to pass.

But for this it is questionable whether Tom King would have suffered himself to be so led away by the possibilities which Old Matthew had suggested.

To one capable of judging calmly and justly, and one acquainted with all the circumstances, nothing would have appeared more unlikely than that by any means or influence, however powerful, Tom King could hope for legal pardon for his many and great offences.

But for his own part he did think it probable, and so did Turpin, whose thoughts, however, it must be confessed, were more bent upon making his way as speedily as possible to the little French village, where Maud had found a last resting-place.

At any rate, he was glad enough to quit the safe shelter which Old Matthew's roof had afforded him.

During the long period of the sojourn of the highwaymen, however, nothing particular had been seen of the police.

They had been unusually quiet and undemonstrative.

This could only be accounted for by the supposition that they were away on the wrong scent, or else that they were concerting such measures as would tend to the annihilation of the two knights of the road.

Both suppositions were in a measure right, as will be shortly seen.

For the present, however, we must confine ourselves to a description of the proceedings of Dick Turpin and Tom King.

Faithful to his promise, Old Matthew had made every preparation, and having watched his opportunity, he succeeded in getting both our friends into the little private parlour.

"Fortune favours you," he said, briskly, rubbing his hands together—"you ought to account yourselves specially lucky. I believe I may say, with truth, there are no officers about."

"Then," said Tom King, "if that is the case, the sooner we are off the better."

"Certainly; and yet there is no need to be precipitate. Believe me, I am not very anxious to get rid of you."

"Where are the horses?" asked Dick.

"In the stable."

"Are they all right?"

"Right as trivets, Bess especially. I think I never saw her in such good trim and spirits. She seems fit for anything."

At these words Dick experienced a faint revisitation of the old joy which the remembrance of his gallant mare occasioned him.

"I long to see the noble creature once more!" he exclaimed, with fervour. "I long to sit again upon her back! When I do—then, and not till then, shall I feel something like myself again."

But though Turpin began to speak enthusiastically he finished with a heavy sigh, which told all too plainly how great was the sorrow that was weighing at his heart.

"Still a cup too low, captain?" said Old Matthew. "But I will try to get you the better of that."

Dick shook his head.

"You may never expect to see me anything like what I once was."

"Pho—pho! You know nothing about it," replied the landlord, who was busily at work with a corkscrew. "Look here" he added, holding a bottle towards the highwaymen "try a drop of this: it is wine, mind you—every drop of it is worth a hogshead of the stuff that is ordinarily sold under that name. Drink this, and then all the vapours now hanging about your heart and brain will banish! Drink it, I say, and then depart."

While speaking, Old Matthew poured out three large glasses of the wine.

The invitation was one which Dick and Tom King were not very likely to refuse.

"A toast!" said Matthew, as he raised his glass. "Here is hoping I shall not see you again until you are in possession of your own, and when you have obtained not only your own pardon but the captain's too!"

"I hope so too!" said Tom, in response. "But now, Matthew, you will excuse my impatience. Let us say no more—let us not lose a moment more of valuable time. Get our horses ready, and we will start at once."

"As you will," answered the landlord, putting down his empty glass. "I am sorry to part with you; but yet I cannot ask you to remain, for I feel assured there can never be a more favourable opportunity for getting off unseen."

"Where are the horses?"

"In the stable at present."

"Right—you told me so. But how are we to mount?"

"I will tell you. I have thought the matter over, and my belief is that the best way will be to have them brought round to the front."

"What, into Drury Lane?"

"Yes—and the moment they arrive you must sally out, mount with all speed, and ride off."

"But why this course?"

"Because it seems to me to be the one that will give you the best chance against your enemies."

"How so?"

"If anyone is on the watch—and there might be a spy at hand—you will be off and away before he has time to raise an alarm."

"Very true, Matthew. It shall be as you have planned it; only let us go now at once."

"Your weapons are all in perfect readiness for instant use?"

"Trust us for that."

"Then in two minutes the horses shall be in the front."

Matthew quitted the bar-parlour as he spoke.

But he did not latch the door, and Tom, prompted by restlessness and curiosity, took advantage of the circumstance to peep out into the bar beyond.

Judging by his manner, he saw something interesting, for he at once beckoned Dick to his side.

The latter then peeped through the crevice, and his regards were instantly fixed upon a man who was in the act of drinking something at the counter.

Although a great part of the countenance of this individual was concealed by a large bandage, which was placed in a diagonal direction over the left eye, yet Dick was immediately conscious that he had seen this man somewhere before.

But in what place, and when, he in vain tasked his memory to remember.

There was nothing in his manner at all provocative of suspicion. He drank from his glass calmly enough, and seemed to stare around him only with the listless gaze of one who wanted better occupation.

The highwaymen were still watching when they observed Old Matthew approaching, and then of course they withdrew.

"Is all well still?" was the first question.

"I think so."

"Who is that fellow at the bar?"

"What, you have seen him?"

"Yes—who is he?"

"I wish I knew. I am impressed with the idea that I have seen him before at some time or other, and looking very different to what he does now."

"That is just my impression," said Dick Turpin.

"I should set him down for a spy," said Tom. "That was my thought when first I caught sight of him."

"Wait a moment," said Matthew. "I shall know more about him directly, for I intend to have a good look at his features, and without his being any the wiser for it."

These words roused the attention of the two friends.

There seemed to be no end to Old Matthew's contrivances, and he made use of a fresh one on the present occasion.

Stopping nimbly on a chair, he removed a small picture which was hanging against the wall.

A small round hole then became visible, and to this he applied his eye.

This peep-hole was so skilfully placed that it enabled anyone to take a full view of the bar and the passage beyond.

Matthew remained motionless for what seemed to be an intolerable long time to those who were watching him.

At last he descended, and, in answer to the inquiring glances which were bent upon him, he said:

"I think I know him now, although he has disguised himself so well."

"Disguised himself! Who is it?"

"One who has had rather rough treatment here," answered Matthew, complacently, "though it seems he has not yet had enough."

"Who is it?"

"A spy—that's who it is!"

"A spy?" repeated both the highwaymen, at once handling their weapons.

"Yes. I scalded him once terribly with some warm water. But I only wish it had been just a trifle hotter!"

"That is the rascal, is it?"

"It is."

"Is he there still?"

"He was when I stepped down."

Dick nimbly mounted the chair, and there sure enough stood the man, apparently having not the least intention of moving—at any rate, not for some time to come.

Now that Old Matthew had declared his identity, Dick had no trouble at all in recognising him.

"What is to be done?" he said, as he descended. "It will not do for us to attempt to pass him."

"No, no—certainly not; and perhaps, after all, he is quite as well where he is as he would be if he were outside."

"What do you intend to do? If the horses are in the lane how are we to reach them?"

"They are sure to be there by now. But you seem to have forgotten my private way. Look here."

So saying, Matthew opened the secret door by which, as the reader will remember, communication could be had with the yard.

In less than a moment all three were standing in the open air.

Matthew without delay unfastened the door leading into White Horse Yard.

With his hand upon the lock, he said, in a subdued voice, for he was not without the dread that there might be listeners near:

"Farewell, and good luck to you both! I hope you will have every success. When I open the door make a rush into Drury Lane, mount your horses, and be off. You cannot possibly be too speedy in your movements."

"Good-bye, Matthew!" said Tom. "If I do succeed, rest assured that you will not be forgotten."

"I know all about that. Be off with you, and above all, be quick!"

"Open the door, then."

The command was instantly obeyed, and the highwaymen at once glided out into the darkness.

Although they moved rapidly towards the end of the passage, yet their steps were very stealthy and cautious.

At the end of it, and before venturing to dash into the road, they paused.

The first thing they caught sight of was a man holding the two horses.

It would seem that he had been keeping a sharp lookout for them, for he came hastily towards them.

All seemed silent and suggestive of safety.

"Now for it, Tom!" said Dick. "One rush, and be into the saddle as quickly as you can."

"Never fear for that."

"Now, then!"

The highwaymen made a sudden dash forward.

"Off, and away!" said the man, in a low voice. "I am greatly deceived if the grabs are not about in good force to-night! Off, and away!"

Before he had finished speaking the sharp, clear tones of a whistle broke the silence.

Had it been the summons of a magician it could not have produced a speedier effect.

As if by enchantment the a moment before quiet street became alive with police officers.

Dick found himself roughly seized; but he quickly threw off the grasp, and with that sudden bound which he had so often practised, and which had so many times stood him in such good stead, he placed himself in the saddle.

But, rapid as he had been in his movements, yet there had been time enough for two of his foes to be busy with the bridle of his mare.

Like a flash of light Dick's sword leaped from its scabbard, and, quick as the eye could wink, the two men released their hold, and drew back with cries of pain, for they had been so severely wounded about the wrists as to deprive them of all use of their hands.

Obeying the rein, Black Bess gave a sudden bound which carried herself and rider out of the immediate reach of their foes.

Fortunate indeed was it that this sudden movement was made, for quite a shower of bullets flew over the spot they had so recently occupied.

For Dick the way of escape lay open, provided he had chosen to avail himself of immediate flight.

But this was just what he was determined not to do.

He resolved to look to his old comrade, who had not been so successful as himself.

Tom King was not quite so expert at mounting rapidly as Dick was.

However, despite the attack made upon him by his foes, he succeeded in getting one of his feet in the stirrup.

But, unluckily, his horse at this moment swerved aside.

Then the chance was lost.

The officer who had been at first repulsed, sprang again upon him and grasped him tightly by the throat.

Self-defence then compelled Tom King to abandon his attempt to mount his steed while he struggled with his foe.

But he found that his antagonist, though inferior to him in point of height, possessed a remarkably muscular frame, and before many seconds had elapsed our old friend felt that for once he was opposed to one whose strength was greater than his own.

That this should be the case will seem in no measure astonishing when it is remembered that Tom was much enfeebled by his wounds, from which he was very far from having recovered.

But he felt that his life depended upon his exertions, and he struggled tremendously.

The officer's tactics were apparent enough.

His intention was to hurl Tom King to the earth and then fling himself upon him.

"Hold off!" he cried to his associates. "Keep where you are; I can manage the job single-handed easily enough. Leave me, I say, and look after the other one."

There was very near an end to his boasting at this moment, for Tom King, fully realising the desperate nature of his position, summoned up all his energies in order to free himself from the firm grip of his adversary.

The attempt almost succeeded, but not quite.

His temporary success was, in fact, merely owing to the circumstance that he found the officer slightly off his guard.

The struggle now was terrific.

It was just at this juncture that Black Bess gave that extraordinary bound which placed Dick Turpin in temporary safety, and enabled him to look round and see how things fared with his friend.

Before he had time to think what he should do—before, even, he could finish drawing a fresh pistol—which was the first thing instinct prompted him to do—the officer succeeded in flinging Tom King to the earth.

But the highwayman did not cease his struggles.

At first he was undermost, but by a dexterous movement he changed positions with his foe.

Happening then to look up, he saw Dick, some paces off, holding a pistol in his hand.

"Fire, captain," he cried—"fire! Shoot the fellow! It is my only chance, for I am almost overpowered.'

Dick raised his arm and levelled his pistol.

But so rapid were the gyrations of the two combatants that it was impossible to take such an aim at the one as would secure him from wounding the other.

But Tom King was getting exhausted.

"Fire, Dick!" he exclaimad, at the top of his voice. "Why don't you fire? Do you want to see me made prisoner before your eyes?"

"I cannot aim. I am afraid of hitting you!"

"No matter!" cried Tom, impetuously. "Better that than be dragged to Tyburn! Fire—fire, I say! It is the first favour I have begged of you! Fire, I say! Now—now, or you will be too late!"

As he spoke, Tom King made the most strenuous efforts to keep his adversary in one position, while at the same time he held back as much as possible.

Dick fancied he saw his chance, and took a rapid aim.

But the officer was by no means insensible to the danger by which he was menaced.

He caught one glimpse of the glittering barrel of Dick Turpin's pistol.

The sight seemed to gift him with double strength.

A sudden wrench enabled him to shift his position, and it was at this moment that the report of a pistol was heard.

Dick's finger was on the trigger when the officer moved; but he was not in time either to alter the position of the barrel or to stop the pressure.

There was a loud, wild cry, and when the smoke cleared away from before Dick's eyes he saw Tom King lying upon the ground bathed in blood.

The frightful spectacle almost maddened him, and with an awful curse he flung the discharged weapon from him.

By a sudden but painful effort, Tom partially raised himself from the ground.

"The prophecy is fulfilled!" he cried. "Dick, I die by the hand of my best friend! Farewell! Fly—fly—fly at once! Do not linger now, for I am past all mortal aid! Keep my secret! I—I——"

A gush of blood interrupted his speech, and with a gurgling groan he sank back on to the hard roadway—dead!

CHAPTER MXCI.

TOM KING, THE HIGHWAYMAN, FINDS HIS LAST RESTING-PLACE.

LIKE some statue of horror or despair, Dick sat upon his steed gazing with a stupified air at what had just occurred.

So great was the shock that it was clear that at present he was in doubt whether what he saw was real.

But he was aroused by the vigorous efforts of the officers, who, quickly recovering from the state of astonishment into which this occurrence had thrown even them, rushed upon him, intent either upon his death or capture.

The well-known accent of Old Matthew's voice also fell upon his ear.

"Fly—fly!" he heard the landlord exclaim. "Make the best speed you can. To linger here can do no good, for Tom is now beyond all mortal power. You are not to blame. It was fate. Fly—fly!"

Thus urged, Dick half mechanically changed the direction of his mare's head.

No sooner had he done so than Black Bess bounded off at a speed that made thousands of sparks fly from the rugged stones with which Drury Lane was paved.

His brain was on fire. Liquid lead seemed coursing through his veins, while his heart seemed to stand still in his breast, and to have become congealed into a mass of solid ice.

In such a state of frenzy as he then was, no one can be surprised that he should urge his mare to redoubled speed, thinking, perhaps, by that means he should be able to outdistance thought—or rather the agonising recollection of what had just occurred.

But before we follow him in his headlong flight—that flight which was destined more than anything else to perpetuate the remembrance of himself and steed—we will devote a few words to what took place at the inn, in order that, having done so, we may follow him throughout his long and eventful ride without being under the necessity of making any interruption.

In the first place, then, we may state that Old Matthew spoke no more than the truth when he said that Tom King was already beyond all human aid.

The bullet from the pistol of his best friend had done its work effectually.

So narrow, though, was the escape of the police officer, that the bullet, in its course, cut off the lower part of his ear, and made a rather deep, ugly-looking furrow along one cheek before it finally found a lodgment in the heart of the highwayman. Old Matthew had been a spectator of the whole of the disastrous affair, which, although we have been some time in describing it, because we have mentioned every detail, yet seemed to him no more than a momentary scuffle.

Even had he felt the inclination to take any share in the affray, he would not have had the opportunity, for before he could possibly re-collect his faculties, Tom King was lying on the ground.

The officer struggled to his feet, scarcely knowing whether he was alive or dead.

Blood poured copiously from his hideous-looking wound, and ere long the frightful smarting which it set up brought him to himself.

The first thing Old Matthew did was to bound forward and stoop down over the prostrate form of the highwayman.

He placed his hand just above the region of the heart.

It was covered with blood in an instant.

But there was not the feeblest pulsation, and a glance at the features showed that they bore the unmistakable impress of Death.

It was then that Old Matthew addressed those words to Dick which we have already recorded.

Then, having spoken, he turned his attention once more to the prostrate form.

The reader will scarcely require to be told how deep and sincere was Old Matthew's grief, for, from the first, Tom had ever been one of his especial favourites.

The wounded officer feeling no inclination to join in the pursuit which had just been set on foot after Dick Turpin, came forward a step or two, and addressing the landlord, said:

"There's one more of your pets done for, my friend; and the one that remains won't hold his life and liberty many hours longer. The precautions taken are such as will make escape totally impossible."

"And you will carry a mark that will remind you of to-night whenever you happen to look in a glass," returned Matthew, who, after one glance at the officer's bleeding physiognomy, turned shudderingly away.

The officer solaced himself by giving vent to some horrible curses.

Then he added:

"I can put up with it, and could put up with a great deal more. I captured him single-handed—I knew I could do it if I only had a fair trial, and so you see I shall have no one to divide the reward, and therefore I shall be quite content."

"People's ideas about contentment widely differ," remarked Old Matthew. Then, in an altered tone, he said:

"What is to be done with this poor fellow?"

"Done with him?" repeated the officer, for he was not prepared with an immediate answer.

"Yes; what is to be done?"

"D—d if I know!"

"Let him be carried indoors," suggested Old Matthew, "otherwise there will be such a crowd about our ears as will prevent us from doing anything."

"I don't know what to do," observed the officer, still busy in his attempts to check the flow of blood from his wound. "But he's dead, and therefore there is nothing to fear about his escaping, so we will carry him in."

Old Matthew beckoned the ostler to come to his assistance, and between them the body of poor Tom King was carried into that room where he had stood only a few minutes before indulging in such bright hopes about the future.

Matthew had much ado to conceal his emotion, nor could he have been able to do so but for the thought that the manifestation of any particular sorrow upon his part might be the means of getting him into much future trouble.

The officer bawled lustily for a surgeon to dress his wound.

"I'll send my report to head-quarters, and sit down here till I hear further," he said, in tones of dogged determination; "and if I stir, blow me! Ten thousand devils! where is the surgeon?"

The pain in his cheek now every moment increased in severity, and it had already reached such a pitch as to be almost unendurable.

Matthew occupied himself in covering Tom over with a sheet; and having thus done for him all that lay in his power, he withdrew to give full vent to his grief.

"Who would have dreamed it?" he said, wringing his hands. "It seems now to be hardly possible. Dead—and at such a moment! To fall by Dick's hand, too—that is strangest of all—and to think that he should dread the occurrence of some such event! What will be Dick's feelings now? He declared himself tired of life before—how will he be after this?"

Such was the nature of the landlord's reflections.

As for the officer, true to his purpose, he remained beside the dead highwayman.

His wound was dressed, and by the time this operation was completed other police officers arrived.

After much discussion it was finally determined that Tom's body should remain where it was until after the inquest, when a further resolution could be made.

This course was carried out, the body all the time being under the guard of a troop of officers.

The official inquiry as to the cause of death was duly made, and the various facts deposed to.

The verdict was one of wilful murder against Dick Turpin, for whom, on this account, though it seems strange to say it, an additional reward was offered.

In this way the affair ended.

With a dead body—though it was that of a daring offender—the law could do nothing.

An effort was indeed made to have it buried within the precincts of Newgate, but Old Matthew got some persons to come forward to claim the body as that of a relative, and of course it was handed to them.

The melancholy duty of finding a last resting-place for the senseless clay then remained, and Old Matthew performed it in a manner which he felt certain would be approved of by Dick himself.

Most anxiously, then, he waited to hear intelligence of the captain, of whom since the moment of his departure he had heard no tidings.

It now becomes our duty to follow Dick, yet first of all we must mention one of Mr. Skellum's manœuvres.

It was one which did credit to his ingenuity, and it must be confessed that had it been put into execution earlier, the career of the highwaymen must have been brought to a full stop.

The plan was simply this:—

On every high-road leading from London he made arrangements at the various posting-houses that horses to the number of at least half a dozen should be kept in constant readiness for him.

The reason of this is obvious.

He trusted that the time was not far off when one or other of the highwaymen would be started from their place of concealment.

When this was done, the officers who were first upon his track were to ride him down, which the continual relays of fresh horses procured without an instant's delay, would doubtless enable them to do.

At all risks, they were not to lose sight of their prey after having once started it.

His instructions were that they should not exhaust themselves in endeavouring to overtake and make a capture, but solely be directed to keeping steadily upon the track.

How these instructions were carried out, and what was the effect of them, will now be very shortly seen.

Certainly, however, these energetic measures seemed to promise ultimate success to Mr. Skellum and his party.

CHAPTER MXCII.

OLD MATTHEW STANDS A FRIEND TO POOR TOM KING FOR THE LAST TIME.

Dick Turpin's sensation of agony increased a thousandfold as he rode at that mad gallop along Drury Lane.

Although, strictly speaking, he was not to blame for what had occurred, he, nevertheless, blamed himself bitterly, and suffered the liveliest sensations of remorse and horror.

His state of mind, however, is so far beyond our powers of discription that we shall pass it over almost in silence.

We can only say that it was in a state closely bordering upon frenzy that he continued to urge his mare onward in a northerly direction.

Where he was going he never troubled himself to think, though that he should take this course, as one may say, almost mechanically, is not to be wondered at when it is remembered that Tom King and himself had agreed to go to York.

At present, however, he had no thought that this should be his destination.

At length the very steep ascent of Stamford Hill was reached, and Black Bess, being left entirely to herself, thought fit to reduce her speed to a walk.

It was this change in the rate of motion that brought Dick Turpin to a sense of where he was.

He looked around him in the utmost surprise for a moment or so.

Then, recognising the locality, he allowed his mare to proceed, while he again overwhelmed himself with vain reproaches.

"To think that it should be this hand that should deprive my old comrade of his life!" he exclaimed, clenching his right fist violently. "To deprive him of it, too, just at the moment when his future began to look bright and worth living for! The prophecy is fulfilled. How strange that it should be so! If I received some intimation of my own fate, I should be far from disregarding it now, however unlikely it might appear.

"And what is to be the end of all?" he asked himself, at length. "I stand alone. One by one my cherished companions have fallen, and I am left alone—alone: no, not alone—that can never be while Black Bess is with me. May I never live to see the day that she is taken from me! If the day ever does come, I shall be desolate indeed."

He patted her neck fondly while he spoke, and Black Bess testified to the pleasure she felt at this recognition on the part of her master.

He little thought how close the time was when this separation would take place, and how soon he would have to experience the intense bitterness of utter desolation.

A moment afterwards, and he paused at the old toll-gate.

"Here's a guinea," said Dick, as he flung the coin named to the tollkeeper. "I always choose to pay in advance. The next time you see me coming, mind you have the gate open."

"All right, your honour," returned the man, placing one finger at the side of his nose and shaking his head in a very knowing manner. "Don't you trouble about that."

Dick rode on very leisurely.

He had no motive for making unusual speed, for he had no idea that he was pursued.

It was easy to see that he was thinking deeply; no doubt he was endeavouring to decide upon some course of future action.

There were many difficulties in the way of this, and before he had at all overcome his perplexity he was aroused by a peculiar sound that Black Bess gave utterance to.

"Hilloa!" he cried. "What does this mean? Steady, old lass—steady—steady! Can you hear anything—eh?"

Black Bess came to a full stop, as though to allow her master the opportunity of listening.

Dick turned half round in the saddle, and placed his hand to his ear.

"Horsemen are coming," he said; "but surely not in pursuit of me. No—no. If so, I should have heard of them long ere this. I will go quietly, and keep a sharp look-out."

It may seem strange that Dick did not seek safety in instant flight; but just then, to tell the truth, he was not in the mood for taking active measures of any kind.

The great incentives to preserve his life and liberty no more existed—life was a thing which he had ceased to prize.

The lapse of a few seconds rendered it beyond doubt that horsemen were coming—not in very large numbers, but at an unusually rapid rate.

"I will make sure whether they are after me or not," he muttered. "I won't take a long ride into the country unnecessarily, I am determined."

So saying, he caused his mare to turn her face towards the direction whence the sounds came, and calmly waited to find out whether his conjectures were well or ill-founded.

He was not allowed to remain very long in his state of incertitude.

Although the night was dark, he presently made out the forms of approaching mounted men, nor did he require them to come very close for him to be certain that they were police officers.

It seemed, however, that it was close enough for them to see him, and consequent upon this discovery they all set up a loud shout.

There were in all about eight well-mounted men, all intent upon the capture of the highwayman.

But the sight of so many armed men close to him, and literally thirsting for his blood, caused him no sensations of dismay.

On the contrary, it would seem as though the mere sight of them did much towards bringing back some of his old boldness of demeanour.

Be this how it may, it is a fact that his manner underwent a great alteration.

In the first place, he took off his hat and, after waving it in an elaborate fashion in the air, made an ironical bow.

Then, raising his voice, he exclaimed:

"If you are inclined for a good long ride along the Old North Road, I shall not for a moment think of baulking your desires. You will excuse me taking the precedence of you, but I allow no one to ride before me unless he has proved himself to be a better man than I am myself. Besides, I shall be able to clear the way of all obstructions, and all you have to do is to follow me just so far as your inclination may lead you."

The reader may perhaps be able to imagine how intensely aggravating these bantering words were to the police officers.

They heard nearly every syllable that fell from Dick's lips—so close, in fact, were they that the foremost of the troop made a trial with his pistol.

But the bullet whistled harmlessly past the highwayman, who, again bowing profoundly, replaced his hat and rode away at a round pace, yet by no means so quickly as to take him out of sight of his enemies.

The police officers were frantic with rage.

"Curse the villain!" cried the one who had fired the pistol. "It is bad enough to put up with the annoyance of failing continually, but to be insulted and braved in this fashion is outrageous. But come on, my boys, the devil himself must have led him on to this road, for, as you know, Mr. Skellum is somewhere on this road. If he falls in with this rascal he'll make him change his tune, I'll warrant!"

"Push on, then," said another voice. "We ought to keep close behind, and by no means lose sight of him; then, should he come up with Mr. Skellum, he will find himself between two fires, d—n him!"

The last two words were spoken with so much emphasis that all the rest laughed loudly.

"There he goes!" said another. "Look—look! He is behind those fir trees now! You will see him again in a moment. Yes—yes, there he is!"

In effect, while the officer thus spoke, Dick Turpin emerged from the protecting shadow of some tall trees that grew by the wayside, and could now be distinctly seen.

The officers finding that his speed was not very extraordinary, became at once flushed with hopes of success, and plied whip and spur most vigorously.

What added most, however, to the anticipation of success was the fact that Mr. Skellum was on the road before them at the head of another troop.

After what he had accomplished all began to show Skellum a great deal of attention, and place great belief in his powers.

"I will tire them out," said Dick, mentally, as he kept Black Bess rather tight in hand. "I should like to know how far they would follow me."

"There's something the matter with his horse," was the impression of the police officers. "Hurrah! we shall have him to-night after all! There must be something the matter that prevents him from going any faster."

This, as the reader knows, was an entirely erroneous idea; but it was quite a feasible thing to the officers, and it formed for them an additional and powerful incentive to make every exertion.

CHAPTER MXCIII.

DICK TURPIN COMMENCES HIS LONG RIDE.

The excitement caused by finding himself thus closely pursued was most agreeable to the feelings of Dick Turpin, for it prevented him from dwelling upon those terrible events which had so weighed him down.

While galloping along the high-road with half a score of well-armed police officers in the rear, all intent upon his destruction, it was hard to turn his thoughts to other matters.

The feeling to Dick was similar to that experienced by anyone who unexpectedly finds an entire relief from bodily pain.

"They will find me in the humour to ride," he said, as he glanced behind him. "I only hope they will not soon tire. They are coming on too fast, however, to be able to keep up the pace."

To the utter astonishment, then, of the police officers Dick continued to keep just such a distance before them as to be out of the range of their pistols; and, strangest of all, no matter how great their efforts, they could not reduce this distance one inch.

Suddenly, however, Dick was warned by Bess that some one was approaching in front, for he was too much occupied to notice the circumstance himself.

It was now a little lighter than it had been, for the moon had reached a point where the clouds were less opaque than elsewhere, and, consequently, a dim light was shed all around.

Turpin looked very attentively in front, and, in less than a moment he made out the forms of five horsemen.

His first thought, of course, was that they must be police officers, but this he found to be an error.

By the careless way in which they rode along, chatting to each other, and occasionally indulging in a laugh that rang out sharply in the clear air, it seemed certain that they were gentlemen devoid of any particular business, and merely riding for amusement.

At the outset Dick had drawn a pistol, but now he returned the weapon to the holster.

In reconnoitring those in advance, he had unwittingly fallen further into the rear than was prudent.

The officers, elate with anticipated triumph, redoubled their efforts.

They caught sight of the approaching horsemen, and set up such a shout as instantly drew their attention to them.

"Stop him!" they bawled, at the top of their lungs—"stop him! A highwayman—a highwayman! Stop him! A hundred pounds reward!"

Owing to the stillness of the night, for there was no sound save that produced by the iron-shod hoofs of the

horses, these words were distinctly heard by the gentlemen in front.

For a second they seemed so surprised as to be incapable of action, but recovering themselves quickly, they placed themselves in a line across the roadway, doubtless thinking that the adoption of this course would stay the further progress of the fugitive.

But they knew not the man with whom they had to deal.

"Stand firm!" bawled the officers. "Whatever you do, stand firm! A hundred pounds reward!"

The gentlemen seemed fully inclined to obey this command.

Dick spoke to Black Bess.

It was only one word that he pronounced, accompanied by a slackening of the rein.

But the effect was as immediate as extraordinary.

At one bound she changed the gentle rate at which he had been going to her old tremendous swinging gallop.

The onward rush of the highwayman and his steed can now be compared to nothing but a whirlwind.

"Stand aside!" he cried, in a loud voice, that made itself distinctly heard above everything else. "Stand aside, or your death be on your own heads!"

The furious onward rush of the highwayman dismayed the travellers.

With more alacrity than was compatible with either dignity or courage, they drew to one side and allowed the furious horseman free passage.

There was a bend in the road not very far in advance, and round this Black Bess sped at the same rate, and was then entirely lost to view, though the sharp clatter of her hoofs upon the stony roadway could still be heard.

Upon seeing what we have described take place, the officers gave vent to the most awful imprecations conceivable.

So enraged were they at the pusillanimity of the travellers that they chose rather to pull up their horses and pour out their abuse than continue the pursuit.

"D—n ye for fine curs!" said the first constable, who followed on with some flowers of speech best left unexpressed. "Why couldn't you stand firm and bar his passage? If you had only shown a little firmness, he would have been in our hands by now."

"Do you know who you are talking to, sirrah!" cried one of the travellers.

"Yes," was the angry reply—"a set of d—d white-livered hounds that couldn't stop a single man among you!"

"You shall smart for this conduct!" said another traveller. "Things have come to a fine pass indeed when gentlemen can be abused by a set of d—d scum-of-the-earth police officers! Get out of the way, and let us ride on!"

"Yes, we'll get out of the way, never fear!" was the sneering response. "And the next time you come out you had better bring your wet nurses with you! Come on, lads!" he added — "its no good dilly-dallying here!"

So saying, he rode on, followed swiftly by his companions, all of whom amused themselves by cursing and swearing and saying what might have been done if the travellers had only showed a bold front.

The travellers, meanwhile—who happened to be a party of noblemen—rode towards London, vowing vengeance upon all the police officers in the land.

We will leave both parties to follow Dick Turpin.

When Black Bess bounded off at the tremendous pace we have mentioned, her rider's sensations were those of joy and triumph, succeeded by the consciousness that the headlong rate at which they were now going was even more exciting still.

Away, then, he flew, for he allowed the reins to fall loosely on his courser's back, and let her go at what speed she chose.

What distance along the high-road was travelled in this manner he had no clear idea, but all at once he perceived several twinkling lights.

"That must be Edmonton," he said, to himself. "We have come further than I thought. No matter, I have distanced them now, no doubt, for they would never think of continuing the chase after seeing Bess lay out in the way she did. It would be madness on their part to think of overtaking her. I will just go on as far as the Old Bell, and stop there awhile. There is time yet," he added, with a heavy sigh—"plenty of time for me to decide what I am to do in the future."

By slow degrees he reduced his mare's gallop so as not to enter the village at such a speed as to excite too much attention, and after the lapse of a few moments pulled up in front of the ancient, well-known inn.

Many lights were shining from the various windows, and sounds of high revelry reached his ears, as though some unusual merry-making was going on within.

A moment or two elapsed before the ostler made his appearance, and the delay caused Dick to alter his mind.

"No—no," he muttered. "Be it how it may, I will not stop here. Such mirth and jollity as now take place beneath the old roof would jar too painfully upon me. I will have something now I have stopped, and so shall Bess; but I will not alight—no—no—I will not alight!"

Just as he had arrived at this determination the ostler came forward.

"Humbly beg your pardon, sir, for keeping you here waiting for so long, but, you see, to-night is an uncommon busy one. I'm most run off my legs. What might your honour want?"

"A bucket of water with a pound of oatmeal in it, a whisp of hay, and a glass of the best brandy you have in the house."

"Right, sir. Will you step inside?"

"No, I will stay here—be quick."

"Depend upon me, your honour."

The ostler vanished, and Dick looked attentively at his mare.

Few persons would have suspected that she had travelled so far, and part of the time so rapidly.

Not a hair was turned.

All over her coat was as glossy and sleek as velvet, and her respiration scarcely, if at all, accelerated.

The nostrils were a little distended, but not sufficiently so as to attract notice.

"Brave Bess," said Dick, patting her fondly, while his heart throbbed and his eyes glistened with joy and pride. "There may have been your equal in the world before, and there may be in time to come, but I doubt both. I have never tried your mettle yet, but you could accomplish a miracle, old lass, I will be bound you could, if you were only put to it. You are the only earthly possession I have left now," he added, in a subdued voice, and with a fresh access of emotion.

Just then the ostler appeared, carrying with him the articles ordered.

The refreshment was truly welcome to both, especially to Dick, who felt like one parched with fever.

The liquor he had called for was not at all calculated to allay his thirst; but he never thought of that, and swallowed the fiery spirit at a draught.

"Put the hay in the rack," he said, "and leave her the bucket. There is no occasion for hurry; and get me another glass."

"Of brandy, sir?"

"Yes, a larger glass than that."

The ostler hurried off, and almost immediately reappeared, carrying a glass in one hand and a bottle in the other.

"This has only just been uncorked," he said, "and you can have just as much as you like."

The glass was a rather large goblet.

Dick filled it to the brim.

"Drink the rest yourself," he cried, giving back the bottle, "and drink to the health of the best steed in England."

As he spoke, he drank deeply of the contents of the glass—so deeply as to make the ostler open his eyes to a most unusual width.

But, for all that, he did not neglect the toast.

Disdaining the luxury of a glass, he placed the neck of the bottle between his lips and allowed the brandy to gurgle down his throat.

"The best steed in England!" he ejaculated, as soon as he had recovered breath after his draught. "And may I make so bold as to ask which that is?"

"This," answered Dick, stroking the beautiful arched neck of Black Bess.

"That?" said the ostler, looking at her with a critical eye. "Well, so far as I can tell, I should think you are not far off the mark."

"I am sure I am not," said Turpin, finishing his huge draught, and speaking with an enthusiasm that might have been in part caused by what he had drunk.

At this moment a loud yelling sound broke the silence.

Dick had so completely given up the idea that he was pursued that he had never listened, and consequently had failed to hear the rattling of horses' hoofs in the distance which had been audible for some moments.

Looking up now, he was astonished to find his pursuers within a few yards of him.

How they had managed to get up with him so quickly passed his comprehension.

They saw him, too. The yelling shout was sufficiently indicative of that fact.

"Those gentlemen seem troubled about something," he said, in a calm voice, as he slowly placed the empty glass in the ostler's outstretched hand. "I wonder what is the matter? However, it is no business of mine. Good night!"

CHAPTER MXCIV.

DICK TURPIN TELLS HIS FOES THAT THEY WILL HEAR OF HIM IN YORK.

THE presence of the police officers at Edmonton at that juncture, although well-nigh incomprehensible to Dick Turpin, was like many other seemingly mysterious events, one of the simplest things in the world.

The reader will remember what has been said about Mr. Skellum's arrangements for relays of horses

Now it so happened that on the North Road, Tottenham was the first place beyond London appointed for that purpose.

Through this village Dick had gone at headlong speed.

The officers, however, burning with resentment and more determined than ever after what had occurred that they would not lose sight of the fugitive, knowing that fresh horses could be had at such a short distance ahead, urged the exhausted beasts they bestrode to make yet greater speed.

Arriving at Tottenham, only the briefest possible delay took place.

It happened also that the steeds which they procured in exchange were of far more than ordinary quality, and consequently by dint of perpetually belabouring the animals with the stocks of their heavy whips, and goring them with their spurs, they succeeded in reaching Edmonton as we have described.

But such was the violence with which they had treated their horses immediately after coming out of the stable that they were now nearly half blown, and exhibited many signs of distress.

"Death and the devil!" said the foremost, furiously, to the wondering ostler. "Why didn't you stop that man? There's a couple of thousand pounds to be had for his head! That is Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

"Blow me!" ejaculated the ostler, with great emphasis. "Why, I might have known it."

"Of course you might! How is his horse?—is it fresh?"

"A d—d sight fresher nor yourn?"

"Get on," said the officer—"don't spare the horseflesh. We have not to take these many miles. If we keep on his track we must run him down at last; and when he is deprived of his horse he will be at our mercy entirely."

Cheered by this prospect, the officers recommenced their efforts, and in a few moments the Old Bell Inn at Edmonton was left behind.

What encouraged the officers still more was that every now and then the light wind would bring to their ears faint clatter of Bess's hoofs, showing that she could such a very long distance in advance.

Leaving the officers to continue their pursuit, we will again accompany the highwayman.

As might be expected, the fumes of the vast quantity of brandy he had swallowed began to mount up to his brain, which, added to the exhilaration produced by his hard riding, caused a most unusual elation of spirits.

That kind of oblivion of unpleasant recollections which follows partial intoxication wrought its full effect upon him

At first he pondered a little upon the means by which his foes had been enabled to get so close upon his heels; but after a few moments this became too perplexing and tiresome for his faculties to carry out.

"They seem in a mood to chase me," he muttered, as he brought his mare to a walk, for a long and steep hill lay before him. "It is doubling the reward that has done it, I suppose. Well—well, I will give them such a tiring as will make them think twice before they attempt to chase me again."

As Dick would not allow Black Bess to ascend this hill except at a walk, it follows that it took a considerable length of time to reach the summit.

The officers, who had not for a moment ceased to flog their horses, consequently gained upon him.

It was while slowly ascending that the idea of riding to York first occurred to him.

"Bess, old lass," he muttered, half aloud and half to himself, "no one knows the extent of your powers yet. Let me think. My determination—my irrevocable resolution is to quit my occupation of highwayman at once and for ever. Good! But, Bess, old lass, shall we, who have made together so great a reputation in the world—I say, shall we drop out of it thus obscurely?—shall we vanish without a sign, and so suffer our glories to be quite eclipsed? No, no," he added, in an exultant voice, for the brandy now was working its full influence upon him—"no, no! Before we quit this scene we will do that which shall cause us both to be remembered and spoken of throughout all future time. Yes, yes," he cried, with growing excitement, "we will do that which no one has done yet, and which most probably no one will ever attempt to do again. We will ride to York—to York: yes, yes—from London to York! Let me think. That is two hundred miles or thereabouts, and the fastest coach takes four days and nights. Ha, ha!—four days and nights! It is odd to me, Bess, if we do not do it in less than twelve hours. At any rate, we will try. What say you, old lass, shall it be so or not?"

Black Bess responded by that answering neigh which she always gave when her master spoke to her.

"So you are willing, then?" exclaimed the highwayman, "and so am I. It shall be done! At sunset to-morrow we will be at York."

He ratified his determination with an oath.

But the summit of the hill was now reached.

Instead of immediately commencing the descent, however, he came to a complete stop, and turned round so as to face his pursuers who, by dint of the almost superhuman exertions they had incessantly made, were about half way up the hill.

Just at this moment the moon peeped down at what was going forward.

To Dick and his foes, who had been for so long in obscurity, her light seemed absolutely brilliant: they could distinguish all around them with great ease and plainness.

"D—n his impudence!" said the foremost officer. "Why he is standing stock still. Is he going to stop there and let us take him?"

"No fear," growled one of his companions. "You had better look out. I am sure he means mischief."

"Push on—push on! If he will only remain where he is a little longer he will be within range, and then, at all risks, I will take a shot at him."

Dick calmly awaited their approach, and when they had got to what seemed a most dangerous proximity he took off his hat and bowed in the same insulting manner as before.

"Gentlemen all," he said, "I have a few remarks to make to you."

Hearing him speak, the officers mechanically checked their steeds and listened intently.

The tired beasts readily came to a standstill, and over and above their loud panting, they heard Dick say:



DICK TURPIN ASTONISHES THE DRIVER OF THE YORK MAIL-COACH.

No. 288.—Black Bess.

No. 239 will be Published next Monday.

"You seem to me, gentlemen, to be like I am—that is, just in the humour for a long ride. If you like to accompany me upon my journey, well and good; I have no objection—not the least in the world; but it will try your mettle. Gentlemen," he added, in a still louder voice, "if you want me, you will find me to-morrow morning at the old Bowling Green in the city of York; till then, farewell!"

As he pronounced the last words, he again waved his hat.

Then, turning round with surprising swiftness, he let go the rein, and away Black Bess flew down the steep declivity at what seemed to be a breakneck pace.

Just as he started, many bullets whistled about his ears, for the officers had recovered from their first astonishment.

Loud and deep were the curses they breathed upon his audacity; but the object of their anger was unhurt, and was speeding along the high-road at a rate that seemed to set all probability of successful pursuit at defiance.

But the officers had the utmost faith in the arrangements made by Mr. Skellum, for whom, by-the-by, they had been for some long time past on the look-out.

Every moment they had expected him to join them; but now, as they got farther and farther away from London, their hopes began to wane, because of their impression that he would have had no object for riding so far away.

Although the police officers came down the long, steep hill with all the speed their horses were capable of making, and incurring no inconsiderable risk in so doing, yet the reader will not be surprised to hear that when they reached the level road Dick Turpin and Black Bess were out of sight.

The next changing-place was only about eight miles farther on, and so they did not scruple to urge their horses as before.

All at once, however, the attention of all was attracted by a cry given by one of their number.

"Look there," he cried, in a somewhat excited tone of voice, and pointing with his whip across the open country as he spoke—"look there! Do you see who is coming?"

"Who—who?" asked several anxious voices.

"Who?—why, Mr. Skellum, to be sure! Can't you see him? I could tell him a mile off."

"Yes—yes, I do believe it is; and what is more, if that is not Bill Jinks who is riding next to him it is odd to me."

"What is to be done?"

"Why, we will wait here a moment and signal to him. We shall perhaps get in for it if we don't let him know just how matters are at present."

"Of course we shall," assented another voice; "though why he should be over in that direction I cannot imagine."

There was little need to make any signals to Mr. Skellum, since he had already caught sight of the troop of police officers, and was making his way in a direct line towards them.

A few moments elapsed before his arrival.

He was most anxious to learn the news.

As soon as he heard that Dick Turpin had undoubtedly passed by such a short time before, he uttered a howl of rage, and then his vexation waxed so great that he pulled off his three-cornered hat and flung it on the ground with furious violence.

It was immediately trampled into the mud by the hoofs of the horses.

"Fool—ass that I have been!" were the first words he ejaculated; and he seemed more than half inclined to fling his dingy-looking wig down too.

The officers looked on in surprise

"Here have I been riding myself nearly to death, thinking Dick Turpin was before me, and now I am convinced it was some one else. I was told it was Captain Hawk; but I would not believe it."

"Captain Hawk? Have you been in pursuit of him?"

"Didn't I say so?"

"And you have not captured him?"

"No fear. He rides like Dick Turpin himself."

"We shall have no little trouble with him, I expect."

"But you say that Dick Turpin himself is on the road before us, don't you?"

"Unquestionably."

"How do you know?"

"Because he told us that if we wanted him, we should find him to-morrow morning at the Bowling Green at York.'

"At where?" bawled Skellum.

"At York."

"At the devil more likely! but"—and here Mr. Skellum seemed to speak more like himself—"if it is really his intention to ride to York his fate is sealed."

"How so?"

"Because of the relays I have upon the road. If he keeps to the highway, we shall be able, by our frequent changes, to overtake him before he has gone half the distance—say, or a quarter of it."

Mr. Skellum spoke with an immense amount of confidence; but this feeling was by no means strongly shared in by the men, who considered much valuable time had been lost.

But Mr. Skellum very soon set them all in motion again.

CHAPTER MXCV.

BLACK BESS SAVES THE TOLLMAN THE TROUBLE OF OPENING THE TURNPIKE GATE.

Dick Turpin did not attempt to lighten rein until he had placed at least twenty miles between himself and the spot where he had spoken to the officers.

The speed Black Bess had made, and the style in which she had done her work, filled him with enthusiasm.

If possible, he felt more certain than before that she would be able to accomplish the tremendous journey with comparative ease.

Although he was now something like thirty miles from Drury Lane, yet Black Bess did not give signs of having travelled more than three.

Slight as was the restraint he placed upon her with the view of moderating her pace, yet she chafed terribly beneath it, and seemed half inclined for once in the way to assert that she had a will of her own.

"You are full of mettle, my old lass," Dick said, as he patted her neck, "and you are beginning to feel a little excited. But quiet, Bess—quiet, I say!—I don't want you to exert yourself too much at present. You must husband your resources, for you have real need of doing so."

As he pronounced the last words he compelled her to walk; but it was easy to see that so far from being sensible of the least fatigue, Black Bess was just sufficiently heated to be desirous to do more.

To see the way in which she would at times try to change her present snail-like pace to gallop would almost induce the belief that she was conscious of the task that lay before her, and was full of impatience to accomplish it as speedily as possible.

The country, however, was now of a more uneven character than it had been, and Dick continually held her in.

In this way five more miles, or thereabouts, were accomplished, and then he perceived in front of him a small, twinkling light.

Drawing closer, he found that it proceeded from a window in the gable-end of a house, which, by its position, would seem to be a roadside inn.

The supposition turned out correct, and Dick resolved that at all hazards he would let his mare rest there for a short time.

The place seemed silent and deserted, and there was little to fear in the shape of an interruption.

The trampling of hoofs brought forth the ostler, who was, indeed, listening for and expecting an arrival, for this was one of Mr. Skellum's changing places.

Dick alighted, but he would not enter the house, nor would he allow Black Bess to enter the stable.

But he unloosed the saddle girths, and wholly removed the bridle, so as to relieve her mouth.

Then he stood by and saw her carefully rubbed down—Black Bess the while eating a little hay and quenching her thirst with water in which oatmeal had been mixed in a liberal proportion.

As the time went on without any sound indicative of the approach of his foes being borne to his ears, Dick began to think that they had abandoned all idea of pursuit

Whether this was so or not, however, he was determined not to relinquish his design.

There would be plenty of testimony as to the time when he left London, and it would be his own business to arrange that the hour of his arrival in York should be correctly noted.

"My lad," he said to the ostler as he prepared to ride away, "if you are asked, you need not be quite sure whether I am Dick Turpin, but you can say I am going to York."

He threw the lad a crown-piece as he spoke, and rode off, leaving the ostler in a state of considerable surprise and bewilderment.

Dick still went on slowly.

There was no urgent need for speed, and he knew he could not do better than perform the first half of his long journey with as little distress and extra exertion as possible.

Ere he had gone far, however, his quick ears caught the sound of horses' hoofs.

But the clatter died away again almost immediately, leaving him in doubt as to whether his ears had served him rightly.

Not for long, though, was he left in this state of indecision.

The sound broke forth again, and this time with a clearness that was unquestionable.

Dick looked behind him.

But the darkness was too great to enable him to see very far.

"I should like to know whether these are the same officers who are upon my track," he muttered. "If so, I should begin to think they were in earnest, and actually meant to follow me. I will stay and see."

There was no need to alter Bess's present speed, for she was going only at a walk, while those behind were coming at a hard gallop.

It was scarcely likely that they were any but police officers; but Dick chose to be quite certain; besides, it might have been a little bravado on his part.

At length they came in sight.

"They are the police officers," ejaculated Dick; "and it is odd to me if their numbers are not doubled. They have had a reinforcement somewhere—they are certainly in earnest."

A loud cry now made him aware that he was seen.

Mr. Skellum was full of exultation.

"I told you so!" he cried to his followers. "We have only to stick to him now and he is ours. No horse can possibly hold out against the relays I have provided. See how we have gained upon him already! Push on—push on!"

To tell the truth, the officers were no less surprised than encouraged upon finding that they had gained upon the highwayman in the way they had done; but they would not have felt half so ardent had they been in full possession of the exact facts of the case in the same way that the reader is.

On the other hand, had Dick known earlier about the relays kept constantly in readiness, it might have induced him to abandon his design.

As it was, they began to think with their leader, that their efforts at last were to be crowned with success.

Dick, finding there was no room for doubt about the character of his pursuers, rode off, though not so swiftly as he might have done, for he felt perfectly certain he could show them a clean pair of heels whenever he thought fit to do so.

But there was an obstacle in front about the existence of which he knew nothing.

Suddenly sweeping round a curve, he came in sight of it.

It was a toll-gate, and as the hour was now very late, it was closed, and so double-locked.

"Gate—gate!" roared Dick, as soon as ever he perceived the obstruction. "Gate—gate! Quick—quick, I say!"

The sound of his voice reached the ears of the tollman, and he at once sauntered forth, lantern in hand.

"Quick—quick!" cried Dick, again, who was compelled to reduce his pace. "Open, I say—open!"

Before the gatekeeper could make any reply, the officers came in sight, and set up a yell like a pack of hungry wolves in sight of their prey.

Now we have him!" shouted Skellum, almost frantic with excitement. "Be firm and resolute—he cannot escape!"

Then raising his voice, he bawled aloud to the tollkeeper:

"A highwayman—a highwayman! A thousand pounds reward! Keep the gate shut! Don't open it for the world!"

The tollman was so astonished that it is questionable whether he understood what was said to him.

But this astonishment was quite as bad to Dick as a fixed determination to keep fast the gate, for he was deprived of action altogether.

What was to be done?

There was little or no time to deliberate upon this question.

The officers were fearfully close behind, though they did not come on quite so fast as hitherto, because they were getting their weapons in readiness and preparing for an encounter.

But Dick's mind was soon made up.

Indeed, so quickly did he come to a decision, that one would have thought his resolution had been taken long beforehand.

"Since it must be so," he muttered, "here goes! You can do it, Bess, I know."

With these words, to the intense amazement of everybody, he faced about, and for, perhaps, the space of a moment, the extraordinary phenomenon of a highwayman riding full tilt at advancing officers might have been observed.

"Stand firm!" cried Skellum, at the top of his voice.

He thought, and not unreasonably, that Dick intended to make a bold dash through their ranks.

"Be ready," he cried—"here he comes!"

The officers formed themselves into a compact and most formidable barrier across the road.

But to their still further astonishment—not to say dismay—Dick faced round again and rode towards the gate.

Black Bess knew what was required of her.

Collecting all her energies, she rose in the air and cleared the gate in most beautiful style, her hoofs not so much as grazing the bristling row of spikes with which the topmost bar of the tollgate was garnished.

Of course the reader knows Dick's reason for riding back towards his foes.

It was because he was too close to the gate for a leap to be taken safely.

By adopting the course described he was, as we have seen, completely successful.

To describe the fury and disappointment experienced by the officers would be far beyond our powers.

They were absolutely frantic, but none more so than Mr. Skellum.

This was on account of the mistake he had made.

But for falling into the blunder of preparing to receive Dick's charge, he fancied that the prize might now have been his.

Now the chance seemed further off than ever, for Black Bess was already lost to sight in the darkness, though the clatter of her hoofs and her rider's mocking laugh of triumph still rang in his ears.

"Open the gate now, you fool, and be as quick as you can about it!" cried Skellum.

But the tollman had now recovered from a portion of his bewilderment.

What had greatly contributed to this, was the knowledge that he had been cheated out of his dues.

"Who are you calling a fool?" he asked, angrily, and without moving an inch towards obeying the command he had received.

"Come—come," said Skellum, making an attempt to moderate his wrath, "open the gate quickly, or we shall lose the rascal after all."

"Give me the money first, and then I will," was the dogged answer.

"Open, I say! We are the King's officers! Beware how you obstruct us in our duty!"

"I don't care if you are the King himself," was the, if possible, more dogged than ever reply; "and as for obstructing you in your duty, take my word, you don't pass through this here gate without paying. It's tuppence apiece."

Mr. Skellum swore awfully.

"You had better give him the money," urged the officer next to him, "or we shall never get through to-night. There's just a dozen of us, including yourself, so it will be exactly two shillings."

Skellum ground his teeth and thrust his hand into his pocket, from which he drew forth the requisite amount.

"Here, fellow! Take it, and open the gate quickly, or you may suffer for your obstinacy."

The man did no more than growl by way of reply.

Then in the most leisurely and aggravating manner possible, he held up his lantern and proceeded to count "heads" as he called it.

Skellum was in agony.

"Will you let us through or not?"

"Seven—eight," said the tollman, not heeding him, and going on steadily with the counting business.

"Open the gate, or I'll break your d—d neck for you!" yelled Skellum, almost black in the face.

"Eleven—twelve," said the tollman, lowering his lantern, "and one that went over the top, thirteen. I want just tuppence more."

That was the last drop in Skellum's cup which caused it to overflow.

He was about to descend from his steed and inflict summary chastisement upon the refractory tollman, when doubtless a regular *fracas* would have ensued, but one of his men seized him by the arm while another slipped the extra twopence into the tollman's outstretched palm, who no sooner felt the coins than he hastened to open the gate.

CHAPTER MXCVI.

MR. SKELLUM FINDS HIS TASK MORE DIFFICULT THAN HE IMAGINED IT.

It was only the rattle of the key in the padlock that restored Skellum to something like composure.

Still, it was only by a very great effort that he controlled himself; but he was enabled to do so by the reflection that if he alighted so much time would be lost that the pursuit of Dick would be a hopeless matter.

But for all that, he shook his clenched fists and vowed vengeance upon him ere long.

The tollman took his threats with marvellous composure, however.

The next moment the ponderous gate swung open; and when there was no bar to their progress all things were forgotten in the general desire to get upon the track again as speedy as possible.

The excited fancy of the officers made them think that the delay had been much greater than it was in reality.

Still, the time had been long enough for Black Bess to get out of hearing.

"Never mind," said Skellum—"we shall make up that, no doubt, for the fellow has but the one horse, and the farther he goes the more tired he must get, while as for us, we are continually having fresh ones, so that, you see, we must get the advantage in time."

The men seemed encouraged and satisfied with this prospect, which certainly seemed reasonable enough.

Their cattle at present were, comparatively speaking, fresh, and under the combined stimulus of whip, voice, and spur, got over the ground at an amazing rate.

Dick, however, was not going so rapidly.

Not on account of any flagging upon his mare's part, but because the road was hard and heavy, and he was nursing her powers for a final effort.

After little more than an hour's hard riding, the sound produced by the hoofs of Black Bess striking against the hard roadway reached their ears.

This caused them to redouble their efforts.

More whip, more spur, more cries, and then, as the moon once more broke through the clouds which had obscured her light, they found themselves within sight of the highwayman.

"The reward is as good as in our pockets!" cried Skellum, by way of animating his followers. "You can see his horse is growing more and more exhausted; and bear in mind at the next inn we come to we shall find horses ready and waiting for us. We shall be able to make better speed than ever. Rely upon it, another dozen miles must settle the business!"

The officers inwardly most devoutly hoped that this would prove to be the case, for though, for the most part, they were well used to the saddle, yet this long gallop without any rest told greatly upon them.

Of course Dick heard them not far behind him, but the circumstance failed to cause him the least uneasiness.

He knew perfectly well that he could, without difficulty maintain a safe distance between himself and them, no matter how great their speed.

Owing to his care Black Bess evinced no more tokens of distress than when he made his first halt at Edmonton.

As the officers came on he slightly increased his speed, a thing easily enough accomplished, for all he had to do was to allow the rein to fall a little loose on her neck.

Onward then she stretched, covering the ground with a scarcely perceptible exertion.

Mr. Skellum saw that the distance between them, if not increasing, was certainly no less than before.

"Whip and spur!" he cried aloud, suiting the action to the word as he thus spoke. "Bear in mind that at the very next inn we come to we can change these brutes Don't forget that. We are sure to have him."

Dick Turpin, riding on, came, presently, to the inn of which Skellum had thus spoken.

It was a most peaceful, picturesque dwelling—looking especially so now that the slant rays of the setting moon fell upon it.

Fain would Dick have paused there a moment or two for his mare's sake, in that quiet spot; and as he dashed by his eyes were turned wistfully towards it.

But a halt then, no matter how brief, was utterly impossible, and Black Bess continued on her course.

On this occasion, however, Dick became acquainted with the tactics of his pursuers.

How they had contrived to keep up with him so long had hitherto been a complete mystery to him.

Now it was a mystery no longer.

They changed their horses at short stages.

It must be confessed that this discovery brought a slight shade of anxiety to his brow, but the expression quickly faded, and a glance of triumph and anticipated success succeeded.

"No matter," he exclaimed, in a determined voice, "they can have twenty horses each if they are so inclined, but I will keep my oath. I have sworn to ride to York, and I will do it in defiance of every obstacle."

As he uttered these last words he turned round towards his foes.

They were some distance in the rear, but, nevertheless, the now dim and sickly moonlight enabled him to distinguish them.

He uttered a loud shout.

The cry was an inarticulate one, and yet, for all that, wonderfully expressive of what he wanted to convey.

The sound was one of defiance and determination, mingled with contempt of their efforts.

This done, he not only allowed Bess the rein, but also spoke to her in animated tones, urging her to make use of her best powers.

This alteration was consequent upon the discovery he had just made.

To the intense mortification and disappointment, then of Mr. Skellum and his party, Black Bess all at once doubled her speed, and in a few seconds got not only out of sight but out of hearing too.

But he was worked up to too great a pitch of desperation to think of abandoning the chase.

"It is but a flash in the pan!" he ejaculated, as he saw the countenances of his companions assume a dejected air. "It is like the lighting up of a candle just before it goes out. Keep on steadfastly, and remember that the race is not always to the swift."

Skellum certainly set his men a good example.

But, then, he had every incentive to exertion.

Moreover, by this time a personal feeling had begun to infuse itself into the matter.

Dick Turpin was not looked upon so much as a fugitive from justice and a breaker of the laws as he was considered to be a personal enemy, depriving them of that to which they believed themselves justly entitled.

This feeling was shared in by all the men, but particularly by Skellum, who was flushed with the success he had already met with, which made him feel that his reputation would not allow him to let Dick Turpin get off.

Consequently, although his horse was by no means the best, yet, by dint of great exertion, he contrived to keep well in advance of the rest, who could not for shame's sake lag far behind.

But Mr. Skellum was wofully deceived when he thought that this increase in Black Bess's speed was only a sudden spurt which would be over in the course of a few minutes.

The gallant animal, for the first time almost that night, could be said to be putting forth her wonderful powers of speed and endurance.

"On, my lass!" her rider would cry, with gladsome exultation. "On—on! Put forth your best speed, old girl; and when we reach the hundredth mile you shall have an hour or two's good rest; then, I know full well, you will be as fresh as ever, and well able to perform the rest of your long journey. On—on, my bonny Black Bess; there shall come a good rest after this!"

But judging by the rate at which she now flew onwards, one would have judged that there was little need to urge her.

The ground seemed to slip beneath her feet.

On and on—miles and miles of the level well-kept high-road are overpassed.

The moon has now quite sunk from sight behind the long, low-lying cloud on the western horizon.

There is no light upon the face of nature save that feeble illumination which proceeds from the thousand sparkling stars in the blue sky above.

About the hour Dick knows little, though the setting of the moon warns him that morning is coming on.

Then suddenly upon accomplishing the ascent of a long hill he finds before him a quiet-looking town of considerable extent.

There are but a few twinkling lights to be seen here and there, yet, in spite of the obscurity, the highwayman can make out the outlines of the buildings, while here and there a spire pointing upwards to the sky forms a conspicuous object.

"That should be Huntingdon," said Dick, as Bess galloped down the hill. "Yes—yes—it is—it is, for here is the sluggish river Ouse."

Before he had finished speaking the ancient town was entered, and Black Bess's hoofs raised a clattering uproar as she crossed the bridge with unabated speed.

Another moment and the town was left behind.

The open country was before him.

But Dick's breast was filled with exultation, and he manifested his joy by a thousand extravagant demonstrations.

More than sixty miles had now been accomplished since he had first set out.

Sixty miles! and he felt convinced that his journey had not occupied four hours.

But by degrees a great change came over Bess.

Her glossy skin had first of all got rough and staring with the sweat that dropped down from her sides in spots and fell upon the ground like drops of rain.

Her mouth was open and filled with white foam, which every now and then detached itself and flew in snowy masses upon her breast, her shoulders, and upon her rider.

Her nostrils, too, were widely expanded, and Dick could feel how much her respiration was accelerated.

None of these symptoms were, however, considered by her rider to be at all dangerous or calculated to excite apprehension.

"Forward—forward!" was still Dick's cry. "An effort for a little longer, and then you shall have rest. In spite of all their boasted arrangements the police officers must by this time be miles and miles behind. You shall rest even if I have to wait till they come up to us again. On, Bess, my lass, on—on!"

Although her speed was as great as ever it had been during the whole of the ride, yet upon hearing her master's voice addressing her in these tones, there was a palpable effort on her part to go faster and faster still.

Dick, in a kind of triumphant ecstasy, flung the reins upon her neck, and submitted himself wholly to her control.

Many and many were the wondering eyes turned upon him as he thus flew past travellers on the road, coming no sooner in sight than he had vanished again.

All were struck with wonder at the transient glimpse of a man having every appearance of wildness about him, waving his arms in the air, and every now and then giving utterance to a loud cry, and a horse covered with white foam, and so reeking with perspiration as to leave a long train of vapour, like a mimic fog, gleaming behind it in the damp atmosphere.

Such an extraordinary apparition as this might well excite comment.

Unheeding everything, however, but the design which he had immediately in view, Dick Turpin kept on.

Another hour elapsed, and over twenty miles were added.

Still the road stretched out before him, and still he galloped on, though every mile now perceptibly increased his mare's distress.

The point which he had determined on was, however, such a little distance on that he could not bring himself to think of allowing her to release her efforts.

Still Black Bess grew more and more exhausted.

For the first time her rider felt her flag.

As he did so his heart smote him.

She flagged again.

"Enough," he ejaculated—"I will try your powers no further, my old lass. We will make a halt at the next inn we come to."

At a slightly diminished speed a distance of about half a dozen miles was accomplished, and then Dick saw before him what he sought.

"Bravo, Bess!" he cried—"bravo, old girl! You have behaved yourself nobly—most gallantly; and now, no matter at what risk, you shall stop until your exhausted energies are restored. That is it, Bess! Quietly, now—quietly! That's it!

CHAPTER MXCVII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS REACH THE STABLE IN WHICH DICK TURPIN AND BLACK BESS ARE RESTING.

"HILLOA!" cried Dick, in a loud voice, as he hammered furiously with the butt-end of a pistol against the gate communicating with the stable-yard of the inn—"hilloa! Ostler—ostler, where are you? Hilloa, I say!"

More knocking succeeded, and finally a gruff, harsh voice coming from some distance, said:

"Wait a bit, then—wait a bit, can't you? Have a moment's patience, do!"

"All right!" said Dick. "But the quicker you are the more it will be in your pocket."

"Eh?"

"I shall deduct a shilling off the amount I intend to give you for every moment you keep me waiting."

This avowal made a wonderful difference to the gruff voice, for it changed its tone and came nearer.

"I'm here—I'm here! Just give me time to undo the gate—that's all!"

Just as the voice finished, the gate opened, and showed who the speaker was.

He proved to be a tall, thin, wiry-looking individual, whose whole appearance bore the unmistakable stamp of a connection with horses and stables.

He carried a stable-lantern in his hand, and he held it up in a convenient position for dispersing the rays, for he was in no slight degree curious to see his nocturnal visitant.

But Dick was not inclined to stand even for a moment merely that the ostler might scrutinise him.

"Stand aside," he cried, imperatively, "and shut the door quickly."

The man obeyed, for there was something in Dick's manner that made him sensible it was best for him to do so.

Dick then, with great swiftness, slipped from the saddle.

Black Bess panted fearfully.

In order to ease her, Dick, with a nimbleness that astonished the ostler, removed the whole of her trappings, and flung them upon the ground.

"My eyes!" ejaculated the latter, "you seem as though you had been coming along a bit!"

"I have. Fetch me a whisp of hay or straw—now, in a moment!"

The man muttered grumblingly below his voice, but what it was Dick did not trouble himself to hear.

He was full of concern about his mare, and examined her with anxious solicitude until the ostler returned.

"Hold the light," cried Turpin, in the same tone of command—"hold the light, and I will do the rest."

So saying, he took a portion of the hay that had been brought, and, rolling it up in his hand, formed a kind of pad, with which he rubbed his mare from head to foot in a manner that called forth the warmest admiration and approval from the ostler.

"You'd get the prize at that job, gaffer," he said, almost as gruffly as ever. "I never saw it better done. Capital—capital!"

Dick went on steadily with his work, apparently unheedful of these appreciative remarks.

At length, when he had nearly made a finish, he asked:

"Can you get into the house?"

"Of course I can! What do you want?"

"A quart bottle of brandy."

"A quart?"

"Yes, I said a quart; and mind it is the very best you have in your house."

"Very well."

"And be quick! Put the lantern on the water-butt—that will do."

The ostler shuffled off, and Dick renewed his scrutiny of his mare.

"Not much the worse," muttered Dick, after a close investigation—"not much the worse; and after what I am about to do there will be very little the matter."

The ostler did not return, and, short as the time was that he had been absent, Dick was full of impatience.

Taking the lantern, he searched about for a stable-bucket, and, having found one, proceeded to fill it at the water-butt.

He had just finished this when the ostler reappeared.

"Here's the brandy."

Dick could not wait to have the cork extracted in the usual way.

He set to work in a much more expeditious way by knocking off the neck by one dexterous blow with the butt-end of a pistol.

To the ostler's still further amazement Dick poured the brandy into the bucket, which was not much more than half full of water.

"My eyes!" he ejaculated, in wonder. "Will your mare drink that?"

"I don't intend to let her try."

"Maybe yourself, then?"

"No," answered Dick, as he allowed the last drops of the spirit to trickle out of the bottle; "I don't in a general way take the refreshment out of a bucket. Where's a sponge?"

"A eponge?"

"Yes."

"You shall have one in a moment."

The ostler's curiosity was now strongly excited, and the strong desire to know what he was going to do caused him to make use of the utmost expedition.

Quickly returning with the article required, he stood stock still to see what was going to happen next.

His surprise was, if possible, increased, when he saw Dick Turpin dip the sponge into the bucket of brandy-and-water, and proceed to bathe Black Bess thoroughly from head to foot.

By this means all fear of a chill was effectually precluded, while the strength of the spirit would cause a reactionary glow throughout the whole system.

It might not actually have been the case, but yet Dick fancied that already he could perceive the effects of what he had done—Black Bess seemed so far refreshed as to be able to recommence her journey.

She no longer panted for her labouring breath, her eye was no longer so dilated, her nostrils quivered less and were less expanded, while no foam appeared upon her lips.

During the last few moments, however, the ostler had been regarding the highwayman attentively, and now, upon looking up he found the man's eyes fixed intently upon him.

He understood the glance, and said quietly, though at the same time he touched a pistol in a significant, not to say threatening manner:

"You know me!"

It was in vain for the man to deny, and perhaps it was with the view of converting necessity into a virtue that he said:

"I do know you, captain, and I know your mare, too, and I am heartily pleased to see you both. You need not show your pistols—Ned Hartill is not the man you have got to be afraid of."

"I am glad to hear it," said Dick, extending his hand. "Depend upon it I shall not leave your services unrewarded."

"I know all about that," answered the man, who took the highwayman's proffered hand with what was manifestly pleased alacrity.

"Now show me the way to the stables."

"All right. This way—this way."

Leading Black Bess by the forelock, Dick Turpin followed his guide, and was not a little pleased to find the stable was a warm and comfortable one.

He would not speak or answer any questions until he had carefully mixed a meal of corn and placed it in the manger.

By the time he had done it, however, he felt himself utterly exhausted, and flung himself down at full length upon the straw, giving utterance as he did so to a long-drawn sigh of relief.

"You are right," he cried, in a voice which he strove to render sprightly and careless in tone. "We have ridden a long way."

"How far, captain?"

"From London."

"London?" ejaculated the ostler, in a way that showed he was greatly taken by surprise.

"Yes," responded Dick. "How far do you reckon it from here? About a hundred miles, do you not?"

"You are as good as a conjuror, for I believe I may say as it is as near to ninety-nine miles and three-quarters as makes no matter."

The highwayman's countenance lighted up with a smile of triumph.

"I knew it—I knew it!" he cried, exultingly.

"Knew what, captain?"

He did not think fit to answer this interrogation, however, but replied by asking another question.

"How long do you think I have been coming, Ned?"

"What, from London?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I don't know. You have come sharpish this last bit—perhaps a couple of days."

"A couple of days?" iterated Turpin, with a laugh of scornful derision. "A couple of days? What can the man be thinking of?"

"Less than that then, captain?"

"Less than that!" he echoed, contemptuously. "I don't know precisely what the hour may be now, but at nine o'clock last night I was in Drury Lane."

"Where's that?"

"Why, in the heart of London. What's the time now?"

"Look here," said the ostler, with a solemn air and extraordinary emphasis, "do you mean for to go for to tell me that you was in London last night?"

"I certainly was."

"Well, captain, if anybody else had told me that I should have up in a minute and said that's a lie."

"Never mind," said the highwayman, impatiently "What is the time?"

"I'll tell you in a brace of snaps. I ain't got a gold and jewelled repeater, captain, but I've got a machine that will tell the time as well as the most of them."

After much tugging and struggling the ostler succeeded in producing from his fob something which he had very rightly designated a "machine."

It was one of the largest watches Dick had ever seen, and, of course, he had had in his time no ordinary experience.

"Bless me!" he ejaculated. "Why, you must have pocketed the eight-day clock by mistake!"

"Nothing of the sort, captain. This is one of the good old-fashioned sort of watches. This belonged to my grandfather, this did. It ain't like none of your new-fangled concerns, no bigger, perhaps, than your thumb-nail, but a regular out-and-outer—one that's got some works inside."

"So I should think," said Dick—"there's room enough. And if ever they build a church hereabouts I should re-

commend you to make the churchwardens a present of it. It would save putting the parish to the expense of a new clock for the steeple."

"Never mind, captain—poke your fun as much as you like."

"Tell me the time. Oh, I see, it's half-past four. I scarcely thought it so late," he added, with a slight shade upon his face.

"Now don't go for to make a mistake, captain. You don't know this here watch of mine like I do. It's got its peculiarities. Now it's just three o'clock, though an ordinary observer like yourself would think it was half-past four."

"That's more like the time," said Turpin, brightening up. "I was certain I had not been more than six hours performing the journey."

"Six hours! Why, captain, you don't mean to say you've rode that poor creature a hundred miles in six hours."

"I will take an oath of it at any minute."

"Well—well, no one would guess it to look at her now. Brandy-and-water is an excellent thing, captain—a wonderful thing."

"It is; and that reminds me that a little would be very acceptable to me. Fetch enough for the pair of us."

"Shall you stop long?"

"An hour or two."

"Then perhaps you would like something to eat?"

"Certainly I should. Run and bring me whatever you can lay hold of the quickest."

"All right."

He vanished.

As soon as the highwayman was alone, he murmured:

"Six hours—only six hours! Who will believe that the distance has been performed in so short a time? Why, let me see, the officers themselves, if they only keep up the chase, will be compelled to testify to it. We must not stop much more than an hour, old girl," he added, addressing his steed; "if we do, not only will your legs get stiff, but we shall not perform the journey to time. I can see now that we shall do it in twelve hours. Ha, ha! At nine o'clock last night there will be abundant testimony that I was in Drury Lane. I will take good care there is proof enough I am in York at nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

The prospect of accomplishing this feat, which he looked upon already as almost achieved, presented itself more and more temptingly to his imagination.

At this moment the ostler returned.

He brought with him an abundant supply of provisions, as well as a bottle of brandy.

"There," he exclaimed, complacently, "we shall not do so very badly after all!"

As may be supposed, Dick Turpin by this time felt pretty keenly the pangs of hunger, which the sight of the food before him served to increase.

He began to eat ravenously, and while he was so engaged the ostler entered into conversation.

"You don't understand my watch," he began, "but it generally gains about thirty minutes every hour, and as it is about three hours since I wound it up, why, you see, of course it must be near enough an hour and a half too fast."

The ostler spoke with as much importance as though he had succeeded in establishing beyond all possibility of cavil some mathematical difficulty.

Dick nodded.

"And, oh!" he exclaimed, with great suddenness, and in very different tones, "there is something else I meant to tell you, but I have been in such a fluster like ever since you came that it quite drove it out of my head."

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing much. Are you pursued?"

"I think so."

"And where are the grabs?"

"A good many miles behind."

"Well, that may be; but just let me advise you to be careful."

"Careful? Why?"

"Get off this high-road as soon as you can."

"What for?"

"Because in the stable next to this we've got twelve horses all ready for instant use, in case the officers should ride up and ask for them."

"Can it be possible?"

"I will show you the animals if you like."

"No—no. I believe you—of course I believe you."

Dick pressed his hand to his forehead with a slightly-troubled air.

"And how far have they carried out this plan?" he asked, after a pause. "Have they arranged changing-places as far as York?"

"I think so," was the cautious answer; "but, mind you, I don't say for certain. But, however, don't you go for to run the risk; get off across the country as soon as you can."

Dick shook his head with a very resolute air.

"You won't do it?"

"I will not."

"But why?"

"Because," said Dick, speaking with peculiar earnestness, "I have made a vow to ride to York—ay, and to be there when the clock in the old minster proclaims the hour of nine. Don't look so amazed, man—I have sworn to do it!"

"You must be mad!"

"Nothing of the sort. And as surely as the sun will rise to-morrow morning I shall be there."

"And you are going to ride poor Black Bess?"

"Yes. But why do you say 'poor?'"

"Because it will be the last journey she will make."

"Pho, pho!"

"It will finish her," said the ostler. "You can believe me or not, just as you think proper; but I have not lived all these years without knowing a thing or two about horseflesh."

"She will do it with ease."

"So you think."

"Look at her now."

"Ay, ay—I see her plain enough, but I know that mare's nature as well as if I saw the end. She will go and go at her full speed until the end of her power is reached. Mind, there will be no flagging—she will go till she drops under you as though struck by lightning."

The earnest way in which the ostler spoke made an evident impression upon Turpin.

He gazed affectionately upon his mare.

"If I lose her," he muttered, "I lose all I have on earth. If I thought it would end so—— But no, no—better that she should perish thus than end her days at the knacker's yard. No, no—she shall die as she has lived. Besides, I have sworn it."

"And you are still resolved to go?"

"I will keep my oath."

"Then it is the same as signing her death-warrant."

"Why, look at her," cried the highwayman, who, having finished his repast, now rose and patted her upon the neck. "What sign of failure can you find about her? She is good for double the distance at this present minute."

The ostler shook his head as he firmly pronounced the word:

"Never!"

"Well, we shall see," was the reply. "She will either do it or perish in the effort."

"Then, if that is your determination," said the ostler, and it almost seemed as though the rough fellow's tones were tinged with sadness—"if your mind is made up, I will help you."

"Help me?"

"Yes; I would not do it, though, only I have heard that when Dick Turpin once decided upon a course, nothing had power to turn him from it."

"You heard rightly; and, what is more, he never was half so fixed in any determination as he is in this."

The ostler sighed, and then he repeated the words:

"I will help you."

"How—how?" asked Turpin, eagerly.

By way of reply, Ned went to a particular corner of the stable, and, standing on the corn-bin, felt about upon a narrow shelf that was fixed against the wall at some distance above his head.

He produced a small bottle containing some dark liquid, in quantity, probably about a couple of ounces.

"Take that," he said—"take that, and keep it carefully."

"What am I to do with it?"

"I will tell you. That bottle of stuff was given me by one of the cleverest fellows with horses that ever lived."

"But what is it for?"

"Do not be impatient. He assured me—and I would take his word for a thousand pounds—that this little drop poured down a horse's throat, even at the moment when he appeared to be completely worn out by exhaustion, would have the effect of filling his body with new blood—with new spirit."

"Can it be possible?" ejaculated Dick, taking the bottle eagerly.

"You may rely upon the truth of what I say. But let me entreat you not to make use of it unless you can help it."

"Why not?"

"Because I will not be answerable for the effects which it may leave behind it when its power has worked off."

"Then, rely upon it, I shall only make use of it as the last resort—when there is no other chance left."

"Enough."

Dick consigned the vial to a small pocket in his vest.

"I have kept the bottle by me until now, little thinking what I should do with it."

"You shall have a liberal recompense," said Turpin; "you will find that a highwayman knows how to pay for such services as these."

"Hark," said the ostler—"hark—hark! What is that?"

Dick immediately assumed a listening attitude.

But no particular acuteness of hearing was requisite.

Horses were close at hand.

The clatter of their hoofs upon the hard high-road could be heard with most unpleasant distinctness, for it showed that they were very close at hand.

Indeed, it will seem strange that their approach had not been heard earlier, but Dick did not anticipate their arrival so soon; besides, they had both been so entirely absorbed in discussing the qualities of the liquid in the bottle, that they had been insensible to all else.

Dick Turpin had no doubt that they were his foes who were outside, and he estimated the amount of desperation they would exhibit by the pertinacity with which they had kept upon his trail.

Although aided by horses as they had been, it was no trifling thing to ride so far in so short a period.

He was amazed, too, that they should arrive so soon, even after he had made every allowance.

But his brow darkened, and he sought his pistols with a menacing air.

"What are you going to do, captain?" cried Ned, as he rapidly secured the door of the stable. "What are you going to do?"

"Fight it out!" was the highwayman's laconic and grim reply.

"Nothing of the sort! Put up your barkers, captain—they will not serve you this time. Put them up, I say, and attend to me."

"What is to be done?"

"Help me on with the saddle and bridle, and while you are doing so I will tell you."

Dick did not hesitate to carry this mandate into execution.

With two pairs of such ready hands, Black Bess was very speedily accoutred.

But before Ned the ostler could say a word, a troop of horsemen stopped with a sudden dash at the yard gate.

Immediately followed a tremendous knocking.

Then came a furious peal upon the bell, and, in fact, such an uproar as probably never before had been heard at that old inn.

As Dick had rightly guessed, these horsemen were, indeed, the police officers who had chased him from London.

The indefatigable Mr. Skellum was still at their head, and, in fact, had it not been for his almost superhuman exertions the chase would have been abandoned long ago.

But he continued to keep the men tolerably well up to the mark by his perpetual assurances that the highwayman's steed could not possibly hold out much longer.

And these assertions received some colour from the accounts they received from the travellers on the road.

There was no difficulty in obtaining tidings of Dick—none in the least.

Everybody had seen him—everybody had noticed his wild and haggard look, and commented upon his foaming, panting, and well-nigh exhausted steed.

By dint, then, of availing themselves of the relays provided, and never pausing a moment longer than was absolutely necessary, they contrived to catch up with the object of their pursuit in the manner we have described—that is to say, after he had made a halt of very nearly an hour.

The racket they made had the very natural effect of rousing the landlord, who jumped out of bed half asleep, with a vague consciousness that something very dreadful was the matter.

In a moment he had opened the little latticed casement in his bed-room, and projected his night-capped head.

His alarm grew greater when he caught sight of so many well-armed men around his door.

"What is the matter?" he asked, in a quivering voice.

"Matter?" retorted Skellum. "It is a fine thing, is it not, for his Majesty's officers to be kept here like this? We want the relays of horses."

"Oh, certainly—certainly! The ostler is there, and will attend to you, gentlemen."

"He may be there," said Skellum, "but he is not here, and we cannot attract his attention."

"That's odd. He is about, I know, for I saw him open that gate about half an hour ago and let in a traveller."

"A traveller!" cried Skellum, vaguely seizing upon this item of information. "What sort of a traveller?—did you see him?"

"Yes."

"What did he look like?" was the feverish question.

"Why, a man on horseback."

"A black horse?"

"Yes."

"And did it seem to have travelled far?"

"Yes, and fast too, for it was covered with foam."

"And how long has that traveller been gone?"

"He has not gone at all. His horse must be now in the stable, for I have not heard him depart."

"And I suppose," added Skellum, scarcely able to control the agitation of his voice—"I suppose you would have been sure to hear it?"

"Certain."

This was enough.

Skellum turned to his companions.

He was so excited that his teeth chattered together, while his voice shook so that what he said was with difficulty distinguished.

"Now we have him at last," he said. "Beyond all doubt he is here. Ten to one if his mare is not lying down in the stable dead beat. For all we know he may be keeping back the ostler by main force, or it may be there is complicity in the case. However, that he will make a bold stand for his life is certain. But you must precipitate yourselves upon him so as to put an end to his existence as quickly as you can. Do you hear me?"

"Yes—yes."

The men looked determined enough.

"If you let him slip through your fingers you will have only yourselves to blame. Now then! In the first place, down with that gate!"

The officers dismounted.

One thing to Mr. Skellum's credit is, that he never proposed anything to be done by his men that he did not share in himself.

On the present occasion he was the first to make a rush at the gate.

The others followed him, and the sudden and combined pressure of so many men caused the lock and bolts to fly in all directions.

The feeble glimmer of a light shining through the chinks of a door pointed out the whereabouts of the stables.

In this direction they all rushed without a moment's pause.

They flung themselves against the door; but it was strong, and though it shook from the violence of the attack, yet it offered an effectual impediment to their entrance.

"Hullo," cried a gruff, surly voice at this moment—"hullo there! Murder!—fire!—police! Help—help! Murder!"



[DICK TURPIN ONCE MORE MEETS WITH CAPTAIN HAWK.]

Amazed beyond expression, the officers looked round in order to find out whence this voice proceeded.

Gazing upward, they saw the upper half of a gaunt figure projected through the circular window of the loft over the stable.

It was Ned the ostler.

"Master—master!" he bawled. "Thieves—thieves! Robbers!—murder!"

"Silence, you d—d idiot!" yelled Skellum, frantic with fury. "What is the matter?"

"Well, that's a good 'un, that is."

"Why, I do believe," exclaimed the officer standing next to Skellum, "that he is fool enough to take us all for a band of robbers."

"Yes, and a mighty fine take you would be," grinned Ned.

"He cannot be so great a fool!" cried Skellum. "Hark ye, my spark," he added, in what he intended should be a tone of solemn warning—"hark ye! We are police officers—his Majesty's police officers—in quest of Dick Turpin, the highwayman, who, as we know very well, is in here!"

Ned shook his head.

"We have certain information."

"Then I'll prove you're wrong," answered the ostler, "for I will come down and open the door this minute; but you must give me time to put a few of my togs on."

This last speech somewhat staggered Skellum's confidence; and he would have felt more staggered still but for the fact that when he entered the yard he had seen a light burning in the stable, and which was suddenly extinguished.

The ostler did not put their patience to a very severe trial.

In less than a minute after he had spoken, they heard

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the sound produced by the withdrawal of rusty bolts.

The stable door then swung back upon its creaking hinges, and the moment that it did so the police officers rushed in.

Ned's lantern lighted up the interior of the place tolerably well—certainly well enough for the officers to perceive by one glance that the stable was empty.

"Rascal!" cried Skellum. "You have cheated us somehow!"

"Cheated you? Come, come—hands off, if you please!"

"Where is Dick Turpin?" cried Skellum, wrathfully.

"How on earth should I know?"

"Look here, sir—look here!" cried one of the officers, for they had all dispersed themselves over the stable, in order to search it thoroughly, leaving their leader to deal with Ned.

"What is it—what is it?"

"A door."

"A door?"

"Yes, sir, a door on this side of the stable. I'll have it open in a moment."

Mr. Skellum pressed forward.

The door was opened, and a rush of cool air came into the stable.

"Take care," growled Ned, "how you step outside; there's a hill there as steep as a housetop. Don't say I did not tell you."

What he said proved to be correct.

The officers looked down, and then uttered a shout.

"The he is," cried Skellum, with ungovernable excitement—"there he is—down at the bottom of the declivity!"

CHAPTER MXCVIII.

DICK TURPIN CONTINUES HIS RIDE TO YORK, AND TREATS BLACK BESS TO A BEEFSTEAK.

From this, no doubt the reader will be able to guess tolerably well what took place between Dick Turpin and the ostler. Still, we think it will be found more satisfactory if we give a brief outline of the events just as they occurred.

A very few words had served to free the highwayman from the anxiety he had first of all experienced.

"Take it easy, captain," Ned had said; "I will get you out of this scrape neatly enough, never fear."

"How shall you manage it?"

"There is another door leading out of this stable," was the reply. "Look, there it is."

"Where does it lead?"

"It is scarcely ever opened, because just over the threshold is about the steepest bit of ground you ever met with. No tiled roof was half as steep. But come, as you are ready—come this way and I will show you."

So saying, the ostler led the way towards the door we have already had occasion to make mention of.

He opened it quickly, and then Dick saw at the first glance that the description of the place was by no means an exaggerated one.

The earth from about a foot from the threshold sloped down in a manner that could only be characterised as precipitous.

"I can never ride down there," said Dick, positively.

"Perhaps not, but you can, I daresay, manage to scramble down—I have done it."

"But Black Bess?"

"You leave her to follow you, and you will find her four legs are quite as good as your two, rely upon it."

"It is my only chance," said Turpin. And just as he pronounced the words the officers flung themselves against the door with so much force that he made sure it would be driven from its hinges.

Hastily pressing a large amount of money into the faithful ostler's hand, he commenced his perilous descent without delay.

He called upon his mare to follow him.

Black Bess, of course, obeyed, and the ostler was proved to be right, for, being left to herself, she seemed to experience but little difficulty, save that she slipped now and then, for the ground was rather soft and of a clayey nature

The ostler, having seen that things were so far well, closed and bolted the door with marvellous alacrity; then rushing up into the loft, he appeared at the window in the way we have described.

The descent occupied so much time that Dick had barely reached the level ground below when the officers discovered him. Knowing himself to be out of pistol range, and feeling tolerably certain that his foes would not venture down such a breakneck-looking place, Dick Turpin did not manifest the least hurry in any of his motions.

As leisurely as possible he resumed his position in the saddle, and then waving his hat, rode off across the low-lying meadows in the direction of the high-road.

The officers were frantic with rage.

At first they could scarcely bring themselves to believe that they had been so extremely unfortunate as to miss their prey by such a hair's breadth.

While under the influence of this vexation they watched Dick until the obscurity had entirely concealed him from their gaze.

They then turned back to the stable, their breasts glowing with rage against the ostler.

"Seize the villain!" roared Skellum. "I will make him answerable for all this! It won't need a conjurer to arrive at his share in this business. Seize him, I say, and handcuff him securely!"

It was all very well to give this order, but a slight difficulty presented itself in attempting to carry it out.

The ostler, probably sniffing out his danger, had had the prudence to decamp, and though a hasty but rigid search was made, it failed to discover him.

He had vanished entirely.

"Never mind him," said one of the officers. "If there are fresh horses here let us have them and be off as quickly as we can. It will not do for us to be worsted after coming this far."

"Certainly not," said Skellum. "Come on. We shall overtake him in a few miles. You heard what the landlord said about the condition his horse was in?"

"Yes—yes," was the universal response, though from the manner it was given the inference might have been drawn that the circumstance had only just been brought back to their memories.

"I believe he will keep his word," said one.

"How do you mean?"

"Why, ride to York."

"Pho, pho! The thing is impossible; no one ever did it or ever will."

Long before this argument was exhausted the officers were all mounted and once more in full pursuit.

For the most part the men were heartily sick of the chase, and would gladly have availed themselves of any pretext for abandoning it.

Skellum, however, was now more determined than ever; and what is more, he felt more assured than he had yet done that he should accomplish his purpose.

Still the extraordinary distance Black Bess had already performed filled him with amazement. But for the irrefragable evidence before him, he would have steadily refused to believe it.

The fresh horses galloped very freely and swiftly along the high-road, and at the pace they were going they felt sure they should before very long hear some intelligence of the highwayman.

They were quite right.

The driver of a heavy flour waggon was the first person they encountered, and from him they learned that a mounted man answering to Dick's description had passed him at a furious gallop, some time before.

This was enough, and off they went again at a speed not far short of twenty miles an hour, which at that time was considered to be very wonderful travelling indeed.

But let us return to Dick.

After mounting at the foot of the declivity, he made his way with all possible speed towards the high-road.

No words can express the gratification caused him by the fact that brave Black Bess bounded along with as much freedom and elasticity of movement as at first.

"No fear of failure on your part!" he cried. "And as for myself, I will do my best. You fail, Bess? He knew little of your mettle, or he would never have made that remark. We shall do it. There is something within me which seems to whisper: 'We shall do it.'"

The first obstacle encountered after this was an unopened toll-bar.

At this hour the keeper of it was no doubt asleep, for pikemen must slumber sometimes.

The highwayman was disinclined to lose time in attempting to arouse him, and, also with a view of testing his mare's present powers, he urged her to the leap.

Almost as much to his surprise as delight, she cleared it with ease. He had scarcely believed that after doing so much she would have accomplished it thus easily.

Once more, then, the high-road stretched out straight and clear before him.

There was no token from behind that his pursuers were anywhere near; but, for all that, Dick did not suffer his mare to abate her speed one jot.

He had another object in view besides simply distancing his pursuers.

He was resolved to make every exertion to reach York within the time he had specified.

Now that half the distance was accomplished, every milestone that he passed made him feel how he was nearing his destination.

Besides, Black Bess was going freely, and he wanted her to do so while she had the power.

The better speed she made for the next two or three hours the longer would be the rest they would be enabled to take.

In brief, let us say that forty more miles were accomplished without one symptom of flagging and fatigue.

But after that every yard seemed to tell fearfully upon the noble creature.

Yet, although her bodily powers failed her a little, her mettle was undaunted—her spirit unsubdued; and it was, Dick fancied, with a feeling of absolute annoyance that she galloped on, striving to rise superior to her muscular strength.

But it could not be.

How keen was the pang which shot through Dick's heart every time her fast-increasing distress manifested itself!

How strange it seemed, too, for up to this moment he fancied she could do anything.

"Gently, Bess," he cried—"gently! You shall have another rest. And then what shall I do? Shall I call into requisition this bottle that the ostler gave me? Shall I drug her with that, and so endue her for a time with a factitious vigour? Alas—alas! I know not—I know not!"

His voice grew sad and hushed.

But presently he spoke again.

"I have heard of such things," he said. "I have been often told that there are concoctions of such marvellous power that they will fill the veins of an exhausted charger with fresh strength—false strength, however, for it will leave them a thousand times weaker than before. Perhaps Bess would gallop on until she fell down dead beneath me. No—no, I will not try it—that is," he added, for his mare staggered slightly, "not—yet—not—yet."

Earnestly he looked around him for some place of shelter.

But none appeared.

The darkness was intense, though it was growing towards morning very fast.

Ere long, however, he felt certain they must reach a roadside inn, for they were much more closely studded along the line of highway than they are now.

Accordingly, he spoke in cheerful strains to his steed, and he was pleased to find that, in spite of her fatigue, his voice had not altogether lost its customary influence.

But suddenly a fresh idea occurred to the highwayman, and he pursued it closely.

"Let me think a little," he cried. "There is upon my mind an indistinct recollection of having heard somewhere that a raw beefsteak, or else the warm entrails of a game cock wrapped round the bit was a stimulant of no ordinary character to an exhausted horse. I will try that. There cannot come much harm of it, and something must be done, for now that I have come thus far I am determined not to fail."

Just as he had reached this point in his reflections, he perceived in the distance the object he had been longing so to behold.

Apparently it was a halting-place of no ordinary character, for the house was large, and flanked by outbuildings of considerable extent.

To reach the inn took Dick but a few moments, and no sooner had Black Bess come to a halt than a door communicating with the stable was opened, and an ostler emerged.

"Were you expecting me," asked Dick, "that you appeared so quickly?"

"Well, no," returned the man, deliberately, and not until he had indulged himself in a long stare at the newcomers—"well, no; but I rather guess you have been pushing that horse of yourn a bit harder than you ought."

"Never mind that," cried Dick. "I want a bucket of water, a quart of brandy, a wisp of straw, and about a pound of raw beefsteak."

"Anything else?" asked the man, as soon as he had recovered his breath, which seemed to have been quite taken away by Dick's orders. "Because," he added, "if there is, I can't attend to you."

"My good fellow," said Dick, "do you see this?"

As he spoke, he held up a guinea between his finger and thumb.

"Yes, I see it."

"Well, it will be yours in about a couple of minutes, and perhaps another guinea added to it, if you do what I want you with all speed."

The man stared hard for a moment, then vanished through the doorway from which he had emerged.

Dick at once alighted, and relieved his mare by loosening her trappings.

By the time he had finished, the ostler returned.

The first thing Dick took was the wisp of straw, and with this he rubbed his mare down, and afterwards bathed her with the brandy-and-water as before.

The ostler was amazed.

"Well, you are a rum 'un, you are. I should like to know who you be."

Dick did not stop to reply, but went on steadily with his work.

"I don't wish to hurry you," added the ostler, "but perhaps you won't take it amiss if I tell you that I expect the mail-coach from York to arrive every minute."

"Thanks," said Dick; "that is important to me. I will be off before it comes."

"Then, let me tell you, you will have to be quick."

"How far is it from here to York?"

"A matter of fifty miles, or thereabouts."

Dick drew a long breath, as he murmured:

"A little more than two hours will serve for that."

Then, raising his voice, he inquired:

"What time is it?"

"Close on six."

"We shall do it," he cried—"I am certain we shall do it!"

"Do what?"

"Get to York by nine o'clock this morning."

"What! on that horse?"

"Yes."

"Never."

"Well, you will see."

"I tell you it will never be done. She is dead beat already."

"Don't make too sure of that. Where's the beefsteak?"

"Here."

Dick cut off a portion, and then, removing his mare's bridle, rolled the rest several times round the bit.

"There," he exclaimed, "that will be as much good to her as a feed of corn and a two hours' rest—mark my words if it is not."

The attention bestowed upon Bess had made a very great difference in her appearance—so great, that one would scarcely have taken her for the same animal.

A small quantity of brandy-and-water was in the bucket, and this, to the surprise of Dick himself, she drank greedily.

His next proceeding was to thrust the meat-encircled bit into her mouth.

She champed at it several times, and then became reconciled to the feel of this fresh substance.

"Blow me, if that isn't a rum start!" ejaculated the ostler. "I was born in a stable and reared in a hay-loft, but I never heard of such a thing as that before."

"Behold the effects of it!" exclaimed Dick, delightedly. "I can see already her eye brighten, her neck arch proudly, and her fore foot paw the ground! How far do you think she has come?"

The ostler shook his head and professed himself unable to hazard a guess.

"From London! Last night at nine o'clock—or it may have been a little later—I rode out of Drury Lane. This morning by nine o'clock I shall be at the Bowling Green at York."

While Dick thus spoke, the ostler's eyes kept getting larger and larger.

He absolutely staggered back in his amazement.

It is doubtful, too, how far he would have gone had not the wall behind him brought him to a sudden stop.

"Do you mean to say that—that—you were in London at nine o'clock last night?"

"I could produce abundant evidence of it."

"Then how have you got here in the time?"

Dick's heart gave a bound of pride as he pointed to his mare.

"One horse has never brought you," exclaimed the ostler.

"It has."

"Then you must be Old Nick himself!"

"Nothing of the sort."

"Who then?"

Before Dick could reply the sound of horses' feet became audible.

"The York mail, by jingo!" ejaculated the ostler.

"No—no!" cried Turpin, hastily. "The sound comes from London."

"So it does; and I can't hear wheels, neither."

"There are no wheels," replied Dick. "Here, take these."

He gave the ostler a couple of guineas as he spoke.

"Thank ye, sir," he cried, with more deference than he had displayed hitherto. "Although you promised me the rhino, blow me if I thought you in earnest!"

Turpin mounted his mare.

No sooner had he seated himself in the saddle than Black Bess showed herself impatient to be off.

"Wonderful!" cried the ostler, though his eyes were directed down the road while he spoke—"wonderful! But it will be the death of her."

"What will?"

"Why, to ride her fifty miles further."

"I will not believe it. Look at her now! Would you think that she had already done so much?"

The ostler was forced to admit he would not.

"Hullo!" he cried. "Look here! What gentry are these coming on so fast? One would think they were riding to York as well."

"I believe they are," answered Dick, striving to pierce the obscurity, for he was anxious to see what sort of a figure his foes cut.

He fancied there was some falling off in their numbers, but could not make sure, for it would have been sheer madness to linger longer.

"Good morning!" he cried, raising his voice. "You will see I shall be as good as my word. Remember, at nine o'clock this morning, the old Bowling Green, York."

Mr. Skellum could only reply with impotent curses.

Dick did not even hear them, for, as he spoke, he loosed the reins, and off set Black Bess at a speed that the ostler had never before seen equalled.

He was still gazing at her fast-receding form when he was aroused by hearing Skellum say:

"D—n you for a fool or a rascal! Why couldn't you stop him?"

"Stop him? What for?" cried the ostler, in a surly voice.

"Don't you know who he is?"

"No. Do you?"

"Of course I do!"

"Who is it, then?"

"Why, Dick Turpin!"

"The highwayman?"

"Yes, fool!"

"And that was Black Bess?"

The ostler was so lost in admiration and astonishment that he paid no attention to the police officer's insulting manner.

"Of course it was Black Bess! He has brought us all the way from London."

The ostler was amazed, but there was no longer room to doubt the truth of what the highwayman had told him.

While this brief conversation—if so it could be called—was going forward, the officers had dismounted, and were busily at work removing the trappings.

"Now, dolt," cried Skellum, as wrathfully as ever, "find us the horses I ordered to be provided. We must be off at once, or we shall lose him after all."

"Civility don't cost much, Mr. Officer," growled the ostler.

"It is too expensive to bestow upon you."

"Oh, is it?"

"Yes. So get us the horses."

"Get 'em yourself; d—d if I do! 'Tain't my business—I am here to look after the coach."

So saying, he thrust his hands very deeply into his breeches' pockets in a manner expressive of the utmost determination, and trudged off.

Skellum so far forgot himself as to stand still cursing fearfully.

But his men, having come so far, felt that they could not possibly afford to lose all their labour, and so searched about and soon found the animals they wanted.

They accoutred them with all speed and led them out.

As soon as he caught sight of the cattle in readiness, Mr. Skellum smothered his resentment, and was the first to mount.

As he rode away, however, he again caught sight of the ostler.

"You're a fool," he yelled, "and I'll make you know it! The reward for Dick Turpin is one thousand pounds, dead or alive, and you have allowed that comfortable sum to slip through your fingers."

"I did not want to interfere with your chance of earning it, old boy," was the imperturbable reply. "I wish you luck."

In another second inn and ostler were left behind, and the troop of police officers were once more in full pursuit of the highwayman.

That they had an immense advantage over him is certain.

The horses they now bestrode were perfectly fresh, and but for the fact that the officers were very tired, and consequently, sat heavily in the saddle, they would have made wonderful speed.

As it was, they galloped not much under the rate of eighteen or twenty miles an hour.

The speed at which Black Bess left the inn was at first much greater than this, and Dick began to draw the most favourable conclusions from this circumstance.

But, to his grief, he was not long in making the discovery that Black Bess's powers of speed were not permanent, but fleeting.

Ere many miles had been overpassed at this furious rate he was sensible of symptoms of giving way.

Black Bess strove hard to disguise these tokens of flagging energy, but in vain.

An ordinary observer, or even an ordinary rider, would have failed to perceive these indications as soon as Dick did.

To all appearances her speed was unabated, and her capability of keeping up undiminished.

The highwayman, however, was sensible of a continual effort or kind of strain to do that which she had always before performed with perfect ease.

"Will she hold out," he asked himself, in anxious tones, "or will she fail when within a brief distance of the goal? My mind almost misgives me. Courage—courage, old lass—take it easy! There is time enough yet."

Cheered by her master's words, Black Bess again for a brief space appeared somewhat like herself.

But the police officers pressed fearfully upon him.

They were gaining ground too.

Dick knew it well, for the sound of their horses' hoofs kept getting more and more distinct; and now he found, by turning his head, that he could actually see them in the rear.

The officers became terribly excited upon making the discovery that they were undoubtedly and palpably gaining upon the object of their pursuit.

Mr. Skellum was loud in his congratulations.

"Didn't I tell you so?" he cried, with an exultant chuckle. "I knew very well what the end would be."

Closer and closer they came.

Less and less grew the distance intervening between themselves and the highwayman.

Dick grew anxious.

A damp, disagreeable moisture broke out all over him.

The triumphant shouts of his pursuers rang in his ears like the clangour of trumpets.

Then all at once he became sensible of another sound.

Horses were coming towards him.

Were they his foes also?

He asked himself the question with no little apprehension; for if it should be so, his position would be critical in the extreme.

That they were police officers was only likely, because it was certain that some one had been sent on in advance to provide the relays of horses which at each place had been found in readiness.

But this fear soon abated.

It was not long before the highwayman's keen sense of hearing detected that mingled with the trampling of horses' hoofs was the rumbling and grinding of carriage wheels.

The discovery caused him to draw a long breath of relief.

It was now very close indeed upon daybreak.

Indeed, it was a question whether day had not yet dawned; but still, if it had, no signs of it were perceptible.

A dense fog, which showed signs of increase rather than abatement, shrouded all things, and it was through this semi-transparent medium that Dick first caught sight of the glimmer of lights.

Then a conviction as to what it was that was approaching flashed upon him.

"It is the stage-coach," he cried—"the mail-coach from York, that the ostler told me he was waiting for. How groundless was my alarm!"

At this moment there came a puff of wind from the south-west, and the mist rolled away before it as if by magic.

A soft though dim gray light overspread the scene, and all objects were revealed with comparative brilliancy.

Before the highwayman was the glorious old lumbering stage-coach, with its team of four splendid horses snorting loudly and champing their bits, for the sagacious animals well knew that they were close to the changing house.

There was the florid-faced jolly-looking driver in front invested with all the glories of a closely-muffled great coat and gold-betrimmed felt hat.

Piled upon the roof was what seemed to be an unentangleable mass of human beings, trunks, boxes, and divers kinds of luggage.

Leaning out from behind could be seen the guard, horn in hand, preparing to give the shrill-sounding signal of their approach.

The cumbrous, heavily-laden vehicle was coming on in dashing style, and to avoid all possibility of collision with it, Dick drew to the right-hand side of the road.

But the driver, and the outside passengers as well, had caught sight of the troop of police officers in the distance, and, of course, one glance was sufficient to make them acquainted with the actual state of affairs.

Moreover, there could be no mistaking Dick Turpin for being any other than a highwayman hotly chased by officers.

Skelium saw the coach, and at the first glance saw with that readiness of thought with which he deserves to be credited, how the circumstance could not only be turned to his advantage, but also put a stop to this vexatiously long chase, of which it need scarcely be said he had for some time been heartily tired.

"Stop him!" he bawled, in such stentorian tones as would almost have justified the belief that his lungs were made of leather. "Stop him—stop him! A highwayman! Dick Turpin! A thousand pounds reward! Draw broadside across the road! That's it—that's it! Bravo—capital!"

These words which we have just set down reached with tolerable distinctness the ears of the driver of the York mail—at any rate, he understood what was wanted of him, for his actions afforded practical proof of that.

That he was a first-class coachman, the entire command he had over his horses sufficiently proved.

With what seemed like magical celerity, the vehicle was drawn broadside across the road.

So well was this done, that the hind wheels of the coach were on the brink of the ditch at one side, while the noses of the two leading horses just touched the opposite hedgerow.

The execution of this manœuvre, however, produced a kind of panic within the coach.

At first shrill screams were heard.

Then the windows were let down and eager heads thrust forth.

Those on the one side had a full view of all that was taking place, and waited the result with no little apprehension, while the others were loud in their demands to know the cause of this sudden and unprecedented stoppage.

No one could be more surprised, however, than Dick Turpin was.

Well he might be at beholding so truly formidable a barrier so suddenly placed in his path.

What was to be done?

Naturally enough, in his indecision he pulled the rein and reduced his mare's speed.

A loud, ringing, mocking laugh of triumph at this moment reached his ears.

It came from the officers behind him.

He ground his teeth with intense vexation.

He glanced quickly to the right and left, but the hedgerows were so high and so dense, and there was so little room for a preparatory gallop, as to make him feel at once that it was hopeless to attempt flight in that direction.

"His goose is cooked," was the coach-driver's complacent remark—"we have him as safe as a rat in a trap."

"Divil a doubt of that, begorra!" cried the guard behind, and he executed so hideous a fantasia of triumph upon his horn that the passengers were fain to clap their hands over their ears.

The shouts and laughter of the officers behind redoubled, while they pushed on at the utmost speed their horses were capable of making.

At the same time they did not neglect to prepare their weapons for immediate service.

Then followed on the part of everybody a breathless silence, so much anxiety was there felt as to the occurrences of the next few moments and their results.

We must describe the exact position of affairs at this juncture.

Dick Turpin, then, was in the high-road with an expression of irresolution upon his face.

Not more than fifty yards in advance of him was the insurmountable-looking barrier composed of the mail-coach and horses.

Something like half fifty yards behind him were the officers, and every fleeting second brought them wonderfully nearer, for they were coming on at the top of their speed, while Black Bess was going little faster than at a walk.

Events approached a crisis.

What was to be done?

Dick felt that he had not much time left for making up his mind.

CHAPTER MXCIX.

DICK TURPIN FINDS A MEANS OF GETTING OUT OF HIS DIFFICULTY, AND ASTONISHES THE DRIVER OF THE YORK MAIL-COACH.

A DARK and ominous frown settled quickly upon the countenance of the highwayman.

He clenched his teeth hard, while his hands wandered towards the holters.

"Cursed chance!" he cried. "What shall I do? Shall I face round and fight it out? Shall I die thus with my purpose unachieved? No—no, never—never!"

And yet while he pronounced this determination he allowed Black Bess to come to a standstill.

Oddly enough, this action caused the police officers to pause.

But they had very undefined ideas as to the powers of resistance possessed by the highwayman.

This stoppage they certainly looked upon as an act of

hostility, and even Mr. Skellum thought it necessary and prudent to advance with caution.

"Cowardly knaves," muttered Turpin, with unutterable scorn, as soon as he comprehended the tactics of his adversaries, "why did they not put on a bold front and ride me down? Bess, old lass," he cried, patting her dripping neck, "shall we, who have in our time done so much to excite the wonder of others—we, who have had so many hairbreadth escapes together, and fought against such overwhelming odds—shall we, I say, shall we at last yield to such base and craven carrion as are now behind us? No—no, it shall never be! We will at least make one bold attempt at freedom."

But it was not only necessary to decide this much, but also resolve what the nature of the attempt should be.

The police officers now were coming on like men nerving themselves for some desperate encounter which they would, if possible, willingly avoid.

Still their weapons were ready in their hands, and if Dick's hesitation lasted much longer they would be within range.

It was questionable, indeed, whether they were not so already.

"There was a time when you would have thought nothing of that barrier yonder, Bess—that barrier upon which our foes appear to place so much reliance. But now, in your present exhausted state, I fear—yes, I fear to put you to it. I could never have believed such a thing as this would come to pass. I—I will try it; we can but fail, and if we do we cannot be much worse off. Yes, Bess, I will try you once more. You have now the chance of once more preserving your master's life."

We have been at some pains to make the reader perfectly acquainted with the nature of the highwayman's situation, and in consequence, some space has been occupied in so doing—this might cause an erroneous impression in the reader's mind with regard to the actual duration of time.

It must, however, be borne in mind, that all occurred very rapidly—even Dick's indecision, which we have dwelt upon at some length, could not be called other than momentary.

To those who were observing him, he seemed merely to make a pause and nothing more.

His next action, however, amazed them far more than anything which had preceded.

With extraordinary suddenness he faced round and rode a little way towards his foes, who were near enough to be able to tell by the look of his face that he had resolved upon doing something desperate.

Mr. Skellum called up all his coolness and presence of mind.

He thought he knew what Dick intended to do.

"Stand firm," he cried to his men—"stand firm, whatever you do! He thinks of dashing through us; but if you are firm he will fail in his attempt and we shall have him!"

The men immediately prepared themselves for the obeyal of this mandate.

But to their extreme rage and disappointment, Dick once more wheeled round and then galloped Black Bess towards the stage-coach.

He touched her with his spur, and she gave a bound forward as though completely maddened.

"Bravo—bravo, old lass!" he cried; and his voice rang out clear and sharp in the morning air. "Bravo—try your best—try your best! Once more your master's life depends alone upon your powers!"

Black Bess heard her master's voice, and if she did not comprehend the actual words she well enough understood the tone.

It was the same as he had made use of many a time before when he required to avail himself of her extraordinary powers.

She saw the obstacle before her, and seemed to gather up all her energies for the terrific leap.

The driver of the stage-coach saw him coming on and uttered loud shouts.

"Stop—stop! Curse the fellow—what is he after? What does he mean to do?—is he going to ride into my leaders? Woa, woa, there—stop, I say—are you mad?"

Dick Turpin paid not the least attention to these words.

Keeping to one side of the way, he rode Black Bess directly towards the two "leaders," as the driver called them, and which he had so fondly believed would prove an impassable barrier.

The two horses were standing close together, and though the feat of leaping over them was one which very few would have thought or cared about attempting, yet Dick Turpin felt assured that it was one which his mare would have accomplished easily had she been in her ordinary condition.

But after the distance she had travelled, Dick felt no slight misgivings as he rode her towards it.

The passengers on the coach looked much alarmed.

The horses, too, that were harnessed to the unwieldy vehicle, grew restive, so that the driver's care was required in attending to them.

The officers, recovering from their first panic, quickly commenced pursuit, for they did not believe it possible for any horse to clear such an obstacle.

But as she drew nearer, Black Bess's speed wonderfully increased.

"Up—up!" shouted her rider at a certain moment; and just as he pronounced the word she rose up in the air and cleared the pair of horses bravely, having apparently a foot or so to spare.

The coachman dropped his whip in astonishment, and as it happened to fall on the backs of his two horses it increased their restiveness in no slight degree.

Then the guard was so flustered that he discharged his blunderbuss in the air, thereby adding tenfold to the panic of the passengers, as well as startling the already half-frightened and consequently scarcely manageable horses.

What the guard meant to do with the blunderbuss, or why he had taken it from its receptacle, are things known only to himself.

It is possible, however, that he had some vague idea that he would be able to use it against the highwayman.

As it was, it was a mercy no one was hurt.

Dick Turpin, finding himself clear, gave vent to a loud ringing cheer, so great was the exultation at his heart.

He did not pause to look behind him, but resolved to make the most he could of the time thus gained.

He knew a little delay must take place before his foes could get fairly on his track again, and it was wise of him under present circumstances to get as good a start as he could.

But by no means anticipated such a long delay as actually took place, and which at length induced him to look behind him and see whether his pursuers had not at last abandoned the chase.

At the first glance he burst out laughing at what he beheld.

It will take us a moment or two to explain what he beheld.

The officers, then, with Mr. Skellum at their head, reached the coach not much after Dick had taken the leap.

Of course, none of them felt inclined to follow his example, but they were most anxious that the horses should be immediately turned out of their way.

But this, owing to the restiveness of the animals, proved no easy matter.

The act of a horse and rider passing over them in such a fashion they could not at all comprehend, and the "two wheelers," or horses next to the coach, happened to catch sight of the flying horseman, and in their terror naturally recoiled.

Now, had not the driver dropped his whip, he could doubtless have put an end to this retrogressive movement; as it was, he had lost his powers, and the horses continued to back most obstinately.

The passengers began to scream and shout in mingled alarm and expostulation.

The hind wheels of the coach had, by the coachman's clever manœuvre, been placed about a foot from the brink of a very wide and deep ditch.

As the horses kept backing it follows that before anything could be done the hind wheels of the vehicle ran down into the ditch, and with so much force and suddenness as to cause the coach to give such a violent lurch as to make all think its overthrow inevitable.

After much swaying to and fro, the cumbrous machine righted itself.

But their terror caused the fore horses to make quite a different movement.

With alarm increased rather than abated, they turned round very short and started forward.

In vain the coachman tugged at the reins with all his might.

In vain he cried out "Woa!"

The horses were insensible to both bit and voice.

The consequence is evident.

The coach was drawn all to one side, and after a general quiver, went over with a hideous crash.

It was at this moment that Dick happened to look behind him.

The horses were kicking and floundering in inextricable confusion, and the harness, as it gave way in various places, became more and more entangled.

Never was heard such screaming before.

The chorus was terrific.

The guard had, most unluckily for himself, been flung into a holly bush, where he stuck fast.

His yells were alarming to listen to, and not a little contributed to the general terror of the passengers.

The pain he endured in the tender parts of his anatomy would not allow him to remain still—human endurance could not bear it.

But the misfortune was that the more he floundered about in his insane and ineffectual efforts to extricate himself, the more was he tormented with the thousand prickles of the holly bush.

It was a case, however, when everybody's first and chief attention was given to number one, and all the travellers had too much to do in looking after themselves even to think about making any effort for his liberation.

Those who had occupied outside seats, of course, experienced severe contusions; and as they one by one picked themselves up and removed to a little distance, they presented truly a pitiable spectacle.

Not a few had fallen head first into the ditch, which happened to be filled almost brim full of stagnant water, overgrown with a kind of green disagreeable-looking vegetation.

It is true that the foul water and the sticky dirt which formed the bed of the ditch saved them from sustaining any severe injury, but then, when they scrambled out, they were in such a woful pickle that made them think that anything much worse could not have well befallen them.

Those inside did not escape, for the overturnment of the vehicle bumped them altogether in a terrible manner.

Most desperate were the efforts made to emerge from their place of prisonage; but they had but little result, for the only means of exit was by crawling through the coach window which was now turned upwards to the sky.

The police officers were too much intent upon the capture of the highwayman, who had given them so much trouble, to think of aiding the passengers in any way, and as soon as they could extricate themselves from the scene of confusion they did so.

The driver bawled to them for assistance, and indeed he considered that he was fully entitled to their services.

The guard alternately beseeched and commanded them to release him from the holly.

But they disregarded the words of both, and rode away amid a storm of yells and curses from the whole assemblage.

The position of the driver was by no means an enviable one, as he quickly found.

At first he had greatly congratulated himself upon the fact that he had reached the ground almost without sustaining a bruise, for a stout passenger, who had sat on the box beside him, had fallen undermost.

But the coachman was not long before he was made aware that he was not destined to get off quite easily.

The passengers having partially recovered themselves, broke out into violent language, which was not at all surprising.

Still less so was the fact that they ardently desired to be revenged upon some one.

By common consent, that some one pitched upon was the driver, whom they considered to be the source of all their troubles.

They came up to him with a menacing air, and formed round him in a dense throng.

"You villain!" cried one, shaking his clenched fist. "What do you mean by overturning the coach in this fashion, and putting all our lives in danger?"

"Ay—what do you mean by it?" iterated the rest, closing closer round him.

The coachman turned, as though he would have fled; but he only felt himself confronted by others, if possible, more menacing.

"I've a d—d good mind to horsewhip the vagabond from here to the next inn!" exclaimed one, who had picked up the article he mentioned.

"Gentlemen—gentlemen," he cried, in an expostulating tone, "don't blame me. How the devil could I help it?"

"Blame you!—who else must we blame?"

"What business had you to interfere with highwaymen?"

"None at all!" yelled the guard, who at that moment was pierced by a larger and stronger thorn than any he had hitherto experienced. "Pitch into him—give it him hot! I only wish I had the chance. Oh, d—n it!"

Another thorn called forth this last ejaculation.

The passengers scarcely needed any bidding in the matter.

They were, it is true, seeking for some pretext to attack the driver, and the guard's word proved sufficient.

To the intense satisfaction of the last-named functionary the passengers, including one or two representatives of the so-called softer sex, made a violent onslaught upon the driver, who vainly bellowed for mercy, and declared that the fault was none of his, but that he should be the greatest sufferer, because his master would expect him to repair the coach, and if he failed to do so to send him to prison.

To this the only reply he got was, that it served him well right, and hoped it would be a warning to him to mind his own business another time.

The coachman felt himself to be a much-injured individual, for he felt morally certain that if his manœuvre had caused the capture of the highwayman he would then have received as much applause as he now had abuse.

But such is the world.

The travellers only ceased their attack when compelled to do so, and finally trudged off towards the inn, whither those of their more peaceable companions had already gone.

The driver and the guard were left alone in their glory masters of the field, the former unable to rise in consequence of the severe punishment he had received, and the latter now hopelessly embedded in the holly bush.

Here we will leave them, for other and more stirring events call for our attention.

Long before the occurrence of the last incident we have described the police officers had got out of sight and hearing.

Having kept up the chase so long with so little result, it may seem strange to say that the weary, worn-out officers had now really greater hopes of success than they had yet entertained.

The reason of this was that daylight was fast coming on, and consequently they would be able to see well about them.

Moreover, there would be a greater number of people abroad, and it might be that some of them, noticing the suspicious appearance of the hard-pressed highwayman, would take upon themselves the responsibility of detaining him.

Once or twice Mr. Skellum and his adherents fancied they could hear the faint clatter of hoofs a long way in advance, but they could not satisfy themselves upon the point.

As before, however, there was no difficulty in gaining intelligence on the subject of their pursuit.

Every one they met could tell them something of the highwayman, and all agreed that he could not be far off, and that his horse appeared to be much exhausted.

Such accounts as these, coupled with the approach of day, might well make the police officers strongly of opinion that their arduous task was drawing to a close.

Still, in spite of all their efforts, they were not success-

ful in catching sight of Dick, although they strained their eyes unceasingly in the belief that the next instant must serve to bring him before their anxious gaze.

Meanwhile, Dick Turpin continued for a long time at a hard gallop, which he knew very well Black Bess kept up with difficulty; but he was conscious he could not permit her to relax her efforts.

The adventure with the coach had given a fresh turn to his thoughts, because the excitement was so unexpected.

The ease, too, with which Black Bess had achieved her tremendous leap filled him with enthusiasm, and he drew from it the most favourable auguries of future success.

"I did not give you credit for half so much, old girl!" he cried. "On—on! Do not flag now! Keep up, brave lass! Do not fail now that so much has been accomplished—now that the end is almost in view! But why do I talk of failure? I will banish the thought. Black Bess, we *must* succeed! The feat performed, it will ever afterwards be spoken of with wonder. We shall never be forgotten—never while horses are made use of. On, Bess—on! Courage — courage! We are doing this for fame!"

The gallant mare responded nobly to the enthusiastic tones of her rider's voice.

But for all that, a strain could be detected; and, though the words we have just set down came from the highwayman's lips, yet in his heart there was a whisper of misgiving and of doubt.

It was, indeed, more with the hope of drowning these inward suggestions that he spoke up so loudly.

Suddenly, he perceived before him a wide river.

The name of it he knew not; but he saw the stream was wide, and that there was no bridge to connect its banks, probably on account of its great width we have spoken of.

Here was an obstacle indeed, and he wondered greatly how it was to be surmounted.

While debating this point, he slackened speed and looked well about him.

The day might now be said fairly to have begun; but the great sheet of water was covered by a shifting mass of vapour, which interfered greatly with the vision.

At last the very bank was reached, and then Dick came to a dead stop.

"There must be a ferry-boat belonging to this place; and yet where is it? Ah!" he exclaimed, as the rolling mist partly cleared away and enabled him to see the opposite bank with greater plainness, "there it is! All will now be well."

As he spoke, he placed his hands before his mouth, and gave utterance to a prolonged shout.

His voice floated across the water and was heard, for he perceived a figure make an answering signal, and directly afterwards he distinguished the faint tones of a distant voice.

"That is well," he said. "You will be able to have a brief rest now, old girl. You shall be rid of my weight, too. While the ferry-boat is coming you will have a chance of recovering your wind."

The overtaxed animal seemed very grateful for this brief respite from exertion, and turned her out-starting, glassy eyes upon her rider with an expression so truly wistful that he was compelled to turn away.

As he did so, his ears caught a faint sound.

He started and listened again, for he fancied his acute sense of hearing had deceived him.

"So close!" he ejaculated, a moment after. "I was not prepared for this. How much like bloodhounds they keep upon the trail! I—I begin to fear that they will hunt us down, after all.

"No, no—I won't think that!" he added, as though ashamed of his fears—"I won't think that—at—at least, not yet."

The sound now was more distinct.

There could be no doubt as to its character.

The officers were coming, and every moment now Dick expected would bring them within sight.

He cast an anxious glance across the water.

The huge, lumbering ferry-boat was not more than half across, for it seemed to encounter much opposition from the tide.

"It is all over," said Dick, as he caught the first glimpse of his pursuers in the distance. "By the time the boat reaches the shore they will be here—perhaps before it. Come, Bess," he added, "I would fain have spared you if I could, but there is no help for it—we must swim across."

In her wearied state, Dick reasonably enough dreaded the imposition of this task.

But he was governed by stern, inflexible necessity.

Either he would have to remain where he was until his foes arrived, or else take to the water.

Full of risk as it was, of course the highwayman chose the latter course.

Taking the rein over his arm, he led his mare into the water, and, as soon as he was deep enough, he began to swim.

She followed his example willingly enough.

Her master knew she had good swimming capabilities, and he was surprised to see what good speed she made.

The ferryman was so astonished at beholding this proceeding that for a moment he forgot it was necessary for him to bestow perpetual care upon his boat.

Being left for this moment, it veered round and drifted off with the current, which was particularly strong, but which, to Dick's advantage, set in for the shore he wished to reach, thus materially diminishing the exertion which his steed and himself were compelled to make.

It had been Dick's hope to get the ferry-boat over to the other side, and bribe the man to keep it there, so as to detain his foes. As things turned out, however, there seemed every probability that they would be able to avail themselves of it much sooner than was ordinary.

Dick thought he might yet achieve his object, and shouted to the man to put back.

But his words were either unheard or disregarded.

Dick was now in mid-stream, and the ferry-boat not much more.

This was the moment when the officers, panting and breathless with the extra efforts they had been making, reached the river's bank.

Scarce one of them had breath enough to hail the ferryman; but he saw them, and comprehended their motions.

"Quick—quick!" cried Skellum. "Come on—come on! Five pounds if you are quick! Come—come on, or I'll be d—d if the man and horse won't reach the other side first!"

Although the water made a strange gurgling in his ears, yet Dick could just hear the words uttered by his foe.

It was, therefore, only reasonable to suppose that they were heard also by the ferryman, who was now out of Turpin's sight.

Black Bess swam bravely, though her master listened with some apprehension to her laborious snorting.

As for Dick himself, a better swimmer need not be, and yet he felt anxious to reach the shore, for he was conscious that he was not in his proper element.

He was able to make capital progress, for the current seemed to increase in strength, while it certainly carried him in the direction of the shore he wished to reach.

The ferryman, on the contrary, made very little motion.

The clumsy boat was much too large to be under the management of one man only, and the current was on this morning unusually strong.

Mr. Skellum and his companions were in a state which we can only describe as being one of absolute frenzy.

They ran up and down, shouted, waved their arms, discharged their pistols over the water, and committed a hundred other extravagant actions.

It was, indeed, galling to think that after all their late exertions which had brought them so close to the object of their pursuit, that they should thus be compelled to remain in a state of absolute inaction.

The ferryman at first seemed somewhat disinclined to approach or have anything to do with such violent individuals, but the promise of a large reward and the declaration that they were police officers in pursuit of a notorious criminal, removed his scruples and abated his fears.

So soon as ever the clumsy bark was anywhere near, several of the officers rushed unbidden into the water, and assisted to drag it to the bank.

No sooner did it grate upon the sand than there was a



[THE DEATH OF BONNY BLACK BESS.]

universal and tremendous rush on the part of the police officers to obtain seats in it.

This haste was so great as for a time to defeat its own object.

The ferryman was in momentary dread of witnessing the capsizement of his boat.

At last, however, both horses and men were safely got on board, and the lumbering vessel pushed off.

Its freight was unusually heavy, and its progress slow on that very account.

But the current soon began to make its influence felt.

Mr. Skellum turned to look at Dick, from whom his eyes had for a brief space been removed.

"Death and the devil!" he cried. "He has reached the shore! Curse his impudence! That shout was meant as defiance. Now he is in the saddle; and now he is off again like the wind! Row, you villain! Are we to have all our trouble thrown away through you? Quick—quick!"

It was quite a relief for Skellum and his officers to find some one they could blame, for they had a great deal of angry feeling stored up in their breasts.

Their rage was vain, for the rate of speed made by the boat could not be accelerated.

Finally, to the great relief of all, the opposite bank of the river was reached.

They disembarked with much precipitation.

No sooner had the promised gratuity been given to the ferryman than they clambered into their saddles.

Mr. Skellum seated himself somewhat gingerly, for though a good horseman, yet he could not help feeling the effects of so long a ride.

Great as was their expedition, yet when they started not only was Dick out of sight but out of hearing too.

"Never mind," said Skellum, with an undaunted voice, "we cannot give in now we have come so far! Push on! This is only a little bit of a spurt, and will soon be over! It is impossible that his mare can hold out much longer."

"It is wonderful that she has come so far," remarked one of the officers.

"Most wonderful!" assented Skellum. "I would never have believed that a horse possessed so much endurance had I not been an actual witness of it."

"It seems like witchcraft," said another.

"It does. But the end must certainly be near."

"What a thousand pities it is," cried the officer who had first spoken, "that such a magnificent creature should be in the hands of this fellow!"

"I am truly sorry," said Skellum; "she deserves a better fate. I know well enough what will be the end—he will contrive to ride her until she falls down dead beneath him—that will be her end; and we shall witness it before very long."

No more was said.

The officers were not exactly the sort of men to waste sentiment about anything.

Indeed, it is in no slight degree surprising that Black Bess should have touched them so much as she did.

The prospect of seeing her dead, and consequently her rider at their mercy, served, however, to change entirely the current of their thoughts.

Besides, while riding as they were, it was by no means an easy matter to keep up anything resembling a continued conversation.

After this, they rode on in silence.

At frequent intervals Skellum would listen intently, in the hope of hearing something of the fugitive.

Suddenly, after going some miles, he uttered an exclamation.

Then, immediately afterwards, he cried out, in a loud voice, that had a good deal of exultation in its tones:

"I can hear him—I can hear him! I am certain of it! Listen—listen, all of you! We are gaining on him! Whip and spur—whip and spur, I say! The end is close at hand!"

The officers all listened, and they were able to distinguish the distant clatter of a horse's hoofs.

All at once, Skellum cried out:

"He has stopped—he has stopped! Something has happened! Perhaps he is thrown. At any rate, something is the matter. Push on! Hurrah! we have him now, at last!"

CHAPTER MC.

DICK TURPIN TRIES THE EFFECTS OF THE OSTLER'S POTION UPON BLACK BESS.

The words just uttered by Mr. Skellum were decidedly premature.

But the reader, no doubt, is anxious to know whether Dick Turpin had been compelled to come to a halt or not.

It is hardly necessary to say that Dick reached the shore in safety.

As soon as he felt the water was shallow enough, he waded through, holding Black Bess by the bridle.

Then, shaking himself as well as he was able, so as to rid himself of as much water as he could, he uttered that shout about the character of which Mr. Skellum had made no mistake, and immediately afterwards vaulted into the saddle.

He was not without considerable misgiving, however, his dread being that swimming so far had done much towards exhausting his mare.

To his joy, however, he quickly found this to be an entire mistake.

So far from showing fatigue, it seemed as though the cold water had had a powerful reactionary effect.

Her sinews seemed braced, and her veins to be filled with fresh vigour.

Her respiration, too, was neither so hurried nor so laboured as it had been.

From all this Dick drew the most favourable auguries.

"We shall do it, Bess, my lass," he ejaculated, patting her fondly—"we shall do it—I am sure we shall! There must be no more flagging. You are not riding to York, old girl, but you are riding to fame; and the story of how you travelled will be recounted as long as horses remain beasts of burden. There will never be one to surpass you. On—on! Forward and onward yet!"

Black Bess responded bravely to her master's words; and to have seen her at this moment no one would have given credence to the fact that she had travelled so many miles in so short a time.

There was a freedom about all her movements and elasticity in her joints which delighted her rider beyond measure.

It actually seemed as though the swim across the river, much as he had dreaded it, was the most favourable circumstance that could occur.

Black Bess appeared as much refreshed by the exertion as she would have been had she enjoyed a good rest and partaken of a good feed of corn.

Dick's joy increased.

In his delight and enthusiasm, he waved his arms and shouted aloud in a manner that greatly excited the wonderment of the few travellers he happened to meet with at that early hour.

Black Bess was once more going at that wonderful stretching gallop of hers which no steed could come near.

But Dick's enthusiasm was more the effects of a wild excitement than a genuine feeling.

Although his lips gave utterance to the expressions we have recorded, yet his heart smote him severely.

He knew that the achievement of riding from London to York in the short space of twelve hours, even if accomplished, would be at the price of his mare's life.

He knew it, though with a strange wilfulness he closed his eyes to it, and, so far from abandoning his purpose, did all he could to urge her to still more exertion.

The time was drawing short, and many miles had yet to be accomplished.

Not that he despaired or even doubted success for a single moment, but he was impatient now that the ride should be over.

Away, then, they flew, at a speed which by an ordinary rider would have been considered dangerous in the extreme.

Instead of thinking so, Dick kept endeavouring to make his mare go faster still.

Suddenly, however, in the midst of her career, she stumbled.

Dick could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses.

She had never in her life done so before.

There could be no doubt about it now, however, for she instantly fell dead lame.

Dick's heart stood still.

Such a panic took possession of him that he was unconscious of everything.

Whether he checked the rein or whether his mare had stopped of her own accord he knew not.

But all at once he awoke to the consciousness that she was standing still.

And yet consciousness did not entirely return to him.

The occurrence of the accident at this particular juncture seemed to have a paralysing effect upon him.

For some seconds he remained in the saddle as though changed to stone.

Black Bess panted terribly.

Every time her lungs expanded it seemed as though her swelling sides must burst the saddle girths.

Now that she had stopped, the perspiration rose above her like a cloud of vapour, while heavy drops fell from her flanks and reached the ground with a sullen dash.

What was to be done?

As yet, Dick had scarcely asked himself this question.

Was this to be the end?

After accomplishing so much—after all his felicitations and anticipations—was this to be the ultimate result?

The blood slowly forced itself through his veins like ice.

Then, faintly but yet distinctly, there came upon his ears a distant ringing sound.

An ordinary ear would perhaps have failed to distin-

guish it; but to the highwayman's educated faculties it was only too audible.

The sound told of the rapid coming of his pursuers.

And yet he sat listening, like one either stupified or else charmed from moving.

Nearer, clearer came the sound.

There was no doubt about its character.

Ere long they would be in sight

But Dick seemed now utterly abandoned to despair.

He did not seem to care what had occurred now that his scheme had been thus rudely put an end to.

With such a sigh as one might suppose would come from the breast of one in whose heart hope had been for ever annihilated, Dick left the saddle.

Dread was at his heart—a fiery mist about his eyes and brain.

What caused the lameness?

With a coolness and a manner that looked like entire indifference, he stooped to ascertain.

He was indifferent.

What did the cause of lameness matter so that the lameness itself existed?

Black Bess was lame, and being so, it was out of all question that she would be able to perform the task he had assigned to her.

He proceeded to make his examination with as much calmness as a man who had abundance of leisure.

But, in point of fact, little more than a glance was required to make him acquainted with the nature of the mischief.

In her desperate attempt to keep up her gallop she had what is technically called overreached.

That is, the sharp iron toe upon the hind shoe had struck against the heel of her fore-foot, inflicting an ugly-looking cut, from which the blood flowed profusely.

It was the sudden pain thus caused that had made Bess lame; and had her rider pushed her on instead of pulling up immediately on making the discovery, the symptoms would have disappeared very speedily.

When Turpin saw that no more mischief had been done than this, he drew a long heartfelt sigh of relief, and once more suffered himself to be buoyed up by hope.

He tore a long slip off his neckcloth and used this as a bandage.

Then, afterwards, by a speedy yet thorough examination satisfied himself that nothing else was amiss.

Yet, rapid as he was, the reader will not require to be told that several precious moments had been consumed.

At any rate, the period had been sufficient to enable his indefatigable pursuers to get into sight.

They saw him, for the morning now was bright and clear—even the warmth of the sun's rays could be felt.

They were not a little surprised to see Turpin dismounted and standing near his mare.

But they very soon arrived at the conclusion that Black Bess had met with an accident of some kind or other; and as this could not but prove an advantage to them, they pushed on as fast as an unceasing application of the whip and spur would urge them.

Dick, having brought his operations to a conclusion, looked up and saw them.

A bitter smile curled his lips.

"They are like wolves upon the track of blood, or sharks after some death-doomed wretch on board a vessel. They will hunt me to the last gasp. Never mind," he concluded, "I can defy them yet. I know Bess is all right now."

He mounted as he spoke; but how different was his mode of doing so to that which he ordinarily adopted.

It was his wont to place one hand upon the pommel, and then to spring with one bound into his seat.

Now, however, the way in which he climbed into the saddle spoke volumes as to the amount of his fatigue: and by his appearance at this moment it would seem as though he would be to the full as much exhausted as his mare upon the conclusion of the journey.

Black Bess had her ears inclined backwards, as though listening to the coming of her master's foes.

Then, no sooner did she feel him seated, than she started off of her own accord.

She went lame at first, but that was only stiffness, and it vanished quickly.

The efforts that she now made cannot be spoken of by any other term than that of superhuman.

Dick did nothing save speak encouragingly now and then.

It was hard, however, to think otherwise than that Black Bess, being fully sensible of the proximity of Dick's foes, was doing her best to increase the distance between them with the least possible delay.

As for the highwayman himself, he had no doubts whatever upon the subject, and his enthusiasm rose to its highest pitch when, on looking back after the lapse of a short interval, he saw that not only had she tried, but had succeeded.

The police officers soon found that they were even now unable to compete with her, and their blown horses had by this time become so accustomed to a brutal and continuous use of whip and spur as to be now heedless and insensible of both.

Do what they could, the officers were unable to increase the speed of their overridden beasts—indeed, they soon discovered that each moment reduced the rate most materially.

Nevertheless, Mr. Skellum did not despair.

Fresh horses were waiting for him on the road, and upon them he relied for making up lost ground.

Mile after mile thus flew by, until at last Dick again found himself upon the high-road alone—both out of sight and out of hearing of his enemies.

The reader, of course, will not be surprised to learn that Black Bess suffered fearfully.

Her terrible and palpable distress sent a pang through her master's heart, but it did not incline him to forget his purpose.

If such a thing could be possible, his determination was stronger than it had yet been.

His goal now he looked upon as being almost within sight.

The race was all but won.

It would have been strange indeed had he relented now.

But he did pull in, for there was time enough yet before him for the accomplishment of his purpose within the bounds he had set himself, and his foes, he thought, were far enough behind to render this course prudent.

Another thing that influenced him was, that a steepish bit of road lay in advance, and up this, at all hazards, he resolved that she should walk.

Her distress now appeared to be greater than ever; and had anyone seen her in her present state they would have boldly enough declared that it would be utterly impossible for her to keep on for many miles longer.

Dick almost began to think so himself.

Her condition wrung a groan from his heart.

His hand sought his waistcoat pocket.

He was thinking about the bottle that had been given him by the ostler.

Although he had no reason to doubt its efficacy, and although one would think it could never be more wanted than at the present moment, yet he felt an invincible reluctance to trying its powers.

Thoughtfully, and thus debating with himself, he rode up the hill.

On the right-hand were some very substantial-looking ricks of hay and straw, and a little way beyond a picturesque farm-house, from the chimneys of which thin wreaths of blue smoke were curling.

Dick looked upon these things with a listless eye, being, indeed, scarcely conscious that he was observing them.

As Black Bess toiled on he was wondering whether he should administer the potion or not.

A slight circumstance caused him to resolve not to do so, and also induced him to make use of another expedient.

Round the ricks of which we have made mention several fowls were strutting, cackling, and working busily.

No sooner did Dick notice them, than he gave a slight start, and muttered:

"I wonder, now, whether there is any truth in it? I am certain I have heard that the warm entrails of a game cock wrapped round the bit will give unusual vigour to a flagging steed. Why should I doubt it? The beefsteak far exceeded all my expectations; and why should not this be as efficacious? At any rate, I will try; the

experiment can do no harm, and I shall be better reconciled to the use of the potion when I know it is absolutely my last resource."

While speaking these words Dick drew from his pocket a small pistol.

He gave just one glance at it to see that it was in readiness for use, and then, pointing it steadily, pulled the trigger.

There was a flash, a report, and a wreath of blue smoke.

When the latter had died away Dick saw the cock rolling on the ground in the agonies of death.

To alight from his steed, spring over the low boundary hedge, and to seize the struggling bird, took the highwayman but a moment.

A knife then put a speedy termination to his existence, and also supplied Turpin with what he wanted.

It was no very easy matter to enwrap the bit with such a mass, but he succeeded, and regained the saddle.

Black Bess was made to ascend the hill at a walk, and on reaching the summit Dick was rejoiced to see that the ground had a downward tendency as far as his eye could reach.

This was greatly in his favour.

There certainly was some strange virtue in the experiment just tried, for Black Bess appeared to be endowed with a new lease of life.

Once again she galloped freely along the high-road; and though it was not like her old rate of travelling, yet she got over the ground exceedingly well, and, what was much more important, with an evident abatement of her distress.

Whether this new-found vigour would endure was a question he hardly dared to think about. It was sufficient to know that all was well in the present.

He looked behind him many times, for he fully expected to catch sight of his pursuers.

For a long time the country was open, and the summit of the hill near the farm-house was, consequently, clearly visible.

But presently the aspect changed.

The high-road was fringed by thick-growing trees, and, besides, took a somewhat serpentine direction, so that it was now impossible for the officers to catch sight of Dick unless they got very close in his rear indeed.

Every milestone that was now passed increased the new-found hope in the highwayman's breast.

The road was getting more occupied with people, who seemed in no ordinary degree astonished at beholding our hero and Black Bess.

Suddenly, Dick's ears were assailed with a fresh sound.

It was that caused by a single horseman riding at a tremendous rate towards him.

Of this horseman Dick could not catch a glimpse in consequence of the sinuous character of the roadway.

But he could hear him distinctly enough.

The gallop, he could tell, was a long stretching one, and yet the advancing horse trod with extraordinary lightness.

"That is no ordinary animal," muttered Turpin, as he inclined a little more to the left-hand side of the road. "Ah!" he added, with a heavy sigh, "would that you, my bonny Black Bess, were only capable of covering the ground in such a style. There was a time when nothing could surpass you; but I sadly fear that time has gone by never—never to come again."

A profound fit of dejection came over him at this moment.

So profound that he forgot all about the advancing rider, in whose steed he had begun to feel so deep an interest.

He was only aroused from this fit of abstraction by seeing the stranger come at full swing round a bend in the road, and not very far ahead.

What first attracted Turpin's attention was that the approaching steed was like Black Bess: of a jetty blackness.

The rider, too, was not altogether unlike Dick himself, save that he had a much more youthful air, and that he was of a much more slender make.

He came on with such swiftness, however, that there was no opportunity of observing him very closely, or his steed either.

Yet as he flitted past, Dick felt convinced that the rider's appearance was very familiar to him—that he had indeed seen him somewhere or other.

The stranger, too, must evidently have been struck with the same idea, for directly he had gone by he reined-in his horse, and having brought him to a standstill, turned round and rode towards our hero.

Hearing some one approach, Dick looked behind, and this time recognised the rider.

"As I live," he ejaculated, "that must be Captain Hawk! What on earth can have brought him into this part of the country?"

"I think I am under no mistake," said Captain Hawk, for it was indeed he—"you are——"

"Dick Turpin, at your service."

"I thought so. Give me your hand. I am heartily glad to see you."

There could be no doubting Captain Hawk's sincerity.

His fine open countenance showed that what he had said had come from his heart.

Dick could not put on an appearance of much gaiety, but nevertheless he pressed Captain Hawk's proffered hand very warmly, for at this juncture it gave Dick a peculiar thrill of emotion to find that he had a friend.

Captain Hawk's eyes, however, at once fixed themselves upon Black Bess, and at the same time his face assumed an expression which we can only term as one of incredulous amazement.

"Good Heavens," he ejaculated, "that is never your famous mare?"

Dick bowed gravely.

"Then what on earth have you been doing with her to change so greatly? Even with you on her back I scarcely knew her. I ask again, what have you done to her?"

"Ridden her from London."

"From London!" repeated the captain, with a puzzled air. "But I don't see that accounts for it. I have ridden Satan here from London, and yet I think he never was in better trim in his life."

"But how long were you about it?"

"How long?"

"Yes."

"Well, I hardly know. I was in no hurry. I simply journeyed from place to place."

"Precisely so," said Turpin, with a smile, while his heart swelled with triumph; "but will you believe me if I tell you how long I have been coming thus far on the road to York?"

"Certainly. Why should I doubt your word?"

"Because what I am going to tell you will sound so incredible."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the captain, eagerly, for he was always much interested in everything relating to Black Bess, for the reason that he looked upon her as the only existing rival to his own splendid steed—"indeed! Let me hear it—I am all impatience."

"Well," said Dick Turpin, with great deliberation, and looking full into the face of Captain Hawk while he spoke, "I don't happen to know what the precise hour may be now——"

"Stay a moment. I will let you know precisely. I have a splendid timekeeper here."

While speaking, Captain Hawk drew from his pocket a magnificent gold repeater, the case of which was absolutely encrusted with diamonds and precious stones.

It must have been worth a small fortune.

But the light-hearted highwayman handled it as though it were the most "careless trifle" in the world.

"It is now," he said, "precisely five minutes to seven."

"Good; then I have five minutes that I can stay and chat with you, then I must be off."

"Yes, but you have not told me how long."

"Then listen."

"I am listening with the utmost eagerness."

"Last night, then, at nine o'clock, or it may, perhaps, have been a few moments later, I was in Drury Lane, so that I have managed to come thus far in ten hours less five minutes."

Captain Hawk sat on his horse and looked at Dick with as much wonderment as probably he would have done had he been assured that he was at that moment in the moon instead of upon the earth.

Dick Turpin enjoyed his astonishment immensely.

"You don't seem to believe me altogether," he said, at length, perceiving that the captain did not speak.

"You take my breath away."

"I thought it would"

"But do you mean to tell me in sober earnest that you have ridden your mare this immense distance in the space of time you mention?"

"I will swear to it if you like; but I think her condition ought to give some weight to my testimony."

"Well, well, you amaze me more than I can express. Even now I am half wondering whether I can have heard aright."

"I am not surprised at that."

"Had anyone else told me this," he continued, "I should have steadfastly refused belief. I should not have hesitated to call it a most monstrous invention."

"That does not surprise me. No doubt there will be many who will refuse to believe that such a feat has been performed. But fortunately there is abundance of proof in existence—the best of proof, I may say. But I must not linger," he added, perceiving that the captain had not yet recovered from his surprise. "I have no time to spare, for I intend to be at the Bowling Green, at York, by the time the clock in the old minster peals forth the hour of nine."

"You will hardly do it, I fear," was the earnest reply. "Still, I will not render your undertaking any more difficult by detaining you here, and yet——"

"Yet what?"

"If you would allow me to ride on a little way by your side I should look upon it as a great favour; I am loth to part with you without exchanging a few words. My way is any way if you will let me come."

To have refused this request would have been churlish to a degree, so Dick at once granted it.

Captain Hawk looked delighted.

"I am impatient," he said, as he put his splendid horse in motion—"most impatient to know what can have induced you to undertake so long a ride. You must have had some powerful reason for it, for—will you excuse me if I speak my thoughts?"

"Certainly. What would you say? Do not hesitate to speak freely."

"Well, then, I think your motive must have been powerful in the extreme, for I am perfectly certain that after this Black Bess will never be again what she has been. You must know it too; and I am at a loss to think why you are willing to sacrifice her."

Captain Hawk's words caused Dick Turpin so much emotion that for a moment or two he could not speak.

Captain Hawk rode beside him in silence, with his eyes fixed upon his countenance.

By a sudden effort Turpin cleared his voice, and then, in sad tones, he said:

"You are right, Black Bess will never, never be again what she has been."

"I regret it," answered Hawk, "for more reasons than one. I have heard much about her, and always hoped that the day would come when I should be able to try Satan against her. Now the trial will be unfair."

Alas! for poor Black Bess.

She was no match now for the captain's splendid horse, which seemed to fly over the ground and to carry his master as though he was no heavier than the air.

Dick's heart swelled.

Hitherto Black Bess had carried off the palm, but now she was compelled to yield it.

Satan could easily have gone two miles to her one.

"But you do not tell me your motive," pursued Captain Hawk, after a lengthy pause.

"It is this," was the answer, given after much effort. "The road has no longer any charms for me. I am determined to quit it. I have already levied my last contribution."

"What do I hear?" ejaculated the captain. "This is more surprising than anything yet. Surely you are not in earnest—you are joking?"

"Far from it."

"Pardon me, I can see you are sad—there is some deep trouble about your heart."

"There is indeed."

"Tell it me. Surely you may confide in me to that extent."

"Yes—yes, I have nothing to conceal. It surprises me that you have not heard already."

"No, I have heard nothing."

"Well, then, the police officers surprised us all at Stonehenge. Maud—you remember Maud?"

Dick's voice faltered here.

He could say no more.

"Remember her?" cried Captain Hawk, in a manner that showed all his interest was awakened. "Of course I do! What of her?"

"She was mortally wounded by a pistol bullet," added Dick, speaking hurriedly, "Sixteen-String Jack made prisoner, and the rest made a temporary escape with difficulty."

"Good Heavens! Mortally wounded do you say? But—but—you do not mean that—that——"

"Yes, she is dead. Listen, I will tell you all. It may interest you a little, and it will certainly relieve my heart a little, for the worst is by no means told."

"It will interest me deeply," answered Captain Hawk; "and you may make sure of having my earnest sympathy."

"I know it."

Dick Turpin then, at some length, recounted those events which have been already laid before the reader.

The captain was deeply affected when he was made acquainted with the particulars of Maud's death.

Dick's emotion almost overcame him, and well-nigh put an end to his narrative altogether.

Rallying, he went on until he described how Tom King had fallen by his hand.

"It is a most unlucky circumstance," said Captain Hawk, "and one that nobody would regret more than I shall. Still, I think you are wrong in taking the blame to yourself—it was an accident, nothing more."

"I know that," was Turpin's answer; "but that does not alter the fact that my hand is red with the blood of my best friend."

"It is sad—very—very sad, but—and I hope you will excuse my persistent curiosity—I am still in the dark as to your reasons for undertaking this long ride."

"True—I had forgotten. The fact is, I have not perhaps what you would call a motive at all. But can you understand that, after all I have related to you, I hould feel doubly anxious and determined to pursue my original course?"

"What was that?"

"Why, to leave England with as much expedition as I could, and make the best of my way to that little hamlet on the coast of France, where—where——"

"Yes—yes," interrupted Hawk, quickly, "I understand—go on."

"I feel that I would sooner end my days in peace and quiet near her grave than I would accept a crown even. But when added to all other disasters came the death of my best friend, Tom King, upon my head, I felt as though I could fly from myself—fly anywhere."

"No doubt it would affect you strongly."

"It did—more strongly by far than I can possibly express. I took the road to York without reflection—I may have done so unconsciously, because it was the intention of Tom and myself to pay a visit to that city. My foes came hard and fast upon my track; I distanced them at first without trouble—the ease with which I did so, and the freedom of my mare's movements, first caused me to conceive the idea of riding to York. I—I fancy I must have been somewhat excited then. Looking back, I don't think I should have taken such a resolution in a moment of calmness."

"I should think not, either."

"My idea was," continued Turpin, speaking with greater animation than before—"my idea was that, as we had made together some little stir in the world, we ought not to drop out of it obscurely. I was conscious that if we fled thus secretly, we should both be speedily forgotten. I was desirous, however, that Black Bess at least should be remembered by posterity, and spoken of as the steed that should eclipse all others. That made me think of riding her to York. The resolution was soon taken, for I believed the task to be within her powers. I fear now I have overrated them, but even if so we will do it yet—York now is close at hand."

CHAPTER MCI.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN LOSES HIS LAST REMAINING FRIEND.

DICK TURPIN pronounced these words with a fervour strikingly at variance with his former dejection.

His eyes sparkled, and a feeble flush of colour suffused both his cheeks.

But Captain Hawk's attention was just then diverted.

He was listening.

His companion, however, was too much taken up with the prospect which the accomplishment of his purpose afforded him to notice it.

"Dick," Captain Hawk exclaimed, "we have not been making such good speed as your pursuers; I can hear them now behind us."

As a matter of course, these words aroused Dick at once.

During the somewhat lengthy conversation that had taken place they had by no means been standing still.

On the contrary, they had made good speed, and yet had not been going so fast as to render the keeping up of a conversation a very difficult matter.

Dick found that Captain Hawk was not mistaken.

He could distinguish the faint clatter of hoofs in the rear.

"I must be pushing on," he exclaimed "They have got another lot of fresh horses, I suppose, and you may judge I shall have a little trouble in preserving my distance from them."

"I had hoped," said Captain Hawk, "to have had a trial of speed between Satan here and your mare, but the odds now are quite unequal."

"Yes, it would not be fair," said Turpin. And it is probable that he never regretted having brought his mare to this condition as he did now.

"If you will let me, though," added Captain Hawk, "I will gallop a little way with you. Not for the sake of making any trial of speed—for that would be manifestly absurd—but because I should like to keep you company for a little longer."

"With all my heart. Come on!"

Both horses now were put upon their mettle.

It was easy to perceive that Captain Hawk's horse Satan was a stimulus of no ordinary character to Black Bess.

She was, although so weary, yet full of fire and impatience to pass the stranger.

But the effort, though gallantly made, proved unsuccessful.

Satan kept the lead easily, and yet his rider was keeping him comparatively tight in hand.

Yet, as we have said, the emulation excited caused Black Bess to gallop for several miles at a speed which she would not otherwise have attained.

But all at once Captain Hawk pulled up.

There was nothing that Dick could see to cause him to do so, and therefore he looked towards him somewhat curiously.

"Dear me," he ejaculated, "you are going to York, and I have only just this moment thought of something which I ought to have told you at first."

"Indeed! what is it?"

"The sight of you put it quite out of my head. When you first saw me I was riding rather swiftly, was I not?"

"You were, indeed."

"Well, then, it is now my turn to be confidential, though, as there is little time, I cannot enter into particulars. However, I have had an adventure in the good old city of York which has caused such a hue and cry after me as has never been heard of before. The officers were in full pursuit of me, and though I had got so well ahead of them I should not wonder if they are not still upon the road."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because they are a party of London officers who were sent to York upon some business or other, and they are upon their return journey."

"This is awkward."

"Very awkward. I take great blame to myself for not having thought about it sooner. However, there is time, for as yet there is no mischief done."

"But I fancy I shall find myself most unpleasantly between two troops of my foes unless I quit the highway, which for many reasons I am unwilling to do; and even if I did," he added, "there is no certainty that I should avoid this second troop."

"Believe me," exclaimed Captain Hawk, "I am sorry, deeply sorry that I should thus have increased your perplexity. But, however, as I got you into the difficulty so will I get you out of it."

"But how?"

"Never mind how. Let it be sufficient for you that I shall do it."

"But it is not sufficient for me," said Turpin, warmly; "I insist upon knowing what it is you intend to do!"

"Why, get you out of your difficulty. Have I not said so?"

"True, you have said that; but I want to know what means you are going to adopt."

"Perhaps you will object to them."

"I shall if it involves you in any danger in attempting to extricate me."

"Now I will tell you what I am going to do," said Captain Hawk; "but I warn you beforehand that I shall take no notice of any objections you may raise, but shall adhere to my purpose."

"Will you tell me what it is?" asked Turpin, impatiently. "I can already hear the hoofs of this second troop you speak of."

"Can you so? Then my purpose will be quickly carried out, and you shall have the high-road quite free before you."

Dick Turpin was full of anxiety to know what it was his companion had in contemplation.

That it was something unusually adventurous, he could gather from his manner and from his unwillingness to speak concerning it.

"There is no doubt about them being on the road," cried the captain, who occupied a position a little in advance of Turpin. "And now I will tell you just what I think of doing, and you will say in a moment it is the simplest and easiest thing in the world."

"Then why use so much circumlocution about it?"

Captain Hawk smiled.

"Listen!" he said, in a deliberate tone. "I am going to gallop on now as fast as I can until I catch sight of the officers who have been in pursuit of me."

"Nay, but——"

"Hold—I will hear nothing! When I catch sight of them, it follows that they must also at that identical moment catch sight of me. Good. I shall just take my course across the country—the open fields, you know—letting them see where I go. You may calculate as a certainty that they will all join in pursuit of me once more, and consequently your road will be clear."

The way in which Captain Hawk stated these intentions was really most amusing to listen to.

Dick was amazed, and well he might be, for he would hardly have contemplated such an act himself.

"Is it not a good plan, now?" asked Hawk, with a laugh.

"It may be, but I don't intend to let you carry it out."

"Let me see you prevent me! Ha, ha! I can do as I like! There was a time when perhaps Black Bess could have kept pace with Satan, but that certainly is not at present. Farewell! I feel assured that if you go to York we shall meet again."

With these lightly-uttered words upon his lips, Captain Hawk wheeled round, loosed the reins, and gave a peculiar signal.

Satan gave a bound forward, and in less than a moment vanished round a bend in the road

To attempt pursuit Dick knew was futile, and how bitter was the pang which this knowledge caused him!

Always before he had been able to outstrip everything—now he was condemned to be a laggard.

His anger was great, and—sadly we say it—found its vent upon Black Bess.

With a savage desperation, much unlike his usual manner and totally in opposition to his treatment of his mare, he plunged both his spurs deeply into her dripping flanks.

The moment she felt the infliction of the sharp pain, a

cry, which can only be described by calling it a scream of agony, burst from the lips of Black Bess.

It was a terrible sound.

Dick shuddered as he heard it, and would have given worlds for the power to recall his hasty action.

But it was too late.

Snorting furiously, Black Bess broke into a mad gallop.

Hard and fast as she went, however, Dick had not the slightest chance of coming up with Captain Hawk.

Still he kept a sharp look-out.

At length he exclaimed:

"He has been as good as his word, I see. There he goes, the officers after him. He has rendered me a good service, beyond all doubt," he continued, as he noted how strongly his foes mustered; "but yet the peril to himself is immense. It is certain that he has more valour, or rather recklessness, than discretion."

About the last part of Dick's speech there could scarcely be a doubt.

True to his expressed purpose, the captain had shown himself to his pursuers, and then led them off across the country.

They had snapped at the bait greedily enough, and so missed the prize they might have gained had they remained.

What made Captain Hawk's feat still more daring, was the circumstance of its being broad daylight, so that there would be little difficulty in keeping him in view.

Not one man in ten thousand would have thought of doing such a thing, but the captain was no ordinary individual, as the reader may yet learn, for it may be we shall hear something more of him.

That his boldness proceeded from the absolute reliance he placed in the speed his horse was able to make, is certain, yet many of his actions only seemed like tempting fate.

It was, however, a source of great satisfaction to Dick Turpin to observe that he kept ahead of his followers bravely; and unless some unforeseen ccident should occur, he would doubtless altogether outdistance them in a little time.

At present, though, it is with Dick Turpin we have to do, not with Captain Hawk.

As soon as his attention was recalled from the chase he noted with a keen throb of anguish how terrible was the condition of his poor steed.

Her panting alone was dreadful to listen to; and then her head, no longer carried proudly by her nobly arching neck, hung down almost to the ground.

Round drops of moisture, looking more like tears than aught else, slowly trickled down her cheeks.

Her eyes protruded dreadfully, while her tongue lobbed out of her foam-flecked mouth.

Dick groaned.

"And so at last, my bonny Black Bess," he said, in a bitter voice, "I have been brute enough to bring you to this. Had I been told, I would never have believed that I should have lived to see this. Fool—fool that I have been to allow a foolish prideful feeling—a yearning after empty fame—to bring you down to this! Fame—fame! What is fame in return for the loss of you, my own brave, true Black Bess?"

There were tears of genuine sorrow in Turpin's eyes as he thus spoke.

But he felt that such a manifestation of feeling was unworthy of him—that it betrayed weakness—and so he subdued it.

The rapidity with which he shook off this sad reflection was wonderful.

"There is no help for it," he said—"we cannot undo the past. But we can make the best possible use of the present and the future, and that I will strive my best to do. Repinings are quite useless, so I will give way to them no longer."

Black Bess was standing now.

She was quivering in every limb, and seemed incapable of travelling half a mile further.

"I have killed her," murmured Dick, in tones of the most poignant anguish—"I have killed her!"

Just then he happened to look across the road, and on a stone which he had not previously noticed, he read the words:—

"TO YORKE, XVIII MILES."

"No more than that," he murmured—"no more than that, and a full hour to do it in? And yet I fear it might as well have been a hundred as eighteen—one is not a whit more possible than the other. And then to think that only yesterday she would have thought nothing of it. Now, to-day, what is she?"

Again Dick paused.

He was compelled to do so, for he was completely overcome.

But presently he spoke again:

"How hard—how vexatious a thing it is to fail—and to fail, too, at a moment when the much-wished-for end seemed graspable! I might as well now have never made the attempt. It will be said now that the boasted powers of Black Bess were overrated, or rather overtasked—that something was found which it was thought she could perform, but which turned out a failure. No—no. As I live, it shall never be!"

He brought down his clenched fist with great violence as he made the determination.

Yet, what use was there in it?

What could he do?

Suddenly a thought struck him.

His fingers wandered towards the pocket of his vest

He recollected the potion given him by the friendly ostler.

He drew forth the bottle and held it up towards the light.

"What latent properties can this drug have to produce so great an effect? Is it real or is it all a delusion? But above all, shall I try it? That is the question."

The repugnance he had felt to administer the drug had not much abated.

But he was undecided.

In that state a little would prove sufficient to determine him one way or other.

This something came in the shape of the hoofbeats of his indefatigable pursuers.

"I am like a gamester with a last stake," he exclaimed. "It is my only chance. I will try it—I will try it. Black Bess cannot be made much worse than she is——"

Here a swelling in the throat prevented him from finishing what he was about to say.

But he soon continued.

"It may be that this will enable us to accomplish our nearly-over purpose, and if so, ought I to hesitate any longer? No—no, I will not! I will run the risk."

He dismounted as he spoke.

"It may be that it will cause you to gallop on till you fall down dead beneath me; but then we shall, perhaps, be so many miles nearer to York; and then, perhaps, after all, she might have a worse end. Better to die serving me, than to drag out a long but painful existence. No—no, Bess, I cannot bear the thought of losing you. It does not seem as though the day could ever come when we must part for ever."

While thus easing his breast by giving utterance to his reflections, his fingers were busily at work removing bit and bridle.

This was soon done, and the latter free from the foam-covered mass around it.

The bottle now was ready.

He uncorked it.

Yet he held it between his thumb and fingers reluctantly still.

"You may lose me soon," he cried, addressing her; "and when you have—— Bah! this is childish! But I may be picked off by a bullet, or—or—— What am I talking of? Yet every now and then there comes over me the consciousness that my end is drawing near—that my race is nearly run. Nonsense—nonsense! At any rate, Bess," he concluded, "I would rather see you die beneath me than be obliged to leave you to the mercies of other people. About that I have no sort of doubt. I should be better content if I knew the end of you."

So saying, Dick Turpin raised his hand with the air of a man who has taken a desperate resolution, but who is compelled to be hasty in carrying it out lest his heart should fail him.

A moment afterwards the drug was poured down the throat of Black Bess.

Dick cast the empty bottle from him.

Then, standing still, he watched to see whether any alteration was perceptible.

He had not long to wait.

Whatever the components of that drug might be, they

must have had when aggregated a marvellous power, for as he gazed, Dick could plainly perceive his mare draw herself together, so to speak, and to stand more as was her wont.

Once more—and a pang rent her master's heart as the reflection crossed him that it might be for the last time—once more her neck arched, her eyes brightened, and her fore-foot pawed the ground.

"Wonderful—wonderful!" ejaculated Turpin. "This surpasses all belief. If its effects will only endure for the space of one short hour I shall care not—our purpose will be achieved."

He was so intent in watching Black Bess, and congratulating himself upon the fact that he should not have to suffer the mortification of failure, that he completely forgot all about his foes.

But he was soon reminded of them by hearing the loud clatter of their approaching horses.

Well-nigh worn out as he was, Dick yet bent a defiant gaze upon them.

Then mounting, he waved his hat as though daring them to the pursuit, and once more gave Black Bess the impulse forward.

The administered drug had now had time to work its full results, and under the influence of it the gallant mare again broke into a gallop.

It could not be expected, however, that this should be anything like equal to her ordinary mode of going, yet it answered Dick's purpose.

Once more the hedgerows, now glistening with dew-drops in the early morning sun, flew past him.

Once more the milestones rapidly succeeded one another.

Once more Dick's spirits rose to their highest pitch.

His foes, too, had dropped off to less than half their former number.

Neither flesh, blood, nor the seats of their smallclothes could withstand the never-ceasing friction of the saddle, and one by one they had dropped off from sheer inability to sit any longer.

Skellum suffered no slight inconvenience from this cause, for scarcely any rider, however well practised, could keep the saddle for so many hours unintermittedly without feeling the disagreeable consequences of it.

But Mr. Skellum's fierce and dogged nature would not have permitted him to succumb to a much greater evil than this, and so he kept on, encouraging by his example those men to follow him who would otherwise have fallen off.

Moreover, he pointed out to those who remained that if they finally succeeded, as he felt assured they must, the fewer that were in at the death the greater would be the share of the reward that each would receive, those who had discontinued the chase not being entitled to anything for their exertions.

This, of course, was a great inducement.

"Never mind the pain," Skellum concluded; "grin and bear it. Stick to your work like men, and the money will prove an excellent healing plaster."

With renewed hope and spirits the men continued the chase, for they had too palpably seen how distressed Black Bess was to have any doubts about their speedy success, provided they could continue to hold out a little longer.

In the meanwhile Dick Turpin found Black Bess tearing over the ground in a manner he had little anticipated.

Indeed, he found it difficult to credit the evidence of his own senses.

The first ten miles were accomplished with apparently little effort.

No stronger proof than this could be brought forward of the surprising efficacy of the ostler's potion.

"Eight miles!"

The words were uttered by Dick Turpin with an exultant shout that so amazed a man ploughing in an adjacent field that he stopped his team at once, and stood gazing in dull wonderment after the flying horseman.

Eight miles!

To Dick this distance seemed as nothing.

Every moment he expected to catch sight of his destination.

"It will be done," he cried—"done easily. Bravo, Bess! it is a feat that will never be forgotten—one that will perpetuate your name for ever. Eight miles! On—on, gallant steed! Rest and peace are now before you—on—on——"

But at this moment the gallant creature stumbled.

Dick snatched the rein suddenly, and she continued as before.

But, nevertheless, the occurrence made the highwayman's heart sink like lead.

All his exultation was gone.

Anxiety and dismay took its place.

The drug was losing its potent, subtle influence.

Never had his mare stumbled so before, and he was conscious that but for the stimulus of the drug she would long since have dropped down insensible or dead.

And this was what he now dreaded.

For all that, he could tell the effects would evaporate as speedily as they were produced.

If so, he had to dread her downfall every moment, and, if so, what was to be done?

The police officers were not in sight just then, but if he lingered they soon would be.

These reflections passed very rapidly through his mind, and yet, short as was the time, Bess stumbled again.

And on this occasion, too, it was a stumble of a much worse character.

With infinite difficulty she kept her legs, and, as if full of anger at the manifestation of such a symptom of weakness, tried most desperately to gallop on as before.

But the effort was a vain one.

Dick felt her reel beneath him.

She swayed fearfully from side to side.

Still she kept on.

Dick Turpin let her go at her own will

He felt that it was his only chance.

His thoughts now were of such a character as altogether to defy any attempt at description.

As for Bess, she bounded on, it is true; but more with the fashion of a galvanised automaton than a real living creature.

Dick sat upon her back in a stupor of despair.

At every moment he expected to see her fall, but to his astonishment she still kept on.

In the distance he saw a milestone.

Would she reach it?

Yes, it is reached and passed.

Dick, looking intently, sees upon it the figure 3.

He cannot read, but he knows that represents the number of miles intervening between that spot and York.

"Good Heavens!" he ejaculated. "Can it be possible that, after all, we are to fail—to fail now that we are so close to our destination? Ah!" he exclaimed, as a turn in the roadway enabled him to see some distance in advance—"ah, there is York!

"Look—look, Bess," he exclaimed, addressing himself to his all but worn-out steed—"look, Bess, there is the point I wish so much to reach: there—there is York! Courage—courage! We shall do it yet, old girl—I feel assured we shall—do it, too, within the time! Courage—courage! We are almost there!"

As before, her master's voice induced Black Bess to increase her efforts.

But it was a fatal attempt.

Again she stumbled.

This time her knees fairly touched the ground.

But, with a snort, she recovered her upright position.

She trembled, though, in every limb.

She struggled on a little way, swaying fearfully the while from side to side.

Even at this, the last gasp, her courage was indomitable.

She would not give in, but strung up every nerve and sinew for a final effort.

Dick knew not what to do, and so sat in the saddle like one stupified.

He was certain his mare was going.

Still, to his astonishment, she staggered on.

Then, finally, as though by sheer desperation, broke into a gallop.

But it did not last out half a dozen yards.

All at once—without any preparation save a slight tremor of all her limbs—she went down.



[THE BLOODHOUNDS ARE LET LOOSE UPON DICK TURPIN'S TRACK.]

Went down like some animal suddenly struck down at the shambles.

Although in one sense Dick Turpin was prepared for this occurrence, yet, nevertheless, he was taken by surprise.

So instantaneous was the fall, and so little expected at that precise juncture, that he could not save himself.

He tried, but the attempt was a failure.

Almost as if he had been projected from some piece of ordnance, he shot over his mare's neck.

He came down heavily in the roadway upon his head, and such was the impetus that he rolled over and over in the dust for several yards.

There he remained for some moments quite insensible.

A painful sensation in his chest, as though it was pressed upon by some heavy weight, was the next thing of which he was conscious.

Slowly he raised his head, too confused at present to comprehend the exact nature of his position, and to recollect with anything like clearness what had last occurred.

But remembrance soon came back.

He had only to look a little way down the roadway.

There was a sight to be seen there which he could scarcely gaze upon without being heartbroken.

Lying at full length on her side—her flanks rising and falling with a convulsive motion, her neck and head stretched out till they formed nearly a straight line, her eyes glassy and dim, her mouth wide open with the lips retracted, her tongue protruded and half cut in two by the sharp steel bit, her whole body reeking—was poor Black Bess!

She had taken her last gallop—her race was run.

She had perished in the effort to serve her master.

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CHAPTER MCII.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN SHOWS HIMSELF TO BE AS GOOD AS HIS WORD.

Yes, all was over.

Poor Black Bess had approved her fidelity with her death.

She had served her master too well—that master who should have given her more consideration.

Yet there was nothing of reproach in the way in which she raised her head, with a painful and languid movement, and looked after her master.

Slowly and painfully, Dick rose to his feet.

It was not so much pain in his limbs, however, as it was the dead weight about his heart which kept him down.

Remorse, deep and bitter, had seized upon him.

He approached with a hesitating, undecided step.

The aspect of poor Black Bess stretched almost lifeless upon the roadway, struck more daggers in his heart than could the most acrimonious of reproaches.

As he advanced, he bent his head down towards the ground.

Bess neighed faintly.

Dick responded by a heavy groan.

The next moment he stood beside her.

Then, with a loud cry of grief and despair, which would much have amazed anyone who had chanced to hear it, he flung himself wildly on his knees.

His faithful mare raised her head still more, and made an ineffectual attempt to rise.

But her master clasped his arms tightly round her neck and pressed her head to his breast.

"My poor, poor Bess!" he cried. "And has it come to this? Is this the end? Now that the worst has happened, I can scarcely believe but that I have been made the sport of some terrible delusion! I am like one in a dream."

Another sob at this moment choked his utterance.

He stroked his mare's neck a few times, and then continued, half aloud:

"Can it be that you have run your last race—that you have sacrificed yourself for your unworthy master? Yes—yes, hard and terrible as belief is, I can hold out against it no longer! You are dying, Bess: yes—yes, surely and swiftly dying! I can see it in your dimming eyes! Alas—alas! Dying, and for what?"

He paused, for just then his ear caught the sound of bells.

He listened intently,

It was a clock striking.

It was the chiming of the four quarters which had first attracted his attention.

Then, after that, he counted, one by one, several distinct booming sounds, telling the hour.

There were nine of them.

As the last reached his ears, his face assumed an air of animation which afforded a striking contrast to his former gloom.

"I am answered," he ejaculated, as the last of the ringing sounds died away—"I am answered! It was that—it was to hear those chimes! The feat is achieved, Bess! We are at York, for those were the bells in the old Minster that I heard. The journey has been performed within the time! It has cost you your life, my gallant Bess; but I can spare it. You might have lived longer, but it would have been to die perhaps ignobly. And what gallant action has ever yet been achieved that has not involved some great sacrifice or other? The sacrifice this time has been your life!"

This last reflection reconciled Dick in some slight degree to that loss which, however much he might deplore it, was inevitable.

For his own part, he felt that he should no longer have occasion for his mare's services, and therefore it is not surprising that he should prefer to see her lying stiff and stark before him than for her to fall into other hands.

His mind once more reverted to that peaceful village near the sea-shore, and a stronger inclination than ever sprung up in his mind to hasten there.

He was aroused from these meditations by feeling his mare's head slip out of his embrace.

A moment afterwards there was a convulsive shuddering of her whole body.

Her ribs expanded, and so great was the force within that the saddle-girths were snapped asunder.

Then ensued a long and heavily-exhaled breath.

It was her last!

There was a slight movement of the muscles.

Then all was still.

Black Bess—the highwayman's stanch, invaluable friend—the incomparable steed, whether for qualities of beauty, shape, fleetness, or endurance, for she possessed them all in the highest degree—Black Bess was dead!

When Dick Turpin realised that the mysterious essence called life had departed—that nothing remained of his priceless steed but a mass of senseless flesh, his grief burst out afresh, and continued for some time without intermission.

But at last it wore itself away, as every violent emotion will—perhaps all the sooner in his case because of the danger with which he was threatened, and the difficulties he had to contend against.

Moreover, he recollected that his purpose was not altogether carried out, and he renewed his determination to complete it.

The question, too, arose as to what he should do with the body of his mare.

To leave it in the highway, subject to all manner of indignities, was a thing to which he could not bring his mind at all.

And yet, how was he to dispose of it?

He looked around him almost despairingly, but in a moment afterwards his features altered in expression.

This was because he perceived on one side of him a rather high stone wall—such a one as would form a boundary to some nobleman's estate—which was pierced by a light iron gate.

At the first glance Dick saw that this gate was only fastened by means of an iron latch.

This he raised, and pushed the gate wide open.

Then, by dint of putting forth all the strength which he possessed, he dragged Black Bess across the road towards it.

It was a toilsome operation, and, but for the intense disinclination he felt to leaving her on the highway, he would have abandoned his undertaking in despair.

Moreover, the reader must have been struck by the fact that it would be of the highest importance to conceal the body of Black Bess from his pursuers.

Dick wanted, if possible, to keep them ignorant of the fact that he was afoot.

This helped to make him persevere in his intention.

Nearer and nearer his load was dragged, until at length he passed through the gate.

Then he paused a little while to rest, for the exertion was almost too much for him in his present wearied state.

The success which had attended his endeavours so far would naturally have the effect of stimulating him to a still greater degree.

His rest, therefore, was a short one.

But it took nearly the whole of his remaining strength to drag Black Bess where he desired to place her.

This was close under the stone wall of which we have spoken.

His foes were too close behind him for him to have the time to dig a grave, though this was what he would have preferred to do.

Besides, he was unprovided with the requisite implements.

This, then, was perforce abandoned, but he did the next best thing in his power.

Close at hand was a great quantity of newly-fallen leaves—in some places they were quite knee-deep.

With these he covered her over, and so well did he work that in less than ten minutes nothing could be seen of her but a huge bed of leaves.

"It grieves me, Bess," he had said, as he covered up the last visible remnant of her body, "to think that I can give you no better burial. But yet you will rest here as well as in a gorgeous tomb. I may, too, have the opportunity of placing you beneath the turf. We shall see—we shall see!"

He paused in saddened thought.

His reverie might have lasted some time had not his

quick ears caught the sound of a horseman approaching.

"What am I to do next?" he asked, arousing himself. "I feel like a vessel without a rudder or a helmsman. What am I to do?"

He walked a few paces nearer to the little iron gate.

"Let me think," he continued. "I undertook to be at the Bowling Green this morning at nine o'clock. In that respect, at any rate, I shall fail, for it is past nine already. Yet I will be as good as my word, even though I am a little late—I will go on to York."

Having come to this determination, he stepped out into the high-road.

The sound of a horse's hoofs could now be heard very plainly indeed, and, glancing in the direction of the sound, he perceived a mounted traveller approaching.

He was coming from York.

At the first glance Dick took a resolution.

He shrank back through the gateway, and, drawing forth one of his pistols, examined it attentively.

It required a little attention to the priming, and by the time this had been put right the horseman was very close at hand indeed.

But Dick was ready.

Choosing the proper moment, he suddenly emerged and placed himself exactly in the centre of the highway.

The gentleman's horse, frightened at his sudden appearance and firm demeanour, brought itself to a standstill with so much abruptness that it rose on its haunches, while its fore legs pawed the air.

Dick was ready as he came down again to seize the rein, which he held with a grasp of iron.

No one could possibly have been more amazed than was this gentleman Dick had so unceremoniously dealt with.

To be stopped thus within a couple of miles of old York City, and by broad daylight, too, seemed beyond the pale of all belief.

But Dick Turpin's first words convinced him that it was a reality.

"Dismount," he said, in the short sharp tones of one accustomed to military command—"dismount!"

"What for?"

"Because I want your horse."

"Well, of all the d—d impudence——"

"Hold—hold, I have no time to waste in words. I want your horse, and, take my word for it, the wisest thing you can do is to submit quietly, for I am not in the humour to put up with any trifling."

"Well, but——"

"Dismount, I tell you! I want your horse!"

"But I decline."

"Then I shall be obliged to have recourse to force. Do you see this pistol? It is loaded, and I looked to the priming not a moment ago. If you don't alight I shall use it to compel you."

"But, my good fellow, I am bound on business of the utmost importance. I assure you it will not brook a moment's delay——"

"I can't help that! Your horse I must and will have!"

"But do you think I will tamely submit to lose my property in this fashion?"

"You will not lose it."

"Not lose it?" echoed the traveller, with an incredulous air.

"Certainly not. I am in haste to reach York; and if you will lend me your horse for that purpose I will either leave it for you at your house or in any part of York you like to name."

"That sounds very like a whale, does it not?"

"Never mind, I will parley no longer. Your steed you will have to surrender, and it is for you to choose whether you will do so with or without the sacrifice of your life."

Dick's resolute air was not to be doubted, and the traveller had sense enough to see that he would at all risks be as good as his word.

Accordingly, he quitted the saddle, though the manner in which he did so showed how much this act went against the grain.

Dick was mounted in a moment.

"Understand me," he said, "yours will be no loss. I am going to the Bowling Green, and there I will leave your horse. You can have it again in half an hour's time if you think fit."

The traveller, who happened to be a very respectable attorney in the City of York, was still incredulous.

Dick Turpin, however, gave him time to say no more, but turning the horse's head, used the spurs vigorously, and dashed off at a gallop.

The attorney looked after him as long as he was in sight, and then murmured, with a rueful air:

"People will call me a fool for giving up my horse so easily; but what the devil could I do? I only hope the rascal will be as good as his word; but I doubt it—I doubt it."

The lawyer stood a moment or two in deep thought, as though endeavouring to come to a decision whether it would be better for him to retrace his steps or continue on his journey.

The trampling of hoofs aroused him, and looking along the road, he caught sight of Mr. Skellum and the remnant of his party.

Both horses and riders seemed to be in the last stage of exhaustion and distress.

Their half immersion in the river had by no means improved the appearance of the officers, and they were moreover covered thickly with dust and the foam from the mouths of their jaded steeds.

Their whole aspect indeed was such as to attract the attention of the most careless observer.

The York attorney was filled with astonishment and curiosity.

Perceiving him, Mr. Skellum drew rein in order to make a few inquiries, for some time had elapsed since he had last seen anyone upon the road.

"Good morning," he said, raising himself in the stirrups, for in the present condition of his skin, anything was preferable to sitting. "Have you seen anything of a red-coated fellow on a black horse?"

"No, I have not."

"You have not?" gasped Mr. Skellum, who was very far from anticipating this reply.

"Certainly not."

"How far have you come?"

"From my house in York?"

"And you have kept along the highway?"

"Yes."

"And you have not seen anyone answering to the description I have given?"

"What description?"

"Why, a man in a red coat, much dirtied and torn, though, and with a generally wild appearance."

"Well," said the attorney, "I have certainly seen a man who would answer to that description——"

"Yes, yes!"

"But he was not on horseback."

"Not on horseback?"

"No."

"How then?"

"On foot."

"And was he going towards York?"

"D—n him! I should think he is there by this time."

"Come—come," said Skellum, shifting himself about uneasily, "I can see you know something more of this matter. Let me know all."

"First give me a reason why I should satisfy your curiosity."

"I can easily do that. We are police officers from London, in pursuit of Dick Turpin, the highwayman."

The lawyer repeated the name.

"You have heard of him, I suppose?"

"Yes, I have heard some extraordinary and incredible tales respecting such a man."

"Well, then, I will undertake to say you never heard of anything half so extraordinary as this last feat of his. I would not have believed it, only I have been a witness to the whole."

"What is it?"

"Why, he has ridden from London to here in just twelve hours."

"Nonsense!"

"Your disbelief does not surprise me, but it *is* a fact, nevertheless."

"That he rode on horseback from London to York in twelve hours?"

"Yes. This time last night we were in Drury Lane, which, as you may happen to know, is near enough the centre of London."

"I know it well. And you have made the journey in the same time?"

"Yes, we have been in hot pursuit of him all the way; and though we have been furnished with relays of horses at about every twenty miles, yet we have been unable to overtake him."

"And how many horses had this highwayman?"

"How many?" ejaculated Skellum, amazed that anyone should ask such a question.

"Yes, how many?"

"Why, one, to be sure!"

It was now the attorney's turn to be amazed.

"Do you mean in sober earnestness to tell me that a man has ridden two hundred miles in twelve hours with one horse?"

"It is an incontrovertible fact. There is but one steed in the world that could have performed such a feat, and that is the highwayman's mare, Black Bess."

The attorney was scarcely able to believe yet what he had heard, and he required Mr. Skellum to repeat it.

"Well," he said, drawing a long breath, "the circumstance seems well attested. I don't know how you could have fallen into any mistake, nor is there any likelihood that you would depose to what you knew to be untrue."

"Certainly not," said Skellum. "It is small credit to us to have to acknowledge that we could not overtake him. But I admire the animal; and if I had Dick Turpin here this moment, I do believe I would let him off, provided he would give me his mare, Black Bess, in recompense. But come, sir, I have satisfied your curiosity pretty well, and have rested my horse into the bargain. But I cannot afford any more time. Tell me now what you know, for I am certain you possess information."

The attorney made no attempt at concealment.

"I feel pretty sure," he said, "that I have seen the fellow you want, but he was without his steed."

"That is strange," said Skellum. "I have not seen it. What can he have done with it?"

"I can answer that question no better than yourself."

"And you say he has gone to York?"

"Yes. I suppose you have noticed these heavy riding-boots?"

"I have, and wondered why you should choose them to walk in."

"I did not choose them for that purpose—I put them on this morning because I had a long and important journey to make on urgent business matters. I rode close to this spot, when all at once the fellow we are talking of darted into the middle of the road, seized my horse, and compelled me to dismount."

"Why did you not capture him?"

"Because he looked an ugly customer to meddle with, and I had no idea who he was. Being under fear of my life, I chose to alight. In a moment he then sprang into the saddle and galloped off towards York."

"Curse it!" said Skellum. "This is most unfortunate! I am afraid we shall lose him, after all, for doubtless yours is a good horse."

"One of the best in the county, though I say it."

"It's all up, then. We have had our trouble for nothing, for I'll wager my life he rides it till it drops."

"I am afraid so, too. And yet he led me to understand that he was going no farther than York—at least, he said his destination was the Bowling Green, and that I could have my horse there in half an hour's time if I chose to apply for it."

"Gammon!" said Skellum, as he put his finger in a very waggish way by the side of his nose—"gammon! I think I see him at it!"

"I thought it an unlikely thing myself," said the attorney, with a sigh. "D—n the fellow! I would not have parted with the horse for a hundred and fifty guineas."

"Well, we will push on to the Bowling Green now we have come so far," exclaimed Skellum, with an air of intense aggravation. "Not that I have the slightest hope of finding him now. But come on—come on!"

"I wish I could come with you," cried the attorney. "But your horses seem hardly able to carry themselves."

"Not one could stand a double burden."

"No, I can see that plainly enough. Go on—I will walk."

Mr. Skellum at once set forward, and the attorney, cursing his ill-luck, prepared to follow him on foot.

But the sound of wheels behind him caused him to turn round, and then he saw approaching at a rapid rate a light vehicle on two wheels.

It was occupied only by one person, and this turned out to be one of the attorney's intimate friends.

The vehicle was stopped at once—the attorney entered it, and began to recount his morning's adventures.

The horse harnessed to the vehicle got over the ground in a capital style.

Consequently, it was not long before the attorney passed the police officers, who were not a little annoyed to think they could not be the first to arrive at the Bowling Green.

Leaving both parties, we will follow Dick.

It need not be said that he made the best use of the horse he had so unexpectedly gained possession of.

The spires of York drew nearer and nearer, and in the space of little more than ten minutes Dick pulled up suddenly in front of the Bowling Green Inn.

At that early hour in the morning—for ten o'clock had not yet struck—it was not likely that many people would be found amusing themselves on the smooth piece of grass in front of the rustic-looking public-house.

Still, there were a few loiterers.

The landlord hurried forward as soon as he saw a horseman pull up in front of the door, and bawled loudly for the ostler.

Dick dismounted, and as he did so he said:

"This is not my horse. Place him in the stable until the gentleman calls for him. I was to have been here by nine o'clock."

"Then you are late," rejoined the host.

"What is the time?"

"Five-and-twenty to ten."

"Thanks," said Dick. "I am sorry I am more than half an hour behind time; but I have had an awkward tumble. Bring me some brandy."

Dick strolled off to one of the many wooden seats that were placed round the Bowling Green.

The landlord looked after him with a little curiosity, which is not surprising when Dick's appearance is taken into consideration.

Still, the mention he had made of an ugly tumble was almost sufficient to account for it.

The brandy was brought.

Dick drained it at a draught.

Then joined the players.

To have seen him at this moment, no one would have dreamed he was the bold highwayman with whose exploits England had rung so long.

Nor would they have thought, when seeing the smile upon his face as he entered into the spirit of the sport, that his heart was bleeding, or that he had sustained so terrible a loss.

Black Bess was the sole tie that bound him to life.

Now she had gone, what would become of him?

At this present time it seemed as though he did not care.

Perhaps it was drinking brandy while in such a heated state, and at a time when he required substantial nourishment, that produced this reckless effect upon him.

He was ready for any deed, however desperate.

He played with great skill and determination, winning every game, to the no small annoyance of those present, who by no means relished a stranger's stepping in and bearing away the bell in such a triumphant style.

There was a pause, and in the silence the Minster clock struck ten.

Dick counted the strokes aloud, in a manner so peculiar and significant as to attract the notice of all.

"So late," he exclaimed, as he threw down the bowls with which he was about to commence playing another game—"so late! I cannot stay any longer. Good morning, gentlemen!"

He tossed half-a-crown to the landlord; then, turning on his heel, he walked rapidly away, vanishing almost instantly round the corner of a street.

"That is a queer fish, any way!" exclaimed the landlord, biting the coin, in order to be sure it was of the right metal. "I wonder, now what he wants at York?"

Hardly had he pronounced the words than the sound of wheels was heard, and in an instant all eyes were turned towards the road.

The arrivals were the attorney and his friend.

Both were well known to the landlord.

"Good morning, Mr. Bridgeman," he said, addressing the former. "I thought you said last night you should be obliged to take a long journey this morning."

"And you are right," said the lawyer, alighting; "but I have come for my horse. Is it here?"

"I do believe it is your horse now I come to think of it. I fancied I had seen the animal before," said the landlord, speaking more to himself than to his interrogator.

"Is it here?" asked the attorney, in an anxious voice, for he had not ventured to think for a moment that he should ever see his much-prized steed again.

"Yes," said the landlord; "he is in the stable."

"Let me see him; I shall believe my own eyes."

This was said as though he should believe nothing else.

But at this moment the landlord's attention was again distracted.

This time the cause was no other than the arrival of Mr. Skellum and his party.

He had managed to push along at much better speed than could have been expected.

"Well," he exclaimed, as he recognised the attorney, "have you any intelligence?"

"I think the horse is here. I am just going to see."

"If it is, then, rely upon it the fellow himself is not far off."

With these words, Mr. Skellum deliberately and carefully dismounted.

Having done so, he hobbled after the attorney and the landlord, for his legs were so stiff with riding that he could scarcely make any use of them whatever.

However, he managed to reach the stable door.

"Well, sir," he asked, "is your horse here?"

"To my unbounded astonishment, he is," answered Mr. Bridgeman. "I little thought of looking on him again."

"But where's the man that brought him?"

No one knew.

Mr. Skellum gazed keenly all around, but seeing nothing suspicious, began to ask for details.

His questions were eagerly responded to.

Prepared as he was for almost anything that Dick might do, yet he, nevertheless, felt strong doubts assail him upon hearing that the highwayman had actually had the audacity to remain half an hour at the inn and the *sangfroid* to join in a game at bowls.

It seemed absolutely incredible, but there were too many eager witnesses around to allow him to indulge in disbelief.

It was also a matter of additional vexation to Mr Skellum that at the very last he should miss his prey by what could only be called a hair's breadth.

He had left such a short time before too—such a few minutes—that he could not have walked many hundred yards.

In this all agreed, while some added that he must have been noticed, his appearance and manners were so singular, and so calculated to attract the observation of the inhabitants of the city.

Hope once more warmed Mr. Skellum's heart.

It did more, for it infused a little vigour into those limbs which but a moment before had been so nearly lifeless.

Surely the clue was good—the scent warm.

The highwayman was on foot, in a strange city, and as he was but mortal, of course not exempt from that fatigue which must be the result of the achievement he had just performed.

Calling his men around him then, Mr. Skellum, also on foot, began a fresh search, feeling sure by what the people at the Bowling Green said that he must come up with him in a few moments.

To these persons the game of bowls had no present interest.

They chose to follow at the heels of the police officers.

Up one street and down another they sped.

What words can portray their disappointment and vexation when they found themselves unable to catch a glimpse of him.

What was more, although they questioned numberless people, not one had seen him.

This was mysterious indeed.

But had Dick Turpin melted into air he could not have vanished more completely.

Mr. Skellum and everyone else concluded he was hiding somewhere.

But the indefatigable hunter of highwaymen could continue the search no longer, for the simple reason that sheer fatigue compelled him to desist.

So thoroughly worn out that he could scarcely move a limb, he crawled back to the inn and flung himself down to take that rest which was imperative.

CHAPTER MCIII.

RELATES THE ADVENTURES OF DICK TURPIN AFTER LEAVING THE BOWLING GREEN.

THE disappearance of Dick Turpin was most extraordinary, but yet it was a fact.

How he had contrived to vanish without leaving the faintest trace behind him, no one could imagine.

But he had gone, and so speedily that no one had seen him, nor was, as we have seen, the closest search and the most diligent inquiry in the least degree availing.

How this mystery came about it is now our business to describe.

It was a return of the old bravado inherent in his nature that made Dick Turpin join in as a player in the game of bowls.

Another feeling also urged him, and that was to establish abundant evidence of the precise hour of his arrival in York city.

This done, he proceeded to look after his own safety.

He was as yet by no means tired of his life, and knew that in order to preserve it he must elude his foes, whose appearance he expected every moment to witness.

And, indeed, had the bold highwayman been ever so weary of existence he would not have been willing to permit his enemies the triumph of making him their prisoner.

Once captured, there was no mistake about what the result would be.

To think of escape would be futile, for the most extraordinary precautions would be taken for his safe keeping.

Nor was Dick in love with that ignominious death which would be the termination of his captivity.

On the contrary, he would do all he could to avoid it, for death in any other form would be preferable.

This will give the reader some idea of the state of the highwayman's mind after he quitted the Bowling Green.

Fatigued, downcast, vinously excited as he was, yet all his wits were about him, and he was wondering by what means he could effectually elude his pursuers.

At this time he found himself in a long, narrow, deserted street.

The houses on either side were of an ancient build, each having overhanging stories, after the fashion approved of by our forefathers.

Although it was a bright day, yet this old street was full of gloomy shadows.

Dick Turpin, all the time thinking busily, looked attentively at every object without perceiving anything that would assist him in his design.

He was interrupted by the sound of wheels in the distance.

As if instinctively, he felt a desire to hide himself.

A place of concealment offered itself close at hand.

This was a dark, open doorway—apparently the means by which access to the rear of the houses in the street could be obtained.

Into this dark recess he shrank, and there remained until the approaching vehicle should pass by.

So obscure was the place where he stood that it was

next to an impossibility for him to be seen, especially by one whirling by in a vehicle.

But from this place Dick was able to see perfectly well who went by.

He had good cause to rejoice at his prompt obedience to the instinct of concealing himself.

As the reader may have anticipated, the vehicle was the one in which the attorney was riding in company with his friend.

Had he seen Dick he would have recognised him beyond all doubt.

Turpin drew back still further.

But the danger was over.

The light gig had passed by, and the attorney never once troubled himself to look behind.

Yet Dick remained where he was, not liking to emerge until the gig was out of sight.

This soon happened.

The opportunity had arrived.

Dick was about to emerge when, to his vexation, he saw something else approaching.

This was a huge tarpaulin-covered waggon, drawn by three horses.

The rate they were going at was certainly under three miles an hour; and by the way they walked they appeared to have an unusually heavy load behind them.

The hope that after this was gone he should have the street to himself made him resolve to linger.

But the time consumed by the approach of the heavy waggon seemed endless.

The driver, Dick noted, was perched up on a high seat holding the reins, and, according to the custom of waggoners in general, his eyes were fast shut—probably he was sleeping.

These may seem trifling things to notice, but then in the state Dick was, every object, no matter how apparently trivial, had for him the strongest interest.

He afterwards had reason to congratulate himself upon having observed so narrowly.

As the waggon passed by, of course he had a view of the end of it.

He then became aware that it was loaded with sacks of grain, although two flapping sheets of canvas partially covered them.

At this moment he was struck by an idea.

He did not wait to consider of it, but proceeded to put it into execution almost as soon as he had conceived it.

Darting swiftly from his place of concealment, he ran to the end of the waggon, seized hold of a rope that was dangling from the top, and with great agility and swiftness swung himself on to the top of the sacks.

Then without loss of time he crawled further in and laid himself down at full length.

So swiftly did all this take place that it amazed even himself, so short was the time elapsing between the thought and the act.

He believed, too, that no one had observed the action.

Most certainly the somnolent driver of the waggon knew nothing of the matter.

But had not Dick acted so much upon impulse, reflection would have suggested to him that it was somewhat important he should know where the vehicle was going.

Of this he was in entire ignorance; but as the step was taken, the best thing he could do was to remain still and await the result.

He was startled from his reflections by the sound of horses' feet.

Then, almost immediately after he heard a voice cry, in stentorian tones:

"Hullo there—hullo, I say!"

"Waur-whoop!" bawled the waggoner, waking up with a start.

His team at once came to a standstill.

Then the horses' feet stopped also.

Could they be Dick's foes?

The highwayman rolled over noiselessly on the sacks, and crept a little nearer to the front.

"Which is the way to the Bowling Green?" asked a voice.

"Doan't yow know?"

"Of course not, or I should not ask."

"Why, it's just at the top of the street yonder; yow'll see it when you get a little further."

"Then you have just come from there?"

"No, I hanna; but I passed it not long since."

"Ha! that's the same thing. Have you seen anything of a man in a dirty red coat?"

"Dirty red coat?"

"Yes."

"No, I hanna."

"I don't suppose he has. He would be coming along with his eyes shut, without seeing anything."

"And if I wor, what's that to you?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Very well, then, hold your row."

"Only," said Mr. Skellum—for it was that individual and his troop of men—"if you do see him, lay hold of him and keep him. There is a thousand pounds reward offered for him!"

At first, Dick had been not a little startled at finding the waggon stopped by his enemies; but, recovering himself, he crawled still nearer towards a fold of the canvas top, through which he hoped to be able to catch a sight of the men who had kept so indefatigably upon his track.

He saw them plainly enough in all conscience, for they were not above a yard from him.

While Skellum was speaking to the waggoner in the way we have recorded, he little thought that the eyes of the man he so much wanted to capture were fixed intently upon him—that he was, indeed, within his reach, had he but stretched out his arm to its full length.

Nothing, however, could have been further from the thoughts of Mr. Skellum and his party than that Dick was there.

A few more words passed between him and the waggoner.

Then he trotted off.

With no little difficulty, the waggoner then got his team into motion again.

As for Dick, emboldened by what had just occurred, he actually had the audacity to creep to the end of the waggon and look after his foes.

He could see them plainly enough, though it would have required a much keener vision than they possessed for them to discover him.

The next consideration which presented itself to Dick was rather an anxious one.

This was as to the destination of the waggoner.

If he was about to deliver his load to some place in the city it would be very awkward indeed for Dick, because his discovery would be inevitable; and his presence there unknown to the driver, and his soiled, travel-stained appearance would be certain to excite suspicion.

Moreover, Dick knew as well as could be that Mr. Skellum, on reaching the Bowling Green, would learn how very recently the object of his pursuit had quitted it, and would therefore institute a strict search immediately.

In a quiet place like York, news of this description would doubtless spread with amazing rapidity; and if an hour elapsed before the waggon stopped, he would, ten to one, be recognised.

This consideration was enough to cause Dick a great deal of anxiety, for never in all his life had he been so desirous or determined to get out of the clutches of the police officers.

Then, he was quite a stranger in York; and as the waggon traversed street after street, he was unable to form any idea as to whether he was being taken towards the open country or not.

Amid all this anxiety, he found his recumbent position on the sacks of grain a very comfortable one, for, after what he had gone through, he felt it no ordinary relief to stretch his limbs out at full length and remain perfectly still.

Thus he awaited the course of events.

At last he began to perceive indications that they were approaching the outskirts of the city, and finally he saw that the horses had entered upon a long, broad highroad.

Having made this discovery, he felt tolerably at his ease.

His enemies could have no clue to his whereabouts, and he indulged in the strong hope that, after having brought them so many miles in quest of him, he should be able to shake them off entirely.

To do so would be to have something like revenge upon them.

He resolved that no effort or ingenuity upon his part should be wanting.

But, standing quite alone in all the world as he now did—without comrades, without Maud, without Black Bess as well—it may seem strange that he should cling to life.

One would have thought that, on the contrary, he would have found life insupportable.

There was, in good truth, an aching void in his heart, but he clung to life because he had a purpose to accomplish.

There was an object before him upon which his mind was ever fixed.

There was a constant yearning of his spirit.

Always in his mind's eye he could see the scenery around Maud's last resting-place.

His throat would swell and ache when he thought of her, but his fixed determination was to get to the coast, embark in a vessel, and make his way to the little French village.

So paramount was his determination that all things bowed beneath it.

In times past it was rarely that he fixed his mind upon any object without securing it, and it remains to be seen whether his former success had or had not deserted him.

He last remembered being busy with these thoughts, and then all at once he was sensible of some kind of jerk.

For full a moment his brain was in confusion.

After that it seemed tolerably certain that he had unconsciously fallen off into a sleep, which might have endured much longer had it not been for the stopping of the waggon.

His sleep, too, must have been a long one, for, to his astonishment, he found that it was now almost dark.

Luckily, his presence of mind was great enough to enable him to remain perfectly still.

He could hear voices around him, and was very curious to know where he could be.

Had he reached the end of his journey?

If so, the waggon would be unloaded, and how was he to escape discovery?

He reconnoitred.

His first discovery was that the waggon had been drawn into a yard at the side of an inn.

The waggoner, assisted by an ostler, was unharnessing the horses.

"This is some halting-place," he muttered—"his journey is not over yet. What shall I do next?"

At present he was pretty well occupied in watching the movements of the men.

It was quite possible that the waggoner might take it into his head to peep inside his waggon to see whether all was right, and if he did, an alarm would immediately ensue.

At that lonely spot, and so far from York, it was questionable whether he would be recognised; but then Dick's wish was not to leave any sort of clue whatever behind him.

The two men led the horses into the stable, and Dick speedily took steps to prevent himself from being seen.

There was no one visible, and so with all possible alacrity and noiselessness he alighted.

When he set foot to earth he did not pause, but turned suddenly the angle of some building and walked on.

What should be his next step?

He was tolerably well provided with money for immediate use, and once thought of walking towards the inn and remaining there.

But a second thought induced him to abandon this intention.

He was not far enough from York to render it safe to show himself; besides, he had come altogether by the high-road, so that it would be easy to follow him so far.

Above all, after the description given by Skellum, the waggoner might recognise him.

A better course he imagined would be to make his way on foot across the country.

With this intention he crossed a stile and walked rapidly along a footpath leading across the fields.

Almost at every step he went the obscurity increased.

"I ought to make good use of the night," he said to himself. "Such darkness as this is the most effectual cover for my flight. I will try to keep on till daylight, and then I will avail myself of the first place of shelter that offers."

But in coming to this decision he quite overlooked his present exhausted state.

The ride in the waggon had rested him a great deal, it is true, but he wanted a better repose than that.

Before he had walked far he felt a dreadful feeling of weariness come over him, and, strive as he would, he could not shake it off.

He tried bravely, and walked on with great resolution, but fatigue asserted itself to be his master.

He was obliged to succumb to it.

He would do no more, however, than fling himself on the ground for a brief space.

Then rising, he went on.

But he began to think this unusual exhaustion was attributable more to the length of time he had gone without partaking of food than any other cause.

Yet in the lonely, desolate situation where he now found himself, where was he to find refreshment?

But the hope of shortly finding some solitary dwelling infused a transitory vigour into his limbs.

It was only transitory, however, for it was not long before he found himself utterly incapable of going any further.

By this time the moon had risen, and although she had not attained any considerable elevation above the horizon, yet he was able to see a little about him.

His eyes had been for some time fixed upon a dark mass in front of him, which he now made out to be a building of some kind.

Hope whispered to his heart that it might be a cottage, the inhabitants of which would afford him the food and shelter of which he stood so much in need.

But there was no ray of light to be perceived to lend any colour to this anticipation.

On the contrary, the building appeared to be lonely, solitary, deserted.

Still, whatever its character might be, it promised to afford the fugitive a better shelter than the bare sky.

Accordingly, he slowly dragged his weary limbs towards it.

As he drew nearer and became able to see it with more distinctness, hope died away within him.

It became evident that the building was merely a barn, or some such place.

Yet its roof promised some shelter, and he held on his course.

But when at last he reached the building, Dick felt that had it been much further off he must have abandoned the thought of gaining it.

As it was, a fresh disappointment awaited him.

Upon becoming aware of the nature of the place, he thought at least that there could be no difficulty in gaining admission to it.

On arriving, though, he found that the huge folding doors were so securely fastened that he could not break them open.

With a heavy sigh he sank down.

For some time he remained thus, utterly dejected, but the intense cold and discomfort of his situation made him resolve to make a fresh attempt to gain the shelter of the building.

By this time he had regained a little strength, so he rose and walked round the walls.

Only one opening presented itself, but this was so high up that he feared he should not be able to reach it.

It was an aperture similar to that which may be seen in the wall of a loft over a stable.

Against the wall, however, a tree was growing, and if it was only strong enough to bear his weight he fancied he might succeed.

At any rate he showed himself willing, for he made the attempt.

By dint of much exertion he climbed up into the branches, which bent dangerously beneath him, but did not break.

Higher—higher still he crawled, until, after twenty ineffectual attempts, he succeeded in forcing himself through the opening.

He found below him a quantity of straw, on to which he stepped with caution, for upon his first entrance the interior seemed pitch dark.

Very soon, however, his eyes accustomed themselves to the small amount of light there was in the place.

Crawling cautiously forward a little, he found that the building was furnished with an upper floor like a loft.

Here then he made sure he should be able to repose himself for any length of time he thought fit.

Certainly the doors were fast, and no one could enter without his having due notification of it.

So far, then, all was as well as could be expected.

Sighing heavily, he once more extended himself at full length and closed his eyes.

A state of semi-consciousness succeeded.

It was not sleep, and yet something wonderfully like it.

The fact was that he suffered as much, perhaps more, from want of food than any other cause.

Since leaving Drury Lane, now about four-and-twenty hours ago, he had tasted nothing but brandy.

The immense quantities of the stimulant of which he had partaken doubtless had the effect of rendering him insensible to the pangs of hunger, but for all that it had failed to supply proper nourishment, hence this terrible prostration.

How long he might have remained in the state we have described he knew not, yet fancied it could not have been long, when he heard something like a human voice.

He started up at once, and listened intently.

Weary as he was, all his faculties were at full stretch, and his apprehension of danger morbidly acute.

Yet on this occasion his sharpened senses would seem to have played him false.

Although he listened so intently, he could hear nothing.

Believing at length that some accidental sound had misled him, he was about to resume his former position, when he felt certain he heard the sound of footsteps.

This time there could be no sort of doubt upon the point.

His first act was to draw his pistols.

It seemed scarcely possible that his foes should be approaching, but yet they had shown themselves so often in places where they were least expected, that he strongly felt the necessity of being on his guard.

He cocked his weapons, and scarcely was the operation finished when the footsteps ceased.

The murmur of voices then followed, and although Dick could not distinguish what was said, in consequence of the suppressed tones in which the conversation was carried on, yet he was confident that the speakers were close at hand.

A moment afterwards he heard a rattling noise.

It was caused by a key being thrust hastily into a lock, as though some one was full of impatience to gain admission.

But this impatience in effect only produced delay, for the key would not act properly upon the wards.

A cry of angry vexation followed.

Then the door was pushed open.

A cool rush of night air came in.

There was a square hole in the flooring of the loft, doubtless made for the purpose of facilitating the storing or removing whatever the loft might contain.

Dick was at the edge of this opening, looking down.

The opening of the one half of the huge doors by which Dick had vainly attempted to gain an entrance to the building brought to view the forms of two persons.

Dark as it was, their figures were clearly distinguishable against the night sky.

At the very first glance, Dick's apprehensions vanished, and he restored his pistols to his pockets.

But his curiosity was instantly inflamed, for one of these two persons was a female, and so far as the obscurity would allow him to judge, a young one.

Her companion was a short, thick-set, muscular-looking man, and the first words he said were:

"Now, Jane, why don't you come in?—what do you stand there for like that, dilly-dallying? Come in, I say!"

The tones of his voice were rude and harsh, and his speech was caused by a reluctance or rather disinclination on the part of his companion to enter the gloomy building.

"Oh, Stephen," she said, at length, in a trembling, tearful voice, "I feel so frightened—so terribly afraid—I feel that I shall die if ever I go in there!"

The man started slightly, but recovered his self-possession almost instantly as he said:

"Die, Jane? What do you mean?"

"Don't be cross with me—pray don't! I am nervous!"

"But what do you mean by talking about dying?" he replied, if anything, with additional fierceness.

"Mean, Stephen?"

"Yes, mean!"

"N-nothing—I am only so frightened!"

"But what have you to be frightened of? Ain't I here to protect and take care of you?"

"Yes, yes—I know you are, and I am very, very foolish—I know I am very foolish; but I cannot help it."

"Well—well, come in—let's have no nonsense! You ought to know by this time that you ought not to be afraid to go anywhere if I am with you."

He took her by the arm.

Her fear of exciting his anger seemed to be greater than her dread of entering the building, for she suffered him to lead her in passively.

"There," he cried, "what have you to be afraid of, I should like to know? The place is rather dark, to be sure; but, then, what matters that? It is safe—quite safe. We may be sure of being able to remain here without anyone interrupting us, for, to my knowledge, not a soul has been here these twelve months."

The girl was silent.

"Here," continued the man, "sit down and rest yourself upon this straw—then you will soon be better."

She acquiesced, but it was with a heavy sigh, as though a trouble of no ordinary character weighed her down.

Her companion assumed an attitude of listening, and Dick Turpin immediately held his breath, lest that slight sound should be detected, for though he was certain he had nothing to fear from these new-comers, yet he by no means wished to be discovered by them.

"Can you hear anything, Stephen?" asked the girl, noticing his attitude, and speaking in consternation.

"I thought I did; but I will go and see, and make sure, directly."

"No—no. You must not leave me! I——"

"Hush! I say. Are you sure you did all that I told you, Jane? I have not had the chance of questioning you before."

"Yes," was the reluctantly-spoken answer.

"That is well, then. You are quite sure?"

"Yes, quite."

"And is there much money?"

"Enough — enough — surely enough. Oh, Stephen, when I think what a doubly-guilty being I have become, I feel as though I should sink into the earth with horror."

"Then don't think of it—that's all I can say," was the rejoinder, accompanied by a boisterous laugh.

"Oh don't—don't, Stephen. If you had seen them as I saw them, you could not help thinking of it. I shall see my poor parents to my dying day, sleeping the sleep of innocence, while I, their guilty, trembling child, purloined the bag which contained the savings of so many years, and which they wholly relied upon for the future."

"Stop—stop, I say: I won't listen to it!"

"Then if you won't listen to it, why did you urge me to commit so dreadful a crime? Oh, Stephen," she added, with a wild and passionate outburst of grief, "I shall never—never be happy again!"

"Nonsense—nonsense: you will soon forget this—I tell you you will. And you are sure you have the money?"

"Yes, Stephen—yes."

There seemed to be great anxiety upon the man's part to be assured in this respect.

Dick could not fail to notice it, and he fancied that the girl observed it too.

But if so, she did not venture to make any remark upon the subject.

The man was silent for a moment or so, and then in an altered voice, as though he was struggling to restrain some violent emotions, he said:

"Now, Jane, I want you to listen to what I am going to say, and to pay particular attention to it; do you hear?"



[THE HALT OF THE OFFICERS ROUND THE TREE IN WHICH DICK TURPIN IS HIDDEN.]

"Yes," she answered, through her tears.

"In order that our flight may be a successful one, and that no clue be left behind, it is necessary that you should remain here a little while, during which I shall go away to complete the arrangements."

"No—no!" she said, wildly and appealingly. "Don't ask me to stop here alone—that is, not alone, for I shall have my guilty conscience with me! Don't ask me to stop! I cannot—indeed I cannot!"

"But you must!" he cried, struggling to release himself from her strong detaining grasp. "It is imperative! Don't anger me, for I am in no good humour—things have not gone as I thought. Beware how you anger me! Let me go, I say! It is useless for you to try to dissuade me."

CHAPTER MCIV.

DICK TURPIN IS THE SPECTATOR OF A TERRIBLE CRIME WHICH HE IS TOO LATE TO PREVENT.

SPEAKING these last words, he broke rudely from her, and the girl, clasping her hands over her face, crouched down in the straw, shaking with grief.

"Don't be long, then," she moaned—"don't be long! If you are, you will find me dead on your return."

"Foolish thing, you know that I shall be only a few minutes at the most. Remain where you are—don't stir till I come back. If you do—if I find that you have been to the door during my absence, I will leave you to your fate and take my flight alone. Do you hear me?"

"Yes—yes."

"Why don't you answer, then? I am going now—remember what I have said."

saying, he quitted the building, taking care to close the door after him, though he did not fasten it.

The sound of his footsteps could be heard a little while, but soon they died away, and then all was silence.

Silence and darkness too.

It was now no longer possible for Dick to make out the form of the young girl, save by means of his imagination.

She did not stir, but remained crouching down among the straw, sobbing as though her heart must break.

Dick was much interested in what had taken place, but at present could not see his way quite clear in the affair.

That there was some villany afoot he felt convinced.

Everything in the man's manner and conduct pointed to this fact.

The mere fact of his leading his companion to so solitary a place at such a late hour was enough to give rise to the strongest suspicion.

What his object could be in leaving the girl where she was defied Dick's conjectures altogether.

That he left her for the purpose mentioned he did not for one moment believe, and he therefore awaited his return with nearly as much impatience and anxiety as Jane herself.

What seemed to him a long time elapsed—how long he could not profess to tell, for under such conditions it is difficult to keep note of the flight of time.

During this interval many thoughts passed through his mind.

He was certain that the girl was in danger, without suspecting it, and consequently felt that she ought to be put upon her guard.

But, then, he was well aware that she was in a state of excessive nervous agitation, and any attempt to attract her attention would doubtless fail, so much would she be overcome with terror.

He was busy thinking of some means by which he could do this, when his ear caught the sound of returning footsteps.

The young girl heard them, too, for she started up.

The chance now was lost.

To utter a warning was impossible, for the footsteps paused just outside the door.

Then, without any appreciable lapse of time the door was flung open, and the man appeared.

With a hysterical cry the girl bounded towards him.

Dick saw him shrink back a pace and raise his hand.

He thought at once the rascal intended to strike her a cowardly blow.

But there was a flash, a report, a shriek, a crash, all seemingly mingled together, and the young girl was next seen lying motionless, with her body half across the threshold of the building.

After the accomplishment of his crime, the man stood for a moment or so as though stupified.

Dick himself was taken by surprise.

He had believed from the first that some crime had been meditated, but the deed had been done so suddenly as to deprive him of all power of saving her.

The highwayman was the first to recover the use of his faculties.

So great was his horror that he forgot all about his own fatigue and weakness in the strong desire he had to seize the murderer.

To drop down from through the hole in the floor, through which he had made his observations, was an easy enough matter.

The man, hearing a sound within that building which, to the best of his knowledge, was untenanted by any living soul, started; but his fear seemed too great to allow him to run away.

The next instant Dick Turpin stood before him.

"Villain!" he cried. "I have been a witness to your crime, nor will I leave you until you are made prisoner!"

With a howl of dismay the assassin gave a great bound, then turned and fled.

Dick made an ineffectual attempt to capture him.

His finger-nails broke against the ruffian's shoulder, but the grasp was missed.

Dick, however, instantly started off in pursuit.

It would seem, however, that the sound made by the discharge of the pistol had been heard, and had caused an alarm, for not far off across the fields, twinkling lights could be seen and the hum of voices heard.

Dick shouted out at the top of his voice.

The man, seeing this fresh danger in front, changed his course.

But in doing so his foot caught violently against some obstacle which he had failed to notice.

The consequence was, that in spite of a vigorous effort to save himself, he fell sprawling on the ground

Before he could rise the people with the lights arrived upon the scene.

Many strong hands were laid upon him, and he was forced to rise.

Dick arrived immediately afterwards, and at first—no doubt in consequence of the disordered state of his apparel—he was looked upon with considerable suspicion.

But these suspicions were quickly found to be ill-grounded.

"It be Stephen Phillips. I told you it wor," said a voice; "and when I say a thing agen, perhaps you'll believe me."

"My daughter—my Jane—my poor girl!" ejaculated an old man, with trembling accents. "This is the serpent that has lured her from her peaceful home. What has he done with her—where is she?"

"I believe I can answer those questions," replied Dick. "She has been foully murdered by that rascal, and you will find her weltering in her blood."

"Where—where?" asked a dozen voices.

"On the threshold of yonder building."

"Keep him secure," said some one, in an authoritative tone. "On no account let him get loose."

After this there was a general move towards the highwayman's late place of shelter.

As he had said, they found the poor girl lying on the threshold in a pool of blood.

But she was not quite dead.

The appearance of so many people around her, and the glare of light, brought her fluttering spirit back to life again.

With a wild burst of grief her father flung himself down beside her, and raised her head.

"Jane—Jane!" he cried. "My only one—my dear one! Look up—look up! Live—live! and all will be forgiven!"

Tears rolled down her cheeks, and as she shook her head mournfully, she said:

"I do not deserve this—I do not deserve it! It goes to my heart like a keen knife! You do not know half the extent of my deep guilt."

"Were it ten times as great it is forgiven. Are you not my daughter? But as for the wretch who has brought you to this, I will hunt him to the death—I will show him no mercy! The bitterest curses of a broken-hearted father be upon him!"

"Hush—hush! Say no more. Forgive him, as I do."

The last words were very faintly uttered.

By the light of the lanterns it could be seen that a terrible change had come over her pallid countenance.

All knew it to be the herald of death.

The frantic grief of her father was now terrible to witness.

He called upon her by a thousand endearing names; he even assured her that her villanous lover should be exempt from his just resentment.

But all was in vain.

Death would not be cheated of his prey; and with faintly-whispered words of contrition and self-accusation on her lips, the young girl expired.

By this time Dick found that there was a village not far off, and that the whole of the inhabitants of it had been aroused, and were hastening to the spot.

To attempt concealment was now useless, and, therefore, he stood forward boldly and as though he had nothing whatever to dread from being seen.

As may be expected, he was overwhelmed with questions, to which he was able to return satisfactory replies.

The next proceeding was to put together a rude kind of bier, on which poor Jane was tenderly placed.

The whole party then proceeded to the village.

Dick accompanied them.

He had been seen, and such being the case, he felt he might as well take all the advantage of it that he could.

Sorely indeed was he in need of proper rest and refreshment, and now he had the chance of obtaining both.

The body of poor Jane was carried to the home of her heart-stricken parents, while her murderer, Stephen Phillips, was secured, bound, and placed in the village cage.

Dick made his way to the inn, which seemed now to be the rendezvous of everyone.

Here he had no difficulty in obtaining all he wanted.

He observed that many looked doubtfully upon him when he stated that he had sought a night's lodging in the old barn, but they were very far indeed from suspecting his identity.

At length he retired to the chamber which had been prepared for him.

Locking the door and placing his weapons in readiness for instant use, he flung himself upon the bed.

Sleep visited him almost instantly; and in spite of all the dangers by which he was beset, no one on that night slept sounder than the highwayman.

He awoke just as it was beginning to grow light.

There was a confused feeling about his brain which lasted for some time.

Recollecting at length all that had occurred, he rose and looked out.

He found there was just beneath his window a sloping shed, and beyond that a small garden bounded by a low hedge.

No sooner did he observe this than he resolved to take his departure.

He was now altogether refreshed and rested, and quite ready for anything which might occur.

If he stayed at the inn during the day he would be no doubt subjected to a close scrutiny; besides, the intelligence of the murder might have the effect of bringing to the place some officials who, from the widely-circulated descriptions of his person, might recognise him.

Moreover, there was the chance now of going without anyone noticing the direction taken.

This was decisive; but first of all he gave his attention to making what alterations he could in his costume and general appearance.

With the aid of water and a brush he effected a considerable change in a short space of time.

Certainly if by chance seen by anyone, he would by no means attract that amount of observation which he would have done in his former disordered, travel-stained state.

"I have a better chance now," he muttered, as he completed his preparations. "I shall be no longer the conspicuous object I have been. This guinea will well recompense the landlord for all I have had."

As he spoke, he placed upon the table the coin he had just mentioned.

Then, cautiously and noiselessly, opened the window.

To Dick, the passing through this aperture was a matter of little difficulty.

The roof below was covered with ridged red tiles, so that it was comparatively easy to descend in silence and safety.

Then, when he dropped, the soft garden mould upon which he alighted gave forth no sound.

He paused a moment in a crouching position, in order to make sure that no one was near.

All appearing quite safe, he rose, and made his way swiftly along the gravel path.

The hedge at the end of the garden was cleared easily, and he pushed on as fast as possible across the fields, so as to place plenty of space between himself and the inn he had just left.

He did not pause until he had gone a couple of miles.

Looking scrutinisingly around, he failed to perceive either a human being or a dwelling.

A feeling of triumph filled his heart.

"I have eluded them!" he cried, with exultation. "I have had my revenge. They will have to ride back to London empty-handed. It would be a great triumph if they captured me; but they have failed—ha, ha!—yes, they have failed!"

This belief elated Dick considerably; but he was soon reminded of the proverb which advises everybody not to holloa before they are out of the wood.

The change that came over him was remarkable.

All at once he dropped flat to the ground, and remained there motionless as a stone.

Just when he had finished speaking, he observed a body of horsemen emerge from a thick belt of trees, which had up to that moment entirely concealed them from his sight.

He knew at the very first glance that these horsemen were police officers.

What could have brought them to this spot was beyond his power to conjecture.

Nor was he at all certain that they had not seen him.

Several minutes elapsed, during which he endured no ordinary amount of anxiety.

At last his surprise grew to such a pitch that he was compelled to raise his head a little and reconnoitre.

His foes did not appear until he had assumed almost an erect position.

Their backs were now turned to him, and they seemed to be making their way towards the inn Dick had so recently quitted.

"Have I such good reason as this to congratulate myself upon having taken this determination? Are they about to seek me there? Can they have learned that some one answering to my appearance was at the scene of murder last night? It may be so—it may be so."

He watched the retiring police officers until they had disappeared from view.

Then, turning round, he again made his way as swiftly as he was able across the open country.

"I was congratulating myself a little too soon," he said. "I made certain that by this time they had abandoned the pursuit. But they must have heard of me by some means or other, and no doubt are now fully impressed with the belief that they will find me at the inn."

Dick had good cause for congratulation, as, if the officers had really discovered him at the village public-house, his chances of getting away would have been slight indeed.

"If I only knew which way to take to reach the sea-coast at the nearest point," he exclaimed, as, having ascended a hill he looked around him in the hope of being able to catch a glimpse of the blue waters. "I cannot be far from the coast, that is certain. The question is, in which direction does it lie?"

Again he glanced around him, but he was not able to catch sight of anything that would help him to solve this question.

"Chance must for the present be my guide," he said, at length. "It will not do to stay here—I must keep in motion; and I will take my course at random until I find some means of discovering the right way."

Dick was quite right when he said it would not do for him to remain long in one place—it was only by keeping continually in motion that he should be able to avoid his foes.

In good truth, however, he had nothing but chance for a guide, the part of the country he was now in being one to which he was an utter stranger.

The only thing was that he took care to go so that the officers were at his back.

The day might now be said to have begun, and already Dick had come a considerable distance without, as he believed, having left one single clue behind him by which he could be followed.

Up to the present moment, in consequence of the earliness of the hour, he had been able to avoid being seen by anyone.

But now that the period had begun when labour would commence, his chances of doing so much longer were slight indeed.

A rest would have been agreeable, but he kept on his way, all the time being keenly on the look-out for the appearance of anyone.

He was also watching for some place where he could conceal himself during the busiest portion of the day, when the chances of meeting with people would be the greatest.

It was long, however, before any place presented itself.

Chance led his footsteps past what he had thought at first to be a stack of bricks, but which upon a closer inspection turned out to be a brick-kiln.

It was situated in the midst of a large space of ground.

As the walls would offer at least a temporary shelter,

he resolved to stay for a few minutes at any rate and rest himself.

It was not long, however, before he came to the determination to stop there if possible till nightfall, for upon looking around he perceived many indications that a long time had elapsed since any fires had been lighted or men worked there.

A slight drizzling rain began to fall, which added much to Dick's discomfort; but it had one advantage—it doubtless served to keep all those persons indoors except such as were compelled to be abroad.

Probably this was the reason that Dick never once caught sight of a human being, although his vigilance was unceasing.

So soon as ever distant objects began to grow obscure and dim, he quitted his hiding-place and took his way in the direction that he had all along been pursuing.

Vainly, however, did he look around him for an indication of what he sought.

The rain now had ceased, and although it could not be said that night had actually commenced, yet in the eastern sky a glimpse of the rising moon could be obtained.

There was indeed every prospect that the night would be a fine one, and that he would have the advantage of the moon's rays to direct his footsteps.

The sharp pangs of hunger ere long made themselves felt, and Dick knew well enough that unless the demands of Nature were complied with he should stand but a poor chance of escaping from his foes.

But the difficulty was, how could he procure what he required without being seen?

The evil seemed unavoidable.

He was pondering upon it, when a collection of houses, so small as scarcely to be worthy of the name of village, presented itself a short distance in advance.

He could not resist making his way towards it, despite the manifest risk of so doing; but, then, he knew that this was the only chance he had of appeasing his hunger.

As he approached the houses he quickened his pace.

The first place which presented itself was the village inn.

Wistful indeed was the hasty glance he gave through the uncurtained window.

He caught sight of a comfortable-looking room lighted up by the ruddy beams of a huge fire.

Dick sighed, and passed on.

At one other house only was a lighted window perceivable, and in this the illumination proceeded solely from a tallow candle placed close to the green-hued lattice panes.

This Dick discovered to be one of those miscellaneous establishments indigenous to every village.

There was scarcely any article they did not keep in stock; the window itself was crammed with a truly heterogeneous mass of goods.

Dick paused a moment, as though half inclined to enter and purchase what he wanted; but before he could make up his mind his ear caught an approaching footstop, which warned him to be cautious.

The footstep was coming from the direction he was taking.

A meeting with a person, no matter who, was of all things what he most wished to avoid, yet how was he to help it in the present instance?

There was no time either for consideration, as the newcomer was close at hand.

After a moment's thought, Dick drew back to the wall contiguous to the window of the little shop, that being the spot cast into the deepest shadow.

He pressed himself close against the wall, and waited for the pedestrian to pass by, trusting to remain unseen himself if he kept quite still.

Directly afterwards he caught sight of a boy in a smock frock, who carried in one hand a basket.

The shop appeared to be his destination, for he pushed open the door and entered.

Dick seized the opportunity to move on.

Famished as he was, however, he could not nerve himself to go very far away from the shop.

He paused irresolutely, wondering what stratagem he could put into execution that would serve his purpose.

He was interrupted in his ruminations by seeing the boy emerge.

He came forwards with a lounging gait.

"Perhaps," muttered Dick, "I may be able to get from him what I want; and surely in this obscurity he will not be able to see me very well. I will try it."

Dick stood still, and waited for the boy to come up to him, when he intended to ask him for something out of his basket.

Dick stepped forward somewhat suddenly.

"My boy——" he said.

But he had no time to say any more.

With a yell of terror, the boy dropped his basket and ran off as though he had seen a ghost.

"Confound him!" said Dick. "What does he mean by that? Surely he could not have been frightened at seeing me? And yet that must be it. No matter, let us see what is in the basket."

Dick stooped and picked it up; but did not stop to examine the contents for fear that the boy's clamour should have aroused the villagers.

Once more he struck off across the country; and, coming presently to a quiet spot, he paused to make an examination.

"What a fool the boy must have been," he muttered. "If he had stayed I would willingly have given him the worth of the basket and its contents ten times over."

Dick said no more, for he found bread, butter, cheese, and other articles, with which he thoroughly succeeded in appeasing his hunger.

He saved a portion also, which he resolved to carry with him in readiness for another meal.

The basket he flung away, and having done so, he recommenced his journey in better spirits.

He came at length to some wooden palings, which stretched themselves before him like a wooden barrier.

The wood of which they were composed was old and quite covered over with moss.

"This is the boundary of some gentleman's estate," he thought; "and there is no knowing how far I may go before I reach the end of the fence. I will keep straight on at all risks; perhaps, too, in these private grounds I may be safe."

Without further delay Dick cleared the palings.

He pushed his way through a kind of cover or preserve, which, owing to the branches being nearly stripped of leaves, by no means looked so dense as it did ordinarily.

But if this was a disadvantage so far as concealing him from observation went, yet it enabled him to make his way more readily through the mass of luxuriant underwood which, in the summer-time, formed a dense entanglement among the trunks.

In his course the highwayman disturbed nothing save a few pheasants and other birds of a similar kind, which flew heavily around his head.

Emerging at length from the plantation, he came to open ground, which again was skirted by woodland.

Suddenly the deep silence which had prevailed for so long was broken by a sound, to which Dick listened with all his ears.

It was the chiming of bells.

Well did he remember the last occasion when he had heard such sounds, and a feeling of so much loneliness and desolation came over him at the reminiscence, that for a time he was quite unmanned.

Still he counted the strokes borne to his ears upon the gentle night breeze.

"Ten o'clock!" he ejaculated at length, when the chiming sounds had ceased—"ten o'clock! The hour is getting late, and I am, I fear, much farther from where I want to be than I imagined. I am terribly afraid that I have made an awful mistake—that in some way or other I have doubled upon my course. How I have done so I know not. One thing is certain: I ought to be many, very many miles away from York; and yet I never made a greater mistake in my life if those are not the bells of old York Minster that I have just heard."

If this was the case, he must indeed have doubled strangely upon his course.

"It cannot be," he said, again—"I will not believe it. Some village clock close by must have deceived me by having a similar jingle—I must be miles and miles from York."

But Dick said this more with the delusive idea of being able to stultify his own mind than because he really thought it.

His ear was an accurate, well-educated one, and it was always sufficient if he heard a sound once to know it a second time.

Could it have deceived him in this instance?

The question was one not easily decided, and so, after pausing a little longer in irresolution, he continued as before.

He had not advanced a dozen yards, however, before he found himself confronted by a stone wall—probably forming the opposite boundary of the grounds he had been crossing.

Here he paused and pressed his hand to his brow like one trying to call back something to his recollection.

"It is odd, indeed," he presently exclaimed, "if I have not somewhere seen this wall before—the only question is, where? Can it have been—— Yes—yes, it must be so!"

All at once he had remembered that it was close to a stone wall that his priceless mare, Black Bess, had fallen in the agonies of death; then he had dragged her through an iron gate, and covered her with leaves.

Could he be near this spot?

Had some strange fatality directed his footsteps to this spot?—was he now within a few paces of where Black Bess was lying calmly and tranquilly in death?

Or was he misled by some chance resemblance? for to a great extent all such stone walls are alike.

He would have been more inclined to the latter supposition, had he not heard the bells.

If upon climbing up and looking over he should find the high-road on the other side, the coincidence would be more than strange.

He determined, however, not to remain long in perplexed doubt upon this point, especially as it was one that could be so easily resolved.

By the aid of a contiguous tree he quickly gained the summit of the wall.

At the first glance he saw that the high-road was indeed beneath him, and so far as he could judge by that imperfect light, the road leading from London to York.

It was a matter of great importance that he should be quite certain whether this was really the case or not; and at the same time an irresistible desire came over him to look once again if possible upon the form of his matchless steed, for even now he could scarcely realise that she was no more—that she would never carry him again.

CHAPTER MCV

THE OFFICERS AVAIL THEMSELVES OF THE ASSISTANCE OF A COUPLE OF BLOODHOUNDS TO DISCOVER DICK TURPIN.

"If it should really happen," said Dick Turpin, "that I have been really brought back so strangely to my mare's last resting-place, not one word of repining or regret shall escape my lips. Indeed, I shall be rather inclined to rejoice at the chance, for, now I come to think of it, I shamefully ill-treated and then deserted her."

His voice shook so that he could no longer speak.

"What though I rode to York in so short a time—what though the feat be deemed by all an unparalleled one—what though we are ever after remembered through it? Will that bring back my noble steed—the only tie that I had left upon the earth? Bah! this is idle talk! I will cease—yes, I will cease at once!"

He sat still for some moments on the wall.

He was beginning to see more clearly now.

Bitterly indeed did he reproach himself for the past; and the mere fact that those regrets were so entirely vain as they were, only gave additional poignancy to his deep sorrow.

He knew now the hollowness and mockery of Fame. He himself was an example of how it would lead men on to extraordinary achievements; but now that he had accomplished that which in the prospect had looked so tempting to his eyes, he experienced nothing but disappointment and desolation, instead of the triumph and satisfaction that he believed awaited him.

"But I will not desert you, Bess," he suddenly broke out. "If instead of being near to your last resting-place I am fifty miles from it, I will know no rest until I have made my way there. You shall at least receive something like a decent burial at my hands. It is the only thing which I can do for you now; and slight and trifling as it may seem, yet it shall be done."

As he pronounced the last words, in accents of stern resolution, he slipped off the wall into the roadway.

"First and foremost," he continued, "I will satisfy myself as to whether I am right or wrong in my suppositions. Now I come to remember, I saw a milestone just before she dropped. If I can find that milestone I shall have no difficulty in finding her."

The anxiety he now experienced was absolutely uncontrollable.

He could not even control himself sufficiently to walk, but ran hastily forward, although he was by no means certain that he was going towards York.

He had only the remembrance of the direction from which the sound of the bells came to guide him.

That, however, was if anything a spur rather than a check upon his excitement, being well aware that, no matter which direction he took, he must of necessity ere long reach a milestone, and then all doubts would be removed.

If he had to retrace his steps through starting wrong, it was a mistake easy of rectification.

Fortunately for him, the road was clear, for just then so great was his state of excitement that it is questionable whether he would have allowed the appearance of any one to turn him aside from the immediate execution of his project.

He was quite breathless when he at length caught sight of the white milestone his eyes were so longing to behold.

Moderating his pace, and dashing from his brow the falling drops of perspiration that obscured his view, he stooped down to make out the figure denoting the number of miles.

"It ought to be a three," he said, straining his eyes; "and it is too! Yes—yes, there can be no mistake about it. How strange that I should get back here!"

Beyond all question Dick Turpin had actually made his way round to the point from which he had started.

But he positively rejoiced at the discovery, and looked out for the little iron gate.

After going a short distance he perceived it.

He increased his pace, pushed open the gate, and was soon by the side of the heap of leaves with which he had covered Black Bess.

Not a little of the anxiety which he felt was owing to his doubts as to whether her resting-place had been discovered and disturbed.

A glance showed him that he had no grounds for apprehension on this score.

The heap of leaves was just as he had left it.

A moment or two elapsed, however, before he could control himself sufficiently to put forth his hand and uncover a portion of his mare.

At length he did so.

She laid there calm and still enough—so calm that he almost envied her the freedom from all trouble which she enjoyed.

"My poor—poor Bess!" he cried, kneeling on the leaves and burying his face in his hands. "My best and most faithful of friends, you are past my aid now. No words of mine, no matter how uttered, will rouse you now. There is one thing that I can do for you, and only one, and it will go hard with me if I don't manage it."

He paused and listened.

"It was but the wind. All is calm and quiet—there is little fear that I shall be disturbed in this place. I will place you beneath the turf, my poor Bess. It is the last service I shall be able to render you. I owe you that at least. By my good-will no one shall ever learn the whereabouts of your last resting-place."

So speaking, he rose as though about to commence the task he had assigned himself.

But all at once he seemed to recollect that he had none of the tools that were indispensable to the carrying out of his intention.

For a little time this difficulty troubled him.

"Digging implements must be had from somewhere," he murmured. "I cannot do without them; and I will not abandon my design for such a trifling thing as this. But where are they to be had? Let me think—let me think."

His reflections soon took a definite shape

"Beyond all doubt," he said, "there must be somewhere in the grounds a house or rather mansion of considerable size. It ought not to be a very hard matter to find it; and about some of the numerous outbuildings, with which it is as a matter of course surrounded, it will be strange if I don't find a few gardening tools. Then all will be easy enough. I will go now at once."

Carefully replacing the leaves he had removed, in case during his absence anyone should pass that way and ascertain what was hidden there, he quitted the spot.

It is needful, however, that we leave him for a brief space, during which we shall make the reader acquainted with a few of Mr. Skellum's movements, which it is necessary should be known.

The last mention we made of him was when Dick perceived him and his party apparently going in the direction of the inn he had just left.

Such was indeed his destination, and how it came to be so is easily explained.

In the first place, Dick Turpin was very much nearer the city of York than he had the least idea of.

Therefore the news of the murder of the young girl was transmitted very speedily, and Mr. Skellum heard of it, if anything, a little before daybreak, for he had left instructions that he should immediately be aroused if anything of an unusual character took place.

Mention of course was made of Dick, about whom, as we have already stated, there was a good deal of suspicion.

Half a word was enough for Mr. Skellum.

He jumped to the conclusion that it must be Dick in a moment.

"This is his work!" he exclaimed. "I will lay ten thousand pounds of it! Be quick! If he is at the inn we shall be sure to have him!"

No time was lost in getting ready for a start, and, having had the position of the little village accurately described to him, Mr. Skellum resolved to make his way to it by the nearest cut.

This, then, is how it happened that Turpin saw him while making his way across the open country.

Upon arriving at the inn, of course he found, to his infinite chagrin, that the bird had flown; and, moreover, there were so many versions of the affair that he scarcely knew what to believe.

He also found that in one point at least he had been mistaken.

The murder had been none of Dick's work, as he had so positively stated it to be, for the coward Stephen, the very first thing in the morning, made a full confession of his guilt.

Finding himself wrong where he felt so convinced he was right, naturally shook Mr. Skellum's faith in other matters.

Nevertheless, an immediate search was instituted for the person who it was agreed on all hands had slept at the village inn and disappeared.

But Dick had been very careful not to leave a track by which he could be followed; and the police officers, having nothing but the acuteness of their own perceptions to guide them, as a matter of course rode off in precisely an opposite direction.

Inquiries were made, but without result.

No one answering to the description given had been seen by anybody.

Different directions were tried with no better result, until a kind of circle had been described, of which the inn was the centre.

To the place last mentioned they finally advanced, in order to breathe their horses, and also in the faint hope that they might be able to learn some news of importance.

On their arrival Mr. Skellum found awaiting him a personage of whom most of the peasantry in the vicinity stood in no ordinary dread.

This was no other than Sir Humphrey Yeomans, an old English baronet, possessed of not a few of the prejudices and peculiarities which at that time generally belonged to those in his position.

Mr. Skellum was made acquainted with this fact by the landlord.

"Look here," he said. "Take a word of caution—mind what you are about—take care what you say."

"Why?" asked Skellum. "Who is he and what does he want?"

"In the first place, he is the owner of all the land and whatever is upon it for as many miles and more than you have ridden to-day, and, consequently, of no slight importance."

"He must be immensely rich?"

"I believe you; one of the richest men in England, I should say."

"And he has asked for me?"

"Have I not said so?"

"Do you know what he wants with me?"

"I believe it is to make some inquiries of you about this Dick Turpin of whom you are in search."

"Where is he?"

"Up in my best room, drinking wine, and waiting for you."

"What brings him here to-day? Does he often come?"

"He calls frequently, because, you see, this is the Yeoman's Arms."

"Yes—yes; but his business here to-day?"

"He has ridden over, I believe, in his capacity of magistrate, just to make himself acquainted with the facts of the case."

"He is a magistrate, then?"

"Yes; and no one knows what else besides. But I should advise you not to stop any longer gossipping with me, but to go up to him at once."

"I will do so; but tell me first what kind of behaviour does he generally receive—very humble, I suppose?"

"Yes—rather so."

"Likes to have his vanity flattered?"

"Oh yes."

"Enough. Lead the way; I will follow."

As the reader must have seen, Mr. Skellum was evidently a man of the world.

He always had his eyes open to every chance there was of betteriug his condition; and he no sooner heard that he had been inquired for by so great a personage, than he began to wonder how he could best turn the incident to his advantage.

The cue he had received was quite enough, and he followed the landlord upstairs with a confident step.

But as soon as he was ushered into the chamber a remarkable alteration came over him.

He made a very low bow, and then stood, hat in hand, just across the threshold.

The landlord closed the door.

But Skellum, although his eyes were so cast down, had taken a tolerably good view of the baronet's appearance.

He can best be described by saying that he was an excellent specimen of a wealthy old English squire: his ruby face and claret-coloured nose standing out in remarkable contrast against his spotlessly-white wig and his portly form, clad in a garb that showed it off to admiration—a garb, which it is to be hoped will some day again come in fashion.

Perceiving he did not speak, Mr. Skellum bowed again.

"Sit ye down, mon—sit ye down," said the baronet, pointing to a chair.

Mr. Skellum, with a little well-affected hesitation, presently complied.

We quite despair of producing upon paper the worthy baronet's peculiar vernacular, and so we will not even so much as make the attempt.

Besides, the broad Yorkshire dialect spoken a hundred years ago would scarcely be comprehended by the majority of readers now.

"I want to know something about this high-flying chap," he began, abruptly, and pushing the bottle across the table as he spoke. "Just fill up your glass and let me know all about it."

Skellum did so; and Sir Humphrey, without giving him time to commence his narrative, said:

"I suppose you are one of the Lunnun regular police officers, Mr. A—a——"

"Skellum, your worship," was the reply, given as though he was begging pardon for having a name which the baronet did not know.

"Ah! Skellum."

"I am not a regular officer, your worship; but I have been sent out as a special agent from the Government to break up and abolish the gangs of robbers that have been the terror of all travellers for so long."

"And very right too."

"I may venture," said Skellum, in a humble, modest way, "to say that I have been tolerably successful. Out of four of the most desperate of these highwaymen only one remains."

"You captured the others?"

"In a strict manner of speaking, your worship, I did not capture them; but I brought about their destruction, which is the same thing."

"Just so—just so. And they are all dead?"

"Yes. And ere long the one who has given me more trouble than all the rest of the lot put together will be in the hands of the authorities."

"Good—good—very good!" assented the baronet, spreading out his hands and warming them, while he reclined at his ease in the most comfortable chair the inn possessed.

"D—n all such varmint, say I; and if I had got them to deal with, I should make short work of them. The authorities are a d—d sight too particular and lenient, that's my opinion! There ought to be no ceremony shown to such wretches; no, nor poachers either."

"You are quite right, your worship, and I make bold to say those are exactly my sentiments."

The baronet was quite pleased to find his opinion so cordially shared in by one he firmly believed to be a special Government agent, and to whom in consequence he was prepared to show no little respect.

Mr. Skellum was invited to fill up his glass, and then the baronet said:

"But I am told that this Dick Turpin you are so anxious to catch is no ordinary rogue."

"No, that he is not."

"I have heard some impossible story about him riding one horse from London to York here in twelve hours, but of course it is not true."

"I must beg to assure you that it is true."

"True?"

"Yes, true."

"He actually did it?"

"Yes: I was witness, otherwise I should have been as incredulous as you are now."

The baronet opened his eyes to an extraordinary width, and even pushed his chair away from the fire, so great was his astonishment.

"And you mean to assure me that one horse brought a man two hundred miles in twelve hours?"

"I am ready to take my oath of it, your worship, only it was a mare and not a horse."

"I am bound to believe you, and yet it seems impossible still."

"It does."

"And what has the villain done with his mare?"

"Rode her till she dropped down dead under him on the high-road, somewhere about three miles this side of York."

"Then d—n him for a villain!" said the baronet, in great wrath.

He struck the table several heavy blows as he spoke, and also gave utterance to some other expletive that would by no means look well upon paper.

His anger somewhat surprised Mr. Skellum, who was unable to arrive at the precise reason for it.

"And you are sure the mare is dead?" was the baronet's next question.

"Yes—that is, as sure as I can be, without having seen the dead body."

"The villain—the rascal! I would have given a thousand pounds, ay, two thousand—any money—for her. She was a prize, a masterpiece—worth her weight in gold! And to think that she should have the misfortune to fall into the hands of a d—d scamp like that, who could ride her to death! D—n me if that isn't the very worst crime he has ever committed!"

The baronet's indignation here became too great for sober utterance.

There could be no doubt about his thinking that Dick Turpin's treatment of Black Bess was an unpardonable atrocity.

"I'll tell you what," he cried at length, "such a scoundrel is no more fit to live than a poacher! And, Mr. Skellum, or whatever your name is——"

"Skellum, humbly begging your worship's pardon."

"Well, if you will let me join with you, I will soon make short work of the d—d vagabond—that I will!"

"I shall be very happy, your worship, if you would only be kind enough to give me your valuable advice and assistance."

"You shall have them, d—m me—you shall ha them! Here, have another glass, and I'll have another, for this d—d business sticks in my throat! The idea of murdering such a creature—yes, d—n me, it's murder and nothing less!"

Mr. Skellum could hardly yet understand the baronet's inconsequent.

He did not know that Sir Humphrey prized a horse above all things in the world, and in his mind there was scarcely any crime greater than injuring one.

Sometimes he used to wonder which could be the worst, that or poaching.

"Your worship," said Mr. Skellum, after rather a long pause, "I should be glad to know what are your opinions—or, rather, what it is you thought of doing in the matter?"

"Ah—very good—you did right to remind me. But you don't drink."

"I have important business, if your worship would excuse me——"

"Tut—tut! A drop of this will only steady your nerves a little. However, as to what I was about to say."

Mr. Skellum prepared himself to be most attentive.

The baronet, before commencing, drew his chair a little nearer, as though it was his intention to be very confidential.

"You must know, in the first place, that poachers are my plague—yes, the plague of my life! I know no rest or peace for them."

"Can you not put them down?"

"I have tried, but then they get off and hide themselves—they can't be found; and then there is proving the charge. But I have got a plan against them that will put a stop to it, and help you to capture this Dick Turpin, d—n him!"

"I am most anxious to know what this plan can be, your worship."

"No doubt, and therefore I will not keep you in suspense another moment."

Mr. Skellum was, in good truth, most curious to know what the baronet was going to say.

"Look here," he began. "A friend of mine abroad has a remarkably fine breed of bloodhounds. What do you think of that?"

"Well, really, your worship——" stammered Skellum, who could not for the life of him think what this circumstance had got to do with the case.

"I see you don't catch at the idea. But I will be more explicit."

Skellum inclined his head.

"This friend of mine, then, some time ago procured me a couple of these matchless creatures, and a little while ago they arrived. They are magnificent! Their training has been everything training should or could be. At present I have made no trial of their powers; but I am assured that once placed upon the track of anyone they will never quit it."

"I have heard of such animals," said Skellum, with a disagreeable sensation pervading his whole frame; "but I have never seen one."

"You shall see mine," said the baronet, who prided himself not a little upon possessing them.

Not knowing exactly what to say, Skellum filled up the pause by bowing again, though he shivered slightly as he did so.

"Of course you guess what I had them for?"

"Well, I—a——"

"To get rid of the poachers."

"Ah!" responded Skellum, with a long breath.

The baronet's countenance assumed a fierce and most vindictive expression as he continued:

"Yes, for the poachers. I have been waiting for them for some time, but they have heard of the bloodhounds, and they have been scared away."

"But your worship, I suppose, merely intends to use these animals as inspirers of terror? You would not use them?"

"Yes, by —— would I if I had the chance!" was the vindictive rejoinder. "The very first time I hear of any being seen I shall call out the bloodhounds, put them on the scent, and quickly track them out."

"But I have heard," said Skellum, deprecatingly and hesitatingly, "that if they happen to catch up with the person they are sent after they will tear them to pieces if some one is not at hand to call them off."

"And if they do, what then? Is it any more than a d—d rascally poacher deserves? Not a bit of it. I should like to make sport of serving them all in the same way."

Mr. Skellum, as the reader knows very well, was neither over nice nor particular about what he did, but yet the baronet's cold-blooded manner made him shudder in spite of himself.

This bitter animosity against poachers was something he could not understand.

To him, the capture of a few pheasants or hares seemed a very trifling offence.

But it was clear that the baronet thought it one of the blackest of crimes, and the perpetrators of it not worthy of the consideration shown to human beings.

"Now look here," he went on—"these bloodhounds are just the very things you want. There will be no trouble in putting them upon the scent, because it seems pretty clear that the fellow got through the bed-room window and dropped into the garden."

Mr. Skellum wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Rely upon it they would soon find him," proceeded the baronet, "and would save you a world of trouble—perhaps prevent the fellow getting off altogether. If you are inclined to try the plan you are quite welcome; I should like to see the fun, and it would also be making a kind of trial of my dogs, which I am very anxious to do."

Mr. Skellum hardly knew what reply to make to the baronet's proposition.

We must do him the justice of stating that the idea of hunting anyone with bloodhounds was repugnant to his feelings.

Side by side with this admission, however, must be put the fact that this repugnancy was not of very long endurance.

He thought about the reward and the credit he should lose if Dick Turpin was not captured.

"Besides," he said to himself, "he is only a highwayman."

Another consideration which weighed much with him was, that if he declined, the baronet would, of course, be very much offended, and Skellum felt that he could not afford to make a foe of so powerful a personage.

That clinched the matter.

"Well?" said Sir Humphrey, who had been waiting in no less impatience than surprise for Skellum to reply.

"I will be frank with your worship," he said. "At the first blush, I must say I did not care about the plan, chiefly, I suppose, because it is out of the ordinary course in which we do our business; but, upon consideration, I feel extremely anxious that it should be tried, for I don't care about telling your worship that if this fellow slips through my fingers it will be a very serious affair for me."

"Very well, then," exclaimed Sir Humphrey, rising, "I am glad we have come to a satisfactory conclusion."

"Are the dogs here?" asked Skellum, anxiously.

"Not here: but they are at the kennels. I will soon have them."

He tugged violently at the bell-pull while he spoke

The landlord made his appearance with marvellous speed, for he knew well the impatient character of his guest.

"Send Jackson up to me," said Sir Humphrey, briefly.

The landlord bowed and retired.

There was then a silence of a minute or two's duration.

It was broken by a faint tapping at the door.

"Come in!"

"Jackson," cried the baronet, "I want you to ride over to the kennels at once, and bring the two bloodhounds. You understand?"

"Yes, your worship.'

"Be off, then, and make as much haste as you can."

Jackson withdrew, and Skellum and the baronet, now the best of friends, imbibed a few more glasses of wine.

The former did indeed feel as though his nerves wanted steadying; but as for Sir Humphrey, it was clear he attached but slight importance to the act of hunting a human being in the same way as some wild animal.

He was used to hunting of various kinds, and looked upon a highwayman as no better than a poacher, and only worthy of being treated in the same manner.

At length intelligence was brought that Jackson had arrived with the dogs, and thereupon Skellum and the baronet both went downstairs.

While the latter was examining the ferocious animals, the former was getting his men together and explaining to them the nature of the unexpected aid they had received.

The men, who had began to think that they were to have no other reward than their trouble for their pains, brightened up at this intelligence, and prepared to set about their task with more spirit and alacrity than otherwise they would have exhibited.

No time was lost in making these preparations, still a good while elapsed before all was ready.

At length the two dogs, which were securely held in slips or leashes, were taken round into the garden, just under the window through which Dick had passed.

They were long-bodied, fawn-coloured animals with massive legs and large, square heads.

Already they had been taken up into the room Dick had occupied in order that they might get familiar with the smell.

They now exhibited the utmost uneasiness and impatience—sniffing the air, howling and struggling desperately to get free from the slips in which they were held, and almost dragging Jackson away in their efforts.

"Is all ready?" asked the baronet.

"Yes, your worship," replied Skellum—"everything."

'Very good, then. Let go, Jackson."

At a touch, Jackson set free the dogs and hastily scrambled on to his horse's back.

The dogs ran round two or three times, sniffing, howling, and barking.

Then, having found the track, they started off, holding their noses close down to the ground.

"Now they are right," said Jackson. "They will find him, no matter where he is, for the track will everywhere be newer and fresher than it is here, and consequently more easy for them to follow."

"Capital—capital!" cried Sir Humphrey, entering with great ardour upon the chase.

"The only thing we have got to do," continued Jackson, "is to keep them in sight so as to be able to call them off. If we don't, they will tear the poor devil in pieces."

The horses were good and fresh, and the speed of the bloodhounds not very great, so that it was very easy to keep up with them.

Skellum and his men were much excited.

To them, the proceedings had that charm which nothing but novelty can impart.

Every motion made by the dogs was followed by them with the closest attention, and beheld with wonder.

There was a little delay occasionally, owing to the track being lost, but the dogs running on in front and careering round in circles quickly recovered it, and started off again.

Despite these delays, however, the reader will scarcely require to be informed they made much greater speed than Dick Turpin did, and consequently there was little doubt that they would ere long come up with him.

CHAPTER MCVI.

DICK TURPIN BECOMES AWARE THAT THE BLOODHOUNDS ARE ON HIS TRACK.

"I AM afraid the darkness will spoil the sport," said Sir Humphrey, in tones of vexation, as he noticed the growing obscurity. "I had no idea it was so late."

Nor had anyone else until the baronet called attention to the circumstance.

The fact was, that each and all had been so much occupied and excited by the strangeness of the events that were taking place, that they never noticed the night's approach.

It happened, too, that the daylight had been considerably prolonged, as it often is at the approach of winter when the sky is unobscured by clouds.



[DICK TURPIN CONCEALS HIMSELF IN THE GARDEN WALL.

But no sooner had the sun set than there came a sudden darkness over the whole face of Nature without the intervention of half the usual space of twilight.

It was the night setting in thus suddenly that caused the baronet to give vent to his angry exclamation.

There was no fear, though, that on this account he would abandon the pursuit.

Jackson, however, said as much as he dared give utterance to in the shape of objection.

"We shall find it very difficult to keep the dogs in view, your worship."

"Then we must keep them in hearing," was the gruff rejoinder—so gruff that Jackson closed his mouth without daring to say another word.

Mr. Skellum looked anxious and uneasy.

He by no means relished the probability of seeing and assisting in the tearing to pieces of a fellow-creature, even though that fellow-creature should be a highwayman, and Dick Turpin to boot.

The baronet did not seem to be troubled with any such scruples.

Glancing towards the east, and perceiving a faint illumination in that quarter, he added:

"We shall have the moon up before long; and as there are no clouds, we shall be able to see well enough. Besides, I know every inch of the ground round the place."

He seemed also to think this quite sufficient for everybody, though Mr. Skellum and his followers were perfectly ignorant of the nature of the ground, and experienced no little difficulty in making their way across a rough, open country.

Skellum's horse stumbled twice, and on the second occasion forced a remonstrance to his lips.

"Your worship," he said, "don't you think it would

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be as well, or even better, to defer the chase till daylight? In the dark no one can tell what accident may happen."

The very idea of abandoning a chase after anything when it had been once commenced, was so preposterous a one, that it fairly took his breath away, and a minute or so elapsed before he could make any reply.

"Put it off? Never! My motto is: 'Never put off.' Besides, if we waited till to-morrow the scent would grow cold, and in the meantime he might get a horse and ride away, in which case we should lose him altogether."

There was so much determination, or rather bulldog obstinacy in the tones in which Sir Humphrey spoke that Mr. Skellum, like the man Jackson, judged it expedient to remain silent.

For some time a general silence reigned.

The obscurity now was so much increased that the attention of everybody was pretty well occupied in taking care that their horses had firm level ground beneath their feet.

Suddenly, Sir Humphrey gave vent to an ejaculation of a forcible character.

"They've got him—they've got the rascal! D—d if I didn't think we should have him before very long! Come on, quick, will you!"

These remarks were called forth by the dogs setting up a terrible howling and barking; and from the nature of the sounds it was evident the creatures had come to a stop somewhere.

The baronet was quite confident that they had seized their prey, and so great was his ardour in consequence, that he speedily outrode all the rest, despite the efforts that were made to overtake him.

Mr. Skellum felt by no means so confident as the baronet; but then that will not be wondered at when it is remembered what a many times he had been disappointed.

Still, he kept up close to the rest, and quickly caught sight of what he took at first to be a cottage or barn, but which on a closer approach turned out to be a brick kiln.

He arrived just in time to see the dogs bolt off again; but there was nothing of the highwayman to be seen.

The baronet was staggered for a second or two, because he had made so very sure that the chase was over.

That such was not the case, however, was unquestionable, for the bloodhounds were once again in full cry.

The brick kiln, as the reader doubtless suspects, was the place where Dick had passed the hours of daylight.

Of course, here the scent was comparatively warm, not a very long time having elapsed since he quitted the place.

"Forward—forward!" he cried, as soon as he recovered from his astonishment. "They are in full cry now, and you may depend, after all, he is not very far off."

This, by the increased animation of the dogs, seemed to be highly probable, for they ran on and barked as though mad.

All anxiously passed onward.

Even Mr. Skellum forgot the danger of the path in the anxiety he felt lest the dogs should come up with Dick and tear him to pieces before the arrival of anyone who could call them off.

Up to the present moment they had had things all their own way, but they found themselves destined to experience a reverse.

All at once the dogs met with a fault—that is, they lost the scent; nor were they able to find it again, although the sagacious animals went round and round in wide and wider circles, in the hope of coming up with it.

The baronet fretted and fumed in a manner that on any other occasion would have been provocative of a smile.

But the present instant was too grave for smiling.

"What's the best thing to be done, Jackson?" asked Sir Humphrey.

"Well, your worship, as you know, I have not had much experience with these creatures, but I suppose the best thing will be to stop where we are until they recover the scent again. They will let us know when that takes place, you may depend."

"Yes," assented the baronet, "I suppose it will be the best to stay here, otherwise we may be riding our horses up and down here and there to no purpose."

"And we might breathe the horses a little the while," said Skellum. "That last bit of ploughed land has taken the steam out of mine, I can assure you."

The halt was thus agreed upon, but the baronet was too impatient and too excited to remain still very long.

Nothing would do but Jackson must ride after the dogs and observe their movements.

This was done.

Still all efforts were unavailing.

It then became the prevalent impression that he must have mounted, and so there was an end of the affair.

But the baronet was unwilling to come to this conclusion, and held out against it as long as he was able.

At last, after what seemed, to him especially, a whole age of suspenseful waiting, the deep baying of the bloodhounds made itself heard.

The sound floated over the silent meadows as though it came from a considerable distance.

"Off and away!" yelled Sir Humphrey, with a furious tally-ho!—"off and away—there, now we have him!"

The chase was now recommenced in real earnestness, and, if possible, under greater excitement than before.

Away they all went helter-skelter, with Sir Humphrey at their head, and all the rest after him like a flock of wild geese.

It is a thousand wonders several of them did not meet with serious accidents, for the ground was very rough and rugged.

The continual baying of the dogs was a tolerably good guide for them to follow, and in a short time they had the further assistance of Jackson's voice, who shouted out to them continually.

On coming up with him the noise made by the dogs was explained.

He had managed to secure them, and he now stood holding the slips just in the same way as when they left the inn.

That they had recovered the scent again was evident enough, for they almost pulled Jackson along with them in the violent attempts they made to get away.

"What is the meaning of it?" asked Sir Humphrey, as he reined up in order that the others might all come up with him. "How can they have lost the scent?"

"Easy enough, your worship; I can quite understand it."

"How is it, then?"

"Why, he must have taken to the road for some distance, and there, owing to many other people and vehicles passing over his footsteps, the scent was destroyed."

"Of course that's it," said Sir Humphrey, with an air of great satisfaction. "And this is just where he has taken to the open country again."

"Exactly so. Yonder is the lane."

Jackson pointed to a low hedge a few paces off, as he spoke.

Previously to entering the village where he had so terrified the boy that he dropped the basket of provisions he was carrying, Dick had walked along the lane, where his footsteps were obliterated.

But the dogs, by going round and round in circles in the manner we have described, had eventually come upon his trail again, though much time had been lost in doing so.

"Let go the dogs," said the baronet; and at the word the slips were unloosed.

In an instant, with guttural growls of satisfaction, the dogs bounded off.

"We must make good speed," Sir Humphrey cried, "or we shall lose them in this darkness."

It did, in good truth, require an eye of more than ordinary sharpness.

The obscurity was very great, for along with the moon clouds had arisen, and it was only occasionally through the straggling rifts that her beams reached the earth.

The dogs kept on steadily; and all at once Sir Humphrey was struck with a circumstance which he had failed to perceive before.

"May I be d—d if we are not going straight towards home, and by a nearer cut I think than ever I took before! Surely the rascal has never had impudence enough to go there?"

"He has impudence enough for anything, interjected Skellum.

"But do you think he would rob me?"

"No doubt he would if he had the chance."

"Curse the villain! Perhaps he is at the Hall now, frightening her ladyship into hysterics."

This idea, for which there was no very reasonable foundation, made the baronet's anxiety and impatience increase tenfold.

But as the pursuit was continued, it became more and more evident that they were riding direct to the Hall, for the dense belt of trees surrounding it was every now and then seen distinctly in the moonlight.

As they came nearer they saw not only the trees, but the very palings which marked the boundary, towards which the bloodhounds were careering headlong.

The baronet spurred his horse so violently that he got far ahead of the rest, though they tried hard to keep up with him.

The dogs all at once came to a stop at the foot of the palings, where for a second or two they howled dismally.

Then they ran up and down sniffing and whining.

Finally, to the surprise of the baronet, they came towards him a little way.

Then giving a spring, they cleared the high palings by a desperate effort, and immediately afterwards could be heard going at full cry through the plantation.

The baronet was so carried away by the chase, and so excited by the positive intelligence he had now got that Dick Turpin was actually on his own grounds, that he rode his horse at the fence as if with the intention of clearing it.

It was insanity to make the attempt, for not only were the palings about twice as high as a horse could be expected to leap, but there was no space of ground to alight upon on the other side, for the trees grew thickly everywhere.

The horse, however, seemed all at once to become aware of one or both of these circumstances, for he stopped short while in full career.

No event could have taken Sir Humphrey more by surprise than this, and the consequence of his unpreparation was, that he shot over the head of his horse like a rocket, and stopped against the old palings so suddenly and with so much force, that it was a wonder he did not break through altogether.

The horse seemed frightened at what it had done, and appeared as though it was about to try a bolt in the opposite direction.

At this moment, however, the others arrived; and Jackson, stretching out his hand, very adroitly seized the animal's bridle.

By the time this was done and before any assistance could be rendered him, the baronet scrambled to his feet, to all appearance being neither hurt nor confused by his terrible fall.

But then he had been canted out of the saddle more than once in his life.

"Don't stop!" he cried—"don't stop! I'm not hurt—not hurt a bit. Where's my horse? D—n it all, the fellow may be at the Hall murdering everybody!"

"The dogs are on his track, that is certain," remarked Jackson, as he assisted his master to mount. "What a racket they are making, to be sure!"

All the place was echoing loudly with the barking of the bloodhounds, and Skellum fancied that the reason was they had found their prey.

The inevitable delay caused by the incident we have just described, put him in a terrible fidget.

He was wondering, too, how the palings were to be surmounted.

But the next words spoken by Jackson relieved him on this point.

"Now, Sir Humphrey, if you will follow me, we will be after the dogs in a twinkling."

But how are we to get over the palings?"

"There is not the slightest necessity for doing so, nor for going through the plantation, since the dogs are no longer in it."

"But where the devil must we go?"

"There is a little gate in the palings a few yards below."

"A gate!" exclaimed the baronet. "I never heard of it."

"That may be; but one is there, though it is never used. It opens upon a little path, along which we can ride with ease, and so get to the other side of the park, where I take it the dogs now are."

"They seem to me closer to the Hall. But lead on and be quick."

Thus admonished, Jackson skirted the park palings, and presently stopped at a little door which, though narrow, still seemed wide enough to allow one horse at a time to pass through.

"I daresay it's fastened," Jackson cried, as he slipped from his horse; "but if your worship don't mind, I'll soon have it open with a stone."

"Open it how the devil you like so long as you are quick about it."

A large stone lay conveniently close to the gate, and Jackson, picking it up, flung it with all his might against the place where the lock might be supposed to be.

There was a crash, and the door swung back upon its hinges in a moment.

The baronet pushed through in a desperate hurry, closely followed by Skellum.

The path was bounded on both sides by dense masses of trees and shrubs, and was only just wide enough to allow of the passage of one horse at a time.

The barking of the dogs still continued, and if anything, with increased fury.

But on emerging into the open ground, the baronet and the rest were at fault for the guidance of Jackson, who knew all the intricacies of the grounds better than anyone.

The loud cries of Sir Humphrey quickly brought him in view, and he again took up a position in advance.

"I know whereabouts they are. Follow me."

Just as he pronounced the last words all were startled by the ringing report of a discharged pistol.

Before anyone had time to speak a word, this first report was followed by a second, and then, strangest of all, an absolute silence followed.

The dogs ceased their barking as if by magic, and this abrupt cessation of sound so affected all that they could do nothing else save stare in each others' faces.

The baronet was the first to recover himself.

"May I be d—d," he yelled, "if I don't believe the villain has killed the dogs! How is it they don't bark, Jackson?"

"I can't tell, your worship. Let us rush forward and see."

This was such a reasonable thing that no one hesitated a moment, especially as Jackson suited the action to the word.

Before long, however, they reached a spot where the trees grew so densely that it was quite out of the question to think of riding among them.

"We must alight here," cried Jackson, "and push through on foot. Get your arms ready in case they are wanted."

Before he had finished speaking every saddle was empty, and the riders engaged with all possible speed in securing their horses to the numerous branches around.

This done, still under the guidance of Jackson, they forced their way through the little wood, for such it seemed to be.

But there was no longer any indication to show them where the dogs were.

Jackson, however, led the way with a great deal of confidence, for he had already decided in his mind whereabouts it was he had last heard the sound.

That he was no bad judge was quickly proved, for all at once he stopped and cried out:

"Here they are!"

The others, who were a little in the rear, pressed forward, and saw a sight for which they were not altogether prepared.

Lying at the foot of a tree were the two bloodhounds.

The cause of their silence was manifest.

Each one had received a pistol bullet in the centre of the forehead, the effect of which must have been to produce instantaneous death.

Their limbs yet twitched convulsively, and the blood continued to gush from the wounds.

But what shall we say of the effect of this spectacle upon the baronet?

We fear our powers of description will altogether fail.

We may, however, state that he at first stood stock-still like one stunned with some terrible calamity.

Then for the next phase he broke out into a torrent of the most horrible invectives conceivable.

If curses could have killed Dick Turpin he would not have survived a moment.

The baronet's resentment against the highwayman was in all conscience strong enough, but the loss of his much-prized bloodhounds increased the intensity of it a thousandfold.

"D—n his blood, but I'll have the life out of him for this!" he exclaimed, after the first fury of his anger had abated. "He can't be far off——"

"No, that's certain," interrupted Jackson, who was kneeling down beside the lifeless animals; "they are quite warm yet."

"And he shall be warm before long, I'll promise him! He's about the grounds somewhere. Search well for him, and the first that finds him shall have a hundred guineas out of my pocket!"

As may be supposed, this offer produced an immediate effect, and without another word the whole of the party eagerly dispersed, searching closely in every direction.

But as they forced their way through the luxurious vegetation, all thought that a better place of concealment could scarcely exist, and therefore that their chances of finding the highwayman were small.

With an utter disregard of personal consequences, the baronet plunged among the underwood.

The skin upon his face and hands was fearfully scratched.

The clothes he wore were torn into long strips by the bramble bushes through which he urged his way.

But, regardless of these minor evils, he continued to struggle on.

To him, Dick now was worse than a thousand poachers; and he promised if he caught sight of him to favour him with the contents of a pistol first and call upon him to surrender afterwards.

Anxious moments elapsed.

A great rustling could be heard, caused by the men struggling with the low-growing branches of the trees and the dense undergrowth, but no sound was heard indicative of the fact that a discovery had been made.

And of course the more time that elapsed the more distant became the chance that they would succeed at all.

And yet there was indisputable evidence of his having been there so very recently that it scarcely seemed possible that he should have escaped.

Skellum looked upon his disappearance as most extraordinary; but he was fast reaching a point when he would cease to be surprised by anything Dick might do, no matter how incredible or astounding it might appear.

Half an hour elapsed, during which the little plantation had been thoroughly searched, but without result.

It was then determined by Skellum and the baronet, who happened to encounter each other, that a consultation should be held as to their future proceedings.

The question was, how could all the men be summoned to that particular spot?

Skellum soon hit upon an expedient.

He fired a pistol.

As he expected, the report was followed by a great trampling of feet, and in a very short time indeed the whole of the troop had assembled, all being most eager to know what had happened.

Their disappointment was great so soon as they became acquainted with the actual state of affairs.

All now were of the unanimous opinion that the highwayman was not in the wood.

Had he been, they could scarcely have failed to light upon some traces of him.

"He must have made a straight rush for the stone wall and escaped," said Jackson; "I feel certain he is not here."

"Unless he should be in some of these trees."

"We should see him if he was, I fancy, for the branches have scarcely a leaf upon them."

"True," assented Skellum.

"But what's that?" exclaimed the baronet, as he raised his hand suddenly.

A faint rustling was heard.

The sound came from somewhere very close to the spot on which they stood.

CHAPTER MCVII.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN EFFECTUALLY DISPOSES OF THE TWO BLOODHOUNDS.

We go back now to Dick Turpin.

It will be remembered that when we left him last he was about to make his way towards the Hall, in order to obtain those implements necessary to enable him to carry out his firmly-fixed intention of burying Black Bess.

He had nothing whatever to serve him as a guide as to the direction in which he ought to go.

Clearly, however, the first thing to accomplish was to get clear of the trees, which now prevented him from seeing even a yard in advance.

At length he found before him an open space, but before venturing to step upon it he remained just so far within the wood as to be well shadowed by the trees, whilst he proceeded to reconnoitre carefully.

The ground before him had a park-like appearance, for the grass was smooth, and here and there stood a noble-looking tree.

But although he looked most scrutinisingly around him he failed altogether to perceive the slightest indication that a human habitation was in the vicinity.

His attention was, however, soon attracted by a sound which seemed to furnish the clue of which he was so anxiously in search.

This was the loud baying of dogs.

"The house must be over there then," he muttered, looking in the direction from which the sound had come. "Those are doubtless the watch-dogs in the yard."

But scarcely had he finished speaking before he discovered that he had come to a most erroneous conclusion.

With a sudden bound he saw emerge from the trees which bounded the open space on the opposite side, two huge, fierce-looking dogs.

They were the bloodhounds.

But, unfortunately, Dick did not recognise them as belonging to this dreaded breed.

Their fierceness, however, made him resolve to abandon for the present his intention of emerging from his present place of concealment.

"There may be a keeper or some one in company with those dogs," he muttered; "doubtless there is. I will draw back a little, for fear they should discover me."

He drew back accordingly, still being in ignorance of the fact that these two dogs were foes more to be dreaded than police officers themselves.

The reader must bear in mind that the bloodhounds hunting by the smell never once quit the trail, even though it should wind round several times and the object of their pursuit still in the centre.

In this case they will follow carefully in all his footsteps—not make a direct rush towards him.

This, then, is how it happened that they did not discover Dick much earlier than they did.

They tracked him to the stone wall, from there to where Black Bess was lying, and finally came direct upon him.

Dick heard their approach.

He had wondered much that he had seen nothing of human beings in charge of the ferocious creatures.

But when he heard them crashing through the dry brushwood, the suspicion of what they were first occurred to him.

"They are bloodhounds!" he gasped, and as he pronounced the awful words a cold sweat broke out all over him.

For the accounts which Dick had heard of these much-dreaded creatures had been highly exaggerated.

He believed that, once fairly set upon the track, it was next to a total impossibility that the victim should escape.

But there was no time for thought, for the ferocious animals were very close at hand indeed.

Yet, before Dick could recover from the kind of stupor of despair and horror into which this discovery had thrown him, he saw them appear.

But the sight of the fierce creatures, with their foam-covered flanks, red eyes, and lolling tongues, seemed to electrify him into sudden life.

With a wild and desperate instinct of self preservation, he sprang up and seized the branch of a tree that extended itself a little distance above his head.

The agility which he displayed in drawing himself up and seizing another could not have been exceeded by any squirrel.

In the twinkling of an eye he was astride a branch, and, temporarily at least, out of the reach of his bloodthirsty foes.

But if he had gained nothing else, he had at least obtained time to think a little.

Under such circumstances anything like calm reflection was well-nigh impossible, for the bloodhounds, furious with disappointment, were making frantic efforts to ascend the tree.

Dick knew this to be far beyond their powers, but yet he could not help watching their movements almost to the exclusion of everything else.

Yet it was not long before Dick was conscious that his foes were somewhere in the rear of the brutes to which they had assigned the task of hunting him.

If so, he might expect them very shortly to make their appearance, and if so, his present place of vantage would be but of slight avail.

Something must be done, and at once.

"I do believe," he said, "that I could shoot them easily. They are so close that I could take a most careful aim. Then when they are disposed of, surely I may be able to find some other hiding-place before my pursuers arrive."

There could clearly be no better course of action for him to adopt than this.

Accordingly, he drew forth one of his pistols, and having satisfied himself that it was in perfect order, aggravated his foes by hissing.

They all at once reared themselves up against the trunk of the tree and barked furiously.

The opportunity had now come.

They were within two or three feet of him, so that to miss was almost impossible.

He fired.

The bullet crashed through the brute's skull.

With a sound such as Dick had never before heard, it fell bleeding and lifeless to the ground.

Then, before a moment had elapsed, his companion shared the same fate.

These two much-dreaded enemies being disposed of, there was nothing to prevent Dick from descending the tree.

The reader may be sure he was not long in doing so.

When he reached the ground, however, sounds were borne to his ear of a character that convinced him his human foes were rapidly approaching him.

He stood still listening, and wondering where he could fly for shelter.

In that place there seemed to be but slight chances of finding any secure place of concealment; and then, as for flight, that was completely out of the question.

Before he had made up his mind how to act, he turned and forced his way through the trees.

But ere he had gone many steps, he saw in front of him a huge tree, the branches of which were thicker than any of the others, and upon which a few withered leaves still hung, thus affording a better chance of hiding than any other.

Dick was half inclined to climb up into it.

While pausing in indecision, he became aware that his pertinacious pursuers were within a few yards of him.

He could not afford to hesitate any longer.

The tree was by no means so easy to ascend as the other one, but Dick had a powerful incentive for exertion, and he overcame with comparative ease obstacles that would have dismayed anyone not similarly situated to himself.

But on gaining the upper part of the trunk of the tree an agreeable discovery awaited him.

The trunk itself, to a considerable depth, was quite hollow; and the width was so great that it would easily allow of the passage of his body.

Here, then, was a hiding-place a thousand times better than any he had hoped to find—and one which could not be discovered unless his enemies actually ascended the tree.

If he was careful to remain quiet there was little fear that they would do this, as the tree itself presented nothing particular to distinguish it from the hundreds of others growing around.

It was therefore without pausing for a moment that Dick lowered himself into the hollow trunk of the tree.

He had quite expected that he should be obliged to descend quite to the bottom.

This, luckily, was not the case, or it would have been no easy task to get out again.

Either the bottom part of the trunk was solid and sound, or else it had been partially filled up with fallen leaves and other matters.

This to Dick mattered little.

He was quite content to take matters as he found them, and desired no further satisfaction than that the actual state of affairs afforded him.

He had scarcely time to settle himself in his hiding-place before he heard the sound of voices and footsteps.

The reader is already better acquainted with what took place after the entrance of Skellum and his party into the wood than even Dick Turpin could be, so that it is quite unnecessary to dwell any further upon this part of the narrative.

But by one of those extraordinary coincidences which occur more frequently than people are aware of, it happened that the spot where the baronet agreed to summon the rest of their party was close at the foot of the very tree inside which Dick had so snugly ensconced himself.

He did not overhear what had been said, but the discharge of the pistol greatly startled him.

So extreme was his anxiety that he had the boldness to raise himself a little and take a peep at what was going on.

He soon comprehended that the pistol was fired merely as a signal.

The approach of the others caused him to sink down again out of sight.

With what interest he listened to all the men had to say about the fruitlessness of their search may perhaps be imagined.

The confident way in which they all declared that he (Dick) was nowhere in the plantation amused him much.

The supposition that he might be in one of the trees disturbed him so greatly that, quite unconsciously to himself, he made a slight movement.

This was the cause of the rustling sound which had reached the ears of the baronet and caused him to cry out in the manner described at the end of the last chapter.

Dick now gave himself up for lost, and this belief caused his heart to beat at such a rate as to make him fearful that this sound would be conveyed to the hearing of the police officers, and so betray him.

This was a groundless fear, but that much suspicion was immediately excited was quite clear.

"Something moved," ejaculated the baronet. "Who heard it?"

All had heard it.

"Then we can't be mistaken. The question is, what can it be?"

"Or, rather, where did the sound come from, your worship?"

"Yes—yes—just so, Mr. Killum——"

"Skellum, your worship."

"Oh, yes, Skellum," said the baronet, correcting himself. "Well, where do you think it came from?"

"I fancy out of this big tree here."

"Nay," said the baronet, "I fancied that was the one."

As might be expected, not two agreed as to the source whence the sound proceeded.

"Let us listen," said the baronet—"perhaps we may hear it again."

All assumed attitudes of intense listening, but, as Dick Turpin took the utmost care to keep perfectly silent in his hiding-place, of course nothing was heard.

Their patience at length being exhausted, Skellum said:

"Perhaps, after all, your worship, it was only a bird, and if so, we are only wasting most valuable time by staying here."

"It may be so, and yet——"

"And yet you do not feel satisfied."

"Not exactly."

"Nor do I; but if I might venture to suggest something——"

"What—what?"

"Why, I propose that, with the view of making sure

that the rustling sound we heard was not caused by the highwayman being in hiding, we will fire a shot or two into all the trees round about; that will soon settle the business."

"Ah, of course it will! That is a capital idea, Mr. Killum—a very capital idea."

Skellum thought he had better give up the attempt to make the baronet call him by his proper name.

At a word, the whole of the party got their pistols ready for use.

"I will have a try at that one over there," cried the baronet, alluding to the tree from which he fancied the rustling had proceeded; "and if he is there I will soon dislodge him."

Without any further notification of what he was about to do, Sir Humphrey fired.

A few leaves and bits of broken branches came fluttering down as soon as the pistol was discharged, but no other effect appeared to be produced.

Skellum, however, did not fire himself, nor allow any of the others to do so until, in a formal voice, he called upon Dick Turpin to surrender.

Of course, the hidden highwayman took no notice of this.

He felt tolerably secure in his present quarters, and resolved to abide by the result.

The proclamation being over, a great banging away followed.

Dick shrank down as close as he could, for the tree in which he had hidden himself appeared to be an especial mark.

Had anyone been concealed among the branches of any of the trees around, he must have been discovered.

"It is as I expected, your worship," said Skellum, as he loaded his pistols and placed them one by one in his pockets. "Some accidental sound has misled us, and caused the waste of all this powder."

"I fear so," assented the baronet, with a gloomy frown. "It must have been some bird. D—n the rascal! he is more trouble than all the poachers I have ever met with put all together!"

"Before he is captured, and finally disposed of," remarked Skellum, "I fancy he will give us very much more trouble than we have had as yet."

"He's a monster—he's a—a—— I'll be d—d if I know what to call him!" cried Sir Humphrey, with a fresh outburst of wrath. "There's no name that I know half bad enough to call him by!"

No one made any reply to this speech, which certainly was not exactly of a character to call forth an answer.

There was a very gloomy expression upon the countenance of every person present.

"The waste of the powder and shot is not all," grumbled Skellum, speaking his thoughts aloud rather than addressing himself to those around him. "All the while we have been fooling here we have been giving him the chance to get far enough away; and I know him well enough to feel certain that he would not neglect any opportunity that was offered him."

"Death and the devil!" the baronet broke out again. "Must this be suffered? Can it be endured? Curse him! I could have looked over his being a highwayman—that isn't so bad as poaching—I might even have pardoned him for riding his mare to death, though it was a shameful thing—but to think that he should come into my grounds, and shoot the animals that have cost me so much money and trouble, d—n me! it's too much of a thing! I can't stand it, nor I won't either! I'll have him before I rest again!"

"But what is to be done?" asked Skellum. "That is the question."

"Why, capture him."

"How?"

"That's your business, not mine," answered the baronet, snappishly. "You can't expect me to show you what to do. Just make your mind up, and I and my men will help you."

"Beg pardon, your worship," said Skellum, anxiously, "I meant no offence. Only you'll admit it is very trying to the temper to have one's efforts set at nought in this manner."

"It is d—d trying, and I don't mind admitting that I can't, for the life of me, think what is the best thing to be done next."

Skellum was in the same predicament, only he was not so candid as Sir Humphrey.

Although at his wits' end, he pretended to have so many ideas that he found it difficult to decide upon the best.

"It's my firm conviction," said the baronet, "that after shooting the dogs he would run as fast as he could to the east wall, and get over it into the high-road."

This was the opinion of most present, for, after having satisfied themselves that the person they sought was not in the plantation, this was the only way of accounting for his disappearance.

"If he has gone that way," said the baronet, "the chances are a thousand to one some one has seen him, for I never knew the highway to be quite deserted at any hour."

"I believe you are right," said Skellum. "At any rate, let us try. If he has gone that way, he must have left some trace behind him."

"Just so," said the baronet, as though this was a matter of course.

"Then we will go back for our horses."

"There is not the least reason for that—they can be brought here; and, Jackson——"

"Yes, your worship."

"There is a little iron gate not far off, is there not, through which we can reach the high-road?"

"Yes, your worship."

"I thought so; therefore let us have the horses at once, and you can lead the way."

A very little time indeed was lost in carrying out these instructions, for in reality the place where the horses had been left was not far off.

"I think you may venture to mount, if you feel inclined, your worship," said Jackson, "for we are very close to the path leading down to the gate you have mentioned."

"Very good. Let all get into the saddle at once."

This order was obeyed with great willingness and promptitude, for the exertions they had made in searching among the brushwood had greatly fatigued them.

Dick Turpin, hearing these preparations for a departure, began to breathe a little more freely than he had done, while his heart recovered its usual action.

A strong desire to take a peep at the baronet, whose presence on the scene of action he could not understand, made Dick run the risk of rising up in the tree.

But any slight noise which he might have made in doing so was drowned by the preparations of the men every one of whom was talking busily.

In the obscurity Dick could not see the baronet very well, and yet he thought he should know him if ever he should chance to catch sight of him again.

Fearful that an accidental glance up in to the tree might discover him, caused Dick to resume his former position.

With great impatience he now waited for them to quit the spot.

He had not long to wait.

The necessary preparations for a start were quickly completed, and, with Jackson leading the way, they all rode off.

The sound made by their retreat was audible for some time.

While it was, Turpin did not venture to move a muscle.

But as soon as ever a general silence prevailed, he hastily descended the tree which had proved so good an asylum for him in the hour of need.

His first act was to listen.

All was still.

"They have gone," he exclaimed, with an air of exultation—"they have gone, and I have once more eluded them! The iron gate, they said, did they not? It is close to that where my poor Black Bess is lying. Will they find her? It is possible—very possible. If they do, I shall soon hear of it."

The silence, however, remained as profound as before.

By following the windings of the path Jackson had mentioned, Dick could not, of course, tell how long it would take the party to make their way to the iron gate.

Sufficient time, as he fancied, had already elapsed, and yet he waited, listening eagerly.

The continued silence inspired him with hope.

"How fortunate it was that I had the prudence to replace the leaves! I would not have had them find Black Bess for all I possess! And they have not found her, I am certain. That gives me an idea: if she can escape discovery by being covered over with leaves, why should not I? That is a good thought—I must not forget it. Some time 't may stand me in good stead."

Although tolerably certain that his foes were out of the way, yet Dick could not quite make up his mind what to do.

The desire he felt to carry out his project was strong indeed, but he was conscious that it would be absolute folly to attempt it now, for, though his enemies had gone, he had no means of knowing how soon they might return.

To linger anywhere near was fraught with the utmost danger.

He knew that well enough, yet he could not bear to think of departing until he had rendered Black Bess the service he had promised.

If he did leave, who could tell how long it might be before he was able to return?

At length he came to a decision.

"I will reconnoitre carefully," he said, "and ascertain my exact whereabouts. Above all, I will try to possess myself of the tools which I require. That will be one step accomplished towards the achievement of the whole. Then, if nothing better offers, I will come back and conceal myself in this tree, which has hidden me so well already."

Having arrived at this determination, he noted very carefully the appearance of the spot on which he stood; and when quite certain that he should not fail to know it again, he moved carefully away.

It was necessary that he should be able to find his way back there without hesitation, in case the necessity should arise of having to do so.

Then, having gained the open space we have so frequently had occasion to refer to, he skirted it, keeping well under the shadow of the trees.

In this way he proceeded a considerable distance without making a discovery of any importance.

At length, however, through the trees he perceived an irregular pile of buildings, consisting of a noble dwelling with numerous outbuildings around it.

Dick gazed at it attentively.

He did not know it, but this was the residence of the irascible baronet, Sir Humphrey Yeomans.

CHAPTER MCVIII.

DICK TURPIN FINDS IT MORE DIFFICULT THAN HE HAD EXPECTED TO SHAKE OFF HIS FOES.

Dick Turpin folded his arms and leaned his back against the trunk of a tree, with his eyes fixed upon the placid scene before him.

The moon was shining through some half transparent clouds, which did not deprive the earth of much of her light.

Viewed under such circumstances as these, the old Hall did indeed present a picturesque appearance, for all its roughness and ruggedness were toned down.

Almost unconsciously Dick found himself envying the peaceful inhabitants of this lordly dwelling.

But as the feeling was one unworthy of him, he banished it as soon as he was aware of its existence.

"I am what I am," he said—"a highwayman, and even my enemies are bound to say a bold one. I will run my course. Something comes over me even now that tells me I am near its termination. No matter, I will achieve what I have determined to accomplish. I will not be daunted by any difficulty now!"

He was silent.

But though his lips were closed, the most casual observer could have told that his thoughts were hard at work.

"Yes," he said, at length, with the air of one who by dint of much reflection has arrived at a definite conclusion—"yes, my mind is quite made up. I know now what I will do. I am certain it will be the best; besides there will be no obstacle in the way."

As he thus spoke he turned and retraced his steps.

His determination it soon expressed.

It was to make his way back to his former hiding-place, and remain there until he heard something further.

"I am certain it will prove to be the wisest plan," he continued, as he strode rapidly along. "I have nothing to fear from hunger, for I have provisions about me. Besides, the night is now too far gone to leave time for much to be accomplished. I am glad I thought of this. By to-morrow night the ardour of my enemies will be much abated, and so far as I can see there will be nothing to prevent me from hiding in the hollow tree till then. Most reasonably may I anticipate that to-morrow night they will be tired out. I shall then have every facility for the carrying out of my design."

Quite fixed now in his resolve, Dick hurried on.

Indeed, now the principal thing he had to fear was that he should meet with his enemies returning from their unsuccessful pursuit before he had time to reach the hollow tree.

This proved, indeed, to be no imaginary danger, for ere half the distance was accomplished a loud shout was borne to his ears.

His first impulse was to bound forward with greater speed.

Then he stopped himself, because he became aware that he was running directly towards his foes.

What was to be done?

Their coming now was unmistakable.

They were again searching among the trees.

Before Dick was a large piece of water, apparently a fish-pond.

Thick bunches of dark green flags and rushes could be seen here and there above the surface of the water, which was thickly strewn with fallen leaves.

Another shout and the loud trampling of feet made Dick aware that his pursuers were at the most a few yards off.

The next moment might bring them before his eyes.

What was to be done?

To remain standing there was nothing short of absolute madness.

Yet what could he do?

If he attempted to cross the open space he would infallibly be seen.

If he attempted to enter the plantation how was he to avoid being seen by those who were searching for him so busily?

He had but one resource.

That was to enter the pool.

Naturally enough, he shrunk from the discomfort this would cause, but in a short time it became an absolute necessity.

He could now almost detect the very words spoken by the searchers; and what was more, every moment that elapsed brought them nearer and nearer to him.

He hesitated till he could hesitate no longer.

Gently and slowly he waded in until breast high.

Then struck out towards the centre of the pool.

Great as was his caution, he could not be altogether noiseless, and the faint splash he made reached the ears of the officers.

Their attention being attracted, they one and all set up a cry, and hastened to the water's edge.

"What is it—what is it?" asked the baronet, eagerly, but in a tone of voice which showed that he was fast getting tired of his night's sport. "I heard nothing."

"I heard a splash," said one.

"And I—and I——"

"What was it?"

"That we don't know: we have come to see."

"You must have fancied it. The water is calm enough."

Such was the case.

At the first alarm Dick had drawn his head under water and made his way towards the bush of rushes near at to him.

There he ventured to rise and breathe.

"What's that yonder?" he heard some one say.

"There—there. Is it a man's head?"

"No—no; it is too still."

"I saw it move."

"Fire at it, then!"

An explosion instantly followed

The rushes shook slightly as the well-aimed bullet cut through them.

But nothing else followed.

Dick, who had again drawn his head under water, was unhurt

He lifted it again instantly, convinced that that danger was over, and that the rushes would in the dim moonlight prevent his head from being observed.

"There is nothing here," said the baronet; "anyone can see that."

Yet the officers lingered, for they were by no means satisfied.

But as moment after moment elapsed without the slightest movement being perceptible upon the surface of the water, their doubts vanished, and they withdrew.

Dick heard them for some time calling to each other and crashing amongst the bushes, but after a time all these sounds faded away, and entire silence succeeded.

When this was the case, Dick cautiously made his way to the shore, for he was by no means certain that the officers had not left one of their number on the watch.

On reaching the bank, he prepared himself for any sudden attack that might be made upon him.

But nothing moved.

The silence seemed to deepen.

Hastily plunging among those trees which his enemies had so closely searched just before, he shook the water from his apparel.

His teeth chattered and he shook from head to foot, for the long immersion in the water had almost frozen his blood.

"I must move about till I am warm," he said; "to sit still thus would be the death of me, and if I lighted a fire I should at once betray myself to those who are so eagerly searching for me."

No words can describe the unutterable discomfort he now endured, and it required him to call up all that resolution and stoutness of heart of which he possessed so abundant a share to prevent himself from falling at once into the deepest depths of despair.

But his resolution and active movements quickly caused a glow to overspread his whole form; and when this took place his heart grew lighter and his former feelings returned.

Had it not been, however, for the unabated longing he experienced to re-visit once more his dear Maud's last resting-place he would never have troubled himself to retain an existence that for him was full of nothing save pain.

This object being in view, endowed him with the vigour of body and mind that enabled him to triumph over all his difficulties.

At length, not without some trouble, the hollow tree was found.

In his present forlorn state even this looked to him like a friend, and he hailed its appearance with keen delight.

"I shall baffle them yet," he said. "Despite all their efforts, I shall triumph over them! That is a satisfaction to obtain which is worth enduring a few disagreeables. I fancy now I shall be safe for a time, and my next act shall be to perform the last service I shall ever be able to render my poor Black Bess."

He mounted the tree as he spoke, and ensconced himself in the hollow portion of it in the way he had previously done.

With what patience he could he prepared himself to wait till the time came he had appointed for attempting his design.

When morning came he partook frugally of the food he carried with him, for he knew not how long a time might elapse before he was able to obtain more.

Just so much as was necessary to appease his hunger he partook of, but no more.

Sad indeed were his reflections while in this solitary situation.

He looked back upon the past—upon the time when he had the comfort of the association of faithful comrades who were now no more.

He thought of Maud, too, until the aching of his heart was so great and so unendurable that it seemed as though his heart would break.

"All is over," he murmured, sadly—"all is over now. The old times will never come back again. I am alone and desolate. And why should I take so much pains to preserve my life now that existence is to me so insupportable a burden. Heaven help me!" he ejaculated—"I am miserable indeed!"

He shivered as he spoke, for the morning was a very cold one, and he had never thoroughly recovered from the effects of his immersion.

After some hesitation, he descended from the tree and moved rapidly about.

In this way he succeeded in restoring the circulation of his blood, and feeling once more returned to his numbed extremities.

With what joy he hailed the rising sun need not be told; and though the season was too far advanced for his beams to give forth much warmth, yet they had a wonderful revivifying influence upon the highwayman.

In his utterly forlorn condition even the sun looked like a friend.

The day wore on.

Dick had no other way of passing the time save by pacing up and down like a sentinel.

Suddenly, however, he stopped.

His caution had never once abated, and at this moment his quick ear caught a sound which made him return with all speed to his hiding-place in the old tree.

Hardly had he settled himself when he heard voices and footsteps close at hand.

Whether any special or new danger was thus boded he knew not, and it was for this reason that he raised himself so as to be able to get a view of what might be about to take place.

There was a great crashing among the branches and bushes around, and then Mr. Skellum, with a few of his men and several of the baronet's servants, appeared.

Slowly and silently, Dick sank down.

He was now quite content to listen to what might be said and done.

What to make of their presence about that spot he knew not; but the circumstance was most suspicious.

What should have induced them to return there?

Something evidently.

What that something was he waited patiently in the hope of hearing.

The first words that reached him were these:

"I knew I was right," said some one, whose voice was quite unfamiliar to him. "I was certain I saw something move on the water."

"Well, the bullet produced no effect upon it, did it?"

"No, that's true enough; but still, if we had looked a little closer we should have found him."

"I don't dispute that, for there are the marks in the mud at the side which show that somebody got out of the water lately."

"Never mind talking about that," said Skellum, peevishly. "All the talking in the world won't alter the case. We haven't got him, and all we can do is to look again."

"But do you think he is here, Mr. Skellum?"

"He may be; at any rate, we will satisfy ourselves upon the point."

"Well, if he is here," said another voice, "he is a bigger fool than I take him to be. I know if I was in his place I should be off as soon as I found the opportunity, and the coast has been clear quite long enough for him."

"Never mind," said Skellum, "we will look. He may be in hiding still; and if so, we shall stand a much better chance of discovering him now than we should at night."

Nobody could deny the truth of this proposition, and without further delay the search commenced.

Dick Turpin felt very uneasy.

He knew very well that a search was much more likely to be successful if carried on in daylight.

What he had overheard enabled him to understand perfectly all that had happened; and now the circumstance was brought to his memory, he recollected that on emerging from the pool his feet had sunk rather deeply in the margin of soft black mud which surrounded the water.

With this evidence of his recent presence the search would be keen indeed, and he was by no means certain but that he had left such a track behind him as would enable them to reach his hiding-place.

This uneasiness he had to bear as best he could, for he



[DICK TURPIN ENTERING THE HALL.]

was quite powerless to make even the slightest alteration in the state of affairs.

His sense of hearing was all the time kept upon the fullest stretch.

Another thing which troubled him was the possibility that some one or other of the baronet's servants might be aware that a cavity existed in the top of the old tree, and if so, the thought would naturally occur that it would form an excellent hiding-place.

Another source of anxiety was the fear that in their researches they might stumble over the remains of poor Black Bess, and if so, there would be an end to all his hopes of placing her beneath the soil in some unknown spot.

The mention of these things will serve to make the reader sensible of the amount of suspense endured by Dick while listening for every sound that might be wafted to his ears.

But he heard nothing of a decisive character.

Every now and then a sudden cry would make his heart beat at a rapid rate.

But silence would again follow, and he would be left in his former doubtful expectation.

That a very strict and methodical search was being made there could be no doubt, for Mr Skellum was anxious to satisfy himself beyond all doubt that Dick was nowhere in Sir Humphrey's grounds.

As for Dick himself, he felt by no means certain that he had not left such marks upon the sod, while pacing up and down in the way we have described, as would lead to his detection.

More than once, different members of the searching party came close to the old tree, and on these occasions Dick would hold his breath.

But each time they would pass on, and Dick would breathe again.

PRICE ONE HALFPENNY.

At last, many approaching footsteps could be heard, and in a short time it became clear that the open space near the old tree had been appointed as a rendezvous.

"Are we all here?" cried Skellum.

"Yes, all."

"Good! We have satisfied ourselves that he is not here, and now we must go further afield to find him. Follow me!"

So saying, he turned and left the spot, followed closely by his companions.

Dick could scarcely credit the extent of his good fortune.

Most eagerly did he listen to their retreating steps, and when all sounds had died away he murmured:

"Safe—safe once more! My enemies are baffled, and while they are busy seeking for me far away from this spot I shall be able to accomplish that upon which I have so set my heart."

The search in the little wood had occupied a considerable time, for already that duskiness which heralds the approach of night began to spread itself over all surrounding objects.

"A little while," said Turpin—"only a little while, and I shall be able to leave this tree. Then, knowing that the officers have left, it will surely be easy enough for me to obtain a pickaxe and a spade. Yes—yes, I can see now that all will be well."

Slowly the minutes passed, as they always do to those who have no other occupation than to watch the flight of time.

Deeper and deeper grew the twilight, until at length the early night had set in.

It was, more strictly speaking, evening; but it was dark, and darkness was what the hunted highwayman wanted.

"They have gone," said Turpin—"they have surely gone by this time, or I should have heard something long ere this. They have gone, and now I will venture to descend. I will be cautious and careful, though—very—very careful."

On attempting to move, however, he found that his limbs were so much benumbed that he had the utmost difficulty in drawing himself up out of the cavity.

He succeeded after many trials, and then for some moments lay helpless on the grass.

What an easy prey he would then have been to anyone who had chanced to come that way, for, in his present state, to have re-climbed the tree would have been an impossibility.

By degrees he recovered his lost powers, and having done so, made his way towards the Hall.

Almost at every step he felt himself better, for of course the cramped feeling caused by remaining for so long in one awkward position wore off as he moved.

Still it took him a long time to reach the spot where he had formerly stood gazing at the residence of Sir Humphrey Ycomans.

Still availing himself of the cover which the trees afforded him, he crept on nearer and nearer still.

At last he came to a stout hedge which formed the boundary of a small paddock, beyond which was an orchard that was contiguous to a garden and some outbuildings.

This, then, was the point he wished to gain.

Unfortunately for him, the further the night advanced the lighter it became, for the moon was climbing the eastern sky, and her beams were so bright that distant objects could be distinguished with ease, whereas, just at the close of the day, before she rose, the obscurity was ten times as great.

A careful observation, however, convinced Dick Turpin that no one was near enough to observe his movements, and so, by the aid of the branch of a tree, he swung himself over the hedge, along the side of which he crept until the orchard wall was gained.

Here once more he paused, but finding all was still, he was emboldened to surmount this obstacle as well.

He dropped down quickly, and was pleased to find that the fruit trees grew closely enough to each other to afford him excellent cover in his progress.

By the time the orchard was crossed he found himself very near to the hall indeed—so close that it required him to double the caution he had already used.

Looking into the garden, he saw that it was of considerable extent, but now, owing to the time of year, it looked little else than an open piece of ground.

In one corner was what seemed to be a summer-house; but whether it really was so, or whether it was merely a place erected for keeping tools and such-like matters, he could not from his present position ascertain.

Emboldened by the continued silence which prevailed, he at length crouched down and ran towards it.

On arriving, he was disappointed to find that his first conjecture was correct.

It was a summer-house, and a hasty search convinced him that it contained nothing that would be of the least service.

For one thing, however, it provided him with a shelter—a place where he could stand and reconnoitre without much fear of being seen.

But it would appear as though all the people belonging to the Hall were within doors.

"I must get towards those outbuildings yonder," Dick muttered at length. "They are the stables doubtless, and there I may make sure of getting what I want; besides, when once among the buildings I shall be able to keep myself concealed."

In another moment his resolution was taken.

As before, he made a hasty rush across and then stopped.

He was now at the gable end of what he took to be a stable, and before making his way to either side it was necessary for him to be careful.

Just as he was in the act of peeping round the angle of the brickwork he was startled by hearing many voices, and on the instant Mr. Skellum and his entire party of officers came in sight.

Their appearance at this juncture, when they were so totally unexpected, deprived Dick of all power of motion.

He had felt so convinced that they had all quitted the vicinity that he could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyes.

There they were, however, though for what purpose he could not pretend to guess.

They were advancing, too, directly towards the spot on which Dick stood.

What was to be done?

Drawing back as he asked himself this question, the fugitive gave one hasty glance around.

As he did so, he gave himself up for lost.

Concealment and escape were equally impossible.

He had no other protection than the end of the stable.

There was the summer-house he had just quitted, it is true; but its position was such that he was sure he could not reach it without being seen.

A cold perspiration bedewed his forehead, and between his parched lips he whispered:

"All is over now!"

And yet while he made this despairing speech, his eyes, eager and restless as those of a beast of prey, settled upon an object which in a second revived his extinct hopes.

This was a massive wooden frame supporting a windlass.

"The well," gasped Dick—"the well! Surely I can hide there!"

While uttering the words he rushed forward.

His hand rested a moment on the wooden roller round which the rope was coiled.

"How deep is it?" he asked.

The question was a vain one, for, looking down, nothing but absolute darkness could be beheld.

Nor was there time for consideration.

Unless his movements were characterised by the utmost rapidity, he would be seen—it would be too late.

It was, therefore, with a feeling of recklessness that he seized the rope and slipped down it with the agility of a sailor.

CHAPTER MCIX

DICK TURPIN FINDS THE GARDEN WELL TO BE A MOST UNPLEASANT ABIDING PLACE

So short a space of time elapsed from the moment when Dick Turpin first caught sight of the police officers until he made his rapid descent into the well, that a mere spectator

would have been under the impression that, so far from having hesituted, his mind had been made up some time previously as to what he should do in such a contingency.

Dick had seized the rope very hastily, and in his excitement failed to notice that a few coils still encircled the barrel of the windlass, the consequence of which was that he descended with much greater rapidity than he had intended or than was at all pleasant.

When the end of the rope was reached such a sudden jerk ensued as almost to deprive him of his grasp.

But the shock over, he continued to slip down until his feet reached the surface of the water, and then he paused.

The well was of considerable depth, and on looking up Dick could only just distinguish a small circular aperture over which the blue night sky seemed stretched.

He remained a little while listening with great intentness and anxiety, for the rapid revolution of the windlass consequent upon his descent had not taken place without a rumbling, rattling noise which could scarcely fail to reach the ears of the officers, and necessarily attract their notice.

But Dick found it was most fatiguing to hang all his weight upon his arms, and wondered what the depth of water might be.

This was a serious matter, for even if he should have the power to hang by his arms until the danger should be overpast, his muscles would be too exhausted to enable him to climb the rope again.

He slipped down a few inches, and then his feet encountered something which he made out to be the top of the large wooden bucket.

On this he was able to stand easily enough, and his arms were relieved of all fatigue save the slight exertion necessary to enable him to steady himself.

It was just as he had accomplished this much, and prepared to listen again, that he heard the sound of voices.

The first words that reached his ears with any distinctness were spoken by Mr. Skellum.

"But what the devil was it?" he said, very petulantly. "It must have been something. What was it?"

No one appeared able to give any reply to this question, for a complete silence ensued.

"It sounded to me like the rattle of this old windlass; but, then, who could have touched it? There's no one about."

"That's true enough, sir, and we must have seen 'em if there was."

"Perhaps it's the wind," said another.

Oh, how Dick Turpin thanked him for this suggestion, and how he hoped it would be received as a tolerably satisfactory explanation of what would otherwise be a very mysterious and suspicious occurrence!

"But the wind does not blow strong enough," growled Skellum; "and besides, why don't it rattle now?"

This was another unanswerable question.

The officers were all greatly perplexed, that is quite evident, and but for the conviction they all had that Dick had got far enough away by this time they would doubtless have attributed the sound to him.

But the fact of his being there just under their noses was so very improbable that they never once thought of it.

The reason was that they knew Dick had had ample opportunities of getting away had he chosen to do so, and they could not think that there was anything to induce him to prefer remaining there in the very heart of danger.

"It looks deep," said Skellum; and by the difference in the sound of his voice the highwayman fancied that he must be peeping down the well. "I wonder what is down? Try the handle and see."

After hearing these words Dick had just time to let go of the rope and step quietly into the water and that was all.

Some of the officers immediately began to wind up.

The bucket ascended without difficulty, and on reaching the top was found to be full of water.

This did not help to clear up the mystery in the least.

"The water will do for our horses," said one of the party. Shall we have any more?"

"Yes, in a moment."

The bucket was emptied and then lowered.

Dick strained his eyes in the hope of seeing it coming. But in vain.

Every now and then it would go with a sudden bump against the brickwork; and there was considerable probability that it would strike Dick's head before it reached the surface of the water, and if so, the force of the blow would be enough to deprive him of consciousness.

He could protect himself in no other way than by holding his hands above his head, and it was well for him that he adopted this safeguard, for the bottom of the bucket struck his fingers so severe a blow as almost to wring a faint ejaculation from his lips.

The bucket was again drawn up, but still the mystery was as far from being solved as ever.

"I wish I could see to the bottom," said Skellum. "I feel very uneasy and dissatisfied about this business."

"Do you think there is anybody down there, Mr. Skellum?"

"I don't know what to think. It's d—d odd there should have been that row."

"Let us fire down. It can't do any harm, and will settle the question."

No opposition being made by his leader, the man who made this proposition pointed his pistol down the well and fired.

Dick guessed some such steps would be taken, and wondered what he should do in the event of it.

He could only think of one thing, and that seemed simple enough.

It was to remain standing perfectly still.

He had presence of mind enough to know that by standing with his back pressed closely against the brickwork of the well he stood many chances of escape.

No slight amount of nerve was requisite for this, but Dick was never deficient of that quality.

The event proved that he had adopted the right course.

The bullet fell harmlessly into the water, leaving him unhurt.

The explosion taking place in so limited a space had a most deafening effect.

The officers above maintained a profound silence after the discharge.

No doubt they were listening intently.

No sound, however, uprose from the bottom of the well.

"There's nothing there," said the man who had fired.

"So it seems," assented Skellum, though by the way he spoke it seemed tolerably clear that he came reluctantly to the conclusion. "Come on. It is waste of time to stay here. We ought to have been off long ago. I wish I knew what had caused the sound, though."

The officers had only their suspicions that it might have been the rattling of the windlass that they heard.

Had they been sure of it, unquestionably they would not have departed until they had made a much closer investigation.

The sound of their retreating footsteps next reached Dick's ears.

But the highwayman now found himself in a fresh dilemma, and one which seemed to be of as serious a character as any.

When the officers had drawn up the second quantity of water they had omitted to lower the bucket again.

It now stood just on the brink of the well, and the rope was coiled up on the windlass.

Dick was a prisoner.

A prisoner, too, under the most uncomfortable of circumstances.

Standing at the bottom of a deep well, nearly up to his thighs in water, that was so cold as to seem within less than a degree of freezing point, and with hardly any hope of getting out unseen.

What could be done?

It might be that water was rarely fetched from that source, as the labour of drawing up the bucket must have been considerable.

Then, supposing that water was drawn, the bucket might be wound up a hundred times and not left empty at the bottom once.

It was not even there when Dick descended.

He grew fearfully anxious.

His limbs were getting numbed, but he could do nothing to prevent it, and to shout aloud for succour would be to set a seal upon his own destruction.

Never before had he been in a situation of so much perplexity.

Oh, how wistfully did he gaze up to the circular aper

ture above, which to him was as inaccessible as the moon.

Many were the plans he tried to raise himself, but the smooth, mossgrown bricks afforded not the slightest hold for either hands or feet; and after many vain attempts he was obliged to abandon the project altogether.

"I must wait," he said—"I have no other resource—I must wait. I must call up to my aid all the patience I possess, and make a virtue of necessity—I must wait—I must wait."

But it was much easier to come to this determination than to carry it out; and Dick felt that never before had his fortitude been put to so severe a trial.

The intense coldness of the water made itself felt all over him from head to foot.

His limbs were as insensible as they could have been had they been severed from him.

With chattering teeth, he murmured:

"Will they find me here? Is this to be the ignoble end of my career—caught here underground, like a rat in a hole? That would be a triumph for my enemies indeed. And yet how can I help it? Even if the bucket was now at the bottom my paralysed limbs would not allow me to climb; the rope would be quite useless to me."

He was silent for a moment, and then, in tones of greater determination, he said:

"I can at least save myself from the humiliation of falling into the hands of my foes. I can die here—that will baffle them."

It required, however, no ordinary amount of stoicism to decide upon this course without acting upon it; and though Dick spoke the words we have recorded, yet he anxiously and restlessly looked around and moved about in the hope of being able to find some means of emerging.

This restlessness had at least one good effect—it stimulated the languid circulation of his blood; but so far from meeting with the slightest success, the unpleasant truth was more and more forcibly pressed upon him that escape was wholly and utterly impossible.

Dick had thought his forced sojourn in the hollow of the old tree unendurable enough, yet how delightful was it when contrasted with his present situation!

And all the time he kept his hearing on full stretch, partly because he fancied that the officers would return, but in reality still more so in the hope that he should hear some one approaching with the intention of drawing water from the well.

The very unlikelihood of any person coming for this purpose at such a late hour of the night only shows how slight a thing will serve as a hold for hope to seize upon and cling to.

But minute after minute elapsed without any sound occurring to break the intense stillness.

"I am in for a night of it at all events," Dick said at length, assuming as much resignation as he was able. "For how much longer, who can tell?"

The conviction that there was no chance of his being able to escape for several hours to come made him cast about for some means by which he could render his position a little less uncomfortable than it was.

This, as may be easily imagined, was no easy matter, especially when we remember the benumbed condition of his limbs.

Nevertheless, after many fruitless efforts, he contrived to draw himself up in such a way that he supported himself above the surface of the water.

He did this by pressing his feet tightly against one side and his back against the other.

Such a position as this, however, was fatiguing to the last degree, still it was preferable to remaining in the water.

Thus the time passed till morning came.

Looking up, Dick could see the change gradually taking place in the colour of the little bit of sky visible to him, until at length it was fairly daylight.

And when this time arrived he seemed as far off escape as ever, for the silence gave no signs of being broken.

He was now in a most commiserable state, and seemingly all but deprived of the use of his limbs.

His long listening, though, was at length rewarded.

Footsteps first of all became audible.

Then voices.

Were the speakers coming to the well?

That was the question which Dick asked himself with feverish anxiousness.

His suspense was not destined to be of long duration.

Nearer and nearer they came, until they paused at the top.

By the sound of the voices, Dick could tell that they were two men.

"Now, then—look sharp!" said one. "Down with the bucket!"

A clattering sound immediately followed, and the bucket was lowered into the well.

Dick fixed his eyes upon it anxiously.

Would these men, after having drawn the water they required, lower the bucket into the well again?

They might do so, but there were so many chances that they would not, that before the bucket had accomplished half the descent Dick had determined not to run the risk.

"No, no!" he muttered. "I have stayed here long enough. At all ventures, I must be off. The police officers I have little doubt are far enough off by this, and I can easily show myself more than a match for these two fellows, even if they should try to molest me, which is more than doubtful."

Just as he pronounced the last words the bucket reached the water.

As quickly as his stiffened joints would permit, Dick seized the rope, placed his feet on the edge of the bucket, and waited to be drawn up.

So much horror had he of any longer continuance there that it is open to question whether he would not have made the ascent even had he been certain that his resolute foe, Mr. Skellum, was at the top waiting for him.

"This bucket seems a devil of a weight this morning, Bill!" were the next words that reached Dick's ears. "What is the meaning of it?"

"Oh, pull away—I can feel no difference."

The dismal creaking of the windlass followed, and Dick Turpin comprehended that there was a man at either side winding up, for the windlass was furnished with two handles.

The strain was, of course, very considerable, and much greater than it was under ordinary circumstances.

Yet they tugged away with hearty goodwill.

"I'll be d—d!" said the one who had spoken first on the former occasion—"I'll be d—d if there is not something in the bucket! Just you look and see."

"Oh, go on! If there is we shall know when it gets to the top, and that will be soon enough."

While the men stood turning the handles, it was impossible for them to see down into the well.

But the second one began to realise at last how much greater the weight was that morning than it was ordinarily.

"It gets heavier and heavier," he said. "What is it?"

"Wait till it gets to the top," cried the other, as though glad of this chance of retaliation.

But all the rope was now almost wound up.

Creak—creak went the clumsy wooden frame, as though protesting against being called upon to sustain so great a weight.

Suddenly, one of them, turning aside, caught sight of Dick's head and shoulders.

The suddenness with which he caught sight of this unexpected apparition terrified him to such a degree that he lost all command over himself.

Uttering the most hideous yell which it is possible to conceive as coming from any human throat, he let go of the handle.

His companion, startled at the sound, turned his head.

At the same time he was not prepared for bearing all the weight himself, and without knowing precisely how it occurred, the handle slipped out of his hand also.

Some very remarkable events ensued in consequence.

They took place, as one may say, simultaneously, and the space of time altogether occupied by them certainly did not exceed a couple of seconds at the very most.

But we must describe them separately, and to do so will occupy several lines.

In the first place, then, the man who had first let go of the windlass handle received a sudden blow on the bridge

of his nose, and so great was the force of it that it sent him flying backwards, as though shot.

The other, who had the handle snatched from his grasp by the unexpected strain, received a tremendous blow under the chin, which caused him to give vent to a loud scream of agony, and fall back also.

These two blows were delivered by the stout iron handles of the windlass, and the force of them may be gathered from the fact that it was Dick's weight added to that of the bucket of water which caused them to revolve.

They went round with the rapidity of lightning, and it would have been quite impossible to avoid the blows.

As for Dick Turpin, he achieved the descent of the well in a much less space of time than it had taken him on the previous occasion.

The lower he went of course the greater was his speed, and he reached the bottom with such a sudden shock that for the moment all his breath was shaken out of him.

"D—n the fools!" he cried, wrathfully, as soon as he could recover the use of his voice.

But he became immediately conscious that he had spoken with imprudent loudness, and he became silent accordingly.

A succession of most dismal groans then reached his ears.

The two men were both severely hurt.

After a minute or two, however, they both contrived to rise to their feet.

The one then cursed the other most soundly for being such a fool as to let go, and then, groaning again, they retired, probably to seek the hall to obtain some attention to their hurts.

"Now is my time, or never," said Dick, with resolution. "If I am quick, all will be well. But when they get to the kitchen they will have such a tale to tell about what they have seen in the well, that all the inmates of the place will be brought here by curiosity; and what would become of me then?"

But Dick was very doubtful as to whether he possessed the amount of strength requisite to enable him to climb the rope.

Had not the performance of this feat been of such extreme importance, it is quite certain that he would never have attempted it.

The certainty of how much he had to lose if he failed enabled him to make wonderful efforts.

Little by little he ascended.

He had to rest very many times; but he did not so much regret this, because he was conscious that each time he gained new strength.

The fact was, as he grew warmer by the exertion he recovered more and more his lost powers.

In much less time than he was aware of the top was gained.

Before venturing to emerge he raised his head just a very little above the brickwork, and looked carefully around.

Satisfied by one glance that the coast was clear, he, with all the quickness of which he was capable, stepped out and made a rush towards the building in order to conceal himself.

He was only just in time, for from another direction to that which, most fortunately for himself, he had taken, Sir Humphrey Yeomans and a whole army of his servants appeared

As may be supposed, they were all in a state of tremendous excitement, while the baronet himself seemed to be making frantic but ineffectual attempts to receive something like a lucid explanation of what had occurred.

The man who had been struck under the jaw had received so much injury that his neck and jaws had already swelled to more than treble their usual size.

In consequence of this he could only make an extraordinary inarticulate sound, which just enabled his hearers to surmise that he had seen something very dreadful indeed, and no more.

As for the other, his eyes had swelled up to such a degree that vision to him was as much an impossibility as speech was to his companion.

He was led by two of his fellow-servants.

"It's the devil, your worship!" he kept bawling at the top of his voice. "The devil is down the well! I am certain of it, because I seed him!"

This alone would he say.

All attempts to obtain any more detailed account were fruitless.

In vain, also, was it to endeavour to stop his clamour.

Dick waited to observe no more, but withdrew, in order to seize upon the present opportunity of concealing himself.

The chance was such a one as would not occur again.

But Dick was not a little perplexed when he tried to decide which would be the best course of action for him to adopt.

He wanted to get away from the Hall altogether, and yet not unless he could take with him the tools which he came purposely to fetch.

And then it was broad daylight—a most unfavourable time for him to think of setting about his task of digging a grave for his mare.

"No," he said, "I must hide myself somewhere here till nightfall, and then beyond a doubt I shall be able to carry out my intention. But it must be no ordinary place of concealment, for, ten to one, suspicion will point to me as being the person hidden in the well, and the cause of so much alarm. Where, then, can I bestow myself?"

The building which afforded Dick this temporary shelter consisted of some outoffices connected with the Hall.

The fugitive looked keenly at the noble dwelling.

"That is the place," he said, nodding his head. "In there surely there are chambers never used and rarely looked into; and, such being the case, cannot I find some nook or corner where I can remain unseen for a few hours? Yes, that will be the place. I fancy they will scarcely give me credit for being bold enough to hide in the very Hall itself."

It did indeed indicate great boldness upon Turpin's part, or he would never have thought of such a thing.

But his mind was quite made up, and so, without any delay, he crept along the walls of the outbuildings to one particular window which at once attracted his attention.

This window was one of those often seen in country houses.

It opened inwardly, like a door, thus forming a ready means of access to the lawn and flower garden.

It now also formed as ready a means for Dick to obtain access to the interior, and he hastened to avail himself of it.

He was not aware of the circumstance, but the reader may as well be told that this window communicated with the breakfast-room where Sir Humphrey had been sitting, just about to commence his morning meal, when the unparalleled uproar in the kitchen reached him.

He had opened the window and passed through it because that was the readiest mode of exit, and in his hurry he forgot to close it.

Little did he think that the next person that would step through it into his room would be the much-dreaded fugitive, Dick Turpin.

CHAPTER MCX.

DICK TURPIN IS CONCEALED IN A WARDROBE BY THE DAUGHTER OF SIR HUMPHREY YEOMANS.

SUCH, however, proved to be the case.

A moment's inspection satisfied Dick that externally the coast was clear, and internally that the room was unoccupied.

This favourable conjunction of circumstances he looked upon as an augury that after all he was to be successful.

The interior of the Hall was profoundly still—so still that Dick began to think that all the inmates must, without any exception, have turned out to see what was the matter at the well.

A huge wood fire was burning in this breakfast-room, diffusing a warmth which was to Dick delightful in the extreme.

On the table, too, were spread substantial delicacies, the bare sight of which forcibly reminded him that a long time had elapsed since he had eaten anything.

To remove any article from the table would only have been to make his presence known, and this enabled him to restrain himself.

On a kind of sideboard, however, were several beautiful cut-glass decanters

One containing brandy.

No sooner did Dick perceive this than, regardless of all consequences, he seized upon it, put the neck to his lips, and drank heartily.

Then, carefully replacing the decanter where he had found it, he prepared himself for action, being fully conscious that he had lost time enough already.

"They will never miss that," he said, smacking his lips; "and if they do, it will doubtless be set down to one of the servants. But it has done me a world of good. I begin to feel as though I had blood in my veins now."

While making this reflection, he looked well around the room.

But not only did it present evident traces of having recently been occupied, but it held out no chances of concealment whatever.

Dick opened a door cautiously and peeped out.

He discovered that it communicated with the main entrance-hall of the building.

He crossed the threshold and closed the door.

Then he advanced slowly, peering everywhere, until he was startled by hearing a footstep not far off.

It was approaching.

Where was he to go?

Just in front of him was the staircase, and up this, after a brief pause of consideration, he bounded, two steps at the time.

He reached the angle of the stairs only just in time, for as he did so the footstep could be heard upon the flagstones below.

Who it might be Dick did not venture to attempt to ascertain.

Indeed, all his faculties were required in looking about him, for he could not tell how suddenly some door or other might open and cause his discovery.

On the landing above, however, the silence was as great as it could have been in any uninhabited dwelling.

From this landing several dark and narrow corridors branched off, apparently forming the means of communication between the various rooms.

Dick chose what he thought was the darkest and narrowest passage of all, and darted down it with a rapid step.

There was no need to tread with any excess of caution, for the thick carpet with which the floor was covered effectually deadened any ordinary sound.

All at once, however, the end of this passage was gained, and Dick Turpin found himself standing upon another landing, which was lighted by a magnificent stained-glass window, and as the sun happened to be shining upon it, its appearance was very beautiful indeed.

His admiration prevented him from noticing so soon as he should have done the opening of one of the doors near to him.

On the threshold appeared a vision of loveliness ten thousand times more bewildering than the stained-glass window.

She was tastefully attired in a light morning wrapper, and was about to cross the landing when she caught sight of the form of a stranger.

She arrested her steps at once, and uttered a loud shriek, then suddenly darted towards the staircase.

All this occurred with so much rapidity that Dick, in spite of his usual self-possession, was not a little bewildered.

But he recovered himself sufficiently to spring forward and seize the young girl.

He saw that she was about to scream again, and so he quickly, and yet with as much gentleness as possible, placed his hand over her mouth.

"Unless the Hall is more generally deserted than I take it to be," he muttered, "that shriek will discover me. However, I will take care not to throw any chance away."

As he pronounced these words he stooped a little, lifted the young girl in his arms, and, despite her struggles, bore her rapidly towards the door from which she had just emerged.

Having done so, he closed it with his foot, and then, in as calm a voice as he was able to command, he said:

"I ask ten thousand pardons for my rudeness, lady, but what I did has only been done from dire necessity and in self-defence. Believe me—pray believe me when I say that you have nothing whatever to fear—no ground at all for apprehension. Not for worlds would I do you the least injury; but I appeal to you by all you hold sacred and dear to be silent, and to listen to what I have to say If you will promise this I will release you."

Dick spoke rapidly, but nevertheless his words were most impressive.

The young girl looked at him closely, and saw an expression upon his face which made her resolve to trust him.

Dick could read her thoughts as though they had been written before him, and in consequence removed his hand.

"I promise," she said, faintly.

But she was calm and collected, exhibiting no other sign of terror than that her gaze was fixed and stony-looking.

"It is well," said Turpin. "My life now is in your hands—I trust entirely in your word. I do so, because I know that I can do so safely."

The young girl did not reply, but gazed at Dick as though she did not exactly comprehend the actual state of affairs.

It was then, with his head bent, and in a voice whose mournfulness went straight to her heart, that Dick said:

"Lady, I admit that in the course of my life I have done much which is wrong—much which makes me liable to the last penalty of the law. Do not shrink from me—I will not harm you; nor have I ever done the least harm to those you may hold dear. Under these circumstances I ask you for protection—I ask you to save me."

"Save you?" she echoed, more and more surprised.

"Yes, save me; for if you do not conceal me, I shall be taken and afterwards hanged. You draw back with unfeigned horror—that serves to strengthen my conviction that one so fair and gentle as you are would not even by these indirect means bring about my death."

"Not for worlds—not for worlds!"

"Heaven bless you, lady, for that assurance! I knew ere you spoke you possessed a kindly heart."

"But how can I save you?"

"Hush—oh, hush!"

Both became silent, and listened.

Tap—tap—tap!

Some one was knocking gently upon the panel of the door.

"Miss Milly—Miss Milly," said a voice, "was that you? Did you scream, or did you hear some one?"

Dick made a sign which signified plainly enough that the girl—no doubt the lady's own waiting-maid—was to be answered and dismissed.

"Martha, is that you?"

"Yes, miss. Can I come in?"

"No—no," answered Milly, for so we may as well call her.

There was no fear that she would be able to enter, for at the first intimation of danger, Dick had glided noiselessly over the carpet to the door.

"But did you scream, miss?"

"Yes—yes."

"Oh dear! what is the matter?"

"Nothing—nothing. Leave me now. I will come down directly."

"Very well, miss. Only I thought as you screamed you must have been frightened; and we have all been terrified to death, for there has some dreadful thing been seen in the well. Leastways, something horrible jumped out of the old well in the garden, miss, and it struck Ritson, the groom, on the face and blinded him, besides breaking his nose; and the new stable-boy, he struck him on the mouth, and has broken his jaw, and his neck has swelled up so that he cannot speak."

This information was poured forth with that glibness of utterance for which the female sex is remarkable.

A shade of alarm came over the young girl's face.

It would have been much more serious than it was had she not noticed that Dick received the intelligence with a

smile, which seemed to say that the report was exaggerated, and that he knew all about it.

"I am all right," answered Milly. "Please say I shall be down directly, when I shall be glad to hear all about this; and tell papa I should have been down to breakfast earlier only my head ached so very badly."

"Yes, miss."

The girl retired.

Dick advanced, and, bowing low, he said:

"Dear lady, you have now given an assurance of your wish and your intention to save me. I know that the idea of handing me over to the power of my enemies would be too terrible a one for you to entertain. You will protect me, will you not?—you will save me, will you not?"

The young girl burst out into tears, and sank down upon a chair a prey to the deepest anguish.

This was something for which Dick was hardly prepared.

Wondering much what could have called forth these expressions of grief, he stood still watching her, knowing full well that this course would be the best.

At length he spoke.

"What is it I have done?" he asked—"what unfortunate act or speech of mine has been the cause of this great grief?"

"Alas—alas!"

"Speak—speak—pray speak!"

"What have I done," she murmured—"what have I done? What may I not suffer from this imprudence? I have had you here—here, in my own chamber, and have not denounced your presence! Should you now be seen, what will become of me—what will be said?"

"You are right," answered Dick, touched by her deep distress. "The thought never once occurred to me. If it had, I would never have compromised you. As it is, I shall thank you deeply and sincerely, and rid you of all further peril."

"What—oh, what would you do?" she added, imploringly, perceiving that Dick stepped towards the door.

"Do?" he iterated. "Why, relieve you of my presence, and so put an end to your embarrassment."

"No, no—ten thousand times no! I will never, never consent to that! What is done cannot be undone; but it seems it still lies in my power to save you."

"But I cannot accept even my life at the price of your fair fame. No, no. Think not of me; I am not worthy of your consideration."

The young girl wept bitterly still; but she had left her chair, and now stood tearful, pale, and trembling, with her back to the room door.

"Here," she said, "you will be safe; and if you are not seen I shall lose nothing, while you have everything to gain. It was selfish and wrong of me to be so ready in putting my own possible danger so quickly forward."

"That I can never allow," responded Dick, "for the selfishness is on my part; but in my haste I never gave it a thought that you might be a sufferer by lending me your aid; had I done so, I repeat, the request would never, never have passed my lips."

"I believe you," she said, gently. "And now let that pass. I know you not, save that you say you are in danger. If it lies in my power I will save you from all harm."

"How feeble and how weak are thanks!" said Dick, in a voice full of emotion. "Fain would I express my gratitude to you, but——"

"Enough—enough! I will leave you now, and there is no reason for anyone to know that we have met."

"Not a word respecting this meeting shall ever pass my lips—I will pledge you my sacred word of that."

"I am satisfied."

"But," said Dick, "are you satisfied that in your absence no one will enter the room?"

"I will lock the door."

"Are you in the habit of doing so?"

"No. Why?"

"Because if you are not, and your door should be found fastened, suspicion would be roused at once."

"True—true! I am distracted!"

"Let me think for you," said Dick, "for in securing my safety I am also securing yours."

"What do you propose?"

"Is not that a wardrobe yonder?" asked Dick, pointing while he spoke to a huge and massive piece of antique furniture.

"It is. Why?"

Dick went towards it, and turning the key, which was in the lock, opened the centre door.

A good-sized closet was then disclosed, which contained only a few articles of apparel at the back.

"This is the very thing."

The young girl looked at him in wonder.

"Look," he said—"I will put a double trust in you. I will enter here—thus."

He suited the action to the word.

"Now," he said, "you shall close this door, lock it, and take away the key. If you like you can betray me—I shall then be wholly at your mercy."

The young girl made an angry, impatient gesture.

"Pardon me for making mention of such a thing. I know full well you would not be guilty of such treachery. Do not doubt my words, for I am ready and anxious to prove them by my actions."

"I do not doubt them."

"Enough, then. When you have locked the door, keep good charge of the key—do not let it go out of your possession."

"I promise that. But what am I to do then?"

"When night comes, let me out, and I will make my escape. There shall be no clumsiness about it. You will never hear of me again after this night."

The young girl sighed heavily.

"Carry out my instructions," said Dick, with much earnestness, "and all will be well. Lock the door now and descend, or wonder may be excited by your delay. If you are asked why you screamed, make what excuse you can, and do not come near this room again until the time comes for you to release me."

With a heavy, aching heart, the young girl promised compliance with his mandates, and locked the door.

Bitterly indeed did she reproach herself for having so readily given way at first to the feelings of compassion for Dick's position which instantly rose in her breast.

The consequences to her might be serious indeed.

But she had gone too far to retract, and the idea of giving up the fugitive to his foes was most abhorrent to her nature.

She felt that she could never do it.

"I will save him if I can," she murmured, as she descended the stairs slowly and very differently to her usual manner; "but I am afraid I shall unconsciously betray him."

On descending to the breakfast parlour, she found the baronet in a state of great perplexity and fury, for all his efforts to come to something like a clear conception of what had taken place at the well had proved unavailing.

His lady was also there, and both were struck at the first glance with the change which was visible in the appearance of their daughter.

But having been already informed of her indisposition, they attributed the alteration to this cause.

The circumstance, too, attracted less attention than it would have done on any other occasion in consequence of the exciting nature of the events that had taken place that morning.

So preoccupied, however, was Milly, that not even the extraordinary narrative could fix her attention.

Little, however, did the baronet imagine the subject of his only daughter's thoughts.

Dick Turpin, meanwhile, locked up in the wardrobe in the manner described, felt more and more uncomfortable the longer he reflected upon his situation.

He was perfectly certain that in an ordinary way Milly was quite guiltless of all deceit, and therefore he feared, and not unreasonably, that her very anxiety to keep his secret would lead to a disclosure.

"I must once more resign myself to circumstances," he said. "I have not much to complain about at present. If I could only sleep, now, it would refresh me, and make me ready for the adventures of to-night. I will try, for I shall be just as safe here sleeping or waking."

A great feeling of drowsiness had been creeping over Dick for some time past, and he yielded to its influence.

Indeed, he was not able to withstand its power.

This might have been caused by the confined space he was in; and then it must be remembered that an unusually

long period had elapsed since he had enjoyed anything like a good sleep.

The wardrobe, too, one would have thought an uncomfortable place to sleep in, but it served well enough for the weary and exhausted fugitive.

In a few minutes he was in a deep slumber, which for a time made him oblivious of all the perils and perplexities of his existence.

How long he might have remained in this state of unconsciousness he could not possibly determine, but all at once his ears caught the sound of voices.

His first thought was that he was dreaming of what had lately happened, for it was Milly's voice which first struck upon his ears.

With a vague sensation of interest, Dick listened, and as he did so he recovered all his faculties, for he found himself threatened by an imminent danger.

"Now, mamma," were the first words he distinguished clearly, "do tell me why you have so insisted upon coming up into my room with me?"

"You do not object to that, surely, do you?" And Dick fancied that there seemed to be an indication of suspicion in the tones.

"Oh, no—no, mamma! What ever made you think that I did? I was only curious, you know. It is such an unusual thing for you to come up with me."

"Oh, is it? Well, you surprise me. Let me see, this makes the fourth time I have been here during the past week."

"Oh yes—yes—I know—I know," stammered Milly, with fast-increasing confusion. "But my headache is so distracting that I do not know what I am saying, and coming upstairs seems to have made it ten times worse."

"I don't think you do know what you are saying," was the reply; "and you seem to me to have a—a—well, I may as well say it—a remarkably guilty air."

"Oh, mamma!"

"Well, well, don't distress yourself, only you seem ill at ease, as though you had a secret weighing on your mind; but perhaps it is your headache—at any rate, I won't bother you about it now. Let it be; we will talk it over another time."

Rather a long pause followed.

In his mind's eye he could see the lady looking keenly at her daughter, and waiting for her to reply.

But finding no reply came, she continued:

"I came up, my dear, merely because I thought I should like to see that crimson velvet dress your papa bought you such a long time ago, and which you seem to have such an objection to wearing."

"Why—why, mamma——" faltered Milly.

"Oh, I want none of your excuses," was the reply. "I am well aware that you took a fanciful dislike to that dress, and that it is the hardest matter in the world to get you to wear it."

"But, mamma——"

"Hush, I say! You know how very fond your papa is of that dress, and how much he wants you to wear it; and he has been very cross about it this morning. What put it into his head I don't know, without he expects some visitor here to-morrow, before whom he wishes you to appear to every advantage."

"Oh, mamma!" ejaculated Milly, in so stifled a voice that Dick fancied she must be fainting.

"What's the matter with you, girl—what is it you have oppressing your mind so much?"

"N-nothing, mamma."

"Oh, nonsense! I am sure there is, and I am determined to find it out! But one thing at a time. Let me see this crimson velvet dress."

"Not to-day, mamma—not to-day."

"Why not?"

"Let it be to-morrow! Anything but now!"

"For what reason?"

"Because—because," stammered Milly, with increasing distress and confusion—"because my head aches so badly. Oh, mamma," she added, with a gush of tears, "you don't know how ill I feel!"

"Something is the matter with you, I am sure. However, I can't think you are so bad as not to be able to find me the dress. It is hanging in the wardrobe, is it not?"

These words at once let Dick understand what was the cause of Milly's extreme embarrassment.

At the same time he was conscious that something was touching him, which by the feel was certainly velvet.

No doubt it was the velvet dress just spoken of.

Dick now felt ten times more uncomfortable than he had yet done, and listened with the greatest intentness to all that might follow.

In his own mind he gave himself up for discovered.

Not that he imagined Milly would betray his hiding-place, but she would manifest so much uneasiness that her mother's suspicions would be unappeasably excited.

To the interrogation as to the whereabouts of the velvet dress Milly made no reply until her mother repeated her words.

It was then in a faint, almost inarticulate whisper she pronounced the one word:

"Yes."

Before she gave the reply, her mother had quitted her seat and walked towards the wardrobe.

Dick heard her coming and held his breath.

Another moment or two would put the matter of his discovery beyond all doubt or question.

His hearing was preternaturally acute—indeed, every one of his faculties seemed sharpened by the imminence of his present danger—and he could hear Milly drawing her breath in short and fitful respirations.

"Where's the key?" were the next words.

The question was an ominous one.

Dick wondered what reply Milly would make to it.

She was silent.

"Where is the key, child?" asked her mother, with additional sternness.

"Is—is—is it not—not in the lock, mamma?"

"Of course not," was the sharp rejoinder; "if it had been do you think I should have asked you for it?"

"It is very strange," said Milly, making a desperate effort to retain what little composure she had left—"very strange, indeed! The key ought to be in the lock."

"I know that—but it isn't. And I ask you where it is?"

"Let me call Martha, mamma—I daresay she will know. Oh, my poor, poor head, I believe I am half distracted!"

"I begin to think so too," said her mother, who began to be more puzzled and alarmed than before. "However, there is some mystery in connection with the velvet dress, and I will have it fathomed."

Milly uttered a faint scream.

At this juncture a faint tapping was heard.

"What's that?"

"I don't know, mamma."

"It's me, miss, if you please," said a voice outside the door.

"That's Martha," cried the baronet's wife, as she stepped hastily across the room; "now we shall find out something more, I have no doubt."

Her voice was full of triumph, and indicated anticipated satisfaction.

Milly now gave herself up in despair.

And so did Dick.

The former was in mortal dread of the consequences of this adventure, and felt the most intense longing conceivable for the floor to open and swallow her, never to let her be seen on earth again.

As for Dick, he awaited the result with more calmness than anyone could have conceived.

He knew what was the worst that could happen to him, and he was collected and prepared accordingly.

CHAPTER MCXI.

DICK TURPIN HAS SOME ODD ADVENTURES BEFORE LEAVING THE HALL.

At this moment the door opened.

Martha entered.

"I want the key of this wardrobe," said the baronet's lady, somewhat sharply. "Where is it?"

"The what, my lady?"

"The key of the wardrobe."

"It's in the lock, my lady."

"No it is not," was the still sharper rejoinder, for the coincident manner in which both fenced with the question gave rise to still greater suspicions.

But the cause of Martha's hesitation was, that she had taken upon herself to secrete in the wardrobe some letters she had received, and her guilty conscience



[DICK TURPIN DIGS A GRAVE FOR BLACK BESS.]

her jump to the conclusion that her mistress had heard about the matter and come to look for the epistles.

The angry manner of her mistress still more embarrassed and confused her.

"It is very strange," said Lady Yeomans, glancing from one to the other of the guilty pair. "It's very odd indeed, but I will not rest until the mystery is settled. Once more I say, where is the key?"

"I assure you, my lady," said the trembling Martha, "I don't know. It is always left in the door, and if it is not there now I am certain I can't tell where it is."

"It is not there now," was the stern answer; "and I insist upon it being found without any further delay!"

Milly screamed again, and all but fainted.

"One of you must know something about it. No one has been here but yourselves. Give up the key at once, without any more prevarication, or you will find that I shall be very angry indeed."

A dead silence followed.

It was broken very abruptly by Martha.

"Oh, my lady! if you please I was sent up to tell you something, only I was so flustered that it went clean out of my head."

"Sent to me? By whom?"

"Sir Humphrey, my lady. He is down in the Red Room, and wants to see you this very moment about something very particular."

"What is it?"

"I don't know, my lady; but he seems terribly put out about something, and was walking up and down from the window to the door for all the world like a lion."

"And he said I was to come to him immediately?"

"Yes, my lady."

Her mistress hesitated.

Her desire to clear up the present mystery was about the strongest feeling she had had for a long time, and no

ordinary circumstance could have turned her aside from it.

But such a message from the baronet as Martha had just delivered was not to be neglected.

She knew the impatient disposition of her husband well, and had long enough ago learned the wisdom of not offering the least opposition to him.

Her hesitation only lasted about a moment, yet during that brief space of time many reflections passed through her mind.

Her fear was that during her absence Martha and her daughter might consult together about the mystery which evidently existed; and she knew Martha well enough to dread that she would be defeated if this conference took place.

"You shall come with me, Martha," she said. "I shall not be more than a moment, I daresay; and then I will come back and have the key of the wardrobe found."

The change which took place in the expression of Martha's countenance was quite enough recompense to the lady, and she felicitated herself not a little upon her cleverness and penetration.

"Stay where you are, miss!" she said to her daughter; "and rest assured I shall be back again in a few moments at the furthest."

With these words, she quitted the chamber, insisting that Martha should precede her, in order that no signals should be exchanged.

When the door closed, Dick waited while perhaps he could have counted ten.

Then with his finger-nails he tapped very lightly and gently against the panel of the wardrobe.

"Hist, hist!" he said, in a faint whisper, placing his mouth close to the keyhole. "Find out whether they have descended the stairs; and if so, let me out."

But Milly did not move.

Dick grew uneasy.

Had she fainted?

He tapped again, and this time with more loudness.

No one can tell what a relief it was to him when he heard the young girl's trembling voice.

"What is it? Oh, what shall I do?"

"See if they have descended."

In her agitated condition she had some difficulty in comprehending what was said to her.

But she went to the door, and peeped out.

Then returning quickly, she said:

"They have gone."

"Open the door, then, and let me out."

"But what will you do?"

"No matter. Release me."

Milly trembled so excessively that she could scarcely draw the key from her pocket.

But at last she did so, and the wardrobe was unlocked.

Dick was in a fever of impatience, and stepped forth hastily.

Then, without delaying time by saying a word, he locked the door again and placed the key upon the dressing-table.

"There!" he said "If you are asked, you can say you were too confused to think where it was before, or that your head distracted you."

But Milly at this trying moment gave evidence of the pure unselfishness of her disposition, for she said, in earnest, anxious tones:

"Never mind me; but tell me what you will do? How will you escape discovery?"

"Leave that to me," said Dick, with easy assurance. "Rest assured, though, that I will compromise you no longer; I regret deeply having done so to the extent I have already, and that I should have caused you not only so much distress of mind, but also been the means of rousing your mother's suspicions against you."

"Think not of that, but say what you will do. I cannot tell how soon she may return."

Dick went first to the window and looked out.

At a considerable distance beneath him could be seen a yard, where a man was busy attending to a whole army of dogs.

He shrank back.

Then going rapidly to the door of Milly's room, he opened it and listened.

Some sounds came from below, but they were distant ones and not of a character to excite any apprehensions in his breast.

With eager eyes, Dick looked everywhere around him, hoping to perceive some place that held out some little prospect of concealing him.

He saw nothing, and therefore, though most unwillingly, he was compelled to call upon the trembling girl for her assistance.

"Do you know of any nook or corner," he asked, "where I can dispose of myself till nightfall? Surely there must be many such about a building like this one. If you will point out a hiding-place, I promise to take my departure in silence and in peace."

"Alas!" replied Milly, clasping her hands, while her face assumed an expression of intense fright—"alas! I know of no such place as you require. What—oh! what is to be done?"

"Hush—hush!" cried Dick, quietly, "there is no need for alarm. Tell me of some one apartment in the Hall that is but little used—some room where you do not think it likely anyone will enter to-day."

"My thoughts forsake or bewilder me," she said, pressing her hands over her temples. "Yet stay, there is one place—yes, I think I may say there is one place."

"What is it?"

"The library."

"The library?" echoed Dick.

"Yes—that is the apartment least of all visited by anyone save myself. There you may chance to find the shelter which you seek."

"Thanks—thanks! I have no doubt, from what you have just said, that the library will be, of all others, the place to suit me."

"Yes—yes. It is one of the rarest things in the world for my father to cross the threshold of that chamber."

"No doubt—no doubt. But how am I to find it?"

"In that I do not think there will be the slightest difficulty."

"You can direct me easily, then?"

"I can—I can. When you reach the bottom of the staircase you will see a door almost opposite to you."

"Is that it?"

"It is."

"Then I cannot fail to find it. Once more, many—many thanks for all that you have done in my behalf!"

"Name it no more."

She started at the moment, for, just as she spoke, the violent slamming of a door was heard.

"That's father," she gasped—"I am sure it is!"

"How can you tell?" asked Dick, curiously.

"Because no one else in the house slams a door like that."

"Oh!"

Dick listened, but a most profound silence ensued.

"Do you think I may venture to descend?" he asked, at last.

"I think so; but oh, be careful—pray be careful!"

"I will, depend upon it; and my only hope now is that ere long I shall be permitted the opportunity of doing something for you which will in part requite what you have done for me."

"No more—no more!"

Like a shadow, Dick stole to the top of the staircase.

Leaning over the massive carved baluster, he peered down.

But, so far as he could tell, no one was near.

"Farewell!" he said, in a whisper, which nevertheless was expressive of his deep gratitude—"farewell, should we not meet again; but rest assured that I shall never—never forget you. You are inclined to think but lightly of it, yet, believe me, you have done no less than save my life."

The young girl did not speak.

But she made a half-imploring, half-commanding gesture, which Dick at once understood.

In obedience to it he inclined his head and commenced a rapid descent of the staircase, for this was what Milly wished him to do without more delay.

But rapid as were his movements, they nevertheless were characterised by the utmost caution.

He did not know how soon some one might appear, and in the event of the occurrence of such a circum-

stance it was imperative that he should be early acquainted with it.

The thick carpet with which the stairs were covered enabled him to tread noiselessly, so that there was no fear of an alarm being raised in consequence of this.

Just as he was about to turn the first angle he heard voices.

He ventured to take a hasty glance.

He caught sight of Martha and her mistress.

They were ascending.

By this it would seem that her interview with the baronet was over.

What was Turpin to do now?

To descend unseen by those who were coming up was of course impossible.

To remain standing where he was would only be to ensure his discovery.

There was no place near that offered a chance of concealment even to a mouse.

Clearly there was but one resource—it was, to ascend again.

He did so with great swiftness and silence, though as he neared the top he was filled with the dread that Milly, on seeing him thus unexpectedly return, would give utterance to some cry which, at the very least, would have the effect of increasing her mother's suspicions.

But, to his infinite satisfaction, he found, on reaching the landing-place, that she had retired to her own chamber.

At any rate, she was nowhere to be seen.

This danger being at an end, Dick grew more hopeful.

Crossing the landing, he opened the first door which presented itself.

Crossing the threshold, he found himself in a small bed-room, which had certainly not been very long unoccupied.

However, it was empty now, and that was enough for Dick.

Although the door was closed, the voices of Martha and her mistress were borne to his ears, though he could not distinguish what was said.

He listened intently, until a door was shut somewhat violently, and the voices ceased.

"Surely—surely," muttered Dick, "I may now venture to say that the coast is clear. Yet, before I leave this place, let me consider whether it will be wise to do so."

He stepped further into the room while he spoke.

The window he found commanded a view of the yard where the baronet's dogs were kept, so that it was quite out of the question to hope for escape in that direction.

Then, the bed-room itself was only furnished with just such articles of furniture as were indispensable, and no more.

Not the least chance of concealment presented itself.

Having gained this knowledge, Dick made his way towards the door again.

"It will never do to remain here," he said, to himself—"that would be running by far too much risk. The library—yes, that, of all others, is the place for me. The old baronet is no reader, I will be bound, nor his wife either. Milly, and Milly only, is in the habit of repairing there. At all hazards, I will go down to the library."

Now, had Turpin only known it, he was perfectly safe where he was, nor could he have done better than remain there.

It was only natural, however, that he should fear that some one would enter before the day was over.

Accordingly he opened the door.

All was once more still.

Again he glided to the top of the staircase.

Again he descended.

In less than a moment the bottom was reached.

He then found himself again in the entrance-hall, and not far off he could perceive the stairs by which he had ascended.

The one at the foot of which he now stood seemed a secondary or more private one.

The object which attracted Dick's attention, however, was the large and massive-looking oaken door in front of him.

This, beyond doubt, communicated with the library.

In spite of what Milly had said Dick felt a strong disinclination to open this door.

The deep silence which reigned, however, inspired him with confidence.

Three strides took him to the mat outside the door.

Placing his hand upon the knob, he turned it very carefully

The lock was well oiled, and gave forth no sound.

Then, with the same gentleness, he pushed open the door and glided in.

No sooner had he done so, however, than he wished himself safely out again.

But it was too late, and finding such to be the case, so far from attempting his escape, he swiftly closed the door and turned the key in the lock.

Contrary to all expectation, he found himself face to face with Sir Humphrey Yeomans.

The baronet was seated at a small writing-table, and had a newspaper spread out before him.

So softly had Dick opened the door that he had never heard him, nor did he become aware of his presence until Dick fairly stood within the apartment.

The emergency was one which well tested the highwayman's presence of mind.

Although startled for a second or so, he never doubted which was the right course for him to pursue.

The baronet had seen him.

This being so, if he had beat a precipitate retreat Sir Humphrey would instantly have raised such an alarm as would have made it quite an impossibility for him to escape undetected.

Difficult as it seemed, it was nevertheless necessary that he should compel the baronet to be silent.

But how?

Dick had not determined.

Action was so necessary that it left him no leisure for further thought.

The unexpected appearance of Dick so startled the baronet at first that he neither moved nor spoke, but simply sat with his mouth open and his eyes glaring wildly over the top of his spectacles.

Dick stepped swiftly forward for a few paces, and then spoke.

"Sir Humphrey," he said, in a low and determined voice, "I mean you no harm—I would not injure you or anything of yours; but the duration of my forbearance depends entirely upon yourself—that is, upon your silence."

Still the baronet spoke not.

Dick drew a pistol from his pocket, and deliberately cocked it.

The slight clicking sound caused the baronet to start.

His lips moved.

"Hold!" said Dick. "Say nothing until you have heard me speak. You see this pistol—I have taken especial care to prepare it so that there will be no danger of its failing me in the hour of need. If you attempt to do anything that will endanger my life or liberty, I will pull the trigger and put a bullet through your head without the least compunction."

Sir Humphrey shrunk back from the muzzle of the pistol, which was by far too close to his head to feel pleasant.

"Do not attempt to play me false," Dick continued. "I own you no ill will—I have never, to my knowledge, done anything to injure you; therefore why should you be so solicitous about giving me up to the officers of justice? I say to you again, beware! for if I saw you make the shadow of an attempt to betray me I would shoot you down, and think no more of it than I should of shooting a dog!"

Now, Dick could not have spoken a more unfortunate sentence than the last.

It re-awoke all the baronet's fury.

He thought about his dogs—his matchless, priceless bloodhounds, which had cost him so much trouble, and from whose doings he expected such great results.

They were dead, and before him stood the man who had deprived them of life.

"Dog, eh?" he begun; but Dick stopped him in a very forcible manner.

"That is too loud," he said—"much too loud for my safety. Speak lower or——"

He did not finish the sentence, but brought the muzzle of the pistol in contact with Sir Humphrey's cheek.

Wonderful to relate, at the first touch of the cold iron

his face lost all its rubicundity, and assumed a strange, disagreeable tint which can be compared to nothing save dirty white wax.

"Now what have you to remark?" continued Dick, coolly. "Speak on; but don't raise your voice too high, and don't say anything disagreeable."

Sir Humphrey turned his goggling eyes full upon him as he said:

"You are the notorious Dick Turpin, I suppose?"

"What if I am?"

"Put down your pistol and sit there. I want to speak to you; but I can't while that infernal thing is digging into my cheek!"

"Agreed," said Dick. "I will sit here; but I shall not put down the pistol. I will keep it in readiness to use the moment I find occasion. My own safety demands that."

The baronet did not demur.

Dick sat down opposite to him on a chair, between the writing table and the window.

Before Sir Humphrey could speak, however, some one knocked at the door.

A change came over the baronet's face in a moment.

It was a slight one, it is true; but Dick noticed it for all that.

He understood it also.

The hope instantly sprang up in the baronet's breast that he should be able to make Dick his prisoner.

But he reckoned without his host.

"Mind what you say!" whispered the highwayman, once more bringing his much-dreaded pistol into view. "If you speak a word that I think will give rise to a suspicion that I am here, I will blow your brains out on the spot!"

This was a terrible threat, to which the appearance of the highwayman's pistol, held in an unwavering grasp, lent great extra force.

The knocking was repeated, and then some one turned the handle.

As Dick had locked the door, of course there was no fear of a sudden entrance.

"What have you got the door fastened for?" said a meek voice.

Dick recognised the speaker instantly.

It was the baronet's wife.

By the tone in which she spoke, as well as by the fact that she knocked at the door instead of entering boldly, Dick surmised that she stood in considerable dread of her liege lord.

Seeing Sir Humphrey was about to speak Dick whispered:

"Say, never mind."

"Never mind!" bawled the baronet, with a promptness of obedience that was really delightful.

"Never mind? What do you mean? Open the door and let me in!"

"I sha'n't!" said the baronet, doggedly.

Of course he spoke the words that Dick commanded.

"But you said you wanted me as soon as I could return."

"Never mind!"

"Yes—but I do mind! There's something amiss upstairs, I am certain; and I want to speak to you about it."

"Never mind!" answered Sir Humphrey, with a persistency which must have seemed strange indeed to his wife.

"But," said she, determined to carry her point, if such a thing could be at all possible, "young Lord Crake has just come. He is in the Red Room, and is waiting to see you."

"Never mind!"

"Never mind! Are you mad?"

"Go to the devil!"

The force and energy with which these last words were pronounced is indescribable.

The fact was, the poor baronet was suffering under a double irritation, and his temper, never at the best of times a very patient one, gladly made him seize upon this opportunity of giving vent to the angry feelings in his breast.

Silence ensued for a moment; but the good lady was not to be shaken off so easily.

"Listen to what I say——"

"Sha'n't!" interrupted the baronet, furiously, and without waiting for Dick to prompt him. "I say, I sha'n't, and I tell you to go to the devil!"

Hereupon his wife beat a retreat; but Dick allowed some moments to elapse before he ventured to speak.

"Sir Humphrey," were his first words, "you are a man of discretion. I see you fully realise that your life is of far more value than mine, and that you are too fond of enjoying the good things of this earth to wish to quit it in the hope of finding a better state of existence elsewhere."

The baronet only glared at him.

"Listen," said Turpin, "and I will let you know what I require of you. Do not start or seem so surprised—it is a mere trifle."

"What is it?" he managed to gasp out.

"I want to remain in the shelter of your house until night comes. It will not be long, for the day is already far spent. As soon as it is dark I will leave your house in peace, never again to return to it, never again to molest you or yours. Tell me now whether you think the favour is not a slight one, and such as you may grant?"

Sir Humphrey gave what was unquestionably a sigh of relief, but he said, grimly:

"You have the means of enforcing compliance."

"I have, I admit; but I shall much regret if I am driven to extremities. Knowing it to be inevitable, submit with a good grace. I again repeat that I require no more."

"Be it so," exclaimed Sir Humphrey, after a pause, though the way he spoke showed that his mortification was very great—"be it so. It's d—d disagreeable to have to submit in one's own house to the terms of a rascally highwayman; but I'd a d—d sight rather do that than lose my life!"

"Spoken like a man of sense. I am glad you have philosophy enough to look at the matter in so reasonable a light."

"Philosophy and reason be d—d, and you and all! You deserve hanging."

"That may be your opinion."

"It is my opinion; and further than that, I think hanging a d—d deal too good for you! You ought to be strung up by the neck, if only for one thing you have done."

"Indeed."

"I mean in fact," growled the baronet, with increasing ill-humour. "By all that I can hear, you had one of the best bits of horseflesh that man ever crossed——"

At these words, very much to the amazement of Sir Humphrey, Dick clasped his hands over his face and uttered a deep, remorseful groan.

"I say again, the best bit of horseflesh ever heard of. What a thousand pities that it should come into the possession of a d—d scoundrel like yourself, who knew no better how to use her than to ride until she dropped down dead beneath you. D—n it all! talk of hanging, you deserve to be drawn and quartered into the bargain!"

Sir Humphrey, as he spoke, brought his hand down upon the table with so much emphasis that it is a wonder it did not split beneath the blow, and finished off with a long string of oaths and imprecations which are best omitted.

But Dick was heedless of all.

The words uttered by the baronet struck deeply into his heart.

What he suffered in the shape of mental anguish and deep regret during those few moments that his face was hidden no one can know.

At last he looked up.

"You are right, sir," he said, in a broken voice, "I am a villain—a deep, double-dyed villain — one for whom no fate could be too bad—no death too ignominious."

"But did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Ride her to death?"

"What, my bonny Black Bess?"

"Yes; I ask you whether it is true that you rode your famous mare to death?"

A sob almost choked Dick's utterance.

"I did," he said—"I did. Shame upon me that I did so!"

The baronet pushed back his chair.

"Then, Mr. Highwayman," he said, "let me tell you that I don't envy you your feelings. D—n me, the man

who could do such a thing as that is—is—d—n me, I don't know what I could say that would——"

"You cannot say anything," replied Dick. "But I feel—I feel it here."

And as he spoke he struck himself sharply twice or thrice upon his breast.

CHAPTER MCXII.

DICK TURPIN DIGS A GRAVE FOR POOR BLACK BESS.

We have before mentioned the peculiar ideas Sir Humphrey Yeomans had about horses.

To him, they almost came first and foremost before everything; and had he only felt one half as much kindness and compassion for his fellow-creatures as he did for them he would have been a very humane man indeed.

But it was not so, the fault perhaps not being so much of his heart as of his education—if so it may be called—for he had been taught from infancy to show tyranny and cruelty to those who were stated to be his inferiors.

Indeed, the more he thought about the death of poor Black Bess the more heinous did Dick Turpin's crime appear.

In comparison to this, the committing of numberless highway robberies seemed of but slight consequence.

For this one fact, Dick Turpin was in his eyes a criminal of the very deepest dye; and after the acknowledgment he had made, he (Sir Humphrey) would not have hesitated to believe Dick guilty of any act, no matter how atrocious.

But the unfeigned remorse displayed by the highwayman touched the baronet a little, and in evidence of this he said:

"Come, my good fellow, you seem to be very much cut up, and about as sorry as I should be if I had done such a thing. Tell me all about it; perhaps when I have heard more particulars I may not blame you as much as I do now?"

Hearing these words, Dick raised his head a little.

"It would be churlish of me to refuse you this satisfaction after the kindness displayed towards me."

"Make no mistake," cried Sir Humphrey, quickly and sternly, "there is no kindness in the matter. I know my life is in your hands if you choose to take it; and I am so convinced that such is the case, that I am doing what I can to make the best of a bad job."

"As you will," answered Dick, sadly. "Still, it is strange to me if you do not feel a strong desire to learn something more about me than you at present know."

"I should like to know whether what I have heard is true," said the baronet, after a momentary hesitation.

"What is it?"

"Why, whether your mare actually carried you from London to York in twelve hours?"

Despite his sorrow and his loss, Dick's breast thrilled a little with pride as he said:

"She did—at least, so nearly accomplished the great feat that she did not give out until she was within the hearing of York bells. She did it," he added, with increasing triumph, "and the achievement will never be forgotten—never—never!"

"And so that reconciles you to it, does it?"

"It does—a little. Still, had I known the result——"

"Known the result," interrupted Sir Humphrey. "You must have known the result. Confound it, man, if you had brought your mare to me, I would have given you any money for her! You could not have set her at too high a price."

"No money would ever have parted us."

"And yet you killed her!"

"I did—I did—I did kill her, and ever since then my repentance has been most bitter."

There was another pause, and by the baronet's manner it seemed as though he was about to say something.

But if this was his intention, he was prevented from carrying it out, for there was another summons at the door.

Dick started at the sound.

"Sir Humphrey," he said, recovering his composure almost instantly, "I have no wish to cause a repetition of the disagreeable scene which took place on a former occasion. If you will promise me not to betray me—and after all, what good would it be to you were you to do so?—I will stand behind these curtains. No one will suspect my presence, and you could give admittance to whom you chose."

While Dick spoke these words in a rapid whisper, the knocking was repeated more than once, as though the person outside was most solicitous to obtain admission.

Then, before Sir Humphrey could reply, a voice said:

"Papa—papa, do let me come in; I want to speak to you so very—very badly—do let me come in!"

Dick knew this voice also.

It was Milly's.

The expression on the baronet's face suffered considerably as those words fell upon his ear.

"Give me your word," said Dick, "then go and unlock the door."

"Enough—I promise."

"But you must not leave the room."

Turpin as he spoke displayed his pistol somewhat ostentatiously.

Having done so, he hastened to conceal himself behind the massive folds of the damask curtain at one side of the window.

Evidently Sir Humphrey had come to the conclusion that the best policy he could adopt was to submit, for he went to the door and turned the key.

The very moment that he did so his daughter entered.

Her voice had been sufficient to indicate to Dick that she was labouring under great mental agitation, and he fancied he understood the cause of it when, peeping through the curtain, he saw that the first thing she did upon entering was to give a hurried glance around.

He was still more inclined to think so when he heard her sigh deeply like one who is suddenly relieved of some great distress.

But though this had something to do with her agitation, there was certainly something else, for she clung to her father's breast and burst into tears.

"Why, my dear," he said, so kindly, so gently that Dick was hardly able to believe his own ears, "what is the matter—what has happened?"

"Oh, papa," she said, endeavouring to repress her tears, "I feel so—so very much distressed."

"Well—well, come in. There, sit down beside me and let me know your trouble."

It really seemed that Sir Humphrey was so much concerned about his daughter's sorrow as to be oblivious of the fact that Dick was present, an observer and a listener to all that passed.

"Come," he said, with the same gentleness as before, "let me know your trouble? Do not be afraid to speak."

But Milly seemed to have a most unconquerable difficulty in commencing.

In fact, the more she tried the greater became her embarrassment.

"At least," said her father, "let me know the immediate cause of this unusual agitation. What is it?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? Who is it, then?"

"Lord——"

She stopped, more confused than ever.

"Lord Orake?" said Sir Humphrey, interrogatively.

"Yes, papa."

"Well, what of him?"

"He is here again."

"I know it."

"And mamma would insist upon my going into the Red Room, where he is."

"Well, and if she did? I see nothing terrible in that."

"Oh yes, there was, papa. I told him that his suit was vain—that I could never love him; but he would not pay the least attention to my words. He laughed, and said that the match had been agreed upon long and long ago, and that you, papa, were quite determined I should wed no other."

Here she broke down entirely.

"Well, well," the baronet replied, a little testily, Dick thought, "I must say that my wishes and your mother's, too, both went in that direction. We considered that the union would be an advantageous one in all respects."

"And do you really wish it? Oh, papa, do not be so unkind as to seal my misery for life. Do not force me to marry a man I cannot endure!"

"Is he, then, so very, very distasteful to you?" asked Sir Humphrey, earnestly.

"More than I can tell you," she replied, with a slight shudder. "Oh, listen to my request: withdraw your consent—do not force this hated marriage upon me!"

A silence followed this appeal.

It was disturbed only by Milly's sobs.

From his post of observation Dick could perceive that a struggle of a somewhat powerful nature was going on in Sir Humphrey's breast.

With the keenest anxiety he waited to know what would be the result, for, need we say it, he felt the warmest interest in the fair girl who had saved him, and in everything which concerned her.

"Say no to him now, papa," she pleaded, seeming to gather hope and courage from his continued silence—"say no to him, and so secure my happiness. Oh, I can never—never love him!"

"It shall never be said, my dear," exclaimed the baronet, at length, "that I forced you to do anything so repugnant to your inclinations as this union seems to be."

"Oh, papa, how can I thank you for those words?"

"By casting off this sadness. I blame you much in the affair. You should have made me understand the state of your feelings earlier, and not have allowed matters to have gone so far as they have now."

"Do not—oh, do not upbraid me on that account! Believe me, papa, I have tried my best to conquer my aversion, because I thought, if I could only succeed, how pleased you would be. But, oh, papa, I found it impossible—quite impossible!"

She clung to him convulsively, and he, with all the tenderness he was able to display, endeavoured to soothe and calm her.

"There, my dear!" he said, kissing her tenderly. "Be calm now—forget this sorrow. I will go at once to the Red Room and make Lord Crake acquainted with the real facts of the case."

He rose and went towards the door.

Dick was in a dilemma.

He did not like to step forward and interfere, and yet at the same time he felt that he should not be right to allow the baronet to leave the room.

Sir Humphrey seemed to recollect all at once the engagement he had entered into, and he paused irresolutely, not knowing what to do.

"I will keep my word," he said, after a moment's thought, "and I leave behind me good security that I shall do so."

These words were in the highest degree enigmatical to Milly, who looked after her father with surprise very visibly depicted upon her features.

But the baronet hurried off.

Dick made no attempt to stop him, for he understood perfectly well what he meant.

After the door was closed Dick was half inclined to step forward and make Milly acquainted with his safety, for he fancied she must be enduring no little uneasiness on that very account.

But he hesitated and hesitated until the opportunity was lost; and perhaps it was as well that he did so.

The baronet returned after a very brief absence.

His countenance wore a very ruffled look.

"Now, my dear," he said, "be happy once again; for to see smiles upon your face does me more good than all else; besides, I have got through with that very disagreeable business. Lord Crake does not like it, and blusters, and talks a great deal about what he shall do. Let him try—I don't care that for him!"

He snapped his fingers contemptuously as he spoke.

But these vague threats seemed to alarm Milly greatly.

"Oh, papa, be careful—pray be careful!" she ejaculated. "Do not anger him too much—you do not know him as I do. If you did, you would not think of despising his threats, for I am sure that he would not stop short at any villany or wickedness."

"Pho, pho! Milly, you are nervous and excited. I think, too, that you misjudge Lord Crake. However, let things be how they may, the match is broken off at once and for ever."

The baronet spoke with great resolution, and Milly, again throwing her arms around his neck, wept and thanked him by turns.

Dick Turpin was far from being an unmoved witness of this scene.

It displayed the baronet to him in altogether a new light.

"What a world of pities it is," he thought, "that a man with such a noble, gentle heart should have his mind so warped and distorted by old prejudices! Never mind—he must, in spite of this, have the respect of all who know him thoroughly."

After some time he persuaded Milly to leave him, alleging for his excuse that he had matters of much moment to attend to.

The moment she passed out he closed the door and locked it.

As he did so, Dick emerged from his hiding-place.

But the pistol was in his pocket.

He was certain that there was no need of his weapon now.

By this time the shades of evening had begun to gather thickly.

Sir Humphrey and Dick had both been so closely occupied and so much interested in what had taken place, that they both failed to notice the obscurity that filled every corner of the apartment.

"Night will very soon be here," Dick said, as soon as he observed the circumstance; "and then I shall relieve you of my presence, which cannot fail to be most distasteful to you. Yet I shall leave with deep regret, and when I go I shall entertain a greater feeling of respect for you than for any man I have ever met with."

"Because I have connived at your concealment?"

"No; that is not the reason. It is because you have displayed a noble and manly heart."

A silence followed.

Dick made his way towards the window and looked out.

It was not yet so dark as to prevent him from seeing all over the garden.

His eyes were riveted at once upon a pickaxe and spade resting against one of the trees.

They had doubtless both been used very recently.

Whether they had been forgotten, or whether the man who had left them there would soon return and remove them to a place of security, were points upon which Dick would have been glad to be resolved.

He thought once of frankly telling the baronet what he wanted, but a little reflection soon induced him to alter his determination.

The question might have been asked for what purpose he required the tools.

He would in that case have been in considerable difficulty.

He had made up his mind that no living creature save himself should be made aware with the last resting-place of poor Black Bess.

The baronet above all persons should be kept in ignorance of it, because after what he had said he would doubtless feel a strong curiosity to see her.

This determined Dick.

He would run the risk of obtaining the tools.

Darkness came on rapidly, and Dick was thankful for it.

He was anxious for more reasons than one to get away from the vicinity of the Hall with as much speed as possible.

He felt that already he had lingered in one spot too long, and nothing was more probable than that the officers, being unable to hear any tidings of him abroad, would return to the baronet's domains in the hope of being able to get upon the scent again.

Time passed on, until, in fact, some one for the third time knocked at the library door.

"Sir Humphrey," said Dick, "it is now dark enough to leave, and I hasten to relieve you of my unwelcome presence. I go, feeling a deep debt of gratitude is owing. You may smile at the gratitude of such a man as I am. But who can say, perhaps a time may come when I shall have the chance of befriending you. If the chance does come, I shall avail myself of it to the utmost; and in any case, believe me when I say that you will find it much better to have Dick Turpin's friendship than his enmity.

The baronet made no reply, but smiled slightly.

"I will put you to the test, if you like," he cried.

"Do so—do so."

"Then you cannot requite what I have done for you better than by maintaining a profound silence respecting the events of this day. Do not mention the occurrence to a soul."

"You may rely upon being obeyed in that respect. Not a syllable shall ever pass my lips. But I shall not and will not look upon that as a requital. Farewell."

He bowed deeply as he uttered the last word.

Then, with a firm step, he walked towards the window, which, like most of them on the ground floor, opened like folding doors.

To turn the button and pass out took Dick but a moment.

He cast a hasty, wary glance around, but seeing no one, made a dart towards the tree, the position of which he had most carefully noted.

He could scarcely repress a cry of gratification upon finding that the tools were still where he had seen them.

Prudence whispered to him to be silent.

Shouldering the much-wished-for implements, he hastened off.

He made his way in the required direction without difficulty and without interruption, for there was no longer such a sharp look-out kept now the officers had departed.

He had to pause and look well about him more than once, in order to make sure that he was going right.

On approaching the Hall, however, he had been careful to note every object he passed, and so at almost every turn he found some familiar object.

Still, it was almost half an hour before he reached that little iron gate in the stone wall of which we have had occasion to make such frequent mention.

Before going to the spot where the remains of his poor mare lay, hastily covered with dead leaves, he looked up and down the high-road, so as to make sure that none of his foes were near.

Nothing could be seen—nothing could be heard; so he prepared to set about his task with very great confidence.

But when he reached the little mound of leaves his heart sank.

A sob rose up in his throat, and, struggling for utterance, almost choked him.

With a wild burst of grief, he threw himself at full length upon the mound, and gave way unrestrainedly to his emotion.

How long he remained there he had no clear idea, for his mind was too much troubled to pay any great regard to the flight of time.

Upon looking up, however, he saw that the moon was shining down upon him with a soft and beautiful radiance.

Sighing heavily, he rose to his feet.

"All the grief and all the remorse in the world is unavailing now," he said. "It will do me no good, nor will it bring back you to life, my poor—poor Bess! When I have performed my task the earth will cover every object of my affection. Nothing will be left—nothing—nothing!"

This melancholy reflection well-nigh overcame him; but, with a sudden effort, he summoned up all his energy, and set about the task he had made up his mind to perform.

He worked with a will; and to have seen him, no one would have guessed that he was so unaccustomed as he was to the use of spade and pickaxe.

The ground was soft, and this made a material difference; but then he had to make an excavation of great size.

But as the moon rose higher and higher in the sky, his work steadily proceeded.

Only occasionally did he pause to rest, and then only for the briefest possible space of time.

No sooner was his breath recovered than he recommenced.

He was anxious to get finished, for he knew not how soon some untoward interruption might take place.

"There is no need to go deeper, I think," he at last exclaimed, while wiping the perspiration from his dripping brow. "No one will suspect that you are here, and by means of all these leaves I shall easily hide all traces of the earth having been disturbed. Yes, I am certain it is deep enough."

So saying, he sprang out of the grave.

He then swept off the leaves with which he had covered poor Black Bess.

Once more, then, was her form fully revealed to him.

He stood gazing at her like one fascinated.

The bright moon, now high above the tree tops, enabled him to see with very great distinctness.

"Poor Bess—poor Bess!" he said, sadly. "This will be the last look that ever I shall take at these strong limbs, once so fleet, and now so rigid in death. I have killed you, and my only satisfaction is that your fame is established; and I would ten times rather see you lying thus stiffened and stark at my feet than know that you had fallen into other hands. This I can endure, but I could not bear the knowledge that you had found another master. Perhaps it is all for the best—at any rate, it will be consoling if I can only think so."

Dick was right enough there, and it was really wonderful to observe what a change was effected by this reflection.

In a steadier way, he now set about finishing his work, having the air of one who has made up his mind that it will be best to go through with a disagreeable business without flinching.

It taxed all his powers, however, to roll Black Bess into the grave.

Her weight seemed to have increased fully one-half, and he could only move her by what seemed imperceptible distances at a time.

But he persevered, and the body was brought nearer and nearer to the brink.

At last, by using the spade as a lever, he was enabled to roll her into the grave altogether.

As he had been careful to make the excavation large enough, he had no further trouble as regarded placing her in any other position than the one into which she chanced to fall.

A few moments of sad reflection passed, and then he threw in the first shovelful of earth.

It seemed to him as though some one had struck him a sharp blow upon his heart.

This was the first pang, and soon over.

Animating himself with all the resolution which he could command, he set briskly to work, and shovelled in the soil.

This was a work that proceeded with great rapidity, and ere long the large hole was completely filled up.

He stamped down the earth with his feet, so as to make it as firm and compact as possible; yet when he reached the surface much superfluous earth remained.

Convinced that it would not do to let it remain in a mass where it was, he, with infinite pains and trouble, carried it away, distributing it by shovelfuls over a large area.

This done, he returned to the scene of his labours, and covered the last resting-place of Black Bess with leaves in such a manner as would, he felt certain, conceal its locality.

CHAPTER MCXIII.

DICK TURPIN UNEXPECTEDLY FINDS HIMSELF INVOLVED IN A MOST STRANGE ADVENTURE.

His melancholy task thus brought to a completion, Dick Turpin flung away the implements with which he had achieved it, and, leaning against a tree, gave himself up to deep and bitter thought.

There was not one pleasant point upon which his mind could rest.

All was as dark, drear, and desolate as the scene around him, for some scudding clouds driven from the north-west had by this time obscured the disc of the queen of night.

As one might say, unconsciously Dick's eyes were fixed upon the leaves covering the grave of poor Black Bess, and yet the idea occurred to him of how much those dead, withered leaves resembled his own blighted hopes.

At length, with a sudden start, he aroused himself.

"Bess, my poor old lass, I have kept my word. I have done for you all that I am able. Now I must leave you And even at this moment the conviction comes over me

that I have looked my last upon this scene. I shall never—never see it more."

He looked around him as well as the diminished light would allow him.

He fully intended that it should be a parting glance.

Having taken it, he stepped towards the wall.

He was about to look over to reconnoitre, when he was startled by a clear whistle.

The sound came from somewhere close at hand.

It was only natural that the fugitive should think it was in some way connected with himself—that he should come immediately to the conclusion that it boded danger to him.

Before he could make up his mind to do anything, however, the whistle was repeated a second and third time.

Being thus on his guard, and in expectation of hearing it, Dick was able to decide with tolerable precision as to the source from which the sound proceeded.

His first idea was that it came from the high-road, and was a signal made by some of his foes.

But now he was certain that it issued from the trees among which he stood.

This was altogether so strange and unlooked-for, that for a brief space of time he stood still in deep thought.

His brain worked busily—so busily that it would be impossible for us to give even a bare outline of what passed through his mind.

Perhaps if any notion was more distinct than another it was that he had been watched, and that this was a signal given by some one who had tracked him from the Hall—a signal that would let the officers form an idea of the whereabouts of their prey.

Such a supposition was a very likely one indeed, and one that made Dick feel no slight amount of anxiety, for he was conscious that he should now be found at a great disadvantage.

It seemed very much like a confirmation of this impression when he heard the sound of another whistle thrice repeated.

It was like the one he had first heard, except that it was fainter in tone.

But evidently it came from a considerable distance off.

It was succeeded by the trampling of horses' feet.

"I am right," said Dick, to himself, as he took his pistols from his pockets and got them in readiness for use—"they are coming now. All will be over in a few moments—I am found, and it will be in vain to fly.

"Is this retribution?" he murmured, after a brief pause. "Am I to die upon your grave, old girl? Was it so prophetic a feeling that told me I was taking my last look of this place? It seems so; but one thing, at least, is certain—I will die nowhere else. If a hundred officers attack me I will fling away my life, but I will never yield—never—never!"

Those who had known Dick Turpin could have told how terribly in earnest he was, by the way he compressed his lips and knitted his brows as soon as he had finished uttering his determination.

But he started again, and listened if possible with greater intentness than before.

His features changed their expression to one of puzzled doubt.

The sounds of the horses' hoofs had not ceased; on the contrary, they were much more audible, but mingled with their clatter could now be distinctly heard the rumbling of wheels.

"It is some vehicle which is coming," ejaculated Dick.

He drew a long breath, for he began to think it was very possible that he was not concerned in the matter at all.

But, beyond doubt, a few minutes at the most would settle that question.

Dick waited.

Nearer and nearer came the vehicle, until, with a sudden dash, it stopped somewhere very close indeed to the little iron gate in the garden wall.

Scarcely had the rumbling of wheels ceased than a footstep was heard.

By the peculiar crunching sound, Dick knew that it was some one treading with rather a heavy step upon the gravelled pathway.

Who was it?

Dick felt he would willingly give much to know, and also to learn why that carriage had been brought so strangely to the gate.

It was mysterious, to say the least of it, and therefore on that account alone quite enough to attract Dick's attention.

But, in addition to this, he seemed so much mixed up in events which had recently taken place upon Sir Humphrey's estate as to make him feel that everything connected with it was sufficient to awaken and claim all his interest.

This was why it was he stepped forward with great caution, in the hope of getting more intelligence than he at present possessed.

We have said that all around the ground was very thickly strewn with decaying fallen leaves, and such was the care Dick made use of in his advance that his footsteps were inaudible even to himself.

But he did not venture to go too near the gravel-path, lest he should be discovered.

Voices he could hear, but was not able to distinguish the words uttered, owing to the suppressed tones employed.

It was fortunate he paused, for the conversation ceased, and his quick ear caught a returning footstep

Dick crouched down behind the trunk of the tree that was nearest to where he stood.

Then peering through the gloom as best he could, he caught a glimpse of a tall figure muffled in a cloak.

But the obscurity was so great, and the figure passed by so quickly, that Dick was unable to form any definite opinion regarding his identity.

He disappeared, and his footsteps soon ceased to be heard.

"I must learn more of this affair," murmured Dick. "I feel that merely for my own safety's sake I ought to gather more intelligence. I will do it. But what shall be the first step?"

It did not require much deliberation to enable him to come to a decision upon this point.

With the same stealthfulness as he had formerly employed, Dick crept towards the wall.

On gaining it, he raised himself and peeped over the coping.

To his surprise, he saw, drawn up quite close to the little iron gate, a large travelling carriage.

It was drawn by four horses.

Upon one sat the postillion, and just inside the vehicle, partially revealed by the light of a lamp, Dick fancied he could detect some one seated and leaning back with folded arms.

He continued to gaze for several seconds.

Then, finding that there was really nothing of which he could take further cognisance, he retired, making use of the same silence and caution as before.

"There is something more in this than appears at first sight," he murmured. "I must try and find out what has become of the man in the cloak. It may be he will be the one that will throw a light upon all these dark proceedings."

With these half-uttered words upon his lips, Dick crept onwards in the direction taken by the stranger.

He did not actually tread upon the gravel-path, but he kept very close indeed to the edge of it.

Still, although he paused at frequent intervals, he found that all was profoundly still.

No sounds whatever floated to his keen, listening ears.

Further and further on he went—so far that he began to think that the stranger must have abandoned the gravel-path and struck off in some other direction.

Just as he paused in irresolution, he detected the faint murmuring of voices.

A little attention made him aware of the locality whence they proceeded, and he hastened in that direction.

As he went, he soon became sensible that the way was familiar to him.

He had trod that part of the domains before.

All at once he recollected that he was approaching the pond where he had had so narrow an escape from being wounded by the bullet from the officer's pistol.

But had to manifest if possible still greater caution in all his movements, owing to the silence which prevailed and the somewhat open nature of the spot.



[DICK TURPIN FALLS SENSELESS BEFORE THE GIPSY'S TENT.]

two figures at length met Turpin's view.

One was male, the other female, and that was about all he could distinguish clearly, save that they were talking very earnestly together.

So earnestly indeed, that he was emboldened to approach much nearer than he would otherwise have deemed prudent.

Nearer and yet nearer still he crept, in the continual hope that he should be able to overhear at least a few of the words they were exchanging.

He was successful.

The first words he detected were these:

"My lord, all your urgings are quite vain—it is useless for you to repeat them or to add others. I can never—never love you. You compel me to speak thus boldly. My father has put an end to the engagement between us—if such it could be called—and henceforth we must be strangers."

Dick knew that voice.

Every tone of it sent a thrill of gratitude and pleasure through his heart.

It was his protector—the baronet's daughter—who had spoken.

Great as had been the amount of interest experienced from the first by Dick, it was as nothing when taken in comparison with that which he now felt.

Why was she there?

What meant that carriage at the gate?

Who was her companion?

It was to the last of these three questions that Dick was able to return the most satisfactory reply.

It was Lord Crake who was standing by her side—the rejected suitor—and the individual who, no doubt, had blown the whistle which for a time excited so much uneasiness in Dick's breast.

But he had not much opportunity for speculation.

All his faculties were required to listen to what was said.

Lord Crake did not return any immediate reply; and Milly, in a voice which showed that her breast was full of agitation, continued:

"You assured me," she said, "that it was of the highest importance to me that I should meet you on this spot to-night—that not only my happiness depended upon it, but absolutely the welfare of all those that I hold dear. It was this last consideration which influenced me most—which induced me, after much hesitation, to make up my mind to accede to your request. I am here. Why do you not make the communication to which you have referred?"

"Have you weighed well all that you have said?" asked her companion, in a manner that seemed to alarm the young girl greatly.

"Yes," she answered, with an effort. "Why do you ask?"

"Simply that you should have nothing to reproach me with."

"How reproach you?"

"Listen, and I will tell you."

"Speak."

"You are perfectly certain that you do not and cannot love me?"

"Perfectly certain."

The answer was given with great dignity and firmness.

"And that no circumstances will occur that will induce you to love me sufficiently for you to consent to become my wife?"

"I do not believe it possible."

"Enough. We now understand each other."

"Sir!"

"You have spoken out clearly. Now it is my turn."

She shrank back in affright at his menacing manner.

But he stepped up closely to her, and, seizing her by the wrist, said, in rapid tones:

"Understand me clearly. You are in my power—wholly, utterly in my power, and, such being the case, I do not mind letting you know what you may expect. In the first place, then, I care no more for you than you do for me—and that is little enough, no doubt."

There was much bitterness in the way these words were pronounced.

But, without pausing, he continued, rapidly—so rapidly, and with so much apparent vindictiveness that Milly, terrified and, as it were, fascinated, neither moved nor spoke.

"But you are an heiress, while I am almost a bankrupt in purse. But it is your wealth I covet—and your wealth that I am determined to have! I tell you so without disguise. I would gladly have had it by fair means; but since you will not have it so, why, rather than fail, I will have it by foul! You are alone—no one can hear you even if you should cry out. Those at the Hall know nothing of your absence. I have things all my own way."

He ended almost with a scream of exultation.

But Dick drew just a trifle nearer, and as he did so he said to himself:

"Not quite so much as you imagine, my lord."

As for poor Milly, she was ready to sink to the ground with apprehension.

Terror overpowered all her faculties.

"Perhaps now," he continued, with a scornful and triumphant air—"perhaps now you wish you had behaved better to me, but it is too late. You are mine—wholly, irrevocably mine. My last chance of saving myself from utter ruin lies in making you my wife."

At these dreadful words Milly shrieked aloud.

So loud and piercing was the cry, and so shrilly did it seem to echo all around, that Dick fancied it could not fail to reach the ears of the inmates of the Hall.

Upon hearing this scream, Turpin's first impulse was to spring forward, but this reflection controlled him

"Another cry like that," said Lord Crake, with savage bitterness, "and you shall dearly rue having given it utterance. I tell you again that you are mine—that you cannot escape me. Listen—listen!"

Milly appeared almost ready to sink to the earth.

Indeed, it is probable that the tight grasp which was maintained upon her wrist kept her from falling.

Lord Crake went on.

He spoke with additional excitement

"Close at hand I have a carriage waiting—fleet horses are harnessed to it—faithful fellows of my own are in attendance. That vehicle shall carry us to a village some twenty miles off, and when we have passed a night there you will be glad to beg to be my wife instead of indignantly refusing as you do now."

"Help—mercy—help!" said Milly, faintly.

But, with a mocking laugh, her companion advanced a step, and flung his arms around her as though about to bear her away by main force from the spot.

Dick had kept quiet thus long with great difficulty.

He could not have done so but for his firmly-grounded expectation that ere long some one from the Hall would appear upon the scene.

But no one came, and so he resolved to interfere.

It was impossible to let matters go on further.

Other reasons, perhaps, induced Dick to hold back as he had done.

He knew well that he was near enough to step forward at any moment and save Milly from any personal harm, and he wished to know to what extent Lord Crake would commit himself.

Precipitation on Dick's part would have ruined all.

Besides, the disappointment of his lordship would be all the greater, and consequently his punishment all the more severe, if he was foiled in what he believed to be the crowning moment of his success.

But when Dick saw him fling his arms around her in the manner we have described, his intentions being, doubtless, to bear her to the carriage that was in waiting, he could contain himself no longer.

With a sudden bound, he quitted his place of concealment and stood before Lord Crake.

Dick held a pistol in his hand, and the use that he immediately made of it was to present it to his lordship's breast, while he said, in a suppressed voice:

"Villain! release your hold upon this lady! And if you refuse, or raise such an outcry as shall bring your fellows to your aid, this moment shall be your last!"

It may safely be asserted that his lordship could not have been more astonished if Dick had suddenly dropped from the clouds.

It was probably while under the influence of this amazement that he released his hold upon his captive.

In her agitation, she did not at first recognise Turpin.

Finding in a moment to whom it was she owed her deliverance, she clung to him for protection.

"Save me—save me!" she half shrieked. "Save me from this man! You spoke about your gratitude—you have now an opportunity of showing it! Save me—save me!"

"Be under no apprehensions," said Dick; "you are quite safe. I have been watching you, and should have interfered before had I thoroughly understood the matter."

Dick still kept the barrel of his pistol steadily pointed at Lord Crake, who made not the least attempt either at resistance or escape.

But that he should prove one of the rankest cowards in the world will surprise no one, for none but a coward could have planned the base design which Turpin had so fortunately been able to frustrate.

But advancing footsteps could now be heard, and immediately afterwards lights appeared here and there among the trees.

Voices, too, were heard calling out, and Dick, believing these new-comers to belong to the Hall, responded to their cries in order to guide them to the scene of action.

Upon observing this, Lord Crake made an attempt to fly

Turpin, however, prevented him in a moment by seizing him by the arm and pressing the muzzle of the pistol against his cheek.

Footsteps were now heard coming from the direction of the iron gate.

It was at this moment, too, that the first party appeared.

With a glad cry of relief, Milly left Dick's side and flung herself upon the breast of some one that Dick instantly recognised to be the baronet.

Sir Humphrey looked about him in great surprise,

evidently unable to comprehend the meaning of what he saw.

Before he could collect himself sufficiently to ask a question, Lord Crake's two accomplices came into view.

No sooner did they find themselves confronted by so large a party than they turned and fled.

"Seize those men!" cried Turpin, in a loud voice. "Do not allow them to escape on any account!".

There was so much command in the way he spoke that, without hesitation, several set off in pursuit, not pausing to ask themselves who had issued the order and whether they ought to obey it.

The sound of Dick's voice had the effect of drawing the baronet's attention to him.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "is it you? What is the meaning of all this?"

"Ask your daughter, and ask this man," responded Dick.

Sir Humphrey at once appealed to Milly.

The task of giving a relation of what had taken place was almost beyond her powers.

But she said enough to enable her father to comprehend the rights of the case.

His rage was so great that he was about to inflict a summary chastisement upon his lordship there and then.

But a fresh event occurred, which produced an entire revolution.

This was nothing less than the return of Mr. Skellum and his party.

They had been many miles round the country, and although they had everywhere made the closest inquiries, they had failed to learn any particulars of the man they sought.

That he could have got away entirely unseen they did not believe to be possible, and it was this belief which induced them, as a kind of last hope, to return to the vicinity of the Hall.

Mr. Skellum in especial clung to the idea that Dick was concealed somewhere on the premises.

Very luckily, Dick was apprised of their approach before they came into view.

One of those who had started off in pursuit of Lord Crake's two accomplices came back and said:

"Your worship—your worship, the Lunnon officers have come back! They will be here in a minute! That's what I call lucky!"

"Hold this fellow, some one!" cried Dick, referring to his lordship.

Half a dozen eagerly rushed forward and seized him.

Dick was about to dash off at once, in the vague and desperate hope that he should be able to secure his safety by immediate flight, when Milly flung herself before him and arrested his further progress.

"Father—father, this man—I know not who he is, save that he is in terror of the law, and that the officers are doing all they can to take him prisoner—I say it is to him, and to him alone, that I owe my safety this night. But for his interposition Lord Crake would have carried out his odious designs. Surely such a great service as this should not go unrequited? No, no—a thousand times no! You must interpose your authority—you must prevent his capture."

Sir Humphrey, as a rule, was not a very good thinker.

More particularly was he puzzled when several things were said to him in a breath, and when it was necessary for him to decide suddenly upon some method of proceeding.

But his faculties had been much quickened by the discovery of the imminent danger in which his daughter had been placed.

He was able to understand the peril in which Dick stood.

But he knew not how to save him.

The officers were not more than a few yards distant, and in a moment or two would appear upon the scene.

Publicly to attempt to throw the shield of protection before him he knew to be far beyond his powers.

What, then, was he to do?

He was willing to save Dick, for he prized his daughter highly.

But the matter required careful and continued thought.

This was now out of the question.

It was imperative that he should make up his mind at once.

CHAPTER MCXIV.

DICK TURPIN CONCEALS HIMSELF IN THE OLD SUMMER-HOUSE.

When Milly first spoke, Dick had remained still, his breast being filled with the vague hope that Sir Humphrey might in some way interpose and save him.

Unless something of the kind was done, too, he felt that his chances of escaping his persistent foes were slight indeed.

But when he saw the indecision which manifested itself in the baronet's manner, he resolved not to linger and not to depend upon anyone but himself in procuring his safety.

"Many thanks," he said, gently striving to release himself from Milly's grasp. "The intention to help me is as well appreciated and as much valued as the very act of doing so would be. But you must leave me to shift for myself."

"Nay, I'll be d—d if I do!" said the baronet, with great warmth.

"But I must go!" pleaded Dick. "It will be death to me if I remain here another moment!"

"Where will you go?"

"Leave that to me."

"No, I tell you!"

"Too late—too late!"

"No—no! Skirt the fishpond here—make your way as fast as you can along the path, and it will bring you in sight of an old, dilapidated summer-house. Enter that, and you are safe."

"How so?" asked Dick, eagerly.

He had released himself from Milly's detaining grasp, and was about to dart off, when the last words of the baronet arrested him and revived his hopes.

"There is a fireplace there," continued the baronet, speaking with great haste and excitement, though he so suppressed his voice that none but his daughter and the fugitive could hear him—"press down on the right-hand corner of the mantel-shelf, and pull towards you—a recess will be disclosed——"

The baronet would doubtless have entered into further particulars, but Dick had heard enough to answer his purpose.

"Thanks—a thousand thanks!" he cried, and then rushed off at the top of his speed in the direction mentioned by the baronet.

But he had already lingered too long.

The police officers all caught sight of the flying form.

Mr. Skellum held a drawn pistol in his hand.

"Stop—stop," he yelled—"stop, or I fire!"

But Dick only increased his pace.

Skellum was as good as his word.

He pulled the trigger.

"I believe I have winged him," he said, as coolly as though he had been speaking of a partridge.

It was at this moment that he caught sight of Sir Humphrey.

"I have him now, your worship—I feel sure I have him now! Something seemed to tell me that he was still lurking about your premises"

Sir Humphrey did not speak, for the very simple reason that he knew not what to say.

He seemed, too, to have a very great amount of confidence in the hiding-place he had signified to Turpin.

His only fear was as to the extent of the hurt he had received.

On the present occasion Skellum was too much excited by the success he had met with to show the baronet much of that deference which he had hitherto been so careful to display.

No sooner had he finished speaking the words we have just recorded than he slipped from his horse, and, calling to his men to follow him, dashed off in pursuit.

Poor Milly was a prey to a thousand terrors.

It was an instinct with her to side with the unfor-

tunate: and the mere fact of Dick having so many enemies to contend with would doubtless have called forth all her compassion; but now that he had rendered her such an important service, she was doubly anxious that he should be saved.

Indeed, when Skellum departed so suddenly, she was just calming herself with the intention of making an appeal to him to let the highwayman go free.

As this appeal would have been utterly fruitless, it was quite as well that it should have been left unmade.

"Oh, father—father," she exclaimed, bursting into tears, and clinging convulsively to Sir Humphrey's breast, "we shall see him slain before our eyes!"

"No—no, my dear! I believe—that is, I hope that he is quite safe. If he can only reach the summer-house in time to conceal himself in the recess——"

"But I am afraid he has not had time. Do you think he has?"

"It is hard to say. He would make great speed unless very severely wounded, which I hope he is not."

Milly wept afresh.

"Have you no power to save him?" she asked. "If you have, exert it for my sake."

"Openly, I have not; but if he has gained the recess all will be well."

"Will not the officers discover it?"

"There is little fear. The secret was, I believe, known only to me up to to-night. It was a contrivance made in troublous times, in order to afford a hiding-place and a means of escape."

No more was said then upon the subject, for Lord Crake interrupted them.

He had been greatly disconcerted by the unexpected turn which affairs had taken, and not a little astonished by the arrival of the police officers, and the events which had succeeded.

But that base, unblushing effrontery of which he possessed no inconsiderable share at last came to his aid.

Immediately he set about attempting to free himself from his present position.

"Sir Humphrey," he cried, in a loud voice, "I know not what your purpose or intention may be in keeping me a prisoner thus; but I can assure you the wisest thing you can do is to set me at liberty."

This cool request would most likely have brought some terrible expletives to the lips of Sir Humphrey had not Milly interposed.

"Yes—yes," she said—"set him free. Let us never see him more. We know him now, and in the future shall be able to beware of him."

"If I do, may I——"

"Hold!" interrupted the dissolute young noble. "Just ask yourself what good you are likely to derive by pushing this matter to extremities? I tried a bold plan—I have failed. Let that be the end of the matter; and the quieter it is kept and the less your daughter is mixed up and mentioned with it, the better it will be for her reputation."

What effect this hint may have had upon the mind of the hot-tempered baronet we know not.

But he said to those who held Lord Crake in custody:

"Release him—let him go where he likes. If I want him I shall be able to find him, and until then he will only be an incumbrance."

The men quitted their hold upon him with great reluctance.

They were every one deeply devoted to their young mistress, and felt keenly the gross insult that had been offered her.

Their fingers itched to take some personal cognisance of the matter.

Most wishful and significant were the glances cast towards the fishpond.

The presence of their master, however, restrained them.

They were well acquainted with his fiery disposition, and had all learned the wisdom of shewing implicit obedience to his commands.

"Papa—papa," said Milly, "let us leave this place. Let us follow the police officers to the old summer-house. Who knows what may have happened? Who can say that our presence will be altogether useless?"

Having nothing to keep him on the present spot, the baronet readily yielded to his daughter's wish.

Moreover, he was very anxious to have his own natural curiosity gratified.

Their departure was eagerly watched by the men who had so lately had charge of Lord Crake.

In another moment, without a word being exchanged—for all were animated by the same desire—they turned and pounced upon their late prisoner, who had not yet had time to get out of their reach.

In vain he struggled and fought, and called in a loud voice upon Sir Humphrey.

The baronet either could not or would not hear.

"Into the old fishpond with him!" was the general cry. "We will make him ford his way across it. Come on—come on! We'll cool his love for him, I'll warrant!"

Lord Crake stood in great dread of his prospective punishment.

He was one of those effeminate creatures to whom the idea of cold water is too horrible to endure a moment's contemplation.

And then the water in the pond too, so thickly overgrown with green slimy weeds as it was, and so bitterly cold as it would most likely prove, for it was the winter season.

But his captors did not think once of turning aside from any such consideration as this.

In vain he offered them large sums of money if they would only set him at liberty—if they would only relinquish their intention of giving him a cold bath.

Then he tried threats, warning them what would be the consequence if they perpetrated this assault upon him.

To his mortification he discovered that no more notice was taken of his threats than of his bribes.

"Now then, my lads," cried one; "let us go all together. Get ready!"

"Right you are!"

"One—two—three!"

At the last word they suddenly ceased swinging him to and fro between them, and the consequence was he was hurled forward through the air several feet.

He came down with a terrific splash into the water; and as he happened to reach it upon his back, he floundered about most tremendously for a moment or two, to the infinite amusement and satisfaction of his tormentors.

At last, blinded and breathless, he gained his feet, and made a frantic dash towards dry land.

But they drove him off.

They were determined not to let him get out unless he chose to wade across and emerge upon the other side.

But, stung to rage and fury, he foolishly refused to do this.

But the men were firm, and all his attempts to land proved fruitless.

They pelted him with stones; they picked up handfuls of the half-dry mud at the brink of the pond and flung at him, until his condition was deplorable indeed.

In the end he had to succumb.

But the yell of delight and derision with which he was greeted when he turned his back to them and began to wade across, so infuriated him that he paused, and seemed half inclined to commence the unequal contest again.

But he thought better of it.

Summoning up all his energies, he made his way across the pond with all the speed that was possible.

But as the sheet of water was of considerable extent, the feat was neither easily nor speedily accomplished.

When he did reach the other side, a more forlorn-looking object than this dissolute young nobleman presented could not by any means be imagined.

Dripping with wet, plastered from head to foot by the slimy mud at the bottom of the pond, and the still more slimy green weed which floated on the surface, and with his features scarcely distinguishable, he did indeed look the very embodiment of wretchedness.

A shriek of laughter from the men on the opposite bank reached his ears.

Maddened with fury, he turned round and shook his clenched fists, while curses and threats of vengeance poured from his lips.

But, from a movement that was made by the throng, he surmised that they were about to run round with the view of repeating their discipline.

This was greatly to be dreaded, so turning round he

tore along at the utmost speed he was capable of making.

He pressed his hands to his ears, so as to shut out the derisive cries by which he was pursued, and felt truly thankful when a little clump of trees hid him from their hated view.

Leaving him to his fate, however, we return to [illegible], who requires all our attention.

Mr. Skellum was quite right when he said he had "winged him."

Dick was conscious of two things, which seemed to him simultaneous.

These were a sharp blow on his arm, such as might be given by a stick, and the report of a pistol.

He knew he was wounded in the arm even before he observed that it was hanging by his side numbed and painless.

But the effects, of course, would quickly make themselves felt.

Still he did not pause; but, grinding his teeth, bounded forward with additional speed.

He heard his pursuers hastening after him, and he would have at once given himself up for lost but for the hope of safety which the old summer-house held out to him.

That stimulated him to make what we are justified in calling supernatural exertions.

It was not until he had run for some distance, and felt the warm blood trickling down his fingers, that he remembered that he was leaving a crimson trail behind him, which the officers would have no trouble whatever in following.

Unless this was stopped, even the secret recess in the old summer-house would prove valueless to him.

He was obliged to pause, though by pausing he knew how very greatly he was diminishing his chances of safety.

Still it was unavoidable.

With great rapidity he tore off his neckcloth, and with equal speed bound it roughly round his arm, so that even if the flow of blood was not stanched, yet it was prevented from trickling to the ground.

The delay was so trifling as to be, under ordinary circumstances, almost unappreciable.

Yet, in the present instance, it allowed his foes to gain upon him fearfully.

Nerving himself to make, if possible, increased exertion, Dick followed in the direction indicated by the baronet, straining his eyes in the continual hope of being able to catch sight of the dilapidated building.

At last he saw something that was a few shades darker than other objects around him, and towards this he ran, convinced it was what he wanted.

Breathless, and throbbing with pain, he dashed open the partially-closed door, and glared around him.

That is, he endeavoured to do so, for the interior of the summer-house was profoundly dark.

Still he fancied he saw the fireplace, and strode across the flooring.

He was right.

Remembering the directions he had received, he pressed upon one end of the mantel-shelf, and then pulled towards him.

Having only one hand to use, he found this task a difficult one

But the exigency of his situation seemed to endow him with fresh strength.

The whole mass came towards him.

Whether there really was a recess or not, he could not perceive; but, pushing in, he found the baronet had described the hiding-place correctly.

But by the time this much was done the officers had got to within a dozen yards of him.

He had still to pull the fireplace back into its place again, and about this he had not waited to receive any instructions whatever.

But Dick's fingers were busy.

With great haste he felt up and down, and in an instant encountered a kind of handle, shaped something like a loop.

This he seized with his right hand, and then pulled towards him with all his might.

The front of the fireplace was made to open on hinges after the fashion of a door, and he pulled until it was impossible to pull any further.

Yet, even then he did not release his hold, but stood grasping the handle, and waiting with no trifling amount of anxiety the approach of his foes.

In this respect he would not have grumbled if his patience had been taxed a little more severely, for scarcely had he drawn the grate into into its place than several of his foes reached the threshold.

"Hullo!" said a voice, which he recognised at once as being Mr. Skellum's—"hullo! what place have we here? Is he inside, I wonder?"

"I believe I saw him enter," said another voice, "though the darkness prevents me from saying for certain."

"Well, we shall soon know," continued Skellum. "Out with a light, some of you! Be quick, can't you!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before Dick caught sight of a glimmer of light.

This naturally raised in his breast a thousand apprehensions.

He made sure that as he could see this light he could not properly have closed the recess.

If so, nothing could prevent his discovery.

With an anxiousness of which it is possible for some remote idea to be formed he waited to hear what should happen next.

The lantern seemed to be flashed all round the place, and then some one said:

"There's no one here."

"So it seems," responded Skellum, though by the tone in which he spoke it might be inferred that he was not over well assured of the fact.

"I fancied myself I saw him come in here," he continued; "and it is certain he made in a direct line for the place; but I must have been deceived, for there is not room here to hide a cat."

Indeed, the summer-house, owing to its disuetude, was absolutely destitute of every article of furniture.

A silence ensued.

Dick's heart beat at such a fearful rate, and to him apparently with so much loudness, that he dreaded it would betray him.

The officers retired towards the door.

Dick breathed a little.

They crossed the threshold.

He breathed with tolerable ease.

The officers went a little way and listened.

But not the faintest sound reached their ears.

They regarded each other with puzzled looks.

This disappearance, so sudden and so complete as it appeared to be, was most mysterious.

What had become of him?

He could scarcely have continued his flight, because, had he done so, the unavoidable noise made by his rapid progress would have been audible at a great distance.

"He is hiding somewhere again, sir," cried one of the officers. "Why, he is ten times worse to hunt than a fox."

"Never mind," said Skellum. "We will take our time. He can't get far, that's one comfort. I'll find out where he is hidden, depend upon it."

That he was hidden somewhere was the general impression.

It was at this juncture that Sir Humphrey and his daughter made their appearance.

They were both somewhat breathless, in consequence of the speed they had made.

"Have you got him?" gasped the baronet.

Mr. Skellum was obliged to make the mortifying confession that he had not.

And now, had he not considered that the fact of the pair before him being in collusion with the fugitive was wholly impossible, he must have had his suspicions aroused by the satisfaction which Milly manifested on receipt of the admission.

It was not that she spoke or started, but she gave her father a glance that was in the highest degree expressive.

"Why, bless me," puffed the baronet, wiping his face with his silk handkerchief—"the fellow doubles and turns like a fox. I thought you had shot him."

"So I did, sir, there's no mistake about that," said Mr. Skellum, as though he derived uncommon satisfaction from his knowledge of the fact.

"Then how the devil has he contrived to slip through

your fingers this time," asked the baronet, "and you so close at his heels, too?"

"That's what I can't make out just at present," replied Skellum. "But I don't despair. He is not far away, I am assured."

"Why do you think that?"

"Because of the suddenness of his disappearance. He has got into a hiding-place somewhere close by—no doubt the same in which he had been concealed while I searched for him before."

The concern which Milly now felt and unconsciously displayed in her countenance was even still more provocative of suspicion than her former satisfaction.

Luckily, however, Mr. Skellum did not observe it; and this is not so much to be wondered at when it is borne in mind that there was no other light than issued from the dark lantern of one of the men.

"So you do not despair?" said the baronet.

"Not by any manner of means. He is hidden somewhere within a few yards of this place; perhaps he may even be able to hear the words that I now speak. But let the place of concealment be as good and as cleverly-contrived as may be, yet I will undertake to discover it."

The positive air with which Mr. Skellum spoke caused Milly to suffer much real terror.

In her own heart from this moment she gave Dick up for lost.

The baronet did the same, yet both waited with feverish anxiety to learn the result of the officers' movements.

"I wish you luck in your search," said Sir Humphrey; "though, if I spoke my opinion, I should say he is far enough off by this time, and that while you are standing here he is rapidly increasing that distance."

But Skellum shook his head with a very positive air.

"I could almost have sworn that I saw him run into this summer-house."

"Into the summer-house?" echoed Sir Humphrey and his daughter, speaking both together.

"Yes."

"Have you looked?"

"Oh yes. We have just had a peep."

"And he is not there?"

"It seems not," responded Skellum; "but I am by no means certain of it. At any rate, I shall not be satisfied until I have had another good look."

Most fortunate indeed was it that he turned upon his heel at this moment.

Had he not done so he could not have failed to see the great distress into which Milly was plunged by these last words, which seemed to her to be the death-knell of Turpin's hopes.

CHAPTER MCXV.

MR. SKELLUM MISSES HIS PREY BY A HAIR'S BREADTH.

SIR HUMPHREY had too good an opinion of the hiding-place to feel afraid that it would be found out very easily, and so he pressed his daughter's arm in a way that he intended should reassure her and followed the police officers into the summer-house.

The first thing they heard after crossing the threshold was a loud exclamation from Mr. Skellum, which seemed to betoken the discovery of something important.

"The light here," he cried—"the light, I say."

The lantern of course was immediately handed to him, and the first use he made of it was to direct the beam of light on to the ground.

"Ah," he cried, "it seems I am right after all."

"What is it—what is it?" asked the baronet, pushing forward.

"Nothing more than a spot of blood, your worship," was the reply. "Look here, it is round and red, and it has not been here long either."

By way of proving that this assertion was correct, he smeared it with his foot, which left no doubt of its liquidity.

"He has been here," he cried. "I thought it odd if I should be mistaken. He is concealed somewhere in or about this building, and with your permission, Sir Humphrey, we will set about finding him."

"Oh, certainly—certainly," answered the baronet, who was aware it would be most unwise to attempt to oppose the police officers in such a matter.

By the steps he now took, Mr. Skellum plainly showed that such business as the present was by no means strange to him.

Some of the men he directed to watch closely the exterior of the structure, while to one he gave particular instructions.

For his own part, he pulled out his discharged pistol, and grasping it by the barrel, used the butt as a hammer.

He struck a couple of sharp blows with it upon the wooden wall of the summer-house, beginning close to the door.

The knocks were responded to by the man outside, whom he had told to test the outer side while he tested the inner.

"Go on," he cried—"all right."

The man walked on responding to every blow given by his chief.

The sound was quite sufficient to enable the most inexperienced person to pronounce with certainty as to whether there was any cavity, recess or secret hiding-place in the walls.

The examination went on rapidly, and as the old summer-house was not of very great extent, it follows that they very soon got near the fireplace.

The baronet had by no means reckoned upon such a rigid scrutiny as this, and could hardly hope that the hiding-place would hold out against it.

It was in all ways most unfortunate that the drop of blood should have been seen on the floor, because it was that which changed Skellum's suspicions into certainties.

The fireplace was now reached.

He had not particularly noticed this before, and his first act was to peep up the chimney.

"Is there anyone there?" asked one of his men.

"I think not, for I can see the night sky through the top. However, I'll soon settle the point.

"Dick Turpin," he cried, "I give you warning that I am about to fire a loaded pistol up this chimney. If you are concealed, speak—if not, the consequence will be upon your head, not mine."

With these words he very deliberately drew a pistol and cocked it.

No notice was taken of his summons, and a sufficiently long interval of silence succeeding, he put his arm up the chimney and pulled the trigger.

The report in that confined space was tremendous.

But nothing was brought down save a quantity of soot, which age had made almost as hard as mortar.

The crazy old building shook from the shock, and seemed for a moment as though it would fall to the ground.

The apprehension of this danger was soon over, and then Skellum said:

"He is not there."

This disappointment, if such we may term it, did not cause him to relax his former exertions.

In his own mind he was quite satisfied that Dick was hidden very close at hand, and nothing but care and patience were required to unearth him.

The fireplace came in for a due share of his scrutiny.

His first act was to tap at the back of it.

A most unmistakably hollow sound was returned.

"Hallo!" he said, and with the word he knocked again.

If possible, the sound was more indicative of the existence of a cavity than it was before.

"Potter!" bawled Skellum.

"Yes, sir," responded the man outside.

"Why the devil don't you answer my knock?"

"I have, sir."

"Knock again."

He listened, and the sound of a blow was heard, but most evidently it was not delivered against the back of the fire-place.

"Your worship," he said, "I have found out the secret at last; I was sure I should do so before very long. But you must give me your permission to look further into this business. Of course I will undertake to do no more damage than I can help."

Milly now was all but in a swoon.

She would have given worlds to get away, yet she could not command herself enough to speak or to make one single movement.

She expected now nothing less than to see Dick Turpin slain before her eyes.

Her father was almost as discomposed as she was; and it was, perhaps, more because he fancied he ought to speak than any other cause, that made him say:

"What was it you thought of doing, Mr. Skellum?"

"I shall be compelled, your worship, in the faithful discharge of my duty, to break into the hiding-place which I am sure exists here."

"Oh, very well—of course," muttered Sir Humphrey, not knowing what other words to make use of.

Being convinced that there was some means of gaining a ready access to this place of concealment caused Mr. Skellum to look narrowly for some kind of secret fastening.

While thus engaged, that chink through which Dick had seen the light of the lantern was presently discovered.

"Here we have it! Now, my lads, keep a sharp look-out round the outside, and if he attempts to run away shoot him down! We will stand no more nonsense!"

So saying, Mr. Skellum drew the heavy cutlass he carried by his side and inserted the point in the crevice we have mentioned.

Then using the weapon as a lever, he succeeded in forcing open the hidden doorway, which, as it was not secured by any spring or snap, caused but very little trouble.

A small recess like a closet was then disclosed, about large enough for a man to stand upright in.

But the recess was empty.

Milly had closed her eyes, determined not to be a witness of the slaughter of the man she had befriended; and when she opened them again she could scarcely believe that she saw aright.

By what unaccountable magic had the highwayman contrived to disappear?

Mr. Skellum was disconcerted for the moment, but we must do him the justice to state that it was for the moment only.

"The light," he cried—"show me the light, and don't relax your vigilance in the least!"

But before we describe the further proceedings of the officers we will return to Dick and give some account of his actions.

No sooner, then, was he conscious that his foes had quitted the old summer-house on the first occasion than he turned round and felt the walls of the recess, wondering whether there was any other means of leaving it than that by which he had entered.

He devoutly hoped such would prove to be the case, and he had tolerable good grounds for the indulgence of this hope, for he remembered what the baronet was saying when he interrupted him.

But his hands enabled him to make no discovery.

When he turned his back to the fireplace he all at once became aware that fresh air was blowing lightly upon his face.

This pointed in the same direction as his hopes, and seemed to go to show that there was an outlet at no great distance.

With a view of reaching the back of the recess, he put his foot forward, and it was well for him that he exercised some caution in putting it down.

It was the fear lest his foes should hear him that made him unusually careful, and he congratulated himself upon his prudence, for he could find no resting-place to put his foot upon.

He was, in fact, standing at the top of a rudely-made staircase which descended very precipitously.

When Dick made this discovery his heart leaped with joy.

Without more ado he commenced making a descent, using the utmost caution in all his progress and keeping his one hand well extended before him to guard against coming into sudden contact with any object.

It was no slight thing thus to make his way through the total darkness in a place that he was utterly unacquainted with.

For aught he knew, some terrible peril might lie in his path, and he be unconscious of it until too late.

It was but rarely Dick was without the means of procuring a light.

Unfortunately, this was one of those rare occasions, and in consequence he wasted much valuable time, for in progressing as he did twice as much time was taken as would have been consumed had he only been able to see before him.

He was much encouraged by the fact that as he advanced the rush of cold air was more and more sensible, which convinced him he was making his way towards the outlet.

Suddenly, however, to his inexpressible astonishment, this ceased.

He stopped, wondering what could be the cause of so strange a circumstance.

There was no doubt about it—the air ceased to blow upon his face.

A great dread now came over him—one that for a moment deprived him of all motion.

This was, that by some means or other his foes had learned the whereabouts of the outlet, and had closed it.

At this reflection he leant against the wall for support.

He felt giddy and sick, and no wonder, for he had lost a great quantity of blood.

The ensanguined fluid was indeed even now escaping in much greater quantity than he was aware of.

Some moments elapsed before he could make up his mind what to do, when luckily a fresh idea occurred to him.

In obedience to it, he turned and retraced his steps.

Presently, as he had almost been afraid to expect, he felt the fresh air again blowing upon him.

This convinced him that he must on the former occasion have passed some branching-off passage which communicated with the open air, and kept along the one that doubtless led to a secret doorway in some apartment in the Hall.

Like most other people at that time, Dick knew very well that there was scarcely a dwelling of any importance and antiquity throughout the land that was unprovided with at least one secret means of exit, and that this was a secret means of communication with the Hall he was perfectly certain.

Using more care than on the former occasion, when indeed his principal aim had been to keep on in a straight direction, he proceeded until he came to a corner where another passage appeared to branch off at right angles.

As it was so profoundly dark, and as he was in too much haste to observe these things closely, he had no very clear notion of the place.

The air blew on his face, and he was content.

Heedless of the danger there might be in doing so, he ran on with extended arms, hoping to make up for the precious moments that had been lost.

In point of fact, the time to him seemed very much greater than it was in reality.

A few moments more, and to his great joy he perceived a faint glimmer of twilight in advance—so faint that no one could have descried it unless after being in total darkness as long as Dick had.

He quickened his steps, and soon after emerged on the side of a little hill which formed one side of a dingle or large dell, which was thickly covered with thorn-bearing bushes.

So well did these conceal the entrance to the secret passage that, after Dick emerged and turned round, he was unable to perceive it.

Just then, such a fearful sensation of sickness came over him that he had much difficulty in saving himself from falling.

A kind of stupor, or state of semi-consciousness, followed.

But the knowledge of his imminent peril never left him, and it was this knowledge which enabled him, after a brief interval, to shake off in some degree the oppressiveness which weighed him down.

He knew, too, what was the cause of this deathlike sensation and his first act was to take the neckcloth and fold it up something in the form of a surgical bandage.

When this was done, it was no easy task to bind up his left arm in such a way as to check the effusion of blood, nor did he succeed, though he managed to stop the flow to a very great extent.

He listened.

From the silence which reigned around, he ventured to hope that his foes had once more lost his trail, and it was this hope which animated him to make all the exertion he could to get away from the spot.

Leaving him for a brief space to struggle on through the baronet's domains, we will return to the summer-

house, because some events took place there that were of a very startling character indeed.

It will be recollected that Mr. Skellum had called aloud for a light.

The lantern was handed to him, and he plunged with it into the recess.

But before he had time to make any examination, he was startled by loud cries of alarm issuing from the lips of those behind him.

When he first heard these cries he naturally enough jumped to the conclusion that Dick Turpin was the cause of it.

Therefore he drew back with great alacrity.

But at the first glance he saw into how great a mistake he had fallen.

The summer-house was in flames.

So intent had everybody been upon the discovery at the fireplace that the blaze was not at first noticed.

The fire spread, however, with lightning-like rapidity.

The summer-house was, in fact, composed of nothing but wood; and by many long years of exposure to the elements it had become as dry and inflammable as paper.

Even by the time Mr. Skellum had drawn back and taken a first glance the fury of the flames so much increased, and the heat generated was so intense, that all were glad to draw back and make what speed they could across the threshold.

Indeed, had a light been applied to a quantity of shavings, the fire could not have spread with more swiftness and vigour.

The first inquiry was as to the origin of the conflagration; but this was a point upon which they were not long in doubt.

From the spot where the fire had first been observed to break out, it was tolerably clear that the cause lay in the pistol which Mr. Skellum had rather foolishly fired up the chimney.

In all probability, the fire had been communicated by a burning wad falling upon the woodwork, which, once alight, burned with a rapidity that appeared incredible to those who were actually witnesses of it.

To enter the summer-house became in less than a moment an impossibility, and, indeed, so great was the heat that it compelled them, though outside, to retire to a respectful distance.

The unexpectedness of this event produced a great deal of confusion.

As may be expected, Skellum was one of the first to recover.

Yet, by the time he had collected his faculties the summer-house was one mass of flames from top to bottom.

It roared like a furnace, and thousands of sparks flew into the air.

"This is a d—d annoying thing!" were his first words. "Excuse me for saying so, your worship, but what could have been more annoying?"

"I am greatly vexed, I confess," said Sir Humphrey, "for the old place was a great favourite of mine, and I would not willingly have had it destroyed. I am d—nably afraid, too, that it will set fire to some of the trees."

"We will try and prevent that, your worship," replied Skellum, "though the danger is greater than I had at first considered it."

As the trees grew very closely indeed round the summer-house, there was a good deal of fear that the fire would be communicated to them.

Little of an active character could, however, be done.

There was no water near at hand, and no means of getting any from the pool without going first to the Hall to obtain buckets for the purpose.

In the opinion of all present, long before this could be done the summer-house would be reduced to ashes.

The greatest fury of the fire, too, was now over, and as it by degrees abated, the apprehensions that the wood would be fired grew much less.

So rapidly did the whole affair take place that certainly not more than twelve minutes elapsed from the moment when the outbreak of fire was discovered until of the whole nothing remained but a mass of red-hot smouldering embers which cast up dense volumes of smoke.

Mr. Skellum did not value the old summer-house one rush; but he was terribly put about to think such an obstacle should have placed itself in the way of his pursuit of Dick, who, as he rightly dreaded, was by this time far enough off.

Yet where to look for him he knew not.

Nothing had been seen or heard, and the only consolation he could find lay in the reflection that it was just possible Dick was still under earth, unable to emerge in consequence of the conflagration.

That he was doomed to be disappointed in this respect the reader knows well enough already.

About the existence of the recess and knowledge of where it led the baronet professed the most profound ignorance, and Skellum, with all his impudence, did not venture to doubt the truth of what he stated.

So soon as the fire was subdued, or, rather, had exhausted itself for want of further material, he plunged among the ruins and busily set to work to remove the mass of rubbish which had fallen over where the fireplace had stood.

In this rather unpleasant task he was well assisted by his men, who could not for shame's sake hold back when their leader set them the example of working.

Yet it was most difficult, not to say dangerous, for the wood, when it came to be disturbed much below the surface, was red-hot, while clouds of the most suffocating and pungent smoke continued to arise.

The opening had been partially choked up, but not so completely as to prevent Mr. Skellum from seeing that there were steps leading downwards into the earth.

This discovery seemed to impart additional vigour to his movements.

In less time than might be thought the passage was entirely cleared.

He was the first to set the example of descending.

In one hand he held the cutlass with which he had been so busily at work—in the other was the dark lantern.

The cool, fresh air in the subterranean passage was most delightful after the smoke in which they had been working above.

Having the advantage of a light, it by no means took Mr. Skellum so long to make his way along the passage as it had Dick.

In fact, he reached the point where the passage divided in something like half the length of time.

But seeing two paths before him instead of one, Mr. Skellum paused in uncertainty.

Which way to go he knew not.

There was nothing that would serve as any indication of the route the fugitive might have taken.

In this dilemma Mr. Skellum did the wisest thing under the circumstances.

This was to divide the force into two equal portions, allowing one-half to take one direction, the other another.

He himself almost by chance placed himself at the head of those who made their way towards the open air.

When he felt the cool wind fanning his flushed body, Mr. Skellum's apprehensions were increased.

He was sadly afraid that the delay which from one cause or another had taken place had allowed Dick to get off altogether.

But remembering that he had wounded him, these fears considerably abated.

A few more minutes brought him to the end of the passage, and then he found himself about half-way down the side of the dell where Dick had had so narrow an escape from swooning.

Here he found abundant evidence that he was on the right track, for on the ground close by was quite a pool of blood.

This was where Dick had stood while he bound up his wound.

"He must have been here a very few minutes ago, sir," said one of the men; "the blood is quite warm."

Skellum looked keenly around him.

But no signs of the fugitive could he behold.

"There is one comfort," he said, though by the tone of his voice one would have judged that his comfort was small: "a man who has lost such a quantity of blood of his veins as that will not be able to go very far."



[DICK TURPIN IMPLORES SHELTER OF THE FARMER.]

last, so that we shall have him, after all; and when we have really got him secure we shall think little of all the trouble we have had."

"That's true enough, sir," said the man who had before spoken; "and it is a very strange thing to me if we shall not be able to follow in his track with the utmost ease."

CHAPTER MCXVI.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN FINDS UNEXPECTED SUCCOUR.

Dick Turpin staggered on for a long way without once turning his head to look behind him, for all his faculties were absorbed by one idea, and that was, to get as far as he could in as little time as was possible.

Sheer exhaustion, however, at length made him, though most unwillingly, come to a halt.

It was only natural that he should then look back towards the spot he had so lately quitted.

He was instantly startled by the ruddy glow of the sky.

"Something is on fire," he ejaculated. "What is it?"

To this question he was unable to return any certain answer.

He little guessed that it was the old summer-house in course of demolition by fire, and even had he guessed this he would have been far, very far, from thinking that this accidental circumstance had caused so much delay to his pursuers.

But for this chance he could scarcely have failed to be overtaken before he had gone far.

Even now there was the strongest probability that this disaster would ere long befall him.

His weakness was terrible—much greater than he would admit to himself.

While taking his forced rest he seemed to be fully sensible that the longer he stood the weaker he became—the less able he felt to continue his flight.

Without knowing it, he was very close indeed upon swooning from loss of blood.

A sudden effort of the mind, however, enabled him partially and temporarily to shake off this feeling, and he once more staggered on.

His gait and progress were just those of a drunken man.

Every now and then he would reel from side to side, or with a desperate effort steady his swaying form by suddenly taking hold of a contiguous tree.

And, as a matter of course, the more he thus exerted his bodily powers the greater became his exhaustion.

By slow degrees consciousness ebbed from him, yet not to so great an extent as to deprive him of all power of locomotion, though his course was a most random and devious one.

But the uppermost idea in his mind still was that he must keep in motion.

As for his pursuers, he seemed to have forgotten them altogether—at any rate, he did not once pause or cast a single glance behind him.

Under these circumstances, as may be expected, his course was a most erratic one.

Then a mist seemed to come over all things.

Yet he groped blindly forward, like one enveloped in utter darkness.

How long this state continued he had no means of knowing, but most likely it was not for long.

Suddenly the mist before his vision rolled away.

The first object which now attracted his attention was a light.

Feeble, glimmering, and dim it seemed, and far away, yet Dick fixed his eyes upon it with an intentness not to be described.

His hope was that this light was the indication of rest and shelter shortly to be granted to him.

Had his faculties been less confused than they were, he would scarcely have imagined the likelihood of such a thing as this.

As it was, he fancied there was a voice in his heart which whispered to him, urging him to make all speed towards the light.

He did so, and for a time he rallied a little from his faintness.

At last, leaning against the trunk of a tree, he wiped the perspiration from his brow, and endeavoured to take a good outlook in advance.

"It is a fire," he gasped, with the manner of one who finds himself unable to credit the evidence of his senses. "It is a fire—a fire of some kind. What can it be?"

He gazed with more intentness, and to his great joy he found his sight grew clearer.

A wild sensation of joy sprang up in his breast—so wild that it was very near producing the worst circumstances.

"Gipsies," he exclaimed, panting with excitement. "I am sure that's a gipsy encampment yonder. Courage—courage, then—keep your heart up, Dick, and all will yet be well!"

The discovery he had made did indeed exert a remarkable influence upon him.

Under its sway much of his old strength came back to him.

"All will be well—all will be well now," he cried, almost frenzied with joy. "The gipsies have ever shown themselves to be real and true friends of mine. Yes, yes—all will yet be well. My enemies will again be disappointed, for the Zingari, as I know for certain, will run every risk to shield and to protect."

Certainly, if there was anything that would have the effect of restoring vigour to Dick's flagging energies the prospect before him would have been sufficient.

Indeed, an extraordinary accession of strength did come over him, and he made his way towards the light with a precision and a speed that, judging by his former manner, would have been deemed absolutely impossible.

And as he advanced it became abundantly manifest that he had not fallen into any error.

In a short time he was able to make out not only the fire, but three poles placed triangularly above it, from which swung a large iron pot.

Round this were assembled several members of the gipsy tribe.

On one side could be seen a portion of the tents forming their encampment.

More and more animated, Dick struggled on.

But he was obliged to confess that his mind, though for a short time capable of displaying a supremacy over his body, was indeed the weaker of the two, and now it began to yield very perceptibly to his physical faculties.

The goal, however, was almost reached.

A mist, seemingly like blood, would at more and more frequent intervals come before his eyes, but yet it did not hide from his view the point he so strongly wished to gain.

A very little more time now brought him within a few paces of the fire, and not until he had attained this proximity were the gipsies conscious of his presence, so totally were they all absorbed by some matter which they had under discussion.

Dick, too, at this juncture felt that the extent of his powers had been reached.

He knew that his senses were leaving him, yet ere consciousness entirely took its flight he endeavoured to give utterance to his wishes—to make his supplication for their assistance and protection.

But the effort was a vain one.

His attempt to articulate—and it was a desperate one—produced no other result than the expression of a gasping, choking sound, half sob, half sigh.

Then he struggled, and, as it were, seemed to be fighting with himself.

Then he slowly spun round upon his heels, seeming to make frantic efforts to clutch at and hold by the unsubstantial air.

Then finally, with another of those gasping sounds, he fell down heavily on his back upon the sward, where he lay as motionless as death.

So sudden, so unexpected was his appearance — so entirely unprepared were all the gipsies for the occurrence of any such event, that up to this moment they had been absolutely incapable of all motion.

Now, however, as if by general consent, they all sprang up, and, with exclamations of wonder and surprise upon their lips, hurried to the spot where the inanimate stranger lay.

Keen and scrutinising were the glances which they bent upon him, and by the glances they exchanged after having done so it appeared that the new-comer was utterly unknown to them.

But a slim, active youth—the last to appear upon the scene—pressed forward as soon as the rest, having satisfied their curiosity, would allow him to do so.

With great intentness he scanned every lineament, and as he did so there came over his face an expression which seemed to indicate that the rigid features were known to him.

"You have seen this house-dweller before, Sebel?" said a swarthy, powerful gipsy, who stood next to him.

"I have," was the response—"I feel sure I have."

"But where?"

Sebel was silent.

"Can you not remember?"

"I cannot; and yet, stay! I feel convinced—though it is long, long ago—that this stranger once came to us, and on that occasion he was accompanied by one who bore no inconsiderable resemblance to him."

"And what was the object of his visit?"

"Shelter and concealment."

These words were echoed inquiringly and surprisedly by most of those who were standing near, and it was observable that the whole group pressed much more closely onward than before.

The reason was simple.

They were all dominated by the strongest curiosity.

"Yes," said Sebel, emphatically, "I feel sure that I am right—that I make no mistake."

"And was he concealed?"

"He was."

"And broke bread with us?" was the eager inquiry.

"Even so."

"You are sure of this?"

"Quite sure now—quite sure."

"Enough," was the general cry—"we are bound to assist him to the utmost of our power."

"And he badly enough needs aid," continued Sebel. "No doubt, had he been able, he would have called upon us to shield him from his foes."

Although Dick lay so still upon the grass, apparently bereft of life, yet there was not one of those who gazed upon him that was not aware that it was not death, but only death's counterfeit.

"Carry him to the tent," said the gipsy of whom we have made mention. "We will do for him all that lies in our power. If he is not saved, it will be no fault of ours."

Indeed, it was strange to see how unanimous was the opinion that Dick had every claim upon their sympathy while in his present situation, and all because he had, to use their own phrase, broken bread with their tribe, which indeed almost sufficed to make him a member of their strange fraternity.

Accordingly the senseless fugitive was lifted up and carried into the largest tent, where preparations were at once made properly to dress his wound and also to restore him to his senses.

Fortunate indeed was it for Dick that chance had guided his footsteps to this particular place, and that he had strength enough to reach it.

He could not possibly have fallen into better hands.

Many were the secrets possessed by the gipsies in the healing art, especially where hurts and wounds were concerned.

And not only in this respect was it that he was well off.

The gipsies who gave him shelter were, like himself, opposed to the police—their enemy was a common one.

In both of these respects, then, was Dick much better off than he could have dared to hope.

They would defend him to the last gasp, and not only that—they were possessed of all that cunning which has passed into a proverb, and the whole of it would be brought to bear as much in Dick's behalf as it would have been had he actually become a member of their brotherhood.

To recover the fugitive from his state of insensibility was in the first place no easy task, in consequence of the entire prostration of the system, which could be only got the better of in time.

Sensibility was restored for a moment or so, but the recovery was so slight, and was followed so rapidly by a relapse, as to make it scarcely worthy of the name.

"Nature must do her work," said the old crone who officiated as physician for that portion of the tribe. "No art can restore his expended energies; there must be time—time and patience."

But this did not stay her from unbandaging the wound, which upon examination proved to be by no means so serious as was at first thought.

The chief danger consisted in the tremendous quantity of blood which had escaped from it, and from this further ill consequences were to be apprehended.

But the manner in which the old gipsy set about her task would have done the greatest credit to a skilful surgeon.

She had barely finished, however, when a fresh arrival took place.

The new-comer was young, slim, and light of build, but with muscles like wire.

Great excitement was visible in his manner.

He had been running hard, too, as was abundantly manifested by the way in which he panted for breath.

As soon as he could speak he exclaimed:

"Off—off! Strike your tents and depart—linger no longer! Quick—quick!"

An immediate stir followed these words, as though those who heard them fully felt that there was danger to be apprehended and not a moment to be lost.

"What has happened—what is amiss?" asked many eager voices.

"The Robin Redbreasts are abroad," was the reply—"they are forcing a way through dell and brake. Quick—quick! Away—away, or they will be in sight!"

The message was well understood.

At that time, "Robin Redbreast" was a cant name for a police officer—a term which had its origin in the red waistcoat they invariably wore, and which served in lieu of a uniform to distinguish them from other men.

Whether the gipsies had lately been engaged in some transaction which caused them to be in more than usual dread of the officers of justice we know not.

But by the commotion which the delivery of this intelligence occasioned, and the speedy preparations which were made on every side for an immediate and hasty flight, there seemed good grounds for suspecting such to be the case.

In much less time than would be considered requisite for such an undertaking, every article which the gipsies possessed was carefully packed up, the tents were struck, and the horses harnessed to the caravans.

At a given signal the whole started, leaving scarcely a trace behind them to indicate the route which they had taken.

As for poor Dick Turpin, he was as insensible and unconscious of all this as he would have been had death really and truly claimed him for his own.

Perfectly unaware of any such thing, he was carried from the tent to which he had first been taken, and placed in one of the caravans, as those strange yellow-painted houses on wheels are called.

Such an act as this, and the prospect of a journey of indefinite length, would have terribly alarmed a regular practitioner, who would have maintained that perfect repose was absolutely necessary in such a case, and that without it he would not be answerable for the consequences.

But if Dick Turpin had been ever so much averse to such a proceeding as the present, it would have been quite useless, the safety of the tribe being always held paramount above every individual consideration.

As we have said, however, all was one to the fugitive at this time. If the gipsies had chosen to deliver him into the hands of his pertinacious foes, he could not have made the least resistance.

The antagonism, however, which we have mentioned as existing between these two parties made the probabilities of the occurrence of such a danger very slight indeed.

How long a time elapsed since he had quitted the old summer-house, and what had precisely happened to him, Dick Turpin scarcely knew.

He only found it out after his recovery, by dint of much anxious thought and eager questioning.

But about the occurrence of one incident he was in no sort of doubt whatever.

Without knowing how, he discovered that he could hear the sound of conversation going on around him.

At first in a dream-like, semi-conscious way he was sensible of this fact, and barely so, when the pronunciation of his own name struck upon his ears.

That had the effect of immediately startling him.

He opened his eyes to their fullest extent.

Where was he?

That was the anxious question which first of all occurred to him.

He tried to gaze around him.

But in vain.

He was environed by the deepest darkness.

So far as the evidence of his eyes went, therefore, he might just as well have kept them closely shut.

In what situation he was seemed impossible for him to ascertain.

But the darkness appeared to have the effect of sharpening his hearing to a preternatural extent.

He listened, therefore, with great eagerness.

There was to be heard more than sufficient to absorb the whole of his faculties.

The first words which he distinctly heard—or, at least, the first whose import he was able thoroughly to comprehend—were these:

"Let me tell you," said a voice, in very resolute tones, "that you will gain nothing by deceiving us or attempting to do so."

"We don't think about such a thing," was the somewhat surlily-spoken rejoinder, though the voice, Dick was thoroughly persuaded, was one which he had never heard in his life before.

His wonder and anxiety increased.

He had no time to reflect, however, for all his faculties were fully absorbed by listening.

"Then," said the voice which had first spoken, "do you assure us that you have seen no one answering to the description we have given?"

"Have I not spoken?" was the rejoinder.

"You have, but that is not an answer to the question."

"Then, if you will take the word of a gipsy, I tell you we know nothing of the man you seek—we have seen nothing of him."

"That seems strange indeed, and were it not a readier belief would be given. But we have tracked him so very close to where you have lately been that it seems scarcely possible for you not to have seen him."

"We have not done so," was the answer, very firmly and very resolutely given; "nor do we know anything about this highwayman, Dick Turpin, that you speak of. We are on our way to York, near to which city we have to meet another portion of our tribe, and there you will find us if you want to learn anything further."

Some more words passed.

But they were exchanged in so low a tone that Dick was not able to distinguish them.

But the word "gipsy" had, so to speak, struck upon his ears like a keynote.

It furnished him with the clue to past events that he was short of.

He recollected perfectly well what had last occurred, though the profound darkness prevented him from finding out where he was.

The voice which he had first heard was familiar enough to him.

Scarcely anyone could have heard its peculiar harshness without retaining a distinct remembrance of it ever after.

It was Skellum who was speaking.

Although he could not make out a single object, yet in imagination Dick could see plainly enough a large troop of well-armed, resolute police officers standing round.

From what had been said, it seemed quite clear that the gipsies had determined to stand by him.

But would the officers be satisfied with taking what was declared for granted?

The occurrence of this question made him think that he could give a good guess as to where he was.

"Yes, yes," he said, mentally—"during my insensibility, the gipsies became aware of the approach of the officers, and have placed me in some secret place where there is little danger of my being found. All I have to do is to remain perfectly still, and then doubtless all will be well."

Dick's brain was not very clear, or he would not have jumped to conclusions which a little calm reflection would show to be erroneous.

How should the gipsies know that the officers were in pursuit of him, and why should they trouble to hide him when he had given no hint that he required such a service at their hands?

Perhaps it was quite as well, however, that Dick should have settled the matter thus, because it had the effect of inducing him to remain perfectly still, which, under the circumstances, was the one thing needful.

A variety of noises now made themselves heard, and then came the sound of horses' hoofs, mingled with the rumbling of revolving wheels.

The next moment, to Dick's increased surprise, he found himself in motion.

There could be no doubt of the fact.

Of course he was in a vehicle of some kind, but what he could not guess.

The reader may perhaps imagine what anxiety took possession of his mind.

So great was the inclination he felt to look about him that it was only with the utmost difficulty he could control it.

The rumbling and jolting continued.

Where was he?

His uneasiness upon this point at last reached so great a pitch as to be unendurable.

At all hazards he resolved to make an effort to ascertain the nature of his surroundings.

But a very simple thing prevented him.

He tried to rise from the recumbent position in which he found himself.

But all his efforts could not raise his head above a couple of inches, and then he had to allow it to fall back into its old position, so much had the exertion exhausted him.

His alarm consequent upon this discovery was terrible indeed.

The thought that he was so powerless to help himself was a terrible one to bear.

If the officers by chance looked into the conveyance and found him, he would not be able so much as to raise a finger in his defence—his foes would be able to do with him what they pleased.

This prospect was to him such a dreadful one that his heart seemed to congeal into a mass of ice within his breast.

Truly it may be said that there was nothing Dick dreaded so much as falling alive into the hands of his enemies.

He had made up his mind to fling away his life rather than yield himself a living prisoner.

But if they came now, what should he do?

He listened, but with sensations such as cannot be conceived except by one in a similar situation.

He was by no means certain that the police officers were not within a few yards of where he then was, for he had not heard any sound betokening their departure.

It might be that the gipsies had driven on, leaving them in consultation together upon the road, and if this was the case, what was more possible than that the result of their deliberation might be to ride back to the gipsies and insist upon satisfying their doubts by making a strict search?

As these reflections crowded into his mind, Dick became more and more uneasy and alarmed.

CHAPTER MCXVII.

MR. SKELLUM IS COMPELLED TO CONFESS HIMSELF DEFEATED.

A VERY few words will suffice to make the reader acquainted with the movements of the officers after emerging from the secret passage in the hill-side.

No trace of Dick was to be seen; but Skellum was sanguine in his expectations of overtaking him, and therefore commenced a pursuit on foot.

His men, who were terribly fatigued, grumbled a good deal at this, and in order to preserve among them that amount of good feeling without the existence of which his plans could not have been carried out, Mr. Skellum despatched one of their number to the spot where the horses had been left, giving him instructions to mount and bring the rest with him as quickly as possible.

This arrangement being made, there was not much difficulty in persuading those who remained to push forward on foot until they were overtaken by the horses, which would be in a very short time indeed.

They all saw that it was much better for them not to relax their efforts just at that juncture, as it was quite possible Dick was lurking among the bushes close at hand.

To track him, however, was no easy matter, for, having bound up his arm in the way we have described, Dick left no trail of sufficient distinctness for them to follow.

Moreover, what made their task all the more difficult was the very erratic course Dick had taken while half unconscious from loss of blood.

His wanderings had indeed been most perplexing and uncertain.

And yet he had been under the impression, too, that all the time he had been making his way in a perfectly straight direction.

At length, to the great relief of the police officers, to whose fatigue disappointment had not a little contributed, the horses overtook them.

Getting into the saddle, they continued the chase, until at length, when almost ready to give up in despair, they perceived a horse emerge from a lane into the high-road.

Of course a man was with it, and as this was the first chance they had had of speaking to any living being since the time of leaving the subterraneous passage, the officers pressed forward with great eagerness, in the hope of gleaning some intelligence.

They were disappointed, for the horse was one of those belonging to the gipsies, and before the officers

could reach the spot the whole of the tribe had debouched into the high-road.

Then ensued that conversation of which Dick had recovered in time to hear the greatest portion.

It may be that the sudden jerk, consequent upon the stoppage of the conveyance, had something to do with producing this result.

The fidelity of the gipsies was extraordinary.

Although made acquainted for the first time with the name of the fugitive to whom they had lent their protection, and although Mr. Skellum particularly dwelt upon the reward which would be paid to anyone who delivered him into the hands of the officers of justice, they remained steadfast and true.

Dick Turpin had broken bread with them, and the peculiar laws which bind their fraternity together would not suffer them to betray him.

After some time Skellum allowed them to proceed, as the reader already is aware, for there was nothing to afford reasonable ground for suspicion in their behaviour

Yet, as he sat upon his horse wondering what step he should take next, and in what direction he should go, he gazed with a strange, indefinable longing after the retiring vehicles until a bend in the road hid them from his view.

Even then, had he chosen to act blindly and wholly from impulse, he would have ridden off after them; but he could find so little, or, rather, no excuse for doing so, that he abandoned the idea altogether.

From this it would almost seem that there was some secret presentiment in his breast, but yet not strong enough to cause him to act in accordance with it.

His men remained for some time silent.

Perceiving that their leader did not move, and that he exhibited some signs of irresolution, one said:

"What are we to do next, Mr. Skellum?"

"I don't know," was the unsatisfactory answer.

There was a pause.

"I am sadly afraid," he continued, "that we have lost him. It is a thousand pities we have done so, for after having lost such an immoderate quantity of blood as we have positive evidence of, it is impossible that he can have got very far away."

"What do you think he has done, then?"

"Why, my own opinion is that he has crawled into some retired nook or other, where we have missed him."

This seemed a very probable supposition indeed, and the opinion was shared in by all without exception.

"It is a thousand pities if he has done so," continued Mr. Skellum, musingly; "because, in the event of it, he will die there, and we shall have no hope of getting recompensed for all the trouble we have been at. In his present condition I feel sure he would not be able to get away again."

Another silence followed, which might have lasted longer than it did had it not been broken by the officer who had been the first to speak in the former instance.

"But what shall we do?" he asked. "I speak for myself, and I think I can do so for all the rest."

"What do you mean—in what way?"

"Why, I am so utterly worn out that I feel every moment as though I must fall off my horse on to the ground."

"And I—and I," answered a chorus of voices.

The men by no means exaggerated, for the duty they had been upon for so long was tiring in the utmost degree.

Mr. Skellum himself was all but worn out; and, indeed, the only thing that had prevented him from giving out before was, that he feared, if he did so, all his previous trouble would go for nothing.

Now, however, there seemed no help for it, and consequently, with much less unwillingness than might have been expected, he agreed to abandon the pursuit for the present and seek rest.

The only consolation he could find lay in the hope that he might chance to have some intelligence brought to him, for the whole country was so alarmed that it was scarcely possible for Dick once to show himself without being recognised.

Accordingly, the whole of the troop repaired to the nearest inn on the high-road, and there refreshed themselves with the food and slumber they were so much in want of.

In the meantime Dick was being gradually carried further and further away from them.

As moment after moment elapsed without making him conscious of any aggressive proceedings on the part of the officers, much of his alarm began to abate.

Yet, before the feeling had quite left him, a fresh and altogether different cause of uneasiness presented itself.

All at once it came into his head that he had heard the gipsies inform the police officers that they were on their way to York.

The confusion of mind he was in when he had heard it, and the anxiety which he had suffered since, had driven this circumstance entirely out of his remembrance.

Now that it occurred to him he wondered greatly how he could have passed it over in the way he had.

Of all places in the world just at that time, York was the very worst that he could be taken to.

His own achievements in the locality were doubtless on every tongue; and the police officers, in their minute inquiries and continual search, had unquestionably circulated a tolerably accurate description of his person.

Should his evil fortune take him to this city, he felt that it would be well-nigh an impossibility for him to escape detection.

So strongly impressed did he become with this idea, that it caused him to resolve to make the attempt to prevent it.

He would call out aloud. There could be no danger in his doing so now that the police were so far behind; and if he made good use of his voice, the gipsies could hardly fail to hear him.

Accordingly, he raised his voice—or rather, he tried to do so, for all his efforts only resulted in the emission of a sound not much above a whisper.

Such a low, hoarse sound could scarcely be heard at a few yards' distance.

How was it likely, then, that it should be audible to the gipsies, who were walking along, conversing busily respecting their encounter with the officers and speculating upon its probable results?

Even had he cried out with the full power of his lungs, it is very doubtful whether it could have been heard above the tremendous grinding and rumbling of the wheels.

Yet Dick tried and tried again and again.

He renewed his efforts to rise, but with less success than before, for his anxiety of mind and previous efforts had greatly exhausted him.

At length, with a weary and heavy sigh, he threw back his half-raised body and gave up in despair.

"It is fate," he murmured—"it is fate."

A strange, drowsy condition followed, during which his thoughts appeared to busy themselves without being under his control.

Looking back to the past, he was struck with the fatality which had hitherto attended his efforts to get away from York.

He could almost fancy that he was under the influence of some spell or charm.

And now, on this last occasion, when he had, as he thought, bidden adieu to the old city for ever, yet here he was being brought back to it, and in a way that it was in vain for him to attempt to resist.

"It is fate," he murmured again—"I feel that it is fate. I shall attempt to leave it no more."

A commotion of voices and a sudden jerk awoke him from what we may call his waking dream.

Where was he?

On this point he was not destined to remain for very long in ignorance.

After the lapse of a few minutes the door at the hind part of the caravan was opened, and a gleam of light appeared.

"Hullo, there!" said a gruff voice. "Are you awake there?"

Conceiving the question must be addressed to him, Dick replied:

"Yes—yes."

But his voice was so weak as to be scarcely audible

"Here, Cazza," said the gruff voice—"I told you you were troubling yourself about nothing. Come in—he's all right."

Another person now entered the caravan; and directly afterwards Dick caught sight of an old woman, whose appearance was so repulsive that he could scarcely repress the loathing which her appearance excited

She bent down over him, while her companion held the light, and looked at him attentively.

"He is bad," she said, at length, shaking her head to and fro while she spoke—"very bad. He has been struggling and chafing since I left him."

Dick tried to speak, but all utterance failed him.

The old woman then produced a cup containing some dark liquor, and without speaking a word she placed this to Dick's lips and poured it into his mouth.

To save himself from choking he was obliged to swallow; but a more nauseous potion he thought had never been administered.

But ere half an hour had elapsed he experienced the virtues of it.

Upon making the attempt, he found himself not only able to lift his head, but even to raise himself to a sitting posture.

His voice, too, had been restored to him.

Some moments, however, were occupied in looking around him, at the many strange things which presented themselves to view on every side.

The caravan was crowded with articles of every conceivable description, many of them such as he had never seen before.

The place, too, was not without a certain air of comfort.

He was interrupted by the entrance of the youth Sebel.

Dick did not recognise him at first, though he was instantly aware that he had somewhere seen him in times long past.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Your face is strongly familiar to me."

"Have you forgotten me? My name is Sebel."

"Sebel—Sebel!" repeated Dick, like one who is taxing his memory.

"I find you have forgotten me. But when you came before another was with you, who—who——"

Dick smiled, and extended his unwounded arm.

"I recollect, now," he said—"recollect quite well. I am deeply grateful. Tell me where I am, and what has happened."

With the last portion of his request the gipsy-boy readily complied.

Dick congratulated himself upon having had strength sufficient to reach this place of safety.

"And we are at York now?"

"Not in the city," was the response; "though our tents are not far from it."

Dick's face clouded.

"I must get away," he said. "I cannot remain here. I am not safe."

"Yes, yes; quite safe. Have no concern on that score."

"But the officers——"

"We will not betray you; not one would do it, were the reward ten times what it is."

"You shall all be rewarded for your fidelity. But if my foes came, would they not find me?"

"No no; do not make yourself uneasy on that account. We could hide you where they would never find you."

This was satisfactory enough, and Dick drew a long breath of exquisite relief, for he knew enough of the manners of these wandering people to feel certain that if they chose to protect him he should be safe.

"But there is another point," he continued, "upon which I suffer much uneasiness."

"What is it, captain?"

"About my wound."

"I——"

"Hush! I want you to tell me truthfully and honestly what kind of a wound it is, and what is the probable extent of danger?"

"To speak the entire truth, then, captain, Cazza considers it a very bad flesh wound."

"There is no bone broken, then?"

"None, captain."

"That's a relief indeed."

"But she says you are in a great state of exhaustion, and that it will take time and care to bring you round."

"And she thinks she can do it?"

"She is certain; that is, if you will assist her by keeping your mind as calm as you can."

"And how long will it take, under favourable circumstances?"

"Many days."

Dick sighed.

At this moment Cazza entered, and peremptorily put an end to the conversation.

Upon first hearing that some time must elapse before his recovery, Dick had felt inclined to repine, but a moment's consideration went very far towards convincing him that he ought to rejoice instead.

Upon the word of the boy Sebel he put an absolute trust.

Safety, then, was secured to him, and if he continued any length of time concealed, without the officers being able to scent it out, the vigour of their pursuit would be much diminished, and his chances of getting to the sea coast much increased.

The only point was, would the officers find him?

If so, they would come upon him in a defenceless state indeed.

When three days passed, however, without the occurrence of anything to disturb him, his mind grew greatly calmer, and consequently his recovery was proportionably rapid.

Freedom from excitement—absolute rest, both of mind and body—was what he required; and this he had to perfection.

It was on the fourth evening that, feeling almost well, he was sitting up, when the sound of voices engaged in conversation came upon his ears.

Having nothing else to occupy his thoughts, and believing that nothing could take place in or about the gipsy encampment that was not of interest to him, he listened.

He soon found out that he was able to distinguish the words uttered tolerably well; and as they continued to be borne to his ears, his interest wonderfully increased.

"Think again," said a voice—"think again, before you reply either way to what I have proposed."

Dick started at the sound, for he was confident that he knew the speaker.

For a short time, however, his identity baffled him.

"I have thought," was the response.

About the identity of this person, however, Dick had no doubts.

It was the man who held what may be called a kind of chieftainship over this portion of the Zingari tribe.

"Well, wait a moment, and I will go over the ground again. Listen!"

"I——"

"Listen, I say!"

The gipsy was silent.

His companion then, in a voice of suppressed excitement, spoke as follows:

"There is no risk to you in the affair, none whatever, and scarcely any difficulty. All that I want is some one of your number—I don't care who—to personate the heir to some property; and I want some others to say that he entered your ranks when about twenty years of age—that he had then every appearance of a gentleman, and only joined you in consequence of some great disappointment in life and reverse of fortune. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, perfectly; but——"

"Stay! Reserve your objections for the present. This young man being found, he will have to come forward and keep to a tale which I shall take care to have him informed of. I will see to lawyers and all that part of the business, and can so arrange it that with moderate care he will have no difficulty in proving himself to be the missing heir of the property. I will take care to furnish him with the papers."

"But——"

"Nay, I have not finished. For this you shall receive any reward you may think fit to demand—such an amount as will enable you and the rest of your tribe to live in independence during the remainder of your existence, instead of continuing your present precarious livelihood."

The man paused, as though he wished the offer he

had just made to sink deeply into the mind of his hearer.

It was at this moment that Dick discovered who this person was.

It was the villain whose schemes for Milly's misery Dick had so signally defeated—in a word, no other than Lord Crake.

To find him in a gipsy's tent surprised Dick in no slight degree.

But he did not stop then to indulge in any reflections or speculations.

He concentrated all his faculties to listen, for now that he had found out who the tempter was, he felt a double interest in every syllable.

"And what else?" asked the gipsy.

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" was the reply, echoed in no little astonishment. "How nothing? Supposing the scheme to succeed, what will become of this young man then?"

"I will tell you that, though I had not at first thought of doing so. He will come into possession of all the property, and then he will sell it to me."

"Sell it to you?"

"Yes. That is, a document will be drawn up by which he will sell it me for half its value, and this will be the reward I mentioned."

"I don't see it," said the gipsy. "I can't see my way clear at all."

"Not see your way clear?"

"No, I cannot. You are telling me half a story. Take me altogether into your confidence. Tell me all from first to last."

"And supposing after I have done so, and you thought fit to decline, what guarantee should I have that you would not come forward and defeat me by laying bare my scheme?"

"I can give you no other guarantee than a gipsy's word. If that is not sufficient, leave me, and there will be an end of the matter."

A silence followed, during which Dick supposed Lord Crake was busily debating within himself.

The gipsy was the first to speak.

"I have only this addition to make," he said, "and that is, if you tell me all and show me that it is safe to make the trial, I will join with you. The house-dwellers never pity the gipsy, and why should I pity them?"

"Very true," said Lord Crake, with an amount of triumphant satisfaction that he could not conceal. "There is no reason why you should show them any extra consideration. Give me your hand upon it."

"You will tell me all?"

"I will, and satisfy you that success is certain."

"I must know all," repeated the gipsy, persistently.

"I will begin at the beginning and end with the end," was the rejoinder; "though I promise you the story is a long one."

"I have nothing else better to do than to listen to it."

"And is there anyone to overhear us?" asked Lord Crake, suspiciously.

"No one."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite."

"Well, then, I will commence. Listen!"

We fancy this last injunction was a superfluous one to the gipsy, and quite certain that it was entirely so to Dick, who felt that he would not miss hearing any portion of the narrative that was about to be given for worlds.

In a low, monotonous, but perfectly distinct voice, Lord Crake then said:

"To convince you that I am about to take you wholly into my confidence, I shall not even alter or suppress a single name."

"It is better so," said the gipsy, quietly. "Half confidences are always dangerous."

"The name, then, of the Marquis of Belgarde must be quite familiar to you."

Upon hearing this, Dick started and almost betrayed himself by giving utterance to an ejaculation.

What name could be better known to Dick?

In an instant it brought before him his true old comrade Tom King.

But he could not stay to think, for, the gipsy having given an assent, Lord Crake continued:

"You may be aware, too, that it came out that in his youth this marquis had married much beneath his station."

"He did. He married——"

The gipsy checked himself.

"Who—who?"

"One of our tribe—I shall say no more."

He pronounced his determination so firmly that Lord Crake did not repeat his query.

"Well, growing tired of her, the marquis left her, and some years after married again. The first wedding was such a private one and the secret so well kept that not more than three knew of it. This first wife, a silly fool, possessed with all manner of foolish notions about devotion and generosity to the man she loved, would not make known the marriage nor take any steps to obtain a restitution of her rights. Only on her deathbed did she reveal her rank."

"She had a son, had she not?"

"Yes, a wild reprobate; but yet, with the perversity of womankind, she loved him proportionately to his ill-treatment of her. She told him what and who he was."

"What followed?"

"After her death he at once resolved to regain his own."

"He was successful?"

"He was; and the young heir that was—his half-brother—suddenly found himself deprived of the snug fortune which up to then he had thought his own."

"What became of him?"

"He fled, nor could he ever afterwards be found. He was traced to London, and there all trace of him was lost."

"And do you want some one to personate this missing man?"

"I do."

Here was another surprise for Dick, for that Tom King was the individual referred to was beyond all possibility of doubt.

His listening powers were still in demand.

"A few words will let you into the secret of the rest. This new-found heir, who had passed all his life among the crime and low life of London, had no other way of showing his appreciation of the good fortune that had befallen him than by drinking all the best and most expensive drinks his money could procure. The quantity he swallowed is incredible, and the end such as anyone might have foretold. The young girl he married, and who only accepted him because of his wealth and title, soon died broken-hearted, some said; but others—and most likely they are right—whisper that her death was brought on by her husband's brutality."

CHAPTER MCXVIII.

DICK TURPIN FINDS HIMSELF INVOLVED IN FRESH DANGERS.

LORD CRAKE paused a little, as if for breath, or else in order to nerve himself for what more he had to say, and then continued:

"On dying, this coroneted blackguard made a will, the terms of which were as outrageous as his whole life. He bequeathed everything to his illegitimate brother—for so he was, the late earl's second marriage being no marriage at all; and not only that, as there was some doubt as to whether this precious fellow should be found, made a proviso that the whole of the property should go to the daughter of Sir Humphrey Yeomans."

At the mention of this last name the gipsy gave utterance to an angry curse, and lucky was it that he did so, for it drowned the slight exclamation which was forced from Turpin's lips before he was aware of it.

"What's the matter?" asked Lord Crake.

"Never mind—go on!"

"In a minute. Why did you let out that exclamation when I pronounced his name?"

The gipsy was silent.

"It must be that you hate him."

"Perhaps I do. But never mind—go on!"

"Not till you have told me."

"Well then," cried the gipsy, vindictively, "I do hate him—he has always been a bitter, unrelenting foe to all our tribe."

Lord Crake chuckled, for this was a lucky discovery.

"Enough," he said. "Now comes the rest of the tale.

I will tell you without reserve. From particular inquiries which I caused to be made, I came with tolerable certainty to the conclusion that this missing heir would never be found. Accordingly, this girl would reap the benefit, and I determined to make her my wife. I fancied I should succeed. Her parents readily consented to the match, I was received as an accepted lover, and congratulated myself that all was well. But the girl I knew did not like me, though I tried to vanquish her dislike. It was in vain, however, and her father, who was foolish enough to pay regard to her whims, came to me and stated that the match must be broken off. Nothing I could say had the least effect upon his resolution, which was inflexible."

"So you were defeated, then?"

"I was, but I vowed to be successful still, and, what is more, to have my revenge upon the minx."

"How so?"

"Why, by finding some one that I could palm off as the missing heir to the estates. And think how simple the affair will be! You have only to pitch upon some one who can play the part in a suitable manner. You can say that he came to you, took the oath, and was received as a member of your tribe."

"But will that be enough?" asked the gipsy, doubtfully.

"For you it will; and as for the other proofs, you must leave them to me, and take my word that they shall be forthcoming."

"And you hope for success?"

"I am certain of it, provided you perform your part of the contract."

"Do you want my decision now?"

"I do."

"But how if I am unable to find a suitable person?"

"I am not afraid of that, for by your manner I am almost satisfied that you have your eye upon some one already."

"But he may not consent."

"You must explain matters to him, and make him understand how much he will be the gainer."

"To tell you the truth," said the gipsy, "that is the only part of it I don't like."

"How?"

"Why, I think you must have some further design in your head."

Lord Crake laughed.

"If you have any ultimate plot in your head to defraud us after you have made us your tools, beware! Take my advice—do not attempt it, or you will suffer dearly, for it will be a matter in which the whole tribe will join, and you will find it impossible to escape the vengeance of so many. If you have thought of such a thing, for your own sake I implore you to abandon the idea this moment."

"What puts such a ridiculous thing into your head?" asked his lordship, forcing a laugh.

"The terms you propose to us seem to be too good—the prospect is too glittering."

"A fine notion that! But let me tell you your fears are groundless."

"I am glad to hear it."

The gipsy spoke as though he was thoroughly in earnest, and no doubt he was so.

"I mean well by you," said Lord Crake, "and the reason is that the property is quite large enough to bear a division, and yet leave me as much as I require. And now to go back to Sir Humphrey Yeomans and his daughter. After the insult I have received at their hands it is only natural that I should look to be revenged—and will it not be vengeance to deprive her of this?"

"Give me your hand," said the gipsy. "I will go through with you in this business—not so much on account of the money which is to be gained by it, but rather because I should like to wring the baronet's proud heart—no easy thing to do, as I daresay you are aware. But his daughter is his tender point."

"It is—it is!" answered Lord Crake, with the same amount of vindictiveness in his tones as he had displayed on a former occasion.

Then he muttered:

"It will go hard with me if my revenge does not reach further than this!"

"What do you say?"

"Nothing—nothing. Am I to look upon this business as being settled?"

"You may rely upon me. If I fall short, it will be through no fault of mine."

"Do not mention failure. With moderate care we must succeed, so never think of failure."

By the sound which now reached his ears, Dick could tell that his lordship had risen to his feet, and consequently that the conference was over.

He listened, however, in the hope that he might hear yet a few words more.

In this expectation he was defeated.

He caught only the sound of their retreating footsteps.

Satisfied that they had left, Dick Turpin gave himself up to those reflections to which what he had overheard could not fail to give birth.

"How wonderful," he murmured—"how truly wonderful! Who could have believed that I, of all others, should overhear this nice little plot? Sir Humphrey will have no occasion to regret having acted towards me as he did. I could have wished for nothing better than the opportunity of rendering them such a service as now lies within my power."

But even as these words escaped him, he was suddenly reminded of the great extent to which he was indebted to the gipsies.

They had unquestionably saved his life at a moment when he was very near indeed to losing it—when he must have perished but for their assistance.

Then, they had refused to hand him over to the police when the temptation to do so was very strong indeed.

In laying bare the conspiracy of which he had been an auditor, he must, of course, implicate them, or, at the very least, be the means of bringing about their defeat.

This was embarrassing, because, although in the wrong, yet it was ill requiting them for what they had done on his behalf.

Dick's hesitation, however, did not long continue.

His old comrade's memory and Milly's welfare overbalanced all consideration he was inclined to show the gipsies on the grounds we have mentioned.

He must place himself in antagonism with one or the other, and there was everything to induce him to resolve that no effort on his part should be wanting to prevent the consummation of so monstrous a fraud.

"Tom cannot enjoy those possessions himself," he said; "but next to doing so would be the satisfaction that they had fallen into the hands of so worthy an object as the baronet's daughter. As for Lord Crake, if by chance we should ever meet, he will find that there will be an account to settle between us."

This discovery, of course, set Dick's mind in a state of furious tumult again, nor could he for the life of him subdue it.

But he was stronger now, and much better able to withstand the effects of any excitement.

As the gipsy-boy, Sebel, had correctly informed him, his hurt was nothing more than a flesh wound, which, under the care of the old sibyl Cazza, rapidly grew well.

Nature herself recovered him from the effects of the vast quantity of blood he had lost—indeed, Dick thought himself quite well, though he vastly overrated his strength.

"What steps shall I take?" he asked himself. "How shall I act for the best in this matter? How powerless I am! With such a look-out as is doubtless kept against me, it will be the most difficult thing in the world for me to do that which another ordinarily situated would accomplish with all the ease imaginable."

He ceased speaking, but his thoughts continued to be busily enough employed.

But deciding upon a definite line of action in such a matter was of no ordinary difficulty.

"Ah!" he said, struck by a sudden thought which seemed to promise him a ready solution of his difficulty, "let me think—let me tax my memory. Tom named some solicitors or other in York to whom he would have to apply. Who were they? What on earth could have been their names?"

He taxed his memory vainly. The names were lost.

But thinking back upon the events of the past brought to his recollection the circumstance that, as a matter of precaution, Tom had requested him to make a memorandum of these names.



[DICK TURPIN RECEIVES IMPORTANT INFORMATION FROM THE OSTLER.]

He at once began to fumble in his pockets, though with very small hopes of finding what he sought.

But in an inner breast pocket of his coat he found a beautifully-bound gilt-edged pocket-book, which had no doubt belonged to a person of considerable distinction.

Opening this with eager haste, Dick turned over the vellum leaves until he came to one whereon was written, in very straggling, ill-formed letters, the following words:—

"*Messrs. Flint and Steel,*
"*Solicitors.*
"*York.*"

"That is it!" he almost cried aloud, so great was his exultation at this unhoped-for discovery. "There is no street mentioned, as I could have wished; but I must do my best to find them out. I shall manage it now I know their names."

Again he paused.

"I will go to these men, although I have little reason enough to be fond of lawyers; but I will go to them—it is my duty. And if in the execution of it I should lose my life, what matters it?—what is existence that I should value it so highly?"

But many obstacles stood in the way of achieving such a simple matter as this.

How was he to leave the gipsy encampment.

If he could do so secretly, it would be so much the better.

A moment's thought, however, showed him that this was impossible, so he abandoned the idea at once.

Before he had settled anything, the principal object of his thoughts—that is to say, the gipsy himself—entered the caravan.

How to treat him, Dick was at a loss to decide; and the worst of it was, a very short time was allowed him to make up his mind in.

Should he admit that he had overheard the plot, and endeavour to persuade him to change his determination?

No; that would be useless, because by the custom of the tribe what word is given must be stood to.

"I owe you many thanks," said Turpin, at length, a slight amount of hesitation manifesting itself. "But I fancy I shall be able to reward you, though not as you deserve, nor as I could wish."

"Say no more about that," answered the gipsy. "Do you find yourself much better?"

"Wonderfully better—so much so that I think I shall try to rid you of me to-night."

"Nay, nay—think not of such a thing."

"Yes," said Dick—"it is imperative."

"But you are not strong enough to walk a dozen paces."

"So you think."

"I am certain of it. You would be mad to think of attempting to go a journey to-night."

"But it is imperative," said Dick. "I have business on hand which will not bear even an hour's delay."

"At any rate, stay till to-morrow," said the gipsy, earnestly. "I should be sorry for you to fall into the hands of your enemies after having baffled them so far. And let me tell you they have by no means given over the pursuit. They seem certain you are hidden somewhere, and believe they have only to wait long enough and you will show yourself."

"Is it so?" said Dick.

"I assure you of it."

"To-morrow night, then, is the utmost limit to which I can prolong my stay. I may as well fall into the hands of my foes as fail in that which wholly depends upon me."

"You are welcome," said the gipsy. "But you know best. You are free to do as you list; and, what is more, be sure the tribe will always aid you to whatever extent lies in their power."

"Many thanks!" said Dick, who at this moment was very near acknowledging that he had overheard Lord Crake's conspiracy.

But he took a second thought, and remained silent.

What more passed had no special interest.

The night elapsed without the least alarm, though Dick's impatience made each hour seem three.

The day seemed to pass even more tediously; but Dick had made up his mind just what to do, and towards noon he fell sound asleep.

His intention may be expressed very briefly.

It was to make his way to York, ascertain the residence of the solicitors, and disclose to them all that he had by chance become acquainted with.

How simple this appeared, and yet what tremendous danger Dick would incur by attempting to carry it into effect!

Had it been ten times as great, however, it would not have prevented Turpin from executing his resolve.

It was dusk when he awoke.

He started up suddenly, for he was surprised to find so many hours had passed away.

The first object upon which his eyes rested was the form of the gipsy chief.

It was quite possible that the slight sound made by him in entering the caravan had abruptly terminated the slumber of the fugitive.

"So late!" were Dick's first words.

"Time enough," was the laconic answer. "It is not dark enough for you to leave our tents; and, remember, if you were seen departing we should have to pay very dearly for having sheltered you."

"I know that, and for my own sake shall be careful not to compromise you—I owe you too deep a debt of gratitude."

The gipsy made no reply to this speech save by nodding his head.

Then he showed Dick a cup which he held carefully in one hand.

"Cazza has sent you this," he said. "It is a cordial of rare efficacy and virtue. It will give fresh strength to your flagging limbs. The effects will not be permanent, of course," he added, "but you will experience great benefit from the draught."

Dick took the draught which was offered him.

It was three-parts full of some dark-coloured decoction.

As he received it a momentary doubt crossed his mind.

Did it mean treachery?

Would the effects of the potion be precisely opposite to those declared?

Was it a plan to deliver him to his foes?

His suspicions lasted but a second.

He was instantly struck with the reflection that if it was the intention of the gipsies to betray him, they had had abundant opportunities for doing so, and no reason to show why they should have aided him thus far.

With a feeling in his heart that he had done his benefactors a deep wrong by allowing such a thought to enter his breast, he placed the cup to his lips and drained it of its contents without either hesitation or dread of the result.

Almost as soon as he had swallowed the last drop he became sensible of its invigorating properties.

His heart beat with stronger and more regular pulsations, forcing the blood through every vein, while an oppressive load seemed suddenly lifted off his mind.

"You feel the effects?" said the gipsy, interrogatively.

"I do indeed."

"Before you start, eat heartily. Who can say how long it will be before you have the opportunity of making another meal?"

"True," said Turpin—"very true. But I must leave at dark."

"That will not be for half an hour to come, at the very least; so make yourself easy until then."

The gipsy's considerate advice was carefully acted upon.

Dick had a very large amount about his person, consisting of money and valuables of various kinds.

From this store he amply satisfied the tribe, who had little anticipated such liberality.

"And now," said the gipsy chief, "if you want a horse there is a good one at your service. You will find it easy travelling; I don't think you have strength enough to walk far."

"I feel the strength of a hundred men."

"That is from the draught; but I warn you the effect will not last. Let me advise you to take the horse."

But Dick very firmly and decidedly shook his head.

"You have my thanks just the same," he said, "but I have made up my mind to go on foot. In this case I shall not run so much risk of observation; moreover, I am not going far."

"You know your own business best; but still, I should recommend you not to decline my offer."

"I will tell you my great reason for doing so," said Dick, with a peculiar smile. "But when Black Bess staggered and fell dead beneath me, I made up my mind as I had prevented her from having another master, so would I refuse to cross the back of another steed. And when I even contemplate doing so, may I be immediately visited by some great misfortune!"

The gipsy saw nothing strange or unaccountable in this—on the contrary, the feeling was one which he could perfectly comprehend.

"The fear is a vague one," added Dick, "but yet I might find some other animal that would supplant my poor mare in my affections. I have had no other steed, and I will have no other."

By the time he had expressed this determination, the time for departure had arrived.

Darkness completely shrouded all things, and under the cover of it Dick hoped to be able to elude the utmost vigilance of his foes.

On quitting the encampment, Dick did not make his way towards York, though he had been careful to inquire in what direction the city lay.

As soon as he felt certain, however, that he was out of sight of the encampment, he changed his course, and walked as nearly as he could judge in a straight line to his destination.

The vigour imparted by the strengthening draught deceived him, and produced disastrous results.

Overrating his powers, he was not content with making his way at a moderate speed, but hurried on at a pace

much too fast to be called a walk and yet by no means a run.

It proved, however, to be a most exhaustive one; and before he had proceeded three-quarters of a mile on his journey he was obliged to come to a halt.

He was dead-beat; and that new-found strength in which he had so much rejoiced left him weaker than before.

He struggled on for some distance further; but every yard cost him a tremendous effort, for he was reduced to such a deplorable state of weakness that a child's strength would have been almost enough to overcome him.

The knowledge of his condition filled him with the greatest apprehensions lest his pursuers should chance to obtain a clue to his whereabouts.

To make his position still worse, the moon rose; and though she was some days past the full, yet, as the heavens were almost free from clouds, she cast around her a much greater amount of light than Turpin wished to have.

"I must rest," he said—"I must rest. Perhaps if I remain perfectly still for a little while my spent strength will in some degree return to me. It was thoughtless of me—most thoughtless to act as I have. I ought to have husbanded my strength with the utmost care."

But this after-wisdom had now no practical good.

He flung himself down, however, upon the smooth turf in a meadow, having taken care to choose a spot that was cast into deep shadow by a belt of trees.

Here he remained he knew not how long, for he did not trouble himself to take notice of the flight of time.

As soon as he felt somewhat recovered he arose.

The moon was shining, as it seemed to him, with additional brilliancy; but perhaps this was caused by his suddenly coming out of the shadow of the trees.

Slowly and gently, he recommenced his journey, carefully avoiding all roads or frequentated paths.

Slight as the exertion was, ere long it told greatly upon him.

In a little time he was compelled to rest, and as he wearily dragged himself onwards these rests became more and more frequent.

"I shall never reach York before daylight," he murmured, at last, in a weak voice. "I find it will be impossible. What shall I do? Where shall I look for a place where I can remain without much fear of being found by the police officers?"

He looked all around him, as though in the hope that his eyes would light upon the place he needed.

It was in vain.

He was evidently upon some farmer's land, for everywhere around the land was carefully cultivated, and here and there could be seen some implement of husbandry.

"There must be a homestead not far off," Dick said at length. "Shall I venture to make my way there? I fancy I have no better chance. Farmers have the general reputation of being good-natured and generous, and so I have found them, I think, without exception. Who knows—I may be fortunate enough to find a friend."

This was very far indeed from being likely, yet Dick felt it no slight consolation to keep the prospect of such a thing before his mind.

Just then he came to a kind of beaten track, which, by its character, seemed as though it led towards the farmhouse.

He walked along it, not so much, perhaps, with the view of making his way to the door of the habitation and asking shelter as with the idea that he might reach some shed or other outbuilding where he could repose his wearied limbs.

The ground had an upward tendency for some distance; but when the level was gained Dick saw before him at no great distance a confused mass of thatched roofs, no doubt covering the homestead.

Very beautiful and very peaceful did the scene look in the silvery moonlight—so calm, so suggestive of happiness, contentment, freedom from care or danger, that as the fugitive gazed upon it his feelings mastered him.

A choking sob rose in his throat, and for a moment or two the quiet scene was hidden from him by a mist of heart-wept tears.

CHAPTER MCXIX.

DICK TURPIN IS RECOGNISED ON HIS ARRIVAL AT THE FARM.

THE prospect before Dick Turpin, so full of peacefulness as it was, made the misery of his own existence all the more palpable from the contrast.

It was no wonder that, especially in his present enfeebled state, he should be overcome by his feelings.

As soon as he recovered himself a little, he stretched out his arms yearningly towards the humble abode, and, in a broken voice, exclaimed:

"What perfect happiness, what freedom from all worldly care, must be the fortunate lot of those who dwell yonder! Life to them must be a calm and pleasant river, down which they float with a gentle, ebbing tide. Now life to me has in it no touch of enjoyment or of peace—hunted from place to place like a wild beast, allowed no rest, deprived of the opportunity of doing good when it lies in my power. All is war—nothing but war, which, even in my case, is productive of the utmost misery. Oh! if I could only once more gain that sequestered spot where one-half of my heart lies buried beneath the churchyard sod, I should be happy—I should be content, unenvying the most brilliant destiny which mortal ever enjoyed upon this earth! Oh! if I could only reach it—if I could only reach it!"

The last words were pronounced with a fervent earnestness which cannot be expressed—nothing could be more ineffable.

This mention of the little village on the French sea-coast, however, so far from increasing his dejection, had a precisely opposite effect.

His breast immediately became filled with the hope of reaching this place in a little time; and the next words which passed his lips consisted of a strong determination to brace up every nerve, to redouble all his efforts, to satisfy this anxious longing.

"I will do it," he exclaimed—"yes, even if the number of my foes was doubled—even if ten times as many obstacles lay before me in my path! I will render, first of all, this great service to the fair girl who, out of the gentleness of her sweet nature, afforded me protection when I so badly needed it, and then, despite the endeavours of all the police officers in the kingdom, I will fight my way to the sea-shore, embark, and remain at rest."

He was silent for a few moments.

Then, with a firmer and steadier footfall than he had yet employed, he made his way towards the homestead.

But the new-found vigour imparted by excitement vanished soon, and again and again he was compelled to rest.

At last, after a tedious lapse of time, he reached one of the outlying sheds—a place used for a variety of purposes, but now it chanced to be almost filled with straw.

Upon this Dick flung himself with an over-weary sigh, and almost instantly consciousness abandoned him.

He fancied that certainly not more than a moment elapsed before he was startled by the rough tones of some strange voice.

Opening his eyes quickly, he saw that there was a dull gray light visible.

"Can it be dawn?" he asked himself, mentally.

The strange voice reached his ears again.

"I won't have these horses here—don't I tell you so! Take them off at once!"

"Yes, meester—I'll be with you momently."

What a sigh of relief it was that Dick gave utterance to when these words fell upon his sense of hearing!

The danger that he so much feared was not present.

His natural thought on awaking was that his enemies were close by.

When he found that this was not the case he moved.

Although the movement was slight, it caused him an infinity of pain, for all his joints seemed stiffened as if with gout.

He was, too, very—very cold.

But he moved again, though the agony it caused almost wrung a groan from his lips.

Nothing save motion, however, would restore the

arrested circulation of his blood, and the sooner this was over the better.

Still it required him to call up all the fortitude he was master of.

At length he emerged from the straw-filled shed, and, standing upright by dint of clinging to the woodwork, he looked about him.

The first objects upon which his eyes fell were those of a tall, burly-looking man and a couple of horses.

Doubtless these were the animals to which he had alluded, for they were munching at a quantity of hay.

"The occupier of this place, no doubt," thought Dick. "Surely, with all this prosperity around him, he will be filled with compassion as soon as he beholds such a miserable wretch as I am now! I will drag myself towards him—I will ask for shelter and protection."

Dick moved but languidly and with difficulty, but the farmer saw him not, his whole attention apparently being absorbed by a man who was at work at a little distance.

But, suddenly turning round, he caught sight of Dick within a few paces of him.

The start he gave upon making this discovery had something ludicrous in it.

Dick leaned himself against the side of the building where the horses stood.

He was so giddy and faint that without this support he must have fallen to the ground.

The farmer, recovering from his first shock of surprise, bent upon him a gaze that held out very little prospect of a friendly reception.

He did not speak, but scanned Dick from head to foot.

The appearance of the fugitive was by no means recommendatory, for the vicissitudes Dick had recently experienced had by no means improved his looks.

"Have mercy!" said the fugitive, feebly—"have mercy and pity, for, as you see, I am in want of both!"

"I don't know you!" growled the farmer. "Who are you?—what do you want?"

"Nothing more than a few hours' shelter," answered Dick, replying only to the last query, for he saw it would be useless to make an appeal for much hospitality.

"Take it, then," was the reply, spoken with a harsh voice. "I don't encourage vagrants as a rule, but as you look ill, and seem as though you had known better days, I don't mind letting you lie down on the straw yonder for an hour or two. But when you are rested you must troop off—I'll have no such varmint as you about the farm. Mind that!"

And with this he turned on his heel and walked with a swift step towards the man whose movements he had been watching.

Dick heaved another sigh.

"And is this churl the fortunate inhabitant of this reposeful place? How unworthy of it! All its charms are unappreciated by him. How strange such beings should be so fortunate! Lie down in the straw! Well, well—perhaps that is more consideration than many would have shown me."

Dick had to pause a minute or two, leaning against the boarding of the shed, before he could recover himself sufficiently to crawl back into the place he had just left.

But his heart was heavy with disappointment.

He had filled himself up with the idea that the inmates of the farm-house would willingly have done all they could to alleviate his distress.

Of all the disappointments he could remember having experienced, not one seemed half so bitter as this.

With more dejection than he had yet displayed, he cast himself down again upon the straw.

It was not long, though, before inherent pride came to his aid, and enabled him to shake off the depression of spirits under which he laboured.

He then found it some relief to pour out his resentment against the churlish farmer, although there was no one near to interrupt him.

He was interrupted by hearing some one coming.

This circumstance, of course, took his attention instantly.

But whatever uneasiness he may have experienced was dispelled when he saw that it was a shock-headed urchin—one of the oddest-looking creatures it had ever been his lot to behold.

His age might have been guessed at fourteen—it may have been more, but was probably less.

He was attired in a kind of white smock frock, which left no part of his person visible from his neck to his ankles.

As he approached, he was amusing himself by whistling some extraordinary melody.

It would seem as though he had been sent on some errand to the very shed under the roof of which Dick lay.

The boy little expected to see a stranger there. His distended cheeks collapsed, and the whistling ceased as if by magic.

But he recovered himself almost instantly, and with an odd mixture of audacity and awkwardness, he came nearer to Dick in order to indulge his curiosity by a closer view.

Upon coming as near as he probably thought was consistent with prudence he stopped, and indulged himself with a good stare.

"Who be ye?" he asked, at length.

Dick, who had been looking closely at the new-comer, saw that beneath his rough exterior there was a certain amount of sharpness and intelligence, though most would have called it cunning.

He fancied, also, that he could perceive something like an air of friendliness about him.

But this might have been fancy, for never before had Dick felt such a strong, irresistible craving for companionship.

"Who be ye?" said the boy, again, after waiting what he thought, perhaps, sufficient length of time for Dick to answer. "Has t' old farmer seed ye? I reckon not, fur he allows none of your sort here."

"I have seen him," said Dick; "and he has told me that I may rest here for a short time."

"My eye, what a wonder! But who be ye?" he reiterated, with more anxiousness than before

"A stranger."

"I could 'a to'd thee that, mun!" he exclaimed, with a grin at his own sharpness. "But I think as how I knows you, though you be nationly altered."

"Know me?" ejaculated Dick, with a sudden movement.

"Yes," said the boy, nodding—"I think I'se seed you afore."

"Nonsense—nonsense! I am a stranger here."

"That may be; but I seed ye at York."

Dick bent forward curiously.

"I'm right—I'm sure I'm right!" continued the boy. "I know where I seed you—it wor at the Bowling-Green at York. You was a-playing at ninepins, and after you had gone the folks all said as how you were Dick Tarpin, and as how you had rode a 'oss—leastways, your mare, Black Bess—from London to York in one night!"

The boy evidently recognised Dick.

He spoke these words, too, in a tone of voice that sounded most dangerously loud in the ears of the weary fugitive.

He evidently failed to understand the vital necessity which existed for the use of secrecy and caution.

Dick held up his hand.

"Hush—hush!" he cried. "Come closer. You speak too loud."

But the shock-headed youth seemed to doubt the advisability of drawing any closer.

"Fear nothing," said Dick. "I only want to speak to you."

"But tell me who you are?"

"Come closer, then. I will not hurt you, and I will tell you all."

This assurance and the promise combined dispelled his dread, and, without further hesitation, he placed himself within arm's-length.

"If you will be my friend," said Dick, earnestly, "this will be the best day you have ever had. Look here—I have money in abundance. You shall have as much as you require, provided you are faithful and secret."

Dick was not deceived when he fancied he could detect the existence of a certain brightness of intellect in this lad.

He clearly comprehended all that Dick said to him, and

what was stranger still, the rudeness and uncouthness he had showed at first wore off to a remarkable extent.

"Go on," he said. "I am listening."

"But will you promise to serve me?"

"Are you Dick Turpin?"

The fugitive hesitated a moment before he replied, but feeling that it would be worse than useless to give a denial, he said:

"I am."

No sooner had he uttered these words than, to his greater surprise, the boy manifested the utmost signs of joy and satisfaction.

"I thought it was, blest if I didn't!"

"Will you serve me?"

"Yes—that is——"

"What are your conditions?" interrupted Dick, quickly.

"That you tell me all about your ride to York on Black Bess—I mean every one of the particulars."

The boy's eyes glittered with excitement.

"I promise that readily," answered Dick, as soon as he had recovered himself from the surprise into which this strange request had thrown him.

"That's all right, then. Hurrah!"

"And is that all?"

"No, not all. I want something else."

"I thought so. What is it?"

"Why, money enough to buy a horse," he continued, with growing excitement.

"A horse?"

"Yes—and a suit of first-class clothes as well, a brace or two of pistols, and plenty of powder and lead."

Dick's amazement increased.

"You are an odd customer, and no mistake!" said Dick. "What on earth do you want a horse and these things for?"

"Because," was the reply, spoken with more excitement than ever in tone and gesture—"because then I should set up as highwayman myself, and perhaps ride all the way from York to London."

Dick was so surprised at this announcement that for a moment or two he was deprived of speech.

His first inclination was to break out into a hearty laugh.

Prudence, however, whispered that the best thing he could do would be to subdue this impulse; for if indulged in, it might change this boy into a foe.

Dick could not afford to lose one who, no matter with what motives, was ready and willing to be his friend.

A more unlikely figure for a highwayman was certainly never before beheld.

"You don't know what you are asking for," said Dick, at length. "If you have any serious intention of adopting such a course, take my advice and abandon it."

"Not till I've given it a good trial," was the firm rejoinder. "I have thought a good deal about it, I have, and the first time I have a chance I mean to try it on."

This determination was delivered in that particular way which makes you feel that any dissuasive arguments would be worse than useless.

"You will not betray me?" cried Dick, presently, fixing a keen glance upon him.

The boy made a gesture of impatience and disdain.

"Does the gaffer know you?"

"Who's the gaffer?"

"Why, the farmer yonder."

"He does not."

"I thought he didn't, because why: if he did, he would send for the officers pretty quick—and do you know they are close by here now!"

"Close by?" ejaculated Dick, with a start.

"Yes. I seed 'em when I fetched the cows up by old Mobbs's coppice."

Dick was as wise as ever.

"Where are they now?"

"I don't know; but I will go and see, if you like."

"Do so—do so; and yet, stay," added Dick, who could hardly feel certain that the boy would not be tempted to betray him.

"What is it, captain?"

"Do you know what a large reward there is offered to anyone who will discover me?"

"Yes, I do."

"It is very large."

"I don't care if it is. Lor' bless you, captain, I ain't such a fool as I look—oh no, not by a good many long chalks. I know them Lunnon officers before to-day."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Suppose as how I was to tell them where you are, and be green enough to think I should get the money, what do you think would be the upshot? Why, they would stick to all the blessed lot theirselves, and tell me if I said a word they'd swear a robbery on to me, and tell me I ought to feel glad to get off. Oh, I knows 'em, I does."

"So it appears," answered Dick, who from that moment gave the boy credit for more than an ordinary share of intelligence.

"Is that all you've got to say, captain?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll go off and see if the officers are about. Don't you move till I come back."

He hurriedly departed, leaving Dick in anything but a comfortable frame of mind.

In spite of everything, the fugitive felt wretched and full of doubt.

Should the officers be at hand, what should he do—how could he hope to escape them?

The farmer if questioned would readily give every information, and it seemed as though he could not possibly avoid falling into their hands.

How rejoiced he felt when he heard the sound of the boy's returning footsteps!

"I can't see anything of them now," he said, in reply to Dick's anxious inquiring glance, "but I have heard as how they have been searching round for you, and so it's most likely they will come here before they leave off."

"I must depart," said Dick, rising with great difficulty—"I must depart. I dare not remain here any longer."

"And if you go," said the boy, "what is to save you then?"

"What is to save me if I remain?"

"I will."

"Thanks for your good will, but I fear it would be beyond your powers to accomplish it."

"You don't know what I could do."

"I certainly do not."

"I should hide you."

"And what good would that be?"

"The officers would never find you."

Dick shook his head.

"The farmer would tell them I was somewhere about the premises, and they would not leave until they had searched every corner."

"Very true," said the boy, scratching his head; "I did not think of that."

Dick came towards the front of the shed, as if about to emerge.

But his strange companion pushed him back.

"Wait a bit, captain; we must think this matter over. Ah! you may smile, but I have heard the fable about the mouse that set the lion free, and I daresay you have too."

"I certainly have," answered Dick, more and more astonished at the boy's manner.

"Very well, then. Now you will hardly think it, but I have thought of a plan to make your safety quite certain."

"You have?"

"I really have, captain."

"Let me hear it, and rest assured I shall not suffer you to be a loser by what you do for me."

"I want nothing more than I have asked you for."

"Well, well—we shall see about that. I am impatient to hear your plan."

"It's simple enough."

"So much the better."

"All you have to do is to go up to the gaffer yonder, and say how very thankful you are for his hospitality, and tell him you are going because you have particular business which won't let you stay any longer."

"Well?"

"That's just to throw him off the scent, you know. Well, when you have said that, you must walk away towards the granary yonder. Do you see it?"

"That round place covered with red tiles?"

"Yes, that's it. You will, as I said, walk towards that, as if you were going straight away as fast as you could."

"I quite understand."

"Well, then, you see the path goes straight to the granary, and then turns round it. Now, as soon as ever you turn the corner of the building so as to be out of sight of the gaffer—for he is almost sure to stand and watch you—you must stand still with your back close to the wall and wait till I come to you."

"And what else?" said Dick.

"That's enough for the present Do as I tell you. He's coming, and if he sees me speaking to you it will be all up."

So saying, the boy hastily retreated, leaving Dick in anything but a settled state of mind.

A moment's consideration made him decide that it would be best to follow the boy's instructions.

Indeed, any movement would be better than remaining where he was.

Accordingly, he emerged from the shed and walked limpingly towards the farmer, who, seeing him approach, waved him off with an impatient and angry gesture.

But Dick, who had grown wonderfully stronger, continued to advance towards him.

Pausing when a few yards from him, he took off his hat and made a bow with much of that grace for which he had once been famous.

"I am grateful," he said, in tones that were full of the deepest irony—"very grateful to you for your kind hospitality; I am rested now, and as I have business which will admit of no delay, I am anxious to depart. Good morning!"

Again he bowed, and then immediately turned on his heel.

The words must have touched him, for he called out:

"Hi—hi—stop! Don't go yet! Come in the house and have something to eat and drink."

But Dick firmly shook his head, and continued to walk as fast as his stiffened limbs would let him towards the granary.

"D—n him for a fool!" cried the farmer, angrily. "However, he can't say anything against me now. I asked him and he refused, so that is his look-out."

The farmer seemed to derive abundant satisfaction from this circumstance, and, as the boy had foretold, continued to watch Dick's receding figure until it vanished round the angle of the granary.

Beyond this point it was no longer possible to observe the path without he had quitted his position, so that he never for one moment suspected that Dick had stopped.

With another hearty curse upon beggars and their pride, he turned on his heel and marched off to superintend the agricultural operations that were being carried on.

In the meanwhile, Dick, according to the instructions he had received, stopped close against the wall.

From this point he was able to obtain a tolerably extensive view, and his first proceeding was to scan the landscape with a rapid glance.

"All is well in that quarter," he said; "there are no officers to be seen there."

He unconsciously spoke these words in a much louder tone than was prudent—at any rate, the boy overheard them.

"Not there, captain," he said, "but they're a coming across by Banks's Meer, and will be at the farm in no time."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quite. But don't put yourself about, captain—there isn't the least occasion. If they come from Lunnon and think themselves mighty clever, they will find the north country chaps a match for them."

CHAPTER MCXX.

MR. SKELLUM MAKES A SEARCH IN THE GRANARY.

There was such a degree of confidence and assurance in the boy's manner that Dick Turpin really began in earnest to believe that his pursuers were destined to have one more defeat added to the long list of those which they had already experienced.

"This way, captain—follow me, and you will soon see what sort of a hiding-place I intend for you. Be quick, or the officers may catch a glimpse of you."

The boy held open the door of the granary, and Dick readily enough crossed the threshold, because it seemed pretty clear that if he attempted to move away from the shadow of the building he would inevitably be seen.

The interior of the granary seemed at first to be profoundly dark, but Dick's eyes growing accustomed to the gloom enabled him to perceive that his new friend was very busy with something which, on closer inspection proved to be a ladder.

This he placed against the wall in one corner, and going to a little shelf just over the door by which he had entered, produced a key.

With this in his hand he hastily ascended the ladder and thrust it into the lock of a trap-door.

"Now, captain," he said, "this door is a devil of a weight, because it is iron, you see, and I want you to help me to lift it up."

Dick also mounted the ladder, and willingly rendered the assistance required.

By their united aid the trap-door was easily raised, and when it had reached a certain height the boy propped it up with an iron rod provided for the purpose, which prevented it from falling.

"Now, captain," he said, "follow me, and the sooner the better—there is not a second to lose."

"Is this where you are going to conceal me?" asked Dick, glancing around him.

"This is the place, captain."

This upper portion of the granary was much better lighted than the lower, though here so much gloom reigned that it was not very easy to distinguish one object from another.

All that the place appeared to contain, however, was a large quantity of either wheat or oats—not contained in sacks, but spread upon the floor, which was composed of iron, and so contrived that it could be heated from below when necessary, so as to dry the grain which laid upon it.

The depth was considerable—certainly more than a yard.

"Now, look here, captain," said the boy; "you must go over to that corner yonder, and help me to make a hole in the corn—you must lay down in it, and I will cover you all over with it so that no one would be able to guess you are here. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

And by way of showing that he thought well of the plan, Dick hastened to the corner indicated, and set to work to scoop up the corn.

A sufficiently large hole was made in a very little time indeed, and then, by the boy's directions, Dick laid down.

"Cover your face with your cap, captain—that's it! Now you will be comfortable. I will throw the corn on very light, and you will be able to breathe without any trouble."

With this wise suggestion Dick at once complied.

With great speed his new friend set about completing his task, which he did with great skill; and no one to have looked at the surface of the corn on the granary floor would guess that it had been disturbed, let alone anyone hid under it.

"Now, captain," were his parting words, "don't on any account think of moving until I come back again, which you may depend I shall be sure to do as soon as ever it is safe for me to do so."

"All right!" said Dick, though his voice sounded so muffled and hollow that it fairly made the boy jump—"all right! Can you close the trap?"

"Oh, yes! And now don't say a word!

Dick was silent, and awaited the result with no small amount of anxiety.

The boy with great agility got down on to the ladder, lowered the trap-door—which was a much easier thing to do than to raise it—and having carefully locked it, placed the key in its accustomed place on the shelf over the door.

Listening for a moment, and finding all silent, he slipped out unobserved and hastened to his work.

There was a bright, twinkling glitter in his eyes as he shuffled along, whistling a popular air the while with a gusto that sufficiently indicated the extent of his satisfaction.

Dick lay and listened, but in vain.

Not the least sound was borne to his ears, which was no doubt in part owing to his being covered over in the manner we have described.

What seemed to him to be an endless length of time gradually passed away without anything arising that would lead to the belief that the police officers were within a hundred miles of the place.

Suddenly, however, the murmur of voices arose, which soon swelled into a loud chorus, but Dick could not distinguish any of the words that were uttered.

Then a door creaked open, and immediately afterwards Dick recognised the farmer's voice.

"But don't I tell you he's gone!" he exclaimed, in tones that showed he was in a state of great irritation. "I saw him go myself, with my own eyes; and while you are poking about my barns he is getting comfortably out of the way."

"And I tell you he hasn't gone!" was the reply. "If he had left the premises I must have seen him, or at least, some of my men, but we have not. No doubt he would catch sight of us coming, and make up his mind to hide."

It was Skellum who spoke.

Dick had no difficulty in identifying him.

"Never tell me!" responded the farmer, impatiently. "Where on earth could he hide, I should like to know?"

"I shall be able to answer that question best when I have had a good look round."

"Oh, very well—very well!"

"What place do you call this?"

"The granary."

"The granary, eh!" said Skellum, suspiciously. "It's devilish dark. Let's have a light."

"Be careful," remonstrated the farmer—"a spark would serve to set this place on fire, and then I should be a ruined man."

"Do you presume to obstruct his Majesty's officers in the execution of their duty?" asked Skellum, fiercely.

"No—no. Only I——"

"Very well, then, hold your row! Smithers, hand me a light."

Skellum took a lantern from one of his subordinates, and flashed the light of it well around him.

"There's nobody here, anyway. But what's above?"

"The drying-room."

"We'll just have a look at it, if merely for satisfaction's sake. How do you get up?"

"You may well ask that. A wilful man, though, will have his own way; but I am a Dutchman if you ain't losing precious minutes."

"That does not matter to you, does it?" retorted Skellum. "Do you know I have a good mind to take you into custody on suspicion of your having concealed Dick Turpin somewhere, or assisted him to escape!"

"Oh, pooh—pooh!"

"You may pooh-pooh as much as you like; but I've a d—d good mind to do it, now then! Your conduct is quite enough to justify me."

"Don't be absurd."

"Well, well, think yourself lucky if you get off without hearing anything more of this affair. Now tell me how we are to get up into the drying-room."

Skellum's persistence in this matter might well have seemed strange, for there was now no visible means of communication with the upper floor of the granary, the boy having had the prudence to restore the ladder to the latter place.

But, to tell the truth, Skellum was not more certain of anything in all his life than he was that Dick must be hidden somewhere among the farm buildings.

The farmer had acknowledged to having seen him only about a quarter of an hour ago, and Skellum was absolutely certain that no living creature could have crossed the open fields surrounding the homestead without their knowledge.

Having this conviction, he had resolved not to allow any nook or corner, no matter how unlikely it might appear, to pass unexamined.

In appearance a more unlikely place for Dick to be concealed in was that which Skellum was so resolved to pry into.

He saw the ladder fetched out and placed against the wall, and after that the key taken off the shelf over the entrance door.

"If he is up there," Skellum muttered, as he heard the key grate harshly in the rusty wards, "he must either have an accomplice about the farm—which I don't for a moment believe—or else he has gained an entrance by some other means, which is quite possible."

Having come to this conclusion, he followed the farmer up the ladder, and by their joint exertions the heavy trap-door was raised and fixed open.

The crisis had now arrived.

Dick would either escape entirely or be found at once.

When he heard that the farmer was one of the exploring party his uneasiness was great.

He considered, and with good reason, that his eyes would be much more likely to detect any little misplacement of the grain than the police officers', who had never been in the place before.

"This place seems quiet enough," said Skellum, looking around and failing to discern the least thing that was suspicious, for the boy had taken care to leave the grain perfectly smooth and level. "The only thing that I should like to feel certain of is, whether there is any other way in and out than that."

He pointed to the trap door.

"If I told you there wasn't I don't suppose you would take my word," answered the farmer, testily; "and I don't suppose you will feel satisfied until you have passed all this corn through a sieve to make sure he is not in it."

"I should be inclined to take that trouble if I could discern the least sign of its having been disturbed," answered Skellum, deliberately. "It would serve to hide fifty men."

He drew his sword as he spoke, and thrust it several times into the corn round about where he stood; but as that happened to be nowhere near the spot where Dick lay, it was, of course, without success.

"You are sure there is no other way by which admittance can be gained to this place?"

"I will give you my word of it; and if you really want to capture the fellow set out in pursuit of him. Your own common sense ought to tell you that I should not encourage such a vagabond about the place; if I did I should expect to be robbed for my pains, and serve me right too," he added.

"It would," replied Skellum. "Give me your hand. I meant no harm; only if you had the least idea what this fellow has caused me to go through lately, you would wonder at my being in my seven senses at all."

"Very likely," said the farmer. "I don't bear malice, and only hope you may catch him. It is quite certain that he can't be far away, for when I saw him he seemed to be so weak that he could hardly crawl."

"We are bound to have him," said Skellum, who was inspired with fresh hope by these words. "Come on—come on!"

In rather a tumultuous manner the whole of the party now quitted the drying-room.

The trap-door was lowered, the steps removed, and Dick might be said to have added one more to the long list of his hair-breadth escapes.

With keenly-sensitive ears, he listened to the departure of his foes, and when, at length, he heard them close the granary door behind them such a sensation of deep joyfulness came over him as cannot be expressed.

Soon he was left in absolute silence.

The position he was in was a most irksome one, yet he was afraid to ease himself by making the least movement, lest his enemies should return and detect the disarrangement of the grain.

Forced to be still, he endeavoured to reconcile himself as best he could.

The silence, the stillness he was obliged to maintain, and perhaps, too, the confined space he had to breathe in, added to his excessive weakness and fatigue, insensibly drew him into a slumber, which rendered him for a while happily oblivious of all his troubles.

How long this slumber lasted he had no means of judging; but suddenly he awoke without knowing whether anything had occurred to awaken him or not.

He was in doubt, too, where he was, the intense darkness and stillness making him think that he must be in the gipsy's caravan.

But a slight tapping reached his ears, and then, with a

ash, the remembrance of what had occurred came back to him.

Before he could control himself sufficiently to have entire command over his actions, he started up.

No sooner had he done so than he became fully sensible of the imprudent nature of the step.

It was now taken, and could not be recalled.

With fast-beating heart, he listened.

The tapping came again.

"Captain—captain!" he heard some one cry, in a muffled voice, which seemed at least to be miles and miles away.

Dick clasped his hands over his temples, for his brain was not quite clear yet.

Then the tapping was renewed.

This time it was louder than before.

Immediately after, a voice much nearer and clearer said:

"Captain—captain! Where are you? Come and help me—I can't lift the trap-door by myself."

The last words were more than sufficient to dispel any lingering doubts.

"All right!" he answered. "I hear you now—I am coming."

And now Dick's practised hearing did him good service.

Dark as it was, yet he was able to make his way without hesitation to the trap-door.

"How can I help you?" he asked, groping busily the while with both his hands upon the floor.

"You will find a ring," answered his friend. "Put out all your strength, and between us we shall manage it."

Dick soon found the iron ring the boy had mentioned.

By their united exertions the ponderous trap-door was raised.

"Have they gone?" was Dick's first eager question as he caught sight of the boy.

"Yes—long ago. It's all right. Why didn't you answer me when I called you first? You have kept me here knocking for ten minutes at least."

"I was asleep."

"Asleep? Well, that's what I call a good 'un—blest if it isn't! The idea, now, that you should go off to sleep, and the officers poking and prying after you everywhere!"

"It was more like a swoon than slumber," answered Dick; "but I fancy it must have been the latter, I feel so wonderfully refreshed."

"Glad to hear it, captain—you will require to make use of all your energies."

"What has happened?"

"Oh, it's all right enough now! Gaffer and the officers have got first-rate friends. I thought once they would have had a round or two, but now it's all right."

"How all right?"

"Why, they have searched everywhere, and failed to find the least trace of you; and if the gaffer wasn't so very positive, they would not believe you had been here at all. As it is, they vow and maintain that he must have been mistaken in the length of time that elapsed after you left him."

"Oh, that is it! And how has it ended?"

"Why, being compelled to rest, they have accepted the gaffer's invitation. Their horses are all standing in the stable, and they are sitting in the big kitchen, feasting like so many hungry wolves."

"Some of them are outside, watching, I suppose?"

"No, not one."

"Then I must go, for such a favourable state of things may not continue long."

"Now, captain, just be easy, will you? Look here! I have brought you something good in the shape of eating and drinking. Take it, and sit still a bit."

These words reminded Dick that a meal of any kind would be a most acceptable thing; so, without hesitation, he very gladly accepted the provisions which the boy had so thoughtfully provided for him.

It was most important that he should recover his strength as soon as possible.

"And now, captain, take my word for it, you are quite safe where you are—that is, for the present. I should not recommend you to stay all night."

"I cannot. It is most important I should leave at once."

"So you shall, never fear; but you must not fail to keep your word."

"What do you mean?"

"To relate the particulars of your ride to York."

Dick could not refuse compliance with this favour, and so, without any demur, he began, and related with tolerable minuteness all those incidents which have already been placed before the reader.

Never did narrator have a more attentive listener.

Every word was greedily swallowed by his ears; and when Dick brought his narration to a conclusion, he drew a long breath and said:

"Ah, captain, I wish I had got to have it all over again!"

"I would gratify you if it laid at all within my power, but I have most particular business on hand. Tell me—how far am I from York city?"

"Maybe three-parts of a mile."

"No more?"

"Certainly no more—rather less, if anything."

This was welcome news indeed.

Dick drew from his pocket a quantity of valuables.

"Here, my lad," he said, "take these in return for the service you have done me. If I had ten times as much, you would be equally welcome to it."

"No, no, captain—I want no more than I asked you for, nor I won't have more either, so take it back."

"Wait a moment! I shall not take it back; and if you have any serious thoughts of taking to the road, let me earnestly implore you to abandon the idea."

"I can't do it—it has been my dream day and night for—oh, I can't tell how long."

"No matter," said Dick, with a tinge of bitterness and regret in his tones. "Look at me! You see what I am now—a poor, miserable, hunted wretch, with not half my stock of life left in my body, surrounded by dangers which I can scarcely hope to evade much longer, deprived of every comfort and enjoyment, short of everything—as peace, home, friends—that can make existence pleasant. This it is to be a highwayman."

These words produced an effect, and Dick, perceiving it, hastened to follow up with all the dissuasive arguments he could call up.

His trouble was not thrown away.

"You have conquered, captain," said the boy, at length, though the sigh which accompanied the words testified the amount of disappointment he experienced. "I didn't consider the matter properly."

"You did not. But you see now what to look forward to. I have been famous, celebrated, successful; and yet, what am I now? Do you think, if I could have seen the end, that I should have embraced such a career?"

"And shall you give it up?"

"For ever. My sole object now is to get away from England, and when I succeed, no more will be heard of Dick Turpin, the highwayman."

An impressive silence followed these words.

The boy hardly knew how to break it, and besides, he had not altogether recovered himself from this rude awakening from his cherished day-dream.

As for Dick, sad, regretful reminiscences deprived him of speech.

With a sudden effort he aroused himself, and having insisted upon the boy receiving the valuables he had drawn out of his pocket, he said:

"Now show me the way out of this place. Finish up the priceless service you have rendered me to-day by putting me on the nearest road to York."

"I will go with you, captain, if you like."

"Many thanks, but for your own sake you had better not. Should we chance to be seen together, the consequences would be most serious to you."

"Never mind me."

"But I do mind you, and will not allow you to make any further sacrifice. Be quick—lead the way!"

No longer attempting to carry his point, the boy obeyed.

The granary was carefully restored to its usual state, so as to leave nothing as a clue to what had taken place, and in a few minutes afterwards Dick once more found himself standing in the open air.

The night was a very dark one, and this, for Dick, was



[DICK TURPIN SHOOTS THE GAME COCK.]

a most fortunate circumstance, though it made the task of keeping the proper road a more difficult one.

Suddenly a loud burst of unruly laughter was carried to their ears.

"The officers are enjoying themselves above a bit, ain't they, captain?"

"It appears so. They are close at hand, are they not?"

"Yes. Look—you see yonder light?"

"Is that the room they are in?"

"Yes. They are making merry now."

"I shall defeat them," said Dick, with something like a return of that energy which had been his characteristic in times of old. "Something seems now to whisper to my heart and say I shall defeat them."

"Of course you will, captain; I have no doubt of it."

The sound of his companion's voice brought him back to a closer consideration of time present.

"York," he cried—"where lies York?"

"Straight before us. Follow me a little way, and I will show it to you."

Dick willingly complied.

A few steps took them clear of all the farm buildings, and pausing on a little knoll, the boy extended his arm, and said:

"There is York."

Dick looked eagerly in the direction thus pointed out.

A few dim and twinkling lights could just be distinguished in the far distance.

"Many thanks!" he said. "I could find my way unerringly with a less guide than that. Farewell! We shall not meet again; but rest assured that Dick Turpin will always think of you with the deepest gratitude. Follow my advice—let nothing induce you to return to your former project. Once more, farewell!"

CHAPTER MCXXI.

THE LAWYER'S CLERK LEARNS MORE THAN IS GOOD FOR HIM TO KNOW.

Dick Turpin turned upon his heel and strode away with as much swiftness as his strength would permit.

The boy looked after him for a few moments in surprise.

Then he took a few paces forward, as though he had made up his mind to follow.

But he soon checked himself, for he remembered what Dick had said.

"I will stop here and watch him, though," he muttered. "He didn't say a word agen that, did he?"

And with a dogged air, he fixed himself in one position, and remained without moving long after Dick's dusky form had disappeared.

As for the fugitive himself, he could not banish his friend's image from his mind.

The effect which his fidelity had produced upon him was marked indeed.

Only those who have been cut off from all friendly intercourse with their fellow-creatures can truly estimate Dick's feelings on this occasion.

There was a warm glow about his heart, and more than once he felt inclined to call him to his side.

But the recollection of the important business he had under hand would make him change his determination and increase his speed.

Although dark, the hour was by no means late, and as the City of York was such a short distance off, he had every hope of being able to complete his business with the lawyers without delay.

As he strode along, he strove to concentrate his thoughts upon the matter in hand, so that he should be able to give a clear and connected narrative when the time came.

It so chanced that Dick did not catch sight of a single person until after he had entered the city.

He now regretted that he had not made some inquiries of the boy about the address of the solicitors.

Doubtless he would have given him such directions as would have enabled him to find out their abode without much trouble.

Upon finding himself in the streets of the ancient city, he had no other guide than chance.

He walked on at random.

The quarter in which he found himself seemed by no means to be the most respectable; but Dick did not care for that.

Upon turning a corner, his ears were assailed by some strains of music—if the vigorous scraping of a fiddle can be so called.

Directly afterwards, he discovered that the sounds proceeded from a kind of public-house, in the front window of which a rude oil lamp was burning.

Here Dick paused and took a peep into the interior, which he was easily able to do, for a large red curtain, by which the gazing of intruders could have been prevented, was only partially drawn across the casement.

He beheld a group of rough-looking individuals of both sexes dancing vigorously to the fiddle.

"If I could only get a little brandy," thought Dick—"only a very little, I feel as though it would be putting fresh life into me. Shall I run the risk of entering? I think I will. There could not be a better place than this; everybody's attention seems to be engaged."

He hesitated for another moment, and then, turning suddenly, he crossed the threshold.

He procured the stimulant he needed without any difficulty, and might have left the place unnoticed had he not shown himself to be a stranger by asking to be directed to the solicitors.

"Flint and Steel?" said the woman who had served him, and who now bent upon him a keen, inquiring look. "Is it possible that you are such a stranger here as not to know that?"

"You might guess it," he answered, quietly, "or I should not have troubled you. Good night."

"Nay—stop! Do you know the Minster front?"

"Of course."

"Then you know Flint and Steel's, for the house is just opposite."

Upon learning this, Dick retreated hastily, scarcely pausing to bid the woman good night.

"I must not stay long in York," he muttered. "Fortunately, there is nothing to detain me."

The streets were all very quiet.

Just then, the chiming of a clock somewhere close at hand struck upon his ear.

He listened, and counted the strokes carefully.

"Eight o'clock," he murmured, as the last of the musical sounds died away. "The night is younger than I thought by one hour at least, and if I am not nearer the Minster than I believed myself to be, it is very strange."

Dick was right.

He was indeed very close to York Minster, for upon gaining the next corner he found himself in full view of the grand old edifice, which looked doubly magnificent in the obscurity which hung about it.

With a quicker and firmer step—for the brandy was beginning to exert its influence—Dick walked in the wished-for direction.

A very few moments afterwards, and he was standing before the principal front of the building.

How to find out precisely which was the residence of the solicitors was not so easy as he had fancied, for there was a row of twenty houses before him, any one of which might have been considered opposite.

"Chance must guide me," he said. "It will not do to linger, or to inquire again. I will try the middle house."

He did so.

He pulled a bell-handle vigorously; and after waiting for a considerable time, a woman carrying a candle made her appearance.

"Next door!" she said, harshly, in answer to Dick's question, and then abruptly retired.

"I am fortunate, I suppose," he murmured, as he stood before the next house.

His eyes were tolerably well accustomed to the darkness by this time, and he was just able to make out that there was a large brass plate on this door, though he could not distinguish the letters upon it.

This time his summons for admittance was promptly attended to.

A thin, loose-jointed young man, with tow-coloured hair, opened the door, and, in a disagreeable voice, inquired Dick's business.

"I want to see Mr. Flint."

"Not at home!" was the snappish answer.

"Mr. Steel, then."

"Engaged!"

"I will wait, then," replied Dick; and as he spoke the words he crossed the threshold, thus frustrating the young man in his design of slamming the door in his face.

"But don't you know, fellow, that business hours are over?"

"I am quite aware of it; but I come upon a private and important matter that will brook not a moment's delay."

"What is it?"

"That I decline to tell anyone but Mr. Steel."

"Then you will have to come to-morrow, for he is engaged the whole of to-night."

"I cannot come to-morrow," responded Dick. "I am in no hurry, and will wait here until he is at leisure."

Just at that moment a door a little way along the passage was opened, and an elderly man, who wore a large white wig, made his appearance.

He carried a wax candle in one hand, which he held high up above his head.

Then bowing very profoundly, he said:

"Excuse the darkness of my dwelling, your worship. I heartily wish that I dwelt in a place more fit for you to visit."

"Pooh—stuff! None of that gammon, Steel—you know d—d well I don't like it!"

Dick started when he heard this last voice.

"Sir Humphrey," he ejaculated—"and here! What could be more fortunate?"

It was indeed the worthy baronet who now emerged from the lawyer's apartment.

Dick hastened towards him.

"Sir Humphrey," he cried, in an earnest voice, "you know me. Don't speak now—ask the lawyer to go back into the room with us; I have something of the most vital interest to communicate to you."

The baronet's face became in a moment the very picture of extreme amazement.

"You here?" he exclaimed at length. "Why, what the devil——"

"Hush—hush!" interrupted Dick, for he saw that the singular-looking young man who had opened the door stood gazing in open-mouthed astonishment upon the scene. "Not another word, I beg! Let me entreat you to accede to my request!"

"Who is this?" asked Mr. Steel, who had been not a little startled by the suddenness with which Dick had made his appearance.

"Why, it's——"

"You shall know in another moment," cried Dick, in a much louder voice, thus completely drowning what the baronet said. "But I have called to-night because I have a communication of the utmost importance to make to you."

"Come in, then—come in. Shut the door, Rogers. What the devil are you standing there with it open for?"

These last words were addressed to the loose-jointed young man, and who was one of the articled clerks.

So absorbed were all his faculties by what was taking place, that he was quite oblivious of the fact that he had omitted to close the front door until thus reminded of it.

By the time he had turned round and done this the little party had entered the room.

Mr. Steel went in last, and he carefully shut the door behind him.

But Rogers, the clerk, was either of an inquiring tone of mind, or else especially interested in what was taking place in the lawyer's sanctum, for he dropped down on his knees on the mat and applied his ear closely to the key-hole.

Leaving him to pick up what he can in this manner, we will make the reader acquainted with what actually took place.

When the door was closed, Mr. Steel looked first at one and then at the other, wondering which would speak first.

He was soon relieved on this head, for Dick was fully conscious that he had not a moment to lose.

Addressing himself to the baronet, he said:

"You, sir, know me, and I fancy will give me a better character than most people. Since, by your kind aid, I succeeded in making my escape, I have had many strange adventures; but the most important is that I chanced to overhear the details of a deep-laid plot, which an unworthy villain has planned against your happiness and your daughter's."

If what Dick had said at first was not sufficient to arrest the attention of Sir Humphrey, this mention of his daughter was more than enough for the purpose.

A change instantly came over his face, and in a voice and manner entirely different from what he generally employed, he cried:

"Speak out quickly—do not keep me in suspense!"

"Nothing is further from my desire."

Dick then, without one word of preface, related what he had overheard while in the gipsy's caravan.

Before he had spoken many words, Mr. Steel became deeply interested, and, taking out a pocket-book, occupied himself by scribbling down copious notes.

Dick had reflected upon what he had to say, and had beforehand called up everything in his mind, so that he was able to repeat the conversation almost word for word.

The baronet drew a long breath as soon as the narrative was concluded.

Then, recovering himself, he said, with great fervour and heartiness:

"D—n the sneaking rascal! Milly was right in reading his character. If I had him here I'd——"

"Hush—hush!" interrupted Mr. Steel, blandly. "No violence, your worship—no violence!"

"Violence be d—d! Am I to learn all this, and not have a word to say for myself about it? No! I could rather be——"

"Pardon me—pray pardon me; but what we have just heard is most important. Important!—why, the word seems a thousand times too weak to express it. This is what I call providential—truly providential. Of course," he added, turning to Dick, "you will come forward at the time appointed, and take your oath that all these particulars are correct? And then there will be about the clearest case of conspiracy that was ever laid before a court of justice. But, what the devil do you keep shaking your head in that fashion for?"

"Because," said Dick, speaking very slowly and solemnly—"because I cannot come forward in the way you mention. I have every desire to do so, but circumstances render it impossible."

The solicitor regarded him with an air of blank amazement.

"Why—why?" he asked.

"Sir Humphrey will tell you."

"Nay—tell him yourself."

"Then, Mr. Steel, I have a still greater secret to confide in you—a still more astounding revelation to make."

"What is it?"

"You have heard, I suppose, of one Dick Turpin?"

"Yes."

"The highwayman?"

"Yes. What of him?"

"Nothing more than that he now stands in person before you."

It would be perfectly useless to attempt to convey any idea of the effect which this altogether unexpected announcement had upon the lawyer.

To use a mild term, his astonishment would have lasted much longer than it did, had not Sir Humphrey exerted himself to put an end to it.

"Don't be so dumbfoundered, man! It's all true—every word of it. Never mind about his being a highwayman—that has got nothing to do with the matter in hand. He is a downright good fellow, and I would take his word at any time for a thousand pounds."

On any other occasion Mr. Steel would have been staggered by hearing the baronet speak in this manner, for, of course, he was well acquainted with his sentiments regarding poachers and such-like.

But his former surprise quite overpowered this, and he did not even make a remark.

"I need not say any more to convince you that I cannot do as you have said," exclaimed Dick. "But if you will take down what I have said, I am ready to sign it in your presence. More I cannot do; and I must leave it to your skill as a lawyer to make the best use possible of the information I have given you."

Mr. Steel inclined his head, and Dick continued:

"But this is not all: I will also sign another document that will prove that the half-brother of the late Marquis of Belgarde will never claim the estates, and consequently Sir Humphrey's daughter will succeed to the whole of the property."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Steel, with additional wonderment. "Is it possible you can do this?"

"You shall judge. The half-brother I have mentioned has been for years my closest and most intimate friend. I would have sacrificed my life a thousand times over to have saved him from harm, and yet, by an accursed chance, it was my hand which deprived him of life."

"Your hand?"

"Yes. It was by the purest accident, though it will never cease to prey upon me with heart-corroding remorse. And yet, if he had been put to his choice, poor fellow, he would have infinitely preferred dying by my hand to falling into the power of his foes and ending his days at Tyburn."

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked the bewildered lawyer.

"Of my best friend—of the truest, noblest fellow that ever breathed—of one who has of late been known as Tom King, the highwayman."

"Tom King?" ejaculated the baronet and Mr. Steel in chorus.

"Yes, or I should say of the Marquis of Belgarde; and to prove to you that he was no other, I will relate you his life as he related it to me. It was under a solemn pledge of secrecy; but had he the power, he would not blame me for breaking the trust if he knew that it was to prevent the perpetration of a fraud, and to assist Sir Humphrey's daughter to obtain possession of her own."

Dick then told the whole history of Tom King, not omitting one particular.

The climax of Mr. Steel's amazement was now reached.

He was intimately acquainted with all the details of the

affair, and found that what Dick said exactly tallied throughout.

"And you will sign a declaration of all this?"

"Most willingly. I rejoice to think I have the power of making this atonement—for so I consider it—for the evil I have done; and my only regret is that I cannot do more."

"Don't let that be a regret, then," said the lawyer. "You have done more than enough already. I have been in practice now a great many years, and consequently have had a tolerable insight into life; but this is altogether unparalleled—absolutely unparalleled."

"I should rather think so!" exclaimed the baronet.

"There is only one thing," added Dick, "and that is, that the declarations must be signed now. My enemies are close at hand, and searching in every direction for me. I shall have to take the greatest precaution to elude them. To return here again would be wholly out of the question—to stay very long would be dangerous to a degree."

"You think they will track you, then?"

"I do."

"Then not a moment shall be lost. And if I can do anything for you, depend upon it I will."

"Many thanks."

"I will set about the declarations now."

He touched a bell as he spoke.

The tinkling sound was the first intimation Dick received of what had taken place.

Had he been aware in time, he would most likely have urged some objections to the adoption of such a course.

Now, however, it was too late to interfere.

A profound silence followed.

At least a moment elapsed, and then Mr. Steel exclaimed:

"Where the devil has Rogers gone to that he does not answer the bell?"

And again he repeated the summons, this time ringing with all the violence he was capable of.

But no better result followed.

Dick's suspicions, ever on the alert, were now thoroughly and completely roused.

"We must find out where Mr. Rogers is without further delay," he said, in very significant tones.

He crossed the room with a rapid step as he pronounced the words, and opened the door quietly.

He peeped out first; but the entrance-hall of the lawyer's house was deserted.

Not a sign of a human being could be seen.

Dick emerged.

The first thing which attracted his attention was that the front door was ajar.

Hastening to it, he peeped out; but seeing nothing of a suspicious nature, he quickly closed it again.

The lawyer looked at him inquiringly.

"What do you make of all this? What are you going to do?"

"What has taken place is clear enough," was the calm response. "Your clerk—whom I distrusted the moment I saw him—has managed to hear enough of our conversation to know who I am. Having learned this, he has set off to fetch the officers; doubtless they will be here in a few moments."

"And can you stand there like that and talk quietly about such an event?" cried the lawyer, aghast. "I am past being surprised to-night, or I should be astounded now."

Dick smiled.

"All will be well," he said—"take my word for it. First of all, let us proceed to business, for time is precious. Believe me," he added, with a smile, "there is not a moment to be lost."

"Well, you are certainly the most extraordinary—— But there, such words as those do waste time. What do you want me to do?"

"Why, to put my communication into as few words as you possibly can, and then I will sign and attest it."

"But you are running too much risk by remaining here like this. If you really think that the clerk has gone out for the purpose of fetching the police officers, you ought not to hesitate a moment, but be off at once."

It was Sir Humphrey Yeomans who spoke.

"Leave that to me," answered Dick, with a coolness seemed to his two auditors to be nothing short of madness. "Go on with the writing. As for you, Sir Humphrey," he added, "you ought to understand by this time that I am not the worst hand in the world at eluding police officers."

"That's true enough, I admit; and how on earth you could have managed to get here while the officers are keeping such a sharp look-out in every quarter, passes my comprehension."

Dick made no other reply to this speech than a smile, for he could perceive that their voices confused the lawyer a little, who was desirous of being as brief as possible, and yet most anxious not to omit any circumstance of importance.

For a time, then, there was absolute silence, broken only by the chirping of the lawyer's quill pen as it hurried over the paper.

Dick, in the meanwhile, was listening intently; but without suffering any sign to appear that he was doing so.

Unknown to either the baronet or the lawyer, he had, at the moment when he closed the front door, not only turned the key in the lock, but also slipped a bolt into its socket.

Having done this, he was quite sure the clerk would not be able to enter either suddenly or noiselessly.

There was a little anxiety perceptible in the glance which he bent upon the lawyer, who was still writing away as if for a wager.

Sir Humphrey seemed plunged into a deep fit of meditation.

Dick was standing close to the door of the lawyer's sanctum.

As this was open he commanded a good view of a portion of the entrance-hall and the front door.

Presently the sound of a stealthy footstep outside came upon his ear.

It stopped upon the threshold.

Then an effort was quietly made to push the door open; but being fastened, of course it was a failure.

The whispering of several voices followed.

Dick turned his eyes towards the baronet and Mr. Steel.

Neither appeared aware of what had taken place so far.

Sir Humphrey looked to be in a profounder meditation than ever.

The lawyer's pen was going at a wonderful rate; but as his face was bent down towards the table, Dick could not note its expression.

The conversation outside was not of very long continuance.

It was terminated by some one raising the ponderous knocker on the door, and banging it down once with great violence.

The sound echoed and re-echoed through the house.

Sir Humphrey started up, looking as scared as if he had been shot.

Mr. Steel dropped his pen, which, in return, discharged a large blot of ink on the white paper.

"God bless me!" he ejaculated. "What's that?"

"Don't be alarmed," returned Dick, with unruffled composure. "It's only Rogers come back."

"Only Rogers! Well, that's a good one, certainly! But come, I have just finished—sign your name."

Dick very readily obeyed this injunction, and wrote his name in full in a tolerably legible hand.

"There," he said, as he threw down the pen, "my mind is lightened of a heavy load. I feel little doubt that what I have written will defeat the machinations of a villain; and my sincere trust is that it will suffice to secure to Sir Humphrey's daughter that which is lawfully her right. Should this be accomplished I shall feel that I have done something towards requiting the priceless service she so generously and freely accorded me."

Dab came the knock at the front door again.

This time it seemed like a full stop to Turpin's speech.

CHAPTER MCXXII.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN RESOLVES TO SET ASIDE HIS VOW.

"WHAT's to be done?" asked Mr. Steel, a little nervously, for the thought just then occurred to him that it would

not be much to his advantage if he was found harbouring and concealing Dick Turpin in his house.

Dick was about to speak, but Sir Humphrey interrupted him.

"Do?" he cried. "Why, I will soon tell you what we must do. By hook or by crook, somehow, we must save this brave fellow. It would be the very height of baseness to allow him to fall into the hands of his enemies."

The lawyer licked his lips, and glared around him in a nervous, despairing way.

"I don't see what is to be done."

"Then I'll tell you," exclaimed Sir Humphrey, quickly. "I have been thinking it over. Lock him up in your big safe yonder, and when the officers come in say that he left some time ago."

"No—no," said Dick. "Many thanks to you, Sir Humphrey, for manifesting so much interest in my safety; but I cannot consent to this. Should suspicion be directed towards my hiding-place, and the door consequently opened, I should have no chance of escape. Besides, both of you would be seriously compromised as well, which is the consideration which weighs most with me. No—no. What I want is to get out of the house with all speed possible. Put me in the way of doing that, and I shall be satisfied—more than satisfied."

Dab—dab!

Those outside were growing impatient, for the bell was pulled violently.

"Now," said Dick, "I dare not stay another second. How can I best leave?"

But the lawyer's wits had either deserted him, or else he had some motive for withholding a reply to Dick's question.

The latter now begun to show signs of uneasiness, as well he might.

"Hark!" he said. "Answer me one question. Is there a trap-door at the top of your house?"

"No."

Dick made a gesture of despair.

"But the attic window opens upon the tiles."

"Enough," said Dick. "Farewell! Do not keep the officers any longer. When they enter, try and induce them to depart."

Dick did not stop to say another word.

In point of fact, he had stayed much too long already.

With a rapid bound he gained the passage, and dashed up the staircase.

The knocking now was both loud and incessant.

On gaining the first floor, Dick found himself involved in darkness, but by retaining his grasp upon the balusters he was able to continue his ascent without much extra difficulty or delay.

Finding himself at the top, he groped about until he found a door.

Where it led he knew not; but he adopted the course most calculated to remove his ignorance on this point, for he lifted the latch without a second's hesitation.

A scream instantly ensued; but Dick, nevertheless, crossed the threshold, closed the door after him, and bolted it.

"Hush!" he said. "Make no sound—you have nothing to fear."

But finding this mild remonstrance had not the effect of silencing the female, he had recourse to threats.

"Another sound like that," he exclaimed, in a furious voice, "and it will be your last! Your head shall be severed from your body at one blow!"

This produced perfect stillness.

The bed-room was very dark, but yet not so profoundly so as to prevent Dick from ascertaining the position of the window, though it was covered with a curtain.

He grasped this, and not stopping to draw it to one side, gave it a sudden snatch, which brought down the whole of it upon him, well-nigh smothering him with dust.

But the next moment he had the little lattice window open, and was crouching down on all-fours on the tiles.

The roof of the lawyer's house was tremendously steep, but it was protected by a very low parapet.

This was not very far below Dick, and he cautiously suffered himself to slip down until his feet rested against it.

Then, carefully raising himself, he peeped over in order to ascertain whether he was at the front or the back of the house.

He fancied the former, and found that he was not mistaken.

He had drawn back at first, fancying that the police officers below might see him.

But, upon more careful scrutiny, he discovered that not one of them could be seen.

This was more than Dick had hoped for.

He now looked round him with an anxious glance in the hope of finding some means of descending safely and speedily to the earth.

Before he had time to decide, he was startled by a flash of light and the sound of contentious voices.

Looking behind him, he found that both proceeded from the attic he had just left.

"Curses on her squalling!" he muttered, angrily. "It must have had the effect of bringing the officers at once upon my track."

There could be little doubt about the correctness of this supposition.

She must have told them, too, by what means he had left the chamber, for the window was dashed open with great violence.

Then Dick, finding himself hard pressed, performed a feat which few indeed would have ventured to attempt.

The pieces of smooth stone with which the top of the parapet was coped were certainly less than a foot in width.

Nevertheless, Dick stepped confidently on to this narrow path, and ran with great swiftness to the further extreme of the row of houses.

The officers at the window were so amazed at the performance of this feat that they forgot to move.

Indeed, they expected every moment to see the fugitive fall headlong down.

And one false step, one moment's giddiness, and nothing could have saved Dick from being dashed to pieces on the stones in the street below him.

But upon gaining the end of the parapet he paused.

The moment they saw him still, the officers recovered their motion, and with more haste than was consistent with either prudence or safety, scrambled through the attic window.

Before they had all emerged, however, there arose a general cry of horror.

They had witnessed Dick standing at the end of the parapet, when suddenly, to their intense alarm, they saw him plunge over and disappear.

"He is down!" they cried, with a simultaneous yell—"he has fallen!"

For a second they were so paralysed by the unexpectedness of this event that they knew not what to do.

Then, recovering themselves, they hurried in a straggling line along the gutter, being impelled to ascertain the worst at once.

The corner was reached, but it took them four times as long at the very least to do it as Dick occupied.

Shuddering in anticipation of the awful sight which would be presented to them in the street below, they peeped over the abyss.

They looked down.

The ground was not very clearly discernible, it is true; yet they were certain they should be able to see so large an object as a man on the flagstones.

But there was nothing—positively nothing.

They stared at each other aghast.

"Where is he?" was the general question.

No one could reply.

Had they not all witnessed the same thing, they might have been in doubt as to what had occurred.

But there was no fear of this.

All had seen him plainly.

Where was he?

To have reached the ground unhurt after leaping from so great a height and afterwards to have run away was so incredible as not to be worth a moment's thought.

No less impossible did it seem for him to have leaped to the next pile of building, which was the width of a wide street distant—some thirty feet at least.

Had he dissolved himself into air, his vanishment could not have been more complete.

Amazement now gave place to consternation, which was so great that the officers could do nothing but gaze blankly at each other for some moments.

Recovering, they searched about in the hope of finding out something or other—they knew not what—by means of which the descent had been accomplished.

But there was nothing save the almost smooth brick walls.

Compelled at last to confess themselves entirely beaten, they turned away with the intention of making their way down into the street, vaguely hoping that they might find something here which would put them in the way of clearing up this great mystery.

But they took the precaution of leaving one of their number on the housetop.

Although they lost not a moment, yet, as a matter of course, they were some time before they reached the right spot, which they had no difficulty in finding.

Here, however, they failed to find anything that held out the faintest promise of giving them a clue.

"We have been deceived," said one—"I feel sure of it."

"But how?" asked another. "Did not we all of us see him jump down? And now where is he?—neither below nor above, that I am quite certain."

Leaving them to clear up this matter in the best way they were able, we will take the reader at once out of the dark.

First, however, we should state that these officers formed no part of Skellum's band, but were a portion of the city constabulary, to the head office of which the clerk had gone after overhearing that his master's strange visitor was no other than Dick Turpin, for whose arrest so large a reward was offered.

Whether Skellum would have been as much at fault in the present business as they were, we will leave the reader to judge for himself after the explanation of what took place has been given.

At the moment, then, when Dick reached the end of the row of houses, he gave himself up to despair.

He thought that the only course left open to him was to turn at bay and die defending himself from his foes, for to overleap the space intervening between him and the next block of building was out of the power of mortal man, and there were no means visible by which he could even hope to accomplish a descent.

It was just at this juncture that he caught sight of a huge waggon loaded with straw.

It was creeping along very slowly, for the horses were weary and the burden almost beyond their powers of draught.

The straw had been piled up to what seemed to be a most dangerous height.

It was, however, well secured by numerous wain-ropes.

It could be likened to nothing but a huge stack of straw on wheels.

As Dick's eyes fell upon it, an idea suggested itself to his mind.

Compared with the distance to the street below, that which intervened between himself and the top of the waggon seemed trifling, though the reader may be sure that it was by no means inconsiderable.

Dick's idea was the desperate one of springing from the parapet to the moving mass beneath.

It was a reckless, daring deed, such as no one would think of attempting unless he valued his life most lightly.

To Dick, however, any fate was preferable to falling into the hands of his foes.

That was a triumph he was firmly determined they should never gain.

If he remained where he stood, death was certain.

If he essayed the frightful leap, there was a faint chance of escape.

Consequently, he had everything to gain, and nothing to lose, by making the attempt.

It cannot be said that he paused thus to reason with himself.

In point of fact, he did not; but these conclusions seemed present to him as though he had arrived at them by a long course of reflection.

Accordingly, he made the terrific spring.

The straw-laden waggon was immediately beneath him, and luckily close to the side of the road.

In a second Dick felt he had alighted upon the yielding, slippery mass; but he was breathless, and almost powerless.

Yet he had sense enough left to be aware that he was sliding down—falling.

With that irresistible instinct common to everyone in such cases he clutched madly with his hands in order to check his descent.

Yet down he went until his convulsive grasp encountered something tangible.

He held on with the death-grip of a drowning man.

It was a rope which he had touched, and his fingers closed round it with a pressure that scarce any power could have loosened.

In this manner, hanging by the side of the waggon, he was carried for some distance—until, indeed, he recovered himself sufficiently to comprehend where he was, and recollect what had happened.

By this time, the waggon, having turned a corner, carried him completely out of sight of the house from the top of which he had leaped, so that his foes did not even catch a sight of the vehicle which had enabled him to escape.

Dick's strength was tried severely by hanging there, with his whole weight supported by his hands; and his first consideration when he recovered possession of his faculties was, how he should extricate himself from his present uncomfortable position.

He glanced up to the top of the waggon.

The driver was in perfect ignorance of what had occurred; and Dick thought that if he could only manage to climb up on to the top of the straw by means of the cross rope he held by it would be an excellent means of getting out of the city unseen and undetected.

But, alas! he had hung down too long for him to retain the amount of strength sufficient for the performance of this feat.

He tried often before he relinquished the attempt, but each trial was feebler than the one which preceded it, and all he accomplished was the exhaustion of his own strength.

Eventually, with a heavy sigh, he was compelled to own to himself that the achievement was impossible.

He found it hard, however, to abandon this project, for the more he reflected upon it, the more certain he felt it would enable him to get clear of the city without leaving the slightest clue behind him.

But abandon it he must; and therefore, with true philosophy, he gave up speculating upon that which was impossible, and turned the whole of his attention towards the consideration of what he might perform.

One course only appeared to lay open to him.

That was to choose the earliest moment and the best opportunity for letting go his hold upon the rope and dropping to the ground.

It was most lucky for him that the streets were so completely deserted, otherwise he must have been seen clinging to the side of the waggon by the first chance pedestrian.

Looking around as well as the darkness would allow, he found that he was in a street of a particularly quiet character.

Surely, if any place was suited to the accomplishment of his purpose, this was.

He determined to hesitate no longer.

Giving a kind of spring backward, so that in alighting he should escape the wheels, he released the rope.

He measured his spring so well that he alighted upon his feet without experiencing much of a shock, though he was unable to keep his balance.

Dropping upon his hands and knees, he remained in this position until the waggon had passed on to what he considered to be a safe distance.

The driver was as unconscious of what had taken place as he was on the former occasion, and the ponderous vehicle continued on its slow but uninterrupted course.

"I must get out of York," he murmured, as he rose slowly to his feet, and brushed the dirt from his soiled apparel. "It will be madness to remain here any longer. What an escape," he added, accompanying the words with a long-drawn breath. "Who else, I wonder, would have ventured such a leap as that?"

Looking back, the feat he had performed seemed to him

to be ten times more prodigious than when he had resolved upon it.

"My time has not yet come," he said to himself; and it appeared as though he tried hard to convince himself that he really thought this as well as said it. "I feel no inward monitor to tell me that my career is over. At any rate, I was not destined to perish through taking that leap."

He walked on with more briskness than might have been expected, considering the state he was in; but his recent miraculous escape—for so we may in justice term it—revived in his breast those hopes of quitting England, and made the prospect of doing so seem ten times more reasonable.

Which was the nearest and best way out of the city, he had not the remotest notion, yet he kept on

His back was turned towards the old Minster, and he was aware that if he only preserved one straight, undeviating course, he must, sooner or later, leave the city behind him.

In his progress he gazed keenly at every shadow, and when any slight or unexpected sound struck upon his ear he would instantly assume a posture of defence, as though he feared the attack of some hidden enemy.

He was agreeably surprised to find that he was much nearer the suburbs than he had dared to anticipate, and when he saw the open country before him the sight seemed to infuse fresh vigour into his wearied frame.

"I wonder, now," he said, "in what direction I am going? It is rather important that I should satisfy myself upon this point. How can I do so?"

He paused a moment, and then said:

"It is easy enough. I ought to have thought of that before. The stars are shining brightly, so that I shall have no difficulty in ascertaining my position."

He looked up at the star-bespangled firmament as he spoke.

He knew enough of the constellations to pick out the polar star, and this amount of knowledge had on more than one occasion stood him in good stead.

"I am going eastward," he muttered, in a satisfied tone. "This is just as I could wish. Can it be possible that Fortune now is about to turn my friend, and help me out of all my difficulties? It will be a pleasant thing to think so, at any rate."

In this respect he was right enough, and he trudged along the far-stretching high-road with redoubled energy.

It was not likely, however, that he would be able to continue thus very long, and so it proved.

Indeed, his strength gave out much sooner than he had expected, and consequently, though it was much against his will, he sat himself down by the roadside to rest awhile.

"I have overrated my powers," he said, sadly. "Who would have thought that I should be reduced to such a stage of feebleness? Old age seems to have dropped upon me all at once. I must be many, many miles now from the sea coast—so many that while in my present state it would be absolute insanity upon my part to dream of attempting it on foot; yet, if so, what other means of locomotion shall I adopt? Let me think—let me think."

He rested his head between his hands.

Some moments elapsed before he spoke again, and when he did speak the words were only half uttered, as they often are by persons who have no one to commune with save themselves.

"With a horse," he murmured, "I feel sure I could do it easily enough, and, what is more, in one fifth part of the time. But yet, where am I to obtain one? And besides, have I not said that I would suffer anything rather than cross another steed, accompanying it with the wish that if I ever attempted to do so the very worst evils might befall me? Yes, yes—a horse is out of the question."

But the advantages which would accrue from his availing himself of the services of one pressed more and more strongly upon his imagination—to such an extent, indeed, that presently, lifting up his head and looking around him, he exclaimed, in a louder voice:

"But is it not childish and foolish in the extreme to be the slave of such a feeling as this? Surely—oh, surely yes! They were hastily-spoken, ill-considered words, wrung from me by remorse; but when I uttered them I could not look into the future and see what would occur. Besides, it is paramount that I should use every endeavour to secure my own safety; and in thus refusing the assistance that would be afforded me by a horse, I am throwing every chance away.

"Yes, yes," he added, after another pause—"my mind is now quite made up. Every rule has its exception. I will renew my vow never to seek an adventure of any kind with another steed, but that must not prevent me from taking one when I see how imperatively necessary it is to my escape."

Having come to this conclusion, he arose.

But, strange to say, there was a heaviness now upon his mind for which he tried vainly to account, and which he as fruitlessly endeavoured to shake off.

Was it a premonition that his wish would be fulfilled?

The thought occurred to him, but he refused to dwell upon it.

"Let me think," he cried, as though resolute to keep his ideas fixed on one point—"let me consider which will be the best and most advantageous means of obtaining a horse. Where shall I look for one?"

This was indeed a point that required much careful consideration.

Secrecy was all-important.

Scarcely less so was it that the animal should be a good one, and properly equipped for the road.

"I have it!" he cried at length, rising from his seat. "I will walk on quietly along the road. I must before going very far come up with a public-house; here, if the place holds out any hopes, I will enter, and being there, will ask to buy a horse. I feel certain that I have not yet been in this part. Every object is quite strange to me, therefore I may infer that the police officers have not been here either. What fear, then, is there that I shall be recognised? At any rate, I will run the risk."

This was, to all intents and purposes, settling the matter.

Strangely enough, the next turning brought him in view of a light, which, upon a closer approach, he found proceeded from a habitation.

Whether an inn or not, he knew not.

But he was soon relieved of all uncertainty upon this head, for, by the faint light of the stars, he presently caught sight of a swinging sign, of unusually large dimensions, which was fixed on the top of a stout post.

"A good omen," he said. "Surely I am justified in looking upon this as a foretoken of good fortune in the future. No sooner have I come to a decision than I behold the place which of all others I most wished to see. Yes, yes—the end is drawing nigh. All—all will be well."

In one sense he was right.

He tried to infuse some gladness into the tone in which he spoke.

But no failure could be more complete.

His lips declared that all was well; but his heart seemed to whisper that so far from such being the case, all was ill, and that, so far from escaping, he was rushing blindly and madly to his doom.

Which was right, heart or lips? We shall quickly see.

CHAPTER MCXXIII.

DICK TURPIN FALLS A VICTIM TO THE TREACHERY OF THE OSTLER.

It did not take him long to reach the inn, or rather a portion of the outbuildings adjoining it which abutted upon the road.

"Hullo!" said a voice, suddenly. "And may I ask where you are off to at this time of night?"

Dick gave a tremendous jump, for he had not the least idea that anyone was present.

Upon hearing this voice, however, and on collecting himself a little, he caught a glimpse of a thin, wiry man, who was leaning in a negligent attitude against the post of the gate leading into the stable-yard.

Although Dick soon recovered himself from the first shock of surprise, yet he was far from feeling comfortable at finding he had not been alone.

What was more, he could not in the then agitated state

of his spirits pretend to recollect what had passed his lips a short time before.

The man unquestionably had heard him.

Unless he had done so he would scarcely have addressed the fugitive in the way he did.

Dick's fear was that his incautious words would give this man a clue to his identity.

"You look as scared as though you had been up to no good," the man continued, after a long pause. "Do you always start like that when you are asked a civil question?"

His interest in Dick seemed to increase, for while thus speaking he quitted his indolent position and came closer to the roadway.

Dick then for the first time perceived that this man was attired in the garb of an ostler; and, moreover, there was about him an indescribable something which proclaimed his profession.

On discovering this, Dick's feelings underwent an entire change.

An idea occurred to him which represented itself in so favourable a light that he resolved to act upon it without delay or further deliberation.

"You may think yourself lucky," were the first words Dick spoke.

That they very much puzzled the ostler the stare of astonishment he gave sufficiently testified.

"Lucky!" he repeated, at length. "What for?"

"For having seen me."

"How so?—why?"

"Because I can put you in the way of earning in an hour more money than you could get for a year's wages."

"And pray how?—some devilry or other, I suppose?"

"Nothing of the sort; I want you to render me a service, for the faithful performance of which I am ready and willing to pay liberally."

"Indeed! And no risk to me?"

"Not a bit."

"Well, then, I'm your man—what do you want?"

"Firstly, that you will keep my presence here a secret from everyone."

"That's easily done."

"Scarcely more easily than the rest."

"Go on, then."

"You must procure me a horse of the best quality, with trappings complete; and put me in the way of reaching the sea-shore at the nearest point where I can obtain a vessel."

"And what else?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing whatever."

"And what are you willing to pay for this?"

"Why, more for the secrecy than anything."

"You are off on the mizzle, then?"

"The what?"

"The mizzle. You have been up to something and want to get off."

"Suppose that is the case—are you willing to earn a good round sum by assisting me? No one will know anything of your share in the transaction—provided you are wise enough to keep a still tongue in your head."

"Trust me for that."

"Do you consent?"

"I do; but I must know about the amount before I stir hand or foot."

"You shall have fifty pounds."

"Not enough."

"A hundred, then."

"That's more like it."

"I will give you no more; you can either take it or decline the business altogether."

"Well. I sha'n't do that."

"Can you get me a horse?"

"I can; nothing could have fallen out better."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; I have one in the stable now that a gentleman has left here for me to sell to the best customer I can get. It is a real beauty; but, not to deceive you, is very spirited, and requires a devilish good rider to master him."

"I should like him all the better on that very account."

"Then you couldn't be better suited. Then it's a bargain. Give me your hand—there now, it's all right. Come into the stable; it's not worth while to stand out here in the cold."

"You are quite right—it is not."

Accordingly, Dick followed the ostler across the spacious inn-yard to the door of the stables, though in his progress he was careful to keep one hand upon the butt of a pistol in such a way that he could instantly avail himself of the service of the weapon should circumstances require it.

But the ostler walked straight across without once turning his head, and Dick was fully impressed with the belief that he was acting in good faith.

Yet, with proper caution, he resolved that the belief should not deprive him of vigilance, for as yet he did not know the man.

The interior of the stable boasted no better illumination than that which a candle stuck into a lantern afforded, and yet, by contrast with the darkness without, the light seemed almost brilliant.

Dick, who had been in the obscurity so long, could not help blinking a little.

The first thing the ostler did was to turn round and indulge himself in a good long stare.

His eyes opened wider and wider, until all at once, with a wild cry, he seized hold of Dick's hand and wrung it warmly.

"Why, captain—captain, whoever could have thought it was you! And to find you in such a plight, too! Well—well, I thought your voice sounded as though I had heard it before, though I could not recollect where. I am glad to see you—heartily glad. But you must tell me how it is I find you in such sad trim as this. Why, you are almost a skeleton!"

Dick was, if anything, more astonished at this second recognition than he was at the first.

There could be no mistaking the fact that the ostler knew him; and, judging by his manner, the circumstance seemed to afford him the keenest delight and satisfaction.

"Why, captain," he continued, shaking Dick's hand again with almost painful violence, "don't you know me—don't you remember me? Don't look so scared. You have found a friend now if you never had one before."

"Thanks—thanks!" said Dick, in reply to this assurance, which we need scarcely tell the reader sounded most sweetly in his ears. "I was overcome at first, but don't be surprised at that. Nothing was further from my thoughts than that I should be recognised in this part of the country."

"Do you know me now, captain?"

Dick passed his hand over his brow, as though striving to remember.

"I see, you have forgotten me."

"I see so many faces," answered Dick, "that——"

"Of course you do. Well, well—it don't matter. I know you, and that is quite as well—perhaps better. Don't be afraid to trust me. I am your friend."

He struck himself lightly on the breast as he spoke, as though he meant to indicate that his heart was entirely at the service of the fugitive.

Dick smiled.

"To utter my thanks would be impossible; but they shall speak in deeds. And now, where is the horse you spoke of?"

"Yonder. But before you go to look at him, let us have some talk. I think it will be to the benefit of both of us."

There was an earnestness in the man's tones that seemed to constrain Dick to listen.

"Are you going to leave the country for a time?"

"For ever."

"What, quit the road? Never, captain—nonsense—you must be joking!"

"Believe me, I am most serious. I have had my last adventure on the road."

Either a shadow was cast by the flickering candle at this moment upon the ostler's countenance, or else it underwent a change; but it was so transient that it was impossible to say which of the two it was, or whether it was either.

"You think so now, captain," he said; "but you won't long remain in that mind, I'll warrant."

"Indeed I shall. Nothing will induce me to alter."

"But—but what has brought about this change?"



[THE CAPTURE OF DICK TURPIN AT THE ROADSIDE INN.]

"I have lost all my friends—not one of my associates is left to me. Even Black Bess is lost to me for ever; and the remains of one I loved dearer than life and the whole world lie under the sod of another land! My heart has been too much bruised and wounded for me to become a knight of the road again."

"Pooh—pooh, captain! Take my word for it, that is all stuff. You will soon get the better of it, and then you will wonder how ever it was that you came to have such ideas. Don't shake your head in that solemn way. You will find out I am right before long."

"No—no—a thousand times no!"

"Have you, then, really made up your mind?"

"I have."

"Then I am sorry to hear it, and yet not surprised either."

"Why not?"

"Because you are reduced to such a dreadful state You are out of condition, captain—that's what's the matter with you. I know what a horse is when he's out of condition. Lor' bless you—after he has been seen to a bit no one would believe him the same. And men and osses is wonderfully alike, captain, I assure you."

Dick smiled at this, but shook his head again to imply that his determination was unshaken.

"I am right," continued the ostler; "and mark my words—things will turn out to prove it. Let me tell you a man don't live in a stable all his life without being up to a thing or two."

"I am weak and ill, I know," returned Dick; "but you would not wonder at that if you knew what I have gone through; still it would have no effect upon my determination—it has long been taken."

"Well, captain, of course I ain't going to presume to

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to dictate to you, of course, but I'm not going to hold an argument with you either while you are in your present state."

"Indeed!"

"I am quite in earnest. It is folly for you to think of continuing your journey while you are in your present state. You couldn't do it. You shall stop here awhile. I'll keep you snug enough, never fear, and I will get you plenty of good things, and you will soon have your strength back again."

Dick was never in all his life more in the humour to be persuaded than he was then, and at the very time the ostler was speaking such a frightful feeling of fatigue and weakness came over him that he had much difficulty in saving himself from falling.

The keen-eyed ostler noticed his condition, and cried:

"What did I tell you! If you persist in leaving here while you are like this you will be nabbed before you are half a dozen hours older."

"But could you conceal me," asked Dick, anxiously, "supposing the officers should call here?"

"I'll take care of all that. Look here, captain—just you follow me."

So saying, the ostler crossed the stable to a place where a ladder was fixed perpendicularly against the wall.

Up this he climbed with the agility which long practice had given him.

In the twinkling of an eye he was upon the loft above holding his hand to assist Dick in the ascent.

The best way to give an idea of the pitiable condition to which Dick Turpin was reduced will be to say that this task was almost beyond his powers, and that he would never have accomplished it without the aid of his new friend.

"Now, captain," the ostler said, as soon as Dick had gained the floor of the loft above, "you see this here place. Good. Well, I will keep you here as snug as you wish for as long as you think proper. I'll take care that no one finds out where you are, and will guarantee you as much as ever you want in the shape of eating and drinking."

"I assure you your offer is a most agreeable one, and I am more than half inclined to accept of it."

"Have a whole mind, captain, and rely upon it you will be all right. How can anyone have the least suspicion you are here. And if you stay you will not only be getting your strength up, but the heat of the pursuit after you will have cooled a little."

"I will stay," said Dick, with sudden resolution. "Fortunately, I have enough left even in this extremity of my fortunes to reward you most liberally for all that you may do for me."

"We sha'n't fall out over that, captain, I am sure. Now listen to what I am going to say."

Dick flung himself down wearily upon the hay with which the floor of the loft was covered.

"That's right, captain," cried the ostler, approvingly. "Take all the rest you can."

"What were you going to propose?"

"Why, that you stayed here until you had regained your strength. Of course, as I said before, I shall supply you with everything for that purpose. Then, at the proper time, I shall mount you on the horse I spoke of, and he will carry you to the sea-coast like a rocket. He is truly a wonderful animal."

Dick could not help being sensible that the ostler's advice was good, and that he could not do better than follow it in every particular, yet so much had he fixed his mind upon continuing his journey to the coast, that he could hardly make himself satisfied to pause anywhere.

But this feeling was not so overpowering as to blind him to the fact that it would be by no means lost time to remain here until he was stronger, because then he would be able to perform the journey in half the time he would be obliged to take while in his present condition.

"I can see you have decided, captain," the ostler continued; "I am glad of it, for you always treated me like a prince in the good old times, and nothing pleases me so much as to be able to do something in return for a favour."

He did not wait to see whether Dick had any more to say, but lowered himself down into the stable again.

It was not long, however, before he returned, bringing with him a very tempting supply of provisions, together with a bottle of wine.

"There," he said, "just let me see you polish that lot off; and when you have you will be disposed to take a more cheerful view of the future than you do now."

Dick ate heartily, and found the wine particularly agreeable and refreshing.

"Now, captain, am I not right?"

"I am better."

"Of course you are. Now, look here: it is too late now for you to think of leaving here to-night, even if you had made your mind up to do so, because we shall have daylight here in no time. So just make yourself as comfortable as you can on the top of the hay, and then if you don't like to stay any longer you will be ready to start to-morrow night as soon as darkness sets in."

Dick willingly enough assented to this, and after a few more words the ostler left the loft.

The reader will not require to be told that Dick now felt himself under circumstances of greater security than he had known for a long time past; and therefore it is not surprising that he should fall asleep very soon after being left alone.

It was rather strange, though, that he should place so much confidence in this ostler, but somehow the idea of being doubtful of his good faith never once occurred to him.

There was such an air of jollity and truth about him that suspicion was blinded and disarmed.

Perhaps had Dick not been so utterly "out of condition," as the ostler phrased it, he would have been a little cautious, and that there was great need of caution will be quickly seen.

No sooner had the ostler reached the stable than he sat himself down upon the corn-bin in an attitude of deep thought.

What reflections were passing in his mind it would be hard for anyone to say.

That they were important, however, there could be no doubt.

At last he began to mutter in an undertone.

His words ran to something like the following effect:

"Which way shall I decide? Blest if I can tell! But I must make up my mind one way or other. Is his race run?—that is the question. If I could only get a reply to that I should know how to act."

He rose up as he spoke, for a faint sound from above fell upon his ears.

After listening for a second, and finding it was not repeated, he leaned his arms on the lower portion of the stable door and looked out into the darkness.

"He seems determined enough to quit the road," he continued; "and I have heard say before now, that when he once made up his mind to a thing there was no turning him. Let me see. Suppose it is so—why, should not I be a downright idiot to let him get off for the sake of a hundred pounds or so! Of course I should!"

Having settled this point, he remained for a short time silent.

But his mutterings soon recommenced.

"My business is to make the most money—that's just the long and the short of it. If I am careful and move right, I am in for a good haul—such an amount as will make me independent for the rest of my days. But one false step, and I lose the lot."

The ostler's excitement continued to increase.

"Let me see," he said. "I will get the bill out again, and see just how much is offered for his apprehension. Let me make sure about that."

He sat himself down again upon the corn-bin, and from a tattered pocket-book produced one of the printed bills offering the reward for the apprehension of Dick Turpin.

Unfolding it upon his knee, he spelt it over carefully.

First, the amount offered for his safe-lodgment in any one of his Majesty's prisons was one thousand pounds, and five hundred pounds more on his conviction and execution.

The ostler gave a long-drawn sigh, and returned the bill to his pocket-book.

"That's clear enough," he said. "But can I get the whole amount?—that's the question. There is a doubt about that—so let me see how much I should be likely to make by standing his friend."

This seemed no easy thing to arrive at.

"He said he would reward me liberally—and I should understand that word to mean a thousand pounds, but I don't suppose he does. Has he got anything like such a sum about him? That is just what I should like to find out; and I don't intend, either, to lose sight of the old proverb about a bird in the hand."

From the foregoing it will be seen that this north-country ostler had no higher motive than many of our most illustrious men—to adopt that course which would turn out most profitable to himself—or, in other words, to dispose of his fidelity to the person who bid the highest price for it.

If Dick had only got enough to satisfy his avarice, Justice might catch her prisoner herself.

This important point—because it would entirely influence his future conduct—the ostler determined to clear up, and the means he took to do this were as bold as they were effectual.

As silently as possible, he made his way up into the loft.

Dick was slumbering heavily.

"It would take rather more than a trifle to wake him now," he murmured. "That wine was strong, and he was quite exhausted. It would be easy enough to find out how much he is worth, and I don't think there would be much fear of waking him up either. At any rate, I shall run the risk."

With these words the ostler very cautiously and gently made an examination of Dick's pockets.

It was not very easy to make an estimate of what he was worth, because the greater part of the wealth was in the more portable shape of precious stones.

He restored everything as he had found it, and slipped down into the stable again.

"Samuel," he said, addressing himself—"Samuel, you have a difficult course before you. One is right, the other is wrong. What have I to guide me in my choice? All depends upon it. I shall either get all or nothing. Shall I befriend him, and be content with perhaps an amount equal to one-third of the reward? I must think."

Samuel did think, but he found it by no means easy to come to a decision.

There were no scruples in the case.

His sole anxiety, as we have said before, was to do that which would bring him the most money.

Whether Dick was hanged, or whether he escaped, was to him equally indifferent.

He had no more regard for serving Justice than he had compunction in meditating the betrayal of one who had placed such utter confidence in him.

"Suppose I make up my mind to give him up, what are the difficulties in the way?—what chance have I of getting the money, and how much risk of losing it? I will sit down again; I can always think with a clearer head when I am sitting on the corn-bin.

"It would never do to call in any assistance," he ruminated, "and certainly not the police, because they would want to share the reward, and I could not afford that. No, no—I must scheme it somehow. Supposing I was to bind him tightly with plenty of rope, and then, without saying a word to anybody, to put a horse into one of the carts and drive to York Castle with him? I don't see anything very difficult about that; and when once I had handed him over to the Governor's charge I should be making sure of a thousand pounds. No one could gainsay my claim to it—certainly not."

Yet the ostler was not satisfied.

He could hardly bring himself to believe that it was possible he should become possessed of so large an amount.

The blood tingled in his veins, and for some time the excitement produced by his anticipations was so great that he could do nothing but yield himself up to the influence of a kind of waking dream.

At last one thought returned.

"How easy it would be to bind him now that he lies sleeping—there would be an end to it. He could not resist. He would be powerless. Fool—fool that I was not to think of that before! What valuable time I have permitted to slip by! It is now too late, though—now too late, of course!"

And it was too late, for, to his infinite chagrin, he found, on once more making his way into the hay-loft, that Dick was awake.

What had aroused him it was, of course, impossible to guess.

The ostler showed himself to be an accomplished dissembler.

"I thought I heard you moving, captain," he said, with the utmost self-possession, and without the ruffling of a single feature, "and so I came up to see what you wanted."

"Thanks—thanks," said Dick—"all is so far well. What is the time?"

"Just about sunrise, captain."

"Alas—alas!"

"What is the matter?"

"I have had a dream—an ugly, uncomfortable dream. Bah!—I——"

"Pooh, pooh! captain—you must get the better of this sort of thing."

But Dick shuddered in a way that showed this dream had produced no ordinary impression upon him.

"I will leave here at nightfall," he said—"yes, yes—I will leave here at nightfall. I will take this vision as a warning: nothing shall induce me to stay longer—I fear, indeed, that I have stayed too long already."

"Why, captain, you get worse and worse," cried the ostler, speaking in as pleased a voice as he could affect, and turning aside so as to conceal the baleful-looking light which these words had caused to blaze up in his eyes. "Whatever could this dream be to trouble you so much?"

"I dreamt," said Dick, "that I was in a deep sleep, and yet half conscious of what was going on. But at last I awoke, and when I opened my eyes it was to find that I was surrounded by stone walls; an iron grating was in front of me—I was the inmate of a prison cell."

CHAPTER MCXXIV.

THE OSTLER DISCOVERS THAT THINGS DO NOT TURN OUT QUITE SO AGREEABLY AS HE ANTICIPATED.

"Now, captain—captain, do not let such a thing as that trouble you—pray, don't," cried the ostler, with a hearty laugh. "After making such a meal as you did, and falling asleep immediately afterwards, you might have expected to dream about that which you were most in dread of."

"It may be so," replied Dick—"it may be so; but I shall not rest again until I am on my journey."

"Oh yes, you will. Keep yourself quiet, or what will you be fit for at night? As soon as the folks in the inn are astir I will see after your breakfast."

Dick poured out his thanks to this unworthy object, who, feeling uncomfortable at having that which he felt he was not entitled to, feigned that it was necessary to descend into the stable and see to the horses there.

Dick said not a word respecting his departure.

The fact was, his senses were all wrapped up in pondering upon his dream, which had been of unusual vividness.

Samuel no sooner reached the stable than he walked deliberately to the wall and struck his head several times with great violence against it.

"I have been a d—d fool," he muttered, grinding his teeth ferociously. "I do believe I am the d—dest fool alive! Here have I been argufying with myself when I ought to have been at work. If I had had a grain of sense he would have been safe where he dreamt he was."

The ostler was in a state of very great aggravation, and some time elapsed before he could bring himself to anything like calmness.

But a fresh thought occurred to him, which went a good way towards reconciling him to the present aspect of affairs.

"I have often heard," he said, "that nothing is done well which is done in a hurry, and I believe it now. How could I have overlooked such a thing as that? Why, I am a double gainer if I can be successful."

It will quickly be seen to what the treacherous fellow alluded, for he sat himself down in his favourite place, and, holding one hand before him with the fingers outspread, he said:

"Let me take it all over quietly from first to last, to make sure all is smooth, and to prevent any unexpected

hack in the business. Now, first, I will wait till towards nightfall, and then give him a drug either in his food or drink, or both. Good! Then, when he is insensible, I shall make it my first business to search every one of his pockets thoroughly, and make up all his wealth into a parcel, which I will hide carefully. Good again! What a fool I must have been to think of taking him to prison with all that in his pocket!"

The ostler was for a moment or two so overcome with astonishment that he could not continue his most agreeable meditations.

"Having buried the parcel," he continued, "I will lift him quietly into the cart, and, without his being one bit the wiser, drive him to York Castle. Once there, the authorities will look to him. I shall send in my claim for the entire reward, and then, with that, and what he carries about with him, I shall be rich—rich indeed!"

For some moments he sat like one entranced.

He was quite carried away by the agreeable prospect which he had conjured up.

Already he saw himself—what he so longed to be—a rich man.

At last he started up, and, in tones that certainly were louder than it was prudent to make use of, he cried:

"Were the risk a thousand times what it is, I would do it!"

From this moment his mind remained quite made up.

He did not waver in the least, and so great were his dissimulative powers that no one to have gazed into his countenance would have given a guess at the nature of his thoughts.

True to his promise, he obtained an excellent breakfast for the hunted fugitive, who little guessed in what tremendous danger he stood, though there was a peculiar heaviness about his heart and oppression about his spirits which he ought to have understood and taken as a warning.

But, alas! he did not.

Perhaps never was there anyone in whom Dick was more disposed to place an absolute trust than in this treacherous, mercenary wretch who was so wholly undeserving of it.

But Dick throughout all his career had gained so much by trusting people, and suffered so little from treachery, that we cannot blame him, nor wonder at his over-confidence in this instance.

It was a strange thing that during the day Dick could not close his eyes in sleep.

It could not be that he feared anything, for he was wholly ignorant of the ostler's intention.

Perhaps it was the dread of renewing his dream that influenced him in keeping awake.

Whatever the cause was, however, there was the fact—sleep was impossible.

Consequently the day was a tediously long one to Dick.

He had no other means of whiling away the time saving peeping forth from the circular window of the loft, from which, in the distance, a view of York could be obtained.

Strange to say, he saw nothing of the police officers, and as the day elapsed without his having done so his hopes begun to rise and much of the weight was taken off his heart.

All would have been well, no doubt, but for the act of treachery the ostler meditated.

Dick saw but little of him during daylight.

The fact was, he could not drive this matter from his mind, and he was afraid to trust himself much in the presence of his intended victim lest his face should betray the black secret in his heart.

Dick Turpin, as soon as ever it was dusk, left the loft and descended into the stable.

"The coast seems clear, captain," the ostler exclaimed.

"It does. I believe all will be well."

"And you are still determined to give up your life on the road?"

"If possible, more so than I have ever been. My resolution has never wavered."

"Well, I'm sorry to hear it, that is all I can say, for of course you are at liberty to adopt whatever course you may think proper."

Dick did not think it worth while to make any reply to this speech.

"Where is the horse you spoke to me about? Let me see him."

"He is a real beauty—he is, and no mistake, and so you'll say. Just look here!"

The ostler lifted the cloth off one of the horses in the stall as he spoke.

Dick looked at him with a critical eye.

"And you say he is a good one?"

"There never was a better; only, as I told you, he takes a good rider. If I was a gentleman I should prefer him for that. I should not care to have an animal that anyone could sit on the back of."

"He will serve my purpose doubtless. What is the price?"

"Only fifty guineas, which is what the owner told me would be the very lowest penny he would take. He cost a hundred, and is well worth it too."

"I will buy him," said Dick, "and you shall have something handsome over and above that amount by way of commission."

The ostler hardly had patience to play his part in this portion of the affair, but he was afraid of doing anything to rouse Dick's suspicions, which would, of course, ruin his project entirely.

"And now," Dick continued, "if you will furnish me with a saddle and a bridle, I will be off without any more delay."

"You shall have both, captain; and, what is more, a bottle of brandy which I have procured for you. Keep it by you—it will prove useful."

"I will taste it now," Dick answered.

This was what the ostler had calculated upon.

As the reader doubtless more than expects, the brandy was drugged.

He gave Dick a glass, who, drawing the cork, nearly filled it with the spirit from the bottle.

"You will find that a drop of splendid stuff, captain. Lor' bless you, I know whereabouts in the cellar master keeps the best of everything—trust me for that! But what's the matter with you?"

Dick had placed the fatal draught to his lips.

It was so long since he had tasted any of his favourite spirit that in his eager haste he swallowed a large mouthful without tasting it.

It was when he paused and licked his lips with the tip of his tongue that the ostler broke off and asked what was the matter.

"It seems to have an odd taste," Dick said.

"Age—age, captain—nothing more. Try it again."

Dick once more placed the glass to his lips.

He sipped dubiously.

A little more had been swallowed, when he happened suddenly to catch sight of the ostler's visage.

The expression upon it told him all as plainly as the longest explanation.

He was betrayed.

The excitement of the ostler had reached fever point; and when he saw Dick in the act of swallowing the second draught, he could no more prevent his features displaying his triumph and exultation than he could have stopped the pulsations of his heart.

This, coupled with the strange taste of the spirit, which was now very noticeable, told Dick that he had been betrayed by the being he had so trusted, and who had spoken so fairly to him.

"Villain!" he shrieked, rather than said, for the consequences of what would follow drinking the drugged brandy rushed with full force upon his brain—"villain! you have betrayed me!"

As he pronounced the last words, he dashed the remainder of the spirit into the rascal's face.

His aim was good.

The ostler was temporarily deprived of sight.

"Base, accursed wretch!" continued Turpin, now in a perfect frenzy. "But you shall not reap the benefit of what you have done! I see through it all! I can at least inflict that punishment upon you!"

So saying, he drew his sword.

It was at this moment that the ostler recovered himself a little.

Maddened with pain, he made a frantic rush upon the fugitive.

He did not see the sword.

Dick held it firmly in front of him, with the hilt pressing against his breast.

The ostler did not pause, and consequently he was impaled upon it.

"Villain!" shrieked Dick. "Take your doom! You did not think that you had been so cleverly plotting your own destruction as well as mine!"

A fearful groan came from the ostler's lips, and, throwing up his arms, he fell backwards to the ground.

When the sword was thus violently withdrawn, the blood gushed forth in a manner that seemed to indicate the wound would prove a mortal one.

"Such a death is too good for you," said Dick, sheathing his sword, all covered with blood as it was. "Yours is a righteous fate, and may such ever be the doom of the traitor!"

He reeled as he spoke, and a strange tumult seemed taking place in his brain.

"What will be the end?" he cried, clasping his hands before his eyes, for they throbbed most painfully—"what will be the end? What was the strength of that accursed drug?"

It was plain that every moment it was asserting its influence.

The dying ostler bent upon him a look of hate that was none the less malignant because so powerless.

"Your race is run," he said. "This is your last deed! But I shall live—live to see you hanging in front of York Castle before many more days are over your head!"

"Never!" screamed Dick, who was now quite maddened by the mixture he had swallowed. "I—I——"

He paused, and again clasped his hands over his painfully-throbbing eyes.

A momentary return of consciousness had taken place.

"What can I do?" he murmured, sadly—"what can I do? Water—water!"

Looking around, his eyes fell upon a stable bucket full of the wished-for liquid.

He intended at first to drink, but his whole brain seemed to be on fire, and it was in obedience to an irresistible impulse that he plunged his head completely into the water.

Oh, how coolly and refreshingly it bubbled round his neck and in his ears!

Thus he remained until want of breath compelled him to withdraw.

He was wonderfully better, and, finding this to be the case, he took a long breath and repeated his bath.

This time he stayed longer still.

He was much refreshed.

His brain was chilled—his eyes no longer seemed as though they would force themselves from their sockets.

"I must not linger here," he said—"this is no place for me. Away—away! If I can but crawl to some lonely spot and lie down and sleep, that will be the best way of getting rid of the effects of the drug. Yes, yes—away—away! I must leave England—England!"

The way in which he finished his sentence showed that the water had only produced a transient effect, and one, too, that was more apparent than real.

He staggered out of the stable.

Fortunately for him, it was growing dusk, and there was no one in sight.

Everything he looked at seemed in motion.

The ground rose and fell under his feet like billows on the ocean.

The symptoms he experienced were just those of complete intoxication.

The fresh air appeared to affect him strongly.

Whether it would enable him to overcome the effects of the drug, or whether it would accelerate its action, was hard indeed to say.

But Dick continued to stumble and stagger on.

Each moment he seemed about to fall, but he would recover his balance miraculously, and resume his devious way.

He knew he was going on, but with that fact it may be said consciousness begun and ended.

What lay before him—whether it was turf or roadway on which he trod—whether he was going towards York—were perfect mysteries.

So stupified did he rapidly become, that he ceased to trouble himself in the least degree upon these points, or to feel at all curious about them.

Motion was more mechanical than aught else.

Still, with sleepy, vacant eyes he gazed around, but his glances had no speculation in them.

Yet he felt no desire to sleep.

Whether this was owing to his not having drunk a sufficient quantity of the drug, or his having immersed his head in cold water in the way we have described, we know not.

How long he continued on this staggering course he had no means of judging.

He fancied it must be long, for he was very, very weary.

Painfully he gazed from side to side, looking out for some place of rest, but finding none.

Had he really paused, the probability is that he would very quickly have become totally insensible.

More than one chance passenger stopped to look at him and watch his erratic steps, for his motions were precisely those of a drunken man, and this was what he was taken to be.

Not one of his observers chanced to guess at his identity, and so, without knowing it, they allowed a large sum to slip through their fingers when they might easily have retained it.

But what a strange fatality it was that directed Dick, while in this helpless state, towards the City of York!

Had he turned precisely the opposite way there might have been some chance for him.

But what hope had he in thus rushing blindly upon the spot which of all others threatened him with the most danger!

Yet so it was.

Every step he took was only carrying him nearer to his foes.

But not even in the dreamy way that he knew he was in motion was Dick conscious of this terrible mistake.

With a strange confidence he went on, his mind so utterly stultified that he never for one single instant entertained the suspicion that he might be going wrong.

When he felt so weary that it seemed as though he could not go any further, he caught sight of an inn.

It was not far off, and on the pleasant bit of green lawn—if we may so term it—several rustic seats had been placed for the accommodation of those guests who might prefer to sit *al fresco* in the summer time.

Oh, how inviting those seats looked to the worn-out fugitive!

Could he only sit for a short time on one of them he believed he should recover himself sufficiently to take steps for his ultimate escape.

The temptation was not to be resisted.

Staggering on with the same swaying gait until he reached one of the twisted wood tables, he sat himself down on the seat near it, and immediately buried his burning forehead in his hands.

His approach had been noticed and commented on by several, especially the landlord, who, long pipe in mouth, was watching the progress of a rubber at bowls.

"Francis," he said, addressing himself to the man who was waiting on the customers, "that cove yonder has had enough, it seems to me. Don't fill him any more if you can help it; let him be awhile—he may recover. At any rate, I'll have an eye upon him."

From this it would seem that the landlord entertained no suspicion as to the identity of the new-comer.

Dick had not sat at the table long before two or three labouring men sat down beside him.

The noise made by them aroused him.

The stupifying effects of the drug seemed to have worn off somewhat even in this brief space, but its influence was by no means gone.

It manifested itself in a different manner.

With bloodshot, aching eyes, he glared around him.

He felt frenzied—maddened, impelled to do some outrageous deed or other.

It was as though some demoniac spirit had taken possession of his breast.

He was in the mood to quarrel with anyone—to interfere with anything.

It was such a disposition indeed which is often manifested by those who are in a certain stage of intoxication.

All at once his ears were assailed by a loud cheer coming from many throats.

"What's that?" he hickuped, in a thick voice, and at the same time half rising—"what's that, I say?"

The game at bowls had just been concluded, and the wager decided.

It would seem that no ordinary interest had attached to the game, and the triumphant sounds were in honour of the victor.

But surely some demon must nave taken possession of Dick's body and directed its movements—it hardly seems credible that he acted in accordance with the dictates of his own mind.

After many efforts, he contrived to stand somewhat steadily upon his legs.

Then he rolled his heavy, bloodshot eyes around until he caught sight of the tumultuous group assembled round the players.

No sooner did he comprehend who they were and what they were about than he reeled towards them.

"Who's won?" he asked, elbowing his way among the throng—"who's won, I say?—I don't care who he is, here's a man here that can beat him—I can do it! I'll bowl the winner or anybody here for any money! I'll bet anybody fifty pounds to five shillings I am the winner!

"What are you all afraid of?" he continued, in a thicker and more inarticulate voice than ever, and looking as though he would be only too glad to enter into a quarrel with anyone upon the slightest provocation. "I ask are you all afraid, or do you think I have no money about me? If that's it you're wrong. Look here! What do you think of that, now?"

While speaking, he plunged his hand into his pocket and drew forth as many guineas as he could grasp.

"Here you are. Here's money enough, and I'll bet you all I tell you!"

With the utmost recklessness, he flung the coins upon the nearest table, upon which many remained, but more fell off and rolled along the grass.

Such behaviour as this was well calculated to excite the astonishment of the rustics assembled at the inn.

When they saw the gold, they immediately felt a great accession of respect.

The general idea was that he was some gentleman—no doubt a lord—who was the worse for liquor, and from whom, most likely, they would all be able to pick up a trifle by humouring him.

Acting upon this idea, the man who had just been vanquished touched his hat.

"I'll bowl your lordship, if your lordship pleases."

"Done!" hickuped Dick. "Down with your five shillings, and here's my fifty pounds."

He placed a quantity of uncounted gold upon the table—certainly more than the amount he had named.

"Now, then," he cried, "for the game!"

The preparations were soon made, and Dick allowed to bowl first.

His antagonist was quite willing to make him any such allowance as this, because he felt sure of winning.

Dick poised the bowl with tipsy gravity, and affected to take the most careful aim.

But when the biased ball left his hand, it rolled, as might be expected, very far way indeed from the jack.

His other efforts were no better, and, of course, there was no doubt that he had lost.

But envy would not let the others allow one of their number to profit so largely by what had happened.

Cries of shame were raised; and more than one declared that it was nothing but barefaced robbery to take the gentleman's money.

"It is—it is," said the landlord. "He is not in a state to play—he is not steady enough."

Incautiously, the landlord spoke these words in a tone sufficiently loud to reach Dick Turpin's ears.

He turned round with an angry scowl, and made his way towards him with angry gestures.

"Do you insult me, you d—d tun-bellied rascal? I'll—I'll——"

A hickup stopped his further speech; and just at the same moment a cock flew up on to the low wall close by, and, flapping his wings, crowed lustily.

Dick's attention was at once attracted to this new object.

"My hand isn't steady, isn't it?" he muttered. "But you're a liar, Mr. Landlord, and this shall prove it!"

At the same time, and without anyone present having the least notion of what he was about to do, he drew a pistol, and raising it, suddenly pulled the trigger.

So rapidly was all this done that there did not seem to be time for him to take aim; certainly no one was quick enough to prevent him.

There was a loud report, and the cock, who had been so exultant a moment before, fell ignominiously into the dust, with his feathers all dabbled in blood, and in the last agonies of death.

"Who says my hand isn't steady now?" Dick asked, with an air of triumph, as he flung the pistol from him.

"I say you are a d—d fool!" responded the landlord, angrily. "You shall pay dearly for it!"

"What do you say?"

"You have shot my favourite bird!" said the landlord, displaying more violent passion than one would have expected on such an occasion. "There isn't such a game cock in all the ridings of Yorkshire as that! I wouldn't have parted with him for any money!"

Dick regarded him with a stupid, besotted stare.

In the meanwhile, some of the bystanders had picked up the game cock and brought it towards the house.

The sight of the bird thus suddenly and wantonly slaughtered redoubled the landlord's resentment.

Flourishing his clenched fist in Dick's face, he resumed:

"I'll have the law on you for this! It shall be the dearest bit of sport you ever had in the whole course of your life!"

"Get back," said Dick, drawing another pistol—"get back, I say! What do I care? If you will get up on the top of the wall and flap your wings and crow, I'll d—d soon shoot you; and think no more about it than I did about shooting him! Perhaps you'll think twice before you insult a gentleman again."

During this speech his voice grew thicker and thicker.

The last words were all but inarticulate.

A rush of blood seemed to force its way into his head, his eyes clouded, and he sank almost insensible upon the nearest seat.

But the landlord's exasperation was much increased by Dick's threat, more especially as it had been greeted by a general laugh.

"I will have the law on him!" he cried. "Yes will I, even if he was the King of England, and if it cost me all the money I am worth!"

CHAPTER MCXXV.

DICK TURPIN AWAKES TO FIND HIMSELF THE INMATE OF A PRISON CELL.

THE landlord fully meant what he said.

The game cock was the one living thing above all others which he loved and prized the most, and it was more than he could endure to see it thus wantonly slaughtered.

Accordingly, he beckoned one of his servants to him, and despatched him for the police.

A very short time elapsed before he returned, accompanied by several constables and police officers belonging to the City of York; but not any of those under Mr. Skellam's command.

These were, indeed, in quite another part of the country, hunting vainly for traces of the fugitive.

"There he is," said the landlord—"arrest him."

"Why, the gentleman's dead drunk! What's the charge?"

"Threatening my life and shooting my game cock. Take him up, I say!"

One of the officers stepped up to Dick, who was as yet unconscious of their arrival, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"You must come with us," he said. "Don't make any fuss."

These words are quite sufficient to show that the officers had not the remotest suspicion of Dick's identity.

By this time the poor fugitive had all but succumbed to the subtle influence of the drug.

He started upon feeling a hand laid upon him, and looked up vacantly.

Yet, stupified as he was, he comprehended that it was an officer standing in such close proximity to him.

With a loud cry thrilling from his lips, he started to his feet.

The sight of his foes galvanised him into life.

As sometimes a sudden shock will almost sober a drunken man, so did the knowledge of the fearful peril in which he stood enable the fugitive to triumph over the insidious power of the drug.

In another moment a most violent struggle commenced.

The first officer received a terrific blow upon the head with the butt end of Dick's pistol, which laid him flat as suddenly as if he had been struck down with a pole-axe.

Upon seeing this attack, the others quickly closed round him, calling in a loud voice upon those standing by to render their assistance.

The struggle was terrific.

Despite the number of his foes. Dick managed to draw his sword; and no doubt many would have suffered severely had it not been wrenched from his hand by one who was bolder and stronger than the rest.

Dick's strength, too, was beginning to fail him.

His blood was too much loaded by the drug for him to be able very long to retain the mastery over it.

Besides, it was not possible for anyone to fight successfully against such odds as were opposed to him.

They hemmed him round.

Many hands seized him.

The landlord clutched him by the throat.

Another officer managed to secure a rope round one of his arms.

It was at this moment that a horseman, mounted on a steed of jetty blackness, was riding along the high-road before the inn.

It was now almost dark—at least, distant objects looked obscure and dim.

Seeing the contention that was going on, this stranger, animated apparently by curiosity, rode up to see what was the cause of it.

When he saw so many attacking one who seemed to be helplessly drunk, he was about to interfere.

But just as he uttered the first words of angry indignation, Dick relapsed into total insensibility, and would have fallen backwards to the ground had he not been held up by those officers who stood behind him.

He was now securely pinioned by the rope, and even now the officers failed to recognise him.

Indeed, that Dick Turpin should be reduced to this condition was so unlikely a circumstance that it never once occurred to them.

But the stranger who had just arrived looked somewhat curiously upon the bruised and dust-covered figure of the fugitive.

"Who is it?" he asked; and as the tumult had somewhat subsided his question was attended to.

The landlord—who was one of those who always had an eye to business, and fancied he saw in the new-comer a customer—said, respectfully:

"It's a gentleman a little overcome, sir—that's it, and, as you see, uncommon violent."

The police officers looked upon the stranger, and immediately began to whisper to each other.

"That's Captain Hawk!" cried one. "Seize him—seize him!"

But Captain Hawk—for it was indeed no other—merely tightened the rein a little, and his magnificent steed rose upon his hind legs, and pawed the air with its fore ones in such a way as to make it particularly unsafe for anyone to approach too near.

"Good evening, gentlemen all!" he said, with an ironical bow. "If you are inclined to exercise the muscles of your legs a little you have an excellent opportunity, for I am off! Good night!"

"Ten thousand curses on the fellow's impudence!" said one of the officers, as Captain Hawk galloped off. "That's just about like him. But he will come it too strong one of these days. I know he will, and then it will be all up with him."

The officers were wise enough to see that it would be quite labour in vain for them to attempt to pursue a mounted man, so they did not offer to stir, but turned the whole of their attention to the capture they had just made.

Captain Hawk was quickly lost to view in the darkness.

It may seem strange that he should not recognise the prisoner; but it is quite certain that he did not.

And could a tolerably good idea be formed of the dejected, wasted, bruised, and bleeding object which Dick was at that moment, the circumstance would by no means have been wondered at.

It was also too dark for anything to be seen with due distinctness.

From a combination of all these causes, then, it happened that Captain Hawk passed by his friend and left him at a moment when he could have been of the utmost service to him.

Yet so it was, and Dick was left absolutely at the mercy of his foes.

The officers were in no hurry to remove him; and, having satisfied themselves that he was secure, they laid him at full length on one of the tables, and proceeded to regale themselves at the expense of the landlord, from whose lips they received a full account of what had taken place.

"You are sure he's a gentleman?" remarked one of the officers, interrogatively.

"Quite sure of it. He has no end of money upon him, and he threw it about just like dirt."

"Then he may think himself lucky, for if he wasn't I can tell you this would turn out a very bad evening's sport for him."

At length, a cart having been procured, Dick, still as insensible as at first, was placed in it, and, at a leisurely pace, made their way towards the castle, used then, as now, as a prison for all kinds of criminals.

On their arrival, the landlord of the public-house specified his charge against the prisoner, swearing that he had threatened to take his life.

The officers also deposed to the manner in which he had resisted the execution of their duty.

His name no one knew.

Dick was still senseless.

His pockets were examined; but, of course, nothing was found that gave the least clue to his identity.

The amount of money found upon his person gave colour to the landlord's statement that he was a gentleman; but the largeness of the sum caused just a little suspicion.

Being looked upon also as a more than usually desperate character, he was carried into one of the strongest cells, and there left to come to himself as best he might.

And this was the strange manner in which Dick Turpin at last had fallen into the hands of his foes.

Of what avail were those often-made protestations that he would never surrender alive?

And yet there he was, lying in a cell perfectly helpless.

It is true he was not known, but after what had taken place the probability was slight that he would for very long remain unrecognised.

From what has been related, the reader will be able to estimate tolerably well the strength of the drug the treacherous ostler had administered.

Had Dick drank off the whole of the glass of brandy the probability is that he would have fallen senseless as soon as he had swallowed the last drop.

He was quite unconscious—quite dead to all around him—quite ignorant of where he was.

And so he remained through the long hours of the tedious night, until the first glimmer of light found its way into his dungeon.

Then he stirred slightly.

But he did not thoroughly wake up for some moments after.

There was an awful sensation in his brain as though it was splitting in two pieces.

His eyes were so heavy that he could scarcely raise the lids, and, feeble as the light was which found its way into that place, yet some time elapsed before he could bear it.

"There am I?" he murmured, at last as something like returning recollection came over him. "What happened last? Why," he added, almost with a shriek, as he started up and glared around him, "this is my dream again!"

a frightful sensation of weakness and sickness at this moment assailed him, and, striving madly to clutch the air and save himself, he fell heavily to the ground.

Here he remained for some time—until, indeed, recollection came back to him.

One point was very clear.

That was that he had swallowed a quantity of drugged brandy, and that he had discovered it just in time to punish the ostler for his treachery.

After that all was blurred and indistinct, nor could he, with all his efforts, call up a remembrance of after events.

With respect to his arrival at the roadside inn, and all that had occurred there, his memory was a perfect blank.

After this he arose.

He was not quite satisfied whether all this was or was not a dream.

"I had a vision like this once before," he said—"when I awoke from my slumber in the loft. Is this a repetition of it or is it the reality?"

There was little likelihood that he would remain very long in doubt upon this point.

Struggling to his feet, he managed to cross the narrow flooring of his cell.

One touch of the cold stone sufficed.

He was satisfied that he was the inmate of a dungeon.

To describe the effect which this discovery had upon him is simply an impossibility.

He was stunned—overwhelmed.

A slight wound causes much pain—a deadly one causes insensibility.

So it was with the effect which this terrible discovery had upon Dick Turpin.

"I was warned of this," he murmured; "but the warning came too late. This is just as I dreamt, and I feel now just those sensations which were presented to me with such horrible distinctness in my vision. To think that it should come to this at last! I, who have so often sworn that I would never yield myself with life—yet here I wake up and find myself the inmate of a prison cell!"

Dick was so dismayed and daunted upon coming to a full realisation of his position that he could think of doing nothing.

Of one important circumstance he yet remained in ignorance.

This was, that his captors were unaware of his identity.

This was a most vital thing, and, could he but have known it, would have produced no slight amount of contentment.

It chanced, however, that he came once very near to guessing it.

He all at once made the discovery that his limbs were entirely free.

This amazed him not a little, as he naturally enough expected that the first step taken would be to load him with the heaviest irons.

Why they had omitted this precaution puzzled him to think.

The true solution never once occurred to him.

It was while in this state of indecision and uncertainty that the cell door was opened.

And now Dick observed another singularity.

This was, that the jailer had a broad grin upon his face, which looked anything but stern in its expression.

The fact was, this man felt quite sure that Dick must be a real gentleman, the grounds for his belief being the amount of valuables which had been found about him.

Not being a poor man, then, this turnkey was well enough acquainted with the mysteries of prison keeping to be aware that the proceedings of the preceding evening would be looked upon as a mere drunken frolic—such a one as it would be a world of pities if a gentleman could not have if he thought proper.

Experience had taught the jailer that there was nothing lost by being civil in such cases.

His behaviour, then, might well strike Dick with astonishment, who found himself wholly unable to account for it.

"Good morning, sir, saving your presence," he said, with an awkward attempt to be respectful. "If you would like anything particular for breakfast, it can always be had in the prison by paying for it."

Dick pressed his hot hands upon his burning, throbbing forehead.

"Head very bad, sir?" the man said, sympathisingly. "I can get you something that will do you a power of good."

"Do so—do so, and I——"

Dick thrust his hands into his pockets, and in no little consternation at finding them empty.

"Never mind the money—that will be all right; I will be back in a jiffey."

The turnkey retired, and Dick sank down upon the stone bench, feeling as though he could not possibly endure the distracting agony in his brain.

It seemed to have been increased a thousandfold by what had just taken place.

Luckily, the man was not long.

On his return he presented Dick with some foaming beverage, which he drank off at a draught without knowing what it was, and almost without tasting it.

"You'll be better now, sir," said the man, with the same deep respect; "you won't be taken before the magistrate for at least an hour, and by that time you will be pretty right. Don't mind it, sir, you will have to pay a fine—but that won't hurt you—perhaps bind you over to keep the peace—that's a mere trifle; and when it's all over just be good enough to remember me, sir—I have tried to make matters as pleasant as I could."

Dick could only reply to this by a long stare of astonishment, which, under any other circumstances, would have been truly comical.

"Ah, sir! I fancy you don't recollect anything about it. Well, so much the better. You will get off all the easier before the beak."

Dick was never more amazed.

Over and over again he asked himself whether he could be awake.

"Surely—surely," he thought, "I must be the sport of the vagaries of some wild dream—all this which seems so actual must be unreal."

"I'll tell you, if you like, what I heard," said the jailer, only too anxious to render a service in any way he could think of.

"What—what?" asked Dick, feverishly. "I am distracted! Tell me—tell me all."

Thereupon the jailer, keeping tolerably well to facts, gave a minute and circumstantial account of what had taken place.

Yet, although his account was such a full one, Dick was not able to comprehend his position properly for some time.

But eventually it dawned upon him that, impossible as it seemed, he had been arrested without those who took him prisoner guessing he was other than an intoxicated person.

Even with the help of the turnkey's narration, he was not able to recollect even one of the events stated to have taken place at the inn.

"I must have been under the influence of that maddening drug," he said, as soon as he was alone; "and it is the accursed stuff which is now causing me all this torment. The rascal who caused all this has met with his deserts, though that does not content me."

Dick Turpin ceased, for the wild and, as it seemed, well-nigh impossible idea seized upon him that he might be able to conceal his identity when examined before the magistrate.

If so, as the jailer had stated, he would escape by the payment of a fine, and he knew himself to be possessed of such an amount as made that a matter of small moment.

His heart beat wildly at this supposition, and his hopes increased in proportion to his former despair upon awaking and finding himself a captive.

The one person he had to dread was Skellum.

Should that persevering hunter of highwaymen chance to be in the Court, detection would be imminent.

It was quite likely he would be elsewhere, unless he had already received some inkling as to who the prisoner was.

Perplexed by these and kindred doubts and fears, Dick passed the time until he was aroused by the opening of the cell door.



[DICK TURPIN WRITES A LETTER TO HIS BROTHER.]

This was to summon him to appear at the Court.

"Say you know nothing about it," whispered the friendly but interested turnkey. "Be civil and sorry, and say how much you regret having swallowed so much wine."

On entering the Court, Dick glanced around him with an anxiety that he strove vainly to conceal.

So few persons were present, however, that he was able to satisfy himself that the much-dreaded Skellum was not visible.

Nor was his rapid gaze arrested by any familiar face.

Dick's name was asked, and after a momentary hesitation, he answered:

"John Palmer."

Some doubt may perhaps have been entertained as to whether this was his real name or an *alias*.

But if so, most assuredly no one guessed him to be the notorious highwayman Dick Turpin, whose exploits formed the theme of every tongue.

But it must be borne in mind that Dick himself had been seen very little in York, and the printed descriptions which had been circulated corresponded very slightly with his present condition.

This will be best understood by remembering that the alteration was so great as to prevent Captain Hawk from recognising him.

The charge was read over by the clerk, and listened to by Dick with an all-absorbing interest.

It needed all his self-command to retain the mastery over his features, but he succeeded admirably.

The charge, divested of all the legal jargon with which it was enveloped, was simply that of wilfully shooting a valuable bird—to wit, a game cock—and making use of such threats against the prosecutor as to put him in fear of his life.

Bearing in mind the promptings of the turnkey, Dick pleaded the influence of the excess of wine he had swallowed, and solemnly declared that he was profoundly ignorant of all the circumstances, and could not call one to his remembrance—that, however, no one was more sorry or regretted what had happened than himself, and protested that the threat was an unmeaning one.

The magistrate felt disposed to take a lenient view of the case.

He assessed the value of the game cock at ten pounds, which Dick was to pay, together with all costs and charges. A fine of five pounds was also levied for the attack upon the officers who arrested him; and, finally, he was to be bound over to keep the peace towards the prosecutor—himself in fifty pounds, and some one else in another fifty.

But for this last most unfortunate occurrence all would have gone well with Dick.

There was not as yet the faintest suspicion concerning him.

Where was Dick to find anyone who would be surety for him?

The thing was impossible.

He asked to be bound in himself for the sum amount, offering to pay the whole into the Court; but this was refused, and, as he was not able to name any person, he was removed to his cell once more.

Dick's vexation was intense—indeed, vexation is much too weak a term to express the condition of his mind.

Every moment of delay was fraught with danger to him.

To be compelled to remain in the prison until he found some one to be bound for him seemed equivalent to sentencing him to a life-long imprisonment.

But the turnkey gave Dick a hint.

"It's disagreeable, I know," he said, "to have to call upon any of your friends in such a matter, but you must positively fix upon some one to get you out of the scrape. Surely you must know some one who would do you this service?"

It was while the man was speaking these words that Dick remembered that he had a brother—at least, he believed he had, for a great many years had elapsed since he had either seen or heard from him.

Whether he would render him this service or not he could not tell, but his only chance lay in trying it.

"I will write to one friend," he said, at length. "Let me have the necessary materials. Here, take this. Rely upon it, I shall not forget to be grateful."

Dick had claimed a portion of his money, and he now slipped a couple of guineas into the man's hand.

"All right, sir," he said—"I will bring pens, ink, and paper at once."

He did so, and Dick sat down to commence.

But when about to put pen to paper such a crowd of recollections of his early days came thronging upon him that he was compelled to pause.

Memory carried him back to the time—and yet it was not to such a very distant period after all—when his hands had been altogether free from the stains of guilt.

When he remembered where he then was, and in what peril he stood of passing out of this world ignominiously, his feelings overwhelmed him, and for a time he was obliged to relinquish his task.

"Brother George," he murmured, at length, "I have had but few favours from your hands; but I cannot bring myself to believe that you will be so hard-hearted as to refuse me this—now, when you find that my life is at stake, and that a little trouble on your part will save it, I am certain you will not refuse. At any rate, I will try."

Dick then began his letter.

There was not much in it, but the few words were to the point.

He told his brother of his arrest, and the circumstances which had led to it.

He told him, too, that there was not the slightest suspicion among the authorities as to who he was, and that the finding of a surety would suffice to throw open the prison doors and make him a free man.

After that, he said, there would be no difficulty in doing what he had long decided upon, viz.: to quit England never to return to it again.

He concluded the letter by an earnest entreaty to his brother not to desert him in this the hour of extreme need.

Having sealed it, he called in the turnkey, and delivered the missive into his hands.

"Pay for the postage," said Dick, "so that there may be no delay. Here is a crown-piece; keep the change for yourself."

In a former chapter we have mentioned the disastrous consequences which followed the dispatch of this letter.

In the first place, the turnkey was not faithful to his trust.

In those days postage was a very different matter to what it is at present—being, in fact, about twenty times the amount.

The turnkey thought he might as well appropriate this trifle as not, and so the letter was posted unprepaid.

How slight and trivial a circumstance, and yet, beyond all question, it sealed Dick's fate.

The letter, on its arrival, was refused by his brother, on account of the sum demanded for the postage.

Unluckily, it happened that he had been hoaxed not long before and made to pay what was to him a serious sum for what he expected to be a letter, but which was nothing more than a piece of blank paper.

The postmark "York" showed him it was from a place where, to the best of his knowledge, he had no friends or relatives, and—though half unwillingly—he refused the missive.

He had been laughed at on the former occasion, and resolved not to be laughed at again.

That was Dick's death-warrant.

The letter was forwarded to the proper authorities in London.

By them it was opened, and the astounding discovery was made that the notorious Dick Turpin was the writer.

A messenger was despatched forthwith to seek out Skellum, if possible, but, at any rate, to take care that the prisoner was not allowed to get away.

After the letter had been sent Dick suffered a world of anxiety.

Days passed without bringing him any intelligence.

His heart grew sick.

Had there been the least chance of success he would have risked an escape.

But there was none.

It was a matter of great wonder to him that he should have remained so long undiscovered.

On the seventh day after his former examination he was summoned to attend the Court again.

CHAPTER MCXXVI.

DICK TURPIN IS RECOGNISED BY HIS OLD FOE, MR. SKELLUM.

"HAVE you had no answer?"

Dick had asked the question hundreds of times since he had despatched his letter, and the answer was always the same as that which the turnkey now returned to him.

"Nothing at all, sir. It is very strange, I think."

But on this last occasion the answer affected Dick more than ever.

"Brother George," he murmured, bending his head down sadly, "was it too much to ask you for so little when you knew my life was at stake?"

On reaching the Court he, as before, looked about him anxiously.

But his worst anticipations were relieved.

He saw no one whose countenance he could recognise.

The circumstance that so long a time had elapsed without the prisoner being able to find the requisite security had given birth, naturally enough, to some little suspicion, and he was called up now in order that some questions might be asked of him as to his antecedents.

How much Dick had to dread from any such inquiry as this we need not tell our readers.

But whatever condition his mind might have been in, his countenance remained unruffled.

In reply to the interrogations, he only stated that his name was John Palmer, that he was a native of Thaxted, in Essex, where his brother resided, and to whom he had written, but without eliciting a reply.

These answers were taken down for the purpose of having due inquiry made.

It was just as Dick was about to leave the bar that an unusual commotion and disturbance took place at the entrance of the Court.

The blood rushed back to Dick's heart.

Somehow, he felt conscious that he had been discovered.

He was not for long left in doubt upon the point.

Turning his head, he caught sight of the detested, cadaverous form of Skellum.

But surely Skellum was never seen in such a state of excitement as he was then.

That he had been making some very great exertion was manifested, for he was so breathless and trembled so with agitation that he was bereft of speech.

The first words, however, that he gasped out were:

"Seize that man!—hold him fast, everybody!—take every care or he will escape! Hold him—hold him, I say!"

He pointed while he spoke at the prisoner at the bar.

At first Dick seemed paralysed at finding his old enemy before him—the man to whom most unquestionably the loss of his faithful comrade and the death of Maud were attributable.

Then, with a sudden bound, his heart seemed to prompt him to be revenged.

Before anyone could stay him, he sprang over the front of the dock.

All thought he was about to make a desperate effort to get free, and the consequence was that the Court then presented such a scene of tumult as had never before been witnessed within its walls, and such as beggars all description.

Unfortunately, Dick fell awkwardly upon some benches, the presence of which he was not aware of; and before he could extricate himself he found at least a dozen men piled upon him.

All his struggles were futile.

Even had he been in possession of his full vigour he could scarcely have coped with so many foes.

But now, worn down and enfeebled, he absolutely stood no chance whatever.

Probably no one was more amazed at these proceedings than the magistrate, who, secure on his high seat, was the only passive spectator of the riotous scene.

It was not without great difficulty that Dick was completely overpowered.

The intense longing he had to revenge the deaths of those he held so dear lent him a temporary and fictitious strength.

It did not endure many minutes.

Busy hands manacled his wrists, while others tightly bound his ankles with a cord.

Further struggling was impossible.

Helpless as a log of wood, he was carried into the dock and placed upon a chair, for his exhaustion was now so great as to make standing an impossibility.

After this was done, the magistrate had no little difficulty in quelling the uproar; and as soon as ever anything approaching silence was obtained he settled his spectacles firmly and bent his gaze upon Mr. Skellum.

"Who are you?" he asked, sternly—"what do you mean by——"

"Your worship," interrupted Skellum, speaking rapidly, "you have need to be thankful that I arrived so opportunely. You little guessed what a desperate character stood before you—and, indeed, still stands. That he should not be recognised does not surprise me, for he is indeed strangely—wonderfully altered!"

"But who are you?" bawled the magistrate, dipping his pen very fiercely into the ink while he spoke.

"My name is Antrobus Skellum, and I am acting under the immediate instructions of the Secretary of State."

"Oh!"

From this moment the magistrate altered his demeanour.

"The prisoner before you," Skellum continued, with a vindictive look at Dick—for nothing could be more vexatious to him than finding after all his trouble he was deprived of the satisfaction of apprehending him—"has caused a world of trouble, and is guilty of more crimes than I could recount."

"Who is he?" asked the magistrate.

"Dick Turpin, the highwayman."

Had a cannon been discharged in the Court the effect could scarcely have been greater than this announcement produced.

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated the magistrate. "Can it be possible?"

"Not only possible, but perfectly true, your worship. That he should be in custody without his identity being suspected is perhaps one of the strangest events in his career."

The magistrate took off his spectacles and looked earnestly at the prisoner.

"You are quite sure of what you say, Mr. ——"

"Quite sure. Here is a letter which he wrote to his brother, asking him to come forward and be his surety for fifty pounds. The postage being unpaid, the letter was refused, and when opened at the Dead Letter Office, the discovery was made that Dick Turpin was the writer—that the man I had been searching for night and day, and straining every nerve to apprehend, was actually safe in prison!"

This was a most aggravating reflection to Skellum—in fact, he could scarcely contain himself.

And his feelings were by no means mollified when he perceived a smile upon the lips of every person in the Court.

"But I am satisfied," he continued, in an acrimonious voice—"quite satisfied at seeing him here a prisoner under any circumstances. I will answer for it he does not escape."

"What evidence do you intend to bring forward?" asked the magistrate.

"I imagine that these letters and my own oath as to his identity will be sufficient to warrant you in remanding him for a day or two."

"Oh, certainly!"

Mr. Skellum then swore very positively to the identity of the prisoner, who was then, under an unusually strong escort, removed to the strongest cell in the whole of York Castle.

The intelligence of the remarkable events which had occurred in the Court very quickly spread themselves over the whole of the city, causing an amount of popular excitement which, till then, had been unexampled.

Dick's first impulse upon finding himself alone in his cell was to give full vent to his despair.

"It is fate," he cried—"it is my fate! All proves it. Every effort I have made to get away from this accursed place has been a futile one—some strange circumstance has ever guided my footsteps back again to it. I am here, and I am doomed!"

But Dick Turpin was never one to abandon himself very long to despair.

On the present occasion he recovered much sooner than might have been expected.

"I know the worst now," he muttered. "Before this, I felt so undecided that I knew not how to act. Now there admits no doubt—I have but one course to follow; I will try it—I will strive my best, for if I fail I shall lose nothing."

Dick resolved upon his escape.

He was animated solely by that strong desire which had of late been so much before him.

But for his hope and confidence of being able to regain the spot where Maud lay so peacefully, he would have resigned himself entirely to his fate.

It is questionable, however, whether the hope of freedom would have presented itself under such circumstances to anyone save Dick Turpin.

After all the trouble the authorities had had, and with the existence of such a personal feeling as filled Skellum's breast, it was only reasonable to suppose that no precaution would be spared to keep him secure.

Indeed, to have permitted him to get free would have been a great scandal to everybody connected with the affair.

Yet, although not unmoved by these considerations, Dick never wavered in his resolve.

He would be free or die in the attempt.

And as to the latter, he would sooner perish so than fall into the hands of the hangman, as he would do inevitably if he remained.

One discovery, however, he was not long making which threatened to be a great impediment to his projected escape.

This was that his weakness was so great that he could scarcely move.

Such a thing as this might well have cast him into despair.

But it did not.

"Let me think," he muttered. "Some time must elapse before—before my trial—say my trial."

The word which had first risen to his lips was "execution," but he could not bring himself to pronounce that word.

"Between now and then, if I take proper measures, surely it will be easy enough for me to recover at least a considerable portion of my expended strength. Yes, yes—I will turn the whole of my attention to doing this, and, moreover, I shall have plenty of time to think over and mature my plans."

There was another thought which struck him too, and which went far towards convincing him that this enforced delay was also most vital to success.

It was only reasonable to think that a much closer and vigilant watch would be kept at first than there would be when they had found, after several nights, their watching was of no avail.

"Yes," he said, "there can be no room for doubt upon the point. I will feign that I am so impressed with the idea that my fate is inevitable that I shall make no effort. I can do that easily; I will throw them quite off their guard."

After the discovery of his identity, Dick had been removed to another and stronger part of the castle, so that for this reason he saw no more of the turnkey who had so thoughtlessly precipitated his recognition.

But he found no difficulty in obtaining a further supply of the money which had been taken from him on his first arrival at the castle, for, as is well known, the usages of prisons in this respect were widely different to what they are at the present day.

At the time of which we write, if a prisoner happened to possess a tolerably good store of cash, confinement in his cell was about the only discomfort he had to endure, and even this was made as light as possible.

Scarcely any restriction was made as to the kinds of provisions and drink that were carried in, and Dick availed himself of this state of things to have brought to him every nourishing kind of food and wine he could think of.

He had to pay for them most extravagantly, it is true, but then he did not care for that—nothing could have caused him less consideration.

He was pleased to find that he was gaining flesh and strength daily in the most surprising manner.

Indeed, when he was had up for his next examination he presented something like his former aspect.

He had not troubled himself to inquire the precise nature of the charge that was to be brought forward against him on this occasion.

Nor had he thought it worth while to engage any legal assistance.

The money paid to any lawyer would have been simply thrown away, for no man, though never so eloquent, could have brought the trial to end in the least degree to his advantage.

All that was gone through was a form merely.

Yet, when the details were made known to him, he could not help feeling some degree of surprise.

"Your worship," said the counsel for the prosecution, "the charge I am about to bring before the prisoner is of the most serious nature known—it is that of murder!"

Dick listened eagerly, for at present he could not think of what was coming.

"I fixed upon this charge," continued the counsel, "because if proved—and no evidence can be clearer than that which I possess—it will be sufficient to warrant the passing of sentence of death, and because it is one of the last of the long list of crimes the prisoner has committed."

Even after this preface it did not strike Dick what was coming.

"It appears that only so lately as the 18th inst. the prisoner was in the environs of York. Stopping at a small public-house, he, with many threats and curses, bade the ostler place a horse at his service, and offering a very considerable sum in return if he would do so. This the honest fellow very properly refused to do, whereupon the prisoner, with a loud oath whipped out his sword and wounded the ostler therewith so grievously that in a short time he died from the effects.

"But not without leaving some testamentary evidence behind.

"Most fortunately the poor fellow survived long enough to serve the ends of justice. Here is his statement of what took place, written down from his lips, and attested by reliable evidence."

The document in question was handed to the magistrate.

Glancing over it, his eyes rested upon the signatures.

"Call John Timmis," he said, in a loud voice.

A portly, jovial-looking man responded to the summons.

He was placed in the witness-box at once.

The magistrate read over the document, which was to the effect of what we have just stated.

"Is that correct?" he asked.

"Every word of it, your worship."

"How did you discover what had happened?"

"We heard a most awful groaning, your worship; and on going to see what was the cause of it, we saw the ostler lying on his back in the stable weltering in his blood."

"Very good. And after he had made this statement, what did he do?"

"Went dead, your worship."

It is not our purpose, however, to enter minutely into the proceedings which took place on this occasion.

The officers who had chased him over the house-tops were examined.

To them Dick's disappearance was as great a mystery as ever.

Then others were produced who testified to having seen Dick walking away from the scene of the murder on the evening in question, and not long after the hour when it must have been committed.

Then Skellum came forward, and swore most positively that the prisoner at the bar was no other than the world-renowned highwayman, Dick Turpin.

"Prisoner at the bar," said the magistrate, "what have you to say?"

"I have nothing to say."

"Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty."

After this Dick Turpin was duly committed to take his trial at the next York assizes, on the charge of wilful murder.

The magistrate thought fit to caution the Governor of the prison to take every possible precaution to prevent the escape of the daring offender he had entrusted to his custody.

Dick merely bowed as he left the Court.

"He seems remarkably quiet," said the magistrate to Skellum, in a confidential whisper. "I thought he was such a desperate character."

"So he is."

"How do you account for his present behaviour?"

"I cannot account for it, your worship," was Skellum's reply; "but feeling convinced that it means something, I shall keep a doubly sharp look-out."

"Are you sure you have got the right man?"

"As sure as I am of my own identity."

"That is sufficient, then."

Outside the Court nothing was talked of but the particulars of Dick's extraordinary arrest; but, strangely enough, it happened that Captain Hawk was the last to hear anything about it.

CHAPTER MCXXVII

DICK TURPIN HAS A MOST UNEXPECTED YET MOST WELCOME VISITOR.

From the day when the good old castle of York had first been put to the base uses of a prison never had there been so much excitement in and around its walls as there was when they had Dick Turpin for a prisoner.

Double guards were placed in all the corridors, and relieved at frequent intervals, while many men were set to patrol the outward walls.

Of all this Skellum was the presiding genius—he was indefatigable.

But this will seem by no means wonderful when it is remembered how much he had at stake.

Dick still preserved that calm, apathetic behaviour which had so surprised the magistrate and caused Mr. Skellum to be more suspicious than ever.

But the prisoner's composure was severely tried by the number of visitors who crowded the cell for the purpose of visiting him.

Of these, nearly all were perfect strangers, brought solely by a contemptible curiosity.

There was not one of them who would have aided him in any way, yet they would stand gaping at him and endeavouring to enter into conversation with him in a manner that would lead one to suppose that they were deeply interested in his fate.

It was in vain that Dick protested against this.

No regard was paid to his complaints.

He was looked upon more in the light of a wild beast than an ordinary mortal, and therefore it was no more than right that he should be gazed at.

But among the rest came the warm-hearted baronet, Sir Humphrey Yeomans.

Dick's face lighted up with pleasure as soon as he beheld him, for he knew his motive to be a better one than mere curiosity.

"I am truly sorry to see you here," were Sir Humphrey's first words. "When I heard you had tricked the officers at the lawyer's, I was in the hopes that you would get clear away."

"And unquestionably I should have succeeded in doing this had it not been for the basest treachery," said Dick, with a bitterness which he could not suppress. "But, there," he added, "it's no good grieving over the past."

"Not a bit of it—not a bit of it. I am glad you think so. What brings me here, however, is to know what I can do in your behalf."

"You are too generous, and I——"

"Pooh, pooh!—nothing of the sort. If what you have done for me does not deserve a return, I should like to know what does. Don't be afraid to speak, but just say what I can do for you."

"I am afraid nothing, though I thank you just the same."

"But I insist upon doing something, if it is ever so little; I sha'n't rest if I don't do something."

"I wish I knew some way in which you could aid me," answered Dick; "but I do not. I am here, and I know my position well enough to feel certain that the authorities will only allow me to leave here when on my way to the scaffold."

"Pooh, pooh, I say! You don't know what can be done in England when money is in the case, and I sha'n't be inclined to spare a few pounds, I assure you."

"And yet, Sir Humphrey, I trust you will forgive me for saying that I am afraid money will be but of slight importance in my case."

"I shall not allow you to be a judge, and that puts into my head what will be the best thing I can do for you. It is to send the lawyers to you; they will know best what can be done."

This offer Dick could not reject.

He had but little hope that it would eventuate to his benefit, but for all that he thanked Sir Humphrey warmly, because he knew how well-intentioned the offer was.

"Put every trust in Steel," he said, when about to depart. "He is a wonderfully clever fellow; and if anybody can do the least good he can."

Again expressing his thanks as well as he was able—for true gratitude is ever poor in thanks—Dick Turpin bade the eccentric baronet farewell.

But another visitor came that same day, whose presence was, if anything, more pleasing to Dick than the baronet's had been, and that is saying a great deal.

Just when the cell was beginning to grow dusky and obscure from the decline of daylight, the cell door was opened, and a form which Turpin at first did not recognise crossed the threshold.

This was a young man of very juvenile appearance—but this was principally owing to the fact that there was only just the faintest possible moustache visible on his upper lip.

His cheeks and chin were as smooth and velvety as those of a woman.

His hands, too, were white, small and delicate—of a very feminine appearance.

He was attired in the very extreme of the then prevailing fashion—in fact, a dandified-looking individual of the Beau Brummel type.

In one hand he carried a perfume-box with a perforated lid, which he applied to his nose continually.

"Disgusting odour!" he exclaimed, advancing with the finikin step of a dancing master. "Odious—odious! Where's Dick Turpin? Hi! you key-carrier—which is Dick Turpin? Ah!"

Having concluded this brilliant speech, he took a particularly long sniff at his perfume-box.

The turnkey manifested the utmost respect and deference towards this foppish individual, though he had to draw the back of his hand across his lips to conceal the grin which appeared there.

From his manner, however, it was clear that the fresh visitor had behaved liberally to him.

"There he is, if you please, sir," the turnkey answered. "He is quite harmless. You can go as close as you like to him without danger—he is securely chained."

"Ah! is it so? Positively—demme!"

He screwed his eye-glass into his eye as he spoke, and stared for some moments in silence.

There was an angry glare visible in Dick's eyes.

This young fellow's manner was, as may be supposed, most offensive to him.

"Monstrous—monstrous strange!" he ejaculated, dropping his eye-glass and again having recourse to his pounce-box. "A curiosity—a wonder! Ah! demme!"

Another long stare followed.

Then turning to the jailer, he said:

"Here, you key-carrier, take this—it's a guinea. Get something to drink outside—I want to talk a little with this Turpin. Ah! I profess he's a curiosity—yes, a monstrous curiosity! Ah, ah!"

The turnkey took the coin slipped into his hand, and withdrew without a word, closing the door after him.

No sooner had he retired than a remarkable alteration took place in the manner of this very affected creature.

With a sudden stride that was surprisingly at variance with his former movements, he placed himself quite close to the prisoner and held out his hand.

"Why, Dick, my friend," he said, in a suppressed voice, and with such a striking difference in its tones—"is it possible that my disguise is so good as to prevent you from recognising me? or is it the darkness of this detestable place? I——"

"Beg, pardon, sir," said the turnkey, opening the door with such suddenness as to cause the visitor to start and appear in no slight degree disconcerted; "I forgot to say that when you wanted to leave all you have to do is to tap against the door here. I shall hear you."

"Very well, key-carrier — very well," replied the stranger, only partially succeeding in his attempt to resume his former voice and manner.

The turnkey, however, seemed to suspect nothing, for he withdrew again without uttering another syllable.

"Confound the fellow!" said the stranger, speaking in what we may suppose to be his natural voice; "he scared me for the moment."

Dick looked puzzled for a moment.

"My disguise is good," said the stranger. "But look; surely you will recognise me now."

He stood so that what light struggled through the window of the cell fell upon his face.

"Captain Hawk!" ejaculated Dick.

"Hush—hush; not so loud! That confounded fellow might have ears long enough to hear what you say, and that would be decidedly unpleasant."

"This is indeed a pleasure and a satisfaction!" Dick cried, with sparkling eyes, and clasping the young man's outstretched hand. "But why are you here?"

"To see you."

"Is that all?"

"All, do you call it? Is it not more than enough? I look upon it as a slight favour to show to one whom I like to consider a comrade and a friend."

"You are very generous."

"Not a bit of it. I have come here to see you and to serve you, Dick; and as I have done the one, so will I accomplish the other."

There could be no mistaking the tone of resolution in which the captain spoke.

His manner was that of a man who is determined

effect some object, no matter what obstacles or difficulties stand in the way."

The way in which he spoke had a great effect upon Dick Turpin.

He had a high opinion of the captain.

He knew him to be one to rush on where all others would shrink back or pause, and Dick had found by experience how often this line of action ensures success in any desperate undertaking.

And what could be too desperate for Captain Hawk?

"I am truly sorry to see you here, Dick," he said; "but there is one comfort even in that."

"How so?"

"We know the worst."

Dick smiled.

"You shall be free."

"I hope so."

"I say it, and mean it. You shall be free, if you have to step over my dead body to make your escape!"

Oh, how grateful it was to Dick to find such a friend as this so unexpectedly, and after what had so lately taken place!

His emotions overcame him to such an extent, that speech was impossible.

But Captain Hawk went on speaking with the same energy and rapidity of utterance as before.

"I hold it as a point of the nicest honour to set you free; so rest assured I shall not fail, for I consider I am to a great extent the cause of your being here now—I am more than anybody else to blame for it, and to my last day I shall never cease to regret the circumstance."

These words were in the highest degree enigmatical to Dick.

He looked up with an air of puzzled wonder.

"You to blame!" he murmured. "I don't understand you. What do you mean?"

"Neither more nor less than I say."

"But explain."

"Why, when you were struggling with the police before your capture, I was close at hand—I rode up just as you were overpowered."

"You did?" ejaculated Dick, in the utmost astonishment.

"I did. And I know you want to ask the question why it was I did not at the least make some attempt to save you."

"Nay, I——"

"But I know you do; and what is more, I know that is what I ought to have done. But incredible as it may seem to you, though I saw you with tolerable plainness, I did not recognise you."

"Not recognise me!" echoed Dick, in a way which showed how much this had surprised him.

"No, I positively did not; and if you could only contrive to form some idea of how you looked on that occasion, your astonishment would cease. You were bruised and bleeding, your apparel was covered with dust, and such a change had been wrought in your features that they were perfectly strange to me."

"It must have been so," responded Dick, somewhat sadly, "otherwise the officers would have known me."

"True."

"And were not you recognised?"

"Well, I was; and, to tell the truth, I was not prepared for the event, and was thrown for a moment off my guard. My immediate impulse, without the least reflection, mind you, was to touch Satan a little, and then the next thing I knew anything about was that we were flying over the open country like the wind."

Dick sighed heavily, for these words reminded him forcibly of his great and irreparable loss.

Captain Hawk did not fail to perceive the effect his words had had, and, with a right instinct, he forebore from asking any questions about Black Bess—a thing he was most anxious to do.

"What causes me the most remorse," he went on, "is the conviction I feel that I could, had I but known, have rescued you from your captors; and that is why I so blame myself, and why I consider I am the cause of your being here."

"But it is wrong on your part to think so."

"Don't try to persuade me of that; it would be a hopeless task, I assure you. I do blame myself, and I am resolved to make what reparation I am able. You shall be free, Dick, and by my agency, even if I have to pull down every stone of York Castle to accomplish it."

Dick smiled at the enthusiasm he manifested.

"Wait a moment," he said; "you must explain your presence here. It is a perfect mystery how you contrived to gain admittance."

"Nothing could be more simple."

"How so?"

"You see this disguise? I play my part tolerably well, do I not?"

"Exceedingly well."

"Such a character is easy enough to play, and that is why I selected it. When my make-up was perfect, I called upon Sir Humphrey Yeomans, and after a little difficulty, got him to write an order for my admittance."

"But you expose yourself to great danger by coming here."

"Not a bit of it. The police are such dunder-headed fellows that you have only got to travel a little out of the beaten track and they are puzzled completely. But never mind that—let us come back to the matter in hand."

"My escape?"

"Just so."

"A very close watch is being kept round the prison, is there not?"

"Yes, very, and I am glad to see it."

"Glad to see it?"

"Yes; the very superfluity of precaution will undo itself. In a night or so, if all is kept quiet, they will grow as careless as possible. These violent measures never last."

"I believe you are right," answered Dick, speaking in a tone of voice which showed that Captain Hawk's words had produced a marked effect upon his spirits.

"Of course I am right; and only consider how easy it would have been for me to supply you with a tool or two on this present visit. But it is not worth while to regret that; we have time enough before us. There is, however, one very important thing."

"What is it?"

"Why, that you try your best to recover your customary strength."

"Rely upon it, I shall do so."

"That is right, then. The rest leave to me; I will take care in a short time to supply you with all things necessary for a successful escape, as well as give you all possible information."

"You are indeed a true friend," exclaimed Dick, enthusiastically, and grasping the young man's hand while he spoke. "Until you came my heart was sad and heavy, for I believed I had no friend; now, however, I feel relieved of a heavier load than I can possibly describe."

"Believe me, I rejoice to hear it; and when your escape has been effected I will aid you to do anything you may decide upon."

Dick was most grateful for this assurance.

Some more conversation passed between them, but it is not necessary to place it before our readers, because it only related to those events that had elapsed, and about which Captain Hawk possessed no very definite information.

"I must put an end to this visit now," he said, at length; "though I am most reluctant to leave you; still, I have stayed long enough already to give rise to suspicion, and it is impossible to be too cautious and too prudent."

Dick could not but admit the force and truth of this, though the prospect of a separation affected him strangely. His feelings can only be understood by those who have been cut off from all communication from their fellow-beings, and whose hearts have yearned for the companionship of some congenial spirit.

Agreeably to the intimation of the turnkey, Captain Hawk tapped upon the panel of the door.

It was opened with so much promptness that he rejoiced to think the whole of the conversation between himself and his friend had been prudently carried on in a low tone.

CHAPTER MCXXVIII.

ALLOWS THE READER TO TAKE A PEEP AT THE REMARKABLE PROCEEDINGS OF CAPTAIN HAWK.

Laughing in his sleeve at the short-sightedness of the authorities, Captain Hawk made his way out of the prison unmolested.

The idea never once entered the minds of the men on duty that this superfinical-looking personage was other than he appeared to be.

On emerging into the streets, the captain was surprised to find it was so dark.

In fact, night had fairly set in.

"Let me see," he said, walking with more briskness than was exactly consonant with his assumed character—"I have much to do—very much. It is plain that Dick relies upon me—perhaps the reason is that he has no one else. No matter, I shall succeed; his reliance will not prove to be ill-placed."

When he spoke again an additional seriousness might have been detected in the tones of his voice.

"It is most certain," he said, "that this enterprise cannot be carried on without money, and it is equally certain that I have not enough at the present moment. The conclusion that follows is plain enough: the money must be had, though my intention was to keep myself perfectly quiet; but that is out of the question now."

At this moment he turned a corner, and found himself close to an old inn—probably one of the oldest and most picturesque-looking habitations in the whole City of York.

Some faded gilt letters on a weather-beaten sign-board informed wayfarers that the old inn was known by the sign of The Chequers.

It was evident that the place did not lack custom, for loud sounds of rude and boisterous merriment issued from its many doors and windows.

Captain Hawk gave a hasty glance around him.

It was the first time he had done so since he left the castle, so that for aught he knew he might have been followed the whole of the way.

Nothing was visible, however, that would cause apprehension.

Having satisfied himself that the coast was clear, he somewhat suddenly plunged into the shadow of a wide, dark gateway communicating with the stables.

It was towards the latter that his steps were directed.

His approach was either seen or heard, for a door was opened and an ostler appeared, whose face was beaming all over with a grin of satisfaction.

"My eyes, captain," he ejaculated, with evident satisfaction, "how first-rate you do look, to be sure—capital!"

Captain Hawk neither paused nor spoke until he had crossed the threshold.

Then his first words were:

"Is Satan all right?"

"Never was better, captain—never better, I'll take upon myself to say that; but do tell me, how ever was it that you came to give him such a name?"

"Because he has power over the darkness."

"Now, that's what I call a good answer, captain—the best I have heard for many a day."

The captain did not seem inclined to take the ostler's word, for he penetrated still further into the stables until he reached the stall where his matchless steed was standing.

A low whinnying sound showed that he was recognised, and it was with a thrill of his nerves and a glow of his heart which cannot be described the captain fondly caressed his horse.

"You are in good trim," he said. "It would be almost a pity to let you stand still. Sam!"

"Yes, captain."

"Get Satan ready for me as quickly as you can. I will just go in and make a few necessary changes in my dress."

"It's a pity, captain—a real pity. Those togs suit you exactly."

Hawk smiled, but said nothing.

Emerging from the stable, he crossed the yard and entered the inn by a small door which did not seem to be much used as a means of entrance.

The passage beyond was very dark, but the captain must have been wonderfully well acquainted with it, for he walked on with the utmost confidence.

At the extremity was a door.

Opening this, he passed into a small apartment dimly lighted by a smouldering fire.

A good kick with his foot caused the logs to break into a blaze.

The flickering light which now shot up showed that the room was by no means destitute of comforts.

On the table a light repast was spread, evidently in anticipation of the captain's coming.

The whole had a most tempting look, and as he glanced at the different viands he pronounced the name:

"Jessie!"

By this he most likely meant that he knew to whom he was indebted for this attention; and by the smile on his lips and the sparkle in his eyes, it might be inferred that this mention of her name conjured up most agreeable recollections.

But he was in too much hurry and excitement to do anything like justice to the delicacies laid before him.

A few minutes sufficed to enable him to make the necessary alterations in his costume.

Advancing to the door, he took down a large horseman's cloak that was hanging behind it, and just as he did so a faint tapping sound came from without.

Captain Hawk opened the door in a moment.

A young girl, whose age at the most could not have exceeded seventeen, just crossed the threshold, and stood in an attitude of mingled timidity and grace.

Her large, dark eyes were fixed in a moment upon the captain's face with a glance that was expressive of pleasure and half reproach.

"Shall you go out again to-night?" she asked, in a sweet, musical voice.

"Yes, Jessie; I am off now. In another moment I should have been gone."

"Without a word?"

"You might have been unaware of my brief return. But never mind, my lass; I shall be back in a few hours after midnight."

The young girl sighed faintly, and turned away, perhaps to hide the tears that sprang up to her eyes.

"*Au revoir*, Jessie!" cried the highwayman, with careless gaiety. "Don't be uneasy; I shall soon return."

And with these words on his lips, he flung the cloak over his shoulder, and left the room.

Not once did he glance back, and when he again emerged into the inn yard he was whistling in an undertone a portion of a popular air from the last new opera.

Satan was quite ready.

Seeing the captain approach, the ostler led the horse into the yard.

After a careful inspection of all the trappings, the captain vaulted into the saddle.

"Keep a good look-out for my return, Sam," he said. "I can't say when it will be—most likely the moment when you least expect me."

He slightly slackened the rein as he spoke.

Satan had already been chafing at the delay in starting, and bounded off at once.

As he rode thus swiftly out of the inn yard, the captain fancied he caught sight of a pale, anxious-looking face watching his departure.

"Poor Jessie!" he muttered. "She is a good lass, but——"

He left the thought unuttered.

The Old Chequers Inn stood quite on the outskirts of the City of York, and therefore a very short time indeed elapsed before Captain Hawk had the open country before him.

As soon as this was the case he loosed the reins, and allowed the horse to go at his own pace.

This was something tremendous.

Trees, hedgerows, solitary houses, and other wayside objects flitted past like swift-fleeting shadows.

A wild enthusiasm took possession of the highwayman's mind as he experienced the exhilaration produced by rapid motion.

Away—away—on and on, further and further still, until Satan's mouth became filled with white flakes of foam.

Presently the captain gently drew the rein.

By slow degrees, Satan's speed was lessened, until it was reduced to an easy trot.

"Surely this is far enough from York," said Captain Hawk. "It's a dozen miles at least from here to the Old Chequers, and so I don't care how soon something comes in the way."

Stopping his horse altogether—for he had reached a spot that seemed most favourable for his purpose—the

highwayman proceeded to make a deliberate and careful examination of his weapons.

One he paid especial attention to.

This was a pistol.

It was altogether a remarkable weapon.

The barrel was of unusual length, and glittered like polished silver.

The butt had nothing pistol-like about it, being, in fact, more suggestive of the handle of a carpenter's saw.

This gave it an odd appearance.

But, as might be seen, this was the captain's favourite weapon, strange and peculiar as it might look.

The strangest thing in connection with it was, that the highwayman addressed it just as he would a living creature.

It had a name—

A most significant name—

Death!

By this appellation the highwayman not only spoke of but to it.

"There, Death," he exclaimed, putting the pistol in his belt in such a way that he felt would enable him to seize it in an instant, "I am ready now for anything that may betide! You are my truest friend, for I never knew you to fail me in the hour of need."

Although made as plainly, perhaps, as any firearm could be—we mean with regard to the chased mountings which are usually seen upon such things—yet it would have been hard to match it with one more beautifully finished in every part.

The lock was everything that it was supposed possible for a lock to be in those days, when nipples and percussion caps were undreamt of.

The peculiar formation of the handle is worthy of consideration even in these days, when it hardly seems possible to bring firearms any closer to perfection.

The saw-like shape we have described, however, had many advantages, which showed it to be far superior to the stock in common use.

It was expressly framed to suit the grasp of the captain's hand—the shape permitted a firm hold to be taken in a moment.

Nor was this all.

The butt being grooved so as to receive each finger separately enabled the weapon to be held with remarkable steadiness, and that tendency to pull upwards that exists in every pistol as now made was completely done away with.

Captain Hawk could take an instant steady and true aim with it, and as the lock was good, and he paid particular attention to the loading, it was rarely indeed, if ever, that he failed to hit the mark with it.

He always relied upon it for use in that emergency when a shot would get him out of his difficulty.

He listened intently for some moments after the examination of his pistols, but no sound indicating the approach of a traveller was borne to his ears.

"The road is strangely deserted," he muttered; "but I must exercise my patience a little. Perhaps, when they do begin to come, they will follow quickly."

He prepared to wait.

But Captain Hawk happened to be one of those individuals who find it impossible to remain still for any length of time.

Even during the few moments he did remain immovable his brain was busily at work.

"That's a good idea," he broke out, all at once—"a very good idea. I've a good mind to try it. I should be saved a world of trouble, I daresay."

Again Captain Hawk listened.

But the highway remained as silent as before.

This decided him.

He at once set about the execution of his idea.

What its nature was will be very quickly seen by his actions.

First of all he dismounted, and leaving his horse to wander whither he pleased, for he knew he could recall him in an instant when he wished to do so, he went towards the side of the road.

By his manner it was clear he was looking for something.

He walked on for a few yards, and stopped at a gate that led into a meadow.

Glancing across the road, he was just able to make out there was a similar gate as nearly as possible opposite to him.

"The very thing," he cried—"nothing could be better!"

The gate close to which he stood was only fastened by means of a piece of chain wrapped round the post; consequently, it was easy enough to open it.

This was his next proceeding.

He pulled at the gate until it was at right angles to the road, and then by means of a couple of large stones lying hard by he contrived to fix it in this position.

Then crossing over, he treated the opposite gate in just the same way.

From this it will be seen he had, with very little expenditure of time and trouble, erected a barrier that blocked up two-thirds of the high-road.

"A couple of good hurdles now, if I could only find them, would finish the job nicely," he said, surveying what he had already accomplished with great satisfaction.

In the country it was not likely he would have to look far without finding some hurdles.

He found some close at hand, and quickly selected two which he judged just fitting to his purpose.

The barrier, though now complete—that is to say, stretching continuously from one side of the highway to the other—was by no means strong.

Indeed, very little would suffice to bear it down.

But it was strong enough to answer Captain Hawk's purpose, especially when he had fortified it by means of a few more of the large stones, of which plenty were lying about.

"There," he exclaimed, "I am ready now, and travellers may come just as soon as they think proper—they will find me prepared. Hi, Satan! here, boy, here!"

He did not raise his voice much.

But the faithful animal heard it.

Faithfully and readily, as some well-trained dog might do, the horse trotted to his side.

Mounting was by no means a lengthy or laborious action for Captain Hawk to accomplish.

He seemed to give but one spring from the ground and then to be firmly fixed in his seat.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as he thrust his right foot carelessly into the stirrup, "just in the very nick of time! Now, I call this providential. How very kind to wait till I had finished!"

It was the unmistakable sound produced by the approach of some vehicle which had brought these words to his lips.

And in the easiest manner possible to conceive, as though it was the best sport imaginable, he held himself in readiness for action.

"Drawn by one horse, running on two wheels, and on the road to York," were the comments made by the captain.

He was quite right.

In less than a moment he caught sight of two star-like looking lights in the distance.

They rapidly approached, and ere long he was able to distinguish the upper portion of the horse that was harnessed to the gig, and, very dimly, the forms of two persons sitting in it.

The horse was coming on at a round trot, and so great was the silence that the captain could hear the murmur of conversation.

The speakers must have been interested in what they were saying or they would have seen the barrier before them sooner than they did; but perhaps one reason for this was, that knowing the roadway to be perfectly clear in this part they did not trouble themselves to keep a good look-out.

CHAPTER MCXXIX.

CONTINUES TO RELATE THE REMARKABLE PROCEEDINGS OF CAPTAIN HAWK.

THE horse, however, showed himself to be far more prudent and sagacious.

Seeing something in his path, he resolutely came to a stop, planting his fore feet upon the roadway in a manner which seemed suggestive of his determination to go no further.

The stoppage aroused the people in the vehicle.

The lamps at the side enabled them to see in a moment



[THE FATE OF ANTROBUS SKELLUM.]

that some strange-looking barricade had been stretched across the road.

The discovery was accompanied by a shrill scream.

"Oh, Alfred," said a female voice, "we are lost and undone! We shall be robbed, I am sure we shall!"

"And if we are, whose fault will it be?" was the rough rejoinder of her companion. "It was you who would insist upon travelling to-night, instead of waiting till morning, as I wanted to do."

"Oh, you mean, pitiful wretch—you base, base-hearted villain! Perhaps you think I did not see through your pretty little plan? I have got eyes in my head, I rather think! I know what you wanted to stop for! Fine doings, indeed!"

"Don't make a fool of yourself," growled her husband, "but just take hold of the reins while I jump down and see what this is in front! Dash me, if I can make it out!"

The lady screamed again.

This time with thrice as much shrillness.

Dimly and imperfectly she had caught sight of the form of Captain Hawk.

"Oh, mercy! Help!" she shrieked. "Here he is—a highwayman! I knew we were going to be robbed!"

"Robbed!" ejaculated the captain, in a deep voice. "I hope you will not shock me by pronouncing such a word while I am by."

"Oh, goodness!"

Captain Hawk came still nearer.

He was careful, however, to keep as much out of the direct rays of the lamp as possible.

"Who are you, sir?" asked the man in the gig, with a great assumption of fierceness and valour—"who are you, I should like to know?"

"A gentleman."

"I am glad to hear it—I took you for a——"

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Hold your row, will you!" cried his wife. "You're not fit to be allowed to open your mouth! Do you want to insult the gentleman?"

"Certainly not; but I should be glad if he would tell us what it is that stops the way.'

"A private gate," replied Captain Hawk, with the utmost gravity.

'A private gate! What on earth do you mean by that?"

"Just what I say."

"But this is a public road, and perfectly free to anyone who may choose to travel along it. No one can put up a private gate on the highway."

"There you are quite wrong," said the captain, "for, as you see, here it is."

"But what is it for?"

"My own convenience."

The travellers were bewildered.

What to make of the captain they knew not.

Certainly his manners were not those of a common robber.

Whether they had anything to fear from him or not they could not decide.

He seemed quite at his ease, and not in the least hurry or confusion.

"Your own convenience, sir!" said the lady, at length, perceiving her companion seemed too astonished to continue the conversation. "Excuse me, sir, but I do not understand you."

"A few words will make all quite clear," returned the captain, with a great affectation of politeness.

"Indeed sir!"

"Yes, I am here to collect subscriptions for a charitable and truly praiseworthy object; but, as I am sorry to say, there are some people in the world so void of principle that they would shuffle out of such a matter. I have been compelled to set up this temporary obstruction."

"In other words," growled the man, "you have stopped up the road simply in order that you may rob us with greater ease and convenience to yourself."

"Really, sir," returned the captain, "I am truly surprised that so respectable a man as you appear to be should make use of such a disreputable word. Rob! Bah! I can't bear the idea of anything so mean and vulgar."

"Good!" said the traveller. "I rather like that, I confess. Rob, forsooth! What have you in your hand now, I should like to know? Why don't you call a spade a spade?"

"What a fool you must be," broke in his better half, "to insult the gentleman in that fashion!"

"Gentleman be d—d! He is a fine gentleman!"

"Such language," said Captain Hawk, professing the utmost disgust, "is horrible—truly horrible! I hope I shall hear no more of it, but that you will pay attention to what I am going to say."

"Speak on, sir—speak on, sir," said the lady. "We shall be glad to listen."

"Thank you," answered Hawk, with a bow. "As I said, I am here to-night to receive subscriptions for a praiseworthy object. Those who are wise contribute liberally, and are allowed to ride on without further molestation; while those who refuse, compel me to make use of arguments."

The wife nudged her husband.

"Give him something," she said, "and perhaps he will allow us to go on."

The captain's ears were quick enough to catch the import of what was said, and he replied, instantly:

"Certainly; there will be no further obstruction; but, understand me, if you offer any unworthy sum I shall resent it as an insult."

"And may I ask the object of this contribution?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Be good enough to inform me, then."

"One of my best friends happens to be in an unfortunate situation, from which he may be relieved by money."

"I suppose some rascally comrade of yours is in jail?"

"If you will insist on representing facts in such a vulgar way," said the captain, "why, I must admit you are right."

"I never heard of anything so cool in my life! D—n me, sir! I could laugh; but—but you are carrying the joke a little too far. You would ask me for money, and what you intend to do with it is to help the escape of one of your associates from prison!"

"It's no joke at all."

"Why, if I gave you a farthing for such a purpose," continued the traveller, "I should be neither more nor less than an accessory before the fact."

"Before or behind is all one to me," returned Hawk "I mean to have your contribution notwithstanding."

"What if I refuse compliance with your demand?"

"You had better not do so."

"But suppose I do?"

"I should be compelled to have recourse to arguments."

As he spoke, the highwayman drew forth a pistol and cocked it with an audible click.

The sound was one which jarred upon the ears of the travellers.

The lady screamed.

Her husband uttered an angry curse.

"I have your folly to thank for this!" he muttered wrathfully. "But it serves me right for not acting according to my own judgment. I hate to ride in the dark, and I will never do it again."

"Come, sir," said Hawk, "I have no more time to spare. Hand over!"

"What do you want?"

"As much as you like. Take care how you offer me too little—the consequence you will find to be rather serious. Be reasonable, and you will be allowed to ride on."

"Unreasonable, you mean."

"Just as you please," returned the captain, as imperturbably as ever.

Such a manner was, to say the least of it, intensely aggravating.

The traveller doubtless thought to behave in a liberal manner, for he opened a small leather bag and took from it several gold pieces.

"I beg your pardon," said Captain Hawk—"I ought to have told you that I make it part of my system never to take loose money. Be good enough to hand me the bag just as it is. Thank you!"

While he spoke, the captain outstretched his arm and took hold of the bag.

The traveller was so amazed at this last speech that for a second or two he could do nothing but stare.

When he recovered himself the bag was gone.

It had found a secure resting-place at the bottom of one of the highwayman's pockets.

"You may pass on now," he said. "The contribution is sufficient. Many thanks! Good night!"

He removed the hurdles as he spoke.

The traveller seemed at first inclined to protest against this appropriation of his money.

Most likely, however, he remembered the captain's pistol, and consequently altered his mind.

Seizing hold of the whip, he gave the horse so smart a cut with it that the poor beast snorted with pain, and set off at a highly dangerous pace.

Rapid as it was, yet, nevertheless, Captain Hawk caught a few words which the traveller addressed to his wife that seemed to indicate that he would visit his annoyance and vexation upon her.

This, as the reader may suppose, occasioned the captain but little uneasiness.

The bag, though small, was weighty, and, as it appeared to him, contained nothing but gold.

If so, the amount would be considerable.

Too careless, however, to take the trouble to ascertain this, Captain Hawk set to work to restore his barrier to its former condition.

"Upon my word," he said, "this is a capital plan. I can't imagine how it is I never thought of it before."

He had barely time to finish making his preparations when his acute sense of hearing informed him that there were more travellers upon the road.

"Just in time," he muttered, as he regained his place upon Satan's back. "I hope I may be as fortunate this time."

The sounds were less equivocal.

The captain was able to pronounce with certainty upon what was coming.

"Two horsemen," he murmured, "and coming from York. If my late friends gave them a hint of what is in store for them, I may have some trouble. But what does it matter?"

He hummed a few lines from one of the most popular airs, and prepared himself for business.

The horsemen came on rapidly—so rapidly that the captain began to think they could have no suspicion of the existence of the barrier across the roadway.

Nor had they light of any kind to make it visible.

"They have no suspicions," murmured Hawk, getting a pistol ready for use; "and yet one would have thought that that man, having been robbed himself, would have been generous enough to put others on their guard against suffering a like loss. But no—no; that would not be in accordance with human nature."

The highwayman was right there.

It would be a satisfaction to the late traveller, beyond a doubt, when he saw that others were in a fair way of falling into the snare.

"Hullo!" said one of the new-comers, suddenly, for his horse stopped all at once, almost unseating him in doing so; "what the devil is the matter?"

His companion happened to be a pace or two behind him, and drew the rein.

"The matter?" he asked. "Where? What do you mean?"

"There's something in the road."

"What is it?"

"That's what I can't make out."

Up to this moment, Captain Hawk had kept himself completely in the background.

The two travellers had not the remotest suspicion that there was a mounted man near them.

Their surprise, therefore, may be imagined when they beheld the highwayman suddenly beside them.

Where he had come from they could not think.

Hawk did not allow them the opportunity of asking.

"There seems to be some obstruction in the roadway, gentlemen," he said, politely.

"There not only seems to be, but there actually is," was the reply. "Some one has been putting hurdles up. What the devil does it mean?"

"The explanation is simple enough, gentlemen."

"Indeed! Can you give it?"

"Certainly."

"Do so, then."

"This is a place appointed for toll taking," the captain continued, with the utmost gravity, "and I have been placed here to collect the dues."

"Toll!" said one of the gentlemen. "Ridiculous! You must be either mad or drunk!"

"You will find me neither one nor the other."

"Get out of the way! Down with the hurdles, Arthur!"

"Touch them who dare!" exclaimed Captain Hawk, with a sudden and startling alteration in his voice. "Gentlemen," he added, "you cannot pass here without paying tolls. If you do so quietly, all will be well."

"A highwayman, by Jove, Arthur!"

"So it seems; but he will find it no easy matter to rob the pair of us single-handed. Get your pistols ready, and stand firm!"

"As you please," said Captain Hawk, with his demeanour as unruffled as it was at first, "only I warn you, if you resist, I shall not let you go until I have taken every article of the least value that you may have about your person. On the other hand, if you like to surrender your purses quietly, you may ride on without further loss, or the least fear of violence."

His words did not fail to produce the effect.

The young man who had spoken about making a resistance now looked rather irresolutely at his comrade.

"May we believe you at your word?" he said, at length.

"Most certainly," answered Hawk.

"Then," said Arthur, "I am not going to risk a shot for the sake of a purse. Here is mine—take it!"

As he spoke he pulled a good-sized purse from his pocket, and tossed it towards the highwayman, who was dexterous enough to catch it in spite of the darkness.

The other traveller required no urging to follow his friend's example.

No doubt, to both of them, the loss of a purse was a trifling enough matter—certainly not of sufficient moment to make it worth while for them to run the least personal risk in the hope of retaining it.

"Many thanks," said Captain Hawk. "I have now all that I require."

He knocked down the hurdle as he spoke.

The young man who had been called Arthur was filled with surprise at finding that the barrier was of such a frail description.

"I'll give you my word," he said, "if I had had any idea the hurdles would have gone down with a push, I should have tried to keep my purse. At any rate, you would have had to gallop for it."

"Take my word for it," responded the captain, significantly, "things could not by any means have turned out better for you than they have. Be satisfied. Good night!"

The young men rode through the gap, and were quickly lost to sight in the darkness.

Captain Hawk remained a moment or two in hesitation.

"I have been tolerably successful," he muttered; "and the hour is getting too late for people to be abroad. Shall I be content, and make my way back again?"

After a little deliberation, the captain resolved to wait, at any rate, a short time longer upon the chance that there might be some late traveller to encounter.

But all was still, and all remained so until the highwayman's patience was exhausted.

"There's nothing more to be done to-night," he muttered, somewhat reluctantly. "But I will not complain."

He dismounted, in order to remove all traces of his barrier.

This did not occupy him many minutes, and it was just as he had finished that the distant hoofbeats of a horse reached his ears.

"Confound it!" he muttered. "What could be more annoying than this? Why couldn't he come a few minutes sooner, I should like to know? But never mind—it don't much matter."

It would have required a much more serious thing than this to ruffle Captain Hawk's composure.

He was one of those happy individuals who always make a point of taking everything by the smooth handle.

Regaining the saddle, he waited with all imaginable calmness until the traveller should reach him.

By this time the waning moon had risen.

The sky was too thickly covered with clouds for her beams to have much effect in dissipating the darkness, yet every now and then the silvery orb would show herself through one of the long, straggling rifts.

It was when she broke forth in this way that the traveller reached a spot within a few paces of where Captain Hawk was standing.

The moonbeams fell with full power upon the forms of both.

A mutual recognition took place.

Captain Hawk was the first to speak.

"Skellum!" he said. "By Jove, it's Skellum!"

CHAPTER MCXXX.

CAPTAIN HAWK COMMENCES HIS PREPARATIONS FOR EFFECTING THE ESCAPE OF DICK TURPIN FROM YORK CASTLE.

It was indeed no other than that indefatigable individual with whom Captain Hawk had so strangely met.

There could be no mistaking him.

It was not an easy matter to startle Skellum.

But surely, if ever he was startled, he was then.

"By all that's d—nable," he at last ejaculated, "it's Captain Hawk!"

Almost before the words had left his lips he drew forth a pistol, and rapidly levelling it, fired point-blank at the highwayman.

But the captain was prepared, and a slight touch of the rein caused Satan to swerve so suddenly as to foil the treacherous shot.

"Bullet for bullet, my friend!" cried Hawk, in a loud voice.

The report of his bright-barreled pistol mingled with and half drowned his words.

By what took place it would almost seem as though Skellum had attempted to follow the highwayman's plan of avoiding a bullet.

Whether this was so or not is a thing that cannot be determined.

But Skellum's horse suddenly made an odd plunging kind of movement—one for which his rider was not prepared, for in the twinkling of an eye the thief-hunter was lying on the ground.

So rapidly did this take place, and so entirely unexpected was the occurrence, that Captain Hawk was a second or two before he could credit his own senses.

There lay Skellum, however, upon the high-road, without displaying the least sign of motion.

Being cast completely over his horse's neck, he had fallen in a most awkward manner.

His head had struck the ground first, and the force of the blow was great, the roadway being as hard as a mass of iron.

His neck had then bent in some strange way, and he now laid with his head bent upon his breast.

Mechanically, Captain Hawk returned his discharged pistol to his belt.

"This is odd indeed!" he said. "Very—very strange! Is he dead, I wonder!"

Disposed as he was to make light of almost everything that took place, the highwayman on this occasion found himself unusually serious.

Skellum still remained as he had fallen.

Whether dead or only insensible it was impossible to say.

The captain deliberated with himself for a few seconds as to whether he should ride away without taking any more notice, or whether he should really attempt to find out whether the fall had been a mortal one.

The latter course was decided upon.

Not that he had any feelings of compassion towards his foe, but chiefly on the score of curiosity.

"I could hardly be content to remain in a state of doubt upon the point," he muttered, as he dismounted slowly. "It will, I daresay, be easy enough to ascertain."

Nevertheless, it was with an inward sensation of repugnance and aversion that he approached the prostrate form.

He touched it with his foot.

Skellum never stirred or gave utterance to a sound.

Overcoming his aversion by a violent effort, Hawk stooped down.

His foe was lying very awkwardly, and it was only after the exercise of much strength and trouble that he laid him, face upward, on the roadway.

The moon was not shining very brightly now, but the clouds showed a diffused light, which enabled him to see with sufficient clearness.

"Dead!" said the captain, after a momentary inspection of Skellum's pallid face. "Dead, for a thousand pounds!"

Such a sudden transition from life to death as this could scarcely have failed to make an impression upon the most callous and unreflecting heart.

Certainly the captain was not unaffected.

It cannot be said that the death of such a man as Skellum would cause him any regret; such would not have been the fact; yet he could not but be awed by the awful suddenness of the event.

In order to satisfy himself upon the point, he made another and closer examination.

But the result was the same.

Skellum was dead!

"He is past all human skill and past all meddling in human matters," the captain said, as he turned away. "It will be a shock to the next person who comes this way. At any rate, it is no concern of mine, and the sooner I am away from the spot the better, for it is quite possible that if it should be known I was the last in his company, his death would be laid upon my shoulders."

This was a reasonable enough supposition; and feeling that it was so, the captain hastened to make his way back to his snug quarters in York.

"I wonder how Dick will receive the news!" he murmured. "He will have no regrets, I fancy, except that he died so painless a death. Ah, well! We must take things as we find them—certainly Dick's escape now looks a far more likely matter, for Skellum was indefatigable."

This was a comfortable reflection, and as it was no part of the captain's philosophy to make himself miserable, he dwelt upon it for a considerable length of time.

"I have nothing to fear now on the score of funds," he continued; "and for the rest I see nothing before me to cause despair. If I do not set Dick at liberty, I shall never forgive myself, but always consider I had a hand in his death."

This was certainly looking at the matter from an extreme point of view, for in actual fact there was little blame attached to him.

So altered as Dick was at the time, it was next to an impossibility that he should have recognised him.

But the captain chose to think differently.

He blamed himself for having been guilty of a most fatal carelessness.

Should his design succeed, however, there could be no question that he had made an ample atonement for his fault, if so it can be called.

The high-road was quite deserted, and Hawk reached the Old Chequers Inn without meeting with a single person.

The ostler was waiting for his return, and so was another.

The former the captain saw, not the latter.

Had he chanced to glance up at one of the windows in the back part of the inn, he could not fail to catch a glimpse of the pale, interesting face of the girl Jessie.

"Is all well, Sam?"

"Yes, Cap'n; I think I may venture to say so."

"Venture? What do you mean?"

"Why, after you had gone, some one came here to look for you, so it was quite as well you made up your mind to take a ride for an hour or two."

"Who was it?"

"Well, that I didn't know at first, but I found out afterwards."

"Who was it, I say?"

"Don't be impatient, captain. They told me his name was Skellum."

"Ah!"

"And that he was death on to all the highwaymen."

"And now death is on to him."

"What do you say, cap'n?"

"Nothing at least, it does not matter. Let me see you put Satan all right, and I will try a turn-in for an hour or two."

"Can't you trust me to do it, cap'n?"

"Yes, I daresay I could; but I would prefer using my own eyes for all that."

The ostler said no more.

The highwayman's steed was taken into the stable and thoroughly attended to.

When the operation was complete, the captain crossed the inn yard again to the little door which we mentioned on a former occasion.

Now, as then, it yielded to his touch.

But he took the precaution to secure it after him, and then stepped cautiously along the passage.

A fire was still burning, and the apartment presented that appearance of comfort which nothing but the presence of a woman can impart.

Very probably much of this was quite lost upon Captain Hawk—at least, such may be inferred by the indifferent manner in which he crossed the chamber and entered an adjoining room.

This was fitted up with the same neatness as a bedchamber.

Having satisfied himself that everything presented its usual aspect, he prepared to sleep.

His right hand grasped the singularly-shaped butt of his ominously-named pistol, and so he fell into a profound slumber.

The habit of sleeping with his fingers encircling his weapon was so firmly fixed that he would have found it next to an impossibility to close his eyes without doing so.

At the Old Chequers, however, he had nothing to fear.

Morning came without anything whatever having

taken place to disturb him, nor did he awake until the sun shone full upon his face.

"I am later than I intended to be," he muttered; "yet if I make haste I shall be in time."

It was evident, by his manner, that he had business on hand of more than usual importance.

His morning preparations were soon completed.

In one corner of the room was a large chest, and this he opened by means of a key that he took from an inner pocket.

Just under the lid was a small travelling portmanteau of the kind then carried by almost everyone who had to make a journey, at the time when locomotion was so different a thing from what it is now.

This he took out, and nothing else.

Carefully locking the chest again, he threw on his ample cloak, which not only to a very great extent served as a disguise, but also concealed what he was carrying in his hand, and prepared to depart.

He made his way quickly to the stables, saw that Satan was safe and well, and then turning to the ostler, said:

"Mind, I leave him in your charge, and shall hold you responsible if anything happens to him."

"Make your mind easy about that, cap'n. When shall you be back?"

"I cannot say—I can only tell you to be prepared at any minute."

So saying, with an easy and confident step, as though he had nothing in the world to dread from recognition, he left the inn yard.

"He's a rum 'un—he is," the ostler said, confidentially to himself. "What I should call a regular out-and-outer. Sam's wrong if something more isn't heard of Captain Hawk than of any other gentleman highwayman who ever cried 'Stand!' on the high-road."

Having delivered himself of this opinion, the ostler returned to his duties.

Captain Hawk took the nearest way out of the city, and when he had fairly gained the open country, plunged into the intricacies of narrow lanes with a readiness which showed that he must have possessed a very familiar acquaintance with the locality.

At length, crossing a stile, he strode rapidly along a narrow footpath, which apparently led in a direct line towards a wood, which seemed to be of great extent.

"All's well!" muttered Hawk, as he glanced around him. "Not a soul is in sight."

So saying, he quickened his steps.

On entering the wood, he followed the footpath for a short distance only, but turned off to the right, where the trees grew most densely, and disappeared.

It was very nearly an hour after this event that a wood-cutter, whistling blithely, crossed the stile we have before had occasion to mention.

It was evident that the wood was his destination, for he followed precisely in the captain's steps.

When within perhaps a dozen paces of those trees which formed a border to the wood, he caught the sound of a footstep, which caused him to raise his eyes and look straight before him.

He then beheld emerging from the trees a person who by his attire was a Roman Catholic priest.

The reverend father advanced with a devout footstep, apparently being busily engaged in communing with himself.

Now, this poor wood-cutter happened to be a Catholic, and upon catching sight of one of the ministers of his religion he made a low obeisance.

The priest was to all appearances deeply absorbed in his meditations, for he started when he saw the wood-cutter bending devoutly before him.

But regaining his composure, as one may say, immediately, he muttered some words in a tone too low for them to be audible.

The wood-cutter seemed to be satisfied, however, for he resumed his way.

"So far, very good," murmured the priest, when sure the man was out of ear-shot. "My disguise has imposed upon you, at any rate, so I may reasonably look for like success elsewhere."

As the reader must know, this seeming priest was no other than Captain Hawk, though the disguise was so excellent and the make-up so perfect, that it would have required a more than ordinary amount of a astuteness to have guessed at his identity.

But Captain Hawk had quite a talent for disguises.

On reaching the stile he once more carefully surveyed the surrounding scene.

"That must be my way," he said at length. "It cannot be far from here, I know."

Feeling quite sure that there were no prying eyes upon him, the captain strode along at what would have been considered an unseemly pace for one of his cloth.

At length he reached a handsome pair of lodge gates, apparently communicating with a mansion of no ordinary importance.

The gates were closed, but the captain gave a summons for admittance.

The woman who emerged from the lodge unlocked the gates without venturing to ask a single question.

Muttering something that might be supposed a blessing, the captain passed on.

The avenue was a long one, and some time elapsed before he came in sight of the mansion.

"A comfortable place," he muttered, when his eyes first encountered it. "Surely whoever dwells there should be happy."

With a degree of boldness which argued well for the captain's strength of nerve, he walked direct to the imposing-looking front-door and rang the bell.

"Is Sir Humphrey within?" he asked of the servant.

"He is, holy sir."

The seeming priest was ushered into a small room, there to wait the baronet's appearance—for it was to Sir Humphrey Yeoman's residence that the captain had thus boldly made his way.

He had not long to wait before the baronet made his appearance.

"Your business?" he said, briefly; for priests were no favourites of his, and he was apt to treat them with scant civility.

"Sir Humphrey," said Captain Hawk, in low, monotonous tones, "I come to you in your magisterial capacity."

The baronet inclined his head slightly.

"I wish you to favour me with a letter that will enable me to have free and unrestricted communion with a prisoner who is now in York Castle, and who is sadly in want of my spiritual aid."

"Do you mean Dick Turpin?"

"I do."

"Then, if I thought Dick wanted you, and that you could do him any good, I would give you the order in a moment. But," he interrupted, "surely there can be no need for my influence in this matter. The cells are always free to the spiritual advisers of the accused."

"Ordinarily, your worship," said Hawk, with a great show of meekness; "but in the present case, such stringent precautions have been adopted, in consequence of the dread the authorities have that an escape would be attempted, that I fear, unless protected by the signature of some influential gentleman like yourself, I shall be subjected to all kinds of impediments."

"Well," said Sir Humphrey, "as I told you a moment or two ago, if I thought Dick wanted you, and that you could do him the least good, you could command me in any way you think proper."

During his conversation with Dick, Captain Hawk had gathered a tolerably clear notion of Sir Humphrey's character, and after such an unequivocal admission as he had just made, he felt strongly tempted to tell him all.

"Believe me," said the captain, after a momentary pause, and raising his eyes for the first time to the baronet's countenance—"believe me that Dick does want me, and that I can do him much good."

The words were pronounced in so significant a tone, that the baronet could not help being struck by them.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Just what I say."

"But explain yourself. If you are a friend of Dick Turpin's, as I suspect you are, despite your cloth, do not hesitate to confide in me."

CHAPTER MOXXXI.

CAPTAIN HAWK PAYS DICK TURPIN ANOTHER VISIT IN YORK CASTLE.

"I WILL not hesitate," said Captain Hawk, with sudden resolution, "for I know you are to be wholly trusted, and therefore I will tell you all."

The baronet nodded, as though to intimate that this was decidedly the best course that could be adopted.

"This, then, is a disguise."

"I thought as much."

"I am Dick's last remaining comrade, and, to a certain extent, to blame for what has happened to him."

"How do you mean?"

The captain explained.

"Go on."

"The fault committed cannot be recalled; but one thing remains to me, and that is to make reparation. This I have sworn to do."

"And what do you propose?"

"To assist him to escape."

Sir Humphrey looked grave.

"You need not fear that I shall compromise you in the matter. There is no need for anyone to know that you even suspect me to be other than I seem. Let me give you the assurance that I shall not play my part clumsily; or if I am discovered, no one will have to suffer for it but myself."

"But, seriously, do you think you stand any chance of success?"

"Certainly I do, or I should not contemplate making the attempt."

"Then, let me tell you that in my opinion you stand scarcely the ghost of a chance."

Captain Hawk smiled.

"Leave that to me, your worship. If you are in earnest in saying that you wish to befriend Dick, believe me you cannot choose a more effectual way of d- g so than by writing me the free pass I require."

"You shall have it."

"Many thanks! Of course it will be sufficient?"

"Oh yes! I have only to tell you that you must be cautious."

"For Dick's sake, you may rely upon it, I shall be."

Sir Humphrey sat down, and taking a pen, scribbled a few words upon a sheet of paper, and then, with a vast deal of flourish, appended his signature.

"There," he said—"that will do."

"My best thanks are your due," answered Captain Hawk, carefully securing the much-prized document; "and I trust the next intelligence you may receive will be that Dick is once more at liberty."

"Get him out of the country, if you can. It is a thousand pities he should die by such a death as I fear awaits him. Say from me that as soon as he reaches foreign parts he is to write and make me acquainted with his whereabouts."

"This is most generous."

"Tut, tut! He would do, and has done, ten times as much for me. He showed me very plainly that I was blindly labouring to secure my daughter's misery, not her happiness. But never mind that now. Money will be required for the accomplishment of your plan. Take this to aid you; if you want more, apply to me."

He placed a well-filled bag of money in the captain's hand.

"Don't refuse it, as Dick did," he added. "He told me he had no occasion for it, but you must know better. All I ask is that you keep my share in this transaction a secret."

"Rely upon me," answered Captain Hawk. "Thanks to fortune, I am not short of funds; but yet your gift will be certain to prove useful."

Little more of any importance was exchanged.

The captain himself was by no means inclined to prolong the interview, because the day was getting on apace, and he had much to do.

On taking his leave, he made his way back direct to York.

He was careful to avoid passing near the Old Chequers Inn.

On arriving at the Castle, which was his destination, he presented his pass, and, to his great satisfaction, was admitted without demur.

To Dick Turpin the hours had followed each other very slowly since his friend had paid him his visit.

He had had no other companionship but his own thoughts, which were gloomy and sad indeed, yet even these were preferable to the annoyance perpetual interruptions caused him.

Having had no intimation of the captain's intention, he naturally looked surprised when he saw so monkish-looking an individual appear upon the threshold.

The jailer seemed inclined to linger in the cell, but after a time withdrew.

The sham priest seated himself beside the prisoner, bending his head so much forward that his features could not be distinguished by anyone.

"Keep quiet, Dick," he said, in tones scarcely above a whisper. "The cell door is not shut, and if you raise your voice I shall be in danger of detection."

Dick had to make use of all his self-command while his comrade thus spoke.

Until he opened his lips he had no suspicion of his visitor's identity—a strong and convincing proof of the captain's skill in disguising himself.

"Give me your hand," said Turpin—"let me press it only for an instant, and then I shall feel more sure as to who you are."

"There—there, that will do. Such an action as that, if seen, would betray us."

A hurried pressure of hands took place.

"How strange it seems," said Dick, "that, in defiance of all the strongest regulations which have been adopted, you should be able to make your way here, as it seems, just when you choose."

"It is more in appearance than in reality. I have seen Sir Humphrey once more, and my object in doing so was to obtain his signature. Armed with that, I at once disarm a thousand suspicions, because it would be considered that he would not give it to me unless he knew who I was, and felt I could be trusted."

"I see," said Dick. "Such a credential would be invaluable."

"Exactly. But never mind that. I have other matters of greater importance than that to talk about. Skellum is dead."

"What?"

"Hush—hush! You must be more cautious or we shall be ruined."

"Did I hear rightly?"

"You did."

"Repeat it."

"Skellum is dead!"

The captain then followed with a description of the events of the night.

"I lived in hopes of having a reckoning with him some day," said Dick. "I could almost regret that he is gone."

"Pooh—pooh! You ought to look upon it as a piece of extraordinary good fortune. Without his never-ceasing supervisions all these precautions will be relaxed—more especially when it is seen that there really seems no necessity for them."

"There is encouragement in that."

"Encouragement! I should think there is! Before, the escape was only possible—now it is probable: that is, if you will perform your part."

"Can you have any doubt about my doing that?"

"I ought not to have."

"You have heard when the trial is to take place?"

"At the next assizes."

"Do you know when they commence?"

"No. Do you?"

"Yes—in three days' time."

"In three days?" repeated the captain. "That leaves but little time for preparation."

"Too little, I fear. The time between now and then will be one of incessant preparation. There will hardly be a chance."

This intelligence plunged Captain Hawk for some time in deep reflection.

He had not expected that the trial would come on so soon, and in consequence the plans he had laid were a little deranged.

"Why are you silent?" asked Dick Turpin.

"I was thinking—about the escape."

"No doubt you are of the same opinion as myself."

"What is that?"

"Why, that it will be wisest to defer the attempt until after the trial; not that I have anything to hope from it, but because then I believe the chances of success will be so much greater."

"And three days is not very long to make all preparations," added the captain.

"Not time enough, rely upon it. At the trial I shall take care to behave as though I was deeply impressed with the feeling that it was useless to resist, and that I had resigned myself to an inevitable fate."

"No doubt that will throw them off their guard, especially as you have nothing now to fear from Skellum's personal interference. If we could only get the guard removed which watches round the exterior of the prison, the rest would be comparatively easy."

While speaking these last words, he took from beneath his robe a small packet, which he slipped quietly and stealthily into Dick's hand.

"Never mind looking at it now; secrete it somewhere until you are sure you have a good opportunity."

"Thanks," said Dick, giving instant obedience. "I may be sure it is something valuable."

"I believe you will find it so. The parcel contains several small skeleton keys of various sizes. They are the best things of the kind to be had for money. I noticed yesterday that your irons were locked upon you, not riveted. You will now, I hope, be able to free yourself from them in the night, and enjoy something like repose; only you must be careful to put them on again in the morning."

"If I can manage that," said Dick, "it will be a boon indeed. These heavy irons, so constantly upon my limbs, cramp me and weigh me down. To be rid of them, if only for an hour, would be an indescribable relief."

"Then I think you will be able to accomplish so to-night. In the meanwhile, I shall set carefully to work, and see that all things are in perfect readiness. I will go now, for my visit has already been a long one."

"And shall you come again?"

"I think not till after the trial; at any rate, not unless something sufficiently important occurs to warrant me in doing so. I can render no further service that I am aware of, and by staying away I diminish the chances of my recognition. Not that I study this from a personal motive, but because, if I am taken, all hopes of your escape, I am afraid, will vanish."

"I am sure they will; and not only for my sake, but for your own, be careful."

The captain laughed silently.

Then, rising, he whispered the word farewell.

Fain would Dick have detained him, but he felt he had no reasonable excuse for so doing.

Yet it would be hard to convey any idea of the desolate feeling which took possession of his heart as soon as the door closed behind this faithful and well-tried friend.

To speak the truth, Dick, upon reflection, had felt by no means sanguine as to the result of an escape.

He was resolved to attempt one, however, because, if he perished in the effort, he would rather a thousand times die so than undergo the last dread penalty of the law.

But the intelligence that Skellum had so suddenly and unexpectedly met with his death materially changed his feelings on the subject.

He was in truth the barrier which he had most to dread.

Now he was removed.

The prospect of being able to relieve his body of the terrible weight of his fetters could not fail to afford a certain amount of satisfaction.

It made him long impatiently for the approach of night.

At about nine o'clock every evening the Governor made a round of the entire prison.

On each occasion he had entered Dick's cell and satisfied himself by a careful personal inspection that the prisoner was safe, and that his fetters showed no signs of having been tampered with.

After this visit, Dick was left uninterrupted till the hour of seven in the morning.

Punctual to the hour, the Governor came.

He looked carefully around as usual.

All seemed well.

When the door was closed again and the sound of footsteps along the corridor without had died away, Dick could scarcely contain himself.

He had a chance now to be comparatively free for nearly ten hours.

The packet or skeleton keys had been carefully secreted, and now, with a trembling hand, he drew it forth.

The keys were all small, of such size as would be used for a padlock.

Dick tried several hastily, and at last had the satisfaction of feeling the wards of the lock yield.

In less than ten minutes afterwards he had rid himself of his disagreeable incumbrances altogether.

Of course, he had to display the utmost caution in all his movements, because any unusual clanking of his irons reaching the ears of the man who watched outside might so far arouse suspicion as to cause him to look in.

In the event of such a thing as this, not only would he be discovered, but such precautions adopted as would prevent him from ever achieving his object again.

Almost without making a sound at all, however, Dick laid his fetters one by one aside.

Then, with the most intense sigh of relief which can be conceived, he stood erect.

Oh! it was a glorious thing to be even temporarily free from his manacles, for they seemed not only to weigh down the body, but to crush the mind also.

He stretched every weary limb, and then, taking care to tread lightly, paced up and down the cell.

It was the first exercise he had been permitted to take since the discovery of his identity.

This action very disagreeably impressed upon his mind that he was by no means so strong as he had fancied himself to be.

The temporary depression which this produced he shook off by remembering that it was quite as well he had found it out now instead of at a time when it might be of the utmost importance for him to possess full strength.

"This exercise will benefit me wonderfully," he soliloquised. "In three days' time I shall be thrice as strong as I am now."

Fatigue at length compelled him to return to his seat.

The night was a light one, for the moon was shining in the heavens unobscured by a single cloud.

Her beams chanced to find their way into the cell in such a manner as to light up the greater part of it.

The silvery radiance fell upon the worn and wasted form of the highwayman, who, as he gazed at the bright face of the queen of night, sighed heavily.

Most forcibly was brought to his remembrance the time when, guided by her rays, he had made his way across the country on the back of bonny Black Bess.

He could not think upon the past and maintain his firmness.

His emotions overcame him, and for some time he let them have their way without the least restraint.

But by degrees the violence of his feelings subsided.

Gazing once more upon the moon, the desire came into his mind to climb up to the cell window and see what was visible from without.

He knew his cell was at some height above the ground, and fancied it must be in a tower, for it was partly circular in shape.

Of course he was not long in gratifying a longing of this sort when once he had decided upon it.

The grated aperture in the cell, by courtesy called a window, was high up in the wall, being placed, in fact, close to the juncture of the latter with the ceiling.

But Dick's cell was furnished with a chair and a table, and by placing one on the other he was able to reach to a good height.

It was no easy task, however, to make these preparations without causing any sound that would attract attention, for at this midnight hour a silence like that of the grave itself prevailed in the prison.

At length he mounted, and grasping the bars with his hands, pressed his face closely against them.

Oh, how sweetly and refreshingly the cool night air blew upon his burning brow!

How beautiful the scene looked without now every object was silvered over with the moon's beams!

How ineffable was the yearning he felt to break away from his confinement!

For some moments Dick remained gazing in a kind of ecstasy or trance.

But when calm reason came back to his aid he took more careful note of the situation of his cell window.

In the first place he made the discovery that he was at a much greater height from the ground than he had believed.

But as he looked he saw that the tallest roofs anywhere visible around were considerably below him.

So far as he was able to tell, too, there was a small paved yard protected by a stone wall, which formed a boundary to the prison.

While gazing down he caught sight of the forms of two men who were advancing towards each other.

When within a certain distance they paused, and apparently exchanged some words, though no sound reached Dick's listening ears.

Then turning round, both retraced their steps.

CHAPTER MCXXXII.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN IS BROUGHT TO TRIAL.

Dick Turpin watched both figures till they disappeared from view.

Then, after a while, they appeared again, advanced to the same spot and retired.

"That is the outside watch of which the captain spoke; and while that is kept up, how am I to escape?"

There seemed to be but one reply which could be given to this question.

While the guard did its duty escape was impossible.

There was just the possibility that, now Skellum was no more, this precaution would, after the trial, be dispensed with as superfluous.

How frail a hope this was everyone must see.

But it was the prisoner's only hope, and he seemed to cling to it with all the more tenacity because he knew it was so slight.

"Were it not for those fellows," he continued, recently afterwards, "I could see my way clear enough, with such aid as Captain Hawk could afford me. A steel saw would be wanted to cut through these bars, a rope long enough to enable me to reach the ground, and then another rope, flung over the outer wall at the proper moment, which would enable me to scale that."

After this, escape seemed quite an easy matter, could the men who watched outside be anyhow got rid of.

Dick remained watching for a long time—how long he did not trouble himself to think.

But during the whole of the period, the men kept up their patrolling backwards and forwards with the most provoking regularity.

Wearied out, at length, with watching, and finding that there was nothing else to take cognizance of, and no advantage in remaining there, he cautiously descended.

Yet he felt this was a privilege scarcely to be enough valued, and a feeling of the greatest gratitude towards Captain Hawk held possession of his heart.

There was yet time enough for him to enjoy a good period of repose; but his fear was that, when once falling asleep, his slumber would be so deep that he would be unable to awake at the proper moment.

Nevertheless he flung himself down at full length, enjoying to the utmost the pleasure of stretching his limbs at freedom.

As may be expected, the end of this was that he unconsciously fell off to sleep.

Awaking with a sudden start, he found himself very cold, and surrounded by an intense darkness.

He knew well that when the jailer paid him his first visit it was scarcely daylight, and, therefore, with some trepidation, he set about the task of relocking the fetters upon his limbs.

Never, however, was any necessary act performed with more unwillingness.

He paused several times, for he was strongly assailed with the temptation to spring upon his jailer when he entered, fling him down, and trust to the confusion which would ensue to effect his escape.

The chances of success, however, if he adopted this course, were so very, very slight, that he felt he could not afford to venture upon it.

If he failed—and the chances were as ten thousand to one that he would fail—more stringent precautions than ever would be taken, instead of a relaxation of those already in force, which was what he was hoping for.

An indiscreet attempt would only serve to mar all chances of the favourable accomplishment of a better-matured plan.

Governed by these considerations, then, he went on with his unwelcome task, though many a heavy, regretful sigh escaped his breast.

He had barely time to finish and to conceal the key which had been of such immense service to him when the sound of distant footsteps warned him of the approach of the turnkey.

Upon entering, the man, according to his custom, glanced around in order to see whether everything presented its usual aspect.

On the present occasion he saw nothing to excite his suspicions, for Dick had been extremely careful to restore everything exactly to its former position.

The day passed without the occurrence of any particular incident to break the monotony of prison life.

Dick was enabled to preserve his cheerfulness by looking forward to the comparative freedom he should enjoy at night.

Towards evening, in accordance with Sir Humphrey's recommendation, Mr. Steel, the solicitor, paid Dick a visit.

"It would be wrong of me," he said, "to lead you to suppose that there is the slightest chance of my being able to do the least good for you. Still, I will watch the case, though that must not buoy you up with any false hopes. I am truly sorry for you, and should rejoice to see you at liberty."

"Many thanks for your kind wishes, but the caution you have just given me is a needless one. I knew well enough from the first that the trial would be a mere form, and that I am as good as sentenced already. It was Sir Humphrey who would insist that you should try to help me."

"And so I will; and what is more, I shall try with all my heart," said the attorney, earnestly. "I cannot forget what you have done; and you may depend that, should anything arise which can possibly be turned to your advantage, it shall be."

"You have my best thanks for that assurance, though still," Dick added, "I know already the termination of the trial."

Mr. Steel must have been fully impressed with the hopelessness of Dick's case, for he never asked him a single question concerning it.

Dick, however, thought fit to set him right as regards the facts.

"Of the particular crime laid to my charge I am not guilty."

"I am afraid that will avail you little."

"I do not expect much from it; still, you may as well know the actual truth."

Dick then described as well as he was able the way in which the ostler met his death.

Mr. Steel shook his head.

"I will bear the particulars in mind," he said; "but you must be aware that the dying witnessed testimony of any person has great weight in a court of law, and you have only your bare word to bring against it."

"I understand you," said Dick. "Still, I should have felt more reconciled had the charge against me possessed some foundation."

The attorney left soon after, and when Dick was left to himself he muttered:

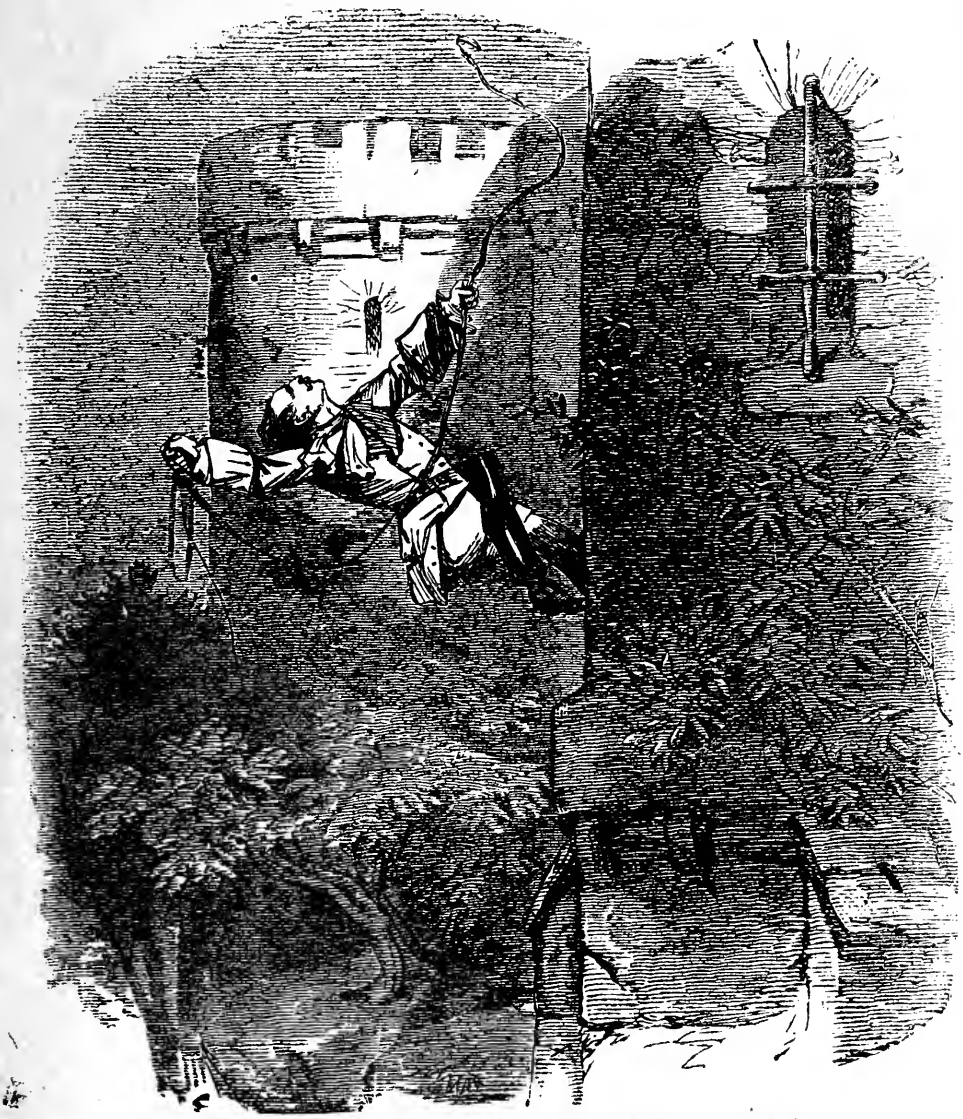
"I am now convinced that I have no hope to look forward to in that quarter."

His sole reliance rested upon Captain Hawk.

It was strong, it is true; but then, he could not help remembering that, after all, it was not much to depend upon.

The captain himself stood in hazard of his life, and was liable to detection at any moment—particularly liable, one would think, when his habitual recklessness and carelessness of consequences is borne in mind.

Should he be discovered or captured, nothing could save Dick from his impending doom.



[DICK TURPIN FAILS IN HIS ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE FROM YORK CASTLE.]

When the prisoner was once again freed from his fetters, he found himself able to take a more cheerful view of matters—a brighter light seemed thrown upon the events of the future.

This went on thus without the occurrence of aught deserving of special mention, until the morning of the trial arrived.

It seems almost needless to say that the deepest interest was manifested by all the inhabitants of the city, and that extraordinary efforts were necessary in order to have a chance of witnessing the interesting proceedings.

A great improvement had taken place in Dick's personal appearance since his last examination, and on the present occasion he paid particular attention to his toilet.

He did not succeed, however, in his attempt to bear some resemblance to his former self—his old acquaintances would scarcely have known him now.

In fact, at least twenty years seemed to have been added to his age, while his hair was perceptibly streaked with gray.

But his eyes retained their brightness, and many remarked what an eagle-like glance it was which he gave on first making his appearance in the Court.

The general hum and buzz which had hitherto prevailed among the densely-packed audience ceased as soon as he entered the dock.

It was strange indeed to see so many, many faces all so closely packed, and all turned towards one point.

It is not to be wondered at if the prisoner did shrink a little upon finding himself the focus of so many eyes.

But the action could hardly have been a momentary one, and then, having drawn himself up to his full height, he gave that rapid and searching glance around him of which we have just made mention.

But he dropped his eyes almost instantly.

Rapid as was his glance, it had nevertheless satisfied him upon one point.

Captain Hawk was in Court.

Dick wondered at his hardihood, for the recognition was instantaneous, and he only dropped his eyes because he was afraid that his friend might be indiscreet enough to make some sign.

The expression on the captain's face at the moment when he first caught sight of it was such as to make Dick feel that so far events had gone on well.

The silence which had greeted the prisoner's first appearance was of short duration.

A general murmur arose, so loud as to prevent the commencement of the business of the Court.

In vain the usher bawled for silence till he was as red in the face as the trimming on his robe.

It was not until the judge arose and positively declared that, at all hazards, the Court should be cleared, that anything resembling order was obtained.

The usual formalities observed on such occasions were then proceeded with.

But we will not weary the reader by describing them in detail.

The Clerk of the Arraigns rose, and read over the indictment.

The ceremony, however, appeared to be one which might very well have been dispensed with, for no one paid the least attention to it.

The judge held a whispered conversation with the Lord-Lieutenant of the county, who had taken his seat upon the bench.

The barristers at the table below amused and busied themselves in various ways.

At last the clerk stopped with a sudden jerk.

"Prisoner at the bar," he exclaimed, "you are charged upon this indictment with the crime of wilful murder. Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty!" responded Dick, in a voice, though apparently low, was nevertheless distinctly audible in every corner of the Court.

The plea was recorded, and the business of the trial fairly began.

It was not until this moment that Dick noticed among the many influential gentlemen who had been accommodated with seats on the bench was his stanch friend, Sir Humphrey Yeomans.

The prosecution was conducted by the Attorney-General himself.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury," he said, in a rapid voice, "it is far from my intention to occupy your time and attention for many minutes on the present occasion. To those few remarks which I have to make, I earnestly desire you will give your entire attention.

"The prisoner at the bar is, I suppose, entitled to the claim of being considered one of the most notorious characters in the land. His misdeeds and daring defiance of justice are so well known that it is quite unnecessary for me to dwell upon them here.

"Aided by numerous well-paid accomplices, and by the poorer sort of people, whose good will he had gained by a few acts of interested liberality, he has succeeded in keeping at bay all the many parties of officers that have been sent out in pursuit of him.

"But that inevitable end which could have been foreseen by anyone, has come at last—his time of triumph is over—he is here in the dock before you on a charge affecting his life.

"In the case of such criminals as the prisoner at the bar (let us be thankful, gentlemen, that there are so few of them,) it is often felt to be a matter of some difficulty to fix upon some specific charge against them, and bring the accusation home to them.

"When such notorious offenders are secured after the expenditure of so much time and trouble, it almost seems that the formality of a trial could be done away with and the speediest steps taken for execution.

"But the English law is jealous of the rights of every man, even when all claim upon the forbearance of society is forfeited, as in the case of the prisoner at the bar.

"It is a matter of gratification to me—not merely that there is no difficulty in fixing upon a specific charge, but because the crime of which he is accused has been committed only a short time, and the evidence upon it is so clear and complete as to leave no doubt of the prisoner's guilt.

"The crime is that of murder—the one which all mankind holds in the most abhorrence. As you are well aware, the penalty is death.

"Leaving out of consideration all the manifold acts of turpitude which have been committed by the prisoner at the bar, we will try him on the present charge, for had he been ten times as guilty as he is the punishment would still have been death.

"I shall now proceed to call witnesses before you—having first read this deposition made by the expiring man—who will be able to show that on the evening of the 18th of the last month the prisoner at the bar did wilfully and with malice prepense, wound to the death one Samuel Thorpe, who held the situation of ostler at the Crown and Cushion, the well-known inn on the London Road."

The Attorney-General then read over the document containing the ostler's deposition.

As the reader is aware, it gave anything but a fair and just account of what had taken place, for it stated that Dick had, alternately by promises and threats, endeavoured to persuade the ostler to furnish him with a horse in order that he might complete his escape. With this demand the ostler stated he resolutely refused to comply, and in consequence the prisoner had drawn his sword and plunged it into his breast before he had time to step aside or defend himself.

The reader, being in possession of the actual facts as they occurred, will be able to see how grossly the mercenary and treacherous ostler misrepresented what had occurred.

Those witnesses who had appeared before the magistrate at the final examination now again stood forward and repeated the testimony they had previously given, which for the most part was correct enough.

Then medical evidence was given respecting the wound, and a proper certificate of the ostler's death.

With this, the case for the prosecution closed.

Mr. Steel, to the surprise of many in Court, then rose up, and, after glancing around, said:

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury,—

"I am not about, in the ordinary sense of the term, to defend the prisoner at the bar, but I am here to make to you a statement which he desires should go forth to the world.

"It is to effect that he is guiltless of the charge now brought against him. He solemnly avers that——"

The Attorney-General jumped up.

"My lord," he said, "I protest against this irregularity. If my learned friend has any evidence to offer on the the part of the prisoner at the bar, well and good—let it be forthcoming; but if, as I imagine, he is only about to repeat some general declaration of innocence made by the prisoner, and unsupported by testimony, I submit that the present is not a fitting opportunity for doing so. I feel certain your lordship will support me in saying that the proper time for the making of such a statement is after the recordation of the verdict."

The judge ruled that his learned friend was right, and Mr. Steel sat down with his statement unmade.

The Attorney-General rose again.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury,—

"I cannot refrain from directing your attention to the singular manner in which the identity of the prisoner at the bar was discovered. The hand of Providence cannot be more plainly traceable than in this instance. The prisoner, maddened with drink, is taken prisoner and locked up without the existence of the faintest suspicion of who he was—so greatly has he altered during the last few months of his wretched existence.

"But for the merest chance he would undoubtedly have been set at liberty again, when he would doubtless have succeeded in effecting his escape. But the ends of justice were not then to be set aside. He was called upon to find a surety for his future good conduct. This he could not obtain. Then it seems he wrote a letter to his brother, who is, I am given to understand, a worthy, honest man, requesting him to come forward and be bail for him. This letter was posted unpaid for, the brother refused to pay the postage, and the letter was finally sent to London to be opened and returned to the sender. It was then that the almost incredible discovery was made that the writer

was no other than the famous—or shall I say in-famous—Dick Turpin, and that he was at that moment safely within the walls of York Castle, while the police officers were vainly searching for him in every direction. His identification followed; and at the same time he was indicted for the wilful murder of the ostler at the road-side inn."

CHAPTER MCXXXIII.

SENTENCE OF DEATH IS PRONOUNCED UPON DICK TURPIN.

WHAT is called nowadays a "sensation" followed the Attorney-General's remarks.

Such a strange concatenation of circumstances was well calculated to excite a more than common degree of interest.

The judge now proceeded to sum up the evidence.

The task was by no means a difficult one, and did not occupy him many minutes.

He dwelt upon the weight which always attaches itself to the testimony of one like the ostler, who made his statements in the full belief that he had not much longer to live in this world.

He referred, too, to the extraordinary manner in which Dick had been secured.

He observed how strange it was to think that, after so many fruitless efforts to capture him, he should at last so singularly be found in custody.

The evidence was so clear, he said, that he did not for his own part see how the jury could have any hesitation or difficulty about coming to a verdict.

The jury appeared to have no difficulty.

Those who sat on the front row of seats turned round to those behind them and exchanged a whisper.

Then all sat down, and the foreman rose up.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you considered your verdict?"

"We have."

"Do you find the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty!"

This announcement took no one by surprise, for the simple reason that every person in Court had fully expected it.

"Prisoner at the bar," said the Clerk of the Arraigns, "you have heard the verdict. Have you anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon you?"

Dick leaned forward towards Mr. Steel, who whispered energetically for a moment.

Then the latter, turning round to the Court, said:

"My lord, the prisoner desires me to make the statement which I was about to give when interrupted by my learned friend. It is brief.

"He solemnly avers that he is guiltless of the crime laid to his charge. He does not pretend to dispute his identity; but he wishes it to be known that what the ostler has sworn to as his dying deposition is not actually in accordance with facts. The prisoner declares that the ostler offered to aid him to escape, provided he well paid him for doing so; but finding that more money was to be made by surrendering him a prisoner and claiming the reward, he resolved upon that course. Accordingly, he administered some drugged brandy to the prisoner, who did not discover it until he had swallowed a considerable portion of the liquor. Finding the plot discovered, the ostler rushed forward with the intention of overpowering him, and in doing so became impaled upon the point of the prisoner's sword, which he held out before him in an attitude of defence; so that it will be seen the ostler was actually the author and bringer about of his own death."

The statement was listened to attentively.

As soon as Mr. Steel sat down, the judge assumed the black cap, and proceeded to pass sentence.

"Prisoner at the bar," he said, "you have this day been found guilty, upon the clearest evidence, of the heinous crime of wilful murder. You must know that your bare statement can have but little notice when weighed against the testimony of a man at the point of death, and who could have no motive for misrepresentation.

"But leaving this point, it is quite patent that you are guilty of innumerable crimes, all of which are punishable by death, and for this reason I feel no compunction in pronouncing the sentence of the Court, which is, that you be taken hence to the place whence you came, and thence to the place appointed for execution, and that you be there hanged by the neck until you be dead; and may Heaven extend that forgiveness towards you which the law will not permit us to show on earth!"

An impressive silence followed.

The two men who had stood beside Dick during the whole examination now signified that it was time for him to depart.

Before leaving, however, Dick turned his eyes to the spot where Captain Hawk was sitting.

He was greeted in a moment by a reassuring smile.

That did wonders for Dick's heart, which had grown very—very heavy during the progress of the trial.

He would not have been human had it not done so.

But Captain Hawk's smile gave him hope, and held out the assurance that after all he might yet succeed in eluding the vigilance of his jailers and become a free man.

Dick was now conducted to a different cell to the one he had formerly occupied, though the resemblance between the two was so great that they could scarcely have been distinguished from one another.

Like the former one, this was situated near the top of the castle keep.

It had one small window near the ceiling—a window that was very strongly barred.

He was again loaded with fetters, and left to pass as best he might the brief time that was to elapse before the day came for his execution.

Dick longed earnestly for night to come.

He was anxious to climb up to the grated window and peep out, in order to ascertain whether it commanded the same view as the other one.

Fortunately, the small bunch of skeleton keys had not been found, and as soon as ever the last visit was paid Dick set to work to put his doubts at rest.

Practice had now rendered him expert in the removal of his fetters.

Having freed himself from them, he mounted up to the window by the same means as before—that is to say, by the aid of the chair and table.

The night was by no means a favourable one for observation, as there was no moon.

Still, he was enabled to discern after awhile the roof-tops beneath him and the boundary-wall.

Whether the watch was continued he was unable to ascertain.

Wearied out at length, he laid down to sleep.

As might be expected, his slumber was not a very calm or peaceful one.

It was disturbed by many images, and all of them of a painful kind.

As soon as the prison was opened to visitors, Captain Hawk appeared.

He was still disguised as a Roman Catholic priest, and, having Sir Humphrey's credential, no suspicion was felt about him.

The authorities were quite willing that the prisoner should be ministered to by a member of any faith he thought fit.

Captain Hawk played his part with more ability on this occasion than before.

He knelt down beside Dick, and while in this position slipped into the prisoner's hands a small steel saw.

It was a wonderful tool, most exquisitely made, of the best temper, and so small that there could be little or no difficulty in keeping it concealed.

"Dick," he whispered, "whatever you do, take care of that saw, for upon it depends your freedom."

"Fear nothing on that head," said Turpin. "Has all gone well?"

"Better than I could wish."

The manner in which this sentence was pronounced, more than the words themselves, revived Dick's hopes.

His eyes sparkled with something like their former lustre as he glanced at his companion and waited to hear more.

"The outside guard?" he said, interrogatively, finding the captain did not speak.

"It is removed."

"Removed? Are you sure of that?"

"There was no guard last night; and I heard a

whisper to the effect that it would not be renewed, as they were confident of your security."

Dick's lip curled with a derisive smile.

"It would be different if Skellum lived," he said.

"No doubt. You have good reason to congratulate yourself upon his removal."

"And how have you planned my escape?"

"Very simply. This cell of yours is nearly at the top of the building."

"I know it."

"That grated window yonder looks into a small court-yard."

Dick nodded.

"You must work with the steel saw at those bars yonder until you are able to remove them at a moment's notice."

"But how shall I reach the court-yard? You see there is no material here by which a rope could be manufactured."

"I will supply you with one."

"How?"

"I shall find a means, never fear. You don't want it yet; such a bulky object could not be hidden very well. I shall contrive to let you have it on the night appointed for the escape."

"And when will that be?"

"It depends partly on yourself. How long would it take you to saw through those bars?"

"Two nights."

"That will give you plenty of time. On the afternoon of the third day from this, then, you shall have the rope."

"I shall be ready."

"When you reach the court-yard," said Captain Hawk, "you must cross it with all speed possible. Just opposite to you you will find a rope hanging down. Seize it and ascend. I shall be on the other side with a couple of good horses, and I hope we shall get some miles away before your escape is discovered."

Dick's heart beat faster.

"The plan is bold, simple, and straightforward."

"And therefore almost certain to succeed."

"I think so."

"Captain Hawk, you are a true friend. Would that our acquaintance had begun earlier, and that we knew each other better!"

"There is plenty of time for that, Dick. Depend upon it, there are merry days in store."

Soon after this, Hawk took his leave.

Dick was in a state of greater excitement, owing to the brilliancy of his hopes, than he had been since his capture.

He had no little difficulty in restraining his emotions within moderate bounds.

But, luckily, he did not meet with many interruptions.

His mind was now exclusively filled with one object; and all the day his eyes were fixed upon the little grated window, while he earnestly prayed for night to come that he might have the chance of making a trial of his saw.

On that day Dick fared sumptuously, for his appetite was good.

He had to pay, as we have said, a most extravagant price for all these luxuries; but Dick Turpin was about the last man in the world to trouble himself upon this score.

His dinner was washed down by a bottle of better wine than one could have fancied procurable within the walls of a prison.

After that, Dick felt in perfect readiness for anything.

Never did he have a more difficult task than the one of simulating patience while he was so anxiously longing for the coming of night.

As if to try him still further, the Governor was half an hour later than usual in making his rounds that night.

This half-hour seemed to [illegible] as long as a day.

When the visit was over, and when the Governor and his subordinates had retired, apparently under the impression that all was secure, Dick sat for a moment or two, and then freed himself from his fetters.

With all speed the table and chair were placed beneath the window.

Then mounting noiselessly, Dick peeped out.

All things below and around him were wrapped in darkness.

Deep silence prevailed.

Finding nothing was to be gained by observation, the prisoner, with a fast-beating heart, produced his saw and set to work with it.

The iron grating was old, but strong, despite the manner in which the rust had corroded.

Compared with the exquisitely-tempered steel saw, the iron bars seemed to be of some soft material.

Dick worked steadily and perseveringly.

Yet after an hour's arduous toil he seemed to have done but little, especially when compared with what remained to be done.

The iron bars would have to be sawn through in at least six places before he could hope to have the aperture large enough to allow of the passage of his body.

As yet he had produced but a slight impression upon one of these bars.

But he was working for his life and liberty; and when two such precious possessions as these are at stake no enterprise is deemed too difficult—no toil too great.

So it was with Dick.

He worked with a will, and when the time came when for safety's sake it was absolutely necessary he should desist, he was so fatigued that he could scarcely move.

With great care he blew away every atom of the iron filings, so that none of these should be seen, and so betray him.

He was, however, well satisfied with his labours, for he had certainly performed one half of his allotted task.

When the turnkey entered the cell at the accustomed hour, he failed to perceive anything unusual in the cell, or in the prisoner himself.

Having been not only awake, but at work, during the whole of the night, Dick stood greatly in need of rest, and as soon as he was alone prepared himself to sleep.

In a few moments he was profoundly unconscious of everything, and remained so until the removal of the heavy fastenings on the outside of the cell door aroused him.

Starting up suddenly, he was surprised to find that the day was already far advanced.

The opening door disclosed the form of the priest, who had come, as everyone in the castle who knew anything about it fully believed, to administer spiritual consolation to the condemned prisoner.

And in one sense so he had—the consolation of spirit, of which Dick considered himself most in need.

The very first glance at the captain's face assured the prisoner that all continued to go well.

There was no difficulty about communicating with each other, for the turnkey left them to themselves, as is usual in such cases.

"All goes on as you could wish?" were Dick's first words.

"Yes, most favourably. And you?"

"I worked during the whole of last night; but the bars are very thick, and will have to be sawn through in many places."

"It is a tedious labour."

"Very."

"But time will enable you to accomplish it."

"The task is half performed."

"Why, then, all is well. Work with equal vigour to-night, and to-morrow get what rest you can. You will have need of all your strength to-morrow night."

"I know it. And the rope?"

"You shall have it."

"But how?"

"I have hit upon the means," said Captain Hawk, with a satisfied smile, "and I think you will give me credit for a little ingenuity."

"I am all impatience to know it."

"Well, then, every day you receive a good dinner, do you not?"

"Certainly; but how——"

"Wait a moment, and you shall hear. When the turnkey comes in to-morrow night, among other things, a fruit pie of some sort. The loaf of bread you will receive as usual."

"Yes—but——"

"Do not interrupt me. The turnkey always brings

you twice as much of everything as you want, because all that you leave he has himself."

"Just so."

"Well, then, I have found out the place where he is in the habit of procuring these delicacies for your table, and I have bribed the woman who serves him so heavily that she has consented to do all that I require."

"And that is?"

"To conceal one half of the rope inside the loaf of bread—the other half will be in the pie dish, covered with the crust."

"I see—I see. But will not these things be examined at the gate?"

"No. I have been careful to ascertain that."

"How is that?"

"If anyone sent you anything it would be most rigorously searched; but these things, you understand, come from a regular place of business, where the people could have no interest in befriending prisoners, and are fetched in by a turnkey. This is how it happens that the things escape scrutiny."

CHAPTER MCXXXIV.

CAPTAIN HAWK HAS A NARROW ESCAPE OF DETECTION IN THE VESTIBULE OF THE PRISON.

"I see—I see!" responded Turpin, whose hopes rose higher. "Success is certain."

"I think we may really venture to think so. Of course, when the provisions come, you must observe every caution. It will be your fault if the turnkey has any suspicions."

"It will be my fault, and if it happens I shall be content to abide the consequences of it."

"That is enough, then. I will answer for the rest."

"But," said Dick, and then he hesitated as if in doubt whether to proceed.

"But what? Why do you pause?"

"Because I ought to feel certain I could trust you."

"Of course you can. But what was your thought?"

"I was wondering whether it would be possible to make a loaf and pie-dish hold a sufficient quantity of rope to enable me to escape. The cell window is a long way from the ground."

"I ought to have explained," said the captain, hastily; "and by no means wonder at your question."

"I might have known you would not have overlooked such an important point."

"The fact is, I have had the rope prepared especially. Being made entirely of silk, it is consequently very fine, and yet strong enough to bear ten times your weight. You need be under no apprehensions about a breakage."

"Pardon me—I see now it was simple enough."

"Ordinary rope," pursued the captain, "would have been by far too bulky to be serviceable; but this will be just what you require. At one end is a hook, which will enable you to fasten it readily and securely."

"A thousand thousand thanks! I feel now assured that the escape will be a successful one."

"Of course it will—why doubt it?"

"I do not."

"Then I will leave you. You understand what you have to do, because I intend this to be my last visit to the castle. The Governor tried to intercept me as I was leaving yesterday, and I want to avoid a meeting with him if I can possibly do so."

"Pray be careful," said Dick, with sudden alarm for the safety of his friend.

"I will be careful; make yourself quite easy on that score; I am not likely to forget that I hold your life in my hands."

"But for your own sake!"

"To tell you the truth, when there is no one else concerned beside myself I always laugh at danger—it is best to despise it."

"Still, be cautious—your life hangs upon a thread."

"A strong one, I hope. but let us leave this. I will repeat once more what you have to do: descend by the rope—cross the court-yard—seize the rope you will find thrown over the wall. On reaching the summit you will see me—another moment we shall be off and away as swiftly as the two best horses in York can take us."

Dick pressed his friend's hand warmly, and renewed his thanks.

"So simple a plan," he said, "and depending on so few contingencies, is certain to succeed."

"If you perform your part," responded the captain, "I have little fear of the result."

With these words the pair parted.

The captain pulled his broad-brimmed hat well over his eyes, and gathered his gown around him.

"If that confounded Governor is only out of the way," he muttered, as he followed the turnkey along the corridor, "all will be well."

The outer vestibule was quickly reached.

The captain drew a long breath when he saw the Governor was not present.

Ten strides took him to the outer door.

The man on duty thrust his key into the lock and was in the act of turning it when Hawk's quick ear caught the sound of a footstep, and some one behind him said:

"Ahem!"

The turnkey stopped unlocking the gate and turned round, for he at once recognised the voice.

"Reverend sir," said the Governor, hastening forward, "a word or two, if you please, before you go."

The captain was now, to use his own expression, "in for it."

The much-dreaded ordeal could not be avoided.

Now that this interview was inevitable the captain put a bold front on the matter.

Turning round, he bowed low, as though to intimate that he was entirely at the Governor's service.

"Ahem!" said the latter, again. "Myself and some others are anxious to know how you have succeeded in your interview with the desperate character we have now in custody?"

"I don't think he suspects me," thought Captain Hawk.

Then aloud he said:

"I think, sir, that I have no great reason to complain Conscientiously, I may say that I have used my best endeavours, and have every hope that I shall succeed."

"Ah! that is very satisfactory. But as there is an uneasy feeling abroad respecting the prisoner, excuse me for suggesting that it would be still more satisfactory if he made a confession."

"He has confessed," said the captain.

"Confessed?"

"Yes, this morning."

"And has he signed it?" asked the Governor, eagerly.

"Not yet. But he has told me all from first to last. At his request, I am now about to commit the facts to writing in as brief a manner as I can. On my next visit he will sign the document, and after his execution he desires that it may be made public."

"And does he seem reconciled to his fate?"

"Through my exhortations, I think—humbly, of course—that I may say yes."

"That is very gratifying. I confess this was my own opinion. But there have been others professing to know the man who have stated that this apparent resignation of his is ten times more to be dreaded than any manifestations of violence."

The captain could not repress a smile.

The Governor noticed it, and said:

"You smile, reverend sir."

"It was at the thought of how much they were mistaken."

"Believe me, it is no slight relief to me to hear you say so. Until a moment or so ago, I had serious thoughts of renewing the outside guard round the prison, which some have said ought never to have been discontinued."

The captain, at hearing this, felt the perspiration start out at every pore.

"What is your opinion, reverend sir?" added the Governor.

"I do not like to take the responsibility of uttering it," answered the captain, with a hesitation and embarrassment which the Governor was far from attributing to its real cause; "but if I may speak from the apparent state of the prisoner's mind, I must say that I think there can be no need of it. He is, I believe, quite resigned to his fate. I must take my leave now," he added, "for I have much on my hands."

"And you will be here to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow, if possible; at any rate, on the next day."

Captain Hawk thought of those words afterwards, for when he uttered them nothing was further from his intention.

The Governor bowed, and retired.

The next moment Captain Hawk, to his intense satisfaction, was outside the prison.

Not until then did he venture to breathe freely.

"Confound him!" he ejaculated. "Renew the outside guard! That would be destruction to my plan. I am glad I know of this, for I should think twice now before I trusted myself inside those strong stone walls. Perhaps what I have said will be sufficient to prevent him from carrying out his intention. At any rate, I can only hope so."

In truth, it was no slight thing that Captain Hawk should thus have undergone the ordeal of a few minutes' interview with the Governor of York Castle.

He was not prepared to submit the excellence of his disguise to so severe a trial.

In the meanwhile, Dick, profoundly ignorant of the narrow escape of discovery his friend had just had, did nothing but felicitate himself upon the tempting prospect he had before him.

The means devised by Captain Hawk were so simple that the more the details were dwelt upon the greater seemed to be the probability of ultimate complete success.

His hopes continued to rise, and it may certainly be said that never was there enterprise about which he felt so sanguine.

Nothing of particular moment occurred to break the ordinary routine of life in his cell until after the Governor had paid his usual nocturnal visit.

When that was over, Dick renewed his work upon the iron bars.

He laboured with even greater energy than on the preceding night.

He did not stop to rest until he had cut deeply into every one of the bars in such a manner that they could be completely severed in an hour at the utmost.

The night was a rough and boisterous one—just such as he would have chosen for his projected escape, for while the wind was roaring so about the massive pile it was next to an impossibility for any slight unusual sound to attract notice.

On this occasion Dick had been careful not to lose the small iron filings, but had collected them carefully and mixed them with a small quantity of black dirt, of which there was a plentiful supply upon the floor and walls of the cell.

The whole he then moistened with some of the wine which had by accident been spilt upon the table.

Having worked the whole up into a soft mass, he applied it to those places where he had used his saw, and so concealed what he had done.

Of course, had anyone gone close to the grating, a single glance would have shown what had been done.

But it was not possible to detect that aught was amiss while standing on the floor of the cell, and this was enough, for Dick had not to dread any closer examination.

It was probably Dick's fancy which made him think that the turnkey looked more closely and suspiciously around the cell than usual.

But he saw nothing.

The active exertions he had made caused Dick to eat with a good appetite.

Doubtless this, being intended for his last day, would have seemed at least double the length of any other; but Dick was so completely fatigued that he fell into a deep sleep, and passed several hours of it in unconsciousness.

But his sleep was vexed with terrible visions, and when he awoke it was with a sudden start.

The perspiration stood out upon his brow in large drops.

He glanced round him wildly for a moment, and then seemed actually to derive consolation from the fact that he was safe in his cell.

"How horrible!" he murmured, in a hollow voice. "It was only a dream; but if I had another such a one I should dread to close my eyes again."

He shuddered from head to foot, and some time elapsed before he could shake off the effects of the terrible vision with which he had been visited.

The remembrance of what he had to do in a short time assisted him greatly in recovering his composure.

It was truly comforting to think that within all probability not more than four or five hours had to elapse before he should again be in possession of that most precious of all things—his liberty.

In the morning, at breakfast, he had, according to his usual custom, ordered his dinner, and was careful to carry out Captain Hawk's injunction.

At the usual hour the turnkey entered.

"A feast for a prince!" he said, as he placed the articles one by one upon the table. "I admire you, captain—I do indeed. I never knew anyone in this prison, all the years I have been in it, make themselves so comfortable and contented as you have. You look a hundred per cent better than you did when you came."

"I am, thanks to your attention," said Dick, with a smile.

"Well, perhaps so. All I can say is, if you manage to get through all you have on the table before you you won't hurt."

This was no doubt right.

There seemed to be enough for half a dozen men.

"I will try to do justice to it," said Dick.

"Do, captain. Take your time. If you want anything else you have only to call out. I shall be just on the other side of the door, that's all."

Dick was full of impatience for this man to be gone, yet he dared not manifest the least sign of this feeling.

Most difficult, however, was it for him to keep this control over himself.

On the table before him he saw the loaf and the pie-dish as well.

The moment the turnkey left him he seized the first-named article, being full of anxiety to satisfy himself that it really contained the rope.

Pulling the loaf apart, he found in the centre of it a quantity of silk cord.

There seemed to be very little, however, though he found it was rolled up tightly into the smallest possible compass.

It was very fine—almost too fine to enable anyone to grasp it firmly.

Dick hid this in a moment.

He did not doubt now that the remainder was in the pie-dish, so he prepared to eat his dinner.

He found himself able to do but scant justice to it, his thoughts being all the time fixed upon the pie.

His impatience increased to such an extent that he found it beyond his control.

He cut the pie with a trembling hand.

He was not disappointed.

The silk cord was there.

Pulling it out, he secreted it hastily, and finished his meal.

When the things were removed by the turnkey, Dick was in an agony of suspense for the Governor to pay his customary visit.

Yet much as he longed for, he justly dreaded this ordeal.

At the least symptom of anything suspicious, a search might be made, which would inevitably bring to light the much-prized cord, and so cut off all hopes of his escape.

Under the circumstances, Dick did the very best thing possible.

This was to place himself at full length upon the bench, with the cord beneath him, and to cover himself over with the rug, as though he had retired to rest for the night.

When the Governor entered, he affected to have been just aroused from a light sleep.

Nothing could have looked more unsuspicious.

The Governor glanced round him with a satisfied air; and, fully impressed with the conviction that the prisoner was perfectly safe, he left the cell.

"Ha," he said to the turnkey, as he strode along the corridor, "what a thing it is to maintain perfect discipline inside a prison! I never could account for escapes in

any other way than concluding that the Governors have been remiss in their duty. I never had an escape in my time, and never shall while I continue to make my regular nightly round."

From this it will be seen that the Governor returned to his quarters on this occasion as comfortable a state of mind as can be imagined, little thinking how truly useless were those visits of inspection upon the importance of which he so prided himself.

When Dick realised that he was really left alone for the night, his emotions were so great that he was completely overpowered.

At last he managed to draw forth his skeleton keys, but his hands shook so, and his heart beat at such a rapid rate, that he could make no use of them.

That he should suffer no ordinary amount of excitement on such an occasion can readily enough be imagined.

At last, however, he managed to calm himself.

The fetters were unfastened and laid upon the floor.

"In the morning," he said, "when they see them here, they will wonder by what mysterious agency I managed to slip out of them."

And to make this wonder the greater he re-locked them all again.

Then, mounting to the window, he commenced his work.

The night was by no means such as he could wish.

A slight breeze was blowing, which drove several detached masses of clouds across the heavens.

When the clouds covered the moon the obscurity was deep enough for his purpose; but the darkness did not last long, and when the cloud passed over it made the moonlight appear, by contrast, to be twice as bright as it really was.

But the attempt must be made.

With hearty goodwill did Dick work; and yet, for all that, rather more than an hour elapsed before he finished his work of sawing through the iron bars.

The top bar he did not saw quite through, but sufficiently to enable him to bend it in such a manner as to leave plenty of room for him to slip out.

CHAPTER MCXXXV.

THE RESULT OF DICK TURPIN'S ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE FROM YORK CASTLE.

HAVING reached this stage in his progress to freedom, Dick Turpin for the first time paused to rest.

Now that the grating was positively removed, it did indeed seem to him that the most serious obstacle intervening between himself and liberty was no longer in existence.

So great was his impatience that it had even hurried him on to doing it before he examined the cord which had been so cleverly delivered to him.

Nor did he seem in any hurry to do so.

Leaning his arms upon the edge of the opening in the wall—for window we cannot call it—he looked out upon the scene before him.

The rapidity with which he had worked had greatly exhausted him, and now, with sensations of the keenest delight, he felt the cool night air fan his temples.

He looked down at the boundary wall he had to cross.

When the moon's disc happened to be free from clouds he could see this plainly enough.

Then he looked for some signs of Captain Hawk with the horses he had promised.

A keen pang shot through his heart when he found he was not to be seen.

A moment's reflection, however, told him how foolish it was on his part to expect to see anything of the kind.

Captain Hawk would take the utmost pains to keep himself invisible.

Had he been seen by Dick he must have also been exposed to the view of anyone else who might happen to look out in that direction.

This was a danger he would never incur, as he would know if seen suspicion would be immediately excited.

"He is there all right," said Dick, after a pause. "I will not wrong him by doubting him for a single moment; beyond all question he will be as good as his word."

Being now considerably rested, Dick stepped down to examine his cord.

The opportunity was a favourable one, for the moon was shining into his cell with so much brightness that he had no difficulty at all in seeing what he was about.

When the cord was all unwound, and the two pieces joined together, he computed the total length to be between sixty and seventy feet.

This, he was quite sure, was more than long enough to reach from the highest point of the castle to the ground, so that all uneasiness on this head was at an end.

He tried it all, and found the strength very great; nor was it so difficult to retain a firm grasp upon it as he at first imagined.

At one end of the cord a strong iron hook was carefully fastened.

Having tested the whole to the best of his ability, and found it perfectly secure, he prepared himself to take a last leave of his cell.

His heart beat faster, and his breath came and went in sudden gasps.

Who could wonder that his excitement should now have risen to its highest pitch?

When he stood once more upon the chair, he trembled so with excess of agitation as to cause the structure below him to shake violently.

His first care was to secure the hook.

This was a matter of no difficulty.

He had left about two inches of the upright bar sticking up from the masonry, and a better place of fastening than this could hardly be conceived.

With shaking fingers he adjusted the hook, and pulled it to make sure that it was firm and that the fragment of the upright iron bar was sufficiently strong to sustain his weight.

All seemed well.

His efforts only served to make the rope more secure.

And yet at this moment he was conscious of feeling a powerful disinclination to trust himself to the rope.

It was one of those strange inward presentiments which we all feel at some time or other, and which are in general too apt to be disregarded.

The feeling grew stronger and stronger, and it required more than an ordinary effort to shake it off.

But Dick did so.

"This is folly," he said—"absolute folly and weakness. I could not have believed I was so childish. What have I to fear? All is well. The rope is strong and securely fixed."

Yet though his lips declared all to be well, his heart whispered all was not well.

"It is the ease with which I have succeeded that has made me so apprehensive. I will take effectual steps to put an end to it without delay."

So saying, he cautiously set himself to work to pass through the aperture, a proceeding that was by no means easy.

He took care to keep fast hold of the rope, and in less than a moment had fairly committed himself to it.

Slowly and carefully he suffered the silken cord to slip through his hands—lower and lower he went.

Half the descent was successfully accomplished—perhaps rather more than half—when, with frightful suddenness, Dick found the rope was no longer supported from above.

Whether the jutting-up piece of iron bar had broken away from the mortar in which it was embedded—

Whether the cord had snapped—

Or whether the iron of which the hook was composed had proved too light and weak to support his weight he knew not.

But his mind was filled with the awful and appalling consciousness that he was falling through the air.

The sensation was a horrible one.

Involuntarily, a dismal shriek thrilled from his lips.

It echoed far and wide in the silent air.

Then instantly came a horrid crashing sound.

It was succeeded by intense silence.

But this silence was of the shortest possible duration.

It might have been that the prison officials had become aware that the prisoner was no longer a tenant of his cell before that awful shriek arose which startled everybody.

Be this how it may, it at all events, is certain that, with

the rapidity of lightning, lights appeared at the various windows of the castle walls.

A huge bell sent forth a sonorous clang.

Those booming sounds, striking the night air, would echo far and wide over the peaceful city, and at once apprise the inhabitants of what had occurred.

That bell was never tolled except on the occasion of an escape or a fire.

Dick lay upon the hard flagstones moaning slightly, and apparently being unconscious of where he was.

But where was Captain Hawk?

True to his engagement, he was at the proper spot at the appointed hour.

He was fully alive to the necessity of concealing himself from the observation of any of the officials or inhabitants of the castle, and this is how it happened that Dick could not catch a glimpse of him.

There being no guard now round the interior wall, the captain had no fear of an interruption.

The horse he had hired for Dick Turpin's use he secured by the bridle to Satan's saddle, for he knew his own docile steed would obey him in all things by word of command, and that there was no need to subject him to any sort of restraint.

He held the rope in his hand which he told Dick would be found hanging down on the inner side from the top of the boundary wall.

At one end was secured a small leaden weight, so that he should have no trouble in casting his line over.

Feeling satisfied that all was well, and judging that the hour was close at hand when he might catch a glimpse of his comrade, he held himself prepared for immediate action.

He made his horse, Satan, stand close against the prison wall in such a manner that his side was pressed against the brickwork.

Then, holding the rope coiled up over one arm, the captain mounted; but, instead of sitting, stood up on the saddle.

This was rather a ticklish position to occupy.

Nearly all depended upon the horse, however.

Should the animal move, a fall would be the almost certain result.

But Captain Hawk knew that Satan would stand as immovable as the wall itself.

By reaching up his arms the captain could put his hands upon the spike-protected coping of the boundary wall, and peep over.

He glanced about him rapidly.

He saw, in the first place, that the court-yard was empty.

That was a great satisfaction.

Glancing upwards, he was just in time to see Dick in the act of passing through the window of his cell.

He held his breath, and gazed with the intensest interest.

From where he stood the feat which Dick was attempting seemed, in good truth, a most perilous one.

The slender silk cord was invisible, and, in comparison with the huge mass of building, Dick looked like a fly upon the wall.

Until that awful moment when there ceased to be any support from above all went well, and Captain Hawk began to breathe more freely, and to think that, after all, the descent was not so terrible as it seemed.

Then he beheld his comrade fall, so suddenly that he could scarcely credit the evidence of his own senses.

His first thought was that Dick must have lost his grasp in some way, but the same moment he saw that something had given way above.

The shriek was an awful one which pealed from the prisoner's lips when he felt himself falling headlong down.

Captain Hawk started, and uttered a faint ejaculation of horror.

He forgot the unsteadfast nature of his footing; and as it required considerable nicety of balance to stand upright upon the horse's back at all, it follows that this start caused him to slip and lose his foothold.

He made a desperate effort to save himself, and partially succeeded.

But for all that he fell heavily and awkwardly under the horse's feet, where he lay for a few moments half stunned and wholly unable to move.

At first he could hardly satisfy himself whether or not all that had just happened was a freak of his own fancy.

To satisfy himself, he struggled to his feet.

He was badly bruised by his fall, and the attempt cost him great pain.

Still more painful, however, was it to remount his steed.

Satan had never stirred.

Once more he peeped over the wall.

At a little distance from him, he could see Dick on the stones.

He was groaning faintly.

"I may be in time to save him yet, for he is not dead," was the thought that flashed like lightning across the highwayman's brain.

In a second he had thrown the weighted rope over the wall.

Having done so, there was no difficulty in securing it to the stout iron spikes.

By the time this was done, however, a door opened, out of which poured a large and well-armed body of men, many of whom carried such lights as in their haste and confusion they had had time to procure.

"Lost—lost!" ejaculated Captain Hawk. "I am too late!"

He was right.

The men, headed by the Governor, had formed themselves into a dense throng round the prostrate form.

To have attempted a rescue would have been an act of such utter madness that even the captain shrunk from it.

To have saved Dick would have been impossible, while he would have been quite certain to bring about his own capture.

The loud tolling of the bell still continued; and though so short a time had elapsed since the alarm was given, yet there were manifest signs that it had widely spread, for people came rushing towards the castle from every direction.

This boded danger to Captain Hawk, but he disregarded it, and continued gazing down into the court-yar like one fascinated.

Many were the ejaculations of wonder which fell from the lips of the assembled crowd when they saw Dick in the court-yard.

But the Governor, after one glance, guessed just what had occurred.

"Raise him quickly and gently, and carry him inside. Thank Heaven it is no worse!"

Apparently, the attempt to raise the fearfully-bruised form was productive of the acutest pain.

His groans increased until they became screams.

"I can't stand this," cried Captain Hawk, "not if I die for him!"

As he spoke he made a desperate effort to raise himself to the top of the wall.

In an ordinary way there is little doubt he would have succeeded in his endeavour.

But now, having so recently been hurt, he felt his limbs so stiff and sore as to make the attempt an abortive one.

Before he could renew it the whole party had passed through the doorway and disappeared.

He heard the ponderous door slammed to, and afterwards the clangour of the bars and bolts.

Dick was beyond his aid now.

With a heavy heart the captain placed himself in the saddle and rode slowly away.

"I would rather have given up my life," he murmured, with deep earnestness, "than such a calamity as this should have happened. What can I do now? What can be more unfortunate? My next step, I suppose, will be to resume my old disguise, and ascertain the extent of his injuries. There may be a chance that a second attempt may succeed; but I fear it—I sadly fear it."

Captain Hawk carried out the intention he had expressed.

Despite his own great personal danger in doing so, he presented himself at the earliest allowed moment on the following morning at the wicket of the prison.

Had he not known so well what had occurred, a glance would have told him that something very unusual had occurred to disturb the monotony of the prison.

"Your services will be needed, I think, holy father," said the turnkey, unsuspiciously. "The prisoner made a desperate attempt to escape last night; but failed, and he



THE EXECUTION OF DICK TURPIN AT YORK CASTLE.

now lies more dead than alive on a bed where he is closely watched. Not that he is to be feared now, however—he cannot raise his hand."

Captain Hawk was much distressed to hear this account of his companion, and hoped that he should find things not quite so bad as they had been represented to him.

Merely thanking the man for his intelligence, but taking care to express his astonishment at what he had heard, the captain passed on.

He was at once allowed to see the prisoner,

He found two of the turnkeys in the cell.

The different things the captain had given Dick had been found, and the pair were speculating as to the means by which the prisoner had obtained them.

When the captain bent down over the bed, Dick's face lighted up with a smile of recognition.

Hawk made a hasty and almost imperceptible sign for him to be cautious.

"You little expected to find me thus; but all is over now: I feel that I must resign myself to my fate."

"Are you much hurt?" asked the seeming priest, in a voice of the deepest grief.

"No bones broke, the doctor says," Dick answered, feebly. "He has caused me a thousand tortures by his examination. Would—oh, would that I had fallen a little further!"

He was compelled to pause and utter a groan.

The two turnkeys, having no suspicion that the priest was other than he seemed to be, without being requested to do so, withdrew to such a distance as to be out of earshot, though they could still watch the movements of their prisoner.

Seeing this, Dick whispered, in a low tone:

"Captain, I feel that I have not long to live. Do not shake your head, or attempt to convince me that I am mistaken; I cannot misunderstand my feelings now. I almost succeeded, but my fate is that I shall remain here. I know the worst, and so shall not shrink, but nerve myself as best I may to meet my doom. Were the prison doors thrown open to me at this moment, I am conscious that it would be of no advantage to me. I have an inward feeling which tells me that the injuries I have received are mortal ones. Besides, I could read that the surgeon's opinion was that there were no hopes of my recovery. What I long for is that I may be allowed to yield up my life in this place, and not upon the gallows."

Pain again compelled him to pause.

Captain Hawk was so much overcome by his emotions that he found himself unable reply.

He tried to gulp down the painful swelling that seemed suddenly to rise up in his throat and prevent all further utterance, but the endeavour was a vain one.

CHAPTER MCXXXVI.

THE PARTING OF DICK TURPIN AND CAPTAIN HAWK.—THE EXECUTION.—CONCLUSION.

Dick Turpin fixed his lustreless eyes upon the captain's face, and went on:

"I do not fear death," he said. "Life has long had but little charms for me, now it has none at all. But I dread the scaffold—the gaping, gibing crowd, and the hateful hangman's loathsome touch—my sole surviving hope is that I may escape this."

He paused again.

"Never despair," said Captain Hawk, with an ineffectual attempt to appear hopeful himself. "I——"

Dick shook his head.

"I know," he continued—"I can understand how I feel; the consciousness is strong upon me that I have not many hours to live. After such injuries as I have received it is a wonder that I live at all—quite out of the question that I can recover. I feel, too, that this will be our last meeting, and so I wish you to listen to the few words I have to say."

"Speak—speak," said the captain, chokingly, for he could plainly see that his companion was not much longer for this world—"let me know all your wishes."

"There are but few—very few."

"They shall be as commands to me. Have no fears that they will not be carried out."

"After my death, then—do not interrupt me, because I know my death in one shape or other is certain to take place—I say, when all is over, endeavour to save my body from desecration by the surgeon. If you can get anyone to claim me my body will be given up. Let it be interred in some quiet nook in a churchyard, where the grass will grow and the trees wave over me. That is all. Indulge my wish, but let us not waste precious time by dwelling upon this part of the subject. You give me your promise, do you not?"

"I do, most faithfully."

"Enough; and now for one more request. Should you ever visit London——"

"I will go at any moment to serve you."

"Nay, there is no emergency in the case. But when you are there again I want you to seek out one Matthew Gale. He is the landlord of a public-house in Drury Lane—the sign is the White Horse. It stands at the corner of White Horse Yard."

"I will not forget it."

"I want you to see him and make him acquainted with all the events that have taken place. Tell him my last thoughts were about him, and that there was hardly anything that caused me so much regret as my inability to see him."

"You may depend that this will be done."

"Thanks. When you see him you will see a true friend. At any risk or hazard to himself he will protect you from the officers. I owe him more than I can possibly express."

"And is there nothing more that I can do for you?" said the captain, sadly. "Think again, Dick—think again."

"Nothing," answered Dick Turpin, after a long pause. "I have said all."

"Then," murmured Captain Hawk, earnestly, "should the worst happen, you need suffer no anxiety on the score of what you have said to me. But, believe me, I have not yet lost all hope of saving you."

"There is only one way of saving me," answered Dick, "and that is, by giving me something which I can take, and so make sure of dying peacefully here before the arrival of the time appointed for my execution."

"Poison!" exclaimed Captain Hawk.

"Yes."

"Dick," he said, "I have called myself your friend, but I have done little yet in the way of friendship."

Turpin raised his hand deprecatingly.

"I have tried," continued the captain, "but no success has attended my endeavours. Still, I have sworn to aid you, and if I can do it in no other way than that which you have just named I will not shrink."

"Thanks—thanks!" was the faint answer. "That would be rendering me a service indeed."

"But I still hope to serve you better."

Dick Turpin, however, would not permit himself to derive any consolation from this.

"Farewell, captain!" he said, at length. "My strength is giving out so fast that I shall not be able to speak much longer. I repeat my wish that I had known you earlier, vain though that wish be. Bid me farewell, for we may not meet again."

There was more despondency about Dick when he pronounced these words than he had yet displayed.

"I will not say farewell," said Captain Hawk, speaking with a great effort. "But I——"

"Yes—yes," interrupted Dick—"indulge me!"

"Farewell, then!"

The parting words were spoken, and an opportunity was seized when the turnkeys did not happen to be looking that way to exchange a warm pressure of the hand.

Dick clasped the captain's convulsively.

But the muscles relaxed, and the famous highwayman, worn out by what had taken place, sunk back in a state of partial unconsciousness.

The captain seized upon this opportunity to withdraw.

He gave one lingering glance, for he seemed in the depths of his heart to be conscious that this was their last meeting.

He made his way somewhat precipitately to the vestibule.

He was dreading an interruption, for he knew that his feelings were anything but under his control, and if the Governor accosted him there would be great danger of discovery.

On gaining the vestibule he crossed over to the door with a swift stride.

It was opened, and he was in the act of crossing the threshold when he heard a voice say:

"Stop him!—stop that priest! Don't let him go yet!"

The tones in which these words were spoken carried to the captain the assurance that he was discovered.

It flashed into his mind instantly that he was suspected of having conveyed the tools to the prisoner—indeed, how else could his possession of them be accounted for?

The captain knew he could never stand the test of an examination, so upon hearing these alarming words behind him he, so far from pausing, gave a sudden bound forward.

It was well that he was so speedy in his movements, for the man on the lock hastened to obey the order which had been issued.

Darting forward, he managed to get a good grasp upon the captain's long cloak.

But Hawk unclasped it in a moment, and fled with the utmost precipitation.

Fortunately, the corner of a street was close at hand, and he vanished round it in a moment.

The alarm inside the prison was immediate; but by the time a small party started in pursuit not a trace of the seeming priest could be anywhere discovered.

* * * * *

In York but one subject was discussed—the extraordinary and daring attempt to escape that Dick Turpin had made.

By common consent the priest was set down as an accomplice in the plot.

But the point upon which there was the greatest amount of discussion was whether the execution would

take place on the day appointed, which was the one succeeding that upon which Captain Hawk had paid his farewell visit.

The majority declared that the execution must be deferred on account of the serious injuries the prisoner had received from his awful fall—it was generally reported that he had not a single bone left that was unbroken.

Others, to use their own phrase, loudly declared that the "gallows would be cheated of its due."

Others, again, were strongly inclined to think that the authorities would make strenuous efforts to carry out the sentence of the law, even if the unhappy victim should be carried half dead to the fatal tree.

But those who thought this were in the minority, though their opinion was fortified by the circumstance that the preparations for an execution went on just as though nothing of an unusual character had taken place.

The greatest uncertainty upon the point prevailed in the old city until a very late hour at night, and then the rumour went that the prisoner had so far recovered that there would be no need for postponing the time originally fixed upon for the carrying out of his sentence.

Among the rest, Captain Hawk—who had managed to gain the shelter of the Old Chequers Inn—heard this rumour, but he resolutely refused to give it credence.

Having seen Dick such a short time before, he felt confident that he could not be taken to the place of execution so soon, and he treated the report as he would have done any other impossible rumour.

But on the following morning the rumour gained strength.

Captain Hawk sent the ostler out to make inquiries.

On his return, the captain was amazed to learn that the preparations were going on more actively than ever, and that everyone declared the sentence would be carried into effect that very day at noon.

Utterly disregarding his own danger, the captain started off.

His first discovery was that a troop of soldiers had arrived, and formed themselves in a circle round the scaffold and in a double line to the door of the prison.

To gain admittance was impossible.

"Alas—alas!" he cried. "Balked again! I cannot even render you the poor service of saving you from the gallows tree!"

Yet, in spite of all he saw, the captain clung to the idea that Dick was too greatly injured to be moved—he could not believe but that the authorities would wait until he had recovered before they proceeded to his immolation.

He did not know that the surgeon, acting under the advice and suggestions of those above him, had administered to the helpless prisoner copious draughts of a medicine which, but for one quality, would have been an invaluable preparation.

This compound caused an inconceivable amount of vigour to infuse itself into the hapless prisoner's aching limbs—he seemed to grow comparatively strong in the course of a few hours.

But the effects of this medicine were only transitory, and the worst was, that with the cessation of them came such a frightful exhaustion that it was next to an impossibility for the patient to rally.

But this was considered to be of no consequence in the present case—all that the authorities desired was that the prisoner should live long enough to be made an example of.

The potent drug produced a species of stupefaction upon Dick not unlike that which he experienced after drinking the brandy given him by the ostler—the feeling was not quite so strong and yet he was partially unconscious.

His mental powers were so much in abeyance that he offered no resistance to the will of his captors—he rose and moved mechanically anywhere that they might choose to direct him

His limbs felt numbed and strange, but he was released from all that pain which only on the preceding day had been so excruciating.

Nevertheless, in a dim, vague way he was aware that he was about to be led forth to die; but even this knowledge did not serve to make him resist.

By the aid of the turnkeys, he was enabled to walk on that fatal morning to the outer door of the prison.

Here the usual kind of procession was made, Dick still being more like an automaton than a living being.

Not until this door was opened and the closely-guarded prisoner appeared did Captain Hawk believe that the execution was really about to take place.

The discovery of his error came upon him like a thunder-clap.

Before he had recovered himself, the prisoner, still aided by supporters, had traversed the short space intervening between the prison door and the scaffold.

It would be too painful to linger over the last moments of the hero whose career we have followed for so long with such deep interest.

Captain Hawk was powerless.

Had he been equal to a hundred men, or, indeed, had he had a thousand at his command, the result would have been the same. The authorities were armed at all points against a rescue.

All know how Dick Turpin met his fate. On reaching the ladder, he summoned up all the strength which he possessed, and ascended unaided. His limbs were not properly under his command—one leg trembled as if with the palsy. Anxious that the cause should not be misconstrued, he stamped down his foot with angry violence, and, by a last exercise of his indomitable will, regained the command over his shaking limb.

The executioner was busy with his rope.

He had run up the ladder first, and now he slipped the noose over the victim's head.

It was just at this very moment that all the sea of faces and the other varied objects around faded from before Dick's eyes, yet there was no quailing in that last glance.

He knew, though, that consciousness was going.

"Are you ready?" he said, in a hollow voice.

These were his last words.

"Yes," said the hangman, descending a step preparatory to "turning the prisoner off," as the phrase then went.

The operation generally consisted in pushing the shuddering wretch off the ladder, and leaving him to dangle at the gibbet's beam until life became extinct by that most painful and cruel of all deaths, strangulation.

But the office was not performed for Dick.

No sooner had the hangman spoke the word than, with a sudden bound, he threw himself off the ladder.

There was a sharp and sudden jerk, a convulsive plunge, and then all was over. He who may justly lay claim to being the Prince of Highwaymen had in a moment ceased to be. All that remained of him was an inanimate mass of clay.

And so, bold and defiant to the last, the gallant highwayman met his fate.

* * * * *

Slowly the crowd dispersed.

At the appointed time the body was cut down and carried into the prison, preparatory to being handed over to the doctors for dissection. There were many practitioners anxious to secure so interesting a subject.

That is, provided no one came to claim the body, and this was scarcely expected.

Contrary to anticipation, however, the body was claimed and carried away.

On the following day the body was interred in one of the most picturesque churchyards in the outskirts that the City of York could boast.

Thousands followed the mourners; and when the grave at last was reached not a square inch of the churchyard was unoccupied.

Yet the day was one that was calculated to keep all those people indoors who were not brought abroad by necessity.

The cold was piercing, and the keen north wind brought with it clouds of frozen ice and snow.

The clergyman hastened to conclude the ceremony, and when the grave was filled up the crowd began rapidly to disperse.

Heedless alike, however, of the bitter inclemency of the weather and of his own personal danger, one individual, attired in black and muffled in a cloak, remained long after the last lingerer had departed.

His face was bent towards the ground, and had upon it an expression of great pain.

"It was Fate," he said; "and who can control that? All is over now! Had I possessed the power, he would, instead of lying here, be safe and well. But no one can blame me because I failed."

After these words, the reader will have no difficulty in recognising the speaker.

It was Captain Hawk.

He stood now only at the opening of one of the strangest and most vicissitudinous careers that ever fell to the lot of man.

But those vicissitudes and the strange events which happened on the night after Dick Turpin's burial cannot be chronicled here.

They will be found in the Second Series of Black Bess, which the writer confidently asserts will not be found inferior in the point of interest to the first.